



SOJOURNER

Here's my sketch of the game, which will be updated and developed further in the future, especially once I actually get the chance to try it out with a friend or two. But it should be playable and fun as-is. Let me know if you play it!

This draft is inspired in part by D. Vincent Baker's excellent games Apocalypse World and Murderous Ghosts, conversations and 1-on-1 play with John Harper, and, of course, videos and stills from thatgamecompany's Journey. Some aspects are eerily reminiscent of Caravan by Emily Care Boss, though I encountered that game later. Several concepts and mechanics are drawn from a couple of my unfinished design projects, Fingers on the Firmament and Super Suit.

Overview

This game begins with just two players: one playing *the sojourner* and the other playing *the journey*. During the course of play, you may be temporarily joined by additional players playing *other sojourners*, but they are free to wander in and out of the game as they please.

One important part of play is creating a map of your journey. Standard-size computer paper works fine for this, along with pencils or other drawing tools. You will also need two dice (the six-sided kind) and may also find it helpful to have a token or pawn to mark the current location of the sojourner on the map.

The Invocations

If you are the journey player, begin by reading this passage aloud...

An ocean of sand stretches out in every direction, its dunes rippled by the desert winds. Far in the distance, the sacred mountain looms immense and silent, a beacon of light shining brightly from the highest peak. Will you reach the summit? What might you find there?

If you are the sojourner player, respond by reading this passage aloud...

I walk steadily through the sands, my red cloak rustling against the breeze. I am human but with a bird's nature, voiceless except for my song, which has no words; faceless and yet striking and beautiful. There are not many of us left, but we are on a journey back home, whether we know it or not. Will I make it there? Are we even welcome? And will the others join my pilgrimage or heed their own hearts?

The Sacred Mountain

Take two sheets of paper: one will eventually become a map of the starting region (the necropolis, see below) and the other will become a map of the sacred mountain, far in the distance.

Begin with the map of the mountain. The journey player should sketch out its basic shape and most prominent features, but strictly limit themselves to aspects that the sojourner can see clearly from their distant location. The sojourner player can assist by asking some questions about what they can see or suggesting features of the mountain that they can barely make out. Are these mirages, strangely-shaped shadows, or the truth? That will only be discovered as the sojourner proceeds closer and the mountain becomes clearer. Consequently, try to limit yourselves as much as possible, only indicating 2-3 vague features at this stage. However, be sure to clearly indicate which point is the summit, where the beacon of light ascends into the sky.

Region One: The Necropolis

The sojourner player should then draw the glyph that identifies them, their “name” of sorts, using it to mark their starting location on one edge of the other blank sheet of paper. If you have difficulty coming up with glyphs, I recommend borrowing them from [the beautiful written language of the Yi](#).

Next, the journey player should describe and sketch out a map of the first region the sojourner encounters, which can take up some or all of this sheet of paper. While the regions encountered later in the game will be different for every group of players, the first region is always the same: *a desert necropolis of scattered ruins and countless grave markers.*

The journey player need not draw the entire region in great detail, at least not all at once. Instead, they should sketch out the major features that would be immediately noticed by a lone figure stumbling upon them after emerging from an ocean of sand: the largest ruins, rather than every block of stone or half-destroyed pillar, and even then just the basic shape of the most significant structures; major features of the landscape like sizable hills and valleys, rocky outcroppings, and waterfalls of sand; and certainly the larger fields of grave markers, some of which have red ribbons fluttering from them. You will add more detail to this map as the sojourner explores the region more fully.

Critically, all regions in the game—including the first—are empty of living things, including other people, unless the sojourner or journey player invoke the rules for encountering another sojourner.

Exploring a Region

When exploring a region of the map, the sojourner player describes where the sojourner walks and what they do, but can't describe what they say (since they have no voice, just a wordless song) or what they feel. As they explore the region, they can ask the journey player questions about what they see, hear, or otherwise experience and the journey player responds, drawing additional details and features on the map or simply describing things that are too small or complicated to illustrate.

The Core Moves

There are several things that the sojourner player can do which break up the normal pattern of play described above. These things are called the “core moves” and generally work to push the game forward towards its ultimate resolution. However, it's important to remember that move-less play—exploring and asking questions about what you experience—is critical for getting to the point where it makes sense to use a core move. It sometimes makes sense to “chain” a series of moves together, but the game should not always be a series of moves, but vary between making moves and exploring/questioning.

All of the core moves involve the sojourner player doing something and the journey player making a judgment call about whether or not the sojourner's actions initiate one of these moves. If so, follow the instructions for that move; if not, continue to explore and question until the conditions for one of the moves is met. If things become confusing or don't seem to be going anywhere, stop playing and talk about it.

The core moves are as follows:

When the sojourner resumes their journey towards the sacred peak:

- the journey player describes and illustrates ruins which appear out of the dusty air or catch your attention; these ruins are not always directly in front of you, but may be off to the side or far in the distance; if the ruins are already on the map, illustrate or describe them in greater detail.
- the journey player rolls 1 die or selects a result from the following list, describing the ruin to match but adding their own details and bringing it to life:
 1. this is a partially buried block of stone.
 2. this is a fragment of ancient architecture.
 3. this contains a stele or statue.
 4. this is a lesser ruin, containing some secret.
 5. this is a lesser ruin, but impossible to reach from the ground.
 6. this is a greater ruin, but impossible to reach from the ground.

When the sojourner searches for something moving amidst the ruins, roll both dice:

- On a 5 or less: you find nothing but swirling sand.
- On a 6-8: you find red ribbons floating in the air.
- On a 9 or greater: you find silver cloth. Add +1 to the length of your tassel. If you have no tassel yet, your cloak grows a long tassel from the hood, which begins at length 1.

When the sojourner interacts with swirling ribbons:

- they gain a number of “float” tokens equal to the length of their tassel.
- when the sojourner wishes to use their cloak to float through the air, roll 2 dice and add the number of float tokens they choose to spend:
 - On a 6 or less: the sojourner can float to any adjacent ruin.
 - On a 7-9: the sojourner can float to any ruin currently on the map.
 - On a 10+: as below or the sojourner can reach a previously unreachable lesser ruin.

When you awaken a lesser ruin, roll to determine the results:

- ribbons emerge, which recharge your ability to float
- ribbons emerge in great numbers and form a bridge to an unreachable place (you may have to do this several times to reach all the way to where you desire to go)
- ribbons emerge in great numbers and carry you to an unreachable place
- kites emerge, leading the way to the hidden places

When you awaken a greater ruin, all of these:

- a ghostly figure appears
- they tell you a story in pictographs, describing what happened here in 2-5 images
- they add the pattern of this region to your cloak
- they open a path to the next region on your journey

Sidenote on awakening ruins and what that might involve, being a fan of the player, and going with whatever they decide to do. The job of the journey player is to describe the things the sojourner encounters on their journey, not place difficult obstacles in front of them. Then again, not everything works on the first try. Find a balance that feels right.

When you see another sojourner, traveling in this direction:

- go ask a stranger some questions
- their answers generate the behavior of the other sojourner
- if the stranger blows you off, the other sojourner just ignores you and walks off
- if the stranger is interested and wants to know more about the game, they are welcome to join in for as long as they want, using the same rules as the sojourner player
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Subsequent Regions

When the sojourner enters a new region:

- features of the sacred mountain become clearer, as it becomes larger and closer in the distance
- the journey player should describe and sketch out the new landscape, as they did for the necropolis
- examples of new regions include the following (feel free to choose from this list or invent your own, based on what the sojourner has learned about these lands): the sanctum, the road, the shrine, the fortress, the village, the dry lakebed, the storehouse, the fields, the market, the city, the crossroads, the school, the caverns, the aquaduct, the tower, the quarry, the craftworks, the monastery.
- certain ruins are difficult to reach without floating, and may require more floating power than the sojourner currently has
- certain greater ruins are truly impossible to reach, at least at present, due to being high in the air, on the far side of a vast chasm, or something other means
- certain greater ruins may even require more than one sojourner to awaken, though never the ruins required for moving to the next region on the way to the sacred mountain; these ruins have affects that are distinct from the other ruins in the game, though they should have a similar vibe; perhaps they reveal hidden areas or even a completely new region, perhaps they adjust certain features of the landscape, or perhaps they uncover additional information that isn't critical but provides additional context

Final Region: The Sacred Mountain

Eventually, of course, the sojourner will reach the sacred mountain itself. At that point, take the map you have gradually created of the mountain and use it as the map of the final region. If your map of the mountain has grown especially complex, it may even make sense to take out some blank sheets of paper and break it down into a few smaller regions, copying over the features and ruins from your existing map.

The ruins and other features of the sacred mountain are handled the same as those in previously encountered regions, but feel free to change or add to the results of certain encounters, based on what the sojourner has learned over the course of play. The final move of the game works as follows:

When the sojourner has reached the end of their journey (they decide): the sojourner player should take a few minutes and describe an epilogue for the game. Does the sojourner stay there? Do they depart for somewhere else? Both of those questions many not even makes sense anymore, depending on what the final segments of your journey are like. In response, the journey player describes what the sojourner sees in their last surveying glance across the landscape, from the desert necropolis to the summit of the sacred mountain, noting how the landscape has changed due to the journey.



THE END