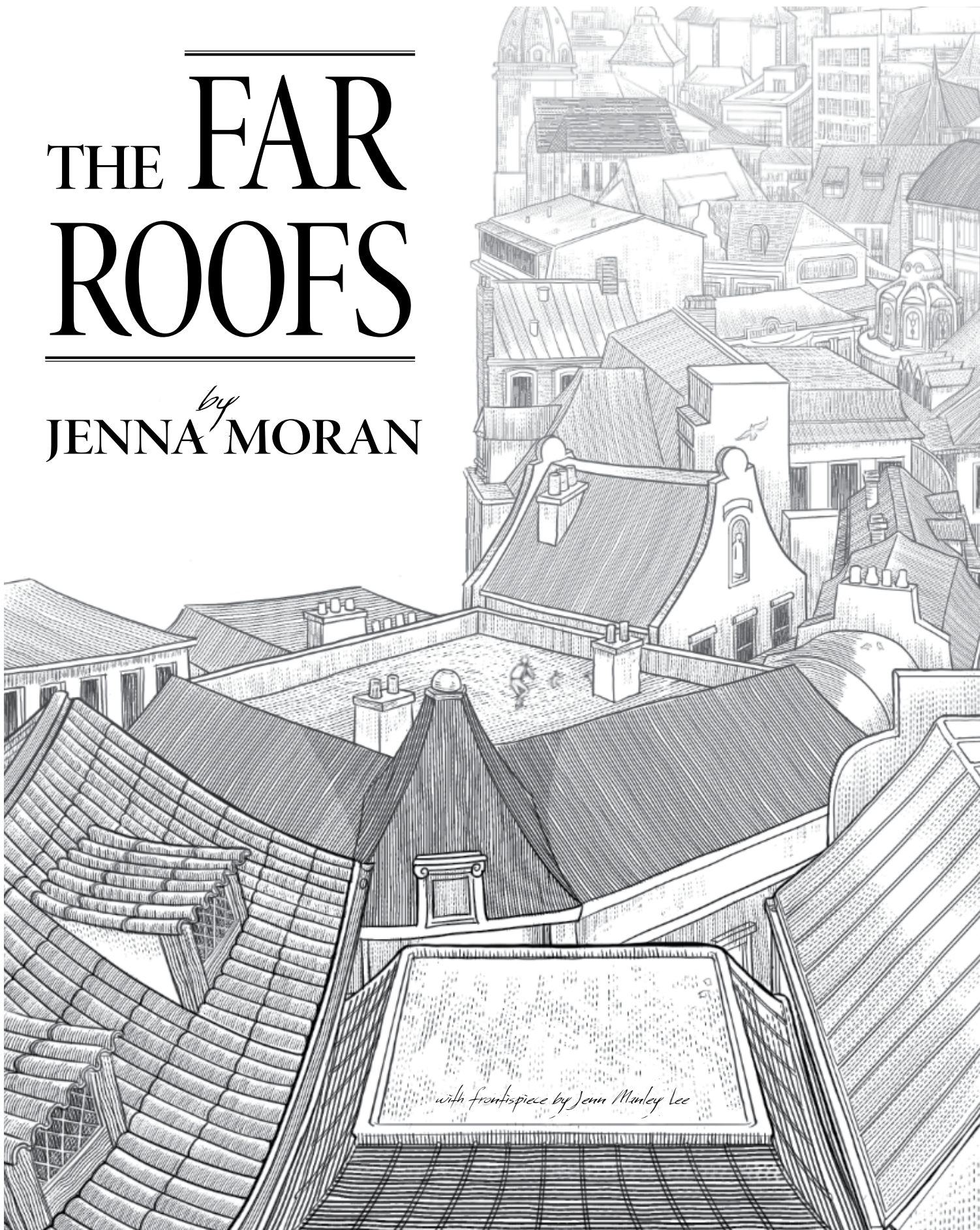


THE FAR ROOFS

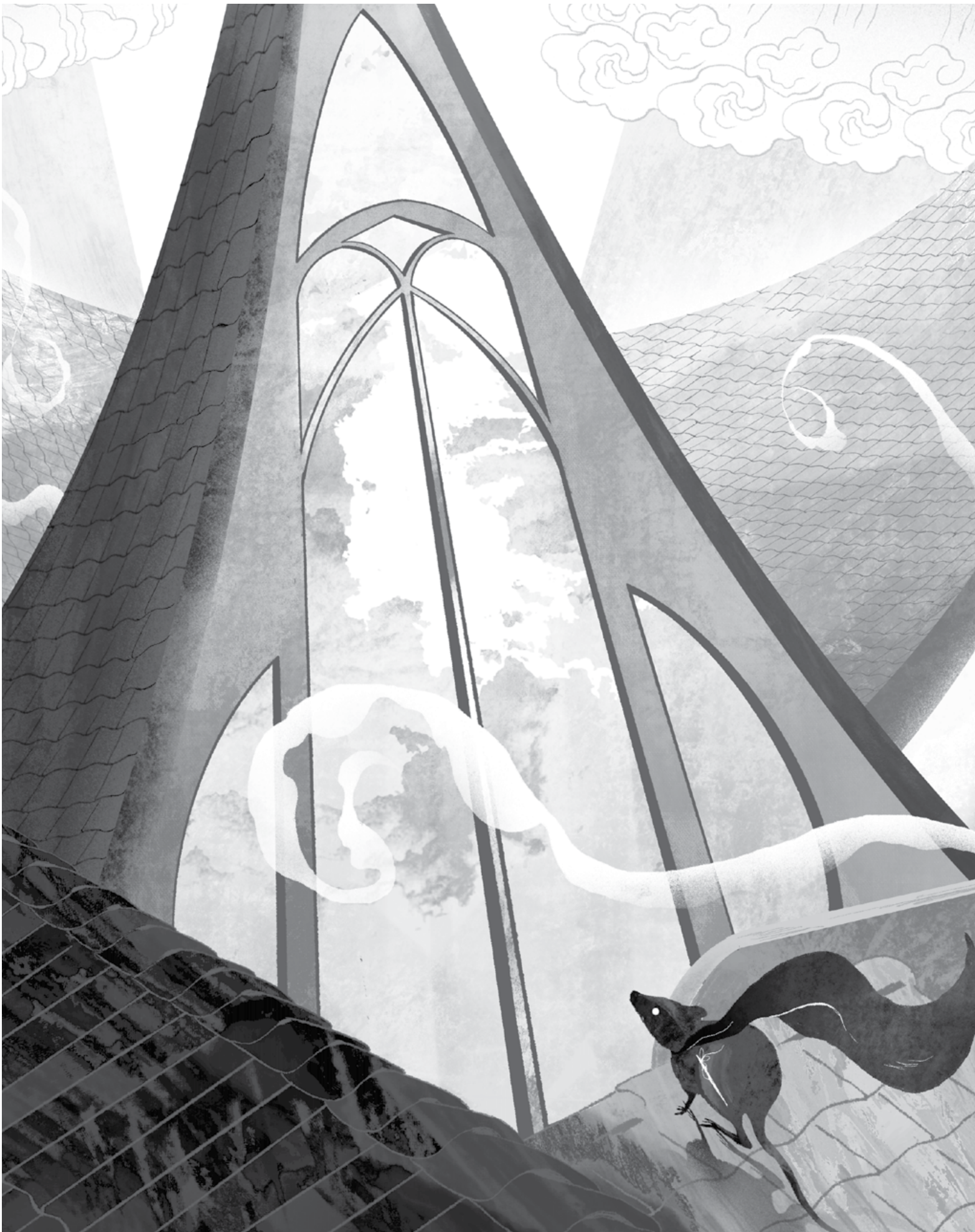
by
JENNA MORAN



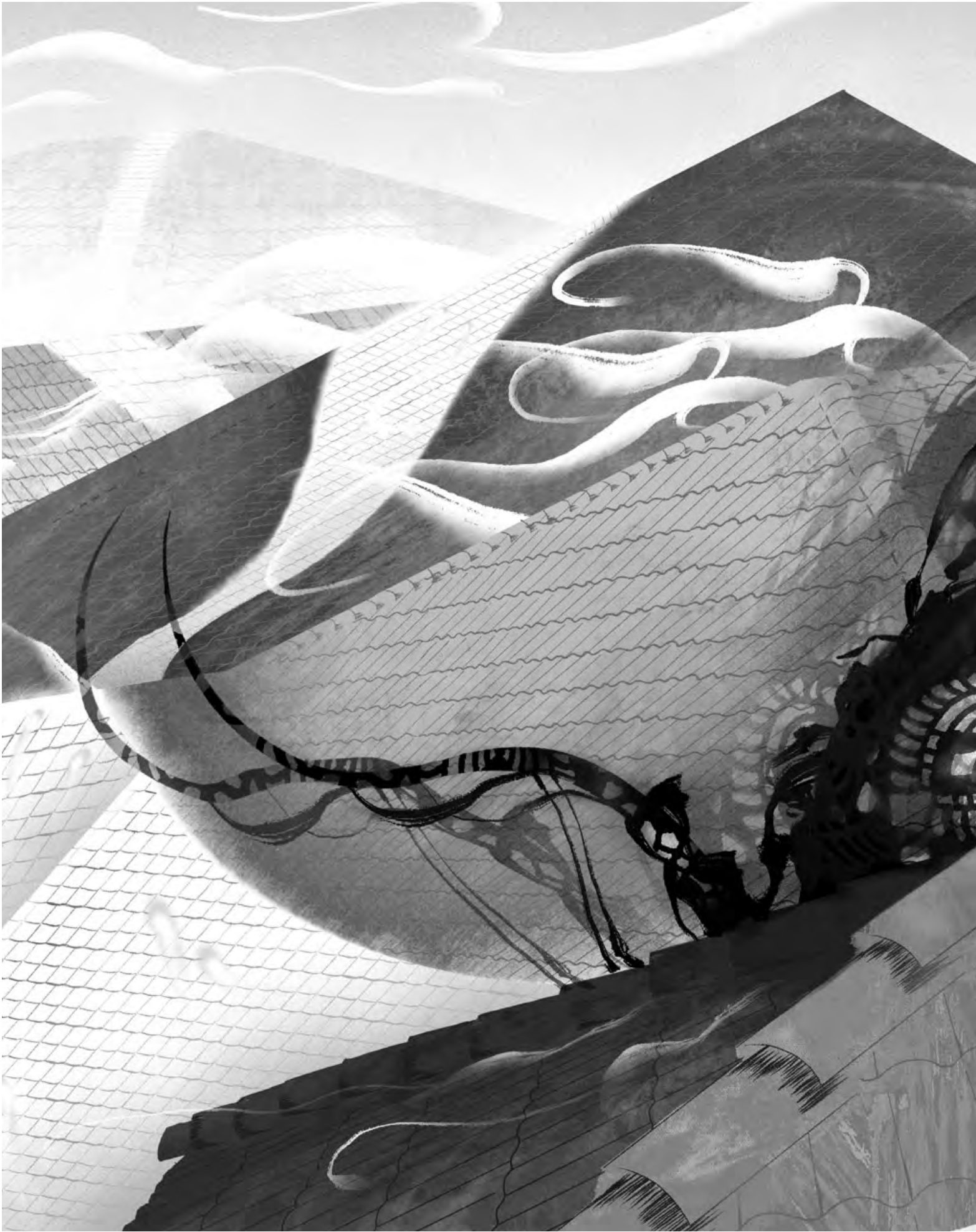
with frontispiece by Jenn Munley Lee













"The King of Shadows," by Isip Xin

CONTENT WARNING

this book contains existential horror; body horror;
unreality; references to aphasia, death, dissociation,
despair, derealization, skinlessness, and Grayvale's sun;
and, a rather large number of rats.

All text and art in this book is copyright its original creators.

Glitch is the creation of Jenna Katerin Moran. **Nobilis** is the creation of Jenna Katerin Moran. **The Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine RPG** is the creation of Jenna Katerin Moran. **The Far Roofs** is the creation of Jenna Katerin Moran. All included text, concepts, and game mechanics are copyright 2001-2024 by Jenna Katerin Moran. Reproduction without the written permission of Jenna Katerin Moran or the appropriate artistic copyright holder is expressly forbidden save as needed for reviews or for personal use.

The mention or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses fantastical and supernatural elements in its setting, for its characters, their abilities, and themes. All such elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content and reader discretion is advised.

Nobilis was created by Jenna Katerin Moran (under the name "R. Sean Borgstrom") under the auspices of David Bolack's Pharos Press. It was later popularized by James Wallis' Hogshead Press.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2	<i>The King of Shadows - 4</i>	106
The Adventure Journal	4	Residents of the Roofs	108
It Begins	5 (7✎)	The Mysteries	116
<i>The King of Shadows - 1</i>	8	Goblin	116 (118✎)
The Near Roofs	11 (14✎)	Harpy	120 (122✎)
Boundaries	17 (21✎)	Hedge the Fang	124 (126✎)
<i>The King of Shadows - 2</i>	22	Hoop Snake	129 (130✎)
The Far Roofs	25 (32✎)	King Death	132 (136✎)
New Neighborhoods	36	Malambruno	139 (140✎)
Telling Stories	38 (39✎)	Typhon	143 (144✎)
<i>The King of Shadows - 3</i>	40	Unicorn	147 (148✎)
Traits	42	Designing your own Mysteries	151
Taking Action	44	<i>The King of Shadows - 5</i>	152
Muddles	55	Quests and Arcs	154
Issues	58	Quest Sets	156
Moods	60	Spooky Stories, for the <i>Cintamani</i> -Bearer	156
Quests	66	The Fated Hero's Fever-Dreams	158
Powers	68	The Lesson Book of the Magician	161
Characters	70	The Secret Journals of the Navigator	163
The <i>Cintamani</i> -Bearer	70	The Remembrances of the Old-Timer	168
Cheat	71	The Tavern Boasts of the Rogue	170
<i>Kaiju</i>	72	The Treasure-Book of the Seeker	173
The Hero of Fate	74	The Everyday Life of the Shieldbearer	175
Become Somebody	75	Narratives of the Arcs	178
Impresario	75	Bindings	178
The Magician	77	Role	180
Indomitable	79	Otherworldly	182
Memetic	80	Storyteller	184
The Navigator	81	Training	186
Creature of Fable	82	Shepherd	190
Prophet	82	Melancholy	192
The Old-Timer	84	Mystic	195
Allegory	85	Your Stories (in Depth)	198
Primordial	86	for the <i>Cintamani</i> -Bearer	198
The Rogue	90	for the Hero of Fate	201
Wounded Angel	91	for the Magician	202
Creature of Delirium	92	for the Navigator	204
The Seeker	93	for the Old-Timer	206
Worldwalker	94	for the Rogue	208
Awakening	95	for the Seeker	212
The Shieldbearer	96	for the Shieldbearer	213
Gardener	97	Rat-Friending Stories	216
Holy	97	<i>The King of Shadows - 6</i>	228
Custom Characters	99	Main Group Storyline	231
Rats you might Meet	100	<i>The King of Shadows - 7</i>	241

Introduction

I want this game to feel like one of those overwhelming movies—like Lord of the Rings, Princess Mononoke, or Spirited Away.

I want it to sweep down and catch you up in it:

To seize you with its vistas, to carry you away with its soundtrack, to stun you with its incredible events, to win your heart instantly with its characters. I don't want you to sit back and be blasé. I want you to be *taken* by it, to lose yourself in it, to forget for a moment now and then that you're playing a game and be lost in the wonder and terror and awe of it.

That's why you're going to play people who get swept up in this as well—why the default storyline in a **Far Roofs** game is that you're ordinary human or human-like people who get *sucked into* the stories of the far roofs, taken out of yourselves, seized up by wonder at the things you'll see and find, stunned by incredible events, and hopefully won over by the stock characters that this book provides.

You'll get the chance to be incredibly cool, if you want, but this game isn't about your being the hero. It's about finding this incredible thing—this incredible place and these amazing people and these *terrors*, these *monsters*, these god-like horrors—you never knew was *right next door*.

Or, rather, well: *above*.

It starts with the Fortitude rats.

You might have heard of them, either IC or OOC. They show up in some of my other games. Maybe you've caught them now and then on the news. Maybe you've met one. I don't know. But if you *haven't* heard of them ... they're the rats that have woken up from the sleep of rats, and, in so doing, doubled in size; gained the power of speech; gained the power of thought; learned to wear clothing and a sword-belt when they want to, to stand on two feet when they need to; in general, to be *people*.

People, and, also, rats.

They are heroic. I don't know if ordinary, voiceless rats think of themselves as heroes, but the talking ones do. And they. Are. *Amazing*. They don't exactly have strength to throw around, but they have tenacity and they have grace and they have hearts *overflowing* with valor, so much valor you can't take five minutes in their company without getting a little braver yourself. They are *alive*, with so much energy and vim that'll rub off on you too ... but most of all, they are brave.

And good. And honorable.

And if you meet them, you'll love them—I hope; but I also hope, for you, that it ends there. I ... *do* feel like it's made me better, and my life better, getting mixed up in the business of the rats; but at the same time, I don't see how I could possibly wish it on anyone else, because they fight such terrible things ...

There is another world, you see, right next door to our own.

If you go up on the roofs and run them like the rats do, you'll find them getting closer and closer together until they merge; until you can't see the houses beneath them any longer ... and if you keep going, you'll eventually reach these whole *landscapes* on the rooftops: strange fairylands, magical gardens, inexplicable towers, all *manner* of wonders; and out there is where the monsters—the “Mysteries”—that haunt the rats reside.

I don't know why any of this is there. I wish I did. I wish I could explain it. The best I can say is, the first time I went to the public library, I was astounded. I had known there were libraries. I'd read books that had talked about libraries. I'd gone to school and there was a little school library. But I hadn't realized—there was so *much*... so very *much*—

The Far Roofs aren't a metaphor for libraries. They aren't a *metaphor* for anything, since they're a real place ... but even if they were, it wouldn't be for *libraries*. It'd be for, for, for *everything*, for all the wonders that you never see, all the things you never find, all the things you could turn the corner and discover, but haven't yet, or never do. For the wonder of the *sea*, the *sky*, the people all around you. There's this whole *world* of magic, and to get there, you just go up, and over, and on a bit, and there you are, and you never knew, you *still* don't know, just what you'll find.

Regrettably it is the domain of the Mysteries.

It is not an *inhabited* land; it hosts neither fantasy civilizations nor real ones. ... oh, there are settlements and wanderers, towns and lighthouses and gardens: some built by rats, some taken over, some to host the entourages of the Mysteries—but “habitation” is not a characteristic of the place. It's too wild, too hostile of a land for that: the demesne of great monster-gods.

... so, what can I tell you of them? Of the Mysteries?

The rats keep books on them—stories, notes, and thoughts

on them—and even so they know little more than you or I. Hoop Snake lures you into following it. Sphinx scrawls riddles on the walls. Unicorn dissolves you with its presence: the moment of its existence is so timeless and real that you fade away before it like a dream. Hedge the Fang lives at the edge of the world and shapes the sea and the endless sky. They are creatures of a profound and overwhelming presence, are the *Mysteries*: horrors, but *very personal* horrors—more likely to take interest in *you* than to crush whole towns. They are functionally immortal: they may die, but they return. Some are cruel; some kind; most are indifferent to morality and simply act as they choose to act, letting outcomes fall out as they may.

This game is a story of how you become entangled with the *Mysteries*: how the shadow of a *Mystery* falls across your life, and you join the rats in an adventure against it; and then, how, afterwards, it's hard to stay away: you *want* to, maybe, but you *can't*. Something's always *calling* you, after that, back to the Farthest Roofs. It's terrifying there, you see, but—so *beautiful*.

It's like, it's like—

All my life ... it had been so *little*. So *meaningless*, until that moment when I met Lilith and Evans Koschieff. Until I found my way up there, and had my first adventures with the rats.

In the real world, they probably aren't in your city. There probably *aren't* rats running around on your roofs, visiting your stores, riding around on your neighbors' shoulders. You probably *can't* look up in the morning at a roof or a chimney and see one posed, caped and glorious, sword striking out at the dawn. There probably *haven't* been generations and generations of rats, complete with heroes, kings, and glorious dynasties, carving out a majestic history up there past your head. People don't know to make rat doors inside their big doors. They freak out when they hear a rat stand up and speak! Probably there aren't even *Mysteries* up there, above where you're living, in real life. This stuff is probably only all happening far, *far* away, in the settlement of Fortitude the rats are named after, in that mist-shrouded fairyland, by the docks of Big Lake.

... but for now, at least: pretend.

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE MECHANICS OF THE GAME

The Far Roofs is a traditional tabletop roleplaying game. Each player controls a PC (player character) ... except for one player, the “GM,” who runs the game and plays the part of the world.

Each PC struggles with a set of personalized ordeals, or, *quests*. A good part of working through these ordeals is steady,

routine effort—as mechanistic as checking off boxes, which is in fact something we'll have players do. Entangling with that routine effort, though, and rooting deeply into each PC's quests and lives, there are more difficult conundrums and **muddles**: things that *can't* just be solved with time, or effort, or by declaring it, or with a power, or by rolling some dice.

Instead, to figure out how to solve muddles, players will be looking to gather meaningful experiences—ideas, insights, and feelings—from the world. To have *rich moments of play*. When they find them, when they have a strong experience of something in the game's world, they'll get to draw a “component,” which'll be something like a letter tile.

In like fashion, triggering a visceral reaction from another player (groans, head-desks, fist-shaking outrage) or receiving a character's heartfelt emotions ... this earns a new draw as well.

Over time, players will pick up enough of these components to build, e.g., *words*: words, which may not be the *solution* to their muddles, but which are at least *emblematic* of the solutions that the character's come to. They'll find their way out of their muddles, complete their quests, and develop their lives.

What about more immediate struggles? Here, **the Far Roofs** includes a dice-rolling system for taking uncertain actions and a conflict system for more dramatic contests, chases, and fights.

Taking a wider view, the characters' *adventure journal* frames the story of the game. Whether the characters are adventuring or just hanging out, the players record important events there—up to two key events each, every morning, every afternoon, and every night. Doing so often lets them claim extra story content for those events (e.g., to push experiences not *quite* worthy of claiming a component for past that line).

Additional standard RPG terminology includes—

- * NPC—a non-player character, usually run by the GM.
- * IC—“in character,” as when one assumes one's character's perspective and says the things they say.
- * ooc—“out of character,” as when one speaks of things outside the game.
- * Scene—a set of more or less continuous events, like a scene in a play.
- * Session—a real life occasion when players and GM gather to play **the Far Roofs**.¹
- * Campaign—a complete game of **the Far Roofs**, from the beginning of the story to its ending.

¹ in a forum game with no actual sessions, your group can substitute in-game days or “chapters” (pg. 4) any time you see “sessions” come up in the rules.

The Adventure Journal

In the Far Roofs, each day will be a new adventure—each morning, each afternoon, and every night.

So we're going to ask you to track in-game time with a daily journal—one per player, or a really big one for the game—that's broken up into those three slices on most given days. We'll call these slices *chapters*. In each chapter, which is to say every morning, every afternoon, and every night, there's room for each player to record up to two important things that their character experiences, witnesses, or does.

Do you have three players? Then a full day has room for about eighteen things.

The GM usually starts off each chapter by announcing its beginning, e.g.:

- * **Morning:** "A new day and a new chapter! What are you doing?"
- * **Afternoon:** "The next chapter picks up after a refreshing [walk/lunch/whatever]..."
- * **Night:** "So, next chapter! It's time for a [fun/terrifying] night. Where are you?"

Most of the time, players can't or won't *actually* keep an extensive journal, so what gets recorded here won't be a full, detailed description of events. Instead, players or the GM will write down a really basic summary, tagging it with the player or character's name if it's a shared journal, and also with its basic emotional flavor:

- * **Wonder** for sights and experiences that just take your breath away.
- * **Losing Yourself** for things you're not handling well, *and*
- * **Being There** for sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings that just sort of ... stick with you.

Plus a few more niche moods that'll be worth marking down now and then:

- * **Daring** when you do something big.
- * **Desperation** ... for trouble, conflict, and struggles.
- * **Delirium** when you're pushed away from yourself by sickness, trauma, or corruption.
- * **Bonding**, for making connections with others, *and finally*
- * **Peace** for simple, honest work.

Putting events in the adventure journal doesn't just form a record—each mood, in its own way, offers the player a chance to earn an advantage. In most cases, as discussed above, the advantage is a chance at additional, relevant story content, to help players dig up components; in a few, it may be something else.



It Begins

So I want to talk about how it all begins—the very first moments of your adventures with the Fortitude rats.

I want to tell you how the first adventure starts, and maybe the second—

Where it goes, how it *happens*, how you go from being an ordinary person, probably not even all that heroic and very rarely the kind of person you'd expect to be out having adventures on the roofs with the rats, to ... well ... to doing just that. To traveling the near and far roofs, hanging out with a bunch of heroic talking rats, and fighting—or finding a peace with—the totemic monster-god Mysteries that they challenge up there.

It's going to start with ... a feeling.

You're going on about your life, not really thinking that there's something important you have to be doing on top of the roofs with the rats, and then there's this incident and it *alerts* you to it. It wakes up your heart to the possibility of it, or maybe just plain wakes up your heart. Maybe you hear the sound of a galloping horse, and the distant sound of bells, and you realize: *that's on the roofs*. Or maybe it's coming from the sky, or the ground, or the distant sea. Maybe you see a riddle scrawled on the wall of some dried-up alley. Maybe it's just a feeling, like the wind is a little colder now. And it *hits* you.

It *gets* to you.

You feel it, and you can't leave it alone. Of course you couldn't. Nobody could. It's like that feeling that makes people investigate spooky sounds in haunted houses, climb random cliffs, fall in love with new people, explore art galleries, or follow up on a scientific experiment's unexpected results. It's a summoning mystery unto you: it twists up your stomach in anticipation, terror, or delight.

You have to understand it. You have to explore it. You're afraid of it, and yet you're drawn to it.

Your heart—it's in your *heart*. You have to know.

That's what a moment of **Wonder** is like.

Seeing the Rats

So, something's happened; taken you out of yourself for a moment. Something magic happened, and your heart—

And you want to know *more*.

But for a while, maybe, you don't. Seconds could pass. Minutes. Hours. Even days.

And then—

Then you're looking at a rat, one of the talking rats, one of the Fortitude rats, and you'll realize: there's a connection.

After that thing with the hooves and bells: this rat is walking along the roof, maybe, and she's listening. She's listening *to the same bells*. Or, after that thing with the riddle, maybe, you walk back by that alley again, and there's a rat hanging from the eaves by his back feet, staring at it, rubbing at his chin. Or, just kind of generally, you're looking up at the silhouette of a rat on the roofs and the wind blows through you and suddenly you feel *long ago and far away* or *This matters. This is something*.

And any of these ways, most likely, no matter what, you'll be thinking: "Oh. Of course."

It'll all make sense as soon as you connect it to the rats. That thing you were feeling. That weird intimation. It was an *adventure*. It's just like realizing that the reason you had so much trouble waking up this morning is that you were getting a cold, only, for weird intimations instead. You suddenly understand: *you've been having an adventure coming on. That's* what you've been feeling like.

Oh. Of course.

And maybe it's part of the same scene, maybe that's how things play out after you mark down the **WONDER** in your journal (or don't, if you don't)—or maybe time's been passing, and it's a completely different day, and this is a *new WONDER* now.

And if the rat in question had been a PC, then that might've been enough; they'd probably recognize the solemnity of the moment just from *looking* at you—just from *being* a PC, in the game, when someone's journal gets marked. ... but they're likely not; and *if* they're not, and you have to sell the rats on it, if you have to *convince* them this really matters to you, that you need to get involved, that you're not just some random Big Person who should stay off the roofs, all you have to do is to say:

"I can't ignore this."

Those are the magic words. They're deep, to a rat. Tactile, like the pen on the journal. Saying that, changes everything. When the heart's calling, when there's an adventure that you can't ignore—fundamentally, in rat culture, that means you *have* to go. That's the rule.

Maybe the actual rat you're talking to isn't the right one for your adventure. Maybe it's not *actually* the rat you were supposed to find and hang out with. That can happen. Sometimes your heart fills a moment with wonder, but that wonder isn't quite ... on point. Like, you see this grand cosmic synchrony in the way you were fascinated by that riddle, and the way that rat is hanging upside down staring at the riddle, only, actually? The rat's thinking, *how can I remove this riddling graffiti? I have a bucket and soap, of course, but my arms. They're so small!*

Or maybe you're staring up at a rat on the roofs, and their silhouette takes you out of yourself to some distant mental realm of antiquity and fraught meaning, and they're tied to some key adventure, your heart sees them and knows them, but it's actually your *next* adventure they're tied to, they have absolutely nothing to do with what's going on now.

Basically, what I mean is, maybe the rat you're talking to will have to say: "Look, I dunno. I hear you, but this isn't my deal—" "But ... I know a rat or two as can help."

Most of the time, though, there won't be any of that. No need to sell them on it. No need to look for the right rat to adventure with. Most of the time, you'll just look at them, and they'll look at you, and then they'll grin with their little rat teeth and say, "Come on, then."

You'll climb up.

Ascending

So, like we've said, something is wrong. Something's intruded on your world; called on you to join the adventures of the rats:

You go *up*.

You'll shed your shoes. At least you should; they're really not that helpful on the roofs. You'll take off any socks or stockings that you wear. You'll feel the sharpness of the tiles underneath your hands, when you climb, and your feet, when you stand up, or maybe your hands and feet *both* if you're a little dizzy about heights (like nobody in particular I'd want to mention) and not quite ready to stomp around or run the instant you hit the roof. You'll feel the sharpness of the tiles. The roughness of the stone. You'll feel the dry rustle of the ivy you push aside and climb, or the slick dampness of the moss. You'll orient yourself on the slanting rooftop world, on your feet or on all fours, and you'll realize you're in a qualitatively different place than you have been. You'll feel alienated, exposed, adventurous and *precarious* even though most roofs rats'll take you up on are relatively low and built to bear your weight. That's what you'll feel the first time, anyway, or the first time (anyway) for most.

Maybe you, in particular, are used to it up here. Are you?

Is this disorienting, vertiginous, and terrible for you, or are you already at home with heights?

Eventually you will get used to it, of course. Eventually you *must* get used to it, if you spend time with the rats. Eventually you will feel totally at home with your shoes slipped off and the tiles of a good roof under your feet. Eventually you'll turn into some kind of *connoisseur* of the rooftops, able to admire a well-turned gable, discourse on the warmth and breakability of terracotta, and giggle when you encounter a balcony railing, because, seriously? *Railings?* Who'd fall off of a *balcony*?

At first, though, it is probably quite strange.

If the rats don't know you yet they'll stare at you and they'll evaluate you either way. They'll be looking to see how you'll do with it, and they'll be a little surprised and a little patronizing no matter what. "Good," they'll say, when you've got your balance. Or "Hey, there, you OK?"

Or maybe once they can get out words through their giggling they'll be apologizing, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," as they laugh. "It's just, oh my God, you Big Folk. I'm sorry."

But even then, when it's done, they're probably kind. It's honestly hard to find the kind of emo dark knight kind of rat who'll just sniff at your best efforts and turn away. They'd have to be a *freak*, really, to get angry at a human entering their world, or you would have to be. If humans had killed their parents, maybe. That could happen. Or if you're a cat person, maybe, they might have a little trouble getting out kind words.

Any other situation, though, and they'll almost certainly be kind. Even if they've been laughing at you, they'll stop as soon as the humor lets them and remind you, "This is brave."

What you are doing, going up onto the roofs, at least the first few times, is brave.

Later, when you've got an adventure or two with the rats under your belt, there won't be anything special about coming up to the roofs. It'll be more like getting your sea legs back after spending a long while on land, or falling back in with a relative or friend you hardly ever get to see, or making yourself at home again in a place you're not really used to but you have always loved. Later, it'll all be greetings and memories and sniffing the faces of the rats, when you've gotten up on the roofs again, unless something terrible has changed.

But the first time you might get up there and find yourself wondering, rapt, at the brightness of it, the height of it, the unsteady frighteningness of it, and at the way the wind blows so much more strongly when you're up above the ground. The first time you're entering the world of creatures that are much lighter, much nimbler (most likely) and much better adapted to it than you, and you'll likely feel a little lost within their world.

You'll freeze up.

That's the kind of thing you might mark down as

LOSING YOURSELF.

IT BEGINS

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some important things for the start of the game:

- * make sure you know where the game is set—are you playing in a fictional place, or right where you live? (maybe with some changes, if your home town doesn't have water access and talking rats, or, if not everyone is local?);
- * make sure you know *what* you're playing—are you playing wholly fictional people, or slightly modified versions of yourselves?
- * make sure everyone picks an archetype from the options starting on pg. 70—e.g., “the Cintamani-Bearer,” or “the Hero of Fate” ...
- * ... or creates their own unique character, as per the rules on pg. 99;
- * if you're using the standard main group storyline, make sure the GM's reviewed its prelude on pg. 231; *and*
- * have the players brainstorm up some rats for your mischief, along with stuff like how you meet them and what they're like! You'll find some broad archetypes to start with here on pg. 100, complete with a bunch of suggested names.

Physical things you might want to get together before any given session of the game include:

- * paper and writing implements;
- * a bunch of six-sided dice—ideally, seven per player/GM, though you can get by with less;
- * a few ten-sided dice, too—though, you'll hardly ever use them, and online dice rollers exist, so you *can* probably skip that if you like;
- * a bag of letter tiles, usually assembled from one or more tilesets from a game like Scrabble;
- * one or more decks of cards, probably with the Jokers removed, shuffled together;
- * a printed or handwritten character sheet for each character with basic information like their name, the player's power selections, and their Traits; *and*
- * ideally, a printed or handwritten record of each character's *quest* (pg. 66).

Some things you might say, at the beginning of it all:

- * “where are you when you realize, *I can't ignore this. I have to know more?*”
- * “tell me why you can't let this go”
- * “tell me about why you can't let this go”
- * “tell me what you already know about the rats of Fortitude”
- * “tell me about your first meeting with (*one of the rats in the mischief*)”
- * “tell me why you told the rats that you can't let this go”
- * “tell me what you felt like, staring upwards at the roofs”
- * “tell me what you felt like, knowing all of this was ... real”

Some things you might say, on the first climb up:

- * “tell me what it feels like, climbing up to the roofs”
- * “tell me, are you dizzy—or does this make you feel ... strong?”
- * “tell me, are the tiles sharp, or rough, or smooth?”
- * “tell me, what are you *using* to actually *get up* to the roofs?”
- * “tell me, how long do you rest before you dare to stand upright upon the roofs?”
- * “tell me, what does it feel like, to walk the roofs there with the rats?”
- * “what do you see, looking out from the roofs?”
- * “tell me about the wind that's blowing”
- * “tell me about the rats as they comment on your climb”
- * “tell me, is it bright, is it tall, is it very frightening?”



by Camille “Karma” O’Leary



THE KING OF SHADOWS

- I -

I woke up unable to move. Lights were wrongly flickering. Illicit noises struck my ears: *chang, chang*, and *whoof*, and little squeaks. I tried my hands. I tried my eyelids. The noise kept my brain too busy to let my body move.

Then: “Jenna,” came the voice. “You’ve got to move.”

Something small touched my hand.

I followed the voice from my frozen state. I opened my eyes. There was a light dancing in the room. There were shadows dueling on the walls. There was a rat touching my hand.

I jerked back my hand. Reflexes clashed. It only moved an inch, and there it twitched. I clenched it into my fist. I’d lived in a lake-town long enough for my brain to say *that is a person*. I’d lived ... everywhere else, though ... long enough to want to scream, waking up like that, with a brown rat in my bed.

I even *liked* rats. Well, liked parrots, anyway, and my brain was pretty sure that pet rats were kind of like really dumb parrots that couldn’t fly. But *gnawing on my body filthy diseased eat your eyes get you sick* was in my palette of reactions too.

Maybe Fortitude rats are like really smart parrots that can’t fly, or at least, can’t fly that far.

“This room’s not safe,” the rat said. “Come on.”

He tugged my finger in the direction he wanted me to go, shoved my glasses into my hand, and ran up my arm to stand beside my ear.

“The living room,” he said. “Quickly.”

I sat up. I put my glasses on. I looked. There was a golden crystal on the floor beside my bed. It gave off light like a dancing flame. There was another rat there, sword in hand beside it. She was dove-white with a crust of red. She was practicing at swords—she was bleeding—

My eyes followed hers outwards towards the wall, where her shadows were fighting the shadows of no women and no rats, nor no men nor children neither; but of great crocodilian shapes *like* men, without a source.

I tried to gawk. The rat on my shoulder nipped my ear. So I got up and staggered out to the living room instead.

“Why,” I said. Then I blinked. “It’s the middle of the night,” I protested.

“It’s 4 a.m.,” the brown rat said.

“That’s the—”

Someone had told me once that rats were not the kind of people who thought of 4 a.m. as the middle of the night. It was *towards the end of the night*, to them. This fact caught in my brain and interrupted my thoughts. Then I got distracted by the shadows again. There isn’t much of a difference between my living room and my bedroom, not right now, just a couple of turns and a five foot walk, and I could still see the play of light.

“She’s fighting shadows,” I said.

“Yes.”

“That seems like something I should help with,” I said. “Or something that should not happen. Or ... is this OK?”

“She’s fine,” he said. “They’ll be leaving now, anyway. They can’t get you, not in here, so she’s just giving them a drubbing as they go.”

“That makes sense,” I said. “Shadows can’t come into living rooms.”

It wasn’t sarcasm. It certainly wasn’t serious. It was a lifeline flung up from the waters in the hopes that somebody would catch it on the ship.

He pushed with his foot on the forward left of my shoulder, and my eyes went down and left like he was pointing. There was a crooked trail of yarn across the space between the bedroom and where I stood.

“It’s an ancient treasure of the rats,” he said. “Seals the path. We blocked off this room with it, but if we’d blocked off that one we’d just have sealed the shadows in.”

“Oh,” I said.

The duel was quieting, in the other room. There was less motion, less flickering in the light. The yarn was not an ancient treasure of the rats. It was cranberry yarn that I was making a sweater out of. I wasn’t entirely sure how to mention this. I’d been a bit lame on finishing the sweater, getting distracted right after I started on the arms, so this might not have been the time.

“I’m not dressed,” I explained. “I don’t have makeup on.”

The fight had stopped. There was only the flickering of the light and the occasional soft peeping of the bedroom rat.

"It's all right," said the rat on my shoulder. "We won't be staying."

"Oh."

"We'll seal up the bedroom now," he said. "Won't last, it'll get dirty or blown away by the window-wind, but it's a start. Hopefully this whole thing will get cleared up before you have to care."

"What thing is that?"

"The King of Shadows," conceded the rat. "He's targeting you. Our fault. Very sorry. Won't happen again."

"The ... uh, ah?"

"His name was Kurobi," said the rat. "Once. But he's just the King of Shadows now."

The white rat came out of the bedroom and down the hall. She was limping. She was a mess. She nodded to the rat on my shoulder and he was down my side in a flash, standing beside her, sniffing at the wound, helping to hold her up.

"Evans," he said. "And this is Lilith."

Myth-bits caught in my head. I started to associate. He saw that, maybe, and he shook his head. "Evans and Lilith Koschieff," he corrected.

"Jenna," I said.

Though I guess that he'd already known.

They were fast. I didn't get the chance to thank them, or to wonder why. They were out the rat-door, which I realized for the first time didn't have a lock, and they were gone.

I was out on the porch steps and playing around with my flute when I saw the white rat again. I guess her footsteps must have cued me in or something, because I twisted most of the way around and looked up at the roof, and that's where she was, clinging to the eaves, looking a bit embarrassed to be seen but not embarrassed enough to move.

"What?" I asked.

I'm not sure why I said that instead of something else.

"It's pretty," she said.

"I'm terrible!"

She considered this. Then she shrugged, came down the wall, and stood on the porch-step railing instead. "It's probably the flute, then," she said. She eyed it. "It's not normal. It's some sort of magical rat-charming flute."

"It's Chinese," I said.

She nodded firmly. "As I said."

I don't think corner stores in China sell magical rat-charming flutes, I said. Or, rather, I planned to say that. I don't know if I actually did. I got distracted by the neatly sewn-up scar along her side. "Are you OK?"

She shrugged. "Sure."

"You were fighting," I said.

"That's really not your affair," she said. "I mean, it shouldn't be." She licked her hand and rubbed it irritably on the wound. "I think that it shouldn't be. I just liked the sound."

"You got hurt," I said. "In my home, in the middle of the night, without an invitation, you came in and got hurt fighting something. That's something I think I need to be either grateful or angry for, depending on why and how. I'm betting grateful, so thank you and all. But seriously."

"Can you just drop it?" she asked.

Cranberry yarn was still running along my doorway. I really needed to actually finish the arms on that sweater sometime.

I tilted my head. "You really like the sound of this?" I said.

She looked away.

"I suck," I said, again, but I played until I would have stopped, anyway, or maybe a little less than that, and then I looked out at the lake for a long while, and I was so sure that when I looked over again she would be gone.

But she wasn't.

She'd pulled herself back into the corner of the stairs, small and trembling.

I followed her gaze. There wasn't anything. Not even me or my flute, unless I was wrong on how a rat turns their head when they are looking. Just the open world.

It didn't seem right.

"I can't," I said. "I can't just drop it."

I put the flute down on the stairs. I held out my hand to her. I waited.

She trembled.

She smelled the air. Her whiskers moved. She looked around.

"Why?" she asked. She came forward to my hand. She stood on it, delicately. From what I've heard of the Fortitude rats, she could probably take me in a fight, if it came down to that; maybe not somebody with any real skills, you understand, but a person like me, who's never actually fought life-and-death, she'd take down in a thousand cuts.

She still looked very small.

"It's stupid," I said. *Dropping it is stupid.*

It wasn't the right thing to say.

The brown rat was on the roof. "Lilith," he said. She turned. She left my hand. She scrambled up the wall.

"I have to know!"

They were frozen. They couldn't move. I tried to remember. There were stories about this. I'd heard how people got involved in the affairs of the rats. I knew the words—

"I can't let this be," I said. "It's calling."

Evans sighed.

"It's calling," I said.

"Come on, then," he said.

Come on, then. I looked at the wall blankly. I looked up at the roof. I brushed at the hem of my skirt.

"It's not much of a calling," Evans said, "if it won't get you up the wall."

Screw you, I thought about saying. Social conditioning intervened. I remembered the play of the shadows in the night.

"Um," I said.

I was standing. I put my fingertips on the mantel of the door. I tried to pull myself up. I did a tiny hop. I attempted to brace one hand on an invisible support beam in the air but as so often happens there were none. I stepped back. I looked around.

The rats were dead-quiet.

"I'll get a ladder," I said. "And change clothes. And—do I need any supplies?"

"Here," Evans said.

He'd moved along the roof. He was hanging from its edge. He was tapping an unevenness in the wall. "One hand here," he said. "One hand in that crack there. Then your feet on the porch rail, and one hand on the roof *here*, and *here*, and up and over. OK?"

"You sure?"

"You have thumbs, right?"

"... yes," I confirmed.

"Easy-peasy," he said. "You're like some kind of freak mutant super-rat. Thumbs! And look how long those arms and legs are. Put us both to shame, you will."

I made a face at him.

"OK," I said.

And I went up.



the Near Roofs

This bit's from when you've just reached the Near Roofs—maybe gotten over your initial shock, maybe walked around up there for a while, maybe gone from the stuff that's more like “your own house's roof” to something more foreign and interesting to you.

You're still in, or at least over, your town.

Eventually, this kind of place is going to be all safe and known territory to you, all old hat to you, because ultimately it *is* just a part of regular old dull boring wherever-you-happened-to-be-living. It's not magic. It's just ... Portland. Suzhou. Whatever. Seattle, Baltimore, Fortitude, or St. Paul.

... but for right *now*? On your first trips up there? It's mysterious and wondrous and strange. Maybe even a little frightening. The place you've lived for so long is suddenly defamiliarized to you; you find places that you have a hard time accepting are actually *there*.

This is a good time to introduce any changes in the real world that are necessary to having the game work—

Like, the rats arrive places by ship, so there's a river, lake, or oceanfront *somewhere*, even if your city is landlocked. Maybe it's not visible from the ground, if you want to hew closer to the established contours of your home, and that's probably weird and a little magical ... but that doesn't really matter *here*; it's not a magic that makes the roofs *themselves* any stranger.

Too, it's useful here to have the roofs be kind of interesting and detailed. To have a lot of them that are relatively safe, relatively low. It's possible that you're living somewhere where you couldn't find that. Where all the roofs are dull, or interesting but rickety and high. If you need to change that kind of thing, introduce some variety or a bit more safety, this defamiliarization process is a good time to bring in something new.

Here're a few places to explore.

Eight Banners

This bit's up north, near the burrow *Little Nymh*. Here rats can fly banners from the roof to mark their victories—any victory, really, although they're grouped, more or less, by scale. There are a lot more than eight banners here, and in fact, it's closer to two thousand; the eight banners of the *name* recognize five great victories:

- * awakening as Fortitude rats;
- * the Hallow's-Eve victory, when the Mystery named **Hedge the Fang** (pg. 124) took over the bodies of seven hundred cats and tried to kill the local rat population—but they drove him out and lost fewer than a thousand rats, two hundred cats, and five or six of the Big Folk (humans, that is) thereby;
- * the peace accords, struck between the Rat King and his rivals Neven and Kysely Vertigen, that ended the “Usurpers' Era;”
- * the rats' discovery of a magical sailing route from Fortitude, the land of their origin, to ... well, originally, the dwarf planet Eris, but let's say here, *the town where the game is set*, instead; *and*
- * their defeat of the monster **Typhon** (pg. 143) at Thresher's Woods (below).

The remaining three of the eight major banners are currently blank; this signifies that they have not yet defeated the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy,² conquered the world, or made an end to Death.

It's a pretty gorgeous span of roofs; they've chosen good ones, with solid construction and chimneys or second stories that offer epic views of the waterfront and your town. It's fun to walk along the Lower Banners, where rats have put up small plaques to relatively small deeds and fly the appropriate streamers—here's one, for instance, commemorating a litter where all the kits survived their first month; here's one for counting the teeth of the Mystery named Goblin; here's one for five years of love and marriage; and here's one from the valedictorian of Professor Roza's academy!

The street of Great Banners is even cooler, but I haven't been there; nevermind flying a banner, you're only supposed to go *there and look* as a commemoration for some great occasion

² a particularly noxious Mystery

in your life, so I'm saving it for something special. Maybe when this book comes out! That'll probably have happened by the time you're reading this, though, so you could certainly go there and see.

Heaven's Sleeve

This bit's not far from the water.

These are pretty ordinary roofs. They're not really crowded together but they're not terribly far apart either. The slopes are modest and consistent. The tiles are red, white, and gray and mostly made of slate. It's not until you go up near the top and look down the length of them that you see anything at all special or interesting here.

If you do that, though, you might catch your breath.

The roofs are like a branching road, or river, or a waving bit of cloth. They run together in the distance—you only really see the gaps between them up close—and become this great sweep of pathway that parallels the shore, touching the harbor in several places, and has breakaway paths that lead past intriguingly colored clusters of rooftops and up into the city's heart.

The rats call this place Heaven's Sleeve, and the story goes like this:

Once upon a time, Cneph the Maker wandered down to Earth—to this very city, in fact! Only, when they turned to leave again, they caught their sleeve on the nail of a house. It ripped off and grew into a hydra of great waving streamers. These lay themselves down to become the region the rats call Heaven's Sleeve. Because of that only *most* of Cneph the Maker could leave the world—they had to leave a portion of themselves here, in the same way they'd left a portion of their robe.

Kaoru's Cross

This bit's roughly central. It's where two major roads cross down below.

The buildings near here tend to have conjoined roofs. That means that when you're looking down from above, the crossroads is two deep, crisscrossed trenches in the rolling hills of the roofs. Those trenches are gaily colored, with rows of trees and bits of white and red plaster visible from above to either side. Good smells drift up. You can hear people walking along the way, and occasionally the jingling of bikes. The roofs aren't wholly contiguous—there are plenty of other little roads that break them up, and a few architectural separations—but there's an overall sense of evenness to the terrain, like you're on rich red ground and you've opened up the earth to see a marvelous miniaturized world of people walking around below.

The rats'll tell you that Karme Kaoru fought here with the

Mystery **Salamander**, also Named "Indiscretion;" it unleashed a terrible fire, but she caught it up, transformed it, and used it to re-fire the terracotta of the rooftop tiles. Ever since, they've been indestructible, like rat-gum-treated rooftops, and just a little bit warmer than you would think they'd be.

The Red King's Road

This bit starts at the waterfront and it runs northwest.

These are pretty ordinary roofs. They're solid enough underfoot, and they're not that high, and the gaps between them are pretty small—all in all, they're good beginner's roofs. They aren't particularly mythic or impressive in themselves. To me, though, the things that happened there give them some grandeur.

The Red King's Road is one of the remnants of the Usurpers' Era, when a whole litter of siblings and a number of cousins and even a handful of foreign powers engaged in war, actions, and rebellion against the throne of the King of Rats.³ "The Red King" was one of those unruly siblings: he rebelled, and he lost, and he walked this road when returning to his throne and grave.

His isn't the only story, or the only rooftop region, emerging from that time. There's a similar history to the Corpse Duke's Runway, the Traitor Prince's Gallows, Sword Princess Path, and Kysely's Edge; not to mention Konrad's Court and Neven's Solace, distinguished from the previous in that Konrad and Neven both reconciled with their King.

The Republic of the Living

The white roofs of this place are the keep of the Living Mayor, who broke off from the Rat King's kingdom some while after the Usurpers' Era and declared himself an independent power. There he sacrificed his mortality with the help of the Mystery **Malambruno** (pg. 139) and sank his flesh and mind into his domain, animating the upper and lower roofs of his republic with his own spirit. Now he is every spinning vane, every laundry line, every roof tile and every gutter; thus the rats of the Republic of the Living may always retreat to the high places and know safety if the Rat King invades them from below. The matter is essentially notional now, as the Republic of the Living and the Kingdom of the Rats long ago made peace and reunited; now the Republic is only the Living Mayor himself and those disaffected rats who want to make a show of political dissent by signing on.

³ Rat generations go pretty fast, so you may well have been alive when all this "ancient history" happened; though, if you want to say that the rats weren't public at the place where you live yet, that is fine.

Thresher's Woods

This bit's off to the northwest.

The name refers to a space of rooftops, telephone poles, and a scant few trees. It's not a real forest, but if you sit or lay down here, if you get your eyes low enough, you'll understand why the rats see it as one. Dark wood is a common construction feature here. Protruding attic windows cast grim shadows. Telephone poles and their wires loom. The place feels and smells like you're in a light forest.

Thresher's Woods is a relatively well-traveled region. You can often find a news-rat about or a place to buy a rat-sized meal. There are fire-pits scattered through the region on stone roofs: the humans below receive a tiny stipend and free fire insurance in exchange for allowing the rats their fires up above. Rats that spend so long on the roofs that they don't feel comfortable in the burrows any longer often set up residence here in Thresher's Woods, so you'll see tiny laundry lines and other signs of habitation scattered here and about.

Here's how the rats tell the story of the place.

In the old days, in the Autumn Dynasty, there was a crop of heroes like nobody'd ever seen, or has ever seen again. They were astonishing. It was an era of warriors like Chryseis Moriko, who could take on a Big Folk soldier toe-to-toe and come out the better; of thieves like Alen Aleksei, who stole his father back from Death; of geniuses like Zlatan Petrova, who invented refrigeration; and of heroes like Kristen Lukenya, who might as well have been a Mystery, save only that she died and once she'd died she did not bother to return.

There were too many of them, and the world too small. That was their curse. They did their best to live under the rule of the Rat King and devote their attention to the Mysteries, but it was too difficult. Little feuds grew large. Tempers grew hot. They called the local rats under their various banners and they waged war such as Fortitude rats have rarely seen; and one by one, they cut each other down, here, in the span of roofs called Thresher's Woods.

It was not until the war had almost ended, not until there were scarcely seven out of seventy of the great remaining, that Typhon came to make an end to all the errant rats. It is their great triumph and their monument that her skin flutters in the wind, a golden kite of flesh, on the street of Great Banners and from the highest telephone pole peak of Thresher's Woods.



by Mariona Roig Torné

Wingmaidens' Reach

These roofs are clean and ever-so-slightly luminous. The Wingmaidens' Reach is mostly made of the roofs of houses, but its northern edge extends to warehouses and a cannery. There is an extensive birdcote in the central portion that resembles a fantasy palace, which, in some respects, it has become.

In the central cote of Wingmaidens' Reach live the seven *ternmays*, rat heroines cursed by Malambruno to adopt the skins and wings of terns. They must take on the form of a tern one day in four, from dawn to dusk, and may do so at other times as often as they like. They tried at first to undo or escape this curse but after learning that *ternmays* are functionally immortal, beautiful to other rats, and can fly as often as they like, they stopped trying to reverse it.

The Wingmaidens' Reach has acquired a portion of the peril of the far rooftops; it is an innate *geas* (pg. 69) of the place and all that transpires there that *beauty has a price*.

a moment of wonder

Do you go looking for the *ternmays*?

Do you stand on Wingmaidens' Reach, by the *ternmays'* cote, and watch the sky—seeing the clouds go by, feeling the wind on your face, bathed in the glow of the sun—and then, a flutter of wings, a flash of speckled white, and a *ternmay* goes by overhead?

Do you stare after it goes, and mark down **WONDER**?

Or is it your first time alone on the roofs—you're waiting to meet a rat friend—and you wander through Thresher's Woods?

Do you see this sight and that—rat-sized laundry lines gaily fluttering in the wind, little houses, the fire pits, and none of it really gets to you, you're just wandering in a daze, and then suddenly you see this news-rat hawking papers and it's just like, wow. That's ... that's a thing?

And you mark it down as **WONDER**, and even claim an *arcanum* (pg. 55), because even if it didn't stand out from anything else to anyone *else* in the game, finding that news-rat really just ... clicked ... somehow for you?



THE NEAR ROOFS

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when the characters are traveling the Near Roofs:

- * “tell me about the views of the water”
- * “tell me about the rats that you see moving here and there on the roofs”
- * “tell me about the rat habitations that you find”
- * “tell me about the rats you see hawking food, newspapers, treasures”
- * “tell me about the warden-rat you see, pensive, with the air of a guardian”
- * “tell me about the music of the rats”
- * “tell me about the banners the rats fly”
- * “tell me about the garden of the rats”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like a desert”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like water”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like a forest”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like the sky”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like the city (in miniature)”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like a glade”
- * “tell me about the roofs where the rats have their advanced industrial project”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like the hills”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like an alley”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like a port”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like an island”
- * “tell me about the roofs that kind of feel like your home”

At Eight Banners ...

- * “tell me how you pass through the Lower Banners, up north, with its flags and kites and its waterfront view”
- * “tell me about the banners you read there, and the accomplishments of the rats”
- * “tell me how you look up at the street of Great Banners; will you visit there when you have an accomplishment worthy of it?”

At Heaven’s Sleeve ...

- * “tell me how you pass through Heaven’s Sleeve, down by the water—do you go up high to see how the roofs flow together to form a great branching road?”
- * “tell me, do you know the story of Heaven’s Sleeve? (pg. 12)
 - “... do you think a rat here might tell you?”
 - “... want to share it with a friend?”

At Kaoru’s Cross ...

- * “tell me how you pass through Kaoru’s Cross, near the heart of the city, with its crossroads like two deep, crisscrossed trenches in the rolling rooftop hills”
- * “tell me what you hear from the people who walk there; from the jingling of bikes”
- * “tell me how it feels to walk on the rich red roofs of Kaoru’s Cross, solid as the ground?”
- * “tell me, do you know the story of Kaoru’s Cross? (pg. 12)
 - “... do you think a rat here might tell you?”
 - “... want to share it with a friend?”

At the Red King’s Road ...

- * “tell me how you walk the Red King’s Road, from the waterfront off northwest—it’s good beginner’s roofs, I’m told, with solid tiles and fairly short gaps for when you have to jump.”
- * “tell me, do you know the story of the Red King’s Road? (pg. 12)
 - “... do you think a rat here might tell you?”
 - “... want to share it with a friend?”



At the Republic of the Living ...

- * “tell me how you pass through the Republic of the Living, where every spinning vane, every white-topped tile, every laundry-line and every gutter ... is inhabited by the spirit of the ‘Living Mayor’ of the rats?”
- * “tell me of the rats who live here, officially forsaking governance by their King?”
- * “tell me, can you feel the presence of the Living Mayor on these roofs?”
- * “tell me, do you speak to him—the Living Mayor—through some chimney-flue or gutter-wind?”

At Thresher’s Woods ...

- * “tell me how you pass through the northwest Thresher’s Woods, where the roofs feel like a forest, and there are tiny fire-pits and laundry lines scattered here and there about around the outside of rats’ homes?”
- * “tell me, do you know the story of the Thresher’s Woods? (pg. 13)
 - “... do you think a rat here might tell you?”
 - “... want to share it with a friend?”

At Wingmaidens’ Reach ...

- * “tell me how you pass through Wingmaidens’ Reach, where beauty has its price?”
- * “tell me of the fairy-tale birdcote at its heart?”
- * “tell me how you see the ternmays passing overhead?”
- * “tell me, do you know the story of Wingmaidens’ Reach? (pg. 13)
 - “... do you think a rat here might tell you?”
 - “... want to share it with a friend?”

AND OTHER PLACES BESIDES ...

- * “tell me about the temple of the rats, and the music that rises from it”
- * “tell me how you walk ...
 - “the Corpse Duke’s Runway, and what the roofs are like there;”
 - “the Traitor Prince’s Gallows, and what the roofs are like there;”
 - “Sword Princess Path, and what its roofs are like;”
 - “Kysely’s Edge, and what the roofs are like there;”
 - “Konrad’s Court, and what its roofs are like;”
 - “Neven’s Solace, and what its roofs are like”
- * “tell me of the roofs you walk—what do they feel like, here? do you know their name?”
- * “tell me, do you know the story of this place?
 - “... do you think a rat here might tell you?”
 - “... want to share it with a friend?”

MATTERS OF THE RATS ...

- * “speak to me of the rats racing, chasing one another on the roofs?”
- * “speak to me of rats and hide and seek—and their excuses, as they pretend they’re *not* at play?”
- * “talk to me about how the rats explore the space around you as they go?”
- * “speak to me of the play-fights of the rats—their eyes boggling, voices giggling, chasing and pouncing or with play-swords dueling until one is softly bitten or tapped upon the neck?”
- * “speak to me how the rats pretended that there was trouble coming ... only, it turned out to be a prank?!”
- * “speak to me of something the rats ran up, or found?”

TRAVELING WITH THE RATS

This bit's about the travel customs of the rats. It tells you what kinds of things the rats will be doing when you're out on the roofs in a traveling or exploration scene.

If you're lucky you'll see them at play.

They'll have little races, from here to there or possibly *around and about everything*—they don't typically need exact rules for this to have fun, not like adult humans might, as long as there's a clear sense that the other rat is doing *something* related to their race. You'll see them chasing one another around and around and around up an old chimney, skittering past an unexpected bird's nest on the way, quite possibly exaggerating the risk of falling off for effect; and then, if one of them is losing, that one might decide suddenly the *real* aim of the race is to jump off the chimney from halfway up, scramble along a weathervane, and jump out before the weathervane turns about onto the roof of a nearby house.

They'll play hide and seek. This is particularly common if there are enough of them that a few of them can get ahead of you while one or two stays beside. They're mature enough not to really *acknowledge* that they're playing hide and seek—instead, it's “that goof! Where's he got off to now?” or “good grief, she's gotten lost again?”—but you can tell they *were* by their smugness when they *do* find one another or when, after not being found, they strut back to the group.

They'll play fight, now and then. This is awesome fun for them, and they'll usually be giggling or boggling their eyes⁴ with good humor the whole time—chasing, pouncing on, and struggling to pin their opponent, with an ultimate aim of softly biting or tapping on their neck.⁵

Even when it's not safe enough to play, or when they're not in the mood, they'll still hardly ever go from one place to another in a straight line. They'll always be exploring, looking at their world and the roof from all directions, exclaiming in soft joy, wonder, or surprise at this and that. They'll run up a television antenna, if they can find one, or up any weather



by Jenn Manley Lee

vane, or along an attic roof. They'll go back and forth between nearby roofs, or between a roof and the branches of a nearby tree, for no real reason other than, *they can*. They're most comfortable and happiest when they've thoroughly explored the space around them, even when they're in places they should technically already know.

Sometimes even in the near rooftops they'll start acting really cautious or aggressive. They'll tell you stories of bad things that have happened nearby, or poke at the rooftops skeptically with their swords, or make plans for coping with horrible danger. Do not be concerned. *They are hamming it up for you*. Seriously, any time you hear a rat admitting to fear, or hinting that you should be afraid, you're getting yourself set up to have your leg pulled—they are perfectly capable of hiding their reactions and talking out of your range of hearing, and that's exactly what they *would* do if they were genuinely concerned. At the very least, say, “For serious?” and, if they agree, say, “Promise?”

Because I guess something scary *could* be going on, but if you can't get them to promise to it, then what's *really* going to happen is that you're about to see a scary mask propped up on the roof or you're walking somewhere where a bat might fly out at you, and they're getting ready to laugh and laugh at you when you get scared. As for why they'd do such a mean thing, well, it's the same reason that people scare children—it's to make you more cautious when you wouldn't be, and less scared when you would!

⁴ Did you know that rats' eyes can sort of pop out and vibrate in their sockets when they're really happy? It's called boggling! It can definitely take you by surprise.

⁵ The rats of Fortitude tend towards neoteny in their fighting—a standard fight is a children's game persisting into adulthood, rather than the kind of fight anybody could take seriously. That's why they're laughing! Boasting, arguing, and tests of skill are conceptualized as extensions of these fights, so you'll often see a rat rubbing at its neck when particularly impressed, or tapping another rat's neck when it thinks it's being particularly impressive. In case you're wondering, in a serious fight, their instincts will tell them to bite the enemy's rump. Their *brains*, of course, will probably be telling them either to use a weapon or to back down.

Boundaries

The rats divide the near and far roofs both into neighborhoods, districts, and other regions.

This distinction is generally arbitrary in the Near Roofs—there *can* be a clear dividing line, or a qualitative feature that makes *this* roof a part of Kaoru's Cross and *that* roof, which isn't even physically separate from it, a part of Kysely's Edge ... but more often there is not. In the Far Roofs, or going between the Far and Near, the division is more palpable—you will *feel* the transition between the two miniature realms.

When approaching a boundary of either sort, the rats will become solemn. They will stand at the edge of a rooftop on or near the line and bow in the direction of their travels, and often to the sun, the moon, or stars as well. They will hold up a mirror, if they have one, to “raise up the sky.” They will recite the name of the neighborhood they're about to enter, and allow themselves a breath of time to mark the transition. Then they'll cross between the two.

I'm not going to talk about the boundaries between the near roof neighborhoods—you and your GM have seen roofs, so you're probably already imagining *more* interesting boundaries than the ones there actually are. Seriously, half the time, it's really just “well, that's where the line is drawn,” and the other half the time it's like “this roof is red, and this roof is white, see?”

Crossing to the Far Roofs is generally a far more interesting matter.

CROSSING OVER

Here's what it's like to travel to the Far Roofs.

There's no way to get there just by wandering around. No matter how long you go jumping from one roof to another you'll always be on top of somebody's ordinary roof—that's just how the world works. To get to the Far Roofs requires something more. It needs a trick, a secret route, something you *could* stumble upon but unless a Mystery is warping your fate you probably never would.

Mostly you'll learn these from the rats.

“Ah,” they'll say, “We'll take the sunway.”

And they'll show you how that works. There's a roof, see, and if you go there at the right time of day it's just this blinding sheet of sunlight; and you leap into that sunlight and you're there.

Or “Oh,” they'll say. “The way to where we're going—let's stop at the altar to Praksia and pray, and when we look up from our prayer, we'll be there.”

If you know what you're doing, either on the roofs or in general, you may be able to figure out a way there on your own. You may be able to *hypothesize* that something is a way to get to the Far Roofs, **DARING**-ly extrapolating from what you know about other routes or spotting something that's out of place in a kind of Far-Roofs-path-y kind of way. That can happen too.

A route to the Far Roofs is always a little strange. Usually the transition happens while you're not paying attention. When you're *unable* to pay attention. You can't follow it. You can't watch it. You're *blinded* or *wholly absorbed in something else*—

And then you're there.

There are a few methods that work when you're paying attention to them, but they're cheating in a different way: they're so weird that even when paying attention to them you can't really integrate them into your picture of the world; or, put another way, when you're paying attention to the path, you stop being able to pay attention to where you actually *are*.

There's almost always a *choice* when you're doing this.

This is important. It's a big deal.

There's a moment of heightened *intention*—a moment of deciding to actually *do* something. You don't, and can't, wind up on the Far Roofs by faffing about. You can get there by accident, deciding to go through a door and propose to somebody or to head out and apply for a job or whatever and winding up on the Far Roofs instead, but there still has to have been a *decisive moment*. You have to have had that *right, doing this now* feeling at some point along the way, or, you have to follow or be led by somebody who at some point does.

You've gotta be bold, because there's no easy way back.

This is the kind of experience you might mark as **DARING**.

A Daring Moment: the Labyrinth

Is this something you might do?

“The Far Roofs are a perspective shift,” you decide. “It’s not about a where, but a ... how. About a ... ‘how-you-look-at-things.’ So I: I’m going to focus on something here ... like, really focus on it ... and when I stop seeing the world around me, and look outwards, I’ll see a world that fits the thing that I focused on instead.”

... or, maybe, this?

“I’m going to draw a labyrinth,” you say. “On these roofs, here, in ‘Thresher’s Woods,’ in chalk. And I will walk that labyrinth. And I will lose myself in it, until I wake with a start and realize I am in a labyrinth of the same form and style, but not in chalk.”

And either way, you do this thing.

And you **LOSE YOURSELF** in it. There is this moment when there is nothing, nothing, nothing but the labyrinth; when you successfully forget the world that’s actually around you. And you snap back to yourself, and you realize ...

You realize where you are ...

... *BUT I DON’T KNOW IF IT WORKS OR NOT, SO HERE,*
OUR EXAMPLE ENDS ...

Animate Landmarks

The rats have a vibrant mythology (or possibly history; or both) pertaining to the rooftops. From time to time this manifests physically—at the right time of day, given the right offering, or whatever, you can suddenly encounter the Red King on his throne, Kaoru battling the fire, the heroes of Thresher’s Woods, or the Traitor Prince’s Gallows’ screaming crowd. You might hear the death-rattling engine sounds of the Corpse Duke’s aeroplane upon his Runway, or catch the scent of blood and perfume upon Sword Princess Path. You can pass through Vikenti Haru’s shadow or pray at an altar to Praksia the rat. Anywhere the rats have stories, they may also very well have evidence; where that evidence manifests, you’ll often also find a path to the Far Roofs. Some of these mythic figures want something from you, like respect or blood, before they’ll open up a path. Some have a specific, repeatable condition (“cut the purses of three rats at the Gallows”) to

take you to another place. Other mythic or historical figures just decide for themselves whether to open the way or not, their criteria as inexplicable as they so choose.

Animate landmarks aren’t always blatant. Sometimes it’s not, like, a sudden full-immersion experience of Kaoru battling a Mystery. It’s more... a distant rattling sound. The scent of blood and perfume. A thing, that matters, that makes you feel something, that takes you a little out of yourself, but not really that big of a deal; only, because you can *feel* that it’s supernatural, because you can tell that it marks a transition to the Far Roofs, the sensory impression of it sticks with you a while.

Other times, of course, they’re terrifying or wondrous.

A thing of: DARING, WONDER, or BEING THERE

Blind Rat’s Roads

A common feature of paths to the Far Rooftops is that the transition’s hard to see: either the path confuses and closes off your senses, or, you have to confuse or close off your senses *to use it*. **Blind Rat’s Roads** are paths that you can only take blind—more specifically, a sighted human needs to be unable to see, and a rat needs a face-mask that stops up their nose and pins their whiskers back.⁶ You seal off your main orienting senses and follow a specific path; at the end, you’re not where you’d expect you would have been.

A related category are the **Lost Rat’s Roads**, which you can only take by confusing your senses and spatial orientation. These can be easier to travel; like, all you have to do is spin around and around before wobbling off along them ... or they can be really difficult, e.g., you have to blindfold yourself *and have someone lying convincingly about where you are* in order to travel them. (The weirdest thing here is what’s going on with the person who has their eyes open and is lying to you about where you are. Presumably they have to go into a trance state at some point and lose track of the world around them? —I guess? The other possibility is that Lost Rat’s Roads don’t actually exist and the rats are having a *lot* of fun with me sometimes.)

A thing of: DARING, BEING THERE, or LOSING YOURSELF

⁶ One interesting feature of the rats’ native language is that the word “blind” refers equally well to losing *the speaker’s* primary sense, or *the listener’s* primary sense. If you stop up a rat’s sense of smell, the rat will say, “I’m blind!” (*I have lost my primary sense!*) Conversely, if you blindfold them, they may report blindness, or they may say something inexplicable like “My eyes have gone deaf” or “I can no longer use my eyes to see!” This is further complicated by the rats’ nominal immunity to the curse of Babel; c.f. Matthews, Lloyd and Neall, Henrietta, *Undifferentiated Bidialectal Syntax and the Afferent Metahuman Self*, Applied Linguistics, Volume 40, Issue 4,

Moonlight Ways

This one is so fantasy-traditional that I thought the rats were kidding until I saw it for myself. In certain places, at certain times, the moonlight forms a bridge. Or reveals a bridge, maybe? ... accumulates, anyhow, about an unseen structure and gives it visibility and substance. You can walk on that bridge, and it will take you from the Near Roofs to the Far.

Moonlight in general is good at revealing paths. It's not just the bridges—there are places where you need moonlight in a certain phase to see a door in a roof that leads to an access tunnel or connected series of attics which can take you to the Far Roofs, or from one side of the city to the other, in just a couple minutes' walk.

A thing of: WONDER

Sunways

A "sunway" is a roof that catches the sun's light along its whole length at a certain time of day—a roof that turns into a sheet of light. You have to make the jump from a sunway while blinded by that light; you'll land in *Heaven's Alley* or *the Little Cosmos*, both neighborhoods in the Far Roofs.

If you're in Little Cosmos, the light will fade away again, except for spots of Zodiac-shaped starlight gleaming from the various roofs; if you land in Heaven's Alley, though, the light won't fade. Eventually you'll take in that light and your eyes and skin or fur will glow softly in their turn and everywhere else in the world will seem a little dark to you for the remainder of the day.

A thing of: DARING

A Daring Moment: the Sunway

Is this what happened to you?

You were listening as the rat explained it.

"When the roof is dark," the rat said, "and you can see it, then there's just a single way forward here. But the sun will come up and angle itself until there's nothing there but light. And in that moment, when you can't see anything at all, there are endless ways forward. That's when you jump."

And it sounded simple, but it isn't simple.

You were already running forward when the light sheeted across the surface of the roof and blinded you with it. You were in motion. And yet, when the light fills you, there is a moment when the motion becomes a still and single thing—

Not *I RUN*, but *I AM EXPERIENCING A MOMENT OF RUNNING*.

I AM EXPERIENCING A MOMENT OF JUMPING.

There is a moment when the ordinary process of your life has stopped and there is a great and listening stillness. There is a long and timeless instant, a moment like no other moment.

There is pressure in the muscles of your legs. Your feet leave the roof. The wheels of the world are turning:

DARE.

Unreachable Towers

Sometimes you get places that just aren't reachable any longer. Sometimes buildings will get abandoned and the municipal authorities won't hear about it. Sometimes the ground actually shifts. Sometimes there's a warehouse that gets cleaned and checked every week and used every month, and it's not *abandoned* or anything, but even so it's in the wrong place, able to block off a certain path.

There aren't many, but there are a few places near where you're living you just can't *get* to from the ground.

When there's a place like that, after a while, *magic* moves in. Chaos. Surrealness. What the rats call "the Outside." Strange towers rise ... maybe. (If you force a path in from the ground, they are not there.) The ground bends in strange ways. There's occasionally a mist. Peculiar and surreal things happen there. The sky is a little orangier than it is everywhere else.

You can pass through places like that and reach the Far Roofs. You climb one of those strange towers, and you lose sight of the rooftops below you in the mist, and then you find yourself beside a different set of rooftops to one side. So you jump, and there you are. Or you go over the rooftops into an "Outside" place, then down onto the ground, then follow the road signs to somewhere in the Far Roofs. Or you slip in to somewhere weird, turn around three times, and head back out, and there you are.

I've heard there's a tower downtown that no rat has ever climbed. It's under construction. They can't get in. They've climbed up twenty, thirty floors of girders from the outside, and they haven't reached the top. They've gone high enough that there is no way you couldn't see the tower from everywhere in your city, and yet you can't, because it's not in your city. It's the Outside.

Someone will probably clean it up, if they can *find* it, but I've canvassed that whole area out of curiosity, and others have done so as their job, and none of us have actually found the part yet that is unreachable from the ground.

Maybe the rats are just teasing? It's sometimes difficult to tell.

A thing of: WONDER

Fantasms

"Fantasms" are recurring phenomena, typically on an erratic but predictable schedule, that serve as gateways between the Near Roofs and the Far. Perhaps an inexplicable thing descends from the sky, every 12 to 17 days, and you stare up at it, as Ezekiel or a Teletubby might, and when you look away again, you are no longer on the Near portion of the Roofs. Maybe now and then, every four or five hours, balloons dangling their strings or hawks carrying ropes float or fly by a given roof; if you catch hold, you'll fly out, not to the place you'd think that would take you, but onto the Far Roofs. Maybe there is a drumming, a terrible drumming, every night, and then the roof of a certain place gives way and you fall screaming through horrors and perversities to land on the roofs of a different country, under a haunted sky. Sometimes traveling by phantasm is perfect and convenient, comfortably timed and taking you and your companions in one great group to wherever you want to go. Sometimes it's a bit of a mess, and you can screw up the transition or get separated on the way.

There is *no reason* that this kind of thing happens. I can't explain it. The inexplicable things, I can theoretically attribute to divine providence. The drumming might be about some kind of ghost. But the balloons and hawks defeat me, so I'm just going to say: this kind of thing happens. Sometimes. If you have a good navigational chart you can go and see it for yourself.

**A thing of: WONDER, LOSING YOURSELF,
and BEING THERE**

Just "Being There:" the Balloons

Here's what this bit might be like.

You check your watch. You wait. A minute or two before the proper hour, you see them coming into sight: these balloons just ... floating by. They're pretty big, but not hot-air-balloon big: they don't look quite big enough to carry you. And if you're worried that they won't, maybe you'll need to gamble on it and you'll need to be **DARING** instead ...

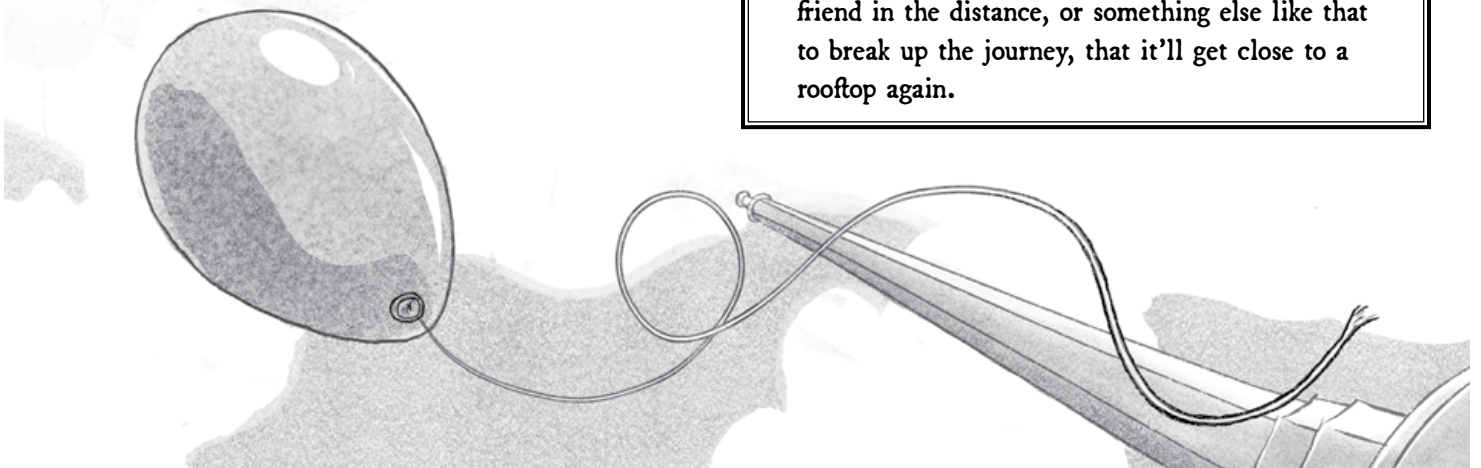
But let's say you've taken this route before.

You know that it's safe. So you watch, and when the balloon is close enough, you reach out, and take hold, and suddenly you're off the ground. Suddenly you're lifted, and you're bobbing along, and you're sailing gently past and over the roofs, just ... **BEING THERE**.

And you pass houses, and you pass jutting television antennae, and you bob past trees and gargoyles and clock faces and other sights; and it feels oddly professional, like you're a banker taking the balloon-tram, and very silly, all at the same time.

It's probably while you're really feeling that, while you're immersed in the mood of that, that something slips in the gears of the world; that you're coming in to land gently on the Far Roofs, and you aren't in the Near any more.

If you just hang on, instead, the balloon will probably keep going; for hours, most likely, keep going; it won't be until ... just ... as the weather's changing, or the sun is setting, or the sun is rising, or a danger approaches, or you see a friend in the distance, or something else like that to break up the journey, that it'll get close to a rooftop again.





BOUNDARIES

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might do when the characters cross the boundary to the Far Roofs:

- * ask them to tell you about the roofs where the change happens—the shape; the material; the feel; the view.
- * ask them to tell you about the sky.
- * ask them of the weather in the moment that they cross.
- * if they turn the questions back on you, suggest that they might mark **BEING THERE** or **WONDER**.
- * for animate landmarks, ask them how *real* the actual point of transition is—if they pass through Vikenti Haru's shadow, for instance, is the "Vikenti Haru" here a statue? A bunch of buildings looking sort of like Vikenti Haru? Or, that cast a shadow (at a particular hour) that's sort of shaped like a rat? Do they just pass through a random roof's shadow people *say* is Vikenti Haru's, for no real reason at all?
- * if it's not covered above or below, or if you don't like *how* it's been covered, ask them to tell you about the thing that distracts them—that keeps them from tracking the moment of transition.
- * if they walk the Red King's Road, ask them, who *was* the Red King? What did, or does, it mean to climb him? What do they see from atop his head?
- * if they passed through Vikenti Haru's shadow, ask them what Vikenti Haru whispers to them in the moment of transition.
- * if they fell into a vision of Kaoru fighting Salamander at Kaoru's Cross, ask them, how did that happen? What did it smell like? Sound like? Taste like? What did they see?
- * if they cut three rats' purses at the Traitor-Prince's Gallows, ask them, did they see the Prince, or the Prince's treason? The crowds that screamed for the Prince's death? Did they cut the purses of ancient rats, in a flashback, or some modern ones? And, in the latter case, did they get *real* purses—or the fake purses some rats wear today to help with Gallows crossings?
- * if they cross at the Corpse-Duke's Runway, ask them to tell you of the sound of the Corpse-Duke's plane.
- * if they cross at Sword Princess Path, ask them to tell you of the vision, the memory, the *fugue* they fell into, when they caught the scent of blood and perfume there?
- * if they cross by praying at the altar of Praksia the rat, ask them, what *was* that altar? What was the cost?
- * if they crossed through some other "animate landmark," ask them, what legacy did they encounter? What mythic or historical personage or being did they have to placate, and what did they pay? ... or did it simply let them pass?
- * for animate landmarks, ask them if they are being, e.g., **DARING**; or experiencing **WONDER**.
- * if they cross by a blind rat's road, ask them how they cover their eyes, or give them a suggestion. Tell them how the rats stop up their noses with their masks and pin their whiskers back. Ask them what it *feels* like to stumble blind across the roofs. Ask them to tell you of the wind and of the echoes. Ask them, can they sense the moment of transition? Ask them, are they tired, before the end? Ask them if they are being **DARING**, **LOSING THEMSELVES**, or something else. Ask if there's a storm.
- * if they cross by moonlight way, ask them to tell you of that road. Speak to them of the moonlit world, if they do not. If they turn questions back on you, encourage them to mark **BEING THERE** or **WONDER**.
- * if they cross by sunway, or a unique path, ask them to monologue, or narrate, of the experience and its dangers; and suggest they might roll **DARING**.
- * if they cross by "unreachable tower," ask them to tell you of that tower. Speak to them of it, if they do not. If they turn questions back on you, encourage them to mark **BEING THERE** or **WONDER**.
- * if they cross by fantasm, play up its eerie strangeness. Pour ideas out from your brain. Then, when you've finished, ask them to add *more*. Ask them, what else do they see, do they hear, do they feel? Ask them, what do they experience there? Ask them if they **LOSE THEMSELVES** in it. Tell them *more* of the journey; let them tell *you* more. If they ask you questions, encourage them to mark **BEING THERE** or **WONDER**.

THE KING OF SHADOWS

- 2 -

“This is the Red King’s Road,” Evans said.

He gestured along the rooftops. I was busy being vertiginous and trying to convince myself to stand. If I weren’t, I would probably have pointed out this was Marlin Lane.

“From here,” he said, “all the way out to the Witchway and the Dragon’s Head. He and his band marched along this very path on their last going, to the Red King’s Throne.”

I’d made it, mostly, to my feet. The wind was blowing harder, up above. The sun was shining more whitely. There was a dead leaf skittering from one place to the next.

“The Red King?”

“From the Usurpers’ Era,” Evans said.

“Long ago,” Lilith said quietly, “there was a Rat King who wouldn’t kill his brothers, and he let them close instead. But one by one they turned on him, seduced from him by the throne. And the Red Duke slew a thousand cats and made a chair from their skulls and bones, and placed it between the Witchway and the Stone, and said, ‘Here I shall sit, when my brother is dead, and I the King of All the Rats.’ And waged he bloody war on the Rat King’s Throne, and he fared not well; and in defiance and in rage he took his bravest remaining band and walked the Red King’s Road and said, ‘I shall yet sit in my bloody throne and be King of All of the Rats.’ And climbed he up and he sat he there, and there his brother killed him; and for his viciousness and his failure and his rage, his brother wrote this in the Book of Names: ‘There died a great Red King.’”

A dead leaf was skittering from place to place. It came to rest against my foot.

“Come on,” Evans said. He ran down to the edge of the roof. He jumped across it to the next.

“Wait,” I said.

“It’s just a story,” Lilith said. “Why, Rat Kings don’t even kill their sibs these days, they just cut ‘em from the Book of Names.”

I walked towards the edge of the roof. Lilith looked at me expectantly.

“That’s ... not the problem,” I said.

“It’s not?”

It was only like ten feet down. I’d have to be unlucky to die. I could fall and not necessarily even break a bone. But still.

“It’s scary,” I said.

“Don’t be silly,” Lilith said. She pushed, ineffectually but tangibly, on the back of my right leg.

I looked at her. I looked at Evans.

“What if it breaks?” I said.

Evans stared at me. Then he laughed, with great bright cheer. “Oh!” he said. “No. You don’t have to worry about that. Not on the Red King’s Road. We gum all the roofs we might take the Big Folk on. This path could hold a *motorbike*.”

That was a cool image. *That* was something I had to write in sometime. Motorbike races on the roofs—

“Go,” Lilith said. She pushed me again.

My knees are not very good. I don’t run. I don’t run and jump. I *definitely* don’t run and jump from one roof to another, at a height of ten feet, when I don’t own the roof on either side and am only even *leasing* one.

Today I did, because two people roughly the size of my two feet seemed pretty confident that I would.

Walk. Jump. Stagger.

Walk. Jump. Stagger.

Evans and Lilith were a joy. They *emitted* joy as they moved, gave it off like a radiator gave heat. It was clear in the way they moved that the world was fascinating to them, like somebody lost in beauty or hitting a flow state. They were constantly examining every little detail of the world around them, poking at tiles, going up on their tiptoes to peer into a bird’s nest or over the roof’s edge to look at something down below. Now and then they’d come together and touch faces and one of them—I am not kidding—would quite often run right over the other.

They didn’t feel that joy themselves.

The thing you’ll find out, if you know the rats long enough, is that they go quiet when they’re afraid. They’ll talk your ear off if they’re feeling comfortable; it’s not until they’re unhappy or fearful or thinking of a dark future that they’ll lift their voices up above the human range, or stop their tongues entirely.

The thing you’ll find out, if you live long enough to see rats that are totally OK, is that they run over one another not from rambunctiousness or sheer wiggling glee of company

but because they're afraid and they want to share their smells, share their warmth, take a moment and be two or more rats instead of single rats alone.

They were terrified and I didn't know it because they were such a joy and comfort to me as we walked.

"The King of Shadows," I said.

They looked around, each in their own direction.

"No," I said. "I mean, I was just wondering."

"Oh."

"He was a brother of that old King too?"

Lilith hesitated. She sat up. She twisted to look back at me.

"Some people say as he was," she agreed. "Some people say as he wasn't. He was a rat who wondered at the shadows, who wanted to know too much what was in the shadows, so he went deep into their world and he became their King."

"I've never done that," I said.

"I'd curtsey," said Lilith, "and say 'Your Majesty,' if you'd done."

"I'd be above such things," I said. "I wouldn't need people calling me 'Your Majesty' all the time. I would just accept their faith and reverence and let them treat me as one of their own."

"That'd be hard," Lilith said.

"It would?"

"It's lonely to be a King," Lilith said. "Or a Queen, I imagine. You have to bear that price, though. You can't just decide to be an ordinary person when you want to not be so lonely instead."

She twitched an ear. "But we shouldn't talk here," she said. "We should go on. We'll lay out a runner's nest and speak further at the crown."

I tried to remember. Was there a Crown Street? Not *here*, anyhow.

"There," she said. She gestured.

You'd think if you were on a roof you'd look up. You'd think *not looking up* would be a condition of the ground. But in fact I'd been spending even *more* time than usual looking at my feet, because I was afraid if I didn't I'd walk out over nothingness and fall. And when I *hadn't* been, I'd been looking at the rats.

So I followed her pointing hand. I looked forward and up.

... it wasn't possible. If the Red King had killed *ten* thousand cats, their bodies wouldn't have stacked high enough to make that throne. If the Red King had been ten times larger than a man, he wouldn't have left a skeleton as large as what I saw.

It was a trick of the light. It was because of the sun and the shadows and the way I couldn't see it well. It was a clock tower, or an attic, or a roof with some strange weathervane overgrown somehow with trees.

It was the Red King's skeleton on a throne, and he wore a crystal crown, and he held a sword in his good right hand,

and his eyes were full of reflections, and everything was red and bleached bone and full of the grandeur of an ancient day.

"He's only the King for an hour a day," Lilith said. "So we have to reach the head of him while we can."

Walk. Jump. Stagger.

Walk. Jump. Stagger.

"It's a trick of the light," I said.

Up close I couldn't see the details. Up close, on the left arm of the throne, it was just a path and some fluttering cloth.

"It's a trick of the light," I said again.

"If that's what it takes," Lilith said, "to get you to the top, then it's a trick of the light. Though, begging your pardon, of course, Your Majesty," she added, making a courtesy to the throne.

I couldn't move. And time was passing.

"Come on, then," Evans said.

And I went up.

We stood on the head of the dead Red King and the world spread wide and small around us and the wind was loud. Evans and Lilith took out three bits of padding from Evans' pack and set them down in the lee of the Red King's crown and lay upon two of them; and as for me, I just looked back and forth between the rats and the leaf-sized pad.

"It's custom," Lilith said, helpfully. "It's a runner's nest. Don't worry about it."

So I sat where I could, beside rather than on that tiny cushion, my back against the crown: "OK."

I looked at my hands. I looked at my feet. I'd kicked my shoes and socks off, back at the beginning, and I hadn't even really noticed at the time.

"I will tell you of the King of Shadows," Lilith said.

She had her sword out. She was playing with it, almost, fencing with something imaginary in the sky.

"His heralds are a sudden chill," she said, "and a sudden movement, which may be natural or forced. They have names and selves but these names we do not know. So we will call them *Biter* and *Shaker*. His weapon is the army of shadows; his weapon, and his will. He is drawn to chaos and disruption; to fever; to weakness; and to strain. He sends his shadows to where he feels such things. They kill by strangling and suffocation. They take your air. They hunger for your fear, for your stillness, for you to retreat from them and hide in shadowed places; if you do, their King will take you, and you will nevermore return.

"The King is slain," she said, "when a hero passes through his Kingdom, and beyond. The King is born again from death, and shadows, and despair. The King will turn aside

from you if he finds you amidst love and companionship and other comforting and comfortable things; these repel him, or displease him, and the shadows may not come. You may rid yourself of the mark of the King and the attention of the King by giving him a portion of your life.

"Kurobi the rat sought the King of Shadows. Kurobi the rat met the King of Shadows. Kurobi the rat is the King of Shadows now."

She was silent for a while.

"Wow," I said.

"I was just a kit," Lilith said, "when I saw him in my book. And the picture made it look like he had my Dad all ground up in his mouth, and was drooling red upon the floor. And I thought, 'You shadowy King, I'll fight you one day, and you'll spit him out.' So I remembered."

"Yes," said Evans. His voice was dryly, consciously sarcastic. "That is why you remember."

Lilith looked at him. He laughed and tapped his neck.

"I may have studied the Mysteries in general," Lilith conceded. "But I still knew I'd fight the King of Shadows one day."

"I didn't," I admitted.

Evans gave me a look. He boggled one eye, like his eyebrow was lifting.

"I didn't!" I protested. "I thought I was going to go into cs!"

Evans sighed. He hid his head.

"You could say 'I've always known me and the King, we'd face off someday,'" he observed. "Or, like, 'at last, my destiny is made explicit!'"

"I can't say that!" I said. I made a face at him. "That's completely ridiculous."

The wind was very loud.

He lifted his head.

"You should," he finally said. "It will get you in the spirit of things. I mean, I'm not going to say, 'leave this Big Folk girl behind,' not while we're up on the Red King's crown. You've come this far. You can come all the way. But you should be enthusiastic. Or this won't work out."

Lilith was shaking.

... Lilith was shaking, so I looked away, and I bit my lip.

"Well," I said, "this one time, when I was a kid, I tried to step on my shadow. I mean, you know, like, 'aha, you think you can get away when I lift my feet, but *waahaa!* Here's another step!'"

"That was mean!" Lilith protested.

"I know," I said. "But I never was sure if I'd managed. You know? Like, what if it'd got away and pooled around just the edges of my foot as I stomped it down? I was very young and maybe a little sorry later but I wouldn't be surprised if the shadow had put me in the King of Shadows' book, just like that

book you found *him* in, only instead of listing people like him, it had people like me in it? Warning! Stompy!"

"That's terrifying," Lilith said. Her voice wasn't terrified. "You think *the Mysteries* have Books of Names on us?"

"Of course," I said.

"Well, then," Evans said. "That's destiny for you, then. We just sped it up."

"Must've," I said.

"We found a flute," Evans said. "We found a flute, in the west of the Shadows' Kingdom. Only it was made from the shadows of the walls, so we couldn't pick it up; and we aren't flautists, particularly not *Big Folk* flautists, so we couldn't play it. We could puff up our mouths and blow as hard as we can and barely get a squeak."

"It's tough without the trick of it," I admitted.

"Mm," Lilith said.

"So, we said, 'If only we knew a flautist,'" Evans said. "And Lilith, she may have mentioned you. As we live not far from the Red King's Road, and your practice can be a little loud."

"There's really nothing I can say to that," I said.

He grinned at me.

I wanted to ask if he was faking human expressions, or if it was the same thing that allows the rats of Fortitude to talk. I even *started* to ask about that, but a stray bit of realization that asking people if their facial expressions are real or if they're just pretending to be human is pretty rude penetrated my consciousness, so I cut it short inside my throat.

Anyway, he grinned at me.

"We didn't know," Lilith said. "We thought we'd finish our challenge, and it wouldn't matter, we'd be dead or we'd have won. But the shadows drove us back, and before we'd gotten done with the licking of our wounds, we saw them stealing off into your home."

"That's—lucky," I said.

"Even bad Kings have rules," said Evans.

He was up. He was packing up his resting pad, and when Lilith and I moved a little, ours as well. He was tidying the Red King's crown.

"I mean, if he'd killed you without giving us a chance to spot him," Evans said, "Well, what kind of monster would he be?"

There are Mysteries that don't play fair.

That was something Lilith admitted, later. There are Mysteries that would have killed me, and been done with it, before they'd even made it back.

There are Mysteries that hate and loathe the mortal kinds, and play them foul tricks—but not the King of Shadows.

The King of Shadows, after all, had been a rat.

the Far Roofs

This bit's about the later part of the adventure, when you've traveled to the Far Roofs.

You're not in your home town any more, or in mine, or any normal world. You're on magical rooftops, instead.

The houses below you, here, are not real houses—at least, to the best of my knowledge, they never are. Sometimes they're strangely simplified, like they were built to *look* like houses without being the real thing. Sometimes they're real enough, but give a sense of being ancient and abandoned. Sometimes they are completely realistic, and you could even believe there *are* real houses below you, but the yards have no windows; or thick, smoky windows with no motion beyond them; or, windows down from the roofs into the attics—but, again, nothing moving you can see through them, at all; or, even in the event of *blatant* openings: clear, clean skylights or roofs or walls broken open by Typhon or yourself, nothing happens to be on the inside there *right then*. The residents have just stepped out, or they were never there at all. The interior is staged, a dollhouse or a show ... not a place where people live. The magic that gives you the sense there are people or fairies or magical creatures in the houses beneath you vanishes in an instant if you force or see your way inside.

It's not so much that the houses are staged for you as that *the entire world* up there is designed to give rise to a certain kind of experience. That is the *nature* of the Far Rooftops: they are an ideal of themselves. They stage themselves around you for maximum effect. It is the *nature* of the roofs on which you walk to offer themselves up as a powerful, personal message straight to you. It isn't necessarily a *relevant* message—Grayvale, e.g., will stage itself to show you despair whether you need to see despair right then or not—but it is always a *significant* one.

The Far Roofs are generally considered a single place—there is only one Far Roofs, no matter how or whence you come to them—but they *do* break down into many districts and neighborhoods with unique individual characters, united only by contiguity. Some rats also divide them, as a whole, into the Middleroof, the Far Rooftops, and the Farthest, or make an effort to distinguish places that are “close” to one or another territory in our outer world.

Some things you might encounter there include ...

A place of tiered fountains and talking birds. Do the birds have their own identities and selves, or are they just talking figures in the passion play of the visitors' lives?

Billboards. There's this section of roof with a ton of billboards advertising—well, weird stuff. The rats wouldn't let me go and investigate, talking about dangerous “hidebehinds” nearby, and they've had trouble really *describing* the billboards' content, but *apparently*, it's a ton of alien-language advertisements for rather unbelievable products? I suggest the GM mad-lib [name]'s [noun or adjective] [noun] [nouns verb], e.g., “Stalin's Hasty Zeppelin Unnervor” or “Princess Alessandra's Art & Food Recycler,” plus some ads for lawyers, insurance, and political stuff, and then describe the boards in glowing, sweeping terms to the PCs ... but that depends how the place feels, I guess? *I* hear billboards and think wacky silliness, but it *could* be a place of hidden meaning and poisoned words instead—or even *both*, like when you're laughing with a comedian and then suddenly instead of being funny they're saying something awful or incomprehensible instead?

Globe-roofs. The rats mentioned this place once where the globe-type roof of a building or planetarium is like *half a mile* across and a full-on *heck* of a hike to climb. I didn't think to ask more about it at the time, and the rats I know don't remember where it actually *is*, but it sounds real cool to me!

Gutter-lakes. There are a few places where the gutters don't work because, well, the roofs all connect together.⁷ That can lead to the accumulation of a gutter-lake, which is really a *roof-lake*, where gunky water covers a *ton* of the lower roofs and can even pour down to fill yards, gardens, patios, and the like! The biggest of these is the gutter-sea, which is apparently contiguous with the waterway the rats used to sail to your town.⁸

Intermittent Buildings. There are buildings out there, and their associated roofs, that are only there sometimes. They're intermittent! Sometimes, when they go away, there's something else there instead. Other times there's just a hole in the world leading down to the deep Outside.

⁷ Or are they just clogged, d'you think? Or, just too much rain?

⁸ Or, if you happen to live in actual Fortitude, to Big Lake.

Milebalks. Sometimes the rats find balconies the length of lower world *streets* attached to hotel-like structures' glass roofs.

Mosaics. In some places the roofs are all part of a giant bumpy mosaic, like Nazca lines for aliens that see in color. These used to be really cool to me until I stopped by *Scylla of the Roofs*, a mythological misnomer for this giant sea-bowl mosaic which becomes increasingly unnerving, disturbing, and *alluring* as you approach the deadly fall at its center. I pulled myself away, but I hear there's a mountain of rat-bones and human-bones down below from adventurers who ... could not.

Octo-roof. I love Octo-Roof. Everybody loves Octo-Roof! It's a giant octopus—fake, I think—that's been hollowed out and used as a multi-story roof. I have no idea what the point of Octo-Roof even is but doesn't it kind of rule?

Roller-coaster paths. There are a few roller-coaster-like experiences available over the far roofs. Some are actual carnival-themed roller-coaster like rides. Others are trolleys or subways or ski lifts the rats or residents have set up that just *resemble* a roller coaster in the way they're really rickety and scary. Most of these rides are built on or into thick metal pathways shaped a bit like abstract art.

Settlements. Here and there on the roofs are small, scattered settlements of humans or (more often) rats who've found a way to live long-term upon the roofs—perhaps eating out of milebalk vending machines, fishing the gutter-lakes, or raising sheep upon the moss of the roofs. Some of these settlements are “warden stations,” places rats use to rest and resupply; some weird survivalist camps ... but *most* are just little communities for people who got cursed or starstruck by a Mystery and couldn't make their way back down. If the locals build houses, there's always something a little unnatural about their roofs.

Slopes and “Mountains.” The rats never took me anywhere the buildings had ridiculous slopes, but I *hear* there're neighborhoods that are basically *mountain ranges*, pagodas and office buildings you need *serious* climbing chops just to get past, plus lots more where a 60-80 degree angle off the ground is the norm.

Towers and spires. You can find plenty of towers, spires, high walkways, minarets, jutting roof-pyramids, and other sky-seizing architecture if you go to the right parts of the Far Roofs. Sometimes they rise up further from the roofs; other times, they redefine your location as “the heights.”

Towering Infernoes. I passed through here once. I was sick and don't remember it very well. Some of the really tall buildings caught fire and they just *stayed* on fire. The rats call them “inferno-torches.” Naturally there aren't any roofs, or for that matter buildings, *near* them, but there *are* high, winding roof-paths a suitable distance away. *Someone* seems to come

out every week or so and treat those paths and the buildings below them with a fire-retardant substance, though only when and if nobody's looking; honestly, it's one of the best pieces of evidence I know of that people *do* live beneath the roofs. There is actual ground—linoleum tile, mostly, but also some streets and burnt mailboxes and the like—down below the buildings here ... but going down and back up again is the kind of thing you'd only bother with if something's happened to your path; it's too hot to bother with if your road is fine.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Silence Road

Fog settles in as you walk, and eventually you're alone in the silence. There's no point in looking for anyone else until you get to the end of Silence Road.

Here, the sky is clear and dark in the momentary breaks in the fog. There may be stars but there will not be a sun or moon. The roofs are completely contiguous with low, alternating slants and scalloped tiles. The occasional chimney puffs out fog instead of smoke.

The feeling of the place is solitude, openness, bittersweetness—a place to think. A place for **BEING THERE** and just possibly **LOSING YOURSELF** in your thoughts.

The Witchway

The roofs here are stone tiles in a mosaic of different colors and sizes. At night, large black tiles light up as golden crystal lights.

Some of the houses here have windowless, boxed-in garden yards with a vaguely Italian feeling. There you might find fruit trees, grass, flowers, and climbing ivy. Other, stranger plants grow here as well; it was here, for instance, that Evans showed me the manna tree, which grew up out of the roof tiles, and they were as its bark; and the vines of it were like descending chimneys, and they dripped with a clear cool nourishment that we'd all lapped from the hanging brick.

The Witchway is a place of strangeness, uncertainty, and quiet awe. It is ever-new, each time you go there; and when the weather changes there, the sun sets, or the sun rises, you may be witness to an unknown marvel. It is a place of **WONDER** and **BEING THERE**.

The Metal Flowers' Maze

The deeper you get into the metal flowers' maze, the more weathervanes there are and the more they resemble thick, tall hedges of metal flowers. Usually these are knee- or waist-height to Big Folk like you or me, but towards the center of the maze they're taller than the buildings.

Despite the name this region is not a proper maze: the clusters look like solid walls or hedges from a distance, but up close there are enough gaps to squeeze through in just about any direction that you'd like.

The roofs here are rubber and wood shingle in a contemporary American style. There are a fair number of weathervanes, as noted, and antennae too. One must assume the place has television reception (though I cannot imagine it has cable).

The maze has occasional skylights looking down into empty kitchens—though sometimes with a passing bug, flicker of suggestive shadow, or, e.g., cooling pot of soup, to give some hint of life. Occasional greenhouses give an even more open view, if one perhaps less notable in its emptiness. Often, a block of eight to twelve houses will enclose a set of contiguous back or front yards, either in the form of one large yard or greenway or several with simple fences dividing them. If you descend and find a house's front or back door, you are unable to get in.

The plant life here is a mix of ordinary and regional ... stuff; the yards have grass and mundane flowers, but also the occasional weathervane flower or flowerbush. Greenhouses grow mostly regular plants, but also a selection of weathervanes.

Above, you will see bright summer day and evening skies.

The metal flowers' maze is a place of seeking, hunting, *looking for reasons*: a place of **WONDER** and **LOSING YOURSELF**.

Escher's Folly

There are buildings built on top of the roofs, in Escher's Folly. The roofs of *those* buildings, if you follow them far enough, become in turn contiguous with the roofs they're on. The whole place is twisted through itself. This is *usually* pretty subtle, but sometimes you'll see buildings twisted into full-on Möbius knots or legitimately Escheresque structures.

The houses here are elaborate marble buildings in a Grecian style. Some have external stairways. None have obvious entrances, not even windows; as a general rule their yards are so uneven and those external stairways so rickety or improbable that sticking to the roofs is for the best. The roofs are generally assembled from fairly large chunks of marble, and are *extremely* slippery when it rains—the rats'll even recommend pitons and ropes for us Big Folk, when they'd normally laugh helplessly, and forever, at their use!

Escher's Folly features many prominent aqueducts, stairways, and tiered gardens. It's impossible to see too far in any direction before your vision's obscured by something grand! These features scale up slowly as one heads in deeper; some rats theorize the white "clouds" floating by above, *or even the sky itself*, are part of the structure of the Folly, connecting to the rooftop "ground" at some great structure much further in.

There are small and large rooftop gardens scattered about the Folly, but gardeners have long since ceased to tend them. Most of the vegetation is dry, dead, or gone; the rest, scraggly and unruly. Such grass as has escaped confinement, to grow in cracks in the roofs and walls, is a translucent, pale green.

All in all, this is a place of amazement, confusion, and laughter: a place of **WONDER**; and sometimes—when one can laugh and marvel with one's friends as one explores it—**BONDING**.

Thoughtful Neighbors

The roofs are patched here—where, apparently, they had developed holes—with soft heated quilting displaying various childlike scenes. Eventually as one goes further in the roofs are replaced in their entirety and there is only quilt. It is often night here, and the moon is always out; the stars and the moon are large and bright. There are books scattered about on the quilted roofs: they hold dream-like stories that do not stick in your memory after they are told. The books themselves dissolve if taken out of where the moonlight shines.

The houses of this neighborhood are cheerful houses in a quaint and vibrant style. Their roofs are not contiguous, so you can get down into the streets of a pleasant, small-town area, complete with lawns, and trees, and gardens. The doors to get *inside* the houses, though, are mostly just painted on the walls—and quilts or paintings depicting realistic indoor scenes hang just inside the windows, completely occluding whatever might actually exist within.

This is a place of affection, kindness, warmth, and happiness—a place *haunted*, metaphysically, by the warmth of those feelings: a place of **BONDING** and **BEING THERE**.

Shadows' Cross

The roofs here are simple wooden shingle roofs with variable slopes. Many houses have smoked glass attic windows visible from the roofs; warm lights shine within. Rooftop garden boxes with daisies or other simple flowers are relatively common here. Some houses have full-on windowless, boxed-in garden yards for them. Initially, their floors are stone or dirt. Deeper in, the floors of the garden boxes become wooden shingles, like the roofs'; conversely, the *plants* begin to spill *out* of the garden boxes and the gardens, forming carpets of dirt and grass and flowers across the roofs, until those roofs become a field.

Shadows' Cross is in the shadow of a great Church and a great fortress—respectively, the "Cathedral of the King," and the fortress of the King of Shadows. Lights hang suspended behind each of them in the sky. It's not a real Church, of course, for all it looks like one; there's just an empty garden court inside, except, about an hour after dawn, the shadows that come through the windows shift and become a flute.

... as for the fortress, I haven't been in there, and wouldn't know.

I don't think the Church and the fortress are part of the neighborhood proper, because, for all that they're scary, the area *in general* has a feeling of safety, delight, and friendship—it's a place of **BONDING**.

Triumph of the Tech-Roofs

When you see the metal beanstalk here, rising into space, it makes you want to cheer. It's like, woohoo! We did this. People *did* this! We built something like this!

... although technically we probably didn't?

Anyway, this is a futuristic region. The "triumph" in question is an elliptical path of lowered cobblestone rooftop (or possibly even *ground*) surrounded by a low ring of metal buildings on the outside and a large metallic complex on the inside. The complex inside the elliptical path is inaccessible even to the rats: a 40' tall or higher structure with very few handholds or footholds save for the cameras and stinging if non-fatal laser turrets that constantly monitor the outside of the ring. Within, there appear to be additional, even higher walls, peaking—at one focus of the ellipse—in a metal beanstalk or elevator rising into space. Occasional strands of confetti or tickertape drift down from up somewhere above, and the lasers won't burn them if you're anywhere nearby, so there's this vague feeling as you circle the place that the people inside are celebrating your passage. ... that is, if there *are* people inside; as usual with the far rooftops, nobody's ever really sure.

There aren't any obvious features of the houses below the cobblestone triumph, if it *is* actually on top of houses and not actual ground. Prince Dragomir Kysely heard from Matthew York that the walls can open seamlessly to let you inside—that Matthew hacked into the cameras and saw them let a rat in once—but, if so, the entrances are completely inobvious, and certainly nobody's ever come back *out*.

The sky is usually sunny or partially cloudy, but the clouds don't approach the beanstalk, which just sits there towering over it all.

This is a place of majesty, victory, and closure—a place of **LOSING YOURSELF** in witnessed glory.

Madcaps' Nave

This is where the Mystery **Typhon** dwells.

Many of the houses here are smashed open from above, revealing peculiarly unfinished and hastily abandoned interiors. You'd think that they'd been lived in, maybe? There are numerous weathervanes showing metal figures dancing, praying, or falling over dead—these, apparently, are the "madcaps." There's some debate whether "falling over dead" is

Madcaps' Nave

A sacred altar sat in the Madcaps' Nave; and the madcap celebrants played.

"Let it fly to the sky and become the moon!" cried the celebrants, and prayed. And the altar danced St. Vitus' dance, and the celebrants shouted praise. And up! it went in a gout of fire, and got stuck in the sky on a silver wire and it singed the hair of the leading friar and the sacredness went away.

And the roofs bent thus, and the roofs bent thus, like the waves of a frenzied sea. And the friar screamed and the celebrants teemed and the roofs were struck by the first moonbeams and a storm rolled in and it burst about and the smoke coalesced in great gouts of house and at the end of the spell all the celebrants fell and the storm smashed Typhon free.

— Dragomir Kysely

an artistic effect or if the weathervanes subtly change their position over time.

The roofs are pretty wild here—like waves on a stormy sea. They're mostly white concrete, or white, blue, or brown shingle roofs, but the weird thing is the angles. It's like whoever lives in the houses below just *can't decide* how many rooms their attics need to have, or like roof-triangles are bubbling up from a mire. There are *a bunch* of roofs overhanging roofs, providing the kind of nooks, crannies, and even *tunnels* that Typhon likes to slither through or lurk in. There are numerous jaunty spires.

The sky is often overcast or stormy here. The moon looks weird when it's out—kind of squarish? and with weird symbols on its face.

There's not much vegetation, but there *are* occasional flowering vines of indeterminate origin that flow along the roofs.

Over *there*, if you check it out, is Dead Man's Manor: a great Victorian mansion, hollowed out and turned into a hellhole ghetto/rookery of dead or undying people, rats, and vermin, run by a mute scarecrow of a gentleman with variably long white-gloved arms. People come and go, sometimes, if they can avoid Typhon—there are rare auctions that meet there every seven years—but the *residents* don't ever get to leave.

This is a place of chaos, madness, unruliness, and wickedness. A place of **LOSING YOURSELF**, of being just overwhelmed.

Grayvale

I do not want to remember Grayvale.

Some of the houses are crumbled, abandoned ruins, here.

There is a fountain far to the west, I think. There is a city, beyond that.

The roofs are monotonous nailed gray shingles.

In some places there is a thick grey or tan mold that—that, it can pile up so greatly as to form small deserts.

And ... uh. And. In, in the sky, there—there's a dead grey sun. And it, it rises in the west, and has never been seen to set, and it's awful. Its light is, it's awful. It's not a sun that, you, that anyone should have to see.

It is a place of despair and loathing and horror. A place of **DELIRIUM** to be in and for the rising of

For the rising of the sun, **DESPERATION**
sorry

The Outside

So, um yeah! Parts of the Far Roofs are basically, I told you about the Outside before, the Outside (pg. 19).

To be in the Outside, it's like:

You are disoriented. You're confused. There are things you can't explain. The uh sun is distorted

You can see, you can hear, your senses are there, but there are subtle contradictions in the world around you.

And like it goes away, you get back to normal, when you get to somewhere you know well. I guess also when you get to know where you are well?

... so, like, these portions of the Roofs are unreliable and inexplicable. They are poorly integrated with the Far Roofs as a whole: the Mysteries don't live there, although they may pass through or encounter you there, and by the time you've actually figured out how to navigate these places, they actually *cease* to be Outside and become more typical Far or Near Roofs. Until then, though, the roofs melt and flow together, the *living* sun which is living and warm but not normal grows mechanical arms that span the sky, and in general things get very strange.

Sometimes you'll need to pass through the Outside as part of a quest against some Mystery. Or, well, "need" is probably a strong term. Sometimes it's *appropriate* to pass through part of the Outside, because it's the fastest way or because it's a good way to get some experience you need.

Sometimes you'll pass through the Outside because it's no longer Outside to the rats you're with. They might have been through an Outside-tainted region so often that it's just *Far Roofs* to them, but to *you* it might be peculiar and strange. The more you rely on their perceptions to orient you, the more that strangeness will recede.

The roofs here, anyway, are surrealist and improbable. The Far Roofs are already prone to take on the features of natural ground, but when touched by the Outside, they're likely to become disorienting conglomerations of the features of roofs and the features of unexpected things—not just "a bit like an ocean," as the Madcaps' Nave, but a sea of roofs that actually flow like water; not just something sane like "rooftops that resemble a forest," but something over-the-top like "rooftops on the back of zebra- and lion-houses on an Ice Age savannah."

The Outside is a place of tension, disorientation, and confusion, but not really in the same way the neighborhoods above are places of certain moods—there aren't architectural choices supporting it, there isn't a kind of *metaphysical weight* of that mood, it's just pretty tense, pretty disorienting, pretty confusing. You're probably most likely to mark down **WONDER**, **DESPERATION**, or **LOSING YOURSELF**.

Other Neighborhoods

There are, of course, many, many more neighborhoods; a guide to creating them can be found on pg. 36.

RUNNER'S NESTS

This bit is about how the rats will make a space for serious conversation when on the roofs.

Sometimes the rats will do this when you first climb up onto the Near Roofs. Sometimes they will wait for a specific stopping place, or until they're tired, or until just before the crossing to the Far. The pause to talk and to tell stories is a key part of the rat concept of adventure, so they'll definitely *do* this sometime unless they're questing against one of the tiny handful of Mysteries that can make that hard.

When it's time to rest for a while, the rats will pull out padding if they can.

This is a ritual like setting tables. It's not really about comfort or efficiency. If they have travel packs then they'll usually have bits of foam to set out for the rats to lay on. *That's* about comfort. And sometimes they take off their cloaks, and lay on those, and that's probably about comfort, or at least cleanliness, as well. If they don't have cloaks or packs, though, they'll still try to find *something*, and even a scratchy bit of leaf or a clot of arguably sanitary debris is better than nothing at all.

They'll try, in short, to find something that defines a space, and ideally a little bed, for each of them. They'll also find something for you, unless—I don't know. Maybe if you're a prisoner, like, somebody's enchanted you into cat form and they *sort of* believe you that you're not a cat but don't trust you

anyway, or if you're so deathly allergic to runner's nests that you start bleeding from every pore whenever they try to drag one out? ... but unless something like *that* is going on, they'll pull out a pad or something for you. Don't worry about it if it's too small. They'd *rather* find and drag out a bean bag or featherbed for you, of course, but that's usually not possible, so they'll set out rat-padding or a leaf or a cloak for you instead.

I eventually found out that you don't actually have to sit on it. You can just sit near it, or pick it up, sit where it was, and put it on your lap, and they'll be perfectly content.

If there are fewer than five of you traveling—counting you, as noted—then the rats might position four of these “beds” to the four directions and bow to them as they do. This is particularly common with the old rats—it comes and goes over the course of rat generations, and the younger generation right now finds it a little antiquated and bizarre. If there are five or more of you traveling, there isn't a comparable ritual, so the rats will just place the nests wherever.⁹

Once the rats have set out the padding, they'll spend a few moments sniffing around the area, climbing on each other or on you, listening to the air, and looking at the sky. After a while doing this they'll decide that the runner's nest is “complete.”

There's a few region or circumstance-specific things that they might do before settling in to talk.

If they're questing on behalf of the Rat King, or some governmental division, then they might set up his banner at the edges of the nest. If there is a dear friend or relative recently deceased, they may say a few private words to a tiny memorial tablet that they carry. If there are kits with them, they'll make sure the kits' needs are tended to, as well as the needs of any seriously injured rats or Big Folk.¹⁰

They may make a fire, if it's dark enough, and particularly if they have humans or elves or whatever with them. This isn't something they can do on just *any* roof, of course, as the residents may object, but there are also numerous places in the Near Roofs where the rats have arranged with the human owners to set up a fire-pit or tiny iron rat-stove. As discussed

in the section on Thresher's Woods (pg. 13), they usually offer a tiny stipend to the human below in exchange and free fire insurance to them or the whole neighborhood, as circumstances suggest. The Far Roofs offer them much more freedom—they're usually not the kinds of *places* that catch on fire, so the rats can often do as they like.

After the fire, if there is one, they will settle in.

Now runner's nests are for any kind of conversation, and so if you've been needing to talk to the rats about stress, or life, or grief, or a loved one who you've been separated from, or something you want to do, then here *is* the time. Legitimately. They will make a quiet space and listen to you as your family would listen, if it's the case that you need to talk.

And there may be things they need to talk about themselves.

If there's something they need to unburden themselves about—their history, *their* guilt, their great devotions, the reason that they quest—and if they think you'll listen, then they'll talk in a runner's nest.

That happens too.

Sharing personal stuff in a runner's nest is mostly answered with silence. They'll ask questions, of course, if there's something they don't understand; and you can do that too. After a bit of silence, they'll tell the stories or personal thoughts that your story reminded them of; or, of course, you could easily do the same.

That happens. But I don't want to give you the wrong idea. The runner's nests aren't mostly for that. They're not about *talking about yourself*.

They're a place for *telling stories*.

Those stories can be the stories of your own heart. They can be the stories of your own life. But when it's the rats' turn to tell stories they will speak most often of the Mysteries, the Far Roofs, and the strange waters their ships sail.

They'll tell, and retell, the stories that they know. They'll chew over what's written in their Books of Names. They'll participate in the rats' grand venture of grinding down everything they've seen, everything they've felt, everything they've been told, and everything they've made up into a single truth. They'll hunt for what's essential in the world they know.

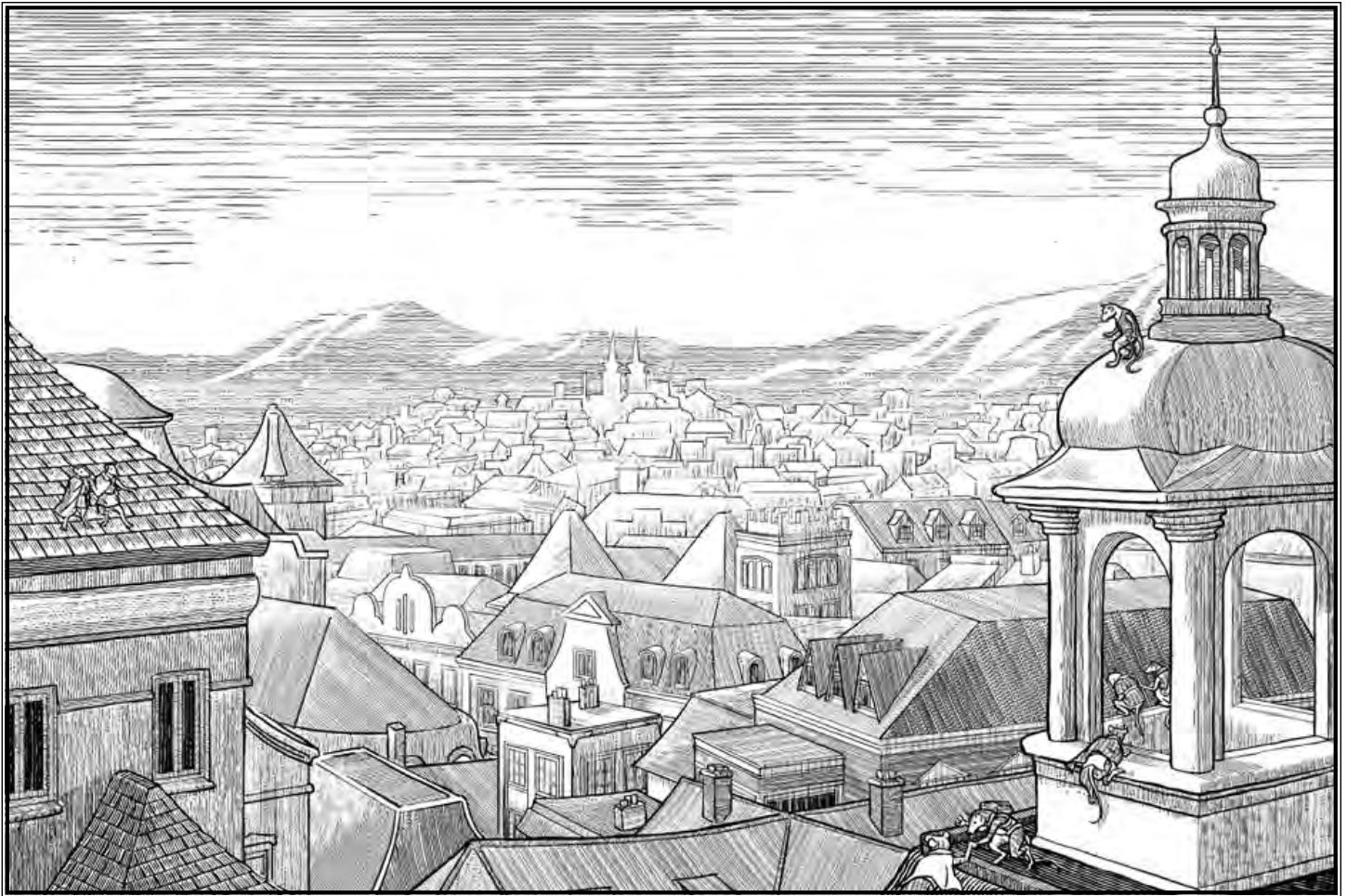
One day, they will grind it all down to wisdom.

One day, they will grind it all down to wisdom, and the Mysteries shall have no power over them; and the rats, that have learned to be their masters, shall be the masters of the world.

You can read more about how to tell the stories of the rats on pg. 38.

⁹ Addendum! Apparently there is a 63-place mandala kind of thing that is used if you happen to have 50+ rats traveling the Far Roofs. Right now this “never happens,” but rats go through about 10 generations to a humans' one, so it's not impossible that you'd see another era of Grand Travelings or Wars on the Far Roofs in your lifetime. There's also a 1001-nest formation that is *entirely* hypothetical.

¹⁰ As a random fact, rats are more lenient than humans about how mature a child has to be before they face Mysteries on the Far Roofs, but they're actually a bit *stricter* about babies. Rat mothers who might want to, or might be forced to, adventure are more likely to preemptively join a nursing and babysitting co-op than to even *consider* taking their babies along. This has been a random fact.



by Jenn Manley Lee

TROUBLE

Eventually, anyway, things become serious.

You'll know that things are serious when the rats get quiet. Maybe genuine quiet, where they're not letting any sound at all slip loose. Maybe they're talking, but they're too nervous to make an effort to include you in the conversation—the natural voice of rats is too high-pitched for an ordinary human to hear.

When the rats are serious, when *things*, that is, have become serious, you will see them fanning out and looking in every direction. They will become quiet and watchful. They will “pace the rounds,” moving in erratic and independent circles around anything or anyone that they've decided to protect. Maybe that's the space you're in: “*a circle will be drawn, here.*” Maybe it's around the more vulnerable and less warlike of the rats. Maybe—this is pretty likely, even—maybe it will be you.

They'll build a sense of the space they're in as they circle. You'll see them learning the footing, spotting and sometimes adjusting visual or physical obstacles, making the area around them into a defensible home. If no threat emerges, they'll keep doing this as they progress; travel on high alert is slow, cautious, and aware.

In theory if something frightens the rats badly enough you might find them slipping off into rat-holes and tunnels, retreating from some threat into the kind of tight spaces where predators have difficulty maneuvering and enemies cannot avoid the rats' own swords and teeth. That's just the theory, though. In practice you're not going to see this happen unless there's a literally supernatural source of fear involved; or if you're small enough to bring into the rat-holes with them; or if they *really* love and trust you; or if they're completely contemptuous of you. If they're willing to slip away into rat-holes with you right there, after all, that means they either don't care what you think *or* they love you enough to let you see them at their weakest; and *also*, either they think you can handle yourself on your own or they just don't care.

Accordingly, if you're ever out with the rats and you know something horrible is coming and you're suddenly alone, you can reasonably find yourself wondering, “What? Should I feel, like, complimented?” Though it might also just mean that the “horrible thing” is just a practical joke, and the rats are giggling at you from their hiding holes, because one common feature of intelligent species, observable both in *Fortitude* and in your own home town, is that they are all *really, really immature*.



THE FAR ROOFS

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when the characters are traveling the Far Roofs:

- * “tell me about the vast mounded half-sphere roof, nearly half a mile wide”
- * “tell me of the tiered fountains and the talking birds”
- * “tell me about the lake stopped-up gutters made—is it ugly? Is it pretty? Are there reeds, fish, roofs like sandy beaches, birds, or waves?”
- * “tell me about the building or feature that you’re pretty sure wasn’t there the last time you
 - “... looked”
 - “... came around this way” (if they’ve traveled the Far Roofs a lot)
- * “tell me about the really, *really* long balcony attached to the hotel-like place you pass. Is it barren? Restful? Are there vending machines there? Tables, chairs? Trees and gardens? Monsters? Wondrous views? The rats call these things the ‘mile-balks:’ grand landmarks and, sometimes, rest stops along the way.”
- * “tell me about the vast rooftop drawing that you pass. What d’you think it would look like from above? What does it look like now?”
- * “there’s an exciting ride! Tell me about it. Is it ... a natural part of the roofs, like, there’s just a roller-coaster here? Or, something the rats set up: a thing of ski lifts, trolleys, and subways that they made? Can you go around it, or do you *have* to ride it? Are the roofs beneath it normal, or is it *set into* some kind of metal thing?”
- * “tell me about the rat settlement you find up on the roofs. What kind of rats live there? Why? Is it a place you go to resupply? ... a place for people too cursed to leave the roofs? A survivalist community? What do they live off of? Whence their water, food, supplies? Did they manage to find a bathroom that you can use?”
- * “tell me about the roofs like mountain ranges, ridiculously angled; did you know how to climb them? How do you get past them? Are there any exciting or interesting moments along the way?”
- * “tell me about the tower, or minaret, or heaven’s ladder that you pass.”

Some things you might do when the characters are traveling the Far Roofs:

- * skim the Near Roofs list (pg. 14) for things to say
- * tell them about the “impressive glory” of the billboards for lawyers, insurance, political stuff, and mad-libbed [name]’s [noun or adjective] [noun] [nouns verbs] (e.g., Mr. Malakai’s Bitter Candy Denunciator!)
- * tell them about Octo-Roof, e.g., “oh! Octo-Roof’s over there!” (What’s Octo-Roof? It’s a fake giant octopus hollowed out to be a multi-story building roof!)
- * tell them of the roofs where the inferno-torches burn.
- * tell them of the rats, suddenly watchful, fanning out, looking in every direction, “pacing the rounds”—that is, moving in erratic circles around whatever they’ve decided to protect—traveling slowly, cautiously, alert, aware. ... before, eventually, a threat appears!
- * speak of Silence Road, where the fog and quiet settle in; ask them what they think about while they’re there, what they do there, what they say into the silence, in that place of introspection, openness, and bittersweet solitude; encourage them to **LOSE THEMSELVES**, or to mark **BEING THERE** if they ask for more sensory details from you.
- * speak of the Witchway: of stone roofs; golden crystal lights, at night; strange marvels when the sun rises or sets, or the weather shifts; of the windowless, boxed-in garden yards, fruit trees and grass and climbing ivy ... and ask them how they process that place; how they explore it; of their experience, in that realm of strangeness, and uncertainty, and quiet awe.
- * tell them of the Metal Flowers’ Maze, where weather-vanes grow ever taller and more thickly clustered; where the roofs are rubber and wood shingle; where the mood is *to hunt, to look for reasons*. Ask them what they looked for there, what they *hunted* for there, what the closest thing they found to a *reason* was: why their heart beat faster, in the Metal Flowers’ Maze.
- * tell them of Escher’s Folly, where the world twists in upon itself—the roofs of the buildings *on* the roofs contiguous ... if you trace things out far enough, with the roofs they stand upon; perhaps, if you go deep enough in, even the *sky and clouds* connected, ultimately, to the ground. Speak of old marble and



withered gardens, aqueducts and stairs; of faded paintings on the walls, and glorious mosaics. Ask them for moments of amazement and wonder; ask them where they laughed and where they gasped. Ask them to tell you of a moment of quiet bonding there. Ask them to tell you the most amazing thing they saw.

- * speak of Thoughtful Neighbors, where the roofs are patched with heated quilting, and eventually there is *only* quilt; where the moon is always out above, and the stars are always bright: a place of affection, kindness, happiness, and warmth. Ask them to tell you what memories the place brings up for them, and about the *new* memories they'll make. Ask them about the conversations that they have there; what they do there. Ask them if they leave a gift.
- * tell them of Shadows' Cross, and how, the deeper they go into that bright and rich-roofed land, the more the flowers and the dirt spill from their windowboxes to become a hilly field and meadow spreading out across the roofs; how the Cathedral of the King, and the fortress of the King, loom above it all, casting shadows—yet how feelings of safety, and delight, and friendship nevertheless persist. Ask them to tell you of their experience there: of how they *process* that delight, in the shadow of that fear; of the stories and memories they share with friends, there, at Shadows' Cross.
- * tell them of the Triumph of the Tech-Roofs—that soaring beanstalk into the sky; the confetti and the tickertape sometimes floating downwards from above; the futuristic buildings; the security cameras that come out now and then to watch. Ask them how they *feel* about that majesty, that victory, that jubilation that both belongs to them ... and not. See if they might **LOSE THEMSELVES** in glory.
- * speak of Madcaps' Nave, where wild roofs rise and fall like a stormy sea, where the tiles are white and blue and brown and edged in tarnished silver, where holes smash through every other roof, where the weathervanes are figures dancing, praying, falling over dead; where the sky is often overcast; where the moon is square and has weird symbols on its face. Ask them what they *experience* on those wicked, unruly, chaotic roofs. Do they **LOSE THEMSELVES** in sensation? Catch a glimpse of Typhon? Find a golden scale? See the Dead Man's Manor, where strange, undying creatures dwell? Does the rain whisper

a warning, *get down!*, to them, as, in the distance, Typhon slithers past?

- * tell them of Grayvale, of the dull monotony of the roofs, of the tan or grey mold that is sometimes dirt and sometimes deserts, of the fountain that one might sense or hear of in the distance—of the rising of its sun; of the rising of its sun, which is despair. ... and ask them where they find themselves, when the grip of that sun upon their souls has passed.
- * tell them of the Outside—that surreal and ever-changing land—where the sun hangs eerie in the sky and the world is full of contradictions; where you are *disoriented*; *confused*; where the world is no longer even *roofs*, but a thing like dreams. Ask them what they see there, what they encounter there. Ask them if they find wonder, desperation, or only uttermost confusion ... in the Outside.
- * tell them of another neighborhood that you create ... of its characteristic features and its mood. Ask them how they *react* to that mood, how they process it, how they experience the world when it settles in. Ask them of their *memories* of that place, of the things they find there; of moments, and rare sights; ask them to give you extra details of the world or of their psyche, there; and stagger them with wonder or dismay.
- * ask them of a neighborhood that you do not know—of its mood, of the kind of roofs there, of the plants that you might find there, of its strange structures, of its sky. Ask them the ... what-it's-likeness ... of the place, ask them of the stories the rats tell ... and then, again, how they process it, how they *experience* it, of their memories and the things they find there, of their *moments* in that place, and its rarest sights. Ask them of the wonders that they find there; or, their reasons to lose themselves; or, its dangers, and their fears.
- * tell them about the ritual of the runner's nests, how the rats pull out padding for each of them, and set them up in patterns; how they climb over you, and one another, and all the place around; how they might start a fire, or, if on government business, set up a banner. Then, ask the players for the stories that they tell around the fire, either through the rats or as yourself; or, tell rat-style stories of your own (pg. 38).



"The Stagger of Rooftops," by Lee Moyer



Moyle

New Neighborhoods

So here's how creating your own neighborhoods might work.

First, please bear in mind that I can't even begin to explain the Far Roofs as a whole. They're huge, and I don't know even the tiniest portion of what the *rats* know about them, much less of what there is to know. That's why you're always free to do your own research here, or, just make a neighborhood up!

The Feel

So, to *do* that, to make a new neighborhood up, you'll want to start with the basic *feel* you want to give.

Pick something that matters in the context of the Mysteries currently connected to the story, maybe? Like, if the PCs are dealing with a Mystery that represents Romantic Love, maybe they should be traveling through neighborhoods representing Laughter, Affection, Awe, Struggle, Hurt, Desperation, Rapprochement, and/or Strength? Or if your characters are questing against Goblin (pg. 116), you might want them to pass through the realms of Agony and Fear before they can properly face Cruelty?

Don't be too mechanical about this. You're trying to get the deep *vibes* right; so, brainstorm, and listen to your heart.

Name and Story

At some point, please, name the neighborhood. Trust your instincts here. It's great if the name's inspired but OK for it to be, instead, a little dumb—it just has to sound right to *you*.

At some other point you'll want to tell a story or two about the neighborhood—not anything complicated, not anything long, just one or two of the simplified stories of the rats (as described on pg. 38). Maybe you'll have a rat actually tell that story in play, later; maybe you won't, and it's just there to give *you* more of the vibe.

You don't have to stop and name the place or tell its stories *now*. ... just make sure to do it *before you're done*. Maybe next time you get bogged down or confused about what to do next?

The Sky

A lot of far rooftops neighborhoods have something going on in the sky. These are gigantic hooks for making a place feel unique and distinctive—like,

- * there's a different sun than usual;
- * the sky's literally painted, and in a weird style;

- * you can see a gigantic bird at the horizon with its beak stretching upwards to bite the sun;
- * there's a constant sideways meteor shower;
- * there's missiles bursting everywhere;
- * there's extremely long knitted ropes hanging down from the various stars;
- * ... or whatever.

Write that stuff down! Anything that catches your eyes when you look up is great.

Even if there's nothing that extreme, imagine you're there. Look up. What time of day is it? Is it cloudy? Is it sunny? Is the architecture getting in the way of the sky? *Write that down.*

Major Architectural Stuff

Maybe the name or a story or the list of stuff below or just your imagination suggests some giant building or architectural *thing* that dominates the region. You look up from the roofs and there's, I don't know—

- * a cathedral? a castle?
- * a gibbet?
- * a hanging garden?
- * a gigantic arch?
- * a gigantic ring puzzle, cube puzzle, or other toy?
- * a statue of a human, rat, or something else?
- * a walled city? a freeway? a skyscraper?
- * an open-air casino?

—completely dominating part or all of the horizon? That's worth note.

Plant Life

A lot of Far Rooftops neighborhoods have something weird going on with the plants—

- * gigantic plants;
- * plants growing where they oughtn't;
- * freaky Hell-plants;

- * plants made from buildings or roof-tiles;
- * storms of tumbleweeds;

—or other such distinctive stuff.

Even if there's nothing like *that*, take a moment to imagine the place and look around and *at least* figure out if there's any vegetation *at all*:

- * Is it a soulless span of roof connected to roof?
- * Can you get down into the yards, gardens, or whatever else below?
- * Are there flower-boxes and the like?
- * Are there hedges or oversized flower beds or vegetables filling the gaps between houses?
- * Are there plants growing directly from the roofs?
- * If there are ordinary plants around, what kind? Flowers? Scattered clusters of palm trees? Tall grass? Tangled undergrowth and trees?

Rooftops

Consider: how are the rooftops shaped?

- * Are they
 - flat, maybe designed as a terrace?
 - lightly sloped? Heavily sloped?
 - A mix of slopes at different angles?
 - Conical?
 - Are there *multiple stories* of roof, with some of the upper house shown in between?
- * Are there windows visible in the roofs? Flower boxes?
- * Are there elaborate decorations? Solar panels? Something else?

What kind of material are they made of?

- * Thatch? (Overlapping layers of plant stalks, holding you up by means principally mysterious);
- * Shingles or tiles of —
 - cedar? some other wood?
 - metal? asphalt? clay?
 - “sick-roof” (either asbestos or just an asphalt or other roof that makes rats sick)?
 - concrete?
 - something unnatural, like, say, soap bubble, fishscale, or chunks of broken sky?

- * Stone slabs?
- * Metal?
- * Fiberglass?
- * Something genuinely weird, like
 - gigantic sheets of translucent glass;
 - tangles of interlocking piping;
 - gigantic eyes;
 - toaster pastries; *or*
 - clouds?

The Houses

Can you get to the houses below? If so, what are they like?

There's endless possibilities here, because if you *can* get down to the houses they could have any architectural style from just about anywhere, including from your dreams and nightmares. ... or they could just be standard houses in the style of your hometown, with mysteriously nonfunctional windows and doors.

Take a moment to come up with an oddball theory about what kind of people live there, or a weird idea for why you can't get in and what the doors and windows might be like?

Key Features

Is there some stand-out feature of the place that's occurred to you while you were thinking all this stuff up? Something that you need to keep in mind, either because people will see it immediately upon getting there, or because they *won't* necessarily see it, because it's something that only happens intermittently on those roofs?

That too is worth writing down.

Revision and Conclusion

... and that's basically all!

... with one exception. Maybe you found out at some point during all this that your picture of the neighborhood doesn't work. That sucks, but it happens, and I'm sorry to say that these rules aren't currently set up to fix that sort of thing in play. So if you're not happy, you will have to do one of the following things:

- * revise it;
- * split it into two neighborhoods, and finish them up;
- * start over; *or*
- * get your fellow players to help you brainstorm, coming up with IC or OOC stories until you feel you *do* know the place, before the PCs travel there.

Telling Stories

Here's how this part works.

When you tell a rat story, as a GM or a player sharing stories on the roofs: it doesn't have to be exactly like you heard it. It doesn't have to be exactly like you created it. And it doesn't have to be the same every time.

It's OK if you fumble, or struggle, or whatever. But more than that, it's OK if the story itself is different for you, in your head, when you tell it, every time.

That's not cheating.

That's part of the truth-process of the rats.

That much ... that much is completely IC, OK? Like, you aren't fudging anything for that part. It isn't a game convention. It isn't something to make play easier or better.

It's how it works.

And maybe you don't have a story ready. Maybe you're not inspired to create one, or you're not confident that your inspiration will hold up all the way. That's fine too. I think you can free-associate most of this in play as long as you **stick to one of the topics to the right at a time**. As the GM, or a player whose PC knows a little about the Mysteries, or a PC who wants to fake it:

Just free-associate on one of these topics.

That part is a game convention. I have to assume the rats aren't just making this stuff up as they go. I have to assume they're not just free-associating and seeing what comes out.

But ... uh, I might maybe be wrong?

For gaming purposes, when you're doing this, it can be helpful to keep the Mystery's metaphorical meaning in mind. Fortunately, they're all named things like **Sorrow** and **Incomprehension** and stuff, even though those aren't their primary use names, so this is usually pretty easy to do.



by Jenn Manley Lee

REMEMBER

You don't have to look this stuff up. If I'm free-associating the heralds of Hedge the Fang, who is Named Unmindful, I'll say blindness, distraction, yowls, the sense of teeth and hunger that stalk you from behind. His heralds are *Eye-Blinder*, *Stalker*, and the little Mystery *Didn't See*—no, wait, *Unknowing*.

... and *officially*, by pg. 125, I'll be wrong.

You don't have to be perfect. The first time I told a story of a rat who met Banshee, it was too complicated, and I had a great idea at the end that meant I *should* have changed the beginning. I didn't. That's OK.

(If you're curious about the story, well. Banshee is Sorrow; and curiosity about sorrow dies, and turns into sympathy and sorrow instead. So the rat died, and became a part of her.

... that's the core of it, anyway.)

You can break the rules, too. Like, maybe you get to the fourth beat of a four-beat story, and you don't want to end there. Feel free to say something else!

A Final Note on Truth and Etiquette

Here's how the rats think of this.

If you feel like you're on a roll, people mostly shouldn't interrupt you. After all, you're speaking *truth*. Or what you think is *truth*. It's good to let the whole thing out.

On the other hand, if you're having trouble, it's always OK to at least ask if others can lend their thoughts. It's OK to speak up and say, "Can I?" and then propose an alternate theory, or suggest something helpful. Depending on the people you're with, you might not even need to ask!

It's not clear to me how much this is social, as in, a way to organize a group of storytellers and keep them from talking over one another when the story's going well, and how much it really reflects the rat's ideas of truth. I've seen rats listen to me like I was preaching gospel when I was just thinking aloud, and I've also seen them start practically dancing with their desire to interrupt when I wasn't that confused, so it's kind of hard to say.

STORIES

For all the players, and the GM.

When telling rat stories, you might ask or tell someone about—

1. *the Signs of a Mystery*: the heralds of the Mystery, the ways it calls to you, the ways it intrudes onto the ordinary world; how it lures you to seek it, maybe, or what you see before it strikes.
2. *the Fate of Those who Face the Mysteries*—
 - a. told first, by explaining that this is a story of those who face the Mysteries;
 - b. then, by asking or speaking of someone who sees the signs of a Mystery;
 - c. then, of how they're drawn into its world;
 - d. then, well ... of the story's ending.
3. *Curiosity and Mysteries*—
 - a. told first, by explaining that this is a story of those who investigate the Mysteries;
 - b. then, by asking or speaking of someone *who* investigates a Mystery;
 - c. then, of how that Mystery demonstrates its nature;
 - d. then, well ... of what happens then.
 - e. ... if you don't know, consider what happens when curiosity, the action/mood, meets the second name (Hatred, the Numinous, etc.) of the Mystery?
4. *the Origins of a Far Roofs neighborhood*—
 - a. told first, by explaining that this is a story of the origin of a Far Roofs neighborhood;
 - b. then, by asking or speaking of how some inexplicable thing happened;
 - c. then, of how that thing became the origin of a Far Roofs neighborhood;
 - d. then, of why it's relevant today.
5. *how a Rat investigated a Far Roofs neighborhood*—
 - a. told first, by explaining that this is a story of someone investigating a Far Roofs neighborhood;
 - b. then, by asking or speaking about how a rat travels to a neighborhood in the Far Roofs
 - c. then, by asking or speaking about how it transforms them or their fate
 - d. then, by asking or speaking about what (appropriate thing) happened then.
6. *the Weapons of a Mystery*: all the ways a Mystery can hurt you, all the things it attacks you with; more and more and *more*, and what can happen to you if they *get* to you, or what happened to a rat once when they suffered or died from just such things ...
7. *How to Turn a Mystery Aside*: all the things that push the Mystery back—that blind it to you, keep it from touching you, drive it *away* from you, gentle its attentions towards you, or protect you from its malice. *This one is hard! Go slowly, and be kind to yourself.*
8. *How a Mystery Kills*: the things a Mystery *does* to actually kill you, the way it becomes *itself to the uttermost degree* to kill you ... maybe a few bits of survival strategy and history, too, in there in the mix. If people laugh at your descriptions instead of being unnerved, you can just say, “Well, not that, I guess, but (the Mystery) *does* do (something a bit less silly.)”
9. *What Attracts a Mystery's Attention*: thinking aloud about what kinds of physical things might draw the Mystery's eye, what kind of emotional things might; what draws it near ...
10. *What it Hungers For*: the *nature* of the Mystery; the thing it wants from you; what it hungers for; how it wins ... and what *happens* to you if you give it what it wants.
11. *How to Fight Back*: the whispers of your heart as to what *should* be able to fight back the Mystery, what *should* be able to kill it, and how exactly it would die.
12. *How a Mystery, Once Killed, will be Reborn*: thinking aloud about how it returns; about what seems dramatic and interesting to you, what seems *right*, what would be *fitting* given its story as you know that story to be; and **in what weather, fair or storms, is such a Mystery reborn?**
13. *How to Divert the Mystery's Attention*: the things that don't so much *settle* matters with a Mystery as help you find a way to live with it still being out there and hungry for what you have to give; the things that are answers, but not *answers*, if you understand? That will ... *sate* Hatred, or Disdain, or Outrage, or whatever else ... temporarily, at best.
14. *Other Ideas*: or did you think of something else? *[only a good one to volunteer, not to ask for, though.]*



THE KING OF SHADOWS

- 3 -

At the boundary between the Red King's Road and the Witchway, which leads to Shadows' Cross, the rats stopped and they bowed their heads. They took out small mirrors, held them in the palm of a single hand, angled them so the sunlight passed across their face, and moved their hands away "to lift the sky."

"The Witchway," said Evans; and Lilith, in her turn; and I. Then down to the edge of the roof, and jump, and on—The *feeling* of the world had changed.

I landed on my face and hands. I wouldn't say it was a bad landing. I didn't really hurt anything. But it wasn't what I had planned.

It had startled me.

Evans nosed me. I'm not sure how I'd actually determined at that moment it was he.

"I'm OK," I said. I pushed myself up onto my hands, then onto my knees. I rubbed at a cut under my eye. "I'm OK, right?"

"It's a little weird the first time," Evans said. "Going beyond the regular roofs."

"Yes," I said. "This is very irregular. The home owner must be notified at once."

I tried to stand up, concluded that I could but that I wouldn't be very good at it, and pulled myself away from the edge of the roof to try it further.

"No home owner," he said.

"Abandoned?"

"The houses wouldn't even be here," Evans said. "If it weren't for the Red King's blessing on us. So I don't know. I guess we could dig through the roof sometime, or find a way to get around and under, and see for ourselves, but I've always assumed there were unfinished clay-born people with no eyes and faces going about their endless daily chores in the rooms below."

"What?"

"It's just an assumption," Evans said. "Because sometimes there's smoke from the chimneys, and the like."

"They're mechanized," Lilith observed.

"Are they?"

"Seriously, Evans," she said. "Unfinished clay people?"

"The footsteps don't sound like machines," he said.

"You can't just look in the windows?" I said. It wasn't as casual a question as it deserved to be. I think I sounded rather overwrought.

"At that edge," said Evans. He pointed back. "But if you look too hard at the near edge of the Witchway, you'll fall back into regular old downbelow, and then this is just the Sidorovs' house. And once you get past the near edge of the Witchway, we'll be getting into roofs that don't have much in the way of actual *houses* beneath them. Not real houses, anyway. They're kind of ... grown."

He nodded to himself, satisfied.

"Like plants," he said, agreeing with himself. "Like houses made of tree."

So when we reached the next garden—and it took a while; the roof that was and wasn't the Sidorovs' roof rolled on and on like waves—I begged the rats' forgiveness and I slipped down to feel the walls as I descended and to sit on the edge of a cracked stone fountain in a garden and to stare at the ivy-covered walls of the house or houses that surrounded me, there in the Witchway, where of windows there were none.

"It's strange?" Lilith said.

She was by my hand, and then, with a quick twitch of her tail, she was standing on my elbow's joint.

"It's strange," I said.

"A witch died," Lilith said. "She fell to the ground from Heaven, and she died, and her hair dug down into the ground like roots, and her bones grew walls, and her teeth the tiles of the roofs above, and the gardens where she spat, or where she'd shed her tears, or where her hundred and seventy-one organs last had been."[†]

"Really?"

"Maybe," Lilith said. She looked upwards. A shadow poured like spilled water from the wall and wrapped around her throat.

I flailed. It was instinctive. She tumbled off my arm to the left—away from the shadow's originating wall—and I

[†] She may have been thinking of Pandora, although this was not, of course, Pandora's fate.

raised my arm to cut between the wall and her. It should have done something. At least, it seemed like it should have done something. It didn't.

I didn't make contact. I didn't rip the shadow and it didn't slow me down. There was only the coolness of its touch on my arm and the sense of sudden motion. I stood. I retreated backwards, almost involuntarily, and took breath to call for Evans. Instead I lost sight of the sky and sun and halfway through my breath I lost the air, there was no air, only the cool black iciness of the void.

I wasn't prepared to not be breathing.

Sometimes you are. Sometimes you can be. Prepared for that, I mean. If you're about to dive into a pool, or something, you take a breath, and you make yourself mentally ready, and it's not such a problem, not for tens of seconds, maybe even minutes at a time.

Other times not being a breathing person is confusing, and disorienting, and you panic, and you can't think, and the world jitters and shivers in the eyes you're seeing it in, and you try to bite the emptiness but you can't, you never can, and you aren't clever enough until much later to even *look* for light sources to douse (not that that helps much, actually, with the sun) or ways to use your own shadow to participate in the fight.

Lilith was having trouble getting her sword out. Evans wasn't there yet. I guess it hadn't been very long. I probably hadn't even used the first of those ten-second intervals that wouldn't have been a problem if I had known I wasn't going to get the chance to breathe yet.

It was very hard to think.

More precisely it was very hard to think anything other than *I want to breathe*. This impulse was rapidly overwriting everything else in my consciousness. Suffocation feels like being an AI under a denial-of-service attack: bit by bit, all the parts of the brain that you think are supposed to be *you* become occupied by this invasive hunger for air instead. They start planning how to get air and investigating the world around you for clues as to how to get that air without even *consulting* with your self.

There was a twist and a crash.

I guess it was me. I guess it was me, falling against the fountain, halfway in and halfway out of the afternoon sun. I guess the blood I tasted was from my own cut lip, or maybe at some point I bit my tongue.

I guess it was me, but I honestly thought—back then—that Evans had made it to us in time.

It sounded like a funeral when I woke up. It sounded like a dirge. And when I realized I wasn't dead, I opened my eyes and I was terrified that Evans or Lilith was.

"Lilith," I said.

"Up top," Evans said.

My heartbeat slowed. "You were singing—"

"Oh," he said. He was embarrassed. "Did you like it?"

I sat up.

"It was very solemn," I said.

"It's for Big Folk," he said. Then he shrugged. "You were out."

"Yeah."

The King will turn aside from you if he finds you amidst comforting and comfortable things ...

"The way I figure it," Evans said, "your parents knocked you unconscious against stone fountains a lot, when you were a kid, and so you think of that as 'comfort' and 'home.' This naturally meant that as soon as you flung yourself forward and thumped your head, the shadows had to go. But Lilith thinks it was the taste of blood that soothed you. In which case, begging your pardon, ma'am, but I hadn't realized, and if you'd *told* us you were a berserker, we could have had this journey with clearer consciences."

I licked my lips. It hurt.

"You didn't save us?" I said.

"Nope," Evans said. "I'd figured you two could handle a garden by yourselves, and had gone up a spire to get a good spy around the Way."

"Oh."

"So—" he asked.

I blushed. I looked away. "I probably fired off my comfort, friendship, and reassurance neurons by accident," I said.

"By accident?"

I gestured. "There were Russian hackers spamming my brain with metaphorical requests for air," I said. This was probably not the clearest possible presentation of my earlier analogy. "So I flipped a lot of switches in my brain."

That didn't actually make it clearer.

"I got confused," I said, finally.

It was really embarrassing.

I don't know why it was really embarrassing.

"I thought you'd gotten there," I said, "and so I thought that everything would be ok."

"Oh," he said.

He looked away.

"Best go back up, then," he said. He sounded a little disappointed.

"I mean, I *like* the taste of my blood," I said defensively. "I mean, if my hand is bleeding or something, I will totally lick it. Because mm, blood."

Don't look at me like that.

"That is good information," Evans agreed, and we went up.

Traits

Let's pause for a bit here, before we meet the game's characters, to talk about how you do things in this game.

Far Roofs characters have five key Traits which measure their ability at acting successfully in the world. These traits are:

- * **Awareness**, for perceiving/understanding the world;
- * **Communication**, for communicating with others;
- * **Introspection**, for understanding yourself;
- * **Physical Action**, for achieving external goals; *and*
- * **Self-Care**, for tending to your own needs.

No matter who you are in this game, **your strongest Trait is always rated 4, your next strongest 3, and so on, down to 0.**¹²

Awareness

Awareness is your facility with sensing stuff, understanding stuff, and creating stuff. It helps you listen to the world and think about things. Most importantly, it helps you decide *to* listen to the world and think about things—to know that observation and reflection are *important*.

In play, you'll use Awareness to **learn** about the world around you; **figure out** puzzles; **do creative work**; and **sense** others' feelings and needs. As a simplified picture,

- * **Awareness 0** means not really *liking* new information;
- * **Awareness 1** means noticing yourself noticing things, now and then;
- * **Awareness 2** means being aware of the world around you;
- * **Awareness 3** means you'll be drawn to mysteries, art, and hidden truths; *and*
- * **Awareness 4** means the world offers up its secrets, mysteries, and wonders.

Communication

Communication is your skill at communicating with others, particularly (but not exclusively) your skill with nonviolent communication rooted deeply in empathy and compassion.

In play, you'll use this for figuring out if you're actually

***Trait:** an ooc, rules-based representation of some ability or quality your character possesses. Awareness, Communication, Introspection, Physical Action, and Self-Care are your most important Traits, but others, like the temporary Trait "Sickness," will be mentioned later on.*

understanding someone you're talking to and vice versa; for **overcoming your own prejudices** and tendencies to judge/pigeonhole people; for **expressing** your feelings and needs; for expressing what you've understood about *other* people's feelings and needs; and for **making yourself understood** despite a language or shared context barrier. As a simplified picture,

- * **Communication 0** gives you a tendency to exacerbate misunderstandings;
- * **Communication 1** gives you a sense that you communicate well;
- * **Communication 2** puts you right in there with the people you're talking to;
- * **Communication 3** gives a sense for others' hearts; *and*
- * **Communication 4** gives you the ability to communicate across great gulfs of meaning, potentially rooting deep misunderstandings and conflicts *out*.

Introspection

Introspection is your ability to understand what you're about—to figure out what you feel and need. More importantly, it's your ability to recognize this as work that has to be done, as something that you don't just expect you'll *know*.

In play you'll use this to **recognize your limits** and when self-care is needed; to **understand yourself** and why you're doing things; to understand what you're feeling; to **resolve internal conflicts**; *and* to respond well to negative messages from others. As a simplified picture,

¹² if this should ever fail you and you need a default Trait value, pick "2."

- * **Introspection 0** means you're not really sure there's anyone in there;
- * **Introspection 1** means you need to do some internal work;
- * **Introspection 2** means you *kind of* know who you are;
- * **Introspection 3** means you put effort into knowing who you are; *and*
- * **Introspection 4** makes you at peace with yourself.

Physical Action

Physical Action is your ability to, well, *do* stuff. Stuff, in the world. It helps you do specific physical tasks, and, more importantly, to know that things in the world are things *you can accomplish*. With enough Physical Action, you won't be intimidated by a cliff to climb, or broken plumbing, or a horse to ride—you'll just trust your mind and body to be able to get things done. In play, you'll use this for just about anything that *doesn't* rely on insight, communication, or keen senses, including **physical challenges** like balance; **most work**, including most intellectual/technical work; **regular chores** and self-maintenance (unless your Self-Care is better); when necessary, **fighting**; *and* recognizing when chores, work, and fighting *are* necessary. As a simplified picture of things,

- * **Physical Action 0** makes you kind of helpless;
- * **Physical Action 1** helps you put in an effort;

- * **Physical Action 2** lets you get things done;
- * **Physical Action 3** means you *like* getting things done; it's part of your image; *and*
- * **Physical Action 4** makes you energized, powerful, and driven.

Self-Care

Self-Care is your ability to tend to your own needs. It measures how good you are at keeping yourself healthy, balanced, and happy; how much permission you can give yourself to want things, to need things, to like things, to dislike things, to spend time on yourself, and to be occasionally hurt or vulnerable.

In play, you'll use it to **endure stress** and trauma; **live an enriching life**; give yourself permission to **take care of yourself**; and for **regular chores** and self-maintenance, unless your Physical Action is better. As a simplified picture of things,

- * **Self-Care 0** is about not really wanting to care for yourself;
- * **Self-Care 1** is knowing that self-care matters;
- * **Self-Care 2** is having compassion for yourself;
- * **Self-Care 3** means you rarely sabotage yourself; *and*
- * **Self-Care 4** lets you be at peace about living in the world.



Taking Action

So: most casual actions in this game will be handled by fiat—unrolled.

Most of the time, if you want to talk to somebody, or ride a bike down to the docks and shop for fresh fish, or go through your daily routine ... you'll just *do* it, and then either describe what happens or let the GM do so.

Other times, you'll roll the dice.

Traditionally, rolling the dice means that you aren't sure how to proceed. Or, that either you or the GM is *pretty* sure that the way to proceed is to put things in the GM's hands; only, the GM isn't sure how to proceed either.

Maybe there are two different roads the game could go down—e.g., an interesting story if you succeed at something, and a *different* interesting story if you fail—so the GM asks for a dice roll to see what happens. Or maybe you're a little lost, a bit confused, so you roll the dice to help figure out what you'll do.

THE GENERIC DICED ACTION

A typical diced action rolls **5d6**—five six-sided dice. You're looking for matches. I *personally* like to read these dice as
(size of match x 10) + (result of match)

—so, for instance, I'd read “two sixes” as 26.

... but this way of reading things really only makes it a little easier to do comparisons between two competing characters' results, so you can also ignore all that and just read that as “two sixes,” if you'd like.

Each roll is tied to a specific Trait—you're said to be “rolling” that Trait, e.g., your Self-Care or your Awareness. By default, you'll roll ...

- * **Physical Action** to show energy, bravery, and competence;
- * **Awareness** to be oriented, alert, aware, and creative;
- * **Communication** to be a thoughtful and empathetic communicator;
- * **Introspection** to know what you feel, what you need, what you want to do; *and*
- * **Self-Care** to be healthy and safe and maintain poise and grace in difficult situations.

Here's how to read the results!

- * Quintuples are an amazing, potentially even *campaign-defining*, success. To whatever extent possible, this is a moment that changes everything.
- * Quadruples show up about 2% of the time, barring dice manipulation tricks, and represent great success.
- * Triples are an impressive success. You may sometimes want to embellish this rule a bit by saying that triples up to your Trait level¹³ represent impressive success based on pure competence and personal virtue, while triples *over* your Trait level have a goodly portion of luck mixed in there as well. Either way, we'll call triples, and better matches, “critical” successes.
- * Doubles up to your Trait level succeed (even if there's also a set of doubles over your Trait level).
- * If the *only* doubles are over your Trait level, you fail. That might mean you do the wrong thing, or, you fail at what you're doing, or, you don't do anything at all! If you were already failing, and were rolling to try to fix that, maybe you just go on like you were.
- * If there's no matches at all, that's a “critical” failure—usually, you manage to go in exactly the *opposite* direction of whatever you were trying to do. Like,
 - when trying to show bravery, fear overcomes you.
 - when trying to show competence, you fail.
 - when trying to be alert, you miss something right in front of your face.
 - when trying to communicate, you put your foot in your mouth.
 - when trying to figure yourself out, you have an insight or revelation that's just ... not correct.
 - when trying to show poise and grace, you panic, fumble, or pass out.

You're responsible for your character's actions, so it's often up to you how the roll's result plays out, but the GM may have suggestions, proposals, or requests.

¹³ E.g. 1 1 1 or 2 2 2 when rolling a level 2 Attribute

Confusion and Uncertainty

One neat trick you can do with diced actions is rolling them when you're feeling stuck or lost during play.

You can roll ...

- * **Physical Action** if you're not sure if your character's "up" to taking action;
- * **Awareness** if you're not sure what's going on;
- * **Communication** if you don't understand *how* to talk to somebody, and would like to;
- * **Introspection** if you're not sure what you ought to be doing; *or*
- * **Self-Care** if you're feeling overwhelmed by your character's situation.

When you're *confused*, success means that you can get help from the GM or the other players on the point of confusion.

When you're *not sure whether to act, or what to do*, success means that you should probably do *something*, and that the GM and the other players should receive your action empathetically. For an in-game action, this means they should be mindful not just of the action and its natural consequences but *also* of what you're trying to accomplish and that you're trying to move the game forward by doing it.

When you're *overwhelmed*, both ideas here apply—success gives you the option of asking for help in figuring out what to do, *and*, success means that the GM/group should receive your final decision (to struggle on, or retreat in some fashion) empathetically. To some extent, it also means the story endorses your choice—if you do something tantamount to “keep going,” it's legitimate for your character to have the necessary strength. If you do something boiling down to “retreat/escape,” instead, then doing so was presumptively sensible or outright *necessary*.

Triples and better matches are “success, but even more so.”

Critical failure works basically the same way as success here, except, the final outcome is counterproductive. For instance, if you're confused about what's going on, and you roll a critical failure, the GM and other players should usually help you figure out what's going on so that your PC can misunderstand it properly. If you're not sure what to do, and you roll a critical failure, then the GM and the other players should still receive your final action empathetically—just, it'll probably blow up in your face.

As for a regular failure—

A failure on a roll like this legitimizes hesitation. It's the game system telling you that it's totally legitimate for your next action

to be “I'm too confused, afraid, uncertain, or overwhelmed to do anything here.” The group should both receive that empathetically *and* conceptualize that as a moving-forward of the story ... and, so should you!

Penalties and Bonuses

It's fundamentally harder to, e.g., “show energy, bravery, and competence” when doing something impossible. If I decide to go shop for groceries on Mars, right this second, then I won't just *fail*—I'll have trouble *starting*.

For cases like this, you or the GM can apply a penalty to your effective Trait based on how improbable the action is—e.g.,

- 1 This is going to be rough.
- 2 This is going to be epic. ... or a failure.
- 3 This isn't possible, but if you squint, you can see “possible” from there.
- 4 This is just plain goofy.
- 5 This is fundamentally, outrageously impossible—it violates logic, thermodynamics, genre, or something else dear to the GM's heart.

“Shop for groceries on Mars,” for instance, is just plain goofy, so I'd be rolling my [Trait - 4]. I have Physical Action 1, so that's a final total of -3.

Looking at that, two points become obvious:

First, if I *do* somehow succeed with a Trait as low as -3, it's actually a little bit believable that I'd somehow show energy, bravery, and competence even trying something so silly as shopping on Mars. Mars itself is, of course, still off the table, but a serious plan to get there, starting with improving my fitness so I can go into space one day ... seems like it might be OK?

... second, we need a mechanism to handle what happens when Traits go below 0.

Specifically, let's say that when your effective Trait is negative, **replace one die for each -1 with a ten-sided die (d10)**. To show my bravery, energy, and competence while “shopping for groceries on Mars,” I'd have to roll 3d10 and 2d6 and—since a double under my effective Trait would be impossible—get a triple or more.

The opposite of a penalty like this is a *bonus*: when circumstances are really richly favorable to what you're trying to do, you can *add* +1 to your effective Trait, or sometimes even more.

Bonuses improve Traits to a maximum of 5; after that, additional points of the Trait grant the ability to reroll one 6 per point. For instance, rolling Self-Care 4 with a +3 bonus would let you treat Self-Care as 5 and reroll up to 2 6s.

The highest possible bonus is +5.

Skills

Some characters have extra skills!

Professional skills affirm a character's professional-level or expert-level expertise at something. They also grant a +1 bonus on relevant rolls—for instance, **Professional Orator** adds to Physical Action when it comes to inspiring a large group to action. Or, to Self-Care to get through a difficult social environment. Or, to Communication when one is really only trying to persuade or charm someone, and not to have an honest and open communication with them.

Superior skills are things you get from not being human. They're rated from 1-5. They can be used unrolled, or, you can roll the skill as if it were a Trait. For instance, an owl with *Superior Owl* would use it to fly and see at night; if they're not very good at being an owl, and prone to fail actual owling rolls, they might have *Superior Owl 1*. Owl *aces*, conversely, might have 4-5.

Magical skills are also rated from 1-5. They allow characters to do things a default character can't even *attempt*. For instance, even though I'm not a surgeon, I could go attempt a surgery right now if nobody stopped me ... but I can't even practically *attempt* lightning magic. Magical skills are rolled as Traits too, but they're a bit more reliable and a bit more draining:

If you fail on a magic that you know well, or a new magic that you had reason to be confident in, it still *works*¹⁹; just, the magic skill goes down by one point for the rest of the session, becoming unusable at 0. A *critical* failure *can* make magic “not work,” but usually makes it go subtly wrong, somehow, instead.

Characters generally start with either a professional skill, a one-point superior skill, or a one-point magical skill; anything more must come from **Skilled** (pg. 69). The GM/group can increase this allocation for a given campaign if they like.

Extended Rolls

If a character can keep trying at something indefinitely—let's say, if they're exploring the mangal, or building a deck for their house, and it doesn't really make sense to say “ah, you screwed up, now you can never have a deck or learn the secrets of that place”—then failure has the following results instead:

- * time slips by. You should talk about the process, in case the things you do in there matter.
- * then, you can roll again, at a cumulative +1 (max 5) to your effective Trait ...
 - but triples now count as *critical failures* instead.
 - (quadruples and quintuples are still good.)

Thus, stubborn persistence rapidly improves your odds ... but also your chances of something going *super wrong*.

This is known as an *extended roll*.

The cumulative bonus and critical penalty don't last forever; loosely speaking, if your character's changed locations and taken two unrelated diced actions between attempts, the extended roll has most likely expired, and further attempts would start over with a normal action instead.

POETIC ACTIONS

In most cases a player will simply name or describe their action, roll if appropriate, and be done. Other times, it may be feasible to speak *poetically* of the action—perhaps still giving a plain language explanation, but *then* offering a (typically unrhymed) poetic couplet or triplet to *paint a picture* of the action, or the character's attention, or the character's virtues and abilities, in the action's support. Sometimes players will want to go for something longer, but the *target* here is just a scrap of poetry, e.g., a vaguely quotable pair of lines:

A typical length is 14-20 syllables.

When taking a poetic action, characters may draw upon a special mechanic known as *the river*, discussed below—a pool of 1-2 dice they can “float” unwanted dice into and “flow” those dice back out of later to strategically improve specific rolls.

The Poetry of the Matter

Since a poetic action is not rhymed—nor, strictly, metered—the player has an extraordinarily free hand. It's *helpful*, certainly, to have a strong rhythm, strong imagery, and to seize the occasional chance to rhyme or make interesting allusions ... but such things aren't necessary. In the end it's on the player's honor not to claim “I want to make an Awareness roll / to figure out what's going on here” as a poetic action. Conversely, **the Far Roofs** also expects the player to trust themselves—

To accept their best actual effort in a reasonable time span as legitimate, on an action that feels like poetry is in reach. Sometimes that may mean that the free verse in question is kind of ugly or ridiculous; that's fine. Beauty has forsaken even the eye of the beholder of late to live inside a crystal sparkling egg, that was swallowed by an octopus, that was devoured by a whale, that's fled into the darkest of abyssal deeps; it *happens*.

Poetic actions in **the Far Roofs** often fall into a naturalistic or “sprung” rhythm, rather than a formal one, leaving couplets off-balance by a syllable. If this leaves a poetic action (particularly a short one) feeling “incomplete,” it's often worth balancing the extra syllable against a breath, a clap or other percussion, or a rattle of the dice in hand, as illustrated below.

¹⁹ that said, this rule won't reverse a loss in a conflict (pg. 48).

Some examples of what this might look like, then, include:

- * for a **Physical Action** like building/repairing a garden wall, it's traditional to speak of the character's dedication, stamina, strength, or aesthetic; or, the reasons they're building it; or, the image of them *as* they're building it. Thus, you'll see poetry like:

in the heat of the summer, [CLAP] /
a trowel slaps against the stone

sweat trickling down the brow, grass waving /
in the wind; [DICE RATTLE] an insect buzzing

this year as every year /
in timeless tradition: /
a garden wall is rising
- * for an **Introspection** action like digging out an understanding or secret hidden deep within your mind, it's traditional to speak in tones of command or, more rarely, intimacy:

arise from the depths, oh phantom /
words, and come to me, your maker!

crack, the stone; /
shatter, the gates; /
oh, sunder all the walls within

I am the eye /
and the voice /
and the will indomitable: /
you may batter me, mind, /
but I will not break

if I should fall into that hurricane within, my love, /
can I trust that you at least will meet me there?
- * for a **Communication** action like arguing one's way into a building after hours, it's traditional to describe your character—and generally *only the character*, and their believability, rather than the argument itself, which is summarized or provided outside the poetry:

who could doubt this [DICE RATTLE]
shining smile, /
this honest face? [CONSPICUOUS SILENCE]

the sun sinks gently behind the hills /
my finger raised in argument [CLAP]

you'd want to believe me, /
oh, you would, I think, /
because no one would tell such foolish lies

how could you refuse me? [BREATH]
I, your child, /
sun-graced heir to all the kingdoms of your earth?
- * for a *perception-focused Awareness* action, like navigating magical paths without getting lost, it's traditional to speak of the things the character is paying attention to:

in the vibrant colors, /
in the turning of the world /
the wind is changing

like golden wine, [BREATH] /
like the leaves of fall: /
I taste the subtle shifting of the path

though all around to confusion falls /
the light of a distant star shines on
- * an **Awareness** action to *create* something—a work of art, say—works in a similar fashion: the player describes the inspiration that they're reaching for, and perhaps also how they are refining it into the world:

will of the fox god [BREATH] /
refined into a mask

they shouldn't be hurt like this [STOMP] /
those are the words; that's all, in this /
they—they shouldn't be hurt like this

a dream of the ocean wind [DICE RATTLE] /
and sun, now carved into the stone
- * for a **Self-Care** action like getting through a difficult family dinner, it's traditional to work on an emotional level, the poetry being *messages to oneself*—traditionally a little longer and more actually *poetic* than most poetic actions, but also a little less *sensical* overall:

endure! Endure! /
You continue to have value; /
it will linger past this dinner /
and well on into the night [CLAP]

in a way, you could say, /
you are showing strength surviving, /
you are showing strength in striving, /
just by being here at all

it is best that you remember /
that these people scarcely know you, /
if they knew you, how they'd love you! /
... a saner person might well say

dream not of this, /
but of a shining crystal palace, /
somewhere distant and aetherial /
where these people cannot go.

As a general rule, the “confusion and uncertainty actions” mentioned above, where the player is trying to figure out what to do or what’s going on, *shouldn’t* be poetic actions, for the simple reason that it’s impossible to properly describe the situation or even the character’s perspective on it until *after* the roll is done. That isn’t meant to be a challenge, and it isn’t meant to be an absolute rule *forbidding* the idea; just, in almost all cases, it’s not a good approach.

The River

As noted above, the river is a space where a player can keep (“float”) 1-2 spare dice.

This works as follows:

On taking a poetic action, a character has the option to take a die or pair of dice from their roll and “float” them into their river, bumping out any dice already there. (It’s fine, if not always advisable, to reduce a roll to a critical failure this way.) If they *don’t* do that, they have the option to “flow” any stored dice *out* of their river, instead, adding them to their roll.

Thus, for instance, on rolling **3 3 2 2 6**, with a relevant Attribute of 3, the player might float **2 2** into the river. Or, less conveniently, upon rolling **3 5 2 2 6**, they could do the same—resulting in a critical failure. On a later poetic action, assuming they hadn’t changed the river in the meantime, they could flow that pair of 2s back out and add it to their roll ... turning a failure, perhaps, into an ordinary success, or adding them to a roll with one or more 2s already in it to produce a *critical* success. Having done so, they might float a **5** from their *next* poetic action into the river, replacing it the action after that with a floated **1**. It is not, alas, feasible to simply cycle the dice through—if the **1** is floated first, it pushes the **5** out to the distant sea; if the **5** is pulled in first, the river closes up behind it.

In a sense, therefore, the mechanics of this system *do* mean that only one in two poetic actions truly *benefit* from the river; that, in fact, it’ll usually be *fewer* than that, that there’s usually be a pattern like “*this* poetic action falls to critical failure; then *these two* don’t *need* the die or dice in the river; then this one, ah, finally, *this one* escalates to a triple or quadruple because those river dice were there ...”

That said, the matter of when to use the river’s dice is in the player’s hands—meaning that the *best* results, intermittent though they may be, will reliably happen either “when needed most,” or, “when they’ll be *the coolest*.”

Abstractly speaking, a lower die in the river is better than a higher, and a pair is better than any single die. There may be cases where this does not work out for the player, and cases where aesthetically a very high pair will not be pleasing, but for players wanting to maximize the river’s utility, and to

know when it’s worth floating dice they can afford to float ... that’s how the rules, on average, play out.

CONFLICT

A simple conflict between two actions is resolved with equal simplicity:

Both parties roll, and compare their rolls. The match with more dice wins, followed by the highest-valued *successful* match. (Failure never beats success.) Thus, **4 4 4** beats **5 5**; if that **5 5** is a success, it in turn beats **4 4**. One can read this as “ $34 > 25 > 24$.”

Occasionally one party or the other will be advantaged or disadvantaged in the contest. This can be reflected by penalties and bonuses, as discussed before. If an *existing* roll gets into a conflict, any new penalties become bonuses for the other side—

For instance, if someone is guarding an office building, and rolls **5 3 2 1 1** (two 1s, or “21”) to succeed, then they can’t be penalized retroactively. If they fall asleep, that doesn’t change their roll of 21—at least, not if the player claims they’re still “guarding,” anyhow, listening with one ear and vaguely aware of movement and shadows; instead, their being asleep gives a +2 or +3 bonus to anyone *contesting* their attempt to guard.

If two contested rolls are equal, it’s traditional to award the contest to whichever action was harder to begin with and then to whichever character is the “defender;” if both tiebreakers fail, the GM can hand out victory arbitrarily (or at random).

Dramatic Conflict

Sometimes a conflict has more dramatic weight than a simple roll-off seems capable of handling. It won’t be a casual test of skills; it will be a storied clash between two antagonists, a moment of danger and catharsis, a load-bearing bit of narrative that’s expected to *bring resolution* to something, often a long-term struggle or ongoing friction. Occasionally, in short, the narrative of a conflict is one of upheaval and passion:

A clash of titans.

Actions that carry that kind of emotional and causal weight are a little more complicated, so there are a few extra rules. In particular, characters will have a limited *capacity* for conflicts with this level of impact behind them. They will be *draining*, chewing through resources even when the character has a winning hand. This is modeled by a hand of cards that (among its other uses) represents the character’s *stamina* for conflicts such as these. Most actions in dramatic conflicts cost a card; these cards are principally replenished *outside* of dramatic conflict. There’s no strict *limit* to the number a character might have on hand, but they’re useful for other things, things *more central* to a character’s interests than conflict; if a character has more than a few on hand when a conflict starts, they were

probably collecting them for something else.

Physical combat generally uses the dramatic conflict rules, and these rules have been tuned to handle moments of adventure that pit ordinary people against mysterious masked antagonists, cold-hearted warriors of the void, gigantic serpents, and the like. That said, it's important to note that any major clash of rival powers *can* invoke these rules—can demand stamina, and more generally the dramatic conflict mechanisms. A sufficiently dramatic argument, race, chase, or cooking contest will, e.g., bring these rules to bear.

DRAMATIC ESCALATION

A dramatic conflict doesn't focus on the characters' moment-to-moment tactical actions. Everybody's probably moving around, doing stuff that's reasonable in context. Don't stress about optimizing or rolling for *that*. We're only going to focus here on those actions that actually *matter*:

The big moments. The things that *stand out*.¹⁵

The actions that count in a dramatic conflict are the ones that seize the spotlight. The ones that change the status quo. You'll play a card, and take dramatic action, when you want to *escalate*, and specifically when you want to escalate *against* someone—when you're taking an action that changes where you stand *vis-a-vis* one or more other participants in the conflict. We'll call this a dramatic conflict “*attack*,” whether it's literally an IC attack or something that's very much *not* ... and to pull one off, you'll have to stand out. To burn stamina. Specifically, you'll need to play a card that can hit a certain “cv target” consonant to the targeted opponents' strength ... something with a [card value] of at least:

cv targets

- 2 ... if they're scarcely any effort to defeat
- 5 ... if they're roughly comparable to an ordinary human
- 7 ... if they're substantially *better* than an ordinary human
- 10 ... if they're outright terrifying, *or*
- A (14) ... if they're about as strong as you can plausibly hope to oppose at all.

This number is known as the target's *card/combat value* (or cv).

In most cases, for a player character, their cv is 5.

Where Cards Come From

Over time, you'll get cards naturally from other players' reactions and rich experiences in play (pg. 56). You can also get cards from your quest's major goals (pg. 66) and, in conflict, from *FALTERING* (pg. 52). Thus, if you ever find yourself short in a conflict, you should first doublecheck your goals; then, consider faltering; then, watch for rich experiences.

When NPCs act against NPCs, the GM can just decide the result. When acting against PCs, though, NPC actions work like the PCs' do—the GM, e.g., spends a suitable card to attack; boasts (below); and then rolls. The GM won't pick up quite enough cards for this naturally; thus, if you're the GM, you may draw three cards and then discard down to a maximum of five any time a dramatic PC/NPC conflict begins ... and again, once per chapter, at a time of your choice (even during an ongoing conflict!).

Depending on context, the cv for a *group* is either the cv for the strongest member, or something higher—in a fistfight, for instance, three ordinary humans have cv 7-8; in a footrace, though, they're just cv 5.

If someone has an invincible advantage, but isn't otherwise all that overwhelming, that's usually represented by adding a “♠” to their cv. You can escalate against such characters by finding a way to negate their advantage, waiting until they show some sort of temporary vulnerability, *or*, by playing a spade—the card suit that ignores invincibility.¹⁶ A poltergeist, for instance, might have a cv of 3♠; they're not all that *tough*, but they're intangible and can throw heavy objects at you. If you have any way of hurting them, you can overwhelm them with ease. ... if you don't, there's not much you can do.

Once you've played a card, anyhow, you're the *active player*. That card is the *active card*.

BOASTING

After playing a card, you can wait a moment to see if someone else is going to jump in—or, you can just take your action.

Begin with a “boast” about your IC prowess or actions.

¹⁵ To be clear, you'll also find occasional reasons during dramatic conflicts to describe or even *roll* for ordinary, background actions. You can do that *when* it makes sense to you, *because* it makes sense to you; it won't hurt anything ... but these won't be dramatic conflict actions, just, well, “background effects.”

¹⁶ you *do* still need some kind of workaround IC ... but a handwave explanation or lucky long-shot play's fine.

“Boasting” doesn’t mean that you have to say things any particular way. In particular, **a boast doesn’t have to be poetic**, though dramatic conflicts *are* one of the occasions where poetic actions most shine. Rather, this rule says you should probably set aside generalizations like *I attack* or matters of uncertainty like *how far apart are we? Do I have leverage for action x?* and talk about one of these two things instead:

- * the particular advantage, the strength, the particular quality or *edge*, your character is bringing to bear; or
- * a *sense* of what your character is doing, perhaps somewhat dissociated from the particular details as they would manifest in the scene, with the actual advantage you’re trying to invoke left mostly implicit.

For instance, if the GM wants to boast of a great golden snake as it menaces a PC shrine maiden and NPC talking rat, they might not really know what it actually *does* to attack ... but they also don’t *need* to. They don’t have to *describe the attack* here; they can be a little more visual, a bit less exact, instead, and say, e.g.,

*The golden serpent rears above, /
its fangs [DICE RATTLE] dripping with venom.*

edge: a quality or move worth boasting about in a conflict. For instance, in a public argument, possible edges include “I talk right over you,” “everyone loves me,” “dazzling rhetoric,” and “I’m the only one talking sense.”

After using an edge in dramatic conflict (seizing the final spotlight and making a non-preempted attack roll), try not to use that edge against that target again for 1-2 IC days. It’s done its damage and is no longer a dramatic escalation! This is a soft, non-binding rule because sometimes it doesn’t make sense and sometimes it would get in the way ... but please keep it in mind.

background effects: when something happens in a dramatic conflict that doesn’t take the spotlight, we’ll call it a “background effects” action. Such an action can’t deal damage, use up an edge, inflict so much narrative harm the target would’ve PREFERRED taking a point of damage, suffer the special dramatic conflict penalties for failing or critically failing, or trigger a reaction like blocking or faltering ... but it does, at least, HAPPEN. Sometimes, it’ll even get rolled!

ROLLING AN ATTACK

After you boast about it, an attack is *rolled*. This is generally a **Physical Action** roll. In some cases, it will be something else.

- * A **critical failure** is bad. You have done exactly what you did *not* want to do.

Your opponent—pick whichever one makes the most sense to you, if you were targeting more than one with your action—can, *if they wish*, replace you as the active player and make an attack as if you were functionally cooperating. This can be an action they were already taking, or, a new attack. It uses your card to hit, but can always hit your cv. If they target you or a group including you, didn’t already roll, and wouldn’t *rather* roll normally, they can set the dice to **2 2 3 4 5** as this attack’s “roll.” (That’s pre-river, if relevant.) On success, the attack does +1 damage to you. If they fail, critically fail, or don’t attack you at all, take 1 damage instead.

If your card is still active after resolving all interrupts (pg. 51), give it to your opponent to put in their hand. (... or, in the event of shenanigans, to pass on to someone *they* critically failed against ... even you!)

- * On a **failure**, your action fails. Take 1 point of damage.
- * On a **success**, it succeeds. Deal 2 points of damage.
- * A **critical success** usually refers to *the thing you’re doing*, not to the effect on the opponent. ... that said, deal 3 points of damage. If this roll is still in play after resolving all interrupts, and your target’s cv is no higher than yours, reclaim your spent card for your hand.

TAKING DAMAGE

You can understand these damage numbers as follows.

Characters start with 5 Health Points (HP)—very rarely, a few more or less. Each point of damage taken removes one HP. Characters are *defeated* when they take their full HP in damage. That means if something happens the player would see as a defeat for the character ... something that’s just not acceptable, whether that’s death, transformation, or even a *blessing* ... it can’t actually happen while they have HP left.

Out of conflict, characters can take a point of damage to *mitigate* that kind of effect—replacing it with something that’s *not* a defeat for them, whatever that means. They reduce its weight. Twist it into an advantage. Whatever makes sense! It’s up to the target’s player. They don’t lose an arm; instead, it’s just bruised. That love potion doesn’t work: it’s a “like” potion instead!

In dramatic conflict, only attacks that deal HP damage can do any meaningful harm to a character in the first place, and the target can mitigate unacceptable effects as long as they still have HP. Once they run out of HP, though, stuff the player sees as an IC “defeat” can transpire; further, they lose the ability to attack, counterattack, block, or falter (below).

INTERRUPTS AND COUNTERATTACKS

Sometimes someone plays a card and seizes the spotlight ... but you don't want to let them. What then?

You can preempt the ongoing action in three different ways, becoming the active player and replacing the active card—

- * **Play a higher card (than the active card)** to *interrupt* the active player, taking your action first.
- * **Play a higher card (than the active card)** to out-escalate someone who's played a card, declared an attack that targets you (possibly among others), and made their boast. You turn around the action on them. For example, the shrine maiden in our example boast puffs up and, even if she can't manage to physically *loom*, manages to look spiritually bigger and more intimidating than the golden snake ... out-escalating.
- * **Invoke a power or circumstance disqualifying the active player's card, and play a card of at least [their cv]**—for example, if someone's attacking you with a 9♥ but you're untouchable when your theme song is playing (meaning that only ♠ cards work), you can start up your theme song to invalidate their card ... as long as you can then play your own.

Stamina used on a preempted action is not spent. If someone plays a 5♥, and that action is preempted by a 6♦, the 5♥ goes back into their hand; they may theoretically turn around and spend, e.g., a 10♠, to preempt that in turn. If they then critically fail, an ally might preempt *that* with a Queen ... just to keep the 10♠ out of their enemies' hands.

Characters make at most one attack roll in any series of interrupts and counterattacks. They can make that roll as they play a card, as they boast, or after all interrupts have resolved. If they should roll early, and their action is preempted or interrupted, the roll is invalidated; if they preempt or interrupt *that* in turn, their new attack action reverts to their original roll.¹⁷

If suspending disbelief ever requires a preempted action still “happen,” it can! Just, unless and until its player seizes the active role again, it's no longer a *dramatic conflict* action—it loses the notional spotlight, becoming just “background effects” (pg. 50).

¹⁷ this does mean it's often wise to write invalidated rolls down ... particularly if the group has a shortage of dice or the GM's tracking 2+ NPCs.

turn: a dramatic sequence starting when someone plays a card to escalate, continuing through any number of interruptions, simultaneous actions, and counterattacks, and finishing up with resolution of the final attack or set of simultaneous attacks and any blocking/faltering (below).

SHARING THE SPOTLIGHT

If you have a card *the same value* as the active card, you can join the active player in the spotlight instead of preempting their action. Both of you are now active players, and may act together. Treat both cards as the active card—that is, if someone can play a card that preempts or matches both cards (including, e.g., at least *matching* your card if they invalidate the other), that's a valid move.

- * **Play a card with the same rank as the active card** to act simultaneously with the active player. This can either represent taking your own action at basically the same time, or, *trying* to out-escalate them and instead winding up so evenly matched that it counts as simultaneous attacks on one another instead. This doesn't preempt their action; instead, both of you are now active players. (That said, note that you can't be active “twice;” if you, e.g., want to take over a critical failure, you must first abandon your previous card.)

LATERAL APPROACHES

As a final option, it's sometimes possible to

- * **Take a lateral approach that works around what they're doing**, rather than facing its strength head-on—e.g., **winning a pie-eating contest by trapping your opponent in a magical sack**. Then, ask the GM if this might qualify for a turn-length bonus on the effective value of your cards against the current active player(s). Finally, if the bonus is big enough that you both can and want to ... **play a card, and act!**

Once everybody's done interrupting and preempting, the notional spotlight is seized. Escalation actually happens. The active players, if they hadn't yet, boast and roll.

Inactive players who want to interfere with a damaging attack may now attempt to *block*. Targets of such attacks, if they do not wish to block, can instead choose to *falter*. Active (that is, attacking) characters do not have these options.

BLOCKING

Blocking is doing something cool that could stop an opponent's damaging "attack" action but is unlikely to set them back or hurt them much otherwise. It's OK to come up with the cool thing yourself or (if you're not feeling inspired) leave it to anyone who wants to spruce the conflict's narrative up.

To *block* an attack, you need a stamina card with a target value of at least [the attacking card's value – 3].

- * On a **critical failure**, you have done exactly what you did not want to do here. You are functionally cooperating with your opponent's attack. Take an extra +1 damage. (This becomes 1 damage if your opponent is attacking someone else or otherwise fails to damage you.) Your opponent claims your spent card for their hand.
- * On a **failure**, you do not succeed.
- * On a **success**, that is also better than the attacker's result, you block the attack (prevent it from dealing damage or bonus damage), and deal 1 damage to them. ... basically, they retroactively fail.
- * A **critical success** is the same; further, if the cv you needed to block was at most equal to your own cv, reclaim your spent card for your hand.

FALTERING

To "falter" is to show weakness to your foe. You're on the back foot—frozen in fear; or, retreating, in a panic or with a plan; or, floundering; or, hiding; or, trying hard, but pushed back nevertheless. You're still in the conflict, but not doing well.

The advantage of faltering is simple:

It helps protect you, but it doesn't cost stamina. In fact, it can sometimes give you a card!

Roll the Trait you are notionally failing to defend with, and:

- * On a **critical failure**, you have done exactly what you did not want to do here. You are functionally cooperating with your opponent's attack. Take an extra +1 damage. (This becomes 1 damage if your opponent—e.g., blocked by a third party—fails to actually damage you.)
- * On a **failure**, you gain nothing.
- * On a **success**, you may reduce the damage taken by 1 (min 0), and draw a new card.
- * A **critical success** reduces the damage taken by 2 (min 0), and again, you may draw a new stamina card. If this is a better roll than the attacker's, it negates all damage to you entirely.

You should probably only block or falter after everyone's done interrupting and counterattacking, but if the order of actions gets confused, it's fine; just retract your card and roll if the character you were defending against doesn't wind up launching that attack after all.

You can only block or falter against attack rolls. There's no defense against the default 1 damage from failure, critical failures the opponent can't or won't capitalize on, or being blocked.

You can only block or falter against damaging attacks.

MULTI-CHARACTER CONFLICT

Any number of characters may simultaneously block an attack. However, only the best successful roll will act as a functional block; conversely, any number of blocks may critically fail and deal damage to the character rolling.

It's fine to block multiple simultaneous attacks, possibly at a small penalty, if the action makes sense. It's also fine to *narrate* a block as if it blocked other, non-damaging actions that turn, though it won't, e.g., deal damage to those attackers on success.

An attack can be launched against multiple targets, if descriptively reasonable. The GM sets a cv for the group. All targets will take damage. The GM may rule, depending on the attack, that the damage is reduced by 1 on some or all targets. Any number of these targets can, if they so choose, falter.

When two characters attempt to preempt the same attack, they are *also* implicitly attempting to preempt or act simultaneously with one another. For instance, if one character in an online argument makes a rhetorical attack, and three members of the opposing team burst out with replies, all four are now in competition for the notional spotlight.

When multiple characters *do* simultaneously roll an attack on the same target, only the single most damaging attack will actually *deal damage* to that target (and trigger possible blocking or faltering). Conversely, any number of attacks can fail or critically fail and deal damage to the character rolling.

Usually characters only simultaneously attack if their stamina cards have the same value, or, if the GM declares them the same effective value after a lateral-approach "bonus." This applies whether they are piling up on the same target or, e.g., attacking each other. That said, the GM can optionally allow practiced/inspired "combination attacks" where all involved attacks are rolled even with cards up to 3 points apart.

As a final note, if two *unrelated* attacks happen at the same time—e.g., a giant golden snake attacks a shrine maiden, while a *tiny* golden snake bites at her talking rat companion—the GM can optionally play out the two relevant turns simultaneously. If they don't, the attack cards compete normally; unless they tie, the losing fight becomes just "background effects" (pg. 50).

TRANSITION PHASE

We don't want dramatic conflicts to last forever OOC, so we're going to cut them off after three uninterrupted attack rolls (or sets of simultaneous attack rolls)—that is, three *turns*, where someone or some group acts, possibly as the final action in a series of interrupts and counterattacks, and then others defend.

At most, really *critical* conflicts will go on four or five.

To help move things along, once everyone's blocked or faltered that's going to, the GM can optionally draw a few random letters (pg. 56) and shuffle around their current pool of letters to look for inspiration as to how the conflict might end. That won't wind up mattering if one side definitively wins by doing so much damage their opponents just collapse ... but if three turns pass, and the conflict's still going, it might!

Optionally, again, if they've picked up or already had some inspiration, the GM can talk about what's happening in the background to move the conflict forward towards that end. If not, that kind of description waits until the end of the next turn, and perhaps the drawing of another few letters. The GM also has the option to ask the players (or a specific player) what moves the conflict on towards its ending.

THE ENDING

In the end, after three turns, the conflict closes ... potentially without resolution. (Rarely, as noted, important or multi-character conflicts may last a couple turns longer.)

If at that time a character is at 0 HP, or has wound up in an obviously irrecoverable place vis-a-vis the conflict itself, they are *defeated*:

That is, the narrative of the conflict ends in their defeat.

To the extent that's both plausible and in the conflict's scope, the GM can give any undefeated opponents a say in how that plays out—in essence, their opponents get as much of a victory, at least, as it is reasonable to gain.

The attack that took the defeated character to 0 HP, and any later attacks on them during the conflict, are in theory unhindered by their HP. The player cannot automatically mitigate them. They *can*, however, discuss with the GM how to adjust, resolve, or recover from effects that are difficult or unfun for them to play—there's nothing about 0 HP that *forces* anything awful to happen, it just means stuff the *character* wouldn't be OK with can happen, if the GM and player are both at least loosely on board.

If at least two sides of the conflict have characters still going strong when it ends—or even, perhaps, if nobody's been defeated at all—it becomes incumbent upon the GM or group to close things out without such defeat.

The “Rule of Three”

A dramatic conflict ends after three turns unless it's *really* important or complicated, in which case it might go for five. Coincidentally, this is also the number of sides in a triangle—think back to how you've only ever seen four- or five-sided triangles at the most pivotal, dramatic moments of your life!

Thus:

- * If the PCs were trying to retreat or disengage, they succeed.
- * Otherwise, perhaps the NPCs involved do that now?
- * Or, perhaps the thing people were fighting over is no longer in play?
- * Or, something happens to separate the participants?
- * Or maybe it just becomes obvious to everyone that the conflict is futile, and both sides must slowly withdraw?

If the GM keeps a pool of letters, and particularly if they've been drawing them after each turn, the GM and/or players can treat this as a muddle (pg. 55) and sort through the letters for hints about why the conflict ends ... or, of course, just talk it all through. The main point is, this isn't a good game for insistently driving every conflict on to its bittermost ending; sometimes, conflicts just sweep in, sweep past, and ... are gone.

AFTERWARDS

After the conflict ends, all participating characters recover: specifically, *characters who either took or dealt damage during the conflict recover 2 HP each*, up to their starting value (usually, 5).

AGAINST THE MYSTERIES

Finally, to complete the story of the “dramatic conflict,” we have a few special rules to use for participating Mysteries.

These are,

- * **Fear and awe mark their presence.**
- * **The deepest truths of you can break their spell.**
- * **Love and acceptance may conquer a Mystery.**
- * **You may hold them at bay.**
- * **Resolving a story may answer a Mystery, and**
- * **The impact of a Mystery lingers.**

HP recovery

As a reminder, all characters taking or dealing HP damage during a dramatic conflict regain 2 HP after the conflict ends, to a maximum of their starting HP. This includes potential recovery from damage taken before the conflict started.

Characters may also regain 1 HP with a decent night's sleep. (Getting such sleep may sometimes require successful SELF-CARE or, when troubled, INTROSPECTION.)

In a dramatic conflict, **fear and awe mark the Mysteries' presence.**

One core way this expresses itself is that, until at least some PC marks the journal with something to indicate that fear and awe—not necessarily **DESPERATION**, but at least **WONDER** or **LOSING YOURSELF** or something—the Mystery cannot be understood as *actually* present. It is foreshadowing. It is a spiritual shadow. It is a vision or a dream.

Fear and awe mark their presence; so someone must mark fear and awe or they are not present at all.

If they *are* present, then, once, they may use that fear and awe as an attack. They may hold whole groups of PCs still with it, may assault their minds with it; this, even if they have no other powers for it, even if they lack **Paralyzing Fear** (pg. 79) and **Conversion** (pg. 95) and other more specific psychic attacks:

They are a Mystery; their presence has just such weight.

This is a standard edge Mysteries have, and it lets them attack groups of people, with or without another associated action. ... but it is not as good an edge as you might imagine.

The deepest truths of you can break their spell; love and acceptance may conquer a Mystery ... and what both of these things mean, in the end, is that if you reach down deep inside yourself, if you dig down to the core of who you are and why you are there, or cling to the love you have for someone, or accept the Mystery's presence—

That can be a *strong* lateral move for counterattacking or blocking with.

Even if you can't find anything good. Even if you're just, like, blowing your nose at the Mystery. Even if all you can think of, in the face of Typhon, is, "but ... my English test. I can't die here. I have a test." If you take it seriously, that's *enough*—not necessarily to fight back, but to block, to break the Mystery's spell.

Even if you don't have a card at all, you can get one for this, a

♠ "good enough to block with," by marking the journal with the core of your plan.

You may hold the Mysteries at bay. In every encounter, a Mystery will likely be vulnerable to 2-3 of:

- * physical heroics
- * argument
- * exploiting "how to turn it aside,"
- * exploiting "how to divert its attention," *and*
- * exploiting "how to kill it"

What that means is if that you're never going to have a case where you're fighting a Mystery, and it's a bear that is a physical combatant that is also immune to physical attacks, and it ignores arguments, and it ignores all the speculation you've come up with about turning it aside, diverting it, and killing it, and it just beats you up without recourse.

There's never going to be a case where the GM rules *all* those rolls you might make just plain impossible; or even decides that all of them would need spades. It *should* be possible, because Mysteries have all the necessary qualities *individually* to justify it ... but they never come together in quite that way.

It just never *happens*.

Resolving a story may answer a Mystery. It is generally the case that an *arcenum* (pg. 56) can defeat a Mystery, or allow one to slip its attention; turn it away for a time. An *arcenum* can even, potentially, kill one. Even if a muddle's been around a long time, and the *arcenum* that'll solve it has been in the players' back pocket waiting for use, it's reliably useful and fun to resolve the *arcenum* during a conflict with the Mystery; it's often, in fact, enough to end the conflict right there.

... though the rats *do* tell me that inventing a pointless muddle on the spot and resolving it with a dumb answer doesn't work—and they also gave me a *look* when I asked—so it's probably necessary that the *arcenum* be a legitimate answer to an ongoing muddle or Issue (pg. 55, 58). It's *also* probably necessary to bring a Mystery down to 0 HP first if one intends to actually *kill* it or do some other such long-lasting harm.

Lastly, **the impact of a Mystery lingers.** Even after a struggle against a Mystery ends ... the impact tends to stick around for a while. The GM might hand out an Issue point or two, or a handful of bonus components; the players may find themselves resolving long-standing concerns. In short such a conflict creates a fruitful time—

A period when things that move characters' stories forward is more likely to happen. This isn't an unalloyed good ... but in the bigger picture, it makes the characters stronger.

Muddles

Not everything is easy to solve just by trying to.

Not everything can be handled with a plan, some cards, and a roll.

Some things, some *important* things, you just have to grow to find a solution to, over time.

These are called *muddles*:

Big dilemmas. Projects that you need to grapple with all along the way. New relationships, or even old ones that you keep needing to figure out new things about—or figure out how and where to invest in. Art. Craft. Things to build, to nurture, to solve.

The simple list of “muddles” is:

- * murky, tricky, and troubling situations;
- * straight-up *problems*;
- * new relationships that you need to sort out;
- * projects, creations, and other things that you’re working on; *and*
- * old relationships or situations that you regularly re-explore.

A longer list of things that count as “muddles” would be:

- * you’re in a troubling situation—you’re at a loss as to how to deal with it, or lack the spirit/means;
- * you’re confused by or about something important;
- * you’re facing a difficult opponent;
- * you’re under new kinds of pressure;
- * there’s something about the life or community you want to build for yourself that you don’t have, and want to figure out how to get;
 - ... or have a plan for, but need time and inspiration to get there;
- * an NPC needs help, and you want to provide it, but it’s complicated;
- * a wish or similar power use has gotten out of control;
- * something mysterious, unclear, and worrisome is happening to you;

- * something’s corrupting/twisting you from outside;
- * you’re wrestling with temptation or vice;
- * you’re wrestling with a big and/or complicated project, new or old;
- * you’re struggling with or revisiting a larger-scale duty or connection, new or old;
- * you’re grieving, or struggling with a painful legacy;
- * there’s something ... a person’s heart? a place? a mystery? ... that you want to explore and understand;
- * there’s something or someone you want to understand—a person? a place? a mystery?;
- * there’s something about yourself that you’re struggling to understand, accept, come to terms with, change, or find a way to deal with for now;
- * there’s a new relationship or context you need to feel out the boundaries of—e.g.,
 - a new romantic interest?
 - a new group you’re part of?
 - an enemy you’re working with now?
 - someone who’s important or connected to you, but it’s not clear how yet?
 - a new job or interest?
 - a budding friendship?
 - a you-don’t-know-what?
- * there’s an extant relationship that you still wind up needing to explore, because it’s just that nuanced and complicated—typically, family or love, but it could be anything.

Every character will have to deal with muddles. That’s just part of life. They’ll start with three, plus, one more for each starting *quest* (pg. 66).

Secrets of the World

How do you solve a muddle?

The way you do it in *this* game is to build your desired solution from pieces you find in the world. From physical resources. From ideas. From spiritual insights, feelings, and experiences. We'll call all these pieces *components*.

Groups can come up with their own components but the two standard kinds are:

- * *letters*, for building 1-2-word *answers*.
- * *playing cards*, for building *poker hands* (when you're not using cards as conflict stamina or as money (pg. 57), anyhow.) You'll use poker hands for the kind of muddles where your actual *solution* isn't narratively interesting ... but how *good* it is matters!¹⁸

So, in order to solve a muddle, a character sticks together a desired solution from the components that they've found—they *build* an answer out of them. It probably won't say everything that they want to say. Instead, it's representative:

A word (or words, or poker hand) at the heart of their new understanding or problem-solving approach.

We'll call this sort of thing an "*arcnum*."

For instance, maybe there's a relationship they're feeling out the boundaries of. What do they think of *this*? Over time they pick up letters like OET DUR SBZ EDT WTK NNE MPC. They'd been thinking about trying to claim it as a BEST friendship for a while, but it didn't fit. Once they finally get a C, though, they can claim a word that's been slowly taking over as the one they want: *CURSED*.

It's a cursed relationship! It never works out like it should!

After that they just have OET DBZ T WTK NNE MP left to handle their other muddles. Maybe there's something else they can solve by putting in a good WEEK of effort, or by giving up and going to BED, or by putting their true opinion in an ENDNOTE ... or, they may have to just sit with their remaining questions a while.

Luck of the Draw

So, characters get components in three ways.

First, a character can get a component when their player has a satisfying interaction with the game world—something that surfaces the hidden richness of *things*, that digs up solidity and realness from something in the world of the game, that has created a strong, or noticeably stronger, tie to or experience of something in that world.

That's so subjective! So we've got to trust the player here, and the player's got to trust themselves. But if we do that, and they do that, it'll be OK.

When the player really *feels* something in the game world, when they have the sense that something real was there, something to hook their dreams of the game world on, they can draw a component from the world!

It's up to the GM what *kind* of component. Most things in the game world give letters, but some things give cards. It's usually about a 3:1 ratio. The GM can have a deep theory of these things ("the best place to mine playing cards is probably under Horizon"), hand different component types out at their whim, or let the players pick freely:

Regardless, *the component a player draws represents their in-world experience*.

One of the major functions of the **adventure journal** (pg. 4) is to help dig these components out; every experience that gets recorded comes with its own potential reward, but *most* of those rewards have been built not to help characters achieve specific things but to help players who are *almost* there better experience the richness of things.

A second way that characters can draw components is by getting just a *visceral* response from another character's player—a strong urge to head desk, to groan, to roll one's eyes, to be struck speechless, to *aww*. Whenever that happens, that player can draw a component and give it to them, or, just give them the right to a draw.

In similar fashion, when a character offers another their trust, their secrets, their heartfelt feelings—anything that isn't really a visceral player response at the moment, but represents a sum of affect built up over play—the player of the character doing the offering can draw a component and give it to the target's player, or, again, just give them the right to a draw.

These last two kinds are almost always letters, but the drawing player can choose a card if they like!

Finally, characters can gain components from **Issues**—traits that sometimes go up when the adventure journal is used (pg. 58). Not only does increasing an Issue give components directly, but each Issue is associated with 1-3 questions; when characters use an arcnum to answer one of those questions, they spend and then *redraw* the components they used; this won't ever increase their total supply, but it does help to cycle them through.

Players should draw at most one component from a rich experience, and receive one at most one component from visceral response or heartfelt feelings, per ten minutes of play (or, in a forum game, per scene)—any faster than that and it's just a pile of stuff from a single event.

¹⁸ Your group can use online randomizers here, or you might, e.g., pour 1+ tilesets from an unrelated game like Scrabble into a bag and shuffle together 1-3 standard playing card decks (optionally removing blank tiles and Jokers) for the players to share and draw components from over time.

Money

Generally speaking, players can substitute cards for any currency that they'd plausibly have but don't actively track. Does the character have something a rat antiques trader wants? Do they have enough bottlecaps, in a settlement where bottlecaps are used as cash? Can they afford a new hat? A new car? Do they have the rep they need to "pull strings?" That's a card.

Random cards buy things—e.g., "any heart card" for a magic wand, or "cards totalling 9+" for a large shopping trip. For things like human-world shopping the GM may adjust the targets after taking the character's actual financial condition into account.

Poker hands, on the other hand, are used to **SOLVE FINANCIAL PROBLEMS**: you wouldn't spend one to buy something, but you might to invest or to get a job for yourself or somebody else.

ARCANA

Characters create art, craft, community, lifestyle, and sense of self through assembling components into arcana. They use them to solve difficult problems and, more importantly, to *create*.

Traditionally a *poker hand arcanum* is going to represent extremely concrete work. Poker hands can build and maintain a house. Poker hands can provide a secure income. Poker hands can build a road or a wall. Nobody really wants to know if that wall expresses a spirit of the creator going to BED or writing an ENDNOTE, but they *do* care how strongly built it is. They may also care about its decorative and conceptual qualities, which might be handled by a separate arcanum—if it's, e.g., carved with strange beasts to give a sense of MYTH, or warm and peaceful to offer HOME ... but its *stability* comes from a poker hand. Similarly, if a career is just about getting the work done, rather than something emotional or artistic, a letter-based *arcanum* might not be right; what *matters* is a poker hand explaining how well the character does and/or what kind of income they bring in.

More abstract projects are usually built and more abstract problems solved by combining letters into words. (Or rarely two-to-three word phrases.) A *word arcanum*

is the artistic inspiration for a painting or a song. A *word arcanum* is an idea that helps to remodel the self, or a concept that defines a connection between two people.

In some cases, if there's a big communal project, the players might wish to bring in a new component type—e.g., refrigerator magnet words from a collection, or images from a supply of random interesting images the GM's printed out—and collect them for a while, before assembling them as a group to form a motto, ideal, or mood board/collage that will govern that project's resolution thenceforth. ... but this'll be pretty rare.

Players are the ultimate arbiter of what arcana are sufficient for a given work or muddle. An arcanum is only intrinsically bad or intrinsically inadequate if the player using it finds it so! That said, some choices may produce a better or worse response from the world:

If that decorated wall, for instance, is built around the arcanum INFERNO, the neighbors forced to look upon it might later object. If it's built around the arcanum IS, to indicate that its artistic touches ... exist ... then that's about as much as anyone looking at that part of the character's portfolio is likely to say. Even if it uses the positive arcanum ARTSY, the scantiness of detail may fade it out from the players' minds over time!

clash: if a dramatic conflict doesn't feel worth playing out, it's probably a CLASH: a muddle one card can resolve. A GM might say, e.g., "your camp's overrun by evil trash spirits; give me a 7+ to chase them off, any pair to get rid of them—or, did you want something else?" Often, at least one player must then boast and roll to decide how the matter plays out, but even the worst roll just means "an unpleasant success."

emotional draw: most character designs have a reaction they'll be particularly good at fishing for. They'll still definitely get a component when they get other visceral reactions from the players, but the reaction their player is most likely actually going for when component-hunting is, e.g., a head-desk, or an *aww*, or a component offered up "in trust." This reaction, and the act of drawing a component afterwards, is their **EMOTIONAL DRAW**.

Issues

Issues are things that are sort of like muddles, except that the waters here aren't quite as deep.

Issues are *little* muddles or stories; little character plots that a character walks through again and again. When they solve them, the solutions tend to daisy-chain *into* answers for the bigger conundrums that fill up their lives.

Here's how this works. Each Issue is a Trait that starts at 0 and can rise, over the course of play, to 4-5. They rise when you critically succeed or fail on an adventure journal action. They can also rise from the GM or group handing Issue points out.¹⁹ **Each time an Issue rises, you get a component.** To resolve the Issue, you'll have to put together an answer, an *arcana*, like for a muddle, sometimes even more than one ...

But, *unlike* for muddles, unlike the biggest questions in a character's life, **after spending an arcana on an Issue, you redraw all spent components** (e.g., each letter or card).

Thus, you can look at an Issue as a series of difficult questions—maybe just one, maybe as many as three—that need arcana to solve; but, from another perspective, they're *opportunities*: ways to turn components that *weren't* helping you solve your other problems into components that *can*!

Unless otherwise stated, when you use any arcana to address an Issue, you redraw all the components you spent.

Unless otherwise stated, when you solve the final conundrum tied to an Issue, the Issue *resolves*, returning to 0, where it will stay until *at least* the end of the next session. Issues that've been sitting at 4-5 for a fair while when the current group storyline ends (pg. 231) may also resolve between stories, if the relevant player or GM so prefers, on their own.

The standard Issues are as follows:

(1) Alienation

Picking up the **Alienation** Issue means that you're alienated from the world. You're acting like your life has meaning, but, for you, at least, it really doesn't. You've lost some of the sense of wonder; some of your empathy; even some of your fear.

At the heart of all this there's a deep-rooted need or feeling

Hedge the Fang

Characters with the Alienation Issue may intermittently, at the player's option, become vessels of Hedge the Fang (pg. 124): sharing their senses with him, spying for him, and feeling instinctively drawn towards actions that (their player thinks) might benefit Hedge.

you really don't want to express—that you want to keep *private*.

At Alienation 4-5, you can answer the first question: *what is that feeling, or, how do you express that?*

If you answer that at Alienation 4, the Issue resolves.

If you answer it at Alienation 5, though ... you soon learn you're wrong. That's not something you need. That's not something you feel. You don't understand yourself any more. The second question is: *What's going on? What do you actually feel?*

(2) Calling

There's something you're going to need to do. There's a task or problem or destiny waiting for you that you won't be able to ignore. You won't know what it is at first. At least, you probably won't, at least not in detail. But you'll figure it out eventually. And in hindsight, when you look back on the story afterwards, you'll realize it was calling out to you all along.

At Calling 4+, you can answer the question: *what is it that you need to do?*

(3) Illusion

If you're in the grip of an **Illusion**, it means there's something going on with your character that hasn't been shown yet in the game. There's something *off* about what the players actually see. It's a narrative trick: you've been replaced by a double, or this isn't really what happened but just a lie someone tells about what happened, or everything's distorted by a Mystery's power—something like that.

At Illusion 4+, you can answer the question: *what is that illusion, exactly?*

¹⁹ the implication that a sufficiently large sufficiently enthused group of other players can hand you an Issue point without going through the GM is intentional, although the GM does theoretically arbitrate "sufficiently large" and "sufficiently enthused."

(4) Isolation

You'll pick up **Isolation** when you reach out to people only to realize that you're alone. At first you may accept it or even valorize it, but eventually you'll realize that you need to turn to somebody else for help.

At Isolation 4-5, you can answer the first question: *how can I make myself do this?* and/or *who can I turn to?*

If you answer that at Isolation 4, the Issue resolves.

If you answer that at Isolation 5, though, reaching out doesn't work. You're betrayed somehow, abandoned, alone, maybe even given over to the grip of some bleak power. Figure out what that means with the GM, then answer the second question: *so ... how do I handle that now?*

(5) Searching

Picking up the **Searching** Issue means that there's something mysterious going on with you. Maybe you know what it is, ooc or even ic. ... most often, you don't. The mysterious thing becomes more important and more central to the scenes you're in over time. Then there'll be a big (or at least little) reveal that brings some closure to it and adds a satisfying beat to the story.

At Searching 4+, you can answer the question: *what is that mystery?* And/or *what lies beyond it?*

(6) Sickness

Picking up a **Sickness** Issue means there's something wrong with you. There's something that's gotten into you that's changing who you are. You're getting weaker and weaker and it's getting stronger and stronger; but in the end, you'll have to show your true strength of character, either casting it out of you or learning how to live with it and integrating it into your identity.

At Sickness 3, you can answer the first question: *what lets me hang on?*

At Sickness 4, you lose the chance to do that. Instead, you can answer the second question: *how do I find new strength?*

At Sickness 5, you lose the chance to do that. Instead, you can answer the third question: *how do I turn this sickness into a temporary or permanent strength?*

(7) Something to Deal With

Picking up a **Something to Deal With** Issue means that there's something nagging at you; something you need to process. It's not so much that there's an *action* you have to take, though there's often a symbolic action at the end. Rather, there's some *emotion* you have to face, or, something in your life you're doing wrong. You need to bring *that* to the surface; deal with it.

At Something to Deal With 4+, you can answer the question: *... what is that something, exactly?*

CARD-DRAWING ISSUES

Two Issues draw cards instead of letters: **Complex** and **(in) Over Your Head**. Accordingly, they don't have muddles to solve; instead, you'll use poker hand arcana to support plans derived from these Issues, redrawing those hands when you're done.

(8) Complex

This Issue draws cards and not letters.

A **Complex** is basically a set of bad ideas that you can't let go of. Ideas that make you feel bad ... only, *having* them feels *good*. Ideas that drive you into a series of escalatingly bad decisions until finally your life falls apart in disaster and disarray.

The Issue can't go higher than 2 until you figure out what the Complex actually *is*. That's not a question, you don't need an arcanum, just, like: figure it out. Once when your Complex is 3, and once again when it's 4 or 5, you can make a really bad but possibly viable plan loosely related to your Complex—e.g., if your Complex is about your health, you can start an excessive exercise program or something—and back that plan up with a 2-5 card poker hand instead of a roll. If the poker hand is good enough, the plan even works out! Afterwards, you can redraw the spent cards.

Either way, the Issue resolves with the level 4-5 plan.

(9) Over your Head

This Issue draws cards and not letters.

You'll pick up **(in) Over Your Head** when you stumble into a situation with more going on than you can easily understand and resolve. You get more and more confused, more and more lost, or deeper and deeper in over your head ... until finally everything suddenly *clicks* and reframes and you understand exactly what you have to do and why you're *just* who this situation actually needs.

Each time your **(in) Over Your Head** goes up, you draw a card. Once when your **(in) Over Your Head** is 3, and once again when it's 4 or 5, you can come up with a clever plan and back it with a 2-5 card poker hand instead of a roll. **Other players whose characters are participating in your plan can contribute cards.** If the poker hand is good enough, the plan even works out and makes you look cool! ... but at level 3, at least, there's always some key loose end that you've missed.

Afterwards, contributing players can redraw the cards spent.

Either way, the Issue resolves with the level 4-5 plan.

Moods

Each chapter your character can record up to two key moments, two really memorable and important events, in the adventure journal—usually in short, sentence-fragment form, rather than a detailed description.

You can take these actions strategically, looking at them as the body of your contribution to the chapter. Or, you can just play out the adventure as it comes, and claim actions as important moments when they stir your heart.

Putting something in the adventure journal is a special kind of diced action, and it takes one of the following eight forms. Most of the time you'll roll the three standard actions:

- * **Being There**, to have an experience more completely.
- * **Losing Yourself**, when you're stunned, adrift, or falling into an obsessive spiral, *or*
- * **Wonder** ... when you want *more*.

But now and then you'll remember or need one of these more special-purpose actions instead:

- * **Bonding**, to seek, or recognize, a moment of meaningful communication.
- * **Peace**, when you're doing simple, honest things.
- * **Daring**, to take bold, decisive action.
- * **Desperation**, for trouble, conflict, and struggles, *and*
- * **Delirium**, when horrible and/or transformative things happen.

These are initially rolled using the standard five traits—Physical Action, Awareness, Introspection, Communication, and Self-Care, with the distant possibility of bringing a Skill to bear.

... later in the game, though, if an Issue is higher, you may be able to roll *its* rating, instead.

Mood rolls grant Issue points on critical success (and, in some cases, on critical failure as well) ... at least, as long as the relevant Issues aren't stuck at 0 from having just recently resolved, or already at their cap of 5. As usual, increasing an Issue offers a component; this is 100% separate from the component a rich experience has on tap, so if you *are* in a good place to claim them, any given Mood roll can give you both.

Being There

When your character is experiencing something in the world—something funny, or horrible, or delicious, or beautiful, or just ... iconic for your experience—you can roll **Awareness** or **Something to Deal With** to get a stronger sense of that experience. Alternatively, this roll can bring sensory experience or mood into play during a relatively slow or casual scene.

Here's what happens.

- * A matchless "critical failure" pushes you to ignore and reject your experience of the world itself and its importance, possibly focusing strongly on what you're doing or talking/thinking about instead.
+1 to Complex.
- * On failure, react to the moment or experience, or, tell the group a bit more about how you're reacting to it.
- * A success lets the moment resonate—
 - the GM talks more about the purely sensory experience of the world around you, or a particular thing that you were savoring ... what you see, touch, taste, hear, smell;
 - *or*, you can talk or emote a bit more, IC or OOC, about what it all feels like to you.
- * Triples work like a success; save, the experience stirs your heart.
+1 to Something to Deal With.
- * Quadruples and quintuples give you a sense of a cosmic force moving underneath the surfaces of things—a private vision of yourself or the world that transfixes you. Discussion of the sensory experience or what you're feeling should bridge into a description of that experience.
+1 to Something to Deal With.

Losing Yourself

You've lost yourself. You're overcome. You're stunned, adrift, agonized, obsessed, or physically lost.

Mark a **Losing Myself** experience in the journal. Then roll **Physical Action** or **Complex** to find your way through.

- * A matchless "critical failure" generally means that you feel a little horrified at yourself. Snap out of it. Reject the obsession if there is one, pull yourself together if you're just stunned, realize that you haven't traveled anywhere near as far as you thought if you were physically lost, and take **+1 to Isolation**.
- * An ordinary failure pushes you to freeze up or be useless for a long time, or, to go into an obsessive spiral building towards an overwrought or self-destructive action. If anyone else is present for the latter, a fog of stress and awkwardness will make it harder to process and respond to what they say.
- * Success means someone interrupts you before "a long time" passes, or before your spiral reaches the point of self-destructive action; that a PC or NPC volunteer, or, if there is none, the notional/cinematic "world itself," steps in before that point and reacts emotionally to your situation, giving you a chance to find your way out.²⁰ If you want to, as a player, you can then use this excuse to switch from losing yourself to doing something dramatic or cool ... or, if that doesn't seem right to you, just continue towards a failure, interminable pause, or self-destructive action from there.
- * Triples don't get that interruption. Instead, they push you past the point of obsession or confusion until you can see something deeper in your lostness. Something *real*. Describe it, or let the GM do so, and know you have a chance of grasping a bit of enlightenment here ... but whether you do or not, you're likely to crash into a metaphorical wall. Either way, **+1 to Complex**.
- * Quadruples or quintuples make that chance more concrete. Take a moment and really *do your best* to find what insight you pick up here; get help from the GM or group, if you need it. It's just ... too bad you're still lost. **+1 to Complex**.

²⁰ What does it mean for "the world itself" to respond to something? Classic examples include a flash of lightning and roll of thunder punctuating a dramatic statement; or, something falling over in the distance, startling you out of a freeze response; or, the world itself "showing its disapproval" of your losing yourself in phone games by having your account run out of funds.

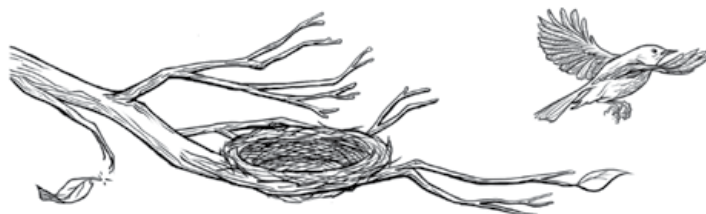
Wonder

Sometimes there's something that your character's bearing witness to—that they're experiencing, or listening to, or watching, say—and you think that they can get something out of it. That there's something *in* it that's worth adding to their life's store of experiences.

In such a case you may mark **Wonder**, and then roll **Awareness** or **Searching** to see if that is so.

Here's what happens:

- * A matchless "critical failure" means that you feel really out of your depth here. It's not just that you don't spot anything of note or understand anything extra—you wind up feeling like you're not really *capable* of getting anything more out of this. Frustrated and alienated. **+1 to Alienation**.
- * On failure, you notice something either *neat*, *scary*, or *mysterious*. Tell the group as much as you can about it—which might just be which of those three things it is, if you don't have a firm sense of what's going on ooc—and ask the GM to fill in the rest. With that, the experience of Wonder ends; more of whatever this is might still *happen*, but you're out of its spell.
- * On success, the relevant GM or player describes what's going on a bit more. Or, if there's nothing more to see, they might describe the silence after the events finish, or the impression (they expect) it leaves you with, or go over it again from another perspective. If it's mystical enough, they might read a bit of poetry or something instead.
- * On a triple, the same thing happens, but the emotional impact on you is stronger. **+1 to Searching**.
- * Quadruples and quintuples point the way to an extraordinary discovery or conclusion, if such a thing is there to be discovered or if the person providing information can think of something worthy with a few moments' thought. If not, then instead it's this piercing, spiritual insight; you feel a strong sense of connection to this place, context, or subject, and take **+1 to Searching**.



by Jenn Manley Lee

Bonding

You're trying to meaningfully communicate with someone. To reach out. To *connect*. Or, you notice that's already happening.

So, mark it down in the adventure journal as **Bonding**, and roll your **Communication** or **Searching**. Here's what happens.

- * A matchless "critical failure" lures you into saying something thoughtless.
- * On failure, you feel an impulse to share a secret or otherwise make yourself vulnerable.
- * On success, you get a glimpse into their heart—ask them a question, and either they'll answer honestly, or their player (for an NPC, the GM) has to signal ooc before they speak that an honest answer is impossible at this time.²¹ If you wish, you can reverse this right, offering *them* a glimpse into *your* heart, instead.
- * On triples, you get the benefits of success. In addition, the conversation is really *good*. **+1 to Searching**.
- * Quadruples and quintuples represent transformative, incredible experiences—you feel like this conversation is life-changing, full of rich insight. You also receive the benefits of a triple, including **+1 to Searching**.

Peace

You're doing some kind of simple, honest activity. You want it to matter enough to be a spotlight moment. So you mark it in the journal as a moment of **Peace**, and roll your **Physical Action** or **Calling**:

- * A matchless "critical failure" means something just plain terrible happens. ... you're a little freaked out. **+1 to Complex**.
- * On failure, you need a little (more?) help—you can probably *manage* without, but it won't go very well.
- * On success, you've gotten something done, cementing progress (or completion?) into the fabric of the game.
- * On triples ... you get the feeling like that progress was *important*. That it relates to what you're meant to be doing, even more than you thought. **+1 to Calling**.
- * Quadruples and quintuples feel like you did *just* the right thing. It's not just progress and **+1 to Calling**: your sense of *connection* to this place or context grows.

The roll here is intended to be self-justifying:

It's not that the work you were doing was already established as important, or that you're discovering it to be important, but rather, you decide as a player that this is one of the actions that you want to have be important enough to mark in the journal, and so, it *becomes* important—at least on success, and to a certain extent even on failure.

If you don't explicitly want that, you can still roll **Physical Action** to do things ... just don't mark them as Peace!

Daring

You're taking a risk. You're stepping forward. You're putting your trust in something—luck or fate; a person; an idea.

So mark it down in the journal as **Daring**, and roll your **Physical Action** or your **(in) Over your Head**.

Here's what happens:

- * A matchless "critical failure" blows up in your face. Sometimes that means you've made a bad gamble. Other times, e.g. if you're trusting an NPC and the GM wants that NPC to be trustworthy, it means that you've done the gamble wrong: you've offended the person you were putting your trust in, or somehow they've gotten the exact wrong idea about what you want, or whatever.
- * On failure, summarize what's going through your character's mind as they take this risk in a short, bold IC or ooc declaration. Then the GM clears their mind and decides, with a fresh perspective, what *should* happen. It doesn't have to be good, but it also doesn't have to be bad: a regular failure doesn't guarantee a bad outcome, it just puts everything in fate's hands.
- * Success counts as a success on the underlying action, and also gives you a feeling like—yeah. You've changed the world with your decisions. You've shaped fate. Maybe, if what you're trying to do is too complicated to succeed at with just a roll, things don't go *perfectly*, but you've done, or will do, *something*. You know?
- * Triples, in addition to being a critical success on the underlying action, give **+1 to (in) Over your Head**.
- * Quadruples and quintuples generally represent extraordinary luck, success, and impact, or at least an appropriate two of the stated three. You also receive the benefits of a triple, including **+1 to (in) Over your Head**.

²¹ if you're just looking to connect, and don't have anything dramatic to ask, the recommended question is either "this is what I think I'm hearing from you: is that right?" or "could you let me know what you're hearing from me?"

Desperation

This is awful! You've got that squirmy feeling deep in your gut, like: *I don't want to be here. I don't want to be doing this. This situation is trouble!*

At such times you may roll **Introspection** or **(in) Over your Head** to see if you can find a way out.

Here's what happens:

- * A matchless “critical failure” means that whatever you've done is worse than useless—you've actively made things worse! *Generally*, that means there's a horrifying cliff-hanger, and the scene ends, and you refuse to talk about what happened there and how you survived(?) for a while.
- * On failure, you freeze up, and something bad happens, though all is not yet lost.
- * On a success, the GM monologues about the doom as it advances. Choose whether:
 - you freeze up, but all is not yet lost;
 - you retreat, but tactically, and all is not yet lost; *or*
 - you achieve a tactical objective, like slowing down the thing that's chasing you or rescuing an unconscious person who's also under threat ... but you're still in danger and still might suffer some negative consequences, at the GM's whim or your own.
- * Triples allow an impressive fighting retreat where you also achieve a tactical objective, or, an incredibly successful escape. You may draw a playing card²² and take *+1 to (in) Over your Head*.
- * Quadruples or quintuples represent extraordinary luck, skill, and survival reflexes—in addition to the playing card and the *+1 to (in) Over your Head*, you can pull off an escape or victory that neither you or the GM would have previously thought possible!

²² by analogy with “faltering” (pg. 52). You will also generally receive a card for raising the **(in) Over your Head** Issue, for a total of two, and, if this is a rich experience for you, a potential third component as well.

Delirium

Something horrible is happening to you! Or at least something scarily transformative. Life is kicking you hard.

To help wrestle with and process the trauma of that, you may roll your **Introspection** or your **Sickness**.

Here's what happens.

- * A matchless “critical failure” means that you can laugh off what's happening. But why? And how? *+1 to Illusion*.
- * On failure, ... whatever happens, happens.
- * On success, the experience of the thing itself is slowed so that the GM can describe lurid, surreal, and supernatural elements of the experience—to add special effects to it like a gothic writer or a stylized movie. You may also have a brief break to process. ... then, alas, the event proceeds.
- * On triples, you gain the benefit of success ... but life really *is* messing with you *hard*. *+1 to Sickness*.
- * Quadruples or quintuples mean that this is just impossible to deal with as things stand. In addition to the *+1 to Sickness* and the other effects above, you can and usually must tie the traumatic event to one of your ongoing “muddles,” you'll have to deal with it, and that muddle, together.

The effects of success, triples, and beyond may not seem like rewards, but this too is illusion; in practice, each will ultimately help you recover from this event and acquire components for your narrative goals.

The GM and Mood Rolls

For the most part, Mood rolls are reserved to the players. The GM may from time to time treat an NPC action as a Mood roll—at most twice per chapter per NPC, and ideally at most twice per chapter altogether—but the dramatic weight of the moment is intrinsically less, and the GM won't need to narrate, e.g., their default response to **BEING THERE** unless the players show interest. If the GM finds themselves “wanting more” after a player statement, they can always just offer an emotional draw, or ask; if group norms push them towards a **WONDER** action, instead, their default **Awareness Trait** should be 3.





"Unicorn," by Isip Xin

Quests

When a muddle fills a defined portion of your life—when it’s not just a problem, but a problem without shortcuts, a problem you ... have to live through, give time to ... wrestle or sit with for a while—it becomes a “quest.”

This is mostly a player-level thing:

- * A muddle *can* be solved instantly, although it rarely *will*. A quest is inherently epochal.
- * A muddle can be a roadbump or a whole story, but a quest is always at least a storylet.

Sometimes a quest winds up being about something very specific, like “building a house.” The muddle is “how am I going to get this house built,” possibly to be solved with a hand of cards. The time requirement is the time it takes to build a house.

Most times, it’s a little more ambiguous:

Just, a question or life thing that you need to wrestle with for a while because that’s how some things work.

Right now, for instance, you could say that finishing this book is a quest. That’s pretty specific, particularly since most of the conceptual roadblocks have already been solved at the time of this sentence’s writing; at this point, I *think* the muddle is done, and I just need to pay my dues in effort and time. ... but you could also say, e.g., that *getting through the pandemic* or even *getting through this block of early 2021 in the pandemic* is my current quest. That would be a lot less tangible:

If I dug down, I could probably find a muddle, but some of the steps to make progress are still automatic, and some are obvious, and others completely ineffable.

Eventually, though, I’ll get through it all. That’s *how it works*.

In **the Far Roofs**, each quest will have:

- * a *progress grid*—a set of blank spaces you can fill in as you progress through the quest.
- * a *set of major goals*—a set of bonus things that give you a letter and a card when complete. You can earn this draw up to twice per chapter.
- * a *set of “flavor” options*—a set of suggested adventure journal events on the quest, *and*
- * an *associated muddle*—you’ll have to fill up the blank spaces and solve this muddle to complete the quest.

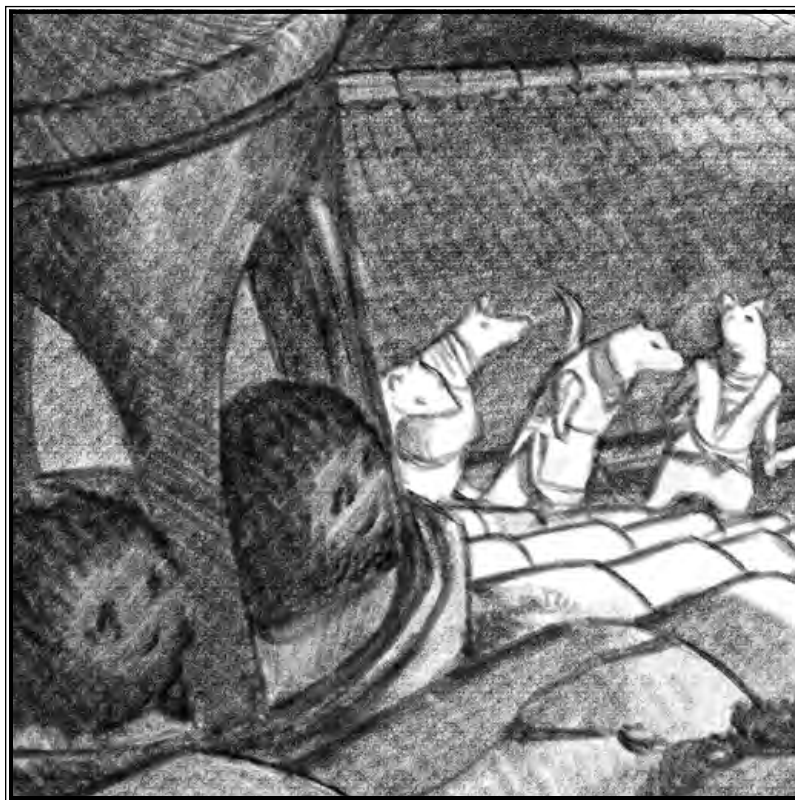
You can fill in one blank space in the progress grid each time you mark an event in the journal—either a generic event, or a flavor option from that particular quest—and, each time another player draws for you or gives you a draw (pg. 55).

When the progress grid is full, and the muddle is solved, the quest completes.

You’ll learn more about quests starting on pg. 154!

A Note on Quest Flavor

So, the “quest flavor” in this book pairs up suggested statements or questions with suggested Mood rolls. Usually, the first is something you’ll direct to the GM or the group—it’s something like, “what do I find in the cookpot?,” and you’re probably wanting to ask the GM that before rolling, so they can answer with, e.g., “a mysterious ring” or, maybe, “... grime?” Or, it’s like, “who wants to talk about where we’re



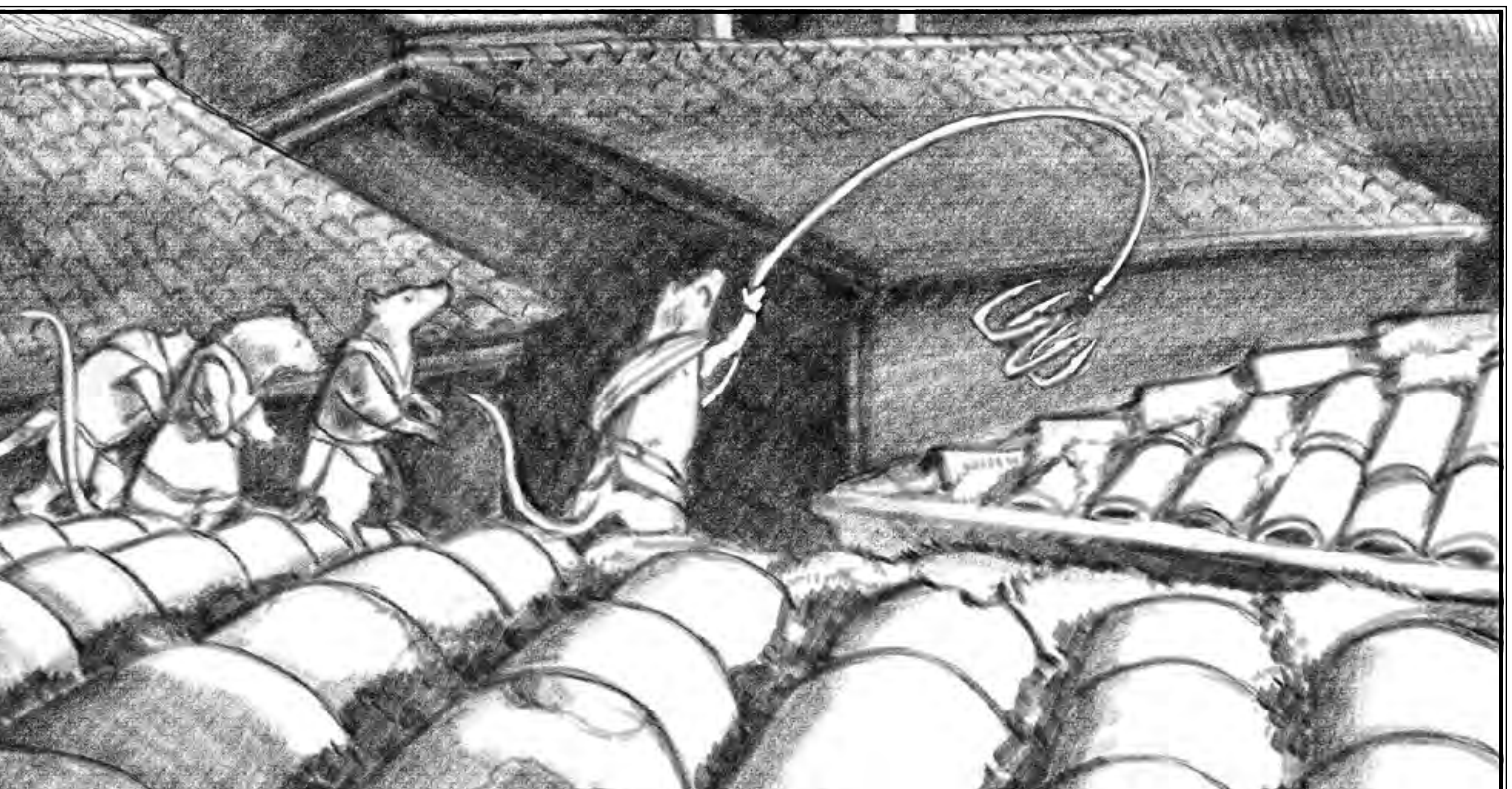
going?”, and you want to aim *that* at the group, so you can see which player wants to hang out for a scene (or, which NPC the GM suggests)! Rarely, quest flavor is something you can say directly IC, in which case the point is just to find an excuse. They’re all just suggestions, though; it’s all up to you; just, bear in mind, when you get there, that they’re suggested *interactions*, not suggestions for solo play.

As for the roll, it’s worth note (both in building quests, and in understanding those provided from pg. 156 on) that that *can* be a piece of content too—it’s not always just an obvious ancillary to the description. For instance, the text might say something like “tell me how I’m dreaming of a snake.” You’d *expect* that to roll **Delirium**, probably, on the face of it. But it could also roll **Being There**, if what matters is the color of the snake’s scales. The slithering movement. The sounds of the world, in your dreams. It could be **Bonding**, if you’re expected to have a snake friend you only talk to in dreams. It could be **Daring**, if you’re the kind of person who needs to dream about a snake before you make a big decision in your life. Make sure you’re ready to roll the Mood before you do! Generally speaking, you can understand the roll in a quest flavor option like so:

- * **BEING THERE** points to a scene where the core action or conversation doesn’t really *go* anywhere, so the metaphorical “narrator” or “camera” focuses on the smell of the air, the light of the evening, distant birds taking flight, the sun’s descent ... that kind of thing.

- * **BONDING** suggests the kind of conversation where interesting truths may be revealed.
- * **DARING** is a hint that you should do something dramatic and interesting.
- * **DESPERATION** means that there’s trouble, and you aren’t expected to actually stop it.
- * **DELIRIUM** means that not only is something bad happening to you, but that digging into it (or, if your Introspection is low, possibly *failing* to dig into it) is sort of the point.
- * **LOSING YOURSELF** means you’re a mess, but in a way where “will someone find you and react?” and “will you find your way out of being a mess?” are interesting questions to ask.
- * **PEACE** means the flavor option is more about establishing that a thing is done, and you think it’s good that it’s done, than the details of the event—even if that “thing” is talking to someone or making a plan, *and*
- * **WONDER** suggests that there’s something here that yet might be learned!

In theory, a quest flavor option like “I think the ghost possessing me is shouting at you again” could be any of the eight.



Powers

Characters in the Far Roofs start the game with an allocation of powers.

The default allocation is 4—every character beginning with four powers—but the GM/group can change that if they like.

Powers are divided into 16 general powersets. Characters usually start by drawing powers from one or two of these sets, and may pick from up to four as they grow. These are:

- * **Allegory**, for being/becoming an embodiment of a concept, emotion, or ideal;
- * **Awakening**, for awakening from *this* reality into a “higher” one;
- * **Become Somebody**, for growing into your place in the world;
- * **Cheat**, for having a cheat/hack for the world, instead;
- * **Creature of Delirium**, for pulling hearts and the like out of people without killing them;
- * **Creature of Fable**, for living a fable;
- * **Gardener**, for being a keeper of miraculous places;
- * **Holy**, for being vaguely numinous and divine;
- * **Impresario**, for stage-managing the world;
- * **Indomitable**, for being an ancient horror or other limitlessly strong (or fast, or whatever) creature;
- * **Kaiju**, for turning into a giant monster, and, hopefully, back;
- * **Memetic**, for living in your own private genre;
- * **Primordial**, for growing into a many-limbed, alien divinity;
- * **Prophet**, for being an apostle of some principle;
- * **Worldwalker**, for traveling between here and a distant, mysterious realm; *and*
- * **Wounded Angel**, for drawing strength from travails.

It is said of those who travel the far roofs that they are at risk of “becoming a legend, or a god;” it is through these power sets they will get there.

Some powers can be bought multiple times, or cost more than one pick to buy. To buy a multi-pick power after the game starts, make up the difference by giving up other powers from that powerset. For instance, if you have the chance to

buy a power, and you want to buy **System**, which costs 3 picks, you’ll need to give up two other **Cheat** powers.

Generally speaking, it’s fine for players and the GM to tweak a power’s details or create a new one; just, add the new option to the powerset afterwards, or, to the generic powers list!

COSTS

Costs are generally listed before the description of the power, or one of its abilities, followed by a colon. Standard costs are:

- * *card*: you must spend a card to activate this effect.
 - **##** (e.g., **5+**, **8+**, **J+**): you must spend a card with at least this value to activate this effect.
 - [**♦♠♥♣**]: you must spend a card with this suit to activate this effect.
 - [two of a suit, e.g. **♦♦**]: you must spend two cards with this suit to activate this effect.
 - **#[suit]+**: you must spend a card with this suit of at least this value to activate this effect.

If your conflict action is “I use this power,” you may use this card as stamina; if preempted, recover the card normally and cancel the power. (For “two of a suit,” use the higher card as stamina; if preempted, recover both.) You can do this even if there’s more to the action than just the power, as long as the power’s use is key.

- * *minutes*: the effect takes a few minutes to activate.
- * *mark journal*: you must mark the adventure journal with “power use,” using one of your two marks for the chapter, to activate this effect.
- * *arcenum*: you must spend an *arcenum* for this effect.
- * *buy twice (or thrice)*: this effect is only available if you have bought this power twice (or thrice).
- * [*misc.*]: finally, a few powers have other requirements, e.g. *kaiju form* for a power only usable in “kaiju” form.

The GM must pay appropriate costs for NPCs actively engaged in hostile or semi-hostile interactions with the PCs. Otherwise, they may assume NPCs have their own component pools to collect and pay from and freely handwave the details.

TERMINOLOGY

Some power-related terminology includes:

- * *geas*: a “geas” can only be opposed/removed by other geas effects, the power that created it ... and spades. Since spades ignore invincible effects like these, outside of conflict, characters can generally defeat a *geas* by playing any spade card (with the details of the situation and what they’re doing determining whether this shatters it, sneaks an action by it, or something in between); even *in* a dramatic conflict, and when it’s directly on point, the strongest effect you’ll see from a *geas* in is temporarily adding a spade to cv.
- * *long-ranged*: a long-ranged power can affect its targets wherever they may be.

“Once per session” effects

As noted earlier, games without specific sessions can replace “1/session” effects with “1/chapter;” or, if that proves too much, “1/day.”

- * *normal action*: a diced/unrolled action that is not a power activation or a Mood roll. Powers might *enhance* or *drive* these, even to the point of using their cost card as stamina ... but there’s a normal action driving the narrative of what the character *does*.
- * *wish*: a wish effect sets a world-changing goal, and then the GM/group figures out how that is achieved. Wishes are stronger than most powers, but must clumsily work around *geasa* and powers backed by spades. Resisting a wish by taking damage costs an extra HP (for a total of –2, though this cannot take HP below 0), and even *then* will generally only immunize the character rather than undoing the wish itself.

GENERIC POWERS

Certain powers are generally available, regardless of one’s powersets. These are:

CV

Gain +1 CV (max A). You can take this more than once. This power only applies in dramatic conflicts where your superhuman nature is relevant; that can be practically all of them, but bear in mind that, e.g., King Death is not necessarily a superior racer of go-karts.

Skilled

Skilled gives you two points worth of skills. Each can be used to buy a new professional, magical, or superior skill, or, to add a point to an existing magical or superior skill.

You can buy this more than once; for instance, buying it three times would let you go from a single Professional Skill to two Professional Skills, a level 3 magical Skill, and a level 2 Superior Skill.

As a reminder, Superior and magical Skills range from 1-5; Professional Skills are unranked.

Treasure

A sacred treasure, which you cannot permanently lose, grants you +1 CV and an unusual ability, which you must roll to use, when wielding it.

Untouchable

Sometimes, others need ♠ to practically attack you—e.g., “when it’s very dark,” “when you’re in water,” or “until you’ve made your first un-preempted attack roll in a given conflict.” This power is generally only applicable in combat, or possibly some other specific form of conflict like cooking contests or army maneuvering ... but it may extend beyond that domain when and if that makes sense.

buy twice: your base cv is 2♠ instead of 5. Other powers can increase the card value normally, up to a maximum of J♠.

... and the Mystery Powers

Finally, the Mystery powers **Heralded** and **Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116) are, technically, available to all.

Powers of Harm

Remember that characters are not defeated until they take their full HP in damage. Many harmful power effects will not come fully into play unless that happens; for instance, Bring to Fruition’s curse (pg. 85) officially lasts until removed with an arcanum, but if the target is not defeated, then they’ll probably recover when the player finds a good non-arcanum excuse. At minimum, the components spent on the arcanum will be redrawn. That said, characters are not obligated to spend their HP defending against effects until and unless those effects become somehow unacceptable; a curse the character can more or less live with ... may, perhaps, just play out in full.

Characters

THE CINTAMANI-BEARER

Physical Action 2

Professional [skill of choice]

Awareness 3

Communication 4

Introspection 1

Self-Care 0

someone haunted by death and beauty

You've touched on it, just a little. The smallest hints of it. *Magic*. But figuring out how to make it work for you—it's a little bit hard!

Suggested Emotional Draw: facepalming/headdesking

Arcana

You often use letter arcana to *help people or ghosts find their way*.

Sometimes you use letter or card arcana to *create magical art or grand spells*.

Stories

Your first story is **Stolen Treasure**. It turns out you have the *cintamani*—the thing that gives the world its worth.²³ It's something you made, or something you have and love. Only, you're not *supposed* to have it. It's *supposed* to be on the island of King Death. And it's great that you have it, because people deserve to know how amazing the world is, how amazing *they* are. ... but it's also terrible, because to claim a thing that rightfully belongs to Death is neither safe nor good.

Muddles include:

- * what is magic to me?
- * what can keep me grounded?
- * what price must I pay for the *cintamani*, and how is it to be paid?

²³ If that's not the magic you want to have, see pg. 198!



By default, this story is a **Training Arc**. The first quest is **At Magic's Gate** (pg. 156); you'll want a copy of that quest near you when you play, and it will give you the additional muddle,

- * how do I fully awaken the power inside me?

Because it's a training Arc, the first quest is all about how your training in magic is blocked; frozen; *stuck* ... but when you finish the quest, filling in its progress and solving the muddle, you'll push past that, as per "Training 1" on pg. 187. You'll also choose a generic power or one of the **Cheat** powers below and move on to the next quest, **The Bridge of Knives**, presenting you with the option of another way of life or thinking (see *Training*, pg. 186). More specifically, **the Bridge of Knives** will focus on a kind of B-plot wherein you rescue an ancestor of yours held captive by **Mallt-y-Nos**, **which is Named Loss**, and will give the muddle,

- * what can be done for the already-dead?

Later quests might give the muddles:

- * how can I use this power to heal or help what I care about?
- * what great wound will this magic make whole?
and
- * what does it mean, that I have these gifts?

When you've solved all of the Arc muddles, plus all of the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you'll move on to your second story, **The Price**: an "extension of the power of King Death" has tracked you into the world and "clings to the edges of your mind."

Your third story will be **The Twisted Jewel**. Your way of handling things has been a mistake. It's *warping* you. You need to do something else, something *difficult*, e.g., accepting death into your heart.

Finally, your fourth story will be **The Sacred Thing**. The world is redeemed by the presence of the *cintamani* within it ... but even after addressing that in the first story, you realize you don't *really* understand what that means. It's time to push beyond your first-draft understanding into deeper truths.

You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 198!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the cintamani-bearer, consider the "Warden" stories on pg. 226!

Cintamani-Bearer Powers

As the *cintamani*-bearer, you have access to the *Cheat* and *Kaiju* powersets. Other suggested powersets include *Worldwalker* (pg. 94) and *Allegory* (pg. 85).

Standard picks are: **Shared Experience**, **A Little Push**, **Let's Talk**, and **Set the Mood**.

CHEAT

You learn *Cheat* powers via **Training Arcs** (pg. 186).

If you have *Cheat* powers, you may have:

- * a normally private **Experience** you can share with others: something—
 - narrative, like "my memories" or "my daydreams;"
 - external, like "my shadow" or "my reputation;" *or*
 - active, like "the thing I am pointing at;" *and*
- * a **Hack**, your way of cheating at the world.

By default, as *cintamani*-bearer, your **Experience** is "my perception that you have value" and your **Hack** a semi-self-willed general reality-shaping magic you're still getting the hang of.

A Little Push

♥: Use your **Hack** to turn a failure into a success on some basic life task, like a household chore or social interaction or small project or game. This generally buys you a very narrow triumph, with effects falling apart if you reach for more. *Can be long-ranged, but generally isn't.*

Childish Dreams

Use your **Hack** in a visceral, childlike way. The effects are clumsy, or more imaginative than useful, or focus on satisfying immediate desires. They fade when you stop paying attention. *Can be long-ranged, but generally isn't.*

Let's Go! Everyone!

8+: if your Experience can be actively engaged in, add "1 2" to a roll to convince people to participate in it.

8+: if your Experience is more passive, add "1 2" to a roll to convince selected targets *that* selected targets *are* experiencing your Experience, in its current form, instead. Anyone trying to see through to their actual experience takes a -2 penalty.

Let's Talk

You can communicate in and understand every language, even, e.g., alien/animal languages. People trust you by default.

Old Friends *[requires Let's Talk]*

8+: have a favorable history with a stranger, practical stranger, or important member of a group/society of strangers.

♣: someone now knows you like an old friend. This doesn't *directly* change their other feelings towards you, but tends to do so with time.

Shared Experience

5+: allow others to share and manipulate your **Experience** in the same way you can for a scene. This cannot harm or significantly impede them without their player's consent.

card: while the above is active, manifest mostly harmless things or not-very-dramatic information from your Experience.

Perspective

[requires Shared Experience or Let's Go! Everyone!]

You can use **Shared Experience** and **Let's Go! Everyone!** on *someone else's* Experience.

Powerful Experience *[requires Shared Experience]*

While using **Shared Experience**, roll an appropriate Trait (normally **Physical Action**) to:

8+, a *“thing”* or *“action”* Experience: make the Experience more truthful or accurate to reality (e.g., using “the thing I am pointing at” to point to “the real killer” or “the way out”). Or, make reality more truthful and accurate to *it*—e.g., using “my daydreams” to overwrite the reality of the world.

8+, an *Experience you feel*: change the world in ways evoking that feeling, or giving the particular form of it you want. For instance, using “that thing I am tasting,” while eating a strawberry, to make everything around you strawberry-scented and red. Or, using “my phobia of snakes” to summon a specific snake.



by Naomi Rubin

System *(costs 3 powers)*

♥: use your **Hack** in some standardized fashion you and the GM design. Usually there's a limited palette of “safe” uses, reliant on a set of props, with possible associated drawbacks, and going beyond that safe palette is possible but dangerous. An example system is *I can visit my wish-granting machine to make one wish per chapter, but the only safe wishes are those somehow connected to the set of arcana I've fed it. I get to feed it five words of my choice as starting arcana for free.*

♥♥: go beyond the limits of your System in a particular way, e.g., invoking it without the normally requisite props or dramatically loosening the restrictions on incorrect use.

Can be long-ranged, but generally isn't.

Someone Else's Rules *[requires System]*

♣: with a specific kind of help from someone else, you can work around the inherent limits of your system in a given way. For instance, your wish-granting engine might treat each person that wishes “with” you as a specific *arcana* of their own.

♥: give someone a limited copy of your System, lasting until the current group storyline (pg. 231) ends, with a GM-chosen, target-specific subset of features.

KAIJU

You learn *Kaiju* powers via **Otherworldly** Arcs (pg. 182).

If you have *Kaiju* powers, you may have:

- * a **Mood** you evoke, like “Order” or “Peace;”
- * a **Realm** you are connected to, somewhere far away;
- * a “**Kaiju**” **form**, a gigantic monster, beast, or being that you may become; *and*
- * a **Scale**, a sliding scale your *kaiju* form can go up and down with advantages on both ends, like fiery <=> icy or small/weak/light <=> big/heavy/strong.

Characters with a *kaiju* form can have more than one *kaiju* form. If you are transforming into a *kaiju*, and have a choice of forms, you must make a **Physical Action** (+ **Professional [Kaiju]**) roll to control which one you become.

By default, as cintamani-bearer, your **Mood** is “Peace,” your **Realm** is the island of King Death, and your *kaiju* form is a dragon or giant snake of arbitrary size (and corresponding strength and weight). You might have no idea why!

Elemental Connection

You may commune spiritually, silently, and with +1 to Communication rolls with nearby creatures of your Realm.

♥: forge a strong, *long-ranged* spiritual connection with a creature of your Realm. This creates a sense of kinship they must spend a ♠ to sever or deny and allows long-ranged communication for the remainder of the scene.

Kaiju Form

minutes: turn into your *kaiju* form. This is permanent. You will be very bad at being a *kaiju* unless you have a **Professional [Kaiju]** skill.

card: transform instantly

arcana: turn back for a short time ... then, something goes wrong, you redraw spent components, and you're a *kaiju* again.

Attention Control [*requires Kaiju Form*]

kaiju form, ♦: grow a weapon, for use with **Communication**, **Natural Weaponry** (below), and/or **Physical Action**, that makes mental or social attacks—e.g., hypnotic eyes, or flowers with calming pollen. It remains until you return to mortal form.

Blend In [*requires Kaiju Form*]

card, kaiju form: blend into a place the GM agrees is like your Realm. Physical obstacles no longer obstruct you. Only those who suspect your presence notice you, and at a -2 Awareness penalty. You must invoke this power again to move at speed.

♦: invoke this power to blend or move at speed as you like, while a *kaiju*, for the rest of the scene.

Bramble [*requires Kaiju Form*]

kaiju form: once per turn (pg. 51), when taking damage, draw a card and fill the area around you with a hostile environmental effect (e.g., magma or time glitches). This often creates penalties/difficulties for others and a new edge for you.

kaiju form, ♥: invoke this power without taking damage.

Defensive Shield [*requires Kaiju Form*]

kaiju form: once per turn (pg. 51), when taking damage, gain +2 CV (max J) and some sort of technological, magical, or elemental edge (pg. 50) that would have notionally helped protect you. These last the chapter or until you return to normal form.

WONDER rolls reacting to the created edge(s) add a free "1."

Mortal Form [*requires Kaiju Form*]

hours: when somehow transformed, and given several hours while unobserved, return permanently to your non-*kaiju* form.

card: do so in minutes.

♦: do so instantly, even if under observation.

Natural Weaponry [*requires Kaiju Form*]

kaiju form: your *kaiju* form includes a natural ranged weapon. When using your *kaiju* form's natural weapons to attack, add +4 to the effective value of stamina cards.

Non-Euclidian [*requires Kaiju Form*]

Two of your observable features—typically "location" and "physical structure"—are not consistent.

card, kaiju form: in the local area, change or add a new element of one of those features and what's happening with them. For instance, "I am chasing my opponent down my own throat."

♦: invoke this power as you like, while a *kaiju*, for the rest of the scene.

[Mood]-Splosion

♥: invoke your Mood on a grand scale. This is a wish based on the **Mood**—e.g., for Order, "I wish this [target] would be clean, organized, and well-lit!"

Set the Mood

5+, or, *minutes*: your **Mood** fills the area around you or a particular target. The effects are real but not strong.

Shed Scales [*requires Kaiju Form*]

card, kaiju form, your Scale is relevant: shift along your **Scale**, if possible, to remove a penalty or bonus up to -3 or +3 on a roll being made. For instance, if squeezing through a tight door in a hurry would currently impose a -2 penalty, and your Scale involves size ... shrink until the penalty is 0.

♦: do so as often as you like, while in *kaiju* form, for the rest of the scene. This does not apply to the upgrade below:

8+, *kaiju form, buy twice*: change your **Scale** to the point where even a mythic/unfeasible action makes sense. This functions as a wish, e.g., "I wish I could (e.g., get big enough) to do (x)."

Wicked Mode

Roll **Introspection** or **DELIRIUM** to reverse your Mood. 1/ session, you may automatically critically succeed on such a roll.

THE HERO OF FATE

Physical Action 4

Awareness 1

Communication 3

Introspection 2

Self-Care 0

Professional Maker of
Weird Things*a tired dreamer*

It's been calling you, since the moment you found the roofs. You knew it, in that moment. This, this thing you were *meant* for.

... your doom.

Suggested Emotional Draw: *aww*

Arcana

You often use letter or card arcana for *your art, which is weird, enthusiastic sculpture*.

You can use letter arcana to *help someone find their own path*.

Stories

Your first story is **The Hero of Fate**. You go up to the roofs. You learn that you've got "dream-snake" poisoning—that that's why you sometimes dream of the future, why you sometimes hear voices on the wind and get glimpses of others' hearts. It's why you probably won't live that long. Becoming what you need to be is hard ... but you're not alone.

Muddles include:

- * [becoming OK with your shortened existence]
- * [finding a worthy goal for your finite life]
- * what does it mean to be a hero?

By default, this story is a **Role** Arc—a story of figuring out your place in the world. The first quest is **Just a Little Worn Down** (pg. 158); you'll want to have a copy of that quest near you when you play, and it will give the additional muddle,

- * [exploring the wonders of the roofs]

Because it's a "role" Arc, the first quest is all about a time in your life when you're dreaming of being something *more*. When you fill in the progress grid, solve the muddle, and finish the quest, as per "Role 1" on pg. 180, you'll have put a name to the thing you want to become—perhaps literally as "the hero of fate," or perhaps with some other framing—and, more importantly, you'll have put your feet on a legitimate path to making that inspiration real. You'll also get to choose

a generic power or one of the **Become Somebody** powers below and move on to the next quest, **Dreams and Visions**: a time in your life dominated by a vice or a difficulty (pg. 180), normally the dream-snake poisoning, with the muddle,

- * what fuels me; what can drive me forward and make me great?

Later quests might give the muddles:

- * [adapting to your weakened state]
- * what is the power that subdues the wolf named Garmr? *and*
- * how can I wield Garmr's power as my own?

When you've solved all of the Arc muddles, plus all of the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you'll move on to your second story, **The Burden of Destiny**. In this story, you're weaker than you were and more weighted down by poison and by destiny. In the end, you're going to have to trust more and more to others; though, they'll reward that trust.

Your third story will be **A Brilliant Future**. Things are beautiful. You're *winning*. Everything is good. You're going to achieve your destiny, get better, laugh and love and have a brilliant life up on the roofs—that's what's in the cards. That's what you can *feel* in every cloudless, windy day ... but you already know that it can't be so.

Finally, your fourth story will be **To Dice with Fate**. Doom is on the wind. Are you going to trust the future you've already seen? Or, your own drive to win? Or put things in the hands of your trusted friends? Find some sacred starry palace out there to change your fate, or try to find a way to live with it?

You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 201!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the hero of fate, consider befriending a navigator rat (per pg. 220)!

Hero of Fate Powers

As the hero of fate, you have access to the *Become Somebody* and *Impresario* powersets. Another suggested powerset might be *Awakening* (pg. 95).

Standard picks are: **Adaptable**, **The Wages of Sin**, **Believe in Me**, and **Stir the Heart**.

BECOME SOMEBODY

You learn *Become Somebody* powers via **Role** Arcs (pg. 180).

If you have *Become Somebody* powers, you may have:

- * a **Role**—something archetypal you’re being (“Detective,” “Thief,” “King of the Stars”);
- * a **Failing**—something that stands in your way; *and*
- * one or more **Truths**—binding laws of your nature.

By default, if you’re the Hero of Fate, your **Role** is “the Hero of Fate.” Your **Failing** is usually your doom, which you will eventually tie to some sort of Mystery. You start with the Truth, *I dream in prophecy and hear the whispers of others’ hearts.*

Adaptable

card: you belong here; you’re at home here, with appropriate bonuses and effects. This is a *geas*, lasting as long as you stay.

8+, *buy twice:* until you leave, as a *geas*, choose: you’re a legend here; *or*, this place revolves around you.

8+, *buy twice:* until the scene ends, as a *geas*, have a deep understanding of, and relationship with, a chosen target.

Ferocity

♥: for the rest of the scene, while you’re expressing your Role, you can repeatedly propose justifications for why suitable actions are feasible. These apply to everyone in the scene. For instance, as a singer, in space, you can decide this is *special* space that carries sound waves. Or, as a ghost, you can crawl out of a television, deciding televisions are now portals. (For anyone.)

This power does not always work, but when it fails, it fails because the world reacts violently against it, twisting or diverting or fighting against your justification. If the GM opts to do this thrice in one invocation, reality begins to crack; five times, and reality completely dissolves into the Outside (pg. 29).

Fierce Connection

♣: this works like **Ferocity**, save, for actions premised on an important relationship you have, rather than on your Role.

Fierce Rejection

♥: this works like **Ferocity**, save, for actions that reject a certain target, in action or spirit, as fit to support your Role.

Harmonious Souls

card: until you spend a few hours alone, automatically understand people to the extent that they share your Role.

Reject

5+: impose a –3 penalty to both card values and dice on any attempt, or a certain kind of attempts, to be like you or take on a complementary Role. Lasts for a few minutes.

5+, *minutes of interaction:* as above, but lasts for hours.

5+, *hours of interaction:* as above, but lasts until your next story.

Unstoppable

card: for the rest of the scene, or until you stop enacting your Role, attempts to get in the way of your expressing and communicating your Role take a –3 penalty to card values and rolls.

8+, *buy twice:* this aegis also covers imaginary events or credentials you bring up to support your Role.

Commanding Aura

[requires Unstoppable]

While **Unstoppable** is active, your Role infects those around you, fitting them into a complementary role. Quick interactions have superficial, transient effects; scene-length interactions have significant impact that lasts until an *arcanum* removes it; a few days with a captive audience destroys and remakes them. Attempted opposition that does not break contact with you or interrupt your Role is at a –3 penalty to card values and Traits.

The Wages of Sin

card: until the scene ends, you can roll Awareness and add your Sickness as a bonus to mystically sense signs of your Failing, and how things relate to your Failing, in the world around you.

Your Truth

Certain truths about you—starting with “you are [your Role],” plus one more chosen Truth—are now *geasa*.

arcanum: add a new truth to this list.

IMPRESARIO

You learn *Impresario* powers via **Shepherd** Arcs (pg. 190).

Believe in Me

mark journal: inspire someone nearby to attempt an action of your choice. They cannot critically fail, receive a +1 bonus, and you may optionally force them to roll if they refuse. (If you do, they may make a second roll to stop themselves from acting.)

mark journal, ♣: you may add “1 5 5” to their roll.

Demesne

You have a deep tie to a particular place, such as a Far Roofs neighborhood or a city park. You have a +1 bonus to your actions there, and a loose narrative authority—even if the moment-to-moment details are the GM’s purview, “how it works, as a rule” is a part of your character concept.

♦: manipulate the weather or the timing of events in your demesne.

♦, *buy twice*: manipulate abstractions like grades or credit rating there; force a plausible coincidence there.

Long-ranged.

Here’s What You’ll Do

mark journal: declare the *practical/sensible* or the natural course of action for someone. If it’s a rolled action, they automatically roll to take the action, and this roll cannot critically fail; they may optionally roll to stop themselves. If it’s an unrolled action, they automatically take it; they may stop themselves with a successful **Self-Care** action. You can trigger this power based on ooc information. *Long-ranged.*

Here’s Where this is Going

mark journal: dictate the fate of someone you’re close to. Their life inevitably arcs in that fate’s direction until you stop being close to them or someone uses an arcanum to subvert this fate. If that fate becomes definitely impossible before then, both you and they lose 3 components.

Here’s Who You Are

Describe someone you care about.

8+, *their player must disagree with the description*: this power functions as “I wish you’d find out which of us was right” or “I wish you would see yourself the way you really are.”

8+, *their player must NOT disagree with the description*: show someone who they really are.

Let’s be BFFS

J+: someone becomes a close friend of yours until your current story ends; actions to deny that or recognize it as “fake” face a –3 penalty. This does not directly change their feelings about you—it’s more like “a new, obvious fact about the world.”

buy twice, J+: in a similar fashion, forge a connection to a place, family, or organization, e.g., becoming someone’s parent, child, sibling, romantic interest, or friend; a park’s caretaker; or a school’s vice-principal.

Long-ranged.

Minions

You have a handful of minions, each with cv 7 and two unique points of skills (e.g., one Superior Skill 2, or 2 professional Skills). Or, you have 1-2 minions with cv 8 and 3 identically-spent points of skills.

buy twice: add +1 cv and +1 skill point to your minions.

buy three times: add a *further* +1 cv and +2 skill points to your minions.

C’mere [*requires Minions*]

5+: some of your minions show up. Or, some local equivalent to your minions shows up, with similar effects. When dismissed, they have a +2 bonus to attempts at subtle departure, or you can spend a component to let them just ... fade away.

♣: summon a specific non-minion you’re close to, instead.

Long-ranged.

Away with You [*requires Minions*]

5+: send some nearby minions to a region nearby. You may specify roughly where they land. If they become trapped, they can find their way back to you or somewhere they know by spending a component.

♣: send a non-minion you’re close to instead.

Rest, Now

8+: invoke a specific form of lassitude. When applicable, the target, everyone in a targeted place, or everyone interacting with a targeted object takes a –3 penalty to all diced actions save resting, fooling around, unproductive stuff, and Mood rolls. This lasts the scene.

Stir the Heart

8+: increase the allure that something holds. (Most users choose a more specific form, like “compel thirst.”) This normally targets something local, but can be combined with **Here’s What You’ll Do** to increase the allure something holds from afar and simultaneously declare the natural/sensible way to react. Without such a combination, others choose how they react, but must block, counterattack, or succeed on a [Self-Care – 2] roll to *ignore* it. *Long-ranged when in combination.*

Where-Sense, the

card, minutes: learn the exact distance and direction to a specific minion or person you have a strong positive relationship with and get a vague vision of their circumstances.

Long-ranged.

THE MAGICIAN

Physical Action 2 Professional Scholar
 Awareness 4
 Communication 3
 Introspection 0
 Self-Care 1

someone being pried out of their shell

You tried to forget, you locked it away, but when you were young, **Hedge the Fang** touched your mind. Took your self from you. Wielded you against the rats.

You ...

You told yourself it wasn't real. Tried to immerse yourself in normality. ... but it never really took.

Suggested Emotional Draw: memetic catch-phrases

Arcana

You often use letter or card arcana for *academic research*, *complicated drawings*, or *writing stories*.

Sometimes you use letter or card arcana for *grand feats of magic* or *investigations of the self*.

Stories

Your first story is **Coming Back**. You've been away, working on an exhausting project or studying abroad or something. Now you're back ... and getting dragged into the affairs of rats and Mysteries. You try to work out how you fit in.

Muddles include:

- * how can I possibly hold myself together through this?
- * do I even believe the Far Roofs are real?
- * [your relationship with the rats]

By default, this is a **Melancholy** Arc. The first quest is usually **A Hollow World** (pg. 161); you'll want a copy of that quest near you when you play, and it'll give the additional muddle:

- * can I really face the far roofs again?

Because it's a melancholy Arc, your first quest is about the daily routine of living with your damage—a routine you'll kind of depend on, and'll have a hard time *letting go of*, even when the story's started moving and there's magic going on. This leads up to a moment when you complete the progress grid, solve the muddle, end the quest, and make a change in your life, as per "Melancholy 1" on pg. 192; at that time, you'll choose either a

generic power or one of the **Indomitable** powers below and move on to the next quest, **Struggling for Control**—the story of your obsession and fascination with magic, the roofs, or the Mysteries. This grants the muddle:

- * what did/will I find on the roofs that I actually need?

Later quests might give the muddles:

- * [building something good or useful from the ashes of what Hedge did to you]
- * [your old trauma] *and*
- * what is the thing inside me that defies the will of Hedge the Fang?

When you've solved all the Arc muddles, plus all the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you can move on to your second story, **Ghost Sweeping**: you train in ghost sweeping and stumble on the plot of a ghost or ghost king infected by Malambruno ... finally laying it to rest.

Your third story will be **The Fire of the World**. You struggle to master your new power over "the fire of the world," learning what it means and what to do with it.

Your fourth story will be **A Dependable Person**. You find a home, and what that means is explored over the course of the quest, possibly in flashbacks.

You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 202!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the magician, consider the "Reckless Prinxe" stories on pg. 223!

Memetic Appeal

The Magician is often a memetic character with the kind of catch-phrases that root deeply in the other players' minds. What those *are* varies from Magician to Magician—we're imagining stuff like "there's a perfectly logical explanation," "to the library!" or "... tastes like Hedge," but if you want to go with "we're doomed" or "stick that phrase on my booty shorts" or whatever, go to! Regardless, you'll often earn your emotional draw when another player's excited about your using a catch-phrase ... or, when you infect them to the point they use one themselves.



Magician Powers

You have access to the *Indomitable* and *Memetic* powersets. Other suggested powersets include *Allegory* (pg. 85) and *Primordial* (pg. 86).

Standard picks are: **Seize the Intangible**, **The Dreams That Dreams do Dream Of**, **Somebody Else's Story**, and **Symbolic Logic**.

INDOMITABLE

You learn *Indomitable* powers via **Melancholy** Arcs (pg. 192).

Cautionary Tale

♠: on first learning someone's committed a specific sin against you, curse them with this *geas*: that until the current group storyline (pg. 231) ends, whenever they do a specific thing that *should* be normal and enjoyable—you choose the thing when cursing them—you can roll **Awareness** to learn about it and trigger the curse, inflicting a chosen adversity on them instead. Outside of dramatic conflict, if they have 1+ HP, you may bargain with their player, limiting the adversity you threaten them with until they choose not to take damage. Later, you cannot curse them again unless they commit a substantially more grievous version of the "sin" that serves to trigger this curse. All this power's effects are *long-ranged*.

Drawn to Certain Bait

See pg. 116.

Inconspicuous Form

5+: assume a small, inconspicuous form. This power turns off **Strong** and may change your chosen **Keen Sense** (both below).

8+, *buy twice*: become a nebulous spiritual presence, possible to sense but impossible to observe directly, with +2 CV, +2 to block and falter rolls and card values, and a -2 to rolls and card values for attacks and descriptively fast-moving actions.

Invincible

♠: while pursuing a specific, stated task, you or a chosen minion (*long-ranged*) attach a ♠ to your CV and win all direct rolled conflicts against *normal actions* (pg. 69) and powers directly contingent upon such actions (such as **Paralyzing Fear**, opposite). These benefits do not apply when in an indirect conflict or against other sorts of powers, which can still, e.g., use ♥ as stamina. **Invincible** lasts until the chapter ends; a power, spade, or indirect action beats an "invincible" action; or, an opponent outside of conflict spends a spade to overcome the effect.

Keen Sense (choose a sense)

5+: sniff out one or more secrets if there are any available to sense; sense anything of interest, if not.

8+: follow a trail.

The Magician's Forge

♦: remake an object's destiny, consecrating or destining it for a certain task. Treat this as "I wish (this thing) could accomplish (this task)"—it doesn't mean that it *will*, but it must become *possible*, and an opportunity must at some point arise.

Paralyzing Fear

5+: your *normal action* (pg. 69), if a success, paralyzes a target with fear, attacks their mind, or induces fearful hallucinations.

Purification

You have a healing/purifying power. It covers physical and mechanical fixes, plus a small number of character-specific healing/purifying effects.

5+: heal small things, e.g., a fallen soufflé, broken arm, or 1 HP.

arcnum: perform large feats of magical healing/purification.

Seize the Intangible

8+: treat something as solid that isn't.

Strong

8+ (5+, *card*): win a direct conflict of strength. Opponents can spend a spade—in dramatic conflict, played as their stamina card, or, played separately if it's too low—to overcome this invincibility effect. Buy once for 8+, twice for 5+, thrice for *card*.

Strong characters are also tough, drawing a bonus card the first time they block or falter in a conflict. On the third purchase, they increase this to two cards, and gain the ability to ignore leverage in conflicts of strength. Optionally, this power affects and is named for a different kind of conflict (like speed, baking, or riddle-solving).

Tribulation

♠: inflict a curse on someone nearby as a *geas*. Something bad repeatedly happens to them. Your tribulation is a specific curse and can't be extensively customized, but you may buy this power more than once for additional curses. The target can use a word *arcnum*, redrawing spent letters, to resolve the curse.

mark journal: actively trigger the curse, making it do whatever it does. *Long-ranged*.

MEMETIC

Characters learn *Memetic* powers via **Role** Arcs (pg. 180).

If you have Memetic powers, you may have:

- * a **Role**—something archetypal you’re being (“Detective,” “Thief,” “King of the Stars”);
- * a **Failing**—a concept you embody, but which is also the source of all the trouble in your life (“Chivalry,” “Hope”);
- * a **Mythos**—a story of your nature and destiny, or, a notional realm that you rule, “the world of [...]” *and*
- * three **Truths**, binding laws of your nature.

By default, the Magician’s **Role** is “The Magician,” their **Failing** is “Understanding of Deep Mysteries,” their **Mythos** is “a world haunted by strange magics,” and their **Truths** are:

- * I understand.
- * I wield power, *and*
- * I resist the will of Hedge the Fang.

The Dream that Dreams do Dream Of

5+: one of your Truths becomes a *geas*.

5+: end such an effect.

8+: force something to happen to make a Truth-*geas* relevant.

8+, *buy twice*: a much stronger version of your Truths becomes a *geas*.

A Glorious Dream

♥: bring a neighborhood-sized or even city-sized area into your Mythos, transforming it appropriately, or cast it out; or impose one of your own Truths upon it, or free it from such a Truth. The effects are, alas, transient and unreal; they fade at the next dawn, with any significant damage done undone and any significant secrets learned through this power fading from one’s mind.

Idealize

You can make small cosmetic physical and mental changes to grant things the aesthetics of your Mythos. These fade over time on unwilling targets with 1+ HP, even if they don’t actively spend HP to resist.

Inevitability Entanglement

5+: enchant someone, enforcing one of your Truths on them as a *geas* that lasts until the end of the current group storyline (pg. 231) or ushering them into your Mythos and

transforming them appropriately and permanently to fit. You have reasonable control over how this plays out, but when you usher a target into your Mythos, they can take damage (pg. 50) to, e.g., substitute a transformation they find more appropriate. An *arcanum* can free the target from these effects, but is not required if they have other means.

Destiny Exile [*requires Inevitability Entanglement*]

♠: cast someone from your Mythos, freeing them from one of your Truths or ushering them *out* of your Mythos and transforming them appropriately to fit. You can advise, but the GM decides how this plays out. An *arcanum* can reverse this, but is not required if they have other means.

Mythos Complementation

J+: impose a destiny on someone/something in your Mythos. It is inflicted on them as a *geas* until your current story ends.

Shine

♥: until the session or the next chapter ends, while acting on your behalf (in any loosely reasonable sense) or recovering from doing the same: all characters now present may add +2 to their effective Self-Care (max 5).

Somebody Else’s Story

You may experience the life of someone/something else in your Mythos, with you or the GM narrating the event. Afterwards, make a Mood roll. 1/session, you may add “1 2” to this roll.

♣: search through many such lives/experiences for information that you need.

Long-ranged.

Communion [*requires Somebody Else’s Story*]

card: if you plausibly might’ve shared someone’s life with *Somebody Else’s Story*, declare that the two of you share an intrinsic, automatic understanding—a sense of kinship they must spend a ♠ to sever or deny. The effect is weaker but still present if you only shared part of their life, e.g., the “life” of their left arm.

Symbolic Logic

card: until the end of the scene, you can roll Awareness with a +2 bonus to mystically understand how things fit into your Mythos. For instance, with “the world of martial arts,” this would reveal that someone studied judo as a kid.

THE NAVIGATOR

Physical Action 2 Professional Navigator
 Awareness 4 Professional Hunter
 Communication 1 Professional Roof-Traveler
 Introspection 3
 Self-Care 0

someone really into it

You're amazed by this place—these roofs. Everything is magical and new. You fall into it like a fish into water ... and before you know it you're (near) as good as any navigator-rat!

Suggested Emotional Draw: trust

Arcana

You often use card arcana for *maps and other records of travel*.

Sometimes you use letter or card arcana to *plan expeditions, draw other stuff, or carve things out of wood*.

Stories

Your first story is **the Navigator's Cat**. You're haunted by a trickster cat spirit, and try a variety of approaches to taming it. There may be a death in your family.

Muddles include:

- * what's my place with the rats, on the roofs?
- * how do I do a good job out here as navigator?
- * is it really OK to leave home and the lower world behind?

By default, this is a **Storyteller** Arc—full of brash energy, blurring fiction and life. The first quest in the Arc is **Chomping at the Bit** (pg. 163); you'll want a copy of that quest near you in play, and it'll give the additional muddle:

- * what will my new life be like?

Because it's a **Storyteller** Arc, the first quest is about how the roofs are exciting and new and you're being swept up in the experience; when you finish the quest, completing the progress grid and solving the muddle, it means the honeymoon phase has ended, and you're used to things now, as per "Storyteller 1" on pg. 184, even though you're probably still in love with the roofs. You'll get to pick a generic power or one of the **Creature of Fable** powers below and move on to **The Navigator's Haunt**, focusing more on the cat spirit itself, with the muddle:

- * how do I get the cat spirit to stop being such a *pest*?

Later quests might give the muddles:

- * what haven't I processed?
- * what secret of the far roofs do I discover, and how?
and
- * [a muddle of loss and grief]

When you've solved all of the Arc muddles, plus all of the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you'll move on to your second story, **the Navigator's Apprentice**. You pick up an apprentice navigator!

Your third story will be **the Navigator's Fear**.

Independent of other stuff going on, you've attracted Goblin's attention. This is *really* not good, but you've got a plan tying this into the group storyline: there's something about the place the group is navigating through that'll let you lose even *this* kind of pursuer for good. Like, if you work it right, you can loop your hunter through their own timeline, or snatch away their memories ...

Your fourth story will be **the Navigator's Ship**.

Something's changing all the directional markers you're used to! Also, you find a magic ship.

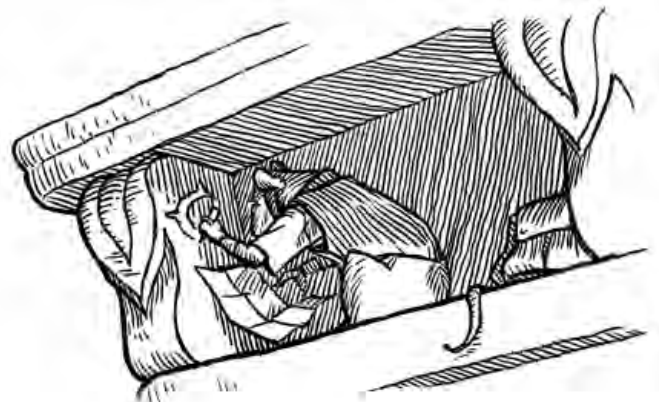
You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 204!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the navigator, consider the "Bard" stories on pg. 216!

Navigator Powers

You have access to the *Creature of Fable* and *Prophet* powersets. Other suggested powersets include *Indomitable* (pg. 79) and *Worldwalker* (pg. 94).

Standard picks are: **Skilled** (skill points already included above), **Between the Boundaries** (finding food and water), **Blind**, and **Divine Guidance**.



by Jenn Manley Lee

CREATURE OF FABLE

You learn *Creature of Fable* powers via **Storyteller Arcs** (pg. 184).

Awaken Self

8+: the target makes the decision they're facing—finding one to make, if necessary—without reference to fear, supernatural compulsion, irrational compulsion or addiction, and with a minimum effective thinking time of twenty breaths.

Between the Boundaries

Pick 1-2 tasks (on the order of “repairing broken-down machines,” “setting traps,” or “reading up on something”). Between scenes or in a flashback, you can complete these tasks nigh-instantly. If no one was looking, “so, a few seconds ago, when no one was looking ...” works fine.

Blind

8+: strip the target of their ability to see, recognize, or understand a particular thing. They may use an *arcnum* to recover.

Cut the Soul

♠: stop someone's power or magical skill use and remove their access to the power/skill until you die, choose to return it, use **Cut the Soul** again, or, they use an *arcnum* (for anything). In dramatic conflict, this cannot target actions backed by spade stamina cards. **Cut the Soul** can and often *will* invalidate opponent actions ... but you cannot both take advantage of this to ignore the value of an opponent's card *and* use this power's cost card as stamina; if both seem viable, pick just one.

Declare

8+: force an emotional truth on one or more of those who can hear you, e.g. “you fear me” or “you've just lost the most important thing in your life.” The effect lasts until you are distracted.

Entice

5+: lure someone to you, as with the wish “I wish you would come and find me here.” They arrive within a day and night.

♣: this can wake the dead.

Long-ranged.

Iconic

You have an iconic appearance. If it gets messed up, the world restores it as quickly as plausible.

card: or, instantly.

Respite

mark action: bring respite, rest, peace, and solace to someone. If external agencies hound the target, or you feel granting an easy rest would be unjust, this is a wish: “I wish things could be easier for you,” or “I wish you could find peace.” Otherwise, it's an attack that forces them to rest, relax, or experience solace.

mark action, **♣**: as above, but targeting a small group.

Revelation

♥: narrate a revelation that retroactively changes the nature or events of a scene—for instance, when caught red-handed committing burglary, swap yourself with a rival, or declare the matter a dream. This cannot directly inflict meaningful harm, but *can* undo such harm. It fails to reveal information that the GM/group feels would be cheapened by card-based discovery.

PROPHET

You learn *Prophet* powers via **Mystic Arcs** (pg. 195).

If you have *Prophet* powers, you might have:

- * a **Principle**, a specific conceptual ideal like Freedom, Love, Truth, Hatred, Hope, Science, or Uncertainty; *and*
- * one to four **Enemies**—opposing spiritual forces, and their agents.

By default, the Navigator's **Principle** is Delight, and their **Enemies** are agents of Dullness, Cruelty, and Disinterest / Unmindfulness.

Divine Guidance

♥: your *normal action* (pg. 69) is guided by your Principle. It cannot critically fail, and **Enemies** must spend a **♠** to oppose it.

card: the same, but the GM, acting as the Principle, chooses the action.

arcnum: your GM-guided actions set the stage for a local festival celebrating your Principle.

buy twice: cards played with Divine Guidance have +2 value.

Elation

Once per session, when you believe (as a player) that you're acting in accordance with your Principle, draw a card.

buy twice: also, once per session, when you believe another PC is acting in accordance with your Principle, grant them a card. *Long-ranged.*

Foresight

You investigate specific occult matters because of your Principle. Once per session, when dealing with some such matter, critically succeed on one **DARING** action without a roll.

Hallow

5+ or *minutes*: strengthen your Principle's presence in a place. The effects are real but not strong.

Illumination

Once per session, when listening to someone's concerns about how to live with your Principle and acting as counselor, you can critically succeed on a **BONDING** action without a roll. You will be inspired to give them good advice—provided by you or the GM—which, barring effortful PC meddling, unpredictable disaster, or the work of **Enemies**, will serve them well.

Inspiration

This power requires a source of your Principle. For instance, being in a place that is decently strong in your Principle, like maybe ¼ of the world is, or witnessing a Principled act, or having a sacred object on hand. Add a (further) +2 to the value of relevant cards if this is a *really* strong source.

5+: grant a +2 bonus to the roll and card value for a *normal* action (pg. 69) you are taking. It also can no longer critically fail.

♥: do so as often as you'd like for the remainder of the scene.

Materialization of Possibility

Ace: your Principle solves a problem that you're facing, in its characteristic fashion.

5+: make something 8× more likely or 2× more powerful, if it helps solve a problem in a Principle-affirming way.

8+, *buy twice*: ... or, 33,000× more likely and 10-20× as powerful.

J+, *buy thrice*: cause things to happen using a palette of motifs that fit your Principle; or, cause things to act in a fashion that evokes your Principle; or, create a new and fine-tuned example of your Principle; or, declare something lacking in your Principle and then have it removed in the characteristic way your Principle removes something.

♥, *buy thrice*: as above, but in a particularly epic fashion, plus the card counts as playing a ♠.

Regretful Warning

♠: When someone betrays your Principle, describe a curse that will befall them unless they repent. It should fit your Principle's palette of motifs. The target has three days to relent, repent, and make a serious start on redemption; if a fourth dawn comes and they haven't yet, the curse befalls them as a wish. If play skips one or more IC days, at the target's player's option, so does the accounting of the curse ... for some reason. You may have one curse "pending" at a time.

buy twice: instead of cursing an individual, you may talk about what happens "if this goes on." This has a four-part result: if (1) certain Principle-related stuff continues, starts, stops, doesn't start, or whatever, (2) things will be your choice of good or bad to (3) a chosen person, area, group or abstract thing (4) in a way that your prophetic language evokes. You are still limited to one pending effect at a time.

Long-ranged.

Vestments

You have a sacred treasure that you cannot lose permanently that adds +1 to two magical skills while you have it and is a powerful source of, attractor to, or instance of your Principle.

You know of a sacred location for your Principle.



by Jenn Manley Lee

THE OLD-TIMER

Physical Action 3

Magical Skill: Knit-Witch 2

Awareness 2

Professional Tenacity

Communication 0

Introspection 4

Self-Care 1

someone defiant

This isn't your first go-round with magic and the far roofs. Players will explore your past with flashbacks in play! But honestly? You thought you were done. You thought you were *done*, right up until you got bit by **Typhon's** poison.

She showed you a truth too big to contain within the world, and the world's become too small and fragile to hold you in it. Is Typhon feeding on you or being devoured? Exalting, or destroying you? Is the seed of grandeur she's put in your heart a hideous, destructive lie or a real truth that's just too bright?

... all you know is, she's just *awful*, and you've gotta hang on.

Suggested Emotional Draw: bonding/heartfelt feelings

Arcana

You often use card arcana for *knitted crafts* and *stories*.

Sometimes you use letter arcana to declare past events or for *grand feats of witchery*.

Stories

Your first story is **Poisoned**—poisoned by Typhon, you are becoming a Mystery, rising beyond the world of life into the world of spirit. ... but you're fighting it.

Muddles include:

- * what is Typhon's poison doing to me?
- * what is Typhon's poison *giving* me?
- * [the political turmoil going on in the mundane world, that might affect your city and your "normal" life]

By default, this story is a Mystic Arc—a story of life in the shadow of divinity. The first quest is **Clinging to the Past** (pg. 168); you'll want to have a copy of that quest near you when you play, and it will give you the additional muddle,

- * [the story of your last journey before "retirement"]

Because it's a Mystic Arc, the first quest is a time of omens and portents, a time in the shadow of a coming miracle, a time when you know the person you are will have to change. When you

"Knit-Witch" Magic

Minor feats of knit-witch magic include knitting, sewing, spinning, fixing a garment as if it hadn't been torn, and downloading any pattern without having to pay. More significant feats include piercing through anything with a needle, winding out arbitrarily much thread, spinning discarded hair or trash into yarn, making a cord to hold even a Mystery or the wind, and knitting, sewing, and spinning abstract things like shadows.

More masculine versions of the Old-Timer may have "fishing magic" instead; minor feats include fishing, crafting a rod, catching improbable fish, and having fishing gear when one oughtn't, while significant feats would include pulling in impossible fish, casting arbitrary amounts of line, catching good things even when not fishing in water, and hooking abstract things like shadows.

complete the progress grid and solve the muddle, finishing the quest, a miracle occurs, as per "Mystic 1" on pg. 195; you'll have to work out with the GM what that means given the events of the game. At that time, you can also pick a generic power or one of the **Primordial** powers below and move on to the next quest, **Taking Some Mental Damage Here**, focusing on the *impact* Typhon's poison is having on you²⁹ and giving the muddle:

- * what is my coping strategy in the face of Typhon's poisoning?

Later quests might give the muddles:

- * can I really be the adventurer I once was, again?
- * [finding a temporary balance with the poison, so you can focus on other things] *and*
- * how can I help my friend deal with local government?

When you've solved all of the Arc muddles, plus all of the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you'll move

²⁹ though see the notes on "opposite numbers" on pg. 195 and 206, just in case you're playing an unusual version of **the Old-Timer** and this quest needs to change.

on to your second story, **Lost Pieces**. At a lull in the group storyline, you have a feverish dream wherein you have many shadows, and you cut them off ... waking to find that you've given rise to "firedrake-youkai," bits of your wishes and dreams, taking form as little dragon-spirits that fly off to haunt the Far Roofs.

Your third story will be **Shadow Self**. You dream of a shadow self—a "you" that is beyond you. A *real* you, maybe.

Finally, your fourth story will be **Preparations for Transcendence**. You make preparations for departing the flesh and becoming part of, or a successor to, Typhon. Though, it doesn't *always* happen—something could prevent it!

You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 206!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the old-timer, consider the "Outcast" stories on pg. 221!

Old-Timer Powers

You have access to the *Allegory* and *Primordial* powersets. Other suggested powersets include *Indomitable* (pg. 79) and *Memetic* (pg. 80).

Standard picks are: **Skilled** (skill points already included on pg. 84), **A Tangled History**, **Digest**, and **Scry**.

ALLEGORY

You learn *Allegory* powers via **Role Arcs** (pg. 180).

If you have *Allegory* powers, you may have:

- * a **Role**—something archetypal you're being ("Detective," "Thief," "King of the Stars"); *and*
- * a **Failing**—a concept you embody, but also the source of all your life's troubles ("Chivalry," "Hope")

By default, as the Old-Timer, your **Role** is "the Elder," and your **Failing** is *hanging on*.

Awaken

8+, *minutes*: awaken the inanimate to life or an animal to consciousness/speech. You may withdraw this gift at a later time.

8+, *minutes*, *buy twice*: optionally, instead: awaken everything around you; or, fill the area around you with either "vigorous life and health" or something inspired by your Failing.

Bound

Claim up to three "bonds," (also called "rules" or "laws,") each a +1 bonus to your doing something and a -1 penalty to your *not* doing that.

Bring to Fruition

5+: transform or curse someone. The transformation/curse is an expression of, metaphor for, or intensification of how they experience your Failing. You can direct them with narration and questions, but the target's player chooses the actual curse. It lasts until removed with an arcanum.

8+, *buy twice*: transform or curse everything around you all at once in the same fashion.

arcanum: develop a curse based on a slight variant, e.g., "how they experience the *opposite* of your Failing." You may still use older curses.

Limitless [*requires Awaken or Bring to Fruition*]

J+: until you next mark the adventure journal, the impossible becomes possible. Given a few minutes, in a reasonable area around where the power was invoked, you can do things like:

- reify a metaphor,
- invite fictional/fabled characters into the world,
- make it feasible for anyone to move some tricky objects (like "those mountains in the distance") around by hand, and lower any roll penalty by 2,
- waive an environmental hazard, *or*
- grant a +2 bonus to anyone trying to organize people into some kind of unusual activity.

The effects are dream-like, doing no permanent harm and yielding no dramatic information.

Imbue

arcanum: imbue an object or loyal creature with the power of an elemental force (e.g., Freedom, Wind, Fire) or a *geas* (e.g., "cannot be defeated"). You cannot permanently lose the object or the loyalty of the creature, but can cancel the power. You can have up to three such accessories at once.

Legendary

card: use a unique power that cannot critically succeed or deal damage, but which demonstrates your identity and Role.

5+: use one of two minor powers that cannot critically succeed or deal more than 1 damage in dramatic conflict, but which demonstrate your identity or Role.

♥: your identity and Role become absolutely impossible to doubt.

Mechanisms of Transport

♦: gain a new, cool mode of transportation, with minor concessions to realism—e.g., a ship that can sail on the rooftops, but not the sky, or a short-distance portal power, or a flying carpet needing some solar recharging. You can have up to two at once.

Somebody Else's Problem

There's a -2 penalty to trying to describe you or spot/recognize you when you don't want to be spotted/recognized.

Stolen Form

J♥+: at most 1/chapter, steal some conceptually straightforward quality or power from someone else. It cannot be something vital like "existence." They gain a +2 to locating, tracking, or traveling to you. They may use an *arcnum* to recover the quality, at which point you lose it. When used outside of dramatic conflict, if the target resists the effect with HP, you may reclaim your card.

A Tangled History

5+: declare that you had detailed personal experience with something.

8+: or, *participated* in it.

♥: or, that there's a fable that you were *responsible* for it.

Wonder-Worker

When acting according to your Role, or using its characteristic weapon/tool, gain +1 to card values and prevent up to one point of HP damage per chapter.

PRIMORDIAL

You learn *Primordial* powers via **Mystic Arcs** (pg. 195).

If you have *Primordial* powers, you may have:

- * a **Principle**, a specific conceptual ideal like Freedom, Love, Truth, Hatred, Hope, Science, or Uncertainty;
- * an **Element**—some element of the natural or human world, like "the wind," "sunlight," or "streets;" and
- * a **Transformation**—a thing you are, in some way, becoming.

By default, as the Old-Timer, your **Principle** is Tenacity. Your **Element** will generally be moonlight, but can be thread/yarn/line or passing time. Your **Transformation** is "a Mystery," often in the form of a fog-shrouded, silver-scaled serpent that is intrinsically difficult to observe.

Bonds of Fate

♥: after talking to someone about your Principle or Transformation, manifest a power based on them, their sense of it, or their sense of you. Each power changes your body or (rarely) your attitude/clothing. You can have up to five, and discard them at will; they take a short time to fade.

... up to two minor powers, e.g., professional skills or 1-2-point magical/superior skills, paired with inconspicuous/pleasant physical changes;

... up to one strong power, e.g., a 2-3 point skill or +1 CV, paired with a conspicuous but concealable change.

... *and*, up to two strong powers, e.g. *geasa* or powers from the powersets, paired with a disturbing and inhuman (but possibly aesthetic) physical change.

If you have a power you got from talking to someone, you are said to be "holding their experience."

♥♥: *in extremis*, manifest a new power by talking to yourself.

A Distant Mood [*requires Bonds of Fate*]

5+: take specific long-ranged actions through your Element. The target should be someone whose experience you hold. You start with two tricks you can perform: one metaphorical and subjective, like using your Element to "call to [someone's] heart;" the other is more solid and real, like using your Element to "catch [someone] when [they] fall." Both should fit your Principle's feel.

arcnum: learn a new trick of this sort, which should also fit your Principle.

♥: if someone whose experience you hold spends a chapter serving your Principle or immersed in your Element, let them draw a component. *Long-ranged*.

A Distant Wish [*requires A Distant Mood*]

8+: enact one of 2-3 pre-designed wishes that fit the general theme of your **A Distant Mood**. For instance, if a sun-spirit's usual **Distant Mood** is "I light the path," they might have wishes like "I wish the sun would keep you safe on this journey" or "I wish you'd find something worth the trouble at the end of this journey." These too are *long-ranged* and target someone whose experience you hold.

card: enhance an ongoing use of this power, blending a new target or different wish option into its effect. *Long-ranged*.

arcnum: develop a new, suitable wish for use with this power.

Effulgent Transformation

[requires Bonds of Fate]

♠: when your Mood is furthest from you, when its opposite threatens to consume you ... transform yourself, developing the power that you need to answer the situation, invoke your Principle, or suppress its opposite. This changes you physically, grants you a power, and uses one of your **Bonds of Fate** power slots. It also invokes that power, if appropriate. The power itself is a shapeless *deus ex machina*: the GM decides what it is, but it never *fails* to help.

Forever Changed *[requires Bonds of Fate]*

Make a single **Bonds of Fate** power and transformation permanent, freeing up its slot. To make a bit more game room for slapdash effulgent transformations and the iffier bonds, we're going to say this purchase needs the GM/group's support.

Shared Witness *[requires Bonds of Fate]*

This is a *long-ranged* power that affects those whose experience you hold. First, they can emote to you—sending complicated feelings if not concrete information. Additionally, you can:

card, minutes: learn the exact distance and direction to them, and, their current level of your Principle or its inverse. For the rest of the chapter, this does not need a card.

♥: learn how to give them/make them feel [your **Principle**]. For instance, *how to make them feel hope*. If the target is a PC, their player is the one to give you the relevant information; otherwise, of course, it's the GM. The power lasts until the end of the current group storyline (pg. 231) or a substantial narrative payoff; until then, if something seems like it might have changed, you can ask for any relevant updates.

Digest

You can digest anything. Poisons have only cosmetic, generally metaphorical effects on you. If you find sufficiently unique and magical things, you can gain 1+ components by eating them.

Scry

card: send out your sight and hearing in a “speck” of your Element to find things inside it. It takes perhaps an hour to search a city-sized space for a person-sized object; time for different searches adjusts proportionally. You can only sense things actually *in* your Element, to the sorrow of, e.g., Element: “clouds.” *Long-ranged*.

5+: replace sight and hearing with touch, and then spread out tendrils of your Element from a known point to grope around and feel for something. *Long-ranged*.

J+: conduct a search, as per the first version, but you can now see/hear “from” your Element, e.g., seeing down *from* the clouds. *Long-ranged*.

Tokens of your Power

8+: pull some of your Element or Principle out of a situation and congeal it into an object—a “token.”

Unleash *[requires Tokens of your Power]*

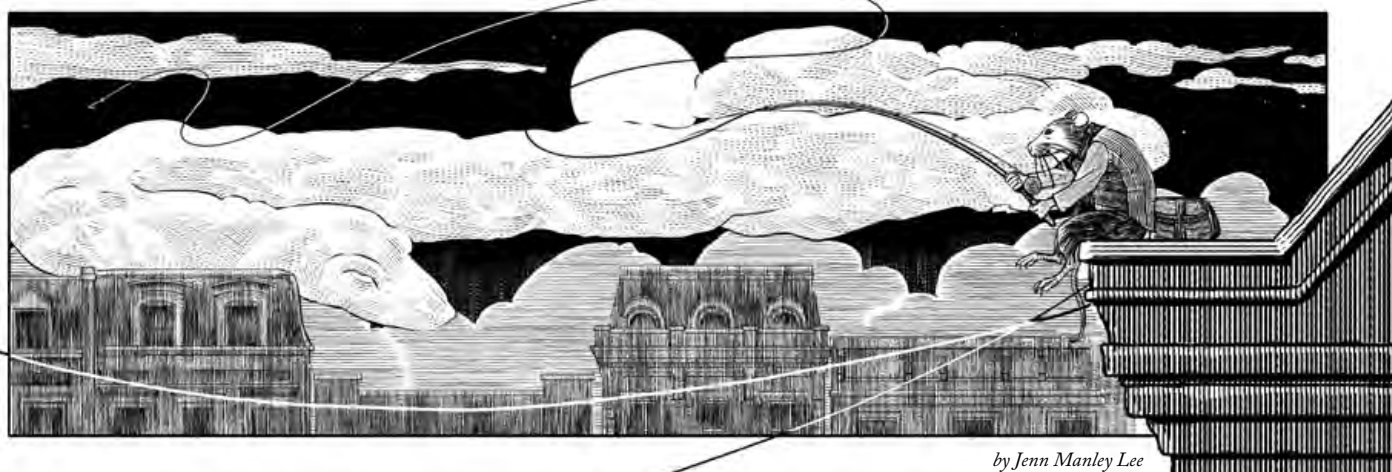
5+: unleash your Element or Principle from such a token, or permit someone else, who is attempting it, to do so. You or they may roll **Physical Action** to manipulate the Element or Principle as it is unleashed. *Long-ranged*.

8+: there is a +3 bonus on that **Physical Action** roll. *Long-ranged*.

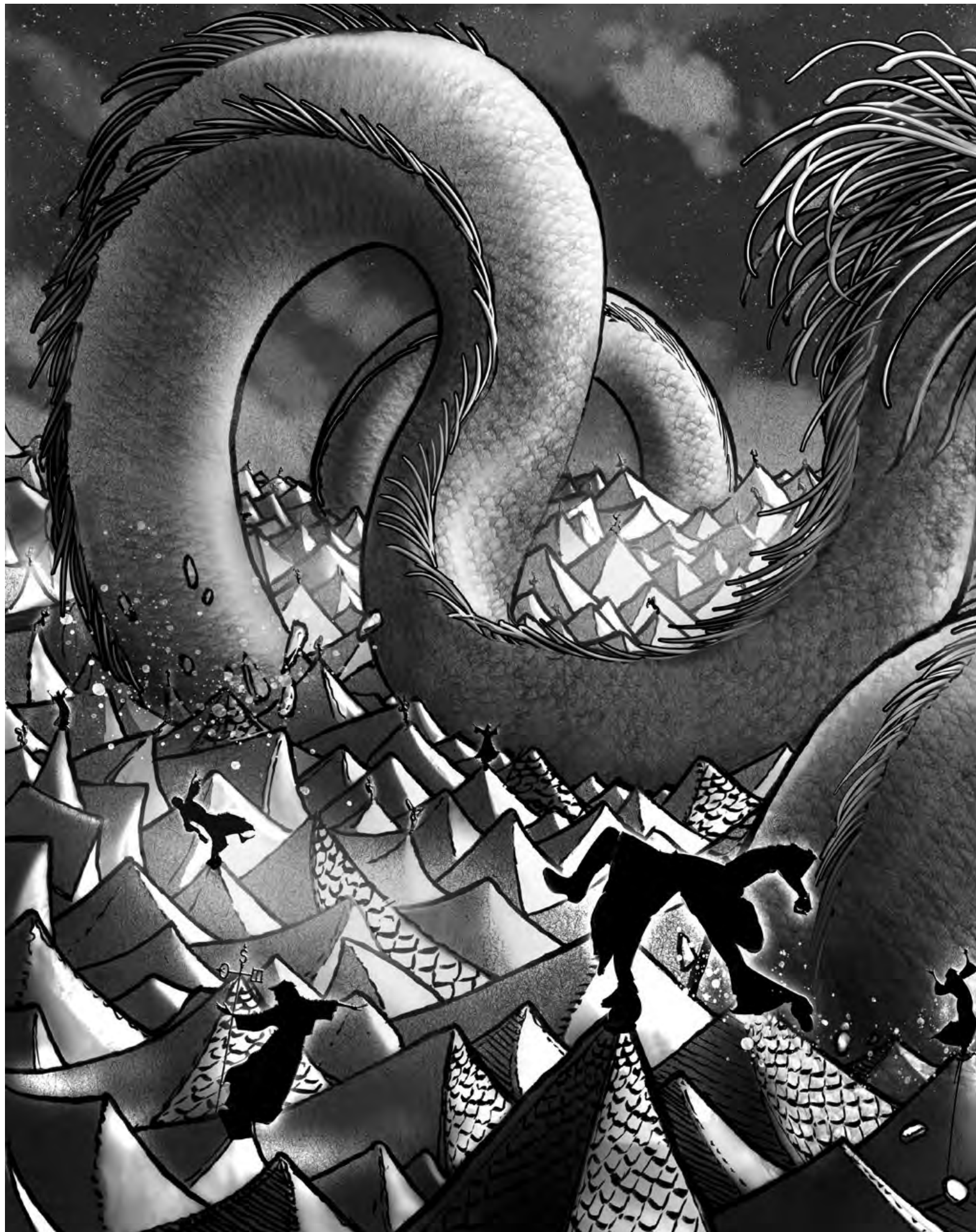
J+: the effect is unleashed as a conceptual, reality-shaping wish rather than a more physically malleable force. *Long-ranged*.

Unnatural Action

You can take action as your **Element**, or set its general mood and disposition towards something. Assume that it can take the kinds of action it could take in a folktale, but can't break the illusion of a normal reality—the sun can willfully shine or hide behind clouds, but can't come down to Earth for ice cream. The wind can whisper, but only sometimes, and deniably. Parking garages can hide your car, but they can't walk away. *Long-ranged*.



by Jenn Manley Lee





"Madcaps' Nave," by Lee Moyer

THE ROGUE

Physical Action 4 Magical Skill: Necromancy 2
 Awareness 0 Professional Hero/Fool
 Communication 3
 Introspection 2
 Self-Care 1

someone doing their best

How did you wind up promising to tame the Mystery **Gravewight**? Who made you a guardian of the people below, to protect them from the horrors of the roofs? How did you “accidentally” learn to rip out “the fire of a body’s life” and command the temporary or permanent corpses this creates? How, for that matter, did you manage to lose your *own* life’s fire?

... let’s just not talk about it!

Who cares about all that backstory kind of stuff?

Suggested Emotional Draw: fist-shaking outrage

Arcana

You often use letter arcana for *necromantic servants and effects*.

Sometimes you use card arcana to *declare past events, unexplained* or to *have money for no reason*.

Stories

Your first story is **A Penitential Journey**. You’ve accidentally hurt someone. Nevermind who! You take a penitential journey, or maybe more than one, challenging whichever Mystery or situation fits other stuff that’s going on.

Muddles include:

- * [why are you like this?]
- * [who was it that you hurt, that this journey is required?]
- * what’s the ethical use case for my powers? What am I meant to do with them?

By default, this story is a **Bindings** Arc—a story of dealing with the liminal and forbidden. The first quest is **A Rival’s Bond** (pg. 170); you’ll want to have a copy of that quest near you when you play, and it will give you the additional muddle,

- * let’s forge a rivalry!

Because it’s a “bindings” Arc, the first quest has two options. One is a new relationship/partnership with something ill-favored or wrong. Could that be your rival? If so, then when you fill in the progress grid, solve the muddle, and finish the quest, you’ll also have hammered your relationship out, as per “Bindings 1” on pg. 178.

... but what if you pick a pure sweet cinnamon roll as your rival?

In that case, the first quest can focus on melodramatic brooding about how to live with being the rogue, and when you fill in the progress grid, solve the muddle, and finish the quest, you’ll have come to terms with yourself a bit more, as per “Bindings 1 – VARIATION” on pg. 178!

Necromancy

In this game, it’s a minor feat of necromancy to sniff out corpses, graves, and places of death at an unnatural range or to speak in a voice not your own. More significant feats include summoning someone or something to you from within a mile, twisting their travels so they lead to you; making a specific person unable to recognize something; making something unrecognizable in general; and, of course, waking and binding a ghost (or possibly some other sort of unliving being) into your service.

After finishing your preferred Bindings 1 quest, you’ll pick a new generic power or one of the **Wounded Angel** powers below and then move on to the next quest, **Practically a Role Model**, wherein you’ll decide that someone is, e.g., too stuffy, too scared of death, too unadventurous, or too “suffering from a mysterious necromantic curse no one but you can detect”²⁵ for your liking; nominate them as your sidekick (possibly in addition to being your rival); and, claim the muddle:

- * how do I help this person?

Later quests might then give the muddles:

- * how do I tame Gravewight?
- * what *is* the fire of a life? *and*
- * how should I atone?

²⁵ note that if the subject in question is a PC, it’s probably best to talk to their player before deciding they have a mysterious necromantic curse only you can detect ... unless (your player is confident) you’re just making things up!

When you've solved all the Arc muddles, plus all the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you'll move on to your second story, **Experiments**. Some kind of magical experimentation blows up in your face. You're pulled away from the ruin of your experimentation to help someone ... but, you're torn between doing whatever the group is doing and conducting more experiments along the rooftops the whole way!

Your third story will be **Jingling Crystal Bee**. You become obsessed with Jingling Crystal Bee (a jingling crystal bee, secretly a variant form of Hoop Snake), trying to analyze and understand WTF. Eventually you ... work it out ...?

Finally, your fourth story will be **The Thorn in their Life**. You discover a "curse" levied on your family line long ago. It's grinding you down slowly and interfering with your relationships. Can you resolve it?

You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 208!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the rogue, consider the "Shieldbearer" stories on pg. 225!

Rogue Powers

You have access to the *Wounded Angel* and *Creature of Delirium* powersets. Other powersets will follow the course of play and your reckless whims.

Standard picks are: **Skilled** (skill points already included on pg. 90), **Command**, **Extraction**, and **Empowered Wounds**.

WOUNDED ANGEL

You learn *Wounded Angel* powers via **Bindings** Arcs (pg. 178).

Aesthetic

Gain +3 points of magical skills, but only while (or within a chapter of your) actively maintaining a specific aesthetic.

(Cage for a) Blasphemy

You contain or hold back a terrible thing (your "blasphemy"). Any time you go from 2+ HP to 1 HP or defeat, release it automatically in an attack with effective Trait [5 – your **Self-Care**]. In a dramatic conflict, this plays out in the next round (or, if necessary, a bonus round) with effective card value **A♠**.

card: the "blasphemy" is also released as a wish effect, shaping and distorting everything around you.

An Undesirable Gift

[requires (Cage for a) Blasphemy]

2-3: when all seems lost, unhappily, your blasphemy saves you. This is a shapeless *deus ex machina*: the GM decides how,

but it never fails. The blasphemy/the GM can also invoke this power on your behalf without a card.

J+: refuse to let the GM invoke this power on your behalf.

Divine Health

Gain +3 starting HP.

Dramatic

card: show up somewhere that fits a chosen theme, as long as it isn't heavily monitored or intrinsically warded.

Empowered Wounds

Sacrifice 1 HP to claim a "wound power"—a custom power of your design, often based on being hurt in a specific way, and usually usable with a **5+**. You cannot recover that HP while still empowering the wound.

Once per turn, when taking damage, you may reduce damage taken by 1 HP if you stop empowering a wound.

buy twice: each "wound power" is now a package: the custom power above, a *geas* that focuses on helping or strengthening you, and an optional third effect that completes or competes against the other two.

Supreme Invocation

[requires Empowered Wounds]

Each wound power now comes with a related, flexible tightly-themed wishing power—e.g., wishes of forgetfulness or history uncreation coming from an amnesic wound.

♠: invoke such a wish. *Potentially long-ranged*.

Embrace of the World

[requires Empowered Wounds × 2]

♣: replace one wound power from a custom package with a social place. This is a wish power that brings you into position of authority, responsibility, or connection regarding some organization, location, or entity, and a professional skill *and* further +1 bonus in carrying out that role. *Potentially long-ranged*.

Salvation

Once ever, with the target's consent, make a hopeless situation work out for someone. This forges a permanent bond between you. This is a *deus ex machina*; you might not get it exactly like you want it, but only the target's withheld consent can stop it from working—and nothing save the target's true, unfettered will can force the target to withhold consent. *Long-ranged*.

♣: with their permission, automatically succeed at a **BONDING** roll with the person you helped.

♣♣: automatically succeed at a **BONDING** roll with *anyone* whose suffering resonates with your own.

CREATURE OF DELIRIUM

You learn *Creature of Delirium* powers via **Storyteller** Arcs (pg. 184).

If you have *Creature of Delirium* powers, you may have an **Experience** you can pull out of others with **Extraction** (below). For instance, you might pull someone's knowledge of cooking out of them as a golden spoon. The target's sense of that Experience takes a heavy blow. The extracted Experience forms a small object, the *weystone/weymark*. Someone holding a weymark can wield that Experience or draw more generally on the target's traits with their actions; people without Extraction, though, take a -2 penalty to doing so.

We'll call things whose *weymark* you hold your "vessels."

By default, the Rogue reaches into someone's chest and pulls out the *weymark* of the fire of their life.

Catharsis

♠: use this with some other power. It gains emotional force: the target draws or loses a component, your choice. Once per in-game day, you can have them gain or lose *three*.

Potentially long-ranged.

Extend the Moment

8+: some experience you impose on a target is unnaturally drawn out and dramatic. If they make a **DELIRIUM** roll, they may add "1 5 5" to it.

Potentially long-ranged.

Extraction

card: after a thematic interaction that takes a few minutes—e.g., an ominous conversation or ritual—use **Communication** to pull the *weymark* of your Experience from your target. If you fail the roll or it loses a conflict, the extraction fails.

card: when the target makes a Mood roll, the *weymark* will return unless you spend another card.

Wield [*requires Extraction*]

♦: make a wish that thematically evokes a *weymark* you hold.

Many-Faced

You have a +1 bonus on disguise actions.

card: change your shape/appearance in a characteristic fashion, possibly giving small bonuses/penalties to actions.

Set Apart

You have a distinguishing mark. Nothing can completely hide it when you have **Complex 1+**. (Or, if you're an NPC, when the most relevant PC has (in) Over Your Head 1+, instead?) Any time the mark gets you in trouble, you may draw a component.

Sovereignty

Sometimes things in metaphysically proximate places just randomly become your vessels. They lose their [whatever your Experience is] and become hollow vessels for your will, or, *overflow* with that Experience and attune to you. Choose what kind of things (e.g., machines, people, certain animals) this happens to and how and why. Eventually, most targets recover.

Sovereignty typically grants enough vessels at any given time to protect or terrify a neighborhood but not to fully *control* one—say, a dozen people; a hundred cats; or, a vast swarm of insects.

♠: enhance this phenomenon, gathering many, many more vessels—enough to, e.g., flood a settlement. At dusk or dawn, whichever comes later, they disperse and return to normal.

Long-ranged (though not *too* long-ranged).

Command [*requires Extraction or Sovereignty*]

You can borrow your vessels' senses, communicate with them, or direct their actions, *long-ranged*. Roll these actions normally, using the minimum of your relevant trait and your **Communication**. When you do this, you become spiritually present and can use powers where they are and be targeted by powers and some magic in turn. If you direct their actions in a way they dislike, PCs and major NPCs can use their own actions to oppose yours.

You may also skim lightly through the senses of all of your vessels in an area (*long-ranged*) for points of interest.

mark journal: direct many vessels at once (*long-ranged*).

Manipulation [*requires Extraction or Sovereignty*]

5+: when something becomes your vessel, impose an appropriate transformation and fate: they adopt a new shape or mode of being of your choice, and are banished to a place of your choosing, where they wander for up to a chapter or two before having an experience that you name. Outside of dramatic conflict, if the target would take damage to mitigate this effect, they should first negotiate with you briefly to see if there is a version of the effect that fits your general concept which they do *not* think is worth taking damage to stop. *Long-ranged*.

8+: use this power on an established vessel. *Long-ranged*.

Shape Fate [*requires Extraction or Sovereignty*]

8+: wish a fate onto a vessel—specifically, "I wish that they would meet this fate" or "I wish that they would struggle against this fate." Once you've wished a fate on a vessel, you can only ever wish that fate on them, not any other. Any character may spend an ace to snap the target free of that fate.

Once in each group storyline (pg. 231), when such a fate for an important character is definitively broken, transcended, or achieved, all players draw a component.

THE SEEKER

Physical Action 2 Professional Bard
 Awareness 3
 Communication 4
 Introspection 1
 Self-Care 0

someone who'll listen

Things were normal. You weren't really *handling them well*—a bit depressed and nihilistic; not that thrilled with yourself as a person; a little tendency to indulge yourself in alcohol, or in smoking, or in gambling, or in getting high—but *basically*, your life was *normal*. ... until you started dreaming of her.

Of the Mystery **Gorgon, which is named Monstrous**.

In your dreams you remember how a treasure-box was taken from you to a place of grass and tumbled columns, mountains of stone and silvered treasures, where the wind blew hard and the sky was blue.

There for a moment you almost saw the face of Gorgon:

... though never quite; no, never *quite*; for, of course, Gorgon's face brings death.

Suggested Emotional Draw: *augh*

Arcana

You often use letter or card arcana for *songwriting and performances*.

You can use letter arcana to *commune with spiritual forces*.

Stories

Your first story is **Gorgon**. You are haunted by the Mystery **Gorgon, which is Named Monstrous**. You don't know the background at first, so you think you're being harassed by a Greek serpent-tailed horror. Around the end of your first quest, though, you realize that Gorgon wasn't always a Mystery. She used to be something *else*, something amazing, before she was betrayed and sold to death. And what that tells *you*, you being you, is: she isn't haunting you as a random hostile act—either she's a punishment, a *curse*; or, she needs *help*; or, she's looking for a kindred spirit, and you're the one she found. Optionally, from that point on, other beings haunt your dreams as well.

Muddles include:

- * what was the payment death made for her?
- * am I really any good?
- * [a song, composed about Gorgon, or, your journey]

By default, this story is an **Otherworldly Arc** (pg. 182). The first quest is **Conversations in a Place of Ruins** (pg. 173); you'll want to have a copy of that quest near you when you play, and it will give you the additional muddle,

- * what was Gorgon, ere she was sold to death?

Because it's an otherworldly Arc, the first quest features mysterious dreams or visions haunting you;²⁶ when you fill in the progress grid, solve the muddle, and complete the quest, you'll *know what you need to do about them*, as per "Otherworldly 1" on pg. 182. You'll pick either a generic power or one of the **Worldwalker** powers below and move on to your second quest, **Cracks in the World**, about how that "what you need to do" thing's difficult; *scary*; how you don't *want* to, with the muddle:

- * in what way are I and Gorgon bound?

Later quests might give the muddles:

- * [a bad memory, and, dealing with it]
- * what's with that treasure-box in my dreams?
- * what can I do about this whole Gorgon situation?

When you've solved all of the Arc muddles, plus all of the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you'll move on to your second story, **the Pact**. Long ago, Gorgon was sacrificed—turned from something bright into a horror. In this story, you are trying to save her;²⁷ but that very effort is causing some key element of the world to crumble.

Your third story will be **Turning Away**. It becomes clear that "saving" Gorgon, or leaving her saved, will break the world. That the best thing you can do is not just to leave her broken but re-enact and re-affirm the original sacrifice. ... only, that isn't a thing someone entangled with these Arcs can do, *even if* it being "the best thing for the world" would make it "right."

Finally, your fourth story is **Changing the Game**: figuring out a new, *viable* relationship between Gorgon and the world.

You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 212!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the seeker, consider befriending a rat elder (per pg. 217)!

²⁶ there's *technically* another option on pg. 182 ... but you can safely ignore it.

²⁷ It's rarely clear from the first Arc that "saving" is what's called for, but the second Arc's content will put you on that road.

Seeker Powers

You have access to the *Worldwalker* and *Awakening* powersets. Other suggested powersets include *Primordial* (pg. 86) and *Kaiju* (pg. 72).

Standard picks are: **Spirit Walking**, **Second Self**, **Step Away**, and **Stumble In**.

WORLDWALKER

Characters learn *Worldwalker* powers via **Otherworldly Arcs** (pg. 182).

If you have *Worldwalker* powers, you may have:

- * a **Mood** you evoke, like “Order” or “Peace;”
- * a **Realm** you are connected to, somewhere far away; *and*
- * a **Shadow**—an “enemy” of that realm, who is (unbenownst to you?) deeply tied to you, or even some form of alternative self.

By default, the Seeker’s **Mood** is “being made monstrous,” their **Realm** is Gorgon’s Reach, and their **Shadow** is Gorgon herself.

Break the Boundaries

5+: improve your chances of unlocking or opening something, discovering a passage, path or gate, or using an unusual mode of travel by 3,000x. (This may allow a roll, improve a roll, waive a roll, or speed up a process.)

Catalytic

5+: your *normal action* (pg. 69) plants a seed of your Mood in a target’s heart. It remains until they use an *arcanum* to remove it, or, use an *arcanum* for something else that their player can plausibly claim would *also* remove that seed.

5+: encourage such a seed to grow. *Long-ranged*.

Dualism

You are now also playing your Shadow. The character sheets begin the same, but when earning new powers/skills, you can choose different ones for them than for you.

Into the Mittelmarches

J+: summon your Realm’s edges into the world around you.

arcanum: learn to summon a particular part of your Realm, or a different Realm you know.

Arrive in Force [*requires Into the Mittelmarches*]

♠: sacrifice 1 HP. Until a circumstance you name, your Realm becomes physically contiguous or coterminous with the local area. You dictate the structure of the overlap. Until the named circumstance dispels the effect, you cannot recover the HP.

arcanum: you may create and stabilize such an overlap without an HP sacrifice. It no longer has a specific ending condition, but lasts a roughly targeted length of time (days, weeks, months) or “indefinitely, perhaps forever.” Further, instead of bringing the Realm itself, you *may* invent a suitable variation—e.g., if your Realm’s the sky, creating a *new sky* for an underground land.

Estrange [*requires Into the Mittelmarches*]

When invoking **Into the Mittelmarches**, you may also transform something (or a handful of small things, or a small area) into a form that fits your Realm. It or they revert after a few chapters spent *out* of your Realm, or, with an *arcanum*.

Shape the Realm

J+: change the nature of your realm, as a wish with up to 5% of the Realm’s power backing it.

Spirit Walking

5+: Manifest a ghost/shadow of yourself anywhere you’re not. This ghost has +2 CV and a –2 penalty to Physical Action and Awareness checks that are not Mood rolls. *Long-ranged*.

Strange, Foreign Treasures

8+: enchant something you’ve encountered in your Realm, removing any major obstacles to it existing and working *outside* your Realm. Optionally, transport it from the Realm to where you are; it arrives next chapter. When your current story ends, the effects fade and transported things return.

♦, *buy twice*: enchant lots of things, or a really big thing.

arcanum, buy twice: learn to use this power on a category of things from a strange place that is not your realm.

Arguably long-ranged.

A World of Endless Wonders

[*requires Strange, Foreign Treasures*]

♦: wish that your Realm had something to help with a friend’s problems, or, a role you want them to fill, then enchant and summon it as per **Strange, Foreign Treasures**.

♦, *buy twice*: as above, but you can wish that you had something to help you achieve basically *anything*, instead.

Arguably long-ranged.

Stumble In

8+: show up anywhere not heavily monitored or intrinsically warded. This can include, e.g., unmonitored closets in heavily monitored bases.

Long-ranged.

AWAKENING

Characters learn *Awakening* powers via **Mystic Arcs** (pg. 195).

Absorption

8+: de-manifest something, later releasing it whenever you like. Living things must consent or be defeated, and slowly die while de-manifested. You can store up to five things at once.

Blessings

arcanum: develop a small, fun power you can give out as a “blessing.” You may stock up to five such powers, and give out as many copies of each as you like. These are normally single-use. Some are small scene, chapter, or story-length bonuses. One copy of a blessing costs a **5+**, **8+**, or **J+** card, usually paid by the customer, to acquire.

buy twice: you may stock up to eight such powers, and waive their cost once per session.

For examples, see pg. 123, 128, and 142.

Deepen the Mystery

Pick or design a far roofs neighborhood that fits your character.

5+: Give a well-defined space of up to 2 acres around you (**8+**: 200 acres, **J+**: 2000 acres) the feel/tone of that neighborhood until you mark the adventure journal or cancel the power.

Exile [*requires Deepen the Mystery*]

card: cast someone out of the area you can reach or of an active **Step Away** or **Deepen the Mystery**.

5+: Create the *opposite* feel to your **Deepen the Mystery** neighborhood in a well-defined space up to 2 acres (**8+**: 200 acres) around you.

Established History

J+: while not in any active scene, change your backstory. Give a 1-2 sentence description of how.

Ace: apply this change to everyone using your character sheet (see **Conversion**, below).

Arguably long-ranged.

Exfiltrate

◆: turn something real into a specific kind of concept or representation (e.g., hopes, dreams, paintings). Sentient targets have a context to experience, which is not torturous, and can escape using an *arcanum*, redrawing its components afterwards.

Materialize

J+: turn an instance of a specific kind of concept or representation (e.g., hopes, paintings, dreams, intrusive thoughts, stories) into a physical thing. This specifically always manifests a *thing*, not, e.g., an event or fact. It can be detailed, in motion, or alive.

Old Memories

5+: recover a power or skill this character used to have, until the end of the next chapter. Useful for amnesiacs, the reincarnated, and users of **Established History** and **Conversion**.

Second Self

You are not really here. Your “true” self exists somewhere else, in a different kind of reality, with a separate 5 HP that are difficult (but not impossible) to touch from the world. It can use limitless-range powers to affect or observe the world, but it cannot enter the world or bring others out of it. Narrative methods like solving muddles may circumvent that limitation or provide other cross-world benefits. *Arguably long-ranged.*

Conversion [*requires Second Self*]

You may enlighten NPCs to the “true reality” of your second self. This comes with the ability to attack others’ minds, normally with **Communication**, but a psychic battle is not required—an *arcanum* or a *lot* of persuasion can also work. These are also the methods to reverse the effect. Once an NPC is enlightened, you play them, using your character sheet. You may not convert a PC, but may psychically attack them.

Step Away [*requires Second Self*]

minutes: cease to exist, optionally replacing yourself with a stand-in object/NPC; or, return from having done so. Your **Second Self** remains aware of the area around where you vanished or around your replacement, at a –2 to Awareness.

buy twice: you may manifest yourself as a spiritual presence where you vanished or where your replacement is. This presence cannot be observed directly. It receives +2 to defensive rolls and cards and –2 to quick or offensive rolls and cards.

Unworldly

Gain a +2 bonus to catching people’s attention. You can survive indefinitely on minimal or no food, water, sleep, or air.

THE SHIELDBEARER

Physical Action 1 Professional Caretaker

Awareness 4

Communication 2

Introspection 0

Self-Care 3

someone who's there when you need them

You're not adventuring for yourself. You *used* to be the kind of person who'd adventure for yourself. A hero, a tyrant, a tumult in the world. Maybe when you were younger. Maybe in another life.

Now, though?

You're just tagging along out of loyalty to one of the other PCs.

Suggested Emotional Draw: trust

Arcana

You often use letter or card arcana for *your art, which is meaningful but not professional*.

Sometimes you use card arcana for *crafts* or letter arcana to *figure things out*.

Stories

Your first story is **Learning a Language**. You're studying the language of the *girtablilu* (a species of scorpion-people who guard the entrance to Kumugi, the land of darkness).²⁸ At the start of the Arc, you're learning it from an old, purple, dog-eared AP language text you found; later in the Arc, you might compose an epic poem therein.

Muddles include:

- * learning the language
- * defining the nature and story of [your Garden, or, if you didn't take a Gardener power, your home]
- * ... what *is* Kumugi, anyway?

By default, this story is a **Shepherd** Arc, a peaceful story of appreciating people and nourishing the strength of your treasures or places of power. The first quest is **In Their Shadow** (pg. 175); you'll want to have a copy of that quest near you when you play, and it will give you the additional muddle,

- * what do I need to do to support my important people?

Because it's a peaceful "shepherd" Arc, the first quest is just the story of your ordinary life—of the everyday work, stresses, and pleasures that form the fabric of your days. When you fill in the progress grid, solve the muddle, and complete the quest, that story is interrupted: as per "Shepherd 1," on pg. 190, a new responsibility falls on you out of nowhere. You'll get to choose a generic power or one of the **Gardener** powers, below, and move on to the next quest, **This Might Be Trouble**. In this quest, you'll pick up a sidekick (and new responsibility) in the form of an animal kit—some monster from the Far Roofs that you and the GM will design, spawn of a Mystery but not a Mystery itself, that decides that you are going to take care of it. ... eventually, though, it'll grow to be much, *much* bigger than you. This comes with the muddle,

- * what does this animal kit need from me?

Later quests might give the muddles:

- * what are the memories that nag at me asking me to do?
- * what am I called to do, upon the Farthest Roofs?
- * [the epic poem that you're planning to compose]

When you've solved all of the Arc muddles, plus all of the quest muddles for the quests you've undertaken, you'll move on to your second story, **Correspondence with a Falling Star**. You exchange letters with a star that is due to fall soon. (It used to live in the kingdom of the sky, which is now AWOL, but it was buzzing the moon when that happened.) You will also get to meet the Mystery **White Snake Spirit**, which wishes to shed its tail, "make itself small," and become an ordinary rat (or human). It has chosen you as its basis for study.

Your third story will be **Correspondence with a Scorpion-Person**. You exchange letters with a *girtablilu* prince, princess, or prinxe who envies you your ability to wander the wider world, and accidentally steal the amulet of King Death.

Finally, your fourth story will be **Knitting**. You work on sweaters for the PCs for the coming winter, or some similar artistic task.

You can learn the details of all these stories on pg. 213!

If you don't want to do these stories, but still want to be the shieldbearer, consider the "Icon" stories on pg. 219!

²⁸ it's a legitimate mythical reference, but I'm assuming the players will improv it if it really matters.

Shieldbearer Powers

You have access to the *Gardener* and *Holy* powersets. Other suggested powersets include *Awakening* (pg. 95) and *Impresario* (pg. 75).

Standard picks are: **Guide**, **the Auctoritas Magister**, **Tireless**, and **Inspire**.

GARDENER

You learn *Gardener* powers via **Shepherd** Arcs (pg. 190).

If you have *Gardener* powers, you may have:

- * one or more “gardens” (starting with one that comes free the first time you buy a power your gardens are relevant for)—places, up to the size of a city borough or a far roofs neighborhood, that are dear to your heart.

By default, the Shieldbearer’s garden is a surprisingly large, maze-like, and cozy family home and grounds, but it could be a library, university, postal route, far roofs neighborhood (pg. 36), or even a large mundane section of city.

Garden

You have an extra garden. [You may take this more than once.]

The Great Magic

arcnum: change the metaphysical nature of a garden, creating a new element of its motifs or metaphysical laws or changing/removing an existing element. If appropriate, this can be combined with solving a muddle, using the same *arcnum* for both.

Guide

5+: shape a living creature from your gardens that can instruct, guide, or lead others through the garden, or instruct them in some principle or rule.

card, in a garden: summon/wake one or more existing guides. *Long-ranged*.

Guardian *[requires Guide]*

8+: embed a principle or thought into something you’re crafting out of a garden, creating a minion with 6 cv and a professional or level 1 magical/Superior Skill.

J+: give the minion a further +1 cv and **Skilled**.

♣, *buy twice*: give the minion +2 cv and **Skilled** (×2) instead.

card, in a garden: summon 1+ existing guardians. *Long-ranged*.

Empower *[requires Guardian]*

J+: a guide or guardian shows a vast, situation-altering power. This is a *shapeless deus ex machina*: the GM decides what happens, but it never fails to help.

Symbiote *[requires Guide]*

♣: wish that your gardens had something to help someone with a particular problem; the wish allows you to find or create such a creature therein. It always has a level 2 magical or superior skill for fitting into their life.

arcnum: do the same to help a community.

Toxic

You exude a supernatural poison, and have a +2 on rolls and card values to administer it. The poison explicitly need not be mundane: strange mutagens, poisons that grant flight, and spiritually overwhelming auras are all legitimate.

The World, Like Clay

You can mold the things of your gardens as if they were malleable clay. Function will tend to follow form—e.g., if you give a mailbox a pair of eyes, it will likely come to life. Free-willed creatures of your gardens can cut ties to resist.

8+: mold up to a few hundred acres of your gardens in one grand ritual action, e.g., dancing or drawing architectural plans.

HOLY

You learn *Holy* powers via **Storyteller** Arcs (pg. 184).

Appear

5+: transport yourself to someone you have a strong connection to, replacing something easily mistaken for you. At the end of the scene, vanish, leaving such a thing behind. *Long-ranged*.

8+: cancel **Appear** retroactively any time during the scene you used it in, negating the substantive effects of your presence on others and you (including damage). You were never there.

The Curtains Rise *[requires Appear]*

Choose 1-2 thematic circumstances when taking this power, like “I appear as you fall into despair.”

♥: a wish arranges that circumstance “soon” for a chosen target you have a strong connection to, then invokes **Appear** for free. *Long-ranged*.

The Auctoritas Magister

card: others' powers do -1 damage to you until the scene ends.

♠: ignore the past minute's effect powers have had upon the world, e.g., to drive on a destroyed road. Your ability to do this lasts the scene.

♠: ignore a wish or *geas*' effects until your current story ends.

Divine Warrant

You have metaphysical license to do something normally wrong or foolish. This license affects how rare license-sensitive magic and spiritual effects view you and may affect the GM/game text's language. Once per session, when you indulge in that thing, and make a **LOSING YOURSELF** roll, you can critically succeed—or, when someone else does so, force/allow them to critically fail—without a roll. *Long-ranged.*

Drawn to Certain Bait

See pg. 116.

Fade

5+, *minutes* or 8+, *instant*: slip away to the closest patch of the Outside, giving the appearance that something left behind was "mistaken" for you. *Long-ranged.*

Inspire

mark action, optional ♥: inspire hope and purpose. If the target lacked hope and purpose because of substantive external factors, it becomes possible (if not necessarily easy) to circumvent them. Use a ♥ to affect a small group.

Music of the Spheres

J+: before you roll, add "1 5 5" to a *normal action's* (pg. 69) result. The action's performance is intrinsically aesthetic.

Obsession

5+: grants your *normal action* (pg. 69) the ability to obsess, entrance, or otherwise inflict a profound emotional effect on a selection of desired witnesses. Their players choose the details unless this power defeats them.

buy twice: cards played with **Obsession** have +2 effective value.

Open the Vault

5+: your *normal action* (pg. 69) evokes, for a targeted witness, a flashback fitting a mood you name. Their player normally describes the flashback ooc and you get the gist, but they can avoid revealing anything with a successful **Self-Care** roll.

♥: your *normal action* (pg. 69) evokes a flashback from an entire crowd.

Ritual

You may learn "rituals" to delve into the psyche, afflict others with evocative (un)pleasant experiences, interact with inaccessible people (e.g., dead, or fictional), or travel to distant places, in specific ways. You start with one such ritual.

♣: use a ritual. *Long-ranged.*

arcnum: create and learn a new ritual. Your three most recently-created rituals are strongest.

Tireless

You may add 1d10 to the dice roll for any non-poetic action, but lose this power for the rest of the session if you critically fail.

Transfix

8+: grants a +2 bonus to your slow *normal action* (pg. 69), and observers (who do not counterattack/block) cannot pay attention to anything else.

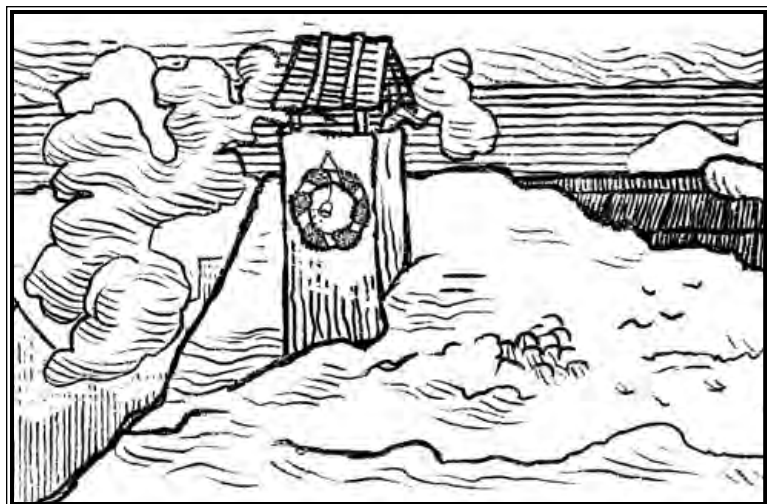
Transition

♥: narrate an experience that others perceive as happening, ending in a forced scene break. No lasting damage is done. Play picks up again a few minutes or hours after the power was used, with the targets' lives largely unchanged. Within those constraints, the GM/group may choose to play forward as if any given experience was real, illusory, or something in between.

Well-Lit

You may declare yourself to be dramatically lit, to the maximum plausible extent.

card: ignore plausibility and declare the desired lighting into existence.



Custom Characters

To build your own character,

- * order your character's five Traits (Awareness, Communication, Introspection, Physical Action, and Self-Care) from strongest to weakest.
- * give them ratings as follows:
 - the strongest Trait is rated 4;
 - the next strongest, 3;
 - the third strongest 2;
 - the fourth strongest 1,
 - and the weakest 0.
- * choose a skill—a professional skill or a 1-point magical/superior skill.
- * choose one to four powersets that your character has access to, *and*
- * choose as many powers as your game allows—normally 4, but it could be more!

If this is everybody's first time playing, you might want to borrow a story from an unused character ... that is, just use, e.g., the Rogue's stories, or at least the Rogue's first story, even though you're not the Rogue. If you or someone who can help you is confident, though, you can create your own story—muddles, quests, and all—from scratch; or, play through one of the bonus stories involving your relationship with one of the rats, as per pg. 216.

Modifying an Existing Character

If you want to rebuild an existing character a little, you can change the default power picks or starting skill—swapping in a new magical skill, in particular, or making a character an animal or other entity with a superior skill, can change a character dramatically!

You can even shuffle their core Traits around according to the design pattern to the left.

If you're interested in doing your character's quests in a different order, so you can pick up different powers, see pg. 155.

If you're interested in a side quest, or want to invent your own quests, also see pg. 155!

If you don't want to do the provided stories, but still want to be a particular character, each character writeup points you to an alternative option shortly before the power picks.

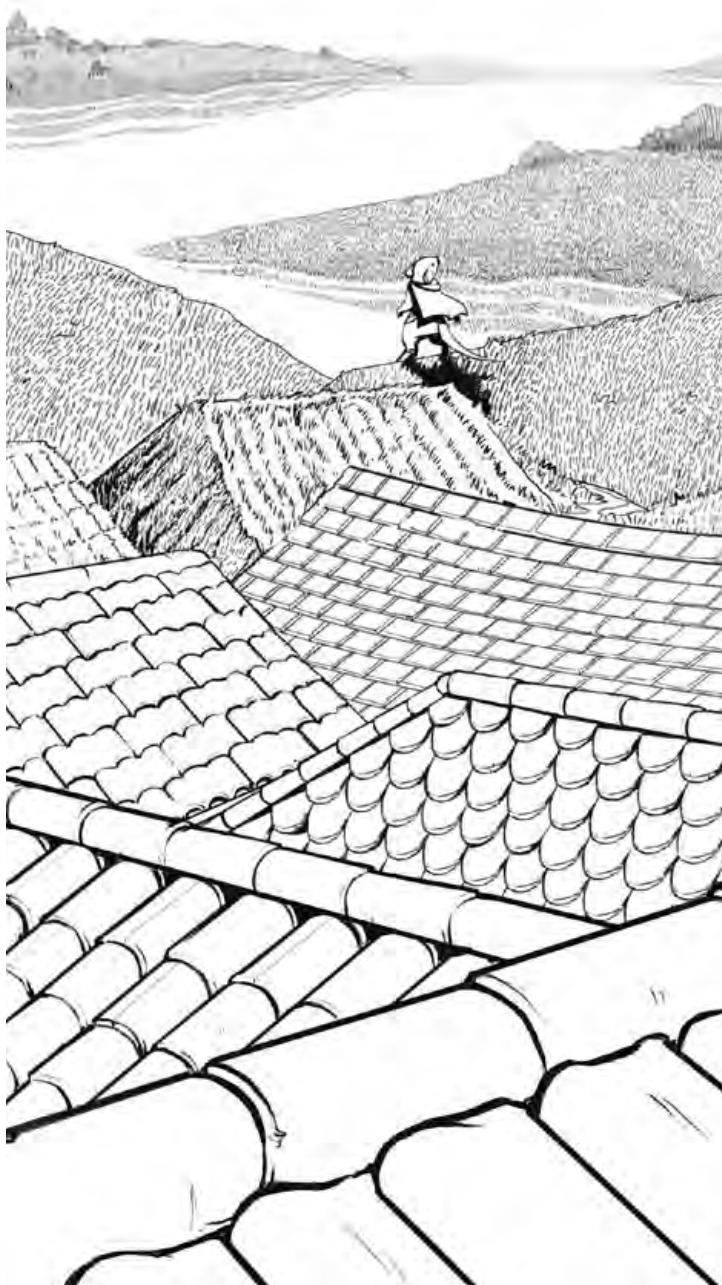
You can learn more about quests on pg. 66.

You can learn more about stories in general on pg. 178.



Rats you might Meet

Provided herein are a selection of traditional rat archetypes.²⁹



by Elizabeth Sherry

You'll want to build a mischief with at least one or two rats; traditionally, in a 2-5 player game, what you'll do is replace each missing PC with an appropriate rat. These won't necessarily be living out the relevant archetype—

Like, just because a rat replaces **the Rogue** doesn't mean they have to be a necromancer on the rogue's storylines—

But it *does* mean that they're a good thematic replacement, and that if there is an NPC rat who walks that storyline, it'll probably be that kind of rat.

Rat naming is somewhat eclectic; they're fond of legends, anime, media, and sounds that strike their fancy. Their "serious" names tend to have a somewhat jumbled Russian and Japanese influence, representing the corresponding waves of human immigration into Fortitude, but only the aristocratic families are reliably serious in their naming, and even then their scions' use-names may break form.

Icons

If you don't have **the Cintamani-Bearer**, then you might want an "icon"-type rat in your mischief. This rat is special in some way—sacred or important, more in others' eyes than their own. Like, maybe they carry some holy power inside them, or there's a prophecy that they'll save the world one day, or they're a kit of the Rat King himself:

They're *chosen*.

Icons are usually pure, virtuous, and sweet. They are also usually self-conscious and kind of awkward and tentative about everything when you meet them—overwhelmed by their awareness of a destiny that was probably just kind of *dropped* on them sometime in their youth.

Suggested Names: Floressa Florentina du Toit, Jazz, Madoka Ketterley, Manami Merlin, Meriadoc Stevens, Opportunity Jones, Owlbait, Clickbait Solovyov(a), Theoretical Czerny

Suggested Appearance: an ordinary-looking rat, maybe with some interesting-looking identifying feature, such as bleached fur or a starburst where a Mystery touched them, or an exceptionally long tail, or just atypical levels of cleanliness and shine.

Activities: You might see them—

- * methodically cleaning their fur and tail;
- * diligently reading or studying, particularly things they aren't very good at —
 - squinting at difficult passages in a Book of Names,
 - losing a practice swordfight over and over again,
 - trying to embroider and failing, in part due to not having thumbs;

²⁹ From classical rat opera, to be precise.

- * encouraging people who are having trouble; *or*
- * thinking hard about where to go or what to do

Default Traits: Physical Action 1, Awareness 4, Communication 3, Introspection 2, Self-Care 0.

Skills: They have *awkward charm* or *formal rat decorum*. They often know a bit about *the history of the rats or the Mysteries*. For the GM's convenience, this can all be bundled up into "Professional Icon." They may also have some special talent represented by *Cheat* or *Kaiju* powers or a magical skill (pg. 71, 72).

Destiny: Sometimes their ultimate fate is horrific. The real world doesn't always follow predictions and tropes and the will of holy powers, and that tends to hit you harder when you were expecting it *would*. Most of the time, though, the ultimate fate of an icon is to live, become confident, and grow into their power. In a year or two, you'll hardly recognize them—they'll be graceful, dignified, happy, confident, and skilled!

Example Icons

MOLLY AUGUSTINE is a polite young child from the Augustine shrine family, destined by familial tradition to help rats cleanse away the influence of the Mysteries and the Outside.

ISABELLA KHOURY drowned, but the sea returned her; she knows she shall be called to it again, and the roaring of the surf still haunts her dreams.

ICHABOD CZERNY is the chosen of a mythic tree he met in dreams. He is a hollow container that will one day hold a descending god.

Grandmothers/Old Soldiers

If you don't have **the Old-Timer**, then you might want an "old soldier" or "grandmother"-type rat in your mischief, like *Ol' Roundabout* or *Inessa Trallens*. This rat's old as nails and has shown the Mysteries a thing or two in their time. Sometimes a little forgetful, sometimes a little weak, but when it comes to cunning, survival, and overcoming despair and helplessness, they're the top of the line!

Suggested Names: Arina Teague, Donat Dimitrios, Finbar, Inessa Trallens, Ol' Graytail, Ol' Roundabout, Valery, Zekiya Augustine

Suggested Appearance: a multicolored rat who was pretty big in their prime, though possibly a bit frailer now.

Activities: You might see them—

- * studying the situation with bright, sharp eyes;

- * playing around with interesting things encountered on a recent journey;
- * hobbling off to investigate something; *or*
- * weaving together a little nest to rest in with techniques borrowed from knitters or the birds.

Default Traits: Physical Action 3, Awareness 0, Communication 1, Introspection 4, Self-Care 2.

Skills: They're *tenacious survivors*. They may know how to *spot your weaknesses*. They're generally pretty good at *logistics, planning, cleaning, packing, and remembering useful trivia about the world*. For the GM's convenience, this can all be bundled up into "Professional Elder." They may also have some special talent represented by *Allegory* or *Primordial* powers (pg. 85, 86) or a magical skill.

Destiny: Their ultimate fate? They barely have one! A grandmother rat will probably outlive the rest of you, but if she doesn't, it's because one day she'll look around, laugh to herself, say, "Well, that's quite enough of that! Have fun, you all," and then fall over dead.

Example Elders

SASCHA WILSON is a harmless old rat who likes community organizing and eating weird things.

ZUNE's too tired to keep going like he did in his youth, but he loves watching others keep at it! He's known for laughing so hard he falls off of things.

MARIN MADELINE HOLMES loves knitting, portmanteaus, and name-dropping historical figures she *can't* have actually met.

TWILIGHT SPARROVICH, a retired agent of the Rat King's secret service, spends their days at the family store.

Reckless Prinxes

If you don't have **the Rogue**, then you might want a "reckless prinxe"-type rat in your mischief. This rat is dashing, athletic, incredibly competent and daring, and most likely styles themselves as a Prince/Princess/Prinxe or aristocrat of some sort. This may be because they're legitimately related to the Rat King or it may be because they're good enough that nobody disputes them.

Suggested Names: Alexandru Prestimian, Clementius Kysely, Dragomir Kysely, Eleanor du Lac, Eos Karolina, Octavia Kysely

Suggested Appearance: a lean, dark-colored rat of slightly over average size.

Activities: You might see them—

- * spinning their cloak around them dramatically before departing;
- * scurrying up to a high place to look about eagerly for trouble;
- * racing into battle;
- * making sure you're all right after you've woken up after passing out;
- * battling an absurdly oversized or numerous foe;
- * drinking, laughing, and telling mad stories; *or*
- * romancing and flattering a suitable rat.

Default Traits: Physical Action 4, Awareness 3, Communication 1, Introspection 2, Self-Care 0.

Skills: They're usually good at *athletics* and *heroics*. They may also have some familiarity with carousing and lore. For the GM's convenience, this can all be bundled up into "Professional Reckless Prinxe." They may also have some special talent represented by *Wounded Angel* or *Creature of Delirium* powers or a magical skill (pg. 91, 92).

Destiny: Their fate is generally to commit some grievous moral or practical error, suffer for it, and either redeem themselves and become even more awesome or (possibly quite justly) die.

Example Prinxes

ASHLEY NEVENS, scion to a collateral royal line, suffers Malambruno's curse. It keeps him awake, encourages strange fixations and flights of fancy, and will one day destroy him. ... still; until then, he does his best.

SAVHALA CORBIN took up the demon sword and heroic legacy of an ancient, dubiously historical rat hero. They think you'd make a great sidekick!

PRINCE DRAGOMIR KYSELY died and got drafted into some kind of ghost rat army on "the other side of the roofs" before eventually getting kicked out and back to life for insubordination. He still gets together now and then to have a drink with his dead buddies. He's known for showing up drunk and trying to drag you into some mess or other. His alleged romantic history with Typhon ended badly.

PRINCESS "VALLEY" KIMURA, celebrity fugitive, stole a Mystery from the Rat King's vault and sealed it into her heart in the hopes of becoming the greatest swordswoman ever. She'll sometimes ask you to hide her and tell other rats she's not there, often while eating your food.

Navigator-rats

If you don't have **the Navigator**, then you might want an *actual* "navigator"-type rat in your mischief. This rat's a cheerful, sensible type with a good sense of direction, good life and organizational skills, and a comprehensive knowledge of how the world's laid out—not just your town and the rat burrows, but also the Far Rooftops, Fortitude, the Outside, the waterways, and foreign worlds. Or at least some of those things! They like to make the world more orderly.

Suggested Names: Alcyone Mayu, Božidar Farsky, Kazuya Guttersea, Palpatine Jones, Solo, Svetlana Seesfar, Verica Starfall

Suggested Appearance: a healthy brown or two-colored rat of moderate size and strength.

Activities: You might see them—

- * taking care of small, practical things like refilling water bottles;
- * surveying terrain from a high vantage;



- * helping the weak or unskilled;
- * playing goofily with the other rats;
- * drawing maps in the dirt or on paper and humming to themselves; *or*
- * pretending, not very seriously, to be a big, important rat.

Default Traits: Physical Action 2, Awareness 3, Communication 1, Introspection 0, Self-Care 4.

Skills: They're good at *navigation* and *area knowledge*. They often know a bit about *keeping records*. For the GM's convenience, this can all be bundled up into "Professional Navigator." If they have powers, they most likely draw them from *Creature of Fable* and *Prophet* (pg. 82). They're often odd ducks, with unusual professional and even superior/magical skills that you might not expect!

Destiny: the Navigator will probably eventually retire and make maps for travelers or write adventure books for rat kits.

Example Navigators

RENATA KOVAC is in love with the roofs and their wonders. She wants to do great deeds and become famous so that she can publish the mythologized version of her adventures as a multi-volume saga every rat kit will read!

PEREGRINE VOLKOV bet a friend once he could kiss seven Mysteries. He's embarrassed about this childhood folly now, and *mostly* just tagging along to make things easier for everyone else ... but, also, can't exactly *retire* while the bet is still on!

SOAP-ON-A-ROPE SOLOVYEV, named after the famous Usurpers' Era highwayrat, is a travel writer and naturalist working for the Little Nymh Dispatch. They're fond of finger guns, their newsboy cap, and "getting the story."

Outcasts

If you don't have **the Magician**, then you might want an "outcast"-type rat in your mischief. This rat doesn't fit in with rat culture. Maybe they like cats. Maybe they're not heroic. Maybe they're just too brainy! Most likely they did something wrong, something terrible, something with a great excuse (they were really young, or under a Mystery's influence) but which the rest of the rats can't forgive them for, or which they have trouble forgiving themselves for. That said, they'll still get involved in adventures if they have reason to.

Suggested Names: Exile, Keres Petrova, Lostheart, Mallory Kent, Mikhael Mordred, Narcissa Natase, Pyrrhos Miaden, Ryuunosuke Maksimilian Honda

Suggested Appearance: in classical rat opera, outcasts are either small, wiry and weak types or huge, hulking brute-rats. I suspect most of them look more or less normal, though, just a little bit defensive and shy? Outcasts are a bit more likely than most rats to have an unnatural fur color—polar-bear white, midnight black, or a strange and unnatural color like hot pink, red and orange, or vibrant aquatic blue-green. The first is hard to fake—rats aren't good with bleach—but the other colors might be dye.³⁰

Activities: You might see them—

- * glaring at you when you're not looking;
- * mending old clothes;
- * puzzling over a handful of scribbled notes;
- * listening, as if to something far away;
- * stalking uneasily around the edges of a runner's nest;
- * staring into a fire;
- * arguing with someone;
- * grieving; *or*
- * railing about the iniquity of humans, rats, or people in general.

Default Traits: Physical Action 2, Awareness 4, Communication 3, Introspection 0, Self-Care 1.

Skills: They're usually good at *an eccentric or unique specialty*. They tend to have *extremely sharp senses*. They may also be good at *dirty fighting* or *perseverance*. For the GM's convenience, this can all be bundled up into "Professional Outcast." They may also have some special talent represented by *Indomitable* or *Memetic* powers or a magical skill (pg. 79, 80).

Destiny: If an outcast survives the early part of the adventure where you meet, they'll probably live long enough to find their place in the world and a few friends, although they'll always feel alienated and separate. (Rat traditional theater and fiction also allows outcasts the "becomes completely normal" and "takes over the Rat Kingdom, leading to enormous misery" options, but those are somewhat less likely in the "real world" of the game.)

³⁰ According to the 1950 Fortitude census, approximately 1 in 40 Fortitude rats are polar-bear white, 1 in 80 midnight black, and another 1 in 80 or so have "strange and unnatural colors." If an unusual color is natural, it usually means that a Mystery intentionally or inadvertently marked the rat before their birth.

Example Outcasts

JEZDIMIR IMBROOK slew seven under the influence of a curse gone wrong. The rat king's oracle absolved them, but they can't forgive themselves.

ANYA TERESHKO is a mock-rat—you know, one of those “rats” that coalesce from dust and lint and the like. It's possible this is just a popular rat metaphor for cutting ties with family but if so it'll be a long time before they admit as much to the PCs.

AIDAN “CAT” BURLOUGH survived, as few others did, when the Mystery Qiongqi burned down their burrow. Sometimes survivors like that are lauded and cherished. Aidan isn't. They're just *off* enough that it's put them under a nameless cloud of suspicion instead.

ZHENYA SCARLING is bitter and weird and just doesn't fit in.

Bards

If you don't have **the Seeker**, then you might want a “bard”-type rat in your mischief. This rat is an artistic and sensitive soul. Mysteries have haunted them from their childhood—they've felt this persistent spiritual openness to them. They've usually obsessively studied everything about the Mysteries and have a good sense of what's out there and what's known.

Suggested Names: Branamir Wednesday, Dole, Ducks, Lesya Parrino, Marin Vasilyev, Ružica Kokkyo, Sachiko Weekes, Vasya Vasil Septimian

Suggested Appearance: a small and single-colored rat.

Activities: You might see them—

- * curling up in small places when they're nervous;
- * staring raptly at something they think is beautiful;
- * communing silently with spiritual forces; *or*
- * looking you straight in the eye as they tell you truths they think are worth living or dying for.

Default Traits: Physical Action 1, Awareness 3, Communication 4, Introspection 0, Self-Care 2.

Skills: Bards are good at *storytelling*. They often know a great deal about *adventuring and the Mysteries*. In short, they have the skill, “Professional Bard.” They may also have some special talent represented by *Worldwalker* or *Awakening* powers or a magical skill (pg. 94, 95).

Destiny: Their ultimate fate is to die or transcend somewhere on the Far Roofs.

Example Bards

THEODORA KUZNETSOVA is a wanderer, harpist, and scholar who lost her early memories to the shadow of a Mystery. It speaks to her sometimes still in her dreams.

WAYLAND PETRENKO is the Rat King's bard; his stories and fantasies alter the nature of reality. He studied for a time under King Death before absconding to reality with the secrets of agriculture, architecture, and verse.

CAM KRISKA lost half their heart to a Mystery that was like the fog, like shadows, like the shifting earth. They're still very young, but home can't fill the hole in who they are, so they wander, instead. Their heart, they say, is a gate ... but they don't know what that means.

NOVOCAINE WELLESLEY, named in hopes that they could heal the pain of the world, plans to do just that. They have sworn the bodhisattva oath.

Shieldbearer Rats

If you don't have **the Shieldbearer**, then you might want a couple of “shieldbearer”-type rat in your mischief. These rats are usually friends or loyal followers to one of the other rats, but sometimes they're more like would-be hero-rats who just kind of *accumulate* over the early part of a story because they want in on all this! In either case, they tend to be one-note characters, with a quirk and a disposition and an event or two that defined their lives—ultimately, not rats driving the story, but rats who are there to help, support, defend, or be defended by the rest.

Suggested Names: Akane, Beniamin, Big Ivan, Chihiro, Constanta, Kaeda, Little Ivan, Marta, Kaito, Vasko, Violeta, Yuudai

Suggested Appearance: an assortment of rats in various sizes and colors but defaulting to gray or brown and a little goofy. If there are two, maybe a big one and a small one? If there are three, the third could be gritty and silent? If there are more than that, they'll probably all be a generic band of merry rats.

Activities: You might see them—

- * standing guard;
- * clustering around to see what happened after some big event;
- * valiantly defending against some nasty foe;
- * scouting;
- * cooking a meal; *or*
- * sitting around a fire listening to the stories of the rats.

Default Traits: Physical Action 3, Awareness 2, Communication 0, Introspection 4, Self-Care 1.

Skills: They're generally *alert*, with basic *domestic* and *combat* ability. They're also good at filling in gaps in the group's skill set and, often, at laughing at themselves and the world. For the GM's convenience, this can all be bundled up into "Professional Shieldbearer." They may also have some special talent represented by *Gardener* or *Holy* powers or a magical skill (pg. 97).

Destiny: Shieldbearers are already living their fate—as shieldbearers to someone else—and that's unlikely to change. Sometimes it does, of course, when fate takes an interest in them, but usually nothing in particular happens to them that doesn't happen to the group as a whole. All else being equal, they're probably also a little more fated than other rats to die or meet terrible but generic fates.

Example Shieldbearers

RUDOLPH CLEVELAND enjoys dramatic overreactions and talking himself up ... but he's mostly just pretty basic.

SOFIA UBYIVOVK is a dreamer, always thinking of a strange land she dreamt.

DENIS AND ROMAN TULLIAN are siblings hoping to get into the famous Caconym Expeditionary Company.

MIA FALLOW is brash, daring, and encouraging.

YUI VIRAHVIST is a socially awkward scout.

ARTYOM NANASHI dies for three days every dark of the moon ... but has always, thus far, returned. They are formally in the service of the crown but rarely have specific duties.

SASHA LEBDEVA is a bookworm who reads or studies most of the time.

VASYA SATO dreams of being a great chef. They're ... not.

TARA WAVELING is in a bit over their head.

Wardens

If you don't have **the Hero of Fate**, then you might want a "warden"-type rat in your mischief, like *Tristan Connall* or *Nausicaa Wright*. This rat is a solemn wayfarer and guardian who walks the far roofs to protect the world below from the threats above. They're tenacious and heroic and have excellent practical skills but they're usually just a little bit overwhelmed by what they're facing—they don't feel good enough, brave enough, strong enough for what they've got to face. They have a bleak fatalism, which is fitting, because ultimately most of them die saving others from awful fates.

Suggested Names: Artur, Angharad Jenkins, Chryseis Olympia, Felicitas Yule, Ianthe Ivanova, Maksim Kyrian Morgan, Nausicaa Wright, Theseus Kent, Tristan Connall

Suggested Appearance: a lean, delicate-looking rat with light or gray fur.

Activities: You might see them—

- * standing at the edge of a roof and smelling the air;
- * brooding;
- * preparing medicine;
- * quietly talking or communing with some local contact or feature;
- * rubbing ointment on their gear to waterproof it;
- * sharpening or cleaning their weapons; *or*
- * teasing, arguing, or laughing with old friends.

Default Traits: Physical Action 4, Awareness 3, Communication 0, Introspection 2, Self-Care 1.

Skills: They're generally best at *wilderness survival*, but tend to be good at a little bit of everything. For the GM's convenience, this can all be bundled up into "Professional Warden." They may also have some special talent represented by *Become Somebody* or *Impresario* powers or a magical skill (pg. 75).

Destiny: As noted, most of the wardens die saving others from awful fates. A few eventually realize that they've actually faced the problems they knew about and beaten the threats they knew about and survived and, somewhat confused by this, return to the burrows to become pillars of the community.

Example Wardens

TULLIFAR GREY is a classic warden: roof-wise and weary, alienated and heroic, overwhelmed by the burdens of the world. They drink too much coffee, right down to the grounds. They look and act healthy and young but if you get to know them you'll find out that they're like *thirty*. They might have witnessed the Usurpers' Era themselves!

ABSINTHE YAMADA is a lost royal from an alternate timeline. To avoid making waves, they self-exiled to wander the roofs.

BENOIT LEBDEVA is a revenant or ghost who deals with the loss of their original traveling party by trying to keep others alive. They've mostly failed thus far, making them more and more determined every time.

THE KING OF SHADOWS

- 4 -

We traveled more slowly now. I was hesitant and a little dazed. Lilith was limping. She went forward and back around me as we went; Evans, he was circling us both.

"You don't have to—" I said.

I was looking at Lilith. She'd drifted off to the side and turned her head, as if about to dart back to check behind.

She could still be fast. She circled my leg, caught hold of my skirt, dragged herself up across it and my top, and was scurrying around and around again my neck.

She said, in a clear high voice, "I have to."

Then she was down and off.

"It's not to protect you," Evans said.

I looked at him.

"I mean, yes, that's part of it. She's horrified you got hurt. I'm terrified for you both. But it's not like we're defending you to all sides. We're mixing up the scent trails. It's instinct." "Oh."

Stagger. Jump. Stagger.

They didn't talk again. Not until we next sat down.

The light was fading. The sun was setting. Reflected light made straight tracks along the roofs.

"Are we safe from the shadow," I asked, "in the dark?"

Evans looked at me. His eyes were tired. He shook his head. Then he sighed. He looked over at Lilith. She wasn't looking at him, not then, but she stopped and she turned her head. She nodded.

He found a sheltered roof. He set out a runner's nest. He made a circuit of the roofs nearby, and three more circuits, and finally he lay down.

"It won't be dark," he said.

Lilith stumbled to her place. She lay down on a pad in turn.

"The Witchway burns like candles," she said, "with the last of a sunset's light. You might as well get to see it. Up there," she said. She gestured with her nose.

I walked up that way. I stood atop the peak.

The sunlight that poured along the roofs went orange, then turned into delicate soft veins of gold. It attenuated as the sun sank lower.

The sun set, but its last light did not fade.

It gathered itself, rather. It flowed like alchemist's silver into globes and narrow streams. Then it moved, from west to east, a pulse along the circuit of the roofs, and where it passed it sent off trickles that turned great black stones set among the roofs to golden crystal lights.

They lit up with a great warm glow.

I stood among them and their flickering, like a scout alone on a plain that had just lit with a thousand scattered fires.

"Come on," Evans said.

So I joined them again. They'd set the pads in a triangle. I sat to face them both.

"There are shadows," I said.

There were shadows everywhere. They didn't seem like the servants of the King, at least, not when I looked straight on; but they were terrifying, each and every one of them, from the corner of my eye.

"There are shadows," Evans agreed.

He looked up.

"That's why I came," he said. "That's why I hunt the King of Shadows. Even in the places that should be safe. Even in the places that should be beautiful. Even when it seems like things are good, there are shadows; and how can anybody trust in goodness, when the shadows of the King can move?"

"One day," he said, "I was walking these roofs—not these roofs exactly, you understand, but roofs sort of like these. And I thought, *how beautiful*. Then a shadow moved around me, and it slipped into the recesses of my mind, and it passed over my heart, and there, amidst the beauty of those things, I was afraid."

He sounded almost petulant.

"It was terribly unfair," he said.

There were shadows everywhere. I wrapped my arms around my knees and huddled in. And for some time—there, amidst the beauty of the world—I was afraid.

Eventually the fear faded into distance, and I drifted almost into sleep. But—

"We won't sleep tonight," Lilith explained.

Her voice was a good thing. It was a comfort in the night,

though it seemed very far away.

"The flute's ... maybe five hours' walk from here," she said.
"And it shows itself an hour before the dawn."

"Oh," I said.

I didn't really want to sleep, I guess. Not there, anyway. I wanted to sleep somewhere, though, somewhere safe, and *that* I wanted rather a lot.

"We should eat," she said. She thought about this. "There's a garden nearby with grapes."

"I'm allergic."

"Seriously?"

I nodded.

She looked at Evans. Evans looked at her. There was a quiet interval, though I think I heard a few soft peeps as their conversation dipped down into the range that I could hear.

"I'm OK," I said. "I mean, I can skip a couple meals. I'd rather skip a couple meals than get killed by shadows, so if I'm going to face one I might as well face the other."

"Whisht," Lilith said.

"Whisht?"

"You don't go hungry against the King of Shadows," Lilith said. "He's not one of the Desolation Mysteries."

Evans cleared his throat softly. I looked his way. He snapped his fingers.

It made no sound at all.

"Snap," he said. "I've got it. There's a manna tree at Grayvale's edge."

"Brilliant," Lilith said.

Evans pulled himself to his feet. He began packing up the runner's nest. "You're in for a treat," he said. "You haven't had manna at least once in your life, you haven't really lived."

This is also what Mrs. Melkanoff had told me about pickled snails, and a street rat about grilled kaiju. To be alive—I mean, to really *live*—

There's a lot of tests you've got to pass.

Softly Lilith sang as the hectometers passed. It was a wordless thing, and it seemed to strain her. I did not ask her what it meant.

"There was a rat," Evans said, after a while.

It fit the tune she sang.

"There was a rat, and his name was Reverie, and he walked beneath Grayvale's sun."

And Lilith sang, and on we walked, and to the west I saw a great gray light.

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I was unable to interrupt the song; I was too tired, and too lost, and the movement of the gray light rising fit the song too well. And maybe I

wouldn't have said anything, even if I could have. Maybe this wasn't the kind of magic that needed an exclamation or an expostulation, but rather staring, watching, just looking quietly aghast off to the west.

A dead sun rose.

It wasn't the real sun, I think. It wasn't the real sun's mother. It's a rat legend that the sun we have is the second sun, that the sun Jade Irinka died and her daughter Jasper Irinka took her place—but this wasn't Jasper, or her corpse.

This was something vile.

"He walked," Evans said, "beneath Grayvale's sun, miles and miles to the west, and in the heart of that place, he found a Word. And he came back, and he told to us that Word, and we slew him. We slew him, so that that Word would never find its way into our Books of Names. We slew him, because to slay him was the Mystery."

Still Lilith sang.

"'Go not into the Grayvale, o ye children of the rats,'" Evans said. "'Go not, ye children of humanity. There is a fountain in that place, and it holds a Word; and that Word is not for you.'"

In the light that reached us I saw my flesh as withered. I was become a horrible thing.

"Bear it," Evans said, softly. "We have not far to go."

I could bear it.

I could bear it, because of Lilith's song. I could hold the desert of that light at bay; and it would have been a passing, painless memory, had the shadows not then struck.

O King of Shadows, you are cruel.



"Grayvale"
by Elizabeth Sherry

Residents of the Roofs

In this section I'll talk a bit about the entities one might run into, on the roofs.

All-Swallower, the

A vast dragon and personification of drought, possibly related to the Vedic serpent **Vritra**. The rats have relatively little experience with it, as they have mostly encountered it thus far in visions of the future and (rarely) of the distant past. If it comes to life it will likely pour slowly down off the roofs across your city, leaving it in flames and ruin.

Alp-Luachra (Alolitha)

If you fall asleep by the springs or streams of the far roofs, the newt **Alp-Luachra** might crawl down your throat, consuming half of everything you eat thereafter. It can purportedly be driven out by eating vast quantities of salted food, which a newt is generally unfond of.

Little is recorded of Alp-Luachra in the Books of Names, as rat throats are generally too narrow for it; it may be Apathy or Grief, if one understands it as leaching some of the value out of life, or it may be a more literal and direct embodiment of, e.g., Hunger, Greed, or Anorexia. Its powers are typically drawn from *Indomitable*, *Memetic*, *Allegory*, and *Primordial*.

Animal Kit, the

Many Mysteries have child-creatures on the roofs. These will appear as relatively ordinary fauna—perhaps with the features of many animals, as when one meets an antlered otter with a serpent's tail—but even when young, they have extraordinary emotional presence, and as they grow, they acquire wisdom and often speech comparable to a human's or a rat's. Over time, some attain great size, others strange powers, and a few go on to become Mysteries themselves. The “animal kit” appearing in the first **Shieldbearer** story is such a creature: cute, empathetic, cleverer than a lower-world beast, and liable to eventually grow up into an intelligent creature larger than a house.

Azag (Asacun), *named Denial*

Azag is the chief of the *gallû* daemons, who know no food, drink, or love; eat no offerings; drink no libations; and are known for dragging victims down into the underworld named Kumugi. His wife is **Ûrsag**, a range of mountain-roofs; many of the *gallû* are their children. It is said that he is hideous

enough to cause fish to boil in the rivers. Despite what some have reported, he has no connection to the Arizona Attorney General's office. His powers are typically drawn from *Kaiju*, *Primordial*, *Worldwalker*, and *Awakening*.

Basilisk, *which is named Reverence*

The king of serpents, whose gaze is death. By some accounts **Basilisk** is identified with **Mushussu (Matasontha)**, a sacred animal of Marduk, apocryphally slain by the prophet Daniel through an act of poisoning. By other accounts it is the word and the weapon of monstrous artificial intelligences of the future, the brush of its gaze a warning that keeps their modern followers in line. It is employed, as a recurring element in its legends, to guard sacred spaces and the sanctuaries and treasures of divinity; thus, for all the poisonous lethality of its nature, it is considered a divine and noble beast. Its powers are typically drawn from *Kaiju*, *Worldwalker*, *Cheat*, and *Allegory*.

Cat Spirits

Occasionally one will meet a cat spirit on the far roofs. While in some sense representing the primordial terror of the wilderness, cat spirits are more generally mischievous than malign, and may even prove friendly or communicative if there are Big Folk or cat-speakers in one's current mischief.

Charybdis (Chlothrida), *which is Named Dissolution*

In legend, **Charybdis** was transformed into a creature with an insatiable thirst and chained beneath the sea; when she drank deep, her draught formed whirlpools. The Mystery that bears her name is most likely a murine reference and not an evolution or manifestation: she is the whirling, desiccating wind of Whitesail Court that reduces anything left too long there to oblivion. Its powers are typically drawn from *Kaiju*, *Primordial*, *Worldwalker*, and *Awakening*.

Dream-Flower, *which is Named the Lotus (Lotos/Liuvis)*

This Mystery is a tree which generally only appears in dreams, out of the corner of your eye, blink-and-it's-gone tiredness hallucinations, rich scent drifting to you from some nearby but unseen location, and suchlike experience. Its flowers'

scent is said to bring forgetfulness and sleep. Its fruit, more of the same, and a psychological addiction, frequently, besides. The Books of Names warn that pursuing **Dream-Flower** too avidly may lead to finding it—only to discover that one has lapsed into the dreams from which there is no waking.

... though presumably at least one rat *did* wake from that, or—I mean—however would they know?

Its powers are typically drawn from *Holy*, *Gardener*, *Awakening*, and *Impresario*.

Dream-Snakes

Traditionally the dream-snakes are not considered a Mystery; there are simply too many of them, which is to say, more than one, yet not so many as to suggest a swarm-mind entity. What is known of them is that they are ethereal, and swim in storms and fiery sunsets; that they are occasionally stranded in the world below, and when they do they turn hostile; and, that the poison of their bite is rarely survivable, but if one *does* survive it, one will have visions that show hints of the future and of others' hearts. The warden rats occasionally take very small amounts of dream-snake venom; monitored, and in doses smaller than a bite, it is nearly *always* survivable, but the benign effects become less reliable in turn.

Edimmu (Eidumir)

Edimmu may be a Mystery or a powerful ghost; it may even be a categorical label for a *kind* of ghosts, wind-like spirits of those who die upon the roofs and are not honored with a burial or shrine back home. What is known is that at several points this Mystery, this creature, or these creatures have been noted sucking life from the sleeping or otherwise vulnerable on expeditions to the roofs. Edimmu dislikes confrontations, and will often flee; though, as some evidence towards it being singular and a Mystery, once it has set its fangs in someone, it tends to return to them at later times.

Erinys (Erinya), which is Named Judgment

Erinys is the will to judge others for their sins and execute punitive measures on them. Her eyeshadow is decorative violet and brass, her hair is pleated snakes, and her feet are taloned; she has a scourge, a drum-sized teakettle, and wings. In **the Far Roofs**, she will mostly show up in **the Seeker's** dreams; fundamentally she is there to grumble about the world and overly lenient solutions, although plausible variations range from *impossibly* terrifying to "someone who wishes the best for Gorgon, and eventually the Seeker, underneath it all." Her powers are typically drawn from *Indomitable*, *Memetic*, *Allegory*, and *Primordial*.

Final Star, the

This Mystery is the final destination of every explorer. It is a lonely, fierce, and terrible creature, a thing of mirrored brass and endless fire, hanging in the sky above the roofs; it is a representation of glory, yearning, emptiness, and death, eternally resentful of its own nature, and whether it represents a gift or an enemy is very much a matter of its personal relationship to a given rat (or ... a given human, one supposes). Its powers typically draw from *Allegory*, *Holy*, *Wounded Angel*, and *Cheat*.

Firedrake-youkai

These little dragon spirits, bright as fireworks, show up in one of **the Old-Timer's** Arcs. They're bits of the Old-Timer's wishes and dreams, broken free, and they *act* like it too—wild; untamed; glorious. Most will have shimmering brass scales; a few, perhaps, shine more like gold. They do not generally breathe fire but rather wrap themselves in auras of it, although this is obviously up to the GM's or the players' inspiration at the time.

Gallû Daemons

The *gallû* daemons know no food, drink, or love; eat no offerings; drink no libations; and are known for dragging victims down into the underworld named Kumugi. They move like ghosts (having no feet) and are known to wield serpents, forks, and flails. They may be appeased by the offering of a lamb, despite the fact that they will just completely waste it afterwards.

Garmr (Geth), which is Named Mistrust

Garmr is a strong and wise but bloodstained hound: the guardian of the gates of Hel. His howl will mark the breaking of those gates and the beginning of the end of days. The rats have an ambivalent relationship towards Garmr; he's only particularly *unfriendly*, you see, when set to hunting or guarding by some other force, and the venom of mistrust works poorly on them.

Garmr likely has *Gardener* and *Holy* powers, with his "garden" being the gates of Hel.

Genius Loci

The spirit of a particular location on the roofs (or elsewhere) is known as its *genius loci*. They generally have some level of magic related to the location that they come from that allows them to control or fade away into their home environment; stronger loci have *Awakening* and *Impresario* powers like **Deepen the Mystery**, **Demesne**, and **Step Away**.

Ghosts

You will doubtless be shocked to discover that ghosts are the enduring spirits of the dead. They mostly live in a neighboring dimension, “the ghost world,” which is a lot like our world except moodier and prone to change when ours does.

Ghost Kings

Powerful ghosts are known as ghost kings. They mostly tend to their internal politicking, although occasionally one will turn their attention outwards on behalf of a friend or loved one, or, to try to conquer Earth or Heaven or the roofs. Traditionally, they’ll have access to *Kaiju*, *Worldwalker*, *Primordial*, and *Awakening* powers, although really they are individuals and thus your mileage may vary!

Girtablilu

The *girtablilu* or *aqrabuamelu* are scorpion-people: the head, arms, and torso of a human, with the body of a scorpion. (Presumably a giant scorpion). Originally created by the dragon of primordial chaos to war against the gods, they were later recruited by those very gods to stand guard over the gates of Kumugi, the land of darkness. They will show up in several stories of **the Shieldbearer**.

Goblin, *which is Named Cruelty*

Goblin is discussed in detail on pg. 116.

Gorgon (Godigunde), *which is Named Monstrous*

Gorgon, also named Godigunde or Colibrand, was sold in the days of antiquity to the people of death—her heart and tongue cut out, her body rolled into the lake, and her *being* given over, in exchange for payment made unto the world. Now she is Named Monstrous, and like the basilisk her gaze is death. She appears with some frequency in the dreams and stories of **the Seeker**.

Her powers are typically drawn from *Cheat*, *Wounded Angel*, *Allegory*, and *Holy*.

Gravewight

This Mystery lurks among the graveyards of the roofs: pale, cold, and hungry. It freezes you with a glance and slips away. Its Name is unknown; some have postulated Ignorance, Anesthesia, Numbness, or Painful Memory. **The Rogue** has sworn to tame it.

Harpy

Harpy is discussed in detail on pg. 120.

Hedge the Fang, *who is Named Unmindful*

Hedge the Fang is discussed in detail on pg. 124.

Hel (Halikai/Halil), *which is Named Stability*

This Mystery is known for a half-blue face and a general downcast air—she is the principle that what is done is done, even if she’s not that happy with it herself. She commands a vast underworld full of the dead, which may or may not overlap with the ghost world, Kumugi, or other underworlds that appear in the game. Her dog is Garmr. She will mostly show up in **the Seeker’s** stories and dreams, and draws on the *Creature of Fable*, *Indomitable*, *Allegory*, and *Impresario* powersets.

Hoop Snake, *which is Named Inexplicable*

Hoop Snake is discussed in detail on pg. 129.

Jingling Crystal Bee, *which is Named Inexplicable*

Jingling Crystal Bee is also discussed in detail on pg. 129.

Kelpie (Scelepa), *which is Named Entanglement*

Kelpie appears to be a perfectly ordinary, convenient horse loitering around on the roofs near a difficult-to-cross gutter-stream. There is nothing suspicious there at all! However, if you touch Kelpie, you will immediately get stuck, and Kelpie will drag you into the water to drown. That said, caution against roof-horses can only take a traveler so far; Kelpie is an adroit shapeshifter, and can appear as anything from a thrashing kraken to a convenient cobbler or ice cream seller of the roofs. This being normally draws powers from the *Memetic*, *Creature of Delirium*, *Cheat*, and *Awakening* power sets, particularly **Many-Faced** (pg. 92) for transformations, **Established History** (pg. 95) to burnish its more anthropomorphic or musomorphic disguises, and **Inevitability Entanglement** (pg. 80) for its stickiest effects.

Ketu (Kallaté), *which is Named False Confidence*

According to legend, a serpent of the void stole immortality from the gods, whereupon its head was struck off to become **Rahu**. The body, still immortal, became Ketu, crawling through the sky, swallowing stars, and occasionally eclipsing either the sun or the moon with its shadowy flesh. It likely draws from the *Kaiju*, *Worldwalker*, *Cheat*, and *Allegory* powersets, though in truth very little past its astrological import is known.

Kifri (Khefrida), *that is Named Envy*

Kifri: a thing that turns your own heart against you. It uses poisons and pollutants to its ends. It wields cold and crystal and spreading fields of ice. It is a green serpent and a little knife; it is a splinter in your heart.

Back in 1973, a rat met Kifri, and Kifri poisoned her, and when she limped back into the world she was a horror, a killing witch, dripping with gangrene and seawater from her flesh and eyes, and everyone she bit was poisoned too, and fell into her thrall; but the Rat King and a human girl caught them in a blind alley and they burned them all.

The god Nayanara is said to have shattered Kifri shortly after its creation, and that is why it has not been lately seen within the world; and a good thing, too! For had it long endured, it would have made everything crystalline, eternal, and *still*.

Kifri's Child

A child of Kifri's, a little Envy, shows up in one of the Warden Arcs (pg. 226). It most likely draws on the *Kaiju*, *Worldwalker*, *Cheat*, and *Allegory* powersets, with the power to cause stillness either its *Kaiju* Mood or the core feature of its *Cheat*.

King Death

King Death is discussed in detail on pg. 132.

King of Shadows, the

The rats haven't named the King of Shadows—it's disrespectful, perhaps, as he *was* once a rat. You may make your own guesses after reading the story on pg. 8, 22, 40, 106, 152, 228, and 241.

Lake Monk, which is Named Inexplicable

Lake Monk is discussed in detail on pg. 129.

Lennan-Shee (Leuava), which is Named Consumption

This Mystery, a highly competent muse, grants endless inspiration—but also she devours the life of those she favors. Her calling and presence is known to be addictive, although it is unclear whether this is simply the rapture of free-flowing inspiration or a separate quality that she possesses; in either case, her victims are often deeply conflicted as to whether their affliction ought to be removed ... if not willing to die of her entirely. She takes form as an elfin nature spirit loosely human (or, rarely, murine) in her form; she has been known to assume other sexes or to be ambiguous if such would suit the inspiration that she wants to give. She rides an elk. She normally draws powers from *Creature of Fable*, *Indomitable*, *Prophet*, and *Worldwalker*, with **Awaken Self** (pg. 82), **Declare** (pg. 82), **Elation** (pg. 82), **Inspiration** (pg. 83), **Materialization of Possibility** (pg. 83), and **Catalytic** (pg. 94) at the core of any musing that isn't handled by fiat and **Tribulation** (pg. 79) allowing her to grant both inspiration and slow, withering death.

Leucrotta (Liecrida), which is Named Unspeakable

Leucrotta is a wolf-dog-hyena-lion creature, ruler of a distant forest on the roofs. If it looks at you thrice, you will be frozen to the spot. If its shadow covers you over, it will take your voice. It loves nothing so much as to use its stolen voices to call out someone's name at night, luring them out into the wilds to be devoured. It wears seven radiances of terror stolen from the sun, making it invincible. Every animal of its forest serves as its minion.

Leucrotta is tied to the main group storyline; you can learn more about it on pg. 232. Its powers are likely drawn from *Creature of Fable*, *Indomitable*, *Allegory*, and *Impresario*, as well as *Necromancy* (pg. 90).

Malambruno (Malabur), which is Named Hatred

Malambruno is discussed in detail on pg. 139.

Mallt-y-Nos (Matahlin), which is Named Loss

It is said of **Mallt-y-Nos** she was a human noble once; when it came time for her to die, she declared, "If there's no hunting in Heaven, I'd rather not go!" Now she helps to drive lost souls to death ... but now and then she will keep one as her own. They live an uncertain, fuzzy life in the twilight world she keeps as her own, rapt for love of her; but once a year—not so much on an alternating schedule, but in an abstract fairy-tale time—she will ritually marry them, and they will follow her into the cathedral of her private rooms, only to be accidentally locked out; and while she putters about inside, looking for the way to open it up again, they are torn apart by her roaming hounds.

If one finds the right token or tokens (an ancient coin? A set of keys?) one may be able to bribe her ushers and intervene without risking a similar fate, oneself.

Mallt-y-nos' powers usually draw on the *Gardener*, *Impresario*, *Awakening*, and *Holy* powersets; her victims are technically a part of her character sheet as per **Conversion** (pg. 95), and thus may only be won back by narrative or *arcanum*-based means.

Magic Ships

Occasionally, at least if one is playing all of **the Navigator's** Arcs (pg. 205), one may encounter a magical ship abandoned on the roofs. The provenance of such ships (often self-sailing and somewhat alive, unless they are crewed by ghosts instead) is not at this time known.

Mock Dragon

no. do ... not ... mock dragon?

mocking dragons sounds like a "bad idea."

Nidhoggr (Nidagern?)

The warden-rats have shared little of what they know of **Nidhoggr**, even with the other rats. We may assume that either it was the inspiration for, or they have named it after, the mythical serpent that once gnawed at the roots of the tree of worlds. A single drop of Nidhoggr's venom can enhance the effects of dream-snake poison, strengthening the visions and making them more controllable for months; two drops, alas, will almost always kill.

Questing Beast, the

This is a weird beast that you're drawn to chase, but are unlikely ever to catch. Its presence foretells the crumbling of the way of things. Its stomach sounds like a bunch of barking dogs. It has the head and neck of a snake, the body of a leopard, and the feet of a hart. It may very well be a form of **Hoop Snake** (pg. 129), but then again, it may not; if it is a creature of its own, it likely draws on *Become Somebody*, *Impresario*, and *Awakening*, with the requisite chase driven by **Commanding Aura** and **Unstoppable** (pg. 75).

Rahu

This is the head of the serpent whose body became **Ketu** (pg. 110); the rats have yet to encounter it (or at least, any who have have yet to return), so little more is known.

Rider, *who is Named Obsession*

This is a shoulder-riding Mystery—invisible but heavy. It clings to you and twists your dreams into nightmares but you don't want to let it go. Of course, even if you got someone to knock it off your back, they wouldn't find anything. Even if you dredged up all your strength and will and dragged it off yourself, you'd just throw a dissipating wisp of smoke away ... and a day or two later, you'd turn around, and it'd just be back again. The only way rats know of to get rid of Rider is to throw your life away on some noble cause, but even the rats know that's not so much a good solution as a plan ... G? O? Z? Rider most likely draws powers from the *Become Somebody*, *Impresario*, and *Awakening* powersets, although an alternate build based on *Creature of Delirium*, *Memetic*, *Awakening*, and *Cheat* (with **Extraction**, pg. 92, being key) is also possible.

Salamander (Hurtali/Hetabia), *which is Named Indiscretion*

This Mystery was allegedly born as the byproduct of a forbidden union between a holy angel and a fallen one; it is both a mortal salamander, made gigantic, and a spirit of eternal flame. Karme Kaoru fought this Mystery at Kaoru's Cross, using its fire to

reforge the roofs (pg. 12); since that time, it has been rarely seen, but it may reappear in the Warden Arcs (pg. 227).

Shadow Selves

Sometimes far roofs travelers split in two, their "original" self and their "shadow" self. (Sometimes it's not even clear which one is which, suggesting that the terminology there may embed one or two false premises.) The main difference is that a shadow self usually wanders the roofs, going about some unclear errand, while the presumably original self continues their normal life. The two generally stay in contact through shared dreams and empathic impulses, and are not necessarily opposed or hostile unless the person in question has a suspicious nature or is within a step or two of being hostile towards themselves. If they meet, they will often find that their perspectives differ but flow from the same basic source, like divergent branches of a river or a tree.

Siren, *which is Named Longing*

This Mystery sings a half-heard song in the distance that *gets* to you, that makes you long to head out onto the roofs and not return. The tale among the rats is that she has a human upper body, abnormally large, but her lower body is a flow of gabled roof; when she moves, the articulation of her "tail" flows through the shape of the roofs beneath her without interrupting its actual substance. Thus, if she rises to coil around a chimney, the roof itself will bulge to lift her up; if she dives beneath it, you will see a flutter of rising and falling clattering rooftiles before the roof goes still and returns to its default and "normal" form. Regardless, she draws powers from a "Roof-maiden" or "Tegimaid" Superior skill and the *Impresario*, *Awakening*, *Holy*, and *Gardener* powersets, with **Stir the Heart** (pg. 76), **Obsession** (pg. 98), **Open the Vault** (pg. 98), and **Step Away** (pg. 95) being particularly relevant powers.

Sorcerers

Sorcerers and sorceresses are nothing but trouble! They live in the lower world and do things that make life harder for honest citizens and far roofs adventurers. A sorcerer may have cursed the family line of **the Rogue** (pg. 90); another sinisterly drains the power of Lennan-Shee or Kelpie in **A Second Round** on pg. 219. Don't do sorcery! Even if it probably gives access to *Cheat*, *Wounded Angel*, *Allegory*, and *Holy*³¹ powersets.

Sphinx, *who is named Incomprehension*

Sphinx is said to dwell in a labyrinth in or underneath a nearby town. There she scribbles riddles and formulae on the walls, trying

³¹ yeah, yeah, I know ... but, well. Sometimes powers are just Holy, there's nothing I can do about it. I can't even reliably promise that all such powers have been stolen!

to understand the nature of the cosmos and the human heart—or perhaps to explain what she already knows; it is not clear.

The murine culture hero Agnes Kolar sought the Sphinx and failed to find her—wandering her labyrinth, instead, studying riddles the Sphinx left behind, and finding unique inspiration therein to invent push pins, the light bulb, and cotton candy. Later, alas, in a bout of absent-minded distraction, Agnes wandered out into the road ... there, to be run over by a truck.

Sylph (Silfrida), *which is Wistful Memory*

Sylph is a fairy-like Mystery, mostly benevolent, save for the occasional indulgence in tricking or confusing travelers who do not notice her, getting them turned around and lost. She is rarely recorded in the annals of the rats, on account of the rarity of her harming someone who has already noticed that she's there; really, the only thing that the Books of Names record of her is that she's drawn to the stories of the past. She shows up in the dreams and stories of **the Seeker**, and typically draws on the *Creature of Fable*, *Indomitable*, *Allegory*, and *Impresario* powersets. She may turn into a butterfly, a small fairy, or an immaterial presence via **Inconspicuous Form** (pg. 79).

Stars

Star-spirits are mutable fires, able to flit around in the shapes of fireflies, ravel themselves out to comet-tail dragons of argent flame, fluff out like sheep while munching on local grass and dandelions, or condense down into glowing human or murine children or adults. Most live in the starry fields of the sky kingdom, which is no longer in communication with the world.

Thrymr, *which is Named Segmentation Fault*

A purely hypothetical Mystery—a thing that might be created by **the Rogue** in one of their stories, on pg. 208. It embodies a malfunction in the world.

Typhon (Teikiph), *which is Named Outrage*

Typhon is discussed in detail on pg. 143.

Unicorn, *which is Named Numinous*

Unicorn is discussed in detail on pg. 147.

Ūrsag

Ūrsag is a range of mountain-roofs, wed to the *gallū*-daemon Azag. It is not known to the rats whether Ūrsag is also a spirit or a Mystery or simply the inchoate principle of existence and awareness that is within that span of roofs.

White Snake Spirit

White Snake Spirit is a snake of the gutter-sea. After practicing magical arts for five hundred years, she eventually became a spirit and a Mystery. Now she wishes to shed her tail, “make herself small,” and become an ordinary human or rat. She has for the most part been reclusive heretofore; the rats have no records on her save one mention, long ago, of teatime with a snake beneath the sea. White Snake Spirit draws from the *Kaiju*, *Worldwalker*, *Cheat*, and *Allegory* powersets.

Witch of the Far Roofs, the, *who is named Embodiment*

The Witch of the Far Roofs lives on Willow Road, past Grayvale and the Window Way. Her house has four legs on every side, so that it can turn about to face in any direction and run along the roofs; one side at a time has windows and doors, one side unfolds its legs, and the rest fold their legs around eerie-looking faces. She has no role in the stories here; but, there *are* some rats who say she is born a second time into Caroline of the Yatskiys, even as King Death (pg. 132) is into her brother. The Witch most likely draws from the *Indomitable*, *Memetic*, *Allegory*, and *Primordial* powersets; she is particularly known for using **Bring to Fruition** (pg. 85) to enact Embodiment-related curses, transformations, and spells.

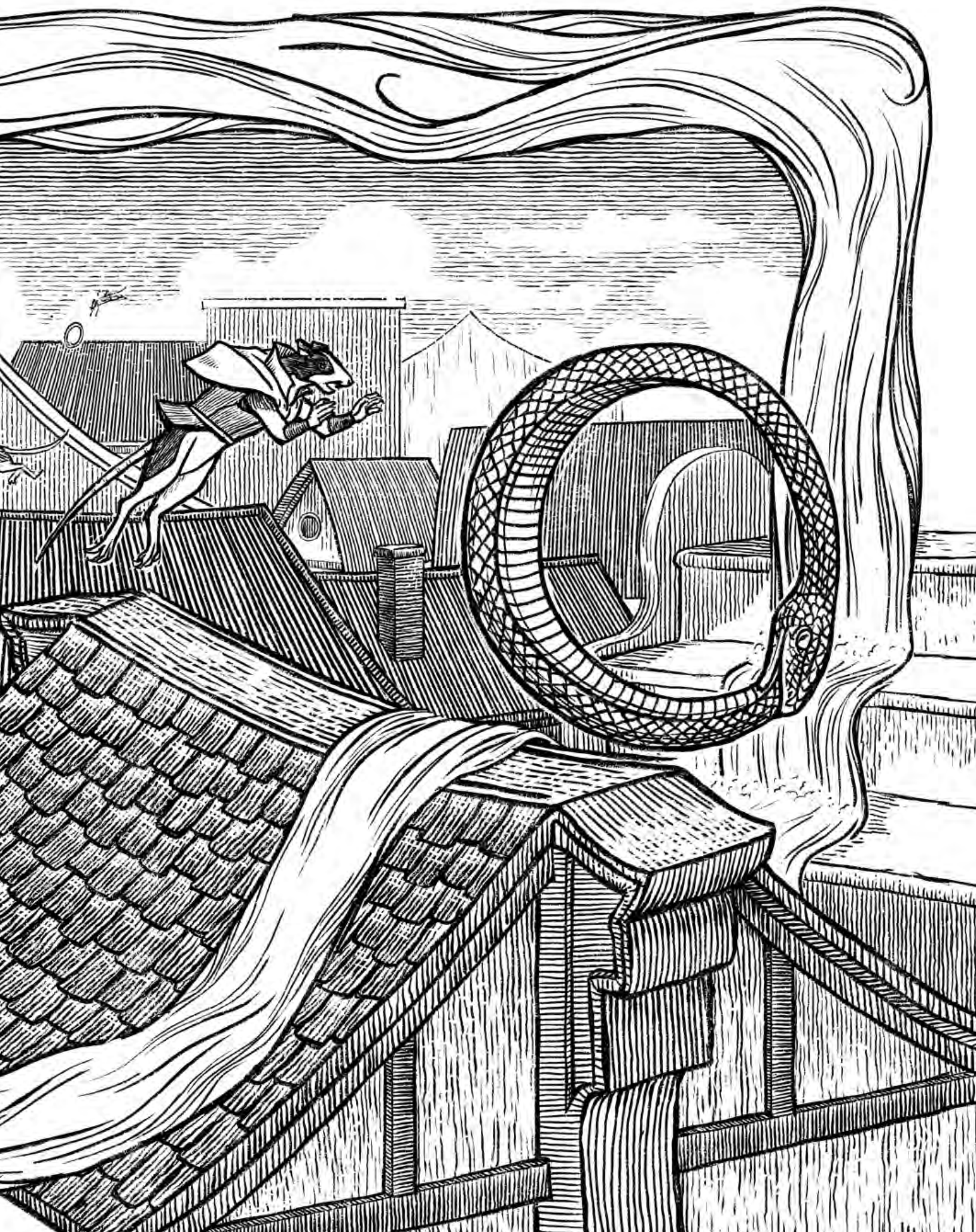
Ymir (Iomir), *who is Named Delusion*

Once, long ago, when fire and ice came together, a giant was born onto the primordial roofs. This was **Ymir**, and they drank from the primordial cow to build strength and life. Later, regrettably, they were torn apart and used to forge the sky and the lower world. It is believed that Ymir retains some consciousness, and some capacity for action. They may be benevolent, of course—in a sense, they are everybody's ancestor—but it is also possible that being torn apart and used as a building material has left them with an unresolved grudge. ... or, of course, like every other Mystery, they could have a peculiar and personal interaction with the world. Regardless, they would draw from the *Kaiju*, *Primordial*, *Worldwalker*, and *Awakening* powersets.

In one of the stories of the shieldbearer rats (pg. 226), Ymir may have trapped the characters in a false existence; since PCs are immune to **Conversion** (pg. 95), this is easiest to handle, conceptually, as **[Mood]-Splosion** (pg. 73) or **Arrive in Force** (pg. 94), though in any case it will be resolved by play or an employed *arcanum*.



"Bluenettle" by Jenn Manley Lee



the Mysteries

In this section I'll talk a little more about eight specific Mysteries: Goblin, Harpy, Hedge the Fang, Hoop Snake, King Death, Malambruno, Typhon, and Unicorn.

First, though, let me build three generic Mystery powers for convenience. The first of them, **Drawn to Certain Bait**, is available to players through the Holy and Indomitable powersets. The other two aren't really *useful* so much as characteristic; players may, one supposes, take them if they like.

Drawn to Certain Bait

Certain things, actions, and events attract your interest. You can scent them and their lingering residue. You can track them by scent, including the perpetrators and enaction site of actions and events, using Awareness or power-enhanced senses.

♦: for the rest of the scene, you can scent them from miles away.

Averse to Certain Things

Certain actions weaken your interest in someone, or expunge it altogether, wherever you may be. This is a *geas*.



by Jenn Manley Lee

Heralded

The weight of your attention or thoughts on someone manifests as characteristic signs and portents in their lives, wherever they may be. *Long-ranged*.

GOBLIN

Goblin, who is named Cruelty, dwells never far from the city roofs. He moves about, now on Cutter's Way, now in Redcap Court, one day in the Flayers' Circle or the Smaller's Alley and the next on Whisperer's Row. There he hides and there he hungers to hurt those whom he hates.

Lykos Korošec woke to find his seven kits slaughtered in their beds. He hunted Goblin, who had done it, and trapped him, but Goblin shed his skin and slipped away. Then for all Lykos' life Goblin haunted him, making faces from the distant roofs, leaving slime and rot about Lykos' den, snuffling at the entrance to his home in the middle of the night, and mixing poison with his salt. In the end, he tried to run away, but failed; his ship went down, with all hands upon it, and Goblin fished up Lykos' corpse.

There has been no glory in fighting Goblin. There have been no good endings. If there is a good side to this Mystery, if there's a way to *get along with him*, the rats don't know it yet. Kill him, and you might survive him. Kill him, or trick him, and get him gone, and never let him know that it was you who'd done so, for Cruelty will not accept defeat.

There's some rats that say that Goblin is a conflation of two separate Mysteries—that there's been so much trouble in dealing with him because there's a Goblin that you can only fight, and a Mystery that takes the shape of Goblin, or follows after Goblin, which you can't directly fight at all. There's other rats that say it's one Goblin, but he has two faces, and can switch between them as he likes.



From the Books of Names

THE NAME OF GOBLIN IS
Cruelty

THE HERALDS OF GOBLIN ARE
misery; crippling accidents; a glimpse of Goblin in the distance; impossible things; traps, poisons, cruel devices; the sound of Goblin's giggling in the night

THE WEAPONS OF GOBLIN ARE
mechanical devices and traps, ranging from crude and simplistic to absurdly complex death traps and "Rube Goldberg" machines; poisons; deception; physical force; making your nightmares real

GOBLIN MAY RETREAT FROM
____ **OR LAUGH IN THE FACE OF!!!** ____

careful investigation and exploration; displays of compassion; banding together into a group large enough to defeat Goblin; true happiness

GOBLIN KILLS YOU BY
driving you to despair; breaking your will to live; trapping you in a no-win situation; just... beating or ripping you to death

GOBLIN IS DRAWN TO
liquor; the rattling of dice; fever; treasure; moral or physical weakness; challenges (e.g. "Goblin can't possibly get in here"); litter; rock and roll; used campsites where the fire's not been properly put out

GOBLIN HUNGERS FOR
suffering; desperation; for you to beg him to stop; for you to tell him your secrets

YOU MAY KILL GOBLIN BY
catching him in his own traps; exposing him to the sun at solar noon; exposing him to the sky during a lunar eclipse

GOBLIN IS REBORN WHEN
someone cruel enough to become Goblin is drawn to collect his goods and trappings and go to the Far Rooftops to take his place

YOU MAY DIVERT GOBLIN FOR A WHILE BY
confusing the landmarks and paths he uses to find his way to the Near Roofs; shriving or purifying him, which sends him away to immerse himself properly in grime and gunk; or, convincing him he's tricked his way into some high, important office, like ... the Mayor of London, say ... whereupon he'll accept he's far too important and good a man to waste his time with little rats like you.



THE "CALLING"

You can open the door to a Goblin story out of *duty*.

Like, maybe someone he's targeted needs your help. And ... you give it? Or, you find a rat. Dead. In one of Goblin's traps. And ... it feels wrong somehow to just ... hand it to the rats and leave? Like, you *found* it, so, you're involved?

GMS open the door to Goblin stories in *endless unfair ways*.

Like, maybe you did something to tick Goblin off. Maybe you threw away some trash, only, it was *Goblin's* trash, and now he'll punish you for the gesture. You helped somebody Goblin was targeting, in some minor way—you gave them directions, or shared an umbrella in the rain—and now you're on his list. You're pretty, and he thought he'd like to date you, and then he decided you'd never allow it, so he'll have to hunt you down. Or, you're cool, he's jealous ... so you have to die.

It's *easiest* to catch Goblin's attention when there's "bad" behavior involved, but ultimately, that isn't necessary.

Traits

Physical Action 3	Professional Trap-Making
Awareness 2	Professional Mischief-Maker
Communication 1	Magical Skill:
Introspection 4	Poisoner and Trapper 3
Self-Care 0	CV +1

Goblin's default CV is 6, with standard edges *angry ball of malice*, *inhumanly strong*, and *nasty-looking holdout weapon*. He draws a free card from **Strong** (pg. 79) the first time each conflict he falters or blocks.

Sometimes his traps enter into dramatic conflict with their targets; a hastily-assembled trap has CV 5 and 1-2 HP, a more professional effort CV 7 and 2-3 HP, and a truly, absurdly *fiendish* contraption might go as high as 5 HP and CV 10.

If he personally uses a trap against a character in dramatic conflict, though—regardless of quality—it uses his own CV 6.



ERRANTRY

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when players are on errantry against Goblin include:

- * “did you just see Goblin making faces at you from the roofs?”³²
- * “did you just hear Goblin laughing, not far away?”
- * “tell me how your sleep was interrupted by Goblin giggling in the night”
- * “tell me how your sleep was interrupted by something moving through the house”
- * “tell me how you met someone in misery, and could not help them like you’d want”
- * “tell me how you strove to lighten someone’s misery—and succeeded, or maybe failed, or possibly do not yet know”
- * “speak to me of misery, and of miserable things”
- * “speak to me of poisons, traps, and cruel devices—such as Goblin might sneak into your life”
- * “tell me how your supplies were tainted, ruined, or poisoned, or how your precautions barely protected them”
- * “tell me how Goblin hurt, or almost hurt, you with something snuck into your stuff”
- * “a trap’s just gone off! What’s the first step in its Rube Goldberg execution?”
 - ... afterwards, ask other players to contribute either other steps or reaction shots, until you’re ready to end it with a suitable disaster or misfire.
- * if Goblin’s triggered his tribulation, with a ♠:
 - “tell me about the inexplicable accident that happened”
 - “tell me of the thing you found, mundane but ... how? How could something like that happen?”
 - “tell me about the inexplicable, ridiculous accident that you’re *not* making up”
 - “tell me about the inexplicable, ridiculous accident or tragedy that you *know* is not your fault”
- * 8+: “what horror comes from the goblin-roofs? What nightmare of yours comes a-visiting?”

- * 5+, successful intimidation roll: “what nightmare comes to life for you when the goblin-fear invades your mind?”

Some things you might do:

- * have Goblin set a pointlessly baroque trap.
- * have Goblin sneak in with **Between the Boundaries** and sabotage, poison, or trap something very quickly between scenes or in a flashback. Cautious characters can roll to stop him from sneaking by.
- * if Goblin’s triggered **Cautionary Tale**, with a ♠, then ruin a specific kind of relaxation for a character with poison, slime, or ugliness every time Goblin succeeds at an **Awareness** roll³³ to notice “in advance.” This is a *geas*.
 - for instance, maybe every time they really enjoy a drink, it’s poisoned.
 - or every time they open a drawer without thinking about it, it’s full of slime!
- * 5+: add some essence of misery with **Catalytic** to any of the above.

What a “Pointlessly Baroque Trap” Looks Like

A blade slices at you. You dodge, and maybe it seems like things are fine, and then *wham!* Darts from the walls! Or, a pit gapes beneath you! Or, bubblegum drops right into your hair! Or, you’re headed face-first for a hornet’s nest! Or, poison gas is filling the room. Or, there’s barbed wire everywhere!

Later, a glue bomb goes off in your clothing while you’re getting dressed. Or, you wake up with barbed wire wound gently at the minimum safe distance all around you. Or, you step on your bathroom scale and you hear a land mine *click*. Just, why?

What an “Inexplicable Accident” Looks Like

You go to get on your bike and it falls to pieces. Or, your oven explodes. Or, your milk explodes. Or, your dog somehow manages to get itself covered in industrial sludge before charging in through the dog door, and then immediately spins out, getting it everywhere. Or, your cookies manage to bake themselves into the shape of bad or threatening words. Or, a newspaper boy throws a newspaper at you and it hits you and there is a possibly stinging jellyfish on it and it gets on your face?!

³² ... it *might* have been a fluttering banner, turning weathercock, or loose bit of roof?

³³ Usually at a +1 from “Mischief-Maker”

How Goblin Works

Goblin is not **Heralded**. He does all the work of giggling in the night and setting up his traps himself.

He *makes* his traps by hand with the **Trap-Making** skill. They can't do permanent harm unless he exhausts the target's health, but they'll do temporary narrative harm and eat HP if his skill roll (often made in advance, or just declared) beats the target's defense.

His worst, most miserable traps carry the literal essence of misery, by way of **Catalytic**.

His magical skill (right) allows a few improbable feats of trap and poison creation and placement each session; the occasional *truly* inexplicable trap that "couldn't possibly" have been built in time is from **Between the Boundaries**, instead.

Tribulation lets him curse somebody with a ♠, and have a series of themed nasty things happen to them until they remove the curse with an *arcanum*, and those nasty things are often basically "the stuff that happens when you're being haunted by Goblin"—but even then, it's assumed that he's still doing all this stuff by himself *somehow*; the Tribulation is just how it plays out by the rules.

Cautionary Tale lets him punish people whose face he doesn't like with a curse that regularly messes up some peaceful part of their life with slime, poison, or whatever just when they were enjoying it. For instance, maybe the curse declares that every time the target really enjoys a drink, Goblin has poisoned it. Or whenever they open a drawer while feeling relatively secure, they discover that the contents have been trashed.

... he can also just sneak in and put razor blades in the toes of their shoes or whatever the regular way, though.

"Making nightmares real" is usually handled by **Strange**, **Foreign Treasures** (pg. 94)—he summons monsters from the goblin-roofs, and then, because of the nature of things, they're a pretty good fit. If the GM wants to be really literal here, though, it can be a second or a substitute **Tribulation** instead.

Standard Powers

Goblin draws powers from *Indomitable*, *Creature of Fable*, *Worldwalker*, and *Prophet*. By default, his **Principle** is "miseries and petty sins" and his realm is "the goblin-roofs," a subdivision of the Far Roofs embodying the mana of that Principle. His **Shadow** is his own nightmare, or, the hypothetical other Goblin mentioned up above.

His most common powers are—

- * ♠ **Cautionary Tale**—curse someone whose face he doesn't like (pg. 79).

Poisoner and Trapper

This skill leans into the magical skill rules to make baroque, improbable poisoning/trapping actions feasible; it is, otherwise, mundane.

- * **5+ Inconspicuous Form**—turn into a crow or locust, wriggle out of his skin, and slip away (pg. 79).
- * **5+/8+ Keen Sense**—his keen nose can sniff out secrets (5+: sniff secret, 8+: follow trail; pg. 79).
- * **5+ Strong (x2)**—win a contest of strength. Spades counter this effect (pg. 79).
- * **5+ Paralyzing Fear**—his *normal action* paralyzes a target with fear, attacks their mind, or induces fearful hallucinations (pg. 79).
- * ♠/mark **Tribulation**—inflict his tribulation (a series of implausible, ridiculous accidents, or possibly "irrational fears come to life"). ♠ to curse, mark the journal to make an ongoing curse cough up an incident right now (pg. 79).
- * **5+ Catalytic**—his *normal action* plants a seed of misery in a target's heart, or encourages such a seed to grow (pg. 94).
- * **5+ Break the Boundaries**—be 3000 times better at unlocking things, opening things, and finding ways in (pg. 94).
- * **8+ Strange, Foreign Treasures**—summon a horror from the goblin-roofs; it arrives next chapter (pg. 94).
- * **Between the Boundaries**—set traps nigh-instantly in a flashback or between scenes (pg. 82).
- * **8+ Declare**—force an emotional truth like "you're wracked with sorrow" on one or more targets who can hear him (pg. 82).

He also has **Skilled (x2)**, **CV (x1)**, and the Mystery bonuses, **Drawn to Certain Bait** and **Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116).

- * ♦ **Drawn to Certain Bait**—Goblin has a keen nose for liquor, the rattling of dice, treasures; with a ♦ he can sniff them out from miles away.
- * **Averse to Certain Things**—certain actions weaken Goblin's interest in you, whether or not there is any technical way that Goblin could know they have happened. This is a *geas*.

HARPY

Harpy, who is named Disdain, is dead; she lives no more; but when she lived, she dwelt in the Stagger of Rooftops near Lethwillam Sore. There she lived and there she made her nest and there the rats go and leave their offerings when they wish to say they're sorry that she died.

Martina Volkova found Harpy soaring above the roofs. She called, "Come closer! I would know your name." The air was still. Silence endured.

She climbed up the Stagger.

"Come closer!" she yelled. "I would have your name!"

A soft wind blew. Harpy spoke not, nor came she close. Martina heard the flapping of her wings.

She kicked aside the bones of rats and men. She stood at the edge of Harpy's nest. She shook her fist at Harpy and she cried, "Come closer! *I would have your name!*"

Then the wind came down and slammed her hard and she grasped at the air but there was only air to grasp, and she flew from the edge of the Stagger and Harpy stooped and her claws came close and Martina thought:

I am saved.

But Harpy said only: "I am that which is not Hope."

Martina struck, and shattered, and bled.

I will tell you one more story of Harpy. I will tell you of Hanako Akiyama, princess of the rats, and prospective heir to the King himself. She had seven suitors, and she killed them all. She left their corpses sitting poisoned at their tables. She gave no reason for it, not to the constables, her father, or the judge. So the rats sealed Hanako in a prison in the cliffs and her window looked out upon the lake.

Hanako endured.

One day she heard wings. She looked out her window. She saw Harpy.

"Come, then, Harpy," she said. "Come down to me and take me from this place."

Harpy laughed and flew away.

On another occasion: Hanako heard wings. She looked out her window. She saw Harpy.

"Come then, Harpy," she said. "Come down to me; and take me from this place."

Harpy laughed and flew away.

"Please," Hanako screamed; and humans tossed and turned in their sleep and dogs all through the town began to bark.

On a third occasion: Hanako heard wings. She looked out her window. She saw Harpy.

"I am lonely," said Hanako, "and sealed inside this place. Come and keep me company in my despond."

So Harpy landed on the window ledge. Harpy and Hanako spoke: through the night and past the dawn.

The wheels of justice spun. A nameless bureaucrat set Hanako's day of death. She was taken from her cell, led to a chopping block in the open air—for the rats are not entirely modern in their practices—and asked one last time if she would explain what she had done.

"Why would I explain?" she asked, and this they could not say.

So they bound her to the guillotine, and down it fell, and shattered there before her neck; and the wind blew hard, and the rats were flung back, and Harpy held Hanako dangling from one claw.

"Harpy?" Hanako asked.

She seemed confused; but the guards had already flung their spears, and the wings came down to shelter her in one great beat, and then Harpy was among the rats, moving through the rats, and the square was full of blood that had just moments before been inside the rats, and Hanako was seized away.

The Rat King sent a messenger to Harpy.

He asked, "Did you take my daughter to save her, or to devour her?"

Neither he nor Harpy showed these words good faith. She killed the messenger, and left his bones in Lethwillam Sore; and less than three hours behind the messenger followed a war band of the rats. They came on her as she rested. They slew her. They ripped the meat and bone of Harpy into shreds. They made sport of her corpse, laughed and played as they flung the gobbets of her around, and they tore down the Nest where she had lived.

Do not judge them more harshly for this than they deserve. It was evil. It was wrong. It was a monstrous deed. It was also the only way to kill Harpy. You must laugh and mock her as you rend her limbs or Harpy will not die.

As for Hanako, her fate remains unknown.³⁴

³⁴ Hanako's story has some obvious holes, but I don't know how to fill them in. I'd speculate, but I feel a little weird writing fanfic about the dead daughter of the King of some friends of mine. The rats are mostly amused by this project, but I am given to understand that there *is* a line.



From the Books of Names

THE NAME OF HARPY IS

“That which is not Hope”

→ traditionally understood as, “Disdain”*

HARPY IS DRAWN TO

rich feasts; high winds; false hopes; impossible situations; injustice; long falls

THE WEAPONS OF HARPY ARE

dust devils and whirlwinds; hunger, thirst, temptation; high places to fall from; poisons in one's food; animated, evil trash; birds; the ability to disguise her voice and sound like anyone else

THE HERALDS OF HARPY ARE

the wind; something moving overhead; a white rainbow; solitude; despair

YOU TURN HARPY ASIDE WITH (OR BY)

simple pleasures; working hard; caring for other people; service to a higher cause; losing yourself entirely in joy

HARPY KILLS YOU BY

dropping you from a height; tearing you to shreds; eating most of your food and drinking most of your water and poisoning the rest; blinding you and letting you stumble into your own undoing

HARPY HUNGERS FOR

companionship; for awful things to happen to you; delicious food and drink

YOU MAY KILL HARPY BY

making a party out of it—laughing and drinking and making jokes as you rip her body apart, probably eating bits of her tainted flesh as you go

HARPY IS REBORN WHEN

(this is currently unknown)

TO ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF HARPY

make a genuine sacrifice on her behalf; find a genuine source of hope, when you'd been in despair; fight her, oh fight her, from the sunset to the dawn, at which point she'll

become exhausted

and drift away.



* I think it might also be Cynicism, Bitter Humor, Aello, or even Envy, although the latter disturbs me.

... you can see more options on pg. 236!

Traits

Physical Action 2	Magical Skill: Necromancy 2
Awareness 1	Superior Skill: Harpy 3
Communication 0	CV +3
Introspection 4	winged: you may need ♠ to fight
Self-Care 3	

Harpy's base CV when alive is 8♠; it drops to 8 for opponents who can reasonably strike flying targets, or, after her first attack burns up that edge. Her standard edges are *winged and unreachable*, *frenzied and monstrous*, and *poisoned claws*.

Her minions are typically CV 7.

Harpy's poison makes you feverish and prone to bad ideas—it grants +1 Complex.

... she usually administers it in person, with her Harpy skill and a +2 bonus from Toxic (pg. 97), so it's not that useful

while she's dead, but minions might have a few tainted feathers or drops of poison around. It won't "take" unless the victim is defeated or their player wants it to, though.

Note that Harpy doesn't have a special power for tearing anyone up, she just uses her Harpy skill. This in turn means that killing people is another thing she'll have a hard time doing while she's dead.

THE "CALLING"

It's *possible* to open the door to a Harpy story with a rich feast; with a false hope, dearly held; with an injustice, with someone caught in an impossible situation; with a long fall; with a season of high winds.

... in the end, though, it's mostly up to the player and the GM.

None of those doors open *very often* or *very easily*, you see, as the world's history of injustice would seem to show.



PRELUDE

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when Harpy's influence touches on a soul:

- * "The world wearies you."
- * "Everything's dirty; it's hard to cope."
- * "Things are ... gray."
- * "Ask another player what dumb or sensory thing is bothering you now."
- * *mark Here's What You'll Do:* "you're driven to express weariness, or resist it with Self-Care."
- * *mark Here's What You'll Do:* "you're driven to wear yourself out, or resist it with Self-Care."
- * (after one of the options above) "... but there's something that could help you, if you only knew its name."
- * (once that's happened)
 - "you yearn for something nameless in the sky"
 - **8+**, *mark Stir the Heart:* "you stare at the sky wishing you knew the name of the thing that could help you ... or resist the impulse with [Self-Care – 2]."

"Something that can help"

Things could be better. It doesn't have to be like this. The thing that could help them, ... it's somewhere up above them, in the heights.

... they are called, to face Harpy.

"Temptations and Mimicry"

To *tempt* someone, she'll use *Here's What You'll Do*. She'll mark the journal, declare them tempted to do something, and they'll automatically do it—unless they use a stronger action dedicated to self-control to fight that off!

She can mimic others' voices thanks to her magical skill; see *Necromancy* (pg. 90).

ERRANTRY

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when players are on errantry against Harpy include:

- * "tell me ...
 - "of the high place you are called to"
 - "of the high place you have to travel to"
 - "of the view from the heights"
 - "of the bell tower, or the cliff"
 - "of what drifts above you in the sky"
 - "of the white rainbow that you saw, and where; and of who was with you then"
 - "of the horrible but kind of funny moment when debris and trash attacked"
 - "how you lose some of your food and water, or of how you barely kept it"
 - "how a fouled Harpy feather found its way into your meal, or of how you managed to prevent that"
- * "speak to me of solitude"
- * "you feel whispers of despair"
- * "the wind howls and batters at you"
- * "the wind is rising"
- * **8+**, *mark Stir the Heart:* "you're unnaturally hungry"
- * **8+**, *mark Stir the Heart:* "you're unnaturally thirsty"
- * *on an untraveled path:*
 - "your path leads you to the heights"
 - "roll [Awareness – 2] to find a source of food"
 - "roll [Awareness – 2] to find a source of water"
- * *on a known path:* "the expected source of food or water isn't here"
- * *on waking:* "tell me ...
 - "how your food and water has been fouled, or how you wake in time to make the tile-beasts retreat"
 - "of your dreams of hunger"
 - "of your dreams of Harpy's poison"



"Suitors," by Jenn Manley Lee



by Jenn Manley Lee

How Harpy Works

Harpy is dead. It's not a problem! She has **Second Self** (pg. 95). Some of her powers care about distance, and so they only work in like dream sequences or whatever. Others span the gap between the worlds of life and death.

The GM can wing this if they want to; Harpy definitely will.

Harpy initially notices her targets through an abstract spiritual perception from on high (**Drawn to Certain Bait**). She can always be declared to be interested when convenient and to miss apparent bait otherwise.

Harpy's calling is managed by the **Heralded** ability, plus a bit of **Here's What You'll Do** and **Stir the Heart**.

The stuff in "errantry" is mostly managed by **Here's What You'll Do**, **Stir the Heart**, and **Minions**. Some of it is just her nature, though—she thinks tactically in terms of luring people to high places and limiting their food and water, so that shows up a lot.

Her **Minions** include dust devils, whirlwinds, birds, and animated, evil trash.³⁵ These Minions generally have cv 7—they're not that deadly, but it is very difficult for a human to fight any of them.

³⁵ invisible spirits betrayed by the crumpled paper, bits of rotten potato, or other trash they carry around; or, things like evil chicken bones that try to leap into your throat; or, little horrible roof-tile-lizard-gremlins that turn into trash to fly away.

Standard Powers

Harpy draws powers from *Impresario*, *Awakening*, *Gardener*, and *Holy*. Her Garden/Demesne is "the Stagger of Rooftops."

Her most common powers are—

- * **Second Self**—she exists, even dead (pg. 95).
- * **Minions**—her minions are dust devils, whirlwinds, and bits of evil trash (pg. 76).
- * **◆ Demesne (x2)**—manipulate the weather, timing of events, or abstractions like grades or credit rating in her Demesne; or, force a plausible coincidence there (pg. 76).
- * **8+ Stir the Heart**—make people hungrier or thirstier (pg. 76).
- * **Here's What You'll Do**—mark the adventure journal to decide what someone *should* do across arbitrary distances. Can be combined with "Stir the Heart" to expand its range (pg. 76).
- * **Toxic**—her talons and feathers are innately venomous, with a poison that can grant **+1 Complex** to a defeated target or a target whose player is willing. She has a +2 bonus to attempts to spread this poison (pg. 97).
- * **Unworldly**—she has a +2 bonus to catching attention. She can survive indefinitely without (or with bad) food, water, sleep, or air (pg. 95).
- * **Conversion**—she may infect others with her nature as "Harpy" ... but most likely only ever does this to one person; specifically, an NPC; specifically, the NPC who will eventually become the new Harpy (pg. 95).
- * **Blessings**—sometimes, when questing against her, there is the opportunity to buy a blessing for a card (pg. 95)—
 - **5+**: a +1 bonus for climbing, lasting the session
 - **5+**: the ability to give an extra year of life to someone dying of natural causes
 - **8+**: a get-out-of-jail-free miracle (also works on other locked/trapped spaces)
 - **8+**: an oracular dream miracle, *and*
 - **8+**: a +1 bonus for wriggling out of tight situations, lasting the session.

She also gets **Skilled (x2)**, **cv (x3)**, **Untouchable**, and the Mystery bonuses, **Heralded**, **Drawn to Certain Bait** and **Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116).

HEDGE THE FANG

Hedge the Fang, who is named Unmindful, dwells on the Farthest Roofs. Past Tanner's Court and the Blind Man's See and the Hawk's High Road and the Dreamer's Roost, and not so far from the Taster's Vale. There stands Hedge in a field of blue. He shapes the sea and the endless sky.

Vikenti Haru of the rats came upon him at his work.

Vikenti watched and marveled for a while.

"That's beautiful, sir Hedge," he said. Hedge turned. Hedge, he smiled.

He did not see the rat Vikenti, for Hedge the Fang had no eyes. He did not touch the rat Vikenti, for Hedge the Fang had no skin. He picked up the rat with his skinless hand, or rather, held him up upon it, not touching it, not flesh to flesh, but above it on a nest of air.

"You poor thing," Hedge said. He grinned. He grinned at the rat with his alien maw. "You poor thing, Vikenti of the rats, Vikenti Haru, *you've learned to see.*"

Vikenti licked his lips. Vikenti licked his hands. With his hands he washed his head and neck and finally his ears.

"That's not very poor," Vikenti said. "It lets me see you shaping the sea and the endless sky."

"In your life," said Hedge to him, "You've known all manner of awful pains."

"Yes," said the rat. "And you have not?"

"I'll just be taking them away."

Vikenti blinked. Vikenti scrubbed his tail. "Um," Vikenti said.

"I'll be taking the sight from those seeing eyes, and the touch from those feeling hands. I'll be taking the pain from that hurting life and you'll sleep like the sea and the endless sky."

And in that place and at that time Vikenti could easily have been lost.

Hedge the Fang unstitched him there. He cut the rat to parts. He rendered him down like the sea and sky. He broke what set the rat apart. He ripped out the thing that made the rat the rat Vikenti, and not simply part of the larger world. He held that piece up, the second Name, and he brought his fang to bear.

Yet Hedge—he could not strike.

In that place the rat could have been lost, he could have become the same as everything and everybody else, *save he saw that he was not Hedge.*

He felt himself shattering into a billion parts, and not a one of them Vikenti—

Still, he knew that he was not Hedge.

So Hedge turned away. Hedge looked up at the endless dark. Hedge sighed.

"You're a stubborn rat."

"I am," the rat conceded.

"I'll take the eyes of a cat," said Hedge the Fang. "And I'll wear that cat's skin as my own. Then I'll chew you up, you little rat, and my stomach will melt you down."

"Oh," Vikenti said.

"Then you'll have to give in," explained Hedge the Fang. "Then you'll have to go back to sleep, when you're dissolved, and one with me and with the sea and the endless sky."

"I wouldn't," Vikenti said.

"You'd have to," Hedge complained.

"If I were eaten," said the rat, "then I wouldn't know the difference; but there'd still be those in the world that recalled that I'd been Vikenti, and not Hedge the Fang."

The wind blew past. "I'd eat them too."

And fate took Vikenti's tongue.

And the rat stared off, and fate took his tongue, and he said these words to Hedge:

... you can try, sir Hedge, if you think you've got cats sufficient to the task.

And if you've ever wondered what's wrong with the world today, if you've ever thought: *how the hell did we wind up in this place*, well, now you know.

Vikenti Haru of the rats, and with those words, spat in the face of Hedge the Fang.



by Jenn Manley Lee



From the Books of Names

THE HERALDS OF HEDGE THE FANG ARE unholy wisdom in the eyes of a cat; clouds racing vigorously across the sky, and changing their various forms; sloth, torpor, and lassitude; a sense of dissolution.

THE WEAPONS OF HEDGE THE FANG ARE cats and owls; clouds, waves, and wind; existential doubt.

YOU TURN HEDGE THE FANG ASIDE BY mindfulness; suffering; careful attention to the world around you; insight into others' hearts.

HEDGE THE FANG IS DRAWN TO comfort; complacency; thoughtlessness.

HEDGE THE FANG KILLS BY ripping you apart; eating you; taking away what makes you into yourself.

HEDGE THE FANG HUNGERS FOR your surrender.

YOU MAY KILL HEDGE THE FANG BY accepting the truth you've denied most fiercely.

HEDGE THE FANG IS REBORN WHEN the world needs someone, again, to shape the sea and the endless sky.

YOU MAY ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF HEDGE THE FANG BY
(this is currently unknown)



Traits

Physical Action 3	Superior Skill: Spirit of the Roofs 2
Awareness 1	Wind, Cloud, Waves Magic 3
Communication 4	Superior Skill: Cat Speaker 1
Introspection 0	Professional Sky-Shaper
Self-Care 2	CV +5

Hedge the Fang has a base CV of 10, with standard edges *impossible speed and strength, fleshless and untouchable, and gigantic monstrosity, with the weight of the world in its needle-like claws.*

“Cats and Owls”

Hedge wields **Sovereignty** to claim the will of random cats and owls; then, directs them with his actions. Notionally, this *particular* sovereignty flows from his role as the rats' great enemy; if that ever changes, then his minions might, too.

“Clouds, Waves, and Wind”

The rats list cloud, waves, and wind as one of his “weapons” ... but outside of his notional ability to sculpt a nasty wave, I think this is *mostly* a description of how much of his work feels like, or *is*, accompanied by the motion of these things.

“Existential Doubt”

In addition to the unsettling effects of his various powers, he can inflict existential doubt directly with **Idealize**.

THE “CALLING”

You can open a door to a Hedge the Fang story by *caring about cats, or, a cat.*

... you notice the local cats have been a lot less friendly. Instead, it's like they're *watching* things. *Plotting* things. They seem *scary*, all of a sudden; not the cats they used to be.

You can open a door to a Hedge the Fang story by *caring about the Fortitude rats.*

... you catch malice in the eyes of the cats (as above), or maybe just a general foreboding: *Hedge the Fang is coming.* Hedge the Fang is coming to kill all the rats who ever knew Vikenti Haru's name.

Maybe he'll stop there. Maybe he'll kill all the humans that they might have ever talked to, too.

The GM can open a door to a Hedge the Fang story *in a dream.*

... you dream you're standing behind Hedge the Fang. And he turns. And he picks you up. He says, “You poor thing. You've learned to see.”

Maybe you're Vikenti Haru in that dream?

Maybe, you're yourself.

Wind, Cloud, Waves Magic

This is the magical skill to shape these things, or, become them.



ERRANTRY

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when players are on errantry against Hedge the Fang include:

- * “tell me of
 - “the clouds that race through the sky above”
 - “the cat, and its eyes too wise”
 - “the sense of eerie dissolution wracking you”
- * “behold, the wind blows through you now”
- * “behold, the clouds are racing by you now”
- * “behold, the waves are tugging at your feet”
- * “what stops making sense, for a dizzying moment; and when; and where?”
- * “what do you reach for inside yourself ... only to have it slip away?”
- * “what do you reach for outside yourself; only, it can’t be grasped?”
- * “tell me of your dream of Hedge the Fang,
 - “and of things you no longer need to hang on to”
 - “and of things that are harder to believe in, now”
 - “and what it’s like to be pulled apart”
 - “and the self you can no longer be”
 - “and how it casts some pillar of you into doubt”
- * (*as a scene closes*) “and if it ends, or if it does not end, we do not really know.”

Some things you might do:

- * after one of the dreams above, optionally reframing that dream as a metaphor or waking delirium instead, have Hedge attempt to extract the dreamer’s “second Name.” Roll Hedge’s **Communication** (4) against whatever the target uses to resist. If Hedge succeeds, he rips away a large chunk of the thing that makes them separate from the world, that lets them identify with themselves as a person, that makes them a valid target for effects ... though he’s not *perfect*, so such identification and targeting will still be *possible*.
- * know that Hedge is hints of a skinless giant rat, visible only as it moves.
- * *card*: know that Hedge is a cat, or an owl, or a cat-like/owl-like humanoid shape.

- * know that Hedge is immanent in the wind, in the racing clouds, in waves.
 - if spotted, an action may reveal his true body as rising and falling bones washed along by the water; or, a nearly-invisible mist passing ten to twenty feet above the ground.
- * know that all things are in vain.
- * have cats and owls, claimed by **Sovereignty**, do something useful for Hedge the Fang.
- * know that Hedge shapes the sea and the endless sky.
- * have Hedge act through someone whose second Name he’s taken—they become inclined to take actions that would help him, and in fact *must* take those actions, though they can theoretically contest those actions by rolling against themselves. If you have no ideas, perhaps he simply wants them to spy upon the rats.
- * have him use **Manipulation** to inflict a fate on someone whose Name he’s taken—at the time he takes it (5+) or later (8+)—like “you can still do math, but counting numbers no longer make sense to you,” “that key event in your past might not have actually happened?” or “you now ‘understand’ that nothing in the world has a meaning—that that’s just a lie.”
- * 5+: inflict the geas, *you find dissolution in stillness and in peace*; or, *you are disjointed from the experiences of the world*; or, *you know of naught but Hedge the Fang*.

Some stories the rats might tell of Hedge the Fang:

- * how he came to this city to do something awful; gathered a sinister force of cats and maybe even human servants ... until the rats snuck into a strange fortress and stole a treasure-token from him, and Hedge’s forces dissolved with the break of day.
- * how someone hides from the truth, and Hedge the Fang threatens them; how he gathers his forces and his metaphorical shadow takes away one thing after another from them ... until finally they accept the truth that they were hiding from, and his forces dissolve with the break of day.
- * ... or other stories of a Mystery, as per pg. 38.

HOW HEDGE THE FANG WORKS

Hedge's spiritual shapes come from his **Spirit of the Roofs** and **Wind, Cloud, Waves Magic** skills. His cat/owl and humanoid shapes come from **Many-Faced**, requiring him to spend a card.

His ability to shape the sea and sky is his **Spirit of the Roofs** skill, enhanced by **Professional Sky-Shaper**.

The way he vanishes when still and the “cushion of air and fate” that separates him from the world are *geasa* built from his Memetic “Truths.” They’re always notionally true, but at some point he must spend a 5+ card to turn them on as *powers*, and he can spend another 5+ to turn them off.

He is **Heralded**, accounting for many of his special effects—

The rest are things he does while hovering near in spiritual form, or the psychological burden of his attention.

That thing he did to Vikenti Haru was most likely **Extraction**, removing his second Name to take away his separateness from the world, but it could have been **Conversion** (which turns someone into an extension of oneself) or **Inevitability Entanglement** with a 5+ and, really, any of the three possible *geasa*.

Standard Powers

Hedge the Fang draws powers from *Awakening*, *Cheat*, *Creature of Delirium*, and *Memetic*.

By default, his **Mythos** is the story of Hedge the Fang, who in some sense embodies the cessation of awareness, who lives on the farthest roofs and shapes the sea and the endless sky. His **Role** is the dissolution of the self. His **Failing** is that he *is*, in some sense, a self. His Truths are “Hedge the Fang finds dissolution in stillness and in peace;” “Hedge the Fang is disjointed from the experiences of the world;” and “Hedge the Fang knows of naught but Hedge the Fang.” If it becomes relevant, his **Hack** is the ability to unravel the things of the world.

His most common powers are—

- * **card Extraction**—after a conversation, pull a person's second Name away: the knot of fate within them that keeps them separate from the world. They become one of his “vessels.” He can draw on the qualities and abilities of those whose second Names he holds. Note that he must spend another card to *keep* a Name any time the original owner makes a Mood roll (pg. 92).
- * **card Many-Faced**—take on the form of a cat, an owl, or a cat/owl-associated person/being (pg. 92).
- * **Unworldly**—he has a +2 bonus to catching others' attention. He can survive indefinitely without food, water, sleep, or air (pg. 95).
- * **Set Apart**—his bony, sharp fingers; his subtly shifting form; the way he isn't quite distinctly separate from the things around him ... these may give him away despite any transformation or disguise, howsoever strange or subtle it might be. If they do, he draws a component. He may only conceal them when his **Complex** is 0. If the GM does not wish to track NPC Issues, use a selected PC's **Over their Head** here instead (pg. 59, 92).
- * **Command**—he can sense through his vessels, communicate with them, and direct their actions, or mark the journal to skim lightly through the senses of all his vessels in an area for things of interest (pg. 92).
- * **♠ Sovereignty**—sometimes cats and owls randomly become his vessels. He can spend a ♠ to intensify this phenomenon, flooding an area with his vessels until the later of dusk or dawn (pg. 92).
- * **5+/8+ Manipulation**—transform and banish someone as they become his vessel (8+: while already his vessel), sending them to wander somewhere until they have an experience he names, sometime before the end of the next chapter. His transformation usually removes an element of their psyche (pg. 92).

To Break His Plans

There's a standard story the rats tell of Hedge, wherein he'll gather forces and weave schemes on a grand scale, only, then, the rats sneak in and steal something from him and it all falls apart. It doesn't even fail; he just ... wanders off.

I don't know why, of course. Not for sure. ... but my best thought is that Hedge the Fang only really does this kind of thing, as opposed to hurting the occasional rat or threatening someone's sense of self in their dreams, when he's already stolen someone's second Name (pg. 92). That maybe he really needs to have someone's weymark, not just his own identity ... if he even has an “own identity” ... to hold himself together enough to run an army or a scheme.

So the rats sneak in. They take that stolen Name. They return it to its proper host. ... and Hedge forgets what he was doing, and that's his grand scheme's end.

- * **Second Self**—his “true self” is not here, but rather is part of the indivisible essence of the sea and sky (pg. 95).
- * **minutes Step Away (x2)**—he may potentially fade away into an indistinct essence, remaining somewhat able to perceive or (by partially manifesting himself) influence events (pg. 95).
- * **Blessings (x2)**—sometimes he’ll accept agents, offering blessings (pg. 95) like:
 - **5+**: a single use of **Digest** (pg. 87).
 - **5+**: a +1 to emptying one’s mind, lasting the session.
 - **8+**: a +1 to actions against the Fortitude rats, lasting the scene.
 - **8+**: a one-use ability to make a cat obey any single order given
 - **8+**: a one-use ability to inflict a nightmare
 - **J+**: a one-use weather-altering charm, to bring or dispel wind or storm
 - **J+**: a one-use ability to step anywhere you can see
 - **J+**: a single use of **Paralyzing Fear** (pg. 79).
 Once per session, he may waive the cost to purchase such a blessing.
- * **card Symbolic Logic**—until the end of the scene, he can roll [Awareness + 2 (3)] to understand how things around him fit into his plans (pg. 80).
- * **Idealize**—he can enforce his aesthetic, making consciousness seem less real (pg. 80).
- * **5+/8+ The Dreams That Dreams do Dream Of**—he can make one of his Truths a *geas*, or undo that for 5+, or make it forcibly relevant for 8+ (pg. 80).
- * **5+ Inevitability Entanglement**—enchant someone, entangling them into his plans or enforcing one of his Truths on *them* (pg. 80).

He also gets **Skilled (x3)**, **CV (x5)**, and the Mystery bonuses, **Heralded, Drawn to Certain Bait** and **Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116).

Optionally and finally (if, e.g., it’s what you think happened with Vikenti Haru, or, if it just happens to work well in play), he might also have:

- * **Conversion**—he may make others as he is himself: sightless; skinless; Hedge, the Fang (pg. 95).

COMMENTARIES

The more I hear about Hedge the Fang the more confused I am about what he actually looks like, but I’m going to give *you* a clear idea—just, bear in mind that I might be wrong.

Imagine a gigantic rat skeleton, maybe fifteen feet tall.

Imagine that you can only see what it’s *doing*. You never see it at rest. You never see even the parts of it at rest. If you can see its head, that means it’s moving its head, or that it’s “looking” or “listening.” If you can see its hand, it’s picking something up, or stirring the sky and sea, or running on all fours. Its bones are visible for a second or so when they’re doing something intentional.

It has ropy grey muscles, the color of donkey-skin, but *those* appear and fade so fast that you can only really see the pulses of tension and relaxation passing through them.

There’s maybe a shimmer where the parts of it are that aren’t moving. A hint of a shadow, a transparent shape. But mostly there’s nothing to see there at all.

That’s Hedge the Fang.

He never touches anything. There’s a cushion of air and fate between him and the world—as strong as steel armor. He can smash things or be smashed but he can’t be cut.

His shape isn’t always described as being the same. There are stories of a jointed bone tongue twenty feet long that comes down to a needle-sharp tip. (I assume that the shell of air and fate around it is also sharp, although presumably less so.) There are stories of butterfly wings formed of bones. And sometimes the skeleton is described as being a human or cat instead of a rat. And obviously it’s possible that what this means is that Hedge the Fang is actually this gigantic chimerical monstrosity with a dozen or more creatures jumbled together and we only ever see one at a time—but I think it’s more that he changes his features now and again.

The rats are *also* a little vague about what “shaping the sky and the endless sea” means, but I think it’s like this. I don’t know if it’s the real sea or just a giant gutter-lake ... or both ... but in the Farthest Roofs, the land ends and there’s just this endless night sky and endless night-dark water.

And there’s Hedge the Fang.

He brushes his hands along the water to set the tempo for the waves of the sea; curls the edges of the clouds or pinches them apart; blows to make the steady winds and gestures to orchestrate the thermals and the eddies. His is the shadow that makes the water darker here and there; his is the light that makes it lighter. From time to time, if the sun ever rises there, he sketches out the road of light that leads from the sun

towards the viewer's eyes. He is the subtle movement in the structures of the world.

No wonder the rat Vikenti praised him, early on!

Finally, I'm going to clarify that when Hedge the Fang disassembled Vikenti Haru, I'm like 99% sure that he wasn't removing Vikenti Haru's physical pieces. Instead, he was taking apart Vikenti's mindscape. And I'm like 80% sure that he was specifically disassembling Vikenti Haru's *identification* with various things—the various beliefs about himself and connections between himself and other things in Vikenti

Haru's mind. Basically, he was saying, "No, this isn't you. See? This is just a memory. This isn't you. See? This is somebody else. *This* isn't you. *This* isn't you. *This* isn't you. See? *You* are nowhere to be found."

Does this mean that Hedge is a purveyor of genuine revelation? ... I think I'm unable to answer that. He wants rats—or possibly everyone—to cease to be aware of themselves and exist as part of the world, which is certainly *similar* to enlightenment. ... but his methodology and the quite literal absence of mindfulness in his suggested approach make me doubt that he's actually helping anyone.

HOOP SNAKE



by Camille "Karma" O'Leary

Hoop Snake, which is named Inexplicable, has no fixed location. It arises from where the whimsy takes it, goes thenceforth where it wills, and disappears again when it is done. It has taken many forms: it can be any oddity. Hoop Snake is simply the name and legend I prefer.

A rat poked Hoop Snake with his paw. Hoop Snake jumped up, bit its tail, and rolled away.

"Like hell!" said the rat. The rat gave chase, over the near roofs and the far. They wrestled at the cliffs over Bluenettle River, and the rat bit into Hoop Snake's neck, and Hoop Snake spat out its own tail and died.

He dragged the snake back, but nobody understood what he had done.

He couldn't explain it! All he could say was, "It put its tail in its mouth and rolled."

THE "CALLING"

The GM can open the door to a Hoop Snake story when you *see an inexplicable mystery*.

There are dozens of them in the books of the rats. There are probably hundreds more that are not recorded, and thousands more that Hoop Snake could be.

You see a Hoop Snake. Or a Lake Monk—like a sea monster, only it's a monk, discoursing in a solemn fashion upon doctrine. You see a person with no normal face: it's on the end of their cigarette, or on their T-shirt, or in the palm of their hand, or on anything they touch that they like. You see Jingling Crystal Bee flying by. Sometimes it's tiny. Sometimes it's big as houses. You see a rabbit with a pocketwatch, like Alice did before *she* met with Hoop Snake. You see something else like that.

It runs from you. You don't get to interact with it, or at least not *enough*. So you follow it into its world above.

Sometimes if you leave Hoop Snake alone it won't bother you. Sometimes when a snake bites its tail and rolls away and you leave it alone and say, "I don't really want to follow a snake like that," you'll be fine. Other times it'll haunt you until you follow it, or maybe it'll get mad.

You don't want to get Hoop Snake mad. You don't want to get involved with Hoop Snake, sure, but you don't want to get it mad, either. If Hoop Snake gets mad, it'll grow into one of the *serious* terrors, it'll evolve into Spring-Heeled Jack or Snallygaster or something, and it'll smash its inexplicability right through your life.



THE CHASE

Everyone should share this one, when the chase begins.

Here's some things you might do when someone's on the chase!

- * tell us why you feel you have to chase Hoop Snake
- * tell us why you feel you have to face Hoop Snake
- * tell us why you feel *they* have to chase or face Hoop Snake
- * tell us about a strange encounter or weird thing that one might see as you go racing past—
 - what bizarre path or sight do you go by?
 - what weirdly emotionally evocative place or event do you happen to see?
 - what do you see in the distance? why is it strange?
 - what weird weather passes by?
 - what's the strange sunlight effect you see?
 - do you see the lakeshore where the gutters don't work?
 - do you see the mark of another Mystery? which one? what marks?
 - what uncomfortable experience do you have?
- * tell us about a previous experience with Hoop Snake
- * ask the GM if Hoop Snake is doing something weird
- * react to something weird that you know it's done
- * tell us about a daring bit of adventure that you have along the way
- * tell us about something really weird, like a door standing in the middle of nowhere that opens for Hoop Snake to roll through
- * tell us about something dangerous, like fields where lightning constantly rains down.

HOW HOOP SNAKE WORKS

I usually think of Hoop Snake, in game terms, as a wish effect—from *Cheat's* power, **System** (pg. 72)—created by something else. That “something else” isn't necessarily ever going to show up in the game, but it makes a wish like:

“I wish that they'd chase the Hoop Snake over hill and dale and out to the far Far Roofs.”

... and so, accordingly, they do; and the *rules* are just, this plays

out however the GM or group thinks it should, with whatever weaseling or mitigation feels right allowed.

Chasing Hoop Snake isn't a power. It's just something that happens. It's what people *do*.

The wisher/GM can shake things up by making a variant wish, e.g., one that leaves Hoop Snake around to trouble other people later:

“I wish there were, like, this snake, and it would totally put its tail in its mouth and roll around, and when it did people would chase it and chase it to distant lands.”

Or a wish with other, unexpected features:

“I wish they'd chase laser Hoop Snake, and then it tries to steal one of their bodies!”

... but no matter what the wish is, it's a wish and not a character. A *story*.

Similar wishes create things like Lake Monk, Cigarette Face, and Jingling Crystal Bee.

Standard Powers

We don't know who creates these things. It probably never matters. Maybe a rip in the normalcy of the world. Maybe somebody's fevered imagination. Maybe a power of genesis passed among the existing cryptids or the spirit of the Far Roofs itself. But whoever or whatever it is, it draws powers from *Allegory*, *Wounded Angel*, *Holy*, and *Cheat*.

By default, its **Experience** would be something like daydreams, puzzlement, or wonder; its **System** would give rise to cryptids; and its **Allegorical Role**, **Failing**, and **Truths** would depend on ... well, what it actually is. Common powers include—

- * ♥/♥♥ **System**—at most once per chapter, at some unknown cost, up to some unknown limit, a new inexplicable Mystery arises. Spending an extra heart may break some portion of those limits (pg. 72).
- * **Let's Talk**—whatever this is, it can communicate with even such things as Jingling Crystal Bees, and is trusted by default (pg. 71).
- * ♣/8+ **Old Friends**—someone now knows it like an old friend (♣), or, it has a favorable history with a stranger, practical stranger, or important member of a group/society (8+; pg. 72).
- * **(Cage for a) Blasphemy**—if you bring it down to 1 HP (or 0), it breaks open and transient terrible things burst out. If it spends a card, it also releases

something likely to cause long term trouble for its attackers, like a Snallygaster or a Spring-Heeled Jack (pg. 91).

- * **Somebody Else's Problem**—there's a -2 penalty to trying to describe or spot/recognize it, when it doesn't want to be described/spotted/recognized (pg. 86).
- * **5+/8+/♥ A Tangled History**—it (or its cryptid summons) had personal experience with something; or, participated in it; or, according to fable at least, was *responsible* for it (pg. 86).
- * **Well-Lit**—it is generally well-lit. It may spend a card to declare improbable but desired lighting (pg. 98).
- * **card/♠ The Auctoritas Magister**—if it spends a card, others' powers will do -1 damage to it this scene. With a ♠ it can ignore the past minute of a power's effects (for a scene) or a wish/geas' effect (for the duration of a story; pg. 98).

Normally Hoop Snake and the rest won't have character sheets of their own at *all*—they're *just* wish effects, occasions for interesting scenes and actions. In a serious conflict, their cv is likely 7.

WHY CHASE HOOP SNAKE?

Some common reasons include:

- * It's a snake with a tail in its mouth! Rolling! How can you *not* try to catch it?
- * It's stolen your hometown! It's right there on its back! (Nobody will ever believe this later.)
- * It's magically obsessive.
- * You mostly don't want to get it mad.
- * You've just realized that it's the same thing, somehow, as the *cintamani*, the thing that gives the world its worth. So you give chase!



From the Books of Names

THE HERALDS OF HOOP SNAKE ARE
blurred vision; getting turned about; sudden light or sudden darkness; the sudden realization that something is and has been very wrong

THE WEAPONS OF HOOP SNAKE ARE
ridicule; confusion; anything you don't expect them to be

HOOP SNAKE KILLS BY
leading you away from the world, never to return; driving you mad; stealing your mind and body and living inside them

HOOP SNAKE WON'T HURT YOU IF YOU'RE
being completely cool with it; focusing on more important things; re-evaluating your plans and activities in light of Hoop Snake's presence, ideally incorporating or taking advantage of it ... though, that's rarely what it's *there* for, so this'll *also* tend to make it go away.

HOOP SNAKE IS DRAWN TO
(this is currently unknown)*

HOOP SNAKE HUNGERS FOR
you to become obsessed with it

YOU MAY KILL HOOP SNAKE BY
killing it physically and/or analyzing it thoroughly, depending on the circumstances; however . . .

HOOP SNAKE IS REBORN
whenever it likes, and possibly even in several different versions that may be alive simultaneously.

YOU MAY ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF HOOP SNAKE BY
catching its interest with some sort of confrontation or contest, and "winning."



* ... and, possibly, unknowable.

KING DEATH

King Death, the Solitary King, the Cat-Headed King, the King of Last Resort, lives on an island on the lake and looks out from the shore. He is born a second time into Kuroma Yatskiy, now, but the rats say his lonely kingdom on the Lake remains.

Long ago, Grandmother Rat took a raft out on Fortitude's Big Lake and found herself on the island of the Solitary King. She was not yet wise, then—just a middle-aged ordinary rat. She hadn't yet woken up. So when she smelled King Death, she tried to hide, but there was no hiding on that shore. When he came for her she fled; tucked herself away between two halves of a broken branch ... but it did not do. King Death's hand came for her. He pulled her out and dangled her above his maw.

A cornered rat will fight, even if she is a common rat, even if there is nothing special to her at all.

She twisted. Got her tail and head and two legs free and bit deeply into King Death's hand. This gave pause to Death.

"So, little rat," he said. "You would bite Death. Well, you shall know what you have tasted."

He spoke a Word. That Word rang through her; woke her up. It echoed in her and she did not simply know the sound, but also found she knew its meaning; and, following on that meaning came things like ... *thought; awareness; and, smaller words.*

She thought the first little words ever thought by rat, in the presence of King Death: *I am afraid.*

He set her down.

She could not tell him she was afraid. It was a thing she feared to say. So, after a time—it may have been five seconds or five days—she thought a different little word, and spoke.

"You," said Grandmother Rat.

And: "I," King Death agreed.

He turned away. He had been watching her, but now he turned away, and walked to look out on the lake. "I shall lift you up," he said. "And you shall live in my lonely kingdom, by my side, and know the secret ways of death."

Longing struck her; she said, "I would like that very much."

So she lived with Death for many years, and she learned many things from Death, and in that time he did not eat her, nor did she show him disrespect. She learned the ways of building things and citadels; to read and write. She learned to honor the Mysteries and the ways of Death.

Yet she was not content.

She thought of her children, back at home. Of her parents, though they must have long been dead. Of her litter-mates, blind and deaf and dumb without the Word of Death; and she

wished they too should hear the Word of Death, and know the ways of Death, and awaken from the sleep of common rats.

"You may not leave," said King Death, when she spoke of it. "You may not share the Word of Death. It is a fundamental law."

She looked at him a while.

She said, "And what will you do if I defy you in this, O Great King?"

To this King Death only smiled, and looked away, out at the endless lake.

So one night Grandmother Rat wove a coracle from the fallen branches near the shore, and cast a spell of sleep upon King Death, and she set sail back for Fortitude. She'd been away too long, and could no longer smell which of the rats she met there were her children, which her siblings—which her family, and which were not. So she treated them indistinguishably, when they met, telling each of them the Word of Death.

Now one day, King Death woke up, and the skies first burned with lightning, then, went dark. The sun burst open and fell into the lake and an evil god was slain. The world tilted on its axis. The stars drew close. King Death came stalking into Fortitude.

In the homes of the rats he found the altars to him.

In the rats he fought he saw the gift that was his Word, that made some bow to him and give to him their lives; made some flee; gave others the will to fight.

On the roof of the hotel, *the Rat King's Recourse*, he met Grandmother Rat.

"I'll bite you," she said, "if you pick me up."

"That's true," King Death agreed.

He hesitated for a while, looking her eye to eye. Then he looked away.

"You may all come," he said.

"No."

He glared at her. The hotel burned with an eerie fire.

"No," she said again. "Yours is a lonely kingdom, O King Death. I will not have it for my kind."

"You are a monstrous fool," he cursed.

"I am."

He squinted at her.

"Come on," she said. "Let's go. You're not ... really scared of a little bite?"

So King Death picked her up, and she bit him hard, and there's a chunk of his finger missing still. The two returned to his lonely land, and the sun was reborn into the sky.



From the Books of Names

THE HERALDS OF KING DEATH ARE

panic; a sense of something searching for you; the sky darkens; lightning flashes; you see dead things around you

THE WEAPONS OF KING DEATH ARE

everything crumbling around you; horrible hallucinations or actual sights; destructive coincidences; his hands and teeth; paralyzing fear

YOU MAY ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF KING DEATH BY

doing him proper honor; accepting him; giving Death or King Death a considered* place in your heart and in your life

OR TURN KING DEATH ASIDE

by resisting your fate, but he will only retreat for a short while—soon enough he just comes sniffing around again

KING DEATH KILLS BY

eating you; by commanding you to die; by stopping a coward's heart

KING DEATH IS DRAWN TO

that which fears him; that which is incomplete; that which is fighting itself

KING DEATH HUNGERS FOR

your company; your service; your honoring him; for the rats of Fortitude to prosper, but also for their flesh as his food

YOU MAY KILL KING DEATH ONLY IN

an act of complete, reckless folly
(including reckless accidents, reckless heroism, and reckless impulses to murder)

AND KING DEATH MAY BE REBORN THROUGH the love and service of the rats of Fortitude, or possibly just the love of Grandmother Rat



* that is, not suicidal or fearful

THE "CALLING"

You can open a door to a King Death story if there's something in your heart that tells you that you must go to Death.

Something inside you drives you to challenge Death, or to ask him for a favor. In such cases you can go to Kuroma Yatskiy, who is possessed by Death, or to King Death's uncharted isle.

Traditionally you will find and meet King Death early in your errantry, in person or in dreams—only to have him reject any requested favors and refuse to participate in any contest! If you push him hard, though, he will eventually tell you something that you can do besides bother him. Maybe it's something that's supposed to help you solve your problem. Maybe it's something that will convince him to deal with you. Often, in the stories, he says it by accident, like:

- * "Bah! You're a thousand years too young to ask anything of me. You could steal Goblin's heart more easily."
- * "The last person walked halfway around the world to find me; you've sailed just a day and a half and expect me to be impressed?"
- * "I can't possibly help you, my tea's gone cold and I don't have any Erisian sugar."

The struggle and the adventure begins from there; at the end, you may meet King Death again, on more favorable terms.

Traits

Physical Action 3	Superior Skill: Cat-Speaker 3
Awareness 2	Magical Skill: Reaper 4
Communication 4	CV +2
Introspection 1	(+1 to cards/HP when
Self-Care 0	acting as King Death)

King Death has a base CV of 7. He has a +1 bonus to cards and waives up to 1 HP damage/chapter when acting within his Role. His standard edges are *bloody scythe*, *impossibly strong*, and *reaper, reaching for your soul*. He gets a free card from **Strong** (pg. 79) the first time each conflict he falters or blocks.

"Reaper" Magic

This is the magic to reap a life ... but not easily, instantly, or from any great distance. One might, e.g., reach out mystically and hook a soul, or snuff a flame of life, or chant a short invocation to kill someone nearby. It's also useful for freeing trapped souls, communicating with spirits, and helping lost souls to their destination or in completing any unfinished business.







ERRANTRY

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when a character is haunted by King Death:

- * “speak to me of a moment of panic”
- * “lightning flashes in the distance; and where are you?”
- * “lightning flashes, and the dead are all around you; then they are gone; where are you?”
- * “the light flickers, and something dead is near you—then it is gone; where are you?”
- * “where did you think you saw a grave?”
- * “where did you think you saw a corpse?”
- * “what was the nightmare you had of death?”
- * “the sky darkens; and where are you?”
- * “tell me where you are”
- * “the sense of *something searching* passes by; where are you?”
 - (and) “it’s passed away; and what happens then?”
- * “your heart stutters, beats faster; and where are you?”
- * “tension, panic—a sudden moment of it, before it fades away; where are you?”
- * “tell me of the dead thing or things you saw”
- * “something is searching for you”
- * if King Death—angry, or going all out in a contest—has invoked his “dangerous accidents” tribulation with a ♠,
 - “tell me of a nasty accident, and how you avoided or survived it”
 - “tell me of a nearly *fatal* accident, and how you avoided it”
 - “tell me of how something important in your life breaks down; and, where are you?”

When first meeting King Death, in person or in dreams, ask the player how they want the “calling” phase to end. Do they want King Death to demand a *specific* favor from them, or is it up to you? Will he slip up, or ask for it deliberately? Will you play out the conversation organically, or only a few key parts?

After that conversation, he will generally hold their experience with **Bonds of Fate**—if there’s something he needs to be able to do, but can’t, you may add **A Distant Mood/Wish** (pg. 86) to his power list and implement it accordingly.

If they steal from King Death, disrespect him, or break a promise to him, and he spends a ♠ on **Cautionary Tale**, then, whenever the character tries to see something hidden or ambiguous, an image of death might confront them. (Rather than rolling his **Awareness** constantly, just pick narratively suitable times:)

- * the character turns on a light, to see corpses withdrawing into the fading darkness;
- * the character opens a door to see everyone dead, only to have that fade away when they see the room clearly;
- * the character turns on a light to see a corpse lying somewhere it shouldn’t be, and it turns and looks at them; then, they snap awake, and it isn’t there;
- * the character glances down into the dark hold of a ship, and a dead thing lunges up with snapping teeth;
- * the character keeps finding actual corpses where they shouldn’t be, or having them *actually* vanish on their own;
- * ... and other similar effects.

SAILING

Everyone should share this one, when/if sailing.

Here’s some things you might do when sailing to mysterious shores (e.g., the island of King Death):

- * tell us about the things you do aboard the boat;
- * show off how you interface with nautical life;
- * emote how you feel about the trip;
- * tell us about a strange encounter or weird thing that the ship sees or finds—
 - of the terrifying weather, and what it’s like;
 - of the strange weather, and what it was like;
 - of your experience of the lashing waves;
 - of the weird and magical islands that you found;
 - of the strange sea creature that you saw;
 - of the uncomfortable experience that you had;
- * tell us a tall tale of the journey;
- * tell us a tale that the sailors shared;
- * tell us a tale of your daring deeds;
- * tell us the tale of a brush with death;
- * tell us what you hope to find, when the journey ends.

HOW KING DEATH WORKS

Most of the signs of King Death's presence and interest are just the power, **Heralded**.

We'll build several of his "weapons" as a **Tribulation**. This, which he must prime with a ♠, is what creates effects like:

- * everything crumbling around someone,
- * horrible actual sights, *and*
- * destructive coincidences.

He *does* have to be close by when initially imposing his Tribulation. However, he has two picks of **Inconspicuous Form** and customizable travel options, as well as the magical skill for being death, **Reaper**, so he can sneak up on people if needs must.

Hallucinations of death are part of **Heralded** or punishment for sinning against him; see **Cautionary Tale** (which must also be primed with a ♠.) He also has **Paralyzing Fear**, which lets him inflict hallucinations or mental damage through sheer intimidation with a 5+ and a successful normal action.

His general ability to hurt people, kill people, and make trouble is the **Reaper** skill paired with the power, **Strong**.

Like—

Because he's a reaper, because he's death, he can walk up to you and reach into you and pull your life-fire out slowly; or, if he locks eyes with you for around twenty seconds he can pull you deeper and deeper into a death-trance and then say, "Die" and you fall down dead; or, if it's the end of a really dramatic chase scene and you're frightened half to death and he's caught up to you, maybe he can do the last half of killing you in that point-and-click fashion that he normally can't.

... but most of that only works at the end of a conflict, and, because it's magic and finicky, it's easier for the GM to come up with some reason why his targets can *somehow* come back; he's not actually invincible against PC or even NPC targets.

Stuff like waking up Grandmother Rat with the word of Death is **Awaken**—it needs an 8+ and a few minutes' time.

Standard Powers

King Death draws powers from *Allegory*, *Indomitable*, *Memetic*, and *Primordial*.

By default:

- * his Allegory **Role** is "Death" and his Primordial **Principle** is "Death,"

- * his Allegory **Failing** and Primordial **Element** are "the Knowledge of Death,"
- * his Primordial **Transformation** is "the cat-headed ogre: King Death,"
- * his Memetic **Mythos** is "the world of the dead and the dying," *and*
- * his Memetic **Truths** include "I must have a lonely kingdom;" ... but the other two remain unknown.

His most common powers are—

- * **Somebody Else's Problem**—as easy as you would think it would be to describe or spot a cat-headed ogre, there is in fact a -2 penalty to trying to describe or spot/recognize him when he doesn't want that (pg. 86).
- * **5+/8+/♥ A Tangled History**—he often had personal experience with something; participated in it; or, according to fable, was even *responsible* for it (pg. 86).
- * **8+ Awaken**—given a few minutes, awaken the inanimate to life or an animal to consciousness/speech (pg. 85).
- * **♦ Mechanisms of Transport**—acquire a new, cool mode of transportation when desired, such as a magic ship or a cloak of wings; King Death may have up to two of these at once (pg. 86).
- * **Wonder-Worker**—+1 to card values, and prevent 1 damage per chapter, when acting as King Death (pg. 86).
- * **8+ Seize the Intangible**—he can treat things that aren't solid as if they are (pg. 79).
- * **5+/8+ Keen Sense**—he has ears keen enough to hear a beetle's footsteps or the whisper of a soul (5+: hear a secret, 8+: follow a trail; pg. 79).
- * **5+ Strong (x2)**—win a contested attempt to reap one or more lives. Spades counter this effect (pg. 79).
- * **5+ Paralyzing Fear**—his normal action paralyzes a target with fear, attacks their mind, or induces fearful hallucinations (pg. 79).
- * **♠/mark Tribulation**—inflict his tribulation ("everything seems to be falling apart"). ♠ to curse, or mark the journal to make an ongoing curse cough up an incident *right now* (pg. 79).
- * **♠ Cautionary Tale**—curse someone who steals from him, *seriously* disrespects his stuff, or breaks a promise to him (pg. 79).

- * **5+/8+ Inconspicuous Form (x2)**—assume the form of a crow, death's-head moth, or cat. (8+: or an immaterial presence; pg. 79).
- * **(♣) Somebody Else's Story**—spiritually “be with” someone dead or dying. With a ♣, search through many such experiences for desired information (pg. 80).
- * **♥(♥) Bonds of Fate**—after talking to someone about death, he may use a ♥ to pick up a bit of their nature and “hold” their experience, forging a spiritual connection to them from afar. He may spend ♥♥ to change himself, without such a conversation, in form or nature, to fit his needs (pg. 86).

He also gets **Skilled (x3)**, **cv (x2)**, and the **Mystery bonuses, Heralded, Drawn to Certain Bait and Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116).

Optionally, he might have:

- * **5+/♥ A Distant Mood**—perform a handful of specific tricks, through the medium of Death, to reach out at long range to those whose experience he holds; or, let someone whose experience he holds, who spends a chapter serving Death or immersed in the Knowledge of Death, draw a component (pg. 86).
- * **8+/card A Distant Wish**—enact one of a handful of specific wishes fitting **A Distant Mood's** themes, at range, targeting someone whose experience he holds; or, enhance an ongoing wish by blending a new target or different specific wish into its use (pg. 86).



MALAMBRUNO

Malambruno, which is named Hatred, lives past Nowhere Way—in the hills of Notting Rather, by the Gutter-Lake of Forms. There it melds in its perfect camouflage into the trees, the rivers, the lake, the sky, the hills themselves, or whatever else comes to hand.

Georgiy Resnik slept, all unknowing, on Malambruno's hide. He breathed in Malambruno's musk. It infected him. He became other than himself. He grew threefold, and his fur and tail became as steel, and he woke with a powerful urge to wickedness. For a time he took sport with this, and made himself a deadly bandit, and did a number of infamous deeds; but in time it palled for him and he wished to return to his former self.

Now once the Rat King had named Georgiy his friend; "brother thou art to me."

So when it came to Georgiy's mind that he should like to be a rat again, he thought nothing of it, but went Down Below at once, tossing aside the guards and princes that opposed him as if they were made of cloth. He marched right into the throne room of the King, and said, "Your Majesty; I am Georgiy Resnik."

"Georgiy," marveled the King.

"Indeed I am," said Georgiy; "or, at least, so I should like to be again."

The Rat King examined him. He walked around and around the rat.

Transformative Pollen

The simplest technique of this skill is triggering pollen allergies in those who have them. More magical abilities include telekinetically controlling clouds of pollen, making others more vulnerable to persuasion, forcing someone to show their "true colors" for a moment, or beginning a long process of transformation. With grave effort, such as to cost Malambruno a point of health during battle, it may merge a herd of animals or loyal servants into a kaiju. With even greater effort, such as to take it off the stage of the game for some good time afterwards, it can reanimate the dead.

"There was a seed of malice in you," the Rat King said. "I had never seen it, but it was there. It is to this seed that Hatred's pollen has attached. Forswear it, I think, and spit it out, and you shall be a rat again."

"Well, then," said Georgiy, and puffed out his cheeks, and squinched his eyes, and strained his every muscle; and then, with a great deep cough, he spat out a viridian egg. The Rat King stepped on it; it squealed and broke; and Georgiy shrank back down again.

"Ah," said Georgiy. He looked around. He shook the metal from his skin and tail.³⁶ "That was rather an adventure, then."

"It was," the Rat King agreed.

And he took Georgiy up and he hung him high, for not all crimes are easily forgiven.

³⁶ The metal was later melted down into *bandit's steel*, from which are made some small number of the treasures of the realm.

Formless Existence

A formless existence is decentralized and elusive—difficult to pin down, to see, to affect.

Traits

Physical Action 2

Awareness 1

Communication 0

Introspection 4

Self-Care 3

Formless Existence Magic 4

Transformative Pollen Magic 3

CV +2

Malambruno has a base CV of 7. His standard edges are *burning you from within*, *choking on pollen*, and *you can't cope with [something]*.

Monsters conjured from his blood have a CV ranging from 5 to A, but tend to be either 6, 8, or 10 depending on the GM's needs.





ERRANTRY

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when a character is being changed by Malambruno:

- * “tell me of ...
 - “the strange monster you fought upon the roofs”
 - “that eerie alien emotion that burst through you”
 - “the eerie brush of Malambruno’s thoughts”
 - “the moments when you’re changing”
 - “how you cope with Malambruno’s curse upon you”
 - “how you were wracked with overwhelming emotion—how it seeped up from the cracks and motion within your changing form”
 - “the sense you have of what you will become”
- * “tell me of that horrid moment when ...
 - “something you rely on became intolerable”
 - “something normal and safe became intolerable”
 - “something you *need* became intolerable”



by Patrick R. Kelley



From the Books of Names

THE HERALDS OF MALAMBRUNO ARE you feel yourself changing; you experience an invisible change in the world; something changes, but nobody but you realizes anything is different

THE WEAPONS OF MALAMBRUNO ARE monsters spawned from its blood; alien emotions that infect you—sudden berserk fury, mad pride, or the inability to cope with something (the presence of your beloved, your children, your boss, your enemies, or anyone of the opposite sex; a sight or smell like moonlight, green things, dead things, garlic, or basil; the touch of something on your skin, like oily things, soap, another’s person’s touch, or iron)

YOU TURN MALAMBRUNO ASIDE BY clinging to routine; surrounding yourself with things that reinforce your identity

MALAMBRUNO KILLS BY eating you from the inside out; burning you to death

MALAMBRUNO IS DRAWN TO injustice; pride; someone setting people against each other

MALAMBRUNO HUNGERS TO make you something unrecognizable to yourself

YOU MAY KILL MALAMBRUNO BY eating Malambruno’s heart; hollowing it out and sleeping in its skin; absorbing it into yourself

MALAMBRUNO IS REBORN FROM the blood spilt in slaying it; its killers, if they’re not careful*

YOU MAY ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF MALAMBRUNO BY accepting some portion of your transformation and finding a way to integrate it into your life; finding a grudge, grief, prejudice, or other problem in your heart to which the transformation is “anchored” and cleansing both the problem and the transformation away.

* The Books of Names are a bit ambiguous here. I think this means that by the time you kill it, you’d better have had some insight into what the whole experience was about and what it means to be careful, or, your unexamined attempts at caution will not suffice.



THE “CALLING”

You or the GM can open the door to a Malambruno story if you *sleep in its vicinity*.

Because you'll start *changing*.

It's usually blatant and physical. It usually hurts. You wake up with scales, or wing-buds, or fangs, or the beginnings of antennae. You start to become something else, or someone else, something alien to who and what you were.

This is the curse of Malambruno upon you.

You won't generally suffer mental and perceptual changes immediately, unless you seek them out, but you'll have some sense—from dreams, visions, ambiguous instincts, or the library—of what you will become.

You won't generally have to seek Malambruno out immediately. If you cling to your daily life, if you hide from it, if you focus on your routine, you may not change very much or very fast.

Eventually, though, you'll slip. It'll eat away at you. You will become something different.

You'll have to face Malambruno, in the end, unless you want to be what you'll become.

You can open the door to a Malambruno story by *living a life of injustice or pride*—

Or, a life where you're *normally* pretty good, but you've decided to set two people against one another *today*.

You'll still have to sleep in its vicinity for something to actually happen, but it's much more likely to find its way to the roofs near your sleeping-place.

HOW MALAMBRUNO WORKS

Malambruno's infection is the Memetic **Inevitability Entanglement**, and needs a 5+. It can start any transformation that seems to fit. He does have to be nearby, but given that he's formless, that's not a big limitation.

Traditionally the transformation leads to **DELIRIUM**, which leads to **Sickness**, which escalates and then resolves the transformation. It doesn't have to work that way, but that's how it usually works out.

His blood spawns monsters based on a Memetic Truth; he activates or deactivates this *geas* with a 5+.

To burn or eat others from within, he shares a different Truth, *hatred burns and devours me from within*. This uses the alternative application of **Inevitability Entanglement**.

Infecting a target with alien emotions or bursts of intolerance can also be **Catalytic** (5+), sometimes paired with **A World of Endless Wonders** (♦)—the first to infect someone with a general condition of “I am overwhelmed by alien emotion and inability to cope with what's I'm witnessing,” which he can trigger from afar by spending another 5+ card; the second to fine-tune the details and, e.g., haunt people with specific moods, effects, or intolerances.

His infection *can* also be **Conversion**—a psychic attack that replaces the target's entire consciousness with Malambruno's. This can't happen to a PC, so it ... doesn't ... but it *can* leave a PC feeling kind of weird and not themselves for a while, instead.

Standard Powers

Malambruno draws powers from *Awakening*, *Memetic*, *Worldwalker*, and *Creature of Delirium*.

By default, his **Mythos** and the attached **Role** are, “I am the transformative seed of malice in every heart.” His **Failing** is that he's kind of a slacker. His Truths are,

- * Injure me, and you birth a monster.
- * Hatred burns and devours me from within.
- * I am trusted, but, I betray.

His **Mood** is a visceral loathing, rejection, and disgust—a being overwhelmed by the presence of emotions and sensations that one detests, fails to understand, and can't (but, yet, very nearly does) relate to. His **Realm** is an abstract space inside himself: the depths of Malambruno, estranged from the outside world. The nature of his **Shadow**, if he has one, is disputed and unclear—he would claim it to be you, or more generally, the bodies of his victims; scholars say, it's he himself.

The **Experience** he would extract, if he took that power, is the ability to be a laid-back slacker—to be at peace with, and have tolerance for, things.

His most common powers are—

- * **5+ Inevitability Entanglement**—impose a Truth on someone as a *geas*, or bind them generally into his Mythos—first, guaranteeing that a seed of Malambruno exists within the target's heart, and second, starting a transformation. He doesn't completely control the transformation—he can shape the broad strokes or a few specific details but not both; a lot of it is based on what's “fitting” for that character and on recent events in play (pg. 80).
- * **J+ Mythos Complementation**—specify a new fate for someone in his Mythos as a *geas*, potentially including a transformation that is more under his control (pg. 80).

- * **5+/8+ The Dream That Dreams Do Dream Of**—he may impose a Truth on himself as a *geas* with a 5+, cancel the *geas* with a 5+, or force something to happen with an 8+ to make a *geas*-imposed Truth relevant (pg. 80).
 - * **Second Self**—His manifestation in the world is not his true form: his *true* form is a malicious will moving inside the cosmic/cosmogonic egg or seed (pg. 95).
 - * **minutes Step Away (x2)**—He may step away from the world, leaving only dissipating pollen behind. He may use that pollen to do stuff, as long as he is unobserved, taking a -2 penalty to Awareness and quick/offensive actions, but receiving a +2 bonus to defense (pg. 95).
 - * **Conversion**—he may attack others' psyches, including corrupting NPCs into an emanation of his will and causing them to use his character sheet. Affected PCs experience alien emotions and changes to their self but do not become emanations of Malambruno (pg. 95).
 - * **J+ Materialize**—he can turn invasive thoughts, hallucinations, and generally anything you think but don't *really* think and don't *want* to really think into reality. (Physical reality only, though, not events, histories, or circumstances—he can manifest an imaginary monster “that murdered your family,” but your family's still fine; pg. 95).
 - * **Blessings (x2)**—sleeping near Malambruno may offer “blessings” (at the cost of cards; pg. 95):
 - **8+**: a +1 to hunting others, lasting the session
 - **8+**: a +1 to lurking unseen, lasting the session
 - **8+**: a +1 to safely digesting bad or uncooked meat, lasting until the buyer's current story ends
 - **8+**: a +1 to ambushes, usable once
 - **8+**: a +1 to scaring people off, lasting the session
 - **8+**: a +1 to dreaming, or actions taking while dreaming, lasting the session
 - **8+**: a +1 to controlling distant phenomena, usable once
 - **J+**: a +2 to tearing things apart, usable once
 - * **5+/8+/J+ Deepen the Mystery**—Malambruno can influence the space (up to 2 acres, 8+: 200, J+: 2000) around him, giving it a dream-like and fey atmosphere, even while Stepped Away (pg. 95).
 - * **card Many-Faced**—Malambruno can shift his shape with relative ease, though mostly in the “amorphous and imitating-environments” style rather than being able to impersonate people or animals (pg. 92).
 - * **♠ Catharsis**—use this with some other power. The power use is extremely emotionally affecting; the target draws, or must lose, a component. (Once per in-game day, three; pg. 92).
 - * **8+ Extend the Moment**—he may draw out an experience he is inflicting on a target. If they make a **DELIRIUM** roll, they may add “1 5 5” to it (pg. 92).
 - * **5+ Catalytic**—he can plant a seed of his Mood in someone's heart, or, no matter how far away he is, encourage it to grow ... battering them with waves of alien emotion and intolerable sensation (pg. 94).
 - * **8+ Strange, Foreign Treasures**—he can manifest strange entities and experiences from within himself (pg. 94).
 - * **♦ A World of Endless Wonders**—digging out a suitable quasi-material shell or parasite from deep within to accompany his pollen or his “seeds,” he can fine-tune their effects. This is particularly useful with Catalytic to create effects like “the seed of Hatred within you makes the color green intolerable.” He can skip the actual invocation of Catalytic if he does not intend to personally trigger heightened instances of this experience from afar; though, this leaves the resulting effect almost entirely in the target's player's hands (pg. 94).
- He also has **Skilled (x3)**, **CV (x2)**, and the Mystery bonuses, **Drawn to Certain Bait** and **Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116).



by Todd Thomas

TYPHON

Typhon, who is named Outrage, is a great and terrible serpent. She dwells past Gallows Way, in the Madcaps' Nave below Dead Man's Manor. There amidst the chaotic rising and falling edges of the Nave she rages at the things that have done her wrong, smashing the rooftops into kindling one day and coiling in deep, hidden places meditating on her malice and dreaming of visitors to bite the next.

Praksia the rat found her there. Typhon broke Praksia's neck and hung her high. Praksia danced, not dead but certainly not living, for seventy and seven days. Then the lightning struck the tower where she hung, and Praksia slipped away.

"I cannot stay," she whispered, when to her family she'd returned. "For I am dead, and Typhon will hunt me down. I cannot stay, but I will tell you her secrets, and you may put them in your Books of Names."

Unbreakable Scales

Typhon's scales are magically impenetrable.

THE "CALLING"

The GM may open the door to a Typhon story with *pomp and privilege, gold and glory*.

Those who actually live such things are unlikely to struggle with her. She does not normally bother celebrities or politicians, athletes or the rich, no matter how virtuous or unjust. But those who are just *nearby* the world of glittering and grandiose things—who live, but not that well, and offend the glorious with their dull and tired gazes—they, may be called to struggle.

Alternatively, the GM may open the door to a Typhon story with *disaster*:

In its aftermath, she may be found supping on the lives of victims, metaphorically or in serpent form; those who see this and feel loathing may attract her ire, and her call.

You may open the door to a Typhon story by *showing her disrespect*.

Whether it is after such a disaster, or in a random meeting at a bar, or formally cursing her in a private ceremony, if you reject her, or refuse her, or spit upon her name, she will visit wrath upon you; and it will generally be difficult to escape that wrath without chasing Typhon down.

Traits

Physical Action 2	Superior Skill: Spirit of the Storm 3
Awareness 3	Unbreakable Scales Magic 3
Communication 0	Entanglement Magic 1
Introspection 4	CV +3
Self-Care 2	Professional Wicked Imagination
	Professional Giant Golden Snake

Typhon has a base CV of 8. Her standard edges are *vast, lashing weight; unbreakable scales; and vicious fangs*.

"Entanglement" Magic

Entanglement magic is used to keep some great specific power bound and sealed away—though in Typhon's case, I know not what that power is. This magic allows one to bind one's own mind and affect, appearing stable and calm when experiencing hallucinations, inner turmoil, or psychosis. It allows one to bind emotions into objects, creating knickknacks of great meaning. Most importantly of all, it can attract someone or something one needs, and know what one might offer them to ensure their willing cooperation ... as well as what greater offer would go beyond that, and ensure that they would not betray one under any reasonable duress. The pinnacle of this art is to create an entire new person, the person that one needs, directly from the earth (or roofs), if there is no one suitable to be summoned; such a person will always have a superior skill targeted at allowing them to assist.

As an interesting side note, this appears to be the same magic practiced by the Titov family of Fortitude; save, of course, that the Titovs presumably keep something different bound.



PRELUDE

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Skip straight to errantry if the characters have already met and angered Typhon. Otherwise ... here are some things you might say when Typhon's influence touches on a soul:

- * "it's raining again."
- * "it's always raining now"
- * "do you ever watch raindrops go down the window?"
- * "tell me about
 - "that pain you keep having"
 - "that jerk who keeps draining you"
 - "that problem that keeps coming back"
 - "that obligation you can't keep up on"
 - "misery"
- * "you're hurting again"
- * "(the recurring problem or jerk) is back again"
- * "you just can't get comfortable"
- * "what kind of sad music does your PC listen to?"
- * "things are ... gray."
- * "ask another player what dumb or sensory thing's bothering you now."

But then, one day, they get a glimpse of gold in the distance, or something *like* gold—something shiny and beautiful; irrationally desirable. It's usually *sensory*, like, something shiny to *see*, maybe a hint of music, or something; not, like, a glimpsed opportunity. But they still know if they can just *get* to it, it'll help.

... only, they can't. By the time they get to it, it's not there any more. And now, after one of the bits above, you can say:

- * "... and it hurts more, because there was (*this glint of gold*), and then (*you chased after it*), and it was gone."
- * "do you ever wonder if there's something out there trying to punish you?"
- * "do you ever think maybe there's something in the world just trying to ... like, devour you?"
- * "maybe, you think, your life isn't dragging *just because*. Maybe it's a *torment*. Maybe there's something you can reach for, something you can *find*, can fight or surrender to, that'll make it better?"

They are called, to face Typhon.

ERRANTRY

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when a character quests against Typhon:

- * "storms lash the roofs"
- * "you hear great scales scraping against the roof"
- * "tell me how you saw Typhon in the distance, and lost sight of her"
- * "tell me of the poisoning, and the fever"
- * "tell me of
 - "the rope, the sheet, the twisted cord that struck at you like a snake"
 - "being strangled by a snake-like thing that ... shouldn't have even been alive"
- * (*afterwards*) "tell me what it's like not to trust the belt, the rope, the sheet"
- * "tell me a rat's tale of fury born from outraged pride"
- * "tell me of abandoned nesting-sites of stolen memories and dreams"
- * "speak to me of the legacies of disaster"
- * "tell me of that dreadful moment
 - "when the lightning struck"
 - "on the storm-slick roofs"
 - "when you were blinded by the storm"
 - "when the roofs broke in the rain"
- * "speak to me of the great disaster—fire, earthquake, or whatever else it is that comes ..."
- * "tell me of how you fought Typhon,
 - "and the roofs broke before it ended"
 - "and lost sight of her while stunned"
 - "but storms and fate tore you apart"
 - "and of how you wounded her, but fled"
 - "and why it was inconclusive"
- * "tell me how you met Typhon,
 - "and were forced to flee—or dragged away"
 - "and were forced to hide—or buried"
 - "and of the great fear—or, was it fear?—you felt"

Eventually they will encounter Typhon "on camera," either in one of those tales or outside of it, and the tale may find an end.

HOW TYPHON WORKS

Typhon has **Kaiju Form** and **Mortal Form**: a human form she spends a lot of time in, and a monstrous form, a giant gold-scaled snake. She can also allegedly turn into a golden whip, but it's not clear how or why.

There are no records of a rat form. If you want her to pretend to be a rat, use **Somebody Else's Problem** or give her a magic power for it.

The oppressive spirit that fills your life when a Typhon story starts isn't an active power. It's just the world's natural balance. When someone gets to be the spirit of wealth and privilege, people somewhere suffer. It's systematized and impersonal and if the players don't want it to include any PCs, it doesn't have to include any PCs. It'll *still* probably rain a lot if her attention is on the characters' city, but that's about all.

That said, **Heralded** is actively responsible for at least some of those storms, some of those glimpses of gold in the distance, and possibly long-term political turmoil that'll help to make things miserable.

She is known as a poisonous creature, not so much for her bite—venomous, but not exceptionally so—as for the corrosive influence of her wealth; her version of **Catalytic**, in particular, may exalt or corrupt by placing a seed of gold and glory in her target's heart. It is by no means necessarily obvious which.

Her **Hack** is a dominance over snake-like things. This includes snakes, but also whips and ropes, which will sometimes just randomly lunge and wrap around your neck if she doesn't like you. Hacks are customizable, so you can customize the rules here—if you feel like letting PCs dodge with a Physical Action roll and chop up the rope *en route* that's fine. If you think her targets have to struggle and gasp and play up the struggle with **DESPERATION** or a power or an intense conflict against a 7 or even 10 CV just to survive, then that's fine too. Similarly, you can decide whether it's completely a matter of opportunity, where the rope has to be right next to your neck before it'll go for it, or if it's more that sometimes at night a rope will crawl out of a chest or something and halfway across a city block just to make it to its target.

Most of the disasters associated with Typhon come from **Heralded**. She doesn't actively direct or cause them—just, when she's active, when she's focused on a person or a place, sometimes, the dominoes for a disaster begin to line up. **A Little Push** (♥) can also create earthquakes in vulnerable locations, **Spirit of the Storm** can make thunderstorms (or, on a critical success, tornadoes), and if she is pushed far enough, she can switch to

Wicked Mode (requiring a roll) and use **[Mood]-Splosion** (♥) to unleash fire tornadoes, earthquakes even in relatively stable regions, unprompted economic collapses, and the like.

It is reasonable to assume that she can automatically create those thunderstorms and tornadoes off-camera as long as she does not do so *often*; instead of sitting there rolling until a (critical) success comes out, the GM should just assume she succeeds when narratively convenient and fails otherwise.

Standard Powers

Typhon draws powers from *Allegory*, *Cheat*, *Kaiju*, and *Worldwalker*.

By default, her **Realm** is “the halls of the powerful”—the secret world of the rich and the great, surrounded by the misery of the weak. Her **Mood** a gilded, archaic pomp and glory. Her *kaiju* form, her serpentine self, with the default **Scale** of weak/small/light to big/heavy/strong. Her **Shadow** ... perhaps Unicorn? Or Harpy?³⁷ Following the pattern of the Mysteries, her default **Role** is “Typhon” and her default **Failing** is “Outrage.”

Her most common powers are—

- * **5+/minutes Set the Mood**—spread her Mood to a target or the area around her (pg. 73).
- * **♥ [Mood]-Splosion**—invoke her Mood on a grand scale (pg. 73).
- * **Wicked Mode**—roll **Introspection** or **DELIRIUM** to invert her outer robes, ornate gold becoming blue, and let her hair hang raggedly before her face, and become a spirit of devastation, misery, and primal wrath. Her Mood shifts accordingly, and her **[Mood]-splosion** becomes *I wish that this that offends my sight would be shattered, broken, and cast down*. Once per session, she may automatically critically succeed on switching to Wicked Mode or back (pg. 73).
- * **minutes/card Kaiju Form**—turn into a giant golden snake (pg. 73).
- * **hours, minutes/card, or ♦ Mortal Form**—become “human” (pg. 73).
- * **card/♦ Shed Scales**—while in kaiju form, adjust size to remove a size-related penalty up to −3 or (adversary's) bonus up to +3. This takes a card; a ♦ allows her to use it as often as she likes for a scene. In either case, she can only reduce the bonus or penalty to the extent an appropriate size to do so exists (pg. 73).

³⁷ You could also make her Shadow an immortal rebel rat from the Autumn Dynasty, one of the ones who joined forces with the other factions and turned on Typhon way back when—but who secretly never gave up aspirations on the throne? (Though, TBC, I just made that up, and there's probably no such rat: if there were, they're too cool not to have shown up in rat operas.)

- * **Let's Talk**—Typhon can communicate with anything, and nothing dares be hostile to her by default (pg. 71).
- * **Childish Dreams**—snake-shaped things lash out on her behalf, when she's angry and it's convenient, even if she's not directly aware (pg. 71).
- * **♥ A Little Push**—twist a fault line, invoke “the inner serpent, greed,” or some other grand serpent-ruling act ... to turn a failure at a basic life task like doing laundry or impressing someone into success (pg. 71).
- * **J+ Into the Mittelmarches**—summon a bit of the world of the wealthy and powerful to her, e.g., by finding a way to exploit her connections or wealth or throwing open a random door to a fancy ball (pg. 94).
- * **5+ Catalytic**—her *normal action* plants a seed of gold and glory in a target's heart ... or, even at range, encourages such a seed to grow (pg. 94).
- * **5+/8+/♥ A Tangled History**—she nests in stolen memories, and may thus declare that she has had personal experience with something (5+); or, participated in it (8+); or, according to fable at least, was *responsible* for it (♥; pg. 86).
- * **Somebody Else's Problem**—she may pass among others unnoticed (–2 to recognizing/spotting/describing her when she so prefers; pg. 86).
- * **♦ Mechanisms of Transport**—get a new, cool mode of transportation when desired, such as a boat to sail the Far Roofs in her human shape or the skill to enter people's dreams. She may have up to two at once (pg. 86).
- * **8+, minutes Awaken**—given a few minutes, awaken a corpse to a sort of life. (Or other inanimate things to life, or an animal to consciousness/speech, but she mostly doesn't do that; pg. 85).

Optionally, she might have:

- * **Wonder-Worker**—+1 to card values, and prevent 1 damage per chapter, when acting as Typhon (pg. 86).
- * **♥ System**—to replace **Childish Dreams** and **A Little Push** with a different, more potent, system for snake control (pg. 72).

She also has **Skilled (x4)**, **CV (x3)**, and the Mystery bonuses, **Heralded, Drawn to Certain Bait** and **Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116).



From the Books of Names

THE NAME OF TYPHON IS

“*Outrage*” ~

the fury of the privileged when intruded on by the weak

THE HERALDS OF TYPHON ARE

storms; the scraping of scales on the roofs; the glint of gold in the distance; political turmoil; the weak, intruding on the strong

THE WEAPONS OF TYPHON ARE

poisons; whips; disasters; anything that moves like snakes

TYPHON KILLS YOU BY

breaking your bones; hanging you high; ripping you up; casting you down; *and in any cruel and wicked way*

YOU MAY KILL TYPHON BY

stabbing her in the eye with a blessed spear; choking her on her own weight; acting to save her (when the need is real)

YOU TURN TYPHON ASIDE THROUGH

hiding from her sight; meekness; willing service to her ends; empathy for those below you in their station

TYPHON IS DRAWN TO

pomp; gold; glory; the vulnerability of prey after disaster; those who refuse her, reject her, or show her disrespect

TYPHON HUNGERS FOR

your love; your adoration: those who praise and adore her she treats more kindly, and those who reject her or flee her she will never in her life forgive

TYPHON IS REBORN WHEN

the storm is fiercest at Madcaps' Nave; when the Rat King dies without an heir, and a new family must take the throne; when a legendary pearl forms around the hatred and jealousy in a high-ranked or otherwise fortunate person's heart

YOU MAY ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF TYPHON BY

praising her as you defy her, until you prove yourself more trouble than you're worth; rejecting a gift she has offered you three times



UNICORN

Unicorn, which is named Numinous, dwells three steps away and beyond the world, but most often in the Farthest Roofs, where the Steppes of the Sky come down to touch the Vast and Earthen Court. There it is stepping upwards from the world, as it has always been stepping upwards from the world, caught in a moment of transcendent glory that does not complete. It simply *is*.

Melanthios heard the footsteps of Unicorn. Melanthios heard the ringing of Unicorn's bells. So Melanthios chased Unicorn off to the Farthest Roofs, and Melanthios did not return.

Anton and Karel, who were his sons, were wiser than their father.

They heard the bells but they did not follow. Instead, they memorized the scent. They gathered swords, and ropes, and nets, and they went out. They brought food and water and all manner of gear. They clung to the roofs with all four feet wheresoever after Unicorn they went. It proved no good. Anton looked up, and Karel to his brother.

The world came down—

That's what Karel said. He had time to look away. He had time to bury his head in his paws. He did not see the fullness of Unicorn's presence. He only saw Anton his brother become unreal.

In the light of the moment of the Unicorn, Anton became as a paper figure in the fire. His reality burned out. His shadow seared into the roofs behind him. Where he'd stood, for just a moment, the Steppes of the Sky came down to touch the Vast and Earthen Court; and Anton was gone away. So Karel ran and Karel ran and Karel ran from the Unicorn; and all his life, he envied but was more fortunate than his brother.

Traits

Physical Action 4	Superior Skill: Unicorn 4
Awareness 1	Holiness Magic 4
Communication 3	Professional Wordless Speech
Introspection 0	Professional Allure
Self-Care 2	CV +4

Unicorn has a base CV of 9. It has 4 HP, but for one card/scene can take -1 damage from powers. Its standard edges are *trapped in eternity*, *drowning in beauty*, and *you no longer exist*.

Holiness

The Holiness magical skill allows for miscellaneous minor aesthetic effects, such as growing flowers in random places, shining in the darkness, or creating a fresh breeze. It can purify water, repel ghosts and spirits, and calm the observing heart.

THE "CALLING"

You open the door to a Unicorn story by *being vulnerable to it*. By wanting something *like* Unicorn, too much.

Here's what it's like:

You hear hoofbeats where you shouldn't. You hear the sound of bells. You see flowers growing where flowers shouldn't grow, and they are ... overpowering, in their sanctity. You feel a cold, sharp, fresh wind coming in suddenly from the distant sea.

And ...

And because you're *vulnerable*, because you've opened that door, you feel it:

This is it. This is the thing. This is what my life is for.

You are called to hunt the Unicorn.

... I will tell you now: this isn't actually what your life is for.

You are not to hunt the Unicorn.

You are not to kill the Unicorn, as Klytië Fujioka did; and it is certainly beyond your power to help it.

At *best*, you can let the hunt change you; and let it go, and in good grace, when you have chased the Unicorn for long enough.

At worst the call to face Unicorn shall be your ending.

Every rat knows this. Every rat knows not to chase the Unicorn. Most humans do as well. ... but they do so anyway, at least a while.

You may open the door to a Unicorn story by *putting someone on a pedestal*—by idealizing them; by holding them to unreal standards. In the end, though, unless that translates into your *wanting* the numinous too much, that door will, at most, be cracked.



PRELUDE & ERRANTRY

For the GM, or anyone who is up for handling this part of things.

Some things you might say when Unicorn's influence touches on a soul:

- * "where were you when ...
 - "you heard the ringing sound of bright, pure bells?"
 - "you heard the hoofbeats, distant on the roofs?"
 - "you found the flowers, growing, where flowers couldn't grow?"
 - "that cold, sharp, fresh wind blew in from the sea?"
 - "the flurry of impossible snow came by?"
 - "you caught that briefest glimpse of timeless, beauteous divinity?"
 - **8+**: "the sounds of Unicorn caught you up; transfixed you ... and you could not move or *think* until they passed?"
- * **5+**: "this is emotionally overwhelming."
- * **5+**: "the sound of bells; the ringing of distant hoofbeats; your mind is cast back to a moment of great (*emotion, e.g., grief or joy*); and tell me of it?"
- * **5+**: "a sharp wind blows in from the sea, and wracks you with a memory of (*emotion, e.g., love or sorrow*); and tell me of it?"

All of the above may still be said, when the characters are on errantry; but also these:

- * "tell me of your hunt for the Unicorn"
- * "have you yet found any signs of the passage of the Unicorn?"
- * "where have you been searching for the signs of Unicorn?"
- * "tell me what it means to you, that you are searching for the Unicorn"
- * "tell me how your friends and family struggle to dissuade you from the hunt"
- * "tell me how your life begins to fall apart, as you are hunting for the Unicorn"
- * "tell me—re: the Unicorn—why you feel that you are ... spiritually ... getting closer"
- * "tell me, have you even seen a sign of Unicorn in the past several days?"

Eventually, perhaps, they may get a clear look at Unicorn, or lay their hand upon its horn; and inevitably, if they do so, it is in that timeless moment of **Transition (♥)**, where the Steppes of the Sky touch the Vast and Earthen Court, and Unicorn ascends, and everything else ... goes away.

Recommended music for that moment includes Sarah Brightman's *How Can Heaven Love Me* featuring Chris Thompson, Suzanne Vega's *The Queen and the Soldier*, Shriekback's *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, and The Killers' *Human*.

Note that if it's just the **Transition**, witnesses will return to existence later, and the timeless eternity of ascension will have taken at most an hour. Unicorn needs an extra **5+** card (and, presumably, running its targets out of HP) to erase anyone for *good*.



by Mariona Roig Torné

HOW UNICORN WORKS

You only ever directly see it in the moment of its ascension.

The Unicorn interacts oddly with time and with perception. You can hear it somewhere far away; catch a glimpse; find traces. You can spot it in the mist, or distance ... but you're not quite sure. You can even attack it from afar. ... but a direct look at Unicorn (with sight, or any comparably precise sense) *means* catching it as it steps into the sky. That moment *is* every other moment of ascension that it's ever had. It burns the current "now" away.

Unicorn can project that moment in two ways. The nice way is with **Transition** (♥); the GM can wax eloquent about that moment and how timeless it is and how you're erased from existence, but, you're *not*, or, not *forever*. You wake up, eventually. The less nice way is with a wound power (5+) which actually extirpates the witnesses.

The obsessive drive to face Unicorn is premised on the player opening the door to it—

Unicorn can use **Obsession** to make its action emotionally affecting enough to do that to people, and **Transfix** to make you unable to pay attention to anything else, and **Open the**

Vault to summon up flashbacks and particular moods ... but ultimately, this relies on the *character* being primed to turn that into an obsessive hunt instead of falling into a state of despair or wonder or creative inspiration or something else.

Unicorn is **Heralded**, so arguably the signs of its presence just "happen"—it doesn't even formally have to *be there*. For when that's not satisfying, though, it uses **Childish Dreams** to "throw" the sound of its hoofbeats or bells to mislead pursuers and teleport away when someone's about to reach it in a flurry of snow; uses the **Holiness** magical skill to grow flowers in weird places or bring a fresh wind blowing in; and escapes in a crunch using **Fade**.

If the rule about only encountering Unicorn in the moment of ascension ever gets too hard to work with, you *can* decide it only applies in initial encounters, or even just ... "sometimes?"

Standard Powers

Unicorn draws powers from *Allegory*, *Holy*, *Cheat*, and *Wounded Angel*.

By default, its Allegory **Role** is "Unicorn;" its **Failing**, "the Numinous." Its Cheat **Experience** is *the moment of its transcendence*; its **Hack**, random unicorn/holiness F/x.



From the Books of Names

THE HERALDS OF UNICORN ARE

the sound of hoofbeats on the roofs;
the sound of bells;
flowers growing where flowers ought not grow;
flurries of snow; sudden cold winds;
a glimpse of divine and endless beauty

THE WEAPONS OF UNICORN ARE

an almost irresistible impulse to hunt or follow it;
the exhaustion and wear and tear you take upon that journey; its horn

THESE THINGS DEFEND YOU AGAINST UNICORN:

stress; practicality; engaging in make-work; the spell of Klytië Fujioka, who slew the Unicorn

UNICORN KILLS BY

superseding you, making you and the place you're standing in so utterly unimportant that you simply

cease to be

UNICORN HUNGERS TO

(this is currently unknown)

UNICORN IS DRAWN TO

open spaces;
natural beauty; Churches; ideals of pure/
virginal beauty, put on a pedestal by others

YOU MAY KILL UNICORN BY

committing abhorrent deeds in her presence and in her name; staining her with the blood of total innocents; binding her with her mane and slaughtering her while reciting the spell of Klytië Fujioka.

UNICORN IS REBORN WHEN

a divine or perfect being sacrifices themselves for its rebirth

YOU MAY ESCAPE THE UNICORN'S ATTENTION IN

finding something or someone worth abandoning the hunt for; letting it break your ability to function in the world, a little; or, standing on ground (or with some object in hand) so solid and real it cannot erase you upon your catching it



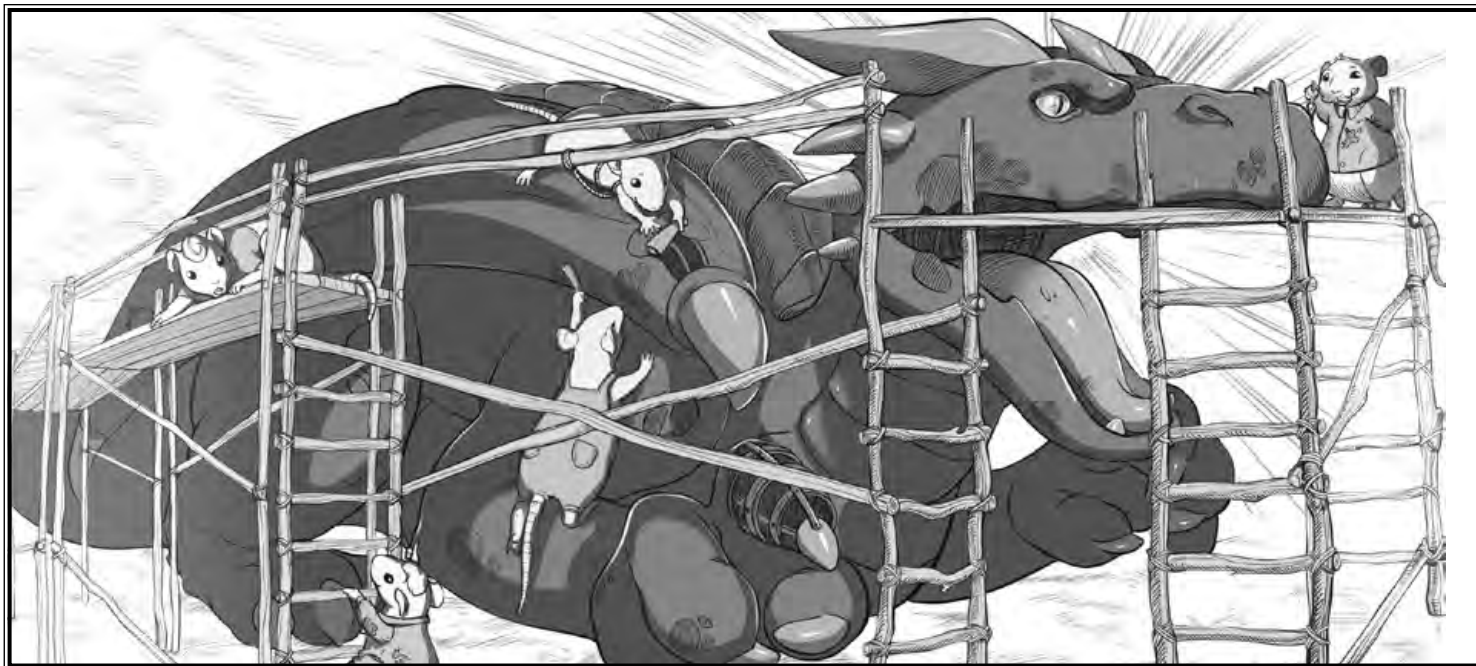
Its most common powers are—

- * **card Dramatic**—show up in an idyllic scene (e.g., an open space, a place of natural beauty, or a Church; pg. 91).
- * **Aesthetic**—Unicorn gains three points of magical skills from wearing belled harness, making meaningful noises in the distance, and leaving a trail of flowers behind it (pg. 91).
- * **(card) (Cage for a) Blasphemy**—if it gets down to 1 HP (or 0), time wobbles dangerously ... or, with a spent card, begins to just plain unravel (pg. 91).
- * **Empowered Wounds**—sacrifice 1 HP for a custom “wound power.” Unicorn can abandon the power to avoid a point of damage or make the HP recoverable (pg. 91).
 - **5+ Wound**—“*The Moment of Transcendence*”: create a bleak zone of nothingness that burns away the reality of all who witness it.
- * **(card) Well-Lit**—Unicorn is often dramatically lit, and can spend a card to force a particular lighting (pg. 98).
- * **card/♠ The Auctoritas Magister**—if it spends a card, others’ powers will do –1 damage to it this scene. With a ♠ it can ignore the past minute of a power’s effects (for a scene) or a wish/geas’ effect (for the duration of a story; pg. 98).
- * **5+/8+ Appear**—Unicorn can fade into being (5+) near someone it has a strong connection to, remaining for a scene ... or, during that scene, retroactively decide (8+) it was never there (pg. 97).
- * **5+ Obsession**—Unicorn’s normal action has a profound emotional effect on a selection of desired witnesses. They choose the details unless this power defeats them (pg. 98).
- * **5+/♥ Open the Vault**—Unicorn’s normal action evokes a flashback that fits the desired mood. (5+: single target, ♥: crowd; pg. 98).
- * **8+ Transfix**—Unicorn’s slow normal action receives a +2 bonus, and observers who do not counterattack/block are unable to pay attention to anything else (pg. 98).
- * **J+ Music of the Spheres**—a normal action becomes intrinsically aesthetic, and adds “1 5 5” to the roll
- * **5+/minutes or 8+ Fade**—Unicorn slips away to the Outside (pg. 98).
- * **Divine Warrant**—it makes Unicorn no less holy that it keeps blasting people from existence. Once per session, it can critically succeed or force someone else to critically fail on a relevant **LOSING YOURSELF** action (pg. 98).
- * **♥ Transition**—Unicorn’s player (normally the GM) narrates an experience that others perceive as happening, ending in a forced scene break. It does no lasting damage. This is often used to present the frozen moment of its ascension as truly eternal—to declare that the witnesses experience something like forever (pg. 98).
- * **Let’s Talk**—Unicorn can communicate (silently, even!) with anything, and is trusted by default (pg. 71).
- * **Childish Dreams**—Unicorn may “throw” the sound of its belled tack or hoofbeats, bring a fresh wind blowing in, or teleport up to a hundred feet in a flurry of snow (pg. 71).
- * **Somebody Else’s Problem**—when Unicorn wishes to go unnoticed, there’s a –2 penalty to trying to describe or spot/recognize it (pg. 86).
- * **5+/8+/♥ A Tangled History**—Unicorn’s been around a while, and has had personal experience with something (5+); or, participated in it (8+); or, according to fable at least, was *responsible* for it (♥; pg. 86).

It also has **Skilled (x3)**, **CV (x4)**, and the Mystery bonuses, **Heralded**, **Drawn to Certain Bait** and **Averse to Certain Things** (pg. 116).



DESIGNING YOUR OWN MYSTERIES



by Mariona Roig Torné

So here's the secret of creating Mysteries.

They are like experiences. They are like *strongly emotionally charged experiences*. So if you want to invent a Mystery, you just have to think about an emotion or state of being that really makes you want to act. Something *powerful*, something that can just grab your heart and go to town with it.

The rats aren't totally consistent in their naming scheme here, and maybe that's because they aren't the original source of the names and someone else was inconsistent somewhere ... or maybe it's just the character of the rats. I don't know.

I mean, Hedge the Fang really *does* seem to embody the experience of being Unmindful, heedless, of drifting in the world and just doing what comes naturally. But Goblin doesn't seem to be the experience of *being* Cruel—Goblin's our experience of *Cruelty in the world*.

(I know, I know, or they are just Hedge the Fang and Goblin, and they don't really care whether they map perfectly onto real experiences. That's true too. I know.)

... but anyway, you can take anything fictional that really *gets* to you, and turn that experience into a Mystery. You can take anything real that really *got* to you—don't do this with something that's fresh unless you're into gaming with an ooc emotional charge—and turn *that* into a Mystery. Remember that time that person did that thing? And how you totally felt completely, you know, whatever, about it?

Like *that*.

I remember being like 10 and designing dungeons for D&D—I was totally certain the publisher was going to buy them and send me a ton of money which I would use to solve all my problems and also to have a set of plastic chainmail made—because there was this intense joy in imagining all these little pieces and fitting them together. Did you ever do that? Do you remember? You stick all this totally crazy stuff together in the structure of your head, maybe you'd do it with your city now instead: a magic book in this shop here, a talking snail over here, here's a gloomy giant twelve feet tall, and here's a street map linking them together, you know, like that?

Anyway, that feeling, that drive, that joy, that could be a Mystery. It could be Spider, which is named Binder. Or Minotaur, which is named the Underworld. Or Zany Talking Snail, which is named Inexplicable.³⁸ Dwarf, which is named "the Craft." Elfstar, which is named Deceitful. Anything like that.

Once you've picked the experience that drives the Mystery, you just have to go through the kinds of stories that rats would tell about that Mystery—see pg. 38—and tell as many as you like. Figure out how many of those stories are actually in the rats' Books of Names (probably all of the ones you actually came up with, unless there's something you really want to save as a surprise), and bam.

... you've got a new Mystery.

³⁸ All zany talking snails are secretly Hoop Snakes.

THE KING OF SHADOWS

- 5 -

In some ways the King of Shadows plays to the strengths of the Fortitude rats. They have no real physical power, but to oppose the King of Shadows they need none. They have finesse instead. They have agility and skill. These are edges that his nature multiplies. In the light of the Witchway and the dead gray sun the rats drew their swords and fought the shadows *as* their shadows, using the sweeping images of themselves to hold the sourceless crocodilian enemies at bay.

And as for me, I tried.

Evans cried out a warning. Lilith's song faded out. Then their swords were drawn, and we were besieged, and I tried, honestly I did.

I felt like a lumbering ogress, flailing, offering unskilled and fruitless mayhem to a skilled rats and shadows fight.

It ended quickly.

I didn't even really see it start or end. I saw the shadow of Lilith's sword pierce an inhuman throat. I saw Evans shaking off a bit of shadow that closed around his head. I saw Lilith leap onto a glowing Witchway stone, her shadow bristling

suddenly in every direction like a sharpened flower and gutting ten or more of the enemy in one move.

I saw that, but I don't know how we lost. I didn't see that part.

All I knew was that I was lying sprawled upon the roof, and my ears were ringing, and my whole body was pins and needles, and I didn't know who I was or where I was or what I might be doing there, and my lungs were a great and echoing valley full of pain, and my eyes saw red and black. And I knew I'd been dying, I knew that all through my body, my every nerve and portion, and that I would very soon be dying once again.

My right knee relocated on its own. I guess it had gone out. My right hand twitched.

I remembered my name.

Jenna.

I sort of remembered it, anyway. I spent what must have been three seconds getting confused because I was *sure* it was the same name as Lilith, and Lilith wasn't me, Lilith was the rat, but wait, if *Lilith* was the rat, then why was *I* named Jenna?



That sort of thing.

I looked up. It was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something that *wouldn't* attract the attention of the shadows, which regrettably this did. Or maybe looking up was what I wanted to do. I wanted to see what was going on. I wanted to see what was going on in a way that *wouldn't* attract the attention of the shadows, but maybe that wasn't possible. Maybe I'd stumbled, by mistake, on the best plan I could have found.

Evans was limp and still.

Lilith was struggling. She was suspended off the ground, caught in the grip of a shadow, held up as if in offering to the light of the dead gray sun. She was struggling, and she was weak.

A shadow slipped back over me. My breath gave out.

There was no comfort that would save me. Cranberry yarn and friendship and writing and the playing of the flute—none of it could help me. Not there, not with that pain.

Yet I think it was the King who said to me there the thing I needed most to know: who reminded me, in soft and subtle tone, *You may rid yourself of the mark of the King and the attention of the King by giving him a portion of your life.*

The King, or, perhaps, the light of that dead gray sun.

And in a timeless time and a placeless place I stood and before me was Kurobi who was King.

Would you have me leave you and these others be? he asked.

He did not use his mouth to speak; nor could he ever. The corpses and horrors that fill his jaws forefend.

Would you have me leave you and these others be? he asked.

I bowed my head.

Then give thy flesh and blood in offering.

It wasn't epic or awesome. Every time I try to write about this it's like—it comes out either really amazing, or really lame. And it wasn't. So I won't try to talk about how I did that.

Just—

It was awful.

It was awful, and it made me awful, and awful was the pain; and there is some of my blood and some of my soul that will leave the King's maw never; and we walked on, and I did not speak, and I scarcely knew my life or heart until the manna brought me ease.

“It is a sacred tree,” Evans said, after we'd been under it a while.

We'd stopped beside the manna tree. It grew up out of the roof tiles, and they were as its bark; and the vines of it were like descending chimneys, and they dripped with a clear cool nourishment that we'd all lapped from the hanging brick.

“It is a sacred tree,” Evans said, and I knew suddenly that he had spoken.

I realized that I was alive and that I was awake and that I was the portion remaining to myself and not the portion given to the King.

Evans had spoken.

He had spoken, and I could speak in turn.

All these things crashed down upon me of a sudden like the bolt of a pure delight.

“That's ridiculous,” I said. “There are supposed to be those rope charm things around sacred trees.”

“There isn't one,” Evans said.

“Oh.”

“It's your own fault, really,” Evans said. “For not bringing one. You could have ought.”

“I should have ought,” in fact, I totally agreed.

I splayed my hands out against the trunk. I licked a bit of manna from a vine.

“Thank you,” I said, to the sacred tree.

It didn't understand me. I didn't expect it to, anyway, and I didn't have any way to determine if it had. It was a tree made out of roof. But I thanked it anyway.

“See,” Evans said, “that bit sucked, where we got beaten up by shadows. But the part where we drank manna, that was pretty good.”

“It's true,” I agreed.

“Like, my head is feeling a little bruised,” he said. “But my throat, well, that's pretty pleased.”

Lilith squeaked.

Evans looked away.

“What?” I asked.

“I just want this over and done with,” Lilith said.

I knew immediately what she meant. My heart ached with it. I reached out my hand, and when she let me I brushed gently at her fur; for if Kurobi the King of Shadows had her father in his maw, then she would see him nevermore in life.

“It must be very convenient,” I said, “to be able to talk in silence.”

You'll have to forgive me. I was in an altered state. I didn't realize until later how utterly stupid an idea it was, what I'd just said.

All those times when they'd spoken out of my range, you see, *it wasn't actually silent to them.*

Quests and Arcs

Most of the time, your quests will glue together into larger, 3-5-step, stories called Arcs.

- * **Bindings** Arcs are larger stories about dealing with the liminal and forbidden;
- * **Role** Arcs are larger stories about figuring out your place in the world;
- * **Otherworldly** Arcs are larger stories about your connection to other worlds and ways of being;
- * **Storyteller** Arcs are full of excitement, energy, and sometimes metafiction;
- * **Training** Arcs are for people who push their bodies and minds to the limit;
- * **Shepherd** Arcs are larger stories about everyday life and making other things/people better;
- * **Melancholy** Arcs are larger stories about life in the shadow of grief or death or wicked power; *and*
- * **Mystic** Arcs are stories about life in the shadow of a more ambiguous divinity.

If you look ahead to pg. 178, you'll find the details on how each of these Arcs tick as a *narrative*—there's a loose but meaningful framework that says, this is roughly what the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth quests would be about, and *here's what happens when each quest ends*.

This is important because in some cases what happens might surprise you. Ultimately, if it *really* surprises you, like, you can't figure out what to do with it at all, that just means I'm wrong in how I've set the Arc up; but more often, hopefully, any surprises will just be something you can bounce off of or use to develop your story further.

Anyway, these eight Arcs are also tied to the power sets in the characters section (pg. 70):

- * **Bindings** Arcs let you buy *Wounded Angel* powers;
- * **Role** Arcs let you buy *Allegory*, *Become Somebody*, and *Memetic* powers;

- * **Otherworldly** Arcs let you buy *Kaiju* and *Worldwalker* powers;
- * **Storyteller** Arcs let you buy *Creature of Delirium*, *Creature of Fable* and *Holy* powers;
- * **Training** Arcs let you buy *Cheat* powers;
- * **Shepherd** Arcs let you buy *Gardener* and *Impresario* powers;
- * **Melancholy** Arcs let you buy *Indomitable* powers; *and*
- * **Mystic** Arcs let you buy *Awakening*, *Primordial*, and *Prophet* powers.

You can buy one power for each completed quest; normally, you'll pick from the same powerset for each step along the Arc, but you can also always pick generic powers like **Skilled** (pg. 69) regardless of the Arc you're on.

Quests in this book are marked with the places they can fit into each Arc.

Accordingly, for instance, if you want to complete a Training Arc, you would start with a quest marked "Training – 1." Then you'd move on to quests marked "Training – 2," "Training – 3," and maybe "Training – 4" and "Training – 5." That's a complete story, wherein you're initially blocked, but then overcome an obstacle in your training, get new perspective from outside, deal with aggravating social hassles, fight a terrifying supernatural threat, win, and are lost for a while after your victory ... before you finally make your way back home. This would let you buy, e.g., five powers from the *Cheat* list on pg. 71, five picks of **Skilled**, +4 cv and **Untouchable**, or some combination thereof.

A last point of note on Arcs is that **each Arc comes with an additional three muddles**. You'll have to solve them all before you can leave the Arc.

... that said, you can take time off once per Arc and do a "side quest," either at the same time or as an intermission.

SIDE QUESTS AND CUSTOM QUESTS

Side quests are usually built by the player, although you may be able to find them on the Internet or in later releases.

To create a side quest, figure out what power you're looking for. Pick the Arc type that *would* get you there—for instance, if you're the *Cintamani*-Bearer, and you want to take a break from your Training Arc to grab a quick *Kaiju* power, you'd want an Otherworldly Arc! Based on that, on pg. 182 you'll find some general recommended "meanings" for side quests and some recommended muddles.

Alternately, you can start with the meaning of your desired quest ("I'm learning to play the flute, so ..."), find something suitable from the Arcs chapter (pg. 178) like "you have a new activity" or "a bit of ordinary life" ... and realize accordingly that you're going to wind up with a Storyteller-based or Shepherd-based power. Perhaps your flute brings a certain **Respite** (pg. 82)?

For quest flavor, record whatever you like—in practice, it's just notes to yourself.³⁹

Lastly, for major goals (which will give you a free letter and a free card draw), just write down some things that you think should happen, maybe once, maybe twice, maybe not at all, but *around* once, over the course of the quest. If you're afraid that you might have picked stuff that's too easy, feel free to cap yourself at a total of 5 draws over the course of the quest.

... and that's everything sorted!

This process is also what you'd do if you got bored with a particular quest in your character's quest set, and wanted to, e.g., replace the Rogue's **Practically a Role Model** Training – 2 quest with a different Training – 2 quest of your own; the only difference is, if you're still using one of the pre-designed stories, you may want to keep its original muddle. Occasionally stuff that's kind of important to the overall story got stuck under the headings of muddles not for the Arc but for particular quests.

QUEST SETS

Most of the time, when you're *not* doing side quests or custom quests, you'll be playing through a particular group of five quests tied to your character: your *quest set*. This is

simply a set of quests designed to be generic and flexible enough that you *should* be able to cycle through them at least four times before they're just too old hat to play. For instance, the default path for **the Rogue** is *the Tavern Boasts of the Rogue* (pg. 170), consisting of the quests

- * **A Rival's Bond,**
- * **Practically a Role Model,**
- * **A Hero's Challenge,**
- * **That's Thinking with Vastness!, and**
- * **The Winter of Your Soul.**

The core quests for each character are set up so that you can always form an Arc for each of their recommended power sets, and usually for a few more besides. That's narratively tricky, because a melancholy story (pg. 192) is *different* from, e.g., a training story (pg. 186); what usually happens is that the quests will appear in different orders depending on the Arc you're actually on. Thus, for instance, the order above is how you'd traverse the Rogue's quests on a Bindings or a Storyteller Arc; if you wanted to do a Melancholy Arc, **A Rival's Bond** would be too energetic to start with! You'd want it to switch places with **Practically a Role Model** to give things a slower, moodier start.

In theory, if you're looking for an [Arc type] [number] quest, and you don't want to do the one from your quest set, you could probably substitute in any quest with that Arc type and number, or, as discussed below, make your own; this *will* change the feel of that part of your life, even if you use the original muddle, but as long as you *want* the new feel that should be totally fine. You could put together a Melancholy Arc like **Practically a Role Model**, **Chomping at the Bit**, **A Burdened Path**, **The Work of Life**, and **A Magician's Practice**, borrowing from five of the eight quest sets below; it's just that if you *do*, the quests will be pushing you, a bit, to brood like the rogue, obsess like the navigator, stress like the *cintamani*-bearer, and then struggle like the seeker, before finally finding answers in the style of the magician.

Note that there is exactly one quest set per character purely as a matter of practical convenience; if you want to build a new one for your character, even an *existing* character, these rules will in no way object.

³⁹ Though, if you're planning to share the quest with others, feel free to fill in seven recommended journal actions for people who are using the quest, much like I did, below!!

Quest Sets

THE SPOOKY STORIES OF THE CINTAMANI-BEARER

*for someone haunted by death and beauty.
play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).*

AT MAGIC'S GATE

Training – 1 Role – 5 Otherworldly – 5
Storyteller – 1 Shepherd – 1 Melancholy – 1

You stand at magic's gate; but understanding it, and yourself, remains a struggle.

On a Shepherd Arc, it's wise to put off the real meat of the Arc until you know what "responsibility" should drop on you at the end of this quest—if nothing better shows up, the Arc story can!

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when you:

- * have a mystical vision
- * change someone's life without really meaning to
- * interact with a wordless expression of mystical power

magic words...

"what do I see when I look down from the roofs?"

"I balance on the edge of something as we walk." *or*

"what are the roof tiles around here like?"

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"who should I be talking to about my problems?" *or*

"who should I be talking to about magic or maybe death?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"doing this thing ... it feels right." *or*

"what kind of magic thing or remnant should I be studying?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

THE BRIDGE OF KNIVES

Training – 2 Role – 1 Otherworldly – 1
Storyteller – 3 Melancholy – 2 Shepherd – 5

You must travel into scary twilight realms. A troubled teacher offers help—alerts you to what must happen in the quest, and guides you through it.

The teacher for this quest may be an existing NPC, or at least someone "obvious;" or, they may be something of an enigma. In the latter case, we recommend you make frequent use of **BONDING** and **WONDER** actions in their company to create and then escalate the Issue "**Searching**;" searching, that is, for an explanation of who they are!

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when you:

- * fall out of reality into a twilight/half-real world
- * help lay old ghosts to rest, literally or metaphorically
- * disguise yourself to travel amongst dangerous things

things to say..

"... I'm locked out."

"what old and buried tragedy should I have a mystic dream of?" *or*

"what kind of haunting is it that wakes me from my dreams?"

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"what should I be reading about in old books and records?"

"where should [my teacher] drag me off to?" *or*

"who wants to tell me a story or a ghost story? what will it be?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"where am I when I find something that I need for this quest?"

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

A Burdened Path

Training – 3 Role – 2 Otherworldly – 2
 Storyteller – 4 Shepherd – 2 Melancholy – 3

People expect a lot out of you, even though your magic isn't really under great control.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * people want you to be more than you are
- * you mess up out of carelessness
- * you are part of a ritual

things to say...

“what grand structure do I witness on the roofs?”
 ... and, roll **WONDER**.

“who's showing off to me, puffed up with pride?”
 ... and, roll **BONDING**.

“my magic goes out of control! what happens?”
 ... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

“who gives me new clothing, and why?”

“who gives me food, drink, or crystal, and why?” *or*

“where am I when an enemy decides to be weirdly companionable?”
 ... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“what weird social expectation do I accept?”
 ... and, roll **DARING**.



Against Vast Enmity

Training – 4 Role – 3 Otherworldly – 3
 Storyteller – 2 Shepherd – 3 Melancholy – 4

Your dreams are troubled. Death haunts you. You confront dangers and Mysteries.

Often, the thing that troubles your dreams is a magical force of some kind ... something pressuring you, leaning in on you mentally, trying to change you. If it's not clear what that might be, you can let it be vague at first until it becomes clearer—if it ever does—what that force might be.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you're confronted by a Mystery
- * everything's strange and new
- * people want you to give magic up

things to say...

“tell me of my troubled dreams, where maybe ... some ominous power feels like it's trying to change me?”

“tell me of death's presence in the world; in my *life*.”

“tell me how it feels in my body, these things the magic and the Mysteries are doing to me.” *or*
 “what fevered dream is it from which I wake?”
 ... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

“who wants to talk to me about magic?”
 ... and, roll **BONDING**.

“what does the magic do on its own?” *or*

“what fearsome sign is it that I will witness in the sky?”
 ... and, roll **WONDER**.



FLOWERS CARVED FROM STONE

Training – 5 Role – 4 Otherworldly – 4
 Storyteller – 5 Shepherd – 4 Melancholy – 5

You struggle to come to terms with death and endings and the prices that you've paid.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you are lost in the darkness
- * something unnatural gives you spiritual guidance
- * you solve a muddle related to this Arc

what Cintamani-Bearers are saying...

"who finds me when I'm wracked with despair?" *or*

"who finds me when I'm struggling to cope with the world's demands?"

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"what little wonder can I luckily witness?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"where am I when the flowers bloom?"

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"what mystic phenomenon *seems* to be demanding something from me ... a thing I cannot name?"

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"who finds me amidst the flowers, or upon white stones?" *or*

"who will wake me from my dream of being torn apart?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.



by Marion Roig Torné

THE FATED HERO'S FEVER-DREAMS

for a tired dreamer.

play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).

JUST A LITTLE WORN DOWN

Role – 1 Shepherd – 1 Mystic – 1
 Otherworldly – 3 Bindings – 5

The far roofs are wondrous, and your friends are amazing, and depending on the story you might even feel like things are going well and there's hope ... but, you're a little worn down.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you see a strange cathedral in the distance
- * you need the rats' help to manage in a new environment
- * you pass out

what Tired Heroes are saying...

"where can I take a break to rest?" *or*

"is there someone who might offer to share my burden? or, take it from me?"

... and, roll **PEACE**.

"tell me of the fresh air of the heights."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"tell me of something that might be an omen or a sign." *or*

"who can tell me stories of those who've faced the Mysteries upon the roofs?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"who can I talk to about the meaning of being a hero?" *or*

"who can I tell about [something, far away]?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

DREAMS AND VISIONS

Role – 2 Shepherd – 3 Mystic – 3
Otherworldly – 1 Bindings – 4

You're afflicted with dreams and visions—memories of the past, glimpses of the future, hallucinatory journeys, distorted pictures of the moment, and eerie, disturbing dreams. On a **Shepherd** Arc, this tends to focus more on past mistakes or extraordinary visions; on a **Bindings** Arc, it's more explicitly a metaphor for the change you're working in yourself and the world.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * a spiritual or hallucinatory being offers guidance
- * you hold a star or something like that in your hand
- * you struggle on an impossible climb or with an impossible burden

what *Delirious Heroes* are saying...

"tell me where I find myself after time slips dizzily by."
or

"tell me of the meal I find, and the place I find it, in dreams or visions, thoughts or life."
... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"tell me of the river that I see, in dreams or visions, thoughts or life."
... and, roll **WONDER**.

"tell me of the treasure that I see in dreams or visions, thoughts or life."
... *act*, then roll **DARING**.

"tell me of the nameless, shadowy thing I see ... in dreams or visions, thoughts or life." or

"tell me of the feeling of sickness as it washes through me."
... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"who can I talk to about the *meaning* of being a hero?"
... and, roll **BONDING**.

ENDURANCE; STRUGGLE

Role – 3 Shepherd – 2 Mystic – 2
Bindings – 1 Otherworldly – 2

Something is influencing you, and it's not going away. You struggle to adapt to the new situation you're in.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you see something important in a vision.
- * you take up a new weapon or armor
- * you rest, exhausted or overheated, among wall-climbing or trellised vines

what *Struggling Heroes* are saying...

"what do I see when fever-dreams consume me?"
... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"when does trouble happen that's worth trying to pull myself together for?"
... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

"it's my destiny."
... and, roll **DARING**.

"tell me about the plant life here."
... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"talk to me about the vistas of the roofs."
... and, roll **WONDER**.

"who's up for talking to me IC about my visions?" or
"who's up for just ... generally connecting?"
... and, roll **BONDING**.



CATCHING DREAMS IN A CUP

Role – 4 Shepherd – 4 Mystic – 4
 Bindings – 2 Otherworldly – 4

You struggle to tame a Mystery that, in some fashion, represents the current conflict in your life or heart. This is “the quest Mystery.”

In a Bindings 2 quest, this struggle is generally “the thing you have to do.”

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you claim a token that in some way represents your destiny
- * someone sacrifices themselves to defend you
- * you are made aware of an enemy by their hot breath upon your neck

things to say...

“who can I discuss [quest Mystery] with?” or

“who can help me set up protections against the Mysteries?”

... and, roll **PEACE**.

“who will tell me a story of [quest Mystery]?” or

“tell me of [quest Mystery]’s heralds, and of what I see while watching for them.”

... and, roll **WONDER**.

“where am I when I notice the scent of [quest Mystery] on the air?” or

“tell me of the influence of [quest Mystery] on my mind.”

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

“I’ll trust my fate into your hands.”

... and, roll **DARING**.

SEIZING TOMORROW

Role – 5 Shepherd – 5 Mystic – 5
 Bindings – 3 Otherworldly – 5

You attempt to master a new source of power, “the quest power,” in a gamble that it can change your fate or at least help with your current situation.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * the full moon burns in the sky
- * you stand on a field of bones or bodies, standard raised
- * blood drips from your arm or sword or claws

things to say...

“Who wants to talk with me about [the quest power]?”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“who wants to talk to me about how [the quest power] is influencing me or burning me out?”

or

“will anyone sit with me while I worry about what I might be turning into?”

... and, roll **BONDING**.

“what happens when [the quest power] rages out of control?”

... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

“what is it like to don the mantle of [the quest power]?”

... and, roll **WONDER**.

“what does it feel like when my spirit is tested by [the quest power]?”

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

“I’m going to try [description of an experiment with the quest power].”

... and, roll **DARING**.



THE LESSON BOOK OF THE MAGICIAN

*for someone being pried out of their shell.
play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).*

A HOLLOW WORLD

Melancholy – 1 Mystic – 1 Role – 2
Bindings – 5 Training – 5

The world is scary. You want to hide from it, and just read big books and draw weird diagrams and not have to care.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you're stuck sharing a meal with someone you're terrified of
- * you get an eerie, occult warning, possibly from a bird
- * you analyze a hostile spell or strange creature's corpse

things to say...

"who am I bitterly talking to about the emptiness or horror behind the surface of the world?" *or*

"who am I talking to about something horrible that happened to me, or, to someone vulnerable?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"tell me sensory tidbits from the world around me, as I read from some occult or academic tome." *or*

"tell me of a truly awful mess I have to clean or purify."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"tell me of a momentary vision of something awful, or, where something normal *seems* awful."

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"actually ... [pedantic argument]"

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"I walk in a dark place, holding up a fire; what is it that I see?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

STRUGGLING FOR CONTROL

Melancholy – 2 Mystic – 2 Role – 4
Training – 2 Bindings – 3

You're trying hard to feel like you're in control. That's probably part of why you're studying what you're studying—why you're trying to learn this new thing, or push it to new heights. It's probably part of why you're practicing whatever it is you're practicing, on your own, or with a teacher, or with a friend. But most importantly, you just ... you need something to hang on to. You need that sense of power in your life, which you don't quite have.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you defend someone against something terrible
- * the world lights up around you in some magical or spiritual way
- * you're preyed upon by the whispers of a Mystery

things to say...

"sobbing at the beauty of it."

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"who can I talk to about the life I want to have?" *or*

"who am I talking to about ... feeling disconnected? out of control?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"tell me of a thing that *is* ordinary, and harmless, but which just ... feels *too weird*, today."

"who am I talking to about my past and ... my time away from all of *this*?" *or*

"speak to me of omens; of magic in the air; or, of the heralds of a Mystery."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"tell me of the horror—the haunt, the corruption, the poison—that I stumble on."

... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

IT'S COMPLICATED

Melancholy – 3 Mystic – 3 Role – 1
 Bindings – 2 Training – 3

You are trying to make something of yourself, but you're in way over your head, drowning in an impossible situation. Maybe it's because you're surrounded by a bunch of complicated personalities, like, there's a bunch of strong-willed NPCs or a bunch of PCs have diverse and vested interests in what you're doing. Maybe it's because you're working with stuff in your own head that's hard to make any sense out of. Maybe it's both!

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you admit a (meaningful) mistake
- * people fight over you
- * you get in a fight with or scare someone you definitely weren't *trying* to get in a fight with or scare

things to say...

"who is telling me their story of themselves?"

"who can I be talking to about power?"

"who am I talking to about making sense of something?" *or*

"what does an enemy who ... isn't really being properly enemy-like ... show up to talk to me about?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"who can I be talking to about what I want to be?"

"tell me about the guidance someone offers that just seems like *nonsense*." *or*

"tell me about a notional enemy who's being all protective, flirty, kind, or, y'know, *whatever*, instead."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

THE THORN'D PATH

Melancholy – 4 Mystic – 4 Role – 3
 Bindings – 1 Training – 4

It is not easy to keep focus. It is not possible to keep up the front of a normal person. Not while spiritual forces and magic push and tug at you and haunt and harass you like this. Not when you have such fearsome work to do. You are embarrassingly broken, because you cannot spend enough energy on *not* being broken: not if you want to keep moving forward and do the things you need to do.

If the Arc does not provide an obvious antagonist or challenge suitable to the quest, and there's nothing obvious floating around in play, you're meant to look to the main group storyline (pg. 231) for ideas.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you drive away a snarling animal
- * a spiritual being pressures you
- * you spot an enemy when no one else can

things to say on the Thorn'd Path...

"tell me of a memory or vision of a disaster."

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"magic bursts free, uncontrolled."

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"who can I tell my new realization about myself?"

or

"can anyone help talk me through, uh, calming down?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"I can't think. I can't move." *or*

"I'm choking on a thought or memory I can't keep down."

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"I'm going to need help dressing [for this]."

... and, roll **PEACE**.

A MAGICIAN'S PRACTICE

Melancholy – 5 Mystic – 5 Role – 5
Training – 1 Bindings – 4

This quest is the struggle to transcend yourself—to master some new element of your practice, or, perhaps, to perfect or master something in yourself. A magician's work is difficult, and it is common to struggle even to *name* the thing you're working on, or the steps along the way.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * a teacher or elder mocks you
- * someone drags you into something or commits you while you're hesitating
- * you bind yourself to a magic tool made of wood (e.g., a broom, or wooden beads)

what Magicians are saying...

"cue the screaming special effects track in my head."
or

"tell me of a vision or memory of blood, or horror, or skinless things, or things *eating* people."
... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"so, I'm a bit wired."
... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"can I talk about some new thoughts on [a ritual, mystic diagram, magic tool, etc.]?" or

"who am I talking to while I'm feeding the birds or some other small animals?"
... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"who can I be talking to about letting other people down?"
... and, roll **BONDING**.

"tell me about this book I'm reading on [something mystical and relevant to the quest]."
... and, roll **WONDER**.

THE SECRET JOURNALS OF THE NAVIGATOR

*for someone really into it.
play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).*

CHOMPING AT THE BIT

Storyteller – 1 Otherworldly – 1 Melancholy – 2
Mystic – 2 Training – 2 Shepherd – 3

You're eager to get out there and get to work on your projects for the Arc!

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you dream of somewhere far away
- * you discover a new landmark
- * someone tells you you're going too far, pushing too hard

what Hopeful Navigators are saying...

"these dreams are tugging at my heart." or
"am I really meant for this?"
... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"what rare fruit do I find to taste of?" or
"what story's someone telling me of the far roofs and their wonders?"
... and, roll **WONDER**.

"who wants to walk with me alongside a roof edge or a cliff?" or

"who wants to listen to me talk to about what I'm losing? what I'm leaving behind?"
... and, roll **BONDING**.

"let's *do* this."
... *act*, then roll **DARING**.

THE NAVIGATOR'S HAUNT

Storyteller – 2 Melancholy – 4 Mystic – 4
Otherworldly – 5 Shepherd – 2 Training – 3

You're haunted on your journey by an external manifestation of something you're dealing with—possibly in a thematic “this NPC is also a metaphor” kind of way, and possibly in a direct and literal sense. This is *the quest target*.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you find running water
- * you shelter for at least one night in a crevice
- * the quest target dissolves away like a dream

what haunted navigators are saying...

“I'm walking with [quest target]; what are they saying?” *or*

“what should I and [quest target] talk about by firelight?”

... and, roll **BONDING**.

“... I can't do this any more.” *or*

“where am I when I remind [quest target] of its place?”

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

“what kind of material aid does [quest target] bring?”

... and, roll **DARING**.

“[the quest target]—they're gone.” *or*

“I find something that's *like* a stand of trees—but what?”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

UNCHARTED LANDS

Storyteller – 3 Melancholy – 3 Mystic – 3
Otherworldly – 2 Training – 4 Shepherd – 4

You explore dangerous and uncertain territory, likely tied to the current main group storyline and also, perhaps, to matters deep within your heart.

If the Arc does not provide an obvious antagonist or challenge suitable to the quest, and there's nothing obvious floating around in play, you're meant to look to the main group storyline (pg. 231) for ideas.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you screw up from overenthusiasm
- * you're separated from someone important
- * there's an enemy you can't even touch (narratively, or because you don't have/don't want to use a ♠).

things to say in a dangerous land...

“where am I when I discover I'm lost?”

“what unfortunate thing happens to me, out on the roofs?”

“why is the sky unnaturally dark?” *or*

“what do I need, but can't find?”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“I'm trapped.”

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

“where am I when a serpent or spirit drives me away from something?” *or*

“tell me how something's hunting me, how I hear it whispering my name.”

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

TO CLIMB A CRUMBLING MOUNTAIN

Storyteller – 4 Melancholy – 5 Mystic – 5
Otherworldly – 3 Training – 1 Shepherd – 5

This is a story of striving for the heights, even though and while something's eating away at you from within: a literal or figurative poison (e.g., magic, sickness, a recent or recently surfaced trauma, or just a pervasive gloom about the "fallen" nature of the world).

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you trick someone, or cadge a gift from them
- * a friend fends off a monster
- * you claim new recognition as authoritative or powerful

things to say...

"I can feel the sickness moving through me." *or*
"tell me of the toxic elements of this place."

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"does anyone notice I'm off thinking of the past again?"

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"there's someone near who can help me find the way."

... and, roll **DARING**.

"where does [someone acting as your guide] lead next?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"who am I talking to about how I'm feeling?"

... and roll **BONDING**.

"tell me of the high place we might have to climb, or, of the branches that brush against me."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

THE ROOFTOP SHORES

Storyteller – 5 Melancholy – 1 Mystic – 1
Otherworldly – 4 Training – 5 Shepherd – 1

An atmosphere of loss and grief. Often, there will be a solemn journey to a rooftop lake, e.g., for a funeral.

Eventually, the time for such matters will complete.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * your travels take you to, and through, an old stone gate
- * you leave a portion of yourself behind
- * the wind blows something made of cloth away

things to say...

"tell me of the mist that is rolling in."

"tell me of the waves that lap against the shore."

"tell me of the birds as they cry in the distance." *or*

"speak to me of the weighty presence of death."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"every day is ... is just the same."

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"who wants to talk to me about memories, or, the departed?" *or*

"who wants to sit on the edge of a roof with me and share a drink?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.



by Patrick R. Kelley



"The Gutter-Sea," by Lee Moyer



LEE
MOYER

THE REMEMBRANCES OF THE OLD-TIMER

*for someone defiant.
play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).*

CLINGING TO THE PAST

Mystic – 1 Melancholy – 1 Role – 2
Otherworldly – 2 Storyteller – 2

You dwell on the past, on *who you used to be*, often focusing on an old adventure or multi-year story from your life.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * it snows, or some equivalent thereof
- * you pass through a dry and echoing place
- * a friend with a meaningful role in a flashback or story of your past is established as having died

old-timers are saying...

“remind me how I encountered a new place, and was shown its tricks and ways.”

... and, roll **WONDER**.

“remind me of someone’s terrible food and drink and jokes.”

... and, roll **BONDING**.

“remind me how small I was back then, before the vastness of [intense thing, e.g., the roofs].” *or*

“remind me of a trick or wonder I’ve used (in life, or dreams) to cross to the far roofs.”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“remind me of an unfair death or wound—of someone snatched from above, or falling.” *or*

“remind me of danger: of an unspooling thread, or eerie fire, or of things crumbling away.”

... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

“remind me of a time when I was clever, yes ... but it only accomplished just so much.”

... and, roll **DARING**.

TAKING SOME MENTAL DAMAGE HERE

Mystic – 2 Role – 3 Melancholy – 3
Otherworldly – 3 Storyteller – 3

Something is pressuring you, pushing at you, trying to change you. It can be a Mystery, someone socially aggressive, or societal notions shoving you around as a whole. Whatever it is, it’s hard to grapple with; confusing, and stressful.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you scare off a Mystery, or something else that attacks your mind
- * you see something revelatory or plot-relevant in a dream
- * you catch a fever

things to say...

“tell me about the vision, dream, or place wherefrom I look down on the world?” *or*

“who am I talking to about my dreams?”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“who am I talking to about whether all this stuff’s

... OK?”

... and, roll **BONDING**.

“what’s impossible for me to handle properly on my own today?” *or*

“tell me of the pain and struggle of these travels.”

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

“tell me of the terrible thing I might sense coming, and of ways I might prepare.”

... and, roll **DARING**.

“who is able to help me today with the physical challenges of the roofs?”

... and, roll **PEACE**.

A GRAND ADVENTURE

Mystic – 3 Melancholy – 2 Role – 4
 Storyteller – 1 Otherworldly – 4

Everything's terrible and wonderful here—an old, familiar sensation! Are you traveling the far roofs again, or is something else awful and amazing going on?

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you talk to something spiritual (e.g., a Mystery) by the fire
- * you find something hidden (e.g., an old secret)
- * you're blown away, or, dragged away by something, not letting go

blast from the past!
Old-Timers are saying...

"what old traveler's trick can I share with someone here?"

"who's around when I'm telling a story of [a magical place, such as a far roofs neighborhood]?" or

"what can I tell people about how this [area or thing] has changed?"

... and, roll **PEACE**.

"who can I praise adventure and the hard life of [a region or group, such as the roofs or army] to?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"tell me of delightedly discovering something here that hasn't changed *at all* since long ago."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"remind me of when I was doing something just like this with someone else, before?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"speak to me of my alienation from my own body, or, my own thoughts."

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

SOMETHING OF A LEGEND

Mystic – 4 Melancholy – 4 Role – 5
 Otherworldly – 5 Storyteller – 5

This quest is your opportunity to tame, subdue, find a balance with, and/or become one with that which was pressuring you in **Taking Some Mental Damage Here**.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you use a flying device or other strange conveyance
- * you wake from an explosion that stunned and injured you
- * you grant or accede to a defeated enemy's request

things to say ...

"who am I talking to about my plans?" or

"tell me of an opportunity—in dreams or visions, thoughts or life—to grow closer with an enemy."

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"tell me of a good place to [set a trap you're planning, possibly involving yarn?]"

... and, roll **DARING**.

"tell me of difficulty breathing; shivers; pain."

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"tell me of my observations of [something you're observing]."

"tell me of the secret that I find." or

"who wants to tell a story of the Mysteries?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.



by Camille "Karma" O'Leary

A FRIEND'S HISTORY

Mystic – 5 Melancholy – 5 Role – 1
Otherworldly – 1 Storyteller – 4

This quest is the story of a friend, “the quest friend’s,” life. Maybe you spend time with them, help them out, learn their story; or, remember or flash back to your time together while doing other things; or, if necessary, just kind of generally focus on the histories of your friends’ lives. Often, on this quest, you’ll have troubled dreams—dreams of burning light and emptiness, of being divided from yourself, of rapid flight across the roofs; dreams where all this is past, and you are *more*.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * a dream proves to have been prophetic.
- * one or more people compliment you on your keen perception.
- * you do something ceremonial with or for [quest friend] in a place of notable greenery.

things to say...

“tell me of [quest friend] & I’s difficult travels—now, or long ago—through some eerie place.” *or*

“tell me what I see in dreams of rapid flight across the roofs.”

... and, roll **WONDER**.

“tell me of how—now, or long ago—[quest friend] and I nearly died.”

... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

“what is it some friend needs from me?”

... and, roll **PEACE**.

“where does a friend talk to me about their backstory, and, who is that friend?”

... and, roll **BONDING**.

“where am I when a friend or I has to face our frailty compared to the halcyon days of yore?” *or*

“tell me of an embankment I can walk along with a friend, or, of a high place we can climb.”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

THE TAVERN BOASTS OF THE ROGUE

*for someone doing their best.
play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).*

A RIVAL'S BOND

Bindings – 1 Storyteller – 1
Training – 1 Melancholy – 2 Mystic – 4

You’re excited to know them. You’re obsessed by their presence. You’re infuriated by their brilliance or their folly. They are the forbidden frenemy, the nothing-but-trouble delight: your one, your only (of many) ... your rival.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you declare a new rivalry
- * you’re troubled by a snake or flying pest
- * you’re stuck in the same shelter as someone else in a sudden rain or snow

things to say...

“who wants to listen to me rhapsodizing about [a current obsession, e.g., penitential journeys]?”

“what special effects accompany my grandiose boast?” *or*

“Enough! I [smash or throw] [some sort of thing] and storm out.”

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

“where are we when I challenge [a rival] to a [a meaningless contest] contest?”

... and, roll **DARING**.

“can I drag [a rival] off to see [something I care about]?”

... and, roll **WONDER**.

“who finds me as I’m [some variant on ‘despairing in a gloomy place’]?”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“no time to explain!”

... *act*, then roll **DARING**.

PRACTICALLY A ROLE MODEL

Bindings – 2 Storyteller – 2

Melancholy – 1 Training – 2 Mystic – 2

This is the story of how you prove your way of living, how you demonstrate its worth; how you use it to uplift those around you—and, most importantly, to help a particular person or group who could *really* use a bit more ... *you-ness* in their life. This is *the quest target*, suffering from *the quest poison or curse* ... a poison or curse they, incidentally, will usually share with you; either that's a key point of common ground that drew your interest, or, you pick it up *from* trying to fix it, along the way.

Either the quest target or something related to the source of their problem COULD make a good Mystic 2 "opposite number" ... but, as noted in "The Winter of your Soul" (pg. 172), it might work better to bring in a new, on-point, NPC for the role.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you take a frightful fall
- * you're menaced by wicked forces
- * an experiment backfires on you

things to say...

"who finds me suffering from the effects of [quest poison or curse] again?"

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"where do I secretly observe and diagnose [quest target]?"

or

"what happens as I'm secretly watching over [quest target]?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"what do I distract [quest target] from with a speech on my approach to [some art/science/skill]?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"where does [quest target] drag me, despite my claims of immobility?"

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"what unexpected trouble finds [quest target] and I?" or

"where are we when something dead is threatening to rise?"

... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

A HERO'S CHALLENGE

Bindings – 3 Storyteller – 3

Melancholy – 3 Mystic – 3 Training – 4

The enemy is impossible. The challenge, practically unbearable! But it's ok. You have a plan.

If the Arc does not provide an obvious antagonist or challenge suitable to the quest, and there's nothing obvious floating around in play, you're meant to look to the main group storyline (pg. 231) for ideas.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * a great structure is broken or tumbles
- * you are buried
- * one or more things rise up from their graves

things to say...

"who is there to witness it when temper and panic overwhelm me?"

"who dares disturb me in my fateful brooding?" or

"who finds me desperately searching through notes, books, or records?"

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"lightning flashes! Thunder booms!"

... *act*, then roll **DARING**.

"what mysterious influence touches on my mind?"

or

"where am I when the earth shakes, or fire rises, or the winds blow fierce and hard?"

... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

"... I ... don't know how to explain."

... and, roll **BONDING**.



THAT'S THINKING WITH VASTNESS!

Bindings – 4 Storyteller – 4
Training – 3 Melancholy – 4 Mystic – 5

Behold, a large-scale ritual magic or a glorious plan! Can any ritual or plan expressed in the form of a quest like this one conceivably be grander? Ha! The gaming world shudders fitfully at the very thought.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * someone scoffs at your work, or slams a door in your face
- * you ascend a difficult path
- * a monster emerges from the underbrush

*awesome, leet Rogues
are saying...*

“where am I when something judges from on high?”
... act, then roll **DARING**.

“behold, the next portion of my [ritual or plan]!”
... and, roll **DARING**.

“what happens when I activate a portion of my
[ritual or plan]?”
... and, roll **WONDER**.

“what happens in the main group storyline to
disrupt my [ritual or plan]?” or

“what petty rule or petty distraction next opposes
me?”
... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

“who wants to talk to me about my [ritual or plan]?”
or

“does anyone dare to lecture me about how I *can't*
have what I want?”
... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

THE WINTER OF YOUR SOUL

Bindings – 5 Storyteller – 5
Mystic – 1 Training – 5 Melancholy – 5

Even you, even *you!*, need to cool down and process the weight of things now and then.

On a Mystic Arc, consider introducing or asking the GM to introduce a good generic “opposite number” for you during this quest—someone who can fill in when the details of a given Arc don't automatically provide one in the following quest.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you hang out peaceably with your enemies
- * you don't bother to stop yourself from getting hurt
- * success is snatched from you just before you would have achieved it

*thoughtful, cool Rogues
are saying...*

“who can I talk to about how we are *all* destined for death in the end?”

“who wants to ask me a question so I can admit that I don't know anything?”

“what sights do I see while wandering blindly, and who do I discover at the end?” or

“nothing makes sense. Nothing!”
... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“Is this ... death?” / “Am I ... dying?”
... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

“who wants to hang out with me on the edge of a roof?”
... and, roll **PEACE**.

“who interrogates me about something ‘apparently’ suspicious?”
... and, roll **BONDING**.

THE TREASURE-BOOK OF THE SEEKER

*for someone who'll listen.
play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).*

CONVERSATIONS IN A PLACE OF RUINS

Otherworldly – 1 Mystic – 1

Melancholy – 1 Role – 2 Bindings – 5

A quest of troubling, lingering experiences, in dreams and life. It is perhaps most typical to dream of a vaguely Grecian-temple ruin, surrounded by dry grass, in the shadow of the mountains, but this is not required; one need only be haunted by Mysteries, by a sense of connection to something far away, by a vague and unformed *purpose*, and by one's own vices.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you inadvertently step upon a bone
- * the wind blows dust out of something hollow
- * something important and difficult to replace breaks down

things to say...

“who am I talking to about Mysteries, and the way just knowing them can change you?” *or*

“who am I talking to about an unclear sense of ... purpose?”

... and, roll **BONDING**.

“who am I talking to about my sense of connection to something ... far away?”

“who am I talking to about what the status quo costs?” *or*

“tell me of a place of ruins I can explore, in dreams or visions, thoughts or life.”

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“who'll [share your vice, e.g., “have a drink” “share a smoke”] with me?”

... and, roll **PEACE**.

“tell me of a treasure that was lost.”

... and, roll **WONDER**.

CRACKS IN THE WORLD

Otherworldly – 2 Mystic – 3

Bindings – 2 Role – 4 Melancholy – 5

A troubled time; there is a sense, on this quest, that the world is cracking, and that the other side is not so much an undifferentiated grey, or void, or night, but something like oozing shadow or a swarm of scarabs bulging through.

... there is someone you must help; or, there is something you must do.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * someone complains (seriously) about your bad habits
- * a beetle scurries out from under something dry and pale
- * you have to be unnaturally strong for another person's sake

things to say...

“who wants to talk to me about the ... allure ... of the Mysteries?”

“who can I talk to about my troubled dreams?”

“who can I talk to about the meaning of ‘worth’ and ... what kinds of things might have any?” *or*

“who can I talk to about how I can't *deal* with all this any longer?”

... and, roll **BONDING**.

“I'm not eating properly. I'm not sleeping properly.”

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

“tell me of a chiaroscuro place.” *or*

“tell me of the world cracking, falling apart around me—in dreams or visions, thoughts or life.”

... and, roll **WONDER**.



by Elizabeth Sherry

THE WORK OF LIFE

Otherworldly – 3 Mystic – 4

Bindings – 3 Role – 3 Melancholy – 4

You are struggling against something unnatural, yes, something that is trying to infect you, to change you ... but most of all, you are struggling to create, to move forward, or to fix something that might be broken in yourself.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you're poisoned, or wracked with disease
- * you search through something's remains
- * something important has been lost

what Seekers are saying...

"speak to me of a formation like a natural moon gate or a spire that the wind plays like a flute?"

"who will tell me a story of how [a chosen Mystery] kills?"

"who will tell me a story of what draws [a chosen Mystery] near?" *or*

"tell me of a glimpse of, or a full encounter with, a Mystery."

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"tell me of the struggle against [a plausible Mystery]'s influence upon my heart." *or*

"there's no time for cleaning, only the work."

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"where am I when the wind comes howling through the trees or the things-like-trees?"

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

RIDDLED WITH HOLES

Otherworldly – 4 Mystic – 2

Bindings – 1 Role – 1 Melancholy – 3

You struggle with a pervasive sense that the world is crumbling; that all reality is riddled with holes, the thinnest patchwork over burgeoning nothingness.

... including you yourself.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * the world actually *does* tear, crumble, fill with holes, or rip apart at its seams (or, at least, the ground, roof, or floor beneath your feet does)
- * you repeatedly or definitively reject a good thing, or a thing you were actively looking for
- * a strange tower is discovered

things to say...

"who can I talk to about my sense that the world's beginning to fray?"

"who can I try to talk to about things difficult to talk about, like depression/trauma?"

"I'm making up weird stories in my head about the things here, so ... tell me about them?" *or*

"tell me of things that we might ride, or, of large shapes going past."

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"who can I talk to about old stuff, formative stuff—personal stuff?"

... and roll **BONDING**.

"I can't talk any more." *or*

"I can't engage with this rationally."

... and roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.



MERGING

Otherworldly – 5 Mystic – 5
Melancholy – 2 Bindings – 4 Role – 5

You reach out to a greater force that is entangled with you, a fascination to you. At least temporarily or symbolically, you will make yourselves as one. They are *the quest subject*.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you bury something, or leave a flower at its grave
- * a spiritual presence comes to you when you're badly injured
- * you are a witness as something proves its conceptual immortality, or, is reborn

things to say...

"tell me what I might find out about [Mystery or quest-relevant topic] among the records of the rats."

"tell me scraps of the stories the rats might know about [Mystery/quest-relevant topic]?"

"speak to me of dreams of spiritual forces, or of magic born into the void." *or*

"speak to me of visions as I step away from my body—into the world of spirit, or of dreams."
... and, roll **WONDER**.

"where and when am I working on a ritual to bring myself and [the quest subject] towards unification?"
... and, roll **DARING**.

"tell me of the sacred or special place or moment that I find."
... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"tell me of the quiet task that [person] and I might work on together, in peace."
... and, roll **PEACE**.

THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE SHIELDBEARER

*for someone who's there when you need them.
play through in an order depending on your Arc (pg. 178).*

In Their Shadow

Shepherd – 1 Mystic – 4 Storyteller – 5
Bindings – 1 Otherworldly – 4

This is the story of your everyday life: doing what you can to support the people you care about; sustaining them through their troubles; ... and, living in their shadow.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * someone talks to you about their troubles
- * you pick up a minor injury
- * you find something good to cook for dinner

little things to say...

"voiceover: [writing about your experiences for a letter/journal.]"
... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

"voiceover: [writing thoughts you want to share or remember.]"

"just workin' quietly by the fire over here." *or*

"what can I do while you're gone to make things better for you [here/when you get back]?"
... and, roll **PEACE**.

"what cool thing do I read about?"
... and, roll **WONDER**.

"who wakes me from my fragmented dream of an ancient past?" *or*

"who wants to listen to me obsess over my latest geeky thing?"
... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

THIS MIGHT BE TROUBLE

Shepherd – 2 Storyteller – 1 Mystic – 2
 Bindings – 2 Otherworldly – 2

You pick up a cool but troublesome associate—the “quest sidekick.” They’re usually hapless, needy, and confident, with a problem they need your help with, but are also so different from your general style as to be a suitable “opposite number” in a Mystic Arc (pg. 195).

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you save the quest sidekick from serious trouble
- * you give in to someone’s begging
- * someone unexpected climbs on you

things to say...

“who is it that wants to use me as a ‘default’ or ‘example’ human, and why?” *or*

“[nope out of ongoing over-the-top trouble (e.g., with ‘right, that’s it, I’m going to sleep.’)]”
 ... and, roll **DESPERATION**.

“who am I valorizing the idea of a simple, background-character life to?”
 ... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

“where am I when [the quest sidekick] shows up again?” *or*

“where are we when [the quest sidekick] breaks something?”
 ... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

“where is [the quest sidekick] failing to hide?”
 ... and, roll **BONDING**.

“tell me about [the quest sidekick’s] better or cuter side.”
 ... and, roll **WONDER**.

ECHOES OF A MYTHIC ERA

Shepherd – 3 Mystic – 1 Storyteller – 2
 Otherworldly – 1 Bindings – 5

You’re a solid, reliable person now ... but, haunted by memories and dreams of another life or way of life. These are set in an ambiguously mythical era before the modern times.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you’re caught in a net, or struck by a spear, or brought low by arrows or the wind
- * the milky way is particularly bright in the nighttime sky
- * your blood spills into the soil

things to say...

“who wants to tell me a story of some hero or monster of the primordial era?”
 ... and, roll **WONDER**.

“what gets left undone because my usual life just doesn’t feel right any longer?” *or*

“why are people making too much noise for me to work again?”
 ... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

“who can I be pickily fixing up the appearance of or cleaning up after?”
 ... and, roll **BONDING**.

“what’s going on while I’m scribbling or poking at some task in the background?” *or*

“who am I talking to about the process of digging for old memories?”
 ... and, roll **PEACE**.

“what are we doing when a weirdly inhuman body memory [e.g., twisting coils] distracts me?”
 ... and, roll **DELIRIUM**.

OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Shepherd – 4 Storyteller – 3 Mystic – 3
 Bindings – 3 Otherworldly – 3

The main group storyline (pg. 231) is focusing a little more on you than it usually does, and you're not really all that good at dealing with it.

If it's not obvious from the Arc itself, or play, the main group storyline is also the first place you should turn to when looking for a "something" to be trying to change you in an Otherworldly Arc. You can also look back to the dreams you'll have had in "Echoes of a Mythic Era" for more ideas.

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * a Mystery picks on you
- * you stumble through a portal or fall through a hole
- * you discover a wondrous location or view

things to say...

"where do I wind up when I get lost—and who eventually finds me?" *or*

"what cool landscapes (am I/are we) passing through?"

... and, roll **WONDER**.

"who finds me when I get stuck doing some stupid task over and over again on a loop?"

"what does the influence of a Mystery push me to do?"

... and, roll **LOSING YOURSELF**.

"where do I find root vegetables, and who's with me at the time?"

... and, roll **PEACE**.

"who do I meet up with, not exactly looking at my best?" *or*

"where am I when something *bites* me?"

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

THE SHINING THING

Shepherd – 5 Storyteller – 4 Mystic – 5
 Bindings – 4 Otherworldly – 5

You have a vision for something particularly cool (if also particularly effortful) you might *just* be able to do.

If the Arc demands it be objectively important—most notably, Bindings 4, but sometimes Otherworldly and Mystic 5—you may give even mundane works planned or unplanned magical or metaphysical effects; these may be obvious, inobvious, or even totally offscreen (to, e.g., let the players know of them even when the PCs, to avoid breaking the game or story's mood, should not).

PROGRESS GRID (1-20)

○○○○○ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○ ○○○○○

MAJOR GOALS

Draw a letter and card, up to twice/chapter, when:

- * you find a good occasion to quote one of your ooc favorite writers, or use an established quote from one of your ic favorite writers
- * you get in trouble because you've been taking the world's dangers too lightly
- * you handle something easily that was a problem before

cool things to say...

"who can I talk to about my project?"

"who wants to help or watch me while I'm constructing something my project's going to need?"
or

"who wants to talk to me about how to handle something that got left undone?"

... and, roll **PEACE**.

"who can I talk to about the really cool trick I've got planned for my project's next step?" *or*

"I have a plan to bind these things together."

... and, roll **DARING**.

"who reminisces with me as I find a way to honor a recent bit of [tragedy/sadness] in my project?"

... and, roll **BONDING**.

"who am I with as I'm out there breathing fresh air and the smells of nature?"

... and, roll **BEING THERE**.

Narratives of the Arcs

BINDINGS

A **Bindings** Arc focuses on the liminal and forbidden.

If you're building your own Bindings quest, you'll have basically eight choices of topic:

- * **Bindings 1:** you get stuck with a wicked partner.
 - **Bindings 1 (variation):** you're stressing over whether being like you are is really ... OK?
- * **Bindings 2:** there's something you must do, because only you can ... *but how?*
 - **Bindings 2 (variation):** there's something you must do, because only you can.
- * **Bindings 3:** you do a big, convoluted plan kinda thing.
- * **Bindings 4:** you attempt a visionary gamble.
- * **Bindings 5:** you explore the consequences of stuff you've done, particularly for other people.
 - **Bindings 5 (variation):** you become the axis of the world, or something.

If it's none of these, then it's not really a Bindings quest ... but you could try fitting it to Bindings 3 or the variant on 1?

Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

(You Aren't Sure if You're OK)

Bindings 1 - VARIATION

You work with wicked or disreputable things; you maybe even *are* one. You're not sure how to live with that. Does it make you evil? A bad person? Trouble? Do you have a place in society? ... you're thinking about stuff like that.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some grounding task]
- * am I OK?
- * what does being OK even mean?
- * do I have a place in society?
- * how do I live with myself?

At the Quest's End: you've come to terms with things ... a little.

You are Stuck With A Wicked Partner

Bindings 1

You have to work with, partner with, or tie your fate to something wrong or in disfavor: a beast; a Mystery; a creature from beyond the world; a cruel or disliked person; a taboo or ill-favored entity; or maybe a ghost, vampire, or witch ...

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with that partner]
- * [some task that will help bring you closer]
- * how will I make this relationship work?
- * how will I survive this?
- * how can I get them under control?
- * how can I help them manage?
- * what's their deal?

When the Quest Ends: you've hammered out a working relationship with them.

I Have to Do This/Help This Person, But I have No Idea How

Bindings 2

There's someone who needs your help, or something you must do, *because* you work with the kinds of things you work with.

... unfortunately, you have no idea what you're doing.

This is big. This is complicated. Maybe leap in feet-first and hope to figure it out as you go?

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the thing you must do]
- * [your relationship with the person who needs help]
- * how can I do this thing?
- * how can I help this person?
- * is this even a good idea?
- * what am I even doing?

When the Quest Ends: you're oriented now. You have a plan.

(I Have to Do This/Help This Person, And I think I Know How)

Bindings 2 - VARIATION

There's someone who needs your help, or something you must do, *because* you work with the kinds of things you work with.

... it'll be tough, but you know what to do.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the thing you must do]
- * [your relationship with the person who needs help]
- * [your plan]
- * is this even a good idea?

When the Quest Ends: you've tangibly helped them or made tangible progress.

You Execute A Clever, Complicated Gambit

Bindings 3

You risk yourself on a complicated and difficult plan. Usually you know what you're doing, and you're doing it right, but you're doing something so hard and complicated that you might lose midway through anyway.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your plan]
- * [the problem it's for]
- * [this thing you need to understand]
- * what's my *real* plan?
- * how can I keep myself safe through this gambit?
- * how can I keep going all the way to the end of this gambit?
- * how will I get this thing that this gambit needs?
- * is this gambit really worth it/ok?

When the Quest Ends: you win! ...unless you already lost. If you already lost, finishing this quest results in the ongoing catastrophe staggering to its natural halt.

You Have A Plan That Will Really *Change* Things

Bindings 4

You're making a proactive choice or gamble. You've decided to fix things, *change* things, or reveal the truth of how they already are.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your choice/gamble]
- * [your relationship with the thing you're fixing/ changing]
- * how does this thing I'm doing work?
- * how does this conceptual underpinning of the thing I'm doing work?
- * was this idea wise?
- * what will I have to sacrifice for this?
- * what effect will this have on the world?

When the Quest Ends: you made an impact. You changed things. Was it right to do so? Time will tell.

You Explore How Things Played Out in Previous Bindings-Type Stuff

Bindings 5

You explore the consequences of a big decision you made for somebody else.

Suggested Muddles:

- * how did that decision work out?
- * how am I feeling about things?
- * what is this situation asking of me?
- * what is the answer to some mystery this situation implicitly contains?
- * what is this situation showing me?
- * [your relationship with the person you made the decision for]
- * [your general life equilibrium]
- * what animal or junior will I meet and hang out with during this quest?

When the Quest Ends: it's time to turn your attention to something new.

(You Become the Axis of the World)

Bindings 5 - VARIATION

You become, or take up your mantle as, part of the axis of the world—e.g., the chain that holds evil at bay, the order that holds the world together, the power that binds all nightmares or dreams away from reality or makes what is alive to live.

Suggested Muddles:

- * am I OK with this?
- * what must I sacrifice of myself for this?
- * how am I to actually accomplish this?
- * what is the thing in me that can become this?
- * what is the insight I must have to become this?
- * why is this necessary?
- * [understanding what you're merging with/ becoming]
- * how do I (task-specific thing, e.g., "hold evil at bay")?
- * what does it mean to (task-specific thing, e.g., "make what is alive to live?")

When the Quest Ends: you fulfill a key cosmos-stabilizing task.

ROLE

A **Role** Arc focuses on figuring out your place in the world.

If you're building your own Role quest, you'll have basically six choices of topic:

- * **Role 1:** you're dreaming of being more.
- * **Role 2:** you have a problem.
- * **Role 3:** something's infecting and trying to change you.
 - **Role 3 (variation):** you wind up outside your normal environment, like a fish out of water or a protagonist when the author runs out of local ideas.
- * **Role 4:** you've fallen short. You're trying to atone.
- * **Role 5:** you've almost become what you're trying to be.

If it's none of these, then it's not really a Role quest ... but you could try fitting it to Role 1, 2, or the variant on 3?

Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

A Time in Your Life When You Dream of Being More

Role 1

You're putting on airs. You're dreaming big. Bigger than the life you have. You're *aspiring*, you know?

But you don't really know how to get there.

Suggested Muddles:

- * what do I want to be?
- * what do I *tell* people I want to be?
- * what do I dream of being?
- * what do I have to do to get there?
- * what are the first steps to getting there?
- * how do I (do some impossible or infinitely scaling thing)?
- * what does this vague dream I have even *mean*?

When the Quest Ends: you've put a name to the thing you want to become, and you've put your feet on a legitimate path to making that aspiration real.

A Time in Your Life Dominated by A Vice or Difficulty

Role 2

This quest is a story of the thing that's in your way. Think of it as a "documentary"—it's not about how you conquer your problem, it's just a tool to help explore what that problem is.

A vice? A weakness? An enemy? Or is it just that you're kind of raw and new?

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your vice or enemy or weakness]
- * how should I manage this problem?
- * what is this problem doing to me?
- * what would I have to do to change?
- * what would have to happen for this to get any better?

When the Quest Ends: this chapter of your life is over—things are about to change. You've either just made a big decision, just gotten the first big sign of that change, or you'll do so tonight or tomorrow morning.

(A Time in Your Life Where You are Out of Your Normal Environment)

Role 3 - VARIATION

You're taken completely outside your normal context. Maybe you try to stick to your role and vice and aspirations. Maybe you take a break from them. I don't know! Everything is different for a while.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your exploration of the new environment]
- * [something you have to do there]
- * [someone you meet there]
- * what can I learn from this?
- * how can I get back home?
- * what do I need to let go of?
- * how do I let go of (something you need to let go of)?
- * what am I meant to do, here?
- * what is the secret of this place?
- * how will this journey change me?
- * how can I survive this?
- * who do I want to be?
- * what do I want to do?

When the Quest Ends: you have new inspiration about how to be what you want to be and do what you want to do. ... plus, unless there's some pressing story reason why you have to *stay* out of your element for now, it's time to wrap things up and come back home or back to normal.

Something is Infecting or Trying to Change You

Role 3

Something infects you or tries to change you. Something challenges your conception of yourself.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the infection]
- * who am I, really?
- * how can I hang on to myself?
- * how can I resist this infection or power?
- * what can I gain from this infection or challenge?
- * what is this infection or force of change doing to me?
- * how am I holding it back?
- * what does it want from me?

When the Quest Ends: You err. Or fall from grace. Or are changed. Or possibly you grow.

A Time in your Life When you Feel Like You've Fallen Short

Role 4

You've fallen short of who you wanted to be. You've erred, or lost your path. Now you have to make amends, and grow.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with someone]
- * how can I find my path again?
- * how can I do better?
- * how and why did I fall short?
- * did I actually fall short?
- * how can I live with this?
- * how should I live with this?
- * what must I do to atone, if atonement is even possible?
- * why is the easy answer here the wrong one?

When the Quest Ends: redemption is an ongoing process, but you've made a start. If possible, an NPC acknowledges that. Either way, the weight of guilt and wrongness on you lightens.

An Exultant Time, When you Don't ... Feel Like You're Falling Short

Role 5

You have it in sight now. You know where you're going. This is the quest that takes you that last step to becoming something better than you've been.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your ideal]
- * [your relationship with some spiritual entity, conceptual ideal, or other self]
- * how can I become what I need to be?
- * how can I clear some trouble out of the way so that I can finish my work?
- * how can I accomplish this metaphysical/spiritual thing that will help with transcendence?
- * what am I supposed to be?

When the Quest Ends: and now you've become that. If possible, an NPC you care about acknowledges that. If not, then the universe does—one day, it's just ... done.

OTHERWORLDLY

An **Otherworldly** Arc focuses on your connection to other worlds and other ways of being.

If you're building your own Otherworldly quest, you'll have basically seven choices of topic:

- * **Otherworldly 1:** you're having mysterious dreams or visions.
 - **Otherworldly 1 (variation):** something is, like, *super* wrong, like in those stories where you *think* you're living in a city but you're actually living in an alien observation tank.
- * **Otherworldly 2:** you don't like the path you've decided you have to be on.
- * **Otherworldly 3:** your otherworldly experiences are transformative, which sucks.
- * **Otherworldly 4:** your sense of self is damaged.
- * **Otherworldly 5:** you reconcile with somebody or something.
 - **Otherworldly 5 (variation):** you merge with a spiritual force.

If it's none of these, then it's not really an Otherworldly quest ... but you could try fitting it to Otherworldly 2, 4, or 5? Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

(There is Something Profoundly Wrong, Maybe with ... Everything?)

Otherworldly 1 - VARIATION

There's something wrong with the world. Chaos has slipped into your nice ordered existence, or maybe something's always been wrong and you've just now realized that you care.

Suggested Muddles:

- * what am I going to do (or, what *must* I do) about this?
- * why is this happening?
- * what's going on?
- * how can I live in an imperfect existence?
- * [the disrupted situation]

When the Quest Ends: you know what you have to do. It is possible that you've found 2-3 options instead of one; if so, it is possible to choose wrongly.

You are Having Mysterious Dreams or Visions or Something

Otherworldly 1

You're having dreams or otherworldly experiences that connect you to something beyond and outside yourself.

Suggested Muddles:

- * why am I having these dreams?
- * what is it that's calling / connecting / being connected to me?
- * [your relationship with the dreams]
- * what am I called to do about this?
- * what have I got to do to get these dreams under control?
- * what path must I walk here?
- * where is my life going?
- * what's the core motivation at my center, my heart?

When the Quest Ends: you know what you have to do about this—a path you are called to walk, or something you must do to keep these experiences under control. It is possible that you've found 2-3 options; if so, it is possible to choose wrongly.

You Don't Actually Want to be on This Path You're On

Otherworldly 2

You're on a scary or difficult path. Part of you is resisting—clinging to how things used to be. Even if you're on this path by choice, it's scary, or hard, or against your instincts, or costing something you really hate to give up.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [something that's making your path even harder]
- * how can I learn what I need to learn?
- * how can I accept what I need to accept?
- * how can I get myself in gear?
- * how can I let go of what used to be?
- * how can I manage on this difficult path?
- * how should I be managing (some personal problem or vice)?
- * why do I have to do this?
- * what would happen if I found a way out?

When the Quest Ends: you release some of that. More of you accepts that you can't go back.

In Which Your Otherworldly Experiences are Inevitably Transformative

Otherworldly 3

Something is trying to *make* you into something *else*.

There's usually a sense that it's trying to take you over, devour you from within, kick you out of your life, or something.

Or maybe it's the other way around: maybe it's *pulling* you.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the attempted transformation]
- * [your feelings about it]
- * [some project that will reveal something about you, or give you strength]
- * what do I have in me that can fight this?
- * what is it trying to do to me?
- * how do I make this stop? / how do I control this?
- * why is this happening?
- * what weakness of my heart has been holding me back?
- * who am I, really, in the end?

When the Quest Ends: you find a part of yourself that hasn't changed, or won't.

You are Suffering from a Damaged Sense of Self

Otherworldly 4

You've lost a key part of your sense of *self*.

You look for a way to get that back.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [an emotional muddle, e.g., grief]
- * [a project that might help sustain you]
- * how do I get myself back?
- * how do I find my way back to wholeness?
- * how do I keep going without this part of me?
- * how did this happen? / where did I go wrong?
- * how do I recover?
- * what should I do, what should I be?

When the Quest Ends: you discover that "key part of you" wasn't really gone. If that's observably impossible (e.g., you're mourning a severed limb) you discover that either your terminology was off and what you were *really* missing was something else that *isn't* gone, like "the sense of yourself as a whole person" or "your ability to play an instrument;" or, you find a potential in you to recover what was lost.

(You Merge with Some Spiritual Force Somehow)

Otherworldly 5 - VARIATION

You merge with some spiritual force. You become its exemplar or host. You are you, and you are also *that*.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with them]
- * [your feelings about the merger]
- * [the ritual or act of power that does the actual merging]
- * [the process of transformation/merging]
- * what am I supposed to do about this?
- * what would I have to become to fix this?
- * how do I want the world to work?
- * how should I understand this force that I am merging with?
- * what am I becoming a host or exemplar of?
- * what must I let go of, in myself, to become one with this?
- * what do I need to understand?
- * what am I meant to do with this new nature/power?
- * how can I contain this force's power?
- * how can I humanize this force's power, or embody it without losing my humanity?

When the Quest Ends: you've grown into who the new combined-self you will be.



by Todd Thomas

The Story of a Reconciliation

Otherworldly 5

You reconcile with someone or something you've been fighting.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with them]
- * [an artistic work]
- * [the fight]
- * how do I figure this out?
- * how do I get them to stop fighting me?
- * why are they so *annoying*?
- * how could I help them, if I wanted to?
- * what do they need from me?
- * are they ... OK?
- * how do we reconcile?

When the Quest Ends: you help them find peace, find acceptance, or find their way back from being lost.

STORYTELLER

A **Storyteller** Arc focuses on excitement, energy, and sometimes metafiction.

If you're building your own Storyteller quest, you'll have basically eight choices of topic:

- * **Storyteller 1:** you're doing something new and cool!
- * **Storyteller 2:** you're taking charge of a situation.
 - **Storyteller 2 (variation):** you're going it on your own, your own way.
- * **Storyteller 3:** you're in a mystery or maze or labyrinth of intrigue or whatever; something like that.
- * **Storyteller 4:** you're aiming high, chasing after someone/something!
 - **Storyteller 4 (variation):** or just ... aiming high?
- * **Storyteller 5:** you're wrestling with hard truths.
 - **Storyteller 5 (variation):** ... or, divided loyalties?

If it's none of these, then it's not really an Storyteller quest ... but you could try fitting it to Storyteller 1, 5, or variant 2 or 4? Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

You have a New Activity (or something), and You're Excited About It!

Storyteller 1

You're excited about the future. You've found or gotten involved in something neat!

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the neat thing]
- * [some foundational question (about the neat thing?)]
- * how can I get better at this?
- * how does this thing work?
- * what do I need to do to make this work?
- * what will my experience of this be like?
- * can I really do this?
- * what will this cost me?
- * how is this going to work for me?

When the Quest Ends: bored now? Or still awesome? You've gotten used to it either way.

(You're Solving Some Problem in Your Own Inimitable Way)

Storyteller 2 - VARIATION

You're ignoring the pressures on you and just doing things your own way.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with the thing you're doing]
- * [some puzzle at the heart of the thing you're doing]
- * what am I supposed to do?
- * what is the hidden danger here?
- * what *is* my own way here?
- * what *can* be accomplished here?
- * what's my reason to be doing this?
- * how am I going to trim this problem down to size?

When the Quest Ends: you've attracted dangerous attention and/or trimmed down the problem to an approachable space. Usually it's both, one during the quest and one when it ends.

You are Taking Charge!

Storyteller 2

You're taking charge of a situation.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some puzzle at the heart of the thing you're doing]
- * what should we be doing here?
- * how do I keep things under control?
- * what can I learn from this?
- * who is my hidden enemy?
- * what is my opponent's plan?

When the Quest Ends: an enemy/opponent praises you, threatens you in a vaguely flattering way, or tries to recruit you.

Solving a Puzzle (like a Mystery or a Maze or a Labyrinth of Intrigue)

Storyteller 3

You're in a confusing situation! You must traverse a labyrinth, maze, or noir mystery. Or, if not *literally* any of these, that's what it feels like!

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the confusing situation]
- * how am I going to figure this out? / beat this?
- * what can I learn from this?
- * what is *going on* here?
- * got to keep my spirits up!
- * what do I need to do here?
- * what have I forgotten?
- * what secret will I discover?
- * how do I help someone else get through this?
- * where will the solution to this puzzle be found?
- * can this problem even *be* solved?
- * what's blinkering me here?

When the Quest Ends: you've cut through the confusion. You've found what you needed to know, and either

- * tied everything up neatly with a bow; *or*
- * you've got your eyes on the prize and you know where to go, but it'll be a bit before you actually get there.

You Aim Very High, While Chasing Someone or Something

Storyteller 4

You're *ascending*. You're going beyond the world, rising past your limitations, reaching for some transcendent height.

...because you're chasing someone, or you have something you have to obtain.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the goal / the struggle]
- * [your emotions about this]
- * how can I catch them?
- * how can I achieve this?
- * how can I obtain this?
- * how can I live up to this challenge?
- * what must I understand to achieve this?
- * what is the secret at the heart of this?
- * where will I achieve my victory?
- * who or what will prove my ally in this?
- * what must I become to succeed?
- * why is this the right thing to do?
- * what is it that's been holding me back?

When the Quest Ends: you catch them. You obtain it. You've surpassed the trials of the⁴⁰ peak.

⁴⁰ metaphorical



by Elizabeth Sherry

(You Aim Very High, Just ... Because)

Storyteller 4 - VARIATION

You're *ascending*. You're going beyond the world, rising past your limitations, reaching for some transcendent height.

... because that's what you decided to do.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the legendary goal]
- * [the work of it]
- * [some metaphorically relevant personal quandary]
- * [complicated feelings about arrogance vs. self-worth]
- * what is the secret to accomplishing this?
- * what must I understand to achieve this?
- * where and how will I obtain my victory?
- * who must I become to succeed?
- * who or what will prove my ally in this?
- * what is my ultimate goal here?
- * why is this the right thing to do?

When the Quest Ends: you reach the top—or your target, anyway, or as high as you can go—and gain some level of self-confidence, self-acceptance, or release.

You are Wrestling with Hard Truths and Bleak Days

Storyteller 5

You're doing rough, terrible work. You're facing hard truths of death, guilt, embodiment, meaning, identity, and failure.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the emotional work]
- * [some physical task bound up in it]
- * who am I, really?
- * why does stuff like this happen?
- * why?
- * why did this happen?
- * what does this stuff mean?
- * how can I move forward again?
- * how can I live with this?
- * is anything OK?
- * was there anything to learn?

When the Quest Ends: you complete the work; you can go on with your life.

(Divided Loyalties Tear at You)

Storyteller 5 - variation

You're torn between two loyalties.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with one side, or the other, or both]
- * [something you're planning to do for one side or the other]
- * [the thing you must do, that will abandon one loyalty]
- * what will be the thing that drives me to choose one way or the other?
- * how can I bear forsaking what I must forsake?
- * how can I mitigate the consequences of this choice?
- * how can I accept the consequences of this choice?
- * how can I atone for this choice?
- * what will this choice cost me?
- * what must I give up to make it through?
- * what will I gain from the loyalty I'm taking up?

When the Quest Ends: you make a choice between them; if you've already done so, you come to an acceptance of it.

TRAINING

A **Training** Arc focuses on pushing your body and/or mind to the limit.

If you're building your own Training quest, you'll have basically five choices of topic:

- * **Training 1:** you're not making progress right now.
- * **Training 2:** you're exposed to a new perspective.
- * **Training 3:** ridiculous social stuff gets in your way.
- * **Training 4:** you face off against a terrifying, supernatural enemy.
- * **Training 5:** you're lost in the literal or metaphorical dark.

If it's none of these, then it's not really a Training quest ... but you could try fitting it to Training 2 or ... maybe ... 5? Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

Your Training is Not Making Progress

Training 1

You're blocked. Frozen. *Stuck*. There's something you can't get past.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your training]
- * [some project you need to get better to accomplish]
- * [your emotions about being stuck]
- * [some relationship that can help you past this]
- * what is within me that can do this?
- * how can I get better at this?
- * how do I figure this out?
- * how does this *work*?
- * what is blocking me?
- * why am I blocked?
- * how can I help (some random unrelated person)?
- * how can I deal with (some sorrow of the world)?
- * what am I failing to do?
- * why am I trying so hard?
- * what secret do I figure out here?

When the Quest Ends: you push past that barrier.

You're Exposed to a New Perspective, Relevant to Your Study/Training

Training 2

You're presented with the option of another way of life or another way of thinking.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with a mentor, friend, or environment providing that]
- * what is this experience teaching me?
- * how does this person see the world?
- * what can I do for this person/place/teacher?
- * how can I trust this person/place/teacher?
- * what is their point?
- * what will I find here that I need?
- * what have I been missing about (subject of studies or training)?

- * what part of who *I* am will this perspective illuminate?
- * how does (something in your field of study or training) work?

When the Quest Ends: you have an insight: you see or hear something that you wouldn't have been able to before.

Farcically Stressful Social Situations Interrupt Your Work

Training 3

You're dealing with stressful, bizarre, and confusing social situations. Romantic drama. People with very large personalities, expecting so much. Faction conflict, with no actual reasons. It's just one thing after another! It never stops! ... sometimes you suspect you're a character in one of Milica Augustine's operas.⁴¹

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with someone or some group expecting a lot]
- * [politics and personalities]
- * [romantic troubles]
- * [your current studies]
- * [a project]
- * [aaaaaaaaaaaaasdfsdfasdfsdf]
- * what am I supposed to do here?
- * how can I live up to what people want me to be?
- * what am I learning from this?
- * how can I calm this?
- * how can I get this (trouble) to *stop*?
- * how can I make these people happy?
- * how can I stay true to myself in all of this?
- * what do I want to be?

When the Quest Ends: you finish up your latest obligation, optionally come home and take your literal or metaphorical shoes off, and learn something shattering.

⁴¹ *MILICA AUGUSTINE*: a rat who wrote the kind of operas you might suspect, on a Training 3 quest, that you're a character in. Though, you'd be wrong! Characters hardly ever discover that they're characters in classical rat opera on a Training Arc; that's *much* more of a Storyteller or Mystic Arc thing!



"Shaping the Sea and the Endless Sky," by Jenn Manley Lee



A Terrifying, Necessarily Long-Term, Conflict with a Supernatural Foe

Training 4

This is an epic struggle with something terrifying and supernatural.

Suggested Muddles:

- * how do I win this?
- * how can I defeat this terrifying, supernatural foe?
- * what is in me that can defeat this terrifying, supernatural foe?
- * what is the secret to defeating this terrifying, supernatural foe?
- * how can I sustain my ally/companion through this?
- * what will I learn from this conflict?
- * how can I find my way through this trouble?
- * what great thing will I accomplish here?
- * what *is* my enemy here?
- * what mistake have I made?
- * (a hand of cards, assembled for the final battle)
- * [a related project]

When the Quest Ends: you win. Sometimes you're left stranded and far from home, sometimes you get a victory parade; sometimes there's more to do, sometimes it's 100% triumph; sometimes the GM has to delay your victory a few scenes or invoke silly tropes like "but that wasn't the *real* big bad" to stop play from grinding to a halt, and sometimes your victory is pure awesome. But, no matter what?

You win.

A Time Spent Metaphorically or Literally Lost in the Dark

Training 5

You're lost in the dark.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the state of being lost]
- * [the shadowed state of things/the world]
- * what would it take to recover?
- * how do I recover?
- * how do I live with this?

- * how do I find my way back to myself?
- * how do I find my way home?
- * why did this happen?
- * what will I find in the dark, to bring back home?
- * what will I leave behind me?
- * how will this experience change me?

When the Quest Ends: you find your way home, maybe even with some treasure, maybe having left something good behind—

But the experience has changed you.

SHEPHERD

A **Shepherd** Arc focuses on everyday life and making other people/things better.

If you're building your own Shepherd quest, you'll have basically six choices of topic:

- * **Shepherd 1:** ordinary life stuff!
- * **Shepherd 2:** a rough patch in an ordinary life.
- * **Shepherd 3:** you're haunted by something from your past, that you'd like to make right.
 - **Shepherd 3 (variation):** somewhat *extraordinary* life stuff.
- * **Shepherd 4:** a big adventure or challenge.
- * **Shepherd 5:** you've grown into something awesome, and do something to prove it.

If it's none of these, then it's not really a Shepherd quest ... but you could try fitting it to Shepherd 1, 4, or the variant 3? Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

This is Just, Like, a Bit of Ordinary Life

Shepherd 1

This is the story of your ordinary life—the everyday work, stresses, and pleasures that form the fabric of your days.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some project]
- * [some experience key to this part of your life]
- * [some emotion or mood you're working through]
- * what will cause my life to change?
- * how can I make this place a better place?

- * how can I do anything more than this, when (issue that exists)?
- * how do I figure (something) out?
- * what do I need to do for these people I care about?
- * what does (something relevant to my general themes, that might give my story a shove forward) mean?
- * what could possibly go wrong?

When the Quest Ends: a responsibility falls on you out of nowhere.

A Somewhat Difficult But Still Basically Normal Patch of Life

Shepherd 2

You're having a little trouble keeping your life on an even keel.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some project or relationship]
- * [some experience key to this part of your life]
- * [some emotion or mood you're working through]
- * [this person, who is trouble]
- * how am I going to manage this?
- * how can I do this?
- * how can I get through this?
- * how can I adapt to this?
- * what am I meant to do here?
- * what do I need to do for this person?
- * how can I make this person's life better?
- * what guidance can I give this person?
- * how will I change during this troubled time?

When the Quest Ends: you're doing OK, but there's a big challenge coming up.

Something from the Past is Haunting You

Shepherd 3

There's something haunting you from the past, but you've got the chance to make it right.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [this thing that is haunting you]

- * what can I do to make this right?
- * what can I find in myself to make this right?
- * what is there here that can be fixed?
- * what am I meant to do?
- * how do I find my way onto the right path again?
- * what marvelous secret will I learn?
- * what is the answer to (old mystery that's plagued you)?
- * what will I be able to make right again?

When the Quest Ends: it's the most amazing thing. You *do*. (Make whatever it is right, that is.)

(An Ordinary Slice of Extraordinary Life)

Shepherd 3 - VARIATION

This is the story of your extraordinary life—the larger-than-life magic, battles, and wonder that form the fabric of your days.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some cool project]
- * [some experience key to this part of your life]
- * [some big emotion or mood you're working through]
- * how do I figure (something) out?
- * what do I need to do here?
- * what do I need to do for these people I care about?
- * what will let me grow into something greater than I've been?
- * what marvelous secret will I learn?
- * what chance for greater happiness will fall upon me?
- * what new role in the world will I attain?
- * why did (something key to my life) happen?
- * what will this part of my life wind up teaching me?
- * what is my life like now?
- * how does this thing I'm doing work?
- * what is the core thing that drives me?

When the Quest Ends: a chance at greater happiness falls on you out of nowhere.

You Go on an Adventure or Face a Big Challenge

Shepherd 4

You're facing a big challenge or adventure.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the adventure or challenge (or grand project, that is also a big challenge)]
- * [something internal it's a metaphor for (or vice versa)]
- * [your relationship with a key ally]
- * [a mystery or question at the heart of the adventure or challenge]
- * what will I find on this adventure / gain from this challenge?
- * how will/should I conquer this trial?
- * how will/should I overcome some key difficulty of this adventure or challenge?
- * what will I learn from this adventure/challenge?
- * what is the key to beating this adventure/challenge?
- * how do I triumph over (this), in the end?
- * what am I supposed to do here?
- * what maintains (some key quality of your character) even through adventures and challenges like this?
- * what secret will I discover on this adventure / from this challenge?
- * (a hand of cards to complete the final challenge)

When the Quest Ends: the challenge or adventure ends, leaving you battle-hardened or refreshed ... and, either way, ready to face the trials of your ordinary life.

You Do Something Really Awesome to Show How Cool You've Become

Shepherd 5

You've become a new person—a stronger, better person. Isn't it awesome?

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some project, that will demonstrate that]
- * [deep⁴² philosophical question related to your character stuff]

- * [deep personal or personally-relevant question]
- * [training/practice/study, to accomplish something]
- * who have I become?
- * what is the core of who I am?
- * how will I achieve (something only the best version of you could achieve)?
- * what can I give to those around me?
- * what amazing, revolutionary thing can I do here?
- * what amazing, revolutionary thing *do* I manage here?
- * what great secret do I discover?

When the Quest Ends: you create or do something amazing and revolutionary.

MELANCHOLY

A **Melancholy** Arc focuses on life in the shadow of grief, death, or some wicked power.

If you're building your own Melancholy quest, you'll have basically six choices of topic:

- * **Melancholy 1:** you are living in that shadow.
- * **Melancholy 2:** you're obsessed with or fixated on something.
- * **Melancholy 3:** you're in just an *impossible* situation here.
- * **Melancholy 4:** you're dealing with something unnatural. (Sometimes this is a grail quest.)
- * **Melancholy 5:** you figure out what happens next.
 - **Melancholy 5 (variation):** you solve a mystery that's been bugging you for a while.

If it's none of these, then it's not really a Melancholy quest ... but you could try fitting it to Melancholy 1, 4, or the variant 5?

Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

Living in a Shadow

Melancholy 1

This quest is about the daily routine of living with the chaotic, wicked, alien, monstrous, haunted, or void- or death-touched elements of your life. It may touch on

⁴² ish

the lives of others in similar situations. A big focus on mealtimes, clothing, and sitting on roof/cliff edges having philosophical discussions is common.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some metaphysical puzzle that troubles you]
- * [some other kind of question that you're stuck because you can't answer]
- * [a muddle of gloom, grief, or sorrow]
- * [a relationship, or question about a relationship, that will spur a change in your life]
- * [a story of your past, contrapunto to the subjects of this Arc]
- * how do I feel about my life?
- * how do I deal with this eternal/persistent sorrow?
- * what will draw me out of my gloom to face the world?
- * what would motivate me to move forward?
- * what or who will force my life to change?
- * what new obsession or fixation will draw me from my static state?
- * what am I supposed to do here?
- * how do I feel about [long-standing life situation]?

When the Quest Ends: you make a change in your life.

You are Obsessing/Fixating on Something

Melancholy 2

There's something you can't stop thinking about—it absorbs your thoughts, obsesses you; it's sucking you into the abyss of its enigmas, emptiness, and strangeness.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the thing that's obsessing/fixating you]
- * [your relationship to the obsession or fixation's target]
- * what am I to do about this (obsession/fixation)?
- * how am I to claim or build a relationship with (the target of your obsession/fixation)?
- * what am I to learn from this obsession?
- * what is my time/life with this (obsession/fixation) going to be like?
- * what does (obsession/fixation/its target) mean to me?
- * let's do this!



by Patrick R. Kelley

When the Quest Ends: your ordinary life stops feeling safe/normal/OK to you.

An Unbearably Tense or Grindingly Stressful Situation

Melancholy 3

You're trying to cope with an impossible situation. This quest spends a lot of time on your emotional state, your memories, and your history as you do so.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [impossible situation]
- * [impossible question]
- * [bleak experience]
- * how am I to stay whole through this?
- * what have I forgotten?
- * what have I not seen?
- * what internal block is getting in my way?
- * how am I to resolve this?
- * how can I stop this?
- * how can I do/survive this?
- * what am I supposed to do here?
- * why is this happening?
- * what is my coping strategy here?
- * how will this change me?
- * what relationship will this experience strengthen, and how?
- * what can I learn from this?

When the Quest Ends: you remember something important you'd forgotten, and make a decision on how to deal with it.

Dealing with Something Unnatural (Sometimes, a Grail Quest)

Melancholy 4

You deal directly with something unnatural—pacifying it, taming it, or maybe struggling and losing against it.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some key question about your past or nature, only notionally relevant]
- * [the unnatural thing]
- * [your relationship with the unnatural thing]
- * [something wondrous or artistic (and potentially wondrous) you are trying to create]
- * [a bleak emotional state]
- * [your plan]
- * how should my plan here work?
- * what would make the world worthwhile to me?
- * what wonder will I wrest from this struggle?
- * how will this struggle change me?
- * what can I learn from it?
- * what great deed can I do here?
- * how can I win this?
- * how can I defeat this unnatural enemy?
- * what in me will allow me to win this?

When the Quest Ends: you find “the key to the world”—something mysterious that seems to hold the key to making your life, or the things around you, have more value to you.



by Elizabeth Sherry

Figuring Out What to Do Next

Melancholy 5

You find out what to do, moving forward.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [a “why” question about your backstory]
- * [an artistic project or other answer to melancholy]
- * [a relationship you’re working out]
- * [a bleak emotional state]
- * [yourself]
- * [(something)’s fate]
- * what should I do, moving forward?
- * how will/should I change?
- * how can I move forward?
- * how much do I care about this?
- * how can/will I fix this?
- * how do I do this thing I’ve been stuck at for a while?
- * what would make me happy/content?
- * what has been holding me back?

When the Quest Ends: you gain a sense of completion.

(Finding Answers)

Melancholy 5 - VARIATION

You tackle a mystery that’s been bugging you for a long time—something where *not knowing* has been driving your character Arc and hurting you. It’s often a social or emotional thing, or a senseless crime, but it could also be a scientific mystery.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [a “why” question about your backstory]
- * [the backstory to something else]
- * [the mystery]
- * what’s kept me from finding the answers to this?
- * what is the true secret of this thing?
- * what secret do I discover, and how?
- * how do I fix this?
- * how do I do this thing I’ve been stuck at for a while?
- * how does this work?

When the Quest Ends: you find the answers that you needed.

MYSTIC

A **Mystic** Arc focuses on life in the shadow of an ambiguous divine presence.

If you're building your own Mystic quest, you'll have basically six choices of topic:

- * **Mystic 1:** omens, portents; feels like who you are now will probably have to die/be reborn?
- * **Mystic 2:** you're courted/tempted by a metaphysical opposite number.
- * **Mystic 3:** your life is a mess. You try to work something out.
- * **Mystic 4:** you're dealing with mirrored psychological and external-world problems.
 - **Mystic 4 (variation):** you refuse to accept that anything is even possibly wrong.
- * **Mystic 5:** you struggle to be a better person despite all the obstacles in your way, and to build a new plan.

If it's none of these, then it's not really a Mystic quest ... but you could try fitting it to Mystic 1, 3, or the variant 4? Specific details and suggested muddles follow.

A Time of Omens and Portents—the Person you Are *Now* Must Die, That Something New Be Born

Mystic 1

This quest is built of portents. You know something is coming. You can *feel* that something is coming. It's like a river seen through glass, this quest, full of motion and darkness and a strange kind of beauty; and, you can't tell where it's going 'til it ends.

It's just, the person you've been ... will have to die. In some way. And something new, be born.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [a morass of unpleasant emotion]
- * [an enduring pleasant, unpleasant, or internal/psychological experience]
- * [a story of your past, contrapunto to the subjects of this Arc]
- * [an ongoing personal project]
- * [a major unfinished “why” question about recent events in your life]

- * [something you've been having trouble handling]
- * what miracle is coming to transform me?
- * what will I become?
- * what am I being asked to do?
- * what am I, really?
- * what secret am I being called to find?
- * why bother?
- * how can/should I live with (some particular burden)?
- * how can I keep going?
- * what am I supposed to do about this stuff?

When the Quest Ends: you are confronted by a miracle. It often relates to a **Principle** or **Second Self** that you have or are picking up at the end of this quest, so if you haven't yet chosen one (and, in the case of a Principle, bound yourself to it), this should be a miracle that gets you there.

Arguments with “the Other Side” - The Most Complicated Quest Template of Them All!

Mystic 2

You're courted and tempted by your “opposite number”—by someone who's playing in the same basic cosmology you are, but for the other team.

If you have or are about to have a **Principle** (pg. 82, 86), that usually means someone who opposes it.

If you have or are about to have a **Second Self** (pg. 95), that usually means someone who has the same basic second self but is on the other side *in that context*, or maybe somehow has the opposite/inverted kind of second self.

Otherwise, we're just generally talking about someone who is trying to pull you off your intended path, in life or for this Arc in general, whatever that path might be. It might be as simple as family members telling you your calling is too dangerous, as supernatural as a spirit trying to tempt you off your religious path, or as positive as someone trying to make you recognize some truth about yourself you've been hiding from.

No matter what, it's always someone with a decent pitch.

If you're fighting for Love, for instance, you won't get a growly enemy dude who fights for Hate and sticks to “cause Hate is awesome” as their argument. That is a terrible argument and while there are probably people it might convince, people who are fighting for Love are not likely to be among them. No. If you get a warrior for Hate to court

and tempt you, they'll be someone awesome and seductive who *happens* to have a Principle of Hate; or, someone twisty and clever enough to make a good play to *get* you to hate someone; or Malambruno, to dig out whatever hate might still exist inside you; ... or, most likely of all, you won't face off against Hate at all, but against some *much* more inconvenient opposite to Love, like Science, Reason, Duty, or Dispassion.

If your Second Self has taught you that you're actually a divine being descending into the world, your opposite number isn't an infernal being ascending that you'll have to fight; it's another divine being that you've always loved but who is on the opposite side of some long-term argument about the disposition of humanity. Or something.

Stuff like that!

Suggested Muddles:

- * [your relationship with your opposite number]
- * [your dedication to your Principle]
- * [some grand project or venture that your opposite number objects to]
- * [some situation you're in that weakens or endangers you]
- * [an old mystery]
- * how am I going to get through this troubled time?
- * how do I stay true to myself here?
- * what's my plan for getting through this?
- * what's my coping strategy for this situation?
- * what do I believe in, in the end?
- * what do I need to do here?
- * how does my opposite number understand the world?
- * what does my opposite number need from me?
- * what am I going to do about (opposite number)?
- * how will I make answer to their argument?
- * why are they so concerned about me and my choices?
- * what is (opposite number)'s point, if they have one?

When the Quest Ends: your life falls apart. You're betrayed by something you had faith in or you're abandoned by your own "side" in some fashion. Your spiritual pleas go unanswered.

Your Life is a Mess! ... Figure Something Out?

Mystic 3

Your life's a mess, and you're not sure what to make of things, but over the course of this quest you hammer out a plan for moving forward.

For putting together a new life. A new purpose. A new plan.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the mess your life is in]
- * [a grand initiative, likely to fail]
- * [some confusing tangle or maze]
- * what am I going to do to fix this?
- * what is the terrible flaw in my plan?
- * what haven't I worked through about myself?
- * why is (something going on that is making your life a mess) happening?
- * how can I do (some difficult thing)?
- * what's the best way to do (some big ambiguous thing)?
- * what am I supposed to do here?
- * what is there in me I can use as my guiding light here?
- * what's the key to getting through this?
- * what's my coping strategy here?
- * what have I already lost?
- * how much is (something that you've been fighting for) worth to me?
- * is this (venture) even a good idea?
- * what does (something you're trying to do) even mean?
- * (a hand of cards for implementing your plan; only ...)

When the Quest Ends: your plan falls apart. Things get confused and out-of-control and the whole affair sort of ends with you feeling carried along by events. You might get to do something awesome, but ... it doesn't feel like you had much of a chance to be consciously decisive in how it all played out?

An External Threat Recapitulates an Internal Flaw

Mystic 4

There's a hole in the world. Or at least a hole in the way your life is put together. It's partly psychological but it's

symbolized by a very real monster, trap, curse, demon, or miraculous effect.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [the hole in the world]
- * [the hole in your life]
- * [a project you think will help to steady or uplift you]
- * [an important relationship]
- * [some question that will help you understand a friend]
- * [some metaphysical question related to your ideals]
- * how do I get this trouble to stop?
- * how am I going to solve this?
- * how am I going to deal with this?
- * what am I supposed to do? / what must I do?
- * what glimpse of beauty will I see beyond these troubled shores?
- * what is that weird octopus even *doing* there with that crystallized externalization of beauty?
- * what do I need to alter in myself?
- * how do I prove myself?
- * what am I to learn from this?
- * how am I to fill this hole inside (the world/ myself)?

When the Quest Ends: you manage to suppress the hole in the world with the help of your family and friends. Or, if you're completely cut off from all of those, by the intervention of a higher power or an unexpected friend. ... it's probably not a permanent solution.

(You're Fine, It's All Good, Honest)

Mystic 4 - VARIATION

Trouble? Whatever. Awful trouble? Whatever! You're going to stay happy and optimistic. Ganbatte!

Suggested Muddles:

- * [some situationally inappropriate or underwhelming project]
- * [an important relationship]
- * what do my friends need from me?
- * how do I get this trouble to leave me alone?
- * let's (do something fun)!
- * what can keep me going to the end?

- * what's driving my optimism?
- * what will bring my shelter of optimism/denial to a shattering end?

When the Quest Ends: you get a shattering piece of news. Your efforts fall to pieces in your hands. This probably means you or someone you care about is dying.

If You are Lost in Darkness, Light a Candle of Yourself

Mystic 5

This is your struggle to live as a better person; to be a blessing unto others, in spite of everything. To be the light of a miracle.

To make things right.

Suggested Muddles:

- * [a grand answer to your problems / existence you are working on]
- * [your relationship with your opposite number, if you have one]
- * [an artistic project]
- * [a general existential question]
- * [a question about who you are, your core beliefs, and/or what you want to be]
- * [an abstract question about your powers]
- * [a "why" question about recent events]
- * [a story that hints at what will inspire you]
- * what's my plan?
- * how am I going to do this?
- * how does my plan even work?
- * how may I keep things going, for a little while?
- * where is my story going / where will it end?
- * who will I meet, and bond to, upon this quest?
- * what, now, will I become?
- * what great secret will I learn?

When the Quest Ends: ... unknown. If you're ever going to find out that it was all worth it, or all for nothing, it's at the end of this quest. If you're ever going to find out that your faith has value, or that it was all a lie... it's at the end of this quest. There'll be some games where which one'll happen is obvious, but others where it might surprise you!

Your Stories (*in depth*)

FOR THE CINTAMANI-BEARER

using “the Spooky Stories of the Cintamani-Bearer” (pg. 156)

So, a quick note before we begin:

In the default version of these stories, the source of your magic is “the *cintamani*”—the thing that gives the world its worth. It’s something you made, or something you have and love. ... only, you’re not *supposed* to have it. It’s not supposed to be in the living world at all. It’s great that you have it; people *deserve* to know how amazing the world is, how amazing *they* are. But it’s also terrible, because it’s stolen from King Death, and that’s *dangerous* ... for you and for everyone else.

... only, what if that’s not what hooked you about being the *cintamani*-bearer? What if you wanted to stand at the gate of a *different* kind of magic? You can change up the source of your power here; the only rule is, it should always be a questionable physical or conceptual treasure—something with this big, poorly-defined virtue (like being holy, or being made to heal the world, or holding humanity’s future)—that “doesn’t belong” in the world, but rather in the domain of some Mystery. Basically, you want to be able to ask similar *questions* to the ones a standard *cintamani*-bearer asks, from relatively static ones like:

- * what price must I pay for this?
- * what is its origin?
- * what is it, exactly?
- * why did it wind up in my hands?
- * what, ultimately, is the *right* way to use this power?
- * why is stealing this from the relevant Mystery OK?

To ones you’ll have to reinterpret a little, like:

- * what does it mean, to have this virtue? (“what do I mean when I say ‘humanity’s future?’”)
- * does the world really need a thing like this? (“doesn’t humanity *have* a future without this magic thing?”)
- * how can a magic object be said to provide it? (“... and if it *doesn’t* have a future, why does this object help?”)

These will substitute for appropriate muddles below.

The Island of King Death

In a similar fashion, part of your story is dreaming about, and maybe traveling to, a distant magical realm. We’re usually going to say that this is the world of the dead—the island of King Death, the haunts of ghostly Mysteries, and maybe “the ghost world” that is adjacent to both the ordinary world and the far roofs. This is mostly a side note as long as you focus on *Cheat* and *Allegory* powers, but it’ll be a little more thematically important if you start to focus on *Kaiju* stuff, and it’ll be a *big* part of your story if you start picking up *Worldwalker* (pg. 94) powers like **Into the Mittelmarches** or **Spirit Walking**.

If you don’t want to be connected to the world of the dead, good alternatives include Faerie, Avalon, and “higher mystical dimensions.” Whatever you choose, you’ll need *Worldwalker* powers to just *go there and hang out*, but you’ll be able to find legacies of the chosen realm and gates into isolated, forgotten portions of it in your town and on the far roofs ... and in **the Bridge of Knives**, you’ll find ways into its scarier side.

If you change the realm you’re working on, you’ll want to change up the details on **the Bridge of Knives** stories below, as well as adjusting the general concept of the second story, **the Price**. You’ll also need to figure out alternative, non-death-themed muddles to replace:

- * what can be done for the already-dead?
- * what can be done for the ghost world itself?
- * why does the world deserve the *cintamani*, and not Death?
- * how can I turn King Death temporarily aside?

For instance, if you have the heart of the world, taken from a dragon-Mystery’s hoard at Avalon, then you might replace those with “how do I defeat the Dragon’s Knight?” “how can the shadow on Avalon be lifted?” “just how OK is it to steal a dragon’s stuff?” and “how can I stop the dragon from finding and eating me for now?” It may also be useful to ponder questions like “how do I settle this for good?” and “why was the world’s heart in Avalon in the dragon’s hoard to begin with?” ... though the relevant muddles below *are* already generically phrased or fairly large in their scope.

All that said, let’s move on to your stories!

Stolen Treasure

Your first story is **Stolen Treasure**.

You've touched on the power of magic! It turns out that the source of the magic you've touched on is "the *cintamani*"—the thing that gives the world its worth. It's something you made, or something you have and love. Only, you're not supposed to have the *cintamani*. It's not supposed to be in the world at all. And it's great that you have it, because people deserve to know how amazing the world is, how amazing they are. But it's also terrible, because to steal from Death, to claim the things of Death, is an offense against magic, and maybe ... consigns a part of the world to death?

You've got to figure all this stuff out.

There's also a side quest going on, in **the Bridge of Knives**:

One of your ancestors was lost to the Mystery **Mallt-y-Nos, which is Named Loss**. Now they live in a twilight world where they ritually marry that Mystery every year, before being temporarily locked out of the bedroom and torn apart in that time by her hounds. A mysterious teacher helps you find an ancient coin or a set of keys to bribe the ushers with, sneak into the wedding, and do what you can. If that happens to be the first quest you do, because you decide to focus on *Kaiju/Worldwalker* powers, then your introduction to magic will be a little scarier, because the touch of magic will seem to plunge you into frightening matters involving ghosts and Mysteries, with the light of the *cintamani* just a distant glimmer that might maybe lead you through.

Anyway, your muddles here include:

- * what is magic to me?
- * what can keep me grounded?
- * what price must I pay for the *cintamani*, and how is it to be paid? [*cintamani-specific*]

Plus,

- * **At Magic's Gate**: how do I fully awaken the power inside me?
- * **The Bridge of Knives**: what can be done for the already-dead? [*realm-specific*]
- * **A Burdened Path**: how can I use this power to heal or help what I care about?
- * **Against Vast Enmity**: what great wound will this magic make whole?
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone**: what does it mean, that I have these gifts?

Note that your answers here don't have to be perfect—they just have to fit *you*. In fact, the third storyline presumes that you'll have messed up at least *one* major answer, in this story or the next, and the fourth storyline will assume that your answers here were incomplete at best!

The Price

Your second story is **The Price**. In this storyline, an "extension of the power of King Death" has tracked you into the world and "clings to the edges of your mind." The details are a little bit fuzzy: figuring them out is a muddle, and you only really know this is *happening* because you feel it, and maybe because the troubled teacher in **the Bridge of Knives** helps to let you know.

Speaking of which:

In *this* story, **the Bridge of Knives** *isn't* a side quest; in it, you dream of that extension consuming you, and maybe of its history, or of Death's, and you go to places of death's power looking for answers and solutions. Ultimately you figure out at least a temporary measure of protection. It's *possible* that your troubled teacher here is just the weight of that power upon your mind, but it's more likely they're an NPC.

Normally, that "extension" is what haunts your dreams in the quest, **Against Vast Enmity**.

Muddles include:

- * what is this extension actually doing to me?
- * how can I forcibly cut it from my mind?
- * who would I, without my magic, be?

You'll also pick up the following bonus muddles along the way:

- * **At Magic's Gate**: what is the "real" form of this haunting?
- * **The Bridge of Knives**: how can I turn King Death temporarily aside? [*realm-specific*]
- * **A Burdened Path**: why does the world deserve the *cintamani*, and not Death? [*cintamani+realm-specific*]
- * **Against Vast Enmity**: what can I find in myself with which to refute this haunting and its source?
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone**: why is "refuting" it the wrong answer, and what should I do instead?

If you figure out how to forcibly cut the extension from your mind early on—if *it's* not the last muddle you solve—then either it keeps haunting you, but more intermittently; or, you only figure out the instrumental method, like answering "how do I build a house?" with "with work" or "with money:" you

don't have the power, the will, or the *details* of what you need to do until you've solved the other muddles first.

Again, remember that your answers don't have to be perfect! It's common to have screwed up something a little, or to have already done some of the work of cutting things away or refuting them when you figured out that that was the wrong course to take.

The Twisted Jewel

Your third story is **The Twisted Jewel**. This storyline makes the assumption that somewhere along the way, in your handling of magic or the price, you've slipped up. You're not necessarily sure *where* you've slipped up ... but you have. And now your power is slipping out of control, and *you're* changing too—particularly in **Against Vast Enmity**, when you can *feel* that change being pushed on you in troubled dreams, but even in the earlier and later quests. Maybe there's a simple moral, like "you need to accept that death exists, and you didn't." Maybe it's more complicated, like you decided back when that the *cintamani* thing was just a metaphor for "magic that helps illuminate people's value," and forgot to take into account that it was *also* a physical thing.

You slipped up, and it's changing you.

In this story, **the Bridge of Knives** will be heavily focused on the ghost world, or whatever magical realm you travel to—you are called there to mend wounds in an unreal land that only the *cintamani* can heal, and, perhaps, to study secrets of magic from the ghosts or people there and figure out what's going on.

Muddles include:

- * what can I still trust in, in my magic?
- * who can I trust to remember who I really am?
- * leaving aside the technical details, what was my core paradigmatic/philosophical mistake?

You'll also pick up the following bonus muddles along the way:

- * **At Magic's Gate:** what, ultimately, is the "right" way to use the *cintamani*? [*cintamani-specific*]
- * **The Bridge of Knives:** what can be done for the ghost world itself? [*realm-specific*]
- * **A Burdened Path:** how am I meant to use this power, to change the world?
- * **Against Vast Enmity:** how can I set foot onto the true path again?
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone:** how do I recover from being twisted?

The Sacred Thing

Your fourth story is **The Sacred Thing**. It's about going beyond your first-draft understanding of magic, and reaching a higher level. Typically, the focus of **the Bridge of Knives** is on internal meditation and studying the origin of the *cintamani*; the teacher here is often, but not always, an aspect of oneself.

Muddles include:

- * what is the origin of the *cintamani*? [*cintamani-specific*]
- * does the world really "need" redemption? [*cintamani-specific*]
- * how can a *cintamani*, a *thing*, be said to provide it? [*cintamani-specific*]

You'll also pick up the following bonus muddles along the way:

- * **At Magic's Gate:** what does it mean, to have "worth?" [*cintamani-specific*]
- * **The Bridge of Knives:** what is the *cintamani*, exactly? [*cintamani-specific*]
- * **A Burdened Path:** what's my ultimate goal in wielding its power?
- * **Against Vast Enmity:** why did the *cintamani* wind up in my hands? [*cintamani-specific*]
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone:** how can I live with a light heart?



by Y. C. Yang

FOR THE HERO OF FATE

using “the Fated Hero’s Fever-Dreams” (pg. 158)

The Hero of Fate

Your first story is **The Hero of Fate**. You go up to the roofs. You learn that you’ve got “dream-snake” poisoning—that that’s why you sometimes dream of the future, why you sometimes hear voices on the wind and get glimpses of others’ hearts. It’s why you probably won’t live that long.

Becoming what you need to be is hard, but you’re not alone.

In **Dreams and Visions**, you remember the poisoning and the past, and dream of the hero you’ll become. In **Endurance; Struggle**, the dream-snake poisoning is your Mystic Arc “opposite number,” and learning to live with it more ably is your Shepherd Arc “responsibility.” In **Catching Dreams in a Cup**, your default quest Mystery is **Dream-Snake, which is named Overwhelming**. Finally, in **Seizing Tomorrow**, the quest power is either the power of the dream-snake’s poison, or, if it’s a literal thing, the mantle of the hero of fate.

Muddles include:

- * [becoming OK with your shortened existence]
- * [finding a worthy goal for your finite life]
- * what does it mean to be a hero?

Plus,

- * **Just a Little Worn Down:** [exploring the wonders of the roofs]
- * **Dreams and Visions:** how should I live?
- * **Endurance; Struggle:** [learning to handle the poisoning]
- * **Catching Dreams in a Cup:** how should I handle the dream-snake, itself?
- * **Seizing Tomorrow:** [training in the mastery of your powers]

The Burden of Destiny

Your second story is **The Burden of Destiny**. You’re weaker now than you were and more weighted down by poison and by destiny. In the end, you’re going to have to trust more and more to others; though, they’ll reward that trust.

In **Dreams and Visions**, you wander in dreams looking

to reignite the spark of *yourself*. In **Endurance; Struggle**, both poison and your sense of destiny are your Mystic Arc “opposite number,” and learning to live with your increasingly weakened state is your Shepherd Arc responsibility. In **Catching Dreams in a Cup**, your default quest Mystery is **Garmr, which is named Mistrust**, with the quest power in **Seizing Tomorrow** normally stolen from that defeated Mystery.

Muddles include:

- * what is my destiny?
- * how can I deal with my burden of stress?
- * where on the roofs is the power I need to stand up properly again as a hero on my own?

Plus,

- * **Just a Little Worn Down:** how can I keep being a hero, even if I’m this far ground down?
- * **Dreams and Visions:** what fuels me; what can drive me forward and make me great?
- * **Endurance; Struggle:** [adapting to your weakened state]
- * **Catching Dreams in a Cup:** what is the power that subdues the wolf named Garmr?
- * **Seizing Tomorrow:** how can I wield Garmr’s power as my own?

A Brilliant Future

Your third story is **A Brilliant Future**. Things are beautiful. You’re *winning*. Everything is good. You’re going to achieve your destiny, and get better, and laugh and love and have a brilliant life up on the roofs. That’s what’s in the cards. That’s what you can feel in every cloudless, windy day. Only, you already know that that can’t be so—that this has to be an illusion, or a last burst of strength before the end.

In **Just a Little Worn Down**, that suspicion is the truest and only representation of your “worn down” state. In **Dreams and Visions**, you wander in poppy-dreams and memories trying to understand what’s real and what’s false. In **Endurance; Struggle**, your Mystic Arc “opposite number” is usually that false hope; your Shepherd Arc responsibility is recognizing that it *is* false hope. In **Catching Dreams in a Cup**, your quest Mystery is normally **Dream-Flower, which is named the Lotus**; finally, the quest power in **Seizing Tomorrow** is stolen from Dream-Flower’s defeat.

Muddles include:

- * is it worth breaking the illusion, if I'm just going to die anyway?
- * what is reality here, if my perceptions aren't?
- * by what external agency or internal weakness did this illusion seize me to begin with?

Plus,

- * **Just a Little Worn Down:** [the experience of things being too good to be true]
- * **Dreams and Visions:** why does it feel like I'm winning, if I'm not?
- * **Endurance; Struggle:** how can I accept that this is just an illusion?
- * **Catching Dreams in a Cup:** how do I overcome or seize the power of the dream-flower?
- * **Seizing Tomorrow:** [your training with the power of the lotus]

To Dice with Fate

Your fourth story is **To Dice with Fate**. Doom is on the wind. Are you going to trust the future you've already seen? Or, your own drive to win? Or put things in the hands of your trusted friends? Find some sacred starry palace out there to change your fate, or try to find a way to live with it?

In **Just a Little Worn Down**, that sense of doom is part of what's wearing you out. In **Dreams and Visions**, you have visions of deities and starry palaces and the like and try to claim a better fate. In **Endurance; Struggle**, your Mystic Arc "opposite number" is typically certainty, the weight of that certainty, of doom and endings; your Shepherd Arc responsibility is perhaps to accept that certainty, or to deny it, or neither, as the player decides. In **Catching Dreams in a Cup**, your default quest Mystery is **Basilisk, which is named Reverence**, the king of serpents and the guardian dispatched against those who steal from fate or Heaven; finally, the quest power in **Seizing Tomorrow** is generally the power of your fate or the power to change your fate or the power of the hero of fate you seize, claim, declare, or steal.

Muddles include:

- * what can I trust in?
- * what is the power of "the hero of fate?"
- * is fate even ... real?

Plus,

- * **Just a Little Worn Down:** [understanding the nature of your doom]
- * **Dreams and Visions:** how do I seize a better fate?
- * **Endurance; Struggle:** [working up the belief that you can make it through]
- * **Catching Dreams in a Cup:** how do I prove my worth and become who I am meant to be?
- * **Seizing Tomorrow:** what do I believe in, in the end?

FOR THE MAGICIAN

using "the Lesson Book of the Magician" (pg. 161)

Coming Back

Your first story is **Coming Back**. You've been somewhere else, working on an exhausting, depleting project or studying abroad or something. Now you're back ... and you get sucked into the affairs of the rats and the Mysteries. You don't want this. But it's happening anyway. You try to understand how you fit in.

In the event that you elect to tackle this as a Mystic Arc, you are often haunted by a few minor spirits—a metaphorical angel and devil on your shoulders, as it were, or perhaps a pair of talking ravens, or a familiar and a ghost. One of these is likely to be your "opposite number," but it may not be initially clear which one. If you like, you can also have these around on another kind of Arc.

Muddles include:

- * how can I possibly hold myself together through this?
- * do I even believe the Far Roofs are real?
- * [your relationship with the rats]

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** can I really face the far roofs again?
- * **Struggling for Control:** what did/will I find on the roofs that I actually need?
- * **It's Complicated:** [building something good or useful from the ashes of what Hedge did to you]
- * **The Thorn'd Path:** [your old trauma]
- * **A Magician's Practice:** what is the thing inside me that defies the will of Hedge the Fang?

Ghost Sweeping

Your second story is **Ghost Sweeping**. You train in ghost sweeping; receive far too much attention from intrusive ghost kings who think you're closer to being "a romantic interest" or "a pet" than something they should fear; pick up hints from meditation or casual references about something called "the fire of the world," whose true nature shall remain ambiguous until next story; and, discover a ghost or ghost king infected by Malamb Bruno and its sinister intentions, ultimately laying them to rest. On a Mystic Arc, your "opposite number" for this story should be a ghost or ghost king (but probably *not* the infected one)—someone with the personal relevance, romantic appeal, charisma, cool, or narrative *zing* to have a believable shot at pulling you consensually off of your path.

Note the ghost world and its kings also show up in **A Twist of Destiny** (pg. 220); unless that story's already over and done, you might want to resist any temptation to, e.g., decide only a tiny lineage of ghost sweepers can interact with the place, make the ghost world only accessible from a particular far roofs neighborhood, or dramatically cut the connection between the ghost world and reality at the story's end.

Muddles include:

- * how do I lay that infected ghost to rest?
- * how can I find and claim "the fire of the world?"
- * how can I fully reclaim the sense of self that Hedge the Fang once stole from me?

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** [the world is haunted and full of horror behind its surfaces]
- * **Struggling for Control:** how do I get enough power to matter in the world of ghosts?
- * **It's Complicated:** [the politics and personalities of the ghost world]
- * **The Thorn'd Path:** [your relationship with a ghost that's personally haunting you]
- * **A Magician's Practice:** what's the true secret of the ghost sweeper's art?

The Fire of the World

Your third story is **The Fire of the World**. You struggle to master your new power over "the fire of the world," learning what it means and what to do with it.

If this is a Mystic Arc, try to use or carry over the "opposite number" from one of the previous two Arcs; if you can't, then



by Camille "Karma" O'Leary

your opposite number will be, somewhat dangerously, the voice of the fire itself.

Muddles include:

- * [a practice of mindfulness]
- * [learning (more of) the ways of the far roofs]
- * why are there so many monsters in the world?

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** [an attempt at psychological self-protection (e.g., withdrawing into academic detachment)]
- * **Struggling for Control:** what does this fire mean? What do I do with it?
- * **It's Complicated:** what do the people around me need?
- * **The Thorn'd Path:** [you're losing control over the fire of the world]
- * **A Magician's Practice:** how do I refine this fire from something I "have" to something I use, wield, and master?

A Dependable Person

Your fourth story is **A Dependable Person**. You find a home, and what that means is explored over the course of the quest, possibly in flashbacks.

Again, if this is a Mystic Arc, try to use or carry over the "opposite number" from one of the previous three Arcs; if you can't, then your opposite number will be, alas, the first home you find—a home destined to be shattered by some insidious element within, or, a home that was a trap for you from the very start. Don't worry, though! You'll still have a chance at finding another one if this story winds up going well!

Muddles include:

- * where will this home be?
- * how can I hang on, when things get too hard?
- * how should I close the books on my relationship with Hedge the Fang?

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** what would it take to feel like I could actually belong somewhere?
- * **Struggling for Control:** how do I relax my defenses against these people?
- * **It's Complicated:** [you are no good at this, you are panicky and picky and you keep pushing people away even when you like them and you never say the right thing and you don't understand anybody and you think they all hate you and it's miserable.]
- * **The Thorn'd Path:** what must I do on the far roofs to protect or help (the people of) this home?
- * **A Magician's Practice:** [your relationship with this home]

FOR THE NAVIGATOR

using "the Secret Journals of the Navigator" (pg. 163)

The Navigator's Cat

Your first story is **The Navigator's Cat**. You're dealing with family or home stuff that doesn't *want* you to go out on the roofs, and, being haunted by a cat spirit that's been bugging you occasionally ever since some traumatic event in your past. In the end, the delight of the roofs is more important to you than the warmth of home (though you might find a compromise), and your relationship with the cat spirit evolves, e.g., it becomes a friend *not* associated with past trauma, or, it decides you don't "need it" any more and wanders off.

The cat spirit will be the "quest target" mentioned in the Navigator's Haunt as well as (typically) the "opposite number" mentioned in Mystic 2 quests (pg. 195) and the "new responsibility" that appears at the end of a Shepherd 1 quest (pg. 190). For a Training Arc, the new perspective for a Training 2 quest comes from the roofs themselves, and from the rats.

Lingering trauma from the event will be the sickness handled in **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain**.

Note that one of these quests—the **Rooftop Shores**—is shrouded in loss and grief. If you get to that quest, or start on that quest, and have nothing to grieve *for*, then you will lose someone: on a Melancholy, Mystic, or Shepherd Arc, probably a family member or friend, and before the game begins. On an Otherworldly, Storyteller, or Training Arc, probably a rat who travels with you ... though, it *could* be something else.

Muddles include:

- * what's my place with the rats, on the roofs?
- * how do I do a good job out here as navigator?
- * is it really OK to leave home and the lower world behind?

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** what will my new life be like?
- * **The Navigator's Haunt:** how do I get the cat spirit to stop being such a *pest*?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** what haven't I processed?
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** what secret of the far roofs do I discover, and how?
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** [a muddle of loss and grief]⁴³

The Navigator's Apprentice

Your second story is the **Navigator's Apprentice**. You pick up an apprentice—a rat whose parents ask you to teach them a few tricks because you showed you were promising, or, a human who finds out about your travels and wants to do what you do—but they're way, *way* too cynical, chill, and unexcited about it all. It's like they want to explore the far roofs out of social pressure, or because *someone* has to, rather than because they're flat amazing! Maybe that's literally how they think, or maybe that's just how their cautious personality comes across?

In the **Navigator's Haunt**, they're "the quest target," and their kind of *a priori* skepticism of you and their belief that you're too reckless and self-important to really know what you're doing is the haunt. They're also probably the "opposite number" mentioned in Mystic 2 quests (pg. 195), the new responsibility that drops on you at the end of a Shepherd 1 quest, and the source of a Training 2 quest's new perspective.

In **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain**, the sickness you'll handle is a literal poisoning or fever that you pick up, often

⁴³ if necessary, as noted, first working out with the GM why there is one

while, e.g., trying to protect the apprentice from something, or while searching for them if they're missing.

The Rooftop Shores should usually borrow inspiration from the main storyline or events in play. Look for things that have happened that are suitably melancholy, or, things going on or impending in the main group storyline that could be! For instance, the quest could concern itself with grief over Harpy (pg. 236) or the possible ending of the world (pg. 238). That said, if there's nothing like that going on, then, on a Melancholy, Mystic, or Shepherd Arc, consider making the apprentice a young rat whose parents have just been lost (and you knew them); on an Otherworldly, Storyteller, or Training Arc, the apprentice *themselves* could be lost to the dangers of the roofs, leaving you arguing with their memory in **the Navigator's Haunt** and making the solving of any remaining muddles that regard them somewhat bittersweet.

Anyway, muddles for this Arc include:

- * what does my apprentice need?
- * how can I be a better navigator?
- * what am I not seeing in all this?

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** what's the core of my teaching, the central/most important lesson?
- * **The Navigator's Haunt:** how can I get my apprentice to stop being so *irritating*?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** what secret of the far roofs do I discover, and how?
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** in what lies my happiness?
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** how should I honor those that have been lost?

The Navigator's Fear

Your third story is **the Navigator's Fear**. You're haunted by a vision of a you that you could have been ... or, maybe, a part of yourself that got split off from you. Worse, sometime before **Chomping at the Bit**—you don't know how or when—you've attracted the attention of the Mystery, **Goblin** ... which is never good. Fortunately, you have a plan, one that ties in to the main group storyline (pg. 231): there's something about the place you're traveling through, or are *going* to be traveling through in the course of this Arc, that'll let you lose even *this* kind of pursuer more or less permanently. Like, if you work it right, you can loop your hunter through their own timeline or

snatch away their memories. It'd be cool to work the story so that that "vision of yourself" was a shard of memory or time-displaced version of you or something else related to your plan, but if that doesn't work out, don't sweat it; you kind of have a tendency to see weird stuff like this sometimes anyway.

Your Mystic 2 opposite number, your "quest target" for **the Navigator's Haunt**, and the source of a Training 2 quest's perspective are all traditionally that other "you," dealing with it is a viable option for your Shepherd Arc "responsibility."

The poison that you deal with in **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain** is often the effects of having them cut off from you, or the effects of their presence, but it might also be poison from one of Goblin's traps (pg. 116).

The Rooftop Shores is usually about stuff that's been lost in play, or implicit melancholy shrouding the main story, but can also be tied to your disconnection from your other self, how they broke off from you, or something of that sort ... an opportunity, in short, to mourn the you that you don't get to be, whether they're right there next to you complaining about it or whether their part in the Arc is already done. It often also involves a bit of wrestling with the classic allegation of the Far Roofs: that if you travel them you are at risk of becoming a legend, or a god.

Muddles include:

- * supposedly if you spend too long on the roofs, you can become a legend, or a god. Am I OK with that?
- * my ever-deeper relationship with the far roofs themselves
- * what secret of the far roofs do I discover, and how?

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** how do I escape Goblin's attention? what's my plan?
- * **The Navigator's Haunt:** what am I supposed to do with myself? ... I mean, my *other* self?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** (a hand of cards *arcanum* to implement the plan from **Chomping at the Bit**)
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** what deep-rooted worry or fear has been holding me back?
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** why do I think Goblin started hunting me, anyway?

The Navigator's Ship

Your fourth story is **the Navigator's Ship**. Something's changing all of the directional markers that you're familiar with—it's like the Far Roofs are completely *new* again. You're

haunted by King Death, though not so much in his usual form but in the form of a cat made of starlight. And in the middle of all of this, you stumble upon an abandoned magic ship that can sail along the roofs.

Your Mystic 2 “opposite number,” Training Arc “new perspective” source, and the “quest target” for **the Navigator’s Haunt** are all typically the starlight cat. It might also be the responsibility that drops on you at the end of a Shepherd 1 quest, or, *that* could be something to do with the ship or changing markers?

The poison that you deal with in **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain** is usually the pervasive influence of death, whether that means that “death energy” has infected you and is sapping your vitality because you got bitten by a starlight cat while poking around in the bushes (or the starbushes?) or that you’re getting worn down by existing in a world full of mortality or something in between. It could also be a ghost pirate curse tied to the ship, although be careful with making it too exact—the poison or curse here will work better if its effects are kind of uncertain, subtle, and ineffable, so as to develop through the course of play.

The Rooftop Shores assumes having King Death around is enough reason to have death on your mind without an absolute requirement for anything else relevant happening; that said, if there *is* nothing else going on in play to merit grief or a sense of loss, it’s worth intentionally doing a bit more thematic stuff than you otherwise would’ve—e.g., following the cat to witness funereal processions, stumbling on a few yourself, or sailing the ship to some “land of death” to release its ghostly crew.

Muddles include:

- * what’s the ship’s origin?
- * what’s at the heart of my journey?
- * are the far roofs even ... real?

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** what do I need to do to get this magic ship roofworthy?
- * **The Navigator’s Haunt:** how do I get King Death to stop being such a *pest*?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** what’s changing all the directional markers?
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** how do I make answer to this poison or curse?
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** why is Death hanging around, anyway?

FOR THE OLD-TIMER

using “the Remembrances of the Old-Timer” (pg. 168)

Poisoned

Your first story is **Poisoned**—poisoned by Typhon, you are becoming a Mystery, rising beyond the world of life into the world of spirit. But you’re fighting it!

Your “opposite number” in a Mystic 2 quest would most likely be Typhon, arguing directly or implicitly through the poison for you to give in and become divine; if you don’t think your Principle is the default Tenacity, though, you may want to work with the GM to figure out a slightly different poisoning and opposite number.

A Friend’s History focuses on a friend and neighbor struggling with local agencies to, e.g., get proper medical care or stop an unjust eviction. The friend is notionally not an adventurer, so it’s possible that “the quest friend” whom you traveled with once was their mother or father, or someone they remind you of ... or maybe they were an adventurer, once, but were injured on their journey and left unable to continue their travels on the roofs.

Muddles include:

- * what is Typhon’s poison doing to me?
- * what is Typhon’s poison *giving* me?
- * [the political turmoil going on in the mundane world, that might affect your city and your “normal” life]

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [the story of your last journey before “retirement”]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** what is my coping strategy in the face of Typhon’s poisoning?
- * **A Grand Adventure:** can I really be the adventurer I once was, again?
- * **Something of a Legend:** [finding a temporary balance with the poison, so you can focus on other things]
- * **A Friend’s History:** how can I help my friend deal with local government?

Lost Pieces

Your second story is **Lost Pieces**. In a feverish dream, you have many shadows, and you cut them off—waking to find that you’ve given rise to *firedrake-youkai*, bits of your wishes and dreams, taking form as little dragon-spirits and scattering to haunt the Roofs. On a Melancholy or Mystic Arc, this dream normally happens around the end of **Clinging to the Past**; on a Role or Otherworldly Arc, it happens early in **A Friend’s History**; on a Storyteller Arc, it will be near the beginning of the quest, **A Grand Adventure**.

Your “opposite number” in a Mystic 2 quest will most likely be these *firedrake-youkai* ... making their case to you, probably, implicitly through dreams. Again, if you don’t think your Principle is the default Tenacity, you may want to work with the GM to figure out something that’s a slightly better opposite number—the *youkai* are an argument for just letting go and flying away, which would not be a solid opposite number for, e.g., a Principle of Love or Science.

In this Arc, **A Friend’s History** is about helping someone take care of things they’re too old or hurt to manage. They can be a new NPC, or someone previously around, or a PC/NPC who got hurt in the previous storyline.

Muddles include:

- * how do I stay stable when I keep dreaming of things like being something else, or fire, or wild flights across the roofs?
- * how do I turn Typhon’s attention aside for a while?
- * [exploring a place of gold and glory—in dreams or life, as *youkai* or yourself]

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [the story of passing through “the grand winter,” and how so many dreams and wishes were stilled, and turned to dust, your own and others’]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** how do I stop this kind of dream weirdness *youkai* explosion stuff from happening again?
- * **A Grand Adventure:** what have I lost, in letting the *firedrake-youkai* free?
- * **Something of a Legend:** how do I catch the *firedrake-youkai*, if I even need to?
- * **A Friend’s History:** for now, what am I going to do and be?

Shadow Self

Your third story is **Shadow Self**. Despite whatever solution you found to last Arc’s **Taking Some Mental Damage Here** muddle, you find yourself dreaming of a shadow self—a “you” that is beyond you. A *real* you, even, maybe. Once again, on a Melancholy or Mystic Arc, this normally happens around the end of **Clinging to the Past**; on a Role or Otherworldly Arc, early in **A Friend’s History**; on a Storyteller Arc, near the beginning of the quest, **A Grand Adventure**.

Your “opposite number” on a Mystic 2 quest would be this shadow self.

In this Arc, **A Friend’s History** focuses on the story of a childhood or at least long-time friend—probably a PC—and how you met, and your early days together.

Muddles include:

- * what does my friend need from me?
- * can I afford to trust my shadow self?
- * how do I escape the attention of Typhon, and make this whole thing ... better?

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [the story of how you fought the many-faced Mock Dragon, perhaps a Mystery, who could not be killed during the day or night, inside or outside, by animal or person, by effort or surrender]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** what’s my strategy for hanging on to my sense of who I am?
- * **A Grand Adventure:** why did this division of myself happen, and is there something to be gained?
- * **Something of a Legend:** [your relationship, devouring, surrender to, reconciliation with, or reunification with your shadow-self]
- * **A Friend’s History:** what makes something a “real” me?

Preparations for Transcendence

Your fourth story is **Preparations for Transcendence**. You make preparations for departing the flesh and becoming a part of, or a successor to, Typhon. Though, it doesn’t necessarily happen—something could prevent it!

Your “opposite number” on a Mystic 2 quest would almost certainly be Typhon again, or, if you did not use Typhon in the

first Arc, whatever substitute you wound up using then.

A Friend's History will focus on an NPC friend who is accompanying you on what will be their final journey on the roofs.

Muddles include:

- * what am I to become?
- * what are the Mysteries, really?
- * [the story of your life]

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [the story of your first journey on the far roofs, and how small and frail and almost-killed you were]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** why did Typhon do this to me?
- * **A Grand Adventure:** what do I want to do, to be?
- * **Something of a Legend:** [the process of transcendence]
- * **A Friend's History:** [the fate/situation of the NPC friend]

FOR THE ROGUE

using "the Tavern Boasts of the Rogue" (pg. 170)

A Penitential Journey

Your first story is **A Penitential Journey**. You've accidentally hurt someone. Nevermind who! You take a penitential journey, or maybe more than one, challenging whichever Mystery or situation fits other stuff that's going on.

In **Practically a Role Model**, pick a PC or major NPC with their player's permission and decide that they're too stuffy, or insufficiently adventurous, or too scared of death, or too "suffering from a mysterious necromantic curse that no one but I can detect," or whatever, and that the only solution is to forcibly nominate them as your sidekick. (Possibly in addition to being your rival). If you go with the curse, remember that any further revelations you come up with are just "what the Rogue believes in today" until the relevant player or GM agree.

In **That's Thinking with Vastness!**, the primary ritual is just the penitential journey itself, but you may also do ritual/necromantic *stuff* to make it more meaningful or magical or effective.

Muddles include:

- * [why are you *like* this?]
- * [who was it that you hurt, that this journey is required?]
- * what's the ethical use case for my powers? What am I meant to *do* with them?

Plus,

- * **A Rival's Bond:** let's forge a rivalry!
- * **Practically a Role Model:** how do I help this person?
- * **A Hero's Challenge:** how do I tame Gravewight?
- * **That's Thinking with Vastness!:** what *is* the fire of a life?
- * **The Winter of your Soul:** how should I atone?

Experiments

Your second story is **Experiments**. Some kind of magical experimentation blows up in your face. Impossible! You can't abandon this now! ... only, there's a lot going on, and someone needs your help, and the group is doing things, and so you're stuck half-heartedly going on adventures while conducting experiments with inadequate traveling equipment and conditions on the side.

The default experiment is "bringing ghosts to life," which you're doing either using electricity and bottled ether or by giving them bits of the fire of bugs' and plants' life. It backfired by turning the random amnesiac ghost volunteer you'd dragged up into a malicious exploding-curse specter. Other possibilities include using the numinous presence of Mysteries as a computation medium so you can program the air, which would create the minor Mystery **Thrymr, which is named Segmentation Fault**, or creating artificial fire-of-life to use as a medical supplement.

Perhaps the rat Palpatine Czernova,⁴⁴ who does similar experiments, will wind up accompanying the group for a time, to serve as a new rival in **A Rival's Bond**?

In **A Rival's Bond**, you're haunted by the effects of the failed experiment, anyway.

In **Practically a Role Model**, you suspect that someone you've been spending time with is suffering similar side effects, or needs the help of your magic.

In **That's Thinking with Vastness!**, you try again, or at

⁴⁴ rats perceive pop culture through a somewhat unusual lens

least try to build on the general foundation of your studies to accomplish something useful to more than just yourself.

Muddles include:

- * why do I let myself get dragged out on adventures when I should be experimenting?
- * what is my official ulterior motive for trying to help this person out?
- * why do I cough up blood now and then?

Plus,

- * **A Rival's Bond:** how do I deal with [some particular] manifestation of my mistake?
- * **Practically a Role Model:** [your relationship with the quest target and their needs]
- * **A Hero's Challenge:** how can I best display my magnificence?
- * **That's Thinking with Vastness!:** how should this experiment actually work?
- * **The Winter of your Soul:** what's even the point?

Jingling Crystal Bee

Your third story is **Jingling Crystal Bee**. You become obsessed with Jingling Crystal Bee (a jingling crystal bee, secretly a variant form of Hoop Snake), trying to analyze and understand WTF. Eventually you work out what's going on there. Or do you ...?

Perhaps you will stumble on the rats Manami and Yuu Ionescu—inveterate crystal bee chasers—along the way?

... they, or Jingling Crystal Bee, or their apprentice Phasma,⁴⁵ would be the quest target in **Practically a Role Model**.

In **That's Thinking with Vastness!**, you perform a grand ritual to understand the nature of Jingling Crystal Bee or, perhaps, to resolve something from the main storyline.

Muddles include:

- * how do I figure out WTF here?
- * who/what lurks in the shadows as my hidden enemy?
- * how should I go about building a roof-traversing necrofortress, to facilitate things like chasing down Jingling Crystal Bee?

Plus,

- * **A Rival's Bond:** who am I and Jingling Crystal Bee to one another?
- * **Practically a Role Model:** how will I prove my worth to Jingling Crystal Bee?
- * **A Hero's Challenge:** what psychological block or old wound still limits my talent?
- * **That's Thinking with Vastness!:** [the ritual itself]
- * **The Winter of your Soul:** is it greatness' destiny to be misunderstood?

The Thorn in Your Life

Your fourth story is **The Thorn in Your Life**. You discover a “curse” levied on your family line long ago, grinding you down slowly, interfering with your relationships. Can you resolve it?

In **Practically a Role Model**, you reconnect with family, possibly family you have only now discovered, and develop a strategy to focus all the energy of the curse on yourself alone—either selflessly or as a necessary problem-solving step!

In **A Hero's Challenge**, we will assume there's a Mystery or Mystery-warped sorcerer responsible for the curse, whom you must defeat—if convenient, the enemy or a minion thereof that you're opposing in the main storyline; if not, then not.

Finally, in **That's Thinking with Vastness!**, you attempt to free yourself and end the curse.

Muddles include:

- * what is the curse's true nature?
- * how can I (re)connect with discovered family?
- * how can I achieve some really great necromantic feat, like lichdom or the philosopher's stone?

Plus,

- * **A Rival's Bond:** what do I need to change in my life, to accommodate this curse?
- * **Practically a Role Model:** how can I bind this doom to myself alone?
- * **A Hero's Challenge:** how do I crush the source, the origin, of this curse?
- * **That's Thinking with Vastness!:** how do I avert this curse?
- * **The Winter of your Soul:** [the lingering awareness of your mortality]

⁴⁵ it's short for Federated Identity Solutions/Management Ionescu





"The Goblin-Roofs," by Lee Moyer

FOR THE SEEKER

using “the Treasure-Book of the Seeker” (pg. 173)

Gorgon

Your first story is **Gorgon**. You are haunted by the Mystery **Gorgon, which is Named Monstrous**. You don’t know the background at first, so you think you’re being harassed by a Greek serpent-tailed horror. But around the end of the first quest, you learn differently:

She used to be something important. Something *good*. And then she was sold to the people of death, her heart and tongue cut out, her body rolled into the lake, and payment made—such payment! It holds the world together at its seams—and now she is the spirit of things made monstrous, that once were beautiful and bright.

And that changes things; because it means she’s not haunting you as a matter of senseless malice. Either she’s a punishment, a curse; or, she needs help; or, she’s looking for a kindred spirit, and you’re what she has found.

Optionally from that point forward other beings will haunt your dreams as well, occasionally substituting for her (or, if other players want to take on these roles, perhaps, joining her) in the places where you meet; beings that chastise the world for her existence, or insist she be kept chained, or disdain the idea of the monstrous.



by Jenn Manley Lee

Beings such as Erinys, which is Named Judgment, or Hel, which is Named Stability; King Death, of course, and Sylph, which is Wistful Memory—they, or whatever proves most appropriate as your “opposite numbers,” should you be upon a Mystic Arc.

Muddles include:

- * what was the payment death made for her?
- * am I really any good?
- * [a song, composed about Gorgon, or, your journey]

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** what was Gorgon, ere she was sold to death?
- * **Cracks in the World:** in what way are I and Gorgon bound?
- * **The Work of Life:** [a bad memory, and, dealing with it]
- * **Riddled with Holes:** what’s with that treasure-box in my dreams?
- * **Merging:** what can I do about this whole Gorgon situation?

The Pact

Your second story is **The Pact**, and it assumes that you’re going to try to “save” Gorgon—to assist her in undoing or recovering from her transformation, either because she asked, because she can’t ask, or because you just decided to on your own.

Maybe you’d already decided last Arc that you would do that. Maybe you already “succeeded” at that, and have to work with the GM to come up with a theology-babble reason why it was just a sliver of Gorgon that you could save. Maybe you weren’t going to help, but now she asks, or guilted you into it, or some rat tells a story that you realize means that you must.

... yet, there is a nagging sense as the Arc progresses; or, as you progress towards saving her; or, she to helping/restoring herself ... that in recovering, she is also crumbling some key, foundational element of the world.

Muddles include:

- * is saving her really the right thing?
- * who actually *sold* Gorgon to death?
- * how can I pull back from or quit a bad habit of mine?

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** what am I meant to do about Gorgon?
- * **Cracks in the World:** [that aforementioned sense of a foundational world-element crumbling]
- * **The Work of Life:** [a song about the wind]
- * **Riddled with Holes:** [an old bleak memory]
- * **Merging:** how may I hold the world together for a little while?

Turning Away

Your third story is **Turning Away**. It becomes clear that “saving” Gorgon, or leaving her saved, will break the world. It becomes clear that the best thing you can do for the world is not just to leave her broken but to re-enact and re-affirm the original sacrifice.

... if that were only one of your options.

It is the official position of this book that you shouldn’t sacrifice other people, including Gorgon, even here—

But that’s beside the point here. You *can’t*.

Maybe it’s friendship, maybe it’s a curse, maybe it’s just divinity-driven emotional entanglement, but you’d tear your soul in half trying before you ever could.

Muddles include:

- * your sense of who you are
- * your relationship with Gorgon
- * finding a third path—a way to reconcile Gorgon and the world

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** how is the world holding up, for now?
- * **Cracks in the World:** what is the world’s endurance worth, to me?
- * **The Work of Life:** [a song of hope]
- * **Riddled with Holes:** [sustaining your own emotional and spiritual health through all of this]
- * **Merging:** [a ritual to better understand/experience the original sacrifice, or, Gorgon]

Changing the Game

Your fourth story is **Changing the Game**: figuring out a new relationship between Gorgon and the world that keeps both Gorgon and the world functional. Maybe you stick close to the “sacrifice” paradigm, and work out a way to cycle or distribute the weight ... or, maybe, you discard it, and focus on interrogating and metaphysically picking apart the idea of “made monstrous” instead.

Muddles include:

- * how have I changed, along this path?
- * how ought the original harm be addressed?
- * a song of Gorgon and the world

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** [the new relationship between Gorgon and the world]
- * **Cracks in the World:** how will the world be patched together?
- * **The Work of Life:** [coming to terms with death, or fallibility, or some other great fear looming close]
- * **Riddled with Holes:** what does it mean, to “make” something “monstrous?”
- * **Merging:** [a grand ritual to draw on something’s power]

FOR THE SHILDBEARER

using “the Everyday Life of the Shildbearer” (pg. 175)

Learning a Language

Your first story is **Learning a Language**. You’re studying an old, purple, dog-eared AP language text on the language of the *girtablilu*, a “species of scorpion-people who guard the entrance to Kumugi, the land of darkness.” You’re not really sure where that is or what that is or anything, but you were bored and curious and this way if you ever meet any scorpion-people you will be able to be *such* a showoff.⁴⁶

In **This Might be Trouble**, you’ll pick up a sidekick in the form of an animal kit—some monster from the Far Roofs, spawn of a Mystery but not a Mystery itself. It’s decided that you’re going to take care of it, but it’ll eventually grow much,

⁴⁶ you’re going to be pen pals with one of the scorpion-people in a later story, by the way, so be careful about firmly concluding things like “they don’t exist, though,” or “they live beneath our very streets ... evilly!”

much bigger than you are.

In **the Shining Thing**, you'll compose your first epic poem in *girtablilu*.

Muddles for this Arc include:

- * learning the language
- * defining the nature and story of [your Garden, or, if you didn't take a Gardener power, your home]
- * ... what is Kumugi, anyway?

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** what do I need to do to support my important people?
- * **This Might be Trouble:** what does this animal kit need from me?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** what are the memories that nag at me asking me to do?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** what am I called to do, upon the Farthest Roofs?
- * **The Shining Thing:** [the epic poem that you're planning to compose]

Correspondence with a Falling Star

Your second story is **Correspondence with a Falling Star**. You're exchanging letters with a star that is due to fall soon. (It used to live in the kingdom of the sky, which is now apparently missing, but it was buzzing the moon during that unfortunate event and thus was left alive and/or behind.)

In **This Might be Trouble**, you encounter **White Snake Spirit**, which wishes to shed its tail, "make itself small," and become an ordinary rat (or human). It has chosen you as its basis for study as to how that kind of thing would work.

In **the Shining Thing**, the time of the star's fall approaches, and you work on ... well, probably on saving it, but possibly just on consoling it and then yourself.

Muddles include:

- * [the letters that you write]
- * why did the star pick *me* to talk to?
- * how are the far roofs changing me?

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** [a meal you're planning to make]
- * **This Might be Trouble:** what am I going to do about White Snake Spirit?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** who was I, before I settled down?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** can anything be done about the fall of the star?
- * **The Shining Thing:** why did the sky kingdom go away?

Correspondence with a Scorpion-Person

Your third story is **Correspondence with a Scorpion-Person**. You're exchanging letters with a *girtablilu* prince or princess who envies you your ability to wander the wider world.

In **This Might be Trouble**, you wake from a particularly vivid dream to discover you have accidentally stolen the amulet of King Death.⁴⁷ The "quest sidekick" may be the spirit or guardian spirit of the amulet, someone you're traveling with, or a newbie reaper spirit in King Death's service sent to get the amulet back but not clearly instructed as to what they are actually retrieving or what they are allowed to do to retrieve it.

In **the Shining Thing**, you try to give meaningful advice that will help a *girtablilu* ruler.

Muddles include:

- * [the letters you're exchanging]
- * how did we wind up exchanging the letters?
- * coming to terms with death and how I've changed

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** [your relationship with your important people]
- * **This Might be Trouble:** what am I going to do about this amulet?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** how can I let go of an old grudge, grief, or prejudice that haunts me?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** why do I matter?
- * **The Shining Thing:** what advice do I want to give?

⁴⁷ His security sucks.

Knitting

Your fourth story is **Knitting**. You work on sweaters for the PCs for the coming winter, or some similar artistic task.

In **This Might be Trouble**, you stumble on a section of the Far Roofs that seems to be unraveling, falling apart into the void of the Outside, and you are the one that the *genius loci* of the place begs to see it fixed. The “quest sidekick” is usually that *genius loci*, but may be a creature or entity of the Outside.

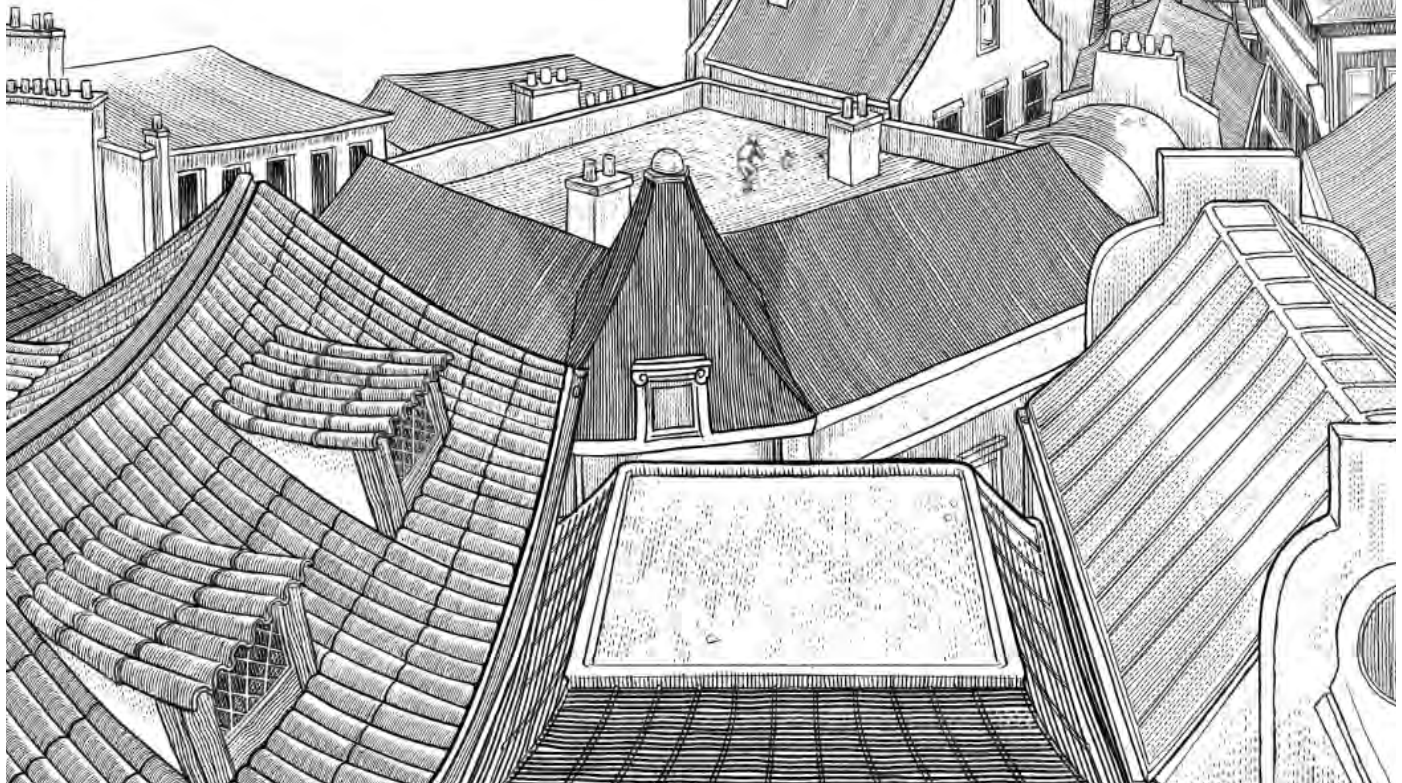
In the **Shining Thing**, you try a really cool new stitch/pattern (or the equivalent).

Muddles include:

- * [making the sweaters]
- * what’s the core of what you’re about?
- * should I stay human and normal, or reclaim the self I was before?

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** [binding things together]
- * **This Might be Trouble:** how might I fix this section of the roofs?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** what are my dreams calling me to see?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** where in the far roofs do I find (inspiration for?) a new stitch/pattern?
- * **The Shining Thing:** [a story from your past]



Rat-Friending Stories

BARD STORIES

being really into it

You can explore your friendship with a bard by playing through a set of stories with the loose concept of “someone who gets involved in their story.” This probably uses the quest set, *the Secret Journals of the Navigator* (pg. 163).

Arc 1: “The Bard”

You’re interested in this bard and their story!

The quest target in **the Navigator’s Haunt** is a Mystery whose presence haunts them—sometimes as a “now” problem, but often as a slow, non-immediate, and lifelong thing.

The poison in **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain** is usually just attunement to and awareness of the pervasive corruption of and Mystery-influence throughout the world and the roofs.

In **the Rooftop Shores**, something’s cast the bard under a kind of shadow. It’s filled them with a philosophy that’s so far twisted against yours that if you have a Principle (pg. 82, 86), it could qualify as one of its **Enemies** (pg. 82) or opposite numbers (pg. 195)—which is why they’ll be your opposite number on a Mystic Arc.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the bard]
- * [something artistic you work on together]
- * why did they get entangled with the Mysteries?

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** how do they see the world?
- * **The Navigator’s Haunt:** how do I get the Mystery that haunts them to stop being such a *pest*?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** [a grand initiative, started in this quest, that fails]
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** what secret of the world do I discover, and how?
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** what’s made them ... like this, something antithetical to my Principle?

Arc 2: “New Problems Appeared”

Something comes up that you think the bard might be able to help with. Is it the main group storyline or something else? (If it’s “something else,” it’s probably someone sick or troubled you want to do spiritual stuff or art for, with the “haunt” in **the Navigator’s Haunt** being something enigmatic that only shows up in IC dreams, roleplay, or imagination.) The quest target in **the Navigator’s Haunt** is basically that problem, or, rather, an NPC that manifests or represents it!

For the poison in **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain** and the melancholy in **the Rooftop Shores**, once again, we’re looking at your Principle or notional Principle’s Enemies—they’re weighing you down. It’s not something specific happening, necessarily; it’s just ... you don’t know how to deal with their presence in your life and the world. Not any more. Maybe their weight is obvious and omnipresent, bearing down on you. Maybe it’s a specific, personal thing. In a Mystic Arc it might be subtler; this might be the thing that the bard could help with, and you’ll probably figure out exactly what it is and what your “opposite number” is at the same time, as you move from the first to the second quest.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the bard]
- * [something artistic you work on together]
- * [an old mystery in your life or the bard’s]

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** what’s my part of fixing this problem look like?
- * **The Navigator’s Haunt:** how do I get this problem to stop being such a problem?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** [a riddle, puzzle, maze, or complicated project that you have to solve]
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** [a large-scale, external answer to the antithetical]
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** [a small-scale, personal, internal answer to the antithetical]

Arc 3: “Bardic Difficulties”

The Mystery they’re closest to is draining them and calling them away to meet their fate.

In **Chomping at the Bit**, you have problems of your own—some challenge or Mystery that is suitable to act as the “opposite number” for this Arc, usually unrelated to the bard’s issues but enough to distract.

In **the Navigator’s Haunt**, that Mystery is the “quest target.”

The poison in **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain** is typically the influence of one Mystery or another, but it can be an ordinary sickness, something out of left field, or just weariness if that might better suit.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the bard]
- * [what you think defines you]
- * how can I save myself—or myself and the bard, if they’re still struggling too—from the Mystery/Mysteries in question?

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** how do I stay true to myself despite my own assailant?
- * **The Navigator’s Haunt:** how do I get my own assailant to stop being such a *pest*?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** how can I support the bard through this?
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** [something artistic you work on together]
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** [the shadow the far roofs has cast upon your psyche]

Arc 4: “Bardic Triumph”

There’s something you or they want to change about the world. So, you do that!

The Mystic 2 “opposite number” is generally something that can make a good argument against what you’re doing. Usually it’s reasonable for the thing you want to change about the world to map well onto your Principle, but if it doesn’t, you may have to think for a bit to find something antithetical to your Principle that also has a good argument against what you’ll do. Regardless, it can be any voice of reason, whether a Mystery, rat, old enemy, parent, or a long-time friend.

Traditionally you get bothered during this Arc by a wind-spirit, which will act as the quest target in **the Navigator’s Haunt**.

The traditional poisoning in **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain** is something that makes sense as the cost of the effort that you put into this work.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the bard]
- * [the attempt to change something about the world]
- * [coming to terms with death, or fallibility, or some other great fear looming close]

Plus,

- * **Chomping at the Bit:** what’s my part of addressing that change look like?
- * **The Navigator’s Haunt:** how do I get the wind-spirit to stop being such a problem?
- * **Uncharted Lands:** [some key difficulty in implementing your change]
- * **To Climb a Crumbling Mountain:** [something artistic you work on together]
- * **The Rooftop Shores:** [the costs in loss and grief of your time with the bard, or on the roofs; or, if there are somehow literally none, of an unexpected, sudden loss.]

GRANDMOTHER/ OLD SOLDIER STORIES

being someone who’ll listen

You can explore your friendship with a grandmother rat or old soldier by playing through a set of Arcs with the loose concept of “someone who likes to share old stories with them at the fire.” This would most likely use the quest set, *the Treasure-Book of the Seeker* (pg. 173).

Arc 1: “The Elder”

You’re enjoying your time with an elder of the rats. Before you start this Arc, it’s good to come up with something personal—something that they’ll look at you and see is the heart of what’s going on with you; that in the back of their mind they might see as a problem they want to help you address. In **Conversations in a Place of Ruins**, they’ll give you advice on it, now and then; a Mystery thematically associated with it will haunt your dreams in that quest, and come up again as a focus of **The Work of Life**. For instance, if you’re struggling with painful family connections, **Kelpie, which is Named Entanglement**—the beast of the gutter-lakes—might be the Mystery at hand.⁴⁸ That Mystery is most *likely* your opposite

⁴⁸ Take note! While Kelpie is not Kraken, and should theoretically be quite containable, rats have noted it becoming a gigantic octopus when ticked.

number on a Mystic Arc, but if it does not fit, then something that does may *also* haunt your dreams, arguing with you and even with, e.g., **Kelpie**, as events suggest.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the elder]
- * what can I do to help them?
- * [your feelings about politics in the mortal world]

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** [something you're having trouble handling; their advice will help]
- * **Cracks in the World:** how may I hold the world together for a little while?
- * **The Work of Life:** [their story of a Mystery metaphorically tied to your personal issues]
- * **Riddled with Holes:** [the reason why you can't think of that Mystery as just an enemy; why you'll care about it some, even when all this is fixed.]
- * **Merging:** [worrying about the elder's health]

Arc 2: "The Clouded Path"

You're haunted by **Lennan-Shee**, whose **Name is Consumption**; you are fevered with inspiration, but also you are drained and in a state of deprivation regardless of any efforts to treat yourself well. The future, which may once have seemed clear to you, has been consumed.

And yet it is in the nature of the Lennan-Shee that you shall love it. It is the maw of cults and capitalism, the lure of artistic projects. It is the job you've always wanted, the inspiration that wakes you in the night, the opportunity for which you've always yearned. If you can just survive this, you know, it will be worthwhile. It will make something of you, and you of it, to replace the destiny you've lost.

Again, if Lennan-Shee is a fit opposite number on a Mystic Arc, then so they shall be; if not, then your dreams are also troubled by another.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the elder]
- * how can I hide the effects this is having on me?
- * [the reason you can't think of Lennan-Shee as just an enemy, either; why you'll care about it some, even when all this is fixed.]

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** [the story of a hard time in your mortal life]
- * **Cracks in the World:** how can you reclaim yourself from Lennan-Shee?
- * **The Work of Life:** [some kind of art or work you create inspired by Lennan-Shee]
- * **Riddled with Holes:** what is the destiny you lost?
- * **Merging:** [your relationship with Lennan-Shee]

Arc 3: "Malaise"

This Arc seems at first to just be epilogue. You think through some of the influence of the Far Roofs on your life, and talk to the elder for advice; and you try to build something better of your life, whether that's just a healthy habit or a business or a relationship or a victory against something in the main storyline. And it's kind of sad how it doesn't seem to be working; how nothing seems to be working; how you're held frozen in this broken part of your life, like nothing will ever be enough.

... it's kind of an *oh thank god* moment when you realize towards the end of **Cracks in the World** that this too is Far Roofs magic; that it is a Mystery or a curse, such as **Edimmu** or **Alp-Luachra**, and not merely the way life is. —that said, this Mystery is unlikely to haunt your dreams with the frequency and overtness of, e.g., Lennan-Shee, so it might be useful at this point to develop a suitable "opposite number" with the GM; to do so, even if you're not *on* a Mystic Arc, and ideally one that will last, if needed, into the final elder story.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the elder]
- * [an art work you're working on in the background]
- * what makes something that I experience "real" as opposed to "a curse or Mystery?"

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** how do I feel about the way Mysteries have shaped me?
- * **Cracks in the World:** what is wrong with me, anyway?
- * **The Work of Life:** [something you're trying to do with your life, a habit you're trying to build]
- * **Riddled with Holes:** how am I to deal with this thing that is wrong with me?
- * **Merging:** and how am I to rise above it?

Arc 4: “A Second Round”

This time it is **Lennan-Shee** or **Kelpie** (or whatnot) who asks *your* help; for a sorcerer is draining away their power, having murdered their greatest representative among the rats. They are held in durance, imprisoned by someone struggling to bend them into weapons; and ... well. It's not that they aren't monsters, but this will only ever make them worse.

Note that on an Otherworldly Arc it will be necessary (sometime around **The Work of Life**) for the sorcerer's attention to turn directly onto you—that, or you must yield more of yourself than you would normally prefer to to Lennan-Shee or Kelpie (or whatnot) in order to protect them from destruction—in order to make an Otherworldly 3 quest make sense.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the elder]
- * what am I supposed to be?
- * [the sorcerer's nature, and plan]

Plus,

- * **Conversations in a Place of Ruins:** [your thoughts on this, that the elder helps you sort]
- * **Cracks in the World:** am I making a mistake helping a Mystery?
- * **The Work of Life:** how am I to handle this sorcerer?
- * **Riddled with Holes:** [the sense that maybe you're maybe kind of messed up]
- * **Merging:** what is the Mysteries' *place* in the world?

ICON STORIES

being there when you need them

You can explore your friendship with an icon rat by playing through a set of stories with the loose concept of “supporting them as they grow towards their destiny.” This would use the quest set *the Everyday Life of the Shieldbearer* (pg. 175), and you'd use the legacy of your own stories and the driving power of your own PC-type qualities to substitute for the shield-bearer's dreams of a mythic time:

For instance, if you're *the Navigator*, and you're taking a break from your own stories, **Echoes of a Mythic Era** and its standard muddle, “what are my dreams calling me to do?” will usually focus on *navigator*-type stuff. Your dreams will call you to explore, or to deal with consequences of earlier

Navigator stories, or the like. Similarly, you can carry over your own's archetype's characteristic artistic or practical pursuits (e.g., mapmaking or discovery) as the great works you practice in **the Shining Thing**.

These stories, then, are:

Arc 1: “The Icon”

You're pretty close with an icon-rat (pg. 100)! They have a burden of destiny, but they're not that great at life. If these things *weren't* true before, they *become* true over the course of the Arc—anxiety, sickness, or Mystery-influence will create any burden or *not-great-at-life* quality they might have lacked, and whispers of fate will create the sense of destiny.

In **This Might be Trouble**, they function as your quest sidekick and opposite number.

Muddles include:

- * your relationship with the icon-rat
- * the nature of their destiny
- * what crucial thing have you forgotten?

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** what does it mean to have their burden?
- * **This Might be Trouble:** what am I going to do about them, seriously?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** what are my dreams calling me to do?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** what does the world need them to do? (that is, “here and now,” on this particular adventure, as opposed to their overall destiny, although the two could be the same.)
- * **The Shining Thing:** [an artistic work, achievement, or answer you've been working on]



by Camille “Karma” O’Leary

Arc 2: “A Tragic Fate”

The icon suffers some sort of poisoning, cursing, or haunting relating to or reacting to their destiny. It’s enough to make them qualify as your quest sidekick and Shepherd 2 responsibility all over again! (The opposite number might be the poison or haunt, though.)

Muddles include:

- * what does this haunting, poison, or curse actually do?
- * where did it come from?
- * is the world really worth such struggles and such sacrifices?

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** what do my friends need me to be?
- * **This Might be Trouble:** how do I draw this haunting, poison, or curse into myself?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** what are my dreams calling me to do?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** what is there in me to resist this curse’s power?
- * **The Shining Thing:** [an artistic work, achievement, or answer you’ve been working on]

Arc 3: “A Twist of Destiny”

Somewhere along the way, the icon’s slipped up. They’re not sure where. And now the magic or other power in them is slipping out of control, and they’re changing too! In order to help them, you peek beyond the veil and into the world of ghosts (that is ever-present behind the living world, and to a lesser extent present on the roofs) in an attempt to find some magical secret that will help. Often, you steal it from or study under a “ghost king,”⁹⁹ who would also be your **This Might Be Trouble** sidekick and Mystic 2 opposite number.

Muddles include:

- * [who the icon is, to you]
- * [a brilliant plan to use some element of this situation to achieve something else]
- * ... details aside, what was the icon’s core paradigmatic/philosophical mistake?

⁹⁹ Note that ghosts and ghost kings also show up in **Ghost Sweeping** (pg. 203), so try not to build a closed ghost world that will give that story trouble.

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** how should I help the icon manage until they’re completely fixed?
- * **This Might be Trouble:** what am I going to do about this ghost king?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** what secret is there to find within the world of ghosts?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** how has my friend been twisted, and how can it be fixed?
- * **The Shining Thing:** [an artistic work, achievement, or answer you’ve been working on]

Arc 4: “All Things, to their Endings”

A dangerous moment of destiny approaches for the icon.

Relatedly or not, a mysterious and holy flame has begun to burn in your dreams, consuming you from within; occasionally, even, leaking out into the world. It speaks in an abstract and spiritual voice; it is your quest sidekick and opposite number in **This Might Be Trouble**.

Muddles include:

- * how will the icon’s story end?
- * [your relationship with the icon]
- * [the story of an identity-defining moment for you, a thing that made you who you are]

Plus,

- * **In their Shadow:** what does it mean for something to be holy, blessed, or “good?”
- * **This Might be Trouble:** what am I going to do about this flame?
- * **Echoes of a Mythic Era:** what are my dreams calling me to do?
- * **Out of Your Comfort Zone:** can the icon be saved from their perilous destiny?
- * **The Shining Thing:** [an artistic work, achievement, or answer you’ve been working on]

NAVIGATOR STORIES

being a tired dreamer

If you want to explore your friendship with a navigator, you could play through a set of stories with the loose concept of “someone who admires their dream.” This probably uses the quest set, *the Fated Hero’s Fever-Dreams* (pg. 158), and

the Arcs are going to be formulaic, with roughly the same pattern and muddles each time:

In **Just a Little Worn Down**, you explore together. In **Dreams and Visions**, you have meaningful visions—perhaps dreams, or, something related to your powers, or, the effect of a miasma or Mystery ... or, perhaps, just the way you process your personal stuff. In **Endurance; Struggle**, a Mystery influences you; you must then properly deal with it in **Catching Dreams in a Cup**. In **Seizing Tomorrow**, you train powers you get from this, or by other means; these are the “quest power(s).” Your “opposite number” in a Mystic 2 quest is generally the Mystery; the responsibility landing on you at the end of a Shepherd 1 quest is to accept and manage its influence upon you.

Arc 1: “The Navigator”

You’re enjoying a navigator’s enthusiasm on your journeys through the roofs. In this first Arc, your visions are likely warnings—hints of somewhere you shouldn’t go, or should be careful in going—as if someone died there and doesn’t want you joining them, or as if it is forbidden. The Mystery you must deal with is **Siren, who is Named Longing**; a half-heard song that *gets* to you, that makes you long to head out onto the roofs and not return.

All four Navigator-rat Arcs engage with the following muddles:

- * [your personal relationship with the navigator]
- * what do they need from you now?
- * what secret of the far roofs do we discover, and how?

Plus,

- * **Just a Little Worn Down:** [exploring the wonders of the roofs]
- * **Dreams and Visions:** what are these visions telling me?
- * **Endurance; Struggle:** how do I handle the influence of the Arc Mystery?
- * **Catching Dreams in a Cup:** how should I handle the Arc Mystery itself?
- * **Seizing Tomorrow:** [training in the mastery of your powers]

Arc 2: “The Changeling”

In the second Navigator-rat Arc, the Mystery you must deal with is **Rider, who is Named Obsession**. It’s the kind of Mystery that invisibly hangs out on your shoulders and twists your dreams into nightmares but you don’t want to let it go. It’s precious to you. ... and even when you do let go, and it dissipates like smoke, like it was never even there, you’ll turn around and it’ll just be back again. The Arc “visions” will focus on a better understanding of and empathy for the natural environment of the far roofs and perhaps your home as well.

Arc 3: “The Questing Beast”

In the third Navigator-rat Arc, the “visions” are flashes of a historical or mythical place and time that’s an important cultural legacy for you—e.g., Stonewall or Camelot. The Mystery you must deal with is **the Questing Beast**, which is pretty much just Hoop Snake with a veneer of mythic cred: a weird beast that you’re drawn to chase (see pg. 130, perhaps?), but are unlikely ever to catch. Notably, its stomach sounds like a bunch of barking dogs and it foretells the crumbling of the way of things; it has the head and neck of a snake, the body of a leopard, and the feet of a hart.

Arc 4: “The Final Star”

In the final Navigator-rat Arc, the “visions” for the Arc will focus on memories you’ve made with the navigator, or dreams of their travels if you’re not with them. The Mystery you must deal with is **the Final Star**, which is to say, the last destination of any explorer. It is a polyvalent creature; perhaps you must confront your fear of the navigator pushing too hard and dying, or perhaps you must confront your own recklessness and *l’appel du vide*. Perhaps it is even a more physical confrontation: you must keep from being burned from within by a trickle of the fire of the end.

OUTCAST STORIES

being someone defiant

You can explore your friendship with an outcast rat by playing through a set of stories with the loose concept of “someone interested in their story despite their self-protective personality traits and dubious social standing.” This probably uses the quest set, *the Remembrances of the Old-Timer* (pg. 168), with the outcast themselves inevitably your “quest friend” in **A Friend’s History**.

In these Arcs, your “opposite number” in a Mystic 2 quest is generally someone that doesn’t agree with your sense of how to be true to yourself—this can be a mystic force, of course,

but can also just be any NPC whose argument on the matter you'd actually listen to. That's probably not someone whose beliefs are *your polar opposite*, unless they're just plain right and you're going to see that later; rather, as with all opposite numbers, it's someone saying something you value but which does not accord with the direction you're wanting to go.

... the exception is the very *first* Arc, "the Outcast," which *might* need something more direct like a literal mystical opposite to whatever Principle you hold dear, in order to provide an actual sense of conflict for the quests.

Arc 1: "The Outcast"

The world doesn't think they're that great. *They* don't think they're that great, probably. But you're increasingly tempted to disagree.

In **Taking Some Mental Damage Here** and **Something of a Legend**, you'll want to pull in something from your own stories or the main group storyline to be the source of the relevant pressure—it's unlikely that "rat culture, taken as a whole, disapproves of one of your friendships" is a strong enough hostile influence just now.

Muddles include:

- * [the story of an old trauma of yours]
- * [your relationship with the outcast]
- * [a project you're working on together with the outcast]

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [a story of a mistake you made, or something you lost]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** [something you learn about their becoming outcast that makes the world less OK for you]
- * **A Grand Adventure:** what have I been failing to see about myself?
- * **Something of a Legend:** how can I be truer to myself, and to the world?
- * **A Friend's History:** [a bit of the outcast's backstory]

Arc 2: "Rats!"

This Arc features a transformation.

If the last Arc ended with a transformation—this normally only really happens with *The Outcast* if you came out of the closet or something, but that's a valid answer to the last couple of muddles there, and you might have taken a break

to do some other Arc—then you can use that transformation. Otherwise, you get turned into a rat. Maybe you know why. Maybe you don't. But it happens.

This is because the second Outcast Arc is focused on something or someone that's pressuring you to *not* be truer to yourself and the world; someone or something you are kind of stuck dealing with that's pulling directly *against* accepting the outcast or against the revelations about yourself you'll have gotten to if you made it to the later quests of the first outcast Arc.

Sometimes that works best if you're still human—if, like, **Something of a Legend** pushed you out of the closet or cracked your egg. If you *already transformed*.

... but most of the time, you won't've, so this social pressure is about rat culture stuff or minor personal changes. *That'll* work better if you're suddenly a lot more vulnerable, and rat social pressure a lot more relevant. Thus, you get turned into a rat.

If, for instance, the only reason the outcast is an outcast is that they're kind of bookish, maybe you came out of the first Arc really disliking the part of rat culture that's so heavily into performative heroism. Only, now someone you care about or depend upon or are stuck with (to survive as a rat, or, for the main group storyline, or somesuch)—maybe even the outcast *themselves*—is both irritated at you for having opinions on another species' culture and giving historical justifications that are hard to refute. Or, maybe, the outcast *did* do something wrong, and your attempts to befriend them are complicated by getting to know the rat they did that wrong *to*. Maybe the navigator-rat you need for some far roofs task is the outcast's estranged parent or sibling, and you *know* you shouldn't intervene, but it hurts to see the stiff silence or the arguments ... or maybe they take the conversation to *you*. [stressed-out squeak.]

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the outcast]
- * how can I become what I want to be?
- * [plans for, or construction of, a memorial of some sort]

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [a story about your childhood]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** what's my coping strategy in the face of this social pressure?
- * **A Grand Adventure:** what's my coping strategy in the face of this transformation?
- * **Something of a Legend:** what did I learn from this?
- * **A Friend's History:** [a story about rat culture]

Arc 3: “Humans,”

Some key pillar of your life falls apart. You have to lean on your outcast friend more than you’d ever expected you would.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the outcast]
- * [a practice of mindfulness]
- * [your plan for some further, secondary but larger danger or threat that follows on your original problem]

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [the story of how you built up whatever pillar of your life just crumbled]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** what am I, without it?
- * **A Grand Adventure:** how are we going to balance our needs here?
- * **Something of a Legend:** what am I to replace it with?
- * **A Friend’s History:** [the story of the closest thing the outcast has to the thing you lost]

Arc 4: “... and Snakes”

A Mystery or monster that serves as a representation of community hatred in some way troubles the outcast and whatever life they have built. (Some obvious options include **Malambruno** and **Typhon**, but if they’ve been overused in your game so far or are about to come up in someone else’s Arcs, then you can make a suitable Mystery up based on the outcast’s nature and your history together.)

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the outcast]
- * [the community around them]
- * [a project you’ve been, or are, working on together]

Plus,

- * **Clinging to the Past:** [the story of how you brushed up against the terror of that being—e.g., how you had to flee from its passage, or met a survivor of its wrath, or had some weird or normal experience long ago that you now believe was influenced by its power.]
- * **Taking Some Mental Damage Here:** what’s your coping strategy when it gets into your head(s)?
- * **A Grand Adventure:** what can you manage against it?
- * **Something of a Legend:** how do you reclaim yourself from it?
- * **A Friend’s History:** [the story of the outcast’s first encounter with this being, long ago]

RECKLESS PRINXE STORIES

being pried out of your shell

You can explore your friendship with a reckless prinxe by playing through a set of stories with the loose concept of “someone they’ve decided to drag out of their shell!” If you happen to not be *in* a shell, you can make friends with them and then have something happen that puts you into one. Anyway, this most likely uses the quest set, *the Lesson Book of the Magician* (pg. 161).

(Another option, if there’s no Rogue, is to just play the Rogue quests and Arcs, and declare the prinxe a key “rival,” instead!)

In general, these Arcs work as follows. **A Hollow World** is fundamentally about your retreat from the world, and how it gets broken. **Struggling for Control** is about your struggle for control of your life, not against them, but just kind of in general; because of what these Arcs are, part of resolving that is understanding what they bring to your life. (Accordingly, your “opposite number” in a Mystic Arc will be someone or something that represents that loss of control—which might be the prinxe! But it also might not be. Just remember that the opposite number should have a positive enough portrayal to be able to “court and tempt” you.) **It’s Complicated** is built around a mess the prinxe drags you into, generally (for the sake of those on Bindings Arcs) incorporating a responsibility or someone who needs help. **The Thorn’d Path** is a big challenge that you tackle together. **A Magician’s Practice** is about pushing forward your development on ... whatever it is you do.



by Todd Thomas

Arc 1: “The Reckless Prinxe”

You have a really awesome tree or something, but now there’s a snake and a demon and a [something that might be an eagle but you can’t tell because there’s a thundercloud covering its body?!!] living in its branches. If you’re not the kind of person to have a tree, maybe it’s a metaphor for your house or your hair, or, somebody gave it to you? Anyway, the reckless prinxe won’t leave you alone, eventually causing you to flee to the underworld to get away from them or to rescue them or to do something they want to do there—specifically, “the underworld” meaning the ghost world if that’s been explored in play and is suitable, or a weird underworld section of the roofs, or a mirror city reachable *by* roof that’s eerily sunless and looking for suitably glamorous figureheads for its revolution against its monstrous overlords.

This is just the kind of thing that happens when you get involved with a reckless prinxe!

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the reckless prinxe]
- * what’s the deal with the tree?
- * what’s the deal with the underworld?

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** what am I supposed to do with this whole reckless prinxe thing?
- * **Struggling for Control:** [the prinxe’s point, if they even have one]
- * **It’s Complicated:** [the politics and personalities of the underworld]
- * **The Thorn’d Path:** how can we work together to accomplish something big?
- * **A Magician’s Practice:** what is the true secret of the current focus of my art?

Arc 2: “The Usurpers’ Era”

This reckless prinxe won’t leave you alone! They’re obsessed with cracks in time that they’ve found leading back to the Usurpers’ Era and really think that you should go back with them to help the hero they really liked (Kysely Vertigen) come out ahead in the race for power.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the reckless prinxe]
- * why are they *like* this?
- * why are there cracks in time?

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** what am I supposed to do with this ... friend?
- * **Struggling for Control:** do they have a point?
- * **It’s Complicated:** how am I supposed to handle *rat politics* and *time travel*?!
- * **The Thorn’d Path:** how can we work together to accomplish something big?
- * **A Magician’s Practice:** what is the true secret of the current focus of my art?

Arc 3: “The Bull of Heaven”

You are not sure that you are completely happy with the fact that the reckless prinxe has gotten a sky kingdom general angry and is having a set of constellation-deities sent after them. (It’s a particularly bad waste of resources given that the sky kingdom is supposed to be *lost* and so these are clearly the nonrenewable forces of an army in exile.) Still, in life, we must all do our best.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the reckless prinxe]
- * why did this even happen?
- * [the backstory of the sky kingdom general]

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** what am I supposed to do about how they keep involving me?
- * **Struggling for Control:** do they have a point about how I should live my life?
- * **It’s Complicated:** what’s the best way to keep things calm for now?
- * **The Thorn’d Path:** how can we work together to accomplish something big?
- * **A Magician’s Practice:** what is the true secret of the current focus of my art?

Arc 4: “Lake Monk”

At the gutter-lake a fish dressed like a monk preaches doctrine. You do not feel like this is your problem. However, you will not actually get any peace until the reckless prinxe is satisfied with their ability to best it in an argument of doctrine and reveal the secret path to treasure that this will no doubt reveal.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the reckless prinxe]
- * [the origin of the lake monk]
- * [the story of the sunken kingdom in the lake]

Plus,

- * **A Hollow World:** who is this prinxe to me, anyway?
- * **Struggling for Control:** am I OK with going along with them again?
- * **It's Complicated:** what does it even mean to "beat" the lake monk in a contest of doctrine?
- * **The Thorn'd Path:** how can I work with the prinxe to accomplish something big?
- * **A Magician's Practice:** what is the true secret of the current focus of my art?

SHIELDBEARER STORIES

just doing your best

You can explore your friendship with a shieldbearer rat, or the group of them, by playing through a set of stories with the loose concept of either "one of the gang" or "the person they become shieldbearers for." Either way, you'd probably use the quest set, *the Tavern Boasts of the Rogue* (pg. 170)—

The difference is mostly one of scale. If you're one of the gang, then your rivalries will be light-hearted and mostly within the group and you'll be overwhelmed by the larger-than-life challenges of the roofs. If you're a leader type and the focus of their attentions, then your rivalries will point outwards and the challenges won't be quite as large as your sweeping attitude!

These Arcs, either way, will be a little formulaic, following the same general pattern each time:

A Rival's Bond is about how shieldbearers get dragged out again and again to face the perils of the far roofs for reasons that don't really concern them and that they may not even understand. Maybe you're the one dragging them, for personal or main group storyline reasons, and you just don't explain very well or they don't get it. Maybe you get dragged along!

Practically a Role Model is sort of the same, only with more of a focus on interpersonal stuff—you socialize more, you show them your way of living, they show you their way of living, the reasons you're doing all of this matter, and maybe there's someone in particular who *needs* a far roofs adventurer that the story becomes (in part) about.

The last three quests are simpler: **A Hero's Challenge** is

simply a battle against a grand enemy; maybe you have a really clear sense of why you're fighting them, and maybe you don't. **That's Thinking with Vastness!** is about the execution of a big plan you have, which might or might be relevant to the main group storyline, the shieldbearers, or the roofs. Finally, **The Winter of your Soul** looks in on how that went, or (on a Mystic Arc) how your life has, more generally, been.

Arc 1: "The Shieldbearer(s)"

You're close with one or more shieldbearers!

In the first Arc, if you don't have better ideas, it's normal for the "enemy *du jour*" to be **Azag, Named Denial**, ruler of a host of *gallû* daemons, a beast so hideous that his presence alone makes fish boil alive in the waters ... said by the rats to be weak to storms, but certainly not weak to rats. A shieldbearer (or a rat they know), haunted or stolen to the underworld by a *gallû* daemon, would be the person needing help in a Bindings 2 quest. Your "big plan" might then be something like using Azag's head to build a sacred ground wherein no rats could ever die, or using his blood as a key ingredient in a nutritional supplement you hope to make your fortune with, or recovering those most recently stolen to the underworld through magic or infiltration.

All four Shieldbearer-rat Arcs engage with the following muddles:

- * [your relationship with the shieldbearer(s)]
- * [the person or the goal (probably from the group storyline) you're following when heading to the roofs]⁵⁰
- * [some craft project or task you work on by the fire in peaceful moments]

Plus,

- * **A Rival's Bond:** [the perils of the far roofs, and what they mean to me]
- * **Practically a Role Model:** what's my reason to keep going?
- * **A Hero's Challenge:** what's the key to surviving the enemy *du jour*?
- * **That's Thinking with Vastness!:** how does my grand plan even ... work?
- * **The Winter of your Soul:** [your sense of the world and of your own life, after various recent events]

⁵⁰ Which one? That depends on whether you're leading them or are another shieldbearer yourself!

Arc 2: “The Star Eater”

In this Arc, the enemy *du jour* would be **Ketu**, which is named **False Confidence**, a headless serpent that devours stars. Fortunately, you are pretty sure you can take them! On a Bindings Arc, it might just be seeing stars wink out slowly over the course of the first and early second quest that makes you realize there’s a Bindings 2 problem that needs addressing. As for your grand plan, perhaps it’s finding a place on the roofs or a magical ritual or a garden tied to a magical ritual or something that’ll let you seed new stars into the sky? It could also just be something like distributing stories of how you totally defeated Ketu to the local tell-all and autobiography markets.

Arc 3: “A Distant Land”

You and your shieldbearer friend(s) dream of a distant land being slowly devoured by the void and of a castle where everyone’s disappeared except for this one kid who grew up after whatever it was happened. You try to figure out *what* happened before the land is entirely consumed.

At (local) night horrible ghoul-like monsters stalk the castle halls.

Arc 4: “Lost and Confused”

In this Arc, you slowly begin to realize that the world around you doesn’t quite add up; you begin to suspect that you are caught, and *may have been caught for quite some time*, in a fully illusory realm, perhaps created by **Ymir**, who is **Named Delusion**. But how may you break free?

WARDEN STORIES

being haunted by death and beauty

You can explore your friendship with a warden rat by playing through a set of stories with the loose concept of “someone they’ve taken under their wing,” most likely using the quest set, *the Spooky Stories of the Cintamani-Bearer* (pg. 156).

At Magic’s Gate will focus on some sort of personal development—“magic,” if that’s what you do, or something that feels magical to you but isn’t *literally*, if not.

The warden themselves is almost inevitably the troubled teacher you will have in **the Bridge of Knives**.

Arc 1: “The Warden”

A warden-rat takes you under their wing.

In **the Bridge of Knives**, they are your troubled teacher, offering you a bit of dream-snake venom as part of a guided

meditation to better understand the roofs, and destiny, and the weight of what it means to stand between the roofs and the world.

If you’re having trouble finding ... well, trouble, for **Against Vast Enmity**, a plausible “enemy” is traveling through an extremely dangerous portion of the roofs to retrieve a (different) warden’s body.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the warden]
- * [what it means to be a warden]
- * [the warden’s grim insistence that they won’t live long]

Plus,

- * **At Magic’s Gate:** how do I figure out this magic or magic-feeling mundane thing I’ve been working on?
- * **The Bridge of Knives:** what am I to learn from the dream-snake poison?
- * **A Burdened Path:** how can I live up to what the warden wants me to be?
- * **Against Vast Enmity:** what are the far roofs teaching me?
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone:** [this feeling like ... you don’t belong in the world below]

Arc 2: “The Wolf, Mistrust”

It turns out that one thing wardens do, at least if you go down this road, is take in contained and limited amounts of the power/influence of one Mystery, to help them better deal with all the rest. In **the Bridge of Knives**, they help you do this—in particular, taking in the power of **Garmr**, which is named **Mistrust**. Just like Typhon doesn’t make you outraged and Unicorn doesn’t make you numinous, the poison of Garmr’s power won’t make you mistrustful; instead, it’ll just put you in the constant *presence* of mistrust—fill you with awareness of the dangers of the roofs, and of the wolf that waits or stalks behind. (Wardens also often talk in a melancholy fashion about how it keeps others from trusting them or them from trusting the world below, but that isn’t really true.)

This Arc is also shadowed by a vivid green snake whose poison calcifies things and can even lock people or areas in time—a child of **Kifri**, that is **Named Envy**. It shows up in the early quests, sometimes small and sometimes vast enough to drool a venom-river; it will normally be dealt with in **Against Vast Enmity**.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the warden]
- * [a secret of their past]
- * how can Kifri's child be contained?

Plus,

- * **At Magic's Gate:** how do I figure out this magic or magic-feeling mundane thing I've been working on?
- * **The Bridge of Knives:** [finding an internal balance with the Garmr (or other Mystery) influence]
- * **A Burdened Path:** how can I live up to what the warden wants me to be?
- * **Against Vast Enmity:** what are the far roofs teaching me?
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone:** [a sense of malaise and dissatisfaction with ... the world]

Arc 3: "The Anesthesia House"

The Anesthesia House is a moving shelter—a dark and peaceful place, wherein rats drift away to dream, tended by unformed shadows. There they will dream, and dream forever; and it is only when the moon and sun are both hidden in the sky that you can see that many of them are long dead, rotting corpses. Once it was a trap; then it was a hazard ... but in later years, the rats took to stashing away scholars there, and great teachers, and the occasional elder whose wisdom is more questionable but who would otherwise have died slowly and in pain. It has left them in a gentle peace, and only ... mostly ... dead.

In **the Bridge of Knives**, you must venture in—not continually, perhaps, but once or twice over the quest—and find someone quasi-alive who knows a secret relevant to either the main group storyline (pg. 231) or to understanding the pattern of the reemergence of **Salamander, which is Named Indiscretion**, which had been absent from the roofs for a great length of time but has lately been setting fires in the near roofs and below. Hunting it down once the pattern of its activities is formed would, if the main story quest is again insufficient, be the subject of **Against Vast Enmity**.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the warden]
- * [the secret found in the Anesthesia House]
- * [a resolution that you make about the place itself]

Plus,

- * **At Magic's Gate:** how do I figure out this magic or magic-feeling mundane thing I've been working on?
- * **The Bridge of Knives:** [the dream you would have, if you let the House take you]
- * **A Burdened Path:** how can I live up to what the warden wants me to be?
- * **Against Vast Enmity:** what are the far roofs teaching me?
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone:** [depression; a sense that the real world is hopeless, with all the good stuff reserved to dream]

Arc 4: "Various Dragons"

It is a thing that may be done once, at most; but, with a drop of the venom of **Nidhoggr**, you can temporarily sharpen the future-viewing powers of the dream-snake poison that already lives within you. You can walk the future as if you lived it ... which is good, because it looks like when you get there the regular way, your home town is going to be in *ruins*. If you are unable to work out a better reason in play, this is most likely the work of **All-Swallow**, a vast dragon and personification of drought, that stirred awake or came back to life one day, came down from the roofs, and tore the place down.

Muddles include:

- * [your relationship with the warden]
- * [managing the effects of the venom]
- * what is Nidhoggr, or, its venom?

Plus,

- * **At Magic's Gate:** how do I figure out this magic or magic-feeling mundane thing I've been working on?
- * **The Bridge of Knives:** what *happened* / *will happen*?
- * **A Burdened Path:** how can I live up to what the warden wants me to be?
- * **Against Vast Enmity:** how can I stop this from coming true?
- * **Flowers Carved from Stone:** how can I shake off the shadow of the future that I saw?

THE KING OF SHADOWS

- 6 -

We came at last to the Witchway's end, where a great Church and a great grave fortress cast crossed shadows on the roofs.

In the sky behind the each of them there burned a light.

The rats took out small mirrors. They held them in their hands. They caught the light behind each fortress in them, and the starlight, and the moonlight too, and they lifted up the sky.

"Shadows' Cross," said Lilith, and Evans in his turn; and I did too.

We walked down the angle of the roof towards where the shadows met; and as we crossed that boundary, the world changed to something new.

The shadows fell cool and refreshing on our skin and the light from the hollow windows of the keep and Church was crisp.

"It's not a real Church," Evans said.

"No?"

"I thought, *'what manner of Church can this be, wherein the shadows congregate?'*" Evans said. "And we thought, why, there's something we should catch and keep within the Books of Names."

"Yeah," Lilith said.

She looked over. Her whiskers twitched.

"We thought," Evans said, "that even if we couldn't beat the King, that we'd at least find something in the Church worth writing down, so that rats like us would later know. But there's no real Church, I mean, it's not a Church inside. It's just an empty garden court. So we sat there, and we were very solemn for a while, because it still seemed a holy place. And then, about an hour before dawn, the light shifted in the windows and the shadows of the walls became a flute."

"It was too big," Lilith said.

"Yes."

I took a breath. It was strange to breathe in shadow and not be strangling on it.

"Are we safe?"

"Until we catch his eye again," Lilith said.

"Because it's nice here," I said.

And Evans grinned.

"We're safe," he said. "Right now."

So I let myself enjoy the coolness of the walk and the strength the manna had put back in my legs and the little garden boxes scattered across the roofs as we walked towards the Cathedral of the King.

"Is there anything under us?" I wondered, after a while.

We were still on shingles and the ground still went up and down and we passed the occasional smoked glass window with a light somewhere inside, but it didn't really feel like rooftops any more. It felt like a lightly wooded land, and the peaks and troughs of the various roofs like dusty paths. Even the sunken gardens had roof-tiles for a floor; even the sloping roofs had dirt, grass and flowers on their sides. I could imagine that there were no houses underneath us, but only stone.

"Things," said Evans. "Beneath us, there are things."

"Clay-things?"

"No," he said. He stood up. He sniffed the air. He looked around. Then he laughed. "Fairies, maybe, or magic, anyhow. The life-power of the earth."

And there amidst the wine-dark roofs the tension left him, and he and Lilith rolled over and over and over in happy, tussling play, until she nipped his neck and he winced and said, "*Damn it*," and she laughed, and he admitted, "Forty-two."

That's how many times she'd beaten him, apparently, in a row.

"Quicker," he said, after a while. "Let's raise our pace. We've got to get there soon."

So we reached the end of Shadows' Cross, and they looked up, and it was their eyes that were the mirrors to the moon.

"The Cathedral of the King," said the rats, and I, and we went past, and a few more steps, and in; and there, in the courtyard of that place, I saw a flute.

"You can turn back," Lilith said.

"I could never," I said.

"I'm just pointing out," Lilith said, "that you've paid the King

of Shadows' price, and he won't bother you right now. We can find some way that rats can play this thing ourselves, and feel content, because—"

"Because?"

"Well," she said. "It's just, right now, I think that we have won. We've found a flute, and we know the King of Shadows cares. We've told the other rats and they've put it in the Books and now and forever we're stronger against him than we've been. That's enough, if you want. It—there doesn't have to be a 'the rest.'"

She and Evans were studying the flute. They were staring at it from different directions.

"I mean," she said, "It took me this long to think of it. But we could have turned back, as soon as you paid the King of Shadows' price. Because you're safe now, and we're safe for now, and we've *learned* something. It's worth it. It's worth it already. There doesn't have to be a more."

I looked up at the light that burned behind the windows of the Church.

The air breathed peace.

And as soon as I knew for sure that I could choose differently, I chose my fate.

"I like the flute," I said.

I lay down on my stomach with my mouth near the air hole of the flute. I frowned. I stood up. I moved my head this way and that, trying to figure things out. Then I gave up, and closed my eyes, and put my fingers to the shadows of the flute, and I tried to play.

I tried to play.

I played.

After a while it was dawn and the sunlight broke the shadow of the flute and the last note of some song I hadn't known I knew was suddenly snuffed out.

And I sat for a time there with the rats and I knew that forever afterwards I'd be somebody who'd played a flute made out of shadows in the Cathedral of the King. And that changed me, I think, and only to the good, but after a while there was a nagging, uneasy unsettledness that arose.

"Did he notice, do you think?" I said.

Evans looked at me. He shivered once. He looked away.

"Because I don't think that killed him. I don't think that—I mean, that was worth doing, but it wasn't an answer to the King. It was just something that ought to have happened, that maybe he didn't want."

"Of course he noticed," Evans said. His voice was strained.

Of course he noticed.

It was palpable. The King of Shadows had noticed. Or

maybe he hadn't noticed *us*. Maybe there was just a service to be held here, every morning, or this morning every week, not so very long after the dawn. Maybe there was some other reason. It didn't matter.

He had turned his attention to the Cathedral where we were.

There was a malignant animus to the sunlight. It was shattering the safety of the dark.

There were shadows moving in the courtyard now. The sun passed through high window grates and made the shadows of long pews. A corrugation in the window's shape made an altar where the flute had been. Dark patches on the roofs below took on the sense of cold dried blood.

The ears of my mind filled with B-movie recollections of the special-effects sound of screams.

I felt sick.

I went to the gate. I stopped just before its edge. Moving on the roofs ahead was the shape of the Shadows' King.

He was vaster than a rat. He was vaster than a human. He was the size of a small ship, and his skin was shadows and flesh all intermixed, and in his mouth he held corpses and writhing, horrid things. Red dripped from him and brightened the red terracotta of the roofs.

That's literal, by the way, as freakish as that is. It was a bizarrely beautiful element of it all. He was glazing the tiles, or cleaning them, or something, as he went. He took the dusty dullness from the roofs wherever he passed, and left behind a bright and brilliant and happy red. The gorgeous shine of a good red roof is blood from the King of Shadows' maw.

It didn't help me.

It made me freak out, it broke my brain a little, but it didn't help me cope at all. He was still the scariest thing I'd ever seen.

I stood there, at the Cathedral's gate, and I could not move, and the shadows moved around me, and the sound was *slurf* and *slurf* from Kurobi's maw and *click-click-click* from his footsteps on the roof. I couldn't move my legs. I couldn't move my hands. I couldn't even breathe.

There was a rat in his mouth. It was dead, I think. He. He was dead. But he, the rat in that trap, he looked at me.

He looked at me, and that all made sense, and it was the most horrible thing that there could be imagined. Of course if I couldn't move, the dead could writhe. Yin and yang, day and night, up the one thing and down the other! Of course.

If I was paralyzed, then the dead could walk.

He was caught there in that horrid place, and I loathed him because I thought that I would join him there, alone and dead and caught forever in the King of Shadows' mouth—

Though, at least, I would help to shine the roofs, and make the tiles bright—

I hated and loathed him, until I realized with this shuddering airy lightness that he wouldn't have hated me.

He *wouldn't* have.

He would have been kind, if he'd been standing here, if the rat in that mouth had been the one who was still living, and not I. He would have—he wouldn't have—he, maybe, I don't know. It's a hard feeling to express.

He might have been like Lilith, listening, hoping that I'd play.

Or like Evans, maybe, with his smiles.

They knew what life was, and what it was that life could offer to the frozen and the damned.

"Come on, then," I said.

I hated myself for doing it. It was so very hard and wrong. But it's what he would have done.

I moved. I reached. "Come on, then."

And he came up.

He came up out of the King of Shadows' maw.

I watched him. I followed him with my eyes as he pulled himself free, as he rained down, rotting, onto the tile. I saw him take a step or two, and then stumble to the ground, and then look up, and see the sun, and raise up the sky with the mirror of his eyes.

"Shadow's Ending," he said; and I echoed him; and the world was a different place.

He didn't move after that. He'd died, or, well, whatever dead things do.

When I looked up, after a while of that, I saw the wild

rising and falling jumble of the roofs, and beyond that, a great expanse of blue. When I looked up, the King of Shadows had left, as if he'd done the only thing, or everything, that he'd wanted on that day to do.

When I looked back down, Lilith was there, looking very, very small, and washing the head of the dead rat with her paws.

"You're an idiot," Evans told me, when I talked about it later.

"What?"

"You honestly thought," he said, "that dead people go around wanting to help the living. That you were being *uncharitable*, less than it would have been, right up until you called it forth."

"Yes!"

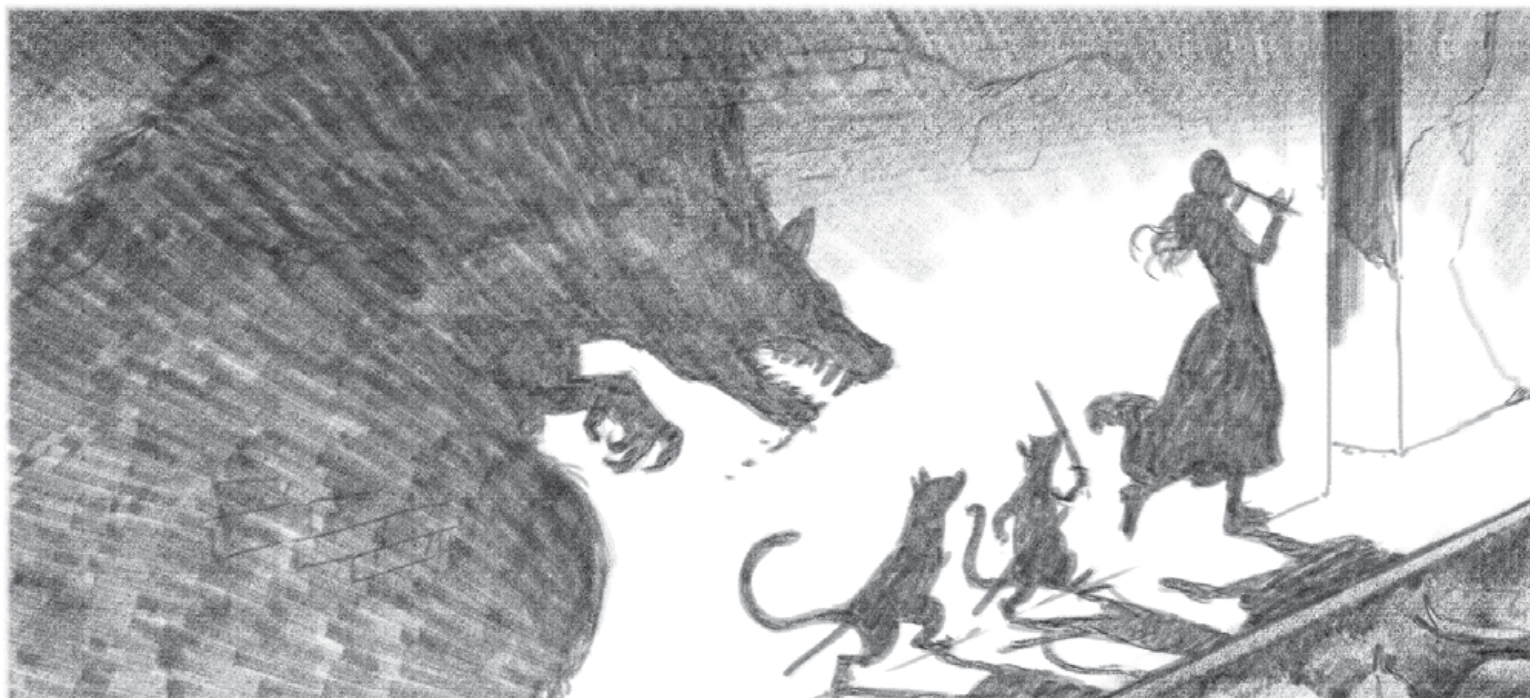
"Jenna," he said calmly. "Dead rats generally want to eat living people. If not, they want to climb on them, and possibly pee on them if they're dead enough to forget their dignity but not so dead as to be out of pee. Then they want to go to sleep forever, ideally on a living person's head. They are not the pillars of charity that you would expect. They are dead rats."

"Oh."

I hid my head under one arm. It was an experiment in body language. I don't know if it worked. They may not actually be brilliant flightless parrots.

"Now I am embarrassed," I explained.

"That is good information," Evans conceded, after a while.



Main Group Storyline

Let's talk for a minute about the shared storyline—the thing everyone in the group is participating in, the big-picture story of how you all get swept up in the affairs of the rats and the Mysteries and explore the far roofs.

The standard introduction looks like this:

There's a Mystery. Some or all of you are haunted by the Mystery in one way or another. You meet the rats, and learn what's up. You travel the Far Roofs. You encounter heralds of the Mystery. You confront it several times, turning it aside or escaping its attention, before a final confrontation in its home territory. Then there's an optional epilogue involving returning home safely, or burying a dead Mystery safely, or shedding a defeated Mystery's curse.

By default, that Mystery will be Hedge the Fang ...

Prelude

It is an ordinary time, except the moon is going away.

Not everyone notices. You'd think it'd be big news, but it isn't. Yet you can go out there and, as long as you make yourself stay on task, you can see it:

It's fading away.

That's how strong the influence of Hedge the Fang has gotten lately in your town. It's gulping down the moon, and people don't even *see*.

How Group Stories Work

In the main group storyline, players can pool their resources and work on the storyline muddles together, each contributing components to the final arcana as they like.

That's why you're called to do something about it, if you can.

There's two ways to play this out. One is that you're friends already. Some of you know about the roofs, like, **the Rogue** and **the Old-Timer** and arguably **the Magician**. Some of you might not. But you're friends, maybe even literally the players except for the way that your character choices have tweaked your backstory, and you've gotten together, and then you see the moon failing for the first time; and trying to figure out what to do about it eventually leads you to the rats and to the roofs.

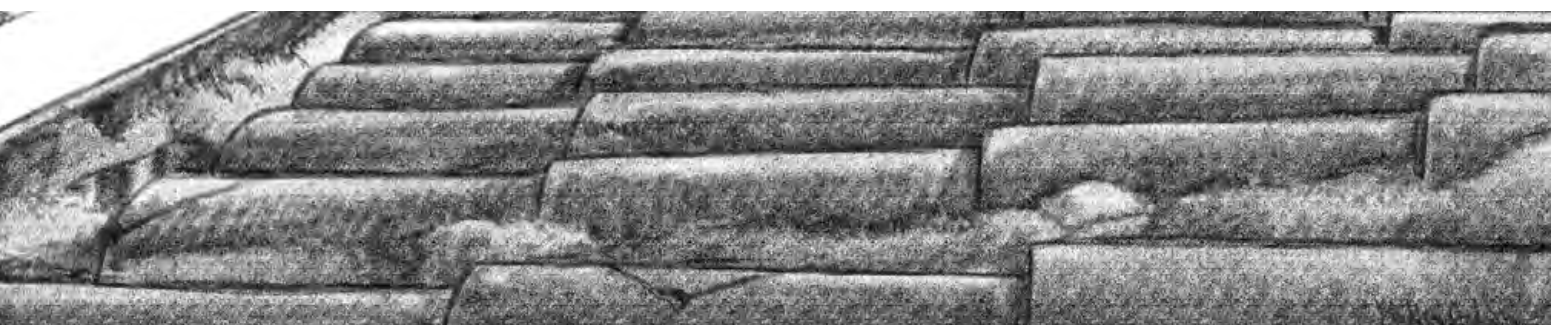
The other way to play it out is that you all start trying to deal with this, and however long it takes you all to act, you all make it up to the roofs to start the adventure on the same day.

These ideas can, obviously, be combined.

Regardless, the group should figure out how they're going to meet the rats and find the far roofs, and which rats they're going to meet. Maybe this is easy and obvious. If it's not, you can do a *free-association muddle*, where you draw a separate set of tiles freely until the group sees answers in them to:

- * how do we meet the rats in our mischief?
- * repeat for an appropriate number of rats:
 - what are the rats like?
 - what are their names?

You don't actually have to have letters corresponding to their names to solve that last one, for clarity, and wouldn't even if this was a real muddle and not a creative exercise—it's enough that the tiles give you a direction in which to go.



SWALLOWING THE MOON

The way this story works is that there's a series of muddles that you'll have to solve before Hedge the Fang can be defeated. The good thing is that you can solve them as a group.

Before your first encounter with Hedge, you'll have to work out the muddle:

- * where your first direct encounter with Hedge the Fang will be;
- * where you must go to learn the way to the Farthest Roofs, where Hedge the Fang dwells.

Before your second encounter with Hedge, you'll have to work out the muddle:

- * how you drive it off, at least once, without resorting to card-based combat;
- * the effects of the missing/damaged moon upon the world;

Before your final encounter with Hedge, you'll need to work out *one* of the following:

- * how you resist the effects of the missing/damaged moon, *or*
- * where you will take shelter from those effects, or from Hedge's power;

Plus all of the following:

- * how its power is affecting the moon at all, when that's not actually its default storyline;
- * how you might be able to get it to back off, or force it to back off, without killing it, if that's possible;
- * the last region you'll pass through to reach Hedge's dominion (or its *concept*, at least, if your answer points towards a mood and not a name).

Eight muddles is on the small side for a main storyline event; as grandiose as the *events* may be, the adventure itself is meant to be simple and bounded—an easy introduction to the wonders and dangers of the roofs. That said, note that “simple” here isn't the same thing as *quick*; even if your group loves making constant Mood rolls and playing around with the *arcana*, it'll probably still take a few sessions to play through this, and if they're equally interested in the rest of the game, you can easily spend fifteen or more sessions herein.

UNSPEAKABLE

This storyline is meant to be relatively standard—setting a baseline of “there's a Mystery, go deal with it” to help with improvisation later on.

The default Mystery here is going to be **Leucrotta, which is Named Unspeakable**—a Mystery representing trauma too raw to think about. The kind of trauma where you process things in pieces. A Mystery that can root you to the spot with three looks or imitate human voices to call out your name.

It lives in the forest, on the roofs—a place where library towers rise up like great cedar trees, and the tiles of the roofs are hilled and wild, and ropes and awnings stretch out from the higher roofs to clutter out the sun.

It is shrouded in seven “radiances of terror” it has stolen from the sun, making it invincible.

It eats people up. Devours them, bit by bit, if it can.

If you don't meet its challenge, it'll devour you.

This is not a story of how someone has a trauma, and then goes out and fights a magical monster, and it turns out that afterwards their trauma is better. This is a story of something too raw to think about, itself.

The Calling to face Leucrotta is that one sees Leucrotta beneath a street lamp, at night; or a photograph, or a too-well-drawn picture; or one comes across a scene of a dog, wolf, rat, hyena, or human it has already killed. One sees Leucrotta, and from that seeing, one sickens. If one is lucky. If one is unlucky it will hunt you, it will attack you, it may even hurt you. If you survive, if you escape, its Calling will not let you go.

So that is what happens.

If the group is large, it's probably too complicated to have all of them see it—it's one thing for two or three PCs who are often together, and can maybe be fudged for four who are a tight group, but after that point you'll want to have just *some* of the PCs called. The rest are, at least at first, just along for the ride.

Optionally, start with the *free-association muddle* (pg. 231):

- * where and how do you encounter Leucrotta?

For the actual storyline, the muddles you'll have to work out are as follows:

- * a region where you'll encounter it;⁵¹
- * a region where you'll encounter it again;
- * why Leucrotta targeted you;

⁵¹ Note that “region” muddles like this aren't about, like, “which of the pg. 26 neighborhoods do we pick?” but more like, “what *kind* of a place is it?”—an excuse to, and a demand that you, create more Far Roofs content yourself.

- * how you'll drive it off, at least once, without resorting to card-based combat;
- * how it might be possible to say Leucrotta's name;
- * how you'll cross the mountain-range roofs between you and the cedar forest—this one might be a hand of cards;
- * why it has the seven radiances of the sun;
- * how you can remove the seven radiances;
- * how you will defeat it, then;
- * the growing bond among the PCs;
- * the last region that you'll pass through before you reach the cedar forest;
- * the cedar forest's mood; *and*
- * what you will do with a treasure claimed from the cedar forest.

- * how to turn it aside;
- * what it hungers for;
- * how it may be killed;
- * how its attention may be escaped.

At least *one* of those three must be for *Leucrotta*, though if you have other Mysteries around you can fill in a bit of their books here as well. Note that whatever you work out probably isn't from the book page found below—these are muddles, so the answers are meant to be new and revelatory. *If* it somehow winds up feeling new and revelatory to you, then you can use one of the answers below, but that's not what this bit is *for*.

Finally, you may need to deal with minion monsters—monkeys, pigeons, and doves, generally larger than their mortal forms and warped in some fashion—before you can reach Leucrotta at the end.

Plus, you'll have to work out (any) three of the following, to add to the book of Names:

- * one of the Mystery's heralds;
- * one of its weapons;



From the Books of Names

THE NAME OF LEUCROTTA IS

"Unspeakable;" traditionally understood as Trauma

THE HERALDS OF LEUCROTTA ARE

people talking but you can't understand what they're saying; flickering disturbing lights; someone calling or whispering your name from afar; visions of anthropophagy


THE WEAPONS OF LEUCROTTA ARE

the people around you, like puppets to its will; small blades; unbearable noises; its teeth and claws; necessary things becoming unbearable

YOU TURN LEUCROTTA ASIDE WITH OR BY

blocking out the world; trusting in yourself; spiking your adrenaline from a completely unrelated crisis

LEUCROTTA KILLS YOU BY

devouring you; leading you into your doom;  a third means, that cannot be recorded

HOOP SNAKE

Intermission! It's time to chase Hoop Snake. This is a whole-group activity, because it'll round people up one by one if they aren't together at the start.

See *Hoop Snake* (pg. 129).

LEUCROTTA IS DRAWN TO

those who speak or think about it; wolves and dogs, hyenas and lions; a disturbance in the cedar forest

LEUCROTTA HUNGERS FOR

time spent with you in peace and silence, before it eats you and it lives inside your skin; a warm embrace or gift from you ... and then to eat you, etc.; its own extinction; the safety of the creatures of the forest

YOU MAY KILL LEUCROTTA BY

calling out its secret name—each time is harder—until it dies; finding a more terrible monster to feed it to, or, to have freeze it, with three paralytic "looks" of its own

LEUCROTTA IS REBORN WHEN

one of those that it has marked but failed to kill becomes the new Leucrotta

YOU MAY ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF LEUCROTTA BY

trapping it; becoming someone new; having enough friends to stand by you when Leucrotta comes







"the Cedar Forest," by Isip Xin

HARPY IS DEAD

Harpy is “that which is not Hope,” and the rats don’t really know what that means. And let’s say that I’ve forgotten my original thought, so that you can work it out during the game.

Maybe Harpy is, like the rats think, Disdain.

Maybe she’s the recognition that things are screwed up, and that’s OK. I mean, it’s not *OK*, but it’s OK. It’s allowed for things to be sucky without there being a way to fix it or that being your moral fault.

Maybe it’s Miracles.

Maybe it’s the ability to let go of your blinders and see past the dualities that are blinding you.

... of course, it could be Despair.

There’s more on Harpy on pg. 120.

So anyway, the rats killed Harpy. She’s dead. But some or all of you are called to quest against her anyway.

Maybe it’s like:

You’re going through a rough time right now. You’re struggling ...

But there’s a sense that things could be better. That there’s a metaphorical light up ahead. That there’s something in the sky, something up above you, that could make things better. That *would* make things better, if you only knew its name.

It’s an oddly specific feeling, and then you learn that it’s not a unique one. That it’s traditionally associated with the influence of the Mystery “Harpy,” one of the totemic monster-gods that the rats of Fortitude quest against. Normally, it’d qualify as a kind of calling to go out and face her; only it can’t be that.

She’s dead.

Or maybe it’s like,

You’ve been dreaming of the Far Roofs. You’ve been dreaming of a place where rooftops pile up on top of one another, gable atop gable, like waves in a sea; and at the center of them, an every-which-way facing ziggurat: “the Stagger of Rooftops,” where the monster-god Harpy once dwelt.

The place has a desolate and empty feel; its mistress, Harpy, is dead.

You’ve been dreaming of her, too, anyway—

Or rather of *something*, something that lives in the skies above you, something poison-dripping and wings a-flutter, something dangerous and awful but which could somehow make things better—if you only knew its name. Not “Harpy,” though, and not the rats’ best guess at her second name, “Disdain.” It would have to be something different than that.

And there’s this woman, Illiana. She’s 20-something and a musician, and when she calls to a bird it comes down to her shoulder, and when she cries she cries sapphires; and it’s all pretty freaky, but if you had the right magical skill you could do all that too.

She’s been called to face Harpy, like you.

And so you travel through the Far Roofs to the Stagger of Rooftops near Lethwillam Sore, and as you do Illiana starts changing physically, growing white feathers on her arms and such, and dreaming not just of meeting Harpy but of becoming her.

You’re allowed to try to save her, but it can only help for so long:

Eventually she’ll get all *this is my destiny, I have to accept it* about things and insist on going to the Stagger of Rooftops, where she’ll become Harpy, and that’s the story.

If you absolutely can’t accept that ... well, you’ll have a chance to address it next storyline, so maybe a rat or maybe Illiana herself or maybe one of y’all might propose it: that she can *feel* it, the movement of destiny, and it’s probably a lot easier to subvert destiny by coming back for her later or changing what it means to be Harpy than by stopping a transformation that’s entirely beyond her control.

Afterwards, anyway, you’ll dispose of some remnant of the original Harpy or the original Illiana at an appropriate place—I’m thinking, at Whitesail Court by the Gutter-Sea, where the remnants of fallen Mysteries are devoured by ... let’s say, **Charybdis, who is Named Dissolution**. This isn’t a visible, monstrous entity; rather, things that spend time in Whitesail Court slowly form a circling, desiccating wind around them, eventually draining them down to nothing: this, the manifestation of Charybdis in our world.

So here are the muddles that you’ll need to address before she becomes Harpy:

- * a region where you’ll encounter Harpy or its minions;
- * another such region;
- * what is stolen from us along the way?
- * what is the Stagger of Rooftops like?
- * what little Mystery will we encounter on the way?
- * what will the oracle say to us, within the deep caverns of the mountain-roofs?
- * what does all this stuff with Illiana *mean*?
- * do the sapphires she cries have flaws?

- * how do we survive that time that all our food gets poisoned?
- * [a song Illiana composes (possibly with one of you, maybe just “what I think ooc the song should be”)]
- * either:
 - what must we dispose at Whitesail Court, *or*
 - *why* must we dispose of something at Whitesail Court?
- * what do we see from the cliffs at Whitesail Court?

ILLIANA

Illiana probably shouldn't have to be Harpy. I mean, you can skip to the next story if somehow she wound up getting played as someone it'd feel weird to spend a story helping, or if she was really enthusiastic about being Harpy; these things can happen even if nobody at the gaming table intends them, but ... probably? She shouldn't have to be.

Or, at least, the metaphysical nature of Harpy ought to change. Like: flying around, not so bad. Being a Mystery? Could be good, could be bad. Poisoning everything she touches, though? Being filthy and abhorrent? Not so good. And it doesn't *sound* great to be “that which is not Hope.”

Juuuust in case nobody has the right abilities to help, you'll get a pet NPC for this story: Ratimir Kovac, with the *Cheat* powers **A Little Push** and **System**. He sees things in the world as having “item slots” with things “slotted into them,” and he can manipulate the slots, e.g. pulling the fire gem out of someone's emotion slot to make them less angry, or slotting lightning gems into clouds to make it rain and thunder and lightning.

... which might be too complicated and weird to be cool, so if it turns out not to be cool he'll admit he was talking his power up and his *actual* power is changing reality through GUTS.

His plan, anyway, is to manipulate the metaphysical definition of Harpy while Illiana is still new at the job, you know, maybe cleaning the slots, maybe taking some of your better qualities from *your* slots and putting them in *her* slots instead of poison gems, or whatever?

Instead, at an appropriately dramatic point in the quest, he dies.

You can still succeed here! You can still make things better! But maybe you don't. I think there *should* still be a Harpy, afterwards ... but if necessary, it can rip away from Illiana, laughing, and leave her behind.

Muddles include:

- * a region where you'll encounter Harpy or its minions;
- * summing up Ratimir;
- * why did Harpy call us, and not just Illiana?
- * how do we survive, after the terrible fall?
- * how do we weather the storm?
- * how will Ratimir die?
- * how will you save, or fail to save, Illiana?
- * should there be a Harpy in the world?
- * what is “that which is not Hope?”

Plus, you'll have to work out three of the following, to add to the book of Names:

- * one of a Mystery's heralds;
- * one of its weapons;
- * how to turn it aside;
- * what it hungers for;
- * how it may be killed;
- * how its attention may be escaped.

At least *one* of these should be about Harpy, but if you happen to have other Mysteries around then you can work on their books as well.

At some point you will likely have to fight a horror that attacks from the sky.

ORDINARY LIVES

Sometimes, the world below is almost as difficult as the roofs.

In this interlude, each player should come up with two muddles tied to their ordinary lives, though current Arc/quest muddles and stuff like “how can I handle the ordinary world when I've tasted the roofs?” both count. You can help each other solve them by trading cards and letters, but other than that they're not really *group* muddles.

When every player has solved at least one, and the remaining muddles don't look like they have any showstoppers that would be unsolvable while on the roofs or render roof travel impossible, move on; any leftover muddles, though, must be solved before the next completed group storyline.

THE MECHANISM OF THE WORLD

This is a story about “the mechanism of the world”—the great steam-and-clockwork machine responsible for fate, and time, and events happening one after another. It’s the engine of causality ... and it’s dying. It’s coming to an end.

People have heard a lot of different stories about this, so you can improvise the backstory, and it’s usually different every time someone tells the story of it, including when the GM does or the rats do:

- * something inexplicable happens, probably relating to time, fate, the world, gears, or something like that,
- * it segues into an origin story for a great machine, *and finally*
- * it’s tied to modern events or something with emotional resonance.

For instance:

Back before time began, a witch was playing with a bunch of gear-animals. She’d skewer them with metal spikes and stick them next to one another and they’d spin around and around and around. She pumped steam into them to scald their fur away and called down lightning to make them dance. After a while she got bored and went away but the gear-animals just kept on turning. And the more they turned the more the world grew, magma pushing rocks around and storms spreading across the earth and algae rising from the sea to turn into animals and then rats and humans and finally all of us, here, today—and all because of the gear-animals and the witch!

Or:

Once upon a time, gears fell from the sky. They self-organized. They formed patterns. They became a great machine. The great machine hid under the surface of the world. It started making things happen. Wars. Peaces. That time Dmitri drank your cup of coffee without even asking first. It was all the work of the great machine!

It’s running down.

Along the way to ... try? to fix it, you’ll encounter an emissary of acausality and unbeing, there, theoretically, to observe. You can do a *free-association muddle* (pg. 231) to figure out who that is and what they’re like.

You may also encounter gear-animal monsters of some sort, and dangerous places needing hands of cards.

Muddles include:

- * where do you think the machine came from?⁵²
- * how can you accept such a machine’s existence?
- * coming to terms with the idea that it’s running down
- * how do you think it actually ... works?
- * how will you traverse a dangerous, ever-reshaping region?
- * [your relationship with the emissary of unbeing]
- * a far roofs neighborhood you’ll pass through to reach the machine;
- * another far roofs neighborhood you’ll pass through to reach it;
- * the neighborhood that it’s in;
- * why is it running down?
- * how will you try to fix it?
- * ... and what will happen if you can’t?

KIFRI, AND HEDGE THE FANG

This is an interruption to a normal journey across the roofs.

Accordingly, there’s a set of muddles that’s just that journey, and you can swap them out if you don’t like the default ideas. The *default* is that you’re disposing of pieces of **Kifri, which is Named Envy**—a Mystery that had the power to crystallize the world, but which was shattered into pieces before it could—and are taking one to a bog on the far roofs, when the story happens. That “original” story would have the muddles:

- * what is in you to resist the crystallizing power of Kifri? (one answer per three pcs, rounded up)
- * the nature of the bog where it can be disposed
- * another neighborhood you will have to travel to, to dispose of a piece
- * a third neighborhood you will have to travel to, to dispose of a piece
- * a fourth neighborhood you will have to travel to, to dispose of a piece
- * the last place you have to go to dispose of a piece
- * how will we survive some terror associated with one of those neighborhoods?

⁵² Other players can disagree—only the player *answering* has to be confident.

You may wish to name one or more of the neighborhoods in advance, and then use the muddles purely to fill in their moods and general character.

As noted earlier, though, this isn't the only thing you could be doing. You could, for instance, just be exploring the roofs, with a few muddles like:

- * what wonder do we find
- * what secret do we find
- * what grand vista do we behold

... or, if appropriate, just borrow them from the muddles in your Arcs.

Or, you could be escorting a fallen star up to the sky, with muddles like:

- * how will you cross the deathly forest?
- * how will you reach the edge between roofs and sky?
- * how will you ascend the bridge of stars?
- * how will you get past the dragon of the night?
- * what is it that casts stars from the sky?
- * how may it be overcome?

But anyway, this is happening, and you bump into Hedge; only, he cuts off your route back home.

So then you have to *also* work out:

- * where does he catch us?
- * how do we escape?⁵³
- * what nightmares do we suffer in a Hedge-cursed bog?
- * what happens when we dream ourselves in another time, or as gods?
- * how will we get around him, and back home?
- * what secret do we learn from an oracular corpse?
- * why is Hedge the Fang skinless?
- * how does one of us restore themselves, after being brushed by the touch of Hedge the Fang?
- * how does one of us remove a bit of Hedge that's stuck inside an eye?
- * what is it like, to reach home at last?

Plus, you'll have to work out three of the following, to add to the book of Names:

- * one of a Mystery's heralds;
- * one of its weapons;
- * how to turn it aside;
- * what it hungers for;
- * how it may be killed;
- * how its attention may be escaped.

At least *one* of these should be about Hedge, but if you happen to have other Mysteries around then you can work on their book as well.

Finally, you may encounter random horrors—a tree that eats people, an anthropophagous scholar from beyond the world, a sandwich that eats people, a horse that eats people ... (you can probably now understand and extrapolate freely upon this general theme).

UNICORN

In this final story, you are called to hunt the Unicorn. And:

- * what is Klytië Fujioka's spell?
- * what is numinous, in the world?
- * how may the Unicorn be caught?

To survive, you'll also have to work out three of the following, to add to the book of Names:

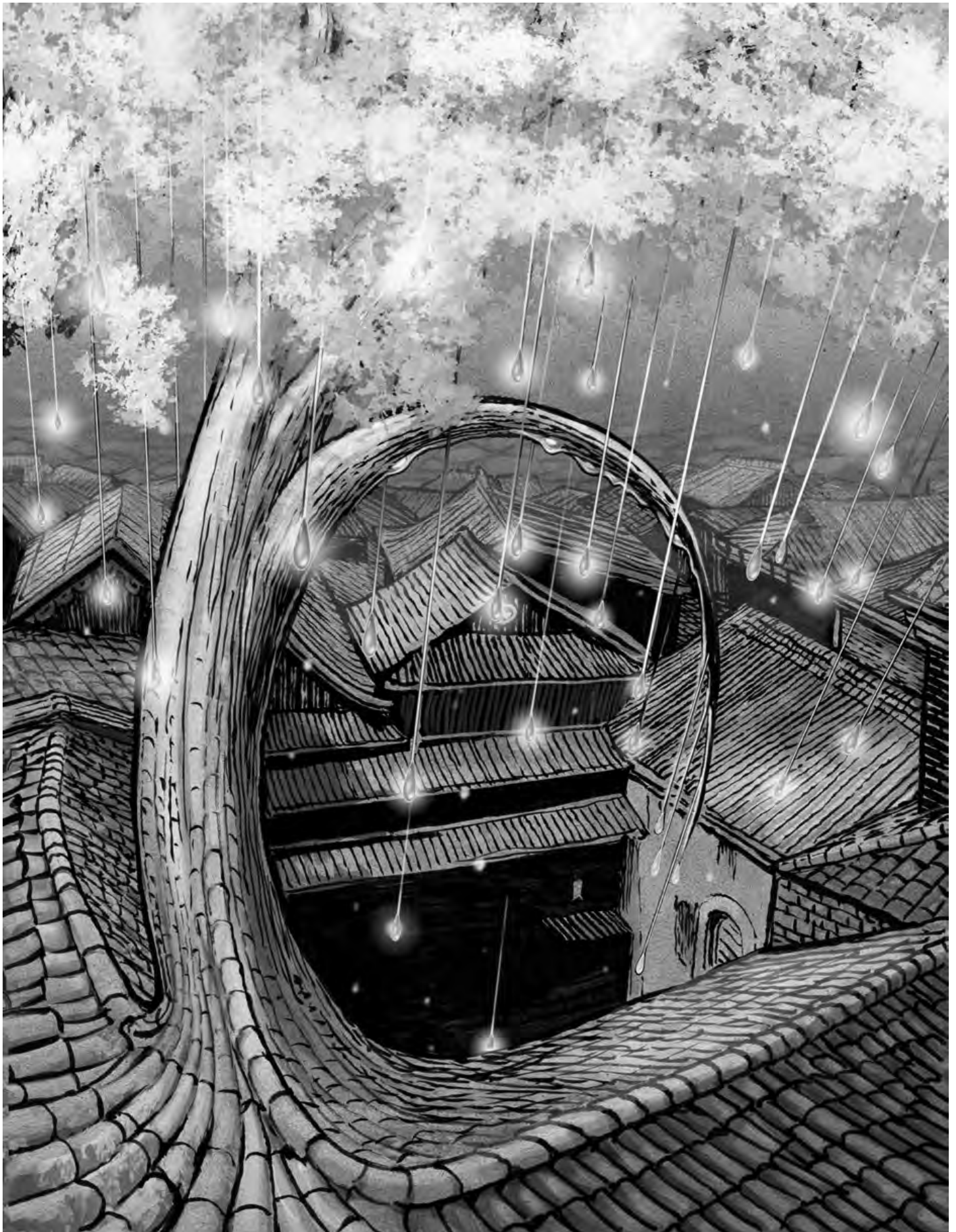
- * one of a Mystery's heralds;
- * one of its weapons;
- * how to turn it aside;
- * what it hungers for;
- * how it may be killed;
- * how its attention may be escaped.

At least *one* of these should be about Unicorn, but if you happen to have other Mysteries around then you can work on their book as well.

Lastly, *for each of you, individually*, you'll need to answer:

- * why must you chase the Unicorn?
- * ... will you return?

⁵³ This is separate from any encounters that will be resolved through cards.



"Manna-Tree," by Lee Moyer

THE KING OF SHADOWS

- 7 -

I don't know if there's a lesson.

If there is one, I guess, it's probably that overestimating the kindness of dead rats will let them climb out of the King of Shadows' maw. Maybe this kills the King. Maybe it just frees up the pressure on his jaw a little and lets people like Lilith who'd want to recover their parent's corpse get off his case. It changes things, anyway, in some fashion. I'd like to think that that's a good lesson, applicable to many of the circumstances of life, but really, I'm not sure it is.

The King of Shadows is a Mystery, after all.

The rats have recorded our story and one day its bits and pieces, gnawed down to meaning, will be added to their Books of Names. Maybe then they'll say something like, *you can free the dead from the mouth of the King of Shadows if you choose to call them out; or, the King fades away if you call someone out from between his jaws.*

Or he cannot live where there is kindness.

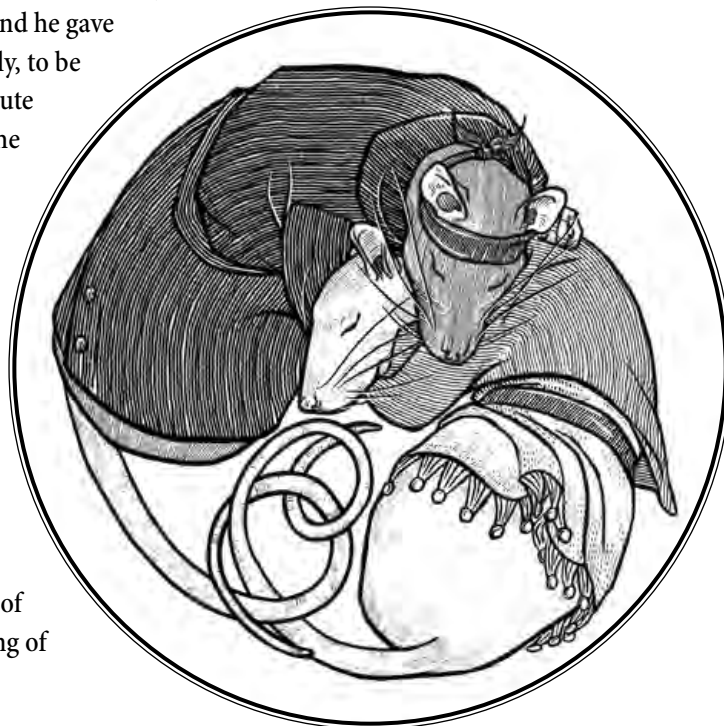
Or he demands kindness before he'll go away.

Something like that, maybe, or maybe something else.

The King of Shadows took a portion of my life, and that's forever gone; and he gave me Lilith and Evans, indirectly, to be my friends; and his was the flute of shadows that I played, in the Cathedral of the King. And the more I think about these things the less I hate him the less I loathe him the less I fear him and maybe I think that I would even cry and hug him if we met again.

That's probably why we haven't.

He's the rat who's the King of Shadows, after all, and no King of Shadows would want that.



Appendix A: Quick NPCs

These character sketches do include powers, but do note that all powers are suggestions—NPCs don't actually have to have powers, much less exactly four.

... rather, four is just a number that feels likely to be a useful reference, a collection of small fun tools to play with as GM, without being too overwhelming to work with when picking a character up on the fly.

Please also remember **the GM only needs to pay costs when an NPC engages in hostile or semi-hostile interactions with the PCs**; otherwise, assume that NPCs pay their own costs from some sort of hidden, off-camera component pool.

That said, herein find some quick trait sets the GM can use for ...

Artificial People

Physical Action 1	Professional Construct
Awareness 3	
Communication 4	
Introspection 2	
Self-Care 0	

Let's Talk—people created by the Mysteries or the occult phenomena exist in a kind of Edenic state; they are free from the curse of Babel, and nothing has an instinct of hostility towards them (pg. 71).

Bound—artificial people are often infused during creation with 1-3 laws or rules, each a +1 bonus to their doing (whatever) and a -1 penalty to *not*.

(Cage for a) Blasphemy—it is often unwise to bring an artificial person down to 1 HP (or 0), though the reasons vary; they may become a vessel for their Mystery, unleash some curse they were *created* to release but had been holding back for ethical or personal reasons, or, have the balance of magics holding them together dissolve explosively (pg. 91).

5+ Obsession—the *normal actions* of these constructs, straddling the boundary between humanity and the numinous as they do, may have profound emotional impact on a selection of desired witnesses. Unless defeated, the targets choose the details (pg. 98).

Cat Spirits

Physical Action 1	Professional Cat Spirit
Awareness 3	
Communication 0	
Introspection 4	
Self-Care 2	

5+/8+ Keen Sense—a cat's instincts are unnaturally keen (5+: sense something secret, 8+: follow a trail; pg. 79).

8+ Seize the Intangible—cat spirits can grip such things as shadows and the wind (pg. 79).

♠/mark Tribulation—a cat spirit may spend a ♠ to impose a personalized curse of, e.g., strange luck or poverty; by marking the journal, it can force an ongoing curse like this to cough up a relevant incident right *now* (pg. 79).

5+ Spirit Walking—the cat spirit can manifest somewhere it isn't as a ghostly presence with +2 cv and a -2 penalty to Physical Action and Awareness checks (except for Mood rolls).

Ghosts

Physical Action 1	Professional Ghost
Awareness 4	
Communication 3	
Introspection 2	
Self-Care 0	

Second Self—a ghost exists, for all it's dead (pg. 95).

minutes Step Away (x2)—a ghost can fade away into an indistinct essence. Even as such an essence, it remains somewhat able to perceive or (by partially manifesting itself) influence events (pg. 95).

Set Apart—ghosts have no feet, instead just sort of ... trailing off. When and if this gets them into trouble with the PCs, draw a component. Clever tricks to hide this feature are possible, but start to fail if the PC most relevant to the ghost's story picks up the Issue, **(in) Over their Head** (pg. 59, 92).

Ghost Kings

Physical Action 4	Professional Ghost King
Awareness 3	<i>Skilled</i> —ghost kings often wield
Communication 1	strange magical or superior
Introspection 0	skills, offering them generic or
Self-Care 2	personalized ghostly abilities.

5+ Break the Boundaries—ghost kings are ~3000 times better at getting past locks and other boundaries (pg. 94).

8+ Stumble In—not to mention their ability to just ... show up, anywhere not heavily monitored or warded (pg. 95)

J+ Into the Mittelmarches—a ghost king can often also summon a bit of its ghostly kingdom to itself (pg. 94).

Guardians or Rulers of Specific Locations

Physical Action 3	Professional Region-Rule
Awareness 1	
Communication 0	
Introspection 2	
Self-Care 4	

Second Self—their true self is, perhaps, that place (pg. 95).

♦ **Demesne**—control timing and the weather there (pg. 76).

5+ Deepen the Mystery—summon that place's "feel" (pg. 95).

8+ Stir the Heart—grant something an occult allure (pg. 76).

Living Plagues

Physical Action 4	Professional Plague
Awareness 2	
Communication 3	
Introspection 0	
Self-Care 1	

Second Self—plagues are tricky things to "kill" (pg. 95).

Conversion—living plagues may infect others with their nature, making them part of the plague; targets can take damage to resist. Fully converted beings use the plague's character sheet and theoretically become "part" of the plague NPC (pg. 95).

5+ Old Memories—until the next chapter ends, a converted entity recovers a power or skill it used to have (pg. 95).

8+ Extend the Moment—linger over symptom descriptions; a target rolling **DELIRIUM** may add "1 5 5" to the roll (pg. 92).

Mythic Monsters

Physical Action 3	Professional Person-Hunter
Awareness 4	
Communication 1	
Introspection 0	
Self-Care 2	

5+/8+ Keen Sense—one of the monster's senses is unnaturally keen (5+: sense something secret, 8+: follow a trail; pg. 79).

Between the Boundaries—it can track others, and move to places in their vicinity, with improbable speed and skill when not being directly observed (pg. 82).

5+ Break the Boundaries—many of these monsters are like 3000 times better than you are at unlocking things, opening things, and finding ways in (pg. 94).

J+ Into the Mittelmarches—distorting the world, the monster summons a bit of its native roofs to itself (pg. 94).

Mountainous Roof-Beasts

Physical Action 4	Professional <i>Kaiju</i>
Awareness 1	
Communication 3	
Introspection 0	
Self-Care 2	

minutes/card Kaiju Form—if somehow transformed, a roof *kaiju* can generally become a giant monster again (pg. 73).

card/♦ Shed Scales—most "giant" roof monsters are actually variably sized. By spending a card, if an appropriate new size exists, they can adjust their size to remove a size-related penalty up to -3 or (adversary's) bonus up to +3. If that card is a ♦, they can use the power as often as they like that scene (pg. 73).

card/♦ Blend In—many can also spend a card to blend in to their native portion of the roofs (and similar locations). When blended in, physical obstacles no longer obstruct them. Only those suspecting their presence notice them, and, at a -2 Awareness penalty. However, they must invoke this again to move at speed. (A ♦ again allows free use of this power, including to move at speed, for the rest of the scene; pg. 73).

Natural Weaponry—a roof *kaiju* often has a natural ranged weapon; when using this or other natural weaponry, it adds +4 to the effective value of its stamina cards (pg. 73).

Rat Bards (and Human Bards)

Physical Action 1 Professional Bard

Awareness 3

Communication 4

Introspection 0

Self-Care 2

5+ Spirit Walking—a bard's wandering spirit betimes appears (+2 CV, -2 to non-Mood Physical Action/Awareness; pg. 94).

8+ Strange, Foreign Treasures—a bard oft produces strange treasures from some magical place (pg. 94).

Blessings—a bard or their music/art may offer opportunities to buy specific “blessings” for cards (pg. 95).

J+ Established History—their backstory ... changes (pg. 95).

Rat Elders (and Human Elders)

Physical Action 3 Professional Elder

Awareness 0 *Skilled*—elders often have two

Communication 1 points of a weird magic or a

Introspection 4 couple of surprising professional

Self-Care 2 skills.

5+/8+/♥ A Tangled History—an elder's often had personal experience with a relevant event (5+); or, *participated* in it (8+); or, according to fable, was *responsible* for it (♥; pg. 86)!

Digest—you'd be surprised what an elder can eat (pg. 87).

Wonder-Worker—they get +1 to card values, and prevent 1 damage per chapter, when fulfilling some role (pg. 86).

Rat Icons (and Strangely Blessed Humans)

Physical Action 1 Professional Icon

Awareness 4

Communication 3

Introspection 2

Self-Care 0

♥ A Little Push—magic away a basic life task failure (pg. 71).

minutes/card Kaiju Form—transcend their form (pg. 73).

hours, minutes/card, or ♦ Mortal Form—turn back (pg. 73).

kaiju form Bramble—1/turn, on taking damage or spending a ♥, draw a card and fill the area around them with a hostile environmental effect (pg. 73).

Rat Navigators (and Mythic Wanderers)

Physical Action 2 Professional Navigator

Awareness 3

Communication 1

Introspection 0

Self-Care 4

Skilled—navigators and wanderers often pick up a few extra professional skills (e.g. “Hunter” and “Roof-Traveler”).

Between the Boundaries—they can get the lay of the land high-instantly in a flashback or between scenes (pg. 82)

mark action, (♣) Respite—bring respite, rest, peace, and solace to someone or, with a ♣, to a small group. If they *can* rest, relax, and experience solace, this forces them to; otherwise, it's a wish that gives them the opportunity (pg. 82).

♥ Revelation—narrate a revelation that retroactively changes the nature or events of a scene but does not directly inflict meaningful harm. (pg. 82).

Rat Outcasts (and Witches/Psychics)

Physical Action 2 Professional Outcast

Awareness 4

Communication 3

Introspection 0

Self-Care 1

5+/8+ Keen Sense—one of the outcast's senses is unnaturally keen (5+: sense something secret, 8+: follow a trail; pg. 79).

♦ The Magician's Forge—reforge an object's destiny as a *wish* that it could accomplish a certain task (pg. 79).

5+/8+ The Dream That Dreams Do Dream Of—impose one of the outcast's core Truths on themselves as a *geas* with a 5+; cancel the *geas* with a 5+; or (8+) force something to happen to make a *geas*-imposed Truth relevant (pg. 80).

(♣) Somebody Else's Story—spiritually “be with” someone or something relevant to the outcast's whole *thing*, or, (♣) search many such experiences for desired information (pg. 80).



by Mariona Roig Torné

Rat Prinxes (and Cursed Humans)

Physical Action 4 Professional Prinxe
Awareness 3
Communication 1
Introspection 2
Self-Care 0

(card) **(Cage for a) Blasphemy**—if they get down to 0-1 HP, their burden/curse unleashes something dangerous as an attack (and, with a card, as a powerful wish effect; pg. 91).

card Dramatic—show up at just the right moment (pg. 91).

Empowered Wounds—a prinxe can sacrifice 1 HP to build a custom “wound power,” or abandon a wound power to avoid up to a point of damage and make the HP recoverable (pg. 91).

(2-3)/J+ An Undesirable Gift—their caged blasphemy saves them (2-3, or, at the GM’s whim), or (J+) they refuse to let that happen. (In practice, the GM can ignore these costs; pg. 91).

Rat Shieldbearers (and Miscellaneous Bystanders)

Physical Action 3 Professional Shieldbearer
Awareness 2
Communication 0
Introspection 4
Self-Care 1

card/♠ **The Auctoritas Magister**—if the shieldbearer spends a card, others’ powers do −1 damage to them this scene. With a ♠ they can ignore the past minute of a power’s effects (for a scene) or a wish/geas’ effect (for the duration of a story; pg. 98).

Divine Warrant—this NPC has narrative and perhaps even *cosmic* license to indulge their specific one-note quirk. Once per session, they can further critically succeed or force someone else to critically fail on a relevant **LOSING YOURSELF** action (pg. 98).

mark action, optional ♥ Inspire—a shieldbearer can often inspire hope and purpose in a target or (♥) small group. If the target lacked hope and purpose because of substantive external factors, it becomes possible (if not necessarily easy) to circumvent them (pg. 98).

Tireless—add 1d10 to one of their non-poetic actions; critically failing turns off this power for the session (pg. 98).

Rat Wardens (and Other Pillars of the Community)

Physical Action 4 Professional Warden
Awareness 3
Communication 0
Introspection 2
Self-Care 1

card Adaptable—they can belong in a place, be at *home* there, for the duration of their stay. This is a *geas* (pg. 75).

mark action, optional ♣ Believe in Me—someone nearby attempts an action of the warden’s choice. This cannot critically fail, receives a +1 bonus, and (♣) adds “1 5 5” to the roll. They can only refuse if you let them, but if you don’t, they can contest their “own” action with a second roll.

mark Here’s What You’ll Do—a warden often knows what someone *should* do, even across arbitrary distances (pg. 76).

card, minutes **The Where-Sense**—a warden can often intuit the exact distance and direction to someone they have a positive relationship with, and, gain a vague awareness of their circumstances (pg. 76).

Sorcerers and Sorceresses

Physical Action 3 Magical Skill: Sorcery 1+
Awareness 4 *Aesthetic*—maintaining a
Communication 1 specific personal and
Introspection 2 sorcerous aesthetic grants
Self-Care 0 many sorcerers an effective +3
points of magical skill (pg. 91).

♥ **A Little Push**—they may call upon dread and fearsome sorcery to turn a failure at a basic life task into a success (pg. 71).

♣ **Ritual**—sorcerers often develop personalized “ritual” spells for delving into the psyche, afflicting others with evocative (un)pleasant experiences, interacting with inaccessible people (e.g., dead, or fictional), or traveling to distant places; using one of these rituals costs a ♣ (pg. 98).

Imbue—a sorcerer may imbue up to three objects or loyal creatures with the power of an elemental force (e.g., Freedom, Wind, Fire) or a *geas* (e.g., “cannot be defeated”). They cannot permanently lose the object or the loyalty of the creature, but can cancel the power. Imbuing an object or creature in play requires an *arcanum*, but it’s fine to start off a sorcerous NPC with a few (pg. 85).

FRIENDS OF THE RATS

Adam Gardner
Adara Rat-Friend
Albert Blom
Alice Marks
Andreas Rugård Klæsøe
Antoine Boegli
Armando DiCianno
Ben Pavey
Benjamin Frost
Brian Sniffen
BV728
Casey Johnson
Cat Gardiner
Celeste Wolf
CigaWeed
Conor Anderson
David-Christian Liebchen
David Hayes
D.M. Geist
Emily Dare
Erika Hoagland
Erin-Lee
 & Ted Pick

Frank Rohrer
Gareth Hodges
Georgia Beatrice Zev
Hawk Cohen
Hawthorn
Hermes Pinto
Isak Bloom
Ivan Velkovsky
Izaak Seaberg
Jais H
Jasmine “Minmo” Collier
Jason W.
Jeffrey Birch
Jesse Breazeale
Jessica Hammer
John M Morgan
Jordan Burkhart
Jordan D.
Josh “Lore Merchant” Harrison
Josh Symonds
June Rodebaugh

Kruno Hrvatinic
Liam DiNapoli
Luc Snider
Lydia & Clark
M Fowler
Marcus Dirr
Mario William
Marshall A. Davis
McGravin
Michael Buice
Michael Little
Michael Stevens
Morgan Weeks
Myra Henderson,
 Ross Eberhardt,
 and Zuki

Nick Mathewson
Omri Drucker
Patrick Willette Healey
Peter FR Wallis
R ‘SpaceCatte’ Rensberger
rybos
S. Mertens
Shervyn
Simon Ward
solly (directxman12)
Some Dave or Another
Stephen Cheney
Striehart
Syrus Quinn
Taylor Leyhew
The Lady of the Library
They say you and me are 「Tautology」
Toby Potato
Tom Sherlock
Toph Wells
(un)reason
Vicki Hsu
Zebe Loun
Zephaniah Strand Bensaid

and

Lord Matthew and Lady Stephanie, of the House of Wyrms
Bane. Bearers of the Sacred Toof, just and noble rats.

CREDITS

Creator: Jenna Katerin Moran

Design and Development Contributors: Rand Brittain, Robert Vance

Artists: Patrick R. Kelley, Jenn Manley Lee, Lee Moyer, Camille “Karma” O’Leary, Naomi Rubin, Elizabeth Sherry, Melissa Spandri, Todd Thomas, Isip Xin, and Y.C. Yang

Cover by: Isip Xin

Graphic Elements and Icons by: Jenn Manley Lee

Graphic Design and Layout: Jenn Manley Lee and Jenna Katerin Moran

Dedicated, with Gratitude, To: Cameron Banks, Jessica Banks, Bruce Baugh, David Bolack, Cync Brantley, Rand Brittain, Genevieve R. Cogman, Anthony Damiani, Fae Garet, Geoffrey Grabowski, Roland Hansson, Cheryl Hahn, Miranda Harrell, John Heron, Kenneth Hite, Christopher Humphrey, Carol Johnson, Dara & Anna Korra’ti, Alexis Lanham, Ben Lehman, AJ Luxton, the Eyrie Mafia, Kiva Maginn, Gayle Margolis, Elizabeth McCoy, Jim McKinney, Chris Nasipak, Becca Newman, Carl Rigney, Charles Seaton, Alexis Siemon, Gretchen Shanrock-Solberg, Elizabeth Sherry, Rachel Swirsky, Kari Tuurihalme, Chrysoula Tzavelas, Mel Uran, James Wallis, and Raymond Wood.

Extra Bonus Dedication To: Sonja Britt Borgstrom, Lillian Heino, Cera Kruger, Michael Maginn, Killian Maginn, Trevor Placker, and Phyllis Rostykus.

In Memoriam: Zach Best, David L. Brittain, Merry Ruth Conley, Alice Gillberg, Rook Hallan, and Jade Piper Hammons-Milo



“Celebrating Rats,” by Mariona Roig Torné

AND, DEDICATED FRIENDS

Alexander Lash
Alyssa Riceman
Anton Adam
Brett Neumeier
Carl Rigney
Christopher Humphrey
David J Prokopetz
Diane Avunvain Noelle Leliel
Katherine Amirault
Lily “Nerium” Qiu

Liz Weir
Nathaniel Krell
Patrick R. Kelley
Piotr “ThePiachu” Piasecki
Rand Brittain
Robert Vance
Tony M
Xavid

and
Jade Piper Hammons-Milo

INDEX

- adventure journal 3, 4, 68
Arcs 154, 178-197
arcnum 56-57
attacking/escalating 49-51
Augustine shrine family, the 101, 187
Autumn Dynasty, the 13, 145
background action 50
balloons 20
bandit's steel 139
billboards 25, 32
blind rat's/lost rat's roads 18, 21
blocking (51), 52
boasting 49-50
boggling 16
Books of Names, the 30
Caroline Yatskaya 113
cat spirits 81, 108, 204, 242
Cneph the Maker 12
clash 57
component 56
conflict 48
counterattacking 51
cv 49, 69
dramatic conflict 48-54
dream-snakes 74, 109, 112, 201, 226-227
edge 50
emotional draw 57
faltering (51), 52
gallû-demons 108, 109, 225
geas 69
ghost kings 77, 110, 203, 220, 243
ghost world, the 110, 198, 200, 220, 224
ghosts 70, 90, 109, 110, 208, 242
girtablilu 96, 110, 213-214
"grand winter," the 207
gutter-lakes/sea 25, 32, 113, 166-167, 236
health points/HP 50-51, 54
hidebehinds 25
Illiana 236-237
inferno-torches 26, 32
interrupting 51
Jade Irinka, Jasper Irinka 107, 132
Kuroma Yatskiy 113, 132, 133
lateral approaches in conflict 51
long-ranged (power) 69
Magical Skills
"Entanglement" Magic 143
Formless Existence 139
Holiness 147
"Knit-Witch" / Fishing Magic 84
Necromancy 90, 111, 122
Poisoner and Trapper 119
"Reaper" Magic 133
Transformative Pollen 139
Unbreakable Scales 143
Wind, Cloud, Waves Magic 125
manna-tree, the 153, 240
milebalks 26, 32
money 57
moonlight ways 19, 21
Mysteries, the 2-3, 53-54, 108-151
All-Swallower, the 108, 227
Alp-Luachra 108, 218
Azag 108, 109, 113, 225
Basilisk 108, 202
Charybdis 108, 236
Dream-Flower 108-109, 201-202
Edimmu 109, 218
Erinyes 109, 212
Final Star, the 109, 221
Garmr 109, 110, 201, 226-227
Goblin 11, 36, 81, 116-119, 205
Gorgon 93, 94, 110, 212-213
Gravewight 90, 110, 208
Headmaster of the Bleak Academy, the 11
Harpy 120-123, 145, 236-237
Hedge the Fang 11, 58, 77, 78, 80, 124-129, 188-189, 202-204, 231-232, 238-239
Hel 109, 110, 212
Hoop Snake 114-115, 129-131, 151, 233
Jingling Crystal Bee 209;
see Hoop Snake
Kelpie 110, 112, 217-219
Ketu 110, 226
Kifri 110-111, 226, 238-239
King Death 70-72, 104, 113, 132-138, 198-199, 205-206, 212, 214
King of Shadows, the F-G, 8, 22, 27, 40, 106, 111, 152, 228, 241
Lake Monk 224-225;
see Hoop Snake
Lennan-Shee 111, 112, 218-219
Leucrotta 111, 232-235
Malambruno 12, 13, 77, 102, 139-142, 203, 223
Mallt-y-Nos 71, 111, 199
Mock Dragon 111, 207
Nidhoggr 112, 227
Qiongqi 104
Questing Beast, the 112, 221;
see Hoop Snake
Rahu 110, 112
Rider 112, 221
Salamander 12, 112, 227
Siren 112, 221
Sphinx 3, 5-6, 112-113
Sylph 113, 212
Thrymr 113, 208
Typhon 11, 28, 84-85, 88-89, 143-146, 206, 207-208, 223
Unicorn 64-65, 145, 147-150, 239
White Snake Spirit 113, 214
Witch of the Far Roofs, the 113, 238
Ymir 113, 226
Nayantara 111
normal action 69
Pandora 40
Places
Anesthesia House, the 110, 227
Avalon 198
Cathedral of the King, the 27, 33, 228-229
cedar forest, the 232-233, 234-235
Corpse Duke's Runway, the 12, 15, 18, 21
Dead Man's Manor 28, 33, 143
Eight Banners 11, 14
Escher's Folly 27, 32-33
Faerie 198
Farthest Roofs, the 25
goblin-roofs, the 119, 210-211
Grayvale 25, 29, 33, 107, 113, 153
Heaven's Alley 19
Heaven's Sleeve 12, 14
Higher Mystical Dimensions 198
Island of King Death, the 70, 72, 132, 134-135, 198
Kaoru's Cross 12, 14, 21, 112
Konrad's Court 12
Kumugi 96, 108, 109, 110, 213
Kysely's Edge 11, 12, 224
Lethwillam Sore 120, 236
Little Cosmos, the 19
Little Nymh 11
Madcaps' Nave 28, 33, 88-89, 143, 146
Metal Flowers' Maze, the 26, 32
Middleroofs, the 25
Near Roofs, the 11-15
Neven's Solace 12
Octo-Roof 26, 32
Outside, the 19, 25, 29, 33, 75, 215;
see void, the
Professor Roza's Academy 11
Rat King's Recourse, the 132
Red King's Road, the 12, 14, 21, 22-24, 40
Republic of the Living, the 12, 15
Scylla of the Roofs 26
Shadows' Cross 27, 33, 40, 228
Silence Road 26, 32
Stagger of Rooftops, the 34-35, 120, 123, 236
Sword Princess Path 12, 18, 21
Thoughtful Neighbors 27, 33
Thresher's Woods 11, 13, 15, 18
Traitor Prince's Gallows, the 12, 18, 21
Triumph of the Tech-Roofs, the 28, 33
Ûrsag 108, 113
Whitesail Court 108, 236-237
Wingmaidens' Reach 13, 15
Witchway, the 22, 26, 32, 40, 106, 152, 228
powers 68-69, 154
Averse/Heralded 69, 116
Drawn to Certain Bait 79, 98, 116
Skilled 69, 81, 85, 91
Treasure 69
Untouchable 69
quests 66-67, 154-155, 156-177
raising up the sky 17, 40, 228
rat-doors 3, 9
rat-gum 12, 22
rat opera 100, 103, 187
rats, Fortitude 2, 8, 11, 15, 30, 31, 38, 100-105 (103), 132, 244-245
Agnes Kolar (inventor) 113
Alen Aleksei 13
Chryseis Moriko 13
Dragomir Kysely 28, 102
Georgiy Resnick 139
Grandmother Rat 132-133
Hanako Akiyama 120
Karme Kaoru 12, 18, 21, 112
Klytië Fujioka 147, 149, 239
Kristen Lukenya 13
Kysely Vertigen 11, 12, 101, 224
Living Mayor, the 12
Lykos Korošec 116
Manami Ionescu 209
Martina Volkova 120
Milica Augustine 187
Neven Vertigen 11, 12, 102
Palpatine Czernova 208
Phasma 209
Praksia 17-18, 21, 143
Ratimir Kovac 237
Rat King, the 11, 12, 30, 100, 101, 104, 111, 120, 139
Red Duke/King, the 12, 14, 18, 21, 22-24
Reverie 107
Vikenti Haru 18, 21, 124
Yuu Ionescu 209
Zlatan Petrova 13
Rat King's oracle, the 104
rats, mock- 104
river, the 49
rule of three, the 53
runner's nests 23, 29-30, 33, 106
session 3, 69
ships 11, 81, 111, 206
sky kingdom, the 113, 214, 224
sorcerers/sorceresses 112, 209, 219, 245
star-spirits 113, 214, 226, 239
sunways 17, 19, 21
ternmays 13
turn 51, 53
Usurpers' Era 11, 12, 22, 103, 224
void, the 49, 110, 215, 226, 238;
see Places: Outside, the
wish 69
Word of Death, the 132, 137