



## INTRODUCTION

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Godkillers is based off a hybridization of ideas from Rebecca Borgstrom's *Nobilis*, the Matrix movies and a touch of Kult. No surprise that anything touching on those two sources is going to carry the fingerprints of Gnosticism, but hopefully it should be pretty painless.

## PITCH

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In a setting similar to *Nobilis*, the Excrucians are those humans who have escaped from the prison of 'reality' and their relationship to the tree is roughly akin to that of the protagonists of the Matrix films to the Matrix.

## PREMISE

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In any case, one idea that always struck me in reading and playing *Nobilis* was that, honestly, it's pretty horrifying. You're really playing the bad guys of a Gnostic horror story, just with some excellent capacity for denial. It's not hard to construct a scenario where the Excrucians are the good guys, genuinely looking to liberate mankind from this prison.

Given that, outside of reality is the City. It's origin and nature is a mystery, but for those humans who have escaped the confines of their prison find that they have seemingly infinite power to shape reality, with only three limitations. First, they are greatly restricted in their ability to harm one another: no human can die here except by their own hands. Second, the city itself has proven immune to their manipulations, and by extension limits their capacities within its bounds – in the void beyond the city, humans have spun themselves entire worlds. Third, and perhaps most telling,

you are limited by yourself – living things will be mere echoes of your expectations, art will be no greater than the inspiration in your heart, knowledge will only be lies you tell yourself.

This kind of power can break a soul the way the prison never could. The initial wave of temptations lead many down a path that ends in self destruction as they grow more and more jaded with wilder and wilder experience. Those who survive do find a way to deal with this, usually by finding some sort of purpose. Some set out to explore what lies beyond the city (dangerous, since it's hard to say if you are discovering or creating), some dedicate themselves to studying the city itself, and other find more exotic ways to cope, such as wiping their own memories at occasional intervals to keep experience fresh, staying within the bounds of the city to keep limited, or even returning to the prison to experience a world beyond their own imaginings.

By itself, the City seems to be a test of the soul, and that would be enough, but something is amiss.

In the middle of a nondescript courtyard, a tree grows out of the foundations of the city, sending cracks running through the seemingly indestructible stones, running in fine lines and fractures far further throughout the city than they should. From anywhere in the city, the way to the tree can be found by following the cracks.

This is the World Tree, and it is humanity's prison, or so some say. It is from here that the humans of the City escaped, and like the city itself, it resists the power of these human gods.

Those who have escaped may return to the tree, and they possess great power within it

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(though not so great as without) but they do so at great risk. The nobles, gods and guardians of the world tree resent their invasion and seek to destroy any returning humans.

There are some that argue that the tree is humanity's prison, and who seek to free more humans from its confines and find a way to destroy it before it splits the city asunder. There are others who have seen the City and have returned to the tree to protect and nourish it, some for a love of what they have left behind, some saying that the tree must split the City, for the city itself is the true prison. Others come and go for reasons entirely their own.

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## PLAY

Easiest mode of play is the Matrix model, at least at the outset. Players are unified in an interest (rescuing other humans who might be capable of escaping) and can have very goal-oriented missions, often with imperfect intelligence (*someone* around this time or place will be able to break free, so keep your eyes out) with opposition coming from the Nobilis and their superiors. This model can go a few rounds until the questions of the setting really start coming up. One way or another, a campaign probably ends with the tree being destroyed, or the city being destroyed, and that outcome resulting from a choice (a leap of faith, even) on the part of the players.

Ultimately, this is a colorful premise, but it needs a decent cast of supporting NPCs to really take off.

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## QUESTIONS

### Who is God?

God is still unknown, and perhaps unknowable, but there discovery of the city raises more questions than it provides

answers for. Who created the city? Who planted the tree? They seem at cross-purposes, so can they both truly be god? And if not, which one is truly God?

When you have nothing and everything, these questions become very important.

### Who escapes?

What makes it possible for someone to escape? Maybe it's enlightenment or madness, maybe its inspiration. One likely possibility is when an anchor's tie to his noble is severed (or a noble's tie to their superior is severed). This moment *risks* destruction of the soul, but is also a moment of opportunity. This is why killing nobles serves no real purpose, though killing one and seizing her anchors may manage to save a soul.

Naturally, this will tie into chargen, and having former anchors/nobles as potential characters seems pretty sexy.

### What is the nature of the soul?

Are there a fixed number of souls, bouncing around in the tree, or are they constantly being generated (by heaven, as some claim)? If the former, it holds up the idea that the tree is a prison and that short term inconveniences like death pale in comparison so long as it gets souls *out*. If, on the other hand, there's a constant flow of new souls, and they all have the potential of the escaped, what the hell does that mean?

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## NOTES

- At least at the outset there is no threat within the city, which makes it a safe place to retreat to. There's a lot to be said for changing that, though how to do so is a fascinating question because the city is so rich in *meaning*. If there is a threat to the

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city, where the players are so powerful, what does it need to be?

- Overall power level may be dropped a bit from Nobilis, probably to more of a supers game level? Silver Age sentinels, or another supers game that handled thematic powers well might be about right. There would be some symmetry to using Weapons of the Gods, but I'm not certain it's a good match. Ultimately, do you want kung fu that lets you punch the rhymes out of poetry? Awesome, but also with a great risk of lame.