

You have been cordially invited to...



A Dance with Death

Arranged by Grant Joyner (g.joyner@digipen.edu)
on this April 22nd of the year 2019
Professor Angie Hoffman
GAT212A-SP19



*"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players."
-William Shakespeare, As You Like It*

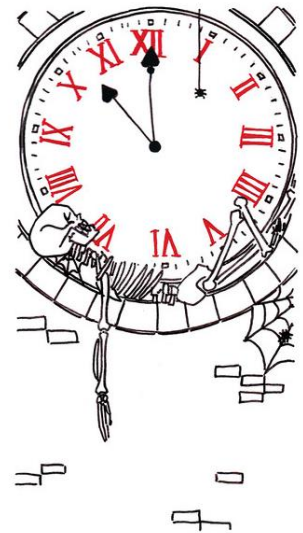
I. World and Story Design

Dear welcomed guest,

The world is beginning to decay. A golden period of expansion and growth has cleared its peak, and life is on its final course of collapse. Eventually, it will crash to a halt and enter its final slumber. Although destruction is almost certain, there's no telling when it could happen; the final hour could be millennia away, or it could be over in the blink of an eye.

Watching the final act unfold from beyond space and time are the beings of creation. These gods, angels, demons, and other deities beyond reality make up the Audience, who watch the stage with delight in the Great Theater. Their entertainment is drawn from the successes and suffering of humanity, and mankind's demise is the Final Act.

On this stage of shrinking size, people are in a scramble to make the best use of what time they have left. Some are in a panic to find a way to extend the life of their world, while others abandon that hope and reach for whatever power they can amass before the end of times. Many people hold faith that they will live out the rest of their lives without seeing the Curtain Call, while more desperate folk fall to their knees and seek peace in whatever sympathetic god may be listening. Some people, in the face of finality, seek companionship. Others seek safety with their loved ones. Some seek new beginnings. And of course, many people struggle just to maintain the possibility of seeing another sunrise at all. Everyone has a philosophy on what the end will bring and what can be done today to prepare for it.



But oh, the irony! A scarlet jester cartwheels across the catwalk and launches his assault on the spotlight. Light shines upon the mechanisms holding the stage together, illuminating the truth that they have grown creaky and wobbly.

The fundamental components of existence are becoming noisy and unstable with the aging of the universe. The very concepts of form, space, time, life and death are all warping and flaking. Mechanisms that were once perfectly efficient and invisible to the universe are now beginning to announce their presence with tired rustling and rattling. These systems, whose inner workings have recently been observed by the people of the universe, are categorized into four domains: Astra, the domain of the universe, Corpus, the domain of matter; Cognus, the domain of time and operations; and Animus, the domain of the soul.

To some, the sudden interfacing of these systems represents hope that revitalizing these divine systems might extend the universe's lifetime. Of course, others simply wish to manipulate the emerging errors for their own devices. By studying the holes in the stage, it becomes possible for matter, time, and even the unfathomable essence of life to become tools that can be used for conquest.

On this stage, where the Curtain Call approaches at an undetectable speed and the machinations behind the stage are being illuminated further with each passing day, you play a lead role in this grand finale. The gods have selected you to participate in this performance where death is no excuse for a final bow.

You are a Macabre, a being who is exempt from death. Being cast as a Macabre means that, when you die, you return to the world in the form of another character through a phase known as Reincarnation. In addition, calling an Intermission automatically kills off your current character unless they have been maintained through special means. Once the Intermission ends and the game resumes, you must Reincarnate as a new character unless you were able to preserve your old character.

During Reincarnation, you create an entirely new character. Some of the characteristics of your old character are carried over to your new one. Along with stats, you might choose to inherit spells, money, resources, and more. However, there is a limit to the amount you can carry from one lifetime to another. Over time, you can earn more options to increase your inheritance between characters.



Be warned, performer: you're not the only special actor invited to this show. There are other Macabre just like you, all competing for the approval and applause from the Audience. Their identities are a mystery for now, but rest assured that fate will have you cross paths with them again and again. Perhaps the gods are searching for a successor, or perhaps you are merely a plaything for their entertainment. Whatever the reason, your role gives you potential and powers beyond that which a normal human can attain within a lifetime.

Now go, Macabre, and prepare for the initial Reincarnation. Your first scene is about to begin. Will you give the Audience a show worthy of applause? Or will the Audience find themselves pulled into the act themselves before the Curtain Call?

May luck be your ally in this perilous journey.

Signed,

Madame
Mortus

Madame Mortus

The World of Ji Won

Ji Won is one of many worlds that the Great Theater watches over. It has existed for millennia and consists of nine regions.

For a world map of Ji Won, see “The World of Ji Won” in the Appendix document.

Vireon, The Central Nation

(VEER-yon)

Right in the center of Ji Won is Vireon, a busy region with a developed infrastructure, government, trade system, and standardized education system. It is all of the productivity of an urban region without any of the dramatic personalities of the sister nations to the east or the harsh climates of the nations to the west. It also doesn't suffer from corruption like Glutalt to the north, yet it lacks characteristic natural resources that Lebra possesses to the south. Vireon is simply a stable nation with a culture that blends nearly every aspect of Ji Won into a single area.

At the center of Vireon, resting next to the coast of the Molga Lake, is the central capitol city. Here, traders come from all around to exchange goods.

Stath – The First Sister

(STATH)

Stath is the northern “sister region” on the east coast of Ji Won. In the legend of the three sisters, Stath is the eldest sister. She is described as being strong, out-going, and hard-working, but also impulsive and violent. Stories talk about her working from sunrise to sunset and then coming home, not to sleep, but to beat up her two younger siblings Frove and Herame. Then she would walk out the door at sunrise and continue to work, never resting. A myth claims that one time she caught a cold during the winter season and “bullied the illness out of herself” so she could keep working.

The climate of Stath ranges from moderate in the south to cold and wet in the north. The region experiences extremely cold winters and decently hot summers. Matching its climate, Stath is all about extremes. It is home to some of the most powerful spellcasters in Ji Won, partially due to conflicts with her neighbor to the north Glutalt. While these conflicts are brief and infrequent, they keep Stath in a constant state of alertness. People in Glutalt usually fear to enter combat with a spellcaster from Stath due to them having a reputation of being skillful, hot-blooded, and short-tempered. The call to battle is one that a Stath warrior anticipates, and their zeal for bloodshed results in battles ending very quickly in their favor.

One of Stath's main draws are its spellcasting sports, most famously its gladiator fights in the central capitol where mid- to high-level spellcasters battle in the Stath Arena for glory and riches. A Stath warrior's career in the Arena often only lasts one day, and it's a day of gratuitous bloodshed where they fight against up to five different opponents in a single elimination bracket. The battles are fought and decided very quickly, with only one spellcaster walking away alive. In a single day at the Stath Arena, over a hundred spellcasters will meet their demise and only a select few will live through to the end. That one victory is all a spellcaster needs to retire and live out the rest of their life in luxury, but it is a victory that isn't easily earned.

The structure of Stath society is split into extremes as well. Stath's major cities have an intensely dense population and can't grow fast enough to accommodate it, so competition for work to earn a living is fierce. Those who aren't willing to put everything they have on the line for work often don't find any and are damned to a life of poverty. In Stath culture, you are either a fighter who devotes every cell in your body to working day and night, or you are the dirt upon which everyone else walks.

Frove – The Second Sister

(FROHV)

Frove is the southern sister on the east coast of Ji Won. While Stath is all about extremes, Frove is about deception. Stories describe Frove as being passive, tactful, and devilishly . She would outsmart Stath’s brutish beatings by inviting guests over and then offering to “do make-up for them” and “let them sleep in her bed”. Her guests would be flattered by these generous offers, but little did they know that Frove was secretly disguising them to look like herself. Then while they were asleep, Frove would hide in the basement while Stath would come home and beat up the guest sleeping in her bed, thinking that she was beating up Frove. When Stath had left, Frove would re-enter her bedroom and loot all of her guest’s possessions before dumping their unconscious and bruised body out in the city. Matching her character, the climate in Frove is deceitful and unpredictable, often moderate but occasionally becoming bitter cold or dreadfully hot.

On the surface, Frove is a beautiful region to live in. The cities make use of complex canal systems to transport people around the many landmarks and shopping districts. However, under the surface of this beautiful area hides a treacherous reality. In Frove society, drawing attention to yourself is a quick ticket to being taken advantage of or snuffed out. Frovian people are naturally devious and have a reputation for being kleptomaniacs, tricksters, and scavengers. Your only form of protection in Frove society is to be on constant guard. It is said that a foolish tourist walking into the Frove capitol will have his wallet stolen the first time he blinks. It’s not uncommon to see citizens wearing colorful masks during their everyday commute, nor is it uncommon to see people carrying around purses and backpacks with multiple locks on them while running everyday errands. There are vast amounts of black markets in Frove cities whose entire supplies are composed of stolen goods from tourists and traders.

The culture of Frove still allows for sports, music, art, and other forms of expression, but they are done so behind a false identity. Frove “celebrities” are highly encouraged to create fake names for themselves and mask their face if they wish to participate in public events. Other regions like to hold “Frovian Festivals” where their citizens get to wear colorful masks and have parades, but Frove itself doesn’t treat masks as a game or a celebration. To them, it’s a matter of life and death.

Herame – The Third Sister

(HAYR-uh-mee)

Herame is a volcanic island to the southeast of the sister regions Stath and Frove. In Ji Won culture, Herame is the silent victim of Stath’s unforgiving coldness and Frove’s treachery. The legends illustrate Herame as a gullible younger sister with a twisted moral compass. She was bullied endlessly by Stath and then tricked by Frove into believing that she could become powerful enough to get revenge if she travelled across the sea and sold her soul to the devil. Herame had no moral dilemmas with the offer and set out to find the devil. On the sea, she saw smoke coming from an island which she figured had to be him, but in actuality it was an underwater volcano erupting. She got too close to the eruption, which wound up catching her ship and pulling it towards the center. The island that was born from the eruption was named after Herame. A myth says that the devil actually was there at the eruption, waiting until the precise moment before Herame drowned to give her the power she begged for in exchange for her soul. Whether or not she actually received the power she asked for before she drowned, she didn’t survive the event to get her revenge.

Today, Herame is a penal colony for criminals from either Frove or Stath. The climate is extremely hot as warm winds blow inwards from the sea and create a humid, tropical atmosphere. The ceremony for banishing someone to the island varies depending on the region; from Stath, people like to throw rocks at the criminal as their ship sets off, while in Frove they like to strip the person down to their undergarments and laugh at them. (How cruel!)

The people who find themselves on Herame have very little to survive on. While the volcano isn’t active anymore, the island doesn’t offer a lot in terms of natural resources. Generations of criminals have done their best to settle down and form civilizations to co-exist with each other, united by similar motivations based on their morals and family past. Some attempt to seek peace with their existence on the island and move past their criminal history that caused them to be banished there. Others wear the name of the family who caused them to be brought there with contempt, never letting themselves forget the identity of the person who ruined their life. The latter shares the goal of getting back to mainland somehow, but decades of attempts to advance technology has done nothing for them as the waters surrounding Herame are too fierce to let anyone leave.

Lebra, Land of Beauty

(LAY-bruh)

In the far south is the region of Lebra, a region riddled with endless storms. Warm, wet winds from both the west and east collide and engage war with each other in the high altitudes of central Lebra, creating some of the most aggressive weather in Ji Won. This makes the region an attractive location for casters to master air pressure and temperature spells in ruthless conditions. The area's unique climate makes it a location to find exotic plants and wildlife. The people of Lebra are some of the most amiable in all of Ji Won as well. People are naturally friendly to outsiders.

There are legends that describe a holy garden somewhere on Mt. Lebra from which mankind first descended from heaven to earth. The stories say that the garden is inhabited by mythical creatures and contains a maze that leads into the Great Theater. Though mankind once lived in the garden, their curiosity spurred them to leave. As punishment for doing so, the gods made it impossible for them to re-enter. Finding the garden is supposed to be a spiritual journey that one must spend a lifetime of devotion to prepare for. The truth behind this story is that no trace of any garden has ever been found, and many talented casters who spend their entire lives preparing for the journey have been found dead on the mountain, having never found it. The tale has earned its nickname of "The Fool's Paradise".

Glutalt, Land of Hunger

(gloo-TALT)

In the north is the cold, wet, militaristic nation of Glutalt. Cold winds blow in from all directions and stir up nasty winter storms almost a year long. Snow is considered a blessing compared to the regular downpours of heavy rain and hail. The nation has a reputation for being corrupt and favoring the wealthy. Lower class citizens live packed together in apartment homes that often have poor heating. They don't even receive a standard education or learn casting. Meanwhile, higher class officials live lavishly in beautiful estates, huddled close to the warmth of the capitol and the country's wealth.

At the borders of Glutalt are three layers of security that many outsiders jokingly call "a harsh lesson to the gullible man," since the checkpoints have a reputation of being corrupt. Very often, people entering merely to pass or tour through Glutalt lose track of their possessions due to "accidents" during handling. They then get reimbursed for the "misplaced" goods with currency that can only be used in Glutalt. Additionally, the security makes it very difficult for lower-class citizens to leave. Citizens must own a permit to even approach security, and even then, citizens wishing to travel outside of Glutalt must leave something of significant value as collateral in case they never return.

Avarock, Land of Tradition

(AH-vuh-rok)

To the far west is the rocky region of Avarock. The area is mountainous and rich with natural resources. The region is split into two subsections, north Avarock and south Avarock, which each have their own cultures. South Avarock is a mixing pot of cultures since traders and travelers from the east travel along the south coast from Belumbo. This area of Avarock is much more amiable and welcoming than its family to the north. The people of northern Avarock are extremely traditional and refuse any use or practice of casting in their daily lives. All of their work is done manually under rigorous effort and strength. Their soldiers fight using weapons and armor forged from rare materials. Outsiders are not permitted near the forges and people who wield their craftsmanship must take an oath against spellcasting. North Avarock is a truer illustration of Avarock's distinct culture throughout history, while south Avarock shows what the nation could become if the nation was more open to outsiders.

The people of north Avarock have a reputation for being antisocial and rigid. Like a mountain, they are stubborn and resistant to change. They look down upon outsiders and their "strange ways", and any mention or indication of casting flares them into a xenophobic rage. To them, casting is a demon's practice. They believe that the world is crumbling because people are embracing the evil of spellcasting and giving demons reign over the forces of good. According to old Avarock teachings, the path to happiness is to stand firm and defend the traditions that have been passed down by early man. Forging weapons manually and fighting using the strongest tools man can create on his own is true honor and devotion to god.



Belumbo, Land of Deprivation

(beh-loom-BOH)

The region of Belumbo is in constant drought due to being mostly landlocked. The only exceptions are the chilling cold coasts to the northwest and the tip at the bottom. The rivers spilling in from Vireon offer some respite from the otherwise uninhabitable conditions. All of Belumbo west of the rivers is desert, ranging from sandy dunes in the south to chilling tundras in the north.

While Belumbo is largely uninhabited, there are some settlements to the east that arose from criminal casters who fled from Vireon into the desert. The eastern border is very dangerous, as a result, so traders have to carefully follow the southern coast in order to reach Avarock.

Tretinum, Land of Bleakness

(TREH-tih-num)

Sharing the cold tundra of northern Belumbo is Tretinum. Tretinum is even less populated than Belumbo, but it's home to refugees who have escaped from Glutalt to the east. The northern coast of Tretinum is purely ice, and parts of it have broken off and drifted out into the sea. Despite the apparent bleakness of the climate conditions, Tretinum represents hope to the refugees from Glutalt.

History of Ji Won

The Origin of Animus Research

In the late 2000's, scholars in Vireon discovered the body's and mind's connection to the soul. In a series of experiments, they were able to establish a link between a subject's soul and the subject's physical and cognitive presence in the world. This link gave that subject the supernatural ability to influence the physical world by manipulating matter using a kind of "psychic energy". The field of study surrounding this connection between the real world and the soul came to be known as Animus.

Through experiments, scholars arrived at two metrics which would describe a subject's ability to use this psychic energy. **Soul Level**, or SL, is the stage of development that a subject's soul resides in. **Soul Power**, or SP, is the amount of supernatural energy that a subject can use to influence the real world. The average human subject, who is SL-1, is capable of exerting 2 SP.

Further research showed that Soul Power could grow linearly if a subject attuned their soul with another soul, essentially "chaining together" their SP. However, the most amount of SP that a human is able to output is enough to affect a space around their hand on a minor level (like creating a brief spark). Even with two human souls attuned together, their combined SP is only enough to affect a space the size of a human (or greatly affect the space around their hand, like sustain a flame).

The First Macabre

In ancient Ji Won legends, there are two families of divine beings. The first is the family of Vitus, which was given the responsibility to overlook the world of the Living. The second is the family of Mortus, which overlooked the world of the Dead. The Vitus were responsible for creating souls to be sent into Life, while the Mortus were responsible for harvesting souls based on karma and prepping them for rebirth. With cooperation between the Vitus and the Mortus, life in the universe would flow in a balanced cycle of life, death, and rebirth into life again.

However, the Vitus family was greedy by nature and invaded the world of the Dead. They wished to seize full control of existence by pushing out the Mortus. The Mortus fought to maintain their control, but ultimately the sheer size of the Vitus family forced the Mortus into hiding. The Vitus weren't satisfied with just pushing out the Mortus and knew that they would likely return to reclaim their share of control, so they initiated a plan to fully eradicate the Mortus.

With the execution of this plan, the Vitus usurped the duties of the deceased Mortus family and imposed their own rule. Rather than harvest souls, they rewarded souls based on devotion over karma, offering paradise to those who gave their life to the Vitus and damning those who refused. Additionally, the Vitus grew their family size by offering seats of power to those who pledged their service in life. Through this, the Vitus were worshipped by the humans and their rule was always maintained.

However, in the absence of the Mortus, humans feared death because they knew there was no rebirth. They fought to prevent death in all of its forms by creating medicines to prevent disease and eliminating threatening dangers. Death could not control nature in the way it was intended, and so the universe tilted favor towards the strong humans. Thus, under the control of the Vitus, human life flourished uncontrollably.

Eventually, life hit its maximum capacity. The Vitus had not been harvesting materials for souls to be sent into rebirth, and so eventually they ran out of materials to create new souls. The last humans were scraped together with skin as thin as tissue paper and bones as weak as crackers. Their minds were weak, barely functioning. Finally, there came a horrifying day where the last human was born. After that, babies emerged from the womb with no soul inside of them. The universe itself was reeling from the overpopulation of living beings, creating pockets of distorted gravity, time, and space. The natural process of life and death had been severed, and the universe was becoming an endless hell of chaos.

At this time, the Vitus controlled the universe for such a long time that they had grown bored. They had stopped taking care of the universe that they had fought to rule, and instead they chose to sit back and watch the universe destroy itself as the final generation of humans committed collective suicide.

Meanwhile, there remained one member of the Mortus family who continued to live in hiding. She is the Mother Mortus, who hid in a realm beyond death where the Vitus couldn't detect her. Mother Mortus hid there and waited for millennia as the universe crippled under the foolish rule of the Vitus. It was only after the universe experienced the horror of unchecked rule that she chose to stage her revenge. She created sixteen children whom she called the Macabre. These children were beings who wielded fragments of her own power. She gave them the forms of humans, since their purpose was to hide within the world that the Vitus had created and grow strong enough to eventually match her own power and then launch an assault on the unsuspecting Vitus family.

For the Deities, all purpose for the universe's existence has

While Animus research was being conducted, incidents began occurring with mysterious people who were using SP tactfully as if they had already mastered it. The first case of this was a person named Aki, who was seen fighting against bandits in the Belumbo Desert by erecting walls of fire from thin air. It was clear that Aki's power came from SP, and based on witness accounts, his SL seemed to be greater than the standard for humans.

Legends in Ji Won speak of sixteen human-like beings who are born with a natural ability to use SP. These legends describe the Macabre. There are always sixteen Macabre

While research around SL and SP was being conducted, the first being with a higher-level SL emerged. This was the First Macabre, a person known as Akira. No one knows where Akira came from, but he was discovered in the Belumbo Desert when a series of bandit encampments were discovered burned to the ground. Akira was found by authorities, who reported him as being able to cause volumes of air the size of a car to ignite and explode at his will. They tried to apprehend him during a raid on his hideout, but he vanished into air. While they were unable to apprehend Akira, it was clear that his power came from having a higher SL than a human's.

Akira's presence caused a panic in the research community. Some scientists were giddy to find out how a human could increase their SL to match Akira's while other scientists warned their peers that the smartest move would be to find a way to control higher Soul Levels before trying to imitate them. Some claimed Akira was a hoax entirely. However, it wasn't long before more beings like Akira began springing up all around Ji Won.

A second Macabre was reported in Lebra, causing a violent hurricane approaching the southern coast to completely dissipate. Another Macabre emerged as a competitor in the Stath Arena, ripping his opponents to pieces without even touching them. Another sprung up on the penal colony of Herame, and then another in Glutalt. After three years, there were eight Macabre identified. Most of the Macabre sought to use their power to gain attention and influence. It was clear that other Macabre didn't want to cause any trouble and simply wished to be left alone, leaving enthusiasts to wonder how many Macabre were out there in hiding.

Scholars in Vireon were naturally very interested in the emerging presence of the Macabre, and they offered protection and compensation for any Macabre willing to help their research. One of the Macabre, Kyabu, happily worked with the scholars in Vireon while maintaining a public presence to assure the people that she didn't pose a threat to anyone. Her intentions were to help everyone, including herself, to understand the mysteries behind Animus. However, other Macabre were not as willing to side with Kyabu and continued to cause chaos and wreak havoc. This caused the public to distrust the Macabre.

In the early 2100's, there was a cultural movement all across Ji Won against the Macabre. People were afraid of their power and wanted the eight identified Macabre to be captured and contained. There were riots in Vireon, Lebra, Frove, and Stath against the institutions who were protecting and conducting research on the Macabre. During a protest, there was a conflict between two Macabre and protesters, which resulted in dozens of casualties including one of the targeted Macabre. Not only was this tragedy blamed on the Macabre, but it revealed yet another facet of their heightened power: the ability to reincarnate. The Macabre who was confirmed dead after the protest was seen active again under a new identity not even a week later. Tensions continued to rise and the public grew more afraid and distrustful of the Macabre than ever.

Spellcasting in the Modern World

Kyabu stepped down from her cooperation with Vireon scholars in 2112, after years of public riots against the Macabre. She went into hiding and no one has heard from her since. However, the research from her cooperation was enough to give scholars a greater understanding of how the connection between the soul and the physical world worked. Eventually, Animus

became integrated as a normal part of society. Schools started teaching the common person how linking their soul with the physical world, as well as teaching self-defense techniques against “spellcasting”. With the aid of a casting conduit, which helps a person visualize and direct their soul’s presence in the physical world, anyone can become a spellcaster! Consequentially, by tuning together many souls, people were able to mimic the strength of the Macabre. Law enforcement became capable of handling and dealing with Soul Power levels that were previously uncontrollable, and many of the original chaos-causing Macabre were either arrested or went into hiding.

It wasn’t long before the practical uses of spellcasting began to see their way into the modern world. It eventually became a part of everyday life in Ji Won. Cooking classes taught people how to stir a pot using spellcasting, boy and girl scouts taught kids how to spark a campfire using an oxidization spell, etc. Spellcasting was also integrated into the military, teaching infantry soldiers close-quarters offensive and defensive spells. Soldiers couldn’t use spells to set fire to a building, they could use spells to block or repel incoming artillery fire or eliminate nearby single enemies.

Animus Technology – Artificial SL

As research surrounding Animus continued to progress, scholars in Vireon began finding out how humans can temporarily evolve their SL to match that of a Macabre. However, they still could not mimic the Macabre’s ability to reincarnate. The humans who can evolve their soul to SL-2 are more powerful, but death is still a threat to them.

Animus technology was drawn into the military force of each nation. Glutalt in particular was very enthusiastic about the emerging Animus technology and employed it in every aspect of their national security. It became a standard for security officers in Glutalt to be SL-2. Then, in the year 2160, a border conflict between Glutalt and Stath caused horrific damage to the impacted areas as civilians were subjected to the first military use of spellcasting. Battles lasted barely an hour and caused hundreds of thousands of casualties; people remarked that it was like a god appeared suddenly and struck down an entire row of cities with one wave of his hand. The conflict ended with Glutalt’s retreat as a specialized unit from Stath (codenamed “Stath’s Angels”) used experimental Animus tech to push themselves to SL-3, a Soul Level even further than that of a Macabre. The unit was capable of unleashing unprecedented levels of SP, melting entire tanks and crushing buildings with ease. Glutalt’s forces stood no chance against Stath’s Angels and ordered a retreat. Vireon proposed a treaty to ban spellcasting as a military weapon. Every nation rejected the treaty, claiming it was more dangerous to not prepare against a form of weaponry that was so easily accessible. The Spellcasting Age of warfare had begun.

A Higher Power

Stath’s tech to push humans to higher SL became mimicked by other nations, and soon people were able to hit levels as high as SL-4. However, people who manage to hit SL-4 become highly physically and mentally unstable and they cannot handle the artificial transformation for long. Additionally, all attempts to push people farther than SL-4 cause their body and mind to be overwhelmed and crushed instantly. Scholars in the field of Animus say that SL-4 is the hard limit for humans, while theorists say that a hypothetical being who could overcome the limitations of the human body and mind could hit potentially infinite SL. There are claims that the Macabre might be able to unlock the secrets behind higher SL, but ever since the early Macabre riots, there hasn’t been any trace of their existence.

As of the current day, the attention of Vireon scholars is drawn towards the environmental impacts of spellcasting. Physicists have detected that Animus a higher levels has far-reaching consequences on the fundamental forces of the physical universe. A being whose soul is powerful enough can destroy a building in one blow just out of the will of their SP, but it’s possible that the fundamental laws of the universe could also be swayed by a soul strong enough. If a soul is the manifestation of a person’s will and motivation, then who is to say that a powerful enough soul couldn’t exert its SP to changing a universal constant or rewriting laws of physics? Is the universe itself the result of a god using his or her soul power to manifest its creation? Could a person with a powerful enough soul stand side to side with that god and bend the world to his or her own desires?

The answer to these questions lies far beyond the physical realm, in the Great Theater. While the theorists draw conjectures, the Audience shares laughter and applause at the exciting show unfolding. And now, a new Act in the show begins. Some Macabre have yet to stand in the spotlight.

II. Game Rules

Setup

The Dance with Death system is best enjoyed with 5 players: 4 Performers and 1 Director.

Performers are the adventuring players who create Characters and roleplay as them for the Scene. The materials needed to be a Performer in the session are a Character Sheet for your Character and a set of four dice: 1d4, 1d6, 1d8, 1d12. Of course, it always helps to bring a vivid imagination!

The Director needs to be the most prepared, since he/she is the host or choreographer for the play session. The Director orchestrates a “Scene”: a quest or adventure, lasting roughly 60 mins, including its various settings and cast of NPC’s, for the Performers to roleplay in. Examples of Scenes that the Director might bring to a session are to defeat a group of bandits that are harassing a village, slay a dragon living in a trap-filled dungeon, or collect ingredients for a baker from a murky swamp. (See “*Director’s Toolkit*” for guidance on how to build a Scene.) The Director is also the speaker for the Audience, which is a pantheon of gods, angels and demons who are watching the Scene unfold from an unseen location called The Great Theater. (See “*Audience*” for more information.) There are no necessary materials to be the Director, but it is recommended that the Director has a copy of this document and the Appendix document, a thorough understanding of the general system and the abilities of the Audience, a Scene in mind for the Performers to roleplay in, and a notebook and writing utensil to take notes with.

System Flow

1. **Ladies and Gentlemen, Take Your Seats!** Sit down at the table with your friends. Decide who in the group is a Performer and who is the Director. (Ideally, The Director is already decided beforehand since they should have a Scene prepared for the group.)
2. **Casting Call.** Performers must create a new Character to play as. A Performer with an existing Character who was preserved from a previous session in the Dressing Room may simply use that Character. Otherwise, if a Performer has Character Sheets from previous Characters, they can Reincarnate a new Character from those. (See “*Reincarnation*”.)
3. **The Audience meets the Main Cast.** Once the Characters have been created, Performers can share their new Characters with the rest of the Performers and the Director. At this point, the Performers can declare their request for a specific Audience Challenge. The Director then issues any Audience Challenges that were requested.
4. **Scene Exposition.** The Director sets the stage for the session’s adventure, introducing the Scene by giving backstory and introducing NPC’s that they want to be a part of the quest.
5. **The Scene Begins!** Performers interact with each other and engage with the world that the Director has laid out to complete the quest. This includes free roam, talking to NPC’s, and combat.
6. **End Scene.** When the quest is over, due to either the success or the failure of the Performers in the quest given at the beginning of the Scene, the Director rewards the Performers. If the Cast succeeded in their quest, then the Cast receives their Audience Reward. (See “*Audience Rewards*”.) If the group was unsuccessful, usually from the entire Cast dying or letting the conditions for success expire, then the Audience is dissatisfied with the performance and Smites all surviving characters. (See “*Audience Actions*”.) After the results have been collected, the group can begin another Scene. (If new characters need to be made, return to the “Casting Call” step. Otherwise, return to “Introducing the Main Cast” so Performers can request new challenges if they wish.) If the group doesn’t want to do another Scene, the Director declares the Curtain Call where the session ends.
7. **Curtain Call.** Curtain Call marks the end of a play session. Each Character in play retires to the Dressing Room where they can be picked up again during a future session.

The Scene

The Scene is where the roleplaying gameplay occurs. During the scene, the Performers play the roles of their characters and the Director fulfills the role of the narrator. The Director also roleplays as NPC's that characters want to interact with, as well as communicates any Audience Actions that the Audience performs to interact with the Scene. (See "Audience Actions" for more information.)

While playing, Performers are welcome to talk with each other freely and ask for information from the Director about the setting, NPC's, etc.

Modes of Gameplay

There are three main modes of gameplay during the Scene:

- **Free Roam** – This mode occurs during any part of gameplay that isn't a dialogue with an NPC or a combat scenario. In this mode, characters are welcome to act within the setting as they wish. There is no strict turn order as the characters wander through a town, explore a cave, or solve a puzzle.
- **Dialogue** – During a social interaction between characters and other NPC's, characters are welcome to talk freely. The Director speaks for NPC's.
- **Combat** – During combat, gameplay becomes more methodical. When combat begins, there is an initialization step where each character readies for battle (see "Combat"). Then, the gameplay proceeds in turns, which consist of the Action Phase and the End Phase. Combat continues with each character taking their turn until the conflict is considered resolved, either by one side of the conflict being totally eliminated, the conflict being halted by dialogue, or one side retreating away. When combat ends, gameplay resumes in either dialogue (if the conflict resolved via dialogue to begin with) or free roam.

Action	Description
Talk	Converse with another character.
Observe	
Move	Move to a visible location. If any types of movement more complicated than simply walking are involved, then the player must describe how they get to the new location.
Standby	Reserve the Action to be used during someone else's turn.

Skill/Ability Use

Using a weapon (i.e. swinging a sword) or using a Spell costs one Action to use once.

Using a Technique costs 1 Technique Point + X Action Points, where X is the number of Actions being used in the Technique.

Movement

Outside of combat, the party moves freely. In combat, characters may spend one Action to move a distance which is determined by the character's AGI.

AGI	Movement
1	10 ft.
2	15 ft.
3	20 ft.
4	25 ft.
5	30 ft.

Combat

At the beginning of combat, Performers must first initialize their characters for battle. Each character gets 2 Actions per turn. During a character's Action Phase, they get to take 2 Actions. These Actions can be using equipment or a weapon, casting a spell, using an item, or using a general action. During a character's End Phase, the character executes any status effects currently on them and subtracts their Lifetime by 1. (See "Status Effects" for more information.) Then the character's turn ends, and gameplay proceeds to the next character. Go around the table clockwise. The Director takes the turn of NPCs. If the Director announces that an Audience Action gets used, it interrupts anything that is currently happening.

Health – Lethal vs Non-Lethal Damage

A character in this system doesn't necessarily have "health" in the way one would think of it. Instead, damage is considered **lethal** if it would reasonably kill a human being in the real world. If the damage isn't lethal, then it's **non-lethal** and doesn't have any inherent consequences. However, depending on the attack and the way the damage was received, the Director might choose to inflict a status like Bleeding[3] upon a victim who received non-lethal damage if it seems appropriate.

Some examples:

- A character gets impaled in the chest with a sword by an enemy in combat. The character receives lethal damage.
- A character gets hit by a large explosion from a combustion spell to their immediate right. The character receives lethal damage.
- A character gets hit in the leg by a wooden sword from an angry toddler. The character receives non-lethal damage (as well as a nasty look from the toddler's mom).
- A character gets hit by an oncoming sedan going 20 MPH. The character receives non-lethal damage, but the Director decides that the character gets inflicted with Paralyzed[3] from the impact.
- A character gets scratched in the torso by a jaguar. The character receives non-lethal damage, but the Director decides that the character gets inflicted with Bleeding[2]. Bad kitty!

When a character takes lethal damage, it doesn't mean that they die!

If your character's Soul Level is greater than 0, the character goes through a very quick process called **Rejuvenation**. After taking lethal damage, simply subtract 1 from your character's Soul Level and skip your next turn. All statuses stay on your character.

If character's Soul Level is 0... well okay, then you die. (See "Death".)

Multi-Lethal Damage

When you really mess up and your character takes damage in such a way that no person would be able to reasonably survive, they take **multi-lethal damage**. In this case, they cannot go through the process of Rejuvenation and they simply die. An example is a character falling off of a cliff. If a character falls 15ft off of a cliff, the character might only take lethal damage. But if a character falls 100ft off of a cliff and goes *SPLAT* on the ground, they take multi-lethal damage. Most cognus spells that aim to overheat someone's brain are considered multi-lethal damage.

As a general rule of thumb, if there is ever a dispute about whether damage is non-lethal, lethal, or multi-lethal, the Director makes the call. Additionally, there is no such thing as "double lethal" damage – you can only ever lose 1 Soul Level per damage source. The exception is with statuses that might deal lethal damage multiple times on separate occasions, like the Burn status which deals lethal damage each time it's triggered. A character might lose 3 Soul Levels across 3 turns if they are burned.



Target is stronger; no damage



Target is equal; lethal damage



Target is weaker; multi-lethal damage

Death

At the moment a Character dies, their Soul leaves their body. The Performer no longer has control over the body of their dead Character. The only way for that Performer to re-enter the Scene is to create a new Character with a new Soul. The body of the dead Character is now an inanimate object within the Scene, free to be interacted with by other Characters as they wish. The dead Character can be looted for goods, or stripped of armor, or fed to a lion, just as any corpse could. However, the Performer does NOT lose control over the Soul of their Character; that Soul becomes a Spirit. (See “Souls” for more information.)

Statuses

Statuses describe effects that come as a result of Actions which have a lasting impact on your character. Statuses are identified by two factors: its Name and its [Lifetime].

Ex. Fatigue[2]

The Name of this status is Fatigue. The Lifetime of this status is 2.

At the end of a character’s turn, each status on that character is Triggered. When an effect is Triggered, any Trigger effects from that status are executed. After a status is Triggered and after all of its Trigger effects have been executed, the Lifetime of the status decreases by 1. If the Lifetime of a status reaches 0 (or less), then the status is immediately removed.

Statuses can have more effects than something that happens when they’re Triggered. Plenty of statuses don’t even have any Trigger effects. The different Effects that a status can have are the following:

- **Passive** – This effect happens constantly while the character is inflicted with this status effect
- **Inflicted** – This effect happens only when the status is initially inflicted.
- **Trigger** – This effect happens only when the status is Triggered.
- **Lifetime** – This effect happens only when the Lifetime of the effect reaches 0. The effect happens before the status is removed.

III. The Performers

As a Performer, your role within the system is to engage with the world laid out by the Director and complete Scenes. To do this, you create a Character within that world. Your Character is your identity in the Scene, and their stats and abilities describe the choices you can make within the Scene.

The basic components that make up a Character include their Stats, Actives, and Passives. Stats are numbers that define the build and capabilities of your character in terms of physique and mental capacity. Actives describe actions that your Character can take during the Scene. Many Actives deal with using magic or dealing damage. Passives describe natural traits for your character including behaviors, reactions, and other things.

Put simply: Stats determine how strong you are. Actives determine what you can do. Passives describe how things interact with you.

How to Make a Character

To make a character, you need a Character Creation sheet, which can be found in the Appendix document. When you sit down with a Character Creation sheet, it's already almost filled out! Most fields on the character creation sheet have a default value which describes what the value for that field normally is. This means that you only have to change that field if your character is outside the norm for that field.

By default...

- Character Level is 5
- Soul Level is 1
- Astral Domains are all 0

This means that, in order to create a Character, you just have to fill in...

- Name
- Corpus points - STR + AGI
- Cognus points - FOC + MEM
- Background + Perks
- Description/Bio

For the character creation sheet, as well as pre-built characters, see "Character Creation" in the Appendix document.

Once you have a Character Creation sheet filled out, you are ready to play!

Character Level & Raw Stats

Each Character has a Character Level which describes their general level of physical and mental prowess. Characters start at Character Level 5, and there is a maximum level which is based on the Character's Soul Level. (See *Soul Level* for more details.) A Character with a Soul Level of 1 has a maximum Character Level of 20.

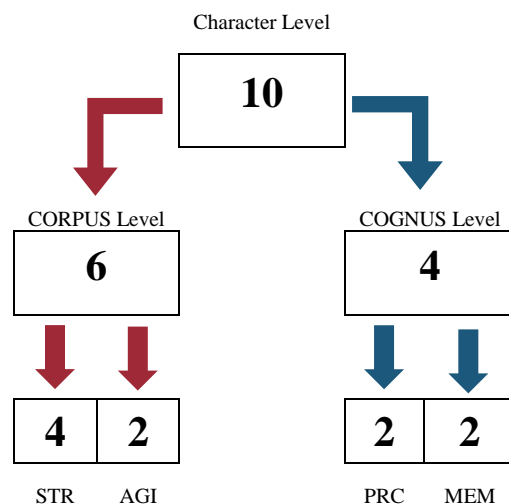
The Character Level acts as a pool of points to be invested into four Raw Stats:

Strength - Represents how much force your body can exert, which determines the power your character uses in physical combat and the amount of weight your character can lift. Used in physical tests of strength.

Agility - Represents how fast your body can move, which determines your movement speed and dodging ability. Also used in physical tests of speed.

Perception - Represents how quickly your character can sense and react to the environment, which determines your accuracy and dodging abilities in combat. Also used for riddles and general tests of attention and wisdom.

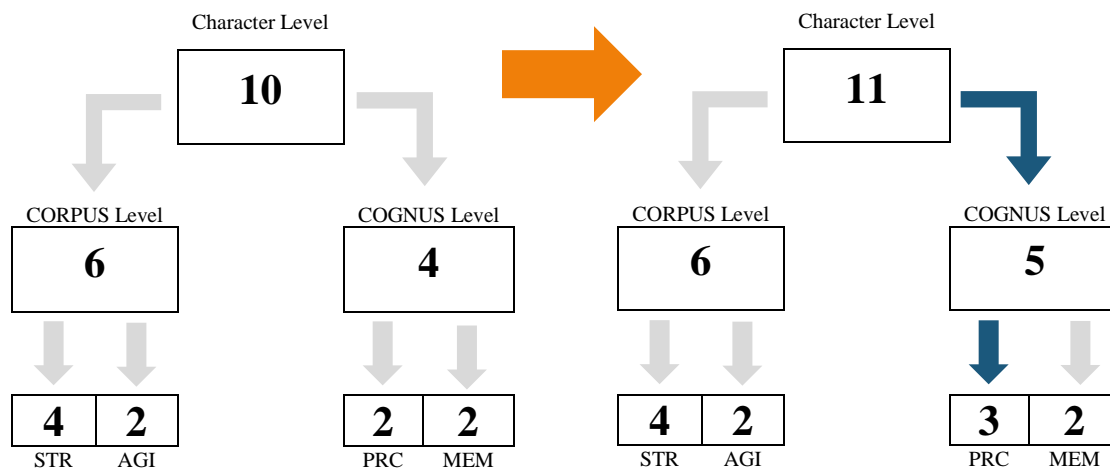
Memory - Represents how well your character can remember things, which determines the number of spells they can learn. Also helps your character remember more details about those on your affiliation list, adding bonuses to your charisma when interacting with them. The GM may neglect to share certain information with players if their characters' memories don't support it.



Total Stats are your Raw Stat added to the corresponding Domain Level. In the example, the Total STR equals the Raw STR (4) added to the Corpus Domain Level (6), totaling to ... 10!

Levelling Up

As you play using a Character, that Character's level will increase by completing missions, fighting in battles, and seeing new places. When your Character levels up, you gain a point which is immediately placed into any of the four Raw Stats of your Character. Remember to recalculate the Domain Level and the Total Stat value when your Character levels up.



Souls and Spirits

A Soul is a Character's life essence. Separate from physical strength and mental capability is the presence within a Character that drives complicated forces such as emotion and understanding. A body and mind without soul is a lifeless corpse, and a soul with no body or mind is a phantom that can't interact with the world. A Soul can be thought of as the controller that the Performer holds which gives them agency over their Character. This also helps define how you can interact with the Soul of your Character and, potentially, the Souls of other Characters.



Each Character is required to have a Soul, which allows them to act and make decisions in gameplay. A newly-created Character is given a Soul automatically, which the Performer who created that Character has control over. NPCs in the Scene have Souls too, and their Souls are controlled by the Director.

Spellcasting & Soul Power

The Soul gives a Character the ability to cast Spells. The “magic” behind Spells is really just the Soul's psychic ability to influence matter within the real world. The amount of psychic energy that the Soul is able to use is Soul Power (SP).

For a table that describes the capabilities of various amounts of Soul Power, see “Soul Power” in the Appendix document.

The higher the Soul Power, the more psychic energy the Soul can use to influence reality. Lots of Soul Power equates to stronger spells and being able to cast them on a greater scale, like casting a spell over time or across a wide space. To put things into perspective, “gods” as we understand them are just Characters with crazy amounts of Soul Power, enough to shape reality on a universal scale. Humans have a microscopic amount of Soul Power in comparison, but luckily for you, a Macabre has the potential to grow its Soul Power massively by increasing its Soul Level!



Soul Level

Soul Power caps out at a certain point for a Soul. This max amount is determined by the Soul Level of that Soul.

The Soul Level (SL) represents the strength of that Character's life essence. It determines several values for the Character, including their Soul Power and their maximum Character Level.

For a Soul Level chart, see “Soul Level” in the Appendix document.



As an example, humans are SL-1, which is consistent across the entire species and is part of what defines them as humans. This means that every human is going to have the same general amount of Soul Power available to them. There might be some small variance, but a human isn't capable of exceeding the limits of being at SL-1. If a human did exceed that limit, it would mean they broke through to SL-2, which grants them access to much more Soul Power. The amount of Soul Power available to a Soul more than doubles as it increases Soul Level! However, it is very difficult to increase your Soul Level, and for many people, it is impossible. *(See “Increasing Soul Level” for more information.)*

Soul Level also describes how much damage a Character can take in combat without dying.

When a Character takes lethal damage in combat, it means that they would normally die. To prevent death from a lethal hit, the Soul quickly sacrifices part of its essence to keep the Character alive through the damage, allowing them to survive and continue fighting past lethal damage! This comes at a temporary cost of one Soul Level though, and the only way to restore the Soul's initial Soul Level is to rest and retrain it. After taking a lethal hit, the Character can get back up and continue fighting, but they will be weaker for the rest of the fight since the Soul has sacrificed part of itself to keep the Character alive. It also means that the Soul is no longer capable of surviving the same amount of damage again; taking another hit of the same strength as the first hit will be multi-lethal damage and will kill the Character.



In the case of multi-lethal damage, the damage is too great for the Soul to adjust to compensate for, so the Character dies. Additionally, at Soul Level 0, the Soul does not have any essence to cover for lethal damage taken, so the Character dies.



Increasing Soul Level

Soul Level is not as easy to increase as Character Level. While Character Level can be reliably increased once per Scene, Soul Level usually doesn't increase at the end of a Scene. Instead, Soul Level increases through a ritual. The cost for the ritual depends on the Soul Level trying to be unlocked.

For a table covering the cost to undergo the Soul Ritual, see "Soul Ritual" in the Appendix document.

Spirits

Spirits are Souls without bodies. Spirits can still be controlled by the Performer who created them, even after the body of the Character is dead. Spirits retain the Soul Level and Soul Power that they had while they were alive, but since they have no body or mind, they do not have a Character Level. This means they can't observe or interact with the world; they are as blind, deaf, and helpless as a bacteria drifting through water. Additionally, since casting requires Character Level, the Spirit has no ability to cast spells. They really can't do much of anything on their own, sadly.

There are methods of manipulating Souls so that a Spirit can re-inhabit a host to form a new Character, but this is very advanced magic. The opposite is also possible, which is removing a Soul from a host before death, but this is also advanced Animus magic. (See "*Spells – Animus Domain*" for more information.) The most common use for Spirits is forming a Soul Link with a Character in the Scene.

Soul Link

Forming a Soul Link means that two Souls form a conduit that allows the Soul Powers of each Soul flow freely between the two, essentially pooling together their Soul Power into one reservoir. A Soul can only form one Soul Link at a time unless otherwise specified. When a Soul Link is formed between two Souls, the Soul Power used in casting is equal to the sum of the Soul Powers of the two Souls.



A Spirit can form a Soul Link with a Character to share its Soul Power with the Character, increasing that Character's Soul Power in combat! This means that even after your Character dies, that Character's Spirit can still help your allies in battle via Soul Link as long as you maintain control over the Soul.

Another use for Soul Link is to link together two living Characters' Souls to allow each individual Character to use the combined pool of their Soul Powers on their turn. Working together with your allies by forming Soul Links to increase the Soul Power available to you is a great way to increase the output of your spellcasting.

Soul Level in the World of Ji Won

Most fully developed citizens in Ji Won are SL-1. A person's Character Level grows and shrinks over the course of their lifespan, as do their Stats. In general, a person usually grows from Character Level 5 to 20 until the age of thirty.

Level 20 describes a Character who can perform physical and mental activities that the average adult human would be able to do if they were keeping their body and mind exercised on a regular basis. Level 20 describes being able to lift a person or run a marathon, but not lift a car or sprint as quickly as a cheetah. Mentally, it describes being able to solve a challenging logic problem given time to think it over, as well as the ability to remember the past week in great detail and the past month and year with increasing vagueness.

After the age of thirty, age starts to factor in towards the decay of their Character Level and their Stats. Humans usually see their Character Level decline to 16 by age forty, 12 by age fifty, 8 around age sixty-five, and then 4 past the age of eighty.

For the common person, it is impossible to increase Soul Level naturally. Instead, people rely on Artificial Souls, or Arts, to temporarily increase their Soul Level with the aid of technology that can interact with and control Souls. In some extremely rare cases, people have been able to increase their Soul Level naturally during moments of intense trauma.

Artificial Souls

A technology in the world of Ji Won allows for the creation and use of Artificial Souls. These Souls are different from Souls that are created naturally through Character Creation; they cannot be controlled by Performers, they have no capability of acting or forming decisions on their own, and they do not create a Spirit when they are severed from the body. There are several uses for Artificial Souls, the most common being to form a Soul Link to extend a Character's Soul Power. Artificial Souls are uncommon to come across in the world of Ji Won, and to buy them, you will need to find a specialist in the black market. (*See "Black Market" for more information.*)

In Ji Won, Artificial Souls are a hot topic of controversy. They are an experimental technology, not yet available to the public. Their use is strictly relegated to the military, where they are used as equipment to extend the Soul Power of infantry units through Soul Linking. In Glutalt, Artificial Souls are also used as drivers to create puppet soldiers. The way this works is by employing Animus magic to place an Artificial Soul in a host, giving that host life. They cannot make their own decisions and they can't be controlled, so they must be manipulated using Animus magic, like a puppet being animated by a puppeteer. Puppet soldiers have the benefit of being much more expendable than a human soldier, since there is no real life at risk. However, they are expensive to operate since they still require someone to "mind control" the soldier from a distance with very powerful Animus magic.

Favor

Roleplaying well earns you Favor with different gods. There are many ways to win the appeal of the gods, but the easiest is to perform actions that align directly with a certain god's favor. For example, Poseidon is a big fan of water spells, so using water spells and adding flourish to them will more likely win his attention.

Other ways of appealing to gods include helping others in their favor, completing Audience Challenges, and simply just being a fun performer to watch. Adding humor and zest to your conversations will appeal to some gods while maintaining composure and displaying bravery will appeal to others.

Favor can be used for two things: requesting Divine Actions and becoming a servant. One Favor can be used to request one Divine Action, while 10 Favor can be used to increase your devotion to a god by 1.

Affiliations

Record info about NPCs as well as Audience members.

Affiliations are notes that chronicle your relationships with other characters in the game. You're going to encounter many new faces during your journeys, so keeping track of them will help

Reincarnation

When your character dies, you must go through the Reincarnation process to make a new character before you can rejoin the game. Thankfully, the character creation process is fast enough that a player can do this very quickly.

When Reincarnating a new character, the following information is carried over directly from your previous character:

1. If the previous character's level was greater than 10, set the new character's level to 10.
2. The new character's Soul Level is always 1.
3. Choose 3 Spells from your previous character and add them to your new character's Spell List. All prerequisites for those 3 Spells also get carried over. All Techniques must be relearned.
4. If the Soul of your previous character has not been captured, you may add their Soul to the new character's inventory. This Soul's Level is equal to the Soul Level of the previous character - 2. Remember to take this Soul into account when determining your new character's Soul Power!

In addition to these, you may choose one additional bonus to carry over to your new character.

For a list of bonuses available to grant a character, see "Reincarnation" in the Appendix document.

IV. Spells and Techniques

Spells are the basic building blocks to all magic in this world. They define individual actions that you can perform to change the world around you.

Astral – Spells that manipulate matter in the universe according to the laws of physics. Includes a wide variety of subdomains, including chemical reactions, atmospheric pressure, fluid dynamics, and sound.

Corporeal – Spells which interact with the systems and forms of living bodies. This includes two major subdomains, which are systematic and cellular.

Cognitive – Spells which interact with the operations of the mind. This include two major subdomains, which are data interpretation and memory.

Animus – Spells which interact with the soul.

Astral Domain

Astral domains exist as a result of physics being studied and experimented with on an atomic scale. The fundamental practices of astral domains include moving particles in space to cause reactions, create pressure, change state of matter, and more. Advanced practices include creating sound filters, optical lenses, traversing higher dimensions, and even creating new timelines.

Beginner Astral casters are merely able to observe physics on a more focused scale than the average person, detecting subtle shifts and nuances in sound or temperature, while medium level casters are able to manipulate matter in space. High level casters are able to adjust and even rewrite laws of physics!

Name	Description
Particle Shift	Cause a particular type of particle in an area to be drawn towards or away from a point. (ex. Drawing Oxygen in the air towards a point)
Density Shift	Cause a particular point in space to become either pressurized (higher density of particles) or depressurized (lower density of particles).
Ionic Shift	Cause an object or surface to become either electrically charged or absent of electrical charge by manipulating its electrons.

Exposing oneself to these practices allows them to perform Spells in a wide variety of sub-domains, which are summarized here. (A thorough list of spells from each domain can be found at the end of the manual, in the References section.) *Note that Spells with a * require Mastery of all Spells in that domain that don't have a *.*

For a comprehensive list of Spells sorted into each Domain, see “Spells” in the Appendix document.

Chemical Reaction

This domain requires Particle Shift as a prerequisite Spell.

The chemical reaction domain deals in drawing particles together so cause some kind of reaction, like a fire or an explosion. The most common examples are reactions involving oxygen. Casters in this magic should be mindful of the materials they carry with them like iron and combustible materials like petroleum – they can come in handy!

Electricity & Magnetism

This domain requires Ionic Shift as a prerequisite Spell.

The electricity & magnetism domain focuses in even smaller than other astral domains in order to manipulate electrons within atoms! Casters can move electrons to create ions and cause objects to become electrically charged. Charged objects will shock objects with a lower charge than itself, so if you want to zap someone, try charging a metal object and then removing electrons from the target! Experienced casters can also easily turn a metal object into an electromagnet by sending electricity around it in a spiral.

Air Pressure

This domain requires Density Shift as a prerequisite spell.

The air pressure domain involves magic that pushes and pulls particles in the atmosphere to create areas of high and low density. In practice, casters can use this magic to create wind gusts, air currents, and even vacuums! If there's a caster using combustion magic, creating a vacuum will stop their magic from working at all.

Sound

The sound domain allows for interaction with the way sound waves move through a medium, whether it be air or a solid object like a cave wall. Casters can use this magic to detect subtle vibrations in anything it touches and manipulate sounds. Note that the sound domain doesn't allow a caster to create their own sounds, but they can marry their sound magic together with other forms of magic to modify a gust of wind into a high-pitched whistling or mute the sound of an explosion.

Fluid Dynamics

This domain requires Particle Shift as a prerequisite spell.

The fluid dynamics domain includes magic that interacts with water in all of its forms. Low-level casters can create ripples and waves in water, or draw together moisture in the air to create fog. As they grow, casters will be able to create larger waves and draw together enough moisture in wet air to create droplets and bubbles.

Thermodynamics

The thermodynamics domain gives access to changing the temperature of objects by shaking the particles or slowing them down. A common use is changing an object's state of matter by heating it up or cooling it down to become a solid, liquid, gas, or plasma. Changing temperature in water or air can also create currents, although this takes longer than other domains would be able to do it.

Time

Characters are required to be at a Soul Level of 5 or higher to practice spells in the time domain.

The time domain is one of the most complicated domains of astral magic. However, when mastered, it becomes infinitely useful. Learning time magic involves taking small, careful steps through new Spells to avoid being completely lost in space-time. It is not recommended that a time caster use Spells in combat until they are at least at the Expert level.

Space

Characters are required to be at a Soul Level of 5 or higher to practice spells in the space domain.

Like the time domain, the space domain is also a very complicated domain in astral magic. This domain gives casters the ability to sense and traverse higher-level spatial dimensions. Performers are limited by not being able to actually see in higher-level dimensions; they can rotate themselves to traverse it, but they will still only see in three dimensions, making it very easy to get lost forever.

Corporeal Domain

Beginner Corporeal casters have a deep understanding of how a living body functions, while advanced casters can manipulate the systems of the body and bend them to their will.

System Control

Cellular Control

Cognitive Domain

Data Interpretation

The **data interpretation** domain gives access to data entering and being passed around within the target's brain, often dealing with information passed from the nervous system. Although the spells in this domain are few, their utility is extremely varied and useful. Casters are able to disable senses in a target, causing them to become temporarily blind or deaf. They can also manufacture sensations and play with the sensitivity of the target. Casters can also directly adjust the rate at which a target perceives data, but this is very dangerous since it bypasses the body's natural pace and safety precautions that would normally be taken into consideration with an adrenaline rush.

Memory

The **memory** domain allows for direct access to and interaction with the memories of a target. Memories can be observed, blocked, destroyed, modified, and created. However, doing most of these requires access to a specific memory.

Memories can be thought of as chains of nerves, with many links holding them together. Finding a memory is made easier by using points of reference within the memory, like a smell or a taste, to help narrow the location of the memory by filtering based on which links are involved. Some Spells also ask the caster to be familiar with the brain's memory interface to avoid causing damage to the target's brain. If the caster is not familiar with this interface when they go to cast their magic, then the target will lose some memories as a result.

Animus Domain

Spirit - Soul Level, Soul Power, intention, motivation

Casting a Spell

STR + Total Soul Power

As for how much damage that does... it depends. Your Power determines the amount of matter you can manipulate at concentrated and unconcentrated levels.

Concentration

At a concentrated level, your cast will deal lethal damage to someone of the same SL as you. At an unconcentrated level, it will deal non-lethal damage to someone of that same SL.

Mastery

Mastery describes your ability to perform a Spell with precision and power. Upon first taking up a Spell, you are a Beginner; your casting is unreliable and you can't put as much power into it because you don't know how to use it efficiently yet. However, as you grow and level up, you gain Gems which are used to increase your mastery of a certain spell.

The tiers of mastery are as follows:

- Beginner - 1d12; must use full PRC to cast, as well as having a casting conduit and performing arm movements.
- Advanced - 1d8+2; must use most of PRC to cast. Casting conduit required. Must be able to perform hand movements
- Expert - 1d6+3; must use 2 points of PRC to cast. Casting conduit no longer needed. Can cast using eye movements; must be able to see target.
- Master - 1d4+4; 1 point of PRC needed, no casting conduit needed, no physical movement needed.

Casting conduits

Basically a wand. Sold by most vendors.

Techniques

Techniques are like user-created Spells. These are more complicated than basic Spells and have to be defined using a Technique Creation sheet before they can be used in combat.

There are three forms of Techniques:

- **Simple** - A simple technique is a new identity given to an existing Spell, usually one that is very specific and/or frequently casted.
There might be some Spells that you want to perform often and it can become tedious to explain the intricacies of them each time. Instead of doing that, you can create a simple technique to summarize the Action and its details under a simple name. You might also create a simple technique for the technique bonus, like to add power or creative flair to an Action you commonly use.
An example of a simple technique is Boiling Water, which is casted by using Change Temperature on water and heating it to 100 degrees Celsius (or higher). Rather than casting Change Temperature and then explaining the exact parameters of the cast each time you want to boil water, you can create a simple technique to quickly identify it. Other examples might include a stylish card trick using a Disappearing Spell, or a secret handshake for a club.
- **Complex** - A complex technique contains two or more Spells being used in tandem to perform a more complicated Action. Complex techniques offer opportunities to diversify the utility of Spells and develop a memorable fighting style. For example, by combining Change Temperature and Create Drop, you can create a complex technique that creates a drop of water and then freezes it.
In addition to Spells, the components of a complex Spell can also be items or materials, like using Petroleum and Remote Blast to cause a massive explosion. There are countless ways to combine Spells into complex techniques, and by adding style to them, you will quickly form a unique identity. You might even attract fans and apprentices to your fighting style!
- **Co-op** - A co-op technique is an Action that involves spells between two or more characters being used simultaneously. You might create a special combo move with your closest ally, or have the entire team work together to perform an extremely powerful action.
Co-op techniques can be used on any participating character's turn, but the other Performers involved in the technique must have the required cost of Actions on Standby at the moment the technique is to be used.

Each technique also gets one bonus from the following list:

- **Effectiveness** - Technique lands more reliably and deals one extra damage.
- **Flashiness** - Technique is particularly magnificent to witness. Draws attention, pleases the Audience, and generally stands out to NPCs.

How to Make a Technique

To make a Technique, you need a Technique Creation sheet, which can be found in the Appendix document.

For a Technique Creation sheet, see "Techniques" in the Appendix document.

V. Economy

Currency

The common currency in Ji Won is

Goods

Shops in Ji Won carry a variety of goods that will aid you on your adventure.

You can find a table in the Appendix document listing each Good, sorted by category.

Equipment

Equipment is a good that is equipped to a character.

Clothing

The clothes that your character wears. The available slots are Hat, Face, Torso, Hands, Legs, Feet.

Weapons

Weapons that your character can use. This includes melee weapons like swords, ranged weapons like guns, and magic weapons.

Items

Items are different from Equipment since you Use them rather than Equip them. They are also known as consumables.

Food

Eating food helps rejuvenate your character. If you don't eat for a long time, you will grow weak from starvation.

Medicine

There are a variety of medicines to treat and cure different Statuses. There are also Medicines to help characters survive lethal damage, although it is expensive.

Ammo

Buy Ammo to refill your ranged weapons.

Companions

Companions are controlled by the Performer who purchased them. Companions receive 1 Action per turn in combat.

Hired Allies

You can recruit allies for quests in exchange for cash.

Pets

You can bring along an animal to join you on your journey.

Souls

Make Your Own Equipment, Items, and Companions!

VI. The Audience

In this system, the GM participates in gameplay as well. The GM speaks for the Audience, which is the body of angels, demons, gods and goddesses who exist beyond the world and watch the actions of the players unfold with enjoyment.

The Audience's desires for each actor, as well as the story in general, represent Fate. Each NPC exists with a specific goal in mind, whether it be a force of chaos or a force for good or evil. Seeing each NPC either fulfill or reject their Fate will cause reactions in the Audience.

However, much like in a real stage performance, the Audience is not unanimous. The Audience contains forces of good as well as forces of evil. Angels and demons alike share this theater, and so gaining the favor of either family usually means losing favor in the other.

There are many families that share this theater, including the family of Angels and the family of Demons. The family of Angels rewards obedience and adherence to good morals with non-material things like knowledge and divine favors, whereas the family of Demons rewards acts of personal growth with possessions like gold, weapons, and dark artifacts.

Audience Actions

These are actions that the Audience can cast, usually in response to something that happens during gameplay. There is no limit to the amount of Audience Actions that can be cast nor the frequency at which Audience Actions can be cast. (Remember, though, that using too many Audience Actions will disengage the players from the game.)

For a table of possible Audience Actions, see "Audience Actions" in the Appendix document.

In addition, the Audience can use an Audience Action to cast any spell at maximum Mastery with a soul level of 9.

Audience Members

These change every quest. Specific characters whom the players can align with, and while they are in the Audience, they give passive and active benefits to those who they like. Draw 3 from a deck. The GM may also override choices to include or exclude any gods of their choosing.

For a table of possible Audience Members, see "Audience Members" in the Appendix document.

Audience Challenges

At this point, any Performers wishing to take on Audience Challenges should let the Director know. The Director deals out any Audience Challenges they wish, whether a Performer requested the challenge for their character or the Audience requests one from a Cast member. When the Audience requests a challenge, the Director gets to choose what the challenge is. It can be either directed (intended for a particular Performer) or undirected (offered for any Performer who is willing to take it on.) In the case of the latter, only one Performer can claim it, but someone must claim it!

VII. The Sixteen Macabre

In the world, there are other characters who are Macabre just like the ones the players control. Macabres can be NPCs; in fact, most of them will be. And just like the players, the Macabre are able to reincarnate after they die.

For sixteen pre-built macabre character sheets, see “The Sixteen Macabre” in the Appendix document.

VIII. Director’s Toolkit

Building a Scene

Goal

A good starting place is to nail down the central conflict for the Performers to engage in. Broad ideas like “fighting a dragon” or “rescuing a group of missing townsfolk” form a great foundation for a Scene. From there, you can set the specific victory or failure conditions, like “In order to win, you must rescue all four missing townsfolk from the cave”. Remember, though: a good Director is flexible and can adapt on the fly. If the Performers aren’t engaging with the Scene as it exists, it’s polite to give them some agency. It’s okay to let them drive the story if that’s what they wish to do; it might lead to a more enjoyable Scene for the Performers (and if the Performers are having fun, the Audience is usually having fun too). fail to rescue one of the townsfolk in the above example, the Scene doesn’t necessarily have to end in failure; the Performers may still put on a good enough performance that the Audience enjoy the drama anyway. some things to consider might be the following:

Setting

Choosing a setting for your Scene is important to give your Performers some context for the story and give them their own tools to work with while engaging with the Scene.

Some good questions to ask are:

1. Which region does the Scene take place in? You could take your players to the freezing-cold militaristic nation of Glutalt and tell a story about overthrowing a corrupt town mayor. You could set your Scene in Frove and have your players hunt down a masked bandit who stole an artifact from them. You could trap your Performers in Stath with an unpayable debt and make them compete in the Stath Arena to earn enough money to pay off the debt. By starting with a nation, you can use the characteristics of the setting as a starting point to guide the story.

Campaign Paths

In the long term, a skillful Director might wish to create an overarching story for their Performers to act through over multiple sessions. There are multiple paths or interpretations of this story, for players to pursue as they wish. Each path is designed to deliver a different experience and offer a satisfying ending to its performers.

Amend

The universe’s destruction is happening due to a lack of maintenance, and its collapse can be reversed. The key to saving it is by understanding, mastering, and repairing its systems. The gods have no intention of interfering with the work of the players in this endeavor, but succeeding will certainly win their approval. This path is relatively easy, has many different approaches, and can take very long to finish.

Overthrow

The universe’s collapse is occurring due to a lack of maintenance in its fundamental systems. The gods have resigned their sworn duties and retired in order to watch their creations for entertainment. This is now your chance to step in and seize the throne of divine power. At the end, you might find yourself owning the Theater and throwing peanuts at the very same gods who once observed you. Other Macabre are after the same prize as you though, so be careful who you trust. This path is medium difficulty, contains a lot of combat, and is relatively short.

Inherit

The universe's destruction is inevitable, but it won't be the end. The gods are searching for a successor to the throne of creation, and the Macabre are their candidates. In this mode, the gods reward skilled players with divine powers, but they also subject the players to rigorous tests of strength, wit, and understanding. They are not so quick to sign the Theater over to an unworthy champion, so the players should expect difficult challenges. The other Macabre are also competing; expect them to treat you as prey to be hunted. This path is hard difficulty, has a medium amount of combat, and is medium length.

Punish

The universe's destruction is irreversible due to the gods' obscene carelessness towards maintaining their own Theater. Although your end is inevitable, you've resolved to ensure that the gods never go on to mess up like this again. With a disapproving glare aimed high up into the Audience, you declare that the gods will pay for their negligence. Only a fool would expect this path to be easy and free of resistance. A wise Macabre would aim to unite the other Macabre under one cause because it's certain that the gods will be united against you. Expect some extremely difficult challenges.

Custom

Feel free to create your own story! Maybe there are no gods or Macabre at all! Maybe the gods have been in a long slumber and the goal is to awaken them! Maybe the Macabre all play instruments, and the party has to bring the band together to save the universe with a rock concert! Who knows!

Choosing a Path

Some questions to consider when deciding how to design your campaign:

1. Heroism vs Power - Can the existing universe be saved?
 If the players want the existing universe to be maintained, then the Amend or Overthrow paths will more easily cater to that conclusion.
 If the players have no desire to save the existing universe, then the Inherit or Punish paths will appeal to them. These paths allow for the timeline to either start anew or end entirely after the universe's destruction.
 (If the answer isn't certain right away, it would probably be keen to assume that the universe can't be saved. Amend can easily be shifted towards Inherit, and Overthrow can be easily shifted into Punish, but not so much vice versa. It wouldn't feel very good for a team to work towards saving a universe only to find that there was never a chance of saving it in the first place.)
2. Lawful vs Chaotic - Do the players want to serve the gods or defy them?
 If the players want no conflict with the gods, then the Inherit or Amend paths will allow the players to collaborate with the gods (as subordinates).
 If the players want to defy the gods, the Overthrow or Punish paths will put the players in a direct contest against the gods for the duration of the campaign.
 (If the answer isn't certain right away, then it would be wise for the players to not make enemies with gods if there's a chance they might change their mind! A sneaky, chaotic-aligned team may even wish to surprise the gods by starting the campaign on the Inherit or Amend paths and then jumping onto either the Overthrow or Punish path near the end!)
3. Affiliation vs Competition - Do the players wish to align with the other Macabre?
 If the players want to form companionships with other Macabre, the players will have a better chance to do so in the Amend or Punish paths.
 If the players have no desire to align with the other Macabre, then the Overthrow or Inherit paths will offer more direct opportunities for conflict.
 (If the answer isn't certain right away, it's more thematically appropriate for the other Macabre to be introduced as enemies or rivals. Luckily, the Macabre can be befriended on any path if the team is socially adept enough; enemies can become allies if they are united against a common threat!)