

Past the stone walls that divide your village from the fairy forest, there's a glow coming from that old cave...

In the attic of your family's cottage, there is a rusty sword that begins to sing one night...

This morning your mother woke you up, and you find yourself meeting the strange girl with a mysterious pendant...

Every map has blanks. Every story has gaps. Every old ruin has secrets. And every person has a dream: to experience those mysteries. To chart a course into the unknown. To explore. To adventure.

Grand Adventure is a roleplaying game, telling stories about how adventurers work together to discover amazing new things, solve challenges, and explore a fantastic world.

How to Play

You need several people to be players, at least two but not more than five or so. One person will take the “MC” role (described below). The others will have individual player characters, or “PCs”. Everyone who plays will need several six-sided dice (d6), and paper and pencils for note-taking.

How to be a player

As a player, you narrate the actions of your player character, as they adventure in a fictional world you and your friends create together. You say the things your character would say, describe the things your character would do.

Fictional license is permission to narrate something about the game world. Most characters can walk, pick up objects, and speak, so you can freely describe your character doing these things. A character with a sword can use it to block attacks or cut things, but probably can't make an energy beam come out of the blade (unless the sword is magical) or turn it into a stack of gold (unless it's really magical).

Players have fictional license over their own characters, and over whatever parts of the game world the MC permits, but do not have license to narrate for other players' characters without their permission.

How to be the MC

“MC” stands for “Master of Ceremonies”, but it could also be “Music Conductor”. In this game, stories are created together by the group, with contributions from the game rules. The MC's role is to help weave these stories into a coherent whole and propel them along. The MC can tell stories too, just like any other player, but the MC's special role is to set a consistent

tone for the stories the players tell. Like the conductor of an orchestra, the MC's job is not to make the music, but to keep everyone else's performance in harmony.

In order to do their job, the MC doesn't have their own PC, but does have fictional license to speak for every part of the game world. In addition, while the group should collectively agree on what's possible for a given character, the MC has final authority over fictional license for other players. The MC should be permissive in allowing players to drive story forward, and only intervene to maintain the tone.

What is the “tone”? It's the feelings you want to get from the story and the expectations you have for the story. In a game driven by optimism and hope, you generally expect happy endings, minimal bloody violence, and consistent loyalties. In darker games, betrayals of trust, tragic deaths, and moral dilemmas are the norm. You have several tools for setting the tone. You can use word choices, like “killed” vs. “defeated”, or narrative choices, like “the enemies surrender” vs. “the enemies fight to the death”. The group should discuss the specific tone they want for their game, but the MC has the authority to enforce it during the game.

How to use these rules

The game itself is just a set of rules. You use these rules to spark, frame, and support a conversation about the fiction. So what does that mean?

The fiction is the name for the world of wonder, mystery, and excitement that you all are imagining and describing together, and for the events that take place in that world. When you say “there's a lumbering Ogre with a stout wooden club, and it takes a swing at Tana's head”, that's the fiction.

The conversation about that fiction is what you, the players, say to each other about the world, your characters, and what is or should be going on. When you say “I think the Ogre should have a spear instead of a club”, or when the MC asks the players, “what is Tana doing about the Ogre?”, that is part of the conversation.

The rules give you a vocabulary for having this conversation. When you see rules for Pools, Actions, Challenges, or Discoveries, for example, these are tools for the MC and the other players to give a structure to what’s happening. Is the Ogre particularly tough or wimpy? Its Action Cost will determine how easily you can attack it. How long will the Ogre last in a fight before it’s defeated? Giving it a Pool lets you track damage done to it, until it is hurt badly enough to run away.

The rules will help you take players from one Discovery to another, facing Challenges along the way. Each Challenge is dealt with by characters performing Actions. A character’s Actions are formed from the Words they have access to. Performing Actions will deplete the characters’ Pools, which are eventually recharged at the next Discovery.

Use the rules when the group doesn’t already know the answer to a question posed by the story, such as “can we defeat the Ogre?” If the MC narrates the presence of an Ogre and frames it as a Challenge, the players are being asked to use the rules for Challenges to deal with it. But the rules are tools for moving the game forward, not a straitjacket preventing the players from creating a shared story. If the characters are powerful enough to easily defeat the Ogre, just narrate that outcome and continue the story.

Words and Intent

A rule of the game is that players should honor the intent of their fellow players’ words. Here’s some examples of this principle in action.

If a player tells the MC that her character has a Word called “Befriend”, that clearly signals the sort of actions she wants her PC to take. The MC shouldn’t interpret that as “Intimidate” or “Provoke”. Likewise, if the MC says that a creature is “forbidding” or “dangerous”, only truly heroic action can justify using an action like “Befriend” to overcome that creature.

If the MC tells you that your character steps into a “mysterious temple”, what do you imagine? Perhaps soft lighting coming through a stained glass window, coming from an unknown source. Shelves feature books written in an old language. On the wall are inscribed holy symbols belonging to ancient gods. Gently glowing crystal orbs hanging on the walls.

But say that instead, the MC tells you that it’s an “eldritch fane”. A fane is a temple, and “eldritch” can mean “mysterious”, but the whole feeling is different. Perhaps now there’s an altar in your imagination, stained with something’s — or someone’s — blood. The walls are darker. Jagged runes spell out dark portents. The PCs should not feel as comfortable in such a place, because the MC is signaling danger and menace.



Quick Character Creation

Pick a **name** for your character.

Pick two **adjectives** that describe your character: Brave, Clever, Cool, Curious, Determined, or Mysterious. Write them down, followed by “Adventurer”, as your first Archetype. For example, “Brave Cool Adventurer”. You’ll gain other Archetypes, like “Ninja”, “Knight”, or “Werewolf”, as you play the game.

Words are how you describe your actions in the game. You’ll gain more Words, or create your own, as you play and discover the sort of adventurer you want to be. See page 5 for Words.

Write down the **Words** you start with, based on which adjectives you picked:

- » Confront (Brave, Cool, or Mysterious)
- » Resist (Brave, Curious, or Determined)
- » Avoid (Clever, Determined, or Mysterious)
- » Outwit (Clever, Cool, or Curious)

Write a star (☆) next to each Word you start with. If you picked two adjectives that give you the same Word, write two stars (☆☆). More stars mean you are more experienced using that Word.

Pools are your ability to keep doing what you do. They measure your health, fatigue, sneakiness, magical power, and many other things. When you use your Words, their cost is paid for by rolling dice from your Pools. See page 4 for Pools.

Write down a **Pool**: “Resolve (♡♡)”.

Think up a concept or a pitch for the first story you want to tell about your character, and write it down under **Threads**. For example, “Searching for an ancient family sword”. You don’t have to know how this story will end, only how it will start. See page 13 for Threads.

Finally, think about your **appearance**. You might have a trait, accessory, or habit that embodies one of your adjectives or suggests the Thread you’ll be chasing. A wooden sword, a special pendant, a thick book, goggles, an unusual hair color, heterochromatic eyes, and many other things can be part of your appearance.

Now you’re ready to adventure!

The Adventurer Archetype

There are many types of adventurers: people who like to explore the world, and have their own ways of surviving the dangers along the way. This Archetype is really six of those types: Brave, Clever, Cool, Curious, Determined, and Mysterious.

When you created your character, you picked two types and combined them. If you advance, you can pick another Adventurer type if you want.

Words:

Confront (4 ☆) (if you are Brave, Cool, Mysterious), You tackle a Challenge head-on, with fists, weapons, words, or simply determination. You typically Confront monsters, angry villagers, or ancient spirits.

Resist (4 ☆) (if you are Brave, Curious, Determined), You endure a Challenge, coming out ahead by surviving it or adapting to it. You typically Resist hostile enchantments, deadly poison, terrible weather, rock slides, and many other hazards.

Avoid (4 ☆) (Clever, Determined, Mysterious), You dodge, hide from, sneak around, misdirect, or otherwise avoid a direct confrontation with a Challenge. You typically Avoid lethal area attacks, guards on patrol, sharp blades on traps in a dungeon, and so forth.

Outwit (4 ☆) (if you are Clever, Cool, Curious). You figure something out, remember something you’ve learned, analyze something, or notice something that lets you defeat the Challenge. You typically Outwit weird magical traps, humanoids speaking a strange language, or doors covered in fiendish riddles.

Pools:

Resolve (♡). Your physical endurance, your spirit, your strength of will, combining to allow you to continue your journey and your fight. *Special*: Recharge Resolve whenever you reach a Discovery. You can spend Resolve on any Action.

Archetypes

Archetypes are iconic character types. Fighter, Magic User, Elf, or Werewolf can all be Archetypes.

A character doesn't have to have an Archetype to describe themselves as something. For example, a player can say "my character is an Elf" without starting with the Elf Archetype. They should take the Archetype when they want to highlight their Elf-ness in the game.

Characters gain new Archetypes during play. There is no limit to how many Archetypes a character may have. For example, a character can start as a Magic User, then become an Elf, then a Werewolf, then a Fighter. If you gain a new Archetype, you don't stop being other things. A Fighter who gains the Mage Archetype can still fight, use weapons, and do everything they did before. They've become something more, not just something else.

Archetypes come with a set of Pools and Words. Most Archetypes will have one or two Words, and one or two Pools. For example, a Fighter might have "Attack" and "Bravely" Words, and a "Courage" Pool. When you gain that Archetype, you gain those Words and Pools.

If you gain a new Archetype with a Word or Pool you have, Level Up the Word or Pool instead of taking it a second time. For example, a Fighter with the "Attack" Word who becomes a Knight will Level Up his Attack. He won't have two Attack Words.



Pools

A Pool is how you track something you lose or regain often. You can use Pools to represent things like:

- » Willpower, stamina, or endurance.
- » Magical strength, "mana", reserves of psychic force, etc.
- » Wealth or valuables which you spend or earn back.
- » Your stealthiness or cover when sneaking around.
- » The King's favor, a good reputation, or credibility.

Pools have a name, like "Resolve", "Mana", or "Rage". Pools with the same name are the same Pool. For example, you are both a Wizard and a Cleric. Both of those Archetypes have an "MP" Pool. You have one MP Pool, not two.

Pools hold six-sided dice (d6). Mark one heart (♥) next to a Pool to show how many dice it can hold at once. Pools have a maximum size, up to 5 hearts.

When you spend dice from a Pool, take dice out of the Pool and roll them. Unless the Pool has a rule that says otherwise, you can spend as many or as few dice as you like. Don't put dice back into a Pool after you spend them. You can make a mark by the hearts, if you want to keep track of spent dice.

You can't spend dice from a Pool if you can't explain how the Pool would help your efforts. For example, the MC can ask you how your Stealth Pool helps you convince the king that you're friendly.

You can recover dice back to a Pool. Other rules will tell you how many dice you can recover. No matter what, you can't put more dice into a Pool than its maximum size.

Some rules let you recharge a Pool. For example, Resolve recharges every time you make a Discovery. Recharging lets you recover your Pool up to its maximum size.

If you Level Up a Pool, add one heart to its size. You can't Level Up a Pool past five hearts. If you Level Up a Pool, recharge it immediately.

Pools can have special rules. For example, the "Mana" Pool might declare that you can recharge it when you encounter a wellspring of magical power.

Words

Words are verbs, nouns, adjectives, or phrases. Words tell your group about the actions you are performing. For example, “Attack”, “Giant Ogre”, “Sneakily”, and “Crystal Sword” are all Words.

Words signal intention. “Confront” and “Avoid” mean different things in the fiction, even if they use the same rules. “Defeat” is not the same as “Kill”, or “Assassinate”. Listen to what the Word tells you, and honor what it means. Words can come with a description to clarify what they mean. The MC should narrate outcomes consistent with the Words the players use.

Many Words come with their own special rules. The most common rule lets the player use a different Pool when rolling dice. For example, the “Pickpocket” Word might allow a Thief to roll dice from their “Stealth” Pool.

Words have an action cost. When you include a Word in an action, you must pay its cost. You usually spend dice from a Pool to do so. You can assign one or more dice to a Word. If the sum of the dice equals or exceeds the action cost, then you’ve paid for the Word. For example, you can activate a Word with cost 4 on a roll of 4, 5, or 6. You could also pay for the Word with two dice showing a 1 and a 3.

Many Words have a star rating. Words can have up to five stars (☆). Write stars next to the action cost, for example “4 ☆☆☆”. Stars allow you to recover dice during Actions, one star per die.

If a rule says to Level Up a Word with a star rating, add one star permanently, to a maximum of five stars.

The same name with the same rules always refers to the same Word. For example, the Fighter and Knight might both have an “Attack” Word. If a Fighter also became a Knight, she only has one “Attack” Word, not two. You should try never to use the same Word but different rules. Instead, pick a new Word.

The MC may adjust Word costs in play. A powerful Word might cost 1 or 2 more points than normal. A weak word might cost less than normal. Almost all Words should have a cost of at least 1.

Creating New Words

Words are a contract between the players and the MC. A Word with a broad definition is useful in many situations. But, the MC can interpret it in many different ways. For example, you can “Confront” many types of problems. “Befriend” only works against people you can talk to. But when you “Befriend” a target, that is what happens. Success doesn’t mean they start a fight, or run away, or ignore you. Success means you win someone over.

To design a Word, think about this scope. Do you want a specific action? Do you want a broad action? Choose a Word that conveys the scope you want.

If your Word should be specific to an Archetype, make it specific. If other Archetypes could share it, make it generic. For example, “Assassinate” is the sort of thing only a Ninja or Assassin would do. “Attack” is a generic Word that could be part of many combat Archetypes.

Words will fall into one of a few types:

- » A verb (Attack, Befriend, Shoot). The cost should be 4 and the Word will have a star rating. These Words will succeed about half the time on a single d6 roll.
- » A modifier (Quickly, Sneakily, With Magic). The cost should be 1. The Word should either have a special rule, or a star rating, but not both. The most common special rule is to let the player use another Pool.
- » A noun (Crystal Sword, Spellbook). The cost should be 2 to 6, depending on how powerful it is. The Word will almost always have a special rule, but not a star rating.

Modifiers with a star rating represent a power-up or second wind. For example, a Knight might have a Word called “For Honor”. This Word would have a cost of 1 and have a star rating. The player may use it any time the Knight’s oath or code of honor is on the line.

With a cost of 1 and one star, the Word requires you to roll a die to activate it. But, it lets you recover that die no matter what. These Words have two advantages. First, if you roll low on your other dice, you can put the low roll on this Word instead. Second, it adds more stars to the Action, which let you recover more and more dice. A Knight who maxes “For Honor” at five stars can get an extra four dice back.

Challenges

A Challenge is anything in the fiction that confronts the characters and forces them to resolve it before they can continue. An encounter with wandering monsters, an avalanche blocking the valley, and an out-of-control magic spell can all be Challenges.

Challenges must be interesting and difficult but not impossible. A hidden elf village with homes growing organically out of the trunks of giant trees can be interesting, but doesn't pose any difficulty by itself. But if the elves living there are hostile to the PCs, and must be won over somehow, that is a Challenge. Similarly, trekking through an endless desert can be difficult, but probably isn't interesting — the players would probably rather not roll to forage for water daily, for example. If there's an Ancient Red Dragon and it's impossible to beat it somehow, it's unfair to present it as a Challenge. The MC should simply narrate its actions, such as setting fire to a village.

Challenges are situations, not creatures. The Challenge is not "the red dragon", and the Challenge doesn't necessarily end if the Dragon itself dies. Similarly, the Challenge might be resolved by successfully hiding from or sneaking past the Dragon, rather than fighting or killing it.

Challenges have stages. A stage represents the natural progression of a Challenge. For example, the player characters encounter a Dragon. It starts on the ground, using claws and tail to attack. After a few exchanges, it takes to the air and starts strafing the group. If the group hides or counterattacks, it might turn its attention to a nearby village. Finally, something might ground it, forcing the group into a desperate final showdown! Each of these changes is a stage. Challenges can have only one stage, but it's often more interesting to have a few.

Each stage has a difficulty rating. Typical difficulty ratings are between 1 (the simplest monsters, like Slimes, that novice adventurers can beat) and 20 (giant or powerful monsters such as ancient dragons, kraken, and the like). Challenges are also Words and can be used in Actions. Their action cost is the difficulty rating of the current stage. Different stages can have the same or different ratings.

Each stage has an endurance. This is measured in squares (□). The more PCs you have, the more squares of endurance your Challenges should have, so that everybody has a chance to act against them. Every successful Action against a Challenge checks off one of its squares. Characters can pay the action cost for a Challenge multiple times, depleting one extra squares, as part of the same action.

When a Challenge has no squares left, it's resolved.

For example, Tana is fighting Slimes. They're easy to beat (difficulty 2) but have 5 squares. Tana rolls 3 dice, getting 2, 3, and 5. She assigns all these dice to the Slime Word, and checks off 3 of the Challenge's squares.

Challenges can come with their own Twists. For example, a dragon can have Twists like "fiery breath!", or a slime can divide when struck, creating multiple smaller slimes. Even if a Challenge specifies some Twists, the MC isn't required to use them.



Creating Challenges

Start by answering the following questions about the Challenge.

- » What is at stake here? What can the PCs gain or lose?
- » Why do the PCs want to get involved?
- » What are some ways to fix the problem (violence, stealth, persuasion, etc.)?

Now you can come up with the parts of a Challenge: the stages, endurance, Features, and Twists.

Stages

Decide on how many different ways the PCs should have to deal with the Challenge. For example, the PCs will encounter a street gang. One stage is the gang members the PCs first interact with. Another stage is the rest of the gang. A final stage is the boss of the gang. The stages you choose will show how the situation evolves in response to the PCs' actions.

Difficulty and Endurance

To pick a difficulty, think about how many dice a player should roll to make a meaningful impact (one Action) at each stage, and multiply that by 3. You can make this number higher or lower to make things harder or easier.

Each stage of the Challenge should have one square per PC. This allows every character a chance to participate at least once per stage. If a stage should logically be defeated by only a few actions, increase its difficulty and give it less endurance. Likewise, an easy but exhausting stage can have more squares of endurance, but a lower difficulty.

Features

A Challenge can have one or more Features. If the Challenge can be resolved in a variety of ways, have fewer Features. If you want to make people think carefully about approaching the situation, have more. You can enable or disable specific Features at different stages.

Twists

A Challenge can come with its own Twists. Decide on two to four. Use Twists to add flavor to a fight, not just difficulty. Some Twists should be positive, to reward good tactics or good roleplaying. Others can be special attacks or hazards of the Challenge itself.

Features

A Feature is an element of the Challenge that can make it more difficult. Features represent things like:

- » A dragon's wings and ability to fly
- » A rock golem's armored surface, deflecting many physical attacks
- » A wizard's anti-magic shell, blocking magic from passing through
- » A magical sentinel's all-seeing vision which negates stealth
- » An evil nobleman's diplomatic immunity
- » A ghost's intangible ectoplasmic body

Features act as Words. The MC determines the activation cost. If the MC declares that a Feature applies to an Action, the player must include it as a Word in the Action.

Characters might have abilities that bypass or ignore Features. The players can narrate actions for their characters that negate Features. For example, a Swordfighter, an Elven Archer, and a Mage all attack a Dragon. During the fight, the Dragon launches itself into the sky. It gains the "Flying" Feature. The Swordfighter's melee attack can't reach. But, the Elven Archer can shoot arrows, and the Mage can cast fireballs. Because of that, the MC rules that Flying doesn't affect those characters.

A Feature should never completely negate a character's ability to act. Players should try to find interesting ways to work around Features. For example, the Dragon swoops low to attack. The Swordfighter's player says, "I leap up and grab hold of its claws as it passes, then fight from its back." In this case, the MC can rule that they ignore Flying as well.

Players can try to remove Features with their Actions. For example, the Elven Archer might say, "I target the Dragon's wings with my magic arrow". On a successful attack, the Dragon could crash to the ground and lose "Flying". In this case, the Action still marks off squares of endurance.

A Twist's complication can include adding a new Feature. For example, a swordfighter on dragonback might be at a disadvantage, and get Twist dice for their trouble.

Creating Features

Features are a signal to the players that a Challenge should be handled a certain way. Think about the sorts of approaches your players will take - or ask them, flat out.

Typical costs for a Feature are 1, 3, 6, 10, or 15, depending on how difficult the Feature is to overcome. 1 is an annoying but noticeable problem. 15 is a nigh-impossible hurdle which can be overcome by legendary action.

Example Features

Here are several “generic” Features that you can apply to your Challenges.

Movement

Fast (1): They can really move, and you’ll have trouble keeping up.

Evasive (3): They’re especially adept at dodging attacks. Find a way to pin them in place, or use area attacks.

Wall-crawling (6): They can climb up walls and hang from a ceiling, thanks to sticky powers, grappling hooks and rope, or other mechanisms.

Flying (10): They can fly! Unless you have ranged attacks, you’ll have a hard time engaging.

Intangible (15): They can turn immaterial. Ghosts, spirits, and similar beings can do this. Use powerful magic.

Protections

Tough (1): They’re a stronger specimen than you’re used to. Time to step up your game.

Armored (3): They’re wearing armor, or are naturally protected from physical attacks. Magic, mental attacks, or social interaction will work.

Shielded (6): They’re protected by a powerful magical barrier. It may have a weakness, if you can find it.

Invisible (10): They can’t be seen with normal sight. Use magic, night-vision, or even bags of flour.

Magic-Proof (10): They’re guarded by a warding circle, protective runes, or something else that shuts down magical attacks. Use physical moves.

Regenerating (15): They can heal damage! Basically anything you do will get healed, unless you can find a weakness, like silver for werewolves, fire for trolls, or holy symbols for vampires.

Social Interaction

Annoyed (1): They’re fed up with your shenanigans. Time to get serious.

Suspicious (3): They have reason to ignore you, but are listening. Taciturn city guards, greedy merchants, or suspicious criminals can be Suspicious.

Uncaring (6): They are uninterested in conversation. Be more forceful, or try something else. The king, a powerful and intelligent monster, or a warlord in front of her troops.

Hostile (10): Whether animal or magically berserk person, this thing is out for blood! You can’t talk it down.

Mindless (15): Normal conversation is basically impossible. Undead like zombies or other creatures with no consciousness to speak of.

Support

Fancy Weapon (1): They’re armed with the blacksmith’s best. Don’t get carved up or smashed - try disarming them.

Minions (3): They’re a boss-type character supported by flunkies. Use area-effect attacks, persuasion, or just run away!

Hostages (6): They took hostages! Friends, loved ones, or just random passersby will be hurt or killed if you make the wrong move. Deal with the hostage-takers first.

Magic Artifact (10): They’ve got ahold of the magic dingsy you’re after, and it’s putting out crazy power. Find a way to shield yourself from its effects until the boss gets overconfident and destroys themselves.

Actions

Actions are how you deal with Challenges. You start an Action by narrating what your character does about a Challenge. Then you choose the right Words that match what you said. Finally, you roll to activate those Words and finish the Action.

An Action isn't a single sword swing or a single attempt to pick a lock. An Action can be several seconds or even minutes long. It's a series of sword thrusts, parries, and ripostes. It's tense seconds running from a cave-in. It's the conversation you have with the sympathetic judge. Most of the Action will be you narrating what you do, and the MC responding.

Choosing Words

The Words you pick should represent what you're doing, to whom or to what, and how you do it. For example, Tana is a Magic Knight — a swordfighter who also uses spells. She encounters a Giant attacking a mountain village. Tana's player might say "I draw my sword, power it up with Flame magic, and charge right at the Giant!" She has an "Attack" Word, which represents physical attacks against opponents. She has a "With Magic" Word, which represents her ability to cast spells. The Challenge — "Giant" — is also a Word. She puts the Words together: "Attack", "Giant", "With Magic". The result is her Action: "I'm Attacking this Giant With Magic".

An Action can have at most one verb-type Word per player involved in the Action. An Action must have at least one verb.

The MC may tell you that you must include certain Words. For example, Basler is fighting a Golem with thick rocky armor. The Golem has a Feature, "Armored", to represent its stony hide. The rogue is fighting with two daggers, which won't do much against the rock. The MC says that Basler's attack Action must include the Word "Armored". Basler will have a harder time than his friend Sir Emory, who can wield a heavy mace that will crunch through rock.

The MC might also declare that you can't use certain Words. You can't "Befriend" an avalanche or "Attack" a spell of mind control. You might not be able to immediately "Befriend" a hostile Nobleman. The MC should inform the player of why they can't use a given Word.

For example, he may have secrets or concerns that you must deal with first as part of the Challenge.

You can't use the same Action twice in the same Challenge. Once you have used a specific combination of Words, you can't re-use that combination. You must change at least one Word. This includes any Words the MC requires, such as Features. You can't repeat Actions even if they failed. If you teamed up with someone else on the same Action, it counts as your Action too for this rule. For example, Tana and Basler are facing an Ogre. Tana uses the "Confront Ogre" Action. Once that's resolved, she cannot use "Confront Ogre" again. She can "Confront Ogre With Magic". If the MC ruled that a Feature like "Angry" was in play, she could "Confront Angry Ogre". Basler may also "Confront Ogre", because he hasn't used that Action yet.

Activating Words

Every Word in the Action has an action cost. You must pay this cost by spending dice from your Pools. You can only use a Pool if either the Pool or the Words say you can. For example, the Resolve Pool has a special rule saying you can always use it. Tana's "Attack" Word allows her to use her "Courage" Pool.

You can accept dice from a Twist Pool created by the MC. Any player may suggest a Twist, including you and the MC. However, only the MC can approve a Twist, and you can refuse the Twist as well.

When you roll dice, assign each die to a specific Word. If you assign several dice to the same Word, add their values together. For example, Tana's "Attack" Word has a cost of 4, and "Giant" has a cost of 5. She spends two Courage dice and one Resolve die and rolls, getting 2, 3, and 4. She assigns the 4 to "Attack" and the 2 and 3 to "Giant". The Action is now paid for.

You can choose to roll more dice at any time during the Action, if the dice you already rolled aren't enough. Once you roll dice, you cannot unroll them.

You must activate every Word for your Action to succeed. Whether you succeed or fail, the MC determines what happens next. The MC should respect your choice of Words. For example, if you declare that you want to "Befriend" the Giant, the outcome should be peaceful. But, other Actions can change this outcome. For example, Attacking an Giant after Befriending it means the Giant is hostile again.

After rolling, you can recover some of your dice. Count up the total number of stars on all Words in the Action. You can recover up to that many dice, but no more. You can recover dice into any Pool you want. You cannot recover more dice in a Pool than its maximum size. For example, Tana's "Attack" word has one star (☆). She can only recover one of her dice, no matter how many she rolled. She can choose to place it into her Courage or Resolve Pools.

If your Action fails, you recover all the dice you rolled.

Teamwork

You can team up with another player on an Action. You can add your Words to the Action, if you want. You can also roll dice from your Pools to activate Words (yours or theirs). When you recover dice, the total you can recover is for the Action, not per player. No Word can be part of the same Action more than once. For example, two characters cannot both add "Confront" to the table at the same time.

Challenges lose endurance per Action, not per character. For example, Tana and Basler make a combined attack, and activate "Confront" and "Ogre" together. The Ogre loses one square of endurance, not two.



Example Actions

Tana and Basler are starting characters. Both have Resolve Pools with 2 dice apiece. They encounter a giant Ogre attacking a peasant village. The Ogre's difficulty is 3, and it has six squares of endurance.

Tana runs up and interposes herself between the Ogre and a screaming villager. She wants to distract it from the villagers and lure it toward Basler, who will ambush it. Her Action is "Resist Ogre". Resist's cost is 4 ☆ ☆. Tana spends her two Resolve dice and rolls 4 and 4. This is enough to pay for both "Resist" and "Ogre". The Action succeeds, and the Ogre loses a square of endurance. Thanks to the two stars in her Action, Tana recovers both dice back to her Resolve Pool.

Next, Basler acts. He leaps from the trees, daggers out, trying to stab the Ogre and then dodge away! The MC rules that this is an "Avoid Ogre" Action - stealth and evasion are key. His Words cost the same as Tana's. He spends two Resolve dice and gets 3 and 2. This isn't enough to activate either Word. "The tree branch breaks under your weight and clocks the ogre on the head, but now it's got a massive wooden club to beat you with," the MC says. The MC offers this as a Twist worth 3 dice. Basler accepts, and rolls 1, 3, and 5. Basler assigns the 1 and 3 to "Avoid", paying its cost of 4. He assigns the extra 3 and the 5 to mark off two more squares, totalling three. He recovers 2 dice back to Resolve, thanks to the two stars he has in Avoid. But the Ogre is now seriously armed, and Basler landed on the ground, so the pair had better act fast!

The MC rules that the Ogre will swing at Basler, so Tana has to act quickly. The two heroes decide on a cooperative Action. As the Ogre raises the tree branch overhead, Tana hits the beast as hard as she can with her sword, and Basler will kick from the ground. If they time it right, the Ogre should drop its improvised club, then trip over it! This is a "Confront and Outwit Ogre" Action. Tana spends her 2 Resolve dice for 2 and 1, while Basler spends his and gets 6 and 6! The two sixes activate "Confront" and "Outwit", while Tana's 2+1 activates "Ogre". This is enough to inflict a final blow, and the Ogre is knocked unconscious. The pair can recover a total of 2 dice, so each PC takes one back.

Twists

Twists are a tool for the MC to create tension and maintain the tone of the game. For example, Tana is fighting a dragon! The MC says, “the beast takes to the air as you come into melee range. If you want to keep attacking, you can grab hold, but the dragon will carry you off. Do you grab on?”

Don’t make a Twist an interruption or distraction from the action. Twists should be an interesting new direction for action to take. Every Twist should offer a way forward for the story.

Twists represent things like:

- » “Critical hits” or exploiting vulnerabilities
- » Ally or enemy reinforcements, or heroic second winds
- » Accidents, sabotage, or feints against an opponent
- » Serious injury or lasting physical or mental complications
- » Changes to the environment, such as crumbling floors, rock slides, or fire
- » Anything else that complicates the situation in an interesting way!

The MC can offer a Twist for many reasons. They can be “success at a cost” for a character’s actions. They can reward clever tactics, preparation, or good roleplaying. For example, Basler is trying to help his friends escape, but he’s spotted sneaking up on them. In desperation, he says “I throw my two knives at the ropes keeping them tied, leaving me unarmed.” The MC agrees this is an interesting development, and offers Twist dice. Twist dice are a reward for making the game more fun or challenging.

A Twist is a temporary Pool created by the MC. It comes with a condition attached. Minor changes in the status quo are worth one die in the Pool. Add more dice for a more serious or interesting change, up to five dice. The MC should describe the condition, but in a way that leaves the player an out. The MC can then ask, “does this affect you?” or “what comes next?”. If the player accepts the full consequences of the Twist, they can spend dice from the Pool.

Players don’t have to spend all the dice from a Twist Pool. If the Twist becomes no longer relevant, the Pool leaves play. In particular, if player action would negate or reverse the Twist, it’s no longer worth any dice. Twists cannot provide dice to player Actions that would negate them immediately. For example, if Tana escapes the dragon’s grasp, she loses any dice left in that Twist’s Pool. Narrative outcomes of a Twist, like physical harm, last as long as the MC says.

A player does not have to accept a Twist. Players can suggest a Twist to the MC, but the MC is not required to accept. The MC and the player may negotiate the details of a Twist.

Creating Twists

You can come up with a Twist at any time players are rolling dice for an Action. If there is no Action in play, there are no Twists. The MC may simply narrate something that happens.

If you aren’t sure how many dice to apply to a Twist, roll d6 — d6. The difference (minimum 1) between the greater and the smaller is the Twist Pool size.

You can pre-write generic Twists. If you write them on index cards, you can draw cards at random. If the Twist you draw doesn’t work for the current situation, discard and draw another.

Absurdity is a source of both comedy and wonder. A weird result, presented with conviction and sincerity, can add to your game world. For example, you draw “Romantic Entanglement” while the PCs are fighting an Ogre. You might decide this means the Ogre has a wife who joins the action. She could become a combatant, or turn the Challenge from physical or social.

Sample Twists

Here's several generic Twists that you can use.

Animal! An animal — wild or tame, yours or theirs or nobody's — intervenes. Sudden tiger attacks, heroic actions from your noble steed, whatever. What animal is involved? What goes out of control thanks to bestial instinct?

Betrayal! Somebody's side has a traitor, and their defection screws up a lot of carefully laid plans. Who defected, and why? What happened next?

Caught! / Noticed! You failed to escape detection by the sentries or gendarmerie. Now they're after you, or raising the alarm. How important was it to stay unseen? What happens to you if you're caught?

Chekhov's Fireball! Some minor detail you overlooked earlier comes back in a big way. That kid from the first town is the daughter of this town's mayor. The pendant worn by the female healer is the key to saving the world. How big a deal is this?

Disarmed! / Spell Backfire! Your special abilities blow up in your face. How bad is the result? How quickly can you recover?

Fall! There's a cliff, a ledge, or somewhere to lose your balance. Do you go all the way in? Does somebody need to save you?

Fire! Things catch on fire, or an existing fire spreads. Dungeon delvers' torches, spare lanterns, errant fireballs — anything could be a source. How does the spreading fire complicate the scene? Does it head toward anything or anyone?

Fools Rush In... You do something impulsive and rash, driven by the heat of the moment. How does it go badly? What would have been lost if you hadn't rushed in?

Forgot Something! A critical detail eluded you at the wrong moment. Your alchemy lab just blew up thanks to a missing ingredient. You brought all the paperwork to sign but left the bribe at home. How badly does this complicate your plans? Can you improvise a replacement?

Inspiration! A rousing speech, a momentary glimpse of greatness, or something else lights a fire in somebody. What is the source of the inspiration? Was it genuine, or just a trick?

Lost! While running down a tunnel, directions got mixed up, and now we're.. somewhere we didn't expect. Where did we end up? Did something chasing us get lost too, or is it still behind us?

Made It Worse! Your efforts only complicated the situation. Your lock pick broke off in the lock. You cut off the Hydra's head, but two more grew back. How does this go badly for you?

My Big Mouth! You say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Insulting the Orc's mother, or casually making a fool of the Duke, is never a good idea. What's the fallout from your action?

No Sell! Your opponent is unfazed by what you just did. Does it make them angrier/tougher? Do you have to change tactics?

"Oops..." An embarrassing, rather than fatal, error. Do you shame yourself or lose reputation with someone whose opinion you value? What will it take to get it back?

Pinned! / Trapped! You're stuck by something, like a heavy rock, a huge monster's claw, a cave-in, or something similar. Is it going to be effort getting you loose? Is there anything interesting where you are now?

Revelation! You learn something both surprising and important. The dragon was the good guy. The Duke is really a shapechanging elf. You're really the amnesiac Dark Lord. Is this revelation going to change your plans radically?

Riposte! Your opponent comes back with a devastating counterattack, whether physical or social. Does it put you on the defensive? Do you have a way to deal with it?

Romantic Entanglement! Love, romance, or attraction comes into play in the scene. A PC or NPC might have a sweetheart who becomes part of the action, or is put at risk by some action. What is the nature of the entanglement? How does it complicate things?

Trap! You step on the wrong flagstone, say the wrong code word, or miss a conversational pitfall. Bad things have been set in motion. Can you outrun them? Will they cut you off from one exit, forcing you to choose another?

Threads

Threads are specific story ideas you want your character to experience. Threads are the way your character gains experience and grows stronger.

A Thread isn't an ongoing mission or a motivation. Something like "Overthrow the evil empire" is too long and too open to be a Thread. A Thread is an achievable short-term goal. You can tell a large, multi-part story with your character's Threads, but you don't have to. For example, Tana starts the game with a Thread: "The Old Ruin Near Home". That story may continue on other Threads, or she can do something different.

You don't have to know how the story will end. You should know how it will start. For example, you can have a Thread such as "find the lady's stolen jewelry". You might round up the usual suspects, or look for known jewel thieves. You don't have to know who the actual thief was when you start the Thread. Perhaps it wasn't stolen at all! You'll discover what happens as you play the game.

When you start a new Thread, you get five milestones. When you reach a Discovery or face a Challenge, you can mark off a milestone. This means that the encounter will become part of your story. The MC should keep this in mind when describing what comes after that. For example, Tana has a Thread called "The Old Ruin Near Home". During a fight with a pack of Slimes, she loses her weapon to one of the adhesive creatures. This gives her an idea, and she marks off a milestone. She declares that one of the defeated Slimes might have grabbed something shiny from the Ruin, the same way one grabbed her weapon. The MC agrees. After winning the fight, Tana discovers a bauble among the defeated Slimes that will help her open the magic locks in the depths of the ruins.

Two or more characters can use a milestone to lay claim to a Discovery or Challenge. If this happens, the group should discuss the way their stories might intersect. For example, Tana is trying to unlock an ancient grimoire. Meanwhile, Basler is chasing the real thief of a valuable necklace. They can both encounter a street gang. Tana and Basler both use a milestone to claim the gang's Challenge. They agree that the necklace a magic pendant that will unlock the grimoire if recovered.

A character's Thread should find its conclusion on the last milestone. The group can end a story early, or allow it to run longer, if they feel it's appropriate.

Once a character finishes their Thread, they get to advance immediately (see "Advancement"). You should base a character's advancement choices on the outcome of the Thread, but you don't have to. For example, a character who finds a grimoire of magic may gain the "Mage" Archetype as a result.

Once all characters have finished their Threads, everybody gets to start a new Thread. You can continue a larger or longer story, or do something new.

Sample Threads

- » Find my mother's missing pendant
- » Uncover the real person who stole the lady's jewels
- » Arrest the thief Basler!
- » Discover the mystery at the heart of the forest
- » Learn swordplay from a suitable teacher
- » Navigate the cave in search of rumored treasure
- » Break the curse the witch placed on me

Sample Milestones

- » A defeated enemy was carrying something relevant to your quest
- » You overhear a conversation that gives you information or clues
- » A location has something special (forensic evidence, mystic runes, a special language) that only you can make use of
- » Running away from something, you end up in a new place and find a new trail to follow
- » You fall into a cave, stumble across a secret room, or otherwise accidentally come across a secret
- » A magical attack unlocks some surprising ability, or an unexpected spell on an item you carry

Advancement

Characters grow and change as part of their experiences. When a character's Thread reaches its last milestone, you get to advance.

Pick one of the following:

- » Gain a new Archetype
- » Gain a new Word and/or a new Pool of your own creation
- » Level Up two Words, two Pools, or a Word and a Pool

You should pick a choice that reflects what happened to the character during their story. For example, you could choose the Mage archetype after deciphering a book of magic. You can choose any advancement option you wish.

The MC should present the group with a list of existing Archetypes. Players can propose new Archetypes. New Archetypes should support the tone of the game world.

The MC has the final word on any new Archetypes.

If you choose a new Archetype that has Words or Pools you already have, Level Up those Words or Pools. Don't gain them a second time. For example, Basler is a Thief who has a Stealth Pool, representing his ability to sneak around quietly. He has one heart in this Pool. He gains the Ninja Archetype, which also has Stealth. Rather than gaining a second Stealth Pool, he instead gains one heart to the Pool he has. If Basler had already maxed out his Stealth Pool, though, he would gain no benefit.

If there is no Archetype that suits what you want to do, you can create your own Words and/or Pools. For example, Tana wants a Crystal Sword that will absorb and radiate magic! This doesn't seem like a standard Archetype, so she creates a new Word: "Crystal Sword". When used in an Action, it can absorb a magic spell that was cast, or a magical effect. If used again, it will cast that spell on someone she hits. Based on this description, the MC assigns it a cost of 4.

Meanwhile, Sir Emory Hawthorne has unexplored feelings for his adventuring companion Tana. His player creates an "Admiration" Pool that has two rules: it can be spent on any Action to impress or protect Tana, and it Recharges whenever the two have a significant emotional scene.



Discoveries

A Discovery is some unique encounter in the fiction — a place, an artifact of power, a strange magical phenomenon, or even a living creature. A Discovery is always special. It might feel different from its surroundings, but it is never out of place. It's the reason for your journey.

A Discovery will do one or more of the following things:

- » Drive a story forward by presenting a question or posing a challenge
- » Decisively resolve elements of a story already in motion
- » Evoke strong feelings, such as wonder, fear, or joy

Every Discovery should logically suggest a few Challenges that go with it. For example, a group of characters might need to deal with a pack of sharks to reach a sunken treasure ship, then survive a fierce storm and a pirate attack getting the treasure back to port.

Creating Discoveries

The results you get from this process aren't the final version of a Discovery. The random generation rules are meant to start a conversation, not shut one down.

Answer the first and most important question about a Discovery: What feeling should the characters have about this?

Second: What is the nature of the discovery?

Third: What should the characters want to do about this discovery?

#	Feeling	Nature	Objective
1	Joy	Place	Reach it
2	Surprise	Exotic Place	Escape it
3	Anger	Object	Find something/someone
4	Fear	Artifact	Hide something/someone
5	Disgust	Creature	Improve/fix something
6	Sorrow	Event	Break something

You can answer these questions yourself, or roll 1d6 per question and look at the table.

A randomly rolled Discovery may sound interesting, but not be suitable for the current adventure. In that case, the MC can file it away for later use, or a player can use it as part of their own Thread down the road.

There's a fourth question that only you can answer: Now how do I do this? How do you stimulate the feeling you want to convey?

One way to evoke an emotion is by drawing associations through visual language, including colors and shapes.

Colors:

- » Red (bravery, strength, aggression, anger)
- » Orange (safety, fun, passion, frustration)
- » Yellow (emotionality, friendliness, fear, depression)
- » Green (harmony, peace, stagnation, blandness)
- » Blue (serenity, order, aloofness, coldness)
- » Violet (spirituality, truth, decadence, repression)
- » Pink (nurturing, warmth, inhibition, vulnerability)
- » Brown (naturalness, reliability, humorless, simple)
- » Black (solidity, reassurance, menace, heaviness)
- » White (purity, simplicity, sterility, exclusiveness)

Once you have a color that corresponds to the emotion, think about the sorts of things you associate with that color. Forests are green, water is blue, caves are black, ice is white. A peasant village can be earthy browns and greens, while a martial fortress can be red-painted brick blazing in the sun. A mysterious artifact can be violet, with flashes of other colors from gemstones embedded into it. A peaceful creature sent on a rampage might have red blood smearing its green scales, showing the dominance of anger over peace.

Shapes are important. A village with round, organic rooftops, looking like a cluster of giant mushrooms, feels different from a snowy industrialized city where the buildings are modular rectangles that fit perfectly and soullessly together. Geometric solids suggest design. Complex or chaotic forms suggest nature at work, or at least natural development. A city of mages might have a perfectly aligned grid of streets, while an ancient trading city's streets and alleys can zig-zag every which way.

Fleshing Out Discoveries

Specific questions are the key to making a Discovery feel real. Take a trait of the discovery, like “this place is very cold”. Create a question in the form of “If (trait), then why/what/how (other thing)?” For example, “if it’s so very cold, why do people live here?” Come up with an answer, then ask more questions.

People, places, and things all have their own stories. Think back in time and ask what was going on with a Discovery at some earlier moment. For example, if there is a war on, has an army recently marched through the village? If the Discovery is a monster, is it already being hunted by somebody else? If the Discovery is a grimoire of magic, who else wants it?

Creating Challenges for Discoveries

A simple approach is to make three Challenges.

- » The first one will embody or provoke the emotion you want the Discovery to suggest
- » The second one will escalate the action or the drama inherent in the Discovery
- » The third one will provide a climax and a feeling of closure for interacting with the Discovery

For example, a Discovery might be a military slave camp where peaceful villagers are being held captive. The dominant emotion of this Discovery is anger.

The first Challenge for the PCs is a group of guards, away from the camp, who are brutally whipping or beating an adult villager. The PCs must intervene, both to defeat the guards and to prevent any from escaping to raise the alarm.

The second Challenge might involve more guards (if one escaped), a rescue attempt to recover more villagers (from the camp, or perhaps somewhere nearby), and so on. The stakes are higher, but the players are hopefully now invested in the Discovery thanks to the first Challenge.

The third can be the recovery of some key villagers who can organize a resistance, or even the PCs leading a direct attack on the commandant of the camp.

Optional Rules

If you want to add more detail around injuries and gear, you can use these optional rules.

Conditions

Tana breaks her leg, and Sir Emory sets it as best he can with a quick prayer of healing. But she’ll be hobbling for awhile, which will make things more difficult...

How do we model that? By creating Words that represent some kind of deleterious condition. The MC gives Tana a “With a Broken Leg” Word with an activation cost of 5. Every action she takes where the leg is a serious impediment must include that Word.

Equipment

Many adventurers care about the equipment they’re carrying around. You can model this using a combination of Words and Pools.

For example, the MC might give the characters a “Health Potion” Pool. They can drink a potion, using dice from the pool when resisting damage or overcoming poison.

Limit Break

Many traditional RPG video games have a “Limit Break” or “Overdrive” type mechanic, allowing characters to power up and defeat opponents. You can simulate such things with a new Pool.

Limit Break (♡): You surpass your mortal limits and shine with power. Special: This pool may be used for any action. You must spend all dice from this Pool when using it. Recover one die to this pool every time you reach a milestone.

Sample World: Talispire

This is a sample world for Grand Adventure. You can use it in your own games, adapt its archetypes and characters to your own world, or create an entirely different world.

The Spirit World

Talispire is really two worlds. There is our familiar material world, where people live and grow and work. Beside it, on the other side of a mystic mirror, is the Spirit World. If our world is one of solids and tangibles, the Spirit World is the source of ideals and pure forms.

There are powerful and primal spirits, ancient and inhuman. People name these “dragons”. Dragons are embodiments of greed, wrath, or other impulses. They are unfettered by civilization, honor, or mortality. They respect no law of man or magic. They can be held back only by force of will, acts of courage, and defiance. Those who have faced dragon spirits are the heroes of story and song, and are revered as “Saints”.

Some dragons are massive beyond comprehension. The whole world of Talispire is sometimes said to be a coiled-up dragon within an egg, waiting to hatch. Other dragons are nimble monsters, lurking in caves and forests, flying like shadows over sleeping cities, sometimes taking hapless travelers or whole caravans by surprise. Dragons are spirits, but form bodies out of the elements: wood, ice, soil, even volcanic magma.



The Church

The Holy Church of Talispire is the most common faith found in the world. It recognizes hundreds of saints. It also catalogs and studies the Spirit World, including dragons of all kinds.

The Church teaches that everyone has a Dragon and a Saint in their soul. The Dragon is mindless instinct, but has the power to change the world. The Saint is idealistic and pure, but controlling and rigid. Neither is “good” or “bad”. The Church believes that struggle between Dragon and Saint within us that defines us.

The Church includes clerics, priests, and preachers who work to educate the populace. It also sponsors Paladins - armored warriors committed to the ideals of a certain saint - who ride against Dragons should they endanger civilians.

The Church is sometimes opposed by “Dragon Cults”: small groups of people who are enslaved by, or who worship, a particular Dragon spirit. These Cults often have charismatic leaders, backed by spiritual allies. A Dragon Cult is not necessarily hostile. Many are joyful, if debauched, celebrations of ecstasy and pleasure in all its forms. Others are dedicated to more negative passions such as anger or contempt. The Church works to discourage Dragon Cults through moderation and public service. If a Cult becomes an active danger to people around it, the church’s templars will intervene.

Pick any or all of the following options when including the Church in your game.

- » The Church is fundamentally a force for good and will be an ally of justice.
- » The Church is corrupted by some inside or outside force: a scheming leader, a powerful Dragon, or some other threat. Purging it will restore the Church as a positive force.
- » The Church is fundamentally wrong on some theological point.
- » Saints are not merely history’s heroes, but powerful spirits that can be called upon by the faithful.
- » The Church has, or seeks, political power within a region, for good or bad reasons (for example, overthrowing a corrupt ruler, or taking power for themselves). Their clerics and paladins will be working toward this aim.

The Cirrus Stratocracy

Long ago, Talispire was dominated by the Cirrus Stratocracy. From their floating city of Zebulon, they ruled the primitive surface-dwelling tribes. Their science, called mechanistry, fused technology and magical power. Their goal was nothing less than the subjugation and control of all Dragons.

Everything changed centuries ago, when Zebulon rose uncontrollably into the sky and disappeared, never to return. The Cirran provincial governors on the ground, left without the support of their mechanist troops and weapons, were at the mercy of the people they had once subjugated. Some of the provinces had been run fairly and kindly. Their rulers became kings and queens, and entrusted the provinces to their children or other worthy heirs. Most of the provinces were run strictly, with harsh rules. They were overthrown by angry mobs and their castles were destroyed.

The Cirrans had captured many Dragon spirits using sophisticated mechanistry prisons. These spirits escaped when their containment fields fell after the fall of Zebulon. Many were driven mad by their imprisonment, and now haunt the dark and dismal corners of the world, venting their mindless rage and endless fear on mortal prey.

Pick any or all of the following options when including the Church in your game.

- » The fall of the Cirrans was thousands of years ago. Their deeds are remembered only by scholars.
- » The Cirrans fell recently - hundreds of years ago at most, perhaps even decades ago. The repercussions are still being felt.
- » The Cirrans destroyed themselves out of hubris. A botched experiment, a mad dream gone wrong, or some other cause ended their civilization early.
- » The Cirrans were destroyed by the Dragons or some other external force, which is still a threat today.
- » Cirran souls still exist and may transmit themselves into suitable containers - golems, mechanist robots, or even unwary Zelves can all be taken over.
- » Cirran survivors (embodied or as souls) plot the resurrection of their civilization, or the continuation of whatever destroyed them to begin with.

The Mesos Empire

The Mesos Empire is a sprawling, multi-cultural power. Their capital is far away, but their arm is long. Agents of the Empire can be found in every major cities. Their couriers travel the roads. Their armies can sometimes be found on the borders of independent kingdoms. They claim that they want to ensure the safety of the world from rogue Cirran mechanistry, Dragons, and other threats. Many people fear their brutal but efficient methods.

The kingdom of Mesos lies at the heart of the Empire. Over time, a dozen major kingdoms surrounding them have been taken over, or surrendered power. The Mesans allow their periphery states to keep their culture and rulers, but they must bow to the will of the Emperor. Uprisings can sometimes happen. The Mesans play their captured kingdoms against each other, maintaining a delicate power balance.

Pick any or all of the following options when including the Empire in your game.

- » The Empire is strongly religious, or not religious at all. Figure out their relationship with the Holy Church (it's the same group, one dominates the other, they act as equals, they're enemies).
- » The Empire's power is built around Cirran mechanistry. Their soldiers and vehicles will be high-tech artifacts.
- » The Empire wants to reclaim the Zelves and/or Gnomads to maintain Cirran mechanistry for them.
- » The Empire is searching for some vital secret or power source it needs to finish its grand plans. The PCs may have the secret, or a clue to where it is.
- » The Empire means what it says, but is still authoritarian and controlling.
- » The Empire means well, but is corrupt from within. Overthrowing the right person will improve matters.
- » The Empire is preparing an invasion of the PCs' home region and will be an immediate menace.
- » The Empire is weak, and a civil war among its member states will generate strife across the world.
- » The Empire has made pacts with Dragons or some other non-humans, or is perhaps even ruled by such beings.

The Free Kingdoms

When the Cirran Stratocracy ruled the world, they appointed provincial governors to rule the surface lands, while they themselves remained in their flying/floating city. To ensure that the serfs didn't overthrow their appointed rulers, the Cirrans created machinery - weapons, defenses, or other wonders - that were tied to the genetic imprint of their chosen provincial governors. These creations later became known as bloodline relics. Access to a bloodline relic was passed from governor to governor through genetic editing, or re-keying the relic to some new bloodline. After the fall of the Cirrans, however, this process was mostly lost.

The surviving provincial governors - the ones who hadn't been overthrown by their subjects - turned mostly to hereditary monarchy to preserve access to these relics. These states, plus the strong new nations that rose around them, are collectively called the free kingdoms.

The goal of the free kingdoms is to resist dominance by the Mesos Empire. To do this, they'll need relics, armies, and magic.

The royal families would closely conserve the genetic keys that made their relics work. Bastard children could sometimes do so, but for the most part the "proper heirs" had a mechanistiry-backed mandate to rule. Many laws were passed that governed who could inherit, and how royal marriage could work. The descendants of the province governors don't understand Cirran science enough to know the reasons for these laws, but they understand that they must be obeyed.

Without access to their relics, a kingdom could easily fall to an invasion. With them, a kingdom could rain fire down on invading armies, raise impenetrable barriers at their borders, and much more. Every so often, a kingdom would lose its ruling family. In many stories, a "rightful heir" will often appear, and demonstrate his or her claim by reactivating the relics at a dramatic moment. All too often, though, the fall of a royal family meant the eventual fall of the kingdom.

Ruin delvers and other treasure hunters sometimes stumble across lost bloodline relics. Such things can restore a broken kingdom to its former glory - or trigger a succession crisis if it's discovered that somebody outside of the royal family can activate it.

The Spirit Tree

At the center of Talispire is a tower. It's a miles-high structure, impossibly tall. It looks like wood, but it's seemingly indestructible. Thick trunks, like tree roots, anchor it to the soil. Seen from the spirit world, there is no tower, only a concentrated cloud of verdant magical energy. But seen from both worlds, it becomes clear that the "cloud" would be the leaves and branches, and the tower the trunk and roots, of a gigantic tree. It is known as the Spirit Tree.

The Spirit Tree is the conduit between the physical and spirit worlds. Water and nutrients are drawn up from the roots and absorbed through the trunk. This base matter is transmuted into nature magic and spreads into the spirit world. Spiritual energy is drawn down from the leaves and radiated into the air of our world. For as long as it lives, the Spirit Tree maintains this cycle of material and ethereal. It is the embodiment of balance.

Should the Spirit Tree ever sicken and die, the connection between worlds would likewise be cut off. This would prevent hostile spirits and malevolent dragons from plaguing mankind. But it would mean the end of human wishes, hopes, and dreams. The cycle of life and death would stop.

The Tree is the holiest place in Talispire. Many powerful relics and wonders are made from its leaves and twigs.

Pick any or all of the following options when including the Spirit Tree in your game.

- » In the past, attempts were made to destroy the Tree to seal away Dragons. Some weapons or tools for that purpose might still exist.
- » Some modern group - the Church or the Mesos Empire - might want to control or destroy the tree for their own ends.
- » The Tree is already withering and dying due to some force, and must be saved through some sort of legendary feat of heroics.
- » The Tree has budded and reproduced smaller versions of itself elsewhere in the world. These holy trees are now important to somebody (to preserve or destroy).
- » The tree is not only alive, but intelligent.

Races

Human beings are the most common race in the world. There are many sub-races of humans - some bigger, some smaller, some different in other ways. There are also demihumans, or human beings who have been magically changed to have animal traits. For example, a race of demihumans have cat ears and tails, while another look like humanoid bulls.

Almost all humans have some traces of magic in their blood. Many have some kind of elemental aspect: air, earth, fire, water, and more. This shows up in their skin, hair, or eye colors. A family with the dark skin of rich soil can live next to a fire-aspected family with flame-red eyes, or people whose hair is the vivid green of the woodlands. For a few people, the magic can go further, such as people blessed with gills and the ability to live underwater as well as on land.

Two other races share Talispire with humanity.

The Zelves were created by the Cirrans to be temporary hosts for their souls, and living repositories of memory. The Cirrans could project their souls into a Zelf body, possessing it or a time. Freed of their enslavement as vessels for their masters and makers, the Zelves had retreated into the forests, to consider who and what they should become. Zelves possess great wisdom and expertise, but they lack direction and prefer quiet contemplation to action and change. Zelves are immortal, mysterious beings, graceful and slender, with an ethereal and peaceful nature.

The Gnomads, like the Zelves, were engineered by the Cirrans. They were originally a slave-race, meant to maintain their masters' mechanistiry. Without the empire to command them, they turned to an independent existence. Gnomads value their freedom and love to travel. Gnomads are intuitively gifted with an understanding of how things connect, whether it's technology or the human heart. They form small mobile communities, traveling both on roads and in secret underground tunnels known only to their own kind, trading their wares and skills for supplies and companionship. They are short and stout, but surprisingly nimble and fast.

The World Today

Today, Talispire is a lushly alive and vital world. Green forests and crop fields surround the sleepy hamlets and bustling towns of mankind. Rocky "skylands" levitate over rolling hills and fertile valleys. The castles and laboratories of the old Cirrans sometimes still stand, whether standing proudly aboveground, floating freely in the sky, or buried deep underground. They are joined by roughly-crafted fortresses and sprawling cities, made by the surface-dwellers from sturdy wood and reliable rock.

Some of the old mechanistiry can still be found, and much of it is dangerous. Metal humanoids, corrupting plagues, and ancient weapons can all threaten the good people of Talispire. A new power, the Mesos Empire, is rising to lay claim to the mantle of the Cirrans. Brigands and monsters accost travelers on the road. Corruption and crime menace the cities.

Fortunately, Talispire is also a world of dreamers and heroes. Children grow up on stories of heroic Saints and fierce Dragons. Magic gives rise to feelings of wonder and courage. Maps are mostly blank, waiting for explorers to fill them in. It's an amazing world, full of amazing people.

Pick any or all of the following options to further customize the world.

- » The world is mostly dangerous, with a few civilized spots amidst monsters and bandits. Travel is risky and armed escorts are the norm.
- » The free kingdoms are more organized, perhaps into a single governing body on the same scale as the Mesos Empire.
- » Magic is powerful and influential, with wizards in every town. Apprentices routinely study the craft.
- » Magic is rare and valuable. Floating islands and ancient wonders are the most obvious signs of its power, but casual wizardry is a thing of the past.
- » Spirits take an active interest in human affairs. A local shaman or seer can be found in most inhabited areas.
- » Humans and spirits are on bad terms, perhaps due to some past grievance or ongoing crisis.

Adventuring

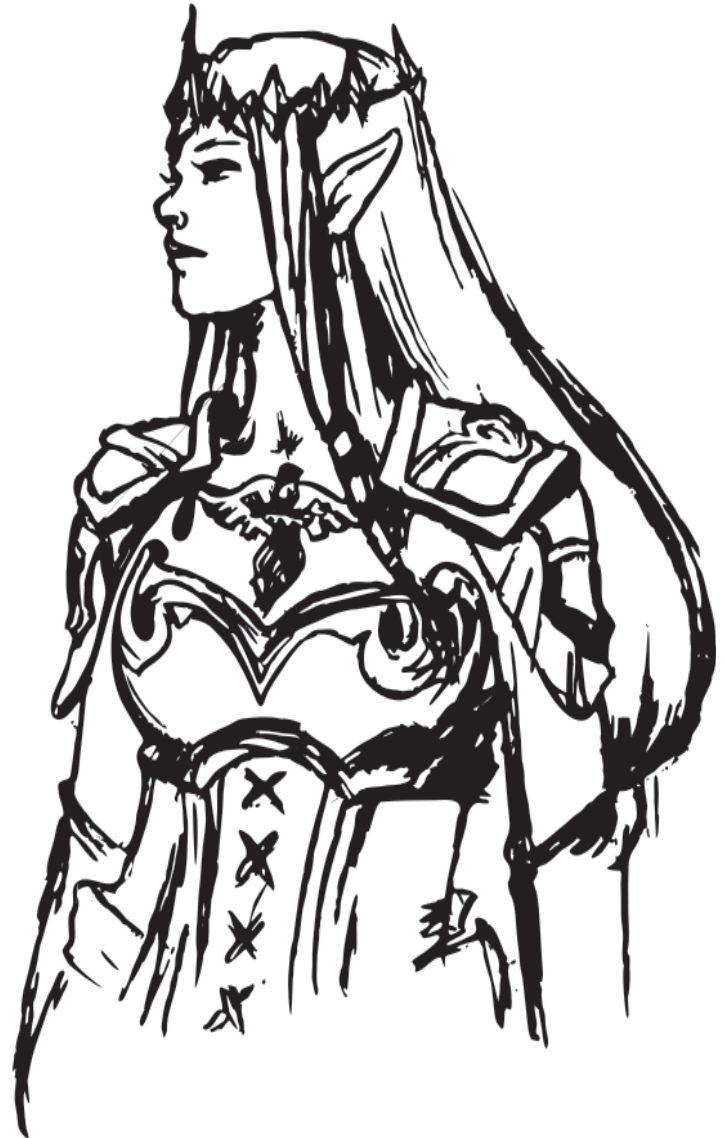
The world is full of opportunities for adventure and exploration. Here are a few suggestions.

- » The PCs are members of the Explorer's Guild. They escort mapmakers to distant locales, or create maps of their own.
- » The PCs carry postal mail from place to place. A recipient opens their letter, turns pale, and says, "can you help me?"
- » The PCs learn of a threat - from bandits and thugs, the Mesos Imperial Army, a Dragon, or something else - and are called or compelled to assist.
- » The Empire is invading the free kingdoms where the PCs are! They must organize a resistance and save who they can.
- » One PC has a dream or goal they wish to pursue - to travel, to find something, to do something. Other PCs feel the same, or join in for other reasons.
- » One PC has a long-running personal problem - a lost family member, a strange secret, a curse - and must deal with it. The other PCs come along for their own reasons.
- » The PCs' home town has been destroyed or radically altered - an army attack, a natural disaster, etc. The PCs must get away, regroup, and decide how to proceed.
- » There is an old ruin or ancient Cirran installation. Something in there leads the PCs to take up a mission. A secret, a special magic, or a dangerous weapon.
- » A conflict between the Dragons, the Church, and/or the Empire pulls the PCs into the fray.
- » The PCs discover a bloodline relic. They must find somebody who can activate it - or perhaps one of them can do so already.
- » People are being stirred up by a rogue Dragonsinger or being inducted into a Dragon Cult. The PCs must discover the motives of the group, then decide how best to help the people.
- » A prince or princess of the free kingdoms has fallen in love, but things are complicated (their lover is a commoner, the kingdoms are rivals, whatever). The PCs must intervene somehow.

» Somebody steals an important or valuable dingus from the PCs, and they must get it back. The theft may have been part of a larger plot. The dingus itself may be key to another plot.

» A powerful mage needs to cast a vital spell, but can only do so in a certain place or at a certain time. The PCs must escort them and stand guard while the spell is cast.

Always look at the Threads the players have chosen to pursue. A given plot line should hook into at least two peoples' Threads, unless the group agrees that a single PC's story should be told for the moment.



New Archetypes

Many Archetypes listed here share the same Pools. For simplicity, Pool descriptions are repeated for each Archetype.

Archer

You are a warrior who uses a bow, crossbow, or even a gunpowder-driven firearm. You attack at range. Mobility, distance, and cover are key.

Archers on Talispire hone their skills hunting game in forests. During wartime, they are on the back lines, volleying arrows at the enemy. Many ruin delvers (or their allies) use “guns” created with Cirran machinery.

Regardless of their origin, archers are more dependent on their equipment than a typical spear-man. Archers must often craft their own arrows, use chemistry to formulate gunpowder, and understand the details of different types of arrowheads.

Words:

Shoot (4 ☆): You take aim and fire at a target. *Pool:* Courage, Tech.

Pools:

Courage (♡): Your strength of will and spirit, and determination in the face of danger. *Recharge:* face incredible odds without flinching, or relate a story of bravery and risk.

Tech (♡): Your mastery of technology and machinery, and your supply of devices. *Recharge:* Describe the construction or operation of a new gadget, or one you carry but haven’t explained before.

Twists:

Out of Ammo! (♡): You’ve shot your last bolt, and must fall back on other weapons for the rest of a combat. You’ll need to spend time regaining ammo.

Broken Weapon! (♡♡): A gun misfire, a snapped bowstring, or something else makes your shot go awry.

Vital Shot! (♡♡♡): You chose exactly the right target to hit, or made a distracting attack from afar that aided a comrade’s attack.

Barbarian

You are a savage wilderness warrior who uses their feral nature to augment their combat prowess.

Barbarians often have some predatory demihuman blood, or are infused with some elemental energy such as fire. Their berserk fury aids in hunting large creatures or intimidating other predators.

Barbarians often use axes or hammers, since they are versatile weapons, have non-combat utility, and are relatively easy to make in the wild. While a barbarian’s culture is often not technically sophisticated, they receive a harsh and practical education.

Words:

Rage Against (4 ☆): You fly into an uncontrollable berserk fury, mindlessly attacking your target. *Pool:* Courage, Instinct.

Pools:

Courage (♡): Your strength of will and spirit, and determination in the face of danger. *Recharge:* face incredible odds without flinching, or relate a story of bravery and risk.

Instinct (♡): Your innate feelings for nature, your connection to the feral and bestial. *Recharge:* Live simply in a natural state — sleeping under the stars, hunting your own food, etc. — to reconnect with the world.

Twists:

Attack! (♡): You neglect your defenses in favor of a savage attack, but open yourself up to a riposte or counterattack. How do you get hurt?

Absolutely Barbaric! (♡♡): Your uncouth social graces or atrocious table manners get you in trouble in a social situation. What sort of behavior offends your companions?

Hair Trigger! (♡♡♡): Something sets you off, and a situation that could have been handled tactfully is now a battle. How did this make things worse?

Bard

You are a traveling singer and storyteller. You use music and charm to get by, singing songs and telling stories for coin.

Bards in Talispire are an old and established profession. When the Cirran Stratocracy fell, the surviving free kingdoms kept themselves organized by sending couriers. These traveling messengers rallied the people with promises of hope and offers of shelter. Many old stories from this time are kept alive only on the lips of Bards today, if loosened with the appropriate drink.

Bards are traditionally given hospitality, in the hope that their hosts will appear favorably in the Bard's songs. An innkeeper in one town can be praised before travelers in the next, if they are kind to a Bard. However, angry aristocrats have been known to send their thugs to accost a Bard who sings the wrong thing.

Words:

Perform (4 ☆): You play a song, singing and/or accompanying yourself on an instrument to get a positive reaction from an audience. *Pool*: Charm.

Entertainingly (1): Use your personality, music or repertoire of songs to achieve some other goal. *Pool*: Charm.

Pools:

Charm (♡): Your charisma, persuasiveness, and inspiration. *Recharge*: Befriend someone or tell a fascinating story, regardless of its truthfulness.

Twists:

Wrong Song! (♡): You mis-read your audience, and your chosen song or story has put people on edge. What's their beef?

Said Too Much! (♡♡): Your devotion to entertainment has revealed something you'd rather have kept quiet about. What secret did you spill?

Accidental Truth! (♡♡♡): You say a particularly outlandish thing or make a wild guess that turns out to be exactly right.

Creature

You are an actual non-humanoid, like an intelligent animal or monster. You might be the product of magical experimentation, a victim of rogue mechanistery, or just a member of a highly intelligent race. *Special*: civilized folk may not see you as a thinking being unless you announce yourself, allowing you to act unnoticed at the cost of some dignity. Your physical shape and size may allow you to carry loads, or even passengers.

Words:

Maul (4 ☆): You scream and leap, charging and clawing at a hapless and terrified target. *Pool*: Instinct.

As an Animal (1): Your feral form gives you moves and advantages unavailable to many humanoids. *Pool*: Instinct.

Pools:

Instinct (♡): Your innate feelings for nature, your connection to the feral and bestial. *Recharge*: Live simply in a natural state — sleeping under the stars, hunting your own food, etc. — to reconnect with the world.

Dragonsinger

You are a sacred chanter who uses a combination of rhetoric and magic to awaken the dragon spirit in each person, enhancing or suppressing their emotional states.

Dragonsingers in Talispire are found as itinerant preachers, traveling from town to town. They inspire or rabble-rouse. Some become leaders of Dragon Cults. Others attract followers on a crusade against evil.

Special: Dragonsingers can have a powerful effect on Dragon spirits, but can also become possessed by them.

Words:

Dragonsing (4 ☆): Your voice mystically influences the emotional state of those around you. *Pool:* Charm, Holy.

Pools:

Charm (♡): Your charisma, persuasiveness, and inspiration. *Recharge:* Befriend someone or tell a fascinating story, regardless of its truthfulness.

Holy (♡): Your connection to the divine and ability to call out sacred power. *Recharge:* Meditate after an extended rest, or be in the presence of an icon of your faith or a miracle of your patron.

Twists:

Wider Audience! (♡): Somebody who was listening is moved by your presentation, even if you didn't intend them to be. Who is it, and what unexpected outcome does this have?

Passion Surge! (♡♡): Your audience takes your message in an unexpected direction. What pre-existing impulse did you awaken? What happens next?

Manifestation! (♡♡♡): A slumbering Dragon spirit awakens and manifests physically in response to your magic. What happens when it does?

Druid

You are a guardian of the living world against the encroachment of civilization.

Druids enforce the natural order by adopting the shapes of wild animals. They fuse primal physical power with a thinking person's intellect, getting the best of both worlds. It is believed that the earliest Druids were demihumans who learned control over the magic that made them partially animal.

Druids in Talispire need no larger organization, though they sometimes come together to deal with larger threats as a group. Instead, they listen to the ebbs and flows of the natural world and respond accordingly.

Special: Druids can instinctively sense threats to nature in a region, but can also be affected by corruptions of nature. Druids can shapeshift into the forms of animals in the region.

Words:

Cleanse (4 ☆): You remove the taint of magical corruption, or a mechanistiry infection, from a natural life-form — a person, an animal, a plant. *Pool:* Instinct.

As an Animal (1): Your feral form gives you moves and advantages unavailable to many humanoids. *Pool:* Instinct.

Pools:

Instinct (♡): Your innate feelings for nature, your connection to the feral and bestial. *Recharge:* Live simply in a natural state — sleeping under the stars, hunting your own food, etc. — to reconnect with the world.

Twists:

Beast Heart! (♡): Animal impulses guide your actions for a moment. How does this change the situation? Do you give in fully?

Nearby Corruption! (♡♡): Some imminent threat to nature is affecting your actions. How are you influenced?

Shapeshifter Mode Lock! (♡♡♡): Coming close to danger freezes you into your animal shape for a time. How does this affect you?

Engineer

An inventor, artificer, or builder of amazing devices. *Special*: Describe the devices you typically carry and use. The MC can offer you a Twist in the form of a malfunction of one of your gadgets, and you can't use it again until you spend time repairing it.

Words:

Improvise (4 ☆): You throw together something quickly to deal with a new problem. *Pool*: Tech.

With a Gadget (1): Use your arsenal to achieve some other goal. *Pool*: Tech.

Pools:

Tech (♡): Your mastery of technology and machinery, and your supply of devices. *Recharge*: Describe the construction or operation of a new gadget, or one you carry but haven't explained before.

Fighter

A master of weapons and fighting techniques. You could be a mercenary, soldier, bravo, or just a very skilled amateur. *Special*: if you use a unique type of weapon, describe it and how it works.

Words:

Attack (4 ☆): You strike an opponent in combat with one of your weapons. *Pool*: Courage.

Bravely (1): You can leverage your guts and battle experience in other ways. *Pool*: Courage.

Pools:

Courage (♡): Your strength of will and spirit, and determination in the face of danger. *Recharge*: face incredible odds without flinching, or relate a story of bravery and risk.

Geomancer

A rough-living natural mystic who masters feng shui and the manipulation of ley lines. Uses the power of time, the seasons, and nature to achieve great magical effects.

Words:

Geomold (4 ☆): You can shift features of the landscape to achieve geomantic effects. *Special:* you can achieve small mundane landscape changes automatically, such as bringing forth springs or flowering plants. *Pool:* Insight, Qi.

Pools:

Insight (♡): Your supernatural sense of the spirit world and currents of fate. *Recharge:* Meditate in a natural setting or upon a natural subject, or tell a parable containing some sort of wisdom or lesson.

Qi (♡): Your inner reserves of subtle power, which flow like water through the body. *Recharge:* meditate after an extended rest, or tell a calming and peaceful tale.

Illusionist

A mystic master of illusions: phantasmal magics that deceive the senses. *Special:* The use of illusion magic is not obvious and won't automatically mark you as the origin of the spell.

Words:

Bedazzle (4 ☆): Create a phantasm or illusion, which will act as you describe. *Pool:* Mana, Stealth.

Pools:

Mana (♡): Your reserve of magical power. *Recharge:* meditate after an extended rest, or expose yourself to any significant source of mystic power.

Stealth (♡): Your ability to hide in shadows, avoid detection, and go unnoticed. *Recharge:* make effort to disappear from sight and stay hidden.

Knight

An armored warrior sworn to a code of honor. Uses a shield for offense and defense.

Words:

Block (4 ☆): You interpose your shield and yourself to take an attack in place of someone else, or blunt the effectiveness of an attack against you. *Pool:* Courage.

For Honor (1 ☆): You fight to uphold your sworn vows. *Special:* You must be upholding your oath in a significant and meaningful way.

Pools:

Courage (♡): Your strength of will and spirit, and determination in the face of danger. *Recharge:* face incredible odds without flinching, or relate a story of bravery and risk.

Mage

You are a student of the arcane. You study the rituals and secrets of magic to cast spells.

Mages draw their power from pacts with the Spirit world. Spirits great and small can enter into agreements, lending their power to mortals. When a mage casts a spell, the terms of these contracts appear in the air or on the ground around them, indicating compliance with the agreement. Knowledgeable mages can learn or identify spells by observing them being cast.

Many spell contracts have been forgotten, and can only be found in old tomes or ruined libraries. Many of the oldest contracts were negotiated by the Cirrans with very powerful spirits. As a result, these spells are far more formidable than those created today by the average mage. They can raise (or destroy) cities, shatter mountains, or other wonderful and fearful deeds.

Special: A mage's spells are accompanied by obvious indicators - magic circles on the ground, concentric rings of energy surrounding their hands, auras of light around their target, and so on.

Words:

Cast a Spell (4 ☆): You shape magic into a physical manifestation, like a floating ball of light or a dangerous fireball. *Pool:* Mana.

With Magic (1): You can wield magic for a variety of other purposes. *Pool:* Mana.

Pools:

Mana (♡): Your reserve of magical power. *Recharge:* meditate after an extended rest, or expose yourself to any significant source of mystic power.

Twists:

Miscast! (♡): Your spell-shaping goes awry somehow, and the spell is altered. What do you accidentally conjure up?

Broken Circle! (♡♡): Your protective wards and guards around the spell aren't tight, and spiritual energy leaks out. A spirit or rogue magical effect comes into existence. What does it do? How can you deal with it?

Secret Contract! (♡♡♡): The time, place, seasons, or some other factor is in alignment, and your spell is powered up. Can you replicate these factors later?

Magic Knight

A combat specialist, wielding both melee weapons and sorcery in concert. Magic Knights are often lightly armored.

Words:

Spelldance (4 ☆): You wield a combination of spells and swordplay, using one as a feint or aid for the other in a graceful but deadly *pas de deux* with your opponent. *Pool*: Courage, Mana

Pools:

Courage (♡): Your strength of will and spirit, and determination in the face of danger. *Recharge*: face incredible odds without flinching, or relate a story of bravery and risk.

Mana (♡): Your reserve of magical power. *Recharge*: meditate after an extended rest, or expose yourself to any significant source of mystic power.

Mechanism

An artificial lifeform: a robot, a mechanist construct, an alchemical golem, or something similar. *Special*: You are powered by electricity rather than food and drink. You are immune to disease and many mortal ailments, but can still wear down and have your own unique class of problems.

Words:

Crush (4 ☆): You use your brute strength to reduce obstacles to fragments. *Pools*: Tech

With a Gadget (1): Use your arsenal to achieve some other goal. *Pool*: Tech.

Pools:

Tech (♡): Your mastery of technology and mechanistry, and your supply of devices. *Recharge*: Describe the construction or operation of a new gadget, or one you carry but haven't explained before.

Monk

You are a disciplined, cautious warrior trained in unarmed combat. You are taught to use your body as a weapon and channel the subtle energy known as “qi” to great effect.

Monks retreat from the world into monasteries, where they can meditate, practice, and train. By isolating themselves from worldly concerns, they can feel the gentle flow of magical energy through their own bodies, then learn to manipulate it. Monks can move with impossible agility and lightness, resist damage, and other physical feats.

Monks in Talispire act as informal peacekeepers in small towns and isolated villages. They are especially common in areas dominated by the Mesos Empire, where weapons are forbidden to commoners. They often pass their skills on to people they deem worthy, as well as their philosophy of peace.

Words:

Punch/Kick (4 ☆): You use unarmed martial arts attacks against an opponent. *Pool:* Qi.

With Martial Arts (1): Your training allows you to attempt many unique feats of body or mind. *Pool:* Qi.

Pools:

Qi (♡): Your inner reserves of subtle power, which flow like water through the body. *Recharge:* meditate after an extended rest, or tell a calming and peaceful tale.

Ninja

A skilled assassin and infiltration specialist. Called upon during wartime to do dishonorable but pragmatic missions. Often found as the secret police of an Eastern state.

Words:

With Ninja Magic (1): You can fool enemies, disappear into a smoke cloud, and many other amazing feats using a mixture of meditative training and misdirection. *Pool:* Qi, Stealth.

Pools:

Qi (♡): Your inner reserves of subtle power, which flow like water through the body. *Recharge:* meditate after an extended rest, or tell a calming and peaceful tale.

Stealth (♡): Your ability to hide in shadows, avoid detection, and go unnoticed. *Recharge:* make effort to disappear from sight and stay hidden.

Oracle

You are an adventurer-academic who uses the stars to tell fortunes and manipulate fate.

The Church teaches that Saints ascend to the Heavens and become stars. As stars, they join with their fellows to plan the destiny of Talispire. The movement of the stars is the emanation of their intentions. As more Saints achieve apotheosis, Talispire will become a more orderly world, but also a more static and unchanging one. The unknown and flexible future will become preordained. Some Oracles see this as a blessing, while others regard it as a curse.

Oracles read these movements using astrolabes, telescopes, special cards, and other tools. They also understand how to capture and redirect this flow of celestial energy for their own purposes. Oracles in the field may use their cards and instruments to cast celestial spells or inflict curses.

Words:

Predict (4 ☆): You reveal or warp the destiny of someone or something, causing a benefic or malefic outcome. *Pool*: Insight.

As Foretold (1): Some other action you perform carries the weight of fate with it. *Pool*: Insight.

Pools:

Insight (♡): Your supernatural sense of the spirit world and currents of fate. *Recharge*: Meditate in a natural setting or upon a natural subject, or tell a parable containing some sort of wisdom or lesson.

Twists:

Reply Hazy! (♡): Your foretelling of the future has a gap in it. What - good or bad - might fill that gap later on?

Ill Omen! (♡♡): Some action - by or against you - carries prophetic significance. What does this portent mean?

Star Wars! (♡♡♡): Your attempt to change the future is met with resistance. Someone or something has a fate planned that conflicts with yours! Who or what is responsible, and what is the plan?

Paladin

A holy warrior who follows a divine command, rather than a merely mundane code of honor. A heavily armored knight with holy magic.

Words:

Smite (4 ☆): You strike down evil with a blaze of power. *Pool*: Courage, Holy.

Pools:

Courage (♡): Your strength of will and spirit, and determination in the face of danger. *Recharge*: face incredible odds without flinching, or relate a story of bravery and risk.

Holy (♡): Your connection to the divine and ability to call out sacred power. *Recharge*: Meditate after an extended rest, or be in the presence of an icon of your faith or a miracle of your patron.

Priest

You are a holy person, authorized by the Holy Church to perform rituals and empowered to call on holy magic. Through miracles and prayer, you heal and protect your allies, or strike down evil.

Priests invoke the power of Talispire's Saints, drawing down iconic power from the heavens in the form of miracles. For the most part, this power is used as the priest wishes, though it cannot be used to do clearly evil acts. Priests may also commune with the Saints, asking for inspiration or blessings.

Almost every village has (or wants) a priest to heal the sick, cure disease, and bless the crops. Some priests travel from town to town, attending their flock. Others stay in one place. A few travel as adventurers, righting wrongs and lifting spirits wherever they go.

Special: Describe one or more Saints you call on, and the ideals they represent. A priest's spells are always accompanied by obvious indicators - glowing haloes over one's head, shafts of protective light from the sky, and so forth.

Words:

Ward (4 ☆): You wield sacred power to repel someone or something from hurting you and your allies. *Pool:* Holy.

With Prayer (1): You pray for divine intervention in some other action. *Pool:* Holy.

Pools:

Holy (♡): Your connection to the divine and ability to call out sacred power. *Recharge:* Meditate after an extended rest, or be in the presence of an icon of your faith or a miracle of your patron.

Twists:

Hidden Evil! (♡): Your blessing or prayers go awry due to the presence of evil. What or who is responsible? Can you find them in time?

Selfish Heart! (♡♡): Your call for power has some selfish or dark aspect to it. Will this corrupt the prayer? Will you get what you want? Will you learn a lesson from it?

Prince/Princess

A member of royalty who goes on adventures for their own reasons. Their strength is their kindness and good heart, and not only a willingness but an ability to see the true natures of others. *Special:* as royalty, you have authority over the good folk of a certain kingdom, and you may exercise it when you are there.

Words:

Befriend (4 ☆): You overcome hatred and fear through perseverance, convincing someone to give up hostility and cooperate with you. *Pool:* Charm.

Kindly (1): Your spirit and purity allow you to see through any difficulty. *Pool:* Charm.

Pools:

Charm (♡): Your charisma, persuasiveness, and inspiration. *Recharge:* Befriend someone or tell a fascinating story, regardless of its truthfulness.

Ranger

You are a tracker, woodsman, and practical naturalist. You are a wilderness explorer and student of the natural world.

Rangers on Talispire escort travelers through the wilderness, keep others apprised about dangerous woodland beasts, and supply city folk with the bounty of nature. They hunt primarily with traps and snares. They may learn the bow to take down dangerous prey at range. Many are also furriers or leatherworkers, and sell both meat and hides at lonely trading posts.

Special: You can follow people or animals through a wilderness area by tracking.

Words:

Ambush (4 ☆): You set up a series of traps — spikes, poisons, trip lines, etc. - to capture prey or harass larger targets. *Pool:* Instinct.

With Woodcraft (1): You use your knowledge of nature to get something done. *Pool:* Instinct.

Pools:

Instinct (♡): Your innate feelings for nature, your connection to the feral and bestial. *Recharge:* Live simply in a natural state — sleeping under the stars, hunting your own food, etc. — to reconnect with the world.

Twists:

Sprung Trap! (♡): Your trap or snare fails to work. Was your prey too wary? What happens now that they're alerted?

Hawk's Eyes! (♡♡): When you fall into a trap or are caught in an ambush, your familiarity with such tactics gives you an advantage. How do you react?

Ruin Delver

A seeker of knowledge, in the form of ancient relics, buried libraries, and forgotten wonders. You dive into crumbling ruins and survive dangers living, mechanical, or natural, hoping to come out with something big. *Special:* you can decipher old languages, appraise artifacts, and similar mundane feats.

Words:

Run From (4 ☆): When ancient traps start activating, walls begin closing, and golems come to life, start running. Seriously, there is an outrageous amount of running involved. *Pool:* Courage.

For Glory (1 ☆): When fortune and glory are on the line, when relics are waiting, when it belongs in a museum, you'll come through somehow.

Pools:

Courage (♡): Your strength of will and spirit, and determination in the face of danger. *Recharge:* face incredible odds without flinching, or relate a story of bravery and risk.

Scoundrel

You are a gambler, con artist, or other shady character. You have a smooth tongue and deft hands. While you rarely resort to outright theft, you're not above a little cheating.

Scoundrels can be found all around the world plying their trades. They play games of chance, run gambling parlors, fence stolen goods, and other shady activities. But some scoundrels put their talents to good uses - like doing recon on the Mesos Empire's territory, or depriving a wealthy warlord of his fortune.

Words:

Swindle (4 ☆): You use legerdemain, trickery, or fast-talk to get the better of somebody. *Pool*: Charm, Stealth.

Pools:

Charm (♡): Your charisma, persuasiveness, and inspiration. *Recharge*: Befriend someone or tell a fascinating story, regardless of its truthfulness.

Stealth (♡): Your ability to hide in shadows, avoid detection, and go unnoticed. *Recharge*: make effort to disappear from sight and stay hidden.

Twists:

One Lie Too Many! (♡): You mix up stories and tell the wrong mark the wrong thing. Can you smooth it over with some fast talk?

Reused Con! (♡♡): You're up to your usual shenanigans, but people have heard this one before. Can you spin it in a new way in time?

Familiar Face! (♡♡♡): An old friend/partner/lover/rival appears. What do they want here? How will their presence impact your plan? Are they running their own scam, and are you the mark?

Shaman

Someone who walks in the world of spirits and create pacts with unseen allies. *Special*: Shamans can see the unseen: spirits of nature, ancestor spirits, and so forth. In return, those spirits can meddle with the shaman.

Words:

Mediate (4 ☆): You bring mortal and spirit communities together to identify and resolve a problem. *Pool*: Insight.

With Spirit Ally (1): The spirits around you move to assist you with some other sort of activity. *Pool*: Insight.

Pools:

Insight (♡): Your supernatural sense of the spirit world and currents of fate. *Recharge*: Meditate in a natural setting or upon a natural subject, or tell a parable containing some sort of wisdom or lesson.

Summoner

A spellcaster who conjures powerful creatures from the ether, commanding them into battle. *Special:* describe one summoned creature you've mastered and that is available to you, including its appearance and abilities.

Words:

Bind (4 ☆): You can recruit a dangerous supernatural creature as a companion. *Pool:* Mana.

With Minion (1): Your summoned creatures assist you in some way with their abilities. *Pool:* Instinct.

Pools:

Mana (♡): Your reserve of magical power. *Recharge:* meditate after an extended rest, or expose yourself to any significant source of mystic power.

Tamer

A naturalist who befriends one or more animal companions, then trains and travels with them. *Special:* Specify the sorts of animals you've allied with, and some of the typical tricks they can do — including attacking enemies, rescuing allies, carrying messages, and so on. Your companions may not always be available.

Words:

Tame (4 ☆): You can recruit a dangerous natural creature as a companion with care and patience. *Special:* You may do this automatically for mundane creatures such as birds or cats. *Pool:* Instinct.

With Pet (1): Your animal companions assist you in some way with their abilities. *Pool:* Instinct.

Pools:

Instinct (♡): Your innate feelings for nature, your connection to the feral and bestial. *Recharge:* Live simply in a natural state — sleeping under the stars, hunting your own food, etc. — to reconnect with the world.

Thief

A sneaky rogue who uses wits and blades to engage in larceny.

Words:

Steal (4 ☆): You deprive a person or place of something valuable, provided you have some way to get away with it. *Pool*: Stealth.

Sneakily (1): Your subtlety can be used in other ways. *Pool*: Stealth.

Pools:

Stealth (♡): Your ability to hide in shadows, avoid detection, and go unnoticed. *Recharge*: make effort to disappear from sight and stay hidden.

Racial Archetypes

Zelf

You are a Zelf, an immortal and mysterious being. You dive into the ocean of your own memories to bring back treasure, sharing it for the benefit of all.

Words:

Dreamwalk (4 ☆): You enter a trance, moving and speaking with impossible and alien grace, as knowledge and competence flow through the vessel of your body. You can play out an ancient story or wield an ancient skill. *Pool:* Insight, Instinct.

Pools:

Insight (♡): Your supernatural sense of the spirit world and currents of fate. *Recharge:* Meditate in a natural setting or upon a natural subject, or tell a parable containing some sort of wisdom or lesson.

Instinct (♡): Your innate feelings for nature, your connection to the feral and bestial. *Recharge:* Live simply in a natural state — sleeping under the stars, hunting your own food, etc. — to reconnect with the world.

Gnomad

You are a Gnomad, a wandering wizard of technology and creativity. You use your intuitive knack for changing things to improve the world, one gadget or person at a time.

Words:

Meddle (4 ☆): You can mess with something — whether devices or people — to get it working better, or occasionally worse. Your methods are intuitive but risky. They involve showing off, improvising with help from friends nearby, and so on. *Pool:* Charm, Tech.

Pools:

Charm (♡): Your charisma, persuasiveness, and inspiration. *Recharge:* Befriend someone or tell a fascinating story, regardless of its truthfulness.

Tech (♡): Your mastery of technology and machinery, and your supply of devices. *Recharge:* Describe the construction or operation of a new gadget, or one you carry but haven't explained before.

There are numerous demihuman races. You can create your own, or use one presented here.

Demihuman (Bullfolk)

You are a demihuman with a muscular build and the head and face of a bull or aurochs - a snout and two sharp horns. Though strong of body, Bullfolk are also renowned for their wisdom, as their horns attract and absorb spiritual energy and insight.

Words:

Gore (4 ☆): You charge at a target, impaling them on your horns! *Pool:* Insight.

With Horns (1): Whether breaking down physical barriers or drawing in spirit energy, your horns are a versatile tool. *Pool:* Insight.

Pools:

Insight (♡): Your supernatural sense of the spirit world and currents of fate. *Recharge:* Meditate in a natural setting or upon a natural subject, or tell a parable containing some sort of wisdom or lesson.

Demihuman (Catfolk)

You are a demihuman with feline features: cat ears and a tail. You may also have claws (retractable or not). Many people consider catfolk to be impulsive, lazy, and a little ditzy, but they are at least as varied as any other human.

Words:

Pounce (4 ☆): You leap at a target unexpectedly, using powerful leg muscles to make a jump! *Pool:* Instinct.

Lithely (1): Your predatory instincts and feline grace are good for combat and stealth, but are surprisingly effective in social situations too... *Pool:* Instinct.

Pools:

Instinct (♡): Your innate feelings for nature, your connection to the feral and bestial. *Recharge:* Live simply in a natural state — sleeping under the stars, hunting your own food, etc. — to reconnect with the world.

Sample Characters

Tana

A spunky, outgoing girl from a sleepy country village. She dresses in country garb. She is bright, cheerful, and always greets people warmly when meeting them. Thanks to her parents' influence, she has a commitment to justice thanks to her farmer father and mysterious mother.

Archetypes: Brave Determined Adventurer

Words: Confront (4 ☆), Resist (4 ☆☆), Avoid (4 ☆)

Pools: Resolve (♡♡)

Threads: The Old Ruin Near Home

Appearance: Wooden Sword, Mother's Mysterious Pendant, Bright-Red Hair

This is our heroine at the beginning of her adventure. At the end of the story "The Old Ruin Near Home", she will discover a grimoire (a book of magic spells), and learn to be a Mage. Later on, she will meet up with a Gnomish caravan, where she is equipped with a new sword and armor, and become a Magic Knight.

Basler

A selfish rogue of no great moral character, who lives and plies his unsavory trade in the city. Meeting Tana, the least cynical person he'd ever encountered, changed his way of thinking. He wears dirty leathers and carries two sharp daggers.

Archetypes: Clever Mysterious Adventurer

Words: Confront (4 ☆), Avoid (4 ☆☆), Outwit (4 ☆)

Pools: Resolve (♡♡)

Threads: The Noblewoman's Necklace

Appearance: Hooded Cloak, Twin Daggers, Locket With Photo

At the end of "The Noblewoman's Necklace", Basler becomes a Thief, but using his skills for good. Later, he'll meet a mysterious but familiar old man, and become a Ninja.

Emory Hawthorne

A young and inexperienced, but noble, squire. Assigned to track down the thief Basler, only to fall in with the group upon seeing Tana's influence on him (and being more than a little impressed with the girl herself).

Archetypes: Curious Determined Adventurer

Words: Resist (4 ☆☆), Avoid (4 ☆), Outwit (4 ☆)

Pools: Resolve (♡♡)

Threads: A Squire's Duty

Appearance: Ill-Fitting Armor, Squire's Sword, Regional Guidebook

At the end of "A Squire's Duty", he becomes Sir Emory and is made a proper Knight. Later, he'll learn the defensive arts of the order of St. Rinadh, and become a Paladin.

Woody

A young forest-dweller who wears thick overlapping cloth to conceal their features. They guide Tana and her friends through a dangerous woodland, and are inspired to leave the forest and join the group. They have frequent discussions with Basler about laws and authority. They carry a bow made of living wood, with a bowstring made of an actual vine.

Archetypes: Clever Cool Adventurer

Words: Confront (4), Avoid (4 ☆), Outwit (4 ☆ ☆)

Pools: Resolve (♡♡)

Threads: Secret in the Forest

Appearance: Piercing Green Eyes, Face-Covering Veil, Vine Bow

In reality, "Woody" is Princess Emerald who escaped a nearby kingdom and has been living in the forest for the past few years. At the end of "Secret in the Forest", she will bring some animal companions with her, becoming a Beastmaster. Later, she'll acknowledge her royal heritage to become a Princess, embrace her life in the wild and become a Ranger, or perhaps both.

Places

The Sleepy Village

A good starting place for any adventurer worth the name. A cluster of huts, with conical white roofs. Thin streams of smoke coil upwards from numerous chimneys. The emerald green of a vibrantly alive forest rises all around. Mountains rise in the distance. There is a path that meanders between the buildings, leading to the one and only road out of town.

Slime Attack!

Slimes are mobile blobs of protoplasm, animated by magic or ancient Cirran mechanistiry. They are a recurring nuisance for many villages, and are one of the first “monsters” any adventurer will face.

Stages:

- 1 ☐ (first wave)
- 2 ☐ (more slimes appear)
- 3 ☐ (lots of slimes!)

Twists:

“It slimed me!” (♡): You’re covered in goop and must scramble to escape, possibly losing something small or valuable as you do.

Stuck weapon! (♡♡): Lose your weapon. You must work to get it back somehow.

The Old Ruin

In a clearing in the forest, pale marble walls rise from the soil. They form irregular and intricate shapes. Once upon a time, this was a church, temple, or other gathering place for celebrants. Everything is overgrown with vines and grass. Little streams of water pour through cracks in the walls and form pools.

The ruin should evoke *sorrow*. Some grand and beautiful civilization built their temple here, and now they are gone, leaving only this memorial of elder times. The characters are here to discover something: what treasure or hidden secrets lie inside?

The walls used to be painted in bright pigments, but most of those have been scrubbed or scratched away. The musical notes for ancient songs are scribed into stone tablets.

The temple has many underground levels. Some passageways will be caved in, while others are closed off by thick doors. There is a strange magic which will act on visitors, driving them away to keep the temple as a silent monument to antiquity.

Mysterious Magic

Strange spells still hang over the ruin, subtly guarding it from intrusion and damage. They will welcome the truly penitent, but who alive today remembers the ancient rituals to demonstrate their piety? The spells begin subtly, affecting the mind and sense of direction. At higher levels, the arrangement of the ruins will begin to adjust itself. Guardian golems will animate from among the statues if someone penetrates to the deepest recesses.

Stages:

- 1 ☐ (misdirections and glamours)
- 3 ☐☐ (shifting walls, vanishing landmarks)
- 5 ☐☐☐ (guardian golems)

Twists:

Holy Prayer (♡♡♡): You deciphered the music of the temple’s upper levels and sang the songs earnestly. Your piety will be rewarded.

The Bustling City

At the end of the road, and the beginning of many others, the city stands with open arms, greeting travelers. The goods of a thousand caravans are on offer in the bazaars. The hands of merchants, officials, and thieves wait to luck coin purses from the pockets of the unwary.

The city should evoke *surprise*. Everything is new to visiting country characters. The party is here to find something: the answers to a mystery, a lost or stolen item, the fate of a friend or family member. The newness of the city and the strange ways of city folk are the obstacles in their search.

The city walls are brown stone. Red banners of bravery fly over mercenary halls and proclaim the presence of the Crown's forces. Yellow and violet paint marks the signs of inns, taverns, and eateries. The roads are a pale, almost creamy colored cobblestone. Water fountains spray their pure blue water into the air. The voices of buyers and sellers ring out from morning to dusk. During the evening, the buildings are dark, with slivers of flickering orange light emanating from the window shutters. The people move from outside to inside when day becomes night, to conclude their business and engage in revelry.

Buildings are roofed with sharply slanted inclines, a contrast to the sleepy village's gently rounded shapes. Everything is angles here, like the sharp turns of a street corner. A trio of cutthroats waits near you in the alley, watching and whispering.

Confrontation with Thugs!

Bandits, muggers, hired soldiers, or mercenaries can harass innocent bystanders, waylay travelers, and so on. The Thugs can be beaten by force, conned, or tricked.

Stages:

- 2 □□ (handful of thugs causing trouble)
- 4 □□ (rest of the gang shows up)
- 6 □□□ (captain of the gang appears)

Features:

Backup (3): More members of the gang appear.

Hostages (6): The gang took hostages. You must save

them.

Twists:

Unnecessary Roughness (♡): You take some minor injury and must deal with it for the rest of the fight.

Dirty Trick! (♡♡): You fall victim to one of the classic blunders — sand in the eye, etc.

“Now I’m mad!” (♡♡♡): The captain no-sells one of your attacks and gets angrier. Add a square of endurance.

“Get in there!” (♡♡♡♡): the gang scrambles to obey. Add the Backup feature.

Escape the Prison!

The characters have been captured by the authorities and imprisoned! For whatever reason, a fair trial seems unlikely. Time to escape.

Stages:

- 3 □□□ (figuring out resources, unlocking cells)
- 5 □□ (dealing with guards)
- 7 □ (the big escape)

Features:

Alarm (5): Somebody saw you and shouted, and now everyone is alerted.

Twists:

All Things Go (♡): You lose some useful piece of equipment in an escape attempt or struggle.

I Lied (♡♡): You came up with a stellar excuse for the guards to come into your cell and get ambushed. Good job!

Save Me (♡♡♡): Another prisoner is vital to your escape plan, but must be escorted out safely and will be a hindrance.

Pound the Alarm (♡♡♡♡): You raise a ruckus or a guard gets away to warn his companions. Add the Alarm feature.

The Eldritch Forest

The forest fills the valleys and creeps up the mountains. It is ancient, with tiny hamlets occupied by taciturn woodsmen only on the edges. Only animals live in the forest itself, and precious few of them live in the deeper stretches.

The forest should evoke fear. An unseen presence hides in the depths, stalking and hunting as it wills. Past a certain boundary, the characters should no longer hear the birds singing, or the shuffling of animals. All that's left is the rhythmic wind on the tree leaves, like breathing.

The forest has something the PCs want: rare herbs, a route to somewhere else that bypasses an invading army or washed-out bridge, and so on.

The Empty Hamlet

A quiet, almost abandoned village where woodcutters live and work. Something is wrong here - the few people you meet are quiet and wary. You might be driven out, if you don't make friends. This might also be a reclusive Zelf village further into the forest. The PCs should need something from the people here - a guide, supplies, or something else.

Stages:

- 3 □□ (find somebody to talk to)
- 5 □□ (deal with distrust and hostility)
- 7 □ (encounter the chieftain)

Twists:

Can We Help You? (♡): Conversation may come around to a problem the forest has. If you volunteer to solve it without being asked, opinions will improve.

Familiar Face (♡♡): Somebody here knows you, for good or ill. What is your relationship? How do they react?

Imperial Patrol!

A detachment of Mesos soldiers are in the forest, either on the move or at camp. Their patrols will spot the PCs if they aren't careful. They may have a goal that conflicts with the PCs, or they might just be a surprise ambush.

Stages:

- 3 □□ (armed squad)
- 4 □□ (camp reinforcements)
- 5 □□ (heavy weapon detachment)

Twists:

Outmaneuvered! (♡♡): The troops get the drop on you with superior tactics or an ambush.

Aid! (♡♡♡): If you befriended any woodsmen or Zelves in the forest, some of them now help out - arrows from treetops, an escape route, etc.

The Vine Dragon!

A Dragon lurks at the center of the forest. Its body is made of roots and vines and leaves. Its eyes are the dewdrops of morning. It can create a lithe serpentine shape to attack its victims, or disappear into an explosion of leaves to become one with the forest again.

Like all Dragons, it can be driven off by harm, but never truly defeated unless the underlying impulse it represents (the forest's rage against hurtful outsiders) is confronted and dealt with.

Stages:

- 1 □□ (encounter with the dragon on the ground)
- 3 □□ (the dragon vanishes into the forest, gaining the Diffuse feature)
- 6 □□ (the dragon animates vines to attack the PCs)
- 10 □□ (the dragon reforms and begins fighting all-out)

Features:

Bark Armor (6): Cutting weapons can break through, and fire will burn, but piercing or impact weapons will be ineffective.

Diffuse (10): The vine dragon has collapsed into its component parts. It cannot be attacked with conventional weapons.

Twists:

Claws! (♡): You are hit and begin to bleed.

Tail Swipe! (♡♡): You are knocked to your feet and must scramble out of the way of further attacks.

Thousand Limbs! (♡♡♡): The dragon uses creates vine tendrils or stone shackles.

Acknowledgements:

TODO

Name:

Concept:

Appearance:

Words	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Pools	♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡

Archetypes

Threads	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓