Gnostigmata™

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"How will you choose between Good and Evil when all of Creation may be a lie?"

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Acknowledgements

Gnostigmata fits the definition of a CSI Game
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http://competitiverpgs.blogspot.com/

Introduction

God exists. Satan exists. In the beginning, one of the two created the Heavens and the Earth. But which one? The vast majority of Christendom asserts that God is the Creator. Since the birth of Catholicism, this has been the view of the Catholic church. But, not all Christians view the world this way. One group of early Christians, known as the Gnostics, believed the world to be a prison created by Satan to ensnare and bewilder countless souls, who would otherwise be deities themselves. Thus, Christ came to teach us how to escape our delusional worldly bonds and assume our rightful place among the divine. Needless to say, the Gnostic view of the world is at odds with the Catholic viewpoint. So, in the fourth century A.D., the early Catholic Church systematically slaughtered the Gnostics. The Church proved highly efficient in the art of genocide, but a few Gnostics managed to slip away. Gnosticism survived, but only in secret.

Gnostigmata is about faith. How can a person believe in a divine Creator who has our best interests in mind without any hard facts supporting that assertion? Is it reasonable to do so?

To play Gnostigmata, you must pick a side for your character: Catholic or Gnostic. If your character believes God is the Creator, then he is a Catholic. If he believes Satan created the universe, he is a Gnostic. For Gnostigmata to work, Catholic and Gnostic characters must be nearly equal in number. So, before creating characters, your play group needs to decide who is on which side. If there are an odd number of players, then one side will have one fewer players than the other. Don't worry about imbalances due to this number disparity. The mechanics of the game can handle a one-player difference and even things out so that both sides have a fair chance of winning.

What's that? Did we just say you can win Gnostigmata? Yes. Unlike most role-playing games, Gnostigmata has actual winners and losers.

The Gnostic Perspective

Gnostics believe that the world is a lie. It is a fiction crafted by nefarious entities as a distraction from reality. All of known creation is a perfect cage holding countless gods in bondage. It is a trap so cleverly devised that even recognizing it as such is miraculous. Rocks, trees, buildings, heaven, earth, and even people are window dressing of the physical illusion. Because the universe was created by Satan, it is fundamentally corrupt and evil. Finally realizing this, how far will you go to escape its grip?

Gnostics believe that if a soul attains a level of perfect knowledge, or "gnosis", it escapes the bonds of the physical world and ascends into "reality". As a person's understanding of the world's true nature increases, his ability to manipulate the Delusion in miraculous ways grows. These miracles are often so spectacular they can put even the best-funded movies' special effects to shame. That is fortunate, because the ability to work miracles can show others reality's true face and gives them hope that they too can break free of their eternal prison. The ultimate miracle is, of course, to escape the Delusion entirely. If a person does not attain gnosis within his lifetime, he will be reincarnated back into the Delusion, doomed to repeat the process until he does.

If you choose to play a Gnostic, it is your character's self-appointed task to discover all that can be revealed about the ultimate reality and to help other Gnostics attain gnosis. Perhaps the best way to do this is to discover one of the many ancient Gnostic texts that were hidden long ago in caves and ancient catacombs by the early Gnostics. These texts were written by pupils of Jesus himself, and so contain accounts of His life that have survived in a relatively uncolored state. Some of the great finds of recent years include The Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel to the Egyptians, the Apocryphon of John, the Letter of Peter to Philip, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Gospel of Judas. Many more are believed to still await discovery, including "Q", which is said to be a document comprising a lengthy list of direct quotes of Jesus.

Gnostics have given the name of "Demiurge" to the creator of the shared delusion that makes up the world. As the creator of the physical universe, the Demiurge is associated with the ancient Hebrew deity Jehovah. As the primary force of evil in the world, the Demiurge also directly corresponds to Satan. Therefore, Gnostics believe that the Creator and Satan are one and the same. The Demiurge will do anything in his power to maintain the Delusion. This primarily involves promoting the concept of sameness throughout the universe and discrediting individuality and miraculous acts of Gnosis. Who the Demiurge actually is and what motivated him to create the Delusion in the first place is unknown, however. Those are some of the big questions Gnostics ask.

In seeking enlightenment, Gnostics look to reports of supernatural occurrences and exciting archeological finds for clues leading to absolute truths. It is hard to predict where these clues may be found, though. In a modern setting, Magazines, newspapers, and Internet websites would all be useful sources. Even tabloids could provide important leads. Whatever the source, the Demiurge does whatever is necessary to cover up or discredit any genuine miracle. This may be done in any number of ways. Some of the more common means of doing so are:

1) Destroying the credibility of the witnesses, such as planting evidence that everyone involved is a pedophile or axe murderer
2) Fabricate fictional facts alongside the real ones to make the witnesses look like kooks. Linking a contrived UFO sighting to a witness generally proves sufficient.
3) Silencing everyone involved through murder or threat of murder.

So, the only way to truly know what parts of a story are accurate is to conduct personal on-site investigations. Unfortunately, demonstrating curiosity in such matters is always dangerous. Unseen demons abound that are eager to claw and rend the flesh of anyone seeking gnosis. It is common for cuts, bruises, and burns to spontaneously appear on a Gnostic's body, occasionally accompanied by snarls or diabolical laughter.

The Catholic Perspective

"God works in mysterious ways." The workings of God permeate every aspect of the world around us. It only takes a willing eye to see them. But, the Creator is a God of faith. He does not reveal Himself through flash and grotesquerie. Such displays would rob His children of their right to freely choose between good and evil. After all, a choice made by force is no choice at all. Ever since He sacrificed His only Son to save mankind, the God of the Old Testament has

tempered His wrath to allow His children to exercise their free will without fear of divine retribution. God is subtle. God is patient. Most of all, God is good. In the end, God will judge.

If you choose to play a Catholic, your character plays a special role in Catholicism. Your character is a Stigmatic. A stigmatic is a person who suffers from stigmata, supernatural wounds that mimic those borne by Jesus at His crucifixion. Many Stigmatics fall into an ecstatic trance having visions of Christ's crucifixion just prior to their wounds appearing, although this is not always the case. Stigmata predominately develop on the hands, feet, and side, but the head and back are also sometimes affected. Stigmatcs generally consider their sufferings to be an honor bestowed by God to allow them to empathize with Christ's agony. Even so, they bear their wounds with great humility. To do otherwise would dishonor God. In fact, some Stigmatics pray that their wounds be made invisible so they can endure their trials with modesty.

Stigmata are not the only crosses your character must bear, though. The world is filled with evil and it is your duty as a follower of Christ to combat it. Satan is always finding new ways to capture the hearts of men. The lure of power, money, and sex are potent weapons in Satan's arsenal. He combines these with confusing and contradictory lies about God's message of love and hope. The only way to keep evil from conquering the world is to fight back, and fight hard.

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Many modern day Catholics take a softened stance on this divinely inspired directive. Even if they believe in its validity, they often choose to ignore it or delegate the dirty work to others. If you choose to play a Stigmatic, you cannot afford this luxury. You are a holy warrior of God who hunts down and kills witches. A captured witch must either genuinely convert to the "true faith" or die. It is your responsibility to track them down and take them out. Your greatest duty, though, is to protect God's Word from any heresy that might obscure its message. The most dangerous of these are the ancient "Gnostic Gospels" and other texts that purport to convey Christ's meaning. All such works arise from Satan. The Holy Bible must never be tainted by them.

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What You Need to Play

Gnostigmata requires a number of different props and tokens so that tracking various rewards and resources is simplified.

Dice

First, each player needs a number of six-sided dice. (One six-sided die is denoted in the game as1d6. Two six-sided dice are denoted as 2d6, etc.) The game uses a lot of them, so it would be best if everyone has 9d6. More would be even better. Ideally, each player's dice would be easily distinguishable from other players dice, so that nobody gets confused over what dice belong to whom. Having each player use a different color of dice is optimal.

Pieces of Silver

Next, you need a bunch of "Pieces of Silver". Ancient Roman silver coins are the most appropriate, if you happen to have several dozen lying around. If not, pennies will do. Pieces of Silver represent a resource whose values can grow quite large. So, feel free to use higher denomination coins when needed.

Rosary Beads

You will also need Rosary Beads of at least three different colors. The rules text describes the beads as being red, white, and black. But, you can obviously substitute your own colors. You will need at least 9 each of the red and black beads and a number of white beads equal to four times the number of players.

Poker Chips

You need Poker Chips to keep track of your character's primary attributes. These values tend to change a lot during play. So, the character sheet is designed to allow you to place poker chips over their spaces instead of forcing you to erase and re-write their values over and over. Having different color poker chips for each attribute is convenient if someone bumps the table and the chips scatter.

The Tarot Deck

You will need a Rider Tarot Deck. In case you don't know what that is, Tarot Decks are those cards commonly used by fortune tellers in their readings. There are several varieties of Tarot Deck, the most popular of which is the Rider deck (which is named after its creator).

Character Sheets

Finally, each player will require a pencil and a copy of one of the character sheets found at the end of this document.

Starting Out

Before anyone works up a character, the entire group needs to sit down and discuss the primary focus of the story they are about to create. Since Gnostigmata is about the conflict between the Gnostic and Catholic world-view, you already have a big head-start in this regard. You already know that it will involve a group of Gnostics competing with a group of Stigmatics over some important relic or event. However, you need to get more specific. Are the Gnostics following leads to an as-yet undiscovered Gospel that the Catholics want to remain lost (like the characters in the movie "Stigmata" seeking the Gospel of Jesus)? Perhaps the Gnostics are trying to follow clues hidden in great works of art to uncover the descendents of Jesus himself (ala "The Da Vinci Code"), but the Catholics are striving to keep what they believe are blatant lies from being propagated. Perhaps the Gnostics are trying to bring about the Apocalypse, because they believe that will free all mankind from its delusional bonds but the Catholics want to prevent the end-time from coming (shadows of "The Exorcist"). Maybe the story will be set on a much smaller scale. Perhaps the Catholics are building a new cathedral in a town where Gnosticism has been warmly received and the Gnostics don't like the competition. Whatever you decide, make sure the topic is something everyone is interested in.

Also, put a little time into discussing the general time period in which the story is to transpire as well as the setting. Does it take place in the 18th century American West, modern day Paris, 4th century Egypt, or somewhere else? Are the characters free to roam the world in their quest or is everyone expected to stay in the same city? When everyone agrees to some parameter, make sure someone writes it down so it can be referenced later if need be.

Once you have your main topic and general setting, you need to start discussing the various characters that will be involved in the plot. Each player will have one primary character to play. These will be the main characters of the story. Other characters may be introduced as the game progresses, but they will essentially be "extras" or, at best, supporting characters. Take your time here and don't be too concerned over what sounds "cool" or "tough". A seven year-old schoolgirl can be just as potent a character in Gnostigmata as a twenty-five year-old Marine. What is important is that each player finds his or her character interesting and worthy of exploring. Discuss their strengths and weaknesses and how the characters relate to one another, if at all. (The more you understand their inter-relationships, the easier it will be to get the game rolling.)

Once you have discussed the story's premise and characters, it is time to start working up characters. Do not be surprised if your discussion and character generation take up most of the game's first session. This is normal and helps to ensure an enjoyable game for all.

Character Makeup

The Four Primary Attributes

Gnostigmata characters have four primary attributes: Physicality, Magic, Coincidence, and Agony. There is an intricate interplay between these attributes. To ease your understanding of these relationships as you read, you might want to periodically review the character sheets provided at the end of this document, since they graphically depict their interdependencies.

Because Gnostic and Catholic characters have such radically different views of the world, they give different pseudonyms to these attributes. Regardless of what they call the attributes, their observed effect on the game world is unaffected. How these effects are interpreted by the various characters may differ, though. What is good to one may be evil to another. What is real and concrete to a Catholic is mere illusion to a Gnostic.

Physicality

Physicality is a Conflicted Resource Attribute. It is used in any contest in which your character directly manipulates the physical world according to its physical laws. The higher the value, the more effective your character is in all physical actions. The only way Physicality can be raised is by using it in the performance of physical actions.

Catholic characters give the name "Self-Reliance" to Physicality. Gnostic characters call it "Delusion". Physicality is a resource, since you can spend these points to a minimum of 1 on gaining ranks in various traits (explained later).

Magic

Magic is also a Conflicted Resource Attribute. It is used in any contest in which a character manipulates the physical world in ways that contradict its physical laws. The higher the value of Magic, the more effective a character is in its use. The only way Magic can be raised is through the performance of metaphysical actions, or actions that break the game world's physical laws.

Gnostic characters give the Magic attribute the pseudonym of "Gnosis". Catholic characters call it "Infernal Favor". Magic points can also be spent on traits (as explained below). You may spend this attribute down to a minimum of 1.

Coincidence

Coincidence is also a Conflicted Resource Attribute. It is used in any contest in which you manipulate the physical world in ways that obey its physical laws but which have no direct cause/effect relationship due to your own character's actions. Coincidence generates seeming fortune. The happenstances may seem far-fetched, but they never break any of the game world's physical laws. Also, your character cannot even be present in a scene for his Coincidence attribute to apply and is never aware when it influences circumstances. So, you can always participate in the development of a scene even when your character is entirely absent. So, while you would use your Physicality attribute to apply to your own character's actions, you would use your Coincidence attribute to apply to the actions of non-player characters you control.

Coincidence points can be spent on Traits (explained later). You may spend it down at any time to a minimum of 1. The only way Coincidence can be raised is by using it in contests.

Gnostic characters give the Coincidence attribute the pseudonym of "Fate". Catholic characters call it "Divine Favor".

Agony

Agony is a Trauma Resource Attribute. It reduces your character's effectiveness in all activities, whether through Physicality, Magic, or Coincidence. Its value often increases whenever your character loses a conflict. Your opponent can "spend" his successes in a conflict to raise your Agony. To do so, he must spend a number of successes equal to the next higher Agony value. So, to raise your Agony from a 2 to a 3, he must spend 3 successes. If he has enough successes to raise it by two or more points in this fashion, he may do so. However, Agony can only be raised in whole increments. Any left-over successes are either spent to purchase facts in the game world (described below) or simply lost.

Traits

Traits are abilities or characteristics that enhance your character's ability to interact with his environment. They are broken up into the categories of Persona & Possessions, Vices, Material Desires & Fears, Relationships, Virtues, and Interests & Hobbies. Virtues and Vices act as "verbs" whereas the other traits play the role of nouns. When performing any action involving traits, the traits must be paired together and only certain kinds of pairs are allowed. You can apply only one Interests & Hobbies/Virtue, Virtue/Relationship, Relationship/Material Desires & Fears, Material Desires & Fears/Vice, or Vice/Persona & Possessions pair to any given contest. There is more detail on this concept later.

If you find yourself befuddled, take a moment to look at the Gnostic and Stigmatic character sheets at the end of this document. They may prove illuminating. Note that only traits in adjacent columns may be paired together. That means that all trait pairs except for Material Desires & Fears / Relationships pairs are verb/noun trait pairs. Verb / noun trait pairs are only usable when your character is present in a scene. Material Desires & Fears / Relationships pairs are only usable when he is not.

All characters start out with 5 points to spend in each trait category. It is important to understand that these points *must* be spent before any Gnostic character can ascend or any Catholic character can martyr himself. So, you can't just decide to abstain from taking character vices as a shortcut to ascension or martyrdom (described later).

Trait Ranks

Traits have ranks, which lie in the range of 0 to 5.

Increasing Trait Ranks

Trait ranks are gained by spending attribute points. The attribute points that must be spent to raise a particular trait depends on whether a character is a Gnostic or a Catholic and the type of trait being raised. These relationships are listed on the following table:

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Category	Catholic Attribute	Gnostic Attribute
Persona & Possessions	Infernal Favor	Delusion
Vices	Infernal Favor, Agony	Delusion, Agony
Material Desires & Fears	Infernal Favor, Divine Favor	Delusion, Fate
Relationships	Self-Reliance, Divine Favor	Gnosis, Fate
Virtues	Divine Favor	Gnosis
Interests & Hobbies	Divine Favor	Gnosis

So, a Gnostic can spend Delusion points to buy ranks in <u>Material Desires & Fears</u>, <u>Vices</u>, and <u>Persona & Possessions</u> traits. A Catholic can buy ranks in <u>Relationships</u>, <u>Interests & Hobbies</u>, and <u>Virtues</u> traits using Divine Favor points, etc. Again, if you find yourself stymied by all the seeming confusion, take a look at the character sheets. The curly braces indicate what primary attributes can be spent on what traits. The only thing missing on the sheets is the fact that Agony can be spent to raise <u>Vices</u> or to lower <u>Virtues</u>.

The cost to gain any rank after having attained the previous rank equals the rank itself. So, attaining rank 1 in a trait, which is the only way to gain new traits, costs only a single point. Rank 2 can only be attained after having gained rank 1 and it costs another 2 points. Rank 3 costs another 3 points, etc. So, a Gnostic with a "Love" <u>Virtue</u> having a rank of 4 could be raised to a rank of 5 by spending 5 Gnosis points.

A player may raise trait ranks any time other than when his character is currently involved in a conflict. To gain a rank in a trait, the player must narrate some scene that illustrates the character's advancement. For example, as a character staggers away from a fist fight he just lost, he could have his character mumble under his breath, "Son-of-a-bitch. You think you're so special beating up a guy twice your size. I'll show you. *I'll show you*." This could qualify as an explanation of gaining a rank in the <u>Vice</u> of Hate.

Forgiveness

No Gnostic can ascend and no Catholic can martyr himself as long as he has any Vice with a rank above zero. So, eventually, most characters will want to "buy off" their vices. In game terms, the character "forgives" the transgressions of others that brought the vice about in the first place. The cost to lower a Vice rank equals the cost to obtain it. However, Gnostics must spend Gnosis points and Catholics must spend Divine Favor points to do so. Therefore, lowering a Gnostic's Rank 3 Hate vice down to a rank of 2 costs 3 Gnosis points. The character's player should narrate an appropriate scene to explain the character's changed attitude.

Note that, from a Christian perspective, forgiveness is an act of internal soul searching that represents the mending of a person's psyche. In comparison, healing physical wounds is easy. As such, there is a fundamental difference between healing and forgiveness that makes forgiveness more difficult and costly than a simple conflict roll.

Persona & Possessions

Persona & Possessions is a trait category that incorporates aspects of the physical nature of a character. These include both the character's physique and most of his trappings.

Elements of physique include aspects such as strength, agility, charisma, etc. Similarly, a physique trait could just as easily be chosen as weakness, clumsiness, or ugliness. Whether a Persona & Possessions trait is described as helpful or harmful to a character's persona, both are beneficial mechanically. The only difference lies in how conflicts are narrated: "With a mighty heave, Jacque forces open the door to surprise those on the other side", "Knowing his strength to be no match for the door, Jacque hides behind it and waylays whoever comes through first."

Trappings correlate to standard items of equipment and/or decoration. For a trapping to fall under the Persona & Possessions category, though, it must be an item that is easily replaced. That is, it has no sentimental value to the character. (Unique items having sentimental value generally fall under the Relationships category.) So, trappings such as "knife", "necklace", and "purse" fall under the Persona & Possessions category. Note that similar traits could be placed under the Material Desires & Fears category as "knives", "necklaces", and "purses". A player may wish to do so because Material Desires & Fears are more general in that their use does not necessarily pertain to items possessed by the character. However, Material Desires & Fears traits have nothing to do with a character's persona or features. If, for example, you picture your character as always wearing a trench coat and fedora hat and carrying a tommy-gun, these aspects would best fit under the Persona & Possessions category.

Persona & Possessions traits enhance conflict rolls when the element is used in an action. Note that a player is free to list Persona & Possessions traits at rank 0 (zero) merely to note that the character possesses a particular item, but it is of no particular value or great quantity. A rank of 4 in "bullets" implies a character has a lot of ammo, so the character increases his chances in shootouts by filling the air with lead. A rank of 3 in the Persona & Possessions trait of "Colt-45" indicates possession of a weapon of superior quality.

Vices

Vices are harmful, self-destructive, or selfish acts. As such, they *must* be verbs. Their expression is an act of indulgence. The group may decide on specific Vices they wish to explore in the game that will be common to all characters. Alternately, the group may decide that Vices should be customized on a character by character basis. For a trait to qualify as a Vice, its expression must be something that a character *chooses* to do. So, "forgets" is not a Vice even though a character's wife might think so. Some examples are: Abuse, Insult, Scream, Yell, Ignore, Despair, Destroy, Sigh, Hate, Glower, Prejudge, Belittle, Brag, Embarrass, Envy, Insult, Overindulge, Judge, Mutilate, Consume, Crave, Devour, Lust, Fondle, Leer, Mistrust, Attack, Desire, Covet, Steal, Defile, Hide, and Neglect. Use whatever you want and add any others the group (or player) wants to explore as Vices.

Material Desires & Fears

Material Desires & Fears are categorical nouns dealing with physical things that your character either wants to possess or fears encountering. Note that they *must* be categories of concrete, physical things. They cannot refer to specific objects or characters (such as the English Crown Jewels) or abstract concepts (such as loneliness). Examples are: Pistols, Guns, Spiders, Locks, Swords, Money, Caucasians, Snakes, Asians, Horses, Cats, Men, Women, Computers, Robots, Bugs, Vulcans, Gods, Gangsters, Emeralds, and Secret Doors. Material Desires & Fears should be broad enough to be useful, but not *too* broad. In general, group consensus decides what is allowable as a Material Desires & Fears trait and what isn't. Disagreements are resolved through the player vs. player conflict rules.

Please note that a character having a rank 3 in the Fear trait of "Spiders" does not mean that he has more fear of spiders than if he had only a rank of 2. It means that he has more control over what he fears. (Listing any fear assumes the character exhibits an extreme aversion to the trait's subject.) Similarly, gaining a rank of 3 in the Material Desire of "Jewelry" does not mean that a character possesses more desire for jewelry than another character only having a rank of 1 in that trait. It means that the character has more influence over what he desires. From a Catholic perspective, ranks in these traits are blessings, even though men often corrupt the blessings God bestows. Gnostics believe Material Desires & Fears exist to tempt souls and delude those trapped in the delusion into perceiving others as commodities rather than as unique individuals.

Also, Material Desires & Fears traits do not imply that a character possesses an item. Only Persona & Possessions traits do that. If a character does not possess an item appropriate to a particular Material Desires & Fears trait, facts must be introduced into scenes to establish the existence of these elements before they can be utilized in conflicts. Also note that a rank of 3 in the Material Desires & Fears trait of "Guns" implies guns are important to the character, but does nothing to convey what weapon he carries, if any.

Relationships

Relationships are the names of specific characters along with brief descriptions of the kind of relationships represented (one or two words generally suffices). "Self" cannot be used as a relationship. For an object to qualify as a character, it must be a specific item and must have a name or have sentimental value. Some groups may want to allow relationships only with entities capable of making some form of judgment or decision, but otherwise relationships with inanimate objects are fine. Examples are: Bill (husband), Mary (girlfriend), Fido (pet cat), Martin Luther King (hero), Grandfather's Pocket watch (given to me on his deathbed), Charles (best friend), Herbie (my Volkswagen bug), Tonto (favorite sidekick), HAL (Artificial Intelligence program I wrote), Superman (arch-rival), R2D2 (robot friend), The One Ring (my Precious), Wedding Ring (most prized possession), Odin (ancestor's pagan god), Excalibur (sword that wields me), The Star of Africa (coveted gemstone), Green Dragon (favorite bong), and God (deity).

Virtues

Virtues are uplifting, helpful, or selfless actions. As such, they *must* be verbs. The group may decide on specific Virtues they wish to explore in the game that will be common to all characters. Alternately, the group may decide that Virtues should be customized on a character by character basis. Virtues must pertain to activities a character chooses to do rather than innate qualities. So, "Breathe" is not a Virtue, even though it is an action that is personally very helpful. Some examples are: Soothe, Confide, Encourage, Compliment, Pray, Mend, Trust, Love, Hope, Sacrifice, Reward, Consecrate, Defend, Support, Beware, Comfort, Appreciate, Consider, Contemplate, Study, Moderate, Fix, Compromise, Inspire, Create, Craft, Design, Build, Endure, Persevere, Prosecute, Negotiate, Defer, Serve, Aid, Praise, Heal, Compose, Abstain, Resist, Await, and Reveal. Use whatever you want and add any other virtues the group (or player) wants to explore.

Interests & Hobbies

Interests & Hobbies encompass any area of academic knowledge, art, creative interest, or sport. Examples are: Classical Music, Rock and Roll, Math, Soccer, Sculpture, Philosophy, Painting, Law, Science, the Occult, Metaphysics, Golf, and Computer Programming. Here again, an interest or hobby should be broad enough to be useful, but not so broad that it covers most situations. Group consensus decides what qualifies as an appropriate interest or hobby.

Exemplars

For every Vice and Virtue trait possessed by a character, draw a line between it and one other trait. For Vices, the line must be between the Vice and either a Material Desires & Fears or Persona & Possessions trait. For Virtues, the line must be between the Virtue and either a Relationship or an Interests & Hobbies trait. This line represents the Exemplar of that trait. (If you look at the Gnostigmata character sheet, you will see that exemplars are always lines that are drawn between traits in adjacent columns where one end of the line is either a Virtue or a Vice.) An Exemplar is the matching trait that is the main focus of the vice or virtue. For example, John Smith might have a Virtue trait of "Love" and a Relationship trait of "Mary Sue". If a line is drawn between "Love" and "Mary Sue", then "Mary Sue" becomes John Smith's exemplar of "Love". In other words, John Smith's Love virtue has a special focus upon Mary Sue.

Stigmatic and Demonic Wounds

Note that Coincidence-based actions can result in Agony for a character as well, even though Coincidence can only be used in scenes where the character is absent. Agony sustained in this way is handled just like Agony sustained any other way. In Gnostigmata, this is the origin of Stigmatic and demonic wounds. The actual wounds do not appear until the next scene in which the character participates (although their effects are felt on any subsequent Coincidence attempt). But, on the character's next appearance, a Catholic will suffer from new or more severe stigmata. Gnostics will suffer the indignity of a demonic claw mark, burns, or other injuries suddenly appearing out of nowhere.

Character Creation

To create a character, perform the following steps:

1) Set the attributes of Physicality, Magic, and Coincidence to 6, 6, and 6 respectively. You may spend these attribute points on traits as normal before play begins.
2) Set Agony and Pieces of Silver to zero.
3) Spend 5 points on trait ranks in each of the categories of <u>Persona & Possessions</u>, <u>Vices</u>, <u>Material Desires & Fears</u>, <u>Relationships</u>, <u>Virtues</u>, and <u>Interests & Hobbies</u>. These points are spent to gain ranks in the traits just like attribute points would be spent to do the same thing. Thus, a rank 2 in a trait would cost 3 points (1 for rank 1 and another 2 for rank 2). There are a few rules on how these initial points must be spent:

    a) One of the <u>Creative Interests & Hobbies</u> traits must be a fairly broad "career" or "profession" trait such as cop, truck driver, bartender, student, private eye, computer programmer, etc. This trait covers all of the abilities related to that particular profession.
    b) At least two <u>Relationship</u> traits must be with living persons that are not player characters. This encourages you to think about your character's past and his relationship to the world at large.
    c) You may decide to delay the expenditure of these initial points on traits until after play starts in order to get a better "feel" for the character first. However, please note that spending these points is mandatory, especially for the <u>Vice</u> traits. A Gnostic character cannot take a "shortcut to heaven" by failing to give his character <u>Vices</u>. You cannot spend any points from your primary attributes of Physicality, Magic, Coincidence, or Agony on trait ranks until all of your initial character points have been spent.
4) Pick a sub-plot for your character from those listed later. Once you choose one, think about its specific requirements. Don't try to dream up most of the details at this time, just decide on the major actors. Who do you want as the antagonist to the sub-plot? If the sub-plot requires a victim, who should that be? If you want another player character to fill a role in your sub-plot, make sure you get approval from that character's player first and make sure he understands the role his character is going to play.

You're done!

The Story Arc

Gnostigmata stories build up to a single Climax through the course of an indeterminate number of Acts and Sub-plots. The Climax resolves the outcome of the overarching storyline that the players all discussed prior to beginning play. Acts are broken down into an indeterminate number of Scenes, and Scenes are broken down into an indeterminate number of Actions. Each of these has a conflict that is resolved based on the outcomes of lower level contests (with the exception of Actions, which are the lowest level contests). So, each Act, Scene, and Action has a winning side and a losing side. So does the story's overall Climax.

Advancing the Story

As mentioned before, every character has a sub-plot that his player is trying to push forward. In addition, the overall story has its own overarching plot. Each of these has a set number of prescribed steps that it must perform to satisfy the plot or sub-plot. These steps are fully described for a variety of sub-plots a little later.

Each scene has a central conflict. The topic of all scenes is pre-determined and is designed to push forward the plot and/or some character's sub-plot. The specific sub-plot that is being advanced depends on the winner of the previous scene. In other words, when players compete against each other in a scene, what they are really trying to win is the right to push their own character's sub-plot forward in the *next* scene. When one side wins enough scenes and when a player finishes his character's sub-plot, the overarching plot is pushed forward in that side's favor.

Also, the winner of a scene gets the last word on that scene's outcome, although he must satisfy all of the requirements of the plot and/or sub-plot currently being advanced.

Perhaps you're thinking that having plots laid out in so bare a form will produce formulaic and boring play. If so, you should be let in on a little secret. Writers and storytellers have known for centuries that there are only a small number of basic plots that cover the entire width and breadth of all literature. Depending on what expert you consult and what hairs they decide to split, you will get a slightly different answer as to exactly how many plots exist. But, the sum total of all plots is somewhere in the neighborhood of two dozen. That's it. The art of storytelling is not in the invention of new plots, but rather in the novel and interesting ways in which a standard plot is retold. Gnostigmata does little more than provide a framework on which you can hang your own unique stories.

Winning a Scene

Every time a conflict is won, that side gains a Rosary bead. If a player wins an individual Action within a Scene, he gains a white Rosary bead. The first player to gain five white Rosary beads wins the Scene for his side. (A scene can also be won by driving all players to an Agony of 7 or more on the opposing side.) Winning a scene earns the following:

1) The right to narrate the outcome of the current scene
2) The right to push forward his character's sub-plot by one step in the next scene.
3) The right to be the "dealer" in the Scene Framing stage of the next scene.
4) A black Rosary bead.

Winning an Act

The first side to gain five black Rosary beads wins the Act and earns the following:

1) The right to narrate the Act's outcome.
2) The right to push forward the overarching plot by one step in his side's favor, although this does not have to take place immediately.
3) A red Rosary bead.

Completing a Sub-Plot

When a player pushes his character's sub-plot to its conclusion, meaning he both earns the right to push the sub-plot forward to its conclusion *and* narrates all scenes in the sub-plot, he gets the following:

1) The right to push the overarching plot forward by one step in his side's favor in the next scene.
2) A red Rosary bead.

Winning the Game

The first side to accumulate a number of red Rosary beads equal to the number of steps in the overarching plot wins the right to narrate the entire plot to its conclusion. Doing so wins game. Note that the game is not actually won until one side both earns the right to do so *and* narrates the climax.

Ties

Although it is unusual for ties to occur in this system, it is possible. If both sides attain 5 Rosary beads simultaneously for either a Scene-level or Act-level contest, then the contest goes into "overtime" and an "instant-death" situation arises. The next side to earn any rosary bead of the appropriate color wins the contest.

The same goes for winning the game. If both sides earn enough red Rosary beads to win the game simultaneously, then the Climax cannot be narrated until one side or the other earns another red Rosary bead. Remember, each step in the overarching plot must be told in a separate scene. So, if one side earns enough red Rosary beads to win, but gets behind in their narration of the story, then the other side may have the opportunity to catch up and steal the game.

Clearing the Scoreboard

Once a Scene, Act, or Climax is won, all Rosary beads pertaining to lower-level contests are lost by all parties. So, if the losing side of a Scene has four white Rosary beads because they won four Actions in a scene, they lose all of their white Rosary beads. But, they do not lose any red or black Rosary beads, since those represent victories of Scene and Act level contests.

Negotiating Stakes

Before a Scene, Act, or Action begins, you have the option to negotiate whatever stakes you desire for the contest. This can even be done for the whole darned Climax, if desired. Most of the time, you probably won't bother. But, the option is always there. If you do want to negotiate some special outcome for a contest, you must explicitly state what the winner gets and what the loser gets. Be sure you write the negotiated stakes down so you don't forget the details when it comes time to pay the piper. Note that you should not try to negotiate the stakes of any Act, Scene, or Action until just prior to their beginning. At the beginning of Act I, for example, it would be impossible to guess at a reasonable set of stakes for Act II since you don't yet know the outcome of Act I.

Other than Rosary beads, anything can be negotiated as the win/lose stakes of a conflict. Of course, the stakes cannot break the rules of Gnostigmata in any way. For example, the side winning the contest cannot be allowed to set their characters' Coincidence attributes to seven because that attribute must lie in the range of one to six. Be very careful what you negotiate, because these stakes can have a big impact on whether you eventually win or lose the overarching conflict.

The negotiated stakes for Scenes and Acts may include plot stakes and/or mechanical stakes. Mechanical stakes deal with meta-game issues (such as adding points to attribute values). Plot stakes deal with game-world events. Does the loser escape or is he captured? Is he killed? Anything is allowed for plot-stakes, as long as they don't contradict any of the pre-scribed plot or sub-plot requirements in play at the time.

If you negotiate stakes for the Climax, keep them fairly vague so that any number of stories could evolve to satisfy them. You may also want to consider negotiating the stakes to be sufficiently personal to the player characters so that the players are even more motivated to win. For example, it is perfectly reasonable to negotiate that Kathy falls in love with George if their side wins the game. Stakes of fame, wealth, and other forms of coolness are also encouraged.

If plot-stakes are negotiated for a scene, they should only deal with elements directly relating to the player characters appearing in the scene. If you do not follow this advice, problems can arise in narrating the scene's outcome. For example, suppose you negotiate that some absent character learns some important bit of knowledge. How are you going to convey that knowledge in a reasonable fashion to the absent character? It's not impossible, of course. You could have some in-scene character get on a telephone to convey the information, but this tactic will quickly become tiresome and cliché. The same recommendation does not apply to Act and Climax level stakes, because you simply do not know what characters will be "on stage" when those are won at the time you negotiate the stakes.

Plots

A Plot represents the game's overarching storyline. At present, we have only a single major plot worked up: Chase the MacGuffin. The term "MacGuffin" was popularized by Alfred Hitchcock. A MacGuffin is something that the major characters, both protagonist and antagonist, are chasing. Seemingly, the MacGuffin is what the story is about. However, it is actually irrelevant to the story, which is really all about character interaction and development. The MacGuffin's only real purpose is to push the characters into action and competition. In "Raiders of the Lost Arc", the MacGuffin is the Arc of the Covenant. In "The Da Vinci Code", it is the Sangrail. In "The Maltese Falcon", the MacGuffin is the Maltese Falcon. In "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone", it is the Sorcerer's Stone. In "The Lord of the Rings", the MacGuffin is the One Ring. In "Moby Dick", it is the White Whale.

Gnostigmata focuses the main plot on "Chase the MacGuffin" because it is perhaps the easiest standard plot to adapt to a game pitting two separate groups against one another. It is adaptable and simple to understand:

Chase the MacGuffin

Description: The characters are all involved in obtaining and/or keeping some item (known as a MacGuffin).

Requirements: Identify what the MacGuffin is and why everyone wants it.

Hints: Introduce a third party consisting purely of NPC's that are also striving to obtain the MacGuffin. That way, the MacGuffin can be lost by one side without it necessarily being acquired by the other.

Introduction: Introduce the MacGuffin into the storyline and demonstrate that it has value in some way. (Describing why it has value is unnecessary prior to the end of Act I.)

For both sides, perform each of the following steps, in order. Winning a Red Rosary bead wins the right to move the plot forward one step. You can be fairly leisurely about narrating each step, since there will usually be several scenes in-between. But, keep in mind that you cannot skip steps and each step must be narrated in separate scenes (although they may be mixed in with sub-plot scenes). Each side must perform each step one at a time, in order, independently of the other side:

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Step	Description	Plot Element Appearances
1	Describe why the MacGuffin is valuable to the characters and narrate that it is their mission to obtain it.	All characters controlled by players on the team.
2	Narrate the characters learning of the current location of the MacGuffin and setting out to obtain it.	All characters controlled by players on the team.
3	Narrate the characters obtaining the MacGuffin.	At least one character controlled by players on the team, the MacGuffin. (The players of the team get to decide who is appearing.)
4	Narrate the characters losing the MacGuffin (possibly to some third party).	At least one character controlled by players on the team (again, the team decides), the MacGuffin, and (possibly) some third party that acquires the MacGuffin.
5	Narrate the characters re-acquiring the MacGuffin for good (This is the climax that wins the game).	All major characters on both sides, the MacGuffin.

The side that wins the scene containing the climax earns the right to narrate a brief scene describing some long term consequence of the climax. The tension of the story has been resolved by the climax, so there is no conflict to this epilogue. This final scene exists merely to tie up any loose ends of the plot. There are no requirements for any particular plot elements to this scene. Some or all characters may be present and the MacGuffin may or may not appear.

Sub-Plots

In this section are the various sub-plots available to Gnostigmata characters. You will need to pick one for your character before play begins and whenever one finishes. In other words, your character must always have a sub-plot. If you complete one, pick another.

Capture and Escape

Description: Your character is captured and imprisoned by some antagonist. His sub-plot focuses on his attempts to escape.

Requirements: Identify the antagonist and why he wants to keep your character imprisoned.

Hints: Make the antagonist an NPC, so that it is easy for both the character and antagonist to appear in the same scene. If you decide you use multiple antagonists, feel free to make characters on the opposing side antagonists as well.

Step	Description	Plot Element Appearances
1	Introduce the antagonist capturing your character. In this step or the next, narrate some compelling reason why the character must escape.	Character and antagonist present.
2	Narrate your character being imprisoned (and possibly interrogated). Introduce elements of a possible escape plan. If you have not already done so, narrate some compelling reason why the character must escape.	Character and antagonist present.
3	Narrate your character's preparations for escape and introduce elements for a second, more risky, escape plan.	Character present.
4	Narrate your character attempting the less risky escape plan and failing. In this step or the next, narrate how the character's reason for escape now has a very short time-table, so the character must escape very soon or lose something he cares about very deeply.	Character and antagonist present.
5	Narrate your character facing the dire consequences of his failed escape. If you have not already done so, narrate how the character's reason for escape now has a very short time-table, so the character must escape very soon or lose something he cares about very deeply.	Character and antagonist present.
6	Narrate your character's preparations for the more risky escape plan.	Character present.
7	Narrate your character's attempted escape. However, narrate the carefully-made preparations falling apart. The scene ends without a successful escape, but also without the character being re-captured.	Character present.
8	Narrate your character improvising a successful escape from an apparently hopeless situation.	Character present.

Exacting Revenge

Description: Your character, the protagonist, is seeking revenge on some antagonist for some grievance made against a victim who is very important to him.

Requirements: Identify the antagonist, the victim, and the crime for which revenge is sought (rape, murder, and torture are all good motivators for revenge plots). Also, decide what authorities your character will seek help from in step 3.

Hints: Make the crime heinous. We must feel the protagonist is justified in seeking revenge.

Step	Description	Plot Element Appearances
1	Narrate some activity in which the character expresses love and/or loyalty to the victim.	Character and victim present.
2	Narrate the heinous crime the antagonist performs on the victim.	Antagonist and victim present.
3	Narrate the character seeking justice through normal channels (police, mercenaries, etc.)	Character and authorities present.
4	Narrate how normal methods fail to bring the antagonist to justice and how your character begins to plot his own revenge.	Character, authorities, and antagonist present.
5	Narrate how your character makes preparations to enact his revenge plans.	Character present.
6	Narrate how your character tries to take his revenge and fails, possibly due to the interference of the authorities from which he sought help in step 3.	Character, antagonist, and (possibly) authorities present.
7	Narrate your character pursuing the now alerted antagonist, possibly skirting the efforts of the authorities to thwart him.	Character, antagonist, and (possibly) authorities present.
8	Narrate your character exacting his revenge.	Character, antagonist, and (possibly) authorities present.

Hunted

Description: Your character is being hunted by some other character or entity.

Requirements: Identify your character's pursuer(s) and why he is being chased. Is the hunter a serial killer or a cop? Perhaps he is an assassin or even a demon. Also identify some thing or person of great importance to your character. Does he or she have a son or daughter? Perhaps he has a spouse or some other close relative for which he cares. This is your character's "focus".

Hints: Make the hunter(s) an NPC, so that it is easy for both the character and hunter(s) to appear in the same scene. (If you have multiple hunters, feel free to allow characters of the opposite side be hunters as well. Just be sure there is at least one NPC hunter.) Also, don't make the mistake of making the character's "focus" the hunter's objective rather than the character himself. The hunter has to be able to threaten the focus in step 7 and be credible when he/she/it does it.

Step	Description	Plot Element Appearances
1	Introduce the hunter and why he is hunting your character.	Hunter present.
2	Introduce your character's "focus" and build up the relationship between the two so the audience can experience it. This is not a scene for the pursuit, but more to allow the audience to start caring about the focus.	Character and focus present. Hunter absent.
3	Establish what the apparent consequences will be if the hunter catches your character. Will he imprison you? Will he kill you? Will he rape you?	Hunter present.
4	Narrate the hunter chasing your aggressively.	Character and hunter present.
5	Narrate a reversal. The hunter is suddenly at the disadvantage and your character chases him.	Character and hunter present.
6	Narrate another reversal. The hunter regains his original upper-hand and is once again chasing your character.	Character and hunter present.
7	Narrate the hunter threatening the "focus" introduced in step 2 and your character giving up to save it.	Character, hunter, and focus present.
8	Narrate the hunter threatening your "focus" once again, but this time make the threat imminent and potentially fatal. Narrate your character risking all to save his focus in a final reversal. Feel free to kill the hunter if it is appropriate and he isn't being used in some other sub-plot.	Character, hunter, and focus present.

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Love Interest

Description: Your character falls in love with another character and seeks to make that other character reciprocate.

Requirements: Identify your character's love interest.

Hints: Make the Love Interest an NPC, so that it is easy for both the character and Love Interest to appear in the same scene.

Step	Description	Plot Element Appearances
1	Meet Love Interest	Love interest and Character present.
2	Express feelings of affection for Love Interest to someone - not necessarily the Love Interest.	Character present.
3	Narrate something of great emotional importance to your Love Interest, his/her "focus"	Love Interest present. Character absent.
4	Perform some action to impress the Love Interest that backfires	Character and Love Interest present.
5	Narrate the Love Interest's "focus" being greatly threatened in some way.	Character and focus present. Love Interest may or may not be present.
6	Narrate the Love Interest rejecting your character.	Character and Love Interest present.
7	Perform some action to save the Love Interest's focus.	Character, Love Interest, and focus present.
8	Narrate the Love Interest expressing his/her love for your character.	Character and Love Interest present.

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Sin and Redemption
Description: Your character succumbs to temptation in some way, which results in catastrophe. The character's efforts drive him toward seeking redemption.

Requirements: Identify what temptation your character succumbs to and the consequences of that action.

Hints: Make sure your character has Vices appropriate for his temptation and sin, so that you can play off of them.

Step	Description	Plot Element Appearances
1	Demonstrate your character's weakness for some temptation	Character and temptation present.
2	Character resists the temptation, and everyone is happy.	Character and temptation present.
3	Character rationalizes that succumbing to the temptation wouldn't be harmful or dangerous.	Character present.
4	Character succumbs to the temptation, sins, and disaster ensues.	Character and temptation present.
5	Player character denies his hand in the disaster	Character present.
6	The problems become even worse.	Character present.
7	Demonstrate player character anguish and repentance over the disaster he has brought about.	Character present.
8	Narrate how character's confession and apology corrects the problem.	Character present.

The Steps of Play

Let's assume you have all agreed on the overall goal of the story (i.e. the MacGuffin), the time-period, and any other restrictions you wish to place on game play (i.e. is time-travel allowed?). Also, everyone has picked a sub-plot for his character and has identified the basic elements of that sub-plot (i.e. what characters are playing what roles within the sub-plots). The next step is to play. Play is broken up into scenes, and each scene is crafted by following the steps listed below, which are described in more detail later:

1) Determine what plot and sub-plot elements should be narrated in the scene and what characters appear in it.
2) Determine whether the scene is in the "present" or is a flashback.
3) Frame the scene by playing a card game with the Tarot Deck.
4) Decide on the scene's major conflict. For example, is it an argument, a gun fight, a barroom brawl, or what?
5) Spend attribute points on traits as desired.
6) Jump to the action.
7) Narrate the scene, with inter-character conflicts resolved using the Conflict Resolution system.
8) Take a 5 minute break.
9) Rinse, repeat.

Plot Elements and Character Appearance

There is a point to every scene in Gnostigmata. The purpose of most scenes is determined by the sub-plot of the previous scene's winner. That is, the winner of the previous scene will be pushing forward his particular sub-plot in the current scene. The winner of the current scene, then, will push his sub-plot forward in the next scene, etc. Also, if one side or the other has earned the right to push forward the overarching plot but has not yet done so, they may include any necessary plot elements.

What this means is that any elements that are mandatory to push a plot or sub-plot forward *will* appear in the scene, whether they be the MacGuffin, characters, or anything else. The required elements are listed in the "Plot Element Appearance" column of the tables listing the steps of the plots and sub-plots. If the table does not list your character as appearing or being absent, he may or may not appear in the scene just like any other character.

Determining the Appearance of Other Characters

The dealer should deal one Tarot Card to every player whose character's appearance is not pre-scripted by the plot or sub-plot. If the card is a Cup or a Pentacle, then the character appears in the scene. If it is a Sword or a Wand, then the character does not appear. If the card is a Trump, then the character may enter the scene at any time of the player's choosing while play proceeds (or not at all, if desired).

The First Scene and Background Scenes

Obviously, the first scene of the game is not pushing forward any plot or sub-plot, simply because there was no previous scene and therefore no previous scene winner. Similar situations can arise in other scenes as well. For example, if the previous scene was actually the last scene of the previous gaming session, it is possible that the winner of that scene is simply not in attendance.

In such cases, the purpose of the current scene is to provide more background information for one or more characters. The scene is always a flashback to some previous conflict of major importance in the characters' lives. Determine what characters appear in the scene by dealing a Tarot Card to each player as described above. If no characters appear, then re-deal the cards until at least one player character appears. Keep in mind, these scenes may or may not appear to have anything to do with the overarching plot. Their purpose is merely to flesh out the backgrounds of one or more characters and to illustrate events that have shaped their lives. So, the scenes let the players glimpse a little into the psyche of the characters. It is not uncommon for these background scenes to be completely independent of the overall story. However, later scenes often have an uncanny way of making these earlier scenes pertinent to the plot. This does not always happen, of course, but do not be surprised if a flashback scene of your character getting beaten up in the 3rd grade by the playground bully turns out to be highly relevant later in the story when the main antagonists reveals himself to be that same bully, only 30 years older.

Hint: The first time you play Gnostigmata, it is likely that you will be a little confused as to how to approach your first scene. This is especially true if your character does not actually appear in the scene. If this is the case, do your best to bring in an NPC. You can do this either by introducing facts when playing cards in the scene framing stage, or by spending a Piece of Silver if that fails. By introducing an NPC, you will automatically have control over that NPC's actions throughout the entire scene. You thereby have a ready means of influencing events and impacting the story. If, for some reason, you were unable to introduce an NPC during scene framing and have no Silver with which to purchase facts, ask a teammate to give you one. Barring that, introduce random acts of God using the already available scene elements. For example, have a ceiling collapse on the characters or have the ground give-way underneath them. If you end up sustaining Agony in these Coincidence-based contests, you will earn Silver which you can then spend to introduce an NPC, making your job that much easier.

Flashback or "Present" Time

The player whose sub-plot is being pushed forward decides whether a scene is a flashback or is occurring in the present time-line of the story. Whether it is a flashback or not, the Agony, attribute, and trait values of all characters remains unaffected. Thus, all flashbacks illustrate a conflict in which the characters were in a similar state as the "present" time.

Scene Framing and the Tarot Deck

Once we know what characters are going to be in the scene, it's time to describe the locale and other setting details. To do this, the players are going to play a card game with the Tarot Deck. On the first scene, pick someone at random to be the dealer. (Have everyone roll 1d6. The highest number wins. Re-roll ties.) On every subsequent scene, the dealer is the person who actually ended up winning the previous scene (by accumulating 5 white Rosary Beads). If that

person is unavailable (i.e. he didn't show up to the next session), pick someone randomly.

Each player is dealt five cards from the Tarot deck. A Tarot deck has five suits: Cups, Swords, Wands, Pentacles, and Trumps (also known as the Major Arcana). Starting with the player to the left of the dealer and proceeding in a clockwise fashion, every player throws down a card into the center of the table. Each round of cards is known as a "trick". The first person to throw a card down determines the suit of the trick. If any subsequent player holds a card in the suit, he must play it, even if it is of a lower value. The highest card in suit wins the trick, unless a trump card is played. A trump supersedes all other cards. If a trump is played, the highest trump card wins the trick. If a person cannot play a card that places him in the lead for taking a trick, he must throw some other card instead. This card is "trash".

The winner of each trick earns one Piece of Silver and gets the right to throw the first card of the next trick.

Now, the important thing about playing cards is simply this: In order for a card to take the lead in winning a trick, the player must introduce some detail to the scene related to the card he plays. He can add more detail if he likes (a great deal more, if he desires), but he must at least add something to the scene somehow related to the card. If a player cannot figure something out to add, his card counts as "trash" regardless of its suit and face value. (Some groups also like having players sketch their additions on a white board or paper pad.) Figuring out what counts as a legal addition based on the card is relatively easy. Just look at the pictures on the card and dream something up loosely related to something you see. The relationship can be very tenuous, as long as some connection can be found. The point here is for the cards to provide inspiration and general guidance, not to ensure that every game of Gnostigmata be played in the world of Tarot. For example, suppose someone threw a Knight of Cups in the center of the table. This card depicts a knight riding a horse, which is a form of transportation. The player would be perfectly justified in declaring, "The characters are walking beside a railroad track. The sound of a train whistle is heard off in the distance."

The previous paragraph states that a player can add a great deal of detail by playing a single card. This needs further elaboration to explain the intent. It is not unusual for a player to introduce some minor detail related to the card he played and then to continue by adding NPC's, buildings, scenery, and many other elements he wants to bring into play that have nothing to do with his card. The point of the scene-framing phase is to frame the scene. So, be bold.

Please note that the only things depicted on a card that do not count as a valid addition are the suit of the card and its number. Also, new additions to a scene cannot contradict or merely repeat previous additions. If one player has stated that the scene takes place in a Chinese restaurant, another player cannot merely re-iterate that fact or state that the scene takes place in the middle of an airport runway. Also, all additions must conform to the original parameters agreed upon by all players prior to game play. So, if the players decided that the story was to take place in 15th century Italy, no player can thereafter state that the current scene takes place on a space station orbiting Mars. As always, any disagreements on whether something is allowable should be handled using the player vs. player conflict rules.

If a player throws trash, then he is not allowed to add anything to the scene at that point (unless he wants to spend a Piece of Silver for narration rights as normal).

If your character does not appear in a scene, it is highly recommended that you introduce an NPC into the scene as part of your scene framing. By doing so, you gain control over that NPC until the scene ends, which provides an opportunity to influence the events that transpire without resorting to extreme means such as earthquakes, fires, stampedes, tornadoes, or other such disasters.

The scene is completely framed when the last trick is taken.

The Tarot Deck

If a card does not inspire you on its own accord, feel free to consult the following lists. However, do not feel constrained by them:

Cups

Ace	Bird, Cloud, Cross, Dove, Fountain, Illumination, Lily Pad, Rain, Shore, Steam, Water
II	Doctor, Caduceus, Flying, Gorgon, Hill, House, Medicine, Tree, Wedding, Wings
III	Autumn, Celebration, Fruit, Harvest, Plenty, Pumpkin, Toast
IV	Gift, Grass, Resting, Shade, Sitting, Tree
V	Building, Bridge, Drink, Liquid, River, Spill, Wine
VI	Children, Flower, Guard, Mansion, Perfume, Smell
VII	Castle, Bust, Demon, Laurel, Skull, Snake, Treasure, Veil
VIII	Climbing, Face, Moon, Night, Slope
IX	Bench, Hat, Merchant, Smile, Tablecloth
X	Children, Creek, Dancing, Singing, Joy, Rainbow, Villa
Page	Fish, Ocean, Turban, Waves
Knight	Armor, Beach, Cliff, Fish, Flying, Helmet, Prancing, Transportation, Wings
Queen	Angel, Cherub, Cliff, Pebbles
King	Pillar, Scepter, Water

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Pentacles

Ace	Grass, Gray, Hedge, Illumination, Mountain, Overcast, Path, Star
II	Juggler, Ocean, Ship, Tsunami, Waves
III	Alcove, Apron, Arch, Bald Head, Bench, Blueprints, Chapel, Church, Chisel, Craftsman, Industry, Mallet, Monk, Pillar, Polka Dots, Stone
IV	Gray, Greed, Protectiveness, Seat, Town
V	Church, Cold, Cripple, Destitute, Rags, Stained Glass, Snow
VI	Balance, Beggar, Justice, Lawyer, Money, Pavement, Rags, Scale, Wealth
VII	Gardener, Leaves, Rest, Scythe, Vines
VIII	Apron, Artist, Block, Craftsman, Hammer, Laborer, Tools, Wood, Workbench
IX	Dress, Falcon, Grapes, Headdress, Snail, Tree, Vines, Vineyard, Warmth
X	Archway, Beard, Child, Decoration, Dog, Gray Hair, Spear, Tapestry, Tower, Windows
Page	Clover, Curiosity, Farmland, Grove, Hill, Warmth, Yellow
Knight	Armor, Black, Farm, Helmet, Horse, Plume, Transportation, Tunic, Yellow
Queen	Flower, Fruit, Garden, Rabbit, Ram
King	Bull, Castle, Fruit, Grapes, Rattle, Scepter, Sculpture, Statue

Swords

Ace	Cloud, Crown, Fire, Greenery, Gold, Hand, Hills, Light, Steam
II	Blindfold, Blindness, Darkness, Night, Island, Moon, Pavement, Stone, Water
III	Betrayal, Clouds, Gray, Heart, Rain, Red
IV	Church, Death, Funeral, Glass, Peace, Prayer, Resting
V	Crying, Shame, Sky, Smile, Tears, Water, Wispy
VI	Boat, Boatman, Child, Cloak, Labor, Mother, River, Ship
VII	Fez, Flag, Sneak, Summer, Tent, Thief, Yellow
VIII	Blindfold, Bondage, Castle, Fortress, Hill, Mud, Plains, Puddle, Stronghold
IX	Bed, Bedclothes, Black, Crying, Darkness, Grief, Insomnia, Quilt, Relief, Restlessness
X	Assassin, Blood, Body, Calm, Death, Martyr, Twilight
Page	Bird, Cloud, Dreamer, Flock, Youth, Wind
Knight	Action, Anger, Armor, Bridle, Gloves, Helmet, Horse, Movement, Speed, Transportation, Tree
Queen	Bird, Butterfly, Chair, Cherub, Commandment, Finery, Gown, Woman
King	Birds, Butterfly, Purple, Ring, Robe, Tapestry, Tree

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Wands

Ace	Castle, Grove, Fortress, Leaves, Smoke, Staff, Stream, Wood
II	Cloak, Forest, Globe, Height, Lake, Overlook, Painting, Parapet, Town
III	Boat, Checkered, Fleet, Headband, Land, Reflection, Sunset
IV	Bridge, Castle, Crowd, Festival, Flower, Fortress, Laurel, Virgins, Window
V	Anger, Brawl, Cap, Mud, Plaid, Polka Dots, Riot, Sparring
VI	Horse, March, Ribbon, Riding, Parade, Wreath
VII	Bravery, Bully, Fence, Grass, Uneven Odds
VIII	Brook, Clear Sky, Hill, Parallel, Stream, Uneven
IX	Fence, Horizon, Pavement, Suspicion, Wound
X	Carrying, Farmland, Heavy Load, Pavement, Town, Walking, Woods
Page	Admiration, Cap, Dunes, Feather, Salamander, Sand
Knight	Armor, Bridle, Dunes, Gloves, Helmet, Hoof, Horse, Horseshoe, Plume, Salamander, Sand, Transportation
Queen	Cat, Clasp, Flower, Lion, Tapestry, Throne
King	Gold, Lion, Lizard, Medallion, Necklace, Profile, Robe, Salamander

Trumps

0	(The Fool) Bag, Cliff, Daydream, Dog, Feather, Flower, Heights, Mountain, Pole, Purse, Sun
I	(The Magician) Cup, Engravings, Flowers, Halo, Infinity, Pentacle, Pointing, Scroll, Sword, Staff, Table, Wand, Weapon
II	(The High Priestess) Crescent, Cross, Habit, Initials, Palms, Pillars, Moon, Nun, Temple, Torah
III	(The Empress) Female, Forest, Grain, Gown, Heart, Necklace, Pillows, Scepter, Stars, Waterfall, Wheat
IV	(The Emperor) Ankh, Beard, Orb, Ram, Stone, Throne
V	(The Hierophant) Cross, Bald, Cardinal, Key, Monk, Pillars, Stone
VI	(The Lovers) Adam & Eve, Angel, Apple, Eden, Naked, Satan, Serpent, Sex, Sun, Tree
VII	(The Chariot) Belt, Black & White, Canopy, City, Hieroglyphs, Isis, River, Shield, Sphinx, Stars, Wheel
VIII	(Strength) Halo, Infinity, Lion, Mountain, Woods
IX	(The Hermit) Darkness, Hood, Illumination, Lamp, Robe, Staff
X	(Wheel of Fortune) Air, Angel, Bird, Book, Bull, Cloud, Devil, Earth, Fire, Flying, Gambling, Glyphs, Lion, Snake, Sphinx, Water, Wings
XI	(Justice) Columns, Drapery, Judge, Scales, Sword
XII	(The Hanged Man) Cross, Execution, Halo, Rope, Wood
XIII	(Death) Bishop, Boat, Child, Cliff, Crossbones, Crown, Flower, Horse, King, Kneeling, River, Skeleton, Skull, Sunset
XIV	(Temperance) Angel, Chalices, Cups, Dipping, Flying, Halo, Pouring, Mountains, Reeds, Road, Rocks, Square, Sun, Triangle, Water, Wings

> XV (The Devil) Chain, Claws, Fire, Fruit, Fur, Horns, Naked, Pentacle, Satan, Shackles, Tail, Torch
> XVI (The Tower) Black, Cliffs, Darkness, Falling, Fear, Fire, Height, Lightning, Night, Smoke, Windows
> XVII (The Star) Bird, Breasts, Hill, Nude, Pond, Pouring, Starlight, Tree, Trickle, Water
> XVIII (The Moon) Crustacean, Lobster, Moonlight, Path, Stones, Towers, Water, Wolves
> XIX (The Sun) Child, Feather, Flag, Flowers, Happiness, Horse, Stone, Wall
> XX (Judgement) Angel, Coffin, Cross, Grave, Praise, Resurrection, Sound, Trumpet
> XXI (The World) Beak, Bull, Drapery, Eagle, Human, Lion, Ribbon, Scrolls, Wreath

Working up Non-Player Characters

Non-Player Characters (NPC's) are essentially window-dressing in Gnostigmata. Anyone can create an NPC during scene framing or by buying the narration rights to describe it (detailed later). Whoever first establishes an NPC assumes the responsibility of writing down any important facts associated with it. The act of introducing an NPC into a scene gives a player control over that NPC for the duration of the scene if his own character does not appear in the scene. (He will control the NPC through his Coincidence attribute.) Please note, though, that the act of working up or introducing an NPC gives a player no permanent "ownership" or control over that NPC beyond the current scene. All NPC's are effectively public property.

One helpful bit of advice concerning the introduction of NPC's is this: *Re-use NPC's whenever possible.* If you need to introduce an NPC into a scene, and it makes sense that an NPC that appeared in a previous scene can fill that role, then re-use the old NPC rather than create a whole new one. It doesn't matter if the previous NPC had a name or was described in any detail. And, you needn't feel obligated to flesh him out any more than absolutely necessary for your current purposes. The simple act of re-introducing an NPC starts establishing a shared history with the characters. Over time, that NPC will gel into a real person, with opinions and relationships of his own. For example, "You know the guy that was sitting in the chair next to your character in the barber shop two scenes ago that nobody paid any attention to? Well, he walks through the door. He's pointing a pistol at you."

Jumping to the Action

Gnostigmata is very much action-oriented. The only thing that ultimately matters is accumulating enough Rosary Beads to win the game. As such, it is the conflicts that players care about. So, Gnostigmata ensures they are always at the forefront. There is to be no sitting around at tea parties waiting for characters to figure out ways to meet and no social pleasantries associated with becoming acquainted. We will accept none of the mindless small-talk that permeates most conversations. Screw that. We want to get to the good stuff.

All scenes must start 5 to 30 seconds *after* the scene's main conflict began. We don't really care how long the conflict has been going on. All we care about is that we start out in the *middle* of it. So, all scenes start while characters are engaged in picking a lock, arguing, screeching down the road in a car chase, blazing away at each other with guns, blasting open a vault door, throwing punches in a barroom brawl, thwarting a bank robbery, or some other contest. We're skipping all of the nonsense leading up to the battle and jumping right to the meat of it. If characters accumulated Agony due to their players' using Coincidence in prior scenes, then include that Agony as part of the scene's initial narration. Characters may have suffered wounds

just before the current scene started through stigmata, demonic attack, plain old punches to the face, or otherwise. They may already be suffering emotional distress due to vicious threats made against family members. They may be experiencing a drug-induced incapacity. Whatever.

Before you start to play out a scene, discuss what the scene's main conflict is about and place your characters appropriately. If your characters are in an argument, they need to be within shouting distance of one another and already engaged in heated debate. If they are dueling with swords, they must be close together and physically attacking one another.

While you discuss the conflict, review the stakes you negotiated for the scene so that the conflict you choose lends itself to narrating the final outcome.

Playing Out a Scene

The last person to take a trick in the Scene Framing phase has the responsibility of starting the narration for a scene. So, he has his character insult, punch, shove, yell at, shoot, or otherwise attack some opposing character. From there, the narration should bounce naturally from player to player as the need arises. We encourage players to narrate facts describing why the characters are in conflict. So, jump to the action first and justify it later.

Interrupt the Routine

If the players get stuck and a period of approximately 4.723 seconds elapses where nobody is talking while playing out a scene, then *anyone* can add a free fact to the scene to break the silence. Yes, the 4.723 seconds is a joke pointing out the ridiculousness of actually trying to measure the length of the pause. All that is required is that a reasonably long pause occurs. Any fact introduced in this manner must obey the laws of physics, although it may be far-fetched. It should have nothing to do with what has transpired in the scene so far and must somehow interrupt what the characters are currently doing. For example:

> Player 1: Okay, so you convince Clarence to go buy a gun. He leaves you all sitting there at the dining room table.

> (Long pause)

> Player 2: A baseball comes crashing through the window, scattering shards of glass all over the turkey dinner.

Fade to Black

The formal ending of a scene occurs after the Scene's conflict is resolved and no player has anything more to add to the current Scene. This is known as a "Fade to Black". At this point, the stakes of the next Scene's conflict are negotiated, cards are dealt, and the framing of the next scene begins.

Character Conflict Resolution

When someone specifies a character action that some other player opposes, a Character Conflict arises. If an introduced action is not controversial, then there is no real conflict and the stated goal simply happens without being "won". So, a character trying to open a Vault door automatically succeeds unless some other player argues the point. In this case, the only characters that could argue the point are the ones with no characters in the scene, since the opposition would most likely involve an opposing Coincidence roll. (Well, I suppose another character could be on the other side of the door actively pulling the door to keep it shut, in which case Physicality or Magic could be involved.) Introducing actions that are controversial enough for players to care about is crucial in driving both the story and game forward. If nobody has their character do anything that anyone else cares enough about to oppose, then no conflicts arise, nobody earns Rosary beads, and nobody wins the game. To win a conflict, a player must have opposition (or, at least, a character to target). So, there is ample reason to insert controversial facts into the story. (Note that players oppose other kinds of facts through Player-vs.-Player conflict resolution, *not* Character Conflict Resolution.)

When some player opposes a character action, any interested player may make a conflict roll against either the characters or the entities (such as NPC's and barriers) controlled by other players. If his character appears in a scene, he must oppose the fact through his character's Physicality or Magic attributes. If a player's character does not appear in a scene and he wants to contest some fact, he must do so by manipulating some element in the scene (such as an NPC) through his Coincidence attribute. If no appropriate element already exists in the scene, he can introduce it at the cost of one Piece of Silver. So, introducing facts during the Scene Framing phase earns players Pieces of Silver. Doing so afterwards costs them. Similarly, a player can take control of an already existing NPC by spending one Piece of Silver. The control lasts until the end of the scene.

These lowest-level conflicts, known as Action Contests, are resolved by die rolls as described below. Each successful action wins a player a white Rosary bead (as stated in the Contest Tree rules above). A player may win the right to narrate a Scene's final outcome (within the constraints of the Scene's negotiated stakes) by being the first to win five white Rosary beads.

Rounds

Scenes involving conflict are broken up into "rounds" of indeterminate length. In the opening phase of all rounds, all parties discuss the actions they intend to perform in a very general sense, freely able to alter their declarations based on the statements of others until all parties are satisfied. At this point, all that a player must state are:

1) The type of attribute he intends to use (Magic, Physicality, or Coincidence)
2) The trait pair he is applying to the exchange, if any.
3) The number of dice he is going to use in the conflict (or on each roll if he chooses to split his dice pool).
4) The target of each dice pool.

Note that all conflicts are broken down into one-on-one contests where a given number of dice of one character are pitted against a given number of dice of another character. That does not mean that conflicts cannot involve multiple characters acting essentially simultaneously, though. Suppose a Gnostic wishes to assist his brethren in competing against a demon. The Gnostics will each contribute dice to contests against the demon, forcing the demon to either split its dice pool between the two assailants or leave itself open to the assaults of one or the other.

At this point, the dice are rolled. If there is more than one contest on a given round, the rolls are handled in an order depending on the total number of dice applied to each one. (Include the dice of both sides in determining this.) The conflict incorporating the smallest number of dice goes first, and contests progress in order from smallest to largest numbers of dice. In the case of ties, actions are assumed to be simultaneous. Each roll is handled in the following fashion:

1) The winner of the roll states how many of the margin's successes he is applying toward the Agony of his opponent and whether he will be using an Intellectual or Physical attack. As stated above, winning the roll earns him a white Rosary bead.
2) The winner narrates his successes, taking into account all known facts. Most especially, he is responsible for incorporating into the narration the components of the trait pair he declared in the conflict's initial phase.
3) The loser narrates his reaction to any Agony sustained, if any. His narration cannot contradict the winner's narration in any way. Of course, if he feels that the winner's narration is inappropriate, he may always resort to player vs. player conflict resolution. Note that the loser is relieved of all responsibility to find a way to incorporate his declared trait pair into his narration.

Action Contest Rolls

All Action Contest Rolls in Gnostigmata have one supporting attribute and two conflicting attributes. Magic conflicts with Physicality and Agony. Physicality conflicts with Coincidence and Agony, and Coincidence conflicts with Magic and Agony. Thus, Agony conflicts with all actions. The following diagram illustrates the conflicting relationships between these various forces:

Gnostigmata™
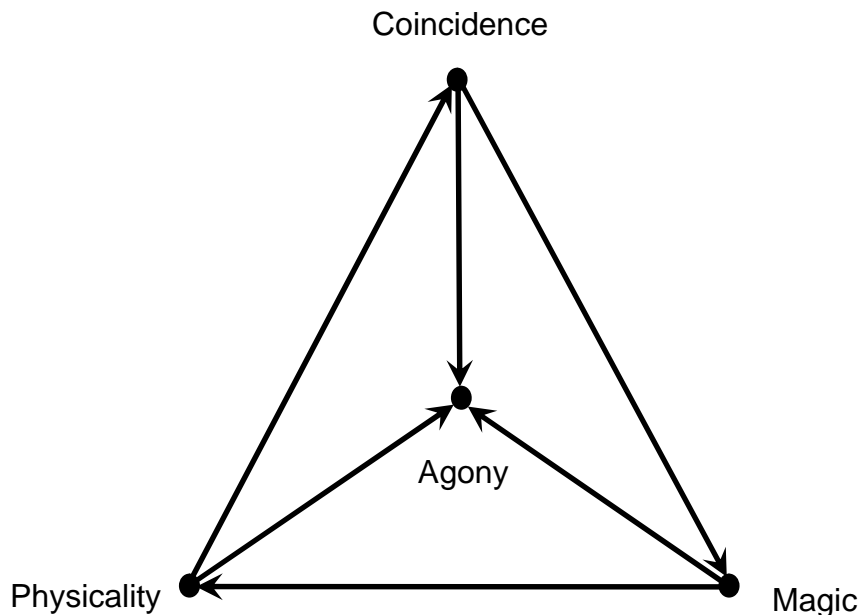
Arrows Point to Conflicting Attributes and Traits

Determining the Threshold

The maximum of all conflicting attributes sets a threshold that all dice must meet or exceed. Suppose a character wanted to punch his opponent in the gut. To do so, he must use his Physicality attribute since it is a physical action. Physical attacks are always opposed by Coincidence and Agony. The higher of these two values sets the threshold. If this is a 4, then the dice used in the contest must meet or exceed 4 to count as successes.

Enhancing Rolls with Trait Pairs

All actions, whether they are based on Magic, Physicality, or Coincidence, may be aided by traits. If this is done, the traits must be used in pairs. All Traits have ranks. So do Trait Pairs. The rank of most Trait Pairs equals the lower rank of either element in the Pair. However, if the Trait Pair represents an "Exemplar" relationship, the rank of the trait pair equals the greater rank of either element in the Pair. A given trait pair may be used only once in any given scene.

A given attribute can only be used with certain kinds of trait pairs. Which are allowed also depends on whether a character is a Gnostic or a Catholic according to the following table:

Trait Pair	Associated Catholic Attribute	Associated Gnostic Attribute
Persona & Possessions/Vice	Infernal Favor	Delusion
Vice/Material Desires & Fears	Infernal Favor	Delusion
Material Desires & Fears/Relationship	Divine Favor	Fate
Relationship/Virtue	Self-Reliance	Gnosis
Virtue/Interests & Hobbies	Self-Reliance	Gnosis

The curly brackets on the character sheets at the end of this document graphically illustrate what trait pair combinations can be used with which attributes.

To use a Trait Pair, both elements of the Pair must appear in the final narration of the action or event. It doesn't matter how the elements are involved, only that they are. For example, a character with a rank of 3 in the Vice of Steal and a rank of 4 in the Material Desires & Fears trait of Cars would have a rank 3 in the Steal/Cars Trait Pair (unless "Cars" was the character's Examplar for the "Steal" trait, in which case the rank of Steal/Cars would be 4). If the need arose, the character could use this Vice/Material Desires & Fears Pair to hotwire a car. Steal/Cars would also apply to making a rapid getaway in the stolen vehicle. Note that hotwiring a car could just as easily be done with a Steal/Electronics Trait Pair, since the action directly involves both stealing and electronics. Or, if the vehicle in question were a Lamborghini well out of the reach of the character's pocketbook, the Trait Pair of Envy/Electronics could apply.

In general, the narrator's fellow gamers judge whether his description meets their level of acceptable quality. In general, the narration is deemed fine unless someone complains. In that case, the narrator can either restate his description or resort to the player vs. player conflict resolution rules. If, in the group's final judgment the narration is deemed unacceptable, then the narrating player's dice are *all* counted as failures and his opponent narrates his successes as appropriate.

Determining the Dice Count
The sum of the supporting attribute plus the rank of the applied trait pair determines the number of d6 that will be rolled in the conflict's dice pool.

Action Contests are Always Opposed
All Action Contests target a single opposing character. That is, there are always two sides rolling against one another. Note that players can add dice to either side of any roll through the expenditure of Pieces of Silver at the rate of 1 Silver = 1 die.

All contests must target a character, even if it is a character that does not appear in a scene (in which case, the character can only defend himself via his Coincidence attribute).

Now, it *is* possible that an opponent simply does not have enough dice to go around and therefore can devote no dice to a particular contest targeting him. In that case, the targeted character is assumed to have zero successes in that contest.

Rolling the Dice

As stated above, all dice are rolled simultaneously in a given round. This occurs before actually describing the actions in detail. (You must state the attribute and trait pair that will be applied before rolling, if any, but not the actual events involving them.) On both sides of each contest, disregard any dice resulting with a number less than the character's conflicting attributes. Each die that rolls a number greater than or equal to its associated threshold is counted as a success. The side with the greatest number of successes wins. The difference between the number of successes is called the *Margin*.

Tied Rolls

If a roll results in a tie, a special situation arises. If either or both of the two characters involved in the contest has an Agony value less than the total number of successes rolled on each side, that character sustains 1 point of Agony and gains the requisite Pieces of Silver associated with it. (The players should narrate appropriate reasons for the inflicted Agony as normal). At this point, if all participants agree, they may break off the conflict with neither side the victor. Otherwise, roll again and double the Margin of the eventual winner. (In the event of a string of ties, keep doubling the Margin.) In these extended conflicts, either side may spend Pieces of Silver prior to each roll to enhance their chances. When they do, those Pieces of Silver apply to all subsequent rolls until the tie is broken.

Splitting Dice Pools

If a player wishes to perform more than one action on a given round, he may do so by splitting his dice pool in any way he desires. Note that, if he does so, the totality of his actions must incorporate the elements of any Trait Pair he uses. However, he is not required to use both elements of the Trait Pair in all actions as long as each element appears *somewhere*. Thus, if a character uses the Trait Pair of Steal/Cars, he could split his pool by snatching a purse from the hands of an unwary window-shopper while jumping onto the hood of a slowly passing car to get away. The same logic applies to exchanges in which a character wants to divide his attention between two or more opponents. So, the character gets a total number of "action dice" which his player can distribute in whatever way desired. Thus, the character's dice pool represents the total effort a character can present to all opposing forces in a given round of conflict. Ultimately, his dice total is still Magic, Coincidence, or Physicality plus a single Trait Pair.

Note that a pool can only be split to attack or defend from two or more opponents. A character cannot split his dice pool against a single opponent. If a player wishes to perform two actions against a single character, there is nothing preventing the narration of his action to include two (or more) actions. But, the totality of the action is mechanically resolved through a single die pool

If a character does not devote dice from his dice pool in defending against the attack of another, or has an insufficient number of dice in his pool to apply to the attempt, then he simply has no dice defending against the attack and is considered to have zero successes in that contest.

Physical vs. Intellectual Attacks

Note that both physical and intellectual attacks can be caused by Physicality, Magic, and Coincidence. Physical attacks are those directed against another character's body: "I punch him in the gut"; "A crackling bolt of electrical energy surges from my fingertips and strikes his

midsection"; "He trips over a skateboard lying on the floor and hits his head on the mantle".

Intellectual attacks are often characterized by dialogue: "Why do you always have to be so different?" Most such attacks use Physicality, because speaking in itself is an action that does not break any physical laws. However, if supernatural evidence is summoned to support an argument, then Magic can be used in an intellectual attack. For example, a Gnostic character hidden in shadows might begin to radiate a soft halo around his head as he says to the priest he has been pursuing: "Your enemy I might be, but we could be allies. Surely by now you must see the path of truth cannot be found by following the dictates of your superiors. Give me the parchments and help me spread Christ's true message." Speech itself is not mandatory in an intellectual attack: "Looking him in the eye, I put the barrel of my gun to his daughter's temple and draw back the hammer."

It is possible that an intellectual attack could be caused by a physical event. For example, the statement, "A red striped ball falls off the shelf and bounces across the floor" could be an intellectual attack to a character that previously hit and killed a child who was chasing after a similar ball into the street. In such cases, the attacked character must find some deeper underlying meaning to the physical event for it to be considered an intellectual attack.

The Currency of Successes
The number of successes on any Action Contest determines the winner's and loser's degrees of control over the conflict. The successes can be applied directly to the Agony of the opponent. In addition, successes can be used to purchase facts in the game world.

Inflicting Agony with Successes
If one character attacks another character, either physically or intellectually, some or all of the resulting successes of that attack can be applied to the targeted character's Agony.

For every point of Agony a character sustains, his player adds one Silver Piece into that character's Purse equal to the new Agony value. Thus, if a character has his Agony raised from a 4 to a 5, he adds 5 Pieces of Silver to his purse. A character that suffers defeat after defeat will slowly build up a Purse that can help him overcome his opposition. So, even an extreme underdog can win conflicts at crucial times. Agony is the stuff from which stories are made!

Buying Narration Rights with Successes
Successes can be used to buy facts in the game world that give detail to the current conflict's outcome. The cost is the same as for obtaining narration rights at any other point in the game (see Narration) on a 1 success = 1 Silver basis. So, successes are essentially converted to Pieces of Silver, but they must be spent immediately. They cannot be added to the winning character's Purse. The first fact of any successful roll is free if used to explain how Agony is inflicted on an opponent. So, a Physicality roll with one success can get a free fact such as, "I punch him in the face" and then use the single success to inflict one point of Agony. However, there are some notable limitations on the narration of conflicts (listed below).

The kinds of facts that can be introduced in this way are determined by whether the contest generating the successes was based on Physicality, Coincidence, or Magic. Actions involving Physicality can only buy facts in the game world that do not contradict the game world's

physical laws and which have a direct cause and effect relationship between a character's action and the event. Coincidence based conflicts involve elements that have no direct correlation to the character's actions but which obey the game world's physical laws. In other words, Coincidence buys facts of happenstance. Magic actions, on the other hand, can alter the game world in ways that break its physical laws.

A character with a high Magic and low Physicality can appear to be a potent magician, wizard, or prophet. A character with a high Coincidence and low Magic appears as any ordinary mortal, but seems to lead an extremely charmed life. A character with a high Physicality and low Coincidence is among the best at swinging swords, shooting guns, and/or performing acrobatic feats.

Limitations on Narrating Conflict Outcomes
The narration of a conflict's outcome has some important limitations:

1) The narrator can only describe the game world as experienced by the characters. Including abstract facts, such as "Joe is Mary's brother", are disallowed. The introduction of any such fact must be stated as a direct observation: "Mary tells me that Joe is her brother" or "Mary and Joe look like brother and sister". These statements allow the possibility that the underlying assumption that "Joe is Mary's brother" is somehow flawed and might be contradicted at a later date.
2) The facts introduced cannot inflict more Agony points on the targeted individuals greater than the remaining successes allow. Thus, a single success may cause a chandelier hanging above an opponent's head to fall from the ceiling. With only one success available to inflict Agony, though, the narration of the event would have to include the target jumping to the side in the nick of time with minimal harm. A corollary to this rule is that any introduced fact must be in line with the Agony inflicted. For example, unless a roll actually kills or *seriously* maims a target, it should not be accompanied by a fact such as: "I empty the clip of my Smith & Wesson into his forehead."
3) Facts cannot be introduced through the expenditure of successes that directly specify wounds without consulting (or negotiating with) the target's player first.
4) Introducing a fact that affects some item under an opponent's direct control costs a number of successes equal to the opponent's highest trait pertaining to that item. If no trait applies, the usual minimum cost of 1 success must be expended. For example, suppose a swordsman tries to use some fancy maneuvers to separate his opponent from his weapon. Further, suppose the defender's highest ranked pertinent trait is a <u>Material Desires & Fears</u> Trait in Katana having a rank of 3. That means it will cost the swordsman 3 successes on a single roll to wrest the sword from its wielder's grip.

The Duration of Narrated Facts
In general, those facts that are narrated through Physicality or Coincidence-based conflict rolls last as long as the physical laws of the game world state they should. If there is a question as to whether the duration of a fact would continue, the first person to obtain narration rights that actually specifies whether the previously established fact remains in effect may do so. If he leaves the question open, then the next person to obtain narration rights may do so, etc.

Facts narrated through Magical actions, which defy the laws of logic and physics, last only until

the end of the scene in which they were introduced. The duration may be even shorter for Magic-based facts, though, if someone eradicates the original fact through his own Magical action. Doing so requires a negotiation between the two parties involved. All of this effectively means that common technological items can be permanently created by purchasing facts, but magical items or items that defy the known laws of physics cannot.

However, the *consequences* of magical actions last as long as the physical laws of the game world allow. So, if magic is used to bend the bars of a jail cell, then those bars will remain bent even after the current Scene ends.

Say "Yes" or Roll the Dice

Gnostigmata lacks a Game Master. As such, the story you collectively create with it is improvised. Improvisation works best when everything a player (or actor) says is accepted, no matter what. Contradicting, criticizing, or questioning what another player says is called "blocking", and is extremely destructive to the creative process. For example:

> Player 1: "Charlie picks up the car."
> Player 2: "A car's way too heavy. He can't do that!" (Block)

Player 1 and the action of the scene have just stopped dead in their tracks due to Player 2's comment. Similarly:

> Player 1: "Charlie picks up the car."
> Player 2: "Can't you be any more imaginative than that?" (Block)

In this case, Player 2 rudely belittled Player 1. Player 2 is probably embarrassed, along with the other players sitting at the table. It is unreasonable to expect someone to be creative when they have been made to feel unworthy. Some players completely shut down after suffering from this kind of attack. Nobody should expect anyone to be a creative genius all the time. Straightforward, simple statements are perfectly acceptable (as are poorly worded moronic statements). Even professional novelists and screen writers use editors to polish their work, and even then editing doesn't start until the rough draft is complete. So, lighten up.

Another no-no in improvising scenes is asking another player for additional information about something he has said:

> Player 1: "Charlie picks up the car."
> Player 2: "What kind of car is it?" (Block)

The reason that this is considered blocking is that you are trying to force information out of another player rather than allow the details to flow naturally from the group as ideas occur to the players. Your question puts the other player on the spot and makes him look stupid.   If a player hasn't offered a piece of information and you want more, then *add* the additional information yourself:

Player 1: "Charlie picks up the car."
Player 2: "Yes, and that's impressive. Not everyone can pick up a '58 Impala."

There are only two situations where it is acceptable to block the introduction of a new fact:

1) The narration breaks the game rules. This could happen, for example, if a player states that his character performs an action that contradicts the laws of physics but he did not use his character's Magic attribute to perform that action in an Action Contest. Anyone stopping that narration is merely pointing out the game rules. In such a case, the narrating player must either restate the action to fit within the game rules or re-roll the dice using the proper attribute.
2) The narration flatly contradicts previously narrated facts. For example, if it has already been established that a scene is taking place in a park in London, a later statement cannot state that the park is actually in Paris (unless the park has somehow been magically moved there).

A player that points out a block made by the opposing side earns one Piece of Silver. The block is voided and the original statement stands. Remember, magic exists and it has very few limitations. So, there are few actions that a character absolutely *cannot* make. If some introduced fact feels out-of-place to you, add more details to the scene to provide a reasonable explanation for the bothersome narration. In fact, you should consider that one of your main responsibilities as a Gnostigmata player: justifying the actions and statements of your fellow players. Doing so doesn't increase your chances of winning or losing. But, it dramatically increases your chances of telling an entertaining story.

Players can still affect other characters' actions, though. It's just that all statements by all players are automatically accepted as facts in the game world unless someone contests something by backing it up with dice. If you want to prevent something from happening in the game world, you must resist that action in some way through your character's own actions or through Coincidence. For example:

Player 1: "Charlie picks up the car."
Player 2: "Hold on. You're going to have to roll for that. I'm using Coincidence with a trait pair of Charlie and Automobile…" (Perfectly acceptable)

In other words, say "yes" or roll the dice.

Failure Rewards

If your character fails a contest in which he devoted at least two dice, the attribute used in that contest rises by one point provided doing so does not raise it above a value of six. (In this case, "failure" is defined as having fewer successes than your opponent.) Yep, that's right. You get rewarded for failing. The winner gets closer to winning the whole she-bang by earning a Rosary bead; the loser gets a consolation prize to help him improve his performance in the future.

Narrating Magical Effects

Players can introduce magical effects through Action contests involving the Magic attribute. But, this can only happen when their characters appear in Scenes. The only attribute that can be used in an Action contest when a character does not appear in a scene is Coincidence, and Coincidence is incapable of generating magical effects. This is on purpose. Magic exists. Magic is cool. Making the player characters the primary source of magic in the story helps emphasize how cool they are. However, weird and bizarre facts that do not *in themselves* contradict the game world's physical laws but whose mere existence can best be explained as the consequence of magic *can* be introduced during Scene Framing, through spending Pieces of Silver, or through Coincidence-based contests. For example, the player characters might encounter a man with a rhinoceros horn protruding from his forehead. There is nothing in the laws of physics stating that a man cannot have a rhinoceros horn growing out of his forehead. But, the fact that it is not impossible does not explain how it happened. It is possible that the man's DNA was manipulated so that he would grow the horn. Or, it is possible that magic produced it. What cannot be done with Scene Framing, Pieces of Silver, or Coincidence is the actual *growing* of the horn in the scene. So, *evidence* of magic should be fairly common in the game, but witnessing non-player character magic *as it transpires* should be much rarer.

It *is* possible to introduce non-player character magical effects into the game if the story demands it, though. This can only be done as the result of negotiating the stakes in the conflicts of Scenes, Acts, or the overall Story. If it is decided that the winner of a Scene can introduce a magical effect, then the winner of the Scene's conflict is free to narrate the magical effect he desires within the parameters of the negotiated stakes.

Healing

First-Aid

Agony ranks hinder a character in conflict resolutions and so are never desirable. Agony heals through the passage of time (natural healing), through the actions of physical or magical actions of characters, and through Coincidence (Fate or Divine Grace). Any healing attempt (other than natural healing) is performed like any other conflict in the game. The only difference is that a successful action does not deliver Agony to an opponent. Instead, it delivers relief from Agony to an ally. Physical actions involve first-aid or other medical intervention. Magical acts, as normal, involve supernatural means to heal. Coincidence-based healing makes it seem that wounds simply weren't as severe as they originally appeared. The pain goes away and the character proceeds.

However the healing is performed, the extent of its effects are based on the standard game currency of 1 success = 1 currency point. Thus, the number of successes must meet or exceed the cost expended to gain the trait rank. Thus, if a character's Agony attribute is a rank of 4, the person attempting to heal his wound must obtain 4 successes on a single roll to lower the rank to a 3. Agony can only be lowered by full increments. Needless to say, a heavily wounded character has difficulty healing himself because the wounds inhibit his own abilities. It is also risky to do so. Failure implies the character may sustain even more Agony.

Healing as an act of Desperation

Note that no level of Agony can force your character to die. The only way death can occur is for you to agree to it (possibly as the stakes of a conflict). Even so, high Agony values are quite undesirable. If your character is in a truly desperate state, you can "buy down" Agony. This represents the character pulling out a last bit of strength from some deep down reserve in his psyche. Essentially, you "spend" your trait ranks (in any traits except Vice traits). Again, the cost is the same as it was to raise the Agony value in the first place. So, an Agony of 5 can be reduced to a value of 4 by spending 5 "character points" taken in any combination from your character traits. Character points are, likewise, harvested at the same rate at which they were spent. Thus, lowering one rank 5 trait to a rank of 4 would suffice. Lowering one rank 4 trait to a 3 and one rank 1 trait to a zero would also do the trick. Agony can only be lowered in whole increments. No fractional Agony value is allowed.

Miraculous Healing

Any character whose Agony is greater than 5 at the end of a scene has his Agony miraculously lowered to 5 at the beginning of the next scene. This is a safety valve ensuring that every player can meaningfully participate in the game, albeit in a somewhat crippled capacity.

Natural Healing

At the end of every scene, each side gets to remove Agony points from the characters on their side. The total number of points each side is allowed to "heal" equals the number of players on the opposing team. So, if there are two Gnostic players and three Stigmatic players, the Gnostics get to distribute 3 points of healing between their two characters while the Stigmatics only get 2

points to distribute amongst their three characters. The points can be distributed in any fashion to which the players on that side agree. Agony can be lowered to a minimum of 0. Any unused healing points are lost.

Note that Miraculous Healing and Natural Healing are an either/or proposition for a character. One cannot have Agony be miraculously healed down to 5 and then naturally healed down to 4. The player of the character being healed decides which option to use.

Ascension & Martyrdom

Gnostic Ascension
The usual goal of a Gnostic is to attain perfect "Gnosis". When he does so, he escapes the bonds of the Delusion and ascends into "Reality", which effectively retires the character from the game. A Gnostic may do so when attaining a 6 in Gnosis, a 1 in Delusion, rank 5 in at least one Virtue, and possessing no rank in any Vices. Ascension is never required, though. A character ready for ascension may opt to delay his departure indefinitely (or until he feels the moment is "right"). Ascension can only happen immediately after a contest in which Gnosis is used (winning the contest is not required). Any Gnostic character that ascends in this way immediately earns his side one red Rosary bead.

The Catholic's View of Gnostic Ascension
Traditionally, Catholics view Gnostics as Satan worshippers. The magic they wield comes directly from Hell, so the historical view is that a Gnostic is a witch that deserves to be burned at the stake. Catholics interpret Gnostic ascension merely as Satan coming to claim his due. The witch finally earns his comeuppance when the devil devours his soul.

Catholic Martyrdom
Although not an actual goal of a Catholic, martyring oneself for the cause is sometimes viewed favorably. Martyrdom is pointless and wasteful, though, if the martyr's soul is not ready to enter God's kingdom. A Catholic may martyr himself after attaining a 6 in Divine Favor, a 1 in Infernal Favor, rank 5 in at least one Virtue, and possessing no rank in any Vices. Martyrdom is never required, though. Any character ready for martyrdom may simply opt to forego the ultimate sacrifice. Martyrdom can only happen immediately after a contest in which Self-Reliance is used (losing the contest is not required). Any Catholic character that martyrs himself in this way earns his side one red Rosary bead.

Player vs. Player Conflict Resolution

Whenever a dispute between players arises, the first level of recourse is to try and negotiate a solution. All players are encouraged to participate in the discussion in order to amicably craft a mutually pleasing compromise. If this fails, the matter can be settled through dice rolls.

Conflicts between players that cannot be resolved through discourse are resolved in a fashion similar to that of character conflict resolutions. However, no character attributes or traits are involved. Players draw exclusively from their Purses to purchase dice. One Piece of Silver = 1 die. Any player can add however many dice they want to any side of a conflict, as their Purse allows. Players having zero Pieces of Silver in their Purse are granted one die to place however they choose for the purposes of the conflict. Any player may, of course, simply opt out. Players may add or remove dice as they see fit until all sides are satisfied with the final dice count. Before any dice are rolled, however, all sides must come to mutual agreement as to what it means for the winner and what it means for the loser. In other words, you shouldn't roll until you know precisely what it is that you are rolling *for*. This is in stark contrast to action contests, where the mechanical influences are known prior to the roll but the facts generated by the roll are unknown until the winner and loser both narrate the results.

If only one side of a player versus player conflict ends up with contributions, then the side with player support automatically wins and all Pieces of Silver are returned to the contributors' dice pools. If more than one side has support, the dice are rolled. Any die result of 4 or more is counted as a success. The side with the greatest number of successes wins the contest. Ties are re-rolled until the tie is broken. All expended Pieces of Silver are lost in player vs. player conflicts. No Agony is inflicted in these contests and no Pieces of Silver are generated.

Character Sheets

The following pages contain character sheets for both Gnostic and Catholic characters.
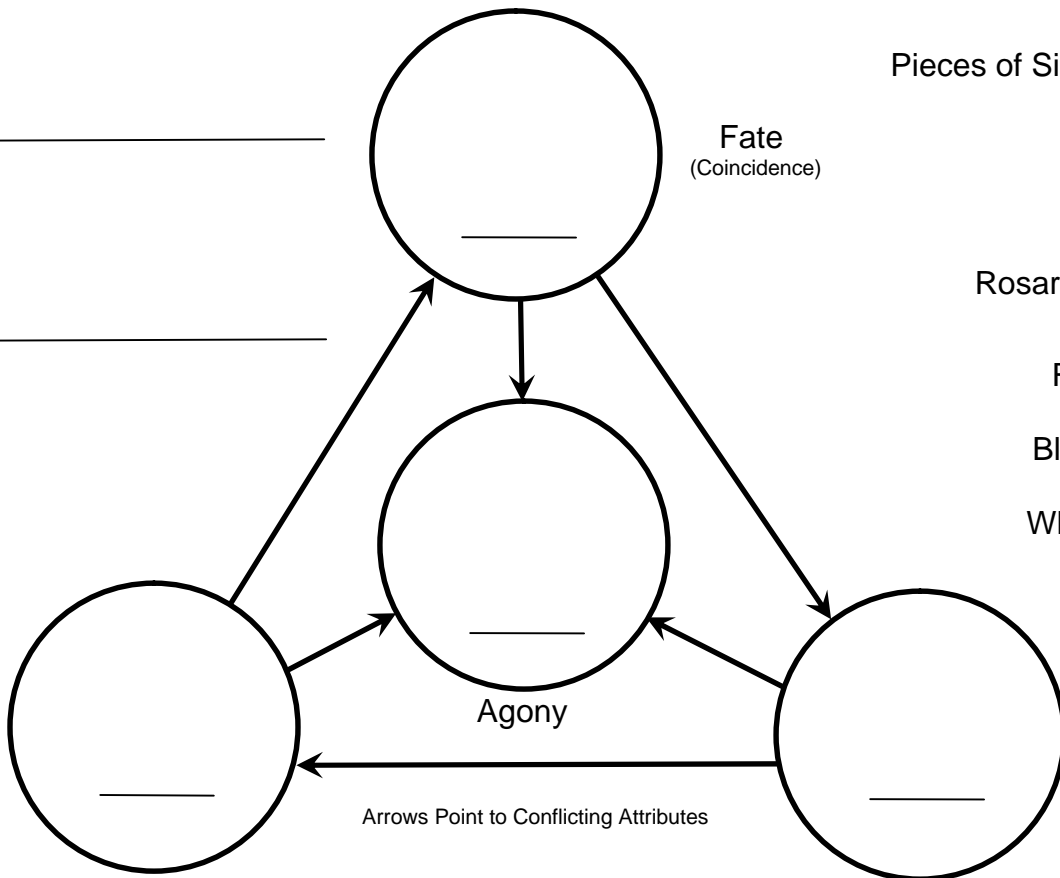
Gnostigmata™ (Gnostic)

Name

_____

Player

_____

Pieces of Silver _____

Fate
(Coincidence)

_____

Rosary Beads:

Red _____

Black _____

White _____

Delusion
(Physicality)

_____

_____

Agony

Arrows Point to Conflicting Attributes

Gnosis
(Magic)

_____

Persona & Possessions	Vices	Material Desires & Fears	Relationships	Virtues	Interests & Hobbies
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
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○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Fate

Plot _____

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Earned

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Narrated

Sub-Plot _____

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Earned

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Narrated

Gnostigmata™ (Stigmatic)

Name

_____

Player

_____
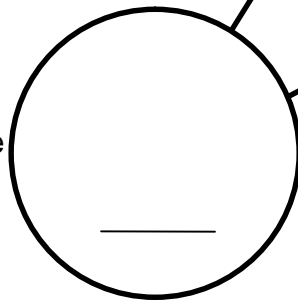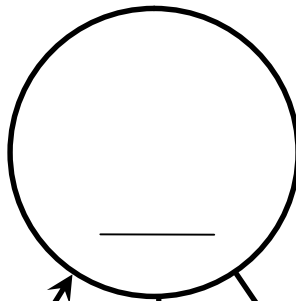
Pieces of Silver _____

Divine Grace
(Coincidence)

_____

Rosary Beads:

Red _____

Black _____

White _____

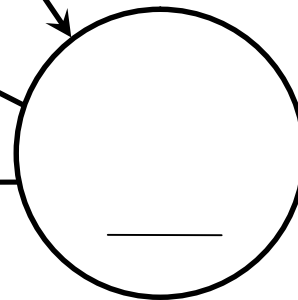Self-
Reliance
(Physicality)

_____

Agony

_____
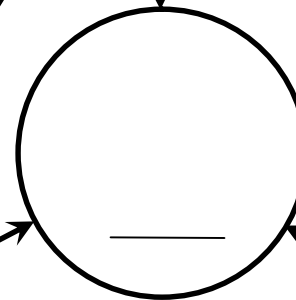
Infernal
Favor
(Magic)

_____

Arrows Point to Conflicting Attributes

Interests & Hobbies	Virtues	Relationships	Material Desires & Fears	Vices	Persona & Possessions
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
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Divine Grace

Plot _____

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Earned

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Narrated

Sub-Plot _____

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Earned

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Narrated