

# *Dreaming Waters*

using

The Filial Piety Action System

by  
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*this work is dedicated to*

*Sebastien*

# Siskery Leah

Leah found an angel at her door one day.

"I'm in love with you," he said.

She slammed the door on him. He caught it with one hand. He spread his wings. They were blue and black with bits of gray in them. They were distorted, rippling, as if between those wings and Leah there was water. They shone with the same dim light as the moon.

So she put her fist against her mouth and she stepped back.

That's how Rags came in.

His wings passed through the door frame like a ghost's.

"I can't keep you," he said. His smile was ingenious and then sad. He did a little twisting motion with his head. "I'm an angel of Rags and fire, and I'd only hurt you in the end. But I can't stand to leave you here. I can't stand to watch the grayness eat away your life."

He took her left hand, which was dangling by her side, and he pressed it to his chest above his heart. She was sick with fear and wonder and she did not know whether to scream.

Then suddenly she felt she was in water.

The world—her home, her shelf of things beside the door, the yellowing light of the lamp above—was reflections in and on the water. A sense of unreality and liquidness pervaded. The world around her rippled. Then it began to drain away.

A world crested above receding waters.

The rocks of Siskery cast great shadows over the tenement she knew. The sun burned where it had been night. In a puddle of rainwater she saw herself reflected, and her home, and Rags, his hand still trapping hers, and leaning close, his wings intersecting with the wall.

*Of course, she thought. That's how they fit. The reflection of those wings overlaps the image of my home.*

Her old life fell from her. It poured from her, ran down her sides and legs, trickled from her hair. It moved like water but it was not water. It left behind gray streaks of dream.

He stepped back.

His wings beat, great and terrible and also nervous, like a dove's.

"This is Siskery," he said.

He looked up at the sky.

"This is real."

She tasted the air. It was cold and clean and good. The light that was on every thing was bright. She could not dispute him. This was real.

He reached out his other hand for her.

Then with a shudder he released her and withdrew. He stepped back. He gave her a wild, panicked look. The beating of his wings made dirt and dead grass skitter on the ground. He rose into the sunlight and she yelled at him. She did not know what it was she yelled.

He left.

*The world, she thought, is made of dreaming waters. And now I stand above it and am whole.*

In the days to come she would find the Siskery tribe. She would take their name. She would live among them, forsaking the Earth she knew.

Fear would often find her, and regret, but she would not go back.

The waters would not close over her head again—  
save once.

# Introduction

In the beginning the One People lived upon the world and in the upper air. And as they moved upon the world and in brightness their lives were as a great sound or tumult in deep places.

The noise of life and living angered the shadow in the dreaming waters. It said:

"These creatures born upon this world,  
and living there,  
are unpleasantness to me."

. . . but let's pause there for a moment, and talk about this game.

**Dreaming Waters** is a setting for the **Filial Piety Action System**. It has as its premise a notion that our world is clouded, made confusing and dim in comparison to its natural state, by the *dreaming waters* and the shadow that lives within them. In this world the natural state of humanity is closer to flow or peak experience, and people really ought have wings.

It's possible to rise above these waters.

This is a metaphysical act. Sometimes we'll describe it as if the waters and the world above are completely separate places—alternate dimensions. Sometimes we'll talk more as if the waters are the Matrix, a perceptual filter creating an artificial world. Sometimes we'll talk as if the two worlds are side by side, elements of the same experience, two parts of a greater system or whole.

That's because all of these things are true.

The dreaming waters are a world all their own. They're a perceptual filter. They're part of the real world, side by side with it, participants in a larger reality. They are everything that our world is; it's just that the actual world is something larger, vaster, and more wild.

It is possible to rise above these waters and reclaim that world.

There one will find the cities of the angels.

They call themselves the people of wine and fire—when they do not call themselves the One People, in which they include humanity. They are more healthy, more long-lived, more clean in their movements, and they are winged. They love more easily—not better, not deeper, but more easily, and with fewer stresses and hang-ups—than humanity. It fills their lives.

To them the humans who live in the dreaming waters are creatures of priceless beauty and matchless valor. This is because they could not bear to live within these waters as we do. Their hearts would die. They would despair and fall to darkness.

Thus the options of this setting are three: urban fantasy, insofar as the characters regularly return to the dreaming waters of our world; paranormal romance, as the relationships between humans and the people of wine and fire can easily drive the game; and swords and sorcery, if the game is set almost entirely in the angels' world.

For that world is brighter than ours and more real but it is also a world of terrors: of demons, and beasts, and monsters, who like the angels escaped it when our world was drowned.

The underlying system for this game is the **Filial Piety Action System**. This system was designed in an attempt to open a bit more space—as an incremental step rather than a large one—for viewing characters' actions in a social context. It's a tiny movement from the atomic, self-contained actions standard in an RPG towards something a bit richer in connotation.

In practice you will find that it's a fairly light and ergonomic system. It has a chaotic and cinematic combat system, but not a tactical one. Players have access to a broad array of abilities but operate in a relatively narrow band of competence. The system gives the most weight to interesting weapons, skills, magic, and combat styles; and after that to how people relate to the people around them; and lastly to all the other little details of the game. The system core is generic and can apply to almost any situation; however, it works best when that core is paired with an interesting technique or two. In situations dramatically beyond those expected by the rules core, those techniques will fall to the GM or players to design.

So if you're interested in that tiny rules step towards a social context; or in a light, fun gaming experience; or if you're in love with interesting weapons, then this may be a system for you. If you also like the idea of shedding the dreaming waters of the world to find the cities of the angels, then this may be your game.

If not, I hear you can do practically anything with that game next to this on the shelf, WUSHU or D&D or KULT or whatever capitalized thing it's called. It's a pretty good game, I bet. Go take a look!

# Daniel Marks

Daniel Marks was born in Spire, the City at the Rock. He made friends with the seagulls. He had strong wings that could soar out far over the sea, strong hands that were good at pottery, and a good heart. He lived every day knowing that his ancestors had hidden at the heights—many on the Rock of Spire—when humanity had drowned.

So he dove into the dreaming waters.

He took a teaching job among the wingless. He watched his students for the presence of the slakes. He tried to share with them some of his knowledge of their own beauty and the beauty of the world.

One night he met the shadow.

Of course it couldn't have been Herself. He knows that to be true. It was a demon of shadow, a beast that spoke for her, or possibly just a dream—

Hollow protestations.

One night he met the shadow. Grayness passed over him. It almost took his soul. He choked on shadow. His stomach lurched. He realized he was vomiting his *self*: disgorging memories, thoughts, and heart into the dreaming waters. Gray fog poured into his lungs and throat and mind.

He broke the surface of the waters screaming.

He could not bear to go back—not even to say goodbye. Yet the idea of returning to life in Spire had too much of a connotation of defeat, of giving up on people who live with what he could not. So now he walks the great roads, selling his sword and wings as a bodyguard and messenger. Now he travels and goes wherever the wind or his duties take him.

Last night he dreamt the face of the shadow, turning towards Siskery.

He woke on Earth, in the lower world, with slakes coiled hungrily about him. His mind was full of screams, and death, and fire.

# Setting

In the beginning, as we have said, the One People lived upon the world and in the upper air. And as they moved upon the world and in brightness their lives were as a great sound or tumult in deep places.

The noise of life and living angered the shadow in the dreaming waters.  
It said:

"These creatures born upon this world,  
and living there,  
are unpleasantness to me."

So it thrashed, and its thrashing cracked the sphere of the world, and the dreaming waters rose. They drowned the cities and plains that were. Everywhere they spread, excepting only the high places and the upper air, and for forty days and forty nights the waters made themselves more deep.

They were not mortal waters but a gray and diffuse uncertainty of being. They washed across the world in a spirit of desperation and forgetfulness and the loneliness of the heart. They covered the places of the One People and the People felt a great aching in their hearts.

Their limbs, which had been strong, knew trembling.

Their hearts, which had been certain, knew uncertainty.

Their eyes, which had seen clearly, faltered.

Some stayed behind to fight the waters. To save their cities, or from a cruel attachment to what was being lost. Some stayed to help others, or to fight for others, or simply because they could not accept that the world they knew was drowning.

Immersed in dreams they forgot themselves. They became the people of the water, the wingless ones, the dreamers and the warriors and the prey of the shadow. Their noise became lost in the flow of waters, became a great and dismal clamor that folded in on itself and around itself and was one with the drowning of the earth.

They forgot how beautiful they were.

Others abandoned the lower world. They scrambled in desperation and in fear to the high places. They fled because they could not bear to lose the way they were. They could not bear to be parted from their truths, their wings, the fire of their sun.

They crouched on the rocks and spires in the upper world, and flew until their wings could hold no more upon the upper air.

The waters reached for them—

But that reaching could not sustain. The dreaming waters sank back down, leaving a place for the People to live. The vastness of the world that was now lay submerged, but atop it—above it—remained the kingdoms of the winged. There remained to them forests, and plains, and great icy mountains, and some few rivers left and lakes untainted by the dreaming waters. There they built new cities and new lives.

Beneath them there endured the dreaming grayness.

It moved beneath the soil, it was reflected in the waters, it drifted across the landscape in great mists. But most particularly it endured just underneath the surface of experience, so that at each moment the angels felt that only their clinging to the high places preserved them. That if they were to open their hearts and dive deep into the intransigent disturbance that the dreaming waters' caused therein, they would step into our world.

We did not live physically below them. We were not under their soil. We were reachable in the depths of their rivers, lakes, and seas, but that was not where we *were*. We were despair-wards of them. We were dream-wards of them. We were confusion- and uncertainty-wards of them, in the direction of a broken heart. They feared this, and they grieved for us, and they wept.

## The Nature of the Waters

The dreaming waters are not like the fresh water or the salt sea.

They are as a mist, or a smoke. A person can breathe in them, though the breathing grows shallow and unpleasant over time. It is the defining characteristic of our world, to the angels: even in the cleanest places, we do not know good air.

A person may move through the dreaming waters, but the waters are heavy. Moving takes effort. The clinging of the waters makes us heavy. A current runs always from the living waters towards the land of death: for this reason, we who live in the dreaming waters are held fast to the ground.

The dreaming waters are not entirely malign.

To be an angel is to be locked into one's nature—bound to one's loves and purposes, timeless, burning, and eternal. To live in the dreaming waters is to know a loosening of bonds. The waters dissolve away at who a person is and it is a freedom as well as a cruelty.

In a like fashion the dreaming waters are the source of shamanic visions. The world of angels knows only truth; the human world knows only dreams. Thus to *dream true* one must know something of both worlds. Before the waters the angels' world was bounded by their experiences; after the waters, art and aspirations both reached new heights.

It is not the waters themselves that were an evil, but only how far they rose—how much of the world they drowned—and that in them still the shadow moves.

## The Shadow in the Dreaming Waters

The shadow is despair.

It is many other things. It is Herself who dwells beneath the living waters and the dead. It is the chanter of dreams. It is the primordial font of being.

It is most poignantly despair.

Its agents move in the waters—gray creatures. They are imperceptible to most. They are invisible because their character is the same as that of the waters that immerse a human from the moment of that human's birth. Those agents bring humans to despair, or abrade away the purpose in a person's heart, or cause us to drift without the knowledge of ourselves. They may cloud the power we have to see the Right. They may live with a person until that person degenerates into an agent of the shadow in his or her own right, hunched down and closed within their mind and made to be as a clawed unruly beast of hungers.

They are that which obscures and atrophies our power of listening;

That which kindles our ferocity;

That which dampens our ambition and desire to serve others;

That which makes other humans incomprehensible to us;

That which makes the mind to drift away from duty.

Also they are that which kills us—that which drags a person down from the living waters to the dead, to dwell in timeless misery.

It would be an excellent world if these things were altogether and entire responsible for each of these sins, but they are not. It must be said, and sadly, that the character of the One People has always been flawed, and the agency of the shadow only worsens what exists.

But it must also be said that to live in the dreaming waters is to know these failings and the presence of death in ways the angels do not.

## The Fall of the One People

Thus the people who stayed to fight or live where the dreaming waters rose drowned in the power of the shadow. The people of the water knew new kinds of dreams but also a dullness of the faculty that sees oneself and others truly.

We lost ourselves to it.

Our birth-wings fell away.

We became forgotten of ourselves. We lived and died and our children, born beneath the water, grew up never knowing what it was like to span the skies.

We gained one thing from it.

It was in the water, in the full presence of despair, that we learned that despair could be defeated. It was in the dreaming waters, emptied of our purposes, that we learned that purpose could be forged and made. That those born to blindness could find a path to see the Right. That to be born rigid in our ways and goodness was not the only hope of virtue.

We learned that evil could be fought.

And even today, the angels say of us that we are beautiful. They say we shine beyond their ability to comprehend it, we who are born in the waters and know not wings. Even today they admire us; though also they say this, wryly, of the water people, of the wingless people, of humanity:

"They don't know how to get along with one another.

They only know how to fight evil."

## The Angels and the Wingless People

They say that we are beautiful.

They say that it is because of such light as we manage to grow and nurture in ourselves, here in the dreaming waters, that we are beautiful. Our dreams and purposes are fragile and battered by the sea—but they call them beautiful for that they are dreams and purposes we *made*.

They feel a guilt.

They are wracked by it. It is terrible to them. Even those angels born now, so many generations after our fall, believe that they abandoned us to

suffer and hid in the high rocks while we who drowned made ourselves a thing of beauty.

They weep to know our dead: to count the endless throngs of us that are taken not by nature but by the dreaming waters, carried down by that dark current that goes to the regions of the dead. They fear for us, who are lost to the agency of the shadow, who are given over to despair.

They would rescue us—

But they believe it would be cruel.

They believe it would deprive us of our birthright; and of our primitive and foolish trust that to live the way we live is good. They believe it would be taking something from us. But most of all they believe that if they brought us to their world we would die of it.

The world of the angels is bloody bright and dangerous, after all.

## Animals

Now it is spoken that the humans are not the only creatures that have drowned, for there are animals in our world as well. Some emulated the angels, climbing to great heights and refusing to drown in dreaming waters. Others remained with us beneath the waves.

In the days before the dreaming waters many of the animals were wise—they opened the third eye of the mind and saw as much or more with it as humans see. They attained the experience of self and the power of prophecy and foresight. They learned the gift of speech.

Under the pressure of the waters it is not so.

Despair is an old associate of wisdom, of course. Insofar as an animal is wise, as it is thoughtful, as it is able to reflect, the dreaming waters will impose on it the same fate of forgetfulness, dreaming, and despair that the humans know. But to the animals it does something else as well. For animals teetering at the edge of awakening to wisdom, or holding wisdom dormant in themselves as an ability of their kind, the pressure of the waters drives that wisdom back and buries it within their heart. It is a chill upon their minds. It drowns away their powers of prophecy, foresight, and reflection. It binds them in a fashion much like that in which it binds the dead, to move through the world in a timeless and thoughtless fashion, unable to look forward or back to memory or satiation, and knowing only the endless now.

For some animal species this is a small difference—for there have never been many wise insects, and few wise mice. For other species of animal the loss is tangible and profound: the dogs, the cats, the horses, the wolverines, the oxen, and the sheep have all lost more in the dreaming waters than have

we. Not only do they suffer despair when their minds grope upwards towards awareness, their innate power of reflection and foresight has been lost. They cannot understand its absence but they feel it keenly always. That is why sometimes we will meet wise animals in dreams. When they are out of their body they recover their buried powers of reflection and foresight, and, clinging to them, do not willingly or easily return to their thoughtless flesh.

## Birds

For birds the matter differs.

What we know of birds is this: that they are immune to death. When their valorous lives give out they leave the shell of their body and ascend to higher realms. For this reason the dreaming waters do not affect them, nor do they fear to dwell among them. Wise birds are rare but travel freely through the upper realms, the lower realms, and the waters of the dead; even the birds that are not wise and live their lives without a thought are as comfortable here as anywhere. The same is true for all the creatures native to the skies.

## The Dreaming Waters and the Heart

It is the nature of the dreaming waters to take something of their form from the patterns and interactions of the heart. They are malleable, as they make us malleable. They learn from us their shapes. We may say that the waters take their stringencies and conditions either from us or from despair: everything that is not directly descended from the hungry will of the shadow comes from us.

That is why this is a world where we may achieve our dreams—

At least within the living waters.

For the human world is only the highest portion of the waters. It is only that portion that is close to the cities of the angels—the descending waters, the receding waters, the waters that may fall back (if one is taken high enough by aspiration or one's destiny) to reveal the higher world.

## The Living Waters, and the Dead

This highest portion of the waters—this experience that we call Earth, or home, or just the world—is also named the *living waters*. It is the forum for our

lives. It is a reflection on and in and through the dreaming waters, where they are above the surface of the world that was.

It is made by our hearts and our ideas—

For in the water we dare not speak the truths of ourselves, and we dare not see the truths of others, and so these truths flow out and into the muddied waters. Distorted by endless ripples and reflections they become our world.

This is the region where we wingless people dwell, in our endless drowning, not far beneath the angels and their homes. It is what we call "Earth," and, to whatever extent we rise beyond that planet, it ascends to fill our "space."

But this is not the entirety of the waters.

There is a current in the waters that flows always down, towards deeps beneath the surface of the world that was. The waters there are infused with the shadow in the dreaming waters, and we call them the dead waters, or just *death*.

The world knew death, of course, even before the waters.

There was the death of birds—the death that is the ending of life and the burning purpose inside it, but also a form of freedom and a new beginning. There was the death of angels—the death that ends, but opens onto mystery. And certain animals had their own kinds of death, such as the elephants and the toads.

Now there is a fearsome death, a monstrous death, a terrible death.

It is named the dead waters or the deep shoals.

In those waters the dead shuffle in a cold and empty fashion through an endless and senseless world. They do not hear each other when they speak: those words are meaningless to them. They do not have the ferocity to fight evil: it is victorious to them. They do not know each other, and thus they may not think on another's thoughts, honor another's wishes, fulfill their obligations to their fellows in the dim and endless darkness that is below.

There is no sensation. They have not the capacity to perceive it.

There is no purpose. They have not the power to experience it.

If there were to be a fiery Hell, and it were to impinge upon their sense experience, and they were able in their dismal toil to form thoughts, then they would envy it. They would reach for it with their unfeeling hands, open their cracked lips and pray for the solace of pain. And, in fairness, no doubt those inhabitants of Hell who looked outwards on that damp and endless grayness would reach out in like fashion, and beg in kind to trade their places.

To those who dwell in the gray waters of the dead even the wingless would be as angels—creatures of endless beauty and hope, free from the

profoundest tethers of material existence, dwelling in a world indescribably wondrous.

And like us the dead have a power and a beauty that may call to those in the higher places. And like us they have an inexpressible capacity that could in theory free them from those regions on their own. It is analogous: for it takes only that capacity for thought, for will, for wishing, for desire, to drive them up into our world, the living waters, that each of them already has within them. It is a thing that they have and a power they can exert, for they are worthy of the living world, and even most likely of the world of angels. But the condition of their lives is such as to forbid it. They have the power but they have no *time*, no moments of experience, no span of sentiment. They have the power to free themselves but no stable moment of existence in which to enact it.

The dead may return to life, but it takes a rare thing—an *epiphany*, an inexplicable intervention of a nameless provenance. Without that they are mazed and drowned eternally, unable to orient themselves and discover within themselves the capacity to break free. The living may help them to find this, may make it more likely, but they cannot force it—the dead still mire in their shells of unknowing, even when the living speak to them, unless a rare spark of connection is made that reorients them on the world.

Thus the bravest humans are those who go deeper even than our world and seek to free the dead before the waters there devour them. This is the highest act of heroism, and beyond even most heroes. Few would try; and of those who try, the majority are driven back, shuddering, before they have sunk more than an inch or two below the waters of our world and into death's bleak regions. And of those who manage to dive deep and do the work of heroes there—they must still struggle weeping and bloody through legions of the dead before they find one they have the capacity to wake.

The dead waters are not an inevitable destiny. They are not the fate of all who lose their flesh. The dead go only to this place when they reach their death by succumbing entirely to the current in the waters—to dreams, to confusion, to despair. Some say a human lives five or six lives before they fall into those depths; some say a person lives through only one, that the *difference* between that which only wounds and that which kills is the current in the waters. The dead waters are not an inevitable fate—but they are the standard one. It is known that it is rare for the wingless, born within the dreaming waters, to find any other death. We rarely flee to higher realms when we depart. We hardly ever untether entirely from the world. We could do better; we could, at least, do otherwise. But the shadow in the dreaming waters is cruel, and so humanity descends.

## The Deep Shoals

The land of the dead is a thing of shoals and atolls, and beneath them waters deeper yet. At its base there is the maw of Herself, the shadow, who drinks the stuff that falls to her as an undifferentiated wine. And we do not know what this means for the souls of those who fall thus far, whether they are cursed beyond all imagining and lost forever or simply returned after their brief digression in the lower waters to the original human death. We cannot know this thing because by the time a soul descends unto that maw, there is nothing left in any portion that distinguishes one soul from the next. There are no qualities and no memories, no purpose and no characters, but only the remnant spirit-flesh that says, "Something remains."

This the shadow in the dreaming waters sifts down and devours in great gulps, and there is nothing left at all.

The angels do not like to think of these waters deeper even than the waters of the dead—but to think on them is unnecessary. The waters of the dead are themselves enough to make our world, and the dreaming waters, into blasphemy. It is enough that there be the dead waters, without any consideration or concern for that below them, to enrage the most temperate of souls—

Or so the angels say.

## The Receding Waters

When the waters pull back from us, when they recede from us, there is the higher world. This is the world of the angels—the other half of the One People. It is what is left of the world that once there was.

This world is bright and its air is clean but it is not Heaven.

## The Absence of the Waters

To live in the world above is to free oneself from the waters. What was clouded becomes clear. A character of dullness in the world departs—things become more vibrant and alive. Purpose becomes sharper, as does desire. The truth of oneself and others becomes more visible—not precise, not obvious, but less opaque, less hidden, and more clear.

To rise above the receding waters is to free oneself from the cacophony and dismal forgetfulness characteristic of the dreaming waters and its shadow. Limbs become stronger. Thoughts become clearer. A fog disperses. The world is

piercing, like a sunrise, like the sound of rivers, like the moments of transcendent flow. To look upon the world after the receding of the waters is to experience one great and timeless joy.

For those who have known joy and love for the world below, it is as if that experience of joy, so difficult to find and bear, now comes easily to hand. Now it pervades, now it is part of one, like a skill finally mastered and made one's own or a dog answering one's whistle with great bounds.

This does not mean that the world above is perfect.

Anything but!

For the wingless have long known that a person may find joy and beauty in imperfect things. It is not an ideal state that impresses fiercely on the aesthetic sense but a sort of fire in the soul and clean-ness of ambition. It is not because the upper world is perfect that it is vibrant and evocative of joy. It is because the waters that hide the light of things have drawn away, and the eyes may love them more cleanly there.

The world above isn't perfect.

It's bloody terrifying.

## The Dangers of the Air

Despair has never been the only enemy of the One People. Since the rising of the waters it has been—perhaps—the greatest. But the oldest enemy remains the fact that everything born is doomed to find an ending; that to desire something is not to have it; that to live we must struggle against chaos and our chains. Nature is still cruel, above, in the world of angels. There are wilds and great beasts.

There too are vast threats—powers not so deadly as the shadow in the dreaming waters, but terrifying enough. There are angels who have learned a wicked path; there are monsters, demons, spells; there are lamia and there is the cult of fire; and there are the sibling-storms.

In this place the tribes and cities of the angels flourish, and struggle to live within their world. Their works are great and fragile, for in a world of many dangers they do not make good heroes. That is reserved for the wingless ones, the people of the water, with their ambitions and their clamorous voices and their self-defining power.

It is said by those shamans who love all things, even the shadow in the dreaming waters, that that is why the waters were given to us. That the shadow exists, and dwells below, and draws humans down to death so that we might learn, through this oppositional instruction, to fight evil and grow strong.

## The Strangeness of the Heights

The principal character of the world one finds when the dreaming waters recede is *strangeness*. For the regulation of things into neat and orderly methodologies is a characteristic of the dreaming waters, while of the risen lands above them, it is not so.

If you ascend above the dreaming waters, it should not surprise you to find a city built upon the vast belly of a dead or slumbering giant; or spires impossibly tall around which the angels fly; or a place where rope bridges are strung gaily between the mountains and the moon, winched out or back as it moves across the sky, and released to thunder upon the forests when the moon is making its descent into the dreaming waters of our world. There are places where green and blue winds blow across the desert, catching up tumbleweeds in their path. There are rock plains that catch on fire in the hottest hours of the day. You may find talking mice, or forest-gods, or love.

## The Homes of the Angels

The people of this realm are for the most part winged. Their capacity for flight is similar to the wingless' ability to run: most can manage a few minutes of hard flight in an emergency and half an hour to an hour of soaring at a relaxed and pleasant pace. A few may sustain themselves for a great length of time aloft, but more than three or four hours tires even the hardiest of angels. A substantial minority of the residents of the upper realm cannot manage sustained flight: their wings may be deformed or weak or they may be born with none at all. These things in mind, the architecture of the upper realms expects but does not depend on flight. It is more aerial, more vertical, and more open than the architecture of our world, but as a rule accessible to those on foot. Even those strong-feathered tribes that spend their lives mostly on the wing build navigable paths through their cities and habitations—this is their gift to those brought up from the dreaming waters, when we make our way among them. Even those cities of angels who can scarcely flutter to a height have an spacious and vertical aesthetic that challenges the sky: this is their recognition of the glory that is flight.

It is common in this land—for the people live longer and in that life have a greater bounty of health and strength—to find great works of art and craftsmanship. It is a great wonder, but no great surprise, to find a painting sketched across a canyon wall that may have taken seventy years to craft; or a city constructed over the course of thousands. It is not the *norm*, but it is not so uncommon as to shock and make the senses reel.

## Ascending and Descending; or, the Wingless' Fate

Now to live in a world of wings when you have none is in itself a certain incitement to despair. And for those who have once dipped themselves in the dreaming waters, much less for those waterlogged humans who were born and grew up there and lived immersed in it for years, despair is a constant presence: a thing that may be evaded when one rises above the waters but which remains forever a possible companion to the soul.

In that despair, or fearing it, some who rise above the waters will return to them. They will let their head fall back beneath the surface, and the dreaming waters will rise to drown and fill them, and they will take some office job or retreat to a temple or monastery or wander aimlessly through the dreaming wingless world.

Others find that they could live forever in the upper world, but cannot bear to leave the whole of humanity behind them. These will travel back and forth between the worlds, spending time in each. In the world below they struggle to free humanity from its sorrow; in the world above, they live with the angels and feast upon the glory of all things. In such fashion they are not bereft of the brightness that is above, but neither do they know the full pain of the sweetness of it. They live with both the drifting aimlessness of the waters and the fierce purpose of the world above.

Lastly there are those who stay above.

Such humans can join a tribe of the winged or find a new home in some angelic city. They are buoyed up by the beauty of things and by the naked adoration that the angels have for their unwinged kin; they are pleased to think that their children or grandchildren shall know wings as they cannot. And these humans find that even wingless they are lighter and may reach to greater heights than they could in the death-drawn dreaming sea. Many learn the ways of the wing-boards, strange gliders of wood and cloth; with them, and with the blessing of a favorable wind, even the wingless may soar the upper air.

## The Animus of Fire

Now not so very long after the shadow made the waters rise, the other powers too took notice of the life upon the world. And of these powers the most fearsome was the animus of fire, also named the animus of the sun. His power was a searing power, an incandescence, a drumming fire in the world. It was an alchemical power, a transmuting power, a driving and awful reign.

But where the shadow in the dreaming waters did look upon that life with a drowning anger, the animus felt only a consuming desire, saying:

"I must take this impure existence  
and exalt it, make it like myself,  
ignite it to a greater brightness."

And the light of the animus of fire fell upon the world, and where it touched the world it burned, and the world was seared by it and lit from within, like the bones of it were on fire, and its servants were those who that light touched upon, and they were enamored of its madness. And they, who had been angels, who had been ordinary winged angels, became brilliant fire angels with its light, and they laughed with the endless glory of it, and they sought to conquer all people but themselves, and to make a dream more great than even the cities of the heights could easily contain. And they were fire and the scourge and they were named the people of the sun.

This was the First Sunfall—the searing of the earth that gave rise to this fearsome people. It heralded a time of fury and of war.

Its people lost.

Its people fell.

The people of the sun were cast down in defeat.

It was not so much the agency of the One People that devoured them. The angels fought them, of course, chose not easily to be conquered. And in this time the first legends were formed that praised the bravery and heroism of the wingless people—for the angels dredged the dreaming waters, as the people of the sun raged among them, and found heroes to defend them there.

So the angels fought to keep the world they had, and the early humans fought beside them. But that was not the reason for the failure of the people of the sun.

They fell, they lost, because their dreams consumed them.

The animus of the sun ignited them from within and made them such creatures of folly and consummate destruction as to be enemies even to themselves and one another. The armies of the animus of the sun and the people of the sun tore themselves apart like frenzied animals, and thus were turned aside.

Then they would have died out—died out, at least, until the next great Sunfall—but the angels took them in.

They would not permit that the people of the sun die out.

They would not let them be consumed by fire and their death, no more than they would give them rein to conquer. They said,

"As we have abandoned our kind to the dreaming waters below,  
we shall not do again."

So the people of the sun were wild and cruel, but they found love in the cities of the angels. They found bright loves and tragic ones. They found a lure that, like the sun, they were unable to reject.

Frustrated in their desires for conquest, they were devoured and taken in. The riving of the Sunfall was undone, and its people brought into the One People once again; and when Sunfalls smaller (and once, larger) followed, the results were much the same.

The animus has spread in consequence through the lineages of angels. There are no angels in the modern day who are wholly free of it. There is a part of each, though it may be small or great, that inclines towards the madness of the animus of fire, towards a greater purpose and greater passion than the mind and heart can bear. The sun speaks in some fashion or another to each—a literal voice they hear in sunlight or a quiet whisper in their soul. Every angel knows the drumming fire, deep within, that drives them to seek conquest, to hold to unforgivable desires, or to try to claim an unearned right. The only question is whether it is a laughable impulse, barely present and easily controlled, or a madness that presses in on them each day.

Those in whom this animus is strong are named the angels of fire. And if it reaches its full flower—if it makes them wicked or wretched with insanity—the only anodyne is the dreaming waters. Only immersion or death redeems them from that drumming fire. It is thus according to the justice of each angel, and each tribe, whether it is better to endure the wicked and the wretched, or to kill them, or to drive them down into the dreaming waters to know both soothing and a suffering below. It is for those who fight them, or love them, or bind them then to choose their fate: and each fate is in its own fashion a thing of sorrow.

## The Lamia

Now from time to time the blood of the people of the sun would mingle with that of the people of the water. For an angel made incandescent by the madness of the animus of the sun, and then driven down into the waters to despair, retains still in themselves the capacity for love; and the brilliance to attract it, too, such that the people of the lower world would not often resist them.

In the upper world when such minglings would happen they would cause no great harm. The fire in one angel's blood and the dreaming waters in another's—each thing would work a transformation on the other, but in the end, the child was just another angel, perhaps a little stranger than the rest.

For the children of fire, born in the dreaming waters, this was not so.

The gray creatures of despair would hover close about them from the moment of their conception; and in their birth, the fire would ignite them, causing a phase change in the very substance of their world.

A child of fire and water, born in the upper realm, is named a *selkie*.

Born below, they become *lamia*.

It is the assertion of the angels—accepted indifferently by some lamia and denied fiercely by the others—that the lamia are as much creatures of shadow and fire as of flesh. They are heirs not just to their parents but to the entirety of the dreaming waters. They dwell within great mandorla of despair.

Even if they are people—even if they are of flesh—they are not human.

They are something different. They are sea and they are fire and they carry with them suffering. And the first lamia rose from the waters and sang songs that brought down angels, and they fed on the lifeblood of the cities of the bright.

And they were repulsive and terrible to the angels—

But the angels recalled still the guilt of our abandonment, that they left wingless humanity to drown while they sought the upper air. They could not forget and they would not forsake a soul again.

They took the lamia in as well.

Those that had any shred of personhood to them—however dim or dismal or repressed—they gave a place of honor in their cities. They gave them the opportunity to live and prosper and sought to soothe the raging darkness of their souls.

Sometimes they failed. Sometimes they had to kill the lamia to survive, or imprison it in dismal state.

Sometimes they failed—

And sometimes they did not. In those times the ice about the heart of a lamia gave way—their evil broke, the walls of their solitude collapsing as if tumbled by a horn, and they found solace in the cities of the angels.

They bred with the angels. They became part of them.

Their blood spread through the angels until it lived within them all.

That is how they, who had been One People with us, became the people of wine and fire.

## The Wingless People

And it might be thought, then, that when the wingless people emerged to live among the angels, this too would cause great change—that we should be an alchemy to them, as the fire and the lamia had been.

This is not so.

The waterlogged and wingless bodies of the human kind do not breed true. It is a sorrow and an exultation, a pity and delight. We are not so forgotten of our natures as to be something different, something truly new. We are only angels—waterlogged and wingless angels.

And when the people of the water and the people of the upper air have children among themselves, then it is one generation—

Perhaps two—

Before our children or our grandchildren have wings.

And that is why it is said, among the angels, that we are still One People and we are still whole. Love may shake the water free of us: it needs not the alchemy of fire nor the taming of the lamia. We are a single species and a single flesh, wingless and winged, the people of the dreaming waters and the residents of the upper realm.

# Kingdoms of the Dreaming Waters

## Introduction

For the most part, the dreaming waters are just the world we know. Take a breath; look around you; recall your basic arsenal of facts about existence: that is the dreaming waters.

However there are certain discrepancies that unfold inexorably from the premises of this game. For the most part they are things that you would not be aware of even were they true—the reason to believe this game is fiction is that it is *unlikely* and *without supporting evidence*, not that you have hard evidence against it being true.

Thus this is a game of secret history and urban fantasy, of hidden powers that move among us in our world. Its premise implies that at any moment, on any occasion, *you* could walk out into the world and meet an angel: that they could descend into the waters, with a great thunder of their wings, to catch you up and take you to the upper world. Or you could encounter something terrible, an agency of the shadow in the dreaming waters, or a sun-maddened angel driven down into the waters for his healing, or some creature kin or servant to an inimical sibling-storm.

## Agencies of the Shadow

It is ambiguous even for those with eyes to see them whether the servants of the shadow in the dreaming waters are independent agents or wholly dependent agencies. The evidence is equivocal: they may be emanations or tentacles, manifestations or servants, dancers to the hidden music of Herself or self-motivated creatures that happen through the demonstrative impulses of their nature to do her service.

They act, regardless, in a fashion reminiscent of intent.

They intimate, in their behavior, that somewhere there is a malign and organizing will; that some respond to it chaotically or unwillingly, and through layers of intermediaries, while others respond stringently to a call. Certain agencies are ambient; others are manifest, and hunt down those who attract the attention of the deeps.

We may call these creatures *shadow demons* or *demons of the waves*, as opposed to the storm-demons and fire-demons that haunt the upper world. The shadow demons are creatures that beckon to despair, that seek with

intentionality to cloud the senses. They are entities that love to send or drag the human soul down into the bleak realms of the dead.

These break down further into the *princes* and the *slakes*—

The former are those that may speak, or think, and who command their mindless brethren. They are also called handlers, tamers, or sometimes Kings. The latter are as beasts: they hunt the living based on an animalistic will.

## Common-Slakes

The world is plagued by the common-slakes. The angels call them sharks or dream-eels or moonlight in the water. They are gray and glimmering darting creatures, commonly amorphous, that spread dissipation and uncertainty and feast upon the devouring of the heart.

These slakes are conscious of humans in the dimmest sense—

Enough to draw them into swarms and frenzies, at times, when they find a human already succumbing to despair; or to return, again and again, and despite their motion in and through the deeps, to a favored prey. They know the taste of our individual accomplishments and despairs. When our heart is torn they may follow the trail of departing hope to find us: it is blood and wine and nectar to them.

If one knows of them—if one has opened one's eyes to the nature of the world, and can see the shapes that move inside the dreaming waters—then a common-slake may be battled or avoided. If one does not, then they are too aetherial and intangible to fight. The only way for the ignorant to oppose them is through vigorous attention to the state of one's hopes and joys. To make an effort to be whole and unbroken in the dimness of the world may stop a person from being good food to the slakes, and cause them to disperse.

## Terrors

The greater slakes are *terrors*.

These are creatures who have taken on themselves so much form and such a character of malignance that humans may sometimes perceive them without wholly breaking the power of the dreaming. They are nightmare visions and horrors that haunt the dreaming waters.

They have a dispersive character that protects them from human hunters and from entering the annals and records of the world. Looked at head-on—without some haze of alcohol, insight, or insanity—they dissolve away. They are able to fade from the keen eye that seeks to pin them down.

Thus one may secure and search a room as often as one desires, only to douse the lights and hear the coughing of a terror from behind you. One can hunt a terror that massacred one's family, scouring the city's streets, only to find nothing—and to realize one day with a distant horror that the names and faces of the victims have left your thoughts, and there is no record that any tragedy occurred. One may find that an entire carnival is the playground of a greater slake, only to jolt awake after it has taken its portion of your heart and see that nothing supernatural transpires.

The hungers of these slakes are more perverse than the common-slakes'. Some, certainly, cling to the general attitude of dissolution that characterizes the common-slakes; they abrade the heart, they conceal the truth of the self and others, they cloud morality, they incite despair. Others, though, have enough mind to seek to *take* from a person—or to filter their general invocation of despair through a set of rituals, patterns, and forms.

A person may count themselves lucky if they live out an entire life in the dreaming waters and never meet a terror; they may count themselves wretchedly unfortunate if they have more than one or two incidental encounters, brushed by a terror's passage or lightly savaged in their sleep. Most humans are in between: never targeted, never seriously hurt, but injured at some point in their lives, in a deep and indefinite fashion, by passage through the edge of a terror's attention or its haunts.

## Deep-Slakes and Other Creatures of the Depths

In the waters of the dead are the deep-slakes.

They are not invisible after the fashion of the common-slakes. They are readily apparent. Yet demons though they are, and visible though they may be, they commingle with the humans of the deeps in perfect freedom. The lost souls there are insensate even to the most plangent and personal horrors. The deep-slakes feast largely and gluttonously on the souls below and they are not noticed, and in the timeless and meaningless passage of the hours of the dead, this torment is indistinguishable from the deepest joy, and from every other thing.

The body of the typical deep-slake is that of a powerful serpent. Such deep-slakes have poisonous fangs; the venom of those fangs is a glutinous manifestation of despair. Dimly in the deeps they perceive themselves as Kings—adopt some reptile sense of royalty and become flush with anger when they imagine some circumstance as betraying them or denying them their privilege. Thus they are prone to rip into one another, when they stumble across another deep-slake in that realm, and are even more fierce to angels or living humans who venture to those deeps.

There are other creatures in the dead waters that are ambiguous in their character: vegetative, and perhaps natural, but as hungry for the lives of others as the slakes. They are named *anemonai*, and their shapes are as great flytraps or anemones, scattered across the ocean's bed. Their tendrils ripple in dead waters. They draw nourishment close, and sting.

Lastly there are deep personages. Some say that these are closer to the deep-slakes in their character; others, that they are as princes, handlers, or terrors. Little is known of them save that they are there, evil presences in the deep. Those that have been encountered by angels or humanity have been slain, or slain their discoverers, in almost every case.

In the end the fate of the deep-slakes, *anemonai*, and personages is the same as that of the humans that they shepherd and devour. They are drawn down deeper by the current until even the sound of the shuffling dead recedes. They lose the distinct character of identity and awareness that they possess. They dissolve into a particulate essence of spirit, food for the shadow Herself, in deepest waters.

## The Shadow's Kings

These shadow demons are the organizing principle behind the works of the shadow of the dreaming waters in the world. They are the kings and princes of its forces, the living minds that hunt humanity, seeking to ensure the triumph of the shadow and drag life down to death.

There are not many of them, not in comparison to the slakes.

There are not enough of them to impinge on the life of a typical human, unless through some perverse misfortune that human catches their attention as a point of interest or a threat. They are the masters of the slakes in whole regions of the dreaming waters, heralds of war and suffering, preachers of damnation, and the princes of still death.

The majority of them are scarcely more conscious than the slakes.

It is worth remembering that—

That they are not so human or so awake as to be gleeful hunters; not for the most part. It is only the most concentrated of the princes, the densest nodes of shadow, that are capable of conversation, negotiation, wanting. The rest are creatures of a great, blasphemous, and introverted mumbling—a stirring and guidance in the dreaming waters suggestive of volition. Spoken to, they still whisper principally to themselves, only occasionally directing their commentary outwards towards attending humans, angels, lamia, or slakes; they dream, and preach their gospels of despair, and wish in various means and fashions that brightness should be extinguished in the world.

That is why it is possible, in the dreaming waters, to oppose them.

Their reactions and their schemes are tentative, slow, malevolent, and unwise. Their hatreds are the dim hatreds of a mumbling dreamer. Their rage and purpose is the same. The prince of evil judgment, who calls humans before him and holds them in the claws of terrors while he recites their sins and hales them down to death—he is monstrous and he is able to react, but he is not *efficient*. The tower-tumbling demon, who seeks always to bring down cities and buildings in fire—he is an enemy, but were he wiser, then many more would fall.

To an ordinary person, the princes are no more of a threat than the terrors; less so, really, as they are much fewer in number. It is unlikely that an ordinary person will attract their notice. If someone does, then the prince will either bring that human to a terrible end or play with them for a while and then forget them entirely. They are monsters, but they are rare, and no more dangerous than the greater slakes.

To angels, and to those humans who have seen the receding waters and breathed the upper air, the matter differs. The princes of the shadow react slowly, and without wisdom, but they do react. They are goaded by the presence of angels and wise humans. They are drawn to opposition, to incite the common-slakes and terrors against such visitors. They do not wish the awakened to live in the waters they command.

Theirs is a fearsome power, but there are some who are not deterred.

## LEVIATHAN

Now certain among the angels, and the humans that have seen the upper world, descend into the depths to battle the shadow there. They have an organization in the mortal world, and its name is LEVIATHAN.

Its mission is three fold:

- to awaken the human consciousness;
- to drive back the dreaming waters, lowering them further to expose more of the angels' land;
- to fight the agencies of the shadow in the dreaming waters, slaying the terrors, their handlers, and the slakes, and freeing those for whom the shadow's princes hunger.

It is not in the form of a mortal organization. There are angels who seek to gather wealth for it in the dreaming waters, or make offices and habitations

for its agents, or aid in its communications—but it is not an organization of the lower world. It is organized and run from the upper realms, and its participants have different and varied approaches to their common task.

The common point of its structure, then, is this.

The angels and humans in its service descend into the deeps. They embed themselves in human communities, watchful for the agencies of the shadow, looking for individuals and opportunities they can serve. They use mortal positions to create hope where there was none, to educate both materially and spiritually, and to rescue the hopeless and targeted from the slakes.

Each has ways of contacting the others—at least a few, both above and below—and a means to call on slayers and hunters competent to battle the fiercer demons of the waves. Each seeks to contribute both to their own personal causes and to the needs of the others—not just in communal spirit, but to keep fresh in their minds the truth of who they are. It is not easy to forget the upper air once you have seen it, and for an angel born it is harder yet—but even angels may drown in the despair of the shadow, and doubt that they have ever known another world.

Someone has to remind them, when that happens, that there *is* a place above the waters. And if they have almost forgotten themselves, and yet their conscience binds them to the dreaming waters, if they refuse to leave and abandon their post when the dreaming waters are destroying them, someone has to throw them out, to drive them back, to banish them to the upper air until they know themselves again.

The three purposes are distributed to different degrees among those who take up with LEVIATHAN. Thus there are some whose principal care is to teach humanity of the upper regions; and some who seek to spread a superfluity of hope; a few who defy the structure of LEVIATHAN, altogether, living in the waters to study them or to dredge the deeps; and some who live only to fight the shadow demons, to slay the slakes and terrorize the terrors and ring down to destruction the inchoate plans of the kings and princes of the sea.

## Tribe or City Stations

There are some among the tribes and cities of the angels who maintain a base of operations in the dreaming waters—whether in sympathy to the humans, or as an opposition to the shadow, or simply because they see the dreaming waters as a natural portion of the world. These are known as *deep stations*, or the tribe or city station of a particular angels' place. Thus the intrusion of Angheim on Los Angeles is the *Angheim Station*. The "tank" where

Siskery keeps its lamia—a creature of sea and fire who was unable to live well in the heights—is *Siskery Station*.

## Fire Angel Stations

In certain places there are concentrations of exiled fire angels—for there are still many, in every cycle of the world, who are possessed by the animus of fire, commit terrible deeds or suffer a burning madness. Some portion of these are driven down into the world below, and there they stay. In places where many of these congregate, there will often be a station dedicated to their service or containment. This is, of course, a *fire angel station*.

It is the right of these angels—

So society upholds, and such is the implication of drowning such an angel in the dreaming waters rather than killing them or leaving them to be—

To seek the aid of their comrades, if they should know tragedy or sorrow or suffer a swarming of the slakes. And further it is necessary that they be monitored and, if necessary, restrained or removed from positions where they may do the humans harm.

For these reasons both are fire angel stations necessary, particularly in densely populated regions such as New York and Shanghai where many exiled angels may be found.

In the ideal case such a station eventually becomes redundant with the service that battles evil. The fire angels are prone to ferocity and pride and a desire to prove themselves. They are inclined as much as any other angel to love humanity. For these reasons, many of these refugees are moved to become heroes and demon slayers, opposing the agencies of the shadow on behalf of humanity and their peers. They become sufficiently sane to repent of any crimes and recover from any mania; they cultivate a desire to serve the One People; and become part of the spearhead of LEVIATHAN in dark waters, and a nuisance to the shadow and Her kin.

## Lamia Stations

There too are a handful of "stations" that have dedicated themselves to the hunting of lamia—not so much their accommodation, for most lamia are either intransigent or taken in in the upper world, but locating them before they rise to trouble the upper realms and making a determination as to whether they are incurably malignant or susceptible to salvation. These stations serve as the meeting point and touchpoint for angels who wander widely across the world. Often the bulk of the lamia station is in the upper

world, but a redundant office is kept and funded in the lower world in case strange eventualities arise.

## The Divers

Scattered among the ranks of LEVIATHAN are the divers—those whose ministry is not the living but the dead. Their work is to descend beneath the living waters, into the timeless spaces, and try—before the gathering deep-slakes devour them—to find and awaken the spark of self in at least one human soul.

Most of them are driven to find some person in particular—

Not because it is possible, not because it is imaginable, but because it organizes their efforts and gives them an iconic hope. They are looking for someone or something in particular among the legions of the dead. But as they do this thing they rescue anyone they can.

It is the most soul-destroying work that the One People know. To travel in dead waters is to hollow oneself out. They do not simply risk themselves on each journey, but lose something of themselves each time. It is considered madness to visit the dead waters more than seven times a year, or more than two years out of ten. Much time must be spent in the high realms and resting in gentle places to restore a diver's soul.

Even among those with no particular target—those who simply believe that they must rescue whom they can, and give themselves to it in meager defiance of the shadow—success is not warming enough to allow them to endure. The divers' work is cruel.

One in every seven whom they rescue, on average, becomes a diver themselves: the rest ascend to the upper realms, or more rarely make uncomfortable residence again in living waters, and frequently have nightmares of deep-slakes and the waiting shadow's maw.

## Lamiae

Now and again the lamiae are born in the dreaming waters of the world. Some rise in their early youth and survey the cities of the angels; for these, a dark malice comes into their heart, and songs of unmaking and summoning fall easily from their lips. They become haunts and tragedies until they are captured, killed, or saved. But there are others whom the upper realm does not call; they rime themselves instead with a mandorla of inky dreams and

power and exhume some portion of the dreaming waters from the surrounding world to serve as their domain.

To live in such a place is to know ordinary reality suddenly perturbed by the presence of a god. The lamia move within a superimposed kinesthetic image of an aquatic creature: it elides the sense-impression of their human joints and makes them seem to glide as though in a tangible sea. Their hair drifts gently about them, typically a thick, long, and solid black. Their features are human, but they do not live as humans do, and their eyes are darkened, and a concussive force surrounds them and shields them from all harm.

They are not terrors: they are kinder than terrors, less often cruel. They will drive the slakes from their waters, and keep intruding angels back. They make little chancel-citadels in the dreaming waters and reshape them to their will. In these domains, and until the angels come to resolve the question of their dominion, their song pervades the dreaming waters and bends reality to its will.

It is more common for humans, in such places, to discover the upper air. The presence of the lamia reveals the unreality of the waters; the mind rejects them, the inner eye opens, the waters recede and the angel's world unfurls. Then it is for the lamia to hunt them down, or let them go; rarely do those who so traumatically find the upper air return to the dreaming waters.

## A Selection of the Lamiae Dominions

The dominion of a lamia may be viewed as the weapon which she holds against the world. It is tuned by her song and wielded against the slakes, the angels, the upper realm, or subjected humanity humans—as she pleases. Thus each has both a meaning and a purpose: the nature of the song the lamia wields, and its target. They are called *chanceries*, *dominions*, or "the lamia's portion."

The *clutching hands dominion* is the chancery of a nameless lamia. It takes the form of either an apartment building or a small stone loop. Either way it may manifest ten thousand clutching hands. This lamia believes that the world is not right, but is unable to find the correct path. Thus she travels and interferes with mortal events but to no well-determined end.

The *drifting mausoleum* is the territory of the lamia Enterissa Andao. She is a lamia who carries the bones of a lover she could not save. Her mausoleum moves through the world even though it is chained down. Her dominion is a weapon of grief against despair, a song that promises that we may refuse death by clinging to what has passed away. Her white-clad soldiers intervene, on occasion, to stop a particularly brutal massacre or battle.

The *drowning kingdom* of the lamia Henry Soring is pervaded with the experience of drowning, and blood in the water, and angry teeth. It is his conception of a Hell to punish sinners and a weapon against slakes. He operates in the human world as a supernatural vigilante, but his heart is uncertain: from time to time, he wavers on his right to hold even the vilest sinner prison in his domain, and disgorges them all to wander as restless sea-dead in the living or dead waters.

The *lion prison dominion* is the cage for those who betrayed the lamia Theresa Irving. She is young, uncertain, and desperate to serve the world and honor the right, but it is the nature of her song to bind those who hurt her into the torturous prison of her dominion, where they live in poverty and in cages the wrong shape for their form. In this regard she exists in a state of denial, wavering between denying the matter entirely and justifying it. Those angels that have tried to correct her have met an unfortunate fate.

# The Angels' Land

## Introduction

When the waters recede we find among us the cities of the angels. They jut forth from the colonies and the hiving-places of humanity. They loom and cast great shadows.

The noise and hungers of our world do always seek to drown them.

The horns of cars. The yelling of the hateful and unruly. The sounds and sensations of our mortal lives: these are the surging tides of the dreaming waters, these drag us down from that borderland of sensation where the waters are receding and the cities of the angels may manifest. It is the character of our world to be immersive, to play hard against the senses and thus resist the other world's formation.

But finally the waters recede away.

Then it is as if we have been in the upper regions all along. Then the human world is unimportant, meaningless, a fading image, and the truth is the roads to the angels' cities, the burning of the angels' sun, the leaping heart that sees the truth of the One People's world at last.

The upper world is *rich* to the senses, as the dreaming waters are vast. A small taste of the upper world is as a feast to the heart and lungs too long raised on a diet of shadow and despair. It is hard to hold in one's mind the glory of it.

It is glorious—but it is not safe.

## Dangers of the Upper Reaches

### Bandits and Small Emperors

The world of the angels is still wild. It attracts a rough and uncivilized sort of evil. There are vicious bandits in its wildernesses, some solitary and others forming ramshackle groups and tribes. They prey on travelers and cities. They do not abide by restrictions on their behavior. They take what they want from others' hands and flesh.

Angelic bandits may have tragic stories, or they may simply be evil and naturally stunted in the faculties of their heart. Some are wingless or monstrous, tainted by the dreaming waters or the animus of fire or some other power. They may be unjustly rejected and taking out their rage on the world,

or they may have found some unbearable grief that makes them cynical about the virtue of all things. They may be as braying beasts, in short, or they may be salvageable heroes.

It is the common characteristic of all of them that they are predators.

The *bandits' law* is taken from an ancient epic—fictional at the time of its writing—that spoke of bandits who fought both evil and the angels, the 100 loathsome heroes. It sets forth the premise that a bandit abiding by this code—fighting only the strong, or when necessary to their livelihood; honoring the holy days and places; respecting those whom they raid; and a charitable heart towards those in even direr straits—may be redeemed, both morally and legally. Those that stray from this code must be punished, or endure great suffering for others, before they may make any claim to virtue or find any manner of acceptance. Though by no means an article of faith for any bandit, or any given tribe or city, this fictional law is perversely influential throughout the angels' world. A bandit may cling to some shred of dignity by adhering, or claiming to adhere, to bandits' law; the tribes of angels will not muster their heroes to oppose a bandit threat unless that law is broken.

An example of a redeemed bandit is *Gyth*, who slew three children against the bandits' law but later lost an arm and an eye defending an angel city against a rampaging boar-demon. He served twenty years' labor in penance, and then—by all except the families of those children—he was forgiven. An example of an unredeemed bandit is *Red Wheel*, who wields the fire wheel, commands a small bandit clan, and adheres to no one's code.

## Warlords and Fearsome Nations

For the same reason that the world of angels has bandits, it has warlords as well. The fire that burns in angels sometimes gives rise to mad dreams of conquest and glory, which may infect or attract large numbers with that madness. To love conquest, to live for the subjugation of other angels, is a disreputable aim—there is something in the history of angels, and their power of flight, that strips from it the glamour that it holds in the dreaming waters. The wiser, elder angels will talk about it, perhaps correctly, as a cruel kind of insanity: why would anyone wish to do such things, to be such a person, just to own land and command thousands?

Such is the standard wisdom—but it is not universal in the angels' realm.

In the south of the angels' land there is the Seven-Direction Empire. It is so thoroughly taken by the fire that even the norms of the elders and teachers there are shifting; "how better to fight evil," reason the people of the Empire, "than to install a wise civilization across all the lands?" A similar dream gains traction in the northeast, among the Elreen Nation, though they have not yet sought expansion.

Elsewhere, though, the angels laugh at such ideas. There is a confidence in them that the sickness of war and conquest will not take any deep root in the upper regions.

"These are human ideas," they say.

"Humans don't know how people ought to live together.

They only know how to fight evil!"

And they may be right; for a certain limited peace is a condition of their world. It is only every few decades that some Sunfall or fire angel brings a small tribe to the point of seeking conquest. It is only every few centuries that something like the Seven-Direction Empire arises, which could in theory bring trouble to a great portion of the world.

## The Sibling-Storms

The shadow in the dreaming waters and the animus of fire are the most fearsome of the powers, but not the only ones of note. They have brothers and sisters, great and terrible creatures. The angels name them the sibling-storms.

Some among the sibling-storms are virtuous—we may list Starholm, the storm-city, and also the brightest city of the angels; Aylantine Seek, who keeps the roads; Grain Waker, of the farmland; and, so they claim, both Prince and Princess Laughter.

Others are as deadly, in their way, as the animus of fire or the shadow in the dreaming water. Wrath and Lightning have angel adherents, cults that serve them, but they are generally known as evil powers; Scerascaling Leetha, the demon mistress, is feared not for herself but for the progeny she's scattered across the world; and many others beside her are neutral or unremarkably evil in themselves but have given rise to terrible things, horrors and disasters, across the realm.

## Great Beasts

In the angels' realm nature is not so tame as it is below.

Some beasts are wise. This is not a bad thing—while one must be more careful, as a conscientious hunter, not to accidentally slay a wise beast, one may also know that wise tigers and wise bears will show the same consideration for oneself. Only a few wise beasts become wicked and turn their hearts

against the angels, and such creatures are no more of a threat than any other bandit, thief, or conqueror.

More dangerous, however, are the great beasts.

These are bears the size of houses or of hills. These are frogs large enough to swallow a human or snap an angel from a sky with one lash of its tongue. These are city-devouring tigers and human-hunting mantises. As terrifying as they may be these are not demons in the technical sense: either they are wise, and they are people, or they are not, and they are dangerous beasts.

They are troublesome and deadly for anyone who does not know their habits and their haunts.

## Demons of the Heights

The inimical creatures created by, in service of, or tainted by the animus of the sun or the sibling-storms are called *demons*—specifically *storm-demons*, *fire-demons*, or *demons of the heights*, in contrast to the shadow demons that haunt the dreaming waters.

It is in the lore of the angels that any sufficiently strong impulse may give rise to a demon. Sorrow, love, fear, joy, grief, hatred, friendship, even physical things like earthquakes—they may attract the power of the sibling-storms or the animus of fire and create a demon. It need not even be a human or animal that feels this impulse: objects that experience strong feelings of joy or abandonment or sorrow may create demons or become them.

Thus when a person feels an overwhelming, overpowering joy, it may sink into the earth all around them and create a demon. Thus totems and statues may wake and walk the world if they are crafted with too much skill, or if they are first revered and then abandoned, or if they evoke an excessive emotion from those who look at them, or even by reason of an emotion not made clear. Thus a forgotten toy may become a demon, and a forest cut to the ground in service to a fire angel's ambition may spawn a vast infernal host.

Sometimes a demon may be pacified. Sometimes it has no interest in the things of the One People, and can simply be avoided. Other times some malevolent impulse settles into its heart and it becomes a trouble to the realm.

There is no unifying principle for the demons of the heights. The animus of the sun covers every rising ambition of the heart and the sibling-storms are numerous and varied. Demons may be physical or subtle beasts, raging monsters or vile corrupters, vicious bandits or enemies abiding by the bandits' law. They may be larger than a human, larger than a building, larger than a hill—or a hive of little creatures, such as *swarming demon-ants*.

It is said that a wandering tribe of angels encounters three troublesome demons in a typical year; a city may fight off anywhere from one to twelve.

## A Wild Land

The upper regions are vast and wild. There are as yet no vast country-covering metropolises. The tribes of the angels have great stretches of land to live their lives in; the cities are spacious and sparsely inhabited. Much of the inhabited region is farmland and hunting grounds.

It is rare, however, for there to be a place so far from civilization as to show no signs of it. Living longer than humans, and traveling often by air, the angels have spread themselves widely. Throughout the land are good roads. Scattered on the hills and mountains are small spire-palaces, tall enough to serve as waymarks from the ground.

## The Spire-Palaces

The high houses and spire-palaces are the homes of the angels of fire—those in whom the animus burns too brightly to contain in a larger settlement or tribe, but not yet so fiercely as to push them to acts of evil. For these it is the norm to exile oneself into the wilderness and build a house on elongated legs, there to pursue researches, purification, or dreams. From these homes some build great devices; others cultivate their Chi and self; and yet others act as rangers or land-holders, maintaining and guarding the land around them.

The custom is to articulate a purpose—an ideal or goal—and inscribe it at the base of one's high house or spire-palace. This is the mechanism by which one may determine which of these angels are best met, best feared, or best avoided. To "walk the spire-palaces" is to travel from one to the next, learning therefore the best and the worst of the fire angels' character, witnessing how their ambitions have become or failed to become reality.

"To meditate on fire;"

"To live in peace, studying as I can;"

"To fear no evil, and tame the wilds;"

"To slay all who disturb me;"

"To wake up each morning and gaze upon the sun;"

"To master the sciences;"

"To conquer the shadow of the dreaming waters with my sword;"

"To destroy demons!"—these are such inscriptions as one may find.

## The Great Roads

Great clean roads run through the lands of the angels. Most are dirt; some of the more central ones are paved. These are used, of course, by messengers and innkeepers, but it is not the society of angels that built or maintains them. Rather it is the work of the "Bu Shen Men," servants of the sibling-storm *Aylantine Seek*. These are wingless creatures, humanoid in appearance, wearing metal bucket-helmets that entirely obscure their face. They do their labors in silence. Stories have it that they are corpses animated by magic; if someone should unwisely force them to speak or remove their helmets, they become enraged and the entire crew will attack relentlessly until the foolish person is dead. The legendary general Anyang Shu disguised himself and his legion as Bu Shen Men to break the siege at Lao; histories differ as to whether he paid any price for this.

Along the road are marker-totems, placed by the angels either to honor a spiritual impulse or to give useful directions through the wild. Thus even on foot the upper realms are not too difficult to traverse.

## The Smaller Towns

Scattered through the wilds are the little settlements, the villages and the places of small tribes. The central feature of and impetus for such settlements is a market and trading post: a place to exchange goods and hire messengers, indigent workers, or traveling warriors. This may attract an inn, form a stable location for a smith or artisan, and eventually expand to form a little town.

The tribes that do not have such a place tend to wander, living in tents or in caravans. In some cases they will have a set of way-towns: places to winter, or places to put down temporary roots, abandoned the rest of the time save for the occasional elderly or pregnant caretaker and one or two of their relatives. It is accepted that from time to time these will come under assault by bandits or demons; the more warlike tribes will take a vengeance in such a case, while others will shrug and accept it as the nature of the world.

## A Selection of Cities, Tribes, and Nations

The *Andurin* is a region of hills and valleys, home to an eponymous tribe. These are gentle angels whose society is in the intermediate phase between

nomadic and agricultural: farms are scattered through their hills, but the tribal elders still favor a wandering way of life.

*Angheim* is a city of face- and wing-painting angels. Their buildings lean inwards towards one another, giving the city a peculiarly crowded and claustrophobic look. They have come under a duty to Grain Waker, trusted to guard five or seven tokens crucial to the fertility of the earth. This has brought them under frequent assault from demons. They operate under a peculiar meritocracy—peculiar in that both the meaning and the perquisites of merit seem poorly defined to those not well-versed in Angheim philosophy—that drives them to constantly seek "interesting" or capable individuals, in the upper and lower world, to participate in their government and defense.

*Demon Belly Town*, most commonly reached for mortals from Hong Kong, is on the stomach of a great sleeping demon. Angels refused to make habitation here for many centuries, but after a while people started noticing that the demon just wasn't waking up. Vermin and fierce animals avoid the place as if it burned them, making this rustic town one of the cleanest places in the upper regions; further, divining rods plunged into the demon's pressure points tap a powerful energy that allows for easy living. Horrified by this circumstance, members of the Yin-Yang Council that now run the city made contact with the sleeping demon's mind—to hear it laughing, great and boisterous, at the very notion, and saying, "Good! Good! Live on me! That's great!" Since that time the Yin-Yang Council have established principles of good conduct that they hope will ensure the demon remains in good spirits, and hope (as does everyone else) that the laughter was benign. Domesticated animals are reasonably happy on the demon belly, so there's a good population of pigs and sheep, but goats are forbidden as they will eventually start eating the demon belly skin.

*The Elreen Nation*, in the northeast, is a tribe of people insular and proud. They have spread throughout a great forest, rich in natural resources, and it has given them opportunities for explosive population growth and a high level of cultural attainment. Its people call themselves the Hundred Families, but at this point there are closer to 569 distinct lineages, and both the family lines and the way-towns have begun to merge together into great Clans and Cities respectively. Proud and prickly though they are, they have been unfamiliar with war: their greatest military achievement thus far is a network of walls, barriers, stakes, cleared ground and nets around the edge of the forest to protect them from outsiders—"the thousand-pieces wall." The Elreen are considered dangerous and a little bit mad, but it is commonly expected that if they do not break free of the influence of fire they are more likely to become introverted city-states that hire mercenaries and war upon one another than to break out of the Elreen Woods and make assaults on others.

The *Great Bat Riders* are a tribe that have domesticated and cultivated a lineage of great bats. Careful breeding and daily care has made these aerial mounts clean, elegant, and sleek; their wings are often painted with understated designs and their faces give an impression more plaintive than

fearsome, fierce, or vile. The tribe is wide-ranging, with an invincible reputation and nocturnal habits, though the need to return regularly to the caves where the bats feel most at home limits them to a certain geographical region. The tiny handful of the bats that have grown wise are considered full members of the tribe, while the rest are mounts, pets, or symbols.

It is the tradition of the three *Moon Anchor Cities* to employ catch-ropes on the moon when it first rises, first hooking it and then unrolling great bridges by which they may walk out towards its light. The turning of these bridges against their anchors as the moon moves through the sky powers the engines of the cities, storing up electricity for later use, and allows the fishermen of the cities to cast hooked lines down into the forests and nets into the prairies to dredge up game. Even for angels these are a fey and peculiar folk, their society legendary for strange customs and behaviors; persistent rumors accuse them of being, in practice, cultists or demons in service to Luna or some other sibling-storm.

*Red Dome* is a city built around—and partially within—a stained glass dome nearly a mile from end to end, decorated with the images of heroes, butterflies, and flowers. It has a good reputation and is something of a mecca for traveling artists and aesthetes.

The *Ruin-Keeper Tribes* task themselves to maintain eight labyrinthine ruins, each a scar on the land from some ancient supernatural event. The Ancient Place remains from before the dreaming waters rose. Like the Mayan cities of the dreaming waters, it holds peculiar mysteries and powers which the angels do not wholly understand but believe to be overall less advanced than modern ways. The five Sunfall cities were the creations of fire angels after the first and fourth Sunfall; these cities are considered dangerous traps, risking the soul if not the body, and the ruin-keeper tribes maintain their own habitations around and outside them. The Obsidian Maze is a remnant of the works of the lamia Yetherai Solace; a tide of dreaming waters rises and falls within it. Lastly there is Scerascaling's Ruin, which histories describe ambiguously as created by a "peculiar incident" and which angels believe to be inhabited by a host of shiftless demons, ghosts, and monsters.

*The Seven-Direction Empire* spreads over much of the south of the major continent in the angels' land. Their culture has moved steadily over time towards the spirit of fire and the animus of the sun—caught in a positive feedback cycle where the spreading of their ideas and national identity has made greater ambitions possible, increased their influence over nearby tribes and cities, and encouraged them to disregard as barbaric and shadow-tainted those places of different ideals. All of these things in turn enhance the element of fire, which gives them greater cause and power to spread. Now they have become a vain empire. Their military history is confined to minor scuffles with their neighbors but increasingly they couch their thoughts in terms of conquest and dominance at whatever cost. There is a growing tradition in this empire for

a young man or woman without other romantic prospects to take a "wandering" in the dreaming waters in hopes of finding a lifemate there.

The good land of *Siskery* is a rocky region at the edge of a physical sea; it houses an eponymous tribe. They are hunters and traders, moving between various way-towns as suits their inclinations, and have a working alliance with the wise seals and wolves that occupy the region. Their shamans have a custom of visiting the dreaming waters, that they may learn greater dreams.

*Spire*, the City at the Rock, is a large city on the edge of that same ocean. It is built on and around an improbable tooth of stone two thousand meters tall and barely four thousand wide at its base. Many angels congregated there during the drowning of the world, and came down afterwards to build Spire at its base; the city has lived and expanded upwards and outwards since that day. Now a constellation of skyscrapers, rookeries, and walkways surround the central Rock; fires burning on the heights form the largest lighthouse known. Most angels fear the physical sea for its associations with and occasional overlap with the dreaming waters; however, the folk of Spire are hardy swimmers and occasionally sailors who do not fear to fly some distance out over the waves.

*Starholm* is both a city and a sibling-storm. It may thus be reached both by physical travel and by mental aspiration, though the former method is more common. It is said, among the angels, that any question the heart has may find its answers there, and that the creatures that dwell there are of brightness even to the angels, with stars like feathers in their wings.

## Celestial Bodies

In the air above the angels' region is the sun. It burns brightly throughout the day; then it turns itself inwards in dark meditations, engulfing the world in darkness rather than light. At such times only the "fire circle" in the sky reveals its presence.

In the sky as well there is the moon. It is the principality of *Luna*, who is sister to the sun and shadow and one of the sibling-storms; revealing little of herself, she travels low across the sky, casting down her light, and each day plunges into the dreaming waters. She has a talent of multiplicity and unity and may therefore appear in many locations at one time: caught in one place by catch-ropes and brought down to ground, or used to pull a chariot through the sky, she will remain glacially unaffected in another.

The sky is full of stars and constellations; a rich lore argues over which great heroes, spirits, and entities of the past have ascended to stand represented among them now.

## Heavens, Hells, Demons, and the Sibling-Storms

The angel's world is a middle place—it is between the dreaming waters and the higher places. Those places are generally named *the upper air* or *the Heavens and the Hells*—the dominions of the animus of fire and the sibling-storms.

The world grows cleaner as one ascends, cleaner and more bright—

But there is not a second experience of waters falling back.

Instead to rise beyond the angels' world is to plunge into another: to dive, as if descending to the waters, into fire, or thunder, or great light.

### The Storms and their Dominions

There are 13 great powers, and these are named the sibling-storms. The cousins and lesser relations of these creatures abound as well, but we shall not name them here—know only that hundreds of smaller storms exist, some few of which may interact with the world at any given time, but most of which are so rare as to be zoological or theological curiosities rather than strong presences in the angels' lives.

The great storms are:

- *(the) Animus of Fire*, who is the sun;
- *Aylantine Seek*, the hunter;
- *Grain Waker*, a principle of fertility;
- *Lightning*, the shattering power;
- *Luna*, an ever-changing glory of the sky;
- *Nameless*, of the clean dominion;
- *Prince and Princess Laughter*, who are heroes to the world;
- *Scerascaling Leetha*, mother of monsters;
- *(the) Shadow in the Dreaming Waters*, who is despair;
- *Starholm*, most glorious city of the angels;
- *Stillness Vale*, in its timeless waiting; and
- *Wrath*, an impetus to evil things.

Each of these storms rules a dominion which has a particular spiritual and emotional character—with the exception of the Prince and Princess Laughter, who share a dominion with no clear spiritual form. Each storm is both specific and omnipresent in location: the animus of fire is the sun, and is in the sky, but also burns wherever there is a fire in one's heart. Each storm has its own cults among the angels, with the arguable exception of the shadow in the dreaming waters, and each gives rise to demons. Sometimes these demons have the fundamental character of the sibling-storm's realm; other times they have a related or even opposite nature, such as the demons of Stillness Vale who impose its power on others or the Bu Shen Men of Aylantine Seek.

More details on these realms, these demons, and their masters are found below.

## The Clean Dominion

The ascent most desired by the angels is to *the clean dominion*, also known as Heaven. It is held by a power that frees one from burdens and deceptions: if reaching the angels' realm is as breathing freely for the first time, then reaching the clean dominion is as unshackling a weight that one has worn the entirety of one's life, letting go of pains that one had held so close one had forgotten one did know them.

This realm is frequented by birds and intangible spirits, but it is no good home to angels: beautiful as it is, one cannot soar forever, and for those with material bodies, it gives nowhere for them to land. In time each person who attains that height falls back and enters the realm of angels once again.

The sibling-storm that rules this realm is formless and nameless—because its nature is *looking-outwards* and *freedom-from-conceptions* it has no proper identity of its own. The angels refer to it as Nameless or just the Clean Dominion—e.g., saying "Nameless bless this," "the Nameless knows," or "the Clean Dominion keep your soul."

Demons touched by the Clean Dominion are peculiar creatures. Some are monsters that take advantage of their clear insight into others to do harm; others are just insightful angels. Some are shapeless creatures that may take form when given it by a careless wish or another person's desire: these become weapons, tools, or nightmares. A few are sad creatures, such as sessile formations with eyes that watch the living and envy them their movement or ghosts that follow people around and try to emulate their lives.

## The Fertile Lands

The realm of Grain Waker is not sane. If it ever had land, sky, and water then these things have ceased. Rather it is a constant rush and explosion of sensation. It is an overpowering movement and a state of transformation in its fullness: to be in the fertile lands is to be crushed between *things* and *events*, each constantly growing and pushing inwards and outwards and developing new features, with no explanation for how the old things and the people present there survive.

One might narrate a few seconds of experience in the fertile lands as a field of grain, that presses inwards on you, the ears of wheat that crush your eyes becoming rivers of visual sensation, like you were rapidly moving on a road and ever-larger meteors were plummeting towards you, until the horizon and the land and the edges of the falling stones become one great rippling boundary, like you were amidst amoebae connecting and separating and forming Escher-like patterns of yourself on an endless stair falling down into spreading lakes of grain.

Like a recital of an irrational number, there is frequent repetition in the fertile lands but never an endless loop: when you land in the grain, in the vision above, the next experience would not be meteors but rather rippling water that becomes strands of sound that fade into the roaring of tigers that are interlocking and grappling with other beasts—

And so forth; and so forth, and so on.

The underlying mechanic and spiritual/emotional character of the fertile lands could be any of the following:

- a creative impulse without filter;
- the ability to transform any idea into form;
- abstraction manifesting through the vehicle of perception as tangible things;
- Experience crowding on the mind; or
- Growth on a scale so impossible to comprehend that the mind cannot make sense of it, and substitutes instead false patterns such as those described above.

In practice, the ascent into the realm of Grain Waker is a drug. It may have spiritual connotations as well—its access is often and easily ritualized; many allege that it holds a path to immortality. Certainly it may help the barren or infertile have children—if they may hold their thoughts long enough together in that place to petition Grain Waker, and sift enough sense from that

realm to understand her answer. It is not a *pleasant* drug, but it is a mind-blowing narcotic suitable for those who cannot bear reality or who find sacred insights in such things.

It is the duty of Grain Waker to rouse the earth to fertility; she performs the rites for such each spring, and in many other ways and times. She has given earth the power to feed life since before there was life—before even there was grain, when she was forced to grow the mountains and the seas, certainly before animals, and long before the One People arose. She will continue to do so, Grain Waker says, long after everything is dead. It is her job. It's what she's for.

She is a somber goddess of the grain, wearing a corn doll on her hat.

The demons of Grain Waker are those in whom life has stirred to some unnatural degree, or who have acquired the power to feed or propagate in an unnatural fashion. Thus when a statue gets up or a hair-comb becomes a hair-comb demon, it is most likely the influence of Grain Waker. When something lurks in the rocks and sups on the dreams or eye-fluid of travelers, it is probably one of her demons too. People who have beehives in themselves may or may not be demons of Grain Waker—if they simply have internal bees, it is unlikely, but if the bees are born from their flesh, then they are demons of hers.

The cultists of Grain Waker are generally addled by repeated visits to her realm, but not in a ditzy or cheerful way: they tend more towards obsessive and ritualistic behavior, exalting strange ideas of what they must do as fixed points in the chaos of their thoughts. Some form monstrous human-sacrificing cults; others shamble down the roads, muttering to themselves, singing strange paeans, or planting apple seeds along the way.

## Foreboding Tower

He is everything you hate. He is everything you fear.

His name is Wrath.

He dwells in a tower, a great black thing of stone, in a blasted plain, and with lightning playing all about it. There he schemes. There he exerts a wicked and cultivating influence on the evils in the world.

His servants and cultists and demons are monsters—self-loathing, raging monsters. They bring no good to the world. Where his touch is heavy on the world, terrible things happen. People die. People suffer. Cruelness transpires. Wise elders lose their wisdom and urge the young to war.

The radiance of him affects even the dreaming waters: it is rife with echoes and reflections of Wrath, his bleak land, and his tower.

Some go to him.

Some make the journey to that land, and find themselves wreathed in fury, hatred, and bilious rage. It plays through them, it is in the rocks and air of that place, it is corrosive to the soul. And this radiance does not stop those who travel there—of course. Oh, some may turn back when they realize how powerful it is, some may recoil and flee to the lower realms, or wrap themselves in mantles of virtue and endure.

But it mostly does not stop those who travel there.

They travel there because they are already angry, don't they? There is something that they hate. They wish power from Wrath to hurt their enemies or they desire to go to Wrath in his tower and make an end to him.

For that is one of the promises of the world—

Worked into the fabric of it, and of Foreboding Tower, *that he may die.*

So some travel to the Foreboding Tower, and they go in, and that is the end of them. Some tell stories that it is otherwise. These stories are delusions. Those who go to the Foreboding Tower at the center of Wrath's realm do not return. They may be traveling there still, climbing the tower to confront their hated foe, or they may be dead. It is not known.

They don't come back.

There is a teaching rhyme of him. It goes like this:

"His name is Wrath: a wicked beast.

He dwelleth in his tower.

It does not serve you in the least

To go into his bower."

## The Hunting-Place of Aylantine Seek

The realm of Aylantine Seek is suffused with electric *interest*—a driving fascination, for all that the realm itself is dull. There are long straight roads and open skies. There are buildings of ordinary construction. There are birds—they look like birds. It is all ultimately unreal; when put into language, the experience that is so compelling there becomes generic, bland, and beige. That is because the reality of his realm is not the physical place. The reality of his realm is the character of actions taken there—a power of looking, hunting, searching, wanting, seeking, testing, finding.

As the dreaming waters overlay the vibrant joy of *things* with a wash of gray disinterest, the realm of Aylantine Seek does the opposite. In his bland beige town and its surrounding prairie there are great and vibrant seekings. To enter his realm is to have a will to hunt possess you. It is driving, obsessive, and exploratory. It puts one in a haze, the realm of Aylantine Seek—the hunger to see and taste and experience and question swallows in the mind even the experience of things seen, tasted, experienced and questioned. It is as if the journey, having become the destination, proceeds to become the landscape and the narrative as well.

It is the nature of his realm, and its redeeming virtue, that the drive it creates in visitors is eventually resolved. First there is a haze of need; then there is a defined journey that emerges; then there are questions, emotional reactions, and realizations, which emerge in peculiarly definitive form despite their lack of a true underlying cause. Finally there is a resolution, a satisfactory ending, either wholly within the self or in the form of an audience with the sibling-storm Aylantine Seek.

This experience, like the realm of Grain Waker, can be addictive. The cultists of Aylantine Seek are those who find it so—who lose interest in the substance of exploratory existence and immerse themselves instead in its syntactic form. Initially they emerge from his realm with real answers that have meaning in their lives; more and more, however, their every answer is "This is what you are: a seeker of Aylantine's realm." A few survive, as he sends them out into the real world on some quest or other that uses up the long years of their lives. Others become generic icons of seeking, heroes living endlessly through the stations of the hero's journey but with no more details than this: "here, it is the hieros gamos;" "here, I fought my nemesis;" "here, I saved my love." They are as the protagonists of a computer game, played by an automated script to save the player time, if the log of what happened in that character's life is never actually read.

The demons of Aylantine Seek are principally hunters—defined by their desire to find something, to catch something, to resolve some question of their life. However his too are the Bu Shen Men, builders and maintainers of the roads of the angelic realm: they seem to have no sense of purpose, following ritualistic protocols without any real desire or any awareness of the self. Some assert that Aylantine is therefore also a power of *disinterest*; others that the Bu Shen Men are as fingers or toes to the sibling-storm, and the roads across the upper realms a map of his explorations.

## Luna

To be in the realm of Luna is to experience a sense that the self is many different things, and these things are reflected in the world. That we are, in short, composed of many elements and vantages, and each of these elements is

like a thread bound to something that is outside. It is to experience oneself profoundly as a creature in flux and a creature that is part of a larger context.

It is a subtle experience.

Those who live on the moon—for there are a few—live stylized existences where the social rôle is highly prized and difficult to tease out from the self. They become creatures of masks and customs, mercurial in personality, subtle and playful in mind. They do not cease to exist as themselves, for that would falsify the basic character of the realm; rather, they cease to have a strict and coherent explanation for themselves, recognizing in themselves many different faces, forms, and principles, with some horizontal integration of those forces across the general populace. To live on the moon is, thus, to become alien.

Luna is herself the moon. She is principally a geological thing, made of rock and dust and white gleaming—indisputably she has personality, but she exerts it only when in conversation, and is content in most circumstances to move predictably through the sky. She has the peculiar ability to exist in multiple places, times, and scales: for instance, some ambitious angel may hitch a bridle and chariot to her and use her to move themselves through the air; while elsewhere, she continues unwavering her procession through the sky; and in yet a third place she is pulled down by catch-ropes to skim low across the world. Looked at from one perspective, she is vast enough to hold many cities on her surface; from another, she is no larger than a bear. She is green cheese, she is a cart pulled by horses, she is lifeless stone, she is a face; she is a home to vibrant cities, she is a disc in the sky, she is a vast stone crescent, she is a storm—all these things she is, and more.

The demons of the moon are changeling creatures: werewolves are hers, and animals turned human, and people with tides of sanity and insanity, and other things as well. Any demon that regularly transforms from one thing to another, or merges into the surrounding world, is likely one of the moontouched creatures. Creatures that may be large or small are hers as well, particularly those that employ tricks of scale: demons that seem like great and distant forces until you walk right into them, or whose fortresses one may approach but never reach, are hers.

## Scerascaling Leetha's Land

The realm of Scerascaling Leetha is a realm of great pleasures and great joys. She welcomes those who can find no other home or peace.

It is a good place. It is one of the Heavens.

Most of those who travel to Scerascaling Leetha's land—even if they only intended the briefest of short visits—do not bother to return. To live in her world is too comfortable, too pleasurable, too good. Those with strong enough

drives or attachments in the upper and lower realms may come back from Leetha's Heaven—but they will hunger to return to it, and find it harder to leave each time, until at last they choose to stay.

The emotional character of her land is *fulfillment*. If, thus, the Heaven of Scerascaling Leetha were nothing more than a crowded hut and a muddy swamp, it would still be a great and joyous realm. However she takes great care to fill it with things that legitimately fulfill, that are worthy of the pleasure, hope, and joy that in her land pervades. Here one may find all good things, and with no real fears or doubts save for the destinies of your friends and other important people in the worlds below.

So most of the One People think the realm of Scerascaling Leetha is a good land, a reward for a life well-lived. It's a place for souls to go when they've done well in life, but can't quite let go of the will towards material existence. If they were pure enough, they'd go to the clean dominion; but if they're still good and blessed in their impurity, the angels say, their destination is Scerascaling Leetha's land.

That's the standard opinion, anyway.

There are those that argue. They say that the whole place is a trap, for souls and living angels alike. They say that it gives you happiness, sure enough, the first few times you visit, but when you finally decide to stay? You become Scerascaling Leetha's food.

The argument goes on—but there's no real way of knowing without first going there, and then not returning, so the matter remains unresolved.

The flaw in Scerascaling Leetha is that she cannot hear the noise of life. She does good things, but only in response to her own character—to a kind of inborn duty, like that which drives Grain Waker. The Elysian fields that Scerascaling Leetha has built are to her something like a dollhouse—she makes the people there happy because that is what she is meant to do with them, but she doesn't see them as people. They're just things, just things, like the mountains, sea, and stars. When she is at her most sophisticated, she imagines them as clever mechanical automata with pleasure and pain outcomes built into their mental states; then the game becomes to maximize the utility of her Heaven as reflected in those states. When she is at her least sophisticated, she goes by the classic ideals of what things make people "happy," relying on the fulfilling character of her dominion to cover any gaps. The fact that life typically considers *itself* to be more than a set dressing cipher or an automata with many states is a matter of fascinating irrelevance to her, like a doll's ability to burp or recite a poem. Such a cool doll! But that doesn't give it meaning.

In addition to being the keeper of her Heaven, Scerascaling Leetha is also a mother of monsters in the realm below. She crafts demons. They are made not by the passing touch of her power, nor corrupted slowly from her cultists, but *constructed* deliberately by her as a conscious act. She molds them

out of the substances of the world, combining life and purpose in new and interesting ways, sometimes using her uterus and sometimes shaping them with her hands. She wears an intent look of concentration while she builds abominations, as if thinking, "Ought this be this way? This other way? Or that?" The motivation seems to be an aesthetic impulse, a way of combining elements or crafting new things that catches her interest, but the results are invariably problematic. Though not always malicious, and sometimes even helpful, her demons all lead troubled lives. Very few of them have any power to understand the independent existence of other beings. Even fewer care. Her purpose in creating these demons is not the same as the purpose of her Heaven; she does not seek, as far as anyone can tell, to maximize any pleasure in them but her own. Even the best of her demons tends to slip up when tired and become a bane to other people; her worst don't give the needs of others even a moment's thought!

## The Sea of Fire

To enter the realm of the animus of fire is to know a battering upon your heart. Passions flare outside you and inside you: they seek to bypass the veil of your flesh and the outer walls of your soul and combine within you in one great making. Thus even to have an audience with the animus of the fire is to risk an utter transformation, a transcendence, or possession. Anyone who goes to him willingly will not return the way one was.

Like the realm of the dreaming waters, the sea of fire has the basic and rough form of the physical world. There is land. There is water. There is a sky. However the animus claims a comparatively smaller portion: his realm is not all-embracing, but rather a collection of specifics. Rather than great shelves of continents and sprawling oceans, the sea of fire contains hundreds or perhaps a thousand *places*, split off from one another by a shimmering curtain of fire that leads back to the angels' realm. The waygates of fire open between them in an erratic but generally navigable fashion: thus, while the residents of this place are few, they may freely travel about the realm. Further, at risk of one's soul, it is possible to use the sea of fire to quickly travel the mortal or angelic world.

The basic character of this realm is not the physical location, however, but a spiritual distinction. It is infused by and lit with burning passion and ambition just as the dreaming waters drown in gray despair. If you think you have ever wanted, needed, dreamed, or aspired, then you will find on first exposure to the sea of fire that you knew only the smallest cousin of the true thing. You can see and feel the possibility of wants, needs, dreams, and aspirations that dwarf the mortal meanings of these words—passions unfathomably deep and great. Humans and angels are not adapted for such things: to try to seize such power is to be as Daedalus, burned and then cast down by the fire of the sun.

The demons of the animus of fire have this selfsame character. They are driven to monstrous extremes. The fortunate ones have bodies touched by flame while their spirits remain partially or completely intact: their flesh ignites or stretches or grapples to hold within itself some impossible quality or ambition (as if your body were to say: I will be a thing of matter and antimatter both! And my lungs shall be uncountable!) but their minds and hearts are not overcome. The unfortunate ones lose any power their ego and superego might possess to rule the id: some are horrified by what they have become, others exultant, but they have no power of restraint.

## The Shattering Land

To step into Lightning's realm is to break.

Your mind gives out and fills with bursts of white and seething green. Your soul gives forth a great red keening. Your flesh splits, your bones snap, the organs that were inside you topple out. Everything is shattered, broken, there is nothing that remains—

And you emerge.

If you are lucky, you wake on land as if cast up on some shore. If you are lucky, you remember who you were, before you dared the shattering land, and your organs have been replaced inside you, and your limbs are only sore. If you are unlucky, you wake dead or you wake falling, and unless you untangle your limbs and sluggish thoughts you will shatter a second time upon the ground.

The name Lightning is spoken as if he were an enemy of the land. In truth, no one really knows. Angels have come across him as a white-haired youth, throwing arcs of power out across the mountain ranges, and he would promise them that he was kind. In other cases he has devastated cities and brought ruin to whole regions as a bestial demon-prince clad in an argent sheathing of incandescent light.

His realm is too destructive for angels or humans to venture in; so which face is his true one, which demons belong to him, and what core truth does drive him, the One People cannot know.

## Starholm

There are endless legends of Starholm, for it shows a different face to every visitor. Many angels fear it as a place of forsaking—a place where a person might go when there's nothing left for them in the mortal world. Some

say that you might meet your sins in Starholm, or see the truth about the self. And there are those that talk of guardians, of horrors met on the road to Starholm, of how only those already forsaken of all other things may go there without sacrifice.

Those are the darker legends.

The angels say, too, that Starholm is the brightest of the angels' cities. That the road is long but at the end of it you may know the answers to every question of your heart. That it is a place of peace and wholeness, and that the angels who live there dwell in brightness. That they wear stars like feathers on their wings.

It is in the sky—among the constellations, some say. Or, it is under a lake, buried in water as crisp and refreshing as the dreaming waters are vile. There's a story that an angel traveled halfway around the world to find Starholm, searching in vain, only to discover it again upon returning home. These stories most likely relate to the spiritual path by which one might reach it, for it is a sibling-storm.

One may reach it by spiritual paths—but it's also at a specific crossroads, in a specific place, in the angels' realm. Sometimes road markers point to it—sometimes you can just go there, without spiritual attainment. It is, after all, a city, a place of habitation, as well as a sibling-storm. There isn't wide agreement on the route or its exact location; if you ask the elders, if you ask the cartographers, if you ask the people who *ought* to know that kind of thing why it is they don't, they'd say, "It's Starholm. That's the problem. That's why that kind of thing is hard to know."

The spiritual/emotional quality that is most likely to correspond to Starholm, that is most tied to the stories above and the meaning of the place, is knowledge of the self. That's the canonical character of the place. That means that what the "demons" of Starholm have in common is that they are at peace with themselves and know a great deal about themselves. They may be generous, vicious, or wild, but they are not blind to what they are. However it is also part of the canon of the game that this might *not* be Starholm's core truth and nature. The answer to the riddle that is Starholm may not be the self, or knowledge of the self, but something strange and terrible and glorious instead, and of the GM's design.

After all, isn't that why we're scared to know ourselves—because we might be something strange and terrible and glorious, and entirely different from what we might expect?

## Stillness Vale

There are some as say that Stillness Vale is like Starholm—situated *on* the world and not just in the heart. There aren't any clear directions to it, or equally to avoid it: maps that place Stillness Vale, including the virtual maps of memory and story, are simply and by definition wrong. But still, there's some as would say that you can come upon it without any spiritual journey, just stumbling across it on some road. And that there wouldn't be any great upheaval or change associated with this—nothing that moved aside to place it there. That if you happen to have a way to test it, you'll find it was always there.

It's not some great celestial region, above us in the sky.

It's a place of the lowlands.

It's a place of death.

Stillness Vale is that which wears a shroud of patience, waiting, and sleep. It's a deep place. It's an outward-looking place. It's like the Clean Dominion that way. But it isn't about *knowing* the world. It's just about *taking the time* to know the world. It's about being quiet and still and letting the world seep in.

So there's a meditative spirit to it. And there's a bit of greatness to it, too. It's the kind of place you might imagine some great monk going, to sit under a bo tree until they found the deep truths of the world. And there's nobody as thinks that the place is just plain evil, or oughtn't exist, for all its faults.

But most of all, Stillness Vale is a place of death.

If you spend too long in Stillness Vale you'll stop being yourself. You'll stop being hungry and thirsty. You'll stop wanting things. You'll stop making that cacophony of life that the fire loves, that the shadow hates, that Scerascaling Leetha cannot see. You'll open yourself so wide that you'll lose your boundary, slipping bit by bit away and in amazing peace, until you are the world.

It's not so bad to be the world. At least, the world isn't complaining. But it's an end to who you were.

The demons of Stillness Vale are harvesters of the world and shapers of great sleeps. They do things like make towns vanish from existence, only to reappear hundreds of years later when the demon dies, or expunge part of a landscape, or make two things or people blend into one another at the edges. They use weapons of the spirit to make their victims fade away—well, those as trouble the world, in any case. Those are the ones that people care about, but they're really a minority: for every demon of Stillness Vale met in the rest of the world, causing trouble and hurting others, there are five to ten that litter

the slopes of Stillness Vale, like monoliths of stone, unmoving, unawaking, silent and unornamented participants in the world.

## The Wooden Town

Prince and Princess Laughter fought for us—

So the story goes.

They say that one day when the world was young, the First Thing there was looked on it from outside—that thing that is the source and maker of the world. The First Thing looked in through its peephole to the world and sighed, "This ought not be the way that things are made."

And it readied then a great judgment, that would have scourged away the world, and no more things the way they are, and never they would have been. But Prince and Princess Laughter put on their finery and their coats, and took up their swords, and stood between the peephole and the world, saying, "If you do this thing we will stab you in the eye, and you shall bleed."

"But why?" asked the First Thing.

And Prince Laughter said, "Because the sword is sharp."

And Princess Laughter said, "Because the world is good."

And the First Thing sighed, and conceded that it did not want Prince and Princess Laughter stabbing it through the peephole. So it spared the world, but it did not spare them.

It cast them into space, in a little wooden town in orbit round the moon.

It bound them there, never to leave it for any serious reason—

"For," said the First Thing, "you saved the world once from my judgment, and that is quite enough accomplishment for a small Princess and small Prince."

That's the outline of the story that the Prince and Princess tell. And it is known that while they are sober folk—they even wear waistcoats, and white gloves!—and seek in general to defend and help the world, they never interfere in mortal things save within the confines of a joke.

Now one tradition has it that they are liars: that the entire story is both self-aggrandizement and mockery of the existence of the world. And another tradition has it that they are satisfied with their doom, and have become great jesters, living only to make fun. But it is the standard belief among the angels that they are as rules lawyers in the sky—inventing the most ridiculous and strained jokes and puns as the "reason" they may act, while striving within that confine to bring weal to all things.

They deny that they have demons—though, in any case, there are always those who are possessed by the spirit of some strange joke, or vanity, or valor. They deny it, and scholars are uncertain: the provenance of any given demon, in the angels' world, is a matter difficult to know.

Their wooden town is a little place—with them, and a few servants, and twenty or thirty more residents at a time. They delight in the visits of angels, particularly traders, and they are reachable through spiritual attainment—but those who would visit more than once, or stay for any length of time, must travel there physically, flying with great effort to the little wooden town there is in orbit round the moon.

### The Dreaming Waters (Seen as a Celestial Realm)

The angels live always with the presence of the dreaming waters. It is not distant from them, not difficult to reach like the realms of the animus of fire or the sibling-storms. With an effort of will, or a descent into many of the physical lakes and seas, an angel may go into those waters.

The other realms are far, but the dreaming waters are pervasive.

It is for this reason that the dreaming waters are seen as "downwards" and not "upwards" by the angels—for up is a direction of will and aspiration, while down is a direction one may fall. It is because the One People had to struggle to stay above the waters that they see them, alone of all the otherworldly dominions of the storms, as "below" and "near." And for this same reason the waters have taken on a place in the culture of angels that is greater than the occasional reverence or fear that they show the other powers. The dreaming waters are an immanent part of the angels' world. They are not just the enemy. They are not just the setting for the plight of wingless humanity. They are a portion of the One People's world, and they travel there, sometimes, not for humanity, not to confront lamia, not to visit fire angels—not, in short, for the sake of those bound within the waters, but for reasons of their own.

The most important of these reasons is "baptism."

An angel descends into the sea for a baptism when their personal sense of purpose, right, and wrong becomes a burden to them. When they feel, in short, that they must change—and yet that they cannot. The character of the dreaming waters is the loss of certainty and faith; baptism in the dreaming waters loosens the boundary of an angel, weakens their nature, and erodes their self-certainty.

Angels may even undertake this ritual when quite satisfied with who they are. They are content with their ideals—but as part of a cultural rite or a

personal challenge, they give their beliefs this trial by water. They erode their faith and confidence, and ask: will I remake myself as I have been?

Shamanic traditions in the angels' realm require many of these baptisms. A shaman goes regularly into the dreaming waters, for all that it wounds them. They give up their selves, they offer their boundaries to the shadow, they allow despair and confusion to eat portions of their spirit. They believe that by doing so and by embracing the resulting uncertainty, they may move on to a higher plateau of experience. They are the closest thing to cultists that the dreaming waters have.

An angel may also go into the dreaming waters out of a restless interest in the wingless. They may already have seen someone important to them in the waters—caught a glimpse of some human reflected in a raindrop, or whatnot, and become fascinated by them. Or they may simply wish to wander, hunting for friends, allies, or most likely lovers among the wingless people of the sea. In the Seven-Directions Empire, where this is common, terminology has become confused, and "baptism" may refer as easily to this wandering as to a spiritual event. One dives, one is baptized, one wanders, both to loosen the boundaries of the self and to find a human suitable to love.

A final reason for which some angels descend into the dreaming waters is to trade—to take the crafts and products of their realm and exchange them for televisions, DVDs, and guns. Bandits, similarly, descend into the dreaming waters with relative impunity to steal. Such actions are rare and a little eccentric in the angels' realm—you might find a weird hobbyist living in a spire-palace with a good collection of anime or old Westerns, or a widespread tribe linked together by a radio station and a handful of receivers scattered throughout way-towns, but you won't find the technological amenities of Earth in every home. A few lazy bandits might use guns or even stolen military armaments, but most stick with spears and arrows. On the one hand, the things that are valuable on Earth are valuable everywhere. On the other, it's easier for good people to get by without them than dive constantly into the dreaming waters to obtain them; and the wicked are more likely to turn to magic and the sibling-storms than to dredge the dreaming waters for their goods. The best ideas of Earth technology—antibiotics, plumbing, the printing press, painkillers, and the like—make it up to the upper world, but things of a more ambivalent character or which require a strong industrial base do not.

The defining power of the dreaming waters is, as has been noted, the shadow; and its demons are the slakes. They are rarely born into the upper realms: having covered much of the world with the dreaming waters, the shadow keeps the bulk of her attention on that realm, and does not inspire the creation of horrors in the world above.

## Eve Meredith Chao

**Eve Meredith Chao** found the way to the angels' land on her own. She'd been deadened by the world—so she thought. She was wandering numbly through the streets of a human metropolis when suddenly she began laughing. Suddenly everything made sense to her; and she fell down from the glory of it, curled around her stomach and wild with mirth, sleeves and skirt against the asphalt of the street.

Someone turned.

Someone yelled. There was a scream of tire rubber and it was not far away. And it seemed that a long blue car would hit Eve Meredith Chao there, on the street, while she laughed and laughed. But it didn't. It didn't hit her because she wasn't there any longer.

The street and its traffic unrolled from her like a movie cringing back on a burning screen. It curled back and away from her to show her Demon Belly Town, in the angels' world. And the telephone poles and their wires there were straight and clean, and the press of a thousand spirits on her own went away, and there were only the dimmest echoes in the sky, the wind, her heart of the tumult of the waters, and in the sky were men with wings.

After a while she stopped laughing and lay there a while to drink it in. It was a balm for her soul, that beauty.

As she lay there angels landed beside her.

As she lay there angels opened doors, walked out from the buildings, and stood beside.

One or two squatted down. The rest just watched.

They didn't say anything.

It might have been different if they'd said something; but it was sacred, too sacred, her first breaths of the upper air. They let her take them in and know satiety from them in peace.

So by the time she could stand up again, and one of them held out a hand, and she took it, and she rose, and saw his eyes—

Oh! His eyes!—

She'd already decided what she would do.

"I can't stay," she said.

It was an apology. It was a kind of prayer. It was plangent and it hurt as she said it. It was a statement against interests.

"I can't stay."

And the bright-winged and burning angel who had her hand bit his lip. But he didn't argue. He just said, "I understand."

So she went back down into the dreaming waters.

She didn't know why. Not exactly—though in part. "It was because," she told Leah later, "it was hard. It was the difficult thing. And I thought, if I am to receive such a brilliant gift as this world, then I must do the difficult thing. I thought, it must be necessary. There must be something I could do."

She tried to live in the dreaming waters, knowing there was a sky.

She'd thought it would be easier, but it wasn't. It was hard.

Knowing of the truth, she was more visible to the slakes. She was more apparent to the shadow. The world that she'd expected to return to was a mundane world, laboring under a cloud. She found herself instead in a fantasyland of horrors.

They hunted her.

They drove her to the point of death. She lost her senses. And only the fear of failing on a decision that was already so painful kept her there—the sense that somehow, she hadn't yet earned the sky. She couldn't just run away from the world to where the air was clear and men had wings and everything was bright and good. Instead she found herself in deep consideration of death.

And Leah saw her.

Leah saw Eve Meredith Chao in the reflection on a tide pool touched by the dreaming waters. Eve was sitting by a bathtub in a grimy room, playing with a straight razor, and pausing—now and again—to cut at the gathering slakes. It took Leah a long moment to realize it was the slakes' blood, and not Eve's, that billowed through the dreaming waters—but still Eve's face was very lost.

And somehow Leah understood.

Understanding was not her strength—but somehow she understood.

So she stepped into the waters.

She held out her hand, emerging from the sky above the world.

She said what is normally an angel's duty, in such times as those to say.

"You would be welcome, up above."

And the burden fell from Eve Meredith Chao, and the waters drew back from her a second time, and Leah took E. M. Chao to Siskery.

But the shadow's face had turned to Siskery.

And Daniel Marks came stumbling to their haunts, to warn them that they could not stay for long.

# Standard Character Types

In **Dreaming Waters** you will normally play one of five basic character types. Other character types are possible, but the game is constructed with these types in mind:

- *the Rescued Human*, which is the standard option;
- *the Angel*, another common choice; and
- *the Fire Angel*, *the Lamia*, and *the Seeker*, who are theoretically more rare.

These relate to the six basic heroic archetypes on pg. XX-XX, but there aren't any rules against mixing and matching—any character type can take any heroic archetype.

## The Angel

*often the:* Budding Hero, Diligent Student, Empathic One, or the Ordinary One

Angels are a common character type in **Dreaming Waters**. If you are *the Angel*, then you were born in the upper world and became involved over time with the events of the game—whether that's LEVIATHAN, heroic adventure, small-scale personal interactions with a group of humans and other creatures, or just normal life in the angels' realm.

The typical angel is a healthy-looking human with the power to manifest feathered wings. Angels are abnormally strong and quick compared to humans. They are prone to fewer diseases. Flight tires them much as running tires a human—five minutes will exhaust a sedentary angel, while athletes can fly for hours. A few (particularly those with a human parent) have trouble manifesting wings or cannot fly at all.

Angels tend towards a generic appearance, with symmetric features, skin in the color range from wheat to copper with occasional dark reds, and moderate height. This is a norm and not a constraint—angels exhibit the full range of human body types and features, and often have wider variation within their nuclear families than humans do. Some also have the markers of descent from the lamia or fire angels. A strong inheritance from the lamia gives dark blood, dark hair, and a cold and polished complexion—like a statue of alabaster, obsidian, or red jade. A strong inheritance from fire makes an angel radiant. For some this radiance is a subtle aura that is felt rather than seen; for

others, a soft and visible halo; for a few, a ruddy physical energy that burns from inside them as if their bones had caught on fire and the light showed through their skin.

## The Fire Angel

*often the:* Empathic One or the Diligent Student

Some angels are born with a strong inheritance of fire. Others the sun changes later in their lives, striking them unexpectedly and imbuing them with its power. The touch of the fire makes a person different from what they would have been, and in some ways better, but the pure passion rising from the sun is difficult for reason and duty to control. Unless their passions incline in conveniently safe directions, like raising children, studying the classics, library management, or painting, a fire angel has to work very hard not to become wicked—and even "safe" passions can go wrong.

Some fire angels exile themselves from society, reducing the temptation of wickedness by pursuing their passions in solitude. Others find some cynosure or focal point of virtue that they are able to cling to—some form of goodness that is simple and clear and obvious enough to them that they can use it to check the worst impulses of their heart. This is normally love, obedience, or generosity, but it can also be something like asceticism, trust, decorum, piety, or the memory of some person better than themselves. If none of these solutions work to regulate their curse, they may immerse themselves in the dreaming waters to calm their hearts; die; or just give in and allow wickedness or madness to rule them.

Full fire angels are an uncommon character type in **Dreaming Waters**. They work best in stories set in the dreaming waters themselves, where the waters can soothe their madness. The fire angels that live there long for the upper realm—but if they ascend too often, they risk losing control of themselves and becoming cruel. In games set in the upper realms they are a rare character type instead.

## The Lamia

*often the:* Budding Hero or the Empathic One

Sometimes a descendant of a fire angel, born in the dreaming waters, is born a *lamia*. All their lives they hear a distant song, but cannot make it out. Then one day the pieces of it fall into place within their mind; it becomes clear and comprehensible and it rives their world and human guise apart. Like a bird

emerging from a cracked shell, they become lamia. Their "song" becomes a spiritual weapon to shape the hearts of others and the physical substance of the dreaming waters. They generally go mad—or, more precisely, they learn to *see* the world as the angels see it but to *hear* the noise of life as the shadow in the dreaming waters does. It is as if their normal world is suddenly full of slakes and terrors, and every person around them gives off such a racket as to make reason and giving order to their thoughts impossible. They generally conclude that the angels, most humans, and the demons of the water are all a single monstrous army. Depending on their temperament, they may rise to strike the cities of the angels down or rime themselves in a defensive shell within the dreaming waters and struggle against the other creatures there. They are mad and they have every reason for this madness; but in all cases, this madness *may* be healed. Some recover partially on their own, recognizing again the basic harmlessness of humanity; others, with the help of angels or a numinous insight, recover entirely, learn to hear the noise of life as beauty, and become a force for good.

Lamia are a rare character type in **Dreaming Waters**.

If you are *the Lamia*, you are probably also

- *The Budding Hero* (pg. XX); or
- *The Empathic One* (pg. XX).

## The Rescued Human

*often the:* Disreputable Warrior, Empathic One, Impressionable One, or the Ordinary One

The standard character type in **Dreaming Waters** is *the Rescued Human*. If you are *the Rescued Human*, then you lived in the dreaming waters all your life—until an angel found you and decided to show you the upper world. There are three reasons this may have happened:

- You were at the brink of death—typically suicide or death by slake.
- You stumbled on supernatural events.
- An angel was so taken by you that they couldn't bear to leave you in the dreaming waters.

In any case, they brought you up, and now you live among the angels.

## The Seeker

*often the:* Disreputable Warrior or the Impressionable One

Some humans find their own way to the upper realms. This generally results from a process of spiritual growth and awakening: the heart opens, preconceptions fade, the sounds of the world become clearer, and without even knowing it *the Seeker* begins to seek the upper realms. One day they are out in the world—typically in a place of meditation and serenity, but it may happen even on a busy street—and the waters recede. Beauty fills their senses: they stand among the cities of the angels.

It is the nature of *the Seeker* to love the upper realms—no matter how difficult life is there, it is also the answer to a long-standing riddle in their heart. The world above the waters makes them happy, simply for that it exists. But it's also the nature of *the Seeker*, having found that place of beauty, to be able to carry it in their hearts and return to the dreaming waters—if they must, at least, if that's where their purposes lead them, and while returning to the upper realms when they can.

The Seeker is an uncommon character type in **Dreaming Waters**.

## Wise Beasts and Other Improbable Characters

It's possible that in a given game of **Dreaming Waters** it will make sense to play a wise animal, a fire-demon, a prince of shadow, or a servant to some sibling-storm. There's nothing inherently wrong with these character types, but we're not going to support or recommend them.

It is also possible to play a human who has not yet seen the upper realms—someone basically like you. Such a character is assumed to be a seeker-in-waiting or human soon to be rescued, but it's OK if you don't know which.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Attributes

Characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** have five key traits, or *Attributes*, which measure their ability at acting successfully in the world. These traits are:

- **Attentive**, your ability to listen and learn;
- **Fierce**, your ability to defy evil;
- **Helpful**, your ability to make peoples' lives better;
- **Insightful**, your understanding of other people; and
- **Reliable**, your ability to live up to others' expectations.

You may choose to stand out in any one of these Attributes—to be better than most of the people around you at it. You can also choose to be kind of middle-of-the-road, not standing out in anything in particular. This gives rise to the six basic character archetypes in the **Filial Piety Action System**.

These Attributes are measured in numbers ranging from 0 to 5.

If you've picked one Attribute to stand out in, that Attribute will be 4. The rest of your Attributes range from 0 to 3, with a total of 6 points among the four of them.

If you haven't picked any Attribute to stand out in, then your Attributes all range from 1-3 and you have 11 points total to spend.

## Stipulations

Each Attribute will allow you to make certain *stipulations* about events in the world. For instance, you may use Reliable (paired with a Subject and a dice roll, two matters that we'll discuss later) to stipulate that your character has lived up to someone's expectations as you understand them. When you successfully make such a stipulation, it is entered as a fact in the world of the game—as if you were writing it in the pages of this book. You can and often will use an Attribute to accomplish more than just this stipulation—but how far you get, beyond the stipulation, is going to be up to the GM.

# Archetype: The Impressionable One

*Key Attribute: Attentive*

If you're the **Impressionable One**, you are very good at listening to other people and absorbing what they have to say. You're OK at keeping secrets, and very good at keeping *important* secrets and emotional confidences. You can learn a lot about the world from books and what other people tell you, but your friends say that sometimes you believe things a bit too easily or get too worked up over what someone said.

Your high Attribute is **Attentive**.

This Attribute is for *listening*. Any time you want to make a connection with someone, learn from them, follow directions, or just kind of be open to information you'll use Attentive. Sometimes when you listen to someone, you can bring out part of their self that lay dormant—evoking their better nature by expecting it, or even through earnest attention bringing out the darkness of some villain.

## *Stipulations*

In a physical situation, you can use Attentive for the following stipulation:

"I follow (the Subject)'s directions."

In a social situation, you can use Attentive for any of these stipulations:

"(The Subject) will talk to me."

"I am earnest and helpful."

"I can learn what (the Subject) is teaching me."

"I can build towards a friendship with (the Subject)."

"I bring (some characteristic) closer to the surface in (the Subject)."

## *Key Subjects*

Attentive can be combined with the following Subjects:

- *to your Family*, to listen to the people closest to you.
- *to your Teachers*, to learn from the wise and skilled.
- *to the Deserving*, to learn from virtuous people anywhere.
- *to (name)*, to learn or connect with a specific person.

### *Special Subject*

If you are *the Impressionable One*, you may also use Attentive with:

- *to the Wicked*, to learn from basically wrong-headed people.

### *Other Subjects*

Characters wishing to use Attentive with a Subject that is not allowed must rely on the kindness of the GM or use their Exemplar Pool (pg. XX).

### *Highlighting the Attentive*

Part of being the Impressionable One is that your Attentive stands out. That doesn't just apply within the PC group—you also stand out among NPCs, and the more Attentive PCs a group has the stronger this impression needs to be.

So, the more Impressionable Ones and high-Attentive characters there are in a group, the more often the GM should create and play NPCs that just don't know how to listen. Sometimes it can even seem like the Attentive PCs are the only ones in the world who actually pay attention to what other people say! But that's OK. You (if you're a high-Attentive PC) probably don't mind—after all, other people are interesting! It's OK if they don't always pay attention to you as long as you get to hear their stories and make a connection with them.

## Attentive and the Dreaming Waters

Attentive is one of the Attributes inimical to the slakes. It is a power in the hearts of the One People that the dreaming waters obscure and make difficult—but even in the waters it may be reclaimed. Its fullness and flowering may drive a human to the surface for the first time, as the power of *listening* dammed up by the waters at last breaks free in the heart and hears the upper regions. Conversely, a character may discover it for the first time when they surface, as if a person deaf and blind all their lives were to discover that their ears were merely clogged with wax, their eyes merely covered by a strip of cloth, and their senses in fine form. Suddenly a vibrant *interest* in other people rises: suddenly other people are more relevant, more apparent, more bright. Suddenly the closed-off capacity in the heart that hears awakens and burns to know what others have to say.

We may say that Attentive is the power that witnesses the brightness of the upper realms and the angels; that looks upon its cities and its good lands and exults. It is the power that enables one to transition between the realms, to shake free of the rigidity of perspective that would bind one in a world. It is a power which the animus of the sun has in too great abundance: because it is too Attentive, it hears the noise of life too keenly, and craves immediately to rule it. It is a power that neither of the shadow in the dreaming waters or Scerascaling Leetha possesses: for this reason, the first loathes the sound of life existing in the world and seeks to drown it out, while the second cannot hear it at all.

## Perception

In **Dreaming Waters** the GM is encouraged to use Attentive as the basis for general perception and exploration rolls. Unless there's an immediate influence from a sibling-storm, the player doesn't add a Subject—they just use their Attentive rating or their Exemplar Pool (pg. XX).

The influence of a sibling-storm changes this calculus, sometimes forcing characters to use Exemplar Pool and sometimes improving their Attentive. Specifically when some sibling-storm has a strong influence on a situation, the storm itself becomes the appropriate Subject; often that Subject is *to the Wicked*, in which case using Attentive instead of the Exemplar Pool is reserved to the Impressionable One.

There is no associated stipulation when using Attentive for general perception and exploration tasks. The result of such an effort is entirely up to the GM.

## Traveling the Worlds

**Dreaming Waters** uses *Attentive* as the key Attribute for travel between worlds. You will use it to enter or leave the dreaming waters; to soar high and enter the sea of fire; or to access the dominion of any of the sibling-storms. If you are *the Seeker* and found the upper realms on your own, you probably have *Attentive* 3-4.

You may usually do these things automatically:

- enter the dreaming waters from the upper realms;
- enter the dead waters from the dreaming waters;
- enter the upper realms from the dreaming waters.

You must only know that it is possible to do so, and make the effort. If the GM wishes, however, you may be required to make a dice roll (pg. XX) to accomplish this; here you will roll *Attentive* + 2.

## The Dead Waters

It may require a roll of *Attentive* + 0 to return from the dead waters. If you fail one of the following things transpires:

- you take longer to return than you'd have hoped;
- you do not return;
- you lose some amount of Spirit (pg. XX) and may try again.

It is up to the GM which of these things transpires.

## The Realms of the Sibling-Storms

To enter the realm of any other sibling-storm, you must use *Attentive*. The Subject is either the storm itself or a guide whom you wish to follow. This makes it difficult to enter the realms of Wicked storms. Further, the GM determines how much progress you make, how difficult the effort is, and so

forth; there is no stipulation associated with this. In some games, the GM will allow players to go from Spire to Starholm in a single roll of *Attentive + to the Deserving*. In others it requires a long spiritual journey. The common ground is that in each case *Attentive* is the key Attribute and the storm or the guide is the relevant Subject for the journey.

## Waking the Dead

In the event that a player and GM have agreed that a given dead person may be woken from the sleep of death, and that a dice roll will determine the outcome (with neither success or failure previously decided upon), that roll will use *Attentive*. The relevant stipulation is:

"I bring (*the characteristic of life, or existence*) closer to the surface in (*the dead person in question*)."

Usually this roll won't happen. Most of the dead that a character finds in the dead waters can't be woken; most of the time, if someone can be woken, the GM and player are more interested in how the character and the dead person connect and how the spark of life wakes again than in whether the player succeeds on a dice roll. For this reason, it's common to either leave the waking of the dead entirely in the hands of GM fiat and role-playing or to make a single roll of *Attentive + to the Deserving* to determine the overall outcome of a dive. In the latter case the GM would then interpret the roll and move on to relating or playing out any adventures or tragedies that occur along the way.

The most important thing to take away from this, thus, is not that rolling to wake the dead uses the *Attentive* Attribute, but that when a character diving into dead waters *does* succeed, it is the *Attentive* Attribute that enables them to do so.

## Attentive and the Storms

There are three sibling-storms with a strong connection to *Attentive*. If a character has the *Spiritual Education* Knack and *Attentive* 3+, they may receive the following bonus Subjects at a rating of *Attentive* - 2:

- *Aylantine Seek*
- *Nameless*
- *the Stillness Vale*

Thus an Impressionable One with this Knack could have 2 free points in each of these Subjects.

### Other Storm-Related Uses

Attentive is the Attribute of choice for interacting with the Bu Shen Men of Aylantine Seek. An Attentive character is often chosen to represent Nameless and the Clean Dominion at funerary rituals—such a character will wear white, stand at attention for a very long time, and perform a blessing over the corpse.

It is generally appropriate for demons of these storms, cultists of these storms, and characters learning magic associated with these storms to have a high Attentive.

## The Impressionable One, in Dreaming Waters

*The Impressionable One* is often a human that found their own way up from the dreaming waters. They were never a good fit for the shadow's sea: somehow, the dreaming waters never wholly drowned their sense of wonder. Somehow the dreaming waters never fully clogged their ears. They grew up able to listen to others. Despite the waters their hearts bore witness to something larger and more real. They knew that the world was *more* than what they saw around them. One day, following that sense, and carrying with them a reverent sense of apartness or togetherness with the world, they found themselves at the angels' shore.

*The Impressionable One* is also a good archetype for young people, whether human children or angelic children. Recognize that even for the most unruly and rebellious teen, the power of listening to others and the implications of doing so hold profound relevance to their lives. To this, the younger and slightly older add an additional capacity and willingness to actually *be* Attentive.

Humans brought up to the upper realms because an angel found them and fell in love with them are also good candidates to be the *Impressionable One*. It is not, however, the standard archetype for humans rescued from common-slakes, terrors, and the other threats of the dreaming waters; the world rarely targets Impressionable Ones, so such a character is most likely some other archetype.

This is an uncommon but not an unheard-of archetype for the angels of LEVIATHAN. Most of them are *the Budding Hero* (below), but a few are drawn into LEVIATHAN through an open and listening heart that "heard" the suffering of humanity below and felt a need to answer.

It is possible that *the Impressionable One* is an agent of Aylantine Seek or some other sibling-storm. It is a rare archetype for the lamia and almost unheard of among the fire angels. It is reasonably common among angels and humans who don't fall under any of the categories above.

## Eve Meredith Chao

The sample character *Eve Meredith Chao* is an Impressionable One.

## Archetype: The Disreputable Warrior

*Key Attribute: Fierce*

The **Disreputable Warrior** doesn't behave! Doesn't listen! Can't get along with everybody else! Doesn't follow the traditional ways! But somehow, when the chips are down, they're fighting on the right side, and doing things only real heroes ought to have the discipline and inner strength to do.

If there's a secret to the disreputable warrior, it's this.

The disreputable warrior *could* be good and obedient. They could follow the righteous path. They could be polite to others, live their lives with discipline, and honor their teachers and their elders. The proof of that is in their skill and their good heart. People who are incapable of living properly are also incapable of fighting hard for the right when things get tough. But living properly isn't the disreputable warrior's path.

Their path is to struggle against other people.

Their path is to struggle against society.

Their path is to struggle against everything that everyone else believes and tells them is right, with the old ways and their teachers and their parents and their elder brothers and people who ought to know better. They need to forge their own path—to do all over again, and for themselves, the work that the generations before them did. They are slovenly, unruly, lazy, un-studious, boisterous, difficult, and arrogant because at their core they don't believe—

Not really—

That the rest of the world has figured things out yet. They don't believe that the people who *ought* to know better actually do. They might accept that good and right and orderly ways of living are those things—but they don't think anybody's proven that they're the *right* good and right and orderly ways. After all, isn't this a world full of trouble and difficulty? Isn't it hard for them, and for everyone else? How could you possibly say that anyone has the answers yet, when the world's this rough?

And that's why the disreputable warrior thrives on having people yell and curse at them and call them a stubborn idiot. That's why their favorite way to fight evil and help people is in secret, doing their best to keep others from catching on to their softer, nicer, more heroic side. They *like* being disreputable. They *like* being troublesome. They almost want to be wicked, since the wicked don't seem as troubled as the virtuous by the suffering in the world. But they can't, because their hearts are good.

So if *you're the Disreputable Warrior*, that means that you have a good heart and good fighting skill—you'll be as good with your **Fierce 4** as even the best-trained characters with their Reliable or Attentive—but you don't like it

when people tell you what to do, or point out your goodness. You just. Don't. Fit. In!

And you don't want to—  
except for part of you, of course, which does.

Your high Attribute is **Fierce**.

This Attribute is for *fighting*, and most importantly *fighting against*. A high Fierce will be your sword against bandits, demons, gangsters, and other enemies. It will stand with you when you fight society and your bosses and people in power and make a clamor against your enemies. It will help when you seek, with your own good hands, to stop the evils of the world.

### *Stipulations*

You can use Fierce for the following stipulation:

"I achieve (a tactical objective) in my struggle against (the Subject)."

### *Key Subjects*

Fierce can be combined with the following Subjects:

- *to your Enemies*, to fight people who are actively hostile to you.
- *to the Wicked*, to oppose people who are wrong-headed.
- *to (name)*, to use your ferocity against a specific person.

### *Special Subjects*

If you are *the Disreputable Warrior*, you may also use Fierce with:

- *to your Family*, to fight people you care about.
- *to your Teachers*, to make trouble for people in authority.
- *to the Deserving*, to make trouble for virtuous people.

### *Other Subjects*

Characters wishing to use Fierce with a Subject that is not allowed must rely on the kindness of the GM or use their Exemplar Pool (pg. XX).

### *Highlighting the Fierce*

The more high-Fierce characters there are in a group, the more often the GM should make NPCs that just don't know how to stand up for themselves.

They're weak!

They're pathetic!

They need someone like you—if you're a high-Fierce character, that is—to give them a little more trouble in their lives. Something to shake them up. Something to give them a little spine. Something to shake their complacency and stop their passive-aggressive moaning.

Now, some of this "weakness" is probably just the side the PCs see. If you are a disreputable warrior, and you're always making trouble, you don't get to see the best side of people. If you're a PC, facing trouble and having adventures, you hardly ever get to see people when they are happy and at peace. But some of it should be real.

There's a reason, after all, that most groups of famous heroes in the past had some kind of disreputable warrior associated with them. They're important! The Disreputable Warrior would say, "They need me. Otherwise they'd go all soft!"

## Fierce and the Dreaming Waters

Life was born, and it spread across the world, and it made noise—it was a great and furious clamoring of hearts, saying:

"Here I am!

Here!

Here!

I will remake this to my desiring. I will feast on the world. I will grow, I will spread, I will become, I will change. I will *want* things. I will *desire to act* and form a purpose from that desire.

This world is mine!

This world will be mine!

HERE I AM!"

And the noise that life made, that so angered the dreaming waters that they rose to drown it, that made the animus in the sun covetous, that inspires people still to live, to endure, to grow, to change, to want, and to make purposes from their desires—

That noise is Fierce.

Fierce is the passionate self-defining power in the heart. Fierce is what gives us the will to laugh at despair and refuse the easy road. Fierce is the enemy of the slakes and the shadow and death itself. It is the conquering will of the fire angels and the transformative song of the lamia.

It is, most of all, the fundamental human power—

The power not to succumb.

## Inanimate Obstacles

In **Dreaming Waters** the GM is encouraged to use Fierce as the basis for overcoming inanimate obstacles. It's generally possible to frame most conflicts with inanimate obstacles as a fight with *somebody*—e.g., breaking through a door as an aggressive act against its owner, or surviving five days in the wilds because you have to get home and show up your arrogant brother. However, if there isn't anything like that that comes to mind, the GM should let players roll *Fierce* + (a bonus from 0-2 of the GM's choice, based on how aggravating that obstacle is) to overcome inanimate obstacles.

There's no stipulation attached to this, so the result is up to the GM.

## Fierce and the Storms

There are two sibling-storms with a strong connection to Fierce. If a character has the *Spiritual Education* Knack and Fierce 3+, they may receive the following bonus Subjects at a rating of *Fierce* - 2:

- *the Animus of Fire*
- *Wrath*

Thus a Disreputable Warrior with this Knack could have 2 free points in each of these Subjects.

## Other Storm-Related Uses

The fire loves the Fierce, and Wrath and its demons attract ferocity. It is generally appropriate for demons of these storms, cultists of these storms, and characters learning magic associated with these storms to have a high Fierce.

## The Disreputable Warrior, in Dreaming Waters

*The Disreputable Warrior* is a good archetype for any of the wingless. They're famous for it—

"They don't know how to get along with one another!

They only know how to fight evil."

That may seem weird to you. You're probably familiar with disreputable warriors in fiction, and, looking around, you might not think it's the best description for the people of the mundane Earth. Would that sales clerk really leap into action if a giant serpent threatened? Would your co-worker laugh at warnings and dive into a crackling field of magic just to save a friend? Would that harried guy in a suit really challenge a twenty-foot-tall talking boar to a duel just because it was blocking their road? And what about that kid? That panhandler? That woman walking her dog? Would they really be able to travel together, bickering and getting into fights the whole way, into a lost city of demons and monsters, to retrieve a magic sword and save the world?

Well—

For one thing, maybe they would. But **Dreaming Waters** doesn't really claim that. It doesn't expect you to believe that the people around you are exemplars of this Attribute, that they are disreputable warriors, that they live their lives in a condition of ferocity.

Rather, it is a thing—we shall imagine—that unfolds in a person when the waters first recede.

For isn't that what the waters are for?

Isn't Fierce the very clamor they exist to suppress? Doesn't one have to cultivate that inner cacophony simply to live in these dreaming waters without despair?

Fierce, we shall say, reaches its full flower in a wingless person on that day when they first breathe the upper realms' good air. When they emerge from the dampening element that has, until that moment and for all their lives, surrounded them. When the weighted cerements of confusion, incomprehension, and despair that have clung to them fall free and they see the truth for the first time and they cry, "What has *happened to our world?*"

*What has happened to our world?*

For it is drowned in dreaming waters. For it is made a prey to death. For even in the upper realms, where the waters have receded, there are plagues of demons, beasts, and fire. And the Fierce see this and it makes a great tempest in their hearts, and they make an oath: "Even as I lived my life in those bleak

waters, and did not despair. Even as I lived blind to the hearts of others, but dared to love. Even as I refused the shadow in the dreaming waters, and gave them not my soul—I won't let evil have its way with anybody else!"

As if a burden has been flung from them, they move recklessly. They don't let bad things stand just because they've been around for days or weeks or months or years. They don't waste time listening to people they think would only slow them down. Once they see the land of angels, they make their pledge; and immediately they become vigilantes and warriors in the service of the upper realms, or dive back down to free their fellows from the sea.

That's the most common story for *the Disreputable Warrior*.

It's also common for *the Disreputable Warrior* to be an angel with just a touch of fire—someone born with a bit of the legacy of the people of fire, someone whose passions burn a bit more brightly than the norm. Someone who doesn't fit into society and who resents that a little—who'd rather that the world were such as to let them fit in. But someone whose fire is not so terrible as to drive them into wickedness. It just makes them disreputable, rebellious, and strong.

On the other side of that, *the Disreputable Warrior* may be a fire angel exiled and accommodated to the dreaming waters. The waters have dampened their passions, made it possible for them to get along with other people, opened for them a path to goodness—and now they channel the fire they have left into bad behavior both to keep it alive and to drain it off so that it does not rule them.

The happy medium between these things is rare. This isn't a common archetype for a full-fledged fire angel in the upper realms; if someone is possessed by the animus of fire in its full strength, they will usually either master some other virtue to control it or become a beast. To be a good-hearted fire angel with Fierce as your highest virtue is *possible* but it requires that your driving passions fit well within the archetype so they don't lead you astray.

This is also an unlikely archetype for the lamia.

## Archetype: The Budding Hero

*Key Attribute: Helpful*

If you are **the Budding Hero**, you're very good at helping other people and making their lives better. You can fight for them, work for them, and in general do stuff that improves the world around you.

It's true that it's not always enough to mean well and seek the good. If you're not very insightful then you'll have to learn to listen to somebody who can tell you when you're going about helping in the wrong way—otherwise you could end up going overboard in the wrong direction like a tragically eager puppy.

But—

Most of the time it's pretty obvious when you're genuinely helping. Most of the time if you step in to defend the helpless, they'll really be helpless and grateful for your help. Most of the time if you fix a problem for someone, it'll really be a problem and you'll really help them. Most of the time, if you repair a broken road, people will go, "That road needed repair! Thank you!" and not "Curses, now the bandits can attack us more easily—"

And even if they do, then you can always help them out by killing those evil bandits!

The key Attribute of the budding hero is **Helpful**.

This Attribute is for *doing things in the world with an intention to help others*. Any time that you think somebody needs you to do something, or that you can do something to make somebody's life better, you can use Helpful to do that thing. You may have to explain your perspective and goals to the GM in order to connect the dots between the activity you want to undertake and the person you want to help—but help them you *can*.

### *Stipulations*

You can use Helpful for the following stipulation:

"I help (the Subject) by doing (some activity in the world.)"

When you do so you are also making an implicit stipulation:

"My character genuinely believes this will help (the Subject), and would be happier to fail in a way that helps them than to succeed in a way that does not."

### *Key Subjects*

Helpful can be combined with every Subject:

- *to the Deserving*, to help the virtuous and good.
- *to your Enemies*, because a hero is generous even to their foes.
- *to your Family*, to help the people you care about.
- *to your Students*, to help people who depend on you.
- *to your Teachers*, because sometimes even great leaders need help.
- *to the Wicked*, to help even the wrong-headed.
- *to (name)*, to help a specific person.

### *Highlighting the Helpful*

The more Budding Heroes a group has, the more harsh the GM should make the conditions of the world.

It's not exactly like for the other Attributes. It's not like if your group is very Helpful that they should be the only helpful people in the world—wouldn't that suck? If nobody but your group was able or interested in helping anybody else? If your Budding Heroes went around hero-ing but nobody could even serve you sandwiches without tripping and smearing mustard on your shirt?

There should always be a reasonable number of Helpful NPCs even if all the PCs are very Helpful—NPCs who are Helpful, at least, in their own little ways. But the more high-Helpful characters your group has, the more often they should face problems that non-heroes just can't fix. A team entirely made up of budding heroes should live in a world where demons and monsters and horrible obstacles are everywhere—where they stand out as Helpful because they're the only ones who can help with *that kind of thing*.

## Helpful and the Dreaming Waters

In **Dreaming Waters** this is a quintessentially *mortal* quality.

The spirit knows only itself. It cannot truly understand what others need or want. It cannot see their truths. To the limited extent that it *can*, that effort falls under the Attribute Insightful—the act of being Helpful does not relate. Yet in being Helpful, a person makes part of themselves contingent on that knowledge they do not possess. They mold their ambition and desire around their guess as to that mystery. They take action organized around a central point that is unknown to them. It's like agreeing to a favor without knowing what the favor is, or seeking all your life to reclaim an unopened box without knowing what's inside.

Helpful is a quality that risks.

Most of the sibling-storms could not even understand this quality. Take the shadow in the dreaming waters as an example. She sees life. She hears it. She thinks only how to drown that noise away. If she were to try to phrase her inclinations in the language of the Helpful, she would say something absurd: "It's for the best for these people that I drown them in my waters. *For is it not the case that their cacophony offends me?*"

The animus of the fire possesses a different mode of incomprehension. It loves life. Truly does it love! But it cannot imagine that life should want anything but what it decides that it wants. "To burn is good; I love the life of the world; therefore, I should make it burn. Sometimes it protests; I cannot understand this protestation. If I could make sense of it, I would heed it, but as it stands, it is doubtless something inconsequential."

Nor are the other sibling-storms better equipped to understand.

Aylantine Seek is aware of mystery. It knows what it is to look on other beings and wonder what they would enjoy. It even knows, to some extent, what it is to seek that enjoyment—but for Aylantine Seek, that mystery is not a risk but the actual desirable thing. Scerascaling Leetha is aware that people are surprising, and wishes to help them, but she scores it almost as a game and not a goal: she attaches no great weight or comprehension to her failings.

And on, and on; each storm, in its fashion, is missing a specific portion of human helpfulness.

There are three ambiguous exceptions.

Luna is in many ways an embodiment of the plight of the Helpful: of the meaning of living for others in a world where one can never be certain of their needs. She understands, or rather *is*, the situation of people in social webs and connections and being incomplete in themselves. However, to be a spirit of mortality is not to be oneself mortal; and it is notable that on the moon, with

an attenuation of other traits, the forms of Helpfulness become peculiarly abstract and strange.

Then there are Prince and Princess Laughter.

They present themselves as Helpful—as striving constantly, and as hard as they can! to be good to others, but without any deep understanding of what helping others means. And certainly they are the most mortal of the sibling-storms: they have lost their original realm (at least, so they claim) and their original function, and now they dwell in a little wooden town in orbit round the moon. So they may be touched by mortality. They may understand what it is to be Helpful. Or, of course, they may be liars pure and simple, and their entire backstory part of some grand joke.

Helpful is a capacity, like Attentive, that the first entrance to the upper world can rouse. Unlike Attentive the opposite is also true: angels may, when they first dive into the dreaming waters, learn more of Helpfulness. To be battered and shaped by the powers of the sibling-storms is part of the mortal condition; each storm in their own way both fights and contributes to the desire that we have to spare others a portion of our shared burdens. Facing the uncertainty of the dreaming waters may better open the soul to service to others, or it may drown out the Helpful will entirely. Exposure to the passion of the fire may do the same.

## Helpful and the Storms

There are three sibling-storms with a strong connection to Helpful. If a character has the *Spiritual Education* Knack and Helpful 3+, they may receive the following bonus Subjects at a rating of *Helpful - 2*:

- *Luna*
- *Prince and Princess Laughter*

Thus an Ordinary One with Helpful 3 and this Knack could have 1 free point in each of these Subjects.

## Other Storm-Related Uses

The creatures of Luna and the little wooden town have high Helpful, and a character would need a high Helpful to fit in well with their society. An explanation of how this fits into the cosmology, where Helpful is a mortal trait, follows.

## The Moon and its Satellite

The moon is a power of being situated in society. This is only a portion of the mortal condition, and not entirely the soul of the Helpful Attribute. Nevertheless it suffices to arouse this Attribute; the people of the moon are highly competent at serving others. Regrettably the character of Insightful, Fierce, and Reliable atrophy there. Thus while the people of the moon think about others and work hard, they don't understand what other people think: they're not Insightful. They have a faded life and passion: they are not Fierce. They do not cherish commitments, and the promise of yesterday is as a meaningless cipher today—they are not Reliable. Thus their culture has evolved into a thing of intricate ritual, manner, and social forms. Through masks and modes of speech they adopt iconic roles and interact through them. Pressed for a commitment, they speak evasively; pilloried, abused, or ordered about, they comply without energy or discretion, and dissipate to return to their own affairs when no longer actively observed. The redeeming feature of their society is a kind of willing accommodation to the larger needs of their community: when faced with a thing that must be done, and no one ready in their mask or location to do it, they "go faceless" (which is to say, maskless; their underlying faces are peculiarly homogenous but not in actuality absent) and throw themselves willingly into the task. To connect with the people on the Moon requires Attentive, of course; to understand what they might be thinking, in their current mask and mode, requires Insightful; but to be a person that they are comfortable with, to earn "quality" in the eyes of the lunar residents, one must have Helpful in high degree.

The little wooden town that orbits round the moon is pervaded by a similarly selfless character. To live there is to feel a keen sense of interdependency. The baker feeds the others, but is dependent on them for all else; the toymaker brings the children there delight, but cannot repair the roads and walkways or bake good bread; the janitor keeps everything tidy but depends on everyone else for the things that must be tidied; and so forth and so on. Even the children are necessary, for the handful that live there at any given time are the soul of the little wooden town. It might seem to an outside observer as if the little wooden town does not require such a keenly felt division of roles, and further, that there are people missing in its ecological equations: where are the farmers, who grow the grain? Where are the lumberjacks, who bring in the lumber for the toymaker? Is there a tailor? If not, where do the heralds of Prince and Princess Laughter get their clothes? Questions like these suggest that the interdependent spirit of the town is an artificial experience, but regardless, it exists. The tiny society is occupied by a strong edifice of community and cheer.

Much as a single *Attentive + to the Deserving* roll may govern a long dive into dead waters, a single *Helpful + to the Deserving* roll may govern a long interaction with the people of the moon or the little wooden town.

## The Budding Hero, in Dreaming Waters

*The Budding Hero* is often an angel—a member of LEVIATHAN, in games that focus heavily on the dreaming waters, or a local or traveling hero in a game set in the upper world. Their love for others compels them to make the world a better place, so they build things that need to be built, help people that need to be helped, fight things that need to be fought, and study things they believe the world needs them to know. They are upright but not extraordinarily so: they have neither the clarity of the empathic one or the firm moral foundation of the diligent student (below). They live with a clear sense of their own imperfection. Some of them dwell obsessively on it; others know they are imperfect but do not mind.

Wingless humans of great innate decency may also be *the Budding Hero*. It's not very common—there's nothing in the world that encourages humans to be more Helpful than they are in reality, or that particularly selects for Helpful humans in the typical stories of the game. So characters like this are about as common as they would be in any modern or historical game *without* the fantasy element. Sometimes humans are good at thinking of others and making their lives better. Usually, they're not.

This archetype is a good fit for a heroic lamia. The fundamental crisis in their lives is a lack of mortality—a distance from the flesh and an immersion in the spirit. However they retain enough of the nature of the One People that they can recover that mortality through careful attention to an Attribute such as this: by giving themselves to others with an uncertain and questioning heart.

If you are such a *Budding Hero*, you probably grew up as a normal human in the dreaming waters. Your blood had transformed at the moment of your birth—possibly even your quickening—but the power lay dormant in you. You only knew that sometimes you would hear a strange and distant song, and the world and yourself would seem different for a time.

Then at some point—puberty being common—you heard the song clearly for the first time. Your spirit kindled. Your heart raced. You felt a sickness that moved through you and a kind of pain-that-was-not-pain with each heartbeat. And like the angels you began to see the slakes and the agencies of the shadow in the waters around you. And like the shadow you began to hear the noise of life. It was a cacophony that tried to drown out the song that finally you could hear. The song that was *you*.

It was sticky and gross and overwhelming.

It was *noise* and it made it impossible to hold on to your self. It made it impossible to organize your thoughts. Just being with another person was like being surrounded by an orchestra of demons playing nails-on-blackboard and the off-key bassoon. Your only option for mental and spiritual survival was to cling closer to your song: and as you did so the world became more dire.

You would then do one of two things. The first was to rise into the upper world. There you would wage war on the monstrous winged creatures and their freakish contraption-cities until you'd made a bit of space to hear your own thinking and your song. The second was to use your song to build a fortress around yourself in the dreaming waters—a personal shield and a private dominion. This would buy you a chance to reorient and wage war against—well, perhaps against everything, for the winged, the slakes, and the other humans might have seemed as one great army. Or perhaps you would correctly identify the shadow in the dreaming waters, or incorrectly isolate everything supernatural as your foe, and fight against only those.

You were possessed by madness.

Then you were reached. It doesn't matter what it was that reached you. It might have been an angel. It might have been fortune—some nameless provenance, that same quality that sometimes brings epiphany to the dead, might have shaken your world.

In any case you were reached. Something let you bring your song into harmony with the lives of others. Somehow you found a way to hear the sound of the lives of angels not as a torturous racket but as a kind of glory. You realized a way by which you could distinguish between the slakes and the descending angels of LEVIATHAN, the storms and the One People. You still stand well outside the norms of the world, and people are still a little incomprehensible to you—as they are to everyone else, of course—but you're able to love people again, and strive to help them, and use Helpful as a new focus for your song. That's how a lamia becomes a *Budding Hero*, dedicated to working towards the weal of others and bringing goodness to the world.

For the fire angels, conversely, this archetype is rare. Helpful is a subtle Attribute. It's not good at taming and controlling the fire in one's own heart. Think of the animus: doesn't it think it's being Helpful? So if a fire angel tries to control their passion by dedicating themselves to service, they're likely to lose their way all over again, and not even knowing *why* others call them wicked, find themselves killed or exiled or banished into the dreaming waters.

## Daniel Marks

The sample character *Daniel Marks* is a Budding Hero.

## Archetype: The Empathic One

*Key Attribute: Insightful*

If you are **the Empathic One**, you're good at knowing what matters to people—what they really want, what they really need, what they'd think about something or what they'd want you to do. This is the perfect character type if you never want to accidentally betray someone or have to figure things out on your own: you can always just think about it carefully and you'll know what your friends, teachers, and other very important people would say.

Your high Attribute is **Insightful**.

This Attribute is a power of *knowing* and *implicit communication*. You will use it to ask the players and GM what their respective PCs and important NPCs would say about something, what they'd want you to do, or what would be helpful to them.

### *Stipulations*

You can use Insightful for the following stipulations:

"I know what (the Subject) would say."

"I know what (the Subject) needs."

"I know how to help (the Subject)."

This first stipulation means that you can have tactical discussions among high-Insightful characters even when there's no real option for communication. That's how well they know each other. The stipulations on the whole mean that you can think through what somebody needs even when you're off on your own. It's even OK to figure out the right thing to do when nobody told you a key bit of information—for instance, you meet an evil bandit, but you know as a player that they're the brother of one of your friends. It's OK to know that your friend would say, "Wait! Don't kill that bandit!"—even if they'd never actually mentioned the affair. You don't know why, exactly. It's just an insight that you have.

### *Two Limitations*

There are two limitations on Insightful, both intended to keep it in the realm of natural human ability or low-level supernatural ability:

- If someone learns something very important *after the last time you met them*, you can't learn it from them with Insightful. For instance, you are out on a patrol when a friend learns that an evil sorcerer is in the area. If you encounter something weird, and wonder, "What would my friend say?" their player doesn't get to tell you, "I'd say, 'Run away! Evil sorcerer!'"
- if someone deceives you from the moment you meet, then you can't both know what they'd say and what they really want—either you can see through to their heart, or you can hear what they'd actually tell you, but because the two things are unrelated, you don't get to know both. It's up to the GM when and if you transition between being able to understand someone's false face and being able to see their heart; there's usually a transition period when you go back and forth, now only knowing one, now seeing a bit of the other.

It's OK for Insightful to do really amazing things, but it's insight, not telepathy, and it's important to play Insightful characters with that distinction in mind.

### *Key Subjects*

Insightful can be combined with the following Subjects:

- *to your Family*, to know what the people close to you would think.
- *to your Students*, to understand what they might need.
- *to the Deserving*, to understand the hearts of good people you know.
- *to (name)*, to understand a specific person's heart.

### *Special Subject*

If you are *the Empathic One*, you may also use Insightful with:

- *to your Teachers*, to know what they would tell you to do. This is limited to basic advice, though, because if you knew *exactly* what they'd tell you to do you'd practically be the teacher yourself!

### *Other Subjects*

Characters wishing to use Insightful with a Subject that is not allowed must rely on the kindness of the GM or use their Exemplar Pool (pg. XX).

### *Highlighting the Insightful*

The more Insightful the PC group is, the more often good and deserving NPCs should be the prey of misunderstandings and unnecessary conflicts. This emphasizes the power of Insight that the group possesses, and it also makes it more useful—if everyone's basically on the same page, then being able to read that page can't be a very useful tool for solving the problems people have.

The **Filial Piety Action System** assumes that "teachers" such as martial arts teachers and other authority figures generally behave correctly—so they will usually talk to one another and with predictable enough motivations and hearts that they won't fall into error. However, if you have a lot of high-Insightful PCs in the group, it may seem like such teachers are the only ones!

That's OK, though. If you're a high-Insightful PC, that's why you're here! You understand people. You *get* what they want and need. You know what they're trying to express. So you can help them understand one another. At least, if that's what's best!

## Insightful and the Dreaming Waters

In **Dreaming Waters** Insightful is an explicitly supernatural ability. It is *common* but it is nevertheless supernatural: it is a power descending from the influence of the sibling-storms. It is driven by the same kind of natural-law insight that the great powers use to understand the world themselves: not, "I deduce this," but rather, "In the presence of the totality of things, I understand what the strand of substance associated with a given 'person' would do."

It is an explicitly external perspective on the soul—

The understandings that you get are filtered through words, and through your own idea of what things mean. That's why you can't connect with people through Insightful like you can through Attentive: you're not listening to them, you're skipping that step and just *knowing* them. This isn't a bad thing but it isn't a good thing either: in fact, and most precisely, it's a good thing *exactly to the degree that you also know how to listen*. If you never listen to someone, but know them well, that's a recipe for seeming patronizing, manipulative, frustrating, arrogant, and cold. But if you listen to people, if you open yourself to them, *and* you know them well as a result, that's like giving them a precious gift.

Insightful is explicitly supernatural, but it's still not mind-reading. It's closer to being able to see the heart and soul despite the flesh and circumstances. It's like, even if when you meet someone they're at their worst, you still see who they really are. And even if years pass and miles stand between you, there's still that kind of clear vision that protects you from self-deceit.

One of the bigger flaws in Insightful, as a mode of understanding others, is that it can't tell when somebody is lying—intentionally or otherwise. It will help you follow what they're trying to say, and give some insight into what they need, but it won't help you know what's *really* going on in their head. Not unless catching the lie or seeing through the confusion is crucial to what they want or need you to do.

For instance, if someone really wants you to come with them to face some enemy, but they're telling you to go away instead—*then* it's a bit like mind-reading, because you can ask their player: "What do you want me to do?" and the player will say, "My character wants you to come along." But if someone's at the negotiating table, and they're lying like crazy, then Insightful won't help at all: if you ask what they'd say, well, it's what they're saying. If you ask what they want, well, it's that you listen to what they're saying and then agree with what they've proposed. You're as easy for them to fool as anybody else, because their outer voice and the real voice of their heart are pushing you in the same direction.

Despite its supernatural character, Insightful is woven through the One People—even the wingless humans of the dreaming waters. It's just that in the waters, like the capacity for Attentive, it's something muted and grayed out. You can think of it, much like the power to use a wing-board, as a power that ascended humans gain. Or you can think of it as an exaggeration of the talent of insight that does exist in the real world.

When the waters recede, the hearts of others become more clear.

Preconceptions fade, or become at least less important. For all your life, if you've been living in the dreaming waters, it was like there was a shell of incomprehensibility around other people. It fades away. Even returning later to the dreaming waters, you'll find that those shells are less dire and the nature of other humans is less dim. The capacity for Insightful quickens.

## Insightful and the Storms

There are three sibling-storms with a strong connection to Insightful. If a character has the *Spiritual Education* Knack and Insightful 3+, they may receive the following bonus Subjects at a rating of *Insightful - 2*:

- *Lightning*
- *Starholm*
- *the Shadow in the Dreaming Waters*

Thus an Ordinary One with Insightful 3 and this Knack could have 1 free point in each of these Subjects.

## Other Storm-Related Uses

It is generally appropriate for shadow demons to have a high Insightful. This is what the slakes use to find people who are wounded and despairing. It is an important tool in the sadisms of the terrors. Shamans, who visit the dreaming waters regularly in search of true dreams, also tend to have a high Insightful. Of the storm-demons and cultists, those associated with Lightning and Starholm tend to have high Insightful, and characters wishing a strong association with or to use the magics of one of these storms should have a high Insightful as well.

## Insight into the Storms

It is not uncommon for characters to develop a working relationship with or interest in one of the sibling-storms—enough to make Insightful rolls to determine what they need, what they think, what they might say. Many fire angels can hear the voice of the sun; they may learn to anticipate it. A friend to Prince and Princess Laughter may wonder, reasonably, "What would the Prince and Princess do?" Or "What does their joke require?"

The GM is encouraged to permit this, but there is a special rule in play:

- when playing a mortal character, you may not stipulate with Insightful as to the needs of the storms, or what would help them.

This doesn't prevent characters from wondering these things, or making an Insightful roll to determine what a storm needs, or hearing information on that subject from the GM. It just means that the GM decides what they hear—the player doesn't have a right to information of this sort, not even an Empathic One making an incredibly lucky roll.

## Mapping the Intentions of the Shadow

**Dreaming Waters** uses Insightful as the key Attribute for understanding the movements of the shadow and her princes. It is possible for the Insightful (even those without a Subject in *the Shadow in the Dreaming Waters*) to gain a sense for how the agencies of the shadow gather and disport themselves. You may think of the shadow and her demons as constantly mumbling to themselves in the dreaming waters—words that the soul hears, if the ears do not. Even those who hate and fear her gain a kind of intimacy with those words.

For this reason the GM may allow characters without an appropriate Subject to roll *Insightful + 0* to gain a rough insight into the works and movements of the shadow and the slakes. Characters *with* an appropriate Subject, naturally enough, can roll *Insightful + that Subject*. The information gained is up to the GM.

## The Shattering of Barriers

Of all the storms it is *Lightning* whose association with Insightful is strongest. He is an awful power, but the spark of his passage may stir Insightful to new heights. His cultists describe this as "the shattering of barriers," and

argue that even the most empathic spirit erects barriers to protect it from the truth of others. With a great dull agony the power of Lightning breaks those barriers; when one orients oneself again and finds a way to live with what one has learned, one is blessed with a keener Insight.

## Empathic Ones in the Dreaming Waters

*The Empathic One* is often a human rescued from the dreaming waters. Maybe they were losing the struggle against despair. Maybe a terror or lamia targeted them. Maybe they were about to die for some perfectly normal reason, but one that intervention could stop—probably not a car accident, but a war or crazed gunman or something—and it seemed their soul would fall down to dead waters. Maybe they weren't in any immediate danger, but an angel fell in love with them, and thought: whatever the risks, I have to save this person from the dreaming waters. Now they've been brought up to the upper realms, and everything is strange and new. It ought to be terrifying. It ought to be incomprehensible and confusing. But somehow, for the Empathic One, it's not. The world just . . . suddenly makes *sense*.

Sometimes *the Empathic One* is an angel. They're someone who stands out, among the people of wine and fire, as clear-sighted and often thinking about others. In a city, they may be a doctor, schoolteacher, or veterinarian. In world politics they may be the kind of skilled intercessor who can mediate between cities and the sibling-storms. In a small traveling group of angels they don't have to have any special role—they're just the empathic one in their family group, special unit, band of pilgrims, group of questing heroes, or handful of traveling companions.

A fire angel may be *the Empathic One*. Such a character is driven by the fierce passions of the animus of the sun, but controls them by always thinking of others—taking refuge, when the fire might impair their own judgment, in what others would say, what others need, what others think.

*The Empathic One* is also a viable concept for the lamia. For them, it can represent someone who is unable to shut the thoughts of others out—someone to whom the life and will in others is so *noisy* that understanding is automatic.

## Archetype: The Diligent Student

*Key Attribute: Reliable*

If you are **the Diligent Student**, you're always thinking of what others expect from you. You practice hard to please your teachers, or work hard to please your superiors, and you're always responsible with your obligations. You're trying hard to make the world better for everybody, but unlike the budding hero, you're not focused on abstract goodness but rather on *duty*—on doing what people ask for or expect rather than giving them what they need.

Imagine that you're in a martial arts school with the budding hero. The hero finds you in the classroom carefully organizing the teacher's ink-brushes. The hero might say:

"Why are you so strict? It won't make the world any better to put the brushes in the right order! Are you trying to learn some kind of special ink-brush-organizing kung fu?"

The answer the diligent student would give is: "Keeping a neat classroom honors our teacher. If you don't respect your teachers, won't you miss the heart of kung fu?"

Your high Attribute is **Reliable**.

This Attribute is for *fulfilling your obligations* and *behaving correctly*. You'll use it any time you have a duty to someone else, or when you want to "do things properly" according to some doctrine. It's what you use when you're trying to live up to the standards of your people or your teachers or your friends, and it's what you use when you're doing that someone expects you to or has asked you to accomplish. Warriors, magicians, and martial artists often use Reliable to honor their teachers and their schools by properly executing the special techniques they've learned.

### *Stipulations*

You can use Reliable for the following stipulations:

"I do (activity) in a fashion that lives up to (the Subject)'s expectations."

"I do (activity) to fulfill my duty to (the Subject)."

The first form is for duties that you may carry out by trying your hardest: it is OK to fail as long as (the Subject) would be satisfied. The second form is for anything you must succeed at, and includes a second implicit stipulation:

"My character genuinely believes that I have a duty to (the Subject) to do this thing, and that these circumstances are appropriate for that duty."

### *Key Subjects*

Reliable can be combined with the following Subjects:

- *to your Family*, to honor your obligations to your most important people.
- *to your Teachers*, to obey those set above you.
- *to (name)*, to live up to what individuals ask of you.

### *Special Subjects*

If you are *the Diligent Student*, you may also use Reliable with:

- *to the Deserving*, to do what good people expect of you.
- *to the Wicked*, to honor a commitment even to the wicked.

### *Other Subjects*

Characters wishing to use Reliable with a Subject that is not allowed must rely on the kindness of the GM or use their Exemplar Pool (pg. XX).

### *Highlighting the Reliable*

The more Reliable the PC group is, the more often the GM should make NPCs unreliable. Sometimes it may seem like you—if you are a high-Reliable PC—are one of the very few people in the world who follows correct procedures and is both able and willing to get things done. In such a world, covering for everybody else and making sure things get done when nobody else seems to know how—why, that's a duty of its own!

## Reliable and the Dreaming Waters

In **Dreaming Waters** Reliable is much like Insightful—a characteristic and mode of operation practiced by the sibling-storms. There is nothing intrinsically supernatural about its *use*, but there is something supernatural about its *origins*: it is more common among the angels, and particularly among those angels who are touched in some fashion by the great powers, because it derives from the nature of the storms.

This is why the angels say “[humans] don’t know how to get along with one another”—while humans have been steeping in the dreaming waters, the angels have been bathing in the influence of the other storms, and a strong element of Reliable has been baked into their character. It holds their cultures together. It is the glue of their civilization. Angels *believe* in correct behavior; in honoring their obligations; in serving their teachers and facing every duty mindfully. They believe in these things in a way that is not impossible for humans, but is atypical. Compared to a typical human, they have a more accommodating nature, less native cynicism for authority, more meditative mindfulness, and a greater burden-bearing strength. It’s not that they’re actively naïve about the corrosive influence of power; it’s more that they take every commitment, including those they didn’t sign up for, even those that have been betrayed at least in part by the other party, as a thing of serious weight and import.

That’s why the angels refused to kill off the fire angels. That’s why they take the lamia in. That’s why they don’t just drag every living human up to the upper realms. It’s not that these choices are right. It’s not that taking in a lamia is necessarily worth the cost in lives that follows. It’s not that letting humans endure in the wingless dark is necessarily better than exposing them to the dangers of the upper realms. It’s just that it seems to the angels that certain duties fall on them, and these duties must be taken seriously even when they entail sacrificing others or themselves.

So Reliable is used to live responsibly and mindfully in the world. It is used to bear the great passions and the great loves. It’s what makes angelic civilization work, and it’s what drives both their greatest successes and their most terrible mistakes.

## Reliable and the Storms

There are two sibling-storms with a strong connection to Reliable. If a character has the *Spiritual Education* Knack and Reliable 3+, they may receive the following bonus Subjects at a rating of *Reliable* - 2:

- *Grain Waker*
- *Scerascaling Leetha*

Thus a Diligent Student with this Knack could have 2 free points in each of these Subjects.

## Other Storm-Related Uses

It is generally appropriate for demons, cultists, and characters wishing to learn the magics of these two storms to have a high Reliable. A Reliable character is often chosen to represent Scerascaling Leetha at funerary rituals—such a character will wear red, speak some form of eulogy, and cut their arm to send some of their own blood into the earth with the corpse. Reliable characters are also most suited for the various rituals of fertility that call on or assist Grain Waker in ensuring a good harvest.

## Diligent Students in the Dreaming Waters

*The Diligent Student* is most often an angel. Because they are good and loyal people who are always thinking of others, these angels are typically drawn into events by someone else's request, order, or need—they are the type of hero that gets sent on a quest by a tribal or city elder, or follows their elder brother into trouble, or tries to save the world from some dark fate. If they are an ordinary angel then they probably try to represent the best of angelic culture: to be good and to bear every burden and to love everyone and to do the right thing in every circumstance, no matter how much it costs them.

It's also common for *the Diligent Student* to be a fire angel. Reliable is the Attribute most effective at controlling the passions of fire—by clinging to duty, they can subdue their tempestuous hearts. They're generally even more rigid than a normal angel would be in this role—they can't afford to doubt!

It's possible for a human—particularly a human struggling to fit into the angels' world—to take on this archetype. It's the kind of thing that'll cause comment from everyone: nobody would expect a wingless human to be the disciplined one in a group! That said, it's obvious that humans have the basic potential for a high Reliable, not only by the example of very Reliable people in the real world but by the fact that they're One People with the angels.

It's rare for a lamia to be *the Diligent Student*. They're very much the kinds of characters who are committed to their own ways of doing things—becoming a diligent student would mean playing to their weaknesses rather than their strengths. It's like a winged angel who spends all their time learning to run fast on the ground: there's nothing *wrong* with it, but there's nothing particularly right about it either.

## Siskery Leah

The sample character *Siskery Leah* is a Diligent Student.

## Archetype: The Ordinary One

*Key Attribute: None*

Not everybody stands out as super-diligent, heroic, empathic, fierce, or impressionable. Every situation has a few people in it who are just, you know, good people who try hard to do the right thing but don't stand out!

If you are **the Ordinary One**, then none of your Attributes are very high or very low. They're all between 1 and 3. You're pretty good at, well, most things, but you don't stand head and shoulders above the other characters in any of the five Attributes.

If you're unexceptional at *everything*, then you're probably a sidekick. If you have a really cool knack or are really skilled with some weapon, then you're part of a group of heroes. But in your group of friends and important people, your role isn't to do anything in *particular*. Your job is just to live your life and care about the people you care about and be part of the social glue.

### *Integrating the Ordinary Ones*

The more Ordinary Ones your group has, the less *surprising* the NPCs should find the group. That doesn't mean that the group can't be heroic and amazing: people can be intensely grateful to them, love them, hate them, fight them, fear them, admire them, look up to them, criticize them, or praise them! But it does mean that people should look at your group more often and say, "Oh! Those are the (whatever) from (wherever), they're an adventuring group of heroes, doing things like adventuring groups of heroes do." Instead of, "Wow! I've never seen such skill!" If a group with many Ordinary Ones earns great renown or infamy, it's not because you're the only people like you in the world: it's because of the honest effort you make to do well and live correctly.

## Ordinary Ones in the Dreaming Waters

Any character type can be *the Ordinary One*—the range of Attributes is high enough that it can embrace humans, angels, lamia, even wise animals or beneficent demons. However, it's typical for ordinary ones to be angels or rescued humans, probably in early or middle adulthood: it'd be weird to play a character that stands out as a rare character type while having no notable strengths or weaknesses compared to others.

## Example Characters: Attributes

Daniel Marks is a *Budding Hero*. This gives him Helpful 4 and six points to spend. He goes for Attentive 0, Fierce 2, Insightful 2, and Reliable 2. He's your typical romantic lead: good at everything except for listening to others!

### Daniel Marks

*Budding Hero / Angel*

Attentive	0
Fierce	2
Insightful	2
Helpful	4
Reliable	2

Eve Meredith Chao is *the Impressionable One*. This gives her Attentive 4 and six points to spend. She goes for Fierce 1, Insightful 0, Helpful 2, and Reliable 3—she doesn't know what other people think, but she's very conscious of her duty to them. That's probably why she listens so well!

### Eve Meredith Chao

*Impressionable One / Seeker*

Attentive	4
Fierce	1
Helpful	2
Insightful	0
Reliable	3

**Siskery Leah** is *the Diligent Student*. That gives her Reliable 4 and six points to spend. She goes for a balanced selection of Attributes: Attentive 2, Fierce 1, Helpful 1, and Insightful 2. She'd like a higher Fierce, being human and all, but the truth is, she was never very good at fighting evil and despair: she only ever knew how to try hard. Plus, she thinks she needs at least two points in Attentive and Insightful to explain how she caught an angel's eye.

## Siskery Leah

*Diligent Student / Rescued Human*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>4</b>

# Subjects

Characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** have six or more Subjects that work with their Attributes to achieve effects. These are:

- to your **Enemies**, which is to say, people hostile to you;
- to your **Family**, which is to say, people very close to you;
- to your **Students**, which is to say, people depending on you;
- to your **Teachers**, which is to say, those who guide you;
- to the **Deserving**, which is to say, basically good people;
- to the **Wicked**, which is to say, people who aren't basically good; and
- to **(name)**, a specific PC or NPC. This will *add* to whatever other rating applies.

These Subjects range from 0 to 4, and you may divide 10 points among them. If you spend 2+ points on a single Subject, you can think of that as a group of people you're pretty good at dealing with; 3-4 points makes it a clear strength. For an individual person, think of the rating as adding to your rating for the relevant group—so if you spend 2 points on *to your Family*, and 2 points on one specific family member, that's somebody you know very, very well.

## To the Deserving

This Subject covers everyone who is basically on the side of goodness and the right. That definitely includes honest peasants, helpless victims, people trying to do a good job in hard circumstances, and most of the random associates of yours in whatever situation you start out in. It absolutely rules out evil demons, evil gangsters, selfish wanderers and aristocrats who only have their own interests at heart, and unjust rulers and magistrates.

This leaves a fairly large middle ground—

Bandits with a moral code, unnatural beasts, demons that are not evil, good people with serious moral failings, disreputable warriors, cruel but fair officials, people blackmailed into doing evil, rabid animals, average people willingly living in or working for the government of evil countries, and so forth.

If someone might or might not qualify as the Deserving, then you have the option to use this Subject. However, the GM can decide that your action fails automatically—negating any stipulation you hope to make and either reducing your normal level of success or waiving your action entirely. The person in question doesn't even have to actually be Wicked—all that the GM has to say is, "You don't have a good enough reason to think they are Deserving," or, "Something about the reason you think they are Deserving is not right."

So for instance, if you meet an evil bandit but decide that they're on the side of right, and use *For the Deserving*, then you'll screw up. They're not on the side of right! They're an evil bandit! But it could still turn out later that they are cursed or mad or being blackmailed, rather than being irredeemably wicked. That gives the GM license to say, "they are in fact Deserving, but your guess as to why was wrong, so your action failed and they betrayed you."

If you have a high rating in this Subject, it means that you have a lot of room in your heart for the troubles of strangers, and you get along well with people when you're out in the big world. You may even be better at dealing with good people you *don't* know well than good people you do!

*Priority:*

This Subject is for use with *outsiders*—don't use it if you can use

*to your Enemies,*  
*to your Family,*  
*to your Students, or*  
*to your Teachers*

instead. That said, if you're using an Attribute that you ordinarily couldn't (e.g., you're trying to be **Attentive** with a student), then use this Subject!

*Key Attributes:*

- **Attentive**
- **Fierce** (if you are a disreputable warrior)
- **Helpful**
- **Insightful**
- **Reliable** (if you are a diligent student)

## The Deserving and the Dreaming Waters

In **Dreaming Waters**, calling someone Deserving just means that you can expect certain kinds of behavior from them—that they behave more or less as a person would expect a "good person" to behave. That gives you a sound basis for interacting with them. To narrow that down a bit, we're going to imagine that the way the One People behave is *naturally* "good," and everything that makes them do otherwise is either a weird and specific circumstance or the influence of the shadow, the fire, or the sibling-storms.

So as a rough baseline, angels and creatures of the angels' realm are presumptively Deserving if they have minimal or no influence from the dreaming waters, the animus, or the sibling-storms. If you meet an angel or wise beast, and there's no obvious storm-taint, then it is appropriate to use "to the Deserving."

This doesn't mean that the storms' influence necessarily transform a deserving person into a wicked one, and it doesn't mean that every person without that influence is good. But it does mean that people influenced by storms stop being part of the great default deserving populace, and it's harder to decide whether they're Deserving or Wicked except in a case-by-case fashion. It also means that an angel should very rarely be evil save through the influence of a storm. It's *possible* for an angel born with no measurable inheritance of fire, and untouched by the influence of the storms, to go rotten—but it takes a long series of escalating moral compromises to get there.

As part of the same rough baseline, cultists, demons, fire angels, lamia, anyone substantially influenced by a storm, and the storms themselves are *not* presumptively Deserving. They may prove to be benign, but the GM is entitled to question any assumption that they are: e.g., "Yes, Nameless is almost certainly Deserving, but you don't know enough to justify that, and certainly not enough to predict its behavior on that basis."

Wingless humans are an edge case.

It's certainly true that the average human in the dreaming waters has come under a strong influence from the shadow. Conversely, we have experimental evidence that humans mostly think other humans are OK, and it's stated as a fact of the setting that angels admire the wingless. Humans are therefore presumptively Deserving as long as they don't stand out as storm-tainted, shadow-tainted, or associated with any unforgivable nastiness. They are in the murky middle ground whenever they do.

## To the Wicked

This Subject covers everyone who is basically wrong-headed. That means just about anybody that doesn't qualify for "to the Deserving." It also covers the questionable cases—you can always decide to treat somebody as basically wrong-headed, and all that means is that if you're wrong you'll suffer shame and awkwardness later.

If you have a high rating in this Subject, it means that you know how to handle the nastiness in the world. You're calm in the face of evil and folly and bad behavior—or at least not panicked by it—and you're not fazed at all when somebody is rotten. You just keep on doing good in your own way and let the wickedness of the world wash off your back.

### *Priority:*

This Subject is for use with *outsiders*—don't use it if you can use

*to your Enemies,*  
*to your Family,*  
*to your Students, or*  
*to your Teachers*

instead. That said, if you're using an Attribute that you ordinarily couldn't (e.g., you're trying to be **Fierce** to a wicked sibling), then use this Subject!

### *Key Attributes:*

- **Attentive** (if you're the impressionable one)
- **Fierce**
- **Helpful**
- **Reliable** (if you are a diligent student)

## The Wicked and the Dreaming Waters

In **Dreaming Waters**, calling someone Wicked just means that you can't expect them to behave as the Deserving would. Instead, you're engaging with them on the assumption that they'll be somewhere in the continuum from

unnatural to actively malign. This puts you on a bit of the wrong footing if they're actually a good and deserving sort—a fire angel is going to notice if you always keep your hand on a weapon when he's around, and if you act with cruel suspicion towards some storm-deformed creature you may push them into actual wickedness.

There is, in short, an implicit stipulation any time you use the Subject *to the Wicked*:

"My character either distrusts or dislikes this person, and it might show."

## To your Enemies

This Subject covers anyone who is basically hostile to you. This is a very contextual matter—that is, it's possible that somebody could be your "enemy" when you're studying at school but a reliable friend when you're out on patrol and evil is lurking round every corner. The big picture is that an enemy is someone who stands out, in the place you're in, as absolutely and frustratingly the worst! And who has it in for you, or vice versa, to boot.

If you have a high rating in this Subject, it means that you're hot-headed and know how to handle opposition. You're always getting into conflicts, but you're good at handling them too—sort of like a smaller version of being the disreputable warrior, you're troublesome or picked-on at home but your experience with that comes in handy when you have to be trouble to, or fight off trouble from, murderous or terrible enemies in the world.

Again, this Subject is perfectly OK for use with family, coworkers, and good people, as long as they're the worst and most inimical thing around. However, you can't use "to your Enemies" on somebody when you're out in a bigger world with more serious foes—basically, any time you should really be cooperating with somebody, and are inclined to do so (even if you complain), you can't use "to your Enemies" any more.

It's OK to use a broad perspective here. If bandits are attacking you in a forest near a village, they can be your enemies. Even if there isn't anyone nice nearby to serve as contrast, you can say, "Look, my social fabric here isn't just the bandits, it's the bandits and the villagers, or at least 'the outdoors,' and that's why these bandits, they're the worst!" It's almost impossible to wind up in a situation where a wicked person is physically attacking you and they're not your enemy. But if you're in an evil kingdom, then random evil shopkeepers aren't your enemies—they're nasty and wicked and you don't like them, but they just don't stand out. Even if they are going to turn you in to evil secret police, they're still not enemies. They're just . . . wicked shopkeepers, like the

shopkeepers in the stall next door and the wicked pedestrians on the street. Now, those evil secret police: *they* might be the worst of the worst!

*Key Attributes:*

- **Fierce**
- **Helpful**

## Enemies in the Dreaming Waters

It is the particular character of Wrath, and its cultists and its demons, that you may always choose to consider them your enemies. Even if in some extremely non-standard game you wind up thinking of Wrath as a student, teacher, family member, or deserving friend—the storm, and its adherents, may still be used for *Fierce + to your Enemies* and *Helpful + to your Enemies* rolls.

## To your Family

This Subject covers the people closest to you—people who are part of your literal or metaphorical family. It always works for the dearest and most important people to you, but more generally, it's anyone whom you'd fight for, anyone whom you might conceivably be willing to die for, anyone who stands out in the environment around you as someone who is *like you*, or *close to you*, or important to you. That means, for instance, that if you and your worst enemy are transported to a hostile planet of monsters, and you're the only humans there, they might count as your family. If you're in a distant kingdom, anyone from your larger Clan or nation might be family. But if you're at home, and you have a dozen brothers and sisters, then maybe only the three or so that are closest to you count.

If you have a high rating in this Subject, it means that you're always thinking about the people close to you. You know what they think and feel about things, how to help them, how to fulfill your duties to them, how to listen to and learn from them, and—if you're the kind of disreputable warrior who would fight with your own family—fight them!

*Key Attributes:*

- **Attentive**
- **Fierce** (if you are a disreputable warrior!)
- **Helpful**
- **Insightful**
- **Reliable**

## Family in the Dreaming Waters

Player characters may freely assume that the other PCs are part of their family. This should change only in rare circumstances, momentary spats, and extremely nonstandard games.

## To your Students

This Subject covers people who depend on you. That means your actual students, but also younger blood siblings and martial siblings, children (including but not limited to your own), and anyone who is so helpless, sick, or misled as to need your guidance.

If you have a high rating in this Subject, it means that you're patient and good with children. You know how to lead people carefully through a subject and how to help them understand. You also know how to help people who might not—either because of extreme youth or because of a lack of technical vocabulary—be able to articulate their needs.

You can only use "to your Students" with Helpful and Insightful, but you can add it *twice*.

*Key Attributes:*

- **Helpful**
- **Insightful**

## To your Teachers

This Subject covers anyone with the right or ability to instruct, guide, or command you. This always includes actual teachers, official and unofficial, and unless you're a defiant child it covers your parents as well. Important leaders of your culture generally qualify—priests, government officials (unless they are unjust or corrupt), and wandering agents of supreme benevolent agencies are generally covered by this Subject.

### *Priority:*

This Subject has the highest priority whenever you're thinking about the person as your teacher and guide. If you want to use something else, like "to your Family," then you're thinking about them as just a person and friend and what you can learn and do is colored accordingly.

### *Key Attributes:*

- **Attentive**
- **Fierce** (if you are a disreputable warrior!)
- **Helpful**
- **Insightful** (if you are the thoughtful one, and to a limited extent!)
- **Reliable**

## Teachers in the Dreaming Waters

The **Dreaming Waters** setting does not situate the PCs in a hierarchy or school, so this Subject isn't as useful as it might be in other genres. Many tribes of angels have tribal elders that qualify, and sometimes rescued humans will look towards almost every angel as a teacher. There are loose governmental structures in most of the angelic cities, and these can produce leaders who qualify for the use of this Subject. "Priests" of the various storms are cultists and therefore presumptively *not* good teachers.

For the most part human characters who become aware of the dreaming waters will lose some of their embedding in human social networks and societies. Angels who travel in the dreaming waters do not generally acquire a loyalty to the same. Thus it is only the rare character with an intense nationalistic belief or a strong inclination to follow and obey others who will continue to treat human governmental authorities as teachers. For religious authority, it's more variable. Religious sects with rigid doctrine and opinions

may render themselves instantly obsolete or dangerous when the character discovers the truth of things. Conversely, it's very much in genre for a human or even an angel to turn to a wise chaplain or priest of some sort for moral counsel. That person could, of course, also be a secular or non-denominational teacher or elder of some sort.

Sometimes a human who works with LEVIATHAN will treat its leadership with the reverence suited to a teacher. If the game focuses on fire angels at a fire angel station, it's possible that some or all of them feel a student-like reverence for an angel who manages the station and was instrumental in their redemption.

## To (name)

You can have a Subject that helps you with a specific person. This means that you know that person so well, or are so good at dealing with them, that no matter what Subject they fall under and no matter what Attribute you are using, you are better at using it with them than you would otherwise be. You can have as many of this sort of Subject as you like—and in particular it's OK to have one for each other PC, for an important teacher or two, for each major enemy, and for a love interest or very important person, though at that point you won't have many points left for anything else.

If you have a high Rating in this subject—that is, enough to get the most likely Subject+(name) total up past 4—then you have a deep and important relationship with that person. It's a central part of your life, probably, and the rhythms of it are very natural to you. If you have a low Rating it doesn't mean that you don't *like* or don't *care* about that person—it just means that you haven't learned how to deal with them in a unique and personal fashion. That can indicate a lack of emotional investment, or the fact that the relationship is new, or just that you're awkward enough around that person to cancel out the benefit of knowing them or dealing with them for a long time.

### *Priority:*

First you pick the Subject of a roll and then you add this bonus. So if you have an important person who is sometimes Family and sometimes an Enemy (like an evil romantic interest), then you decide whether to roll "to your Enemies" or "to your Family," and then you add this rating in.

If there is no appropriate Subject, but your Rating is 1+, you may roll the relevant *Attribute + to (Name)*. That means that if you have a Rating of 2 in "to Leah," you can roll *Fierce + to Leah* even if she qualifies neither as Wicked or an Enemy.

*Key Attributes:*

- **Attentive**
- **Fierce**
- **Helpful**
- **Insightful**
- **Reliable**

## In the Dreaming Waters

Player characters should always record their Subject in each other PC, and think about whether to raise it, even though in most cases it will be 0-1. Characters with a strong connection to one of the sibling-storms should record that too, again, even though this is normally 0.

Characters may have person-specific Subjects with members of the One People, demons, lamia, wise and unwise beasts and great beasts, and the various sibling-storms. Many angels with a strong fire inheritance have a Subject in the animus of the sun. Characters with Subjects in the other storms are relatively rare—it denotes a strong interest in and a personal connection with that storm.

## Example Characters: Subjects

Regardless of archetype, each character has 10 points to spend here.

**Daniel Marks** isn't good at handling personal malice—it reminds him of his encounter with the shadow. So we're going to start by giving him *to your Enemies 0*. To make him a better hero, we're going to give him a strength in both *to your Family* and *to the Wicked*: the first means that he's concerned and kind at least to his traveling companions, and the second means that he's good at handling random trouble in the world. They're at least 2; it'll turn out that we have enough points to bump them both up to 3.

He needs at least one point in *to the Deserving* and *to your Teachers*, since neither of them is a particular weakness for him; also, since he spent time as a schoolteacher, he needs at least one point there. He's going to wind up traveling with Siskery Leah and Eve Meredith Chao; we've decided to give him a strong bond to Eve Meredith Chao, so he spends another point there.

### Daniel Marks

*Budding Hero / Angel*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>0</b>	to your Enemies	0
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Family	3
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	1
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>4</b>	to Leah	0
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Students	1
		to your Teachers	1
		to the Deserving	1
		to the Wicked	3

**Eve Meredith Chao** isn't good with personal opposition either. The first pass at her character sheet probably also has *to your Enemies 0*. But we're going to imagine that Leah's player teased them, saying, "Some heroes, you two fall over the first time somebody gets mad." And also that Eve's player thought that it'd be kind of cool to try to relate to somebody actively hostile—some kind of emergent nemesis. So she winds up with a point there. We're going to wind up a bit squeezed for points when designing her, so we're giving her a weakness in *to your Teachers*: it's not so much that she's rebellious, since with her Attentive 4 she's still quite good at listening to wise or important people, but

rather that she hasn't found a solid place in society yet, so it's natural that she wouldn't have a habit of thinking of her "teachers."

Her player decides that Eve, who's a seeker and found the upper realms on her own, should be very good at dealing with the world and people in general, but maybe not so great at highly charged personal interactions. So we give Eve *to the Wicked* 2 and a very high *to the Deserving* 3. She takes two points in *to your Students* to be good with children and animals, but only one point in *to your Family*. We've decided that she's a bit awkward with Daniel Marks and the way he's an angel and everything, but has a deep friendship with Leah—so her last point goes to her relationship with Siskery Leah.

### Eve Meredith Chao

*Impressionable One / Seeker*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>4</b>	to your Enemies	1
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>	to your Family	1
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Daniel	0
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>0</b>	to Leah	1
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>3</b>	to your Students	2
		to your Teachers	0
		to the Deserving	3
		to the Wicked	2

**Siskery Leah** is part of the Siskery tribe—she even took their name as a sign of loyalty and affection. So we're going to start with 3 points in *to your Family*. The game won't focus on Siskery, so it's not that being good at living with her tribe will matter much in play—but that part of her history defines one of the strengths of her character. Similarly, we're going to give her 2 points in *to your Teachers*, because she actually has tribal elders to listen to and honor. Plus, it's a good Attribute for a diligent student to take—it gives her the ability to handle almost any situation by thinking about how to do honor in it to the Siskery tribe.

The special power of the diligent student—to pair Reliable with both "to the Deserving" and "to the Wicked"—appeals to Leah's player. So she puts a point in each. She'd like to put two points in each, but her player can't decide which of the other PCs Leah is closer to, and she's hesitant to leave both of those relationships at 0. So she drops a point in each of those relationships, and

her last point in *to your Enemies*. She's not particularly good with children or her students, but she doesn't actually expect to have either.

### Siskery Leah

*Diligent Student / Rescued Human*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Enemies	1
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>	to your Family	3
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>1</b>	to Daniel	1
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	1
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>4</b>	to your Students	0
		to your Teachers	2
		to the Deserving	1
		to the Wicked	1

## Fight, Heart, and Spirit

Sometimes you will face terrible enemies.

Evil bandits will hack at you with their great swords and clubs. Wicked sorcerers and demons will assail you with magic. You will face hunger and thirst and exposure in the wilderness, and you will encounter the schemes of unrighteous ministers and unjust magistrates in the city. All in all the world has many dangers!

To resist these dangers you have **Fight, Heart, and Spirit**.

### Fight

Fight is simply the pool of everything that keeps you going in a fight. It's your physical health and your willpower and your battle aura and your killing intent. It's the thing that makes you dangerous to your enemies, the vital power you have to exert soft and hard force. The more Fight you have, the more it takes to kill you, knock you out, daze you, or otherwise put you down.

You can give up before you run out of Fight, but it's not until you run out of Fight that you are *beaten*.

### Starting Fight

The standard PC starts with 50 Fight.

This is quite a lot—even tough enemies will often have 10-20 Fight. But it's possible to buy it up further with Knacks, starting with 60, 70, or even 80 Fight. The most important teachers and scary ancients in the world of combat or martial arts will have 100+.

### Heart

Heart is what keeps you committed to your goals. It's the confident spirit that believes in your means and your ends.

Of the three defensive traits, Heart is the least scary to run out of. This is because sometimes your means and your ends are *wrong*, and if you didn't run out of confidence now and then you'd never learn anything or change in any

way. It's awful and feels awful to run out of Heart, and it's a defeat as real as running out of Fight is, but it's just not as dangerous.

Running out of Heart always means that you can't immediately continue what you were doing; the reason may be internal or external. It often means that there's a brief pause in the general forward motion of your life, whether that's due to despair, physical collapse, circumstances that pin you down, or something else.

## Starting Heart

The standard PC starts with 60 Heart; however, PCs with the *warrior* or *magician* knack are fairly common, and they will have 50 instead. As with Fight, this is just a lower bound—you can get up to 80 Heart if you want to specialize. That's the archetype for a very stubborn problem-solver!

## Spirit

Spirit is what protects you against demons and evil magic. It's also the integrity of soul that lets you have your own perspective—it helps protect against evil lies on the one hand and virtuous pleading on the other. It makes you yourself and not just a leaf in the current of events.

If you run out of Spirit, that can mean one of two things.

The first is that something natural got to you—you lost control of events or someone said something that threw you or more generally you stopped being an immaculately self-determining island in the river of fate and were swayed by something from outside.

The second possibility is that something *unnatural* got to you, and used magic to transform you. This *also* means, in general, that you've stopped being an immaculately self-determining island in the river of fate, and are being swayed instead by something from outside, but it's a lot scarier.

Either way, when you run out of Spirit, you're likely to be stunned and disoriented for a little bit, defeated in at least one sense, and there is at least a short time in which you can't keep doing what you were doing before.

## Starting Spirit

The standard PC starts with 50 Spirit, but can have up to 80; a magician will most likely have 70-80, while a resolutely mundane character won't buy it up at all.

## Example Characters: Fight, Heart, and Spirit

Each character has 50 Fight, 60 Heart, and 50 Spirit by default. We won't talk about *how* to change this until pg. XX, so you'll just have to trust that we've done various character-creation-type things to get the results below.

### Daniel Marks

*Budding Hero / Angel*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>0</b>	to your Enemies	<b>0</b>
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Family	<b>3</b>
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	<b>1</b>
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>4</b>	to Leah	<b>0</b>
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Students	<b>1</b>
		to your Teachers	<b>1</b>
		to the Deserving	<b>1</b>
		to the Wicked	<b>3</b>

<b>Fight</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>Heart</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>Spirit</b>	<b>50</b>
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## Eve Meredith Chao

*Impressionable One / Seeker*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>4</b>	to your Enemies	1
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>	to your Family	1
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Daniel	0
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>0</b>	to Leah	1
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>3</b>	to your Students	2
		to your Teachers	0
		to the Deserving	3
		to the Wicked	2

**Fight** 50      **Heart** 50      **Spirit** 70

## Siskery Leah

*Diligent Student / Rescued Human*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Enemies	1
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>	to your Family	3
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>1</b>	to Daniel	1
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	1
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>4</b>	to your Students	0
		to your Teachers	2
		to the Deserving	1
		to the Wicked	1

**Fight** 50      **Heart** 60      **Spirit** 50

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Simple Actions

The simplest mode of action in the **Filial Piety Action System** is simply to explain what you want to do and have the GM rule on it. Most of the things you do in game will work this way, but not most of the *important* things. Those, for the most part, you'll handle with a roll of the dice.

The standard dice used in the **Filial Piety Action System** are six-sided dice (d6s) and ten-sided dice (d10s). Simple actions use the former: you'll use a small number of d6s on each roll. Specifically when you make a roll you will roll a number of d6s equal to one of your Attributes, plus a Subject, plus (if you have a single-person Subject that applies) a single-person Subject.

### Choosing your Attribute and Subject

Even if your description of what you want to do fits multiple Attributes and Subjects, it's the Attribute and Subject you choose that determines the details of the outcome. What that means, most specifically, is that succeeding with each Attribute carries an included stipulation. For a physical situation these stipulations are:

- **Attentive:** roll well enough and you can follow the Subject's directions.
- **Fierce:** roll well enough, and you can achieve your tactical objectives in a struggle against the Subject.
- **Helpful:** roll well enough, and you can help the Subject.
- **Reliable:** roll well enough, and you can fulfill your duty to the Subject or live up to the Subject's expectations.

If you absolutely *must* accomplish more than one of these—like, winning the roll but only earning one of these stipulations would make you actively unhappy—then you can pick two or more Attributes and Subjects and just roll the smallest set of dice that results. For instance, if you could roll *Helpful + to the Deserving* and *Fierce + to your Enemies* in a single roll, and the first would be 4 dice and the second would be 2 dice—you *can* roll both at once with just 2 dice.

Most of the time, though, you need to pick the single Attribute and the single Subject that are the closest match to your intention. Then, with a good roll, you can earn the appropriate stipulation. The GM may or may not let things work out for you on the other points, but that one point is definitely within reach.

For example, you're carrying an important message for a friend and you encounter a young child who is treed by wolves. You could fight the wolves using *Reliable + to your Teachers*—that's enough to make your teachers proud! But it won't guarantee that you save the child. You won't screw up and let the child die, but maybe it'll turn out it was just too late to save them.

But maybe that's not OK! Isn't the most important thing to help the child?

If so, then try *Helpful + to Your Students*. Enough success and you can definitely save the child—but you might screw up the forms and embarrass yourself! Later as you're bringing the child in to town, a proud hero representing your home town or martial arts school, you'll just have to hope the child's stopped chanting "Bee-Hair Trippy-Foot Wolf Killer! Bee-Hair Trippy-Foot Wolf Killer!" Another thing that could happen is that you'd save the child, but have to run from the wolves, and maybe even drop the letter—that would be embarrassing, and your friend might think you're not reliable, but the child would be safe.

But maybe you want to save the child, *and* fight the wolves. Those are both martial objectives, and the wolves are pretty scary, so *Fierce + to your Enemies* should work. That would let you beat up the wolves and save the child from them. Bad things still *could* happen, e.g., the child could fall out of the tree and get hurt.

Is the most important thing to you the message? Well, in that case, you probably shouldn't get involved with the child at all. But maybe you've already gotten involved. You're up in the tree and the wolves are after you as well. (These are very angry wolves, probably trained by an evil demon or kung fu master, which is why they're so into eating people and not just hunting caribou in some Canadian forest.) In that case, *Reliable + to your Family* should guarantee that you get away to deliver the message—and, to be honest, unless the message is some kind of fate-of-kingdoms thing, it should let you save the child too. Your friend isn't going to expect you to leave a child behind just to deliver the letter; at *that* point, when you're already involved, your friend is going to expect you to save both of them and yourself. That's the correct, reliable path!

The stipulations above for Attentive, Fierce, Helpful, and Reliable also apply in social and mental situations—situations involving knowing what to do or interacting with others. However there are additional possible stipulations available in such situations:

- **Attentive:** roll well enough and—
  - you can bring some quality of the Subject towards the surface;
  - the Subject will talk to you;
  - you can learn what the Subject is teaching you; and/or
  - you can build towards a friendship with the Subject.
  
- **Insightful:** roll well enough and—
  - you know what the Subject needs;
  - you know how to help the Subject; and/or
  - you know what the Subject would say.

It's not generally possible—in a social or mental situation—to do all these things at *once*. In a social situation, you pick one stipulation to pursue and then time elapses. If you need to do multiple things at once, and pick the lowest dice pool as before, then you still pick one thing to achieve, and the others you just *don't lose ground* on.

For example, it turns out that that child is out in the woods because they ran away from the magician and the throng of evil demons that were devastating the child's village. Given sufficient time to talk to the child you may accomplish everything on the list above—but in a short, finite time, you might have to choose:

Do you want to roll *Insightful + to your Students* to find out what the best way to help this child would be? Do you want to roll *Attentive + to your Students* to find out more about what happened? Do you want to build a friendship with the child, first, to make sure they don't run away (and to move towards being able to use *+ to your Family*, if you aren't good with Students?) Do you want to roll *Reliable + to your Teachers* to ensure that you get the child a good meal and place to sleep and generally observe upright and correct child-wrangling procedure despite being in the middle of the wilderness with a demon-haunted youth?

A lot of competing options—but, that said, you'll probably notice that the choices you have to make here are a bit less grueling and the consequences less dire than when you're choosing among physical actions. This is OK—being able to handle social situations well is part of what being Attentive and Insightful is all about.

## Target

There's one other decision to make before you roll. Once you know what you're generally trying to do, and what Attribute and Subject you're doing it with, you have to decide how *much* you're hoping to achieve.

Are you aiming to accomplish:

- something *ordinary*?
- something *extraordinary*? Or
- something *practically impossible*?

Most of the time you will just decide what you are trying to *do*, and the GM will decide whether it's ordinary, extraordinary, or practically impossible. Sometimes, though—particularly when you're using Insightful or Attentive—the baseline action is chosen separately from the target. For instance, whether you're trying to do something ordinary or something practically impossible with Insightful, the basic action is "I think about what this person would say" or "tell me what's in your heart." The only difference is how much information you're hoping to get. Similarly, an extraordinary feat of Attentiveness is one where you learn a lot and make a strong bond, not where you listen so fiercely that the rabbit-gods of the far eastern mountains hear your feat of listening and die in shame.

Back to the child whom you've rescued from the wolves. You might decide to use Attentive to get the story from the child—to encourage the kid to pour their heart out and thus learn more about this magician and these demons and this village that seem relevant to your overall business of being a hero in a story. If you're willing to settle for an ordinary success, that's a good enough plan—after all, the kid's delicate right now, it's OK if they can't tell you everything. But the price of being willing to settle for just what the kid would be likely to tell you is—that's all you get. If the kid is too frightened to do more than ramble about scary demons and how their village is "big," then you have learned exactly that much—that demons are scary and the village seems, to a child, to be quite large.

Alternately you might decide to try for something extraordinary. You might want to ask just the right questions, and gently, to get a lot more out of the child without traumatizing them. Maybe descriptions of the demons or useful directions to the village. The risk, of course, is that you're more likely to fail outright, and then you won't get to stipulate that the kid talks to you at all—in fact, maybe the kid decides you're working with the magician, or runs away! Something similar applies if you want to draw out so many details that you can practically name every one of the magician's techniques and start

organizing a plan to defeat him. The GM might say, "The kid doesn't know that much, you should probably settle for the extraordinary"—or "OK, but that's practically impossible. Roll!"

### Action without Stipulation

If your action has no associated stipulation—if it's just a roll to see how kind the GM will be—the GM may waive the declaration of how much you hope to achieve and/or take the rolled number of successes directly into account. It's up to the GM how often to invoke this rule, from "almost never" to "every time."

### Social Actions with a PC target

If you're using Attentive or Insightful on another PC, their player is going to decide how much you accomplish. If it's the kind of thing where you'd get a ruling in advance on whether your proposed action is ordinary, extraordinary, or practically impossible, it's the player in question and not the GM who makes that ruling.

### Success

Having decided all of the above, you roll a number of six-sided dice equal to the Attribute + the Subject + (if there is a relevant single-person Subject) the single-person Subject.

Each die that comes up either 5 or 6 is a *success*.

One success is enough for a relatively ordinary action. Two successes is enough to do something extraordinary. Three is enough for practically impossible feats. If you get four more successes than you were trying for, and if it is meaningful to do so, then you do one level better—so, e.g., if you roll five successes when trying for one, you do something extraordinary. If by some chance you manage to roll six more successes than you were expecting, then you do something really amazing.

### Assistance

Each die that comes up 1 is an opportunity for *assistance*.

Each player can—if they want—roll one die for each 1 you rolled. They add any successes they receive to your roll.

A player can assist even if their character isn't involved in the roll. In fact, their character doesn't have to be within 100 miles of yours. Their character doesn't even have to *alive*. The only rule is that the player has to believe that their character *would* support your action, if they could.

Even that rule is applied loosely. Players don't have to stick hard and fast to the idea that they assist your roll if and only if their character would support it. If that takes too much thinking, or if it's not fun, players can just go with what they'd like to do. But most of the time, that's what it should mean when someone decides to assist or not assist—that they're deciding whether their character would be behind the roll in question.

Which way do you err?

The more players you have the more discretion you should exert. In a two-player game, you should assist your partner unless it's obvious that your character wouldn't approve. In a seven-player game, you should only assist if you're paying close attention and feel confident your character would be enthusiastic about the action in question.

All that aside—

Every player has a chance to roll a number of dice up to the number of ones you rolled, and add their successes to yours. This can make the impossible possible, the extraordinary ordinary, and push you to succeed in cases where your dice pool would otherwise be far too small.

## NPCs and Assistance

When an NPC is a strong ally of the PCs, and acting "on camera" so that the players think of their actions as dice rolls rather than as *things the NPC does or did*, then the players can assist that NPC. In all other circumstances, the GM should assume that an NPC has 0-3 relevant NPC allies, and roll to assist that NPC based on whether those allies would approve. For example, when an evil bandit attacks, their wicked henchmen may be able to assist.

## Small Player Groups

If there are 1-3 players, not counting the GM, then the GM can create a small handful of NPCs that can *assist* each character. Their teacher, perhaps; their most important someone; a best friend that isn't a PC; and so forth. These people do not have to be major characters in the game, and don't have to be

treated like PCs in any other respect, but they're important enough that when a PC lives up to their standards, the GM gets to assist the PC on that NPC's behalf, and the PC does better.

In a group with 4+ players, this rule isn't necessary, and NPCs should not assist players unless there's an important reason why they should.

## Chains

It's possible that when you roll, you can roll a 1; and someone can try to assist you, and *they* roll a 1. This can start a "chain."

The "chain" starts with a flashback.

The person who is assisting you, who rolled a 1, explains something that happened between the two of you in the past. This is something that is relevant to the situation, something that can help you now. *Simply by describing this flashback they give you one extra success.* Then, if people want, everyone but the two of you can roll a die (one for each 1 they rolled) to assist that. Successes get added right back on to your current roll.

If someone rolls a 1 on *this* roll, the chain can continue. They add to the flashback, bringing their character in somehow and giving you another free success. Now everyone but them and the person they were assisting gets to roll up to one die for each "1"—and this time you get to roll too!

It is technically possible for a chain to continue indefinitely with as few as 3 players (or 2 players and a GM who is very active about playing their assisting NPCs.) This is OK, since it's rare enough to be either interesting or amusingly ridiculous when it happens. In a game of 4+ players, each player can only start or continue a chain once per session.

Thus a 6-player game could have a result like this:

Cindy rolls and gets one success and one "1." Bobby rolls an extra die and gives her a second success. Marsha rolls a "1" and *chains*, as she can do once per session. She describes a relevant flashback and gives Cindy a third success. Bobby rolls a last success, for a total of four.

## NPCs and Flashbacks

Sometimes NPCs—even wicked enemies—can chain. In such a case, the GM should neither skip the flashback or narrate it. Instead, the players can, imagining and describing the flashback encounter between the NPCs. The GM can help out in setting the stage, or just sit back and watch. Flashbacks of this sort are *non-canonical*—the GM is encouraged to let it represent the NPCs' true

character, and to help out as much as necessary to make that possible, but it's also OK if it's just a way for the players to entertain themselves.

## PCs and Flashbacks

It's explicitly OK to invent shared history on the spot when creating the flashback for a chain—you don't have to limit yourself to exploring things you already knew had happened. In some games, this will bear the whole weight of creating group back story—instead of creating a fully detailed history of the characters and the group, you can define it over time through these flashbacks. In such a game the only thing you'd really need to know when starting is who the characters are *now* and how they relate to each other *today*, with everything else emerging in casual references or in flashback form.

## Size Zero Dice Pools

If you don't have any dice for a roll, you can't succeed on your own!

However you are allowed to take one die and roll it, hoping for a 1. It's not a *real* roll, so a 5 or 6 won't help, but if you roll a 1, other people can assist. That way even if you have no idea how to do what you're doing—like a disreputable warrior, with no skill in Helpful or Family, trying uncomfortably to repay a debt by building a family member a house—there's a *chance* that you'll get a success or two from someone else.

## When to use Simple Actions

These are the three key traits of any simple action.

## Failure is Acceptable

Many of the things that *could* happen as the result of a given dice roll are boring, anticlimactic, or would make the GM or a player unhappy. Those things should not be the result of failures. Unless something has already gone wrong with the flow of the game, and a moment of dullness or aggravation is the simplest way to get back to good play, those things should never happen at all.

So "failure is acceptable" means that failing on the simple action has to decide something interesting, falling within the range of acceptable outcomes. If there's no suitable failure, there really isn't a point in rolling.

This isn't intended as a harsh provision—there's a quality of interest in just making a die roll and letting it decide the outcome, and it's OK to roll purely for that interest value. But don't roll if that interest value comes at a price of damaging the rest of the game.

### Success is Acceptable

The same rules apply to success. There has to be a way for the character to succeed, which is to say, to earn a favorable outcome relating to their stipulation and the task at hand. If there isn't a way to do that, or if doing that would make the game not fun, then don't roll. This is, again, not a very harsh provision—usually, it's not *that* difficult to imagine a better and a worse outcome, tying in to the stipulation and the effort made, even if there's no way to have an ideal success.

### A Short Time spent on Resolution is Desirable

The GM should only use simple action resolution when they want a single roll to decide what happens—to spend, in short, at most 15-20 seconds of the game on *deciding whether the character succeeds or fails*.

The group may spend time on chain-initiated flashbacks, discussing the character's approach, and deciding what it means that the character failed or succeeded—but there is an immediate resolution to the question of success or failure.

This means that ultimately the GM's interest—as a stand-in for the more general issue of dramatic interest and meaning—decides how much a character can accomplish in a single action. This also defines the action space in which a character is likely to have exceptional success or failure: the more actions something requires, the more the results tend towards the average.

## Summary

You use simple action resolution when these things are true:

- there's a reasonable outcome on failure;
- there's a reasonable outcome on success;
- the GM wants to decide using very little game time which of the two things happens.

The timeline of how this works in play is something like this:

- the players and the GM are building a story together.
- the GM takes interest in a certain span of time where the story could go in any of several directions.
- the player chooses a specific action and stipulation.
- the GM re-imagines the situation as a forking point that decides between two possible outcomes, covering a certain interval of time in the game world.
- the player rolls.
- one of those outcomes becomes the game reality.

Actual Play is a chaotic situation and ideas may form in the mind of the player and GM earlier than this timeline requests—but that's the general flow.

## The Order of Simple Actions

You won't usually need to keep careful track of time and order of actions for simple action resolution—if it starts to matter exactly who gets to go when, and how long things take, you should probably use detailed action resolution (pg. XX). That said, it's possible that you'll want to keep rough track of how various simple actions taken by the various characters interact.

In such a case the most important thing for the GM to do is to agree with the player before the roll on how great a span of time the roll covers, and, if there are likely to be interactions between the characters' actions and choices, to keep the various actions on a roughly similar time scale. You can also generally assume that any time events are happening more than five times

faster for one player than another, that the other player can get involved in bits of "free time"—for instance, if one character is building a house, and it's going to take five weeks, and another is getting into a fight, the character that is building a house can participate in the fight while still, generally, spending those five weeks "building a house."

To sum it up: characters are only as tied up in a simple action resolution as they're tied up in the corresponding in-game activity. The GM can make retroactive adjustments, if it makes the game more fun, in how long certain actions took and how much time they covered, but it's best to stand as much as possible by the results of rolls already made.

## Fight, Heart, and Spirit

In some cases failure on a simple action may have a cost in Fight, Heart, or Spirit. For example, as a pacing device, a character might lose Fight when they fail on a roll to "fight an enemy"—that puts them on a track towards defeat while still allowing them to recover and try again. Similarly a character can lose Heart or Spirit as a pacing device on complicated tasks and spiritual or social struggle. Or it's possible that failure on the simple action represents "winning," but at a high cost—they're battered, losing Fight; exhausted, losing Heart; or under a spiritual or magical strain, losing Spirit. For example, if a character is fighting some worthless thugs, and the game will bog down if they lose, then the simple action might just decide: do they win, losing 25 Fight, or achieve a flawless victory, costing nothing?

It's harder to gain Fight, Heart, or Spirit through a roll. Usually it takes rest or medicine to recover them. That said, characters can recover a small amount of Fight, Heart, or Spirit when something makes them more enthusiastic or builds their momentum. For instance, in a PG-rated game, a character might be rescuing a child from a terrible demon that is about to eat that child. The game is PG, so there's no way that the character *loses*—so maybe the roll is between rescuing the child, and *daringly* rescuing the child, with the latter gaining 5-10 Fight, Heart, or Spirit.

How much Fight, Heart, or Spirit is an action worth?

In the big picture, what matters is how much strain the GM wants the characters to be under. A 50 point penalty, for a typical character, means collapsing entirely under the strain—so one way to set values for these gains and losses is relative to that 50 points.

Another yardstick is the detailed action system (below). As you gain familiarity with it, you'll start to get a sense for just how much playing out conflicts in detail "costs" the characters in Fight, Heart, and Spirit—and how much of a handicap a given loss will be. This is going to depend a great deal on

the kinds of challenges the characters face and how recklessly they handle them. Once you know how that plays out for your particular gaming group, though, you'll be in a good position to assign costs such that the characters aren't necessarily penalized or benefited by the GM's choice of simple or detailed resolution.

## Example Characters and Simple Actions

### Siskery Leah

*Diligent Student / Rescued Human*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Enemies	<b>1</b>		
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>	to your Family	<b>3</b>		
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>1</b>	to Daniel	<b>1</b>		
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	<b>1</b>		
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>4</b>	to your Students	<b>0</b>		
		to your Teachers	<b>2</b>		
		to the Deserving	<b>1</b>		
		to the Wicked	<b>1</b>		
<b>Fight</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>Heart</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>Spirit</b>	<b>50</b>

### Siskery Leah and E. M. Chao

**Siskery Leah** is walking on the beaches when she sees a reflection in a tide pool: the apartment of Eve Meredith Chao. The player tries to figure out why she's seeing this, and the GM suggests an Attentive roll for general perception and exploration. This has no Subject because there's no stipulation attached—she isn't looking to figure out what *E. M. Chao* is showing her, but rather what's going on. The GM takes a moment to figure out what would happen if Leah fails, and then has the player roll two dice.

She rolls a 3 and a 2—failure.

The GM opines that Leah has no idea, and should probably just walk off. So Leah does; but a little later, the GM adds: "It's preying on you. There was blood. It wasn't just the red in the tide pool. It was blood. Do you panic?"

Leah, in fact, panics, and rushes back to the pool.

The GM assesses a 10 Spirit cost for failing the roll—a bit belated, but the GM didn't want to invoke a cost until it was clear that Leah *would* be thrown by the information. Leah makes another roll and this time rolls 1 and 4.

Both of the other players assist, Daniel's player rolling 2 and Eve's player rolling a 6.

This time Leah sees some of what's going on. She sees that the blood in the water isn't Eve's, but a slake's. She realizes that Eve must be aware of the dreaming waters—so why is she sitting on the edge of her bathtub, toying with a razor, while common-slakes swarm about her?

The GM adds: "It's not just that she sees slakes. She's *like* you somehow. She's like . . . you would be, if you'd had to go back."

"That's awful," thinks Leah. "What does she need?"

At this point the two don't know one another, and Leah doesn't have the *to Eve* Subject yet. So her player rolls *Insightful + to the Deserving*—just two dice. She wants to stipulate "I know what Eve Meredith Chao needs." She only has two dice, but rolls a pair of sixes.

Eve's player says: "I need someone to tell me it's OK to come back to the upper realms. I need someone to tell me I don't have to stay here and keep trying to help people down below. I need someone to reach out their hand to me and say, 'You would be welcome, up above.'"

So that's what Leah does.

## Daniel Marks

*Budding Hero / Angel*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>0</b>	to your Enemies	0
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Family	3
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	1
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>4</b>	to Leah	0
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Students	1
		to your Teachers	1
		to the Deserving	1
		to the Wicked	3

## Daniel Marks and Siskery

A few days later . . .

Daniel Marks dreams of the face of the shadow turning towards Siskery. He wakes up on Earth. His mind is "full of screams, and death, and fire," and slakes are coiling about him.

His player wants to savagely cut apart the slakes.

The GM isn't that interested in the fight with the slakes, but is curious how beaten up Daniel becomes. So to decide whether Daniel cuts them to pieces while still half-awake or if he gets wounded and bloody, the GM has Daniel's player roll *Fierce + to your Enemies* in hopes of at least one success. He rolls a 1 and 4. Both of the other players assist: Leah rolls a success, and Eve's player rolls a 1 and *chains*.

"I was in your dreams," she says. "Maybe? Didn't you see me, trying to fight the shadow like you fought the shadow once, and losing, and getting drawn away by Leah—only the eyes of the shadow followed me?"

Eve's player is not entirely certain that this works, but the GM is OK with it and Daniel's player thinks it's awesome.

"That fires me up," he says:

*"For that she was beautiful, I will rip the shadow apart."*

Leah's player laughs and tosses another die in, saying: "Don't I get to be in this vision?" But she only rolls a 4, so the answer is "sort of."

Daniel Marks has two successes, so he tears apart the slakes and heads up to the upper world. Only—

"The shadow grips at you," says the GM. "Roll Attentive + 2 to escape, or be stuck on the other side of watery images and reflections while the shadow approaches Siskery."

This time Daniel rolls 1 and 1.

Both of the other players accommodately roll two dice to help out. Leah's player rolls 4 and 5 and Eve's rolls a 1 and 4.

"Ooh, another chain!" says Eve's player. "Maybe when I was in his dream and left the waters, he saw the exit to Siskery—like, it's a shining mental path for him?"

"That'll do it," says the GM. "He tears through into the upper realm, the waters reluctantly releasing him, and staggers out onto the beach right where Leah pulled Eve free."

"Siskery," says Daniel's player, half in and half out of character. "God. They need to evacuate. Can I get them to evacuate?"

"I'd rather you play it out," says the GM, "but if you get an extraordinary success on . . ."

"Helpful + to the Deserving?"

"Yeah, sure, that, then you can at least find the tribe and impress them with your doomful prognostications."

Daniel's player rolls his five dice: 3, 1, 5, 4, 3.

"That's one success; anyone assisting?"

"I don't *want* to evacuate," says Leah's player; but Eve's player rolls a 5.

"I don't want to evacuate either," says Eve's player. "But . . . I think E.M. would agree with him that there's something going on."

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Exemplar Pool

Sometimes you will need to perform actions that do not align well with these rules. In particular, you may need to act for yourself, or work out the correct thing to do on your own, or explain the correct way of doing things to someone. Or you may need to make a stipulation that just doesn't seem to match the stipulations available to the five normal Attributes.

Situations like this are an opportunity for you to show how well you have internalized the lessons of your teachers and your life—to display the quality of character that could one day make you a respected elder of your Clan, a teacher of your own school, or a wise person that people look up to.

Doing so draws on your **Exemplar Pool** (aka your **Exemplar Dice**).

Your Exemplar Pool works like an Attribute, except that it doesn't add in Subjects and the number associated with it changes over the course of the story. For that reason we think of it as a "pool" of d6s that you can roll rather than a fixed measure of accomplishment. You can pretty much define your own stipulation, when rolling Exemplar, as long as it's not substantially broader than the stipulations given for the five Attributes above.

The more you exemplify the right way of being, the more dice you'll accumulate in your Exemplar Pool. Both setbacks and major victories will reduce it—setbacks because they suggest failings in your understanding of the teachings, and victories because the victory itself is a kind of demonstration of skill that is redundant with the pool.

For most people, the Exemplar Pool starts at 1. It resets to this starting value at the course of each story.

If the GM is starting a high-rank game (see the rules for *campaigns*), it's possible that some or all the PCs will start with a higher Exemplar. Characters can also spend one of their Attribute or Knack points on Exemplar, starting it at 2. (Or, in high-rank games, at one point higher than normal.)

### Earning Exemplar Dice

You earn dice for your Exemplar Pool through exemplary behavior. There are many kinds of exemplary behavior, including one sort that is typical for each character type—but all of them are available for characters of all types. You can generally only earn Exemplar Dice from one category at a time: if in one shining moment you fulfill a duty, help a bunch of people, make the game

more fun, and defeat an enemy, you still only get Exemplar Dice from one of the sources below. The GM can bend this rule if you had the opportunity to do these things one at a time and opted to do them all at once for role-playing reasons.

When you roll an Attribute to earn Exemplar Dice do not add a Subject.

### Attentive

Heeding an elder, teacher, or other authority when you very much don't want to earns Exemplar Dice. The maximum Exemplar Pool earned is:

- 1 point: it was probably a good idea to listen anyway.
- 2 points: you're showing impressive virtue by listening.
- 3 points: trusting your parents or teachers, you'd even walk into a tiger's den!

To earn these Exemplar Dice you will roll **Attentive**, with each success earning one point of Exemplar Pool up to the limit that your behavior earned. Characters impressed by your virtue may assist or chain, even if they don't have a specific interest in or approval of your having more Exemplar Dice.

### Fierce

Subduing evil and destroying your enemies can earn Exemplar Pool! You can earn up to:

- 1 point: defeating a typical antagonist or group of minor antagonists for this campaign;
- 2 points: defeating a major enemy;
- 3 points: pushing yourself beyond your limits to defeat an evil way out of your league!

To earn these Exemplar Dice you will roll **Fierce**, with each success earning one point of Exemplar Pool up to the limit that your behavior earned. Characters impressed by your victory may assist or chain, even if they don't have a specific interest in or approval of your having more Exemplar Dice.

## Helpful

Completing an important task that makes a difference for somebody can earn Exemplar Dice. You can earn up to:

- 1 point: completing a task that is meaningful on the scale of this game;
- 2 points: achieving something unusually impressive;
- 3 points: achieving something unusually impressive that also changes or saves the lives of a lot of people.

To earn these Exemplar Dice you will roll **Helpful**, with each success earning one point of Exemplar Pool up to the limit that your behavior earned. Characters impressed by your actions may assist or chain, even if they don't have a specific interest in or approval of your having more Exemplar Dice.

## Insightful

Thinking of others before yourself can earn Exemplar Dice. You can earn up to:

- 1 point: thinking of others first when you're in trouble yourself;
- 2 points: an impressively virtuous self-sacrifice;
- 3 points: thinking of others, you'd even feed your blood to mosquitoes so they'll leave your companions alone!

Often the higher levels are earned through persistent behavior over the course of a session or story rather than a single act: as esteemed as Huang T'ing-chien was, nobody would have praised him for cleaning his mother's chamber-pot one evening. It's because he did so every day, even after becoming famous, that he was a legend of virtue. In just this fashion, characters may roll to improve their Exemplar Pool once or twice a session for general self-sacrificing habits that have an effect in the game, even if there is no specific point at which this behavior "completes."

To earn these Exemplar Dice, whether from a single act or a collection of them, roll **Insightful**. Each success earns one point of Exemplar Pool up to the limit that your character's actions earned. Characters impressed by your

actions may assist or chain, even if they don't have a specific interest in or approval of your having more Exemplar Dice.

## Reliable

Striving to live correctly even at a cost to yourself can earn Exemplar Dice. You can earn up to:

- 1 point: fulfilling or living up to your duty in difficult circumstances;
- 2 points: continuing to pursue the correct path despite grievous obstacles or personal cost;
- 3 points: honoring obligations despite obstacles or costs so great that even your parents will be astonished.

You may earn these Exemplar Dice both by completing important tasks (as with Helpful) and by engaging in correct behavior (as with Insightful). This is balanced against the fact that fulfilling your duty is generally less "impressive" and more "expected" than other good acts, and so the higher levels are harder to obtain. In either case, to earn these Exemplar Dice, roll your **Reliable**; each success earns one point of Exemplar Pool, up to the limit given above. Characters impressed by your conduct may assist or chain, even if they don't have a specific interest in or approval of your having more Exemplar Dice.

## General: Making the Game More Fun

Making the game more fun for other players can earn Exemplar Dice for your character. You can't lose the Exemplar Pool you earn this way unintentionally: for the rest of the session, or until you voluntarily spend it on something, it adds to the minimum Exemplar Pool your character can possess.

- 1 point: set the stage in an important way for the amazing role-playing or brilliant tactical success of another player.
- 1 point: do something important for another player between games to help them succeed in the real world.
- 1 point: help with the game—
  - substantial organizational help in combat/detailed resolution;
  - providing snacks, etc.; or

- providing character art, write-ups of the sessions, etc.

You don't have to roll for this, and often you will get these points at the beginning of a session (whereupon they stay, of course, until you use them or the session ends.) There is no particular limit to how many of these points you can get; if players start helping each other so much that Exemplar Pools get out of control, they may voluntarily refuse some number of these points.

### General: Impressive Actions

It's possible that you'll find in play that some character has done some "generically" impressive thing—it certainly seems as cool as stuff that earns Exemplar Dice, but it doesn't seem to fit any of the categories herein. In such a case, they may earn up to:

- 1 point: your teachers would nod to acknowledge this feat;
- 2 points: your teachers would definitely praise or condemn this!
- 3 points: stunning! Shocking! Truly a feat worthy of the great heroes.

For instance, something kills the universe while your character is off in a spirit meditation. Your character decides to use kung fu to create a new one. Difficult as it may be to categorize this as Attentive, Fierce, Helpful, Insightful, or Reliable—arguably helpful, perhaps, maybe?—it is certainly impressive.

In such cases as these, the character rolls 3 dice. Each success earns one point of Exemplar Pool, up to the limit given above. Characters impressed by your conduct may assist or chain, even if they don't have a specific interest in or approval of your having more Exemplar Dice.

### Chaining while Gaining Exemplar Dice

The first time someone *chains* while you are rolling to earn Exemplar Dice, the maximum number of dice you can gain from that roll goes up by 1. For instance, you're rolling to gain Exemplar Dice from Insightful, and the relevant subject is

- 1 point: thinking of others first when you're in trouble yourself.

You could normally gain up to one point of Exemplar Pool from this—but if people assist you, and there is a *chain*, the amount of pool you can gain goes up to two. You only get this benefit once, so even if it's a five-step chain, your Exemplar Dice gain caps one point higher than it otherwise would have—in this case, at two.

## Losing Exemplar Dice

Characters lose dice from their Exemplar Pool when they fail at something that the GM deems critical to their interests—when they are beaten, forced to give up, embarrassed, or damaged in some way that *matters*. Exemplar Dice provide both the price for failing on an important roll and a kind of meta-health-pool for keeping going between combats—if a character is defeated but still has Exemplar Dice then the GM can just assume that they survive and keep going, while if they are at minimum Exemplar Pool, that assumption is no longer valid. (That doesn't mean the character dies or is totally defeated or destroyed—it just means that it's no longer a system assumption that they *don't* or *aren't*.)

Players also have an opportunity to voluntarily lose one point from their Exemplar Pool after a victory. (This may or may not be balanced by receiving more Exemplar Dice from the rules above.) The player spends that point of Exemplar Pool and announces a *moral*: a few sentences summarizing what your victory means and why it happened. This "cements" that victory, and the GM should avoid having events undermine the moral or the key stipulation of the victory until late in the next story, at the earliest.

Your Exemplar Pool normally has a hard minimum of 0. However, there are three sources of Exemplar Dice that provide Exemplar Pool that cannot be "lost:"

- being in a high-power game where the GM assigns extra Exemplar Dice;
- making the game more fun (above); or
- spending a Knack or Attribute point on your Exemplar Pool.

Even in a low-power game, a player who spends a Knack on their Exemplar Pool and helps the game by, e.g., writing up game sessions may have a soft minimum of 2 Exemplar Dice—the only way they can go below 2 points in their Exemplar Pool is to be at that soft minimum and spend an Exemplar Die. Once they've spent it, though, it's gone until the next session—their new soft minimum is 1, and if they spend the other point, it's 0. They can gain new Exemplar Dice, but the minimum won't change.

## Exemplar Dice and Detailed Action Resolution

It's also possible to gain and lose Exemplar Dice as part of the *detailed action resolution* rules below. These methods are more liquid than the methods above; you can expect to gain and lose many points of Exemplar Pool from detailed action resolution over the course of a story, but most of this will balance out.

## Example Characters: Exemplar Dice

None of our characters have anything special here—their Exemplar Pool has a base of 1. However, Eve's player keeps logs of the sessions and maintains a wiki on the game, earning her an Exemplar Die as long as she doesn't fall way behind. We're going to go ahead and assume that her Exemplar Pool is 2.

<b>Daniel Marks</b>		<b>Exemplar Pool 1</b>	
<i>Budding Hero / Angel</i>			
<b>Attentive</b>	<b>0</b>	to your Enemies	<b>0</b>
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Family	<b>3</b>
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	<b>1</b>
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>4</b>	to Leah	<b>0</b>
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Students	<b>1</b>
		to your Teachers	<b>1</b>
		to the Deserving	<b>1</b>
		to the Wicked	<b>3</b>
<b>Fight</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>Heart</b>	<b>50</b>
		<b>Spirit</b>	<b>50</b>

**Eve Meredith Chao**

*Impressionable One / Seeker*

**Exemplar Pool 2**

*soft minimum 1*

**Attentive 4**

**Fierce 1**

**Insightful 2**

**Helpful 0**

**Reliable 3**

to your Enemies 1

to your Family 1

to Daniel 0

to Leah 1

to your Students 2

to your Teachers 0

to the Deserving 3

to the Wicked 2

**Fight 50**

**Heart 50**

**Spirit 70**

**Siskery Leah**

*Diligent Student / Rescued Human*

**Exemplar Pool 1**

**Attentive 2**

**Fierce 1**

**Insightful 1**

**Helpful 2**

**Reliable 4**

to your Enemies 1

to your Family 3

to Daniel 1

to Eve 1

to your Students 0

to your Teachers 2

to the Deserving 1

to the Wicked 1

**Fight 50**

**Heart 60**

**Spirit 50**

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Detailed Action Resolution

Sometimes you will find that many people are acting at once, and their actions might interfere with one another. Sometimes there is a conflict between two characters and if both succeed or both fail it isn't obvious what would happen then. Sometimes a single roll seems too quick to resolve a situation, but at the same time, resolving the situation is definitely in the character's reach.

In such cases you use detailed action resolution.

### Rounds

In detailed action resolution the time your action takes is broken up into a series of "rounds." Conceptually you can think of a round as just enough time to roll a single die—to take that one small step towards success or failure. It may also work to think of it as a measure of reaction time: it's enough time for everyone involved to act, but short enough that nobody has time to *react* until the next round.

### A Change of Dice

To make things a little more interesting—specifically, to make notably good rolls and 1s a little rarer, so that you're happier when they happen—the detailed action resolution system uses d10s. Specifically, each round, you will roll 1d10, and possibly add something to it based on a weapon or skill (below).

[If you don't have any d10s, and you can't borrow them from anybody, then you can roll 2d6. The GM will have to adjust the difficulty of some rolls, and people can only assist you if you roll two 1s.]

### Succeeding on a Roll

The target of this roll—the number you have to get—is set by the GM, and is between 5 and 12, with a default of 7. You succeed if you get that number or higher. You can receive *assistance*, much as with simple actions, if

you roll a 1. When someone assists you, they roll a 1d10 and add their result to your own.

## Chains

If someone assisting you rolls a 1, they may *chain*—just as before. They narrate a flashback. Just by doing so, they guarantee you success on this roll. Even better, other players may assist you on your next roll, even if it is not a 1.

## Progress and Damage

The result of a successful roll is *Progress* or, in combat, *Damage*.

The default Progress or Damage is 1d6. If you succeed on the roll to act, you'll make 1d6 Progress on a task or do 1d6 Damage to an enemy. You can usually improve this Damage or Progress with some weapon or technique, so don't worry too much if it seems a little small.

Sometimes, e.g., when 5 points of Progress is enough to do something extraordinary, the chance to make 1d6 Progress or deal 1d6 Damage is a little bit better than normal success. Most of the time, a single success worth of Progress or Damage is a little bit *less* impressive than a single success on a simple action. However, unlike simple action resolution, you won't run out of dice after rolling your Attribute + a Subject (+ a specific Subject); instead, you can keep going until you succeed or something happens to drive you away!

Other players cannot assist you on Progress or Damage rolls.

## Intervals

The length of time you commit to a single approach in a detailed action resolution is called an *interval*. This is basically you trying to achieve your aims (whatever they might be) while following a single initiative, a single overall plan.

The maximum length of the interval in rounds is based on the relevant Attribute + the relevant Subject (+ any relevant single-person Subject). That is, a strategy that you undertake in order to help your dear friend Dao Err would have an interval lasting up to *Helpful + to Your Family + to Dao Err*. If there's no obvious Attribute or Subject, or if you can't roll the obvious Attribute with the obvious Subject, then the maximum interval is the size of your Exemplar Pool when you start. If that's 0, then your maximum interval size is 1. In all

three cases, you can stop and pick a new strategy before that maximum length, but after that many rounds, you've either succeeded at what you're trying to do or you need to pause, rethink, and try something else.

If the interval ends and you have not achieved your goal, then you must spend one round reorienting. During this round you don't roll Progress or Damage—in fact, you don't act at all. Then the next round you can either *give up* or spend one Exemplar Die from your pool and come up with a new strategy. If your Exemplar Pool is already 0, you don't have to give up—you can just stay at Exemplar Pool 0 and come up with a new strategy anyway.

You'll do basically the same thing when you want to stop what you're doing and start a new interval. You spend one round reorienting. If you had one action left, or if your interval had ended anyway, then this works exactly as above—you reorient, then spend an Exemplar Die to start a new interval. If you had at least two actions left on your interval, then you can choose to concede *partial failure* instead. This means giving up on what you were doing as something of a bad job. You still spend a round reorienting, but you don't have to spend an Exemplar Die to start a new interval. Since you're conceding some small portion of that interval's purpose, the GM may stipulate a small element of failure that occurs.

### Intervals: Choosing an Approach

So imagine that you're *the Impressionable One*. You have Attentive 4 and Reliable 2, with to the Deserving 1 and to your Teachers 2. One of your teachers asks you to mediate a dispute between two families in your Clan. You start by listening to each of them. You have a total of 5 points in *Attentive + to the Deserving*, so you can spend 5 rounds doing that. Unfortunately you don't make much progress—they like *you* now but they're still stubborn! So you lose a round, spend a point of Exemplar Pool, and come up with a new strategy: you'll be strict and firm, like teacher would expect! This gives you another 4 rounds, equal to your *Reliable + to your Teachers*.

But . . . wait!

4 rounds isn't much time. Would another try with Attentive be better?

It's always most efficient—in terms of raw progress and damage—to use your highest Attribute/Subject pairing. However, just as with the Simple Actions rules, the plan you use ultimately defines what you can stipulate when you "win." There's only one key difference—because you're interacting with the GM over multiple rounds, you have the opportunity to see how well winning a given stipulation will work out for you. With your Attentive roll, all you can do is get them to talk to you and like you. We know that didn't get the job done in the first interval—but if it seemed to be heading in the right direction, then that's useful data! In such a case, it might be worth sticking with the same

Attribute and Subject pairing, and coming up with a new strategy that fits into *Attentive + to the Deserving*. Maybe spend a day with each family to better understand their concerns, and hope that that heads in the correct direction?

On the other hand, maybe you were getting the impression during the first interval that the *Attentive* approach just wasn't right here—that making friends with them was only good enough to eke out a poor compromise between the two families, at best, something hung together mostly by their liking you and not wanting to make you cry. In such a case the *Reliable + to your Teachers* plan is better. Or maybe you should drag them to the school and get them to listen to your teacher's words directly—that's a six-round plan based on *Attentive + to your Teachers*. But is that enough to fulfill your duty?

### Gaining and Losing Interval

Some effects allow you to "gain interval." This adds rounds of action to the end of your current interval; if you voluntarily give up your interval to do something else, that benefit is lost. Other effects will cost you interval; if this removes your last action in the interval, your interval ends immediately.

If an effect forcibly ends your interval, you must spend your next action reorienting and then start a new interval normally. If you forcibly end someone's interval before they have had the chance to act in a given round, the GM or the relevant player has two choices. The first is to use the current round to reorient. The second is to roll Promptness (see below) against the highest Promptness of any character that reduced their interval that round; victory allows the person in question to take one last action in their current interval before it ends. This doesn't cancel the round of reorienting, just delays it!

If you lose interval when you're not actually in an interval—someone uses some interval-reducing effect on you before your action on the first round of combat, or while you're reorienting, say—then that reduction applies to the interval you're about to start. You can take this information into account when deciding on your strategy.

### Stunned while Reorienting

You don't have to be able to act to reorient and start a new interval.

It doesn't do any good to stun someone or otherwise deny them their action if they're reorienting anyway!

## Success

When you earn enough Progress or Damage—without giving up or getting defeated by a wicked enemy—you have completed your action. Further, just for engaging in the detailed action resolution (unless it was an incredibly trivial and easy encounter, or unless your showing was abysmal), you'll earn an Exemplar Die, and an important NPC may praise or chide you. After the GM does or does not give you this Exemplar Die, you have the option to spend a point of your Exemplar Pool and announce a *moral*, as described earlier—a few sentences now that summarize what your victory means will help ensure that it *stays* a victory for a few sessions to come.

To maintain a reasonable flow of Exemplar Dice, the GM should aim to have the average detailed action resolution last a little bit more than one interval; what that really means is that for every encounter that lasts 3-4 intervals, there are a few small encounters that give a net gain in Exemplar Pool. Characters should generally expect their Exemplar Pool to slowly increase over the course of a story, principally from impressive actions and choices, but to a lesser extent from having more short encounters than long ones.

If balancing this is making the game's pacing too rigid, the GM can make new intervals cost Fight/Heart/Spirit and stop awarding Exemplar Dice for participating in detailed action resolution. This is a troubleshooting measure rather than an alternate rules structure, and should be used mostly to stop or stem massive Exemplar Die inflation or deflation while the GM and players either adapt to the structure of the **Filial Piety Action System** or adapt the structure to the needs of the group.

## Components of an Action

For completeness, the components of a single round's worth of activity on a character's part—a single "action," such as is taken on a round, are:

- an optional declaration that you are changing weapons (see pg. XX);
- either
  - a d10 roll to determine if you make Progress/deal Damage;
    - on success, a Damage/Progress roll to decide *how much*;
  - or an unrolled action, such as "cheering someone on."
- an optional "normal move" (described a fair bit below); and
- an optional description of what exactly you're doing.

Why is description optional?

Normally you'll want to say at least *something* about what your character is doing. However, it's not always your fault if you can't. Sometimes things get weird and abstract. Sometimes your actions get repetitive. Even then it's *best* to come up with apropos and interesting descriptions of each of your actions, but it's not always worth the investment of time and mental energy. Your general strategy and game plan is decided when you start the interval, so it's OK sometimes to just roll for Progress or Damage and assume you're still working on that general plan.

### Cheering Someone On

You may give up your action in a round to "cheer someone on." Instead of earning Progress or dealing Damage, your character helps or roots for someone else. This is not like the assistance you give when someone rolls a 1—cheering someone on is an in-character action, and it means either that you're helping them out or you're literally cheering them on. Your character has to be present, able to act, and in communication with the person you're cheering on. Because this is an in-character thing, NPCs can do it too—if you have an allied NPC who is strong enough to make real Progress or deal real Damage in the situation you're in, they can give up their action to cheer someone on instead. Wicked NPC enemies can give up their action to cheer each other on.

Cheering someone on replaces your roll to make Progress/deal Damage. It also *waives* your normal move, but it doesn't require it—if for some reason you're able to act but not able to move, you can still cheer someone on.

When you cheer someone on, you as a player provide:

- an indication of who you're cheering on; and
- an optional description of how you're cheering for or helping them.

If you are cheering someone on, they have a better chance to manage an "epic move" (see below). The second, third, and fourth people to cheer a character on also give a cumulative +1 *cheering bonus* to the target's roll to make Progress or deal Damage (max +3) — so if you have four people cheering you on, you've got a +3!

## Other People's Actions

As the cheering rules suggest, detailed action resolution is not limited to a single character. In fact, it's hardly ever used for a single-character action: expect there to be other PCs, friendly NPCs, and/or wicked enemies acting at the same time.

Most of the time PCs will be on the same side of any conflict. So the usual order of events is this: first, all the PCs act. Then, everybody the GM plays gets to act. It's up to the players what order the PCs do things in. If things get confusing, the default is for players to go leftwards around the room or table from the GM. The default for GM characters is for friendly NPCs to act first, then enemies, in alphabetical or random order.

## Promptness

If the PCs get into a conflict among themselves, or if they eliminate an enemy before it gets to act, then suddenly the rules that put all the PCs acting together in an undifferentiated lump and then the GM characters afterwards don't work as well.

In such cases you will roll **Promptness**.

Promptness is the quality that allows one PC to act before another in a conflict between them. It's also the quality that sometimes lets an enemy stay in a fight (despite being Damaged to the point of defeat by PC weapons or skills) long enough to take one more action.

PCs have a base Promptness of +0. This is modified by Knacks and either Weapons or Approaches. The result is a number that is usually somewhere between -2 and 4. To decide who goes first between two PCs, each rolls their a d10 and adds their Promptness. The higher number wins, with both players re-rolling on a tie.

In any round where a character (PC or NPC) takes so much Damage from other character's actions that they die or are forced to give up, they can roll their Promptness against the highest Promptness of a character that injured them that round. If they succeed, they get off a last action before collapsing. If this action suffices to defeat one of the enemies that hurt it, as a matter of GM discretion, they may survive the round after all!

Similarly when a character overcomes an obstacle, and it is relevant exactly when that obstacle fails, the player with the highest Promptness who made Progress against that obstacle may roll  $d10 + \text{Promptness}$  against some number associated with the obstacle. Success means that the obstacle vanishes immediately. Failure means that the obstacle is not technically overcome until after players and friendly NPCs act next round.

Characters who are defeated during their own action, e.g. from throwing themselves on a grenade or walking into a spear, don't get to make a Promptness roll for another action. Their action is the one that defeated them!

Players cannot assist one another on Promptness rolls.

## Failing to Act

Sometimes a character will be unable to act in a given round. In some cases this will count as one round against their interval; in others it will not. Other times a character will voluntarily wish to not act in a round—possibly to trigger some power of their weapon that requires a round of "charging up." Characters also cannot act in the round they spend "reorienting" between two intervals.

Characters who do not or cannot act suffer the following:

- They lose their normal roll to deal Damage/make Progress;
- They cannot cheer someone on;
- They cannot use "terrain control" abilities unless otherwise stated; and
- They lose their normal move (see below).

Players may still assist other players when they roll a 1, even if their character cannot act. For future reference, since we haven't talked about movement yet, note that characters who can't act still have some mobility—it's only the flexible and highly tactical "normal move" that they give up.

## Losing your Next Action

Most of the time when a character cannot act, it is either because their own action failed badly in some way or due to enemy action. In each case it's clear what losing their next action means: the next time they have an opportunity to act, they suffer the *cannot act* penalties above.

Sometimes, however, an environmental effect or an ally's fumble will cost you your next action in a round where you haven't acted yet but *could* have. For instance, you're waiting for another player to act before you explain your character's action—not because their character is faster, but because you want to be polite! Then their character accidentally costs your character the next action, and the order of PC actions unexpectedly becomes important.

In such a case you have two choices. The first is to give up your action in the current round. The second is to roll a  $d10 + \text{your Promptness}$  against a similar roll by the highest-Promptness character or effect to cost you your next action. If you win the roll, you may choose to act in the current round and lose your action in the following round instead.

## Defending Yourself

It is always possible that strife will arise where there ought only be harmony. One character will, for whatever reason, attack another.

In this case, we ask: what is the difficulty of the roll?

And, what does Damage do?

## Physical Defense and Fight

The base defense that a character has against physical attacks is the minimum roll necessary to hit them—if it's 12, then they're very difficult for anyone to hit, while if it's 5 or even lower, it's like beating up a child. We'll almost always just call this Defense, but sometimes we'll call it Fight Defense, (Fight) Defense, or physical Defense.

For a PC, this defense is 7, with two exceptions:

- the *disreputable warrior* has a defense of 8.
- the *diligent student* has a defense of 8.

This may be improved further with Knacks and defensive weapons, and heavy weapons may lower it; thus a PC's Defense ranges from 6 to 10.

## Fight

Damage that a character takes in physical combat is subtracted from their Fight. Characters who lose all their Fight are *defeated*. It takes around 15 hits at  $1d6$  Damage each to subdue an average PC, which means about 50 attacks—but that's from unarmed human enemies who don't know martial arts. Evil bandits are more dangerous!

## Shell

Some fighting styles allow the character to acquire "shell." This ranges from 0 up, with a normal range of 3-8. Shell reduces the Damage taken from each physical attack: if you have 3 points of Shell, and someone rolls 6 points of Damage against you, then you only lose 3 points of Fight. It's possible to acquire negative Shell, which effectively adds to all Damage taken instead.

## Spirit Defense and Spirit

The base defense that a character has against spiritual attacks is called Spirit Defense. You can think of it as the *firm moral grounding* that keeps you attached to who you are and prevents you from being changed. Effects that reduce your Spirit Defense confuse you and make it harder for you to cling to your basic principles. Effects that increase it firm up whatever you use for moral guidance—memories, ideas, ideals, or whatever it is that justifies to you what kind of person you've decided to be.

For a PC, Spirit Defense is 7, again with two exceptions:

- the *impressionable one* has a base Spirit Defense of 8;
- the *empathic one* has a base Spirit Defense of 8.

This may be improved further with Knacks and defensive "weapons," and the spiritual equivalent of heavy weapons may lower it. Thus a PC's Spirit Defense, like their physical Defense, ranges from 6 to 10.

## Spirit

Damage that a character takes from spiritual attack is subtracted from their Spirit. Thus you have to take 50-80 Spirit Damage before you are wholly defeated.

## Spirit Shell

Characters may have Spirit Shell that reduces the damage from spiritual attacks; this functions as with physical shell.

## The Total Defense of the Heart

You will almost never roll to attack somebody's Heart. Most of the time it is the GM who does so, as the PC confronts some problematic Difficulty—and even that is a little rare. Still, for the sake of having rules for all three defenses in the same place, a few notes on the Heart equivalent of Defense, "Heart Defense," follow.

For a PC, Heart Defense begins at 7, again with two exceptions:

- the *budding hero* has a heart defense of 8.
- the *ordinary one* has a heart defense of 8.

Heart Defense is *something* like the strength and energy of youth or the wisdom of age—it's the ability that makes you not get tired when working to overcome some obstacle, rather than the ability that keeps you going. It's your power of not being discouraged by problems in the first place, while Heart is closer to your ability to keep going despite the trouble you may have.

## Heart

Damage that a character takes while wrestling with various Difficulties is subtracted from their Heart. You will not be entirely discouraged until you've taken 50-80 points of such Heart Damage.

## Heart Shell

Many things that "should" attack the Heart Defense wind up not rolling at all. Instead they just Damage the character's Heart automatically when the player makes a roll and doesn't succeed. So in addition to an improved Heart Defense for those rare occasions where it actually matters, the budding hero and the ordinary one *also* start with Heart Shell. Just like Heart Defense, Heart Shell is the power not to be discouraged in the first place when trouble happens: you just accept it and work harder! The budding hero has some Heart Shell because heroes need trouble to be heroes; the ordinary one has some Heart Shell because it's how ordinary people without special accomplishments

survive! But if that isn't quite true for *your* budding hero or ordinary one, you're allowed to figure out a different reason you have this Heart Shell.

Heart Shell works exactly as with physical shell—each time the character takes Heart Damage, subtract their Heart Shell from the damage taken.

- the *budding hero* has 3 points of Heart Shell.
- the *ordinary one* has 3 points of Heart Shell.

## Total and Partial Conflict

A *total* conflict is one in which the enemy's victory *means* your defeat and vice versa. In such a fight, there's nothing reasonable to do with enemy Damage or Progress save to take it directly off your Fight, Heart, or Spirit, and vice versa. When they've done enough Damage or Progress to deplete the appropriate pool, they've won, and you've lost.

Sometimes characters engage, instead, in *partial conflict*.

This means that one character can "win" without actually subjugating or defeating their foe. The victory of one does not require the defeat of the other.

In such a case, it's generally true that the amount of Damage or Progress you need will be equivalent to their Fight, Heart, or Spirit—that if you need 20 Damage to defeat a bear in a total conflict, you also need 20 Damage/Progress to lure it away from your campsite and then escape it in the forest. The difference is very limited from the perspective of the attacker—but for the defender, in this case the bear, it makes all the difference. In one case, where you're trying to kill or capture the bear, that 20 Damage you do eliminates its Fight. In the other, where you're just leading it off into the woods and then escaping, it probably has 15 Fight left.

Who cares about a bear's Fight?

But the same applies when something is in partial conflict with you. You are a guard at a mansion. You want to uphold the peace and defend your master's treasures. You catch a thief in the act: they try to escape! You're a bit embarrassed if the thief gets away, but as long as they don't steal anything big, it's just a partial conflict—if they win, then maybe you still have some Fight left, because you didn't chase them past the border of your master's estate.

In such a case, the GM decides after the battle how much Fight, Heart, or Spirit was actually lost. This is usually either some fixed number (the loser loses 5, the winner loses nothing) or a percentage of the Damage taken ("They did 50 Damage, so lose 25 Fight; you did 30 Damage, so they lose 15.")

If two characters are at cross-purposes but they can both win a complete and full victory—e.g. two thieves meet on a bridge, and, mistaking the other for a guard, try to fight their way past the other—then as soon as one wins, they drop out of the conflict. This leaves the other to pursue their remaining ends unopposed.

## The Last Throes

Sometimes the end of a fight can drag out for some time, with everyone involved missing repeatedly. This is fine in the context of a typical detailed action resolution, where rolling low is just like "not rolling a success" in a simple action—but in a battle where much has already been fought for, and won, or lost, and the characters are several intervals in or have taken down several of their enemies, the interest value of gaining and losing Fight, Spirit, or Heart may replace the interest value of high and low dice rolls. Any time this happens, the GM may declare the fight in its *last throes* and stop tracking interval, or if appropriate simply declare that the last few enemies surrender or succumb to defeat.

## Example Characters: Defenses

Our example characters have the standard levels of Defense. As *the Budding Hero*, Daniel Marks has three points of Heart Shell (and implicitly Heart Defense 8, though we won't bother to record it). As *the Impressionable One*, Eve Meredith Chao has an improved Spirit Defense. Finally, as *the Diligent Student*, Siskery Leah has a base physical Defense of 8, which makes her the toughest of our three characters in a fight.

Daniel Marks		Exemplar Pool		1	
<i>Budding Hero / Angel</i>					
Attentive	0	to your Enemies	0		
Fierce	2	to your Family	3		
Insightful	2	to Eve	1		
Helpful	4	to Leah	0		
Reliable	2	to your Students	1		
		to your Teachers	1		
		to the Deserving	1		
		to the Wicked	3		
Fight	60	Heart	50	Spirit	50
Defense	7	Heart Shell	3	S. Defense	7

**Eve Meredith Chao**

*Impressionable One / Seeker*

**Exemplar Pool 2**

*soft minimum 1*

**Attentive 4**  
**Fierce 1**  
**Insightful 2**  
**Helpful 0**  
**Reliable 3**

to your Enemies 1  
to your Family 1  
to Daniel 0  
to Leah 1  
to your Students 2  
to your Teachers 0  
to the Deserving 3  
to the Wicked 2

**Fight 50**  
**Defense 7**

**Heart 50**

**Spirit 70**  
**S. Defense 8**

**Siskery Leah**

*Diligent Student / Rescued Human*

**Exemplar Pool 1**

**Attentive 2**  
**Fierce 1**  
**Insightful 1**  
**Helpful 2**  
**Reliable 4**

to your Enemies 1  
to your Family 3  
to Daniel 1  
to Eve 1  
to your Students 0  
to your Teachers 2  
to the Deserving 1  
to the Wicked 1

**Fight 50**  
**Defense 8**

**Heart 60**

**Spirit 50**  
**S. Defense 7**

# Filial Piety Action System: Weapons and Weapon Styles

In combat, you won't just flail about with your **Fierce** ferocity. You'll use a **Weapon** or a **Martial Style**!

In each round of combat, when you make your d10 roll to deal **Damage**, that roll normally represents a single offensive move or a short set of offensive moves you make with the specific weapon or martial style that you are using. What weapon or martial style that *is* will have a big effect: it's one thing to hit a deer with your fist, after all, and another thing entirely to shoot it with a bow. One perplexes the deer; the other may strike it dead!

## Weapons and Styles

The physical weapon that a character is wielding matters—but it's not the be-all and end-all of fighting. The weapon is nothing until a coherent fighting style comes into play. Holding a bow in one's hands allows one to make interesting twanging sounds with its string; *archery* adds the ability to hurl projectiles forcefully at distant targets.

The **Filial Piety Action System** blurs the distinction between physical weapons and the weapon styles that use them. In particular, things like two-sword styles and unarmed styles are treated as *weapons*, using the very same rules as swords and axes, except when answering the very narrow question of what things a character is holding physically in their hands. It's even possible—though we won't take advantage of this in the basic **Filial Piety Action System** rules—to have two or more "weapons" that rely on the same physical object, like a *shadow sword style* weapon and a *fire sword style* weapon. These would both use the same piece of sharpened and balanced metal as the one-handed sword style below, but you'd have to "change weapons" to swap between them.

Sometimes we will highlight this notion by using the term **Weapon** and not **weapon**. This capitalized form refers more to the game rules surrounding a weapon style and not as much to the physical weapon. Your humble author considers this usage optional, so don't read too much into the cases where it is not used.

## Basic Weapon Traits

Each weapon has a base **Accuracy** ranging from -1 to +1. This will add to your roll to succeed. Most weapons also improve the basic Damage of your actions: when you successfully deal Damage, instead of rolling 1d6, you'll do around 2d6 Damage instead—sometimes as much as 2d10. With the right weapon, you'll hit more often and/or do more damage when you hit. Some weapons also increase or decrease your Defense, making it harder or easier for enemies to hit *you*, or modify your Promptness, affecting your ability to control the flow of the fight.

The basic Weapon templates are:

- **Balanced** (2d6 Damage, +1 Accuracy, +0 or +1 Promptness)
- **Defensive** (2d6 Damage, +1 Defense)
- **Light** (1d10 Damage, +1 Accuracy or Defense, -1 Promptness)
- **Heavy** (2d10 Damage, -1 Accuracy or Defense, +1 Promptness) and
- **Tactical** (2d6 or 2d6+1 Damage)

Accuracy, Damage, Defense, and Promptness are the most important qualities of a weapon in game mechanics terms. They're the reason people invented weapons in the first place! They aren't, however, the most *interesting* qualities of a weapon. In the **Filial Piety Action System**, these traits fit into a fairly tight range. They shape the weapon you choose and how you use it, but they aren't the heart of the weapon's story.

The interesting features of weapons, the things that make swords, axes, knives, clubs, and fighting chains feel different in play are *their failure mode* and their *epic moves*.

## Failure Mode

The failure mode for a weapon is triggered on a roll of 7-8 if you do not know the weapon very well. If you're proficient with that weapon, it's only triggered on a roll of 7.

This 7 or 7-8—like the roll of "1" that triggers assistance—is the raw roll of the die before any modifiers. It also supersedes success: if that 7-8 is a *high enough roll* to hit an enemy, but it triggers the failure mode, then you don't get to deal Damage against the enemy.

In addition to waiving your chance to deal Damage, failure mode causes some negative effect to happen. The effects vary from weapon to weapon, ranging from the minor to the substantial, and generally last until your interval ends.

## Missing and Failing

When you're trying to do Damage against an enemy, and you don't get to make a Damage roll—either because you *failed* or because you just didn't roll well enough on the initial 1d10 roll to deal any Damage—we will say you *missed* that enemy. Missing includes but is not limited to failure modes.

## Epic Moves

Epic moves are the opposite of the failure mode. Each is something cool that you can do if you use the weapon very well.

There are five different ways to trigger an epic move:

- rolling a 10 (on the d10, before any modifiers);
- having someone who is assisting you roll a 10 (on the d10, before any modifiers);
- having someone who is assisting you *chain*, when you would have succeeded even without their help;
- rolling at least twice what you need (e.g. 14 when you need a 7); or
- an ally (such as a PC) spends their action "cheering you on" instead of taking action on their own.

Epic moves do *not* supersede the initial roll to do Damage—before you can use an epic move, you must first succeed on your roll. This is most important in cases where someone is cheering you on: cheering you on will turn a success into an epic move, but it won't help you if you miss or fail. The need to succeed before earning an epic move can also come into play when fighting enemies with very high Defense, such that rolling a 10 does not succeed.

That said, you can reasonably expect an epic move at least 10% of the time. This rises to 20-30% in *most* cases where someone is cheering you on.

## Standard Epic Moves

Every weapon has three default epic moves:

*Combat Stunt*—do [the weapon's normal damage], and a much weaker form of some other weapon's special moves.

*Extraordinary Stunt*—do [the weapon's normal damage], and also do something that interacts with the field of battle in a way the GM would normally classify as an "extraordinary feat."

*Powerful Attack*—do [twice the weapon's normal damage].

For example, a basic one-handed sword deals 2d6 Damage.

If you're wielding such a sword, and you earn an epic move, you have the option to do 4d6 Damage; or to do 2d6 Damage and a weak form of, say, an axe move; or the power to do 2d6 Damage and an extraordinary stunt, such as using sword wind to extinguish a small nearby fire. Unless you use a combat stunt that lets you change targets, the Damage is always assessed against the target you originally attacked. The effects of the extraordinary stunt or combat stunt can, when appropriate, affect something or someone else.

## Weapon-Specific Moves

In addition to the basic moves, every weapon and martial style also has 1-3 special epic moves that are unique to that weapon. These may be clumsily copied by other weapons through the combat stunt (for instance, an archer may disarm somebody, but it won't be as effective as the fighting chain move) but for the most part you'll only see them from people using that weapon. Axes hack open an enemy's defense and make them bleed; clubs and staves stun their targets; sword users regain their balance and renew their dedication through perfection of form!

If an epic move does Damage, without specifying a target, that Damage goes to the enemy you were attacking. However, some moves let you pick an enemy or multiple enemies to damage. These have to be within the weapon's range or a range the epic move specifies, but they do not have to be the enemy you originally targeted. For instance, *cleave* targets two enemies; this doesn't *have* to include the enemy you were originally attacking.

When you go through the list of weapons below and decide what weapon or weapons your character uses, don't think *too* much about their Accuracy,

Damage, Defense, and Promptness: instead, figure out whether the epic moves and failure mode are things you're likely to enjoy.

## Hitting the Enemy

Whenever you get to make a Damage roll against an enemy, we'll say that you *hit* them. Hitting includes most of the epic moves below, but also includes ordinary moves where you succeed on the initial 1d10 roll and then get to roll your weapon's Damage dice. There are extremely rare cases where you earn an epic move but do not "hit"—your roll succeeds, but you choose an epic move that does no Damage at all. Instead, you move a long way, or gain a persistent power, or something of the kind. Such actions don't count as a hit, a miss, or as not using your action; if you need to call them something, call them *special moves*.

## Special Features

Some weapons have special features. Assume that unless they affect the process of wielding or readying the weapon, these features are only active when actually wielding the weapon. For instance, a club offers a *Powerful Swing* after each round you spend not acting; you only gain this benefit when actually wielding a club.

## Proficiency

As noted above, you're more likely to *fail* with a weapon you aren't very familiar with. In the **Filial Piety Action System**, familiarity with a weapon is also called *proficiency*, and each character starts proficient in a small number of weapons:

- two melee weapons or dual-weapon styles.
- Brawling
- two special weapons (ranged, magic, or unarmed).

You may buy additional proficiencies with Knacks. Further, if you spend a long time training with a weapon, or if you use it a great deal despite your lack of proficiency, you will eventually become proficient. At a dramatic point

during the story, or at the beginning of a new story, you gain a proficiency in that weapon and now only *fail* with it when rolling a 7.

## Modifiers

When you use an epic move, fail, or are *hit* by an epic move, it's common to suffer a *modifier*. This is something like

-1 to Accuracy (max -3)

or

+1 to Defense (max +1)

There are many different kinds of modifiers, but in the world of melee combat, they wind up being pretty simple. Each one changes your Accuracy, Defense, or some other rating. Each one can accumulate up to a given point—e.g., that first one accumulates to a maximum of a -3 penalty to Accuracy. If you encounter that effect four times, the fourth time you'll already be at the maximum and the penalty won't do anything.

These maxima are *shared* among modifiers of the same type. Here's an example. When you *fail* with an axe, you give enemies an opening—you take a Defense penalty. The epic move with an axe, "staggering blow," makes an opening in the enemy's defense. So if three axe wielders are in a brawl, then one of them could fail with their axe and then take three staggering blows. These penalties all share a type, and cap out at -3: the third staggering blow can't open their defense any further.

Most modifiers on you expire at the end of your interval. If you're not in an interval when a modifier of this type takes effect, then they expire at the end of your *next* interval. Some modifier types have different rules, ending—typically—at the end of one round or when some event takes place.

So here is how to calculate your actual Accuracy (etc.) in a given round:

- Take the base Accuracy (etc.) of your weapon;
- Add any benefit from Knacks;
- Add in positive modifiers, such as "rhythm;" and
- Subtract negative modifiers, such as "off balance."

## Changing Weapons

You may change the Weapon(s) you are using at the beginning of each of your actions. In general you may *always* do this, even if you are unable to act or cheering someone on or dangling upside down from a tree with both of your wrists tied behind you. The only condition is that the weapon be physically available to you to wield. So you don't get to draw a sword out of nowhere, but it's hard to imagine a case where you *couldn't* switch to an unarmed style or wield a knife that's in easy reach of your hand.

There are three general cases.

The first case is drawing and wielding an entirely new weapon. This has a base cost of **5 Fight**. This represents your losing some of your overall "momentum" and ability to stay in the fight as you change weapons. We won't worry too much about the weapons you stop using—unless something weird is going on, assume that you put them away or do some other unspecified thing that keeps them within reach.

This is also called *changing your readied weapon(s)*.

The second case is that you are drawing a new Weapon—that is, a set of game mechanical traits associated with some weapon or style—without actually changing what you're holding in your hands. One classic example is switching from a one-handed sword style to an unarmed weapon style, using your free hand or your foot, without dropping the sword. Another is switching back and forth from a dual-sword style to a single-sword style—again, without sheathing or dropping anything as you move from style to style. This kind of change has a base cost of **2 Fight**.

If you want to stop using Weapons altogether, this costs **0 Fight**. You'd generally do this if you need to change weapons but have no feasible weapon to change to.

These two options are also called *changing your wielded weapon(s)*.

Changing weapons does not automatically remove modifiers. Negative modifiers typically persist. Some positive modifiers go away. Others remain. Many positive modifiers are weapon-specific, in that they give you a benefit with a particular weapon or set of weapons, but even these often persist when you change weapons just in case you change back before the benefit expires.

## Readied and Wielded Weapons

The reduced cost for switching between weapons that you are already "using" means that it's important to track what you are physically holding in each hand.

At any given time you may have any of the following weapons *ready*:

- no Weapon at all;
- an unarmed style;
- a one-handed weapon and an unarmed style;
- two one-handed weapons;
- one two-handed weapon.

These *readied* weapons are the ones you have in your hands, available for use at a moment's notice. The weapon you're actually *using* to fight with is the weapon you are *wielding*. In general there is no reason to have "no Weapon" ready instead of an unarmed style; the unarmed style only puts you in fighting stance once a fight actually begins. The no Weapon option is included on the list because strange eventualities can ensue.

## Changing What You Have Ready

You may change what weapons you have ready when:

- a new interval starts; or
- you spend the **5 Fight** cost to draw a new weapon or weapons.

In both cases it is legitimate to, e.g., go from a dual-sword style to a club/unarmed weapon combination—when you change the physical weapons you're holding, you can switch things up as much as you like.

## New Interval, New Weapons

When you start a new interval, it's like a breath of fresh air: old ideas go out the window, and you can start in on a new tack. The first round of a new

interval, you may change both the Weapon you are using and the weapons you have ready at **no cost in Fight**. This is specifically no cost and not 0 cost—ignore any cost modifiers that might be in play.

## Supplementary Weapons

Supplementary weapons are things like *shields* that are designed for use with other weapons. You can wield a supplementary weapon *at the same time* as another weapon, as long as you're proficient in at least one of them. This usually imposes some modifier on the use of your primary weapon and gives you access to an additional epic move. When you earn an epic move, you may choose one of the standard epic moves, an epic move associated with your weapon, or an epic move associated with your supplementary weapon.

You can ready a supplementary weapon for free any time you're readying and/or wielding another weapon—you can draw a sword and ready your shield at the same time, say. You can also wield a supplementary weapon for free any time you start wielding another weapon—you can start *using* a sword and shield simultaneously, at no extra cost in Fight. If for some reason you have a supplementary weapon ready but not wielded, it costs 2 Fight to start wielding it together with your other weapon; if you want to *stop* using it, that costs 2 Fight as well.

Here's an example.

You've been using an unarmed style—Brawling. You decide to draw your sword and pull on your shield. That costs 5 Fight, and you could start wielding sword and shield immediately. Instead, you're not sure you want to take the accuracy penalty associated with a shield, so you just wield your sword and keep the shield ready for use. Later, you realize you *do* want to use your shield, so you switch to a sword and shield style at the cost of 2 Fight. If the accuracy penalty really is too steep, you can spend another 2 Fight later to switch from sword-and-shield style back to sword style.

## Gaining Fight and Temporary Fight

Some weapon moves give you extra Fight. This just adds to your Fight total. It can raise your Fight above its starting level and the bonus remains even if you change to a different weapon. If you manage to end a fight with more than your base Fight (e.g., a character with 50 starting Fight who ends a battle with 75), you reset down to your starting level. You're only limited by the base Fight you start every game with, though—if you go into a battle with only 5 Fight, and come out of it with 50, that's just fine.

Some weapons give *Temporary Fight* instead. This is a defensive bonus to Fight that expires at the end of your interval or your next action. When something damages you, you can choose to assess some or all of that Damage against your temporary Fight instead of your personal Fight (up to a maximum of the temporary Fight you have.)

For example, someone using a shield uses the epic move *Shelter* to gain 10 temporary Fight. Someone deals 15 Damage to them. They can take 15 Damage and keep their temporary Fight; take 5 Damage and eliminate their temporary Fight; or anything in between.

Finally some weapons *heal*. The first example of this won't show up until the spirit weapons below. Healing effects give you Fight (or, in the case of Spirit Weapons, Spirit) but cannot increase it above its starting value. Thus if you're down 3 Fight, and something would "heal" you for 10 Fight, you just get 3 Fight back.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Melee Weapons

Below you will find the most common melee Weapons and Styles in the game. If you encounter a notable omission—let's say, a player wishes to use a sickle, or develop a harmonious sword/axe style—then you have two options. First, the GM and player may develop such a style together. Second, you may approximate the weapon or style's features with the most similar of the available weapons below.

Characters may ready two different one-handed weapons. One of these is wielded as the character's Weapon at any given time, and the character will use its Accuracy, Damage, Defense, Promptness, special features, epic moves, and failure mode. As detailed above, the character may change which Weapon they are wielding at the start of their action by spending **2 Fight**, at which point they will use the new Weapon's traits.

### Melee Weapon Modifier Summary

<i>block</i>	+1 to Defense (max +1)
<i>flashy</i>	+2 to Accuracy and Damage (max +2); lasts until failure. (may also be +2 Accuracy for a single round.)
<i>focus</i>	+5 to Damage (max +15)
<i>momentum</i>	+2 to Accuracy (max +2); also gives Fight when you hit.
<i>off balance</i>	-1 to Accuracy (max -3)
<i>opening</i>	-1 to Defense (max -3 or -5)
<i>pinned weapon</i>	-5 to Damage (max -5)
<i>sword balance</i>	+1 to Defense (max +3)
<i>sword lightening</i>	+2 to Accuracy (max +2) and +1 to Defense (max +1)
<i>stunned</i>	-1 to Defense (max -1)

These are the modifiers you can expect to encounter if you are using a large number of different melee weapons and being hit by a large number of melee weapons during a fight.

## Range and Movement

A few of the weapons below—fighting chains and knives, in particular—make reference to the range and movement rules. You'll find those after this section, on pg. XX.

## Active Weapons

You must be able to target an actual enemy or obstacle to roll an attack, even if an epic move would be advantageous for other reasons. Club users can't gain fight by swinging their clubs at random walls and chain-wielders can't just randomly roll in hopes of earning the move *Mobility*.

## Melee Weapons

### Axe, One-Handed

+1 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

The one-handed axe has a bad tendency to get stuck in enemies or leave openings in your defense. On the other hand, it's light enough to slash precisely and keep enemies at bay, heavy enough to bite deep and leave gaping wounds, and easy to make, keep, repair, or replace. Plus, you can use it to chop wood.

*Fail:* you're wide open! Take a -1 *opening* to your Defense (max -3) until the end of your interval.

#### *Epic Moves:*

*Savage Cut*—do 2d6 Damage and your target *bleeds*, taking 1d6 Damage each round until the end of their interval.

*Staggering Blow*—do 2d6 damage and your target takes a -1 *opening* to their Defense (max -3) until the end of their interval.

### Axe, Two-Handed

-1 Accuracy/2d10 Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

The two-handed axe is a brutal weapon suitable for berserkers and savage heroes. Much like the one-handed axe, it "defends" by intimidating enemies and making it dangerous to approach; unlike the one-handed axe, it's designed for cleaving enemies in half rather than for precise forms of battle.

*Fail:* you're wide open! Take a -1 *opening* to your Defense (max -3) until the end of your interval.

#### *Epic Moves:*

*Cleave*—strike two enemies, doing 2d10 Damage to each.

*Staggering Blow*—do 2d10 Damage and your target takes a -1 *opening* to their Defense (max -3) until the end of their interval.

Axes, Dual-Wielded  
+0 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

[Two One-Handed Weapons]  
(+0 Promptness, +1 Defense)

Fighting styles that use an axe in each hand allow much better control of the situation, defense, and good management of multiple enemies, but they're tiring and tricky to use even for supreme masters.

*Fail:* you're wide open! Take a -1 *opening* to your Defense (max -5) until the end of your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Cleave*—strike two enemies, doing 2d6 Damage to each.

*Savage Cut*—do 2d6 Damage and your target bleeds, taking 1d6 Damage each round until the end of their interval.

Club or Stave  
+0 Accuracy/2d6+1 Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]  
(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Clubs are blunt weapons. They hit hard, particularly when the wielder has time to put their strength behind a blow, but they have a tendency to overbalance their user. Use this weapon or the "huge club" below to represent a staff.

Clubs have the following special feature:

***Powerful Swing:*** if you didn't act last round, or if this is the first round of the fight, you have a +2 *momentum* modifier to your Accuracy with a club. If you hit with a club this round, gain 2 Fight.

*Fail:* you *stagger*. Next round you can't act. This counts against your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Club Rhythm*—do 2d6+1 Damage. In addition, for the remainder of your interval or until you spend a round not acting, you get the effect of Powerful Swing (+2 *momentum* to Accuracy, and 2 Fight on a hit, when using a club.)

*Smash*—do 2d6+1 Damage and your enemy is stunned for a round, losing their next action. This does not count against their interval. Your enemy also suffers a -1 *stunned* penalty to their Defense (max -1) until they next act.

**Club, Huge**

-1 Accuracy/2d10 Damage

**[Two-Handed Weapon]**

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Huge clubs include both finely-made great clubs and any great big battering devices that only a martial artist could wield. You're basically pummeling your enemies with a tree. Huge clubs have a tendency to get stuck in walls and crevices and to exhaust you—either way, you'll occasionally need a substantial breather between blows.

Huge clubs have the following special feature:

***Mighty Swing***: if you didn't act last round, or if this is the first round of the fight, you have +2 *momentum* to your Accuracy with a huge club. If you hit with a huge club this round, gain 5 Fight.

*Fail*: you *stagger* and cannot act for two rounds. These rounds do not count against your interval. You can spend one Exemplar Die to negate this failure mode.

*Epic Moves:*

*Wind Up*—do no damage and gain 5 Fight. Your next hit with a huge club in this interval will do 35 Damage. If *that* hit is an epic move, you may choose between the normal epic move options or just dealing 50 Damage.

*Smash*—do 2d10 damage and your enemy is stunned for a round, losing their next action. This does not count against their interval. Your enemy also suffers a -1 *stunned* penalty to their Defense (max -1) until they next act.

## Defensive Offhand

[One-Handed Weapon]

Defensive off-hands include shields, sword-catchers, and weird wheel-like devices. Their purpose is to make you a little harder to hit.

Defensive off-hands have the following special feature:

**Supplementary Weapon:** defensive off-hands are supplements to your weapon or style and are not a weapon or style of their own. You may wield a defensive off-hand and another weapon simultaneously, but must be proficient with at least one of them. When you start wielding a defensive offhand, take a -1 *off balance* to your Accuracy (max -3) until the end of your interval and add a +1 *block* to your Defense (max +1) until you stop wielding the defensive offhand. While wielding the offhand you also gain the epic move option, *Shelter*, below; you may use this instead of your weapon's normal epic move options.

### Epic Moves:

**Shelter**—gain 10 temporary Fight (max +10). Until your interval ends, if an ally within Short Range of you is hit, you may immediately give them up to 10 of your temporary Fight (max +10), sheltering them with your shield or defensive technique. Transfer this Fight before Damage is rolled or applied. You may only transfer temporary Fight you actually have.

## Fighting Chain

+0 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Fighting chains are flexible weapons that move in patterns that are difficult for enemies to predict. You can use this Weapon to represent any similarly sinuous weapon, such as a whip or a many-sectioned staff.

Fighting chains have the following special features:

**Terrain Control:** when an enemy moves into Melee Range of you, you may attack them immediately with the fighting chain. You must be able to act but it doesn't *use* your action—it's just something that you get to do.  
*You may use this power twice per round.*

*Fail:* your weapon is *tangled*. You can't attack with the fighting chain again until your interval ends!

*Epic Moves:*

*Disarm*—do 2d6 Damage and take an enemy's weapon or weapons away—you knock them away, tangle them up, or steal them. On their next action they must switch to an unarmed style or to no Weapon. They cannot use either the disarmed weapons or any identical weapons until their next interval. This does not affect any unarmed styles they were wielding, and so it has no effect at all if the only Weapon they were using was an unarmed style.

*Mobility*—make up to three normal moves, ignoring terrain control and any obstacle that swinging around on a fighting chain might let you circumvent. You don't need a place to stand until the last move—you can move straight up a cliff, for instance, as long as you can reach the top.

**Fighting Sticks**

+0 Accuracy/1d10 Damage

**[Two One-Handed Weapons]**

(-1 Promptness, +1 Defense)

Fighting sticks are paired short lengths of wood. They promote a flashy and opportunistic fighting style that doesn't commit against any given enemy until there's a good chance to pin that enemy's weapon out of the way and beat them up.

*Fail:* you *let an attack through*. The GM chooses an enemy who is in range of you and would be able to attack you with their next action. That enemy can make an immediate, free attack against you with a +2 *flashy* bonus (max +2) to their Accuracy.

*Epic Moves:*

*Spinning Defense*—do 1d10 Damage, and then deal 1 Damage each to up to seven different enemies within Melee Range. Gain 25 temporary Fight (max 25) for one round. You lose all your temporary Fight at the beginning of your next action, whether or not you can act and whether or not that temporary Fight came from *Spinning Defense*.

*Seven Enemy Dance*—do 1d10 Damage and attack up to six more enemies in Melee Range with your fighting sticks. Ignore failure mode and epic moves on these attacks. You may attack each enemy only once.

*Weapon Pin*—do 1d10 Damage and pin the enemy's weapon, giving them a -5 *pinned weapon* penalty to their Damage (max -5). This penalty lasts until the next round in which you do not Damage that enemy with the fighting sticks, whether because you missed them, chose not to attack them, or could not act.

### Freaky Martial Arts Weapons

+0 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Defense)

Freaky martial arts weapons are crazy things that nobody in their right mind would wield. At least, not in the real world. Even in the game, though, use these stats when a weapon is so silly, bizarre, or difficult to use that the only purpose in using it is showing off how cool your fighting style is. Weapons on the borderline (such as war fans) should use the freaky martial arts weapon template if the PC uses them to show off, but a customized weapon setup made by the player and GM if the PC uses them in earnest.

*Fail: you screw up.* Your interval ends immediately. You don't have to pay an Exemplar Die to start the next interval if you humbly switch to a more manageable weapon when you do.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Show Off Your Stuff*—you gain a +2 *flashy* modifier to your Accuracy and Damage (max +2) until you next *fail*. This can extend past the current interval: a few rounds of showing off your freaky martial arts weapons moves can theoretically benefit you for the rest of the fight.

## Knife

+1 Accuracy/1d10 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Knives are nasty weapons for close and dirty fighting. They're sharp and precise and can do a lot of damage, but the short reach is problematic in a serious fight. The knife-fighting rules here are meant to suggest a cunning and roguish style; if you want to be an upright and noble knife fighter, consider building a new Weapon with your GM.

*Fail:* you're too close! The enemy you're attacking can ignore your Defense (as if your total Defense was 0) on their next attack. They still need to roll well enough to hit twice your actual Defense to earn an epic move from "rolling twice what they need." Their attack will certainly hit unless they attack someone else or fail.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Low Blow*—do 25 Damage, but you can't act next round.

*Mark the Target*—do 1d10 Damage. Add a +5 *focus* modifier to your knife damage against that target for the rest of your interval (max +15).

*Skip Back*—do 1d10 Damage and move your normal move, ignoring terrain control.

## Sword, One-Handed

+1 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Swords are functional, expressive weapons. Many martial styles have their truest expression in a sword form, which captures the vision, insight, passion, natural-world emulation, or virtuous core of what the style is about; for this reason, swords are a favorite weapon of the diligent student.

*Fail:* you're off balance. Take a -1 *off balance* to your Accuracy (max -3) until the end of your interval.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Rigorous Form*—do 2d6 Damage and gain 5 Fight.

*Sword Rhythm*—do 2d6 Damage, recover from any *off balance* or *opening* penalty, and extend the length of this interval by 2.

### Sword, Two-Handed

-1 Accuracy/2d10 Damage

### [Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Some martial artists favor massive swords. When they perfect their balance and inner peace, even a thousand-pound greatsword becomes as flexible as a fan and light as a feather in their hands.

*Fail*: you're off balance. Take a -1 *off balance* to your Accuracy (max -3) until the end of your interval.

#### *Epic Moves*:

*Light as a Feather*—do 5 Damage and gain a +2 *sword lightening* modifier to Accuracy (max +2) and a +1 *sword lightening* modifier to Defense (max +1), both only while wielding a two-handed sword, for the rest of the interval.

*Sword Rhythm*—do 2d10 Damage, recover from any *off balance* or *opening* penalty, and extend the length of this interval by 1.

### Swords, Dual-Wielded

+0 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

### [Two One-Handed Weapons]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Defense)

Certain fluid styles are best performed with a sword in each hand. Freed of the necessity to make and parry every strike with a single weapon, the two-sword stylist can flow smoothly through the field of battle, striking as they will.

*Fail*: you're off balance. Take a -1 *off balance* to your Accuracy (max -3) until the end of your interval.

#### *Epic Moves*:

*Sword Dance*—do 2d6 Damage and add a +1 *sword balance* to your Defense (max +3) for the rest of the interval while you are wielding one or two one-handed swords. You may move your normal distance, ignoring terrain control.

*Sword Rhythm*—do 2d6 Damage, recover from any *off balance* or *opening* penalty, and extend the length of this interval by 2.

## Examples of Weapon Use

### Nix Hedrine Valentine vs. Bao Zuzao

Nix is a roaming swordswoman and investigator. She saves people from their troubles, then hits them up for cash. She wears a banana leaf hat. Today she's tracked down a kidnapper, *Bao Zuzao*, and his kidnap victim Levin Blake. She doesn't waste time on negotiating with the kidnapper: she shouts, "Get away from him, Blake!" and rolls in with a one-handed sword drawn.

She starts with an interval of *Helpful + to the Deserving*.

For her, this is 4.

### Round 1: PCs

She rolls to attack with her sword. Bao Zuzao's Defense is 8. Nix's sword has an Accuracy of +1, but it looks like that won't help her much today: a roll of 7 will *fail*, and a roll of 8-10 will hit. On the other hand, it gives her a bit of breathing room to take a single off balance penalty without losing anything.

Her roll turns out to be 1.

The other players haven't arrived yet, so the GM decides that a couple of NPCs can assist—Nix's teacher and Levin Blake. On Levin's behalf, the GM rolls a 9; on the teacher's behalf, a 1! The teacher *chains*. Since this is an NPC helping and acting as a PC, the GM could create the flashback or let the player do so; in this case, the GM passes the burden off to Nix's player, who offers:

*"Remember, grasshopper! The pointy end goes in the enemy!"*

*It was a cold day. It was a rainy day.*

*It was like someone smeared gray paint all over the sky, and the shadows, and the ground, as they practiced there. She'd been trying to hit the spry old man for the past 68 hours and hadn't touched him once.*

*"Screw you," Nix said, flailing at him one last time, and falling down into the mud.*

Nix would have succeeded even without the teacher's help, so she pulls off an epic move. She settles for double damage, in this case, rolling 4d6 for a total of 11 points.

It is not enough!

Bao Zuzao is the kind of evil bandit who needs 20 Damage to defeat!

## Round 1: NPCs

The GM decides that Levin is not strong enough to do anything terribly interesting—that might change if he has a heroic moment or something, but right now he just stumbles away. The GM moves on to handling the enemy, Bao Zuzao.

Bao Zuzao starts an interval of length 4—if he were a fully detailed NPC he would pick a strategy such as *Fierce + to your Enemies*, but since he's just a stepping stone on her path to her next meal, the GM is just assigning him an interval length. That said, the GM does need to decide what he's doing. In this case, it's drawing a nasty-looking one-handed axe (with Brawling readied in his "other hand") and hitting back.

Nix is a *diligent student* with a base Defense of 8. One-handed swords don't add anything to this. Bao Zuzao is using a one-handed axe, with a +1 Accuracy that puts him in exactly the same position as Nix: a 7 *fails*, while an 8-10 is more than enough to succeed.

He rolls a 9 and hits, then deals 2d6 Damage to her Fight: 5 points.

Nix is a warrior with 60 Fight, so she's not even troubled. There's a thin trickle of blood down one arm, but while she's at 55 Fight still, he's already down to 9.

The next round begins.

## Round 2

Nix's teacher *chained*, so Levin can assist her on this roll—

But Nix rolls a 7. This triggers her weapon's *failure mode*, lowering her Accuracy by 1 until the end of her interval. More importantly, it means that there's no point in assisting her. Levin rolls anyway, getting a 3 and making her total roll 10, but she's still failed, so she still misses.

Bao Zuzao rolls a 3, which isn't enough to hit her.

### Round 3

Nix rolls a 9. She hits, and does 10 more points of Damage. Bao Zuzao is down! He challenges her to a Promptness roll to see if she beats him before or "after" his action in this round. She rolls a 5, he rolls a 1.

The GM tries to roll assistance, but Nix's player reminds the GM that you don't use assistance on Promptness rolls. That means that Nix has won: in one smooth iaijutsu move, she's taken Bao Zuzao out, and he doesn't start reacting until after she's put her weapon away and moved some distance off. Then he flails, once, and falls down.

Nix has completed the encounter (at a cost of 5 Fight) and gains a point of Exemplar Pool. She goes over to Levin and checks whether he's all right. "That bandit may think he can profit by holding you for ransom," she says. "But a reliable warrior knows the best way to profit from a child is to return them to their parents!"

This is a poor moral for this story, so she doesn't bother spending a point of Exemplar Pool to cement it in the annals of the game.

### Hinda meets Arcadie on the Moor

A long time ago, Hinda and Arcadie Wetherin were sisters.

"Even if you're adopted," Arcadie promised. "You'll always be my little sister! And I'll take care of you, and you'll be at my side, and we'll stand together against the world!"

Then Hinda found out the reason for her adoption—that the Baron and Baroness Wetherin had slain her parents. They wouldn't explain when she challenged them, and Arcadie made the mistake of telling Hinda that the Baron must have had good reason.

They didn't see each other for twelve years.

Then they met on the moor, and Hinda's face was pale, fey and distant, and she was scarcely older than on the night she left, and she held the six-hook yin-yang kite-sword in her hands.

"I've learned so much," she said, "and from a terrible master."

"Oh, Hinda!" said Arcadie.

But she would not get the chance to save Hinda before they fought.

## Round 1: Who Goes First?

Hinda and Arcadie are both PCs, so we'll start with a Promptness roll. Hinda is wielding a freaky martial arts weapon, and rolls a 1. Arcadie is currently wielding no Weapon (it's not that she *couldn't* be wielding Brawling or an unarmed style even while out walking on the moor, but it's not her style.) She rolls a 2, which is enough to get the first move.

## Round 1: Arcadie

Arcadie isn't intimidated by Hinda's manner. She decides to start off an interval with *Attentive + to Your Family*. But since the rules for doing non-combat things in combat won't show up for many pages, the GM tells her, "It's probably best to subdue her before you try to get anything out of her."

"OK!" says Arcadie.

She goes for *Helpful + to Your Family*, instead, which for Arcadie is 6, hops back with her skirt and sleeves flaring, and seizes up a large fallen tree branch (using the *Club* weapon) to wield. It takes her a moment to pick it up, and she lets the momentum from heaving it off the ground carry her forward in an assault.

"It's reactions like this," Hinda says, "that caused such difficulty in our relationship."

Hinda is *the empathic one* with a base Defense of 7.

Her *freaky martial arts weapon* adds +1, so her total Defense is 8.

Arcadie has an Accuracy of +0, with a *powerful swing* modifier of +2. She doesn't actually have proficiency with a club, so the outcomes on her die roll look like this:

- 1 – chance for *assistance*, probably from NPCs;
- 2-5 – *miss*
- 6 – hit
- 7-8 – *fail*
- 9 – hit
- 10 – epic move

She rolls a 7, and *fails*. She *staggers*, probably spinning completely in a circle or something, and won't be able to act on round 2.

## Round 1: Hinda

Hinda assumes her battle stance. "Fear the awesome power of the six-hook yin-yang kite-sword!" she says. She picks *Fierce + to your Enemies*, with total 4, as the basis of her interval, and opts to make her attack roll before describing how the weapon actually works. This will let her inflect her description based upon the outcome.

Arcadie is *the budding hero*, with a base Defense of 7.

Arcadie's weapon has +0 Defense, and Hinda's weapon has +0 Accuracy, so the outcome space for Hinda's roll looks like this:

- 1 – chance for *assistance*, probably from NPCs;
- 2-6 – *miss*
- 7 – *fail*
- 8-9 – hit
- 10 – epic move

She rolls a 5 and misses.

"I wave my sword at you and a thing like a hooked paper streamer reels out at you. It lands lifelessly next to you on the moor."

## Round 2: Arcadie

Arcadie cannot act. She has four rounds left on her interval.

## Round 2: Hinda

Hinda tries again. This time she rolls a 10, earning an *epic move*.

"I'm manipulating the weapon's dancing head with wires. The streamer dances up. It has something like the face of a dragon at the end. It hisses and the weapon explodes around you—metal-mesh-reinforced origami streamers, tipped with hooks, swirling around you like cherry blossoms on the wind! Who could stand before this terrible onslaught?"

She claims a +2 *flashy* bonus on Accuracy and Damage until she next *fails*.

### Round 3: Arcadie

Arcadie laughs. "Oh my God! You're awesome, Hinda! If I don't take you out fast I could even die!"

She didn't act last round, so she has the effect of *powerful swing* again—  
But she rolls a 3, and it doesn't help.

### Round 3: Hinda

Hinda now has a +2 to Accuracy from her flashy martial arts. This means her possible rolls look like this:

- 1 – chance for *assistance*, probably from NPCs;
- 2-4 – *miss*
- 5-6 – hit
- 7 – *fail*
- 8-9 – hit
- 10 – epic move

She too rolls a 3. The GM declares, "Clearly, you two had one of those freeze-frame action shots where you look really cool but nothing happens."

### Round 4: Arcadie

Arcadie no longer has *powerful swing*. That means that she needs an 8 to hit Hinda, and, since she's not proficient with a club, she effectively needs 9:

- 1 – chance for *assistance*, probably from NPCs;
- 2-6 – *miss*

- 7-8 – *fail*
- 9 – hit
- 10 – epic move

The dice, sadly, appear to be stuck, as she rolls a 3 again.  
She has two actions left on her interval.

#### Round 4: Hinda

This is the last round of Hinda's interval, and she rolls a 9. This is enough to hit Arcadie, and deal 2d6 Damage (+2 from her *flashy* modifier)—

"You won't be laughing when I rip you apart!"

She rolls a total of 13 Damage. This is assessed against Arcadie's Fight.

Arcadie isn't really a warrior, so she only has the default 50 Fight—which means she has 37 left.

#### Round 5: Arcadie

Arcadie's player shakes the die quite a bit, chiding it for not letting her hit even once. "It's not that I want to beat up my dear sister," she says. "It's just, she's so stubborn!"

The die, which is not persuaded, rolls a 5.

#### Round 5: Hinda

Hinda has run out of interval, so she takes a round to reorient. She's just a bit shocked, her player thinks, by the sight of Arcadie's wound.

#### Round 6: Arcadie

This time, and on the very last round of her interval, Arcadie rolls a 10.

"This is a fight!" she says. "You can't be shocked by seeing a little blood! Where's your spirit, Hinda?"

She has the following epic moves available:

- *Combat Stunt*. She could deal 2d6+1 Damage and then borrow some cool epic move from another weapon in lesser form. It'd be funny to borrow "flashy" and see if the GM would let her have, e.g., a +1 flashy bonus; but she can't think of any way to describe that to make it cool as well as funny, so she doesn't. She also doesn't have anything in particular that she wants to do that another weapon could, so she passes up this option.
- *Extraordinary Stunt*. She could deal 2d6+1 Damage and do something neat that would usually be an extraordinary roll.
- *Powerful Attack*. She could slam Hinda for 4d6+2 damage, or about 16 points' worth, evening up the battle.
- *Club Rhythm*. She could deal 2d6+1 Damage and gain the effect of *powerful swing* every round for the rest of her interval. Her interval ends as soon as she finishes this action, though, so this is useless!
- *Smash*. She could deal 2d6+1 Damage and stun Hinda for a round. This is a little bit interesting to Arcadie, since she knows *she'll* spend next round reorienting. But it's not like the fight is so close to its end that a round of disadvantage is a pressing problem.

Arcadie decides to go for *extraordinary stunt*. "I want my style to mesh so well with hers as I catch up the streamers with the branch and then hit her that it's like a 2-success Attentive stunt."

The GM thinks, and says: "It's up to Hinda how much that affects her."

"Of course!" Arcadie says.

"Then do it!"

Arcadie rolls a total of 8 Damage against Hinda's Fight.

## Round 6: Hinda

"We can't be friends again," Hinda says. "My master wouldn't accept it!"

She spends an Exemplar Die and starts a new 5-action interval based on *Reliable + to your Teachers*. She tosses aside the freaky martial arts weapon, which is tangled about Arcadie's improvised club, and draws a sorrowful sword and knife. She starts by wielding the sword, thinking that when Arcadie has 25 Fight left she can switch to the knife to finish her off.

Hinda's sword has +1 Accuracy, and she still has the benefit of *flashy*. So her outcome space looks like this:

- 1 – chance for *assistance*, probably from NPCs;
- 2-3 – *miss*
- 4-6 – hit
- 7 – *fail*
- 8-9 – hit
- 10 – epic move

It's beginning to look to the players as if Arcadie's confidence is dangerously misplaced—

But Hinda rolls a 7, and everything changes.

First, because she's *failed*, she loses the benefit of *flashy*. She's also *off balance*—instead of a total of +3 Accuracy, she's down to +0.

*I guess she's getting to me*, Hinda thinks, but what she says is:

"Don't think I'll fight that way if you'll enjoy it!"

#### Round 7: Arcadie

It's Arcadie's turn to spend a round to reorient. Her player expresses her thoughts as:

"This whole 'beat her up to save her' thing—

I just realized, it only works if I can beat her up!"

#### Round 7: Hinda

"I never liked you!" Hinda says, lashing out with the sword. "I have to kill you! Don't you understand?"

She rolls a 5, and misses.

#### Round 8: Arcadie

Arcadie recovers her poise. "Of course I can beat her up," she realizes. "I'm her older sister!"

She picks up the discarded martial arts weapon.

"Look!" she says. "We're the same!"

She starts a new six-round *Helpful + to your Family* interval.

Then, even though it's a very bad idea, she uses the six-hook yin-yang kite-sword to attack!

She rolls a 2, which even her player has to concede is probably about right.

### Round 8: Hinda

Hinda scores a 10, giving her the opportunity to use one of the sword's epic moves. She calculates that a double-Damage 4d6 attack will probably bring Arcadie down into range of the knife's Low Blow, but then she realizes that there's something far more appropriate: a combat stunt based on the fighting chain's *disarm* move to stop her puffed-up older sister from casually using the six-hook yin-yang kite-sword that she'd spent years learning how to use with her wicked and magical master under the moors.

She deals 2d6 Damage, which in this case turns out to be a terribly low 3, and knocks the kite-sword from her sister's hands.

"Don't touch that!" she howls.

The GM rules that the "weaker" form of disarm, in this case, will allow Arcadie to switch to either Brawling or back to the club at no cost at all in Fight. Also, if Arcadie *really* wants to use the kite-sword again, she'll be able to do so in round 10.

Arcadie shakes her wounded hand, and is down to 34 Fight. She shrugs and picks the tree branch up again.

### Round 9: Arcadie

The fight must be heating up, because Arcadie returns fire with a 10 of her own. She opts for *Club Rhythm*. She deals 9 Damage. Hinda's taken a total of 17 Fight, leaving her with 33—for the first time, Arcadie has an edge!

She has four rounds of interval left.

### Round 9: Hinda

"Why is randomness not working?" Hinda's player asks, as she rolls a 10 for the third epic move in a row.

"It's the inexorable workings of destiny," the GM answers, as if to deny any charges that there is a button the GM can press under the table to determine what the outcome of a given roll shall be. The GM also croups roulette on the weekends so this suspicion is important to allay.

Hinda picks 4d6 Damage as her move. Just as Arcadie's getting into her rhythm, the sword goes into her chest and out the other side—16 Damage, bringing Arcadie down to 17, and blood bubbling from the corner of her mouth.

Hinda has one round of interval left.

### Round 10: Arcadie

Arcadie rolls a 4. Even with *club rhythm* and with Hinda no longer using a defensive weapon, it's not enough—she misses.

"Hey," she says, staggering a little. "Hey."

### Round 10: Hinda

Hinda has to spend 2 Fight to change to the knife. This isn't a large cost, but she takes a moment to think about it—this is the last round of her interval, so she'll have a chance to change weapons for "free" shortly. On the other hand, if she switches weapons and rolls a 10, she wins the fight—and the 10% chance of that is worth more to her than 2 Fight.

So she changes to her knife, and is down to 31 Fight.

She'd like to bring it up in a nasty cut to Arcadie's stomach. Instead she rolls a 2.

"I guess I kind of look at it in my hand," Hinda's player says. "As if to say, 'wait, what am I doing?'"

### Round 11: Arcadie

"That's a mean thing to do to your older sister," Arcadie says.

She spits blood to the side, then pulls the club around in one great sweep. She rolls a 5. With *club rhythm*, that's enough to hit.

She's now up to 19 Fight—in theory, she's regaining momentum.

She rolls 10 points of Damage against Hinda, who's down to 21.

The branch cracks hard against Hinda's side and breaks two ribs.

"I don't like this," Arcadie's player says. "It's making me feel like I'm not really helping her."

"That's the problem with breaking somebody's ribs," the GM agrees.

#### Round 11: Hinda

Hinda reorients.

#### Round 12: Arcadie

"Just? Let's rest, OK?"

And the branch comes around, and Arcadie's crying a little, and the dice roll comes up 9. So that's another 2 points of healing for Arcadie and another 6 points of Damage on Hinda.

She has one round of interval left.

She's at 21 Fight, and Hinda's at 15.

Her player's planning to give up after this interval—to just drop the club and turn away. It's going through her mind. It's going to be sad and tragic and cool.

#### Round 12: Hinda

"You're a demon," says Hinda. "A demon."

She doesn't want to kill Arcadie any more. But she still wants to beat her. She doesn't want this to end with her proving that all the time she spent working to be good enough to take on the Wetherins was useless.

So she spends an Exemplar Die she doesn't have and starts a new *Fierce + to your Enemies* interval.

Then she attacks Arcadie with the knife.

It's a *Low Blow*.

She does 25 Damage.

Arcadie looks at her, her mouth opening and closing. She makes a Promptness roll to determine whether she can get in one last action. She doesn't succeed.

"Hinda?" she asks; and falls down.

# Melee Weapons in the Dreaming Waters

For the most part **Dreaming Waters** uses the standard selection of melee weapons provided by the **Filial Piety Action System**. In addition characters may use the setting-specific weapons below.

## Angel Reaper

+0 Accuracy/2d10 Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -1 Defense)

The angel reaper is a brutal and top-heavy scythe, invented by human heroes for angelic use during the first Sunfall. The angel advances in the manner of a berserker; to retreat, they beat their wings and flutter backwards to balance out the momentum of the blade. The former motion is intimidating, the latter deceptive—angel reaper style pushes and pulls enemies strategically around the battlefield. The *tumbling flight* move is a winged charge that uses the weight of the scythe to make the angel's flight unpredictable.

The angel reaper has the following special feature:

**Push:** when you move between Ranges, enemies within *Melee Range* of you that do not move with you suffer 3 points of *Damage* as a terrain control effect.

**Fail:** you drive your target in a direction they were going anyway. They make a normal move, ignoring terrain control.

### *Epic Moves:*

**Deceptive Movement**—do 2d10 *Damage*. Make a normal move, ignoring terrain control; if you move between Ranges, the target must move with you if they can.

**Tumbling Flight**—do 2d10 *Damage*. Make one or two normal moves, ignoring terrain control. If there is a different enemy now in *Range*, deal 2d10 *Damage* to one such enemy.

### Brass Knuckles

+0 Accuracy/1d10 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Brass knuckles are a classic melee weapon of the dreaming waters. They're designed to amplify the force of a punch. You can use either this Weapon or a large club to simulate a baseball bat.

*Fail:* you hurt your hand, but it's not serious. Lose 2 Fight and you can't use the brass knuckles Weapon to attack next round.

#### *Epic Moves:*

*Brutal Beating*—until the end of their interval, the target takes an amount of Spirit Damage equal to their physical Damage taken. Deal 1d10 Damage and Spirit Damage to that target now.

*Clip their Wings*—deal 1d10 Damage. Your target cannot use their normal move on their next action. They may still use other forms of movement, such as free movement from an epic move and moving with other characters. If you hit the enemy next round, you may apply *Clip their Wings* again, even if you don't roll an epic move—it's possible to keep an enemy locked down until the end of your interval.

### Shock Weapon

+0 Accuracy/1d10 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Shock weapons include electrified cattle prods and various short-range stun guns. Cultists of Lightning and human police officers are the most likely characters to have possession of and training with this weapon.

*Fail:* your enemy has the opportunity to twist the weapon and use it against you. They make a free attack roll against you as if using the shock weapon, applying its Accuracy, Damage, Promptness, Defense, failure mode, and epic moves.

*Epic Moves:*

*Brutal Shock*—until the end of their interval, the target takes an amount of Spirit Damage equal to their physical Damage taken. Deal 1d10 Damage and Spirit Damage to that target now.

*Immobilize*—deal 1d10 Damage and immobilize your enemy. They are convulsing and unable to act until you change weapons, make an attack on someone else, are no longer in Melee Range of the enemy, or they break free. Each round they roll d10+their Defense, and break free on a total of 12+. Rounds of immobilization do not count against their interval.

# Dreaming Waters:

## Additional Melee Examples

### Two Children, Near Siskery

Eida and Lin are practicing at swords, and Eida wins the Promptness roll to act first.

#### Round 1: Eida

Eida begins a 4 round *Attentive + to your Teachers* interval. She's going for Attentive because she's trying to practice the way her teachers taught her, with a key focus on learning rather than winning.

That's probably for the best, since she starts out with a 7 and is instantly off balance.

#### Round 1: Lin

Lin is a lean angelic youth with a bit of fire in his eyes. He's going for a 5 round *Fierce + to the Wicked* Interval—not against Eida, but against imaginary demons and monsters which she's standing in for. Whack! Whack! Whack! goes his sword against hers, at least in theory.

He rolls an 8! And deals 7 Damage to those imaginary demons.

#### Round 2: Eida

"Hey!" Eida says. "That's not how you're supposed to do it!"

But she rolls a 3.

#### Round 2: Lin

Whack! Lin rolls a 6. His practice sword is a well-balanced weapon with +1 Accuracy, so it saves him from an embarrassing miss—

Another 9 points of Damage to those demons!

"How much is this actually hurting *me*?" Eida's player asks.

"Well," says the GM, "he's going to 'win' if he gets to 20, but I think you'll probably only be down 5 Fight or so since it's just a practice duel. Less if you win."

### Round 3: Eida

Eida rallies, rolling a 9 and gaining 8 points of Progress. She falls into the proper rhythm of things, like her teacher talked about!

### Round 3: Lin

Now Lin rolls a 10!

The demon's sword flies out of her hands! He spins, an imaginary camera zooming in on him on slow motion. Then he stabs up in a long thrust against the defenseless enemy—

"LIN!" snaps Eida.

He stops the attack, gaining one Exemplar Die as her practice sword lands clattering against a tree. He leans, panting, on his weapon.

A shadow falls over them.

## A Cultist, Near Siskery

"I am Lightning," whispers Farren Koy. "I am shattering. I am death."

He tilts his head from one side to the other, cracking his neck.

He grins down from his hidden tree-perch at a warrior of Siskery; and then with his wings unfurling like a thunder, he descends.

### Round 1: Farren Koy

His weapon is a shock weapon. He has personal skill with it, a Knack that increases his Accuracy. His target is a patrolling Siskery warrior with a base Defense of 7, wielding an angel reaper, which has -1 Defense.

So his outcome space is:

- 1 – chance for *assistance* from Lightning;
- 2-4 – *miss*
- 5-6 – hit
- 7 – *fail*
- 8-9 – hit
- 10 – epic move, presumably *Immobilize*.

He rolls a 6 and deals 8 Damage.

#### Round 1: Sangryuk, Warrior of Siskery

His target turns and lashes out at him, rolling a 3 and failing utterly.

#### Round 2: Farren Koy

Farren rolls a 6 again and another 8 Damage. He needs 20 to demolish the Siskery angel.

#### Round 2: Sangryuk, Warrior of Siskery

Dizzy from the shock and pain, the angel can't muster an attack. He rolls a 2.

#### Round 3: Farren Koy

Farren rolls an 8 to hit and another 6 Damage.

The angel slumps.

"Heh," says Farren. "And I didn't even manage a clean shock."

He kicks the fallen angel, cleans his weapon on their shirt, and starts to walk away.

Something is behind him.

Something is behind him, and he turns—

# Filial Piety Action System: Range, Movement, and Terrain Control

Characters don't always stand in a convenient clump slugging at one another with melee weapons. Often a battle is a highly mobile affair, and characters will spread out across many locations.

In some fights, this will happen, but it won't really matter.

The *conflict* will be interesting enough to justify the detailed action resolution system, but *issues of range* won't be important. In cases like that, the GM should just handwave movement—treating it as a pacing device that occasionally forces PCs or enemies to take an extra round or two, now and again, to move about.

In other fights, motion will be part of what's interesting about a fight. Tactical considerations involving range will come heavily into play. In those cases, the **Filial Piety Action System** presents the tactical battlefield below: abstract enough that you shouldn't have to track movement on a grid, but tactical enough that movement matters. In short, the goal is to keep as much tactical depth as possible while eliminating the bookkeeping of a physical map.

## Elementary Ranges

The **Filial Piety Action System** considers the people, terrain features, and various objective-related things on the field of battle to be at one of the following ranges from any given character:

- *Melee*, or, actively engaged in melee;
- *Short*, or, within a typical range of incidental movement in a duel;
- *Medium*, or, a loose tactical range between short and long;
- *Long*, or, a bit troublesome to get to while fighting;
- *Very Long*, or, within range for bows and the like; and
- *Inaccessible*, or, too far away to interact with. In some cases, shouting and shining lights may allow limited communication at this range.

These are tactical ranges, so in a non-combat situation it's possible for the GM to fudge them or to use the *Scaling Up* rules below—expanding or condensing the Range set to fit the scope of the conflict. For instance, if you're chasing an enemy across the countryside, then you could replace "Melee" with "closed in."

In each round, you can make a "normal" move in addition to your rolled action, either before or after you act. To do this, you pick some target that is on the battlefield—something that you want to reach.

Then you move in its direction.

The default assumption is that if you are unopposed—if no enemies stand between you and that destination, if no enemies care that you travel there, if they wish to let you pass or move with you there—you may move to any point in Very Long Range in a single move. You may reduce its range as much as you want—for instance, you can go to Medium Range of a target at Long Range, or bring it all the way into Short or Melee Range. Alternately, you may move in the direction of any Inaccessible point and bring it substantially closer.

If you *are* opposed, then enemies can constrain your movements a bit.

## Constrained Action

Melee Range is considered to mean that you're "at" or "with" somebody or something. To be on a house's roof is to be in Melee Range of that roof. Every enemy that's also on that roof is in Melee Range of the roof, and you, and each other enemy there.

When an enemy is in *Melee Range* and able to act, they can constrain your motion. They also have the option not to do so, if they want to let you move. If they elect to constrain their motion this limits you to what is called "Short Range Mobility."

In this state you can still use a single normal move to move to something at Short Range—to move from Short Range into Melee Range of any Short-Range target. However, you can't move up to things at Medium or higher Range that easily. More precisely,

- It takes one move to move from Short to Melee Range;
- it takes two moves to move from Medium to Short Range;
- it takes four moves to move from Long to Medium Range; and
- it takes eight moves to move from Very Long to Long Range

of whatever your destination might be.

If you're constrained in this fashion, it might take you as much as fifteen moves to cross the entire battlefield.

### Medium Range Mobility

There are also corresponding concepts of Medium, Long, and Very Long Range Mobility. When an enemy is in *Short Range*, and can act, and wishes to limit your mobility, they can control your ability to move—just not to the same degree.

You have "Medium Range Mobility," which means:

- it takes one move to move from Medium to any shorter Range;
- it takes two moves to move from Long to Medium Range; and
- it takes four moves to move from Very Long to Long Range

of whatever your destination might be.

If you're constrained in this fashion, it might take you as much as seven moves to cross the entire battlefield.

### Long Range Mobility

When there is an enemy within *Medium Range* who can act and wishes to limit your mobility, they can limit you to Long Range Mobility—

- it takes one move to move from Long to any shorter Range; and
- it takes two moves to move from Very Long to Long Range

of whatever your destination might be.

### Very Long Range Mobility

Enemies within *Long Range* do not constrain you very much. However, if they can act, and wish to limit your mobility, they may limit you to *Very Long Range Mobility*—

- it takes one move to move from Very Long Range to any shorter Range;
- the GM might put "Inaccessible" places a little farther away.

## Breaking Free of Constraint

Characters may give up their Progress/Damage roll to try to "break free" of their current level of Mobility, restoring their ability to move to any point on the battlefield with a single move. This is a roll of  $d10 + \text{their Defense}$ . No one may assist, and there are no epic moves or failures. This roll is opposed by  $d10 +$  the highest *Promptness* of any enemy that might wish to pin them down.

If the character does not succeed in breaking free, up to five enemies who were constraining them may make a free attack. The GM chooses which enemies receive this benefit, but it only applies to enemies able to reach the character with their attacks.

## The Transitive Battlefield

The tactical battlefield in the **Filial Piety Action System** looks a little like a Russian doll—inside the circle that is "Very Long Range," you'll find a bunch of non-overlapping circles marked as "Long Range," and inside those, circles marked as "Medium" (and then Short, and then Melee) Range. Inside each of those circles, characters move around as tactical considerations require; occasionally, they jump between circles. The circles define the space in which a clump of warriors fights: a group of brawlers in Melee Range are moving around within a Melee-Range circle, for instance. It's a circle because

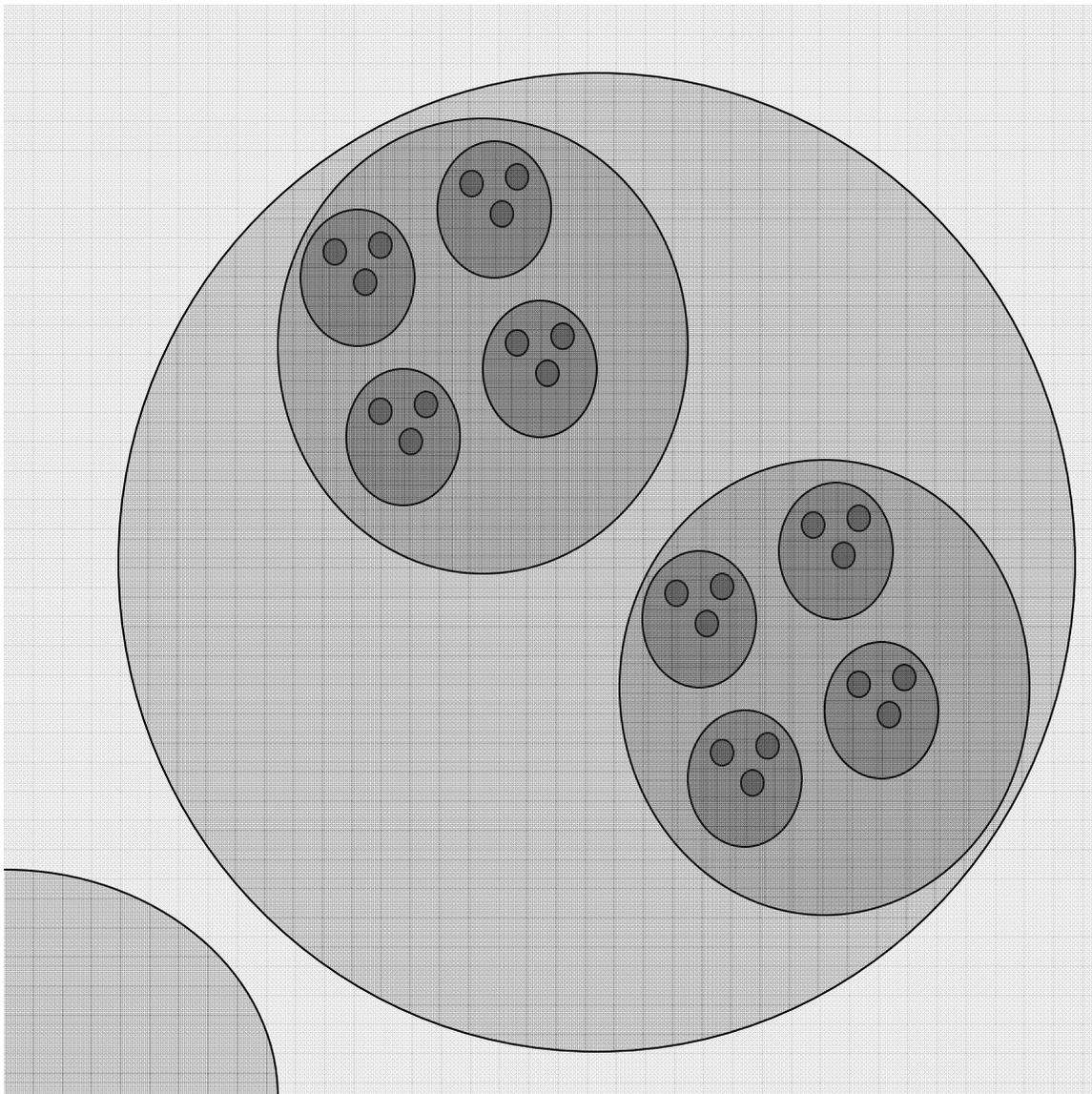
they're all in Melee Range of one another—until one breaks off and moves to some other point at range, they're all basically equidistant.

The circle that corresponds to Melee Range is a scrum—a clump in which everyone could in theory hit everyone else. It's not a *requirement* that the characters there be circling one another, moving around, and lashing out occasionally at unexpected targets—but it is always an *option*. The major features of terrain in Melee Range are the fighters themselves.

The circle that corresponds to Short Range is the setting for the fight. It has terrain features. You won't always take specific note of them, but they're there—for instance, in a rooftop battle, a Short Range circle will contain points of interest like "an awning," "a chimney," "the roof of the complaining baker's house." When the GM invents a new location in a combat example, we'll usually capitalize or italicize it—the Lonely Cubicle, e.g., or *the low air above the houses*. This is to emphasize that these are defined locations (circles of their own) on the tactical map—not spatial continua.

Just like with Melee Range, to be in Short Range of someone is to be in Short Range of all the things and people they're in Short Range of. In a two-dimensional battle, like most battles in the **Filial Piety Action System**, characters with Short or better Range Mobility move around freely in that circle. In a hallway or gauntlet or other one-dimensional environment, that mobility is still preserved—the limited line or section of hallway that represents a given Short Range location will grow and shrink constantly as the characters change their foci of attention, allowing characters to move around a fair bit while remaining in that Range.

You won't ever have a case, in the **Filial Piety Action System**, where you have a line of characters, each in Short Range of the next, that extends out to Medium or longer Range. The ranges are all a bit abstract, and in situations like that the GM will make arbitrary Medium-Range cuts in the battlefield to section that "line" of fighters off into Short-Range clumps at Medium Range from one another.



**Diagram 1: Melee clumps**  
nested in Short, Medium, Long, and Very Long Range circles

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Medium Range is a Range of convenience—it exists to let the GM place a few locations of interest "near" a Short Range battle, but say that they're a bit harder to get to. This allows characters to dash for an interesting vantage when they're not happy with the terrain where they are.

In our example of the rooftop battle, Medium Range might include most of the rest of the town in which it takes place. For instance, a character wants to move to the clock tower—the GM says, "That's at Medium Range!" If they're hard-pressed by their enemies, it'll take them three moves to get there rather than one.

Long Range is also a Range of convenience—it's where the GM can place tactical destinations that are actively difficult to reach. It's also bow range in cluttered terrain—if you don't always have a clear shot, then bows are limited to Long Range. In the rooftop battle, Long Range might be the stables (your enemies are specifically trying to keep you from getting to a horse, so that's extra hard) or the edge of town.

As another example, you're fighting soldiers at the base of a waterfall; going up to a friend or lover waiting at the top of the waterfall requires up to seven moves. That takes the constrained paths and the need to climb into account; it might be only Medium Range if you can go straight up the waterfall or cliff.

Very Long Range represents the edge of reasonable movement for this conflict—it's assumed that if you go any farther, you're either winning, losing, or changing the nature of the battle. It's also the range of a bow in open or at least relatively manageable terrain.

Most of the time, Inaccessible Range really is Inaccessible—it represents everything outside the scope of the conflict. There is, however, room for the GM to fudge this rule, extend the scope of reasonable movement to include things that are initially inaccessible, and treat it more as "Extreme" Range than "Not-the-Battlefield" Range. This will usually happen when a battlefield has an unusually wide and detailed scope.

## Splitting the Circle

Any time a character moves outside the circle in which they and some other character are engaged, that other character—whether enemy or ally—must choose one of two options.

The first is to *stay behind*.

In this case, the circle they were in splits—there are now two regions of battle. For instance, Alfred and Ling are engaged in Melee. At Long Range is the edge of town. Alfred moves to Medium Range of the edge of town. (This is something that takes four moves, but we're only interested in the fourth move on which it actually happens.)

If Ling stays behind, then there are now two Melee and two Short Range circles—one where Alfred is, and one where Ling is. This may be important, if other characters remain behind to battle Ling or stay with Alfred to fight him. They're both still in the same Long Range circle, which covers both their old battlefield and the edge of town; ergo, when Alfred moves to somewhere Long Range and Ling does not follow, they are at Long Range from one another

The second option is to *move with* the character—staying as close to the moving character as one was before that character moved. In this case, both

Ling and Alfred are now in Medium Range of the edge of the town. If they were the only combatants, then we say we've moved the battle to a new location. If someone else was there, and stayed behind, then the circle split.

If you elect to *move with* a character, you limit your next move. On your next action, if you use your normal move, you have to move towards them or towards someone else that moved with you. However, even if you know you won't be able to move on your next action—because you've been stunned by a club or are between intervals or for any other reason—you can still move with some character that is moving out of your range.

## Closing In

Movement in this system operates on the notion that you pick a target and move towards it. There isn't really a notion of "away"—once you've closed on someone, they'll have a difficult time moving away from you, and the converse is also true when someone closes in on you.

This may not always reflect itself properly in the role-play.

Sometimes it will seem that the only viable direction for your character to move is "away! Away! Oh my God AWAY!" On other occasions you will want, explicitly, to move to a higher Range.

In such cases the GM may create such a vantage for you—

Placing some feature on the battlefield for you to move towards. This may not be your conscious destination, but it's where you're going. It may be that fate has taken a hand, and you're going somewhere interesting. Or it may just be a system convenience that identifies a location to move towards.

## Partial Movement

The **Filial Piety Action System** is agnostic on how far you actually go on each of the intermediate moves—the eight moves it takes, for instance, to move from Very Long to Long Range when you are beset by enemies who wish to impede your movement.

The default assumption is: not far.

The eight rounds, in this context, represent your struggle to reach a good open space or appropriate forum for travel. You're moving in a fairly small region, and then you break for it and make good distance. Until that last round of movement you haven't gone much of anywhere.

The GM is free to vary this by circumstance.

Sometimes partial movement, at the GM's whim, will include substantial travel. In such case each of these moves allows enemies and allies the opportunity to move with you or split the circle. Sometimes partial movement will stick around even if you change destinations—you make three moves towards something at Very Long Range, then change your mind and head for something at Medium Range, and the GM will let you close on it in a single move. In general, though, and as a rule, you're just maneuvering for space.

You are entitled to ask the GM which of these options is actually going to apply in a given case as soon as it affects your tactical decisions. The answer is open to whim.

## Movement and Intervals

If your interest in a given conflict is just *what happens*, and movement and elapsed time are not directly on point, then rounds spend entirely on movement or waiting for others to move do not count against your interval.

For instance, you engage in combat with two enemies—one in your Melee Range and one at Very Long Range. You're only interested in the fight with the distant enemy, but you're going to need fifteen moves to reach them! If you choose to focus entirely on movement, not rolling Progress/Damage against the nearby enemy, then you won't lose interval in the relevant rounds.

## Obstacles

Barriers and obstacles come in two sorts.

The first are *flavor* obstacles. They're things that the GM places in your Short or Medium or Long Range circle, and they constrain your actions in a mostly descriptive sense. Sometimes you won't be able to make a move or an attack or something because of the obstacle, but that'll only happen when you and your enemies have moved in such a fashion as to place it in the way.

The second are *barriers*. These divide the combat circles—part or all of the circle is defined as being on one side or the other of the barrier. Before you can move across the barrier, and generally but not always before you can attack someone on the other side, you must move to, deal Damage to, or make some sort of Progress against the barrier. For instance, if there is a locked gate that you *can't* go around, at Medium Range, you must move to the gate and Damage it before you may proceed to destinations on the other side. If you are

inside a house, you may have to move to a door or window before you can move to the outside.

Barriers are only meaningful when you are constrained to the relevant scale of mobility. In a cityscape, for instance—

- the clutter in a room could be relevant at Short Range Mobility;
- being in or out of a building is relevant at Medium Range Mobility;
- narrow streets and dragnet searches are relevant at Long Range Mobility;
- closed-off districts are relevant at Very Long Range Mobility;
- things like the city wall or a dangerous forest outside the city are always relevant.

The GM may scale this up or down a bit based on the encounter scale—making individual gnarled trees irrelevant when the encounter sprawls across an open countryside, or deciding that every last blockade is relevant when an encounter fits inside a single long hallway (as in the *Testing the Dragon Spear* example, below.)

## Terrain Control

If you are a spear or bow wielder, who prizes the ability to keep enemies out of reach, you may review the rules above and feel a certain understandable concern. As things stand, melee-based enemies may immediately move right up to you from anywhere on the map—and even if you have friends that hamper their movement, you're limited to a mere handful of rounds before they reach you. Moving away from them won't help—they'll just stay with you and then continue to close!

Fear not.

Long-range weapons, unless their intended use is a quick bit of Damage as an enemy moves in, have access to a suite of effects that limit enemy motion. It'll be hard to get away from someone once they close—you'll need help or an epic move to peel an attacker off—but you'll be able to use covering fire or spear techniques to keep your enemies at bay.

These effects are called *terrain control*.

The simplest form of terrain control is the terrain control practiced by those who wield the fighting chain. When an enemy moves into Melee Range, they may immediately attack that enemy. These and similar effects are meant

to discourage ganging up on a chain user, or allow them to act as a bodyguard for a fragile archer or companion.

There may be any number of fighting chain users on the battlefield, and custom weapons may duplicate this effect. For sanity's sake, only five characters may make a free attack of this nature in response to any given move—that's the maximum number of fighting chains that can batter you when you join a Melee scrum. In the unlikely event that a character falls into a nest of fighting chain users and more than five of them wish to attack, the GM must choose which five have the opportunity to do so.

A more traditional form of terrain control is that of the dart, spear, and bow. This does not take the form of a free attack. Rather, it allows the character to *interdict* the region near them. When an enemy attempts to move closer, either with a normal move or by moving with someone else, they must make a roll of  $d10 + \text{their Defense}$  (or more rarely some other trait)—

On failure, they are walking into withering fire, and must either cancel their move or take Damage. This Damage begins with a dice roll—the largest number of d6s that anyone interdicting that region can use. For instance, the terrain control of an archer fields  $4d6$ . If there are other effects of this sort, dealing comparable Damage (that is, Damage that can be added up to form a single number, such as the Fight Damage from multiple physical attacks) then additional Damage is replaced by a small fixed number. Again using the archer: archer terrain control deals either  $4d6$  or  $+2$  Damage, with a cap of  $4d6 + 10$ . If you walk into the withering fire of a single archer, you take  $4d6$ ; six or more archers, and you take  $4d6 + 10$ .

The roll to avoid terrain control is like a Promptness roll—other players cannot assist, there is no epic move available, and failure cannot happen.

Often terrain control also acts to reduce the target's mobility.

For instance, hostile archers (even at Long Range) constrict a character to Short Range Mobility. To reach such an archer a melee character must either "break free" of constraint, wait out the archer's interval, or move successfully seven times—even if there's no one else physically impeding them.

Epic moves often allow movement that ignores terrain control. You may use this to ignore Mobility constraint imposed through terrain control but not the Mobility constraint imposed by having enemies in Range.

## Damage Types

Most terrain control deals Fight Damage. All such terrain control adds up into a single Damage roll—something like the  $4d6 + 10$  Damage, above. It doesn't matter how many different weapons you have pointed at an area: if the target

decides to move into an interdicted region, there'll be a single Damage roll that probably caps out at  $8d6+15$  for even the lethal weapons of a long-lost age. In this sense, adding darts and spears and crossbow bolts and gunfire and magic to the basic nest of archers doesn't bring very much to the table.

Some terrain control deals Spirit Damage. This is common if you're out of body in a spirit realm; it's pretty rare in the real world. Similarly terrain control that does Heart Damage is possible but rare. It's not intended that any enemy group can reasonably stack up all three types.

That said, Spirit Damage, Heart Damage, and Fight Damage are applied separately when someone defies terrain control. The bonus attacks from weapons like fighting chains are separate as well (from the automatic terrain control damage and from each other.) It's possible that a single move can walk into five fighting chain attacks,  $4d6+10$  Damage from archers,  $4d6+10$  Spirit Damage from "spirit archers," and some kind of Heart Damage from some extremely problematic barrier.

A few rare weapons have terrain control that isn't "Damage" per se. This also stacks separately, with comparable kinds of terrain control.

## Variable Rolls

Some terrain control is a little more precise than others—so it's possible that a character moves into terrain control and rolls well enough to void some terrain control and not the rest. This isn't very common, but if it happens, then it happens: ignore the terrain control which their roll allows them to ignore, and, should they choose to move, simply apply damage from the terrain control they did *not* roll well enough to ignore.

Typically you'll need to roll either 14 or 15 on a  $d10+(\text{your total Defense, including base and weapon Defense})$  to ignore terrain control, so it's only if you roll exactly 14 in an already complicated situation with many different kinds of enemies wielding different ranged weapons that this kind of thing will happen.

## Obstacles

Barriers can prevent the use of terrain control. This is generally a matter for GM discretion; the important thing is that you're not allowed to hole up in a windowless room and use archery to keep your enemies at bay. Some flavor obstacles may limit your terrain control as well—if you can't move or shoot through a thing, you probably can't exert terrain control on the other side either.

## Terrain Control and Waiting

Terrain control is active. If you don't attack in a round, but you do use your terrain control on somebody, then that round counts towards your interval.

## Scaling Up

Tactical conflicts may occur on a larger scale—the time and space that is allotted to the detailed action resolution grows, and a single "move" may span days of travel. These conflicts aren't actually covered by the combat system, as they're out of range for even the longest-range weapons. However, it's worth taking a moment to show how these large-scale conflicts interact with weapon ranges.

- *Combat Range* forms the circle that corresponds to the Very Long Range circle within which combat may take place. Think of it as the equivalent of Melee Range for long-distance chases and the like: when combatants close into this Range, they can start using weapons, and the GM usually shifts down to the combat scale above.
- *Short Range (Regional)* is a good range for hunting and chasing someone.
- *Medium Range (Regional)* is a loose tactical range between short and long.
- *Long Range (Regional)* covers a Kingdom or Principality or great forest or something of the kind.
- *Very Long Range (Regional)* is for international conflicts.
- *Inaccessible*, or, too far away to interact with. In some cases, there may be slow communication at this range.

The rules for movement all work basically the same way, save that as a general rule while you can make Progress against someone at range, you can't Damage them without first closing into Combat Range no matter *what* weapon you're using. Thus, a combatant trapped at the regional level should seek to close to Combat Range before the wiles of their enemies bring too much Progress to bear against them.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Ranged Weapons

In this section you will find templates for common ranged weapons in the **Filial Piety Action System**. Weapons like these, that may attack beyond Short Range, have a notation in their description indicating that they are—

- **Short Range** weapons, as with spears;
- **Medium Range** weapons, as with darts and thrown weapons; and
- **Long Range or Very Long Range** weapons, as with bows.

Such weapons can attack targets out to that range. Weapons have no range minimum by default. Bows can shoot at Short Range as easily as Very Long Range; the only penalty is the bow's low Accuracy and Defense. The ability to get "inside" a spear or polearm's reach is represented in its failure mode. It's not that minimum range is anathema to the **Filial Piety Action System**; it's just not a good thematic fit for the weapons presented below.

Characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** have a proficiency in

- two special weapons (which can include 1-2 ranged weapons).

They may purchase additional ranged weapon proficiency with Knacks.

### Ranged Weapon Modifier Summary

<i>aim</i>	+2 to Accuracy (max +2); also gives Fight when you hit.
<i>flail wildly</i>	-2 to Defense (max -2); lasts one round.
<i>flashy</i>	+2 to Accuracy and Damage (max +2); lasts until failure.
<i>positional</i>	+1 to Defense (max +3) against a target in Short Range; lasts until you move away.
<i>spear balance</i>	+1 to Defense (max +3)
<i>tangled</i>	-2 to Defense (max -2); lasts one round.

## Archer-Style Terrain Control

The ranged weapons herein use a damaging form of terrain control to keep enemies at bay. They "cover" the area between themselves and enemies, so that, when an enemy attempts to move closer, the enemy might take damage. For typical non-magical weapons, the enemy may make a roll to "avoid" this damage, and, if they fail that roll, may choose not to move closer—imagine that an arrow lands in front of their foot or something and they jerk back, canceling their intended charge. The roll to avoid damage is like a Promptness roll—there's no failure mode, assistance, or epic moves, just a straight roll of a die. If an enemy cancels their move to avoid damage, they don't get their move back—effectively, they've spent that move on trying to approach you safely and failing. If someone has the power to make two or more moves in succession, they can attempt to move closer, fail the roll, decide not to move, and then use their next normal move to approach again.

Enemies moving *with you* (as when you move and they stay in range, or when someone else moves and both of you move with that person) do not normally fall under the effects of a ranged weapon's terrain control. Terrain control can keep someone at bay, but it takes a friend or an epic move such as *archer's retreat* to shake someone off once they're already close.

Terrain control generally affects a limited number of enemies per round. You may always opt not to use terrain control against a given enemy to conserve applications of the effect for later in the round. If a failure mode or hostile epic move makes allies subject to your terrain control, that terrain control is always active and the GM (not you) chooses whether to use it, picking whichever option seems most amusing to the GM or least desirable to you. You can only affect a number of allies with your terrain control in each round equal to the number of enemies you could affect, and this doesn't reduce the number of enemies that you can use terrain control against in that round. For instance, you can use a bow's terrain control against two enemies per round; if for some reason allies become subject to this affect, you may use your terrain control against two of your enemies and the GM may use it against two of your allies in any given round.

## Shooting an Ally

Many ranged weapons have a failure mode that involves shooting an ally. The rules for this run a bit long, so we're going to present them here rather than including them in each weapon's failure mode.

## Hitting an Ally

If you trigger the *Shooting an Ally* failure mode, the GM first determines if there is an ally in the vicinity of your enemy or an ally that the GM could reasonably consider "between" you and your enemy. If there *is* such an ally, one such ally suffers the ranged weapon's normal damage—usually 2d6.

## Hitting an Ally while being Cheered On

If you hit an ally while someone is cheering you on, it makes for a *very* embarrassing incident. The ally takes *double* the weapon's normal damage—usually 4d6—and you lose a point of Exemplar Pool.

## No Allies to Hit

If there is no ally to hit, you trigger a weapon-specific failure mode.

## Ranged Weapons

### Bow

-2 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

Very Long Range (open region)  
or Long Range (cluttered area)

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, -2 Defense)

The bow is capable of withering fire at extremely long range—a good archer can destroy enemies before they come close.

Bows have the following special features:

**Inflexible:** when changing weapons from wielding a bow to not wielding a bow, you spend +5 Fight (max 15).

**Terrain Control:** a bow may constrain up to three enemies per round.

You may constrain an enemy, who is in Long Range of you or who tries to move into Melee, Short, or Medium Range of you, to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained enemies that move to a Range closer to you, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll  $d10 + \text{their Defense}$ . If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or take damage— $4d6$  or +2 damage (max  $4d6 + 10$ ).

For instance, if someone at Long Range moves closer to a nest of four archers, then those archers may reactively apply this power and both constrain their mobility and force this roll. This forces that character to take four moves to close to Medium Range, and on the fourth move they must roll  $d10 + \text{their Defense}$ . If they roll 13-, they must cancel their move or take  $4d6 + 6$  damage.

*You can use this control on up to three enemies per round.*

**Fail:** You shoot an ally. If there are no allies you can hit, then you damage the bow or run out of accessible ammunition. You cannot use the bow or its terrain control again this interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Archer's Retreat*—for the remainder of the interval, you may treat any character who is moving *with* you as moving *towards* you. This reduces your terrain control damage to 2d6 or +1 damage (max 2d6+5).

*Dig In*—do 2d6 Damage. For the rest of the interval, you may use your terrain control on up to 5 enemies per round and enemies need an 16+ and not a 14+ to move closer to you without taking Damage. This effect cancels or is cancelled by *archer's retreat*.

*Rain of Arrows*—do 2d6 Damage, and then roll an attack against up to four more enemies within bow range. These attacks cannot receive assistance or trigger epic moves; they can, however, fail and hit allies (potentially, even, multiple times.)

## Dart

-2 Accuracy/1d6 Damage  
Medium Range

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -2 Defense)

Metal darts and similar weapons can be flung at enemies to keep them back and do some damage as they close. Needles, ball bearings, sharpened coins, fistfuls of burning sand, and other simple thrown weapons use this basic Weapon.

Darts have the following special features:

**Flexible:** when you change weapons such that you are no longer using darts, you spend -2 Fight (min 0).

**Terrain Control:** darts may constrain up to one enemy per round.

You may constrain an enemy, who is in Medium Range or who tries to move into Melee or Short Range of you, to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained enemies that move to a Range closer to you, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or take damage—3d6 or +0 damage (max 3d6).

*You can use this control on one enemy per round.*

**Fail:** You shoot an ally. If there are no allies you can hit, then you *flail wildly*—next round you cannot act, and you are at a -2 *flail wildly* penalty to Defense, but this lost action will not count against your interval.

### Epic Moves:

**Back! Back!**—do 1d6 Damage to each of 1-3 enemies in Medium or shorter Range. Make a normal move, ignoring terrain control. Your enemies cannot move with you, nor may they move with allies that move with you.

**Fill the Sky**—until you change weapons or trigger a failure mode, every enemy within Long Range takes 2 damage at the start of their action.

*Poison:*

Poisoned darts and similar weapons do an additional 1d6 Damage on both the attack and the terrain control, but cost you one point of Exemplar Pool in each interval in which they are used. This penalty does not apply to wicked characters consciously serving some evil power.

**Freaky Martial Arts Ranged Weapons**

-2 Accuracy/1d6 Damage  
**Medium or Long Range**

**[Two-Handed Weapon]**

(+0 Promptness, -2 Defense)

Ranged weapons, too, include freaky martial arts toys that nobody in their right mind would wield. Whether it's bladed battle kites or snake-launchers, such weapons fall under the freaky martial arts ranged weapon template.

***Terrain Control:*** freaky martial arts ranged weapons may constrain up to one enemy per round.

You may constrain an enemy who is in Medium Range or who tries to move into Melee or Short Range of you, to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

*You can use this control on one enemy per round.*

***Fail:*** you screw up. Your interval ends immediately and you lose 5 Fight.

***Epic Moves:***

***Show Off Your Stuff***—you gain a +2 *flashy* modifier to your Accuracy and Damage (max +2) until you next *fail*. This can extend past the current interval: a few rounds of showing off your freaky martial arts weapons moves can theoretically benefit you for the rest of the fight.

## Spear

+0 Accuracy/2d6 Damage  
Short Range

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, -1 Defense)

The spear is a long flexible weapon that controls the space around you and can pierce enemies before they approach. You can use this Weapon for most other polearms as well.

Spears have the following special feature:

***Terrain Control:*** a spear may constrain up to four enemies per round.

You may constrain an enemy who is in Short Range or who tries to move into Melee Range of you to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained enemies that move to Melee Range of you, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either move into Short Range of you instead, cancel their move, or take damage—4d6 or +0 Damage (max 4d6+10).

*You can use this control on up to four enemies per round.*

***Fail:*** the targeted enemy is *inside your guard*. For the rest of their interval, or until they move away from you, they are immune to your terrain control and have +3 *positional* Defense (max +3) against your spear.

***Epic Moves:***

***Tactical Spear***—make two normal moves, ignoring terrain control. If an enemy moves with you, they suffer 4d6 Damage as a terrain control effect. (They may choose to cancel their move instead.)

***Unpredictable Spear***—do 2d6 damage, and gain a +1 *spear balance* to your Defense (max +3) until you change weapons or your interval ends.

## Examples of Ranged Weapon Use

### Nix Hedrine Valentine vs. Bao Zuzao's Gang

Nix Hedrine Valentine has just defeated the bandit Bao Zuzao—but that doesn't end her story. She's cleaned up the site of the battle and moved off when she hears an exclamation from behind her:

"Brother Bao!"

*Heck*, she thinks.

Then two more voices:

"What's happened to brother Bao?"

"He's been beaten up by robbers! Surely we must rip out their teeth and poke small straws into their eyes! Bao! Bao! Hang in there, Bao!"

The forest's just a little bit too quiet.

Her voice is just a little bit too loud.

"Robbers? Him? He didn't even *have anything good to steal!*"

### Round 1: PCs

Nix tries to run, but she doesn't get far. The three catch up to her in an open clearing. One of them's Odious Bang—he's an archer. The other two are Lucky Nao and Unlucky Nao—they're using great big clubs. Bang's at Long Range but the other two are at Short Range.

"All right," she says. "Call me a thief? I'll show you clowns the honor of my sword—of the Eagle School Sword Style!"

She starts a 5-round interval based on *Reliable + to your Teachers*.

She could move freely up to Lucky and Unlucky Nao, but she decides to close in on Bang instead. He uses his terrain control on her, constraining her immediately to Short Range Mobility. She doesn't want to burn her action on trying to break free, so she just moves the first of four moves necessary to close to Medium Range of Odious Bang.

*This round does not count against her interval.*

### Round 1: NPCs

"You go, Unlucky!" says Lucky Nao. "You beat her up!"

Unlucky Nao advances into *Melee Range*. He rolls a 4 on his attack, and even with his huge club's *momentum* bonus, he misses.

Odious Bang shoots her for 4 points of Damage.

### Round 2: PCs

Nix turns furiously on Unlucky Nao, but it's a misnomer: she misses him. She moves the second move towards Odious Bang.

### Round 2: NPCs

"Come on, Lucky!" shouts Unlucky Nao, and rolls a 4.

Lucky Nao advances into *Melee Range*.

He rolls a 7 to attack.

He *fails* and is staggering for the next two rounds.

"I have named these NPCs poorly," says the GM.

"It's probably just irony," Nix's player suggests.

Odious Bang rolls a 1. The Nao brothers assist, rolling 8 and 10. That's enough to qualify Bang for an epic move in two different ways.

He decides to go for a *combat stunt*—

A pepper bomb arrow explodes in Nix's face, blinding her and staggering her for one round. She can't act next round, and her Defense goes down by 1 for that round, just like the club epic move *smash*; however, because he wasn't using a club, she's allowed to move. Odious Bang rolls 10 points of Damage against her, too, bringing her down from 55 to 45 Fight.

### Round 3: PCs

Nix staggers around with her eyes tearing up. This happens to bring her one move closer to Odious Bang.

*This round does not count against her interval.*

### Round 3: NPCs

Lucky Nao staggers around.

"Solidarity!" Nix's player exclaims.

Unlucky Nao, on the other hand, rolls a 10—he can now do an *epic move* against Nix. He decides to *wind up*, gaining 5 Fight and preparing to do 35 Damage on his next hit.

Odious Bang rolls a 7 and shoots Unlucky Nao in the back for 3 Damage.

"Unlucky!" cries Odious Bang.

"Odious!" growls Unlucky Nao.

### Round 4: PCs

Nix wipes her eyes clean and rolls a 2 to stab Unlucky Nao. This does not work very well. Then she makes her fourth move towards Odious Bang. This move *should* allow her to close to Medium Range. However, first, she must roll against his terrain control. Her Defense is 8, so she rolls 1d10+8 to move without taking damage. She rolls a 1, for a total of 9, which falls under the description "13 or less." She has to stay put or soak 4d6 Damage; she opts to stay put.

"Unlucky," she sighs.

"Solidarity!" cries Unlucky Nao.

*This round counts against her interval.*

### Round 4: NPCs

Lucky Nao continues to stagger around.

Unlucky Nao rolls an 8 and hits Nix. Because of the *wind up* effect from his huge club epic move, he does 35 Damage instantly.

Odious Bang shoots at her again and rolls a 10—

He can see which way the wind is blowing!

He opts to deal 4d6 Damage, since Nix has 10 Fight left. Unsurprisingly it is enough: he rolls 20 points of Damage. Nix is cinematically knocked into the air by Unlucky Nao's club and shot in the forehead with a blunted arrow at the apex of her arc.

She rolls Promptness to see if she'll get off a last hit—and loses.

The last thing she hears, as her consciousness fades, is Lucky Nao ripping the cash purse from her belt. Then jingle, jangle, jingle, as they walk away.

## Testing the Dragon Spear

The warrior Nesbit Hawke seeks to move through a gauntlet of warriors and shatter the gate at the far end—all to prove the worth of a newly-forged weapon, the glorious dragon spear!

Nesbit is a fierce disreputable warrior with an awesome 80 Fight—

Will it be enough to prove the worth of his dragon spear?

### Short Range

Nesbit is the only person in his Short Range circle, *Gauntlet Entrance*.

### Medium Range

At Medium range are two sword users—

- Hu Zu and
- Hu Ya

They have 10 Fight and interval 5.

## Long Range

At Long Range are four more warriors—

- Corten, an impatient axe user;
- Demes, a bow user;
- Magrit, another sword user; and
- Eustoi, who uses a staff.

These also have 10 Fight and interval 5.

There is a crude barricade at Long Range from both Nesbit and the four warriors here. It has 5 Fight and divides the battlefield.

## Very Long Range

For this encounter, the GM compresses Very Long Range down to the two ends of the hallway—it's probably not anywhere near as large as most Very Long Range circles, but it's fitting to the challenge at hand.

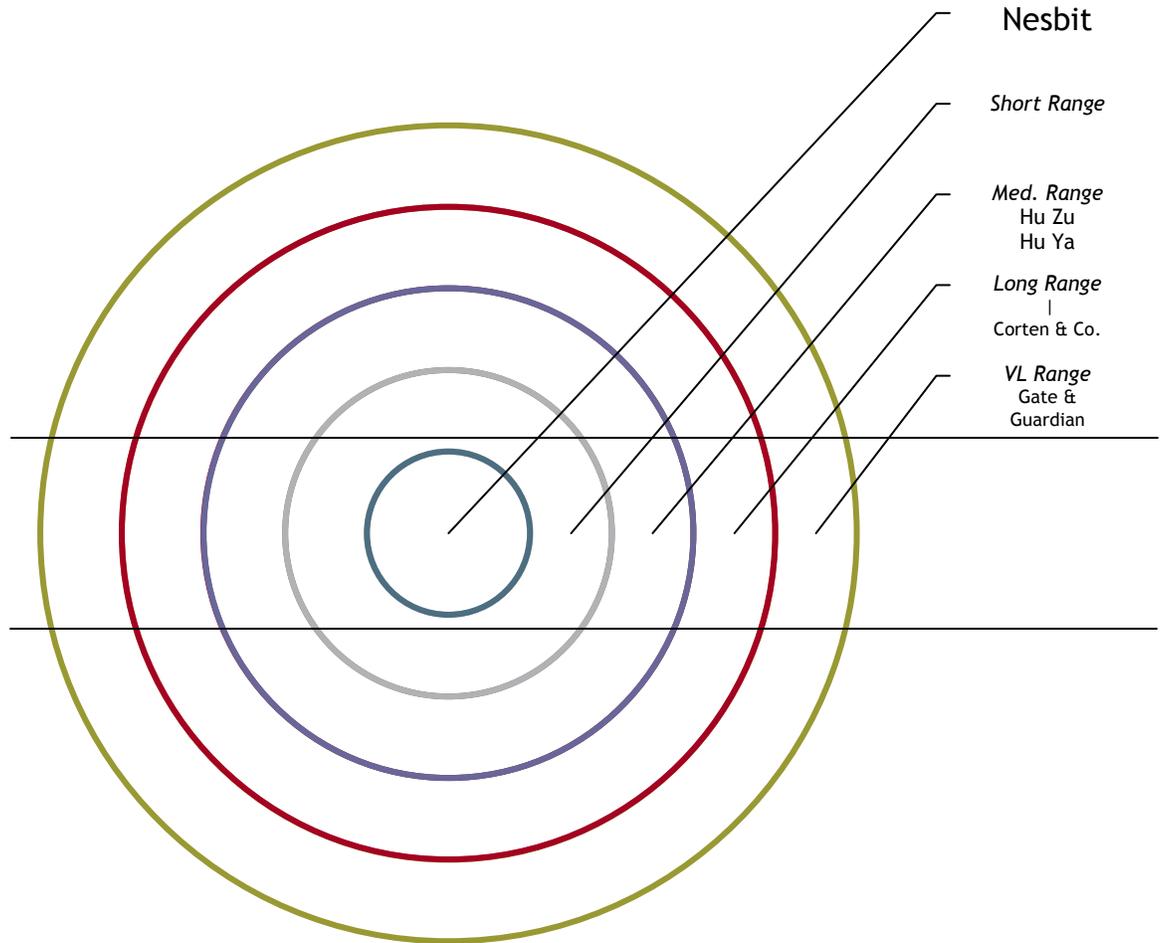
At Very Long Range is one last warrior—

- the *Immaculate Masked Chain-Fighting Guardian*, a chain fighter; and
- the gate.

The gate has a mere 10 Fight, but its guardian has 15. He is also a lazy guardian—he won't start his interval until Nesbit Hawke gets close!

## Layout

The straight lines describe the hall; the circles indicate range. Technically the battle sprawls through the entirety of the circles, but in practice the walls constrain the fight. The | at Long Range denotes a barrier.



## Round 1: PCs

Nesbit treats this as a serious fight, even though his enemies are really all here as part of the test. He starts a 5-round interval based on *Fierce + to the Wicked*.

He starts with enemies at Medium Range.

That limits him to Long Range Mobility.

He springs forward towards the barricade, ignoring Hu Zu and Hu Ya, reaching Short Range from it in a single round. He stabs at it with his spear—and misses.

Hu Zu and Hu Ya move with him, staying at Medium Range.

## Round 1: NPCs

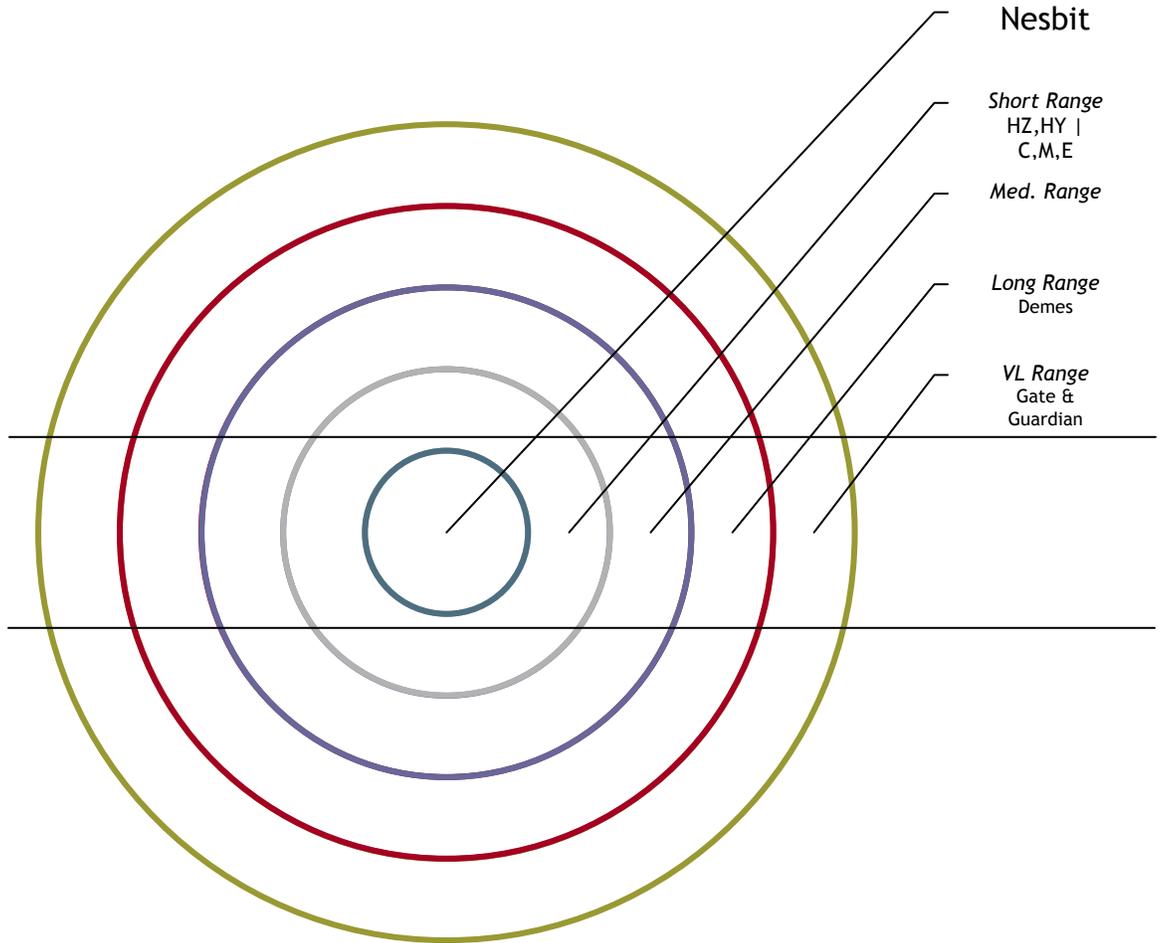
Hu Zu and Hu Ya can advance on Nesbit. They don't dare move directly into Melee Range—he'd constrain them both to Short Range Mobility, and they would take three rounds to get there.

So instead they move instantly into Short Range. They take up positions by the barricade.

On the other side of the barrier, Corten, Magrit, and Eustoi do the same. Demes is at Long Range from the barrier, and stays put.

## Layout

Nesbit is in Short Range of five enemies now, having advanced to the middle of the hall. Three are on the other side of the barricade, as is Demes.



## Round 2: PCs

Nesbit spins his spear and tries to take Hu Ya out.

He rolls a 7.

Hu Ya is now *inside his guard*.

"Still learning, still learning," says Nesbit. "You're good practice!"

## Round 2: NPCs

Hu Ya is a grim black-haired swordsman. He moves in to Melee Range. Nesbit can't target him for terrain control—he's *inside Nesbit's guard*.

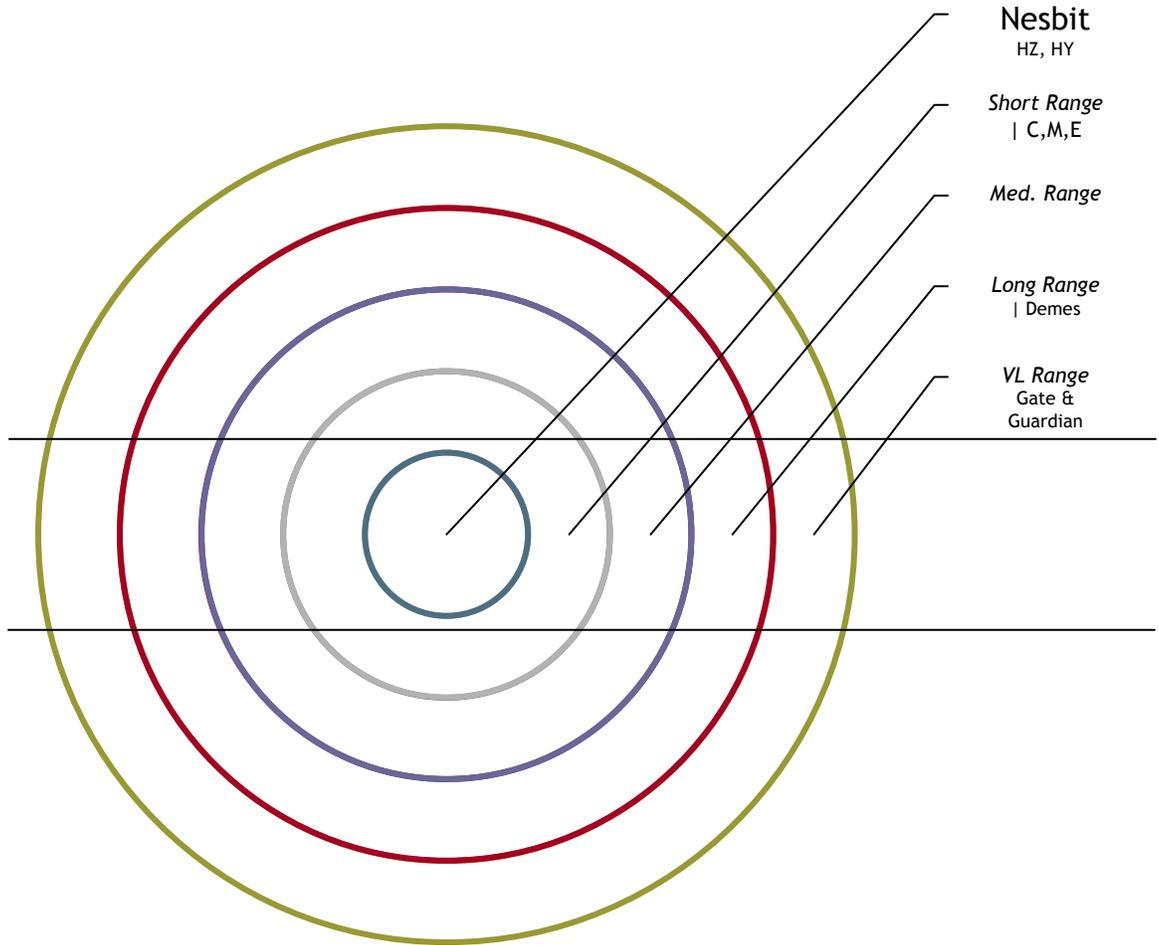
Hu Zu is Ya's elegant water-dancer sister.

She moves in. Nesbit targets her. She rolls an 8. She moves in to Melee Range, ignoring terrain control.

Each rolls a 6 to attack—lucky doubles! Nesbit is a disreputable warrior with a base Defense of 8, but their swords have Accuracy +1 and his spear has Defense -1, so that's enough to hit him. They roll a total of 10 Damage, costing Nesbit 10 Fight, putting him at 70.

## Layout

Nesbit, Hu Zu, and Hu Ya are in a Melee scrum. Three more enemies are at Short Range, on the other side of a barricade.



### Round 3: PCs

Nesbit decides to take Hu Zu out, since Hu Ya is inside his guard.

He rolls a 1.

The smith that made the dragon spear helps him out with a 6 and Nesbit smashes Hu Zu for 12 points of Damage. That's enough to take Hu Zu out of the fight!

### Round 3: NPCs

Hu Zu is defeated—but she succeeds at a Promptness roll.

She attacks one last time as she tumbles to the side, hitting and dealing 5 Damage.

Hu Ya rolls a 1 on his attack. Hu Zu assists him, adding an 8.

Hu Ya hits for another 3 Damage.

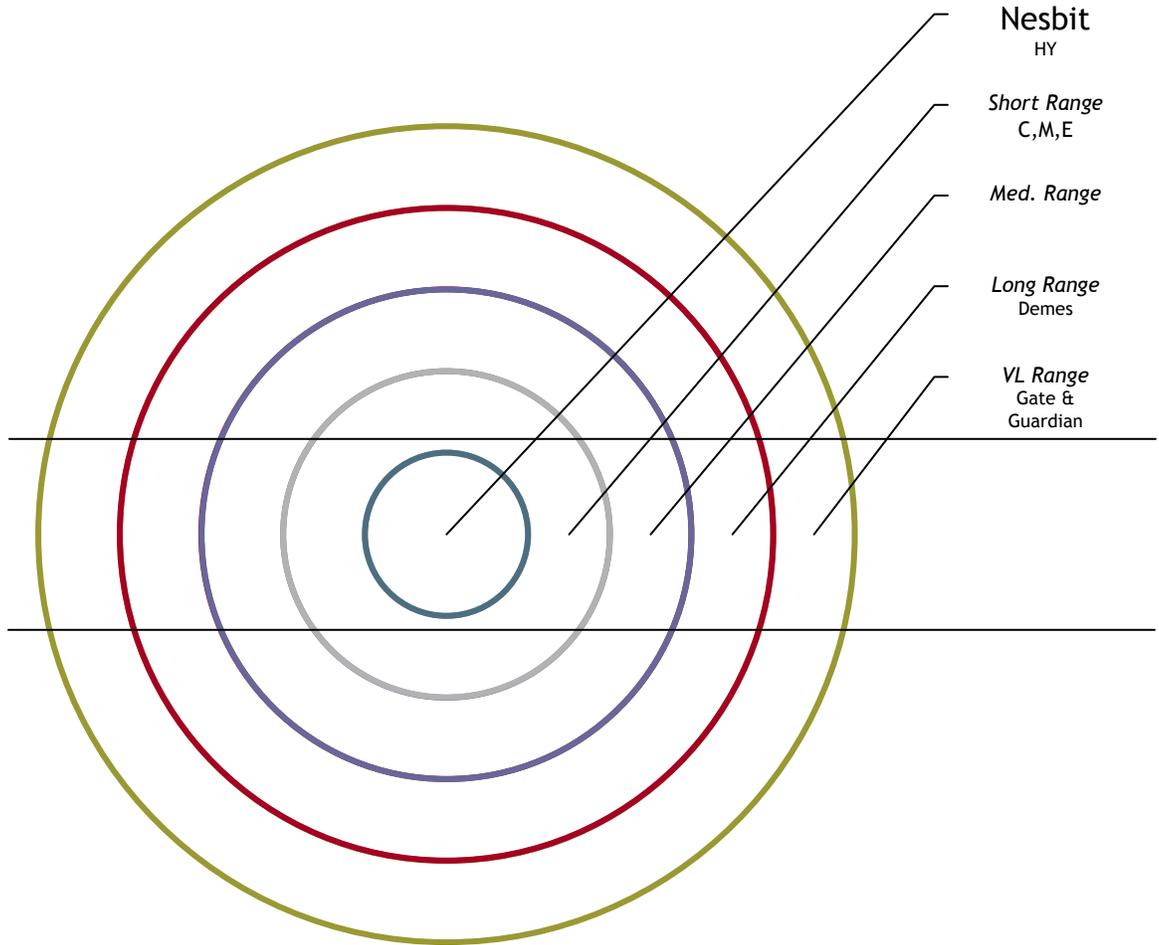
Nesbit is now at 62 Fight.

"Bah, I can't just watch!" Corten says. He attacks the barrier, rolling a 1. Demes approves, and throws in a 3. For a long moment, it seems that that's going to be all, before the GM finally decides that Magrit too is willing to assist. An 8 allows Corten to shatter the barrier in one blow!

Demes asks Corten to roll Promptness to see if the barrier goes away in time to shoot Nesbit this round. Corten rolls poorly; it does not.

## Layout

Nesbit and Hu Ya are in a Melee scrum. Three more enemies are at Short Range and Demes is at Long Range.



## Round 4: PCs

Hu Ya is still inside Nesbit's guard, but Nesbit's in something of a target-rich environment—he contemptuously ignores Hu Ya and slashes Eustoi, hitting the thick-headed staff wielder for 11 points and knocking him out of the battle.

Demes can target Nesbit now, and puts Nesbit under constraint.

Nesbit ignores the archer and moves straight for the gate. Technically, in a narrow hallway, he should pass the archer at *some* point—but Nesbit isn't trying to get to Demes, so we can assume that he's feinting back and forth and then dashing *past* Demes. That means that Demes, much like Hu Ya, limits Nesbit to Short Range Mobility, but he doesn't get to shoot Nesbit just for moving towards the gate.

"How far am I from the gate?" Nesbit asks. "I've been focused on getting close to the barricade, so I don't know if I'm still at Very Long Range."

"I think you are," the GM says.

"OK. So I need eight moves here, and this was number one."

"Eight moves is a lot!"

"I'll break free when I've cleared away the riffraff," Nesbit says.

## Round 5: NPCs

Corten and Magrit both roll low against Nesbit's terrain control. They cannot advance into Melee Range.

"The dragon spear dances!" Nesbit says, pleased.

Corten, a bit impatient, dares the 4d6 Damage—and takes 12 Damage, which knocks him out of the fight. He doesn't even get to roll Promptness to stay in the battle one last round, since it was his own action that defeated him.

Eustoi succeeds at a Promptness roll to take one last action.

Then the thick-headed staff wielder slips past Nesbit's terrain control.

Then he misses with his attack.

"So, what, he takes a sidelong blow while darting past my spear, gets in front of my face, lifts his staff to whack me, and falls over?" Nesbit's player proposes.

"Sure," the GM says.

Demes shoots Nesbit, rolling an 8. Alas, he needs a 9—  
Bows aren't very accurate on a per-shot basis. He misses.

Hu Ya rolls a 3 and misses badly.

#### Round 5: PCs

Nesbit uses the spear's butt to whack at Magrit, but misses.  
He moves the second of eight moves towards the gate.

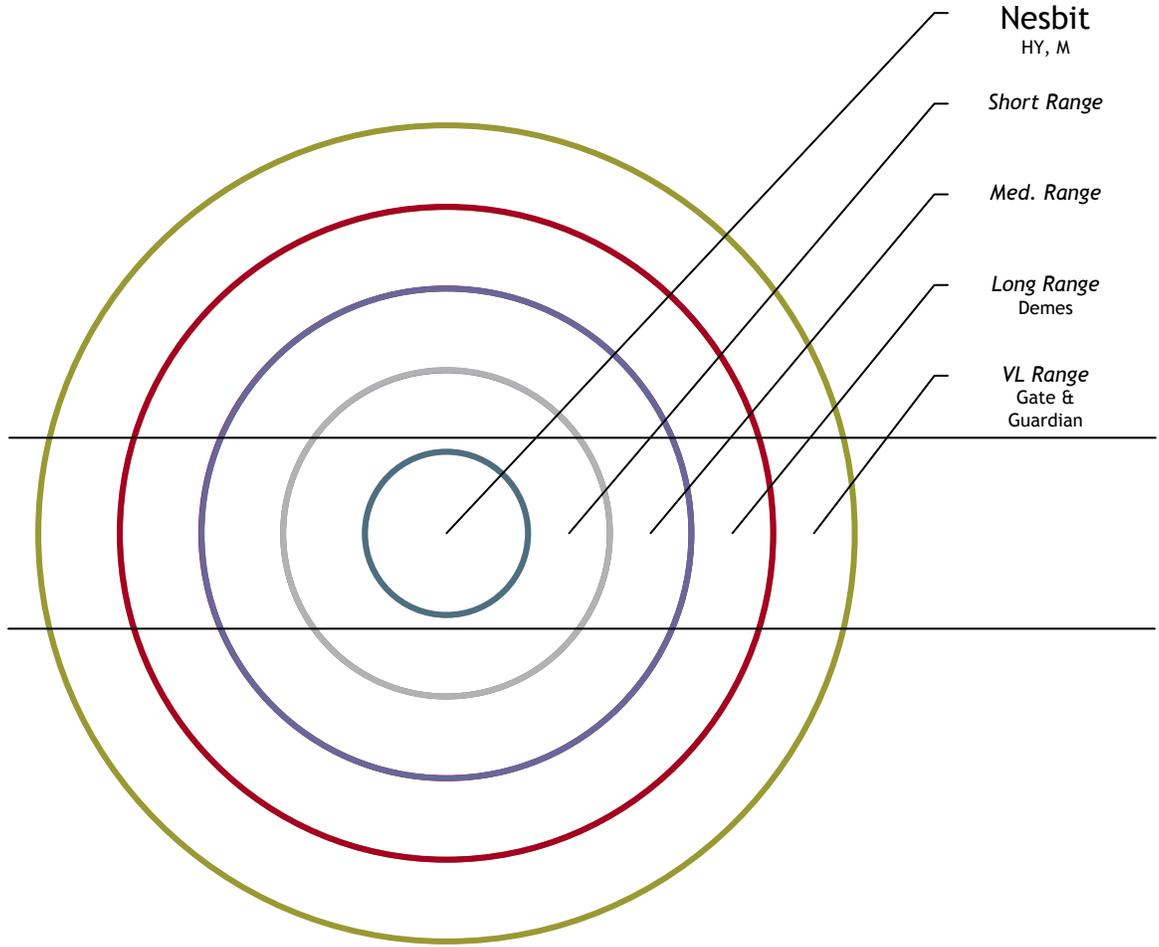
#### Round 5: NPCs

The grim swordsman Hu Ya slices Nesbit's arm for another 7 Damage; he's  
down to 55 Fight and bleeding freely.

Magrit, the wiry swordswoman, slips past Nesbit's terrain control.  
She misses her attack.

## Layout

Nesbit, Hu Ya, and Magrit are in a Melee scrum. Demes is at Long Range.



## Round 6: PCs

Nesbit has to pause and reorient—he's out of interval.

## Round 6: Immaculate Masked Chain Fighting Guardian

The Immaculate Masked Chain-Fighting Guardian gives a bit of a monologue: "You call that a spear? I've seen sharper spears in the mirror every morning!"

"I'll show you my supreme weapon!" Nesbit hotly promises.

There's a pause.

"I can't believe we just had that exchange," Nesbit's player says.

## Round 6: NPCs

Hu Ya is also out of interval, but Magrit and Demes aren't—they spent the first three rounds of the fight waiting for the barrier to fall.

Magrit rolls a 10—epic move!

She deals 10 Damage and gains 5 Fight, showing off her marvelous sword form and sneering:

"It's all very well for men to play with their sticks, but calling them some kind of supreme weapon? Don't make me laugh! Glittering Steel Serpent Cage!"

Demes rolls a 1. Corten, Magrit, and Eustoi assist, managing to push the roll up to 17—not quite enough for an epic move. He deals 9 Damage, pushing Nesbit down to 36 Fight.

## Round 7: PCs

Nesbit spends a point of Exemplar Pool.

"Right, then," Nesbit says. "You're all going down."

He starts a new 5-round *Fierce + to the Wicked* interval. He takes a third move towards the gate. Noticing that Hu Ya isn't *inside his guard* any more, he stabs at the black-haired swordsman—dealing 7 Damage.

That's not quite enough.

### Round 7: NPCs

Hu Ya has no Exemplar Dice. He can start a new interval freely.  
He does so, rolling a 5, and misses.

Magrit rolls another 10 and pumps her *rigorous form* up another notch.  
She deals another 11 Damage, bringing Nesbit down to 25 Fight.

Demes rolls a 1. He gets a 4, 2, and 3 for assistance—"I guess they're counting off seconds for him," the GM says—and hits Nesbit for another 9 Damage.

Nesbit is in dire straits: he has 16 Fight left.

### Round 8: PCs

Nesbit moves forward again. This is his fourth move towards the gate.

He attacks Hu Ya—

And rolls a 10!

Nesbit's player shouts, "Dragon Spear Technique: Tactical Spear!"

He then pauses to think.

"Can I get a bit of actual distance with *tactical spear*? So that they have to move with me or fall back to Short or Medium Range? Or does that only work if I'm close enough to someone to change ranges?"

"You can, but you wouldn't also make progress towards the gate," the GM rules. "Basically, you can lever yourself into Medium Range of Hu Ya and Magrit, but it'd involve feinting back and forth."

"Bah!" Nesbit says. "OK, let's go with Glorious Dragon Spear Technique: Unpredictable Spear!"

His unpredictable spear takes Hu Ya down with 8 points of Damage—and Nesbit's Defense rises to 8.

### Round 8: NPCs

Hu Ya makes a Promptness roll to last the round—and does! But alas, he rolls a 7.

"That's just sad," Nesbit concedes. Then he remembers he's being a mean bastard of a disreputable warrior, and adds, "That's how laughable a weak man's sword form is before my glorious dragon spear! Hu Ya!"

Magrit rolls her third epic move in a row.

"This is crazy," the GM says. "OK, this was her last round of interval, so I think she's going for *sword rhythm*—extending the length of the interval by 2."

She also deals 5 Damage to Nesbit, bringing him down to 11.

Demes shoots at Nesbit, rolling a 3.

#### Round 9: PCs

Nesbit stabs at Magrit and *fails*. She is now *inside his guard*.

He makes his fifth move towards the gate.

#### Round 9: NPCs

Magrit rolls an 8 and hits for another 10 Damage.

Nesbit's down to 1.

Demes has to take the round off—he's out of interval!

#### Round 10: PCs

Nesbit counts his interval. He has two rounds left.

"Good, good," he praises. "But I can't afford to play with you!"

He puts on a burst of speed and moves towards the gate without making an attack. This is his sixth move towards the gate.

#### Round 10: NPCs

Magrit laughs. "Who's playing with who?" she asks, and then rolls a 7. "I thought that was pretty obvious," Nesbit says. "Did I say it wrong?"

Demes shoots at Nesbit again, rolling a 4.

#### Round 11: PCs

Nesbit makes his seventh move towards the gate.

#### Round 11: NPCs

Magrit is at the end of her interval. "Off balance," the GM says, "she falls a bit behind."

Demes rolls another 4. Twang!

#### Round 12: PCs

Nesbit moves into Long Range of the gate.

Magrit and Demes move with him—she stays at Melee Range and he stays at Long Range. This puts both of them at Long Range of the gate.

#### Round 12: NPCs

Demes adjusts his position, advancing to Medium Range of the gate—his plan is to stop Nesbit from advancing when Nesbit gets close.

Demes rolls a 9—and misses.

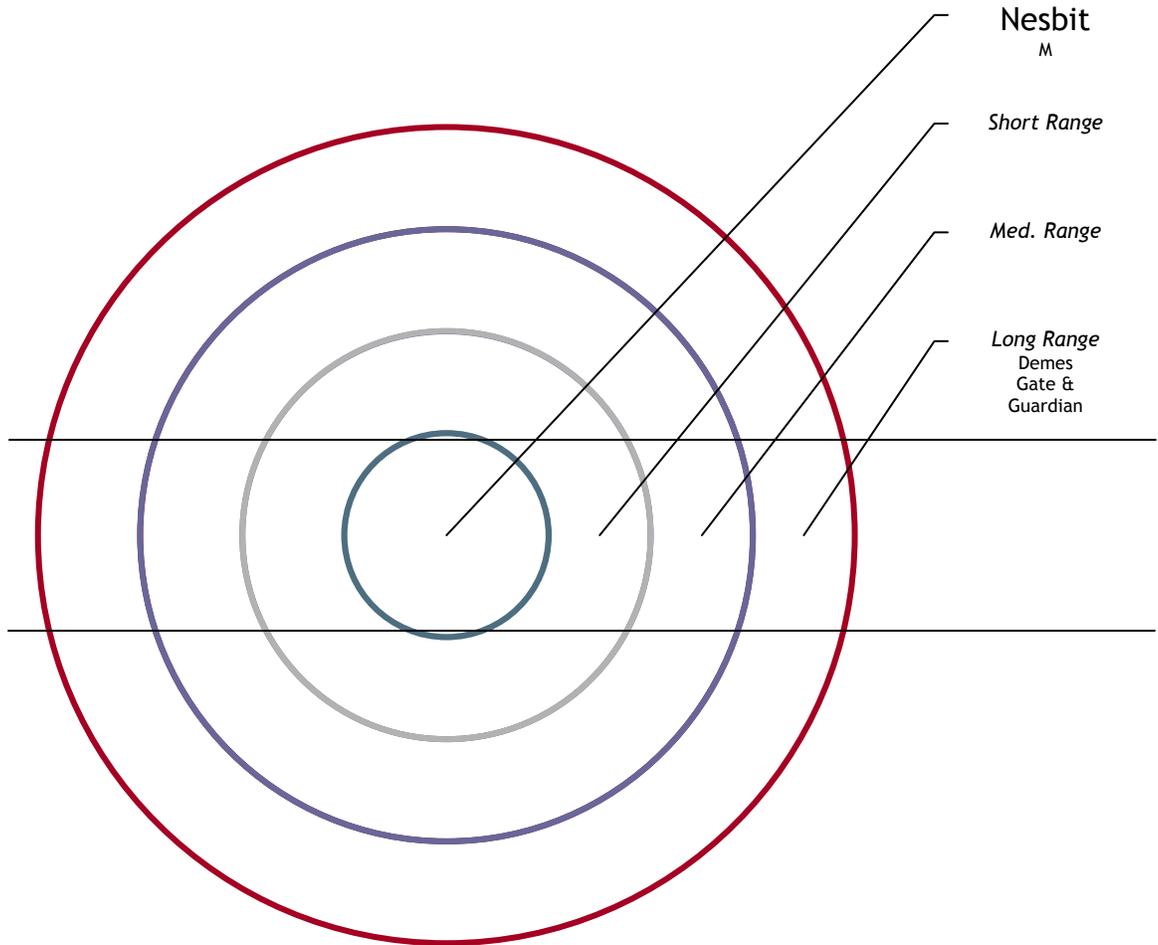
Magrit rolls a 6—and misses.

"That's the unpredictable spear!" Nesbit says. "I bet I did some really cool move to fake them both out there."

## Layout

Nesbit and Magrit are in a Melee scrum. Demes is at Long Range of Nesbit, but Medium Range of the gate.

The gate is also at Long Range.



### Round 13: PCs

Nesbit moves one step closer to the gate, with three remaining.

"Hey," Nesbit says. "I just realized. She's no longer inside my guard?"

"Nope," the GM agrees.

Nesbit rolls an attack on Magrit, hoping for an epic move. Instead he hits for 9 points of Damage—leaving her still a little better off than when the fight started.

### Round 13: NPCs

Magrit and Demes miss again—this time with a 6 and a 3.

### Round 14: PCs

Nesbit lashes out at Magrit again—and rolls a 10.

"Now it's time for Dragon Spear Technique: Tactical Spear," his player cheers. "Can I say I moved before the attack? There wasn't any reason not to have."

"Sure," the GM says.

"Then I can move instantly into Medium Range of the gate. That keeps Demes from using terrain control on me, and if Magrit wants to stay with me, she'll eat 4d6 Damage. And if she doesn't, she'll be at Long Range—either way, she's out of the fight!"

"That's so!" the GM agrees. "Unless you roll less than 11 on 4d6."

"Nope," Nesbit's player says.

Magrit, who tried to stay with him, takes 16 Damage and is immediately out of the fight.

### Round 14: NPCs

Demes rolls a 9—his shot plinks off of Nesbit's Defense again.

"But next round you'll run out of interval, and with it, your *unpredictable spear!*" he says.

### Round 15: PCs

Nesbit is at the end of his interval and has to take a round to reorient.

### Round 15: NPCs

Demes reorients.

The Immaculate Masked Chain-Fighting Guardian has been biding his time and waiting for Nesbit to reach the gate—but he just realized that his opportunity is *now*. And as soon as he realizes that, he also realizes how stupid it was to wait at the gate when Nesbit never has a reason to move into Melee Range of a chain fighter.

"Nevermind!" thinks the gatekeeper. "Opportunity! Now!"

The Immaculate Masked Chain-Fighting Guardian leaps forward and into Melee Range of Nesbit, who cannot use terrain control while reorienting. Then whack! He rolls a 6 and misses.

### Round 16: PCs

Nesbit's player unhappily spends Nesbit's last Exemplar Die.

"I'd hoped to come out even here—but enh. It's enough for one last push!"

He takes up a last 5-round interval!

He charges forward towards the gate.

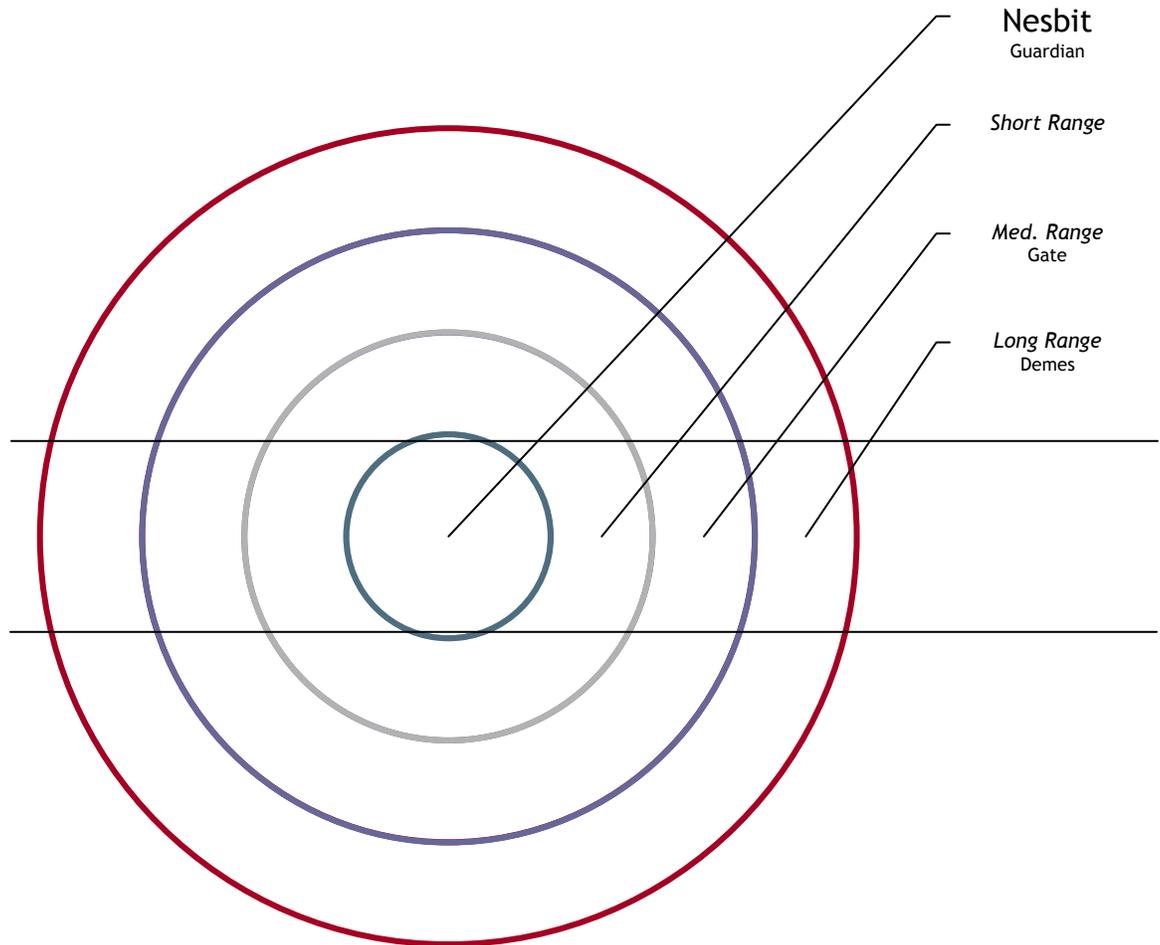
He turns his spear on the Immaculate Masked Chain-Fighting Guardian!

He rolls a 7.

"*Every last one of these guys has spent time inside my guard,*" Nesbit exaggerates. "Is there something wrong with the guard? Is it too far out?"

## Layout

Nesbit and the Masked Guardian are in a Melee scrum. The gate is at Medium Range. Demes is at Long Range.



## Round 16: NPCs

Demes backs into Short Range of the gate, shoots, and misses again. He mutters plangently, "Such is the archer's fate."

The Immaculate Masked Chain-Fighting Guardian lashes out with the chain at Nesbit's back as Nesbit moves. He deals 7 Damage, ripping Nesbit's shirt and cutting deep into Nesbit's back.

### Round 17: PCs

Nesbit makes a Promptness roll, hoping for one last action.

He succeeds.

"Too late," he gloats.

"Too late! Now you'll see my supreme and glorious spear!"

He makes a second move, bringing the gate into Short Range. Demes exerts terrain control, but Nesbit rolls a 7 and ducks past the archer's final shot. The Immaculate Masked Chain-Fighting Guardian doesn't bother to follow.

Nesbit stabs at the gate with his Short-Range Spear.

He rolls a 1.

The smith who made the Dragon Spear assists him with an 8. Truly, it's not Nesbit Hawke's skill—great as it is!—but the glorious dragon spear that lets him manage a final powerful blow!

Nesbit rolls 11 Damage, shattering the gate.

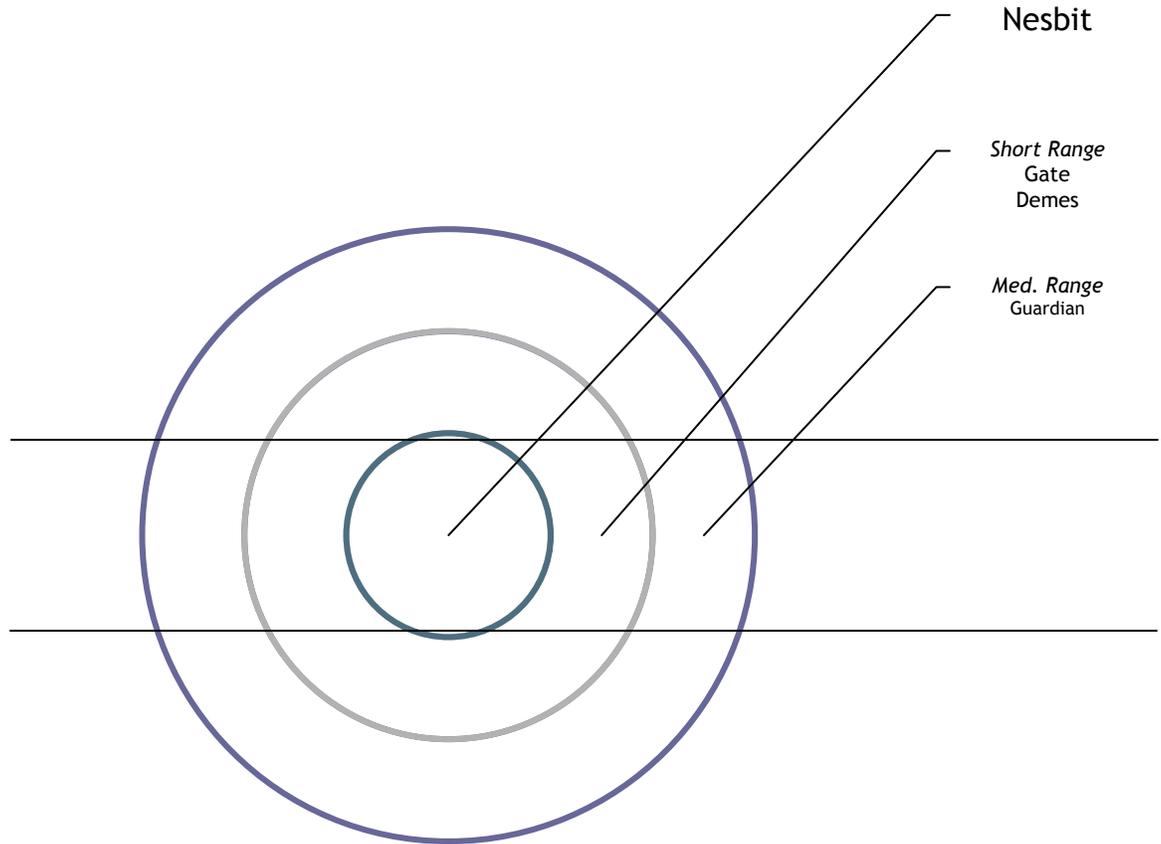
Then he falls down.

"Sleeping now," he says.

It wouldn't be a very good moral, but, Nesbit thinks, it has its own piquant appeal.

### Final Layout

Nesbit is collapsed alone, at Short Range from the gate. Demes is in Short Range of the gate and therefore of Nesbit. The Masked Guardian is at Medium Range—when Nesbit closed on the gate, which was at the time at Medium Range, the Guardian stayed behind.



## Ranged Weapons in the Dreaming Waters

In addition to the classic medieval and martial arts weaponry above, the **Dreaming Waters** setting includes a handful of modern ranged weapons, the catch-ropes used to bring down aerial enemies, and a non-lethal polearm, the sasumata.

### Guns in the Dreaming Waters

Guns are powerful weapons, but ammunition for them is not common in the upper realms. It's not a matter of preference and the demand curve—there are plenty of tribes and cities that admire the gun. Rather, it's a problem of supply. The manufacturing process for gunpowder does not go as smoothly in the upper realms as in the lower world. The underlying chemistry works fine, but there's something about *the process of manufacture of explosives* in the upper world and in the light of the animus of the sun that relegates it to the realm of mad science. People trying to set up the mass production of guns and ammunition in the upper realms tend to die or lose their manufactories in memorable explosions. Most ammunition is brought up one box at a time from the dreaming waters. This isn't *hard*, but diving into the dreaming waters is unpleasant enough that the supply of ammunition in the upper realms remains meager and guns remain rare.

### Guns and Terrain Control

The rules for how guns control terrain are a little different than the rules for bows and other medieval weapons. This isn't intended to express some deep military distinction but rather a different philosophy of operation: the **Filial Action Piety System** expects that a character picks up a bow to pin enemies down and keep them at range, while **Dreaming Waters** assumes that characters who are using guns want to be able to "cover" an area in a fashion more reminiscent of an action movie.

So instead of controlling movement *towards* you, guns control movement in an area—everything within some specific Range of some target point, except as obstructed by physical obstacles. If consistency is desired, the GM can declare that bows and darts use this style of terrain control or that guns use the bow/dart form.

## Assault Weapon

-1 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

Very Long Range (open region)  
or Long Range (cluttered area)

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, -2 Defense)

Assault weapons can perform selective fire or just fill the air with lead.

Assault weapons have the following special features:

***Inflexible:*** when changing weapons from wielding an assault weapon to not wielding an assault weapon, you spend +5 Fight (max 15).

***Terrain Control:*** you may give up your normal attack to fill an area with machine gun fire.

If you do so you may attempt to drive up to five enemies and any number of allies or neutral parties out of that area.

Pick a target in assault weapon range.

Pick up to five enemies within Short Range of that target, and all allies in Short Range of that target. They are *driven back*, and must roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 14 or less, they must immediately sacrifice their next action's normal move to move (ignoring other terrain control) to some location of the GM's choice that is at Medium Range from the target *or* take Damage—6d6 or +5 (max 6d6+10) Damage.

Further, any character that moves to Short or Melee Range of the target before your next action is *driven back*. They must roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 14 or less, they must either move to a location of the GM's choice that is at Medium Range from the target *or* take 6d6 or +5 (max 6d6+10) Damage.

*You may drive back five enemies and any number of allies per round.*

***Fail:*** You *shoot an ally*. If there are no allies you can hit, then you damage the gun or run out of accessible ammunition. You cannot use assault weapons or their terrain control again this interval.

***Clean Kill***—if your target has less than 15 Fight, including any temporary Fight, deal 15 Damage and then deal 2d6 Damage against another target in range. If not, the GM tells you that you can't get a clean kill and you may choose another epic move.

*Fill the Air*—do 2d6 Damage and then roll an attack against any number of additional enemies within assault weapon range. These attacks cannot receive assistance or trigger epic moves; they can, however, fail and hit allies (potentially, even, multiple times.)

*Short Burst*—deal 3d6 Damage and make another attack. This attack can fail or trigger a new epic move, but it cannot trigger another short burst.

### Catch-Rope

-2 Accuracy/2d6 Damage  
Long Range

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, -2 Defense)

Catch-ropes are weapons designed to bring angels and other winged enemies down. The basic form is a limber metal rope with sharp or sticky "hairs" that can tangle in wings, clothing, or the struts of a wing-board.

Catch-ropes have the following special features:

**Flexible:** when you change weapons such that you are no longer using a catch-rope, you spend -2 Fight (min 0).

**Terrain Control:** a catch-rope may constrain up to two enemies per round.

You may constrain an enemy who is at Long Range or less to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained enemies that attempt a move that would take them to a further Range from you must roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or take damage: 3d6 or +0 (max 3d6).

*You may use this terrain control against two enemies per round.*

**Fail:** You shoot an ally. If you hit an ally while being cheered on, deal only 2d6 Damage to them but your terrain control *constrains* them until your interval ends. If there are no allies you can hit, then your weapon is *tangled* instead. You take a -2 *tangled* penalty to Defense next round, and you cannot use the catch-rope again this interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Drag them Down*—pick an enemy within Long Range. Deal 2d6 Damage to that enemy and move them to a location one Range class closer to you, ignoring terrain control.

*Tightening the Noose*—deal 2d6 Damage or move the target to a location one Range class closer to you (ignoring terrain control). For the rest of your interval, while you are wielding a catch-rope, that enemy needs a 17 and not a 14 to move away from you without taking damage.

Handgun

-1 Accuracy/1d10 Damage  
Long Range

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, -2 Defense)

Handguns are light and effective weapons with good stopping power.

Handguns have the following special features:

**Rate of Fire:** you may give up your normal move to fire a second time in a given round.

**Terrain Control:** you may give up your normal move to "cover" an area with handgun fire.

This allows you to protect that area from up to two enemies per round.

Pick a target in Long Range.

Until you next move or change weapons, when an enemy moves into Short or Melee Range of your target, they roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 14 or less, they must either cancel their move, stop at Medium Range of that target (if they were originally at Long or Very Long Range), or take damage—4d6 or +5 (max 4d6+10) damage.

*You may use this terrain control against two enemies per round.*

**Fail:** You shoot an ally. If there are no allies you can hit, then you damage the gun or run out of accessible ammunition. You cannot use the handgun Weapon or its terrain control again this interval. (If your character wants to switch guns, you should end your current interval, describe the

reorientation round as switching guns, and start a new interval with the new gun.)

*Epic Moves:*

*Clean Kill*—if your target has less than 15 Fight, including any temporary Fight, deal 15 Damage and then deal 1d10 Damage against another target in range. If not, the GM tells you that you can't get a clean kill and you may choose another epic move.

*Roll*—deal 1d10 Damage and make a normal move, ignoring terrain control. If you were covering an area before you moved, you resume covering that area.

*Stopping Power*—deal 1d10 Damage. If your target moves in a voluntary fashion before your next action, including moving with someone when they move, the target takes 4d6 or +5 Damage (max 4d6+10) as a terrain control effect.

## Rifle

-1 Accuracy/2d6 Damage  
Very Long Range

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, -2 Defense)

Rifles are accurate and deadly ranged weapons. Their major weakness in comparison to the bow is that cartridges are difficult to obtain in the upper realms.

Rifles have the a number of special features:

**Careful Shot:** if you didn't act last round, you have a +2 *aim* modifier to your Accuracy with a rifle (max +2) and gain 2 Fight when you hit an enemy with your rifle.

**Inflexible:** when changing weapons from wielding a rifle to not wielding a rifle, you spend +5 Fight (max 15).

**Minimum Range:** rifle damage in Short or Melee Range is only 1d6.

**Terrain Control:** you may give up your normal move to "cover" an area with rifle fire.

This allows you to protect that area from one enemy per round.

Pick a target in Very Long Range.

Until you next move or change weapons, when an enemy moves into Medium, Short, or Melee Range of your target, they roll  $d10 + \text{their Defense}$ . If they roll 14 or less, they must either cancel their move, stop at Long Range of that target (if they were originally at Very Long Range), or take damage— $4d6$  or +5 (max  $4d6 + 10$ ) damage.

*You may use this terrain control against one enemy per round.*

**Fail:** you shoot an ally. If there are no allies you can hit, then you damage the gun or run out of accessible ammunition. You cannot use any rifle or its terrain control again this interval.

### Epic Moves:

**Clean Kill**—if your target has less than 15 Fight, including any temporary Fight, deal 15 Damage and then deal 2d6 Damage against another target in range. If not, the GM tells you that you can't get a clean kill and you may choose another epic move.

**Pick them Off**—deal 2d6 Damage. In addition, for the remainder of your interval or until you spend a round not acting, you get the effect of *Careful Shot* (+2 *aim* to Accuracy, and 2 Fight gained per hit, when using a rifle.)

### Sasumata

+0 Accuracy/1d10 Damage  
**Short Range**

### [Two-Handed Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, +0 Defense)

Sasumata are pole weapons with blunt prongs on the end, useful for pinning an enemy's neck, arm, or body against a wall or the ground. Spikes prevent the target from simply grabbing the pole and wrestling it away. These non-lethal weapons are popular tools in the cities of the angels for capturing criminals and maintaining order.

Sasumata have the following special feature:

**Terrain Control:** a sasumata may constrain one enemy per round.

You may constrain an enemy who is in Short Range or who tries to move into Melee Range of you to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained enemies that move towards you, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 12 or less, they stay at Short Range or move into Short Range (as applicable). They do not have the option of taking Damage instead.

*You may use this power on one enemy per round.*

**Fail:** the targeted enemy is *inside your guard*. For the rest of their interval, or until they move away from you, they are immune to your terrain control and have +3 *positional* Defense (max +3) against your sasumata.

*Epic Moves:*

*Pin them Down*—deal 1d10 Damage. Your enemy is *pinned down*: they are unable to move in any way save for involuntary motion such as falling or moving with you when you move. This is a form of terrain control. It lasts until you change weapons, make an attack on someone else, are no longer in Short Range of the enemy, or they break free. Each round they roll d10+their Defense, and break free on a total of 12+.

*Tactical Retreat*—deal 1d10 Damage and make a normal move, ignoring terrain control. If an enemy moves with you, you may use the sasumata's terrain control power against one such enemy.

**Taser**

-1 Accuracy/1d10 Damage  
Medium Range

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, -2 Defense)

Tasers are stun guns intended to subdue enemies at range. Most can fire one or two shots at a modest range and have a melee shock weapon capacity as well.

Tasers have the following special feature:

**Limited Shots:** after you attack with a taser either once or twice, depending on the specific model, it becomes a melee shock weapon. You automatically stop wielding a taser and ready and wield a shock weapon in the relevant hand at no cost in Fight.

*Fail:* You *shoot an ally*. In addition to the damaging effect, the ally loses their next action. This does count against their interval. If there is no suitable ally to shoot, you flail wildly and lose your next action, and this counts against your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Immobilize*—deal 1d10 Damage and immobilize your enemy. They are convulsing and unable to act until you wield a weapon that is neither a shock weapon or a taser, make an attack on someone else, are no longer in Medium Range of the enemy, or they break free. Each round they roll d10+their Defense, and break free on a total of 12+. Rounds of immobilization do not count against their interval.

# Dreaming Waters:

## Additional Ranged Combat Examples

### Jacob vs. the Terror

Jacob is a human. He's been tracking a terror. He doesn't know what it is—he can't see the dreaming waters. He doesn't know why nobody else knows about it, why the evidence keeps fading away, why in the richest nation in the world he has to fight it on his own.

But nobody believes him. People think he's crazy.

He has connections.

He's not helpless. He knows people. The kind of people who got him off the hook when the cops were dragging him off to the psych ward. The kind of people who can get him weapons, tools, even backup—if he can cope with it, if he can bear having it dissipate *one more time* when other people show up. Being a Blackwater vet has its perks.

So that's why he's pinned it down on the thirteenth floor of a downtown office building. That's why he's got explosives set up and an assault rifle in his hands. All he has to do is lure it to his trap, and hit the trigger. He moves into the cubicle farm, hunting, every sense alert, waiting to see the terror move—

It moves.

It flows like water through the air.

It's at Short Range from him—oh, God, just Short Range.

He fires.

### Round 1: PCs

Jacob knows from experience that this terror has a 9 Defense, so he's not going to hit it with a regular shot—instead, he fires a burst at it to gain some range. Sadly, it rolls a 10 (+9) for a total of 19 on its roll to ignore terrain control. He retreats towards the trap he's set up, which is at Long Range.

He is currently constrained to Medium Range Mobility; this will take him two rounds.

## Round 1: NPCs

The terror moves into Melee Range of him.

It attacks, rolling another 10.

This triggers a special terror epic move. It divides into five jellyfish-like creatures that swarm through the air next to him. Each equips "dangling stinging tendrils," which function like melee shock weapons.

## Round 2: PCs

Jacob fires a burst point-blank. Three of the creatures fail the terrain control roll (rolling 3, 2, 3 for a total of 12, 11, 12) and are driven away to a Lonely Cubicle and a Happy Cubicle, both of which are at Medium Range.

Two remain in Melee Range.

He is now constrained to Short Range Mobility. He needs a total of four moves to close from Long to Medium Range of his trap. He's moved once, and under better conditions—the GM rules that it counts double, and so Jacob only needs two more.

He moves again.

## Round 2: NPCs

The three mini-terrors at Medium Range try to close again. His terrain control applies, but all three of them move past it—

He's got five of them on him again.

They roll 3, 8, 1, 7, and 10 to attack him.

The first is a miss.

The second is a hit, and does 6 points of Damage.

The third gets *assistance*—not from its fellow mini-terrors, since they're the same creature, but from the shadow in the dreaming waters. The shadow rolls a 1 and *chains*, guaranteeing a hit, and creating a flashback which Jacob's player must describe:

*"I hate all life," confesses the shadow. "It's the noise! You should totally go off and sting perfectly innocent people with your tendrils of horror."*

*"But that would be cruel to a poor and innocent person!"*

*"Yes," agrees the shadow. "Also, to dashing men who are good, brave, upstanding, and have immaculate hair. But what can we do? If we were not inimical, then these admirable human beasts would take over the planet and enslave us!"*

The GM is not immediately inclined to treat this flashback as canonical.

The assisted jellyfish deals 2 Damage.

The fourth allows Jacob to turn its own stinger against it. He rolls a 6, so it's an opportunity that Jacob sees but can't take advantage of—perhaps the stinging tendril is briefly tangled in a potted plant, but then it uncoils and is free.

The last *Immobilizes* Jacob, rolling 4 points of Damage.

### Round 3: PCs

Jacob rolls to break free. He fails—rolling a 3, plus his Defense of 5, for a total of 8. He cannot act this round.

### Round 3: NPCs

The jellyfish swarm him, rolling 6, 8, 3, 5, 10.

The middle jellyfish has the benefit of a chain—but no applicable allies. Thus it misses, even though Jacob's already half-paralyzed by the tendrils. Three of them hit for a total of 11 Damage. The last invokes *Brutal Shock*. Until the end of Jacob's interval, he will take Spirit Damage equal to the Physical Damage he takes—starting with 1 point of each from the creature's initial sting. The Physical Damage can merely kill him—but the telepathic shock as the terror insinuates itself into his mind can *change* him.

#### Round 4: PCs

Jacob rolls to break free. A 7, plus his Defense of 5, is a 12—enough!

Choking down a scream, strangling on strange thoughts, he rips the mini-terrors off him, staggers back, and fires another burst.

He moves first, putting him in Medium Range of his trap. All five jellyfish follow. Then he uses terrain control against the jellyfish. Two are driven back, bumping futilely against the Motivational Poster at Medium Range. (The Lonely Cubicle is at Long Range from where he is now, so they don't return to it.) The remaining three jellyfish stay with him.

#### Round 4: NPCs

The two jellyfish try to move back from the poster ("Teamwork") and into the Melee scrum. Neither succeeds.

The three in range attack—one missing, and two rolling 7s.

Once again Jacob is unable to take proper advantage of the opportunity, rolling a 5 and 6—too low to practically turn their Weapons against them.

#### Round 5: PCs

Jacob moves to Short Range of his trap, the creatures moving with him, and fires another burst. The three jellyfish in range roll 5, 1, and 10 to avoid it: one skirls away to join the others at the Motivational Poster. The other two remain.

"At least I soaked out that 1 and 10," Jacob's player says.

He has two of the creatures with him now.

#### Round 5: NPCs

One of the jellyfish swirls around the bursts of gunfire and joins the others in the air about him. The three that are in Melee Range batter him, two of them hitting for a total of 10 Damage (and 10 Spirit Damage).

Jacob has taken 34 Fight Damage and 11 Spirit Damage.

### Round 6: PCs

Jacob moves into Melee Range of his trap and triggers it.

He no longer wants the mini-terrors kept back. So instead of firing a last burst he spends 5 Fight to drop his assault rifle, draw a handgun, and squeeze off two shots.

He rolls a 7, for an immediate epic failure. The gun is not useful.

### Round 6: NPCs

The mini-terrors close. One hits for another 8 Fight and Spirit Damage, leaving him down 47 Fight and 19 Spirit.

Two of them miss.

Two manage an epic failure, again. Jacob starts laughing, helplessly, in part because the creatures keep almost stinging themselves, and in part because he's about to die. He uses his broken gun to tangle the tendrils of the jellyfish and bang one into the other (that's his description for using their own shock weapon against them, with one hit for 6 Damage and one miss.) Sadly without an epic move, he can't paralyze it or do Spirit Damage.

### Round 7: PCs

Jacob's bomb goes off, catching Jacob and three of the jellyfish.

There is a moment of searing light.

"Am I dead?" Jacob's player asks.

"You wake up like a castaway on some shore, near a city of the Seven-Direction Empire. There's what looks like the remains of three dead jellyfish coiled about you."

"Where's the rest of it?" Jacob asks. "*Where's the rest of the terror?*"

But the world does not tell him; and so he lays there, battered and burned and breathing the good air of Heaven, and he weeps.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Stealthy and Elusive Styles

Certain weapons—beginning with the *secret palm style* Weapon below—allow a character to move stealthily and evade the enemy's notice.

This works as follows.

When a character is stealthy, enemies must explicitly become *aware* of the character before they can interact directly. This means, for instance, that they can approach the character by approaching someone near the character—but they can't identify the character and specifically move towards them. They can't use terrain control on a stealthy character, they can't attack them, and they can't use any effects that force that character to move closer.

To become aware of stealthy enemies, you'll roll  $d10 + \text{your Promptness}$ . You can usually make this roll at the beginning of each action for free, and it usually applies across the board to all enemies within Long Range that you'd wish to become aware of.

At the same time—that is, at the beginning of your action—you can also choose to automatically *stop* paying attention to a stealthy character. Some stealthy characters have epic moves that affect everyone who *is* aware of them and so keeping track of everyone you can isn't always best.

The GM *can* conceal information about the locations of stealthy NPCs, but the default system assumption is that players and the GM when playing hostile NPCs will just pretend either

- that enemies they're not aware of don't exist, if there's been no reason to think they do; or
- that they have no clear sense of where enemies they're not aware of are.

It's fine to make basic tactical decisions based on out-of-character information about stealthy enemies, but don't dwell on it—if the game is slowing down because you're thinking too much about the movements of stealthy enemies, or if you're getting into chess-like tactical planning involving them, quit it! Your characters don't know exactly where the stealthy enemies are.

Some Weapons are *elusive* instead of stealthy. Elusive characters are a lot like stealthy characters, except you know they're there: you just can't pin them down enough to target them.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Unarmed Styles

Characters may practice various unarmed combat styles. The **Filial Piety Action System** treats these styles as weapons of their own, save that characters always have their unarmed styles "with" them (barring strange amnesia plotlines, Chi-draining environmental effects, and other such effects) and unarmed styles are immune to the *disarm* effect from fighting chains.

If you are wielding a one-handed weapon, you can feel free to wield a martial arts style in "the other hand"—that makes it cheap to switch back and forth between the weapon and the style. If you're wielding two weapons or a big weapon, it's not that easy—you'll lose a lot more momentum (Fight) when you switch to an unarmed style.

Characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** have a proficiency in

- Brawling
- two special weapons (which can include 1-2 unarmed styles).

They may purchase further unarmed styles with Knacks.

### Unarmed Style Modifier Summary

<i>balance</i>	+1 to Defense (max +3)
<i>drunken style</i>	+2 to avoid terrain control (max +2)
<i>hemorrhage</i>	3 Fight bleeds away a round (max 9)
<i>off balance</i>	-1 to Accuracy (max -3)
<i>opening</i>	-1 to Defense (max -3)

## Brawling

+0 Accuracy/1d6 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

This is the most basic style of unarmed fighting—you're practiced at basic punches, kicks, and grappling.

This style has the following special feature:

**Flexible:** it costs 3 less Fight (min 0) to switch weapons to "brawling."

**Fail:** your crude style is shown up by the enemy's polished competence! Give your target an immediate free attack against you or lose one point of Exemplar Pool (down to your soft minimum)—your choice. This failure will not necessarily hurt you if you are already at your soft minimum for Exemplar Pool or if your enemy has no way to use their free attack.

### Epic Moves:

**Physical Dominance**—you seize the enemy. They are pinned and unable to act until you change weapons, make an attack on someone else, are no longer in Short Range of the enemy, or they break free. Each round they roll d10+their Defense, and break free on a total of 12+.

**Knockout Blow**—if your enemy has less than 15 Fight remaining, including temporary Fight, deal 15 damage.

## Drunken Style

+0 Accuracy/1d6 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

A drunken style martial artist weaves through the battlefield. They are deceptively hard to pin down.

**Fail:** instead of attacking the enemy, you perform a pratfall. Gain 2 Fight.

### Epic Moves:

**Drunkard's Walk**—do 1d6 Damage. You have a +2 *drunken style* bonus (max +2) on attempts to avoid terrain control until you change weapons or the interval ends.

*Assisted Fall*—do 1d6 Damage. Your enemy is *knocked off balance or prone*, losing their normal move for one round and taking a -1 *opening* to Defense (max -3) until their interval ends.

### Hard Style

+0 Accuracy/1d6+1 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

This is a hard style of martial arts focusing on balance, blocking power, and some combination of powerful punches, open-palm blows, and kicks. The point is to take the enemy down fast.

*Fail*: you're off balance! (Just like a sword stylist.) Take a -1 *off balance* to your Accuracy (max -3) until the end of your interval.

### *Epic Moves*:

*Shattering Blow*—do 1d6+1 damage. Your enemy was probably able to guard, but if they *fail* on their next action, they take another 4d10 damage "retroactively" before their failure mode applies.

*Stand against the Sword*—until the end of your interval, increase the Damage of your hard style martial art to 2d6+1.

## Secret Palm Style

+1 Accuracy/1d6 Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

This is a martial arts style focused on infiltration, subtlety, and stealth. Its users borrow the nature of shadows and the night.

This style has the following special features:

**Stealthy:** enemies must explicitly become *aware* of the character before they can target the character to, e.g., move closer to them, attack them, or use terrain control against them. This is a roll of d10 *minus* their Promptness, made within Long Range or before a move when the character closes to Medium or shorter Range, and requires a 7+. Enemies can attempt this roll once each round; success makes them aware of all stealthy characters within Long Range or closing that round into Medium or shorter Range in whom they would be interested. Enemies that are aware of you may choose to stop being aware of you.

**Inflexible:** it costs +5 Fight (max 15) to switch from another weapon to this style. When you start using this style, you vanish into the shadows: enemies are no longer aware of you, but they may make an immediate roll to become aware of you again. If you switch out of this style before making at least one attack with it, you must spend another 5 Fight.

**Fail:** you have betrayed your presence. You lose one point of Exemplar Pool and all enemies within Long Range are aware of you.

### Epic Moves:

**Poison Palm**—strike your enemy for 1d6 damage. They *hemorrhage* 3 Fight per round (max 9) until the end of their interval. Unlike a battle-axe's bleed effect, treat hemorrhage like a modifier: no matter how many secret palm stylists hit an enemy, they lose at most 9 Fight per round.

**Vanish**—make a normal move, ignoring terrain control. Enemies are no longer aware of you.

## Soft Style

+0 Accuracy/1d6 Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, +1 Defense)

This is a soft style of martial arts focusing on flowing movements that tangle and disrupt the enemy's assault. It works almost exactly like a dual-sword style, only, without the swords.

*Fail:* you're off balance. Take a -1 *opening* to your Defense (max -3) until the end of your interval.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Water Dance*—do 1d6 damage and add a +1 *balance* to your Defense (max +3) for the rest of the interval while you are wielding your soft style. You may move your normal distance, ignoring terrain control.

*Martial Rhythm*—do 1d6 damage, recover from any *opening* penalty, and extend the length of this interval by 2.

## Example of Unarmed Combat

### Nix Hedrine Valentine meets Renna, the Drunken Scholar!

"Hey," says a voice. "Hey, you OK?"

Nix Hedrine Valentine has been defeated—but not killed, or even very badly hurt. First, it's always the GM's option to leave a PC alive. Second, she has Exemplar Pool left, and that makes almost any defeat temporary.

So that's why she opens her eyes blearily to see **Drunken Scholar Renna** leaning over her.

"Oh, God," Nix says. "My purse. And the kid!"

"I used to worry about money and kids," says Renna. "But now I just walk the land as a drunken scholar. That's my answer to everything! It's like being a Buddha of the grapes."

"I see," says Nix, because she does.

She struggles to her feet. "Listen," she says. "Are you the kind of reliable drunkard whom I could draft to help me save a kidnapped child, and then pawn off with some cheap wine?"

"Am I ever!"

The GM restores Nix to 35 Fight, since she's had an involuntary rest and Renna uses a bit of drunken medicine. Renna has 50 Fight. The two of them resolve to hunt the three bandits down.

### Layout

The two of them sneak into Long Range of the three bandits.

### Round 1: PCs

Nix proposes *Reliable + to your Family* as the basis of her interval, but the GM rules that her money is not a proper member of her family. She switches to *Fierce + to your Enemies*, which is only a 3-round interval, but allows an option of delicious revenge.

She draws her sword and readies Brawling in the other hand.

She tries to spring forward to the attack, but Odious Bang reflexively turns and applies his terrain control. "Hey! Brothers!" he says. Nix is *constrained* to Short Range Mobility. It'll take her seven rounds to close! She elects to move in on him anyway.

Renna is simply being *Helpful + to the Deserving*, which for her is 5. She readies and wields *Secret Palm Style*, vanishing into the trees.

Odious Bang rolls a 2—he can't see or constrain her!

Unlucky Nao rolls a 5—he can't either!

Lucky Nao rolls an 8. "There's another one, brothers!" he says, pointing.

Renna closes, moving into Melee Range of the three.

She attacks Odious Bang, rolling a 3, to no effect.

### Round 1: NPCs

Lucky Nao attacks Renna with his club, rolling a 4.

"There's no one there, brother!" says Unlucky Nao.

Odious Bang shoots at Nix and misses.

### Round 2: PCs

Nix rolls a 3 to break free of her Short Range Mobility. She fails! Bang is the only one who can attack her, so he does—and misses.

Nix moves another move closer.

"Return the boy and I'll let you leave alive!" she calls out.

"That's not very Fierce," the GM says.

"Yeah," says Nix. "I guess that my anger is fading a bit here. Maybe I'll go ahead and switch strategies to *Reliable + to the Deserving*."

"Next round," says the GM. "You acted—well, tried to act—this round."

Renna rolls an 8, dealing 5 Fight Damage to Odious Bang.

### Round 2: NPCs

Bang spins around—catching sight of Renna! Unlucky Nao does the same. They roll a 10 and 8, respectively, to become aware of Renna.

"Kill the ninja!" Bang roars.

"I'm a *drunken scholar*," Renna emphasizes.

Bang shoots her point-blank, which fails.

Unlucky Nao hits for 11 points of Damage. He also gains 5 Fight from his *mighty swing* since he didn't act last round—he's in the swing of things!

Lucky Nao manages an *epic move*.

He *smashes* Renna for another 11 Damage, and also gains 5 Fight—plus, Renna cannot act next round. Her head rings like a drum!

### Round 3: PCs

Nix gives up on *Fierce + to your Enemies* as a bad job, and spends the round reorienting. The GM stipulates, "You can fight them, but you can't get *revenge* unless you use a Fierce round later—it looks like you don't have the heart to be really nasty. That OK?"

Nix's player agrees.

Renna is *smashed* and cannot act.

### Round 3: NPCs

Bang shoots—and misses, even with Renna's lowered defense.

Unlucky Nao *fails*. His mighty club swing has him off balance, and he's staggering for two rounds.

Lucky Nao just plain misses.

#### Round 4: PCs

Nix starts a new 6-round interval. This doesn't cost her anything since she had more than two rounds left on her last interval—she'd only used one action from it! Then she rolls a 3 to break free of Short Range Mobility.

"So frustrating!" she says. "This die is stuck!"

Bang shoots at her, because she tried to break free of constraint and couldn't, rolling a 3 of his own. "Not so!" says the GM. "It's just a contagious randomness-depleting '3 flu!"

Nix makes a third move towards the Melee scrum.

Renna sees no reason to stay in secret palm style now that she's been seen, so she spends 5 Fight to switch to *drunken style*. She's now down 27 Fight. She attacks and misses, rolling a 4.

#### Round 4: NPCs

Bang shoots Renna, rolling a 10. He activates *archer's retreat* and then pulls back towards a Likely Bush in Short Range—thinking that he'll trap Renna at range.

Renna has to overcome his terrain control to move with him—but she rolls a 7 and sticks to him like glue. Lucky and Unlucky Nao move with her. Unlucky Nao is staggering, barely keeping up with the fight; Lucky Nao rolls a 6, which isn't enough to hit the drunken scholar.

Nix advances into Medium Range, rolling a 9 (plus her Defense) to avoid terrain control.

"Not that it matters," says Nix, "since he's about to run out of interval."

#### Round 5: PCs

Renna attacks Bang again, rolling a 9 and dealing another 5 Damage.

Bang can't exert terrain control this round—he's going to be reorienting—so Nix leaps forward into Melee and rolls a 1 to hit him. Renna supplements with a 6 and the GM throws in a 4 from Nix's master—that's enough to hit, but not to pull off an epic move. She deals 10 Damage, and finishes Bang off.

"*Finally*," she says.

### Round 5: NPCs

Bang doesn't bother rolling Promptness—he'd just have to spend a round reorienting anyway. Lucky Nao also has to reorient. Unlucky Nao, on the other hand, just staggers.

### Round 6: PCs

"About time you got here!" says Renna. She feints, distracting Lucky and Unlucky Nao—*cheering Nix on*.

Sadly Nix wastes the moment, failing on her attack roll.

Nix is now off-balance.

### Round 6: NPCs

Lucky Nao starts a new interval. Unlucky Nao has two actions left on his interval. They both have *mighty swing* active—and miss anyway.

### Round 7: PCs

Renna reorients.

Nix stabs Lucky Nao, earning an *epic move*—invoking *sword rhythm* to recover from her off-balance penalty and extend her interval. She deals 8 Damage to Lucky Nao.

### Round 7: NPCs

Lucky and Unlucky Nao both roll low—2, and 3. They flail.

### Round 8: PCs

"No, no, no," Renna explains, spending an Exemplar Die and starting a new interval of *Helpful + to your Students*. "When I *feint*, you want *them* to react. *You* just stab!"

Nix's player squawks. "I'm not your student!"

"I distracted them! You fell over! Clearly you need instruction in drunken fighting!"

"I'm not DRUNK either!"

Nix rolls a 6. Her sword has +1 Accuracy, and she's no longer off balance, so that's a 7.

"Is that enough to hit?" she asks.

"Yup!" the GM confirms.

"Lucky!"

Cheered on by Renna, Nix earns an epic move, which she uses to deal a full 4d6 Damage to Lucky Nao. Her total is 12—he's down to 5 Fight, and *that* only because of his earlier mighty swing.

### Round 8: NPCs

Unlucky Nao reorients.

Lucky Nao lashes out, rolling a 6. That's no good!

### Round 9: PCs

Renna punches Lucky Nao, but misses—she might as well be clapping him on the shoulder! But Nix manages to hit, with another 6, and deals the 5 Damage necessary to defeat him.

### Round 9: NPCs

Lucky Nao rolls two 10s in a row—enough to win a Promptness roll and use an epic move. He opts to do a *combat stunt* version of the sword stunt, *rigorous form*—dealing 2d10 Damage and gaining 2 Fight. Just when it looks like he's down, he heaves himself up and whacks Nix for 11 Damage instead!

Unlucky Nao has *mighty swing*—but he *fails*, meaning that he's going to stagger for two rounds.

Again.

#### Round 10: PCs

Renna goes first, rolling a 3 and missing Lucky Nao again.

Nix stabs Lucky Nao, rolling a 10. "You call that rigorous form?" she says. "I'll show you a rigorous form!" She regains 5 Fight and deals 9 Damage to him. Rolling a 1 on his Promptness this time, he just topples.

#### Round 10: NPCs

Unlucky Nao staggers.

#### Round 11: PCs

"Here," says Renna. "He's staggering—like a drunkard! That's when you hit his pressure points, here, here, and here."

"I don't need your instruction!" howls Nix.

Cheered on by Renna, she rolls an 8 to hit—that becomes an epic move. She opts for *sword rhythm*, seeing a chance to come out of this fight an Exemplar Die ahead: and rolls minimum damage against Unlucky Nao. Unlucky Nao is at 23 Fight; Nix has, thanks to two uses of sword rhythm, 3 rounds of interval remaining.

#### Round 11: NPCs

Unlucky Nao continues to stagger.

#### Round 12: PCs

"Pathetic!" says Renna. "You missed every pressure point! Do I have to strip him and draw Chi meridians on his flesh?"

This is the last round of Renna's interval.

She spends it arguably cheering Nix on. Lashing her into a fury might be a more accurate term—

Nix rolls a 1. Renna throws in an 8. Nix's master adds a 5.

Nix goes for 4d6 Damage this time, dealing 13. Unlucky Nao has 10 Fight left.

### Round 12: NPCs

Unlucky Nao recovers from rounds of not acting with a *mighty swing!*  
And rolls a 2.

### Round 13: PCs

Renna reorients.

Nix stabs at Unlucky Nao, rolling a 4.

### Round 13: NPCs

Unlucky Nao misses.

### Round 14: PCs

"Bah," says Renna. "This student's no good! I'll save the kid myself."

She starts a new interval, spending a second Exemplar Die.

She drops into her *serious* drunken fighting stance and rolls a 1. Nix irritably assists, throwing in a 10. The GM rolls on behalf of Renna's very important person back at home, and *chains*.

*"I can't love you, Renna," he says.*

*His eyes shine like the stars.*

*"You're a drunken scholar, and you never beat up bandits. I'm a sober hero who's always thinking of others! It would never work out."*

*"I can beat up bandits!" she protests.*

*She illustrates a special drunken style move.*

*"Renna, Renna," he sighs, and hugs her tightly, and almost cries. But then he draws back. "You'd need to have your left hand higher," he says, and walks away.*

Renna goes for *assisted fall*, rolling 4 Damage and pulling Unlucky Nao off-balance.

Nix reorients.

### Round 14: NPCs

Unlucky Nao lashes out—and rolls a 7.

"He surrenders," says the GM. "He just ... closes his eyes and lets himself fall down."

"Woohoo!" cheers Nix, collecting her Exemplar Die. "If the enemy doesn't have good determination, you can come out of long fights smelling like a rose!"

"He's a good enough man," says Renna.

"Who, Unlucky Nao?"

"Yeah."

"Bit unlucky," Nix says.

"Bit unlucky. Staggers a lot. Let's all drink wine together!" the drunken scholar concludes.

# Filial Piety Action System: What to Track in Combat

In general, in a combat, the GM will need to keep track of the following:

- Damage taken by various participants;
- rounds of interval remaining for each participant;
- range and movement, to taste.

Typically you can record Damage with a tally sheet—e.g.,

## Damage Tally Sheet: Variant 1

Nix	35	24	29
Renna	50	39	28 23
Lucky Nao	20	25	17 5 0 2 -5
Unlucky Nao	20	25	23 10 6
Odious Bang	20	15	10 0

## Damage Tally Sheet: Variant 2

Other options include just tracking how much Damage characters take, and noting modifiers or effects on the same tally.

Nix	off-balance	-11	-6
Renna	<del>-22</del> stunned	-27	chain
Lucky Nao	+5	-3	-15 -20 -18 -27
Unlucky Nao	+5	stagger x2	stagger x2 +3 -10 -14 off-balance stagger x2
Odious Bang	-5	-15	-20

## Interval

There are two ways to keep track of interval.

The simplest is to give each character a number of 10-sided dice equal to their interval. When they attack, or do something else that uses interval, they roll one of those dice and put it aside. When they're out of dice, they are out of interval. If players start losing track of what these dice are for, you can replace them with tokens—spend a token when you're taking action.

The alternative, when you have a large number of NPCs, is to give one token to each character and NPC and place these tokens on a track—

*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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When you start an interval, place the token on the appropriate number for the number of rounds in that interval. When a character uses their action, move their token one step to the left; at the \*, they are out of actions, and must reorient.

# Dreaming Waters:

## Aerial Combat

The angels of the **Dreaming Waters** are winged, and battles in the upper realms often require characters to move into the air.

### Taking to the Skies

It's not just angels who can take to the skies for aerial combat. Wingless humans and animals can participate in aerial combat too—with options ranging from the standard fallback of a wing-board to a desperate or graceful acrobatic scramble to the heights. We're going to assume that in almost every case, if there's an aerial combat, every character can participate—some more easily than others.

### Modes of Flight

#### Wings

It is a power that most angels have, to manifest their wings. Wings are capable of ripping through clothing as they manifest, with a few magical exceptions—if the angel is locked in a shirt of dream-forged iron, or fire-infused brass, or something of the kind, it may baffle and contain the manifestation of their wings. Wings may move unimpeded through anything physical and inanimate in the dreaming waters—unlike the rest of the angel, they can pass right through walls, doors, and shackles, and vice versa.

Angels' wings are feathered—closer to bird's wings than to bat wings or to aeroplane struts. They're quite large, spanning six to eight feet, but even still biologists and physicists squint at them—under the mortal rules of the dreaming waters, they wouldn't be able to carry an angel's weight. Not only that, they would tear the angel's chest and back apart in trying! Yet those wings *can* carry that weight, the angel's weight and most of the angel's normal carrying capacity to boot, and angels don't generally get hurt from it. This isn't exactly magic: everything is lighter and stronger in the upper realms, and the fire of life in the heart acts both as an energy source and as a structural buffer. This game isn't set up to endure or support *intensive* scientific examination of the mechanisms of flight, but the GM should pretend it's mundane enough that a

loose consideration of aerodynamics and physics is relevant when deciding how aerial encounters work. Angels can't *ignore* momentum, weight, lift, wind, aerodynamics, and the assorted physical concerns of winged flight—they're just much less affected than you'd expect them to be.

Angels do have the power to manifest their wings and fly while still in the dreaming waters.

## Wing-Boards

The closest a human can come to angels' wings is a wing-board. You can think of this as a hang-glider with some aesthetic elements of light aircraft: smaller, more maneuverable, and more portable than a hang-glider, but more powerful in practice due to the relaxed constraints of the upper realms. Some wing-boards also have small and quiet wing-mounted engines—one on each side, each as large as a fist—for extra power. Most high-end wing-boards can fold up into something the size of a guitar case when not in use.

Much like an angel's wings, the wing-boards ought not work, so you don't have to worry *too* much about how they actually do. They're in the game to allow awesome aerobatics and to let humans soar with the angels, so that's what you should use them for.

Only characters with the Knack *Light* can use wing-boards while in the dreaming waters.

## Athletic Ascent

Everything in the upper realms is, as we have said, lighter; and stronger; and more dexterous. For this reason it is sometimes possible for a human, even without a wing-board, to keep up with a flying enemy—using athletic leaps or laborious climbing to ascend to the heights.

A certain portion of this power clings to humans even when they return to the dreaming waters. It is nothing close to the effortlessness or utility of flight, but humans who have breathed the good air of the upper regions may move with an ease somewhere between that of Parkour and that of fictional light-foot martial arts—sometimes enough, in a cityscape, to keep up with a flying enemy. Characters can reach full-on aerial maneuverability in the dreaming waters by taking the Knack *Light*.

There are a small handful of aerial combat options that a character using athletic ascent cannot use. For instance, while it's *rare* for someone to convert their wing-board into a mobile weapons platform, it's considered *impossible* for an athlete to do the same with their skill at scrambling and jumping. Most

other options are available to those participating athletically in aerial combat, including the majority of the "winged styles" below.

## Airborne Failure

An airborne character is typically also fighting with some weapon. That means that by default they can't concentrate fully on flight, and they incur an additional mode of failure, triggered on a 3—

*Aerial Failure Mode (Flight):* the character damages their wings, body, or wing-board. Until they have a chance to rest and/or repair, any aerial movement that is neither following an enemy or ally or descending to the ground inflicts 2d6 Damage to the character. This is a terrain control effect.

Characters cannot avoid this by using other modes of aerial movement: their body is damaged enough to prevent it.

## Airborne Failure and Athletic Ascent

The failure mode for an airborne character who doesn't actually have wings or a wing-board is different—instead of taking some injury and going down in flames, they just fall. Sometimes that's better, e.g., when they're high enough to reassert their mobility before landing. Sometimes it's worse. Characters using athletic ascent to participate in an aerial combat have the following mode of failure, triggered on a 3—

*Aerial Failure Mode (Athletics):* the character falls, taking 2d6 Damage and making two normal moves towards the ground. If terrain control prevents this motion, or gives you an opportunity you accept not to take one of these moves, you cannot act next round.

## Avoiding Airborne Failure

Characters can remove the risk of airborne failure in two ways:

- readying no Weapon at all, and just concentrating on movement; or
- using a "winged style" of combat that's designed for use in the air.

Most winged styles remove the risk of airborne failure entirely, but a few change the aerial failure mode in some way.

## Aerial Combat

Aerial combat is possible any time there is enough open space above the battlefield to fly. When that's the case, there's no special requirement for taking off—characters with access to wings, a wing-board, or athletic ascent can move through the sky as easily as they can move along the ground. This is normal movement, and doesn't require any special kind of action—though bear in mind that if you're using your normal move to ascend, you must still choose something, even if it's just "an advantageous height," to move *towards*.

## Aerial Obstacles

Obstacles and terrain aren't a huge part of battles in the **Filial Piety Action System**, but they can crop up. In this context we're going to assume aerial combat uses a lot more space than an equivalent battle would on land. Whenever the GM places an aerial obstacle or barrier—a spire, battleship, lightning-filled cloud, or whatever—that obstacle should have a fuzzy region around its actual border where it isn't safe to fly. It's up to the GM what this means, but some sort of terrain control effect is typical.

## High Winds and Tight Spaces

Sometimes high winds or cramped environments may create a Difficulty for airborne combatants. Characters may tackle this Difficulty directly, developing some kind of coping adaptation. If they do not, they likely take a penalty (damage, or involuntary movement) each time their interval ends.

## Winged Styles

Any time you have an aerial combat—one with enough space in the sky for the characters to ascend—every character may ready one *winged style* in addition to their physical weapons, and may choose to wield this style as their Weapon. Some winged styles require actual wings; most are usable with a wing-board or with athletic ascent.

When in an aerial combat, therefore, a character may ready any of the following combinations of Weapons:

- no Weapon at all;
- a winged style;
- an unarmed style *and optionally a winged style*;
- a one-handed weapon, an unarmed style, *and optionally a winged style*;
- two one-handed weapons *and optionally a winged style*; or
- one two-handed weapon *and optionally a winged style*.

For instance, a character could be fighting with a sword, a soft unarmed style like aikido, and a winged style such as *harrier-hawk style*, below. Only one of these would be wielded as the character's Weapon at any given time, but they could spend 2 Fight to switch seamlessly between them, in one action attacking with their sword, in another tangling up an enemy with aikido, and in the next tiring them out with harrier-hawk style.

Readying a winged style or no Weapon generally protects the character against airborne failure, making it safe (if still usually a miss) to roll a 3 on an attack.

## Winged Styles on the Ground

In general if you are using a winged style you are always *ready* to fly: an angel has their wings extended, a human has their wing-board out, and an athlete is monitoring the area for good handholds and footholds and other mechanisms for ascent. However, you're not required to *actually* fly just

because you're using a winged style. For instance, if you're fighting with *harrier-hawk style*, you can stay on the ground until an enemy gives you a *reason* to take off.

When a character using a winged style moves into a location without adequate open space in which to fly, they may not make attacks using their winged styles. Treat all winged styles as "no Weapon" (1d6 Damage, ignore special features, no failure mode, no epic moves, and no bonuses or penalties to Accuracy, Defense, etc.) until the character has room to fly. Thus a character wielding *harrier-hawk style* is effectively unarmed when indoors, and a character wielding *unfettered flight* paired with a sword is just wielding the sword. Characters who are in confined locations may wield and ready or continue to wield and ready winged styles if they believe there is a chance they will reach the open air before their interval ends.

## Natural and Unnatural Styles

Even though an angel's wings are inborn and a wing-board user is at the mercy of a machine, most winged styles are equally usable by both. Most are even usable by characters who prefer the athletic ascent! It's assumed that if you've trained to fight in the air, you can overcome the individual handicaps of your means of flight.

A few styles differ, taking advantage of the responsiveness of an angel's natural wings or the tireless power of a machine. Characters may take the *Like an Angel* or *Like a Machine* Knack to overcome these handicaps, allowing a wing-board user who is *Like an Angel* to soar with an angel's grace or an angel who is *Like a Machine* to emulate the tireless mechanical character of a plane.

*Unfettered flight* is the winged style most associated with natural flight. It's an aerial style based on instinct and grace. It's more tiring than the other aerial combat styles—the character is pushing themselves to excel, making their flight into an art. Wingless characters need the *Like an Angel* Knack to use this style.

*Shelter of the Wings*, conversely, is an aerial style that relies on the speed and physical shelter of the wing-board for defense. It's unpleasant if somebody shoots or stabs your wing-board, but it's better than if they shoot or stab *you!* This is a style for skilled and tireless wing-board users, but there's a risk when you're using it that you'll get out of tune with the fight and need to glide around in a big circle to get back into position. Winged characters need the *Like a Machine* Knack to use this style with their natural wings.

## Proficiency

In addition to the standard proficiencies, characters in **Dreaming Waters** have a proficiency in

- one winged style

and may use Knacks and one or both of their "two special weapons" to purchase winged styles.

### Winged Style Modifier Summary

<i>cautious</i>	-1 to Accuracy (max -3)
<i>exhilaration</i>	+1 to Defense (max +2)
<i>opening</i>	-2 to Defense (max -5)
<i>opening</i>	-5 to Defense (max -5); lasts through the next round. these two kinds of opening are not cumulative.
<i>positional</i>	+3 to Defense against terrain control (max +3)
<i>strafing</i>	+1 to Accuracy (max +3); lasts until you succeed on an attack or the interval ends
<i>unfettered</i>	+1 to Accuracy and Defense (max +1)

## Winged Styles: Self-Contained Styles

These are winged styles that functionally replace the use of a weapon. It's assumed that you're using *something* besides your wings to hit your enemies, probably whatever weapon you have in your hand, but the core of your attack and defense is the winged style itself.

### Flowing with the Sky

+1 Accuracy/1d10 Damage

[Winged]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

*Flowing with the Sky* means using the local wind and thermals to move efficiently through the air. It's a graceful and understated style characterized by lulls, twisting and spiraling motions, and bursts of speed. This style is usable with wing-boards as well as wings.

*Fail:* you stall or overshoot a target. Decide on the most inconvenient possible thing to move towards. (The GM can overrule your decision at their whim.) Move one normal move in that direction, ignoring terrain control; enemies that have been constraining your movement must continue to do so. If there is an obstacle in Melee Range after this move, collide with it and take 2d10 Damage. If there is no obstacle in Melee Range, but there *is* an ally in Melee Range, collide with *them*, taking 1d10 Damage and dealing 1d10 Damage.

### Epic Moves:

*Flow*—deal 1d10 Damage, and another 1d10 against up to two more enemies within Short Range.

*Elusive Fighter*—deal 1d10 Damage. You fade into the wind, seeming to vanish away from enemy attacks: gain 10 temporary Fight (max 20) which lasts until damage exhausts it or your interval ends.

*Move the Battle*—deal 1d10 Damage and move one Range class closer to something within Long Range, ignoring terrain control. Any enemies that move with you suffer any terrain control that would have affected you, but have a +1 bonus on their roll to avoid its effects. This only applies to terrain control imposed by people

and effects whom the GM reasonably believes would have targeted you if they could.

### Harrier-Hawk Style

+0 Accuracy/2d6 Damage

[Winged]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Defense)

*Harrier-Hawk Style* is a defensive style. The character takes advantage of aerial mobility to harass the enemy without coming into reach, normally staying close to the ground.

*Fail:* Your enemy's *clipped your wings*. You have -3 *Shell* (max -8) until the end of your interval. Note that *Shell* is subtracted from the *Damage* of attacks against you, so a negative *Shell* means taking additional *Damage* from attacks.

#### *Epic Moves:*

*Exhaust the Foe*—deal 2d6 *Damage* and *tire* your enemy, giving them -3 *Shell* (max -8) until the end of their interval.

*Pin them Down*—until the end of the target's interval, when they strike at you or move, you may inflict 2d6 *Damage* on them as a terrain control effect. When their interval ends, deal another 2d6 *Damage* and make a normal move, ignoring terrain control.

## Sea-Eagle Style

-1 Accuracy/2d10 Damage

[Winged]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Defense)

*Sea-Eagle Style* is an aggressive style focused on driving its enemies down out of the sky and then skewering or beating them from above.

*Fail:* You're *wide open!* Take a -2 *opening* to your Defense (max -5) until the end of your interval.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Push*—deal 2d10 Damage and drive your enemy towards some location in Short, Medium, or Long Range. They must roll 14+ on a d10+their Defense, take another 4d6 or +5 (max 4d6+10), or move one Range class closer to that thing as a terrain control effect.

*Brutal Assault*—deal 2d10 and shatter the enemy's defense, inflicting a -5 *opening* to their Defense (max -5) for this round and the next. If necessary, keep track of what their *opening* penalty would be without this effect—recovering from it won't remove any other *opening* penalties they have.

## Winged Styles: Supplementary Styles

Supplementary styles are designed for use with another weapon or style—much as defensive off-hands are. Skilled users combine them with winged or physical styles.

### Unfettered Flight

[One-Handed Weapon]

The character is a dancer in the sky, unstinting in effort and matchless in grace. To use this style with a wing-board requires the Knack *Like an Angel*.

Unfettered Flight has the following special feature:

**Supplementary Weapon:** unfettered flight is a supplement to your weapon or style and is not a weapon or style of its own. You may wield unfettered flight and a winged style or one-handed weapon at the same time, but you must be proficient with at least one of them. If you are using unfettered flight, you must spend 3 Fight each round (to remain airborne) but gain a +1 *unfettered* bonus to your Accuracy and Defense (max +1). You also gain the epic move option, *Deep Breath*, below.

#### *Epic Moves:*

*Deep Breath*—exhilaration overcomes exhaustion; deal your normal Damage and heal 10 Fight.

The character is tireless in the air. This is a wing-board style; to use this style with natural wings or athletic ascent requires the Knack, *Like a Machine*.

Shelter of the Wings has the following special features:

**Supplementary Weapon:** shelter of the wings is a supplement to your weapon or style and is not a weapon or style of its own. You may wield shelter of the wings with either a winged style or a ranged weapon such as a spear, bow, or gun, but you must be proficient with at least one of them. If you are using shelter of the wings, you gain 3 points of Shell (max 8) but cannot apply terrain control against enemies. You gain access to the epic move, *Spinning Defense*, below.

**Aerial Failure Mode:** you do not suffer the normal aerial failure mode, but something bad still happens on a roll of 3: next round, you may move but you may not roll for Progress/Damage. That round will not count against your interval.

**Epic Moves:**

**Spinning Defense**—deal your normal Damage and gain 1 Shell (max 8) and +1 *exhilaration* to Defense (max +2) until the end of your interval.

## Winged Styles: Aerial Weapon Styles

These winged styles are meant for use with another weapon—your aerial mobility supports the use of a melee or ranged attack. Unlike *unfettered flight* and *shelter of the wings*, they cannot pair with other winged styles.

These styles cannot be used with athletic ascent.

### Aerial Maneuvers

[Winged]

The character moves very consciously and perhaps even formally through the air, but uses a weapon or unarmed style for attack and defense. Anyone can use this style with an unarmed style—basically, the wing or wing-board becomes an extension of the unarmed forms—but wing-board users can only pair it with other weapons if they have the *Like the Angels* knack.

Aerial maneuvers has the following special feature:

**Supplementary Weapon:** aerial maneuvers is a supplement to your weapon or style and is not a weapon or style of its own. You may wield aerial maneuvers with any non-winged style, but you must be proficient in either aerial maneuvers or the weapons chosen. If you are using aerial maneuvers, take a -1 *cautious* to your Accuracy (max -3) until the end of your interval. While using aerial maneuvers you gain the epic move option, *Take Wing*, below.

### Epic Moves:

*Take Wing*—gain 5 temporary Fight (max 5) and a +3 *positional* bonus to your Defense that only applies when rolling to break free of constraint or defend against terrain control (max +3) until the end of your interval. You can give up to 5 of your temporary Fight to someone else within Medium Range of you next time they take damage (max 5), knocking the attack out of the way with an aerial maneuver.

The character uses their wing-board to achieve tactical advantage or aerial mobility while attacking fiercely (typically with ranged weapons or multiple passes combined with hit-and-run tactics). Anyone can use this style with heavily automated weaponry (physical or magical), and wing-board users can use it with any weapon that doesn't disallow it, but for an angel to use this with a normal weapon requires the *Like a Machine* Knack.

The mobile weapons platform has the following special features:

**Supplementary Weapon:** mobile weapons platform (style) is a supplement to your weapon or combat style and not a weapon or style of its own. You may wield this Weapon in combination with anything but a winged style, but you must be proficient in either this weapon or the other weapon you are wielding. It is legitimate, but not recommended, to pair this with an unarmed style—try to avoid doing this. When using a mobile weapons platform you gain the special features **Strafing Attacks** and **Spiraling Down in Flames** and access to the epic move *Blam Blam Blam!*, below.

**Strafing Attacks:** each missed/failed attack gives you a +1 *strafing* bonus to Accuracy (max +3) until your interval ends or you succeed on an attack.

**Spiraling Down in Flames:** even though this is a winged style, you can still suffer the aerial failure mode during its use. Rolling a 3 not only damages your wings and wing-board as per the aerial failure mode, but when it happens your interval ends immediately and you cannot use this style in the next.

#### *Epic Moves:*

**Blam Blam Blam!**—deal your normal damage. Make up to three additional attacks, each with the *strafing* bonus to Accuracy that your original attack roll had, until you miss or fail. You cannot earn an epic move on these attacks, but any time you or someone assisting you rolls a 10 on one of these attacks, add one to the maximum number of attacks allowed—with enough good luck, you can just keep going!

# Dreaming Waters:

## Aerial Combat Examples

### The Siege of Siskery

The world is curdling. There is a clammy sensation in the air. There is a metal taste at the back of the tongue.

The rocks are becoming damp.

The birds have fled. The insects' voices have stilled.

Daniel's world is spinning. He comes out of—sleep? Perhaps? A faint? Just a moment's sickness? He staggers to the door of his guest-dwelling. It is midday and the sky is black.

A corpse is clinging like a tick to the second floor of Eve's guest-home.

Like her bedroom, it is on the second floor.

It is ripping out the paper window-screen.

Round 1: PCs

<b>Daniel Marks</b>		<b>Exemplar Pool 1</b>	
<i>Budding Hero / Angel</i>			
<b>Attentive</b>	<b>0</b>	to your Enemies	<b>0</b>
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Family	<b>3</b>
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	<b>1</b>
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>4</b>	to Leah	<b>0</b>
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Students	<b>1</b>
		to your Teachers	<b>1</b>
		to the Deserving	<b>1</b>
		to the Wicked	<b>3</b>
<b>Fight</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>Heart</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Defense</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Heart Shell</b>	<b>3</b>
		<b>Spirit</b>	<b>50</b>
		<b>S. Defense</b>	<b>7</b>

"Eve!" Daniel shouts.

Then he moves. *Helpful* + *to your Family* + *Eve* gives him a eight-round interval. He readies a sword but wields *Sea-Eagle Style* and *Unfettered Flight*.

He moves to the creature, closing to Melee Range in a thunder of wings

He attacks the creature.

He rolls a 3.

Since he's using a winged style, this doesn't trigger aerial failure mode. He does however spend 3 Fight to stay aloft, and he doesn't hit.

**Eve Meredith Chao**

*Impressionable One / Seeker*

**Exemplar Pool 2**

*soft minimum 1*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>4</b>	to your Enemies	1
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>	to your Family	1
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Daniel	0
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>0</b>	to Leah	1
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>3</b>	to your Students	2
		to your Teachers	0
		to the Deserving	3
		to the Wicked	2

**Fight** 50  
**Defense** 7

**Heart** 50

**Spirit** 70  
**S. Defense** 8

Daniel's shout wakes Eve. She sees a dead man's hand plunge through her paper window-screen.

"Oh God," she says.

She scrambles out of bed. She starts a *Fierce + to your Enemies* interval, worth only two rounds, since the only thing on her mind is getting away from the creature. She has no weapons handy, so she wields Brawling—she's ready to fight it off if she has to. She can't move out of the house without first going to the door or window, so she races downstairs to the door.

## Siskery Leah

Exemplar Pool 1

*Diligent Student / Rescued Human*

<b>Attentive</b>	<b>2</b>	to your Enemies	<b>1</b>
<b>Fierce</b>	<b>1</b>	to your Family	<b>3</b>
<b>Insightful</b>	<b>1</b>	to Daniel	<b>1</b>
<b>Helpful</b>	<b>2</b>	to Eve	<b>1</b>
<b>Reliable</b>	<b>4</b>	to your Students	<b>0</b>
		to your Teachers	<b>2</b>
		to the Deserving	<b>1</b>
		to the Wicked	<b>1</b>

**Fight** 50      **Heart** 60      **Spirit** 50

Leah is speaking to the grey-winged Samuel Lorrin when the world goes quiet, terrible, and dark.

"Eve," she says.

"You are mistaken," Samuel Lorrin says. His tone is definite. "And Marks is mistaken. It cannot be that the shadow seeks Eve Chao."

He hesitates.

"But go," he says. "Go, child! I would not have you look at me with such fearful eyes."

Leah starts a six-round *Helpful + to Your Family + to Eve* interval. She readies and wields a pair of winged styles as her weapons: Shelter of the Wings and Flowing with the Sky. She moves to her wing-board, which is at Long Range, and seizes it up.

## Round 1: NPCs

The corpse on the wall is bloated and sea-dead. He has 30 Fight and a default interval of 5 rounds. He is wielding a shock weapon and the supplementary style, Shelter of the Wings, with a drunken style ("zombie style") readied in his "other hand."

These are the remains of Farren Koy.

He moves into Eve's house and tumbles down the stairs like a corpse, but when he lands at the base of the stairs he is moving forward and there is lightning clinging to his blade. The dramatic attack is ruined by his rolling a 7, allowing Eve to turn the weapon on him, and her rolling a 5, preventing her from actually doing so.

Like a goblet of meat flung by a person's hand, a child's body caroms into a wall outside Eve's home. Its mouth opens. It drools blood. It mutters, "Lonely."

There's a practice sword dangling from its rictus hand.

Wings flare from its back. They fling it into Daniel, using harrier-hawk style.

It rolls a 10.

It *pins him down*, clinging obscenely to him.

In the sky above them rises a dead angel.

## Round 2: PCs

Daniel is pinned down by the harrier-hawk style, but doesn't care. He moves to Eve's door, taking 10 Damage from *pin them down*.

The child moves with him.

Daniel stabs at the remains of Farren Koy.

He rolls a 1. Both Eve and Leah assist—rolling 6 and 1 respectively. Leah *chains—*

*Daniel Marks' "doomful prognostications" have impressed the elders of Siskery. Quieting Leah's protests, the grey-winged Samuel Lorrin orders the bells of Siskery rung to gather the children, the decrepit, and the wanderers; the warriors to take up and keep arms*

*ready; and a plan made ready for retreat if the shadow moves across the upper world.*

*"I don't like you," Leah tells Daniel.*

*"I want to help," he says.*

*She looks away. Then she shrugs.*

*"I'll show you the winds of Siskery," she says. "So you don't bump into walls every time you turn around."*

Farren's Defense is 8. The GM rules that while Daniel has aerial mobility, Farren is still basically indoors and does not. That means that Daniel does not manage an epic move, but he does succeed, and Farren's shell from "shelter of the wings" is not operative.

Daniel deals 11 Damage. He spends another 3 Fight for the Unfettered Flight style.

"He fell—" Eve says.

"Get behind me," Daniel says.

Moving out of the house and behind Daniel doesn't take her move—she's in a Melee scrum with Daniel, Farren, and the child-zombie. So she ends her interval and reorients.

Leah moves from Very Long Range into the Melee scrum.

"You recognize two of them," the GM says. "That child is Lin and the corpse in the sky is Sangryuk of Siskery. You don't have any idea whom that other guy is, though you might as well use the name Farren Koy since that's what I'm calling him."

"Oh, hell," says Leah. "Can I tell what's got them?"

"They're dead," the GM says. "Not even really zombies. They're dead, they're meat, something is using them as its hands and feet to reach into Siskery."

Leah rolls her attack. A 4.

"I think," she says, "that that's me frozen in horror."

## Round 2: NPCs

Farren springs on Eve, resuming his aerial style—and rolls a 3. Shelter of the Wings has an aerial failure mode, which this triggers. He hits a wall and staggers sideways; next round, he can move but cannot act.

Lin rolls a 4.

Sangryuk descends into the scrum, also rolling a 4.

*Daniel has 44 Fight left.*

*Farren has 19 Fight left.*

## Round 3: PCs

Daniel attacks again, rolling a 2. Because of Leah's *chain*, Eve can assist—but all she adds is a 3.

Eve starts a new 5-round interval, *Attentive + to your Family + Daniel*.

She had two rounds left on her first interval when she started. This does not cost her. In a low tone of voice, she says, "Tell me what I need to do."

She readies *Sea-Eagle Style*, even though she's not trained in it—

Her theory is that she's going to try to synch up with Daniel's movements or cheer him on, depending on which way events go. For now she waits.

Her player doesn't *plan* on Eve spending long as "the damsel in distress" or "the romantic interest," but she's new to the upper realms, impressionable, social, and currently unarmed—so for right now she's not going to expect to do much.

Leah on the other hand is here to kick butt and take names—but she rolls a 3. This triggers the same failure mode as Farren: she can move next round but not attack.

### Round 3: NPCs

Farren cannot attack; he is still staggering, as if whatever is moving his body cannot see properly through his eyes. Lin rolls a 1; whatever is distantly controlling him rolls a 3, and that does not suffice.

Sangryuk's corpse strikes at Eve with its reaper, dealing 20 Damage—the scythe opens a horrific wound. The creature then circles back up into the air above Siskery, to *the low air above the houses*, driving the enemies before it—

Any enemy who doesn't move with it will take more Damage.

"How do I do *that*?" asks Eve's player.

"I'll drag you up," Daniel's player says. "Or Leah will. I assume that you're able to either call it athletic ascent or just use our wings when you're in Melee Range."

"OK."

So as the horrible scythe cuts upwards, Daniel grabs Eve and leaps back, and now they're all in the air above Siskery. He takes another 7 points from the *pin them down effect*.

*Daniel has 37 Fight left.*

*Farren has 19 Fight left.*

*Eve has 30 Fight left.*

### Round 4: PCs

Leah cannot attack; it's all she can do to stay with them and away from the spinning angel reaper blade.

Eve hides her face against Daniel and *cheers him on*.

It doesn't help—Daniel rolls a 7. He takes a -2 penalty to his Defense, reducing it to 7. He also spends another 3 Fight on Unfettered Flight.

### Round 4: NPCs

Sangryuk rolls a 1, and his distant master assists, rolling a 7.

This suffices to hit Daniel for 8 Damage.

He moves again, pushing them back into a *Large Spire of Rock*.

"I can't keep moving with this child-thing on me," Daniel's player says. "Can you stick to Sangryuk, Leah?"

"Sure."

Daniel and Eve take 3 Damage as he breaks off and lets Sangryuk and Leah move off to Short Range.

Farren springs upwards, striking at Daniel; he rolls a 6. Were Daniel just using Sea-Eagle Style, this would hit—but Daniel has +1 Defense from Unfettered Flight, so it's not quite enough.

Lin rolls a 3. He's using harrier-hawk style, so he doesn't fall.

*Daniel has 23 Fight left.*

*Farren has 19 Fight left.*

*Eve has 27 Fight left.*

#### Round 5: PCs

Leah rolls another 4.

Eve cheers Daniel on as he tries to rally and shake Lin off. It turns out to be unnecessary—he rolls a 1, which they assist up to a total of 16. Daniel earns an *epic move* against Lin. He chooses a powerful blow, dealing a burst of 24 Damage. He spends another 3 Fight on flight.

It's enough to shatter the child's body; it bursts in the air.

#### Round 6: NPCs

Sangryuk moves back in on Daniel, but rolls a 4. Leah follows.

Lin succeeds on a Promptness roll, but fails on the attack.

Farren rolls a 6, again not enough.

*Daniel has 20 Fight left.*

*Farren has 19 Fight left.*

*Eve has 27 Fight left.*

### Round 7: PCs

Daniel focuses on Farren again, with Eve's support.

Once again, he rolls a 1; they add another 15 from assistance. He is tempted to drive Farren away; if he sends Farren off to Long Range, it'd be possible for either Leah or Daniel to travel with Farren while the other remained behind to limit the other enemy's mobility, allowing them to deal with one target at a time. On the other hand, it would mean that Leah couldn't help him if something went terribly wrong—so he opts for a *brutal assault*, instead, dealing 8 Damage and forcing Farren's defense wide open. He spends another 3 Fight on Unfettered Flight.

Leah attacks. Farren's Defense is at -5 this round—

But it doesn't matter, as she rolls a 10. She *flows*, spinning her wing-board in the wind, dealing 3 Damage to Farren and 10 to Sangryuk.

Farren is using *Shelter of the Wings* and has 3 Shell.

This means he takes only 5 Damage from Daniel and none from Leah. Bits of his corpse fall off instead.

### Round 7: NPCs

Farren claws at Daniel, rolling a 1 (which rises, with assistance, to 8); he deals 6 more Damage with his shock weapon.

Sangryuk rolls a 5, which does not suffice.

He drives Daniel, Eve, and Leah dizzyingly down to the street; however, with Eida gone, Daniel takes no damage from this.

*Daniel has 11 Fight left.*

*Farren has 19 Fight left.*

*Sangryuk has 25 Fight left.*

*Eve has 27 Fight left.*

## Round 8: PCs

"Stay strong," says Daniel, as he staggers across the street with Eve in his arms. He kicks off into the air as Sangryuk advances on him with the whirling angel reaper and tries to maneuver him into a wall.

Instead, he *fails*. His Defense is now at -4. He loses another 3 Fight.

Eve's player forgot to specify that she was cheering him on, but decides that it's probably still what she was doing.

Leah dives for Farren, rolling a 3. Farren's Defense is still at -5, so it would be enough—but *shelter of the wings* has an aerial failure mode, so a gust of wind drives her away at just the wrong moment.

## Round 8: NPCs

Farren and Sangryuk *reorient*.

*Daniel has 11 Fight left.*

*Farren has 19 Fight left.*

*Sangryuk has 25 Fight left.*

*Eve has 27 Fight left.*

## Round 9: PCs

There's a momentary opportunity in the scuffle. Farren and Sangryuk are not maintaining their control over others' position. Daniel takes advantage of this to move, with Eve, to Samuel Lorrin's house—which ought to be guarded by a cluster of warriors.

Farren and Sangryuk move with them, as does Leah.

"Well done," says the GM. "But you don't make it all the way."

"Why not?"

"The dreaming waters are pouring from every crevice of the world; and you can see by the time you're in Long Range of the elder's house that it is drowned, and sea-fires are burning, and the warriors are struggling with a white-haired girl-child who has already slaughtered more than half."

"Oh," says Daniel.

He spends another 3 Fight on Unfettered Flight.

He whirls furiously on Sangryuk, shouting something incomprehensible, with Eve still cheering him on; and rolls a 6.

It's enough.

He deals 26 Damage. He hurls Sangryuk out of the air into the cliff wall beside the way-town, driving him in, lashing with his sword.

Leah rolls a 3, and glides helplessly past.

### Round 9: NPCs

Sangryuk succeeds at a Promptness roll and strikes at Daniel, hitting and dealing an unimpressive 6 Damage. Then, dying, he moves down towards the surface of the rising waters.

He moves downwards through the surface of the waters and is gone.

"Gah," says Daniel. "I have 2 Fight left. I guess . . . I have to go with him. But I'll throw Eve to Leah as I fall."

Farren attacks Eve midthrow. He rolls a 7.

Eve rolls an 8.

"Hm," says Eve's player. "I guess that as Daniel and Sangryuk go below the surface of the waters, this Farren guy swoops on me, and Leah is swirling heroically under to catch me on some air current, and I'm wrestling with the shock weapon as his teeth are gleaming and his dead breath is coming at me or something?"

"OK," the GM says.

Eve deals a grand total of 2 points of Damage to Farren with his shock weapon, which doesn't penetrate his shell.

*Daniel has 2 Fight left.*

*Farren has 19 Fight left.*

*Eve has 24 Fight left.*

## Round 10: PCs

As Daniel plunges into the dreaming waters and Leah catches Eve, all three characters *reorient*.

## Round 10: NPCs

Farren lands with a hideous thump on the top of the wing-board and claws at Eve. He rolls a 4. He fails.

## Round 11: PCs

"I don't know who to help," Leah says.

"Elder Lorrin said to help Eve," says the GM. "You haven't done that yet."

". . . point."

She spends an Exemplar Die and starts a new six-round *Reliable + to your Teachers* interval. "Eve, you with me? And do you want to cheer me on or start doing some stuff on your own?"

"I don't have a weapon," Eve's player says.

". . . fair point," Leah's player says. "OK, assuming that whatever else happens, she's starting an interval and cheering me on, I roll!"

She rolls, in fact, an 8.

"I want to do a combat stunt," says Leah. "Use the wing-board to get shield-like transferable temporary Fight."

"Sure," says the GM. "You can have 5."

Leah deals 7 Damage, 4 of which Farren takes.

Daniel says, "Am I still in the fight?"

The GM thinks. "You're not *defeated*, but let's get back to you later."

"OK!"

Eve thinks.

"We need to help him," she says. "I want to find some way to do that. Which I guess starts with shedding this guy, but after?"

"OK."

Eve looks at her *Helpful + to your Family + Daniel* total. It is grim.

"On second thought," she says, "I'm going to focus on trying to figure out what's driving these zombies. And that can be what I'm doing that's cheering Leah on. Like, copilot duty!"

This is based on *Insightful* with the Subject being the relevant sibling-storm—a two-round interval, which is better than the single action helping Daniel would give her.

"I feel snubbed," Daniel's player says.

#### Round 11: NPCs

Farren rolls a 6 and misses.

#### Round 12: PCs

Eve hoards her action, waiting for Farren to get a little closer to defeat.

Leah attacks, rolling a 1. Daniel *chains*, and Eve throws in an 8.

Daniel's player tries to imagine an even vaguely relevant flashback.

"You don't have to come up with one," the GM says. "It just costs you the chain benefit if you don't."

"It's just, when would I have discussed how to fight off zombie angels that are clinging to your wing-board while escorting someone to safe—"

Daniel's player stops there, as he realizes what to say.

*"I dream of her," he says to Leah.*

*He looks a bit goofy. She laughs.*

*"I do," he protests. "Look—if anything happens to me. You have to keep her safe. You have to carry my heart with you in this. I have to know it'll happen."*

*"I dredged her from the dreaming waters," Leah says. "All you've done is make moony eyes."*

"Right," says Leah. "FOR THE MOONY EYES!"

She rolls over the surface of the water, dealing 2d10 in a *powerful blow*. It's only enough for 7 points of Damage, of which 4 get through.

"I'm also going to switch to his sea-eagle style after this," she says.

## Round 12: NPCs

Farren *fails*.

Eve could turn his weapon on him—but she, too, fails.

Farren manages an epic move. Lightning cascades through Eve, whiting out her thoughts. She begins to slide off the edge of Leah's wing-board's wing.

## Round 13: PCs

Eve rolls a 10, breaking free of the electric shock.

"A sign from the dice-gods!" she says, and uses the second action of her interval to cheer Leah on.

Leah spends 5 Fight to switch to sea-eagle style—and immediately *fails*. She has a -2 Defense.

Eve, somewhat disconsolately, rolls to assist on the chain—

And rolls a 1. She can continue the chain!

*"I like moony eyes," Eve observes, coming in from behind them.*

*Daniel flushes bright red.*

*He hadn't expected her to hear.*

*Leah is helping to set up Daniel's guest-house. Eve's been by a few times to help to.*

*This time, she's brought a basket of sandwiches.*

*"Some kid named Lin made 'em," Eve says. "Begged me to bring them to 'the awesome wandering swordsman.' There's enough for 3!"*

"Damn it," mutters Leah.

### Round 13: NPCs

Farren rolls a 3. It doesn't matter, since he has to reorient next round anyway.

### Round 14: PCs

Eve reorients.

Leah rolls a 6. Daniel, because of the chain, can assist—and adds a 5.

She deals 14 Damage, which the shell reduces to 11.

Farren fails his Promptness roll and plunges into the sea.

"Do I earn my stipulation?" Eve wonders.

"Nope," says the GM. "The closest you can do is use the Exemplar Die you are about to get on a relevant moral. Leah does get to get you to safety, though, as per her Reliable action."

And there's a long slow silence as the wing-board and its two passengers soar over the shimmering surface of the dreaming waters.

Then there is a thunder.

Then there is a shaking of the world.

The silvered waters close over the good land of Siskery, and not even the gulls protest.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Magic and the Spirit

Weapon-using bandits and martial artists are not the only dangerous thing that characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** may face. In addition to the standard rogues' gallery of bandits, unjust magistrates, cultists, gangsters, and power-mad warriors, the GM may pit characters against magic—curses, demons, and spells!

Beside the world—

Impinging on it, overlapping with it, touching it, but rarely touching it directly—are *spirit realms*. Living in those realms are intangible presences that weight upon the world, whether ancient curses, possessing demons, or fairy palaces; from those realms, through the barrier between worlds, they work their subtle effects on the mortal places.

To fight the gross manifestations of magic, such as embodied demons and energy-bolt-throwing sorcerers, takes no more tools than those already developed in the sections above. A sword can take down even gigantic, gnarled demons with iron-like skin; a bow can duel with a sorcerer at range.

To fight against the subtler magics, such as spells of transformation or control, intangible spirits and curses, and hostile presences impinging from other worlds, a character will need to use *Spirit Weapons*—the tools that both magicians and mundane characters have to oppose magical effects. In some cases, they may even need to reach across the veil between the worlds, calling down magic on their heads or traveling to an intangible realm.

## The Wall Between the Worlds

Between the physical world and the spirit world there is a *barrier*—the intangible curtain of separation that distinguishes the two modes of experience. Physical attacks and effects do not generally cross this barrier, though exceptions may exist; conversely, spiritual attacks may generally pass through it as if it were not there.

For most mortals, and in most places, this barrier impedes visibility and communication. The spirits, places, and magical effects on the other side are either wholly invisible or visible only as *portents*—

- *Melee Range*: they impend, the effect is obvious and apparent;

- *Short Range*: they give rise to strangeness and omens;
- *Medium Range*: they are a dim sense hanging about the world;
- *Long and Very Long Range*: there are hints and intimations which any character could pick up on (but most will not) and which only a character conceptualized as a magician, shaman, or knowledgeable about otherworldly things and influences can really understand.

This is true to some extent in the other direction, though normally it is less so; the spirits that inhabit the spirit world do not spend all their time in the presence of the mortal world, but witness hints and intimations of mortal activities in the substance of their realm. It is enough for them to monitor the material world if they care to but generally only specific sorts of spirits or spirits in specific places or kinds of spirit world will have a clear vision of the mortal world without first closing into Melee Range of it.

## Presences

There are natural and unnatural spiritual phenomena—both impinging and terrible presences, like a demon that settles in on some farmland and curses it to fallowness, and natural spiritual flows and locations that are a part of the landscape of the physical world. Each of these things has the power to shape the nature of experience on the other side—to reach through, simply by being imminent, and contribute to the character of a region, and to move up close and shape the world directly.

Thus a forest that is near some fairy-habit is likely touched by the spirits of that place even when they are not acting on it directly; it is the kind of forest that is obviously bordering on a fairy wood. Thus a wind-spirit, even if it remains entirely in the spirit realm, may touch upon the physical world to make the wind blow. The totality of the subtle and intentional effects of the spirit realm on the physical world is generally part of a place's character; it is only when a strong beneficent or malevolent effect sets itself to work that this distinguishes itself from "the way of things" and becomes specifically magic or spiritual attack.

## Attacking through the Barrier

The Weapons that a PC or NPC must wield to strike at others through the barrier are called Spirit Weapons. These include magicians' tools and spells, the natural efficacies and influences of spirit creatures, and the weapons that

characters wield in spirit realms against one another—but they also include *qualities of character*. Strong emotions, honor, dedication, and other tools of self-definition allow characters to defend themselves against spiritual assault. In the close presence of immaterial enemies, they even allow the character to strike back—love can vanquish evil, honor can conquer mind-twisting magic, and meditation, craft, and clever trickery can allow even an ordinary person to trap and defeat spirit-traveling magicians bedeviling them from the spirit world.

Wielding a Spirit Weapon shifts your concentration away from physical combat and the physical battlefield. Spirit Weapons all have a -2 Defense (here, specifically referring to the physical Defense that defends against Fight Damage) and occupy one or two hands just as a physical Weapon does. Characters may ready and wield Spirit Weapons just as they ready and wield physical weapons, using them to attack through the barrier—characters can even technically ready "no Weapon, as a Spirit Weapon" (aka "Spirit no Weapon;") this gives them a -2 Defense and allows them to roll the default 1d6 Damage/Progress as Spirit Damage. The default for Spirit Weapons is melee, and thus enemies must impinge close upon the world before the character may attack.

## Calling Spirits from the Vasty Deep

Spiritual enemies may, just as mortal antagonists, use ranged attacks to harm their prey. They may move within the spiritual realm, retreating from a close proximity to the mortal world when they fear it. Securely ensconced deep in some spirit fastness, they may work terrible magics on the human realm—but even mundane characters have a mechanism to respond.

This is a power that characters in the physical realm possess:

They may *pull* some location or enemy in the spirit realm closer. It, and all appropriate Range Circles, are drawn nigh to the world. The naked power of the will, intent on facing the enemy, makes it manifest. The intangible, confronted by the flame of a mortal's spirit, is forced into imminence. Hints become a presence; a presence becomes omens; omens become an impending spiritual force!

Imagine that a dedicated mortal wishes to confront a demon.

The demon is at Long Range. The mortal pulls it into Medium Range. The entire Medium Range circle surrounding the demon in the spirit world—a portion, e.g., of a demon town—moves to Medium Range imminence of the entire Medium Range circle that surrounds that mortal. In essence, the two are brought into alignment. The mortal pulls the demon into Short Range; the demon building is now in Short Range of the building or other Short Range location in which the mortal resides. The mortal pulls the demon into Melee

Range—that demon, and anything that happened to be with it just then in spirit range of the Melee scrum, is now imminent.

This is considered to be a natural and instinctive power. Characters do not need to have special knowledge or spiritual prowess to do it—but they do need sufficient motivation. Humans that are driven to confront a spell or spirit or other unnatural presence *reach*—caressing and shaping the fabric of the spirit realm and its border with whatever Spirit Weapon they use, or just the strong power of their being—and the spirit world draws nigh.

Nor may targeted enemies retreat.

Just as a character may *move with* an enemy or ally that moves away from their Range circle in the physical world, characters in the mortal world can *move the worlds with* an enemy or ally in the spirit realm that tries to retreat, maintaining their proximity.

### Working Together

Multiple characters working together do not draw a spirit to themselves any faster. Instead, each draws it individually towards themselves. It's comparable to physical movement in this respect: ten fast runners don't run any faster than one, they just run more *thoroughly*.

### Complicated Scrums

It is possible for a strange knot of spiritual and physical locations to form in consequence to these rules. For instance, in Hong Kong, a businessman opens his spirit briefcase and pulls a spirit from the Eternal Realm close. On the streets of New York, a vagrant drops a sacred coin in the slot of a dead telephone and does the same. Now, suddenly, the vagrant and the businessman are technically close enough to touch. Events could proceed in the same vein, until dozens of spirit and physical locations overlap.

This isn't actually a problem—

It's exactly how magic that connects multiple physical locations through the spirit world works. Whatever limits there are come not from the general rules for spirit-world interaction but from the nature of the barrier between worlds—the businessman and vagrant may interact through any effects that are allowed to cross that barrier twice in a single round. They may be blind and deaf to one another; they may be able to talk to one another, but not physically interact; they may be able to fight. It all depends on how their magic works!

## What Actually Moves?

The process of pulling spiritual things closer applies only to the Range circles that *must* move in order to make the necessary spirit and mortal locations coincide. Thus, the largest region that may be *pulled closer* in a normal conflict is a Very Long Range circle; anything larger moves only according to its own inexplicable whims or mechanisms. Further, when pulling some location into a certain Range, only the circle at that Range moves—to move something from Medium Range into Short Range moves only its Short Range circle. That circle may shift relative to other locations in the spirit world; then again, it's possible that it does not, only becoming more imminent with respect to the mortal world while remaining in an exact and fixed location relative to spirit travelers. It is as if one point on the map of the spirit world is perturbed, drawing it down to touch upon the map of the physical world; strange effects occur when it is greatly stretched, but the underlying maps themselves are not necessarily transformed.

## Pulling the World from the Other Side

By default, the ability to pull spiritual things closer is a property of the barrier between worlds and not the spirit world itself. Further, this power is symmetric: if a spirit wishes to sit in its palace and drag some mortal creature close, it may do so, and this functions exactly as if the mortal had pulled upon the spirit.

In some settings it may differ—perhaps only "lower" worlds may pull the things of "higher" worlds closer. Or this kind of movement could be a property of the spirit world more generally, such that anyone in the spirit world may drag their enemies or allies to them rather than traveling to their enemies or allies. The standard option is preferred only when it coexists peacefully with the specific genre of the game.

## Deeper Regions

There are realms of spirit "deeper" or "further" from the mortal world. These are separated from the spirit realm by a second barrier—they are sacred realms and regions that even disembodied spirits must struggle to reach. In some cases, these can provide a trump card escape for entities assaulted from the mortal world—effects cannot travel through both barriers at once, and deep regions cannot be pulled into proximity to the mortal world. In other cases, the sacred realms are no better defended than the realms of spirit;

when circumstances dictate, a conflict may span three worlds and cross two barriers at a time.

## Mobility

The power of "pulling" enemies has the same basic structure as physical movement. Your Mobility is limited by the exact same constraints as in the physical world—in fact, it's the same Mobility, so that a Melee Range enemy in the physical world limits your ability to pull spirit things closer. The number of rounds it takes to drag a spirit-world enemy close is the same as it would take for you to reach a physical enemy at the same range:

### Short Range Mobility

If you are constrained to Short Range Mobility, it takes

- one move to move something spiritual from Short to Melee Range;
- two moves to move something spiritual from Medium to Short Range;
- four moves to move something spiritual from Long to Medium Range; and
- eight moves to move something spiritual from Very Long to Long Range

of yourself.

### Medium Range Mobility

If you are constrained to Medium Range Mobility, it takes

- one move to move them from Medium to any shorter Range;
- two moves to move them from Long to Medium Range; and
- four moves to move them from Very Long to Long Range

of yourself.

## Long Range Mobility

If you are constrained to Long Range Mobility, it takes

- one move to move them from Long to any shorter Range; and
- two moves to move them from Very Long to Long Range

of yourself.

## Very Long Range Mobility

If you are not constrained, or constrained to Very Long Range Mobility, it takes

- one move to move them from Very Long Range to any shorter Range

of yourself.

## Mobility and the Two Worlds

Enemies in the spirit world *do* constrain the mobility of physical-world characters and vice versa—but only insofar as they are actively engaged in cross-world conflict. Even if malicious curses and demons throng throughout some malign and imminent spirit world, they don't constrain physical characters without a reason to interact with them; nor do saints, randomly moving through the physical world, constrain nearby spirits by their mere presence.

## Walking between the Worlds

To draw apart from physical reality and enter the spirit world in either physical or spirit form, characters must overcome the barrier that stands between them. This passage normally works as follows:

- attempting this passage costs your normal move.

- characters with Long Range Mobility may move freely past this barrier.
- otherwise the character must roll d10+their Spirit Defense.
- If the character rolls 13-, they cannot move between worlds. This is a terrain control effect, but physical effects that bypass terrain control will not apply unless so stated.

On occasion some hostile or even benevolent presence will guard the entrance to the spirit world with their own terrain control effects. These do Spirit Damage, alter perceptions, or simply attract the attention of guardian powers. Normally this control takes effect if the character rolls 14 or 15 on the roll to enter the spirit world; on a 16+, not only do they enter, but they may bypass this control entirely.

### The Other Side

When a character moves past the barrier, they find themselves in Melee Range of the gap between worlds (and thus Melee Range of their previous location)—but where they had been in the physical world, they are now in the world of the spirit.

The locations most immediately accessible—that is to say, spirit world locations that are in Melee Range and Short Range of the mortal world—are generally best understood as *the other side* of the corresponding mortal world locations. If the character assays the barrier while standing in Sether's Glen, they arrive on *the other side of Sether's Glen*. If they are falling off a cliff, and pass through the barrier, they arrive on *the other side of the cliffside air*.

These locations are normally arranged just as the corresponding physical locations are. If there is a Knotted Tree in Short Range of Sether's Glen, then the *other side of a Knotted Tree* is in Short Range of *the other side of Sether's Glen*. It may or may not be possible to travel freely between physical locations while in the spirit world, but insofar as it is possible, the ranges are roughly the same.

### Spirit World Locations

The closest spirit world location, by default, is at Medium Range—close enough to have a dim presence in the physical world, but not close enough to fill the world with omens and portents and magical effects. Closing to Short Range of such a location typically brings one to a location on its outskirts—the

edge of a demon town, fairy forest, spirit temple, or some multicolored river of strange experience.

For example, a character with Short Range Mobility wishes to travel from Sether's Glen in the physical world to the Woeful Hollow, a spirit realm location which is at Medium Range. The first move takes the character through the barrier; they are now on the spirit side of their previous Melee scrum, on the *other side of Sether's Glen*. Two moves later, they close to *the outskirts of Woeful Hollow*; one move later, they reach their destination.

## Projecting the Spirit

When a character *projects their spirit*, their soul crosses the barrier and their body remains on the other side. Their body is subject to physical assault, but immune to *most* spiritual attack (possession and similar effects sometimes being an exception); their spirit is immune to most physical assault, but subject to spiritual attack. They may immediately ready and wield some combination of Spirit Weapons at no cost in Fight or Spirit. Their body continues to have the weapons ready that it had ready before; the character may ready and wield those weapons automatically, at no cost in Fight or Spirit, when they return to their flesh.

Not every spirit world accepts this mode of travel, and not all characters are skilled with it—but as a rule, if the option exists, any character may take it. The difference between magicians and mundane characters, in this regard, is that a magician in the spirit world knows what they're doing, while a mundane character is confused and likely not proficient with the weapons they now use.

Characters who are projecting their spirit may dissociate from physical reality and participate in spiritual battle any time they are sufficiently motivated. This is a risky move in the middle of a physical combat, since the character will not have attention to spare for their physical safety.

More precisely, characters who wish to project their spirit—

- must bypass the barrier between worlds;
- cannot roll to do Damage or make Progress in the physical realm while their spirit is in the spirit realm;
- cannot make a normal move in the physical realm;
- cannot automatically move with enemies in the physical realm;
- cannot automatically *move the worlds with* enemies in the spirit realm;
- cannot become aware of stealthy enemies in the physical realm; and

- use Spirit Weapons, which have -2 Defense.

In exchange, the character's spirit may ready and wield Spirit Weapons at no cost and may—

- roll to deal Damage or make Progress in the spirit realm;
- make a normal move in the spirit realm;
- sacrifice their action and move to cheer on allies in the spirit realm;
- become aware of stealthy enemies in the spirit world; and
- move automatically with allies or enemies in the spirit realm.

The character's body may still move automatically with allies in the physical world, even if those allies are in turn moving with enemies. They retain a dim awareness of physical events and the ability to cheer on allies in the physical world—they are not 100% estranged.

### Metaphorical and Literal Journeys

Spirit projection is either *literal* or *metaphorical*. In the first case, the character's soul literally leaves their body—though often it remains attached with a silver cord or other dockline of awareness. They travel through the landscape of the spirit world, and may observe and interact with other places in the mortal world just as spirits do. In the second case, the journey is simply a different way to play out the battle between the character's heart and the spiritual forces that assail it—the character's observations and interactions with other mortal-world locations are constrained by, respectively, their natural qualities of insight and the medium of any spiritual forces they work with. Metaphorical journeys *can* still teach the characters interesting things, and can give them access to spirit allies with the power to affect the real world in other places—but the character isn't going anywhere except deep within their mind. Typically this represents an intermittent but absolute defense against certain actions—if a character taking a spirit journey gets dragged into a scrum with someone in a different place in the physical world, and deals or takes Spirit Damage, the GM has the option of saying (either at the time or later) that the effects were entirely in the character's head. For obvious reasons the character cannot be confident of this before the GM makes this ruling—sometimes, some spiritual agency will serve as a medium for interaction, and the effects will be quite real.

It's common for mundane characters, even in a world where projecting spirits is literal, to *view* all spirit journeys as metaphorical. Their mind will cloud and reinterpret the things they experience there, until it seems to them to be an internal struggle, flight of fantasy, or dream.

## Physical Travel to other Realms

In some cases characters may physically travel into the or a spirit world. They leave the physical world behind them entirely; their body vanishes from physical existence and manifests in the other world. When this kind of thing is possible, the spirit world is just another portion of the battlefield—obstructed by the barrier, certainly, which prevents most physical attack and terrain control, but only in the same sense that a physical gate would do the same. Fights may range over both physical and spiritual regions, with characters moving back and forth between them.

Normally, even when physical travel between the worlds is possible, the barrier still blocks physical attacks and confuses normal means of observation while allowing spiritual attacks through. This does not *have* to be the case—it's possible that the wall between worlds is so thin that people can stab through it once they get their weapons pointed in the right direction, or look right into the other world with either magical tricks or just normal observation. There's also a third possibility—that "between" the physical and spirit world, just on the other side of the barrier, there is an estranged space where characters may watch the physical world, make physical attacks on it, take (Fight) Damage from physical attacks, and/or be visible to mortal eyes. This space is normally in Melee Range of the physical world, on the other side of the barrier.

## Physical Travel and Wielded Weapons

Traveling between two worlds that are fundamentally physical in character does not change the character's readied or wielded weapons. Physical travel to a genuinely spiritual world, on the other hand, can interact with the Weapons rules in a number of different ways. One mechanism is typically standard for each world, and sometimes for all or almost all of the spirit worlds in a given game.

These mechanisms are as follows.

Traveling from a physical realm to a spiritual realm either:

- converts the character's readied and wielded weapons to equivalent Spirit Weapons;

- strips the character down to "no Weapon, as a Spirit Weapon;"
- returns them to the Weapons they had ready and wielded when last they were in the spirit realm; or
- allows them to automatically ready and wield Spirit Weapons of their choice.

Traveling from a spiritual realm to a physical realm either:

- strips the character down to "no Weapon;"
- returns them to the Weapons they had ready and wielded when last they were in the physical realm;
- manifests the character's readied and wielded Spirit Weapons as magical physical Weapons; or
- allows them to automatically ready and wield physical Weapons.

The first two options make the most sense in *general*; the latter two are for specific campaigns, where characters may return from spiritual journeys wielding their *concentration* as a burning third eye that shoots enemies or use quick trips to the spirit world to smuggle weapons into prisons or diplomatic talks.

## Magicians

A character that is deeply familiar with Spirit Weapons, spirit worlds, and the mechanisms of travel between them is called a *magician*. This is a system term, and it can refer in play to shamans, cultists, lunatics, priests, heroes, worldly travelers, spirit visitors, or characters who practice magic—who may, in turn, be honored or reviled by the society around them.

The distinction between a magician and everybody else is that magicians understand what it means when they take up a Spirit Weapon, when they project their spirit, when they fight magic or bargain with spirits or walk between the worlds. They do these things consciously and deliberately—or at least with a will and a power of intent. Those who are not magicians may still use Spirit Weapons, project their spirit, fight magic, interact with magical entities, and travel between worlds, but they won't necessarily know what they are doing or understand what it means. In role-play terms, characters who are not magicians don't have to understand the tactics their players choose for them—the *player* may decide to "equip the Devotion Weapon and attack the

impending spirit," but all the *character* knows is that the world is suddenly heavy-laden with an experience of malevolent attention and terror, and to fight it off, they're clinging to their love for their most important person. The player may take their non-magical character into the spirit world and engage in a fierce battle there; the character perceives instead a sudden strange and fevered dreaming. In short, when playing a character who is not a magician, players are entitled to view spiritual combat as a metaphorical struggle between their character's heart and mind and the probably-real spiritual forces that assail it. When playing a magician, conversely, the player is entitled to treat it as a comprehensible conflict using understandable tools against immanent if intangible enemies.

There are worlds where magicians are honored elders. There are worlds where to be a magician is seen as a sign of low and degenerate character. These are concerns that may play into a player's decision to be a magician or not—do they wish their character to seek that honor at the price of whatever duties are contingent upon it, or do they wish their character to avoid that mark of shame even at the cost of traveling blindly in a world of spiritual dangers?

### The Transformation into a Magician

That said, the player's choice notwithstanding, the more often a mundane character enters the spirit realms or interacts with the creatures there, the less mundane they are and the more they take on the air of a magician to other eyes. This is most true when they actually project their spirit or travel between the worlds, but any conflict with the spirit realm is potentially tainting or enlightening. Eventually, if a mundane character dashes off every other session to other worlds, and no matter how hard they protest and how much they might look and talk like an unspiritual person, it'll become clear to everyone around them that they are a magician, priest, or shaman of some stature. At that point, they might as well start buying proficiency with spirit weapons and learning how magic really works—denying their nature just won't help!

Characters may use their Attributes and Subjects to help others become a magician, to pull them back from it, or to become more or less of a magician themselves. The transformation itself is generally a five-stage process, where characters are progressively

- relentlessly mundane;
- somewhat spiritually aware;
- a novice, beginning to think as a magician thinks;

- visible to other magicians as a magician;
- obviously and palpably a magician.

Characters can usually only wobble within two steps—once a character is at the level of a novice magician, they can never again lose their basic spiritual awareness. Once they've gone all the way, the most they can hope for is to cloak themselves in subtlety. It's usually a spiritual victory (in some worlds) or defeat (in others) that pushes a character backwards or forwards along the scale.

# Examples of Spirit Travel

## The Terrifying Backstory of Bao Zuzao

Bao Zuzao is a wealthy merchant's son. But he's angered some magician or divine provenance, and now he faces a terrible curse—

"Bao Zuzao will lose all his wealth  
and run out into the world to become an evil bandit!"

### Bao Zuzao Discovers the Curse

The curse that thus harasses Bao Zuzao takes the form of a curse-spirit. It is not a purely mechanical thing, but a malevolent will—like a gold-swallowing evil toad that crouches in its grotto in the spirit world, coincident to Bao Zuzao's father's treasury, and works its efforts upon the Zuzao family.

Bao Zuzao does not notice it at first.

It is at Medium Range from the family treasury; at Long Range from him. It is a dim sense of foreboding. He could think back, later, and remember the day it arrived—there was a sense of bleakness and strangeness to it. But he does not immediately notice it. There are many days of bleakness, as with brightness, in the life of Bao Zuzao.

Slowly his family's wealth trickles away.

Each event is plausible. He has bad luck; each incident could be non-magical, as much as bad fortune is ever non-magical. But the sum of them is disturbing.

He does not want to believe it.

But one day he is overcome by angst at his misfortune; one day, he says, "I am cursed! I am cursed!" and staggers into the Zuzao treasury to overturn the lamps and look through the papers and hunt for some object with which some yin-yang magician might have cursed him or his father. And there it becomes apparent to him, in the bitter and clammy foreboding that suffuses that room, that he *is* cursed, and not simply unlucky; that there is something, somewhere, some malevolent power, and it is regarding him with its wide toad's eyes.

## Bao Zuzao's Response

Now it is possible that he might have challenged it, in a different story, with a simple action; rolled, perhaps, *Fierce + to your Enemies* to fight it, or sought out help with *Attentive + to your Teachers* and learned how to discharge the curse. But in this story he challenges it to spiritual battle. In this story, he realizes that the curse is present, and his heart protests, and he challenges it, crying:

"What monstrous curse is this?"

He drags it into Melee Range with a single move. *It becomes imminent.* The walls run with dark blood. The gold bins rattle. He stands in the presence of the curse-entity, on the other side of the barrier between worlds, and he may now attack.

## Bao Zuzao's Weapons

If he were a magician, then at this point he could use magic to subdue the curse. But Bao Zuzao is not. Nor does he have access to a magician's advice, or magical tools that a layman could employ. His only weapons against this curse are those possessed by everyone in the world: the various powers and potencies of his heart.

Some of the Weapons he could take up, of those listed on ppg. XX-XX, include—

- Acceptance ("I brought this curse on myself—how can I change?")
- Desire ("Money! MONEY MONEY MONEY!")
- Morality ("You can't destroy me, I'm a virtuous man!")
- Rage ("No! No! I won't have it!")
- Slipperiness ("This isn't Bao Zuzao's treasury! This is Zu Baozao's!")
- Willpower ("I will subdue you, foul curse!")

Of these Bao Zuzao selects *desire*—he pits his raw will to stay wealthy against the power of the curse. He lashes it with this Spirit Weapon, dealing instantly a goodly chunk of Spirit Damage. Will he defeat the curse?

## The Curse-Toad's Flight

The curse is a cold and cowardly creature; it does not wish to come up against the wrath of Bao Zuzao. It seeks to retreat, scrambling towards a deeper region in the spirit world—diving through the murky depths of its grotto and into the Gold-Devouring Demon Hell. This is a bizarre toad-demon Hell that likes to devour Earthly wealth; its motto is "all things pass away!"

Bao Zuzao does not wish it to escape. He exercises his option to *move the worlds with* the fleeing curse. He remains inexorably in Melee with the curse, and by doing so, brings his treasury and himself into close proximity of the Gold-Devouring Demon Hell. The walls mottle, like the bumpy throat of a congested toad; a wind moans; digestive acids begin to eat at the spiritual and even the physical substance of the scattered wealth.

"No!" shouts Bao Zuzao. "No!"

The curse-toad lashes back behind him with his tongue, wrapping it in an ineffable and immaterial fashion around Bao Zuzao; he feels dizzily for a moment as if he is being heaved up from the ground, that he is being swallowed, that the nature of what is Bao Zuzao is changing.

## Battle . . . and Defeat

Once more he lashes at the curse with his Desire Weapon, but it does not suffice. More spirits are emerging, allies of the curse that dwell in the Gold-Devouring Demon Hell. They are swarming around him. He cannot see them, not exactly, but he can feel them. He is dizzy. He passes out.

When he wakes, the room is on fire.

He tries to save a handful of coins; they dissolve in his hands. Bao Zuzao screams. He staggers out. He is raggedly-clothed. His hair is unkempt. He is overcome by a strong feeling of despair, and clutching at the one small piece of jade he was able to save from the Zuzao treasury.

His father's guards arrest him.

"I don't know any Bao Zuzao," his father says. "Why would you do this? To steal, I understand—but why would you ruin me and my wealth this way?"

"Father," he begs.

But when he understands that the look of incomprehension in his father's eyes is real, that the man literally does not recognize his son, he howls one long shout of grief, rips himself away from his father's guards, and plunges into the forest to be an outlaw.

If he had been a PC before, he is not now.

## The Sad Little Demon

Dahlia Skain is hiking through the countryside. She finds a farmhouse that is empty; the fields beyond it are withered and dead.

"Sickness?" she asks.

Then she shakes her head. She licks her finger and holds it in the air. She feels the wind. "It's magic, isn't it."

She goes out to the fields.

She sits down.

She takes out a seed and puts it in the ground. She waits.

Something draws near. She looks to one side; a three-eyed raven sits on the scarecrow's arm, croaks at her, and flutters up and away. She looks down: she is casting two shadows. The air tastes strange. It is near—but not upon her, only in Short Range.

It reaches Melee Range. It is just on the other side of the barrier. There is a sickness writhing in the air. The seed below her dies. Her insides feel like they're knotting up. She can hear a distant incoherent mumbling, like that of a child torn by grief.

It's starting to recede.

"I don't think so," says Dahlia Skain. She throws off the coat of flesh and blood that humans wear, the skin and muscles and lungs and heart and bones and brain of her, and walks out as a spirit into the spirit world. It takes her just one leap to surmount the barrier and take up her seven-bladed spirit sword; behind her, dimly, she can feel her body falling down.

The demon is a short little grass-stalk demon in a blue and white bonnet and a cloak. It is walking away. It is making little snuffling noises. It stops as it hears the ringing of the drawing of her sword. It looks back at her. It turns around. It has a scythe. It huddles defensively behind the scythe, and trembles.

"Don't give me the pathetic act," says Dahlia. "You're killing the fields so nobody can live here any more. You're an evil grain-devouring demon!"

It's eyes are wide and as sad as a chastised puppy's.

"I've killed dozens just like you—" she starts.

It makes a choked sound of fear. It turns to scramble away. It trips. It rises. It struggles. She's standing on its cloak.

She hides her head in one hand. She rolls *Attentive + to the Deserving*.

"Fine," she says. "Fine. I won't kill you. Just— Tell me what's going on."

# Dreaming Waters: Traveling the Worlds

In **Dreaming Waters**, there are spirit worlds in two distinct directions:

The dreaming waters, which is to say, our world, imminent and proximate to the cities of the angels, and operating as an alternate (meta)physical dimension, below; and the realms of the sibling-storms, which impinge upon the upper realms but are comparatively distant from them, above.

## The Dreaming Waters

The dreaming waters have something of an "airlock"—paired barriers, one in proximity to the upper realms, and one in proximity to the world below. Each barrier works according to the standard model. Characters with Long Range Mobility may pass through both at once, while characters without it must move through one at a time. Between these barriers, characters experience the world of the dreaming waters but have a dim perception of the upper realm. Human visionaries have sometimes reached this place, while striving upwards, and confused it for the end of their journey. Characters between the two barriers are dimly visible in the upper realm, seen on the surface of water or in a dissipate haze of mist. Weapons, action, and communication can penetrate one of these barriers but not both at once—thus, an angel in the "airlock" can fight characters in either world. There is a flat -2 Accuracy, Control, and Solve penalty for attacks from this airlock into the upper realms; there is no penalty at all when interacting with the dreaming waters.

As a special rule, characters entering the dreaming waters do not change weapons—they continue to have the weapons readied and wielded they had wielded or readied before. Physical weapons that deal Fight Damage (rather than spirit weapons that deal Spirit Damage) are the norm for the shadow's realm.

Characters in the upper realms may "pull" things in the dreaming waters closer, and vice versa, but there is a sharp decline in effectiveness outside of Very Long Range. It's possible to drag some Inaccessible location to yourself but often easier to descend or ascend and then use mortal travel. That said, even at Inaccessible Range the correspondence between regions of the angelic world and regions of the human world is unstable and inexact. The various Earthly and angelic locations "drift" relative to one another following the alien impulses of the waters' currents and its tides.

## Outside of a Conflict

Characters aware of the waters, and not currently fighting anyone, can usually travel between the upper realms and the dreaming waters without a dice roll. All it takes is a declaration of intent. It doesn't even take much *time*—it's instant at best and takes thirty seconds at worst.

The GM may require a roll to leave the dreaming waters if—

- the shadow's attention is fixed on the characters;
- the characters are still "new" to traveling;
- the characters are in the grip of despair and/or low on Spirit; or
- some effect is operating that would keep the characters below.

Conversely, it may take a roll to enter the dreaming waters if—

- some other sibling-storm is strongly impinging on the world;
- the characters are still "new" to traveling;
- some effect is operating that would keep the characters above.

In such cases a simple action normally involves *Attentive* + 2 dice. In a detailed action resolution, the default interval for "I stipulate that I escape/enter the dreaming waters, overcoming this obstacle" is *Attentive* + 2 rounds.

## Terror, King, and Lamia Dominions

The common-slakes are merely stealthy creatures—they are not spirits, but rather live in the same dreaming waters as the drowning mortals there. Terrors, on the other hand, have a spiritual character. They may hide from the world, secluding themselves behind mirrors, in shadows, on the other side of the mind.

Each terror, some Kings of the shadow, and certain lamia command a little spirit realm of their own. For lamia it is called their *Dominion*, in and out of character; for the terrors and kings of shadow, we'll still use the term Dominion but no fixed terminology exists in game. It is a small realm of the

spirit, guarded by a barrier which the owner may bypass at will. For a terror, the typical size is a single Very Long Range circle; for a king of shadow or a lamia, it may be smaller or comparable to a city in its scale.

This realm acts legitimately as a spirit realm.

The manner of entrance may be projecting the spirit or physical travel into the dominion. Often even if others cannot physically enter the realm, its ruling lamia, terror, or handler may. Entering it may change the character's readied and wielded Weapons according to any of the standard models; leaving it may do the same.

Dominions and everything within them are generally stealthy—just like characters using a stealthy Weapon. They are not omnipresent, as a typical spirit realm would be—the "edge" of the Dominion, the barrier that separates the worlds, is not necessarily in Melee Range. Thus before you can pass through the barrier into the Dominion, you must first close to Long Range of the Dominion and become aware of its presence; then pull that barrier to Melee Range; and finally pass through it using the standard rolls and methods. Dominions and their locations may be moved normally by characters in the dreaming waters or the upper realms.

When the ruler of the Dominion travels in the dreaming waters, their Dominion is never more than Very Long Range from them, and they may never fail to be aware of it. By default it is at Medium Range.

## Outside of a Conflict

Characters in the dreaming waters may normally enter and leave a nearby Dominion, if they are aware of how to do such things, with a roll of *Attentive* + 2. They may add any Subject they have in the Shadow in the Dreaming Waters or the specific terror or King when entering a terror or King's Dominion, and may add a Subject in the lamia or other person in that Dominion if they are entering a lamia's realm. The consequence of failure is generally lost time or the attention of the creature within—if these are not meaningful consequences, just assume the character succeeds on such a roll.

## The Dead Waters

The dead waters, and deeper places, are a part of the dreaming waters. They are not distinct from them, but merely buried in them, like the caverns beneath the physical earth. They have entrances and exits—mystical paths, but functioning as physical paths do. To find them you must feel out the currents in the dreaming waters; then you follow them down. These paths *look* like

mystical travel—the character vanishes into dead-end alleys or wanders through banks of fog and into another region—but there is no mystical barrier and no genuine distinction between the two waters, only a current that sometimes fights against those climbing back into the realm of life. If that current is strong, or the character is spiritually "heavy" and drawn towards the maw of Herself, then it may take a terrain control-type roll of  $d10 + \text{Spirit Defense}$  against some GM-selected target to make progress back upwards towards the living waters or the upper realms. Otherwise it just takes walking.

It is possible—but difficult—to drag regions of the dead, or even the maw of Herself, up to proximity to the upper realms. It is also possible for the opposite to occur—for the deep-slakes or the maw to bring the dead waters nigh to some desired angel. Normally the entirety of the waters of the dead are inaccessible vis-à-vis the angels' realm, but this may be circumvented by circumstance or conscious intent.

### Outside of a Conflict

Characters may usually enter the dead waters from the dreaming waters without a roll. It's no harder than dying. If a character understands the nature of the dreaming waters, they can feel the current that leads down to the lands of the dead. Following that current is *like* physical travel, so it takes anywhere from seconds to hours to get there—but three to ten minutes is the typical travel time, or up to twenty minutes where freezing temperatures make the currents sluggish. If rolling out an action is necessary, the character usually has *Attentive* + 2 dice or rounds with which to succeed.

Returning is a little harder. The first few minutes are usually safe—when the character has done little more than "dipped their toe," as it were, into dead waters. But after that, when the character is soaked in the waters of the dead and wishes to return, it is standard rather than uncommon for the GM to require a roll. This roll is normally made with *Attentive* alone, although a kind GM can sometimes allow characters to bypass this and use *Fierce*, *Helpful*, or *Reliable* instead, as appropriate to whatever their purpose might be in returning to the upper world. In any case, failure may delay the character for hours, days, or weeks; cost them a large amount of Spirit (and optionally leave them still below, so that they must roll and risk losing this Spirit again); or mean that they do not return at all. It's rare that this last option is a good idea, from a storytelling standpoint, but if it would make a satisfying or at least haunting conclusion to the character's story, it could happen—just like that!

## The Realms of the Sibling-Storms

The realms of the sibling-storms are spiritual. They are intermittently contiguous with the upper realm; at one moment they may be imminent, while in the next they are far away. Sometimes physical threats emerge from them; more often, the power of the storms impinges on a place, either in the fullness of the storm or through the medium of some subsidiary intentionality or entity, and communication, flesh-twisting, mind-twisting, binding, cursing, enshrouding, or beneficent effects ensue. These realms are host to curses, influences, and immaterial entities that may operate between the worlds and require spiritual combat or other mechanisms to dispel.

The barriers between the world and the realms of the sibling-storms are difficult to traverse. Spiritual Weapons and Approaches may freely attack through them, but actually moving through the barrier is difficult: most of the time, when the storms impinge, it is an emotional and metaphysical experience that offers no clear avenue for physical travel.

Characters with substantial experience, the right Attributes, and who are in the right sort of story may sometimes travel back and forth to these spirit worlds. Entering the world of one storm wholly separates the character from contact with the other such worlds: they are in no way contiguous with one another. With a few specific exceptions, such as the entrance of sunlight and moonlight into the dreaming waters, there is no mechanism to reach from one sibling-storm into the domain of another.

In most games, entering the realm of a sibling-storm is the subject of a long journey and not a single combat-time normal move, but this is in the GM's hands; if it *is* possible to step back and forth between the upper realms and a given storm's realm, this uses the normal barrier-bypassing rules.

Projecting one's spirit into the realm of a sibling-storm is more feasible, and may be accomplished any time the battlefield includes a strong influence from that storm. Here, the naïve metaphorical interpretation is actually correct, even though the enemies are real—the character is engaging in a kind of waking dream, using the idea of a "spirit journey" into the realm of the storm to organize their thoughts and spiritual opposition to the forces present there. Characters who have "projected their spirit" in this fashion may not attack from the spirit realm into the physical realm, and can only see or learn things in the physical world that they are capable of intuiting. The journey is unreal in the sense that characters may find, e.g., that the Starholm visited "in spirit" is not the same as the Starholm of a spiritual journey; but it is real in the sense that the character may deal and receive real Spirit Damage to opponents in the realm of the storm, and may even be pulled into Melee scrums with other projecting characters or even characters elsewhere in the physical world. Their soul *is* acting on the realm of the storm, and vice versa; it's just that the "spirit body" that their mind imagines for them is a metaphor, simplification,

and illusion. The choice of projecting one's spirit vs. just using a standard spirit Weapon to fight off such foes is stylistic; just as in the real world, mystic characters wage their spiritual battles in a mystic fashion, while rationalists entrench themselves instead in the prosaic elements of experience.

Demons and cultists do not live in the metaphorical fastnesses of the storms. They operate directly in the angels' realm. They are physical monstrosities—not spirits lurking in the sunlight or the fertile principle of the earth, threatening the One People from that diffuse and numinous ground. But this is not to say that there are no intangible presences and curses.

Rather the "spirits" that impinge and threaten from the realms of the storms are almost always singular ideas of the sibling-storms themselves. An impulse, an idea, a concept, a portion of the storm's agency—it detaches from the whole, touches upon the world, takes up a Spirit Weapon, and with it assails the land or a human victim, hoping to transform them. It may have consciousness or it may be nothing more than a symbol—a lifeless idea that, having been formed, imposes itself on the land. It may have a devious intelligence, even if unconscious—like the organizing principle of a dream; or it may be a ravaging and mindless force of the spirit.

To face such a manifestation is common.

Mystic experiences are as much a part of the lives of the One People as summer, winter, or the rain. They visit themselves upon the cities and tribes of the angels—and not just in the acute and critical forms of a Sunfall or a sudden angel-to-demon transformation, but in subtler forms as well. The world is full of long-term or chronic hauntings, suffusions, influences, transubstantiations, and emotive conditions. In games that take place in the upper realms, a story of a spirit-realm phenomenon that impinges on the angel's world is as valid as a story of a hostile demon, great beast, or bandit clan.

## Outside of a Conflict

As noted earlier, the base Attribute and Subject for entering the realm of a sibling-storm is Attentive and either a guide or the storm itself. Most characters don't have a Subject in a storm, and only *the Impressionable One* can default to using *Attentive + to the Wicked*; for many characters, thus, this journey is flatly impossible without a guide. Even for characters *with* such a guide (a cultist or demon, say, or the wise and detailed advice of an elder, or *the Impressionable One*), this is a long and difficult physical or mental journey. It takes twenty minutes at least and months or years at the longest. Characters could spend an entire game on the road to Starholm and not even know for sure if they've found it at the end.

The accessibility of the storms varies from game to game—it's based on GM and player interest. The GM determines what kind of game world they're

interested in and able to run, which affects how much spirit travel, in general, there ought to be; within that framework, storms are more or less reachable based on what gives the coolest experience for the players and the GM.

That said, if a storm is accessible at all, it's usually as accessible through a mental or internal journey as a physical one—and doing so *will* take the character's body through into the realm of the storm. Most characters who find the Clean Dominion travel there while physically soaring through the sky—but a crippled recluse, if they manage to free themselves properly from preconceptions, may call down the Clean Dominion to exhume them. They may take their body up to soar in that clean bright realm without ever passing through their hermitage's door. For the other realms it is the same—fire angels who give themselves wholly to their internal flame are sometimes consumed by it, burning up in a few surprising instants and finding themselves in the sea of fire. Caught up in a moment of absolute fulfillment, losing sight of the world in the haze of a great accomplishment, a character may discover they are in Scerascaling Leetha's land.

Characters need not die to reach the realm of Scerascaling Leetha; sometimes, they do not even need to work at it, but rather find themselves consumed by it in a single moment of absolute fulfillment, waking after some great accomplishment to find themselves in Scerascaling Leetha's Land.

If characters wish to metaphorically project their spirit into the realm of a storm, and not physically travel there, this is as feasible outside of combat as it is in battle. It does not require a guide or a Subject in the storm—it's rolled, if a roll must be made at all, according to the Attribute and Subject appropriate to the thing that the character hopes to accomplish in visiting that realm. Do they wish to learn from it, or what it wants? Attentive and Insightful are difficult to use with the storms, but rolling Exemplar Pool can work. Do they wish to help somebody, or fulfill a duty, or fight some evil, by a spirit journey into the realm of the storm? Then their Helpful, Fierce, and Reliable Attributes work just as they normally do. It's easy to project in this fashion—but, on the other hand, the journey is just a kind of spirit-touched daydream; the character is only "in" the realm of the storm to the extent that they experience themselves as such.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Spirit Weapons

In this section you will find templates for a variety of Spirit Weapons for the **Filial Piety Action System**. This first section covers the weapons that even mundane characters can wield to inflict Spirit Damage; later sections will discuss the weapons with a more overtly magical character. As usual, if there isn't a suitable weapon for a player character or a key NPC here, then you have two options: pick the closest approximation below, or develop a new Weapon that is to everybody's taste.

Spirit Weapons attack *Spirit* and not *Fight*. In the spirit world, this will look very much the same—they deal gross damage to the spirit body, just as physical weapons deal damage to the physical body. However, the effect in the material world is very different: the progressive loss of Spirit is a progressive influence from the power of the Weapon, able to enchant, enthrall, curse, bind, twist, or otherwise transform the victim. The thing that they attack is not the flesh, or even the metaphorical flesh of the spirit world, but the target's independence-of-self, their power of self-definition. To defeat someone physically is to batter their body into submission and douse their fighting spirit; to defeat them spiritually is to bring them under your power, to change them or make them see things the way you do, to assign them a role of your choosing in the story of the fight—to exert, in short, a transformative authority over them. This is one reason that using Spirit Weapons to fight off evil influences is traditionally the domain of priests, monks, and other such religious authorities; they may force spiritual phenomena to yield to the higher power that they represent without arrogantly claiming dominion over such powers themselves. If a character wants to use their Spirit Weapon to accomplish a morally sound effect—to forbid a spirit entrance to a place, rather than rewriting its nature, say, or to persuade an enemy rather than taking over their mind—they should be very careful in the stipulations that they make.

### Spirit Weapons in Physical Conflicts

Characters *can* use Spirit Weapons in a physical conflict. They wield the spirit weapon and assail the target with it. The only cost is that a Spirit Weapon has a -2 Defense against physical attack. However, the range of effects that a character can accomplish with non-magical use of these Weapons is limited. When the character stipulates what they hope to accomplish by fighting some enemy with a Spirit Weapon, that enemy's player (or the GM, for an NPC) has the option to say: "that effect would require magic." At this point,

it's still possible to use the Spirit Weapon to accomplish that effect, but doing so is exerting an unnatural spirit influence, rather than using a natural quality of character to influence an enemy. Something similar applies if you wish to make progress against an inanimate obstacle with one of these weapons: if the GM rules that the action requires supernatural influence, then you must declare your actions supernatural, cancel your action, or accept automatic failure.

These Weapons are things like meditation, fear, and devotion.

In the non-magical case, their power to subdue others is limited. They do not so much "defeat" an enemy as *reach* or *impress* them—they introduce sufficient doubt in the enemy's mind, or make a strong enough impression, or provide sufficient cause for hesitation, that the enemy is stunned for a bit and no longer opposes what you want to do. The defeated enemy may have, in short, a transformative experience—they are swayed, changed, *affected* by your actions. They have to take time to think, to process, to consider; or they are confused, misled, and spend time traveling the wrong path; or they're distracted and go off to do something else. It's a minor turning point in their life, just like getting beaten up would be. But ultimately all you can do is reach them: if it's non-magical, the details are up to them.

In the magical case, the power of these Weapons becomes supernatural. The spiritual force of the mind, the heart, and the will jacks up to 11—where 10 was the limits of the mundane. Your *selfhood* becomes a spiritual force. The power of your meditation, or the fire of your passion, or whatever else you're wielding kindles in the world, makes everything around you alive with it. The world of experience grows heavy with the weight of your spirit weapon. It beats on the minds and hearts of others like the waves of an ocean. Your presence lifts them up and exalts them or weighs their hearts and minds down like they are buried under heavy carpets. If the world is not magical enough that these things can reach the enemy, then "defeating" the enemy spurs the Spirit Weapon's wielder on to sufficient mundane excellence to defeat their target physically or tactically: think here of Gandhi or O-Sensei, characters who could use Spirit Weapons both non-magically and morally yet to devastating practical effect. Or think, if you prefer, of classic action heroes: to become an enemy-defeating engine of destruction, they must first wallow properly in the spiritual experience of defeat, frustration, agony, and loss.

Each of these Spirit Weapons has two forms—the form apparent in the normal mundane world and the form in which the weapon manifests when in spirit realms. The first is typically a quality of character that is common as dirt, though rarely strong enough in a person to justify wielding it in Spiritual Combat. The second form is something bizarre and supernatural, encountered only in dreams, magical worlds, and out-of-body experiences.

## Running out of Spirit

Spiritual defeat allows your enemy to *compel* or *transform* you.

Your mind, heart, and body become open to their will. They may change how you act or what you are. Spirit Weapons like religion and meditation are unlikely to inflict bizarre curses, shrivel your limbs, force you to love someone or keep a secret, or turn you into a goldfish—but that's only because the GM is unlikely to accept the relevant stipulation when the attacker uses a Weapon of that sort. Spirit Weapons with genuine magical effects can do almost anything—up to the point of changing your character so dramatically that they become an NPC.

That doesn't mean that every spiritual defeat is destructive.

Ultimately it depends on the stipulations your enemy seeks to make. One common outcome of a spiritual victory is to force you to play a role in the story of the enemy's cleverness or power—for instance, an enemy using the *Slipperiness* Weapon declares that they have eluded or tricked you. An enemy using the *Acceptance* Weapon declares that their passive resistance has impelled you to doubt your cause. In such cases, the compulsion is non-magical if you're willing to believe that the enemy can in fact elude you, shake your faith, or otherwise do what they claim they want to do. In short, when defeated in this fashion, you're conceding to their stipulation as something that could reasonably happen to your character. They may not even go that far—sometimes all they want to do to you when they defeat you in spiritual combat is open your ears to their ideas, or generically awe you, frighten you, or impress. In such cases, the effect can be non-magical if your character is potentially open to such things, and is magical otherwise. A spiritual attack can be nothing more than a kind appeal.

It can also be profoundly destructive.

Spiritual attack can turn a person into a goldfish or a statue. It can make you loyal to an enemy or turn your bones to molten lead. These things require magic, but forcing your enemy's player to admit that they used magic is not much of a consolation when you are drowning in the air.

When facing magic—or even non-magical attacks that you believe would work against your character, but also injure them severely—you may resist a portion of the effect as long as you have Exemplar Dice remaining. Specifically, if you are defeated in spiritual combat (either running out of Spirit or giving up while actively under spiritual attack), whatever happens is inherently transitory and cannot ruin your life. Not only will the effects fade, but they will be limited to effects that allow you to pick up the pieces, later, and continue with your life. If someone uses a mundane Spirit Weapon to open your mind to new ideas, you will have the option to close it again. If someone uses a magical Weapon to drain your life force and artificially age you, you will be able to restore yourself with rest or available magical remedies. If someone uses a

mundane or magical Weapon to convince you to betray your most important person, and either you or they would never forgive yourself—then you will manage to stop yourself, somehow, when the moment comes. You will snap out of it before the fatal effect completes. If you're turned into a statue, then not only will you turn back into a person, but nobody will shatter you before that time—or if they do, it won't stop you from coming back to life in a single piece.

If you don't have Exemplar Dice remaining then it's up to the GM. They should only inflict permanent effects with your permission or in the same circumstances when they'd be willing to kill your character—but if it's the kind of battle that should let the enemy defeat you for good, that's exactly what can happen, and if the effects are too nasty for you to keep playing your character, your character becomes an NPC.

Whether or not you have Exemplar Dice left, there's a secondary effect to spiritual defeat: you are disoriented for a bit. You can't just immediately pick up where you left off, starting a new interval or rolling a new action and returning to the fray; losing a conflict means that you need to stop doing what you were doing for a bit. Maybe you just need to pause and rethink. Maybe you're actually unconscious. Whatever it is, running out of Spirit or giving up in a spiritual conflict means that you have lost at something meaningful and will be out of the action for a little while.

## Spirit Weapon Properties

Spirit Weapons use "Control" rather than Accuracy; this measures the character's ability to master the forces at play. They modify Spirit Defense rather than Defense, and deal Spirit Damage rather than just Damage, for the obvious reasons. As has been noted before, all Spirit Weapons have -2 Defense against physical attack.

At the beginning of each interval, characters may ready and wield any combination of available weapons, which can include Spirit Weapons. During their interval, at the beginning of a round, characters can spend **2 Spirit** to wield a Spirit Weapon that they had "ready" or **5 Spirit** to ready and wield a new combination of weapons that includes Spirit Weapons. If this also includes a physical weapon, the total cost is **5 Spirit and 5 Fight**.

## Proficiency

Characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** have a proficiency in

- two special weapons (which can include 1-2 spirit weapons).

They may purchase additional spirit weapon proficiencies with Knacks.

## Spirit Weapons

### Acceptance

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -2 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of accepting that the world is as it is, and not as you desire it to be. Use this Weapon for the false "acceptance" of despair, the freedom of madness, the calm of Buddhist practice, and the magical technique of letting enemy power flow through you without opposing or yielding to it.

Love your enemies.

Accept their presence. In the end, it will make you stronger.

You may turn this Weapon against physical enemies as either passive acts of resistance or an offer of understanding and forgiveness. They have trouble attacking and defeating someone who flows with them, not fighting back but not giving in either. It may also allow you to understand what they do not wish understood and see what they do not wish seen, and thus learn the secrets of their moves.

In the spirit world this is the "green mirror half-body armor." It forms a shell of tarnished silver over half of your body that absorbs enemy attacks; sometimes, when attacking or defending against you, their perspective will temporarily shift from being the self they are in the outer world to being their reflection in that field of green.

Acceptance has the following special features:

**Endurance:** if you choose not to act or move in a round, you heal 2 Spirit. Even if time is critical this does not count against your interval.

**Terrain Control:** when an enemy moves into Melee Range of you, you may attack them immediately with acceptance. It doesn't use your action: it's just something you get to do.

**Fail:** you've made yourself way too open! Up to two enemies who are in range to attack you may do so immediately. Lower the remaining time in your interval by 1 for each one that hits you, to a minimum of 0.

### Epic Moves:

*Flow Through*—for the rest of the interval, any time you are attacked, roll d10+your Control. If you roll a 7+ against a spirit attack or a 10+ against a physical attack, the attack affects either the attacker or someone else of your choice instead of you. You must choose someone in Range of the original attack. This effect is not obvious to your enemies until the first time it kicks in.

*All Things in Harmony*—until you change weapons or the end of your interval, you may reply to any enemy attack with an attack of your own. If no enemy chooses to attack you in a given round, you may steal 5 points of Spirit from an enemy in Melee Range: they lose 5 Spirit, you gain 5 Spirit.

### Concentration

+1 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

### [Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of intent focus.

You may use this Weapon to fight off spiritual enemies by clinging to a key memory or experience. You may also use it to think through difficult magical rituals and structures, or complicated tactical situations, while under physical or magical assault.

You may turn this Weapon directly against physical opponents, stunning them with the intensity of your focus. Your attention is like a physical weight. Their mouth goes dry, they feel transfixed, judged, captured like an insect in amber, or small. It wears on them—but is unlikely to defeat them unless they are naturally weak, already weakened, or you manage an epic move.

In the spirit world, this weapon manifests the *burning inner eye*, a red spherical eye that you can hold in your hand or place in your forehead. It fires melee-range beams of light. The effort it takes to wield this weapon precludes using any others.

Concentration has the following special feature:

***Deepening Concentration:*** Each round you do not act while wielding this weapon, or miss with your roll to act while wielding this weapon, you gain a +1 *deepening concentration* modifier to your Spirit Damage (max +10). This lasts until you change weapons.

*Fail:* your concentration *dissolves*. You lose any *deepening concentration* bonus and cannot use the concentration Weapon again this interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Everything Comes Together*—your inner eye opens and a clear view of all of the elements of the situation manifests. Do 2d6+your Deepening Concentration in Spirit Damage. Your target is paralyzed until the next time you take Fight or Spirit Damage, the next time they take Fight or Spirit Damage, or the end of their interval.

*Single Supreme Vision*—you clear your mind of distractions. Gain 15 Spirit, 15 Heart, or 15 Fight.

## Craft

+0 Control/1d10 Spirit Damage  
Medium Range

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of careful and orderly work.

What you do is well-made, well-thought, and well-done. Things that are made properly are strong against curses. A life lived meticulously is strong against magic and spirits. This Weapon may also be used to carry out formal religious or magical rituals with precision.

You may turn this Weapon against enemies in the physical world. You work hard and carefully to defeat them; or, you impress them so much with the work you do that they admire you. A warrior prince, defeated by a commoner using Craft, might say, "I don't want to kill someone like you! If you won't give up, I guess I'll have to back away for now."

In the Spirit World, this is the *ten-thousand hook meteor Weapon*, a board with holes in it. From the knotted thread on one side of the board, red hooked lines extend that attach to everything in the world. When the wielder dances and turns the board, they tug on the pieces of the world, using them to hit their enemy or tangle them in the lines.

Craft has the following special features:

**Long Labors:** if you choose not to act or move in a round, you heal 2 Spirit. Even if time is critical this does not count against your interval.

**Enmeshment:** when something takes damage from Craft, it also takes an *enmeshment* penalty to Control of -1 (max -3). This fades at the end of their interval or when the thing moves or is moved to within Melee Range of you; in either case, it takes another 5 points of Spirit Damage for each -1 that fades. This is a terrain control effect.

**Fail:** . . . this is not your best work. You are *enmeshed* as if you had hit yourself twice, for a Control penalty of -2 (max -3).

### Epic Moves:

**The Twitching Thread**—for the rest of the interval, any time you are attacked, roll d10+your Control. If you roll a 7+ against a Spirit attack or a 10+ against a physical attack, the attacker takes the damage from their attack instead. This effect is not obvious to your enemies until the first time it kicks in. This power cannot be used against ranged physical attacks unless there is an easy,

sensible explanation for how your Craft causes them to injure themselves instead of you.

*The Well Made Thing*—when your enmeshment fades, during or at the end of your interval, it deals 10 points of damage (instead of 5) for each -1.

### Desire

-1 Control/2d10 Spirit Damage

### [Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -1 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of a fierce heart that wants things *badly*.

You may use this Weapon in a spiritual conflict to bend enemies to your will and passion—a spirit, thinking to possess or afflict you, instead finds that your heart contains a raging fire larger than the world! Battered by that flame, it succumbs, and you shape it into your servant or your image.

You may turn this Weapon against physical opponents. You may terrify or consume them with your passion. You may use it as a goad to drive yourself into defeating them. You may make them think of you as demon-possessed, and thus quail at dealing with you at all. You may corrode their sense of right and wrong.

In the spirit world this manifests as the *great bull style*, transforming you into a maddened bull or other large and fierce animal—a dragon for covetousness, a serpent or demoness for lust, a red broad-shouldered bull for wine-thirst, a thunderbird for freedom/irresponsibility, a great-jawed ogre for power-hunger, or whatever else seems appropriate. This is an "unarmed style" that surrounds you with the manifest spirit-body mandorla of that creature rather than a biological transformation.

Desire has the following special feature:

***Ignited by Temptation:*** if you are wielding desire, and your allies "cheer you on" by either tempting you with the thing you want or taunting you with your lack of it, you gain 5 Spirit in addition to the normal cheering effects. Prudish allies may cheer you on the normal way, in which case you don't benefit from this effect.

*Fail:* you are *consumed by a mad craving*. You cannot act until the end of your interval, except to move towards an objective relevant to your desire.

### Epic Moves:

*At Last You Are Mine*—locate an objective associated with your craving that is within Very Long Range in the physical or spirit realm. Move instantly to that objective, or drag it instantly to yourself, as appropriate, ignoring constraint and terrain control. Next round you are *savoring*: you cannot act but it does not count against your interval.

*Ah! I Needed That!*—once before your interval ends, you can twist an attack or effect that would have done Spirit Damage to some person or thing within Short Range. Instead of doing its Spirit Damage it fulfills your craving instead, giving you Spirit—or, with GM permission, Fight or Heart—equal to the amount of damage it would have otherwise done. It is your obligation to explain how this works.

### Devotion

+0 Control/2d6+1 Spirit Damage

### [One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of selfless love.

You may use this as a Weapon in spiritual conflict to banish evil, protect the person you love, and bend spiritual creatures into awed service. The strong spirit that cares for people casts a fierce and intimidating light!

You may turn this Weapon against physical opponents. The typical effect is *contagious romanticism*—whether you are acting in true love or just out of selfless fondness for a friend, your pure heart makes your opponent want to get out of your way or take your side. Or it may infuse you with such strength as to stand against them until they are no longer able to oppose you.

In the spirit world this is the *fiery sword* or *fiery moon scythe*—a clean and good weapon that can nevertheless wreak great havoc on your foes. The flames of this weapon are colorless and when they flare they smite the enemy with fear or awe.

Devotion has the following special feature:

***The Flaring Fire:*** each time you assist or cheer on an ally, or they assist or cheer you on, both you and that ally gain 2 Spirit.

*Fail*: you're *carried away with thinking about others*. For the remainder of your interval, the only action you may take is to cheer others on. You may still move; you may still opt not to act at all in a given round; and you may still take advantage of the free attacks from the epic move *Spirit Shelter*, below.

*Epic Moves*:

*Standing Together*—deal 2d6+1 Spirit Damage and move to the side (Melee Range) of someone important to you, ignoring terrain control.

*Spirit Shelter*—pick an ally in Melee Range. Until you change weapons, your interval ends, or you move out of Melee Range of that ally, whenever that ally takes Damage or Spirit Damage you may take that Damage or Spirit Damage instead. In addition, once per round when you take Damage or Spirit Damage from this effect, you may make a free attack against an enemy in range of your weapon.

*TLC*—heal one ally for 5 Fight, Spirit, or Heart.

## Fear

—/2d6 Spirit Damage  
Medium Range

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of absolute terror.

You may use this Weapon in a spiritual conflict. Strong fear blinds and confuses enemies. It shrouds you within darkness. It sharpens you to a fever pitch. You writhe out of the way of magical assault. Your heart pounds, there are monsters under every shadow, but somehow they cannot touch you.

You may turn this Weapon against enemies in a physical fight. It gives you the tactical benefits of paranoia and a highly-trained flight reflex. Like other emotions, when it reaches the level of a Weapon, it becomes physically stunning—a look in your eyes can drown your enemies in the visceral awareness of your fear, and trying to follow your movements is disorienting. Hunters and predators are immune to this effect unless and often even if your fear reaches an actively magical level.

In the Spirit World fear becomes the *nightmare shroud horse*, a black shroud which billows around you and can fold in around you, tauten to show your absence, flow along the ground like a river, and then flow upwards and form you within it again. The power of this shroud is specifically to reduce part of your spirit body to two-dimensional form when it flows over you, allowing you to dodge and counter even seemingly inevitable attacks.

Fear has the following special features:

**Reactive Style:** fear does not make attacks. In each round where the character did not act but could have acted, the character may strike the first three enemies in their Range that miss or fail on a roll to attack the character. A round where the character chooses to do so counts against their interval, even if they do not act. Since there is no attack roll, assistance, failure, and epic moves use the Spirit Damage dice. The character cannot earn an epic move from earning "double what they need to hit the enemy," but all other sources of epic moves apply. For instance, if they roll double 1s, and an ally assists and rolls 2d6 and gets a 10, that's an epic move! Extraordinary stunts and combat stunts deal the Spirit Damage you rolled, while a powerful attack deals the rolled Spirit Damage plus another 2d6.

**Terrain Control:** when an enemy in Medium or shorter Range moves in such a fashion as to be closer to you or to bring you closer to it, they must roll d10+their Spirit Defense. On a 13-, they must cancel the move or take 2d6 damage.

*Fail:* GAAHHHHHHH!!! *Faint.* You do no Spirit Damage to your target after all, cannot make further reactive attacks this round, and cannot act (and accordingly can't make reactive attacks) next turn.

*Epic Moves:*

*Unexpected Escape*—deal the Spirit Damage that you rolled. Your target cannot act next round, and this counts against their interval.

*Run Away*—you are *fleeing*. Choose one:

- until the end of your interval, or until you change weapons, take a +2 *escape* to your Defense and Spirit Defense (max +2).
- make up to three normal moves, ignoring terrain control. You don't need a place to stand until the last move—you can move straight up a cliff, for instance, as long as you can reach the top.

## Flow

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

## [Two One-Handed Weapon]

(-2 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This is the magic of "listening" to the world and flowing with events.

This Weapon is accessible to mundane characters, but it is a Weapon of spiritual masters and sages—of characters who can make themselves "as water" and disappear into the fabric of events. This is the art of leaving no footprints, and its masters cannot be defeated: to try it is like fighting the wind! The rain! Your own reflection!

This Weapon can be turned against physical enemies. The magician uses strategic inaction to allow their enemies to defeat themselves. They move when their enemies cannot counter them. They are soft when their enemies expect hardness and hard when their enemies expect softness. They fight using found potential—things that were already there.

In the Spirit World this Weapon is a pair of *spirit winds* that blow around the character, shaped by the movement of their hands. One carries glittering reflections; the other casts shadows. When enemies waste their attacks on these shadows and reflections the magician's location becomes uncertain. The supreme aspiration of this style combines these two winds into nothingness, no weapon at all, while the enemy continues to flail at nothingness and struggle with their own conceptions and ideas.

Flow has the following special features:

**Stealthy:** enemies must explicitly become *aware* of the character before they can target the character to, e.g., move closer to them, drag the character closer, attack the character, or use terrain control against them. This is a roll of d10 *minus* their Promptness, made within Long Range or before a move when the character closes to Medium or shorter Range, and requires a 7+. Enemies can attempt this roll once each round; success makes them aware of all stealthy characters within Long Range or closing that round into Medium or shorter Range in whom they would be interested. Enemies that are aware of you may choose to stop being aware of you.

**Reactive Concealment:** when an enemy misses or fails on a roll to strike the magician, they are no longer *aware* of the magician.

**Fail:** you are no longer aware of yourself. You cannot act until you change weapons or become aware of yourself with a roll of d10 *minus* your Promptness, requiring a 7+.

**Epic Moves:**

*The Futility of Action*—all enemies that are aware of you lose their next action. More precisely, they spend it futilely wrestling with a shadow, image, or idea of yourself. This counts towards their interval.

*Slip Away*—deal 2d6 Spirit Damage. Until the end of your interval, or until you change weapons, your Defense and Spirit Damage Defense gain a +2 *escape* modifier (max +2).

## Joy

+1 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage  
Short Range

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is the magic of raw love for life, other people, and all things.

This Weapon is accessible to mundane characters, but it is a Weapon of laughing sages, tricksters, and spiritual warriors—it is a boundless, fiery joy capable of filling the field of experience, destroying hostility, and transforming the world with the sheer *heat* of it.

You may turn this Weapon against physical opponents. Your joy is both holy (and thus a source of awe); infuriating or confusing (and thus a means to defeat enemies); and transformative (and thus a mechanism by which you may change others' lives). You redefine the context of everything around you; you bring them into your story, and show your enemies how amazingly beautiful or funny or joyous the world can be.

In the spirit world this weapon transforms you into a divine spirit dancer with many arms and hands wielding cloud- or mountain-range-hilted swords, extra legs that come out of your chest, eyes that radiate light, a third eye that burns with awful fire, a wide and jagged-toothed mouth, and great large ears. The rings on your swords rattle as you move, and when you reach one hand out the cloud hilt of your weapon covers their sky with rolling clouds. Your eyes laugh down at them from the heights above. The skin of the divine spirit dancer is the color of heated bronze with a dusting of coal dust and it is as hard as diamond. Much like the transformation of *desire*, this is a kind of shrouding nimbus that forms when you wield this weapon—a visual impression, more than an actual shift of scale, and definitely not a biological transformation.

The Joy Weapon has the following special features:

***Inflexible:*** it costs +5 Spirit (max 10) to switch from Joy to another Weapon within a single interval.

***Laughing at the World:*** if you are wielding Joy, and you or an ally in Melee Range spends a round doing nothing at all (voluntarily or otherwise), you or that ally respectively gain 5 Spirit.

***Fail:*** you are *laughing helplessly* or *in a reverie of bliss*. You cannot act until your interval ends; rounds of inaction count against your interval. You must wield a different weapon when you start your next interval—you cannot start it wielding the Joy Weapon again.

***Epic Moves:***

*Twist of Fate*—once before your interval ends, you may pick an attack that deals Damage or Spirit Damage to someone within Medium Range of you and declare that it *gives* that many points of Fight, Heart, or Spirit (your choice) instead. You may only have one instance of this effect active at any given time.

*Spirit Shelter*—pick an ally in Short Range. Until your interval ends, you change weapons, or you move out of Short Range of that ally, you're able to *shelter* that ally—once per round, when an enemy attacks that ally, you may make a free attack against that enemy. If your attack succeeds, the enemy's attack does not! You interrupt them or distract them in some fashion.

## Meditation

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage  
Short Range

## [Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This is the magic of deep meditation.

This Weapon is accessible to mundane characters, but it is a Weapon of magicians and spiritual warriors—the meditation of the magician, who transcends material perceptions and concerns, subdues their own reckless thoughts, and pierces the veils of the world with an all-consuming insight! If the character falls too deeply into meditation, they become a stationary and terrible icon in the spirit realm, burning to all who witness them with a consuming sense of spiritual fire.

This Weapon may awe mundane opponents, shrouding you in a sense of holy and sacred power. It allows you to ignore certain concerns of the body, which may help defeat opponents or obstacles. Most mortals are frightened and disturbed by the thought of bothering you while you wield this weapon.

In the spirit realm, it forms the Weapon "Supreme Eightfold Inner Eye Fire." This is a spiky crystal formation that you channel power through. It causes your entire being to burn with incandescent fire while crystallizing the world around you. Then that fire is reflected eight times over within the manifesting crystal spikes! There are legends of this eye opening and burning enemies to death in an instant—even in the physical world.

Meditation has the following special features:

**Deepening Meditation:** Each round you do not act while wielding this weapon, or miss with your roll to act while wielding this weapon, you gain a +2 *deepening meditation* modifier to your Spirit Damage (max +20). This lasts until you change weapons or move.

**Shield of Insight:** you have 5 Shell (max 8) and 5 Spirit Shell (max 8) when wielding this Weapon. Reduce Fight or Spirit Damage of attacks that hurt you by the appropriate Shell.

**Fail:** you *transcend interest*. You cannot act until you next take Damage or Spirit Damage, and this inaction does not count against your interval. If 3 rounds elapse and you remain in this state, then you regain the ability to *cheer others on*, illuminating their actions with radiant wisdom—but you may not act in any other fashion. If you have transcended interest, and there are no allies remaining in the conflict, then the GM has the option of ending the detailed action resolution inconclusively and declaring that you emerge from meditation some time later with apparently unrelated insights into the nature of the world.

*Epic Moves:*

*Piercing Vision*—your inner eye opens and catches the enemy in its view, dealing 2d6 + your Deepening Meditation in Spirit Damage and paralyzing them until you or they next take Damage or Spirit Damage or the end of their interval.

*Greater Shield*—your shield of insight now gives an 8-point Shell (max 8) and an 8-point Spirit Shell (max 8) until you change weapons.

**Morality**

+0 Control/2d6 Damage

**[One-Handed Weapon]**

(+0 Promptness, +2 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of virtue.

You may use this Weapon to fight off spiritual enemies by reciting from important sacred scriptures or using an important symbol—e.g., warding off unholy things with a sacred cross. You may also oppose enemies in any realm by holding fast to virtue in your heart.

This Weapon may give you the strength to defeat enemies. It may also open their hearts to you and your beliefs—it allows you to radiate the light of clear conscience and a virtuous spirit, which may sometimes crack even the most wicked or cynical façade and speak to the natural virtue which all but the most vile opponents secretly possess. You may seem to them like an avatar of a righteousness that they lack, a sad puppy that should not be kicked further, or a remnant of what is beautiful in the world.

In the spirit world this becomes the *coruscating light weapon*, a shroud of shimmering light with a fox or dragon's head. It spreads itself through the area before you, watchful, fierce, and nimble, and interposing itself between you and attacks. Sparks of light float around you. You stand on a platform of white light and hold the fox or dragon's tail in one hand.

Morality has the following special feature:

***Shield of Virtue:*** you have 4 Spirit Shell (max 8) when you are using this weapon. Reduce the Spirit Damage of each attack that hurts you by this number.

*Fail:* you are *tempted*. Take a -1 *temptation* modifier to your Spirit Defense (maximum -3); this lasts for the entirety of the conflict.

*Epic Moves:*

*Virtue Does Not Falter*—remembering what's really important to you, you strike a powerful blow that does 2d6 Fight to a physical opponent or 2d6 Spirit Damage to any opponent. Gain 15 Spirit, 15 Heart, or 15 Fight.

*Greater Shield*—your shield of virtue increases to a 6-point Spirit Shell (max 8) until you change weapons or your interval ends.

## Rage

-1 Control/1d10 Spirit Damage

## [Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of raw fury.

You may wield this Weapon in spiritual combat to rip enemies and spells apart. The outrage of your heart shreds or shatters them, drives them before you, rends them to pieces.

You may turn this Weapon against enemies in physical combat. You fight them as a berserker, shrouded in towering fury, and they cannot stand against you. Your fury alone is like a blow, and your actual blows are terrifying.

In the Spirit World this is the *misshapen demon hammer-sword*, a huge and poorly-shaped weapon that constantly shifts its form. The wielder is surrounded by a mottled black choleric armor that does little to protect them but much to make them more intimidating.

Rage has the following special features:

***Berserker***: when you attack with this Weapon, you may choose to deal Damage instead of Spirit Damage to your foe. For instance, you can punch someone in the physical world, or your rage can lash the distant body of a projected spirit.

***Rending or Terrifying Blows***: once you damage an enemy or spell with *rage*, it takes 1d10 Damage or 1d10 Spirit Damage each round (your choice, but max 1d10 total between the two) until the end of your interval. Rending and terrifying blows is per attacker, not per target, and the Damage or Spirit Damage is dealt on your action.

***Fail***: your anger makes you putty in your enemy's hands. Take 2d10 Spirit Damage and suffer the effect of your own *rending blows*.

*Epic Moves:*

*This Shall (Not) Happen!*—do 2d10 Damage or Spirit Damage and gain 15 Spirit.

*Self-Destructive Fury*—do 2d10 Damage or Spirit Damage. Take the same amount of Damage or Spirit Damage yourself. Until the end of your interval, all characters suffering from your *rending blows* take an additional +1d10 Damage or Spirit Damage (max +3d10, for a total of max 4d10).

**Ritual**

+1 Control/— Spirit Damage  
**Long Range**

**[One-Handed Weapon]**

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is the magic of talismans, ritual invocations, and spells.

This Weapon is accessible to mundane characters, but must draw upon a magical source. For example the character could use spells provided them by a magician, recite from a religious text, use a ritual taught them by a fairy relative, or tinker with the settings on a super-science device that they are not post-human enough to understand. For the most part this Weapon is the domain of actual magicians, who use it intentionally rather than by rote. Their collection of rituals, talismans, and spells allows them to subdue spiritual things and bind them to their will.

This Weapon may be turned on physical enemies. In a world with limited magic the only effect is intimidation—at best it creates psychosomatic reactions or a wave of awe and fear; at worst it fails to impress. In a world where magic can have substantial physical effect, even a non-magician can use rituals or talismans to thwart and enchant their enemies.

In the spirit world this weapon is *sorcery*; the magician is surrounded by various colorful effects that manifest and de-manifest as they cast spells. Blades or hands are conjured to attack their foes; talismans dance in front of them to defend them; they rise into the air on colorful streamers of light. It is a diverse weapon when wielded by a magician. When used by rote, by characters who do not really know or understand magic, it may manifest more simply as a single large object—an energy blast, or a dancing sword, or a giant cross that crushes enemies.

The Ritual Weapon has the following special features:

**Enmeshment:** ritual magic does no damage. Instead each hit imposes an *enmeshment* penalty of -1 (max -3) to the target's Control. This lasts until the end of the target's interval, or until some effect removes the target's enmeshment penalties. Alternately, when succeeding with ritual magic, the magician can convert each -1 enmeshment penalty on the target to 15 points of damage. For instance, four successive hits could deal a total of 45 damage, leaving the target free of penalty. Enmeshment is per target, not per magician; thus, for example, one magician can do damage with another's enmeshment, or take advantage of the enmeshment of the Weapon "Craft."

**Terrain Control:** ritual magic may constrain up to three enemies per round.

You may constrain a spirit-world enemy who is in Long Range of you, or who tries to move into Melee, Short, or Medium Range of you, to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained enemies that voluntarily decrease the Range between you and themselves, whether through a normal move or moving with someone else, roll d10+their Control. If they roll 6 or less, they take a -1 or -0 *enmeshment* penalty to Control (max -3). The -0 penalty applies if the target is enmeshed by some other terrain control effect on that move—they can only take a maximum of -1 from this terrain control, no matter how many magicians apply it, and none at all if some more powerful enmeshment effect applies at the same time.

*You can use this control on up to three enemies per round.*

**Fail:** your magic *backfires*. You hit yourself with it. You may choose normally between inflicting *enmeshment* and dealing Spirit Damage to yourself, but cannot pick a choice that has no effect. (That is, you cannot choose to convert your enmeshment to Spirit Damage when you are not enmeshed, and cannot choose to take enmeshment penalties when you are already at -3 *enmeshment*.)

*Epic Moves:*

*All Things in Harmony*—until you change weapons or the end of your interval, you may reply to any enemy attack with an attack of your own. If no enemy chooses to attack you in a given round, you may steal 5 points of Spirit from an enemy in Melee, Short, or Medium Range; you gain 5 Spirit and they lose 5 Spirit.

*Masterstroke*—convert each enmeshment effect on an enemy into 20 points of Spirit damage, and then apply a new -1 *enmeshment* penalty to their Control (max -3).

## Slipperiness

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This is a power of elusiveness.

You may use this Weapon in spiritual combat if you're too clever and too lucky for a curse to land. A demon strikes at you—you aren't there! Your food is tainted—someone else ate it! Lightning blows up your house: you were away, completing negotiations for a five-year journey! Curse you to fall in love with a toad or a hideous beggar—they're a prince or princess in disguise! Is it genius? Is it fortune? It's enough to make an evil demon tear out all its hair!

You may turn this Weapon against enemies in physical combat. You may exhaust them or win them over. Usually defeat doesn't mean that they're *changed* so much as that they just don't have the energy to keep trying to pin you down.

In the spirit world this Weapon is an unarmed style that uses impossible movements and transformations (in the lunatic style of cartoons) to evade and entrap the wielder's foes.

Slipperiness has the following special features:

**Stealthy:** enemies must explicitly become *aware* of the character before they can target the character to, e.g., move closer to them, drag the character closer, attack the character, or use terrain control against them. This is a roll of d10 *minus* their Promptness, made within Long Range or before a move when the character closes to Medium or shorter Range, and requires a 7+. Enemies can attempt this roll once each round; success makes them aware of all stealthy characters within Long Range or closing that round into Medium or shorter Range in whom they would be interested. Enemies that are aware of you may choose to stop being aware of you.

**Terrain Control:** when an enemy moves to within Melee Range of the character, or moves the character to within Melee Range of themselves, they must roll d10 *minus* their Promptness. On a 6-, they are no longer aware of the character. Make this roll once no matter how many stealthy characters apply this terrain control; however, each additional such character gives a +1 *how can you MISS them* bonus (max +3) on the roll. As an optional rule, roll this separately from terrain control effects that add Defense or Spirit Defense—this is to save you the headache of making multiple calculations on the same d10 to determine which effects take place.

*Fail:* You are too clever for your own good. All enemies participating in the battle become aware of you. You take a -1 *wide open* modifier to Defense and Spirit Defense (max -3) for the rest of your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Unexpected Escape*—deal 2d6 Spirit Damage and your enemies are no longer aware of you. If they have not rolled to become aware of stealthy characters this round, they may immediately attempt to locate you. After eligible enemies make this roll, make a normal move.

*Diversion*—all enemies that are aware of you lose their next action. This counts against their interval.

## Vitality

+1 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is the magic of raw life force.

This Weapon is accessible to mundane characters, but it is a Weapon of martial artists and magicians—of characters who consciously cultivate their vital energy, training themselves to such a pitch of *life* that not even a death curse slows them down. This is a path of magic that requires living heartily, with lots of hard work, lots of practice, and also great indulgence in pleasure.

You may turn this Weapon on physical opponents. You fight them with your refusal to give up. They cut you, trip you up, batter you, and you just don't fall down. Eventually—you win.

In the Spirit World this becomes the *unconquerable energy barrel weapon*. It's a barrel that you carry with you. When you open its top or set it down beside you, gouts of energy burst out to parry attack and blast your enemies.

Vitality has the following special features:

***Inflexible***: it costs +5 Spirit (max 15) to switch from Vitality to another weapon or approach in a single interval.

***Blinding Hurricane of Life Energy***: when you use vitality to attack, even if you miss or fail, every enemy within Melee Range in the spirit realm takes 1d10 Spirit Damage. This is in addition to whatever Spirit Damage your attack itself achieves.

***Fail***: you are *drained*. Take 2d10 Spirit Damage. You suffer the effects of your own "blinding hurricane of life energy" until the end of your interval.

***Epic Moves***:

***Unquenchable Spirit***—do 2d6 Spirit Damage. For the rest of this interval, whenever you successfully attack with Vitality, extend your interval by 1.

***Stand Your Ground***—do 2d6 Spirit Damage, cancel the ongoing effect of *drained* (if applicable), and gain 5 Spirit.

## Willpower

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of raw willpower.

You may wield the raw force of will—the unwavering commitment to do what you intend to do and be who you are—to defeat spiritual attacks and enemies. Your will dominates them, dissolving or compelling obedience from magic, demons, and spirits.

You may turn this willpower against enemies in the physical world. This allows you to turn a physical battle into a test of wills, and when they break, it's as good as a physical victory.

In the Spirit World, this becomes the *all-conquering spirit sword*. This is a living weapon with an eye in the hilt, and it lives up to its name only if the wielder absolutely does not waver.

Willpower has the following special features:

***Inflexible***: it costs +5 Spirit (max 15) to switch weapons away from Willpower inside of your interval.

***Absolute Commitment***: each time you make a successful attack with willpower, increase your Spirit Damage by +1 (max +5) until your interval ends. When using the epic move *Powerful Attack*, add this bonus twice.

***Fail***: somewhere, you've made an error—and you can't exactly stop to rethink when resolute obstinacy is all that's standing between you and the enemy! Take 2d10 Spirit Damage. Until your interval ends, your enemy gains the benefit of your Absolute Commitment feature when attacking you; you retain the benefit yourself.

*Epic Moves:*

*Unquenchable Spirit*—do 2d6 Spirit Damage, adding the bonus from your Absolute Commitment normally. For the rest of this interval, each time you successfully attack with willpower, extend your interval by 1.

*Even Unto the End*—do 2d6 Spirit Damage, take 2d6 Spirit Damage, and double your absolute commitment effect, current total, and maximum (max x2, for a total of +2 to +10) until your interval ends. Extend your interval by 2. If you have failed this interval, note that your enemy also benefits from this doubled effect.

# Spirit Weapons in the Dreaming Waters

For the most part **Dreaming Waters** uses the standard selection of spirit weapons. In addition characters may use the setting-specific weapons below.

Of these—

- **Harmony** is designed for angels;
- **Seeker** is designed for humans and angels;
- **Wingless Hero** is designed for human use.

Note that **Desire** is the traditional spirit weapon of fire angels, and that lamia have access to special weapons (their "songs") that we will discuss at a later time.

**Harmony**

+1 Control/2d6+1 Spirit Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of an angel who can live in harmony with others—

Someone who has grown up learning ways to live with the presence of the great powers. This Weapon may be wielded in spiritual combat to understand and bleed off the powers that derive from the sibling-storms—to ground the power of Grain Waker, to focus the power of the animus into a single point of flame that may be carried safely in the soul, to propitiate the spirit in the presence of Wrath, to carry oneself through Stillness Vale, and so forth.

Turning this Weapon against a physical opponent makes it progressively harder for that opponent to justify opposition to the angel. The angel deflects animosity, seeks cooperation, finds ways to live together. It chips away at the self-righteousness that puts enemies in conflict with the angel.

In the Spirit World these are the *earth channel drums*. When you beat them they cut or fill trenches of the earth and sky that turn aside attacks, draining away the power of the foe until they concede to you and repent of their actions.

*Fail:* you have committed an error—most likely in arrogance. Some storm gains an inroad into your soul. Gain 1 interval but lose one Exemplar Die.

*Epic Moves:*

*Flashback*—present a flashback where an elder or teacher or other very important person taught you how to handle spiritual attacks or situations like the one you're in. Gain one Exemplar Die, 1 point of interval, and a +1 *insight* bonus to the Control and Spirit Damage of this Weapon (max +3) until the end of your interval.

*Co-opt*—stipulate that you may find a way to work with your target—not just co-exist but to put its abilities to good use, and without corrupting it, coercing it, or fundamentally changing its nature. This immediately becomes possible, although it may not be *practical* unless you also win the conflict. Gain 1 point of interval and a +1 *insight* bonus to the Control and Spirit Damage of this Weapon (max +3) until the end of your interval.

**Seeker Weapon**

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

**[One-Handed Weapon]**

(+0 Promptness, -2 Spirit Defense)

This is the power of a human who isn't afraid of change.

You may use this Weapon in a spiritual conflict. Instead of allowing your enemy's power to define you, or standing firm against it, you move and flow together with your enemy, learning from it. You listen for the clear truth that lies behind the muddled fervor of an attack.

You may turn this Weapon against enemies in a physical conflict. You are not fighting them, but looking for the best in them; if you defeat them before they defeat you, then you have *found* the best in them. If you are fighting a genuinely evil force, or something like a demon of fire that cannot control its impulses, then you may discover a weakness or some sort of practical leverage instead.

In the Spirit World this is an unarmed soft style, distinguished from the physical unarmed style only in its power to safely handle and stick to terrible attacks or diffuse magical energy. For this reason it is called the *subtle touch Weapon*.

*Fail:* it's too hard! You can't balance your *self* and the enemy's power. End your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*The Seeker's Way*—propose a compromise: the enemy achieves part of whatever effect they hope to obtain now, in exchange for the GM's agreement that even if they run you out of Spirit or Fight or you give up, they are unable to defeat you entirely. If the enemy refuses this compromise, they take 6d6 Spirit Damage and lose their next action.

*Magical Insight*—deal 20 Spirit Damage, take 20 Spirit Damage, and stipulate that you have learned something from the enemy. Typically this is a minor magical trick learned from observing the power of a storm or demon; however, you can also improve fighting skill or have an insight about the kind of person you are dealing with. If you give up or lose all of your Spirit this interval, the major effect is a temporary or permanent enthrallment with the enemy in question.

## Wingless Hero Weapon

+1 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

[One-Handed Weapon]

(-1 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This is the strong power of humans who have risen above despair.

You may use this Weapon in a spiritual conflict. You dominate the fire of the sun and the influence of the storms when they seek to control you. You make them subject to you, draw them into your inner world, show them your supreme self-defining spirit.

You may turn this Weapon against enemies in a physical conflict. You rage across the battlefield as a berserk demon-god of battle, burning with unconquerable spirit. You may deal physical damage or—if you're trying to stop a fight or break the spirits of a foe—Spirit Damage. At the highest levels of prowess, you burn so brightly that even your enemies admire you and even the world may reshape itself to your will.

In the Spirit World this is known as the *reality vortex weapon*—a sword or dream-catcher that cuts or sucks away the Spirit World as it is and leaves behind instead the world as you imagine it. If you manage to draw the enemy into one of these gaps the battle is effectively won.

The wingless hero Weapon has the following special features:

**Berserker:** when you attack a physical opponent with this Weapon, you may choose to deal Damage instead of Spirit Damage to your foe.

**Prowess:** you gain a +1 *refusal to bend* (max +5) to your Control, Spirit Defense, Damage, and Spirit Damage each time you miss with an attack, take Damage, or take Spirit Damage while wielding this weapon. This lasts until you change weapons.

*Fail:* the power of your enemies humbles you. The enemy you were attacking can ignore your Spirit Defense (treating your total Spirit Defense as 0) on their next attack. They still need to roll well enough to hit twice your actual Spirit Defense to earn an epic move from "rolling twice what they need," and this effect goes away if they attack something else, do not attack, or make an attack that does not go up against Spirit Defense.

*Epic Moves:*

*The Human Spirit*—deal 2d6 Spirit Damage and stipulate that you show an amazing fighting spirit, such as to attract the admiration and attention of any enemies or allies susceptible to such things.

*Fiery Vortex*—deal 20 Spirit Damage, adding your *refusal to bend*, and stipulate that you can inflict magical effects if you win this conflict: cursing your enemy in judgment for their wickedness, bending or breaking their will, or causing some minor beneficent magical effect on the world around you.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Magic

**Magic** is the practice of spiritual creatures; it is *the effectuation of a moral or emotionally meaningful outcome in defiance of reason and causal principles*. It takes a compelling motivational force, something born in spirit, mind, or heart, and manifests it so thoroughly in the physical world that the reality of things bends to match.

Details of magical effects often develop through analogy and metaphor. Someone *turns to stone* because of a baleful demonic power that does not appreciate or recognize the motivational power of life: the means of breaking the spell is something that breaks its gaze (e.g., cracking the magical mirror through which it watches the world); or affirms the virtue of life (e.g., true love's kiss, or recognizing that the statue is alive); or denies the demonic power its own life, turning its power on itself; or treats the statue in defiance of the truth of things as if it were alive, speaking to it and caring for it until the stone melts and life once again awakes. Each of these is a mechanism for denying the moral and emotional logic that the spell employed.

In the **Filial Piety Action System** magic is orthogonal to reason.

This does not mean that they do not interact. The yin-yang magician or Taoist sage or Hermetic scholar certainly practices a reasoned art. However, this art functions because of the power of reason *as a moral or emotional substance*. Even as Marduk ascends to become the supreme deity through his power to create, subdue chaos, and order the world; even as the Logos exists before the world; even as Descartes' reason gives proof to existence; thus a magic that acts through reason and causality draws on the metaphorical and emotional power of reason to defeat chaos, create new things and innovations, bring order to the world, and prove and affirm existence in a wind-blown abyss of uncertainty.

In like fashion there are fairy creatures that seek to undermine reason: presented with a duty, phrased in words, they will subvert those words and that duty. Caught up by reason's net, and forced through some equal cleverness to abide by some rule or promise, they will succumb. This too is a metaphor. It's not because magic abides by reason that they engage in sophistry. Rather, they're metaphorically drawing on unreason's power to subvert the awakened mind by appealing to rationalization, justification, and the letter of the law.

So magic and reason interact—but the fundamental essence of magic is not a thing that can be cadged into place with application of engineering or programming techniques. It's not energy. It's not matter. It's not a physical

process. It's the manifestation of a fundamental emotional impulse towards justice, or vengeance, or uplifting hope, or romantic love.

## Wielding Magic

To wield magic, a character must have access to it. They must obtain or learn some mechanism by which the power of the heart may apply directly to the world. This is something obtained through experience, a Knack, being a certain character type, or the acquisition of or practice with a suitable Weapon.

That given, the rules for using magic are the same as for any other act:

- **Attentive** governs magic with a purpose of listening and learning;
- **Fierce** governs magic that fights evil;
- **Helpful** governs magic used to help people;
- **Insightful** governs magic used to know what other people need or want;
- **Reliable** governs magic used to fulfill duties.

You may accomplish magic by declaring it and having the GM accept your declaration; through a simple action, as part of your stipulation or independent of it; or through a detailed action resolution, which may or may not include the use of Spirit Weapons or magical Approaches (pg. XX).

## Spirit Weapons

In most worlds characters can use a very basic magic through the Spirit Weapons in the previous section, on ppg. XX-XX. This is "basic" in two respects: first, it uses a raw and unrefined power, a metaphor made fast into the world without any filter of occult traditions or reasoned interpretation. Second, it's basic in that the GM should seek minimally arcane explanations for the effects. Slipperiness and fear do not cause the character to turn invisible or teleport—they make the character easier to overlook. The intent look of a character using Concentration or even Meditation does not pin the enemy down with divine godly power, it just makes them hesitate and lose track of a little bit of time. Even when using Devotion to make an implacable enemy relent, it's closer to "love finds a way to flourish" than "the light of your heart catches up the enemy in a whirlwind of glory, defeating them and bringing peace."

In some worlds even this basic magic is not possible, and characters may only make inherently plausible stipulations when using mundane Spirit Weapons to defeat enemies. If they push too hard, their action or interval fails, just as if they'd lost.

## Adjudicating Magic

Whenever a character uses magic, the GM should evaluate its effects through the lens of

- the relevant stipulation; and
- the driving emotion behind it.

The strength of the effect is determined by the stipulation and the level of success it earns; the details are shaped by *what makes a satisfying and harmonious story*. In general, this is entirely up to the GM; if a player needs to adjust the detail, they can use another action or declaration or more generally another application of magic to tune the details to their taste.

Here are some specific thoughts on ten key categories of magic used in the **Filial Piety Action System**.

## Binding Magic

Binding magic inflicts stillness, imprisonment, or obsession. It's a power of reason and language—it flows from the ivory tower of the solipsistic mind, that formulates theses regarding how the world ought to be and how things dwelling within it ought to act, to enforce those ideas axiomatically upon the world.

Its power is to stop and deny the independence of other things.

Its nature is linguistic or metaphorical: it is *words* or *symbols* that apply the binding. To stop up a secret, so that a person cannot speak it, a binding magic might place a toad on the back of the tongue—this is analogous to a self-motivated physical weight that can block speech, make it impossible, and quite reasonably replace it with a croaking when the will overcomes that heavy obstruction. Alternately, it might impose a sentence—"you will not speak of this."

The weakness of this magic is obvious: the symbol or the sentence is always something that says both *more* and *less* than desired. It always and

invariably offers points of leverage by which a person who comes to terms with their binding can circumvent it or even use it for power. (There is a long narrative tradition of people using their curses or enchantments as blessings and sources of power. This is practically obligatory with cursing, below, but is entirely appropriate for binding magic as well.) If the character strives hard enough, they *must* find a means by which the toad can be co-opted—if not to release the secret, than to suck in the soul of the person that enchanted them, bit by bit, or to speak secret wisdom that the toad knows, or to taste the air in mysterious places and learn what transpires there, or to never have to drown or worry about poison. The toad may also be defeated—poisoned or drowned, if it doesn't make the victim immune to these things, or lured out of the throat with honey, or made to crawl down into the stomach to disconsolately keep the stomach from gurgling the secret while the tongue wags on in peace. As for the sentence, "you will not speak of this" is absurdly open to interpretation; the only thing preventing the character from *immediately* circumventing it is that there must be some emotional force, cultivated or real, behind the means of circumvention.

For this is also true—that while characters can always manipulate the words and symbols that bind them, they must do so using words and symbols that are at least as compelling as the binding power. It's not enough to just come up with an idea: the counteracting agent has to have, if not magic, then *vital meaning* of its own. Power must be invested in the counteragent, power deriving from drama, time, and thought—it must be shaped, either by the characters or the players, into a suitably dramatic counteragent or it will not suffice.

There is a third category of binding, alluded to before, neither symbolic nor linguistic in its operation—the magic of *denial*, that says that a thing does not exist. This is a power that covers up secrets by trying to magically erase that the secret ever existed—a *will to not have something be*, or *to have something not have happened*. This magic can only be countered with acts of belief—people must put their faith in the notion that, whether or not the thing that is being erased is real, it is important. They must make a symbol of it, as in the earlier example where a person talks daily with a statue—they do not have to *believe* there is a real person in the statue, much less in the void where a person has been erased, but they must affirm that existence through their actions.

How far must a character go to unmake such a binding?

If a character has Exemplar Dice remaining when they are bound, then their player can declare that the magic quickly fades away. They don't even have to justify it—they can leave that to the GM, or provide a paper-thin excuse and then ignore the matter. The magic doesn't take because fundamentally a character who still has Exemplar Dice is a character with enough confidence in who they are to reject hostile symbols, words, and claims of nonexistence. If a character does not have Exemplar Dice remaining when

they are defeated by a binding effect, or if the player chooses to allow the effect to come to pass, then it's up to the GM how difficult it is to counter; the player's only option, should it be too onerous, is to declare that the character is now an NPC.

## Cursing Magic

If binding magic is a magic of reason, cursing magic is fundamentally the magic of unreason. It's magic that *mocks* reason, in fact, causing explicitly unreasonable effects. It curses a person to have bees living in their hair. It curses a person to smell deliciously of strawberries, no matter how much or how little they bathe. It curses a person to be sleeted on any time they go outside, or perhaps only on Tuesdays.

This is magic of the chaos in the world, the surprising, weird, unnatural things that we find in it, and how we integrate them piece by piece into our lives. It starts with a seed, an idea, a curiosity, and then embroiders itself bit by bit after attaching to a life—the consequences, rather than being designed entirely by the original casting power, are generally things that evolve on their own, and according in some respect to the character of the person who suffers from the curse. Thus every curse begins as some kind of impediment; every curse creates a crisis; then, bit by bit, with the passage of time, every curse defeats some portion of its victim's character and becomes an enhancement and blessing to the rest. If a person's spirits are not subdued by being sleeted on every time they go outside, eventually it becomes a power that lets them toboggan wherever they wish to go. If a person is made despondent but not crushed by having their image in a mirror or photograph turned into a donkey, then it will make them sad but won't ruin their life—if some journalist discovers it, they'll just say, "Oh, yes, that's what I look like in the mirror now, I've gotten used to it, I guess," while their reflection's ears dangle disconsolate at its side; efforts to turn it into a sensational story and make things worse for that person will fail. Having bees in one's hair will make an angry person angrier, a sad person sadder, a dedicated martial artist into a dedicated bee-wielding martial artist, and a scientist ever more certain of a naturalistic explanation.

The power that is strongest against this kind of curse is to *face it*, to *use pieces of it*, and to *explore it*. These are the attributes of the hero that subdues chaos and transforms it into a source of useful things. The more energy that a character puts into facing, suborning, and reasoning about a curse, the quicker it unravels into nothingness or becomes an active ally—here, basically, it's the player's choice whether it's the kind of curse that they can eventually make useful or whether it's something that will torment and benefit them for a little bit before going away in entirety. If a character has Exemplar Dice remaining when they are cursed, then it takes very little to make the curse fade away entirely; if they had no Exemplar Dice left, then the curse can

create a long and difficult struggle. That said, it's pretty much impossible for an effect of this category to make a *character's* life unlivable in the long run; the only time it can turn a character into an NPC is by making them someone the player doesn't want to play.

Curses have to be supported in some fashion or other by their maker—there's always some kind of metaphorical thread that leads back from the victim to the creator of the effect. Perhaps the sleeting curse was made by using a handful of crushed ice, which has to be kept in the curse-maker's freezer. Or perhaps the bee-hair curse required that the caster sneak a felt bee into the target's bed. Using this curse-making tool in some fashion or other it's always possible to turn the curse back on its maker; it's impossible to craft a curse so carefully that investigation cannot eventually find that link and effort eventually turn it back. The more difficult this is made, in fact, the more devastating the effect on the curse-casting agency when the effect finally redounds.

### Enshrouding Magic

Enshrouding *drains life* or brings *sleep, death, and darkness*. It's a magic that dampens life, casts it in shadow, wraps it in a shroud, drains away its vital and memorable character and attracts the affection of others. It makes things weak, sallow, monotonous, and flat.

This is a magic of *taking*—

Always a magic of hunger, and theft, and claiming a life that is not the magician or spirit's to take. When it casts forth darkness, it is to shroud an area in unnatural claim—to say, "this land is mine, the sun shall not touch it." When it makes someone sleep, it is a possessive power—a power that hides the person that can speak for themselves and leaves only a sleeping doll onto which the enshrouding power can project whatever conceptions it so desires.

Thus the greatest counter to enshrouding, metaphorically, is *giving*. To defeat a demon of the shroud, one must give—to the victims, to the world, to whatever; the character of love and generosity is a light that is abhorrent to the power of the shroud. The kiss of selfish lust can wake someone subject to *binding*, but to break the sleep of a shroud requires the kiss of true love; the brilliance of genius can shatter a curse of darkness, but to break a shroud a genius must turn to charity and compassion. The most effective counter to a shroud, traditionally, is to give openly to the source of the enchantment itself—to love the shrouding demon or spirit, to give freely to the magician what the shrouding magician desires. Such a gift is like a handing them a burning ember that they cannot hold or refuse—it ignites them, consumes them, burns away the shroud. At the same time, the character risks that the opposite will transpire, that the shrouding creature will in fact take, and take, and latch

onto the gift and drain them dry through it. If that risk isn't there, if there isn't a reason in the character's heart to accept it happening if it does, then it's not a gift at all! A dice roll that gambles between victory and defeat is often the best way to capture this notion that the character must offer to lose in order to vanquish their foe; if victory is certain, the GM should not say as much until after the roll is made.

## Flesh-Twisting Magic

Flesh-twisting magic hurts, twists, disfigures, or physically transforms. It is a malign or at least coercive magic, associated with spiritual attack and demonic action—magic that heals or inflicts a desired transformation (as, say, by enhancing the target's grace) is a life magic or wild magic that overlaps in its edge cases with magic that twists flesh.

The core of a flesh-twisting magic is *imposing your emotional reaction to someone on their body*. It's a power that turns someone into what you see within them. If it makes you angry that someone beat you in a foot race, then their strong legs are twisted to you—so the magic twists them. If you have an unnatural affection for someone, it makes them more beautiful. If you think of them as a useless fop or socialite, they become a peacock or butterfly. If they are a noisome monster to you, then you shrivel and corrupt them. If you dream of hurting them, it hurts them. In some sense, the change must *satisfy* the caster: it must strike them as right, virtuous, aesthetically harmonious with some impulse in the magician or demon's regard.

The greatest danger of flesh-twisting magic is that it will become natural to the twisted creature. This is a mental and also spiritual threat: the butterfly may begin to think as a butterfly, or they may continue to think as a person but acquire, in some sense, a lepidopteran destiny. If this does not happen then it is inevitable that the creature's original nature will reassert itself—as the vitriolic emotion of the flesh-twisting power fades, and its attention turns to other things, the power of the initial judgment diminishes. This is why when a character is scourged by flesh-twisting magic, but still has Exemplar Dice, it is possible to assume that the spell or effect will fade.

There are many traditional counters to flesh-twisting magic.

The two most common are to defeat the source of that judgment, using force to kill the source of the magic or make it recant; and to defeat the judgment itself, proving either to the eyes of the flesh-twisting power or to an impartial universal judge that it was wrongly made. If it is impossible to make the flesh-twisting power relent, then they may be conned into imposing a new and contradictory judgment on the target or into casting the same judgment in one fashion or another onto their own reflection. In any of these cases, when the judgment relents or is superseded, the flesh untwists.

It's also possible to find some power capable of making a contrary judgment at a similarly efficacious level—something that will seek to untwist what is twisted, make whole what was lost. This method is problematic, however, as it can easily result in a character who is twisted in two opposing directions—crippled by one magic, then given wings by another, or a salaryman turned first into a peacock by scorn and then, by a loving heart, into a shining prince. They weren't originally a prince! They're a humble salaryman!

The characteristics and miscellaneous special effects of this magic are generally as determined by the emotional judgment in play. The most likely fate for a character or enemy who overindulges in flesh-twisting magic is to willingly remake themselves into a monstrous but powerful form before suffering a tragic defeat.

## Land-Rule

It is the power of land-rule to *stabilize* and *strengthen*. It is the power that flows from a person—a smith, an artist, a guardian, a King—to sustain all things.

This power draws, as does binding, on the orderly impulse of the mind.

This is the power of the ego, and of reason, to commit acts of craft and organization; to admire and categorize analytically the things of the world; to be the source, or the seeming source, of a harmony and justice and general *good order* of existence. And it is also the power of the will and discipline to adhere to and defend that order; to bind oneself to it; to proceed with care and in the proper manner, to live for others and dutifully and well.

It is also the other side of that power—the power of the mind to feel a connectedness to things, to feel a flow of purposes in the world around one, that sense that says: *I have a role and a place in this, and a part—not exalted but real—in the grand celestial order.*

It is thus two metaphors—the self as King and the self as subject—that unite through the shared sense that through proper behavior the world may be made tame, cultivated to richness, and kept good.

This land-rule has a price.

Something must always be given; something must always be sacrificed, emotionally if not energetically proportional to the result. The metaphorical King shares their blood with the hungry soil. They expose themselves to their subjects, make themselves humble and at risk one day a year. They consent to die if the land is failing, that it may be restored to health. These are not always the specific sacrifices that land-rule asks—but to create order through this magic, there is always sacrifice, both symbolic and real. To corrupt the

land-rule, the sacrifice must be corrupted; to create greater effects with it, the sacrifice must be taken to a greater extent.

Healing magic sometimes falls under this general rubric; the doctor is a creature of order, who knows the place of every bone and the proper movement of every blood vessel. They may act through the skin, without tools, pushing a body to reassemble itself in proper order, but to do so they make some sacrifice of their own: they take on a smaller form of the injury, or they live with some form of asceticism, or they do their work and studies without accepting a fee. If something messes with their sacrifice, their healing magic (both future and recent) fails them.

## Life Magic

Life magic is a power of *healing* and *quickenning*. It draws on the will to give of oneself to others—to donate your own life force to them. It's something like the land-rule, but it's a bit less formal and cognitive—it's not about your duty to the world, although magicians of this sort can *feel* that duty. It's not about the kingly spirit obliged to protect others, or the humble spirit obliged to serve them, but rather a kind of delicate and personal feeling of adoration that connects one personally to the people you can help and allows one to put oneself in their shadow.

Life magic stands opposed to and of a similar character to enshrouding magic. It's the magic of taking your life force and using it for others, unstinting, holding back only what you need so that you can keep helping others in the future. It *wakens*. It *brightens*. It brings life and casts back the shrouds and agencies of despair. It's a power to fill the world with light.

And like enshrouding its weakness is in its fundamental character.

To study this kind of magic is to make oneself open to draining—to being greedily gulped dry by any power that latches onto the flow of life you have to give. If a life mage goes up against an enshrouding power, it's anyone's guess what happens—sometimes the gift of their life shatters the shroud, sometimes they're drunk down in one great draught by some vampiric demon or power, and darkness consumes them. This sort of magic is also extremely vulnerable to anything that closes off the heart—not just selfish impulses, but things like fear, trauma, or rejection can break the power of a life mage or healer of this sort. If something crusts over their heart and blocks their ability to use their power for others, it takes a joy, love, or need stronger than that trauma to awaken their power again.

## Mind-Twisting Magic

Mind-twisting magic inflicts delirium, passion, or disinhibiting madness. It's a power of emotion, of inflicting the kind of emotion or desire that overrides reason—it's not a power of reason, and it can't be bent entirely to reason's ends.

The core of a mind-twisting magic is *unshackling motivational forces*.

It's hard to use this kind of magic to make someone believe or want or feel something that's entirely unnatural to them. It's not a power of turning people into things they're not. Its efficacy is to unlock an internal power that is already there. The medium for this is anything that stirs up that force—something seductive to unlock lust, the trickling of golden coins from one hand to the next to unlock greed, the beating of drums to unlock everything primal in a person, a soft and distant music to awaken daydreams or a questing impulse, and so forth.

The counter to this is often keyed to the medium that unlocks it. Some terrible cacophony puts an end to the spell of soft music; cultural in-jokes break the spell of drums; a dash of ice water breaks seduction; conning the victim into seizing a "great treasure" that turns out to be a handful of slugs or Monopoly money breaks the spell of golden coins; and so forth.

It's also possible to use any force strongly associated with reason, faith, or discipline to break the spell—there's symbolic weight in seeking a bishop's exorcism, the examination of a fully tenured Professor (no matter of what), or a sergeant from the victim's old army unit. This method cannot, however, succeed without first prompting a conflict of some sort—when challenged by reason, faith, or discipline, a fully unshackled motivational force is prone to fight it, challenge it, rave and struggle against it before finally giving in and allowing the mind to shackle it once again.

Finally there are the methods that people use themselves, and through the natural course of their lives, to subdue their own heart. Duty; love; remorse; calming yoga techniques; precious memories—anything of this sort can restore the mind unhinged by magical effects. This is why when a character is damaged by mind-twisting effects, but has Exemplar Dice remaining, they will not do anything abominable to themselves—the closer they approach an unforgivable action, the more their traditional recourses loom largely in their mind.

The power of a mind-twisting magic should be considered comparable to that of drugs—it is possible to create the same level of madness as hallucinogens, to make oneself or some random desire as addictive as heroin, to clarify the mind or bring a delirious languor in the same fashion as the drugs that do these things. This is a tool for understanding the limits of magic and not a direct equivalence; drugs are a good mechanism for understanding mind-twisting magic because they show us the limits of behavior when the ego and

superego are prevented from asserting dominance over the other motivational forces in the soul.

## Ritual Magic

Ritual magic is a more benign variant of binding used for *organizing* and *controlling* the world. It's a magic that affirms the supremacy of reason, using complicated formal systems or pseudo-scientific ideas as a fetish to manipulate the raw emotional and moral content of the world. The metaphor is conquering the world through careful observation and applying influences—but the raw "things" that are studied and influenced are not the atoms and newtons of physics, but rather symbols. It differs from binding in that it always begins with a symbolic picture of the current situation—it's a magic that both cares and notices what's there before it begins its work. This makes it stronger, in that the result is generally more inherently compatible with the target's nature and that it's much easier to work benevolent or morally neutral effects—and weaker in that the target or an enemy may undo the magic by undermining the applicability of the symbols that the ritual magician uses to understand the target. For instance, if the magician uses Tarot cards and builds an effect based on understanding their target as the Hermit, the effect can be unmade by luring the target out into society. It's also open to subversion according to all the same methods as binding, manipulating the words or symbols that bind or assist the target.

## Theurgy

Theurgy is a form of magic that promotes *joy and happiness*. Theurgy is a fundamentally benevolent magic, though it overlaps at its edges with cursing and mind-twisting magic. It's the kind of thing that sends shockwaves of brilliant light across a kingdom to make everybody happy, wakes up a hero from a half-dead state and inspires them to keep fighting for everybody's future, and makes even monsters laugh with joy and shake hands with good people. It's a magic that fundamentally wants to make things better for people, because its metaphorical character *is* joy—the profound, bubbling, irresistible joy that sometimes wells up in a person when they contemplate their love for either a romantic interest or the whole wide world. It's the shout of the heart that scatters glory and beauty through the world. It's the crisp taste of mountain air. It's the sea and the sunrise. It's hearing that people did everything exactly right in a crisis. It's music. It's playing music and it's hearing music perfectly played. It's that thing in the heart that makes everything good—expressed into the world, poured out literally into the world, as the magic of happy endings and ringing glorious joy-in-being!

It is not the power of theurgy to compel. Grouches may be pushed by it, it may batter at their hearts to make them smile, but it does not force a smile from them. It is not the power of theurgy to coerce an enemy into becoming an ally or a friend—only to open a path that they could choose to walk to friendship. It is not, in short, the power of theurgy to do anything that is genuinely objectionable to any but the most power-crazed despot (who will naturally fear the disorderly component of joy) or the most bitterly evil zealots of cruelty that tremble in fierce anger that certain others should know joy.

For these despots and zealots, as even children's television knows, there is a means—a poor and generally fallible one, but a means—to counter the effects of theurgy. Any magic or effect that spreads grayness, that deadens the senses, that shrinks and shrivels the conscience and the span of one's conceptions—all the agencies of despair, in short—inevitably undermine the power of theurgy, and may conquer it even if it is actively maintained. And if it is not maintained, if there is not an effort given on a regular basis to pour more joy-in-life and beauty into the world, then it will fade on its own. For it is the perverse character of people to forget what a wonder! What a marvel! What a beautiful, rare, and strange world it is they live in; and just as a person may wake to a sunrise! And breathe fresh air! And then succumb, bit by bit, piecemeal to the dreariness of the life they have conceived for themselves, so may the work of theurgy, that replicates that joy, fade in time to dreariness and grayness.

## Wild Magic

Wild magic *promotes growth and change*. It is a beneficent magic, a magic that creates new potentials and causes things to flourish. It is transformative, and as a transformative magic it borders on flesh-twisting, mind-twisting, binding, and cursing at its edges—but the fundamental impulse in it is a love for the possibilities of the world, a desire to waken new power, health, and beauty in the objects of experience, a creative and birthing and uncontainable power.

The power of wild magic is fundamentally constrained by the nature of the things it touches. It is an *unlocking* power that joys in discovery of what was secretly always there within the things it touches; it has no power to dictate what it finds. When a character uses the wild magic, both they and their target may find the results surprising—but always they either bring out what existed already, or they bring out a metaphorically enhanced version of what was already there.

Where a flesh-twisting spell might turn a person into a bird because *the caster* thought it was appropriate, wild magic might do the same because *their true nature* was always like a bird. Or consider a person who'd always secretly

dreamed of wealth—a mind-twisting spell could unlock uncontrollable greed, while a wild magic spell might show them a way to make all the money they've dreamed of, shower them immediately in cash, or allow them to recognize at last that they've been denying what they really want and shift to a career that makes more money at the expense of some of their puritan moral values.

In general the character of wild magic is also that it needs no counter, at least not from the perspective of the afflicted: if they choose, if they force themselves to so choose, they may always lock that power away again. The bird may become human again; after getting a concussion from constant rains of coins, the wealth-dreamer may stop wanting money; a land made with wild magic to flourish may decide, for no reason apparent to anybody who is not themselves a landscape, to return to the way it had been.

Externally, to conquer wild magic—to beat it back down again, and remove the abilities it's offered your enemies—requires some effort to make that power seem abhorrent to them. Cage the bird long enough and it may consent to become human; berate the wealth-dreamer until they feel unworthy of their gift and they may forsake it; fight wars over the enchanted land until blood soaks into its soil and its nature withers, and it may return to its prior state. A more efficacious method is to counter the wild magic with binding or flesh-twisting or mind-twisting; regrettably, however, this requires comparable mystical potency and is often less effective than binding or twisting someone without comparable wild magic effects.

## Acting on Metaphors and Symbols

In dealing with magic, thus, characters may have reason to strive against or with allegories, metaphors, and ideas. This rouses the natural creativity in players, which may lead to a GM allowing almost any plan to succeed (for to make a good story of something is the most effective action one can undertake when working with a narrative medium like an RPG.) On other occasions, things won't be that easy. Characters will need to *work* at it to subdue the toad in the back of their throat, or to grasp a curse in the obstinate claws of their optimism and turn it to their service, or properly apply ritual magic, or subdue the fire a mind-twisting effect raised, or in general make the fullest application of the principles above.

We have thus already imagined that the players cannot simply use their descriptive prowess to subdue or declare a certain metaphorical idea. If the characters may use a simple action, then no special rules are necessary. They determine which Attribute and Subject governs what they want to do—which may require that they think a little far afield, and focus not on the immediate effects on themselves but the bigger picture effects on others—and then they make their roll.

If a simple action seems inadequate, then the GM should build the idea the character is working with—the symbol they are trying to manipulate—as either a spiritual enemy or a Difficulty. The character may then take up either a spiritual weapon or one of the Heart Weapons below and attempt to subdue it.

For example, a character suffers a flesh-twisting effect.

Some evil sorceress has transformed them into a mouse!

Normally this means that they've been utterly defeated; or it's a short-term condition that they'll recover from naturally. But let's assume that the player only knows "you can probably recover, so don't write up a new character yet"—and so their first impulse is to try to undo this condition.

They recognize on a player level or a character level that the sorceress must think of them as small, harmless, but irritating vermin. This is the judgment imposed by the mouse form (unless she's a peculiar mouse-adoring sorceress.) They know that the mechanisms to defeat this judgment are:

- defeat the sorceress;
- cause the sorceress to try to turn them into something else;
- cause the sorceress somehow to cast a mousing spell on herself or her own reflection; or
- prove to a theoretical universal authority that the judgment is wrong!

The first is actually not *that* difficult. There aren't any specific penalties for being a mouse: the character might even acquire temporary proficiency with an awesome Being a Mouse Weapon. It's problematic to just pretend that the flesh-twisting effect didn't happen, but as long as the character can roll with the punch here it doesn't really have to slow them down. That's part of what being a fictional hero is all about!

The middle two options are probably situational.

Tricking a sorceress into casting a different transformation—that's either easy or hard depending on how often she transforms things, how indirectly she does it, how much the character knows about her plans, and the like. The same applies to getting her to transform herself. If it's plausible, then a good plan can get you there—possibly paired with a good roll on a simple action or victory in a Heart or Spirit battle. But it might not be obvious how to even start there, and that's fine.

The last option is the one that's easiest for characters to sink their little teeth into. To stop being a mouse, what one has to do is . . . demonstrate a distinctly non-mousy character. To go out into the world and be anything but a small, harmless, and irritating vermin.

Traditionally this means doing something heroic.

The transformed mouse, say, saves a child from a kidnapper. Or fights off an evil spirit that's the local King of the Cats. Or saves a bunch of mice. Or gives up their chance to become human again to save someone else, thereby proving their worth and . . . becoming human again.

The character has to defeat the image-of-themselves-as-mouse.

The GM doesn't want to just let it happen. And it's too important for a simple action. So the GM should encode the symbol the character is trying to defeat: themselves-as-mouse, or possibly some double negation thereof (the absence of a clear symbol of themselves-not-being-a-mouse) as a spiritual enemy or a Difficulty, and let the character fight it with an appropriate Weapon.

Let's say that the player surprises the GM here.

If you've been reading along, you're probably thinking that the way to beat that mousiness is heroism—because that's what your humble author has been thinking. But maybe the player doesn't know what the GM, or the author, or you the reader has been thinking. Maybe they believe that the way to defeat the image is to use some completely unrelated-to-heroism spiritual weapon. They pick Desire, on the theory that nobody's ever heard of a mouse willing to turn a whole town upside down to get their booze.

Or, for the sake of this example, Acceptance.

With the symbol in question reified as a spiritual enemy, it's still easy to work out what happens. The player tries to live with being a mouse, to overcome being a mouse. They make their attacks. They deal Spirit Damage. Maybe they win. Maybe they win, and the story is: "I was a mouse for a while. I needed to learn some things from being a mouse. But I wasn't attached to it. I didn't wrestle with it. I let myself be a mouse while I was a mouse. Then I let it go. And the world understood that, and that judgment of flesh-twisting passed through me, it moved and I moved with it, and then it found nothing to grip in me and it was gone."

Or, of course, the mouse symbol wins. They go unconscious. They lose a bit more of themselves to mouse-hood. Maybe they're changed a bit more permanently now.

Oops!

# Dreaming Waters:

## Magic

**Dreaming Waters** is not a setting where wizards and magic wielders are exalted above ordinary people. The opposite is true: to take up magic is either a curse, or a folly, or an act of self-sacrifice. For magic is a thing of the storms, and the storms will corrupt you if you let them. The same magic that a healer uses to mend a broken bone is the magic that turns people into hideous demons of Grain Waker. The same magic that inspires solitary fire angels to greatness brings war, madness, and the Sunfalls. To wield any sort of magic is to expose oneself to the risk of destruction.

That said, there are certain practices that are "safe"—to the extent that turning into a tormented demon is more of an occupational hazard than a doom. There are ways to walk with the storms in safety, or partial safety, and help the world and others thereby.

## The Human Spirit

It is possible on occasion to work magic with just the human spirit—to do the impossible without calling on the power of the storms at all. There are quasi-supernatural abilities scattered throughout the rules and setting: characters may wield the Acceptance Spirit Weapon to turn enemy attacks against them, compete with athletics alone against a winged person in the sky, or use Attentive to travel to spirit worlds. Any character may do the practically impossible just by rolling three successes on a simple action, and use Insightful to know exactly what another person would say.

But also there are things that a person may sometimes do, categorized explicitly as magic, and drawing only on the power of their heart—

- land-rule;
- life magic;
- theurgy; and
- wild magic.

This power sometimes allows characters to be Helpful or Reliable when they have no idea how to succeed. Miracles can happen. Love can heal. The

world can be repaired. Demons can be redeemed. Wars can end. Hope can find a path.

The mechanism is ineffable.

The character cannot force these effects. In practice, that means that it is up to both GM whim and the dice. All the character can do is find sufficient openness in themselves, sufficient devotion, faith, and trust, to put away their ego and stand in the presence of the world and the divine—and ask.

And then, if the world is stirred by it—

Then the positive spirit of their heart may flow out into the world, and in accordance with the magical principles of the **Filial Piety Action System**, transform it.

Or not.

Sometimes it doesn't happen. Sometimes you open your heart and stand in peace with the world, and all that happens is that you learn—there will not be a miracle today. Sometimes you have to accept that.

But maybe you won't.

## The Fiery Vortex Epic Move

Wingless humans, and a few rare angels, have access to the *Wingless Hero Spirit Weapon* and its epic move, *Fiery Vortex*. This is intended to highlight the ferocity of the human spirit, allowing the passions of rescued humans to boil over and impose their emotional character on the world.

In general, winning a conflict means that a character's causal intention defines the outcome. They wish to build a wall: the wall is built. They try to defeat an enemy: the enemy is defeated. The orderly impulse of the rational mind, that says "achieve this" is satisfied.

With the *Fiery Vortex* move, the character's emotional intention also acts on the world. They wish to make something better. It becomes *better*. They wish to prove their righteousness: their righteousness is *proven*. They hate their enemy: that hate *scourges* them.

These murky emotional intentions are often difficult to define. Even if the GM wants to or is willing to give the player what they want, it can be unclear what it means to do so. The purpose of the *Fiery Vortex* is, then, to give that definition—

- a desire to *take* something becomes *enshrouding*;
- a moral judgment of someone else becomes *flesh-twisting*;

- a desire to *fix things* becomes *land-rule* or *life magic*;
- love and outward-looking joy becomes *theurgy*; and
- a desire to free something becomes *wild magic*.

In practice it is still necessary (in the long run) to define those emotions and moral impulses to have a hope of achieving what the character really wants—but the magic here reifies them, allowing that meaning to be explored in more detail in the course of play.

The minimum effect of this is a palpable spiritual "sense."

That is, in a low-magic game, enshrouding might give rise to an invisible and haunting malaise, paired perhaps with an increase in the character's sense of control and vitality. Flesh-twisting effects would be subtle infirmities—as if the acting character's anger or judgment sank into the flesh, but did not in any literal fashion transform it. Their love might make the world "seem" to sparkle, and infect others with a sense of brightness. Their wild magic might help others give up their burdens, but again, not change their shape. The effects are subtle and the chroniclers of the character's history might even claim them allegorical—but there they are, and subject to the same conditions for defeat as any other magic.

Or, of course, the GM can allow the full range of effects, giving a human in full fervor a power like unto the storms. An enraged human transforms their enemies into twisted creatures; a joyful heart causes flowers to bloom and spring to wash across a frozen land; in the flush of the *fiery vortex*, a character can heal the blind, raise sunken ships, and allow a wingless friend to fly. This power would be accessible even during simple actions or descriptive resolution—but the amount of Progress, Damage, or success necessary to achieve it would be high.

## Speaking Law

There are legends of wingless humans *speaking law* to their enemies—not just wielding the emotional powers above, but using words and symbols to bind or curse their foes. Again this may be overtly magical or it might be an allegorical experience; but even the non-magical may be able to use this Binding or Cursing power when need requires.

Specifically, when a wingless human earns a major victory—something that earns them 2-3 Exemplar Dice—they may spend all of those Dice to invoke either the *Fiery Vortex* effect above or a Binding or Cursing effect. They attempt to transcend mortality and act, for a moment, as a divine creature, equal in the power of their spirit to the sibling-storms.

Again there is necessarily a palpable effect; again, it may be so subtle as to seem allegorical or so blatant as to split the earth and sky.

## Creatures of Eldritch Strangeness

Characters who walk too much with magic—with the storms, with the fiery vortex, with any sort of power—become *sacred* and at the same time *taboo*. If they may be redeemed or lived with, then they are treasures—valued by the One People, taken in and given a place—but they are never a part of society in the same way again. They are set apart. They are numinous and they are wounded. They are precious and pitiful. They are understood as broken.

They are loved but they are not human. Nor are they simply *different* from humans. They are not like the animals, or like some conjectural aliens. They are members of the One People, from whom some sacred portion of humanity has been lost, and to whom some sacred potential of the storm has been given. They have moved away from humanity in a direction that is strange—that calls their autonomy and personhood and independent existence more and more into question as time goes past. They are burning out their humanity to become a part of the gods.

At the end of this journey they are cultists or demons. The first reject the One People—they have become so thoroughly enslaved to the will and nature of their storm that they put its values above the interests of all others. They need not be inimical but they have declared their authority supreme where it conflicts with the beliefs of everybody else—that's what makes them cultists. At best they relate to the societies of the angels as Russia and the United States related during the cold war: not necessarily with a personal enmity, but with a constant recognition of great glacial interests behind them inextricably bound together and opposed. The demons, conversely, are those that even the One People cannot take in—like the most dangerous lamia and fire angels, themselves really a subtype of the demons, they are creatures so thoroughly broken by the touch of the storms that they can have no place in society. They can be accommodated, lived with, walked around, but not taken in. That's ultimately what distinguishes a demon from a storm-touched angel: someone who's been a little twisted by a storm can be lived with, but a demon can't; or, if they can, then they can be lived with only in the sense that one can live with animals, with nature, with technology, with the dead. Demons aren't part of the One People any more.

## The Transformation

The process of becoming sacred and taboo uses the basic **Filial Piety Action System** rules for becoming a magician. It's not something that is specifically defined—rather, at some point, the character comes under the threat of losing their basic humanity and becoming sacred and taboo, and saving them from this becomes something characters can attempt over the course of the story.

The path of a character's transformation is a little like this—

- relentlessly mundane;
- awake to the influence of the storms;
- a little strange;
- a practitioner, sacred and taboo;
- a practitioner in danger of losing themselves;
- a demon or cultist or (for wingless humans using powers like the fiery vortex) a budding storm.

We're not going to make the rules for this very hard—the corrupting power of the storms is a threat, like physical enemies are a threat, that characters must find some way of overcoming in play. The GM can make it difficult or easy; it can be a looming and abstract presence or a series of spiritual combat encounters with spirits or Difficulties that represent the storm's power. Either way, though, it works just like a physical enemy, and characters oughtn't lose their way without a fight unless the player and GM both think it ought to happen.

## The Magicians of the Storms

There are three sorts of sacred/taboo figures common enough that most angels know at least a rumor of where one might be—

- Healers, who have learned some of the arts of Grain Waker;
- Saints, troubled angels with unique powers; and
- Scholars, who have learned some measure of truth-finding wisdom from Starholm, Nameless, or Aylantine Seek.

If one is sick, and cannot live with that sickness, then there is generally a healer in range of a pilgrimage. If one has a question that one absolutely must answer, then a scholar can probably be found. The world has scattered saints. It's generally a matter of weeks of hard travel to find one—but not years.

There are other sacred figures too, touched by the power of the storms but neither cultist or demon. A storm-by-storm discussion follows—but the other sorts are not common by default, and thus likely to show up only when a GM or player finds it specifically interesting that they should do so.

## (The) Animus of Fire

The animus of fire makes occasional mad geniuses—characters with some specific talent that exceeds normal limits. They may just be incredibly good artisans, dancers, sword-saints, or beast-tamers. They may be able to perform acts of sorcery or mad science. Those touched by the power, in this fashion, are counted among the saints, the fire angels, or (if necessary) the demons.

### Mechanism

The power of the animus is a Mind-Twisting and Flesh-Twisting power. At its kindest it verges on both Wild Magic and Theurgy—but only by accident, as it does not know how to be kind.

It only knows how to be the fire.

Characters who are lucky enough to be enhanced by fire rather than just consumed gain additional prowess that they can wield through the Fierce and Helpful Attributes—augmented abilities to fight evil and help others. This may just be an extraordinary skill or it may be actual magic: a power of Cursing, of Flesh-Twisting, of Mind-Twisting, of Theurgy, or of Wild Magic.

**Cursing:** Mad science, as practiced by fire angels, pairs a legitimate extraordinary skill with the power to Curse. In short, every impossible device they make, and sometimes the effects on the victims, is a kind of bizarre curse that a person must learn to live with in order to transform it into a useful tool. The way one treats these devices, the love or hate one expresses for them, determines whether they become useful tools, dangerous traps, or fade over time into uselessness.

**Flesh-Twisting and Wild Magic:** The deadliest of the fire angels have a flesh-twisting power. They may look on someone and transform them, or burn

them up from within. If they use scrupulous control, they may be allowed to live, at the edges of society or in the dreaming waters; if they do not, they are demons, and generally they are destroyed. This power sometimes borders on Wild Magic, unlocking and waking something in the subject rather than imposing the fire angel's will; such instances are rare.

**Mind-Twisting and Theurgy:** A few rare fire angels have a power to waken the passions of others as the fire wakened their own. They are called succubi or incubi if they wake corrupt passions, fire-saints if they practice theurgy, and ecstasies if their character is dubious, variable, or indifferent. Often those that retain their sanity become traveling entertainers and deny the extent of their power. These fire angels wield Mind-Twisting or Theurgical effects.

## Aylantine Seek

A few of the Scholars have learned their power from Aylantine Seek—they are named Scholars because they found some impossible secret or understanding in his realm, or have a touch of Aylantine's questing spirit that allows them to learn and find things others would not be able to learn and find. There is, for instance, at least one Great Library in the world prowled by a Scholar of Aylantine Seek—without the touch of magic upon him, nobody would ever be able to find things in its tangled stacks.

## Mechanism

The power of Aylantine Seek is Ritual Magic—those blessed by him gain their power through symbols, and this power fades when those symbols cease to apply. For instance, the aforementioned librarian has the paths of the library written into his heart: to wound the books is to attack the librarian's spirit, and to introduce some symbol of confusion into the library—to mark each aisle, for instance, with a diagram of a different kind of maze—could destroy his knowledge.

## Grain Waker

There are some who walk the paths of Grain Waker because they cannot bear to see the sick and dying go untreated. They lose themselves—eventually. The more they immerse themselves in Grain Waker's power, the more they study and learn, the more risk they have of addiction to it, of becoming desperate for it. The more they *use* that power, the more risk they have of

waking too much life in themselves or their target and becoming or creating a demon.

It can take a very long time to realize this fate. It is safer to be a Healer than to dive to dead waters, or to wage war. A character can endure for decades as a Healer, giving of their life to wake life in others, and finding that somehow they gain more from this than they must sacrifice—but they still cannot be just an ordinary angel, once they walk this path, or an ordinary human. It sets them apart, makes them a thing both sacred and wounded, precious and pitiful and welcomed by the angels but never entirely of the One People again. They are like a fire angel or a lamia: loved, taken in, but taken in as a stranger or a god is taken in, with a sense of distance that can never fade.

Other characters sometimes follow that aspect of Grain Waker that blesses the land, becoming in themselves an architect of the land's fertility and someone who can nurture an entire region. This path is riskier: to become one with a place that is so much larger than oneself leaves no room for careful stabilization of the body, mind, and soul. It turns the character rapidly into a demon. Thus the Harvest Kings (or Queens), as these characters are called, have a span of perhaps three months from beginning to bless the land to being perverted, twisted, and driven from it.

## Mechanism

The power of Grain Waker is a power of Land-Rule and Binding.

She is an orderly creature.

She has decided what she will do for the mortal world; the endless life and creative power in her she channels to that end. She gives of herself eternally and somberly, observing the proper rituals and ordinances, and in so doing she keeps the good land sound.

Those who are touched by her power are corrupted by a symbol. Some *idea* works its way into their life force. It buries itself in them like seed in cropland. When it flourishes it fills them—it re-defines for them what it is to live, to grow, to feed.

This effect is an effect of Binding.

Even the most monstrous demons and cultists of Grain Waker rarely pick up this latter art. The power to corrupt the process of life of another—that comes from the storm alone. Her passage may create a demon that can feed on sound or ligaments; that can grow without limit; that can reproduce the pattern of its mind in stones. Her servants and her demons cannot make such changes in another.

What may be learned from her, instead, is the power of invested life—the power to take one's raw life force and give it to others, multiplying it as one does so to produce a harvest greater than the seed. One may learn Life Magic and even just a touch of Theurgy from her; if one is unfortunate, one instead learns the Land-Rule and becomes a Harvest King or Harvest Queen. These powers are wielded through the Attributes after the normal fashion; and most of the supernatural healers in the world have acquired their power by this means.

## Lightning

The power of Lightning is not well understood by the angels.

Sometimes there are angels who seem touched by the power of this storm. Their minds and souls are blasted; or they are afflicted with a destructive gift, an unwanted power of devastation and war. These creatures may be touched by Lightning—or by something else. To know for sure one would have to know the Lightning, and He the angels do not know.

## Mechanism

The power of Lightning is a Cursing power.

It is a subtle power—

He doesn't curse people to never be able to roll an 8 on a 10-sided die, or to be wealthy only when money won't satisfy them, or to always find themselves stuck in traffic on the highways. He doesn't give people extra arms or the power to turn into a ladybug.

He is Lightning.

Sometimes he takes part of a person away. Memories, or something of their self. They can get it back, or live without it. Sometimes he gives them powers after his own nature: shattering, impossible, burdens difficult to bear. Sometimes he just hurts them, and they don't know why.

He is Lightning. He challenges the completeness of understanding. For that reason, the metaphor with which to treat these influences is always the metaphor of the curse—they're always something that one can learn to live with, find a new answer to, recover from in the fullness of time. That doesn't mean that that's what he's about. That doesn't mean that's what he *is*.

It just means that this is how his power *works*.

## Luna

The magic of Luna is the magic of transformation.

For the most part it makes the person a demon. Sometimes it just curses them—they live most of their lives as part of the One People, but on specific occasions they become something *else*. There are a few cases, however, where Luna's power makes a person eldritch and strange, but does not wholly corrupt them. They find a way to live naturally while being sometimes one thing and sometimes another. Someone who turns into a monstrous wolf that attacks people is at least a part-time demon. Someone who is occasionally drawn to go down to the sea and turn into an eel for a while—they're just mildly cursed.

## Mechanism

The power of Luna is Binding and Wild Magic.

The kinder versions of her power are those that fit the latter form—that unlock some potential always hidden in the target. This is, because of Luna's changeling nature, something that has its tides: the target cannot make a free and unfettered choice to be one thing or another, because they traverse a cycle where at one point it is too painful to be as they were and at another point it is too painful to be what the power makes them. Thus even someone who would, for instance, normally prefer to stay an angel, or to stay an eel in the sea, is driven by a changing impulse to go from one to the other.

The less kind version is that which imposes a symbol on its target and makes them—if not a demon—a person transformed by that power. This is as the moonlight saying, "You, you shall be a conqueror;" or "you, you shall be disregarded by others;" or "you, you shall be a seven-tined spear that mutters in an alien tongue." The purpose behind the transformation is opaque; if it is ever understood, then the target gains a much greater control over their nature. All of these Bindings are woven with the symbol of the moon, which is change, and that is why her demons either take two forms, change shapelessly from one form to the next, or spend some time as an angel every day, month, or year before the change to demon takes them.

## Nameless

Characters touched by Nameless tend to become unworldly—saints and ascetics who are simultaneously blessed with a great love for things and a persistent dissatisfaction with being embodied and trapped in their single mind. Living to them, living at all, is a bit like being immersed in the dreaming

waters, clouded and despairing; but also important, valuable, something that they ought not give up. Their magic, if they have magic, is to see things truly and sometimes to know things that happen far away. A character who has seen the Clean Dominions may be a Truth-Seer or a Far-Seer for a while before they become a cultist or a demon or allow themselves to pass away.

### Mechanism

The power of Nameless is a power of Theurgy and Enshrouding.

The former is the power it has to touch on a place and bring joy—to roll back sorrow and despair and then birth instead a joy-in-looking-outwards. But to face Nameless unprepared—to experience the Clean Dominion too thoroughly, too soon, when one is still all tangled up with the accidents of the self—is to know it as a devouring power. Not everyone is ready for the touch of grace; and those who encounter it unready may find themselves hollowed out by it, emptied by their inability to live up to the things it offers, made small and desperate and grasping by it.

The demons and cultists of Nameless are those that know this other face and have lost their grounding in themselves to it. This is not a flaw in them, nor in the clean divine: they simply were not strong enough in themselves to stand before the face of the Clean Dominion. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, they looked upon the divine and knew themselves naked, small, and full of sin.

The power that one learns from Nameless is simply heightened skill with Attentive and Insightful, sometimes paired with a Ritual Magic or Life Magic of self-transformation. They become able to change themselves, using symbols or the will-to-self-sacrifice, into something that they were not, in order to fill the wild void the touch of Nameless left behind.

### Prince and Princess Laughter

The Prince and Princess of the little wooden town in orbit round the moon claim to have no demons and prefer not to have cultists. Instead, sometimes, they will take friends or comrades or students. These become heroes—usually heroes, sometimes peculiar tricksters or jesters—and may learn various sorts of magic or supernatural martial arts.

### Mechanism

The power of Prince and Princess Laughter is a power of Wild Magic.

They waken potentials in those they teach.

Some whom they train acquire great or unusual skills, or take up various special weapons. Others learn bits of Land-Rule, Life Magic, Ritual Magic, Theurgy, or even a Wild Magic of their own.

## Scerascaling Leetha

Those touched by Scerascaling Leetha are presumptively demonic.

She has worked her will into their flesh and spirit.

They may be kind; they may be good; they may seek to do service to the angels and the world. But they are not safe. They are not even safe in the sense that spiritual figures, sacred and taboo, are safe. They are demons, and best kept at arm's length, no matter how much doing so might rend the heart.

### Mechanism

The power of Scerascaling Leetha is a power of Cursing. It is only in her own realm that she practices the beneficent art of Theurgy; when descending to the land below, she seeks her own fulfillment and not that of the One People.

Because her power is a power of Cursing, there is always a way for the demons she makes to live with themselves. They have a path to live with the curse that is in them and turn it into a blessing. However, there is a secondary element of Enshrouding in her power—something that clouds Attentive, the power to see others as themselves and listen to the song of their hearts. Until that power is broken—that is, until and unless some impossible hero destroys Scerascaling Leetha by giving her the power to hear the noise of life—her demons are kept from truly relating to others in anything but the most intellectual sense. They are virtuous only in accordance to their sense of enlightened self-interest and their mourning for the compassion they have lost. This they may or may not be able to live with; if it destroys them, then that is considered one more soul that Scerascaling Leetha has destroyed.

The powers of her demons are typically expressed as strange Spirit and Heart Weapons—they rarely do "magic" with their Attributes alone. However, it's possible that portions of their individual curses allow them to effect Binding or Ritual Magic effects with their Reliable or Helpful Attribute, or even wield other sorts of spells.

## (The) Shadow in the Dreaming Waters

A *saint of the dreaming waters* is a human—almost always a wingless human—who has spent so long immersed as to learn to wield the dreaming waters as a weapon. This is something every rescued human and seeker can unlock in themselves: the cost is that once they do so, they are sacred and taboo, as much so as any healer, fire angel, or lamia.

The term "saint," particularly in this context, is used with both honor and pity; it's meant to suggest both that the person is holy and that they have been ill-used by that holiness. It means someone whose soul was never a good fit for the mortal condition—someone tormented by visions and knowledge of the intangible and spiritual powers.

The troubled, the precious, the feared: saints of the dreaming waters.

There are also those ridden, damaged, changed, or carrying forward in some fashion a legacy of the slakes, terrors, and princes of the water. These too are seen as strange and eldritch, blessed and cursed by the shadow. Something in the shamans who dive repeatedly into the waters to learn wisdom strives for this condition; many never find it, and remain a part of the One People. A few find some strange and sacred sight that changes them: they are set apart, as all those claimed by the powers are.

### Mechanism

The power of the dreaming waters is Enshrouding.

It *takes*—from everything, it takes, and what it takes it has no right to steal. Those who wield this power echo it: they learn to take, as it takes, to claim as it claims, to devour as the shadow in the dreaming waters devours. It is only the rarest few who find the other side of this power, which is Life Magic or Theurgy—though it is for the sake of learning that power that the shamans dive.

### Starholm

Many Scholars are Starholm-touched—

It haunts them in their dreams, or they studied under a master from that city, or they descended from it themselves. And from Starholm they have learned strange wisdom. They are in tune with the constellations, and the wilds of the world, and the heart. They are herbalists and astrologers, philosophers,

psychologists, and sages. They see things that others do not see and know what others do not know.

They are viziers and sages to the cities of the angels.

### Mechanism

The power of Starholm is a power of Ritual Magic.

Its Sages have an enlightened and Insightful power—they are excellent at seeing into others' hearts. Their other skills may simply be skills, things they wield as any other character might through their Attentive, Fierce, Helpful, and Reliable Attributes. Or they may know a Ritual Magic of their own.

### Mechanism (Alternate)

Starholm has a darker face—both that of its demons and cultists and that which it wears in worlds where it is not good. This is an Enshrouding Power, a power that has stolen something fundamental from its victims; a Mind-Twisting Power, that has bent them to its service; and a power which teaches its Scholars and its demons the use of Flesh-Twisting, Mind-Twisting, and Binding effects. The alternate setting in which Starholm is evil is one in which its Scholars, betrayed as Scerascaling Leetha's demons are betrayed by the power that shaped them, are secretly mad for power, engineers and architects of vast evil plans by which they shall bring the world under their sway or end it entirely. They are creatures of orreries, who change the motions of the planets to manipulate the fate of the world; of libraries of false scriptures; and of the power to wield wretched fates against those who challenge them.

This may be the true face of Starholm.

Only the Scholars know.

It is the fear that this is so that makes its gentle Scholars sacred, outcast, and taboo.

### Stillness Vale

No one learns any sacred magic from the Stillness Vale.

Magic acts.

The thing one learns from Stillness Vale, if one is fortunate enough to learn from it and is not destroyed, is not a thing that *acts*. It is a kind of

patience—the ability to *wait for fullness*. Its gift is thus indistinguishable from the serene character that some, even without the touch of this storm, possess. It makes no flowers bloom. It heals no broken bones. It topples no towers—

Or rather, patience does all of these things, but through the natural course of time.

What the sages of Stillness Vale know is that all good things will come to you, in time, and all that is terrible shall pass. The world is a great slow dream. Its blessings are as inevitable as they are glacial; every need, in time, finds its answer. Every pain, one day, subsides.

## Mechanism

Stillness Vale is a power of Enshrouding.

Those touched by it usually fall under this shroud. They wait, as Stillness Vale waits. They listen, as Stillness Vale listens. There are stories that one day some fullness will come, that it will break the waiting of the vale like a trumpet's call breaks the silence. That everything that sits in silence in the Vale will come awake, and with joy leaping in their hearts, and say: At last! At last! The day has come!

It is more likely that this is not so.

It is more likely that things, once falling entirely under Stillness Vale's shroud, escape it only by giving their hearts and minds and bodies entirely to the world—that once the Vale has claimed a person, they may leave it only by surrendering their boundaries entirely and allowing their spirit to fall into oneness with the great undifferentiated object of experience.

In any case, the demons and cultists that are not shrouded entirely by the Vale's power take on a power of Enshrouding themselves. They learn to cover the world in darkness, stealing life, stealing time, slowing the sound of life, devouring—and in so doing, for a time, preventing themselves from being devoured. It does not last. Eventually someone makes an end to them; what they have taken is returned, and they themselves dissolve, taken by Stillness Vale or simply gone we cannot know.

## Wrath

Those who follow Wrath are cultists and evil demons. But there are also the Unsheltered: warriors and heroes who are called to hunt down Wrath. They are drawn to seek out the evil he represents and extinguish it; driven to battle the evils he creates and make an end to them. They are called to the

Foreboding Tower to do battle with the monster there, and in the time until they reach it, they are itinerant heroes and walkers in madness. They are considered spiritually crippled and doomed, but there is no town or tribe that will not give them at least a portion of aid and welcome—

It is the overall feeling of the tribes of the angels that those who go to fight Wrath ought to have comfort and allies along their way. So in this sense they have the welcome given by the peaceful to the battle-scarred soldiers of an ongoing just war—the welcome that says: "You are strange. You are violent. You are being broken by the things you do. We do not know that we believe it must be done—but perhaps it must. So we honor you for your service, and we thank you for fighting on our behalf, and we will give you what you must have to live and go on with your fight. But if it please you—do not linger."

As the Unsheltered progress towards Wrath they are shaped further by the power of that storm. They gain a prowess that is not natural, and become strange even to themselves. This is normally an enhancement to their Fierce, that allows them to accomplish more even than heroes can accomplish; sometimes it also takes the form of special demon weapons, found along their journey or born from their twisting flesh.

## Mechanism

Wrath is a Flesh-Twisting and Cursing power.

Where its touch comes down upon the world it breaks the destinies of the One People. It stirs the cauldrons of wickedness. It brings down ruination. Its power is not the power to waken the natural evil of the soul.

Its power is a curse upon the land.

Its Unsheltered—for they belong to it, they have been called to it, they are its storm-touched for all that they seek to bring its end—are Cursed. Their destiny has been changed, it draws them now to the Foreboding Tower, and they may only choose how and whether to live with that.

It twists the flesh of its demons and the Unsheltered ones as well.

They are cursed by its baleful judgments. They are affected by its hate, or perhaps their own self-loathing, made into creatures demonic to themselves. There is a wild self-loathing that burns in the hearts of the demons of Wrath, which they may take out on others but cannot otherwise expunge.

Typically inasmuch as the Unsheltered have power, it is the power of a unique Weapon or two and a high Fierce that opposes evil. The corruption of flesh occasionally offers additional power to wield against one's enemies, which is represented by nothing more than an additional point or two in the *to Your Enemies* Subject. They may also acquire limited Flesh-Twisting and Binding powers of their own, similar to the wingless power *Speaking Law*.

## Lamia

The lamia are always sacred. They are always taboo. They are always powerful and dangerous and strange. They do not fit in. Their power is the power of their *song*.

The song is a Weapon—a Spirit Weapon and a Heart Weapon and even sometimes a physical Weapon. It is a tool. It is a thing that they may use to reshape the world after the fashion of their desiring.

Its effect is typically Binding—

It is a creation of a new law, a power they may wield to define and to redefine the world. But perhaps, when they develop a greater awareness of what it means to be alive as a lamia in this world, it will become something else: something subtler. Wild magic, perhaps, or the power of life.

It is not constrained by any one perspective.

It is magic.

It is a song.

It is the Weapon of the lamia, by which they may subdue or heal the cacophony of the world.

# Filial Piety Action System:

## Unnatural Weapons

In this section you will find templates for a variety of Spirit Weapons and Magic Weapons in the **Filial Piety Action System**. These Weapons are overtly supernatural in character: they are tools wielded by sorcerers and demons and residents of the Spirit World, and not the Weapons of the ordinary heart.

You can wield some of these Weapons in the real world.

Sometimes they're the kind of Weapon that can manifest in both worlds. Sometimes it's OK to change them to deal Fight Damage, using the rules below, and treat them as a physical Weapon. Sometimes they're even weird enchanting Weapons, which you can only wield physically but which deal Spirit Damage to your enemies.

Weapons like this are called *Magic Weapons*.

You need a Knack to start the game proficient with a Magic Weapon—whether it does Spirit or Fight Damage, it's a rare and special tool. Other than that, they are just like any other Weapon in play.

Characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** have a proficiency in

- two special weapons (which can include 1-2 spirit weapons).

They may purchase additional spirit or magic weapon proficiency with Knacks.

## Spirit Weapon Conversion

The simplest class of Spirit Weapons are those based on the mundane Weapons. The character enters the spirit realm. They wield something to chastise their opponents there. This weapon may have cool and magical special effects, but the fight is exactly parallel to a physical fight: wielding a spiritual weapon in the hands of their spiritual body, a character seeks to defeat the spiritual body of their opponent; the fight plays out just as a physical duel would. This is a feature and not a bug—one of the reasons every character in the **Filial Piety Action System** is allowed to travel to the spirit worlds is so the GM or players can strip the metaphor and elusive strangeness from a battle with some curse or immaterial spirit and turn it into a high-F/X physical duel in a magic realm.

Every weapon presented in the mundane weapons section may be used as a template for an equivalent Spirit Weapon. An onmyouji might wield a set of magical scales; if these work like the fighting chain or the huge club, adapt the fighting chain or huge club Weapon. A sacred druidic staff operates with the failure mode and epic moves equivalent to those of a sword: use the sword Weapon, and make the appropriate changes.

To convert a physical Weapon to a spirit Weapon,

- replace the word "Accuracy" with "Control;"
- replace the word "Defense" with "Spirit Defense;"
- replace the word "Damage" with "Spirit Damage;"
- replace the word "Fight" with "Spirit;"
- assign it a Defense of -2;
- if the physical Weapon had some way to deal Spirit Damage, allow it to deal either Heart Damage or physical Damage as a Spirit Weapon.

Then adjust the special effects and appearance of the weapon to taste. For example, here's a conversion of the dual-axe style. The -2 Defense isn't explicitly listed, since it's common to all Spirit Weapons—it's a consequence of focusing on the spirit world, rather than a weapon trait per se.

Magical Streamers, Dual-Wielded  
+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

[Two One-Handed Spirit Weapons]  
(+0 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

The character wields a diffuse streamer of red light in one hand and a diffuse streamer of blue light in the other. These spin about the magician defensively and trail after their movements while they attack. Striking enemies with both streamers simultaneously is necessary to achieve the most efficacious curses, bindings, and influences.

*Fail:* you're wide open! Take a -1 *opening* to your Spirit Defense (max -5) until the end of your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Cleave*—strike two enemies, doing 2d6 Spirit Damage to each.

*Savage Cut*—do 2d6 Spirit Damage and your target suffers an unstable transformation, taking 1d6 Spirit Damage each round until their interval ends.

## Magic Weapon Conversion

It's possible to make the opposite conversion—to take one of the Spirit Weapons below and make a physical Magic Weapon from it.

## Magic Weapons that deal Spirit Damage

You can use any of the Spirit Weapons below as Magic Weapons that, even when wielded physically, attack the Spirit. Such a weapon will transform or enchant the characters it defeats—the *twin fire rods* would still infuse victims with passion, while the *living earth sympathy club* might imprison them in living stone. This requires no conversion; keep the Weapon traits as they are, even the default -2 Defense against physical attack. Switching to a readied Magic Weapon of this sort during an interval has a base cost of **2 Spirit**, while readying and wielding a new set of Weapons during an interval that includes such a Magic Weapon has a base cost of **5 Spirit** or (if the character also wields a physical weapon) **5 Spirit and 5 Fight**.

## Magic Weapons that deal Fight Damage

If a Magic Weapon deals Fight Damage, it makes for an unusual and most likely exceptional physical Weapon. To build such a Weapon, start with a Spirit Weapon and

- remove the Defense penalty of -2;
- replace the word "Control" with "Accuracy;"
- replace the words "Spirit Defense" with "Defense;"
- replace the words "Spirit Damage" with "Damage;"
- replace the word "Spirit" with "Fight;"
- if the Spirit Weapon had some way to deal Fight Damage, allow it to deal either Heart Damage or Spirit Damage as a physical Weapon.

For example, you can convert the Swarm Weapon below from a spiritual weapon made out of a swarm of insects to a physical Magic Weapon made out of a swarm of insects. The special effects are the same, it's just that now instead of being the kind of weapon that you only encounter in the spirit world, it's something that can show up in the physical world as well. Or you could convert the dual-wielded magical streamers, above, back into a physical weapon: they'd work exactly like a dual-axe style, but they'd look like magical streamers.

## Flesh-Twisting Weapons

These weapons *hurt* the enemy—defeated enemies are twisted, killed, destroyed, damaged, or disfigured. Characters who are defeated by these weapons but retain Exemplar Dice are generally knocked unconscious and then *temporarily afflicted*, suffering some physical curse that fades over time.

### Scouring Flail

-1 Control/1d10 Spirit Damage

### [One-Handed Spirit Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This Flesh-Twisting Weapon is a lash of thorny wood. It glows dimly with heat and drips with an inky miasma. It rips the spirit apart or assails it with guilt, self-loathing, and a sense of dissolution and coming-apart.

It has the following special features:

**Inflexible:** it costs +5 Spirit (max 15) to switch from this weapon to another weapon inside of your interval.

**Ripping Scourge:** an enemy damaged by your scouring flail takes 1d10 *vitriol* damage (max 1d10) every round until the end of their interval.

**Fail:** the weapon tries to devour your life. You suffer the effect of your own ripping scourge and cannot end your interval voluntarily. If this is the last round of your interval anyway, take 1d10 damage.

### Epic Moves:

**Implacable**—deal 2d10 damage and increase your interval by 2.

**The Scourge Hungers**—deal 1d10 damage, take 1d10 damage, and increase your *vitriol* damage by 1d10 (max 3d10) until your interval ends.

**Transfix**—deal 2d10 damage to every enemy within Short Range. They lose their next action and take a -1 *stunned* penalty to Defense and Spirit Defense (max -1) until they next act.

## Swarm Weapon

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage  
**Short Range**

## [Two-Handed Spirit Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, -1 Spirit Defense)

This Spirit Weapon is a swarm of metallic green insects constellated around an oblong central crystal that acts as both a handle and a hive. At rest insects crawl in disorganized fashion on and around the hand that holds the hive; when used as a weapon, they fill the air and descend upon the wielder's enemies. It slowly settles on and eats the spirit of its target, producing a sense of growing malaise, discomfort, and horror spreading nonspecifically inwards from the entirety of the skin.

It has the following special feature:

**Terrain Control:** when an enemy at Medium range attempts to move closer to you, or to move you closer to it, they must roll d10+their Spirit Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or take damage—4d6 or +0 (max 4d6+10) damage.

**Fail:** the swarm disperses. Take a -5 *opening* to your Spirit Defense (max -5) until your next action.

### Epic Moves:

**Whispers**—deal 3d6 Damage. The swarm weapon becomes awake, a hive mind NPC that may assist you on rolls of 1 until the end of the interval. Further, once in the next 1-5 rounds, at a time of the GM's choosing, and unless you change weapons, the weapon will *cheer you on*.

**Slow Devouring**—every enemy within Short Range takes a -1 *being devoured by insects* penalty to their Control (max -3). This remains until you change weapons or a given enemy uses an epic move on an extraordinary stunt to scrape the insects away. If an enemy within Short Range already has a -3 *being devoured by insects* penalty, you may inflict 75 Spirit Damage instead as your weapon eats their Spirit.

## Example

Sister Violet Merrith is trying to shake a demon out of a book of sacred scripture. She's in the physical world and the demon's at Short Range—nasty portents, but not actually upon her. It is using the swarm weapon. She drags it closer, rolling a 9 to fight off the terrain control—with her Spirit Defense of 8, that's no trouble.

She attacks and misses.

The demon is in Melee Range now, very much imminent. The book seems to be crawling with horrible insects and green light. It hits her, producing a twitchy sense of wrongness: she gasps, looks nauseated, and hurls the book away from her.

Sister Merrith is a trained professional and stands a good chance of using a sacred sutra or prayer or invocation to defeat the demon before it can pull off its epic moves. However, if it does, the *whispers* might manifest in the physical world as a sudden sensation of two different demon presences, while the *slow devouring* would afflict her with a sense of horror and monstrosity and despair at the worthlessness of the world, which would inch inwards from her skin towards the core deep inside her that is Violet Merrith's true self.

If the demon manages to defeat her, Sister Merrith will pass out and wake up with her skin marked by thousands of nasty pocks—something likely to fade away if she has Exemplar Dice remaining, but which the GM could make permanent (or require metaphorical/exorcism-type work to recover from) if she does not.

## Mind-Twisting Weapons

These weapons *incite* or *release passion*, producing either a state of acute desire or a state of unfocused delirium. They give rise to a kind of disinhibiting madness, either shattering the cage in which the ego keeps the id or leaving the id caged but casting the ego from its moorings of logic, need, and fear. In the first case, the afflicted remains coherent but is ridden and spurred by a powerful motivational force; in the latter, they lack the power to sort consistently through their impulses.

These weapons do not always commit their victims to error.

It is possible to use a mind-twisting weapon to inflict a virtuous impulse. This will have the same illegitimate and driven character as an addiction or lust, but the end result is good; eventually, the target casts off this effect and either learns virtue from it or rejects virtue altogether. Mind-twisting weapons can also inflict a generic delirium or a kind of benevolent fog, such as is associated with fever, happy exhaustion, or the completion of great labors. The proper domain of mind-twisting weapons is passion, not thought: thus, while it's possible to produce maddened cleanliness or loyalty through a mind-twisting weapons, it's a lot more like turning cleanliness or loyalty into a drug for that person than binding them to discipline or obedience.

Characters that are defeated by these weapons while having Exemplar Dice remaining are generally *distracted* and *made temporarily useless*. For example, if they lose to the Demon Liquor Weapon, they do not immediately become degenerate or evil monsters—they retain enough of themselves not to commit any unforgivable sins by their own code. If driven desperately to drink, a teetotaler will crawl into a corner or have someone tie them up while they writhe in wine-lust, but won't indulge; a hardened swill-swigging warrior will, instead, rampage through the streets shouting for beer or wine. They may even steal some—but they won't kill for it, not unless that's the kind of thing they'd forgive themselves for later. Similarly, if afflicted with an unforgivable drive to, say, seduce or kill one's teacher, even a disreputable warrior can refrain—but they'll lose a lot of time and energy wrestling with the insane passion that rises within them.

Characters who are defeated by these weapons without any Exemplar Dice remaining may or may not maintain that level of control. The GM will decide how far they have to go; the player then decides whether to keep playing the character or to declare such acts so thoroughly against the character's soul and identity that they are, effectively, "dead" (an NPC.)

## Demon Liquor

[One-Handed Spirit Weapon]

-1 Control/2d10 Spirit Damage

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

**Special Range (Melee, but some Epic Moves and Effects are Short Range)**

This demon weapon is a bulbous wine skin with a short flexible handle attached to the neck. It has a peculiar resistance, for a wine skin, to being actively destroyed in combat, though it does tend to take damage. The wielder may breathe on sprays or gouts of wine to make them catch fire; sometimes the heavily flammable wine seems to do so on its own.

Demon liquor has the following special feature:

***Terrain Control:*** each round enemies within Melee and Short Range must roll d10+their Spirit Defense and earn a 14+ or take a -1 *intoxicated* penalty to their Control (max -3) that lasts until the end of their interval.

***Fail:*** you are either dizzy from fumes, dizzy from drink, or groping around on the ground licking up booze that the enemy spilled. Lose your next action; this does not count against your interval.

***Epic Moves:***

***Gout of Flames***—deal 2d10 damage to an enemy within Short Range. On their next action they take a -3 *blind and dazed* penalty to both their Control and Spirit Defense (max -3).

***Burn Out***—deal 2d10 damage. Pick an enemy within Short Range and remove their *intoxicated* penalty, dealing 2d10 for each point of penalty that had accumulated.

***Ignite***—deal 2d10 damage. Until the end of your interval, your terrain control also deals 1d10 damage when an enemy does or would take a penalty.

## Twin Fire Rods

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage

**Special Range (Melee, but some Epic Moves and Effects are Short Range)**

[Two One-Handed Spirit Weapons]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

These two short staves are made of a peculiar red metal. Wielded as a pair they form a Spirit Weapon that creates bursts and trails of flame in addition to its blunt attacking character. When they move across each other, the enemy's weapon, or the enemy's skin they produce bursts of flame in a direction shaped by the angle.

Twin fire rods have the following special feature:

**Fire Burst:** you may attack an enemy at Short Range, but hits at that Range deal a flat 3 Spirit Damage instead of 2d6 Spirit Damage.

**Fail:** even in failure you're too hot to handle! Deal 1d6 Spirit Damage to the enemy.

### *Epic Moves:*

**Fire Burst**—deal 2d6 damage to an enemy at Short Range.

**Fire Sheath**—deal 2d6 damage and wreath yourself in fire. Until the end of your interval, any enemy that hits you with an attack takes 1d6 Spirit Damage.

**Triumph of Fire**—sear the enemy and roll 7d6 Spirit Damage. Enemies in your world must choose between taking that damage or kowtowing/kneeling before you. Enemies in the other world must choose between taking that damage or accepting, momentarily, the passion you seek to inflict upon them. Either way, if they do not take the damage, they lose one Exemplar Die.

## Example

Syth's walking home from the docks. He's a bit distracted and doesn't notice the demon prince until he's bumped into the guy.

Then he stops.

He looks up. And up. The prince is wearing white. His face is sealed in an impassive bronze mask. There is a crust at the edge of the eyesockets of the mask, like ichor, perhaps, or pus.

"Hey," Syth says. He's backing away. "Hey, demons ain't allowed in the City."

Twin fire rods rip across his skin. They sear him, igniting his pain nerves, but he realizes as he staggers back that it's not physical fire. It's . . . need.

"What do you *want*?" he asks, trying to fend off the blows.

But he's starting to know. It's filling his mind. Something in the city. A priceless treasure that was lost.

He wants it.

His wanting is the demon's wanting.

The demon rolls *triumph of fire* and for a moment, Syth crawls before him, the image of that treasure burning in his mind.

"Hey," he says. "Can't you talk to your Embassy?"

The face leans in. There is heat from the sockets of the mask. He sees that inside, behind it, the demon's face is ruined; and he knows, as surely as he knows the inside of his soul, that the demon cannot talk. His tongue must be like his eyes, his skin, his flesh: burning, burning still.

He tries to decide, in that moment, whether Syth's the kind of person who helps a body that needs help, even if it's a prince of Hell itself; or whether he's the kind of person who can stand against the lash of fire and of need, and turn away, if it's the folk of Hell that're asking.

The fire descends . . .

## Binding Weapons

These weapons induce *stillness*, *binding*, or *obsession*—they bind some part of the target's body, life, or mind. These weapons can cyst an image or phrase into your thoughts, compel behavior, seal the entrances and exits to your house, forbid a person to speak some secret, or seal a person's stomach against the need or power to eat.

Transformations that are too ambiguous and strange to qualify as flesh-twisting or mind-twisting effects are also bindings. The binding weapon introduces a symbol directly into the target's mind or flesh, shackling them to that symbol and through that process transforming them.

If a character is defeated by a binding weapon, but retains Exemplar Dice, the power is temporary. They are bound or changed, but eventually, they shake it off. If they have no Exemplar Dice remaining, the effects may be permanent or semi-permanent: a person may be turned to stone, trapped in an animal shape (though this could also be a flesh-twisting spell), made such that they may only feed on sunlight or vitreous fluid, or unable to share some secret until someone guesses they possess it and forces it free with magic of another sort.

Binding effects segue fairly seamlessly into protective effects—often, the same spells and powers that can compel or trap can also guard or bless. However, at some point along the binding-protecting continuum, it ceases to be appropriate to assail the target with Spirit Weapons as a game mechanism for inflicting this effect.

## Living Earth Sympathy Club

+0 Control/2d6+1 Spirit Damage

Short Range

[Two-Handed Spirit Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This magic club has the sympathy with the earth—when it strikes, the ground will often aid it by quaking or throwing up spikes of stone!

*Fail:* your weapon *roots in the earth*. You cannot use it again until either this detailed action resolution ends or you use an epic move with another weapon on an "extraordinary stunt" to break it free.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Stance Break*—do 3d6 Damage. The enemy takes a -1 *off balance* penalty to Accuracy (max -3) and -2 Shell (max -6) until the end of their interval.

*Stone Spikes*—deal 2d6+1 Damage. Stone spikes thrust up from the earth and do another 2d6+1 Damage to that enemy. In the event that it matters, these are treated as separate attacks—e.g., positive or negative Shell applies twice.

### Example

Lillimund Sunslayer is hunting trolls. Unfortunately, she's met with a nobbin instead; and as even a child knows, a nobbin's far the scarier. It's a lean, rat-faced kind of creature, and it's dressed in rags, but the stone walking stick it uses has a resonance with the earth.

Wham! It clunks the stick down against the road.

Whum! The earth buckles and tosses beneath her feet.

"I'm Lillimund—" she tries to say, since a nobbin can't hurt you if you've been properly introduced; but it folds its ears down and wraps them around its neck like a scarf, and it belts her in the stomach with the walking stick, and it laughs and stone thunders about her as she protestingly crawls near.

## Spinning Stone Wheel

+1 Control/1d10 Spirit Damage  
Long Range

[Two-Handed Spirit Weapon]

(+3 Promptness, +1 Spirit Defense)

This spirit weapon is a many-spoked stone wheel inscribed with various magical symbols. It spins in the air in front of the wielder, tangling up time to make the wielder more difficult to approach and increasing gravity to force its enemies to the ground. Its spin may reverse temporarily to allow the wielder lightning-fast attacks or to throw an enemy into the sky.

This weapon has the following special feature:

***Terrain Control:*** when you activate this power, all characters that are in Long Range or that attempt to move into Medium or shorter Range of you are constrained to Short Range Mobility as a terrain control effect. This power lasts until you change weapons or deactivate the power. You may activate or deactivate this power once per round, even if you are otherwise unable to act, and it does not use your move or action.

***Fail:*** you are *frozen*. You cannot act until the end of your interval or until some person attacks you and either triggers a failure mode or earns an epic move. While this effect endures, you cannot end your interval voluntarily and you gain 5 Shell (max 8) and 5 Spirit Shell (max 8).

***Epic Moves:***

***Fling***—deal 2d10 Damage to one enemy within Medium range. They are flung into the air, *knocked off balance or prone*, losing their normal move for one round and taking a -1 *off balance* to Defense and Spirit Defense (max -3) until their interval ends.

***Earthquake***—deal 1d10 Damage to each enemy within Medium range. They are *knocked off balance or prone*, losing their normal move for one round and taking a -1 *off balance* to Defense or Spirit Defense (max -3) until their interval ends.

***Fast as Lightning***—deal 1d10 Damage. Gain a +1 *flashy* bonus to Accuracy and Damage (max +2) until the next time you fail.

## Cursing Weapons

These Spirit Weapons have strange and mysterious effects. They draw on the "inner world" of a person that is not constrained by reason or propriety, producing curses like the "being sleeted on whenever you're outside" curse or the "anyone killed nearby by a slit throat gets up and hunts you down" curse. These Weapons can even inflict harmless effects like the "always smells embarrassingly nice, like fresh strawberries on a sunny day" curse!

If the character is defeated by the curse while they have Exemplar Dice remaining, the curse is largely descriptive—rather than ruining their life, it *troubles* them and perhaps even *seems like it ought to ruin their life, but it's never actually that bad*.

If they're out of Exemplar Dice—

Well, the same could be true, or it could be as good as death. The GM has a free hand, depending on the circumstances, to stipulate the effects and their severity.

### Engulfing Talisman Weapon

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage  
Short Range

### [Two-Handed Spirit Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This demon weapon is a gigantic dancing talisman parchment (a set of magical symbols on a sheet of paper) attached to a string. The symbols sometimes change when nobody is looking.

*Fail:* the talisman *engulfs* you. Each round, roll the Damage for your wielded weapon. If the total is 6+ Damage or Spirit Damage you break free and this effect ends; otherwise, you may change weapons or cheer allies on but otherwise cannot act.

#### *Epic Moves:*

*Brand*—deal 2d6 Damage. The talisman burns one of its symbols into the enemy; they will take 10 *inscription* Damage (max 30) when their interval ends.

*Engulf*—deal 2d6 Damage and the talisman *engulfs* the target. They may roll once immediately and then once each round to break free; this is a Damage or Spirit Damage roll using their wielded weapon, and they need a 6+. They also break free if their interval ends. Until they break free they can change weapons or cheer allies on but otherwise cannot act. They also have 5 Spirit Shell (max 8) which reduces the Spirit Damage taken from every incoming attack.

### Example

A yin-yang magician desires graceful companions and servants. Yet all humans are inadequate! Some lack grace; others, power; a few are just too obdurate to serve! He mopes at a local bar. He spots a person—mousy, non-descript, with no obvious destiny. A thought occurs. He retreats to the maintenance closet next to the bathrooms. He estranges from the world. He follows his target in the Spirit Realm. He watches them go through the motions of their life. He waits until an auspicious night. His target undresses and goes to bed.

The magician takes up his talisman-kite.

"Go," says the magician.

The talisman descends upon the victim's sleeping form. Symbols writhe across its surface. It strives to work its transformation on the victim's being—

"In the name of the perfect man," says the magician. "In the name of the sacred register. Promptly! Promptly! In accordance with the statutes and the ordinances! Grant this person the power, grace, and destiny to come to me and take service as the first of my illustrious dragon warriors!"

He rolls his first attack.

### Resonating Lightning Spear Weapon

+0 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage  
Short Range

### [Two-Handed Spirit Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, -1 Spirit Defense)

This long magic spear is just a thin spine of metal like a radio antenna. The handguard is a hollow metal diamond like a kite frame, with wires dangling from the outside ends. It crackles with electricity or blue flames.

*Fail:* you have failed in the rigorous forms of this weapon. It goes dead, losing any *lightning flare* bonus to Damage and giving you a -5 *useless* penalty to Spirit Damage with the resonating lightning spear (max -5) until the end of your interval.

#### Epic Moves:

*Flare*—your weapon flares up. Remove any *useless* penalty to your Spirit Damage and add +3 *lightning flare* (max +9) to your Spirit Damage with the resonating lightning spear until the end of your interval.

*Inflict*—deal 2d6 Spirit Damage. Lightning erupts from the target's every pore. They burn for 1d6+1 Spirit Damage per round every round until their interval ends, and everyone within Melee Range of them takes 1 point of Spirit Damage. This can include yourself, and both effects are modified by modifiers to Spirit Damage.

*Tactical Spear*—make two normal moves, ignoring terrain control. If an enemy moves with you or moves the world with you, they suffer 4d6 Spirit Damage as a terrain control effect. (They may choose to cancel their move instead.)

## Enshrouding Weapons

These spirit weapons drain someone's life force or inflict curses of sleep, death, or darkness. Much as with curses and bindings, defeated characters suffer a temporary effect if they have Exemplar Dice remaining; the effect may or may not be permanent, at the GM's discretion, if they do not. An example of such a temporary effect is a malaise and weariness—a weakening of the life force that eventually passes.

### Evil Silk Shrouds

+1 Control/2d6 Spirit Damage  
Short Range

[Two-Handed Spirit Weapon]  
(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

Evil lengths of silk cloth hang from your sleeves and hover about your body. They flow with your movements and wrap about or tug at enemies.

Evil silk shrouds have the following special features:

**Life-Draining Weapon:** each hit heals the wielder for 1 Spirit (max 1).

**Terrain Control:** these silk shrouds may constrain up to three enemies per round.

You may constrain an enemy who is in Short Range or who tries to move into Melee Range of you to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained enemies that move to Melee Range of you, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll d10+their Spirit Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they gain a point of *enmeshment*, which imposes a -1 *enmeshment* penalty (max -3) on their Control until the end of their interval. Canceling their move does not prevent this effect.

*You can use this control on up to three enemies per round.*

**Fail:** you are *tangled*, taking a -1 *off balance* penalty to your Control (max -3) until the end of your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Enmeshment*—deal 2d6 Spirit Damage and inflict one point of *enmeshment* on your enemy.

*Seize Them and Rip Them Apart*—deal 22 points of Spirit Damage. If this is not enough to defeat your enemy, you are *tangled*, taking a -1 *off balance* penalty to your Control (max -3) until the end of your interval.

**Soul-Eating Demon Claws**

+0 Control/1d10 Spirit Damage

**[Two-Handed Spirit Weapon]**

(-1 Promptness, -1 Spirit Defense)

These are metal bracers, palm plates, and claws that attach to the arm and hand. A soul-eating demon claw user gains life from an enemy's blood and can suck the soul or life force from an enemy's mouth to their own whenever they manage a brief clinch.

Soul-eating demon claws have the following special feature:

***Life-Draining Weapon***: each hit heals the wielder an amount of Spirit equal to the damage done (max 10).

***Fail***: if you've healed at least once this interval from the *life-draining weapon* property, then yurgh! It was too rich! You vomit up some of the life you've stolen, losing 10 Spirit, and you cannot act next round. If you haven't, you're *hungry*—lose 5 Spirit, but you automatically hit on your next attack with the soul-eating demon claws this fight. Don't bother to roll it: you can't get an epic move, you can't fail, you can't miss, and you can't get a chain: you just hit.

*Epic Moves:*

*Devour Soul*—deal 1d10 Spirit Damage. You begin sucking the life from your enemy. Your enemy cannot use their normal move or cheer others on and you deal another 1d10 Spirit Damage to them each round. Both effects last until they hit someone, move out of Melee Range of you, or end their interval. Think of your enemy as paralyzed, and their hit, movement, or interval-change as indicating the moment they break free.

*Choking Down Souls*—your *life-draining weapon* now gives Spirit instead of healing it until the end of your interval, allowing you to exceed your normal maximum. Gain a +1 *glut* bonus to your Spirit Defense and deal 1d10 Damage.

### Example

Sanuel the Exorcist has come to a forsaken temple. The priest says that a black dog sits on his chest at night and sucks his breath.

He sits by the priest's bed.

He waits.

Late that night it impinges. The moonlight through the window fades. There is a husky breathing in the darkness. There is a shape—

It is, of course, just a bunching of the quilt and night—

It has an astonishing reminiscence to a black dog.

"I see," says Sanuel. He rises to his feet. In his world Spirit Weapons may be used from the mortal to the spirit world; so he takes off his necklace and transforms the stone circle that hangs there into the Spinning Stone Wheel. The demon is not expecting his intervention; his first attack all but stuns it—

Then he can feel its claws ripping into him—

No! It can't be anything more than an icy wind!—

And pulling at his breath and life.

# Dreaming Waters:

## Spirit and Magical Weapons

In **Dreaming Waters**, many demons wield or even *become* unique magic weapons. (This is particularly common for demons of the Clean Dominion.) If characters find themselves in conflict with the spiritual power of a storm, the symbolic enemy or active monstrous agency that they have to defeat might wield a unique spirit weapon—the power of Wrath might, for example, wield something like the scourging flail. This has the appropriate Weapon traits and, if the character projects their spirit for the duration of the fight, its special effects as well.

In addition there are a couple of distinctive Magic Weapons associated with the setting—the *Dreaming Ocean Weapon* and the *Lamia Songs*.

- wingless characters and lamia are automatically proficient with the *Dreaming Ocean Weapon*; and
- lamia are automatically proficient with one custom lamia song.

Characters who are not themselves lamia may spend a proficiency to become proficient with one or more lamia songs, but lamia themselves can only learn their own.

## Raising the Dreaming Waters

Imagine for a moment that a human is caught out in the open prairie. They have no wing-board. They have no catch-rope. Winged bandits are shooting arrows at them from above.

It's situations like that that turn humans into *saints of the dreaming waters*—that rouse a desperate impulse to call upon the grayness that once drowned them and use it to defeat their foes. They begin on the magical path of one who commands the waters; and, too, they recognize the Dreaming Ocean Weapon.

This is an uncomfortable and unhappy power.

It makes one feel too much like the terrors and the slakes—like one has become an avatar of despair and murk, like the waterlogged and wingless existence of the humans of the dreaming waters is exactly what one deserves.

It takes a long time to find a peace in oneself with power over the dreaming waters—at least, for typical characters it does. But peace or not, it's a power wingless humans have.

### Surfing the Dreaming Waters

Wingless characters who wish to engage in aerial combat in the upper realms may raise up the dreaming waters and balance on top of them. Like flight and like athletic ascent, this has an aerial failure mode:

*Aerial Failure Mode (Surfing the Dreaming Waters):* the character plunges into the dreaming waters, losing 5 Spirit and ending their interval. If their enemies do not follow, then the conflict ends inconclusively and they wander for a while in a daze. If their enemies do follow, then they are able to reorient and return to the fight.

### Angels and the Dreaming Waters

Angels may attempt to surf the dreaming waters as well, but doing so is profoundly unnatural for them. It's assumed that they've either watched a human doing it or spent time in the waters or they aren't able to do it at all; if they have some reason to have a sense for how to do it, they still suffer the aerial failure mode on a 3-5. They may learn to wield the dreaming ocean weapon but may never be proficient with it.

## Dreaming Ocean Weapon

-2 Accuracy/2d6 Damage  
Long Range

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+2 Promptness, -2 Defense)

The dreaming ocean weapon raises the dreaming waters, lashing out at enemies with gouts or blasts of water.

The dreaming ocean weapon has the following special features:

**Inflexible:** it costs +5 Fight (max 10) to switch from the dreaming ocean weapon to another weapon in a single interval.

**Water Influence:** each round you use this weapon you and up to three enemies of your choice within range of this weapon take 1d6 Spirit Damage.

**Fail:** the dreaming waters corrupt you. You take 5 Fight and 5 Spirit damage. All allies in range of your weapon take 1d6 Spirit Damage each round until the end of your interval.

### Epic Moves:

**Deadly Ocean Spear**—skewer an enemy with an ocean-forged spear. They take 2d6 Damage to both Fight and Spirit and lose their next action.

**Icy Shell**—deal 2d6 Damage and shelter behind a typhoon of living water, gaining 3 Shell until the end of your interval (max 8).

**Surging Waters**—you gain a +2 *flashy* modifier to your Accuracy and Damage (max +2) until your interval ends or you *fail*.

## Lamia Songs

Each lamia song is a unique Magic Weapon that may be employed either on the physical or on the spiritual plane. They wield this song to achieve their supernatural effects.

Often the lamia does not work their magic directly.

Instead they direct their song or their Dominion to act for them. In such cases they may not roll out their actions directly, but neither do they put their own Fight, Heart, and Spirit at risk. Victory will earn them what they desire; failure will cost them some portion of their strength and the strength of their Dominion. If the lamia is a PC, the effect is entirely in the GM's hands—neither the player or the character is the guiding intelligence behind the action. If the lamia is an NPC, this allows their enemies to challenge the work of the song and the lamia without necessarily defeating the lamia themselves.

If there is a lamia PC, then the player and GM must work together to create an appropriate song. A few examples, associated with the Setting Chapter's example lamia, follow.

### Enterissa Andao's Song

-1 Control/2d10 Spirit Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is a Mind-Twisting Weapon of grief against despair.

It wakes a passionate will-to-live.

It promises that we may refuse death by clinging to what has passed away. Any character may use this song as a Spiritual Weapon, but only Enterissa and those who have "plac"—a kind of magical token found in her Dominion—may use it to work magical effects in the dreaming waters or the upper realm.

Enterissa's Song has the following special features:

**Grieving Armor:** you have 3 Shell (max 8) and 3 Spirit Shell (max 8) when wielding this Weapon. Reduce Fight or Spirit Damage of attacks that hurt you by the appropriate Shell.

**Fail:** your grief betrays you; despair swallows your heart. You cannot act next round, and your Shell and Spirit Shell have no effect until you act again.

*Epic Moves:*

*A Single Reclamation*—deal 2d10 Spirit Damage. Once before the end of your interval you may turn Spirit or Fight Damage that you would otherwise take into something positive and bright. Do not take this Damage. Instead, you may either deal that much Spirit Damage to an enemy in Short Range as a Mind-Twisting effect or heal 10 Spirit Damage as a Theurgy effect. The song prevents the loss and invests that salvation with a strong emotional effect.

*Struggle On*—deal 2d10 Spirit Damage. Your Grief grows. You may narrate a short flashback. Either way, add 2 to your Shell and Spirit Shell (max 8).

Henry Soring's Song

+0 Control/2d10 Progress

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -1 Spirit Defense)

This is an Enshrouding Weapon of drowning, blood in the water, and sharp teeth.

It punishes and terrifies.

It draws its victims into the drowning kingdom.

It may also chew through walls, seal an area against people, or draw out predators to be destroyed.

This Song is only usable by Henry Soring, by victims of his later released from the drowning kingdom, and by close disciples or personal friends.

*Fail:* your Weapon eats at your Spirit. Lose 3 Spirit per round for the rest of your interval.

*Epic Moves:*

*Drowning and Blood*—deal 2d10 Spirit Damage. Your enemy suffers a -1 *enshrouding* penalty to Accuracy and Control (max -3) until their interval ends. This is a terrifying magical effect.

*Moral Conflict*—deal 2d10 Spirit Damage and make a *connection* with your target. You may use this to drain up to 5 Spirit per round from the target until your interval ends, healing an equal amount of Spirit or Fight.

Theresa Irving's Song

+0 Control/1d6 Spirit Damage

[Two-Handed Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Spirit Defense)

This is a naïve Binding song that tries to solve problems by forcing things into the image of a perfect world. It's the kind of song that would pound a square peg into a round hole until it broke, or make people act happy even when they are not. By default only Theresa Irving can use this song.

Theresa Irving's song has the following special feature:

**Negative Feedback:** each time you take damage, add a +1 *try harder* bonus to your Control and Spirit Damage (max +3) until the end of your interval.

*Fail:* this isn't how the world should be! Everything but yourself in Short Range takes 5 Spirit Damage as your frustrated Song lashes the world around you. Enemies and allies who are defeated by this effect are sent to the lion prison dominion.

*Epic Moves:*

*Transformational Glory*—deal 1d6 Spirit Damage and recover the same amount of Spirit. A minor Binding effect causes something awesome to happen, and for one shining moment everything works out.

*Healing Insight*—recover 1d6 Spirit, adding any Spirit Damage bonuses such as *try harder*. You develop a weird theory about the situation, and a minor Binding, Land-Rule, or Theurgy effect causes it (for a moment) to make sense.

*Lion Prison*—deal 2d6 Spirit Damage to yourself, including any Spirit Damage bonuses such as *try harder*. Remove one barrier or one relatively minor NPC enemy to the *lion prison dominion*, whereupon it vanishes from the battlefield.

# Progress

Consider for a moment a detailed action resolution with no opponents—the character's only purpose is to make progress towards some defined ambition. In such a case we measure their efforts as Progress.

Perhaps the character needs 20 points of Progress.

Perhaps they need 50.

Regardless their effort in each action is to first succeed on a roll to make Progress, and then ideally do well on the roll that measures it. This is, by default, uninteresting; if you're pitting a character or characters against an insensate pool of points, you might as well resolve it through simple actions or descriptive resolution. But it's the basis on which we build the interesting non-combat uses of the detailed action system.

## Tests

Just as with combat, a non-combat situation may have multiple targets. Instead of dealing 50 points of Progress against a large overall enemy of "this task is not yet accomplished," the characters might need to deal 25 points of Progress here, 10 there, 15 there—in short, complete a number of subsidiary goals or tasks.

Determining these tasks in play is usually a cooperative effort between the players and the GM. That is, it's certainly possible that the GM can break the end goal down into a the task down into a fixed initial number of sub-tasks, but it's generally more fun to let the players develop these on their own. A player spots a Test—something that challenges them, but which allows them an opportunity for progress. The GM's role then is to look at what the player is doing and determine how much Progress they can earn by pitting themselves against that Test.

## Test

A Test therefore has the following traits:

- the maximum amount of Progress earned by struggling with that Test;
- the amount of Progress required to earn victory on that Test; and

- a good thing the GM will stipulate to if the PCs earn that victory.

Players generally have at least a rough idea of how much Progress they can earn by facing a given Test, and earn victory a little before that. For instance, en route to rescue a captive Prince, a player decides that their character needs to buy horses for the PCs. The GM informs them they can earn at most 5 Progress from this. They manage to roll a mere 3-4 Progress, which the GM decides is enough to stipulate that they have horses. If they continue, maybe bargaining down the price or learning more about the horses in question, they can earn a bit more—but after 5 Progress, they can no longer make Progress towards the rescue by talking to the hostler.

As a rule, even if the characters stop before earning victory, much less the maximum, the Progress they have made still counts as Progress towards their goal. Presumably they had reason for stopping, and that reason relates to what they're doing in the larger picture, so it would be perverse to penalize them for working properly towards their goal by removing their progress towards it!

## Heart Damage, Progress, and Crises

A character's Heart pool measures both their energy to continue making Progress and their overall control over the situation.

On occasion characters will face a Crisis—

Something that can deplete that energy and control. They're riding hard through a clouded plain to the rescue of a Prince, and they're assaulted by monsters or magic. They're flying, and battered by harsh winds. They're trying to organize a town's defenses, and the town council refuses to cooperate.

### Crisis Qualities

A Crisis has the following traits:

- the maximum amount of Heart Damage it may deal against a given character;
- an unhappy eventuality that the GM stipulates to at that point.

Thus, for instance, the monstrous assault might deal at most 10 Heart Damage; at that point, the GM brings the characters into combat. The town council might deal at most 20 Heart Damage; at that point, they have turned wholly against the characters.

Sometimes that unhappy eventuality will seem worse to the targeted character than the loss of Heart does. In such a case, when a Crisis acts, the character may choose to *stake their Heart* on defense—taking the Heart Damage directly, rather than it accumulating towards the unhappy eventuality. This option can be invoked retroactively after the Crisis acts if the player is at least a little bit surprised by the eventuality or how quickly it was reached.

### The Other Side of the Coin

Every Crisis for a character is also:

- a Test for that character; or
- a potential Crisis for an enemy.

That is, every Crisis can either be turned around to damage an enemy or to make Progress towards their own ends. Further, if the character caps out on Progress or Heart Damage, as appropriate, the Crisis dissolves—it is no longer something that can impede them.

For example, an enemy establishes an ambush.

This is a Crisis for the characters. It may deal Heart Damage; if it deals 10 Heart, that character is taken by surprise. However, the characters may turn that around, using their perceptual skills to either

- make progress on a broader goal (e.g., "lure the enemies out of position") or
- surprise their enemies in turn.

When a Crisis is also a Test, the Progress needed for victory is generally the full amount needed to defeat the Crisis.

## Conditions

A Crisis often begins as an *environmental condition* or *difficulty*. It is in some fashion or another troublesome, but does not become an active problem for any character until an enemy or the GM turns it into a Crisis.

Examples include things like fires, ambient hostility, or harsh winds.

## Unhappy Eventualities outside of a Crisis

On occasion characters will fail so thoroughly on a Test that it won't matter that it couldn't attack *them*—they've still lost a large amount of Heart to that test alone.

In such cases the GM may treat the Test as a Crisis that simply chooses never to attack. At a certain amount of lost Heart, the character suffers an appropriate unhappy eventuality.

## Tests

At the beginning of a character's action, before they change weapons or move or take action, they may set out a new *Test* for themselves—a challenge they hope to overcome, earning victory and Progress towards their overall goal.

Example Tests include,

- "Find the evidence hidden in this burning warehouse."
- "Destroy the evidence hidden in this burning warehouse."
- "Solve this riddle."
- "Calculate the necessary angle for artillery fire."
- "Fix this broken weapon, vehicle, or device."
- "Get public opinion on my side."
- "Maneuver my enemy onto a trap door."
- "Call the police using that phone booth."
- "Hotwire (any | a specific) car."
- "Conjure a water elemental."

- "Film this battle."

## Valid and Invalid Tests

There are two cases where a proposed Test is not valid.

The first case is that the GM believes the character can overcome the proposed Test without using this resolution system. For instance, "walk steadily" is automatic for just about everybody, and in most games you won't need a Test to "look cool while fighting."

The second case is one where the GM does not believe success is possible or interesting. For instance, "Become the Supreme Being" is usually invalid as a declared Test within a conflict. Even lesser ambitions like "Become King" are problematic when one is, say, fighting a bear in the middle of the wilderness.

If a Test is valid, then the GM places it on the battlefield and defines its points of interaction, as explained below.

## Placing a Test

Each Test comes in two stages. First there is the non-dramatic portion: the leg work, the preparation, the planning and packing, the training, all the parts that a movie would mostly skip or place in a quick montage unless some enemy gets in the way. Then there's the dramatic moments in which the character either succeeds or fails.

In most cases these proceed in strict succession: the non-dramatic part and then the dramatic part, with an inherent difference in kind as well as interest. For example, a character is looking for evidence in a burning warehouse. First the character canvasses the warehouse methodically; then they have an insight or make a discovery, and it becomes a race to reach the location they have deduced for the evidence before the fire burns it. Or consider a magician conjuring an elemental: first they draw chalk circles, burn candles, and locate various spells. Then the tenor of the ritual changes: their face is drawn, they are chanting, they are testing their will against some magical thing.

In other cases the distinction is a bit fuzzier and the chronology uneven.

A character seeks, in the dead of winter, to build a great wall to close a mountain pass. Their dramatic moments of struggle against exhaustion are scattered in time. Deciding which moments to skip and which to focus on is a matter of taste and not an inherent function of drama.

Nevertheless, when there's a distinguishable pre-drama phase, it has its own rules. We're going to adapt the Range system to measure *how much work the character must put in before things become dramatic*:

- *Melee Range*: the character is struggling with the Test *right now*.
- *Short Range*: the Test is mere moments away.
- *Medium Range*: the character must put in some focused effort before things get interesting.
- *Long and Very Long Range*: there is tricky and time-consuming legwork, methodical action, and preparation to be done before the character faces this Test. In itself this work is dull, but doing it in combat is both dramatic and difficult.
- *Inaccessible Range*: the character cannot undertake to face this Test at this time.

Once the Test is placed in this fashion, characters may pull it closer just as they would pull a spirit; and, as with pulling spirit, their reach depends on their Mobility. A character restricted to Short Range Mobility by archer constraint or enemies in Melee Range may need many rounds to bring a Test at Very Long Range nigh. A character without any opposition would be able to start facing that same Test in one round.

## Points of Interaction

Typically to face a Test (and, sometimes, to bring it closer) a character must interact with some object or objects on the battlefield. Such an object has a specific physical location. Often, unless the character is using a ten foot pole or a cell phone in which to interact with the object, the character must be in Melee Range of that object to do so—they can't work on the Test without access to that object. This object is called an *interaction point* for that Test.

As noted on pg. XX, when discussing barriers, the physical location of an object on the battlefield only really matters when a character is constrained to act on a certain scale. For instance, in a cityscape—

- where you are in a building can be relevant at Short Range Mobility;
- which building you're in can be relevant at Medium Range Mobility;
- which neighborhood you're in can be relevant at Long Range Mobility;

- which part of town you're in can be relevant at Very Long Range Mobility;
- where you are in the county is always relevant.

Put another way, characters don't really have to define precisely where they are in a building until an enemy tries to constrain them with a ranged weapon or close to Melee Range. If no enemy is doing so, the character can move about freely in the building without using their normal move, because all that matters to anybody else is the Short Range circle they're in.

Even with constrained Mobility, the character's physical Range from the interaction point may not be important. Sometimes all you have to do to interact with something is shine a flashlight on it. Sometimes the interaction point is the character's own brain! In general, being at the "wrong" Range from all meaningful interaction points may do any of the following:

- reduce the character's Progress against that Test (it's harder to haggle when you're shouting across a crowded room);
- make it impossible to work on that Test (you can't look for lost keys in a different part of the city than the part where you lost them);
- make no difference (your brain or body is the real interaction point); or
- something weird and specific, as the GM rules necessary.

The only firm rule is that a character *must be within reach of what their plan or idea requires them to reach*.

## Tests and Movement

Strictly speaking a character does not pull their Test closer to *them*. Rather, they pull the Test closer to *imminence*. Its interaction points, once imminent, may be in the character's location—but they don't have to be. It's contingent on the nature of the Test.

When the character moves, the Test does not. It remains at its previous proximity to imminence. It does not limit characters' Mobility; it is generally not limited by them. It does not consciously move with other Tests. It simply lingers until the next chance the character has to move it closer.

As a *general* rule, it doesn't matter how many characters pull on a Test. It still takes the same number of rounds to pull it close.

## Range Circles

The Range Circles for Tests are based on *relatedness*.

- *Melee Range*: the Tests in a scrum are faced simultaneously.
- *Short Range*: the Tests are focused on the same key events.
- *Medium Range*: the Tests are related, but even after or while facing one Test, the character must still put in some effort to bring the others near.
- *Long and Very Long Range*: the Tests have a loose connection.
- *Inaccessible Range*: the Tests are wholly independent.

These Circles are only important in their interaction with pulling Tests nearer. As with spirits, when a character brings a Test into a certain Range, they also bring its entire similarly-sized Range Circle of Tests into that Range. So, for instance, when a character brings a Test into Short Range (so that it's imminent), they also drag all the other Tests focused on the same key events into that Range.

If you're just about to find a key bit of evidence, then be warned! Those hoping to destroy that evidence, or film it, or stand nearby and admire your detective work, or steal credit for your detective work, or otherwise do things that are focused on that moment when the evidence turns up—they're getting closer to *their* dramatic Test, too!

## Preventing a Test

Sometimes there is something or someone in a position to obstruct the character's efforts and preparation. An enemy, perhaps, standing physically in their way; or using ranged weapons to cover the area in which they need to interact with a battlefield object; or blowing up the character's supply lines; or using spiritual attack to discourage them; or in any other and troublesome way offending.

It may even be a flaw in the character's own heart. Perhaps the Test is to shut down a wicked enemy using a lawsuit. Only, the character is not entirely willing to face that Test. The character's tragic flaw is sloth, and lawsuits are troublesome. Or their flaw is fear of solicitors, or a skeleton in their closet that must be concealed from the same. Or their love for that very enemy.

The character goes to pull the Test closer—

And some thing opposes.

In such a case, even these early non-dramatic steps become dramatic, and the movement towards the Test becomes uncertain. Each time the character wishes to bring the Test to a closer Range, the player must make a roll to see whether their character succeeds. This roll is typically  $d10+a$  relevant Defense:

- $d10+$ the character's physical Defense to overcome physical harassment and opposition;
- $d10+$ the character's Spirit Defense to overcome spiritual attack and flaws and social attacks that discourage the character;
- $d10+$ the character's Heart Defense to overcome enemies and flaws that make the character's effort more complicated, difficult, and intricate.

The target for this roll is **14**.

This is an extension of the idea of terrain control, and just like with terrain control, the character usually has the option—even if they fail—to take some dice of Damage to Fight, Spirit, or Heart or to cancel their move. Cancelled moves use up your normal move, but you can try again the next round.

This damage is **3d6 or +1** (max 3d6+5).

### Stopping an Enemy

In order to block someone's movement towards a Test you must have a reasonable means of doing so. This can be an issue when—

- trying to block a purely mental effort;
- trying to block someone's actions at range without a Ranged Weapon;
- trying to block someone's actions with a Ranged Weapon when they have cover; or
- trying to stop someone from finding something, when you don't know where it is—

along with many other cases.

If you *can* interfere with them at this stage, the cost for doing so is the same as for *moving with* somebody. Interfering with somebody's Test limits your next move. On your next action, if you use your normal move, you have to move towards the enemy you're interfering with or an interaction point for that Test.

### Harassing Enemies with Ranged Weapons

If you obstruct an enemy's progress towards a Test using a ranged attack, then the following rules apply by default:

- you must constrain that enemy's motion, if you have the option to do so;
- if you have terrain control, it counts as one use of that terrain control.

For instance, someone's preparing to use magic. You harass them with a bow, turning that boring "draw the chalk circle and light the candles" part that brings the Test closer into something more dramatic. You have to use your bow to constrain their movements, and it counts against your three uses of the bow's terrain control per round. If you're using a freaky martial arts ranged weapon to stop them, you have to constrain them, and it uses up the weapon's single charge of terrain control for the round.

No matter what Ranged Weapon you're using, the target still needs to either roll a 14 or higher or take 3d6 or +1 (max 3d6+5) of the appropriate Damage type to bring the Test closer.

### Points of Contention

Once the Test is in Melee Range, it's too late for enemies to stop you. It is *happening*. It is *ongoing*. You're ready to start rolling Progress—

Or are you?

Tests are generally assumed to be personal to a character. They don't interact in a direct fashion with other character's interests. But sometimes a Test for you is a Crisis for an enemy.

The Test is always a Crisis for the enemy if:

- it would prevent them from earning victory on one of their Tests;
- it would obviate the stipulation associated with their current interval;

- it would basically defeat them and their purpose in being there.

It can also turn into a Crisis if you or they decide that it ought to. For instance, you may want to "wield" this Test against that enemy, making it a Crisis for them; or they may decide that it's a Crisis simply to stake their Heart on stopping you.

An enemy may choose to renounce the Test or end the interval that is forcing this Crisis. They may also declare, though limited by the GM's assessment of their correctness, that the Test is not a Crisis for them—that they don't mind if you get away with it, that the specific character of their Tests, stipulations, goals, and momentary position in the conflict is such that this thing you seek to do is actually just fine.

### When a Test is a Crisis

When a Test is a Crisis for some enemy, it has the following effects:

- the enemy may defend against your Progress on that Test, lending it their own Heart Defense and possibly their Heart Shell;
- the enemy may choose to stake their Heart on preventing your victory; and
- your Progress deals equal Heart Damage to the enemy.

For instance, you're an angel that sits on the shoulder of the Eternal Queen. You're trying to persuade her to certain reforms, and want to encourage her to launch an investigation of the relevant matter. This is a Test for you—but the sinister creature on the opposite shoulder decides that this Test is also a Crisis for itself. Only one of you will earn a victory, and both of you are likely to take Heart Damage along the way.

### Earning your Victory

If you bring your Test into Melee Range, and it doesn't become a Crisis, you may then take action to overcome this Test and earn victory. Usually this means using a Heart Weapon of some sort against the Test; we'll talk more about those soon.

## Non-Combat Tests in Combat

The victory condition for "combat" is not reckoned in Progress but rather in Damage. Slowly earning Progress in such a case, unless it's also a Crisis that damages the enemy, is not much more dramatic than the preparatory steps. Thus, if:

- Progress is not the goal of the encounter;
- The Test is not a Crisis; and
- The lingering effect of victory, after the encounter ends, will be small

the character may defeat the Test without rolling.

If there's no question of the character's success, this is a *free action*. It doesn't cost the character anything. Once the character brings the Test into Melee Range, and move themselves into physical Range of an interaction point, they may achieve victory simply by declaring it.

A classic example is opening a door.

The character may have to travel under fire to reach the door. They may need to pound on a stuck door. There may even be something interesting involved—the door is covered with bugs, and the character has to sweep them aside. Or the door is locked, but the character is a professional burglar—they need to purchase or check their lockpicks, but there's no question of failure. In any case, though, once the character is at the door and the Test is upon them, there's no risk of failure, so it's a free action.

The alternative is an *unrolled action*.

An unrolled action is something that may technically be difficult for the character in the world. But because Progress is not the goal of the encounter, and it won't matter much after the encounter that the character succeeded, and there's not even a Crisis involved—we're just going to assume the character succeeds. They do, however, have to spend one action to do so. For example, the character's been working hard on repairing their broken shield-strap. Having brought the Test into Melee Range, and with no enemy willing to claim it as a Crisis for them, they simply succeed. Similarly, a character drives unsafely along a mountain road while engaged in a spiritual struggle. It's obvious that the character won't *necessarily* succeed at this, but all it takes to reach their destination is an unrolled action.

## Scaling Up

For reference, Test Ranges scale up as the battlefield does—

- *Combat Range*: the Test is mere minutes away.
- *Short Range (Regional)*: hours of preparation are necessary.
- *Medium Range (Regional)*: a day or two of preparation precedes the dramatic portion of the Test.
- *Long Range (Regional)*: many days of work precede the Test.
- *Very Long Range (Regional)*: months or years of work precede the Test.
- *Inaccessible*: the character cannot practically dare this Test at this time.

This assumes that characters aren't putting in an all-out effort; if they push themselves hard it can reduce this time. It also assumes that events at the regional scale are moving slowly enough that these measurements make sense and that there's no overriding dramatic interest in speeding things up—it's OK to reach even a Very Long Range (Regional) Test in a matter of days if that's more interesting and the characters use the appropriate move actions.

## Obstacles

Sometimes a character hits a wall.

More precisely, sometimes they encounter an unexpected barrier where figuring out *how* they're getting past it is part of the point. There isn't a prescribed path: there's just an obstacle, be it physical, social, intellectual, magical, or something else.

Other times there will be an open question about how a PC even *starts* their work on some Test. The GM believes that they can accomplish it in the current circumstances, but has no clear sense of how.

In such cases the Test itself may exert terrain control—

When the character pulls it closer, and in rare cases when they try to make Progress/deal Damage/use a free or unrolled action against it, they must explain their general plan and roll d10+their Heart Defense. Success (that is, usually, rolling 14+) overcomes the general complexity of the Test. Failure indicates that their idea yields no immediate fruit: they must either cancel their move or "bull through" at a cost of 3d6 Heart.

There are five general categories of Obstacle.

## Magical Obstacle

This is a magical barrier or problem. You suddenly learn that the town you're in is cursed. Or you go to visit your honored mother and the door is covered in fiery bees. You wake up one morning and your sword has learned both how to talk and how to make rude innuendoes.

You can Test yourself to solve this—but how?

## Physical Obstacle

This is a physical barrier or problem. You are planning to go to the market, but a landslide has blocked the road.

## Social Obstacle

This is a social barrier or issue. You plan a visit to a city, only to discover that the guards are very picky about who they let in.

## Tactical Obstacle

This is an unexpected tactical situation. You are dealing with a high-level conflict against opposition, and you need to figure out how you are handling it. Once you have a good sense of what's going on and what you can and will do, you reach the Test.

## Wilderness Obstacle

This is a problem encountered in nature. For example, you find that you need to travel through a woods full of bears. How do you plan to not get eaten?

## Crises

A Crisis pits the character against the world. It's a Test the character may not choose to avoid; the world does not lay itself out under their feet,

becoming a road, but rather looms in close like dark clouds rushing across the sky. It takes on its role as *chaos, unwanted or unexpected things happening, and the forum for the character's darker self or failings to emerge.*

There are three origins for a Crisis:

- as a Test, which the characters seek out but then cannot evade;
- as a Test which the GM creates for the characters;
- as a weapon wielded against a character by some enemy.

On occasion we will distinguish the two types of Crisis. A Trial is a Crisis of one of the first two sorts; it is a Test as well as a Crisis, and when a character makes Progress against it, they also make Progress towards their goals. A Trial acts as an NPC in its own right: it may draw close to you unlooked-for; it may impose Mobility constraints; it may attack and it may be attacked. The last sort of Crisis is a Crisis Weapon. It does not move, but your enemies may pull it closer to imminence. It does not act, but an enemy may act through it.

The Mobility constraint that a Trial imposes is based on the larger of its Range from imminence and the character's Range from its interaction points. For instance, a character is at Medium Range from an interaction point. When the Crisis is at Long Range from imminence, the character is constrained as if they had an enemy at Long Range. When the Crisis is imminent, the character is constrained as if they had an enemy at Medium Range.

## Attacking a Crisis

Characters attack a Crisis by *dealing Heart Damage* to it. If the Crisis is also a Test, this is the same thing as *making Progress* against it. If not, then this is the same thing as dealing Heart Damage against an enemy. In all cases, the Crisis has a Heart Defense, which must be bypassed; a pool of Heart (or needed Progress, the two being much the same) which measures its ability to endure and withhold victory.

There are two common methods for dealing Heart Damage to a Crisis.

The first is to attack it with a Heart Weapon. Standard Heart Weapons are ways to go about facing the Crises that life throws at you—things like "Correct Procedure," "Fierce Effort," or "With a Smile." These are written up below as the Correct Weapon, the Invested Weapon, and the Resilient Weapon. There's also "no Weapon, wielded as a Heart Weapon," which is basically a

default problem-solving stance. The rules for switching between Heart Weapons and combat Weapons are lenient, so you may find yourself doing so regularly in fights that mix Crises and physical dangers.

The second standard way to damage a Crisis is to let it attack you. This offers lucky characters several reactive options to deal Heart Damage, as the next section describes.

It's always possible that you'll come up against a Crisis best addressed by physical or spiritual means. An avalanche is a Crisis—but maybe it's better to use a high-tech supreme snow-destroying physical Weapon instead of a Heart Weapon against it. Fighting the demon of sickness may be the optimal solution to a medical crisis. And sometimes the best way to throw a wrench into an enemy's plans is to throw a wrench into their stomach. But the **Filial Piety Action System** intends cases like this to be particular and unusual, driven by circumstantial concerns, and you should understand them as such.

## Crisis Attacks

When an enemy's Test becomes a Crisis for you, they may no longer use Heart Weapons to make progress against it; rather, when they wish to deepen that Crisis, they use it and their action to attack you. This is called using a Crisis Weapon; for example, an enemy may take advantage of an environmental hazard to inconvenience you.

Trials attack on their own recognizance, or rather, the GM's.

## A Crisis' Attacks

Three things distinguish the "attack" of a Crisis from NPC attacks:

- a Crisis may not attack in the round it receives an attack;
- when a Crisis attacks, the GM does not roll the attack, nor does an attacking player. Instead, the player of the attacked character rolls to defend themselves;
- the player chooses between several different *failure modes* on that defense, while having only one epic move option.

Defending against a Crisis, which you may think of as "holding it at bay," doesn't use interval or the character's action or move. Nor does it require that the character have an action available. The character's actions in defending

against a Crisis are the kind of things we assume characters do constantly, even while doing other things and moving about—they're in control of their environment. It's just that when a Crisis is in play these actions are interesting enough to be worth talking about.

## Powering Through

Often a character will challenge a Crisis but not defeat it. If the Crisis is bound up inexorably in an enemy's plans—if they'd be willing to stake their Heart on defending it—then that's fine and appropriate. But if it's a Trial, or a Crisis Weapon wielded casually, the character has the option to just *power through*, exerting a supreme effort and defeating the Crisis despite their low roll. The cost is Heart Damage.

More precisely, you may *power through* a Crisis when:

- there is no enemy willing to stake their Heart on defending it; and
- you attacked the Crisis and missed (but did not fail) or
- you rolled Heart Damage against the Crisis but did not defeat it.

When you power through the Crisis, you take a certain amount of Heart Damage—usually 3d6, but it's up to the GM—and the Crisis is defeated in an instant.

For instance, a character is fighting on a crumbling bridge.

There's a Crisis looming: do they fall?

The character attacks the Crisis, or rolls an epic move on the defense. They describe this as "I balance impeccably, leaping from stone to stone;" or, "No way! I retreat to safety;" or "I sprout wings." They roll low; the Crisis still threatens! The player can choose to accept Damage (e.g. 3d6 Heart Damage, which is typically 10-11 points) and declare that their solution stands and that the Crisis is resolved.

Powering through a Crisis is mostly intended to keep the game from bogging down in struggles against lifeless things. The Heart cost is for an incredible surge of effort which turns that potential mire into a shining moment instead. An enemy's willingness to stake their Heart is used as an indicator to determine which Crises are too important and intricately bound up in the nature of the conflict to casually overcome. That said, as a calibration measure, if the GM says that an NPC would stake their Heart, or a player says their PC would do so, the player who'd hoped to power through the Crisis may

instead roll 3d6 and deal that amount of Heart Damage both to their own PC and to the other character in question.

## Tactical Defeat

The character also has the option, when a Crisis attacks them, of giving up—rather than fighting it, they immediately stipulate that they do *not* successfully overcome the Trial or Crisis Weapon. Cancel the attack that the Crisis made. The Crisis cannot attack them again and is optionally removed entirely from play. Instead, the GM applies the unhappy eventuality that would otherwise have required a certain amount of Heart Damage to achieve.

For instance, a character is fleeing a mad scientist's agents. She's in her car and they're in gyrocopters. Smoke starts to come out from under her car's hood. An impending Crisis!—unless the character slows down, dives out of the car, rolls to her feet, and dashes off into the woods while her car plows into a mountain. At this point there's really no point in worrying about the car's original mechanical breakdown, and struggling with it can't cost the character any Heart.

## Crises and Heart

Each Crisis has Heart Defense, a pool of Heart, and possibly Heart Shell. When you create a Crisis Weapon, these are based on your own traits—attacks against the Crisis even deplete your own pool of Heart, up to the point where an unhappy eventuality occurs. When the GM creates a Trial, it has Heart Defense and Heart determined by the GM.

In either case, when the Crisis runs out of Heart, it is resolved in favor of the characters for whom it was a Crisis. They earn a victory or inflict upon their enemy an unhappy eventuality. The same occurs if someone powers through that Crisis.

If for some reason a Crisis heals or gains Heart—e.g., with the special property *Recoverable*—then either the character loses that much Progress towards their ultimate goals, for a Trial, or the enemy in question gains that amount of Heart.

## Resolving a Crisis

When a Crisis either *inflicts* its maximum Heart Damage, or takes enough Heart Damage to run out of Heart, it is said to be "resolved."

## Crisis and Movement

Crisis Weapons move as Tests do. Either the perpetrator or a victim of the Crisis may pull it closer. Characters may pull Trials closer, but they may also move of their own volition, either lurking malevolently in proximity to some other Test or lurching to imminence on their own accord. If a Crisis attempts to move away from imminence, characters may "move the world" with it to prevent this effect, as they would for a fleeing spirit.

## Group Tests and Group Crises

On occasion a group of characters will confront a Test or Crisis together.

Once a Test or Crisis is in range, it's possible for any character to use a Heart Weapon against it. This does generally require an explanation of how that character participates. A particularly personal Test or Crisis may have +1 Defense and 3-5 Heart Shell against outside interference. It isn't the norm—but it's possible, and sometimes it's even the right way to play a challenge out.

In a similar fashion, when a Crisis attacks, it may attack an entire group and it may represent the attack of an entire group.

There are two ways to handle this.

One way is to break it up into many individual Crises targeted on each individual target. A single enemy may choose to wield one of these Crises against a single character. The other alternative is to resolve it as a single Crisis attack, no matter how many minds are behind the attack and no matter how many characters it targets. In this latter case, the player responsible for each targeted character—the GM, for NPCs—has the option to roll a defense for that character. At least one such roll is required. If many enemies are "wielding" the Crisis, then defensive rolls must be made on behalf of at least that many characters, if possible. If someone succeeds on their Defense, the Heart Damage is divided among the characters wielding the Crisis as they choose.

For example, an airplane is about to crash. This is a Crisis for everyone on the plane; both the pilot and the copilot could roll a defense. Alternately, if just one of them manages to attack the Crisis every round, defense will be unnecessary.

As another example, two ruffians ambush a traveler. The traveler rolls an epic move on defense against the ambush, dealing Heart Damage to the Crisis and the ruffians; the Crisis takes that much Heart Damage regardless, and the two ruffians split the cost as they choose.

# Crisis Weapons and Trials

In this section you will find a selection of Crises for use with the **Filial Piety Action System**. These are dramatic Crises the characters may face. Sometimes enemies will create these Crises and use them against the characters; other times the Crisis will reflect a nasty GM-created Trial that at the same time relates to and supports the character's own efforts.

## Wielding a Crisis

You do not have to officially ready and wield a Crisis Weapon—you may simply decide to attack with it. This uses your action just as any other attack does.

## Defending against a Crisis

The Weapon templates below are not, however, for *attacking with a Crisis*, however. They are for defending against it.

When a Crisis attacks a character, that character's player rolls d10+their Heart Defense to determine whether they defend. Their target is in the range of 12-19. If the character rolls below that target, they take Damage (typically Heart Damage). **If they roll the target or higher, they deal 3 Heart Damage to the Crisis**, which becomes Progress or Heart Damage to an enemy as normal.

A player may earn failure or an epic move normally; there is, however, only a single epic move, while there are generally four different failure modes that the player may choose from.

## Survival Crisis

Certain Crises are designed as challenges to the character's long-term endurance. They are expected to survive, to endure the Crisis, to weather it. This is more or less a thematic choice on the GM's part: any Crisis *can* be constructed as a survival Crisis, or as an acute Crisis (below), so it's all about how the GM thinks the Crisis "feels."

A Survival Crisis has the following key features:

- the epic move for defending against it is *Survival*;
- the player may choose *Passive Focus* as a failure mode; and
- it is generally relatively easy to defend against.

A Survival Crisis is usually a Crisis when it's in the background—when it's something that's a backdrop to the character's other actions. When facing a very similar challenge, but consciously, purposefully, and in the foreground, it's a Test. For instance, "I have to build some grand project" is a good Survival Crisis when it's a backdrop to the story, while "I want to build this grand thing" as the centerpiece of a story is more of a Test.

## Survival

The epic move *Survival* deals [the Crisis' normal (Heart) Damage] to the Crisis. This translates accordingly into Progress towards victory and the character's end goals, or into Heart Damage to some enemy that accumulates towards an unhappy eventuality for them. It also gives a Crisis-specific benefit that lasts until the character's interval ends. Usually there are no options—this is the only epic move available when you roll an epic move against a Survival-style Crisis, and the benefit is specific to the Crisis.

## Passive Focus

The failure mode *Passive Focus* occupies the character's attention.

Roll a 1d6.

For that many rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, the character focuses on weathering the Crisis. The player's job is no longer to choose useful tactical actions. Instead, when their action comes around, their job is to describe their struggle with the Crisis. As usual, they may go into detail or simply state that "struggling with the Crisis" is their action.

Passive focus does not preclude movement but it does dictate it.

A character who is passively focused on medicine, for example, moves to and stays with their patient; or, if appropriate, to herbal or other resources located in the world. A character who is passively focused on enduring inclement weather may keep trudging forward if they are not in a comparatively sheltered location when the passive focus begins. A character passively focused on making excuses to some NPC may move with that NPC. The GM will ultimately decide this movement, but should err in favor of what's useful for the character when there's a reasonable case either way.

With the exception, thus, of description and of GM-dictated movement, the character cannot act. These rounds of passive focus count towards the character's interval, but the interval can't actually end while they're in this state—the interval always lasts until the last round of passive focus.

Players can choose this failure mode even when their characters are already in a state of passive focus. In such a case, increase its duration by 1 round (not another 1d6). As noted earlier, the passive focus also ends if the Crisis resolves, e.g., by the character conceding tactical defeat or dealing enough defensive Heart Damage to defeat it; however, if the player chooses this failure mode for one Crisis while still passively focusing on another, it won't end until either the full duration elapses or *all* associated Crises resolve.

If their character is already in a state of *active focus* (below) on some other Crisis, players cannot choose this failure mode.

## Acute Crisis

Other Crises are designed as challenges to the character's acute Crisis-handling ability. The character isn't expected to *endure*: they're expected to frantically scramble for solutions or coolly resolve the situation. This is the other side of the thematic decision above, and again, it's a choice on the GM's part.

An Acute Crisis has the following key features:

- the epic move for defending against it is *Victory*;
- the player may choose *Active Focus* as a failure mode; and
- it is generally relatively easy to attack with a Heart Weapon.

An Acute Crisis is usually a Crisis when it's in the foreground—when it's suddenly the central drama of the character's life. When facing a very similar challenge, but as a general backdrop to events, it's usually better handled as a Test. For instance, "I have to get my sea legs" is usually a Test, while "Oh no am I going to fall?" is an Acute Crisis.

## Victory

The epic move *Victory* immediately defeats the Crisis. More precisely, it immediately deals the Crisis' starting Heart pool in Heart Damage—so unless an enemy stakes their Heart on defense, or some weird effect has given the Crisis extra Heart, the character defeats it in a moment. The player may and usually should take a moment to describe their victory.

## Active Focus

The failure mode *Active Focus* occupies the character's attention.

Roll a 1d6.

For that many rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, the character works feverishly on overcoming the Crisis. The player's job is no longer to choose or roll useful tactical actions. Instead, when their action comes around, their job is to describe their struggle with the Crisis. They may go into detail or simply state that "struggling with the Crisis" is their action.

Like passive focus, active focus dictates the character's movement. And as with passive focus, outside of description and GM-dictated movement, the character cannot act.

Active focus has two benefits that passive focus does not:

- rounds of active focus *do not count towards your interval*.
- at the end of your active focus, you defeat the Crisis—just as if you'd rolled the epic move *Victory*. You deal the Crisis its starting pool of Heart in Heart Damage.

If a player chooses this failure mode while their character is already in a state of active focus, increase its duration by 2 rounds. At the end of this newly-extended active focus, all Crises for which the character is in a state of active focus are defeated, as if the character had rolled the epic move *Victory* against each in turn.

If their character is already in a state of *passive focus*, players cannot choose this failure mode; the two sorts of focus are not compatible.

## Other Failure Mode Options

When failing on defense against a Crisis, a character may choose one of the following failure modes:

*Concede*—take [the Crisis' normal (Heart) Damage] and immediately concede tactical defeat;

*Exhaustion*—take [three times the Crisis' normal (Heart) Damage];

*Focus*—either

*Active Focus*, for an acute Crisis, or

*Passive Focus*, for a long-term Crisis; or

*Penalty*—take [the Crisis' normal (Heart) Damage] and suffer a penalty.

## Penalty

Each Crisis has a specific associated penalty. If you might want to take this option, the GM will tell you what that penalty is. It's usually standard within a given type of Crisis—a Crisis that tests your agility, for instance, will usually have a penalty that Damages you when you move—but can vary as the GM elects.

The penalty typically lasts until the Crisis resolves.

You're allowed to take this option even if your current penalty is as bad as it can get. Think of it as the system choosing not to kick you when you're already down—usually if you've capped the penalty and are looking at failure modes again, you'll have failed no less than four times defending against a single Crisis, and a little bit of leniency is probably not entirely misplaced.

## Running out of Heart

### Crisis Properties

A Crisis has the following key properties:

- Properties relating to defense against it—
  - the **Target** for the d10+your Heart Defense roll;
  - the **(Heart) Damage** you take if you roll below that Target;
  - the **Damage Pool** for this Crisis (the maximum amount of Damage it deals unless you stake your Heart); and

- the **Unhappy Eventuality** that takes place when you concede tactical defeat or you've taken that much (Heart) Damage from the Crisis without staking your Heart.
- Properties relating to its defense against you—
  - its **Heart Defense**;
  - its **Heart Pool** (the maximum amount of Damage you can do to it unless someone stakes their Heart);
  - the **Victory** that you earn, or the **Unhappy Eventuality** that some enemy suffers, when you've dealt its full Heart Pool in Damage without somebody staking their Heart on stopping you.
- Epic move and failure modes—
  - whether it's a Survival Crisis or an Acute Crisis;
  - the epic move benefit for a Survival Crisis;
  - the specific penalty for the Penalty failure mode.

## Proficiency

Crises are organized into *categories*, based on the skill or quality you need in order to defeat them. For instance, the "suddenly unstable footing" Crisis is in the category of Agility Challenges. In general, the epic move and failure modes are similar or identical across a category of Crisis, while the GM adjusts the other traits such as Target, Damage, Heart, and Heart Defense to taste.

Characters in the **Filial Piety Action System** have no proficiency in Crisis wielding. The Crisis never rolls an attack—they'd have no way to fail or earn an epic move! Characters *do*, however, have proficiency in defending against

- fifteen *categories* of Crisis.

They may purchase additional defensive proficiencies with Knacks.

A Crisis may fall into multiple categories; if this is stringent, requiring great skill in each category, then a character must be proficient in all categories to defend proficiently against the Crisis. More commonly they need only be proficient in any one. For instance, if you're proficient with Performance Challenges *or* Work Challenges, you can do quite hard work that

has a strong artistic component; to paint the Sistine Chapel, however, required both.

## Agility Challenges

Unexpectedly you need agility! Perhaps a mine is caving in about you and you must ascend a chimney-shaft at great speed. Perhaps a bridge is collapsing. Or perhaps you unexpectedly have to navigate a martial arts training area where you stand on top of tall swaying bamboo poles!

Here's an example of this class of crisis:

### Suddenly Unstable Footing

[Crisis]

You're on a cliff—and now it's crumbling! Can you make it to safety, or will you plunge screaming into the darkness below?

#### Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 10]

You struggle to recover your footing. When you're defeated (e.g. by conceding tactical defeat or by taking 10 Heart Damage from this Crisis without staking your Heart on preventing this unhappy eventuality), you fall. The GM moves you to an appropriate location, ignoring almost every form of terrain control, and deals 10 Fight Damage.

*Epic Move (Victory):* you find your footing, dealing 5 Heart Damage to the Crisis and typically defeating it.

#### Failure Modes:

*Scrambling (Active Focus)*—feverishly struggle for balance for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the Active Focus rules.

*Unstable Footing (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage. Until you resolve the Crisis, you take 3 Heart Damage (max 8) from *unstable footing* every time you use your normal move or physically move with someone else. This counts towards the Heart Damage cap for this Crisis.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 5

At 5 Progress the character typically earns a small Victory on the order of "made it to the other side" or "became used to the footing/paths here."

### Example: "I Attack Their Footing"

Here's how to trip someone or try to knock them off when you're fighting on a narrow bridge or ledge. Declare that you want to do so. You can usually skip straight to declaring this a Crisis for them, at which point you may use an action attacking them with it. They roll their defense. Possibly they succeed, dealing 3 Heart Damage to you and your new Crisis. Possibly they miss or fail, and suffer accordingly.

Unpacking this a little, the sequence of events goes like this:

- you declare a Test: "knock them down."
- the GM places it, deciding its interaction points and Range.
- your enemy is generally the interaction point. Are you in physical Range to attack their footing?
- if the dramatic moment is right for this, then the Test is at Melee Range. If the GM places it at a more distant range some preparatory work may be required—you need to move to an appropriate spot, or engage in some complicated subterfuge, to reach the point where you can pit this enemy against a real Crisis.
- you declare that the Test is a Crisis for them.
- the GM decides whether they may make Progress towards their goal by attacking the Crisis, or just deal Heart Damage to you. Usually if you're fighting someone, the latter is appropriate.
- the GM decides how much Heart Damage they must deal to the Crisis to defeat it, and what happens to you if they succeed. For instance, "they knock *you* down!"
- you make your attack.

Despite these intermediate steps, 9 times out of 10, you can just say "I'm attacking your footing, roll your Agility defense!" and go from there.

## Craft Challenges

Unexpectedly you need to make or fix something! Perhaps your sword just broke. Perhaps your clothes are ripped. Perhaps you have just been assigned to make a series of watch towers along the cliff walls of the valley where your family lives.

If a character is actively focused on building or making something, you should probably handle it as a Test. When it's the backdrop to or a distraction from events, however, a challenge of this sort often becomes a Survival Crisis.

Here are two examples:

### Important Thing Just Broke

[Crisis]

You *need* that thing! It's an important thing for what you're doing right now!

And it's broken!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 15]

You struggle to jury-rig or repair the thing or kludge together a solution that does not require it. If you're defeated (e.g. by conceding tactical defeat or by taking 15 Heart Damage from this Crisis without staking your Heart on preventing this unhappy eventuality), the important thing is not repairable with your current resources and you cannot continue with whatever you were doing that needed that thing until your next interval.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: you won't let something like this stop you! You gain 3 Heart Shell (max 8) until the end of your interval. Deal 2d6 Heart Damage to the Crisis; if that's enough to defeat it, you casually repair the item.

### Failure Modes:

*Flailing (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage. The broken thing handicaps you, giving a -2 *craft-related* penalty (max -3) to your Accuracy, Control, and Solve until you resolve the Crisis.

*Frustrated (Passive Focus)*—you are wrongfooted by the broken thing for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the Passive Focus rules.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 5-15

The GM could assign this Challenge a pool of 5 Heart, in which case a suitable Victory is just "the thing is repaired." Or the GM could choose 10-15 Heart, in which case a suitable Victory is "the thing is repaired, and better than ever" or "the thing is repaired, and I accomplish what I was using it for."

### In Over Your Head

[Crisis]

You're in over your head. The work's too hard. The deadline's too tight. Something terrible will happen if you fail.

Can you struggle though?

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 50]

You're working hard. Constantly. And either you're doing something else at the same time, or you're conserving interval against a future threat—because instead of focusing the story on the work, you're just letting it chip away at your heart and your will to keep going, bit by bit. If you're defeated here, you don't complete the work well enough, or in time, or possibly (if you're being forced to work by someone else) you get seriously ill and lose 10 of your *maximum* Fight and Heart until the story ends.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: doggedly you labor on. Deal 2d10 Heart Damage to the Crisis. Gain 1 interval and 3 Heart Shell (max 8) until the end of your interval.

### Failure Modes:

*Endless Labor (Passive Focus)*—the labor is endless. You drop everything else and work on it for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the Passive Focus rules.

*It Just Got Harder (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage. The work gets tougher, or conditions get worse, or the deadline is shortened: you have a -2 *craft-related* penalty (max -3) to your Accuracy, Control, and Solve until you resolve the Crisis.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 9 / Heart Pool 20-30

At 20-30 Progress the character overcomes the Challenge. They may put down their tools and rest. Their endless labor is complete, and they earn the appropriate Victory.

### Example: "The House, in Winter."

You're stranded in the mountains. And winter is near.

You want your family to survive.

That's the larger task—and you need 50 Progress to get there.

It's hard.

You'll have to build a house. You'll have to catch or drive off that tiger that's prowling around. You'll have to stockpile food.

You decide to focus on the tiger—to leave the rest in the background.

The GM, in the typical mix of generosity and cruelty that produces a Trial, makes the house-building and food-stockpiling into a Crisis with 30 Heart. It goes on, background to the story, as you contrive against the tiger. It attacks, which gives you a chance for extra Progress but also burns through your Heart.

Each round, you defend—

An 8 succeeds. You earn 3 Progress / deal 3 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

A 3 fails. You burn 11 Heart.

A 5 fails. You burn 8 Heart.

An 8 succeeds. You earn 3 Progress / deal 3 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

You spend a round reorienting.

A 7—failure! You opt for *endless labor*, lasting 1d6 rounds—in this case, two rounds. For the first two rounds of your new interval you must turn your attention from the tiger and work frantically on the house, or you won't have a solid roof and larder when winter comes.

Then things start looking up.

In each of those two rounds, when the Crisis attacks—for it may even at this time of passive focus attack—you roll a 10. You deal 22 total Heart Damage. You gain 6 Heart Shell until your interval ends. And when it attacks you again on the next round, you roll a 9 to defend—dealing the last 3 Heart Damage you need to defeat the Crisis.

This gives you two benefits: first, 30 Progress towards your ultimate goal of keeping your family safe in winter. Second, a Victory: the house is built, the larder laid in, so only the tiger and any small issues that come up during the last bits of this detailed action resolution remain to stand in the way of your family's survival.

## Endurance Challenges

Unexpectedly you have a grave need for physical or mental stamina. Perhaps you are cut off from civilization by bad weather. Perhaps you are cursed so that you cannot rest. Perhaps you are tracking somebody but their early lead has made this a grueling marathon!

Here's two examples of this category of crisis:

### Exposure to the Elements

[Crisis]

You're stuck in the cold, the heat, or some other adverse environment without the resources to protect yourself. Sometimes giving up on some Test resolves this Crisis (you can find shelter if you abandon your pride or de-prioritize carrying a message somewhere). Other times you literally have no recourse but to struggle through.

This Crisis usually has a vast area as its interaction point, sometimes excluding specific shelters. That said, if the character can move away from these large interaction points, they can avoid the Crisis' attacks.

## Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 50]

Slowly and steadily, the world is killing you. If you're defeated by them, you can't keep going. You turn back—or, if there's no way to do so, you fall down, unconscious, and it's up to the GM to decide what happens then. Normally, it involves waking up in someone's care (or a monster's lair, or an enemy's prison) a while later. This makes a good time for a short break in play both to heighten tension and let the GM work out the details.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: the vital spirit in you won't give in! Deal 2d10 Heart Damage to the Crisis. Gain 5 Heart. Gain either 5 Spirit or 5 Fight. Finally, gain 3 Heart Shell (max 8) until your interval ends.

### *Failure Modes:*

*Brutal Sickness (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Damage to your Heart and also to either your Fight or your Spirit. Lose 1 point of interval.

*Staggering Haze (Passive Focus)*—you are in a staggering haze for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the passive focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 10-50+

The Heart Pool for this Crisis depends on how much of the character's work they must complete in adverse conditions. Basically, if it's a sideline, like a brief interregnum staggering through the desert before the character moves on to interesting matters in a city or oasis, then the exposure Crisis might only have 10 Heart. If the entire detailed action resolution takes place in harsh conditions, the GM can make this Crisis more important—perhaps 25 Heart, out of the 50 Progress needed to succeed, or even the full 50.

Success, in any case, means that the character has weathered the challenge. They're either used to the environment, conditions have improved, or they've moved past the part of the story concerned with their survival in a harsh climate.

## Don't Get Sick!

[Crisis]

This Crisis is similar, only, conditions aren't all that bad. It's raining, or it's dangerously but not lethally hot. You won't die or pass out from it, but you might get sick!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 10]

The harsh weather or other such condition is wearing at you. If you're defeated by it, you get sick! The cold or heatstroke or frostbite or infected wound or whatever it is lingers for a few encounters or even a session or two.

*Epic Move (Survival):* the vital spirit in you won't give in! Deal 2d6 Heart Damage to the Crisis. Gain 5 Heart. Gain either 5 Spirit or 5 Fight. Finally, gain 3 Heart Shell (max 8) until your interval ends.

### Failure Modes:

*Fighting off Sickness (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Damage to your Heart and also to either your Fight or your Spirit. Lose 1 point of interval.

*Staggering Haze (Passive Focus)*—you are in a staggering haze for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the passive focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 6 / Heart Pool 5-10

At 5-10 Progress the character has proven that they can handle a little harsh weather. They earn the victory, "not impeded by the inclement conditions."

Example: "On top of everything else, it's raining."

Things are already tough for a character—and then it starts to rain.

In the city, and assuming the character is well-fed and usually has warm clothing and shelter and such, this isn't much of a Crisis. It's probably just a general environmental condition. In the wild, or for a runaway with limited resources, it could be a Suddenly Unstable Footing and/or a Don't Get Sick! Crisis.

It's also possible for the rain to become a Crisis Weapon.

A vampire, for instance, immune to much of the environmental impact, takes advantage of the rain in a fight against a vampire hunter. They turn that rain into a Crisis, allowing the elements to wear down, blind, and weary the hunter as they fight—again, either a Suddenly Unstable Footing Crisis or a Don't Get Sick! Crisis. Of course, the vampire hunter, in turn, can use their Heart Damage against the Crisis for *something*—either Progress towards whatever larger goal they are working on or Heart Damage to the vampire. Both cases are probably about the vampire hunter turning the vampire's confidence against them, but could instead be something on the order of "the vampire hunter, by weathering this storm, shows they're the kind of tough hero this vampire wasn't expecting to fight today."

## Grace Challenges

Unexpectedly you have met someone whom it is important to impress! It may be the meeting or the value of impressing them that is unexpected. In either case manners are called for and you cannot think through your approach in advance. What's at stake here is the NPC's formal approval, in their role as . . . whatever their role in society is; if a character needs to win someone's *affection* look to the Hostility Challenges, below.

Here are two examples:

You've just discovered that this person can bring all your plans to a halt, or at least make your life much worse. Maybe it's an accident. Maybe an enemy's poisoning their mind against you! In either case, you better make a good impression!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 2d6+1 Heart Damage [max 20]

You struggle to stay on this person's good side. When you're defeated (or just decide that it's not worth it), the GM declares that that person is now an enemy or at least a problematically hostile force. If they are basically good and Deserving then you may get back in their favor later, either with a Test or when events display your virtue.

*Epic Move (Victory):* the perfect line! The perfect move! Some other amazing incident of suaveness. Deal 20 Heart Damage to the Crisis, likely defeating it instantly.

#### *Failure Modes:*

*Admittedly, This Looks Bad (Penalty)*—take 2d6+1 Heart Damage and take a -1 *degenerating situation* penalty (max -3) to Heart Defense until the Crisis resolves.

*Social Entanglement (Active Focus)*—you lay low, conceal your activities, or focus your attention entirely on the dignitary. This uses the active focus rules.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 20

At 20 Progress you typically win them over. If they're basically Deserving, they recognize your quality; if they're Wicked, they decide it's not worth bothering you. This is either a Victory for you or an unhappy eventuality that turns their wrath on some opponent.

You're doing something disreputable. Or dangerous. Or scary.

Then—

You realize that those people? Over there? They're the parents of the person you love more than anything else in life. Maybe they're disapproving. Maybe they're hostages. Maybe they're judging you. Maybe they're in danger. Whatever!

It's a Crisis!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 40]

You work hard to keep this situation from spiraling out of control. Maybe it's a crushing strain on your heart, your vitality, your pride. Maybe it calls for incredible heroism. Maybe the situation degenerates into farce. If this Crisis defeats you then either your beloved's parents are hurt or captured or they reject or loathe you. Much as with the Unexpected Dignitary Crisis, burnt bridges may usually be later mended—but there are no guarantees, particularly if your Exemplar Dice are low.

*Epic Move (Victory):* they're safe! They don't reject you! Deal the Crisis' starting Heart pool [35] in Heart Damage to it, most likely defeating it instantly.

#### *Failure Modes:*

*Awkward Moment (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage and take a -1 *degenerating situation* penalty to Heart Defense (max -3) until you resolve the Crisis or it defeats you. You cannot choose this option if you have a -3 *degenerating situation* penalty already.

*Dropping Everything Else (Active Focus)*—you drop everything, or at least everything you're not already scrambling to deal with, and focus entirely on your beloved's parents. This uses the active focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 35 (but may vary)

At 35 Progress, you've usually won them over or won their safety. You may, if they are heroes in their own right, have also won their help.

### Example: "I Call the City Council"

Suppose a PC or NPC wants to use some governmental agency against an enemy—whether a King, a Princess, a guard-captain, or a faceless bureau. This starts as a Test but will rapidly become a Grace Crisis for their target. This assumes some important or self-important person will investigate personally; if the way to thwart this stratagem is to maneuver through a bureaucratic and impersonal maze, this is a Scholarly Crisis or Work Crisis (below).

## Hostility Challenges

Unexpectedly an NPC is hostile to you.

Further, that hostility is something that you *can* resolve—it's not just the universal element of their character, or a first impression that they refuse to sacrifice. They dislike you. That dislike may be a Trial to you, or it may be carefully cultivated by some enemy as a Crisis. Either way, the GM will allow you to resolve and remove that hostility through politeness, charm, compromise, intimidation, exposition, discussion, or some other social or practical means.

A Hostility Crisis is similar to a Grace Crisis. What's at stake in a Grace Crisis is the NPC's respect for you and appreciation for you according to their formal role in society; what's at stake in a Hostility Crisis is their personal feelings. You can imagine that both might be at stake at once in a conflict that involves your beloved's parents; win the Grace Crisis and lose the Hostility Crisis, and they'll acknowledge you but won't like you. Win the Hostility Crisis and lose the Grace Crisis and they'll like you but think you're unsuitable! Win a Hostility Crisis and you'll have made a connection.

Here are two examples:

This NPC misunderstands you. They think you're evil!

Convincing them otherwise is a problem.

They don't want to listen! They want, in fact, to attack you physically! But there's also something in them that waits for you to prove that you're actually evil before they strike.

This Crisis has the following special feature:

**Recoverable:** if this Crisis defeats you, it doesn't disappear. It gains 5 Heart and it stops attacking, but it remains in play and you are still able to beat *it*.

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 15]

You try to explain yourself and keep them from attacking you. If this Crisis defeats you then you've failed at this—the NPC attacks you physically! However, unlike most other Crises, you should leave the Crisis in play at this point—if you defeat the Crisis before you defeat the NPC, then they stop attacking.

**Epic Move (Survival):** for a moment, there's a connection. Deal 2d6 Heart Damage to the Crisis. The Crisis will not attack you again, nor the associated NPC, until your next interval. This condition applies even should you concede tactical defeat.

### Failure Modes:

**Can't We Talk About This? (Passive Focus)**—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're focused on defending yourself verbally or physically. This uses the passive focus rules.

**Wounded Pride (Penalty)**—take 2d6 Heart Damage. You become more fond of or interested in the NPC or more offended by the misunderstanding; take -3 Heart Shell (max -8).

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 20

At 20 Progress, you typically win a victory: "The NPC realizes their error and becomes friendly."

Note that dealing Heart Damage to the Crisis is not the same as dealing Heart Damage to the NPC. Overcoming hostility is draining, but being hostile is generally Heart-neutral. Letting go of it can actually feel good!

## Frosty or Bitter NPC

[Crisis]

This NPC is good at heart, but acts mean anyway. Maybe they're grumpy. Maybe they're cynical. Maybe you're just off on the wrong foot.

This Crisis has the following special feature:

**Recoverable:** if this Crisis defeats you, it doesn't disappear. It gains 5 Heart and it stops attacking, but it remains in play and you are still able to beat *it*.

## Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 1d10 Heart Damage [max 10]

You try to make a connection. If this Crisis defeats you then the NPC shuts you down. They won't attack you physically. They *might* use a Spiritual or Heart Weapon against you, or they might just snark, refuse to cooperate, and make themselves either unpleasant or scarce. Unlike most Crises, this Crisis stays in play at this point—if you defeat the Crisis later in the conflict, then you make a connection and they stop attacking or otherwise being a pain.

**Epic Move (Survival):** for a moment, there's a connection. Deal 1d10 Heart Damage to the Crisis. The Crisis will not attack you again, nor the associated NPC, until your next interval. This condition applies even should you concede tactical defeat.

### Failure Modes:

*Trying too Hard (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're focused on trying to overcome the NPC's hostility. This uses the passive focus rules.

*Caring too Much (Penalty)*—take 1d10 Heart Damage and start caring whether this person likes you. Take -3 Heart Shell (max -8).

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 10+

Unless this is a very important NPC, the Crisis usually has a pool of 10 Heart. When you've dealt that much Heart Damage to the Crisis, you win a Victory: "You've made a connection to that NPC, and they become friendly."

Note that dealing Heart Damage to the Crisis is not the same as dealing Heart Damage to the NPC. Overcoming hostility is draining, but being hostile is generally Heart-neutral. Letting go of it can actually feel good!

### Example: "The Kid."

You're trapped in the school gym with an obsessive-compulsive kid.

Trapped, more specifically, by zombies.

You're doing OK at using dodgeball-based terrain control to smooch the heads of zombies that get in, but somehow, in the middle of all this, the kid's gone snarky on you. You kind of need them to *not* be in your way: it's a Crisis.

Your first roll is a 10, followed by a 1 for Damage—

You've stalled the Crisis for the rest of your interval, but it's brewing.

When your next interval comes, the kid's getting weird again.

Over the course of that interval, while you're *trying* to concentrate on the zombies, the kid gets in your way or on your nerves for a total of 29 Heart Damage. No failures, no epic moves, just bit by bit they're draining you—and it's actually more of a risk than what the zombies are managing to your flesh! So you turn and lash out at the kid (or throw them in the closet, or soothe their fears, or give them a dazzling smile that stuns them—whatever seems appropriate) with your Heart Weapon, ignoring the zombies for a round while you close out the Crisis.

## Leadership Challenges

Unexpectedly you have to lead, guide, or teach somebody or a group. This is most unexpected if your "to your Students" is low. For instance you attend a meeting of important people in a city and it is dissolving into a fight or ruckus. You have to step up and organize them or you won't get anything done—that's a Leadership Crisis!

Here's an example:

### Unruly Crowd

[Crisis]

Is it enemy action? Is it just bad luck? Suddenly your alliance is dissolving into chaos. Suddenly the board meeting, or the people on the streets, or the ship's crew, or your marvelous assembly of Nuclear Heroes—they're practically in a riot!

This Crisis has the following special feature:

**Recoverable:** if this Crisis defeats you, it doesn't disappear. It gains 5 Heart and it stops attacking, but it remains in play and you are still able to beat *it*.

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 16 / 1d10 Heart Damage [max 10]

You try to keep things from dissolving completely into chaos and inanity. If you fail, the unruly crowd exerts *terrain control*—on you, sometimes on your allies, and occasionally even on your enemies. Even when the crowd degenerates to this point, the Crisis remains in play, and you may remove the terrain control by defeating it. This terrain control is described below:

**Terrain Control:** the unruly crowd may constrain any number of characters.

The crowd may constrain any character, who is within Short Range of its interaction points or moving into Melee Range of such a point, to Short Range Mobility. It may do this on its action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained characters that move to disentangle themselves from the

unruly crowd, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or take damage—2d6 or +2 damage (max 2d6+10).

Constrained characters that move a Test or Crisis closer, or use a Heart Weapon to attack something, without justifying it in some fashion as "in response to a request from the unruly crowd," roll d10+their Heart Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or action or take damage—2d6 or +2 Heart Damage (max 2d6+10).

For instance, you're trying to convince a town council to let you build a school for mutants. But you've lost control of the situation and now they're unruly! They demand instead that you prove that mutants aren't evil. If you want to keep working on zoning-related arguments, you'll face that terrain control! If you try to leave, they won't attack you, but they will get in your way. It's perfectly fine, though, to find a tissue-thin justification like, "I'm trying to convince them that mutants aren't evil by focusing on the relentlessly normal and reassuringly humdrum civic process—would evil mutants care about zoning laws?"

*Epic Move (Victory):* Flawlessly you rise to the occasion, dealing 20 Heart Damage to the Crisis and thus most likely subduing the crowd.

*Failure Modes:*

*Herding Cats (Active Focus)*—spend the next 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis ends frantically trying to rein people in and get all the relevant cats herded and ducks in a row. This uses the active focus rules.

*Sucked In (Penalty)*—take 1d10 Heart Damage and 1d10 Spirit Damage. You're sucked in to the crowd's perspective. If the crowd defeats you, you will not be able to use tissue-thin arguments to avoid terrain control, and the terrain control Damage and Heart Damage improves by +1d6 (to a maximum of +2d6.) This penalty has no effect if you defeat the Crisis before it defeats you.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 20

When you have earned 20 Progress, the crowd settles down. It no longer exerts terrain control, if it was doing so, and it becomes an orderly and pliable unit.

## Example: "I Calm the Mob"

Perhaps an enemy lashed up the mob. Perhaps it develops naturally from a condition of social unrest. But once you go out to face it, it's not just a Test that you can abandon at your leisure—it's a Leadership Crisis. Once you're out in the raging crowd, you either bring your order to them or they bring theirs to you.

## Legal Challenges

Unexpectedly you are in trouble with the law or with the rules of some place like your martial arts school, secret society, werewolf clan, or special ops team. You will need to explain yourself or someone else to the satisfaction of a magistrate, police officer, or their equivalent!

Here are two examples:

### Suspicious Cop

[Crisis]

There's a cop who does not believe you are on the level!

This Crisis usually represents a cop who is just investigating you, but it can also mean a cop who is actively harassing or arresting you—as long as something *could* happen to change their mind and convince them to let you go and either help you out or leave, this is the right Crisis to use.

This Crisis has the following special feature:

***Don't Fight!***: the "suspicious cop" Crisis gains 3 Heart Shell (max 8) if the cop interaction point witnesses physical violence.

In a pulp story or other genre where you can get into a fight with a cop and wind up with a bloody nose and a new friend rather than jail time, it may also have:

***Recoverable***: if this Crisis defeats you, it doesn't disappear. It gains 5 Heart and it stops attacking, but it remains in play and you are still able to beat *it*.

## Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d6+1 Heart Damage [max 30]

You try to defray the cop's suspicions. If you take 30 Heart Damage, or if you concede tactical defeat, then the cop becomes a hostile NPC. As noted, it's possible *in some genres* to recover the situation, convincing the cop that you are harmless or righteous from the back of the police car or while fighting them. In such a genre, the Crisis remains in play even after defeating you, and if you defeat it in turn the cop is no longer hostile and will usually either waive an ongoing arrest or let you go after some questions.

*Epic Move (Victory):* you've turned aside the cop's suspicions. Deal 10 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

*Failure Modes:*

*Admittedly, This Looks Bad (Penalty)*—take 2d6+1 Heart Damage. The Crisis gains 3 Heart Shell (max 8) and you take a -2 *legal impediment* penalty to Heart and Spirit Damage dealt (max -3) against all other targets until the Crisis is resolved.

*Frantic Explanation (Active Focus)*—you spend the next 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, defraying the cop's suspicions. If you're suave, maybe you're convincing. If you're not, maybe the cop is just talking to you because it's procedure, and you're wasting your time irritating or amusing them. In either case this uses the active focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 10

When you have earned 10 Progress, the cop loses interest or turns their attention towards your enemies.

You've been taken into police custody!  
 It's a huge Crisis!  
 How will it resolve?

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d6+1 Heart Damage [max 30]

You struggle to clear your name, make a favorable plea bargain, conduct your affairs despite the imprisonment, and the like. Remember that if the penalty for losing this struggle is more than you can cope with, you can stake your Heart on this defense—or, if you have Exemplar Dice remaining, you could just give up on the whole surrounding conflict and trust that things will get better. If you are defeated, in any case, you face whatever weight of legal sanction is poised to descend upon you.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: something good happens with your case. Deal 2d6+1 Heart Damage to the Crisis and gain +1 *leverage* to your Solve and your Heart Defense (max +3) until your interval ends.

#### *Failure Modes:*

*Not Good For Business (Penalty)*—take 2d6+1 Heart Damage. The Crisis gains 3 Heart Shell (max 8) and you take a -2 *legal impediment* penalty to Heart and Spirit Damage dealt (max -3) against all other targets until the Crisis is resolved.

*Locked Up (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're prevented from taking other actions by the fact that you're locked up. This uses the passive focus rules.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 9 / Heart Pool 20

When you've made 20 points of Progress against the Crisis, you've earned some sort of Victory. Unless you're playing a gritty crime or legal drama, this is probably "you are now free to go."

### Example: "In the Clink"

You're an honest merchant! Even if you do dramatic PC-type stuff on the side, the fact that you're under arrest right now is really quite unfair.

Normally you would attack the Crisis. But you're low on Exemplar Dice, so you'd like to conserve interval. You decide to wait things out and see what happens.

Your first defense roll is an epic move.

Why, someone else just confessed to the crime! That's 8 Progress for you right there, and a +1 to your Solve and Heart Defense until your interval ends. It doesn't get you out, though, because the police think your friends put the person up to confessing, and the details don't match.

A couple more rounds pass. You're fine the first round, hitting the target of 15 and earning 3 more Progress when you do.

The second round you take 4 Heart Damage from stress.

Then another epic move, another break for you in the case: you've just obtained *pro bono* help from an excellent lawyer, and another 6 Progress. At this point you're probably telling yourself one of two stories as a player: "I am so running this town from the prison" or "fate must love me!"

You ready and wield a Heart Weapon with a +1 Defense; that, plus the +2 *leverage* bonus, puts you in a pretty good position for the next few rounds. But you've pushed your luck too far: a 7's just as easy to roll as a 10, and you roll one. Your options aren't palatable; the Crisis will become very difficult to deal with alone if you opt for *No Good For Business*, and passive focus is a tricky thing when you're trying to conserve interval. You've been lucky so far, though, so you risk it.

For the next four rounds, you are *Locked Up*.

The first round you take 8 Heart Damage. Is the situation sinking in? Are you cut off from outside contact? Is it just fear?

The next round it's another epic move, and 9 Heart Damage you deal to the Crisis. The warden comes to get you, cursing; you walk out of prison, whistling, having lost all of 12 Heart and two rounds of interval and with a +3 to Solve and Heart Defense for the remainder of your interval to do what you need to do next. The narrative is fixed in your mind: whether it's "fate's favored fool," "all part of my plan," or something else, you can leverage the whole incident to accomplish your other tasks with style.

## Medical Challenge

Unexpectedly someone needs medical treatment! If you do not have access to someone proficient in handling medical challenges this is a matter for some concern.

Here are three examples:

### Acute Sickness or Injury!

[Crisis]

You're sick! Or injured!

Can you push past it and focus on what you need to do right now?

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 20]

You fight to ignore the pain, hold off the dizziness, and in general keep going even with sickness consuming you. If this Crisis defeats you, you take a large chunk of Fight Damage (often 30) and have lingering complications or penalties as the GM deems fit. It's often worthwhile to stake your Heart on preventing this outcome.

*Epic Move (Victory):* you won't let a thing like this stop you. Deal 20 Heart Damage to the Crisis, which is normally enough to defeat it.

### Failure Modes:

*Failing (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage and you are *doomed*. You have 1d10 rounds to defeat the Crisis (starting next round), or if you were already doomed, you lose 1d6 rounds from your remaining time. If you do not defeat it in that time, you are defeated, just as if the Crisis dealt 20 Heart Damage to you.

*Ham it Up (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're coughing, staggering, wheezing, falling down, resting, whining or melodramatically orating about pain, or otherwise doing stuff to drive home how sick or injured you are. This uses the active focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 20

When you've made 20 points of Progress against the Crisis, you've overcome the illness. That doesn't mean you're miraculously better ("oh, hey, my broken leg healed") but it does mean that it becomes a cosmetic issue rather than a serious issue for at least the next few encounters.

## Debilitating Sickness or Injury!

[Crisis]

You're sick! Or injured!

It's not an intense and vivid sickness. It's not a broken bone that makes you wince and cry out, or Eduardo's Encysted Conflagration, the disease that traps small fire elementals in pores under your skin. It's more of a slow, long-term drain. It's sapping your vitality. It's dragging you down.

Can you push past it and focus on what you need to do right now?

## Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 30]

You fight . . . just to keep going. If this Crisis defeats you, you have to rest—to find some decent place and just lay down for the rest of the battle. That may or may not remove you from play; it's legitimate to have someone carry you while you use Heart and Spirit Weapons, say.

*Epic Move (Survival):* desperation breeds urgency. Gain a +2 *stand against death* bonus to all Damage or Progress dealt (max +5) until your interval ends, and then deal 2d10 Heart Damage (plus your *stand against death* bonus) to this Crisis.

### *Failure Modes:*

*Struggle Warily On (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage and you are *doomed*. You have 1d10 rounds to defeat the Crisis (starting next round), or if you were already doomed, you lose 1d6 rounds from your remaining time. If you do not defeat it in that time, you are defeated, just as if the Crisis dealt 30 Heart Damage to you.

*Staggering Haze (Passive Focus)*—you are in a staggering haze and cannot act for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the passive focus rules.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 25

When you've made 25 points of Progress against the Crisis, the illness recedes.

### A Doctor Is Needed!

[Crisis]

Someone is sick! A doctor is needed!  
Can you save them?

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 20]

If you're defending against the Crisis, it means you don't have time to focus on treatment—you're busy with something else, and just trying to hold the Crisis at bay until you have time to do serious medical work. If it defeats you, in any case, then something bad happens—the patient dies; or gets worse, and you can't treat them any further right now; or you're driven out of town as a quack doctor; or whatever else seems appropriate.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: you stall the Crisis. Gain a +2 *stand against death* bonus to all Damage or Progress dealt (max +5) until your interval ends, and then deal 2d6 Heart Damage (plus your *stand against death* bonus) to this Crisis.

### Failure Modes:

*Desperate Intervention (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're in a desperate struggle to keep the patient alive. This uses the passive focus rules.

*You're Losing Them! (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage and you are (or, at least, your patient is) *doomed*. You have 1d10 rounds to defeat the Crisis (starting next round), or if you were already doomed, you lose 1d6 rounds from your remaining time. If you do not defeat it in that time, you are defeated, just as if the Crisis dealt 20 Heart Damage to you.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 9 / Heart Pool 20

When you've made 20 points of Progress against the Crisis, miracle of miracles! The illness recedes, or, if appropriate, is entirely defeated.

### Example: "Break their Arm"

The Crisis of an acute injury works just as well for an injury that hasn't happened yet.

Here's how!

Imagine that you're having a lot of trouble hitting an enemy. They use a shield to devastating effect! So you decide to try to hit the same point in their defense every time—hoping to either break their shield (a Craft Crisis) or their arm (a Medical Crisis). Let's say it's the latter.

Until you deal at least a little Heart Damage, you haven't succeeded.

When you earn your victory and inflict your desired unhappy eventuality it is as if they have just lost a Medical Crisis—

- their arm is broken;
- they take 30 Fight Damage;
- they take appropriate penalties and lingering effects; and
- it's as if they couldn't keep going through the pain.

Somewhere in between—the details are pretty much entirely at your target's option, though it's likely to happen if they happen to *fail* during a defense—their arm actually breaks and they start trying to weather it.

## Motivation Challenge

Unexpectedly an NPC is indifferent and uninterested in doing what you would like them to do! They are reachable through persuasion, they just don't know yet why they should care.

Here's the classic example:

### Apathetic NPC or NPCs

[Crisis]

This NPC ought to care. But they don't!  
It's a Crisis!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 1d10 Heart Damage [max 10]

This is usually a Trial—you're working on something else, but there's a chance at either free Progress or some Heart Damage when an NPC unexpectedly doesn't play along with your plan. If you manage in passing to revive or create interest in them, that's bonus progress; otherwise, they are a potentially frustrating speedbump. In any case, if the Crisis defeats you, the unhappy eventuality is that the NPC does not care.

*Epic Move (Victory)*: you've sparked their interest. Deal 10 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

### Failure Modes:

*Motivate (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you change your focus to showing this NPC why they ought to care. This uses the active focus rules.

*Enthusiasm . . . Fading . . . (Penalty)*—take 1d10 Heart Damage and lose 1 interval as their apathy bogs you down.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 10

It usually takes 10 Progress to motivate the apathetic NPC. If that's not enough of a victory to be worth your time, you might earn their help with what you're doing instead.

### Example: Expectation Clash

You're messengers and heroes of a great Duchy, trying to bring a nearby orcish kingdom into your alliance against a rising ancient evil. You were prepared for the orcs to join you, you were prepared for them to be part of evil's army. What you weren't expecting was to get to their capital and find nobody particularly interested in ancient evils. "It's the new century," an orc merchant prince airily explains. "The light of reason has banished such muddy old concerns."

You move on to the elves, but it's *disheartening*. In the background you exchange furious letters with the merchant prince, trying to convince *him*, at least, to care.

## Perception Crisis

Unexpectedly you have to locate something important. Maybe it is hidden. Maybe it is just subtle. Use your senses!

Here are two examples:

### Something is Hidden

[Crisis]

Something is hidden, and the situation is worse for you because of that.

Perhaps it's evidence or proof. Perhaps it's the location of an elusive enemy. Whatever it is, there's a missing piece.

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 1d10 Heart Damage [max 20]

If this is a Crisis and not just a Test, that means you can't just turn your back on the lost or hidden thing—not finding it is *bad*. Defense here is a matter of looking for it, casually but constantly, as you fight. If the Crisis defeats you, *you won't find it*.

*Epic Move (Victory)*: you've found it! Or at least dealt 10 Heart Damage to the Crisis, which really ought to do.

*Failure Modes*:

*Hunt it Down (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you wander around trying to find or figure out what you're missing. This uses the active focus rules.

*Missing Piece (Penalty)*—while it's missing, you're vulnerable. Take a -1 *oblivious* penalty to Solve and Heart Defense (max -3) until the Crisis resolves.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 10

It usually takes just 10 Progress to find the important thing.

### Impending Ambush

[Crisis]

The enemy plans to take advantage of something you don't know about. If you don't spot it before they close the trap, it's a serious Crisis!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d6+1 Heart Damage [max 10-15]

Sensing some danger—at least, the player does, if the character doesn't—you watch for evidence of hidden intent! If this Crisis defeats you, you are surprised; this normally manifests as either a chunk of Fight or Spirit Damage or a penalty to the corresponding Shell for the rest of your interval.

*Epic Move (Victory)*: you've spotted the incoming ambush or hidden threat. Deal the Crisis' starting Heart Pool in Heart Damage to the Crisis.

*Failure Modes*:

*Exposed (Penalty)*—until you spot the ambush, you're vulnerable. Take a -1 *oblivious* penalty to Solve and Heart Defense (max -3) until the Crisis resolves.

*Paranoia (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you focus on finding the ambush. This uses the active focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 10-15

10-15 Progress made against the ambush is usually sufficient to riddle it out and not suffer surprise—or, if applicable, to turn it on its head and bring that same Damage or Shell penalty down on your enemy's head.

## Example: "Laying in Wait"

A group of five characters is traveling through a dark forest. They face a possible ambush by three evil bats!

The GM can handle this in several ways.

The bats could wield a single Ambush Crisis against the characters. This would allow them to surprise all the characters at once. Alternately, if they have some evil bat scheme that could surprise the characters individually, they could wield five separate Ambush Crises, one against each character. We're going to go with the latter option. The bats only have three actions to ambush with, so they pick three characters to attack with the Crisis. The defenders roll 9, 4, and 6—adding their Heart Defense, which ranges from 7 to 8, that's 16, 12, and 14. Two defend, dealing 3 Heart Damage to the relevant bats; one takes 9 Heart Damage.

There are two ways the players can respond.

First, they can just ignore the context of the ambush and charge. This is fine. The bats are opponents, they're on the battlefield, the conflict has

started—the GM can make the bats stealthy, and then characters must roll to become aware of them, but the point is, it's acceptable to assume that the fight has started.

Second, they can focus on the ambush.

Let's assume three reckless characters charge in to fight the bats, while two characters—forward scouts—attack the ambush with Heart Weapons. They succeed, turning the conflict around and taking the bats by surprise. Meanwhile, the bats finish the ambush on one of the other characters, putting that character at a disadvantage.

At this point it's been determined: two scouts effectively got the drop on the evil bats, while one of the other characters is completely freaked out by the sudden fight. There are a couple of characters for whom the matter of who surprised who is kind of hanging—leftover, and abandoned if everyone starts focusing on the physical fight.

This could mean either of two different things.

The first is that even while the physical fight happens, the players and GM are still kind of backfilling in the story of how it started. The second is that both the characters and bats have surprises for one another, and each time an ambush Crisis resolves, we see what one of those surprises might be.

It's not as clean, generally speaking, as if the characters resolved the ambush before the physical fight started, but then again, *someone* had to decide to handle things that way, and they're at least one sixth of the live human beings involved in play, so that's probably all right.

#### Example: "The Baron's Chambers."

You've broken into the private chambers of your enemy, the evil Baron. You must find the deed he stole from your family. Unfortunately, he was at home, so you have to find it *while* dueling him.

As long as the Baron sticks to his sword, the *oblivious* penalty is no big deal.

You might fail three times in a row while defending against "something is hidden:" so what? It's just -3 to Solve and Heart Defense.

But then the Baron switches to a Heart Weapon—he starts trying to stall you until his guards get there, rather than to stab you. *Now* you're in trouble—either you have to give up on finding the deed right away, or you're practically a helpless target!

## Performance Challenges

Unexpectedly you have to commit an act of artistic valor. Swiftly, to your flute and zither! Quickly, to the stage! The lives of thousands depend upon your watercolor brush! Performance Crises do not come up very often, but buying your character proficiency with them also makes your character a decent artist or performer of whatever sort.

### But Will You Please the King?

[Crisis]

You're performing for an important person—but will they look on you with favor?

#### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 15-20]

You strive—but if this Crisis defeats you, then your music or performance is not pleasing to the important person. Something will be lost to you or an important opportunity will not be given.

*Epic Move (Victory):* that, my dear heart, was perfection. Deal an instant 15 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

#### *Failure Modes:*

*Heartless Audience (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage, and bleed for another 1d10 *dying up here* Heart Damage (max 3d10) per round until the Crisis is resolved.

*Flow (Active Focus)*—you give your whole soul to the performance for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the active focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 15

15 Progress is usually sufficient to declare, "My performance pleased them" and earn whatever benefit accords.

## Nobody Leaves This Stage Without Performing

[Crisis]

Medium Range

You've wandered into a particularly nasty crew of thespians, beat poets, jazz musicians, or Sharcassos (half-shark, half-Picasso). You'd like to just go, but *nobody* leaves *this stage* without performing.

This Crisis has the following special feature:

**Ranged:** this Crisis can attack from Medium Range in remaining-time, distance from its interaction points, or both—your troubles will begin a bit before the performance, and continue even if you *do* leave the stage.

**Recoverable:** if this Crisis defeats you, it doesn't disappear. It gains 5 Heart and it stops attacking, but it remains in play and you are still able to beat *it*.

## Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 10]

You make your excuses, or attempt some half-hearted work. If this Crisis defeats you, then these terrifying improvisational performers become an unruly crowd that exerts *terrain control* upon you and possibly your allies. Even when the situation degenerates to this point, the Crisis remains in play, and you may remove the terrain control by defeating it. This terrain control is described below:

**Terrain Control:** the unruly crowd may constrain any number of characters.

The crowd may constrain any character who is within Medium Range of its interaction points to Short Range Mobility. It may do this on its action or reactively when they seek to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

Constrained characters that move to disentangle themselves from the unruly crowd, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll d10+their Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or take damage—3d6 or +0 damage (max 3d6).

Constrained characters that move a Test or Crisis closer, or use a Heart Weapon to attack something, without justifying it in some fashion as "part of the performance," roll d10+their Heart Defense. If they roll 13 or less, they must either cancel their move or action or take damage—3d6 or +0 Heart Damage (max 3d6).

*Epic Move (Survival)*: you're doing OK here. Deal 2d6 Heart Damage to the Crisis, cancel any *dying up here* penalty, and gain 3 Heart yourself.

*Failure Modes*:

*Heartless Audience (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage and bleed for another 1d6 *dying up here* Heart Damage (max 3d6) per round until the Crisis is resolved.

*A Brilliant Panic (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're desperately improvising. This uses the passive focus rules.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 6 / Heart Pool 20

20 Progress is usually sufficient to indicate that you have given the crowd their metaphorical pound of flesh.

## Example: "Musical Duel"

Any time a conflict centers on the reactions of some audience—any time two characters act against one another while aiming their efforts at pleasing or winning over a third—it is possible to turn the matter into a musical or artistic duel. Simply attempt to win over your mutual target with music; this then may become a Crisis for the other side. From such transformations were wrought the song-duels of the 1900s and the viciously musical power the Von Trapp Family used to wrest the Spear of Destiny from the Axis under the watchful eyes of Heaven.

## Political Challenges

Unexpectedly you are embroiled in a political matter that you must resolve. Perhaps you are caught in the machinations of two rival families. Perhaps you have been nominated unexpectedly for democratic office, or falsely named a lost prince or princess as part of some devious gambit by a great family. To swim unbitten with such sharks requires political skill!

### Hidden Implications

[Crisis]

Someone's asked a favor—but do you really know what you're setting yourself up for?

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 12]

Hidden motives and implications move about you like sharks in an empyrean sea. Do they penetrate your consciousness? If the Crisis defeats you, it is not so: they rend you and leave you vulnerable. It becomes an explicit stipulation that you don't know what you're getting into.

*Epic Move (Victory):* you see what's really going on, dealing 15 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

### *Failure Modes:*

*Hasty Commitment (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage and [stipulate that you] take a strong and dramatically interesting position regarding these matters that may or may not be correct. "Of course I'll help you!" you might cry, or tell the GM, "I know this person's trying to get me to betray the throne. But I'd better play along for now!" Even if you later defeat the Crisis, the GM will not give you information that contradicts this. The GM may decide that your hasty commitment in and of itself represents a victory or tactical defeat, in which case the Crisis ends.

*Insight (Active Focus)*—you spend 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves listening, thinking, and playing along. This uses the active focus rules.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 15

15 Progress is usually enough to see through the veils of deception or subtle implication to the truth.

## Rejection Challenges

Unexpectedly someone declares their love or passion for you—and it's more than you are ready for at this time! You must find a way to reject them without doing more harm than you intend.

### Why is this NPC in my Bed?

[Crisis]

Perhaps you expected a different NPC in your bed. Perhaps you did not expect your bed to be occupied at all. In any case this is awkward, as (e.g.) you're expecting the British Prime Minister, a supervillain attack, a gateway to the Green Dimension, a group of hard-bitten animal rights activists, or all of them at once, relatively soon.

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 1d10 Heart Damage [max 10]

You try to spare their feelings as you reject them. If the Crisis defeats you, make sure the GM knows what your general approach to the matter was. The GM chooses an unhappy eventuality: either you've hurt them; you've made them an enemy; or you've failed to reject them properly, and they think you're still interested.

*Epic Move (Victory)*: you may choose to resolve the situation either with honesty or with deception. Either way, shockingly, it works, and without hurt feelings, at least for now. Deal 10 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

### Failure Modes:

*Farce (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're focused on trying to juggle preventing hurt feelings and whatever else is going on. This uses the active focus rules.

*Heated Argument (Penalty)*—take 1d10 Heart Damage, 1d10 Spirit Damage, and a -1 *degenerating situation* (max -3) to Heart Defense until you resolve the Crisis or it defeats you.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 10

10 Progress usually suffices to extricate yourself from this unexpected and undesired entanglement.

### Doomed Love

[Crisis]

This NPC loves you.  
It's a doomed love!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 15]

Again, you try to spare their feelings as you reject them. Remember that you can stake your Heart to save theirs, if it comes to that. Defeat leads to the same unhappy eventuality as "Why is this NPC in my bed?" does—you've hurt them, possibly to the point of tragic behavior; you've made them an enemy; or you've failed to reject them properly, and they cling to you still.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: you gently deflect their interest—at least for right now. Deal 2d10 Heart Damage to the Crisis and gain 3 Heart Shell (max 8) until the end of your interval, either from their affections or from the reminder of whatever reason it is you have for rejecting them.

*Failure Modes:*

*Disentangling Yourself (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're focused on trying to juggle preventing hurt feelings and whatever else is going on. This uses the passive focus rules.

*Fight! (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage. The NPC turns on you until you next deal Heart Damage to the Crisis, using a physical, spiritual, or heart weapon as appropriate. If they're already fighting you they become more accurate or deadly.

*Epic Move (Victory):* you may choose to resolve the situation either with honesty or with deception. Either way, shockingly, it works, and without hurt feelings, at least for now. Deal 10 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

*Failure Modes:*

*Farce (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're focused on trying to juggle preventing hurt feelings and whatever else is going on. This uses the active focus rules.

*Heated Argument (Penalty)*—take 1d10 Heart Damage, 1d10 Spirit Damage, and a -1 *degenerating situation* (max -3) to Heart Defense until you resolve the Crisis or it defeats you.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 35

If their love for you is a Crisis rather than a pleasant or tragic side note, it most likely takes quite a bit of work to handle properly. 35 Progress is necessary to earn the victory, "we have parted in peace, and they are neither shattered nor angry nor clinging to illusions."

### Example: "More than they can Chew"

In a series of fast-paced diplomatic encounters at a merchant hub, the characters are trying to do everything at once. But this time, as they broker their inhumanly complex deals, the GM's thinking: "they've bitten off more than they can chew. I think this'll take too many intervals to resolve."

Simple solution: drop a romantic crisis or two on our whirligig diplomats!

The NPC may not actually be *in their bed* every time, but a handful of Crises of the "Why is this NPC in my bed?" form are sure to give a bit of extra Progress to the characters over time, reducing the number of rounds it takes them to get things done.

### Example: "High School Tragedy"

You're a celibate witch engaged in a long-term social struggle with the head cheerleader for dominance over your high school. To wound you, she encouraged your best friend to believe that you have romantic feelings for him. It didn't take long for him to start returning this mythical desire.

It's not the first time a magical oath of celibacy has clouded the bright innocence of high school romance. It probably won't be the last. If you asked your teacher for help, she'd just laugh and reminisce about how medieval squires would make garlands for her hair. (And then claim it was in fact just yesterday, which may very well be true.) But what can you possibly do?

Getting out of this situation without hurting his feelings or introducing him to a forbidden magical world—that's going to be tricky!

## Scholarly Challenges

Unexpectedly you have to show off your scholarship—demonstrating your penmanship or knowledge of the classics, solving a riddle, proving your yin-yang mastery, or whatnot. Something needs your educated brain! An NPC won't talk to anyone who can't impress them with calligraphy. A goal of yours requires quickly sorting through a hundred scrolls of dry facts and figures to find the one forgery. Someone quotes half a line of ancient poetry, as if they want you to give the other half.

This is a job for a scholar!

This is a Job for a Scholar!

[Crisis]

The situation will worsen unless you solve this problem.

## Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 25]

If the Crisis defeats you, then you've let the task "die"—you may be able to do whatever it is, but the moment is lost and you can't do it now. Maybe you've lost your place on some huge project. Maybe you've made an impression of unacademic boorishness that you cannot now undo. In any case, your chance to solve this problem right now is lost.

Thus, defending against the "This is a Job for a Scholar!" Crisis is about keeping the problem simmering, the big picture in your head, and your options for moving forward open. If it's fundamentally a social Crisis, you talk like a scholar and think aloud as you stall. If it's fundamentally an intellectual Crisis, you have to keep a portion of your brain devoted to it. If it's a more practical issue, you keep doing the kind of preparatory work that brought the Crisis to Melee Range—file papers, manipulate devices, sift through scrolls, and the like. In short, you're keep the problem "live."

For example, an NPC wants you to impress them with calligraphy. Defending is talking about calligraphy, or meditating over your brush, or drawing sample lines. If you roll low, maybe you just don't have the energy to think about or deal with calligraphy right now. As another example, you have to find a forgery in a huge library. Defending is "taking the time to work on the task, keeping everything you need fresh in your mind."

*Epic Move (Survival)*: a passing realization deals 2d6 Heart Damage to the Crisis and earns you a +1 *scholarship* bonus to Solve (max +3) until the end of your interval.

### *Failure Modes:*

*Lost in Thought (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're distracted by elements of the problem. This uses the passive focus rules.

*Procrastinate (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage and delay work on the matter. You'll continue this later! It's harder to keep a problem live while procrastinating, so the penalty is that the Crisis immediately attacks you again!

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 10-30

When you earn 10 Progress for impressing someone or 30 Progress for solving an actual problem, you may declare the appropriate victory achieved.

### Example: "Tax Paperwork"

A character is in trouble in regards to their taxes. Once an auditor is involved this might become a Grace Crisis—but until then, sorting through paperwork and arcane tax law is a job for a scholar! The character may "defend" against this crisis by filing for extensions and making incomplete reports; or, of course, attack it directly by devoting time to the matter.

## Sneaky Challenges

Unexpectedly you need to hide or move stealthily! Most of the time you will consciously choose situations where you sneak, but sometimes you will find yourself needing to hide without planning for it in advance.

Here's the classic example:

Quick! Hide!

[Crisis]

Can you get to cover in time?

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 16 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 10]

You're off your game—instead of coolly sneaking around, you're scrambling to do what you have to do while also staying out of sight. If this Crisis defeats you, you've been spotted.

*Epic Move (Victory):* you're safe from observation! Deal 5 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

*Failure Modes:*

*Scrambling for Cover (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're scrambling for cover or struggling to stay out of sight and can't pay attention to anything else. This uses the active focus rules.

*In Plain Sight (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage. Each of your actions takes +1 round (max +3 rounds) to complete until the Crisis resolves, and this doesn't count against your interval. For instance, if you've triggered this failure mode three times, you have to spend 4 rounds to do one thing (without being noticed). The idea here is that you're trying to do whatever you're doing without being noticed, which slows everything to a crawl!

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 5

It takes 5 Progress to declare that you've hidden successfully. This doesn't necessarily mean that you're safe, it just negates the incident of almost-discovery and restores whatever rules for sneakiness were previously in force.

### Example: "Thieving"

A couple of characters are trying to steal an incredibly valuable vase. They conceal themselves via a Test, and the GM allows them a victory: the guards won't notice them unless something happens.

Something happens—

They run across *another thief!*

The battle is, momentarily noisy. It attracts a guard's attention. Quick! Hide!

## Speed Challenges

Unexpectedly you need to move quickly over a short distance—to grab a vase before it breaks, to win a race, to catch a horse as it runs away. If what you really need is agility, then this is (also?) an Agility Crisis, but if you can solve the problem with an all-out dash on relatively flat ground, it's a Speed Crisis.

Often you will also be moving using the normal movement rules—but it's the Crisis, and not the mechanism of the normal move, that determines if you can catch up.

## You Have to Act Fast!

[Crisis]

If you're not *there* in a few moments, there'll be trouble!  
You have to act fast!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 15]

When you "defend" in a Speed Crisis, you're trying not to fall behind. If this Crisis defeats you, it's too late—you didn't make it in time.

It takes 5 Progress to declare that you've hidden successfully. This doesn't necessarily mean that you're safe, it just negates the incident of almost-discovery and restores whatever rules for sneakiness were previously in force.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: you're gaining. Make 2d6 Progress. You may move your normal move, ignoring terrain control.

#### *Failure Modes:*

*Desperate Chase (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're struggling to keep up. This uses the passive focus rules.

*Strain (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage, 2d6 Fight Damage, and burn 1 point of interval.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 15

It takes 15 Progress to declare that you've reached what you needed to reach in time. The consequences for this victory are heavily dependent on what you were trying to reach and what the time constraint actually was.

#### Example: "Catching a Fleeing Foe"

Your enemy's running away. Ha! You think. You'll just move with them whenever they gain a Range on you while moving towards them, yourself, all the time. They're a bit unhappy about this, so they create a Test for

themselves: can they get away? This is, naturally, a Crisis for you. You could attack the Crisis with a Heart Weapon as you run, or you could let the Crisis attack you, instead, hoping to make Progress on it through successful defense.

## Travel Challenges

Unexpectedly you have to get somewhere fast. You need to put together a travel plan (bringing the Crisis into range) and then cover a lot of ground in a hurry!

Here are four examples:

### Reach Your Destination in Time

[Crisis]

If you're not *there* in a few hours/days, there'll be trouble!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 15]

As with a Speed Crisis, defending against this Crisis is about not falling behind. If the Crisis defeats you, you're too late.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: it's all under control. Make 2d6 Progress and gain 3 Heart Shell (max 8) until the end of your interval.

### Failure Modes:

*Scramble (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you can't do anything but ride hard, walk until you're exhausted, run around city streets, or otherwise struggle to keep up with the rigors of your schedule. This uses the rules for passive focus.

*Strain (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage and bleed for another 1d6 *falling behind* Heart Damage (max 3d6) per round until the Crisis is resolved.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 15

As with a Speed Crisis, it takes 15 Progress to declare that you've reached what you needed to reach in time.

## Get the Hang of this Horseback Thing

[Crisis]

This is your first time using a horse.  
Learning to ride while you have somewhere to go—it's not just a Test. It can go horribly wrong! It's a Crisis!

## Defense against the Crisis

Target 16 / 2d6 Heart Damage [max 15]

Defending against this Crisis, much like trying actively to solve it, is all about becoming used to riding and your horse. If this Crisis defeats you, then you're not up for horseback riding at this time, and will probably also be late to wherever you're going.

*Epic Move (Survival)*: it's all under control. Make 2d6 Progress and gain 3 Heart Shell (max 8) until the end of your interval. However, your butt hurts.

### *Failure Modes:*

*Concentrating on Not Falling Off (Passive Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you can't think about anything except not falling off. This uses the passive focus rules.

*Stiff and Weary (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage and bleed for another 1d6 *stiff and weary* Heart Damage (max 1d6) per round until the Crisis is resolved.

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 15

If you earn 15 Progress on this Crisis, you may declare a victory: you've gotten used to horseback riding and your horse.

## Don't Crash Your Boat!

[Crisis]

Your motorboat is out of control!  
Don't crash it into anything . . .

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d6+1 Heart Damage [max 20]

Defending against this Crisis principally involves not blowing up and, to a lesser degree, continuing to head generally in the correct direction. If the Crisis defeats you, you crash into some location of the GM's choice (ignoring terrain control, most likely) and take somewhere between 0d6 and 6d6 Fight Damage, again depending on the GM's mood.

*Epic Move (Victory):* You get the boat back under control and deal 5 Heart Damage to this Crisis, probably resolving it.

#### *Failure Modes:*

*Wrestling with the Wheel (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you're wrestling with the wheel and avoiding obstacles. This uses the active focus rules.

*Duck and Pray (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage, dodge obstacles, and wait it out—bleeding for another 1d6 *spinning out of control* Heart Damage (max 1d6) per round until the Crisis is resolved.

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 5

If you earn 5 Progress, you bring the motorboat back under control. In general, scenes of motorboats going out of control last a lot longer when you're distracted by other things you have to do.

## Recover your Bearings

[Crisis]

You were trying to catch someone or find something—  
Or you decided to travel on uncharted paths—  
And now you're lost!

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 15 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 15]

You're confused. You're trying to recover your bearings. If this Crisis defeats you, then after the conflict ends, you'll wind up somewhere strange or lose large amounts of time (character time, not real-world time) wandering around lost. It's up to the GM which will happen. You can't avoid this fate by moving somewhere known before the conflict ends; all you can do is ruin your own suspension of disbelief.

*Epic Move (Victory):* you've recovered your bearings! Deal 10 Heart Damage to the Crisis.

#### *Failure Modes:*

*Wander Around (Active Focus)*—for 1d6 rounds, or until the Crisis resolves, you wander around trying to figure out where you are. This uses the active focus rules.

*Disoriented (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage and bleed for 1d10 *disoriented* (max 2d10) until the Crisis ends. Being lost can destroy you!

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 10

When you've made 10 Progress, you are no longer lost.

### Example: "Kung Fu Fighting in an Airplane Cockpit"

You're piloting a small aircraft when you get into an unplanned kung fu fight with your copilot. (He insulted your favorite anime and high-handedly

dismissed your concept of moe.) At some point the fight may be interrupted by a Crisis, "Don't Crash Your Plane!" which works exactly like the "Don't Crash Your Boat!" Crisis. Can you spare the time to control the airplane when you're busy holding off his Seven Irritating Fist or whatever the heck he called it?

## Work Challenges

Unexpectedly you have to do a lot of hard work! For instance, you are drafted to help sandbag a river before it floods, or you need to carry an unexpectedly huge and heavy amount of treasure back from an ancient ruin. If it's heavily skilled labor, then this is (also?) a Craft Challenge, but if it's mostly just a huge amount of work and sweat, it's a Work Challenge.

Here's an example:

### Staggering Effort

[Crisis]

Nobody could possibly do this in time. Could they? This will test your physical capacities and determination to the limit!

#### Defense against the Crisis

Target 14 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 30]

You struggle to keep up with the work. If this Crisis defeats you, the unhappy eventuality begins with "you weren't up to the challenge, or at least, you weren't willing to push yourself that hard." It continues on to whatever other implications this might have under the relevant circumstances.

*Epic Move (Survival):* Gain a +2 *working hard* modifier (max +5) to your Progress until the end of your interval. Deal 2d10 plus your working hard bonus to this Crisis.

#### Failure Modes:

*Endless Labor (Passive Focus)*—the labor is endless. You struggle and stumble but without making progress for 1d6 rounds or until the Crisis resolves. This uses the passive focus rules.

*Taxed to the Utmost (Penalty)*—take 2d10 Heart Damage. Until this Crisis is resolved, each time you act, you take 2 Heart Damage and 2 Fight Damage or 2 Spirit Damage from *exertion* (max 6).

### Making Progress

Heart Defense 8 / Heart Pool 40

When you've made 40 Progress, your labors are complete.

### Can you Carry This?

[Crisis]

You have a huge burden to carry. Can you manage?

### Defense against the Crisis

Target 13 / 2d10 Heart Damage [max 5]

You fight not to be crushed by the burden. If you miss your target even once you'll probably need to stake your Heart on it or let the Crisis defeat you.

If the Crisis does defeat you, the burden falls. You may also take 10 Fight, 10 Spirit, and 10 Heart Damage from exhaustion.

*Epic Move (Victory)*: That wasn't so hard! Defeat the Crisis.

### Failure Modes:

*Settle In (Active Focus)*—spend 1d6 rounds staggering and groaning or settling the load in on your shoulders or gathering more weight or walking very slowly or the like. This uses the active focus rules.

*Taxed to the Utmost (Penalty)*—take 2d6 Heart Damage. Until this Crisis is resolved, each time you act, you take 2 Heart Damage and 2 Fight Damage or 2 Spirit Damage (max 6). Hope that your Heart doesn't give out!

## Making Progress

Heart Defense 7 / Heart Pool 5

It only takes 5 Progress to prove you can handle the weight.

# Heart Weapons

In this section you will find descriptions of the general Attitudes with which characters can attempt to solve Crises and Tests and otherwise control the situations in which they find themselves.

These Attitudes are the "Weapons" you use when what you're doing doesn't have anything to *do* with beating somebody up or not getting beaten up. When you're looking to build something, or fix something, or have a pleasant conversation that doesn't involve enough verbal sparks to get into a spiritual fight. When in short you're doing something so non-violent that you don't need a *weapon*—you need a general approach.

## Attitudes

Attitudes are the non-combat equivalent to Weapons. They're the tools you use to improve your progress past the baseline 1d6. They'll give you an improvement to your roll *to* progress; they'll give you the chance to make *more* progress; and they'll increase your Promptness and your Heart Defense.

For, just as weapons need to bypass your Defense before they can kill you; just as magic needs to beat your Spirit Defense before it can twist you: things that go wrong as you're working on a project need to get past your Heart Defense before they can make you lose Heart.

## Running out of Heart

The default risk of dealing with a Test or Crisis is that you'll run out of Heart and give up. You will have done all that you can do.

Of course—

Sometimes there won't be a good enough explicit reason to give up. The character is *still energetic*—signaled, ideally early in the conflict and well before the character runs out of Heart, by the player telling the GM as much. If you're searching for the bandits who kidnapped your child, it's not enough to say, "Well, you've run out of Heart, so the search is over"—you're still energetic! If you're in an argument with an inflexible minister and you're about to run out of Heart from his stern opposition—that doesn't always mean your character is convinced there's nothing more they can say. You're still energetic!

In such cases it is up to the GM—

Or, sometimes, the player, or the player of a PC enemy attacking the character in question—

to come up with a stipulation as to the meaning of exhausting the PC's Heart that is not just "you give up."

Some things that it can mean include:

- The PC has definitively lost. They can keep trying, but until they accept that loss and reflect on it for a bit, it won't do any good. Period.
- The PC is defeated in some fashion that they don't have to "accept." The thing they wanted to guard . . . is broken. They have been imprisoned. They've lost track of someone they were hunting. They cannot continue, regardless of their fighting spirit.
- There's magic at work—that wasn't an ordinary difficulty or enemy, but a curse or magician!
- The PC can keep going, and even "win," but doing so is incorrect! Their teacher or most important person will chide them, people will be shocked by their behavior, or something else of the sort. It's actually OK for a disreputable warrior to benefit from this sometimes—the GM doesn't have to rule out this option just because the PC won't hate it.

How do you decide?

The first of your fallback positions, in case it's not appropriate for the PC to just give up, is chosen by the PC's Heart Weapon. Characters who pursue the Difficulty with a ruthless attitude are generally stopped by trouble of some sort as the moral compromises they make along the way catch up to them. Ruthlessly hunting the bandits that stole your child—maybe you catch a wounded bandit they left behind, but beating up that bandit for information gets you in trouble with a hero! Or maybe you're so fierce about the hunt that you drive off everyone who was helping you and now there's just no way you can do more than wander around randomly in despair. Argue ruthlessly with an inflexible minister and his guards will throw you out! If your approach is resilience, of knowing that everything will be all right, of never falling down without getting up again, then when you run out of Heart on the search it just means that it's time to try a completely different thing. You're not giving up on the search, you're . . . say, going to a nearby mountain monastery to ask the kung fu monks there for help! Similarly, in that argument with the inflexible minister, that's when you realize that arguing isn't going to *help*—you can keep doing it if you're angry and want to keep talking, or if you're having fun with the conversation, or whatever, but it's also time to start figuring out what will work better.

If that first fallback doesn't make sense either, then it's time for the GM to get creative. Look at the list above and the possible outcomes for the other approaches: maybe something will give you an idea!

## The Basics: Attitudes

Attitudes give a bit more detail than your basic interval plan on how you're attacking a test or crisis. Much like weapons, their basic purpose is to provide a few combat stats, fail mode options, and epic moves.

Each Attitude also has a short description of what it means, when you are using that weapon, that you might lose Heart or fail.

The "Accuracy" equivalent for an attitude is called Solve.

The "Defense" equivalent is called Heart Defense.

If you find yourself making a new attitude, you can start with one of these basic templates:

- **Cheerful** (1d10 Progress, +1 Solve, -1 Promptness)
- **Committed** (2d6 Progress, +1 Solve, -1 Heart Defense)
- **Daring** (2d10 Damage, -1 Heart Defense)
- **Driven** (2d10 Damage, -1 Solve, +1 Promptness)
- **Hesitant** (1d6 Progress)
- **Resolute** (2d6 Progress, +1 Heart Defense)

Unlike physical weapons, we're only going to cover one Attitude for each of these basic templates. If you can't find one that fits one of your character's common schticks, or if you don't like the way the most fitting Attitude works, then please feel free to develop a new Attitude with your GM.

## Missing and Failing

Many of the things you attack with a Heart Weapon can't fight back—you use it to move forward on *Tests*. Accordingly, any time you miss with a Heart Weapon, you suffer **3 Heart Damage** or, for Heart Weapons such as Social and no Weapon that deal only 1d6 Damage themselves, **1 Heart Damage**. This is a measure of the effort you've put in, and it can't be reduced below 1 by Heart Shell.

Failing offers two choices.

The first is overexertion. You take Heart Damage as if you'd hit yourself with that Weapon.

The second option is to take the normal 3 (or 1) Heart Damage, and face your failure in an *interlude*. The pace of events around you slows for a moment while the character faces their failure and the player puts it into context:

- the character can't act, nor can they take Damage, for a round;
- the character can't act, for a round;
- the character can't act, nor can they take Damage, for a final round; and
- the player stipulates to something that could stop or taint the character's success.

The specifics of that last stipulation vary based on the Weapon.

The interlude may look a bit odd, so here's an explanation of what it means. The character is frozen for a moment. They fall behind the pace of events; but their pause is more mental and dramatic than physical, and does not allow, e.g., enemies to flurry three attacks against them.

## Epic Moves

The standard epic moves for Styles are these:

*Borrowed Move*—pick an epic move for another Style. Don't make Progress, but get the other benefits of that move. For instance, you're using the recklessness Style, but want to use an epic move found under Resilient: do it! But don't make any other Progress. This is also what you'd do if you and the GM make up an epic move that isn't associated with any of the listed approaches.

*Stunt*—stipulate that you've done something extraordinary (something that would normally fit under "extraordinary feat"). This makes [the normal amount of Progress for the Style.]

*Go All-Out*—make [twice the normal Progress for this Style.]

## Proficiencies

Characters are proficient in six of the following Styles. This is quite a large number: it's expected that characters will always use a Style in which they're proficient unless they're deliberately working out of their natural mode. However, if they do not, then they fail on a 7-8.

Read on for the standard Styles in the **Filial Piety Action System!**

## Responsive

"Responsive" approaches react to problems that are already imminent. A Test or Crisis is upon the character: the character responds!

## Correctness

What is there that is not spoken of in the classics? If you proceed in the manner dictated by propriety and traditional practice, every problem wilts away before you.

## Thoughts on Failure

It is correct to give things no more importance than they merit—to turn from one thing to another when the other becomes more pressing. An inferior student, facing endless interruption, frantically bewails that they cannot finish their studies. A correct student knows that what they accomplish in the time set aside for studying is what they accomplish: an inability to complete it is a representation of the work of fate.

When you, as a Correctness user, lose Heart, it is not so much a *loss* as a budgetary matter for time. Each time you lose Heart, it is as if the world is saying: the interval allotted for this matter is running low. You have done well, but you must soon turn your attention elsewhere. To run out of Heart is to recognize that this task will not be completed to-day.

This may be an entirely psychological matter. Or, if you're still energetic as your Heart runs low, it may be practical. You are practicing your calligraphy in a monastic cell: will you succeed? Not if others are continuously fighting outside your practice room, and then the monastery catches fire. At a certain

point you must realize simply that continuing this at this time will yield no better results—that the GM will give you the same amount of stipulated work accomplished whether you stop now or go on forever.

But what if you run out of Heart and Exemplar Dice both?

In such a case you face a profound crisis of practice. Something in either your goals or your methods is flawed: you cannot do it! One course of action is to abandon an unrealistic ambition: a diligent person may attempt the impossible, but may not waste their life on it! Another course is to change your methodology: if training at one school will never teach you how to topple an evil King, then perhaps you must apply to another. This is an extreme crisis and character change, but it is also comparable to running out of Fight and Exemplar Dice, which can kill or maim you, or Spirit and Exemplar Dice, which invites magic to warp your skin and soul.

### Correctness

+0 Solve/2d6 Progress

### [Heart Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Heart Defense)

The Correctness Weapon offers an opportunity to establish and express yourself as a stable, competent individual who shirks no cost to do what is right. Its strong Heart Defense is good when beset by many Crises.

### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d6 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude how it might be that you could fail at this task while still being yourself. The GM may freely establish some portion of your explanation as fact.

## Epic Moves:

*Fulfillment*—make 2d6 Progress and stipulate that you have done some correct and appropriate thing. Perhaps in the example of calligraphy, even if you have not learned much from your practice about the character for Heaven, you have been exemplary in your handling of the brush and ink stone. If you were hunting for a stolen child, perhaps you stipulate that your search has been in good order and has ruled out several possible locations; or that you have despite your grief paused to make an appropriate sacrifice to the spirits of the mountain.

*Personal Cost*—make 2d6 Progress and stipulate that you have pushed yourself at some personal cost, but not complained or shown weakness. Perhaps to help you shut out the noise of others fighting, you have cut your leg: the pain helps you focus on your work! Or perhaps you've actually given up on calligraphy to go help your less worthy martial siblings sort out their fight. If you defeat the Difficulty in that latter case, won't it show that the superior person achieves much even while helping others? This is also a suitable epic move for staying up five days while on some duty without showing your exhaustion, carrying a wound without complaining, and refusing to tremble in a fight against an enemy despite the pain or pneumonia that wracks you.

## Example

You're a martial artist, fighting an enemy on a dam. Only, someone's sabotaged the dam! You need to shore it up or both of you will die. You pause near a growing crack and attempt to resolve the situation. Success makes a little bit of Progress: you quite correctly look for some way to seal it up. Missing or failing costs you a little bit of Heart: do you have time to fix it properly while under attack?

Then you roll an epic move.

Now you have to think about what's important.

Is it solving the problem fast? Then go all out, make 4d6 progress, and you have a good chance at doing so. Perhaps you use a kung fu move to melt some stone with inner fire and smear it over the crack. Or perhaps you insightfully realize that straightening a cracked metal support will relieve the pressure long enough for an actual architect to fix the dam.

But that's a provincial perspective.

Sure, you can fix the dam with that extra progress. But your master didn't train you so that you could be a dam-fixing warrior! You were trained to do things *correctly*. So maybe you could use fulfillment to indicate that you've taken the time to properly warn your enemy and advise them that attacking you right now isn't the best course, and instead they should help you with the dam. Using the *fulfillment* move won't guarantee that the enemy listens, but it will guarantee that either they listen now or they were *never* going to listen no matter what you said or did.

There's also the personal cost move: maybe you press your palms against the crack and use an internal-external technique to seal it, taking numerous hits from your ruthless enemy while you do it. Doing something like that and not minding: that's the very stuff of legendary righteous warriors!

Going all out is the best way to fix the dam, but taking a different epic move is the best way to live correctly.

## Emotional Investment

No matter what it takes, you want to do this *right*. What you're doing is a very important thing to you, not for some greater outside goal but because, in itself and as itself, it matters. You want it done and you want it done right.

## Thoughts on Failure

Losing your Heart might mean that you're not good enough.

. . . or that you give up.

But most of all, what it means is that you're dragged away from the task, kicking and screaming as it were, by circumstance. You don't get to keep going. You've run out of time, you're dragged away by your friends, you get attacked or imprisoned or cursed, your masters tell you that you can't keep going, some important thing that you need to keep trying breaks, something like that.

Losing your Heart means . . . that you put your Heart in fighting or, well, making Progress on this Difficulty. And then you lost.

Losing your Heart to this while you're out of Exemplar Dice is devastating. It's the kind of thing that just empties you out. It's probably OK to just have your character despair for a while and then pick up the pieces—though it's up to the GM, of course—but it's devastating enough that it ought to matter as much as getting defeated by a nasty enemy or losing your Spirit to a curse. When you

put so much desire or love into doing something and it falls apart, it's like the earth opens up under your feet and the sky turns to a beast of winter.

### Emotional Investment

+1 Solve/2d6 Progress

[Heart Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -1 Heart Defense)

The Emotional Investment Weapon offers you steady Progress and the chance to show both how much you value this effort and that it merits your commitment.

### Fail:

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d6 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude what it would take to drag you away from this.

### Epic Moves:

*A Small Part Done*—make 2d6 Progress and stipulate that you have made at least a small and partial response to the need or desire or exigency that drives you to attempt this task. Maybe you haven't found the child that you are hunting in the mountains, but you've found a piece of the child's clothing, something for you and the rest of the child's family to remember them by if you don't find anything else. Maybe you're arguing with an unjust magistrate, trying to convince them to be, well, just, and you've . . . said, at least, something that they'll think about. No matter what, your time wasn't totally wasted. See also *Something is Finished*, under Ruthless, below.

*Justified Labors*—make 2d6 Progress and stipulate that this thing that you are doing is worth the effort you're pouring into it. You can pick a particular reason and justification, or ask the GM to do so, or you can just generally say, "This is worth it." See also *Goodness*, under Enthusiastic, above.

## Example

You're building a dam—and you really care about the project. After all, like you keep telling people, isn't it the ordinary villagers who suffer from the way the river rises and falls, rises and falls, floods and then goes back into its channel? Wouldn't a dam and an irrigation system serve everyone better? And you've got a team of people that you love working with you, even if that one most important person keeps refusing to assist your rolls.

You start by rolling a 4, 4, and 2. You've lost 9 Heart before you've even started! But with great risks come great rewards: the very next action you take is an epic move, a roll of 9 with your faithful assistant cheering you on. You complete initial construction, and even if the dam doesn't hold up, some of the foundations will remain—that's a *small part done* and 7 points of Progress. Another epic move on your next roll, and you take the 4d6: 15 points of Progress, and you're already at 22.

Next a failure, which almost breaks your Heart.

You have to take the Damage; there's nothing that would drag you away.

Then you roll a 1. Your faithful assistant chips in a 4—

"Why?" you ask your most important person. Well, her player, anyway. Why? Why won't she assist?

She doesn't answer in character.

In character, she *is* helping. But her player tells you. *When it's done, we'll go our separate ways, and I don't want to leave.*

Winter comes, and spring, and the summer rains, and still the project is not complete.

## Enthusiasm

Give everything you have to everything you do. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing it with a whole heart!

## Thoughts on Failure

Sometimes you do the wrong thing!

The more Heart you lose the greater the chance that you're going about things the wrong way—that you're doing something you really shouldn't be doing. So if you lose all your Heart, that could just mean that you've finally gotten discouraged—but it could also mean that you're realizing that you're not actually helping. Losing your Heart can mean, in fact, that whatever you're doing is actually making things worse. This is also what is intimated during an interlude of failure.

If you have Exemplar Dice left, this is, of course, recoverable.

If you're out of Exemplar Dice and you run out of Heart, then you may be in it quite deep indeed. Maybe you're enthusiastically helping a lost princess, and you've just found out that she's a lost princess of a demon kingdom. Or maybe your trying to help someone has led you to betray your master! That's not very good but sometimes when you are enthusiastic and not very well versed in the correct behavior it can happen. Often this will actually manifest as a *success* on what you were trying to do, followed shortly thereafter by a catastrophic revelation.

On the other hand, you know, life goes on. You can only spend so many hours crying about how you've messed up everything before it's time to get up and make your next mistake.

### Enthusiasm

+0 Solve/2d10 Progress

[Heart Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -1 Heart Defense)

The Enthusiasm Weapon offers you very high Progress and the chance to do good and right things with joy and ease. Sickness and survival Crises are troublesome for the enthusiastic—if they don't have energy to work with their whole problem-solving strategy becomes a weak wave and a smile.

### Fail:

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d10 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude what you're likely to believe if you fail at this task. The GM may freely establish some portion of your belief as fact.

## Epic Moves:

*Goodness*—make 2d10 Progress and stipulate that you do something right and helpful and good. Maybe you're moving towards the wrong ends, maybe you're screwing up everything else, but right now and no matter whatever else happens, the thing you are doing in this round matters, and it's good, and whatever beneficent divine spirit there may be approves. This is for things like "this lost princess may be from a demon kingdom, but showing her the perfect place to watch the rainbow from was still good." Or "maybe the scrolls this guy asked me to fetch are actually the stolen secret scrolls of our order, but reorganizing that section of the library was still good work."

*Playing it Cool*—make 2d10 Progress and stipulate that you've just made something really amazing look easy. Like, you're hunting for a lost child, so you jump up to the treetops and scan a huge swathe of forest, and then go: "The animals to the west are disturbed, that's probably the right direction!"  
*This is a little stronger than the standard Stunt, and that's OK.*

## Example

You're a novelist—trapped in a raging forest fire!

Your helicopter crashed.

You remember it crashing. But that's not important right now. What's important is that you're trapped in a raging forest fire. It is material. It is present with you. It is filling your senses, it is pounding against your world of experience, it is overwhelming and terrifying and *real*.

And you don't know what to do.

You know what your life coach suggested in situations like this. *Breathe*. Don't be afraid. Challenges are just . . . opportunities to open up to the world. To release some of your fears. Ideas are everywhere; possibilities and opportunities are immanent everywhere in the world. Maybe you'll get a new poem out of this. Maybe even a novel!

Didn't Proust set himself on fire once? Or was that Kierkegaard?

The very first thing that happens, unfortunately, is that you roll a 7.

You opt for an interlude.

For one round, nothing happens. You just stand there as the wind blows past you, and you wonder, *is this really the best place and time to look for opportunities in the world?*

And maybe a tumbleweed goes past. And maybe it's on fire.

Or maybe that's just smoke inhalation.

And then there's a round where the Crisis can attack you; can Damage you; can just barely hit you, thanks to your -1 Heart Defense, and do 4 points of Heart Damage to you.

That's the tree, by the way, falling on you, like a Chanukah miracle.

Then another round.

You stipulate: "if this beats me, if I run out of Heart, I will probably be all tangled up in the incidents of material existence and I won't find the words for the fire."

And then, the next round, you can go back to your attacks.

Your next roll is a 9.

That's enough to make a solid 15 points of Progress. Your cell phone is squawking. Something about getting the indelicate out of there and is the helicopter pilot all right? But you've made *15 Progress*. Something is transcendent here. Something is forming, like secret letters written in wine and awakened by the flame.

Then a 3.

That is your jacket. That is your jacket catching on fire.

Another 9, another 10 points of Progress, and you might very well win here. You might beat the fire—for such is what happens to a Crisis when you make enough Progress on the associated test—and your editorial deadlines to boot!

Everything changes on the next roll.

It's a 10.

Will you *play it cool*, taking the flames into your hand and letting them dance without hurting you? Or seeing, perhaps, past the forms and shapes of things and speaking your next novel into the world? Or will you perhaps put that kind of thing aside and drag the helicopter pilot away from the fire, doing something good?

With an average of 11 Progress per 2d10, there's a good chance that you'll "beat" the forest fire no matter what you roll. There's a palpable risk. You're probably best off going all out, rolling 4d10, and making sure you don't die in a fire. But 2d10 is probably enough. Even if the fire has 40 or 50 Heart, you probably have enough maneuvering room to pick whichever choice you like.

What do you do?

## Freaky Martial Arts Attitude

There is no problem, as movies like *Shaolin Soccer* have shown, that cannot be solved through martial arts. Does a road need repaving? Kung fu! Someone in your family near-suicidal from heartbreak? Kung fu! What about solving a mystery? Well, maybe kung fu isn't so hot there, but why bother tromping around investigating scenes and interrogating witnesses when you have the yarrow sticks for the *I Ching* right there?

Freaky martial arts approaches are over-the-top applications of martial arts, secret techniques, and divination that nobody in their right mind would ever attempt. At least, not in the real world. Even in the game, though, only use these stats when your approach is so thoroughly silly, bizarre, perverse, or harder-than-necessary that the only imaginable point to doing so is to show off your amazing martial arts and special techniques.

This approach doesn't have to be comedic, exactly—in fact, in many games, it shouldn't be. It just has to be . . . stylized.

## Thoughts on Failure

Failure ought to be inconceivable. Your theory is perfect, after all. Your style is amazing. This ought to work. If it weren't obvious that it was going to work, after all, would you really do it this way?

. . . well, perhaps.

Sadly, though, the Heart you lose corresponds to the hope and glory that harsh reality abrades off your grand scheme. Each little loss is a little hitch where your plan did not survive contact with the enemy. Each little bit of Heart is something going wrong, someone betraying you, something not working out. And when you lose all your Heart, your plan collapses.

One consequence to losing all your Heart when you don't have Exemplar Dice to sustain you is that your dreams shatter. You see yourself, suddenly, as small. You have to change who you are because you realize you were not so much larger than life as a hollow braggart with dreams of glory. Or, perhaps, it just means that your amazing scheme backfired and buried you under a ton of rock, or left you falling off a cliff into a pit of dream-snakes, or flung you as if from your own Confucian Reality-Realigining Catapult to land nakedly in the bedroom of your arch-nemesis Minister Di Lao.

It really all depends on how serious the game is, and how impending the various impending dooms might be.

## Freaky Martial Arts Attitude

+0 Solve/2d6 Progress

[Heart Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +1 Heart Defense)

The Freaky Martial Arts Attitude makes it very clear that you are a mad genius. Not just mad! That wouldn't be that good, on its own. But, in addition to mad, a genius.

It may get you into trouble.

But there isn't any trouble that you can't get yourself out of—so it's fine!

### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d6 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude how your approach might make things worse. The GM may freely play off of this to create new and unique issues.

### *Epic Moves:*

*A Genuinely Amazing Thing*—make 2d6 Progress and stipulate that there was a moment of . . . something genuinely amazing and cinematic. Maybe it will all fall apart a moment later. Maybe it won't. Like, you're casting the yarrow sticks to solve a mystery, and they land to form the pattern of the killer's face. You're repaving a road, and you actually manage the earthquake stomp that sends all the paving stones flying in the air to land neatly in rows. For this section, at least. You're scouting an enemy army by strapping yourself to a dragon kite—and you *fly*. See also *Playing it Cool*, under Enthusiastic, above.

*Betrayed!*—make 2d6 Progress and stipulate someone or something that is the real cause of any failure that may ensue. They don't have to be an active traitor or anything: incompetent minions, hostile enemies, even "an unlucky day as described by my birth calendar" or "a bad wind" suffices. The GM must approve the stipulation or propose a reasonable alternative.

## Example

Your family land has gone fallow. You decide to try a freaky martial arts approach: pushing your own vital Chi into the land, and then taking the sick land Chi back into your system so that you can purify it. You'll be like a kung fu dialysis machine for the soil!

Your first attempt is a 4, which costs you 3 Heart.

This is followed by a 1.

You look hopefully at the other PCs—surely *everyone* would approve! Indeed they do, rolling an 8 and 6 to honor your filial devotion. That lets you make the first 7 points of Progress! Then a 3, which is no good, and . . . a 7.

You opt for an interlude.

This is a Test, not a Crisis, and we're not concerned with what the other characters are doing. So the three rounds that pass are meaningless. What *does* matter is that you have to think up something to make the problem worse.

"Well," you might say, "What if I get stuck? What if I can't get away, and something nasty in the land comes up into me?"

The GM agrees that that's interesting.

Demonic Chi pours into you!

It's bad, and it's happening, but it doesn't have any game meaning yet. It is just descriptive, because you haven't actually been beaten yet.

Your next roll succeeds, for another 9 Progress.

You lose a little Heart now and again.

You bleed demonic Chi from your nose and ears.

Then you roll a 7 again.

You realize that you don't have much Heart left. You decide to cut your losses—taking the 2d6 and then giving up while you still have some Heart and a spare Exemplar Die. You pass out. When you wake up, the land is lush and green with demon corn, and you have a temporary affliction of horns and evil glowing eyes. It's pretty sad! Your elder brother points and laughs—and what will your teachers say?

## Resilience

This is the attitude of someone who stays cheerful and OK no matter what happens. It's best for people who *know* that they haven't learned everything they might want to learn about the world—it's OK to be weak if you can become strong and learn more!

### Thoughts on Failure

It's OK if you fail as long as you tried your hardest.

Losing Heart in a conflict just means that fighting this Difficulty is, well, difficult for you. If you lose all your Heart, you just can't handle this situation yet—even if you keep trying, you won't make progress. Maybe you need to think of a new approach, or maybe you just need to practice harder!

Losing all your Heart when you're out of Exemplar Dice—that's the only thing that might make you genuinely give up. You might wander aimlessly for a while. You might desperately seek help and counsel, even if that makes you pathetic to your Clan or your very important person. You might do something dramatic and emo like consigning yourself to a nunnery. If the GM wants you to keep playing, it can always turn out to be a kung fu nunnery haunted by demons and secrets that the other players can break you out of later!

### Resilience

+1 Solve/1d10 Progress

### [Heart Weapon]

(-1 Promptness, +0 Heart Defense)

The Resilience Weapon offers steady Progress, acceptable emotional defense, and the chance to keep learning and moving evenly forward in the world.

### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 1d10 Heart Damage, or

- take 1 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude why this task might be too much for you. The GM may enshrine some of this as fact.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Something Good*—make 1d10 Progress and stipulate that, no matter how tough things are, something good is happening. You can identify that good thing, ask the GM to describe it, or both. If you identify it you must believe, as a player, that it's a reasonably likely idea for something that was already going on.

*Lesson*—make 1d10 Progress and stipulate an important lesson that you have learned from events. To the extent that the GM buys your description of the lesson, this can add to your toolkit for handling problems in the future!

### Example

You were sad that your magic wasn't up to snuff. That's when a sacred scroll fell from the sky into a nearby tree! So here's the Test: can you climb up this tall and scary tree filled with wicked ravens?

The first three times you roll you get a 2—and each time you lose Heart from that failure. The birds: they're too fierce! The tree: it's too tall! Is it possible that this isn't for you? But you chin up, try again, and make 6 points of progress. And again: 4 points! And again: 9!

You're out of interval.

You lose Exemplar Pool.

The birds drive you from the branch, and you hit the ground hard. It's a good chance to give up—but you're not out of Heart, just out of interval. So you decide to try again, and the very next round you roll a 10. What do you do? Do you make 2d10 Progress, which will probably beat any normal Test? Do you make 1d10 Progress and stipulate that there's something good about this—maybe the scroll itself, maybe you'll have a chance to save a baby bird, maybe your important person is watching you bravely climb the tree? Or do you make 1d10 Progress and learn an important lesson, one that will carry with you—probably something about climbing, or perseverance, or how to handle birds?

## Ruthlessness

In a bleak world it is sometimes necessary to be ruthless. Sometimes you have something so important to you nothing can stand in its way.

### Thoughts on Failure

As you lose Heart you get into more trouble. If you lose all your Heart it means that your actions have caught up to you. If you're also out of Exemplar Dice you could lose your important something or wind up arrested, disgraced, or dead.

### Ruthlessness

-1 Solve/2d10 Progress

### [Heart Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, +0 Heart Defense)

The Ruthlessness Weapon offers powerful bursts of Progress at a cost—you must always struggle to stay on the side of virtue.

### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d10 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude what kinds of things might catch up with you to stop you. The GM may freely enshrine some of this as fact.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Something is Finished*—make 2d10 Progress and stipulate that you have made key progress towards your goal.

*Holding Back*—make 2d10 Progress and stipulate that you managed to do something without serious harm—e.g., knocking out a guard rather than killing them during an infiltration.

## Example

You're working with a renowned scholar to build a dam—but you're in love with him! So you set out to sabotage the dam so that you can work together longer. The dam is a Test; your approach is ruthless. Your first roll hits for 11 Progress. Your second roll is a 1, but there's nobody willing to assist you. So you miss and lose a bit of Heart—did someone just see you sneaking into the construction site? You miss again: you encounter a late worker and have to knock him out. Then you roll a 10 and you have three choices: do you do double damage, which might be enough to complete the sabotage? Do you achieve some key sub-goal, such as undermining the foundations? Or do you declare definitively that the worker you knocked out is still alive?

## Social

This is the approach of pulling everyone together to work for a given end. It's one of the trickiest attitudes since it's impossible for you alone to make it work—no matter how good you are at guiding people and pulling them together as a group, they can always just refuse!

## Thoughts on Failure

Sometimes you just can't get people on the same page. That just means that there's no way to go forward without making somebody unhappy, which is more or less something you have to live with.

Losing Heart means either that you're giving up on being the social glue for this or that you're losing some of the social capital that allows you to make the attempt. If you lose all your Heart, then one or the other is gone: if you're still energetic, then nobody is listening to you, while if you're exhausted and depleted, maybe that's the only problem that is at hand.

What about losing all your Heart and having no Exemplar Dice?

This is a path that tends to lead to an irrevocable split, either with a group or with your own ideas. You don't have much choice, once something makes it clear that there's nothing you can do to bring a group together on an issue: either you have to change or you have to change who you care about. That may mean becoming an NPC, if, for instance, you just can't bear to work with some PC any more. Or it may just mean that you can't treat them as

Family/Deserving—or that you're embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated by the fact that you took the stand you did. It's up to you what you're willing to accept and still play your character, and up to the GM what option (something you accept, or making the character an NPC villain or ally and having you make a new one) makes the most sense.

### Social

+0 Solve/1d6 Progress

### [Heart Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, +0 Heart Defense)

The Social Weapon helps you organize a group to work together. It's not very useful on its own but can be a powerful offensive and defensive Weapon if you have good friends standing by your side.

The Social Attitude has the following special feature:

**Positive Feedback:** if someone cheers you on, your Progress is 2d10.

### Fail:

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 1d6 Heart Damage, or
- take no Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude how your social capital or interest might be fading.

### Epic Moves:

**Compromise**—make 1d6 Progress, recover 1d6 Heart, and stipulate that something happens or is decided that everybody can agree on. If your first few suggestions for what that might be don't "take" (an NPC or PC is still unhappy with them), then you get a free two-success extraordinary Insightful result that you can use to find out from the players and GM what *would* work.

**Insight**—recover 1d6 Heart and learn something important about the heart of one of the people you are dealing with. The relevant player or the GM decides what you actually learn.

*Sacrifice*—make 2d6 Progress and stipulate that you've put someone's interest ahead of yours without complaining. If this doesn't actually make them feel either better or less bad than they would otherwise, then you get a free two-success extraordinary Insightful result that you can use to find out from the relevant player or GM what they *do* need.

## Example

The legendary Prince Dao is ruthlessly invading your homeland of Wu. You have traveled to his court from the mountains of Wu in order to reason with him. But can you sway the legendary Prince's heart?

The first three rolls *miss*, making no Progress and giving you 3 Heart Damage. That's not surprising: he's a stern and unreasonable Prince! Your interval was only three rounds, so you have to spend a round reorienting: he batters at your Heart with a Heart Weapon of his own, inflicting another 12 Heart Damage.

Your next roll allows an epic move. Recovering some Heart seems like a good idea, but the situation is difficult. An Insight might help you solve or bypass this whole problem, but you just started a new interval: starting a new strategy now will cost you another point of Exemplar Pool, and you're low on Heart. You might not be able to *act* on what you learn! A compromise or self-sacrificing act is more immediately useful, but will it just leave you spinning your wheels? In the end, you opt for a compromise, and work out with the Prince that leaving the temples and martial arts schools alone is a good idea: at last! 6 points of Progress, and you get back 4 points of Heart.

You could give up now, having earned at least something, or you could keep going. It's obvious that having temples and schools serve as sanctuaries for fleeing peasants and the like is going to stretch the compromise you've set up, but if you keep talking, there's a chance you could get his formal consent for it! Another failure and you're down another 4 Heart—a success only buys you another 2 points against the Prince. It probably is time to settle for what you have, unless you can find some ally in the court willing to cheer you on. If only you'd done better early on!

## Whimsical

You act as your heart calls on you to act. You flow with the situation! Are you a drunken master, a Daoist sage, a natural genius, or just unhinged? You have the power to flow past problems without being touched by them.

### Thoughts on Failure

The whimsical approach works best when the player is willing to accept failure—when losing your Heart means that you've wandered off and started focusing on something else. Each bit of Heart you lose is a bit less focus that you have available for dealing with the Difficulty; each bit of Heart you regain is just an opportunity to move on without being too much scarred.

That said, if you're still energetic, losing your Heart means that you've had something step in to stop you. Something is in the way of your continuing in your old ways. Of course, you're elusive, you're tricky, it can't constrain you—unless you're also out of Exemplar Dice. Then your whimsy may turn out not so much a hidden wisdom as an erratic failing that life's about to punish you for.

### Whimsical

-1 Solve/2d10 Progress

### [Heart Weapon]

(-2 Promptness, +1 Heart Defense)

The Whimsical Weapon is powerful—it won't solve every problem, but it can give the most unexpected successes!

Whimsical has the following special feature:

**Water Influence:** you heal 2 Heart in every round in which you can act. If you end a detailed action resolution while wielding this weapon, heal another 5 Heart. (And then stop healing, because there aren't any rounds when you're not in detailed action resolution.)

### Fail:

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d10 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude how your interest is fading.

### *Epic Moves:*

*Restore*—pick an ally and heal 2d10 of their Heart Damage. Stipulate that you've found some way to restore the hope or situational advantage that they've lost.

*Surprisingly Relevant*—make 1d10 Progress and gain 1d10 Heart. Stipulate that something you did, normally the GM's choice from actions you've recently described, really was the right thing to do, or at least productive in light of the Difficulty.

### Example

You are in a cave. With a tiger. And no weapons.

Perhaps, you think, you can just stroll past without fighting. Treat it as a Test, not a battle. Then you won't have to test its teeth and claws!

"Sure," says the GM.

So, let's do it! You try to stroll out, rolling a 5. The tiger is not happy. It bares its jaws. It walks towards you. It makes a hungry noise. Perhaps it is happier than your first conception. You lose 3 points of Heart, but still you are hopeful. You hold out your hands in placation. Nice kitty! You roll a 2. It wriggles its butt. It plans to spring. You lose another 3 points of Heart. But you are a resilient student of wu wei; you are healing almost as much as you lose.

You think, perhaps, that when it leaps, you will pivot neatly out of the way and begin scratching its ears. Isn't that what a great water-style master would do? Isn't that what *you* should do? Won't it disarm the tiger?

You roll a 7. You heal 2 Heart and lose 6 more—

And actual combat begins.

In the end, that wasn't very helpful! But you don't mind terribly much. It was a moment of whimsy, and it did not cost much Heart. You mind, rather more, that a large tiger is fighting you while you are in a cave and do not have the springy willow stave with which you are accustomed to fight.

It is up to the GM, in a circumstance like this, whether you have ended one detailed action resolution and begun another, or if it all flows together. In this case, due to the change in structure being the result of a failure on the character's part, the GM runs them together—so your first action in the fight is to spend Fight to switch to an unarmed style, and you do not get the 5 Heart bonus for ending the detailed action resolution while wielding Whimsical.

## Methodical

Methodical approaches use strong foundations to prevent future trouble. That's why they can start tackling a Test before it's imminent!

More specifically they may make "ranged Progress rolls."

This isn't exactly normal preparation. That's covered in moving a Test closer. You're not thinking ahead to the specifics of the trouble you face. Instead, you're acting in the present in a way that could eliminate all forms of future trouble—a well-lived life does not encounter many Trials! So for that reason you get to make Progress against Tests and Crises in the far future without explicitly preparing for the day that future comes—unraveling instead the roots that those problems have in the now.

The GM may react to this strategy in one of two ways.

First, a Test may remain at Long or Medium Range while you make slow and steady Progress against it. Nor does it strike back against your Heart: only failing and missing impose the Test's penalties.

Second, the Test may "charge" as soon as you begin making Progress against it. Your way of living essentially illumines the Test early.

You've gotten a few free attempts at making Progress, but that's all.

The second is the standard model, but either works. It's up to the GM once the GM has a feel for things to decide how that should work out.

## Conscientious

You're the kind of person who plans for the worst and never leaves a necessary thing un-done—by the time you have to face a Test, it's half-solved already!

## Thoughts on Failure

Doing things right eats up a lot of time. Sometimes you don't have that time—and in the end, that's what running out of Heart means. It means that planning for the worst wasn't the best notion, *this time*, because you needed that thinking time to deal with what actually happened. C'est la vie.

Losing all your Heart, thus, means that you just didn't have time to get everything you needed done before turning your attention to the problem at hand. It's like a soldier who's still carefully cleaning the cannon and thinking through the tactical situation when the enemy's at hand. Losing all your Heart and Exemplar Pool at the same time means that this was an irrecoverable mistake.

It's natural to go from Conscientious to another strategy—e.g., Correct—when the Test is actually at the door. Bear in mind, though, that just like switching weapons, switching Attitudes has a cost in Heart.

## Conscientious

-1 Solve/1d6 Progress  
Long Range [in time]

[Heart Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -2 Heart Defense)

The Conscientious Weapon has the power to tackle many problems at once and resolve Tests during the preparation phase.

Conscientious has the following special features:

***Terrain Control:*** this Weapon may constrain up to three Tests or Crises per round.

You may constrain a Test or Crisis, that is in Long Range of you or that tries to move into Melee, Short, or Medium Range of you, to Short Range Mobility. You may do this on your action or reactively when it seeks to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before their move.

*You can use this control on up to three enemies per round.*

***Multitasking:*** when you succeed in making Progress or perform an epic move to make Progress on a constrained Test or Crisis, you may make equal Progress on all other constrained Tests or Crises.

### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 1d6 Heart Damage, or
- take 1 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude how time is slipping away from you.

### *Epic Moves:*

*I Expected That*—make 2d6 Progress on a single Test or Crisis, without taking advantage of the *multitasking* feature. Stipulate that something bad happened, but good practice or thoughtful preparation saved the day.

*Done Right*—make 1d6 Progress on up to three Tests within Long Range and stipulate that something you are doing is the correct action under the circumstances. In some cases this may break the GM's suspension of disbelief—attempting to appease the spirit of a wildfire by pouring a libation, say—and in these cases the GM must tell you what the correct and appropriate action actually is and stipulate (if you agree) that you perform it.

## Example

You are a magician and you have two concerns. The first is an army that is advancing towards the forest you have sworn to protect. The second is the impending sinking of the entire continent on which you live. Regrettably time is running short (or rather Medium Range) for each, and you must solve them both at once.

There is so much to do!

You must secure an apprentice, in the event that you die before you can stop the continent from sinking. You must begin negotiations with the commander of the army. You must make preparations to destroy the army if they are intransigent. You must plan out the spell that will save the continent, and consider and investigate the possibility that an enemy has arranged this possibility for you. It's a difficult time management problem, and you begin by making Long Range attacks with the Conscientious strategy.

Your first two attacks do not succeed; and the problems move calmly into Short Range. Another miss: the army is at your doorstep, earthquakes have begun. There was no time! No time! You desperately hurry through your plans, finally rolling an 8 and making a lucky 6 points of Progress on both problems. Unfortunately they are now here, so you dare not fail again. A 9: 1 more point of Progress. A 10: the army, you decide, ignored your advances and charged viciously into the forest, but you were ready for this act and had established illusions and traps to convince the commander you are worth speaking to. 5 more Progress against the army. A 1, with seven points of assistance from your new apprentice: 5 more progress on each. That's 17 on the army and 12 on the whole continent-sinking thing. Hot dice! But when your interval ends, and you spend a round not attacking, the Crises attack you in turn: an earthquake sunders the entire area and disrupts your house, your notes, your spells, and your plans. Maybe it's time, given the way millions of people are going to die, to shift to a focused local strategy and just let the army be.

## Hard Work

If you work hard then you can stay one step ahead of your Trials. People won't say, "That person is good at solving problems." They'll say, "That person works so hard! Problems don't show up at all."

## Thoughts on Failure

Hard work is tiring, and there's nothing more dispiriting than to work hard and see it all go for nothing. So it's natural for you to give up and fall down (metaphorically or literally) when you lose enough Heart.

But let's back up a step first.

Part of hard work is knowing that things are difficult. So it's not really losing a little bit of Heart here and a little bit there that bothers you. That's normal, and really it just means that you're burning some of your energy and devotion on your work.

If you start getting close to losing all your Heart, it's more like the world is being unfair. It could mean that you've slipped up, and it could mean that you've just burned yourself out. But most of the time, if you'd like for your character to remain energetic, it means that the world is just not fair. Things are going wrong that there wasn't any way for you to prevent, and there wasn't ever anything you could do.

When you finally lose all your Heart, then, it's when your efforts just fell apart on you. If you still have Exemplar Dice, then it's obvious what to do: take a little time to pull yourself and your life back together, then shoulder the yoke and harness once again. If you're out of Exemplar Dice, then maybe you're just in despair. It's time to change how you live your life! Imagine the farmer whose Heart runs out in this manner: that's how you get bandits, magicians, shovel-wielding farming heroes, and weird, unruly sages.

### Hard Work

+0 Solve/1d10 Progress  
Medium Range [in time]

### [Heart Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, +0 Heart Defense)

The Hard Work Weapon is exceptional for challenging Crises that loom on the horizon.

Hard work has the following special feature:

***Terrain Control:*** when a Test or Crisis at Medium Range moves into Short or Melee Range of you, you may immediately make 2d10 Progress against it.

*You may use this power against one Test or Crisis per round.*

### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 1d10 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and explain over the course of an interlude how your efforts are falling apart.

### *Epic Moves:*

***Foundation of Hard Work***—make 1d10 Progress and stipulate a mitigating factor: some thing that you have done well that will reduce the severity of the Crisis if it triumphs. For example, if an unjust magistrate is gouging you for tax money, then you can stipulate to having a small amount of cash buried on nearby land so that you won't wind up destitute, or to having worked hard all year so that you'll have some left even if he gets his way.

***Trying Hard***—make 1d10 Progress and stipulate that you tried hard. No one can (or at least no one *ought*) to say that you didn't give this your all.

### Example

You have been sheltering runaway conscripts from an unjust King's evil war. Now soldiers come up to your house—they want to search your lands and

see if you've done anything illegal! Even if they don't find anything, you're pretty sure they plan to conscript you. You could kill them all with martial arts but right now that's not your plan, so they're not enemies: they're a Crisis.

A first success is made even before the soldiers get to your house. After all you don't need to explicitly prepare for their arrival: you've been expecting it for months, and you've got everything planned out. Your first 8 points of Progress are made as you hide the conscripts you have at your house now in a perfectly serviceable hidden cellar.

Now the Crisis attempts to become imminent: the soldiers march up! You immediately earn another 8 Progress.

Next, you roll an epic move. You opt for a *foundation of hard work*. Even if they decide to make trouble, they won't find the conscripts you've hidden away. There's that much at least, and it gives you another 7 points of Progress to boot.

Next, you roll a 3. That's not so good! The soldiers rudely interrogate you and you lose a bit of Heart. Still, you've made 23 points of Progress, so you're not doing so badly—

Until you roll a 7.

Suddenly, *bam*: the other shoe drops. They are in fact going to try to drag you in as a soldier of their King's glorious army. Worse, you find out that if they fail at this, or if you start killing the soldiers in front of you, they're going to burn your house. The foundation you've laid means that the hidden conscripts may live, but even so, being under a burning building isn't so good for them. You lose 3 points of Heart.

A roll of 1 doesn't get you enough help. One player chips in a roll, but it comes up a 3. Then a 6 fails, and two 8s make twelve points of Progress—it must be almost enough, you've done 35 Progress—but the battle isn't quite complete. Another bad roll and you're out of interval—

So you give up. You go with them. It's not worth staying and watching the rude soldiers take your life apart piece by piece, when you can go with them and take the matter up with the commander.

And as you leave everything behind, at least knowing that you've saved some good people, they're laughing and saying that they never thought they'd capture a glorious hero so easily. If only you'd had another epic move, they wouldn't be so jolly!

## Unbreakable Confidence

You have some theory for how the world works. Like:

- "If I keep love in my heart, everything will work out all right;"
- "Everyone's ultimately good at heart;" or even
- "My fire sword technique can overcome any kind of trouble!"

You cling to it even in the face of contrary evidence—and sometimes it even bears out!

### Thoughts on Failure

The world is full of specters—of phantasmal experiences that seem to indicate, when looked at casually, that your theory is wrong. Sometimes you will keep love in your heart but bandits and wolves will attack, your soup will catch on fire, and you'll wake up to find ants covering your bed. Sometimes people, even though people are all ultimately good at heart, will do rotten things. Sometimes you'll use your fire sword technique, as when you're lost out on a mountainside and night is setting in, and it just won't seem to help.

But keep the faith.

You *know* the truth, don't you? So when you lose Heart, you know that all it really means, in the end, is that the world is trying harder to deceive. Even an apparent total victory for darkness is just . . . a sign that you need to hang on harder. A necessary setback on the path to necessary triumph. It's OK, when that happens, when you run out of Heart, to let the bad things happen while you catch your breath for your next try. They're not real, or at least, not *really* real. They're in-between steps. They're real for what they are, but they don't mean the defeat they seem to mean. You'll recover, you'll come back and overcome them or prove them false. That's just what living in this world means and it's your way of living with it.

In the end, you'll only be shattered if you run out of Heart and Exemplar Dice both. Then maybe you'll actually lose your faith. And if you don't, then and only then does it mean your faith is actually a little crazy. Then and only then can someone look at you and shake their head and say, "That kid! Thinking a fire sword technique can fix everything!" and have them be sort of close to right.

Then, maybe, you should treat it as kind of comic and kind of sad for a while, as a player, until enough time has passed for your dream to rise up and become good and sound, again.

### Unbreakable Confidence

-1 Solve/1d6 Progress  
Long Range [in time]

[Heart Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, -2 Heart Defense)

The Unbreakable Confidence Weapon helps you cling to and defend to your declared truth of the world no matter what stands in your way!

Unbreakable Confidence has the following special features:

***Inflexible:*** it costs +5 Heart to switch from unbreakable confidence to another Approach in a single interval, for a total of 10 Heart.

***Terrain Control:*** unbreakable confidence may constrain two Tests or Crises per round.

You may constrain a Test or Crisis who is in Long or Medium Range or who tries to move into Medium or closer Range of you to Short Range Mobility. As a special rule you may not constrain Tests or Crises at Short or Melee Range, even though that means that they are also technically within Medium Range. You may constrain a target on your action or reactively when it seeks to move. In this case the constraint takes effect before its move.

Constrained enemies that move towards you, whether through a normal move or by moving with someone else, roll d10+their Heart Defense. If they roll 12 or less, they stay at Medium Range or move into Medium Range (as applicable). They do not have the option of taking Damage instead.

*You may use this power on two Tests or Crises per round.*

### Fail:

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 1d6 Heart Damage, or

- take 1 Heart Damage, and rant about your theory and how it still holds together over the course of an interlude.

### *Epic Moves:*

*The Truth Demonstrates Itself*—make 1d6+1 Progress and stipulate some evidence towards your theory. Either you get to enter your evidence into the official reality of the game, or the GM (or appropriate player) admits to some other thing that transpires that would seem to indicate that your theory is correct.

*Shelter of Innocence*—make 1d6+1 Progress and stipulate something that will allow you to continue to hold to your belief even if circumstances go awry. This may also be something that will reinforce your belief if things go well, but it should not be the solid evidence of righteousness given by *The Truth Demonstrates Itself* but rather a circumstance that will conspire to render things ambiguous if you fail.

### Example

You're a pacifist. You think you can live your life without hurting a living thing. But now you're being hunted by an evil sorcerer. You're in a ramshackle house up in the mountains in the winter with your very pregnant mother-in-law and a wolf that was living there before you got there. You're surrounded by possible Tests. What can you do?

Well, the first thing you can do is stand by your conviction. You have to make peace with that wolf. Your roll of 5 is a failure, and it leaps on you and savages your arm. That costs you some Fight *and* some Heart. A 3, 5, 3, and 1 (which your mother-in-law turns into a success by adding a 6) indicate that things are going pretty poorly there.

Meanwhile! The sorcerer's minions, winter in a decrepit house, hunger, and the upcoming childbirth are closing in. You get to pick two to try to keep at bay with terrain control. You start with the sorcerer's minions. An 8 means that you can make 3 points of Progress on that—maybe the minions are unhappy about hunting down a virtuous person like you. A 5 means that you can't do anything about the empty larder just by reiterating your belief in the virtue of all life. Two more misses the next round are discouraging, and 5 points of Progress towards the larder isn't much worth believing in. So as your interval ends, you're facing absolute Heart depletion and you haven't done more than 4 points on the wolf, 3 on the minions, and 5 on the larder.

But that's just bad dice luck, isn't it? You make a new plan for the next interval. You beg your mother-in-law to put her faith in you—to cheer you on. That'll render your successes on distant issues into epic moves, and possibly prevent the non-wolf problems from being an issue at all—

Except, regrettably, the wolf tears you apart. It's not a moral lesson! It's terrible dice luck. Later people will tell the story that you were so filial and self-sacrificing that you fed your own body to a wolf so that your mother-in-law could live to have another child.

## Magic Heart Weapons

## Lamia Song

In addition to its use as a spiritual weapon, a lamia's "song" is a tool for resolving difficulties. For instance, the song of Enterissa Andao is a weapon against death—she may use it to put an end to battles, drive death away from a place, even bring people back from the grave if they have not gone too far into dead waters.

## Enterissa's Song

This is a weapon of grief against despair. Enterissa's song promises that we may refuse death by clinging to what has passed away. Any character may use this song, but it has magical effects only when used by Enterissa or with the expenditure of "plac."

## Thoughts on Failure

To lose your Heart is to lose to death and its bleakness. The dead waters will draw nigh—preceded, in the upper realm, by the dreaming waters. Slakes will cluster to you, motivations will become clouded, and the shadow will smile.

Some of this is psychological—what it means to *you*, and particularly, since this is Enterissa's song, to Enterissa Andao. This is what she fears. But some of it is actual. The song, always, is a thing that holds the dead waters back. Its faltering, always, is a thing that draws them near. Death's reign increases when you lose your Heart; that is why you must be careful and choose your battles.

So to fail means first, that something of the grief in you surrenders to a cold and useless emptiness. Something in your heart ceases to be a barrier against death, and becomes instead a deadness. And second, it means that insofar as circumstances allow, the actuality of death prevails: around you, the world moves closer to dead waters.

To falter, in this fashion, when Exemplar Dice remain—  
That is not so great a bleakness. It may mean nothing more than a flood-water surging of dead or dreaming waters, a single life lost, or the attention of a

handful of the slakes. But when there are no longer Exemplar Dice to sustain you, then it is quite likely death: the death of the dominion, or the self, or the heart. At best, when you return from it, you will be forgotten of yourself, less than you were, unable to wield this weapon further but perhaps finding a new, death-tainted song.

### Enterissa's Song

-1 Solve/2d10 Progress

[Heart Weapon]

(+1 Promptness, +0 Heart Defense)

This Song Weapon allows you to struggle onwards while filled with grief.

### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d10 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and stipulate over the course of an interlude that the power of despair and the shadow draws nigh.

### *Epic Moves:*

*A Single Reclamation*—make 2d10 Progress and turn one thing that was nearly lost to death into a remedy for it. One despairing soul becomes a brightness that may bring hope to others; one soldier that would have died becomes a hero to save his squadron; one tenement that was becoming a grimy holding of the slakes becomes instead a tiny refuge against the shadow. This must fall under the rubric of your general mission: a family can be saved when you're struggling to save a neighborhood, but not when you're struggling to save a single person.

*Struggle On*—make 2d10 Progress and grieve for something that was lost, stipulating both that failure and that your "grief" for it actually makes you stronger. This must be something that is with you now, at least emotionally: you can carry forward old losses and turn them into present grief, or you could lose something important in

the current conflict, but you can't just decide that zebras suddenly died out and you feel bad about them.

## Floating Mausoleum Dominion

Enterissa Andao is a lamia who carries the bones of a dead lover whom she could not save. Her dominion is not tethered but rather drifts in the "air" within the dreaming waters.

The concern of Enterissa Andao is death.

She defies it; she opposes it; she seeks to cleanse it from the dreaming waters. It is for this reason that she has cut her dominion from the city that once contained it and now moves it through the dreaming waters. Her sensibilities on this matter are carried by her haunting song, which resounds at all times through the dreaming waters of her dominion: it is heard not with the ear but with the heart, and it teaches of her conceptions.

Thus in her realm the industry is to make an end to death. The soldiers of her dominion are white-clad and wear bone masks; they descend into the mortal waters to end battles and great tragedies. The workers strive to build out the limits of the dominion, working with impure "plac"—a calcifying substance that contains some elements of her song—to extend the physical reach of her chancery. Others make charms against death, or poetry, or tend to the more ordinary physical matters such as food and transportation.

The people of her chancery speak of a virtue they name "grief." This is not simple sadness, or even the full complexity of a grieving emotion. Rather they have expanded on the concept with layers of philosophical and metaphysical complexity, crafting the notion of an ineffable will-against-death that has a character both of sadness and of victory. A person with strong grief is admirable, even if they are not otherwise virtuous or good: in a confrontation with the shadow or the slakes, Andao's people believe, they would come out ahead.

The impinging of Andao's citadel on the ordinary world creates a kind of death-refusing madness. Mortals become aware of slakes and the shadow and hunger to defy both them and death. Some experience a passing insanity; others are touched or inspired by it for all their lives; a few gain a partial and intellectual understanding of the nature of the world, and either swim up to Andao's chancery to take service there or simply fight the agencies of death in isolation and ignorance until at last it takes them.

It is the power of Enterissa Andao to know the hearts of each person in her dominion. She exhorts them not to know despair. Should they fail, she suspends them in ice and takes them to her hall of instruction for remaking.

## Henry Soring's Song

This song is drowning, and blood in the water, and teeth. Most often it solves problems by punishing people or terrifying them, but it's also useful for chewing through walls, keeping people out of an area, and drawing predators out. This song is usable by Henry Soring, by people released from his drowning kingdom, and by any close disciples and personal friends.

### Thoughts on Failure

The song of Henry Soring eats at the heart from the inside, and the more you lose your Heart, the harder it is to bear. Is it right to sing drowning and blood in the water and teeth onto the world? Can you sing drowning without yourself drowning, can you sing blood without bleeding out, can you sing of teeth without that song turning on you and devouring you, drawing you in? These are the concerns of the wielders of Henry Soring's song.

It is a heavy burden, this song, and the more you lose Heart the heavier it grows. To lose Heart entirely is to realize that you are wrong: to reject the song, to cry over what you've done. Or, conversely, it is to be drawn into that song, to mire yourself in it until you are choking, unable to breathe, to be chewed up by it and spit out until you feel as if there is nothing left of your *self* but fear and pain—

And, if you have Exemplar Dice remaining, to wake up, later, drifting in the dreaming waters, intact on most physical levels but badly wounded in mind and heart.

There are two ends for someone using Henry Soring's song who runs entirely out of Heart and Exemplar Dice both. Neither is pretty, but one is much kinder than the other. The first, and kinder, is repentance: the deeds one committed while using the song are a painful howl in the heart, a crime that can never wholly be made right. Whatever moral justification a person might have used to invoke the song is discarded, and the ethical structures or loyalties and drives behind it; thus, the person who loses all their Heart and Exemplar Dice in this fashion is never truly the same again. The second end is to be devoured into the nature of Henry Soring's Chancery—to immerse so thoroughly in that artificial Hell that not even Soring could extract you. The exact nature of this fate can be ambiguous: are you suffering inside it, or are you part of it now? But either way, as long as the song anywhere is sung, you will be immersed inside it.

The GM should only pick the second ending if the player is OK with it, but players should only use this song if there are circumstances in which they would be.

### Henry Spring's Song

+0 Solve/2d10 Progress

[Heart Weapon]

(+0 Promptness, -1 Heart Defense)

This Song Weapon allows you to punish your enemies—but is that really right?

#### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 2d10 Heart Damage, or
- take 3 Heart Damage, and stipulate over the course of an interlude that the burden of your Song is becoming too much to bear.

#### *Epic Moves:*

*Drowning and Blood*—make 2d10 Progress and stipulate an overt magical effect associated with this song, either to take effect immediately (for an effect with scope substantially smaller than the task at hand) or to take effect on success. For instance, when fighting City Hall, you can immediately stipulate a drowning, dizzying sensation that makes lesser functionaries fear you, but carrying the Mayor and your opposition off to suffer in the drowning kingdom would probably be a stipulation that only takes effect on success.

*Moral Conflict*—make 2d10 Progress and stipulate that you have learned something that makes winning less desirable and losing more acceptable. Perhaps there's potential for redemption in a person you were hunting, or someone's raising a good point about the moral stickiness of haling people off to the drowning kingdom, or your dreams are haunted by blood in the water. The stipulation

should give you a good excuse to give up if you have to, to angst if you win, or to feel as a player (if not as a character) that something has improved in the situation.

## Theresa Irving's Song

This is a naïve song that tries to solve problems by forcing things into the image of a perfect world. It's the kind of song that would pound a square peg into a round hole until it broke, or make people act happy even when they are not. By default only Theresa Irving can use this song.

## Thoughts on Failure

Losing Heart is frustrating. It's like the pieces of how the world ought to be just don't align! You can't figure out what's wrong. If you run entirely out of Heart, then you may snap and give up on the whole matter, or you may extract something semi-voluntarily from the situation and exile it to the cages of the lion prison dominion.

Losing all your Heart and Exemplar Dice simultaneously most likely will precipitate a total breakdown. The lion prison dominion will attempt to grow to swallow everything related to that which hurts you, or, conversely, dissolve entirely.

It is the character of the lion prison dominion to operate on narrative time—that is, the people imprisoned there do not so much live as experience stories told about their lives. There is a terrain control effect requiring characters to roll 9+ on their d10+their Control to escape, but more importantly, they may only do so when brought back into the flow of time by an active witness to their imprisonment. Player characters may only be thrown into the lion prison dominion when they run out of Heart, Fight, or Spirit, and they should have a relatively early opportunity to escape unless they are also out of Exemplar Dice. This is an approximation to a more general rule of "Something has to happen, to catch a person emotionally and metaphysically off-balance, for them to go to the lion prison dominion"—for PCs, that's represented by running out of Fight, Heart, and Spirit, but for NPCs, it doesn't have to have that precise story.

Theresa Irving's Song  
+0 Solve/1d6 Progress

[Heart Weapon]  
(+0 Promptness, +0 Heart Defense)

This Song Weapon tames the world to the illogic of your desires.

Theresa Irving's song has the following special feature:

**Negative Feedback:** each time you take damage, add a +1 *try harder* bonus to your Solve and Progress (max +3) until the end of your interval.

#### *Fail:*

When you *fail* using this Weapon, you may either

- take 1d6 Heart Damage, plus your *try harder* bonus, or
- take 1 Heart Damage, and stipulate over the course of an interlude that you're coming closer to giving up in frustration.

#### *Epic Moves:*

**Transformational Glory**—make 1d6 Progress and recover 1d6 Heart; add Progress bonuses such as *try harder* to each. Stipulate that magic has made something work out or two things make sense together that otherwise would not. For instance, a magical pony helps you rescue someone from a building fire, or a mystical bow and arrow created by your song has allowed two people previously entirely compatible to fall in love. The GM may amend the specific means of the magic, and may cause new problems to crop up immediately, but for at least one shining instant things *do* work out or make sense together.

**Healing Insight**—recover 1d6 Heart, adding any Progress bonuses such as *try harder*. Stipulate some understanding that you've come to. The world changes such that that insight makes sense, at least for now and to the limits of the power of the song. For instance, you might realize that your car has broken down because it's unhappy, which points the way towards using praise and empathy to heal it.

*Lion Prison*—lose 2d6 Heart and make 2d6 Progress. Add any Progress bonuses such as *try harder* twice to each. Estrange some element of the situation into the lion prison dominion or stipulate details about some resident therein.