

# PIGSMOKE



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**POWERED BY THE  
APOCALYPSE**

**CERTAIN  
DEATH**

Pigsmoke  
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# CONTENTS



<b>PIGSMOKE 101</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>BASIC MOVES</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>ROLE PLAYBOOKS</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT PLAYBOOKS</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>PIGSMOKE</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>AGENDAS, PRINCIPLES, AND MC MOVES</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>THE FIRST SESSION</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>THREATS</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>EXAMPLE THREATS</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>PLOTS, SCHEMES, AND POOR FORTUNE</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>INDEX</b>	<b>141</b>







**PIGSMOKE 101**

# WHAT THIS IS

*Pigsmoke* is a roleplaying game about being the faculty at Pigsmoke – America’s Foremost College Of Magic. When you play it, you and your friends will tell a story about a handful of plucky academics and their struggles against the vicissitudes of faculty life as they pursue tenure and the stability that comes with it. Also, those academics can cast spells. This does not make anything easier for them.

## IF YOU’RE NEW TO ROLEPLAYING GAMES...

If you have no idea what a roleplaying game is or how to do it, this is the section for you.

First of all, welcome! Roleplaying games (RPGs for short) are a ton of fun. Some offer intense drama and thought-provoking stories – a ‘serious’ kind of fun – but *Pigsmoke* isn’t really in that category. *Pigsmoke* is more of a comedy-drama, where the focus is on awkward people and the outlandish situations they get into. You’ll have a constant cast of characters who you’ll become attached to and whose lives you’ll be invested in, but you’ll spend more time laughing at them than fearing for them.

When you’re playing *Pigsmoke*, most of you will take on the role of a single member of staff, your character. One of you will take on the role of *the whole rest of the world* – which isn’t actually as difficult as it sounds – and together you’ll all collaborate on the story you’re telling. Every so often you’ll roll some dice; these help keep the story fresh and interesting by pushing it in unexpected directions.

The rest of this chapter will tell you how to set up and get started. You don’t need to do very much, just follow the instructions starting on page 7. If in doubt, remember this:

The other people who’ve arranged to play this game with you? They’re just as invested as you are in making it work. They aren’t going to mind if you need a moment to figure something out, or if you get the rules a bit wrong here and there, or if there’s a place you don’t want the story to go and you ask them not to go there. Pause the game, have a talk about it or a food break or whatever you need, then when everyone’s feeling it again you can jump back in.

Roleplaying is a messy, human endeavor; you don’t have to get it 100% right 100% of the time. Give it your best shot, and everything will be fine.

## INSPIRATION

The primary inspiration for *Pigsmoke* is my own experience in and near academia, but there are plenty of other sources you can consult for ideas.

*Harry Potter* is an obvious one. Think of the wonder of Hogwarts as seen through the jaded eyes of a grown adult with their own problems to deal with – of the sheer damage a handful of irresponsible teenagers with magic could cause, and how draining it must be to be responsible for keeping them in line – and you'll get an idea of the atmosphere in the *Pigsmoke* faculty lounges.

The Unseen University in the various *Discworld* books is another primary source. Building a thinking machine so complex no-one knows how it works, or distilling an ancient rite of blood sacrifice down to one mouse and a bit of flair, are just the sorts of things that *Pigsmoke* faculty get up to.

*The Thick Of It*, while set in a real-world press office rather than a fictional magical university, does an excellent job of capturing the tone of browbeaten employees trying to manage the behaviour of people who ostensibly have way more power than them. It's also a cracking black comedy – maybe a little darker than *Pigsmoke's* default tone, but if you like your humour gallows-shaped, then *Pigsmoke* can deliver that as well.

Likewise, despite being set in a corporation rather than academia *The IT Crowd* showcases the bizarre characters and slightly surreal humour that makes for a good *Pigsmoke* game. A renamed copy of either of the Reynholms would make an excellent head of department to inflict on the player characters.

@legoacademics on Twitter.





## IF YOU'RE NEW TO POWERED BY THE APOCALYPSE...

This is the section for people who are familiar with roleplaying games in general, but haven't played anything 'powered by the apocalypse'.

So hey! *Pigsmoke* is pretty traditional as far as roleplaying games go - there'll be one Master of Ceremonies (MC), who you may be more familiar with as a Games Master or Dungeon Master, who runs the show, and everyone else will play a single character of their own design.

If you're going to be a player then all you really need to know is in this chapter, in the chapter on Basic Moves (see page 19), and written in your playbooks (which are the equivalent of the character sheet you may be used to from other games).

If you're going to be running the game then you'll need to be familiar with this whole book, but there are three big differences you should probably know about:

First, you don't need to do any prep. *Pigsmoke* is intended to generate story from nowhere - all the questions that players have to answer about their characters and the universe as a whole are intended to create an unstable status quo. All you as the MC have to do is throw something volatile into the mix and watch everything explode. Conversely, if you do try to prep a detailed 'adventure' you'll find that the game resists your planning. Don't waste your time.

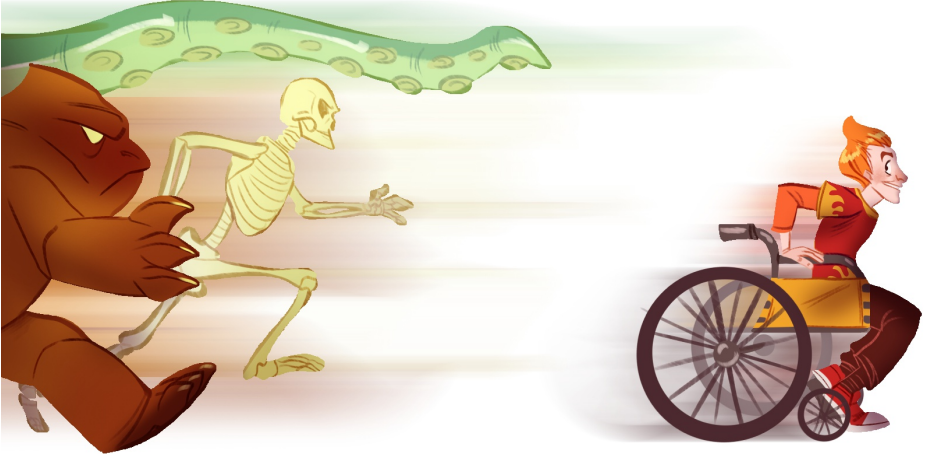
Second, *Pigsmoke* values player input. Even though the MC has absolute authority over the world of the game, players are encouraged to contribute their own details. You may be familiar with this sort of practice from other games, but if it's wholly new to you don't try to keep sole control of the world. Just remember that the MC's job in *Pigsmoke* isn't to create a world in exhaustive detail, and it's *certainly* not to 'tell a story' in which the player characters are the protagonists; it's to keep the pressure on the player characters until they sweat out a tale of woe and (hopefully) triumph.

Thirdly, you need to follow the rules. Many games include 'Rule Zero' at the start (or at least early on) encouraging GMs to bend or ignore the rules to suit their own vision of drama. *Pigsmoke* does not, and as the MC you are expected to run the game by the rules as they're written here. Your rules give you every tool you need to run the game, and they've been designed and tested to produce good results.

That said, I can't *prevent* you from altering the rules of the game on the fly. Hell, 'hacking' games to produce new games is how *Pigsmoke* came to be in the first place. Just... try to resist the urge to do so until you've played it a bit and understand how all the moving parts fit together. (Which is a topic well beyond the scope of this introduction. Seek out your favourite internet discussion forum for more details.)

## IF YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH POWERED BY THE APOCALYPSE...

Hello! You already know how this works, more or less. If you're playing, then skim through this and the basic moves chapter, grab your role and department playbooks and you're good to go. If you're running the show, then the MC Agendas, Principles, and Moves are discussed starting on page 93, and you'll probably want to check those out first. You should at least skim the whole book though, keeping an eye out for places where it deviates from what you're familiar with.



## WHY?

Why play *Pigsmoke*?

Because it's not just children who go to magic schools to have adventures. Well, maybe it *is* just children, but **adults also go to magic schools and they have to do all the work.**

Because **there are a million terrible mistakes to be made in the fast-paced, cut-throat world of academia**, and watching the characters make them is going to be both dramatic and hilarious.

Because sometimes it's good to **cut loose with a game less serious** than maybe some others.

And because sometimes it's good to line up an obstructive bureaucracy, a thousand barely-educated students, the walking dead, and the forces of hell, and watch the characters somehow, against all odds, scrape out some sort of victory against it all.

That's pretty cool.

# THE SETTING?

Pigsmoke is a cross between Hogwarts and a typical United States college, roughly set in the present day. Students are 18+ and exist to make your life difficult. Your department head is an arch-conservative taskmaster who leans on you to make their department look good. The Dean's Office wants to ensure you're following all of their ridiculous rules. The bursar won't give you any money, your peers want their names ahead of yours on your latest paper, and your personal life is a garbage fire. Chase tenure, avoid burnout, and try to resist the urge to go adventuring: like all get-rich-quick schemes, it'll probably just end with a humiliating death.

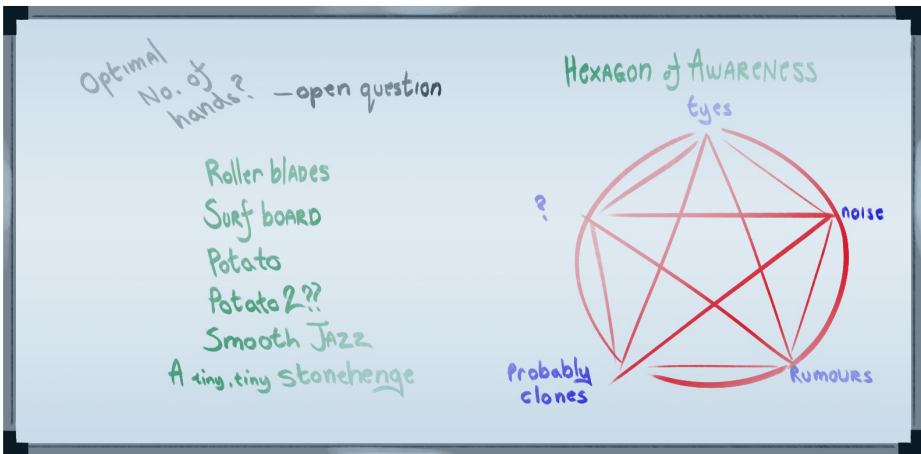
Pigsmoke itself is defined in broad strokes, with the expectation that you'll fill in the details during play. During character creation you will have the opportunity to introduce details about yourself, your personal contacts, and the department you work for. Once all that's done, the group will work together to define the Dean (see page 79).

# WHAT ABOUT MAGIC?

Magic exists in the Pigsmoke setting, obviously. But what *is* it? Well, that's not really specified beyond the following:

- It can be studied, with academic papers and breakthroughs in understanding and areas of specialist interest.
- It can be taught to others.

All of the other details are left to you to figure out in play *if and only if they become relevant*. You might choose to make this the focus of the research part of the game, or just quietly handwave it unless and until it becomes interesting, but what you really shouldn't be doing is sweating the details that aren't actually relevant to the game.



## SETTING UP

Get three or more players, including yourself. One of you is going to be the Master of Ceremonies (MC) and, since you're the one reading this book, it's probably going to be you. A game of *Pigsmoke* can take a while to play, so make sure you've all either got room in your schedules for an ongoing commitment, or that you're all happy to be playing a short game. A typical session of *Pigsmoke* will run 3-4 hours, and a full game will run several sessions.

Whoever's going to be the MC should probably read this whole book, but pay special attention to the First Session chapter (page 107). Players only *need* to read their playbooks, assuming other people at the table are going to help them with the basics, but they'd probably benefit from reading this chapter and the Basic Moves chapter (page 19) as well.

Print and assemble a batch of character playbooks: one each of the roles and 1-2 each of the departments. Technically you need as many copies of each department playbook as you have players, in case they all choose the same one, but that doesn't happen very often. Print your worksheets too.

You'll also need scratch paper, something to write with, and some 6-sided dice - at minimum three dice, but ideally three per player. Some snacks and drinks are also a smart move.

## THE CONVERSATION

Roleplaying is, at heart, a conversation. It's you and your friends sitting around talking about things, except instead of the things being what's going on in your life, or the latest episode of Current Hot TV Show, it's the fictional exploits of a bunch of characters you've all made up. You talk about the situations they get into, what they do about that, how it all goes wrong (or, occasionally, right) and exult in their victories against the vicissitudes of life. Sometimes you talk over each other, interrupt, build on each others' ideas, or get stuck and ask for help, and that's fine. That's how conversations go.

What these rules do is mediate that conversation. When someone describes a character doing a particular kind of thing, the rules step in. Then they put limits on what people can say afterwards. If the rules say you screwed up that seminar, no one gets to say it went well. Or if the rules say you knocked it out of the park, no one gets to say it went badly. Either way, in the story you're all telling together, the fact that the rules just created is true.



# MOVES AND DICE

The exact things that signal 'It's time for rules!' are called **moves**.

There are a set of **basic moves** that apply to everyone except the MC, all the time, and each playbook has its own **playbook moves** that apply only to a character with that playbook, and only if a player has chosen that move as part of their character. There are also **MC moves**, which are the only moves the MC can make, and only the MC can make them. They're very different from the character moves, but you don't need to know about them unless you're the MC. (They're spelled out on pages 100–101 if you want to know more.)

Moves have two basic parts: a **trigger**, which is written in bold text, and a **result**, which describes what happens when the move is triggered. The trigger is an event in the fiction. When it comes up, you take a quick break from the fiction to make the move. You follow the instructions, then return to the fiction with whatever new information the move has provided.

## EXAMPLE MOVE: SCHMOOZE

**When you tell an NPC what you think they want to hear**, roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they'll do something simple for you, or something big and complex if you give them a payment, favour, or bribe. On a 7-9 they'll do something simple in exchange for a payment, favour, or bribe.

In this example move the trigger is **when you tell an NPC what you think they want to hear**. So when Lindsay the Assistant Professor assures her supervisor that yes, she's got everything under control, and yes, she's on top of his lab work and will have the results tomorrow... well, she's telling him what she thinks he wants to hear, so the move triggers.

There are two rules for triggers. The first is 'to do it, do it'. If you want to *schmooze* someone, you have to do what the trigger says; you have to tell them what you think they want to hear. If you're giving them brutal honesty, that's not *schmooze*, and you don't get to roll to see if they'll do you a favour.

The second rule is 'if you do it, you do it'. If you're talking to someone and telling them whatever you think they want to hear, then you're *schmoozing* them. On the plus side, you might roll well and get a favour. On the negative side, you might roll badly and then the MC gets to do bad things to your character. However, you are allowed to walk back from this *before rolling* if you didn't really mean to make the move: "Oh! I wasn't telling him what I thought he wanted to hear, I just thought he'd appreciate knowing that his car was possessed by a demon."

Once the dice hit the table, though, it's too late to back out. You're committed.

The result of *schmooze* is "roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they'll do something simple for you, or something big and complex if you give them a payment, favour or bribe. On a 7-9 they'll do something simple in exchange for a payment, favour, or bribe." There's a lot going on here, so let's break it down.

"Roll +Charisma" means roll two dice, add them together, then add your Charisma rating (which will be a number between -1 and +2; see page 10 for more about abilities). If the sum total is 6 or less, that's a **miss**. Misses give the MC an opportunity to make one of *their* moves, and that's going to suck for you. Some moves let you do things on a miss anyway, but the MC still gets their go. If the total is 7 or higher, that's a **hit**. Typically a 10 or higher gets you a **strong hit**, where you get exactly what you want, how you want it, and 7-9 is a **weak hit** where you get some of what you want, or all of what you want plus a helping of trouble.

Going back to *schmooze*, you can see that the strong hit means "they'll do something simple for you, or something big and complex if you give them a payment, favour or bribe". And that's now true. You go back to the conversation knowing that this is now the case. If Lindsay the Assistant Professor hits a 10+ on her *schmooze* then she can ask her supervisor for a little thing and he'll just do it for her. Alternatively, she can ask for something big and he might still do it, but he'll want something from her as well.

On the other hand, if Lindsay only ekes out a weak hit, she can still ask for little things and stand a chance of getting them, but she's going to have to trade her services for his.

## ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

Sometimes you'll see something that gives you **advantage** or **disadvantage**. When you have advantage on a move, instead of rolling two dice you roll three dice and take the two highest for your total. When you have disadvantage, you roll three dice and take the two lowest.

Advantage and disadvantage don't 'stack' with themselves. You could have advantage from one source or twenty, but you still only roll three dice and take the top two. Likewise for disadvantage.

When you have both advantage and disadvantage, they cancel each other out and you roll normally. It doesn't matter how many sources of each you have; one advantage cancels any amount of disadvantage and vice versa.

## HOLD

Some moves have instructions like “hold 2”. Hold is a sort of nebulous currency that can later be spent to achieve certain effects – moves which grant hold will also offer you a variety of ways to spend that hold or, in some cases, notes on what happens when you have a certain amount. You can hang on to hold for as long as you like, but hold is specific to each move that generates it: you can’t spend hold from *practical demonstration* (page 62) to power *publish or perish* (page 41), for example.

## COMPULSIONS

Some moves are **compulsions** – these are moves which take control of another character and compel them to act in a certain way. Some are persuasion, some are outright mind control. These moves are marked with a tag and an icon, to make them clear:



COMPULSION

When you use a move like this on an NPC they work as written. Player characters are different, though: when you successfully use a compulsion on a player character, the player of the target can choose one of the following options:

- Reject the compulsion and act as they see fit. (An explanation of how or why the compulsion fails is appreciated but not required.)
- Act as the compulsion dictates and mark experience.

## THE ABILITIES

There are four **abilities** in *Pigsmove*, each with a value ranging from +2 (good) to -1 (oh dear). The abilities are Bureaucracy, Charisma, Research, and Sorcery.

Speaking generally, Bureaucracy is used primarily to extract resources from the university, Charisma covers interpersonal interaction and teaching students in class, Research is used to uncover new knowledge and write academic papers, and Sorcery is for the casting of spells.

However, the various playbooks have alternative uses for the various abilities, so when prioritising them during character generation you should pay attention to which ones are favoured by your role and department.

# STUFF

Characters are assumed to have the usual accoutrements of modern American academic life, including but not limited to:

- A cellphone, probably smart.
- A laptop, old but good enough. (Stickers optional.)
- All the occult paraphernalia you might need for everyday spellcasting.
- A reasonable apartment or a cruddy house.
- Some sort of personal vehicle or a detailed knowledge of local public transport.
- Debt. (Either student debt or credit card debt, depending on your age.)

Your department provides you with access to:

- A tiny cupboard of an office.
- A classroom where you hold your lectures.
- Something else that you choose when you choose your department.

How you decorate your classroom shows off your nature; your department playbook offers several examples, which you can either take verbatim or use as fuel for your own ideas.

You can upgrade your apartment to 'nice', your house to 'reasonable', or your office to 'spacious' if you share it with someone who makes your life difficult. Not necessarily someone awful, mind you, just someone who makes demands on your time and capacity to cope. If you do, name this person and tell everyone who they are.

Anything else must either be requisitioned from the university with the *purchase order* move, borrowed, stolen, or otherwise acquired in game.

## HOW DOES STUFF WORK?

Stuff doesn't usually offer much in terms of bonuses to die rolls. Instead it enhances what's known as **fictional positioning**: a simple concept with a slightly intimidating name, best explained by an example. For instance, Aisling wants to get out to a secluded spot in the gloomy forests near campus. If she has a car, that's simple – her player just says "I drive out to the secluded spot" and it happens. If she *doesn't* have a car, then she can't do that. She'll need to walk, if it's close enough, or get somebody to give her a ride. The fictional positioning of her having or not having a car affects her possible actions without affecting her moves or die rolls.



Magical artefacts can be a little more complex, but follow the same basic pattern. For example, the Sceptre of Sandoval allows you to ask three questions of any skull you tap with it. If Aisling had the Sceptre she could just tap a skull with it and get quizzing – but without the Sceptre she’s dependent on *cast a spell* or other methods should she want to interrogate somebody’s severed head.

## CHARACTER CREATION

There are two kinds of character in *Pigsmoke*: Each non-MC player controls a **player character** (PC), which is built using the following rules; the MC controls everyone else, referred to **non-player characters** (NPCs), and they follow different rules. Player characters might also acquire **teaching assistants** (TAs), which function sort of like PCs but have their own special rules (page 18).

The creation of a player character is a six step process, with two additional steps meant to flesh out the departments and the Dean.



## 1. PLAYBOOKS

Choose two playbooks: one role and one department. There can be no more than one of each role playbook among the characters, but you can have as many members of any given department as players want to play. If more than one player wants a particular role, talk about it like adults and see if one of you is willing to choose an alternative.

## 2. DETAILS

Choose your name, look, and classroom details from among those suggested in your playbooks. These are suggestions meant to let you jump right into playing if you're short on inspiration, so feel free to come up with your own details if you have better ideas.

## 3. FULFILMENT CRITERION

Choose a fulfilment criterion for recovering burnout from among those provided by your department playbook.

## 4. ABILITIES

Assign +2, +1, 0, and -1 to the four abilities: Bureaucracy, Charisma, Research and Sorcery.

## 5. STARTING MOVES

Choose two starting moves, one from each playbook you have.

## 6. QUESTIONS

Each playbook will have some character creation questions on it. One player at a time, pick two questions from one of your playbooks and one from the other, read them aloud, and answer them.

## 7. YOUR DEPARTMENT

Following the character creation questions, each player will each have the opportunity to say one true thing about their department. This is covered in more depth on page 81.

## 8. THE DEAN

As a group, answer the questions about the Dean. These can be found on page 79.

# ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLANS

When characters *teach* or *publish*, they will often be told to mark experience, which just means check off one of the boxes on their experience track. When you have filled in five boxes, choose one of the following two options:

- Take an Advance from the below list and erase all marked experience.
- Erase one experience and advance the tenure track by one.

When the tenure track has ten marks, you gain access to the final Advance: Gain Tenure. When you gain tenure your character becomes a permanent member of the faculty, which is as close to winning the game as you can get. You'll have to make a new character – perhaps based on your TA if you have one – if you want to keep playing.

## ADVANCES

Advances can only be taken a certain number of times each, indicated by the number of boxes next to each option. Check off a box each time you take that Advance.

- Recover all burnout boxes.
- Gain a teaching assistant.
- Gain a move from your department playbook.
- Gain a move from your role playbook.
- Gain a move from a role or department playbook which no player is using.
- Improve an ability by +1. (Max +2)
- Gain an artefact with a minor magical effect.
- Gain a second Stuff choice from your department playbook.
- Improve one of your existing items in some way.

If you choose to gain an artefact, you should work with the MC to determine what it is, what it does, and how you came to be its owner. Taking an artefact as an advance doesn't guarantee that you'll always have the artefact – you could lose it, break it, sell it, etc. – but it does make it *yours*, at least to start with. The basic assumption is that it's legitimately yours, but even if you stole it the previous owner will turn out to be unable or unwilling to make the effort required to get it back. That's what differentiates taking an artefact as an advance from simply stealing one in play.

# THE INEXORABLE PASSAGE OF TIME

Sorcerous intervention notwithstanding, there are only so many hours in the day – and you need to spend at least some of those eating and sleeping. The MC will handle most of the detail regarding the passage of time, but the basics you need to know are these:

- Some moves are tagged **time-consuming**. You can only do one of these per in-game week.



TIME-CONSUMING

- As time moves on, events will proceed with or without your input. Sometimes, these events will be bad for you.

More about the way time works can be found on page 106.

## RESEARCH

At least part of the player characters' job is advancing knowledge in their field – and they get to mark experience whenever they publish a paper, which is a nice added incentive. In order to do research a player character must select a **research topic** and write it down with a track of six boxes next to it. Characters can have as many research topics on the go as they like, but must uncover new topics through the use of moves (usually *delve deeper*).

The usual way to fill research tracks is with *delve deeper* (see page 20) but there are other ways. The most common is recruiting a co-author or six. Player character co-authors can add the research topic to their sheet and roll *delve deeper* to work on it just like the topic originator. NPC co-authors contribute one box as a small favour, or three boxes as a big one.

When a research track is full, any player character who contributed to it can make the *publish* move. Further contributions to the topic achieve nothing.

As a note, researching is a relatively slow way to gain experience compared to teaching, but teaching is way more stressful. Failing a *delve deeper* or *publish* move will never cause you burnout, but *teach* (page 24) can lead to a rapid breakdown if you don't have a good way to deal with aggravating students.

# BURNOUT AND HARM

There are two ways to get hurt in *Pigsmoke*. You can get into fights, adventures, or scrapes – which is ridiculous, because you’re supposed to be academics – and suffer physical **harm**. Or you can just, you know, *exist in academia* and suffer psychological **burnout**.

## HARM

The characters are academics, not adventurers. Violence is not something they should encounter in the course of their day-to-day lives. Nevertheless, getting hurt is always a risk when sorcery is involved.

**Hurt** is a specific status that can be applied to a character to indicate that they’re suffering from the physical consequences of an injury. If a *hurt* character is hurt again, they are instead **taken out**: possibly dead, possibly unconscious, possibly just in so much pain that they can’t function. Follow the fiction, and if in doubt let the player choose, but *taken out* characters can’t participate in any scenes until they somehow recover.

There are two ways to remove the *hurt* status: time or medicine, the latter normally meaning a trip to the medical wing. Characters who are *taken out* have to visit the medical wing before they can do anything else.

Other moves (such as the Department of Life and Death’s *lifestealer*) and perhaps the MC’s discretion, may allow for other ways to heal the hurt status. Very few things allow a character to come back from being taken out except a trip to the medical wing.

## TIME

Six weeks and some home-brewed alchemical remedies are sufficient to heal pretty much any instance of the *hurt* status. At the MC’s discretion some injuries might heal faster, but anything that would take longer probably counts as *taken out* rather than *hurt*. In practical terms, this means that characters who get hurt are likely to remain that way at least until the end of the scenario and probably longer.

Violence sucks!



## MEDICINE

Pigsmoke's medical wing can cure anything. *Anything*. Cuts and scrapes, broken bones, possession, uncontrollable mutation, even death. The sorcerers who work there are at the bleeding edge of their art. It's just... they're very experimental. You never go to the medical wing unless you have to, because you're never sure quite what shape you'll come back in. Literally: Your shape may change.

A trip to the medical wing removes *hurt* and reinstates any characters who have been *taken out*. It also means there might well be complications. See the *hospital hospitality* move on page 30 for details.

## BURNOUT

Every character starts as a fresh-faced staffer with nine empty burnout boxes. As the burnout boxes are filled in they become increasingly frustrated with their situation, not helped by periodic investigations into their 'wellbeing'.

**When you fill in the third burnout box**, or very soon thereafter, you are called into your head of department's office for "an informal chat". During this chat the head of department will drag up every mistake you've made, every failure or disaster that's happened on your watch, and generally berate you for incompetence, all under the guise of a concerned chat about your workload and mental health.

**When you fill in the sixth burnout box**, or very soon thereafter, your case has been escalated to the dean. This is now "a formal interview" in which the dean will, once again, lay out all of your failures and other moments when you fell short of perfection, then hold those up as an example that you're not cutting it at Pigsmoke and you need to be careful or you'll lose your job.

**When you fill in the ninth burnout box**, that's it. You either retire, are fired, or you quit right there, with just enough energy left to do one last brilliant or spiteful thing. Time for a new character.

These moves trigger every time, so if you keep hitting your fulfilment criterion *and* getting stressed over bureaucracy so you bounce between 2 and 3 filled-in burnout boxes, you'll spend a lot of time getting grilled by your head of department.

The only way to recover burnout is by satisfying your **fulfilment criterion** – a particular behavior which reinforces a character's identity and sense of place in the world of academia, or is maybe just something they enjoy doing. You will pick your fulfilment criterion from your role playbook at the beginning of the game.

## TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Every playbook has the option to gain a teaching assistant (TA). TAs are semi-player characters who can act on your behalf. This allows you to effectively be in two places at once, or to act without risking your own skin. Dependent on your department playbook, your TA may have other useful skills or qualities.

When your main character is not in the scene, you control your TA. When your main character is in the scene, the MC controls your TA in line with your portrayal. When you are controlling your TA, they trigger moves as if they were PCs: each has a single specialist move with which they roll +1, and they roll -1 with everything else.

When the MC is controlling your TA, they function like an NPC with one important exception: If you make a **COMPULSION** move against your own TA it cannot fail. If you roll a miss, bump the result up to a weak hit.

TAs can be *hurt* or *taken out* just like anyone else, but they don't suffer burnout (and can't fill in burnout boxes to satisfy move conditions).







# BASIC MOVES

All player characters have access to all of the basic moves.



## DELVE DEEPER

TIME-CONSUMING

**When you spend time poring over something or plumbing its secrets,** roll +Research. On a 10+ ask three questions from the list below. On a 7-9 ask one:

- What's the history here?
- Who do I know who might have a vested interest in this?
- What sort of people that I don't know might have a vested interest in this?
- What here is not as it appears to be?
- What could I use this for?

Instead of asking a question, you can choose to declare that you have discovered something relevant to your research. Start a new research topic on that subject.

If the thing you studied is relevant to one of your research topics, you can fill in boxes on the research track instead of asking questions on a 1-for-1 basis.

---

*Blake: "Okay, I'm going to start playing all my video games looking for more evidence of this semiotic virus thing. I want to delve deeper."*

*MC: "That's going to take a while."*

*Blake: "A week playing video games. What a chore."*

*Blake rolls Research and scores a 7.*

*Blake: "Huh. I really want to know what the history is... but eyes on the prize. What can I use this for?"*

*MC: "Well it's probably got all kinds of accessibility applications, but knowing Blake... if you infected your whole team's computers the semiotic communication would make you unstoppable at League of Legends."*

---

*Aisling: "Oh God, this place is full of cool junk. I want to search it with delve deeper."*

*MC: "Remember, delve deeper is time-consuming. You'd need a week of more or less unrestricted access and you only just managed to talk your way in here in the first place."*

*Aisling: "Damn. Yeah. Welp, time to turn the charm as high as it'll go. Who's in charge here?"*

## PUBLISH

**When a research track is full**, you can choose to publish your work. If you do, come up with a suitably academic title for the paper you've written and roll +Research. On a 10+ everyone is happy, the research is good, and all co-authors can mark experience. On a 7-9 all co-authors still mark experience, but the MC will choose one:

- Someone doesn't like your results and now it's personal. You've made an enemy.
- Your head of department is jealous and cuts your funding. Take ongoing disadvantage to all Research rolls until you somehow soothe their ego.
- The Dean reminds you "This is a teaching university." You must teach at least one class before you can *delve deeper* or *publish* again.
- It's in a low-quality journal and your reputation suffers. Take disadvantage on your next *schmooze* roll.

---

*Priya: "That last favour from my head of department will fill in the last box on this research track nicely. Let's publish 'Minimum Chant Duration Varies With Reanimated Mass'."*

*Priya rolls Research and scores an 8.*

*MC: "Well, you mark experience. But Dr Sokol thinks he should have been first author. He's going to use his leverage as your department head to cut your funding; take disadvantage to all Research rolls until you can butter him up a bit."*

---

*Phillip: "With me and five co-authors, 'Cognitive Dissonance Experienced From The Inside' is finally ready to publish."*

*Phillip rolls Research and scores a 4.*

*MC: "Oh dear. It's published alright, but... your name's not on it."*

*Phillip: "What? It's Alex, isn't it? I ask her what the hell she's playing at."*

*MC: "She looks confused. 'You were never there. Maybe you imagined it?'"*

*Phillip: "...I'm never working with Mindbenders again."*

## SCHMOOZE

**When you tell an NPC what you think they want to hear,** roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they'll do something simple for you, or something big and complex if you give them a payment, favour, or bribe. On a 7-9 they'll do something simple in exchange for a payment, favour, or bribe.

This move does not work on other PCs.

---

*Aisling: "Yeah, everything's cool Dad. Yes, I'm staying safe. No, I'm not drinking. But... you know. This archaeology business is expensive..."*

*MC: "Not mentioning the monster now resident in your closet? Or the casino thing? Or the tequila?"*

*Aisling: "I know what Daddy wants to hear. Schmooze for extra money!"*

*Aisling rolls Charisma and scores a 9.*

*MC: "He'll transfer the money right away. But... he's going to come down for a visit this weekend. He wants to see his little girl. Also what his money's paying for."*

*Aisling: "Hum. Time to paint over the eldritch sigils?"*

*MC: "For starters."*

---

*MC: "The Dean stands in your office wearing an approximately human shape. It looks at you with its alien eyes and you catch something that's probably... displeasure."*

*Blake: "Gack. No, wait, the Dean can't resist a challenge, right? I challenge it to a game of Smash Brothers. No items, Final Destination. Can I roll schmooze for that?"*

*MC: "I don't think you even need to roll. The Dean can't resist a challenge so when you challenge it, it's going to accept. The question just becomes... how good are you at Smash Brothers? And is that good enough to beat an entity to whom linear time is a quaint curiosity?"*

*Blake: "It is if I can trick it into picking Dedede or someone."*



## SCATHE

### COMPULSION

**When you give someone a piece of your mind**, roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they choose one:

- Cringe or cower.
- Flee your presence.
- Give you something they think you want.

On a 7-9 the target of your ire still has to choose one, but someone important witnesses or learns of your rudeness. They are not pleased.

If you try to *scathe* someone with leverage or authority over you, you do so with disadvantage.

---

*Phillip: "So I've got the evidence? And it's just us two here?"*

*MC: "Yep."*

*Phillip: "My time to shine. I'm going to scathe him. Just go all Gordon Ramsey on him, pointing out everything he's doing wrong, all that."*

*Phillip rolls Charisma and scores a 12.*

*MC: "Thomas looks terrified... but he talks fast. 'Look, look,' he says. 'It wasn't just the cash I grabbed. There was some sort of alchemical formula there as well...' He's hinting that he'll hand it over if you just stop calling him names."*

*Phillip: "Nice. Alchemy's not really my thing, but I'm sure I can find a use for it."*

---

*Lindsay: "Oh for... forget it. I'm going to tell this dragon exactly where she can get off, consequences be damned. I am the vet. I know best."*

*MC: "She's significantly more powerful than you; you'll be at disadvantage."*

*Lindsay: "Don't care."*

*Lindsay rolls Charisma at disadvantage and scores a 7.*

*MC: "Well, she's not going to cringe or flee, so I guess she'll give you what you want and promise to take her medication. But... I think that the important person who isn't happy is her. Once she's had time to stop being shocked, she's going to be properly angry with you."*

## TEACH

**When you teach a lecture or seminar,** roll +Charisma. On a 10+ everything goes according to plan and you can mark experience. On a 7-9 still mark experience, but one of your students will visit your office with a complication or a difficult question. If you don't sort them out the resulting stress or complaints will cause you to mark a burnout box.

You can't roll *teach* more than once per week. Other lectures and seminars just aren't as dramatically interesting.

---

*Priya: "Ugh. I hate teaching 101 courses. It's all gen ed students and future dropouts until you get to the advanced stuff. Let's get it over with."*

*Priya rolls Charisma and scores a 7.*

*MC: "Okay, the lecture goes well enough, mark experience. But the next day one of your students – let's call her Abigail – rocks up at your office hours with a question. It seems what you taught is directly contradictory to the course text."*

*Priya: "But I'm right, yeah?"*

*MC: "Sure. But since the exam's being set from the text you can either be right, or you can be responsible for the whole class dropping those marks."*



## PURCHASE ORDER

**When you fill in a purchase order for something,** roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ all three, on a 7-9 choose 2.

- You don't need to offer anything in exchange.
- You get exactly what you asked for.
- You get it right now.

---

*Mercy: "I've got no time to wait around for this stuff. I'll try and source it through the college."*

*Mercy rolls Bureaucracy and scores a 7.*

*Mercy: "Great. This is supposed to be my specialty. Um... well, I need the powder right now, and I don't want to find out what happens if I use the wrong material in the binding circle, so I guess I have to offer something in exchange?"*

*MC: "Yeah. Carla in purchasing knows exactly how much of a barrel she's got you over, so she's going to skewer you: she wants you to babysit for an evening."*

*Mercy: "Let me guess? The evening of the ritual?"*

*MC: "Yup. She doesn't know about it, she just wants to go on a date with her husband."*

*Mercy: "How old's the kid?"*

*MC: "Like, six."*

*Mercy: "I'll bring him along! Kid's gotta see his first binding sooner or later."*

---

*Lindsay: "So I have to feed the goose exactly the right diet if I want the golden eggs? And I know what that is? Fine. I'll purchase order for it."*

*Lindsay rolls Bureaucracy and gets a 6.*

*Lindsay: "Damn. So close. And yet..."*

*MC: "Well, you ordered the right stuff. And it came in a box with the right label on it. But when you come into the department the next morning, the goose is dead."*

*Lindsay: "WHAT?!"*

*MC: "Turns out what was in the box was never meant for geese. Or biological life at all, really."*





## RED TAPE

**When you interact with Pigmoke's nightmarish bureaucracy,** say what you're trying to do – deflect attention, compel the school to provide a service, or crush your enemies – and roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ you get what you want. On a 7-9 you still get what you want but pick one:

- It'll be TIME-CONSUMING.
- You need to do something for someone else in return.
- The stress causes you to mark a burnout box.

*Mercy: "Oh, that scumbag. He works some sort of admin job, right?"*

*MC: "Yeah, in accounts."*

*Mercy: "Excellent. I'll have the department servitors start making spurious purchase orders for a penny each time, directed right to his desk."*

*Mercy rolls Bureaucracy and scores a 9.*

*Mercy: "Hm. I'll owe a favour to the servitors, since this isn't exactly their bound purpose. Plus owing favours to extraplanar creatures who resent you is never a bad plan. In the meantime, the purchases will continue until I get my parking space back."*



## CAST A SPELL

**When you use your magic to solve a problem or remove an obstacle**, roll +Sorcery. If the type of magic you're working is outside your department's area of expertise, roll at disadvantage. On a hit the magic works and the problem is solved. On a 10+ choose one unintended consequence. On a 7-9 choose two:

- Your solution becomes someone else's problem.
  - The magic is short-lived or otherwise temporary.
  - The magic affects far more than you intended.
  - Something goes wrong, and you get *hurt*.
- 

*Priya: "No problem. Magic destroyed my neighbour's garage, magic will replace my neighbour's garage."*

*MC: "That's not quite within the Life and Death area of expertise, though..."*

*Priya: "Yeah... oh, I know! There's a graveyard down the street; plenty of unpaid manual labour there for an experienced necromancer like myself."*

*Priya rolls Sorcery and scores an 8.*

*Priya: "Well, the obvious problem is that zombies don't know how to build garages. So the solution is going to look okay, but it's going to fall down the next time there's a strong wind or something. Not sure about the other one..."*

*MC: "How about the classic 'too many zombies' problem? They're out there, walking the night..."*

*Priya: "Wildly irresponsible! Works for me."*

---

*Blake: "The only way I'm going to get all this done tonight is with a little trick I learned from computers: I'm going to multi-thread my own mind."*

*MC: "This can only go well."*

*Blake rolls Sorcery and scores a 5.*

*MC: "I'm nice, so I'll give you a choice: mark a burnout box to hold it together, or wake up two days from now with no clear memory of what you did. Hint: it's all bad."*

*Blake: "Someone hand me a pencil. Burnout box over fugue state, every time."*

## ADVENTURING

**When you risk physical danger**, say what you're trying to achieve and roll +nothing. On a 10+ choose 2, on a 7-9 choose 1.

- You don't get *hurt*.
- You come out of it looking good.
- You get whatever it is you were after.

---

MC: "The police have got their guns out. They're looking for you, and there's no way you can get from where you are to the treeline without being seen. What do you do?"

Phillip: "There are times in a man's life when 'I told you so' just doesn't seem emphatic enough. Ugh. I run for it."

MC: "Roll adventuring."

Phillip rolls and scores a 7.

Phillip: "Good enough. I don't care about looking good, I just want to get away. I'll take the hurting."

MC: "Sure thing. You wait until the officers are looking the other way, then sprint for the trees – and they don't see you! You're away clean. Then you get into the trees, fail to see the sudden drop, and bounce down about thirty feet of slope. By the time you stagger home about an hour later you're muddy, scratched up, your clothes are shredded, and you feel like one giant bruise."

---

MC: "You have no idea what the runes mean. They look very... runic."

Aisling: "Huh. Well, it's only someone's lunch. How bad could it be? Yoink."

MC: "It's as bad as someone who's very sick of you stealing their lunch. Roll adventuring."

Aisling: "But I need their mystery condiment!"

Aisling rolls and scores a 10.

Aisling: "Nice. I'm not about to get hurt stealing fancy ketchup, and I want the fancy ketchup, so I'll choose those two."

MC: "Okay, you gingerly remove Dr Sokol's lunch from its protective wards and walk off with it. And Dr Trevelyan sees the whole thing."

Aisling: "Ah. Well, I'll flash her my dimples as I make an exit. Bye!"

## A SMALL, INCESTUOUS WORLD

**When you eat or drink in a public place on campus**, roll +nothing. On a 10+ choose one:

- You run into someone unexpected.
- You get wind of some news which will affect your department.
- You see two other faculty members doing something out of the ordinary.

On a 7-9 choose one of these instead:

- You run into someone you'd really rather have avoided.
- You catch wind of some *bad* news that will affect your department.
- You see two other faculty members doing something highly dubious, and you are implicated or drawn in.

On a 6- it's even worse.

---

*Mercy: "I know I'm going to regret this, but after that I desperately need a drink. I'll find the closest pub and hole up in a quiet corner."*

*MC: "That's drinking in public on campus..."*

*Mercy: "I know, I know."*

*Mercy rolls and scores a 12.*

*Mercy: "Nice. Could have used that about twenty minutes ago. I'll bump into someone unexpected."*

*MC: "Hum. Aisling, you're teetotal, right? So what are you doing in the Drinking Hole?"*

*Aisling: "Uh... stealing something. That seems like me. Oh, no, better idea: I'm selling one of the skulls I looted. To Mr Book."*

*Mercy: "So I see you, like, in a booth, with a shady guy who never takes off his sunglasses and smells like burning, and you're handing him a skull?"*

*Aisling: "Pretty much."*

*Mercy: "I'll slip into the seat next to you, so you can't get out. 'Aisling. What the hell are you doing?"*

*MC: "Mr Book takes this as his cue to leave..."*

## HOSPITAL HOSPITALITY

**When you are treated in the medical wing**, roll +nothing. On a 10+ you're back to your old self again! Like nothing happened. On a 7-9 you're more or less okay; choose one:

- You're fine, but you've got a strange cosmetic mutation.
- You're fine, but you owe someone a favour for helping fix you up.
- You're fine, but you weren't discharged; you escaped, and the orderlies are coming for you.
- You're *not* fine. You're still *hurt*, and the medical wing cannot help you further. You'll have to heal from here the old-fashioned way.

On a miss, the MC will choose at least one of the above options, plus any other consequences they dream up.

---

MC: "That's the thing about fantastic beasts. They can really do a number on you if you screw up."

Lindsay: "Ow. I suppose it's the medical wing for me, right?"

MC: "Yup. Roll it."

Lindsay rolls and scores a 9.

Lindsay: "Oh dear. Um. Owing someone a favour seems like the best option."

MC: "Okay. So, when you wake up you're not in a hospital room. You're in some sort of basement. All kinds of medical and chemical equipment jammed in all around – almost certainly stolen. And there's a person there, who perks up when they hear you come round."

Lindsay: "'Where am I?'"

MC: "'I saved you. Got you out before the senior professors got the experimental stuff fired up, fixed you up.' They seem a bit twitchy. 'Figured I could go freelance, get a bit of quid pro quo, yeah?'"

Lindsay: "'...like what?'"

MC: "'An alicorn would be perfect. Can you get me one?'"

Lindsay: "Alicorns are pretty harmless, right?"

MC: "Well you could stab someone with one..."

Lindsay: "I'll risk it. 'Sure.'"

## SOME NOTES ON VIVIMANCER-INDUCED TRANSITION

So, we know Vivimancers march to the beat of their own otherworldly drum in how they practice magic medicine. You take what they give you, roll those cosmic dice, and hope for the best—specifically, hoping “the best” doesn’t include tentacles you didn’t have before.

But in coming up with “miss” related side-effects for the medical wing treatment move, there’s a temptation for GMs to fall back on one of the oldest jokes about magic in tabletop RPGs: forcing a gender/sex change on someone. If you decide to go this route, here are a couple of issues you might want to think about.

First: consider that simply playing this for laughs is an extremely played out joke that got old when we were still excited/outraged about the 3.0 update to D&D. It may also hurt someone at your table or make them feel like they’re just a joke and otherwise unwelcome.

Secondly, this isn’t to say you *shouldn’t* tell this kind of story, but if you do, it should follow good GM practice in general by a) collaborating with your players to ensure they consent to the changes and b) trying to tell an original and meaningful story. As any transgender person will tell you, there is a lot of (often dark) humour to be found in their lives, but it doesn’t come from the classic “haha that’s a man in a dress!” or “ooh, let me play with my new boobies” gag you see in countless TV shows and films.

Instead, take your inspiration from the world of Pigmoke itself. If you decided to make the gender order of your Pigmoke fairly patriarchal, perhaps explore how a faculty member being vivimanced from male to female leads them to be more frequently disrespected, talked-over, or pushed around. Or, if the player is really invested in their gender identity, it’s an opportunity to explore gender dysphoria – the deep seated sense that there is something viscerally wrong with your sexed body; does dysphoria hinder job performance? Scuttle the forthcoming publication of a paper? Or does it make the player single-mindedly seek a solution to the exclusion of other necessary work?

Or what if the player actually likes the change and wants to retain it? Perhaps you as a GM could collaborate with a player who wants their character's gender to change, and to RP the difficulties of gender transition in an academic environment. Go for it! Perhaps a vivimancy "accident" gives them the kick in the pants they need to finally transition.

Another alternative is to look deeper into the vivimancer's fell experiments themselves. After all, many of the side-effects they impose on their patients/victims are *intentional*. Why would they impose a gender/sex change on someone? What experiment are they conducting? Is the faculty member being watched afterwards by a department secretly conducting social science research on gender expression?

The long and short of it is that there are lots of ways to tell a story about a magically induced change to one's gender without making a bad joke about real transgender people; in the process you might be able to tell a new and interesting story altogether.





# ROLE PLAYBOOKS

# THE GIT

*"If the students aren't scared of you, you're doing it wrong."*

The Git specialises in dealing with students by intimidating them into submission, advancing up the tenure track through diligent research and making it clear to anyone in their classes that the feedback forms are *totally anonymous* and on the off chance they did somehow find out who gave them a bad write-up there's *no way* they'd bear a grudge and ruin that student's future.

The Git is good at getting things done, but often risks retribution from the people they tread on while pursuing their goals. Even students sometimes seek revenge, and at a magical college like Pigsmoke that can escalate quickly.

## Name

Amin or Amina El-Hashem  
Charles or Meredith Grabbe  
Gerhardt or Katrin Schreier

## Attitude

distant contempt  
scathing mockery  
belligerent shouting  
the Stare of Death



## QUESTIONS

- Who did you drive out of their office to make it your office?
- Who can get past your defenses, every time?
- Which one of your students is untouchable? Why?

## MOVES

### FEARSOME RECORD

**When you browbeat someone with your academic credentials,** roll *scathe* +Research instead of +Charisma. You can also gain advantage on any *scathe* roll by marking a burnout box.

---

### A VERY EFFICIENT MONSTER

**When you reduce someone to tears,** you can perform another TIME-CONSUMING action this week. You can only trigger this move once per week.

---

### SILENCE!

COMPULSION

**When other people are talking and you demand silence,** if you mark a burnout box, you get it. If you follow this up with a move that capitalises on the sudden quiet, you have advantage on that move.

At the MC's discretion, the Dean and entities of similar power may be unaffected by this move. If no-one is affected, the marked burnout box is refunded.

---

### THREATS

**When you need to do someone else a favour to pay for a move,** you can choose to make the favour "I won't subject you to my ire." If you do, then the NPC will do what you want right now, but will return to complicate your life later.

This can potentially affect *red tape*, *schmooze*, *purchase order* and some other moves.

---

### MY DOOR IS ALWAYS CLOSED

COMPULSION

**When in your office with the door closed,** the only people who would dare interrupt you are the Dean or your head of department. Everyone else who needs to talk to you will have to wait outside, secure an invitation to enter, or catch you elsewhere.

---

### DRAG THEM DOWN

**When you scathe someone,** they cannot choose to cringe or cower – instead they have access to the following option:

- Attack you, physically or verbally, right here and now.



# THE NETWORKER

*"No problem. I know just the person."*

The Networker knows people. They seem to have half the western world on their Facebook friends list, and some uncanny ability to keep all those people separate in their head.

Networkers are experts at getting other people to do things for them, although their social obligations often leave them without the time to do their actual jobs.

## **Name**

Govinda or Priya Chowdhury

Nobu or Kiku Takenaka

Liam or Emma Webb

## **Attitude**

open and friendly

winning smile

in a lot of clubs

giant folder of blackmail



## **QUESTIONS**

- Who's been digging into your social media accounts looking for something shameful? What have they found?
- You owe one of your students a favour. How did that happen?
- You've got dirt on an NPC in your department. Who is it? What's the dirt?

## MOVES

### WHO ARE ALL THESE PEOPLE?

With 24 hours notice you can arrange for about a hundred people – vague acquaintances, friends of friends of friends, randoms from social media – to converge on a given spot at a given time. Once there they'll hang around for a few minutes or perform a brief flash-mob-like activity then disperse, unless there's something else going on to hold their interest.

---

### HELPFUL

You can accumulate favours 'in advance' by doing good deeds for people, then use those favours to pay for the *schmooze*, *red tape*, and *purchase order* moves. You can hold at most one favour per person.

---

### ACTIVE SOCIAL LIFE

TIME-CONSUMING

**When you spend every night this week socialising**, roll +Charisma. On a 10+ you meet a friend of a friend who just happens to be able to offer significant assistance with a problem you're having. On a 7-9 you either meet a friend of a friend with a useful skill set that you don't need right now, or you meet someone with a perfect skill set for right now but who's a real asshole.

---



### PROFESSIONAL TIES

**When you successfully publish a paper**, you can automatically bring in one of your NPC co-authors as a 'one-box' co-author on the next research topic you start.

---

### TELL ME EVERYTHING

COMPULSION

**When you spend time chatting and gossiping with someone**, roll +Charisma. On a hit they'll tell you a secret, either about themselves or someone else. You choose who, the MC will tell you what. On a 7-9, though, you have to give up a secret yourself in order to earn their confidence.

---



### COVER FOR ME?

You can *schmooze* someone just by flat-out asking them for a favour. If you do this, you can only ever get a small favour out of them; the 10+ option to offer a trade and get a big favour is off the table.

# THE POLITICIAN

"If you want to get ahead, you've got to play the game – the right game."

The Politician is a careerist, with one eye firmly on their tenure, and they play the bureaucracy and the greater structure of the university to get what they want. They know who holds the keys to power, which forms permit which behaviours, and how to secure their gains against competitors.

The Politician doesn't care much about research or teaching except as such things further their career.

## Name

Oluwayemi or Abeni Afolayan  
Ramiro or Reina Medina  
Jack or Karen Parish

## Attitude

professional  
shark-like  
driven by demons metaphorical or literal  
just waiting for that inevitable betrayal

## MOVES



### SUDDEN CONFERENCE

TIME-CONSUMING

**When you want to disappear in a hurry**, roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ you've managed to secure a place at a conference suitably far away. You'll be back next week, when the greater part of the trouble has blown over. On a 7-9 you've got your tickets but there's a problem; choose one:

- Your flight out is in 24 hours; you'll have to stall whatever's happening until you can escape.
- The conference is somewhere dangerous; you'll come back *hurt*. (If you're already *hurt*, you'll be straight off to the medical wing when you get back.)
- You didn't get away with it clean; take an ongoing disadvantage to all Bureaucracy moves until you successfully *teach* or *publish*.
- You'll need to do someone in admin a favour when you get back.

## WEATHERVANE

**When something big is happening in administration or one of the departments**, you know about it. You can ask one question from the following list and the MC must give you a *full* answer. No secrets.

- Who's involved?
- What's happened so far?
- What's the next big move going to be?

## WEAPONISED PAPERWORK

**When you roll red tape to destroy your enemies**, you have advantage.

---

## TEFLON

**When something bad is obviously, undeniably your fault**, make an excuse – any excuse – and nothing sticks. You'll come out of the whole thing smelling, if not of roses, then at least exactly the same way you usually smell. Individuals may remember what you did, but as far as the university is concerned you did nothing wrong.

This move works *once*. You can 'recharge' it by choosing to do so the next time you gain an Advance, in place of any other Advance.

---

## HOSTAGE-TAKER

Any paper you are a co-author of cannot *publish* unless you allow it.

---

## THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

**When someone is out to get you**, roll +Charisma. On a 10+ you find someone else who hates your enemy, and they're willing to help you out for nothing more than the satisfaction of thwarting their rival. On a 7-9 you still find an ally but choose one:

- They're willing to help you out, but are relatively powerless.
- They won't budge without you doing something for them first.
- Their enemies become your enemies.



## QUESTIONS

- You've got a rival with just as strong a power base as you. Who?
- The Dean hates you – you, personally – and wants you to fail. Why?
- You owe someone a big favour. Who are they, and what did they do for you?



# THE ROCKSTAR

*"I'm sorry, do I make you feel mediocre?"*

The Rockstar is always brilliant, usually young, and often arrogant. They burst through boundaries, ignore restrictions, and scrape through appraisals and disciplinary proceedings on the sheer strength of their work. So long as they keep publishing high-quality incisive content, they're basically untouchable - but that talent comes with a cost that even the rockstar must pay.

## Name

Benoit or Mélisande Belmont

Theodore or Caroline King

Guanyu or Yahui Wen

## Attitude

genuinely cool

mind like a razor

anarchist

fusion-powered ego



## QUESTIONS

- Who is jealous of your success?
- Who is trying to ride your coat-tails?
- What wildly irresponsible thing were you doing with the undergrads last weekend?

## MOVES

The Rockstar gets *publish or perish* as a free bonus move.

### PUBLISH OR PERISH

**When you are the author or co-author of a successfully published paper,** hold 1. When one of your superiors tries to discipline you, spend this hold to get away with, at worst, a slap on the wrist.

You can never hold more than 1 for this move.

Whenever you would have to spend *publish or perish* hold, you can choose to mark a burnout box instead.

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### INADVISABLE STIMULANTS

**When you jack yourself up with excessive or dangerous stimulants,** you become *hurt* and gain 1 hold for *publish or perish*. If you were already *hurt* you are *taken out*, but not until the end of the scene (giving you a chance to spend that hold to achieve something before you're whisked off to the medical wing).

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### BY THE LIGHT OF BURNING BRIDGES

**When someone discovers just how thoroughly you've betrayed their trust,** you gain 1 hold for *publish or perish*.

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### TRAILBLAZING

You can spend hold from *publish or perish* to immediately start a new research topic.

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### CUTTING EDGE TOOLS

**When you make a purchase order,** you can spend hold from *publish or perish* after the roll to bump your success up one category: from a miss to a weak hit, or from a weak hit to a strong hit.

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### APPLIED THEORY

**When you** cast a spell, you can spend hold from *publish or perish* after the roll to bump your success up one category: from a miss to a weak hit, or from a weak hit to a strong hit.

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### TALK THE TALK

**When you** schmooze or scathe **a student or TA,** you have advantage.

# THE SLACKER

*"No one ever got anywhere by working hard."*

The lazy don't typically last long in academia or sorcery - but the Slacker makes up for their shockingly low research output and lax approach to seminars through a keen sense of the absolute minimum required effort and a well-honed gift for making their problems into other people's problems.

## Name

Ray or Lisa Keller  
Premsyl or Zita Sokol  
An or Huan Xu

## Attitude

checked out  
crippling anxiety  
way too many other irons in the fire  
420 smoke weed erryday

## MOVES



### BUSY DOING NOTHING

TIME-CONSUMING

**When you take it easy for a week**, roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ choose two, on a 7-9 choose one:

- Recover a burnout box.
- You have an interesting thought; start a new research topic.
- Someone covers for you or fulfils one of your obligations, but now you owe them. You choose the obligation you just got out of, the MC chooses the person you're now indebted to.
- You overhear a secret, a promising rumour, or interesting fact. The MC will tell you what.

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### EVERYTHING I KNOW, I LEARNED BY DOING GROUP PROJECTS

**When you are required to teach a class**, you can instead assign a group project. If you do, this counts as an automatic 7-9 on *teach* without needing to roll.

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### EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENT

**When you try to get your students to do something for you by disguising it as academic work**, roll +Charisma. On a 10+ you get all three, on a 7-9 choose two.

- They don't realise you're scamming them.
- They do it right.
- They do it fast.

## SELF-INDULGENT

When you first take this move, choose a second fulfilment condition from your department. You get the benefits of both.

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## STRATEGIC INCOMPETENCE

**When you try to get out of doing something for your superiors,** tell the story of how badly you screwed it up last time and roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ they'll let you choose a different task instead. On a 7-9 they'll *assign* you a different task.

However the move turns out, you gain ongoing disadvantage to this move until you actually do something you were asked to do, within the deadline, to a reasonable standard.

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## THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

Your magical expertise expands to include animating objects, or automating or simplifying a tedious task.



## QUESTIONS

- What piece of work haven't you started yet, despite the deadline being tomorrow?
- Who in your department is wise to your ways, and not very happy about them?
- Which one of your friends is tired of you letting them down?

# THE FAKE

"The mark of true power is never having to display it. Right? Yeah."

The Fake isn't magical. They can't cast spells. They may be a genuine academic?

## Name

Temitope or Monifa Bankole  
Simon or Rebecca Joiner  
Surinder or Abhilasha Patil

## Attitude

out of your depth  
proving a point  
on a mission  
completely oblivious

## MOVES

The Fake gains *not actually a wizard* as a free bonus move.

## NOT ACTUALLY A WIZARD

**When you roll +Sorcery for any reason**, mark experience and the move misses.

You can trigger the *cast a spell* move by trying to cast a spell or use magic, even though you're guaranteed to fail.

You can only take the following moves from the department playbooks:

- Department of Life and Death: *dissectionist, feel my power, priest*
- Department of Mindbending: *charm offensive, hypnosis*
- Department of Foresight: *fortune teller, portentous*
- Department of Elements: *expert, opinionated*
- Department of Alchemy: *I've got what you need, minted, playing the game, self-sufficient*
- Department of CABSA: *devil in the details, extraplanar tutor, mind-blasting knowledge*
- Department of Paraveterinary Medicine: *furry friend, field experience, twitcher, elbow deep, the naked ape*
- Department of Artefacts and Relics: *foci* (although when you cast a spell matching a focus' qualities you do so with disadvantage instead of normally), *it belongs in a museum, specifically my museum, history repeats itself, wealth by level, tooled up*



## OCCULTIST

TIME-CONSUMING

**When you take significant time setting out your occult paraphernalia**, you can roll *cast a spell* +Research instead of +Sorcery, giving the magic an actual chance to hit.



## TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE

TIME-CONSUMING

**When you study someone and ask “What are they hiding?”,** roll +Research. On a 10+ you intuit something juicy about them that they’d rather you didn’t know. On a 7-9 you still get your information but choose one:

- The information you learn isn’t juicy. It’s kind of tame.
- Your study draws unwanted attention from authority.
- They notice your interest, and realise that you’re ferreting out their secrets.

If someone doesn’t have any more secrets for you to dig up, you learn that when you trigger this move.





## JUST THIS SIDE OF PLAUSIBLE

### COMPULSION

**When someone starts to wonder if you're really magical or not**, roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they reject any doubts out of hand. Of *course* you can cast spells. On a 7-9 they're still mostly convinced, but they're either going to demand proof of your spellcasting from you or start monitoring you closely for signs of being a fake (MC decides which).

This move triggers even when you're not present.

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## RUNNING ON STRESS AND CAFFEINE

You can mark a burnout box to turn a miss into a weak hit on any non-Sorcery move.

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## THE TRUTH

**When you** delve deeper on arcane matters, you roll with advantage.

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## RESOURCEFUL

**When you need an important but non-unique item**, roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ you have one either on your person or nearby and easily accessible. On a 7-9 choose one:

- You have one but it's **TIME-CONSUMING** to get.
- You have a sub-standard one.
- You know where you can get one, but it's not yours.

Exactly what constitutes "important" varies according to the fictional context. In everyday life a screwdriver isn't important – at worst you can just buy one from the local hardware store. If you're trapped in the necro-fusion lab at midnight, being stalked by campus security and/or some unspeakable beast from a neighbouring reality... well, *now* that screwdriver might be important.

## QUESTIONS

- What are you even doing at Pigmoke?
- Who is close to discovering your secret?
- Who knows your secret? And why don't they tell?

# THE ALBATROSS

*"What's good for them is good for me. What's bad for them is also good for me."*

The Albatross is one of those unspeakably annoying people who seem to succeed entirely by clinging on to the coat tails of others. They produce almost nothing of substance, and when convinced to do some actual work they prefer to coast on what little they've done for as long as possible.

The stress of carrying the Albatross can quickly add up for the poor unfortunate they've chosen as their ticket to greatness, encouraging them to give the aggravating little toad exactly what they want just to make them go away. However, if their skein of lies and buzzwords starts to unravel the Albatross can quickly be revealed for the deadweight they are.

## Name

Chinonso or Gbemisola Baratunde  
Chad or Kelly Spencer  
Hugo or Fortunata Aldana

## Attitude

smarm  
easily overlooked  
go big or go home  
a smile that never reaches the eyes

## MOVES

### COASTING

#### COMPULSION

If you're the lead author on a successfully published paper, hold 1.

**When you play up your previous contributions to your field to someone who might be interested,** spend 1 hold and roll +Charisma. On a hit the person you're talking to will do you a small favour. On a 7-9, it's wearing a bit thin. Choose one:

- Spend 1 additional hold.
- You'll have to do something for them first.
- Take disadvantage on this move until you're the lead author on a successfully published paper again.

If you cannot spend the required hold for this move, it automatically misses.

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## VULTURE

**When someone you can see misses a roll, gets humiliated, gets hurt, or marks a burnout box,** hold 1. Spend that hold to gain advantage on any roll. You can only hold a maximum of 1 for this move.





## AND ALSO, I WAS THERE

**When someone you know publishes a paper as a lead or contributing author,** you can try to sneak your name onto the list of authors before they roll *publish*. If you do, any player character who is an author on the paper can mark a burnout box to stop you. If they don't, roll +Bureaucracy.

On a hit your name is on there. You gain all the benefits and consequences of the *publish* roll as if you were a co-author.

On a 7-9 there have been complications. You suffer an additional one of the 7-9 conditions of *publish* in addition to any other consequences of the roll.



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## GRANDILOQUENCE

COMPULSION

**When you use a lot of words to say absolutely nothing,** roll +Charisma. On a hit whoever you're talking to will grant you a small concession or favour right now, but later they'll realise you tricked them. On a 10+ choose one:

- They'll do you a big favour instead of a small one.
- They won't realise they've been tricked.



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## REFLECTED GLORY

COMPULSION

**When you take credit for or claim association with something which is nothing to do with you,** any player character directly involved with that thing can mark a burnout box to stop you. If they don't, roll +Charisma.

On a hit people believe you played a role in, are close to, or are otherwise connected to the thing. On a 10+ choose two, on a 7-9 choose one:

- You can leverage your new reputation into advantage on a single *purchase order* roll.
- People believe you played a major or significant role in the thing.
- People extend you small boons like free drinks, conference (or party) invites, and other quality of life benefits.
- People refuse to believe any assertion that you *weren't* involved with the thing, unless backed by overwhelming evidence – and sometimes not even then.

Anyone directly involved with the thing you're claiming to be a part of is unaffected by this move. They *know* you're talking rubbish.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Choose a target and tell them what you want them to do. Until they do it, up to once per scene you can:

- Insert yourself into any home or personal life scene that features the target.
- Insert one or more NPCs from the target's home or personal life into any work scene that they're in. These characters are still under the control of the MC, you just get to declare that they're there.

The insertion need not be physical: daydreams, inconvenient phone calls, even symbolic representations can all count. It *does* need to be plausible. Player character targets can mark a burnout box to negate your insertion if they don't want to deal with it.

You can only have one target for this move at a time, but you can end this effect any time you feel like.

## QUESTIONS

- Who has been burned by your methods before?
- Who do you hold in such contempt that you would *never* attach yourself to them?
- Which recent high-profile failure did you mistakenly attach yourself to?



# THE WORKHORSE

*"That doesn't even crack the top five strangest things I've been asked to do today. I'll put it on the list, shall I?"*

Unlike basically everyone else at Pigsmoke, the Workhorse specialises in *getting things done*. They work hard, burn the midnight oil, pursue due diligence in every regard, and somehow manage to keep up with the flagrant liars, cheaters, and political dodgers who seem to occupy every other chair at the college.

The Workhorse serves as something of a foil for the other characters, making themselves useful while the others grandstand. Their work ethic can sometimes damage their personal life or get them involved in more things than they can easily cope with, but for the most part they're everybody's friend when there are things which need doing.

## Name

Arthur or Hildegard Stenger

Jamal or Ivory Nelson

Blair or Kim Palomer

## Attitude

nobody special

so much tweed

distracted

one piece of flair

## MOVES



### LET'S BE RATIONAL

#### COMPULSION

**When you present someone with a reasoned conclusion supported by evidence,** tell them what you want them to do about it and roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ they have to choose one:

- Do what you want.
- Reject your evidence, no matter how stupid it makes them look.
- Go off on you, *right now*.

On a 7-9 they have the additional options:

- Do something kind of like what you want.
- Do something unrelated that benefits you personally.

If your conclusion isn't supported by your evidence, this move automatically misses.

## THE EDUCATOR



TIME-CONSUMING

**When you give an NPC patient, one-on-one tuition over the course of a week, roll +Charisma.** On a hit, they understand what you're trying to explain. On a 7-9 choose one, on a 10+ choose three:

- They'll remember it when it comes time to take the test, display their knowledge, or otherwise put whatever you've taught them to use.
- Tell the MC something you'd like to know more about; turns out this person knows something about that! The MC will tell you what you learn from them.
- They'll do you a small favour in return.
- They won't come back to you next time they have a problem.



## MIDNIGHT OIL

**When you roll** delve deeper, you can mark a burnout box to gain advantage.

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## THIS IS MY LIFE NOW

**When you react to something ridiculous, over-the-top, mind-rending, or appalling by rolling your eyes and getting on with things,** choose up to one:

- Choose a nearby NPC: they're inspired by your example to keep calm and carry on.
- Choose a nearby NPC: they're impressed by your calm and form a good opinion of you.
- You know something interesting and useful about whatever's happening. The MC will tell you what.
- Whatever's happening won't directly hurt you, or one other person or thing you name.

This move only works once per event.

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## RAIN CHECK

**When you abandon an important personal commitment,** you can perform another TIME-CONSUMING action this week. You can only trigger this move once per week.

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## DEPENDABLE

You can roll *schmooze* with Research instead of Charisma when talking to fellow academics. If you do, any favours they ask of you will involve you helping with their work.

## QUESTIONS

- Who has roped you into doing the lion's share of the work on their latest project? What is it? Why are you helping?
- What part of your job do you hate the most? Why do you keep doing it?
- Who infuriates you with their ability to skate by on the minimum of effort?



**DEPARTMENT  
PLAYBOOKS**

# THE DEPARTMENT OF LIFE AND DEATH

**Expertise:** Death magic, healing, darkness, animating corpses, calling deceased spirits, interacting with the undead.

**Name:** Mortimer or Zoe Black; Husam or Suha Imani; Ichirou or Yuko Inoue

**Eyes:** black eyeliner; goggles; bug-eyed and intense; bloodshot

**Style:** lab coat; proper villain; BDSM accessories; wildly against type

**Classroom:** damp dungeon; spotless morgue; overgrown graveyard; monolithic black marble

## FULFILMENT

**Researcher:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you are the main or co-author on a published paper.

**Misanthrope:** Regain one point of burnout whenever a student comes to you and you leave them miserable, terrified, or confused.

**Necromancer:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you cast a spell and choose to “make your solution someone else’s problem.”

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in *adventuring*, *delve deeper*, or *cast a spell*.

If you want, your teaching assistant can be *undead*. The particular kind of undead creature is up to you, but it will affect their activities in the fiction; vampires can’t come out during the day, for example.

## STUFF

The Department of Life and Death grants you access to one of the following (you choose):

- A well-equipped forensics lab.
- A library of ancient texts, filled with dangerous knowledge.
- A large stockpile of biological... *bits*.

## QUESTIONS

- Who recognised one of the bodies in your lab? What’s the connection?
- Which of your students is flunking your class hard? Why is it important that they pass?
- Name and describe the undead creature on campus you’ve struck up a casual friendship with.

## MOVES

### LIFESTEALER

**When someone nearby becomes hurt, or goes from hurt to taken out,** you can heal one step – from *taken out* to *hurt*, and from *hurt* to fine. You also roll +Sorcery when making the *hospital hospitality* move instead of +nothing.

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### FEEL MY POWER

You can roll *schmooze* +Sorcery instead of +Charisma if, instead of telling them what they want to hear, you play up your powerful dark magic.

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### LICH

You have traded in your mortal life for a better version: an eternal existence as an intelligent skeleton, or perhaps a corpse inlaid with runes of silver. You are now invulnerable to most sources of harm, although you can still be hurt by magic, certain occult rituals, and massive overkill from mundane sources.

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### THE WALKING DEAD

You have many skeleton and zombie servants which respond to your verbal commands. They function effectively as a single NPC, but cannot be *hurt* except by attacks that would destroy many at once. If they are *hurt* or taken out you can replace them with a few hours' work and a source of fresh bodies.

**When you send them to fetch something,** roll +Sorcery. On a 10+ they come back with it as quickly as possible. On a 7-9 they either come back quickly with something that isn't quite right, or they come back with the right thing but take much longer to return.

**When you have them fight for you,** roll *adventuring* +Sorcery instead of +nothing. If you are *hurt* as a result of the move, you can opt to have your army of the dead *hurt* instead.

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### DISSECTIONIST

**When you delve deeper by slicing up a body,** on a hit hold 1. Spend 1 hold to get advantage on your next *teach* roll so long as your class touches upon what you discovered while delving. You cannot spend more than 1 hold per *teach* roll.

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### PRIEST

When you are called upon to *teach*, you may instead deliver a sermon. If you do so, you recover one burnout in addition to any other effects of the move, but you take ongoing disadvantage to future *teach* rolls. This penalty lasts until you score a hit on a *teach* roll.



# THE DEPARTMENT OF MINDBENDING

**Expertise:** Telepathy, mind reading, mind control, self control, intellect boosts, mental illusions.

**Name:** Said Singh or Kanti Kaur; Eli or Leah Meyer; Gyeong or Seung-Min Yi

**Eyes:** elaborate makeup; unblinking stare; solid colour; shifty

**Style:** shaven-headed ascetic; high-collared vizier; crystals and incense; stage magician

**Classroom:** new age meditation room; faux Shaolin temple; it's all stolen;  
"You see what I want you to see."

## FULFILMENT

**Vizier:** Regain one point of burnout whenever someone follows your advice and gets into trouble.

**Puppetmaster:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you make someone else solve one of your problems.

**Self-Denying:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you cast a spell and choose the option to become hurt.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in *purchase order* or *schmooze*.

Any teaching assistant you gain is *dominated*. They cannot keep secrets from you or act against your will, provided a) your commands are not blatantly self-destructive and b) they know what your will is.

## STUFF

The Department of Mindbending grants you access to one of the following (you choose):

- A magical device which can store and replay memories.
- A dark secret which offers leverage over somebody on campus.
- A really good therapist, immune to or protected from mindbending magic.

## QUESTIONS

- Who is highly resistant (or immune) to your mind control? Do you (or they) know why?
- Who is convinced you're constantly adjusting their perceptions? Are you actually?
- Which of your students is scheming to put your techniques to work... *on you?*

## MOVES

### LIKE A BOOK

**When you try to read someone's mind**, you stare at them in an unnerving and obvious manner. Also, roll +Sorcery. On a 10+ you can ask two of the following questions, on a 7-9 one. On a miss, they can ask a question of you.

You can ask extra questions by allowing the target to ask them of you first, on a one-for-one basis.

- What are you thinking right now?
- What do you think of \_\_\_\_\_?
- Who or what do you value?
- How could I get you to \_\_\_\_\_?

Players whose characters are affected by this move must answer honestly!

### ILLUSIONIST

#### COMPULSION



**When you blatantly overwrite someone's perception of reality with something else**, they experience what you want them to experience but they know it's not real.

**When you subtly bend someone's perceptions**, roll +Sorcery. On a 10+ they notice nothing amiss and mistake your illusions for reality. On a 7-9 choose one:

- They're fooled, but only for a moment.
- They massively overreact to what you show them.
- Later, they'll think back and realise a) what you did and b) that it was you that did it.
- Feedback bends *your* perceptions. Take ongoing disadvantage to all Sorcery rolls until you get a chance for a proper rest of several hours.

### HYPNOSIS

**When you teach**, you can roll +Sorcery instead of +Charisma. On a hit you can choose to instil a post-hypnotic suggestion in all, some, or one of your students instead of marking experience.



## COMPEL OBEDIENCE

COMPULSION

**When you assail someone with the full might of your mental powers,** roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they do exactly what you demand or become *hurt*. On a 7-9 they can avoid becoming *hurt* by doing something kind of like what you demanded, or by following the letter of your demand rather than the spirit.

P.S. This is not a subtle power. The target knows what you did and that it was you who did it.

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## HANDWAVE

COMPULSION

**When you tell someone what you want them to believe,** roll +Charisma. On a hit they believe exactly that, but only for a few minutes. On a 7-9, when the illusion fades they remember what you did.

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## CHARM OFFENSIVE

Instead of rolling for *schmooze* you can choose to mark a burnout box and assume you got a 7-9 result.



# THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESIGHT

**Expertise:** The discovery of hidden knowledge, object-reading, predicting the future.

**Name:** Roderick or Aisling MacNechtan; Stavros or Zinovia Panagiotis;  
Abdur-Rashid or Raniya Zaman

**Eyes:** piercing eyes; faraway stare; blindfold; one big, one small

**Style:** long grey robes; future fashions; stars and moons; assorted dramatic portents

**Classroom:** a giant orrery or telescope; shadows and candlelight;  
many, many clocks; the right place at the right time

## FULFILMENT

**Smug:** Regain one point of burnout whenever someone rejects your instructions, and suffers as a result.

**Doomed:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you predict the worst and it happens.

**Cryptic:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you miss on a teach roll.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in *red tape*, *delve deeper*, or *purchase order*.

Any teaching assistant you gain has a powerful *destiny*. Tell everyone what it is; anything which will stop them from achieving this destiny will fail, immediately or eventually. They may also possess strange attributes, an adorable pet, a comedy sidekick, a tragic backstory, and/or anything else that typically attends someone for whom Fate has plans.

## STUFF

The Department of Foresight grants you access to one of the following (you choose):

- A library of prophecies known to be mostly accurate.
- A generous slush fund made of lottery winnings, stock market dividends, and so on.
- A random item, for which no use is immediately obvious. "You'll need it soon."

## QUESTIONS

- Who has the heaviest weight of destiny upon them?
- What omens have accompanied the start of the new academic year? What do they mean?
- Make a prediction about the way things are going to go.

## MOVES

### PORTENTOUS

By studying omens and portents you can *delve deeper* on any topic, even when you don't have a specific thing to study.

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### VISIONS

**When you mark a burnout box,** you receive a vague and confused vision of the future. The MC will tell you what you see; gain advantage to the next roll you make when acting on your vision.

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### FORTUNE TELLER

When you *schmooze* someone, the 'payment, favour, or bribe' can include an optimistic prediction of their future. If the prediction does not come true, further *schmooze* attempts against that person are made with disadvantage until you successfully predict their future.

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### FATALIST

**When you miss a roll, before the MC tells you what happens,** you can mark a burnout box in order to treat the move as if you rolled a 7-9.

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### SIGHT BEYOND SIGHT

**When you want to know what's going on elsewhere,** roll +Sorcery. On a 10+ your visions are clear; tell the MC who or what you are scrying on, and you can see and hear what's happening as if you were there. On a 7-9 choose one:

- The visions are vague and cryptic.
  - Someone detects, discovers, or notices your spying.
  - You see something other than what you wanted; the MC will tell you what.
- 



### FATESPINNER

**When you meddle with someone's destiny,** enact the correct ritual and roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ hold 3, on a 7-9 hold 1. Spend that hold one-for-one to trigger the following events.

- An object or role, meant for the destined person, enters the story. (You choose the object or role.)
- The destined person is confronted by a situation relevant to their destiny. (You frame the situation.)
- The destined person makes a decision or choice that carries them closer to their destiny. (This is a **COMPULSION**.)

You can't store more than 3 hold for this move at any one time, spread among up to three people.

# THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTS

**Expertise:** The creation and manipulation of earth, wind, fire, water, thunder, lightning, light, or darkness (choose one).

**Name:** Peter or Diana Aristide; Agni or Saraswati Bandyopadhyay;  
Anwar or Shula El-Ghazzawy

**Eyes:** wide eyes; intense eyes; glowing eyes; eyes of an element-related colour

**Style:** wildly impractical; all one colour; intricate embroidery;  
less clothing, more body modification

**Classroom:** lots of your element; lots of symbolism related to your element;  
scarred by unleashed energy; outside

## FULFILMENT

**Unleashed:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you cast a spell and choose to have the magic affect far more than you intended.

**Monomaniac:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you delve deeper on a mystery related to your element.

**I Have A Hammer:** Regain one point of burnout whenever a student comes to you and you convince them that your element is the solution to their problem.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in *adventuring*, *teach*, or *cast a spell*.

Your teaching assistant always has a different elemental focus to you.

## STUFF

The Department of Elements grants you access to one of the following (you choose):

- A well-stocked chemistry lab.
- A reinforced room where one can cut loose with impunity.
- A service from a powerful elemental spirit.

## QUESTIONS

- Who in the Department of Elements is your primary rival? What do they think of you?
- What did you damage the last time you unleashed your magic?
- What was the really stupid thing you did right before term started?

## MOVES

### APPLIED POWER

You can roll *adventuring* +Sorcery instead of +nothing.



### AVATAR

**When you try to compel the cosmic principle of your element to do something for you**, say what you want to happen and roll +Charisma. On a 10+ you get what you want. On a 7-9 you still get what you want but pick one:

- It's *TIME-CONSUMING* and the effects won't show up until next week.
- You need to do something else for the cosmic principle first.
- Backlash makes you *hurt*.

### PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION

You can roll *teach* +Sorcery instead of +Charisma. If you do so, hold 1. When you have 3 hold, lose all hold and choose one:

- Something important is damaged or destroyed. The MC will tell you what.
- Someone gets *hurt*. If it isn't you, the MC gets to choose who.
- Disciplinary proceedings and paperwork; fill in one burnout box.

### OPINIONATED

**When you publish**, you can choose to make the paper a targeted debunking, rebuttal, or obloquy. If you do, roll +Charisma instead of +Research but you will always gain an enemy in addition to any other results.

### EXPERT

**When you delve deeper into a matter related to your element**, you can ask one more question than usual. This grants one question even on a miss.

### 101 THINGS TO DO WITH [ELEMENT]

The following things are now considered part of your magic's areas of expertise: impressing people with displays of power, destruction or tight control of your element, survival when immersed in your element, communication with your element.

In addition, you can treat things which are emblematic or symbolic of your element as if they were your element.

# THE DEPARTMENT OF ALCHEMY

**Expertise:** Transformation of matter, creation of potions, enchantment of magic items.

**Name:** Girogio or Antonia Bandoni; Jamaar or Shanice Jackson;  
Jianhong or Xue Pan

**Eyes:** avaricious stare; slightly unfocused; one weird eye; goggles

**Style:** lab coat; dripping with gold and jewels; a million pockets and pouches;  
every stain tells a story

**Classroom:** laboratory (scientific); laboratory (weird); lots of geodes;  
a giant cauldron right in the middle

## FULFILMENT

**Scientist:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you are the main or co-author on a published paper.

**Greed:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you acquire a substantial material treasure.

**Experimental:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you miss on a *delve deeper* roll.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in *delve deeper* or *purchase order*.

If you want, your teaching assistant can be a *construct*. Constructs get a free bonus specialisation in *adventuring* and have many other advantages over flesh-and-blood teaching assistants (not least that they don't need to sleep) but can't pass for human.

## STUFF

The Department of Alchemy grants you access to one of the following (you choose):

- A workshop containing a forge and smelter, a chemistry lab, or nearly-unlimited craft supplies.
- A sealed vault holding extremely rare or dangerous reagents.
- A cupboard stuffed full of junk that might come in handy eventually.

## QUESTIONS

- Who is enraged by the amount of stuff you're expensing to the department?
- Which of your students is blatantly cheating? Why are you letting it slide?
- What was the last thing you made that went dreadfully wrong?





## MOVES

### SELF-SUFFICIENT

**When you decide to create something you need**, tell everyone what you're making and roll +Research. On a 10+ you've made it and it works. On a 7-9 you still make it, but choose one:

- It's got some unwanted side effects.
- It needs a rare ingredient or component that you'll have to work to get hold of.
- It'll be TIME-CONSUMING to make.
- Someone else wants it, and will go to great lengths to get it.

---

### BIONIC

Instead of going to the medical wing, you can repair yourself with an obvious magical graft or prosthetic. You are fully healed. In addition, this replacement is better than your baseline body: gain advantage on any rolls where the graft or prosthetic would improve your performance.

You can take this move in advance, in case you ever require treatment in the medical wing, or you can take it at any time instead of rolling *hospital hospitality* and skip your next Advance.

---

### TECHNOMANCY

The following things are now considered part of your magic's areas of expertise: interacting with computers and machinery, programming, and surfing the internet.

---

### I'VE GOT WHAT YOU NEED

**When you spend time brewing and transmuting to get practical, pragmatic goods**, roll +Research. On a 10+ hold 3, on a 7-9 hold 1. Spend 3 hold to compel an NPC to do you a big favour as if you had rolled 10+ on *schmooze* and bribed them. Spend 1 hold to compel an NPC to do you a small favour as if you had rolled 7-9 on *schmooze* and bribed them.

---

### PLAYING THE GAME

You can *publish* even if you don't have anything new to publish a paper about. If you do, take ongoing disadvantage to *publish* rolls until you successfully publish some original research.

## MINTED

**When you use your money to solve a problem or remove an obstacle,** roll +nothing. On a 10+ the problem or obstacle goes away. On a 7-9 the problem goes away, but choose one:

- It's only gone temporarily.
- Someone notices you flash the cash, and is now after your wealth.
- You're a little less flush; gain ongoing disadvantage with this move until you find a new source of capital.

On a miss the problem still goes away, but it cost more than you thought. You can't use this move again until you do something to reinvigorate your fortunes. (A long stretch of downtime will also work if you spend some of it working on your portfolio.)



# THE DEPARTMENT OF CALLING, BINDING, AND SEALING AWAY (CABSA)

**Expertise:** Summoning demons and other entities, making demons and other entities do what you want, avoiding the wrath of demons and other entities, small-scale and temporary creation *ex nihilo*.

**Name:** Adam or Astrid Solomon; Nicolas or Genevieve Sergeant;  
Javier or Mercedes Espinoza

**Eyes:** eyes that have seen too much; eyes that want to see more;  
slit pupils or an unusual colour; cool sunglasses hiding something terrible

**Style:** seductive like a flame; bookish nerd; dress to impress;  
every scar is a mistake I'll never make again

**Classroom:** inlaid summoning circles; a library of forbidden knowledge;  
chains, spikes, bound demons; aggressively normal

## FULFILMENT

**Bureaucrat:** You can make a *purchase order* for the recovery of burnout. If you get it, recover one point of burnout.

**Cultist:** Regain one point of burnout whenever a student comes to you and you convince them to take up worship of or bargaining with extraplanar entities for power.

**Servant:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you perform a service for an extraplanar entity and it gets you into trouble.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in any **two** of *cast a spell*, *delve deeper*, *red tape*, or *scathe*.

Any teaching assistant you gain is *corrupt* – either an actual extraplanar entity, or in service to one. You are most definitely second on your TA's list of priorities, and should always be at least a little concerned about what's first.

## STUFF

CABSA grants you access to one of the following (you choose):

- Contact details for various powerful extraplanar entities.
- An artefact of dread power and significance, the use of which carries a terrible price.
- A very, very good lawyer.

## QUESTIONS

- You are beholden to an extraplanar patron. What is it, and what does it want from you?
- Who is a bastion of purity, yet still manages to keep up with you?
- Which of your students has made a Very Bad Deal? And with what?

## MOVES

### DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

**When you are disciplined for your actions**, explain how, technically, what you've done isn't against the rules and roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ you're right, and they can't touch you – at least, not here, not now, and not for this. On a 7-9 you make a compelling case; you get away with it, but the powers that be are out to get you now. Take ongoing disadvantage to all Bureaucracy rolls until you suffer the consequences for something you did.

---

### EXTRAPLANAR TUTOR

You have made contact with a putatively friendly inhabitant of another plane, which possesses great storehouses of knowledge. Give it a description and a name or title.

**When you delve deeper**, you can choose to ask one additional question even on a miss, but in order to do so you'll have to do something for your extraplanar tutor first. The MC will tell you what it wants.

---

### PROMISES OF POWER

You can roll *teach* +Sorcery instead of +Charisma if you exhort your students to inadvisable bargains with dark powers.

---

### THERE ARE RULES

**When you cast a spell on, at, or using an extraplanar creature**, you can roll +Bureaucracy instead of +Sorcery.

---

### BINDING PROMISE

**When you roll schmooze**, the target will accept a promise of future service instead of a payment, favour, or bribe. If they call in this promise, you must fulfil the letter of the agreement or mark two burnout boxes.

You can also use *binding promise* when you make an agreement with a player character: if they hold up their end of the agreement (to the letter, as usual) then you must hold up yours or mark two burnout boxes. If both of you agree, you can dissolve the promise with a handshake.

## MIND-BLASTING KNOWLEDGE

**When you** publish, you can choose to make the content of your paper mind-blasting. If you do, gain advantage on the *publish* roll and hold 1. When you hold 3, lose all hold and choose one of the following:

- Someone important has read your mind-blasting work and is going to do something inadvisable as a result.
- You have attracted the attention of a rival scholar of the forbidden, occult investigators, an alien intelligence, or something else bad. This is in addition to any enemies you may make as a result of the publish roll.
- Something terrible has made its way into the world through a crack caused by your work.
- You accidentally put together some important details; mark two burnout boxes.

The MC will fill in any further details.



# THE DEPARTMENT OF PARAVETERINARY MEDICINE

**Expertise:** Charming animals, transforming animals, communicating with animals, assuming animal features. 'Animals' also includes monsters and cryptids.

**Name:** Abraham or Vivian Falkner; Vahid or Shahnaz Charmchi;  
Semyon or Felicia Cojocar

**Eyes:** world-weary eyes; faraway eyes; slit pupils; eyepatch

**Style:** torn clothes and scratches; tweed jacket with elbow patches;  
skins, furs, and hides; exotic stains

**Classroom:** tangled woodland; pristine surgery; taxidermy everywhere; mud

## FULFILMENT

**Liberator:** Regain one point of burnout whenever a creature you allowed to run free causes chaos, disruption, or harm.

**Breeder:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you successfully create a new hybrid species.

**Fluffy:** Regain one point of burnout when you get *hurt* by an animal or creature.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in the moves *schmooze*, *scathe*, or *adventuring*.

If you want your teaching assistant can also be *inhuman*: a part-human creature like a satyr or a mermaid, or some other intelligent creature which can't blend in on a crowded street. Inhuman TAs can't pass for human, and so are limited in what they can get up to, but they can grant advantage on any *delve deeper* roll related to their species or natural habitat.

## STUFF

The Department of Paraveterinary Medicine grants you access to a menagerie of magical beasts and one of the following (you choose):

- A rare creature which produces something valuable or useful.
- Assorted nets, traps, and snares.
- High-quality pharmaceuticals and alchemical compounds, intended for animals.

## QUESTIONS

- Which of the creatures you're responsible for is sick?
- Which of the creatures you're responsible for is missing?
- What creature has been spotted on campus that you would give your eyeteeth to capture?

## MOVES

### FURRY FRIEND

You gain an animal companion – precisely which animal is up to you, and it can be a magical animal or monster if you like – which is more or less tame, well-disposed towards you so long as you treat it well, and at least as smart and helpful as a typical creature of its kind.

**When you command your animal companion to help you out**, if it's plausibly able to do so it will. Roll +Charisma.

On a 10+ it does what you ask, either accomplishing a task or giving you advantage on a suitable roll. On a 7-9 choose one:

- It does exactly as you ask, but you gain disadvantage with this move until you give it some sort of bribe or treat.
- It does almost exactly what you want, but not quite: it gets a critical detail wrong (time, place, target), draws too much attention, or damages something important.
- It doesn't do anything like what you asked, and does something else helpful instead. The MC will choose what, but should bear in mind that the animal should be actually helpful – just maybe not with *this* thing, right now.

At your discretion your animal can be *awakened*; that is, at least as intelligent as a typical student and able to speak. The advantage of this is that the scope of what it can do for you is dramatically increased – answer emails, mark papers, play video games – but the drawback is that other people can now persuade it to do things as if it was an NPC. It still likes you best, of course, but its loyalty is less concrete.



## FIELD EXPERIENCE

You can roll *adventuring* +Research instead of +nothing if there is a monster, beast, creature, or animal involved. Tell everyone the (brief) story of where you learned this particular trick.

---

## TWITCHER

You can trigger the move *a small, incestuous world* by going looking for rare animals or creatures on campus (in addition to the normal method). If you go poking around in places you're not supposed to be you can roll with advantage.

If you score a hit, you find a rare or interesting beastly as well as anything else that happens.

---

## ELBOW DEEP

**When you teach**, you can choose to hold a hands-on participation session where you invite ('invite') your students to perform the most unpleasant tasks you can think of. If you do so, gain advantage on the teach roll and hold 1. When you hold 3 for this move, lose all hold and choose one:

- A careless student gets hurt by one of the creatures.
  - One of the creatures gets hurt by a careless student.
  - A dangerous creature escapes.
  - You receive enough complaints that your head of department calls you to task.
- 

## BOTANIST

Your magic expertise expands to include interacting with, transforming, or animating plants.

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## THE NAKED APE

**When you use animal behavioural theory or tricks to persuade a person to do something for you**, roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they do it. On a 7-9 you learn an immediate need or want of theirs; if you do that, they'll do what you want. On a miss you look like an idiot, as well as whatever the MC says.

The effects of this move fade after about 5-10 minutes if the target remains distracted, or instantly if the target stops and thinks about what they're doing.



# THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTEFACTS AND RELICS

**Expertise:** The faculty of Artefacts and Relics have no expertise – they always roll to *cast a spell* with disadvantage. (But see *foci*, below.)

**Name:** Hector or Gemma Salazar; Rasim or Ozma Al Farsi; Archer or Erika Benson

**Eyes:** faraway eyes; alert eyes; techno-goggles; one squinty eye (loupe optional)

**Style:** right out of the 1950s; khakis and dust; carpenter’s toolbelt;  
bearer of at least one curse

**Classroom:** full of esoterica; full of tools; dig site;  
in the shadow of something huge and ominous

## FULFILMENT

**Dusty:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you complicate your life by refusing to use something new or innovative.

**Revisionist:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you convince someone that their (true) knowledge of history is in fact false.

**Hoarder:** Regain one point of burnout whenever you successfully add another artefact to your collection. *Mark* a burnout box whenever you *use* an artefact from your collection.

## MOVES

Members of the Department of Artefacts and Relics get *foci* as a free bonus move.

### Foci

You start with three artefacts to help you cast spells, called **foci**. Each one has a **function**, a **target**, and a **drawback** – you choose the first two from the list opposite, and the MC chooses the drawback. You and the MC can go ‘off-list’ when choosing properties for a focus, but such choices should be in line with the ones presented and require approval from the whole group. You should also name your foci and come up with a brief description for each one – exactly what each focus is and the details of what it can be used for are up to you and the MC to work out.

**When you use one of your foci to cast a spell**, if the target and function of the spell match those of the focus, it counts as being within your area of expertise.

The drawbacks are permanent fictional problems to be used by the MC as inspiration for making your life difficult. If you’re not carrying the artefact then the drawbacks don’t affect you, but neither can you benefit from its power.

## FUNCTIONS

- harm
- enhance
- control
- twist
- move
- learn about

## TARGETS

- members of a specific bloodline
- everyone you can see, except yourself
- any one person/thing touching the focus
- a person/thing with a strong emotional link to the person/thing you are touching
- empty space, anywhere you have ever been
- insects, arthropods, and other exoskeletal creatures
- dead (or technically dead) things you can see  
[if no-one is in the Department of Life and Death]
- the memories of someone you can see  
[if no-one is in the Department of Mindbending]
- future events where you are present  
[if no-one is in the Department of Foresight]
- small-scale chemical and alchemical reactions  
[if no-one is in the Department of Alchemy]
- one of the elements  
[if no-one is in the Department of the Elements]
- denizens of another plane  
[if no-one is in CABSA]
- animals or magical beasts  
[if no-one is in the Department of Paraveterinary Medicine]

## DRAWBACKS

- it interacts badly with certain other phenomena
- it's really, obnoxiously obvious when you use it
- it requires a payment in blood (enough to make someone *hurt*)
- it requires a payment in nightmares (mark a burnout box each time)
- it's building-sized, embedded in local geomantic patterns, or otherwise non-portable
- using it is time-consuming
- using it triggers nausea or hallucinations which give you disadvantage for your next two rolls
- it talks, but you wish it wouldn't
- sometimes, it takes control of you while you sleep

For further focus inspiration, check out @dungeon\_junk on Twitter

## IT BELONGS IN A MUSEUM, SPECIFICALLY MY MUSEUM

**When you covet a unique and precious item in the possession of another department,** roll +Bureaucracy. On a 10+ you have a solid claim; the Dean's office will back your attempts to take control of it. On a 7-9 you have something *resembling* a claim - the Dean's office will stay neutral if you try to take control of the item.

---

## HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

**When you offer someone advice based on historical precedent,** tell them what happened last time someone tried this and roll +Research. On a 10+ your recounting contains useful truths: the next roll they make in pursuit of this goal gains advantage.

On a 7-9 it's a little more complex: they can still gain advantage on the roll but it will require something valuable, something dangerous to acquire, or something humiliating. (The MC will tell you what.) If they meet this condition, they gain advantage.

On a 6- you're wrong wrong wrong.

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## TOMB RAIDER

Roll *adventuring* +Sorcery instead of +nothing whenever you're breaking and entering.

---

## WEALTH BY LEVEL

**When you hit up one of your shady contacts to sell them an artefact,** roll +Charisma. On a 10+ they'll meet you within 48 hours to trade you the artefact for a selection of used, non-sequential banknotes or something equally valuable. On a 7-9 they'll still meet you, but choose one:

- The meet won't be until next week.
  - You can't get quite what you were angling for.
  - The meet attracts unwanted attention.
- 

## TOOLED UP

Either gain an additional focus when you take this move, or remove the drawback from one of your existing foci. You can take this move as many times as you like.

## HANDS-ON

**When you enchant or create an artefact for a specific purpose**, tell the MC what you're trying to achieve. The MC will say "yes, you can do that..." then add 1–4 qualifiers from the following list:

- It's going to be huge and immobile.
- It's going to take one or more \*time-consuming\* actions.
- You'll need some rare ingredient(s).
- You'll need to dismantle or disenchant some other artefact to make it work.
- You'll need help from someone.
- It's going to be expensive.
- The best you can do is a lesser version: unreliable, limited, or temporary.
- It's going to be dangerous to use.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your teaching assistant can specialise in *adventuring*, *delve deeper*, or *teach*. They share your departmental disadvantage on *cast a spell* but don't have any foci to help them out unless you arrange for them to acquire some.

If you like, your teaching assistant can be an *ancient relic*. (Technically your teaching assistant is the person who carts the relic around, but it's the relic which has all the talent.) A relic can speak or otherwise communicate, and possesses deep reserves of historical and sorcerous knowledge. On the other hand they can't operate independently and struggle in regular society. They also tend to be coveted by others.

## STUFF

The Department of Artefacts and Relics grants you access to one of the following (you choose):

- The location of an ancient treasure.
- 'A powerful artefact', allegedly. No-one knows what it does or how to use it.
- A team of students who are technically for helping out with excavations, but who could probably be turned to alternative purposes.

## QUESTIONS

- Who used to own one of your foci? What were they using it for?
- Which very important relic has gone missing from the department stores? Why is that bad?
- What did you bring back from the last dig you were on?





**PIGSMOKE**

## THE PLACE

Pigsmoke is America's foremost institute of the arcane arts. Home to thousands of students and hundreds of faculty, it nevertheless manages to keep a low profile. All the better to avoid paranormalists, witch hunters, and other impediments to the process of teaching.

As a modern place of learning, Pigsmoke has everything you'd expect from a 21st-century American university: campus wifi, computer labs, science labs, sports facilities and the teams to use them, lecture theaters, classrooms, steam tunnels, a library, coffee shops, cheap restaurants open very late at night, campus bars with an amazing tolerance for fake IDs, the works.

However, as an arcane university Pigsmoke also possesses: mist-shrouded graveyards, strange monuments that don't quite align with regular space-time, alchemical laboratories filled with bizarre components, haunted paintings, animate graffiti, buildings that only exist during certain astronomical alignments, towers, spires, pentagrams, lonely spots where one can brood while overlooking campus, and more.

Administratively, Pigsmoke is divided into several departments, all overseen by the Dean's Office – a tangled bureaucracy which operates according to its own inscrutable rules. It sets targets and budgets, monitors departmental objectives, and imposes its will with implacable constructs of lead and bronze. Surprisingly intelligent, these arcane enforcers know dozens of ways to deny requests for mercy.

The students live either in rented accommodation near to campus or in on-campus dormitories, the latter of which are operated by a tiny sub-section of the Dean's Office with aid from student volunteers. Any egregious mishaps are cleared up by the maintenance staff: men and women rapidly turned bitter and hard-eyed by the endless parade of magical disasters they're meant to take care of.

Any disasters which leave people hurt or dead also fall under the purview of the medical wing: a secretive clique of doctors and vivimancers who brook no interference in their work, even from the Dean's Office. In return, they perform miracles, and occasional atrocities, of healing and transformation. When there's no other option, the medical wing can heal you... but there's no knowing what other experiments they may perform at the same time.

And the faculty? Well, they've got their own problems – as you'll find out in play.



## THE DEAN

The Dean is Pigmoke's almighty leader. The driver behind the university's every scheme. The *causa causans* that brings education – or a reasonable facsimile thereof – into being. The Dean's word is written into law by the Dean's Office, and enforced by Pigmoke's constructs of lead and bronze.

At the start of the game, the players should go around the table and take turns choosing traits for the Dean. The first person to choose a trait also chooses the Dean's name.

As with the traits you can choose for your character, you can supersede these with your own ideas, but to give the Dean an 'off-list' trait requires unanimous approval from the group.



The Dean's **name** is...

- Dr Adam or Eve Kowalski
- Smith. Just... Smith.
- Japhiel
- Unpronounceable in mortal tongues, but we call it 'the Dean'

The Dean's **nature** is...

- A decent person trying to do a hard job.
- An awful person outsourcing life's difficulties to *you*.
- A mysterious person whose demands are cryptic, and hint at a greater pattern.

The Dean **cares about**...

- The reputation of the school.
- Rules and regulations.
- The wellbeing of the student body.
- Nothing but themselves.

The Dean **wants**...

- To lord it over their rival, the Dean of Glorystaff College.
- To transform Pigsmoke in some sweeping way.
- To make the students, or some subset of them, 'worthy'.
- A quiet life.

The Dean's **vision** for Pigsmoke is...

- Something wildly unrealistic, even at America's foremost school of sorcery.
- To make it a bastion of excellent teaching.
- To make it a bastion of cutting-edge research.
- That it runs itself while they do their own thing.

The Dean **cannot resist**...

- Gambling.
- Promises.
- A fight.
- Making cryptic decrees and pronouncements, which must be obeyed.
- Silver and holy water.

# THE DEPARTMENTS

At the start of the game, players can say one true thing about their department to give it a little more character. Anything is fair game for this, but just in case you need a little inspiration this section presents some sample questions and things to consider when making your statements.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF LIFE AND DEATH

The head of department is...

- A priest, full of religious conviction, on a mission to convert the whole department.
- An anatomist, who offloads *everything* onto the rest of the faculty so they can get on with their beloved research.
- A rune-inscribed skeleton whose command of necromancy is unsurpassed and whose agenda is... dubious.

The key problem facing the department is...

- The terrible reputation of necromancy. The head of department is adamant that it's *everybody's* job to fix it.
- A lack of raw materials, i.e. corpses. Where might you be able to source a load of dead bodies?
- Spontaneous undead.

The department building is...

- Haunted. No-one knows why, since it's a brand new building funded by a wealthy benefactor who definitely isn't going to meddle in your research, no, no way.
- Haunted. Which is what you get when you take over an old hospital and turn it into classrooms and offices. Oh, and you're sharing with the medical wing. Hope you like experimental biology!
- Haunted. Really haunted. *Notoriously* haunted. Haunted enough that paranormal investigators keep breaking in, ruining experiments, risking Pigsmoke's low profile, and otherwise making a nuisance of themselves.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF MINDBENDING

The head of department is...

- A control freak and micromanager of the worst kind. No deviation from their will is permitted, even if the Dean *has* forbidden them from using their sorcery to enforce compliance.
- The most charming person you've ever met. They're friendly, personable, always there for you with whatever you need... *what are they up to?*
- Known only through the works of others, who manifest the head's will in their actions without even realising.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Mind control as a discipline tends to attract egotists and other assholes, and now the department is overflowing with them. They sabotage your research, steal your best students, and constantly test your mental defences with stupid mindbending pranks. Clearly, you must destroy them.
- An internal power struggle between the two deputy heads of department threatens to drag everyone else into the sucking vortex. Who will you side with? Are you one of the deputy heads? What started this mess in the first place?
- A growing pattern of amnesia, fugue, and other strange behaviour is spreading across campus – and naturally all fingers are swiveling to point at the Department of Mindbending. Except this time it's not you! You need to find out what's going on before the increased scrutiny reveals some *other* secret you're keeping...

The department building is...

- Covered with illusions, to a ridiculous and often annoying level. It seems like every day someone finds a new secret passage or mysterious object cloaked behind some spectral image.
- Unapproachable, thanks to someone blanketing the whole place with a powerful antipathy spell. You've kept this little mishap secret from the Dean so far, but if he finds out the department screwed up this badly heads will roll.
- Another department's building. Naturally, they have no idea you're sharing it with them and they mustn't find out. Think of it as a never-ending opportunity to put your theories into practice.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESIGHT

The head of department is...

- A blindfolded seer of the old school who frowns on the more... *worldly* uses of prophecy.
- An ambitious schemer who meddles endlessly in the lives of others – including yours.
- Foretold by prophecy: They will come to the department in its time of greatest need and deliver it from peril.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Too many wrong prophecies. It's damaging the department's reputation, it's driving away students, and it's *embarrassing*. The department needs to get its mojo back – preferably before the head organises some diabolical 'team away day'.
- An accumulated weight of destiny. There's been so much meddling with fate that anyone associated with the department has a tendency to find themselves hip-deep in exciting times if they aren't careful to avoid it. Worse, they may attract an eager young protege just *itching* to be cast into a life-defining adventure by the death of their mentor.
- Wouldn't you know it, a great and terrible doom is coming. Yawn. Time to make sure it can't happen – or better, get *someone else* to make sure it can't happen.

The department building is...

- Overrun with omens and portents. Crows flock ominously on the roof, menacing the students for cigarettes and lunch money. Clocks run backwards or chime thirteen every couple of hours, disrupting meetings and seminars. The menacing storm never lets up, so the building is slowly sinking into a swamp. It's annoying as hell, but what can you do?
- Filled with books of prophecy written by ex-staff. The twisting stacks and noise-absorbing paper make for some great privacy for clandestine meetings, but sadly the students know it too and you're forever having to interrupt whatever they're up to and chase them out.
- Foretold by prophecy. In the department's time of greatest need, it is said that a building will manifest for them to call home. In the meantime they work out of whatever offices or local independent coffee houses they can claim, and wonder if maybe this prophecy was misinterpreted.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTS

The head of department is...

- An exemplar of an element directly opposed to yours, who is deeply invested in this whole 'war of the elements' thing and consequently makes sure you get *all* the worst jobs.
- An exemplar of your own element, who is deeply invested in this whole 'war of the elements' thing and constantly uses you as a disposable pawn in their schemes.
- An honest-to-God elemental, their thoughts alien and inscrutable. They occasionally speak in their own tongue, but they barely acknowledge the humans around them. How did they even *get* this job? You're pretty certain they've never published a paper.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Elementalist schools are prone to infighting, and the department at Pigsmoke is one of the worst of the lot. How are you supposed to get anything done while you're navigating this tangled web of elemental allegiances? And the duels! It's almost like they're competing to see who can do most collateral damage...
- Students just aren't interested in elementalism any more. "It lacks practical application", they say, then swan off to study alchemy or mindbending or binding – and when your budget's determined by the number of students you teach, that's no good. The department's got to revamp its image and show everyone that elementalism still has a place in the 21st century!
- The department's got a rockstar. They're brilliant, but also wildly irresponsible – and when you're an elementalist playing with the building blocks of physical reality, 'wildly irresponsible' comes with some severe consequences. (And if you're also the Rockstar? Well, it's *rivalry time*.)

The department building is...

- Several different buildings mashed together, knocked through, and repurposed over the decades into a maze of tiny rooms, dead-end corridors, and inadvertently secret doors. People – and things – get lost in there all the time.
- Brand new this year. Clean and spotless and full of the latest modern conveniences. It will, of course, get ruined over the course of the year.
- A smoking crater. What did you *do*?!

## THE DEPARTMENT OF ALCHEMY

The head of department is...

- Far too prone to experimenting on themselves. You don't *think* they're experimenting on anyone else.
- Hell-bent on imposing some genuine scientific method on this mess of mysticism and hand-waving. Are you with them? Or against them?
- Supplying illegal drugs to most of the students and half the faculty.

The key problem facing the department is...

- A lack of raw materials. Alchemy needs all kinds of rare earths and reagents for research and (sometimes) teaching, but you're running short. What happened to the usual suppliers? Can you find alternative sources of ingredients?
- Crime. The Department of Alchemy is both wealthy and well-equipped with potentially intoxicating chemicals, making it a prime target for criminally-minded students – and mundanes! Naturally, you're going to have to put a stop to this.
- Disposal. A lot of alchemical processes create waste; various levels of nasty, poisonous, and/or mutagenic ooze. Dumping it into the sewers isn't going to cut it for much longer, but no-one seems to have a good plan for what else to do with it.

The department building is...

- A dank place of cauldrons, weird clouds, and strange jars containing mysterious ingredients. 'Old school', as the students say.
- Full of modern scientific laboratories and the necessary accoutrements.
- A garish and ostentatious display of wealth.

## CABSA

The head of department is...

- Using their body as a timeshare with a powerful extraplanar entity. You're never quite sure who's driving the meat around here on Earth, or what the mind is up to when they're in control of the whatever-it-is on another plane.
- So terrified of binding agreements that getting any kind of information, commitment, or signature out of them is impossible.
- Someone who insists they're Actually The Devil, but obviously isn't.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Demons. Again. You'd think people would learn after the first few times.
- Outside manipulation. At least two extraplanar entities are using the department in a proxy war for mysterious reasons of their own, and now the Dean's Office is getting involved for mysterious reasons of *their* own. It's getting so you don't even know who your own boss is!
- Favours owed. At some point in the distant past a previous head of department signed the services of the department away in a poorly-conceived deal with some dreadful entity. And now payment is due.

The department building is...

- Mortgaged from a powerful extraplanar entity. Most months it's fine with money, but sometimes it changes the terms of payment – always at short notice, and always to something inconvenient.
- Only loosely tethered to Earth. Open the wrong door at the wrong time and you may find yourself on another plane entirely; never mind what might make the journey in the opposite direction.
- Constructed and maintained by half a dozen bound entities. They'll make whatever structural changes CABSA faculty require – but they also hate you, so be wary of surprises and loopholes in the letter of your instructions.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF PARAVETERINARY MEDICINE

The head of department is...

- Utterly convinced that all creatures are lovely and friendly and good-natured at heart. Even – *especially* – the angry, dangerous, balls of teeth and venom. And they will judge the hell out of you for contradicting them.
- A tweed-clad, upper-crust buffoon whose interest in exotic creatures extends exactly as far as hunting them for sport. How they got the job is a mystery. How they *keep* it when almost the entire department desperately wants rid of them is a deeper mystery still.
- Crawling with insects. It's, uh... a bit creepy. A lot creepy. And don't look too closely at their office. Or their lunch.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Overcrowding. Not of people, but of creatures – housing and feeding such a vast menagerie is consuming all of the space the department has, not to mention the cost in both dollars and time. And the head of department keeps acquiring *more*.
- Disease. It's not infectious to people *yet*, but it's nasty and it's magical and it's jumping between other species with ever-increasing speed. If the Dean's Office finds out they're going to cull the whole menagerie – and how can you research creatures you don't have?
- Oh God, it's loose. We weren't even supposed to have it, and now... we don't.

The department building is...

- Alive, literally. It may or may not look like a normal building, but the whole edifice is a living, thinking creature. It mostly sits idle, but sometimes moves or flexes according to its own strange instincts – or when suitably persuaded.
- Alive, metaphorically. Every room, every dark corner, every closet or wardrobe or desk drawer, contains something alive and – to the right kind of person – absolutely fascinating.
- Alive. Sort of? In a new and interesting way? It's not life as anyone currently understands it, but there's a wealth of research papers in it if you can keep the other departments from claiming it's an extraplanar entity, a sentient artefact, an alien, or somehow otherwise taking it away from you.



## THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTEFACTS AND RELICS

The head of department is...

- On a dig in the middle of nowhere whenever you try to get in touch with them, and looming over your shoulder whenever you wish they weren't.
- Probably a thief. Well, *definitely* a thief if you're a long-dead sorcerer with a tomb full of magical artefacts, but only probably a thief if you e.g. bring a tasty lunch to work. At least as far as anyone can prove.
- A magic amulet which drives its nameless owner around like a car. It's got a bizarre grasp of time, only writes in an obscure dialect of Middle English, and it's almost certainly up to something untoward. But it's still better than the other candidate.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Turns out if you keep relics in close proximity they can set up some dangerous magical resonances. The department has a *lot* of sorcerous oddments in a very small space, and the effects are starting to show. Silver lining, though: plenty of material for research!
- An audit. The department's always been a bit *laissez faire* about letting people borrow artefacts, and now the supposed inventory bears almost no resemblance to what is actually in the reliquary. Better fix that before the Dean finds out!
- The... thing. Someone built it, certainly, but even they're not sure exactly what it is, what it does, or how it does it. All anyone really knows is that it's doing *something*. Better hope it's nothing bad!

The department building is...

- A pinnacle of geomantic engineering. It's a phenomenal place to work... but all the other departments want it too, and they're planning to deploy paperwork, money, and accusations that you're not a real department in order to get it.
- Someone's idea of a 'test', aimed at teaching students how to safely raid the various storehouses of goodies that ancient sorcerers tended to leave lying around. Health and safety limits how dangerous the traps can be, of course, but they can still ruin the day of a careless student – or a new hire.
- Old. Very, very old, and built on top of itself over and over again. It's got basements on sub-basements, secret doors, hidden levels, and long-forgotten archives. Who knows what could be down there?

# ACADEMIA AND IDENTITY

## Content notice for discussion of sexual assault.

Academia is a rough place to be yourself, especially if who you are is something you can't help. How you design your Pigsmoke to best challenge your players is up to you, of course, but if you want to explore themes of social marginalisation, particularly around issues of race, gender, sexuality, or class, here are some possible ideas.

Class is an everpresent issue in the leafy towers of higher learning, themselves symbols of high status and socio-economic caste. If your faculty member is, say, the first in their family to go to college (much less teach at one) then they will confront a world where they have less access to the privileged informal social networks that pervade academe. Your colleague might be someone whose parents have a whole wing of another university building named after them; meanwhile your own father never graduated high school and doesn't quite understand what your job is, other than being a teacher.

Academia is awash in unspoken rules; from entering as a grad student to being professor emeritus, no one tells you exactly what the game is or how it's played. Being born into it helps tremendously, though. Parents who were professors, or administrators, or major donors, have experience, networks, and insights that are invaluable to their offspring if they decide to follow in their family's footsteps. If you play as a poor faculty member who climbed their way up via scholarships, you'll have to learn everything from scratch and likely keep learning throughout your whole career. The existence of magic adds a whole new dimension to this, but the fundamental dynamics would remain the same: *whom* you know matters as much as what you know, and "what you know" has to include more than the brass tacks of your discipline.

More than anything, university culture, even as expressed by its more politically radical elements, orbits a kind of upper middle class gentility that is at home in dinner parties and conferences. It uses "summer" as a verb. Its aggressions, therefore, will rarely be overt because this is seen as barbaric and unseemly. Instead, it relies on *passive-aggression*, the power of a cutting put-down, or simply freezing you out.

Being a woman in academia comes with a similar set of challenges that are best expressed by this evocative paragraph from the game *The Icebound Concordance* where an arctic researcher, Katrin, describes her experience in the field with a male colleague:

*There is always someone else in our small conversations [with her colleague, Björn] (smaller each time, through the chilly weeks since he's arrived). I have never learned this someone's name, but he is a more diligent researcher than I, follows all procedures, knows what's good for him. He deserves to be here, you see; he is an appropriate partner for such important research. He is, if nothing else, at the very least a man. Of course, I am used to this someone ... Being so often in his shadow I have learned how to operate there. It is a kind of home.*

There are two things to take away from this: one, of course, is that a woman in academia is often treated with a quiet disdain by certain male colleagues simply because she is a woman. This disdain will rarely rise to the level of an uncouth, bigoted outburst. This would be declassé. But it will gather over time into an unbearable weight that tugs at every thread of one's impostor syndrome. You don't belong here, you're not like these people, you're not as good as them, you're not a *real* academic, you're an affirmative action hire, you don't deserve to be sole author on this paper, et cetera.

The second thing to take away is that there is more to sexism than a sense of victimisation, a point often missed when portraying bigotry of any kind in fiction. One has to live, even *thrive* under such circumstances. Katrin made a "home" in Björn's shadow. If you are to survive in academia, sometimes that's exactly what you have to do if you don't want to quit or be driven off. This does not mean being content to play second fiddle forever, but it means working and struggling within the limitations you have. As both a GM and player, focus should be given to *living* with the quiet, classy discrimination that dwells throughout the academy, not just on how it "makes you a victim."

The meat of any woman's story lies in how she persisted in the face of obstacles, and how she fought back.

In academia, being a woman means being assumed to be a student when you're actually the department chair, or having a male colleague explain something you're an expert in as if you're a novice; it can mean jingling your keys around ostentatiously to ensure that people don't mistake you for a student. It can mean people assuming you weren't the PI on a research project in spite of where your name is in the list of co-authors. It means walking a fine line between showing what you can do so no one doubts you, but not so much that you seem like you've "got something to prove." It can mean being judged

for your appearance by your students, seeing sexually harassing comments written on their desks, and being rated “hot or not” on various websites that grade professors. It means having to be professional-looking with on-point (but modest) makeup while your male colleagues can roll out of bed with unkempt beards, ratty sweaters and jeans and be thought of as “edgy” or just as “absent-minded professors.”

Sometimes, however, it gets worse. It can mean navigating the most wretched office politics in the academy if you’re sexually harassed by a powerful colleague – or your advisor.

Even other women may turn their backs on you if your accusations threaten a particularly powerful “rockstar” academic who can do no wrong. If it was your older, male advisor who assaulted you, you will likely be framed as a predatory vixen who wanted to sleep with her betters to improve her grades and gain access (doubly so if you’re from a poor background and/or non-white). If you’re already on the tenure-track and accuse a more senior colleague of assault, prepare to have your motivations called into question immediately. Perhaps you were trying to get rid of someone you thought would vote against your tenure? Perhaps you’re just a jealous rival? In these sorts of environments, the basest, most careerist motivations will be assumed and will always be infused with whatever stereotypes best apply to the aggrieved party.

Racism presents a range of related obstacles. As with class and gender, you’ll be given an all-over, pervasive sense that you do not belong here, even if no one ever deigns to shout it in your face. You will be surrounded by people who do not come from your background and who look on your experiences as alien, charmingly quaint, or even backward. Your ability to fit in is judged specifically on how much you distance yourself from your origins. If you are deemed “too Black” or “too Latino/a,” you may be seen as disruptive, “political,” or otherwise not a team player in your department. You may be constructed as a threatening presence, even.

Given the liberal tilt of the academy, you’ll be surrounded by white people who will fall over themselves to tout their tolerant bona fides but who may not have had friends or colleagues of colour before and who will therefore be prone to saying ignorant things. Whether they meant to hurt you or not becomes immaterial after the slights pile up and after they recoil at any suggestion that they’ve said or done something wrong.

I’ve had colleagues of colour describe how white academics reject their ideas only to pilfer them and use them for their next big publication, or how being black in the academy meant being mistaken for a janitor, support staff, or a

night school student. Again, the “affirmative-action hire” meme would surface, with people not only diminishing your struggle to succeed, but insinuating you actually had it so much easier you don’t even deserve to be where you are. Often, being a person of colour in academia also meant being from the wrong social class, just due to existing racial economic disparities, so you’d get all the joys of being both a class and racial outsider.

This “stacking” of marginalisations is important to note; nothing discussed here is discrete, and the fact that each (all too brief) treatment of sex, race, and class echoes similar themes isn’t a coincidence. They are intersectional and play off of each other.

Finally, there are unique concerns around being transgender in the academy. Your name is everything. If you’re John Smith, (Smith, 2017) appearing on an academic citation in someone else’s work is the currency of the realm and it matters almost as much as actual money. Citations don’t buy ramen, but in the free-labour-driven world of academia they get you the exposure that may lead to someone being willing to hire you or give you the research grant that allows you to fully stock your fridge with all the ramen you could eat.

But what if you had to change your name suddenly? Trans academics who transition mid-career face this particular challenge all the time. It can limit your ability to easily change your last name, for one. It’s difficult to ring up every academic journal you’ve been published in to get your name changed in their records, and even then you can’t retract the printed versions of journals that populate countless university libraries. Even then, though, if you become Jane Smith, suddenly all the currency you’ve built up as John disappears – you have to out yourself every time you try to tell people about all that work you did under your old name, and even that doesn’t completely get that necessary social currency back. In a real sense, you have to start over and make up for lost ground.

In either event, transitioning on the job means you have to be “out” whether you want to or not, opening you to all the pratfalls of that kind of exposure.

As a final note, one important thing to remember about all of this is that all of these identities that academia favours – being upper class, being the “ideal male academic,” being white – are all performances of a kind. You can learn them, master them, hide your origins and look like you belong by sheer dint of your comportment and behaviour. If this sounds familiar, yes, it’s roleplaying. Approach it that way, and think about how it would affect you if this was your whole life, even away from the game table. You can roleplay a character who’s roleplaying a character; how’s that for meta academic navel-gazing?



**AGENDAS,  
PRINCIPLES,  
AND MC MOVES**

# AGENDAS

These reflect your role in the game as MC, and you should always have them in the back of your mind. Whenever you make a move it should hit at least one agenda, because this is what the game is driving towards.

- Sorcerous academia is never dull.
- It's always personal.
- Play to find out what happens.

## SORCEROUS ACADEMIA IS NEVER DULL

Boredom is not something the faculty of Pigsmoke ever have to deal with. If it isn't demons breaking through from the nether realms, or the latest thing to escape from the hospital wing, or a spell gone wild, it's the mundane concerns of teaching students, doing research, meeting deadlines, and wrangling publishers. Never mind everything that's going on their personal lives! As the MC, it's your job to keep throwing interesting situations and problems at the players. There's a short list of ideas provided in the chapter on Plots, Schemes, and Poor Fortune (page 133) in case you run out of inspiration.

## IT'S ALWAYS PERSONAL

The stakes at Pigsmoke aren't particularly high, at least not on a cosmic scale. The world isn't going to end if you screw up. Thanks to the intervention of the hospital wing it's not even likely that anyone will lose their life. But the characters still care about things, and threatening those things grounds the story in their concerns.

Find out what the characters care about, and target those things directly. Even if the stakes this time are high – demons trying to drag the entire campus into hell, or something similar – that's not really where the story is. The story is where a demon is tempting a character's relative, or favoured student, or even the character themselves. How will they react? What does that mean for the people connected to them? That's what life at Pigsmoke is all about.

Likewise, take care to establish rivalries and feuds with other faculty at Pigsmoke, especially ones that have the same general area of study as the characters. Will they stab their peers in the back to get published first? Or will they accept second author status because they need to publish something, anything, *right now*?

What's important is what the characters consider important.



## PLAY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS

Don't come into Pigmoke with any preconceived notions of where things are going. Let the dice fall where they may and let the fiction proceed logically from there. Pigmoke is designed so that no matter what the player characters do, complications will find them. Every time they make a weak hit on a roll, their lives become that little bit more complex. Every time they miss a roll and you make one of your moves (see page 100) you'll find that it drives the story that much further forward, automatically creating bad situations that the player characters have to struggle free from – provoking more dice rolls, more weak hits, more misses... it's a self-perpetuating system.

However, all this means the system will fight any attempt to tell a pre-written story. It's designed to squirm out of the player characters' control like a live thing, and it'll do the same to an MC who thinks they can control it. Instead, present the player characters with situations ripe with conflict, make them roll the dice, and abide by the results. When you get a chance to make a move, choose an appropriate one from your list and make it. This will generate further conflict. You'll find the story naturally arises from this cycle.





# PRINCIPLES

These are the basic techniques for running Pigsmoke, broad ideas that sketch out what you should be aiming for when you play. When you make your moves, never contradict your principles – so long as you follow them faithfully, everything you do will be pushing in the right direction.

- Highlight the quirky details.
- Balance the mundane with the supernatural.
- Start with the basics, fill in the details through play.
- Address the characters, not the players.
- Make your move, but never speak its name.
- Name everyone, make them human.
- Your NPCs can't die, but they *can* fail.
- Ask questions and build on the answers.
- Nothing is ever simple... except sometimes, when it is.
- Be a fan of the players' characters.
- Everything comes with strings attached.

## HIGHLIGHT THE QUIRKY DETAILS

Academics and spellcasters are both known for their quirky natures, libraries of arcane tomes, and collections of weird esoterica. At Pigsmoke, play this up. Everyone the characters meet should have some unusual hobby, quality, or collection. It could be anything from scrapbooking to always talking just a little too loud to a wall of bottled imps. Just something that sets them apart.

Even students have their oddities, although they're likely to be drawn from a different set of stereotypes. Anything from a 'drat those millenials' online thinkpiece could do (always on the iPhone, lumberjack beard, excessive piercings...) or you could go for something more typically student-like: always first to office hours, consistently shows up to class in last night's clothes, has a car with a new jury-rigged repair every time you look at it, etc.

## BALANCE THE MUNDANE WITH THE SUPERNATURAL

Life at Pigsmoke isn't all sorcery, but it's not all research and teaching either. If things tend to be swinging one way a little too much, introduce a threat from the other category.

## START WITH THE BASICS, FILL IN THE DETAILS THROUGH PLAY

If a detail doesn't see use in play, it might as well not be there. Pigsmoke the setting is painted in such broad strokes because it works this principle backwards: the details aren't there until you need them for play, then you come up with something plausible and that's The Truth as far as your game is concerned.

## ADDRESS THE CHARACTERS, NOT THE PLAYERS

The players aren't the ones stuck in a department meeting from hell while their latest experiment rampages around campus, the characters are – so when you're talking, talk to the characters. It seems like a small thing, but it's essential in driving home who the story is about and who the story is happening to.

Additionally, when you're describing the scene, make sure to include any details that would be obvious to someone who was there, in that room. The players are dependent on your description to make their decisions, so give them that info. Give them *loads* of info. If someone looks a bit shifty, don't be afraid to tell them that they look shifty. If someone's a mighty sorcerer, make sure to mention their aura of power. If in doubt, give the players plenty to work with. You don't need to keep secrets to generate drama.

## MAKE YOUR MOVE, BUT NEVER SPEAK ITS NAME

When you make a move, don't tell the players what you're doing. Your moves have to look like the fictional consequences of fictional actions, so don't say "Priya, you biffed that *schmooze* roll so I'm going to *put you in a spot*." You may be *thinking* that, but what you should say is more along the lines of "Priya, you know the lie isn't going to work the moment it leaves your mouth. The Dean scowls at you and you swear to God you hear a clap of thunder from somewhere. 'Excuse me?' he says. 'What kind of fool do you think I am?'"

See? The move should look like 'just what would happen' as a natural consequence of what came before.

## NAME EVERYONE, MAKE THEM HUMAN

The rest of the faculty at Pigsmoke aren't just nameless ciphers who exist to make the characters' lives difficult. They're people, with their own hopes and dreams and lives. If it looks like the players are zeroing in on someone as an 'acceptable target' you should take steps to show the target's human side. Make them think twice before demolishing someone.

This also goes for students: Although they're often a nameless, faceless mass to the faculty, if one of them is important enough to appear in a scene then they're important enough to have a rounded portrayal. Give them a name, think about what other classes they might be taking and what they do when not at classes. They're part of the characters' story now, and that makes them important.

## YOUR NPCs CAN'T DIE, BUT THEY CAN FAIL

This is not a story about the NPCs. No matter how cool they are, or how interesting you find them, they are ultimately just props in the stories of the player characters. So if the fiction and/or player character interference dictates that an NPC should fail, or lose out, or make a decision which is going to ruin their life... follow through with that. They're expendable.

And if they suffer physical harm? Ship them off to the medical wing and bring them back *changed*.



## ASK QUESTIONS AND BUILD ON THE ANSWERS

As a group you are more creative than any one of you alone. If someone puts a question to you and you have no idea what the answer might be, admit it and open it up to everyone else. Or sometimes just throw questions out as they cross your mind. The answers could change everything!

Possibly the most important question you can ask is 'What do you do?' Keep prompting the characters for action in the face of your moves (see page 100).

## NOTHING IS EVER SIMPLE... EXCEPT SOMETIMES, WHEN IT IS

The characters in *Pigsmoke* pursue four broad areas of endeavour: research, teaching, sorcery, and personal lives. But they're only human and there's a lot going on. If they look like they're getting on top of all of these – or even three out of four – it's your job to shake things up a bit. Whether you destabilise something they thought they had a handle on or make an already-bad situation worse, your role is to complicate the characters' lives. If they want something it's your job to put hoops to jump through between them and it, then set the hoops on fire if the jumps seem too easy.

But occasionally... not often, but once in a while... just give them what they want. Sometimes, life just works out that way.

## BE A FAN OF THE PLAYERS' CHARACTERS

*Pigsmoke* is not a game about 'you vs them'. It's a game where all of you are working together to tell a story about the player characters' struggles in the world of sorcerous academia. As the MC you should want the characters to succeed, but not without working for their success, and perhaps paying some sort of price.

Quite apart from that, being a fan of the characters means being *interested* in them. You always want to know more, to see how their story unfolds, how they would react under these or those circumstances. When you throw terrible things at the player characters, you'll get a better story if you're invested in how they react to those things.

## EVERYTHING COMES WITH STRINGS ATTACHED

In academia and sorcery alike, nothing comes for free. No matter what you want, someone, somewhere can provide it – and they'll have a price that they expect you to meet. The obvious prices are the easy ones: A demon who demands blood sacrifice in order to guarantee you a parking space outside the faculty lounge is one thing, but an administrator who cheerfully expedites all your paperwork until one day he needs something from you and threatens to take that service away... that's something else.

# MOVES

As the MC you don't make moves like the players make moves. Theirs are triggered by events in the fiction and feed back into the fiction. Yours *are* the fiction, or at least the skeleton which supports the fiction. When you make your moves you don't roll dice like the players do when they make theirs. What you say, happens. But your moves still have triggers:

- When a character rolls to make a move and misses.
- When one of your soft moves is ignored or unaddressed. (So-called 'soft' moves are defined below.)
- When everyone looks to you to see what happens next.

So when Aisling, a Fake, nods and smiles and tells her head of department that of course she can whip up a quick divination to work out who vandalised the library, that triggers *schmooze* for Aisling's player. When Aisling's player rolls snake eyes and the move misses, that gives you an opportunity to make a move – but exactly which move you make is up to you. Perhaps Aisling's head of department wants to watch her work (*put someone in a spot*). Perhaps she withholds Aisling's funding until the library mess is sorted out (*deny them support*). Perhaps she waits until Aisling has left then calls a mysterious number and tells them to be on the lookout for the assistant professor (*announce off-screen badness*). You should go with whatever follows logically from the fiction, and within that whatever seems like the coolest idea to you.

Two asides: First, you don't get to make moves when your triggers don't fire. If the players' dice are hot and they're getting strong hits on everything they try, good for them. You just let them roll on through and wait for the inevitable miss. (Remember: *be a fan of the players' characters* is one of your principles.)

This is less restrictive than you might think. Frequently when a player character does something everyone will look to you to see what happens next – What's behind the door? How does the Dean respond? – and then you get to do your thing. It mainly just means that you can't interrupt a run of great success to arbitrarily make the characters' lives more difficult.

Second, note that none of your moves are 'do nothing'. When the players all run out of ideas or things to do and they look to you, *something* is going to happen. You have to keep things rolling.

- Make them work together.
- Have somebody else do it first, or better, or both.
- Hurt someone, if it makes sense.
- Tell them the possible consequences and ask.
- Announce off-screen badness.
- Announce future badness.
- Put someone in a spot.
- Deny them support.
- Turn their move back on them.
- Use up their time.
- Give them a difficult decision to make.
- Show the effect of their decisions on someone else.
- Turn the university's attention on them.
- Make them teach a class.
- Use a Threat move.

## MAKE THEM WORK TOGETHER

Everyone loves a group project, right? When you use this move, put them in a subordinate position to someone who they loathe – or put them in a position of responsibility for a project which is already off the rails and heading for disaster. Give them a duty or responsibility to their peers which they don't want, then have their superiors hold them to it.

## HAVE SOMEBODY ELSE DO IT FIRST, OR BETTER, OR BOTH

At its worst academia is a cutthroat race to publication, and nothing stings like being beaten to the punch on something you've been working on for months – except perhaps a paper that comes out *after* yours, highlighting all your mistakes.

## HURT SOMEONE, IF IT MAKES SENSE

If they jump from a great height, with no spell or some such to catch their fall, go ahead and hurt them. Hell, take them out and send them to the hospital wing if they do something stupid enough.

None of the moves listed here allow the MC to inflict burnout directly on the characters. That's something they have to choose to suffer as a result of their moves – avoiding greater consequences by internalising the stress.

However, you're fine offering a burnout box as an optional *price* for something else: most commonly with the moves *tell them the possible consequences and ask*, and *give them a difficult decision to make*. Just so long as the final decision to mark off that burnout box is theirs, not yours.

## TELL THEM THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES AND ASK

Clarify things. Explain. Say “if you do that, these things will happen” and ask if they want to continue. If they say yes, follow through hard. After all, you’ve given them every chance to back down.

## ANNOUNCE OFF-SCREEN BADNESS

Sometimes, it’s nice to let the players get a look at what their characters are about to catch full in the face. Not a full, detailed look – just a couple of sentences about a shadowy figure watching them leave the scene, or a ‘zoom in’ on a bubbling cauldron that cuts away just as a grasping hand breaks the surface, or something like that. The tension comes from the fact that the players know *something* is about to go wrong but not exactly what, and the characters are totally clueless.

## ANNOUNCE FUTURE BADNESS

Sometimes, the characters can also see what’s coming.

This occupies a sort of middle ground between *announce off-screen badness* and *put someone in a spot*; like the latter it telegraphs that things are about to get bad, but like the former that badness is more of a sweeping wave or tonal shift than a specific bad thing that is happening to a specific person right now. Also, unlike off-screen badness, this move makes sure that the characters know what’s about to fall on them.

### ANNOUNCING BADNESS: A TRIPARTITE EXAMPLE

*Announce off-screen badness:* A quick glimpse of a shadowy figure at a desk, illuminated only by the glow of their monitor as they pull up the player characters’ financial records and start flagging all the irregularities. Fade to black.

*Announce future badness:* Everyone in the department gets an email from the Dean’s Office: A number of financial irregularities have been discovered within the department, so everyone will be subject to an audit. Tomorrow. Whose perfidy has been discovered? Can everyone else who’s up to something hide their tracks in time? Can the characters use this to frame their rivals?

*Put someone in a spot:* One of the characters is summoned to see their head of department – but in her office the head is flanked by one of the Dean’s leaden constructs on one side and a blind calculator demon on the other.

“Your expenses this year don’t add up,” the head says. She offers them a chilly smile. “Why don’t you walk me through them?”

## **PUT SOMEONE IN A SPOT**

Suddenly, things get worse! This is a go-to move a lot of the time because it creates drama and it forces the characters to take action. It's also an easy call in the fiction: the player misses a roll, so naturally the situation escalates. Just be wary of continually creating new spots without ever following through on the old ones; this is almost always a soft move, so when it goes ignored or unaddressed you get to drop the hammer as hard as you like.

## **DENY THEM SUPPORT**

When they reach out for help, there's nothing there. Someone who promised to come through for them, doesn't. Show them that other people can't be relied on.

## **TURN THEIR MOVE BACK ON THEM**

If you're familiar with improv techniques, this is your 'no, and...' move for when someone misses a roll. If you're not familiar with that terminology, what this move means is that the character hasn't just failed to get what they want; their actions have actively made their situation worse. They didn't simply fail to get through to their failing student, they've driven them to pursue some terrible scheme out of spite or shame. They haven't just failed to requisition that spirit-pinning Vajra dagger they needed; the university now wants their previous 'loan item' returned (and naturally, it's long since been lost or ruined).

## **USE UP THEIR TIME**

Sometimes things just take longer than you expected. Whatever the character was doing, it's now **TIME-CONSUMING**. This may cause them to abandon it and do something else instead, which is fine – sometimes best practice has to give way to a solution which works *right now*.

## **GIVE THEM A DIFFICULT DECISION TO MAKE**

Find two things they want, and offer them one at the cost of the other. It's a safe bet that they'll try to have both anyway, but now you're telling the story of their grand plan and how it goes wrong (or right).

## **SHOW THE EFFECT OF THEIR DECISIONS ON SOMEONE ELSE**

No one lives in a vacuum. When a player character decides to do something, go ahead and show how their actions impact the lives of people around them. Maybe they've gained respect or people fear them. Maybe that student they blew off has just lost their scholarship and they're out on the street, their dreams destroyed.



## HARD MOVES VS SOFT MOVES

When what you describe can still be prevented, deflected, or otherwise avoided, that's a **soft move**:

- "The minotaur drops its head and charges! What do you do?"
- "You *could* use the last of the powdered silver for your ritual, but Lucian will know it was you – and he specifically asked you to save it for him. Will you do it?"
- "It's a shame you gambled away all your grant money, because the email says the Dean's Office is going to be auditing your finances in two weeks. What will you do?"

When what you describe happens, as you describe it, that's a **hard move**:

- "The minotaur slaps you across the room with a powerful backhand.  
You're *hurt*."
- "Well, you got your answers from Shagraznarular the demon serpent, but you used up the last of the powdered silver in the process. Lucian needed that for his research; he's not going to be happy with you."
- "When you get to your office, it's mostly occupied by a hulking automaton of lead and bronze. 'Be seated,' it says. 'We have detected some irregularities in your accounting...'"

As the MC you can make any move you like when you get the opportunity, but it's best practice to lead with soft moves and then follow through with hard moves if the player characters ignore the soft moves or find themselves unable to stop the approaching doom. You can also tune your use of moves to suit the state of the game. If the characters have been having a hard time or have a lot to deal with, use soft moves to give them some breathing room. If they seem to be on top of things, get harder.

Your moves aren't specifically broken into a list of hard and a list of soft moves, because most of them can be both depending on context.

## TURN THE UNIVERSITY'S ATTENTION ON THEM

Most bureaucracies only work because no-one enforces all the rules. Everyone develops little loopholes and lax habits which allow them to actually get the important stuff done.

The university doesn't care about that. They care about the letter of every regulation. They care that you fill in every form, and that you use block capitals when you're supposed to use block capitals. They care that you're not publishing enough papers, and that your students are failing in statistically significant numbers.

They care, and they have constructs of lead and bronze which will make sure you care too.

## MAKE THEM TEACH A CLASS

Pigsmoke is a teaching university, and that means that staff are expected to put in a minimum number of hours educating students (or compelling their TA to do so on their behalf). It's assumed that player characters do all this in the background, unless they foreground it by voluntarily triggering the *teach* move - or unless you foreground it by using this move on them.

This move serves two main purposes. First of all, it forces the characters to engage with the mechanics of the game: when they teach a class they have to roll the *teach* move, which comes with all the glorious possibilities of failure. Second, it forces the characters to engage with the fiction of the game world: they're faculty at a teaching university, therefore they need to teach. What do their classes cover? Who else might be interested in that field and seek them out for a research partnership or other scheme?

## USE A THREAT MOVE

When you've got some codified Threats in your game (see page 115) they'll come with move options of their own. For example, if a character's rebellious daughter Clara is a significant Threat then any time you can make a move you have the option to make one of the Family Threat moves listed on page 120. Maybe Clara shows up at their office while they're trying to impress their head of department (*be present somewhere unexpected*). Maybe that dog she 'rescued' actually belongs to a local member of the Russian mob (*bring something unwelcome home*). These are the moves that let you personalise the Threats in your game and show the unique ways in which they complicate the PCs' lives.

## TIME

As the MC, your job also involves applying the constant pressure of time. Events continue to move whether the PCs are paying attention to them or not.

A year at PigsSmoke is split into two semesters (fall and spring), split by the summer and winter holidays, and each semester is divided into two terms by spring break in the spring and Thanksgiving in the fall. By default the game begins at the start of the fall semester, then follows this pattern:

- The first fall term (9 weeks)
- Thanksgiving/Fall break (1 week)
- The second fall term (9 weeks)
- Winter holidays (3 weeks)
- The first spring term (9 weeks)
- Spring break (1 week)
- The second spring term (9 weeks)
- Summer holidays (11 weeks)

Weeks pass either when every player has performed a **TIME-CONSUMING** activity, or when they pass in the fiction. Every three weeks, or after every holiday, you as the MC have the option to *make them teach a class* or make a soft move of your choice – you don't *have* to do anything, but you are explicitly granted the option to step in and say 'This is happening. What do you do?'

If you're short of ideas, either set up or carry out one of your Threats' agenda steps (see page 118). The characters' rivals aren't sitting around doing nothing!

## THE ART OF GETTING THINGS DONE

If someone *really* wants to make the most of their time, remember that one of your moves is *tell them the possible consequences and ask*. So offer them the ability to get an extra **TIME-CONSUMING** activity in at the cost of a burnout box, or a failed relationship, or whatever other price you feel like attaching to their hubris.

And remember also that one of your principles is *nothing is ever simple... except sometimes, when it is*, and that means sometimes it's okay to just give them what they want. Have they not been doing much this week? Does it make fictional sense? Then sure, throw them a bone, let them get another **TIME-CONSUMING** activity in. Or don't! The game can cope either way.



**THE FIRST  
SESSION**

# YOU THE MC

The players have an easy job: pick a couple of playbooks, answer some questions, and they're ready to go. But if you're going to be the MC, your job is a little more involved.

## BEFORE

Read this whole book. The players can get away with just reading their playbooks, but you're going to need to know the whole deal (or at least enough to find the info you need with a minimum of searching).

Print and assemble a batch of character playbooks: one each of the roles and 1-2 each of the departments. Technically you need as many copies of each department playbook as you have players, in case they all choose the same one, but that doesn't happen very often. Print your worksheets too.

This is a lot of printing, so if you want to conserve paper you could discuss who wants to play what online before the first session and only print the relevant playbooks, or you could use scratch paper for rough playbooks for the first session and print proper ones once you know what everyone's playing - either in time for the second session or during the first session, if you have a printer handy.

If you bought this game online, print-friendly playbooks are in the same zip file as this document. If this is a hardcopy, the playbooks can be downloaded from <http://www.certain-death.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Playbooks.pdf>

Skim through the rules for Threats, but don't make any yet. Note down any good ideas you have for later reference, though.

Likewise, if the inspiration strikes you, make some notes regarding any themes, motifs, or scenes you'd like to see. Don't get too hung up on them, since they may never see play, but it's good to have the texture of the game floating around in your head ahead of time.

If you're a veteran of other roleplaying games, you may think you need to prepare some material for the first session, an adventure or plot to hook the characters in and give them a reason to spend time together, but *Pigsmoke* is meant to be played 'cold' and resists any pre-planning. So don't waste your time.

# DURING

Oversee character creation. Answer questions, and ask them if they spring to mind. Take some notes regarding the questions the players choose and their answers – those are sources of drives and vulnerabilities that you can lean on later.

Then start playing. It's the first day of the fall semester in a new academic year. Find out what the characters are doing and follow them around for a bit. If they're short on ideas, suggest some of the following scenes:

- **Home Life:** How does the character keep their home? What's their morning routine? This is a good option for characters who live with families or roommates. Their family makes demands of them. Their roommate's awful friend or lover is here and winding them up already. Their house is haunted, *again*.
- **Teaching:** What's the name of the course the character is teaching? Is it a lecture or seminar or lab? Do they have a favourite or least favourite student? This scene can (and probably will) feed right into a *teach* roll, but as a first scene its main purpose is to introduce some of the character's students and establish how the character interacts with them.
- **Research:** A scene of a character hitting the books isn't very interesting, so as a first scene this is going to be more about the interpersonal aspects of research: the character needs something from the university, or they're trying to get onto a promising project being run by a different academic, or they're bargaining for forbidden lore with some inadvisable patron.
- **Departmental Meeting:** The head of department has called everyone together to meet the new hires and set the department's course for the coming year. Who among the character's department is their rival? Their ally? What do they think of the new hires? Are *they* the new hire? What's the head of department got up their sleeve? This is particularly good if you have multiple PCs in the same department.
- **Interdepartmental Lunch:** All teaching staff at Pigsmoke are required to attend a huge lunch put on by the university in an attempt to promote cross-departmental co-operation. This is a great opportunity to introduce a huge array of NPCs and entangle the characters in their concerns; it makes a great second scene once some of the PCs have generated some conflict in earlier scenes.

As the MC your job is to look for the nascent conflict in any of these scenes and bring it to the fore. Always ask yourself: What does the character want? And what (or who) is stopping them from getting it? That's a good basic conflict. A slightly more advanced conflict occurs when what the character wants is 'not to do whatever this NPC has asked me to do' and what's stopping them is whatever leverage the NPC holds over them.

You may find that in order to play up the conflict in some scenes, you have to play an NPC like a total asshole. That's fine: the first session benefits from nice, obvious antagonists with transparent motivations. Preferably ones the character(s) can feel good about knocking over. You can get into nuanced antagonists later, but for now... go loud.

While you're playing, always refer back to your agendas, principles, and moves; this is only the first session but you're still playing the game, after all. However, if in doubt lean on these:

- Get your description in. Make it weird.
- Springboard off character creation.
- Ask questions but don't answer all of them.
- Find their weak points. Poke their weak points.
- Keep an eye out for move opportunities.
- Get them on-screen together.
- Make your NPCs obvious and loud.
- Use the 1st session worksheet.

These are your principles, somewhat condensed for ease of use right out of the gate. In later sessions you'll probably want to branch out a bit, but for the first session if you follow these instructions and use your moves you won't go wrong.



## GET YOUR DESCRIPTION IN. MAKE IT WEIRD.

This is a more definite version of your principle *highlight the quirky details*. The first session is where you establish the tone for the rest of the game, so you want to go all in on describing the setting and the people who inhabit it. Give everyone the characters meet a defining oddness. Every location is weird, except for maybe one which is aggressively normal. Dig in to the senses other than sight or hearing. What's that strange smell in the elementalists' lab? What hangs so thickly in the air near the CABSBA building that you can taste it, or feel it greasy on your skin? Just keep throwing out detail after occult detail.

Also, ask the players! They may have weird and wonderful details of their own they'd like to add, and that's *perfect*. Ask for them, collect them, use them.

## SPRINGBOARD OFF CHARACTER CREATION

The character creation questions are the most obvious elements you can hang further details on, but there will be others. Everything the players tell you about their characters can suggest more: places, events, problems, people. Especially people.

If a character isn't self-sufficient, then they'll spend at least some of their time interacting with other people. If they *are* self-sufficient, then other people will seek them out to learn from (or steal from) them. Either way, human contact is a rich source of conflict.

## ASK QUESTIONS BUT DON'T ANSWER ALL OF THEM

All of you together are more creative than any one of you alone – so share the load! Any time the players ask a question about the university and you don't have an immediate answer, consider turning it back to them. "I don't know. *Why does the head of department keep calling you the wrong name?*" And more broadly, any time you see something of interest, give it a poke. Most of the time you'll find that innocuous statements are just the tip of very large, dangerous icebergs, and it's that danger you want to tap for your game.

That said, resist the urge to dig right down to the bedrock in the first session. Open questions are going to drive the later sessions of *Pigsmoke*, and also offer interesting options for linking characters and storylines. So while you want to be asking a lot of questions, resist the urge to find all the answers just yet.



## FIND THEIR WEAK POINTS. POKE THEIR WEAK POINTS.

People like things ordered and controlled. They like it when everything goes according to plan. This applies both to the characters and the players playing them, but it makes for bad storytelling. The good stories come out of times when everything spirals out of control, and giving things the tug they need to start unravelling is your job. The moves in *Pigsmoke* will take care of the rest.

In those first few scenes, look for things the characters would like to control but can't, or the things they think they control but don't. These are the points where you can apply pressure, destabilise the characters' lives, and create situations where they can flounder.

So apply that pressure. Remember your principle *nothing is ever simple* and target whichever part of the character's life is most likely to slip away from them. You can target their research with rivals or sabotage. You can make their teaching difficult with intractable students or impossible demands from the Dean or their head of department. Their home life can become a quagmire of demands from their families or roommates, with horrible complications looming if they refuse or fail. And sorcery... well, sorcery can screw up *anything*.

Keep an eye out for anything that looks like a status quo, and terminate it with extreme prejudice.

## KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR MOVE OPPORTUNITIES

As the first session progresses, pay attention to the conversation. Every time it sounds like someone might have triggered a move – perhaps they're telling someone what they want to hear, or making a purchase order – give them a moment to go 'oh, that's a move!' and if they don't, step in with a gentle reminder.

Keep an eye on their playbook moves too. They'll probably need less reminding of those, but it doesn't hurt to be aware of them just in case.

## GET THEM ON-SCREEN TOGETHER

Frame scenes that bring the characters together, in whatever combinations you can manage. The interdepartmental lunch mentioned on page 109 isn't a bad way of doing this, but there are some others. Give one a problem that another one can solve. Make one of their solutions to a different problem impact on the other. Introduce something that threatens areas of interest to each of them. Have them carpool together, either every day or as a one-off for some special occasion. Or just throw together a pairing that interests you or seems underplayed and ask them to justify it. "Just why *are* you two the only people in the computer lab at 3 a.m.?"

## MAKE YOUR NPCs OBVIOUS AND LOUD

As mentioned before, the first session benefits from NPCs with transparent motivations and no subtlety. Give them each a name (from the worksheet or make one up), determine what they want, and have them pursue that drive with all the vigour of a coked-up rhinoceros. Put the things the characters care about in their way, and force the PCs to somehow deal with these rampaging assholes or watch their dreams get trampled.

Nuanced characters, subtle schemes, and slow-burn plots are all cool things – but in the first session your job is to get things rolling *right now*, and nothing does that like the proverbial bull in a china shop.

## USE THE 1ST SESSION WORKSHEET

As you go through the first session, make notes all over your worksheet. Note down the PCs and what they want, and the NPCs and what *they* want, and link them all together in a spidery sort of map based on who has what whoever needs, and who stands between Person X and Person X's Desires.

## AFTER

Give the session some time to percolate in your brain. Mull it over. Consider it.

Then go back over the whole thing and, with the help of your 1st session sheet, solidify the key non-player characters into Threats (as detailed in the next section). You don't have to stick exactly to what went down in the 1st session, or take everything there literally. Just remember what's established as true and what's just rumour: maybe you'd prefer it if the head of the Department of Life and Death *wasn't* a vampire, but for some reason everyone thinks she is. Maybe she's some other kind of paranormal thing entirely. Maybe she's just weird.

Once you've got the Threats written up, you can go back for the 2nd and later sessions with a new mechanical tool. Now, when time passes and you get to make a move, you can glance at your Threats and advance one of their plans. When you need to know how the head of the Department of Mindbending will respond to a blatant ploy to replace them, it'll be simple.

Then just keep going until everything wraps up.





**THREATS**

# THREATS?

Threats are the people – and sometimes things – that are going to make the characters' lives in academia difficult. Threats have one or more wants, one or more resources, an agenda, and a selection of moves to go with your *use a Threat move* move.

To create a Threat grab some paper and list the following things:

- What the Threat is.
- What the Threat wants.
- What resources the Threat has.
- A 3-5 step agenda that the Threat will follow to get what it wants.
- The Threat's overall category and moves.

# WANTS

A Threat isn't a threat unless it has some sort of call to action. Most Threats will only have one, but some may sit on an awkward join between two or three. Those will generally be less effective because they're pulled in different directions, but that's people for you.

Each want is going to fall into one of the following categories:

- Ambition
- Envy
- Fear
- Greed
- Ignorance
- Pride

Note down the general category of the want and a sentence or two about its specific details.

- Alex Morris wants absolute control of the Department of Mindbending – and then, why not topple the Dean? Why not indeed. (Ambition)
- Ying-Wai Cheung wants protection from the demon that stalks his family, and is going to go looking in all the wrong places for it. (Fear)
- Rosa Mendez wants to show her Catholic family that being a witch is nothing to be ashamed of. (Pride)
- Verdant is an actual dragon. She sees the money that flows through the university and wants a slice of that action. A large slice. Really, the whole cake. (Greed)

# RESOURCES

A Threat always has one or more things that it can use to get what it wants – and which often double as things the PCs want, encouraging them to get involved with the Threat in the first place. Choose one or more from the following list that suit your vision of the Threat:

- Artefacts (powerful individual items)
- Charisma (social)
- Command (over minions, TAs, students)
- Force (physical)
- Influence (over the university bureaucracy)
- Keys (to places)
- Knowledge (mundane or sorcerous)
- Network (of people who know people)
- Wealth (including piles of mundane *stuff*)
- Willpower

The specific nature of resources varies from Threat to Threat – a witch hunter with an influence resource, for example, probably holds and exercises that resource differently than a head of department with an influence resource.

These resources exist to give you, the MC, a sense of how a Threat will pursue their drives in the game. A Threat with force and command will respond to player character meddling in a very different way to one with keys and influence.

- Alex is the deputy head of Mindbending, so her resources cover charisma, command, influence, and network. She does not have knowledge; she certainly has plenty of sorcerous know-how, but not significantly more than any other Pigsmoke faculty member.
- Ying-Wai has been to a lot of bad places and learned a lot of bad things. He gets keys and knowledge.
- Rosa has precious little to work with, so I adapt her characterisation a bit and give her force and willpower. She's athletic and stubborn and uses that to get what she wants, although what she wants is to prove herself as a witch, and using her current resources to achieve her goal is going to make her an interesting mess.
- As a dragon Verdant obviously has force – a different kind of force to Rosa – and knowledge, and wealth. But she has to hide from the world at large so she has nothing in the way of social connections. Note also that her wealth resource doesn't affect her greed: she's got plenty, but she wants more.

# AGENDAS

For every Threat, look at their wants and their resources, and work out a 3-5 step plan that will take them from where they are to where they want to be. This is their agenda.

Like moves, agendas are both prescriptive and descriptive. For example, if a Threat has the agenda step 'open the forbidden vault of the Campbell Memorial Library' then if this step is checked off, they have opened the vault; and if the vault is somehow opened in play, then you should check this step off.

Agendas as written describe what happens if the PCs don't interfere, and at least the final step must be a problem for one or more of the PCs – this is what makes the Threat a Threat, after all, rather than just a cautionary tale that happened to someone else. But if steps become impossible, or the Threat changes their goals, or something else happens to disrupt the Agenda, either scribble out the previous steps and come up with some new ones, or retire the Threat and introduce a new one.

- Alex's initial agenda looks something like this: dig up or fabricate evidence against her detractors; get her detractors fired; acquire the Hieratic Scrolls; decipher the Scrolls; crush the minds of everyone at the departmental meeting. It's not strictly linear, and that's fine. You just cross off the steps as they come to pass. It also doesn't cover her plan to assault the Dean – odds are the PCs will put a stop to her before then, or it could make a good 'second season' plot.
- Ying-Wai's agenda could be: open the forbidden vault of the Campbell Memorial Library; destroy something important while pitting demon against demon; turn to human sacrifice; unleash something terrible. This one's got a couple of vague steps in it, but that's fine too; just fill in the details as they become relevant.
- Rosa's agenda might go: do good deeds with magic; perform an act of sorcery in public; bring witch hunters down on herself and everyone nearby. None of this plays into her resources, and that's ok – she's going to use them as a response when her plans get derailed, rather than her primary way of achieving her goals.
- Verdant's agenda would probably be something like: gain leverage through bargaining; gain leverage through blackmail; gain leverage through threats; exploit all that leverage to channel money her way; accidentally defund something important. The first three steps could be done in any order, and not all of them are necessary for the fourth step.

If the PCs render some part of a Threat's agenda unattainable, you'll need to put yourself in the Threat's shoes and reassess. What other steps are no longer feasible now? Can the agenda continue without them? If not, can the agenda be modified to still produce something like the same outcome?

A Threat probably won't abandon their agenda unless their fundamental want is addressed in the process. So long as that still exists they'll keep modifying their plans or coming up with new ones to achieve the same ends, forcing the player characters to keep dealing with them until the basic drive behind the Threat's actions goes away.

For example, thwarting Alex Morris' plans will likely just lead her to dream up new ones. Likewise Verdant. In both cases the Threat is likely to remain until their fundamental nature is changed to remove their want (e.g. persuading Verdant that she has enough gold) or, more likely, they suffer such a huge defeat that their want is no longer remotely tenable (e.g. getting Alex fired).



# CATEGORY, IMPULSE AND MOVES

Threats fall into one of five broad categories, which each come with their own MC moves:

- Family
- Magical
- Peers
- Students
- University

Threats also have an **impulse**, which is the drive which makes them a problem. It's the thing which causes them to interfere with the lives of the player characters and otherwise disrupt the status quo. If you're at a loss regarding what the Threat will do next, look to their impulse. That's what they'll do next.

## FAMILY

Family Threats also cover friends, roommates, pets... anyone who commands your attention because you like them, because you share living space with them, or both. Choose what kind of family the Threat is:

- Loved One (impulse: to make genuine mistakes)
- Roommate (impulse: to leave their mess – physical or emotional – all over your living space)
- Nightmare Roommate (impulse: to make you feel unsafe)
- Couch Surfer (impulse: to use up your resources)

## MC MOVES FOR FAMILY THREATS

- Surprise someone.
- Get entangled in something that isn't really their business.
- Be present somewhere unexpected.
- Place demands on someone's time.
- Neglect a chore or task.
- Consume or throw away something important.
- Bring something unwelcome home: a thing, a stranger, or some drama.

Most familial Threats will also do nice things from time to time – but if they're listed as a Threat it's because their ultimate dramatic purpose is to screw things up for the PCs, hence the list of negative and unhelpful moves.

## MAGICAL

Magical Threats encompass the paranormal – ghosts, curses, demons, undead plagues – but also Threats which wouldn't be a problem if the character wasn't a sorcerer, such as witch hunters or other sorcerers who are not affiliated with Pigsmoke. Choose what kind of Threat it is:

- Paranormal Entity (impulse: to express its nature)
- Curse (impulse: to ruin a life)
- Plague (impulse: to spread)
- Witch Hunter (impulse: to unearth secrets)
- Rival Sorcerer (impulse: to cast spells, recklessly)

## MC MOVES FOR MAGICAL THREATS

- Endanger someone directly.
- Take something from someone.
- Corrupt someone.
- Kill an NPC, permanently.
- Claim territory.
- Defy theoretical limits or restrictions.
- Display naked power.

Magical Threats have probably the widest variety among Threat types, covering everything from dragons to vampires to ghosts to curses to witch hunters to out-of-control sorcerers. These things might also be categorised as other Threats – a dragon with a teaching position at Pigsmoke might be a peer instead, or an out-of-control sorcerer who is also your teenage son might be a family Threat – but magical Threats make a good catch-all for things which don't neatly fit into the other categories.

## PEERS

Your peers are faculty members at Pigsnoke and other magical colleges, fellow travellers on the road to wisdom.

Also your primary rivals for grant money. *Destroy.*

- Gatekeeper (impulse: to obstruct)
- Darling (impulse: to be better than you)
- Liar (impulse: to spread false knowledge)
- Saboteur (impulse: to undermine)
- Doomed (impulse: to pursue bad ideas)

## MC MOVES FOR PEER THREATS

- Split up a partnership.
- Deny a request.
- Complicate something which should be simple.
- Vanish without warning. Return when convenient.
- Reveal new information.
- Act out of spite.
- Parade a victory.

Your peers are also your main source of co-authors for your papers, though, so even a Threat might be helpful in some ways.



## STUDENTS

The students at Pigsmove are there to make the faculty's lives difficult. They fail to absorb the knowledge so generously imparted to them, and clutter up professors' office hours with rambling complaints and ample evidence that they fail to grasp even the most simple principles of their field. Of course, their fees also pay the bills so the Dean's office is very interested in keeping them happy - and you don't want to disappoint the Dean's office, do you?

Students don't often become full-fledged Threats, acting more as the sort of background frustration to academics' lives, but sometimes they do. Choose one:

- Driven (impulse: to excel at any cost)
- Obdurate (impulse: to get everything wrong)
- Mob (impulse: to lash out)
- VIP (impulse: to threaten retribution)
- Activist (impulse: to bring about change)

## MC MOVES FOR STUDENT THREATS

- Ask a difficult question.
- Appear at an inconvenient time or place.
- Find a simple, bad solution to a complex problem.
- Conceal their own ignorance.
- Be blind to their own potential.
- Miss an opportunity.
- Pick on someone who has shown weakness.

Not all students are terrible. Some are brilliant, some are lovely, most are unremarkable but pleasant enough. The ones who become Threats are the worst of the bunch: the ones who are going to use all the potential of youth to do stupid, destructive things... unless someone steps in to mentor them. Or at least, direct the worst of the harm elsewhere.

## UNIVERSITY

'University' covers the bureaucratic engine that drives the entire institution, including the baleful eye of one's head of department and the arcane decrees of the Dean's office. Essentially, if a Threat comes from someone with legitimate authority over a character, from a faceless bureaucrat, or from a monolithic organisation that cares nothing for the individuals that stand against it, it could be a university Threat. Choose a type:

- Tyrant (impulse: to compel obedience)
- Monolith (impulse: to create collateral damage)
- Cipher (impulse: to issue impossible commands)
- Accountant (impulse: to take away whatever they have)
- Architect (impulse: to build something new)

### MC MOVES FOR UNIVERSITY THREATS

- Deny access to equipment or resources.
- Issue an order, with threat of punishment if not followed.
- Issue an order disguised as a request.
- Give someone more work than they can cope with.
- Make a show of disciplining someone.
- Show off wealth or power.
- Cast aside the unsatisfactory.
- Discover a breach of protocol, a breaking of the rules, or a moment of weakness.



# EXAMPLE THREATS

## SIGNIFICANT OTHER

**Type:** Family (Loved One)

**Want:** Ignorance

**Resources:** Charisma, Keys (specifically, to your home), maybe Network, maybe Wealth

You love them. You want them in your life. Just not *this particular part* of your life, whichever part that might be. Naturally they're going to show up where and when you least expect them, doing their part to keep the relationship alive and get close to you – and you're going to struggle to keep them at arm's length.

### AGENDA

- Surprise them at a bad time; ask "Is this a bad time?"
- Drop a large family obligation on them – meet the parents, attend a wedding or funeral, etc.
- "We need to talk." Ideally at a time when they're supposed to be doing something else.
- Reveal a long-running infidelity if there is one. Otherwise, start one.
- End it.

## TEENAGER GOING OFF THE RAILS

**Type:** Family (Roommate)

**Want:** Pride

**Resources:** Charisma, Force, maybe others

They may be your son or daughter, or a nephew or niece, or even just the child of a friend who you've always got on well with. Whoever it is, this isn't standard teenage rebellion: this is a life that's jumped the tracks and is sliding downhill with increasing speed. What will you sacrifice to save them? *Can you save them?*

### AGENDA

- Get into trouble with the authorities, and bring them to the player characters' door.
- Ask for advice. Do the exact opposite.
- Get into trouble with someone or something more dangerous than the authorities.
- Try your own solution. Fail. *Hard.*
- Meet a sticky end. Prison, if you're lucky.

## INDEX LIBRARY GHOST

**Type:** Magical (Paranormal Entity)

**Want:** Envy

**Resources:** Keys, Knowledge, Willpower

The library's haunted. Everyone knows it's haunted, and as far as you can tell it's been haunted for at least a hundred years. But now the library ghost is starting to act out and for some reason it's picked you as the focal point of its agitation. What do you have that it wants so badly? Are you willing to give it up? Are you able?

### AGENDA

- Make nonsensical or impossible demands.
- Deny them access to the library.
- Deny others access to the library.
- Stop haunting the library; start haunting them.







## THE PARANORMALIST

**Type:** Magical (Witch Hunter)

**Want:** Ignorance, or maybe Envy

**Resources:** Network

Organised witch hunts haven't been a thing in the US for hundreds of years, a fact for which everyone at Pigsmoke is extremely thankful, but they haven't gone away entirely. Now the practice is continued by everyone's least favourite meddlers: paranormalists. Sure, they're (probably) not going to burn you at the stake if they find you but their behaviour is notoriously unpredictable, and if one gets wind of something juicy - or worse, *evidence* - there'll quickly be more.

### AGENDA

- Stalk them around campus.
- Break into their home or office in search of evidence.
- Summon others.
- Reveal your knowledge to exactly the wrong person.

## THE ANCIENT

**Type:** Peer (Gatekeeper)

**Want:** Fear

**Resources:** Command, Influence, Network, maybe Artefacts, maybe Knowledge

Decades ago, this academic was responsible for a major breakthrough in the field, one of those famous discoveries or developments that now bears their name. Pigsmeoke snapped them up as a draw for new students, and they've spent the past thirty-some years doing *nothing*. The department doesn't care – their purpose is marketing, not teaching or research – but for some reason they've taken a dislike to you specifically, and their new hobby is throwing their considerable weight against anything you attempt.

### AGENDA

- Publish something in a wizarding journal denigrating the PC's area of research and them personally.
- Reject their application to publish in a journal you review or run.
- Override their official requests with your own; let the resources gather dust or go to waste.
- Covertly sabotage their work.
- Have them fired for ineptitude.

## THE NEW HIRE

**Type:** Peer (Darling)

**Want:** Ambition

**Resources:** Command, Knowledge, maybe Charisma, maybe Influence, maybe Wealth

They're young, ambitious, and just gifted enough that maybe that ambition isn't wholly unreasonable. Their aim is to be the youngest head of department in Pigsmeoke history, and woe to anyone who gets in their way.

### AGENDA

- Ride their coat-tails.
- Steal their credit.
- Steal their work.
- Create an opening.
- Achieve power. Look smug.

## THE DONOR'S KID

**Type:** Student (VIP)

**Want:** Fear

**Resources:** Wealth, maybe Artefacts, maybe Network

Their parents are big names, and they've dropped a lot of money on Pigsmove. Money which comes with the unspoken condition that this darling child is going to walk out with a full degree and a 4.0 GPA. And you know what? They're not a bad kid! They study, they attend lectures and seminars, they try their hardest... they just *suck*.

### AGENDA

- Your parents try to buy you a pass instead of a fail.
- Your parents leverage blackmail or threats to get you a pass instead of a fail.
- You try something inadvisable or beyond your abilities.
- Your parents demand that the PC fixes everything. Or else.

## THE LOUDMOUTH

**Type:** Student (Obdurate)

**Want:** Ignorance

**Resources:** Willpower

Intelligent and driven, this student has made a fundamental mis-step somewhere and fallen head-first into a sinkhole of terrible ideology. And now *because* they're intelligent and driven they won't stop to wonder if maybe they made a mistake somewhere; they just act in line with their new, awful ideals. Worse, they've zeroed in on you as a 'debate partner' and love to 'challenge' you with their garbage.

I mean sure, so far they're not much different from other students with bad ideas – but this one's got the will to *act*, and it won't be long before they do something regrettable.

### AGENDA

- Disrupt their class.
- Monopolise their time outside of class.
- Gather support.
- Denounce them as a part of the vast conspiracy arrayed against you.
- Take direct, violent action against them.

## THE ACCOUNTANT

**Type:** University (Accountant)

**Want:** Greed

**Resources:** Command, Influence, Knowledge, Wealth

Somewhere in the depths of the accounts department of the Dean's Office, there sits a person who can work magic with money. Not just the ordinary sort of money magic either – moving it, growing it, making it appear when needed and disappear when inconvenient – but actual honest-to-God sorcery that uses financial value as part of its medium of exchange.

Maybe they're jealous of you. Maybe you stole their parking space. Maybe your papers crossed their desk at just the wrong moment. Whatever the reason, now they and their strange magic are coming for *your* money.

### AGENDA

- Audit their university budget.
- Audit their home finances, whether you have the right or not.
- Work the sorcery that will bleed them dry.
- Take every last shred of value that they have.
- (Optional) Use that power to do something awful.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

**Type:** University (Architect)

**Want:** Ambition

**Resources:** Command, Influence, Keys, Network

There's a new head of HR at Pigsnoke, and they're looking to make their mark on the university. Their plan is to entirely do away with the current system of separate departments and replace it with... well, you're not sure. Some sort of poorly-explained "learning cloud". Firstly, this is almost certainly a terrible idea. Secondly – and more importantly – restructuring always means job losses, and it's not like tenure track positions at prestigious arcane universities are easy to come by. Human Resources must be stopped.

### AGENDA

- Gain the Dean's approval – and protection.
- Stage a trial merger of two departments.
- Target anyone who complains or tries to reveal problems for silencing or elimination.
- Dissolve the department structure and replace it with something worse in every way.





**PLOTS,  
SCHEMES, AND  
POOR FORTUNE**

# PROBLEMS BY DEPARTMENT

## THE DEPARTMENT OF LIFE AND DEATH

- The Pigsmeoke football team – the Fighting Piggies – have been possessed by the ghosts of the Piggies team of '77! This isn't super-unusual, but Coach Brown is tearing his hair out because the '77 team were *dreadful*. With an important match against Glorystaff coming up Brown needs his team functional ASAP, and the exorcism has been assigned to you.
- The head of department has made an ill-advised move to bring the medical wing under the auspices of Life and Death. The medical wing is, naturally, fighting for their independence. Will you back up the head's terrible idea? Or will you turn against them at the risk of your career? How bad will the political skirmishing get?
- Curtis Bellweather was a professor in another department until he died over summer – actually, properly died, beyond the reach of even the medical wing – and the jockeying for his position begins with the new term. The awkwardness starts when he rises from his grave as a powerful undead and wants his old job back. Naturally, the Department of Life and Death will become involved – if they aren't already!

## THE DEPARTMENT OF MINDBENDING

- Students across the university are suffering from strange memory loss and odd behaviour. Everyone assumes the Department of Mindbending is up to something – and specifically they blame you. What's really going on? Can you clear your name? Or at least find a convincing scapegoat?
- The problem with the study of mind control is that it attracts a lot of assholes. Alex Morris is one of those assholes. She's the deputy head of department, and she keeps trying to make you do things you don't want to do – work late, work weekends, take on her students' problems, get her a better computer from IT, etc. You need to find a way to get her off your back.
- Several students are convinced that a secret society exists among the faculty hell-bent on nefarious deeds and eating out at fancy restaurants on the university's dollar, and they keep writing exposes in the student paper. The head of mindbending has assigned you the task of convincing them that this is a bunch of ridiculous fiction... and if you do well the head will sponsor you for membership!

## THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESIGHT

- Someone in your department – possibly you – has made a great and sweeping prophecy regarding the future of the university. Now the faculty is divided between those who wish to see the prophecy come to pass, and those who desperately want anything *except* that vision. Which side are you on? Who is on your side that you wish wasn't? And what will you do in order to win?
- Your head of department has made a great and sweeping prophecy... in order to win a bet. The whole prophecy is completely made up, but due to miscellaneous events their professional reputation – and the bet – now depend on it coming true. You are the one they chose to help them fake it.
- A new member of staff in a different department is completely unpredictable; no sorcery known to the Department of Foresight can foresee their actions. This has pressing practical concerns for predicting the future at all – and will also make a fantastic paper if you can work out how they're doing it and beat everyone else in the department to the punch. How far will you go to claim a top-flight publishing opportunity?

## THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTS

- Your head of department commands an ideologically-opposed element to you, and to shore up their power base they're making sure that people of your elemental alignment are deprived of everything they need, forced to share office space with the most obnoxious people they can think of, and so on. You can't work like this – but what will you do about it?
- It all started out as a way for students to practice their skills – but now the Department of Elements has their very own fight club. The Dean has found out and the Dean isn't happy, and your head of department has passed that unhappiness down to you: find out what's going on, who's responsible, and put a stop to it. Fail, and additional Dean-related unhappiness will doubtless follow.
- The Dean is conducting a review of all the departments; the results will affect budgets, but more importantly also the level of smugness the higher-rated departments can deploy for the next year or two. So for at least the next term the Department of Elements has to operate like a smoothly-oiled machine: unified, efficient, engaging of students and at the cutting edge of research. Not the mess of factions, backstabbing, theft, and aggro that it is now. Can you unify the department and earn your head's gratitude? Is this just another opportunity to throw your rivals under the bus? *Both?*



## THE DEPARTMENT OF ALCHEMY

- It's come to the head of department's attention that alchemical compounds are circulating on the mundane streets as the latest designer drug – which is capital-B Bad for a number of reasons. They've chosen you to dig up the truth and put a stop to it, all without crossing the police or any drug dealers, and without letting the Dean catch wind of what's going on. This sounds suspiciously like... *adventuring*. Oh dear.
- Ever since the formula for the philosopher's stone was published, there's been a low-level trade in bootleg stones among students looking to cheat on alchemy tests and/or make terrible transmutation mistakes. But the problem at Pigsmoke is becoming endemic and the department's reputation is tanking. Worse, the finger of suspicion is pointing at *you*. Can you persuade everyone of your innocence? Find the real culprit (or at least deflect the blame)? Are you even innocent at all?
- The departments of Alchemy and Foresight have a long-running mostly-unofficial contest to see who can amass the most wealth – and right now, Alchemy is losing. The head of department wants to fix this, and there's departmental prestige at stake. Since the Dean has banned the simple creation of valuables following the Great Devaluation of 2011, you're going to need to find a legitimate way of making mad bank. Or a way of fooling the Dean into not noticing your breaking of the rules.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF CABSAs

- The department has arranged an exchange program with a distant plane: students from there come here to learn our magic, and select lucky students from here go there to learn... something? Naturally this creates all sorts of logistical problems – feeding the visitors, hiding them from the general public, etc. – as well as whatever unearthly schemes they may have brought with them.
- CABSAs and the Department of Elements have announced a joint scheme to investigate the elemental planes and make contact with the alien principles which live there. Are you part of this initiative? Or opposed to it? How will you deal with (or commit) the inevitable sabotage? And what is it about the elemental principles which makes them so different?
- CABSAs has been abusing a poorly-worded agreement with one entity in particular for decades, prevailing upon it to do everything from helping with research to filling in for the department secretary to heating the offices in winter. But now someone has screwed up and released it, and everything's going to hell. Did you release it? Are you the one assigned to renegotiate the deal? And what form is its revenge going to take?

## THE DEPARTMENT OF PARAVETERINARY MEDICINE

- The stuff is like kudzu: invasive, aggressive, almost impossible to kill. Also, it eats magic. And sometimes spits it back out. No one wants to be the department that deals with angry supernatural plants, but since maintenance have threatened to quit *en masse* if they're forced to deal with it the Dean decided paraveterinary medicine are the next best thing. Have fun!
- It's a new kind of thing. It's alive and more or less biological, which makes it part of the purview of paraveterinary medicine. It's very much on fire a lot of the time, which draws the interest of the Department of Elements. And it's from another plane of existence, which means CABSA want to claim it too. There's career-making research there – if you can somehow navigate the office politics and the egos of your fellow academics.
- Someone in the medical wing is binding animal parts to human subjects – which isn't exactly unusual for them – but this time they seem to be sourcing their bits from the department menagerie. On the one hand, they shouldn't be doing that. On the other hand, do you want to risk meddling in the affairs of the vivimancers? No? Shame the head of department has told you to make them stop. Hop to it.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTEFACTS AND RELICS

- Fraternities and sororities have long traditions of hazing rituals, and it seems that this year a popular task for new pledges is to steal something from the department. Which would be bad enough if it was just the magical students doing it, but the trend has spread to mundane students as well and somehow they manage to know even less about what they're stealing. If the department – by which the head means *you* – doesn't put a stop to it, someone's going to get badly hurt.
- The rivalry with Glorystaff College is becoming ridiculous. You steal one of their artefacts, they steal three of your relics... the constant back and forth has killed productivity and the Dean has ruled it has to stop. After you win so decisively they can never come back, of course.
- Someone on campus is making bootleg artefacts; more or less functional but prone to odd side effects and occasionally dangerous feedback. Campus security reckons whoever it is has an 'in' with the department allowing them to covertly swipe genuine relics for copying. The head of department has turned to you to sort this out: Can you put a stop to the bootlegging? Or at the very least turn it to your advantage?

# PROBLEMS FOR ANYONE

## CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'RE A MENTOR!

At the start of term staff meeting, you're introduced to one of the new hires and told that they'll be under your wing for the foreseeable future. Your head of department impresses on you that they've got a lot of promise, a publication or two in influential journals, a wealthy or connected relative... at least one good reason why their success and happiness must be assured.

Unfortunately, they're terrible. Their research is juvenile, their teaching makes nothing but enemies, they're sleeping with people in three other departments and *none* of those liaisons are a good idea, their home life is a disaster that they cheerfully bring to work and expect you to unravel. It's not a good position to be in.

- Does your head of department know they've saddled you with an albatross?
- Is there any actual promise buried beneath the surface of this person?
- Is this a scheme by somebody to discredit you or your department?  
Who? Why?
- One of their romantic conquests is only using them to get to you. Why?  
What stops them from approaching you the traditional way?
- Suddenly, out of nowhere, they make a groundbreaking discovery. They must be cheating... but how? And can you take advantage of it?

## THE DEAN IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE DEAN

The first you hear about it is on the university intranet: last night the Dean died. The power struggle to replace him has already begun, and your head of department expects your support in their bid for Deanship.

You have to be a head of department to become the new Dean, you see, but if it's your head who gets the promotion there'll be an opening above you – and if you helped them into the Deanhood they might just be grateful enough to usher you into their old office.

- Did the Dean die, or was he murdered?
- Why hasn't the medical wing just repaired him?
- Who will be the new Dean?
- Why are the Departments of Death and Alchemy fighting for the Dean's body?
- What does the Department of Foresight know, and why aren't they saying anything?

## STUDENT UPRISING

As a response to recent changes in policy, the students have risen up to commence a Marxist-style takeover of the university. No faculty are safe from being overthrown and replaced with... something. They haven't decided what yet.

On their side they've got numbers; the energy of youth; and the simple fact that they are, basically, in the right. On your side you've got raw power; the cunning of age; and the simple fact that, being students, they know considerably less than they think they do.

(Or maybe you're on the students' side?)

- What was the change in policy that prompted this?
- Who is the firebrand student becoming the public face of the revolt?
- Who is the member of faculty looking to do something unpleasant to that student?
- Who is quietly using the uprising to advance their own plans?
- Why hasn't the Department of Mindbending just fixed this already?

## TRAPPED IN A YA NOVEL

One of the students taking a class with each of the player character faculty is a *chosen one*. They've got oddly-coloured eyes or hair, or a distinctive scar, or some other obvious mark of destiny. They and their rag-tag group of friends never seem to do any work and skip class to have adventures on the regular, yet they still manage to pass everything – even tests you create to be deliberately unfair.

And as if this wasn't bad enough, their japes and hijinks are *constantly* interrupting classes and forcing the whole school to reschedule things. At least the other students manage to keep their dramas quiet.

- What is this student's destiny?
- Can it be changed or averted?
- What was the last thing they did to disrupt your class?
- Who is the student's nemesis among the student body?
- Are you going to be the Good Teacher, who absorbs all the fallout of the chosen one's bad decisions?
- Or are you going to be the Bad Teacher, who tries to impose a modicum of order on things at the cost of their own reputation?





# INDEX

Abilities	10	Mindbending, department of	56
Academia and identity	89	Moves	8
Academic improvement plans	14	Moves, basic	19
Advances	14	Moves, MC	100
Advantage	9	Networker	36
Agendas	94	Paraveterinary Medicine, dept of	69
Albatross	47	Peers	122
Alchemy, department of	63	Pigsmoke	77
Artefacts and Relics, dept of	72	Pigsmoke 101	1
Basic moves	19	Playbooks, department	53
Burnout	17	Playbooks, role	33
CABSA, department of	66	Plots	133
Character creation	12	Politician	38
Compulsions	10	Poor fortune	133
Dean, the	79	Principles	96
Department details	81	Research	15
Department playbooks	53	Rockstar	40
Dice	8	Role playbooks	33
Disadvantage	9	Schemes	133
Elements, department of	61	Setting	6
Example threats	125	Setting up	7
Experience	14	Slacker	42
Fake	44	Students	123
Family	120	Stuff	11
First session, the	107	Teaching assistants	18
Foresight, department of	59	Threats	115
Git	34	Threats, examples	125
Harm	16	Time-consuming	15
Healing	16	Transition	31
Hold	10	University	124
Index	141	What this is	2
Inspiration (box text)	3	Why play Pigsmoke?	5
Life and Death, department of	54	Workhorse	50
Magical	121		