Unwritten

Adventures in the Ages of
MYST and Beyond

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Further Credits at the end of this book.

Special Thanks

Hello my friend,

It has been tradition that those who take their first steps on this journey do so without support, that they face the new worlds that open up before them as a blank slate. We begin this path unaware of what we are leaping into, and it is only our own curiosity and inventiveness that propels us forward; we only discover that which we experience ourselves.

As a scholar, this offends me. I am one who stands on the shoulders of the many researchers, scientists, and explorers who have come before me. Furthermore, it is the credo of my profession that we learn and then return with that knowledge so that others may partake of the fruits of our labor. Our job is to illuminate, and that is what I will do.

You now have access to what could rightly be called one of the greatest mysteries in the history of the universe: an infinity of worlds is now at your disposal and an opportunity built on the bones of a once great civilization.

But you are not alone. We have been gathering from every corner of the globe, called to this deep place underground. We hold the pen that will write the next chapter of its history. We will decide its future, for better or worse.

These loose pages, gathered from those who are on the Journey as well, are my attempt to give you a small window into the peculiar fellowship in which you now find yourself a member.

And, much like I stand on the shoulders of those who preceded me, you can now stand on mine and these others. May you delve into the Great Tree of Possibilities farther than I ever have, and may you learn and build things far grander than I have been capable.

The Deep City awaits, my fellow explorer.

J.D. Barnes

Please remember to go to Gahreesehn and get a KI. You will need it to communicate with your fellow explorers.

Trying to sum up the Art isn't an easy task, but I will try.

Creation is a multiverse, and the universe we know is just one of many. There are an endless number of them out there in the Great Tree of Possibilities. Each branch of the Tree is an Age: a section of reality that is its own. In one, the forces of erosion have miraculously carved mountains into the shapes of giants. In another, crystals grow on trees, and diamonds can be dug up from the dirt by the handful. And so on, in infinite number and variety. Ages can push the limits of possibility, and often do.

The Art of Writing is the secret; with it, we can bridge the gaps between the branches of the Great Tree, and new Ages can be discovered. Thanks to the Art, we become explorers in something far larger than we have ever known.

Writing an Age requires a special combination of Book, ink and symbol. The pages and the ink must be specially prepared, made with exotic materials and crafted in just the right way. The symbols are a language, passed down by masters of the Art for generations. Each one describes an exact concept about the environment of an Age, such as the shapes of the mountains, the temperature of the oceans or the workings of the ecology. With them, a skilled Writer carefully describes a place in detail and the Book creates a 'link' to a universe that fits the description.

Because the complexity of even a single environment in an Age is incredibly vast, a Writer can only describe an Age either in broad strokes, or go into great detail on specific topics. Aspiring Writers spend years or even decades learning the symbols, understanding their consequences and how they interact. It's common for an Age to exhibit unexpected consequences that flow from a Writer's description, and it's the mark of a true genius of

the Art for a Writer to account for these in the work. But no Book can describe everything in an Age. Everything the Book doesn't describe is a complete unknown, waiting for an intrepid explorer to come along.

No one is quite sure why the Art functions the way it does, and there are many questions. Is a Writer creating the world that they describe, or are they simply finding a place on the Tree that matches? It may seem like an academic question, but it is one that has real implications. If Writing is an act of creation, one might be able to argue that the Writer has a right to the Ages, that they are theirs to do with as they wish. But if they simply find the Ages, then they may only be uninvited visitors at best.

The Art is still very much alive. We at the Guild of Writers are pouring over everything we can find on the Art, and have been able to reconstruct portions of it. We have learned how to make simple linking books, allowing us to bridge the Ages more easily. One of our current projects have been installing these new books into the Nexus system so that everyone can utilize them.

We are also experimenting with actual Descriptive Books. We have been able to Write one or two Ages based heavily off of example books that we have found. Soon we will be able to branch out more into the Art. It's an exciting time.

Our biggest problem is one of resources. We have only been able to salvage so much ink, and only a handful of blank Books large enough to hold an entire Descriptive Book. Please remind new explorers that if they stumble on any leads on ink or blank Books, contact us right away.

—-

Cristina Estrada, Guild of Writers
KI ID: 0000481523
"Yahvo does not give us a stone we cannot lift."
- D'ni proverb

For most of my life, D'ni was just a fantasy land. My father was a civil engineer and worked for the D'ni Restoration Council, though I had no idea what that meant at the time. Dad would tell me these stories about work. He'd talk about caves deep underground and ancient ruins, about clearing out old buildings and repairing strange machinery. As a kid I ate it up.

My favorite parts of the story were always the Books. These D'ni people could write books that could take you to other worlds. Strange, beautiful worlds. I begged my father to take me to see them, but he always said it was no place for a little girl.

Still, I dreamed of those Books, and of the D'ni cavern. As I grew older, I began to consider them just another story my Dad told me, ya know, a way to get me to read more. He always stuck to the stories, insisted that they were true. I'd yell at him, tell him to stop treating me like stupid child that would believe in fairy lands and magic. Yeah, I was a pain in the rear as a teenager.

When he lost his job with the DRC, it shattered him. He always defined himself by his job, and he hadn't been without one since he was a teenager. He would just mope around talking about lost opportunities. he started drinking. He would drink a few too many and he'd bring up D'ni. We ended up in a lot of screaming fights. No, I'm not proud of that. It just hurt so much to see him like that, drinking his life away and going on and on about children's stories.

The last time I saw him, we got into another fight and I stormed out. When I came back... well, a neighbor found him passed out on the sidewalk. By the time the ambulance got there, it was too late.

The funeral was hard — we didn't really have any family. Mom died when I was a kid, and her family blamed him. Most of the people who showed up were former co-workers. One of them, an older guy with a beard and a quiet voice, came up to me after the service. He said that my father was a good man, and he regretted not keeping in touch. He handed me an old satchel and said it was my father's. I just stood there like an idiot, holding it in my hands and staring at it. I didn't even notice when the nice man left.

When I got home, I emptied the satchel onto my sofa. There was a this huge watch thing with buttons and lights. And with it: a book. I looked at it, afraid to touch it. It was like something you'd see in an antique store — yellowing pages, leather cover, little decorative designs embossed on it.

Finally, I opened the cover and there was the linking panel — a picture that looked like a video on the page. I turned the page; there was nothing behind it, no little screen embedded in it. The page had a picture, moving and looking more real than anything I've ever seen. In the picture, a chamber with machinery and a star pattern on the floor.

No, it wasn't a book. It was a Book. Capital B. Dad told me hundreds of stories about them, and here one was. Right there, on my sofa.

I grabbed the watch thing and Dad's satchel. I knew what to do; I'd dreamed about it all my life. I touched my hand on the page, and I was gone.

Obviously, we were not the first to rediscover D'ni. The D'ni Restoration Council had found the cavern much earlier and had been working for years. They put in all of the hard work: figuring out how to restart the machinery and the ventilation fans, excavating the rubble, sorting through the remains of D'ni civilization. The DRC worked tirelessly on the greatest archaeological find of all times.

And then we showed up. The Called caught the DRC completely by surprise. There they were, being all scholarly and industrious and suddenly, all these people started showing up. We had Books they never knew existed and had no control over. Worse, we were getting into everything.

We called ourselves explorers, though I'm pretty sure the DRC had much stronger names for us, if you get my meaning. They blocked us off from Ages and sections of D'ni they thought weren't safe.

Now, my surface life isn't that interesting. It never has been. Sure, there's been good times and bad times, but really, I just had times. I was a nobody in a dead-end job just tryin' to get along. But this, this was a new world. I had a second chance down here, and I was damned if I wasn't going to take it. I was done being a nobody.

So I did what I wasn't supposed to do. I went past the traffic cones and barriers the DRC put up. I trekked into the unsafe rubble to find a place I could claim for my own.

I settled on a place along the wall of the main cavern, overlooking the lake. I'd like to say I chose it because of some great historical significance, but it was just a practical choice. It was close enough to the lake that the orange glow from the water gave me some light to work by. The real bonus was that I found a working Nexus terminal. It still had a Nexus Book on the pedestal, so I could link to Nexus from there. I fiddled with the mechanism in the base and was able to start it up. Sure enough, once I turned it on, it showed up as a destination in Nexus' list. Boom, the D'ni version of a city bus stopped right in front of my new house.

One more trip to the surface, and I came back less one 401k savings account and carrying a ton of supplies - bulk food, camping equipment, batteries, first aid kits. It wasn't long before some curious soul linked to my front door. I offered him some food for the fire marbles he'd collected from one of the neighborhoods. Now, I was in business.

Yeesha's recording re:Gahreesehn
transcribed by
S. Richter

   Your journey has begun. You can't
imagine how these small things affect
the future, but someday you will; you
will return. Many paths have brought me
to this place. The path of my great-
grandmother, bringer of destruction. The
path of my grandfather, the rebuilder
of pride. The path of my mother, writer
of dreams, and of my father, my dear
father, the caretaker of burdens. And I
knew that at the end of such great paths
must lie a great purpose.

   I returned to the Cleft to find it.
The Cleft. The Fissure in the desert,
the wound in the Earth, the path to
things beneath the surface. It was
there I sought to find my purpose. It
was from there I came to know the dead
underground city of D'ni. These D'ni
people who are now gone came thousands
of years ago to the shelter of the
Cavern to return to leastness. They
found solace in their smallness in
the dark, and so did I. But light is
powerful in the darkness.

   Let me tell you of King Kerath, dare
I speak ill of him. One of the great
kings, but yet, he was the maker of

the proud, for it was his system of guilds that served as the foundation of power, and corruption. The powerful need control; fortresses and garrisons to guard their power, and soon the guarding is yet another thing to be proud of. Layers within layers built to preserve their Ages and their pride from the weak and Least who might attack from without. And yet, it is from within that most nations fall. And so the mighty garrisons of D'ni now stand vacant.

The people of D'ni didn't return easily. They only would take, until all was taken from them in the Great Returning, the Fall that destroyed them. D'ni fell only a few hundred years ago. All of it was removed.

And my journey was similar. I could write things that no D'ni had ever dreamed of. My writing smashed barriers held as absolutes for millennia. I could change things, I could move things, I could control things. I learned beyond my parents, I learned beyond all. I wrote Ages against any challenger, masters of The Art and they were beaten. I took all that I could hold. Only death can conquer pride so strong. For the D'ni, and for Yeesha, it was death that moved me to return. All died. All but the Least. The unproud. The Bahro considered themselves as dead already, and so they continued to watch D'ni, always ready to give more away. And now they will return.

THURSDAY, Tokotah Alley, Ae'gura

I hear that the temperature on the surface is in the 100's. Here, miles beneath the desert, it's nice and cool. It's not even stuffy; the ancient fans keep the air moving even this far down.

I'm sitting here on the steps of Tokotah Alley, enjoying a leisurely afternoon of watching people literally appearing out of thin air. Even after years of visiting the cavern, watching people link in and out still fascinates me to no end. There is no one there, and with that unique wa wa noise, someone just fades into view. Or someone walks over to the Nexus pedestal and puts there hand on the book, wa wa sound and then they fade away. I can watch it for hours. The orange light from the lake water down below just makes it more surreal. It's alien. And yet it's home now.

People smile at me as they walk by and go about their business. Ho hum, just another day teleporting across space and dimensions, no big deal here. It's amazing what people can become used to. Not me, though. Even to this day it weirds me out a little.

What a strange life I have found myself in.

Learning "The Art"
requires having good
penmanship with
D'ni dip pens.

2 ζ Ε ↙ Ⅲ
Ⅲ 2 Ε ↙ ↙ Ⅱ
2 I think
I'm doomed
··

ʒʒℛⁿ — ZAHFAY = "FATE"

ℤⁿℓⁿ — BEKHE = "COMPEL" or "FORCE"

⫪⫪ℓⁿⁱ — KHOYOO = "INVOKE"

I will never forget the day I first saw a Bahro up close. Sure, I'd heard of them. Heck, I'd heard them - during the Restoration, their screams would echo through the cavern like the call of a ghostly raptor. It happened so often that we all just got used to it - like tuning out the noise from the freeway you live next to.

Anyway, this was just before the DRC turned tail and fled the cavern. Tensions were high - everyone was talking about the Bahro. People said that they were fighting each other. One group wanted to wipe out anything 'tainted' by the D'ni (like us) while the others were fighting to save us. At least, that's what people said. I'd not seen anything like that myself.

I was hanging out on my favorite terrace above Tokotah plaza when it happened. I was the only person that ever came up there, since I had figured how to climb up here on my own. So I perched over the people below, watching the world go by. It was relaxing. I even had a great view of the Arch of Kerath, stretching over the entrance to the harbor.

It was quiet. That's what caught me off guard. Usually there were bahro noises in the background every few minutes by this point. Now, there was nothing. Just dead quiet.

After about fifteen minutes (and that was just about the spookiest fifteen minutes of my life, let me tell you), came the linking sounds. One, then two, then many, one after the other. I watched Bahro pop out of thin air around the Arch, their

wings wide. They swooped around the Arch. They dived at each other, veering at each other and then away. Sometimes, it looked liked they collided in mid air. One bahro would fly at another, which would disappear and reappear when the first had passed.

And the noise, linking sounds coming like machine gun fire, growls and screeches and roars. The battle had come to us, finally. I watched them swarm and collide in the air above the city. And I saw one form bank and head towards me.

The next noise was next to me, another link sound, and I found myself perched next to a Bahro. It crouched on all fours, and it's bat like wings were partially unfurled. For a moment, I stared at it, and it stared back at me, with those insectoid eyes.

I was so shocked that I hadn't realized it had grabbed my arm. We linked out together. Now both of us, man and Bahro, were on the floor of Takotah plaza, surrounded by surprised explorers. The Bahro looked around and bowed curtly. It chirped a sound that sounded like it was trying to say a word and linked away.

I looked around, "Did anyone get what it said?"

"Yeah," said one of the crowd. "I think it said 'shorah'." Shorah... the D'ni word for peace.

It's been years since the DRC left and Yeesha decided to play fox and hound with the Bahro to draw them off. No one has heard a peep from them since. No Bahro screams, no rambling holographic recordings of Yeesha talking like she's been drinking too much lake water, nada.

Someone told me that Laxman still comes to visit from time to time, but I never seem to catch him. I even tracked down a few of the other DRC members on the surface, but none of them wanted to talk to me. Cate Alexander just hung up on me. Someone is so not getting a Christmas card this year.

The big question is: what the heck do we do now?

People seem to come down in one of four camps. First are the scholars. They want to continue the restoration and get down to some hardcore sciencing of the place. There's a ton of super science D'ni technology that no one understands that can be examined, and there is literally ten thousand years of D'ni history to uncover. So, DRC-lite, really. They get their noses out of joint whenever someone digs around, muttering about disturbing priceless archaeological sites, but a lot of people pay no attention.

The next group are the squatters. They've decided that D'ni is their new home and they are trying to make do. People are digging out buildings and fixing them up and moving in. A few people I know have moved to Carlsbad and gotten jobs there so they can be close to D'ni and still keep a surface life going. After one person over in the city set up her own little general

store, people have caught the idea and are bringing down stuff and selling and trading them to each other.

The third group are the people who are a little too fond of the D'ni. They go gaga over any bit of D'ni people unearth. (Can you really say 'unearth' when we're still under the earth down here?). They stick apostrophes in their names, cobble together D'ni clothing and pretty much do anything they can to forget there is a world way up above us.

The last camp are the hardcore Davy Crockett types. You know, the ones that look at a new Age, pull on the work boots and head off to go boldly going-boldly. A few of them just have that sort of wanderlust to them. But some people are homesteading out there.

We've had a lot of time to ourselves down here, and we've pretty much done what humanity usually does when left to its own devices: getting on each other's nerves. Oh sure, there's a lot of good people down here, but there are a few nutjobs and they always seem to make more noise than everyone else.

The Guilds try to keep everything together. They are the closest thing we have to central organization, but they are ultimately just a bunch of people herding cats. The Maintainers are a little too eager to volunteer for any adventure that comes their way. They are also way too eager to get involved in other people's business. I haven't talked to any of the Writers lately, but I know they don't have the lock on the Art anymore, and that has them in a tizzy. The Messengers just wander around, treating everyone nice and shaking hands while they deliver messages and pass along news.

We have a bunch of paranoid ones down here as well. They are gearing up for when the surface world finds out about what's happening underneath their feet. It's only a matter of time, really, and they are expecting governments to come storming in here with black helicopters and stuff. I've heard all sorts of crazy cockemamie theories and plans from these types: everything from declaring sovereignty to fleeing to the Ages to burning all of the Books to make sure the Feds don't get their hands on them.

And then there's Exhibit A in the nutjob category, the Children of the New Seed. Remember I mentioned those D'ni obsessives? The New Seed gives them a bad name. They take D'ni names, forswear the surface and try to live as 'real D'ni' as much as possible. They are rocking the whole faux D'ni clothing thing and insist you call them by their D'ni names. I'm sure there are some nice people, but I can never get them to talk to me. They always tell me to go to their leader, Harlen, if I want to talk. That's like talking to brick wall that thinks way too highly of itself.

Someday, I hope a real D'ni shows up and punches Harlen in the nose.

Never forget to take a Linking Book with you.

When in doubt, turn on the power.

Take copious notes.

Don't drink the lake water.

Read everything you can find.

Echo was, in general, one of the mellowest, zen people I'd ever met. Even people who didn't believe in her visions of D'ni, and thought she was deluded or crazy or both, agreed that she was pretty relaxed. Sure, she had her moments - but even when she was upset, it was a quiet intensity.

This day was different.

She'd been over by the Great Library, painting something only she could see. A few of us were watching her, like an underground Bob Ross. Not just because it was fun to watch her paint (I'd once mentioned Bob Ross to her, and she'd promptly painted a "Happy Little Great Tree" into what she was working on), but because you never knew when she'd start talking about what she was "seeing"- and her stories (true or not) were fascinating.

She seemed on the verge of saying something, when there was a series of incoming links behind us. It was a cluster of new explorers, the largest group of newbies I'd seen in a while, all chattering animatedly about discovering D'ni and being in various stages of Yeesha's Journey.

One of them started lecturing about the pride of D'ni, and how the poor Bahro suffered - the usual Yeesha-ist party line. We all went back to watching Echo but she'd

stopped painting, and was staring after the group with something like loathing crossing her features.

Echo tried to go back to painting, but you could tell she was agitated. She was tapping her brush on her hand and fidgeting with the paints. Her whole body was restless, and she kept looking back at the group of newbs.

Finally she set her things down, squared her shoulders, and strode off towards the cluster of people. They were still on the same subject matter when Echo walked up to them and announced loudly, "Yeesha was wrong."

The conversation screeched to a halt, as they all turned to face this random redhead who had interrupted them. The one who'd been talking cleared her throat, and started to speak- "Well, I'm sure you would agree that..."

Echo whipped her head around to glare at her. "I wouldn't agree to anything."

"Yeesha!" She snarled. "Yeesha lectures us on the Pride of D'ni. "D'ni grew proud..." she says, "... and then it died. But what does Yeesha really tell us? The stories of a few Kings who were horrible. A single Age that was supposedly a hub for a slave trade."

She tells us that the Bahro were enslaved to the D'ni. That D'ni was "Built on the backs of the Least." But when did that slave

trade start? How did the Bahro, obviously an intelligent species, with abilities that eclipsed the D'ni's own, how did they become slaves?"

"A few bad kings, no matter how bad, does not a 'prideful' society make. A hidden slave economy, known to only a limited few, does not a 'prideful' society make. What is pride, anyhow? Was the whole of D'ni really overrun by a cultural sense of hubris and importance that caused their society to crumble under its own weight?"

"No. Not at all. D'ni ended because of hate. The hate of a single man. A man so vile, so determined to revenge himself on the society he thought had wronged him, that he manipulated and twisted the feeling and weaknesses of others to his own ends. A man so evil that he was willing to murder every single man, woman and child, just to feel superior."

"Pride didn't kill those people. An engineered biological weapon did. A domestic terrorist did. They were slaughtered in the streets, and hunted down in the Ages where they took refuge. They died in fear and chaos and confusion. How many of them deserved to die because of 'pride'?"

She pointed at the person who'd first raised her ire. "The D'ni were just like you. They had jobs, they had families, they had lives and loves and dreams and just were."

"Remember that, when you hear Yeesha talking. Remember that she has her own past, her own scars, and her own agenda. She has her own idea of right and wrong, her own assumed burden of guilt for her family's role in the Fall. Remember, when you start feeling superior to the "prideful" D'ni culture- that millions died in a single day. An entire culture wiped out because of one man's evil."

She lifted a hand to her eyes, like she was in pain, "Bringing new life to D'ni and the Ages is the dream we all shared when we felt called here, but we should never, ever forget what the cost was, for us to have all these wonders to explore."

She let her hand drop to her side, flipped open her Relto book, and vanished. We all just sat there, stunned, and considered how nothing in D'ni is really what it seems.

My first impression of the Age was the smell. Few people mention it, but each Age has a subtle and unique scent, the result of a thousand little details of geology, chemistry and biology. This Age reminded me vaguely of burnt cinnamon.

The sun shined overhead, but the breeze was cool and refreshing. I smiled. "Nice universe you have here." I breathed in deeply. It was a pleasant change from Carlsbad in late August.

He waited impatiently as I enjoyed the climate. "We'd have had fawning natives here to greet you with leis, but there aren't any natives. But this is not a vacation. May we start?"

"Of course. Let's begin the tour."

The link in point was in a small valley between two hills. "We decided to make the entry point a ways away from the camp itself. It seemed safer that way. Camp is on the other side of the hill. That gives us a natural barrier."

He led me over the hill and from the top, I was able to see their year of work spread out below me. It was a network of squat mesas. The tallest couldn't have been more than two stories high. They had odd lumps throughout them, and I could see cave openings. A river wound between the mesas, sparkling in the sun.

"What makes them so irregularly shaped?"

"Bubbles of volcanic gas during formation. They've left pockets and tunnels through the rock. We decided we'd let the Age do part of the building for us. The caves make excellent housing."

I nodded. "What about geologic activity?"

"It's completely safe. We did write the Age after all. We made sure it's geologically inactive."

"You aren't creating this Age, just discovering it. You never know what the complete picture might be."

He waved me off, "Yes yes, pride of D'ni, etc. etc."

He led me down the hill to the mesas. "The water table in this area is very high and the rock is very porous. So there are dozens of springs and underground water flows throughout the area."

"Do those feed the river?"

"Rivers. There are several in the area. They are fed by the springs and by the mountains to the north." He pointed to a range of snow-capped mountains that rivaled the Rockies.

"What about flora and fauna?" I asked.

He shrugged, "I only dabbled in that part of the Age. All I know is that the purple berries are definitely safe. You'll have to ask others for details. Let's go meet them."

Gary Buddell   #0000147 ⟩ Res Engs??
Mr. Dogberra   #0000122
Dr. Julian Lupis #0005701
Echo McKenzie   #0006299 - little freaky
JD Barnes   #0007001   shorah??
Phoung Ha Ngo   #0004226 - General store   (Hello)
Leander   #0009010 - nice guy
Bob   #0000072 - Janitor??
Te'eleth   #0009932   who names their kid this?
Bridget Reed   #0010053

KI icons ⬭ Nexus Terminal
▦ - Ages ☼ setting
👁 people 〰 pellets?

Gahreesehn (gah-REE-sen)
Bevin Neighborhood
DRC #6 Neighborhood
Guild of Greeters hall
Kirel
K'Veer - no one will tell me how to get here!
Ferry Terminal
~~Takata Alley~~ Tah k Aah Alley
  Egg Room??

flashlight
backpack
better shoes
gloves
sunglasses
umbrella - rains in Kemo
battery packs for camera
vest/coat with lots of pockets
more paper or notebook
snacks
water bottle
multitool

⊙ angle
⇿ distance
⤒ height

Ï·İ = 0
III = 1
IV = 2
V = 3
VI = 4
III = 4
III = 5
VI = 6
III = 7
IX = 8
III = 9
IX = 10

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WHAT IS UNWRITTEN?

Unwritten is a way to get together with your friends, explore new worlds, and tackle the interesting situations that they present. You get to determine the challenges that the characters encounter, how they deal with the challenges, and what happens afterward.

However, the D'niverse shapes your experiences around several specific themes. These are the cornerstones of what it means for a game to be an *Unwritten* game.

Unwritten is about discovery. Every Age is a new thing to experience, and there are forgotten secrets just waiting to be uncovered all around. Whether it is exploration of places, uncovering the unknown, or pushing past the limits of believability, discovery should be at the core of the experience. The D'niverse is full of surreal worlds and alternate dimensions; there is always another possibility out there, waiting for you.

Unwritten is about the journey. We learn about the protagonists and their world by the challenges they face and how they choose to meet them. Their experiences shape who they are and who they become. As they discover new worlds, they discover more about themselves. As they affect the world, the world affects them. For a character, their story is not just about what they know or where they have been, but how they got there and why.

Unwritten is about thought and creativity. The primary tools of an *Unwritten* character are knowledge, insight, and ingenuity. As Myst is a thinking person's game, so is *Unwritten*. Of course, there are adventures to be had, crises to resolve, and sometimes even worlds to save. However, the D'niverse has a cerebral cornerstone, one where forethought and creativity are

centrally placed. The adventure progresses, not with shoot outs and duels, but with solving mysteries and creatively resolving dilemmas. Think of it as pulp's nerdier sibling.

WHO ARE THE PROTAGONISTS?

Protagonists in *Unwritten* are, above all else, explorers. They all have things that they are trying to learn. They have mysteries they want to solve, new places they want to see and questions that they want answered. In that pursuit, *Unwritten* characters are proactive, competent, and dramatic.

PROACTIVE

Explorers are proactive. They have a variety of abilities that lend themselves to active problem solving, and they aren't timid about using them. They don't sit around waiting for the solution to a crisis to come to them—they go out and apply their energies, taking risks and overcoming obstacles to achieve their goals. They are driven by the need to know.

This doesn't mean that they don't ever plan or strategize, or that they're all careless to a fault. It just means that even the most patient among them will eventually rise and take action in a tangible, demonstrable way.

COMPETENT

Explorers are good at things. They're skilled, talented, or trained individuals who are capable of making visible change in the world they inhabit. The understanding that they pursue is within their reach. They are the right people for the job, and they get involved in a crisis because they have a good chance of being able to resolve it for the better.

This doesn't mean they always succeed, or that their actions are without unintended consequence. It just means that when they fail, it isn't because they made dumb mistakes or weren't prepared for the risks.

DRAMATIC

Explorers lead dramatic lives. The secrets that they uncover have meaning, and affect the world in which they live. Their lives require them to make hard choices and live with the consequences. Their experiences affect who they are, and shape what they can accomplish and what path they choose.

Essentially, they are people. Like us, they have interpersonal troubles and struggle with their issues. Though the external circumstances of their lives might be a lot bigger in scope than what we go through, we can still relate to and sympathize with them.

FOR THE MYST FANS

If you are a fan of the Myst franchise, *Unwritten* offers you a different experience of the D'niverse than you have had before. Myst games have always tried to focus on your personal experience of the game as a player. However, the narrative has always been one direction—from the game developer to you. Role-playing is even more interactive than a video game. You have the chance to carve out your own place in the D'niverse, a place where you can experience a version of the setting that is under your control.

A lot of Myst fans are very concerned with 'canon'—the truth of the game as derived from the games. *Unwritten* is not solely about that truth. Rather it is a way to play with a universe you love. Use this tool to give life to the elements of the D'niverse that fascinate you. And yet, you have the option to add to it and adjust it. Don't be afraid to make changes, to try different things. If there is an element you never liked, change it. If you want to go a different direction, then go for it. This game is focused on providing you possibilities. You can combine the known and your ideas into just the game you want.

Role-playing games are all about sharing imagination with other people. Sure, we can all tell stories. But with the right tools, you can tell better stories. The rules in here provide a framework that you can use to help you. They help you keep focus on the narrative in front of you and provide hints and surprises (in the form of dice rolls) that you can use as inspiration for even more.

Remember that this is a toolbox. The mechanics here are intended to support you with your story. There isn't a right or wrong way to use the rules. Use what makes your game more enjoyable and don't worry about what seems to get in the way.

For Veteran Role-players

Those of you who have role-played before have probably seen more 'What is role-playing?' chapters than you can count. Instead of going through that again, I'd like to focus on what this setting can do for you.

Pulp gaming avoids the modern era because much of it involves exploring edges of the known and delves into the unknown. Our modern world has a lot less room for that than the world of the pulp magazines. Because of pervasive technology, we just know too much. The D'niverse brings us back to delving into the unknown by opening the door to an infinite number of strange worlds. If you want to trek through unknown wildernesses and negotiate with strange civilizations, *Unwritten* can do that. If you want weird science, there's room for that in *Unwritten* as well. Best of all, it's equally available to your characters in the 1890s, the 1930s, or the modern day.

Adventure stories work nicely in *Unwritten*; any pulp story about rugged archaeologists delving into forgotten tombs can find a place in *Unwritten*. But you also have a chance for stories that focus on exploration itself. Characters are not only up against antagonists, but the unknown. Your game can give you chances to uncover mysteries, whether they are the secrets of the universe or just what is on the other side of the hill. Sometimes the environment itself will be the obstacle in your way, clearing the way for a story of person versus nature or versus themselves.

The Art of Writing allows a gamemaster a way to include very different environments into the same game, and an easy way to bring them in. Characters can always just find another Book that takes them to another world with minimal fuss or concern about 'railroading'. The Art also gives players a chance to create parts of the world, not just as co-authors of a shared experience, but in a definite in-character perspective.

If you are familiar with Fate Core, you will see a lot here that you recognize. You will also see some significant changes here and there, in order to capture the unique feel of the D'niverse.

Some topics are only given very broad consideration in *Unwritten*. If you want more specific systems for various elements, bring them in from your favorite Fate game. In fact, you'll find a few suggestions for that towards the end of this book.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Unwritten is divided into four basic sections:

- Fundamentals - These chapters introduce the game system of *Unwritten*. This is where you put together the *Unwritten* game you want to play and make characters.
- Tools of the Journey - In these chapters, we get into the details of the game system. This section is good reference for both players, who control protagonists of the game, and gamemasters, who manage the world around the protagonists.
- The Once and Future Cavern - This section goes into more depth on the D'niverse itself, as well as the past and present of D'ni.
- Hand of the Maker - This is aimed at gamemasters, where we discuss conducting a game of *Unwritten* both in terms of mechanics and story. There are no secrets here, so players should feel free to read it as well.

Additionally you'll find glossaries at the end of the book, as well as a blank character sheet. Print out or photocopy this as you need.

"Crimson Kadish"

There's a whole pack of these beauties fluttering around my Relto. Need to spend some time catching some of the ones hovering around the Cleft and see if they will stay here too!

Fundamentals
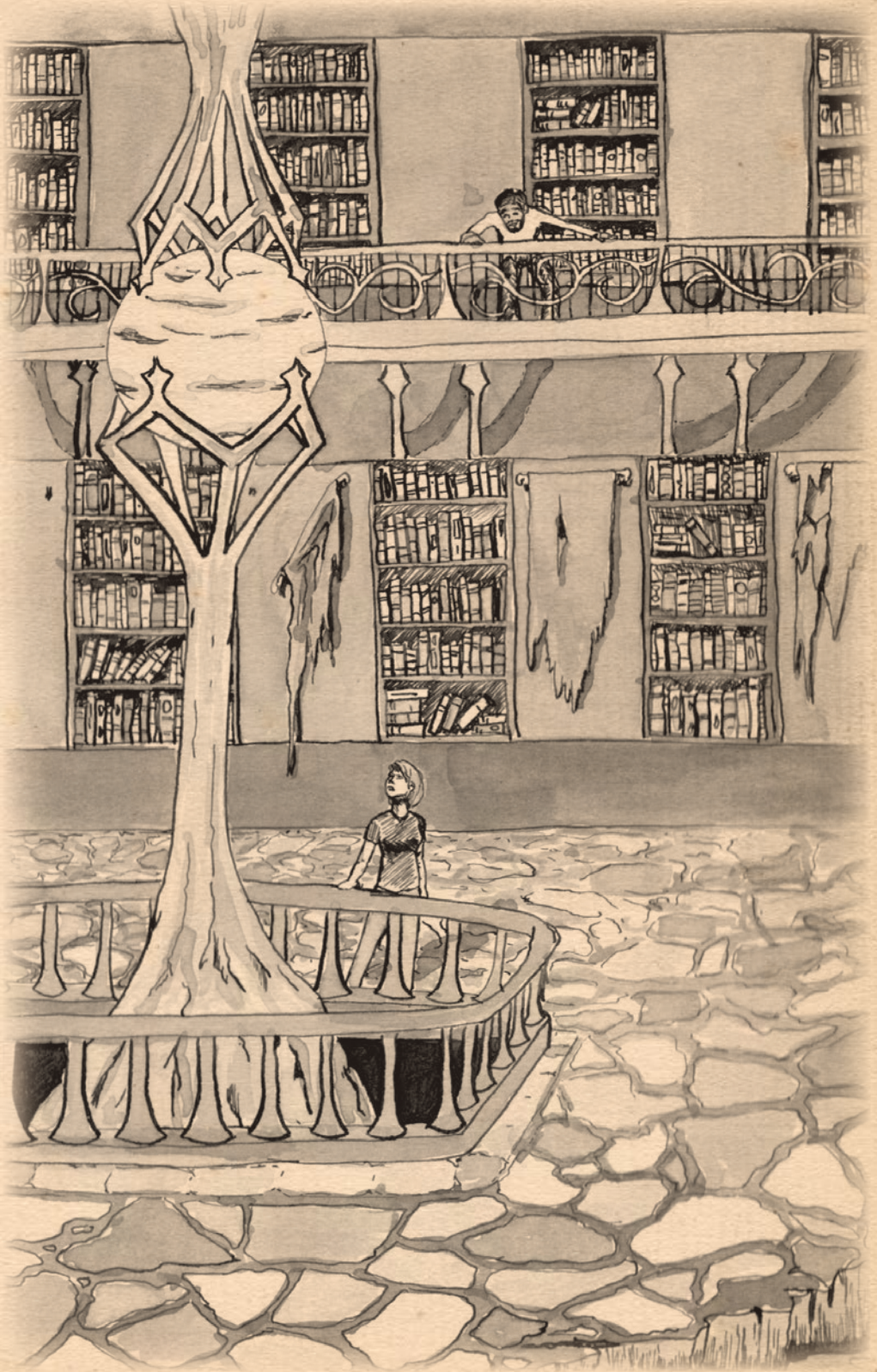
Game Basics

What do you need to play?

- **People** - Three to five people are ideal. One person is the gamemaster (GM); the others are players.
- **Fate Dice** - Rolls in *Unwritten* use special dice called Fate dice (sometimes called Fudge dice): six-sided dice with sides that are blank, or have a plus (+) or a minus (-). A plus stands for +1, a minus stands for -1, and a blank stands for zero. Roll four dice and add the sides together for the value. The range of values is from +4 to -4.
- **Character sheet** - Each player will need a character sheet. You can find blank character sheets at the end of the book that you can photocopy, or you can write your own.
- **Tokens** - Tokens symbolize fate points. You can keep track of them on paper if you like, but something physical for players to hold add a little more fun. Edible tokens are ill-advised.
- **Index cards** - Optionally, you can have a stack of index cards available to jot things down and place where everyone can see them. Sticky notes and whiteboards work as well.

Powered by Fate

Unwritten is based on *Fate Core* by Evil Hat Productions. You do not need *Fate Core* to play *Unwritten*, but if you like this game, we suggest you check out Fate Core and other games Powered by Fate. You can find excellent games for almost any genre you like.

WHAT DO WE DO?

In any game of Fate, you're either a player or a gamemaster.

Players, you...
- portray protagonists in the story, called **Player Characters** (PCs).
- make decisions for your PCs.
- describe what your characters say and do.
- direct your character's growth over time (this is called the Journey).
- roll dice for your characters when situations have uncertain outcomes.
- maintain your character's character sheet.

The **gamemaster**...
- portrays the world the PCs inhabit.
- portrays and roll dice for **non-player characters** (NPCs).
- creates the environments and scenarios characters interact with.
- acts as the final arbiter of rules.

Everyone...
- helps everyone else look awesome.

Our examples come from a game run by Gwen. Her players and their characters are:
- *Maica - a socially focused character played by Maria*
- *Naomi - a strong-willed explorer played by Nadine*
- *Stefan - a low-key outdoorsy type played by Samuel*
- *Templeton - a caustic genius played by Todd*

Most of the time, we will refer to the players by their character's name, except to emphasize those actions and choices which are not 'in character'.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

Each player has a character: it's their interface with the setting. Their character is also one of the protagonists of the story as it unfolds. The player characters are the stars of the show.

Let's look at the nuts and bolts of a character. This is just an overview. Each of these are explained in greater detail elsewhere in this book.

A character has:

▸ Aspects. Important and dramatic details that can help the character, or cause interesting complications they must overcome.

▸ Skills. What the character can do, and how good they are at doing it.

▸ Stunts and Resources. Special talents, situations, or other factors that give the character special bonuses.

▸ Consequences. Aspects that describe the lasting effects of things gone wrong.

▸ Fate points. Points the player can spend to affect the course of play.

How do we do stuff?

Players, most of the time you will just do things. As long as it makes sense, you describe it and it happens. Sometimes though, life isn't that easy.

When something is difficult, or whether you succeed or not is interesting, you will have to roll the dice to see what happens. This is called attempting an **action**. You will roll the dice when you're opposing another character with your efforts, or when there's a significant obstacle in the way. Otherwise, just say what your character does and assume it happens.

Actions
p. 120

The Ladder

The basic measuring stick for *Unwritten* is the **Ladder**; it is used to measure skills, opposition, results and more.

+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Adequate
0	Mediocre
–1	Poor
–2	Terrible

Alternatives to Fate Dice

Fate Dice can be ordered from your friendly local gaming store, or from many online gaming outlets. However, you can make your own Fate dice. Take a six-sided die and mark two sides as plus, two sides as minus and two sides as blank or zero.

You can use 2 six-sided dice as well. Designate one the positive die and the other the negative die. Subtract the negative die from the positive die to get your result. While this gives you a wider range of results (from +5 to -5), it is very close to Fate dice.

Each step on the Ladder has a name and a numeric value. The name is descriptive; you can describe an action as Epic, or someone's skill as Mediocre. The number is used for rolls and other parts of gameplay that need a little math in order to work. Whichever version is easier for your gaming group works just fine, though this book will include both, such as "Adequate (+1)".

If a GM wants, they can use levels above or below the provided ladder and name them what they wish (e.g. "Horrible (-3)"). However, this book will assume the ladder is as listed.

Skills and Rolls

Skills determine what a character can do and how well they can do it. Each player has a number of skills, each with a rating indicating how good they are at it. Everything else that a character does is considered Mediocre (0).

When you try to do something, you roll the four Fate dice, add up the pluses and subtract the minuses, then add an appropriate skill.

Skill List
p. 87

All else being equal, if the result is positive then you succeed. If the result is high, you do really well. If the value is negative, then things don't work out for you. If the dice total up to zero, then you don't quite do it, but you get close or make progress.

Of course, nothing is ever completely equal. Other factors will shift the result up (add to the result) or down (subtract from the result).

Opposition

Your actions will often be opposed. The value of the opposition shifts the value down. Opposition comes in one of two forms: **active**, when someone is rolling dice against you, or **passive**, when an obstacle just has a set rating.

In your favor, you may have stunts which can affect the result of your roll. They may shift the value up, or give you other options.

Once the result, measured in **shifts**, is finalized you determine success or lack thereof. Later in the book, we'll talk about different instances where getting shifts on a roll benefits you.

Nadine is rolling an action for Naomi that uses her Will skill. Nadine rolls + 0 - + for a total of +1 and adds her skill level of Great (+4). The result is Superb (+5). She is up against a passive opposition of Great (+4), so her result shifts down the ladder four levels to Adequate (+1). So she is successful, but not by much.

Maria is rolling an action for Maica that uses Notice. She rolls 0 0 - - for a total of -2. She adds her skill of Good (+3) for a result of Adequate (+1). She is being opposed by an NPC with a Will skill of Adequate (+1). Gwen rolls + 0 0 0, adding the NPCs skill for a result of Fair (+2). The active opposition shifts Maria's result two levels down to Poor (-1). Maica fumbles the roll.

Stunts

Stunts represent something about the character that translates into bonuses or special mechanics that are always in play. These can be personal talents, special training, etc.

One type of stunt is called a resource and reflects special items, key contacts, or locations. Resources are stunts that are tied to a specific location, person or thing. They are listed separately to make it easier to remember that the character has to be at the place in order to use the stunt.

FATE POINTS

Each character has a pool of **fate points**. Spending a fate point indicates that the character is doing something or being affected by something dramatically significant.

You can spend fate points to invoke an aspect or to activate certain powerful stunts. You earn fate points by accepting a compel on one of your aspects.

Defining
Fate Points
p. 61

Each character has a refresh rate. Each session, a character's pool of fate points will refill up to their refresh. Refresh is also used to buy additional stunts and resources as the character grows and changes.

DECLARING A DETAIL

Sometimes, you want to add a detail that works to your character's advantage in a scene. For example, you might use this to narrate a convenient coincidence, like retroactively having the right supplies for a certain job ("Of course I brought that along!"), showing up at a dramatically appropriate moment, or suggesting that you and the NPC you just met have mutual clients in common.

To do this, you'll spend a fate point and justify your story details by relating them to your aspects. GMs, you have the right to veto any suggestions that seem out of scope or ask the player to revise them, especially if the rest of the group isn't buying into it.

> *Maica is rummaging through an old D'ni building in hopes of finding something interesting to trade for some work she needs to have done on the Treehouse, her home base in D'ni. She's having a lot of problems moving the rubble around though.*
>
> *Maria asks Gwen if there is any equipment in nearby buildings she can use to help her excavate. She says that since an industrial area of D'ni is close by, it would make sense. Gwen says "Sure, you can declare that for a fate point."*
>
> *Maria spends the fate point and describes how she finds a mini-forklift device. Gwen points out that now, Maica just has to figure out how to turn it on.*

Aspects

Aspects are a key tool that *Unwritten* provides. Aspects are short phrases that signify important details about a character, a place, a thing, or even an action. They can cover a lot of ground and help paint a complete picture. For example, a character could have an aspect of Hotshot Big Game Hunter. That immediately indicates several things about that character: they are a hunter and probably pretty good at it, they have a tendency to take risks, they are pretty confident in their ability, etc.

Defining
Aspects
p. 61

Aspect can represent anything that is distinctive or noteworthy. But more than being a description, the GM or players can use an aspect to affect play. A character aspect of Shy can be used to the character's advantage (a shy person might be harder to pick out in a crowd) or to their disadvantage (a shy person is going to have a hard time in social situations).

Invoke an Aspect

An aspect can be **invoked** by a player in appropriate situations to improve a character's chances. For example, Hotshot Big Game Hunter could be invoked when when doing something really dangerous, because you are used to taking big risks.

Whenever you're making a roll, and you're in a situation where an aspect might be able to help you, you can invoke it in order to shift the dice result. This allows you to either reroll the dice or shift the roll by +2, whichever is more helpful. You do this after you've rolled the dice and you aren't happy with your total. You also have to explain or justify how the aspect is helpful in order to get the bonus—sometimes it'll be self-evident, and other times it might require some creative description.

You spend fate points to invoke an aspect. You can spend more than one fate point on a single roll, gaining another reroll or an additional +2, as long as each point you spend invokes a different aspect. You can also roll to gain 'free invocations', which allow you to invoke an aspect without a fate point.

When stopped at a gas station near the deserts above the D'ni caverns, Naomi discovers that someone has stolen a Linking Book from her car. She sees a figure run off behind the dunes and follows. When she rolls to see if she can track the thief, she spends a fate point to invoke her Desert Rat aspect, which gives her a +2 bonus.

COMPELS

Sometimes (in fact, probably often), you'll find yourself in a situation where an aspect complicates your character's life and creates unexpected drama. When that happens, the GM will suggest a potential complication that might arise. This is called a **compel**.

Sometimes, a compel means your character automatically fails at some goal, your character's choices are restricted, or simply that unintended consequences cloud whatever your character does. You might negotiate back and forth on the details a little to arrive at what would be most appropriate in the moment. In our hunter example, if the character was challenged to a bet, the GM could compel HOTSHOT BIG GAME HUNTER to decide that the bet ends up being more risky than the character expected, and the results stir up all sorts of trouble.

Once you've agreed to accept the complication, you get a fate point for your troubles. Alternatively, you can pay a fate point to prevent the complication from affecting your character, but we don't recommend you do that very often—you'll probably need that fate point later, and getting compelled brings drama (and hence, fun) into your game's story.

Players, you may also call for a compel when you want there to be a complication in a decision you've just made, if it's related to one of your aspects. GMs, you call for a compel when you make the world respond to the characters in a complicated or dramatic way.

Anyone at the table is free to suggest when a compel might be appropriate for any character (including their own). GMs, you have the final word on whether or not a compel is valid. Speak up if you see that a compel happened naturally as a result of play, but no fate points were awarded.

> *Templeton is trying to get the leader of the Children of the New Seed to let him see the books that they discovered in some D'ni ruins. Gwen points out that this is a perfect time for Templeton to say something ENTERTAININGLY CAUSTIC and compels the aspect. Todd decides to accept the compel and gets a fate point. Templeton says something about throwing in a case of Kool Aid to sweeten the deal because he's heard cult-types like Kool Aid. The leader of the cult is suitably offended.*

Character Aspects

A character's aspects describe important parts of the character that can help or hinder them.

Characters have three types of aspects:
- **High Concept** - A character's High Concept gives a basic overview of the character in one phrase. While this is not the entirety of the character, it is the core concept of the character.
- **Journey Aspects** - A character's journey aspects reflect where the character is in their life: their hopes, their desires, what and who is important to them. As characters advance along their Journey, these can change.
- **Consequences** - A character has a set of consequences, which are aspects representing things that have occurred to and hamper the character, such as stress, set-backs, and so forth.

Non-Character Aspects

Objects can have aspects, as well as areas or scenes. These often fill the role that situational modifiers use in other games. For example, a tool might have an aspect of MALFUNCTIONS EASILY. That could be compelled to force a problem at a difficult moment. Or it could be invoked by a player whose character is trying to break it. A warehouse might have aspects like FULL OF BOXES and SHADOWY CORNERS, which could be used by players and NPCs or compelled by the GM, throughout a scene.

The Next Step

Now that you know the basics of how *Unwritten* works, you are ready to play the game. The next chapters, Starting a Game and Character Creation, will walk you through creating your game and your protagonists.

If you have questions about the rules, the chapters in the Tools of the Journey section delve deeper into the mechanics of the game, how they interact and what issues might arise as you play.

If you want to know more about the D'niverse itself, the Once and Future Cavern section discusses topics like how the Art works, what we know about the lost D'ni people, and who is in D'ni now.

Starting a Game

The explorers in the Cavern have been holding their collective breath for years now. Yeesha's ploy to draw off the Bahro seems to have worked, but no one has heard from her since. The DRC abandoned the Cavern, and many explorers have followed their lead.

The skeleton of a new society has begun to grow. Those who have remained behind have clustered into small groups; some are happy to cooperate and others just want to be left alone. Those that remain behind have been struggling with the question on everyone's mind: what now?

Your game is your answer to that.

Discussing the Setting

The first step in putting together an *Unwritten* game is discussion. The players and the GM sit down and talk about what they want to do with the game. The GM will usually have some ideas about the game they want to run, and the players will have ideas to bring to the table as well. Let's look at what you should think about as you start your game: the big questions and the key decisions. After that, you will collaborate with each other to fill in the details of your game.

The Big Questions

The future of D'ni, the Ages, and the Art are in front of the characters, and that opens up some serious questions. When you start your game, you should decide which of these questions interest you and your group the most, or if there is some other question you would like to address.

*What should the future of D'ni be,
and what is the explorers' place in that future?*

What purpose does the cavern serve now? Should D'ni be rebuilt anew? Are the explorers the spiritual successors of the D'ni people, or is this the beginning of humanity's turn as stewards of the Ages?

What will the explorers do with the power the Art provides them?

What happens when someone has the ability to seemingly create whatever world they want? What will explorers do with such abundance? Will they see themselves as masters of the Ages, like the D'ni? How will they treat the peoples they meet and what will they do with the worlds they find—learn and explore, or exploit and dominate?

How will the Art change the world?

The Art is, if you will excuse the pun, a game-changer. What happens when the rest of humanity finds out about it (if they ever do)? How will it change society? What new societies will develop? What new technologies will we discover because of what we may encounter? Will space travel simply become passe when you can just open a book to go to the next universe over?

*What is out there on the Great Tree of Possibilities,
and what does it mean?*

Just what *is* out there? What sorts of new things can we find? Are there other civilizations who know the Art and what are they like? What is the possibility that the characters my discover something that fundamentally changes their understanding of the universe?

Key Decisions

Once you have considered those big questions, here are some decisions you need to make about your version of the setting.

The role of D'ni

D'ni is a hub for everything that happens in *Unwritten*, but you should decide how central will D'ni itself be to your game. Is it just a place to stop over on your way to exploring another Age? Or will the cavern be an important backdrop for your game? What you choose here tells you some of the details you need to think about.

If D'ni is central to your story, then you will need to think about how many people are actually in the cavern at any given time, and what influence the various factions will have over the population in general and your characters in specific. The Ages in the game will be secondary locations and whatever drama happens out there will have effects back in D'ni. However, if D'ni is just a place for quick stops and the occasional interlude, then you won't have to sweat these details. More of your focus will be the Ages that you will be visiting.

Accessibility of the Art

Explorers have been slowly rediscovering the Art, but how much of that will actually be in the hands of the players?

If the Art is completely inaccessible to the players, then travel to the Ages is entirely dependent on what Books they can find. Getting to a particular Book may be an adventure in itself, whether they are blocked by physical obstacles or unhelpful NPCs. It means that the place in the Age where the Book links to is inherently a key location, since all incoming visitors will end up in the same place. Access to a new Age is a significant event here, and requires discovering a Linking Book.

On the other end of the scale, if the Art is central to your game and some or all of the characters are Writers, you have significantly different possibilities. The availability of new Ages is defined by the skill, vision, and time of the characters (limited by the availability of appropriate books and ink). Solving a problem by Writing an Age that has what you need is a potential option, with all of the ramifications that come with that. Mistakes may literally have cosmic implications.

A middle ground may be that your characters have the ability to create Linking Books, but not Descriptive Books. In this option, new Ages may not be forthcoming, but travel between existing Ages will be more flexible as characters write Linking Books to new places in existing Ages.

Books
p. 174

Puzzles

You can't have a Myst game without talking about puzzles, and it's important to discuss up front how they will fit into your game.

Ask everyone how they feel about puzzles. If not everyone likes the idea of explicit puzzles in the game, then building your game around them is a bad idea. Also, some of your group may dislike particular types of puzzles—that's another thing to get on the table right away.

Discuss how you want your characters to interact with the puzzles. Will puzzle solving primarily be the purview of players, or will the abilities that your characters have that you do not affect puzzle solving? Answering this question will tell you how often you should bring in game mechanics to provide hints or solve problems.

Also, consider how other elements in the setting will interact with puzzles. Devices like KIs will keep characters in contact with each other and allow them to record information, or they may be able to contact knowledgeable NPCs when they come up against something they can't decipher. Similarly, Linking Books (especially Relto Books) provide easy ways of bypassing physical obstacles. If those solutions don't appeal to you and your group, discuss limiting access to them, or removing them from the setting entirely.

Collaborative Game Creation

Now that you have looked at the big picture, it's time to get to the nitty-gritty. Below we present a structure for filling out your game, designed to give everyone a chance to have a hand in how the game is put together.

While we present the process in order, that's not a hard and fast rule. If you have a definite idea for, say, how your characters fit together, start there and build the game around that. Or you may wish to start with the type of characters you want to play and then build your setting choices from there. Feel free to move back and forth through the process in a way that seems natural. Just make sure that all of the steps in the process are addressed in some way.

It's easy to draw a blank as a part of this process. That's fine; if you don't have an inspiration, skip it for now. You can come back to it later. And if you still don't have an idea you like, just leave it. Those are good things to focus on as you play.

Declare Preferences

Go around the table and ask each person to describe what they want to do in the game.

Everyone is likely to have something that they want to do. It may be as general as a category of activity (solving puzzles, exploring new places, etc.) or something more specific (exploring the limits of what is possible with the Art of Writing, preventing greedy explorers from exploiting native populations, etc).

GMs, don't forget that you are a part of this process. Declare the sorts of things that you want the game to be about and what challenges you want to present to the players.

Write things down

It may seem unnecessary, but writing down ideas that come up during the discussion can be a big help. Ideas can come up and be easily forgotten, but if they are written down and visible to everyone then those ideas stay in people's minds. You don't have to be fancy—no one is being graded on this. A stack of note cards in middle of the table will be fine.

GMs, these notes are invaluable for you. Whatever is left over from the process is a ready-made cache of ideas to draw on. Even nicer is that many of them came from your players, so you know that they will find them interesting.

Now, go around the table again and declare what they do not want to do.

This is the place where people at the table can throw up their red flags. There may be elements that particular players find offensive or stressful. Or, there may be things that people just don't like dealing with, feel have been done too often, or give the game a tone they would rather avoid for this particular game.

What is important to remember here is that no one has to justify what they do not want in the game unless they want to volunteer that information. The purpose of this question is to ensure that everyone has a game that they will enjoy, not put people on the defensive for their preferences.

The group sits down to discuss their new Unwritten game. Gwen starts off by saying that, while she has some ideas, she would like to see a game where the characters really shape the course of the setting directly. Gwen asks each player in turn what they want to do in the game. Maria would like to do something in D'ni that involves a lot of people; no lonely island Ages for her. Nadine is interested in finding out more about D'ni history and culture. Samuel just wants some good pulpy adventure scenes. Todd is hoping he'll get the chance to figure out mysteries.

Now, Gwen brings up the idea of what people don't want to do. Maria is pretty open to anything that isn't obviously inappropriate. Nadine says she's never liked the Bahro, so she'd rather not they be a focus in the game. Samuel really doesn't like situations in which people are getting exploited or harassed, so he'd prefer not to be put into a position where he has to do anything like that. Todd doesn't want the number of explorers to be really big—he likes the idea that parts of D'ni are completely deserted.
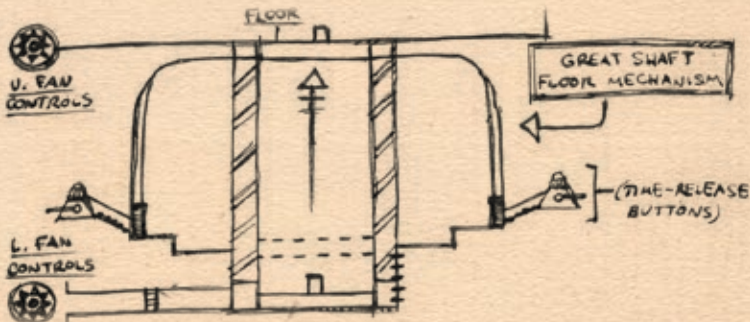
Build a Framework

It is now time to create the framework, the basic details of your game. This is the scaffolding that functions as the foundation for the rest of the collaboration. There are sample frameworks at the end of this chapter. Mine them for ideas as you like.

Address the features we discussed at the beginning of this chapter.
> What are the big questions of the setting? Choose one of the ones discussed previously in this chapter or use them as a starting place for your own.
> What will the role of D'ni be in the game?
> What is the role of the Art in the game?
> How will you handle puzzles and puzzle solving?

Looking at the dos and don'ts from the previous step, Gwen thinks that the Deep City Breathes Again would make a good basic framework. She asks if the Big Questions are the questions everyone wants to explore, to which they all agree. She opens up discussion on some of the other key considerations.

The role of D'ni in the game is pretty clear from the framework. Todd says he wants to play a Writer, so he'd like the Art to be accessible, but Nadine doesn't want to spend a lot of the game dealing with the metaphysics of Writing. They compromise on the idea that Writing Linking Books is fairly well known, but just a few people have really figured out Writing Ages.

As for puzzles, Todd says that his character will probably much better at solving puzzles than he is, so he'd like to have mechanics help him out. Maria asks if there can be a bit of both player puzzle solving and character puzzle solving. Gwen says she can work with that.

Declare Details and Unknowns

Each player gets an opportunity to declare an additional detail about the setting. Players, if you want to see something specific in the game, this is your chance to point it out.

When you declare a detail about the setting, you have a few options:
> Add a new detail to the setting.
> Declare something specific about one of the details that already exist.
> Change a pre-existing detail to something new.

Potential details can involve any of the following:

- ‣ A location
- ‣ A person or faction
- ‣ A relationship
- ‣ A current event
- ‣ An important event in the past
- ‣ An environmental factor
- ‣ A particular item
- ‣ A technology

Next, what are the unknowns, the unanswered questions that the characters (and the players) care about? Each player now gets a chance to declare something that is specifically unknown. Phrase this as a question and write it down.

GMs, use these ideas from the players to build your scenarios and mysteries. Try to work them into your existing plans or use them as inspiration.

Gwen gives everyone a chance to add details. Here's what they come up with: Maria has always wanted to explore the Haven Age from Myst IV, so she adds that to the list. Nadine declares that an uprising of bookworlders in a D'ni occupied Age will be important. Gwen asks for more information, but Nadine says, "You decide the details. Surprise us." Samuel draws a blank, so they save that for later. Todd wants to have the New Seed as a primary antagonist, so he says that they are significantly active in the Cavern nowadays.

For unknowns, the players come up with the following: Maria suggests "Why has the Great Zero suddenly stopped working?" thus implying that it has in their setting. Nadine adds the question "What is the mysterious connection that one of the characters unknowingly has with a member of the DRC?" Gwen makes a comment about Nadine making her job easier. Samuel adds "What is the mysterious creature reported in the Age of Negilahn?", and Todd finishes up with "Who has been ransacking explorers' camps throughout the cavern?" He says that will make sure everyone is nice and tense.

Establish Issues

Every setting needs to have something going on that the characters care about, often a peril they want to oppose or a mystery they want to solve. These are the setting's **issues**.

You'll come up with two issues as a group and write them down. The issues should reflect the scale of your game and what the characters will face. They're broad ideas; they don't just affect your characters, but many people in the world. Issues take two forms:

- **Current Issues**: These are problems or threats that exist in the world already, possibly for a long time.
- **Impending Issues**: These are things that have begun to rear their ugly heads, and threaten to make the world worse if they come to pass or achieve a goal.

The default number of issues is two: Either two current issues (for a story solely about trying to make the world a better place), two impending issues (for a story about striving to save people from threats), or one of each. The latter option is common in fiction: think about the stalwart heroes who work against some impending doom while already discontent with the world around them. Additionally, the unknowns defined in the last step can be the basis of an issue.

The group comes up with a current issue. The first is that all of the explorers are confused and worried about what they are going to do in D'ni; there are a lot of problems and everyone is struggling to address them.

The second issue is an impending one: the friction rising between the various groups. Everyone is tense because of the mysterious happenings in D'ni and in the Ages, and they are starting to take it out on each other. It's only a matter of time before people start over-reacting.

Establish Game Aspects

Turn the issues you have into aspects that you could conceivably use at different times in the story (often as compels to the protagonists or as invocations for foes, but clever players will always find other uses for aspects). Write them down, and then if you need to add a little bit to remember the context or some details, write those down alongside the aspects.

If you're new to making aspects, hold off on this for now. You'll get quite a bit of practice making aspects for your characters. Once you're done with character creation, turn these issue ideas into aspects.

Boiling down the current issue, the group creates the game aspect: FIND A WAY, MAKE A HOME. They feel that it embodies the desire for everyone to find the way forward and make D'ni their home.

The second aspect they settle on is SOON WE WILL BE AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS. There's a good sense of impending danger in that.

Build an Age Library

One of the key elements of an *Unwritten* game is the Ages that the protagonists will find themselves in. Each player will create an Age to add to the setting's **Age library**. The GM will use these as backdrops for the game.

For each Age, write the answers to the following questions down:

> What is one distinctive physical characteristic of the Age?
> What is one important fact about the Age's history/past?
> What is one thing that is unknown about the Age?

Each player works out an Age and presents it to the group:

Valley of the Lake (Maria)
- *The valley is surrounded on all sides by tall craggy mountains with rivers that lead to a central lake*
- *The Age was once owned by a family of wealthy D'ni merchants.*
- *No one knows what lies beyond the mountains.*

New Roanoke (Nadine)
- *The Age is an archipelago of small islands on a sea with strong winds.*
- *A D'ni colony mysteriously disappeared from the Age.*
- *What happened to the original colonists?*

Gohn'ahn (Samuel)
- *A lush jungle with scattered Mayan-like pyramids.*
- *According to D'ni records, the Age was never actually visited by the D'ni; it was scheduled for initial examination by the Maintainers at the time of the Fall.*
- *If the D'ni never visited the Age, who built the pyramids?*

Goldberg (Todd)
- *The Age is a flat plain with a huge complex of clockwork machines that seems to have been running continuously since the Fall.*
- *There is evidence of conflict around the link point for the Age.*
- *What is the purpose of the incredibly complex clockwork machinery?*

Gwen adds these to Haven (which Maria asked to be included) and Negilahn (which Samuel mentioned in his suggested unknown) to her list of Ages to use in the game.

Establish the Protagonists

Here is where the GM and players begin to discuss what they want each individual character to be, how the characters know each other, and why they are together. This discussion informs character creation, especially the choice of High Concept.

The characters will be interacting, so it is important for the players to figure out why they are interacting and why they might continue to do so in the future. A lone wolf character might have a neat concept, but if a character ends up spending all of their time away from everyone else, then they are

essentially playing their own game on the group's time. This doesn't mean that characters can't split up and don't get unique moments to shine, but the game is a group activity and the dynamics of the characters should support that.

Also discuss how characters might conflict with each other. Some groups have fun when the characters are at odds; some do not. That should be worked out up front.

Filling out the details of your characters is a part of character creation, covered in the next chapter.

Both Maria and Todd already have ideas for the characters they want to play: Maria wants to play a people-person, and Todd wants his character to be a sarcastic Writer. Gwen asks if they want to be allied with any particular group in the cavern, like the Guilds. The players discuss it and think that they want to be a group of explorers who fell in together so that they can have a lot of freedom in their character concepts. Gwen reminds them that they need to be certain that the characters they make have a good reason to stay together, and the players decide they'll work out the details after they make their characters.

Wrapping it Up

By the end of this process, you have:

> A setting framework
> A list of what the players and GM want to do and not do
> A list of details
> A list of unknowns
> A current issue and an impending issue
> Two game aspects
> A list of Ages
> A reason the characters are interacting

With these in hand, the next step is to design the characters themselves. Move onto the next chapter: Character Creation.

Sample Frameworks

The Deep City Breathes Again

The future of the cavern is at hand, and no one is left but the explorers to shape it. The problem is, no one can agree on how to proceed. The scholars want to follow in the DRC's footsteps, while others like the New Seed have a definite vision of who the new D'ni people are. Everyone has an opinion, and lines are being drawn.

In this framework, focus how the different factions in D'ni compare and contrast in their goals and their methods. This is a clash not only of factions, however, but also of ideologies—what people believe, what they are willing to believe, and what they are willing to do for those beliefs. The players and the GM should discuss what factions in the Cavern they want to have the most sway. Some of the factions may even be completely unknown to the characters (or even the players) at first. From these factions the players will eventually choose their allies and their antagonists.

The protagonists themselves can be any sorts that you could find in D'ni nowadays. They may be members of an established faction, or they may be free agents. In any case, the characters have to rely on each other, and eventually become a force to be reckoned with in the course of D'ni's future.

This is a game that tends more toward intrigue and politics. The unknowns will center around the factions themselves, agendas they are pushing, or resources they want to obtain. Secrets can and will change the course of events. Adventure scenes can happen anywhere, of course, but they will be part of the larger struggle.

Big Questions

› What is the purpose of the cavern?
› Who should decide the future of D'ni?
› How does having access to the Art affect how ideologies view the universe?

D'ni and the Ages

In this game, D'ni plays a central role; everything is about what happens in the cavern. Influence and control of D'ni is paramount, and that is what factions will struggle over. Ages are backdrops for these clashes, and will often themselves be gambits. Ages make excellent places for factions to create bases of operation, or to hide uncomfortable secrets.

The Art

The significance of the Art plays a big role in this game. If the Art is not accessible, Ages are a limited resource, and very important to all factions. If anyone develops reliable access to the Art, that's a major tipping point.

If the Art is readily accessible, then various groups will be Writing their own Ages to give them what they want. The importance of D'ni will focus on issues other than access to Ages and resources. This may be an ideological conflict, or there may be other reasons D'ni itself is so important.

Brave New Worlds
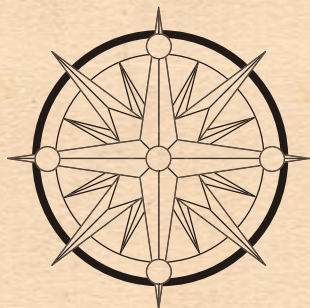
The Great Tree is open to humanity, and there are endless worlds out there. The explorers are the stewards of what the D'ni left behind, now. Someone has to go investigate all those places. Someone needs to make sure that they are safe, and see what is out there that may help the world.

The protagonists are those someones, of course. They will be working with the Guilds most likely, though other organizations are possible. They are likely to have skills that are helpful out in the wilderness and be chosen to complement each other, as they will often be on their own.

Brave New Worlds is an "Age a Week" game, similar in structure to a TV series. The characters will get sent out to different Ages to explore, record, and report back in. This allows characters to cycle in and out as different Ages are explored. There may be an overarching story that gets revealed slowly over different chapters.

Antagonists are wary native populations, isolated D'ni colonies, or rival explorer groups with less-than-innocent motives for getting into the Ages. The environment itself is an important antagonist as well, as it can be as dangerous as any people the characters might encounter.

Adventure and exploration are the watchwords of this framework. Dealing with natural disasters and hostile environments slot into first contact scenarios and culture clashes.

Big Questions

- ◊ What exactly is out there?
- ◊ What do we do with what we find out there?
- ◊ How do we deal with the cultures we find?

D'ni and the Ages

The Ages are the obvious stars of a framework like this. D'ni is the hub for all of the group's adventures, but it is really there for supplying the mission and debriefing afterwards. The Guild or whomever the protagonists work for will provide special equipment and supplies.

The Art

The Art doesn't play a big role in this game; most of the action happens in discovered Ages, and possibly in new Ages Written by explorers (who knows what they will find in an Age Written by someone just learning the Art).

The ability to Write a Linking Book, however, can be an important factor. Exploring to important places and bringing back Books that link to there is incredibly useful. If there isn't a Writer in the group, they should expect to occasionally escort Writers to the dangerous places they have found.

WANDERERS ON THE GREAT TREE

Not everyone who looks to the Ages has the interests of the Guilds or D'ni in mind, however. Others see the endless Ages as opportunity and head out into the Ages to find their destiny.

In structure, this is similar to the Brave New Worlds framework; the motivation is different, however. The protagonists will be looking for something out there on the Great Tree. It may be something specific, a place to call their own, or a personal meaning. The characters may all have the same goal in mind, or they may each have something unique they are looking for. In any case, the group should be relatively cohesive, as they will only be able to rely on each other.

Exploration is center stage. The protagonists are up against the environments and the unknown itself. Sure, there will be peoples out there, but the unknown is their real adversary.

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Deductions
p. 156

If the GM is comfortable with a lot of improvisation, a Wanderers game is ideal for repeated use of Deduction scenes. All the GM has to do is set up a bunch of details, run a Deduction to see what the players come up with, and run with it.

An interesting variation is where the group is stranded out in the Ages, trying to get home. Probably this would be in a series of Ages that had been previously visited by the D'ni, in order to have a trail of Linking Books to follow.

Big Questions

- ‣ What is out there?
- ‣ What are we looking for and what will it mean to us?
- ‣ How will what we find change who we are?

D'ni and the Ages

D'ni itself has a small role to play in the wandering game, if any at all. It might only serve as a touchstone and a place to find more Ages to explore.

The Ages themselves, however—it's all about them. Ages that they enter will have lessons to teach about the universe or about themselves.

The Art

The Art itself is likely to not be that important to the wanderings, unless one of the characters is a Writer and the group is wandering through the Ages they Write. A game of exploring an Age, then Writing the next one to explore and then exploring that again and again could lead to some pretty interesting places, metaphorically and literally.

Turning that First Page

Discovering D'ni in the first place is a great adventure. If the players are not familiar with the setting of the Myst games, one way to introduce them to it is by playing a game where their characters are just discovering D'ni as well. The design of your game that and your characters will assume that they know nothing of D'ni.

GROUPS OF MIXED EXPERIENCE

An option for a group of players who have mixed knowledge of the setting is to work with it: the knowledgeable players to play veteran explorers who have decided to (or have been assigned to) take care of the new arrivals.

New explorers may be people who found D'ni on their own, or may have been brought to D'ni for specific purposes. When the uninitiated characters reach the Crossing Paths step in character creation, replace that step with the question "How did you discover, or why were you brought to, D'ni?"

Crossing Paths p. 45

You can combine this approach with most of the frameworks presented here. Much of the initial sessions will be centered around the new arrivals learning about D'ni, but transition into other plots quickly to keep the story going.

The ability to Write Linking Books would probably have a place in any Wandering game, unless you want the characters to be compelled to move forward through Books without having the chance to look back.

Make sure you have interesting characters that are likely to stick together as they are uncovering their secret. They may know each other from before the game and even be part of the same organization (academics from the same university, members of a privately-funded archeological dig, etc.)

AS BELOW, SO ABOVE

So few people understand the incredible secrets that exist beneath their feet, in the depths of D'ni. But those who do hold a lot of power. How long before it falls into the wrong hands? In As Below, So Above, it already has. Persons unknown have brought the Art to the surface. As the new inhabitants of D'ni, it is up to the protagonists to keep that from becoming a problem.

Some details in *Unwritten*, such as Linking Books being created for homes and meeting places on the surface, exist to provide a plausible reason for explorers to get back and forth from their daily surface lives. Here, we shine the spotlight instead on where D'ni crosses over with the world above.

The protagonists are charged with finding out who is using Linking Books on the surface, stopping them, and keeping the secret of D'ni safe. Their antagonists are their fellow explorers, who are using the Art in self-serving, unsafe, or attention-grabbing ways. Likely, they will be backed by the Guilds, members of law enforcement who are also in the know, or work for a mysterious powerful benefactor, Charlie's Angels-style.

The most 'traditional RPG' option presented here, this framework is a significant departure from the default mood of the setting. To retain the focus on discovery and creative thinking, build the game around investigation of suspected uses of the Art and creative ways of using Linking Books to interfere. Investigations, Deductions, and the Discover action are the primary tools of this framework. Think of it as a hybrid: police procedural in order to find the people responsible, and a heist story in order to stop what is happening.

Discovery and Investigation p. 143

Big Questions

- ❭ How can the Art be used on the surface?
- ❭ How can the protagonists counter others using the art for nefarious purposes?
- ❭ What will the protagonists do to keep the secret?

D'ni and the Ages

Most of the action happens on the surface, with Ages used as layover points or as a source for items to bring back to the surface. D'ni itself is a safe area—a home base where you don't have to worry about keeping the secret. Of course, a scenario where a newcomer comes to D'ni and decides that the world above needs to know could be interesting as well.

The Art

The Art is really critical, as it is both the tool and the treasure in this game. While D'ni technology or exotic materials from the Ages might find their way to the surface, Linking Books are what makes it all possible: miraculous thefts, confounding escapes, and more. Books are also easily hidden. What happens if someone stumbles upon a Linking Book in an obscure corner of a library, or an investigative journalist receives a Relto Book anonymously in the mail?

At least one of the protagonists should be able to make Linking Books; players should be encouraged to make creative use of them. Entire sessions could revolve around getting the group's Writer into a key location long enough to Write a Book there that they could use later.

The New Stewards of the Tree

The Art shapes the destiny of all those who learn it. A Writer has an incredible amount of power; that's why Writers were so important to D'ni society. It is also why they were restricted by rigid traditions about how the Art was used and what it meant about creation.

All of that is gone now. Sure, we have records about what the D'ni did and why, but we are not the D'ni people. We come from different backgrounds, with different ideas about responsibility (or lack thereof). As the new caretakers of the Art, we will shape the Great Tree of Possibilities our way, for good or ill.

In this game, all of the characters are Writers. They may cleave to D'ni traditions, or they may look forward to daring to pass the limits of imagination. They may even have mixed opinions on it, with tension between those of differing philosophies. Whatever the case may be, the power is in the protagonists' hands. The nature of reality itself becomes a topic of study, and may become an area of experimentation.

The most important discussion you can have when choosing this framework is around how much conflict between the protagonists you want to have. On one end of the spectrum, the group may be of similar minds of what they want to do. On the other end, they may each have different ideas and agendas—the tone of such a game would be very different.

If the characters are working together, they may be working on the same Age, or same set of Ages. Or they may share a common purpose. The unintended effects of what they Write and how they respond are the primary fuel for the plot of the game. Dealing with external forces (enclaves of surviving D'ni, opportunistic indigenous cultures, rival Writers) will drive drama as well. Given the cosmological scale of the Art, Yeesha herself may get involved. Or the Bahro.

If players like the idea of tension between the protagonists, the game can become a game of politics and intrigue with characters as the guardians, task masters, or representatives of the peoples in 'their' Ages.

When building your Age Library in the process above, the players will describe an Age that they have written instead of one they have visited. Ask them to describe why they Wrote the Age as well. Then in character creation, give them that Age as a resource.

Big Questions

> How does the Art change a person?
> What responsibility does a Writer have to the Ages they Write?
> When you can Write your way to anything you want, what really matters to you?

D'ni and the Ages

D'ni is the neutral ground in this take on the setting. It's the way home, and the source of supplies for Writing. The Ages, however, can be anything that the players want. The game focuses on what the characters do with (and to) the Ages. In many ways, the Ages themselves are as much characters as the protagonists themselves.

The Art

With every character as a Writer, it's all about the Art. Linking Books and Descriptive Books will be key elements throughout the game. Expect that journey rolls will focus on adding aspects to Ages, and that you may just decide that Ages get finished between chapters in order to keep things moving forward.

With so much Writing going on, the stranger aspects of the Art may become elements of the game. Characters may attempt to Write details into already completed Ages, or make seemingly impossible ones. They might want to experiment with creative ways to create Books, or devise complicated mechanisms that utilize the Art. The GM may also present unexpected uses of the Art as mysteries for the characters to investigate.

Add how the Art works to the list of things you discuss. If the GM and a player have different ideas about how the Art works and what that means, that can end up in an argument or someone becoming disheartened by what they can and can't do throughout the game.
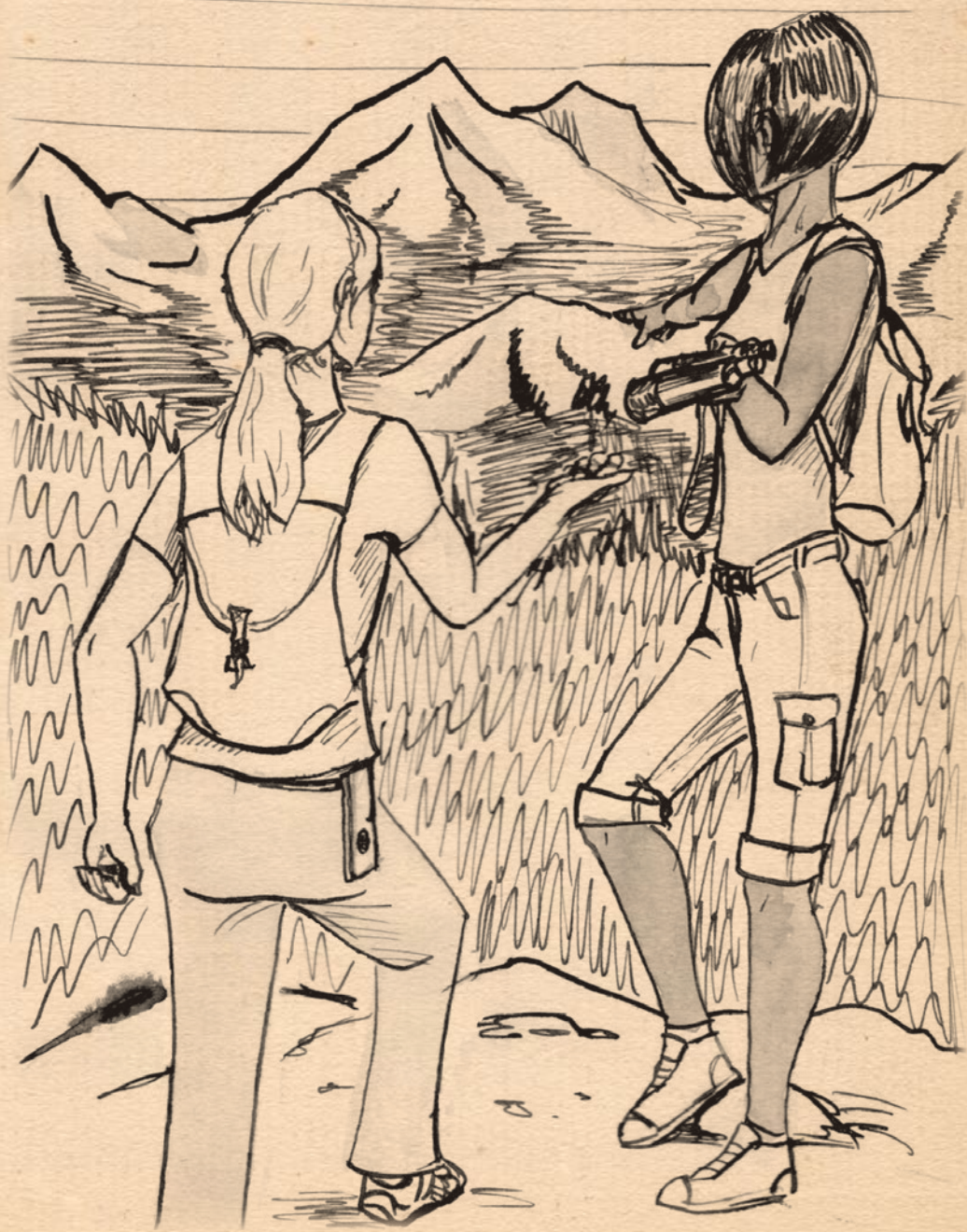
CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation can be collaborative or a mix of individual work and collaboration. If your group has fun sitting around the table and working on each other's characters, then roll with it. If everyone needs some time to digest everything and think about their options, take a break, order pizza, and give everyone time to mull things over. You might even want to wait until the next session.

Not every decision needs to be run past the group, but there should be a lot of communication going on. Doing at least some of this together builds a strong foundation of communication between the players and GM, and this process has a number of ways to establish connections between the characters and the setting. Remember that you are all players working together— everyone is there to help each other be awesome.

Character creation follows these steps:
1. Build your character concept and choose your High Concept
2. Describe your Journey
3. Choose Journey aspects
4. Choose Skills
5. Pick or invent stunts
6. Finishing Touches

YOUR CHARACTER CONCEPT

Character creation starts with a concept for your character. It could be modeled after a character from a favorite novel or movie, or it could be based around some specific thing that you want to be able to do (like decipher

ancient languages, make deals with other explorers, etc.). Just like we did with game creation, we will interweave some brainstorming in with tying down some details.

Player characters should be exceptional, interesting, and engaged. You must figure out why your character is going to keep getting involved in challenging situations. If you don't, the GM is under no obligation to go out of her way to make the game work for you—they'll be too busy with other players who made characters that have a reason to participate.

High Concept

Your **high concept** is a phrase that sums up what your character is about—who he is and what he does. It's an aspect, one of the first and most important ones for your character.

Think of this aspect like your job, your role in life, or your calling—it's what you're good at, but it's also a duty you have to deal with, and it's constantly filled with problems of its own. That is to say, it comes with some good and some bad. There are a few different directions you can take this:

> You could take the idea of "like your job" literally: Investigative Journalist, Civil Engineer, Corporate Drone.
> You could throw on an adjective or other descriptor to further define the idea: Tireless Investigative Journalist, Curious Civil Engineer, Bored Corporate Drone.
> You could play off of an important relationship to your family or an organization you're deeply involved with (especially if the organization is well-known or one of the factions created earlier): DRC Restoration Engineer, Faithful Follower of the Children of D'ni, The Explorers' Favorite Gossip.

These aren't the only ways to play with your high concept, but they'll get you started. But don't stress out over it—the worst thing you can do is make it into too big of a deal. You'll come up with four other aspects after this one—you don't have to get it all nailed right now.

High concepts can have overlap among the characters, as long as you have something to distinguish how your character is different from the others. If high concepts must be similar among all the characters, such as if the GM pitches an all-scientist story, it's crucial that the details differ.

Maria is looking forward to playing a character who is good at social situations. She's also a big fan of the Myst universe and knows a lot about the setting, so she wants to play someone who has been around for a while. She comes up with a character named Maica who was one of the first of the Called to come to D'ni, and has been around since. For the people who arrived later, she's just always been there.

She decides on the high concept of FIXTURE OF THE RESTORATION.

YOUR JOURNEY

Unwritten characters are driven to know and discover things, whether it is about the universe, about life, or about themselves. They are on an on-going experience in which they have grown and changed, and will continue to do so in the future. This is their **journey**.

You define your journey by the steps that you take along the way. Your character is already on their path, so now you will describe what has led them to who they are now. Then, you will use these as the foundation for choosing your remaining aspects.

STEPS ON THE PATH

These are key experiences that have shaped who your character is now. They depict what they are seeking, what has happened to them, and what matters to them.

Choose two options from below and answer the prompts. You do not need to go into great detail on these right now—just a sentence or two will do fine now. If you want to go into greater detail later, feel free.

- Choose something your character desires above all else. Describe an event where your character has done something extraordinary in hopes of achieving that goal.
- Choose a belief your character holds dear. You can decide if this is a religious belief, an ethical principle, or just something that your character clings to tightly. Describe when that belief formed or when it crystallized as so important to them.
- Choose a belief your character holds or held dear. Describe a moment where that belief was tested or challenged. Explain how your character responded to the challenge and how it shaped them. You can choose the same belief as the step above, or a different one. It is your choice whether your character continues to hold that belief or not.
- Choose something or someone important to your character. Describe how it came to mean so much.
- Choose an issue you have never resolved. Describe an incident where you struggled to deal with it.
- Choose an Age that your character visited. Describe the Age and what happened there that affected your character deeply.

For her first journey step, Maria chooses a belief that her character holds dear and decides to describe how that belief crystallized. She feels that her character is service and community oriented. She describes that, when her character was a little girl, her apartment complex caught on fire. The neighbors rallied together and got all of the children out of the building safely and even saved a few of the pets before the Fire Department arrived. To her young eyes, true heroes were people who were always trying to lend a hand.

Her second journey step talks about someone important to her character. She decides that her aunt was always a powerful force in her life and tried to encourage her to use her mind wherever possible. Her aunt would always buy her puzzles for her birthdays, and she treasures them to this day.

CROSSING PATHS

Your Journey also includes the other player characters in the game. You share experiences with them that bind you together.

You will be working collaboratively with other players on this section. Start with a random player. That player chooses another player to work with to create an experience that their two characters shared. Then the player who was chosen gets to choose the next player to do the same thing and so on until the last player left creates an experience with the first. This creates a circle of connections throughout the group, which each character being connected to two others.

For each experience, choose one of the following prompts:
> Describe an event where their character helped yours in a time of need.
> Describe a tragedy you weathered together.
> Describe a moment where you disagreed strongly in a way that has never been resolved.
> Describe someone you both knew and cared about or respected greatly.
> Describe when a problem their character had or caused impacted your character as well.

Like the previous section, don't go too deeply into detail right now. You can come up with more detail with the other players after character creation, or you may want to add details during play as they occur to you.

For her crossed path, she chooses Samuel's character and decides that they were trapped in a cave-in together. She and Samuel work out that they were trapped together for two days until they dug themselves out. Samuel's character is a survivalist, so his skill brought them through. They decide that the encounter brought them close together and sparked a romance between the two.

Journey Aspects

Now we look at the journey that your character has taken and create four aspects based off of those experiences. Not every experience needs to be represented in your **Journey aspects**, nor does every aspect need to tie directly back to one of these experiences. Instead, use your character's journey as inspiration for what elements are important and dramatic to your character's on-going story.

If you have time, you might want to read the whole chapter we have dedicated to aspects before you go through the process of character creation. In case you're pressed for time, here are some guidelines for choosing aspects:

Aspects which don't help you tell a good story (by giving you success when you need it and by drawing you into danger and action when the story needs it) aren't doing their job. The aspects which push you into conflict—and help you excel once you're there—will be among your best and most-used.

Aspects need to be both useful and dangerous—allowing you to help shape the story and generating lots of fate points. They should never be boring. The best aspect suggests both ways to use it and ways it can complicate your situation. Aspects that cannot be used for either of those are likely to be dull indeed. Bottom line: if you want to maximize the power of your aspects, maximize their interest.

When you're told you need to come up with an aspect, you might experience brain freeze. If you feel stumped for decent ideas for aspects, there's a big section focusing on several methods for coming up with good aspect ideas in Aspects and Fate Points.

If you ultimately can't break the block by any means, don't force it— leave it completely blank. You can always come back and fill out that aspect later, or let it develop during play. Ultimately, it's much better to leave an

aspect slot blank than to pick one that isn't inspiring and evocative to play. If you're picking aspects you're not invested in, they'll end up being noticeable drags on your fun.

Based off of her first journey step, Maria decides that MAICA CAN'T RESIST A REQUEST FOR HELP. *She also wants Maica's natural puzzle solving ability to be important, so she adds* FASCINATED BY PATTERNS *to the list. Next, she wants to make sure her character is well-connected, and writes down* EVERYONE KNOWS MAICA.

For her last aspect, she's not sure what to take. After a little discussion with the other players, the group decides that they will need a base of operations, and that it makes sense that Maica would be in charge of that. Maria likes the idea of a treehouse in some forest Age, but the group wants a place in D'ni itself.

Maria decides that Maica found a D'ni home decorated with tree murals all over, which Maica cleaned out and called her own. She calls it the Treehouse, and adds the aspect THE TREEHOUSE — MY HOME AWAY FROM HOME.

KINDA CUTE, FOR A BIG

INTERESTING "SPLOTCH" PATTERN ON BACK — SIMILAR TO DYNASTES TITUS MALE. LOOKS LIKE DROPS OF INK!

INK BEETLE?

WHERE DID ATRUS GET HIS INK FROM, ANYHOW?
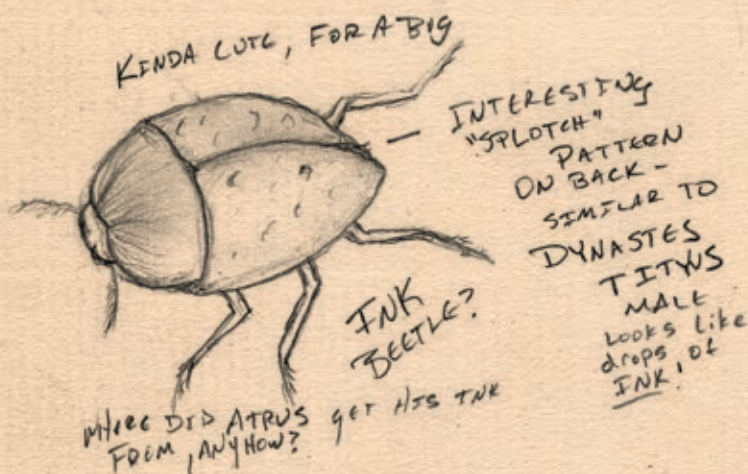
BEWARE COMPEL PARALYSIS

Avoid aspects that lead to inaction. Being unable or unwilling to act is an obvious compel, but it has a key flaw: it can bring the game to a screeching halt. Simply *not doing anything* is boring.

Aim for aspects that fall forward: aspects whose compels lead to action instead of preventing it.

CHOOSE SKILLS

Once you have mapped out your character's phases and chosen aspects, it's time to pick skills.

Remember that your character is considered to be generally competent; you don't need to worry about skills that reflect capabilities everyone would have at average levels (average for an adventurous explorer, of course). Your skills point out the areas where the character's abilities stand out above the average person.

📖

Skill List
p. 87

Your skills form a pyramid, with a single skill rated at Great (+4)—which we'll usually refer to as the peak skill—and more skills at each lower rating on the ladder going down to Adequate (+1):

- ❯ One skill at Great (+4)
- ❯ Two skills at Good (+3)
- ❯ Three skills at Fair (+2)
- ❯ Four skills at Adequate (+1)

Mediocre (+0) is the default for any situation where you don't have a skill. Sometimes, you won't be able to attempt actions if you don't have an applicable skill; in those cases, rolling the dice is irrelevant.

For her Great (+4) skill, Maria chooses Rapport. Maica is supposed to be a people-person after all. For her Good (+3) skills, she chooses Notice and Experiment for her natural problem solving abilities. She adds Will, Craft, and Empathy at Fair (+2) and rounds out the skill pyramid with Medicine, Athletics, Finesse, and Deceive at Adequate (+1).

WHAT IF I'M REALLY BAD AT IT?

Even otherwise competent people can have something that they are just horrible at. There is no mechanic in *Unwritten* for giving penalties to yourself on rolls, so this is mostly just flavor that you might want to role-play.

If it is dramatically important, however, it should show up on your character sheet. Represent it with an aspect to be compelled.

Build for Diversity

Protagonists are not just competent, but have some all-around capability. You should expect your character to be able to add something to a wide variety of situations.

When you are choosing your skills, aim for having a diverse range of options. Your skills should not all be in the same discipline or same set of disciplines—no more than two in any particular domain, ideally. A scholar might have a secondary area of interest, for example. If they have worked in the field a lot, maybe they have picked up some hands-on survival skills.

Think about the type of game you will be playing as well. If you have a game heavy on mysteries, you'll need skills that you help you uncover clues. Exploration games will require problem-solving abilities, or skills that help in varying types of wilderness. If there's going to be some action, you'd best be able to defend yourself or know when to run.

Diversity also applies to the group of characters as well. Where there is overlap in concepts, your skills should help differentiate you. If you have several scholars, they should have different specializations. Everyone should have a place where they have the spotlight.

Your Stunts

Stunts are knowledges, talents, abilities or other assets that apply to your character. They are not dramatic focuses like aspects (meaning that, among other things, they cannot be compelled), but they are capabilities that are always at your disposal. Stunts follow the basic format of "when *trigger*, I can do *effect*." So you will decide what capabilities you want to have under what conditions. Sometimes stunts will be mechanical in nature, or they will be entirely narrative.

Resources are like stunts, except that they connect to specific people, places, or things. Their trigger is that you have access to the item or can get to the person or place.

Your character starts the game by creating three stunts. You can take up to two more stunts at the cost of lowering your refresh by one each. (The gist is this: the more cool tricks you can do, the more you'll need to accept compels to get fate points.)

Figuring out stunts can take a while, so you may want to pick one for now and determine the rest of them during play. At least one of your stunts should describe a primary skill or knowledge that your character has, such as a profession or focused area of study. If you only choose one for now, choose one that reflects this.

Maria decides on just the three free stunts; she wants to keep her refresh high.

She wants to be especially good at getting people to open up. She already has a high Rapport, so she's not worried about dealing with high opposition. But when she gets them to open up, they really open up.

· **Revealing Questions.** *When using Rapport to question someone, she gets an extra free invoke when succeeding or excelling.*

Because knowing everyone is Maica's thing, her next stunt shows that. She just has collected a lot of juicy gossip over the years.

· **Friends Everywhere.** *She can spend a fate point to know details about any long-time explorer or DRC member.*

She also wants her Treehouse to be a useful place, so she creates a location resource for it. It'll have all sorts of supplies. She wants it to be useful in a wide array of situations. Gwen says that if the stunt will have wide application, the bonus will have to be lower than the standard +2 bonus.

· **Resource: The Treehouse.** *The Treehouse is a D'ni building in the City Proper with carvings of trees all over the inside. Maica has been fixing it up for years and has been bringing down tools and supplies. Any Craft, Engineering, or Medicine actions done at the Treehouse get a +1.*

FINISHING TOUCHES

Record your character's refresh. A player character starts with a refresh of 3, which means they'll start each session off with at least 3 fate points. If you picked four stunts (your three free plus one), your refresh is 2. If you pick five stunts, your refresh is 1.

Every PC also has three consequence slots. One is mild, one is moderate, and the last one is severe. Stunts could potentially add to these defaults.

Oh, and if you haven't come up with one yet, choose a name.

Gear

Your characters will have stuff. The things your character has are mostly color. Whether you take apart a machine with your bare hands or with a set of socket wrenches won't make much difference in terms of the numbers. Rather, such differences are more important to the narrative, or when wording situation aspects and consequences.

Assume your character has access to any reasonable gear and items that would make sense. They will have flashlights, first aid kits, and other similar necessities. If your character has a particular skill or aspect that implies gear, then they have it. A character with the Engineer skill would have tools; a character with Survival would have hunting weapons of their choice. This includes locations as well: everyone has a home and you can assume you have appropriate tools, books, etc.

Some gear or locations may be significantly unusual enough to have a bigger effect on the story. Use aspects to describe these, and remember that the aspects should provide opportunities for invocations and compels. If the gear provides a specific bonus, it could be made into a stunt instead. Or it can be represented by both if it works in both ways.

We recommend against going overboard with this and giving every single item your PC owns an aspect or stunt. This is a game about your character, not about his or her stuff. Reserve this for items that have unique or personal value, something that you're not going to be changing constantly through the course of the campaign.
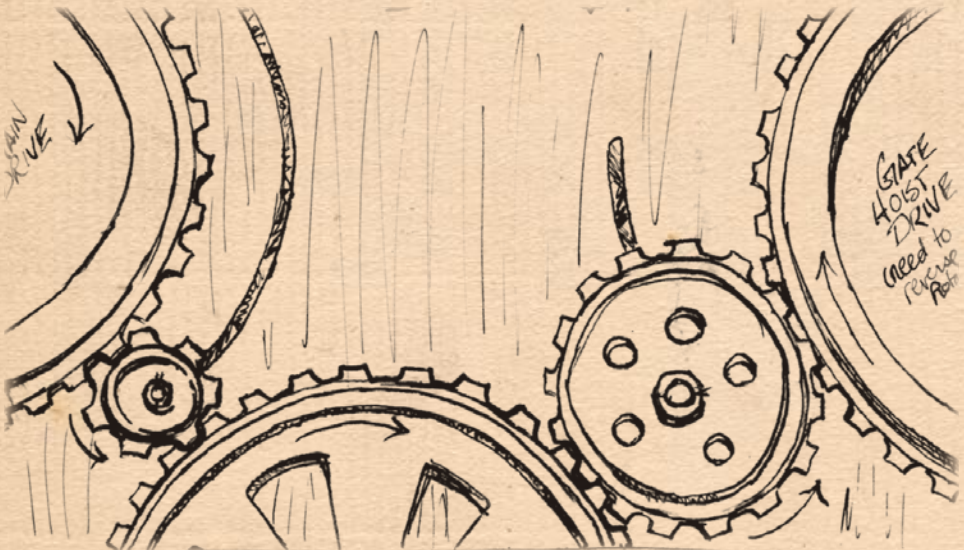
Quick Character Creation

If you want to skip making a detailed character and just want to play, you can leave most of the character blank and fill in as you play. After all, the Myst games start you off immediately in the game without telling you much else.

At minimum, you need to have the following filled out to start:

> High concept aspect
> Your Great (+4) skill
> Name

When it comes to your high concept, you can start off vague and refine the aspect later. Rugged Archaeologist is an okay high concept for this method, and later you might discover something about your character that puts a spin on it. When that happens, rewrite the aspect to reflect that spin.

You should know your best skill to start—that gives us further ideas about your character. If you have any other thoughts on skills, either skills you're good at or skills you're bad at, write those down. (Since you don't normally write down any skills you have at lower than Adequate (+1), just make a note on your sheet about those skills you're intentionally saying you don't have.)

And, of course, you need a name! Maybe a first name is all you need for the moment, or a nickname. (There's also the trick of giving yourself a name, only to later reveal that you've been hiding, are undercover, or have amnesia, and write down what your real name is.)

Adding Aspects in Play

With your Journey aspects, you'll just make up whatever aspect seems interesting to you at the moment. Typically you'll do this when you need an aspect on your character to achieve something, or you want to turn a situation that's happening into something that's compel-worthy.

As with high concept, don't stress about getting this aspect dead-on. After the session's over, take some time to look over and tweak the aspects you've created on the fly.

Adding Skills in Play

At any point, if you are using a skill that isn't on your character sheet, one of two things happens: you'll assume the skill is Mediocre (+0), or you'll write it down on one of your empty skill slots and roll it at that level. This choice exists until all of your skill slots are filled in.

If you roll for a skill not on your sheet and choose to assume it was Mediocre rather than write it down, you can later fill it in on your sheet as something higher. Likewise, if you roll well on a skill when you chose to take it at Mediocre, maybe that'll inspire you to take that skill later.

Adding Stunts in Play

You get three stunts for free, which you can fill in at any time. You can fill in other stunts at any time, but you must pay a fate point for each one. That's because your refresh tells you how many fate points you start the game with, so by taking a stunt, you should have started with fewer.

If you're out of fate points, but want to note down a stunt you have because you're suddenly struck with the idea, do so. But your character doesn't actually have it until you gain a fate point and spend it.

You'll also need to reduce your refresh by one for the next session for each extra stunt you take.

After the First Session

After the first session is over, if you're planning on playing your character again, you should take time to fill in the rest of the aspects, skills and stunts. Revisit your previous choices and make sure they fit what you want to do with your character as you continue to play.

MAICA LAKAEM

Maica is one of the first wave of the Called to make their way down to D'ni, back when the DRC was not expecting others. She's been around and actively getting to know people in the Cavern for years. The Cavern has been a central part of Maica's life—she even met her husband, Stefan, in D'ni and had their wedding in one of the Ages the DRC renovated.

Whenever anyone asks for help, she's there to lend a hand. That's gotten her into many awkward situations over the years, as she often over-commits and is willing to help even the most hare-brained ideas. More than a few of them have involved Cavern gadfly Adelaide Houston, which has left Maica with an on-going rivalry and mutual loathing.

Maica is an empathetic person who likes helping people out. She is inherently quick-witted and perceptive, but hasn't turned much of that to academic topics, preferring to focus on people instead.

Unwritten
Adventures in the Ages of MYST and Beyond

Name Maica Lakaem

Refresh 3

High Concept Fixture of the Restoration

Journey Aspects

Can't Resist a Request for Help

Fascinated by Patterns

Everyone Knows Maica

Treehouse - My Home Away from Home

Skills

Superb (+5)				
Great (+4)	Rapport			
Good (+3)	Notice	Experiment		
Fair (+2)	Will	Craft	Empathy	
Adequate (+1)	Medicine	Athletics	Finesse	Deceive

Stunts

Revealing Questions. When using Rapport to question someone, she gets an extra free invoke when succeeding or excelling.
Friends Everywhere. she can spend a fate points to know details about any long-time explorer or DRC member.

Resources

The Treehouse. The Treehouse is a D'ni building in the City Proper with carvings of trees all over the inside. Maica has been fixing it up for years and has been bringing down tools and supplies. Any Craft, Engineering or Medicine rolls done at the Treehouse get a +1 when done at the Treehouse.

Consequences

Minor ◯ Recovering? Moderate ◯ Recovering? Severe ◯

Naomi Ito

Naomi grew up in Carlsbad with a father who was rarely around. He'd tell her stories about ancient civilizations in caverns when he came back, but then he'd disappear for a long time again. Her mother tried to raise her, but Naomi was a handful: headstrong and rebellious. She grew up getting into fights, ditching classes, and generally hanging out with a rough crowd.

By the time she her father died of a heart attack when she was 18, she'd been arrested several times and was turning out to be what her mother called 'a bad apple'. She spent her early adulthood working odd jobs and partying in the desert with her friends. During one of her jobs, someone recognized her as 'Daichi's kid' and explained that he worked with her father. He returned with a box of her father's equipment that he'd been keeping around.

In that box was a funny watch (that is, a KI) and Linking Book to Nexus. She soon discovered the place of all her childhood stories. Naomi also discovered that the few remaining DRC employees there remembered her father fondly. His old friends have been willing to help her out several times.

Unwritten
Adventures in the Ages of MYST and Beyond

Name Naomi Ito

Refresh 3

High Concept Graduate of the School of Hard Knocks

Journey Aspects

Grew Up on Stories of D'ni

How Long Does Patience Take?

Child of a Former ResEng

Desert Rat

Skills

Superb (+5)				
Great (+4)	Will			
Good (+3)	Athletics	Intrusion		
Fair (+2)	Provoke	Finesse	Notice	
Adequate (+1)	Medicine	Stealth	Craft	Deceive

Stunts

Indomitable. +2 to defend against Provoke actions specifically related to intimidation and fear.

Resources

Level 3 KI. Her father's KI has special access to the Lattice system. She can use Intrusion to pull up information on connected D'ni systems, control them if they have remote capability, and track details about other active KIs.

Consequences

Minor   ◯ *Recovering?*   Moderate   ◯ *Recovering?*   Severe   ◯

Stefan Eridoza

Stefan Eridoza has always just seemed to be around, quietly paying attention. Whenever a crowd gathers, he is there. Whenever something interesting happens, he seems to just be walking by. He rarely draws attention to himself and people just tend to forget he is there. Even after being a regular part of Cavern activities for years, others still refer to him as "you know, that guy with the pony tail."

Since coming to D'ni, he's had quite a few adventures. He's volunteered to help in several excursions and is perfectly comfortable roughing it in a strange wilderness or poking around yet another abandoned D'ni outpost.

When there's a new place to explore, he's the first one in. When there's a problem, he makes sure everyone gets out okay. Stefan brings a quiet humility to everything he does that usually leaves him overlooked. It doesn't seem to bother him though—he's just that sort of guy.

Unwritten
Adventures in the Ages of MYST and Beyond

Name Stefan Eridoza

High Concept Laid Back Veteran Explorer

Refresh 3

Journey Aspects

First In, Last Out

Always Around in the Background

At Home In The Wild

Likes Taking Things Apart

Skills

Superb (+5)			
Great (+4)	Survival		
Good (+3)	Surveying	Finesse	
Fair (+2)	Athletics	Engineering	Craft
Adequate (+1)	Intrusion	Will	Rapport	Stealth

Stunts

Seen One Tomb, Seen 'em All. When investigating a place of the type he's seen before (Maintainer installation, Egyptian burial chamber, etc.), Stefan gets an extra free invocation on any clues you uncover, due to his familiarity with the style.

Always Making Useful Things. He doesn't ever have to spend a fate point to declare that he has the proper tools for a particular job using Crafts, even in extreme situations (like being imprisoned and separated from all his gear). This source of opposition is just off the table.

Field Medic. He gets a +2 to treat medical issues, provided they happened in the current scene.

Resources

Consequences

Minor _____ ○ Recovering?   Moderate _____ ○ Recovering?   Severe _____ ○

Templeton Davis

Templeton Davis is like one of those characters common to TV shows nowadays: he's a jerk with a good heart, and everyone puts up with him because he's a genius. From a young age, he displayed an almost savant-level understanding of languages and learned several as he grew up. He applied his genius to several subjects, including computers.

He also developed a superiority complex. He's smart, and he knows it. Templeton finds everything funny, especially himself, and doesn't seem to care if other people don't agree with him. He's not a people person, but is very protective of those who he considers friends; either people who have helped him out or seem to appreciate his sense of humor.

As one of the Called, Templeton took to D'ni like a duck to water. The very nature of D'ni seemed like it was tailor-made for Templeton's talents and interests. He learned the D'ni language and quickly turned his focus to the Art itself, which he has become adept with. He has yet to write an Age himself yet—he's still considering what his first masterpiece should be.

Unwritten
Adventures in the Ages of MYST and Beyond

Name Templeton Davis

Refresh 3

High Concept Cocky Linguistic Genius

Journey Aspects

Entertainingly Caustic

Fluent in Ones and Zeroes

It's Their Fault If They Can't Take A Joke

Don't Mess With My Friends

Skills

Superb (+5)			
Great (+4)	Research		
Good (+3)	Experiment	Provoke	
Fair (+2)	Notice	Engineering	Will
Adequate (+1)	Deceive	Intrusion	Empathy	Surveying

Stunts

The Art of Writing. Templeton can understand the Art and Write Ages.
Linguistic Prodigy. You can spend a fate point to get a basic idea of something written or said in a language you have never studied before.
Okay, Fine! You can use Provoke in place of Empathy to learn a target's aspects, by bullying them until they reveal one to you. The target defends against this with Will. (If the GM thinks the aspect is particularly vulnerable to your hostile approach, you get a +2 bonus.)

Resources

Consequences

Minor _____ ○ Recovering?   Moderate _____ ○ Recovering?   Severe _____ ○

Tools of the Journey

Aspects and Fate Points

Defining Aspects

An **aspect** is a phrase that describes something unique or noteworthy about whatever it's attached to. They're the primary way you spend and gain fate points, and they influence the story by providing an opportunity for a character to get a bonus, complicating a character's life, or shifting another character's roll.

Defining Fate Points

GMs and players, you both have a pool of points called **fate points** you can use to influence the game. You represent these with tokens, as we mentioned in The Basics. Players, you start with a certain number of points every scenario, equal to your character's refresh. You'll also reset to your refresh rate if you ended a mid-scenario session with fewer fate points than your rate. GMs, you get a budget of fate points to spend in every scene. When your aspects come into play, you will usually spend or gain a fate point.

What Aspects Do

In *Unwritten*, aspects do two major things: they tell you what's important about the game, and they help you decide when to use the mechanics.

Importance

Your collection of game and character aspects tell you what you need to focus on during your game. Think of them as a message from yourself to yourself, a set of flags waving you towards the path with the most fun. GMs, when you make scenarios for Fate, you're going to use those aspects, and the connections between aspects, to generate the problems your PCs are going to solve. Players, your aspects are the reason why your PC stands out from every other character who might have similar skills—lots of characters might have a high skill in some science, but only Victor Laxman is a DRC Expert in D'ni Technology. When his specialization in D'ni technology comes into play, or the DRC takes action, it gives the game a personal touch that it wouldn't have had otherwise.

The game aspects do something similar on a larger scale—they tell us why we care about playing this particular game in the first place, what makes it concrete and compelling to us. We can all say, "Oh, we like games about exploring new places," but until we drill down to the specifics of a universe where There is Always a Surprise Over the Next Hill, and where D'ni Left Their Mark Everywhere, we don't have anything to attach our interest to.

Situation aspects make the moment-to-moment interactions of play interesting by adding color and depth to what might otherwise be a boring scene. A scene in ancient ruins is generic by nature—there are a lot of ancient ruins around D'ni, after all. But when you add the aspect Huge Bronze Statue to the scene, and people bring it into play, it becomes "that time we were at the Bronze Statue, when I was blocking the door and you were deciphering the inscription." The unique details add interest and investment.

Deciding When to Use Mechanics

Because aspects tell us what's important, they also tell us when it's most appropriate to use the mechanics to deal with a situation, rather than letting people decide what happens just by describing what they do.

GMs, this comes up for you most often when you're trying to figure out whether to require a player to roll dice. If a player says, "I climb this ladder and grab the idol," and there's nothing special about the ladder or the idol, then there's no real reason to require an action to grab it. But if the situation aspects tell you that the ladder is a Rotting Rope Ladder and the idol is Protected by Deadly Traps, then you suddenly have an element of pressure and risk that makes it worth going to the dice.

Players, this comes up for you most often when invoking your aspects and considering compels. Your aspects highlight what makes your character an individual, and you want to play that up, right? So when the opportunity comes up to make your character more awesome by invoking, go for it! When you see an opportunity to influence the story by suggesting a compel for your character, do it! The game as a whole will be much richer for it.

Game Aspects

Game aspects are permanent fixtures of the game, hence the name. While they might change over time, they're never going to go away. If you've gone through game creation, you've already defined these—the current or impending issues that you came up with. They describe problems or threats that exist in the world, which are going to be the basis for your game's story. Everyone can invoke, compel, or create an advantage on a game aspect at any time; they're always there and available for anyone's use.

Character Aspects

Character aspects are just as permanent, but smaller in scope, attached to an individual PC or NPC. They describe a near-infinite number of things that set the character apart, such as:

> Significant personality traits or beliefs (Argues at the Drop of A Hat, D'ni is the Epitome of Civilization).
> The character's background or profession (Top of His Class at West Point, Just a Working Stiff).
> An important possession or noticeable feature (Mysterious Ancient Pendant, Built like a Sherman Tank).
> Relationships to people and organizations (Wanted by Surface Authorities, Heir to a Fortune).
> Problems, goals, or issues the character is dealing with (I'll Never Amount to Anything, Determined to Master the Art).
> Titles, reputations, or obligations the character may have (World-Renowned Physicist, I Promised to Look After My Sister).

You can invoke or call for a compel on any of your character aspects whenever they're relevant. GMs, you can always propose compels to any PC. Players, you can suggest compels for other people's characters, but the GM is always going to get the final say on whether or not it's a valid suggestion.

SITUATION ASPECTS

By default, a **situation aspect** is temporary, intended to last only for a single scene or until it no longer makes sense (but no longer than a session, at most). Situation aspects can be attached to the environment the scene takes place in—which affects everybody in the scene—but you can also attach them to specific characters by targeting them when you create an advantage. Situation aspects describe significant features of the circumstances the characters are dealing with in a scene. That includes:

- Physical features of the environment (FREEZING WINDS, HUMMING CRYSTAL SHARDS).
- Positioning or placement (BEHIND COVER, POISED TO STRIKE).
- Immediate obstacles (PILES OF RUBBLE, CRUMBLING BRIDGES).
- Contextual details that are likely to come into play (THE NATIVES ARE RESTLESS, WALLS COVERED IN ANCIENT SYMBOLS).
- Sudden changes in a character's status (BLINDED, OFF-BALANCE).

RESERVING SITUATION ASPECTS

As a rule, situation aspects last as long as makes sense. Rarely does this extend past the end of the scene (though occasionally you create aspects for use in the next scene). Situation aspects are transitory by design.

You might want to make something that lasts for longer. Maybe you want to set up something that you might use later, but not necessarily in the next scene. Another possibility is that you want to take some situation aspect and extend its usefulness.

You can choose to 'reserve' an aspect for later usage by spending a fate point. That aspect sticks around. When you invoke the aspect, it becomes active; the clock starts ticking. It will be available for use but may go away soon like any other active situation aspect.

Unused reserved aspects go away at the end of the chapter. Or a character can release the aspect at any point. Additionally, a change in the situation may nullify the aspect. Something might have happened to counteract it, or it simply might not make sense anymore. It goes away. Here is the tricky thing: reserved aspects can still be compelled. And a compel does not necessarily activate the situation aspect like invoking it does.

Boosts cannot be reserved—they are simply too momentary.

Who can use a situation aspect depends on narrative context—sometimes it'll be clear, and sometimes you'll need to justify how you're using the aspect so it makes sense based on what's happening in the scene.

GMs, you're the final arbiter on what claims on an aspect are valid. Sometimes situation aspects become obstacles that characters need to overcome. Other times they give you justification to provide active opposition against someone else's action.

CONSEQUENCES

A **consequence** is more permanent than a situation aspect, but not quite as permanent as a character aspect. They're a special kind of aspect a character might take in order to avoid getting overwhelmed in a conflict, and they describe lasting injuries or problems that you take away from a conflict. Consequences stick around for a variable length of time, from a few scenes to a chapter or two, depending on how severe they are. Because of their negative phrasing, you're likely to get compelled a lot when you have them, and anyone who can justifiably benefit from the consequence can invoke it or create an advantage on it.

Chapters
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Consequences come in three levels of severity—mild, moderate, and severe. Each one has a different shift value: two, four, and six, respectively. On your character sheet, you have a number of available consequence slots.

A character can receive a consequence as a result of one of the following situations:

> Being the target of an excelled Advantage action (see p. 123)
> Succeeding at a cost (see p. 131)
> Making a sacrifice

a small herd enjoying the berry bushes next to our campsite! The sound of a digital camera turning on sent them running!

MAKING A SACRIFICE

When you are out of fate points and want to make one final effort as a last resort, you can make a **sacrifice**. To make a sacrifice, you describe what you are doing to push yourself beyond your ordinary limits. Then, you place a consequence on yourself that fits the situation at hand— he GM gets a free invoke on the consequence. In exchange, you get a number of fate points. You can only take a consequence in an available slot (i.e. if you only have one Minor consequence slot, you cannot take another).

Consequence	Fate Points
Minor	1
Moderate	2
Severe	3

Maica is face-to-face with Harlan Mason, leader of the Children of the New Seed. He is holding her friends hostage and Maica is negotiating for their release. She is out of fate points, so she decides to take a moderate consequence in order to get two points back. Because the negotiations are intense, she chooses EMOTIONALLY EXHAUSTED as her consequence, and the GM gets a free invoke on it.

NAMING A CONSEQUENCE

Here are some guidelines for choosing what to name a consequence:

Mild consequences don't require immediate medical attention. They hurt, and they may present an inconvenience, but they aren't going to force you into a lot of bed rest. On the mental side, mild consequences express things like small social gaffes or changes in your surface emotions.

Examples: BLACK EYE, BRUISED HAND, WINDED, FLUSTERED, CRANKY, TEMPORARILY BLINDED.

Moderate consequences represent fairly serious impairments that require dedicated effort toward recovery (including medical attention). On the mental side, they express things like damage to your reputation or emotional problems that you can't just shrug off with an apology and a good night's sleep.

Examples: DEEP CUT, FIRST DEGREE BURN, EXHAUSTED, DRUNK, TERRIFIED.

Severe consequences go straight to the emergency room (or whatever the equivalent is in your game)—they're extremely nasty and prevent you from doing a lot of things, and will lay you out for a while. On the mental side, they express things like serious trauma or relationship-changing harm.

Examples: Second-Degree Burn, Compound Fracture, Gaping Wound, Crippling Shame, Trauma-Induced Phobia.

Recovering from a Consequence

In order to regain the use of a consequence slot, you have to **recover** from the consequence. That requires two things—succeeding at an action that allows you to justify recovery, and then waiting an appropriate amount of game time for that recovery to take place.

The action in question is an overcome action; the obstacle is the consequence that you took. If it's a physical injury, then the action is some kind of medical treatment or first aid. For mental consequences, the action may involve therapy, counseling, or simply a night out with friends. For social consequences, you may need to do some 'damage control' to counteract the consequence.

Overcome
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The difficulty for this obstacle is based on the shift value of the consequence. Mild is Fair (+2), Moderate is Great (+4), and severe is Fantastic (+6). If you are trying to perform the recovery action on yourself, increase the difficulty by one.

Keep in mind that the circumstances have to be appropriately free of distraction and tension for you to make this roll in the first place—you're not going to clean and bandage a nasty cut while an out-of-control fire rages around you. GMs, you have the final judgment call.

If you succeed at the recovery action, or someone else succeeds on a recovery action for you, you get to rename the consequence aspect to show that it's in recovery. So, for example, Broken Leg could become Stuck in a Cast, Scandalized could become Social Damage Control, and so on. This doesn't free up the consequence slot, but it serves as an indicator that you're recovering, and it changes the ways the aspect can be used while it remains.

Whether you change the consequence's name or not—and sometimes it might not make sense to do so—mark it with a star at the end of the current scene, so that everyone remembers that recovery has started.

Then, you just have to wait the time.

- For a mild consequence, recovering consequences go away at the end of a scene.
- For a moderate consequence, recovering consequences go away at the end of a session.
- For a severe consequence, recovering consequences go away at the end of a chapter.

Naomi gained a minor consequence of TWISTED ANKLE as she was running through the jungles of Haven. She's been nursing it through several scenes until she met back out with the rest of the group.

Stefan has a little bit of medical knowledge (Medicine skill at Fair (+1)) and succeeds at treating her ankle. Gwen changes the consequence to WRAPPED UP ANKLE and marks it as recovering. As a minor consequence, it will go away at the end of the scene now that it is recovering.

OVERWHELMED

If a consequence is ever placed on you and you have no empty consequence slots, you are overwhelmed.

Overwhelmed
p. 135
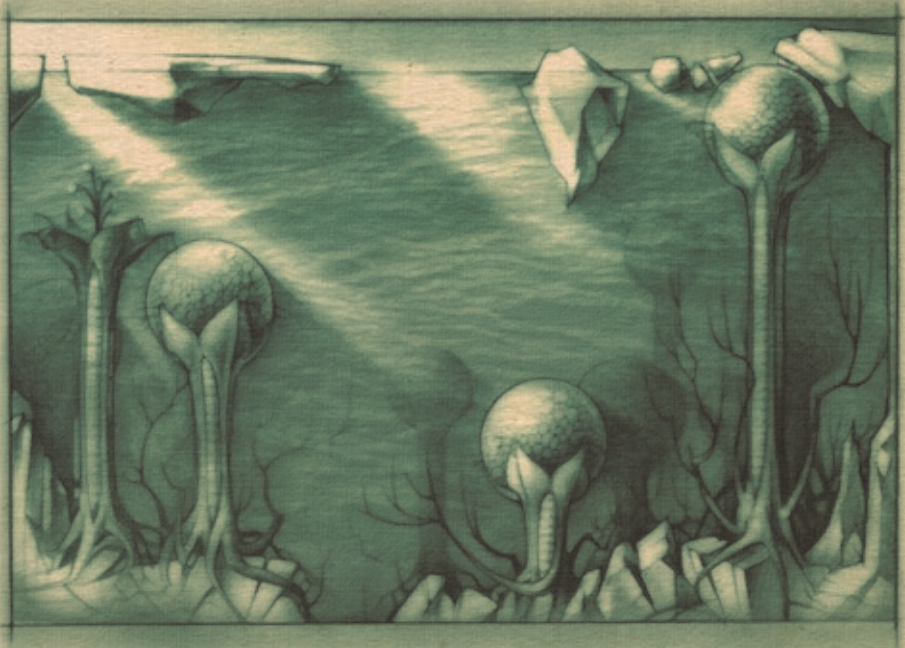
Boosts

Boosts are temporary, free-floating invocations that happen when you get a momentary benefit that isn't lasting enough to be an aspect. You get a boost when you're trying to create an advantage but don't succeed well enough, or as an added benefit to succeeding especially well at an action (notably defending). You invoke boosts just like you would for an aspect, for the +2, reroll, or other effect that requires an invocation. As with aspect invocations, you need to describe what's happening that makes that boost relevant to your action.

Once you invoke the boost, it goes away. They go away on their own fairly quickly—usually after the next action when you could use them—so use them as soon as possible! If you want, you can allow another character to invoke your boost, though it needs to be relevant to their action and could help them out.

When you earn a boost, give it a name like you would an aspect to help you remember where the boost came from and how you can use it. Don't dwell on coming up with something clever, since it doesn't last long.

Just remember that a boost isn't a full, "grown up" aspect—you can't compel with it, use it as permission for extras, pay a fate point to invoke it again, or other things that manipulate aspects or that aspects affect. But you can promote it to a full aspect; see Promoting Boosts below.

Leaving Boosts Unnamed

If you're struggling to name a boost, let it be unnamed and continue playing—boosts aren't worth stopping play to name! If you do, though, you'll have to keep track of the situation that created the boost, which some people find difficult to remember.

Promoting Boosts

Sometimes when you're creating a new aspect, you find that there's a boost in play that's exactly the aspect you want to make, turning a momentary benefit into a lasting one. Great! That's called promoting a boost. Just declare an aspect you're making to have the same name as a boost in play, and you're done. If the action gives this new aspect a free invocation, it has two instead thanks to the boost being active. If you haven't named the boost yet, now's the time to do it.

For example, say I am trying to wrestle a Book from your grasp and get a boost from that Oppose action, and we say that you managed to get me A LITTLE OFF-BALANCE. On your next action, you follow-up by saying that you want to keep me off-balance by creating an advantage. You roll for the advantage, succeed without needing to use the boost, and then name the advantage A LITTLE OFF-BALANCE with two free invocations (or three if you succeeded with style—essentially one extra free invocation).

Even if you've used a boost already, nothing says you can't bring that idea back around as an aspect later in the scene if it's appropriate. There's no special rule about that, just something to keep in mind. In our example above, you could still create the A LITTLE OFF-BALANCE advantage, even if you use the boost on that roll or on a past turn.

BOOSTS ARE NOT FULL ASPECTS

Unlike aspects, you cannot compel a boost or pay a fate point to invoke a boost (including invoking it against its owner). Any other rules that require an aspect to exist or be used don't count for boosts. Don't let the fact that they're often given names mislead you.

MAKING A GOOD ASPECT

Because aspects are so important to the game, it's important to make the best aspects you can. So, how do you know what a good aspect is? The best aspects are double-edged, say more than one thing, and keep the phrasing simple.

DOUBLE-EDGED

Players, good aspects offer a clear benefit to your character while also providing opportunities to complicate their lives or be used to their detriment. An aspect with a double-edge is going to come up in play more often than a mostly positive or negative one. You can use them frequently to be awesome, and you'll be able to accept more compels and gain more fate points.

Try this as a litmus test—list two ways you might invoke the aspect, and two ways someone else could invoke it or you could get a compel from it. If the examples come easily to mind, great! If not, add more context to make that aspect work or put that idea to the side and come up with a new aspect.

GMs, this is just as true of your game and situation aspects. Any feature of a scene you call out should be something that either the PCs or their foes could use in a dramatic fashion. Your game aspects do present problems, but they also should present ways for the PCs to take advantage of the status quo.

Templeton is an incredibly sarcastic character, which Todd (his player) hopes will get him into lots of interesting complications. But he also wants some people to find Templeton funny as well. He chooses Entertainingly Caustic *for an aspect, which shows that he'll be grating on some people, but entertaining to others.*

Say More Than One Thing

Earlier, we noted several things that a character aspect might describe: personality traits, backgrounds, relationships, problems, possessions, and so forth. The best aspects overlap across a few of those categories, because that means you have more ways to bring them into play.

GMs, for your situation aspects, you don't have to worry about this as much, because they're only intended to stick around for a scene. It's much more important for game and character aspects to suggest multiple contexts for use.

Nadine (Naomi's player) wants to show that Naomi is a rough-and-tumble type, and that she grew up having to take care of herself. She has been considering the aspects Scrappy Girl *and* Pulled Herself By Her Own Bootstraps. *However, after a bit of thought, she decides she can combine the two into one aspect by using* Graduate of the School of Hard-Knocks.

CLEAR PHRASING

Because aspects are phrases, they come with all the ambiguities of language. If no one knows what your aspect means, it won't get used enough. That isn't to say you have to avoid poetic or fanciful expression; JUST A SIMPLE FARMBOY isn't quite as fetching as CHILD OF PASTORAL BLISS. If that's the tone your game is going for, feel free to indulge your linguistic desires.

However, don't do this at the expense of clarity. Avoid metaphors and implications when you can get away with just saying what you mean. That way, other people don't have to stop and ask you during play if a certain aspect would apply, or get bogged down in discussions about what it means.

If you're wondering if your aspect is unclear, ask the people at the table what they think it means.

Samuel chooses OH, I'M JUST THIS GUY as an aspect for Stefan. He thinks it is creative and evocative. Gwen points out that the aspect is really vague; it's really hard to figure out what that means without a lot of discussion.

Samuel takes a moment and thinks about what he is trying to get across. Stefan is a pretty laid-back 'everyman'. He's not the sort of person who is center stage, but is always around. He settles on ALWAYS AROUND IN THE BACKGROUND instead.

IF YOU GET STUCK

Now you know what makes for a good aspect, but that doesn't narrow down your potential choices any—you still have a nearly infinite set of topics and ideas to choose from.

If you're still stuck about what to choose, here are some tips to make things a little easier on you.

Sometimes, It's Better Not to Choose

If you can't think of an aspect that really grabs you and the other people at the table, you're better off leaving that space blank, or just keeping whatever ideas you had scribbled in the margins. Sometimes it's much easier to wait for your character to get into play before you figure out how you want to word a particular aspect.

So when in doubt, leave it blank. Maybe you have a general idea of the aspect but don't know how to phrase it, or maybe you just have no idea. Don't worry about it. There's always room during the game to figure it out as you go.

The same thing is true if you have more than one idea that seems juicy, but they don't work together and you don't know which one to pick. Write them all down in the margins and see which one seems to really sing in play. Then fill the space in later, with the one that gets the most mileage.

Always Ask What Matters and Why

We said above that aspects tell you why something matters in the game and why we care about it. This is your primary compass and guide to choosing the best possible aspect. When in doubt, always ask: what do we really care about here, and why?

The events of your Journey should help you figure out what your aspect should be. Don't try to summarize the events of your Journey or anything like that with your aspect—remember, the point is to reveal something important about the character. Again, ask yourself what really matters about the phase:

- ❧ What was the outcome? Is that important?
- ❧ Did the character develop any important relationships or connections during this phase?
- ❧ Does the phase help establish anything important about the character's personality or beliefs?
- ❧ Did the phase give the character a reputation?
- ❧ Did the phase create a problem for the character in the game world?

Assume that each question ends with "for good or ill"—these features, relationships, and reputations aren't necessarily going to be positive, after all. Developing a relationship with a nemesis is as juicy as developing one with your best friend.

If there's more than one option, poll the other players and GM to see what they find interesting. Remember, you should all be helping each other out—the game works best if everyone's a fan of what everyone else is doing.

Vary It Up

You don't want all your aspects to describe the same kind of thing. Five relationships means that you can't use your aspects unless one of them is in play, but five personality traits means that you have no connection to the

game world. If you're stuck on what to pick for an aspect, looking at what kinds of things your other aspects describe may help you figure out which way to go for the current phase.

Let Your Friends Decide

We've talked before about the fact that the game works best if everyone is invested in what everyone else is doing—collaboration is at the heart of the game, and we'll probably say it a lot more times before the end of this book.

You always have the option, especially with aspects, of simply asking the GM and other players to come up with something on your behalf. Pitch them the events of the phase, and ask them the same questions they're going to be asking of you. What matters to them? What are they excited about? Do they have suggestions about how to make the events of the phase more dramatic or intense? What aspect do they think would be most interesting or appropriate?

You have the final decision as to what your character's aspects are, so don't look at it as giving up control. Look at it as asking your ever-important fan club and audience what they want to see, and using their suggestions to jumpstart your own train of thought. If everyone has a bit of input on everyone else's characters, the game will benefit from that sense of mutual investment.

INVOKING ASPECTS

The primary way you're going to use aspects in a game of *Unwritten* is to **invoke** them. If you're in a situation where an aspect is beneficial to your character somehow, you can invoke it.

In order to invoke an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, spend a fate point, and you can choose one of these benefits:

› Shift the result of your current roll by +2 after you've rolled the dice.
› Reroll all your dice.
› Pass a +2 benefit to another character's roll, if it's reasonable that the aspect you're invoking would be able to help.
› Create an obstacle worth passive opposition of Fair (+2) that reprsents a complication cause by the aspect.
› Add +2 to any source of passive opposition, if it's reasonable that the aspect you're invoking could contribute to making things more difficult.

It doesn't matter when you invoke the aspect, but usually it's best to wait until after you've rolled the dice to see if you're going to need the benefit. You can invoke multiple aspects on a single roll, but you cannot invoke the same aspect multiple times on a single roll. So if your reroll doesn't help you enough, you'll have to pick another aspect (and spend another fate point) for a second reroll or that +2.

The group has to buy into the relevance of a particular aspect when you invoke it; GMs, you're the final arbiter on this one. The use of an aspect should make sense, or you should be able to creatively narrate your way into ensuring it makes sense.

Precisely how you do this is up to you. Sometimes, it makes so much sense to use a particular aspect that you can just hold up the fate point and name it. Or you might need to embellish your character's action a little more so that everyone understands where you're coming from. (That's why we recommend making sure that you're on the same page with the group as to what each of your aspects means—it makes it easier to justify bringing it into play.)

If the aspect you invoke is on someone else's character sheet, including situation aspects attached to them, you give them the fate point you spent. They don't actually get to use it until after the end of the scene, though.

The DRC left behind an old laptop when they left the cavern, and Templeton has gotten his hands on it. He's trying to search through it to find any information on where the DRC kept their materials for Writing Linking Books. Whoever owned this laptop before took steps to obfuscate the data.

Templeton attempts an Overcome action to sort out the data. He has a high Research, but he rolls low and gets a -1 as his final result. Todd spends a fate point to invoke FLUENT IN ONES AND ZEROES, because this is all about computers. The +2 bonus changes that result to a 1, and now Templeton succeeds.

FREE INVOCATIONS

You don't always have to pay a fate point to invoke an aspect—sometimes it's free.

When you succeed at creating an advantage, you "stick" a **free invocation** onto an aspect. If you excel on the action, you get two invocations. Some of the other actions also give you free boosts. You also get to stick a free invocation on any consequences you inflict in a conflict.

Free invocations work like normal ones except in two ways: no fate points are exchanged, and you can stack them with a normal invocation for a better bonus. So you can use a free invocation and pay a fate point on the same aspect to get a +4 bonus instead of a +2, two rerolls instead of one, or you can add +4 to another character's roll or increase passive opposition by +4. Or you could split the benefits, getting a reroll and a +2 bonus. You can also stack multiple free invocations together.

After you've used your free invocation, if the aspect in question is still around, you can keep invoking it by spending fate points.

If you want, you can pass your free invocation to another character. That allows you to get some teamwork going between you and a buddy. This is really useful in a conflict if you want to set someone up for a big finish—have everyone create an advantage and pass their free invocations onto one person, then that person stacks all of them up at once for a huge bonus.

Maica is the social butterfly of the group so when she finds out that there is a party for explorers planned by the Guilds, she plans to attend to gather rumors on what the Guilds are up to. The party has the aspect EVERYONE IS HAVING FUN, *and Maica uses an Advantage action to get some free invokes—you know, get people comfortable and talking. She excels on her roll, so she has two free invokes on the aspect.*

When she starts asking a few questions here and there, however, she ends up with a horrible roll on her Rapport action. She spends both free invokes for a total of +4, which puts her result into the positive.

COMPELLING ASPECTS

The other way you use aspects in the game is called a **compel**. If you're in a situation where having or being around a certain aspect means your character's life is more dramatic or complicated, someone can compel the aspect. That aspect can be on your character, the scene, location, game, or anywhere else that's currently in play. We'll start with character aspects, and then talk about situation aspects in a bit.

In order to compel an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, and then make an offer as to what the complication is. You can negotiate the terms of the complication a bit, until you reach a reasonable consensus. Whoever is getting compelled then has two options:

> Accept the complication and receive a fate point
> Pay a fate point to prevent the complication from happening

The complication from a compel occurs regardless of anyone's efforts—once you've made a deal and taken the fate point, you can't use your skills or anything else to mitigate the situation. You have to deal with the new story developments that arise from the complication.

If you prevent the complication from happening, then you and the group describe how you avoid it. Sometimes it just means that you agree that the event never happened in the first place, and sometimes it means narrating your character doing something proactive. Whatever you need to do in order to make it make sense works fine, as long as the group is okay with it.

GMs, you're the final arbiter here, as always—not just on how the result of a compel plays out, but on whether or not a compel is valid in the first place. Use the same judgment you apply to an invocation; it should make instinctive sense, or require only a small amount of explanation, that a complication might arise from the aspect.

Finally, and this is important: if a player wants to compel another character, it costs a fate point to propose the complication. The GM can always compel for free, and any player can propose a compel on his or her own character for free.

Types of Compels

There are two major categories for what a compel looks like in the game: events and decisions. These are tools to help you figure out what a compel should look like and help break any mental blocks.

Events

An event-based compel happens to the character in spite of herself, when the world around her responds to a certain aspect in a certain way and creates a complicating circumstance. It looks like this:

You have ___ aspect and are in ___ situation, so it makes sense that, unfortunately, ___ would happen to you.

> *Maica found out that someone at the party may have a line on the location of some blank Books. Blank Books are a hot commodity in the Cavern, so she's trying to discreetly engage her fellow explorer in conversation.*

> *However, Maica has* Everyone Knows Maica *and is trying to be subtle, so it makes sense that, unfortunately, she would be recognized by one of the party members who loudly calls her name out from across the room.*

As you'll see with decision-based compels, the real mileage is in the complication itself. Without that, you don't really have anything worth focusing on—the fact that the PCs continually have complicated and dramatic things happen to them is, well, exactly what makes them PCs in the first place.

GMs, event-based compels are your opportunity to party. You're expected to control the world around the PCs, so having that world react to them in an unexpected way is pretty much part and parcel of your job description. Players, event-based compels are great for you. You get rewarded simply

by being there—how much more awesome can you get? You might have a difficult time justifying an event-based compel yourself, as it requires you to assert control over an element of the game that you typically aren't in charge of. Feel free to propose an event-based compel, but remember that the GM has the final say on controlling the game world and may veto you if she has something else in mind.

Decisions

A decision is a kind of compel that is internal to the character. It happens because of a decision they make. It looks like this:

You have ___ aspect in ___ situation, so it makes sense that you'd decide to ___. This goes wrong when ___ happens.

Naomi has been looking around for Maica and is getting frustrated with how long it is taking.

Naomi has How Long Does Patience Take? *and it trying to find Maica, so it makes sense she would start calling out for Maica loudly. This goes wrong when the person that Maica has been talking to decides this is just too much attention, and flees from the party.*

So the real dramatic impact from these kinds of compels is not what decision the character makes, most of the time—it's how things go wrong. Before something goes wrong, the first sentence could be a prelude to making a skill roll or simply a matter of roleplaying. The complication that the decision creates is really what makes it a compel.

The decision part should be self-evident, and something a player might have been thinking about doing anyway. The same goes for players trying to compel NPCs or each other's PCs—make sure you have a strong mutual understanding of what that NPC or other character might do before proposing the compel.

Players, if you need fate points, this is a really good way of getting them. If you propose a decision-based compel for your character to the GM, then what you're basically asking is for something you're about to do to go wrong somehow. You don't even have to have a complication in mind—simply signaling the GM should be enough to start a conversation. GMs, as long as the compel isn't weak (as in, as long as there's a good, juicy complication), you should go with this. If the compel is weak, poll the rest of the group for ideas until something more substantial sticks.

Compelling with Situation Aspects

Just like with every other kind of aspect use, you can use situation aspects (and by extension, game aspects) for compels. Because situation aspects are usually external to characters, you're almost always looking at event-based compels rather than decision-based ones. The characters affected each get a fate point for the compel.

> Stefan has been creeping quietly through the forests of Haven, which are TEEMING WITH WILDLIFE.
>
> Because the forest is TEEMING WITH WILDLIFE and Stefan is in the middle of it, it makes sense that, unfortunately, he stumbles upon the den of an angry creature and her litter of babies. The mother is definitely unhappy.

Retroactive Compels

Sometimes, you'll notice during the game that you've fulfilled the criteria for a compel without a fate point getting awarded. You've played your aspects to the hilt and gotten yourself into all kinds of trouble, or you've narrated crazy and dramatic stuff happening to a character related to their aspects just out of reflex.

Anyone who realizes this in play can mention it, and the fate point can be awarded retroactively, treating it like a compel after the fact. GMs, you're the final arbiter. It should be pretty obvious when something like this occurs, though—just look at the guidelines for event and decision compels above, and see if you can summarize what happened in the game according to those guidelines. If you can, award a fate point.

GMs, remember that a player is ultimately responsible for everything that the character says and does. You can offer decision-based compels, but if the player doesn't feel like the decision is one that the character would make, don't force the issue by charging a fate point.

Instead, negotiate the terms of the compel until you find a decision the player is comfortable making, and a complication that chains from that decision instead. If you can't agree on something, drop it.

If you offer a decision-based compel, and no one can agree on what the decision part should be, it shouldn't cost a fate point to counter—just drop it. Countering a decision-based compel should only mean that the "what goes wrong" part doesn't happen.

- The key of a compel is the resulting complication. If there is no complication, it isn't a compel.
- Compels lead to complications that have a noticeable effect on the narrative. They are sources of drama.
- Role-playing an aspect, in and of itself, does not merit a compel.
- You can point out where following one of your aspects has caused a significant complication for the GM to consider.
- Complications from compels come in many forms. Some may be obvious, others may be subtle or have effects later on.
- Compels don't force you to take a particular action or make a particular choice. They simply mean that whatever happens, there *will* be a problem.

ASPECTS AND ROLEPLAYING

Finally, aspects have a passive use that you can draw on in almost every instance of play. Players, you can use them as a guide to roleplaying your character. This may seem self-evident, but we figured we'd call it out anyway—the aspects on your character sheet are true of your character at all times, not just when they're invoked or compelled.

Think of your collection of aspects as an oracle, like a tarot spread or tea leaves. They give you a big picture of what your character's about, and they can reveal interesting implications if you read between the lines. If you're wondering what your character might do in a certain situation, look at their aspects. What do they say about your character's personality, goals, and desires? Are there any clues in what their aspects say that might suggest a course of action? Once you find that suggestion, go for it.

Playing to your aspects also has another benefit: you're feeding the GM ideas for compels. You're already bringing your aspects into the game, so all she has to do is offer you complications and you're good to go.

GMs, you'll use your NPCs aspects the same way, but you get an additional way of "reading the tea leaves"—you can also use them as a way of figuring out how the world reacts to the characters. Does someone have the aspect STRONGEST MAN IN THE WORLD? That's a reputation that might precede that character, one that people might know about and react to. People might

crowd in to see that character when he's passing through. Also, it suggests something about that character's physical size and build. You know that most people are going to give that character a wide berth in a crowded space, might be naturally intimidated, or might be overly aggressive or brusque as overcompensation for being intimidated. But no one's going to ignore that character. Inserting these kinds of aspect related details into your narration can help your game seem more vivid and consistent, even when you're not shuffling fate points around.

Removing or Changing Aspects

📖
Milestones on the Journey
p. 163

Game and character aspects change through milestones. If you want to get rid of a situation aspect, you can do it in one of two ways: roll an overcome action specifically for the purpose of getting rid of the aspect, or roll some other kind of action that would make the aspect make no sense if you succeed. (For example, if you're GRAPPLED, you could try to get away. If you succeed, it would no longer be GRAPPLED anymore, so you'd get rid of that aspect.)

If a character can interfere with your action, they get to roll active opposition against you as per normal. Otherwise, the GM sets passive opposition or just allows the player to get rid of the aspect without a roll, if there's nothing risky or interesting in the way.

Finally, if at any point it simply makes no sense for a situation aspect to be in play, get rid of it.

Unlocking Aspects in Play

In addition to your character aspects, game aspects, and the situation aspects that the GM presents, you have the ability to create, discover, or gain access to other aspects as you play.

For the most part, you'll use the Advantage action to make new aspects. When you describe the action that gives you an advantage, the context should

📖
Advantage
p. 123

tell you if it requires a new aspect or if it derives from an existing one. If you're bringing a new circumstance into play— like throwing sand in someone's eyes—you're indicating that you need a new situation aspect. Questions from Discover actions can make aspects available as well.

With some skills, it's going to make more sense to stick an advantage to an aspect that's already on some other character's sheet. In this case, the PC or NPC you're targeting would provide active opposition to keep you from being able to use that aspect.

If you're not looking for a free invocation, and you just think it'd make sense if there were a particular situation aspect in play, you don't need to roll the dice—just suggest it. If the group thinks they're interesting, write it down.

The Fate Point Economy

For the most part, the use of aspects revolves around fate points. You indicate your supply of fate points by using tokens, such as poker chips, glass beads, or other markers.

Ideally, you want a consistent ebb and flow of fate points going on throughout your sessions. Players spend them in order to be awesome in a crucial moment, and they get them back when their lives get dramatic and complicated. So if your fate points are flowing, you'll end up with cycles of triumphs and setbacks that make for a fun and interesting story.

Refresh

Each character has a **refresh** rate, which determines how many points they receive when their pool of fate points are refilled. Refrehes usually happen at the beginning of a session, though the gamemaster can decide to declare a refresh at other times.

During a refresh, your fate points refill up to your refresh rate. If you have more fate points than your actual refresh, you don't lose the additional points, but you don't gain any either.

At the start of a new chapter, you reset your fate points to your refresh rate no matter what. You lose any extra fate points you have.

Spending Fate Points

You spend fate points in any of the following ways:

▷ Invoke an aspect: You can spend a fate point to invoke an aspect. p. 75
▷ Declare a minor detail. You can spend a point to declare a minor detail as true, related to the aspects in play. p. 14

- Power a stunt: Some stunts are potent, and as such, cost a fate point in order to activate. p. 111
- Refuse a compel: Once a compel is proposed, you can pay a fate point to avoid the complication associated with it. p. 77

Earning Fate Points

You earn fate points in any of the following ways:

- Accept a compel. You get a fate point when you agree to the complication associated with a compel. As we said above, this may sometimes happen retroactively if the circumstances warrant. p. 77
- Have your aspects invoked against you. If someone pays a fate point to invoke an aspect attached to your character, you gain their fate point at the end of the scene. This includes advantages created on your character, as well as consequences. p. 75
- Concede in a contest or dangerous action. You receive one fate point for conceding in a contest or dangerous action. p. 132
- Make a sacrifice. If you choose to make a sacrifice and take a consequence, you get fate points in exchange for the sacrifice. p. 66
- Avoid using a hint. If you excel on a Discover action, you can request a hint from thr gamemaster. If you do not use your hint, you receive one fate point. p. 129

Fate points vs. free invokes

Fate points and free invokes do the same thing with an aspect: invoke it. But they have key differences.

Fate points:

... reflect dramatic focus and the player's ability to influence it.

... can be used for other things besides invocations.

... can only be used to invoke once per action per aspect.

... require dramatic complication (that is, compels) or waiting until a refresh to acquire.

Free invokes:

... reflect a character's advantage as a result of their own actions.

... can only be used for invocations.

... can be stacked on top of fate points or themselves from the same aspect on an action.

... are tied to a specific aspect and go away when they no longer make sense or the aspect goes away.

... require character action to acquire.

The GM and Fate Points

GMs, you also get to use fate points, but the rules are a little bit different than the rules for players.

When you award players fate points for compels or concession, they come out of an unlimited pool you have for doing so—you don't have to worry about running out of fate points to award, and you always get to compel for free.
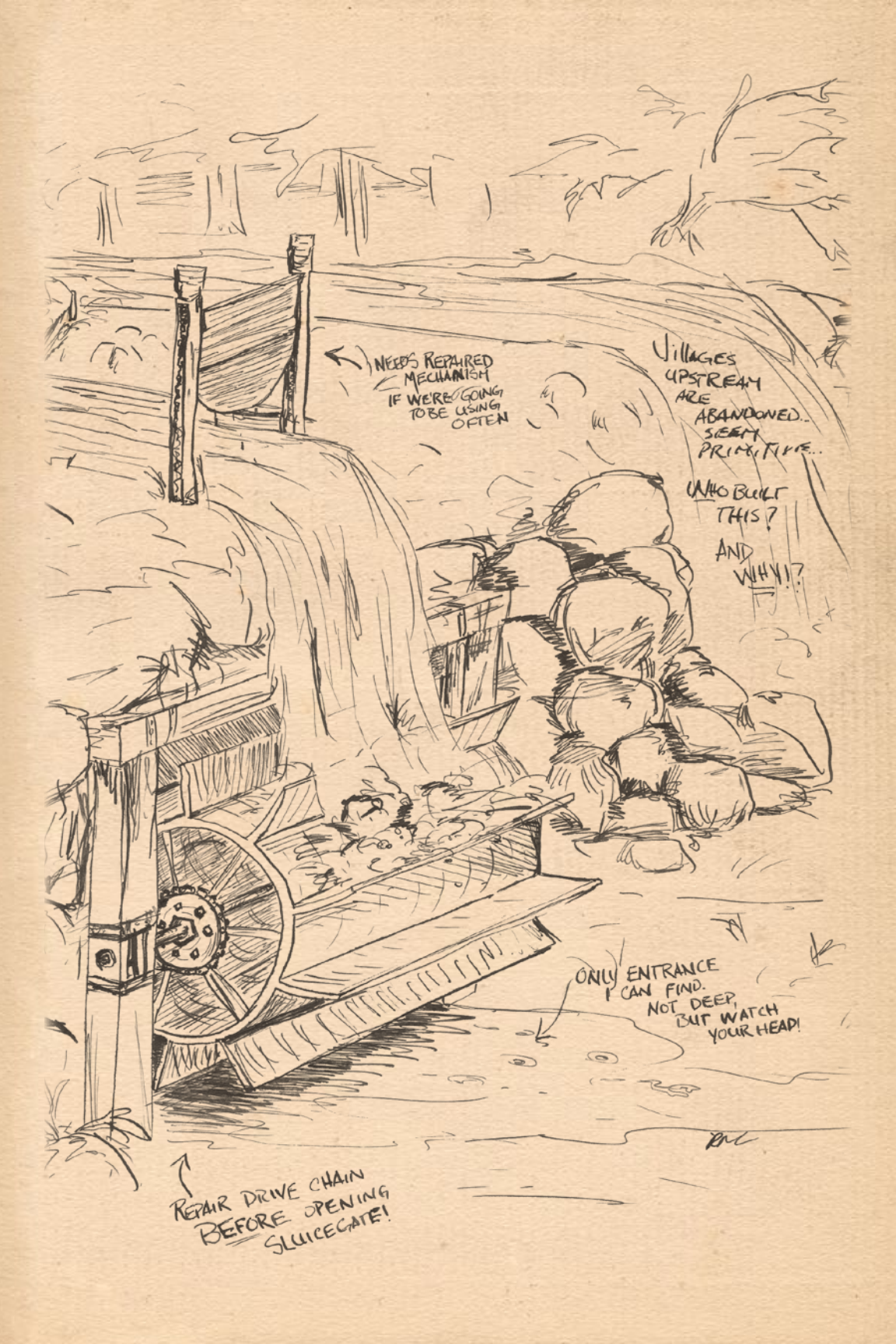
The NPCs under your control are not so lucky. They have a limited pool of fate points you get to use on their behalf. Whenever a scene starts, you get one fate point for every PC in that scene. You can use these points on behalf of any NPC you want, but you can get more in that scene if they take a compel, like PCs do. You reset to your default total, one per PC, at the beginning of every scene.

There are two exceptions:
- You accepted a compel that effectively ended the last scene or starts the next one. If that happens, take an extra fate point in the next scene.
- You conceded a conflict to the PCs in the previous scene. If that happens, take the fate points you'd normally get for the concession into the next scene and add them to the default total.

If the immediate next scene doesn't present a significant interaction with NPCs, you can save these extra points until the next scene that does.
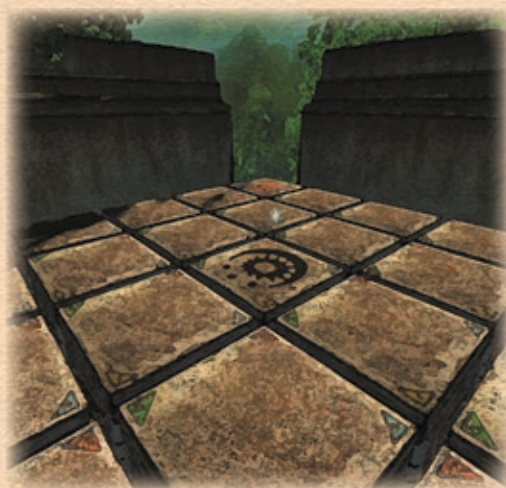
Skills

A **skill** describes a broad family of competency at something which your character might have gained through innate talent, training, or years of trial and error. Skills are the basis for everything your character actually does in the game that involves challenge and chance (and dice).

Skills are rated on the Ladder. The higher the rating, the better your character is at the skill. Taken together, your list of skills gives you a picture of that character's potential for action at a glance - what you're best at, what you're okay at, and what you're not so good at.

Skill List

Athletics	Notice
Craft	Provoke
Deceive	Rapport
Empathy	Research
Engineering	Stealth
Experiment	Surveying
Finesse	Survival
Intrusion	Will
Medicine	

Skill Descriptions

Each of the skills are listed below. Each entry discusses how the skill can be used for the various possible Actions. There are also a number of example stunts based off of each skill that you can use in your game or as inspiration.

Athletics

The Athletics skill represents your character's general level of physical fitness and strength, whether through training, natural gifts, or other means. It's how good you are at using your body and a popular choice for nearly any action-y character.

Potential Uses: Outrunning charging animals, lifting heavy things, dodging poison darts fired from ancient temple traps, jumping chasms, climbing to the top of trees

Actions

Overcome: You can use Athletics to overcome any obstacle that requires raw physicality. This can be feats of strength and endurance as well overcoming obstacles that require physical movement: jumping, running, climbing, swimming, etc.

Advantage: When you're creating an advantage with Athletics, you're jumping to high ground, running faster than the opponent can keep up with, or performing dazzling acrobatic maneuvers in order to confound your foes.

Discover: Athletics does not have much of a role in discovery. It's just not a skill about information. However, you might be able to use it to size up a person and guess their physical capabilities, or gauge how athletic someone would have to be to perform some physical task (jump a chasm, for instance).

Sample Questions:

▹ Is this person capable of jumping that chasm/lifting this stone/ climbing up this cliff?
▹ How physically fit is this person?

Example stunts

No Pain, No Gain. You have an extra Minor consequence slot that can only be used for physical consequences.

Hardcore Parkour. +2 to overcome actions with Athletics if you are in a chase across rooftops or a similarly precarious environment.

Grappler. +2 to Athletics rolls made to create advantages on a target by wrestling or grappling with them.

CRAFT

Craft is the skill of making things out of other things. Craft is focused on making things from 'scratch'. It's all about hands on work with materials and tools. While there is some overlap with Engineering, Craft is more likely to focus on 'simple' machines and hand-made items. Activities like carpentry, carving, blacksmithing, and sewing fall under Craft, as do many artistic endeavors that use those skills.

Potential Uses: Building rope bridges, repairing shredded clothing, shoring up old wooden walls, making tools out of found materials, finding the one load-bearing beam that if destroyed will bring the whole building crashing down

Actions

Overcome: Crafts allows you to build, break, or fix things, presuming you have the time and tools you need. Often, actions with Craft happen as one component of a more complex situation, making it a popular skill for challenges. For example, if you're just fixing a broken door, neither success nor failure is interesting; you should just succeed and move on. Now, if there are wild animals scrabbling at the door, rolls will probably need to be made.

Advantage: You can use Craft to create aspects representing features of a piece of crafted item, pointing out useful features or strengths you can use to your advantage (like RUGGED CONSTRUCTION) or a vulnerability for you to exploit (FLAW IN THE CROSS-BEAM, HASTY WORK).

Discover: Craft is a good skill for discovering details about how things are built and how they can fall apart. Someone with Craft is likely to know what is required to make an item, or identify Craft specific materials or techniques. Like Experiment, Craft might be used to create advantages that can be invoked for help on uncovering clues and explanations.

Sample Questions:

�▷ How is this object made?
�▷ What purpose does this object serve?
┷ What would it take to repair this object?

Example stunts

Always Making Useful Things. You don't ever have to spend a fate point to declare that you have the proper tools for a particular job using Crafts, even in extreme situations (like being imprisoned and separated from all your stuff). This source of opposition is just off the table.

Better than New! Whenever you excel on an overcome action to repair an item, you can immediately give it a new situation aspect (with a free invoke) reflecting the improvements you've made, instead of just a boost.

Expert Witness. Pick a craft (woodworking, jewelry making, etc). You can use your Craft skill instead of Experiment or Research in regards to your specified craft.

DECEIVE

Deceive is the skill about lying to and misdirecting people. Deceive is the skill you use for determining if a disguise works, whether on yourself or others. You'll need to have the time and supplies to create the desired effect. (This is subject to GM approval—the GM may require a stunt for this in some games).

Potential Uses: lying, cheating, stealing, passing yourself off as someone who is supposed to be there, convincing someone that you are on their side when you aren't, passing along misinformation

Actions

Overcome: Use Deceive to bluff your way past someone, to get someone to believe a lie, or to get something out of someone because they believe in one of your lies. For nameless NPCs, this is just an overcome roll, but for PCs or named NPCs, it requires a contest, and the target opposes with Empathy. Winning this contest could justify placing a situation aspect on your target, if buying into your lie could help you in a future scene.

Advantage: Use Deceive to create momentary distractions, cover stories, or false impressions. You could do the whole, "What's that over there!" trick to give you a HEAD START when you run away. You could establish a COVER STORY. You could trick someone into revealing one of their aspects or other information.

Discover: Deceive is more than likely to be used to oppose discover rather than support it.

Example stunts

Lies upon Lies. +2 to create a Deceive advantage against someone who has believed one of your lies already during this session.

Mind Games. You can use Deceive in place of Provoke on an advantage action, as long as you can make up a clever lie as part of the action.

The Long Con. When you create an aspect on a target that shows they believe one of your deceptions, you can spend free invokes on that aspect to make it last like consequences do: 1 invoke for Minor, 2 invokes for Moderate and 3 invokes for Severe. These aspects recover just like consequences do, but do not count towards consequences for filling up consequence slots.

Empathy

Empathy involves being able to spot changes in a person's mood or bearing. It's basically the emotional and social Notice skill.

Potential Uses: Watching how a person reacts in a certain situation, getting a feeling for what someone thinks is important, checking out the social dynamics of a group, talking a friend through an emotional trauma, detecting lies

Actions

Overcome: You don't really use Empathy to overcome obstacles directly—normally, you find out some information with it, and then use another skill to act. In some cases, though, you might use Empathy like you would Notice, to see if you catch a change in someone's attitude or intent. Empathy is the main skill you use to help others recover from consequences that are mental in nature, as well.

Advantage: You can use Empathy to read a person's emotional state and get a general sense of who they are, presuming you have some kind of interpersonal contact with them. Most often, you'll use this to assess the aspects on another character's sheet, but sometimes you'll also be able to create new aspects, especially on NPCs. If the target has some reason to be aware that you're trying to read them, they can oppose with Deceive or Rapport.

Discover: When it comes to sussing out a person, Empathy is your main skill. Like Notice, this is an observational skill. It's passive and you won't use it to directly do something to another. However, you can use it to reveal clues and create advantages that will help Rapport, Provoke and Deceive rolls.

Sample Questions:

▹ How does this person feel about this event/situation/other person?
▹ Who seems to be in charge of this group of people?
▹ Who seems not to fit in?

Example stunts

Lie Whisperer. +2 to all Empathy rolls made to discern or discover lies, whether they're directed at you or someone else.

First Impressions. When you meet a person for the first time, you can ask the gamemaster one question about that person, no discover action needed.

Psychologist. Once per session you can reduce someone else's consequence of an emotional nature by one level of severity (severe to moderate, moderate to mild, mild to nothing at all) by succeeding on an Empathy roll with a difficulty of Fair (+2) for a mild consequence, Good (+3) for moderate, or Great (+4) for severe. You need to talk with the person you're treating for at least half an hour in order for them to receive the benefits of this stunt, and you can't use it on yourself. (Normally, this roll would only start the recovery process, instead of changing the consequence level.)
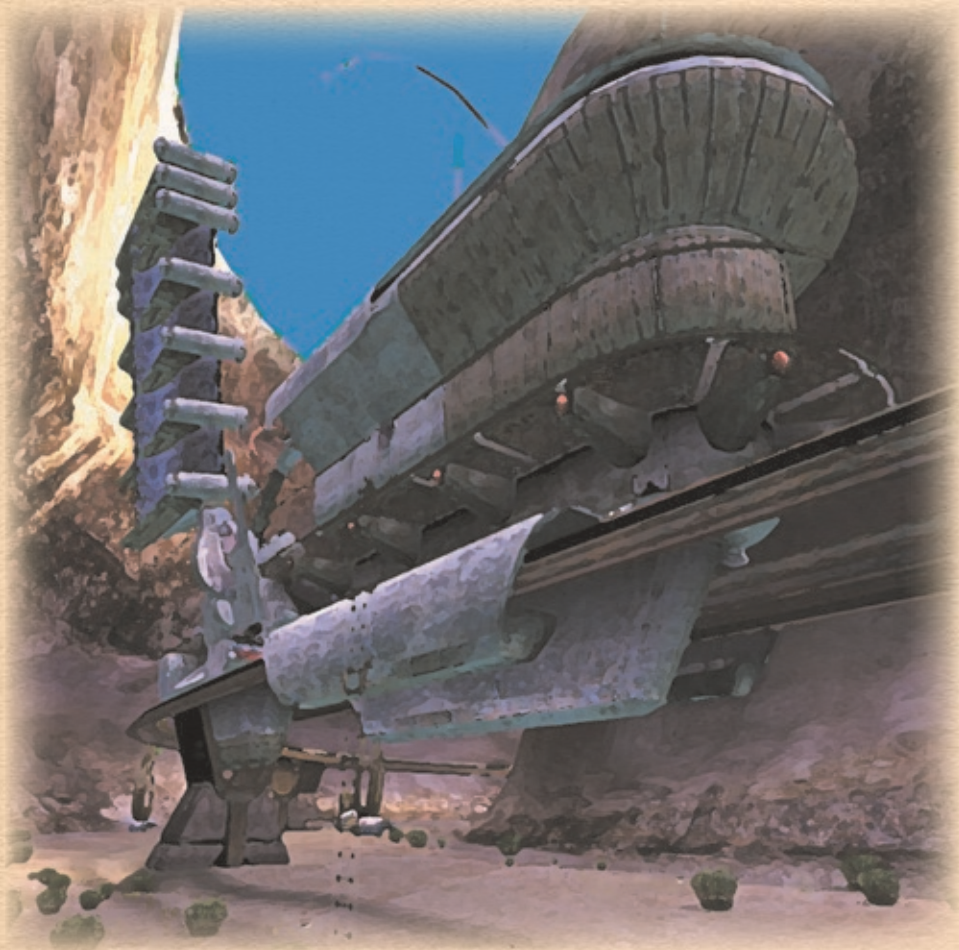
Engineering

Engineering is about machinery and making big complex things. This is the counterpart of Craft, but focuses on mechanics, electronics, computers, and things with lots of buttons and levers. Powered items fall under Engineering as well. At the simpler levels of machinery, it overlaps with Craft.

Potential Uses: jury rigging machines, fixing an engine, operating heavy machinery, setting up delicate equipment, wiring power to a building, sabotaging a vehicle, diagnosing problems with your car

Actions

Overcome: Engineering allows you to build, break, or fix machines, presuming you have the time and tools you need. Like actions with Craft, these actions are usually one component of a more complex situation.

Advantage: You can create the same sorts of advantages with Engineering that you can with Craft. Rolls involving setting up complex experimental equipment could create aspects that can be used to assist in Experiment or Notice rolls as well.

Discover: Engineering can be used in situations where you normally would use Experiment when the subject matter is the machines involved and clues that involve how machines operate.

Sample questions:

▸ What does this gadget do?
▸ How do I turn this on?
▸ What can I do to repair this?

Example stunts

Monkeywrench. You gain +2 on advantage actions that involve negative effects on a technological device.

Duct Tape and Chewing Gum. You can repair a machine without the appropriate materials and tools on a successful Engineering roll. However, it gains an aspect like Unreliable or About to Fall Apart.

High-Tech Detection. If you get a chance to set up complicated diagnostic equipment, you can use Engineering instead of Experiment on discover actions.

EXPERIMENT

Experiment is science in action. It's the skill of scientific method and experimentation. This skill doesn't necessarily imply specific knowledge; instead Experiment is used to tease out information through testing and trial-and-error.

Potential Uses: trial and error, examining the composition of samples, analysing unknown plants, setting up lab equipment, neutralizing chemicals leaking from strange device, checking for background radiation

Actions

Overcome: Experiment overcomes the obstacle of not knowing. Lab work and working with unknown devices and situations to see how they work qualify as uses of Experiment. The pure logic required for puzzle solving fits under this skill as well.

Advantage: Experiment is a versatile skill you can use to create an advantage. As long as you're willing to take the time and make some tests, you can discover nearly any detail about a place or object, or make up aspects about nearly anything in the game world that your character could reasonably unearth. Creating advantages using Experiment can be used as a set-up for key actions where information is revealed. These would represent experiments that allow an investigator to dig deeper.

Discover: Experiment is one of the cornerstones of investigation. This is an active skill; if you are using Experiment, you are doing things, comparing results and verifying hypotheses. This is in contrast to Notice, which is a passive skill of observation, and Research, which is focused on previously discovered knowledge. Be prepared to describe the method of your analysis, at least in general terms.

Sample Questions:

▹ What is the most likely cause of this?
▹ How are these details interconnected?
▹ What is the most likely result of this particular action/experiment?

Example stunts

Shield of Reason. You can use Experiment as a defense against Provoke attempts, provided you can justify your ability to overcome your fear through rational thought and reason.

Specialist. Choose a field of specialization, such as herbology, criminology, or zoology. You get a +2 to all Experiment rolls relating to that field.

Expert Opinion. When using Experiment in combining skills on an action (see Teamwork rules), you provide a +2 bonus to the lead character instead of +1.

Finesse

Finesse is the skill of hand-eye coordination and fine motor control. Where Athletics deals with agility of the entire body, Finesse is about how well you can use your hands, how steady you are, and how good you are with your reflexes.

Potential Uses: balancing a book on your head, sleight of hand, undoing complicated knots, performing delicate movements with your hands, swapping a bag of sand with an idol that is sitting on a pressure plate, getting out of bonds

Actions

Overcome: Any situation that requires nimble fingers can be overcome with Finesse, like snatching an artifact out of a complex trap or sleight of hand.

Advantage: Finesse can be used to perform a wide variety of maneuvers. This includes moves that require careful aim, or feats of manual dexterity.

Discover: Finesse doesn't have any direct application to investigation, except in comparing another's capability to your own ("Man, that guy has fast hands!").

Sample Questions:

▸ How agile/dexterous is this person?
▸ Is this person more agile than me?

Example stunts

Steady Hands. If you tie when making a Finesse roll to do fine manual work, it is treated as a success instead.

Uncanny Accuracy. Once per scene, stack an additional free invoke on an advantage you've created to represent the time you take to aim (like In My Sights).

Quicker than the Eye. When using Finesse to conceal a small item in your hand or covertly grab something, you get a +2 to your skill.

Intrusion

The Intrusion skill covers your character's aptitude for defeating security systems and getting into places that are off-limits. This can be anything from hacking security systems and disabling alarms to defeating ancient locks and traps intended to ward off tomb raiders. It also covers your ability to create obstacles to prevent others from intruding, as well as getting out of places.

Potential Uses: Finding weaknesses in security systems, breaking into a building, picking locks, setting up traps, escaping out the window, investigating the scene of a theft, installing a safe, cracking a safe

What You Know

You'll notice that most of the skills do not refer to specific areas of knowledge. They don't indicate if your scientific skills are in physics or biology, or your academic skills are focused on archeology or art history. The skill set focuses on things you can do, rather than what you know.

So how do you know what you know? The answer is from your aspects and your stunts. Because aspects indicate when you should use mechanics and justify mechanical actions, they also indicate what type of situations you can use your skills in, especially Experiment and Research. Alternatively, some stunts indicate a specialized area of knowledge. So if you get a +2 in Chemistry, we can assume that your character knows Chemistry.

GMs, keep this in mind when you decide whether a particular clue would be available, or if a particular action would make sense. Players, when you are deciding on what your character's specialties should be, make sure that they are reflected in either your aspects or your stunts.

Actions

Overcome: Intrusion allows you to overcome any obstacle related to theft or infiltration. Bypassing locks and traps, pickpocketing and filching, covering your tracks, and other such activities all fall under the purview of this skill.

Advantage: You can case a location with Intrusion, to determine how hard it will be to break into and what kind of security you're dealing with, as well as discover any vulnerabilities you might exploit. You can also examine the work of others to determine how a particular heist was done, and create or discover aspects related to whatever evidence they may have left behind. Finally, you can use Intrusion to shore up the defenses and security systems of a location you are trying to protect.

Discover: Use Intrusion to find clues of intrusion and to examine systems meant to prevent it.

Sample Questions:

▹ How does this lock work?
▹ What would prevent someone from accessing this place or object?
▹ What is the safest way to escape this location?

Example stunts

Always a Way Out. +2 on Intrusion rolls made to create an advantage whenever you're trying to escape from a location.

Security Specialist. You don't have to be present to provide active opposition to someone trying to overcome security measures you put in place or worked on. (Normally, a character would roll against passive opposition for that.)

Black Hat Hacker. Use Intrusion instead of Engineering on actions involving computers or advanced electronics.

MEDICINE

Medicine is the skill of making people better. Unlike many other skills, Medicine implies specific areas of knowledge: anatomy, pharmacology, human bio-chemistry. In those limited areas, Medicine can be used instead of Experiment. The big difference is that Medicine is also an applied skill—you can use it on people directly.

Potential Uses: treating injury, diagnosing diseases, examining biological remains, preparing medications, preparing antidotes for poisons, determining cause of death

Actions

Overcome: Use Medicine to help with recovery from physical injuries, dealing with medical emergencies and the like. An overcome roll using Medicine can be used to justify the healing process starting on physical consequences.

Advantage: You can use Medicine to get a general sense of their health. You can use this to assess the aspects on another character's sheet that involve their physical state, but sometimes you'll also be able to create new aspects, especially on NPCs.

Discover: Medicine is the Experiment skill of all things involving the human body, everything from analyzing blood samples to examining a corpse. Experiment or Notice can be used for this as well, but Medicine is explicitly focused on these topics.

Sample Questions:

▹ What is the state of this person's health?
▹ What medical issue is this person affected by?
▹ Is this material toxic?
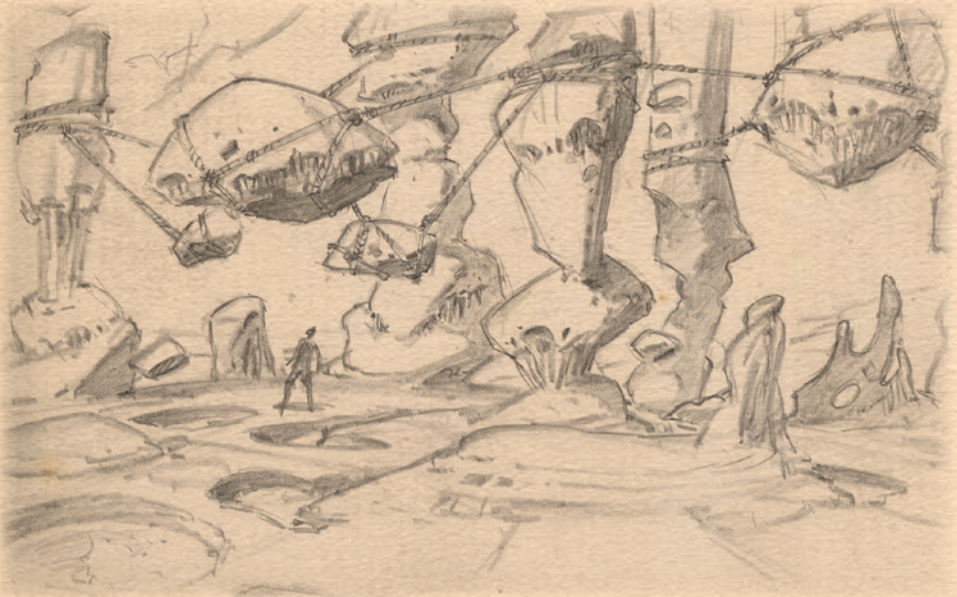
Example stunts

Field Medic. You get a +2 to treat medical issues provided they happened in the current scene.

Flora Analysis. Given a little bit of time, you can tell if a particular plant (from any Age) is dangerous to ingest and you can spend a fate point to 'discover' a medical use for it.

Don't Worry, I'm a Doctor. You can use your Medicine skill instead of Deceive to convince someone of a medical declaration.

NOTICE

The Notice skill involves just that—noticing things. It's a counterpart to Experiment, representing a character's overall perception, ability to pick out details at a glance, and other powers of observation.

Potential Uses: Avoiding ambush, looking for details that stick out, examining a location for clues, observing things from very far away, looking for patterns

Actions

Overcome: Notice is used in a reactive way: noticing something in a scene, hearing a faint sound, spotting the concealed gun in that guy's waistband.

Advantage: You use Notice to create aspects based on direct observation—looking over a room for details that stand out, finding an escape route in a debris-filled building, noticing someone sticking out in a crowd, etc. When you're watching people, Notice can tell you what's going on with them externally; for internal changes, see Empathy. You might also use Notice to declare that your character spots something you can use to your advantage in a situation, such as a convenient ESCAPE ROUTE when you're trying to get out of a building, or a SUBTLE WEAKNESS in the enemy's line of defense.

Discover: Notice is the on-the-scene investigator's best friend. You use it to justify uncovering clues and questions based off of observation. You can roll Notice to create free invokes on clues so you can ask more questions. Notice is a passive ability and something that happens quickly. Once it becomes an active process of testing out ideas, you've moved into territory for Experiment instead.

Sample Questions:

- ▹ What detail is the most out of place?
- ▹ Where would something be hidden here?
- ▹ What here is dangerous?

Example stunts

Danger Sense. You have an almost preternatural capacity for detecting danger. Your Notice skill works unimpeded by conditions like total concealment, darkness, or other sensory impairments in situations where someone or something intends to harm you.

Body Language Reader. You can use Notice in place of Empathy to learn the aspects of a target through observation.

Eavesdropper. On a successful Notice roll to create an advantage by eavesdropping on a conversation, you can discover or create one additional detail or aspect (though this doesn't give you an extra free invocation).

Provoke

Provoke is the skill about getting someone's dander up and eliciting emotional response from them—fear, anger, shame, etc. It's the "being a jerk" skill. To use Provoke, you need some kind of justification. That could come entirely from the situation, or because you have an aspect that's appropriate, because you've created an advantage with another skill (like Rapport or Deceive), or because you've assessed your target's aspects (see Empathy). Alternatively, Provoke can be used to evoke strong positive emotions, such as boosting the morale of a crowd.

Potential Uses: Staring down an opponent, inciting a riot, looking intimidating, badgering someone until they give in, dispersing an angry mob, goading a person into making a mistake

Actions

Overcome: You can Provoke someone into doing what you want in a fit of emotional pique. You might intimidate them for information, goad them into acting out, or scare them into running away. This will often happen when you're going up against nameless NPCs or it

isn't worthwhile to play out the particulars. Against PCs or important NPCs, you'll need to win a contest with three victories. They oppose with Will.

Advantage: You can create advantages representing momentary emotional states, like ENRAGED, SHOCKED, OR HESITANT. Your target opposes with Will.

Discover: Provoke's main use in discovery is getting people to talk by unbalancing them into revealing something they wouldn't otherwise. For example, you can use it to place aspects indicating fear so you can really ramp up the pressure, or for someone else to play off of in a 'good cop, bad cop' way.

Example stunts

Double Dare. You gain a +2 on Provoke rolls to convince someone to do something dangerous, embarrassing, or unwise.

Draw Ire. When you create an advantage on an opponent using Provoke, you can use your free invocation to become the target of that character's next relevant action, drawing their attention away from another target.

Okay, Fine! You can use Provoke in place of Empathy to learn a target's aspects, by bullying or bothering them until they reveal one to you. The target opposes this with Will. (If the GM thinks the aspect is particularly vulnerable to your hostile approach, you get a +2 bonus.)

RAPPORT

The Rapport skill is all about making positive connections to people and eliciting positive emotional responses. It's the skill of being liked and trusted. Performing artists would also use Rapport to communicate using their art.

Potential Uses: Diplomacy, making friends, getting a person to talk, making an honest deal, haggling, gaining someone's trust, interviewing a person politely, getting someone to see your side of the story

Actions

Overcome: Use Rapport to charm or inspire people to do what you want, or to establish a good connection with them. Charm your way past the guard, convince someone to take you into their confidence, or become the man of the hour at the local tavern. For nameless NPCs, this is just an overcome action, but you may have to enter a contest to sufficiently ingratiate yourself to a named NPC or PC.

Advantage: Use Rapport to establish a positive mood on a target or in a scene or to get someone to confide in you out of a genuine sense of trust. You could pep talk someone into having ELEVATED CONFIDENCE, or stir a crowd into a JOYFUL FERVOR, or simply make someone TALKATIVE or HELPFUL.

Discover: This is the skill you use to get people to talk. Provoke can be used as well, but it is a blunt hammer in relation to Rapport's more nuanced approach.

Sample Questions:

▹ What topic does this person seem to be avoiding?
▹ What topic are they most interested in?
▹ What is this person most worried about/happy about?

Example stunts

Best Foot Forward. Twice per session, you may upgrade a boost you receive with Rapport into a full situation aspect with a free invocation.

Demagogue. +2 to Rapport when you're delivering an inspiring speech in front of a crowd. (If there are named NPCs or PCs in the scene, you may target them all simultaneously with one roll rather than dividing up your shifts.)

Revealing Questions. When using Rapport to question someone in an investigation, you get two extra questions when succeeding or excelling.

Research

Research is the skill of discovering and leveraging the knowledge that others have collected. It represents the act of actively looking for previously recorded information as well as applying education.

Potential Uses: Digging through scientific journals, checking the library for what has been written on a certain subject, remembering facts you had studied before, reading and interpreting books, translating from one language to another, discovering documented strengths or weaknesses of an item, doing your homework before a debate

Actions

Overcome: You can use Research to overcome any obstacle that requires applying your character's knowledge to achieve a goal, assuming there is an aspect or stunt that justifies that you would have that knowledge. For example, you might roll Research to decipher an ancient D'ni inscription if you have had exposure to the language before. Also, if you need to dig through archives, Research is used to determine the quality of the information you discover.

Advantage: Research provides many flexible opportunities to create advantages, provided you can access relevant records. More often than not, you'll be using Research to get a story detail, some obscure bit of information that you uncover or know already, but if that information gives you an edge in a future scene, it might take the form of an aspect. Likewise, you can use Research to create advantages based on any subject matter your character might have studied, which gives you a fun way to add details to the setting.

Discover: Investigation is where Research really shines. It can be used to uncover clues that can be found in existing records, and to piece together new insights out of existing details and research. Using Research to get free invokes on clue aspects is relatively common.

Sample Questions:

▹ What research has been done on this subject?
▹ What are the important details to look for when a particular situation occurs?
▹ Who are the experts on this subject?

Example stunts

I've Read about That! You've read hundreds—if not thousands—of books on a wide variety of topics. You can spend a fate point to use Research in place of any other skill for one roll or exchange, provided you can justify having read about the action you're attempting.

It's all Greek to You. Using Research, you can use a Create Advantage roll to confuse someone with a flood of obscure gobbledygook.

Linguistic Prodigy. You can spend a fate point to get a basic idea of something written or said in a language you have never studied before.

Stealth

The Stealth skill allows you to avoid detection, both when hiding in place and trying to move about unseen.

Potential Uses: Sneaking around. hiding valuables, staying hidden in the shadows, avoiding pursuit, eavesdropping on conversations

Actions

Overcome: You can use Stealth to get past any situation that primarily depends on you not being seen. Sneaking past sentries and security, hiding from a pursuer, avoiding leaving evidence as you pass through a place, and any other such uses all fall under the purview of Stealth.

Advantage: You'll mainly use Stealth to create aspects on yourself, setting yourself in an ideal position for further action. That way, you can be Well-Hidden when the guards pass by and take advantage of that, or Hard to Pin Down if you're being followed in the dark.

Discover: Stealth doesn't really have investigation uses.

Example stunts

Face in the Crowd. +2 to any Stealth roll to blend into a crowd. What a "crowd" means will depend on the environment—a subway station requires more people to be crowded than a small bar.

Slippery Target. Provided you're in darkness or shadow, you can use Stealth to oppose Finesse actions from actors that are not immediately near by.

Voice from Nowhere. You can use Stealth instead of Provoke to engender fear, provided you are hidden from view. Any aspects created in this manner go away if you your hiding place is discovered.

Surveying

Surveying is the skill that is about investigating the lay of the land and exploring unknown places. Maps (using and creating) fall under this skill as well.

Potential Uses: reading maps, navigating on land, sea, or air, cartography, examining natural features, designing structures such as dams or roads, civil engineering, uncovering the effects of weather on the terrain

Actions

Overcome: Use Surveying to overcome large scale obstacles that block your progress. You can use it to get around cave-ins and plan treks the wilderness.

Advantage: Advantages created using Surveying will relate to understanding the local topography. You can discover details about the local geology or the layout of ancient ruins, or make up reasonable aspects about the local area. Mapping an area can create aspects that can be used later.

Discover: Surveying lends itself well to investigation. Looking for hidden passages is covered by Surveying, as well as making deductions based off of maps and blueprints. Anything that involves the large-scale examination of an area could be uncovered using Surveying.

Sample Questions:

▹ What is the best way to get from here to there?
▹ What geological features might not be immediately apparent?
▹ How safe is this structure?

Example stunts

Unerring Direction. You always know which way is north (or the local equivalent) and you get a +1 on navigation rolls made with Surveying.

Cut 'em Off at the Pass. Once per contest or similar situation, you can make a Surveying roll to catch-up with someone you are following provided you have a map or are familiar with the area.

Seen One Tomb, Seen 'em All. When investigating a place of the type you've seen before (Maintainer installation, Egyptian burial chamber, etc.), you get an extra free invocation on any advantage actions you place on the location, due to your familiarity with the style.

Survival

The survival skill is about making it in the wilderness. You use it to live off the land, to weather the elements and stay safe in the face of Mother Nature (whether it's your Mother Nature or not). Dealing with animals falls under survival, well as hunting, riding and tracking.

Potential Uses: scavenging for food, hunting, fishing, building makeshift shelters, tracking a person through the wilderness, dealing with animals (tame and wild), avoiding natural hazards

Actions

Overcome: Following someone (or something) can be done with Survival, as well as overcoming elements of the environment. You use it to make it through a blizzard or find food in the desert.

Advantage: Survival can be used to discover details about the local environment or about various animals. You can use it to place traps or create aspects to make a camp safer. When dealing with animals, you can use Survival instead of Empathy, Rapport, Provoke, or even Medicine.

Discover: The role of Survival in investigation will be in teasing out information from the wilderness. Clues that indicate the activity of animals or weather could be revealed using Survival, as well as leading clues which tell you which direction someone has run off.

Sample Questions:

▹ What weather/features can I expect from this environment?
▹ What animals have been through here recently?
▹ Is this plant poisonous?

Example stunts

Blend into the Scenery. Once per scene, you can vanish by ducking into the wilderness by spending a fate point. This places the Vanished boost on you. While you're vanished, no one can target you in an action until after they've succeeded at an overcome roll with Notice

or Survival to suss out where you went (basically meaning they have to give up an exchange to try). This boost goes away as soon as you invoke it, or someone makes that overcome roll.

Hard to Shake. +2 to Survival whenever you're tracking someone through the wilderness.

Native Child. Choose a type of environment when gaining this stunt (jungle, desert, tundra, etc.). Any Survival overcome actions involving resisting the elements or finding food are automatic successes when you are just taking care of yourself. Spend a fate point to apply it to yourself and one companion for a scene.

Will

The Will skill represents your character's general level of mental fortitude.

Potential Uses: Enduring pain, maintaining focus amid a chaotic environment, resisting emotional manipulation, defending deeply-held beliefs, standing up to threatening people

Actions

Overcome: You can use Will to pit yourself against obstacles that require concentration. Use Will when it's only a matter of time before you overcome the mental challenge, and Experiment if it takes something more than brute mental force to get past it. Many of the obstacles that you go up against with Will might be made part of challenges, to reflect the effort involved.

Advantage: You can use Will to place aspects on yourself, representing a state of deep concentration or focus.

Discover: Will won't reveal much in a discovery action. However, it works as an excellent support skill when trying to uncover information in situations that have a lot of distractions.

Example stunts

Strength From Determination. Use Will instead of Athletics on any overcome rolls representing feats of strength.

Hard Boiled. You can choose to ignore a mild or moderate consequence for the duration of the scene. It can't be compelled against you or invoked by your enemies. At the end of the scene it comes back worse, though; if it was a mild consequence it becomes a moderate consequence, and if it was already moderate, it becomes severe.

Indomitable. +2 to oppose Provoke actions specifically related to intimidation and fear.

WHAT YOU HAVE AND WHO YOU KNOW

Veterans of Fate games will notice that two common skills are missing from this list: Contacts and Resources. These usually represent general capability to get stuff and to know people in the right place. When you are exploring across the Ages, however, what you have available and who you know that might be able to help you is dependent on where you are and what you can get to.

Instead of general skills to reflect this, use your skills to cultivate resources and contacts. If you want to make in-roads with the locals in a new Age, you will use Rapport. If you want to set up a lab, that's Engineering. Figuring out what you can do with the strange minerals you found in an Age requires Experiment or Surveying. You will usually be using an Advantage action to set up situation aspects. You can spend fate points to reserve them for later.

After that, these are details in your character's story. If it makes sense to come back to someone you know, you can just come back, butter them up, and make another Rapport roll. However, if these connections are going to become focal points for your character, then you should change your character to reflect them. You have two options: aspects and stunts.

In many cases, you can simply change one of your aspects during a minor milestone to reflect the change in your character's story. If you've developed the plants in the Age of Haven into incredible medicines, you can change an aspect to AMAZING BOTANICAL MEDICINES OF HAVEN. Or if you build a hidden home base in an out of the way place in the D'ni City, you could change an aspect to SECRET HIDEWAY IN THE KALEH DISTRICT.

The other option is to use stunts. Rather than being a dramatic pivot, these are reliable bonuses rooted with the people or the location in question. See Resources in the Stunts and Resources chapter.
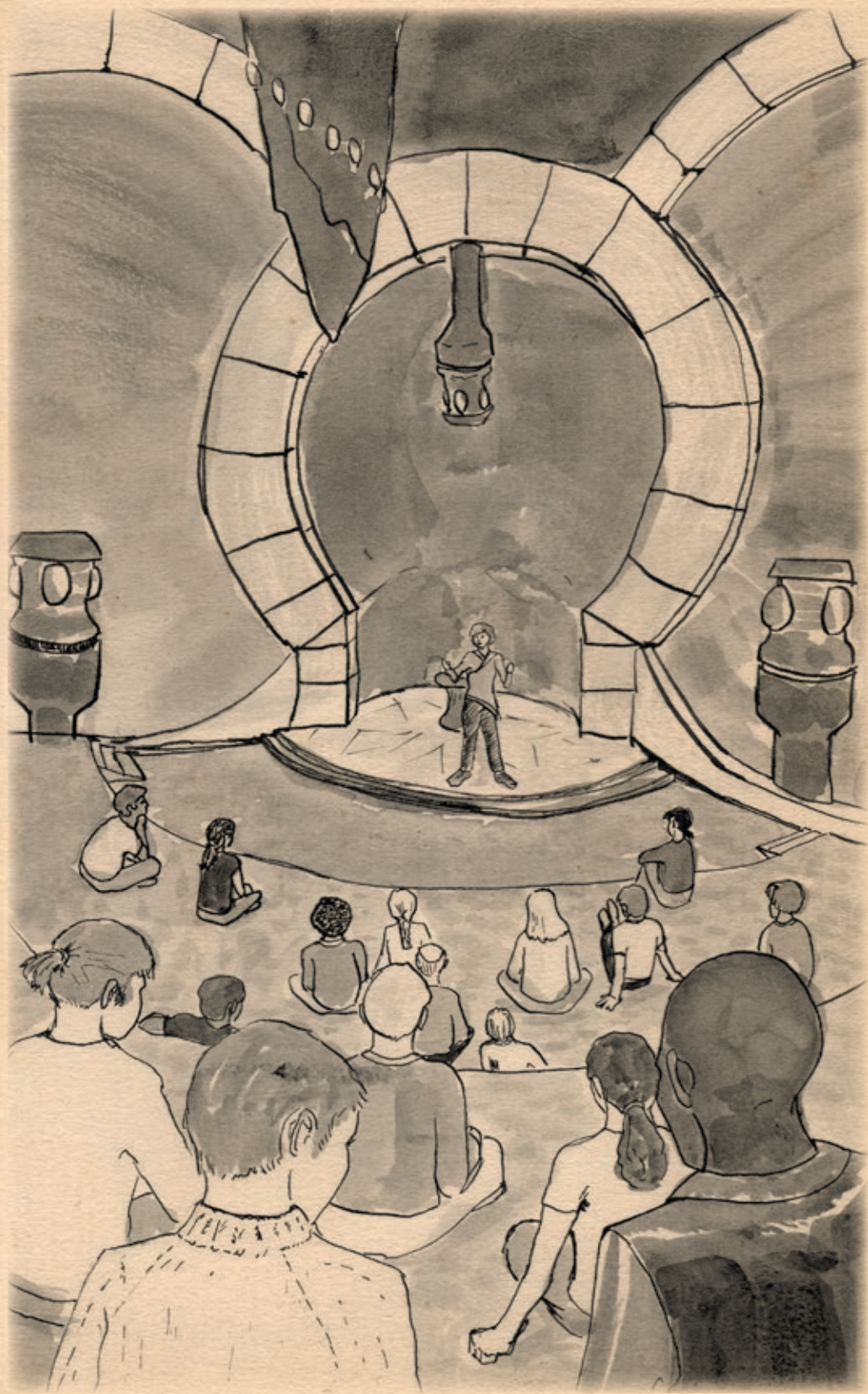
STUNTS AND RESOURCES

While character aspects describe important facts about a character and skills describe general capability, **stunts** represent specific situations where the rules work differently for a character. This can represented by bonuses in certain situations, small exceptions to rules, or rules that apply to just that character in specific situations.

You'll find guidance on here on building your own stunts; GMs and players are encouraged to work together to build stunt that add the right flavor to the character. We have also provided a list of stunts that you can use as inspiration or just use as-is.

Stunts can represent more than just a character's personal capabilities. They can represent external entities, called **resources**. A resource could be a place the character has access to, an item they have, or someone they know who helps them in a specific way. A resource works like a stunt, except that its trigger is being able to access the resource in question.

Creating a Stunt

There is no definitive list of stunts. Rather they are created by players and the GM working together to find things that add the right flavor to the character. Use these general categories and examples as guidelines for building what you need.

ADDING A BONUS TO AN ACTION

The most basic option for a stunt is to give a skill an automatic bonus under a particular, narrow circumstance, effectively letting a character specialize in something. The circumstance should be narrower than what the normal action allows, and only apply to one particular action or pair of actions.

The usual bonus is +2 to the skill total. However, if you want, you can also express the bonus as two shifts of additional effect after the roll succeeds, if that makes more sense. Remember, higher shifts on a roll allow your action to be more effective in certain ways.

You can also use this to establish any effect worth two shifts as an additional benefit of succeeding at the skill roll. This might be Fair (+2) passive opposition, the equivalent of a 2-point hit, a mild consequence, or an advantage that takes Fair (+2) opposition to remove.

> **Special Forensics Training.** You have been trained to gather detailed physical evidence and tease out as much detail as you can. If you succeed at a discover action while initially examining the scene, you get two additional shifts added to your successful result.
>
> **Backwoods MacGuyver.** You've got a flair for whipping up things (traps, simple contraptions, etc.) with just materials you find in nature. You get a +2 bonus on actions using Craft while in the wilderness that involve you making things on the fly.
>
> **Explosive Intellect.** You are particularly good at making machines malfunction in messy, distracting ways. If you succeed at a Create Advantage action using Engineering, you place a distracting situation aspect on an area and you automatically create a Fair (+2) opposition for the next person who attempts any action in that area. (Normally you'd have to invoke the aspect somehow, but this is for free).

ADDING AN NEW ACTION TO A SKILL

Another use for a stunt is to allow a skill to do something that it normally can't do. It adds a new action onto the base skill in certain situations, for those with this stunt. This new action can be one that's available to another skill (allowing one skill to swap for another under certain circumstances), or one that's not available to any skill.

Mind of the Creator. Using Craft or Engineering, you can analyze an item in order to tell you something about the creator as a discover action.

Master of Bluster. You may use Provoke instead of Deceive when making a scene in order to distract onlookers from some other action.

Biofeedback Training. You have studied how the body reacts to stress as well as strategies for alleviating it. You may use Medicine instead of Will to oppose Provoke actions that target you.

CREATING A RULES EXCEPTION

Finally, a stunt can a single exception for any other game rule that doesn't precisely fit into the category of an action. There are all sorts of different little rules about the circumstances under which a skill can be used and what happens when you use them, for example. Stunts can break those, allowing your character to stretch the boundaries of the possible. Additionally, your stunt may simply be narrative with no specific system effects.

The only limit to this is that a stunt can't change any of the basic rules for aspects in terms of invoking, compelling, and the fate point economy. Those always remain the same.

Friendly Face. You immediately come across as a likeable person, no matter the situation. NPCs are favorably disposed to you when you first meet them until you give them a reason to feel otherwise. This works even if you do not share a language.

Useful Little Things. Your pockets are full of useful little things. Whenever you need something, you have it, provided it's not something too unusual or too large to fit in a pocket, belt pouch, or backpack. When you say you have something, the GM should be likely to agree.

Carefully Concealed. When you use Stealth to create a CAREFULLY CONCEALED (or similar) advantage on something, you can always actively oppose any overcome rolls to discover the item (also using the same skill), even if you're not there. (Normally, if you weren't there, the investigating character would roll against passive opposition, making it much easier to discover.)
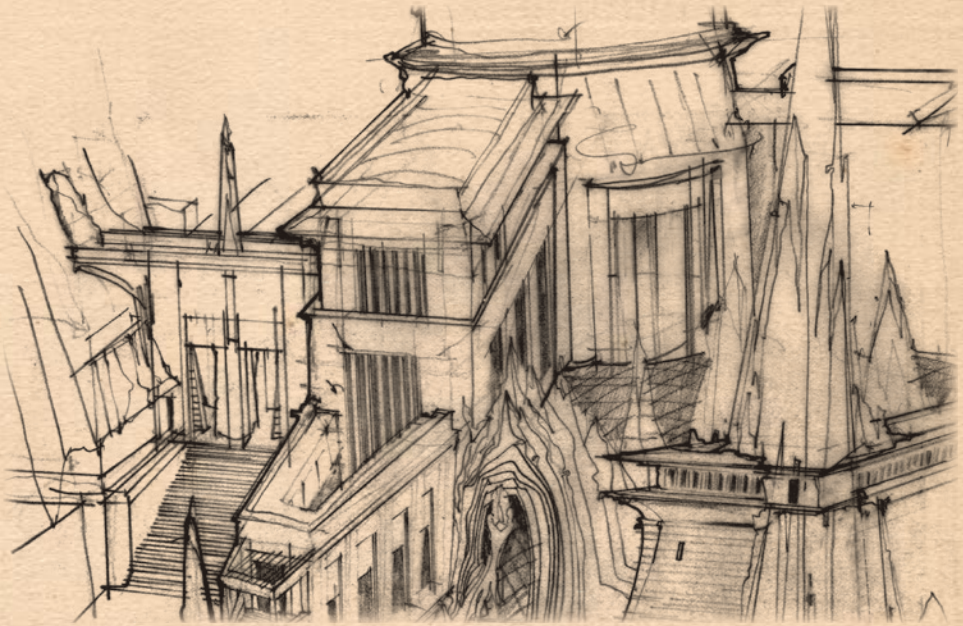
Resources

A resource could be a place the character has access to, an item they have or someone they know who helps them in a specific way. The rules for a resource are exactly like those for a stunt, except that to use the stunt, you must have current access to the resource.

Locations

There are all sorts of places in the Ages that a character can turn into useful resources. These might be hidden strongholds, ancient ruins, or fields of useful materials. The key commonality is that the benefits that such a stunt gives you require you to go to the location in order to use them.

Extensive Library. You have a library full of useful books and research. You get a +2 on actions using Research while you are there.

Garden of Exotic Herbs. You have cultivated a garden of plants with unique medicinal properties. If you have access to your garden, l get a +2 on actions using Medicine.

Restored D'ni Pub. You are the proprietor of a new little restored pub in the D'ni city; it's a great place to sit down and hash things out. You get a +2 to actions that involve getting people to cooperate while you are dealing with others there.

Gadgets

Engineers build all sorts of things, and the D'ni left all sorts of technology lying around as well. Any of this can be the basis for a stunt. Remember that standard items usually don't give any special benefit or only serve narrative purposes, such as standard KIs and Linking Books. These would not be stunts unless they are special in some way.

The trick to gadgets is that, since they are items, they can be stolen or damaged. Gadgets represented by stunts can't be taken away from you permanently, however. At the end of a chapter, at the very least, you'll be assumed to have repaired it, built a new one or recovered the item in some way.

> **Incredibly Useful Multi-Tool.** You get a +1 on actions involving Engineering or Craft when using it.

> **D'ni Atlas.** You get a +2 to discover actions in the cavern or well-traveled D'ni Ages when it is on hand.

> **D'ni Sounding Equipment.** You've salvaged some portable D'ni sounding equipment—it's like a personal sonar kit. You can use it to detect people or large items on the other side of walls, buried inside the ground, or in complete darkness with an overcome action.

Contacts

And other times, it's all about who you know. Contacts represent people or organizations that you can call on for specific favors. The stunt represents the relationship you have built with your contact and the arrangements you have made.

Contacts are specific, like all stunts. If you want the relationship to reflect story elements, you should use an aspect instead of, or in addition to, the stunt.

> **Joey DeAngelo, Carlsbad Pawn Shop Owner.** Joey knows people who know people, ya know? You can spend a fate point and go see him to get unusual equipment. Really unusual items may take a long time, or the GM may veto them entirely.

> **Friends in the Guild of Greeters.** You know a lot of people in the Guild of Greeters. When you can go chat with them, you get a +2 on discover actions focused on rumors in the cavern.

Apprentice. You have someone you are teaching your craft to. Pick a skill that you have at Great (+4) or above. You can give your apprentices tasks that use that skill to do while you are doing other things. Their level in that skill is Fair (+2), but you roll the dice. The results are available to you next session.

BALANCING STUNT UTILITY

If you look at most of the example stunts, you'll notice that the circumstances under which you can use them are pretty narrow compared to the base skills. That's the sweet spot you want to shoot for with your own stunts—you want them to be limited enough in scope that it feels special when you use them, but not so narrow that you never see them come up after you take them.

If the stunt effectively takes over all of the skill's base actions, it's not limited enough. You don't want a stunt replacing the skill it modifies.

The two main ways to limit a stunt are by keeping its effects to a specific action or pair of actions (only creating an advantage or only attack and defend rolls), or by limiting the situations in which you can use it.

COMBINING RESOURCES AND ASPECTS

As a rule, stunts that represent locations, gadgets or contacts provide static bonuses, like any other stunt. They don't have any special particular story significance; they just are.

However, it doesn't have to be that way. If you have some resource that gives you a static bonus *and* has narrative implications, you can represent it with both an aspect and a stunt. You still have to use one of your available aspects and it costs a stunt as well, but it gives you something that works in both ways.

For example, Joey DeAngelo (see the stunt above) is your best friend from high school; you grew up together. Whenever you need anything, he knows where to find it. He's always got your back, but he sticks his nose into things and he has trouble keeping secret. That could be very bad for you if he finds out exactly what you are doing in the desert. So, you could take an aspect of JOEY DEANGELO, MY NOSY BEST FRIEND; he's a source of help *and* of compels. However, you want to be able to use his help without spending fate points, so you also create the stunt above to model him as a contact.

For the best results, use both—have the stunt restricted to a specific action, which can only be used in a specific in-game situation. If you're worried about the situation being too narrow, back up and think of the ways the skill might be used in play. If you can see the stunt being relevant to one of those uses, you're probably on the right track. If you can't, you may need to adjust the stunt a little to make sure it'll come up.

You can also restrict a stunt by only allowing it to be used once in a certain period of game time, such as once per conflict, once per scene, or once per session.

Playing a Scene

Characters do lots of things. They jump chasms, they negotiate with antagonistic leaders, they decipher strange inscriptions on the ruins of D'ni outposts, etc. This all happens in scenes.

A **scene** is a coherent bit of game play, usually one that happens in a particular setting. It is the amount of time it takes to resolve a conflict, deal with a single prominent situation, or accomplish a goal. Scenes vary in length, from a minute or two if it's just a quick description and some dialogue, to a half hour or more in the case of a major set piece. Taken together, the collection of scenes you play through make up a whole session of play.

You can look at them as the foundational unit of game time, and you probably already have a good idea of what one looks like. It's not all that different from a scene in a movie, a television show, or a novel—the main characters are doing stuff in continuous time, usually all in the same space. Once the action shifts to a new goal, moves to a new place related to that goal, or jumps in time, you're in the next scene.

Doing Things in a Scene

Playing out a scene is just a conversation between everyone at the table in which the story and the details of the scene unfold as the conversation continues. Most of what your character does is not all that interesting. They are not particularly difficult things to do, nor are they points of drama in the character's story. Even when they need to be commented on, your character just does them.

In *Unwritten*, much of what you do just happens, as long as it makes sense. If it doesn't make sense, it doesn't happen. This is a call made by the people around the table, with the GM as moderator of the discussion. That's not to say that every action needs to be reviewed by committee; but everyone at the table should feel free to bring up relevant points at appropriate times.

However, there are times when the stakes are higher. At these times, you can still succeed, but potential failure is interesting. Even more so, what you are willing to do to ensure success is interesting and a dramatic moment. When that happens, it's time to break out the dice and take an action.

Our scene begins as Maica, Naomi, Stefan, and Templeton approach the Guild of Mechanists workshop that had been locked behind a complex mechanical locking mechanism. In the previous scene, they dug through the archives they found in the rest of the building and discovered schematics for the lock. The schematics included information on how to unlock the mechanism.

Stefan follows the instructions that they copied down and the door unlocks and slowly opens. After he pokes his head in to see if there is any danger, Stefan signals the others that it is okay, and everyone fans out, investigating the room. Gwen tells the players that the room is Filled with Antiquated Mechanical Equipment *and there is a* Stench of Old Chemicals *in the air.*

Actions

An **action** represents something interesting that your character does. By 'interesting', we mean that what the character does has a possibility of failure or complication that that leads to further drama. It may lead to a failure that has ramifications later on, or it might require you to make a hard choice, or pay a price.

An action does not tell you exactly what happens; rather it provides the skeleton of what happens. It places constraints which you can then flesh out with juicy narrative details. Depending on the outcome of the action, you and the GM will be asked to describe how your character failed or succeeded. Use that to your advantage to make your actions flow with the story better.

One of the constraints that may come up is just what price is required for success. You will be presented with a choice to fail at your goal, or to succeed at a cost to ultimately attain your goal for a price.

Time Is Flexible

An action represents as much time as makes sense. This means that an action can represent a variable amount from one time to the next, or even in quick succession. If you spend an action to see if you can find a way to escape an oncoming avalanche, that action may only take a split-second. Taking an action to dig yourself out of the avalanche that you just got caught in may take a lot longer.

The Action Roll

Taking action boils down to:
- Establish the nature of the action
- Choose the skill and type of action
- Determine the opposition
- Determine the outcome
- Resolve action

Establish the Nature of the Action

The first step you perform on an action is to determine the nature of the action. The character performing the action is the actor and you establish what the goal of your action is, and how you plan to get there.

Before anything else, ask yourself "What is the character trying to accomplish?" You may want to jump straight to describing what your character is actually doing, but resist that temptation. You need to have your intention figured out before you can effectively continue—it is the linchpin for what your character actually does and how well it turns out for them.

Once you have gotten a handle on what you are trying to accomplish, then you describe how you want to get from here to there. Think

Actions are Story

Actions are descriptive elements, not just dice rolls.

Decide what you are trying to accomplish before you decide what your character is actually doing. That guides the rest of the process.

Fill in details after you determine how the roll went. That way you can describe the whole action and not just the effects. For example, if you excel at the action, you may want to describe it with greater flair than if you merely tied.

Remember to include aspects that you invoke on a roll in the description of the action and the result.

about what your character would attempt based off of what they know and what strengths they would rely on. If you have a detailed idea of exactly your character will be attempting, then go ahead and describe it. However, if you aren't sure on the details yet, don't worry. Just make sure you have a general idea of what your character will be doing. We'll settle the details when we resolve the action.

Naomi finds some locked cabinets in the room. She thinks there might be valuable materials or equipment in there. They look pretty old, so she thinks she's just going to strong arm them open.

Maica takes a moment to examine the large number of machines to see if she can find a pattern that would be useful in determining what this room was used for.

Stefan starts tinkering with some of the machines directly to see what they can do. He thinks he might be able to get some tools working that will help with working on the larger machines.

Templeton finds a stack of logbooks in the corner, written in D'ni. Luckily he can read D'ni so he starts reading through them, looking for clues.

Choose the Skill and Type of Action

First, you choose which skill you will be using as the basis for the action.

Next, we classify what the character is doing into one of four different actions. Which action you choose determines what the actual outcomes signify and how they are resolved. There are four different actions.

Overcome

This is the action for overcoming opposition. When there's something between your character and their goals, you use the overcome action to deal with it. Look at it as the "catch-all" action—if it doesn't fall into any other category, it's probably an overcome action.

Success in an overcome action means you have gotten past whatever was in your way.

Naomi is going to try to break the doors on the locked cabinets to get into them. She decides she will use Athletics on an Overcome action to do so.

Advantage

Advantage actions are focused on aspects and using them to help you. You can create advantage or take advantage.

Creating an advantage means that you have created something that your character can use to help out in other rolls. Sometimes, that means you're doing something to actively change your circumstances (like attaching pulleys to a set of heavy stones or setting something on fire), but it could also mean that you're discovering new information that helps you (like scouting out the lay of the land). If you are successful, you can place an situation aspect on a person or scene.

Taking advantage of something means you are using something you've previously observed (like an antagonist's predisposition to a bad temper). Success means you can create free invocations on an existing aspect.

No matter what type of advantage action you are performing, if you are not successful then you may inadvertently accomplish something that hinders you instead.

Maica looks over the machines, trying to find a pattern that she will be able to use to help later. She will attempt an Advantage action to place a situation aspect on the scene, using Notice.

Stephan is tinkering with some tools, hoping that will give him some clues on how to use the machines. He will use an Advantage action to try to get free invokes on the aspect FILLED WITH ANTIQUATED MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT with his Engineering skill.

FOR VETERAN FATE PLAYERS

Violence and force as solutions don't fit into *Unwritten*. Thus *Unwritten* has no Attack action, nor does it have Stress tracks. It is possible to take violent action, via an overcome or an advantage action, and you can apply a consequence with an advantage action if you excel. However, *Unwritten* doesn't directly support it or the combat metaphor.

If you are considering a violent action, take a moment to think about it first. Does it really fit into the game you are playing? Can you resolve the situation creatively?

Discover

The discover action is how a character (and thus a player) learns about the world around them. They may be examining a building, digging through dusty tomes, or talking to people in the know. A successful discover action gives the player a chance to ask the GM a specific number of questions dependent on the outcome.

Templeton pores over the logbooks to see what he can find. He decides that he will make a Discover action using his Research skill.

Oppose

A oppose action is what your character is doing when you are acting as active opposition. You may be the target of a Create Advantage action or otherwise providing actively getting in the way of some action. Unlike other actions, an oppose action is a reaction to another's action. However, it is also resolved during the resolution phase of an action.

Determine the Opposition

The opposition to the action determines how effective a character's roll is and the results of the action. If someone or something is actively working against the action, then the opposition is active. Otherwise, the opposition is passive. In either case, the type and amount of opposition is determined before the actor rolls.

If a character is the target of an action, that is the actor is trying to *do* something to the character, then that character is actively opposing the action as long as they are capable of doing so (not unconscious, etc.).

Passive Opposition

Passive opposition represents the general resistance to an action. It is represented by a static rating. In some cases, the GM may decide that the opposition is coming from an active source, but may consider the source unimportant or uninteresting and just use a passive opposition for brevity's sake.

Active Opposition

Active opposition signifies someone or something putting out effort to oppose the action. The opposition gets an Oppose action, which they roll before the actor rolls. Like an actor, they will choose a skill, collect any relevant bonuses from stunts, and add both to their dice roll.

There is no one there to oppose their actions, so the characters only meet up with passive opposition. Both Maica and Stefan meet an opposition of Good (+3) in understanding the equipment.

The cabinets are pretty strong, so Naomi faces an opposition of Great (+4).

There is nothing out of the ordinary with the logbooks, so Templeton only faces an opposition of Fair (+2).

Determine the Outcome

Now we get down to the nitty-gritty and determine the outcome of the action.

1. The actor rolls the Fate dice, adds up the pluses and subtracts the minuses.
2. The actor adds the value of the chosen skill.
3. The actor totals up any applicable stunts and adds that.
4. The opposition total is subtracted from the actor's total.

If the final result is...
- ...negative, the action **fumbles**.
- ...zero, the action **ties**.
- ...positive and the result is 1 or 2, the action **succeeds**.
- ...positive and the result is 3 or greater, the action **excels**.

Naomi's Athletics are Good (+3). She rolls a 1 for a total of 4. Subtracting the opposition of Great (+4), her final result is 0. She ties.

Maica's Notice is Good (+3). She rolls a 2 for a total of 5. Subtracting an opposition of Good (+3), her final result is a 2. She succeeds.

Stefan's Engineering is Fair (+2). He rolls a -2 for a total of zero. Subtracting an opposition of Good (+3), his final result is -3. He fumbles.

Templeton's Research is Great (+4). He rolls a 2 for a total of 6. Subtracting the opposition of Fair (+2), his final result is 4. He excels.

Invoke aspects

If the involved players or the GM are not satisfied with the roll, they can now invoke aspects (either using fate points or free invokes) for bonus or to re-roll the dice. Boosts can also be spent for bonuses at this time. You can invoke several different aspects using fate points, but each aspect can only be invoked once for this action by fate point. However, multiple free invokes can be used on the same aspect in this one action (on top of a fate point, if needed).

Players and the GM can go back and forth spending fate points, free invokes and boosts as much as they like. Once they are done, the outcome is figured out again and the action is resolved.

The lowly quab.
Fearful, foolish, and surprisingly forgetful...

is it bad that I still think they're cute?

Ethan swears that one of these times, he's going to hold a seafood barbeque and invite these guys as the main course!

Resolve action

So, what happened? That depends on the type of action, listed below. Also, if the action was actively opposed, the oppose action is resolved as well.

You'll notice below that in some cases, you have the option of turning a fumble or tie into a success by incurring a cost. We'll discuss the nature of costs after we discuss the outcomes of each type of action.

Overcome

If you fumble...
Choose one of the following:

> Describe how you fail to overcome the situation at hand.
> Succeed at a serious cost. Work with the GM to determine the cost, then describe how you succeed and how the cost affected the success.

If you tie...
Choose one of the following:

> Describe how you fail to overcome the situation at hand.
> Succeed at a minor cost. Work with the GM to determine the cost, then describe how you succeed and how the cost affected the success.

If you succeed...

> Describe how you overcome and obtain your goal.

If you excel...

> Describe how you overcome and obtain your goal particularly well or with flair. Receive an appropriate boost to reflect how well you did in overcoming the action.

An obstacle that has been overcome successfully is no longer an obstacle for that character. Unless the situation changes, you should not have to overcome the obstacle again and again. For example, if you have managed to get across the menacing chasm in your way, you shouldn't have to roll overcome every time you come to it again; overcoming it is no longer interesting. But if there was a earthquake, or someone has been tampering with the rope bridge you set up, it may be time for another overcome action.

Naomi tied her Overcome action. She describes how she slams her shoulder into the doors of the cabinet, but gets nothing out of it than dust all over her shirt.

Advantage

If you attempted to create an advantage, resolve the action as follows:

If you fumble...
Choose one of the following:
> ▸ Describe how you failed to make a change to your advantage or failed to recognize a potential advantage.
> ▸ Describe how you create a situation aspect that is not what you intended.
> ▸ Succeed at a serious cost. Work with the GM to determine the cost, then describe how you created your advantage, and how the cost affected the success.

In any case, the GM can give a free invoke to someone else who would benefit from how things went badly for you.

If you tie...
> ▸ Describe how you created or recognized something to your advantage, but only get to use it momentarily. You receive a boost to reflect this.

If you succeed...
> ▸ Describe how you created an advantage or recognized something to your advantage. Place a situation aspect and receive a free invoke on that aspect.

If you excel...
> ▸ Describe how you created an advantage or recognized something that was distinctly to your advantage. Place a situation aspect and receive two free invokes on that aspect.

If you chose to take advantage of an existing aspect, resolve the action as follows:

If you fumble...
Choose one of the following:
> ▸ Describe how you failed to utilize the situation to your advantage. The GM can give a free invoke to someone else who would benefit from how things went badly for you.
> ▸ Succeed at a serious cost. Work with the GM to determine the cost, then describe how you succeed and how the cost affected the success. Receive a free invoke on the aspect.

If you tie or you succeed...

 ▹ Describe how you take advantage of the aspect in question. Receive a free invoke on that aspect.

If you excel...

 ▹ Describe how you take advantage of the aspect in question particularly well. Receive two free invokes on that aspect.

Maica succeeded on her Advantage action. She places the THERE IS A PATTERN HERE aspect on the scene. She gets one free invoke on that aspect.

Stefan fumbled his Advantage action. He thinks he's really going to need that invoke later on, so he chooses to succeed at a serious cost. He explains that he is pulling on one of the tools and accidentally causes a stack of tools and books to topple over. Gwen smiles and says she has just the cost in mind.

THAT'S GOING TO LEAVE A MARK

If you excel at creating an advantage on a target character, you can spend one of your free invokes to place a minor consequence on the target instead of a situation aspect. If the target has no open minor consequence slots available, it 'rolls up' to the next available empty slot. If your target has no empty consequence slots, they are overwhelmed.

Discover

If you fumble...

Choose one of the following:

 ▹ Describe how you are unable to find any useful information.
 ▹ Succeed at a serious cost. Describe how your search inadvertently damages something helpful or important. Ask the GM a single question.

If you tie...

Choose one of the following:

 ▹ Describe how you are unable to find any useful information.
 ▹ Choose to succeed at a minor cost. Describe how your search causes an inconvenience and ask the GM a single question.

If you succeed...

> ⊳ Describe how you are seeking information. Ask one question for every shift you succeed by.

If you excel...

> ⊳ Describe how you cleverly (or luckily) discover information. Ask one question for every shift you succeed by. You also have the option to ask the GM to reveal an important detail or hint. If you do not use that option during the scene, you receive a fate point.

Your discover roll represents all of the details you can get out of the situation as it is. That means once you run out of questions, you cannot simply attempt another discover action to get more. Instead, you have to change the situation before you can dig further. Changing the situation is anything that would allow you to approach the question from a different angle. Ultimately, what qualifies as a sufficient change is up to the GM, but here are some suggestions:

> ⊳ Change the environment with a create advantage action, such as performing an experiment or setting up helpful equipment. A nice side-effect of this is that you get a free invocation to help out with your roll.
> ⊳ Get someone to help you using the Teamwork rules (someone different if you had help last time).
> ⊳ Go away to do research, or go off to clear your head. It should take you out of play for a little bit of time.
> ⊳ Provide a really detailed description on how you are approaching the problem differently that impresses the people at the table.

Templeton excels at his action with a result of 4. He now has four questions he can ask about the information in the logbook. He also has the option of asking Gwen to reveal an important bit of information.

Oppose

Oppose is the mirror of an attempted action, so it is mostly resolved by the resolution of the action itself (if you succeed, the actor fumbles; if you tie, the actor ties, etc.). Describe your part in the action

However, you can excel at your opposition when you beat the actor's roll by 3 or more shifts. When you excel at opposition, describe how you manage to turn the tables momentarily. Receive a boost to reflect this.
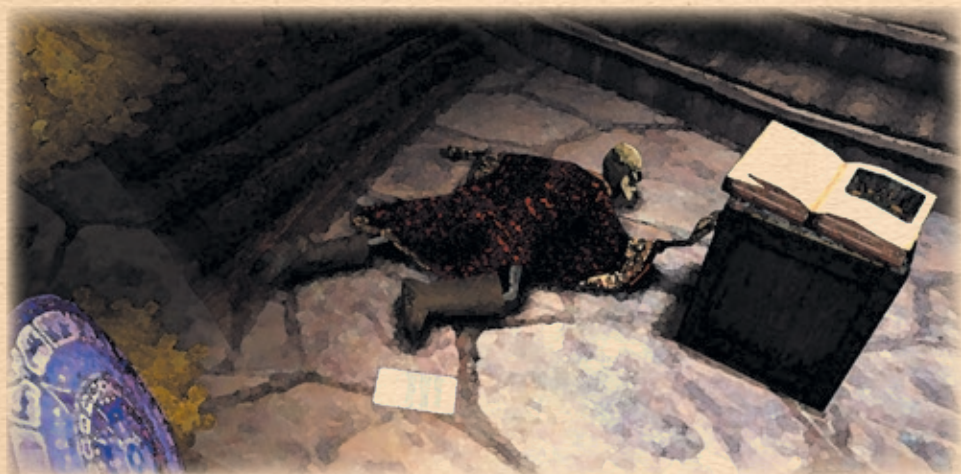
Resolving costs

Costs can be considered to be either minor or serious. The GM should consider the nature of the action and the failure to come up with an appropriate and interesting cost.

A minor cost should add a story detail that's problematic for the character, but isn't really a danger, nor does it negate what the character was trying to do. Some examples of minor costs include:

> Introduce a new wrinkle to the situation that complicates things a little
> Present the player with a tough choice as part of the success
> Give an NPC a boost
> Place a situation aspect on the character

A serious cost should make the current situation worse. Some options include:

> Introduce a new wrinkle that complicates things a lot
> Reinforce the opposition or bring in new opposition
> Place a Minor consequence on the character (or the lowest empty consequence slot the character has available)
> Give an opponent an advantage with a free invoke
> Delay success so it will take much longer than expected

Gwen explains that since Stefan knocked over books and equipment and there is a STENCH OF OLD CHEMICALS in the air, one of the tools sparks when it hits the ground, and the books burst into oddly-colored flame. An old warning system triggers, klaxons go off, and the door to the room snaps shut.

TEAMWORK

Characters can help each other out on actions. There are two versions of helping in Fate: combining skills, for when you are all putting the same kind of effort into an action (like using skills together to push over a crumbling wall), and stacking advantages, for when the group is setting a single person up to do well (like causing multiple distractions so one person can use Stealth to get into a guarded camp).

When you combine skills, figure out who has the highest skill level among the participants. Each other participant who has at least an Adequate (+1) in similar skills adds a +1 to the highest person's skill level, and then only the lead character rolls. So if you have three helpers and you're the highest, you roll your skill level with a +3 bonus.

If you fail a roll with combined skills, all of the participants share in the potential costs—whatever complication affects one character affects all of them, or everyone has to take consequences. Alternatively, you can impose a cost that affects all the characters the same.

When you stack advantages, each person takes a create an advantage action as usual, and gives whatever free invocations they get to a single character. Remember that multiple free invocations from the same aspect can stack.

Naomi grabs a big piece of machinery and tells the others to help her batter down the door with it. She has the highest Athletics at Good (+3). Maica and Stefan both have Athletics at Adequate or above, so they give her a +2 to her roll. Unfortunately, she rolls badly and fumbles the action. She considers choosing to succeed for a serious cost, but she decides that they don't need to deal with yet another problem right now.

DANGEROUS ACTIONS

The GM can declare that an action is **dangerous**: the action represents something that could have significant repercussions if you fumble your roll. If you fumble a dangerous action, you are overwhelmed, and are no longer an active part of the scene. (See Overwhelmed below)

In an action that is being actively opposed, an action can be dangerous for both sides. This means that whichever character fumbles the action will be overwhelmed. However, the GM may declare that only one side of the action is

dangerous. For example, you may be leaping from a high overhead balcony to cut off an escaping opponent, meaning it is dangerous for you, but not them. If you fumble, you are overwhelmed (you landed badly); but if they fumble, they are simply cut off and they continue to be active in the scene.

> Undeterred, Naomi grabs a survival blanket from her pack (she spent her last fate point to declare she had one) and tries to smother the fire with it. Gwen declares this is a dangerous action. She ties and thus does not stop the fire. If she had fumbled, she would have been overwhelmed, possibly hurt badly in the process.

Conceding Dangerous Actions

Sometimes, discretion is the better part of valor. When you are facing a dangerous action, you can interrupt it at any time before the roll is made to declare that you **concede** the action. This is critical—once dice hit the table, what happens happens, and you deal with it.

Concession gives the other person what they wanted, or in the case of more than two relevant participants, removes you from the scene. You are overwhelmed, period.

But it's not all bad. First of all, you get a fate point for choosing to concede. The fate point may be used once this scene is over.

Second of all, you get to avoid the worst parts of your fate; you have a say in how your character is removed from the scene. Yes, you lost, and the narration has to reflect that. You can't use this privilege to undermine the opponent's victory, either—what you say happens has to pass muster with the group. It may mean that you have a choice between dire consequences and merely dangerous consequences. But sometimes that is better than nothing.

> *Gwen decides that the fire spreads and that she will run the fire as an active participant in the scene. She says that the fire will attempt to place a* Burning *aspect on Naomi. Gwen points out that this is a dangerous action for Naomi and Naomi has no fate points left. Gwen reminds her that she can concede to avoid further danger, and she'll get a fate point for it after the scene.*
>
> *Naomi passes on the option and opposes the fire's action. Gwen rolls badly and Naomi not only successfully opposes the fire, she excels in her opposition. Gwen gives her a boost called* Out of Harm's Way.
>
> *We'll get back to this scene later on in this chapter.*

INTERLUDES

Interludes are a special scene that represents important dramatic moments and details, but happen outside the flow of the main action. This is a chance for characters to do other things, have some downtime, or to put some dramatic spotlight on things that don't fit into the main story. You could think of them as happening 'off stage'.

The GM can choose to call for an interlude at any time that seems appropriate. During an interlude, the characters have a chance to go about their own lives for a bit. Each player has a chance to do some little things on their own and refocus themselves. The actual amount of time this type of interlude represents will vary. Sometimes it is just a few hours, sometimes it could be days or weeks.

OVERWHELMED

Normally, you leave a scene whenever makes sense. However, sometimes circumstances conspire to make you irrelevant. When you are **overwhelmed**, you are no longer an active participant in the scene. You have been trapped, fallen unconscious, chased away, or any other result that would remove you from the action. In some scenes, such as an investigation, it might be that you simply has gotten so confused that you are no longer helpful.

You are overwhelmed when:

▷ You are required to take a consequence and you have no empty consequence slots left.
▷ You fumble a dangerous action.

Whatever the case, you are no longer a part of that scene, even if your character is physically present. The person who caused you to be overwhelmed (player or GM) describes how you are removed from the scene.

Ending the Scene

Once the subject at hand has been dealt with, whatever that may be, the scene ends and the following things take place:

- Remove any minor consequences that are marked as recovering.
- Any consequences that have been successfully addressed during the scene are now marked as recovering.
- Any fate points earned from invokes are given to the players.

Zooming in on the Action

A single overcome action is sufficient to deal with a straightforward goal or obstacle—you needs to pick this lock, disarm this ancient security system, sift out a vital piece of information, and so on. It's also useful when the details of how something gets done aren't important or worth spending an intense amount of time on, when what you need to know is whether the character can get something done without any setbacks or costs.

Sometimes, however, things get complicated. It's not enough to pick the lock, because you also have to avoid the falling rocks and set up the device that's going to signal for help. It's not enough to disarm the trap, because you also have to land the crashing blimp and keep the unconscious scientist you're rescuing from getting hurt in said landing. It's time to zoom in on the action.

When you want to zoom, in, you have four different ways to do so:
- Challenge - A lot of different actions all happening at once
- Contest - Characters compete over mutually exclusive goals
- Deduction - Players build an answer to a mystery
- Investigation - Characters dig for information

Deductions and Investigations are detailed in the Discovery and Investigation chapter. The other two are detailed below.

Challenges

A **challenge** is a series of overcome actions that you use to resolve an especially complicated or dynamic situation. Each overcome action uses a different roll to deal with one task or part of the situation, and you take the individual results as a whole to figure out how the situation resolves.

GMs, when you're trying to figure out if it's appropriate to call for a challenge, ask yourself the following questions:

> ⊳ Is each separate task something that can generate tension and drama independently of the other tasks? If all the tasks are really part of the same overall goal, then that should be one overcome action, where you use those details to explain what happened if the roll goes wrong.
> ⊳ Does the situation require different skills to deal with? Holding off the crazed animals (one skill) while pushing down a barricade (another skill) and fixing your broken wagon (a third skill) so that you can get away would be a good instance for a challenge.

To set up a challenge, simply identify the individual tasks or goals that make up the situation, and treat each one as a separate overcome roll. (Sometimes, only a certain sequence for the rolls will make sense to you; that's okay too.) Depending on the situation, one character may be required to make several rolls, or multiple characters may be able to participate.

To conduct a challenge, call for each overcome action in whichever order seems most interesting, but don't decide anything about how the situation turns out until after you've collected all the results—you want to have the freedom to sequence the events of each roll in the order that makes the most sense and is the most entertaining. Players, if you get a boost on one of your rolls, feel free to use it on another roll in the challenge, provided you can justify it.

GMs, after the rolls have been made, you'll consider the successes, failures, and costs of each action as you interpret how the scene proceeds. It could be that the results lead you into another challenge or a contest.

If you have any boosts that went unused in the challenge, feel free to keep them for the rest of this scene or whatever scene you're transitioning to, if the events of the challenge connect directly to the next scene.

Advantages in a Challenge

You can try to create an advantage during a challenge, for yourself or to help someone else out. Creating an advantage doesn't count towards completing one of the challenge goals, but fumbling the roll could create a cost or problem that negatively impacts one of the other goals. Be careful using this tactic; advantages can help complete tasks more effectively and create momentum, but trying to create them is not without risk.

The group decides that they have to work together to get out of the situation. Maica says she's going to try to find some emergency equipment—the Mechanists must have been prepared for this sort of thing, right? Stefan and Naomi try to keep the fire at bay, while Templeton tries to decipher mechanisms on the door.

Maica succeeds creating an advantage of EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT with Notice. She feels she needs a little more help, so she spends her free invoke on THERE'S A PATTERN HERE to get a +2 so that she excels instead, getting two free invokes. She gives those invokes to Stefan and Naomi to use.

They work together on Overcome actions with Finesse to push the fire back using the emergency equipment, using one of Maica's invokes to ensure success.

Templeton uses Experiment to try to open the door. He fumbles but decides to take a serious cost to succeed, because if he doesn't, they might not make it out. The door pops open and everyone runs out. Gwen says that the serious cost is that the room explodes right after they make it out, spreading the fire to the rest of the building.

CONTESTS

Whenever two or more characters have mutually exclusive goals they are attempting to resolve at the same time, they're in a **contest**. Races or other sports competitions, and public debates are all good examples of contests.

GMs, answer the following questions when you're setting up a contest:

- What are the "sides"? Is every character in the contest in it for herself, or are there groups of people opposing other groups? If you have multiple characters on a side, they roll together using the Teamwork rules.
- What environment does the contest take place in? Are there any significant or notable features of that environment you want to define as situation aspects?
- How are the participants opposing each other? Are they rolling against each other directly (like in a straight sprint race or a poker match), or are they trying to overcome something in the environment (like an obstacle course or a panel of judges)?

Now you can get started.

A contest proceeds in a series of **exchanges**. In an exchange, every participant gets to make one action roll to determine how well they do in that leg of the contest. This is basically an overcome action. If you are rolling against each other, you will be comparing your rolls to each other's. If you are rolling against an environmental factor, you will be each be rolling against a passive opposition.

Players, when you make a contest roll, compare your result to everyone else's. If you have the highest result, you win the exchange.

> If you're rolling directly against the other participants, then that means you have beat the result of everyone involved, and you win by how much it you beat the next highest opponent.
> If you're all rolling against something in the environment, it means you have the most shifts out of everyone after rolling against passive resistance. If no one succeeded in the exchange, this exchange is over.

Winning the exchange means you gain a point of **progress** (which you can just represent with a tally mark or check mark on scratch paper) and describe how you take the lead.

- If you excel and no one else does, then you get to mark two points of progress.
- If there's a tie for the highest result, no one gets any progress, and an unexpected twist occurs. This could mean several things depending on the situation—the terrain or environment shifts somehow, the parameters of the contest change, or an unanticipated variable shows up and affects all the participants. GMs, you should create a new situation aspect reflecting this change.
- The first participant to achieve three points of progress wins the contest and describes achieving their goal.

Advantages in a Contest

During any exchange, you can try an advantage action before you make your contest roll. If you're targeting another participant or someone can interfere, they get to oppose normally.

Doing this carries an additional risk—fumbling an advantage action means you forfeit your contest roll, which means there's no way you can make progress in the current exchange. If you at least tie, you get to make your contest roll normally.

Now, the characters need to get out of the building before the fire overtakes them. Gwen suggests a Contest with two sides: the characters and the fire. The players and Gwen decide that the group as a whole will have an Athletics of Fair (+2) to reflect the fact that some of them, like Naomi, have a high Athletics skill and some of them, like Templeton, have a low one.

In the first exchange, the characters excel at their Athletics roll. They get two points of progress.

In the second exchange, the fire wins, getting one point of progress.

In the third exchange, the fire wins again, getting one point of progress. This makes it two points on each side. Whomever makes the next point wins the contest.

In the fourth exchange, the fire wins again. Stefan spends a fate point to tag his aspect First In, Last Out for a bonus. Gwen explains that only makes sense if Stefan stays behind, to which he agrees. The +2 gives the success to the characters and they are at three points of progress. Stefan describes him stopping to shove each of the other characters out the door.

Now, Gwen describes this as a contest between Stefan and the fire, each at two points of progress. Stefan says since this seems like a dangerous action for him now, he asks if he can concede to escape, but not unscathed. Gwen agrees and describes the fire exploding and the shockwave knocking Stefan out the door. He lands on the ground unconscious and smoldering.

Maica says, "Help me carry him. We've got to get him to a doctor."

DISCOVERY AND INVESTIGATION

MORE ON THE DISCOVER ACTION

CHOOSING A SKILL

Almost all skills can be used in some way in discover actions. However, some naturally fit for particular situations.

Experiment vs. Notice vs. Research

The obvious trifecta of skills to use on a discover action is Experiment, Notice, and Research. Each of these skills fills a different role in discovery; understanding those roles will prevent a lot of confusion.

Experiment is the skill used for experimentation. It is an active skill that takes some time to utilize. Use Experiment when you are actively testing, checking, and re-checking. An easy trap to fall into is to use Experiment for any process of mental evaluation, but Experiment is not suitable for situations that require quick decisions, or that rely on significant amounts of digging through information.

Experiment
p. 95

Notice is your skill for things that happen quickly: perception that happens on the fly while other things are happening. What you notice is colored by your aspects and stunts, of course; someone with the aspect TRAINED PALEONTOLOGIST will notice things that a FORMER BEAT COP would not, and vice versa.

Notice
p. 100

Research revolves around hitting the books. In general, Research is a procedure that takes a long time. You will be digging through archives, comparing texts, asking experts, etc. You will use it in interlude scenes more than anywhere else. However, a gamemaster may allow you to use Research to represent the knowledge that you have already accumulated. Once again, your aspects and stunts will affect this and reflect the sort of knowledge you are assumed to have.

Research
p. 104

Other Skills

The three above are the foundation of discovery. However, other skills can be used and will have more specific areas of application. Craft and Engineering will be used for discovery on crafted items or machines, Surveying is used on the lay of the land, Survival on the elements of an environment, Medicine on medical subjects, etc. Each of these skills can be used in place of Experiment, Notice, or Research as appropriate.

ASKING QUESTIONS

As part of the Discover action, you will be asking the GM questions to tease out information. You want to make your questions count, so keep the following principles in mind.

Your question should be rooted in what your character is capable of doing. If your character is an engineering expert, asking a question that involves mechanical details of a machine makes sense. It will not make sense if their expertise is in linguistics and not in any way mechanical.

Refer to the skill you used, as well as relevant aspects or stunts, when you ask your question in order to frame the context of the question and tune the information you will get.

Explain your intent with the question. Don't assume that the GM is following your specific train of thought. You are more likely to get a useful answer if the GM knows what you are aiming for.

Don't ask questions for which there is an obvious answer. You want questions to reveal new information whenever possible.

What if I don't know what to ask?

Even the cleverest people draw a blank sometimes. So when you don't know what questions to ask, try one of the following strategies.

- Open it up to the others at the table for suggestions.
- Ask for more information on an aspect or existing detail.
- Pick a question from the suggestions under each skill description.
- Force a hint.

Forcing a Hint

Excelling on a discover action allows you to request the GM reveal an important bit of information, so if you are ever stuck, this is your out. You just have to engineer a situation where you excel. The easiest way to do this is to use Advantage actions to create situation aspects and build free invokes up until you can ensure that you excel at the action. The teamwork rules may help as well.

Uncovering Aspects

Generally speaking, we assume that most of the aspects in play are public knowledge for the players. The PCs' character sheets are sitting on the table, and probably the main and supporting NPCs are as well. That doesn't always mean the characters know about those aspects, but that's one of the reasons why the create an advantage action exists—to help you justify how a character learns about other characters.

However, GMs, we know that sometimes you're going to want to keep an NPC's aspects secret, or not reveal certain situation aspects right away, because you're trying to build tension in the story. Questions can reveal aspects as answers reveal information.

Known aspects can change as a result of the questions you ask as well. If there is an aspect on the scene of Signs of Forced Entry, for example, and questions reveal that the doors bear the marks of D'ni stone sculpting devices, change the aspect to Telltale Marks of D'ni Sculpting Devices or something similar.

You should never have to use a question to ask "Is this an aspect?"; the GM should just tell you.

PUZZLES

Puzzles are the cornerstone of all of the Myst games, and you will likely encounter them in your *Unwritten* games as well. You may stumble upon obvious puzzles like you'd find in a Myst video game, or they may be integrated into the environment as a situation that you must use cleverness to resolve.

SOLVING PUZZLES

When solving the puzzle in front of you, you and the gamemaster will be acting out the situation. You ask questions about what you see, and try different things out to see what happens. Some of the things you attempt may require actions to complete, but a lot of what you will do will just be talking back and forth with the gamemaster.

There are pitfalls to this approach, however. Sometimes you just draw blanks on a particular puzzle, or you are in a situation where your character would know what to do, but you as the player do not. That can bring the game to a screeching halt. When this happens, you have a few tools available.

Asking Questions with a Discover Action

When you need guidance, you can use the questions gained from a discover action to help you out. Ask questions that give you information you might not be able to get through role-playing. This is ideal for characters who have expertise that you do not ("My character is a trained physician, what would they think made sense when dealing with this plant?")

You can also use questions to double-check the solving process. Describe how you think something works and ask if you are correct. Or, ask if a particular detail you are looking at is relevant. Even on a tie, the gamemaster should tell you if you are 'hot or cold'.

Aim for a Hint

When you get stuck, you can aim for excelling by carefully choosing a high skill, creating situation aspects and free invokes to use, spending fate points, etc. When you engineer the situation to get that hint, ask for what you have been missing. Or ask the gamemaster to consider letting you solve the puzzle using the hint.

Change the Situation

If you just can't get past the puzzle, think about how you can change the situation to your advantage. Is there a way you can move the focus of the situation to one of your higher skills, or where you might be able to invoke relevant aspects? Also consider if there is a way for you to spend a fate point to declare a minor detail that will give you an opportunity to use your skills and aspects more effectively.

INVESTIGATIONS

The questions you ask as a part of a discover action will often be enough to uncover any information you need so you can get to more interesting encounters. But there will be situations where delving into the unknown is what is interesting. Like in the scenes of a police procedural or a Sherlock Holmes investigation, the 'action' is all about the inquiry itself. In these situations, how you discover the truth is as important as what you discover.

An **investigation** is a sequence of actions that focus on the process of discovery. As the investigation progresses, your character will discover clues and ask questions in hopes of finding out more information about the situation in front of them.

Leading to the truth is a set of clues: sign-posts lead to information, and that information leads to the truth. You can think of it like a tree: the root of the tree is the truth, and it splits off into branches that end at leaves. The characters start with the leaves of the mystery. From there they follow the branches back to the source.

The Process

An investigation consists of the following steps:

> The first look
> Action rolls
> Asking questions
> Digging deeper

"B FLAT
ON TUBA"

TRUMPET
BUSH
SOMETHING (A BUG?)
BORES HOLES IN
THE WOODY STEM
AIR BLOWS IN THOSE
HOLES + OUT THE
THICK 'BLOSSOM'

First Look

An investigation begins with a **first look**. We assume that the first question your character will have is "Because of who I am and what I know, what do I notice?" If it makes sense that a clue would be obvious to your character, the GM tells you the clue. That's it. No rolls involved. You can mention why you think that an aspect, stunt, or high skill is relevant to the investigation, but the GM won't base the first look entirely on that.

So how do you know if 'it makes sense'?
- Aspects - If you have an aspect that implies that you would know about the subject or that the clue would be apparent to you, that is justification enough.
- Skills - If you have a high enough appropriate skill, then the GM can decide that it would make sense that you would see the clue.
- Stunts - You may have a stunt that makes certain clues easier to find. Or a stunt that implies knowledge that might justify discovering a clue.

Each involved character gets a first look at the situation.

> *Using a Linking Book that they found, Naomi, Templeton and Stefan link into an abandoned D'ni structure. It looks ornate with impressive architecture, with multiple balconies around a central platform, but is old and falling apart in places. They decide it is time to investigate the area.*

> *Gwen begins with a first look. She tells Naomi that since she GREW UP ON STORIES OF D'NI, that she remembers her father telling her about radical D'ni sects that had distinctive styles of temples. The stages were raised in the middle so that they could be surrounded on all sides by the people they preached to.*

> *She tells Stefan, because of his high Surveying skill, that it seems like the floor in this room is higher than you'd expect for the ground floor of a building..*

Action rolls

After the first look, all of the characters involved declare what they are going to be doing:

- If you are looking for answers, you describe what you are doing and how. Then attempt a discover action.

⟩ If you are assisting others, you describe what you are doing toward that end. You can then attempt overcome or advantage actions to reflect that.

The actual order in which these actions are taken is flexible. If you are attempting advantage actions to give other investigators an edge, or overcome actions to remove obstacles, then you will want to do those first so those benefits are available to those performing discover actions.

Naomi rolls Research to remember what her father said about these cults. She gets one question. Templeton examines the inscriptions on the wall with Research. He gets one question as well. Stefan examines the room with Surveying and gets two questions.

Asking Questions

At the end of the action rolls, your characters will have a set of questions to ask. Each player asks their questions. Keep in mind that the questions you ask must relate to the process that you described when making the action rolls—if you were taking samples for chemical analysis, then you won't be able to ask questions about the demeanor of the frightened explorers that were found near by.

It's likely that all of the PCs will be working together on the mystery in front of them. You can as well. Questions can be asked in any order, and you should use the answers to inform what question you or another player asks next. Build off of each other's work. If anyone has hints available from excelling at a discover action, they can be spent during this time as well.

Questions continue until all the players involved run out of available questions or feel that they have uncovered enough information.

Naomi asks "What do I remember my father telling me about the people in these cults?" Gwen tells her that these cults were usually ultra-fanatical religious cults lead by charismatic figures. The leaders were the equivalent of televangelists, and they commanded unwavering loyalty from the people they recruited.

Templeton asks "What do the inscriptions indicate about the cult?" Gwen explains that the inscriptions are poems that decry the corruption and immorality of the common person in D'ni. The poems use odd phrasing though—they are stilted, like bad high school poetry.

Stefan asks if there are any features of the room that seem out of place. Gwen says that there are small parallel furrows along the floor that lead up to and under the raised stage, like something was drug across the ground. Stefan asks how old do they appear to be. Gwen tells him that the furrows look recent; definitely not something the original occupants put there.

Digging Deeper

What happens if you have used up all of your questions, but you still want to know more? You have the option of digging deeper by changing the situation.

You and the other players must do something to change the situation at hand in order to justify another round of questions. Some options are:

> Change things in the scene using an overcome or advantage action, such as setting up specialized equipment, performing extra experiments or tests, or sweet talking someone who doesn't want to talk any further.
> Take a scene to go perform research or collect relevant information and support.
> Spend a fate point to declare a relevant minor detail based off of one of your aspects.

The GM decides what would be appropriate. It should be something that requires thought, effort, or time (or a combination of the three).

Once the change has been made (and the GM is satisfied), go back to the Action Rolls step and start the process again.

The characters still have more questions to ask, so they decide to change things up a bit. Stefan decides to push the small stage to see if it moves along the furrows, which it does.

Templeton spends a fate point to declare he has a friend who has done a lot of work on D'ni poetry. He'll contact him by KI to see what he thinks of it.

Naomi checks through the notes her father left to see if there is any details in there. She attempts (and succeeds on) an overcome roll to see if she finds any details.

Gwen says that they have each done enough to justify asking more questions in another round of investigation.

Avenues of Investigation

On-the-scene investigation

The most obvious example of an investigation is where you arrive on the scene where something has happened and try to divine the details. Skills and aspects that allow on the spot observation will help you find clues on the first look. Clues in this kind of investigation will most likely be the description of details that are significant and out of the ordinary. These will usually presented as the details themselves without much context.

Advantages in Investigations

You can create advantages by doing preparation work. Setting up additional equipment and doing research ahead of time make an excellent basis for rolls and a way to bring in skills that may not have direct investigative uses into play.

Costs for success can include accidentally destroying evidence, otherwise cutting off access to other clues, or angering others involved in the situation.

Clues may or may not be aspects, but an advantage action could make one more relevant by making it a situation aspect. Reserve the aspect and it will continue to be useful, maybe in subsequent investigations.

Questioning

People may have witnessed important events or may know critical details. Exactly how that plays out depends on the questions that the characters are asking and how they are doing it. If the characters are simply asking the locals general questions, then they can just state that without needing to go into detail. Questions and answers can be done in vague terms. Clues from a first look would reveal details one could discern from the person's dress or demeanor.

Additional details will come from the usual process of questions and digging for more information. How they exactly get there will depend on the tack the characters take with the NPC. Clever role-playing should be rewarded with clearer answers and possibly the revelation of extra clues.

The ramifications of the discussion should linger with the characters. Not only are the characters digging for information, they are establishing relationships with others. Notably dramatic and entertaining interactions should lead to the questioned character becoming a returning character. If the PCs are nice to a downtrodden native of an Age, that native may be more likely to help them later on. However, if they subject someone to an intense interrogation, they may have earned an enemy.

This is also an excellent excuse for character development. How the PCs act and react in these discussions will go a long way toward rounding out their characters. These should also be kept in mind during interludes when looking at a character's aspects. A character's actions might prompt the player to adjust an aspect to reflect allies or enemies made, for example.

Advantages in Questioning

The characters involved can use advantage rolls to butter up, outwit, or intimidate others and use invocations to get people to talk. Character aspects on all sides of the interaction are ripe for invocation. Compels are also appropriate, more so in these cases than in other types of investigation.

Previous clues can be used as leverage in trying to get someone to talk. You can use an Advantage action to bring up the clue successfully and use fate points and free invokes to press your advantage. GMs, roll with the invocations and be creative on fumbles and costs.

Contests in Questioning

It's possible that you might end up trying to get information out of an unwilling subject in a more confrontational way. This could be an intense bit of back and forth, or it could be a full on interrogation. One way to model this is through a contest between you and the other person instead of an investigation. Run the questioning as various exchanges based off of social skills. You should be describing what you are doing and including bits of dialog with each exchange.

If you win the contest, then you get the information out of them. You might be able to push the contest a few more rounds in order to get more advantage actions in, if the GM is willing. If you lose the contest, then you aren't getting any information out of them; they've won the battle of wits. Even if the subject is confined and can't get away, you can't go back and press the issue. You'll have to change the situation enough (get a new bit of information, find some different leverage, wait a chunk of time) before you can go back in.

Research

In many cases, a character will need to hit the books for answers. Authoritative sources, research materials, and expert commentaries are a wellspring of useful information. This is especially the case when dealing with scientific, anthropological, or archaeological mysteries. Characters with access to appropriate libraries, databases, etc. can ask questions.

Research will rarely happen 'on-stage' as it is a slow and often boring process, narratively speaking. Characters who want to do research should do it during interludes or opt out of scenes while other characters do on-stage activities.

Advantages in Research

There is not much maneuvering to research so it is not an interactive process. Nor is it one with much drama and of itself. Advantages used in research will most likely reflect helpful situations set up beforehand (consequences or situation aspects reserved in previous scenes) or character aspects and stunts.

DEDUCTIONS

There are mysteries that you will encounter that require you to come together and consider the facts, one that are key to the direction of your story. **Deduction** is required.

Where an investigation is a method for you to uncover what the gamemaster has hidden, a deduction is a chance for you to shape the story. You and the other characters gather together, consider the facts around an unknown for several rounds and devise what is the truth of the situation.

Whenever there is an open question on the table, the gamemaster can decide to put you in the driver's seat.

THE PROCESS OF DEDUCTION

  ⟩ Frame the deduction
  ⟩ Establish the participants
  ⟩ Initial round of consideration
  ⟩ Next round of consideration
  ⟩ Final round of consideration
  ⟩ Reveal the truth

Frame the deduction

To start off, you need to frame the deduction by clarifying what the question is, and then deciding who will be involved in the deduction.

The question itself should be stated simply, such as "How does this strange contraption work?" or "What is the explanation for all of the weird phenomena we have been experiencing?" Write it down.

Now, each character who wants to be involved in the deduction presents a reason they can contribute to the deduction. Usually this will be an aspect, but anything that makes sense will do.

After a few more questions, Gwen decides to give the characters an option of a Deduction. They agree and come up with the question "What is going on with this temple?" Naomi presents her aspect GREW UP ON STORIES OF D'NI as why she is involved. Templeton cites his high concept of COCKY LINGUISTIC PRODIGY, and Stefan points to a high Surveying skill.

First round of consideration

Next, everyone involved choose a skill and rolls against a passive opposition of Good (+3). The character that succeeds at the roll by the highest amount has won the round.

First, record progress on the deduction:
- ⟩ If the winner excelled on their roll, then record two points of progress.
- ⟩ If the winner succeeded, then record one point of progress.
- ⟩ If the winner tied, record one point of progress and the group pays a minor cost.

Now, the winner declares a situation aspect as a fact. This fact is now absolutely true. It must derive from the skill the winner used, relate clearly to the situation, and must be stated as an objective piece of information. It may or may not be something that has been previously established in the game so far.

The fact should not be a potential answer to the question, however. Rather, it's one of the steps toward the answer.

If two or more characters tie for the highest total, each gets to establish a fact, but only one records points of progress.

If no one wins the first roll, no facts are established and no progress made.

Naomi rolls Research with a final result of Good (+3). Templeton rolls Research and gets a result of Great (+4). Stefan gets a result of Fair (+1) with Surveying, so he doesn't succeed at all. Templeton wins the round and the group gets one point of progress.

Templeton declares a fact: **"The inscriptions on the walls were not written by native D'ni speakers."**

Next round of consideration

The discussion on the question continues and proceeds much like the previous step did: everyone picks a skill (either the same skill or a new one as makes sense) and makes a roll.

This time, the passive opposition of this roll is the result that won the previous round. So if the previous winner rolled a Great (+4) for their win, then that is the passive opposition this round. If no one won the first round, then the opposition remains Good (+3).

The winner of this round records progress and establishes a fact just like in the previous round.

Since Templeton won last with a Great (+4), that is the opposition for this round. This time, Stefan wins the round by tying Great (+4) with his Surveying skill. The group gets a point of progress and has to pay a minor cost.

Stefan declares a fact: **"This building was something else before it was a temple."**

Final round of consideration

This last round runs like the previous one, now with the passive opposition as the winning result from the previous round, or Good (+3) if there was none.

Reveal the truth

If the characters have made at least three points of progress, then someone has divined the truth. All who are involved pick a skill and roll one last time. Whomever rolls the highest (no opposition) wins.

The winner devises an answer to the question that takes into account all of the established facts. The answer is now true and becomes an aspect. The three established fact aspects are subsumed into this new one.

The new aspect gets a number of free invokes depending on the progress made during the deduction:

3 points	no free invokes
4 - 5 points	one free invoke
6 points	two free invokes

If the characters have not made at least three points of progress, then the question remains unanswered. Any established facts cease to be aspects.

No matter what happens (a successfully answered question or not), the established facts remain true—they are just no longer aspects.

On the last roll, Templeton gets the highest value. He now gets to declare the truth.

He says that the native people in this Age were used as servants of a D'ni cult during the Fall, but were left alone when all the D'ni died. They took this as a sign of the destruction and that they would be the new faithful. So they rebuilt this D'ni mining station as a temple, and built their religion around that. That's why the poems on the wall are so stilted - they wrote them as non-native speakers. They have been worshiping and waiting since the Fall for their chance to 'build anew'.

He declares the truth aspect DEVOUT END OF THE WORLD BOOKWORLDER CULT. As they only got three points of progress, they get no free invokes on it.

Dramatic Time and Milestones

Sessions

A traditional way to measure game time is in **sessions**. When everyone sits down to play, that's the beginning of a session. The session ends when you and your friends pack it up for the night and go home. For most people, a session is about 2 to 4 hours, but there is no theoretical limit.

Sessions do not necessarily reflect anything in the dramatic pacing of the story. However, it is a useful concept to use for pacing both player time and game time. At the end or the beginning of a session is a natural time for an interlude, either for wrapping up what has happened or preparing for the next round of the game.

At the Beginning of a Session

- Recap what happened the last session.
- Refill all of the characters' fate points up to their maximum refresh. If they have more than their refresh, they keep the extra fate points.
- Remove any minor or moderate consequences marked as recovering.

At the End of a Session

- Go around the table and ask each player "As of right now, what is your character most interested in finding out?"
- Each character gets a minor milestone.

CHAPTERS

A **chapter** is usually 3 to 4 sessions and represents the shape of the story. Some plot point is resolved or significantly transformed in a chapter. Most of the time, a chapter will definitively resolve some kind of problem or dilemma presented by the GM, or wrap up a storyline. You can look at this like an episode of a television show.

AT THE BEGINNING OF A CHAPTER

When you start a new chapter, do the following:
- Each player explains what their character has been up to since the last chapter.
- Reset each character's fate points to their refresh (extra fate points are lost).
- Remove any consequences marked as recovering.

AT THE END OF A CHAPTER

When you end a chapter:
- Each character gets a significant milestone.

STORY ARCS

A **story arc** is a long-term story made up of several chapters, usually between two and four. An arc typically culminates in an event that brings great change to the game world, building up from the resolution of the chapters. You can look at an arc like a season of a television show, where individual episodes lead to a tumultuous climax. You're not always guaranteed to have a recognizable arc, just like not all TV shows have a plot line that carries through the whole season—it's possible to bounce from situation to situation without having a defined plot structure.

This is the place where characters really evolve and where the directions of their stories can change. The trials of yesterday simply aren't sufficient to challenge these characters anymore, and the threats of tomorrow will need to be more adept, organized, and determined to stand against them in the future.

AT THE END OF AN ARC

When you end an arc, do the following:
- Each character gets a major milestone.

Milestones on the Journey

A **milestone** is a moment during the game where you have the chance to change or advance your character. They are called milestones because they usually happen at significant "break points" in the action of a game—the end of a session, the end of a chapter, and the end of a story arc, respectively.

Usually, those break points immediately follow some significant event in the story that justifies your character changing in response to events. You might reveal a significant plot detail or have a cliffhanger at the end of a session. You might resolve a plotline at the end of a chapter. You might resolve a major storyline that shakes up the campaign world at the end of an arc.

Obviously, things won't always line up that nicely, so GMs, you have some discretion in deciding when a certain level of milestone occurs. If it seems satisfying to give out a milestone in the middle of a session, go ahead, but stick to the guidelines here to keep from handing out too many advancement opportunities too often.

Milestones come in three levels of importance: minor, significant, and major.

Minor Milestone

Minor milestones usually occur at the end of a session of play, or when one piece of a story has been resolved. These kinds of milestones are more about changing your character rather than character growth, about adjusting in response to whatever's going on in the story if you need to. Sometimes it won't really make sense to take advantage of a minor milestone, but you always have the opportunity if you should need to.

In a minor milestone, each player can choose one of the following:
▷ Switch the rank value of any two skills.
▷ Replace an Adequate (+1) skill with a new skill.
▷ Swap out one stunt for another stunt.
▷ Rename a journey aspect.

This is a good way to make slight character adjustments, if it seems like something on your character isn't quite right—you don't end up using that stunt as often as you thought, or you resolved a journey aspect you had and thus it's no longer appropriate, or any of those changes that keep your character consistent with the events of play.

In fact, you should almost always be able to justify the change you're making in terms of the game's story. GMs, you're the final arbiter on this, but don't be so much of a stickler that you sacrifice a player's fun for consistency.

> After the first session, Todd looks at Templeton's journey aspects. One of his aspects is IT'S THEIR FAULT IF THEY CAN'T TAKE A JOKE, but Todd doesn't think that really fits. While Templeton likes making pointed comments at people, he isn't malicious about it; he just thinks he is hilarious. Todd changes that aspect to ENTIRELY TOO ENTERTAINED WITH MYSELF. He thinks that fits Templeton better.
>
> Naomi discovered her father's old KI with special functions and access. She thinks this is a great item for Naomi to have, so she trades out one of her stunts for a gadget resource to reflect the KI.

SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE

Significant milestones usually occur at the end of a chapter or the conclusion of a big plot event (when in doubt, at the end of every two or three sessions).

Unlike minor milestones, which are primarily about change, significant milestones are about learning new things—dealing with problems and challenges has made your character generally more capable at what they do.

During a significant milestone, a player can do everything that they could do during a minor one. In addition, each player can:

> ...gain one additional skill point, which you can spend to buy a new skill at Adequate (+1) or increase an existing skill by one rank.
> ...spend a refresh for a new stunt (you can never reduce your refresh to zero)
> ...attempt a journey roll (see below).

Balancing your skill set

During character creation, you organized your skills into a pyramid. You don't have to stick to that for character advancement.

However, there's still a limitation you have to deal with: skill columns. This means you can't have more skills at a certain rank than you have at the rank below it. So if you have three Good (+3) skill, you must have at least three Adequate (+1) skills and at least three Fair (+2) skills to support them.

The pyramid from character creation follows this rule already, but when you're adding skills, you need to make sure you don't violate this limitation. It's easy to forget that if you use a skill point to upgrade one of your own skills, you might suddenly not have enough skills to "support" it at the new rank.

So, let's say you have one Good (+3), two Fair (+2), and three Adequate (+1) skills.

Great (+4)			
Good (+3) Survival			
Fair (+2) Will	Notice		
Adequate (+1) Research	Craft	Stealth	

After a chapter, you want to upgrade a Fair (+2) skill to Good (+3). That'd give you two Good (+3), one Fair (+2), and three Adequate (+1).

That doesn't work. You're now missing the second Fair skill you'd need to be square with the rules.

Great (+4)			
Good (+3) Survival	Notice		
Fair (+2) Will			
Adequate (+1) Research	Craft	Stealth	

When this happens, you have one of two options. You can buy a new skill at the lowest possible rank—in this case, Adequate (+1)—and then upgrade it in subsequent chapters until you're in a position to bump the skill you want to the appropriate level. Or you can "bank" the skill point, not spend it now, and wait until you've accumulated enough to buy a skill at whatever rank you need to support the move.

So in the case above, you could buy an Adequate (+1) skill, promote one of your Average skills to a Fair (+2), then bump the original skill up to Good (+3). That would take three significant or major milestones to do. Or, you could wait, bank up three skill points, buy a new skill at Fair (+2), then bump the original skill up to Good (+3). It just depends on whether you want to put new stuff on your sheet or not in the interim.

Journey Rolls

Characters are often in the middle of all sorts of projects that they do in their spare time. This is where big things are done: scientific discoveries made or edifices built. *Unwritten* assumes that characters are in the midst of various projects. The actual projects themselves rarely intrude on the on-stage story until they are complete.

The player should look to their character's history and actions to inform this process. Aspects should especially be looked at as a source for things they might accomplish. However, this shouldn't be a straitjacket, merely a guideline. As long as the player can reasonably rationalize their choice, that should be close enough.

Journey rolls reflect the fruits of the character's labor. A successful roll will have the intended effects, while a fumble may result in some particularly sour fruits. The effects will vary depending on what character is attempting to accomplish.

Explore

A character may go back to someplace they have been, or that is otherwise available to them, and explore. Through exploration, a character can reveal details of the area, modify existing details, or even declare that certain details exist.

Because exploration can be such a detailed and laborious process, doing that in the middle of active play can end up being awkward. This is especially the case when the process would take a long time. However, journey rolls are perfect for such efforts.

Gather Information

The primary activity in exploring is to gather information about the place in question. Run the journey roll as a discover action. Questions and answers from such an invoke should be wider in scope than would happen in a scene. The character has spent a lot more time and effort, so they should be able to ask more complex questions and get more thorough answers.

Declare a Detail

There is always a lot unsaid about any location, and players can fill in these unknowns. A journey roll spent on exploration gives the player a chance to add to the background. The player may add something that fills in one of the blanks, or expands on an existing detail or aspect.
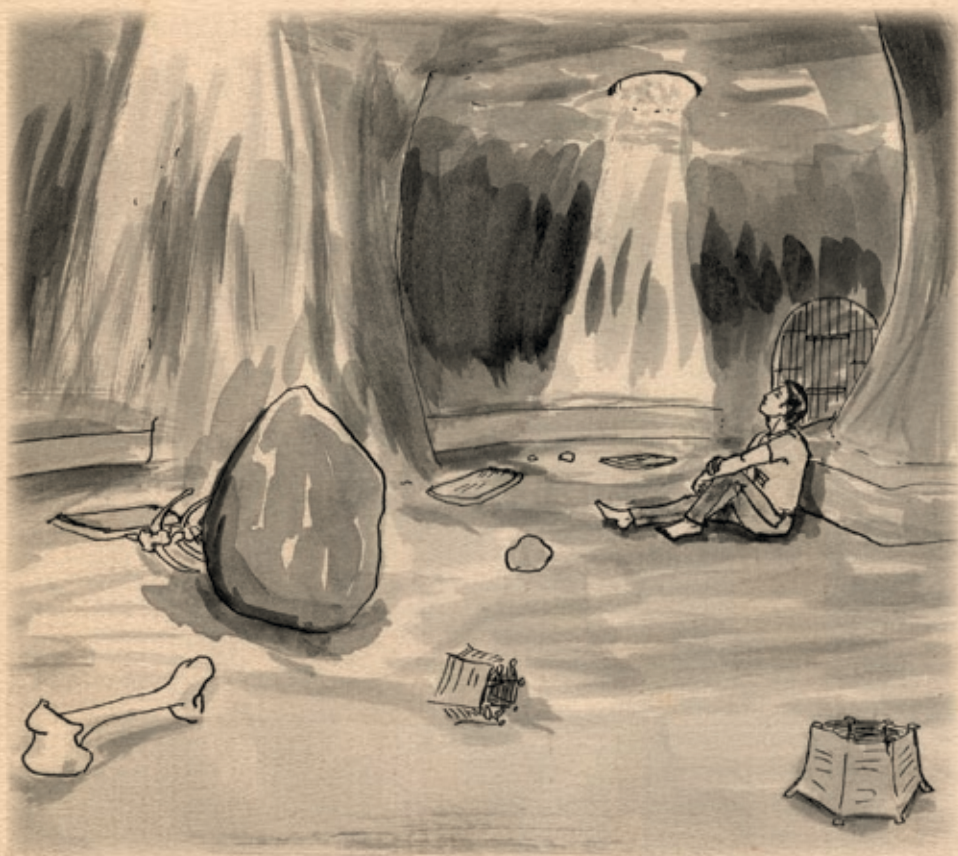
Usually, declaring a detail in this way is handled similar to an advantage action:

- Fumble - The detail or aspect is not created, or one is created that is definitely not what the character wanted. The player has success at a serious cost as an option; this choice should become a major plot point in the game.
- Tie - The detail is created or expanded, but with some minor unexpected quirks or differences. The GM should devise something sufficiently annoying to be noticeable but not severe.
- Succeed - The detail or aspect is created as the player described, or an existing aspect is changed to fit.
- Excel - The detail or aspect is created as the player described, or an existing aspect is changed to fit. In addition, the player gets situation aspect for use in the next chapter. The aspect should reflect something they learned while 'discovering' the declared detail.

02 12 So hot here - can't find a way forward. Door is store, hinges are hidden, no lock mechanism that we can find.
Beautiful workmanship, but I'm sick of the sight of it

Need air conditioning.
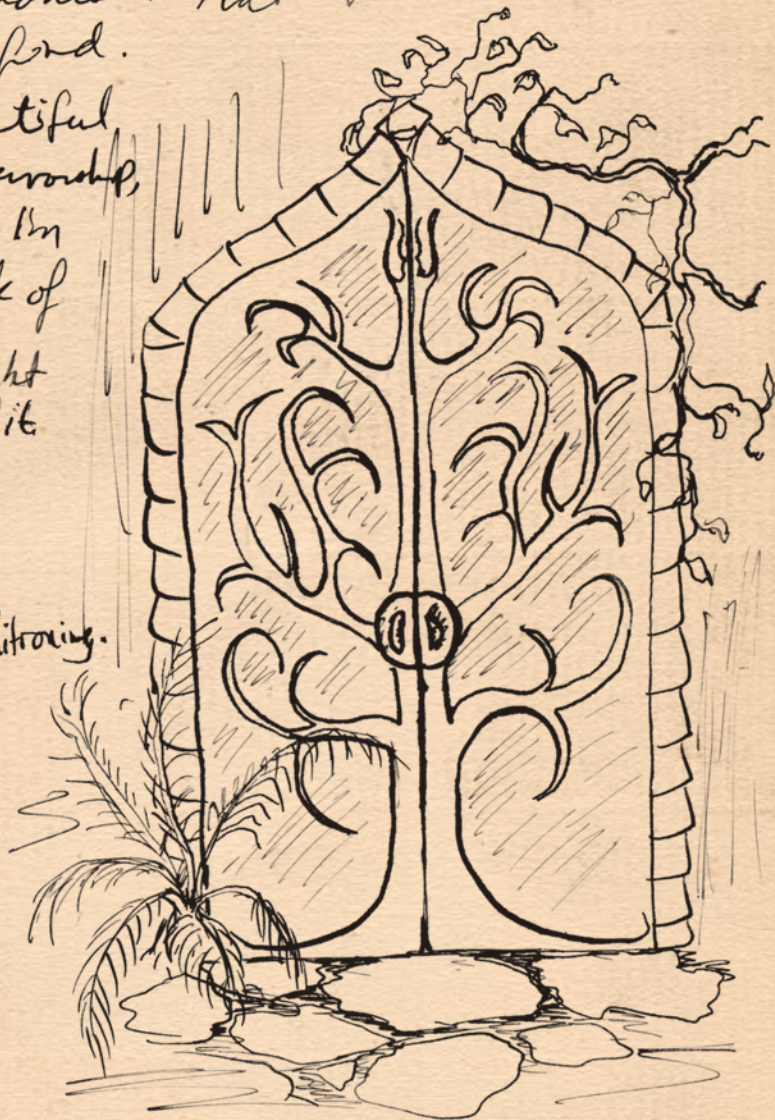
— reference to Great Tree, perhaps?

Naomi goes back to the Age of Er'cana to take a little look around. She knows that there are factories in Er'cana that processed the local plants into various foodstuffs. Nadine thinks it would be cool if some of that processed food turns out to be this incredibly nutritious food source, one where you could eat a few bites and be set for the whole day.

She rolls to explore and add the detail for her journey roll. She fumbles, but she decides that she'll succeed at a cost because she really likes the idea.

Gwen smiles and says the food is there and it works as Nadine described. But, she adds, it turns out that Naomi is incredibly allergic to the contents of the processed food. While she is exploring, her throat swells up immediately, she becomes very dizzy and she drops unconscious. At the beginning of the next session, the other characters will find that Naomi is mysteriously missing.

Practicing the Art

Writing is a long and complicated process, one that can only be done using journey rolls. See the Writing Systems section of the Art chapter for exactly how that is done.

Creating a Resource

A player can attempt to create the resource using a journey roll. This is in addition to the regular stunt gain in a significant milestone—a resource can be created with a successful journey roll and a player can gain another stunt (including another resource) in the same significant milestone.

The roll is run as an overcome action. Character and campaign aspects, consequences, as well as reserved situation aspects, can be invoked to help on this roll.

If the milestone is happening at the end of a chapter, fate points spent are still spent at of the beginning of the first scene of the next chapter.

Here are the outcomes:
- Fumble - The resource is not created.
- Tie - The resource needs just a little bit more: possibly special materials, equipment, or knowledge. Maybe the character needs to garner the help or approval of particular people. The details depend

on the project and the game, but it has to be something that requires effort. (Think of it as a side quest.) Once that requirement is met, the resource goes into effect immediately, even during regular play

- ⟩ Succeed - The resource is created as expected.
- ⟩ Excel - The player has access to an appropriate situation aspect for use at the beginning of the next chapter (no free invokes are granted, however).

In his spare time, Stefan has been fiddling with some devices he found in a Guild of Stone-Masons' storehouse. He's been trying to get some of the stone sculpting tools working. As a journey roll, he attempts an Engineering roll to fix up a device that allows him to open up a hole in solid stone over the space of a scene.

Samuel ties on the journey roll. Gwen decides that the device works, but that the power modules run out the first time he tests it. Stefan will need to find a suitable replacement power source for them to work. Once he does, the tool becomes a Gadget resource for him.

Complete a Project

Completing a project is an umbrella option for endeavors that would take a good deal of time and effort but, in the interest of drama, happen off-stage. If the GM feels that there should be an effort behind something the character was attempting and that failure has interesting dramatic implications, they can fall back on this mechanism.

- ⟩ Fumble - It didn't work at all. The player may choose success at a serious cost. The cost should become a continuing thorn in the character's side.
- ⟩ Tie - The project is a success... sort of. It is basically what you wanted, but there should be unwanted quirks or unexpected consequences. The GM should devise something sufficiently annoying to be noticeable but not severe.
- ⟩ Succeed - The project was completed just as the player had hoped.
- ⟩ Excel - The project exceeded expectations. The character should get an extra benefit out of the project. The result is particularly good quality, or useful in some additional way. Alternatively, the player can get an appropriate situation aspect in reserve for use in the next chapter.

Being particularly community-minded, Maica has been trying to organize a community service group in the cavern that focuses on making living space available and safe for people who want to 'settle' in D'ni (given that EVERYONE KNOWS MAICA, she's in a good position to get something like this going).

Maria decides she wants it to start up and uses her journey roll for it. She succeeds in her roll. The effort gets a bit of a life of its own and is now part of the setting for the game.

MAJOR MILESTONE

A **major milestone** should only occur when something happens in the campaign that shakes it up a lot—the end of a story arc (or around three chapters) or any other large-scale change that reverberates around your game world.

On a major milestone, each player performs all of the actions that happen in a significant milestone. In addition, each player can:

▷ ...rename their character's High Concept, if they want.

▷ ...increase your refresh by one.

▷ ...get the benefits of a journey roll as if they succeeded at the roll (this is in addition to the roll they get from the significant milestone).

A major milestone is a pretty big deal. It should signal that lots of things in the world of your game have changed. Some of that will probably be reflected in world itself, but given the number of chances the PCs have had to revise their aspects in response to the story, you could be looking at a group with a much different set of priorities and concerns than they had when they started.

Over the course of several chapters, Maica has stepped up to organize explorers and direct efforts around the cavern. When Maica talks, people listen.

At her major milestone, Maria decides that Maica settles into the role of a mover and shaker in D'ni. She has a lot more sway now, but it means she'll also get a lot more resistance from contrary factions, like the New Seed.

To show this, she changes Maica's high concept from FIXTURE OF THE RESTORATION to A WELL-RESPECTED LEADER IN THE CAVERN.

The Great Art of Writing

Linking Theory

As a number of surface scientists have pointed out, quantum mechanics does not make sense without an ever expanding set of parallel universes. Every subatomic event splits off into multiple parallel universes based off of the possible outcomes of that event, and there is an infinite number of parallel universe in infinite variety.

The D'ni envisioned this quantum universe as the Great Tree of Possibilities, and Ages as the leaves of this tree. The Art allows travel between these leaves by creating books which connect to those realities.

The books use a special set of D'ni characters called the *gahro-hevtee* (literally 'great words'). Each *gahro-hev* represents a specific feature of an Age. These can be everything from composition of soil or specifics of weather patterns to orbital periods or axial tilts to details regarding the geography of a particular area. In a Descriptive Book, all of these symbols together create a detailed description of a universe, the one that the Book connects to.

Obviously, a universe is a far more complex thing than can be described in any Book. A Book can only describe a small portion of an entire universe, and for every Book, there are an infinite number of universes that it might contain. Some of these Ages are infinitesimally different from one another while others may be different in every respect except for the specifics of that description. The first time someone uses the Descriptive Book, one of those possibilities is randomly set as the actual link.

This means that much of what a Writer finds in an Age they Write will be unexpected. Only the things they actually described are 'set', and even then a Writer cannot be sure. These details can change over time after the first link is made. Additionally, what may fit the description the Writer actually wrote may not be what they expected. For example, if a Writer describes a black rock, that rock could be composed of many different things, or it may only be black on the outside. This is why gahro-hevtee are so specific in what they describe. But even the best Writer can misunderstand the nuances of a gahro-hev, or think they are describing something more specific than they actually are.

Also, because of the number of potential universes that fit any description with the rest 'filled in' randomly during the first link, Descriptive Books are effectively unique. Even if a second Descriptive Book were copied from the first symbol-by-symbol, they would connect to different (though possibly very similar) Ages.

Books

The Art requires books constructed in a specific way, one that the D'ni perfected over thousands of years. The D'ni had two separate major Guilds devoted to this: the Guild of Books and the Guild of Ink-Makers. The Book needs to be made of specific materials. The paper has to be made in the right way and the pages bound together properly. Additionally, the ink has to be made to exacting standards. D'ni ink was derived from a type of beetle that they cultivated (thus the beetle is a common D'ni symbol for ink).

The Books themselves can be any size; they simply have to have enough space to contain all of the information required. Covers for the Books the D'ni crafted were always hardbound, though the appearance of the covers varied quite a bit.

The first page of a Book has an image called a Linking panel that takes up about a third of the page. The Linking panel is an actual visual window to the place the Book links to. It is a live image, and changes in real time. The rest of the Book is filled with the symbols that define the Age.
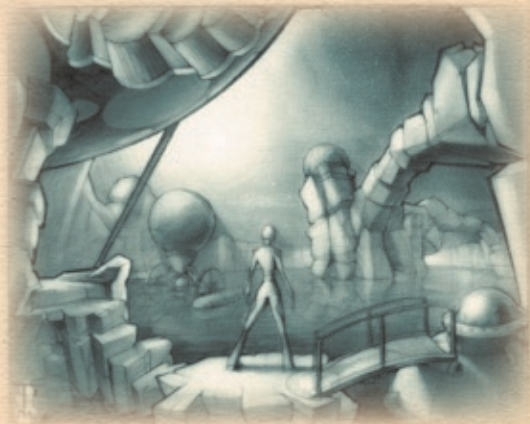
D'ni Books are durable. While they can be torn or damaged (burning is a favorite method), they resist the ravages of time exceptionally well. There is evidence of D'ni Books lasting for millennia if properly stored.

D'ni books come in two flavors: Descriptive Books and Linking Books.

Descriptive Books are thick tomes that actually define the link to the Age. Each Age is defined by a single Descriptive Book. When a Writer is said to be 'Writing an Age', they are writing its Descriptive Book. It links to a specific place in the Age as described in the Book.

Linking Books are much smaller books that link to a specific place in an Age. Linking Books are written while in an Age and link to the place the Linking Book was written. An Age can have any number of Linking Books tied to it, potentially connecting to anywhere in the Age. There is some unknown connection between the Descriptive Book for an Age and the Linking Books that link to the same Age. If a Descriptive Book is destroyed, all Linking Books to that Age cease working, no matter where in the Age they link to, who made them, etc. That Age becomes completely inaccessible.

WRITING DESCRIPTIVE BOOKS

Technically speaking, a Descriptive Book is viable as soon as the ink has dried on the first symbols written down on its pages. However, such links could conceivably lead to anywhere that meets such a general description. To link to an Age that is of any use requires quite a bit of time and effort to get right.

While training in Writing includes how to properly write the gahro-hevtee (making it essentially a specialized training in calligraphy), the core of the Art is understanding the concepts that the symbols represent and how they interact. Writers must be able to understand the concepts themselves and be able to distill that down into something that can be effectively described. A Writer has to develop a wide knowledge of several sciences. Those with specialized knowledge in a particular science tend to write toward their strengths, putting more detail into those facets of an Age and leaving the others vague and more open to chance.

The act of Writing is a long and complicated process based around building toward a Writer's final design through an ever expanding sequence of details about the prospective Age. It is one that requires the ability to recognize conflicts and contradictions in one's Writing. Resolving these contradictions requires adding more details to the Age's description so that the contradictions now make sense. This is a separate discipline from simply

describing an Age, and is much like solving a puzzle or fixing a computer program. A significant amount of a Guildsman's training in the D'ni Guild of Writers was focused on avoiding these contradictions, double-checking the Age's description, and determining effective solutions before anyone sets foot into the Age.

Modifying Descriptive Books

The D'ni had a rule that a Descriptive Book must be complete before using it the first time, and that after the first link was made, no more changes would be made to the Book. That's because changing a Descriptive Book after that first Link is dangerous and just plain hard to do.

Once that first link has been made, the Age has been observed and details are set. To borrow a term from quantum mechanics, the state has 'collapsed' at that point. The Book points to a particular universe. On top of that, all of the natural forces described in the Book begin acting, interacting and affecting the rest of the Age. It's a moving target.

Small changes to a Descriptive Book that do not contradict what has been observed can 'modify' the Age. In essence, the Writer is filling in details that still exist in vague quantum uncertainty. These changes can have unexpected consequences, however, since the Writer no longer knows the exact state of many of the details like they might have during the initial authoring of the Age. Innocuous changes have been known to throw an Age into massive geological (or even cosmological) upheaval.

Larger changes, or changes that contradict what has been observed after the first link, have more serious ramifications. At best, the connection that the Descriptive Book defines will change to point to a new Age where those changes are true. All of the Linking Books to the original Age change with the Descriptive Book as well, rendering the old Age inaccessible and

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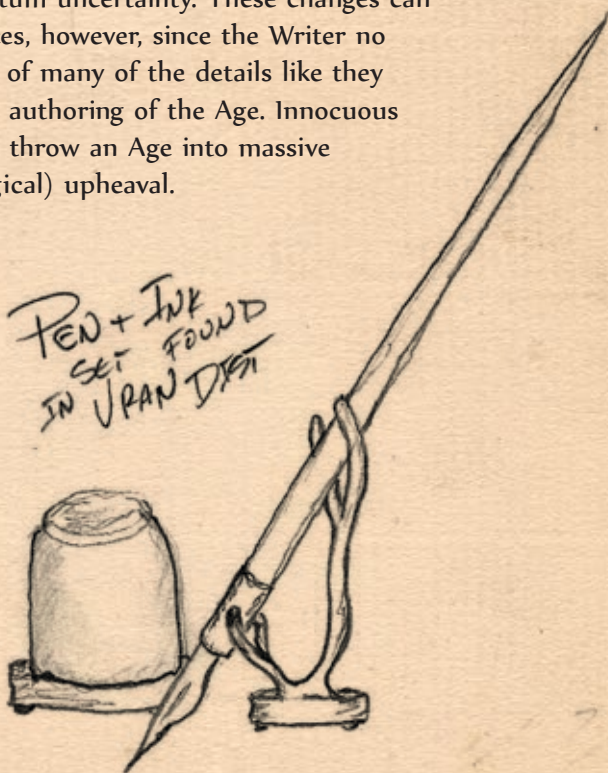
stranding anyone in the Age. At worst, the link may change to some Age that is bizarre and completely unviable as an actual universe. Or the Book will just cease to work. There's no way to be certain.

Most successful post-link changes are small ones to natural features. It *is* possible to write in artificial objects into an Age, but only a few writers have ever managed to do that successfully. The effects are unpredictable and often destructive.

WRITING LINKING BOOKS

Writing a Linking Book to an Age is a much simpler task. To create a Linking Book, the Writer must be at the location the book will link to and then write a standardized type of book.

THE ART OF THE ART

Writing does require a lot of understanding of the sciences of how worlds work. However, it is as much an art as it is a science. There are nuances that you can't explain in purely empirical terms. Also, there is a certain poetry to a well-designed Age. A writer can describe an Age around aesthetic principles and express as much depth in an Age as a could a painter or sculptor. Talented Writers can work artistic themes and moods into the fabric of an Age; there is a poetry to Art. Thus the theme aspect of an Age may express that metaphor instead of any particular physical facet.

GMs, an Age with a story to tell or a feeling to embody is a powerful tool, one that is uniquely "Myst"; use it often.

Once the Linking Book is written, it will always lead to the same place. Large scale movement of the frame of reference (like rotation of a planet and movement around a star) seems to be automatically taken into account. Other changes to the environment are not, however. For example, if the Book was written on the roof of a building and the building was demolished, travelers will link in mid-air and fall.

Because of the need to describe the area around a linking point, it's difficult to write a usable Linking Book in something that is moving, like a boat or a train. Secure D'ni installations often took advantage of this by making rotating buildings.

Linking

Linking is easy. All someone has to do is open a Book (Linking or Descriptive), place their hand on the Linking panel, and they are teleported to the location the book points to (known as the Linking point). Travel is instantaneous. The person disappears with a distinctive wa-wa sound, leaving the Linking Book behind. To the person linking, the old location fades out and then the new one fades in.

The traveler brings with them whatever they are carrying: clothes, items, etc. This includes creatures and other people. The rule of thumb is that if something would come with you when taking a step, it will come with you when Linking. Any skin contact on the Linking panel is enough, though things like very thin gloves do not seem to prevent a link.

A link requires a living creature to activate it. Inorganic or dead matter does not trigger a link, though even a few living cells on a creature can suffice for transporting the whole creature (corpses have been linked with a book immediately after death before all of the cells expired). If someone places another's hand onto the Linking panel, that other person will link without the first.

Matter on the other end of the link at the linking point is moved out of the way when linking in; there is no worry about linking into solid objects. The exact linking point is slightly variable, so people who quickly link through the same Book one after the other are likely to end up offset from one another.

As mentioned above, the Book used to link is left behind. If the traveler was holding the Book they used, it simply falls from where it was. A traveler can carry other Linking Books (and Descriptive Books) with them when linking—as much as they can carry.

The Age of D'ni

The great Writer Ri'neref wrote the Descriptive Book for D'ni, also known as our home universe. Explorers from the surface rarely think of Earth as an Age, but it is, and all the same rules apply. That means that there is an intact Descriptive Book for our Age somewhere.

Getting access to that Book could have interesting implications. A Writer could add features into an Age, from local changes ("Who knew there was a massive vein of gold right under my house?") to the truly cosmic in scale. Also, if that Book was destroyed, D'ni and the rest of the earth would be cut off from the Great Tree. People out in the Ages would never be able to get home.

Linking Books do not function in the Age they connect to. In order to use the Book, it has to be taken to a different Age. So if you want to link from one side of the planet to another (or even across the room), you have to link to another Age with one Book and then use another Book to link to the new location.

Ages

An Age is a complete universe, infinite in scope and size, just like our own. In fact, our universe is just one Age among an endless number. Every Descriptive Book links to a distinct universe that is completely set apart from the others except through the use of the Art.

While the Art is powerful, it is limited by the Writer's ability to describe. It's impossible for a Descriptive Book to encompass all but the most basic principles on a planetary scale, much less a cosmic one. When Writers describe an Age, their focus is often on a specific area. Beyond a few broad strokes of the brush, this is the only thing that is actually written into the book. (Incidentally, this is why so many Ages are on islands: since they are isolated, they are easier to describe as a whole unit.)

For this reason, when people talk about an Age, they are most often talking about what is in the text of the Descriptive Book. The rest of the universe just isn't relevant. It's not uncommon to erroneously refer to different parts of the same universe as different Ages because they are significantly different environments that can only be gotten to via a Linking Book.

For *Unwritten*, this means that an Age is a place that has been accessed via the Art in some way. An Age's aspects model the Writer's description more than they describe the universe as a whole. Broad aspects will describe tendencies across the Age and universe, leaving the GM to fill in the details. Specific aspects will be about particular places or facets of the Age. The GM gets to fill in the rest of the universe as needed. Players, you should make sure that you discuss with the GM where and how various aspects apply to an Age your character Writes or explores.

Physics and the Art

Ages in general adhere to physics as we understand it, though sometimes the situations in an Age reside on the limits of probability. While it is astronomically unlikely that natural forces would, say, shape the rivers of a planet into perfect spirals, it is still *possible*. Traditional Writers are likely to

RELTO, THE HIGH PLACE

Perched on top of a mountain peak, surrounded by a sea of clouds, sits a small hut. This is Relto, the high place. Relto is Yeesha's gift to those who follow her. It is her masterpiece. Every person who begins Yeesha's journey finds a Book waiting for them that links to their personal instance of Relto. Yeesha has told explorers that Relto "will change. It will be your soul, showing you what you are." Inside the hut is a mechanical bookshelf that contains Linking Books with an automated mechanism that opens them, and allows the owner to secure the books in it from tampering. Books appear in the shelf through some mysterious facet of Yeesha's control over the Ages she Writes.

The Linking Book to Relto breaks many of the rules of Linking. Each Relto Book leads to a distinct instance of Relto. Unlike other Linking Books, when someone uses their Relto Book, the Book travels with them. The only way to get into someone else's Relto is for them to physically present the Book to a person. It's the primary way that some explorers access D'ni; they travel to Relto and then to D'ni using one of the Books in their shelf.

Since Relto Books are also smaller than the typical Linking Book, explorers have devised a way to wear their Relto Book on their hip for easy access. It is used as an emergency escape system by 'panic linking' away from danger. Because of this, explorers tend to be more daring than one might expect. Jumping off of cliffs and panic linking before hitting the ground is especially popular.
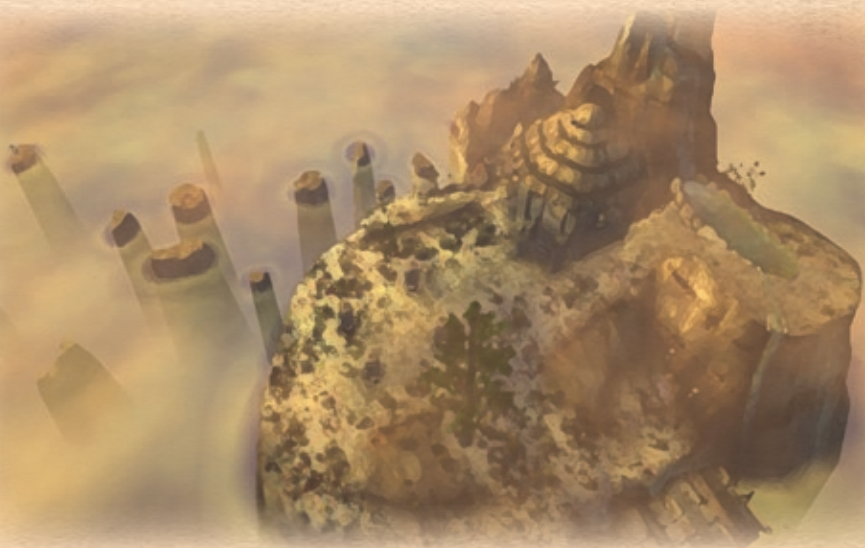
Write Ages that are more mundane and focused on utility. The more avant-garde Writer will play on the extreme ends of the spectrum for spectacular effect.

The key is that Ages match the description in their Descriptive Books at the time of the first link. Barring some critical error in the writing of the book itself, the Age will be in that exact state. The Writer has far less control over how that state of affairs came to be and almost none on how those forces will continue to shape the nature of the Age in the future. Skilled Writers will attempt to compensate for this as much as possible, describing the mechanics at work in detail with an eye toward direct and indirect results. More conventional approaches to Age design may not lead to wildly surreal landscapes, but they are less likely to have bizarre and unexpected side-effects.

From the narrative level, the Art firmly occupies the space of fantastical technology. Self-consistent and plausible rationales are sufficient for most cases. There's no need to get mired down in trying to provide a robust scientific explanation for some of the more unusual aspects of an Age.

D'ni Ages

The D'ni were a careful people, and that was nowhere more evident than in how they designed and treated the Ages they made. D'ni education in the Art stressed stability and safety of the Ages, using techniques that were tried and true over the millenia. In the estimation of a D'ni, the hallmarks of a skillfully executed Age were stability, completeness, and understated finesse. Excessively unusual Ages were considered gaudy at best and dangerously reckless at worst.

D'ni Ages were usually written with specific purposes in mind. This Age would be used for industry, that Age would be used for entertainment. Specific materials or needs were the basis that entire Ages were built around. A few common types were:

- ⟩ Garden Ages - Written specifically to be the type of place that one would want to spend an afternoon. Wealthy families had their own garden Ages, while others were available at Common Libraries.
- ⟩ Harvest Ages - These were the primary source of food for the D'ni. This included Ages given over entirely to wide-scale agriculture, as well as smaller Ages that were dedicated to specific delicacies that the D'ni enjoyed.
- ⟩ Prison Ages - These were Ages that were set aside for D'ni criminals. In most cases, the D'ni simply linked criminals through and left them to their own devices.

Inhabited Ages

The likelihood of a random Age being inhabited by intelligent beings is relatively low, given the endless number of uninhabited Ages out there for Descriptive Books to connect to. That being said, it seems to happen with surprising regularity. D'ni history is full of examples of interactions with indigenous populations, as well as discovering native inhabitants where none were expected.

Clearly, there is some way to indicate that an Age is likely to be inhabited when Writing it. The mechanism for that is unclear, however. It may be simply that writing an Age that is highly compatible with human/D'ni life improves the chances of parallel evolution dramatically. It may be that the D'ni discovered key *gahro-hevtee* that either ensure or prevent intelligent life. Modern experts in the Art are uncertain.

D'ni historians mention several examples of intelligent natives, but none of them would be what one could consider 'alien'. The difference between natives and D'ni seem to be minor, and interbreeding is possible like it is between humans and D'ni. D'ni history even mentions that one of their ancient kings married a native of an Age.

The only known alien intelligent species is the Bahro, but D'ni history barely hints at them.

'Impossible' Ages

And then there are Ages that just seem to break the rules for no known reason.

Catherine was known for writing Ages that seemed beyond the pale. These were the result of her natural talent in describing unusual things with the Art. The Age of Serenia had something akin to an Astral plane, a psychic layer that the Serenian Protectors could access. She also wrote Ages that consisted of torus-shaped planetoids with waterfalls falling through the middle from one end to the other.

Other Ages just operate on principles that seem like magic because they are completely unknown. Stable Ages are always self-consistent, however. Logical incongruities lead to Ages that tear themselves apart.

Age Aspects

Age Theme

Every Age has a **theme**. This is like the High Concept for characters. It encompasses the basics of the Age and what the writer was trying to accomplish when they were developing it. Like a High Concept, the Age's theme is not the end-all-be-all of the Age. However, it provides a touchstone for the rest of the details.

Themes will generally fall into two different types: environments and principles. Environments are aspects that describe the physical nature of the Age. The scope of an environmental theme will vary according to the nature of the aspect. Humid and Murky Swamps might be just what is in the 'Written' parts of an Age, or it might be the entire planet. An aspect like A Planet of Rolling Dunes Driven by the Wind would be less ambiguous.

Principles are descriptions of the underlying forces at work. These may govern geological or cosmological forces. For example, aspects like Cataclysmic Natural Forces could describe an Age full of volcanoes, earthquakes and raging storms. Alternatively, a principle as a theme may indicate design principles that the writer was using as a guide for the Age. An Age designed to be an example of ecological interdependence might have a theme of All Life Depends on Each Other, while an Age written to be a source of resources may have a theme of Endless Natural Abundance.

Other Age Aspects

Besides the theme, an Age can have other additional aspects that embody important details about an Age.

- ▷ Important Natural Features
- ▷ Unusual Flora or Fauna
- ▷ Notable Resources
- ▷ Indigenous Populations
- ▷ Key Settlements or Installations

'Unwritable' Age Aspects

While *Unwritten*'s treatment of an Age is based on it being Written using the Art, it has an existence beyond that. The Art can't dictate cultures or peoples, nor sociological and historical details. However, these may still be important enough to be aspects of an Age. They just cannot result directly from the Art (either in the initial Writing of the Age or Writing in details later).

Writing Systems

Reading Books

Any Writer can understand the gahro-hevtee in a book. Getting a general feel of the nature of the Age it describes is relatively simple and should not require a roll. Given the complexity of the Art, however, any deeper understanding takes time and effort.

Basic information should simply be provided to the investigating character, such as the Age's theme aspect. Those who have stunts or aspects in specific areas should get a little more information relevant to that area without rolls (e.g. a Geology stunt gets you a Geology-specific clue).

Further information requires digging deeper with discover actions. The passive opposition should be based on the complexity of the Age. Additionally, Ages that were written in ways to be intentionally deceiving (such as Books written to be traps) would have higher opposition values. Note that some skills that might not be useful in Writing Ages may be useful in deciphering Descriptive Books (especially those involving deductive logic or finding patterns).

A character that does not have the Art of Writing stunt, but has some knowledge of the D'ni language, might be able to investigate a Descriptive Book. This is up to the GM to decide. If the GM does allow it, no details should be given without successful discover actions, even the Age's theme aspect.

Writing Linking Books

Creating a Linking Book requires no rolls—the Writer just has to have the appropriate materials, a little bit of time, and be in the place the book will link to. That's it.

Writing Descriptive Books

Writing Descriptive Books is another matter. Writing a viable Descriptive Book is a long process and never happens 'on stage'.

Before a new Age is linked to, writing an Age is a process of layering Age aspects. The first aspect attempted is always the Age theme. Additional aspects can be more thematic aspects, or aspects that describe specific areas or elements.

Before The First Link

More aspects can be added to the Age in subsequent journey rolls, as long as no one has linked into the Age. Before that first link, the exact nature of the Age on the other end of the link is theoretical. But once someone links into the Age, it is no longer 'under development'. The forces put into place by the writing of the Age move forward. Additional changes to the Descriptive Book fall under Writing changes to the Age.

The Writing Journey roll

The Writer uses a Journey roll to create an aspect in the Age, using the following steps:

- ▷ Describe the aspect to be created
- ▷ Determine opposition
- ▷ Roll
- ▷ Determine the outcome

Describe the aspect to be created

As noted above, Age aspects are broad brushes that describe the Age. This is especially true of aspects that are written into an Age. Aspects that reflect sentient beings are far too complex for any Writer, much less anything reflecting cultures or individuals.

Aspects can be divided into two general types: explanatory (or 'how') aspects and declarative (or 'what') aspects.

Explanatory aspects describe how something works. These descriptions can be of specific phenomena, or they can be high-level thematic aspects that describe general 'design principles' of the Age. These aspects are harder for the Writer to Write and they require more detail and consideration. A successfully Written aspect will operate how it says, though the actual details may vary.

STUNT: THE ART OF WRITING

A character with this stunt is a Writer (one who can Write Ages, not a member of the Guild of Writers). This represents a basic grounding in the methods of Writing and a working familiarity with the gahro-hevtee. Given the proper materials, the character has access to all of the systems listed in this section. As a side effect, this stunt implies that the character can read and write the D'ni language at least passably well.

Journey
Rolls
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Declarative aspects describe what is there, but do not specify why it is there or how became that way. These are easier to write because they only describe the state of things in the Age at the time of first linking. However, the repercussions of that state of affairs are filled in out of the Writer's control. It is up to the GM to determine what forces lead to that state of affairs, what details that haven't been specified exist, and the future effects of those forces in motion.

Determine opposition

All opposition for writing is passive. The value of the opposition depends on the scope of the aspect and on the skill being used for the roll.

Complex or specific Age aspects provide a higher opposition than more general aspects. Basic physical elements of the Age are the easiest, such as basic astronomical and geological details. Describing biological features adds to the difficulty, increasing as the complexity of the biology increases. Flora is much less complex than fauna, as a rule. Describing individual creatures is far too complex for even the most advanced writers.

The knowledge of the Writer has a significant effect on the difficulty of explanatory aspects. The more general the Writer's knowledge, the more difficult an explanatory aspect will be; general knowledge only gets you so far when describing complex concepts in an Age. Specific applicable knowledge will mean a lower difficulty and the more specific the better (e.g. Biology-related stunts for an aspect about plants, for example).

Roll

Like all journey rolls, a skill is chosen and bonuses from stunts are applied to shift the result. Character and campaign aspects can be invoked, as well as reserved situation aspects (at the GM's discretion).

Determine the Outcome

If the roll fumbles, the Writer has an option to accept the fumble or to succeed at a cost. If they accept, the GM gets to decide what the new aspect is. This will be related to the intended aspect but will definitely have unintended results, probably unpleasant or unhelpful in some way.

If the Writer chooses to succeed at a cost, then they get the aspect they want. However, the GM also adds a secret aspect to the Age. This is guaranteed to be bad for the character and is likely to become a significant plot point.

If the roll ties, the aspect is created but with some minor difference that is slightly annoying or awkward. A slight modification of the wording of the aspect might be needed.

If the roll succeeds, the aspect is created as intended. The GM and the player need to make sure that they are on the same page on what that means. Unintended effects of the aspect (specific results for explanatory aspects or root causes for declarative aspects) should be cosmetic or neutral.

If the roll excels, then the Writer has a choice. They can specify some of the 'unintended' effects of the aspect. Or they can choose to let the GM define the effects in some beneficial way and surprise them with it during play.

Now that his friends have secured blank Books and ink, Templeton is finally beginning his first Age. He's interested in an Age that has lots of natural power - underground steam tunnels, geysers, etc.; lots of power there to be harnessed. He decides that the Age theme will be ENDLESS GEOTHERMAL POWER.

He attempts his Writing action with Research, reflecting how much study he has put into the Art. He fumbles the action, however. Templeton is afraid of what a serious cost might when Writing an Age, so he accepts the fumble. Gwen tells him that the Age theme is actually CONSTANT VOLCANIC ACTIVITY. Templeton decides he'll have to work out how to insert some areas of stability and safety into the landscape the next journey roll.
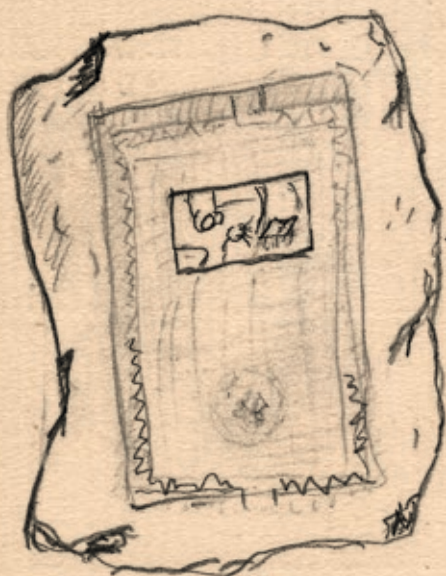
BAHRO STONE = JOURNEY CLOTH + LINK PANEL? HOW?

Advanced Writing

Writing changes into Descriptive Books

Making changes to a Descriptive Book is hard. The GM should carefully consider whether they want to allow it at all. Even more so than other decisions, how modifying a Book affects the Age it describes is a narrative one and is akin to the level of a plot device.

If you are looking to make some rolls, a character can use Journey rolls to attempt to make changes. The passive opposition for such rolls should is Superb (+5) at a minimum. Fumbling the action will always have some unintended and negative effect. Success at cost should lead to some truly epic drama. Even a tie should indicate that the change didn't work, but amounted to no ill effects.

No matter what the decision, the process should be long and stressful.

Alternate materials

The D'ni used a specific set of materials and processes for constructing their paper, Books, and ink. But that's not the only way to make usable Books. Later Writers like Atrus, Gehn, and Catherine were able to find substitutions of varying degrees of reliability. In some cases, these variant Linking Books require a power source to work properly. There are no hard rules on what sorts of materials could be used and how they work. Rather this is something that has to fit into the specific game and background. Discovering or developing these alternatives would probably fuel an entire set of stories in and of themselves.

Anomalies

The D'ni rules of linking are relatively stable and uniform, but they are not absolute. Seemingly miraculous things have been found in the Ages and in D'ni history, but how they function is a mystery. Here are the most well-known.

Art-Based Technology

By the time of the Fall, the D'ni also devised ways to transmit messages to different Ages (a technology incorporated into the KI system). Whether this indicates a deep D'ni familiarity with quantum physics or is simply a side-effect of the D'ni understanding of linking is unclear.

Similarly, Atrus developed a way of remotely viewing different Ages and cross-Age communication using the crystals from Rime. Other such technologies that interact with the Art may be possible.

Linking without Books

Unusual artifacts have been discovered that allow people to link. So-called linking portals are symbols (sometimes even just images or holograms) that act just like a linking panel. The Bahro left stones with crude tapestries attached to them that had usable linking panels on them as well.

The Bahro and Yeesha have displayed the ability to 'link at will'. They can link out and link to other places without the use of a Linking Book or similar device. They seem to be able to link to wherever they want. And by all appearances, they simply will it to happen. The capability seems to be tied to the tattoos that both Yeesha and the Bahro have; the sadistic D'ni survivor Esher cut a piece of skin off of a Bahro and wore it on his jacket. He was able to use it to link in a similar way.

Bahro tech

This is a catch-all term for the many artifacts and abilities of the Bahro that seem to involve the Art. The Bahro have constructed bahro stones that act like Linking Books, as well as other symbols and glyphs. The Bahro link at will. They even seem to have to ability to make changes within an Age, such as changing the weather.

As a rule, bahro tech uses crude petroglyphs (called bahroglyphs) and tapestries as the basis for their 'technology'. No one knows the full extent of what it can accomplish.

Yeesha magic

Yeesha is easily the greatest writer to have ever lived and she has managed to do things with the Art that should be

USING ANOMALIES IN YOUR GAME

The D'ni version of linking is a stable and reliable system. But there's so much even the D'ni didn't know. These anomalies are examples of that fact. You can use them in your game or disregard them entirely. Some groups may enjoy discovering the mechanisms that allow such things (a great use for the Investigation or Deduction rules) or simply handwave them and keep them unknown.

GMs can create their own anomalies and mysteries, of course. These examples are merely starting places for inspiration.

completely impossible. Explorers firmly plant their tongues in their cheeks and call this 'Yeesha magic'. Yeesha created Relto and the Relto Books that many explorers use. She also seems to have no problem creating bahro artifacts and writing objects into an existing Age with exceptional control and accuracy.

Taking advantage of the quantum variations inherent in the Art, Yeesha has been able to create books that lead to several different versions of the same Age, called instances. In some cases, her books lead all users to the same Age, while others will link each individual to different personal instances of the same Age.

The extent of Yeesha's abilities are unknown. She's even claimed to be able to link through *time*.

Star Fissure

The Star Fissure appears as a rip or crevasse in the very fabric of an Age that contains what Catherine called 'a sea of stars'. It's not a vacuum—Atrus and many others have survived passage in the Star Fissure unharmed. For some unknown reason, what falls into the Star Fissure seems to end up near the Cleft in the New Mexico desert. Presumably, that is where the Stranger found the Linking Book to Myst.

Catherine accidentally created the Star Fissure in Riven while attempting to write changes into the Book of Riven. Later on, Yeesha seemed to be to create stable Star Fissures in Relto, and a similar thing exists in some of the enigmatic Bahro caves.

SAMPLE AGES

HARD LESSONS

Age Theme: SOME LESSONS ARE PAINFUL

Other Aspects:
> CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT
> YOU CAN SEE THE IMPOSSIBLE FROM HERE

The Age of Hard Lessons is an example of the heights that the Art can reach, and a symbol of the danger of such hubris. Records tell the story of a rash apprentice in the Guild of Writers who was determined to Write an Age. The Guildmasters told him that he was far too inexperienced, but they did not sway the apprentice. He stole a blank Book and crafted his Age in secret

for years. But just before he was to become a full Guildsman, he disappeared. When his absence was noticed, the Descriptive Book was discovered in his quarters.

The Age was a marvel of the Art. The vistas were breathtaking. There were forests of crystal trees with arcing lightning and rainbows of refracted light grew up quickly, and rivers of water intertwined with streams of red hot lava, co-existing without interacting. The creatures were not quite animal, vegetable or mineral and seemed to grow and evolve in complex patterns as an amazing speed. And over it all, almost a dozen celestial objects—moons, planets, comets—arc visibly through the sky.

The Guildmasters who came in search of the apprentice were in awe. But their trained eyes could see the wrongness of the place. Obviously the apprentice was an unsung genius. But he was one without the solid sense of a Grandmaster of the Art. His Age was in constant motion, changing from one nigh impossible state to another. It moved too fast, stretched the rules too far. And it was the end of the apprentice. Not too far from the Linking point, they
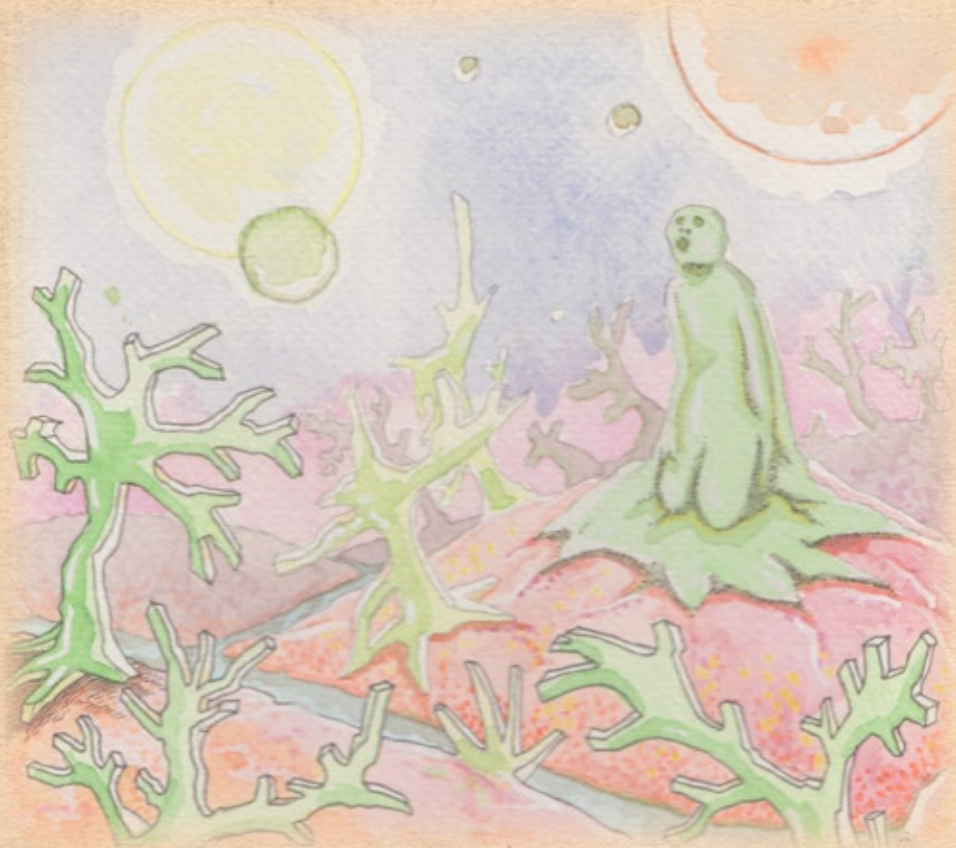
found him on top of a mound of crystalline powder that stirred of its own accord. His bodily fluids had solidified, leaving a gruesome statue and his face contorted into a look of utter horror.

The Guild used the Age as an object lesson. Instructors took new apprentices to see the Fool, to show them vivid proof that such untempered vision was dangerous.

Some Guildmasters had more pragmatic uses for the Age. On one hand, they ridiculed the Age for being reckless, dangerous, and even worse, thoroughly un-D'ni. But in many ways, it surpassed reasonable expectations for a D'ni Writer. For example, everyone expected the Age to tear itself apart, but the fabric of the Age remained stable despite its radically dynamic environment. In secret, Writers were sent to study the Age and tease out its secrets. But what they learned, if anything, was never recorded.

Possibilities

In some Writer's private library or secure Guild storeroom, the Descriptive Book waits to be discovered. Records that refer to the Age are likely to be fragmentary. Some may even refer to the Age as a myth, a story that Guildmasters tell headstrong apprentices to set them on the proper path. Investigators might find references in student journals that confirm its existence, or a personal journal of a Grandmaster may discuss the results of experiments performed in the Age.

Hard Lessons is a perfect Age for a scenario that emphasizes themes about person versus the environment. More so than other Ages, the environment is an active participant and an active threat to explorers. GMs should give each area a set of skills to use in environmental conflicts. Once the characters get the hang of how to handle the situation, it should change into something different. Spending any time in the Age should challenge characters in some way, whether it is potentially dangerous or not. While a lot of D'ni Ages are fairly utilitarian, this is a GM's chance to really go to town on surreal landscapes.

If characters discover the Descriptive Book, they could use it for the same purpose as the D'ni did: to learn more about the Art. Examining the Age (both how it is Written and how it behaves) can justify learning more about the Art and journey rolls that involve pushing the edges of possibility. In a game that is focused on the Art, access to the Book of Hard Lessons can be an effective character aspect.

Attempts to modify the Descriptive Book itself should be extraordinarily difficult, and success an accomplishment of epic proportions. Failures could send the Age spiraling into self-destruction. Or they may have no effect on the Age, drowned out by the complex processes in motion.

Besides the unique nature of the Age, explorers might need explicit reasons to venture further into the Age.

› The Fool may not be the only casualty of Hard Lessons. If the Guild lost others in their experiments into the Age, characters may find other crystallized figures, or remnants of D'ni who met grisly ends in other ways. Alternatively, they may find a survivor who was simply preserved in stasis by one of the processes of the Age.
› A key figure in the explorers' researches may have last been seen linking to Hard Lessons. If they had a valuable resource or unique research, the trail may lead the characters into the Age to retrieve it.
› Journals describe a unique process that Writers of the Guild observed in the Age that does just what the characters need. It could be a unique resource, a process required for creating a special medicine, or any McGuffin that requires a unique environment.
› There is one group who could easily withstand the worst that the Age could generate: the Bahro. There could be a small enclave of Bahro who live in the Age. Their ability to control Ages could make Hard Lessons a valuable hiding place, one that is safe for them but hostile to all others.

Heartskein

Age Theme: Dwelling in Grief

Other Aspects:
› In the Dim Light of a Dying Star
› Serene Crystalline Memorials

The Age is a planet tidally locked to face the glow of a red dwarf star natives call the Heart. A thread of solar plasma, the Skein, curls off it into the black hole jetting plasma streams, the Hopespindle, that will eventually consume it. The red light casts garish shadows across a multi-colored rocky landscape with low, creeping russet vegetation, and ancient but well-tended open-air shrines for the many departed natives.

The Linking Book links to a small valley, with a well-worn path leading to the sunward crest. Following this, a visitor's first vista is of the red sun and its voracious companion hanging unmoving against the western sky, and hills for
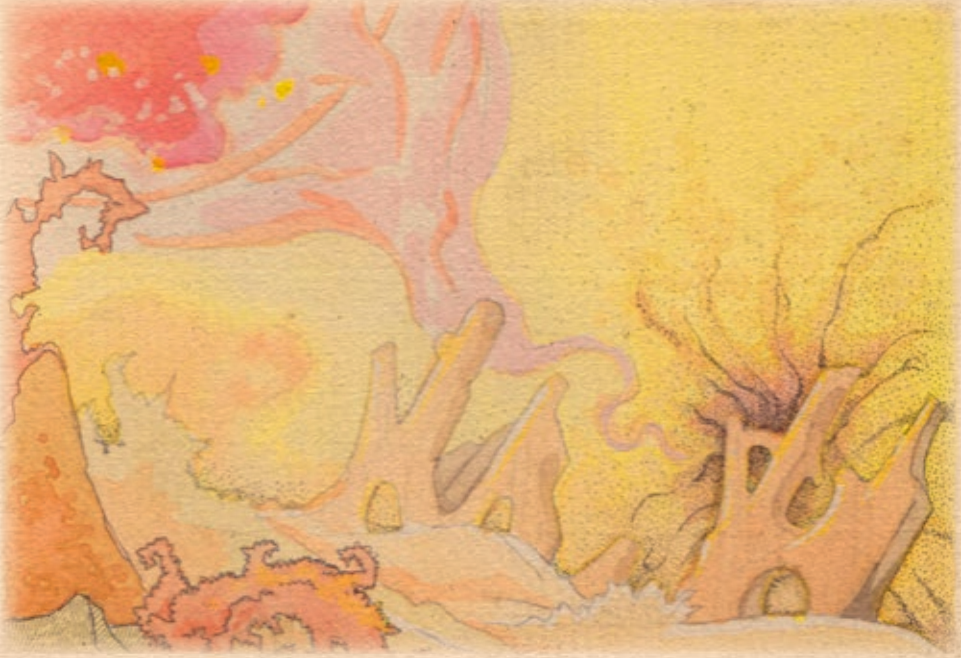
miles around glittering with crystal pillars. When they approach more closely the occupants can be seen. At first, it is unclear whether they are alive or dead, prisoners or simply held in stasis.

The dead stand perfectly preserved in upright crystal columns, peacefully contemplating eternity while the living creep like ghosts among them, waiting to join their ranks. The departed are prepared and preserved in such lifelike condition that a newcomer could mistake this Age for a gallery of sombre sentinels in suspended animation. Often, the Folk will voluntarily undergo the preservation process while still living and entering their crystal tombs willingly, blurring the line between life and death.

The main settlement is Call-of-Yearning, with a population of several hundred. In the center, as with all Folk villages, is the Cenotaph of the Lost, an empty chamber decorated only with symbolic Marks for those who pass on without being preserved. The Folk are peaceful, if maudlin, and otherwise agrarian, cultivating mosses and small domesticated animals in damp caverns dug throughout the hills.

The native people are close to human; tall and lean with an untanned gray-olive complexion from their dim sun, and staring eyes with enlarged pupils and little white. In their oral history, the Heartskein-folk tell that the world was once a whole, rich tapestry but the coming of a great and terrible Death began its unraveling. They believe that the threads of the universe spin

out from the hearts of the Folk onto the spindle of a distant hope of renewal; it is their duty to ensure nothing is lost, that the skein may one day be rewoven into immortal perfection.

They tattoo and scarify themselves with a ritual ink, and with these Marks they claim to dream of other worlds. In meditation or sleep, they may carry others along and wander the world like shades. Marks are taken on when a loved one dies, and the world they dream of is shaped by the Marked One's feelings and experiences of that person; some are similar to Heartskein and others are wildly alien, but all give the Marked a sense of closeness to the departed.

The crystal in which the dead are kept is also the main ingredient in the making of Marks, and is mined carefully from deeper places beneath the hills. The mines are overseen by Elder-shamans whose skin is crowded with Marks and who live in waking dreams of many worlds, directing the miners intuitively to the precious stone.

Possibilities

This Age might be a destination for PCs who have lost loved ones, a way for a group to preserve the memory and presence of a dead companion. If they are accepted by the Heartskein-folk, they might end up with a memento mori and Marks of their own.

The Folk are initially welcoming of strangers in their midst, as travelers from strange origins are not unknown in Heartskein. The Folk feel to meet someone new is to experience a part of the Lost Tapestry. They rarely pry but willingly listen to those who wish to talk. Travelers who show respect for their traditions will be slowly introduced to the deeper philosophy of Marks, and the Rites of the Everknown (the broad term for their burial practices). Those who commit violence will be offered a peace-token of food, though it will be laced with a soporific to allow them to calm the poor soul who is endangering their way of life.

Whether the dreams of the Marked are hallucinations or a legitimate way to see other Ages is up to the GM. If the dreaming is real, players of dead PCs might take the chance to design their 'Heart's Age' as a swan song they can give to other characters. And who knows what the group might see or learn in their dreams and visions of that Age?

In practical terms, the recipient of a Mark receives a permanent scar, tattoo, or brand in a symbolic representation of the departed. The recipient of a new Mark is plunged into a vivid dream of another world or Age, where they

walk as a ghost, and return with full knowledge and memory of their journey. Marks, and the experience that being Marked entails, are excellent fodder for changes in character aspects.

Some people that PCs might meet:

- Chaldron - A grave-tender, likely to be the first of the Folk the PCs meet. Chaldron keeps vegetation from blocking the view of the older Everknown. Middle-aged, patient and full of slow delight, Chaldron is happy to wax philosophical with these short strangers from another world while continuing to make the rounds. Soon to undertake the Rite while living, and quite happy about the prospect.
- Minseiri - A child in Call-of-Yearning who will silently attach themselves to one of the PCs and follow them everywhere with wide eyes. Slow to break their silence, Minseiri was orphaned soon after birth and was too young to take Marks for their parents. Nevertheless the child dreams of Ages from both parents, and others that may seem oddly familiar to the PC.
- Buruk-Aan - An Elder-shaman, covered with Marks, who sees something terrible in their waking dreams when the PCs first appear. They press the PCs to stay and become part of the Folk, so nothing of them is lost.

Se'reti Prime

Age Theme: The Triumph of Darkness

Other Aspects:
- Labyrinthine Corridors

Illuminated by a distant star, Se'reti Prime is a dimly lit world of crags, mountains and valleys. It is a world ruled by darkness. The natural light is far too weak for most visitors, but those whose eyes are adapted to dim light (such as the D'ni) can make out the vague shapes of the ancient ruins of a technological civilization, with machinery connected by ghostly silver latticeworks. The one place even mildly friendly to typical eyes is a glittering desert of obsidian sand, lit by a sky filled with clouds streaked with aurora-like electrical disturbances.

The Age seems dead at first glance, but it is actually the capital of the Se'reti Empire, which reflects the darkness it dwells in. Se'reti civilization is founded on the 'Philosophy of Darkness' which dictates that all beings come from darkness and that there is a seed of darkness inside them gives them strength. This must be embraced and all fears, passions, and hate are tools for personal and spiritual advancement. Se'reti society rewards the determined and
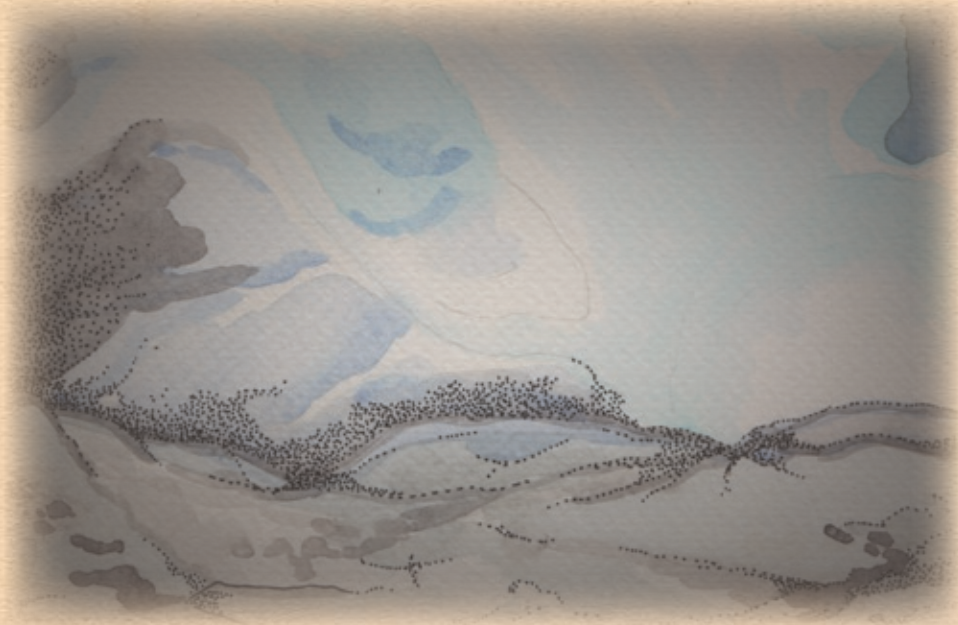
the clever, and it prizes a life that is earned in the face of adversity. They view subjecting others to similar adversity both as duty for them and an honor for those that they test.

While the Se'reti are not skilled in the Art, they do have some Linking Books, which they have used for conquest. Thus the Empire itself stretches across several Ages, which it rules with a firm hand. Paradoxically, the Empire is less demanding of subject cultures than their own citizens; as long as they get tribute and resources, the Se'reti are satisfied. However, as fitting with the Philosophy, the more respect a culture has among the Empire's elite, the more they are considered worthy of the Empire's harsh attentions.

The Se'reti are tall, pale and slender with monochrome hair that is either white or black. Their eyes are completely black and are adapted to the levels of light in the Age. As you might expect, their eyes are highly sensitive to light and their skin is particularly vulnerable to what we would consider normal levels of ultraviolet light in sunshine. When they venture out of their home cities, they don a distinctive black synthetic armor with helmets that are emblazoned with nightmare imagery.

Most of the City of Se'reti is underground and heated by geothermal stations. The area above the city contains the Spire (where the leaders of the Empire live) and the Grotesqueries: shrines dedicated to nightmares and fears that all Se'reti must learn to overcome and embody in order to achieve power and respect in the Empire.

Possibilities

Se'reti Prime could be used for a very different sort of gaming experience, as PCs find they need to rely on other senses aside from sight to maneuver around. Bringing their own light sources is a source of more trouble, as they will be depending on devices which actively hurt the natives of the Age. Explorers may find a Book that leads to Se'reti Prime, but they may mistake it as non-functioning, since the Linking Panel will seem completely dark.

Alternatively, characters may discover a Linking Book to one of the Empire's subject Ages instead of Se'reti Prime itself. Exactly how the people of one of these conquered Ages will react to newcomers will vary. They may assume that explorers are from other subjugated Ages, though the revelation that the explorers have access to their own Linking Books could shake up the power structure quite a bit. PCs may be seen as potential liberators, or as useful tools in a complex political game.

While the Se'reti are an obvious choice for antagonists, portraying them as cartoonish villains would waste their potential. Rather, they are a civilization founded on different foundation than the nations of the surface world or the D'ni. They can provide a foil that is both frightening and potentially thought-provoking as their cultural morals are contrasted with the character's own. And just how does one deal with a people who will cultivate chaos and adversity as a sign of respect and admiration?

In any case, an active Se'reti Empire in a game leans the game heavily towards action and adventure. For players who are looking for a pulp flavor in their game, this could be just the thing they want. Delving into the Se'reti society leads to a potentially gritty political game, as various factions of Se'reti society use the presences of 'outworlders' to jockey for personal and political power. An enterprising GM could develop a complex political structure that resembles feudal kingdoms, with Houses, Lords, and Byzantine backstabbing. Once again, that is a departure from the standard *Unwritten* game, but could be a satisfying one for the right group.

Some ideas that a GM might use:

- The Empire has Linking Books; how did they get them? It implies that they encountered the D'ni before at the very least. What were the D'ni doing there? What was the Writer intending when Writing their Age?
- While the Se'reti Empire might be too intense for some games, a lost Se'reti that finds their way to D'ni or one of its Ages (maybe through the Star Fissure somehow) could be an interesting NPC for characters to encounter. Or even a PC.

> For a less intense game, characters could stumble upon the ruins of the Se'reti Empire after it has fallen. Investigating such a unique civilization could be a lot of fun for a cerebral game. The subjugated cultures may still be around and remember their former rulers—they could be friendly or hostile. One of them may be trying to step into the power vacuum left by the Empire.

STONESONG

Age Theme: SOUND IS TRANSFORMATIVE

Other Aspects:
> NOT A TREE TO BE SEEN
> OUR SONG IS SACRED
> ENDLESS VARIETY OF STONE AND ORE

Sound is the pivot on which the entire Age of Stonesong turns. Sounds echo in strange ways across the landscape. The rock itself reacts to specific harmonics - changing shape, color or other properties depending on the stone and the sound. Crystalline minerals are bountiful and veins of metallic ore are common with some even visible on the surface. There a wide variety of plants: grasses, bushes full of berries, and fibrous vines. Oddly enough, there is nothing resembling an actual tree in the Age.

Originally commissioned by the Guild of Stone-Masons, the purpose of the Stonesong was to act as a laboratory for acoustics research and its effects on materials. The Writer used some unorthodox techniques when envisioning the Age, focusing solely on the stone itself. In addition to a stunning variety of stone and mineral formations, his design included rock that responded in unexpected ways to sound. Senior members in the Guild of Writers found his work too avant-garde and needlessly gaudy, so Stonesong's author was punished and demoted for his work. He resolutely claimed that Stonesong was his masterpiece until the day he died during the Fall.

The Stone-Masons who had commissioned the Age, however, were thrilled. They established a colony in Stonesong and brought in natives of other Ages to work as labor. Because of the nature of some of materials there, they singled out talented book worlders with absolute pitch and inherent musical talent to act as assistants. The Age became a hub of innovation within the Guild as resources were mined and materials were experimented on. The boom in research came to an abrupt end during the Fall of D'ni. Guild members fled to the Age and inadvertently brought the biological weapon with them. It wiped out the D'ni populace, leaving the gathered servants unharmed.

Since then, life has gone on in Stonesong. The ability of the musically-talented proved invaluable while the survivors tried to rebuild their lives. Singers became the most important members of society as they refined their techniques for manipulating stone and passed their knowledge onto subsequent generations. In the centuries since the Fall, a pastoral civilization with the song as its cornerstone has developed. Traces of the acoustically sensitive minerals have built up in the natives' bodies as they grow older, making them sensitive to sound and music. Song is considered sacred, as it has miraculous effects both on the environment and on the people who live there.

Possibilities

The D'ni are still remembered in Stonesong, though over the generations they have taken a mythic cast. How they remember their former masters is a key element in how they might react to rediscovery by modern explorers. They may see the D'ni as demi-gods and view the Fall as an end of the world catastrophe. They may see the Fall as a corrupt people who were destroyed for their sins. Either way, they remember the D'ni as proud and possessing wondrous technology. However, the prevailing belief of the natives is that the D'ni did not understand the songs, and thus were never really meant for this land.

Explorers will find a curious people who want to know what happened to the figures in their stories. If the characters have any skill with music, they will be hailed as kindred spirits. They will want to know everything about the music of where the visitors come from. They may be particularly fascinated by musical instruments made of wood, as they are almost unknown in Stonesong. Who knows what they would make of an electric guitar or something as unique as a theremin.

The natives are likely to have stories about the Ages their ancestors originally came from. If there are other Ages with native civilizations, some of them may have ended here. Beliefs may have crossed over as well, and there may be artifacts from those other Ages that have survived, passed down from parent to child. While most of the D'ni technology left behind by the Stone-Masons is no longer operative, it is likely to be salvageable. Records that have survived might have key information on the Guild or important members.

Finally, Stonesong is a cornucopia of mineral wealth. Any type of metal ore, stone or mineral that the characters need could be readily available; players could use Stonesong as the basis of resource stunts. The sound sensitive stones could have untold uses out in the Ages. The natives will have little concern for people who take small amounts of materials from the Age. Large-scale exploitation could spur them to action, even violence if it is egregious enough. A resistance force of people who can manipulate parts of the environment using only their voices could be a frighteningly effective opposition.

Swell

Age Theme: Swollen Landmasses Rising Out of the Sea

Other Aspects:
- Rejuvenating To the Body and Mind
- Obscure Signs of Disaster

The Age appears to be an uninhabited island. The islands form a clump of large, swollen geologic formations covered in mossy green grasses and lightly forested with twisting, broad-topped trees. There are almost no natural flat areas on the island due to the round, bubble-like nature of the landmasses. The inside of these bubbly rocks are hollow, containing hot springs and volcanic vents. At the top of the island is a spring that sends two peaceful streams falling and curving over and between crevasses of the island.

The Linking Book links just off shore atop an open platform built on a rock, a smaller version of the same formations that cluster together to form the main land. An elegantly simple bridge leads to the beach and up a stairway to top of the island. The path runs parallel to the trickling stream, bending and rising with it. Midway up the island, the stream swirls around a crevice in the rock forming a pond before flowing down to the sea. At the crest of each land swell sit little pavilions which the path branches out to meet. All has a gentle and calming feeling to it. Soothing, yet somewhat eerie.

Just before the utmost peak is an open plaza laid out before three obviously D'ni buildings. The empty grounds resemble that of a resort or lodge. The main structure is completely locked up. The tallest building is unlocked but only the ground floor is accessible because there is no power to operate the lift. The last structure is locked also, but a quick trip around the side of the building shows an entrance that had been broken into.

Past the breached doorway is something akin to a maintenance room. There are signs of wear from the elements and a coat of dust over everything. On the wall are layouts of the complex and the surrounding pavilions. On a shelf rests a worn and faded journal with pages torn from the binding. The journal, written by the lodge's groundskeeper, relates a bit of the Age's history. The Age was originally Written as part of a study by the D'ni to observe

unique geologic rock formations and volcanic land creation. Researchers became fascinated by the hot springs and mineral waters inside the caverns as well as the overall peaceful feeling of the island. The Age was converted into an place of rest which became host to thousands of visitors looking to getaway and relax. At one point a fire broke out, destroying the main building. Soon after, when the building was rebuilt, the crowds came back stronger than ever. But at the height of its popularity, the Age was abandoned for reasons of which the author is unclear. The last entry, marked long before the fall of D'ni, simply reads: "I saw another flash on the horizon."

Possibilities

Swell is a ready-made investigation scene. Clues lie scattered across the island, and characters can be lead from one to the other as it dawns on them that something strange happened here. Nothing in the Age tells the characters anything definite, so it is an excellent backdrop for building whatever mystery you want to present to your players. Swell could be an archaeological crime scene where the characters are trying to find out what happened to the inhabitants. Or if played for suspense, it has all of the elements of a horror film. If characters make the classic blunder of splitting up, they could each individually encounter something dangerous and bizarre. To emphasize the paranoia, take each character aside and run through their scene privately.

Another option is to strip out all of the signs of foul play and use Swell simply as a location with an interesting aesthetic. The nature of the landmass fits with Myst's tradition of surreal landscapes. Add a series of puzzles and a trail of journals written by your favorite antagonist and you have an Age that would fit into any Myst game. Antagonists that need an out-of-the-way safe house or lair could have found it just past the horizon.

What makes Swell such a restful place? Is it more than just a lot of sunshine and fresh sea air? If there was something in the environment, chemical or biological, that makes the island especially relaxing, that could be either a hazard or a boon. If played as a hazard, the island may lull people into not leaving, or whatever effect it has on people could be addictive. If long-term exposure lead to serious health issues, or mental instability, that could explain the disturbing evidence left behind. Alternatively, if the special something of Swell is beneficial, it could be used as a resource stunt for characters. Resting on the island might encourage healing, either physical or psychological. The chemicals or flora might be a source of beneficial medicine or the cure for one of the many diseases an explorer might run into out in the Ages. The springs and vents could be harnessed for geothermal energy.

Once and Future Cavern

D'NI CIVILIZATION

The DRC has done a lot of work in reconstructing details about the D'ni over the years, but there is still so much that explorers don't know. Even the majority of their history remains unknown or obscured. Most of what we do know comes from records available at the Fall of the D'ni, or from journals of the important post-Fall personalities, like Catherine and Yeesha. Thus, our clearest picture of life in D'ni comes from a narrow slice of their history. This chapter encompasses our best guess at what D'ni society was like at that time.

BEING D'NI

D'ni individuals were as diverse as humans or any other people. As a culture, the D'ni underwent many changes over the millennia. However, they retained a core identity and cultural sensibility throughout that time. There are several themes that D'ni came back to again and again throughout its history.

LINKING

The importance of the Art to the D'ni cannot be overstated. Whenever the D'ni needed something, Writing an Age was their primary solution. Exploitation of Ages gave them the ability to live in what was otherwise an isolated underground city. They never explored the surface of their own world (that is, where we live) because Linking made going to the universe next door an easier and more productive option.

Linking permeated every facet of D'ni culture. Their civilization was founded by a great Writer, and they revered him throughout their history. Their religions developed around the concept of Linking, to the point that the

D'ni concept of heaven was called 'the Perfect Age'. The Guild of Caterers had Ages that were used for nothing but food production. Criminals were banished to prison Ages. An entire Age was used simply as a graveyard.

To the D'ni, Linking was a given. It was their divine right and they exploited it in every way that they could.

Longevity

The D'ni were a small but long-lived people, with a low birth-rate. A D'ni was not considered truly mature until they reached around 125 years old. Because of this, tradition was always a powerful force. New ideas often took a long time to work their way through the populace. The D'ni empire lasted for almost ten thousand years. But despite the inevitable march of history, D'ni retained a core cultural identity throughout those millennia.

Due to the importance of Writing, D'ni culture held history and the written word in high esteem. Their books and documents were maintained for enormous stretches of time—some records allude to Linking Books that lasted thousands of years. Thus the D'ni had ready access to their history and a strong connection to their heritage. This was essential to being D'ni.

On top of that, D'ni construction was mostly done in stone, and they were unparalleled in their use of it. Their structures withstood thousands of years of use. Unlike our modern world, in which planned obsolescence is common, the D'ni built things to last.

Stone is an apt metaphor for the D'ni mindset. The D'ni way is slow, careful, and methodical. Tradition was championed over innovation and stability was considered their highest calling.

CLEVERNESS

The D'ni were a bit too fond of their own cleverness. They were explorers and seekers, so they saw everything as something for their intellect to decipher. Intellectual challenges were a common pastime and a key way to establish the social order.

While never explicitly stated by D'ni historians, this developed into a cultural obsession with puzzles that overflowed into many other aspects of D'ni life. Locks were often made into puzzle-based locks rather than more secure mechanisms. Controls for machinery were often more ostentatious and complex than was strictly necessary. The expectation was that any D'ni worth their salt would be intelligent enough to figure it out. 'User friendliness' was an unknown concept to the D'ni, and in fact, the average D'ni would consider the concept insulting.

PRIDE

To the D'ni, the center of the Great Tree was the D'ni cavern. All power rested in D'ni, and political machinations were focused on gaining power within the Cavern itself. Ages were exploited for resources, cultivated as research centers, tended as gardens and zoos. But they were never seen as anything more than commodities. Rogue factions in D'ni politics often hid out among the Ages, but their goal was always focused on the home Cavern.

As the D'ni began to encounter native peoples among the Ages, the question of how to deal with them was a constant debate. Public opinion shifted back and forth throughout their history. At times, the D'ni were open with the natives, and one king even went as far to marry an outsider.

However, that was the exception and not the rule. Despite their founder's intent for D'ni to be a humble society, the D'ni saw themselves as the natural rulers of the Ages. A combination of cultural xenophobia and religious dogma kept the D'ni separate from those they encountered. At their most liberal, a D'ni treated natives much in the same way an enlightened British colonial might—they were happy to get along as long as everyone acknowledged that the D'ni were inherently superior. At their worst, they treated natives like insignificant animals. While slavery was illegal in D'ni, it popped up repeatedly throughout their history.

By the time of the Fall of D'ni, the position of D'ni as superior was firmly cemented in the D'ni worldview. Common wisdom said that only D'ni had the intellectual capacity to learn the Art. It was this xenophobia that led to D'ni's ultimate demise.

The Guilds

From the beginning of D'ni history, the Guilds were one of the centers around which society revolved. In the era of kings, they worked in tandem with the king. By the time of the Fall, the Guilds served as the government.

A Guild in D'ni was a fusion of a branch of government and a political party. Each Guild had a function in society, providing public services of a particular sort. While there was some overlap, and various specific projects and services moved back and forth between Guilds as the political winds blew, the Guilds had well-established boundaries of what they accomplished for D'ni. The Guilds also acted as the educational system for the elite, with children from wealthy families being trained from a young age to be a part of a particular Guild.

Guilds were divided into Major and Minor Guilds. The 18 Major Guilds formed the bedrock of the system and were the groups that formed the highest levels of government. The Guild Council acted as the primary legislative body, with each of the Major Guilds represented by a handful of Guildmasters and one Grandmaster.

Over the Guild Council were the Great Lords, a body of five taken from Guildmasters of the Major Guilds. They functioned as an executive branch. At the time of the Fall, the Great Lords were: Lord Eneah of the Guild of Maintainers, Lord Nehir of the Guild of Stone-Masons, Lord R'hira of the Guild of Maintainers, Lord Rakeri of the Guild of Miners, and Lord Sajka of the Guild of Writers.

Guild Life

Membership in a guild provided access to the highest level of D'ni society. It meant you were a part of the D'ni government and the most powerful entities in D'ni culture. To the wealthy, what Guild you were in defined you as much as the history of your family. For the less wealthy, your Guild (or lack thereof) defined your role in society almost completely.

Where are the women?

Historical records rarely mention D'ni women. One or two are mentioned as wives or mothers of various kings, but they seem to be given little focus. Women were not allowed to be members of the Major Guilds, either.

The only exception to this is that the role of 'prophetess' was historically influential throughout D'ni society. Women were seen as having a deeper connection to Yahvo. It became tradition during the era of the kings that each king had a prophetess as an adviser. However, the most transformative figures in D'ni religion were, in fact, men.

GMs, you don't have stick to that interpretation. There's no reason that you can't fill the holes in D'ni history and society with interesting women who run the gamut of roles and characterization. D'ni is big enough for Guildmasters and rugged adventurers of any gender.

Once we get into the story of D'ni after the Fall, we find a much more diverse palette of women. Ti'ana, Catherine, and Yeesha are all well-realized female characters. Look to them as inspirations for what an inclusive campaign can offer.

As a rule, children were enrolled into the Guilds at a young age and educated by their Guild. Because of this, loyalty to one's Guild was fierce. Enrolling a child was an expensive proposition and the majority of new cadets came from wealthy and influential families. Some systems of scholarships were available for the less wealthy and middle class D'ni parents worked hard to afford enrolling their children. However, this happened only rarely. The Major Guild were predominantly populated by the higher classes and stayed that way.

While each Guild handled their internal affairs slightly differently, they seemed to all use similar ranking systems. Those who were learning were Cadets while the rank-and-file members were called Guildsmen. Influential and important members became Guildmasters. The Guild was headed by a Grandmaster.

Mobility within a Guild was a mix of nepotism and merit. Members of influential families and children of Grandmasters were likely to attain high ranks as long as they weren't incompetent. However, there was more than enough room for competent individuals to rise through the ranks, even at relatively young ages for an adult. A notably skilled and talented D'ni could establish their family as a one of higher standing by rising to important Guild positions.

Major Guilds

Guild of Analysts

The Analysts focused on data. They processed data sets and analyzed them for trends. They took up any activity where analysis and extrapolation could be beneficial. They functioned like statisticians, and applied their skills to economics, mathematics, and even real-world systems like meteorology.

Guild of Archivists

Archivists were in charge of keeping the records of D'ni society—stories and histories as well as maintaining more conventional libraries of knowledge.

Guild of Books

The Guild of Books managed the production of the blank Books used to write Ages. They jealously guarded the secrets of Linking Book construction.

Guild of Cartographers

The Cartographers scrupulously mapped every Age written by the D'ni, as well as the cavern itself. They followed behind the Surveyors and Miners to catalog all of the details. They also consulted on large-scale design projects.

Guild of Caterers

D'ni had to get food from somewhere; that's where the Caterers came in. They were in charge of food production and distribution throughout D'ni. They managed many 'harvest Ages'.

Guild of Chemists

Chemists worked with chemistry and similar science specialties, developing new materials as well as items like fire-marbles. Some Chemists were more akin to pharmacists and worked closely with the Healers and the Engineers.

Guild of Engineers

Members of this Guild were the inventors and designers. They were structural engineers and architects. If you needed something that stood for ten thousand years, you hired an Engineer to design it for you.

Guild of Healers

The Healers were in charge of public health, both on the personal and wider scales. Outside of acting as doctors and other health-care professionals, they worked with the Maintainers on addressing diseases and other pathogens that might be discovered in new Ages.

Guild of Ink-Makers

The ink-makers held the other secret needed for the Art: the formula for the ink used. Records indicate that the details for making the ink were never written down, but rather passed down orally as a Guild secret.

Guild of Legislators

The Guild Council was responsible for making laws, but the Legislators were the legal experts of D'ni and maintained the infrastructure that kept the government running.

Guild of Linguists

The purpose of the Linguists was two-fold: first, they were in charge of establishing communications between the D'ni and indigenous inhabitants by deciphering native languages. Second, they were in charge of shepherding the D'ni language itself. They taught D'ni language to natives, managed education of literacy to D'ni children, and maintained dictionaries for the proper understanding of D'ni words.

Guild of Maintainers

The Maintainers held several functions in D'ni society. They 'maintained' the peace and security of D'ni. In that, they acted as the police force, as well as performing public services like firefighting. They were in charge of prisons and Prison Ages.

The Maintainers also took an active role in regulating the use of Linking Books. They inspected new Ages for safety—no one was allowed to link into a new Age before they gave it their seal of approval.

Guild of Mechanists

Anything involving actual machinery was the purview of the Mechanists. They built the majority of the machinery used throughout D'ni and ensured that they were in working order.

Guild of Messengers

The D'ni never developed the mass media technologies that we on the surface have. The Messengers stepped in to fill that role. They acted as couriers and managed the large-scale shipping of materials throughout the cavern and into the Ages. They were part teamsters, part Pony Express.

Guild of Miners

The Miners were a critical Guild in D'ni, as they were responsible for all of the mines and excavations in D'ni. They were also in charge of maintaining the integrity of the caverns themselves.

Guild of Stone-Masons

The D'ni made all of their buildings with stone, and the Stone Masons were in charge of any construction. They also developed the many types of stone composites the D'ni used, such as nara.

Guild of Surveyors

The Surveyors were the explorers of D'ni culture. They took the lead in exploring new caves for D'ni habitation, opening them up, and then turning them over to the Guild of Miners for long-term preparation. Once an Age was deemed safe enough by the Maintainers, the Surveyors would go in and examine the plants, document the animals, and take samples back for examination. They assisted the Cartographers with their mapping efforts as well.

Guild of Writers

Arguably, the Writers were the most important Guild in D'ni. These were the D'ni who wrote the Ages that D'ni society was built on. All official Ages for the Guilds and private enterprise were written by the Guild of Writers. Skilled individuals (especially among the upper classes) outside of the Writers *did* write Ages, but these were for personal use only and not to be used for official D'ni business.

Minor Guilds

Minor Guilds had no representation in the Guild Council and focused on smaller niches of public service. While the Major Guilds resembled aristocracies, the Minors varied more in how they worked. Those Minor Guilds formed around a specific public service functioned like a large business. Others, mostly built around an occupation or particular set of occupations, were closer to what we on the surface would think of a worker's union.

The number and composition of minor guilds varied considerably over D'ni's history.

Here is an incomplete list from the time of the Fall:

- Guild of Actors
- Guild of Artists
- Guild of Bankers
- Guild of Burial Workers
- Guild of Educators
- Guild of Musicians
- Guild of Sculptors
- Guild of Zoologists

Other Levels of Society

Not all D'ni were members of a Guild. These D'ni rarely had the benefits of a Guild education, but played important roles in society.

Merchants and other entrepreneurs made up a good portion of the lower upper class. These are the people who ran the business that the Guild members frequented, as well as services that weren't considered 'public works' by the D'ni. They were never quite considered the equals of members of the Major Guilds, but many were able to hobnob with them and buy Guild enrollment for their children.

Modest and local shopkeepers filled out the middle class, along side members of the Minor guilds. These were the people most likely to utilize Common Libraries for access to Garden Ages, though some might scrimp and save to get their own Linking Books to common Ages. Some rare members of the middle class managed to save up enough to get a private Age commissioned. These became family heirlooms, passed down from generation to generation.

The lower classes consisted of mainly industrial workers that the Guilds employed and workers employed by higher class merchants. The poorest of the poor were sometimes employed as servants (when they were employed at all). Poor D'ni rarely mixed with the middle class and were completely ignored by the upper classes. They formed a seedy underbelly of D'ni society and the only dignity they claimed was that they were at least still D'ni and not some book-worlder.

Science and Technology

D'ni culture took a different path in its technological evolution than humanity did. This led to the D'ni being far more advanced in some areas, while seeming old-fashioned in others.

Physical sciences

The D'ni were masters of physics and chemistry. Specifically, they were particularly advanced in material sciences. The D'ni were adept with all aspects of materials fabrication, including metallurgy.

The D'ni preoccupation with stone was highly characteristic of their science. While it makes sense that a subterranean civilization would be experts with stone, the D'ni took it to amazing lengths. Their stone-masons had access

to a diverse range of technology for dealing with stone. They were able to use sonar to analyze stone both in the ground and on discrete pieces. Also, they had equipment that could soften stone and allow it to be shaped like putty, only to re-harden to its original strength.

Because of this, the D'ni used stone in many places we would use wood, metal, or plastic. Stone was the primary building material in construction of all scales. They went as far as using stone for small components in machinery.

The D'ni even excelled in developing new types of stone like a metallurgist created alloys. The most well-known of these fused stones is nara, a stone composite 30 times harder than steel. Nara was used in large-scale projects like tunneling, where stability and integrity were paramount. Its resistance to fracture and erosion means that the great D'ni buildings have lasted centuries even under harsh weather conditions. And even their early examples of engineering (from machines to buildings and bridges) dwarf anything humanity has done.

Their knowledge of energy physics was extremely advanced, utilizing radiant energy, particle physics, and the electromagnetic spectrum in ways we could not even imagine. For example, the Great Zero emits neutrinos in order to provide communications and positioning data.

While there is no evidence that the D'ni ever flirted with nuclear power, they utilized other power sources (geothermal, wind and hydro as appropriate to an Age) to great effect. The D'ni obviously understood the chemistry around chemically-generated power, but rarely seemed to use it except in isolated Ages.

Conversely, electronics and computing technology seems rare in D'ni, with some evidence that it was only beginning to be used at the time of the Fall. The D'ni had many automated systems, but they were mechanical in nature. D'ni technology does show a proficiency with what we'd think of computerized displays, including effective 3D holograms and imaging. But none of these were used for complex and multi-use interfaces of the kind that 21st century computer users would expect (with the display screen projected by a KI being a notable exception).

Earth Sciences

While the term 'Earth sciences' could be a misnomer in this case, the D'ni had a deep understanding of geology. Given their hands-on experience with actual exoplanets, they developed a sophisticated understanding of how a planet can function that surface scientists could only speculate on. This included knowledge of areas including but not limited to geology, astrophysics, oceanography, meteorology, and atmospheric sciences.

Life Sciences and Medicine

As evidenced in what writers could describe effectively when writing Ages, the D'ni had a good grasp of the life sciences, especially on the macro scale. An understanding of ecology and botany was a must for Writing effective Ages. Food Ages were exploited specifically for the plants available and the D'ni were well-versed with large scale agriculture. They also put a lot of effort into the domestication of native species.

We know almost nothing about their medical technology. History does refer to several plagues that the D'ni combated and we know they had a working knowledge of microbiology. And there is evidence of biological warfare (as seen in the Fall). There is nothing to indicate one way or the other whether they had in-depth knowledge of genetics or similar topics.

Examples of D'ni Technology

Firemarbles

These are round rocks used as a primary source of light in D'ni. Shaking a firemarble activates the chemical reaction that emits light. Dousing it in water will stop it. However, a firemarble emits no heat. Large firemarbles are used as large-scale lighting, while smaller ones are used for personal lighting, such as in the light of a mining helmet.

Great Zero

The Great Zero is an enormous crystal mechanism that sits on the origin point of D'ni mapping, which shares its name. The Zero emits neutrino beams and is used as a beacon for positioning throughout the Cavern. Reactivation of the Great Zero during the restoration took the assistance of hundreds of explorers in order to calibrate it correctly.

Imager

Imagers project a 2D picture or text above or next to the device. They come in two styles: wall imagers and table imagers. Wall imagers are common in neighborhoods, while table imagers are used in the Guild Halls and as a part of Ahyoheek tables. Imagers that project 3D holograms have been found, but there is no evidence that they were in general use.

KI

A KI is the D'ni-equivalent of a smart phone. It is a round watch-like device that is held on the back of the hand with a strap that goes across the palm. Readouts on the KIs have been converted from D'ni to English.

Functions of the KI include pictures, journaling, email and real-time text communication (even between different Ages), and GPS navigation of explored Ages, often referred to as the KI-PS system by explorers.

KIs also provided remote control for various nearby devices (Nexus terminals, doors, imagers, etc.).

The actual D'ni name of the device is unknown. The current name was given by the DRC based on the first models they found, where it was inscribed with the D'ni numeral for 3, which looks like the Roman letters "KI". It is pronounced "key".

Lattice

The Lattice system is the network on which the KI system operates and connects to the Great Zero as well. Only the DRC understands how it operates (specifically Victor Laxman), though there are some indications that it is connected to the Great Zero.

Stone shapers

Stone was the D'ni material of choice and their tools reflected this. These hand-held devices of various styles allowed them to shape stone as if it were clay. With these, the D'ni were able to carve the intricate details and embellishments that were a hallmark of their architecture and decoration.

Tunneling machines

The D'ni built massive excavating machinery for clearing out new caverns. The greatest of these machines took decades to complete and were given names like Stone Eater and Stone Tooth. They became cultural icons.

RELIGION

Religion played an important part of D'ni life. While the D'ni were never superstitious by any account, they had a strong sense of right action and propriety when it came to spiritual matters. The D'ni were originally a group of religious refugees from Garternay, after all. After establishing D'ni, the great Writer Ri'neref established a state religion which became the core of religious thought for all of D'ni history. Certainly there were times in D'ni history that are counted as significantly accepting of non-traditional religion, and multiple small sects were competing for the minds of the populace. However, they always seemed to find their way back to the state faith.

The basic tenet was the worship of Yahvo, the Maker. It was said that Yahvo created the Great Tree of Possibilities and that the Art was a gift from him. After death, the soul of a D'ni was brought to the Judgment Age for consideration. If they were found to be virtuous, they were sent to the Perfect

Age to exist for the rest of eternity. If they were found wanting, they were sent to Jakooth's Age (Jakooth was a devil figure in D'ni religion).

Beyond the metaphysics, however, the real focus of D'ni religion was on what it meant for proper behavior and what it meant to be D'ni. The D'ni acknowledged prophecy as a key metaphysical element, and the prophets that appeared throughout history were the primary shapers of religious thought.

That's not to say that the prophets agreed on that much. Over the course of D'ni history, religious doctrine shifted back and forth between legalistic interpretations and those that focused on personal relationships with Yahvo. As D'ni approached the Fall, the legalistic interpretations won over and integrated themselves into the fabric of D'ni life and tradition.

The Story of D'ni

Humble Beginnings

According to D'ni tradition, our Age was written by Ri'neref, one of the greatest Writers in the history of Garternay. When Garternay discovered that their sun would soon explode, the King of Garternay ordered Ri'neref to Write an Age to which the people escape. He ordered that it be filled with native inhabitants that the King could exploit and rule. Ri'neref refused. Instead, he Wrote our Age and fled with a few thousand followers.

They arrived in caverns deep in the earth and named their new home D'ni, which means 'new beginning'. Their only contact with the surface was a project of building great fans that lead to surface caves in order to ensure that their new home would have a supply of fresh air.

Spoiler Alert!

Necessarily, this section goes into some details that are revealed in the Myst and Uru games, as well as the Myst novels. While not every detail is here, those who want to discover everything from the source should skip this section.

Some early records indicate that some of the workers on this project did leave for the surface, and there is some circumstantial evidence that those D'ni interbred with the native human population. This fuels speculation that there are humans who today have D'ni blood in their veins.

Why a cavern, when there was an entire Age to be explored? Ri'neref felt that Garternay had become corrupt and infected with hubris. His intention was to take his followers into a humble place where they could focus on the worship of Yahvo, the Maker. Any needs they had could be handled by Writing an Age.

D'ni History

Despite the large amount of research done on the D'ni by both the DRC and independent researchers, there is not a lot known about D'ni history itself. From what has been discovered, the first half of D'ni history was defined by a long series of kings. Each king had their own personality, and some were good kings while others were incompetent.

The most notable factors in D'ni culture involved changes in public opinion on religion and how to deal with non-D'ni. Rogue D'ni factions tended to rally around one of these core issues. The pattern, however, became a familiar one. Every few centuries, religious zealots or isolationist fanatics (the two often overlapped) would infiltrate the D'ni government, try to drum up support, and eventually do something radical to make a point. This would lead to persecution by the King and the faction would flee to the Ages. In a while, they would attempt a comeback, only to be crushed. Then, society was relatively quiet until it happened again.

Ultimately, it was religion that had the most lasting effect. The last of the kings, Kerath, abdicated for religious reasons. He left the Guilds in charge of the D'ni, setting the basis for the society that would stand for the second half of D'ni's history. The era of the Guilds is largely unknown, despite being more recent.

Overall, D'ni history paints a picture with a singular nature. In the time it took humanity to develop from Stone Age tools to the capability of interplanetary exploration, comparatively little seems to have changed in D'ni. Humanity has had thousands of languages and cultures in that time. Why was D'ni so different? Here are some theories. The truth is probably some combination of them all.

- The D'ni, being much longer lived than and having a lower birth rate than humanity, developed socially at a slower pace. New ideas from the next generations were a longer time coming, and the elder D'ni, with their more conservative beliefs, were in power for a significantly longer time.
- Human history is filled with 'game-changing' technological change. While there was some technological advancement over the history of D'ni, they arrived from Garternay relatively advanced.
- Another transformative factor in human history is the scarcity of resources. Having started with the Ages at their fingertips, the D'ni never encountered true scarcity.
- D'ni was founded with a deep respect for tradition. This led generations of D'ni to emulate their ancestors.
- History is written by the winners. At the time of the Fall, D'ni culture was focused on tradition and an unbroken cultural heritage. Thus, the bias of historical records reflected that. The destruction of records due to the Fall makes it harder to find any existing opposing accounts.

The Fall

How D'ni ended is well-known, however.

In the nineteenth century (as reckoned on the surface), D'ni had their first definitive contact with the surface. Anna, the daughter of a surveyor, became lost in the caves of New Mexico and found her way to the D'ni caverns. Anna surprised the D'ni, as she was nothing like the savages that they expected to be roaming the surface of their world. Rather, she was intelligent and gifted, and learned the D'ni language quickly.

The governing council of D'ni decided that they could not let her return to the surface. Anna (now called Ti'ana by the D'ni) became a fixture in D'ni society. She married a Guildsman named Aitrus. Together, they had a son (Gehn) and Aitrus began teaching Ti'ana the Art of Writing.

Ti'ana's presence was a constant irritant to the D'ni concepts of racial superiority and purity. Veovis, a great Writer, spoke out against against Ti'ana's integration. He became entangled with a criminal named A'Gaeris, who shared his feelings on racial purity. Unfortunately for Veovis, A'Gaeris had become a bitter anarchist, intent on destroying D'ni society.

Ages of Note in Pre-Fall D'ni

The following Ages were mentioned prominently in D'ni records from around the time of the Fall.

- ▷ Ader Jamat - Written by Veovis just before the Fall, Ader Jamat was considered a masterpiece. It was the last Age to be accepted into the canon of great D'ni Ages.
- ▷ Ahnonay - An Age written by former Guildmaster Kadish. He claimed it proved that he was the Grower, a messiah figure in D'ni prophecies.
- ▷ Direbo - A garden Age used as a rest area for stops along the staircase that spiraled up the Great Shaft.
- ▷ Er'cana - An Age owned by Kadish where local plants were collected and processed into food pellets.
- ▷ Er'duna - A food Age owned by the Guild of Caterers
- ▷ Er'jerah - Another food Age owned by the Guild of Caterers.
- ▷ Gadar - This Age housed the Great Library of Legislation, as maintained by the Guild of Legislators.
- ▷ Gahreesehn - A fortified outpost of the Guild of Maintainers, and a center for distribution of the new message devices the Maintainers had developed.
- ▷ Gemedet - Age Written by Aitrus and the surface-dweller Ti'ana. Named after a popular D'ni game.
- ▷ Pento - An ancient Age ravaged by plague. It was sealed off in the time just before the Fall, but was often mentioned in D'ni histories.
- ▷ Te'negamiris - Age used as a massive cemetary. Owned by the minor Guild of Burial-Workers.

Together, they began a series of attacks that ended with the release of a biological weapon into D'ni, which wiped out most of the populace. The surviving D'ni scattered into the Ages. Veovis and A'Gaeris linked dying D'ni through any book they could find, releasing the weapon into most of the D'ni Ages as well.

A'Gaeris and Veovis turned on each other, while Aitrus died from the plague while trying to save his family. Ti'ana and Gehn were mostly unaffected by the weapon, not being wholly D'ni. They fled to the surface and left D'ni behind and abandoned.

The Family of Atrus

After the Fall, the history of D'ni is intertwined with the descendants of Ti'ana. The world would unknowingly become acquainted with their story through the best-selling computer game of the twentieth century, Myst.

Gehn

Ti'ana's son, Gehn, was young during the Fall of D'ni, but he never forgot it. He remembered the glory of D'ni and blamed his mother for its destruction. When his wife died in childbirth, Gehn abandoned his newborn son with Ti'ana. He returned to D'ni and spent many years piecing together the Art from the records that remained after the Fall. He began writing Ages, where he set himself up as the ruler and god of the natives he found.

Meanwhile, Ti'ana raised Gehn's son, Atrus, in a cleft in the desert of what is now known as New Mexico. Under Ti'ana's tutelage, Atrus became an earnest boy with a brilliant mind. Where his father was rash, Atrus was methodical. Where his father was arrogant, Atrus was humble.

Soon after Atrus's fourteenth birthday, Gehn returned to the Cleft. He brought Atrus with him to D'ni, to be an assistant and the heir to the new D'ni empire he was building. There he taught Atrus the fundamentals of the Art.

Atrus excelled at the Art, as his mind fully grasped the intricacies of describing the aspects of an Age. However, it did not take long for him to realize that his father had far less understanding. Gehn had Written his Ages by copying passages and phrases from other books, and his Ages were dangerously unstable. Even worse in Atrus's eyes, he showed little regard for the natives in those Ages.

The conflict between father and son escalated in the unstable Age of Riven. A native named Catherine, with the help of Ti'ana, aided Atrus and together they trapped Gehn in the dying Age. Ti'ana and Catherine escaped to Myst. However, Atrus threw himself into a strange anomaly called the Star Fissure, carrying the last Linking Book out of Riven. While falling through it, he linked to Myst, letting the book fall away into a sea of stars.

An Island Called Myst

On Myst, Ti'ana, Atrus, and Catherine lived happily for many years. Atrus and Catherine continued to Write, and they had two sons. Sadly, Ti'ana died in one of Catherine's Ages. Catherine blamed herself and Atrus retreated from grief by throwing himself into the Art. Their sons grew up disconnected from

their parents. They became sadistic adults and viewed the Ages as their own personal playgrounds. For instance, in one Age they started a civil war, simply for their own amusement.

Atrus focused on Writing and exploring his Ages, and paid no notice to what his sons had become. They conspired to capture their father and force him to teach them the Art. They tricked their mother into returning to Riven, and then trapped their father in D'ni. They were themselves tricked by Linking Books Atrus had devised as traps to catch thieves if any ever managed to get to Myst. This left the entire family stranded in the Ages.

Atrus' lost Linking Book to Myst was discovered by a stranger in the deserts of New Mexico. This stranger linked to Myst and rescued Atrus from D'ni. Atrus possessed Riven's Descriptive Book and was effecting repairs with the hope of saving Catherine. Atrus asked the stranger to travel to Riven to rescue Catherine while he repaired the book. The stranger rescued Catherine and escaped from Riven as it began to tear itself apart.

Releeshahn

After many years, Atrus decided it was time to return to D'ni and begin rebuilding. He discovered a handful of inhabited D'ni outposts in the abandoned Ages and gathered the survivors together for the effort.

He felt that the remaining D'ni people needed a fresh start, without the baggage of the past. He wrote a well-balanced Age based off of sound principles for a new civilization. He called it 'Releeshahn', which means 'the whole' in D'ni. Atrus and the remaining D'ni settled together in the new Age.

The Deep City Breathes Again

Yeesha was the daughter of Atrus and Catherine, the last of their children. She became a brilliant Writer, far outstripping her parents in the Art. She traveled back to D'ni to learn more from what remained of the ancient civilization.

Yeesha would discover the darkest secret of D'ni: the D'ni had enslaved a powerful race they called the Bahro. These Bahro had incredible control over Linking. They could link without the use of a Linking Book and could affect the nature of the Age itself. However, they were bound to serve the D'ni through a tablet that was locked within D'ni. Yeesha, confident in her abilities, attempted to release the Tablet so that she could free the Bahro. She failed, and the guilt of it weighed heavily on her.

In her research, Yeesha discovered a D'ni prophecy describing 'the Grower', a messianic figure who was described as being able to 'link at will' and who would rebuild D'ni. She came to believe that the prophecy referred to her family, and that she was the Grower. It became her obsession to free the Bahro from their captivity, fulfill the prophecy, and build a better D'ni.

The Restoration Begins

In 1987, the way to the D'ni caverns were discovered by a prospector who worked for Elias Zandi, a wealthy archaeologist. This ultimately lead to the formation of the D'ni Restoration Council (DRC), headed by Dr. Richard Watson. Engineers worked to excavate areas of the cavern and to help explore and restore the Ages that they discovered in D'ni.

In the early 21st century, the DRC found themselves no longer alone in D'ni. People from all over the world felt themselves drawn to the New Mexico desert. There they were greeted by a holographic recording from Yeesha. Yeesha charged the newcomers to take a 'Journey' across several Ages. Throughout the journey, Yeesha left clues emphasizing the pride of the D'ni, and exposing their use of the Bahro as slaves. She claimed that completing the journey freed a soul of a Bahro, and she awarded each person their own instance of the Age of Relto.

The DRC reeled from the sudden influx of what they called unauthorized explorers. They struggled to maintain their project while maintaining the safety of the newcomers. The explorers settled into the city and the Ages and pushed for more access to D'ni Ages as well as more say in the direction of the restoration. Events came to a head when a DRC engineer was caught in a collapse in the Guild Hall and was presumed dead. Dr. Watson left for the surface in grief. The funding for the DRC dried up shortly after, and the DRC left the Cavern. However, small groups of explorers remained in the Cavern, claiming it as their own.

The Bahro War

Dr. Watson returned to D'ni in 2005 and encountered Yeesha, who set him to releasing the Tablet that controlled the Bahro. Successful in freeing the Tablet, Dr. Watson gave it to the Bahro themselves, freeing them from their slavery. Once the Bahro were free, an extreme faction decided that any trace of D'ni needed to be wiped out. This faction began attacking Releeshahn and the remaining D'ni. The other Bahro faction worked to defend the D'ni.

Meanwhile, remaining DRC members managed to secure additional funding and began the restoration anew. The Bahro War spilled into the cavern as the anti-D'ni Bahro attacked explorers and the opposite Bahro faction strove to defend them. Dr. Watson told the assembled explorers in D'ni that the only answer to stopping the Bahro Civil War was somewhere in the Ages, and that they would have to Write Ages in order to find it. Yeesha drew the Bahro off from D'ni, leaving the explorers in D'ni by themselves.
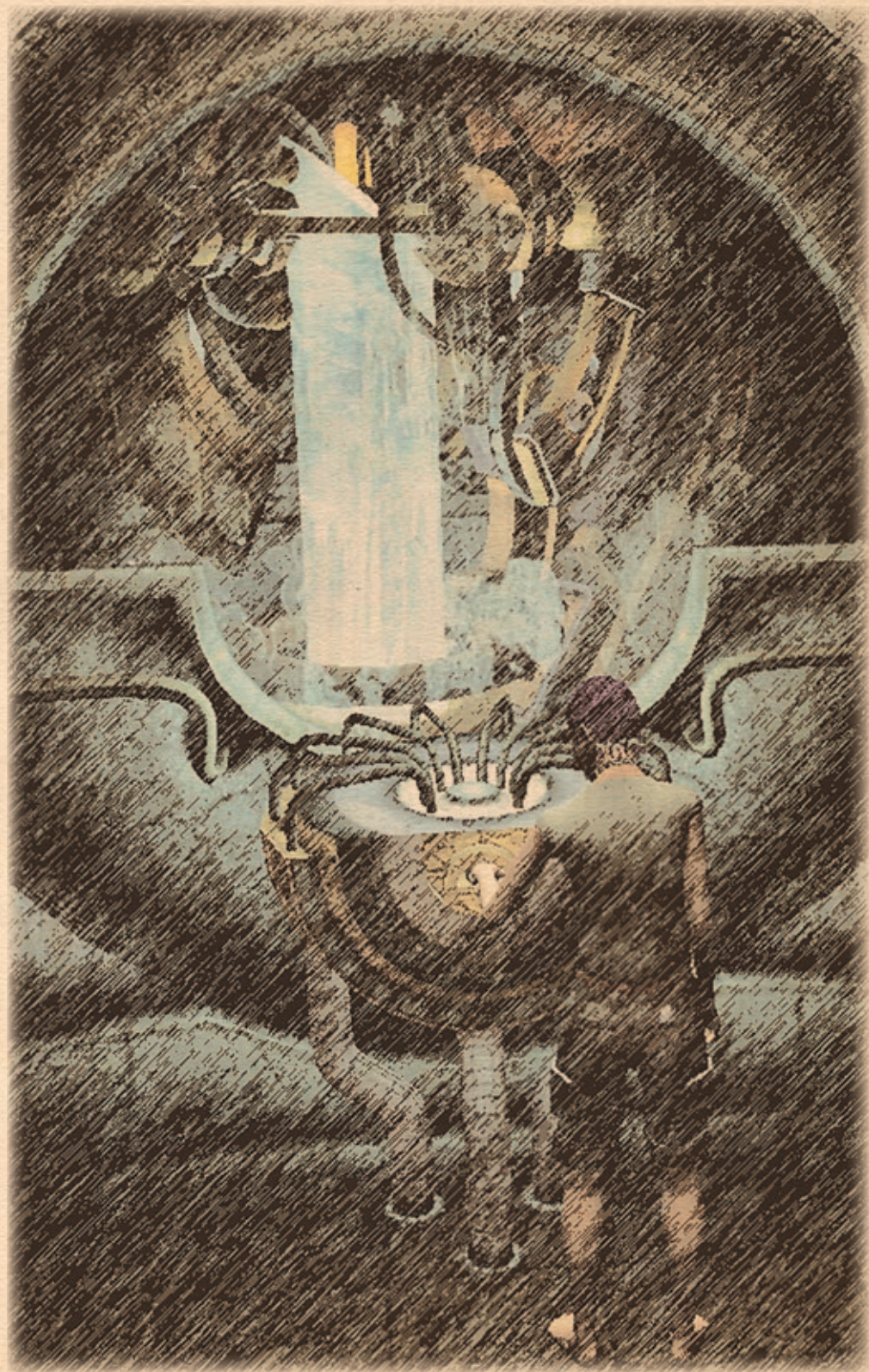
D'ni Today

Even without the DRC around, life goes on. It's a quieter life with Yeesha and the Bahro gone, but it still draws people to it. Those left in D'ni still call themselves 'explorers'. However, they have become settlers, pioneers, businesspeople, and visionaries. They struggle to grow a new life, with one foot on the surface and the other out in the Ages.

Factions

Most of those called to D'ni fall into two general categories: rugged individualists and opinionated dreamers. While none of them have the expertise in D'ni matters that the DRC has developed in the past decades, they have a diverse set of skills and are highly motivated. They could accomplish a lot, if they could agree on anything.

D'ni Restoration Council

The D'ni Restoration Council (DRC) was founded by Dr. Richard Watson to steward the exploration of D'ni and to manage its restoration. The DRC proper were the scientists and academics in charge of the Restoration, though in later years, those people on the council who controlled the funding called the shots.

The DRC employed researchers, assistants, and engineers. The most visible of these were the Restoration Engineers, who did most of the grunt work and maintenance for the Restoration. Explorers called them ResEngs for short and for many, they were the only side of the DRC they ever actually met in person. As the DRC expanded their operations, they hired independent contractors to oversee the restoration of particular D'ni installations in the Ages.

While they were active, the DRC were considered the people 'in charge' of the cavern. They had the most access, resources, and information. And they were there first, after all.

Friction between the DRC and explorers was common, however. Explorers clamored for more access. People volunteered to help out the DRC in droves. But with little understanding of just how much effort it takes to direct a large volunteer organization, they became frustrated with the DRC's reluctance to include them. They saw the focus on safety as stifling, and some just had an issue with authority no matter what form it came in.

Ultimately, the DRC were unable to balance maintaining control of the situation with the costs involved. They shut down operations several times and left the cavern. At first they tried to get explorers to leave but eventually gave up. It has been years since the DRC existed as an official entity. Some DRC members and employees come back to the cavern on a regular basis however, and occasionally rumors surface that the DRC has some other project in the works.

The Modern Guilds

Nowadays, the closest thing to organized management are the modern Guilds. The DRC had attempted to organize the explorers into Guilds modeled after the system that was the center of D'ni civilization. Other groups claimed the name of a Guild and have, by default, become the modern incarnation of one of their ancient counterparts. Left to their own devices, the Guilds have attempted to provide some structure and sense of cooperation to the Cavern, with varying degrees of success.

Here are the most prominent of the modern Guilds:

Guild of Archivists

A mix of professional scholars and obsessed amateurs, the Guild of Archivists is home to some of the most ardent D'ni scholars you can find in the Cavern. If there is any exploration into an unexplored part of the D'ni city, or D'ni settlement in an Age, an Archivist is a good person to have along, and there would be no shortage of them wanting to go.

Guild of Cartographers

While many Cartographers work with the Guild of Archivists, they focused on mapping the Ages in as much detail as possible. The smallest of the Guilds with only a handful of members, they tend to be methodical and thorough to the point of distraction. Cartographers are often happy to wander into an Age on their own with just the equipment to survey the landscape.

Guild of Greeters

The Greeters are not modeled after one of the ancient D'ni guilds. Rather, as new explorers began to flood the Cavern out of the DRC's control, several banded together to try to make things easier for the new people who arrived. Of all of the Guilds, they are the ones most focused on what is happening in the Cavern socially. Their goal is to support those who want to make D'ni itself their home. New people will be directed to their Guild Hall first and there is always at least one Greeter on shift there.

Guild of Maintainers

The modern counterparts of the Maintainers have taken to the role of explorers eagerly. When it comes to exploration, they are ready to jump into a new situation with a smile on their face and a Relto Book on their hip. Once they began to salvage Maintainer equipment (especially Maintainer Suits, incredibly durable armored suits for exploring hostile and toxic environments), some would say their fervor began to border on the insane. If you need a two-fisted Indiana Jones-style explorer, then you need a Maintainer.

Guild of Messengers

The Messengers form the communication network of the explorers and are the closest thing to the Cavern's news service. They maintain a presence on the surface as well as in several of the more populated areas and Ages. Relayers act as couriers of information and small items, and Messengers have stepped up to act as mediators (not always successfully).

Guild of Writers

The Writers have been focusing on trying to tease out as much about the Art as possible. They have been able to reliably create Linking Books and have begun writing new Ages. It takes a certain brilliance to reconstruct something like the Art, and the Writers have that in spades. Unfortunately, like many brilliant people, a few of the Writers don't work well with others.

The Children of the New Seed

The discovery of D'ni was a world-changing event for many people, but few as much as Harlon Mason. He saw the D'ni way of life as an inherently better one and felt that he'd been led to the cavern so that humanity may succeed where there D'ni themselves had failed.

He's gathered a sizeable number of followers around him who have cast off the customs of the surface world for the 'purer' way of life of the D'ni. The New Seed has all the symptoms of a cult: they separate themselves from others, they fanatically follow the beliefs of their leader, and are actively recruiting others. Tensions with other explorers are often high.

Project Ethereal

A small group of individuals have quietly secured a number of DRC caches of equipment and research materials, possibly with assistance of the former employees of the DRC. Calling the effort Project Ethereal, this group has continued the DRC's work in restoring Ages, and it is a secret known to very few explorers.

Where Ethereal differs from the DRC's efforts is in transparency and in focus. First, the project has been actively hidden from the explorer community. Second, some of the Ages the project has been working on restoring that the DRC considered far too dangerous, including some Ages known in D'ni history for being the sources of plagues.

Also, Ethereal is notably ahead of the Guild of Writers in their understanding of the art. They also have more blank Books and ink, allowing them to do more exploration of the Art's capabilities.

Is Project Ethereal simply working to the same goals as the DRC while trying to avoid interruptions from explorers at large, or do they have other goals? Even to those few in the know, their ultimate goals are unknown.

The Called

The Called are those who felt drawn to the New Mexico deserts for some reason. Some had dreams of a lost city. Others just felt like they wanted to visit Carlsbad Caverns, or that living in the desert sounded like a great idea. They drifted together into Eddy County and began running into each other and into Jeff Zandi.
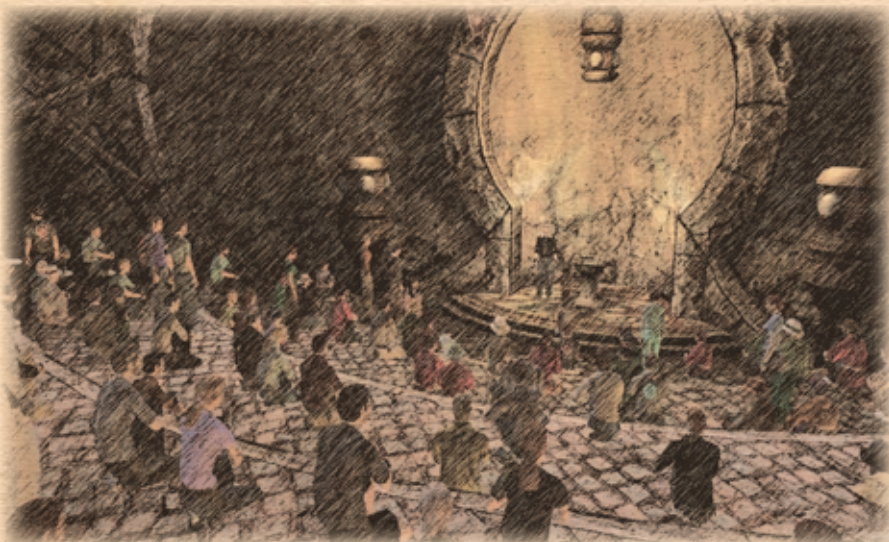
Zandi directed them to the Cleft, where a message from Yeesha waited for them. She charged them to follow a Journey, an adventure of discovery that led them across several Ages and introduced them to the D'ni and their folly. From there, it led to the deep city itself.

Simply because D'ni is under the United States, Americans are most represented among the explorers. But D'ni has attracted all types from all over the world, and dozens of languages can be heard regularly throughout the cavern. D'ni takes all types. However, there are a few stereotypes that have become iconic.

How many explorers are there?

There is no way to know how many people have been called to D'ni. There is simply too much space to survey and many visit the city rarely. The DRC once claimed to have distributed thousands of KI devices through the automated dispensers in Gahreesen and have seen several thousand active at the same time during the height of the restoration.

Nowadays, the number is much lower. According to the readouts in Nexus, there are regularly a dozen or so explorers in the central areas of Ae'gura and a several dozen scattered through various neighborhoods and guild halls. Around 500 are estimated to be active in the Cavern or D'ni-related projects, with maybe twice that amount who visit irregularly. So D'ni is still largely unpopulated, but it is easy to find a few people at any time if someone goes looking.

Inhabitants

Settlers

The core cavern population are those who have re-arranged their lives around D'ni. While not the most numerous of the people you run into in the Cavern, they are the bedrock on which the rest of explorer society is built.

These 'full-timers' have moved their surface lives to New Mexico so that they can spend a lot of their time in D'ni. Some work their day jobs in local towns like Carlsbad and spend their evenings in D'ni or in the Ages. As the Guild of Writers has been setting up Nexus hubs in other surface cities, this has begun to spread out, leading to what some call 'cavern commuters'. But these people are in the minority at the moment.

Some have been able to tie their livelihood to D'ni, either by providing key services to other explorers or finding wealthy patrons among those in the know (Jeff Zandi supports several researchers, for example). No one has started bringing things back from the Ages to the surface for commercial purposes (at least openly), but it is just a matter of time. It is an unpopular idea among explorers, however. Anyone who makes noises in that direction find themselves to be pariahs.

A few wealthy explorers focus on D'ni and act as the above mentioned patrons. There are also a few ambitious retirees who look to the Ages for a place to spend their golden years.

Others just have no life they want to return to on the surface. Whether they are running from their past or they want to live a simpler life, these explorers pulled up roots and set down in D'ni. Because of the lack of amenities, this is a rough life to choose. It cuts you off from the rest of humanity and your life becomes focused on subsistence—gathering your own food from Ages or bartering for it from others. On the other hand, that's exactly what some people want.

Weekend Explorers

By far the most frequent visitors to D'ni are the 'weekend warriors' of the Called. They spend most of their lives on the surface, living regular lives. But weekends or vacations give them the chance to get back to the place they love so much. Relto and Nexus Books let them get to the cavern. New

Nexus hubs on the surface allow those near them to do this every weekend. Others just tell their friends and family that they are going on 'caving trips' to Carlsbad.

Age Pioneers

D'ni is not the focus for some explorers. Rather they see the Ages as the true opportunities. When they do interact with D'ni, it's usually for replenishing supplies and checking up on the latest news.

There are as many goals for pioneers out in the Ages as there are Ages themselves. A few notable trends are:

- Homesteaders - On the surface, it is hard to truly set out on your own except in the more extreme environments. For those who want to live off of the land, the Ages provide lots of isolated places with good soil and resources that have not been gobbled up by big agro corporations. And because of Linking Books, people have the chance to tune their life to the level of self-sufficiency that they want.
- Social experiments - Idealists see Ages as the perfect opportunity to give their ideas about society a real chance without the baggage of the surface world. Communes, libertarian utopias, and other 'new societies' have been attempted in the Ages. Most have failed spectacularly, but there are always more who want to try. And one or two have managed to hold it together so far.
- Field Study - Ages provide unique scientific opportunities for examining situations that could not exist on Earth. Some Ages have been turned into research facilities, especially those with unique properties. As Writers increase their knowledge of the Art, Ages will be made to order. For science, of course.

Explorer Archetypes

Independent Researcher

Of all the types of people in D'ni, the independent researcher is the most widely recognized. While no particular occupation was primary among the called, those with a scholarly bent were the most likely to stick around, and to invite others of like mind to join them. Everyone is either in the midst of some research or knows someone who is.

Researchers vary in specialty and level of education. Archaeologists, linguists, and anthropologists abound, as do engineers, geologists, and biologists. Many are professionals with advanced degrees in their field, though they are matched in number by determined hobbyists and obsessive amateurs. Given how much of D'ni is still unexplored and how many questions there are to answer, there's been little friction so far. But it is just a matter of time.

Former Restoration Engineer

Restoration Engineers tended more towards skilled labor and hired contractors rather than high-level scholars, and thus had more on-the-ground experience with D'ni and with the explorers themselves. After the DRC left, many ResEngs stayed behind, having become as attached to the cavern as anyone else.

Nowadays, these former DRC employees are often the go-to people when others need help. They feel like the cavern is their responsibility now and work to keep things going and keep people safe. On average, they have more knowledge of the cavern than other explorers, and several kept DRC equipment for their own use.

Cavern Entrepreneur

People continue to gather in the cavern, and they need things: food, first aid kits, flashlights, generators, and more. Small cottage industries have sprung up as enterprising explorers have stepped in to fill these needs.

These 'local businessmen' run the gamut, from pillar-of-the-community types who run general stores in renovated neighborhoods, to shifty types who border on snake-oil salesmen. Most are focused on their own businesses and projects, though an occasional 'adventure capitalist' will put together a team of people in hopes of making a big score.

Explorer by Day, Homemaker by Night

Every morning, they get up, get the kids off to school and take care of the chores around the house. Then they pull out their Relto Book and head off to another universe. These explorers live a double life, one that is mundane and one that no one at the PTA meeting would ever believe.

While there are not many professional scholars and adventurers in this bunch, they form an emotional backbone of the cavern community. They are some of the most inquisitive explorers, genuinely astounded on a daily basis

by the grandeur of D'ni and the beauty of the Ages. They are always willing to lend out a helping hand, help organize an event or activity, and generally provide a sensibility that a lot of scholars and engineers lack. They always are game to trek around a new Age, but are the most likely to be protective of their Relto Books; they need to have a quick way to get home before the school bus arrives.

Gone Native

You know that feeling you have that there is something missing in your life? That there's a better place for you in the world? For a few of the Called, D'ni is the answer. They see D'ni as a more civilized society, one with a place of real meaning in the universe. They have given up their surface life (or are trying to) to become the new D'ni people.

Explorers like this tend to be obsessive about the D'ni; they are constantly trying to get ahold of new information. They take D'ni names and emulate D'ni dress, culture, and religion.

The Bahro

The Bahro are the great enigma of D'ni. The Bahro are obviously inhuman. They are skinny creatures with dark leathery skin. They have enlarged forearms that end in large claws. Their heads are small and round with an insectoid appearance. They have wings which fold around their bodies and across their chests. They call to each other in characteristic screeches and chirps. The Bahro are intelligent and sentient; they possess a system of petroglyphs and have proved capable of understanding humans.

More importantly, they have a special connection with the Art. They can Link at will without need for Books, and can even cause changes in the Ages they visit. Even the D'ni would have considered such abilities magical. No one knows how they do this.

At some point in the Bahro's history, they were enslaved by the D'ni. A tablet covered in petroglyphs allowed the D'ni control over the Bahro through some unknown mechanism. It's also unknown definitively what the D'ni used the Bahro for, though it seems likely that they used the Bahro's ability to change Ages to further their control over Ages.

When D'ni fell, the Bahro were left in bondage to the Tablet. Yeesha discovered the Bahro and unsuccessfully attempted to free them. They remained enslaved until Dr. Watson obtained the Tablet and turned it over to them, thus putting their fate in their own hands. Once they gained their

18-08-16 — Aaron has been doing a lot of experimenting with the slates, and I've noticed this fellow seems to be our 'regular' assistant.

His markings are all I have to go by; I don't know how much variation they have between individuals. Not actually sure of the gender either, if bahro HAVE genders.

I call him "Duke"

freedom, a faction of Bahro split off, intent on destroying anything D'ni. These 'twisted' Bahro waged war against the surviving D'ni and eventually turned their attention to the explorers. The remaining Bahro aligned with Yeesha to oppose the slaughter of D'ni, sparking the Bahro civil war.

During the restoration, the Bahro were part bogeyman and part mythic creature. They left artifacts for explorers to find for inscrutable reasons. To some they represented the wonder of the Great Tree of Possibilities. To others they represented the sins of the D'ni that must not be forgotten. Since Yeesha drew the war away from the Cavern, the threat of the twisted Bahro has hung over explorers like the Sword of Damocles. Fortunately, no one has seen a Bahro (hostile or not) in years.

Notable Personalities

There are a few people in and around D'ni everyone seems to know. We've listed a few here, with suggestions for their High Concept and some possible aspects.

Yeesha

Yeesha is the daughter of Atrus and Catherine. Where Atrus was neglectful with his sons, he was very attentive to Yeesha (perhaps too much) and taught her the Art. She had many harrowing experiences among the Ages and eventually left her parents to explore D'ni, where she discovered a D'ni survivor who trained her further. She delved deeply into the mysteries of the Art.

Plainly put, Yeesha is the greatest Writer to have ever lived. As a child, she was a prodigy, the result of her father's methodical genius and her mother's wildly creative insight. She combined this with the fruits of ten millenia of D'ni expertise, and then she discovered the Bahro and learned from them. As a result, the things that Yeesha can do with the Art race past the boundaries of the plausible and deep into the realm of the miraculous. Her body is covered with tattoos which seem to give her the ability to link without books, like the Bahro do.

The discovery of the Bahro's slavery horrified her, and she took up the burden of freeing them. She failed to do so, and took on the guilt of her ancestors. When the Called began to arrive in D'ni, she was ready for them, sending each on a vision quest across the Ages so that they could learn from the example of D'ni's folly.

Yeesha's experiences have affected her dramatically. Her body is aged beyond her years. She speaks as if she's not entirely paying attention to the world around her. Those that meet her are never sure if she's become a little too detached from reality, or somehow inexplicably closer to it. She has taken on the mantle of the Grower, a figure in D'ni prophecy. She sees the spiritual redemption of D'ni as her destiny.

Yeesha

High Concept:
The Greatest Writer to Ever Live
Aspects:
I AM the Grower!
Burdened by Guilt
Yeesha Magic
A Few Pages Short of a Full Book

Yeesha was last seen several years ago, drawing off the twisted Bahro away from D'ni. Explorers are unlikely to run into her around D'ni, but the signs of her influence are unavoidable.

DR. RICHARD WATSON

Dr. Richard Watson is a historian and founder of the D'ni Restoration Council. During his tenure as the head of the DRC, he directed the archaeological exploration and restoration of D'ni. As explorers filtered into the cavern, one of his primary concerns became their safety. He often erred strongly on the side of caution, much to the dismay of many explorers who were hungry for more access to D'ni. The apparent death of DRC research assistant Phil Henderson hit him badly, and he resigned from the DRC in despair. He fled into the Ages in search of Yeesha, and purpose.

He eventually discovered Yeesha, who set him on the task of freeing the Bahro. Where she failed, Dr. Watson succeeded by giving the Bahro tablet over to the Bahro themselves, effectively making them masters of their own fate. As the Bahro war began to heat up, he returned to the cavern to warn explorers and convince them that they were the key to finding its solution.

Dr. Watson is a husky man with a full beard and often wearing his signature ballcap and vest. He's a quiet person who rarely raises his voice and says little. That is, unless you get him talking on an academic subject he is well-versed in. While his demeanor is decidedly understated, he has a deep sense of duty to explorers. Accidents that happen in the cavern weigh on his mind heavily.

Of anyone, he is the most knowledgeable about D'ni history and language. However, he prefers to let others pursue their own research and projects without interference. During Yeesha's absence, Dr. Watson has kept

a low profile. He visits the cavern on occasion to check on the progress of explorers and give a nudge here or there on their work with the Art or in the study of D'ni.

DR. RICHARD WATSON

High Concept:
FORMER HEAD OF THE DRC
Aspects:
SAFETY FIRST
FOREMOST EXPERT ON D'NI
SPEAK SOFTLY BUT CLEARLY

JEFF ZANDI

Jeff Zandi is the son of Elias Zandi, one of the first people to rediscover D'ni. He disagreed with his father's (and later the DRC's) agenda of a physical restoration of D'ni. Rather, he felt that D'ni needed a spiritual restoration. He and his father parted ways. However, when he father died, Jeff inherited the land above D'ni in the New Mexico desert. When the explorers began to be drawn to D'ni, he assisted them. Camping out near the Cleft in his vintage Airstream camper, Zandi greeted newcomers and directed them to Yeesha's Journey.

Jeff is a big man with an inordinate fondness for gaudy Hawaiian shirts. He's friendly yet enigmatic, and can often be found near the Cleft in his spare time. He hardly visits D'ni itself anymore, but is integral in explorer efforts to get back and forth between D'ni and the surface.

JEFF ZANDI

High Concept:
ENIGMATIC PATRON OF D'NI
Aspects:
WELL-OFF AND WELL-CONNECTED
OWNS THE LAND ABOVE D'NI

Victor Laxman

Victor Laxman was the DRC's chief engineer and expert in D'ni technology. Of all of the members of the DRC, he is the most likely to be encountered in the cavern nowadays, as he frequently comes back down to tinker with the Great Zero and the KI/Lattice system.

While he has never really involved himself in the politics of the DRC and the explorers, Laxman is fairly approachable. He is generally no-nonsense, but not above the occasional quip. He is happy to discuss the details of any D'ni technology as he truly enjoys the subject and talking with those of like mind.

Victor Laxman

High Concept:
Foremost Expert in D'ni Technology

Aspects:
Former member of the DRC
Only Person who Understands the Lattice

Echo McKenzie

Echo McKenzie is an explorer and a tortured soul. Drawn to D'ni like many others, when she arrived she began to have visions of death and pain. She claimed she could hear the screams of the D'ni dying during the Fall, and could see images of them wherever in the cavern she went.

Instead of fleeing the cavern, Echo decided that it was her duty to be a speaker for the dead. She spends much of her time

in Ae'gura, often gathering a small circle of explorers who sit around her as she tells stories of D'ni life and death. She also paints scenes she has claimed to see. Sometimes, her feelings overwhelm her and she breaks down, sobbing over the tragedy of D'ni.

Anyone who has been around D'ni for a while has at least heard stories of the 'crazy ghost lady' who hangs around. While pragmatists like Victor Laxman simply dismiss her, she has developed a small following as the resident psychic and medium. Her stories have never been verified or discredited, but that just enhances their mystique.

Echo is a willowy young woman with red hair and freckles. She is a reluctant local celebrity and seems to share her stories more as a compulsion than a desire for the spotlight.

Echo McKenzie

High Concept:
Speaker for the D'ni Dead
Aspects:
Is this Real or Is This Just Fantasy?
Resident Crazy Ghost Lady

J.D. Barnes

J.D. Barnes is an anthropologist with colleagues in the DRC. One of the Called himself, he came to D'ni to study the explorers as much as to unearth the mysteries of the past. He finds explorer culture endlessly fascinating. He has acted as an advocate of the explorers to the DRC in times past as well.

Unlike many of the more scholarly types in the Cavern, J.D. goes out of his way to talk with explorers and build personal connections among them. He has a good memory for names and

faces, and will often ask people about their personal projects and families. He seems genuinely interested in people, even those people who others tend to find unpleasant or annoying.

J.D. is an older gentleman who comes across like a friendly professor with a dry wit, the sort who refers to his students as by Mister or Miss and their last name. He has a tendency to treat everyone he talks to as a student, however, and easily slips into pontificating about a subject as if he was a lecturing a class.

J.D. Barnes

High Concept:
Quietly Curious Anthropologist
Aspects:
Every Story is Important
The Universe is a Classroom
Precise and Pedantic

Adelaide Houston

Every group of people has 'that guy', and in the cavern, that's Adelaide Houston. An opinionated busybody, she can usually be found arguing with other explorers or drumming up support for her latest project. While the DRC were around, she came into frequent conflict with them, often being the one to stand up during meetings and events to make an accusation or an awkward sarcastic comment.

Adelaide always has a project she is working on, though it changes every few weeks or so. Many of these are frivolous or overly-ambitious, though occasionally she latches onto a genuinely good idea. And while she is often abrasive, she has never been actually malicious. That being said, people tend to roll their eyes when they hear her voice headed their way.

Adelaide Houston

High Concept:
Resident Contrarian Busybody
Aspect:
"Let Me Tell You What I Think."
Too Many Projects, So Little Time

Harlan Mason

A defrocked Methodist deacon, Harlon Mason had lost most of his faith to cynicism and ennui. That is, until he heard the Call and made his way to D'ni. When he got there, he knew that God had led him to this glorious truth, one that the surface world did not deserve. He rolled up his sleeves and founded the Children of the New Seed to prepare the faithful for their new place in the universe.

He truly believes that he has been chosen to lead humanity into an event that is as significant as Noah weathering the flood. The unshakable nature of his beliefs are infectious, especially to those looking to fill a void in their life. Harlan is no mastermind, but he is charismatic and used to tending a flock. And he is serious about ushering in a new era and will go to great lengths to fulfill what he thinks is his destiny.

Harlan Mason

High Concept:
Self-Declared Prophet of D'ni
Aspects:
Yavho speaks to Me, Not You
My People Believe in Me
Rousing Sermons

Mike Ando

Mike Ando is the closest thing to an actual mad scientist that modern D'ni has ever seen. Intelligent and focused, he will happily start up projects that seem absurdly difficult or oddly obscure. Even more surprising, he has managed to complete many of them successfully, going as far performing his own experiments and researching obscure subjects in levels of detail that would make other people's eyes cross. He is second only to Victor Laxman in knowledge of D'ni technology and exceeds him in recreational knowledge of radioactive isotopes.

Being around Mike is never dull. He's frenetic in an entertaining way, peppering his speech with puns and obscure in-jokes as he works on whatever vaguely dangerous thing that has caught his imagination. While a little awkward socially, he makes up for it in sheer good-natured energy. He's developed a large circle of friends around the cavern who are fiercely protective of him (though those with common sense tend not to visit him in his workshop, just in case).

MIKE ANDO

High Concept:
GARAGE MAD SCIENTIST
Aspects:
SO MANY WONDERFUL TOYS!
BRAIN ON OVERDRIVE
FRIENDS IN ODD PLACES

LIFE, EXPLORER STYLE

Daily life in the cavern is a mix of mundane activities and rough living. Amenities in D'ni are few and far between. While the DRC left the basic systems running (the ventilations systems, primary power systems, etc.), the rest of D'ni is filled with non-functional machinery. Explorers have to make do with the things that they can cobble together or can bring from the surface.

Food and supplies are generally brought in by explorers for their own use, though some have taken over storefronts and other buildings to provide these services. They will take US dollars but also engage in a lot of barter. Those who have gone into the Ages have begun bringing back new foods and materials as well and trade for what they need.

Technical skills are in high demand, especially those who can fix D'ni machinery and can adapt surface technology for use in D'ni. Those who have taught themselves D'ni are also popular. Anyone who plans to explore Ages wants people with survival skills with them as well as scientists (particularly biologists, geologists, and chemists).

On the surface, explorers are connected through a series of mailing lists and forums on the Internet. They keep in frequent contact with each other, and any news gets disseminated quickly by the Guild of Messengers or by

word of mouth. In the cavern itself, the KI is the primary communications system. Explorers send email and text messages using their KIs from wherever they are in the Ages. Messages are left on neighborhood imagers as well. New explorers are directed to get their own KI as soon as possible.

Most explorers have Relto Books and carry them with them everywhere, attached to their hips. "Panic linking" is their primary safety mechanism: when they are in danger, they slap their hand on the linking panel and link to their Relto. Because of this, even inexperienced explorers are willing to charge forward into new situations and take extra chances; adventure is a bit easier to swallow when you have a quick way out.

📖 Relto, the
High Place
p. 180

The State of the Art

In the years after the Restoration ended, the explorers have managed to piece together the Art from fragments of D'ni manuscripts, analyzing existing Books, and good old fashioned trial-and-error. Most explorers know somebody who knows somebody who has learned to Write a simple Linking Book. Members of the resurrected Guild of Writers and other independent researchers stand started taking baby steps toward writing their own Ages.

D'ni traditionalists have worked hard to reconstruct the procedures of D'ni's Writers, as well as mimicking their methods and even cultural rituals. Others hope to focus on experimenting with the Art, trying to determine how it functions, and just how far they can push its limits. While none of these rival the works of the D'ni masters, the explorers' skill in the Art is steadily increasing.

The factor that limits the modern development of the Art the most is one of resources. The construction methods of the Books and the ink the D'ni used have not been fully re-discovered, so materials for Writing are at a premium. Writing materials have been too valuable to use up in willy-nilly experimentation.

So far, aspiring Writers have had to scavenge for supplies among the ruins of D'ni. Blank books, especially those large enough for describing an Age, and caches of ink are highly sought after.

Modern Art

It is only a matter of time before radical researchers attempt to reconstruct the Art of Writing with an eye on how to improve upon it. Rumors talk about experiments with combining surface technology and D'ni technology, for example. There are a lot of questions. For example, do Books have to be written by hand, or can the writing be automated? Are there alternate materials available on the surface that be used to make paper and ink? What happens to a Descriptive Book if it is scanned into a computer? Can pages be printed with ink-jet printers? The possibilities are endless.

GMs, you have to decide how you want to handle these situations. While there are many interesting stories that can be told using such a melding of technologies, that's a deep rabbit hole to head down. You may end up finding yourself dealing with players that have a head full of creative ideas that could totally remake the feel of the game (and the history of the world as well). That's a valid path, but make sure you choose it intentionally.

Notable Ages in Modern D'ni

Ahnonay - A small island among waters with very strong currents. There are signs of settlements on the horizon. Owned by the infamous guildmaster Kadish.

Eder Delin - A D'ni garden Age with conifer trees and short seasons.

Eder Gira - Another D'ni garden Age, full of lava flows and waterfalls. Gira is peppered with natural steam vents that result from the lava and water meeting underground. There is evidence of inhabitants, but none have ever been encountered.

Eder Kemo - A pleasant garden Age known for surreal plant life and glowing swarms of fireflies that like to gather around visitors. Sudden rains are common.

Eder Tsogal - This garden Age is locked in a perpetual summer, with tall grasses and clear streams.

Er'cana - A Food Age of canyons owned by Kadish. Harvesting machines collect the native plants and small factories to process them into 'food pellets' that were used to sustain the algae in the D'ni lake.

Gahreesehn - A heavily fortified Maintainer outpost surrounded by a forest full of reportedly vicious animals. The outpost includes training facilities, a prison, and advanced workshops related to the lattice and KI systems. While damaged, many of the vaults in Gahreesehn have never been breached.

Jalak Dador - A jungle Age containing an arena with shifting platforms and solid objects of light that are used as game pieces. While reportedly very popular in D'ni, records of the actual sports played there have been lost.

Kadish Tolesa - Another Age owned by Kadish, this one with towering trees. Kadish built a vault here to protect his wealth and fled to it during the Fall. His bones are still there today.

Minkata - Used as a training Age for the Guild of Surveyors, Minkata is swept with raging duststorms during the day. After dark, the night sky is spectacular.

Pod Age - The Pod Age is an Age with incredible biome diversity. It is named because of the pods that the D'ni built here as observation areas. Records indicate that there are 25 pods scattered throughout the Age, but Linking Books have only been discovered for four of them.

Teledahn - In this island Age of towering mushrooms, the Guild of Caterers gathered spores for making food. Explorers have discovered hidden tunnels used as a base for such unsavory activities as smuggling and slave trade.
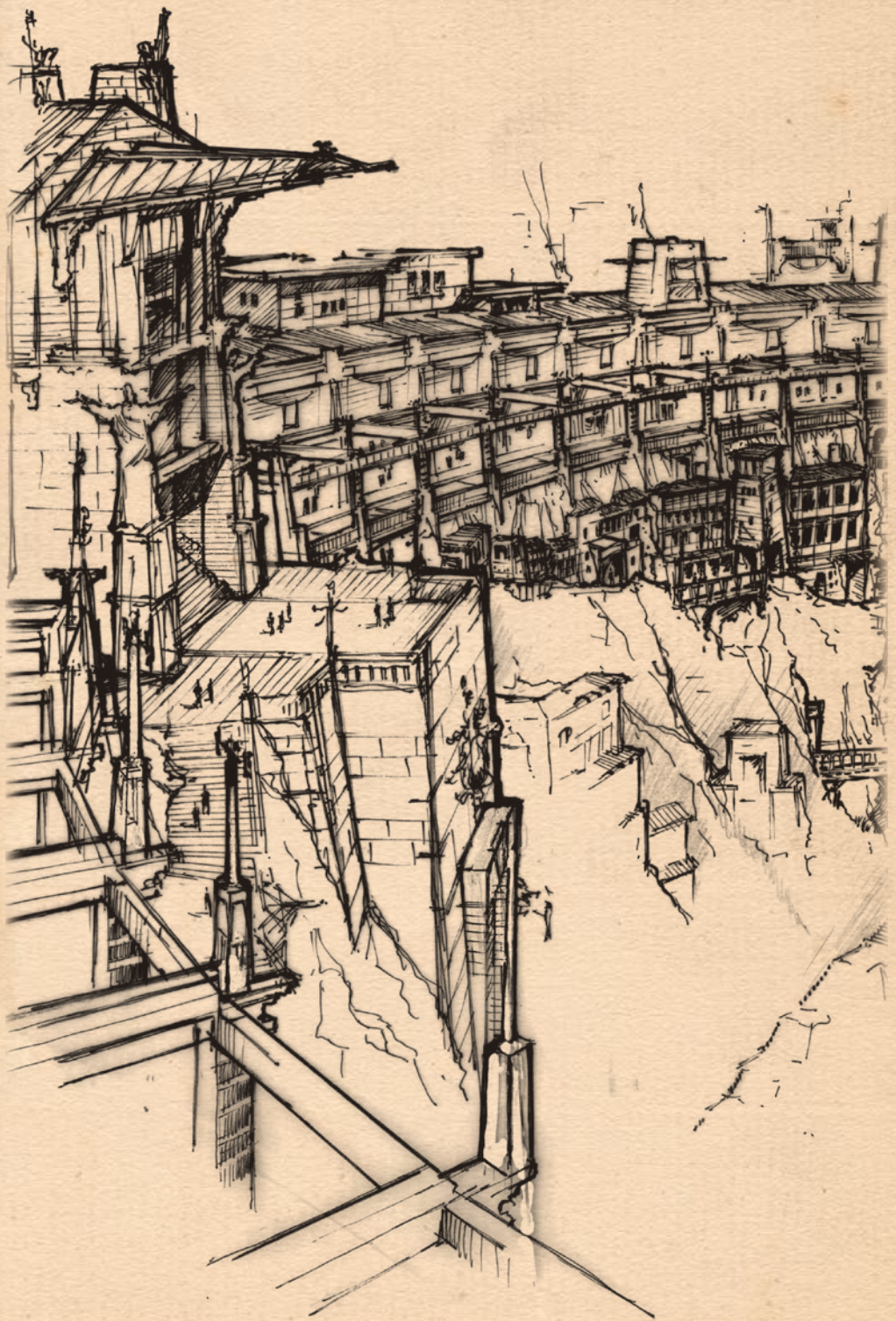
The D'ni City

The D'ni caverns are over three miles below the surface of Eddy County, New Mexico. The main cavern is naturally-occurring, but has been extensively modified by the D'ni over the millennia. Passageways have been dug out between the main cavern and smaller adjacent caverns which were converted for residential, commercial, and industrial use.

The primary cavern is huge, and contains an underground lake with several islands in the middle. The lake water contains bioluminescent algae that glow with an orange light. The brightness of the algae changes on a 30-hour cycle, which the D'ni used as their day and night cycle.

In the modern day, the algae is not healthy due to decades of neglect, so the cavern is fairly dim all of the time. The lake algae is an ongoing topic of research, though the DRC did discover that the algae was fed using nutrients the D'ni produced in other Ages. Newcomers to D'ni are advised not to drink the lake water.

The islands in the lake were reserved for the wealthy, and for religious and government functions. Islands that have been identified are:

- Ae'gura - the center of government and the Guilds. Of all of the islands, Ae'gura is the one that has been most explored and restored.
- Katha - Location of a mansion that belonged to the Relyimah, the D'ni secret police, and their front organization the Guild of Illusionists. D'ni records indicate that the mansion was famous for containing puzzles and illusions throughout.
- K'veer - Home of one of the wealthiest families in D'ni. After the Fall, K'veer was used by Gehn and Atrus as a base of operations.
- Neref - A park that kept Books linking to recreational Ages.

Along the walls of the cavern is the City Proper, with neighborhoods and districts carved into the walls and built on the shore of the lake. The majority of D'ni civilization lived in the city walls.

THE SURFACE

Most of what happens in D'ni goes unnoticed by those on the surface, but there are a few locations up there that are of particular interest.

THE CLEFT

The land that lies directly above D'ni is in a remote area of the desert. Bought up by Elias Zandi after the discovery of D'ni, it is currently owned by his son, Jeff. In the middle is a fenced-off area with a small caldera and a crevasse in the ground. Often Zandi parks an old Airstream trailer nearby and camps out in order to welcome visitors with a few enigmatic hints.

The crevasse is called the Cleft, and is the childhood home of Atrus. His grandmother Ti'ana raised him in the Cleft in the mid 1800s. The cleft itself is about the size of a small house, with rooms carved directly into the stone walls. The remnants of rope bridges, ladders, and old pulley systems connect rooms that still have handmade tools and scientific equipment. In one room is a D'ni holographic imager. Recorded on the imager is a message from Yeesha, encouraging listeners to start on her Journey. Throughout the cleft and the surrounding area are several Journey cloths, rough tapestries which are part of an elaborate test that leads to the rest of her quest.

Next to the Cleft is a small volcanic caldera. Inside the caldera is a large statue of a Riven dagger, a series of petroglyphs that describe the history of the family of Atrus, and a tunnel that leads into one of the many ventilation shafts left by the D'ni.

Scattered about the area of the Cleft and caldera are relics of the Age of Riven, including machinery and a full skeleton of a large marine creature. (See the section on the Star Fissure for theories on how those came to be in the middle of the New Mexico desert.)

Possible Aspects: MESSAGES FROM YEESHA, MYSTERIOUS TAPESTRIES, JEFF ZANDI—MYSTERIOUS BENEFACTOR

TOMAHNA

Somewhere in the nearby desert are the ruins of Tomahna, where Atrus lived later as an adult. At its height, it was a multi-building compound set into the cliffs of a small river, including living spaces and workshops full of Atrus's inventions. It has not been rediscovered.

Possible Aspects: ABANDONED WORKSHOPS, LIBRARY WITH ANCIENT HISTORY BOOKS

STAN'S GAS STATION

Stan's Gas Station is a 'last chance for gas' establishment at the edge of the desert, and the closest bit of civilization to the Cleft. Stan is fully aware of D'ni and his station is a common stopping point for those who go there. He's been known to arrange rides out to the Cleft for new people, as well as misdirect suspicious characters looking for the strange thing out in the desert.

Possible Aspects: LAST STOP FOR MILES AND MILES, STAN'S A GOOD GUY, NOTHING TO SEE HERE—MOVE ALONG

CARLSBAD

While Carlsbad is a ways away from the Cleft, it is still an important place in modern D'ni culture. The DRC had its official offices in Carlsbad. Additionally, as more explorers have been called to D'ni, many have moved to settle in Carlsbad. A few have set up businesses that provide services and products to D'ni on the side. So far, no one not 'in the know' has connected the dots between the increase in population in Carlsbad over the last decade, the brisk sales of camping and construction equipment, and a higher than expected number of archaeologists per capita.

GETTING TO D'NI AND BACK

The most common way to get to the cavern is by Linking Book. Given that a Linking Book cannot take a person to the same Age they are in, visitors link into an intermediary Age where there is a Book that leads to D'ni itself. Relto Books are common among explorers, so Relto is a common transfer point. Another common waypoint Age is Nexus, but any Age will do. Enterprising explorers have taken Linking Books back home with them, and a few have set themselves up as community gatekeepers in major metropolitan areas around the globe.

The other way to get to D'ni is on foot. The caves under the caldera lead into the ventilation tunnels that feed fresh air into D'ni. These tunnels lead to the Great Shaft and from there, one can make their way to the D'ni cavern. This way is difficult, however, since time and earthquakes have left the walkways and stairs in bad shape. Going this way is slow and dangerous—it takes about a day to get to D'ni.

The D'ni created several ventilation tunnels that connected to natural cave systems. In theory, there are other caves which would lead to the cavern. However, only the one path starting at the Cleft has ever been documented.

Getting back from D'ni is pretty much the same story. Those who have access to Relto can get to the Cleft from there by Linking Book. From there, they can make their way to Carlsbad or elsewhere in the world. Alternatively,

they can climb the Great Shaft and back up to the desert. However, going up is even harder than going down. People rarely attempt the return trip that way.

The modern Guilds have begun creating Linking Books to major metropolitan areas of the surface. So far, books to Carlsbad, Seattle, Boston, London, and Sydney have been added to Nexus. Members of the Guild of Writers have also written other Linking Books to people's homes as well.

Getting Around the Cavern

The D'ni city is a maze of neighborhoods and districts, connected by stairways, walkways, tunnels, and bridges. While there were elevators and some evidence of small motorized vehicles, they were normally used only for freight and construction work. Explorers have found no personal conveyances such as bicycles either—the average D'ni walked almost everywhere while in the cavern. Getting across the lake was done by small ferry boats.

Because of the ubiquity of Linking Books in D'ni life, there are many parts of D'ni that are difficult to access by mundane means. These were accessed by appropriate Linking Books.

Nexus

The closest thing to a mass-transit system in D'ni was implemented just before the Fall. In a separate Age called Nexus, the Maintainers set up a storehouse of Books linking to the Cavern, including a huge stockpile of Books to all of the neighborhoods that ring the wall of the cavern. Public Ages were included in the Nexus library and some private Books were entrusted to Nexus for convenience's sake. Alcoves in the Nexus building have a terminal which responds to a person's KI and displays the locations to which they have access. The person selects a location and is presented with the Book automatically.

Nexus acted as a central location for Books, both public and private. Private links in Nexus could be shared with others by sending invites via KI. Public Nexus terminals were placed at public locations around the cavern and in the Ages. These terminals had a place for the traveler to put in their KI to add it to their location list. Other locations simply had a Linking Book to Nexus placed on a pedestal. As explorers settled into the cavern, many took Nexus Books home with them.

Possible Aspects: Hundreds of Linking Books, Stopover for All of D'ni, Linked to the D'ni Lattice
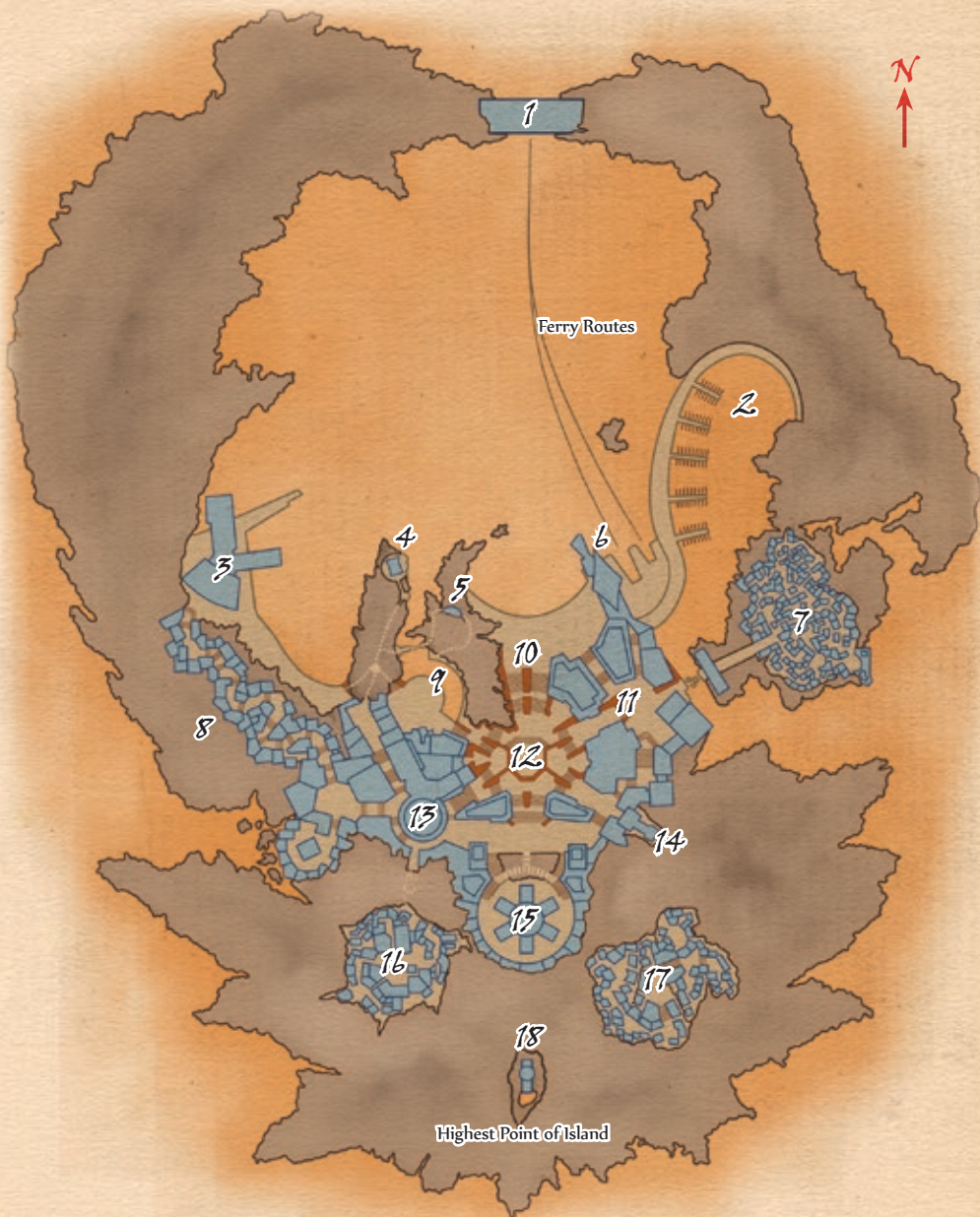
Explored Areas of Ae'gura

Ae'gura

The D'ni caverns were the center of the universe as far as the D'ni were concerned, and the island of Ae'gura is the center of the caverns. Ae'gura was the seat of government for the entire D'ni empire and the focal point for cultural and religious life. While there are several islands in the D'ni cavern, and the city of D'ni is properly the communities along the cavern wall, Ae'gura is what explorers mean when they say 'the island' or 'the city'.

The island sits in roughly the center of the lake and is the tallest of the lake's islands. Ae'gura is divided into the central government area and several districts. The north end of Ae'gura contains an enclosed harbor. The island naturally creates a short, roughly circular barrier around the harbor except for one narrow passage opposite the actual city. Standing over the passage is the Arch of Kerath.

The Great Zero

At the highest point of Ae'gura sits the Great Zero. Water falls from the ceiling of the cavern and interacts with a series of crystals to create a beam of energy that is directed to a large rotating machine of gears and crystals that resembles an orrery. As it rotates, it sweeps the entire cavern with a neutrino beam that passes through the rock and earth. The neutrino beam allows the Zero mechanism to provide positioning data throughout the D'ni Caverns and, theoretically, the surface.

Unfortunately, the Fall and years of neglect have left the Great Zero in poor repair. Much of the data that comprised the coordinate system is corrupt, and the mechanisms frequently need to be recalibrated. Calibration of the Great Zero is a complex project, requiring thousands of readings from the field. In the past, the DRC has crowd-sourced this to the explorers, placing virtual markers all over the cavern for the explorers to find via their KIs.

After the departure of the DRC, the accuracy of the Great Zero is questionable. Most areas on Ae'gura report reliable results, but the farther one travels from the Zero, the less certain the data is. Experienced explorers take KI coordinates with a grain of salt.

Possible Aspects: Gigantic Energized Crystals, Center of the Lattice Network, High Above D'ni

Central Ae'gura

The central district of Ae'gura was the home of the D'ni government and D'ni life. The Guilds had their primary halls here and the King's Palace (even after there was no D'ni king) stands near the top of the area. The features of this area were also key symbols of D'ni culture.

On the harbor, opposite the Arch of Kerath, is a ferry terminal built on a small peninsula. The terminal functions as a hub for the ferry system, the primary non-Linking method of getting across the lake. From the ferry terminal raises the Great Stair, a long multi-tier staircase that leads up the side of the island to the main plaza. Explorers frequently gather here for conversation.

Several areas split off from the main plaza. Northwest from the plaza is the Canyon Mall. As its name implies, the mall is actually built in a small canyon with storefronts built into one side. The canyon itself is an inlet from the harbor. The storefront that has received the most attention is the Gallery of Kadish, an art gallery owned by Guildmaster Kadish that specialized in art from various Ages.

A staircase on the west end of the mall leads up to large concert hall. Leading up and south from the Concert Hall's foyer is a destroyed bridge (replaced with a rope bridge thanks to the DRC) that crosses the canyon.

Northeast of the plaza is a section known as Tokotah, comprised of several buildings and open areas between them, ending where a part of the city has fallen off in a previous seismic event. Now there is a dead drop to the harbor. Two buildings, Tokotah I and II, were occupied by the DRC during the restoration and served as their main in-cavern audiences. The rooftop of Tokotah II served as an informal discussion area for DRC employees and later for explorers as well.

Southeast from the main plaza and past Tokotah is the Museum. The Museum is a huge building, but few of the rooms have been fully cleared and restored. Its foyer includes portraits of D'ni kings and famous D'ni prophetesses.

A staircase to the southwest of the plaza leads up to the Palace. The public areas of the Palace included the Hall of Kings, a ceremonial hall with the names of the D'ni kings set in the arches that held up the domed ceiling. During the restoration, the DRC set out notebooks detailing the research they had done on the D'ni kings for explorers to read at their leisure. Pathways and stairs running northwest lead to the Library.
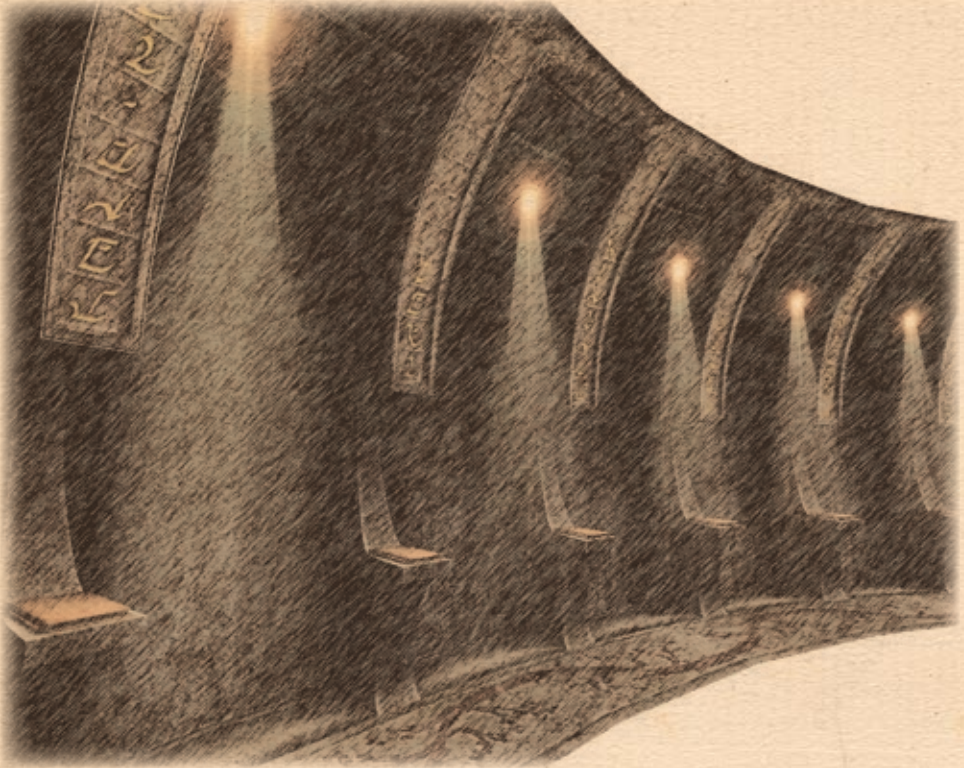
Directly south from the main plaza are the Guild Halls. An impressively large structure that sits below the Great Zero, it contains dozens of rooms and chambers used by the D'ni Guilds and from which the Guilds ran D'ni government. Each Guild had its own rooms including a central 'guild pub' designed in a standard style but with the Guild's colors. Most of the halls are inaccessible, though a few of the guild pubs were restored by the DRC for use by the modern Guilds.

To the west of the concert hall is the Library. The Library was a public facility that held Linking Books for general use as well as volumes and volumes of standard books. The center of the Library is a massive spiraling hallway that coils downward around a central atrium. In modern times, only the top levels are accessible; the DRC has generally cleared out the available research materials. Before the DRC left the cavern, they left behind a few Linking Books for explorer use in this area.

Possible Aspects: WELL-TRAFFICKED, CENTER OF D'NI CULTURE, ABANDONED DRC MACHINERY

J'Taeri District

J'Taeri sits on the southwestern side of Ae'gura, high up on the island. This was a wealthy district and the home of important Guild members and wealthy merchants. The mansions of the wealthiest D'ni are here, built out of an expensive red and black stone. Some of the buildings here are designed to look like natural features. J'Taeri also houses a community library with Linking Books for the well-to-do.

The only place in J'Taeri that has had much traffic during the Restoration is the Watcher's Sanctuary. The Sanctuary was originally an area in the style of a guild pub that was built in tribute to an important D'ni prophet known as the Watcher. Near the Fall of D'ni, it was taken over by Guildmaster Kadish, who renovated it and claimed that the Watcher's prophecies referred to him. He created a puzzle room in the Sanctuary, and he would mock others who could not solve it.

Possible Aspects: D'ni Mansions, Abandoned D'ni Wealth

Kerath'an District

This was the lowest district in Ae'gura, sitting right on the lake. It was a lower class district where mainly ferry workers and boat builders lived.

Possible Aspects: Cramped and Dingy Quarters, Boats and Docks

Ishah District

The Ishah District has been mentioned by the DRC and in D'ni records, beyond Tokotah, but cut off by a destroyed bridge. Few explorers have claimed to have visited the area, and no details are widely known about the area besides its general layout.

Possible Aspects: Full of Rubble, Dangerously Unstable Buildings

Jaren District

Jaren is a district adjacent high up on the southeastern side of Ae'gura. It was an upper-class district and the home of many Guildsmen and important families. Notably, Aitrus (grandfather of Atrus) lived with his family in this district.

Possible Aspects: Upscale D'ni Housing, House of Aitrus

Around D'ni

While Ae'gura was the focus of D'ni culture and government, the D'ni used the rest of the cavern as well as adjacent caverns. Along the wall is a patchwork of D'ni districts and residential neighborhoods built in consistent styles that start at the lake shore and climb up the walls of the cavern. Many individual sections have been restored (especially neighborhoods), but it is a large area with sections where no living being has been in 250 years.

Districts

Several districts have been referred to in D'ni records, but not all of these have been identified in modern times. Some were referred to only in early D'ni documents, so what became of those districts later in history is unknown.

These include:

▷ Ashem'en - An industrial district in the city.
▷ Belari - Historically one of the poorest districts in D'ni, it was renovated and then left to sink into disrepair several times over D'ni's history.
▷ Kaleh - A high-class wealthy district referred to as the "elite of the elite".
▷ Kali - A D'ni commercial district.
▷ Karim - A community district that boasted an opera house and a concert hall.
▷ Lanaren - A residential district, home to laborers from Ashem'en
▷ Nehw'eril - This district was the primary industrial in D'ni for a long time. That title was later usurped by the Ashem'em district and new industrial areas built in adjoining caverns to get away from the city.
▷ Vamen - A middle class district with a large Common Library.

Neighborhoods

Much of the walls of the cavern are covered with neighborhoods: small community areas surrounded by personal residences. D'ni neighborhoods have similar elements and designs such that they are almost indistinguishable from each other. While many had individual names, most of those have been lost to history.

By the time of the Fall, all neighborhoods were all accessible via the Nexus. Because of their easy accessibility via Nexus, the DRC focused on restoring these areas to support the sudden influx of explorers that came in during the Restoration. Many groups simply adopted specific neighborhoods as their own and continue to gather and even live there.

The D'ni Cavern

N →

Neighborhoods

Ae'gura

Ashem'en District

To the Surface

K'Veer

BUT THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE...

Much of D'ni (even Ae'gura) is unexplored, and suriving D'ni records are fragmentary at best. These maps are merely educated guesses. Careful explorers should use them as a useful starting point, but not consider them definitive.

SOMEONE BUILT "CONFERENCE" ON A BALCONY.
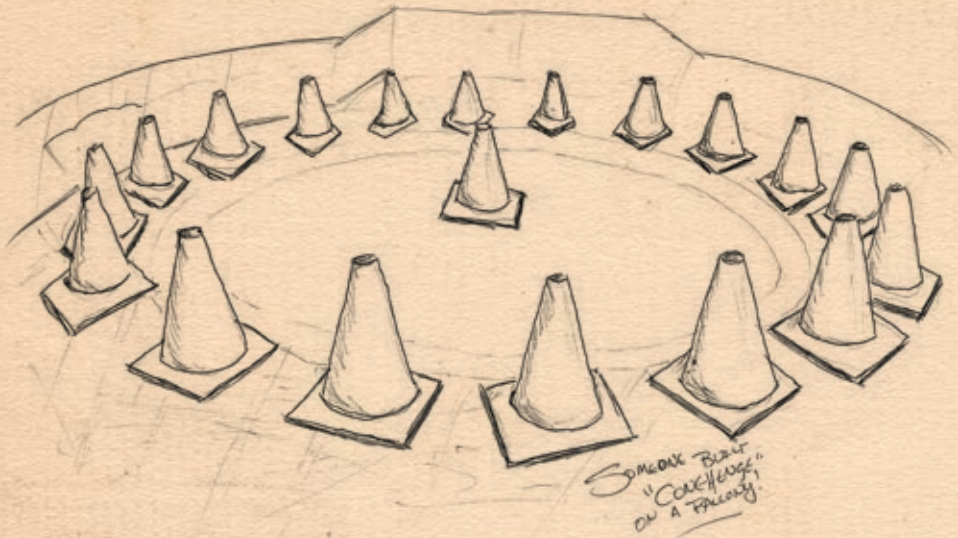
Key features of neighborhoods included a small lecture hall/meeting room, a classroom, a room which held Linking Books and a Nexus pedestal, a meditation room containing several small quiet cubicles, open common areas, and a garden area. Social function rooms were common, as were automated Ahyoheek tables.

Possible Aspects: HARD TO TELL APART, FULL OF SQUATTERS

THE GREAT SHAFT

Just before the Fall, the D'ni undertook a massive project to connect the Cavern to the surface and discover what was actually above D'ni. They built a shaft that is several miles tall and goes up at a slight angle. Around the wall of the shaft is a spiral staircase that goes up its entire length.

The shaft was never finished, as the project became politically unpopular. Rather, the top of the shaft was capped before it reached the surface. Seismic activity cracked some of the upper walls of the shaft, allowing access through natural tunnels in the New Mexico desert. Ancient ventilation shafts built by the D'ni also lead from caves on the surface to the Great Shaft. This includes one such tunnel that connects to the caldera near the Cleft.

The Shaft has twice been the reason for the discovery of D'ni—first by Ti'ana in the 1800s and in modern times by John Loftin, leading to the formation of the DRC.

Possible Aspects: THAT'S A LONG WAY DOWN, WATCH YOUR STEP!

Hand of the Maker

The Art of Gamemastering

What a GM Does

If you're the GM, then your job is a little different from everyone else's. This chapter is going to give you several tools to make that job easier during play. We already talked a little bit about the GM's job in The Basics, but let's take a more detailed look at your unique responsibilities.

Portray the World

It's your job to decide how everyone and everything else in the world responds to PC's actions, as well as what the environment is like. If a PC fumbles a roll, you're the one who gets to decide the consequences. When an NPC attempts to trap a PC's friend, you decide how they go about it. When the PCs stroll up to a food vendor in a market, you decide what kind of day the vendor is having, what kind of personality he or she has, and what's on sale that day. You determine the weather when the PCs approach that dark building.

Fortunately, you don't have to do this in a vacuum—you have a lot of tools to help you decide what would be appropriate. The process we outline in Starting a Game should provide you with a lot of context about the game you're running, whether that's in the form of aspects like current and impending issues, specific locations that you might visit, or NPCs with strong agendas that you can use.

The PCs' aspects also help you decide how to make the world respond to them. The best aspects have a double edge to them; you have a lot of power to exploit that double edge by using event-based compels. That way, you kill two birds with one stone—you add detail and surprise to your game world, but you also keep the PCs at the center of the story you're telling.

Portray NPCs

When you have NPCs in a scene, you speak for and make decisions for them like the players do for their PCs—you decide when they're taking an action that requires dice, and you follow the same rules the players do for determining how that turns out. Your NPCs are going to be a little different than the PCs, however, depending on how important they are to the story.

Create Environments and Scenarios

You're responsible for making all of the stuff that the PCs encounter and react to in the game. That not only includes NPCs with skills and aspects, but it also includes the aspects on scenes, environments, and objects, as well as the dilemmas and challenges that make up a chapter of *Unwritten*. You provide the prompts that give your group a reason to play this game to begin with—what problems they face, what issues they have to resolve, whom they're opposing, and what they'll have to go through in order to win the day.

Arbitrate Rules

It's also your job to make most of the moment-to-moment decisions about what's legit and what's not regarding the rules. Most often, you're going to decide when something in the game deserves a roll, what type of action that is (Overcome, Discover, etc.) and how difficult that roll is. In challenges and contests, this can get a little more complicated, like determining if a situation aspect should force someone to make an Overcome action, or deciding whether or not a player can justify a particular advantage they're trying to create.

You also judge the appropriateness of any invocations or compels that come up during play and make sure that everyone at the table is clear on what's going on. With invocations, this is pretty easy—as long as the player can explain why the aspect is relevant, you're good to go. With compels, it can get a little more complicated, because you need to articulate precisely what complication the player is agreeing to.

Rules vs. Rulings

A ruling is a decision that your playgroup makes—usually guided by the GM—about how something works in your game. Rulings cover special cases that aren't explicitly covered by the rules of the game, cases that require some interpretation.

A new rule, on the other hand, is a change to one or more of the sub-systems within the game, or the addition of a new one. Where a ruling is an interpretation of how the game works, a new rule is a change to how the game works.

When do you use one or the other? Use a new rule if you're addressing something that comes up a lot. Whether you're finding something problematic or you want to be able to do something new, if it happens a lot, it's often a good case for a rule. Use a ruling if you're not sure a situation will come up again, or if you think it'll be rare.

Here's the secret—rulings can become rules. If you make a ruling and you find that situation comes up again and again, turn it into a rule. If you've made a ruling multiple times, your players will probably remember it, so there's less chance of a rule that just gets forgotten.

Make Everyone Look Awesome

Get used to the word "interesting"—you see it again and again throughout this book. Fiction is about interesting things happening to interesting people in interesting places. Your job is to keep it coming.

As protagonists, the PCs already live on the fringes of the probable. Exploit that so that cool things happen. Characters should have moments to shine. That not only means doing really cool things, but having challenges to overcome, because beating the odds is inherently cool.

Don't forget about yourself. Make places fun to explore and be. Secrets that are uncovered need to mean something, and have consequences. Give your antagonists chances to be, well, antagonizing. When your players are interested (there's that word again) in the world, then you look awesome, too.

D'NI GONDOLA FOUND LAKESIDE + RESTORED

Principles of Gamemastering

K.I.S.S.

K.I.S.S. stands for Keep It Simple, Storyteller (of course). There are lots of rules in this book; don't get caught up in them. They are just a means. If you find yourself spending more time trying to figure out how something fits into the rules than actually playing it out, then you need to stop and rethink.

When you strip it down to its basics, the rules just boil down to roll the dice, add skill level, and subtract opposition. If the player fumbles, it went badly. If they tie, it barely worked. If they succeed, then it worked. If they excel, then they did really well.

That's it. The rest is icing. Apply it when it makes sense and makes things more interesting.

Drama is Better than Realism

Don't get too bogged down trying to maintain absolute consistency in the world or adhere to a draconian sense of realism. The game operates by the rules of drama and fiction; use that to your advantage. There should be few moments in the game where the PCs are free of conflicts or problems to deal with, even if it'd be more "realistic" for them to get a long breather.

When you're trying to decide what happens, and the answer that makes the most sense is also kind of boring, go with something that's more exciting than sensible! You can always find a way later on to justify something that doesn't make immediate sense.

"Mentor" is better than "Master"

Approach your position as arbiter of the rules by thinking of yourself as "first among equals" in a committee, rather than as an absolute authority. If there's a disagreement on the use of the rules, try encouraging a brief discussion and let everyone talk freely, rather than making a unilateral decision. A lot of times, you'll find that the group is self-policing—if someone tries to throw out a compel that's a real stretch, it's just as likely that another player will bring it up before you do.

Don't be afraid to direct the conversation honestly if you need to. If you see a potential problem with a player's choice, bring it up earlier rather than later. Do so honestly and openly. Explaining the issue ahead of time is better than springing unexpected consequences later.

Your job is really to have the "last word" on any rules-related subject, rather than to dictate from your chair. Keep that in mind.

Let the Players Help You

You don't have to shoulder the whole burden of making up world details yourself. The more collaborative you get, the more emotional investment the players are going to have in the result, because they shared in its creation.

If a character has an aspect that connects them to someone or something in the world, make that player your resident "expert" on whatever the aspect refers to. So if someone has Wrote the Book on Spelunking, poll that player for information whenever exploring caves comes up in conversation. Some players will defer back to you, and that's fine, but it's important that you keep making the offer so as to foster a collaborative atmosphere.

A main use of the Advantage action is precisely to give players a way to add details to the world through their characters. Use that when you draw a blank or simply want to delegate more control. One good way to do this during play is to answer the player's question with a question if they ask for information. Ask "What do you think it is?" and consider running with the answer. Deductions fit nicely into this role as well.

Finally, when a player makes a suggestion (or even an interesting off-hand remark), you may want to roll with it. Instead of saying "yes" or "no", try saying "yes, but..." or "yes, and...." Then, add your own twist. You can slip in something that you have been wanting to bring forward as part of going along. That makes transitioning plot elements smoother than just springing it on them. Or you can use a twist that gives the player a hard decision by making it one that could have unpleasant results. Make sure you let them know ahead of time, and give them the option to take it or leave it.

FIT THE RULES TO THE SITUATION

Unlike most D'ni construction, the rules in *Unwritten* are not set in stone. You can represent a situation in many different ways using the rules you have; it's okay to be creative in how you apply them. Base what rules you use off of the needs of the moment, not the other way around.

For example, if a character is trying to deal with an angry crowd, you could represent the situation in several ways:

> ⟩ Use the crowd as background description.
> ⟩ Represent the angry crowd with a situation aspect; compel and invoke as appropriate.
> ⟩ Represent the crowd as a passive opposition for actions (Overcome action to convince them to calm down, for instance).
> ⟩ Describe the crowd as if they were an NPC: give them a few aspects and maybe a skill or two and attempt actions with them.
> ⟩ Use a Contest to model the attempt to sway the crowd in one way or another (if someone else is trying to sway the crowd in a different direction, they would be your opposition, or the crowd itself might be).

Any of the above options can work, and they all have their strengths and weaknesses. You don't even have to use the same option for the crowd every time; let the needs of the fiction decide which you use at any given time. Focus on what the situation actually needs, even if that changes how you would normally handle it. As long as everyone at the table agrees, it should be fine.

An unknown thief has snuck into Stefan's camp and stolen supplies. Stefan decides to give chase through the forest. The NPC succeeds to create the advantage ONE WITH THE FOREST. Stefan also succeeds at an Advantage action and places AT HOME IN THE FOREST on himself. Gwen decides that just gives them a level playing field and drops the two aspects for the sake of simplicity.

The group is planning a trip to Dereno, an arctic Age. They all attempt to Create Advantages to reflect them preparing for the Age's harsh climate. Everyone but Naomi succeeds the roll. Since Naomi is now the odd person out, Gwen decides that instead of giving the other three characters good situation aspects, she will give Naomi the aspect UNPREPARED FOR THE COLD to represent that she is the only one who didn't think ahead.

BE "AWESOME" THE UNWRITTEN WAY

One of your jobs is to make everyone look awesome, right? Well, in *Unwritten*, "awesome" has a specific definition. That definition is based off of creativity, cleverness, and discovery.

Avoid force as a focus

Unwritten treats force as interesting. Sure, there are times when you just have to bash down a door, but that isn't what this game is about. It's focused on applying your mind to a situation. In a way, every situation is a puzzle to be solved—make that the foundation of how you present the game.

In those cases where force is needed, don't use a traditional RPG 'combat scene'. Rather, de-emphasize force and violence by minimizing the attention it gets, both in terms of story and in mechanics. Resolve those situations with a single roll, or even considering just declaring them without dice. Move on quickly.

Situations that require thought should be made the centerpiece of a session. Walk through the details of sneaking into that DRC compound, or the process the characters are using to build the machine they are working on. Ask questions: "How does that work?", "Why do you do that?" and "What do you think the effects of that will be?" Weave those answers into the game as it goes along.

Reward creativity

The environments found in the Myst games are creative and inventive. Ideally, role-playing in *Unwritten* should be the same. Challenges the characters encounter should be designed to evoke thought from your players. You want them to approach the entire game as an exercise in problem-solving and thinking outside of the box.

Why? Because creative solutions make better stories. Which game story do you want to tell your friends about: the time you pulled off this amazing off-the-wall plan, or the time when you did that same thing you always do? Characters lead interesting lives, so encourage your players to approach the game with that in mind.

So, roll with those nifty ideas that your players come up with. Give them more time in the spotlight. Especially interesting solutions should end up with lower opposition than mundane ones. If it really wows the table, consider just saying "That's so cool! It happens!"

The road to awesome is paved with curiosity

Think back to the horror movies you have seen; poking around in dark places is the worst thing you could do. *Unwritten* is the opposite of that— characters should be poking their noses into everything.

Incentivize exploration. Spend more time on playing out situations centered around inquiry and exploration. Present more opportunities to the characters when they overcome obstacles on the way to uncharted territory.

Sometimes a character might act risky, maybe even unwise, in that pursuit. Do not penalize characters for it. That doesn't mean that players should get away with anything. Rather, actions rooted in a desire to know more should always lead to interesting situations. Curiosity shouldn't kill the cat, but give it an even bigger challenge that it can step up to.

Keep adding questions to be answered

There is an old adage in games that when things get boring, you maintain the tension by bringing in someone who starts shooting.

Unwritten's version of this is to bring in a new mystery. If you have had something waiting in the wings, bring it into play. Describe something strange happening: a flickering light across the cavern, a strange book in a language no one can read, whatever. This is also a great time to look through the Age Library you created when starting the game and drop a Linking Book into play.

New experiences are new opportunities for a character; encourage that theme. When you have a reasonable choice between going back to an old situation or place and a new one, choose the new one. If you go back to an old one, put a new twist on it; make it new and different.

Building Mysteries

When you put an unknown in front of the characters, it is a good idea to plan the details ahead of time. As players dig into those details, they need to remain consistent and need to provide opportunities for the characters to move forward. A mystery consists of an answer to a question (what you want your characters to discover) and a set of clues that represent that answer. The clues are what the characters will find first and are the pieces that they will have to use to put together the answer.

Players will start off with scattered information and will be driving toward the truth. When preparing for them, start at the other end. Decide what the truth is (the answer that you want the characters to discover). From there, you decide what clues lead to your truth.

Crafting Clues

Think about Evidence

The mystery has ramifications that express themselves through the clues available. When trying to determine what clues you should put in a scene, ask yourself "what effects would the mystery have had?"

If an important event happened somewhere, you can walk through the event and come up with ideas of how that affected what was left behind. If someone has passed through an area, there would be traces of their passing. If someone was nearby, they may have heard something. For more abstract mysteries, the evidence may be occurrences that point to a pattern or are notable.

Tailor Clues to the Characters

The clues are there for the characters to find, so make sure that it make senses for them to be discovered and understood. Look at characters' aspects, stunts, and resources to guide you when deciding which clues to use. If none of the characters have experience with medicine, then a clue that requires medical knowledge would not make sense.

If you are going to use clues that lie outside of your characters' area of knowledge, make sure that you have other options for the characters, such as expert NPCs or devices that can get them the information they need. Options like this should be obvious; reveal them in previous scenes. An NPC may make a point of telling the characters that they have the right skills in a previous scene. Maybe a previous investigation already revealed the capabilities of the D'ni device the character found.

Use Clues to Show, Not Tell

A good clue doesn't come right out and reveal its meaning. What piques the character's interest and entices them to dig deeper.

A clue should be descriptive. It implies things. The act of investigation is figuring out how that description fits into the larger context of the scene and the story. When designing a clue, there should always be one mental step from the clue to the meaning. You don't need a huge leap of deduction for every clue; but there should always be at least a moment of thought required.

If there doesn't seem to be a good way to create that moment of thought, then the clue may not be an interesting device to use. Just tell the players the information. Or you may consider folding the information into a different clue.

Think Outside the Scene

Understanding a clue might require information that is not in the scene at hand. Research may be required. Or maybe the characters will need to consult with an expert.

Hopefully this leads to an interesting scene for the players. If it looks like it might not, you have several options.

> If one of the players has an aspect that would justify them knowing the information, then they know it.
> The activity can be done during an interlude as an off-stage event.
> A character can go off-stage while the other characters continue on stage.
> If characters have KIs or other similar communications, they can contact others to do the research for them.

Any of the above can use an action if you think it would add to the drama of the situation.

Keep Lists and Use Index Cards

Keeping list of clues can be incredibly useful. You can tie them to places, people, or scenes. Or you can have a pool of clues that you can draw on and insert into scenes as you need. You don't have to use all the clues you come up with; your list can be mainly as inspiration.

Index cards are a powerful tool as well. When a clue comes up, write it on an index card and put it in the middle of the table so everyone can see it. That way, clues stay in the players' minds as they play out the scene.

If you have a number of clues that might show up any time, you can put them on index cards and draw one at random when you need to add a little extra spice to a scene.

USING PUZZLES

Throughout the Myst franchise, puzzles are the primary obstacle that game players face—you have to solve the puzzle in order to move on. Often, these are explicit puzzles that may or may not have any direct connection to the story or environment.

The place of puzzles in your *Unwritten* game depends heavily on everyone involved. You as a gamemaster may be good at making puzzles and a particular group of players (such as veteran Myst fans) may like sitting down and solving logic puzzles, or decrypting scrambled clues. If that works, then that's great.

On the other hand, that may not be the case. You may have players who just aren't good at puzzles. Some players may prefer that their puzzles stay in the video games or on sudoku page in the paper and their role-playing to be focused on other things. There are a lot of possibilities.

If you will have puzzles in your game, the following discusses how to fit them in.

PLAYTEST YOUR PUZZLES

Be sure to test any puzzles you build beforehand to make sure it works like you expect. The flow of the game can be sidetracked if you realize halfway through the puzzle that you made a mistake or forget key information. If you can, show the puzzle to someone not involved in the game and have then step through it.

Puzzles are Story

Unwritten always comes back to 'fiction first' and that includes puzzles. The best puzzles are those that are both interesting to solve and support the game in some way.

Your puzzle can say something about the setting, the narrative, or the characters. For example, the D'ni had an underlying fascination with puzzles and intellectual pursuits, so using a puzzle-based lock in place of something more secure says a lot about the D'ni.

The right puzzle can encourage the sort of play you want to see in the game. If you want players to think on their feet, add time pressure to the puzzles. If you want to emphasize teamwork, everyone has to have a part in the solution.

Puzzles can also support the themes of the game. Yeesha's Journeys required players to explore and in doing so, encounter evidence of the D'ni's folly. Guild training Ages were explicitly tests, so they can emphasize a character pursuing expertise as a personal goal.

You are on the Players' Side

Like compels, puzzles should lead to interesting avenues of action. If a puzzle becomes a dead end or a source of frustration, that's not awesome. You should rethink how you are using it.

You want players to enjoy the challenge, so be aware of your players and how they are reacting to the puzzle. If they are struggling, remind them of the tools that *Unwritten* gives them. You can offer discover actions to the players so they have questions to use to get information they might not otherwise. Point out that excelling on a Discover action will give them a hint. If they don't use it, then great, they get a fate point.

Also, keep an eye out for situations where a few players are enjoying the puzzles while other players are bored or frustrated whenever they come up. Watching other people have fun when you aren't is definitely not awesome. Make sure everyone has a type of puzzle that they or their character can participate in, or alternate puzzles with other activities that players find entertaining.

If players are just at a complete loss, you can turn the scene around and make it a deduction. ("Okay everyone, this D'ni vault you are stuck in is really tricky. Let's deduce how this works!") That gives them the power in the scene.

Or, you introduce a new element into the situation that may change the puzzle to something that your players can more easily handle. That might be as minor as declaring a puzzle is mechanical in nature so someone can bring their high Engineering to bear on it. Or it could change the situation entirely, such as adding in someone who has key information for getting past the puzzle. Then it becomes an issue of tracking down the person and getting the information from them.

No Puzzle Survives Contact with the Players

Players will surprise you on a regular basis. Be ready to accept creative player solutions; *Unwritten* rewards ingenuity. Don't hold on too firmly to your puzzles or specific solutions. A player may come up with a creative idea that completely bypasses your puzzle. That's fine — just roll with it.

Clutch Control   Small gear control   Large gear control

Broken gear. I'll take it back to Sid and see if he can get or make a replacement.

Setting Resources

What is presented in this book is just an overview of the background of D'ni. You can find a wealth of details in books, games, and on the Internet.

Official Resources

Unwritten is, of course, based off of the games by Cyan Inc and other companies who worked with Cyan. In addition to the games, there are three novels that add detail to the background. We've listed the games and novels here in the order the depicted events happen in the setting.

- *Book of Ti'ana.* Novel, Hyperion, 1996.* Anna, daughter of a prospector, finds her way down to D'ni and lives through the events of the Fall.
- *Book of Atrus.* Novel, Hyperion, 1995.* Atrus is taken down to D'ni by his father Gehn to reclaim the glories of the lost D'ni civilization.
- *Myst. Video Game, Cyan, 1993.* A stranger finds a Linking Book to the island of Myst.
- *Riven. Video Game, Cyan, 1997.* The stranger is sent to Riven to save Atrus's wife Catherine from his mad father, Gehn.
- *Book of D'ni.* Novel, Hyperion, 1998.* Atrus returns to D'ni to rebuild and discovers a Linking Book to an ancient civilization.
- *Myst III: Exile. Video Game, Presto Studios, 2001.* Atrus's Age of Releeshahn is stolen and the stranger is sent to retrieve it.
- *Myst IV: Revelation. Video Game, Ubisoft, 2004.* The stranger must rescue Atrus's daughter Yeesha from his older sons.
- *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst.** Video Game, Cyan Worlds, 2003.* A modern day person is 'called' to D'ni and led on a Journey by Yeesha.
- *Uru Live. MMORPG, Cyan Worlds, 2003.* The Called gather in D'ni as the Restoration begins.
- *Myst V: End of Ages. Video Game, Cyan Worlds, 2005.* A stranger embarks on a journey to free the Bahro.
- *Myst Online: Uru Live. MMORPG, Cyan Worlds, 2007.* The DRC and explorers return to D'ni.
- * The three novels are collected in *The Myst Reader.*

** Uru: Ages Beyond Myst was followed by two expansion packs: *To D'ni* and *Path of the Shell*. The game *Uru: Complete Chronicles* contains Uru and the expansion packs.

Myst Online still exists. While no longer being developed by Cyan, they have made the game available as it was at the end of Myst Online: Uru Live. Access is free and supported by donations. Go to http://www.mystonline.com for details.

Online Resources

You can find many sites for information about Myst, Uru and D'ni. There are too many to list. Here are a few places to start:

- ⊳ Myst Online forums - http://www.mystonline.com - The center of Myst fandom.
- ⊳ The Guild of Archivists - http://www.guildofarchivsts.org - Home of the Guild of Archivists, this site has detailed information about D'ni as well as transcriptions of game documents and letters from Myst and Uru developers from over the years.
- ⊳ Rel.to - http://rel.to - A directory of online Myst and Uru resources.
- ⊳ A Dictionary of the D'ni Language - http://www.eldalamberon.com/dni_dict.htm - A listing of all known words from the D'ni language, their meanings and their sources.
- ⊳ Mysterium - http://www.mysterium.net - The annual gathering of Myst fans.

A Note on Canon

While games and novels are the official sources of the D'niverse, the 'true' story of D'ni is slightly different. They contradict themselves in small ways, and Cyan has declared certain details as incomplete or incorrect due to limitations of computing technology or for narrative reasons. *Unwritten* stays as close to Cyan's canonical details as possible. If you are interested in the variations, you can find that information on the Internet. And, of course, your version of D'ni will fit the needs of your game.
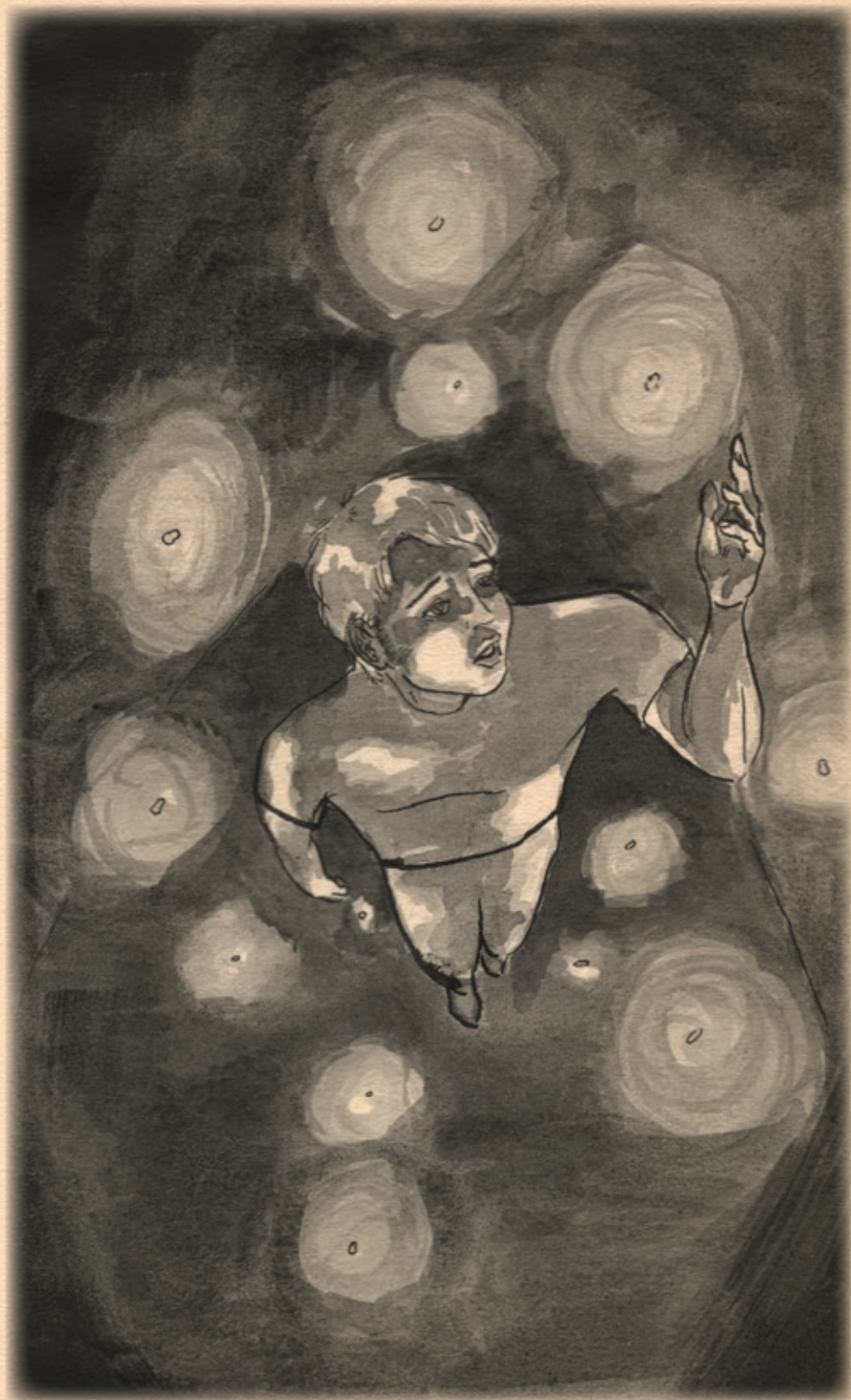
Running the Game

Fiction First

We'll get to guidance for specific situations you may encounter below. But first, the guiding principle that you as a GM should always keep in mind can be boiled down to two words: Fiction First. As a GM you should always keep the narrative firmly in mind. Your rulings and decisions on when to apply rules should always be based on the needs of the story. From this we get the Golden and Silver Rules of Fate games (and thus *Unwritten*).

The Golden Rule is: Decide what you are trying to accomplish first, then consult the rules to help you do it.

This is more important than it seems at first glance, so we'll go into it into more detail. You don't pick up a hammer and decide you want to build something that involves nails. Instead you decide what you are making, then decide you need nails to keep it together. Similarly, the rules in this book do not always tell you how to do things or what you should do. Rather, they give you tools you can use for what you are trying to do.

Some decisions will be easy. If you are trying to jump a chasm, that's an Overcome roll. If you are dodging out of the way as that charging animal comes at you, that's an Oppose roll. But a lot of situations may not be so clear. Don't let that stop you. Try to boil down the action to its most basic expression and you'll find that one of the rules you have will probably fit.

And this leads to the next rule...

The Silver Rule: Never let the rules get in the way of what makes narrative sense.

The rules should not dictate how the narrative plays out. Once again, they don't tell you what is possible; they just help you get to what you want to do. So, if the rules as stated don't quite fit the situation at hand, make a ruling to modify how you apply the rules. Don't change the story if it doesn't neatly fit into the mechanics as they are presented here.

You can see this philosophy throughout this book. Several mechanics, such as the rules for Writing or exploring, deviate from the particulars of the Four Actions. You should feel free to do so as well. For example, if it doesn't make sense on an Advantage roll to give the character a Boost on a tie, then don't do it. Look back to the spirit of the rule as a guide - a tie on an Advantage roll should be not quite what the character wanted, whatever that may mean.

As always, applying these rules and any game mechanics are something that should be up for some discussion with the players if needed. Everyone should be on the same page.

Handling Aspects

Aspects are the pivot that the Fate system turns on. You have an important job in managing the flow of fate points to and from the players, giving them opportunities to spend freely in order to succeed and look awesome, and bringing in potential complications to help keep them stocked up on points. As a GM, understanding how aspects work is the most important skill you can develop.

A lot of people get confused about what qualifies as an aspect and what doesn't. The only difference between a story detail and an aspect is that an aspect is important. Pre-determined aspects are inherently important: character aspects are those details that the players want to be important, while the aspects you place on a scene are what you think the scene will be about. They are meant to 'stick out' so that you remember them, and so you can use them for invocations and compels. Not everything in a scene or a location will be notable. You don't need to give a forest an aspect of Lush Forest unless you plan to actually use it.

There is no way you can anticipate what players will find important, though. As soon as a detail becomes important to the story, it becomes an aspect. You should allow it to be used as an aspect as long as it makes sense. If a player says in the middle of an action, says something like , "Hey, this forest is pretty dense right? Maybe it has the aspect Lush Forest that I can

invoke with a fate point," you should consider it. Players can force this to happen through successful Advantage actions, but there is no requirement that an aspect has to come from an action.

At the same time, if a detail just doesn't come up, then it won't become an aspect. If an aspect never gets used, then just drop it.

This may seem really vague, with aspects popping in and out of existence. This is a strength of aspects - what is important narratively becomes mechanically important when it needs to.

VIBRANTLY COLOURED
        SAURIAN
- CLEARLY SENTIENT
  UNUSUAL COLOUR PATTERNS
      MAY BE DYE/DELIBERATE
  LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE/
      LANGUAGE USE UNKNOWN
  RECCOMEND SEND IN
      GOM CONTACT TEAM

JUSTIFICATION IS POWER

Justification might seem like the least interesting of the roles that aspects play. However, using an aspect to justify an action or a situation gets the most mileage out of anything you can use it for.

Aspects are true. Because they are, they shape the game. Whether an action makes sense or not depends on the aspects that affect it. Dissecting a mysteriously dead animal makes perfect sense if you are a FORMER MEDICAL EXAMINER or a BIOLOGY MAJOR. Without that, it won't fly.

Situation aspects offer the same guidance. For example, if a character is trying to sprint quickly across a room with CLUTTERED FLOORS, it makes sense to ask for a roll before they can move. If there is no such aspect, just let them make the move and get on to something more interesting.

Naomi witnesses an unscrupulous archeologist making a shady deal with local pirates in the Haven Age. Due to an unfortunate Stealth roll, she is discovered and flees into the forest with the archeologist in close pursuit. She leads the chase into an area with ANGRY BUZZING INSECTS *and says "Hey, I'm going to kick the hives as I run through the area so the guy behind me will have to deal with it." She rolls Athletics for an Advantage roll and succeeds, and places* COVERED IN ANGRY BITING INSECTS *on her pursuer.*

What does this actually mean for Gwen as she manages the scene? She has a number of options. She can...

- *... leave the aspect on the pursuer and just let Nadine invoke it on Naomi's behalf.*
- *... decide that the insects are an Obstacle that requires the pursuer to succeed on an Overcome action before he can do anything else.*
- *... play the insects as an NPC with an appropriate skill (for example Swarm at Good (+3)) that targets the pursuer with dangerous actions.*
- *... have the pursuer concede the scene and run out of the woods cursing and scratching.*
- *... just end the scene with Naomi escaping.*

There is no particular rule that says how to handle a swarm of nasty insects. Rather, all of these options (and more) are possibilities because they make sense given that the pursuer now has the aspect COVERED IN ANGRY BITING INSECTS. *Which Gwen uses depends on how she wants the scene to play out.*

INVOCATIONS

We recommend that you don't apply extremely exacting standards when the PC wants to invoke an aspect—you want them to spend in order to keep the flow going. If you're too stringent on your requirements, it's going to discourage them from that free spending.

On the other hand, ask for more clarification if you don't get what a player is implying, in terms of how the aspect relates to what's happening in play. Sometimes, what seems obvious to one person isn't to another, and you shouldn't let the desire to toss fate points lead to overlooking the narration. If a player is having a hard time justifying the invocation, ask them to elaborate on their action more or unpack their thoughts.

You might also have the problem of players who get lost in the open-ended nature of aspects—they don't invoke because they aren't sure if it's too much of a stretch to apply an aspect in a certain way. The more work you do beforehand making sure that everyone's clear on what an aspect means,

the less you'll run into this. To get the player talking about invoking aspects, always ask them whether or not they're satisfied with a roll result ("So, you succeed with a result of 1 shift. You want to leave it at that? Or do you want to be even more awesome?"). Make it clear that invoking an aspect is almost always an option on any roll, in order to try and get them talking about the possibilities. Eventually, once you get a consistent dialogue going, things should smooth out.

Compels

During the game, you should look for opportunities to compel the PCs' aspects at the following times:

> - Whenever simply succeeding at a skill roll would be bland
> - Whenever any player has one or no fate points
> - Whenever someone tries to do something, and you immediately think of some aspect-related way it could go wrong

Remember that there are essentially two types of compels in the game: decision-based, where something complicated occurs as a result of something a character does, and event-based, where something complicated occurs simply as a result of the character being in the wrong situation at the wrong time.

Of the two, you're going to get the most mileage out of event-based compels—it's already your job to decide how the world responds to the PCs, so you have a lot of leeway to bring unfortunate coincidence into their lives. Most of the time, players are just going to accept you doing this with minimal negotiation.

Decision-based compels are a little trickier. Try to refrain from suggesting decisions to the players, and focus on responding to their decisions with potential complications. It's important that the players retain their sense of autonomy over what their PCs say and do, so you don't want to dictate that to them. If the players are roleplaying their characters according to their aspects, it shouldn't be hard to connect the complications you propose to one of them.

During play, you'll also need to make clear when a particular compel is "set", meaning that there's no backing out without paying a fate point. When players propose their own compels, this won't come up, because they're fishing for the point to begin with. When you propose them, you need to give the players room to negotiate with you over what the complication is, before you make a final decision. Be transparent about this—let them know when the negotiation phase has ended.

Weak Compels

In order for the compel mechanic to be effective, you have to take care that you're proposing complications of sufficient dramatic weight. Stay away from superficial consequences that don't really affect the character except to provide color for the scene. If you can't think of an immediate, tangible way that the complication changes what's going on in the game, you probably need to turn up the heat. If it doesn't give someone a sinking feeling, you probably need to turn up the heat. It's not good enough for someone to be angry at the PC—they get angry and they're willing to do something about it in front of everyone. It's not good enough for a business partner to cut them off—he cuts them off and tells the rest of his associates to blacklist them.

Also, keep in mind that some players may tend to offer weak compels when they're fishing for fate points, because they don't really want to hose their character that badly. Feel free to push for something harder if their initial proposal doesn't actually make the situation that much more dramatic.

Encouraging Players to Compel

With five aspects per PC, it's prohibitively difficult for you to take the sole responsibility for compels at the table, because that's a lot of stuff to remember and keep track of. You need the players to be invested in looking for moments to compel their own characters.

Open-ended prompting can go a long way to create this habit in your players. If you see an opportunity for a potential compel, instead of proposing it directly, ask a leading question instead. Let the player do the work of coming up with the complication and then pass the fate point along.

Also remind the players that they can compel your NPCs, if they happen to know one of that NPC's aspects. Do the same open-ended prompting when you're about to have an NPC make a decision, and ask the players to fill in the blanks.

Your main goal should be to enlist the players as partners in bringing the drama, rather than being the sole provider.

Running Game Creation

As outlined in Starting a Game section, establishing setting details is often a collaborative effort between you and your players. In that sense, the best thing you can do as GM during the process is to be open to new ideas

and be generous with your own, just like everyone else. Play off of and expand upon the suggestions that the others offer up. Your players will be more invested in the game if they feel like they've had a hand in building it.

Of course, if everyone's amenable, there's nothing stopping you from showing up with a clear vision of exactly what you want to run. Just make sure everyone's on board if you go that route. Even one player who isn't into it, and doesn't really feel inclined to get into it, can really affect the game.

Top Down vs. Bottom Up

Some like to start with the big picture first and drill down to the details, while others prefer to start with the here and now and develop the big picture as they go. These are often called "top down" and "bottom up," respectively. Neither one's better than the other, but each has its pros and cons.

With the top-down approach, you'll determine most of the setting in advance—stuff like who the movers and shakers are, the locations of important cities, the nature of important organizations, and so on. This has the advantage of providing a clear sense of how the world fits together.

The downside, of course, is that unless you're working from the default setting, it's usually a lot of work on the front end. It also requires the players to show up with a pretty thorough understanding of it all, which can be daunting. But if everyone's up to speed, it can make for an enjoyable and rewarding game.

If you're going bottom-up, though, you'll start with whatever's immediately important to the PCs. That might be anything from a few notable NPCs in their neighborhood to the name of someone the characters ran into in Ae'gura. Then the group figures out the details as the story goes along. There's no need to have an idea of how things fit into the world, because everyone will make that up as you go. The world just spirals out from whatever you start with.

The potential downside here is that it requires quite a bit of improvisation and thinking on your feet. That goes for everyone at the table, GM and players alike. For you, the GM, that might not be such a big deal—running a game almost always involves a degree of flying by the seat of one's pants—but not all players are going to be ready for that sort of responsibility. In addition, if your players like to immerse themselves in their characters and see the game world through their eyes, they may find it jarring to occasionally break from that perspective to, say, invent a name on the spot for the Age they just found or tell you the history a cult of neo-D'ni fanatics that have been hiding out in an obscure cavern.

Mixing Epic and Personal

Small-scale stories concern events closely connected to the PCs, and probably within a very limited area: just D'ni and a few Ages. Large-scale games are the opposite: epic tales spanning dozens of Ages with world(s)-shaking consequences. Both types of stories can be a lot of fun. However, don't be fooled into thinking the two are mutually exclusive. Here are a couple ways to combine them.

- Start Small and Grow: This is the classic zero-to-hero story in which an unassuming individual with no pretensions to glory is suddenly swept up in events beyond the scope of his experience.
- Peaks and Valleys: Here, you're alternating the large-scale with the small, using the latter almost as something of a breather. Typically, the large-scale storylines will deal with epic threats, while the small-scale storylines will be of a more personal nature, with few if any connections to the earth-shaking events transpiring in the characters' lives. The small-scale sessions serve as something of a breather between all that epic action, and give the players a chance to delve into some unexplored corners of their characters. Plus, if you want to connect the small- and large-scale stories down the line, you can—and the payoff will be all the more satisfying for the players.

ACTIONS

Roll the dice when succeeding or failing at the action could each contribute something interesting to the game. If you can't imagine an interesting outcome from both results, then don't call for that roll. If failure is the uninteresting option, just give the PCs what they want and call for a roll later, when you can think of an interesting failure. If success is the boring option, then see if you can turn your idea for failure into a compel instead, using that moment as an opportunity to funnel fate points to the players.

GMs, when considering a roll, you should consider the following questions:

Is the action is a reasonable action for the character to perform?

If the action is impossible, or just too improbable, then it doesn't happen.

Is this an action that deserves dramatic attention?

Some things the characters want to do may be difficult. However, they may not be interesting. Stopping to roll the dice may interrupt the flow of gameplay unnecessarily. Or maybe failure or the cost of success will just have little effect on the flow of the story. If it doesn't really matter, then let the player have the action and move on.

Is failure an interesting option?

Sometimes failure is just boring. Maybe failing here just stops gameplay completely to no effect. There's no need to have the characters standing around and the players stumped. If you are in a situation where a character fails and a player would just decline to pay a price for success and ask to roll again, then it may not be worth making the player roll in the first place. However, if failure might lead to the characters making different choices or open up other avenues for drama, a roll could be a good idea.

Could paying a price for success be interesting?

Some things the characters are just going to succeed at eventually. The master cat burglar will eventually figure out how to get past the ancient D'ni security system - it's what they do. However, what it takes to do that and what effects it has is ripe for drama. A roll can take advantage of that.

Is the action being actively opposed?

Any time two (or more) people are working against each other, we have drama. Both failure and the price of success have ramifications, so rolling the dice makes sense.

DECIDING ON DIFFICULTIES

Like most of *Unwritten*, choosing the level of opposition is driven by narrative factors, rather than any attempt to represent a reality. Base difficulties off of both the nature of the situation and its importance to the story. It's more an art than a science, but we have some guidelines to help you.

When deciding on passive opposition, look at how the PC's skill level compares with the opposition.

› Anything that's two or more steps higher than the PC's skill level—Fair (+2) skill and Great (+4) opposition, for example— means that the player will probably fail or need to invoke aspects to succeed.

› Anything that's two or more steps lower than the PC's skill level—Fair (+2) skill and Mediocre (+0) opposition, for example—means that the player will probably not need to invoke aspects and have a good chance of succeeding with style.

› Between that range, there's a roughly equal chance that they'll tie or succeed, and a roughly equal chance that they will or won't need to invoke aspects to do so.

Therefore, low difficulties are best when you want to give the PCs a chance to show off and be awesome, difficulties near their skill levels are best when you want to provide tension but not overwhelm them, and high difficulties are best when you want to emphasize how dire or unusual the circumstances are and make them pull out all the stops.

Of course, there needs to be a good reason that backs up your choice in the story. It's totally okay if that justification is something you're about to make up, rather than something you know beforehand. Aspects are a great tool for this, especially situation aspects. It makes sense that a character with JUST NOT A PEOPLE PERSON would have more trouble trying to communicate with natives who don't speak their language. This is a situation ripe for compels, but if you aren't specifically looking to throw a complication into the mix, adjusting the strength of the opposition makes sense.

In fact, the need for more challenge for a particularly skilled player or set of players is a great chance to be creative and bring new details into play. Let's say you want to make bypassing an old D'ni security system more of a challenge, and you have an NPC you have been wanting to bring in. You could decide that the NPC has upgraded the system, or is somehow interfering. By doing so, you've brought in a narrative hook and made things more interesting.

You might also try using "out of place" difficulties to indicate the presence of unanswered questions during the game—for some odd reason, the store room you're trying to break into has a +5 lock on the door. What could be so important in there that you don't know about?

Either way, don't skip the justification part—either let the players know what it is immediately when you tell them the difficulty, or shrug mysteriously and then let them find out soon thereafter (as in, the time it takes to think it up).

GREAT SUCCESS!

Sometimes, a PC is going to roll far in excess of the difficulty, getting a lot of shifts on the roll. Some of the basic actions already have a built-in effect for rolling really well, like getting free invokes on an Advantage action.

For others, it's not so clear. What's happens when you get a lot of shifts on a roll? You want to make sure those results have some kind of meaning and reflect how competent the PC's are.

Here are a few choice options.

▷ Go Gonzo with the Narration: It's important to celebrate a great roll with a suitable narration of over the top success. Let the success affect something else, in addition to what the PC was going for, and bring the player into the process of selling it by prompting them to make up cool details. "Three extra shifts on that attempt to get past the lock — tell me, is anyone ever going to be able to lock that crypt again?"

▷ Add an Aspect: You can express additional effects of a good roll by placing an aspect on the PC or on the scene, essentially letting them create an advantage for free. "So your action to chat up the ResEng succeeded with four shifts. She'll let you into the DRC library, and she'll also act as AVAILABLE BACKUP if you should need some help later."

▷ Reducing Time: If it's important to get something done fast, then you can use extra shifts to decrease the time that it takes to do an action.

AWESOME FAILURE

Failure is a hard thing to make awesome, but it pays off in making interesting games. Fumbles are only dead ends if there isn't anything interesting to be found by following up on it.

Blame the Circumstances

The PCs are competent people. They aren't supposed to look like fools on a regular or even semi-regular basis. Sometimes, all it takes is the right description to make failure into something dynamic—instead of narrating that the PC just made a stupid mistake, blame the failure on something that the PC couldn't have prevented. There's a secondary mechanism on that lock that initially looked simple, or the contact broke his promise to show up on time, or the ancient tome is too withered to read, or a sudden seismic shift throws off your run.

That way, the PCs still look competent, even though they don't get what they want. More importantly, shifting the blame to the circumstances gives you an opportunity to suggest a new course of action, which allows the failure to create forward momentum in your story. The contact didn't make his appointment? Where is he? Who was following him to the rendezvous? The ancient tome is withered? Maybe someone can restore it. That way, you don't spend time dwelling on the failure and can move on to something new.

Let the Player Do the Work

You can also kick the question back to the players, and let them decide what the context of their own failure is. This is a great move to foster a collaborative spirit, and some players will be surprisingly eager to hose their own characters in order to further the story, especially if it means they can keep control of their own portrayal.

It's also a great thing to do if you just plain can't think of anything. "Okay, so, you fumbled that action by 2. So you're working the lock, and something goes wrong. What is it?" "You missed that roll to keep your eyes peeled. What don't you notice as you're sneaking up to the queen's chambers?" It's better if the question is specific, like those examples—just saying, "Okay, tell me how you fail!" can easily stall things by putting a player on the spot unnecessarily. You want to let the player do the work, not make them.

ANTAGONISTS

One of your most important jobs as a GM is creating the NPCs who will oppose the PCs and try to keep them from their goals during your chapters. The real story comes from what the PCs do when worthy adversaries stand between them and their objectives—how far they're willing to go, what price they're willing to pay, and how they change as a result of the experience.

TAKE ONLY WHAT YOU NEED TO SURVIVE

First of all, keep in mind that you're never obligated to give any NPC a full sheet like the ones the PCs have. Most of the time, you're not going to need to know that much information, because the NPCs aren't going to be the center of attention like the PCs are. It's better to focus on writing down exactly what you need for that NPC's encounter with the PCs, and then fill in the blanks on the fly (just like PCs can) if that NPC ends up becoming more important in the campaign.

THE NPC TYPES

NPCs come in three different flavors: nameless NPCs, supporting NPCs, and main NPCs.

Nameless NPCs

The majority of the NPCs in your campaign world are nameless—people who are so insignificant to the story that the PC's interactions with them don't even require them to learn a name. The random explorer they pass in the Cavern, the archivist at the library, the DRC minions running around. Their role in the story is temporary and fleeting—the PCs will probably encounter them once and never see them again. In fact, most of the time, you'll create them simply out of reflex when you describe an environment.

On their own, nameless NPCs usually aren't meant to provide much of a challenge to the PCs. You use them like you use a low-difficulty skill roll, mainly as an opportunity to showcase the PCs' competence. In conflicts, they serve as a distraction or a delay, forcing the PCs to work a little harder to get what they want.

For a nameless NPC, all you really need is two or three skills based on their role in the scene. Your average security guard might have Athletics and Notice, while your average clerk might only have Research. They never get more than one or two aspects, because they just aren't important enough.

New Seed Cult Member

Aspect: Stubbornly Devout
Skills: Fair (+2): Will, Provoke

Good Samaritan Explorer

Aspect: Can't We All Just Get Along?
Skills: Fair (+2); Medicine, Empathy

Nameless NPCs as Obstacles

The easiest way to handle nameless NPCs is simply to treat them as obstacles: Give a difficulty for the PC to overcome whatever threat the NPC presents, and just do it in one roll. You don't even have to write anything down, just set a difficulty according to the guidelines in this chapter, and assume that the PC gets past on a successful roll.

If the situation is more complicated than that, make it a challenge instead. This trick is useful when you want a group of nameless NPCs more as a feature of the scene than as individuals.

NPC First, Name Later

Nameless NPCs don't have to remain nameless. If the players decide to get to know that explorer or Restoration Engineer or whatever, go ahead and make a real person out of them—but that doesn't mean that you need to make them any more mechanically complex. If you want to, of course, go ahead and promote them to a supporting NPC. But otherwise, simply giving that courtier a name and a motivation doesn't mean he can't go down in one punch.

Supporting NPCs

Supporting NPCs have proper names and are a little more detailed than nameless NPCs, playing a supporting role in your scenarios (hence the name). They often display some kind of strong distinguishing trait that sets them apart from the crowd: their relationship to a PC or NPC, a particular competence or unique ability, or simply the fact that they tend to appear in the game a great deal. Any faces that you assign to the locations or factions you make during game creation are supporting NPCs, as are any characters who are named in one of the PCs' aspects.

Supporting NPCs are a great source of interpersonal drama, because they're usually the people that the PCs have a relationship with, such as friends, sidekicks, family, contacts, and noteworthy opponents. While they may never be central to resolving the main dilemma of a scenario, they're a significant part of the journey, either because they provide aid, present a problem, or figure into a subplot.

Supporting NPCs are made much like nameless NPCs, except they get to have a few more of the standard character elements. These include a high concept, one or more additional aspects, one stunt, and a handful of skills (say four or five). They have one mild consequence and, if you want them to be especially tough, one moderate consequence.

Skills for a supporting NPC should follow a column distribution. Because you're only going to define four or five skills, just treat it as one column. If your NPC has a skill at Great, fill in one skill at each positive step below it—so one Good, one Fair, and one Adequate skill.

- Skill Levels: A supporting NPC's top skill can exceed your best PC's by one or two levels, but only if their role in the game is to provide serious opposition—supporting NPCs who are allied with the PCs should be their rough peers in skill level.
- Concessions: Supporting NPCs should not fight to the bitter end, given the option. Instead, have them concede conflicts often, especially early in a story, and especially if the concession is something like "They get away." Conceding like this serves a few purposes. For one, it foreshadows a future, more significant encounter with the NPC. Because conceding comes with a reward of one or more fate points, it also

Phuong Ha Ngo

High Concept: Relentless Hunter

Aspects: It's Nothing Personal, Can Track a Hawk on a Cloudy Day

Skills:

Great (+4): Survival

Good (+3): Athletics, Notice

Fair (+2): Surveying, Finesse

Adequate (+1): Craft, Medicine

Johanna Doxen

High Concept:
Wily Cavern Business Person

Aspects:
A Deal is A Deal
You Won't Find This Anywhere Else

Skills:
Good (+3): Will, Rapport
Fair (+2): Deceive, Craft

Stunts:
Resource: General Store. Johanna runs a general store in the cavern. She has a ready supply of all sorts of gear and food, as well as some rare items. If you come to her with something of value, you can get something special in trade.

makes them more of a threat the next time they show up. What's more, it's virtually guaranteed to pay off for the players in a satisfying way the next time the NPC makes an appearance.

Finally, it implicitly demonstrates to the players that, when things are desperate, conceding a conflict is a viable course of action. A PC concession here and there can raise the stakes and introduce new complications organically, both of which make for a more dramatic, engaging story.

Main NPCs

Main NPCs are the closest you're ever going to get to playing a PC yourself. They have full character sheets just like a PC does, with five aspects, a full distribution of skills, and a selection of stunts. They are the most significant characters in your PCs' lives, because they represent pivotal forces of opposition or allies of crucial importance. Because they have a full spread of aspects, they also offer the most nuanced options for interaction, and they have the most options to invoke and be compelled. Your primary antagonists in a scenario or arc should always be main NPCs, as should any NPCs who are the most vital pieces of your stories.

Because they have all the same things on their sheet as PCs do, main NPCs will require a lot more of your time and attention than other characters. How you create one really depends on how much time you have—if you want, you can go through the whole character creation process and work out their whole backstory through phases, leaving only those slots for "guest starring" open.

Of course, if you want, you can also upgrade one of your current supporting NPCs to a main using this method. This is great for when a supporting NPC has suddenly or gradually become a major fixture in the story. Players may fixate on a specific NPC, regardless of your original plans for them.

You could also do things more on the fly if you need to, creating a partial sheet of the aspects you know for sure, those skills you definitely need them to have, and any stunts you want. Then fill in the rest as you go. This is almost like making a supporting NPC, except you can add to the sheet during play.

Main NPCs will resist to the bitter end if need be, making the PCs work for every step.

Regarding skill levels, your main NPCs will come in one of two flavors—exact peers of the PCs who grow with them as the campaign progresses, or superiors to the PCs who remain static while the PCs grow to sufficient strength to oppose them. If it's the former, just give them the exact same skill distribution the PCs currently have. If it's the latter, give them enough skills to go at least two higher than whatever the current skill cap is for the game.

Playing the Opposition

Remember, you want a balancing act between stonewalling the PCs and letting them walk all over your opposition (unless they are nameless NPCs, in which case that's pretty much what they're there for). It's important to keep in mind not just the skill levels of the NPCs in your scenes, but their number and importance.

Right-sizing the opposition is more of an art than a science, but here are some strategies to help.

> Don't outnumber the PCs unless your NPCs have comparatively lower skills.
> If they're going to team up against one big opponent, make sure that opponent has a peak skill two levels higher than whatever the best PC can bring in that conflict.
> Limit yourself to one main NPC per scene, unless it's a big climactic conflict at the end of an arc. Remember, supporting NPCs can have skills as high as you want.
> Most of the opposition the PCs encounter in a session should be nameless NPCs, with one or two supporting NPCs and main NPCs along the way.
> Nameless and supporting NPCs means shorter conflicts because they give up or lose sooner; main NPCs mean longer conflicts.

It's easy to fall into the default mode of using the opposition as a direct means to get in the PCs' way, drawing them into a series of conflict scenes until someone is defeated.

However, keep in mind that the NPCs can create advantages just like the PCs can. Feel free to use opposition characters to create scenes that aren't necessarily about stopping the PCs from achieving a goal, but scouting out information about them and stacking up free invocations. Let your antagonists and the PCs have tea together and then bring out the Empathy rolls. Or instead of having that fight scene take place in the dark alley, let your NPCs show up, gauge the PCs' abilities, and then flee.

Likewise, keep in mind that your NPCs have a home turf advantage in conflicts if the PCs go to them in order to resolve something. So, when you're setting up situation aspects, you can pre-load the NPC with some free invocations if it's reasonable that they've had time to place those aspects. Use this trick in good faith, though—two or three such aspects is probably pushing the limit.

Your opposition will be way more interesting if they try to get at the PCs in multiple venues of conflict, rather than just going for the most direct route. Remember that there are a lot of ways to get at someone, and that mental conflict is just as valid as physical conflict as a means of doing so. If the opposition has a vastly different skill set than one or more of your PCs, leverage their strengths and choose a conflict strategy that gives them the best advantage.

OBSTACLES

Drama suggests that the explorers encounter a series of obstacles that they have to overcome in order to see what is over the next hill. As always, what is interesting should guide you on what to throw in the explorer's path and how much focus it deserves. Slogging through the swamps of Negilahn is difficult, but we only need to spend any time on it if the trek is interesting.

Simple Overcome and Advantage actions will usually suffice. Failure should rarely simply cut off access to an area. Rather, it should be the chance for creative problem solving or diverting into interesting subplots. Success at a cost can leave the explorers hurt or resources depleted, for example.

When it is time to zoom in on the drama of exploration, it becomes an exercise in problem solving for the characters. Rather than just simple obstacles, characters should face problems that they have to solve that require more than a roll of the dice to bypass. Teamwork, planning, and thought should be required. Dipping into action sequences like challenges and contests as a structure allow you to turn it into an adventure scene on all its own. Getting past a particular obstacle can even be the basis of a sub-plot or story arc, with gathering the information or resources needed.

GMs, one thing to remember: once a problem has been solved, it is solved. Don't make your players run through the sequence again when they head back or come that way again; that's just boring. Unless the situation has changed significantly or there is a chance for additional new drama (such as an interesting compel), just let them walk by without further problem.

Hazards

Environmental hazards are a common hurdle for explorers to face. A simple passive opposition will often be enough. Situation aspects can be used for invocations and compels. A forest age may have aspects like Dangerous Predators or Poisonous Mushrooms Everywhere, for instance.

However, hazards can be viewed as 'characters' with aspects and even skills. Playing a hazard like this makes it an active participant in the scene— the environment (or elements in the environment) can actively do things to characters. They become participants in scenes like contests.

The environment may have an attribute that will affect the characters the longer they are exposed to it. A contest that is run through the scene can model this. The environment uses its skill against the characters and each characters resists with appropriate skills in return. If the hazard gets a three-victory lead over a character, then the character takes an appropriate consequence. If the character takes the same lead, they have bypassed the

hazard and no longer have to deal with it. Remember that this is a contest between the hazard and each character. One character overcoming the hazard may not mean the others have as well.

A scene that is just a contest versus a hazard has some possibilities, but combining the contest with other actions will be more fun. Interspersing contest exchanges with other activities (even other contests, such as running from an angry mob) adds another level of worry to the situation. A contest could be run across several scenes to reflect a pervasive threat that affects the characters the whole time they are in the area.

Our characters are trekking across the desert wastes of Payiferen over the course of several scenes. Gwen decides that the heat of the desert is constantly beating down and models it as a contest. Each character is in a separate contest with the environment. She gives the desert the skill Searing Heat. At the end of each consecutive scene in the desert, Gwen runs an exchange.

At the end of scene 1:
- *Samuel hopes to use Stefan's Survival skill to deal with the heat. He rolls Survival versus the environment's Searing Heat. He succeeds and gets one point of progress.*
- *Todd follows Samuel's example. So Templeton also rolls Survival and does badly. The environment excels over Templeton and gets two points of progress.*
- *Naomi pushes through out of sheer stubbornness. Nadine rolls Naomi's Will and excels versus the Searing Heat. She gets two points.*

At the end of scene 2:
- *Samuel continues using Survival. Stefan beats the environment again, excelling this time. That gets him a two points for a total of three progress. He wins his contest and has bested the hazard. He's figured out a way with his Survival skill to withstand the heat long term.*
- *Nadine rolls Will again but the environment succeeds this time. It gets one point, to her two. She will have to continue to resist in the next scene.*
- *Todd switches tactics and switches to Experiment to figure out a way to deal with the heat. The environment succeeds versus Templeton's skill, however. The environment prevails over Templeton with three points. Templeton collapses of heat stroke....*
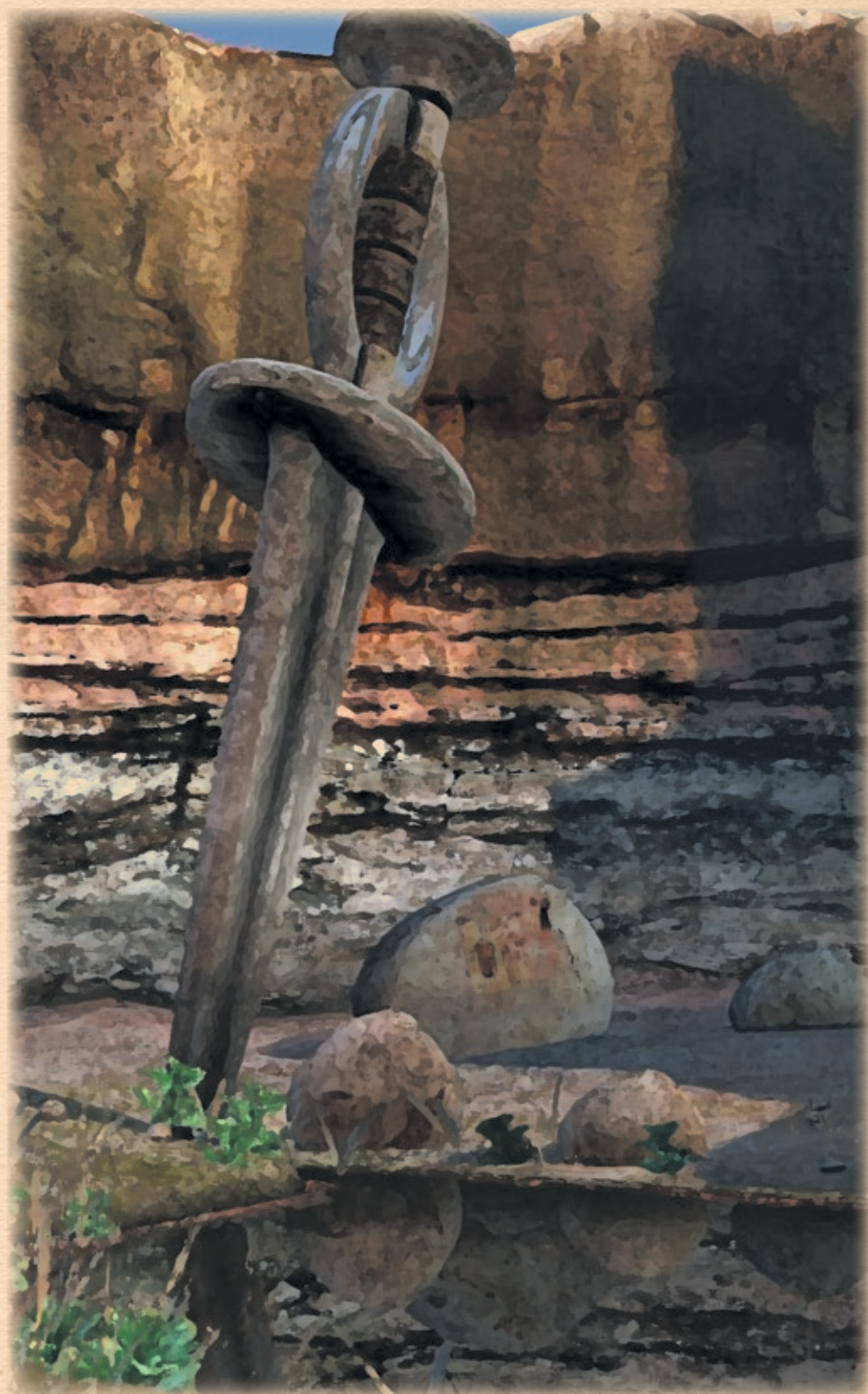
Adjusting the Sliders

Mystery Seeds

There are a lot of unanswered questions in the D'niverse, each with wide-ranging ramifications. Any of these can be a mystery for characters to investigate and explore.

Why did the DRC leave?

The DRC have left the cavern due to funding issues not once but twice during the Restoration. It seems odd that with a myriad of universes at their disposal, it was so difficult to turn that into a little coin. Looking at what independent explorers have managed to do on their own, it begs the question: why did they leave?

Some have suggested that the DRC left due to fear of the Bahro more than anything else. But what if the story is bigger than that?

Here are some dramatic possibilities:

▷ The DRC left because their activities were drawing the attention of the hostile Bahro faction. Organized restoration resembled a resurgence of the D'ni too much. They left in an attempt to give the cavern a lower profile. That means that the more organized explorers become on their own, the more likely the Bahro will turn their gaze back. Maybe the DRC (or former members) will turn their efforts towards discouraging or outright sabotaging explorer efforts. It's for their own good, after all.

- The DRC never left, they are just hidden. They might be attempting something wildly dangerous and want to keep the explorers safe. Or maybe what they were doing is just so much easier without hundreds of self-important busybodies always interfering. Whatever the case, there are bound to be clues around that lead to their doorstep.
- The DRC has been subverted or were threatened to leave. Perhaps it was the government (see below), or maybe by some other cross-Age power that didn't like them poking into Ages which they considered theirs.

WHAT ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT?

The question of the government has been an ongoing one. It would make sense that the government (any government) would be interested in D'ni and the potential for unlimited worlds to exploit. It is a common fear around the Cavern. However, there has been no indication that any surface government has an inkling that anything is going on. There are several competing theories about this. Any of them are ripe with potential.

- There has not been enough activity related to D'ni for the government to notice, especially since the only known surface entrance to D'ni is in the middle of the New Mexico desert on private land. Perhaps the government has gotten wind of D'ni, but no one believes anything about it. But what if an explorer does something big that blows D'ni's cover?
- Someone in the government does know about D'ni, but is actively blocking further information from leaking out about it. There could be an elaborate conspiracy involved. Zandi seems like an obvious person to be behind this sort of thing. He might recruit explorers to help keep things quiet.
- The government does know about D'ni, and is there undercover or has already claimed their own Ages. Someone is bound to stumble upon some clues that indicate something is amiss. Some explorers are likely to be plants, keeping an eye on the rest. Maybe it's one of the characters' friends, or one of the characters.
- Something about Yeesha or the Bahro has 'affected' fate in some way to keep the government from noticing D'ni. The implications of such power are staggering. What if someone less benevolent gets ahold of that same power, or even a fraction of it?

Whatever the case, no one knows for certain. Paranoid explorers have been discussing plans for when the government does discover what is happening underground. Some advocate welcoming them and working with them. Others talk about declaring sovereignty. Some talk about scattering to the Ages and destroying the Cavern as they leave in order to keep it out of the hands of government bureaucrats. Who knows what direction things will take?

WHAT IS THE CALL?

Thousands answered the Call to D'ni. No one knows what calls someone to D'ni or how it works, but Yeesha seemed to be ready for it.

» The Call may have been the result of Yeesha's tampering with the world (her 'Yeesha magic'). That implies she can affect more than just Ages. Will she use that influence again in the future? How will people react to finding out that they are being influenced?

» A popular theory is that the Called are those with D'ni blood. Early records suggest that some D'ni left for the surface right after they arrived in this Age. Did the D'ni have any effect on human history? And what does it mean to have D'ni ancestry?

» The Call may have been a rationalization. Someone like Jeff Zandi could have worked to direct people to D'ni in hopes of starting a flood of newcomers to D'ni. Many new people come to D'ni now because others bring them, after all. Maybe it was just that way all along and 'the Call' is part of the propaganda. If so, what is Zandi's game?

WHAT ABOUT YEESHA?

Yeesha is powerful and, to put it mildly, unstable. She has always been focused on helping and protecting the explorers... so far. What if that changes? She seems to view things on a different level than the rest of us. That means what she thinks is right may not line up with what explorers believe.

» Why is Yeesha so unstable? Has she just seen too much or is there something else going on with her? If she's tied herself so closely to the Bahro, and they are in a civil war, does that have an effect on her mind? Given just how much power she has, wouldn't helping her be more stable really make everyone safer?

» How does Yeesha do what she does? That's a secret that a lot of people would like to get their hands on. At least some of those people are likely to be less benevolent than Yeesha. The characters might want to make sure that those secrets fall into the right hands - maybe their own.

- Is Yeesha really the Grower? Is Yeesha just rationalizing her actions? What if the Grower is real, but it is not Yeesha? Does she know and is just trying to draw off the dangerous elements in the universe? Or is she deluded? How might she react if the real Grower shows up?

WHAT ABOUT THE BAHRO?

The Bahro have abilities that go far past anything that even the D'ni seemed to have dreamed of. They also seem to be constrained (or rather, used to be constrained) in ways that we don't understand. Understanding how 'bahrotech' works could go a long way to resolving the Bahro War, or at least giving explorers a chance to be something besides collateral damage.

- How do the Bahro 'Link at will'? Yeesha seems to have figured this out herself. Can others figure out the same thing? What will they do with it?
- The Tablet kept the Bahro enslaved, even after D'ni fell. How? What is the connection of the Tablet to the Bahro? Since Dr. Watson returned it to them, they seem to have free will now. But does it still have power over them? Someone may decide that the only way to protect the explorers and the rest of the universe from the twisted Bahro is to re-establish control. Can it be done?
- Yeesha said that the D'ni enslaved the Bahro (presumably with the Tablet). Why? They were able to write Ages already, why enslave a whole race? As we've mentioned, D'ni records barely even allude to the Bahro. Who in D'ni did the actual enslavement? Just the D'ni government, maybe a particular Guild? The answer could have a significant bearing on how the Bahro War plays out.

Is there anybody out there?

We know that we aren't alone on the Great Tree. But who really is out there, and do we have a chance to actually interact with them?

- ⟩ We know Releeshahn is out there with the last of the D'ni. What is going on there? Is the Bahro War still raging there?
- ⟩ What about other D'ni colonies? They can't have been all wiped out or moved to Releeshahn. What have they become over the last several centuries? Maybe they are still thriving, and all it takes is an enterprising explorer to follow the clues on how to get there. If there is just another set of ruins out there, what might someone discover?
- ⟩ Were the people of Gartnernay the only people to have developed the Art? Another cross-Age empire might be out there and stumble onto one of D'ni's Ages. All it takes is a trail of Linking Books to make it back to D'ni and Earth.

Apocryphal Settings

Sometimes, it is time to take the Linking Book less traveled. A little creativity can take an *Unwritten* game in an entirely different direction. If you are looking for some inspiration before heading off into the metaphorical weeds, we've provided some ideas here.

Historical D'ni

D'ni history is long and varied. It is also full of holes and unknowns where you could fit in any sort of game.

- ⟩ If you want court intrigue, place a game in the D'ni era of Kings. For example, the King is an NPC that all of the players are trying to manipulate. It could be interesting for one of the characters to actually be the King of D'ni and have them experience just how heavy the crown sits on their brow. There are options for the characters working together, or even against each other. Inter-Guild politics are ripe for drama as well.
- ⟩ A game set just before the Fall of D'ni puts players in the path of the on-coming tragedy. Will they have a chance to prevent it? Or will they just have to deal with what happens? Depending on how it is run, you have a Bourne Conspiracy-style thriller or a disaster movie in the making.

> ❧ Players play a group of Maintainers that protects D'ni from unfriendly forces in the Ages and at home. Think one part crime drama and one part special ops.

When you are discussing this with your players, make sure that you have the same ideas of how things are going to work. There will be details that you will have to work out. For example, just how does a group of Maintainers operate? Do they act like a military unit, or something more like a police precinct? Ask specific questions, and get the players' help in filling in the details.

STEAMPUNK IT

D'ni fits well into a steampunk genre. The tropes of the genre mesh without much trouble; both are focused on exploring the unknown in a more civilized time. The technology of the D'ni was highly mechanical and baroque; clockwork automata fit right in. And if they didn't live in a cavern, you know the D'ni could do wonders with a fleet of zeppelins.

Focus on the D'ni in the role of 'civilized society' (at least, in their own minds). Portray them as Edwardian in manner and dress. Make them less isolationist and more prone to adventure. Incorporating elements and motifs of colonial Britain into the D'ni would be very steampunk.

D'NI UNCOVERED

What happens when D'ni becomes known to the surface world?
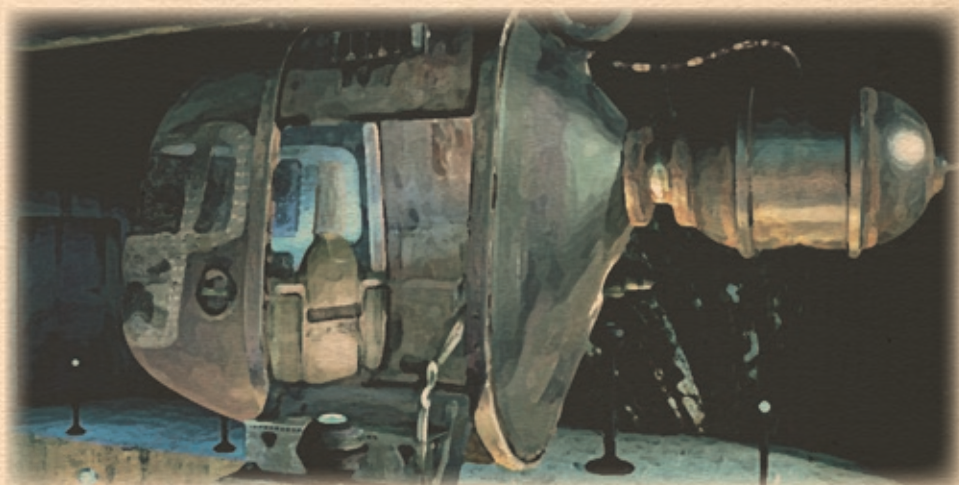
- If the cavern is a secret kept among parts of the government, the game might be cloak and dagger. Players can be government operatives sent in to D'ni to find out more information and bring back key technology. Or maybe their mission is to find something specific in the Ages that can make a difference in global balance of power.
- Authorities stumble upon someone using Linking Books. How would a group of police officers track down a thief using Linking Books? How about a terrorist cell?
- On the other hand, what do explorers do when the government moves in? Do they work with the government? Do they resist? Do they go public to the world to prevent the military from using the Art for bad things?
- Fast-forward about 20 years after the public learns about D'ni. What is life like when the universe next door is a colony or sovereign state? Or when the quickest way to the moon is via Linking Book?

These sorts of games have a lot of potential, but they move away from the pulp adventure style that is a signature of the Myst games. This sort of game can end up being much grittier and may end up feeling more like an urban fantasy with a specific form of magic.

High Weirdness

For the conspiracy buffs out there, D'ni makes a great backdrop for weaving strange tales. Most high weirdness delves into the horror genre, which doesn't fit *Unwritten*. However, switch the focus to adventure and leave out the maddening elder monstrosities and you have a lot of possibilities that put the Da Vinci Code to shame.

- Area 51 was built on top of a series of tunnels that lead down to the D'ni caverns. The military has been experimenting with the Art there for decades.
- The Merovingians, instead of being the line descended from Jesus, were a line of pure-blood D'ni dating back to before the Flood. The Priory of Sion has been keeping them a secret for thousands of years.
- A rogue D'ni made his way to the surface and traveled the world, eventually making it to the Middle East. There he took the name Hiram Abiff and became the architect that built King Solomon's temple. He went on to found the Freemasons to pass on his secrets (they are called masons for a reason, after all...)

Different D'nis

Open up the world building stage of the game and develop who the D'ni were with the players. Or you could surprise veteran Myst fans with something completely different than they were expecting.

- ⟩ Instead of a hidebound D'ni focused on tradition, the D'ni were a cosmopolitan culture that absorbed as much as possible from the inhabited Ages they encountered. Their culture changed rapidly, appropriating what they found as the next fad. Possibly, they were just decadent and interested in collecting the treasures of the universe for themselves.
- ⟩ What if the D'ni were a subjugated people rather than the princes of the Ages? The cavern was a prison/gulag and eventually they were just worked to extinction. Their former masters are still out there, somewhere....
- ⟩ The D'ni were nomads wandered who through the Ages, building small installations and then moving on to the next place. The cavern is just one of their stops. The characters could follow a trail across the Great Tree to find them.

D'ni-less

Who says that you have to have D'ni at all? The game could happen completely out in the Ages with no access to D'ni. Or maybe D'ni just never existed. Just lift the Art out of the rest of the setting and run with it.

You run the risk of making an entirely different game; maybe that is something you are aiming for. If you want to keep the feel of *Unwritten*, you'll probably want to focus on the sort of pulp adventure and exploration that happens in D'ni. We suggest that you keep the trappings of the Art (Linking Books, etc.) in order to maintain the feel of books being miraculous.

Using other Fate Games

One of the strengths of the *Fate Core* system (and its earlier versions) is that it is modular; there are a lot of games out there that have developed specific rules for specific purposes. You may have a particular feel you want to encourage using one of these systems. Generally speaking you can slot them into your game with little effort.

We encourage you to look at many Fate games and see what piques your interest. Here are a few that may be specifically useful.

Fate Toolkit, Evil Hat Productions

A supplement to Fate Core, the Fate Toolkit talks about various ways to change the system to fit different types of games. There are too many juicy morsels in the Toolkit to list here — if you are the type of gamemaster who likes playing with the rules, check this out.
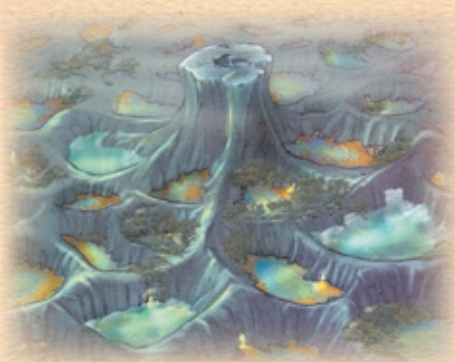
Atomic Robo, Evil Hat Productions

Atomic Robo has many tools that could be repurposed for use in D'ni. *Unwritten*'s Deduction mechanic is simply Robo's Brainstorm with the serial numbers filed off. If you want to put more of an emphasis on creating gadgets, Robo's invention mechanics would snap into *Unwritten* easily. If you want a more definite skill system for reflecting a character's academic or scientific skills, how Robo treats science skills may be right up your alley.

Diaspora, VSCA Publishing

A hard SF game based on an earlier version of Fate. Diaspora has some interesting ideas about creating systems of planets that might be adapted to develop an initial set of Ages for *Unwritten*. Additionally, it describes a structured system for 'social combat' that could be useful for a game focused on politicking.

Jadepunk, Reroll Productions

Jadepunk's combination of wuxia martial arts and steampunk sensibilities is not quite what *Unwritten* is about. However, if you are looking for a more granular approach to gear and items, Jadepunk provides a wonderful subsystem for Assets, which covers items and contacts. It could easily be adapted for locations as well.

Mindjammer, 2nd Ed., Mindjammer Press

A transhuman SF game. Mindjammer has excellent systems for portraying organizations and even entire cultures as characters, or as extras that characters can access and manipulate. If you are going for epic games involving the clash of cultures, these rules could be invaluable.

GLOSSARIES

SETTING GLOSSARY

- *Ae'gura* - The central island in the D'ni Cavern, center of the D'ni government. Often referred to as 'the city'. Contrast with the City Proper.

- *Age* - Another world, accessed by the Art. Technically an Age is a whole universe. However, many people refer to the area immediately accessible by a Linking Book as the Age.

- *Ahyoheek* - A popular D'ni game with some resemblance to a rock-paper-scissors tournament.

- *Arch of Kerath* - The arch that sits over the lake in the D'ni cavern. Named after the last King of D'ni.

- *Art, The* - See The Art of Writing.

- *Art of Writing* - The discipline in which special books are used to create links to other worlds.

- *Bahro* - A sentient race of winged creatures, used secretly as slaves by the D'ni. The Bahro can link without Linking Books, and seem to have some control over the environment in Ages.

- *Bahro Stone* - The Bahro equivalent of a Linking Book.

- *Bevin* - A neighborhood in the City Proper of the D'ni cavern. Many neighborhoods look similar to Bevin and are erroneously referred to as 'bevins'.

- *Cannen* - A D'ni music player.

- *Cavern, The* - The cavern containing the city of D'ni.

- *City Proper* - The actual D'ni city along the walls of the Cavern and around the lake.

- *Death Age* - An Age with a lethal environment.
- *Descriptive Book* - A book that describes an Age that it links to. In order to access an Age, a Descriptive Book must be written for that Age. If a Descriptive Book is destroyed, all Linking Books to that Age cease to work, making it inaccessible. Can be used to link to the Age it describes.
- *DRC* - D'ni Restoration Council.
- *Eder* - A garden Age or place of rest. Eder is often used as a title for garden Ages (e.g. Eder Tsogal).
- *Eder Tomahn* - A rest area.
- *Explorer* - A catch-all name for those who came to visit D'ni during the Restoration.
- *Fall, The* - The destruction of D'ni caused by the plague released by Veovis and Ae'geris.
- *Firemarble* - A small stone that glows when shaken, used by the D'ni for lighting.
- *Five Lords, The* - The D'ni ruling body (after the last D'ni King abdicated). The Five Lords are chosen from the Grandmasters of the Major Guilds.
- *Gahro-hevtee* - Symbols used to write Linking Books and Descriptive Books. Gahro-hevtee refer to precise descriptions of concepts in an Age.
- *Grandmaster* - The highest ranking master in a Guild.
- *Garden Age* - An Age written specifically as a garden or park. See Eder.
- *Great Shaft* - An enormous shaft dug from the D'ni tunnels up towards the surface. Never completed.
- *Great Stair* - The stairway in Ae'gura that leads up from the lake to the Tokotah Courtyard.
- *Great Tree of Possibilities* - The D'ni name for the multitude of universes accessible through Linking Books.
- *Great Zero* - The point of origin for mapping in an Age. In D'ni, the Great Zero is also the machine that sits on that point, which aids the KI network in D'ni.
- *Grower, The* - A messianic figure in D'ni prophecy that will regrow D'ni after it has been destroyed. Yeesha claims to be the Grower.

- *Guild* - One of the organizations that formed the cornerstones of D'ni society.

- *Guildsman* - Member of a guild.

- *Guildmaster* - A high ranking member of a Guild.

- *Imager* - A D'ni device that projects a holographic image.

- *Journey* - One of several object lessons in which Yeesha charged explorers to complete during the Restoration.

- *KI* - A smartphone-like device of D'ni origin worn on the back of the hand. Pronounced "key".

- *Lattice* - The backbone of the D'ni network used for KI communications and mapping.

- *Least, The* - Another term for the Bahro.

- *Lesson Age* - An Age written specifically for teaching purposes.

- *Link* - To use a Linking Book to teleport to an Age.

- *Link Point* - The place where a Linking Book leads to.

- *Linking Book* - A small book that leads to a specific location in an Age. Using a Linking Book leaves the Book behind.

- *Linking panel* - A small image on a page of a Linking or Descriptive Book that shows where the book links to.

- *Maintainer* - A D'ni Guild member that served as the first explorers of new Ages, as well as a police force in D'ni and D'ni Ages.

- *Maintainer's Mark* - A mark or plaque set in an Age that has been examined by the Guild of Maintainers. Often the mark will be placed at the Great Zero of an Age.

- *Major Guild* - One of the 18 most important Guilds in D'ni society. They played a major role in D'ni government.

- *Minor Guild* - A smaller Guild in D'ni society.

- *Modern Guild* - One of the Guilds restarted by the DRC during the Restoration.

- *Nara* - The hardest D'ni stone, thirty times harder than steel.

- *Neighborhood* - A section of the City Proper in the D'ni cavern that acted as a residential area. Sometimes erroneously referred to as a 'bevin'.

- *Nexus* - A D'ni Age that acts as a central hub for accessing other Ages and various parts of D'ni.
- *Panic link* - To link away from a dangerous situation, especially with a Relto Book.
- *Prison Age* - An Age written specifically to imprison criminals.
- *Relto* - A unique Age with many individual copies, written by Yeesha. Many explorers have their 'own' Relto, accessible through their Relto Book.
- *Relto Book* - A Linking Book that leads to a Relto. Unlike other Linking Books, a Relto Book links with its owner.
- *Restoration, The* - The modern effort to restore D'ni.
- *Restoration Engineer* - An engineer employed by the DRC to assist with the Restoration. Also referred to as a ResEng.
- *Surface, The* - The surface of Earth (as opposed to D'ni). The 'mundane' world.
- *Writer* - One who uses the art to Write Ages.
- *Yahvo* - D'ni name for God. Yahvo created the Great Tree and all the Ages.
- *Yeesha Magic* - Tongue-in-cheek term for applications of the Art that only Yeesha seems capable of pulling off.

System Glossary

- *Action* - An attempt to accomplish something that meets opposition and may or may not succeed. There are four types of action: Overcome, Advantage, Discover, and Oppose.
- *Active Opposition* - Resistance to an action by an active entity, represented by an Oppose action which the character must exceed on a roll.
- *Advantage* - A benefit received from a successful Advantage action, such as a new situation aspect or free invokes
- *Advantage action* - An action where a character creates something to help them, such as an aspect or free invokes on an aspect
- *Aspect* - A phrase that describes an important detail. Aspects are true, and can be justification for decisions and actions. Aspects can be invoked or compelled, as well.

- *Boost* - A temporary bonus that can be used like an aspect with a free invoke. Boosts go away as soon as they are used.

- *Challenge* - A sequence of events in a scene where many actions are happening at once.

- *Compel* - The gamemaster can offer a compel of an aspect to require that the aspect be a source of complication for the character. The player can accept the compel and get a fate point, or pay a fate point to refuse a compel.

- *Conceding* - In response to a dangerous action, a player may concede the action. The opponent succeeds the action and the PC is overwhelmed, but the character's player decides how the PC is overwhlemed.

- *Consequence* - A character aspect that represents a lasting impediment for the character.

- *Contest* - A series of exchanges in a scene in which characters compete to gather points of progress toward mutually exclusive goal.

- *Create Advantage* - An Advantage action that can create a new aspect.

- *Chapter* - A series of sessions that contain coherent narrative.

- *Character aspect* - An aspect attached to a particular character

- *Dangerous Action* - An action where a character would be overwhlemed as a result of fumble.

- *Declare* - To create a detail in the story.

- *Deduction* - A sequence in a scene in which players propose facts to be used in deciding on a truth of a mystery or unknown.

- *Detail* - Any specific narrative piece of information.

- *Discover Action* - An action where a character can ask questions about something.

- *Excel* - To exceed the opposition of a roll by 3 shifts or more. Excelling indicates a higher degree of success.

- *Exchange* - One turn of a contest in which all sides involved have a chance to make progess toward their goal.

- *Fate point* - A point used by players and the gamemaster to pay for invokes, pay off compels, declare details, or activate certain stunts.

- *First Look* - The first round of an investigation, where all obvious details are provided to the investigating characters.

- *Free invocation* - An advantage attached to a particular action that can be spent to invoke that aspect. Free invocations are gained from an Advantage action. Also 'free invoke'.
- *High Concept* - A character aspect that described the primary concept or nature of a character.
- *Hint* - An option to request that the gamemaster reveal an important detail. Hints are gained by excelling at Discover actions.
- *Interlude* - An scene composed of actions that characters do 'off-stage', that is, not in real-time roleplaying.
- *Investigation* - A sequence in a scene where characters woek togther and use Discover actions to investigate clues and find out information.
- *Invocation* - Using an aspect for a bonus or other helpful effect. Can be triggered by paying a fate point or a free invocation. Also 'invoke'.
- *Issue* - An important theme or situation in game creation that describes what the characters will be dealing with. Issues can be current issues or impending issues.
- *Journey Aspect* - A character aspect that describes important details, separate from a character's high concept.
- *Journey Roll* - A roll made between sessions that reflects efforts that a character is doing 'off-stage'.
- *Justification* - An aspect can provide justification for making choices that the aspect affects, such as the need (or lack of need) for action rolls, the existence of story details, etc.
- *Ladder* - The table of values used to measure skill levels and difficulties, Each 'rung' on the Ladder has a name and a value (e,g, Good (+3)).
- *Milestone* - An event between sessions where the growth and change of a character are considered.
- *Oppose action* - An action performed by a character in active opposition to another action.
- *Opposition* - The resistance to an action that the roll much exceed. Opposition is either active or passive.
- *Overcome Action* - A catch-all action describing an attempt to accomplish a goal by overcoming opposition.
- *Overwhelmed* - An overwhelmed character is removed from the current scene.

- *Passive Opposition* - A static value on the Ladder that represents the value a roll must exceed in order to be successful.

- *Progress* - Points toward a specific goal, gained in a contest.

- *Recovering Consequence* - A consequece that has been addressed by an actiona nd will disappear over time.

- *Refresh* - When fate points are refilled up to the character's refresh level. Refreshes happen at the beginning of a session.

- *Refresh level* - The amount of fate points a character refreshes to.

- *Reserved Aspect* - A situation that is set aside to be used in a later scene.

- *Resource* - A stunt that describes a location, gadget, or contact that a character has access to.

- *Result* - The value of a roll after opposition is subtracted.

- *Roll* - A roll of the dice in which the value of the dice is added to a skill and then compared to opposition.

- *Sacrifice* - To choose a consequence in exchange for fate points.

- *Scene* - A coherent bit of narrative.

- *Shift* - A level of value in a dice roll. Shifts correspond to 'shifting' a value up and down the Ladder.

- *Situation aspect* - An aspect that applies only to the situation or scene at hand.

- *Skill* - An ability that a character uses in a roll. Skills are rated on the Ladder.

- *Story Arc* - A series of chapters that form an overall narrative.

- *Stunt* - A special ability or rules exception attached to a particular character.

- *Succeed* - To exceed the opposition on a roll. When exceeding the opposition by 3 or more shifts, the action excels.

- *Take Advantage* - An Advantage action where a character gains free invokes on an existing aspect.

- *Tie* - To exactly match the opposition on a roll (i.e. a result of 0).

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Unwritten

Adventures in the Ages of MYST™ and Beyond

Name

High Concept

Refresh

Journey Aspects

Skills

- Superb (+5)
- Great (+4)
- Good (+3)
- Fair (+2)
- Adequate (+1)

Stunts

Resources

Consequences

Minor

Recovering? ○

Moderate

Recovering? ○

Severe

Recovering? ○

From caverns miles beneath the New Mexico desert, the D'ni ruled an empire that lasted ten millennia. They wrote Linking Books that allowed them to span universes, ignoring the primitive humans that infested the surface. But the glory of D'ni was brought low mere centuries ago, and their Ages were left empty and abandoned...
until now.

Called to the desert, we have found our way down to D'ni. Its secrets are in our hands, and its future is ours to determine.

The next chapter of D'ni is Unwritten.

In 1993 Cyan, Inc. introduced us to the surreal worlds of MYST™ and the D'ni. Now you can make your own journeys of exploration and adventure through the Ages.

~ Discovery Focused Mechanics

~ Play in Modern or Historical D'ni

~ Unlimited Possible Environments

"I love the idea of having other ways for people to tell stories in the Myst universe."

- Richard "RAWA" Watson; Cyan, Inc.

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