THE GATE

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A book for game masters.

GAMEPLAY

Like all roleplaying games, Invisible Sun is a series of interactions between the game master (GM) and the players. The GM is the world (and all who inhabit it), and the players are the main characters in the story that unfolds as the group plays the game. It's the creation of that story that is the goal. All the game's rules and mechanics, and all player and GM decisions, should service the story.

The GM sets a scene, describing the environment and providing a context for the characters to inhabit. The players, in turn, describe the actions that their characters will undertake. Using the rules, the GM and the players work together to determine if the characters are successful or not. Remember that success does not always mean a good story, and failure does not necessarily mean a bad one. Ups and downs are part of any good tale.

THE NARRATIVE

Invisible Sun's stories are the focus, and they're driven by the character arcs of the vislae involved. A story encompasses all the activities of an individual or the group as they advance toward a goal and achieve it (or fail to do so). Many stories can be intertwined, with one starting while another is in full swing.

All the stories involving a given set of characters are collectively called the narrative.

Remember that vislae are almost always studious types. Invisible Sun isn't meant to be a game of nonstop action. The rules reflect this, requiring a fair bit of study time to learn new spells, skills, and so on. The narrative enables this through side scenes. Thus, big, important events are handled in a group session, but between sessions, days or even weeks might pass where the characters are studying or pursuing side interests (as perhaps reflected in the character arcs).

THE THREE MODES OF GAMEPLAY

Invisible Sun is a game played on three different levels, or modes, depending on the situation. Each has its use to address certain types of experiences and activities in the game, and each solves certain types of issues that can arise.

ACTION MODE

The first mode, called Action Mode, is the one with the greatest focus on detail. It's where everyone involved is together (probably sitting around a table with all the Black Cube components out) and the action is being tracked round by round so that every player gets a turn before anyone gets a second turn. This could be a fight, a chase, or a tense moment of negotiation. Most roleplayers are very familiar with this mode.

NARRATIVE MODE

The second mode, called Narrative Mode, handles the more flexible activities in the game in terms of detail and time. While no one is tracking things carefully in rounds or strictly managing turns, everyone's still at the table, the Path of Suns board and Sooth Deck are out and in play, and the GM is managing the actions and outcomes. The game might use this mode to handle travel, investigating an interesting area, resting, commerce, or casually negotiating with NPCs. There are still die rolls to be made, points to be spent, and so on, but probably not with the frequency of Action Mode.

The first two modes go hand in hand, with play naturally moving from one to the other. The group might question a few NPCs to learn the location of King Nine's Candleflame Palace, equip themselves for the journey, and then travel there using Narrative Mode. Upon arrival, they switch to Action Mode and deal with the magical wards and strange guardians. Both modes can be thought of as "table play," because they take place, obviously, with everyone gathered at the game table.

DEVELOPMENT MODE

The third mode of play is a bit different. It's called Development Mode. It doesn't take place at the game table, but away from it. It can involve one player or many. It can involve the GM, or it might not.

Development Mode always involves a single turn of a Sooth card. You don't use dice in Development Mode. Even character sheets probably aren't necessary much of the time. This mode might involve the player(s) sitting down with the GM, or it might be handled through texts sent back and forth, perhaps using the feature in the Invisible Sun app designed exactly for that. The app also makes it possible for the GM to turn a card and send it to the player(s), indicating how any interpretation inspired by the card influences the outcomes of their proposed actions.

In Development Mode, one or more players decide to take an action that can be resolved away from the table. They might elect to talk to the magistrate and see if they can get permission to enter one of the forbidden areas of The Silent City. They might spend time asking around about the The Library of the Undone and where it can be found. Or (if multiple players are involved) they might simply talk among themselves to determine their next course of action as a group. These events are referred to as side scenes. There's even a type of side scene that details events that happened in the past, but which might impact events in the present or even the future. These appropriately titled flashbacks are always interesting because they

If you are going to use the pregenerated characters included in the Black Cube, keep in mind that these are somewhat advanced characters that have earned (and used) some Crux and Acumen. Each will need the cards for the spells, ephemera, and objects of power mentioned in their Character Tomes and Grimoire sheets. Use them as drop-in characters in an existing narrative or even as modalities of the regular PCs.

allow a nonlinear narrative. A flashback doesn't have to take place in the distant past. It might reveal how two characters spent the previous day getting ready for the events in the most recent session of table play by spying on their opponents and gaining valuable information.

Development Mode offers all manner of play opportunities. Players can play the game between full group sessions if they want. A player can use Development Mode as it fits into their personal schedule. Even if they can't make it to the regular session, they can still move their character's story forward. If one or two players can't make it to a scheduled session, the group can still play using Development Mode, focusing on side issues rather than the main narrative. Players can play even if the GM isn't available. A side scene could involve the entire group taking an action that they discuss in person and then communicate through text to the GM. The GM can send them a Sooth card through the app, and then, whenever she's able, respond to the players' actions and intentions through a text of her own.

Last, note that it's possible for a side scene in Development Mode to become significant enough that it expands into one of the other two modes at the table. An investigation into a minor matter in a side scene might reveal information that interests the whole group, who will act on it in an upcoming full session.

TABLE PLAY

Let's lump Action Mode and Narrative Mode together, because they're both intended to be used while the whole group—GM and players—are gathered together, probably around a table.

SETUP

There's a lot of stuff in the Black Cube, and it's all useful for Action and Narrative Modes. Each player probably has a character tome filled out with their character details. Each player probably also wants a grimoire sheet to keep track of magical practices

known and a bit of blank paper to keep notes of active spell effects and depletion, as well as—of course—notes on the events in the story. And obviously, you'll want the books handy.

Each player should have any cards or tokens appropriate to their character. If a character knows a spell, they should have that card handy. Vances should have their various cards and diagram ready to show what spells they have prepared. Weavers should have their cards. And so on.

The GM should set up the Path of Suns board. Place the Testament of Suns on the **Invisible** Sun. Shuffle the Sooth Deck and place it face down on or next to the board. Tokens for Joy, Despair, and Acumen should be nearby, ready to award to players.

Now you're ready to start.

PLAYER ABSENCES

A player cancels at the last minute. They were going to be a part of tonight's session, but now they're not. (It happens—real life rears its ugly head.) The GM informs the rest of the players that the missing player has been pulled back into Shadow. Something—a nostalgic memory, a sudden connection with a Shadow memento, or just the power of the lie—draws vislae back into Shadow from time to time. They simply fade away and, just as inexplicably, reappear later, having escaped Shadow yet again. This approach alleviates any need to run the missing player's character as an NPC or come up with a story-based reason for why they're suddenly gone.

A TYPICAL SESSION BEGINS

A session is the actual play of the game at the table. Whatever happens during that time is considered a single session. A story might occur in a single session, but most stretch over multiple sessions. Certainly an entire narrative takes up many sessions.

Most sessions should start with a brief recap of who the characters are and what's happened in the story so far. This is not unlike a "Previously on . . ." bit from a television show in Shadow.

During both Narrative Mode and Action Mode, characters will take actions. Players will roll dice and spend bene from their stat pools. All of this is handled in the next chapter. See Actions, page 16.

And then play begins. Unless things start off with a bang (which is fun to do sometimes, GMs, so take note), play begins in Narrative Mode. The players probably discuss briefly what they want to do, and when and where they meet (since they likely live in different places), and then play proceeds.

SWITCHING MODES

When play switches from Narrative Mode to Action Mode is up to the GM. The deciding factor is, "Do we need to start determining who does what, when?" If the answer is yes, Action Mode is needed.

Now, the very nature of the beginning of Action Mode is that the GM presents a situation or event and then asks the players, "What do you do?" That means the players' response is always the first thing that happens. There's no need to roll dice to determine the order. However, this doesn't mean that the players always go first. The event that triggers Action Mode might be something an NPC does, such as "The demonic guard raises his bone sword above his head and attacks!" Or something that happens in the world, such as "The explosion shakes the whole building and the ceiling begins to collapse!" In such a case, the first thing that a player might do is make a defense roll.

But things don't have to start that way either. If the characters are sneaking into a dangerous location, Action Mode might start with the GM stating, "You hear the footsteps of a guard coming your way. What do you do?" The players need to deal with that situation, and the GM needs to know what they do right at that moment. They've probably got only a round or two. That's clearly Action Mode.

When Action Mode is no longer needed, the group transitions back to Narrative Mode. If the fight is over, the angry ghosts are gone, or the avalanche is done, you probably don't need to keep track of rounds anymore.

Thus, the game shifts back and forth a few times during a typical session. There's no right or wrong amount of time in either mode—you do what the story demands.
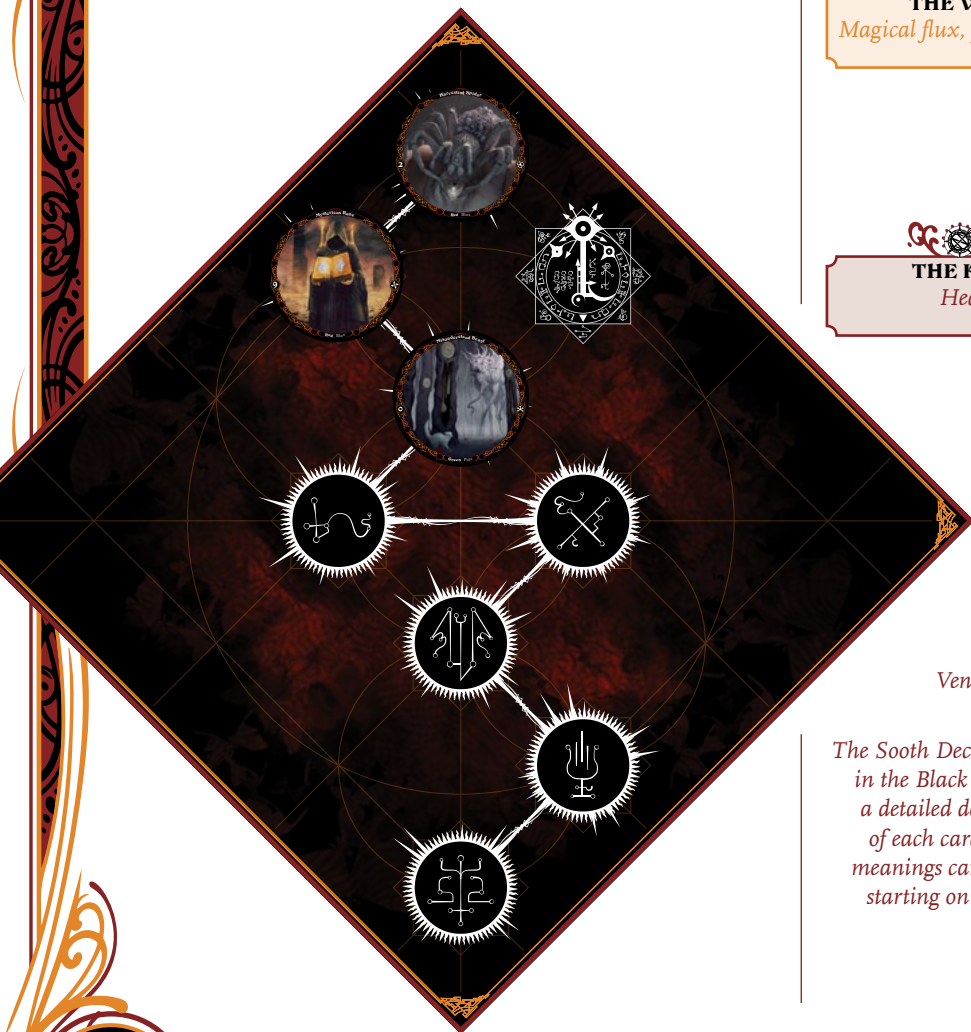
THE SOOTH DECK

Throughout the session, the GM will, at various points, play a Sooth card on the Path of Suns. The first card is played at the beginning of the session, and a new card is played at the GM's discretion, but the following things probably should trigger a card turn:

+ Characters move to a new location
+ A significant event occurs
+ A significant new NPC enters the scene
+ A PC suffers a Wound or an Anguish
+ Something surprising happens
+ A GM shift is introduced
+ Magical flux occurs

Cards are always played in order, moving down the Path of Suns. So the first card is played on the Silver Sun, the next on the Green Sun, and so on. The most recent card is the active card, and any effects of the previous card are now canceled. The only exception is that a card played on the Invisible Sun goes into the Testament of Suns and remains in effect until a new card is played on the Invisible Sun.

Cards represent the constant fluctuations of magic. Most cards make one type of magic (based on sun color association) stronger and another type weaker. On the Sooth cards, the name of the enhanced sun is bold and the diminished sun is faint. For spells and effects linked to the stronger sun, either their effective level is increased by 1 (with no additional cost) or the Sorcery cost of the effect is reduced by 1—player choice. For weaker sun effects, either the level is lowered by 1 or the cost is raised by 1. For example, the Endless Maze card either increases the level of Blue spells by 1 or reduces the cost of Blue spells by 1. Likewise, it reduces the level of Red spells by 1 or increases the cost by 1.

Cards affecting magic of a particular sun double the effect when played on that sun in the path. So if Endless Maze is played on the Blue Sun, it increases the level or lowers the cost by 2. Played on the Red Sun, it lowers the level or increases the cost by 2.

All cards belong to one of four families, which are also keyed to character hearts. The other effect is that if a card is played from the family associated with a character's heart, such as a Mysteries card for a Stoic, all of that character's actions get a +1 bonus to their venture.

Special royalty cards have these effects:

Sovereign: +1 to all actions, +2 if heart is linked to family
Nemesis: –1 to all actions, –2 if heart is linked to family
Defender: +2 to all actions if heart is linked to family
Apprentice: –1 to all actions if heart is linked to family
Companion: Duplicates the effects of the previously played card (if played first in a session on the Silver Sun, immediately play another card on the next sun)
Adept: Play another card on the next sun

GM SHIFTS

At various times—in either mode—the GM will introduce something called a shift. A shift is when something works in a way that a player wasn't expecting. This isn't because of a die roll, but because the GM decides to shift an outcome or a circumstance to make the ongoing story more exciting. In general, when the GM does this, a character affected positively gains 1 Joy. A character affected negatively gains 1 Despair.

The GM should probably introduce one or two shifts in a given session, affecting one or two characters. At the very most, no character should be affected by more than one shift in a session.

ENDING A SESSION AND CHARACTER SUMMARIES

There's no right or wrong length of time for a session. Some groups will play for a couple of hours. Others will want to devote all Saturday afternoon. The only thing that's important is that the GM has an idea of when the session needs to wrap up. This is so they can hopefully guide the story not only to a good stopping point narratively, but also to one that isn't right in the middle of something (because stopping then shuts down Development Mode opportunities, as explained below). The GM should find a stopping point that allows the characters the chance to go home or do something on their own between this session and the next.

At the end of each session, each player describes why they did what they did, or how they felt about what transpired. This is called the Character Summaries part of the session. Players discuss what they think and feel about other characters, events that occurred, places they've seen, and so on. Specifically, a player should focus on their character arc(s) and discuss how they potentially completed one or more steps in an arc. The player might also reference the kinds of things that might bring their specific character Joy or Despair.

The GM then awards Acumen, Joy, and Despair. These awards come primarily from what the players

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THE PATH
Hate cyst, page 73

Ruined Expanses, page 72

It's okay to end in the middle of the action or on a cliffhanger every once in a while. It's exciting and starts the next session off with a bang. But doing so should be the exception, not the rule.

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reveal in their Character Summaries. They are in addition to any Joy or Despair that resulted from GM shifts.

In addition, the GM should award discretionary Acumen for accomplishments and experiences outside the characters' stated arcs. If, on the way to an important meeting, the characters encounter and defeat a creature spawned from a Hate Cyst in one of Satyrine's Ruined Expanses, they should probably earn Acumen.

Likewise, a GM can award discretionary Joy and Despair. If, in that encounter with the hate spawn, the PCs save an endangered bystander, that might be worth 1 Joy (depending on the characters). If they try to save the bystander but he is still consumed by the creature, the characters might earn 1 Despair.

In general, these discretionary awards should never be more than 1 Acumen per session and 1 Joy or Despair per session, for each character. This is above and beyond what characters earn from their character arcs.

CHARACTER SUMMARIES AWAY FROM THE TABLE

Some players would rather not talk about their character's thoughts, motives, or feelings in front of the group. This might be because they are shy, they are introverted, or there isn't enough time at the end of the session for someone who has a lot to say. In these cases, the player can talk to the GM one on one or convey their feelings and ideas in an email, a text, or another message.

Players choosing this option should always share their Character Summaries with the GM before the next session.

DEVELOPMENT MODE IN PLAY

Between sessions, a player can contact the GM and state that they want to have a side scene. There are three reasons why someone might do this:

1. The character wants to do something on their own. For example, a character goes alone to talk to a contact in the Vancian Order. This usually has something to do with what happened in the last session (or what might happen in the upcoming session). Perhaps the character wants to ask their contact some questions about the weird half-world the group will travel to next session.

2. The character wants to do something that pertains to their character arc or some other task that's important to them but doesn't involve the other characters in any way.

3. The player just wants to get in some gaming fun during long gaps between sessions, and it's a good way to further develop their character.

THE FORMAT OF A SIDE SCENE

Side scenes detail what a character does between sessions, which means the default assumption is that there's always at least a little bit of uncommitted time between each session to fit in a side scene. If that's not the case, probably because a session ended in the middle of a situation where the characters can't leave to do something else briefly, the only kinds of side scenes available are flashbacks or flashforwards (see below).

Ideally, a side scene involves the initiating player and the GM meeting between sessions, face to face. A side scene can be handled at a coffee shop, on a walk in the park, on the bus, or at home on the couch. Most can be resolved in ten to fifteen minutes of real-world time.

Of course, the realities of life are such that sometimes you can't get together. In this case, a side scene could be handled as a phone call, an online chat, a text conversation, or a short series of email exchanges. The Invisible Sun app has a feature that allows this to happen right in the app itself, handled as a text conversation.

Some side scenes will not require cards at all. If a player is studying a new spell or buying new clothes, no card is needed, and the exchange between the player and the GM might be very brief. In fact, many times, players will want to do this kind of simple "maintenance" scene in addition to another scene, or multiple such scenes if they have a lot of Acumen or money to spend. That's probably fine.

All parties involved should try to be as flexible as possible to accommodate each other and make the side scene work.

THE NATURE OF A SIDE SCENE

Side scenes are short and singularly focused. Think of a single scene in a movie or book (one that isn't a climactic scene). Such scenes in fiction deal with a single matter and then are done. Examples of a side scene include:

A conversation. The PC goes to talk to someone. In this case, once the player describes who they want to talk to and how they get there, the player and the GM roleplay the conversation as though they were in Narrative Mode. In other words, the GM takes on the role of the NPC, and they talk. The PC might want to learn information, make a friend, get a favor, or intimidate someone for some end. When the conversation is over, the scene is over.

An observation. The PC goes to check something or someplace out. In heist movie parlance, this might be called "casing the joint," but it can just be walking by an NPC vislae's house to see if they're home or following that vislae to see where they get their coffee. The goal of the observation is to get information that can be obtained without interacting with anyone. The only thing that might be at stake is whether the PC is noticed or not, but only in certain situations will there even be consequences for such a thing.

Research. Whether it takes the form of finding a book with the right information or asking around at the local pub to see if anyone has the answers the PC needs, the character tries to get intelligence on a subject. The player describes how they will learn what they need. This might be chatting people up, going to the bookstore, or sneaking into an exclusive library, so in some cases, there might be a bit more to it than just research. If the character is successful, the GM provides them with the information.

This approach is also a great way to handle how a character gains a new skill, spell, or secret. It handles the story reason for that advancement without taking up time at the table when the entire group is present.

There is a darkness that is darker than dark that, once seen, the human mind cannot forget. There is likewise a light that cannot be remembered.

The Thah are an organization of self-appointed—and sometimes not all that well liked—law enforcers. See The Path*, page 71.*

THE KEY
Goetic, page 52

Maker, page 42

Shopping. The PC needs new stuff—perhaps goods for their house, clothing, gear to prepare for an upcoming mission, or ephemera objects. Shopping might be as simple as the player informing the GM that they want to buy a few things for prices listed in the rules and the GM agreeing that the items are available. The GM, of course, might turn a simple trip to the market into a more complex scene, such as an encounter with a particular NPC, a pickpocket trying to ply their trade, or another event intruding on what would normally be mundane.

A short, simple mission. The most open-ended of the options, this type of side scene involves something that might be difficult but hopefully is straightforward. Breaking into someone's house to steal back an amulet they took from you earlier is a short, simple mission. Slipping a sleep potion into a guard's water glass so they oversleep and miss tomorrow's shift is a short, simple mission. Going to an NPC Maker to buy a specific amulet is a short, simple mission. The consequences of such a mission vary in both complexity and severity. Committing a crime could literally land the PC in the hands of the Thah. The character could end up in a fight, which means that—although it's unlikely—the PC could even die.

Short, simple missions are also appropriate opportunities for certain characters—namely Goetics and Makers—to use their order abilities without taking up the rest of the group's time. A Goetic, knowing the group will go into danger in the next session, summons a demonic bodyguard in a side scene. A Maker in the same group uses the Maker's Matrix to craft a defensive item for protection. Each of these character abilities can take ten or fifteen minutes to resolve. Just right for a side scene, but a long time to make the rest of the players wait at the table.

FLASHBACKS

A flashback is a special side scene that works just like any other, except that it happened in the past. We see flashbacks in fiction all the time. They're

usually used to flesh out the background of a character or explain something that happens in the present.

For example, the PCs are stymied by a magical barrier barring them from entering a library that they want to reach. One of the players could initiate a flashback between group sessions in which they were at the library once before and learned the secret of the barrier. If they succeed, at the start of the next session, that character knows the way past it.

This kind of side scene has its own challenges, of course. Since it already happened, it shouldn't contradict something that has been established to have happened after it. For example, if the PCs found a magical ceramic mask, a character shouldn't be able to smash that mask in a flashback. Fortunately, the surreal, magical nature of the setting makes it easy to compensate for such contradictory paradoxes. The mask in the example is magically repaired. A character (NPC or PC) killed in a flashback who should be alive in the present somehow returned to life. An NPC that a character met during a session and then encountered in a flashback must have had some kind of memory loss between the two meetings.

If the contradiction is out of the player's purview, the GM should make up whatever explanation they desire to compensate for it. They don't have to reveal the explanation to the player if the character wouldn't know. If the contradiction involves the player, the player and GM should work together to come up with an explanation that works and satisfies everyone. The explanation itself might further develop the character and make them a deeper, more interesting vislae.

Most of the time, however, flashbacks should be allowed only when contradictions are unlikely. A flashback might be a conversation with a mentor that occurred years earlier, a challenge the PC faced in the past (and determining whether they were successful further deepens the character), or some other character-defining moment. The point is to give the character more detail and depth.

The Book Without Pages *is a magical grimoire written on the intestines of a living cat.*

King Nine: *Once a Goetic in Satyrine, the selfproclaimed "King" Nine is a gangster at best and an ontological terrorist at worst. King Nine dwells in a palace of his own creation within a candle flame burning in a quiet monastery 20 miles (32 km) south of Satyrine, along with many guards and servants, his daughter, Avelia, and his kavail, Patral.*

A flashback can be the impetus for a new character arc. If, in a flashback, a Goetic summoned a being that got loose and caused a lot of hardship, the character in the present could adopt the Undo a Wrong character arc to finally hunt down that being. This can also work the other way around: a player who wants to take the Undo a Wrong arc for their character might decide to have a flashback in which they play through the scene where this happened. The point of the scene isn't whether or not the being got loose (that's a foregone conclusion), but to determine the other details involved.

Last, a flashback can literally be a fix. Let's say the character would have summoned a spirit to scout out a location ahead of time, but the player didn't think of it, and now there's no time in the story before the next session. Well, what if they did it yesterday? A generous GM can give a player a break and allow a flashback to cover things that probably should have happened.

FLASHFORWARDS

Flashforwards are very similar to flashbacks even though they are the opposite—scenes detailing something that happens in the future. The only reason you'd probably want to do a flashforward scene is if the most recent group session ended in such a way that there are no real opportunities for side scenes, but it's clear that there will be soon.

For example, say the group ended the last session in the Candleflame Palace of King Nine. They've got some unfinished business with him, and then they plan to return to Satyrine. It's clear that they'll finish what they're doing and be back in the city well before the end of the next session. The players can develop side scenes with the GM that will take place when they get back to Satyrine (studying new spells, talking to contacts, buying ephemera, and so on). Then, when they return to the city, they can insert those scenes into the narrative (the characters learn their spells, get information from their contacts, and have their new ephemera—and a bit less money) and keep things moving, probably

advancing the narrative's timeline by days or even weeks.

Of course, everyone must understand that flashforward scenes are contingent on things going as expected. If the PCs are thrown into King Nine's dungeon because they offended him, obviously they're not getting back to Satyrine just yet.

THE GM-INSTIGATED SIDE SCENE

There's another type of side scene, and that's one initiated by the GM rather than the player. A PC gets a mysterious visitor at their house. They receive a package or a letter that contains an interesting and unexpected development. A contact shows up and wants a favor from the PC for all the information they've provided.

In this case, the GM contacts the player to work out when and how they can play through a side scene. Sometimes the GM won't give any information at the outset, and other times, a teaser is in order ("A strange woman shows up at your door one rainy night. She bears an oddly shaped package in her arms. Are you available for a side scene?")

Once the side scene is arranged, the GM runs it as they would any other.

RESOLVING A SIDE SCENE

Development Mode doesn't involve actions and dice the way the other modes do. It's handled narratively. A general understanding of a character's nature and abilities is more important than the specifics. If a character is skilled in stealth, that's what's important. The player doesn't total up a bunch of modifiers to create a venture.

Where a determination of success or failure is needed, the GM turns a single Sooth card. It's not played on the Path of Suns, and the effects on magic are likely irrelevant. Instead, the GM either uses the interpretive meaning of the card to come up with a narrative resolution or uses the 0–9 number on the card to provide a quick answer, comparing it to an appropriate challenge (with the character's general skills and abilities broadly taken into account). Both

Elusive Sleep, page 90

the Monarch, page 116

Gerents are local leaders, and officially or unofficially administrators.

Don't worry about bene, vex, flux, or various modifiers to actions during a side scene. Very occasionally, GM shifts might be appropriate.

of these involve a lot of judgment calls by the GM. This is where the game becomes more art than science. The thing to remember is that a side scene is all about story. You're practically forgetting about game mechanics.

As an example, Fiona is a Goetic in a side scene where she talks to a superior in her order, looking for help and sponsorship so she can advance to the next degree. Fiona is charming and well spoken. The GM decides that the superior she's chosen to meet with is a curmudgeon, so the challenge is difficult—a 7. The Sooth card is drawn, and it's Elusive Sleep—a 6. Fiona's charm and persuasion should be more than enough to turn that into a successful resolution.

As another example, Riven is a vislae who wants to sneak into a bookshop after hours and steal a book he desperately needs but cannot afford. He's not particularly stealthy and his spells don't much apply to the situation. The GM turns the Monarch card. Uh oh. The meanings of that card include authority and judgment. The GM rules that Riven is spotted exiting the shop with the book and apprehended by the local gerent's agents. They let him go but say that he's got to pay for any damages and pay a fine for his transgression. He can't afford that, so they confiscate all his ephemera. (Bad decisions make good stories.)

As an aside, if a Goetic or Maker uses their summoning or crafting abilities in a side scene, you could make an exception and turn over multiple cards to reflect the standard mechanics of those special processes—both of which involve a series of actions. Or you could simply stick with the one-card system of side scenes and base the success or failure of the undertaking on that. Either way is viable.

SPECIAL CASE SIDE SCENES

Sometimes, two or more players want to be part of the same side scene. This works the same as with one player. Only one card is turned—not one card per player. Thus, the resolution is the success of the scene, not the success of the individuals involved. All involved must be present at the same time or involved in the same conversation to make it easy for the GM to resolve the scene.

Sometimes, the entire group will get together (in person or virtually) for a side scene. This might sound like a regular session, but it can be useful to discuss their next step in the overall story. Imagine a case where a regular group session was scheduled and everyone made it except the GM. The group could still meet and possibly undertake a short, simple mission or other action worthy of a side scene. They could then inform the GM of their conversation and desired action and, with the turn of a card, resolve the outcome after the fact.

REWARDS OF A SIDE SCENE

Most of the time, side scenes don't result in rewards other than the obvious. If a PC does research and is successful, they come away with the information they sought but no special Acumen, Joy, or Despair awards.

The exception is when a side scene is also a step in a character arc. This carries the stated awards for that step as normal.
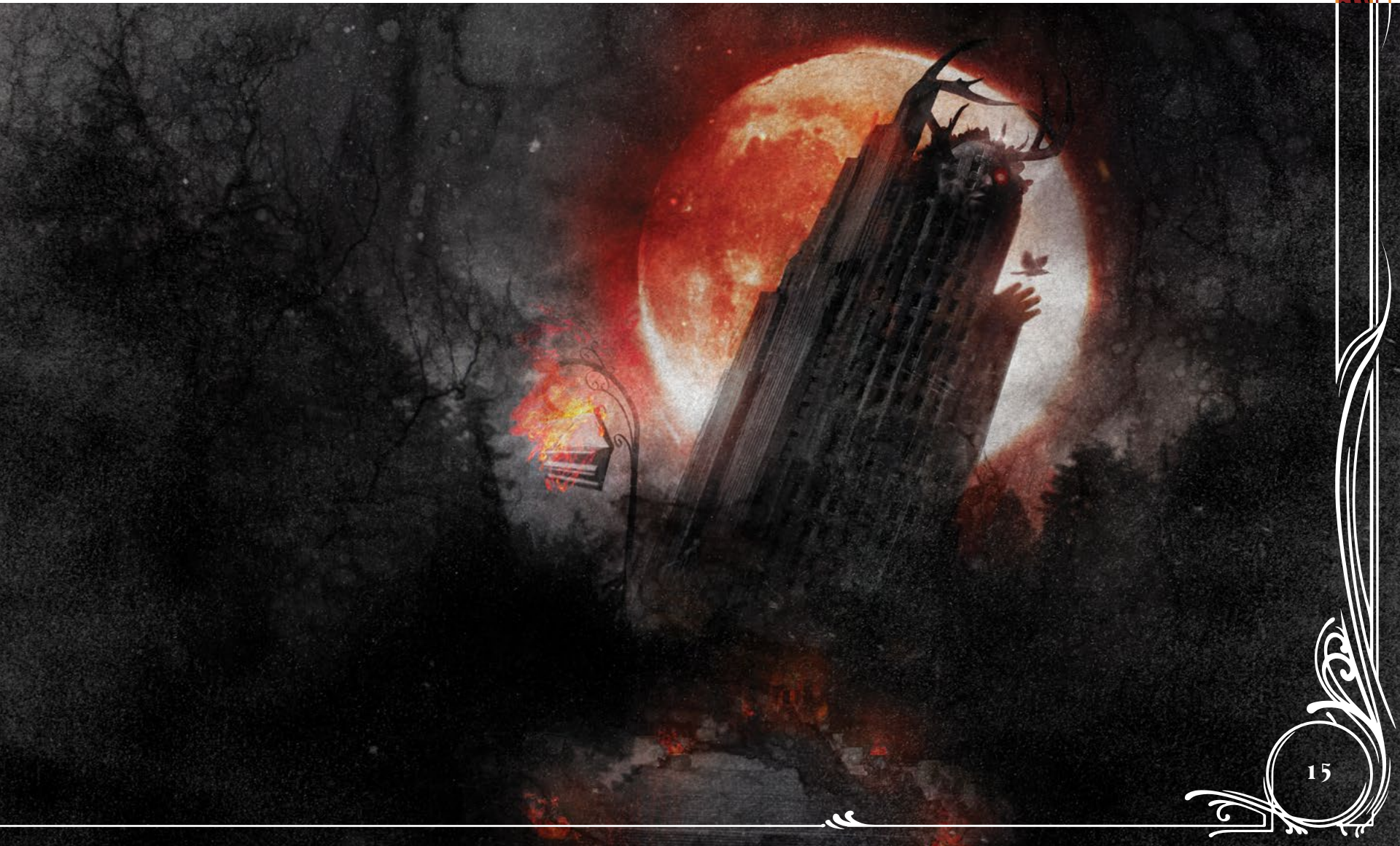
ACTIONS

With the words I conjure the spell
With my mind I see its new truth
With my heart I give it purpose
With my soul I grant it life

The stories of Invisible Sun are made up of actions. Actions are what characters do. They are driven by player and character motivations, desires, and goals.

An action is something a character does that is significant. Casting a spell. Running across the city square. Picking a lock. Drinking a potion. Reasoning with a murderer. Trying to figure out the puzzle box. Shooting a gun.

This means that insignificant things are not actions. Pulling something out of your pocket. Picking up a stone. Sitting down. Standing up. These are things your character can do, but they are part of another action.

PLAYING THE GAME IS ABOUT PLAYER ACTIONS

This is how you play Invisible Sun, regardless of what gameplay mode you use: players take actions, and the GM helps resolve those actions. With a few exceptions (like defensive actions), *only* players initiate character actions. Actions are proactive in this way.

In Action Mode, an action is typically one round. A round is a very game-mechanic-focused unit of time, equal to about five to ten seconds. Just long enough to do one significant thing. In Narrative Mode and Development Mode, it can be longer—a variable depending on the action and the circumstance.

When a player states their action, the GM determines how difficult it might be to accomplish. The challenge can range from "routine," which means there's no real chance for failure, to "impossible," which means there's no real chance for success. Between these two states is a range of numbers, normally 1 to 10. This is called the challenge. (Great skill or magic can broaden the scale to 1 to 13, or even 1 to 17, effectively pushing "impossible" farther and farther off, as advantages make more of the impossible possible.)

If the action at hand falls somewhere between routine and impossible (and thus has a challenge number attached to it), the player uses dice or Sooth Deck cards to determine success or failure. If playing in Development Mode, cards determine the outcome. In Development Mode, each side scene essentially has one action at its core. Since that is fully covered in the previous chapter, and since actions in Action Mode and Narrative Mode are more complex and dynamic, we will focus on those here, and the use of dice to resolve them.

Players roll a die to determine the success or failure of an action that is between routine and impossible. First, however, they determine if they have anything that will help them with the action. If they do, this is called creating a venture, and it will modify the challenge.

To determine the venture, the player totals all the levels of skill, tools, spells, and so on (if any) that they have in play. Then they decide whether to increase the venture further by spending bene from the applicable stat pool. The greater the venture, the more likely the character will succeed at the action.

The venture is subtracted from the challenge. If the result is 0 or less, the character succeeds automatically. If it is 1 to 9, that is the number they need to roll on the die to succeed. If the result is 10 or higher, no roll is necessary, because the action is impossible.

When a roll is called for, if the result is greater than or equal to the number needed, the character succeeds. If not, they fail.

However, when a character attempts an action, the player can also spend bene for effect. Doing so usually reflects great mastery of the action at hand, great luck, or sometimes just desperation. Regardless, such effects can increase the intensity of a success, add detailed specificity to a success, or mitigate failure.

DICE

Invisible Sun uses ten-sided dice, numbered 0 to 9. If you roll or exceed the level that the GM rated the challenge, you succeed.

Vislae can also use their Sortilege pool to roll additional dice. Thus, if a vislae needs to roll a 4 to succeed at an action, they can use magic to roll two dice rather than just one to try to get at least one 4 on the roll.

Sortilege represents a vislae's ability to draw on their inherent magical power to manipulate reality in small ways. Sortilege is not spellcasting—it is a far less precise (some would say crude) use of magic. It can get the job done, but it's not without its risks.

Spells and magical abilities that require a roll also add extra dice (usually one, but sometimes more) to help determine if you succeed. This is noted after the spell or ability's level. Starting characters can't use Sortilege on actions that already have additional dice, but it's possible to learn a secret called Advanced Sortilege that allows you to do just that.

You always know then, that if magic is involved, you're rolling multiple dice. And that if you're rolling multiple dice, magic is involved. However, if magic is involved in the challenge (for example, you're trying to break down a magically sealed door), you'll need

There is no die roll or other formalized method to determine order of play. Unless circumstances suggest otherwise (an ambush, for example), the PCs act before the NPCs. Players can act in whatever order they choose, and when everyone—PC and NPC alike—has taken a turn, the round is over.

THE WAY
Magical flux, page 13

THE KEY
Sortilege, page 27

Only the players roll dice in Invisible Sun. When a character acts, the player rolls dice for the action. When an NPC acts against a PC, the player rolls to defend.

THE WAY
Advanced Sortilege, page 85

multiple successes. So if the challenge is 4, you need to roll two 4s. That means that without magic, you can't break down the door, ever. Because without magic, you're rolling only one die.

Using magic, of course, runs a risk. On the first die (the mundane die), you just get success or failure. If you roll a 0 on the die you added thanks to a spell or Sortilege (the magic die), it's not just a failure—it's a magical flux. Magical flux results in strange, dangerous, and generally unwanted side effects. When rolling two dice, it's possible to get a magical flux and still succeed. For example, if you need one success but you use Sortilege to roll an extra die, you could succeed with the mundane die and roll a 0 on the magic die. This means that the action succeeds but still produces an unwanted magical flux effect.

It's possible, if you know the right secrets or cast powerful spells, that you'll roll more than just one magic die, so you're rolling three or four dice total.

When rolling three or four dice, it's possible to get multiple magical fluxes, which make the failure more potent and generally worse. A minor complication might be that your spell inadvertently sours milk nearby. A major complication might make it difficult to cast spells in that location for days, months, or even years to come. There are many complication results, and they run the gamut. They help make magic unpredictable and strange.

In the Black Cube, you get four dice. One is the mundane die, numbered 0 to 9. The others are magic dice, still numbered 0 to 9, but the 0s are replaced with the symbol (◉) that means magical flux.

CHALLENGES

Challenges are the threads that Invisible Sun weaves to create stories. We use dice to determine if the characters can overcome the challenges, knowing full well that both success and failure make for good stories.

Challenge is the number representing the difficulty of succeeding on an action. Determining

the challenge number is probably the main job of the GM, mechanically speaking. Two things to remember, although they've already been stated:

1. Challenges that are routine and challenges that are impossible aren't assigned numbers. Characters automatically succeed at routine challenges and have no chance at those that are impossible. Challenges, then, are actions for which the outcome remains unknown until a character attempts them.

2. Challenge is merely the GM's opening in the discussion between GM and player. The player responds with a venture, which is subtracted from the challenge to determine the number needed on the die roll.

There are no restrictions on what challenge a GM assigns, nor how big or small a modifier they might assess for circumstances. In the world of Invisible Sun, so many nigh-unbelievable things can happen that to put mechanical limitations on such things would be to do the setting an injustice.

SECRET OR OPEN CHALLENGES

GMs often state the challenge when a player declares their intended action. The player calculates their venture and subtracts it aloud from the challenge, so that they (and everyone else paying attention) know precisely what number they need to roll on the die. No need for the GM to confirm success or failure—the die result speaks for itself.

However, while we refer to the challenge as the GM's opening in the discussion, GMs are free to keep the actual challenge a secret. In this case, they hear the venture from the player, silently subtract it from the challenge, and then ask for a roll. The player announces the result of the roll, and the GM silently compares that to the number in their head. Then they announce to the player whether the roll was successful or not.

Keeping the challenge a secret reduces some of the mechanical feel of the game and keeps the players' actions more grounded in story than in math. But some players prefer to know the math, so the GM should do what's best for the game, perhaps even switching methods from player to player.

DETERMINING CHALLENGE

Challenge is often very easy to determine because you can just use the level of the NPC, object, or whatever else is involved. Trying to pick a level 5 lock? Challenge 5. Sneaking past a level 3 watchdog? Challenge 3. Casting a spell on a level 4 thoughtform? Challenge 4.

The only caveat to this simple rule is that sometimes circumstances or specific modifications to NPCs alter the challenge. The level is still the starting point, but, for example, a level 4 NPC might have +3 defenses, so striking them in combat or affecting them with spells is challenge 7. Climbing a wall might be a challenge of 5, but the high winds add +1 to make it a challenge of 6.

Unfavorable circumstances usually add no more than 1 or 2 to the challenge. Favorable circumstances add to the venture (see below).

When there are no levels involved, determining a challenge requires a bit more consideration, but it is still fairly easy. For the vast majority of actions, if it's something that's possible for a normal person to do, rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the hardest.

For example, attempting a standing long jump across a gap of 1 foot is challenge 1. A standing long jump of 10 feet is challenge 10. But a typical person can't leap farther than 6 or 7 feet under normal circumstances. Does that mean that each foot of distance equals +1 to the challenge? Seems close enough to say yes.

And in fact, it's that "close enough" that GMs would do well to remember. Don't agonize over challenges. Set a number and keep the game moving. Rating something on a scale of 1 to 10 is something we're all fairly used to doing.

If a character is trying to swim in a raging river, you might think, "Well, that's a very tough swim, but I can imagine even harder swims (swimming in a tidal wave, perhaps), so I'll call it challenge 7." Later, the same character is swimming in a pool with a strong current. Not routine, but not as hard as in that river. So you rate it challenge 5.

That's all there is to it.

CHALLENGES ABOVE 10

Challenges 11, 12, and 13 are for things that a normal person cannot do, but that someone with extensive training and talent, or someone with extraordinary tools or circumstances (or both), can possibly achieve.

This creates a new range, of 1–13, for things that are possible for mortals to do. And 13 is the number of mortality. It is the number of the Grey Sun of the Nightside Path.

Obviously, you can't get to numbers above 9 without some kind of venture—skills, tools, bene, spells, and so on (or a combination thereof). So setting a challenge in that range means the PCs can't succeed at the associated action without some kind of advantage, no matter what they roll.

To keep with the standing long jump example, Olympic-level athletes can jump 10 to 12 feet. That would be challenge 12. Olympic athletes certainly fall into the range of "someone with extensive training and talent." You can imagine that they have 3 or even 4 levels in jumping, so if they were a character, they would still need to roll well (and probably use some bene), but for them, it's achievable. For someone with no skill, it's simply not. So the system works.

Of course, challenges go beyond 13 in Invisible Sun, because the game involves things that go well beyond even the highest normal human limits. Challenges go to a top end of 17.

The number 17 is the very limit of the suns, the final number of the Nightside Path, and the number of known suns (8) plus the number of actual suns (9). Among other things, it is the number of immortality and divinity.

Thus, a powerful royal demon might be level 11, with +5 defenses. Trying to cast a spell on them would be a challenge of 16. Wresting free of bonds made of magical energy while suspended over a pool of lava as beings of living fire buffet you with burning wings might be challenge 15—more or less unthinkable without magical assistance.

It is possible—but very rare—for a challenge to go higher than 17. A level 15 NPC might have special skills or circumstances that add +3 or higher to their effective level. Powerful beings can be . . . very powerful.

The reason that players calculate a venture and subtract it from the challenge rather than just add those numbers to the die roll (which would mathematically be the same) is that eventually, players end up rolling multiple dice most of the time. Rather than adding a number to two or more die rolls each time, it's easier to make the calculation once and then simply roll and look for a given number. Try it. You'll find that it's quicker and less mentally taxing to roll three dice and look for a number than to roll three dice, add a number to each result, and compare those totals to a target. Particularly as ventures can easily get to be 10 or higher.

SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES

Challenge	Description
0	Routine; never requires a die roll.
1–10	Challenge range for actions possible by a typical unskilled person.
11–13	Challenge range for actions impossible for a normal person, but possible for a highly skilled person or someone with special advantages (an inhuman nature, a fantastically designed tool, and so on).
14–17	Challenge range for actions impossible for a normal person, but possible through use of magic. These are challenges in the realm of powerful magical beings and even gods.

REQUIRING MULTIPLE SUCCESSES

When certain magical effects get involved, they bend reality in unexpected ways. In these cases, the GM might require a player to achieve multiple successes. This means that although the challenge might be 6, you need two 6s to succeed. Getting two 6s is impossible on one die. You need to roll at least two dice. So you need some kind of magical aid, because the only way to get an additional die is with magic.

For example, a player attempting to climb and jump across a series of rocks and logs floating in midair to get to a high window finds that one wrong step sends the rock or log spinning away. This isn't just a tricky physical challenge—magic is actively working against them. There's magic involved, so the player must achieve two successes.

Because this is still one action, the venture applies to all the rolls. In other words, once the calculation of the final challenge is made, all the die rolls are looking for the same number.

This means that resisting the effects of an unwanted spell requires two successes. Dodging a magical bolt of fire requires two successes.

Withstanding a magical disease requires two successes.

Here are more examples that require multiple successes:

+ Breaking down a magically barred door
+ Finding a magically shielded, invisible button on a wall
+ Picking a magically enhanced lock
+ Running up a magically protected staircase
+ Reading a magically encrypted book
+ Intimidating a magically resilient NPC
+ Locating an invisible foe moving around the room
+ Affecting a magically warded NPC with a spell
+ Dodging a magically created explosion of fire

Sometimes, a GM will rule that, despite the involvement of magic, multiple successes are not required. For example, breaking a ceramic vase made by magic is not harder than breaking one made conventionally. Grabbing a ball that's levitating in the air is not necessarily harder than grabbing a ball that's sitting on a shelf (assuming both remain

NPCs do not roll for actions, so they do not need multiple successes when facing magic. Instead, a PC's magical actions always allow them to roll multiple dice to affect an NPC.

THE WAY
Sensitivity, page 92
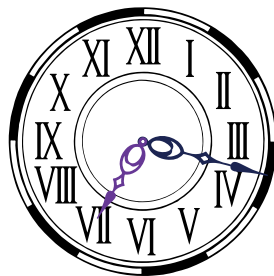
still). Dodging a knife hurled by psychokinesis is probably not inherently harder than dodging a knife thrown normally (although depending on the magic involved, this might not be true). In other words, logic must prevail. Multiple successes exist in the game to reflect the mysterious qualities of magic, and that's how and why they should be applied.

Magic sometimes negates the need for multiple successes. Let's say an invisible ghost is hiding in the room. Normally, finding it would require multiple successes. But you have an ability that allows you to see ghosts, such as the Sensitivity secret. Now, finding it requires only one success for you.

Finally, in situations involving magic, mundane circumstances sometimes take away the need for multiple successes. Say you're looking for that invisible ghost hiding in the room, but you don't have Sensitivity. Normally, finding it would require multiple successes. But it jostles a table with plates and glasses on it, revealing itself. The GM should rule that—at least in that moment—only one success is needed.

THE VENTURE

Players tally up all the modifiers they can for an action to create a venture. The venture is subtracted from the challenge, so the higher the venture, the easier it is to succeed. When a spell, item, ability, or something else adds a bonus (sometimes called easing the action), this is a bonus to the venture. Likewise, when an effect gives a penalty (sometimes called hindering the action), this applies to the venture too.

The following go into a venture:

Skills: Players can add the levels of a character's appropriate skill to the venture.

Bene: Players can spend bene from their stat pools to add to the venture for most actions. Under normal circumstances, a character cannot spend more than 1 bene in this way on their action. (The secret Expansive Endeavor allows vislae to break that limit.)

Tools: Players add the level of a tool to the venture. Unless otherwise noted, the level of a simple tool is 1. This includes weapons when making an attack, so a level 2 rapier adds +2 to the venture of a rapier attack.

Circumstances: This is typically the GM's purview, but favorable circumstances can add to the venture. For example, hiding in a dark room is easier than hiding in a brightly lit place. Most of the time, circumstances add +1, but extremely favorable circumstances add +2.

Unfavorable circumstances can add to the challenge as well. In either case, make sure you don't apply a circumstance to both venture and challenge.

MAGIC IS ALWAYS RISKY

There is a special effect when you roll a ☉ on a magic die. It triggers magical flux. Thus, each time you roll an extra die, there's a 10% chance that something will go unexpectedly.

Since NPCs don't have a venture, apply bonuses and penalties directly to their level.

THE KEY

THE WAY

Adding the level of a spell means that higher-level spells are always more likely to work than lower-level spells.

Typically, a modification known to the player modifies the venture, but one that is unknown to the player modifies the challenge.

If you're using regular d10s as magic dice, the 0 signifies a magical flux.

Magical Effects: As with a tool or weapon, you add the level of a spell, forte ability, or other magical effect to the venture.

Further, sometimes a spell or effect adds to the venture of subsequent actions. In other words, a level 3 Watchman Watching spell gives you +1 to Dodge actions. You cast the spell on yourself (which never requires a roll), so you can ignore the fact that it is level 3 when you are dodging and instead look at the fact that it adds +1 to all such actions while it is in effect.

Any time an ability says that you get a certain modifier to an action, what it means is that you modify the venture. So a spell that gives you +2 to climbing actions means that when you attempt to climb something, you add +2 to the venture.

Hidden Knowledge: If a player wishes, 1 point of the character's Hidden Knowledge score can be sacrificed toward an action. Usually, the player provides a very brief explanation of what sort of rare bit of lore or gossip they are using to improve this particular action.

USING BENE FOR EFFECT

Rather than using their bene to add to their venture, players can spend bene to modify the *results* of the action, if they are successful. The limit of 1 bene at a time (without the proper secret) still applies. In other words, a character can use a bene for success or for effect, but not for both.

You can do things like increase the damage of an attack or gain a unique result that goes beyond the realm of success or failure. For example, a vislae with a pistol wants to shoot a thief that just grabbed a bronze idol from them and is running away. Instead of making a normal attack, the vislae shoots at the idol, hoping to knock it out of the thief's hand.

There are four levels of effect that a character can achieve by using bene in this way. Without the secret Expansive Endeavor, a character can only reach effect level 1, but even a character with the ability to spend many bene can spend only a maximum of 4 for effect.

EFFECT LEVEL 1

Demoralize or disrupt one character: One (presumably unfriendly) character of your choosing that is nearby and is aware of your action is disheartened by your success. Alternatively, your action knocks them off balance, dazes them, or otherwise physically disrupts or hinders them. In either case, their next action suffers a –1 penalty.

Inflict more damage: You inflict +2 damage with your successful attack. This is true whether it is a mundane attack or a magical one.

Damage, page 30

Impress one character: One character of your choosing that is nearby and is aware of your action is so impressed by your success that any interaction with them adds +1 to the venture.

Venture, page 22

Set up your next attempt: You put yourself in a good position, mentally or physically, so that if you attempt the same action in the next round, you add +2 to the venture.

Just simply excel: Although there's no mechanical effect, you succeed at the action with flourish, speed, grace, and aplomb.

EFFECT LEVEL 2

Inspire one character: One (presumably friendly) character of your choosing that is nearby and is aware of your action is so inspired by your success that their next action gains +1.

Change the environment: This is a broad effect, but it involves causing one character of your choosing to move a close distance, cause a closed door to open (or vice versa), knock over an unsecured object, slice through a rope holding a chandelier, and so on. You accomplish these things by maneuvering well and acting quickly.

Go farther: As a part of an action that involves moving (like running, jumping, swimming, and so on), you move an additional short distance or a distance that seems reasonable under the circumstances.

Strike precisely: You aim for a specific spot when you make an attack. You might aim for a foe's weapon to disarm them, or aim for a body part with the hopes of crippling it. How this precision strike

affects the target depends on the target and the circumstances.

Inflict more damage: You inflict +4 damage with your successful attack. This is true whether it is a mundane attack or a magical one.

Knock one character down: When you attack, you do so with such power or precision that the foe is knocked to the ground in addition to suffering damage.

EFFECT LEVEL 3

All that plus moving: You accomplish your action so quickly that at the end you can move a short distance as a part of your action.

Inspire all nearby friendly characters: Nearby friendly characters aware of your action are so inspired by your success that their next action gains +1.

Demoralize all nearby unfriendly characters: Nearby unfriendly characters aware of your action are so disheartened by your success that their next action suffers –1.

Inflict more damage: You inflict +6 damage with your successful attack. This is true whether it is a mundane attack or a magical one.

Impress all nearby characters: All characters nearby and aware of your action are so impressed by your success that any interaction with them gains +1 to the venture.

Stun one character: When you attack, you do so with such power or precision that the foe loses their next action.

EFFECT LEVEL 4

Gain information: You do something so well that you learn something. This is a broad effect, and it might simply mean that when you search an object, you learn something about who made it. Other examples follow.

When you attack a foe, you notice that something they do reveals a weakness that you can exploit later.

In a conversation, you read between the lines of what the other person is saying to learn something they are trying to keep secret.

This might even be used in combat to get an opponent to reveal information through the use of witty repartee.

Impair one character: When you attack, you do so with such power or precision that the foe suffers a –2 penalty that is ongoing until they recover from the wound.

Frighten one character: One (presumably unfriendly) character of your choosing that is nearby and is aware of your action is so demoralized by your success that they surrender, flee, give in, or whatever else might be appropriate to the situation.

Inflict more damage: You inflict +8 damage with your successful attack. This is true whether it is a mundane attack or a magical one.

The heartlessness of the mirror is no guiding light.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE OPTIONS

Sometimes, success or failure is a yes/no proposition. You either jump over the hole or you don't. But sometimes, the GM will decide that circumstances warrant a more graduated result.

PARTIAL SUCCESS

Sometimes, a PC will fail a roll, but circumstances suggest that there could be a partial success. You don't accomplish exactly what you set out to do, but you don't achieve absolutely nothing, either. If you're talking with a gerent, you might not convince them to give you the key to the vault, but that failed roll could mean that your words still softened them up a bit. They might, for example, offer a compromise.

If you used a divination to learn information with a challenge of 8 but you roll a 6, you fail, but you still learn a level 6 fact. So if you're trying to find a person in hiding, you don't find their current, secret

location, but you learn where lots of people saw them yesterday.

Partial success examples include the following.

Interaction: You don't persuade the person you're talking to, but they become somewhat more welcoming or friendly to you.

Knowledge: The character doesn't know the answer, but they do know something.

Perception: The character doesn't find the thing they're looking for, but they find a clue. For example, they don't find the secret panel, but they do find some odd scrapes in the wood.

Combat: The character misses their target, but just barely. The graze doesn't inflict damage, but it gets the target's attention, and maybe even scares them somewhat.

Spellcasting: The character's spell affects its target for only a brief second. Your attempts to turn your foe into a newt fail, but you're so close that they turn green and vaguely amphibian for just a second.

SUCCESS, BUT...

Occasionally, the GM might rule that your failure is actually a success, but with immediate and not entirely positive ramifications. For example, a thief snatches a vial that contains a potent potion. You reach out to grab them, but you roll poorly. The GM says that you did grab them, but with such force that the vial falls from their hand and is dropping to the floor. Will anyone catch it before it shatters?

You're talking to a vendor in the market and trying to persuade them with kind words to give you a discount. Your die roll indicates failure, but the GM says that the vendor does offer a discount. However, you quickly discover that they misconstrued your words and thought you were flirting. Now they are very interested in you.

CATASTROPHIC FAILURE OR REMARKABLE SUCCESS

In **Invisible** Sun, there are no special rolls. You don't get a bonus for rolling a 9 or penalties for rolling a 0 (except for flux on a magic die, but even that doesn't

necessarily mean the PC did anything wrong or the action fails). Catastrophic failure and remarkable success are instead the hallmarks of a GM shift, where the GM changes a success into a remarkable result or a simple failure into a catastrophic one. As with any GM shift, this results in the character in question being awarded 1 Despair or 1 Joy.

For example, the PC throws a knife at a foe trying to grab their friend. Not only do they hit, but the knife strikes the foe's outstretched hand and pins it to the nearby wall. A remarkable success. Or the PC throws the knife and not only misses the foe but strikes their friend. A catastrophic failure.

Not every action has the potential to be a catastrophic failure or remarkable success.

NPC ACTIONS

NPCs do not roll dice. The players always roll dice in **Invisible** Sun. When a PC acts, the player rolls to determine success or failure. When an NPC acts against a PC, the player rolls to defend.

NPC MODIFICATIONS

Although they are discussed in greater detail in *The Path*, NPCs often have modifications on certain actions. An intelligent level 4 NPC might have a +2 to interactions, meaning that an attempt to fool them would have a challenge of 6, not 4. A nimble level 5 NPC with something useful to block attacks might have a Dodge defense of +3, making the challenge to strike them in combat an 8. (Most NPCs that have the freedom to act and an awareness of an attack have at least +1 Dodge defense.) A level 6 NPC with powerful wards against magic might be a challenge 10 to affect with spells.

If an NPC gains a bene or a vex, this is a +1 bonus or –1 penalty to the NPC's level, respectively. The vex applies to only one action for the NPC, but a scourge is a penalty that doesn't go away.

When a spell effect bestows a –1 penalty on a PC, that penalty applies to the venture. But for an NPC, the –1 penalty applies to the NPC's level, particularly in regard to the challenge the NPC presents to a PC.

NPCs AND MULTIPLE SUCCESSES

Since NPCs don't make rolls, they can't get multiple successes, so this is not a consideration for them. Instead, if an NPC faces a challenge that requires multiple successes, they must have some kind of magic to aid them (just like a PC), and the NPC suffers a penalty of –3 per additional success required. So if a level 7 NPC attempts to deal with a door affected by a Sealed Door spell, treat the NPC as level 4 (7 minus 3) to open it, but it's only possible if they've got some kind of magic on their side.

NPCs ACTING WITH NO PC INVOLVED

When an NPC takes an action that does not involve a PC, the GM determines the outcome, perhaps comparing the NPC's level to the challenge for reference.

That means, in general, a level 4 NPC can overcome any challenge of 4 or less, although circumstances (and, most important, the needs of the story) can modify this greatly.

As a very general guideline, when there is no PC involved, the GM should feel free to add anywhere from +1 to +4 to a motivated NPC's level to determine the maximum challenge they can overcome. This means that if a level 4 NPC is shooting at another level 4 NPC, but the defender has +2 Dodge, the attacker will miss most of the time, but it's possible for them to hit. Again, this adjudication should come from the GM based on the circumstances and the needs of the story.

PCs INSTIGATING BUT NOT CONTROLLING AN EVENT

Sometimes a PC action will put something into play, but no effort on the PC's part makes a difference.

For example, if a PC puts poison in a NPC's drink, the GM compares the level of the poison to the level of the NPC. If the poison is greater, the NPC is poisoned. This pertains to any situation where the skill or effort of a PC has no bearing on the outcome. Even if the PC initiated the action, the

Sealed Door, see Spell Deck

The GM determines which NPCs are important. A simple rule of thumb: if it seems worth the trouble of tracking recovery actions for a particular NPC, that NPC is important.

PC has no effect on the result. In other words, no matter how smart or powerful the PC is, they can't make the poison in the drink more effective once it's there.

Likewise, if a PC casts a potent spell that causes an earthquake and makes a building collapse on a group of NPCs, the NPCs involved cope with a challenge that has nothing to do with the PC or the spell. The collapsing building is an independent challenge given a level by the GM, and that challenge is compared to the NPCs' levels to determine if they get caught in the collapse. There's no way for the PC to aim or finesse the collapsing building, and a more powerful spell doesn't cause the building to collapse in a different way. It collapses or it doesn't.

RECOVERY ACTIONS

NPCs don't have rest actions like PCs, but important NPCs do have a very similar action called recovery. They can use a recovery action to:

+ Remove an unwanted condition that does not have a depletion (usually one that is removed by rests)
+ Reset the number of spells they can cast (if a vislae)
+ Remove/heal all Injuries
+ Remove/heal 1 Wound
+ Gain a +3 bonus to their next action

An NPC can never use a recovery action more than once in an encounter.

ONGOING ACTIONS

Sometimes a PC wants to undertake an action that is bigger than a "normal" action such as sneaking past a guard or deciphering an inscription. A bigger action might be increasing the success of a business, deciphering and reading a coded journal, training a beast, or building a piece of furniture.

It's tempting to handle this as a series of many actions, with many die rolls and so on, and that's fine. But designating the larger action as an "ongoing action" simplifies the process and allows

the GM to better manage the time and effort taken. An ongoing action can go on in the background of the rest of the game, so that between more focused actions, a character could be renovating his house or training an apprentice.

First, the GM determines how long the ongoing action will take. This is very likely a range of times, such as two to four weeks or three to four months, but it's best to start with the lowest estimate. Then the GM determines how many successful rolls are needed to complete the action. This is arbitrary, but in general, the more complex the action, the more rolls are involved. Usually, a GM should call for three to five rolls.

The lowest estimate of time is then divided by the number of successful rolls, and that defines the time increment. So if the action might take three months, and the PC must make three rolls, each represents a month.

At each time increment, the GM asks the player to make a progress roll. Each successful progress roll indicates that the action is closer to successful completion. Failure is a setback equal to one time increment and means that an additional roll must be attempted. So if the second roll of that three-month project indicates failure, it's now a four-month project.

Ongoing actions often involve expenses—materials for crafting, library fees, books, supplies for research, and so on. The GM should determine a total cost and divide it by the time increment. Failure, then, means not only more time, but more cost.

RETRYING AN ACTION AND GETTING ASSISTANCE

If you fail at an action, you can usually retry it. In Action Mode, you can simply try again in the next round with no penalty for doing so. In a fight, you can attack someone you tried to attack in the last round, or you can try to push open a heavy door again.

In Narrative Mode, where time is not an issue and you could keep rolling and rerolling all day, retrying

The GM is the final arbiter of task resolution of any kind. Not because they are more important or even any kind of authority figure, but because someone's got to make sure the mechanics don't get in the way of the story and things keep moving at a nice pace. It's much more a responsibility than a privilege. Rules disputes are entirely counter to the reason why anyone would play this game.

an action has a cost. It costs 1 bene from the appropriate pool to retry an action, and this bene does not modify your venture.

The only time this isn't true is when circumstances dictate that retrying isn't possible. If you try to carefully catch a crystal vase that your friend gently tosses to you and you fail, dropping it to the ground where it shatters, you obviously can't retry.

You can also get help on an action. If one character helps another character, the acting PC gains +1 to their venture. This requires both characters to act toward the same goal. So, in Action Mode, both characters use their action in a given round to accomplish one thing. A character could help another decipher a manuscript, climb up to a ledge, or attack a foe.

A particularly skilled character can help even more. If a character has levels in a skill that pertains to the action, they add their skill level if it is greater than 1. So either a helping character adds +1 or they add their skill level, whichever is greater.

As with retries, helping is limited by circumstance. Only one character can pick a lock, for example.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Although all actions are treated the same and handled in the same way, a few actions deserve special attention.

INTERACTION

Interacting with NPCs, whether it be asking around for information, trying to intimidate a street urchin, or attempting to fast-talk your way past a guard, is an action. Interaction takes place in Narrative Mode, so the time the action takes is variable. It takes as long as a conversation logically takes.

Players should make it clear what they are saying. If a player isn't great at improvisational or extemporaneous speaking, have them give the gist of what they want to say.

TIME AND DISTANCE

In Action Mode, the group should take careful consideration to track time in rounds. Rounds are useful because everyone gets to take a single action in a round. When everyone's acted, the round is over. Each round represents about five to ten seconds. If something would take longer than that, it requires multiple rounds.

Time in Narrative Mode and Development Mode is far more fluid and less precise. Rarely is it useful to track anything in minutes. Usually, tracking how many hours pass is useful only if effect depletions are in play.

Keeping track of days is always useful. The sun rising and setting are important magical moments, as all power flows through the sun(s).

In Invisible Sun, distances are divided into four categories.

Close: Anything close enough to touch (or touch after taking a few steps) is close. Two things next to each other are close, even if they're not touching. Very loosely speaking, this range extends up to about 10 feet (3 m). Conversationally, this might be referred to as "point-blank range." Something that affects an area that encompasses this distance, more or less, is said to affect a **small area**.

Near: Something you could reach fairly quickly is near. Often referred to as "nearby" or "short range," it represents a distance of 10 to 50 feet (3 to 15 m). Something that affects an area a short distance in diameter is said to affect a **medium area**.

Far: Something you can see clearly but not reach quickly is far. Commonly referred to as "far away" or "long range," this is a distance of about 50 to 100 feet (15 to 30 m). Something that affects an area a long distance in diameter is said to affect a **large area**.

Very Far: Something you can see but not clearly is very far. Called "very far away" or "very long range" at times, this is anything from about 100 to 500 feet (30 to 150 m). Something that affects an area a very long distance in diameter is said to affect a **very large area**.

In an interaction encounter, players can use bene from their Interaction pool. Use the NPC's level as the challenge. This is based heavily on the circumstance. An NPC fighting for their life is a lot less likely to react well to even a particularly persuasive speech.

In some cases, GMs should consider not even asking for a roll. If a player says just the right thing, they should be rewarded for it (if they don't, however, they shouldn't necessarily be punished— that's where the roll comes in).

Sometimes, multiple successful actions are needed to reach the desired goal. Consider a wary NPC traveler making their way down the road at night. If a PC wants to get information from them, first they might have to convince the NPC that they're not a threat (first action). Then they might have to convince the NPC to stay on the road to chat (second action). Finally, they attempt a third action to ask the questions they are really interested in.

A good interaction encounter should be as interesting and dynamic as a combat encounter.

THE KEY
Depletion, page 74

MOVEMENT

In Action Mode, a normal character can move to any nearby location as an action. They can move to something close as part of another action. So, for example, a character can use their entire action to run a short distance or they can move a close distance and cast a spell.

If a movement action requires a roll, players can use bene from their Movement pool. Walking or running is almost always routine. Only when moving over difficult or dangerous terrain in Action Mode should anyone have to make a roll for moving.

Movement that takes another form (such as climbing, jumping, or swimming) might necessitate die rolls more often. Usually, activities like these cut the distance of the character's movement in half, but this varies by circumstances.

In Narrative Mode, it's usually far less important to track how far the PCs move incrementally and far more important to simply determine how long

it takes to get where they're going. GMs generally describe movement broadly. "It takes about an hour to walk there." "You travel all day and get about halfway to the city."

Normal characters walking on a road travel about 4 miles (6 km) per hour. Characters in a vehicle or on a mount rely on the vehicle or mount's speed, obviously.

DEFENSE

There are three kinds of defense actions. Defense actions are different from other actions because they are initiated by the GM, not by a player.

Dodge Defense: Used when a character is attacked physically. A character takes a Dodge defense action when someone tries to stab them, shoot them, run them over with a car, or cast a spell that flings a bolt of magical fire at them. It's also used to dodge explosions, cave-ins, rolling boulders, stampeding herds, or other things characters would like to get away from. If a character wants to use a bene, it should come from their Movement pool.

Resist Defense: Used when a character's mind is targeted by an effect. You don't dodge mind control, you resist it. This is probably the most common defense against magic. If a character wants to use a bene, it should come from their Intellect pool. As magical effects almost always require two successes, wise vislae use their Sortilege when making a Resist defense roll.

Withstand Defense: Used when a character's body or overall health is targeted by an effect. You don't dodge a disease, nor do you resist it. You withstand it. This is used for effects that transform a character in unwanted ways, for infections and disease, for poison and venom, and for effects that outright destroy a character's physical form in part or in whole. If a character wants to use a bene, it should come from their Physicality pool.
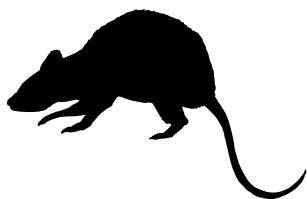
ATTACKS

If you attempt to punch, stab, or shoot someone, it's an attack. If you try to blast them with a spell that involves a physical manifestation that affects a target physically—such as a blast of fire or a conjured spear made of ice—that's an attack too.

If a character wants to use a bene on an attack, it should come from their Accuracy pool.

Attacks always inflict points of damage, and the amount of the damage is based on the specific attack. Weapon attacks are based on the type of weapon (light inflict 2 points, medium inflict 4 points, and heavy inflict 6 points). Magical effects generally inflict damage based on their level. As a general rule, NPCs ignore weapon type and spell level and simply inflict damage equal to their own level.

Sometimes, an attack has an additional effect. A poisoned dagger is an attack that inflicts 2 points of damage (a dagger is a light weapon) but also might poison the person stabbed. If the victim is a PC, two defense rolls might be called for—one to dodge the dagger attack, and one to withstand the poison if the dagger hits (the challenge of the latter is based on the level of the poison, not the attacker). If the attacker is a PC, the attacker makes an attack roll with the dagger. On a hit, the GM compares the poison's level to the NPC's level. If the poison is greater, it poisons the NPC.

Generally speaking, circumstances that the GM feels are significant—weather, lighting, distance, movement, weird gravity, and so on—either modify the challenge by 1 or 2 or modify the venture by 1 or 2, depending on whether they are detrimental or beneficial to the action.

Combat can be quite deadly, particularly against powerful foes who, if they hit, might inflict enough damage to cause 2 Wounds with one attack.

If an effect created by an NPC has no target—such as a spell that changes the temperature, or one that creates a wall of magical energy—or if the affected target doesn't want the effect to end, the spell lasts as long as seems appropriate to the situation. And, unless the effect is permanent, spells and such never last longer than the next sunrise.

GENERAL AID

If a character uses their action to give aid to another character, they can heal 1 Injury, wake them from sleep or unconsciousness (if possible), or get them on their feet. Unless the helping character has a first aid kit or similar medical supplies, they can't use further actions to heal more Injuries on the same character in the same encounter.

SPELLS AND OTHER ABILITIES

Spells and most other magical abilities, like forte abilities, are single actions. They are explained in complete detail in *The Way*.

DAMAGE AND HEALTH

When a character is successfully attacked, the attack inflicts damage. Points of damage that affect a character are recorded as Injuries.

If a character sustains 3 Injuries, those Injuries become 1 Wound. All characters can sustain 3 Wounds before dying. On each character tome in the Black Cube, Injuries and Wounds are represented by boxes that a player checks off as they are sustained. When you've filled in all the Injury boxes, you get a Wound, and you start tracking Injuries again.

When a character sustains 1 Wound, they gain a scourge in every Certes stat pool. When they sustain 2 Wounds, they gain 2 scourges in every Certes stat pool. When they sustain 3 Wounds, they are dead.

A character's Armor, whether from protective garments, spells, or some other source, reduces damage on a point-by-point basis. So 2 points of Armor block 2 points of damage. Points of damage that get through Armor are sustained by a character and become Injuries.

When a character takes damage, they can use 1 bene from their Physicality pool to negate a Wound. If a character has the Expansive Endeavor secret, they can spend multiple bene from their Physicality pool to negate multiple Wounds. This reflects that tougher characters (those with more Physicality) can sustain more damage than those who aren't so

FERAL SHEPHERD

tough. Characters can do this only as the damage comes in. Once damage is sustained, a character cannot use Physicality to negate a Wound. (See Recovering and Healing, below.)

Example: A vampire attacks Schaelee, a Weaver. Schaelee has woven a magical effect that gives her 1 point of Armor. The vampire inflicts 5 damage. Schaelee's Armor reduces that to 4 points. The first 3 points become a Wound, and the fourth an Injury. Schaelee spends 1 bene from her Physicality pool and negates the Wound, so she suffers only 1 Injury from the vampire's attack. Then the vampire's thrall attacks her with a huge maul that strikes for 6 damage. Her Armor reduces it to 5 damage, which becomes 1 Wound and 2 Injuries. Since she already has 1 Injury, her Injuries add up to another Wound—she now has 2 Wounds. She's got 1 more bene in Physicality and she uses it to negate 1 Wound, but that leaves her with no Physicality and 1 Wound (and no Injuries). She's at –1 on all her Certes actions now, and she's probably in trouble.

A process or effect that heals Injuries has no effect on Wounds or Anguish. Once a Wound or an Anguish is sustained, they must be healed in their own ways.

DAMAGE FROM SOURCES OTHER THAN ATTACKS

Sometimes a character sustains damage from a fall, from being on fire, or from some other source. When possible, use the level of the damaging source as the amount of damage. So a level 4 fire inflicts 4 damage. A character caught in the gears of a level 3 machine sustains 3 damage. And so on.

If there's no level to use, compare the damage inflicted to the weapon types. Is the damaging thing more like being sliced by a knife (2 points of damage) or being smashed by a giant hammer (6 points of damage)?

A fall typically inflicts 1 point of damage per 5 feet (1.5 m) of the fall.

Sometimes conditions inflict damage over time. Being caught in a blizzard might inflict 1 damage per hour. So might trekking across a horrible, hot desert.

Ultimately, this is all up to the GM and what best suits the story.

ANGUISH

Mental effects and magical attacks that harm the mind inflict damage, but such Injuries do not become Wounds, they become Anguish. Anguish works much like Wounds. Suffering 1 Anguish means a character gains a scourge in all Qualia pools. Suffering 3 Anguish results in long-term catatonia, madness, utter suggestibility, or even death, depending on circumstances.

A character can use bene from their Intellect pool to negate 1 Anguish just like they can use bene from Physicality to negate 1 Wound. A character cannot use Intellect bene to negate Wounds at any time.

Armor does not protect against mental damage.

UNWANTED CONDITIONS

You might be poisoned or contract a disease. You might be frozen solid or turned into mist. There are terrible physical or mental things that NPCs can do to you that aren't expressed as points of damage.

Sometimes, the condition has a logical way to end it. A serpent that coils around a character holds them fast until they break free (or someone else breaks them out). This is likely a Physicality action.

Most of the time, though, to end an unwanted effect created by an NPC, the target can take a rest action. Sometimes multiple rest actions are needed. If a poison needs 3 rests to end its ongoing effect and a vislae has only 2 rests left for the day, they'll have to wait until the next day to use the third. That's probably going to be a rough night.

This is also true of spells cast by NPCs, which usually don't have depletions. They end when the affected target ends the spell by taking rest actions.

If the number of rests needed isn't specified, assume that effects with a level of 1–5 require 1 rest, those of level 6–10 require 2 rests, and those above level 10 require 3 rests. If some other way of ending the condition is specified (waiting for the sun to rise, finding an antidote, and so on), rests will *not* end the condition. Particularly potent effects could require 5, 8, 10, or even more rests, meaning that it will take days to recover, if the victim lasts that long.

Sometimes, powerful magical attacks inflict Wounds or Anguish rather than points of damage. These ignore Armor.

If a character has 1 Injury from a mental attack and 1 Injury from a physical attack, the third Injury sustained determines whether the Injuries translate to a Wound or an Anguish. So if you suffer 2 points of mental damage and then 1 point of physical damage, those Injuries become 1 Wound.

THE KEY
Resting and Refreshing Pools, page 29

An effect that inflicts a Wound every hour that requires five rests is almost certain death to anyone who can't get a remedy quickly or a steady stream of magical healing.

THE PATH
Ghost, page 18

Death and the Vislae, page 21

NPCs AND DAMAGE

Damage taken by NPCs works exactly the same way as damage taken by PCs, although some may have a different ratio of Injuries to Wounds. A low-level NPC might sustain a Wound after only 2 Injuries. A high-level NPC might take 4 or even 5 Injuries before they become a Wound. In addition, particularly massive or tough NPC creatures might be able to sustain 4, 5, or even 6 Wounds before dying. The beliggos, for example, is a level 9 behemoth the size of a small town that takes a Wound after 5 Injuries and can sustain 10 Wounds before dying. With its 4 Armor, it's very difficult to slay.

RECOVERING AND HEALING

As an action, a character can spend bene from their Physicality pool to recover Injuries that have not yet become Wounds on a one-for-one basis. This is for Injuries already sustained and is different from using Physicality to negate Wounds *as they occur*. Characters cannot recover Wounds using Physicality after the fact.

Instead, a character can use a ten-minute or one-hour rest to recover from 1 Wound or Anguish. PCs have 1 such rest of each type, each day. These are normally used to restore stat pools. A character can also recover 1 Wound or Anguish from sleeping a full night.

DEATH

Vislae who die have the opportunity to continue to act, using their inherent magical power to sustain their spiritual form in the material world. They become ghosts.

Vislae also have a variety of ways (spells, secrets, artifacts, and so on) to come back from death or sidestep the process entirely.

Regardless, death almost always results in the character earning 1 Despair.

GAMEMASTERING ACTIONS

One of the things you need to understand right away (and players will need to pick up on eventually) is the difference between a bonus to the venture and an enhancement. Both are extremely valuable, and each has its own crucial use.

Bonuses to the venture are the only way a PC can succeed when the challenge is above 9. You can roll as many dice as you want, but you'll never get a 10 or 11 on any of them. Likewise, if the PC needs two successes, the best venture in the history of the game won't help if you're rolling only one die.

Combat in Invisible Sun is typically fairly brief and often quite brutal for NPCs and PCs alike. However, characters with good Physicality pools can take a lot of punishment (and those with the Expansive Endeavor secret and lots of Physicality bene are very resistant to damage). But since characters can "survive" death by becoming ghosts, don't be afraid to unleash hell upon them.

NPCs should have bonuses to defense. Obviously, if you cast a level 5 spell on a level 5 target with no defense, it works automatically. This is why spells are so potent—they can add a lot to the venture. The higher the level, the more potency you have. The idea in combat is that when you go up against the toughest foe, you want to use your best spells and weapons.

Of course, multiple successes should probably be required to harm magical NPCs, affect them with spells, or in some cases persuade or sneak past them.

Everything needs a level. This idea starts with NPCs, but honestly, the rest of the world needs levels too. Use the same 1–10, 1–13, and 1–17 sensibilities with materials and actions that you do with creatures. Things (creatures, objects, beings, spells, and so on) have levels, but actions have challenges. Many times, the level of the thing the PC is opposing is the challenge, but sometimes you'll have to come up with a challenge for an action. What's the challenge for swinging on a chandelier to get over the barroom brawl and land on the other side of the room? The level of the chandelier doesn't come into play—it's just your gut feeling of how hard it is to do that. Very likely, it's something a normal person could do, so the challenge is below 10, but it's not something most people could do most of the time, so it's higher than 5. Probably around 8. (But don't worry. There isn't an absolute right or wrong answer here. Use your inclination.)

In a surreal setting, you've got to be able to assess far stranger things than this and still do it on the fly. When the PCs suddenly find the need to climb up the wall of living beetles, you need to be able to determine the challenge. That's what the challenge ranges above 10 are for. A wall of beetles? Probably around 12.

Last, but certainly not least, don't forget that anything that's magical—resisting a spell, breaking down a mystically reinforced door, spotting something invisible, attacking a magically protected target, and so on— requires at least two successes. Not certain if something counts as magical for this purpose? When in doubt, require two successes.

ADVANCED RULES MODULES

Jaadi (verb, vislae secret tongue): to prepare, specifically to prepare for danger or difficulty. Vislae slang: a question, loosely meaning, "Are you ready for this?"

Sometimes, rules don't come up until later in play, and that's for the best. Secret soul gifts, for example, rarely come up early in the narrative. This chapter presents rules that only come up late in the game, if at all. They are referred to as "modules" because each stands alone and can be added to or removed from any narrative.

APPURTENANCES

You thought your vislae's sentence was done, but it might not be. Some players add an appurtenance to the end, after the forte, to show a specific style or focus for the vislae and their skills. Each is a phrase indicating how, where, or with whom the verb in the sentence (the forte) is conducted.

Appurtenances require Crux to unlock, each being a different amount. They also have a story-based requirement in the form of training, agreements with otherworldly agencies, or more. Appurtenances aren't always secrets, but they all require special training, blessings, tools, or some other key beyond Crux.

A character can have only one appurtenance.

THE KEY
Forte, page 70

THE KEY
Crux, page 22

ALLIED WITH ANGELS

An angel guides my every step. They come to my aid when I am in greatest need, for they know that I serve the same causes that they do. I fight for their just causes. I stand among them as a peer and an ally. I am pleasing in their sight.

Some sort of physical manifestation of this blessing marks me as an angelic ally: a silvery tattoo; a golden hue to my eyes; faint, translucent (but non-functional) wings at my back; or something similar.

Cost: 4 Crux

Requirement: A mutual agreement made with a powerful angel.

Benefits: There are two benefits.

1. Foresight. For a cost of 4 Sorcery, angels watch over me until the sun next rises. During this time, I gain 6 bene that I can put in any pool of my choosing other than Sorcery, representing that the angels can see events before they transpire and their advice aids me greatly in all manner of tasks.

2. Protection. If I should ever die, angels appear immediately at my side and use healing magic to pull me back from death's door and restore me to full health. This can happen only once.

EMBLAZONED IN COLOR

Color is the source of all reality. Its distinctions in the suns separate and define all that is vital to existence. I have chosen to become a champion of one sun's color to further its meaning and principles, and to more closely attune myself to its power and mysteries. When I gain this appurtenance, I choose the color of one of the nine suns. Once I select my allegiance, I cannot change it.

A faint glowing aura of my chosen color swathes me in its beauty.

Cost: 3 Crux

Requirement: I must speak with and perform a duty on behalf of the proper sun warden.

Benefits: There are two benefits.

1. When I cast a spell of my chosen color, the Sorcery cost is 1 less (minimum 1).

2. Whenever a Sooth card is played on my chosen sun, I add 1 bene to a pool of my choosing.

HAVING WALKED THE HALLS OF DEATH

I have taken Sister Death's hand. I have trod the bone-dust streets of the Pale. I have chatted with long-passed relatives in their wan gardens. And I have returned.

Death changed me forever. It granted me insights and knowledge. But it marked me as well. I bear a physical manifestation of death—a skull scar on my face, skull-shaped irises, a death's-head halo about my visage, or just a palpable aura of unease for the living close by.

Cost: 2 Crux

Requirements: I must have died, gone to the Pale, and returned.

Benefits: There are two benefits.

1. I no longer feel fear. No one can magically compel me to feel fear or any other emotion against my will.

2. If I use an action concentrating, I can see ghosts and similar dead spirits within a far distance.

THE WAY
Scream Into the Void, page 37

Moritat, page 37

THE WAY
Sacrificial Rite, page 44

IN LEAGUE WITH DEMONS

Ah, the hellish hosts, they treat me as a peer. I am their ally and they are mine. Together, we will accomplish great (and likely dark) wonders. They will come to my aid when I am in need, to strike down my foes. Woe to any who might do me harm!

A physical manifestation of this allegiance marks me: a demonic tattoo, glowing red eyes, small horns on my head, a constant smell of sulfur, or something similar.

Cost: 4 Crux

Requirement: I must perform the Scream Into the Void invocation or the Moritat invocation and make a special agreement with a powerful demonic lord.

Benefit: If I am ever so hurt that only 1 Wound stands between me and death, two level 7 warrior demons appear next to me and do whatever they can to prevent my death—first and foremost, killing anyone who threatens me.

However, the strain of this event inflicts 2 Anguish (which means, depending on my situation, that I might die by Anguish rather than Wounds) and bestows 1 scourge in all my pools. The scourge lasts until I pay the debt I now owe—one soul. I'll likely have to use something like the Sacrificial Rite to obtain it and then deliver it. If I still have the scourge when circumstances warrant the demons returning again, the scourges are cumulative. Should I ever have 3 scourges at once, I must pay the debt before the sun next rises or the demons will come to claim my soul as payment.
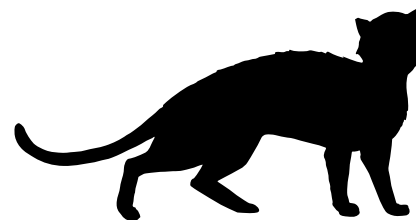
WITH A BEAST

I am not one, but two. My companion is my sibling. We move in lockstep. We share everything. My companion is always at my side, unless it's doing something at my behest.

Cost: 3 Crux

Requirement: I must find, rescue, befriend, train, or otherwise bond with a willing beast. (Regardless of the creature, it becomes level 6.) This likely takes at least a month.

Benefit: I gain a level 6 creature as a companion. I have a psychic bond with it, so that each of us always knows the other's general location and well-being. It understands whatever I say. Normally, if it is nearby, the creature aids whatever action I am taking, granting me +1 to my venture, but it can also carry out whatever instructions I give it. It watches my back, protects me if I'm incapacitated, and will give its life for me if need be.

Should the creature ever die, I gain 1 Despair and 1 scourge in all my pools for a month, after which time I can gain a new companion.

WITH BLOOD

In blood I was born, from blood I am alive, and with blood I shall do as I need.

I carry a knife or similar implement with me at all times. And I always keep it clean and razor-sharp, because I use it to cut myself. My blood is power, and unleashing it into the world allows me to cast spells or use it to fuel other magical workings.

Cost: 2 Crux

Requirement: I must perform the Flesh for Knowledge invocation.

Benefit: When I inflict damage upon myself, drawing blood, in the following round I can use the damage as Sorcery on a one-for-one basis. If I don't use the extra Sorcery immediately, it is lost.

The With a Beast appurtenance goes hand in hand with the Train a Creature character arc. See The Key, *page 177..*

THE WAY
Magical flux, page 13

THE WAY
Flesh for Knowledge, page 35

WITH A DIVINATORY DECK

Everyone reads the Sooth, but I wield it.

Sooth cards fly from my hands, moving like a thing alive, like an extension of my own body. I've always got my Sooth Deck with me, always at hand. The cards appear before me and float around me, indicating to me instantly what will happen next. Thus, I see the ebbs and flows of magic better than anyone, dramatically, all around me.

Cost: 3 Crux

Requirement: I must study very rare secret lore for a month.

Benefits: There are two benefits.

1. I gain a +1 bonus to all defense rolls, since I see danger coming.

2. I cannot stop magical flux, but I can attempt to shape it a bit. Whenever magical flux occurs near me, I can attempt a Sorcery action (even if it is not my turn) with the challenge being the level of the magical practice that created the flux. If I succeed, the GM and I work together to determine what the effect is, and I can send potential negative effects to targets other than myself.

WITH A GUN

My gun is practically an extension of my arm, its bullets an extension of my will. I care for it like it was a member of my family. I use my gun in my magical practices the way a clichéd wizard from stories might use a wand.

I almost always wear my weapon prominently. When I draw it, and when I fire it, mystic runes and symbols appear in the air briefly to accompany each action.

Cost: 3 Crux

Requirement: I must have at least 2 levels of skill with a gun, and I must train exclusively for one month.

Benefit: For the cost of 2 additional Sorcery, I can cast a spell on a bullet and, as part of the same action, fire the gun that holds the bullet. The bullet carries the spell, and the target I hit is also potentially affected by the spell. The spell must be one that can normally affect others, but it ignores any consideration of range (this ability even works with spells that normally require a touch).

WITH A KNIFE

The edge of my blade is an extension of my soul. With each slice, I carve my name on the world. While others see a knife as a tool or a weapon, I see it as a magical implement through which I draw power. Without it, I feel alone and powerless.

When I wield my knife, you can see each slice cutting through the air with a flash of magical energy.

Cost: 3 Crux

Requirement: I must have at least 2 levels of skill with a knife, and I must train exclusively for one month.

Benefit: If I inflict damage on a being with my knife, I gain 1 Sorcery.

WITH NAHASH

Words have more potency when spoken in the ancient art of Nahash. Some call it hissing or harsh whispers. I call it the path to power.

All my spells are whispered quietly but forcefully. To many, it sounds like the hissing of a snake.

Cost: 2 Crux

Requirement: I must study very rare secret lore for a month.

Benefit: If I spend 1 additional Sorcery, I can change the effective color of any spell I cast to whatever I want it to be.

WITH THE NAMES OF MY FAMILY

I cast my spells and recite my incantations interwoven with the names of those I love. I draw upon the ancient bonds of family, family history, and familial love that we share. This bond—the strongest bond I know—enhances my spells.

Cost: 3 Crux

Requirement: I must study very rare secret lore for a month.

Benefit: When I cast a spell or an incantation and include the names of some of my own family members, the spell or incantation is 1 level higher with no increase in the cost.

Although it may seem counterintuitive at first, it's smart to keep a PC's retinue mostly undefined. Maybe name a few of them, but don't worry about tracking their movements or stats. The point isn't to keep track of all of them as individuals, but to treat them as an ability.

THE KEY
Sortir, page 190

WITH A RETINUE

I never go anywhere without my people. Menial tasks are beneath me, and my time is too precious to squander. Likewise, my work and goals are too big to try to accomplish alone.

Cost: 3 Crux

Requirements: I must pay my retinue a salary as well as cover their expenses. This costs about 100 crystal orbs each week.

Benefit: I have an entourage of five or six people. At any given time, I can have someone deliver a message or package for me. I never open my own doors, prepare my own food, carry my own burdens, or perform any menial tasks at all. My people keep up my spirits when need be and give me advice.

Although my retinue are not bodyguards, if I am attacked, they protect me and grant me +1 to Dodge actions. I can consult with them when needed, and someone is always watching my back, so I add 3 bene to my Perception and Intellect pools if they are around.

WITH A SORTIR

I wield this mystic tool and call upon its history as a sign of a bold and mighty sorcerer. Its power flows into me, and my power flows through it. I can cast spells without it, but why would I?

When I first draw my sortir, there is a visible burst of power around it.

Cost: 2 Crux

Requirement: I must study very rare secret lore for a month.

Benefit: When I cast a spell or incantation while holding the sortir and I spend an additional 2 Sorcery, a practice that affects only me becomes one I can cast on others with a touch, and spells or incantations normally delivered with a touch affect close targets.

CHANGING ORDER OR FORTE

Sometimes the choices made at character creation are not the right ones. Or sometimes, they are right to begin with, but as the narrative unfolds, they are no longer right. Sometimes a player will want to change their forte or even their order.

Forte is an ingrained aspect of a character—an inborn, innate talent, in most cases. Changing fortes should be extremely difficult and certainly should never happen more than once.

Likewise, changing one's order practically never happens once a vislae attains their 1st degree. The only real choice for leaving an order is to become an Apostate. No formal order will accept someone who has quit or been expelled from another order. Only the most remarkable circumstances would allow an exception to this rule.

Ironically, it is possible that an Apostate, who has no past with any order, could join one of them later. This would be a special circumstance. It's likely that such an individual would find acceptance among the Weavers first.

NARRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Changing one's forte probably means something fundamental about the character has changed. After undergoing death, magical transformation, long-term possession, or a similar dramatic event, a character's basic nature might be so altered or damaged that a forte change is a way to portray that. It shouldn't happen on a whim, and if it is done because of player desire, the change should be lengthy and difficult.

Switching orders should be a momentous, one-time event in the narrative. It can't be done lightly or casually. It would alienate members of the old order and require special dispensations from the hierarchy of the new order (which is why, when this happens, it usually entails someone becoming an Apostate, for they have no hierarchy).

Almost all vislae look down on someone who would abandon their order.

Characters who learn every ability in their forte might be able to select a second forte, but even then, this should require at least a month of study and meditation.
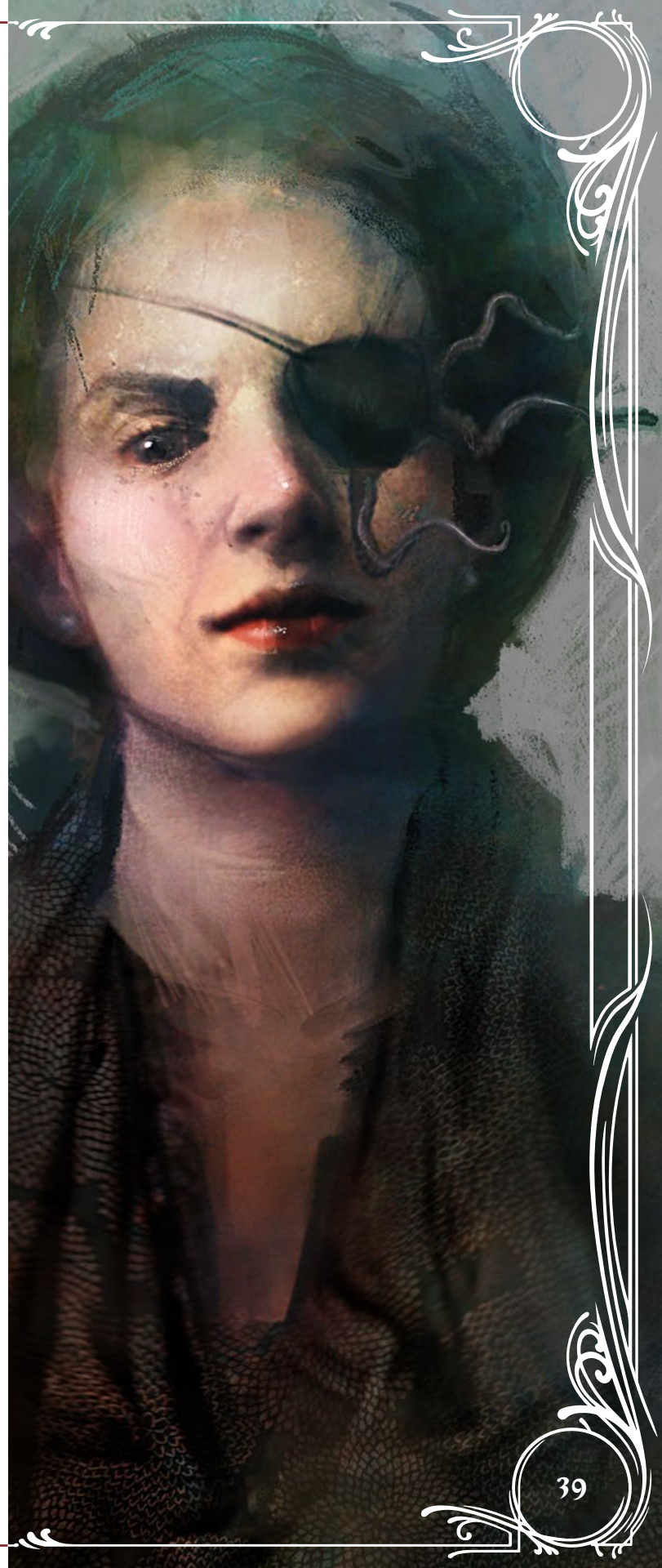
MECHANICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A character who switches fortes keeps all forte abilities they have learned and pays for the first ability in the new forte. They can never go back to their old forte.

A vislae who switches orders does not leave behind or forget their existing knowledge. New abilities, spells, skills, or anything else gained after the switch suffer a –1 penalty to the venture until the vislae progresses in degree in the new order at least as far as they progressed in their previous order.

For Apostates, this is not a consideration since Apostates do not have degrees. They suffer no such penalties.

However, those giving up Apostate status lose the additional 3 Sorcery they gained from the Raw Power ability. Likewise, those becoming an Apostate do not gain that ability or that additional Sorcery.

Characters lose all levels of connection to the order they leave, if they have any.

USE OF CHANGERIES

Some GMs may decide that a new forte is such a fundamental change that the magic of a changery is required.

Using a changery to switch to a new forte costs 50 magecoins and 1 Crux. The process takes four visits, each taking at least 48 hours. Afterward, the PC is granted the first ability in the new forte.

Changeries cannot help with a change of order.

PATRONS

By Kulallin's fiery beard, I cast thee out, demon!

Some vislae—particularly, but not limited to, Goetics—form a special sort of alliance with powerful immortal beings. This relationship, called patronage, indicates that the vislae owes particular allegiance to the immortal being. In return, the being grants the vislae power. Almost any powerful immortal or godlike being can act as a patron.

Sun wardens are virtually never vislae patrons.

GMs may want to make certain spells available only to those with certain patrons. Just remove those spells from the standard Spell Deck and hold the cards in reserve.

THE WAY
Beseech, page 31

Similar to changing one's forte, using a changery to forget a spell or change another ability costs 5 magecoins per level of the spell or ability, as well as four visits, each taking at least 48 hours. In this case, any Acumen spent to learn the spell is restored.

In the case of patronage, "forms" doesn't mean papers to fill out, but instead procedures and ceremonies.

Patronage is developed by means of the elaborate forms and pacts established in the far distant past. Because Goetics have a familiarity with such agreements and ceremonies already, they find the process easier.

The vislae must find a patron, carry out the proper forms and manners, give the formalized obeisances, and swear a number of binding oaths. The vislae provides gifts and services for the desired patron.

PATRONAGE

A vislae pledges allegiance to their patron and agrees to act in a manner befitting one associated with the patron. This varies, obviously, from patron to patron. The patron always gets something for their patronage. This is called "the Ask." The vislae gets something too. This is called "the Aid."

In addition to any specific aid detailed in the patronage agreement, patrons are very likely to respond to their vislae's invocations and are somewhat more favorably disposed to them.

Patrons can always be called upon in times of great need, similar to the Beseech invocation, although no long-form magic need be performed. Likewise, the vislae should expect that their patron will require them to carry out a specific task from time to time.

SAMPLE PATRONS

There are many patrons throughout the universe or universes, and each will set up patronage differently, with a different Ask and Aid offering. Below are a few examples to show how it might work.

CHRUSIS

A powerful demonic entity dwelling in the Red, Chrusis is a capricious, self-aggrandizing patron that enjoys advancing his position almost as much as he enjoys destroying his enemies. And if he can do one to accomplish the other, all the better. He appears as a thin, vaguely humanoid being with yellow eyes and ashen skin that literally smokes and smolders.

Aid: Chrusis provides the vislae with a level 7 (or lower) object of power given a new name that incorporates his own, such as the Crown of Chrusis (rather than the Fatidical Crown) or Chrusis's Mind Palace. The vislae can ask for a specific object, but ultimately the choice is up to Chrusis. As long as the vislae remains in good standing with Chrusis, the object will not deplete.

Ask: Chrusis demands one soul each full moon, usually offered by means of the Sacrificial Rite or a similar method.

FRAGELIVA, QUEEN OF ANGELS

Queen Frageliva is an imperious ruler of angels within the realm of the Silver Sun. She insists on order, harmony, structure, and peace, and she'll use almost any means—including the opposite of those things—to get them. She is not a beatific, loving, and altruistic cliché of angels, but neither is she petty, vengeful, deceitful, or self-aggrandizing.

Aid: A vislae pledged to Frageliva is given the ability to see through lies and deception. She grants knowledge of a level 8 spell called Sight of Frageliva, which allows the caster to detect nearby illusions, sense lies told by anyone close, see in the dark, and see through other visual impediments like mist or smoke (but not, say, a wall). The spell is Indigo and adds +2 dice.

Ask: Frageliva appears to the vislae frequently in dreams in which she gives very short errands and tasks. Most of these involve the use of Sight of Frageliva to help root out deception and restore order and tranquility—often involving strangers and situations unknown to the vislae. The vislae should expect at least one or two such tasks each week, but they rarely take more than an hour of their time. Considering the nature of the work, however, it can put the vislae in danger from time to time.

Fatidical Crown, Objects of Power deck

The Mind Palace, Objects of Power deck

THE WAY
Sacrificial Rite, page 44

THE PATH
Queen Frageliva, page 39

Perfect Execution, see Spell Deck

Prescient Defense, see Spell Deck

Stone Pistol, see Spell Deck

THE KEY
Character arc, page 162

THE WAY
Imprimatur, page 36

Exculpation, page 35

KULALLIN

Broad of spirit as well as form, Kulallin is a fiery god of battle, vengeance, and taking principled stances. He doesn't seem to care so much why you fight, only that you fight against the things you see as wrong. Kulallin has a floating fortress in the Blue and tests vislae seeking his patronage in battle and in conviction.

Aid: Kulallin bestows upon the vislae a level 4 (or lower) spell given a new name that incorporates his own, such as Kulallin's Perfection (rather than Perfect Execution) or Kulallin's Prescience (rather than Prescient Defense). The vislae can ask for a specific spell, but ultimately the choice is Kulallin's, and he often chooses Kulallin's Pistol (Stone Pistol).

In addition, he grants a +1 damage bonus to the vislae's damage-inflicting spells with no increase in cost or level.

Ask: The vislae must always have one of the following character arcs in progress:

Avenge
Defeat a Foe
Defense
Justice
Rescue
Revenge
Undo a Wrong

At the undertaking of each arc, the vislae must perform the Imprimatur invocation to dedicate the arc in Kulallin's name.

Failure to have an active, dedicated arc results in the loss of all benefits bestowed, which requires the Exculpation invocation to restore.

THE NIGHTMARE PRINCE

The Nightmare Prince dwells in the Deeps of Sleep. Despite the title, the Prince is genderless. They are a flighty, whimsical being, terrifying to behold one moment and mysterious, sinister, or simply exasperating the next. The Prince feeds on all negative emotions and feelings—fear, to be sure, but also disappointment, unease, anger, frustration, and annoyance. They want nothing more than to foster negativity in the world. They can take almost any form.

Aid: The Nightmare Prince bestows upon the vislae a level 7 (or lower) spell given a new name that incorporates the word Nightmare, such as Nightmare Arena (rather than Expansive Arena) or Ineffable Nightmare (rather than Ineffable Thought). The vislae can ask for a specific spell, but ultimately the choice is the Prince's, and they often choose Nightmare Weather.

The Nightmare Prince also makes it possible for the vislae to freely enter or exit the Deeps of Sleep while sleeping.

Ask: The Nightmare Prince asks nothing of the vislae at first. Eventually, this patron summons the vislae to the Deeps of Sleep and conscripts them into long-term service (at least three to four months) in their never-ending war with other dream-related entities and their various servants in the Deeps. Many vislae do not survive.

*Expansive Arena,
see Spell Deck*

*Ineffable Thought,
see Spell Deck*

*Nightmare Weather,
see Spell Deck*

SALLIXIMOR

Swimming through the constant verdant growth of the Green, Salliximor is a potent spirit of life and fecundity. He values life and almost nothing else. He opposes death at every turn. If Salliximor had his way, all life would be immortal and constantly reproducing to create more life. He appears to be an amorphous, shapeless mass the size of a small lake, always moving, always spreading.

Aid: Salliximor makes a vislae hardier and more filled with life force. The vislae can suffer 4 Injuries before sustaining a Wound and can suffer 4 Wounds before dying.

Ask: A vislae accepting Salliximor's patronage can never kill a living thing, not even a plant. If they do, they lose the granted life force until an Exculpation invocation is performed (having a child automatically grants forgiveness in Salliximor's eyes). They can eat food that was killed by another or conjured, and many vislae learn the secret necessary to become Breatharians.

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MODALITIES

Many vislae know that modalities exist, but few understand the concept entirely. Most believe that vislae (and perhaps other magical beings) unintentionally create other versions of themselves just by the act of existing so utterly steeped in magic. Modalities are not the inhabitants of a parallel universe or some kind of timelost doubles. They are not random doppelgängers (although such things do exist, and they are perhaps close, in some manner, to the modalities of vislae). Modalities are unreal beings of pure magic, yet at the same time, they are quite real. Vislae *are* their modalities as surely as they are themselves. And yet, a vislae's modalities are different from them as well.

Sometimes, a singer will write a song and become well known for singing it. But later, another musician will sing the same song, but in their own voice and perhaps with their own arrangement or take on it. The song is still the original song, but it is also different. This is, at least broadly speaking, a way to think about modalities.

Through modalities, vislae have versions of themselves that coexist but operate independently on different levels of reality. The more a vislae uses magic and the deeper they delve into the occult arts, the more likely it is that their actions and some fraction of their life force and power inadvertently "spin off" into a modality. The modality appears somewhere in the Actuality, under a different sun, and lives a life completely separate and different from the original vislae. The modality very likely does not even realize they are a modality, remembering much of the original's background as their own, though with possibly significant diversions.

Sometimes a vislae has multiple modalities—once the first is created, it's more likely that others will spin off. Most people believe that there is a maximum, although they disagree as to whether that maximum is five, seven, or nine. Some believe that the number is significant, and that modalities are not accidental at all. Once a vislae's maximum number of modalities is reached (whatever that

Modalities probably shouldn't be introduced into a narrative until after at least 15–20 or more game sessions have progressed. Many times, they will never come up.

Is the so-called original PC actually the original, or are they a modality? Is there even such a thing as "the original?"

number is), there is the potential to complete a circuit, combine into one ascended form, perform a ritual together, or . . . something else.

Modalities often have distinct differences in personality, abilities, skills, and areas of expertise. A studious, cerebral vislae might have a modality that is strong and physical. A quiet, upstanding vislae might have a modality who is a smooth-talking thief or a braggart who leads with his fists. A vislae who uses mostly divinatory and psychic-style magic might have one modality who specializes in fire spells and another who uses illusions. In some cases, a modality might have a different heart, a different forte, or even belong to a different order (although the latter is so exceedingly rare, it's almost not worth mentioning). Modalities always have the same soul.

MODALITIES IN GAMEPLAY

Vislae are not aware that they have modalities until they directly encounter them or some other proof of their existence. It's possible that a vislae might have different modalities and simply never know. Some vislae actively seek them out. They're always in the realm of a different sun, usually living a quiet, sedentary life. A modality is active only if the original is inactive. PCs might get along with this new version of themselves or they might not, but there is an undeniable bond between them. If it comes to it, they find that they cannot bring themselves to do harm to each other.

If a PC vislae has modalities, they have no particular control over them—the modalities are NPCs. That is, until they become part of gameplay. Once a relationship is established, a PC can call on their modalities to attempt tasks for them. The communication is instinctual and instantaneous, and it never contains more information than "You are needed," but the range is limitless.

This does not give a PC the opportunity to have an extra character—it gives them the opportunity to play a (somewhat) different character. Vislae find that only one version of themselves can be truly active at a time. The other versions can do little but

rest and relax. In other words, there is only one strong, motivated soul among them. The original PC and a modality (or two different modalities) can't act in concert. It's one or the other.

Thus, if a bookish vislae needs to track down and apprehend a gang of killers, they might call on a tougher, more violent modality. Eventually, the player might have a few different modalities to choose from, and when a new situation arises—assuming there's time to plan and travel—they can choose which version comes to the fore. In fact, over time, it might become immaterial which modality is the original.

Acumen, Joy, and Despair earned by one modality apply to all, so all modalities remain at about the same level of power and experience. If a modality dies, they can become a ghost, but due to a strange quirk of the universe, there can be only one ghost of a vislae at a time. In other words, if a vislae is a ghost, one of their living modalities can become active, but if that modality dies, they are gone forever. The Pale takes only one of each person, no exceptions.

CREATING MODALITIES

A modality shouldn't be more or less powerful than an existing character, just different. The easiest thing to do is to have a different stat pool configuration, a different spell selection, and different skills. These are easy because the exchange is one for one. Points in pools are reconfigured, one level 6 spell is swapped for another, and so on. A bit more complex approach would be to take all the levels of spells, secrets, and other magical practices and add them to get an Acumen total that can then be spent on whole new selections.

Ambitious players can choose a different forte and give the modality the same number of abilities within it (of levels close enough that the Crux cost would be the same).

In the end, perhaps even more fun would be giving the modality a similar but different outlook and personality. It's the same person, but circumstances and happenstance have changed

Shadow player characters are very simple to create and play. They are good for players who are new to the game, who make a temporary appearance in a campaign, or who want or need a simpler experience. They might be less powerful than adept characters, which in some cases is fine and in other cases could be compensated by letting an experienced player have more than one Shadow character at a time.

There are so many unanswered questions about modalities. What creates them? (Or have they always existed?) How do they come to be in the circumstances in which they're found? Why is only one active at a time? Why do they exist at all? Even among vislae, these are mysteries with no firm solutions.

them. If the modality is just like the original, what's the point of playing them as a different character? Players should feel free to use this as an opportunity to expand their horizons. Sometimes appearance or gender is completely different.

SAPIENT SHADOWS

Some—in fact, most—of the people living in Shadow are not self-exiled vislae. Most of them are just . . . shadows. They exist as a part of Shadow as much as an airplane or a tree found there. They're no more real than the world they inhabit. They think and act, but they have no qualia. They have no soul. Some of these shadow people, however, develop an awareness. A few of them find their way out of Shadow, often as a result of being dragged out by forces beyond their control.

In other words, while there are real people still living in Shadow, there are also shadow people living in the real world. The streets of Satyrine are no stranger to their presence, to be sure. Shadow people in the Actuality are usually comparatively simple folk. They are relatively single-minded (although not necessarily simple-minded). Their goals and needs are straightforward. Nevertheless, they still think and feel as would a "real" person. Whether they are treated as real people by others varies from place to place and individual to individual.

Players who want a very simple (but fun) experience can play a Shadow character. Such characters take literally moments to create. They don't use magic, but they excel at all manner of other things. Shadow characters are perfect for players who want to join an existing campaign on short notice and don't have a character ready.

Shadow characters also offer possibilities for new, interesting campaign dynamics. For example, each player might create a vislae character and a Shadow character to work as a team, or in such a way that all the vislae characters operate together and all the Shadow characters work together. It's even possible for most of the players to run vislae characters while

one experienced player runs a small team of sapient Shadow characters.

CREATING A SHADOW CHARACTER

Shadow characters have only skills. They do not have pools or Hidden Knowledge. This means when a Shadow character acts, there are no "resource management" concerns. No points to track. They just roll a die and add any bonuses they might have to their venture—and those bonuses are static.

A starting Shadow character has 6 levels of skills. These can be divided into any skills in any category (Action, Narrative, or Development), but no more than 2 levels in any one skill to start with. At least 1 level of one skill must be something appropriate to Shadow (like a vislae's Shadow skill).

They have 10 crystal orbs to buy goods.

That's it. Shadow character finished. Shadow characters do not have heart, order, forte, soul, or foundation. They do not start with a character arc (although they can get arcs later by spending Acumen earned). They do not have houses or any of the things generated in the first session. They cannot learn magical practices, including character or house secrets. They can use ephemera objects and objects of power but do not start with any. They can possess and use two ephemera objects at one time.

Shadow characters suffer damage (Injuries, Wounds, and Anguish) the same way that vislae characters do. They have the same four rest actions as vislae characters, but since they have no pools, they use the one-action rests to heal 1 Injury and the ten-minute or one-hour rests to heal 1 Wound or 1 Anguish.

Sapient Shadow characters who die do not become ghosts, nor do they pass into the Pale. They are just gone forever.

THE KEY
Skills, page 31

THE KEY
Shadow skills, page 154

When distinguishing people from sapient Shadow characters, there is nothing wrong with using the terms "real person" and "Shadow person."

Shadow characters are not equal to vislae. That isn't the point. They're for players who want a quick and easy experience. Players who wish to try to use a Shadow character throughout an entire narrative will want to have multiple Shadow characters that act in relative concert with each other.

ADVANCING A SHADOW CHARACTER

Although few players will want to play a Shadow character for very long, they can advance.

Shadow characters do not earn Joy or Despair. They can earn Acumen and can spend those points on new skills or a few other advantages, including the following.

Hardiness (4 Acumen): The Shadow character can sustain 1 additional Injury before their Injuries convert into a Wound. A Shadow character can select this ability as many times as they wish, paying the Acumen cost each time.

Gathering One's Wits (4 Acumen): The Shadow character can use one of their one-action rests to instead assess the current situation—regardless of what it is—and gain a +1 bonus to all actions for the rest of the encounter. A Shadow character can select this ability only once.

Magical Enhancement (6 Acumen): The Shadow character can add one magic die to an action one time. This ability refreshes each time they use a ten-minute or one-hour rest. A Shadow character can select this ability as many times as they wish, paying the Acumen cost each time. Each time the ability is selected, they gain an additional use. So if they choose this ability twice, the character can add one magic die to an action two times.
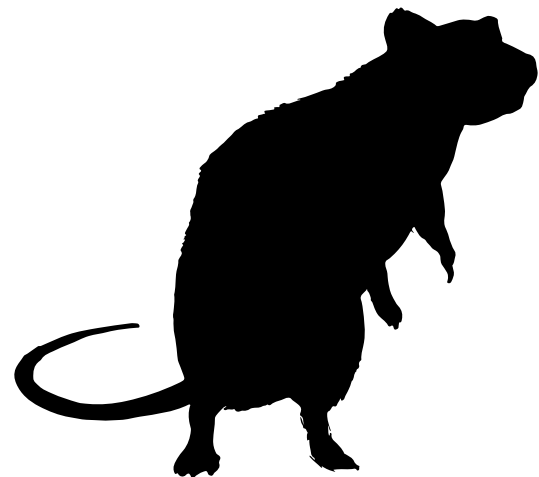
GAMEMASTERING

I know. You've run a bunch of games, and you've read even more. You're about to skip over this section because you know how to run games and you've heard it all before.

WAIT!

This gamemastering chapter isn't going to be like others you've seen. I'm writing it assuming you've run a lot of games. I'm going to dispense with the basics and get right to the heart of the matter.

Running Invisible Sun isn't like running other games. This is for two reasons. First, because of the surreal nature of the setting, and second, because of the narrative structure of the game. Let's talk about the second one first.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE GAME

This is a big topic, and it's going to cover a lot of ground, but let's start with the most important and significant point first.

THE PLAYERS ARE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

"Players in the driver's seat? Hey now! That's not how I run games," you might say. "When I run games, I'm in charge!"

Hear me out. If for no other reason than I'm going to tell you things that you will probably find surprising. Maybe even things you can write angry Internet posts about. But you've got to read it before you can do that. I'm going to contend, first and foremost, that you need to run different games differently. I personally run Numenera very differently than I run Invisible Sun, and both are

Looking for more GM advice and information? All the books in the Black Cube have special sections on gamemastering pertaining to the topic at hand.

THE KEY
Character arcs, page 162

very different than how I run Dungeons & Dragons. Probably the single best bit of advice I can give you on gamemastering is that if you've got only one GM mode or one GM style, you need to start rethinking that—different games require different things of the GM. A horror writer doesn't use the same voice and style when he writes nonfiction. Or romance. Or science fiction. Why should a GM running various games be any different?

Getting ready to run an Invisible Sun game is the perfect time to start a new GM style. Because it's designed from a completely different perspective.

In most roleplaying games, the game master creates a plot and populates it with NPCs. If it's a plot about investigating an evil cult, the GM crafts the cult and all its members, creates its victims, and creates those who might fight against it. Then the PCs, who are most likely extraneous to the plot, get hooked in some fashion—usually recruited by an NPC who's involved. The story happens when the PCs collide with the plot. This is true whether the plot is a murder mystery, a supervillain's evil scheme, or simply an ancient citadel full of interesting stuff, waiting to be explored.

And that's great. Seriously. I love games like that. I play them, and I've written them.

But it's not how fiction works. Or rather, it's very rarely how fiction works. In most fiction, the plot is built around the characters, not separate from the characters. So to capture that same essence, the approach in Invisible Sun follows that lead.

The key, of course, is the character arcs. With every PC possessing their own character arc or arcs, the characters—and thus, the players—drive the action. That doesn't mean the GM is somehow

stripped of their role. The GM still controls all the NPCs and the setting at large.

It's probably worth diverting into a discussion about what we'll call "narrative control" versus "driving the narrative."

Narrative control is being able to say the bridge collapses. It's being able to say the governor decides to press charges or the wild dog pack retreats into the woods. Narrative control means determining what happens outside, beyond, and out of the reach of the PCs. And in Invisible Sun, that authority is firmly in the hands of the GM.

The players, of course, have authority over their own characters. Just like how in this game the GM never tells a player what their character does (unless the PC's mind is being controlled or something similar), the players don't tell the GM what the NPCs do or what happens in the world (again, unless they use abilities to control minds or shape their environment).

Driving the narrative is what determines what the PCs do from session to session. And, as I stated earlier, that too originates with the GM in most games. The GM shepherds along the story, probably subtly guiding the PCs to the next scene. Even if the game allows for a lot of player discretion, meaning they can choose whether to go into the dragon's lair or go back to the castle and talk to the ghosts, it's still the GM giving them those two choices.

But in Invisible Sun, the authority to drive the narrative is given over (mostly) to the players. Players choose character arcs and take actions to move through the steps of those arcs. Those actions propel the game forward. Sometimes, that comes in the form of side scenes in Development Mode. But you'll also find that it comes to the table as well, as two or more arcs complement each other or one or more PCs decides to help another with their arc. In these cases, the character arcs join together to become story arcs.

So since the players—through their characters—drive the narrative, let's look at characters more closely.

The difference between power and authority is that power is claimed, while authority is granted. So a GM has authority, not power. The players grant the GM narrative control because they want to have a narrative in which to carry out their characters' actions.

The narrative is always more important than the rules.

With a little initial encouragement and assurances that they are free to say what they want, even the most reticent player is usually willing to talk about their character, why they did what they did, and how events in the game made their character feel. Even better, the players enjoy talking about these things.

CHARACTERS

Amid the ghosts and spells, stats and points, dice and cards, Invisible Sun—at its very heart—is about attempting to catch a glimpse of what is real, what is truth, and who we are.

Characters—both PCs and NPCs—are a mixture of the sublimely surreal and the shockingly human. A character carried aloft by a swarm of bees affixed to their belt via piano wires that play music as they fly might be traveling to visit a veteran friend of theirs who suffers from PTSD from the War.

That's why the character arc system—which tries to instill clear and understandable motives in each character—is so important for Invisible Sun. Because amid the strange and surreal, the only thing that matters is meaning. In a world where anything is possible, "How?" stops being a pertinent question. But "Why?" remains vital.

Thus, while circumstances are very strange (by Shadow standards), the actions and motives of people should be very familiar. Those are the things to which we can affix meaning. The players can more easily navigate through the wonders they encounter each session with clear, human motivations.

ENCOURAGING CHARACTERS TO GROW AND CHANGE

Character creation is an ongoing process. What I mean is that characters continue to grow and change in significant ways based on what they experience. Consider your favorite fictional character. Whether it's Michael Corleone, Meg Murray, Samwise Gamgee, or Leia Organa, they didn't end up the same as they started. Their stories changed them. That's what we want for Invisible Sun characters.

Each incremental change, each new forte ability, skill, or spell is the character not just growing more powerful, but adapting to their situation. A character who starts with nothing but combat-related abilities learns that there's a lot more to their life than fighting—they develop interaction skills, study utility spells, or learn secrets that take them in an entirely new direction.

As GM, you should encourage the player to think about these choices and changes, particularly within the context of one-on-one side scenes and talking about the characters in the Character Summaries at the end of each session. I don't mean to direct them to one change or another, but to help them think about these changes as a narrative through-line.

That's one of the things that character arcs help with. Each arc is a personal goal—not just something to work toward, but a story that includes each decision they make.

The point, ultimately, is to get the players to think about the story they want to tell as much as you think about it. Telling awesome stories together is why you're all playing this game. That's why, for example, some player choices are suboptimal. Because sometimes those are the right choices for the story you want to tell. Take, for example, the Fall From Grace character arc. Taking that arc is like setting yourself up for failure. But failure makes for good stories sometimes, and—I'm going to stress this a lot—players need Despair to advance. And Despair comes from failure, from nasty surprises, and from things going wrong.

Which means, in the larger context, after things go wrong for a PC (and they will), ask them how their character is affected by the events. If a character dies and comes back, that's certainly going to change them. If they set off to find their missing sister and fail, that's going to change them too. We learn more from failure than from success in life, and it's nice to see that mirrored in our fictional characters.

Of course, success changes someone too. In Invisible Sun, success often means advancement in one's order or social standing. These can bring new responsibilities and new obligations. Success can also mean knowledge, learning secrets about—well, anything and everything. If you set out to rescue a captive taken by the Sodality of Vryn and end up learning a deeper, darker truth about the nature of morals versus demonkind, how does that affect you?

Character creation is an ongoing process.

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Cryter Miniss, page 89

THE KEY
Fall From Grace, page 170

THE PATH
Sodality of Vryn, page 57

INTERACTING WITH PLAYERS

In any roleplaying game, the GM is the eyes and ears (and other senses) of the player characters, and Invisible Sun is no different. The role of the GM is to present the world in all its aspects to the players and to adjudicate their actions within that world.

So the GM describes. They set the scene. We'll discuss that in the context of the surreal nature of the setting in a bit.

And the GM adjudicates. When a player casts a spell, the GM determines the challenge. When they talk to their superior in the order, the GM decides what the NPC says. When they chase Cryter Miniss down the alley, the GM figures out if they can catch him, and what happens next.

You know all this already. But let's think about how Invisible Sun is different from other games you've run. Consider how things work in those other games. The GM presents the players with a situation, and the players must—on the spot—come up with a way to react. Now, there's still plenty of that in Invisible Sun, but there are also many cases where this is entirely flipped around. A player presents a situation to the GM, and the GM must—on the spot—respond.

For example, a player might say, "I'm going to find someone who's been to the Red and ask them for advice." It falls on the GM to provide someone for them to talk to, something for that person to say, and someplace for this conversation to happen.

A player might say, "Now that I know a vislae named Edric Dahl stole the Orb of Pestilence, I'm going to find him and do whatever it takes to get it back." It behooves the GM to make Edric interesting, make wherever he is interesting, and present some interesting challenges to be overcome to accomplish the goal.

It's great to know a player's intent because it allows you to plan ahead at the table, even if it's just a few minutes ahead. Because you can anticipate their reaction to success or failure at the action, and you can anticipate their next action as well. Sometimes, a player starts with an action, and you'll want to ask what their intention is (and they should always tell you).

PLAYER ACTION VERSUS INTENT

In most cases, player "action" starts as "player intent." But you need to break such statements down into actions. You can't (and should never try to) adjudicate intention.

So a player states their intent. "I want to find out who murdered the elderbrin." "I need to travel to the Pale to talk with my dead uncle." "I want to explore the Ruined Expanses and destroy a Hate Cyst."

A great response to these kinds of player statements is, "Okay, how do you go about that?" This is *reductionism* and it is what makes roleplaying games work. Because through reductionism, you take a stated intent and you break it down into more manageable chunks. Ultimately, you break it down into actions (in the sense of "action" in chapter 2).

"How are you going to go about that?" works because rather than making a statement of intent ("I want to learn the True Cleansing ritual," which implies no real activity), the player determines something *to do*. "I ask my friend Thae if she knows where I can learn the True Cleansing ritual." You can't really do anything with intent at the table— although it's really, really good to know intent—but you can do something with an action. That's why it's so important to distinguish the two.

GM RESPONSES

In this game, then, the GM responds to the player's actions, not the other way around. There are many ways to deal with this, including how you prepare for a session.

But the best place to start is just in outlook and attitude. As the GM of Invisible Sun, you have to be ready to respond. And the response shouldn't be, "You can't do that," unless it's in a really interesting way. "You can't find a high-ranking Vance to talk to because every Vance of 4th degree and higher has mysteriously disappeared."

A GM needs to be responsive, open, and ready. Even though the players are initiating and driving the things that happen in the game, you're still the

facilitator that makes it all work. Without a ready and responsive GM, the game goes nowhere.

So think about how to handle the PCs' actions. Now, to be clear, I'm not talking about actions as described in chapter 2, necessarily. I don't mean actions such as "I cast a spell" or "I jump off the ledge." Those are straightforward. They usually take place in Action Mode rather than Narrative Mode. You know how to handle them (and if you don't, just read that chapter). I'm talking about larger actions such as "I look for a place to buy a weapon that will affect ghosts," "I try to find out where Jeren the idea thief has gone," or "I find the quickest way to get to the Green."

You basically have two choices of how to handle these larger actions. The first is purely descriptive. "You go to the Celestial Bazaar and find a Maker named Barristol, who will sell you a pair of Ghost Bullets that will harm ghosts for 6 magecoins. Do you want to buy them?"

The second is to turn it into an encounter or even a series of encounters. The GM asks, "Where do you look for the weapon you seek?" The PC says that they'll ask their Maker friend (and NPC bond) if they know anyone. The player and GM discuss this away from the table and handle it as a side scene. The stakes are not high in the scene, but it reaffirms the relationship in both the player's and the GM's mind. The friend directs them to Barristol in the Celestial Bazaar. Again, as a side scene, the GM describes the sights and sounds of the market, and the player interacts with a few other NPC vendors, buying some things they didn't know they wanted. (Isn't that always the way when you go shopping?) Then they play out the conversation with Barristol, who has the bullets and a gun to fire them with. Barristol takes a liking to the PC, who has skill in persuasion and is quite affable, and offers to make a deal. Not only does the player get to show up at the next table session with cool new things, but the encounter rewards the focus in interaction.

Deciding between these two methods of handling larger actions comes down to pacing. If there's time to use the second method and the player is

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Focusing initially on player intent helps to detach the concept of player success from character success. A player can feel like they did a good job at being a burglar even though their character got caught and thrown in jail, because of their intent. Bad die rolls or unexpected complications can foil actions, but they don't affect intent.

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Player characters are very powerful and very resourceful. This isn't the kind of game where starting characters are weak. It's possible that beginning characters can fly, teleport, or create matter out of thin air.

interested in doing so, it's worth it. But if not, the first method is fine too.

In a case like the weapon shopping trip, it also depends on when the player's statement of intent comes. Is it in the middle of a session? Unless the other PCs want to go shopping as well (which could be fun), it's probably best to handle the action the first way or ask if the player is willing to do it as a side scene between table sessions. Something larger that potentially involves the entire group—like tracking down an infamous idea thief or going to the realm of a different sun—is likely handled at the table or as a combination of Development Mode and Narrative Mode scenes.

Reductionism, then, allows us to break down any grandiose plan into a series of actions that you and the game can handle. But success isn't assured. In fact, perhaps more than in other games, in Invisible Sun failure is assumed. It's necessary, even, because that's how players earn Despair, and they can't advance without it.

If a player has a goal—probably based on their character arc—that doesn't mean the goal needs to be attainable. Character arcs imply motive, not success. An impossible goal is still impossible. Alternatively, sometimes the GM will decide it's impossible to achieve the goal in the way the player initially approaches it. Defeating the head of the Church of Midnight might not be possible in a straightforward assault on the Midnight Cathedral. The player characters very likely need to find another way.

MANAGING AND ADJUDICATING THE ACTION

Once identified, actions—whether in Action Mode or Narrative Mode—can be handled in a fairly straightforward manner using the rules in chapter 2.

When players take actions, they don't impose on what happens in the world beyond their character. Likewise, the GM doesn't impose on what a character does or thinks. These statements are equal if you consider that the world, in effect, is the GM's "character."

Players have complete control over their characters. They can use bene, Hidden Knowledge, Sortilege, or any other resources at their disposal to try to influence success on the actions that matter most to them (and reserve their resources on actions that don't).

An extension of this idea is that, with only a few exceptions (like defensive actions), *only* players initiate character actions. Actions are proactive in this way.

As the GM, your only input into character actions should be when you need more information. Sometimes that's just for clarity, but sometimes it's to add to the flavor of what's going on.

For example, the player says, "I go down the hall." You might say, "How does your character move down the hall? Does she walk cautiously? Confidently? With a hand on the wall to steady herself after that last battle?"

Or a player says, "I attack." You could ask, "How does your character wield his knife? Does he say anything? How does he react to the foe?"

Obviously, you don't want to do that every time, but while it's your job to paint a visual picture of the world, it's the player's job to paint one of their character. Don't let them renege on that obligation. You'll be surprised at how quickly they no longer need to be asked.

Managing the action—finding out who does what, and how—is only half of it. The other half is adjudication. Let's face it, rules can't cover every situation. The players at your table will, in the first few sessions, likely come up with an action or a use for an ability that isn't clearly defined in the rules.

That's okay. That's why you're there. You'll have to make snap judgments on how to handle things and whether something has a chance to succeed. You'll have to set the challenge for strange actions and determine what happens when two different magical effects occur at the same time.

Although much of this is discussed elsewhere, let me give you a few bits of important advice, some of which might surprise you.

Don't be generous. Don't be lenient. I know, you're used to giving the players a break now and

Most rules, such as the description of a spell's effect, are left loose to allow them to be tailored to fit the need of the narrative.

again. You pull your punches or fudge a rule here or there to help them when things are bad.

In **Invisible** Sun, I highly, highly encourage you to stop doing this. Why? Well, there are two main reasons why GMs do this:

1. Because the rules restrict the PC (and therefore the player) and keep them from doing something fun.
2. Because the rules are going to kill the PC and keep the player from having fun (because it's hard to have fun without a character to play).

Neither of these is true in this game. The first reason isn't a problem because the game is very, very generous to PCs already. If players use their resources even reasonably well, their spells will succeed most of the time. Characters have a lot of options that give them the flexibility to get out of almost any jam you might put them in. A creative Weaver, a Goetic with a little time, a Maker with a little more time, or any character with access to conation incantations can very likely come up with a magical solution to most problems. So there's no need to bend the rules quietly to favor them when they're in a rough spot or to give a PC a break. If you can't decide whether the effect the Weaver wants to create should be level 7 or level 8, make it 8.

If you do want to affect things one way or another, do it overtly with a GM shift. A GM shift means that you can make things either good or bad, at least for a moment, contributing to the narrative. But either way, the player gets something for it.

If the PCs are in a rough spot and things look dire, don't try to fix things for them every time, because the game offers a direct reward for that. When the players talk about the events in the Character Summaries part of the session, and one player says, "It was awful when we were trapped in that prison and I was entirely out of Sorcery. I felt really helpless," give them 1 Despair. See what happens? The part that would have been a real downer is suddenly a viable part of the narrative. PCs need Despair to advance. In other words,

bad things happening in Invisible Sun are part of the fun. You shouldn't try to avoid them, and you certainly shouldn't bend the rules to avoid them.

As for the second reason why GMs usually give players a break, don't fudge things to keep PCs alive because dying is a fun part of the game. It unlocks new options for the characters. It provides new experiences for the group. It's dramatic and interesting and shows that this setting and game are really quite different than what people are used to. In a good way.

If the PCs get rewards for failure as well as success and don't have to fear death as the end of the game, that means they can hit rock bottom in ways that are normally difficult to explore. The safety net of continuing to play after death means a character in bad straits can really push their luck, ending up in a dire situation, but the game doesn't end. And fighting back up from rock bottom is a fantastic type of story that doesn't get seen in roleplaying games often.

CHARACTERS AT THE BEGINNING

There's a lot to grasp at the beginning of your first Invisible Sun game. In an attempt to manage this, advanced concepts were moved to the Advanced Rules Modules chapter in this book. In addition, in the first or even the second game session, don't mention long-form magic, minor magic, or objects of power. For that matter, don't worry about souls, challenges above 10, or using bene for effect.

In other words, start small and build. Focus on stats, order, and forte. Spend time talking about each character's house, their neighborhood, their personalities, and who they were in Shadow. There's a reason all of that is called the character's foundation. It is literally what everything that initially happens in the narrative is built upon. The characters may well travel the length of the Path of Suns and beyond, but they'll always return to their house and their neighborhood.

Sometimes an initial challenge a GM faces is simply getting players to accept the paradigm that they are in the driver's seat. Thus, focus also on

There's one other way in which GMs frequently fudge the rules, and that's when they don't want to slow down the game to look up something in a rulebook. This is not a bad instinct. But when you do this, err on the side of being harsh, not helpful, to the PCs.

character arcs. Talk about what each character wants to accomplish, and how. Show the players that their arcs weave through everything that happens, even if the connection is indirect.

The desideratum that comes out of the first session is the first big indicator that the players drive the action. The way you create the first few encounters or scenes to address the desideratum shows the players that you are reacting to them and their arcs, not the other way around.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Vislae are not necessarily intended to be action heroes. In fact, one of the few common elements of practically all vislae is their need to spend a lot of time in quiet study.

Sometimes, players or the GM will worry about spending too much time doing the "small stuff," or what some might think of as downtime activities. For vislae, though, spending weeks studying new spells, conducting research, or ingratiating themselves into the upper ranks of their order is the norm. It's going into potentially dangerous situations or exploring unknown locales that's weird.

Not only are characters rewarded for studying by learning new skills and abilities, but they also earn money each week based on their foundation. Players sometimes wait and save up their money for things they need. Again, this is a perfectly viable way to play. (As characters advance, it will become clear that the weekly money they earn covers minor expenses, not the things they really want, which require magecoins.)

Likewise, some GMs may try to discourage the "cast a few spells and then rest to recover Sorcery" method of play. But in truth, that sort of relaxed play makes perfect sense. Let the players rest as often as they'd like. The balance of the game is not upset if they go into every situation with fully restored pools. Still, keep close track of time. Knowing if the sun's about to set or rise is important in terms of effect depletion.

On the other hand, don't put a lot of time pressures on the players. Such pressure discourages study,

THE KEY
Desideratum, page 200

First session, page 194

THE PATH
Zero's, page 102

which is what vislae do. It discourages side scenes and Development Mode, which are important facets of this game. Frequent time pressure situations have no place in Invisible Sun. Keep it as a tool to heighten the tension, but use it sparingly.

It all comes down, once again, to pacing. Sometimes, you want to focus on action and excitement. In between such events, quieter scenes of conversation, shopping, relaxation, study, and research work nicely. Because Action Mode is much more detailed and exacting, it often takes as long (or longer) to play through a few minutes of game time in that mode as it does playing through whole weeks of other activities.

Sometimes, it's worth playing through a scene of the PCs sitting around in one of their houses, in Zero's, or somewhere else, just talking. The players are gathered around the table already, and it's a game about talking, so it isn't a stretch for the characters to sit around a table and talk about what's going on. To look at it another way, when the players get together to plan or review what they've discovered, they're going to have those conversations anyway. Why not do it in character (or mostly so) with a few drinks at a bar that's actually a demon?

One way to accomplish this, by the way, is to have a friendly NPC involved in the conversation. Players instinctively know that they can talk to each other out of character, but they can only talk to an NPC while in character.

CHARACTER SUMMARIES AT THE END OF THE SESSION

Speaking of getting into the characters' heads, do not neglect the game's built-in way of doing just that. At the end of each session, each player talks about what (if any) steps in their character arc they've accomplished and how they feel about the events of the game. Ostensibly, this is to see if they earn Acumen, Despair, or Joy. But it's also so you can hear what's going on in their character's heads. Does one player really hate and fear ghosts? Perhaps there's room to explore that in the

INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS AT THE TABLE

The idea of a gaming introvert probably sounds like an oxymoron. Gaming is social. Why would introverts play roleplaying games? Well, we do. A lot. Introverts are often very imaginative. We spend much of our lives inside our own heads. Most introverts really like escapism, and let's face it, there's no better means of escape than a great RPG session.

However, because RPG sessions are social activities, they sometimes favor extroverts. You know the ones I mean. The people who talk with varied accents, stand up when their character talks, and make a lot of gestures. I like these people. They add a lot to a game. But not everyone is an extroverted thespian, and they can dominate a game session. That's not an accusation—I don't think they *want* to run roughshod over the other players—but it happens. (Although I identify as an introvert, gaming can sometimes bring this out in me as well. But only sometimes.)

One of the advantages of Development Mode is that it allows for gameplay away from the table. For introverts, this offers one-on-one time with the GM. It gives them a chance to talk about their character and take actions where they don't have to worry about the other players jumping in. If desired, Development Mode can be handled in written form, so players who feel more comfortable writing than talking can express themselves and describe their intentions in that way.

Allowing for Character Summaries to be handled outside the group can be good for some introverts as well. It not only gives them alone time after the session to collect their thoughts about their character, but it also allows them to express those thoughts in a way they find comfortable. And that's important because that's where they get the various rewards that characters use for advancement.

Last, many introverts don't need to express themselves away from the group—they just need space created to allow them to do it. If all the extroverts are talking during a session, it's hard to get a word in edgewise, and introverts can get trampled down and end up not saying or contributing much.

Action Mode is its own solution to this problem. In Action Mode, everyone gets a turn, which means everyone gets space to talk and contribute. With this in mind, there should be a time (perhaps multiple times) each session where you go around the table and give each player a chance to talk, but not in a combat or action sequence. Each player should have a chance to talk, describing how their character reacts to things, what they're doing, and so on. Giving this kind of space keeps some players from getting lost in the shuffle.

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narrative. Does another focus heavily on fashion? Well, that's an interesting motive to play on or reward to offer later. And so on.

Some players won't want to do this in front of everyone else. That's okay. Do them one on one, or via email or text. If they are okay with it, though, it can be valuable for players to discuss inner dialogue and thoughts at the table even if it provides information that the other players (or rather, their characters) do not know. All the players should know all the characters involved in the narrative well. These (fictional) people should not be strangers to them.

Flashbacks or in-depth character development that result from actions during the game or revelations during the Character Summaries can be handled as side scenes between sessions.

THE PLAYERS, THE GM, AND THE NARRATIVE

I've stressed a few times now that the players are in the driver's seat. That doesn't mean the GM never creates situations or storylines for the game. The pendulum has not swung that far.

What the players' character arcs really do is set up the GM to create. If the PCs need to go to the Pale, you know they need to go to the Dead Embassy first, and you can design that encounter or series of encounters (or, if it fits the pacing better, skip over it with a few lines of description and exposition about getting visas from the Dead). The GM is still creating, a lot—it's just that you're creating what the players say they want to see and do. Which, let

me tell you, is great. It's a treat, in fact, to know that what you're creating is of interest to the players as opposed to creating it on spec and hoping they'll care.

Sometimes, the GM wants to create a whole story. That's okay. But it's still sometimes best to work it into the character arcs. That is, make it a direct offshoot of a goal the PCs already have. For example, say one of the players has the Join an Organization arc and wants to become a member of the Cahdedron, but the GM wants to craft a story about The Enemy of Truth and demonic infiltration in Satyrine. Combine these two so that in order to join the Cahdedron, Cheilith herself says that the PC must investigate a suspected possessed merchant in the Emotion Mills Consortium. Their inquiries end up embroiling them in a vast demonic conspiracy.

An easy opportunity to create a story involving the PCs comes right at the beginning. At the end of the first session, the group comes up with a desideratum, meaning what they desire. Whatever that general desire is, the GM can and should design a small story based on that. If the PCs want information, they learn of the location of a great cache of old books, but it's in a basement in the Ruined Expanses. If they want money, they learn that there's an Apostate willing to pay to have someone protect her and her house while she travels in her spiritform, but she's got enemies who attempt to break in.

Another great place to mine for inserting your own stories is through the PCs' foundations, particularly as they were completed in the first session. If they have a neighbor who's always skulking around their house, it's up to you to decide why and if it turns into something they must contend with. If there's a gang of Dead pickpockets and burglars in the neighborhood, it's up to you to decide if and when that impacts the PC. If the PC has a close friend—probably a character they have an NPC bond with—working for a local gerent, that friend might eventually use the bond to ask the PC (and their friends) for help in an urgent matter. The great thing about these relationships and associations is that they're open-ended enough

for you to insert whatever story you want, yet they're still tied to and ultimately originate from the players. The players will be motivated to do something about a gang in their neighborhood if it was their house that was burglarized.

Sometimes GM stories come from random encounters. Well, that's a loaded term, and for many people, it conjures up tables to roll on and fight scenes with little point (in the right context, such things are fun, but they're not always right in Invisible Sun). So instead, let's call them "chance encounters." This is the mysterious woman the PCs meet in Zero's who tells them about a hidden pathway into the Deeps of Sleep. This is the traveler they meet on the road who's hiding a secret. It's Her Elegance, who comes along and proclaims one of the PCs her Champion of Glamour. This is a PC suddenly discovering a doorway in their house that they never saw before.

No one planned for these things. They're not part of a character arc. But they certainly make life interesting. The only thing you, as the GM, need to ensure is that they don't keep PCs from progressing and completing arcs. Sometimes players will adapt and select an additional arc that matches the story. For example, the PC who finds a mysterious doorway might take the Explore arc to see what's on the other side (so make it good).

All the suns have sample "chance" encounters designated for them in *The Path*, and Satyrine does as well. The viruses in the Precepts chapter of that book all offer fascinating chance encounters (spidering, mirrors, and so on).

Last, GM stories can come as consequences of PC actions. In fact, the best of them always do. Active PCs make waves. They make enemies. They owe debts. They need things. They travel. All of these things spawn stories.

To fulfill a character arc, the PCs find and rescue a prisoner held by the Vespertine for interrogation. Later, the Vespertine seek revenge against the PCs. Or, in the course of their travels through Silver, the PCs befriend a man who provides them with needed information. Later, they learn that he was the person

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Join an Organization, page 171

THE PATH
Cahdedron, page 112

The Enemy of Truth, page 27

Cheilith, page 113

Emotion Mills Consortium, page 118

Deeps of Sleep, page 24

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Explore, page 170

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Vespertine, page 114

that high-ranking members of the Vancian Order want them to find. Or the PCs bring down one of the worst criminal gangs in the Hollows, but the vacuum created leaves room for an all-new, even more dangerous gang to take their place.

COINCIDENCE

Coincidence should play a big part in your Invisible Sun narrative. It plays a big part in both the actual Surrealism movement and the occult. Giving significance to coincidence is our human brains trying to establish order in a random, chaotic universe. It's an explanation for almost every real-world superstition.

Coincidence can occur because of the subconscious, and the subconscious merging with the conscious is a part of surreality. Surreal painters often paint quickly so that what their hand does is driven more by their subconscious than their conscious mind. Surreal writers use imagery from dreams or generate poetry by making subconscious word-association choices. Or they go all the way and create sentences with randomized word generation (often cutting up newspapers or other texts) to allow a mixture of their conscious and subconscious mind, developing meaning from what comes out.

What does this mean for your game? Well, say you name an NPC Nicolas Festran. Later, you're searching for an NPC name on the fly and you say, "Nick Festron." Now, two people with similar names might just be a coincidence. It certainly happens in the real world—uh, I mean Shadow. Use the unconscious link you've given these two characters to mean something. Is one just an alias of the other? If so, why does Nicolas need a fake identity? What's he up to? Or maybe they're two people who are inextricably linked. Mysterious doppelgangers or different modalities of the same person on different layers of reality. Time travel. Literally anything is possible.

But you can engineer coincidence, too. Invisible Sun isn't an application of the actual occult, but a game of telling stories. So intentionally add coincidences to the narrative. The secret activation

Invisible Sun has lots of lists, but they are not tables for the GM to roll on to see what happens. Instead, allow your subconscious inclination to choose items from a table to create coincidence and unintended implications.

word for the mysterious artifact was written on the back cover of the children's book a character had when they were young. The villain menacing the PCs is secretly the mother of their staunchest ally. A seer knows that the PCs need to go to the Gold Sun because there are 8 ants crawling across the plate of food in her kitchen—and she's right.

Coincidence will seem phony and forced at first, because the powers that be in Shadow tell us it's a technique that writers and creators shouldn't use. But in the Actuality, coincidence is a part of life explained by the impossibly intricate, interacting, and ever-tangled skeins of magic (if it's explained at all). Eventually, encountering coincidence will be a comfort. Players will start to look for coincidences.

Human nature will make this happen at the game table every session. You'll turn over a new Sooth card that directly relates to what's going on in the narrative right then and there. It will seem uncanny, and the players will ask if you stacked the deck. The truth is that it's our human need to see patterns, relationships, and coincidence. That's why it's such a fundamental tool to use as you create stories.

USING CHARACTER ARCS TO BUILD A STORY ARC

The most beautiful thing in the game is when two or even three different character arcs weave together to form a story arc for the entire group. One person's arc to craft an object of power leads them to the deep jungles of the Green, where another PC's arc to bring someone to justice has also led them. For good measure, another player takes the Explore arc for their character to explore the specific area in the Green where everyone's going. Suddenly, it all becomes a story arc rather than separate character arcs, involving the whole group working together to get to a remote, dangerous location in the Green.

Twining character arcs into story arcs, making individual stories into group stories, isn't difficult. Remember, as GM, you're the one who provides the ways in which a character achieves an arc. You can craft things so that the goal of the PC with

the Repay a Debt arc is to rescue the captive that another PC with the Rescue arc must save. For that matter, another PC with the Revenge arc might want to go after the captor. See? It's easy. (And now you're starting to get a clearer picture of why I said coincidence was so important to the game.)

Sometimes, the players will do this for you. They can make it so that what one PC needs to carry out the Undo a Wrong arc is exactly what will allow another with the Restoration arc to restore their good name. And of course, at any time, a PC can take the Aid a Friend arc to help another character.

Finally, sometimes a personal arc just becomes too big for one character. A side scene moves from Development Mode to Narrative Mode in a full session as a PC asks their friends to help. It can be tricky at first, knowing how (or better yet, when) to move from side scene to main session, so I have found it best to leave it up to the player(s) involved. When they want to make it part of the group's story, it's time to do so. If they want to keep it to side scenes, do that.

AN EXTENDED EXAMPLE

Scarlett, a Vance, has the Finish a Great Work character arc. She wants to complete a spell her instructor was working on before he died. Chylissa, a Maker, has the Theft arc. Her sister has an object of power crafted by their mother, and Chylissa always felt she deserved it instead. Jackson is a Weaver with the Romance arc. He's infatuated with a librarian working in the Palindrome.

Scarlett needs to do some research to create her spell, so she and Jackson go to the library where the object of his affection works. Chylissa tags along—there are always good reasons to spend time in a library.

The main session finds Jackson talking to the librarian a fair bit, learning that he likes to spend time at a particular prosody. Of interest to Scarlett, that prosody is also the evening hangout of many Vances, and she could use some additional connections, not to mention they might be able to help her with the spell. The two decide to go there the evening after next. Chylissa just wants to know

if this is the kind of prosody that serves drinks. When she learns that it is, she's in.

At the prosody, Jackson's trying to charm his love interest and Scarlett's making connections. There are lots of interaction-based actions and in-game conversations. Only Chylissa notices a pickpocket trying to steal from Scarlett and some of the other Vances. She intervenes and there's a scuffle. The game switches from Narrative Mode to Action Mode. The thief tries to make a run for it, but the three characters catch him. The local gerent's people haul the thief away, but only then is the revelation made—the thief wasn't stealing. He was planting a mysterious blue stone in the pocket of every Vance in the place. (This is a storyline inserted by the GM, tailored specifically to involve Scarlett.)

All three characters are intrigued. Scarlett meets with some of her superiors in the order while Jackson and Chylissa try to convince the gerent to let them question the thief. Scarlett learns that the blue stones are minor magical tracking devices, but the order has no idea who made them or why they were planted only on Vances. After some bribes and some stretched truth, Jackson and Chylissa convince the gerent to let them talk to the thief. A bit of magical compulsion forces the prisoner to reveal that he was hired by a vislae named Norosse to plant the stones, but that's all he knows.

The session ends. Scarlett earns 1 Acumen for the opening of her arc. Jackson earns 2 Acumen for the opening and first step of his arc. All three earn 2 Acumen for stopping and apprehending the thief. The GM used a shift to make him harder to catch in the heat of the action, and Chylissa earned 1 Despair for that.

Chylissa has a side scene in Development Mode where she spies on her sister and her sister's house. She earns 2 Acumen for the opening and first step of her arc. In her own side scene, Scarlett speaks with an NPC Vance that she has a bond with, and he says that if she uncovers the mystery of the tracking stones, he'll help her work on the spell. Jackson studies to improve a skill.

The next session is a week later in the characters' lives. They're interested in checking out Norosse. It's of interest to all of them, but now it's a vital step in Scarlett's arc. They spend some time asking around Fartown about Norosse, but they don't learn much.

They decide the direct approach is best and confront Norosse outside his home. There's a heated conversation as Norosse denies everything and then tries to use a spell to force them to leave. Jackson's looking for a good story that will make him seem heroic in his new paramour's eyes, so he tries to subdue Norosse. Things once again go into Action Mode. Norosse has a number of thoughtform guards that intervene, and the three characters are forced to retreat, slightly wounded and with their resources depleted. They rest a bit but keep tabs on Norosse. He doesn't report them to the authorities (which they feared) but instead heads for a secret location in the Ruined Expanses. The three PCs follow.

There's a protracted scene of subterfuge and eavesdropping, but the characters learn that Norosse belongs to the Vespertine, and he and a few others are plotting against the Order of the Vance for some reason. And they've got a prisoner who they're questioning. Jackson thinks he recognizes her from the prosody last week—one of the Vances the thief slipped a tracker. The characters once again retreat to avoid getting caught.

The session nears its end. The characters relax at Zero's and discuss what they've learned. Jackson says he's committed to rescuing the Vespertine's prisoner, so much so that he's going to select an additional character arc: Rescue. During the same conversation, Chylissa reveals her plans to break into her sister's house, and her friends agree to help if she'll continue to help them deal with the Vespertine first, and she agrees.

Jackson did get a heroic story for his Romance arc, and Scarlett made progress toward her Finish a Great Work arc, so they both get 1 Acumen. The GM also rewards all three with 1 Acumen for discovering the Vespertine hideout. Jackson got 1 Despair for a GM shift that caused one of his woven

spells to end prematurely while they scuffled with Norosse's thoughtform guards. Chylissa gained 1 Joy, however, because inside the Vespertine house, they found extraordinarily valuable ingredients and she pocketed them. Between sessions, she plans to see if she can use them to make helpful ephemera items. Scarlett and Jackson plan a side scene together to find out more about the captive Vance.

The GM, meanwhile, begins to give some thought to preparing for the story involving Chylissa's sister. For now, though, they can focus on the Vespertine story they managed to weave into the players' arcs. The GM knows that Chylissa stealing those ingredients is likely to tip off the Vespertine that someone discovered their secret location, so when the PCs return to rescue the Vance, she and her captors will be long gone.

JOY AND DESPAIR

When a PC has 1 Joy and 1 Despair, they can make a Crux and use it to advance their character. You know this already. It's just a way for me to reiterate, yet again, that both good and bad things need to happen to the PCs for them to advance.

You are the final arbiter of what earns a character Joy or Despair. However, you look to the players

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for cues. When a player says during the Character Summaries that an event made them really happy, relieved, excited, thrilled, or some other such emotion, that might mean they've earned 1 Joy. If something made them sad, worried, terrified, guilty, or something similar, they may be due 1 Despair. But you've got to understand the character and the circumstances well enough to decide if it's worthy. "I was sad that Zero's was out of my favorite beer" is probably not worth a Despair.

Each order and each forte gives a few examples of possible sources of Joy and Despair. But those are only starting points.

In any given session, a PC should probably earn one or the other—or none at all—but never more than 1 and never 1 of each. This doesn't count Joy or Despair that might come from GM shifts, however.

Once in a while, a character will experience something that is both good and bad. When Callahan learned his parents were still alive, it seemed like a good thing, but at the same time discovering that they were members of the Court of Nous and likely using their power for ill was an awful revelation. In rare cases like these, let the player decide if the experience gives them a Joy or a Despair (never both). But make them explain why.

BUT MY PLOT!

Invisible Sun turns the table on the traditional RPG setup. In effect, the players design the story and the GM reacts (often with unexpected twists and turns). The GM isn't making up a story for the group. The story emerges from the proactivity and initiative of the players. This emergent quality is reinforced because each character has an arc (or two). If Riven wants to find the demon that killed his friend, and Fiona wants to rise in the ranks of the Order of Goetica, she works in the order's records rooms to earn goodwill, and at the same time she looks for records about the location of Riven's demon. The interaction of the goals of the character arcs creates the storyline step by step.

This means the GM has both more and less onus on them. Really, it just makes the GM's job different. Less preparation with plot and more preparation with characters and setting. Because when the PCs' story takes them to the records rooms of the Order of Goetica, they ought to meet someone interesting. Thus, the GM has prepared a handful of interesting NPCs that the group will meet at some point, but the GM doesn't necessarily know where. An NPC might very well have something to add to the ongoing storyline, or perhaps something to trigger a new storyline, but only because it interests the PCs or relates to their goals, not because the GM is trying to entice the group into a predetermined plot of their devising.

The plot will take care of itself.

If the PCs average about 1 Joy or 1 Despair a session, that means that it would take them about seventy sessions to reach the highest degree in their order (20 Crux) and get all the abilities from their forte (approximately 17 Crux).

ACUMEN

Acumen rewards mostly come from steps in a character's arc. However, when the PCs set out to do something and accomplish it when there is no arc involved, award them 1 or 2 Acumen (depending on the difficulty, determined after the fact). Not everything needs to be a full arc, and stories and plotlines that you interject are still worth a reward most of the time. The basic rule of thumb is, if something takes up a significant amount of time at the table, and it's got a distinct beginning and end, it's probably worth a couple of Acumen for each character.

GM SHIFTS AND COMPLICATIONS

If, as stated earlier, the setting is the GM's character, then GM shifts are a way for you to take a turn and act on behalf of that character.

You should try to use one or two shifts per session. Not only do they make things interesting, but they are a great way to award Joy and Despair. It behooves you to keep an eye on character totals for Joy and Despair, and use shifts to award a PC what they need.

You are in complete control of GM shifts (thus the name). They aren't critical failures or successes that come about as a result of terrible or terrific die rolls. They are entirely a narrative tool. You might, however, want to let the current active Sooth card (or a new one you suddenly reveal from the deck) dictate the nature of your shift, at least a little. See the Sooth Deck for examples for each card that might represent a shift that earns a PC Joy or Despair.

GM shifts are a way to introduce complications. This might be something simple, like a spell ending long before it should, or it might be a whole new plot twist that unravels the PCs' carefully laid plans.

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Charnel Heart, page 91

If you've played a Cypher System game like Numenera, you're familiar with GM intrusions. GM shifts are similar, but not identical. The biggest challenge you'll have is remembering that GM shifts can be good for PCs and make things better rather than just more difficult.

Complications almost always reward Despair, but that's okay. You'll find that players are good at engineering Joy for themselves, but not as good at gaining Despair without a little help from you.

Since **Invisible** Sun GMs never roll dice, shifts are also a way for you to do something that you might roll for in another game. Rather than roll to see if a vendor in the Celestial Bazaar has something really amazing for sale, just make it so and award 1 Joy to the PC who comes upon this lucky find. If you would normally roll to see if reinforcements from the Charnel Heart show up, just decide what you think should happen (for the good of the narrative or the sake of verisimilitude), and if they do, award a PC 1 Despair.

You can also use shifts to soften the blow when you have to rule against a player. Use a GM shift and award Despair to a player who's found a way to "abuse" the rules. "It doesn't work that way anymore," you say, and give them 1 Despair. And then you change the rules to something that works better.

Other interesting shifts:

+ NPC (friend or foe) uses a capability outside the norm or even the standard rules, but one that serves the narrative well.
+ NPC using magic experiences flux, which could be good or bad for a PC.
+ PC ability works better or worse (or just drastically different) than expected.
+ NPC ally provides more help than expected.
+ NPC foe gets help from allies or circumstances.
+ Terrain, weather, or other circumstances change.

PREPARING FOR A GAME SESSION

Now we come back around to the beginning. We said that GMs don't create a plot and guide the PCs through it. So what do they do instead? How do you prepare for an Invisible Sun session?

The answer is simple: piecemeal.

Piecemeal preparation is when the GM creates a bunch of pieces that will get used in the game, but without foreknowledge of how they will get used. You create a handful of interesting NPCs, but you don't place them in the world. The woman named Shalli with green hair and a scar might be an angry representative of the Ov if the PCs seek that group out in the course of the session, or she might be a vendor in the Celestial Bazaar if they decide to go shopping. The Apostate named Vaegor with the animated tattoo of a crocodile on his bald head will be an expert on demons if the PCs need to consult one, or you might just use him as an interesting patron in a cafe the characters are in when Dark-Eyed Manfred comes looking for them.

The point is, you create interesting characters and pull them out of your notebook when you need one. Likewise, you might come up with a cool idea for an M.C. Escher-like building and save it for an encounter where the location really needs to be interesting. It might be a library, the home of a gerent, or the meeting place for a Weaver cell.

This is going to fly in the face of the way some GMs look at worldbuilding and running games. Remember, I said at the beginning of this chapter that you've got to try to run different games with different styles that are appropriate to the needs of each game. Honestly, *this is the most important specific Invisible Sun GM tip I can give you*. This isn't cheating. It's not a crime against sandbox-style worldbuilding. It's just a way to be ready for whatever the players throw at you, so that you're not winging it through the whole session. It's a way to have a reservoir of interesting material so that you don't have to rely entirely on whatever strikes your fancy in the middle of a session (because we all

The beginning is also the end.

You might have to make minor, on-the-fly tweaks to the pieces you prepped. An elderly aristocrat might also need to be a vislae. A hovering, animate stone butler might need to be a bodyguard. A high-level NPC might need to be brought down a bit. Someone without extra defenses might suddenly need some. And so on.

draw blanks or get repetitious from time to time). It's a way to instill your imaginative and cool ideas into the game where they are most appropriate. When you thought up a book that converses with the reader by changing its letters around, you might not have had any idea where it would get used.

That's good. You'll figure that out as you're running the game.

Piecemeal preparation includes NPCs, locations, miscellaneous ideas, and scenes or encounters.

NPCs

Show up at every game session with at least three really memorable NPCs. They should have a distinctive look, an interesting personality trait, and of course a name, a level, and an interesting talent or ability. But don't give them any context—or rather, give them as little context as you can. A disaffected and surly Apostate with a death wish. A needy elderbrin with a sweet tooth. An angel with raven wings and a huge silver mace who talks only to children and the elderly.

The context comes in the course of play. When the PCs need to consult with someone about hauntings, they get the surly Apostate. When they need to barter for rare ingredients, the vendor in the market is the needy elderbrin. When they go to settle the score with the crime lord, she's under the protection of the angel. (But why? The answer potentially makes the whole story even more interesting.)

You'll find NPCs throughout the Path of Suns, Satyrine, and Fartown chapters of *The Path*.

In addition to a minimum of three interesting NPCs, come with at least ten new names you can drop around. The clerk behind the store counter, the lawyer about to show up with legal papers at any minute, and the pickpocket that the PCs apprehend before she can get away will all need names. But you didn't know any of them would be part of the game, or at least not important enough to have a name, until you were in the middle of the session.

LOCATIONS

Have at least one location prepared all the time. Two are probably better. You don't have to have a map of the place (but it wouldn't hurt), although an idea of the size and general layout is a must—even if it's just "a series of submerged tunnels that make an underwater maze."

You'll end up using the location whenever something in the session happens that needs to take place somewhere new. That is, if the PCs are wandering around their standard haunts in Fartown, that's one thing, but if they visit a vislae they don't know, that house might be the place where you can use your location. If you created a koi pond composed entirely of fish (no water), that might literally be their house, it might be the magical entrance, or it might be the main distinctive feature in their back yard.

If possible, vary the locations from session to session. One time it might be a tower, the next a garden. In fact, that's why I said that two are better than one, so you can always have an interesting feature (a talking statue or a copse of trees made of ice) as well as an actual structure (an upside-down pavilion or a building made entirely of adjoining round rooms).

Every location doesn't need to be surreal, just interesting. A fairly conventional building protected by lots of magical traps and wards certainly is interesting.

You'll find dozens of locations both interesting and surreal in *The Path*.

MISCELLANEOUS IDEAS

You should also prepare a couple of ideas that can be incorporated into the session whenever they seem appropriate. In fact, it can be a fun game you play on your own, figuring when and where to insert a seemingly random item, sight, phrase, or experience. Examples might include:

+ A man with a glowing heart that keeps trying to escape his chest
+ Someone who says, "The dreamer remains asleep"
+ Someone aggressively trying to sell lots of stolen goods on the street
+ A hat that is home to a spider that can telepathically communicate with the wearer

+ A building where every interior surface, including the walls and ceilings, offers enough gravity to walk on
+ A demon-possessed foe that splits apart in the middle of a fight, the demon manifesting within their body

Sometimes, you might not be able to work in an idea for a few sessions. Don't worry. The right time will make itself known.

SCENES OR ENCOUNTERS

Of course, sometimes you know very well what the PCs are going to do, and you can prepare for those actions. If you know they need to go to the Blue to accomplish their goal, you can prepare an encounter with Marra and come up with what she'll ask them to do in return for passage through her gateway. With that in mind, you can also prepare an encounter with the missing Court of Nous member that Marra asks them to find out in the nothingness of Blue. You can give him a name, a backstory, and some stats.

But then be ready to use none of that material because the players decide to go to the Pale instead. They're the ones in the driver's seat. Even though they said last week that they wanted to visit the Blue, they're under no obligation to do that.

However, you can salvage those encounters or scenes. They'll likely go to the Blue at some point and talk with Marra, and if you don't want to wait, what if the renegade Court of Nous member made it out of the Blue and is now hiding in Satyrine, where the PCs might run into him?

That's one of the great things about piecemeal preparation—because you're not tying anything to a specific situation or location, you can always use them later. If you prepare three NPCs for the current session and use only two, you've still got the third, so you're either one ahead or (better yet) you'll have four going into the next session. Before you know it, you'll have whole notebooks filled with preparation. You'll be ready for a session anytime!

The Guiding Hand is filled with prompts to help you with piecemeal preparation and even has some ideas to get you started.

SURREAL GAMING

I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality.

> **—André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme***

Surreal, as opposed to just "weird," is the merging of the dreamlike and the realistic. The weird stands right alongside the normal, in order to show us that neither is somehow more normal or less weird. In the sense of a setting for a roleplaying game, it's a place where people accept the dreamlike as part of their world. It's a place where the illogical isn't actually illogical because the definition of logic has changed.

In such a setting, the metaphorical becomes literal. To portray this theme, Invisible Sun uses two methods. The first is to apply it to the world, and the second is to apply it to the characters.

The world isn't so difficult, at least at first. It's just a matter of letting your imagination run wilder than normal. It's not just a floating city—it's a floating city held aloft on giant mothlike wings. It's not just a demon with big claws who wants to eat you—it's a demon with a clock face (with no clock hands) instead of a normal face who steals time from you so you die sooner. And so on.

A surreal setting does mean, however, that you'll need to shed any sort of hang-ups you might have about believable biologies or ecologies, or the long-term implications of an idea thanks to the laws of physics. Because if a fortress is built on the back of a giant turtle and you spend time thinking about the volume of plant matter a turtle of that size would need to consume to live, you're missing the point of a surreal setting. Likewise, if there's a locale where everyone must speak in rhyme or they float up into the air as if gravity is reversed, and you feel the need to develop a long explanation of why and how that works according to the laws of conservation of energy, surreal gaming might not be for you.

It's a matter of priority. In a surreal setting, you put ideas and visuals before rationality. Some

To define something is to describe the least of what it is. Magic doesn't define. It tries to explore the most of what something is. Which is impossible. Thus, magic is always striving for the boundless and the infinite in all things.

people might think it's lazy or haphazard to be unable to explain the reality of everything in the fictional world, but in truth it's just a different way of looking at things. The explanation and physics of it all isn't the point.

At the same time, though—and here's where surreality can get difficult—you don't want to go too far. You can't just say "everything goes, all the time" and abandon the idea of cause and effect entirely. Utterly random and haphazard events, all the time, lose all meaning. And meaning is important to surreality. In fact, it's possibly more important than in another kind of setting. Meaning is as important as (or more important than) explanations or justifications. So you need balance. The players need something solid to hang onto, something they can understand and count on. That's why Satyrine exists, on a meta level. It's a weird and wondrous place, but you can understand it. It's (fairly) firm footing to stand on, particularly at the beginning of the game. This is one of the many reasons why PCs have houses in this game. Having a house that exists on a street that runs through a town is grounding. Not only does the house tie the PC to the setting (and encourage them to stay in Satyrine in the early stages of the game, before venturing into the far stranger realms of the Path of Suns), but it also gives the player some control over that most relatable corner of the setting. They have a firm footing to stand on for certain because it's their house and they decide what it looks like, what's in it, and so on.

The larger point is that the things the PCs encounter, the people they meet, and the events that happen still need to have meaning. The people in the fortress on the back of the turtle don't talk to the PCs about what the turtle eats, but they do say that they stay on its back because it's the most defensible place during the frequent attacks from the skin-stealing pirates.

But since this is a roleplaying game, it's not just about the setting. It's also about the characters. In Invisible Sun, the characters are not separate from the setting, but part of it. Thus, the characters are

also surreal. From the get-go, the players can choose really weird abilities for their characters, allowing them to eat knowledge out of books or brains they touch or intentionally (and safely) shatter into a million pieces only to reform again. It means that, to immerse themselves into the poetry of the setting, characters gain incantations with names like The Voice of Blind Devotion Speaks Only Soothing Lies, or Anger Hates Itself Most of All. When a player at the table says, "I cast The Book's Offer Is a Welcome Escape," it is clear to them, and to the other players, that they aren't just in a wondrous world, but part of it. They're wondrous too.

Further, just as the setting is extremely visual in its surreality, so too are the characters. It can and will be a goal for many players to become more like the setting. It's aspirational. Not something that happens right away (so players can start off a bit grounded), but something that happens over time—because the players want it to. So while the generally relatable human characters start off with minor quirks, they eventually earn the ability to afford the changeries and make basically any physical modifications they can imagine. A giant metal cube for a head? An extra arm? Detachable eyes? Want to exist in the form of a swarm of flies? The answer is always yes (although making it happen isn't necessarily easy). Making such transformations aspirational casts a spotlight on the characters' (and players') relationship to the setting and the game as a whole. Rather than experienced characters who gain amazing powers and become less and less akin to the mundane world in which they live, **Invisible** Sun characters become more and more like the surreal and wondrous setting in which they live. It's a sort of reward as surely as any kind of mechanical bonus or treasure, but one that appeals both to the roleplaying (rather than game mechanic) side of the experience and to the fundamental nature of why the player is playing this game and not something else.

To put it another way, the players "win" the game by joining with it, not by fighting against

Despite all the weirdness and wonder, eventually players should be made to feel a part of the surreality of the game, not strangers to it.
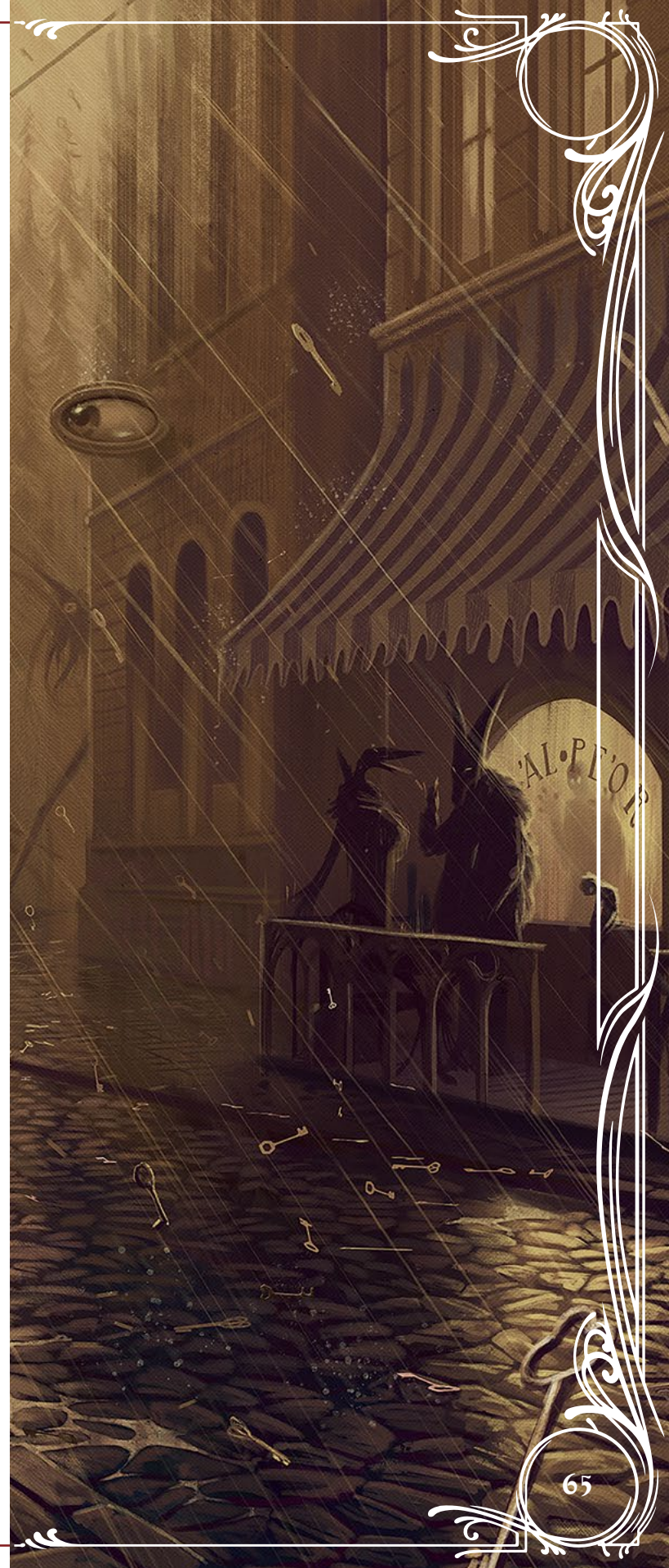
it. Nietzsche said, "He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster." His only mistake was assuming that was a bad thing. Weird, surreal monsters, metaphors taken literally—at least in the escapist context of a game—can be a lot of fun.

DESCRIBING A SURREAL WORLD

I categorically refused to consider the Surrealists as just another literary and artistic group. I believed they were capable of liberating man from the tyranny of the 'practical, rational world.'

—Salvador Dali

I wrote earlier, in the context of the surreal, that the metaphorical is literal. That's a fine place to start when thinking about how to convey the setting to the players.

If you're looking for inspiration, look to old science fiction and fantasy art, particularly from the 1970s. You'll find images of cities with

To find that which is lost, you must lose something else. The Lords of Lonely Corners demand this tribute.

faces, mountains made of eyes, skeletons riding motorcycles, and buildings constructed within giant skulls. Taken literally, they're all right at home in the Actuality.

Take song lyrics or lines of poetry that are meant to be metaphorical, be figurative, or contain imagery suggestive of emotions, and make them literal. Whether that be a frozen heart, a world in my eyes, or "O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being," all of them conjure images that fit into the setting. In fact, each of them could be the core concept for an NPC, a location, or a whole story arc.

Take ideas that are weird and combine them. If you have an idea for a tiger-headed woman and another for a woman with clocks for eyes, create an NPC that has the head of a tiger *and* clocks for eyes.

Take ideas that would be silly and hone them until the silliness is gone. For example, you might think "a man with dogs for arms" is a silly image. But now take the same idea and think about a man who, instead of hands and forearms, has mangy masses of flesh with snarling canine mouths and

bulging, angry eyes. Silly can become surreal and horrific pretty fast.

Not everything surreal is grotesque or terrifying. The surreal can be beautiful—a river of pale, shimmering light pouring down from the moon or a handsome man wearing a robe made entirely of blooming roses. The surreal can even spring forth from the mundane. A clock face in a tree trunk or a ship made of books are surreal combinations of two quite mundane things.

If you've got it in you, be a little poetic with your descriptions from time to time. Sometimes this just means not always being precise. A doglike beast with "too many legs" conjures different things in different imaginations, but they're all surreal. Use loaded, emotional words with your descriptions. An angry mouth. A welcoming door. A pathetic ghost.

One of the most difficult challenges you'll face as an Invisible Sun GM is resisting your natural inclination to divide the world into the real and the surreal. When describing a tree with green leaves, you'll want to call it "normal" to distinguish it from the nearby tree that has eyes peering out from the bark and smoke pouring out from one large knot. But in this setting, neither tree is more real than the other. (One might be more common than the other, but even that depends on circumstance.) That's a concept that lies at the very heart of the surreal. Surreality is a fusion of the dreamlike and the rational. It requires both, together, at the same time.

USING RANDOM SELECTION TO CREATE SURREALISM

The "cut-up technique" can be traced back to the Dadaists, who were sort of the precursors of the Surrealists, but it was popularized by William Burroughs. The idea is that you take a page of text, cut it up, and then rearrange the words to create something new. This technique, or at least the general idea behind it, can be a useful tool in creating the surreal. Mixing and matching things not through imagination but through

The dreamer remains asleep.

When the PCs leave Satyrine, things need to get more surreal. Weirder. Far weirder. Satyrine is a touchstone with a bit of normalcy, but venturing out into the Path of Suns is a trip with few guideposts and no familiar landmarks.

randomization or subconscious selection brings about new creations that no one's ever seen before. Doing this can result in creations that surprise you, and you're the one creating it. The trick, though, is to *not* throw out the combinations that don't make sense. Instead, ponder them and let your subconscious mind pull meaning from them.

Flip through a book—literally any book—and pick the first word your eye falls on, and then do it again. You might come upon "relative" and then "gradual." That might not mean anything to you at first. But after you sit for a while, you think about what it would be to gradually become someone's relative. What if there was a being that, after it spent time with you, eventually started to rewrite your memories (and perhaps the past itself) so you started to believe it was your sibling? That's an insidious and disturbing way to bond with you and get you to do what it wants.

Trying again, you come upon "tool" and "tenant." Again, thinking about it a bit, you conceive of an object of power that, once activated, takes up residence within a person's very existence. It's not a piece of equipment, but a part of them. A tenant in their soul, and thus its power is always available to them, no matter what—even if they're not in their physical body.

MANAGING THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Invisible Sun is a game of secrets. Players don't start out knowing everything. For example, players probably shouldn't read *The Path* or any of this chapter. And even if they do, you still have the secrets envelope, which contains some of the deepest secrets of the game.

Players should earn their knowledge. That's what research is for. That's why Satyrine is filled with libraries and bookstores. They should look for information, find someone to talk to, consult with summoned spirits, or use divinations to learn what they need.

The GM doesn't simply feed them exposition. The only exception is if a PC attempts an Intellect-based action to see if they already know something, but this should always be something that could be in their knowledge base. Not deep secrets, but information like "Where's the best place to get pizza in Fartown?" or a Goetic wondering "Do all angels have wings?"

In other words, secrets don't come easy. That's why there are character arcs to learn them. If it's a spell, a character secret, a house secret, and the like (that is to say, a game mechanic), it's often just a matter of spending Acumen, but the GM can still say—for any of them—that the PC needs to find a source for the knowledge. And some of them might require a concerted effort. An arc. Following a trail of clues and bits of information until they learn the whole of it.

The same is true of information not related to game mechanics. If the PCs want to know where a ghost named Barul is hiding, they might have to succeed at multiple interaction actions with many different sources before they get a solid lead. Think of any television show, movie, or book that has an investigator in it. One clue leads to the next.

Sometimes the investigator has to break it down. Who was Barul in life? That might shed some light into where he is. They ask one person, and she doesn't know the answer but provides the name of someone else who might. That second person knows a bit, but his real value is that he has the name of a book where he read about Barul's past. Someone else knows of a rare book dealer who might have that book, and the dealer herself (who was really hard to find, as doing so required traveling across the breadth of Indigo) might be able to lay her hands on a copy of the tome, but only for a steep price.

Basically, you need to create a map for your secrets—or rather, the revelation of those secrets. If the PCs are trying to find Barul, they first need to learn more information about him, either as a ghost, who he was in life, or both. Either of these might be a path of inquiry, and each path leads to

Taking notes in Invisible Sun really isn't a choice for players. It's a necessity. There's so much information that a player without notes will quickly get lost.

a revelation. So you note that Barul is currently interested in finding a Vance named Philip Menuel. In life, Barul was a Vance as well, a friend of Menuel. Barul was married to a Maker named Delia.

Further down the path, you note that Menuel and Barul were working on a spell together. A new path forms, with investigation leading to the fact that Philip Menuel and Delia were having an affair. The two of them killed Barul once the spell was done so Menuel could take full credit. But now he's in hiding, because Barul is coming for revenge as a ghost. Delia's operating in secret to cover their tracks, and she might be on to the investigating PCs before they are on to her. If the PCs want to find Barul, they should find Philip Menuel and Delia.

When you reveal clues, surprises, and other interesting information, keep in mind three things:

1. The order of the revelations needs to be logical. If the PCs discover right away that Menuel killed Barul, the other revelations become scattered, as opposed to a more pleasing chain of discovery.

2. The revelations should build in intensity. With each new discovery, the drama and tension increase. Sex. Jealousy. Betrayal. Murder. And the threat to the PCs themselves from Delia.

3. Revelations should come at an increasing pace. This heightens the excitement. It might take a relatively long time to learn who Barul was in life and who Philip Menuel was, but by the end, revelations come fast and furious—the affair, the murder, Menuel's hiding place, and Delia's intervention.

Don't connect the dots for the players. Let them do it—but make sure they have plenty of dots to connect. In fact, you probably will have to provide more dots than they need, because they might not find them all. The fun is in the chase. The encounters can involve interaction actions, persuasion skill, connections, and Hidden Knowledge use. And perhaps bribes and smart thinking from the players.

PHTHISIS, IN THE REALM
OF THE RED SUN.

SURREAL SITUATIONS AND THEMES

If you think the players would appreciate it, Invisible Sun offers opportunities to explore topics, concepts, and situations that normally don't come up in roleplaying games. Identity, existence, life and death, ethics and morality, and more are all potential topics that might arise. Your narrative might end up asking the players questions like these:

+ You're dead, but you're still around. What do you do?
+ Is murder so bad if it's not permanent?
+ If you can accomplish anything, what do you do first?
+ Are there questions that can't be answered?
+ Are there questions that shouldn't be answered?
+ If your magic can solve every problem, is it wrong to let problems exist?
+ How do you solve the unsolvable?
+ What do you do if you're forced to imagine the unimaginable?
+ Can you exist outside of time? And if so, what does the world look like?
+ You're in love with someone who's not real. Is that really love?
+ You're not you anymore. Who are you?
+ I am you and you are me. What happens now?
+ What if you're just a figment of someone's imagination?
+ If everything has a soul, is meat murder? (And if magic allows us to talk to plants, are vegetarians any better?)

> **The importance of the unconscious as a source of inspiration is central to the nature of surrealism.**

Invisible Sun ideas can come from mistakes (typos or misheard song lyrics), dreams, or opening up a book randomly and pointing at a line of text.

USING THE BLACK CUBE

There's a lot of stuff in the big box of Invisible Sun. As you go through the setup, it's up to you to see that it all contributes to the enjoyment of the game. Invisible Sun is designed with the assumption that you're using all the components.

The Character Tomes and the Tokens: Every player should have a tome appropriate to their order, a stat pool sheet, and enough tokens to indicate the totals in each pool so they can keep track of bene.

If you're used to roleplaying games where the only way to keep track of information is by writing it down, you might be amazed at the ease of using tokens to keep track of everything.

Each player should have a grimoire sheet as needed to record the spells and other magical practices they know.

The Rules References: There's very likely something for everyone here. Make sure the Vance player has the Vance spell preparation sheets and the appropriate Vance spell cards. The Weaver needs the Weaver cards, the Goetic needs the Goetic Summoning reference sheet, and the Maker needs the Maker's Matrix reference sheet.

In addition, the other general rules reference sheets should be available for everyone to see at the table.

The Books: *The Key*, *The Gate*, *The Path*, and *The Way* are obviously useful references. As GM, you'll want to have read them all. Players will want to read *The Key*, although you can lead them through character creation in person if you'd rather.

The Cards: Every spell, ephemera, and object of power has its own card. Players should have the cards associated with the things they know or possess. No flipping through books to reference these abilities—the cards make it easy to have the information a player or GM needs at their fingertips.

The fact that all the spells, ephemera, and objects of power are on cards is something you can take advantage of in many ways.

One thing you can do is present the players only with the spell cards you wish them to have access to or even know about at the outset, holding others back to be revealed as secret discoveries or the result of research. Whole concepts can be held back for later. A GM could reserve ideas like the Deeps of Sleep or spells dealing with being dead for mid-narrative revelations, for example.

The decks can be used to determine an incantation randomly. This is useful for meditating for acquiescent incantations. The other decks can be used this way as well—gather a few ephemera object cards and one or two object of power cards, and you've just stocked a Maker's booth in the Celestial Bazaar.

The Guiding Hand: This notebook is for the GM. Use it to help you plan out upcoming sessions and manage information about the PCs as well as information that comes out of each session.

The Path of Suns and the Sooth Deck: The Path of Suns board needs to have a prominent place at your game table. Play the Sooth cards right on each sun. When a card is played on the Invisible Sun, place it in the Testament of Suns, because that card's effects will be active for a while, so it should be visible for all to see.

When a PC's heart is "activated" by the family of the Sooth card in play, use the tokens provided as easy reminders that they get +1 to their ventures.

THE SOOTH DECK

The currents of magic create a complex, ever-changing tapestry of power. Their fluctuations grant certain varieties of spells and other magical practices a brief facilitation or impediment. Vislae see these changing patterns. They feel them in their very bones and along their skin. To communicate these difficult concepts quickly and easily, they created a set of 60 icons that play along a specific pattern—the Path of Suns—to show the (seemingly) random changes and their effects.

The Sooth Deck represents these icons of pure magical power. They are simple images, each encoded with volumes of meaning, particularly as they interplay with the Path and with each other.

Sixty icons means that there are 60 cards in the deck. They are divided into four families of 15 cards each.

Secrets ✥   Visions ☀

Mysteries ⚕   Notions ✷

Each family also has an associated animal, object, and classic element.

Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind

Because vislae are so inherently magical, modifications based on Sooth cards and associated hearts affect all vislae actions, not just spells or other magical actions.

Within each family is a set of royalty cards, representing some of the more potent icons, with special effects and meanings.

Throughout a session of Invisible Sun, the GM will, at various points, play a Sooth card on the Path of Suns, starting on the Silver Sun at the top, and ending with the Invisible Sun off to the side. Playing a Sooth card on the Path is usually called a card turn, as in turning over (and thus revealing) the card. The first card is turned at the beginning of the session, and a new card is played at the GM's discretion, but the following things should probably always trigger a card turn:

+ Characters move to a new location
+ A significant event occurs
+ A significant new NPC enters the scene
+ A PC suffers a Wound or Anguish
+ Something surprising happens
+ A GM shift is introduced
+ Flux occurs

The most recently turned card is the active card, and any effects of the previous card are now canceled. The only exception is that a card played on the Invisible Sun goes into the Testament of Suns and remains in effect until a new card is played on the Invisible Sun.

Sooth cards represent the constant fluctuations of magic. Most cards make one type of magic stronger and another type weaker, based on their stronger and weaker association with the suns. The sun listed at the bottom of the card in bold is enhanced, and the other sun listed, in fainter text, is diminished. Spells and effects linked to the stronger

sun have their effective level increased by 1 (with no additional cost) or the Sorcery cost of their effect reduced by 1—player choice. Effects tied to the weaker sun have their effective level lowered by 1 or their Sorcery cost raised by 1. So a card like Endless Maze enhances the Blue Sun and diminishes the Red Sun. This means it either increases the level of Blue spells by 1 or reduces the cost of Blue spells by 1. Likewise, it reduces the level of Red spells by 1 or increases the cost by 1.

Cards affecting magic of a particular color sun double the effect when played on that sun in the Path. So if Endless Maze was played on the Blue Sun, it would increase the level or lower the cost by 2. Played on the Red Sun, it would lower the level or increase the cost by 2.

The other effect is that if a card is played from the card family associated with a character's heart, such as a Mysteries card for a Stoic, all of that character's actions get a +1 bonus to their venture.

Special royalty cards have these effects:

Sovereign: +1 to all actions, +2 if heart is linked to family

Nemesis: –1 to all actions, –2 if heart is linked to family

Defender: +2 to all actions if heart is linked to family

Apprentice: –1 to all actions if heart is linked to family

Companion: Duplicates the effects of the previously played card (if played first in a session on the Silver Sun, immediately play another card on the next sun)

Adept: Play another card on the next sun

CARD LISTING

Each Sooth Deck card has a value from 0 to 9, and a family (Secrets, Visions, Mysteries, or Notions) with associated animal, element, and so on. Mostly, however, each card's listing deals with its meanings. In each description, you'll find quick meanings that offer some key words or phrases to help remind you of the card's full meanings. Within the general description of the card's meanings, you'll find four distinct categories.

It's not uncommon that in one session, only three or four cards are turned on the Path of Suns, and in the next, ten or twelve might be played. GMs can, if they wish, pick up where one session left off, or simply start over at the beginning of each session on the Silver Sun.

First, the divinatory meaning. The Sooth Deck is, of course, a divinatory tool. In the course of a game, someone may do a "reading," in which cards are shuffled and played along the Path of Suns in order, starting with Silver and ending with the Invisible Sun. The cards each have their own individual meaning, but only when played with eight other cards can they form a cohesive reading, with each card interpreted in the context of the others. The closer in proximity a card is to another, the greater influence it has on that card's meaning (and vice versa). The card played on the Invisible Sun affects all other cards equally. The person whose future path is being divined—the "person in question"— can state a goal or topic they want the reading to concern, or they can choose to be a blank slate and let the cards dictate the direction the reading takes.

Second, the game narrative meaning. Within the course of a game, the GM can use the visual elements of a card for inspiration, particularly for handling things on the fly. However, in a deeper sense, the card meanings can also inspire events in the game narrative. The GM should usually just choose one of the listed ideas. And of course, most of the time, a card turn is just a card turn. There's no requirement that a Sooth card affects the narrative. The possible meanings are simply there, and the GM can choose to use them or not.

Third and fourth, meanings associated with Joy and Despair. These are also game-affecting meanings if the GM wants them. Remember that GMs will be using shifts, in which a character gains Joy or Despair, a couple of times each session. These shifts change the course of events in the game, usually to the benefit or detriment of a character. The Joy or Despair meanings, then, are specific suggestions for shifts based on the card. So the Joy meanings are all positive, and the Despair meanings are all negative. Obviously, these are not required, and a GM can institute a shift that has nothing to do with a card's meaning.

Invisible Sun

ALCHEMIST

Value: 8
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Complexity, transformation, knowledge

The Alchemist seeks transformation, usually in the sense of advancement or enlightenment. She hopes to better herself though understanding.

As adept of the Secrets family, the Alchemist is of course complicated. Her knowledge is deep and vast. Magical processes surround her. Chemicals and substances and the flame that catalyzes them all dance upon her fingertips. But her true raw materials are her own essence and her own soul.

   Makers often see this card as a good omen.

Divination: The Alchemist's complexity suggests that there's far more to a situation than previously understood. Just as often, however, she indicates drastic and sudden change—a new opportunity, a new person involved, or a new facet to a problem. Should one turn the Alchemist and Dangerous Elixir consecutively, this is called the Ultimate Transformation, and it suggests total and complete upheaval of the situation and possibly someone involved in it.

Game Narrative: A situation transforms, usually by becoming more complex—new NPCs get involved, new facts arise, new challenges or barriers present themselves.

Joy: The PC gains knowledge, or insight into a complex problem. An NPC ally has information or understanding that can be of great use.

Despair: The PC fails at a vital task because they didn't understand it and its real complexities.

The fumes of the Alchemist's work offer her both bane and boon.

AMBASSADOR

Value: 8
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Diplomacy, reason, discussion, intelligence

She hails from a far-off land, carrying a message of unity and civility. The Ambassador wishes to talk, not to fight. She knows that words and wisdom offer a path to success that violence never could. Her words are careful and measured, never rash or ill-considered. If only there were more such individuals to make the world a better place.

The Ambassador is the adept of the Visions family. Her magic and skill come from her ability to persuade, which again brings us to the idea that words are as magical as any spell or ritual. Just another type of incantation.

Divination: For some, the Ambassador card is a blessing. She indicates that calm heads and reason must prevail to remain on the path to success. That intellect is superior to brawn, and conversation is greater than conflict. But to those who already plan a more direct, confrontational, or even violent approach, this card be a can be a thorn in their side.

Game Narrative: An NPC is very smart. One or more combatants in a conflict choose diplomacy over violence. Someone must use intelligence and reason to move forward.

Joy: The PC succeeds due to something they say. An NPC foe chooses to talk out a problem rather than move forward into conflict. A PC action appears extremely wise or intelligent.

Despair: The PC fails due to something they say. An NPC ally does not aid the PC in a conflict, choosing instead to sue for peace.

The offering of a broken blade is an overture for peace.

ANGEL

Value: 7
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: judgment, safety, assistance, light, justice

No greater representation of goodness, light, or justice exists than the winged form of an angel from on high. Left behind as a part of the Legacy, they attempt to aid, to teach, and to protect. However, some angels also pass judgment. Their vengeance can be terrible to behold, their anger something no mortal ever wishes to experience. Thus, the Angel represents both the open palm of altruism and the terrible fist of retribution.

The Angel is the defender of Notions. Its light insures that they are kept safe.

Divination: One should take this opportunity to look for an ally or at least shelter. Someone or something out there can help the person in question. The Angel brings justice as it passes judgment. As long as one is not found wanting, this card turn suggests that external forces bring assistance or succor.

Game Narrative: Someone seeks shelter. An angel gets involved in the matter at hand. An NPC offers assistance to another. A stronghold keeps important people or things safe.

Joy: An NPC intervenes on the PC's behalf. The PC finds shelter or protection when needed. The PC finds light in the darkness.

Despair: An NPC determines the PC is untrustworthy or a wrongdoer. An NPC foe finds safety or aid.

The eyes on her outstretched wings saw far more than a mortal's eyes ever could, gazing into secret realms and guarded hearts.

ASSASSIN

Value: 8
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Finesse, stealth, betrayal, finality

Subtlety is the Assassin's greatest tool. Anyone can kill, but he does it so deftly and so quickly that even the victim doesn't realize they're dead until the Assassin is long gone. He often poses as someone harmless or even friendly, because betrayal is subtlety's closest sibling.

The Assassin is the adept of Mysteries. His knowledge of the secrets of death is limitless, and his use of skill and finesse would be a thing of beauty if he used them for anything other than murder. But he does not.

Divination: The Assassin doesn't just bring death. He brings an ending. Endings can be welcome—the ending of something unwanted, for example. Or, when it suggests betrayal, it might be a relationship that comes to an end. But

when this card is turned, it can indeed foretell literal death or the threat of death. If this is the case, the death will come from an unexpected quarter.

Game Narrative: An NPC is betrayed. An NPC is murdered. Something significant—a dynasty, a tradition, an organization—comes to an end. Something unexpected turns deadly, such as a bottle of wine turning to poison.

Joy: The PC's use of skill and finesse (or stealth) overcomes extremely difficult odds. Something the PC does not like comes to an end. An NPC foe is betrayed by one of their own.

Despair: The PC is betrayed by a trusted NPC. Something important to the PC comes to a surprising end.
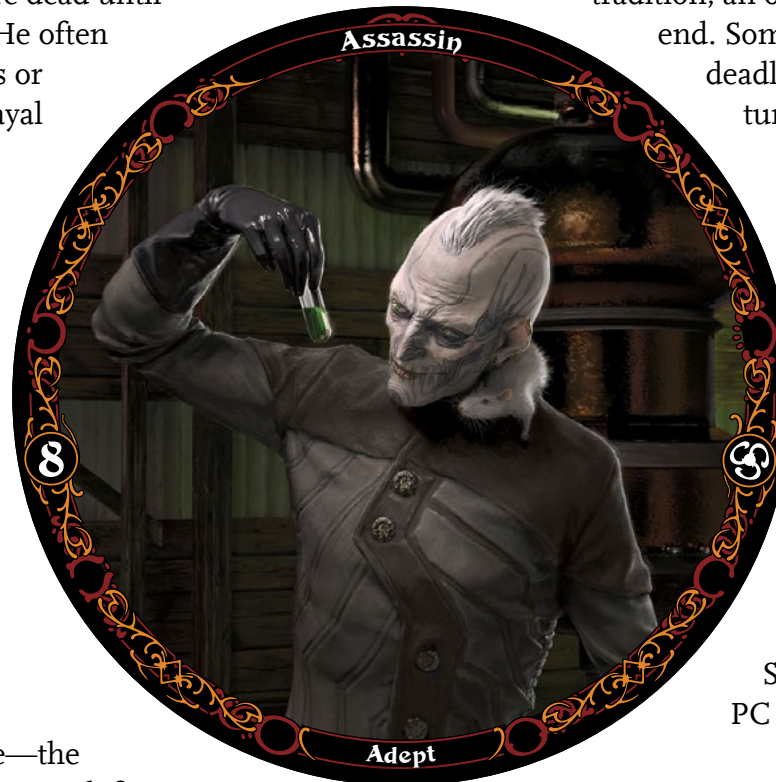
Dealing death is a magical art all its own.

BANISHED SERPENT

Value: 3
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Balance, exile, punishment

Vislae know exile. But for them, and their time in Shadow, the exile was self-imposed. The Banished Serpent was cast out, sent back from whence it came. Banishment rids us of a problem, but it does not bring it to a permanent end. It is rarely a true solution. Rather, it is most often a punishment. We banish those who have threatened us or wronged us because exile is what they fear. The fact that it ends the threat, at least temporarily, is just an added benefit. As a punishment, then, it is an act of balance. An appropriate and measured response to an unwanted act.

Divination: The Banished Serpent can be a blessing or a curse depending on who is getting exiled or punished. The card turn may suggest that the person in question faces this fate, but it might also be someone else involved in the matter at hand. Sometimes, though, it can simply be a balancing of the metaphorical scales. It can mean that someone gets what's coming to them, whether that be good or bad. It is a "settling of accounts," so to speak.

Game Narrative: Someone is cast out. A demon or spirit is banished (or must be banished to end its threat). Harmony is upset and can only be restored through an act that balances the situation once again, which might very well involve casting away a criminal or troublemaker. A wrongdoer is punished for a crime.

Joy: An NPC foe is punished for some act they committed. An unloved NPC is sent away. The PC escapes a bad situation.

Despair: The PC is cast out of a place they wish to be. The PC is punished for a crime (real or otherwise).

Cast out, the serpent retreats back to its lair to contemplate its next scheme.

BLIND GUARDIAN

Value: 2
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Safety, impartiality, serenity, blindness, challenges

The Blind Guardian watches over us like a protector. That's probably our door it guards. Because of its blindness, it confronts all intruders equally, from the lowest vermin to the most powerful god, from the purest angel to the vilest demon. Its blindness also confers a calmness. You'll never see the guardian worry or fret, nor will you see it eager or anticipatory.

To those that seek what it guards, it is a difficult challenge. You cannot bribe or charm this guardian, and despite its blindness—or because of it—it is very difficult to fool or deceive.

Divination: Although it can represent a challenge arising before one can proceed, typically this card is a positive turn, indicating safety or serenity. If some sort of authority figure (or any judgment at all) is involved, this card indicates that they can be counted on to be impartial. Rarely, it suggests literal blindness involved.

Game Narrative: An endangered person or place remains safe. An authority makes an impartial and fair ruling. A challenge arises, with an obvious reward if it is overcome.

Joy: The PC is safe from some immediate danger. An NPC takes action to keep the PC safe.

Despair: The PC does not notice something vital. Something causes the PC to be blinded (permanently or temporarily).

Crouching before the door, the guardian does not judge, only protects.

Invisible Sun

CAT

Value: 6
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Solitude, curiosity, cleverness, dexterity

Cats see much. They prowl about, or simply find a good vantage point and watch (and sleep). Should something really catch their eye, however, they move to investigate. "Curiosity killed the cat," as the saying goes, and it's true. But cats have nine lives and thus they can afford a little curiosity.

The Cat is the companion of the Notions family. It watches over them, and sometimes even protects them.

Divination: One sometimes must act alone to succeed. Curiosity and cleverness can be virtues, but be wary of taking them too far. A challenge may arise that involves both mental and physical dexterity.

Game Narrative: Someone important to matters at hand is a misanthrope and lives alone. A cat takes an interest. A trap is sprung by curiosity. An NPC's cleverness gets them into trouble.

Joy: The PC avoids danger that otherwise would have harmed them. The PC finds a clever solution to a problem.

Despair: An NPC the PC wishes to talk to demands to be left alone. An NPC ally falls into a trap. An unexpected predator hunts the PC.

Humans make excellent domesticated companions for cats.

COMPELLING VOICE

Value: 2
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Control, domination, persuasion

The right voice can command an army.

In word or song, the Compelling Voice bids us to do something we might not do otherwise. It moves us. Frightens us. Appeals to our sense of reason. Those who master such a technique have a weapon in their arsenal equal to any other.

Because the Secrets family is related to books, however, it's worth considering that the voice in question might actually come in the form of a written message. The speaker might be an author instead. Mostly, however, Compelling Voice is considered to be the outsider of the Secrets family.

Divination: The domination or persuasion inherent in Compelling Voice can be used both by and against the person in question. It can be a warning to beware honeyed words, or that someone you trust or interact with is actually being controlled by someone else. Alternatively, it can mean that you must use some persuasion to get what you want or need.

Game Narrative: An NPC uses influence over another to change a situation.

Joy: An NPC listens to the PC's words and does as asked.

Despair: An NPC listens to the words of another and does something that significantly works against the PC.

We follow the voice. We are compelled by the words.

CONSPIRATOR

Value: 7
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Upheaval, hidden agendas, gossip

The Conspirator keeps to the shadows, whispering with others like her. How many conspirators are there? Who is involved? We never know. Those hushed whispers in the right—or wrong—ears can tear us all apart. Bring us all crashing down.

The Conspirator is the defender of Secrets. She guards them and the family they represent. It is her role to know the secrets and spread them as needed, whispering to just the right people at the right time.

Divination: When this card is turned, only someone engaging in conspiratorial action looks at it as a good thing. For them, it means secrets are kept safe. For everyone else, this card means conspirators work or speak against you, or at the very least that some surprising upheaval may be coming.

Game Narrative: A big, dramatic change occurs. A secretive group of NPCs is involved in the narrative.

Joy: The PC's secrets remain safe. A group of NPCs includes the PC in their secret discussions.

Despair: A group of NPCs is working against the PCs. Whispered gossip about the PC is spreading.

She speaks in words of power, but a different kind of power.

CROWDED TOMB

Value: 1
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Endings, despair, completion

The tomb lies at the end of all stories, the reward for the greatest monarch and the lowliest beggar. Of course the tomb is crowded. It grows more crowded each day. Mourners crowd around the tomb, but it is even more crowded within. So many deaths. So many endings.

Crowded Tomb is the location card of the Secrets family, and thus represents a permanence or is related to a physical place. This means that the finality that it represents probably occurs in a specific and significant location.
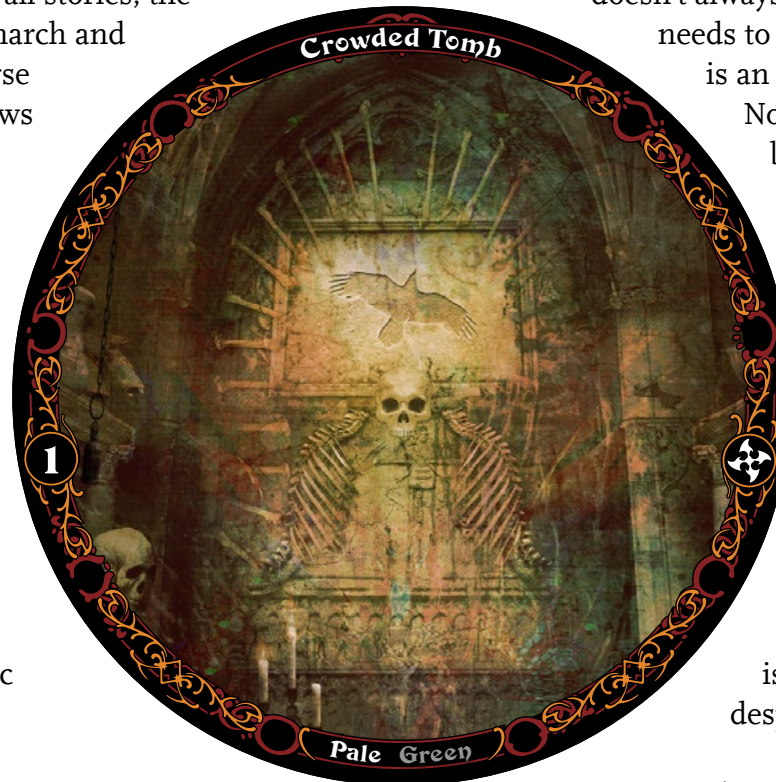
Divination: The Crowded Tomb is an ending. Not necessarily a sudden ending—an ending that you know full well is coming, whether you acknowledge it or not. It might just mean that a task is finished. It doesn't always need to be sad—everything needs to end sometime. But there is an air of despair to this card. Not outright misery, perhaps, but a lingering sadness. A mourning.

Game Narrative: Someone dies. Something ends. An NPC is filled with sadness.

Joy: Something harmful to the PC comes to an end. An opponent or obstacle for the PC dies or is gripped with debilitating despair.

Despair: Someone significant to the PC dies. Something created by the PC is destroyed or otherwise comes to an end.

The silence grows more crowded. And yet remains silent.

DANGEROUS ELIXIR

Value: 1
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Power, transformation, risk, consequences

Powerful magic comes in small, perhaps even innocuous forms. The Dangerous Elixir proves that to be true. It is powerful and transformative, but is it a boon or a bane? Are the potion's effects harmful or helpful? It's all about the risk you're willing to take and the consequences you're willing to face.

Divination: This card turn offers power, but at a risk. Power can backfire. The Dangerous Elixir promises transformation, and that can be literal or figurative. It might transform a situation, changing the outcome of events. But there's still always that risk—something's going to change, but will it be good or bad for the person in question?

Should one turn the Alchemist and Dangerous Elixir consecutively, this is called the Ultimate Transformation, and it suggests total and complete upheaval of the situation and possibly someone involved in it.

Game Narrative: An extremely powerful vislae is involved in the events at hand. An NPC takes a terrible risk to get what they want. Someone or something is magically transformed. Current events clearly carry major consequences depending on their outcomes.

Joy: The PC's spell or other ability proves to be more powerful than expected. The PC takes a risk, and it pays off with some reward.

Despair: A magical effect unexpectedly affects the PC. The PC takes a risk, and it goes very poorly. The consequences of the PC's actions are far worse than expected.

A test of bravery in a single bottle.

DEVIL

Value: 0
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Temptation, lies, charm, persuasion, words

The nemesis of secrets is the prince of lies, the Devil. Of course, there are many devils. Their commonality is their need to corrupt the world around them. Charming, sexy liars that seek to draw mortals into their own evil. Devils don't kill, they talk. They don't destroy, they tempt. The term "devil" stands apart from "demon" in that way. A demon is typically a relatively unintelligent engine of violence and destruction. Devils are far more insidious.

Divination: This is most often a sign of danger, but its interpretation can focus more on the devil's tools than his aims—charm, persuasion, and honeyed words. But beware the insincerity of such things, and the lies they conceal. In a more straightforward reading, the card represents the lure of seduction—either literally (sexually) or figuratively in the seduction of evil. Making easy choices can be seductive, but that way lies real danger.

Game Narrative: A devil literally gets involved with the narrative. A charming NPC uses their persuasive powers for good or ill.

Joy: An NPC believes the PC's words or is charmed by their actions.

Despair: An important NPC's words prove insincere. An NPC ally falls for the lies or trickery of someone else.

He sits there staring, and while you might wonder, you do not want to know what he's thinking.

DOCTOR

Value: 0

Visions • Swans • Blades • Water

Meanings: Wisdom, health, dependence upon others, disease

Doctors help, but it's a help we'd rather not need. No one wants to see a doctor. We only see them if something's gone frighteningly wrong. They have knowledge—perhaps secret knowledge—and an insight few can match. But these are secrets about disease and death. Can one delve so deeply into such topics and not come out affected?

The Doctor is the nemesis of the Visions family. This enigmatic, genderless figure is a harbinger of illness and plague, but they the possibility of succor or even remedy from the disease they foretell. There is an inherent contradiction to the Doctor, then. They are the hero that we really do not want.

Divination: Although sinister in appearance and position in its family, the Doctor card can mean good health and a wisdom in dealing with the challenges that life can bring. However, there's always an undercurrent of dependence with the turn of this card. It's not the wisdom of the person in question, but the wisdom of someone else. The presage of well-being comes from the intervention of some outside force. Worse, however, sometimes the Doctor suggests not health but illness.

Game Narrative: Someone falls ill. A plague threatens. A powerful NPC relies upon another for their survival. An NPC consults wise advisors. People search for a remedy to some widespread affliction.

Joy: The PC recovers from illness or injury. Someone knowledgeable provides aid to the PC.

Despair: The PC falls victim to disease. An injury the PC suffers won't seem to heal.

But doctors are supposed to heal. What is it that you're doing?

DRIVER

Value: 7
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Impetuous, travel, forward motion, speed

Always moving forward. Sometimes there is no other recourse than to simply get away. Escape is often the best option, and the best escape is a quick one. Like a shark, the Driver can never stop moving. She's always racing ahead, always moving forward, making sudden, abrupt turns down new avenues without warning. They say that it's not the destination that's important, it's the trip. Well, if that's true, the Driver does it best, because ultimately, she has no destination in mind. It's never the point. The point is speed, motion, and the ability to change one's mind from second to second and yet do so fluidly and flawlessly.

   The Driver is the defender of the Mysteries family. She protects by enabling others to get away. She carries them to safety. Always moving forward.
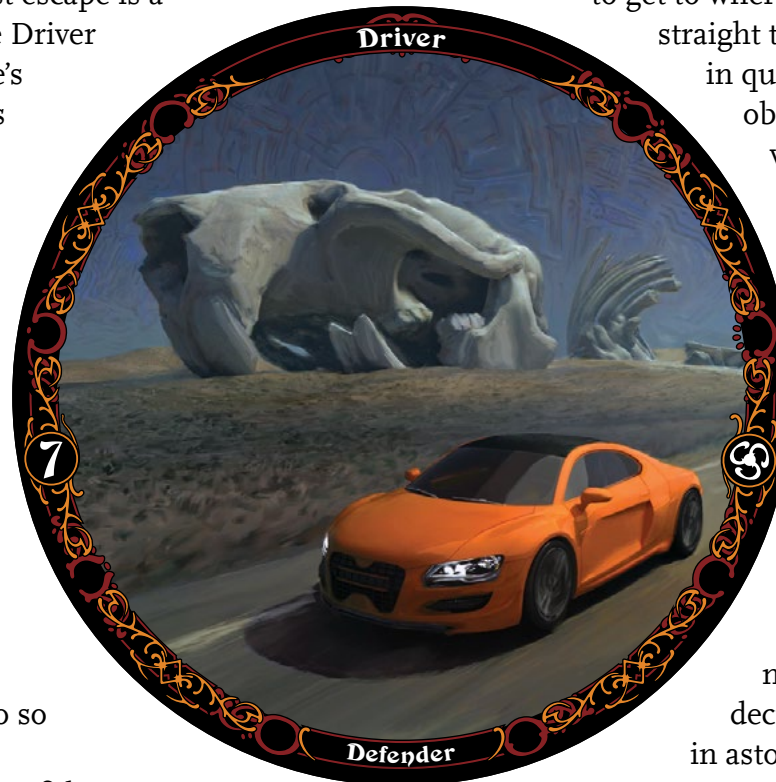
Divination: The Driver indicates an upcoming trip. It suggests that speed is important, but most of all it says that one should keep moving forward. Ostensibly, "forward" means toward one's goal, but there's an impetuousness to the Driver that suggests—at least sometimes—that the best way to get to where one's going might not be straight toward it. The Driver moves in quick turns to get around obstacles and befuddle those who try to follow her.

Game Narrative: An NPC takes an important journey. Someone is in a terrible hurry. The impetuous decision that someone makes has huge ramifications for many others.

Joy: The PC moves faster than normal in a crucial moment. An impetuous decision on the PC's part results in astonishing success.

Despair: An NPC ally makes an impetuous decision that turns out poorly. An NPC foe moves faster than normal. Something the PC wants or needs is a very long distance away.

There is nowhere she cannot go if she is behind the wheel.

ELUSIVE SLEEP

Value: 6
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Futility, worry, stress, awareness

The richest noble cannot buy sleep. The strongest among us cannot compel its submission. Even the wisest person might lose a night's rest to anxiety. Still, when we're awake, we are aware, and that awareness can be crucial.

Divination: Elusive Sleep indicates one is wracked with worry. . . or should be. It might indicate that the stress that one feels is a real detriment, and that whatever is being attempted is utterly futile. Last, this card turn might suggest that the key to success lies in vigilance.

Game Narrative: Someone is wracked with worry. An NPC notices something important. An NPC's actions are futile. No one can sleep.

Joy: The PC notices something vital. An NPC foe struggles against something impossible, wasting time and energy.

Despair: The PC's actions are useless. The PC cannot sleep and suffers for it. A vigilant NPC notices something the PC would like to remain hidden.

Elusive Sleep
6
Blue Red

Sleep can be difficult prey for even the most skilled hunter when it wishes to be.

EMPTY GALLOWS

Value: 3
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Rescue, salvation, solution, favorable judgment, escape

The gallows claims no victory today. Today, we are granted a reprieve. Or we make an escape. Or someone rescues us. Whatever the reason, the threat is gone. The problem is solved. The Empty Gallows brings a feeling of relief, of gratitude, and newfound purpose. It is a sudden extension of life.

The Empty Gallows serves as the location card for the Notions family.

Divination: The Empty Gallows suggests that some problem—perhaps a major problem—will be solved. This might be from an external source, or one might bring upon their own salvation. Either way, this positive card turn signifies that one avoids a terrible fate. Less commonly (but still in a positive accord), this card may presage that someone of importance passes favorable judgment upon the person in question. They are found innocent, worthy, or to have some other favorable trait.

Game Narrative: Someone accused of a crime is pardoned or freed. A prisoner escapes.

Joy: An outside force rescues the PC from a dire circumstance. The PC realizes a solution to their problem. The PC avoids some impending doom or harm. An NPC judges the PC to be trustworthy or reliable.

Despair: Circumstances bring salvation to a doomed NPC foe. An NPC held or confined by the PC escapes.

The terrible appointed hour comes. . . and goes.

ENDLESS MAZE

Value: 3

Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame

Meanings: Journey, long spans of time, insanity, inner turmoil

As within, so without. The maze that traps you—slows your journey, forces you to double back, and leads you where you don't want to go—might be a physical maze, or it might be your own indecision, self-criticism, or self-doubt. To get where we need to go, or do what we need to do, we have to conquer the mazes we find ourselves in.

Divination: To succeed, one must undertake a long journey. This is an ill-met card. At best, it indicates that there is much to do, but even then the process is long—likely because it is difficult, confusing, or maddening. The traveler will get lost. One will be caught within the worst labyrinth of all—one's own tumultuous mind.

Game Narrative: A journey or task takes much longer than expected. An NPC feels indecision or even starts to go mad.

Joy: An enemy is filled with hesitation or confusion and does not act. An unwanted NPC does not arrive.

Despair: The PC arrives late, to dire consequences. A PC's movement takes longer than expected. An NPC ally arrives too late to help.

She had a map. But it would still be a long journey, fraught with peril.

ENDLESS WOODS

Value: 3

Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone

Meanings: Sounds, nature, mysteries, the dark side of the forces of life

The woods and the wilderness are untamed and unsafe. Travel through them is perilous. We hear things all around us that we cannot see. Trees and undergrowth conceal dangers and—perhaps— wonders. The Endless Woods is the location card of the Mysteries family, and rightfully so, for it is the very home to the unknown and perhaps the unknowable.

Divination: Nature plays a role in what's about to happen. That can be good or bad, depending on the context. For one about to embark on a journey, this is likely a dire card turn. For someone staying put, the Endless Woods can be protective and even nurturing. The card can also suggest that something is happening that one doesn't yet know about—a mystery just at the edge of hearing like the whisper of a voice or the rustle of undergrowth.

Game Narrative: Someone gets lost in the woods or wilderness. The forces of nature—weather, plague, living creatures— cause an incident. A mysterious event occurs. A significant event happens in an unknown land.

Joy: Nature smiles upon the PC, bringing good weather, a fortuitous animal encounter, and so on. The PC finds their way out of a situation.

Despair: The PC is distracted by a mysterious sound. The forces of nature make the PC's life more difficult.

Take even a step into those dark woods and you'll never find your way back.

ENTICING JEWEL

Value: 2
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Greed, money, beauty, goals, success

The light at the end of the tunnel. The brass ring. The center of the target. The object of our desire lies before us in the form of the Enticing Jewel. We want it. We have to have it. It represents beauty, but the side of beauty that demands attention and probably possession. It is the beauty that can sometimes call to our darker natures. It brings out greed, ambition, and selfishness.

Divination: When the Enticing Jewel is turned, everything focuses upon it. Most of the time, this is one of the most positive cards that can be revealed. It indicates success in one's endeavor. It suggests beauty and wealth. At the very least, even if not actual success, the Enticing Jewel is the potential for success, which in itself can be encouraging (because sometimes there is no possibility for success). Still, the card has a darker side, because it also suggests greed and a love of wealth, and the dangers of such things.

Game Narrative: Someone succeeds at a major goal. Something or someone of great physical beauty enters the scene. An NPC possessing great wealth becomes involved. An NPC obtains (or desires) an object of great value.

Joy: The PC succeeds at a major undertaking, perhaps not through their own actions. The PC obtains something of great beauty or value.

Despair: An NPC foe succeeds at a goal. Something the PC desires remains out of reach, perhaps because they are too driven by greed.

It shines in the darkness, its beauty mocking me.
Its absence from my possession is a wrong that must be righted.

ENVELOPING DARKNESS

Value: 5
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Restriction, loss, endings

Dark isn't an absence of light. Light is an absence of darkness. Darkness is the default. It moves in to fill any place the light abandons. The Dark was the totality of the Actuality before the sun(s) existed. And according to many, the Dark will be the totality again, once the sun(s) are gone. The darkness is the end. It takes things. It takes us. It grabs, constricts, and overwhelms everything not warded by the light.

Divination: The Enveloping Darkness portends an ending. Something draws quickly to a close. Endings aren't always bad, though, so this card turn can bring relief as an affliction or problem comes to an end. The card can also mean restriction or denial. The tendrils of the Enveloping Darkness can hold us fast and keep us from doing what we want—an end to freedom, so to speak. This card does not suggest death for the person in question, but it can suggest the death of someone involved in the matter at hand.

Game Narrative: Something significant happens (or will happen) at night. An NPC dies. An important object is lost. People are trapped or otherwise prevented from moving freely.

Joy: Some unwanted condition or spell afflicting the PC comes to an end. The PC's enemies are temporarily held at bay.

Despair: Something restricts or hinders the PC's movement. An NPC close to the PC dies.

He was so afraid of the darkness beneath his bed, he neglected the darkness outside his window.

ETERNAL MOUNTAIN

Value: 4

Visions • Swans • Blades • Water

Meanings: Unchanging, solitude, memory, eternal, long life

The mountain stands alone and unchanging. It always has and it always will. Some find this compelling. Others, terrifying. The mountain sees all and never forgets what it has seen.

Eternal Mountain is the location card of the Visions family.

Divination: A challenge that lies ahead is insurmountable. Conversely, if one is on the defense, one can weather any storm, any assault, or any ill fate. Eternal Mountain in general predicts a long life, but it can also suggest that one should move forward alone, particularly to better reflect upon the past.

Game Narrative: A structure or object remains strong and intact. An NPC of great age becomes involved. An NPC will not be changed. Someone remembers something important.

Joy: The PC recalls an important fact (this might be new information to the player). An NPC ally pledges eternal fidelity.

Despair: Something the PC would like to destroy or overcome remains inviolable. The PC is left all alone by their friends.

We all hope and dread to reach the Eternal Mountain one day.

FLEETING MOMENT

Value: 1
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Lost time, elusiveness, agility, reaction

Time moves inexorably forward. Sometimes it moves so quickly that it moves so quickly that we lose track of it. We try to watch, we try to pay attention, and yet it's gone. Mercurially, it slips through our fingers. Time can move so rapidly, in fact, that we can lose time. Look at the clock—it's 6:22. Look again, seemingly a moment later, and it's 8:05. They say that there was once an hour that came after midnight, but eventually it moved so quickly that it disappeared altogether. If that's true, perhaps it's the fate of all time, and the midnight hour will flit away next. Time is elusive and impossible to hold, no matter how you try. It's a force even the gods fear.

ready. This could be a threat, or it could be a valuable opportunity. Either way, one has to react to it with agility (physical, mental, or both) or this elusive event will flitter away, leaving only its results behind to show that it ever even happened.

Game Narrative: Something strange happens with time, or the perception of time. An NPC escapes from confinement. An elusive figure (perhaps a spirit or a legendary beast) makes a brief appearance. An NPC performs a feat of amazing agility.

Joy: The PC manages to dodge an attack that would otherwise harm them. The PC acts and reacts so quickly that they gain another action. An attempt to hold the PC or somehow restrict them fails.

Despair: Time passes suddenly and the PC has no memory of it. An NPC foe reacts impossibly fast and avoids an attack or spell.

Divination: Quick and decisive reaction is the advice suggested by this card. The implication is that something is going to happen, it's going to happen soon, and it's going to happen fast. One must be

Blink and it's gone—a moment too quick to perceive. But your whole life is made of such moments.

FORBIDDEN GAME

Value: 2
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Danger, intellect, strategy, balance

The temptation to partake in the game is strong. But you know you shouldn't—it's dangerous. It's forbidden. It's far more than it seems. It may appear to be a simple diversion. A pastime. But it is so much deeper, so much more engrossing, and so much more addicting. Some have lost their very souls to its intricacies. It's not just that people want to win—although that's a part of it—it's the game's complexities that draw them in. Every move is a colossal undertaking. The game is more intricate than the real world that it simulates. That's the impossible thing. The game is bigger on the inside than the outside. It's bigger than the world in which it is played.

Divination: There is a threat here, but it is one that can be overcome with cleverness and strategy. This cleverness needs to take into account the balance of all involved factors, which can be daunting, as sometimes those factors are difficult to see.

Game Narrative: A leader uses elaborate plans to get what they want. A military leader develops intricate strategies as they prepare their soldiers. People are engaged in some kind of game or sport. Weavers playing the Spider's Game become important to the matters at hand.

Joy: The PC's use of intellect proves to be successful even beyond what was expected. Two factors at play in the PC's current situation that seemed to contradict or come into conflict instead find balance.

Despair: An NPC has utterly outmaneuvered the PC. The balance is off-kilter. Something the PC relied on falls apart.

The game isn't like life. It's better. It's more realistic.

FORGOTTEN PRISONER

Value: 5

Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone

Meanings: Injustice, bad fortune, memory loss, something lost

Is there really such a thing as justice? The Forgotten Prisoner would say no. How long has he been there? We don't know, and neither does he. His dank cell is wrapped in gloom and lost deep in some dungeon or high above in a locked tower. His stomach cramps with hunger and his muscles ache from confinement. He has lost the world and the world has lost him.

As the apprentice of Mysteries, he himself is a mystery. What's his identity? Why is he locked away? What crime—if any—did he commit?

Divination: The Forgotten Prisoner most likely indicates that one has forgotten something vital, but it can also presage some coming injustice or just simply a bit of bad luck. It is not a happy moment to see this card turned.

Game Narrative: Someone is incarcerated, or something happens involving a prison. Something vital has been forgotten or lost. An NPC falls victim to horrible injustice.

Joy: Something terrible happens to an NPC foe. Someone forgets something the PC would like them not to remember.

Despair: Someone of importance forgets the PC, or an agreement they had with the character. Something terrible happens to the PC from sheer bad luck.

They locked him away and forgot about him until he forgot about himself.

GHOSTLY PRESENCE

Value: 7
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: The past, guilt, unresolved issues

We all have our ghosts. They haunt us, both metaphorically and—of course—literally. We can become weighed down by our past sins, our unrequited feelings, our unresolved issues. As humans, we crave closure, but is such a thing ever truly possible? The Ghostly Presence suggests that it is not. There's always something from our past that will arise later to remind us of the wrongs of long ago.

Divination: Something from the past—perhaps something forgotten—arises in the present. The most typical interpretation is that this ghost from the past will give the person in question trouble, but it's possible that the reminder of the past is not entirely negative.

Game Narrative: Something done poorly in the past affects the present (a poorly made bridge collapses, a well runs dry, or the like). An NPC is motivated by guilt. NPCs wronged in the past demand justice in the present.

Joy: An ally from the past returns. The PC remembers some fact from the past—even a negative one—that is useful in the present.

Despair: Some past wrongdoing on the PC's part returns to haunt them. An NPC wronged in the past arrives to get revenge upon the PC. A past debt incurred by the PC comes due.

Do you remember? Do you remember what you did? I do.

GOLDEN SHIP

Value: 2
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Wealth earned, honor, prestige, respect

There are many ships, but only one Golden Ship. This legendary vessel supposedly carries only the greatest heroes, the most influential celebrities, the highest nobles, and the most powerful vislae to ports of call most people cannot even imagine. Even seeing the ship is a great honor. It represents wealth and prestige.

Divination: A highly positive card, the Golden Ship suggests that one will earn wealth, fame, or respect. Or all three. It presages a successful endeavor, but usually only if that endeavor is grand in scope. The Golden Ship does not waste its time on petty actions or minor deeds. Alternatively, this card turn might suggest the intervention (again, probably in a positive way) of someone wealthy, well-respected, or influential.

Game Narrative: A wealthy or famous person is involved in some matter. Someone earns a fortune, a great honor, or considerable respect for something that they do. An NPC acts to uphold their honor or out of a desire for wealth or prestige. A sea voyage of great length or scope occurs.

Joy: The PC earns a great deal of money. An NPC respects the PC for something they've done. The PC is awarded some great honor, position, or title.

Despair: An NPC loses all respect for the PC based on something they've done. An NPC foe earns some great honor or wealth. Someone famous or noteworthy takes a dislike to the PC.

The starry sky is our ocean. We set sail for eternity.

HARVESTING SPIDER

Value: 2
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Action, labor, stealth

Spiders are so many things: builders, weavers, and caretakers, but also hunters, killers, and blood-drinkers. The Harvesting Spider cares for her young, but at the expense of what she harvests, and that just might be you. She is stealthy and sneaky. Her many footsteps are silent. Regardless, spiders never stop working. They build and create to serve specific purposes.

Divination: As terrifying as this card appears, its meanings are more esoteric, but still significant. The always-active spider signifies action. Act—immediately. Work—hard. Success can be had, but only as the result of action and toil. The Harvesting Spider is also a subtle hunter, and thus can suggest that stealth might be required in one's endeavors.

Game Narrative: Someone takes action. People labor to achieve a goal. A newly erected structure becomes important. Various forces debate over a single important action. Thieves or spies are active in the shadows.

Joy: The PC's hard work pays off. The PC's use of stealth is not just successful—it's crucial. The PC is so energized, they act faster than normal.

Despair: Something or someone sneaks past the PC without them noticing. An NPC foe acts faster than normal.

Harvesting Spider

2

Red Blue

That "dream" you had of a spider sipping the fluid from your eye?
Just a mother's desire to feed her babies. Don't think anything of it.

HIDDEN MOON

Value: 1

Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame

Meanings: New beginnings, insight, intuition, foresight, looking ahead, potential danger

We talk a lot about the sun, but the moon has as much influence over our lives. It just does it more subtly, quietly. The moon is stealthy. It comes at night. It hides amid the tree tops and behind tall buildings. Its light is soft and dim.

The moon hides so that it can peer ahead unnoticed, and catch a glimpse of even those things it should not see.

The ever-changing moon reflects our changing nature—our bodies and our minds. It represents intuition. The moon is present when we feel more than we think. When something just "feels right" or "feels wrong," that might be the moon's influence. It also represents inspiration—a sudden new idea.

Divination: When Hidden Moon is played, something new begins. It suggests looking forward, not backward. But what's coming ahead might be dangerous rather than beneficial, so be wary.

Game Narrative: A new NPC arrives. An NPC has an idea. The PCs learn of a new NPC they can talk to in order to get some insight.

Joy: The PC gets an insight, seemingly out of the blue. An NPC arrives that saves or significantly helps the PC.

Despair: An NPC arrives unexpectedly and means the PC ill.

Hidden Moon

1

Grey Indigo

The moon rewards those who can discover its secrets.

HUNTER

Value: 8

Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind

Meanings: Nature, death, conflict, survival, seeking a goal

The Hunter is a lonely soul, pursuing prey with dogged tenacity. Their single-minded dedication is why they are successful in tracking, confronting, and killing their prey. The Hunter knows better than anyone that it is "kill or be killed" in the harsh world we live in. In the city, we pretend civilization has lifted us above such things, but the Hunter travels into the wilderness where no such delusions exist. But that's not to say that there aren't hunters in cities. On the contrary, there are hunters who prey upon people. Sometimes these hunters seek murder, but some hunt with other goals, just as dark.

The Hunter is the adept of Notions. Her skills in the wilds, and her knowledge of her prey and the best way to bring it down, make her the match for any vislae.

Divination: This is the perfect card for one pursuing a goal. The Hunter suggests that vigilance and persistence will win the day. However, if one isn't actively seeking something, this card turn can portend conflict and even death.

Game Narrative: Important events occur in the wilderness. An NPC is murdered. A group of people struggle to survive against the environment. A large-scale conflict occurs. An NPC is single-mindedly pursuing a goal.

Joy: The PC achieves their goal. The PC survives a significant threat. Nature smiles upon the PC, so the weather and other conditions are favorable to their needs.

Despair: Someone or something stalks the PC. The PC finds conflict where they were not expecting it. Nature is unkind to the PC, and the surrounding conditions make things much harder for them. An NPC ally is murdered.

A hunter in the Ticking Forest very likely seeks errix hounds. Or they seek her.

IMPERATOR

Value: 9

Visions • Swans • Blades • Water

Meanings: Wisdom in war, turning points, deciding factors

Sometimes conflict is needed, and the Imperator believes that keeping a level head and using intellect and wisdom, rather than rage or brute force, paves the path to victory. Of course, not every crisis point lies within a literal battle. Some conflicts take other forms—stressful situations where some are prone to make rash decisions based on emotion. But not the Imperator. Follow his example.

The Imperator is the sovereign of the Visions family. He is a leader, an advisor, a teacher, and a mighty warrior.

Divination: This card represents the crucial turning point—the deciding factor that brings victory or defeat. The crisis point. Generally, the interpretation is that when this card

is turned, the person in question must make a very important decision upon which everything that follows now rests. The Imperator also suggests that this choice should be made with consideration and care, not emotion or haste.

Game Narrative: Events come to a head. Something happens to alter the course of future events, and it could be for the better or the worse. An NPC makes a wise choice in the midst of stress and conflict. A revelation is made of a new deciding factor.

Joy: The PC gets an intelligent idea that will aid them in a coming challenge. Something important reaches a turning point and it goes well for the PC.

Despair: An NPC foe makes a wise choice. Something important reaches a turning point and it goes poorly for the PC. The PC's failed actions turn out to be the deciding factor for an even larger matter.

He shall lead us through the gates. The storm of war cannot harm us if we follow his command.

Invisible Sun

IMPRISONING ICE

Value: 4
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Entrapment, imprisonment, danger, conflict

The very environment holds you fast when you are trapped in the ice. You cannot move and the cold threatens your life. You can't persuade the ice, or trick it. You can't fight it or best it in a contest. The ice is impersonal, unrelenting, and vastly powerful, even though it's nothing more than frozen water. Unless, of course, it's more than that. Perhaps there is intelligence there. Perhaps it's not just frozen water, but a living spirit of cold. Of stillness. Of imprisonment. In such a case, the actions of the ice might be entirely personal. You may have brought your terrible fate down upon your own head.

Divination: Danger lies ahead. This card turn predicts a coming conflict with dire consequences. The person in question might be imprisoned or otherwise entrapped. Traps, of course, come in many forms. Emotional traps. Psychological traps. Legal traps. A relationship can be a trap. To escape, one must either act on the warning given by Imprisoning Ice or succeed in a bitter struggle.

Game Narrative: An important NPC is thrown in prison. A conflict looms, with powerful forces on both sides. Someone builds a new prison. Someone falls into a trap.

Joy: The PC manages to trap an opponent. The PC achieves victory in a dangerous struggle.

Despair: The PC or one of their allies is trapped or held fast. The PC loses a fight. The PC is thrown in prison.

The ice doesn't need to hurry. You're not going anywhere.

INCRIMINATING SKULL

Value: 5

Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame

Meanings: Disaster, discovery, evidence, connections, friends/family

The skull is uncovered, revealing a long-buried wrong. It is evidence of a crime. However, the skull was once a person, and that person's family and friends miss them. They wonder what happened to them, and discovering the remains of the victim actually brings them some comfort and closure on the situation.

The evidence that is uncovered might be the result of a long investigation, or it might be entirely accidental and inadvertent. It might be something that people have long searched for, or the remains of someone or something that no one even knew was missing. Last, it might be something that someone was trying to actively conceal, or it might just be the remains of some past event covered up only by time.

Divination: Incriminating Skull tells us that there's a deeper, darker meaning to the matter at hand. It presages failure, particularly being caught at wrongdoing. However, if the context is right, it might also simply indicate that a friend or relative—particularly one that has been long estranged—is involved in some way.

Game Narrative: Something that should have remained hidden becomes evident. A friendly NPC, particularly one with a bond to the PC, makes an appearance or something happens that suggests a connection with them.

Joy: The PC makes a new friend, or reconnects with an old one.

Despair: Someone discovers something the PC did in the past that they would have preferred remain secret.

The raven remembers your sins.

INEVITABLE CATACLYSM

Value: 4

Visions • Swans • Blades • Water

Meanings: Bad luck, endings, inevitability, breaking a relationship

While we fear the cataclysm, it is inevitable. We cannot prevent it. The end comes for all things eventually, and we cannot stop it. The earth quakes, the seas advance, the sky falls. Fire engulfs everything. We can try to survive it, but that's likely the best we can hope for. An optimist might try to say that a cataclysm can be cleansing, and change things for the better. But the Inevitable Cataclysm really isn't about that. It's about endings.

Divination: It's difficult to see this card turn as a positive one. Typically, even if it suggests that something unwanted comes to an end, it is usually a violent and costly one. This card might just be seen as ill fortune, but it could also be the end of a relationship, the end of an ongoing success, or that a significant possession (like a house) might be in danger of destruction.

Game Narrative: A significant relationship comes to an end. A disaster strikes. A structure collapses.

Joy: An NPC foe faces bad luck, utter failure, or even death. The relationship between two NPC foes ends.

Despair: The PC's spell ends unexpectedly. Whatever the PC is doing ends in failure. An NPC important to the PC dies. An NPC ends a relationship with the PC.

Towers topple. Creatures die. Everything has an ending.

JACKAL

Value: 0

Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone

Meanings: Intimidation, power, ruthlessness, dark magic, necromancy

This intimidating fellow is a dread figure to be certain. The Jackal represents everything nons fear about vislae—threatening displays of destructive power; dark, soul-twisting spells; ruthless, unforgiving magic that taps into death, demons, and worse. Power for power's sake, he is a selfish, megalomaniacal figure, willing to do whatever it takes to get what he wants.

The Jackal is the nemesis of the Mysteries family. Many believe, however, that he is a literal being, and not just a symbol on a card (some believe all the royalty cards show real, immortal beings). If he is real, he is some kind of diabolic figure that not only uses dark magic but offers it to others willing to use his methods.

Divination: While most see the Jackal as a dire omen of dark magic and ruthlessness, some embrace the power he represents. To be certain, this card turn can be a threat, or it can be an offer. The person in question may want to take precautions against the effects of hexes or other dangerous magic, the intervention of demonic spirits, or simply an angry vislae. The Jackal can, in some instances, be equated to any figure in power (not just magical power) or authority, but even then usually only to a ruthless or intimidating figure.

Game Narrative: Demons get involved. An NPC utilizes powerful and probably dark magic. Something important is destroyed by magic. The Dead get involved.

Joy: An NPC foe is intimidated by the PC's abilities. The PC's spell or other ability is more powerful than expected (but probably in a destructive or dangerous way).

Despair: An NPC ally is terrified of a foe. An NPC ally succumbs to a powerful spell. The PC is affected by magic more potent than expected.

The Jackal bides his time, waiting to escort us into death personally.

LOOMING SHADE

Value: 9

Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone

Meanings: Terror, doom, impending danger, unseen threats

Ghosts and spirits lurk everywhere. Most never interact with mortals. Some shades, however, prey upon mortals, looking to feast upon their fear, their flesh, or their very souls. The Looming Shade is almost certainly such a danger. It is terrifying, but it's not just idle fear—the threat is real. The best possible outcome you can hope for is that it's not a horror that appears now, but is yet to come, so perhaps you can prepare for it. But readying for the unseen is always difficult. Even forewarned, how do you expect the unexpected?

Divination: Danger raises its head when this card is turned. This is a threat that comes from an unseen, unexpected quarter. It is the doom that lurks where one least expects it. Obviously, this card is always a bad omen. It really has no positive meanings.

Game Narrative: An unexpected threat arises. An evil spirit (probably a dead spirit) attacks a living mortal. An NPC is terrified of something (probably justifiably).

Joy: The PC recognizes an impending threat before it occurs, in time to try to prevent it. An NPC foe is terrified.

Despair: The PC loses control for a time, gripped in abject terror. An unseen threat harms an NPC ally.

Do not ignore the threat that lurks in the dark just because you can't see it.

LOST STAR

Value: 8
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Good or bad luck, great distance, great age, great value

We gaze into the night sky and we see the stars shining back down on us. We wonder what they really are (but that's a secret for another time). Stars represent a higher world, where everything is magnified. Everything having to do with the stars is far greater than it would be in our world. Love burns brighter, gems sparkle more beautifully, and children sing more sweetly. At the same time, disasters are more calamitous, anger seethes more deeply, and armies wage wars far longer.

Divination: The Lost Star offers good or bad fortune determined by the card turned after it on the Path. Whatever this card suggests, it is epic in scale. Something important to the person in question is a very long way away, very old, or very valuable. The Lost Star amplifies any other results determined by other cards.

Game Narrative: Something needed is a very long distance away. An important NPC is very old. A treasure or work of art is very valuable. Something that was going to happen anyway happens in a much larger way—a rain shower becomes a torrential downpour, a raid by enemies is an invasion, a bit of success in gambling turns into a huge windfall.

Joy: The PC's success is magnified greatly—an attack is a killing blow, an attempt to charm results in romance, and so on. The range or duration of a spell cast by the PC is doubled.

Despair: The PC's failure has far greater implications than they realized initially. A minor injury turns into a terrible affliction. Something the PC needs is much farther away than they thought.

Stars fall. It happens. But what happens next depends on who finds it.

Invisible Sun

LUCKY COIN

Value: 4

Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind

Meanings: Good fortune, wealth, freedom, unexpected luck, unstructured

We put a lot of value in objects. We place a lot of importance in their presence in our lives. Some people might have a favorite shirt, a trusty handkerchief, or—of course—a Lucky Coin. Armed with a talisman such as this, no harm can befall us. But we only barely understand the truth of such things. The luck they bring—if they work—never comes in an expected form.
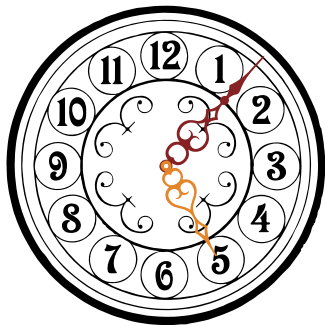
Divination: Something good is coming. It's likely nothing one planned on or was expecting, and it can come in many forms: success, money, or the elimination of a problem. The Lucky Coin is a positive card turn, and suggests that the person in question has perhaps less structure weighing upon them than they thought. Fewer strings for the marionette, so to speak. They are more free than they believed. Free to act and do as they please.

Game Narrative: An NPC comes into a great deal of wealth. A group of wild, unfettered individuals is involved in the matters at hand.

Joy: The PC succeeds at what they attempt to an even greater degree than they thought possible. The PC gets an unexpected windfall. The PC or an NPC ally get free of something that fetters them.

Despair: An NPC foe succeeds thanks to some unexpected, outside force. An NPC foe gains wealth or a treasure that significantly aids them.

If you find a good luck charm, hang onto it. They're rarer than you'd think.

MESSIAH

Value: 7
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Change, salvation, familial love

Many fear change. Others embrace it eagerly. Often—not always, but often—the former live happy and satisfying situations, while the latter do not. In other words, change is a salvation that not everyone needs.

The Messiah is the defender of the Visions family. She defends by changing the things that threaten or menace. As a defender, the Messiah is particularly concerned with families, and the bonds of love that exist there.

Divination: First and foremost, the Messiah portends change. The source of the change is almost certainly external to the person in question. More often than not, this is a positive change, and in fact the worse things are for the person, the more likely that the change will be positive. The Messiah can indicate the involvement of a beloved family member, like a parent or a sibling. This involvement is not always positive.

Game Narrative: Something changes drastically. A new leader (or other prominent figure) emerges.

Joy: Something negatively affecting the PC changes for the better. The PC is saved from certain doom by an outside force. Something good happens to a close family member of the PC.

Despair: Something good that the PC has changes for the worse. An object of importance to the PC breaks or stops working. Something terrible happens to the PC's family.

She brings salvation, but at the cost of changing everything in your existence.

MISREMEMBERED DREAM

Value: 1
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Confusion, mistakes, change in identity

Dreams are strange constructs of our subconscious, made stranger still because we don't remember them clearly. Some say that in Shadow, people's dreams seem strange because they're remembering the Actuality, and in the Actuality, people's dreams resemble the mundanity of the Grey. This is, at least in part, true. But of course like anything having to do with the deepest reaches of the mind, it's much more complex than that. The line between memory and dream is already tenuous, but the memory of a dream (or the dream of a memory)? Who can count on that?

Divination: The Misremembered Dream isn't necessarily a bad card turn. It suggests confusion or mistakes, but they don't need to be the confusion or mistakes of the person in question. We all dream, so this card can represent the poor memory or befuddlement of anyone. It might also suggest that one should adopt a new identity or disguise something important in order to succeed.

Game Narrative: People are confused about something. An NPC makes a huge mistake. Something strange is occurring in the dreams of multiple people. Events transpire in the Deeps of Sleep.

Joy: NPC foes around the PC are confused. Someone makes a mistake that benefits the PC.

Despair: The PC loses their action in confusion. The PC makes a terrible mistake. An NPC ally confuses someone else for the PC (or the PC for someone else).

Ah yes, there were rats coming out of mirrors in the sky in my dream. Weren't there?

MISUNDERSTOOD BEAST

Value: 0

Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind

Meanings: Mistakes, gentleness, friendship, danger, betrayal

The Misunderstood Beast is a gentle giant—not a murderous monster. It seeks our friendship, not our flesh. Can we see past its physical nature and ascertain its truth? Will we even try? Snap judgments can result in horrific mistakes. We judge something by its appearance, or simply by the initial reaction it churns in our heart, but the real truth of a thing can rarely be ascertained so quickly. This misstep can catch us from either direction: we might judge something ugly as evil when it is not, or we might assume someone pleasant is a friend when they are not. Either way, we are harmed or at least lessened as a result.

mistakes, but the mistake might have already been made and the Misunderstood Beast spells out the results of such a mistake. Often, this card suggests that one should look for aid from unexpected corners, but warily. In fact, what it really says is that if someone looks to be a friend, they are not, and those that seem to be a threat, likewise, are not. This is hard advice to take, and obviously it is not always true— only when this card is turned.

Game Narrative: Something perceived as a threat is no threat at all. A terrible danger hides in plain sight, appearing to be something benign or even beautiful.

Joy: An NPC becomes a surprising ally. Something that seemed like it would be a threat is actually a boon. An NPC trusts the PC when they shouldn't.

Divination: Something is not what it seems. This could be a concealed threat that will result in betrayal, or it could be something useful that one is ignoring or even avoiding. The turn of this card warns of such

Despair: A trusted NPC betrays the PC. The PC's decision turns out to be a terrible mistake. Someone mistakenly judges the PC to be a threat and treats them appropriately.

The fearsome need not always be feared.

MONARCH

Value: 9
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Authority, judgment, the land/the world

Ruler, authority, sovereign. The Monarch stands above all and passes judgment. Their commands must be obeyed, because there is no other choice. The Monarch isn't the ruler of the world, they *are* the world. They represent reality itself. They claim authority over you because you are a small part of them. You can no more refuse than your little finger can refuse to move as directed by your mind. You are a gear that turns in a vast machine, and the Monarch is the machine.

   The Monarch, as their name would suggest, is the sovereign of the Notions family. They guide and direct through thought and idea.

Divination: If one is going against the status quo, this card turn is likely very unwanted. It signifies that the powers that be get involved. If that isn't the case, then this card may suggest the aid, or the thanks of those above the person in question. This card can be a blessing or a reward, but there is judgment involved, and should one be found wanting, punishment is the result. In a broader sense, the Monarch represents the entire world, and thus can simply be an indicator of the immensity of a task.

Game Narrative: A ruler or authority figure becomes involved in the matter at hand. Someone passes judgment. Someone travels between worlds (or suns).

Joy: An authority figure judges the PC favorably. An authority figure takes the PC's side in a dispute.

Despair: An NPC passes judgment upon the PC unfavorably. An NPC ally is wanted by the authorities.

My words shall dictate your actions, regardless of the choices you make.

MYSTERIOUS RUNE

Value: 9
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Magic, mystery, wordless communication

Words are spells, and spells are words. Runes encode words. They hide them—in plain sight. Store them. If you can decipher the rune, you gain its meaning, and thus its power. Those who scribe a rune, or even those who hold the book or other object the rune marks, are its masters.

The Secrets family holds the mystery of a rune along with all its hidden meanings. It is not an Unknowable Truth, but a secret that can be learned—though it's likely a difficult and dangerous one.

Divination: Generally, this is considered a card of good fortune by vislae, and bad fortune by nons. There's mystery afoot—there's something important that can be discovered if the person in question looks for it. Specifically, looking for something in a book is a good idea after this card is turned.

Game Narrative: Something unexpected is revealed to be magical. A mystery arises. Something significant is found in a book.

Joy: The PC comes upon a wondrous secret in a book or similar media. The PC's magic works better than expected.

Despair: Important magic falters or fails. The PC reads something that carries a terrible meaning for them.

Can you decipher what the book holds?

QUESTING KNIGHT

Value: 5
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Justice, journey, determination, achieving goals

The apprentice of the Visions family, the Questing Knight is a stalwart and focused individual seeking justice, but over the long term. The quest is long and hard. Success, however, comes to the persistent and the determined.

Divination: This card suggests determination is needed for success, but it indicates that such success is within one's grasp, particularly if such a turn of events is just and right. It can also mean that success—still likely—comes only at the end of a long journey.

Game Narrative: An NPC in need is looking for help to achieve something. Someone has to go on a long journey. An NPC becomes very determined. An NPC succeeds at their goal.

Joy: The PC achieves a goal. An NPC that has wronged the PC is dealt justice.

Despair: An NPC foe achieves their goal. An NPC ally is delayed by a surprisingly long or difficult journey.

Nothing stops the knight and their consecrated steed.
No journey too long, no quest too difficult keeps them from their goal.

RAT

Value: 6
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Survival, resistance, shadows, concealment

Rats are masters of survival. They're hardy, smart, and stealthy. Some rats, of course, get very smart, and devise whole new ways of prospering amid humans, literally right under their noses. A few rats learn to adopt human identities through disguise, concealment, and trickery. Humans, as a group, are notoriously easy to fool as long as you don't overtly threaten them, and rats have no need to do so.

   The Rat is the companion of the Mysteries family. The Rat sees much and learns much, and keeps those secrets to itself. It keeps to the shadows, and in fact is the lord of the shadows.

Divination: If one can keep a low profile, success is very likely. If a stronger force presents itself, resist but do so cleverly and from the shadows—not openly. Sometimes survival is the best one can hope for, but that is the very thing the Rat card suggests. No matter what, the person in question will at least survive (if they keep concealed).

Game Narrative: A terrible calamity or disaster occurs, but hardy survivors withstand it. A community is plagued by rats. A secretive resistance forms to combat a larger force (like a government). Something strange is going on with shadows.

Joy: The PC survives something he shouldn't have been able to survive through sheer tenacity. The PC remains concealed from those looking for them. The PC withstands an effect (a poison, a disease, and so on).

Despair: A surprise attack comes at the PC from the shadows. Something hidden remains out of sight of the PC. An NPC foe survives something that should have killed them.
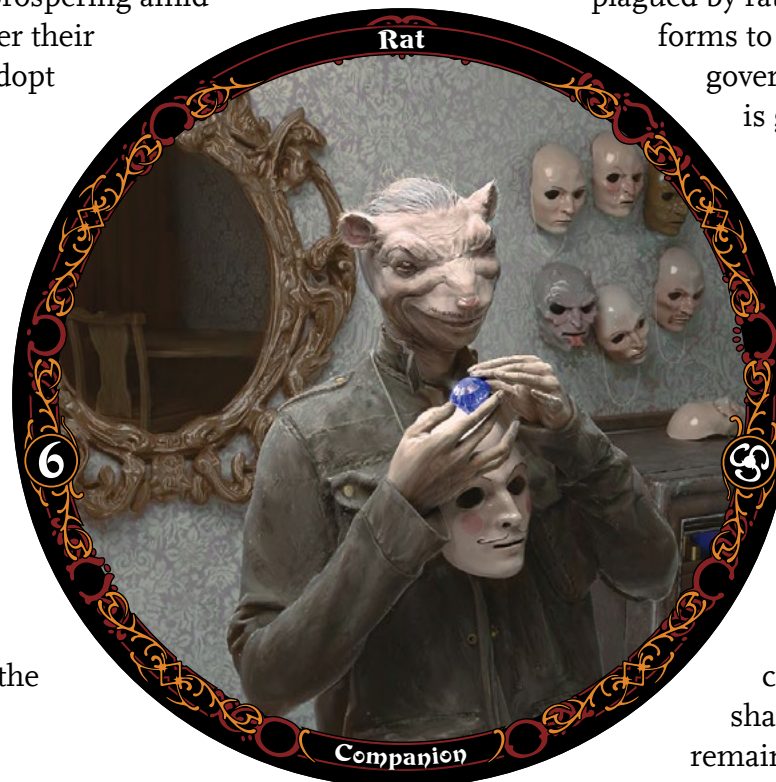
The Rat can be anywhere. Or anyone.

RAVEN

Value: 6
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Jealousy, sight, trickery

Companion to the Secrets family, the Raven sees everything and tells nothing. The Raven is smarter and wiser than it ever lets on. Its intelligence, however, manifests in its crafty solutions to problems. Some might use the word "cheating," in fact.

The Raven's weakness is greed and jealousy. It wants what you have, and that probably means your secrets. Can you keep them from its watchful eyes? Is it even worth trying?

Divination: The Raven has both positive and negative connotations. Most commonly, it indicates that someone is watching, jealous—usually someone unexpected. It's also a warning to beware of greed and trickery. On the positive side, however, it advises vigilance or suggests that there's a trick involved in what one must do to succeed. Either means that there's a problem that can be overcome.

Game Narrative: A jealous NPC takes action. An NPC turns out to be a con artist. An NPC notices something or sees a solution to a problem.

Joy: An NPC falls for the PC's deception. The PC sees something they normally would have missed.

Despair: An NPC reacts badly to a PC due to jealousy. An NPC ally falls for a trick.

The sights seen by the too-many eyes of the Raven are beyond anyone else's ability to cope.

RELENTLESS RUMOR

Value: 3

Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame

Meanings: Endless, half-truths, incessant drives, ruthlessness

There is never a real truth in whispered rumors. Searching for authenticity amid the clandestine, furtive words of a rumor is a fruitless task. And yet still we try. We listen.

Despite the lack of complete veracity, though, this rumor is relentless. It cannot die, and a living rumor is one not just told and told again, but believed and believed again.

Addiction and relentless drives are a part of this. Needs and compulsions are strong motivators and they never stop pushing.

Divination: Relentless Rumor suggests an ongoing action. If one is hoping for resolution, there's none to be found here. It also indicates that there's something involved—a fact, a person, a device, a spell—that cannot be entirely relied upon.

Game Narrative: An NPC shares a rumor. An NPC chooses not to quit. Something turns out to not be entirely true. An NPC is addicted to something. An NPC acts ruthlessly.

Joy: The PC learns something that might be of real value amid other information that isn't true. An NPC refuses to quit, to the PC's betterment.

Despair: An NPC refuses to quit, to the PC's detriment (or the NPC's own, if they are important to the PC). Something the PC was relying on turns out to be only partially true or partially functional. Something the PC is using becomes addictive.

She didn't want to hear what he had to say, but she couldn't stop herself from listening.

REVEALING KNIFE

Value: 8
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Revelation, discovery, finesse

The Revealing Knife cuts everything. It slices through buildings or mountains as easily as paper or flesh. Anything that obfuscates what lies beyond or within is cut with precise strokes. We all long for such a tool to cut away the confusion and the lies, but we fear it as well. For what would such a knife slice away from us? What would it expose? The philosopher Timon Grein said, "We always assume that what lies beneath, buried deep, is what is real. But what if the truth is actually the outermost layer? What if the grandest secret in the world is that there are no secrets, and everything is what it appears to be?" Most believe the Revealing Knife to be the counterpoint to Grein's idea.

Divination: When the Revealing Knife card is turned, it suggests that careful, precise action is required for what lies ahead. It indicates that there are secrets to be discovered, and whether their revelation is a good or ill tiding is up to the individual concerned. When the card is turned, most assume that the next card played on the Path of Suns indicates the nature of the secret revealed by the knife.

Game Narrative: A secret is revealed, or, at the very least, there is a secret that might be revealed. A challenge arises that requires finesse. Something is cut or severed.

Joy: The PC discovers a vital secret. The PC uses finesse to succeed at an action they would have otherwise failed.

Despair: A secret of the PC's is exposed. The PC learns a truth that hurts them.

The blade carves away all that obscures, leaving truth exposed for all to see.

REVOLUTIONARY

Value: 9
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Lust, sexuality, change, destruction

Sovereign of the family of Secrets, the Revolutionary is a force for change. Quite possibly the least "secret" of the family, the Revolutionary is brazen and bold, changing what needs changing, even if through destruction or violence. The strong sexuality of the Revolutionary is obvious, but this aspect is quite separate from the other—there is no suggestion of sexual violence here, but instead sincere passion and mutual attraction.

Divination: Generally considered a positive card, the Revolutionary indicates sex and sexual energy or, alternatively, change (for the better). However, less often, the interpretation focuses on the destructive nature of change, or the potential negative aspects of sexual desire and lust. This card turn says that something important is coming to an end.

Game Narrative: An NPC feels lust for someone. An NPC who had not formerly displayed much in the way of sexuality does so for the first time. Something changes radically or is destroyed—could be a person or object but just as likely an institution, a law, or something similar.

Joy: An NPC is attracted to, or drawn to, the PC. Conditions change in favor of the PC.

Despair: An NPC makes unwanted sexual or romantic advances to the PC. Conditions change against the interests of the PC.

He changed everything. And looked damned good doing it.

SAVAGE SWORD

Value: 3
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: War, savagery, strength, violence, brute force

The sword is a weapon of war, a metaphor for any kind of weapon one might wield. The Savage Sword is our basest nature, our predilection toward violence, and our shameful bloodlust. But it is also our strength to overcome obstacles and foes when we need to. It is the opposite of thought, strategy, or consideration. It is immediate and decisive, without hesitation or regard for consequence.

The Savage Sword is the opposite of the Revealing Knife in most respects.

Divination: Some kind of conflict is imminent. Almost certainly, blood will be shed. But this can go either way—it might be a danger to the person in question, or it might be a recommendation that they must use violence or brute force to succeed. This card turn can also indicate strength, or even a specific individual who is known for their physical prowess.

Game Narrative: A battle occurs. Someone is murdered. Something is destroyed. An NPC displays sudden and unexpected savagery and ruthlessness.

Joy: The PC has some sudden advantage in a physical trial or battle. The PC's savagery is rewarded with success.

Despair: The PC or someone important to them is severely harmed by violence. A wound the PC suffers is far worse and more difficult to heal than first believed.

There was nothing that could stand before him when the savage sword was drawn.

SEALED DOOR

Value: 7
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Delay, inaction, barriers, unchanging

The door holds more promise than a wall, but a sealed door is perhaps worse for the egress it suggests, and then denies. This barrier prevents us from moving forward. It is delay. Wasted time. A failed attempt. Still, a door with a keyhole suggests both the existence of a key, and something valuable on the other side.

Of course the door in the family of Secrets is sealed. It keeps the secrets safe. The implication, of course, is that great discoveries lie on the other side. If you can only get there.

Divination: Generally a card of ill omen, the Sealed Door stands in the way of victory. It keeps one from a goal. Since progression always involves change, it can, however, simply mean that things don't change. And if one is in a good place when this card is turned, that can indicate that the pleasing situation will continue.

Game Narrative: An attempted action fails. A path is blocked. An NPC fails or takes no action. Nothing changes.

Joy: The PC's spell lasts longer than expected. An NPC that was going to leave does not. A barrier holds back an enemy.

Despair: An important action fails. An enemy is better protected than expected.

He wept at the barrier. It bested him as surely as any warrior.

SUSPICIOUS HOUND

Value: 0
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Doubt, suspicion, lack of clarity, judgment, decisions

The hound stands sentinel, and you approach. But you don't want the Suspicious Hound to be focused on you. Snarling and glaring, the hound isn't certain of its enemies, but once it decides you are a danger, that's almost certainly a bad thing. However, the hound is also the representative of our own doubts and difficult decisions. In many ways, we are the Suspicious Hound, or at least we ought to be.

Divination: A negative card to turn, the Suspicious Hound typically suggests that one is plagued with doubt and indecision. Or it might just suggest that one doesn't have enough information to make a good decision yet. Judgment must be passed and a decision must be made, but there's no clarity yet. If one is looking for an answer, that answer is, "too difficult to tell, try again later."

Game Narrative: An NPC grows suspicious. An NPC makes a decision based on little evidence. A PC is faced with a difficult decision.

Joy: An NPC's poor judgment works to the benefit of the PC. A nefarious NPC is revealed to be quite suspicious.

Despair: An NPC doubts the PC. An NPC's ill-considered decision works against the PC.

No good can come from rousing the hound's suspicions.

SWAN

Value: 6
Visions • Swans • Blades • Water
Meanings: Good fortune, good weather, latent talents

Elegant and serene, the Swan is the companion card of the Visions family. It is a harbinger of luck, and in particular it is said to bring calm, favorable weather with it wherever it goes. But, as someone—many someones—have said, we make our own luck. In this case, the Swan represents that as well. In the midst of a challenge, someone displays a talent, an affinity, or even a magical ability that they didn't know they had. When this happens, it is sometimes called "a swan event."

Divination: This is a card suggesting good fortune. The winds of fate blow favorably for the person in question and the path that lies before them. Rarely, however, it is deeper than that. The Swan and its resultant "swan events" can suggest that one might have a talent that has so far been unrecognized, even by the person in question. That talent is the key to moving forward and succeeding at some upcoming challenge. But how does one discover such a thing?

Game Narrative: The weather calms. Someone gets a lucky break. An NPC finds a latent talent or ability previously unknown.

Joy: Something unexpectedly fortuitous occurs to aid the PC. The PC suddenly manifests some new talent or ability.

Despair: An NPC foe experiences some incredibly good fortune. An NPC foe displays a skill or ability the PC didn't know they had.

The regal swan's quiet mind conceals wonders.

TYRANNICAL CLOCK

Value: 6
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Oppression, time, countdown, schedule, repetition

We live and die, quite literally, by time. It rules our actions, for we have no actions without it. We struggle to accomplish what we must by a certain time, or we face grim consequences. We eat, sleep, and even breathe measured by the movements of the clock. It is our master. It is our enemy.

Divination: The pressures of time affect one's goals. Not only must one succeed, it must be done by a certain cutoff time. The Tyrannical Clock suggests some extraneous, oppressive force that compels us with threat of pain or even death. The compulsion is to keep moving, and to do so on a schedule. It might involve repetition or simply a deadline, depending on the circumstances. This card turn isn't automatically negative. One can still succeed, but the requirements become harsher and the challenges greater.

Game Narrative: Something—good or ill—approaches, and everyone knows it. A repetitious action figures prominently into important events. It is or soon will be a holiday or day of celebration. A young person with great potential comes of age. A prominent elderly person dies.

Joy: The PC moves more quickly than normal, accomplishing twice as much. The PC's repetition pays off with success.

Despair: The PC arrives too late. A powerful authority attempts to restrict the PC.

By the ticking of the clock,
By the breaking of your bones,
By the shrieking of the flock,
The tyrant revels in the moans.

UNKNOWABLE TRUTH

Value: 4
Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame
Meanings: Truth, searching, futility

The raven stands watch over the unknown.

As we strive for understanding, the closer we get to the truth, the farther away it becomes—we know this to be true, but only after we've made the journey. The truth we learn is that we cannot actually know the truth.

At the very heart of the Secrets family, the Unknowable Truth is the ultimate secret—the secret that cannot be, by its very nature, learned. But still we try anyway. It is futile, and yet it is productive. Even when you climb an infinite mountain, you're still moving forward.

Divination: When the Unknowable Truth card is revealed, it affirms and advocates for a conclusion. However, it indicates futility regarding a plan. Otherwise, it means that the answer requires more searching, perhaps searching elsewhere.

Game Narrative: Something is affirmed. A question is answered with a "yes." An NPC is searching for something. A book with questionable contents is found.

Joy: The PC learns the truth about something (but it probably raises more questions).

Despair: The PC's plan fails in such a way that it is clear that even retrying is futile. An NPC with ill intent is searching for the PC.

The foolish find the unknowable frustrating. I find it sustaining.

UNTRUSTWORTHY MIRROR

Value: 4
Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone
Meanings: Illusion, false identity, failure

Can we trust the mirror? Shadow-thinking would say yes, but wisdom gained in the Actuality suggests otherwise. When no one can see your reflection, is it really yours? If you have to look in a mirror to confirm your own appearance (or identity), how do we know it's not lying? The world is full of illusion and deception. Believing your own eyes isn't always wise, and believing what's in the mirror is a step removed even from that.

Divination: Something that appears real is not. It could be that someone's in disguise, or it might just be that an idea, a fact, or an emotion is actually a deception. Taken broadly, the Untrustworthy Mirror suggests failure.

Game Narrative: Someone significant is actually someone else in disguise. Some important fact accepted by many people is really a lie. A great endeavor fails. The mirror virus begins to spread.

Joy: Someone believes a lie told by the PC. An NPC mistakes the PC for someone else (and that benefits the PC). An NPC foe fails at some important action.

Despair: The PC's action fails unexpectedly. An NPC ally is actually deceiving the PC. Something the PC is counting on isn't actually real.

When you don't look into the mirror, what's the mirror looking at?

UNWELCOME CHILD

Value: 5

Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind

Meanings: Bad luck, imbalance, things undesired, outcasts, duplicitousness

The Unwelcome Child is unwelcome because she is a horror. No one sees her for what she truly is, and they assume that the terrible things that happen around her have other causes. She maintains a facade of sweetness and love, exploiting our own inherent affection for children. She uses our desire to nurture against us. At best, once we have realized her nature, all we can really do is cast her out. Anything more would be wrong, for she is, after all, only a child. The Unwelcome Child is the apprentice of the Notions family and brings them no joy.

Divination: A negative card to be sure, the Unwelcome Child almost always involves one getting something they do not want. Alternatively, the person in question could be the unwanted one, and they might be exiled or cast out. The Unwelcome Child suggests a lie or something out of balance. Something that should be positive is not, but unlike with the Misunderstood Beast, this comes through no fault of the person in question. It is the result of an accidental imbalance at best or an intentional deception at worst.
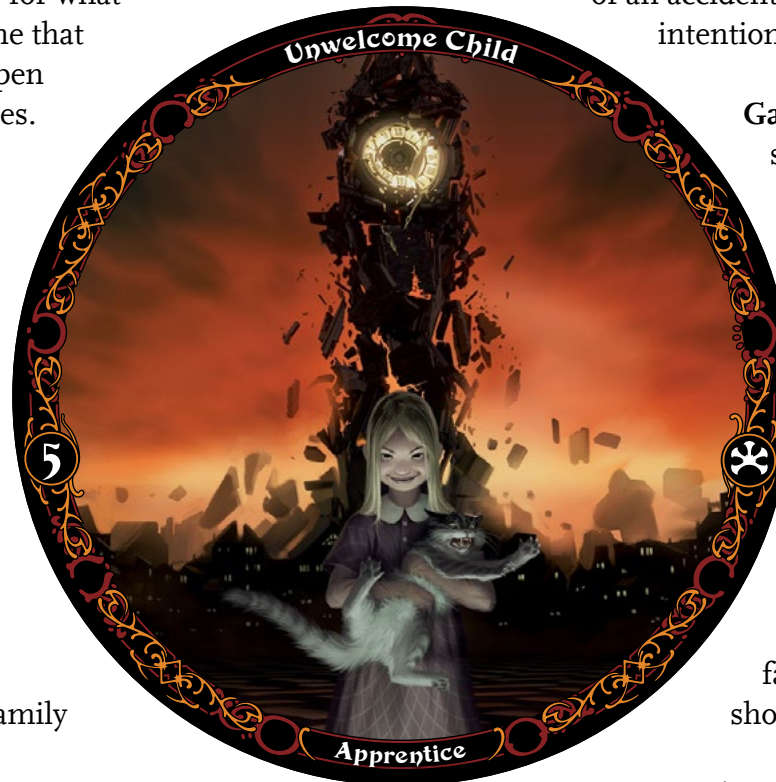
Game Narrative: Disaster strikes. A curse or plague ravages the area. An NPC has deceived someone. Someone is exiled. An NPC infiltrates a location under false pretenses to do something awful. A child is involved in something of import.

Joy: An NPC foe experiences terrible luck. An NPC foe places their faith in something that they should not.

Despair: The PC experiences terrible luck. The PC's own magic becomes a curse that afflicts them. An NPC has deceived the PC. The PC is given a gift that is, in fact, something awful.

The cat knew the truth, but no one would listen to it.

VIZIER

Value: 0
Notions • Cats • Clocks • Wind
Meanings: Manipulation, sycophant, power, influence

Lurking in the shadows, the Vizier controls from a distance. They do not sit upon a throne, but instead are the power behind that throne. They don't make laws, they circumvent them—but they do it to further the ends of the ruler, the land, or perhaps themselves. The Vizier has secret agendas within agendas. Their smooth words manipulate everyone, even the ruler they supposedly serve. Thus, they have much of the real power and influence. Are they acting in the best interests of the ruler, or themselves? How can we ever be certain?

The Vizier is the nemesis of Notions. They cannot be trusted.

Divination: Someone is manipulating things behind the scenes, and that's almost certainly bad for the person in question. One must look for where the real power is, because this card turn suggests that it isn't where one thinks it is. The Vizier can also mean that there is a way for one to manipulate the people involved in one's goals through careful words, clever words, coercion, or extortion.

Game Narrative: A sycophant is manipulating a leader. A person in power is being threatened. A leader is overthrown. Someone is exerting secretive influence upon someone else.

Joy: The PC finds they have more power than they thought. The PC gains influence over an important NPC.

Despair: Someone is undermining the wishes of the PC. An NPC gains leverage over the PC and uses it.

Vizier

Nemesis

The right words in the right ear can be more potent than any spell.

WATCHER

Value: 9

Mysteries • Rats • Mirrors • Stone

Meanings: Parental figure, sight, alertness, observation, knowledge

The wisdom that comes from taking the time to observe and contemplate before acting cannot be overstated. The Watcher watches. He observes from afar, assessing and contemplating. He records what he sees and analyzes the data. He remains ever vigilant from his vantage point. Nothing slips by his eternal gaze.

The sovereign of Mysteries, the Watcher is a father figure. He shares his knowledge with those close to him, and advises those he deems worthy.
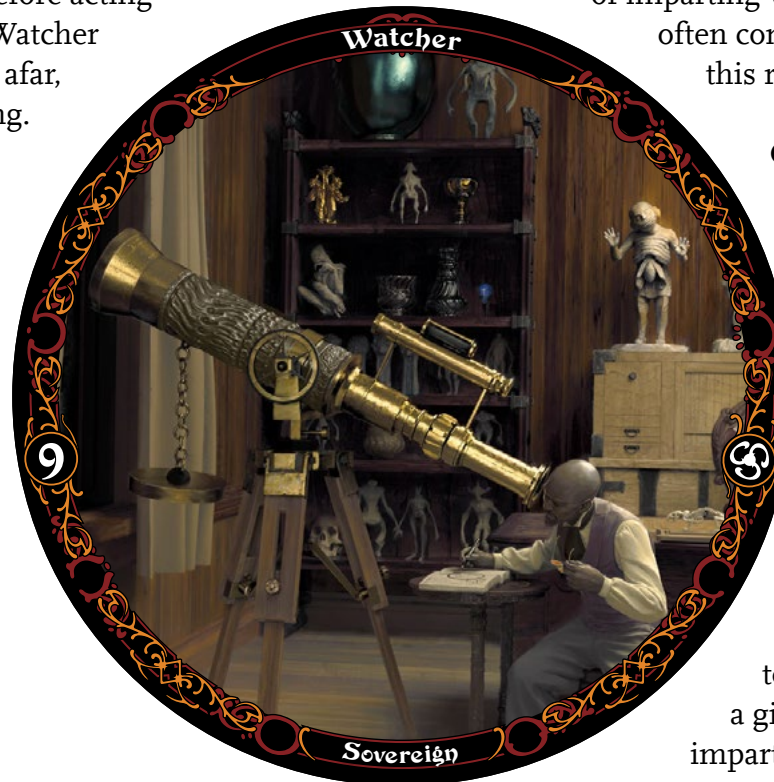
Divination: The Watcher card indicates that one must pay close attention. Often, the next card turned suggests exactly what they should pay attention to, but other times it is a more general guideline: stay alert! The Watcher presages the involvement of a parent or parental figure, particularly in the context of imparting wisdom or knowledge. It is often considered a positive card for this reason.

Game Narrative: A parent becomes a prominent figure. A watchperson catches a criminal in the act. Something amazing is seen. Secret knowledge is the key to a significant problem or challenge.

Joy: The PC notices something vital. The PC's area of expertise turns out to be extremely helpful in a given situation. Someone imparts crucial information to the PC.

Despair: Something terrible happens to the PC's parent. An NPC sees through the PC's attempts at stealth or deception. The PC does not have the knowledge they need.

The movements of the stars are the thoughts of God given motion.

WEEPING PRIEST

Value: 5

Secrets • Ravens • Books • Flame

Meanings: Betrayal, weakness, turnabout, disillusionment, loss

The priest sits alone, filled with sadness or remorse. What has happened? What's causing his misery? Happiness, success, and good fortune are fragile things—easily taken away by the cruel hand of fate. This is particularly true when there's a (probably unseen) weakness in a plan.

As the apprentice of the Secrets family, the Weeping Priest is its weak link. It's a hindrance at best and a hidden stab in the back at worst. The worst secret of all is the one that conceals betrayal by the one you love most.

Divination: The Weeping Priest is almost always an unwelcome card. It indicates a surprise reversal and it's almost always bad. It suggests that there's an unexpected weakness in the plan to deal with the matter at hand.

Game Narrative: An NPC changes their mind about something. Something is lost.

Joy: Something unexpected happens to dramatically alter a bad situation. An ally of one of the PC's enemies or obstacles betrays them. The PC realizes an opponent's weakness.

Despair: An NPC suddenly turns on the PC. An NPC important to the PC dies or leaves forever. The PC suddenly finds themselves unexpectedly vulnerable.

Do I weep most for the wrongs I have witnessed? Or those I have committed?

WHISPERING LOVER

Value: 1

Visions • Swans • Blades • Water

Meanings: Love, romance, partnership, loved ones, relationships

Love represents the strongest of bonds: romance, family, and deep friendship. The intimacy inherent in the whispers of a lover is rare and valuable. We seek love, and once we have it, we fight to keep it. The Whispering Lover represents those people in our lives that are most important to us. It doesn't have to suggest romance—there are many kinds of positive relationships one can have in their life.

Divination: The Whispering Lover always suggests a bond in place or one that will form very soon, but it can be a positive one or a negative one. Depending on other cards played, this might suggest that the relationship in question remains strong, ends, faces a challenge, and so on. This card turn essentially just brings the relationship into play.

Game Narrative: A relationship forms. NPCs fall in love. Two NPCs unexpectedly have an existing relationship.

Joy: An NPC, due to their relationship with the PC, provides great help to the PC.

Despair: An NPC rejects the PC, or ends a relationship. Someone the PC loves is in danger.

Moments with those we love are fleeting, and yet carry the most power.

GLOSSARY

Abnormous, the: Cult that believes that a mortal can serve no greater purpose than to host an immortal spirit, especially a demon.

absence: An aspect of a Weaver's aggregate that can be woven into a magical effect.

Absolute, the: The uncreated creator, the world mind, the unmoved mover, god.

Abyss, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It knows no bounds. Its depths are limitless and ultimately beyond understanding.

Accuracy: One of the four Certes stat pools, Accuracy involves making all physical attacks.

Action Mode: The mode of gameplay with the greatest focus on detail, where everyone involved is together and the action is being tracked round by round so that every player gets a turn before anyone gets a second turn.

Actuality: The real world, where vislae live and act, in the light of the manifold and dichotomous Invisible Sun.

Acumen: Points PCs earn for performing tasks or having significant experiences. Acumen is used to gain new general spells, secrets, long-form magic, minor magic, and skills.

aethyr (rarely called akashic): The medium that sustains spirits of all types and allows them to move and act in the physical world.

aggregate: A metaphysical concept used by Weavers, representing different magical effects and forces in the universe, from illumination to strength, from protection to dreams. Aggregates themselves are as philosophical as they are physical, both literally and figuratively representing powers that a Weaver can tap into. Usually called a "thread."

aid (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity for help with a physical action that is not combat related.

ally (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity to work with the Goetic on a long-term basis on whatever task is at hand.

angel: A being associated with the Legacy.

Anguish: 3 Injuries from attacks to the mind become 1 Anguish. Suffering 3 Anguish results in long-term catatonia, madness, or utter suggestibility, depending on circumstances.

Apostate: Vislae who reject the orders of magic and thus reject the Testament of Suns.

appurtenance: An optional style or focus for a vislae, listed after the forte, such as Allied With Angels, Emblazoned in Color, or In League With Demons.

assail (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity to go forth and attack a specific target.

attack (action): An attempt to affect another creature with a weapon, spell, or hostile effect.

augment: A way to advance a vislae's house. Also called a house secret.

being: Any self-aware thing, be it human, animal, elderbrin, demon, spirit, vampire, ghost, or thoughtform. Even most quasi-intelligent constructs are considered beings.

bene: Tokens used to track the current value in a stat pool (except for Sortilege).

binding (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity to bind itself to an object (or place) and then become that object (or place).

Blade, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It is swift and full of action and initiative, so precise that it can cut to heal as well as harm.

Blue Sun: Along the Path of Suns, the Blue Sun represents nothingness, or at least nowhere observed, expected, or understood.

Blue Sun, Nightside: Along the Path of Suns, the Nightside of Blue is sometimes known as the beginning of the end.

cantrips: Very minor, temporary spells, usually little more than helpful tricks or prestidigitation.

Certes: One of three character statistics, Certes is physical stamina, health, strength, speed, and so on. Certes is broken down into four stat pools: Accuracy, Movement, Physicality, and Perception.

challenge: The target number set by the GM to grade the difficulty of a task attempted by a PC.

Chalmara Sodality: Those who see the universe as a work of art. Anything they deem to mar or give offense to the universe must be identified, isolated, and eliminated.

changery (changeries): Places that use extensive and complex magical techniques to reshape the bodies of those who can afford their services.

character arc: Central mechanism that allows characters to determine their own fates in the Actuality. Pursuing character arcs allows a PC to earn Acumen (and possibly Joy and Despair).

character summary: The end of each session when each player describes why they did what they did, or how they felt about what transpired. Players discuss what they think and feel about other characters, events that occurred, places they've seen, their character arc(s), and the kinds of things that might bring their specific character Joy or Despair. The GM then awards Acumen, Joy, and Despair.

charms: Minor, usually defensive or beguiling effects that cover mundane circumstances.

Child, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It represents purity and naiveté.

Church of the Invisible Sun: A way to refer to all vislae together. See also: Invisible Church.

City of Forever: See Satyrine.

City of Notions: See Satyrine.

close (range): Anything close enough to touch (or touch after taking a few steps) is close. Very loosely speaking, this range extends up to about 10 feet (3 m). Conversationally, this might be referred to as "point-blank range."

colloquy: The negotiation and interaction between Goetics and the inhuman otherworldly creatures they conjure.

color: Spells and other magical abilities are almost always tied to color, just like the suns. Thus, a spell can be blue, green, red, and so on.

Conclave of Iov: A ceremony presided over by the Supreme Magus of the Order of See Satyrine. where 6th-degree Vances are inducted.

conjurations: Long-form magic that summons a being from another world or plane.

connections: Relationships that a character has with groups, organizations, and classes of people in the world.

consecrations: Long-form magical practices that imbue special objects or places with power or ability.

counsel (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity for advice.

creation (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity to create an object and give it to the Goetic.

creature: A being of flesh and blood. Thus, any being other than a spirit, demon, ghost, elemental, construct, and the like.

Crux: Points earned for performing tasks and having significant experiences, but not directly. Crux is synthesized from an equal number of Joy and Despair; 1 Joy plus 1 Despair equals 1 Crux. Crux allows a character to gain greater abilities related to order and forte.

da: The vislae word for heart.

daimon: A thoughtform created to be placed in the service of another.

Dancer, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It is grace and movement, the creation of beauty and art, and the appreciation of the same.

Dark, the: Existence without a sun. Lightless and cold, the Dark is not just unknown, it is incapable of being known. It is the concept of nonbeing, the absence of everything found amid the Path of Suns.

dead, the: Unliving, most of whom take the form of ghosts and wraiths that haunt (a great many) locales, although a few inhabit corporeal bodies and live—well, exist—and work alongside the living.

death: Death is a transition to another state, called the Pale, and it is possible to return from it.

death curse: A curse a vislae can speak upon their death, powered by their secret soul.

Deathless Triumvirate: A group of three potentially godlike individuals who rule Satyrine.

Deeps of Sleep, the: Composed of cast-off dream images that take root and become "real," the Deeps of Sleep are an actual place.

defense (action): One of the three kinds of defense: Dodge, Resist, or Withstand.

degree: The measure of advancement in an order's hierarchy.

demon: The worst thing in the world.

depletion: The circumstances under which an effect (or object of power) ends, such as sunrise, sunset, or rolling a particular number at the end of each round, hour, or use.

Despair: Points earned for having a negative experience. 1 Despair combined with 1 Joy equals 1 Crux.

Development Mode: The mode of gameplay that takes place away from the game table. One or more players decide to take an action that can be resolved away from the table, such as a side scene or flashback. Resolving the scene always involves a single turn of a Sooth card.

divination: An effect that provides answers—sometimes in response to a question, sometimes just random information.

Doctor, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. Knowledge—and the application of that knowledge—is its purview.

drune: A four-armed people from a half-world beyond Satyrine.

ectoplasm: Spiritual matter given quasi-physical form.

elderbrin: Mystical beings that can alter their appearance and take a multitude of strange forms.

Emergent Point: The moment at which the creator in her infinite (?) wisdom cast/will cast the spell that is the universe, and it spread/will spread from its point of origin both backward and forward in time. The moment from which the Legacy originates.

Empty, the: See also: Transition, the; Limbo. A strange state of near non-existence that occurs after death, a period of transition for the spirit that can last for ten days or even longer, and almost never less than one day.

Empty Ones: Demons that recognize their lack of sapience, qualia, and souls, and desire them.

enchantments: Long-form magical practices that imbue special objects or places with power or ability.

enhancements: One or more additional dice you get to roll when you attempt an action. Rolling a success on any of the dice results in a success.

ephemera: A category of magic items that includes ephemera objects and incantations.

ephemera object: One-use item imbued with magic.

evocations: Long-form magic that summons a being from another world or plane.

Eye, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It is more about the thoughts, impressions, and sensations of the soul than what is actually seen.

facet: Spell minutiae such as Curse, Divination, or Fire. Secrets or other abilities may strengthen or weaken a spell based on interaction with the spell's facets.

familiar: A spirit advisor to a Goetic.

far (range): Something you can see clearly but not reach quickly is far. Commonly referred to as "far away" or "long range," this is a distance of about 50 to 100 feet (15 to 30 m).

Fartown: A district in Satyrine catering almost exclusively to vislae.

fetch: A thoughtform created to perform tasks for the practitioner.

Flame, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It grants life-giving warmth, but also destroys.

forte: A talent or focus that is essentially unique to the character, what they do best and what they can do that most people can't.

foundation: A character's personality, background, home, family, connections, and knowledge of secrets in the world.

gerent: Person in charge of a neighborhood in Satyrine; each neighborhood has one.

ghost: Any kind of spirit of something—object, people, or creatures—that used to exist.

GM shift: When something works in a way that a player wasn't expecting because the GM decides to shift an outcome or a circumstance to make the ongoing story more exciting. In general, when the GM does this, a character affected positively gains 1 Joy. A character affected negatively gains 1 Despair.

Goetic: One of the four major orders of vislae, Goetics summon, communicate with, and sometimes control spirits, demons, angels, and far stranger beings.

Gold Sun: Along the Path of Suns, the Gold Sun represents new beginnings, redemption, mercy, and forgiveness. Many elderbrin reside under the Gold.

Gold Sun, Nightside: Along the Path of Suns, the Nightside of Gold represents new beginnings and new rules. Some devils and similar creatures call the Nightside of Gold their home, as well as mortals invested in controlling change.

gramayre: The study of magic, as well as the books magic is learned from.

Green Sun: Along the Path of Suns, the Green Sun represents life, growth, flourishing, health, vigor, and prosperity. The Green seethes with life. Every inch of it holds a living creature or plant. Nature spirits are almost as common.

Green Sun, Nightside: Along the Path of Suns, the Nightside of Green still represents life and the present. But life and growth can be ravenous and expansive—dangerous even in its verdancy and health.

Grey Reapers: The "field agents" of the Hendassa that willingly enter Shadow to find trapped vislae.

Grey Sun: Along the Path of Suns, the Grey Sun represents an imperfect, twisted reflection of what's real. All under the Grey is an illusion and false. Many vislae fled here to escape the War, but have lost the way back. See also: Shadow.

Grey Sun, Nightside: Along the Path of Suns, the Nightside of Grey represents hollowness, emptiness, and lack. It also embodies the limits of mortality.

incantation: Fleeting spell-like practices that characters can meditate to learn.

incantation, acquiescent: A type of incantation gained through meditative ecstasy. They represent a vislae's willingness to allow the universe to bestow power upon them in a form the universe decides.

incantation, conation: A type of incantation acquired by a vislae imposing their will upon the universe to gain the power they wish.

Indigo Sun: Along the Path of Suns, the Indigo Sun represents truth. Perhaps the most populated of the realms, Indigo is home to hundreds of millions of people. The city of Satyrine glistens under the Indigo Sun.

Indigo Sun, Nightside: Along the Path of Suns, the Nightside of Indigo is the dark side of truth and disturbing secrets.

influence (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity to mentally influence a specific target.

Injury: When you suffer damage, it comes in the form of an Injury. When you have 3 Injuries, they become a Wound (if the attack was physical) or an Anguish (if the attack was to your mind).

Intellect: One of the four Qualia stat pools, Intellect is the power of your mind and your accumulated knowledge.

Interaction: One of the four Qualia stat pools, Interaction focuses on interacting with others, including persuasion, interrogation, deception, and so on.

Invisible Church: See also: Church of the Invisible Sun.

Invisible Sun (game): Escapism.

Invisible Sun (sun): Presiding over the Path of Suns, the Invisible Sun is the source of magical power and energy in all worlds. Its unseen light illuminates nothing.

invocation: Long-form magic that calls for assistance, attention, or favor from powerful otherworldly entities.

Journeyman (degree): The lowest-ranked members of an order. Player character vislae have advanced beyond Journeyman degree to 1st degree.

Joy: Points earned for having a positive experience. 1 Joy combined with 1 Despair equals 1 Crux.

ka: The vislae word for soul.

kellidos: A fiery winged people who hail from a half-world beyond the Unfathomable Archipelago.

keyfalls: Magical storms in Satyrine that drop keys, including wicked keys.

kindled item: An item, usually crafted by a Maker, that is "more like itself than itself."

Knights of the Name: Organization dedicated to the ideals of altruism and righting wrongs.

la: The vislae word for foundation.

lacuna: Beings that are literally intelligent rifts in the universe, leading to elsewhere.

Lady, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. She is capricious and embraces change, bestowing blessings one day and calamity the next.

large area: An area that encompasses a long distance in diameter.

Legacy, the: A term to describe objects of power, beings, forces, and places left behind by the entity that is believed to have created the Actuality.

Limbo: See also: Empty, the; Transition, the

magical flux: The result of a wayward discharge of magical energy or a disruption in the magical field.

magical practices: All the various magical applications known to vislae—spells, charms, hexes, rituals, processes, secrets, and so on. Some also like the catch-all term "magical workings."

Magisterium, the: Group that oversees the thirteen secret souls of all the inhabitants of Satyrine (and in fact, all those outside as well), keeping the secrets and maintaining the power of each soul.

Makers: One of the four major orders of vislae, Makers craft ephemera, kindled items, and objects of power from energy sources, spirits, demons, souls, and more.

Maker's Matrix: The process used by Makers to craft objects of power.

medium area: An area that encompasses a near distance in diameter.

minor magic: A catch-all term for what might be thought of as spells of very low power, such as cantrips, charms, signs, and hexes.

modalities: Unreal beings of pure magic, duplicates of a vislae created just by the act of existing so utterly steeped in magic.

monograph: The details of a long-form practice laid out in a very special text.

Movement: One of the four Certes stat pools, covering most physical actions that aren't combat (including dodging attacks).

movement (action): Moving to another location.

name, secret: The name of a vislae's soul, usually kept secret from other beings because knowing it grants power over that vislae.

Narrative Mode: The mode of gameplay that handles the more flexible activities in the game in terms of detail and time.

near (range): Something you could reach fairly quickly, a distance of 10 to 50 feet (3 to 15 m). Often called short range.

Nightside Path: The Path of Suns in reverse, revealing an altered, often darker, aspect to each sun.

nons: What vislae call non-vislae, indicating that they do not use magic.

Noösphere: An emergent result of all the thinking beings in the Actuality, which can be used to communicate by those who can access it.

object of power: Item imbued with magic that can be used many times.

Old Man, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. Cantankerous and set in his ways, he treads the well-worn path, rejecting change and chance.

orb: The most widely accepted currency, an orb represents a thought, a secret, or an idea.

order: A grouping of vislae into one of four major orders of magic: the Order of the Vance, the Order of Makers, the Order of Weavers, and the Order of Goetica.

Ov, the: A group that feels personally betrayed by the loss of the creator of the universe; members feel that the Legacy is at best inadequate and at worst condescending.

Pale, the: Another term for the Pale Sun, where spirits go after death.

Pale Sun: Along the Path of Suns, the Pale Sun is death. Any living thing with a soul that dies transitions to the Pale Sun.

Pale Sun, Nightside: Along the Path of Suns, the Nightside of Pale is quiet and desolate, a place of fear, but more a place of dread.

Path of Suns: Both a map of the Actuality and a representation of the way magic works, connecting all eight suns, from Silver, to Green, to Blue, to Indigo, then Grey, next Pale, and Red, and finally Gold. The Path of Suns is also a map of the human soul.

Perception: One of the four Certes stat pools, Perception represents seeing, hearing, touching, or smelling things.

Perfected, the: Those who've reshaped their bodies at one of Satyrine's changeries.

person/people: A human, elderbrin, or something very similar. Thoughtforms that look like people can be considered people for such purposes.

Physicality: One of the four Certes stat pools, Physicality focuses on things that require brute force or great stamina, as well as resisting poison and disease.

precepts: Fundamental rules of reality that vislae understand, like numerology, the importance of souls, the ways of demons, and so on.

processes: Large, magical workings that require a variety of ingredients, devices, time, and permanent structures.

psychokinesis: An effect that allows a being to move matter with their mind.

Qualia: One of three character statistics, Qualia includes intelligence, wisdom, charisma, education, reasoning, wit, willpower, and charm. Qualia is broken down into four stat pools: Intellect, Interaction, Sorcery, and Sortilege.

quality, Weaver thread: An aspect of a Weaver's aggregate that can be weaved into a magical effect.

query (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity for the answer to a single specific question.

range: Ranges are divided into four categories: close, near (short range), far (long range), and very far (very long range).

Red Sun: Represents change, danger, the strange, the alien, and the other.

Red Sun, Nightside: Represents chaos, destruction, and constant upheaval.

relic: Naturally occurring object of power, which is fueled by its inherent nature, proximity to a source of power, or some other unintentional source.

restore (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity to heal the Goetic.

retrying: Attempting an action again after failing it.

rituals: Long-form magic that requires multiple casters.

royalty (Sooth Deck): Special cards in the Sooth Deck (sovereign, nemesis, defender, apprentice, companion, and adept) that affect magic in different ways than the other cards.

Ruined Expanses: The stretches of apocalyptic and dangerous wilderness dividing many of the intact districts of Satyrine, still in ruins after the War.

sapient shadows: People of Shadow who develop an awareness and become real enough to exist outside of Shadow.

Satyrine: A huge city in Indigo, much of which still lies in ruins from the War. Also called the City of Forever, the City of Notions, and the Glistening City.

scourge: A lingering type of vex that forces you to subtract 1 from your venture for every action you take related to that pool.

secrets: Things you can learn to "shortcut" reality and do things you wouldn't normally be able to do.

Shadow: The false world under the Grey Sun to which many vislae escaped during the War.

shadow: An illusion from the Grey that is so elaborate that they have taken on a true life of their own.

Shadow character: Characters that are easy to create and play.

Shadow memento: An object from the vislae's false life in Shadow with some meaning to them that accompanies them back to the Actuality.

Shadow skill: Something learned in Shadow, within the bonds of one's false life.

side scene: What a character does between sessions.

signature object: A high-quality object that Makers fashion for themselves.

signs: Quick, simple gestures and words that offer a small amount of protection to the caster against various dangers.

Silent Church, the: A group that studies the Legacy and plumbs its mysteries.

Silver Star, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It offers protection, but also focuses on mystery and the unknown.

Silver Sun: The sun representing birth, beginnings, and potential.

Silver Sun, Nightside: The sun at the very end of the Path of Suns, representing forgetting, fading, and loss.

skills: Specific physical or mental actions you are good at thanks to training and practice.

small area: An area that encompasses a close distance in diameter.

Sooth Deck: Deck of cards that affect play and the flow of magic, and may aid or hinder character actions.

Sorcery: One of the four Qualia stat pools, Sorcery is used for performing rituals, slinging hexes, and using abilities granted by your forte.

Sortilege: One of the four Qualia stat pools, Sortilege allows you to use magic to impose your will on events.

soul: Sometimes called the "secret soul," the soul is something a vislae keeps secret.

Soul Guardian: A spiritual entity that watches over a particular soul.

spells: Magical workings performed by vislae to accomplish all manner of tasks.

Spider's Game, the: A game Weavers play on a complex set of at least four and as many as nine boards at once, with a wide variety of specific pieces representing different moves and combinations.

Telemeric Court: The governing body that leads the Order of the Vance.

Testament of Suns: Object in the shape of a stylized hand with six fingers carried by all vislae (save Apostates), representing their connection to the **Invisible** Sun.

Thah: A quasi-military organization that acts as one of Satyrine's major law enforcement and peacekeeping agencies, wielding fear rather than authority.

theft (summoning): A type of Goetic summoning that asks the summoned entity to go forth and return with a specific object.

thoughtform: Servitors that look like people, but are actually magical force shaped by sorcerous thought and given existence in the world to perform tasks.

threads, Weaver: see aggregate.

tor: The vislae word for order.

transition, the: See also: Empty, the; Limbo

trueorb: A Satyrine currency made of solidified ideas, thoughts, and secrets.

tu: The vislae word for forte.

tulpa: A magically created intelligence with no soul, shaped by sorcerous thought and given existence in the world.

turn: The playing of a new Sooth card.

Unseen Children: Furtive movements creeping at the edge of sight, but never quite entering it—tiny thieving hands, prying eyes, empty candy wrappers on the ground, and occasional high-pitched whispers.

Vance: One of the four major orders of vislae that cast powerful, predictable, and reliable spells.

venture: The amount by which a PC modifies an action they are attempting. Venture is gained by adding skill level, circumstance modifiers, or points spent from stats.

ver: The vislae word for the story someone's life tells, also known as a character arc.

vertula kada: Object—abstract, multi-piece object of glass, crystal or metal—that Apostates carry, representing their connection to the Invisible Sun.

very far (range): Something you can see but not clearly is very far, anything from about 100 to 500 feet (30 to 150 m).

very large area: An area that encompasses a very long distance in diameter.

Vespertine: A group of sinister infiltrators that ultimately serve the Dark and hate the suns.

vex: The opposite of bene, a vex in a character's stat pool forces the character to subtract 1 from their venture.

virus: A contagious biological or magical effect, usually harmful.

Visla: Warden of the Invisible Sun.

vislae: Mages, sorcerers, adepts—people who practice magic— collectively call themselves vislae, honoring Visla, the steward of the Invisible Sun. Most PCs are vislae.

Void, the: See also: the Dark.

vordir: A thoughtform created to be a guardian.

War, the: Long and terrible war that wrought death and destruction across the realms, particularly Indigo. But it is over now, and we won.

warden (sun): Guardians, gatekeepers, protectors, and in some cases rulers. There are two for each sun, since each sun occupies a position on two different paths.

Watcher, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. Distant and aloof, it possesses vast knowledge and clear logic, and values little else.

Weaver: One of the four major orders of vislae, Weavers take magical concepts deeply imbued into the world and weave them together to produce effects as they conceive of and need them, without prior study.

Whisper, the: One of the thirteen vislae secret souls. It is quiet, but persuasive. It speaks directly into one's heart.

wicked key: Rare, magical keys, often discovered in a keyfall.

Wound: 3 Injuries created by physical attacks become 1 Wound. 3 Wounds equal death.

Xan Weir: Organization whose mask-wearing members believe existence is a sin.

zilat: Those with an affinity for a single magical effect who hone it to perfection.

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