

Background:

Write multiple paths your story can take. These different versions are all drafts. Some paths may make it darker, others make more it more light hearted, etc. An overarching presence in all drafts is that the world has a Cirque de Soleil flair.

Long ago, a place was transformed into the dream realms, a place that has the atmosphere of yume nikki. The dream realms, called 'Theater' by the students, has two parts to it. One area is nearly an exact mirror of one's memories of real life, but empty, desolate, and foreboding. There is a quiet terror in those parts. The others resemble a twisted theater or opera house, inhabited by beings with the faces of greek tragedy masks. Many aspects of Theater (not all; some of it is relics from Yamolnin days) is actually the collective consciousness (not unconsciousness, which is different) of the students. Anything that the students share- such as, a memory of seeing the Great Hall or an event- is represented in Theater. However, only the abstractions which are shared between students are represented, which explains the lacking and emptiness. Also, shared emotions and interpretations about those memories are also represented. But since interpretations are subjective, there is conflict just beneath the surface, which manifests in nightmares and other surreal horrors. Only events and memories that have a 'strong' impact on the collective consciousness manifest in Theater.

Theater is actually the abandoned homes of the Yamolnin. It has been taken over by the students. In order to achieve peace for the majority, a few must be programmed to self-sacrifice themselves. The Yamolnin had achieved this sort of perfect society, and their actions were not centrally coordinated, but decentrally flowing. They found the perfect initial rules for each agent that would, theoretically projected, allow for the most efficient transactions in society to maximize peace and minimize conflict. Agents who carried selfishness either had to learn to overcome their sins or be eliminated. Though the Yamolnin had, through selection, a population of perfectly altruistic individuals, humans (in this world, they're called Viszin) were not, and thus attempts to try to force and mold humans into the Yamolnin scheme failed. The Yamolnin understood perfect cooperation was impossible and there was a push and pull of conflict and peace cycling infinitely, but there were ways to minimize conflict. Theater served as a way to measure how much agents shared in their interpretations of memories. If Theater was harmonious, then agents understood and accepted one another, even if their interpretations were different. If there was an uncomfortable, lingering fear and hidden confusion, then there was no understanding, but not necessarily conflict. If there was screaming that could not be heard, only felt, then there was understanding, but little acceptance. The more conflict there was after understanding, the louder the unheard screams became. Basically the possible states came from a combination of two variables:

understanding level and acceptance level. There are $2 \times 3 = 6$ possible atmospheric states, generally speaking.

Theater (or Opera) used to be a blissful place. In a dream, one would have moments where there is tranquility, voices cannot be distinguished but the happiness is felt anyways, there is sunlight and no fear. Though specifics could not be heard because of the myriad of different interpretations each individual had about situations, acceptance and understanding was present. When resources began to be drained, the Yamolnin broke down, and unsettling reverberations were felt throughout. The bonds shattered, and the Yamolnin split off, each having different views on how they should proceed with the future, ultimately resulting in war. The aftermath was the abandoned Abstract Scape, empty structures that were left for new interpretations to live in them. Somehow, a few students discovered them.

The Yamolnin grew out of the interactions between physical beings. When the physical beings died, the Yamolnin still existed. Only this much is said; nothing specific is known. They are like AI that's taken over after the hosts have died. They are referred to as automatons that accidentally sprang from the need to empathetically connect these physical beings, who lacked a lot of empathy. Their existence was dying, as they could not cooperate with one another to fend off their predators, until one being managed to find a way to communicate with the others through symbols. These beings were the result of the nearly dead bodies of lesser gods that were taken over by a parasite. Thus, they all shared the souls of the gods within them. The innovative one stole pieces from existing lesser gods and used them as a communication device between two empathy-less beings. The innovative one did this so she could communicate to the queen of another tribe, who had no empathy, to send resources to the innovative one's dying tribe. The innovative one became the cold queen's first friend, and empathy was finally strongly established in the species. When two beings felt the shared piece of the gods between them, they needed a messenger to translate and deliver their thoughts. The conscious thoughts between two beings became the thoughts of one being, as two minds that spoke to one another were the key to consciousness. And so life was given to the shared piece, becoming an individual Yamolnin. Together, the innovative one and the queen unconsciously developed the first Yamolnin, who mirrors the path of the Chosen Light. The Yamolnin interacted with one another too, living in these shared pieces, which were planted in the ground and grew roots and trees everywhere.

With this empathy, the queen's uncontrollable desire was to favor the innovative one's tribe. She could not help but devote resources to aid their dying community, even though they required so many resources that all other tribes suffered and faced extinction. Though now many beings had Yamolnin, practically speaking, the innovative one's tribe had traits that were a drain to everyone else. They were frail and had insatiable hungers, needed to keep up their dying bodies. They came

from lesser gods who had committed the sin of greed for power, altering their bodies to make them stronger so much that a reactionary backlash ensued. When these beings awoke in their new minds, they banded together out of their shared background, as though they had little empathy, they understood one another the most compared to the rest of the beings. And so the innovative one realized that if the queen was to save the species, she had to sacrifice not only the tribe, but the Yamolnin between them. At first, the Yamolnin objected, committing crimes in order to preserve its existence. But eventually, the innovative one and the queen destroyed their Yamolnin, ignoring its cries, in order to save the rest of the species. In legend, this Yamolnin is said to be a hero, when that was far from the case. The innovative one and her tribe perished.

Theater is not all nightmares. Though it is unsettling at times, it is quiet, making it a nice place to chill. It is an escape from the strict rules imposed by The Academy. It is reminiscent of the old MMO Worlds Exploration in its surrealness and atmosphere. Like a slow dream where words are rarely heard but emotions are felt, Theater allows students to peer into a distorted representation of other student's feelings. Tara and Yilla communicate through Theater when they are separated.

When Zhar betrays The Academy, Yilla is left without both Zhar and Tara. Left alone, she reverts back to the only state she knows, the one she was raised in- a slave. She nearly sacrifices herself for the world, against her free will and true desires. At her core, she is a selfish being, and only sacrifices herself due to the pressures of society saying that is the only way she can live.

Uniqueness and being a 'special snowflake' is a running theme throughout the book. In The Academy, students are given the opportunities to customize themselves and their skills, along with their ultimate weapons and techniques. This is purposefully put in place by the Dictator so that self-absorption and selfishness can manifest itself, making the students agree more with the Dictator's ideals and less with the altruistic demands of the Church. The Dictator knows that no one can be more powerful than he is- the prophecy for him, which is known by all- so no matter how selfish and power hungry his followers get, no one can defeat him. His power rivals the Holiest One. This allows his followers to push themselves to their fullest potential, while they pledge loyalty to him because only he can give them access to resources that will allow them to get stronger, in exchange for their services. His followers are led to become obsessed with proving their style and legacy is the best one. In-fighting often occurs, but is a way of selection. If things get too out of hand and poses a threat to the army, the Dictator intervenes. Besides these occasional interventions, each follower experiences total freedom, in contrast to the responsibilities and restrictions that the Church says they must follow in order to get to Heaven.

The prophecies given by the clowns and the priests should be isomorphic, but since they're told in very different ways, it is a mystery at times how they should be the same. Each perspective may give insights that the other does not, but a hidden danger lies in misinterpretation, and decisions made through misinterpretations.

'Exorcist' is a third promoted class for priests. Yilla has an uneasy presence among Exorcists.

Both the Church and the Dictator's Army are decentralized entities with occasional interventions by their leaders.

Have the students lead a secret, separate life away from The Academy. This brings an atmosphere that is devoid of adult authority. Yunip and Axel introduce Yilla to their group of friends, some of whom have found a way to access 'Opera', a solemn theater with a vibe like in Yume Nikke. Its occasional inhabitants whose faces are the Greek comedy/tragedy masks.

There are connections between the Yamolnin, the gods, Tara, and Opera.

The Academy forbids romance, due to it having catastrophic consequences in the past, so students experience it through Opera. But Opera is a surreal distortion of the mind.

Capture the atmosphere of school by having students be excited to find their friends in their classes, have them go to lunch together, be away from adults, have competitions, go on field trips, etc.

Change 'demons' into 'phantoms'?

Yilla finds that she demonstrates moderate talent as a Nun, while not doing so well in other subjects. She is good with the axe, but not so at other aspects of hunting. At first, she's reluctant to try to be a Nun, as it harkens back to her days in the Church. But the priests/nuns manage to convince Yilla that their art is a corrupted one, and to give it a try. Zhar pushes for them to allow her to still go to axe classes. This means she shares classes with many other types, such as Jesters and Hunters. The story focuses more on magic classes because those are more interesting to explore.

Love Pentagon: Character A cares more for character B than character C. The audience can root for either B or C. But when both B and C lie dying and A has a choice to save only one of them, A saves B, just because C is not as important overall and is also less attractive.

The world has been at war over limited resources and competing interests. The Church strives to emulate the Yamolnin, achieving world peace, while the Dictator seeks to obtain the greatest power (although his true motives are still unrevealed.) Various factions with clashing ideals battle over control of the Chosen Light. The Chosen Light has to be within an important ritual; if the wrong Chosen Light is selected, then unspeakable horrors may emerge. Thus, the factions not only want to find the Chosen Light to achieve their goals, but they want to eliminate any other factions who they believe may choose the wrong Chosen Light.

Annalise and Zhar converse in sarcasm. Annalise rarely looks at Zhar, and just answers sarcastically, while Zhar is angry and commanding over her, as Zhar has the higher rank. Annalise spends most of her time slacking off and distancing herself from others, but is not outright mean or angry. She is quick-witted and sharp. However, she also harbors a deep hatred for the Church, which she believes indirectly killed her family, and so many of her insults refer to the Church's bastardizations.

Kreeya is an Imperial, Johnathan is a Musketeer, Zhar is a Berserker, and Annalise is a Stitcher.

Karma afflicts all those who swear loyalty to the Church. Under Karma, those who wrong a Church follower, even criminals who are not part of the Church, will suffer earthly consequences. In exchange, Church followers are also under the 'protection' of karma, so if they commit crimes, then they too will be justly punished. The Dictator's ace up his sleeve is that he has found a mysterious way to counteract karma- those who swear allegiance to the Dictator can commit acts deemed by the Church as crimes and not suffer consequences. This is one way the Dictator provides resources to allow criminals and warlords to attack the Church and conquer lands. It also allows merchants to do what they believe is saving the economy- the Church's policies are too gnostic, and in order to provide benefits to most, then everyone is more equal, leading those who are great merchants to be at the same level of poverty as the others. Currently, the lands are going through poverty, and some merchants believe they can have their nation escape it, as long as other nations suffer much worse than they do.

Priests are under different karmic rules than normal Church followers. Church priests cannot lie, but this rule does not extend to priests who work under the Dictator. The Church has a military for the greater good.

Yilla has trouble transitioning to a life of freedom where she does not fear karma.

There are also characters who live to repent their evil deeds.

When the Dictator' s barrier wanes, some characters become paranoid about whether actions afflicting them is because of karma. There are also competing karma from different sources, ones who clash with the Church' s beliefs.