

POLARIS

Chivalric Tragedy at the Utmost North



By Ben Lehman
All Men Are Brothers Edition

Nº. 0F 108



There is nothing left.

There are no artifacts.

There are no stories.

There is no history,

not even in secret.

There are most especially no games.

Polaris: Chivalric Tragedy at Utmost North

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by Ben Lehman in Nostalgia Studio

This is our game.

The Polaris title typeface is CHARLEMAGNE; CAROLINA is the subtitle. The book's interior is set in the elegant CENTAUR typeface family. Decorative elements are CELESTIA ANTIGUA ORNAMENTS. Design and layout was done with Adobe Creative Suite by Matt Snyder

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All Men Are Brothers edition

First and only printing, AD MMV

For my mother, my father, and my brother

All of whom will save the world



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Moments Frozen From the Flow of Time —

Once upon a time, as far north as north can go, there lived the greatest people that this world will ever know. We cannot look upon them as they were, but we can understand them as they die, melting like a snowflake in the sun.

For those people are gone now, destroyed just as the world destroys all beautiful things. All that remains are these moments we call memories, moments frozen from the flow of time.

Behold ...

- * **A BEAUTIFUL GIRL**, *alone in a waste of ice, stares into a glowing starlit city. Her face is expressionless, but the snow falling from her lips betrays her envy.*
- * **HIS BLOOD DRIPS** from an alien flower that he cannot bear to hold, while his sister cradles her own hand and waits, not quite crying, for the knife.
- * **IN SUCH A BLIZZARD**, you can only see them by the light of their swords.
- * **WITH A SINGLE GESTURE** and a single note from her single song, the flesh tears off the corrupt senators, exposing the worms squirming beneath.
- * **DANCING THICK ON AN ICICLE FLOOR**, a thousand couples stop in time, staring through a rainbow glass at glowing edge of dawn, just appearing on the horizon.
- * **ENRAPTURED**, he does not see its claws.
- * **SWORDS CLASH** at the edge of a glacial ravine, one pale and singing like starlight, one hot and burning like the sun. Our knight looks up into his opponent's frozen and fiery eyes to recognize his brother.
- * **IN A CRYPT OF SLEEPING KNIGHTS**, she leans over a fallen warrior, betrayed by his own compatriots. "Hush..." she whispers, and kisses him gently as he turns to ice.
- * **WITH ONLY A MOMENT'S HESITATION**, she drives her sword into her lover's heart. "Forgive me," he says, and toasts her as he dies.

This is no longer a history; this is not yet a story. This is all that remains. Whatever else is what you make of it.



The People

Once upon a time, before knights fought with demons, before battle, before war, and before the sun, there was a great city at the top of the world. Built of ice and starlight, full of elegant palaces, shimmering statues, it was home to a people whose splendor we are not given to understand. Clad in starlight and snowflakes, they lived a life of bliss, eating thin delicacies, toasting each other with wine made from the night, and loving each other like the sea beneath the ice. They named their city Polaris, for it stood atop the world like that guardian star stood atop the sky.

It was an enchanted age, that single night. The stars spun at their command and drew rainbows through the ice, painting the air in red and blue and white and shadow. Between the star-shadows, the people danced with the stars, each other, to the tunes of the empyrean. And in the dances they smiled, for the stars were beautiful, they themselves were beautiful, and their queen was most beautiful of all.

The people in that age did not yet measure time, for they did not yet know fear. Who can say how long it lasted? Perhaps it was merely a moment, melting away as breath melts a snowflake, passing even as it was born. Perhaps it was forever until it ended. Does it matter, or is the thing the memory that lingers?

Their King

Amongst them, there was a man and yet, above them, he was their king. Learned in both the oldest lore and the utmost courtesy, the grace of his judgment and the wit of his law was admired by all amongst the people, from the highest ministers to the lowest dancers and entertainers. There were those poets amongst them that excelled at their craft such that you would go deaf to hear their art; there were those sculptors amongst them that excelled at their marks such that you would tremble with ecstasy to touch their work; there were those knights amongst them that excelled at their quests such that you would

cower in fear even to hear once of their bravery; but there were none amongst them that excelled at their professions as much as their king excelled at his kingship. Every word, every action, every breath, he was his people. He was their justice, their law, the nature of their love. He was everything that each one of them wished in their darkest hearts, with wishes thick and pungent with the smell of dreams, that they might become.

And so it was natural that they named him Polaris, for he ruled over them as their city stood atop the world, and their guardian star shone above the sky.

His Queen

With him, there was a girl and yet, beside him, she was his queen. Stark and quiet, with a laugh rare like blue starlight, she held breath in her eyes — and such a smile! — to look upon her was to love her, and love her the people did, but Polaris loved her most of all. She darted in and through his life, a wink here, a note here, and a soft word of love whispered quiet and private right within his court, easing the weight of his crown with a single effortless touch, never close enough to strain or tire, but never, never, never far away.

She was a queen and a princess, born of stars and night, careful and carefree, each single sign unpracticed through long study. She was so much his queen, so much devoted to him, and love between them so clearly apparent that, even during their courtship, there were none amongst the people who called her anything but Polaris's Queen, Lady of Snow and Star, Maiden of the Highest City. Or, perhaps, if they were close companions and friends of her family, the Snow Queen. No one remembered her name.

Her Knights

Such a treasure, she was, that queen, such a treasure — the greatest amongst a city of treasures, the greatest treasure that her people had ever possessed — that she could not have been left without her guardians. Not one amongst the people would ever have harmed her, not even the mounts, not even the

crevasses, not even the sky itself, but still, her husband gave her not just a single warrior, but a whole order. For the people, they were soldiers and yet, in her honor, they were Knights.

Each one of them loved her, of course, for it was not in their power to resist her grace. Each one of them would have thought a thousand wars at her request, and not a one would have died in the attempt, but each one of them would have died for a smile. They were brave and elegant like footprints in the snow. Surpassing in art, they trained constantly for her defense, singing their war-songs to each other like the tides at the edge of the world. The people were cold and kind, yes, cold and kind, but where the people had leisure, her knights had purpose, and that made them mighty, bright like the stars that burn their holes in the sky. She was the only thing that could have broken their will, and they would have loved her all the more for that.

There was one amongst them, who was greater than the rest. He was not the strongest, nor the bravest, nor the most beautiful as soft light fell from his lips in poetry, but he was the greatest in his love for her. He was their captain, and they named him Algol, for his star was red and beat a hot, slow rhythm against the black skin of the sky.

The Dawn

Could that night have been forever? Was it some error, or some choice, that summoned a rosy temptation into their history? Were those people lax, or failing, or unlucky in some way? Or was it merely the turning wheel of fate?

We cannot know why it came, or what could have been if it had not. We can only know that the sightings began with the artists. One and one they saw it, only fleeting and irregular, that light coming up from the edge of the sky, colors redder than stars, new shades that had never been seen, yellow and green and golden through the icicle walls, burning out the stars from the sky, brilliant and impossible and beautiful and alien. They spoke of it, they wrote of it, they drew on it and sung its cacophonies into the air. At first it was thought to be madness, that particular sort of gentle madness, for it struck at the very best of them, and those that are the very best are shrouded in cloth and the dark heart of dreams. But if it was madness, it was a madness that spread, for more people saw, and more, so that by the time it reached the highest, Polaris himself, it had already been given a name. Because it was new, they called it beautiful. Because it was new, they called it the Dawn.

The king saw it then, and saw it, and for the second time in his life cried for beauty. And so it was that when the sages discovered that the coming Dawn could be tracked, he ordered the construction of a great calendar, that he might know its comings and prepare them. The calendar's thrumming and clicking clackings filled the halls of Polaris, and black smoke smudged across the whirling sky, and his people knew for the first time a thing that was not beautiful.

At those rare moments and in preparation for them, the king began to hold court in the highest towers of the city, and during the Dawn's light they did not eat or drink or sing or even dance, but instead sat, motionless, watching that heavy, steady star suffuse the sky with its gaudy colors. And Dawn came longer, each time longer, and the king said that it was

because the Dawn was pleased with them, pleased with their calendar and its master. Soon, the Dawn dominated the sky, and the king and his court sat endlessly in a solitary tower, watching that vacant light circle silently around the edge of the sky.

The musicians that saw the Dawn would only draw from it a long, hideous scream, but no one paid them any heed. Music was out of style at the court.

The Pact

But hope was not yet lost, for there were some amongst the people that did not love the dawn. First among them was the Snow Queen, Polaris's bride herself, and second only to her was Algol, her champion. In the safest, deepest, darkest hallways of Polaris, where that baleful alien light could not see their faces or hear their hearts, they held their own shadow court, where they spoke of the screeching of the musicians, the slow, soft, unrelenting melt that had set in at outermost parts of the city, the odd trances of the royal court, and many other things. It was there that they each swore ancient oaths by the highest star, oaths to stop the dawn's fell influence.

Each of the queen's guardians took that oath, each of them on his own, and that, it is said, was the origin of the Knights of the Order of the Stars — each alone, wretched, huddled in deep darkness like wild spiders, fearful of that celestial that they could not understand. The first to swear against it was Algol, and it was because he always wore his sword, even at the most decorous occasions, that the sword was chosen as their symbol.

It is said that that first oath was sealed with a kiss in the most ancient manner. And some say that was the beginning of the Mistake.

The Mistake

Beneath the light of the highest star, the Mistake festers like a neglected apology, giving witness to the arrogance of the past just as the demons it spawns give the promise of doom to the future.

Many stories are told about the Mistake, its nature, its origins,

and its history. Some say that it has always been there — that the time of Polaris and the dancing stars is simply a myth for children. Others say that it is not there at all — that it is merely an illusion created by the summer sun. But most say that it was done, and that it was done by the people, and so they must take up the blame for their own doom. No one among the people knows the truth. The histories, if there ever were histories, have been lost. Although the libraries list books on the subject, they are filled with ashes and not with words.

No one knows the truth, but everyone knows that before the Mistake, their city was perfect, their sky was dark, and the people had no fear, and that now, their city is left a smoking crater, their sky is lit by the brilliant sun and haunted by a ghostly moon, and the people have learned horror, terror, and ten thousand other ravages of time.

Such knowledge cannot be born without some excuse, some meaning, some explanation. And so it is that the people have made their own stories of how it came to pass.

Adultery and Blasphemy

There are those people who say that, with the founding of the Order and the conspiracy against the dawn, the Snow Queen and Algol drew closer and closer together, until they became lovers. As the great affection between the King and his Queen melted as softly as the ice in a dawn-lit tower, the King grew increasingly paranoid, his practices increasingly bizarre. Eventually, he entombed himself and his highest councillors in the highest tower of the city Polaris, where they performed great and terrible rituals to the sun — things that were not music and were not dances — and some further speak in hushed whispers about the terrible prices that the dawn drew from them as it burned their blood red, prices paid in skulls, flesh, and still beating hearts.

Sabotage and Sacrifice

There are some that say it happened a different way, that in a devastating assault on the King's dawn cult, the Order of the

Stars struck and destroyed the foul apparatus of the Calendar, leaving only rubble where there were once its intricate gears and springs. Without that machine, the dawn worshippers did not know when their deity might return and, as the darkness wore on, they grew fearful that it would not. The King flew into a mad fit, and declared that they must sacrifice what was most precious to them that the dawn might return, and that he must offer up his most precious Queen. Algol came to her rescue and, as he and the King fought on that machine, their icicle blood mingled with that of the woman they both loved, strange alchemies began upon the mechanism of the calendar.

Things that should not be built, power that should not be known

Some say that the King learned of a certain type of crystal that might magnify the dawn, and constructed a great one in his high tower above the Calendar and the city Polaris. Even as the crystal was being built, the Order of the Stars struck out at it, but as that fearsome battle ensued, the dawn rose up and was transformed by that crystal into the sun. Terrified by that burning star, the King and all of the People rose up as one to fight against it, but even then they and their city were destroyed by its power.

Cowardice and Contracts

Some say that the Order of the Stars, in desperation to escape the dawn, dug into the ice, deeper even than the sewers, deeper even than the ancient and abandoned hovels of their ancestors, deep into some terrible realm of water and fire. There they met with the Mistaken, and led them to the city to fight against the King, for they feared the dawn even more than they feared hell.

It is the way of things

Some say that the transformation of the mysterious dawn into the terrible sun is a process as natural as the transformation of sight into music, and that the terrible tragic violence of the time was merely the reactions of an ignorant people to an unknown phenomenon.

And there are a thousand other tales, and yet

There are other stories, multitudinous and strange, but to believe them, you must hear them for yourself.

In the end

All of these are right; all of these are wrong. It does not matter. The world is as it is. The Mistake has already been made. The sun spirals in the sky and the moon dances around it. Demons live in smoke at the center of the world. The nature of these things is that they shall not be reversed.

All that is left to a dying people is to try to explain, to try to understand, to try to comprehend some reason or meaning in their own obliteration. Will you forgive them their inaccuracies, or will you deny them that comfort, even as they die?

The Sun and the Moon

The first thing that was seen after the mistake was the fiery sun, emerging from the dawn like a terrified scream, blinding all those that saw it, burning all those that it saw, deafening all those that were held in its radiance. Its power is without peer. It melts snow into worthless water, blasts starlight into insignificance, and curdles silk rough like leather. Even the mighty glaciers soften and run beneath its light. There is no thing mightier upon the sky or upon the ice. Without fail, it spirals in the sky all summer long, up and then down, and will not stop nor alter its path for any obstacle or song. Each time, as it passes the sky, it once more takes on the form of the dawn (sometimes called the dusk as it is dying), taunting the people with the more fragile beauty that it once seduced them with.

The sun is great and terrible, and naturally not without those that regard it highly, but it is the enemy of the Knights, for they are sworn against it.

Nothing so great can come into the world without leaving its mark, and so the sun has left the moon, a white and tattered hole where it burned its way through the empyrean. The moon spirals and circles behind and before the sun, dancing around its progenitor, giving a reminder of its light in the dead of

winter and a ghost of its glory in the height of summer. It changes, too, growing fickle and inconstant, as the sky tries to heal the slash in its side before the sun once again tears open a fresh wound.

But the moon is white, and colored like starlight is colored, and there are those among the knights, the most desperate for hope, the most close to their dooms, that say it is a star.

Your People

The people that live in the memory of Polaris are tall, thin, and beautiful. Their hair is silver and gold and all the colors of the sky at night and their skin is so thin that you can see their pale blue veins beneath it. Their eyes are pale blue or pale red, or rarely white or green or purple or black. They are so beautiful it would stop your heart to look at them, so beautiful that — at times — they move even themselves to tears. Their names are taken from the stars. Their speech, when they deign to use it, is like the sound of water freezing, their anger is like the cracking of the glacial ice. Although they are capable of great feats of combat and engineering, their tempers run towards the arts and musics, even when they are roused to action.

These people, who were once great, are decadent and dissolute. They sip gaudy wines, while away their summers gazing listlessly at the gaudy colors of the sun through careful crystals, and while away the winters in petty politics and senatorial debates. While they recall their former glory, few amongst them will do anything to stop their own apathetic decline, or even the slaughter at the hands of the Mistaken.

The Remnants

All that remains of the great dream of the city of Polaris are four remnants, and each carries with it a fragile hint of former majesty. Once these were the lowest parts of the city, the furthest away from the royal court, the least majestic and most southward. But, even now, if you looked upon those glowing citadels crafted in ancient age from ice and silver starlight, you would know beauty and wonder at its inhabitants. You would know the smooth and winding hallways that lead to great open vistas in the ice, the nooks and retiring rooms that are intimately befitted with both crystal wines and spider silks, and the grand council chambers that are home to such wonderous arts and ceremonies that you would not dare to dream of them, even in your darkest heart. The people live in a pale reflection

of their former age, but it cannot be said that they do not live in splendor.

Splendor is not the remnants' only virtue, though, for each has been rendered by the Order into a fortress. These four remnants are all that remains of the people, all that remains of the city and, if one were to fall to the Mistaken, it would be an irreparable sorrow.

The four remnants are named Southwatch, Southkeep, Tallstar and Southreach. Each has its own unique qualities and unique delights (Southreach, for example, is famous for its orchestras), but those cannot be detailed here, and must be left for you to discover.

There are roads between the remnants, leading in a grand circle around the Mistake, but none use them save the Knights.

The Knights

The Knights of the Order of the Stars are the great heroes of the people, the only line between them and total annihilation at the hands of the mistaken. Each one is bold and brave and true, and you should mourn at their inevitable passing into corruption, evil, despair, and death, and not make light of it.

The Mistaken

Rising up from the direct center of the four remnants, at the very top of the world, the Mistake blights the sky and lurks, reminding all those that look upon it of their ancestors' folly. The air around it boils over with wisps of steam and smoke, lit white by sunlight. And yet no light can hide that it is not smoke, for it slowly disappears, rising upward, into the cool, clear summer air.

Though there are those amongst the people who would try to deny it, who say that the smoke in the sky is merely an illusion, or that it was always there, meaningless. Most of the people do not consider the meaning of the Mistake at all, though, nor even regard it in any manner except when contemplating the design of their landscaping and picture windows (most point southwards.)

To the knights, of course, the Mistake is much more. To some of them, it is a symbol of their greatest sin and their greatest failure, to some of them, it is a symbol of their duty to the people, to some others, a symbol of the truth of their cause. And all of them know that it is the source of the Mistaken. But there is so much more — the Mistake, and the hatred of it, is the center of the Order of the Stars. Even more than the cities and the people that they love, even more than their star light swords and their patrons above, even more than the sun that they are sworn to fight, it defines them. It is the Mistake that beckons them to crusade, the Mistake that spawns the demons that haunt them, the Mistake that gives them a reason to exist at all.

The Mistaken are twisted, demonic creatures. Shaped by whatever contamination lies at the heart of the Mistake, they boil out of those boiling mists into the world, slaughtering and devouring all in their path. Each is foul, the stuff of nightmares. Each is unique, and any attempt to prepare you for your first encounters with them is fruitless. It will be horrible. These meager categories will have to suffice you.

Demons of the Blood and Flesh

These most obvious of demons — those made of blood, bone, flesh, and rot — pour forth from the Mistake every Spring in multifarious and improbable bodies. Most are roughly in the shape of people, although there are those that resemble beasts, or spiders, or shapeless blobs of transparent skin. Spikes of bone protrude rudely from wounds in their hides, and their teeth are long and yellowed with the marks of meat. Some demons are great monstrous creatures, but yet have muscle and bone like the people. Others are merely skeletal, or blood sculpted into a stable form by some sort of foul will. Some, the more like the people, wear the blood-stained fineries of their prey and others, more alien, wear the skins of those that they have eaten.

These demons shape their blood into weapons, or breathe poison, or tear things apart with their claws. To a one, they hunger for the flesh of the people, and will stop at nothing to get it, although some prefer to drink blood, and others to eat

bones, and still others only yearn for the beat of hearts. When they are cut, they bleed red, and hot enough to melt ice and burn flesh. Many are mindless, slavering beasts, but others are clever, and some might even be called subtle. They are not opposed to sieges, and they understand stealth, infiltration, and patience.

It is said, amongst the knights, that there are some demons that are more sly than mere warriors — some that have mastered the art of wearing the skins of the people as disguises, and others have learned to crawl into the brains of the people and turn their thoughts and wills to the purposes of whatever lurks within the Mistake.

Demons of the Heart and Soul

But there are more insidious demons yet; there are those which have no forms at all. Some of them are capable of taking the bodies of individuals amongst the people, whilst others are merely a feeling in the heart, a sinister cast to the light, or the bright color in a sunny rainbow. Like the demons of blood and flesh, they hunger for things from the people, but the things that they hunger for are not so simple as flesh: some devour joy, some feed from sadness, some require homage and dark pacts, and one there is will destroy the one moment that you were sure that she loved you, just because it can.

These demons easily penetrate the remnant fortresses, and manipulate the people to their own agenda. Although the knights are often resistant to their powers, the people are far too susceptible, and such a demon is often capable of enormous harm before it is rooted out and destroyed, if it ever is.

Such demons are difficult, though not impossible, to fight. They cannot be cut, even by the starlight swords of the knights, and they are often strong enough to overcome a simple exorcism. Fortunately, each one has a weakness but, unfortunately, each weakness is unique.

The Two That Have Fallen

The most terrifying demons within the horde are not giant, slavering monsters, nor are they the barely noticeable shafts of

poisoned light. The greatest among the demons are not demons at all. They are people: the Solaris Knight and the Frost Maiden.

Only rarely ever sighted, the Solaris Knight appears to be the greatest general among the demons, and greatly respected by their kind. He is one of the people, golden-haired, and he wields a starlight sword that burns bright and hot with the fire of the sun. His blood is so cold that it has frozen into icicles that break through his skin but, for all that, he is tall and strong and one of the people.

He has been known, at times, to speak with knights, and though he has been driven back and defeated many times, even killed, he returns the same every summer.

The Frost Maiden is even more rarely seen. She is the epitome of beauty among the people — thin and silver-haired, with eyes the white color of the highest star. She wanders the wasted landscape between the remnants, all alone, and contents herself with the sort of melancholy songs that can only be heard by the saddest of souls. Snow falls from her breath, and her kiss turns the most loving heart to ice.

Some among the knights say that the Solaris Knight and the Frost Maiden are Polaris's Queen and her champion, Algol, turned by the Mistake's cruel irony into servants of the Sun. If you listen to the stories, this makes sense. But the truth is not that simple.

The oldest, weariest, and wisest amongst the knights — those that are near to death — know the truth. The Solaris Knight and the Ice Maiden are every knight who has ever, frustrated and angry, cast lots against the people, every knight who has ever despised of his people's faith, every knight who has ever turned to the demons with a corrupt and blackened heart. The Solaris Knight and the Ice Maiden are terrible because they are mighty, yes, but they are all the more terrible because they are the future of every knight who does not perish in battle against them. They are most terrible because, with one look into their eyes, you know that once, a forgotten age ago, they meant well.

The Year

Ever since the construction of the calendar, the people have tracked the interval between the dawns and have given it the name “year.” Now, after the rise of the sun, the year is further subdivided into seasons, and the people sculpt their lives around it, for the sun has burned its mark into their hearts and changed their nature.

Spring

The coming of spring brings that ancient dawn spinning to the horizon, and the people, captivated by its beauty, do nothing but gaze at that golden fire in their sky, most through windows crafted especially for the purpose, that paint the light a thousand colors that never should have been.

During this time, the remnants are eerily quiet, and no people are about. The only things that move are Knights and Demons. For, even in the winter, the Mistake is growing, ever growing, and now it rouses itself, belching forth great hordes of demons that rampage through the remnants, hungry from their long hibernation. The Mistaken know that, beneath the dawnlight, the people are paralyzed, and this is the motive behind their invasion — it is an easy time to slake their foul thirsts for blood, flesh, or things yet more perverse. So captivated they are by the dawn, the people will stand staring into it even as the demons rend them apart, unaware or simply uncaring of their doom.

This is a time of year that the Order bands together, for all hands are needed at the defense of the remnants. The Knights establish siege lines, lay traps against the horde, and do their best to fight against the invasion. This is also the time where they function most as a group, and the time where they learn each other’s news and experiences. In the dawn, deaths are tallied, dirges sung, and heroes are congratulated, even as the siege is held.

As the years wear on, the Springs are getting shorter. Some knights are grateful for the reprieve, whereas others worry about what this might imply.

Summer

As that burning star the people call the Sun leaves the horizon, some of the people begin to stir from their trances, the demonic hordes retreat for a time, and the remnants return to some semblance of society. The people, so caught up in the golden light of the sun, remember nothing of the atrocities that the dawn brought (no matter if the knights remind them or not), and devote their time to the crafting of rainbow rooms to trap the sunlight and sculpt it into gaudy colors. Some of them put on great feasts and balls to commemorate the Sun's return. Ostensibly, these are in remembrance of the Mistake, but in all but name they are a celebration of that violent, bloated star. As the sun works higher in the sky, the people hold sumptuous feasts and clad themselves in red and yellow spider-silks.

At this time of year, courtships begin at the grand dances, and maidens hold the starlight from their suitors in crystal necklaces. At this time, music is played, for the cacophonous howls that the sun sings to musicians are no longer considered foul.

For the Order, the summer is a time of travel and questing. The stragglers of the demons armies that were defeated in the spring roam the wastes, and the knights sally forth to fight the Mistaken and re-establish communication between the remnants. The shifting of the ice during the winter changes the terrain in the wastes, so each summer maps must be drawn anew.

In this time, the knights often come upon mysterious ruins — ancient castles and towers inhabited by people, demons, or stranger things. Many also take this time to become reunited with friends and acquaintances in other remnants. Within the remnants, mistaken are largely limited to demons of the heart and soul, who will use this social season to corrupt and feed on unsuspecting lovers. In the wastes that stretch between the four remnants, of course, there remain many other demons, who pose a threat to both questing knights and the few people who deign to travel...

Each year, at the peak of summer, the sun has risen higher in the sky. It is said by those that are too fond of prophecy that, some summer, the fire star shall rise all the way to zenith and

eclipse the pole star, and in that year the people shall finally be overrun. This year, if it ever comes, will be a while yet, and many Knights say the end is coming much sooner than that.

Autumn or Fall

As summer draws to a close, the people of the remnants become listless and unpleasant to each other for, though they would never admit it, they are anticipating the orange fire of the accursed screaming star as it sinks once more from their sight. “The Song of the Return of the Stars” is played on lightpipes and echoes through the halls of Southreach.

As the sun touches the horizon, the people gather in great dance halls in the heart of the remnants, windowed on all sides, to watch the slow twirling descent of the demon eye. At this time, disputes are settled in the new manner — whoever’s star first appears in the sky has the victory. After such disputes, weddings are held for lovers and, as the sunset wears on, couples often retire to their personal chambers (although there are some that prefer to watch the beauty of the sunset to any physical pleasure).

The demons, meanwhile, have been beaten back and, for the knights, autumn is the season of crusade. The knights march on the coldly evaporating smoke of the Mistake, rounding up the final scraps of the demonic hoard and driving them back from whence they came. It is at this time that the most zealous of knights will charge into the Mistake itself, bringing the fight to the demons, and be honored in song by his compatriots.

This charge, and especially the return from it, is a somber time for knights, for each time, there are fewer of them, and each time, the Mistake is grown larger and closer to the remnants.

Winter

As winter comes, the stars return to the sky and, if you did not move or speak or look to the north, you might believe for a moment that the Mistake had never happened at all.

Among the people, winter is considered the proper time for affairs of state and politics, and the elders and most titled

among them make pronouncements for the coming year. At this time, the knights often appeal for more resources and, almost always, are roundly rejected in favor of development of music and the arts, usually on the grounds that they must surely be exaggerating the demonic threat. In the lower hallways, where the politics are truly played out: alliances are made and broken, deals are craftily crafted, and people manipulated. Winter is the time when the people are most ruthless towards each other, and assaults and even murders are not unheard of. Knights, as de facto policemen, are often called in to handle such cases. Sometimes, there are Mistaken at the root of it, but sometimes it is corruption within the people themselves.

In a few forgotten rooms, off in ancient spires, a few of the people given to ancient and traditional ways still dance, quietly, with the stars, and sing their gentle songs, but they will not speak of it for the shame of their conservatism.

And outside, underneath the fickle and strange light of that moon that marks where the sun was torn from the sky, the Mistake grows larger, and within it, the demons rest for spring.

The Mysterious South

Amongst the people, there are whispered tales of foreign nations, located “south of the sky,” where the sun is higher and the world is filled with fantastical things such as stones, wheat, and foxes, where dark skinned princes and princesses have magical adventures that always end with happy marriages. Although these stories are clearly mere fairy tales for children, there are those among the people who believe that the torrid south does hold some sort of civilization, citing strange relics found in the ruins of Polaris. Chief among these believers are some members of the Knights Stellar, and amongst them there are even those, their hearts perhaps given over entirely to fool’s errands, who make grand treks to the south in hope that these alien cities will offer some lore or force of use against the Mistake. These questors often do not return, although there are those who wander back sheepish and empty handed, and there are also a small few who return — half-starved, half-burnt, and entirely mad — with mad tales of bizarre people, strange cities, and impossible empires. They are usually ignored by all save the most impressionable, and often pass away of mysterious illnesses.

The foreign cities most often named in legend are: Byzantium, Alert, Chang’an, Hopi, Rome, Mecca, Grail, Ur and Jerusalem. Each has its own legends associated with it, but they are so diverse and contradictory that it is perhaps best to leave you to discover the truth on your own. After all, you should know the nature of the South. You have already been there countless times before.

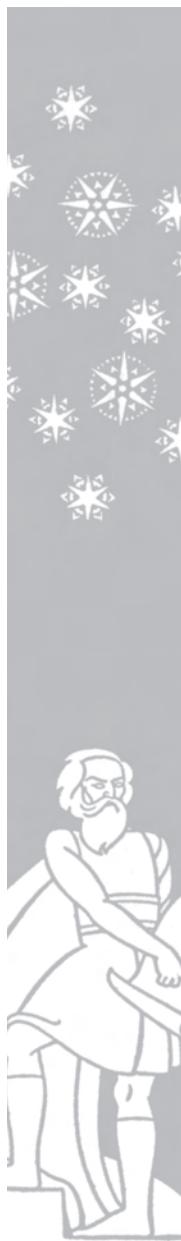
Your Battle —

In the center of the world, the Mistake festers like a forgotten apology, belching out demons onto the earth and a sickly white white vapor into the sky. In everything you do: Dance, sing, love, and war, it haunts your vision, a stain upon the perfect empyrean, the mark of the sun upon the ice.

Once, there would have been no need for Knights, when the sky was dark and perfect, the starlight pure and cold, and the people without fear or flaw. But that time is over now, and the call for Knights has never been greater, for there is only one order, your order, the Knights Stellar, that stand opposed between the remnants of the people and the demons that would devour them.

And so, beneath the burning sunlight and its alien blue sky, you have come to this battle. Your sword sings of winter's starlight and flows like water in your hand, one, two, and another hideous form falls, belching red blood across the snow, to your hand.

There are others with you, other knights, for this is a battle, and not all of them fare well. The dooms of the Knights are plentiful and great. Some time will come a time when you succumb to them — to death on the field of treachery in the heart. Some summer will come when this battle will not be fought, when the Mistaken will rage without fear through the melting ice, when the fiery sun enchant no hearts with its gaudy colors as it rises like a wound in the spring sky, when there are no more knights upon the field of battle. But this summer is not that summer, for your sword is sharp and your courage is bright. You are sworn against the sun, and the people still have a champion.









PREVIOUS:

*A veteran knight chastises a demon
on the steps of Tallstar remnant.*



THE RULES

LONG AGO, THE PEOPLE WERE DYING AT THE END OF THE WORLD. BUT HOPE IS NOT YET LOST, FOR YOU STILL HEAR THIS SONG OF THE STARS.

FIRST, THE INTRODUCTION

Polaris is a game, but it is more like a game that you would play with a small child and her toys than a competitive game like monopoly, chess, or soccer. The goals of playing *Polaris* are no more and no less than the goals of a child's play-pretend — to create a good story, to explore an imaginary world, and to have fun doing it.

But *Polaris* also differs from pretend play in a few key ways. We are adults now, and the stories that drew us as children will not necessarily hold the same joy for us now. Adult stories demand more structure, more action, and more compelling quandaries for the protagonists. To this end, *Polaris* has a set background and a set of rules to help you structure the story that you'll be developing, to make sure that it is satisfying, interesting, and fun.

The setting of the story that you will tell is the world you have just read about, a snowflake melting beneath a demonic sun, doomed by the foolishness of its own people. The protagonists will be the Knights of the Order of the Stars, and the conflicts will be driven from their struggles against the alien mistaken, their own people, and themselves. The story will be a tragedy and, if I've done my job right, this game and its rules will help you to make it a good one: full of heart-rending sorrows and strong catharsis. Like a play or a novel, it should engage you with its plot and characters. Unlike a play or a novel, it will be authored by you and your friends together. And, because everyone can contribute, it will speak to your interests and desires, as well as surprising and intriguing all of you.

It's great fun, but there are a few issues that we need to discuss before you can start.

This is the shape of the thing

Polaris is intended to be played with four people, all of whom are friends, whenever they have two or three hours of leisure time that they wish to devote to the game. The game requires little preparation or work between sessions. A single session of the game can be perfectly enjoyable, but it really shines when the full story-arcs are allowed to play out: somewhere between four and ten sessions of play should be sufficient.

During play, the players will sit together in a circle — usually around a table, but sometimes on couches or even on pillows on the floor — and collaborate on describing scenes from the stories of the Knights Stellar, each player describing the actions of some specific characters in the story and giving advice and enthusiasm to the other players. Once a scene is over, a new scene will start, focusing on the same or a different protagonist, and the players may shift roles accordingly.

When their play is done, between the scenes or after all of them, the players take time to discuss the game (and other things unrelated) and think about what they want to do next with the story.

Protagonists are the heart of your story

The very center of a *Polaris* story is the set of *protagonists*, usually one for each player. The dictionary defines protagonists as the main characters of a story and also as the initiators of great things. *Protagonists* in *Polaris* are both of these things and more. Every scene must center around a single *protagonist*, and that *protagonist's* decisions will shape the fate of the people, the world, and herself. *Protagonists* are the heart of the *Polaris* game, and each one is defined by her name, *themes*, *values*, and *cosmos*. For more about *protagonists*, please see the second chapter (pg 40).

Characters that are not *protagonists*, but still have importance to the story, are called *secondary characters*. Characters that are of no account are not often mentioned in this text, nor useful in the game, but may be called *minor* or *tertiary characters*.

A note on rules terms

If a word is introduced which is a part of the *Polaris* game rules, it will be presented in *italics*. Keep an eye out for these terms — they will be important later.

Key Phrases are used to structure play

Play of *Polaris* is punctuated by *key phrases* which serve to structure the narrative of the game into sessions and further into scenes, to introduce characters, and also to govern conflict and struggle. They are introduced throughout the text and, like other rules terms, are always presented using **SMALLCASE LETTERING**.

There are four general use *key phrases* and eight *key conflict phrases* that are used in the game of *Polaris*.

The general use *key phrases* are:

- * LONG AGO, THE PEOPLE WERE DYING AT THE END OF THE WORLD.
- * BUT HOPE WAS NOT YET LOST, FOR [NAME] STILL HEARD THE SONG OF THE STARS.
- * AND SO IT WAS ...
- * BUT THAT ALL HAPPENED LONG AGO, AND NOW THERE ARE NONE WHO REMEMBER IT.

The eight *key conflict phrases* are:

- * BUT ONLY IF ...
- * AND FURTHERMORE ...
- * IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS.
- * YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH.
- * IT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE.
- * THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED.
- * IT WAS NO MATTER.
- * WE SHALL SEE WHAT COMES OF IT.

Further information about the *key phrases* and how they are used will be included as they are introduced in the rules.

This is the most important thing in the book

The most important thing about the game is to remember that you are playing with your friends and trying to make a good story. Working well together requires trust. Don't abuse the trust of your friends. Despite the fact that the story is a tragedy, make sure that your cruelty and conflict is directed towards the characters inside your game and not the players outside of it.

If, at any time, a player is not having fun, he should say so at the earliest opportunity. Take time to discuss and resolve his difficulties. If you cannot resolve them, set the game aside and play another time.

AND SO IT WAS ...





FACING:

*A general amongst the mistaken rests
in his personal estate.*



SECOND, THE PROTAGONISTS

Protagonists are the central characters of your game. Whether heroes, villains or both, they will make the moral, ethical and personal choices that will define the shape and quality of the story you are telling. As such, they deserve special consideration and are the heart of the *Polaris* game rules. *Protagonists* are defined by four components: *Guidance*, *Cosmos*, *Values* and *Themes*.

How you will guide your protagonists

Each player in the group serves in a different capacity as a *guide* to the protagonist and a shepherd to his story. To this end, each one is said to have *guidance* over a specific set of story elements. Only the player with *guidance* over the proper character can make a statement in the story about that character, although other players are strongly encouraged to make suggestions. The different *guides* are:

The *Heart* guides the protagonist himself, and can make definitive statements about his actions, their results, his health, emotions, and general status. The *Heart's* main responsibility in play is to react to the situations presented by the other players and play aggressively: making judgments, taking decisive action, and moving the story forward. The *Heart* is also responsible for maintenance of the *Cosmos* (see below). When there is conflict, the *Heart* negotiates in favor of the protagonist.

The *Mistaken* guides the antagonists of the story, including all demons, and also guides the environment and background of the story. The *Mistaken's* main responsibility in play is to create conflict for the *Heart* to respond to — difficult situations, difficult battles, difficult choices. She plays the demons to the hilt, as vicious and nasty creatures, and at the same time makes sure that there is as much threat from those amongst the people that have turned against the knights. Perhaps the most important demons that the *Mistaken* must guide are the dark temptations within the *Knight's* mind, which is why, in conflict, the *Mistaken* negotiates for the demons.

The *Full Moon* guides the social and hierarchical realms of the story, including guiding all the secondary characters with

whom the protagonist has a primarily societal or hierarchical relationship, like fellow knights, artistic colleagues, commanding officers, senators, or emotionally distant family members. The *Full Moon* also guides minor male characters not present in the *Cosmos*. The *Full Moon's* main role in play is to introduce these characters, support their interests, and allow them to at times conflict with knight, at times aid him. In conflict, the *Full Moon* takes a referee role, making judgments about the fairness of the maneuvers between the *Mistaken* and the *Heart*.

The *New Moon* guides the personal and interpersonal realms of the story, including guiding all the secondary characters with whom the protagonist has a primarily emotional and personal relationship, like lovers, close friends, and some family members. The *New Moon* also guides minor female characters not present in the *Cosmos*. The *New Moon's* main role in play is to introduce these characters, support their interests, and allow them to at times ask too much of the knight, at times support him. In conflict, the *New Moon* works with the full moon in a referee role, making judgments about the fairness of the maneuvers between the *Mistaken* and the *Heart*.

Each of the four protagonists will have a different set of guides, and each player at the table will serve in a different guiding role for each character. Within the boundaries of these roles, however, there is a great deal of flexibility. To set clearer guidelines and avoid arguments between the players, guidance is further delineated by the *Cosmos*.

Note: If you have three or five players, the roles of the *guides* are a little different. Please see the first appendix (pg 91).

The Cosmos holds everything important

In the center of the *protagonist's* record sheet, there is a great circular diagram, divided into four parts. This is referred to as the *protagonist's* *Cosmos*, and it is used to keep track of who has *guidance* over each of the important people, places, things, events, ideas and demons present within that *protagonist's* story.

Inside the small central circle labeled *Heart* is written the

Heart's name and the one thing that that player is granted guidance over: the *protagonist* himself.

The outer ring is split into three sections, one each for the *Full Moon*, *New Moon*, and *Mistaken*. In these sections are written the names of important people, demons, and other things that the player in question is called upon to guide. Also, the player's name is written in their own section.

The protagonist's *Heart* is responsible for updating, revising, and tracking the *Cosmos*. Whenever the *Heart* wishes, she may add to or move elements in her *protagonist*'s *Cosmos* to represent changes in the *protagonist*'s relationships. Other players may also request that the *Heart* change the *Cosmos* at any time. No matter how much the *Cosmos* changes, there must be at least one character in each section.

Elements of the *Cosmos* can also be moved or added as part of a *conflict*. If this is the case, the *Heart* should refrain from moving or changing them too much without the consent of the *Mistaken*.

The *Cosmos* also serves as a map of the world, with all four remnant cities marked on it. The Mistake would be located in the center of the four remnants, exactly where the *Heart*'s circle is located.

EXAMPLE: A scene focusing on Emily's Protagonist Subail has just ended. During that scene, she met a fellow knight named Praecipula. Emily wants the character to appear again in Subail's story, and maybe have a role of some importance, so she writes "Praecipula" in the Cosmos section of her record sheet. As Praecipula is a fellow knight, and Subail does not have a particularly personal or emotional relationship with her, Emily writes her name in the Full Moon section. Carrie, Subail's Full Moon, now has guidance over Praecipula, which will only change if Emily moves Praecipula to a new section to reflect a change in Subail's relationship with her.

Values measure a knight's story

The *Cosmos* serves to describe the world around the *protagonist*,

but that is not enough for a story. The knight's *Values* describe his internal ties to the world and ability to resist demonic temptation, as well as his movement through a tragic story. They are measured numerically, from one to five, and are used during *conflict* and *experience*. Each knight has three *Values*.

Ice is a measure of the strength of the knight's relationship to the world and society around him. A knight with a high *Ice* value will be able to oppose the demons well when fighting for the preservation of society or in relation to ideas, people or events that he cares about. *Ice* starts rated at one and increases throughout the game.

Light is a measure of the knight's internal strength and prowess. A knight with a high *Light* value will be able to oppose demons well when fighting them primarily alone, with his own abilities and equipment. *Light*, like *Ice*, starts rated at one and increases throughout the game.

Zeal is a measure of the knight's sense of purpose and connection to the stars, drive to save the people and protect them from demons, and general hatred of the mistaken. All protagonists start with a four *Zeal* value, which they will slowly lose over the course of play. Knights with *Zeal* values are often called *Novices*.

Once the *Zeal* value drops to zero, the knight will gain a *Weariness* value in its place. Whereas *Zeal* measured the protagonist's willing ability to combat the demons, the *Weariness* value measures despair and frustration at the impossibility of the struggle. *Weariness* only goes up, never down. Knights with *Weariness* values are often called *Veterans*.

EXAMPLE: Emily's Protagonist Subail, like all Protagonists, starts with an Ice Value of 1, Light Value of 1, and Zeal Value of 4.

Later in her story, after some Experience, she has an Ice Value of 3 and a Zeal Value of 2, while her Light remains at 1. Now, she is stronger against demonic influence when dealing with society or the outside world, but not as strong when she depends on her own abilities to combat demons. While her capabilities have increased, her drive is beginning to falter as she realizes the immensity of her mission.

Still later, Subail has become a Veteran. She no longer has a Zeal Value. Her Ice Value is now 4, her Light Value is 3, and her Weariness Value is 1. She is now more skilled in a diversity of situations, but she become weighed down by the burden of her fate, and often despairs from it.

Themes measure a knight's soul

The *Cosmos* describes the world around the knight, and the *Values* describe the knight's inner world. The protagonist's *Themes* serve to describe certain events, objects, abilities, or relationships which will come up time and again in his story. Each knight has the same four *Themes*, which are *Offices*, *Fate*, *Blessings*, and *Ability*. Each knight also has several *Aspects* which describe how these *Themes* apply to that knight personally.

The *Offices* theme describes the formal roles with which the knight relates to society. Possible *Offices Aspects* include memberships in clubs or secret societies, membership in a great family or great house, a job or honorary appointment, or a general social role. All *protagonists* start with the *Offices Aspect* Knight of the Order of the Stars. Example *Aspects* of the *Offices Theme* include:

- * Knight of the Order of the Stars
- * Aide to Senator Altair
- * Curator of the Leftmost Museum
- * Sole Heir of the Kaus Borealis
- * Matriarch of the Yildun
- * Exile
- * Renowned Champion

The *Fate* theme describes those things, external to the knight, that will be important to his story. *Aspects* are specific people, demons, events, or ideas that are tied strongly into his history, reputation, or destiny. I divide them, conceptually, into Ideas, Events and Relationships, but there might be overlap between these. If such a division doesn't help you, by all means please ignore it. There is no specific required *Fate* aspect for all protagonists, but the

players must decide on a *Fate Aspect* that their *protagonists* all share. Example *Aspects* of the *Fate Theme* include:

- * Event: Betrayal of the People
- * Event: A Mysterious Disappearance
- * Event: The Fall of Kerhah
- * Idea: The Greatest Knight
- * Idea: The South
- * Relationship: Rischa, Maiden of the Midmost Hall
- * Relationship: Asmidike, my Father
- * Relationship: Etzlitotec, Princess of Spring

The *Blessings* theme describes the artifacts, equipment, and companions that the Knight has been granted by the stars to battle against the mistaken. *Blessings Aspects* are specific items. All *protagonists* start out with a Starlight Sword. Example *Aspects* of the *Blessings Theme* include:

- * Starlight Sword
- * Greater Starlight Weapon
- * My Father's Sword
- * Wings of the Stars
- * Breathsuit
- * Memory Crystal
- * The Call of Home
- * Loyal Steed Shackleton
- * Boon Companion Arrakis
- * Four Birds, Lord of Carrion

The *Ability Theme* describes any personal characteristics, skills, or talents of the *protagonist*. *Aspects* of this *Theme* can be roughly divided into Lore, Techniques, Attributes and Skills. All *protagonists* start out with the Lore of Demons *Aspect*. Example *Aspects* of the *Ability Theme* include:

- * Lore of Demons
- * Lore of the Stars

- * Lore of the Outer Wastes
- * Technique: Strike from the Shadows
- * Technique: Song of Truth
- * Attribute: Refined
- * Attribute: Big
- * Skill: Musician
- * Skill: Sculptor

Each *Theme* can be used by both the *Mistaken* and the *Heart* to open up new options when in negotiation over *conflict*. When a *Theme* is used in this way, it is considered *exhausted* for that player, and may not be used again until it is refreshed. For more about the use of *Themes*, see the section on *conflict* (pg 71).

EXAMPLE: At the beginning of the game, Emily's protagonist, Subail, has the automatic Aspects of all characters: Knight of the Order of the Stars under the Office Theme, Starlight Sword under the Blessing Theme, and Lore of Demons under the Ability Theme. In addition, she has extra Aspects to differentiate her from other starting Protagonists: Lore of the Wastes under Ability, and Kolab and Betrayal under Fate.

Later, after the game has been played a while, these aspects have changed somewhat. Her starlight sword has been replaced by a Southern Ancestor Sword, she has acquired a crystal that serves as the Call of Home and has the attributes of Brave and Tough. Fomolhaut has been added to her Fate, and she has been appointed to the rank of Sergeant, which is reflected as an Aspect of the Office Theme.

How a hero is made

Before you begin play, you will need a set of *protagonists*. In most games of *Polaris*, there are three or four *protagonists*, one for each player of the game, though if you are just starting out you might want to only use one or two *protagonists*. You will want to have a *record sheet* for each *protagonist*. You can copy the *record sheet* from the back of the book or download a pdf version from the *TAO Games* site and print it out.

First, Choose a name for the knight. Don't just make up a name, though! The people, to a one, take their names from the stars. Look at the list of star and constellation names in the appendix (pg 126) and choose one. Or, if you already have a star name in mind, use that.

Second, On the character's *record sheet*, write down her initial *Values*. Next to *Ice* and *Light*, write a one. Next to *Zeal*, write a four. Don't write anything under *Weariness* yet.

Third, on the character's *record sheet*, underneath each of the *Themes*, write down the initial *Aspects* for each *Theme*. Under *Office*, write "Knight of the Order of the Stars." Under *Blessing*, write "Starlight Sword." Under *Abilities*, write "Lore of Demons." Under *Fate*, write the name of a demon or person that all protagonists will have in common as a *Fate Aspect*. (All the players must agree on this.)

Fourth, you get to choose one extra *Aspect* for two of your *Themes*, or two extra *Aspects* for one of your *Themes*. You shouldn't worry about having to invent new *Aspects* if you would rather not. You can use the examples from the appendix (pg 94).

Fifth, you need to fill out your *Cosmos*. You must have at least one secondary character, person or demon, in each section (*New Moon*, *Full Moon* and *Mistaken*). You can also add a few extra people, places, ideas, objects, or other protagonists as you want, but don't overdo it (two or three per category is fine). If you're having trouble, the list of star names at the end of the book is a great help. Remember to talk with the other players about these ideas.

Sixth, Wait until everyone is done this far. Now it is time to assign *Guidance*. Look around. The person sitting across from you is the *Mistaken* for your character. The person to your left is the *New Moon*. The person to your right is the *Full Moon*. You are the character's *Heart*. Let the other players look at your *Cosmos* and get some ideas for what to do with the character. If they like, they may add a single character or idea to the *Cosmos*, preferably in their own section.

(If you want to shuffle seating at this point, you can, but not afterwards. Even in a multiple session game, seating should continue in the same pattern each time.)

Seventh, Begin the character's story by saying the key phrase BUT HOPE WAS NOT YET LOST, FOR [CHARACTER NAME] STILL HEARD THIS SONG OF THE STARS. This is the way to introduce the character in your world. On the character's *record sheet*, write down her name in the center of the *Cosmos*, in the section labeled "Heart."

Eighth, you must decide who is going to start play. They can start a scene for either their *Heart* or *Mistaken* character by saying the AND SO IT WAS *key phrase* and describing the scene.

If you can't decide who should start the first scene, the oldest player goes first.

EXAMPLE: Emily has gathered together Paul, Rick, and Carrie for a game of Polaris. After introducing the basics of the game and starting the session with the appropriate key phrase, it is time to start character creation.

EMILY: Okay, guys, now we're going to make our Protagonists. We're going to make four, one for each of us, and these are going to be the central characters of our story. All of them are definitely going to be knights, but the rest is up to us.

PAUL: Cool.

EMILY: So, normally, we'd all make the characters together, but we're going to do my character first, as an example, and then we'll do the rest. Is that okay?

CARRIE: Sure, yeah.

EMILY: Cool. So the first thing to do is pick a name. All of the people, knights included, have the names of stars, and fortunately there's this big list of star names right here. So what name do we want for my character?

CARRIE: How about "Subail?" It doesn't have a known meaning, but it sounds cool.

EMILY: I was kind of thinking of a mysterious character.

RICK: I like it, too.

EMILY: Cool. Subail it is. Okay, so the next thing I'm going to do is write down my initial Values. I have a 1 Ice, a 1 Light, a 4 Zeal, and no Weariness at all. *Emily writes down the proper numbers*

PAUL: What do we use those for, again?

RICK: The Zeal and Weariness values help with the storyline, and all the values are used when we roll a die.

PAUL: Cool.

EMILY: Right, now I'm going to write in the automatic Aspects to my Themes. I'm writing Knight of the Order of the Stars under Office, Starlight Sword under Blessing, and Lore of Demons under Ability. I'm going to leave the Fate space blank — we're going to decide later on a fate that all of our Protagonists will share.

CARRIE: And we all have those same Aspects, right?

RICK: Yup, we do.

EMILY: Yes, but we also get to choose two extra aspects to flesh out the character. I kind of want to play a loner-type, so I think I'm going to take Lore of the Wastes as an Ability Aspect. Any ideas for the second one?

RICK: Maybe you could have a Loyal Steed or some other sort of transport if you're out in the wastes all the time?

PAUL: I was thinking that maybe you could take an office like "Royal Explorer" or something.

CARRIE: If she's a real loner-type, she has to have some reason that she's alone. What if she had a Fate aspect of Betrayal?

PAUL: Oooh. Emily, if you don't take that, I will.

EMILY: Betrayal, definitely.

CARRIE: Great! What next?

EMILY: Next we're going to fill out my Cosmos. We need at least one person or demon in each section: New Moon, Full Moon, and Mistaken. I think I'm going to be struggling with my society's expectations of me, so I'll put a fiancee over in the Full Moon section. Named... Fomolbaut. Any other ideas?

RICK: Hmn... not really.

EMILY: That's okay. I'm just going to add in some random names from the star list, then. Let's put El Nasl in the New Moon section, whoever that is, and maybe "The Engine of Fire" in the Mistaken section.

RICK: I've got to play that? That's nasty sounding.

EMILY: Yeah, well, that's the way of it. I'll probably steal some

folks off of other characters' Cosmos, as well.

CARRIE: *Let's get going on the rest of our's so we can play!*

EMILY: *Oh, one last bit: BUT HOPE WAS NOT YET LOST, FOR SUHAIL STILL HEARD THE SONG OF THE STARS.*

AND SO IT WAS ...









PREVIOUS:

*Fresh from rest within the Mistake,
this demonic host charges towards the remnants*

THIRD, WE DISCUSS THE STRUCTURE OF THE GAME

How to organize a group of friends to play

The ideal *Polaris* group is 2-4 other people who are good friends of yours, who you trust to work together with you to make a good story. While *Polaris* can be played satisfactorily in one evening, it is best extended over a period of several play sessions, to allow the full story arc to reveal itself. You will need the same set of players for each game, so make sure that you can get together again, if you have that inclination. Some players like to schedule things out in advance (every other Monday is *Polaris* night) and others, with busier lives, must play when the opportunity presents itself.

All players should have some introduction to the game text before you start play. At the very least, they should all have heard “Moments Frozen From the Flow of Time” in the beginning of the text.

EXAMPLE: Emily has just bought a copy of Polaris and, after reading the book fully, wants to play the game. She calls her friends Rick and Paul, who she plays Primetime Adventures with, to see if they'd be up for playing a new game that Sunday. They are interested in at least giving it a try, but they are still short one player. Emily calls her friend Carrie, explains a bit about the game, and asks her if she'd like to play. Carrie is interested, and agrees.

Emily loans her copy of the Polaris book to Rick, who also reads it. That Sunday, before they start playing, she and Rick briefly explain the rules to Carrie and Paul, read Moments Frozen From the Flow of Time out loud, and then settle down to play.

You begin with a *Key Phrase*

Just as any other time when a group of friends gathers together, you will want to do other things than just play a game — eat a meal, catch up on each other's lives, talk about the events of the day, chat about creative projects, put the kids to bed, schedule other social events, etc. But, at some point in the evening, you will want to start playing the game and shift the focus toward that activity.

For this reason, there is a specific way set aside to mark that you are starting the game. When you are ready to start, gather everyone around in a circle (around a table, on couches, on the floor) and say the key phrase **LONG AGO, THE PEOPLE WERE DYING AT THE END OF THE WORLD**. Some people also light a candle, play a song, or use some other marker — I'm partial to the candle, myself — but the phrase is strictly mandatory.

Saying this, and perhaps taking the other actions, serves to separate the play of the game from normal interaction. Before you said the key phrase, you were not playing the game. Now that you have said it, the game has begun and should be the focus of your attention.

EXAMPLE: Emily has a big purple candle that she never uses for anything, so she puts it in the center of the table for use with the game. After she introduces Carrie to Rick and Paul, and they all get to know each other a bit, she asks if they'd like to start the game. Everyone agrees, so she lights the candle and says LONG AGO, THE PEOPLE WERE DYING AT THE END OF THE WORLD. The game has begun.

Between scenes, you should do other things

When you aren't playing a scene, it's a good time to talk about how the game is going, how cool the last scene was, what is or isn't working, what ideas you have for new scenes, what's going on in each other's personal lives, current events, or anything else that comes to mind. The *Heart* should make sure to update the *Cosmos* after every scene, taking input from the other players. It is also time to go to the bathroom, go get food, take a smoke break, or call home and let your sweetie know that the game is running just a little bit over time.

When you aren't playing a scene, any player can start a scene focusing on either her *Heart* protagonist or her *Mistaken* protagonist at any time.

If both the *Heart* player and the *Mistaken* player want to start a scene with the same character, the *Mistaken* takes priority.

Many groups like to rotate scenes — having one scene focus

on each character in turn (so a scene focusing on Suhail would be followed by a scene for Sir Mirzam, followed by a scene for Rick's protagonist). This is a great idea, and highly recommended for most play, but it is by no means required, and you should feel free to break turn order if you have a good idea for a scene out of order.

EXAMPLE: After playing out two scenes, one for Paul's protagonist (started by Paul) and one for Emily's protagonist (started by Rick), Emily pauses to ask how everyone likes the game so far. The two guys smile and nod, and Carrie says that it's been really fun, but she's a little confused about the rules. Rick takes time to explain the rules to Carrie, Paul heads out to get some juice (he's thirsty), and Emily updates her protagonist's Cosmos and then takes a bathroom break.

Starting a scene properly

As long as you are not presently playing a scene, any player may start a scene for either their Heart character or their Mistaken character by saying the key phrase AND SO IT WAS... and following that with a brief description of whatever situation the knight finds himself embroiled in this time. Either before or after that description, the Heart should place the protagonist's record sheet in the center of the table, where everyone can see and read the Cosmos. Then, you are in Free Play (see below).

If, for this session of play, it is the first scene with this particular protagonist, introduce him by saying the key phrase BUT HOPE WAS NOT YET LOST, FOR [CHARACTER NAME] STILL HEARD THIS SONG OF THE STARS before saying AND SO IT WAS... You need only do this once for each protagonist for each session of play.

For *Polaris* scenes, it is best to cut straight to the meat of the story — terrible battles both internal and external, difficult choices that the knight must make, and scenes of incredible horror and beauty. Do not dwell upon the details of every day life, or the long, boring travels through the wastes. Such things can be quickly summarized or skipped altogether. Rather, make sure each scene is active and exciting.

EXAMPLE: *When everyone comes back to the table, Carrie starts a new scene for Paul's protagonist.*

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): Okay, let's see... (*she looks at the protagonist record sheet for Mirzam, Paul's protagonist, particularly the Cosmos*) **AND SO IT WAS** that Sir Mirzam faced off on an open plain with his ancient foe, *The Lord Long Summer*, while his ward Gienah lay dead at his feet. (*She does not need to use the BUT HOPE WAS NOT YET LOST, FOR MIRZAM STILL HEARD THE SONG OF THE STARS key phrase, because he has already been introduced this session.*)

PAUL (HEART): Wha?

Advice for Starting Scenes

Usually, it is no trouble to start a scene. You have a great idea about where you want to go next with the story, and you just need to set it up. Great! Say **AND SO IT WAS** and start it off.

But sometimes, you're just totally stuck. It's your turn to make a scene and everyone is looking at you all blank eyed and you just have no idea what you're going to do next. This happens to everyone, all the time. The most important thing is — don't worry. The structure of the game is here to help you in just this situation.

The first thing to do is ask the *Moons* if they have any ideas. *Moons* aren't allowed to start scenes, but that doesn't mean that they haven't been thinking about this knight's story just as much as you have. Often, one of the *Moons* will have a great idea, which you can then modify or just use whole cloth.

The second thing to do is look at the *Cosmos*. Remember, everything important to the knight's story should be written down right there, on the sheet. If you're in doubt, just pick two people from two different parts of the *Cosmos* and think about how they could be brought into conflict.

The final resort, if you really can't think of anything, is to frame a scene with a character from the *New Moon* or the *Full Moon* section of the *Cosmos* (or one from each) and describe the character(s) as "crying for help," or "bearing desperate news," or "in heated argument with each other." Then, the *Full*

Moon and the *New Moon* will have to come up with the conflict for the scene, leaving you totally free to handle things later. This puts a great deal of pressure on the *Moons*, though, so you probably shouldn't do it too often.

Conversely, sometimes you have a great idea for a scene, but you have already decided in your head that it should definitely turn out one way, and not any other. This is very dangerous! *Polaris* is a collaborative game, and such predetermination hinders any such collaboration in a particularly destructive way. My recommendation is to simply ignore that scene and find a different one to play, one that you are less attached to. If you really want to play out the scene, you must divorce yourself from any expected event or outcome. Planning things out too much in advance shows that you don't respect the creativity of your fellow players. Don't do it!

EXAMPLE: *It has come time for Rick to start a scene.*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *Okay, I want to do a scene with Subail (Emily's protagonist), but I can't think of anything. Guys?*

PAUL (NEW MOON): *Well, she has "El Nasl" written just on the New Moon side of her Cosmos, right next to the Mistaken side. You gotta be able to use that for something.*

CARRIE (FULL MOON): *Hey, maybe they're lovers, and Fomolhaut, her fiancee, who's over here (points to the Full Moon section), could catch them together.*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *Ooh, that's good. Okay, AND SO IT WAS that, even as El Nasl and Subail exchanged sweet promises of love with each other, Fomolhaut watched unseen from the balcony above.*

While you're playing a scene

After the introduction, everyone portrays the characters that they have guidance over, with the *Mistaken* bringing in as much difficulty as possible, the *Heart* trying to handle all the terrible decisions and trials of the knight, and *Moons* playing their characters as best they can. People will also be throwing out suggestions at the other players, who will be using them or

rejecting them as best they can. Everyone works together to say what happens. This sort of play is sometimes called “free play.”

Different people will guide their characters in different ways. Some people like to play the game more like telling a story: “and so Sir Arcturus took up his sword and spoke to Cassiopeia: ‘We have too much love for our city to abandon it in its time of need.’” Some people like to describe a character’s actions in the first person: “I lift up my sword, look at her, and say ‘We have too much love for our city to abandon it in its time of need.’” Some people like to portray characters like an actor would, without too much talking outside of character: (pantomimes picking up a sword, gives Cassiopeia’s player a heavy look) “We have too much love for our city to abandon it in its time of need.” Any of these is fine. It is most likely that you will find yourself moving amongst all three of them as the needs of the scene dictate. Just use whatever makes you most comfortable. The story is the important thing.

When the scene comes to a natural end, either the Heart or the Mistaken can end it by saying the key phrase **AND SO IT WAS**. Saying this ends the scene, and now the next person (if you’re taking turns) or anyone with a good idea (if you aren’t) can start the next scene.

EXAMPLE: Continuing from the previous example.

PAUL (NEW MOON, AS EL NASL): *Okay, so I have my arms around you, and we’re kissing, and I say “Subail, my love, when can we be married?”*

EMILY (HEART): *We can’t do that, Nasl. . . My family would never permit it.*

CARRIE (FULL MOON, AS FOMOLHAUT): *Okay, I burst in about now. I see them kissing and I drop to my knees. “Subail! I. . .”*

EMILY (HEART): *“Fomolhaut! I. . .” I pull away and run over to him, placing my hands on his head.*

CARRIE (FULL MOON): *I thought you loved me, Subail. We are promised to each other. How could you do this?*

PAUL (NEW MOON): *She doesn’t want you, you pathetic*

creature. Get out of here and leave us in peace. Perhaps, if you die, we can finally be happy!

Advice for Free Play

During free play, it is of the utmost importance that every player says what they want to have happen. It can be very tempting to hedge one's bets, to say things that won't have long term consequences because you are worried that the other players will be unhappy with your contributions or have their own ideas, and you don't want to step on their toes. This is a reasonable fear, but you must conquer it if you want to be able to play *Polaris* to its full potential.

A good sort of statement to make is something like:

"I perform an expulsion, knocking her sword aside, and with a quick thrust I run her through the heart. She dies."

or maybe:

"I kiss him, and he falls into my arms. He loves me."

A bad sort of statement to make is something like this:

"I swing at him."

"I move in to kiss her."

Each of the first set of statements, you see, contains a result of the action. If some player objects or wants something else, she can address it via the conflict mechanics, or get someone else to do so for her. The other statements, in truth, don't amount to much. There is no permanent change to the game world. Even if another player objects to where you are going with it, or has their own ideas about it, they can't really bring in the *conflict* mechanics because there is nothing for them to start with.

Conflict is good for your story, and the *conflict* mechanics are good for your play. The *Mistaken* has a special responsibility to drive towards it by making difficult situations, but every player should also move towards conflict by always saying what they want to have happen. I cannot stress this point enough — if you do not make definitive statements, your game of *Polaris* will be less satisfying, less interesting, and less fun.

Everyone ought to watch out for *conflicts* and *experience*

During free play, there are a couple of things that you, as a player, should keep an eye open for. The first is *conflict*, and the second is *experience*. Both will be addressed in more detail later in the book, *conflict* in chapter four, and *experience* in chapter five.

Officially, *conflict* happens whenever one player has a character do something that another player thinks should be difficult, should have a price attached to it, or should not happen at all. However, there can be times when a *conflict* is clearly coming up, but neither the *Heart* nor the *Mistaken* is willing to make a statement definitive enough to begin the *conflict*. If this is happening, it's a good time for one of the *Moons* to say something like, "Guys, is this a *conflict*? I think it is."

Experience is easier to notice. Every time that the knight performs an action indicative of hatred of the people, sympathy for the *Mistaken*, callousness, cynicism, or apathy (or when the *Heart* fails a roll in *conflict*), *experience* must be rolled. The *Mistaken* is in charge of when *experience* is rolled, and makes the final call, but everyone should be on the lookout for it.

A few words about Guidance

Usually, players will be portraying and deciding the actions taken by the characters that they guide. However, sometimes, a single player will be called upon to guide more than one character for a scene. In these cases, it may be handy to lend guidance over a character or two to another player, for at least the duration of the scene. This is fine, and you can do it any time that both players agree, with the exception that the *Heart* can never lend guidance over her *protagonist*.

EXAMPLE: Subail has a scene where she reviews the troops under her command. Since there are no real antagonists or interpersonal characters involved in this scene, Carrie (the Full Moon) lends the other Paul and Rick a character each, lightening her own burden and allowing them to participate in the scene.

Whenever one *protagonist* appears in a scene which focuses on another *protagonist*, the first *protagonist's Heart* retains guidance over her character, regardless of the character's position in the *Cosmos*. Indeed, no situation can ever cause the *Heart* of a *protagonist* to lose guidance over the character's actions.

EXAMPLE: Sir Mirzam rides out with Subail to patrol the wastes. Despite the fact that Subail is a rival of Mirzam's (and thus listed in the Mistaken's section of his *Cosmos*), she is still guided by Emily (her own *Heart*) and not Carrie (the Mistaken).

EXAMPLE: Sir Mirzam has delved too deeply into mystic lore and been possessed by the demon Etzlitotec. While the demon controls his actions, Paul (his *Heart*) retains guidance and decides what the demon makes him do, taking advice and suggestions from Carrie (the Mistaken).

It is good to have allies and friends

It is quite likely that, in the course of play, you will at some point want to have a scene that features multiple *protagonists* at the same time. When this comes up, keep the following rules in mind.

Each scene focuses on one and only one *protagonist*. Other *protagonists* may be present, but they are treated as secondary characters — they cannot enter conflicts, nor can their players end the scene. However, there are two key exceptions to this.

First, as mentioned above, the *protagonist's Heart* always retains guidance over the *protagonist*, no matter what the situation. Likewise, to use another *protagonist* in a *conflict statement*, you must have the permission of that *protagonist's Heart*.

EXAMPLE: Carrie (Mistaken) has just framed a scene focusing on Sir Mirzam, where he faces down with his old rival Subail. As Subail is Mirzam's rival, she would normally be guided by Carrie (Mirzam's Mistaken). However, Subail is a *Protagonist*. As such, she is guided by her *Heart*, Emily. During the scene, Subail is treated like a secondary character — she cannot participate in conflicts, Emily cannot end the scene, etc.

It is possible to have two *protagonists* participate in the same conflict via judicious use of the AND SO IT WAS key phrase. This is somewhat of an advanced technique, and it is not recommended until you have mastered the basic conflict methods.

At the end of the world

When the time has come that you need to stop playing *Polaris* and take care of other things, make sure to take time to end the game properly. Ask all the other players if there are any last scenes that they want to play out. After all that is done, one of the players should say the *key phrase* BUT THAT ALL HAPPENED LONG AGO, AND NOW THERE ARE NONE WHO REMEMBER IT. If you lit a candle at the beginning of the game, now you should blow it out. If you played a song at the beginning, you might want to play a song at the end, and so on. Saying this *key phrase* means that the game is over for now, although you can still take some time to talk about what happened, think about what might happen next, and plan ahead for the next game.

EXAMPLE: After a scene for each protagonist, it is getting late in the afternoon. Emily asks if people want to keep playing for a while, or if they'd like to wrap things up. Paul says that he'd like to run one more scene for Emily's protagonist, to set things up for next time. The players play out the scene, then Emily blows out the candle, and Carrie says "BUT THAT ALL HAPPENED LONG AGO, AND NOW THERE ARE NONE WHO REMEMBER IT."

The players take some time to talk about the game. Emily asks if they want to play again, and they agree to meet up two weeks later. Paul gives Rick and Carrie a ride home.

AND SO IT WAS...





FACING:

*A knight jests
with the Lord of Flames.*



FOURTH, A CLASH OF STARLIGHT, A SONG OF SWORDS, A FROZEN KISS. CONFLICT!

First you must know when to use it

When, in the course of free play, one character takes any action that another player feels should be difficult, should have a price attached to it, or should not happen, a *conflict* should occur. Either the *Heart* or the *Mistaken* can initiate by using one of the *key conflict phrases* at any time during ordinary play. The *Moons* may not initiate a conflict, nor can they use any of the *key conflict phrases*, though they can and should ask for another player to negotiate on their behalf. In this section, the *Heart* and the *Mistaken* are sometimes referred to together as *active players*, and sometimes the opposite (*Heart* for the *Mistaken*, *Mistaken* for the *Heart*) is called the *opponent*.

While it might seem that conflict is an argument between players, it shouldn't be. If the players are actually upset with each other, something is wrong. Rather, the *Heart* and the *Mistaken* are taking the opportunity to lobby for the knight and the demons, all in the interests of driving the tragedy forward. If players are actually upset with each other, it is past time to take a break from the game!

And you must know who can use it

All conflict is settled by a negotiation between the *Heart* and the *Mistaken*, with the *Moons* taking an important, but less involved, position as referees. As such, if the *Moon* guides a character to take an action that the *Heart* or the *Mistaken* objects to, either *active player* can negate, oppose, or disregard that action as they see fit, although they are not allowed to dictate a new action to replace it. This is only appropriate, as the *protagonists* and their demons are central to the story. Likewise, if the *Heart* or *Mistaken* has a character take an action that a *Moon* objects to, the *Moon* must ask for a representative in conflict.

Either the *Heart* or the *Mistaken* can use the **BUT IT WAS NO MATTER** key phrase to negate or oppose a *Moon's* action. When this is said, the other *active player* must either repeat the phrase **BUT IT**

WAS NO MATTER or say the phrase WE SHALL SEE WHAT COMES OF IT. If the other player says BUT IT WAS NO MATTER, the dismissal, cancellation, or opposition occurs. If the other player says WE SHALL SEE WHAT COMES OF IT, conflict begins as if that player had made the *Moon's* statement themselves, and the other active player must respond with one of the *key conflict phrases*.

EXAMPLE: *Subail is in an argument with her lover, El Nasl, and her fiancee, Fomolhaut.*

CARRIE (NEW MOON): *El Nasl grabs a vase from the table and just like that smashes it over Fomolhaut's head, killing him.*

EMILY (HEART): *Whoa, hold on! BUT IT WAS NO MATTER. Uhm, Subail cuts the vase out of his hand before he can swing it.*

Everyone looks at Rick, the Mistaken, who now must answer.

RICK (MISTAKEN): *Hmm... BUT IT WAS NO MATTER. Sorry, Carrie, but I have too many plans for Fomolhaut to let him go this early.*

CARRIE (NEW MOON): *No problem.*

Now we can discuss how conflict proceeds, and what you say

Conflict in *Polaris* is an extended negotiation between the *Heart* and the *Mistaken* over the events of the scene. When it ends, you can end the scene right there, or return to free play. You can also play out the events you have just negotiated, or skip past them to the new action.

Conflict doesn't proceed as a freeform negotiation, however. Rather, it is performed through a series of specific *key phrases*, called *key conflict phrases*. Following this structure focuses the *conflict* on difficult choices, especially for the knight, which moves the focus onto heroic tragedy. Not following it can result in muddled, unfocused, and unpleasant play.

Two key conflict phrases — BUT IT WAS NO MATTER and WE SHALL SEE WHAT COMES OF IT — were introduced in the last section. These phrases are used for conflict between the *active players* and the *Moons*. The six remaining *key conflict phrases* are

used exclusively between the *Heart* and the *Mistaken*. They are listed, with their effects, below.

- * **BUT ONLY IF...** followed by a statement means that you are willing to allow the *opponent's* statement to come to pass, if he will only accept your statement as well. *Conflict* continues.

BUT ONLY IF can be used at the beginning of a conflict, or in response to another **BUT ONLY IF** statement. Any of the key conflict phrases can be used to respond to it.

- * **AND FURTHERMORE** followed by a statement means that you accept your opponent's statement, and that you have another statement that must go along with it. *Conflict* continues, but your *opponent* has a limited selection of responses to your statement.

AND FURTHERMORE can be used at the beginning of a conflict, or in response to **BUT ONLY IF** and **AND FURTHERMORE**. Only the phrases **IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS**, **AND FURTHERMORE**, **YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH**, and **AND THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED** may be used to respond to it.

To use **AND FURTHERMORE** you must exhaust an appropriate *Theme*, confirmed by the *Moons*. If you have no appropriate *Themes* available, you cannot use this phrase. The process of exhausting *Themes* will be explained in more depth later in this chapter.

- * **IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS** means that you oppose the last statement, aren't willing to compromise at all, and are willing to take a risk.

Based on the last *Theme* expended in the *conflict*, or their own judgement, the *Moons* determine what *Value* is associated with the *conflict*. (*Ice* is associated with *Offices* and *Fate*, *Light* is associated with *Blessings* and *Ability*.) The *Heart* rolls a die to determine the outcome, with a disadvantage going to the player who invoked the **IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS** key phrase. (If the *Mistaken* is disadvantaged, add *Zeal* (if any) to the

Value. If the *Heart* is disadvantaged, subtract *Weariness* (if any) from the *Value*.) If the roll of the die is lower than or equal to this *challenge value*, the *Heart* succeeds. Otherwise, the *Mistaken* succeeds. This will be discussed more later in this chapter.

If you succeed, the *opponent's* last statement is negated, but all the previously negotiated statements occur. If you fail, the *opponent's* last statement and all other other negotiated statements occur. (If the *Heart* fails, you should also check *Experience* — see the next chapter.) Either way, *conflict* ends with the roll of the dice.

IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS can be used at the beginning of a *conflict*, or in response to **BUT ONLY IF...** and **AND FURTHERMORE...** No *key conflict phrase* can be used to respond to it, as it ends the *conflict*.

Warning: At the beginning of the story-arc, the odds of succeeding with **IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS** are only 1 in 6. Success becomes more probable later in the storyline.

- * **YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH** means that you don't think that your *opponent* is asking something reasonable. Your *opponent* must offer up another suggestion which is either lesser in scope or dramatically different from their previous statement. The *Moons* must confirm that their offer is sufficiently smaller in scale or different in scope. You choose one of the two options, the original statement or the newly offered one, and continue with any *key conflict phrase* you wish to use.

You should not, under any circumstances, give your *opponent* suggestions on what to offer.

YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH can be used at the beginning of a *conflict*, or in response to **BUT ONLY IF** and **AND FURTHERMORE** The only response to it is for your *opponent* to revise her statement.

To use **YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH** you must exhaust an appropriate *Theme*, confirmed by the *Moons*. If you have no appropriate *Theme* available, you cannot use this phrase. The process of exhausting *Themes* will be explained in more depth later in this chapter.

- * **AND THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED** means that you accept your *opponent's* statement, and don't wish to ask for anything more yourself. It can be used in response to any *key conflict phrase* except for **YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH**. It ends *conflict*.

- * **IT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE** means that you reject your *opponent's* statement, and are willing to sacrifice some of your own to deny it. Your *opponent's* statement does not happen, and neither does your own last statement. All other statements do occur, and *conflict* ends. **IT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE** can be used in response to **BUT ONLY IF**.

These *key phrases* are summarized on the *Key Phrases Reference Sheet* (page 137). You may wish to photocopy this page that lists the *key phrases* and their effects and keep it at the table as you play, to help remind you of them during play.

EXAMPLE: *AND SO IT WAS that Sir Suhail found himself in pitched battle against a great demon, some amorphous blob of flesh that breathed acid and would not yield to his blade. Suhail and Shackleton, his brave steed, battled for hours against the beast to no avail.*

EMILY (HEART): *Suhail jumps up into the air, pauses for a moment at the top of his jump, and then drives his sword straight into the beast, not stopping until he reaches its heart, killing it.*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *BUT ONLY IF Shackleton is fatally wounded in the fight. You lose your "Loyal Steed" aspect from your Blessings Theme.*

EMILY (HEART): *No way! IT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE. I ride a retreat away from the demon, hoping to warn Southreach in time.*

EXAMPLE: *AND SO IT WAS that, at the Autumn dance, Sir Mirzam came across Algieba, who he had loved in his youth.*

PAUL (HEART): *"Algieba! It has been a long time."*

RICK (NEW MOON): *She gets this guilty, slightly terrified*

look on her face and then leans in and whispers “I’m sorry, Mirzam, but I have broken our childhood promise. I am betrothed.” You’re falling in love with her all over again, though.

PAUL (HEART): BUT IT WAS NO MATTER. *I’m here to find that demon, not to get moony over some chick.*

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): WE SHALL SEE WHAT COMES OF IT. *C’mon, Paul, where’s your sense of romance?*

PAUL (HEART): All right, *I’m falling in love with her, BUT ONLY IF I find the demon anyway.*

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): BUT ONLY IF *the demon is inside of her.*

PAUL (HEART): Whoa! Okay, BUT ONLY IF *she doesn’t die from it.*

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): Nice! AND THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED. *Okay, so as you look into her eyes, you see the face of Doubt reflected in them. “You see, there is nothing of yours that I cannot take as mine.”*

Let’s discuss some basic procedures: Exhausting a theme and rolling the die

When you are called upon to exhaust a Theme, it means that you must turn to the Moon and say, “I would like to spend my Blessing Theme,” or whichever sort you’d like to spend. If you’d like to, you can give a brief explanation (using the Aspects of the Theme) as to why you think the Theme applies to the situation.

The Moons consider the situation. If they agree, which is likely, you exhaust the Theme and make your statement. If they disagree, they can either reject your offer (in which case the Theme is not exhausted and you can’t make the statement) or they can ask you to exhaust an additional Theme, in which case you can decide to spend the extra Theme or to just make a different statement that doesn’t cost a Theme. For the second Theme, any will do. It does not have to apply to the conflict.

Each Theme may be exhausted once by the Heart (marked by checking off the right hand side of the Theme on the record sheet) and once by the Mistaken (marked by checking off

the left hand side of the Theme). When Themes refresh via Experience, they can be spent again.

When you roll the die, you first determine the challenge value like this:

First, if any Themes were exhausted in the conflict, the challenge value is determined by the last Theme exhausted (Ice if the last Theme was Offices or Fate, Light if the last Theme was Blessings or Ability).

If no theme was exhausted during the conflict, the Moons decide which Value (Ice or Light) seems appropriate, given the situation.

Then, if the Mistaken has the disadvantage, add the knight's Zeal Value, if any. If the Heart has the disadvantage, subtract the knight's Weariness Value, if any.

You now have a challenge value between one and five, based on one or two of the knight's Values. The Heart now rolls the die. If the result is lower than or equal to the challenge value, the knight has triumphed. If the result is higher than the challenge value, the demons are victorious, and also the knight must test Experience (see next chapter).

A roll of the die always ends the conflict.

EXAMPLE: Alsafi, who was once Sir Mirzam's wife before she was transformed into a demon, has come in the knight to take back her love. Finding him in bed with Algieba, his new lover, she is driven into a rage.

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): *Alsafi tosses Algieba out of the bed, grabs her, and throws her against the wall. "You slut!" Then she turns to you and says "I have always been faithful to you, all these years, and you repay me like this!"*

RICK (NEW MOON): *Eek!*

PAUL (HEART): *"You gave me up when you turned away from the people!" I draw my sword and it sings softly.*

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): *"No, it was all for them, all for you."*

PAUL (HEART): *I throw her against the wall. She falls down.*

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): *BUT ONLY IF Alsafi and Algieba are sisters.*

PAUL (HEART): AND FURTHERMORE I'm the only one who knows about it. I'd like to exhaust my Fate Theme, because I have Alsafit as an Aspect of Fate.

EMILY (FULL MOON): Sounds fine.

RICK (NEW MOON): *nods*

CARRIE: *shakes head* Sure. AND THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED.

EXAMPLE: AND SO IT WAS that Subail was trying to drive out Doubt, the demon that had possessed her fiancee, Fomolhaut.

EMILY (HEART): I hold up my sword, and the light of stars shines into his eyes, and Doubt is driven from him in fear of my power and the power of my star.

RICK (MISTAKEN): BUT ONLY IF Fomolhaut dies.

EMILY (HEART): YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH. I'm expending my Ability theme, which has the Exorcist Aspect.

CARRIE (NEW MOON): Sounds fine. What are you going to offer, Rick?

RICK (MISTAKEN): BUT ONLY IF Fomolhaut abandons you, and moves to the Mistaken section of your Cosmos.

PAUL (FULL MOON): Hmm... is that really lesser than him dying? I mean, for Subail?

CARRIE (NEW MOON): It sure is different.

EMILY (HEART): Hmm... I don't like that either. IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS.

CARRIE (NEW MOON): Well, the last theme expended was Ability, and you don't have the advantage, so you just use Light, without adding Zeal, right?

RICK (MISTAKEN): Right. So that's a three.

EMILY (HEART) ROLLS. THE DIE SHOWS A FIVE.

RICK (MISTAKEN): Hah! And remember that's an Experience roll, too.

It is important that you know what you can ask for and what you cannot

Almost anything can be negotiated in a conflict, not just events which have to do with the struggle at hand. Other events,

seemingly unconnected, can be introduced, although if the effects are lasting or removed in time it is good to tie them to a change in the Cosmos or in the Themes. Further, the Heart and the Mistaken can ask for Aspects to be added, removed, or changed; Themes to be exhausted; and the Cosmos to be shifted. Either can ask for an additional roll for Experience.

The following things can only be asked for when the knight is a Veteran (has a Weariness score): The death of a protagonist, which only the Heart may ask for and only with a **BUT ONLY IF** statement; and the destruction or transformation of the whole or most of the world, which only the Mistaken may ask for and also only with a **BUT ONLY IF** statement (characters on other protagonist's Cosmos are only affected at the discretion of the players who guide them).

If you are using another protagonist as part of a scene (or even if you aren't), either active player can include that protagonist in their statements, but only with the permission of that protagonist's Heart.

No player can ever ask for the following things: Values cannot be changed. Themes may not be refreshed. Guides cannot be changed, and neither can any other rules of the game. If you have asked for one thing already this scene, and it has been denied, you can't ask for it again (and generally it is bad form to ask again until things have really changed dramatically). No requests that are purely unrelated to the game (money, favors, dares) can be requested.

And, of course, the Mistake may never be wholly repealed nor resolved.

EXAMPLE: *Early in Sir Mirzam's story-arc, he is struck down in a great autumn battle against the demonic host. Left for dead on the field, his case seems hopeless, but because he is not yet a Veteran, Paul (his Heart) cannot ask for his death.*

*Later, after Mirzam's Zeal has run out and he has become a Veteran, he finds himself in a duel with the Solaris Knight atop of Tallstar remnant. Because Mirzam is a veteran, Paul can ask for Mirzam's death with a **BUT ONLY IF** statement. Carrie (the Mistaken) still cannot ask for his death.*

Some Advice for the Heart and the Mistaken

Don't ever ask for things that you don't want to see in play! There can be a temptation to get the other player to back down by making a big **BUT ONLY IF...** statement. This is fine, but make sure that its something that you don't mind happening.

Be considerate to the Moons. If they really want something to happen, try to advocate for them if you can. Likewise, don't offer up particularly inappropriate Themes in the hope that they will be accepted. That just wastes everyone's time.

But do go for the throat. If you ask for big things, you just might get them. See how far you can push the other player before they back down. Remember that a story is only good if the players are emotionally engaged in it, and nothing drives emotional engagement like hard choices.

At the same time, know when it's over. When you're happy with the outcome, don't push it too much. Saying **AND THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED** lets everyone get back to playing out the scene.

If the events in play would cause a change to the Cosmos or the Aspects of the character's Themes, make sure to include that in your statement. Anything you want to be important long-term should be reflected on the record sheet, somehow. Generally speaking, if what you're asking for has long-term effects or will only be important in the future, it should be reflected as an Aspect or a change to the Cosmos or both.

Get advice from the Moons. If you're stuck for an idea of what sort of statement to make, ask the Moons! They almost certainly have ideas of their own.

Don't get advice from your opponent. If you ask your opponent what they would be happy with, or what they want you to ask, the entire conflict system breaks down. So don't do it. Make them sweat a little.

Some Advice for the Moons

Be fair. Remember that your role is as judges, not as participants. If a Theme is appropriate, don't reject it just because you don't like where that player is going with the challenge. Try to judge

Themes based on whether or not they apply to the situation at hand. (For instance, if the knight is fighting demons, of course their starlight sword applies. Likewise, if a secondary character is present in the scene, the knight can obviously use his Fate with her.) At the same time, don't be afraid to ask for a second Theme or just deny the usage if it really doesn't apply to the situation.

If you are called upon to decide which Value applies to a conflict, you should also try to decide impartially. Ice conflicts have to do with things which are beyond the knight, or social connections, etc. Light conflicts have to do with the knight himself and his own abilities. If you absolutely cannot decide, you should choose whichever is most advantageous to the knight.

Engage as audience. Conflicts are really fun to watch, and feedback is good for creativity. Talk about what's going on while the others are involved. Gasp, clap, or laugh when you're impressed.

Give advice. If either player seems stuck for an idea, start tossing out things that they could use. There's no rule against suggestions. Your job is to keep things running smoothly, after all.

Make sure all the statements play out. If, after a conflict is over, people seem to be skipping over a statement that was confirmed during the conflict, gently remind them of it and offer suggestions for how they might work it into play.

Finally, you must know what happens after

When conflict ends, you can end the scene right there by saying **AND SO IT WAS...** or you can go back to free play. Often, a scene will have lots of little conflicts, but sometimes you also get one big conflict that really ends the scene.

When you go back to free play, you can play out the events you have just negotiated, or you can simply acknowledge that they happened and move on. Either way is fine, and you'll probably use both at different times, depending on your group's tastes and the needs of the scene.

AND SO IT WAS...





FACING:

*Trapped in the south, a young knight bargains
with Leviathan for return to his homeland..*



FIFTH AND FINALLY, HOW THE STORY MOVES AND HOW IT ENDS

Let's discuss how the rules of this chapter are a little different

All the rules of the game that we have discussed so far have dealt with immediate play — the Cosmos guides you in making conflict, the Themes in furthering it, the Values in resolving it, and so on. The rules in this chapter are different: they do not necessarily influence play on a moment to moment basis. Rather, they are about how protagonists change and grow, how storylines move towards their final tragic endings and what shape that ending might take.

These sorts of rules take some getting used to, but they are the key to a satisfying game. Make sure that at least one of your players understands all the rules in this chapter before you start play.

What is Experience, and when does it happen, you ask?

Experience marks the progression of the knight from a untested novice, full of zeal and will to fight, to a seasoned veteran, skilled but weighed down by the horrors he has seen. Experience is checked whenever one of two things happens:

- * The Heart loses a roll in conflict. It does not matter who called for the roll.
- * The protagonist acts in some way that is indicative of sympathy for a demon or the demons as a whole, hatred of a person or the people as a whole, apathy, callousness, cynicism, doubt, or despair. If there is an argument about what counts for Experience, the Mistaken makes the final decision.

You can roll Experience right when you see it, or you can wait until the end of the scene to roll for it. If you do the second, make sure to count each separate instance of Experience — it is possible to get a great amount of Experience from a single scene.

For an example of the first type of Experience, see pg 74.

EXAMPLE: The scene is focusing on Subail, after her fiancee Fomolhaut has been taken away by the host of the Mistaken.

PAUL (FULL MOON, PLAYING A FELLOW KNIGHT):

Come, Subail, let us go and win back your betrothed from the foul things that have taken him.

EMILY (HEART): No. You may go, but I will not.

PAUL (FULL MOON): Not go! Why?

EMILY (HEART): Why should I care for him? He is not the one I love.

RICK (MISTAKEN): Hey, Emily, that sounds like Experience to me.

EMILY (HEART): Yup, sounds like it to me, too. Let's roll.

How to roll for Experience and the results thereof: Advances and Refreshes

Whenever Experience occurs, the Heart rolls a die.

If the number showing is lesser than or equal the protagonist's Zeal or Weariness Value, the result is an advance. Add one to either the Ice or the Light Value, remembering that the highest possible Value is a five. If the knight is a Novice, subtract one from Zeal. If the knight is a Veteran, add one to Weariness. Look at the knight's Aspects. If there are any that no one really cares about, the sort that probably haven't been invoked since the last advance, consider removing them. If the knight has less Aspects than you'd like, now is a great time to add more.

If the number showing is greater than the protagonist's Zeal or Weariness Value, the result is a refresh. Refresh all exhausted Themes, for both the Heart and the Mistaken.

EXAMPLE: Continuing the last example, Emily is rolling Experience for her character Subail. Subail's Zeal Value is a 2. Emily rolls the die and the result is a 1. One is less than two, so Subail will Advance. Subail's Zeal drops to 1. Emily chooses to raise Subail's Light from 3 to 4, and everyone else agrees that that is fine. She doesn't really see a need to adjust any of Subail's aspects, so she doesn't.

If she had rolled a 3 or higher, she would not have changed her Values at all, and would have instead refreshed all expended Themes (both Heart and Mistaken).

How Novices become Veterans

If the protagonist has a Zeal score of one and rolls an advance, special rules apply.

First, add one to both Ice and Light, instead of just to one.

Second, replace the protagonist's Zeal Value with a Weariness Value, rated at one.

Third and most importantly, in the next scene the knight must encounter the Frost Maiden or the Solaris Knight, and in that scene must learn from them of the doom of all knights to betray their cause. At the point where the knight learns of this, add Aspect "Betrayal of the People" to the knight's Fate Theme.

The knight is now considered a Veteran. Previously off-limits statements can be made in conflict (about protagonist death and the end of the world). Weariness is subtracted, rather than Zeal added, to challenge values. The knight has begun her slow slide towards corruption or death.

EXAMPLE: Later, Subail faces another Experience roll. Her Zeal is one, so only a result of one will result in an advance but, eventually, it happens.

Her Ice and Light Values both increase by one — Her Ice to two, and her Light to five. Her Zeal has vanished entirely, never to return, but she gains a Weariness Value that starts at one.

Emily writes Betrayal of the People with Subail's other Fate aspects. Now that she is done with the Advance, play can continue. Rick jumps right into framing the next scene.

AND SO IT WAS that Subail, wandering in the wastes, came across a frightened girl, huddled in the snow. The girl looks up at you and snow falls from her lips as she says, "I will not let you take him from me."

How they died

After their protagonist becomes a Veteran, at any point, in any conflict, the Heart can now say "BUT ONLY IF [protagonist's name] dies," which was previously not allowed. Generally, this applies to the Heart's protagonist, but it can apply to another protagonist if their own Heart consents. The Mistaken can

never make this statement, and need not grant it.

After this the knight is dead, and beyond the reach of the people and the demons forever. The character cannot continue in play, but please do take some time to go over her story, think about it, talk about it, and keep the sheet that records it. You can make a new protagonist to fill in the gap or just carry on with one less.

EXAMPLE: And so it was that Sir Mirzam faced down with the Solaris Knight on the very top of the Tallstar remnant.

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): So, you're fighting back and forth, with lightning slashes and parries, right? Every time your swords meet, great flames are leaping up from his sword, and they rise in the sky and become aurora, blotting out the stars. Just as the last star vanishes, he brings his sword down on yours in a beat attack, and your sword shatters into a thousand pieces. You lose the Starlight Sword Blessing.

PAUL (HEART): BUT ONLY IF the central shard of the sword drives through his chest, pinning him to the spot forever.

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): BUT ONLY IF his blood seeps into the remnant, corrupting its people.

PAUL (HEART): Whoa... BUT ONLY IF I die.

EMILY (FULL MOON): Wow... Are you sure?

PAUL (HEART): *nods.*

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): AND THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED.

PAUL (HEART): Can I end the scene? AND SO IT WAS that Mirzam died, his corpse slumped over the Solaris Knight that he had imprisoned, their blood mingling together and tainting his home, under a starless winter sky...

RICK (NEW MOON): Wow.

EMILY (FULL MOON): That was cool.

CARRIE (MISTAKEN): Yeah, it was a little unexpected. Do you have a new character?

PAUL (HEART): Yeah, I thought I'd make a new guy right now, if the rest of you don't mind...

And how they fell

Four is the highest possible value for Weariness. If, while this Value is at four, the Heart rolls an advance, that protagonist has finally given in to his frustration and pain and turned against the people. The character has become a demon and can no longer be considered a protagonist. As with when a character dies, take time to reflect on the character's tragic fall. If you wish, the Heart or the Mistaken can frame one last scene focusing on this protagonist which shows the exact moment of his descent.

But, even though the character has turned permanently to a foul demonic creature, it does not mean that the character has left play. This character, a former protagonist, must now return to play as a demonic antagonist. Further, whenever the character is present in a scene, the character's old Heart still guides him.

Just the same as when a character dies, you can make a new protagonist to fill in the gap or continue play with one less.

EXAMPLE: Subail, now a seasoned Veteran with a Weariness Value of 4, plunges into the Mistake itself during the Autumn crusade. She fights demon after demon, never falling, until finally, before her, she sees, though the mists, an armored figure with a sword that shines as bright as the sun — the Solaris Knight.

EMILY (HEART): *Subail stands up to full height, bleeding from all of her wounds but still strong. She points her sword at the Solaris Knight and says, "Even if it means my death, I will destroy you."*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *He reaches up and throws off his helmet. You recognize Fomolbaut. "Kill me if you will," he says.*

EMILY (HEART): *Don't think that love will protect you. I never loved you.*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *I know you never loved me. But I loved you. I loved you while you were in El Nasl's arms. I loved you when you abandoned me to the Mistaken. I loved you, and at every turn you spited me, and I loved you still, and still I love you now. He drops his sword and holds out his arms.*

EMILY (HEART): *I run him through.*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *I think that's Experience, for callousness. Right?*

EVERYONE: *nods*

Emily rolls the check, and gets an Advance. Subail has fallen into corruption.

EMILY (HEART): *I think that she stabs him through to the bilt and he falls on top of her.*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *He gently strokes your hair and says "my love..."*

EMILY (HEART): *And, as he is dying, I embrace him. AND SO IT WAS.*

RICK (MISTAKEN): *Whew...*

PAUL: *I'm going to add Subail to Arneb's Mistaken section. Is that cool?*

CARRIE: *Are you going to start a new Protagonist?*

EMILY: *Yeah... I don't know.*

RICK: *That was pretty intense stuff. Why don't we take a break for a bit?*

EMILY: *Sounds good. And I don't think I'll make another character just yet. I want to think through Subail's story before I start another one. We'll see how it goes.*

And that is all

There is no more of Polaris that I can show you. From now on, you must discover it yourself, by playing the game.

AND SO IT WAS...

BUT THAT ALL HAPPENED LONG AGO, AND NOW THERE ARE NONE WHO REMEMBER IT.







PREVIOUS:

*Two knights, a novice and a veteran,
ride demonic steeds into battle.*



APPENDIX 1: VARIANT RULES

At times, you will find that various circumstances prevent you from using the Polaris rules as they stand. In these cases, please make use of these variant rules as you would.

If you have three players

For optimal Polaris play, you simply must have four players. However, if you are desperate to play a game and can't find the last player, a perfectly satisfactory game can be achieved with only three players, if you change around the rules a little bit.

In a three-player game of Polaris, the role of the Full Moon and the New Moon is combined into a single player, called the Moon, who guides all the people and beasts that are not actively antagonistic to the protagonist, and has all the other responsibilities of both the Full Moon and the New Moon.

The protagonist record sheet is changed, as well — the outer is divided into two parts, Mistaken on the left, Moon on the right. Similarly, the Moon sits to the right of the Heart, the Mistaken to the left.

If you have five or six players

Perhaps you are truly blessed and have enough friends eager to play your game that you exceed the four required to play. In this case, the best device is to simply split into multiple groups of three and four players (perhaps sharing the same setting events?) However, if you have exactly five players, this clearly will not do. For those players, the following variant rule is present.

One player, usually the one two seats to the right of the Heart, is chosen to be the Dummy. The Dummy has no guidance over anything, and need not even be present when the scene is being played. If desired, other players can loan guidance over particular characters to the Dummy for the duration of the scene.

The Dummy is also a good person to take notes on the game, get tea and snacks, etc. Such things are left to the individual group to decide.

This may be expanded to a six-player variant, with two Dummy players per scene (one two seats to the left, one two seats to the right), but at the cost of the some slowness in game play. More than six players is emphatically not recommended.

If you have unexpected guests

If you have a friend who wants to come and watch your ongoing Polaris game, you should by all means welcome them to join in. However, the structure of the game seems to prevent participation by a newcomer.

The simple resolution to this is, rather than giving them a protagonist, have each player loan them guidance over specific characters. This allows them reasonably full participation in the game without disrupting the pre-existing structure.

If one player simply cannot arrive

If one player cannot, for whatever reason, arrive at the game, your best option is simply to play some other game — I heartily recommend Universalis for such occasions. If you simply must play Polaris, you can play as such.

Focus on the protagonists whose Heart and Mistaken are both present. All the third player to play any characters in any Moon section of the Cosmos. In addition, you might want to allow the Moon to start and end scenes with the AND SO IT WAS key phrase. It is highly ill-advised to play scenes without both the Heart and the Mistaken present.

Make sure that you record what happened, so you can brief the errant player when she returns.

If you have an inconsistent group

If you can't get a constant group of friends to meet to play your game, even irregularly scheduled, Polaris is probably not the game for you. However, if you still really want to play, you might consider this variant: don't associate a particular protagonist with a particular set of players in any way.

To play like this, you must first build a pool of 2-6 protagonists. Whenever you start a session of the game, distribute the sheets

to players via consensus, a draft, or perhaps randomly. Allow the seating at the time to determine who fills the roles of the Moons and Mistaken. All assignments are temporary and only last for that one session of play.

This will give you a much more disjointed story, and perhaps not as satisfying, but if it sounds appealing, give it a try.

If you want for more focus

A great way to start the game is to only have one or two protagonists. Assign guidance as normal, but not every player will take on every role. This allows you to test out the game and move through a story more quickly, and new protagonists can always be introduced if you see the need.

Likewise, there is no saying that each player can only be Heart for one protagonist. A game with more than four protagonists could also be interesting, if slow moving.

If you are not patient

A Polaris storyline is long. On average, it will take around 27 times checking Experience to take a knight all the way into corruption, 14 to get to veteran status. Depending on your group, this might be a very long time, and some players might want to end their story more quickly. If this is the case, try this variant, which should result in a story about half as long.

When checking for Experience, a roll of 1-3 indicates an Advance, and a roll of 4-6 indicates a Refresh, regardless of the knight's Zeal or Weariness value.



APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLE ASPECTS

Remember that these Aspects are merely examples, and that you can (and should) think up your own for your own characters as well.

Example Office Aspects

Knight of the Order of the Stars

DESCRIPTION: The character is a Knight Stellar, called or driven into the service of the stars.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You need to find evidence in an investigation. You use your role as a knight to gain special privilege. You are performing some action characteristic of knights and the Order.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: Someone brings up the Knights' bad reputation. The terrible doom of all knights confronts you. You discover something terrible about the past of the Order. You are fighting the Frost Maiden or the Solaris Knight.

SPECIAL RULES: Automatic Aspect

Matriarch of Yildun

DESCRIPTION: The Yildun are a numerous clan, particular influential in the Southreach orchestra, and you are their senior member, due great respect and appreciation.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: Using the support of your family. Ordering family members around. Taking care of family business. Using the prestige of your family name to your advantage.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: You are betrayed by a family member. You have to deal with your family's bad reputation. You have to take care of an irresponsible family member.

Sole Heir of Kaus Borealis

DESCRIPTION: You are the only Kaus Borealis left living, the sole heir of the ancient heritage of royal philosophers that was

near exterminated by their cousins, the Kaus Australius.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: Calling upon the strength of your ancestors. Reciting your lineage to impress others with your ability. Recalling bits of family history.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: You are alone, without kin in the world, and your solitude is turned against you. Someone brings up a mad relative in conversation. Someone mentions that Kaus Borealis was involved in the construction of the First Calendar.

Aide to Senator Altair

DESCRIPTION: You are employed as a clerk and aide to the aging and senile Senator Altair. While he was renowned in his youth for his political savvy and dashing rhetorical skills, he is long since past his prime, and in truth much of the work of his senatorial appointment falls into your hands.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You utilize the power of your employer to call on a favor. You intimidate someone with your office. You use your busy schedule as an excuse to escape a boring conversation. You find a secret bill of law amongst the senator's papers. You can turn the senator's interests towards your own.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: The job takes up too much of your time. You are pinned for a scandal. Senator Altair comes under attack. Papers that need signing follow you everywhere (even into battle.) The aging man suffers from a wasting disease. In his senility the senator mistakes you for a demon. Your hands are grimy with the sly manipulations of the political realm. Someone mentions that no modern person really cares about politics

SPECIAL RULES: If you lose this position, this Aspect either becomes Former Aide to Senator Altair or perhaps something else.

Exile

DESCRIPTION: Whatever your crime or supposed crime, perhaps as simple as unfashionable gossip or perhaps so terrible that there are not words to speak of it, you have been exiled from the society of your remnant, or perhaps the society of

the people altogether. Bitter and alone, you wander the wastes. None, not even your fellow knights, will take you in or give you solace. Perhaps you have considered a desperate voyage south, or a desperate strike into the heart of the Mistake, for either death would be preferable to this slow torment. Or perhaps you have reconciled yourself to your solitude, and draw strength from it.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You are called upon to be alone. Since you are separated from society and its judgments only you can do what is right. You must flee from the sight of people. You maintain a quiet dignity even in your solitude. You have learned from your mistakes. Your desperation spurs you to do great things. You need to survive alone.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: All that look upon you fear and hate you. Even your brother knights turn from you. You must flee from the sight of people. You are depressed and moody about your past. You take vengeance upon the remnants. You believe the Frost Maiden when she whispers that she alone still loves you.

SPECIAL RULES: If the character is ever accepted into society, this Aspect vanishes.

Renowned Champion

DESCRIPTION: You are hailed amongst the greatest of knights, a wonder of the Sun Age, true hero to the people and champion of the stars. Those that love the knights decorate the ground you tread with tears and cries, and even those that hate your order give you a grudging respect and even genuine concern. Your brother knights love your company, and are honored to serve next to you if they get the chance, for you have rescued them time and again from the clutches of the Mistaken. The stars themselves shine with your glory. Maidens faint at a taste of the air that has run through your hair, and poets are dumbstruck by your valor.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You must perform the greatest of tasks. You are called upon to speak in public. You must help the needy or lift up the fallen. Your reputation precedes

you. You go courting. You lead a thousand knights into battle and execute it perfectly. You seek the help of those that call themselves your enemies and find it despite your differences. You are beloved by everyone.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: You are beloved by everyone. All you want to do is get some rest. All you want to do is handle your own affairs, without assistance. You are pestered by a thousand relentless suitors. Everyone is so concerned for your well-being that they will not let you risk yourself in battle. You doubt yourself. You have nightmares about failure. All the things that are said about you are lies. Across a crowded battlefield, the Solaris Knight points his blazing blade at you, smiles, and beckons you to duel.

Keeper of the Leftmost Museum

DESCRIPTION: You are, at least in theory, charged with the care and keeping of the priceless artifacts housed within the Leftmost Museum at Tallstar remnant.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: Use the mysterious lore of those Dark Age artifacts. Grant or take away access to the Museum. Any conflict that occurs within the Museum. Leverage your position for political favor.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: Your duties distract you. Someone mentions that no one goes to museums in these modern times, anyway. Your underlings are stealing items and replacing them with fakes.

SPECIAL RULES: If you are ever stripped of your rank, this Aspect becomes “Former Keeper of the Leftmost Museum.”

Example Fate Aspects

Fates are events, actions, people, places or organizations that are tied, irrevocably, into your story. They can be very loosely grouped into Events, Ideas, and Relationships.

Event: Betrayal of the People

DESCRIPTION: You are a Knight of the Order of the stars, and your doom lurks closer by the hour — those among you who do not fall in the bloody sieges of spring and the bloodier crusades of autumn will turn against the people, becoming demons yourselves. Once, that fate was long-off and easily ignored, but now it lurks within your heart and nightmares. The turned faces of friends confront you on the battlefield, and you cannot dare to hope that you will be more valorous.

HOW IT AIDS AND HINDERS YOU: You are fighting a fallen knight. You are tempted to turn against the people. You are preventing a knight from falling. One amongst the people or the mistaken names your doom.

SPECIAL RULES: All knights obtain this Aspect when they become Veterans.

Event: A Mysterious Disappearance

DESCRIPTION: No one knows what became of poor Altinak, that day that she visited your study and vanished before she could return. It seemed that she had vanished like mist before sunlight, here one moment and gone the next.

Do you already know the truth? Are you committed to uncovering it? Perhaps you will learn that Etzlitotec is at fault, or perhaps it was you who caused her vanishing? Is she dead or in hiding or something stranger?

HOW IT MIGHT AID OR HINDER YOU: You are investigating the disappearance. Others ask you about it. There are others who are disappearing in similar manners. The demon that confessed to you was a ruse within a ruse. You know the truth, but no one will believe you.

Event: The Fall of Kerhab

DESCRIPTION: Kerhab was a knight, a guide in the outer wastes, a slayer of great demons, and a credit to her order. But in one moment something changed, and she will be remembered by the people not for her great deeds but for her horrific betrayal and the terrible price that she paid for it.

Has it already come to pass, or does it lie in the future? Were you the cause of her downfall, her antagonist as she turned, the witness to her failure, the bard of her corruption; or were you the last to love her, even as she fell? Perhaps you were all this, and more. As we start to play with this aspect, we do not know.

HOW IT MIGHT AID OR HINDER YOU: The seeds of Kerhab's downfall are revealed. You confront Kerhab about her corruption. You defend her against the charges and accusations, even when they are true. As you hold her hand in yours, there is a cold pink slime beneath the surface of her skin. You give her the water, anyway.

Event: Reuniting the Kaus

DESCRIPTION: Torn by ancient but not forgotten feuding, the Kaus families have split into the Borealis, Australius, and Media branches, all of whom violently hate each other. Despite the fact that the Kaus Australius slew all of your clan in a petty power-play, you have nonetheless vowed that, as the last of Kaus Borealis, you will reunite your wayward family and turn their strength and anger against the mistaken.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You have an ally for your noble goal, a member of a Kaus family thinks kindly of you for it, you have a good opportunity to achieve your goal. You suffer ridicule for your idealism. The members of Kaus Australius oppose your goals. Your single-mindedness drives you onward, ignoring or deserting other crises.

SPECIAL RULES: If this Aspect is rendered impossible or completed, it may be changed into another similar sort of goal, preferably an appropriate one.

Relationship: Rischia, Maiden of the Midmost Hall

DESCRIPTION: Rischia, hailed in song and poetry as the greatest beauty of the Sun Age, has had suitors travel two remnants and gift her with priceless rubies merely for the privilege of a moment in her sight. But she cares not for these suitors, wealthy and powerful and handsome as they may be, for she already has found her true love — you, a common knight. But, although you know she is beautiful and kind, you cannot find it within yourself to love her back, and so your romance lingers, unspoken and rotting, between the two of you.

HOW IT AIDS AND HINDERS YOU: Rischia is involved in the conflict — either she is in danger, or is fighting you, fighting alongside you, or is, in some other manner, at stake in the conflict.

Relationship: Asmidike, Your Father

DESCRIPTION: Your father was a knight. Though you never saw him, and only heard tell of his exploits from others in the Order, you always imagined that he was the greatest among the champions and, even as your mother disparaged the Knights Stellar, you came to love them even more through the absent image of your father.

HOW IT AIDS AND HINDERS YOU: Your father is involved in the conflict—either she is in danger, or is fighting you, fighting alongside you, or is, in some other manner, at stake in the conflict.

Relationship: Etzlitotec, the Princess of Spring

DESCRIPTION: Clad in the skins of the people she has slain, wielding a knife of burning obsidian, Etzlitotec is a great princess among the demons, the first to emerge from the mistake come springtime, slaughterer of ten thousand people, all victims of her fecund savagery. Plants and flowers sprout behind her as she walks, and while her masks are capable of deception, her true face is always curled into a scream of terrible agony. She has lived in secret among the people from time to time, and in that time has come to know you, just as you have come to know her. Once, you swore that you would rid the ice of her corruption, but as you hunt her, you have come to understand her. And, perhaps, she has also come to understand you. In your darkest dreams,

you fear that she is the only one.

HOW IT AIDS AND HINDERS YOU: You are fighting Etzlitotec, you are tracking her schemes, you are talking to her, she is assisting you, or tempting you.

Idea: The Greatest Knight

DESCRIPTION: It is not enough to be a great warrior, defending your people from the Mistake, and sacrificing yourself for the good of the whole. You must be the best knight, at whatever cost.

HOW IT AIDS AND HINDERS YOU: You strive to fight on even when all your companions have failed. You volunteer for the most dangerous mission. On Crusade, you plunge headlong into the Mistake. You pick fights with your fellow knights, testing who is the strongest. You cannot abide defeat lightly. The Solaris Knight smiles as he lays his hand on your shoulder and tells you of true power.

Idea: The South

DESCRIPTION: The mysterious South! Tales of its contents and myths of its nations have haunted the people since before the Mistake. Now, afterwards, these things that were once whimsical fantasies of the exotic have taken on a tone of desperate hope and desperate fear. Perhaps those people in the South will come to the aid of your people, or perhaps they are simply another form of demon.

Perhaps you will be called to go, perhaps you will discover ancient artifacts brought from their in a forgotten ago, perhaps you have already been and come bearing tidings from it. Whatever its nature, the south tempts you, haunting your dreams and your waking life. It will be important.

HOW IT MIGHT AID OR HINDER YOU: The south comes up in conversation. Someone enquires about your travel or travel plans. You are headed towards the south. You are in the south. Someone has come from the south, with a desperate message for you. You are bearing a message from the south. You find evidence of old and forgotten treaties with the Empire of Tass.

Example Blessing Aspects

Blessings are all gifts of stars — strange artifacts with mysterious powers. Those gifted with them intuitively understand how to use them, but others may not (unless they, also, have the appropriate Aspect.)

Starlight Sword

DESCRIPTION: A shimmering, transparent sword of starlight appears in your hand whenever you need it (faintly colored red, blue, or white). It is perfectly sharp, and sings slightly as it moves. (Some knights keep their swords hung at their belts. No one knows why some knights have permanent swords and others don't.)

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You are fighting something in melee combat. You gesture with your sword and all conversation stops at the pure tone. You hold up your sword as a symbol of your knighthood.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: The demon you are fighting is immune to your sword. You accidentally hurt a companion with your sword.

SPECIAL RULES: Automatic

Breathsuit

DESCRIPTION: A thin jumpsuit with a heavy visor and breathing mask. The food and water stores inside allow you to survive for a great time.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You need to breathe in a hostile environment, you need protection against the elements, you need to survive for a long time without food.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: The breathsuit has a leak. The ugly image of the mask frightens a would-be ally. The taste of food has become dry and dull to you. You choke suddenly.

Loyal Steed Shackleton

DESCRIPTION: You have in your possession one of the great steeds of the people, a creature by the name of Shackleton, a trained jumper, with long, graceful legs and chitin proof against demon

claws. He carries you swiftly over the ice and fights beside you in battle with terrible claws and mandibles. But most importantly he is a silent, listening companion in your darkest hours.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You need to get somewhere fast. Shackleton aids you in battle with his sharpened claws. A mighty leap takes you to the top of some ruin. He provides comfort in a long journey

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: Shackleton needs to hibernate, eat or mate at an inconvenient time. He is easily distracted. His armor and visage scare off the more delicate amongst the people. He will not obey your commands, and bolts.

Greater Starlight Weapon

DESCRIPTION: Your starlight weapon takes the form of a larger sword, or some other sort of weapon, or a bow and arrows, or is bolts of starlight that you throw from your hands.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: Just as a Starlight Sword might aid, but take into account the different form. A starlight bow will be useful at different times than a starlight sword.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: See above.

SPECIAL RULES: Replaces the Starlight Sword Aspect.

My Father's Sword

DESCRIPTION: Your father's fall is still unspoken amongst the knights, whispered about only in the darkest parts of the dawn, when neither sun nor the stars can see those that speak of the terrible things that he did, and the black marks it put upon the sword that you now wield. It is tainted, even to look upon: It casts a rippled and shadowy light and is shot through with crystals the color of obsidian. Can you redeem the blade or are you lost to it already?

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: Just as a Starlight Sword might aid you. The insatiable hunger of the darkness devours your foes. As you kill the demon, the taint begins to wash away. You are killing the people. The darkness blots the sun from your vision. Despite it all, you act with honor. Though the sword screeches for murder, you do not touch it.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: The sword is recognized and feared. Your father haunts your waking. In battle, you turn on your allies. As you draw it forth, the horde of Mistaken look upon it and each cowers in honor of the blade.

SPECIAL RULES: Replaces the Starlight Sword Aspect.

Wings of the Stars

DESCRIPTION: You have a great glider, a pair of wings crafted out of ice, rigid and smooth, and with them you soar through the skies like the gulls of the south. Though your flights cannot last forever, many hours can pass before you finally have snow beneath your feet again.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: In battle, you circle around, perhaps bombing, perhaps fighting those things that haunt the air. You escape by leaping from a high place. You must travel far, and quickly. From the high angle, you can see what others cannot see. As the demon dies, the ground gives way, and you are left floating in the air.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: The wings crack or crumble at some odd moment. You are too close to the sun, and they melt. You are too close to the stars, and driven mad by their beautiful songs. Bulky and awkward, the contraption makes it hard to maneuver on the ground.

Memory Crystal

DESCRIPTION: Beginning as a clear crystal, it gradually turns blue or red as information is stored in it. It can return the information as text, images (both flat and spatial), or even as a dull, flat speech.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: Use the crystal to recall something important. Use the crystal as a trick.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: The crystal contains foul things. The crystal contains incriminating information about you. The crystal lies.

The Call of Home

DESCRIPTION: A tiny contraption of gem and metal, it contains a miniature star that helps the Knight navigate the treacherous wastes.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You need to find something in the wilderness. You need to keep up hope.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: The star points you towards the Mistake.

Bound Companion Arrakis

DESCRIPTION: Bonded to you since birth, Arrakis is your friend and servant, the perfect handmaiden, attendant on your every need before you even wish it in your heart. She followed you into knighthood as your squire and serves you still in that capacity. She is clever, quick, and pretty — ultimately useful and perfectly loyal.

HOW SHE MIGHT AID YOU: She leaps in front of the black knight's sword, protecting you from the final blow. She throws your sword to you from across the room. A sudden cry of "look out!"

HOW SHE MIGHT HINDER YOU: She will not let you go into danger. She clings to you even in the night. She is jealous of your lovers. Others regard your relationship as strange.

Four Birds, Lord of Carrion

DESCRIPTION: Ranked among the twenty-nine fearsome dukes of battle, Four Birds is a demon, foul and miserable, the enemy of the people and the slave of the Mistake. After each battle, he sates himself on the flesh of the weak and the dying, cracking open their marrowy bones while they still live, eating their eyes while they still see, defiling their corpses so that the people will not let them into graveyards. He is terrible and proud and not above mockery, but you have mastered him and bound him into your service with strange and sunlit ritual. Now, he serves you as your steed and servant, and although he is still demon and enemy of the people, he is subject to your will.

HOW HE MIGHT AID YOU: He lifts you off into the air, out of danger. He gives you passage through demon held territory. He advises you about the customs amongst the Mistaken. You see through his eyes. Four birds descend and peck out the eyes of your enemies.

HOW HE MIGHT HINDER YOU: He demands a price that you are not willing to pay. When you see through his eyes, it is blood and madness. You gain his custom of eating carrion. Other knights do not trust you. You have unknowingly let a spy into your midst. He was not so bound to you, after all.

Example Ability Aspects

Abilities represent capabilities of your character — things that he, personally can do. They are roughly categorized into Lore, Technique, Attribute and Skill.

Lore of Demons

DESCRIPTION: You have learned from the Knights about the nature and types of demons, and how to fight them.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You recall something about a demonic weakness, and exploit it. Your use your lore to diagnose a demonic possession, or perform an exorcism.

How it might hinder you: Your lore is incorrect. Demons use your knowledge to manipulate you. Your knowledge separates you from the people.

SPECIAL RULES: Automatic

Lore of the Stars

DESCRIPTION: You are learned in the paths and tones of the stars, their colors and the tunes they weave across the sky. Even the alien stars that rise only in the south are not strange to you, for you have read texts smuggled from those hidden kingdoms in the ancient age of starlight, copied wholesale in their foreign scripts that none among the people can understand.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: If you can see the stars, you will know without question or hesitation your time, position, and the conditions of the knights that bear their burdens. You must give a lecture on the topic before the senate. You are familiar with the ancient libraries. Even in the depths of the wastes, you are never alone. You must comfort a star that is dying in the sky. You are called upon to lead a wedding or a funeral.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: Your preoccupation with studying the stars prevents you from paying attention to the matters at hand. You make a mistake in your calculations. The stars make a mistake in their motion across the sky. Someone mentions that no one has yet done a study of the sun, and you are fascinated by the challenge.

Lore of the Outer Wastes

DESCRIPTION: Those rugged wastes that lie further south than even the Remnants remain mostly unexplored by even the knights, but you are not cowed by such things. You are intimately familiar with the makeup and geography of the southern wastes. Even the changes that they go through every winter are not completely random to you — you have a certain understanding and intuition which pierces through that veil of winter.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You must guide others through the wastes. You must survive in the wastes, yourself. You use your knowledge of the wastes to duck into a crevasse, avoiding the flood of poisoned gas. You are the first to see them coming from the south.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: You spend so much time in the wastes that you have forgotten how to live among the people. Your love and your friends are abandoned. The geography around the demonic citadel is strange, and you stumble. Even all your lore cannot save you in this barren, hostile land.

Technique: Strike from the Shadows

DESCRIPTION: You attack from hiding, allowing yourself more time to study your opponent, and so striking more effectively.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You are fighting someone and can use the trick.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: Your target sees you coming. Someone uses the same trick against you.

Technique: Song of Truth

DESCRIPTION: When you sing, it is a glorious song, and right in the eyes of the empyrean. Lies have no power before your tune — indiscretions are admitted, betrayals exposed, and disguises torn off like ragged flesh. When you are done, no falsehood remains.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You must root out a web of lies and corruption. You are called before a senate committee on false charges. Your superior has become corrupt. Your father finally tells you how your mother died.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: Even you cannot resist your own song. Your wife tells you that she loves another. They blame you and not those that told the lies. You accidentally expose a tactical deception in the midst of battle. You discover that your entire life has been a carefully crafted illusion.

SPECIAL RULES: When the Heart invokes this ability, he must sing, at least a note.

Attribute: Refined

DESCRIPTION: You are, at your core, a refined and distinguished member of the people. You have little taste for the rugged life of the knight, and are capable of appreciating subtleties of music and food that even surpass even the artists that create them.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: Your recognized refinement brings you social benefit. You notice something subtle about music, food, or art that is an important clue. You refuse a temptation that is not sophisticated.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: You miss something important because of your refinement. You are placed in an unacceptable situations. You get flustered.

Attribute: Big

DESCRIPTION: The people are small and thin, slight like rays of starlight, but you are different. You stand nearly two heads taller than the others, and are thick and muscular. You barely fit through the smaller doorways within the remnants, and can carry three other people on your back with ease. Even the Mistaken are mostly smaller than you.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You need to pick up or move something large. You intimidate someone. Alien armor, brought from the south in some forgotten age, fits you perfectly. You stand out in a crowd. Your sword is longer than someone else's. You shatter the ice with a single crushing blow. You barely feel the claws as they strike you.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: You are bulky and awkward. You stand out in a crowd. Other people think you are terrifying, or maybe even demonic. You must kneel to see eye-to-eye with him.

Skill: Musician

DESCRIPTION: You are a musician of no mean skill, attuned to the music of the spheres.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: The sound of the stars gives you some warning. You play music to impress people. The pure sound of your star-music drives back a demon.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: You are overwhelmed by the screaming of the sun. You must stop to play a song and are distracted from your task. Your playing ability proves unworthy to the composition that you have chosen to perform

Skill: Sculptor

DESCRIPTION: You ken the ice. It moves through your guidance to reveal its true and beautiful forms, shaping your hands into shaping its forms — people, cities, stars, and other things that have not been seen before and shall not be seen again. And, just as the ice gives them likeness and shape, the light within reveals something more personal and true, a form beyond shape, a meaning to the thing you have made and what you have made it after. Once, people clamored and waited to be sculpted by you, but now they are afraid of the insight you will show.

HOW IT MIGHT AID YOU: You recognize a form through touch. Your sculpture is renowned. You make a beautiful thing. Your art gives you insight into the nature of some thing. You feel your way effortlessly, even when blind. You speak silently to the ice, and it responds.

HOW IT MIGHT HINDER YOU: Something terrible lurks beneath the ice. Your art is scorned, and no one will look at it. Poseurs badger you about unimportant minutia. You make a horrible thing. Your art gives you insights into the nature of the Mistake. They take your hands. You speak silently to the ice, and it lies to please you.





FACING:

*A group of demons hauls trophies
from the remnants back to the Mistake.*





APPENDIX 3: LUDOGRAPHY

Actual Play:

These are games that were played, whether I played in them or not, that have influenced my design of Polaris. As it is unfortunately impossible to list every participant in each game, they are listed by their game masters or organizers, if possible.

Baker, Megeuy; Baker, Vincent; Boss, Emily Care. Griffin's Aerie

This slightly-famous “Ars Magica” game inspired the player responsibility breakdown, as well as a lot of thought about the nature of RPGs in general.

Gafford, Ethan. Gravity, Vidi Aquam, etc.

Morality in gaming. Morality in gaming. Morality in gaming.

Johnson, Calder. Nocturne Imperium

Calder’s fantasy setting and his fantasy game is a sister to my own. A bitter, sometimes feuding sister, but a sister nonetheless.

Kenney, Adam; Lehman, Ben. Threshold

Adam’s Threshold setting was the source of a lot of the melancholy tone of the setting, and his one-use system was the way I started thinking about players having significant effects in the world with ease.

Yannopolous, Ion. The Great Game

Ion’s conspiratorial game about the nature of the world has a complicated relationship to Polaris.

Essays About Gaming:

Theory and criticism play a big part in my own game design, and I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the essays that influenced me the most.

Baker, Vincent. Doing away with the GM

The guidance system used in Polaris was written directly in response to this article.

Edwards, Ron. GNS and other maters of roleplaying theory

Ron's revolutionary essay about the structure of games as they are played, and how that interacts with game texts, really revolutionized my thinking about games, and pretty much led directly to my design at all. Furthermore, Polaris is distinctly an attempt to write an RPG in a Narrativist style.

_____. Review of Legends of Alyria

Which pretty much blew my mind about what an RPG system is, and how it is so much more than a resolution mechanic.

Lehrich, Chris. Ritual Discourse in RPGs

The key phrases are pretty much directly inspired by this “impractical” essay.

Game texts which influenced me:

All good writers steal. I won’t make a claim to being a good writer, but I’m a thief, and that’s half the battle, at least.

Baker, Vincent. Dogs in the Vineyard

Mormonesque marshals patrol a spiritually alive version of pre-statehood Utah. The social role of the Knights is somewhat similar to Dogs, and if I took some influence from this game’s mechanics it was only for the better.

Ben-Ezra, Seth. Legends of Alyria (forthcoming)

A science-fantasy game of tremendous moral clarity and spiritual depth.

Borgstrom, Rebecca. Nobilis

Godlings struggle to preserve reality from incomprehensible invaders. The tone of beauty and loss in Nobilis is something that I tried to emulate in parts of Polaris, and the Excrucians and Mistaken bear more than a passing resemblance.

Edwards, Ron. Sorcerer

The zeal/weariness progression and story-arc mechanics are pretty much a direct rip from this game of demon-binding and prices. The negotiation mechanics are what I wished the game could have been. The Cosmos is a shocking case of parallel evolution. Demon-binding, mentioned in the aspects, should work like Sorcerer's does. Pretty much everything in this game text can be seen as a direct response to, rip-off of, or achieving similar goals to this impressive game.

Polaris could have been a supplement for Sorcerer.

Gygax, Gary and Arneson, Dave. Dungeons and Dragons

Fantasy characters set out on quests to make their fortunes and confront their dooms. My first introduction to role-playing, I would be remiss to not mention it in my bibliography. Aside from the basic concept of using a game to assist in group-created story, Polaris also takes its particular sense of adventurous wandering straight from D&D.

Knipe, Scott. Charnel Gods

In this Sorcerer supplement, the players are mortals who wield power they cannot control and, in the process of trying to save a world, they will damn it. Sound familiar?

. Wyrd (forthcoming)

A game of telling tragic Norse sagas. A great game, one of the first I read directly targeted at story-telling, and gave me the concept that stories could be tragedies and still be fun. The tone of the game, especially with regards to Zeal/Weariness, owes a great deal to Wyrd.

Norwood, Jake et al. The Riddle of Steel

A game of heroic passion, swords and sorcerers, mighty deeds and glorious heroes. Fates are a direct play off of Spiritual Attributes, and the Knights were first designed for a Riddle of Steel game.

Tweet, Jonathan. Over the Edge

A game of paranoia and conspiracies, famous for its very

flexible and simple mechanics. The self-defined traits are a touch of a nod to Over the Edge, and the game system radically realigned all of my thoughts about games.

Wucjik, Eric. Amber Diceless Roleplaying

This game totally blew my mind, both with respect to character power levels and simplified resolution mechanics.

Brown, Timothy B; Denning, Troy. Dark Sun D&D Setting, 1st edition

An ancient ruined, desert world full of danger and mystery, ruled over by draconian god-king and their corrupt priests. For me, this was the first published setting which was alive with wonder. Polaris draws a lot of the ancient, ruined, blasted tone from Dark Sun, and the same approach to setting mystery that was found in The Wanderer's Journal that accompanied the original rule set.

Related Game texts that I haven't read:

I haven't actually read these games, but just hearing other people talk about them ended up influencing my design a great deal, or perhaps I have just realized that they have shocking similarities.

Stafford, Greg. Pendragon

Heroic knights struggle with their knightly drives and their mortal passions in Arthurian Britain. As far as I know, the first game with numerical representation and morality.

Matheny, Michael E. Hero

I heard about this fantasy board-game after I had finished writing Polaris and boy do I wish I had heard about it earlier, because the mechanism for monster and trap control is pretty much just like my Guidance mechanics.

Tweet, Jonathan. Everway

This new-age game, where mystically-empowered characters explore various planes. I have never had a chance to read this game, and I have only played it in a very simplified form, but

the innovation of mechanics and theory contained is absolutely staggering. It is in this book that Tweet lays out his Karma/Fortune/Drama distinction, and Polaris's conflict resolution is an attempt to do a Drama based system with more structure.

Design Contests and Websites:

Holmes, Mike (Chairman). Iron Game Chef.

Polaris was originally designed for this annual contest, a weeklong frenzy of game mechanics, mutual encouragement, and smack talk. It didn't win, or even place, but the contest was a great experience. <http://www.game-chef.com/>

Nixon, Clinton; Edwards, Ron. The Forge

The Forge is a tremendous community of game designers. Without their incredible support and innovative ideas, Polaris could never have been completed or even begun.

There are, of course, many other things which have inspired the game. However, time and space do not allow me to detail them here in their entirety. <http://www.indie-rpgs.com>

THANKS TO

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Sculpting in Time Cafe in Beijing, where I wrote the first draft, and Salamander Farm, in Plainfield, where I wrote the second draft, a year and a half later and at the opposite side of the world.

Everyone at the Forge, most especially Ron and Clinton.

And you.

LIST OF STAR NAMES

Below is a list of star names, grouped by constellation. Any of these could be used for character names in Polaris, and some players will enjoy using the constellations to create famous alliances, rivalries, thematic, and family ties between the characters.

The names are formatted as such:

PRIMARY NAME / Alternate Versions : Meaning

Constellations are listed alphabetically. Stars within constellations are listed according to scientific ranking, which is generally brightness.

ANDROMEDA / *Andromedae* : the daughter of Cassiopeia

ALPHERATZ / *Sirrah* : the horse or the navel

MIRACH : the loins

ALMACH : the weasel

ADHIL : train of a garment

ANTLIA / *Antliae* : the pump

APUS / *Apodis* : the bird of paradise

AQUARIUS / *Aquarii* : the water carrier

SADAL MELIK : lucky star of the king

SADAL SUUD : luck of lucks

SADACHBIA : lucky star of tents

SKAT / *Scheat* / *Seat* : the shin

AL BALI : the swallower

ANCHA : hip-bone

SITULA : water jar

AQUILA / *Aqualae* : the eagle

ALTAIR : flying one

ALSHAIN : falcon

TARAZED : plundering falcon

AL THALIMAIN : the two ostriches (actually two stars)

ARA / ARAE : the altar

CHOO OR QU : staff

ARIES / *Arietis* : the ram

HAMAL : ram

SHERATAN : the two signs

MESARTHIM : servants

BOTEIN : little belly

AURIGA / *Aurigae* : the charioteer

CAPELLA : she-goat

MENKALINAN : shoulder of him of the reigns

PRIJIPATI : Lord of Creation

MAAZ : he-goat

SADATONI : two young goats

KABDHILINAN : anklebone of the rein-holder

BOOTES / *Bootis* : the oxherd

ARCTURUS : bear-guard

NEKKAR / *Nakkar* : cattleman

SIGNUS : (a bastardized version of Thegius, Medieval

Latin from Arabic

transliteration of Greek “bootes”)

MIRAK / *Izar* / *Pulcherrima* : loins / loincloth

MUPHRID : isolated / lance-bearer's

ALKALUROPS : shepherd's crook

CAELUM / *Caeli* : the graving tool

CAMELOPARDALIS : the giraffe

CANCER / *Cancri* : the crab

ACUBENS : claw

TARF : GLANCE / eye

ASELLUS BOREALIS : northern donkey

ASELLUS ASTRALIUS : southern donkey

TEGMINE : cover

CANES VENATICI / *Canum Venaticorum* : the hunting dogs

COR CAROLI : heart of Charles

CHARA : joy

CANIS MAJOR / *Canis Majoris* : the big dog

SIRIUS : scorching

MIRZAM : (unknown meaning)

MULIPHEIN : TWO CAUSING DISPUTE / swearing an oath

WEZEN : the weight

FURUD : solitary ones

ALUDRA : maidenhood

CANIS MINOR / *Canis Minoris* : the little dog

PROCYON : before the dog
GOMEISA : the bleary eyed
CAPRICORNUS / *Capricorni* : the horned goat
AL GIEDI : goat
DABIH : slaughterer
NASHIRA : she who brings good news
DENEB ALGIEDI : tail of the goat
CARINA / *Carinae* : the keel of the Argo
CANOPUS : Menelaus's helmsman
MIAPLACIDUS : placid waters
AVIOR : (unknown meaning, modern)
SCUTULUM / *Aspidiske* : little shield
CASSIOPEIA / *Cassiopeiae* : the wife of Cepheus
SCHEDAR / *Shedir* : breast
CAPH : palm
TSIH / *Ci* : (whip?)
RUCHBAH / *Rukbah* : knee
SEGIN / *Navi* : (unknown)
ACHIRD : (unknown)
CENTAURUS / *Centauri* : the centaur
RIGEL KENTAURUS / *Rigilkent* : foot of the centaur
HADAR / *Agena* : unknown
MUHLIFAIN : unknown
MENKENT : shoulder of the center
KE KUAN : cavalry officer
CEPHEUS / *Cephie* : a legendary king
ALDERAMIN : right forearm
ALFIRK : flock
ER RAI : shepherd
KERHAH : blaze
THE GARNET STAR
CETUS / *Ceti* : the whale or the menace
MENKAR / *Menkab* : nostril
DIPHDA / *Deneb Kaitos* : frog / tail of Cetus
KAFFALJIDHMAH : cut-short hand
BATEN KAITOS : belly of Cetus
SCHEMALI : northern (branch of the tail)

MIRA : wonderful

CHAMAELEON / *Chamaeleontis* : the chameleon

CIRCINUS / *Circini* : a pair of compasses

COLUMBA / *Columbae* : the dove

PHACT / *Phaet* : dove

WEZN / *Wazn* : weight

ZI / *Dz* : son

COMA BERENICES / *Comae Berenices* : Bernice's lock of hair

CORONA AUSTRALIS / *Coronae Australis* : the southern crown

CORONA BOREALIS / *Coronae Borealis* : the northern crown

GEMMA / *Alphecca* : gem or the broken

NUSAKAN : the two series

CORVUS / *Corvi* : the crown / the raven

ALCHIBAH : tent

KRAZ : unknown

GIENAH : wing

ALGORAB : raven

MINKAR : beak

CRATER / *Crateris* : the cup

ALKES : cup

CRUX / *Crucis* : the cross

ACRUX : first of the cross

MIMOSA : (name of a plant)

GACRUX : gamma of the cross

CYGNUS / *Cygni* : the swan

DENEBO : tail of the hen

ALBIREO : iris

SADR : breast

GIENAH : wing

RUCHBA : hen's knee

AZELFAFAGE: tortoise (originally a part of Lyra)

X-I : the first discovered black hole (not visible)

DELPHINUS / *Delphini* : the dolphin

SUALOCIN : Nicolaus backwards

ROTANEV : Venator backwards

DENEBO OR AL DHANAB AL DULFIM : tail of the dolphin

DORADO / *Doradus* : the goldfish

- DRACO / *Draconis*** : the dragon
THUBAN : snake
RASTABAN : head of the snake
ELTANIN : snake (arabic)
NODUS SECUNDUS / *Altais* : second knot
TYL / *Jin Yu* : Unknown / Goldfish
EDASICH : hyena
GIAUZAR : dragon
ARRAKIS : dancer
KUMA : as last
GRUMIUM : jaw
ALSAFI : cooking tripod
DZIBAN : the two jackals
EQUULEUS / *Equulei* : the little horse
KITALPHA : part of the horse
ERIDANUS / *Eridani* : the river
ACHEMAR : end of the river
CURSA : CHAIR / *footstool* (of Orion)
ZAURAK : boat
RANA : frog
AZHA : hatching place
ACAMAR : end of the river
BEID : ostrich eggs
KEID : broken eggshell
ANGETENAR : curve of the river
FORNAX / *Fornacius* : the furnace
GEMINI / *Geminorum* : the twins
CASTOR : BEAVER / *first twin*
POLLUX : MUCH WINE / *second twin*
ALMEISAN / *Albena* : shining / the mark
WASAT : middle of the sky
MEBSUTA : outstretched
MEKBUDA : pulled in paw
PROPUS / *Tejat prior* : forward foot
TEJAT : FOOT?
GRUS / *Gruis* : the crane
AL NA'IR : the bright

- AL DHANAB** : tail
HERCULES / Hercules : a famous hero
RAS ALGETHI : head of the kneeling one
KORNEPHOROS : club-bearer
SARIN : Unknown
MASSIM : wrist
MARFIK : elbow
CUJAM : club
HOROLOGIUM / Horologii : the clock
HYDRA / Hydrael : a legendary dragon
ALPHARD / Cor Hydrael : solitary / heart of the hydra
MINHAR AL SHUJA : the snake's nose
UKDAH : the knot
HYDRUS / Hydri : the water serpent
INDUS / Indi : the Indian
AL NAIR : bright
LACERTA / Lacertae : the lizard
LEO / Leonis : the lion
REGULUS / Cor Leonis / Kalb : Heart of the Lion
DENEBO LA : tail of the lion
AL GIEBA : forehead
ZOZMA : loin cloth
RAS ELASED : head of the lion
ADHA FERA : curl of the hair
COXA / Chort / Chertan : hip / small rib
ZI CENG : second general
ALTERF : glance
RASALAS : head of the lion
LEO MINOR / Leonis Minoris : the little lion
PRAECIPULA : principal star
LEPUS / Leporis : the hare
ARNEB : hare
NIHAL : camels drinking
LIBRA / Librae : the scales
ZUBEN EL GENUBI : southern claw (of the scorpion)
ZUBEN ESCHAMALI : northern claw (of the scorpion)
MULU-LIZI : man of fire

ZUBENHAKRABI / *Zuban alakrab*: scorpion's claw
LUPUS / *Lupi* : the wolf
MEN : Unknown
LYNX : the lynx
LYRA / *Lyrae* : the lyre
VEGA : the swooping eagle
SHELIAK OR SHELYAK : harp
SULAFAT : tortoise
ALADFAR : talons (with Al Athfar)
AL ATHFAR : talons (with Aladfar)
MENSA / *Mensae* : the table
MICROSCOPIUM / *Microscopii* : the microscope
MONOCEROS / *Monocerotis* : the unicorn
MUSCA / *Muscae* : the fly
NORMA / *Normae* : the carpenter's level
OCTANS / *Octanis* : the octant
OPHIUCHUS / *Ophiuchi* : the snake holder
RAS ALHAGUE : head of the snake
CHELEB / *Celbalrai* : dog of the shepherd
YED PRIOR : western hand
YED POSTERIOR : eastern hand
SABIK : the preceding
MARFIK : elbow
ORION / *Orionis* : the hunter
BETELGEUSE : hand of Al-Jazwa
RIGEL : foot
BELLATRIX : warrioress
MINTAKA : belt (west)
ALNILAM : arrangement of pearls (middle of the belt)
ALNITAK : belt (east)
NA'IR AL SAIF : bright tip of the sword
HEKA / *Meissa* : white spot / shining
THABIT : fixed star
PAVO / *Pavonis* : the peacock
THE PEACOCK STAR
PEGASUS / *Pegasi* : the winged horse
MARKAB / *Marhab* : shoulder

- SCHEAT** : leg
ALGENIB : flank
ENIF : nose
HOMAM : the high-minded man
MATAR : rain
BAHAM : livestock
SADALBARI : lucky star of the excellent one
PERSEUS / Persei : the heroic rescuer of Andromeda
MIRFAK / Marfak : elbow
ALGOL / the ghoul / the demon star
MENKIB : shoulder
ATIK : shoulder
PHOENIX / Phoenicis : the phoenix
ANKAA : (a magical bird)
PICTOR / Pictoris : the painter (or the easel)
PISCES / Piscium : the fish
AL RESCHIA / Rischia : rope
FUM AL SAMAKAH : the fish's mouth
PISCIS ASTRINUS / Piscis Austrini : the southern fish
FOMALHAUT : mouth of the fish
PUPPIS / Puppis : the poop deck (of the Argo)
NAOS : ship
ASMIDISKE : little shield
PYXIS / Pyxidis : the box, the compass or the Argo
RETICULUM / Reticuli : the net (or the optical instrument)
SAGITTA / Sagittae : the arrow
SAGITTARIUS / Sagittarii : the archer
RUKBAT : knee
ARKAB : hamstringing
EL NASL : arrowhead
KAUS MEDIA : bow (middle)
KAUS AUSTRALIS : bow (southern)
ASCELLA : armpit
KAUS BOREALIS : bow (northern)
NUNKI : of Enki
SCORPIUS / Scorpii : the scorpion
ANTARES : anti-Ares (rival of Mars)

GRAFFIAS / *Acra* : claws / scorpion
DSCHUBBA : forehead
SARGAS / *seizer / smiter / weapon of the god of war*
SHAULA : raised tail
JABBAH : forehead
AL NIYAT : the arteries
LESATH / *Lesuth* : sting / bite
JABHAT AL AKRAB : scorpion's forehead
SCULPTOR / *Sculptoris* : the sculptor (originally the studio)
SCUTUM / *Scuti* : the shield
SERPENS / *Serpentis* : the snake
 UNUK AL HAY / *Unukalhai* : neck of the snake
 ZHOU : an imperial dynasty
 ALYA : the tail of a sheep
SEXTANS / *Sextantis* : the sextant
TAURUS / *Tauri* : the bull
 ALDEBARAN : follower
 EL NATH : the butting
 PRIMUS HYADUM : first Hyad
 AIN : eye of the bull
(The following are all in the Pleadies)
 ALCYONE : queen who wards off evil and storms
 ATLAS : he who dares suffers (father)
 ELECTRA : amber
 MAIA : mother / grandmother / nurse
 MEROPE : eloquent / bee-eater / mortal
 TAYGETA : LONG-NECKED
 PLEIONE : SAILING QUEEN (MOTHER)
 CELAENO : SWARTHY
 ASTEROPE : LIGHTNING / twinkling /
 sun-face Telescopium / Telescopii : the telescope
TRIANGULUM / *Tranguli* : the triangle
 MOTHALLAH / *Caput Trianguli* : head of the triangle
TRIANGULUM AUSTRALE / *Trianguli Australis* : south triangle
 ATRIA : height of the triangle
TUCANA / *Tucanae* : the toucan
URSA MAJOR / *Ursae Majoris* : the big bear

DUBHE / *Dubb / Dubb / Alruccabah* : bear
MERAK / *Mirak* : loins
PHAD / *Phecda* : thigh
MEGREZ : insertion point
ALIOTH : black horse / black bull
MIZAR : corruption of “Mirak (loins)”
ALCOR : black horse (?)
ALKAID / *Benetnasch* : the leader / daughters of bier
AL HAUD : the pond
TALITHA BOREALIS / *Dnoces* : third leap of the gazelle
TALITHA AUSTRALIS : third leap of the gazelle
TANIA BOREALIS : second leap of the gazelle
TANIA AUSTRALIS : second leap of the gazelle
ALULA BOREALIS : first leap of the gazelle
ALULA AUSTRALIS : first leap of the gazelle
MUSCIDA: muzzle
URSA MINOR / *Ursae Minoris* : the little bear
 POLARIS : pole star
 KOCHAB / *Kokab* : star
 PHERKAB : calf
 YILDUN : star
VELA / *Velorum* : the sails
 SUHAIL / *Regor* : unknown / “Roger” backwards
 MARKAB : ship
 SUHAIL : unknown
 TIAN KE : heaven’s record
VIRGO / *Virginis* : the virgin
 SPICA / *Azimech* : ear of wheat
 ZAVIJAVA / *Alaraph* : barker’s corner / grape gatherer
 PORRIMA : (Roman goddess of childbirth)
 AUVA : the barker
 VINDEMIATRIX : vine-harvester (female)
 HEZE : unknown
 ZANIAH : corner
 SYRMA : train of a garment
VOLANS / *Volantis* : the flying fish
VULPECULA / *Vulpeculae* : the little fox



General Key Phrases:

- * LONG AGO, THE PEOPLE WERE DYING AT THE END OF THE WORLD. Start the game.
- * BUT HOPE WAS NOT YET LOST, FOR N_ STILL HEARD THE SONG OF THE STARS. Introduce a Protagonist.
- * AND SO IT WAS... begin or end a scene.
- * BUT THAT ALL HAPPENED LONG AGO, AND NOW THERE ARE NONE WHO REMEMBER IT. End the game.

Key Conflict Phrases:

Phrases which add new things:

- * BUT ONLY IF... Suggest some additional event or compensation. Your opponent may respond with any phrase.
- * AND FURTHERMORE... Require some additional event or compensation. Your opponent may respond with any phrase except "IT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE" or "BUT ONLY IF..." You must exhaust an appropriate Theme to say this phrase.

Phrases which remove or reduce things:

- * IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS. Roll to decide the conflict. Conflict ends. May be used at any time.
- * YOU ASK FAR TOO MUCH. Opponent must reduce or change his statement. You may then choose either the new statement or the old one, and respond to it as normal. You must exhaust an appropriate Theme to say this phrase.

Phrases which end Conflict:

- * IT SHALL NOT COME TO PASS: See above.
- * IT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE. Follows "BUT ONLY IF." Your opponent does not get the last thing that he asked for. You do not get the last thing you asked for. Conflict ends. May not be used at the start of a conflict.
- * AND THAT WAS HOW IT HAPPENED. Accept all statements and end conflict.

Phrases which deal with the Moons

- * BUT IT WAS NO MATTER... Negate or oppose a Moon's statement.
- * WE SHALL SEE WHAT COMES OF IT. Take up a Moon's statement as your own.

POLARIS

Protagonist
record sheet

