



IN NOMINE™

ETHEREAL PLAYER'S GUIDE™

BY R. SEAN BORGSTROM
AND DAVID EDELSTEIN

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

IN NOMINE

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ETHEREAL PLAYER'S GUIDE™

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ABOUT IN NOMINE

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *In Nomine* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources include:

Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid/). Our online magazine includes new rules and articles for *In Nomine*. It also covers *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *GURPS*, *Illuminati*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures*, and more. *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online!

New supplements and adventures. *In Nomine* continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. For a current catalog, send us a legal-sized or 9"x12" SASE – please use two stamps! – or just visit www.warehouse23.com.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *In Nomine* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see below.

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Mailing List. Much of the online discussion of *In Nomine* happens on our e-mail list. To join, e-send mail to majordomo@io.com with “subscribe in_nomine-l” in the body.

In Nomine IRC. We also support online roleplaying channels for *In Nomine*. If you'd like to start a MOO or similar Internet environment for gaming *In Nomine*, please check out our policy information at www.sjgames.com/in-nomine/angelmush.html.

The *Ethereal Player's Guide* web page can be found at www.sjgames.com/in-nomine/ethereal/.

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of *In Nomine*, angels and demons dominate the struggle, casting their shadows upon the Earth – or so they see it. Mundane humans, unaware of the battles around them, go on with their lives . . . and have more influence on the Symphony as a whole. Indeed, mortal dreams and imagination create shadowy beings who owe their lives to the humanity that spawned them. Of course, these dwellers within the ethereal realm of the Marches do not necessarily acknowledge this debt. Some are predators, some are parasites, some are enslaved by sorcerers, some attempt to be symbionts, while others roam the Far Marches and ignore humanity as much as they can.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rebecca Sean Borgstrom (also the author of Hogshead Publishing's *Nobilis*, contributor to White Wolf's *Games of Divinity*, and featured in *Superiors 1: War and Honor*, *Liber Castellorum*, and *Liber Servitorum*) is either 5, 7, 12, 15, 21, or 30 years old; has blonde or red hair, blue or green eyes, and a rapidly changing phenotype; lives in Virginia, California, or Washington; and enjoys activities. She has a computer science doctorate in its original mailing tube in a box somewhere around her home.

David Edelstein started gaming when he was 12. He is the author of the *In Nomine Game Master's Guide*, the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, and the co-author and editor of many other *In Nomine* supplements. An English teacher and a computer programmer, he has lived in California, Maryland, Texas, and South Korea, and was last seen headed for New Mexico with his wife. David is either an EloHITE or a Habbalite, depending on his current dissonance level.

Though less powerful – especially now – than angels and demons, these ethereal spirits are still plentiful. They have their own societies, their own feuds, their own intrigues. Despite the ravages of the Crusade of Purity, despite the sporadic depredations of bored demons, ethereals are still the most plentiful creatures in the Far Marches, and an

ethereal is far more likely to suffer at the hands of a fellow ethereal than he is to encounter a celestial.

Still, those creatures of dream who seek to gain power on Earth *do* run into celestials – for better or worse. They may be pawns of sorcerers, they may be masterminds in their own right. They may even be on the run from their fellows in the Marches!

Whether as player characters amidst celestials, NPC antagonists and sidekicks, or the stars of a Far Marches campaign that never touches Earth, Heaven, or Hell . . . ethereal spirits are here.

The Dream is alive.

ORIGIN MYTHS

(based heavily on a Nigerian folktale)

I dreamed I met a frog named Mainu, as large as a bear, and he opened his mouth wide. I thought he would swallow me, and I panicked, and I said, "Mister Frog, you can't eat me yet."

His mouth closed. "Why not?"

"You haven't introduced yourself properly."

Mainu thought on this, and then he nodded. "My name is Mainu," he said.


*"I know **that**," I said, "but I don't know what you are."*

Mainu's throat sac inflated and deflated. "Then I'll tell you," he said.

BEGINNINGS

At the beginning of time, the Marches held only mists and chaos. The mist was raw potential, the substance of dreams yet to come. Some patches of mist could fit in a teardrop. Others could swallow a thousand worlds. Seas of chaos raged beyond the borders of the mist. They had no boundaries. They reached to infinity. Chaos has retreated, but remains unchartable even to this day.

Then a number of spirits descended into the Marches from somewhere else and began sweeping it into shape. They pushed some of the mist patches together to make a space for future spirits to grow. They surrounded that



space with the Utgard stones, to keep the chaos at bay. They swept the tiny impurities in the mists into neat little piles. These were both the first life and the first terrain of the Marches. The chiefs of these spirits were Dream, Imagination, Myth, and Hypothesis. Each had a dozen lieutenants. When they finished their task, all of them left as suddenly as they came.

The Origins of Spirits

The mists drew back to reveal a large table and an equally large chair. A knife as sharp as an arctic wind lay on the table. Thunder boomed. Lightning cut through the mist. Woyengi, the mother of dreams, appeared. She sat in the chair and took the knife from the table. With one hand, she fished Dosha out of the sea of Chaos.

Woyengi's servant, Imagination, had created Dosha by sweeping together the various impurities found in his region of the Marches. Dosha was a serpentine creature, with whiskers as long as his body, and he was bad to the bone. He could fit a mountain in his mouth, but Woyengi held him as you or I might hold a worm, and she lifted the knife to his flesh.

"Please," Dosha said, dangling from her hand, "that knife looks very dangerous, and I want very much to live."

"I need your stomach for my work," Woyengi answered. "Do not think of your sacrifice as an ending. Rather, consider it a great honor that comes only once in a lifetime."

"I humbly decline the honor," said Dosha, and bit Woyengi on the finger. This startled her so much that she dropped him, and like a worm he wriggled away.

Woyengi resigned herself to this turn of events. She cut the wound off her finger with her knife. She looked in the sea of Chaos for another victim. Finding a creature named Atavus, she plucked him forth and neatly cut away his stomach. She sealed Atavus' stomach at one end, inflated it with her own divine breath, and then squeezed it gently. Spirits flew out of the open end of Atavus' stomach. At first, since all of them came from the same breath, all of them were exactly alike.

The Origin of Elemental Strands and Dreamscapes

Woyengi did not want all of the spirits to be exactly alike. She called her four chiefs to her side. "Dream," she said, "the first animals walk the Earth. When they sleep, I want you to create small worlds for them in the Marches, based upon the patterns of their minds."

Dream went and did this thing. He created the first dreamscapes.

"Myth," Woyengi said, "The worlds of Dream are colorful, while my spirits are bland. Distill out the color of the dreams so that I can flavor the spirits with them."

Myth went to work. He took all the dreams of water and he fished out a long string of waterness from each – just like pulling out one of a tapestry's threads! Then he braided all these threads together, so that he had a long rope of Water-dream. He did the same thing with Anger, and Thunder, and the Mountains, and the Moon. Soon he had linked all the animal dreams together with strands of dream, and he brought the free end of each rope to Woyengi.

One by one, Woyengi asked each spirit, "Choose for yourself what kind of spirit you want to be." Each spirit chose one of the strands of dream. Myth untangled a thread from that strand and ran it right through the spirit's heart! If the spirit chose Water, its whole body filled up with waterness. If it chose the Mountains, it became full of mountainness. Even the littlest spirit could be frightening if Myth spliced it with a bit of Fear. That's how primal spirits came to be.

The Origin of Masks

Much, much later, humans started to dream. Now, animal dreams are simple, but human dreams are complex. Woyengi's chief, Myth, came to her early on and said, "If I have to make a rope out of every different image in a human dream, I'll get gray hairs on my head before I'm even a billion years old. That's how complicated it would be."

Woyengi finished her work for the day and then answered him. "Look at this dream over here," she said. "It's about a mad sheep who kills the greatest god. It thereby dooms the world. How many dreams feature sheep who kill gods?"

"Just the one," Myth admitted.

Woyengi said, "Then do not make a rope for 'god-killing sheep.' Pull out the thread of Beasts in the sheep, and the thread of Anger, and the thread of Greatness. And if a spirit wants to be made of the God-Killing Sheep idea, put bits of all three ropes inside its soul."

"If we make spirits out of more than one strand," Myth asked, "won't they be terribly confused?"

Woyengi thought on that, and then turned to her chief, Imagination. "Whenever a spirit chooses to be made from human dreams or stories, I want you to create a clay mask for him. The clay mask will show his role in the dream – like the sheep. Then, if the spirit becomes confused about what he is, because he has so many elemental strands in his soul, he can put on the mask and pretend that *that's* what he really is."



So Imagination began making masks. He made the mask of “the mad sheep who kills God,” and the mask of “the cave painter with tentacles instead of legs,” and many more. He gave each spirit a mask.

The Origin of Affinities and Domains

In the early days, Dosha would sneak out of the Chaos at the edges of the world to prey upon the primal spirits. So would other creatures of his kind, built from the original impurities in the world. The primal spirits could not defend themselves from such terrible monsters. They began to wail and cry to Woyengi about the horrors devouring them.

Woyengi, being very busy, sent Hypothesis to answer their plaints. “We have no power to defend ourselves!” the spirits told him. “Nor do we have homes in which to hide.”

“What kind of homes would you like?” asked Hypothesis reasonably.

The spirits conferred. “Impregnable fortresses,” they answered, “with every conceivable amenity.”

“I shall see what I can do,” Hypothesis said, and went out into Chaos. He found the creature known as Kshetrashuddhi and battled it to its death. Then he dragged it into the Marches and scattered its scales. Where a scale landed, it created a world. These worlds resembled dreamscapes without dreamers. Their natures varied. “These Domains are not impregnable,” Hypothesis said, “nor do they have every conceivable amenity. However, they are a rather fine creation. By studying them, you may learn how to build your own.”

The spirits spoke among themselves, and chose not to complain.

“Now,” Hypothesis said, “what kind of power would you like?”

The spirits conferred. “We would like absolute power over everything in the Marches.”

Hypothesis laughed. “Even Woyengi does not have that! But I shall see what I can do.” He reached into Kshetrashuddhi’s corpse and pulled out its heart. Crushing it in his hand, he let its blood flow over the spirits. “This blood shall activate the power that naturally lies within you. The spirits with stormy dispositions shall gain power over Storms. The fickle and oceanic will acquire power over the Sea. In like manner, every spirit shall receive some measure of power.”

The spirits spoke among themselves, and chose not to complain. Hypothesis returned to Woyengi. The monsters of Chaos invaded the Marches less frequently, fearing the defenses of the Domains and the spirits’ new powers. Still, they did not cease their wickedness for some time to come.

Then Mainu told me, “And that’s what I am. I am a spirit. I am the elements of dream. I am the power of hunger. I am the mask of a frog.”

He opened his mouth wide.

“Wait!” I said. “You cannot eat me yet.”

Mainu closed his mouth. “Honestly,” he said, disapprovingly, and then shrugged his great frog shoulders. “Why not?”

“A person should know why he’s going to die.”

The pads on Mainu’s great frog foot pressed against the ground. “Then I’ll tell you,” he said.



SERENA

One day, Woyengi blew a spirit out of Atavus' stomach who chose to be made out of the elements of Anger and the Sun. Myth put a thread of each of those elements in her soul, filling her up with rage and glory. Imagination looked through all the human dreams to find a dream with those elements in it. He found one in a human dreaming about the "glorious Lady Serena, savior of France." So he made a mask of Lady Serena for the spirit, and she stepped into the world.

Lady Serena found a place as the hero of the Domain named Shunyata. The anger in her soul pushed her to perform great deeds, and soon she became famous for miles around. However, as the years went by, she felt a growing discontent. Even the greatest accomplishment did not cause her inner rage to subside, and she was quickly running out of great deeds to do.

"I will go back to Woyengi," she said, "and get myself new elements for my soul." So she shouldered her pack and set out for Woyengi's Table, deep in the mist.

Serena Challenges a God

Serena trudged through the Marches until she came to a large forest. In the forest lived Isembi, its god and king. In the distance, she could hear the rage of chaos against the Utgard stones. Unafraid, she picked her way through the trees, until Isembi himself came out to confront her.

"You must be the famous Lady Serena of Shunyata. Is that not so?" he asked.

Serena was startled that he knew her name, but she answered with aplomb. "In all the Marches, there is only one Lady Serena, and I am she."

"Then your manners are lacking!" Isembi snapped. "My whole Domain is abuzz with your exploits. Courtesy demands that you pay me a visit and join me for a meal, if you pass through my Domain."

Serena could hardly refuse the invitation! So she joined Isembi for dinner, and regaled him with stories from her life. After enjoying his hospitality, however, she insisted that she had to return to the road.

"Where are you going?" Isembi asked.

"I go to Woyengi," Serena answered, "for I wish to change my nature."

"Out of the question!" roared Isembi. "Do you not know that no one sees Woyengi after their birth? The notion is madness; I insist that you turn back."

Serena basked in his anger, as an Anger spirit ought. Yet his attempt to tell her what to do awakened her own temper. "You do not have the power to turn me from my journey; and if you think you do, I demand you test your powers against mine!"

"Has no one told you of my might?" Isembi cried. "I am Isembi the invincible, king, god, and lord of the forest! How dare you challenge me like this?"

"It does not matter how I dare," Serena answered. "You have been challenged, and cannot refuse."

So Isembi and Serena went out into the forest and made a circle for their duel. (The customs for challenging gods were more primitive then than they are now.) Isembi graciously yielded the first attack to Serena, but she would have none of it. "You are older and wiser, Isembi. It is only fitting that you should go first."

So Isembi gathered his might and struck! The trees bent down all around Serena, and each grabbed one of her limbs. Yank! One pulled off her right arm! One pulled off her left arm! One pulled off each leg, and one pulled off her head! One even ripped her heart right out of her chest. But Serena wasn't finished yet. Her head opened its mouth and began to sing, and straightaway, all her body parts pulled back together, snapping off the branches that tried to resist.

"Try again, great King! Only this time," Serena said, "do not hold back any of your power."

"That was the extent of my powers," Isembi answered grumpily. "You may employ your own, if you have any abilities worth the mentioning."

So Serena sang again, and danced about Isembi, and in an instant all of Isembi's magic left his body and flew into hers. Isembi straightaway fell dead, and Serena walked on.

Serena Drives Back Chaos

At the edge of the forest, Serena encountered the Utgard stones, and beyond them, Chaos. This puzzled her, for she knew that Woyengi lived in the Marches – but then she saw a great bridge that arched over the Chaos sea. It was so long that it went right past the end of infinity and back into the Marches that Serena knew! "Woyengi must be on the other side," Serena said, and set off across the bridge.

When she had just gone halfway across the bridge, Akosmia, who rules over Chaos, roared up from the sea to confront her. "You must be the famous Lady Serena of Shunyata," he cried. "Is this not so?"

Serena did not let her trepidation show, but rather answered bluffly. "In all the Marches, there is but one Lady Serena, and I am she."

"How dare you walk above my home and never pay me a visit?" Akosmia asked. "All of Chaos is abuzz with talk about you, except for those parts which are not. Courtesy demands that you join me for dinner."

Serena, as a spirit of the Sun, believed very much in courtesy. So she joined Akosmia for dinner. It was not long, however, before she felt the urge to return to the road.

"Where are you going?" Akosmia asked.

"I go to Woyengi," Serena answered, "for I wish to change my nature."

"Out of the question!" roared Akosmia. "Do you not know that no one sees Woyengi after their birth? The notion is madness; I insist that you turn back."

Serena basked in his anger, as an Anger spirit ought. Yet his attempt to tell her what to do awakened her own temper. "You do not have the power to turn me from my journey; and if you think you do, I demand you test your powers against mine!"

Akosmia, once challenged, could not refuse, and soon the two of them stood in a dueling circle on the chaotic sea. "You are older and wiser," Serena said courteously, "so it is only right that you go first."

Akosmia spread his arms wide. The sea of chaos that he ruled rose up and swallowed Serena. Time around her stuttered and shifted. Geography twisted. The world, strange as it was in the Farthest Marches (and Beyond), became stranger. Now, Akosmia thought that before Serena could so much as blink, she would lose her connection to time and space forever. But instead, Serena called up her clay mask and cried out to all Chaos, "I am not just any spirit, but the Lady Serena from Aicelina's dream." So great was her identification with her mask that the sea could not shake Serena from her proper time or place. Slowly, the chaos receded.

"Try again, great King! Only this time," Serena said, "do not hold back any of your power."

"That was the extent of my powers," Akosmia answered glumly. "You may employ your own, if you have any abilities worth the mentioning."

So Serena took out her sword and systematically drew a pattern around Akosmia; and each time she added a line, the entropy around Akosmia decreased, until he dropped dead from the sheer order of it all. All of Akosmia's magic left his body and flew into Serena's, and Serena walked on.

Sahajaklesha and Dosha

Serena had almost reached the end of the bridge when Dosha lifted his head from the chaos. "You must be the famous Lady Serena of Shunyata," he murmured, voice low. "Is that not so?"

"In all the Marches," Serena answered, "there is but one Serena, and I am she."

"Then I insist that you join me for dinner," Dosha answered. "For courtesy's sake, if nothing else."

Serena looked down at Dosha's great green shape and pointed out, "I have already eaten twice upon this journey, when spirits do not need to eat at all. Perhaps I could dine with you on the way back."

Dosha's head rose higher. "Where are you going in such a hurry, then?"

"I go to see Woyengi," Serena answered, "for I wish to change my nature."

Dosha sighed. "I feared as much. In all honesty, I cannot permit anyone to cross this bridge in search of Woyengi, for they might see me from the bridge, as they pass, and inform her of my location. Make your peace with the universe and prepare to be eaten."

"I did not see you from the bridge until you raised your head!" Serena protested.

"The matter has since become academic."

"You cannot eat me without facing me in challenge!" Serena offered.

"You could walk for a year and not draw a dueling circle around me," Dosha answered. "The notion is impractical."

Serena gave this a moment's thought, and then ran as fast as she could down the length of the bridge. Dosha roared along after her, casting up great waves of Chaos higher than the mortal stars. But before he could eat her, the bridge ended – Serena had run so fast that they reached Woyengi before Dosha could get his neck out of the sea!

Woyengi raised a hand to pluck Dosha from the Chaos. Dosha swam quickly back out into the sea. Her hand followed him. Dosha roared into the Marches. Woyengi's hand followed him. Dosha looked for a hiding place, but could only find one. Knowing that Woyengi would not harm her children, he dove right into a spirit's eyes!

Now, in Dosha's hurry to escape Woyengi, he scraped off many of his scales on the Utgard stones. Then in the Marches he scraped off much of his flesh. So by the time he reached his hiding place, there was nothing left of him but *Sahajaklesha* – the essence of caution and fear. That essence still haunts the spirits of the Marches. You can see it in their eyes! So Woyengi wisely refused Serena a second chance as a spirit. Instead, she stripped away Serena's mask and made her *Raga* – the essence of desire and ambition. She shouts in every spirit's heart, demanding power and greatness. But though the lady Raga tries her best, the monster Sahajaklesha holds most spirits back from dangerous excesses of glory. For that reason, few heroes since have ever lived up to the boldness of Serena of Shunyata.

Then Mainu told me, "And that's why I will eat you. The Raga in me demands the power in your flesh, and the Sahajaklesha in me fears to be weak."

"But is the story true?" I said, mourning brave Serena.

"I'm sure I don't know," Mainu said. He took two bites and I woke up screaming.



THE ETHEREAL CHARACTER



9

THE ETHEREAL CHARACTER



ETHEREAL PLAYER CHARACTERS

Ethereals are, for the most part, much weaker than celestials. There are some ethereal spirits who have 9 Forces or more (and there were many more before the Purity Crusade), but nowadays, such potent spirits are mostly gods or former gods, or old ethereals who have remained hidden in the Far Marches and avoided any contact with celestials. The recommended starting level for player character ethereals is 6 Forces if playing in a “low-level” campaign, where most of the PCs are ethereals or humans, or 7 Forces if playing in a mixed campaign with celestial and ethereal PCs. Even with 7 Forces, an ethereal will be weaker than the average angel or demon, which is as it should be. A group of 9-Force ethereals is improbable; pantheons rarely work together. (But if the GM *wants* to allow ethereal player characters of this magnitude, particularly if there is just one ethereal among the celestials or the campaign premise is a pantheon of PCs – feel free!)

Character Points

Beginning ethereals should receive character points equal to $4 \times$ their initial allotment of Forces with which to buy Resources. Optionally, the GM may allow ethereal PCs to “sell off” one of their starting Forces in exchange for 10 extra character points, or to spend 10 character points to receive an extra Force. It’s not recommended that more than a single Force be traded in this manner.

Ethereals who start out *initiated* (p. 46) will have a Dread, and gain points for it – see p. 48.

Any ethereal with 3 Forces or more must have at least 1 Force in each realm, with the exception of those damaged in celestial combat (p. 98), or *figments* (p. 74). Ethereals with fewer than 3 Forces *must* have at least 1 Ethereal Force. An ethereal may not have any characteristic of 0 unless it has 0 Forces in that realm; GMs may, as always, permit variations in their own games.

Ethereal characters may increase their Forces and characteristics as celestials do. Normally, a new Force costs 10 character points, but unless a spirit has a patron (such as a celestial Superior or pagan god), it is recommended that it be required to raise its Forces by individually raising the characteristics associated with a Force, at a cost of 3 points each. (I.e., to gain an extra Corporeal Forces, an ethereal would have to raise its Strength and/or Agility by a total of 4 points, at total cost of 12 character points.)

Ethereals can also gain Forces either by *assumption* or by devouring other ethereals; see p. 17.

ELEMENTS AND AFFINITIES

“Do not anger the magpie queen, lest she visit upon your house the men made of sorrow. For what they touch becomes ashes, and what they taste turns to dust, and the footprints they leave behind them are tragedy and pain.”

– *The Injunctions of Mikah the Dispersed*

Where celestials are primarily defined by their resonance and Word, ethereals are largely defined by the *elements* of which they are composed (also called *strands*), and concepts for which they have an *affinity*. Elements are not paid for with character points, but selected as part of the character concept, and are described in detail in Chapter 2.

An ethereal spirit also has *affinities* (see pp. 52–62 for a list of typical ones), based in part on its elemental composition. Affinities are concepts imbedded in an ethereal’s soul – often they are responsible for its very creation, when a particular concept figured so strongly in a potent dreamscape or domain that it imbued the substance of the Marches with life, weaving the elemental strands together and spawning a new spirit. (Ethereals see the affinities as “tying the knot;” celestials tend to see affinities as attunements, and elements as akin the Word a Servitor follows.) An ethereal spirit has a certain amount of power over concepts for which it has an affinity – especially on the ethereal plane.

Most spirits have at least one affinity, especially if they have been initiated (p. 46). Multiple affinities are common, but there is a limit to how many different concepts a spirit’s soul can embrace. No ethereal can have more

CHARACTER CREATION

Ethereal spirits are created much like any other character type in *In Nomine*, following the guidelines below.

FORCES AND CHARACTERISTICS

While beginning ethereals are at a disadvantage compared to celestials, their growth is not limited. Ethereals can have up to 6 Forces in any realm, and up to 18 Forces total. (Very few have anywhere near this many, nowadays.) Likewise, they may have characteristics of up to 12.

affinities than it has Forces, and stronger affinities demand a greater portion of the ethereal's being. The strength of an affinity can be rated as *slight, moderate, strong, or primal*. (See p. 50 for the abilities and character point costs associated with each level.)

RESOURCES

Besides affinities, ethereal characters can buy other Resources with character points.

Attunements

Ethereals can be given celestial attunements if a Superior sees fit, and some of the most powerful gods can grant their own equivalent of Servitor Attunements. See p. 82. It is common for ethereal-granted attunements to come with a cost beyond mere character points; like Superiors, the gods reward those who *serve* them or their concepts.

Skills

Ethereals can learn most of the same skills that humans and celestials can. Of course, many skills are difficult to learn in the Marches, but it's possible for a spirit who's never been to the corporeal plane to learn Driving, if it gets enough practice driving cars in mortal dreamscapes or an appropriate Domain.

Note that, like celestials, ethereals can *learn* sorcerous skills and rituals (*Corporeal Player's Guide*, p. 33), and sometimes do in order to teach them to humans – but they cannot practice sorcery.

And some skills simply work *differently*. For a list of skills that require special treatment, plus the new skill of Dreaming, see p. 64.

Songs

All of the Songs in the *In Nomine* rulebook (pp. 78–85) can be assumed to be commonly known in the Marches; the GM should allow an ethereal character to start with any of them (unless he has a reason for restricting them). Some of the Songs from the *Liber Canticorum* are also available in the Marches, but most

ETHEREAL INTELLIGENCE

But he was intelligent. And it was an angelic intelligence which, while not particularly higher than human intelligence, is much broader and has the advantage of having thousands of years of practice.

– Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*

Ethereals tend to develop their Ethereal Forces most heavily, just as many celestials tend to emphasize their Celestial Forces.

Therefore, a middling to powerful ethereal will frequently have an Intelligence that's quite high by human standards. Does this mean that ethereals tend to be geniuses because Intelligence falls within their natural realm?

Not necessarily. As described in *In Nomine* (p. 35), Intelligence is raw mental capability. This includes what we conventionally label “intelligence,” but it also encompasses imagination, mental flexibility, and *speed* of thought, as well as the breadth of one's knowledge-base. (The ability to concentrate, and *focus* one's mental abilities, including on hand-eye coordination, is governed by the other ethereal characteristic, Precision.) A high Intelligence score *can* represent an Einstein, but it can also represent someone whose IQ is merely average, but who has the experience of many lifetimes with which to make quick decisions. And it can represent an ethereal spirit whose “intelligence,” as humans understand the term, is so alien as to be unquantifiable, but whose raw mental energy is a potent force in the Marches.

Thus, even though an ethereal (or a celestial) might have an Intelligence of 12, that doesn't mean you have to play it as a super-genius. Such a being can outmatch any mortal in mental contests, but that doesn't mean that the *quality* of its thoughts is superhuman, or that it's impossible for someone with a lower Intelligence score to outwit it.

should be considered rare if not unknown. (The major exceptions are included on p. 66) It is entirely up to the GM which ones he will allow player characters to purchase at creation.

Roles

Ethereal Roles are possible, as described in the *Liber Servitorum* (p. 114). However, ethereal spirits don't have networks of Servitors to help create an identity and the material resources to support one, as celestial Superiors do. So the only way for most ethereal spirits to establish a Role is to actually spend time on the corporeal plane *living* it. They also have to be even more cautious than celestials about being discovered. Consequently, very few ethereal Roles will be either of high level or high Status. The GM should require an ethereal character to do a *lot* of work, and spend a lot of time living as a mundane, to have a Role or Status level above 3.

ETHEREAL CHARACTER CREATION CHECKLIST

With more combinations than angels and demons, ethereal spirits can be daunting to create. Here is a step-by-step guide to assist players in making characters.

When designing an ethereal, you can start by choosing a personality type and selecting the elements to support that (*Elements*, p. 22.) or you can decide which powers you want from the affinities (p. 50) and pick elements which have those affinities. Either way, this is a good place to start thinking about the character's *concept*.

Ethereal spirits start with 6 Forces and therefore (*In Nomine*, pp. 35-36) 24 character points. With GM permission, they may sell 1 Force for 10 points (5 Forces, 34 points), or buy 1 Force for 10 points (7 Forces, 14 points). Allocate Forces and characteristics normally – 1-6 per Force, 1-12 per characteristic. (If the GM permits, Corporeal Forces may be 0 due to a history involving celestial combat.)

Choose your elements, either directly by the personality you wish, or indirectly, by the affinities you desire. Quick references to personality are on p. 45, and to affinities on p. 63.

Choose and pay for your affinities and their strengths, as per p. 50. Slight: 2 points; Moderate; 5 points; Strong; 10

points; Primal: 10 points. Remember that you can only have as many total affinities as you have Forces, but only those affinities which require more than your *total* Forces are out of reach (*Combining Affinities*, p. 51).

Decide if your character has initiated or not (p. 46). If so, select one or two element strands to emphasize, and an appropriate Dread (and get the character points for it; double-check with the GM to see how many points a given Dread is worth). Spend those points on element-appropriate Resources. (Affinities which aren't "appropriate" *can* be bought with your general points.)

Determine what your Image (p. 125) is, and how you feel about it.

Purchase your other Resources: skills, Songs, attunements, Roles, Servants, artifacts, etc. For ethereals, vessels are easier to come by; see *Vessels*, p. 68. (A vessel from an Archangel or Prince will cost points normally.)

Create enough of a background for you and the Game Master to be satisfied – what pantheon or Domain the character counts as "home," and what attitudes it holds toward celestials, humans, and other ethereals.

Play!

Servants

A master-servant connection is a Symphonic bond (*Liber Servitorum*, pp. 115-125), not merely a relationship of obedience and/or loyalty such as any two beings might develop. Thus, an ethereal can only acquire a servant through some sort of supernatural bonding . . . players and GMs should feel free to improvise details. Some examples for creating servants include sorcerous rituals, more powerful ethereals (or, rarely, Superiors), or long association in a particular Domain or dreamscape. Possession of a micro-Domain split from a mortal's dreamscape (p. 105) may also aid in forging such a link – in either direction.

The most likely servant of an ethereal is another ethereal. Occasionally, a dream-shade (p. 122) might bond to an ethereal as its servant (the reverse is also possible!). It's rare for any but pagan gods to have corporeal servants, but some spirits have found willing minions and/or worshipers among humanity; these are usually mundanes, but the occasional Pagan Soldier or sorcerer is a rare and valued resource.

Celestial servants, of course, are extremely unlikely. A few Outcasts and Renegades might receive patronage from an old god, but to actually become a servant of an ethereal would be almost unthinkable. Beleth occasionally gives an infernal spirit to one of the dark gods who serve her . . . but it's certain that however servile the demonling might be to his ethereal master, his *first* allegiance will be to Beleth . . .

An ethereal spirit might *be* a mortal's servant, too. It could have been mystically enslaved by a sorcerer, made a bargain for a steady supply of Essence, or be one of the ineffably rare dream-fragments that a lucid dreamer managed to actually *create* (see box, p. 74).

Artifacts

Ethereals can have artifacts; some can even *make* artifacts. Talismans, relics, and reliquaries can be brought to the ethereal plane. Purely corporeal artifacts cannot, and thus an ethereal spirit is unlikely to possess one, unless it's on Earth. See the *Liber Reliquarum* for more details about all sorts of artifacts, including some of the legendary relics of the gods.

Discord and Dread

Discord in ethereals represents alien elements *imposed* upon their natures, sometimes by being in the wrong dreamscape at the wrong time (see p. 109), sometimes by fluctuations in the patterns of the Marches and that realm's unpredictable effects on its native inhabitants. Ethereals can also choose to accept Discord, to make it easier to form a vessel (p. 69). This latter type of Discord does *not* give the spirit any character points directly; it only reduces the Essence cost of a vessel.

Most ethereals have one or more inherent *Dreads*, stemming from their elemental strands (see p. 22). These Dreads function like Ethereal Discord except where otherwise noted. An ethereal character does receive character points for any *starting* Dreads, but once play begins, new or enhanced Dreads only grant benefits if they are acquired as part of an initiation (p. 46).

Celestial Discord can prevent ethereals from regenerating their daily Essence, just as for celestials (*In Nomine*, p. 60).

POINT COST TABLE

| Resource | Point Cost | Maximum |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Elements | No cost | Typically 10 |
| Affinities | Varies; see below | Total Forces (A character cannot have more total Affinities than its total Forces) |
| <i>Slight Affinity</i> | 2 | Total Forces |
| <i>Moderate Affinity</i> | 5 | Total Forces/3 |
| <i>Strong Affinity</i> | 10 | Total Forces/6 |
| <i>Primal Affinity</i> | 10 | 1 (unless the character is a god) |
| Skills | 1/level | 6 levels/skill |
| Songs | 1/level | 6 levels/skill |
| Roles | (Level × Status)/2 | 6 levels/Role, Status no higher than Level |
| Servants | (Level × Class)/2 | 6 levels/Servant |
| Artifacts | Varies; see below; can be modified with Features | Varies; see below |
| <i>Corporeal (Artifacts)</i> | 1/level | 6 levels/Artifact |
| <i>Ethereal (Talismans)</i> | 2/level | 6 levels/Skill granted |
| <i>Celestial (Relics)</i> | 3/level | 6 levels/Song granted |
| <i>Celestial (Reliquaries)</i> | 3/level | 6 levels/Reliquary |
| Dreads* | Varies; see below | 1 Dread; must be taken at a level equal to Ethereal Forces |
| <i>Minor Dread</i> | +1/level | |
| <i>Moderate Dread</i> | +2/level | |
| <i>Major Dread</i> | +3/level | |
| Initiation* | +5 | Once per character |
| Forces | 10 | 6 Forces/Realm, 18 Total Forces |
| Vessels** | 15 Essence × Size × Level | 6 levels/Vessel; no more Essence spent at creation than 100 × Total Forces |
| Vessel Discord*** | Varies; see below | 6 levels/Discord |
| <i>Corporeal Discord</i> | (-3 × Vessel level × Discord level) in Essence | |
| <i>Ethereal Discord</i> | (-3 × Vessel level × Discord level) in Essence | |
| <i>Celestial Discord</i> | (-5 × Vessel level × Discord level) in Essence | |

* *Dreads and Initiation increase the number of character points that the character can use at creation, or when the Dread is taken (if the character begins uninitiated). They do not cost character points.*

** *Vessels cost Essence, not character points, unless using the optional rule in the box on p. 68.*

*** *Vessel Discord lowers the Essence cost of a vessel. However, at creation, a character may not have vessels whose Essence cost exceeds its total Essence cache (100 × Total Forces) before adding in Discord reduction.*

Removing Discord

As with celestials (and corporeals, for Disadvantages), an ethereal cannot usually shed Discord without the intervention of a higher power. A Superior can remove Discord from ethereals, but rarely will. Some of the old gods can, too (and are *rumored* to be able to do the same for celestials). Since Discord is part of an ethereal's Image (p. 125) – albeit an unwanted part – it's said that some of the methods of refashioning one's Image (see p. 129) can also alter or eliminate Discord. This is up to the GM's discretion.

Vessels

Like celestials, ethereal spirits must have a vessel to interact with the corporeal world. Unlike celestials, they cannot manipulate a body too large for their Forces, and they can “cache” enough Essence to *create* vessels by themselves. For details, see p. 68.

ESSENCE

Ethereals store and use Essence as other beings do. With the exception of their Essence cache (p. 17), they can only hold Essence equal to their total Forces. Ethereals are all Symphonically aware and thus capable of controlling their Essence. *Figments* (p. 74) cannot voluntarily transfer Essence to others, but are otherwise like any other spirits in this respect. An ethereal makes a disturbance just like a celestial does when spending Essence (see p. 96 for disturbances on the ethereal plane).

Ethereals can't generate Essence by succeeding at their greatest skill, as humans do (*In Nomine*, p. 50). They do have other options, though.

DAILY REGENERATION

Ethereal spirits regenerate 1 point of Essence per day, like other beings. On Earth, they do so at midnight. In the Marches, time can flow differently, even between different Domains, and so the span of 24 hours may be difficult to measure. The Symphony itself maintains an ineffable balancing act when Essence flows among and between realms. No spirit has ever mastered the trick of running into a Domain where time is flowing faster, spending several days there so as to fully recover its Essence, and then returning to its previous location in the Marches (or on Earth), only a few subjective minutes later. Somehow, it just never works.

Everywhere on the ethereal plane will have the equivalent of a midnight. When the GM is called upon to figure

out when “midnight” is across different Domains, the easiest way is to decide upon an arbitrary, wholly imaginary “Marches Standard Time” and assume every ethereal spirit regenerates their Essence at the same time. When confronted with travel between areas of differing time flow (and particularly when dealing with spirits who deliberately try to manipulate the difference, as described above), the most common outcome is an unexpectedly lengthened journey or detour for the spirit; “distance” in the Marches is as subjective as “time,” and the Symphony has a funny way of preventing paradoxes . . .

RITEs

Ethereals can receive and perform Rites from Word-bound celestials, but few celestials (especially angels) will give an ethereal one of their Rites, and some ethereals wouldn't want to use a celestial Rite anyway. However, many ethereal spirits have Rites of their own, based on their affinities (p. 50). Note that like other Rites, a Rite stemming from an affinity can only generate Essence once per day.

Some of the pagan gods can grant Rites, much as Superiors do. However, *no* god grants his Rites casually; they just don't have the Essence to spare. Earning a Rite from an ethereal deity should be at *least* as difficult as earning a new Rite from an Archangel or Demon Prince. Even if an ethereal PC begins play as the servant of a god, it's recommended he be required to pay 3 character points each for any starting Rites.

WORSHIP AND BELIEF

Some ethereal spirits have another kind of Rite: *worship rites*. These are rituals which, when performed by a willing being, channel Essence *to* the spirit. Usually they are taught to mortal worshipers by a pagan god. Anyone who knows a worship rite may perform it once per day and send 1 point of Essence to the recipient of the Rite. Worship rites are particular to a single god; spending 3 hours reading stories about the god might be a worship rite for Odin, while a group of ritual sunbathers might send 1 Essence each to Apollo. (See *The Marches*, p. 95, for more sample worship rites.) Note that for it to qualify as a worship rite, the performer must be willing, and fully aware that he is giving Essence to the god (though he may not think of it in those terms – a mundane can do it). He must also be taught how to perform the rite properly, either by the god or by fellow worshipers. Simply lying in the sun saying prayers to Apollo, or reading Asgardian myths to a Norse pagan “Sunday school” class, probably won't do the trick – though it *might*.

Creating Worship Rites

Though the gods would have lesser spirits believe otherwise, the fact is that nearly *any* ethereal can benefit from a worship rite. In order to do so, however, the spirit must have a *unique* Image (p. 125), and the worship rite must be indelibly associated with that Image. (And part of the proper performance of a worship rite requires that the performer have the correct mental image of the recipient, which is why it's unlikely – albeit possible – for independent worshipers who've had no actual contact with a god or his followers to successfully send Essence to the god.) If a legitimate worship rite is performed, and there is more than one ethereal spirit extant with that rite's Image, then any Essence generated will be sent to one of the eligible spirits *randomly*.

This means that an ethereal spirit whose Image is “Faerie” or “Lightning Spirit” or “Miss December” will almost never get Essence from a worship rite; the Marches are full of faeries, lightning spirits, and Miss Decembers. Taking on an individual name *might* be sufficient, but probably won't be enough to distinguish the spirit from all the similar spirits in the Marches. “Rumpleboggins the Household Fairy” might be able to teach someone to send her Essence by speaking her name three times, dancing on the doorstep at midnight, and then leaving her a plate of milk, but there are so many other household fairies with Images and names similar enough to Rumpleboggins that they are as likely as she to receive her Essence.

Thus, the only way to be sure that worship rites will work is to eliminate (or replace – see *Assumption*, p. 133) every other spirit whose Image infringes on yours.

That is how the gods grew powerful originally, and it's why they're quick to destroy dream-fragments and other minor spirits who mimic them. There is only one Apollo who has been the Olympian sun-god for millennia. False Apollos are common, but if other ethereals don't devour the copycats, the real Apollo will eventually notice that someone else is getting *his* Essence, and he will hunt the impostor down (see box).

Worship Rites for Player Characters

An ethereal who wants to develop worship rites has three challenges. First, it needs a unique Image (or it needs to eliminate all potential rivals). Secondly, it needs to find mortals who are willing to worship it. Third, it

needs to craft a rite that reflects its unique composition of elemental strands, affinities, and Image, and teach the ritual to its would-be worshipers.

PLAYER CHARACTER IMPOSTORS

If a player wants to create an ethereal spirit modeled after Thor or Zeus or Ra or some other pagan god (either deceased or still-living), in the hopes of picking up some of the Essence their worshipers still send him, let him. Depending on how active the GM deems such worshipers to be, this may amount to anywhere from 1 Essence a week to several points a day coming his way. (Some of the old gods have a few traditionalist or neo-pagan worshipers still performing effective rites . . . plus the Essence accruing to them as a byproduct of popular mythology; see *Ambient Belief*, below.)

If the real god is still alive, though, he's going to notice that he's not getting all his Essence, and he's not going to be happy. The Essence an impostor might siphon off will in no way make it a match for an ethereal deity. Players should understand that taking on the mask of a god will probably result in a short-lived character. (See *Assumption*, p. 133.)

Even if the god is dead, that means one of two things. One is that there is no one guarding his Image, which means either that Image doesn't attract a significant amount of Essence from worship or belief, or there are numerous other impostors also claiming the Essence. The second is that someone *is* guarding the Image. This may be angels who are extremely watchful for new ethereals trying to claim the mantle of a god whom Uriel destroyed, and will be quick to smite erstwhile replacements. Or it may be the god's kin; pantheons jealously persecute any spirit who would usurp the Image of one their fallen members.

Either way, pretenders to godhood will find that their efforts are at best non-productive, and at worst suicidal.

If all this works, of course, the ethereal then has a fourth problem. Jealous rivals and even more jealous elder gods, the Divine Inquisition, and most demons (if it doesn't serve Beleth) will all be out to squash the upstart. Most ethereals find that what little Essence they might be able to solicit from the corporeal world isn't worth the trouble.

Ambient Belief

*Elvis looked helplessly at me from the wicker man's heart.
“I'm just a hunka hunka burning love,” he explained.*

– A Dream Journal



Some ethereal spirits, with a very famous and/or popular Image, receive Essence from the collective dreams of humanity, even though nobody actively perform worship rites for them. Elvis, Santa Claus, Darth Vader, the Greys, and Ricky Martin are all alive and well in the Marches, subsisting on the Essence of millions of dreamers.

As with worship rites, Essence from ambient beliefs is divided randomly among all spirits with the appropriate Image. This is why Santa Claus has not become a modern deity with power to rival the pagan gods of old; there are so *many* Santas in the Marches that no one spirit has ever been able to secure a stable power base. If one Santa could eliminate enough of his competitors to become the “real” Santa, he might become a truly powerful entity . . . but of course, murdering one’s imitators is hardly very Santa-like.

Since belief in Santa Claus or adoration of The King is not the same as a *deliberate* attempt to send Essence in a rite, the Essence generated by all those dreams is extremely diffuse – many thousands of times weaker than the Essence of true worship. Rarely will it generate more than a few points of Essence per night (again, divided between all the spirits with that Image). During “peak” periods (such as Christmas, for Santa, or a world tour for a rock star), the nightly flow of Essence may be multiplied many times over.

Player character ethereals who personify the Easter Bunny or a specific *Playboy* centerfold may occasionally benefit from a stray point of Essence, particularly during Easter, or sweeps week on the Playboy Channel. A favorable Intervention (p. 20) is a good time to let this happen. Of course, if the character could eliminate all those other ethereal *Playboy* models, she’d be well on her way to becoming the next pagan Goddess of Centerfolds . . .

TETHERS

Ethereal Tethers are rare, but a few still exist. Most are consecrated to a single god, though in a few cases, an entire pantheon has joined together to keep a Tether alive, and thus share in its Essence flow.

A Tether is a potent supply of Essence; even a very tiny one can contribute several points a day. The strongest celestial Tethers may generate *thousands* of points of Essence every day for the Superior who controls them. There are no ethereal Tethers of that magnitude left (if there ever were), but even the weakest Tether is a resource worth defending, especially for today’s pagan gods, who have so little left to work with.

ETHEREAL TRIBES

While spirits with the same Image usually regard one another as competitors, sometimes a group of ethereals will deliberately “share” a potent Image, and accept the Essence that is divided between them. These are often called tribes, but functionally they are more like syndicates; they keep their number small, so that all members will receive some benefit, and ruthlessly purge any “unauthorized” wearers of their mask.

Sometimes the mask adopted by a tribe is that of an individual – the “Elvis tribe” is quite powerful in the

Marches. Other tribes portray “races” of beings, such as the Greys (*Liber Servitorum*, p. 89).

Larger groups of ethereals with a similar Image, such as the fey, unicorns, and the multitudes of Santas, are too large to organize or weed out competitors (though there are rumors of abortive attempts at forming a “Santa’s Guild”), and thus rarely derive any benefit from what Essence their Image might garner.

THE ESSENCE CACHE

Every ethereal spirit has the ability to store Essence in a personal reservoir called an *Essence cache*. A spirit can transfer Essence directly from itself into its Essence cache at will, but once it is cached, the spirit can *only* use that Essence to create vessels for itself (see p. 68). It cannot be retrieved for any other purpose, under any circumstances; neither can any other being access an ethereal spirit’s Essence cache. (Devouring a spirit – p. 131 – will *not* give the victor the contents of the loser’s Essence cache!) An ethereal can cache up to 100 points of Essence times its Forces; should it lose a Force, its cache capacity will diminish accordingly (and any Essence above the new limit will be gone).

Nobody knows why ethereals, and only ethereals, are able to do this, or even where all that Essence is actually stored while waiting to be formed into a vessel. The most popular theory is that “Essence caches” are located in the ethereal plane itself, and that ethereal spirits are able to transform Essence into vessels drawn from the substance of the Marches of which they are also a part. Another theory (supported by those who believe ethereals and celestials are really the same creatures) is that celestials *could* cache Essence and form their own vessels, just as ethereals can, if Heaven and Hell didn’t conspire to make it impossible for any but Superiors. This would explain why celestials only have access to this ability in Limbo (*Heaven and Hell*, p. 79), where they are beyond the reach of Superiors, and apparently even Lucifer and God . . .

Sadly, only a god can have a Tether, so this is unlikely to be a resource for player characters. (See p. 134 for what it takes to become a god.) The *Liber Castellorum* describes Tethers in more detail, including ethereal Tethers and Seneschal attunements.

DREAM-EATING

Ethereals have a predatory reputation, in large part because of the practice of “dream-eating.” Dream-eating actually describes several different phenomena. The most common is the use of the Celestial Song of Draining (p. 66) on a mortal’s dreamscape. This is mostly done by malevolent spirits serving Beleth, who inflict nightmares on their victims, hoping to scare the mortal into expending all his Essence in his dreams and thus feed it to the spirit.

A more literal form of dream-eating, however, is the cannibalistic manner in which ethereals can devour one another and thus absorb their victim’s power. When ethereals engage *each other* in celestial combat (see p. 98), they receive 1 Essence for every Force they strip from their victim. Upon completely destroying another spirit, the victor will also gain the Essence the deceased had left, if any, and perhaps even a Force (see p. 132). Ethereals cannot prey on humans or celestials in this manner, nor do humans or celestials gain Essence by destroying ethereals in celestial combat.

(*Assumption*, p. 133, also transfers to the victor all the Essence of the loser, plus 1 per Force possessed by the unsuccessful challenger, in addition to any other powers gained.)

There are rumors of ethereal spirits who have additional ways of draining other spirits, dreamscapes, mortals, and even celestials, of Essence (see *L’Mellner*, *Liber Servitorum*, p. 90).

ETHEREAL ANCHORS

Ethereal spirits don't have Hearts, but each spirit does have an "anchor" – a place in the Marches where its unique compositions of strands tie together most strongly. An ethereal who suffers Trauma (below) or defeat in ethereal combat (p. 97) is dispersed into the Marches until it reforms at its anchor. An ethereal who has a home Domain (either by controlling one, or by having been made a "resident" by its master – see p. 103) has its anchor there; the spirit may reform anywhere within the Domain, most likely the last place it occupied. (Some Domain rulers can define where residents will reform, essentially centralizing all anchors, but usually it's random.) Ethereals without a home Domain can attempt to anchor themselves in any other Domain; this requires spending 1 Essence while occupying that Domain. It's impossible to be sure the anchor will hold, however; when it comes time for a spirit to reform, it must make a Will roll, at a penalty equal to the number of weeks since the last time it anchored itself. If it succeeds, it will reform in that Domain – *probably* at the precise location it anchored itself. (Some Domains have special properties making them easier or more difficult to use as anchors; see p. 18. Some Domain rulers charge for the privilege of using their Domain as an anchor, and some can sense ethereal anchors in their Domains . . . which can lead to unpleasant surprises for non-residents who create anchors without permission.) A spirit can anchor itself to a human dreamscape, but the anchor is automatically dissolved when the dreamer awakens, so this rarely accomplishes much.

If a spirit hasn't established an anchor, or its anchor fails to hold, then it will reform in the last Domain it occupied . . . which could be bad, if that was Blandine's or Beleth's territory. If the last place the spirit occupied in the Marches was a space between Domains, or a human dreamscape that has not been continuously active since (i.e., the dreamer has awakened at least once in the intervening time), then the spirit will reform somewhere completely unpredictable in the Marches, between Domains. It may be right next to the Vale of Dreams, or it may be out in the unknown Far Marches, but it most likely won't be anywhere convenient. Or safe.

Ethereals have no Heart, and really only exist in the Marches as embodiments of elemental strands animated by their intellect. Thus, an ethereal in Trauma doesn't "go" anywhere; there are no "unconscious" ethereal spirits floating about the Marches. They are simply dispersed into the ethereal plane until they gather enough of themselves to reform. Not all do.

Having been killed on the corporeal plane, an ethereal gets to make a Will roll at -2 after a number of weeks equal to its Corporeal Forces (minimum of one week). If it succeeds, it regains awareness and reforms at its anchor (see box). If it fails, it loses 1 Force (determined randomly), and may try again in a number of weeks equal to its Corporeal Forces plus the check digit of the failed roll. Each failure costs another Force, until the spirit either emerges from Trauma or fades from existence.

LOSING FORCES

Ethereals can engage (or be attacked) in celestial combat in the Marches, so they sometimes lose Forces. Besides the usual effects, stripping away a spirit's Forces can strip some of its elemental strands as well. If a spirit's Forces become too low to sustain all its affinities (p. 50), it will lose some of them. (The GM may let the player choose which affinities are lost, or may choose himself.) For example, if a 6-Force ethereal with a strong affinity and two moderate affinities is reduced to 5 Forces, it must lose its strong affinity and one of its moderate ones. (At the GM's option, the ethereal may regain its affinities without having to pay character points for them again, if it builds its Forces

back up.) The fact that losing even a single Force can have serious consequences makes most ethereals extremely wary of celestial combat.

Being reduced to 0 Forces in a realm has the same effect on ethereals as on celestials (*In Nomine*, p. 68), except as noted below.

Loss of Corporeal Forces

Not only can an ethereal with no Corporeal Forces not take physical form (it will be sent back to the Marches in Trauma if this somehow occurs on Earth), but it also can-

ETHEREAL DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

Ethereals aren't quite as difficult as celestials to permanently destroy, but they don't die as easily as mortals.

ETHEREAL TRAUMA

If an ethereal's vessel is killed, it suffers Trauma much like celestials (*In Nomine*, p. 67). However, corporeal death is more traumatic for the spirits of dream, and more dangerous.



not contribute to its Essence cache (p. 17), or form a new vessel, until it regains at least 1 Corporeal Force.

Loss of Ethereal Forces

An ethereal who loses all its Ethereal Forces also loses its Image (p. 125). If it regenerates an Ethereal Force, it will regain its Image . . . but it's not always the same one it had before.

Loss of Celestial Forces

Celestial Forces contain the spark of soul that makes an ethereal spirit an autonomous, self-aware being, as opposed to a background dreamscape animation (p. 74).

Ethereals who lose their last Celestial Force usually fade out of existence, though occasionally they will become soulless figments, if they can attach themselves to a Domain or a dreamscape. (If the latter, the animation will fade like any other when the dreamer awakens.)

FADING

"When I was young, I used to dream of my perfect Prince, and he promised that he would come for me and sweep me away when I grew up. But as the years passed, he grew haggard instead, each dream sweeping away a touch of his glory. I dreamed of him last as a wan and pale ghost, and for ten years I have not dreamt of him at all."

ETHEREAL REMNANTS

An ethereal spirit which loses all its Celestial Forces can theoretically do what celestials do, and manifest on Earth in a vessel – if it has one. However, since ethereals must spend a point of Essence and make a Will roll to leave the Marches (p. 89) – or have *re*-entered the ethereal plane by sleeping – it doesn't often happen. If an ethereal who's just been savaged in celestial combat has enough Essence to raise its target number above 0, and makes the roll, it will appear on Earth at the last location it physically occupied, unconscious for 2d hours. Thereafter, it will be much like a celestial Remnant (*In Nomine*, p. 68). An ethereal Remnant might retain some of its affinities – this is up the GM. (See also p. 93 of the *Corporeal Player's Guide*.)

Trauma and celestial combat can destroy an ethereal, but the fate that spirits dread the most is "the slow death" of fading from existence a bit at a time. It is the downside of worship and belief (p. 14) – when an ethereal who has been sustained by mortal dreams and prayer loses its following, it loses that which makes it what it is.

Usually this happens to gods, but it can also happen to a dream spirit whose Image is that of a cultural icon. When the icon is forgotten, the spirit weakens and fades. Once there was a mighty king and renowned warrior named Nimrod, and fear of him spawned quite a few ethereal spirits. Over the millennia, his name and accomplishments were all but forgotten; now the only extant reference to him is a single verse in the Old Testament, and the spirits born of the nightmares he inspired have long since faded. More recently, Red Rider, Davy Crockett, Buddy Holly, and other luckless ethereals are struggling to survive. Their Images are based on pop icons who were once found in millions of dreamscapes, and are now remembered by fewer and fewer mortals.

*Shadows and fogs, lilies
and frogs, that's what little
ethereals are made of.*

This phenomenon is most likely to affect dream spirits (p. 74), and least likely to affect elementals (p. 72), but it can diminish any ethereal whom the GM decides is sustained in large part by a fading popular belief. So long as the absolute degree of belief in or worship of an ethereal is decreasing, the GM may require the spirit to make a d666 roll every year, with a target number equal to the spirit's total Forces. On a failed roll, the spirit loses 1 Force; on an unfavorable Intervention, the spirit loses 1d Forces. The gods, who often have more than 12 Forces, will take a long time to deteriorate, but after centuries of neglect, even they will eventually incur an unfavorable Intervention or two. A pagan god must also roll against fading if it loses a Tether, and the GM may require additional rolls if something causes a sudden drastic reduction in belief (such as a quarter of its following being slaughtered, converting to another religion, etc.).

ETHEREALS IN THE CORPOREAL REALM

Heaven has forbidden ethereal spirits to manifest on the corporeal plane. Since the Purity Crusade, Laurence has maintained that with the exception of a few occasional rogues, ethereals been driven from the Earth and are no longer a presence there. Any dream spirits who dare to leave the Far Marches are swiftly chased back or dispatched. The old gods are dead.

Laurence no doubt overstates the case, but those spirits who do make their way to Earth try to be very, very quiet about it. Uriel's crusade may not have convinced the ethereals of the righteousness of the Lord, but it certainly taught them to avoid His servants at all costs.

But ethereals travel to the corporeal realm a lot more often than either Heaven or Hell would like. They come to Earth in search of Essence, to fulfill their purposes, to recruit followers, to pursue their own

Earthly schemes, or sometimes just for fun. Not all of the old gods are dead, and some of them still have a fair number of followers.

CORPOREAL MANIFESTATIONS

Ethereal spirits can only manifest on the corporeal plane if they have a vessel; they have no celestial forms. An ethereal must spend 1 Essence and make a Will roll to manifest on Earth. An ethereal can manifest anywhere it has been before, at the lower locus of an ethereal Tether, next to any human with whom it has a Soul Link (p. 64), or anywhere it can follow another ethereal (in much the way celestials can follow each other; see *In Nomine*, p. 53). At the GM's option, an ethereal may be able to manifest in a place it's seen in an exceptionally vivid and accurate dream; make an Intelligence roll to avoid mistakes.

Returning to the Marches requires 1 Essence and another Will roll; see p. 89.

DISTURBANCES

On the corporeal plane, ethereals make disturbances just like celestials do. Any expenditure of Essence causes a disturbance; so does causing corporeal death or destruction. A spirit who manifests corporeally (or returns to the Marches), or switches vessels, also makes a disturbance equal to its total Forces, just like celestials. Likewise, Roles may mask disturbance normally.

The use of affinities (p. 50) does not automatically cause a disturbance, but any Essence spent on them, as well as some of the effects they may generate, will.

INTERVENTIONS

Ethereal spirits are, by default, a "third party" in the War; they are not automatically allied with or opposed to either side. Thus, it is not always predictable how Interventions will affect them.

The GM will have to improvise when an ethereal rolls an Intervention; the result will be based on how the spirit's current activities would be seen by the side that Intervenes. If an ethereal rolls a 111, for example, the Intervention will be favorable *if* it is currently acting selflessly, or doing something that would aid the forces of Heaven. If the ethereal is working for Hell, or acting selfishly, then a Divine Intervention will be bad. Likewise, an Infernal Intervention can be good or bad, depending on how Lucifer would see the current situation (which is entirely up to the GM . . .).



ELEMENTS AND INITIATION



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ELEMENTS AND INITIATION



Philosopher spirits speak of the “Knife of Niyonizigiye,” which cuts not the physical body-image of a spirit (severing a hand at the wrist) but rather divides it into its conceptual components. The knife can cut the dedicated and patriotic defender out of the military spirit, leaving only the ruthless and violent bogeyman. It can split away the sense of freedom and travel from a motorcycle spirit, leaving only the nebulous element of the Mechanical.

In the Marches, home to those things that life might someday conceive of, the Knife of Niyonizigiye provides a more accurate dissection than any dream-blade. Ethereals are not assemblages of bodily parts. The substrate of the Marches is not a dancing world of atoms and quarks, but rather a seething mix of primal concepts. Dreamers build ethereals out of these primal images, not out of little tiny motes of dream. The basic elements of a spirit are not carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen, but rather the foundation concepts of the human and animal worlds – things like Air, the Sun, Family, Pain, Color, and War.

– From “Spiritual Anatomy,”
by the Greek god Asklepios



Where celestials view themselves as instruments or musicians, their self-image defined as notes in a Symphony (or personal symphony), ethereals see themselves as collections of *strands* of various elements. Indeed, many spirits refer to the universal Symphony as the Tapestry of all things, forever being woven. (The metaphor is sometimes extended even further, with disturbance as a “snarl,” “tug,” or “runner” in the corporeal weave – but the exact terms vary from Domain to Domain.)

The elements that form an ethereal affect its personality. If an ethereal has *initiated* (see p. 46), it has gotten into touch with one or more of its elements. This both empowers it, allowing it to learn Songs and skills without

a teacher, and weakens it, instilling a Dread. Even if a spirit has not yet initiated, the elements described below are a place to start when forming its personality and selecting its affinities. (For those who prefer to work “backward,” selecting affinities first, see the box on p. 63.)

ELEMENT DESCRIPTIONS

*Needs bought, hopes sold, dreams and themes and stories told
– that’s what little spirits are made of!*

A typical animal lives in a very immediate universe. The building blocks of that universe are things like the Forest he lives in, the Sun that warms him from the sky, his Fear of being eaten, and the Hunt that earns him his dinner. His mind contains a reflection of these building blocks and some very basic tools for reasoning about them.

As with humans, when animals dream, they enter a world where the basic components of their existence – Forest, the Sun, the Hunt, *et al.* – jumble together into new forms. The animal kingdom’s simple and powerful impressions of these building blocks became the elements. They knotted together to form the first dreamscapes.

These elements changed, a little, over the years. Each spirit built from the elements had a microscopic feedback effect on the element itself. When humans came along, each human’s vision of Forests, the Sun, Fear, and the Hunt made its own minuscule changes. For the most part, though, the ancient elements remain as they began – raw, primitive, preconscious, precultural ideas. Not even the newest elements, spawned by humans alone, are tame.

Elements are not dreams. They are the roots of dream. They are not myths, but rather the substance from which myths are brought to life.

Strands of thousands of different elements knit together to create the Marches. No hand-written list could enumerate them all. Fortunately for those who study the ways of spirits, most of the elements can be grouped roughly into categories. Elements with similar themes share similar Dreads. Stemming from the same mythic, instinctive roots, they specialize in similar affinities and Songs. Thus, an ethereal who awakens the element of Light in initiation has much in common with ethereals who awaken elements like Color or Darkness. Even the non-initiates will have flashes of harmony with the elements strongest within them. The worldviews of thematically similar elements do not always match, but they reflect one another through a distorted lens.

ANATOMY OF AN ETHEREAL

This section summarizes the Greek god Asklepios' "Spiritual Anatomy," which has remained the leading description of ethereal "biology" for more than 1,700 years.

Strands

Asklepios pictures the elements as infinitely long strands of dreamstuff weaving invisibly through the Marches. Like threads on the loom of the Fates, these strands knit together to create substance.

Dreamscapes and Domains are great tangled knots of the elements. Spirits usually embody strands of no more than three or four major elements, though some have many more. One or two strands serve as the linchpins of the knot.

Asklepios described spirits with a strand of an element weaving through them as "having" that strand or being "[Element]-strand spirits." A spirit who "dissipates," entering a state much like sleep, can sense with the entire strand. (Sadly, it cannot *understand* what it senses.) Otherwise, even initiated spirits can only sense and think with their piece of the strand.

A number of ethereal scientists, inspired by Asklepios' work, struggle to isolate and control these strands. Success could bring any number of rewards – a rapid transit system that celestials cannot use, a simpler form of initiation, or even mental control over Domains and legions of spirits!

Image

When innovators combined the ideas of "explosions" and "celebrations," some came up with fireworks and some glorified terrorism. No one, however, invented an exploding holiday. Basic concepts combine to create more sophisticated ideas, not unholy blends of the original images. When strands of primal ideas knot together, they create complex ideas. Spirits see their "bodies," the knots of primal elements inside them, as the complex image which that knot creates. Their body is an "Image" – something like "villainous, six-armed violinist" or "garden gnome with fangs."



Cutting off the hand of a swashbuckling pirate, Asklepios notes, does not change his Image to "one-handed pirate" any more than putting on a hat makes him a "pirate in a hat." Mind hits and soul hits take effect regardless of Image. Visible damage just expresses how that Image naturally looks when hurt. Thus, an "invulnerable pirate," in the Marches, can be hit until he dies without ever *looking* damaged.

Affinities

Dreamers actively shape the Marches. Spirits inherit some of this ability from their human creators. This power ultimately derives from the soul, or whatever approximation to souls ethereals possess, and therefore remains a mystery. Asklepios' text hypothesizes the existence of *active strands* worked into a soul, each capable of manipulating the corresponding element. This (he believed) is what gives rise to affinities, an ethereal's power over certain elements in dream and reality. Asklepios demonstrates that Domain powers derive from the general pool of sleeping minds. The figments' affinities come from the lingering will of the dreamer that created them. Unfortunately, Asklepios could not directly verify the existence of active strands.

The Mind

Ethereal self-awareness derives primarily from their Celestial Forces. While humans categorize the sense of "I" as a mental construct, it does not belong in the Marches. Concepts like Fear and Society form elemental strands. The ego and the sense of self do not. In short, while most of an ethereal's mind is made of Marches stuff – a pseudo-physical part of its Image – some of it is not. Its sapience and its ability to dream exist on a different level. Some think of it as the ethereal soul. Others think of it as the ethereal mind.

Either way, *something* pervades an ethereal's Image and elemental nature, allowing it to think and have some measure of Free Will. Before initiation, this consciousness exists primarily within its Image. Afterward, some of it lives within its elements as well.



Each section below describes one thematic group of elements (such as “Astronomical Concepts”) and focuses on one particular element from that group (e.g., “the Sun”). The first sections – “On the Surface,” “Personality,” and “In Human Society” – describe that particular element. The section on “The Others” describes other elements of the group, especially as they differ from the detailed one. The suggested Dreads and Resources apply to all elements in the group.

To gain insight into the other spirits in an element group, use the depicted element as the baseline. A Darkness spirit should concern itself with the same superficial appearances that Light spirits do. However, its elemental nature motivates it to *conceal* its flaws rather than *attract attention* to its virtues.

Spirits vary as much as humans do. There are female Sun-spirits and male Moons, healing Waters, cuddly Beasts and poisonous Plants. The element descriptions below are not gospel, but rather a picture of the statistical mean. Not all spirits focus on the same aspects of their elements. Trends may vary with time. Even absolute statements have exceptions.

ASTRONOMICAL CONCEPTS: THE SUN

The world turns, far below.

Common astronomical elements include the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars. These “elements of the upper reaches” have given light, warmth, and beauty to the world since the very first dreams began. Since the dawn of recorded time, they have reigned over the seasons, the tides, and the harvest. Exalted, set above the world, majestic, and abstract – ethereals who awaken these elements in their spirit consider themselves royalty. They are not entirely wrong.

The Sun, in particular, represents the ruler of the world and the King of the sky. Majestic and golden, he seeks to drive away fear and darkness. Warmth is his specialty, though he understands light and beauty as well. Many powerful spirits have a primary element of the Sun.

ON THE SURFACE

Spirits with a major Sun influence appear radiant and larger than life. They cultivate grandeur and not

“LOST” SONGS

A “critical mass” of spirits of a given element must know a Song before it can be studied from a strand. This keeps most lost and secret Songs safe. However, it’s possible that one or two “lost” Songs remain latent in one element or another – just waiting for someone to do the research. A good example of this is the “lost” Ethereal Song of Exchange (p. 66). Heaven makes every effort to suppress this Song, but it keeps popping back up. Maybe Family spirits can study this Song from their strand, with a lot of extra work – that would explain Heaven’s failure!

Making a lost or secret Song available through an element is a major plot device. Granting one should always be the GM’s idea; players should not *expect* such an in-character treat. One reason a GM might *offer* a lost Song to a PC is to catapult a spirit to prominence in a celestial-focused game.

elegance. A suit of gleaming golden armor suits them well in combat, but so does a lion skin and loincloth. Most prefer dark-skinned vessels to pale ones. Some have a fondness for golden hair. They often seem strikingly healthy and vigorous. A few of the nastier Sun-strand ethereals have signature blemishes suggesting skin cancer.

Traveling through the Marches, these ethereals favor the shapes of “noble” animals: hawks, stags, unicorns, bears, dolphins, and great cats, among others. They fight deviously but without treachery, considering betrayal beneath them. Their homes often resemble small, cleanly-designed temples or shrines after the Hellenic or Japanese mold.

PERSONALITY

Ethereals of the Sun consider their nature a weighty responsibility, a burden as well as a gift. Fueled by the fires of the life-father Sun burning in their hearts, they must set an example for all to follow. Whatever angels might say of “soulless ethereals,” *they* know they have a shining destiny to fulfill. Arrogant, vain, honest, valorous, and honorable to a fault, they seek to burn their name into the Marches’ history.

The Sun hangs in the sky far above the Earth. Events on Earth rarely have much impact on its activities. Similarly, the changing situation in the gross pseudo-material world of the Marches rarely changes a Sun-strand spirit’s plans or beliefs. Its thoughts soar the dizzying heights of speculation, abstraction, genius, and glory; reality rarely penetrates.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

The brilliant intensity of a Sun-strand ethereal's attention has just the right overtones of warmth to make a human feel special. The Sun's track record with humans sparkles. Ethereals of the Sun often take flesh as salesmen, social workers, psychologists, human resources managers, hostage negotiators, and other professionals whose career benefits from their unique charm. Other times, they take on leadership positions – executive director, politician, union boss – to better reflect their natural superiority.

THE OTHERS

The Moon much resembles the Sun, but acts as sage, wise woman, and mother rather than King and father. She unriddles the mysteries of life in the name of the Sun's causes and her own. Her own secrets, however, she keeps inviolate. Her deceptions are impenetrable. The Stars represent the subject of a quest and the realization of hopes. Others must prove themselves worthy to claim the stars' beauty or their help, but once someone has done so, the stars do not fail him.

THE MIGRATION OF STARS

Spirits who awaken an element of the upper reaches acknowledge with some reluctance that they embody *concepts* of the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, rather than the glorious heavenly bodies themselves. Some argue, however, that the story does not end there. According to some Far Marches travelers, once in every seven years the sky opens above an unnamed Domain and the stars descend into the ethereal realm. They wear the shapes of princes and princesses, with a retinue of perfect servants, yet their nature is clear. For a month – so Sinbad claims, who followed them on the sly – they wend their way through the strangest lands of fable until they enter to a cave guarded by three monsters; and for all his efforts to slip in behind them, he does not know where they go thence. Ethereals of astronomical concepts argue, however dubiously, that the strands of Sun, Moon, and Stars are not just things of dream but rather dreams *infused in that cave* with the true essence of the lords and ladies of the sky.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Significant failure. Losing control over a situation important to its plans. Darkness. Becoming lost in the darkness. Discovering itself unimportant. Acting dishonorably. Acting cowardly. Acting without justice. Undignified situations. Cold. Severe cold. Abandoning a project. *Any* failure. A moonless night. The full light of day. Mist. Revelation of its secrets. The Sun dreads the undead, the Moon fears Balseraphic lies, and many Stars hate the work of Fate on Earth.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Astronomical strands:

- ✦ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Astronomy, Astrology, Great Deeds of History);
- ✦ Lying, Savoir-Faire, and Seduction;
- ✦ The Songs of Attraction (Ethereal), Entropy (Corporeal), Healing, Light, Motion (Corporeal), Projection (Corporeal, Ethereal), and Spirit Speech (Celestial);
- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Nightmares (Ethereal), Nimbus (Ethereal), or Truth.

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Deception [Moon], Divination, Glamour, Light, Luck, Obscurement.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Angels came, terrible and fearful things, to steal our place in the sky. What merit is there in their love if their love does not recognize our merit?

Demons: That treacherous and unseemly rabble! A time will come when we shall sweep them from our Marches and claim Beleth's Tower as our own.

CLASSICAL ELEMENTS: WATER

Simple principles, in combination, create the world.

Classical Elements include Winds, Water, Flame, and Rock. Three shape the world with furious energy. One molds the realms with its passive strength. The classical elements fight tooth and nail for supremacy and survival, but stand united in one belief: the balance between rock's resistance to change and the metamorphic power of winds, water, and flame gives rise to every event in all three

realms. Earth and water smother fires, winds and water erode stone, rock scatters the wind and flames boil water – but the classical elements are rivals, not enemies. They struggle because their struggle creates reality. Even in the absence of physical winds, water, flame, and rock, the principles they embody carve out the course of history.

Other classical elements, such as Wood and Metal, exist. They are under-represented in the Marches, save in Domains where Eastern myths hold sway. There, they are considered to be opposites of Winds, Water, and Flame – with Rock, they balance the energies with their own quiet power.

WORDS AND ELEMENTS

Celestial Words and ethereal strands have certain similarities, especially noticeable with the Classical Elements and the Archangels of Fire, the Wind, and Stone. However, there are differences. Chief among them, as celestials are quick to point out, is that even strands which embody elemental concepts – things which are rooted deeply in the Symphonic harmonies of the corporeal world such as Flowers or Stone – are more malleable by human perceptions than equivalent Words.

For example: the Truth of Flowers encompasses many things, including the slow ruthlessness of vegetative battles for survival. So an angel of Flowers may be violent as a last resort, because the Symphonic *concept* of plants includes their slow, unending warfare. The essence of a *strand* of plants or flowers began with that truth, and still includes it . . . but it has been altered by human perceptions of “healing herbs” or “gentle flowers,” not to mention metaphors for helplessness like “wheat before the scythe.” And human dreams of plants tend to weave the Plants strand with strands of food, of healing, of interior decoration . . . creating Plants spirits “contaminated” with other ideas. An ethereal whose Plant strands are combined with these other elements may be doomed to be a victim; even if cornered, it would be *unable* to fight back. It is passive, a prey-thing, and *cannot* kill.

Angels and demons say this proves ethereals are deluded and weaker beings, slaves to human “groupthink.” Ethereals tend to reply that they are more flexible because of their link to complex humanity, and besides, Divine and Infernal Words are merely strands given power by their linkage to the strand of *The Almighty*. (Celestials often retort, “Why hasn’t any other ethereal awakened that strand, then?” and the conversation goes downhill from there.)

Water, in particular, represents change through flexibility, dedication, and endless reserves of strength. Water-strand ethereals have a primal tie to the cloud-bursts that drown villages, the floods that rip houses from their foundations, the rivers that slice through mountains and dig deep chasms in the plains – and the oases that give rise to towns in harsh lands.

ON THE SURFACE

Some Water spirits have long clean bodies. Others have massive girth, with stomachs curved like lake bottoms and limbs swollen like rain-filled rivers. All move with a smooth, lithe grace. Their bodies instinctively take the path of least resistance. Most are pale. Some have a murkier color scheme.

Water spirits travel the Marches in aquatic shapes, of course, scissoring through the mists as sharks, dolphins, swordfish, and even orca. Some become rivers, dozens or hundreds of yards of rushing water tumbling toward their destination. Water spirits do not fight fair, and often have a dozen contingency plans before a battle begins. Their homes resemble lakebeds, riverbeds, giant bowls, and storm clouds. (Some of the latter are mobile micro-Domains; see p. 105.)

PERSONALITY

Spirits of the Classical Elements presume that *they* create the world they live in. They can make anything or anyone useful, helpful, or beautiful. For Water spirits, all it takes is cutting away the obstacles and the detritus until the pure entity within shines out. Typically amoral, they use any tool that comes to hand to do that cutting – devious treachery, force, sweet persuasion, skill, love, hate, generosity, or patience. Their motivations vary, but most have a “Big Picture” goal for their life. Achieving it, they set a new goal and move on.

Ethereals influenced by Water have tricky, capable minds, always brimming with new approaches to old problems. So fluid are their thoughts, in fact, that they find committing to a single plan of action difficult. They hold their strength in reserve – sometimes for minutes, rarely for years,

and often for “too long.”

Many spirits with a classical strand cultivate a certain anonymity. They conceal their names and origins and use only heavily descriptive nicknames (“One-Eye,” “Redbeard”). This lets them imagine themselves local incarnations of the four world-shaping classical elements and not weak spirits with a touch of one such element inside them. This is a distinct step up!

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Humans instinctively recognize the primal nature of Water-strand spirits. They treat such spirits with respect but maintain a comfortable distance. Spirits of Water seek Roles that highlight their creative flexibility – engineers, scientists, military and political tacticians, troubleshooters, marketing executives, painters, and so forth. However, these spirits also find themselves in atypical careers – dogcatcher, model, translator, streetwalker, and so forth – as suits their ever-changing agendas in society.

THE OTHERS

Flame takes an even more destructive approach to the world, aggressive and fierce. It does not cut its way to the hidden utility and beauty inside things: it burns them into shape! Winds have a less fearsome approach. If the tools to hand do not satisfy them, they scour the world for tools that will. This approach seems non-violent – but God help the human who gets in their way. Rock shapes the world by infusing it with its own strength.

Thus, Water would reform a drug addict by killing the local suppliers. Flame would make his life Hell until he reformed. Winds would search the world for a suitable man who was *not* addicted to drugs. A spirit of Rock would counsel the addict, trying to resolve the problems that put him on drugs to begin with.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Burning. Immersion. Suffocation. Incarceration. Powerlessness. Stillness. Exposure of its true name. Witnessing the physical destruction of its element in quantity. Failing to shape the world using its element's approach – indirect force for water, direct force for fire, supportive action for rock, and a study of all options for the winds. Having someone manipulate it using the approach of an opposing element. Losing ground on its current grand plan. Running out of ideas. Chaos. The void.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

As four pieces of a larger process, spirits with a Classical strand can access powers tied to all four elements – although those from “opposed” elements make

them uncomfortable. Spirits can learn the following Resources from Classical strands:

- ✧ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Alchemy, Physics, Fire Fighting);
- ✧ The Songs of Form (Corporeal, Celestial), Healing, Light (Corporeal), Motion (Corporeal, Ethereal), Shields (Corporeal), and Thunder;
- ✧ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Fire, Ice and Numinous Corpus (Fins, Plates).

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✧ Air, Cold [Water as ice], Drowning, Fire, Minerals, Water.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: In a place far from this world, fire, water, earth, and air met. By their meeting, they formed a God. So vain was He that He sent His children to kill the four who fathered Him. He shall learn better when they succeed, and He winks out like a dreamscape on a dreamer's waking.

Demons: They have no truth in them, no primal glory. The world does not welcome them. Still, they make good allies. Strong enemies. Unpleasant masters.

ZANG WANXIAO'S SALAMANDER RANCH

Zang Wanxiao's Far Marches Domain employs some of the tightest security in the ethereal realm. No one still capable of communication knows exactly what goes on inside her obsidian fortress. Most important people in the Marches *do* know, however, that if they need shock troops or bodyguards, and price is no object, Zang Wanxiao is the person to talk to. Some artifact, gateway, captive dreamer, scientific process, or breeding farm within her Domain can produce an apparently unlimited supply of salamanders – spirits of flame, and in this case primal figments thereof. Wanxiao's salamanders are sufficiently independent from the Domain of their birth that they can travel the Marches. Zang Wanxiao quite happily sells them into slavery for the duration of their existence – about a month, that is – and her prices are exorbitant but sane.



THE BEASTS OF PASSION

Some claim that Apunej Thanchvil, a woman of the Etruscan people, dreamed more powerfully than any human born before or since. A single dream – one of only three she dreamt in all her life – created the 14 beasts of passion, magnificent primal spirits in animal shape. Each embodies a single emotion “more truly” than any other spirit known; when the nameless Red Bull of Anger draws near, entire Domains succumb to riot. ‘Khrul Shes, Silver Bear of Delight, can incapacitate all but the most hardened Servitors of Laurence with laughter. Zad Par Bcu, the Abhorrent Hawk, drives all others away with her approach; none save Apunej has ever seen her color. Five of the beasts have been missing in action for over a millennium. Some say they saw angels over the body of Lce’i Rnam Shes, the Black Lion of Jealousy. Nevertheless, spirits whisper that Uriel himself placed these beasts under his protection during the Purity Crusade. Their deaths, the story claims, would cripple the human capacity for emotion. Not even Uriel wanted that.

The other Beasts of Passion are Shes Pa Phyi Ma, the Mottled Owl of Grief; Tshad Min Gyi Blo, the Blue Toad of Confusion; Lce’i Yi, the Emerald Serpent of Pride; Tshogs Gi Rnam Shes, the Yellow Ram of Despair; Mig Gi Rnam Shes, the Claret Dragonfly of Lust; Shes Pa Rang Gsal, the Argent Spider of Mindfulness; Gsur, the Gray Worm of Ambition; Rna Ba’i Rnam Shes, the Russet Wolf of Hope; Lus Shes Kyi Khams, the Indigo Anglerfish of Loneliness; and Log Shes, the White Shark of Torment.

EMOTIONS: FEAR

The world is a thin cloth of substance over a masonry of passion.

Common emotion elements include Fear, Hunger, Love, Lust, and Pain. They drive the bestial animal dreams and stir beneath the elaborate ornamentation of human dreamscapes. Vibrantly alive, primitive and ferocious, emotional elements connect the Marches to the key motivating forces in the human psyche and the reptile brain.

Fear commands great respect in the Marches. In dreamscapes and on Earth, Fear regularly overpowers Fury, Lust, Love, Torment, Pride, and all the rest of that motley crew. Fear inspires deeds of infamy and deeds of glory. Humans can spend their whole lives haunted by one dream’s worth of Fear. Beleth favors the spirits of Fear; they delight her black heart.

ON THE SURFACE

A patina of terror, invisible but real, surrounds most spirits of Fear. Even much stronger ethereals, aware of their strength, feel reflexively nervous in a Fear-strand spirit’s presence. They must monitor their emotions carefully to keep it from influencing them. Otherwise, Fear spirits take on any appearance they choose. As small a thing as a pen can terrify, in the proper context.

Fear spirits usually wear their Image’s natural shape when traveling the Marches. Favored alternatives (achieved by Dream-Shaping skill, p. 93) include clouds of malign intent, spinning mirrors, and, of course, black-winged Malakim, symbols of cruelty and horror. In battle, Fear-strand ethereals fight to inflict maximum pain and suffering. Their homes resemble ordinary Earth or Domain scenes – the architecture of fear requires a subtle touch.

PERSONALITY

Fear-strand spirits involve themselves intensely in their activities. *Built* in part from emotion, they know a furious passion that few other ethereals can match. Having an Emotion element magnifies their ambitions and their Dreads. They love to cause Fear, of course – they come alive in fear’s presence, like a flower unfolding in the sun. The storm winds of emotion in their spirits do not end there, however. Creatures of motivation, they want to control others, to sway or dominate them, to weave the tapestry of events with their own two (or six, or eight) hands. They seek power and rule, and if love seems a better tool than fear, they *will* use love . . . with fearful determination.

Emotion spirits are notorious for poor impulse control. Passion gives them strength, fueling and directing their incisive intellects, but sometimes it overpowers them and derails the most carefully developed plans.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Humans find the presence of Fear ethereals extremely uncomfortable. Like strong ethereals, humans can censor their fear if they do not rationally consider the spirit dangerous – but it remains a tangible presence. Daring Fear-strand spirits choose Roles where this gives them an advantage. Athletes, lawyers, scientists, PIs, and corporate raiders all benefit from a heightened ability to intimidate others. Conservative spirits of Fear choose Roles that make fear seem natural, to avoid angelic attention. Terrifying IRS agents, cops, military sergeants, gangsters, and serial killers do not strike others as unusual.

THE OTHERS

Traditional ethereal taxonomy identifies 33 major emotional elements: Abhorrence, Adoration, Ambition, Amusement, Bewilderment, Bliss, Cheer, Despair, Devotion, Disgust, Dispassion, Exultation, Fear, Fervor, Fury, Gloom, Grief, Hope, Hunger, Jealousy, Loneliness, Love, Lust, Mindfulness, Mortification, Pain, Pride, Resentment, Selfishness, Selflessness, Sorrow, Stress, and Torment. As with the other element groups, minor, less common elements from this group also exist. The various Emotion-strand ethereals radiate the emotion embedded in their nature, not fear. They bask in the presence of that emotion, and not fear. They adopt Roles that justify or take advantage of their own particular radiance. Otherwise, they resemble Fear-strand spirits.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Watching its attempt to inspire an emotion backfire, extinguishing that emotion or creating an opposite emotion (fear to humor, cheer to despair, etc.) instead. Others escaping its control. Suppressing its emotional reaction to an important situation. Working with computers, zombies, actuaries, and other emotionless automata. While inside a dreamscape, permitting the dreamer to enter Blandine's Marches – or, for emotions like Love, Beleth's Domain. Loneliness – being without someone to inspire an emotion in.

Some Emotion spirits have apparently unrelated Dreads. Their increased emotional intensity magnifies their worst pre-initiation fear. Some possible Dreads are: Failing its pagan Superior. Being shown up by a rival. Confronting celestials.

A spirit might also manifest a normal Dread *and* a Fear Discord.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Emotion strands:

- ✦ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Psychology, Drama);
- ✦ Artistry, Emote, and Seduction;
- ✦ The Songs of Attraction (Ethereal), Charm, Entropy (Ethereal, Celestial), Form (Ethereal), Healing (Ethereal), Motion (Ethereal), Possession, and Tongues (Ethereal);
- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Empathy (Ethereal), Nightmares, Nimbus (Ethereal), Revulsion (Ethereal), Sensation (Ethereal), and Solace (Ethereal).

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Air, Emotions [often, these spirits have several Emotion affinities], Speed.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Beasts! Monsters! Abominations! They *stole* from us. The Earth is our *right!* The Marches are our *right!* I spit on them. May their God reject them. May corruption grow in their oh-so-pure souls. May Heaven fall and may the Earth be *damned*. Nothing else would punish them enough.

Demons: They have done us *one* favor. They have saved us from the wrath of Heaven. For this we must pay the Danegeld forever after. Or so they would have us believe.

INFORMATION: NEWS

The world is all and only those things that we believe to exist.

Most elements are life's concepts of the world. Information elements are life's concepts of life's concepts of the world. A human's dream of his grandmother dying involves the element of Death, even though it all takes place within his mind. A human's dream of *knowing* about his grandmother's death involves the element of Knowledge. Information elements concern themselves with things unseen – with understanding the world and with awareness of truths beyond the confines of the senses. Knowledge and Wisdom collect true concepts under their aegis. Faith and Imagination oversee false or unprovable concepts. Perspective and Perception embody the murkier middle ground of half-truth. Information spirits are masters of all they do not survey.

News stands out among the common Information elements. It represents information in motion. It represents fact and fancy cut free of a single mind, able to travel the world on its own recognizance. Heralds of the Marches, the ethereals of News spread story and truth in the name of their inner muse: information's need to propagate itself, lest it be forgotten. Most Domains welcome them.



ON THE SURFACE

Like most Information ethereals, spirits of News seem semi-visible in the Marches – not quite *there*, a bit more abstract than the ethereals around them. They like to wear “traveling costume,” adorning their appearance with symbols of speed. Winged boots, a herald's trumpet, cheetah fur, a hawk's shape, sports car fins, and back-mounted jet engines all show off their natural role and mobility.

Modern News spirits often travel the ethereal realm as lengths of fiber-optic cable, the wire snaking ahead at a breakneck pace and vanishing to the rear as bits sizzle down its length. Other popular shapes include ravens, the wind, and equestrian messengers. News spirits avoid battle, although many of them have a library's worth of tactical knowledge memorized. They prefer mobile micro-Domains (see p. 105) as homes, but occasionally settle down in a home resembling abstract artwork or a public service building.

PERSONALITY

News spirits tend to view other ethereals with friendly disdain. Spirits, in News' worldview, look a lot like uppity bits of information that don't like being thrown in a mail sack and carted off to the next stop. True, spirits listen to the news that News spirits bring. Some – the really interesting ones – *generate* news worth the telling. For these virtues, News forgives spirits their folly. Still, spirits of other elements who consider themselves the equals of Information's ethereals are just plain presumptuous.

Ethereals with a strong News element do not like to settle down. Like Ofanim, they prefer to keep on the move. Like most of their Information kin, News spirits tend to assume a "clean" world – one where the unknown and the inexplicable plays a small role. An Information spirit who understands logistics and strategy makes a magnificent general. An Information spirit who only knows strategy will not even think to *ask* whether the troops can implement its grand plans.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Humans fascinate News spirits. *Homo sapiens* is a big ambulatory pile of meat . . . and a living storehouse for a hundred million bits of information. Given the chance, some News spirits study humans for *hours* – before their own need to be on the move kicks in. News spirits appeal to humans, too, with their gossip, stories, and early reports on things of interest. Preferred Roles include reporter, writer, librarian, teacher, hairdresser, scientist, policy analyst, mailman, traveling salesman, guru, and talent scout.

THE OTHERS

On average, other Information spirits lack News' propensity for travel. Knowledge spirits replace it with an urge to collect both information and valuables. Wisdom spirits seek understanding, while ethereals of Perception desire experience. Faith-strand ethereals spread faith on Earth, but also love the capacity for faith within themselves. Many travel the Marches in search of sacred mysteries to behold – questions without answers, like the Topaz Gates that stand alone in the Far Marches mists and sing the Theme of Time. Imagination Spirits create. Although they can tell the truth when they choose, they are endless founts of story, inspiration, and lies. They enjoy nothing so much as a deception that teaches the victim *more* than the truth would. Finally, Perspective spirits have a distinct inclination toward both empathy and selfishness; they understand others' internal worlds, but are obsessed with their own. Most Information spirits have one of these elements, although other types exist.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Forgetting something important. Misunderstanding something important. Yielding to a natural inferior. Giving up on a mystery. Failing a test of knowledge. Failing a meaningful test of knowledge. Losing a compendium of knowledge (computer database on disk, valuable tome, public library). Silence. Refusing to share non-confidential information. Refusing to share *any* information. Witnessing inexplicable events. Permitting a preventable destruction of information – book-burning, a cover-up, the release of a malicious computer virus. Discovering that a lie has taken it in. Admitting a lack of knowledge. Some News spirits Dread personal involvement in the events they witness and report on. Many Information spirits, the most abstract of the whole Marches lot, can't handle the idea of performing certain "manifestly" corporeal activities. For some, this means mucking out chamber pots. For others, it means violence.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Information strands:

- ✧ Any Knowledge or Language skill not either secret or extremely rare;
- ✧ Artistry, Detect Lies, or Lying;
- ✧ The Songs of Attraction (Celestial), Light (Ethereal), Possession, Projection (Corporeal, Ethereal), or Tongues;



✧ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Direction, Fire (Ethereal), Memory (Ethereal), or Truth (Corporeal, Ethereal).

Suggested Affinities include:

✧ Books, Deception [Imagination/Faith], Divination, Obscurement, Speed [News].

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Creatures truly beyond our hegemony. The celestial is not, whatever they say, a “higher” realm than ours. The soul is not supreme over the mind. Yet the existence of *peers* so different from ourselves is fascinating. We do not understand them. *Can* we understand them? Can the mind comprehend the soul? Can the soul . . . do soul things to the mind?

Demons: Demons wish to be our friends, because demons hope to exploit us. History shows, many times over, that friends like the demons do more damage in the end than the vilest of enemies. This speaks only of demons as a group, of course; individuals vary.

LIFE: BEASTS

The world is a test of our skill at survival.

Common elements of Life include Beasts and Plants. Feral and wild, these elements do not accept the elegant lies and pretenses of society. They see only the savage garden. It lurks beneath the surface of the civilized places, a morass of animal motivations that drives apparently sophisticated and elegant discourse. In the wilds of Earth and the Far Marches, the savage garden casts off the mask of culture and shines in all its untamed glory. The only law of the savage garden is *endure* – whatever the cost.

Human imagination has corrupted the elements of Life. The Beasts strand remains the purer of the two, but human knowledge of domestication has tainted its primeval nature. Some Beasts initiates are even *pleasant*. The Plants strand has suffered far more. Under the weight of human herbalism and medicine, it warped and took on connotations of “healing” and “utility” – an object lesson for any spirit tempted to consider humans irrelevant!

Life elements can manifest in dreams and myths without actual animal or plant images in them. Humans and semi-humans graphically displaying their bestial heritage – with the kind of primitive behavior found in the savage garden – appear in dreams touched by Life.

THE INVERSE DATA STORE

Several Domains have tried to build an ultimate repository of knowledge. It would contain examples of or references on all things known or imagined – the spirits’ version of Yves’ Library or Kronos’ Archives. All such efforts have failed, although the resulting libraries are quite impressive. The Inverse Data Store, created by the Chalk Entity of Calenture, tackles this problem from a new angle. It seeks to contain examples of or references on all things *unknown* or *unimaginable* – by those below Superiors in understanding, at least. Gem Ferriza, who serves as the Chalk Entity’s voice, argues that this Data Store contains all truth and fiction implicitly. “To know all things real or imagined, you need only consider all possibilities. Subtract those found within our Citadel. Then take what remains.” Few ethereals visit the Store; some of the creatures beyond knowledge and imagination have teeth.

ON THE SURFACE

Beasts-strand spirits never look tame. Even at their most charming, they have a touch of the wild clinging to them – a tiny piece of “Nature, red in tooth and claw.” Some move like predators. Others have the hyperactive nerves of prey. In their manner, dress, and habits of speech, all display a bestial focus on the basic necessities of life.

Most Beasts spirits identify with a specific animal type, and wear that shape when traveling. They approach battle with more ferocity than subtlety. Their homes often resemble dens, warrens, nests, or hives. A few homes resemble modern buildings with Nature creeping in at the edges – weeds sprout among the floor tiles, vines strangle the water cooler, and the howls of coyotes disturb the night.

PERSONALITY

Spirits of Beasts have no patience for superficiality and deceit in others. (They themselves can be perfectly cunning, if it suits their Image and whim.) Their nature impels them to consider the underlying truth of any situation, because surface appearances can conceal danger and opportunity. Perceiving the physical aspects of the world as preeminent, they prefer shiny treasures to paper currency, athletics to theater, and strong leaders to astute ones. They live in the present rather than the past or the future.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Beasts-strand spirits prefer vessels that put them near the top of the food chain. Bears, tigers, sharks, and even humans are popular. As humans, they *try* to play by the rules – they must do so to survive! They have no intuition for rules nonsensical by animal standards, however. Most understand the laws against murder. Many have a decent grasp of property laws. Drug and traffic laws – sometimes realistic, often highly theoretical – elude them. Few Beasts understand the logic behind politeness to inferiors, and Beasts spirits have *no* grasp of fashion past simple display to impress a mate.

THE OTHERS

Plants spirits focus on growth and competition. They see themselves as locked in a constant race with all their enemies to claim the resources of the world. The tallest plants seize the sun. Their near-by rivals die. As a plant's roots seek water, Plants spirits seek to gather allies and treasures to support their endless striving. As a plant's leaves absorb the strength of the sun, so Plants spirits take from the world without question or qualm. The ambition that drives these spirits to their extremes of ruthlessness and greed varies. Many simply desire survival or personal power. However, as plants were the first medicine known to man, many ethereals with a Plants strand seek ultimately to heal and to build. A great number of those are even pacifistic! Gathering power and crushing their enemies – socially, when violence becomes anathema to them – simply makes them feel safe and effective as they pursue their benevolence.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Risking its life. Risking its life for anything but a loved one. Ending life. Wasting time on something superficial. Sacrificing present pleasures for future gain. Spending 24 hours in an urban area. Going without food or water, even though spirits and vessels can normally survive without such things. Showing mercy. Showing weakness. Failing to repel an invasion of its territory. Pointless cruelty. Pointless self-sacrifice. (Or both.) Failing to advance the interests of the animal species it identifies with. Dealing out physical violence [some Plants]. Physical violence [some Plants]. Being trapped. Being hunted.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

The Life strands share a single essence. Initiating in any Life element gives access to the healing power of Plants and the combat abilities of Beasts. Spirits can learn the following Resources from Life strands:

- ✦ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Animals, Plants, Herbalism);
- ✦ Climbing, Dodge, Escape, Fighting, Move Silently, Running, Survival, Swimming, and Tracking;
- ✦ The Songs of Healing, Thunder, and Numinous Corpus (Claws, Fangs, Feet, Horns, Tail, Wings);
- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Cacophony (Ethereal), Nemesis (Ethereal, Celestial), Sight (Corporeal) and Numinous Corpus (Eyes, Fins, Legs, Plates, Spines, Tentacles).

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Animals, Fertility, Hunger, Obscurement, Plants, Speed.

THE FOREST BEYOND HOPE'S END

Beyond the last major Domain in the Far Marches lies the cliff named Hope. Miles below, a seething mass of green washes against the cliff in waves. Though it moves, this is not water, but rather vegetation – a single living plant, grown over millions of years from a single seed. Its thousand sprouts and vines and blooms resemble lesser plants and trees. In the center, it does not move – unless there is danger. At its edges, it moves constantly, striving to spread itself across more land. No one knows why it cannot climb the cliff called Hope, yet only Hope holds it back from the Marches at large. In time, perhaps, it will climb its own mass until it stands tall enough to pass this barrier. In the meantime, spirits of Plants sometimes make a pilgrimage to this spot, to witness the greatest forest of the ethereal realm.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: They killed without cause and without reason. That is not wildness. That is sickness. They are not sane and should be culled.

Demons: They resemble human developers. They have no interest in destroying the wilds. In damaging the Marches. In killing spirits. Not even in bending spirits to their will. They do these things merely as a byproduct of their blind concerns – marking their Prince's territory.

SENSES: LIGHT

The world is what you see.

Common elements of Sight include Light, Color, and Darkness. Elements of Hearing include Sound, Silence, and Euphony. The other senses have their own elements, all relatively common in the Marches. The Senses concern themselves with the visible, superficial properties of things. The Senses *witness*. They do not *understand*. They love appearances that evoke instinctive reactions. Beautiful faces, hideous bodies, and terrifying images please them. Such sensory pictures affect human and animal reactions directly, without the intervention of thought.

Light, in particular, illumines. It embodies the *ability* to see. It casts beauty and horror into stark relief. Light loathes the hidden. It judges the truth in a desultory fashion, based on appearances alone – but it hates not *knowing* the truth, and will seep through any crack to find it.

ON THE SURFACE

Looking at a Light-strand spirit, it is hard to imagine that it does not possess every virtue it wishes for itself. Does it take pride in its engineering skills? Then it looks every inch the brilliant engineer – even while bungling a mechanical design. Does it take pride in its ability to act? Then it looks exactly like a glamorous movie star. However, this glamour does not apply to its words – the other four senses betray it. The spirit speaks without an actor's grace or an engineer's understanding.

Light-strand spirits often travel the Marches as will-o'-wisp and beams of prismatic light. They fight with much flash and (usually) little skill – but most avoid violence. Illumination spreads itself through every corner of their homes.

PERSONALITY

Light-strand spirits have many possible ambitions. Many dream of great deeds. Others seek to be magnificently villainous, wealthy, powerful, honorable, or just plain “cool.” Extremely vain, they cultivate an attractive appearance and draw attention to their successes along their chosen path. For most Light-strand spirits, in fact, the opinions others have of their success matters more than success itself! Those who seek to be heroes perform deeds of *showy* heroism. The villains cultivate their foul reputations. Light spirits who dream of wealth often devote their energy to *appearing* wealthy rather than to accumulating actual riches.

Deceiving ethereals of the Senses tends to be easy. Manipulating them is trivial. In most situations, they aren't the brightest bulbs in the lot. However, Senses spirits can summon forth great reserves of insight and creativity when the alternative is humiliation. They care a great deal about the image they project!

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Light-strand spirits usually choose Roles that allow them to arrange their environment to match their expectations. Roles that come with sycophants have a particular appeal – spirits of Light value the reassurance that they are every inch as successful as they (hope to) appear. Many Light spirits on Earth take Roles tied to the various arts. The rest treat their lives and careers as a kind of art form, building a life that matches their design.

THE OTHERS

Spirits of Colors resemble Light spirits, but the drive to illuminate all things disappears. Rather, they wish to *leave their mark* on all they see. Life without influence frightens them. Often, they identify with a single color, which becomes their “signature.” It features heavily in their personal style and its symbolic associations and physical manifestations are a part of the mark they leave. Darkness-strand ethereals cultivate mystery and obscurity. They seek to conceal their flaws. Often, their virtues also disappear into the shadows of their nature.

The various spirits of other Senses have equivalent natures: Touch (e.g., Sharp, Prickle, Soft) enjoys touching, even if no obvious mark is left (their vessels may even be blind!); Hearing (Music, Cacophony, Middle-C) must be heard; Taste-strand ethereals (Salty, Bitter, Sweet, Sour) gravitate toward appropriate chefs and food critics – either such humans' dreams, or as their own Roles.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Social invisibility. Public exposure of a flaw or failing. Humiliation. Failing to uncover a truth. Failing to leave its mark. Failing to produce a reaction. Blindness. Sight. Violation of its ability to think of itself as the image it tries to project. Looking too far past appearances. Absolute darkness. Absolute silence. Being shown up. Research. Witnessing the destruction of the beautiful. Witnessing the destruction of the hideous. Displaying emotional or intellectual depth. Using physical force. Not reacting as a living thing would to a strong visual stimulus.



THE SUNDERED CASTLE

During the Purity Crusade, an angel touched by the Intervention of the Lord slew the ruling deity of a castle-Domain. In that moment, as if his blade had cut between a projector and a film, the Domain itself flickered out. The only things that remained were the voices of the people and the sounds of castle life. For centuries, the courtiers and warriors of that Domain have endured as bodiless voices. Most have gone irredeemably insane. The remainder cluster in what was once the great hall, exchanging stories of their physical days. No one knows how the Domain might be restored. Even the cold-hearted consider this a shame – the castle held many unique treasures.

Light-strand spirits have a heavy investment in their social persona – the person they portray themselves as being. They sometimes Dread things that traditionally oppose that person. (A “scientist” might Dread the trappings of faith. A “rogue cop” might Dread settling down.) Players of Colors spirits should define the symbolic associations for their favored color. The character might Dread events conceptually opposed to these associations.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Senses strands:

- ✦ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Art, Music, Spectography);
- ✦ Artistry, Emote, Move Silently, Singing, and Tracking;
- ✦ The Songs of Form (Ethereal, Celestial), Light, Projection (Corporeal, Ethereal), Shields (Celestial), and Thunder;
- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Cacophony (Corporeal, Ethereal), Darkness (Corporeal, Ethereal), Fire (Celestial), Shattering (Ethereal), Sight, and Silence (Corporeal, Ethereal).

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Deception, Entrancement, Glamour, Light, Luck, Obscurement.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Glorious creatures! Naturally, they kill only evil spirits. Well, and other spirits that they mistakenly *think* are evil. Angels make an awful lot of mistakes. Best to be careful.

Demons: Magnificent villains! At least, many are. The remainder seem somewhat sordid. Soiled. Their unimportant, petty malignity is an embarrassment to Hell.

SOCIETY: THE FAMILY

Your world is nothing more than the people who matter to you.

Common elements of Society include Culture, Nations, the Family, the Pack, and the Tribe. An invisible net of social pressures, punishments, and rewards, these elements surround every living mind. Even the animals are not immune. They love; they grieve; they know the bond between parent and child; they gather in packs. The fishers who wield this invisible net are the spirits of Society. Peerlessly skilled at the arts of interpersonal relations, these spirits radiate natural charisma, manipulate others brilliantly, and match-make as few others can.

The element of the Family operates on a very small and local scale, but it forms both powerful and enduring ties. Spirits of the Family work with small groups, binding them in a common cause. Family itself connects people on a level deeper than most arguments and conflicts. Spirits of Family, more limited, strive to eliminate and smooth over conflict. Some help the group reach consensus. Others enforce the will of the leader. A few try to become leaders themselves.

ON THE SURFACE

Spirits of Family have a pleasant demeanor. When young, they favor neutral shapes – bland, featureless humans, blobby shapes with limbs, and so forth. As they age, they assume shapes closer to composites of the people *they* care about. Or they may adopt shapes that reflect their present company. When forming relationships, they quickly establish a basic rapport and mutual sense of kinship.

Family spirits often adopt the shapes of pack animals when traveling in the Marches. They fight underhandedly – every blow is metaphorically “below the belt.” They build comfortably appointed homes, often filled with figments that they capture and treat as pets.

PERSONALITY

Spirits of Family, naturally, seek to form family groups. Their nature as ethereals cruelly denies them ties of blood. They must *adopt* their family – and convince their family members to adopt one another. Spirits capable of forming the family bond are slightly unusual; Family-strand ethereals have no easy task. They *themselves* possess an intense ability to bond to their small family groups. Outsiders face only the razor edge of their charm and social powers.

Society spirits tend to put social needs foremost. Most will risk death to protect their social position. More importantly, most Family spirits will protect a *family member's* social position at the risk of that member's life.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

The natural charm of a Family-strand spirit rubs certain humans the wrong way, such as those seriously hurt by family members or the family bond. The rest of mankind respond positively to these ethereals by instinct. Family spirits rarely adopt living humans as part of their personal family groups – corporeal beings are too short-lived, though dream-shades (p. 122) are possibilities – and hence act on Earth to advance the interests of their ethereal kin. (A few have projects of their own best pursued on Earth, such as the protection of a given lineage in the guise and Image of an “ancestor spirit,” but they are a minority. Purity’s angels took specific exception to such direct bat-tening off of “domesticated” humans.)

THE OTHERS

Spirits of the Pack and the Tribe identify with larger groups than Family-strand spirits do. Rather than focusing

on the survival and advancement of every member of their group, they focus on protecting the *important* members, values, and goals of their group. Spirits of Culture and Nations take this to a further extreme. Dedicating themselves to entire Domains, pantheons, or multi-Domain causes, they care about *individuals* only when those individuals are immediately relevant.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Harm to an important member of its society. Rejection by an important member of its society. Isolation. Being cast out. Losing status. Failure with check digit 6 on an important social roll. Failure to settle an important conflict in its society. Placing other needs (short of immediate survival) above social needs. Disobeying its society’s leader. Violating the principles of its society. Succumbing to an outsider’s charms – a disadvantage even for cold-hearted spirits, given the Songs, skills, and attunements that can help someone succumb. Witnessing the breakup of a family. Falling behind the trends. The failure of a project that its society as a whole supports.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Society strands:

- ✦ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Sociology, Psychology, Culture X);
- ✦ Detect Lies, Emote, Fast-Talk, Lying, Savoir-Faire, and Seduction;
- ✦ The Songs of Attraction (Ethereal, Celestial), Charm, Harmony (Corporeal, Ethereal), Possession, or Tongues;
- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Affinity (Ethereal), Opening (Ethereal, Celestial), Solace (Corporeal, Ethereal), or Unity (Ethereal).

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Animals [Pack/Tribe], Deception, Entrancement, Glamour, Motherhood.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Their social pattern – uniting around a single individual, God – provides great protection against disorder and disloyalty. One might question its efficiency, however, given Hell’s spreading influence on Earth.

Demons: Anarchy and disloyalty poisons their society. Naturally, this produces treacherous, deceitful, and thoroughly unpleasant demons.

MNEMONIC CRETINS

The Nightmare Surgeons, under Beleth’s patronage, study grotesque arts of medicine only possible in the Marches. They know the techniques for carving off an ethereal’s Forces to make soulless and obedient homunculi. They can embed a talisman in a spirit’s flesh, infusing it with the relevant skill. Most importantly, in a painful three-day surgery, they can cut a mnemonic cretin out of a spirit’s flesh.

Mnemonic cretins, fawning insectile symbionts, form unbreakable emotional bonds with their “parent” – the ethereal from whose flesh they come. When in physical contact with his parent, a mnemonic cretin can absorb memories too dangerous for that spirit to possess – or return memories previously absorbed. Members of the Order of Broken Stone, Beleth’s agents in the Far Marches, use mnemonic cretins to seal away their knowledge that they work for the Princess of Nightmares. Until their cretin creeps out of the shadows and reminds them of their true allegiance, they *do not know* they serve Beleth – making them perfect deep-cover agents.

Many spirits fear the possibility that they are “cretin-ridden.” When a spirit actually sees its own symbiont, however, it reacts not with fear but with love. The symbiote is *family*, or something closer – a part of its soul.

STRUCTURES: HOMES

The world sheathes the living, providing a setting for their lives.

Common elements of Structures include Homes and Buildings. Before humans, Structures elements represented hives, lairs, and even caves and territories. Now, endless human construction has made offices, service establishments, and houses the dominant Structures. Artificial, created environments, precursors to Tech and cousins to Terrain, Structures elements represent control over one's surroundings. Some offer the warm reassurance that one controls one's own world. Others carry the oppressive knowledge that *others* control it.

Home is where the heart is. The Homes element represents the quality in a structure that makes the heart reside there. A preconscious sense of comfort surrounds homes – the knowledge that one is in one's own territory. Even when no physical structure exists, the effort invested to “claim” a place makes it a home. On the other hand, the most elaborate dream-house does not invoke this element if the dreamer “knows” that no one lives there.

ON THE SURFACE

Most Structures spirits look like created things. When humanoid, some take on the shapes of wooden golems. Others become robots built from soap or coils of steel pipe. A few resemble three-ring binders come to life, with snapping claws for hands and riffling sheaves of paper for abdomens. On average, they tend to be massive creatures, with a natural “edge” in terms of sheer presence. Spirits of Homes adopt shapes of this type, but add an aura of conviviality and comfort. They look like “gentle giants” rather than fearsome manufactured monsters.

Most of these shapes can cover ground easily, so Structures spirits use them for travel. When entering battle, they sometimes add ferocious “frills” like side-mounted cannons and spinning spikes – although this shapechanging does not affect the Power of their attacks. Homes spirits usually build micro-Domains or residences to match their Image. Sometimes they build a giant version of their Image or a favored shape to live inside. This could be a walking colossus or a micro-Domain containing a 15-story hollow statue of themselves.

PERSONALITY

Homes-strand spirits nurture and shelter others, but they should not be mistaken for altruists. A Homes spirit identifies deeply with its possessions and associates. They become a part of it, just as objects and residents become part of a home. The darkest Homes spirits are overprotective and domineering, going to any lengths to control their associates' lives. Brighter Homes spirits show prudence and restraint in their meddling. They can form loving friendships. They radiate genuine warmth rather than a mere aura of comfort. Even so, they still meddle. It's a rare Homes spirit that lacks a passion for order. It's a rarer one yet who does not think of itself as “owning” its people.

FINAL SANCTUARY

On a barren hilltop in the Far Marches, an island in a sea of mists, a small square temple stands. Arches on three sides open it to the world. Two heavy doors marked “Final Sanctuary” occupy the fourth. A spirit passing through these doors does not return to the hillside. Rather, it vanishes from mortal and ethereal ken. Spirits fleeing the wrath of gods sometimes find themselves at Final Sanctuary, intentionally or otherwise, and must decide whether to dare the doors. Occasionally, a god or Domain ruler offers a criminal the option to pass through those doors as an alternative to punishment. Some spirits believe that the doors annihilate ethereals who go through them, funneling their Forces and Essence to the Domain's masters. Others believe the stories that some spirits have returned from Final Sanctuary, unharmed but unable to speak of what they might have seen.

Spirits of the Homes strand are legendarily stubborn in both friendship and enmity. Once a spirit acquires a Homes spirit's confidence, it takes grand or continuous treachery to lose it! However, once lost, it can never be regained. The home divides the world into “outside” and “inside.” If someone winds up outside, he can never go home again.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Humans instinctively relax around Homes spirits. Many exploit this edge, seeking employment as diplomats, salesmen, interrogators, and police officers. Their favorite business, of course, is construction. Participating in the creation of a new structure – marvelous, uplifting stuff! Real estate jobs and work in the construction lobby come in as close seconds.

THE OTHERS

Buildings spirits have a harsher edge. The animal impressions of the great strange structures humans build has tainted the element. In addition to its connotations of utility, progress, and wealth, the Buildings element reeks of the human conquest of the world. A sense of environmental havoc and death leaks out around the edges. Buildings spirits do not bond to others; they simply dominate.

Some spirits have strands of elements like the Nest and the Hive. These elements resemble Homes spirits in most respects, but their most common shapes reflect their bestial creators. Humans feel less comfortable around these spirits. Animals feel more so.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Losing its home. Losing any fixture of its life. Spending an hour out of sight of a developed area or Domain. Powerlessness – that is, inability to control or influence its environment. Failing to quash rebellion by one of “its” people. Entering a chaotic environment. Not trying to force order down the throat of such an environment, once entered. Immolation. Witnessing demolition. Witnessing a demonstration of Nature’s superiority over human creation. Suffering entropic effects (e.g., the Calabite resonance and the Songs of Entropy). Making last-minute changes to its plans. Choosing not to protect one of “its” people or possessions. Turning its back on a friendship. Making peace with an enemy.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Structures strands:

- ✦ Any Knowledge related to construction, architecture, or buildings;

- ✦ The Songs of Attraction (Celestial), Form (Corporeal), Harmony, Motion (Ethereal, Celestial), Possession, and Shields;

- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Affinity (Corporeal, Ethereal), Forbidding (Corporeal), Opening (Corporeal), or Seals.

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Artifice, Drowning [i.e., smothering], Glamour, Minerals, Motherhood.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Once, they came down into the Marches like a fiery wind, a murderous primal force that swept away everything in its path. We must build a wall,

metaphorically and literally, against that wind. Otherwise, it will come again.

Demons: Water seeping into our foundations. They erode that which makes us who we are.



STRUGGLE: THE HUNT

The world is whatever joy you can rip out of it in bloody chunks.

Common elements of Struggle include Battle, Duels, the Hunt, and Warfare. The elements of Struggle represent raw and bloody conflict between one creature and another – hunts, battles for mating rights or pack dominance, cobra-mongoose combats, and so forth. Even formal warfare and honorable duels fall under the aegis of Struggle, unless conducted so ceremonially that the blood does not show.

The Hunt, in particular, ties together hunger and the fear of death, both common ingredients in animal dreams. Uriel’s purge attracted the Primal Spirits of the Hunt as heroin calls an addict, and vast numbers of them died. Before that point, the Hunt had a strong Primal representation in the Marches. Now, most spirits of the Hunt have other elements mitigating their tendency toward violence. Most Hunt-strand spirits act as hunters and not prey – the predators, after all, are the *active* part of the Hunt.

ON THE SURFACE

Ethereals with a major Hunt influence tend toward a lean and rugged look. Whether they have a human-like, animalistic, or utterly alien appearance, they resemble a particularly fierce and hungry example of their type. The Hunt relies on fear, so they appear dangerous. The Hunt relies on speed, so they move quickly when they must. The Hunt requires patience, and so they can hold completely still for days. Staring contests with Hunt-strand ethereals are exercises in futility.

When traveling through the Marches, these ethereals favor shapes like wolves, sharks, great cats, ferrets, hunting hawks, and water moccasins – the sleeker, faster hunters of the animal world. When they fight, most prefer aggressive tactics and unarmed combat. Their homes may resemble burrows, hives, or caves. Other times, they simply stake their claim to an undeveloped area in the Marches or a Domain and wander it at their will.

PERSONALITY

Ethereals of the Hunt tend to classify other creatures as companions, rivals, or prey. A Hunt-strand spirit remains polite to rivals, if they do not cross its carefully-delineated boundaries – yet they remain rivals. It knows how to pursue its prey in a subtle fashion, stalking a weaker enemy within the laws of the relevant Domain – yet the target remains prey. Few predators anywhere pursue their victims more relentlessly. Few defend their turf more carefully. Few Earthly companions care more for their fellows than the Hunt spirits do.

Spirits of the Hunt find every possession and victory more precious if they must pursue it first. Never satisfied with an easy triumph, they usually direct their efforts toward goals just barely within reach.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Humans automatically identify Hunt-strand spirits as dangerous and brutal beings. The body language of the spirit, unless it has great emotive skill, sends warning signals to every living thing. Even in vessels that appear small, weak, and pretty, Hunt-strand spirits receive more attention from police and authorities. These spirits often take Roles where brutality is appreciated: gangsters, enforcers, corporate sharks, and vigilantes. None are vegetarians, except as a disguise, and most prefer leather and fur clothing.

A THOUSAND BODIES DEEP

The Domains of Selkirk and Roxburgh went to war in 286 AD. The lady of Selkirk swore on her soul that she would not lay down her sword until her banner flew from Auchop Cairn, Roxburgh's highest point. The lord of Roxburgh swore similarly with regards to Selkirk's Ettrick Pen. On the third night of war, a visiting trickster god stole both Auchop Cairn and Ettrick Pen away.

Roxburgh and Selkirk were well-matched, and the oaths taken were vile. The war continued for 600 years before God, or the Marches, or the elements themselves could bear it no longer. A bloody muck seeped from the mist between and beneath the two Domains, and Roxburgh and Selkirk sank. Yet the war *still* did not end. Every few days, bodies – a thing spirits do not normally leave behind – float to the surface in proof. And, so the Wisdom spirits say, Roxburgh and Selkirk continue to sink, in a cloud of blood and corpses, once a hundred and now a thousand bodies deep.

THE OTHERS

Spirits of Battle exceed even the Hunt in their aggressive fervor. Their elemental makeup urges them to use violence as an all-purpose tool: to establish dominance; to take the things they desire; and to extinguish threats, rivals, and enemies. Player characters with a Battle strand should most likely struggle to *contain* their violent streak – a motivation giving rise to some powerful stories – rather than indulging it and killing everything around them.

Duels-strand spirits and spirits of Warfare embody more purposeful struggles. A Duels element inclines a spirit to use combat to “measure” itself against an opponent or personal standard. Warfare spirits have a deep understanding of the uses and purposes of violence. Like Battle spirits, they tend to use combat as an all-purpose solution, but from calculation rather than emotion. If a peaceful approach seems smarter, a Warfare spirit employs peace, and leaves the threat of war in the background.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Encountering “prey” that refuses to flee or back down. Fighting an enemy who refuses to fight back. Failing to “measure up” as a hunter, duelist, or warrior. Failing an ally. Failing an ally due to military weakness. Abandoning a hunt or military action unfinished. Limiting its ambition. Some Struggle spirits Dread the triumphs of their

rivals or enemies, even when they themselves are not involved in the conflict. Many of Life's non-cowardly Dreads (see p. 32) apply.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Struggle strands:

✧ Dodge, Fighting, Move Silently, Tactics, Tracking, and Weapons skills;

✧ The Songs of Entropy (Ethereal, Celestial), Thunder, and Numinous Corpus (Acid, Claws, Fangs, Feet, Horns, Tail, Tongue);

✧ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Forbidding (Celestial), Might, Nemesis, Nightmares, Sight (Corporeal), and Numinous Corpus (Barbs, Spines).

Suggested Affinities include:

✧ Destruction, Filth [that is, gore], Hunger, Puissance, Speed.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Why exactly did they come to the Marches? Don't they have their own world? If they wanted to live among us, that would be different – but they've tried to push us around since the moment they arrived. I refuse to accept their rule, and I do not acknowledge their right to hunt in this territory.

Demons: Angels with a different name, really. The only difference between angels and demons is that the angels want human souls in Heaven and the demons want those souls in Hell. Look! This is me not caring.

TECH: VEHICLES

Make the world what you want it to be.

Tech, as elements go, is a newcomer to the Marches. Only one spirit openly claims to be a Technological primal spirit. Any others keep it very much under their hats. Tech's representation among non-primal spirits is minuscule. Its history, and therefore its benefits to the initiate, is small. Technology has had a huge impact on the waking world, and in time will probably dominate the Marches. Right now, though, most dreams of renegade machines are dreams of Fear. Most dreams of starships are dreams of Winds and Battle. A typical dream about a

far-future computer-run dystopia involves the dark side of Society. Only dreams where the technology takes as much of the stage as the *things that technology does* rely on Tech elements.

The most prominent elements of Tech include Vehicles, Computers, and Machines in general. None qualify as "common," though, and there are plenty of others out there.

The Vehicles element captures the idea that, by building physical hulks of metal, humans have stolen the mana of the wind. They have given themselves the power to roam across countries as easily as a wolf can roam the woods. The magic of Vehicles is not their power nor their form but the combination. With just mind, hands, and will to bend and shape the steel, humans have tamed distance and made travel their slave.



ON THE SURFACE

The principles of motion and freedom stir beneath a Vehicle spirit's skin. These spirits move with inevitability and power, not grace, and they never seem to stop. They are massive, with cold eyes and inhuman faces. The very lines of their form reflect their nature: geometric and precisely symmetrical, like a machine and not a living thing.

Vehicles spirits naturally choose the shapes of human vehicles, modern, anachronistic, or futuristic, when traveling. They are direct and brutal in personal combat. Many are expert tacticians when it comes to unit maneuvers. Some indulge in cliché and build homes that resemble airports and garages. A few indulge more esoteric tastes – creating a miniature planet for their micro-Domain, for example, the better to travel great distances and crunch over millions of microscopic buildings.

PERSONALITY

"Just point me at your problems and stand back. There's nothing I can't tear through with a running start and some music blasting."

– Boneyard Red, Vehicles-strand spirit

Like most engine-driven creatures, spirits with a Vehicles strand think in terms of raw power before subtlety. As incarnations of the technology that gave humans freedom and speed, they love these two things as virtues. One confines a Vehicles spirit at one's peril! Nor do these spirits like to see others deprived of freedom. Vehicles are tools for travel as much as they are travelers themselves.

THE SPIDERSILK FORGE

Near Blandine's Marches, a web stretches between the ground and the sky. A million spider-figments, or more, crawl on its massive framework. A spirit who stumbles into the web risks its life. The swarm of red-and-black spiders can kill an unlucky intruder in seconds, leaving only a desiccated sac of dreamstuff in a silk cocoon. But if a spirit *voluntarily* walks into the web, without coercion of any kind, then its true virtue becomes manifest. In minutes, the busy spiders drain away every scrap of the spirit's life while leaving its essential qualities behind. This takes the form of a tool for the spirit's most developed skill, a tool of nearly divine quality and a beauty as great as the spirit's heart. No more than 20 spirits have ever made this sacrifice, so these tools are some of the most valuable items in the Marches – without occult power but more *precious* than talismans, relics, and the lesser artifacts of the gods.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Humans do not necessarily *enjoy* the company of Tech spirits, but these spirits uplift them. A Tech spirit's company reminds humans emotionally that nothing is outside the reach of human ambition. *Knowing* that they can achieve anything, humans achieve more. As their fortunes improve, and vaguely understanding why, humans start to think of Tech spirits as “lucky charms.” Tech spirits naturally drift to the center of human cliques, the vital force around which those cliques turn.

Tech spirits often have a strong attachment to human society, wishing to serve it directly or indirectly. In so doing, they validate their element's worth as a tool of human advancement.

THE OTHERS

The element of Computers is still finding itself, still changing. On the one hand, it represents human control over information and calculation. It transforms ordinary people into scientists and scholars. It gives away power over text and mathematics that once only a few commanded. But on the other hand, many people fear computers, seeing them as animated, wicked, hostile and random . . . and when they dream this, it becomes real in the Marches. Thus, some Computers-strand spirits have a rigorous, intellectual, and rational approach to life and are friendly to man; others are chaotic, sneaky, and hostile. It is too early to know what will happen here;

perhaps there will be two opposed Computers strands! Spirits of Machines are the ultimate generalists, tool-users *par excellence* – they aspire to control everything in the world around them and to master every skill.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Witnessing a human's disempowerment. Blackouts. Harming human society. Harming humans. Failing to perform its function, as when a Telephone spirit fails to deliver a message or keep lines of communication open. Showing emotion. Demonstrating unreliability. Running out of “power.” (That is, falling to 0 Essence. This Dread always costs Mind hits.) Loss of mobility, for Vehicles; loss of data, for Computers; and loss of effectiveness, for Machines. Some Structures Dreads (see p. 37) apply.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from Tech strands:

- ✦ Any modern-Earth scientific or technical Knowledge;
- ✦ Chemistry, Computer Operation, Driving, Electronics, Engineering, and weapons skills;
- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Artifacts and Machines.

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Artifice, Divination, Lightning, Puissance, Speed.

PERSPECTIVES


Angels: They lack up-to-dateness. In the modern world, faith is obsolete.

Demons: Similarly, evil is passé. When the world actualizes the promise of technology and scarcity no longer drives the economy, society's interests and the interests of each person will align. Evil will become foolish rather than profitable.

TERRAIN: MOUNTAINS

We are the substance of the world.

Common elements of Terrain include Mountains, Beaches, Forests, Plains, the Tundra, and the Sea. These “elements of the land” create the solid world, surrounding and supporting everything on the planet's face. Terrain elements watch over the affairs of the land, making it possible for life to exist, but they are not kind and they are not gentle. They do not exist *for* life. They do not *care* about



life. Terrain elements make it possible for lesser things to live within them only as a byproduct of their own nature. Full of majesty, as old as the Earth itself, Terrain elements know that they fulfill one purpose of the universe simply by existing.

The Mountains element contains in itself the stuff of snow, sheer rock, mighty forest, and howling wind. It radiates starkness, steepness, distant majesty, towering height, and the ancient power of stone. The Mountains are the Gates to the World, the knife-edged peaks standing between the things that are seen and the things that are not.

ON THE SURFACE

Grizzled, white-capped, barrel-bellied, and tall, Mountains spirits have incredible presence and an aura of indestructibility. Even when beaten, bloody, and sprawled beneath an enemy's sword, a spirit of the Mountains looks ready to take on any foe and win. These ethereals are implacable, determined, and endlessly strong.

Favored travel forms include bears, whales, tanks, and (in the modern day) mecha – but any massive form will do. A few, despite the incongruity, adopt the shape of house-sized mountains and glide along the Marches' surface under their own power. Mountains-strand spirits fight with cunning and ferocity, their pride as well as their survival riding on their ability to defeat any lesser foe. Many have no home, feeling that what they cannot carry with them is not worth keeping. Those who live in Domains tend to accept whatever house is offered them, making no modifications.

PERSONALITY

A Mountains spirit's mass is its power. Heavy, powerful forms and vessels “connect” it to the vast extent of real mountains. A mountain's immutability depends on that scope, on that physical greatness. In like manner, the mass of a Mountains spirit's form increases its will to endure. These spirits also value raw might, whether it rests in their fists, their minds, or their reputation. Wherever it lies, they use it bluntly and without remorse. These spirits tend to develop their abilities unevenly, focusing on areas of strength rather than striving to overcome their weaknesses.

Mountains spirits have a bit of the climber in them, too. Faced with the kind of unopposable might they seek to develop in themselves, their natural instinct is to conquer it – to find some way to overcome that power and wind up at the top of the world. They are, at the same time, Edmund Hillary and Mt. Everest.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

The Mountains element transcends humanity. It has existed since the earliest animal dreams. Humans do not impress Mountains spirits. In turn, most humans do not *like* Mountains spirits – humans prefer to be respected, after all. Common Roles for Mountains spirits allow them to spend time bonding with real peaks: forest rangers in mountainous areas, hermits, mountaineers, and miscellaneous residents of the great mountain ranges.

THE OTHERS

The characteristics of a given terrain type, and of the humans who love it, manifest in the personality and appearance of the Terrain elements. Spirits of other forms of terrain value the qualities in themselves that help that terrain endure. Thus, a Sea strand inclines a spirit to be as cruel, passionate, and mysterious as the Sea itself. It inspires in its heart the adventurousness of the boldest sailors. The Sea is strong because it covers so much of the world. A Sea strand therefore encourages the spirit to ensure that there is no place in the world that it cannot reach. Naturally, a given Sea spirit need not manifest *all* of these traits. Likewise, Desert is arid, stark, and stoic; Woods are mysterious and cool; and Islands tend to be remote and either forbidding or alluring.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Defeat. Defeat at the hands of a human or animal. Adopting a shape that does not evoke the power of the relevant terrain. Spending six hours indoors. Lacking a key trait the player associates with the terrain type – “honesty” could fit the open and unconcealing plains. Putting customs or manners ahead of its immediate needs. Shrinking from a challenge. Shrinking from an appropriate challenge – many Sea spirits love exploration, as does the romantic image of a sailor. Failing to work against an ecological disaster it could prevent. Failing to prevent such a disaster. Showing remorse.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from any Terrain strand:

- ✧ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Geology, Area Knowledge: some wild area, Area Knowledge: the Marches);
- ✧ Survival and Tracking;
- ✧ The Songs of Form (Corporeal, Celestial), Motion (Ethereal, Celestial), Projection (Corporeal, Ethereal), Shields, and Thunder;

✧ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Direction (Ethereal, Celestial), Location (Ethereal), Might (Corporeal, Ethereal), and Sight (Ethereal).

Suggested Affinities include:

✧ Drowning [For watery elements], Filth [Landfill], Minerals [For earthy elements], Plants [Forest/Grasslands], Terrain

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: If they had hammered out the mountains, I would see the dust of mountains on their brow. If they had poured out the sea, I would smell the salt on their skin. They claim arrogantly to have shaped the world, but their claim does not withstand the testing.

Demons: The Archangel of Light stood before his host, and said, "I loathe God for his lies, and his uncaring heart, and his destructive ways, and his cruelty; for his temptations to vice, the corruption in his soul, and the way he uses us for his pleasure." So moving was his speech that all his armies became those things he hated most. Thus were the demons born.

WEALTH: JEWELS

Who cares about the world, baby? You have me.

Common elements of Wealth include Gold, Silver, Jewels, and Money. A single piece of gold contains the essence of everything it can buy. More than that, it represents everything that *can be bought*: Possessions. Labor. Virtue and vice. A coin of gold, in the right hands, can buy almost anything of worth. Most Wealth spirits are venal and shallow, but they *can* be admirable souls. Everything high and noble lies within Wealth's purview, if someone cares for it and money can buy it – joy, the truth, dedication, and labor directed toward a good cause.

Of course, wealth also buys poison, treachery, and daggers in the night.

Spirits of Jewels extend the general concept of Wealth with echoes of the tangible form of gems and jewelry. They have sparkling, resplendent personalities. They can bear up against the greatest steady stresses, but a sharp shock shatters their composure. They catch everyone's attention while in the room, but they think small. They rarely build nets of influence spreading across the Marches.

STRAIGHT ROADS

Only a few roads run through the Marches. Finding them is difficult. One must know what to look for. The signs of a nearby road are subtle. An electric feeling hovers in the air. Dreamscapes move away from the road as if blown by a wind. The mists change color, ever so slightly, as one draws close. The road itself is nothing more than a faintly glowing line, straight as a ruler's edge. Spirits on a straight road move as far in a minute as they could otherwise move in an hour.

Straight roads run only between major landmarks of the Marches – the great mountains, rivers, and forests that hide in the mist. They connect places of deadliest nightmare to places of beauteous glory, created by the spiritual differential between them. Straight roads are dangerous: nothing about the road makes it obvious whether one is heading toward nightmare or glory. Nor do they indicate how close to the destination one may be. All a spirit knows for sure, walking a straight road, is that it is going *someplace*.

ON THE SURFACE

Jewels spirits are usually diminutive and vibrantly colorful. In humanoid shapes and vessels, they wear colors like canary, crimson, aquamarine, emerald, royal blue, and silver. Most stand under five feet tall. They have perfect teeth, hair, and skin. Some common less-human shapes include ambulatory golems "powered" by glowing gemstones; crystal statues drawn from place to place by translucent tentacles; and spinning sapphires that fly under their own power.

Their favored travel shape is doubtlessly the human merchant, a peddler of rarities and eccentricities. A pigment-drawn cart loaded with small miracles makes good time and turns the spirit into a center for mercantile activity and avarice. Jewels spirits avoid battle, having no particular competence with it. They design their homes to best display their possessions, including the most valuable possession of all: themselves.

PERSONALITY

In their natural state, most Jewels spirits have no morals. The knowledge of their own preciousness corrupts their judgment. On Earth, they slip into superficial and dissipated lifestyles. In the Marches, they wind up in early graves. Fortunately, few Jewels spirits remain in their natural state. As creatures of Wealth, they tend to

reflect the things that those around them value. If they spend a long time attending to a dark overlord, they become loyal and competent lieutenants. If for some reason a Jewels spirit spent a year with a group of angels, it might even become virtuous!

Some Jewels spirits are natural exceptions to this pattern. They seek from the beginning to justify their natural appeal rather than reveling in it. Others, drawing on the lore of gems hidden in the Earth, conceal their true worth behind a facade of lazy good-for-nothingness.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Jewels spirits have a keen sense for bargains and a good head for finance. In the human world, they appraise property; trade and speculate in the market; manage accounts; and sometimes work in fields like art restoration and diamond cutting. Such careers add value to merchandise.

THE OTHERS

Gold-strand spirits – glowing, effulgent, and quietly glorious – seek to add value to everything they touch. They feel a deep bond with the golden Sun, and many of

their traits mirror his. Silver-strand spirits, pale and lambent, feel a closer tie to the Moon and the Stars. (For descriptions of the Sun, Moon, and Stars elements, see pp. 24-25.) The other Wealth spirits consider ethereals of Money classless and vulgar. Money-strand spirits disagree. Though they lack the beauty and grace associated with most Wealth, they consider themselves a superior breed – intimately, precisely acquainted with the notion of value that underlies Wealth's power. Other strands of Wealth play prominent roles in Marches affairs, although none so great as Gold, Silver, Money, and Jewels. Food is wealth in some parts of the world, Toys are the kings of a child's heart, and so forth.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Becoming less valuable. Losing a significant portion of its net worth. Losing any portion of its net worth. Discovering that something is definitely not for sale. Failing to elicit desire or avarice. Failing to convince someone to value what it values. Making a financial error. Undignified situations. Appearing in public “not at its best.” Spending long periods of time with someone without expressing the traits that person values. Having someone outshine it. Admitting its own value. *Not* admitting to its own value. (Obviously, the same spirit should not have both of these last two Dreads.)

THE WEALTH OF STAMATIS STAVROS

Stamatis Stavros rules a small Far Marches Domain known for two things: its wine, pressed from the hearts of slithering beasts, and its slaves. When Stavros' army takes captives, as the object of a mission or the spoils of war, it hauls them before him in chains. The King takes the captives down below his palace, descending half a mile of stairs, and shows them a Face that hangs on his basement wall. The name of that Face, and its provenance, are not spoken of. From the moment they set their eyes upon it, however, the captives are Stamatis Stavros' slaves and serve him with all their mind and heart. It is said by some that the power of the Face is fading, and that several of the more recent captives have broken free. Others dismiss such rumors; Stamatis Stavros is an institution and a legend, and his power will surely endure forever. In any case, Stamatis commands some of the greatest wealth – measured in geniuses and artists, warriors and seers, “human resources” of the highest order – in all the Marches.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from any Wealth strand:

- ✦ Fitting Knowledges (e.g., Finance, Valuable Items);
- ✦ Emote, Savoir-Faire, or Seduction;
- ✦ The Songs of Attraction (Ethereal, Celestial), Charm, Light (Corporeal, Ethereal), Possession, and Tongues (Corporeal, Ethereal);
- ✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Empathy (Ethereal, Celestial), Opening (Ethereal, Celestial), and Solace (Ethereal).

Suggested Affinities include:

- ✦ Entrancement, Filth [for devaluing others], Glamour, Minerals, Wealth.

PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Rumor has it that certain powerful spirits survived the Purity Crusade by paying angels for “protection.” How comforting, if true!

Demons: Every demon has a price. This makes demons our slaves, though they know it not.

WEATHER: SNOW

Make the world tremble with your footsteps. Break it with your rage.

Every form of weather – from Rain to Snow, Storms to Clear Skies – has a noteworthy presence in the Marches. These elements express the moods of the sky. They pour forth emotion in the form of healing sunshine, ominous darkness, gentle or pelting rain, cool clean snow, fierce lightning, and hurricane rage.

Snow represents dispassion and purity of intent. Sheltered from the world by inner quiet and a frozen heart, ethereals of Snow move through life with near-Elohite calm. Pain does not reach them. Anger does not disturb them. Legends say that if a Snow spirit gives its heart in love, it dies – melting away in the fires of that emotion, like a snowman in a summer's thaw.

ON THE SURFACE

Snow spirits tend to be pale, diffuse, and light. (Gray and piebald color schemes they leave to the less common Slush spirits.) Their reach is long, even given their often-magnificent height. Some adopt transparent forms, with snow endlessly falling beneath their empty skin.

Their most common travel forms include arctic animals, puffs of snow hurled across the Marches by a nonexistent wind, and monsters made of ice. In battle and stressful situations, these spirits keep a cool head, working the situation to their own best advantage. Like Water spirits, many live in mobile clouds fashioned by dream-smiths. A few build ice palaces. Others live in ordinary Earth-like settings, distinguished only by the snow that never ceases falling.

PERSONALITY

Spirits of Weather have an instinct for chaos. They enjoy travel, sowing the seeds of change and disorder, and forcing their will onto the world. They actively *dislike* stability and order. A spirit of Weather can throw a curve ball into the best-planned efforts. Even Snow spirits, distant by nature, feel an echo of these drives.

Weather spirits resemble Emotion-strand ethereals in the scope of their passions. Snow spirits are no exception. The cold in their hearts is not the absence of emotion but a passion of its own – a chill depression, a bleak refusal to care, that radiates as powerfully as any salamander's flame. A wall of ice separates them from the world and

STRANGE RAINS

The characters and places of fiction and story come to life in the Marches. In just the same way, the *conventions* of fiction sometimes take on their own life – in the form of strange rains. These pour down from the Marches sky on rare occasions, a glimmering rain of adhesive dust. Spirits doused by a passing storm become natural attractors for the creatures and situations of a certain style of story, until time and labor cleanse the last sparkles from them.

Strange rains can provide a serious game with a terrifying interlude in the horror genre. An already mythic game can twist temporarily into the stuff of Greek or Arabian story. A light and humorous game can turn into a daytime soap.

brings them peace. Just as an angry man is driven to incite a mob, and a compassionate man exhorts others to care, Snow spirits seek to snuff out others' cares with the sheer weight of their own callous nature.

IN HUMAN SOCIETY

Snow-strand ethereals often take employment as mercenaries, carrying out other spirits' goals in the mortal world. Indifferent to both compassion and cruelty, they serve "good" and "evil" gods with equal efficiency. When pursuing their element's goal – snuffing out passion – they take any Role that seems handy. They do not care about their effectiveness in the Role itself – inspiring their co-workers with great deeds rarely serves their purpose.

THE OTHERS

The drives that power the other Weather spirits are as strong as a Snow spirit's reserve and generally far more blatant. In the full heat of emotion, a Weather ethereal can withstand the harshest adversity, make any sacrifice, and commit stunning atrocities and acts of compassion. A spirit of Storms, driven by anger, will cross the wildest Marches to enact its vengeance. An ethereal of Sunny Days can endure the most terrible tortures to prove to itself that there is still hope in the world.

SUGGESTED DREADS

Losing its freedom. Failure to undermine order. Falling into a routine. Showing too much respect for tradition. Permitting circumstances to keep it from

following the dictates of its heart. Failing to impose its emotional perspective, when so attempting. Failing to impose its emotional perspective on others regularly. Hiding its passion (or showing passion, for a Snow spirit). Spending an hour outside on Earth in the wrong kind of weather. Staying in one area for too long (e.g., a day, three days, or a week). Frustration. Having someone successfully predict its actions.

ASSOCIATED ABILITIES

Spirits can learn the following Resources from any Weather strand:

✦ Fitting Knowledges (Meteorology, Area Knowledge: a major tourist spot);

✦ Artistry, Emote, and Fast-Talk;

✦ The Songs of Attraction (Ethereal), Entropy (Ethereal, Celestial), Form (Celestial), Motion, Shields (Corporeal, Celestial), and Thunder;

✦ The *Liber Canticorum* Songs of Empathy (Corporeal, Ethereal), and Ice (Celestial).

Suggested Affinities include:

✦ Air, Cold [Snow/Hail], Destruction, Emotions [the appropriate emotion only], Fertility, Lightning [Storms/Lightning], Weather.



PERSPECTIVES

Angels: Are they not like us? Making, breaking, going where they will – they do not acknowledge the kinship between us, but we, ah, we cannot do otherwise. Fiercely devoted to their God, insistent that others share their ruling passion, children of the sky, sowers of chaos in our land . . . Are they not like us?

Demons: In my own person, I am no greater than a demon, and less than some. Yet I am more than my own person. The strands of my being spread throughout the Marches. I am not merely a spirit. I am *Weather*. In this light, demons are petty tyrants, strutting fiercely but ultimately irrelevant.

HOW TO USE THE ELEMENT GROUPS

| <i>Element</i> | <i>Key Traits</i> |
|------------------------------|---|
| <i>Astronomical Concepts</i> | <i>Unworldly, aristocratic, larger-than-life.</i> |
| <i>Classical Elements</i> | <i>Active, forceful, ruthless.</i> |
| <i>Emotions</i> | <i>Passionate, ferocious, full of life.</i> |
| <i>Information</i> | <i>Scholarly, egotistical, mystical.</i> |
| <i>Life</i> | <i>Uncivilized, survival-oriented, wild.</i> |
| <i>Senses</i> | <i>Superficial, image-conscious, artistic.</i> |
| <i>Society</i> | <i>Charismatic, social, group-oriented.</i> |
| <i>Structures</i> | <i>Orderly, controlling, stubborn.</i> |
| <i>Struggle</i> | <i>Raw, warlike, rugged.</i> |
| <i>Tech</i> | <i>Up to date, self-empowering, other-empowering.</i> |
| <i>Terrain</i> | <i>Proud, earthy, primal.</i> |
| <i>Wealth</i> | <i>Materialistic, worldly, whatever traits its friends value.</i> |
| <i>Weather</i> | <i>Ardent, driven, lovers of chaos.</i> |

A character with one or two appropriate traits is a logical fit for the appropriate element group(s). The character need not have *all* the key traits for the group. A player can build a solid interpretation of an element group with just one of the key traits – or none at all, if something else about the element appeals to him! An artistic character can have a Senses element without superficiality. A scholar can have an Information element without arrogance. Also, each different element in a group has its own “twist” on the same general ideas.

A character’s primary element, especially after initiation (p. 46), should capture the core of his character conception. If that means inventing a new element in a group, or a new element group, so be it! (See p. 46.) The secondary element provides a strong influence on the character. It can be central to the spirit’s conception or a barely perceptible influence. With an uninitiated character, feel free to write down several elements and choose the primary and secondary one after some play.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

Suppose the spirits are right: God was an ethereal, and the celestials are still basically ethereal. Here's how a GM might choose elements for Dominic, Archangel of Judgment. (Note that ethereal scholars often engage in just this sort of Superior-dissection, as "proof" that celestials *are* a kind of ethereal.)

Dominic, more than most Archangels, places the public good of Heaven above the good of the individual. He protects Heaven against the cancer of heresy, even when it means punishing those in no immediate danger of Falling. He orders his servants into hierarchies. In general, he thinks in social terms. His primary element should be in the Society group. Specifically (see p. 35), the "Nations" element fits him well, with Heaven as the nation he invests his effort in.

Dominic, as a Seraph and Archangel, possesses all the common qualities of the Astronomical Concepts group. He is unworldly, aristocratic, and larger than life. This makes his secondary element an Astronomical element. With the Moon (see p. 25) as his secondary element, he would focus on unearthing others' dark secrets in God's name, while of course protecting his own. With the Stars (see p. 25) as his secondary element, he would require angels to prove themselves to him, but would go to great lengths for those demonstrated worthy.

and then write it on their character sheet. If the element should be relatively common, they can talk to their GM about it. There's no mechanical benefit, so it should not cause a problem.

EXAMPLES

A player can choose Music as one of his character's elements, creating the "Music" element in the Senses group. If it is the character's primary or secondary element, the character can learn the standard Senses Resources from that element.

A player can create the Ghosts element in the unwritten Death group. First, he runs the idea past the GM, suggesting that the concept of the separation between the living and the dead forms the basis for this group. If the GM suggests some appropriate Resources, the player spends the Dread and initiation points there. If the GM okays the idea without discussion, the player figures out non-abusive Resources to spend the points on. The Songs of Ethereal Form, Projection, and Possession are obvious choices. So are Move Silently and Knowledge: Forensic Medicine.

Buying Lockpicking for the Ghosts element is inappropriate. It has very little to do with Ghosts or Death. Similarly, the Song of Oblivion (*Liber Cantorum*, p. 73) is not available through this element. It *fits*, but the Song is a secret. Spirits of the element never had a chance to learn the Song, and so the element itself never "learned" it. Finally, the player should make sure that the GM uses the *Liber Cantorum* Songs before putting a Song like Ethereal Ice in the group.

CREATING YOUR OWN

Do not hesitate to invent new elements, in or out of the groups listed above. The Marches contain endless variety.

Players should follow the steps below when creating an element group. First, they should talk to the GM about the Songs and skills that seem to belong in that group. Ultimately, the decision is in the GM's hands. Second, in character generation, they should spend their initiation and Dread points on non-controversial Resources. Even with the element of Questions, starting play with the Song of Symphony (*Liber Cantorum*, p. 57) is not appropriate! The GM needs time to decide whether to put that Song into a PC's hands *before* deciding whether it fits the element. More appropriate Resources include Detect Lies, Knowledge: Philosophy, Knowledge: Riddles, and the Song of Tongues.

Creating a new element in an established group is simpler. Players can just think about what the element means

INITIATION: AWAKENING THE ELEMENTS

Some ethereals have a sense of "connection" with the most important elements of their spirit. Such a spirit would care a great deal that a dreamer built its soul from (for example) "the Rain." It has a heavy influence on its behavior. Other ethereals could not care less what primal images lurk within their spirits. Some have *so many* different images inside them that nothing stands out. A few do not even *know* what elements they come from – instinct tells them nothing.

Ethereals of every type who want a stronger connection to their elemental selves eventually undergo a "rite of initiation." This rite awakens and strengthens several of the elements within them.

Rites of initiation involve a journey of self-discovery that ignites the spirit's elemental nature with the spark of the spirit's consciousness. Suddenly, it is more than "the mantichore of Sunbridge;" it is *Mountains* and it is *the Hunt*. No longer a substrate of its existence, these elements are alive – an active part of its identity. The image of Mountains woven into its spirit awakens. The spirit thinks as much with the Mountains' majesty as with a mantichore's hunger.

A willing spirit sometimes initiates spontaneously in extremely dramatic situations – when facing dire threats to its life, for example, or on learning some hidden truth about the Marches' nature. Usually, though, a spirit must undertake something akin to a vision quest. Using ethereal poisons or great meditative skill, it invites a hallucinatory state and travels its inner landscape to find the truth of its being. Alternately, an instinct-guided journey to the distant reaches of the Far Marches has similar effects.

GMs should populate these vision quests with symbols and portents – talking figments who represent the spirit's weaknesses, rivers of swords that scythe away its illusions about itself, and brilliant dawns illuminating the final truth. Some Domain rulers can help an ethereal into the state of mind necessary to undertake this journey. Such a great favor demands an equal favor in return.

Spirits discussing initiation with mortals most often liken it to a shamanic initiation or rite of passage; celestials tend to think of it as "fledging," and liken it to the

moment when a demonling or reliever becomes a full demon or angel. Other common analogies include "becoming an adult," "understanding yourself for the first time," and "crawling out of a small dark place and seeing the dawn." Spirits who deliberately choose not to initiate have different analogies to offer: "mass insanity" and "crippling the psyche with atavistic mumbo-jumbo," for instance.

INITIATION EFFECTS

Initiation has both concrete and subjective effects. The *player* of an initiating PC chooses a primary element and a secondary element to awaken. (The *character* has no say in this choice.) Normally, these elements represent the most important building blocks of the PC's Image and psyche. Certain "primal spirits" have only one element to awaken, and therefore cannot choose a secondary element. Rare initiates awaken more than two elements, but only the first two offer mechanical benefits.

Just as the *same* Symphonic Word of Eagles is manifest in every eagle, all the spirits of a given element *share* that element. There are not "chunks" of that element in various spirits and dreamscapes. Rather, each element is unique – a single strand of the Hunt weaves through the entire ethereal realm. As spirits of a given element learn skills and Songs, they imprint the tiniest echo of their knowledge on the element.



Initiates have an easier time learning the skills and Songs that many spirits of their element have studied before. Meditating and reflecting on the strands of its being, an initiate can acquire certain Songs without teachers and certain skills without practice – though it must still spend the necessary character points! It is not so much *learning* these things as digging out knowledge that part of its soul already possesses.

Each element described above has a list of Songs and skills associated with it. Many of the spirits of the element learned these Songs or skills the hard way, recently or long ago. With work, initiates can “remember” the Songs and skills associated with their primary and secondary element, spending up to one character point per week on them without an instructor. In that week, they must be able to devote several hours a day to meditation. Heavily physical skills require some amount of practice. The GM can rule that an obscure skill or powerful Song requires more time, on the premise that fewer spirits of the PC’s element learned it the hard way – or forbid the acquisition entirely if it would be unbalancing! All elements have access to the Songs of Dreams and variant Celestial Draining (see p. 66). These are ubiquitous in the Marches.

Initiates receive a special weakness – a “Dread” – from their primary element. For example, a primary Fire element often creates a Dread of water or immersion. (See *Dreads* box.) The character points received for this Dread should be spent over time on Resources tied to the primary and secondary elements. Specifically, this includes both the skills and Songs one can learn from these elements *and* relevant affinities. Unlike skills and Songs, the list of relevant affinities is not fixed. Use the common sense test when considering an affinity not listed for a group.

As the last mechanical effect, initiates receive a bonus of five Resource points. Spend these points, like the Dread points, on Resources connected to the primary and secondary elements.

All awakened elements play an active if unquantified role in a character’s personality. Awakening primary and secondary elements of Battle and Darkness biases a spirit toward pugnacious and shady behavior!

INITIATING BEFORE AND DURING PLAY

An ethereal PC can initiate before play begins. In character creation, the player selects a Dread and divides the Dread points and five extra points among element-

DREADS

Ethereals with a primary Love element dread and fear things like “losing a loved one” and “rejection by a potential paramour.” This fear represents something every bit as strong, irrational, and soul-twisting as a Fear Discord. The main difference is that they don’t *run away* when facing the things they fear. Instead, the disasters they Dread cost them Essence. Their fear, realized, cuts away at their will to exist.

A Dread functions like an Ethereal Discord, similar to Fear. The cost per level depends on what the ethereal dreads. Something easy to avoid like “showing anger,” or something that comes up rarely, like “immersion or suffocation,” is worth 1 point per level. Something common and hard to avoid, such as “appearing in public poorly groomed,” is worth 2-3 points per level. It’s hard to get through a battle and stay clean! When facing the realization of its Dread, an ethereal must make a Will roll at a penalty equal to the level of its Dread. If it fails, it loses 1 Essence. If it Dreads a *situation* rather than an event, it must keep making rolls (usually, one per hour or so) until it escapes the situation or runs out of Essence. If the ethereal does not have the necessary Essence to lose, it loses Mind hits equal to its Intelligence instead.

An ethereal who initiates during play must accept an appropriate Dread at a level equal to its Ethereal Forces, and *does* receive points for it! If the player desires more points, or the character concept fits, it can increase the level of its Dread, or take an additional Dread corresponding to its secondary element, if it so chooses.

related Resources. (The Dread’s level is, again, equal to Ethereal Forces, though the GM may agree that the character either gained or lost Forces *subsequent* to initiation.) This is considered *standard* in an ethereals game. A GM should let the players know if he wants uninitiated PCs.

If the GM wants *most* PCs to start uninitiated, but is okay with one or two initiates, he can cancel the five-point bonus for initiating before play. Those characters receive only the Dread and the points for their Dread.

Spirits can have strong elemental influences before their initiation. The player of an uninitiated PC can choose tentative primary and secondary elements to help shape his character conception. Once the game begins, the PC can *attempt* to initiate at any time, although only the GM decides when the PC succeeds and receives the benefits.



RESOURCES



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RESOURCES



AFFINITY LEVELS

Affinities come in four levels. *Slight* affinities cost 2 points each, *Moderate* affinities cost 5 points each, and *Strong* and *Primal* affinities cost 10 points each.

The total number of a spirit's Affinities may not exceed the number of its Forces.

Slight Affinity

A slight affinity is barely noticeable in most situations, even in the Marches. The spirit feels attracted to its affinity and may learn Songs and skills reflecting it, but the only inherent power such a minor affinity grants is a +1 on Dream-Shaping rolls when the subject of the affinity is present (see p. 93). A slight affinity is not strong enough to grant access to the powers listed for that affinity type.

Moderate Affinity

Moderate affinities affect a spirit in many significant ways. They allow access to the Rites and powers that come with the affinity (see individual affinity descriptions), and give the spirit a +2 to affinity and relevant Dream-Shaping rolls. A spirit must have at least 3 Forces per moderate affinity, and an appropriate elemental strand (see p. 22).

Strong Affinity

A strong affinity is a dominant theme in an ethereal's consciousness, and it grants the spirit significant power. The spirit gets a bonus of +4 to affinity rolls (see p. 51) and to relevant Dream-Shaping rolls. A spirit must have at least 6 Forces per strong affinity, and an appropriate elemental strand.

Primal Affinity

Only primal spirits (p. 73) can have a primal affinity, and no spirit can have more than one. (At least, not without being a god; see p. 81.) The spirit may add its Ethereal Forces to appropriate Dream-Shaping rolls and twice that to affinity rolls – and it always has a minimum target number of 10 in either case. Some primal affinities give additional powers. The cost and requirements are the same as strong affinities (above). Thus, a primal spirit with at least 6 Forces can define its strong affinity as primal; it would need at least 12 Forces to add a second strong affinity, but only one of them could be primal.

For more years than anyone can count, the Basalt Seal has remained unbroken. I do not know what it holds back. Some terror, I think, from the primeval days. Or a cataclysm to bury this realm. Or perhaps God has set it upon us, to seal away apotheosis. I would like to know, but there is no one I could ask.

These are the words on the Basalt Seal: "This darkness lasts until the sun."

Though I live in its Domain, I did not fear the Seal. There is no sunlight in this realm. Clouds cover the sky, sooty in color and mournful in demeanor. Twice in my lifetime, they have let a spark of sunlight through, to spit and crackle upon the surface of the land. That light makes the forgetful black trees stir with ancient memory. It makes the spirits of this place look up with wonder. But it has never touched the Forbidden Hills, or come near the Basalt Seal that rests upon them.

I lay with my lover on sheets that clung to us like hands, tangled in the knots and catches that love makes; and I saw the clouds open. A ray of light swept down to spear a tradesman. His face contorted with startlement and joy.

Then, as relentless as the wind that drove it, the light swept toward the Hills.

By the time I had disentangled myself, I knew the clouds had shifted far enough; the sunlight had begun to fall through them, at velocities immeasurable, toward the Basalt Seal.

My body was large enough to cover the Seal. And I am the element of Speed.

I began to run.

The Resources in this chapter pertain specifically to ethereal campaigns. Most are available to ethereal spirits, but some are more appropriate for Dream Soldiers, or other humans with dealings in the Marches.

AFFINITIES

Affinities are purchased at character creation, though with the GM's permission they can be modified later (see box, p. 51). They function somewhat like attunements, but are both more flexible and less powerful. Affinities are usually related to the character's elemental strands, its Image, the event that granted it self-awareness (or at least freedom from a dreamscape), or all of the above. Ethereals do *not* have to be initiated to possess affinities!

COMBINING AFFINITIES

Forces are not “spent” on affinities; the restrictions above are simply minimum requirements. An ethereal with 6 Forces can have a Strong affinity *and* up to two Moderate affinities, since it meets the Forces requirements for both. Remember only that a spirit cannot have more *total* affinities than it has Forces.

Example: A 3-Force ethereal could have up to three slight affinities, or one moderate affinity and two slight affinities.

Example 2: A 7-Force ethereal could have one strong affinity, two moderate affinities, and up to four slight affinities, or two moderate affinities and five slight affinities, or seven slight affinities, or any other combination adding up to seven affinities or less.

Every affinity comes with a Rite; any spirit with at least a *moderate* affinity has access to it. (Remember that like other Rites, each one can only be used once per day.) Additionally, each affinity lists a set of suggested powers; any spirit with a moderate affinity or greater may attempt to use any power on the list by making an affinity roll (below), and spending any required Essence. Unless otherwise stated, this takes no concentration or time.

These powers are not necessarily all-inclusive; the GM may think of additional abilities that an affinity might grant, and players should also be encouraged to think of creative uses. As a general rule, the more potent the effect, the greater the Essence expenditure necessary, and rarely will an affinity be able to trump a Song or an attunement. Spirits with the proper ethereal strands may have more discrete “powers” than any ordinary celestial can command, but no one of them has the potency of a direct attunement to or a Song played directly upon some aspect of the Symphony.

AFFINITY ROLLS

To use a power associated with a moderate (or higher) affinity, the spirit must make a d666 roll with a target number equal to his Intelligence (with modifiers; see below), and spend any necessary Essence. (Additional Essence may be spent to increase the chances, as usual.)

A *moderate* affinity gives a +2 to the roll. A *strong* affinity grants a bonus of +4. A *primal* affinity allows the spirit to add twice its Ethereal Forces to the roll, and raise its target number to 10 if the result is less than that.

On a successful roll, the affinity will take effect as described. On an unsuccessful roll, there is no result other than the waste of Essence.

Some powers require no roll to activate (though they may still require Essence). These are marked “*No roll*”. Certain affinities also have special powers that are *only* available to primal spirits (p. 73); a primal affinity is necessary to use them.

SONG AFFILIATIONS

Affinities can synchronize with certain Songs, just as celestial resonances do (see the *Liber Canticorum*, p. 16). Some affinities have “Affiliated Songs” listed under them. Spirits who possess a Strong or Primal affinity will receive a bonus of +1 to the check digit of any affiliated Songs. Affiliation bonuses are *not* cumulative; even if a spirit has multiple affinities affiliated with the same Song, the maximum bonus is +1.

(Do note that the GM must still approve *access* to any Secret or Lost Songs, whether or not a strand or affinity might otherwise permit them!)

NEW AND IMPROVED AFFINITIES

Spirits can develop a stronger bond to their existing affinities, or even gain new ones. Assuming they have the Forces to accommodate such “upgrades” (p. 50), the GM may allow ethereal characters to spend experience points on increasing an affinity’s level, or buying a new one. However, affinities are not like skills one can simply acquire with practice; any change in a spirit’s affinities represents a significant change in its very nature. Thus, the GM may require that any such “improvement” be preceded by roleplaying that supports such a change in the character. It is also recommended that *new* affinities start at Slight and require further roleplaying to strengthen, unless unusual circumstances support a spirit’s spontaneous development of a stronger affinity.

AFFINITIES LIST

Air

Sometimes called a Wind affinity. The spirit gets a bonus to create wind or aerial imagery.

Rite: Spend an entire night exposed to the open air.

Powers:

✧ Create light breezes. These are not strong enough to push heavy objects, but can blow papers or dust around, and put out candle flames. (Make a Precision roll to push a light object in the direction the spirit wants) (1 Essence)

✧ Create enough air for one person to breathe for an hour. (1 Essence)

✧ Create stronger puffs of wind, with an effective Strength equal to the check digit. Roll a Contest of Strength to knock someone over or tear something from someone's hand. A Precision roll is necessary to direct the wind with any finesse. (2 Essence)

✧ "Ride the wind": go whichever direction the wind is blowing (or float gently to the ground if there is no wind) for check digit minutes. (1 Essence)

✧ Fly, at a speed in yards per round equal to the check digit \times the amount of Essence spent. Duration is equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces in minutes. (3 Essence, +3 to carry another person)

Primal: The spirit can create gaseous vessels. For purposes of pushing things around, the vessel has a Strength equal to its Forces in "size" (p. 68); i.e., a 6-Force gaseous vessel could try to push someone over with a Strength of 6. Any kind of fine manipulation will require a Precision roll. Gaseous vessels may ride the wind as described above for free (but generating a wind to direct oneself has the normal cost), or drift through the air in any direction at half the spirit's normal running speed. These vessels are immune to most physical attacks, but ethereal and celestial powers will do normal damage. (No roll)

Animals

Affiliated Songs: Beasts, Healing (*only* when used on animals)

The spirit gets a bonus to bring animals into a dream, and to control their behavior.

Rite: Spend all night in animal form (either in a dream, or in a corporeal vessel).

Powers:

✧ If the spirit has an animal Image (p. 125), it may form animal vessels of the appropriate type larger than its Forces would normally allow (see p. 68). Spirits with insect Images may form insect vessels. Insect spirits with a *primal* affinity may form vessels consisting of *swarms* of insects; see *In Nomine*, p. 191. (No roll)

CREATING YOUR OWN AFFINITIES

Ethereal affinities aren't as varied as celestial Words, but anything that can be conceptualized is represented somehow in the ethereal realm. This chapter describes only the most common affinities; GMs and players are encouraged to create their own. However, before writing up a new one, consider that conceptually similar affinities tend to function similarly. Some affinities, such as Emotion and Terrain, are really categories of affinities. If the affinity you want is not listed here, see if there is one based on a similar concept which can be modified. Remember that as a general rule, affinities have a broad scope – individual spirits may "specialize" in particular uses of an affinity, but affinities are not as narrow as some highly-focused Words can become. For example, Manny (p. 76) doesn't have an affinity for Mexican Food or Tacos. He has an affinity for Hunger; what *he* hungers for is tacos. The Final Exam (p. 73) has an affinity for Fear; tests are merely the instrument with which it delivers fear. If you have an ethereal character based on a popular science fiction movie, and his primary talent is wielding a laser-sword, he doesn't need an affinity for Laser-Swords. Instead, give him Puissance, with which he can wield a laser-sword in the Marches (or on Earth, if he can find a real one!) to deadly effect.

Remember, *any* new affinities must be approved by the GM. Because of the wildly variable nature of ethereal spirits, new affinities are easier to introduce into a campaign than new Songs or Attunements. As such, they represent an opportunity for players to create a plethora of new powers . . . which is not a bad thing in itself. But be watchful for any affinity that threatens to unbalance a campaign, or which seems tailored to optimize the potency of a particular character. If there is a broader affinity that encompasses the concept of the new one, then it should probably be a "specialization" of the broader one, rather than a separate affinity.

✧ Add Ethereal Forces to reaction rolls from animals (including other spirits with an animal Image!). (1 Essence – unless the spirit has an animal Image, in which case it can elicit reaction bonuses from animals of the same type without spending Essence)

✧ Communicate with animals for check digit minutes – this does not ensure the animals will listen to the spirit, nor does it grant them abnormal intelligence. (1 Essence – with the same exception noted above)

✧ Summon (check digit) animals of a particular type (spirit's choice). On Earth, the nearest such animals will proceed to his location by whatever normal means are available to them; there is no effect if none are within an hour's travel. On the ethereal plane, the spirit actually conjures *figments* (p. 74) of 1 Ethereal Force each. These dream-spirits behave like any other, with Images of normal animals. The animals will not automatically obey their summoner, and will probably disappear as soon as they are no longer in its presence. (2 Essence – 1 for animals of the spirit's Image)

BEASTS AND STARS

The woman sat tailor-style in the starlight and looked in the mockingbird's eye. "Why should I help you?" she asked it.

The mockingbird sang.

"Why," the woman said, in mild wonder, "that song was your own." She held out her hand to the bird, and her black eyes sparkled like the heavens above.

✧ Charm any animal; the creature will be obedient as if it were a servant with a Resource level equal to the check digit, until it leaves the ethereal's presence. (2 Essence – 1 for an animal of the spirit's Image)

Primal: Bless animals (*not* including humans) with fecundity, or curse them with barrenness. A number of creatures equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces will be unusually fertile for a number of weeks equal to the check digit. This won't cause impossible conceptions, but any attempt to conceive that *might* be successful, will be (and the offspring will usually be particularly healthy and fecund). Conversely, a curse of low fertility will balk all attempts at conception for the same duration. (5 Essence) (*This is similar to the Fertility affinity – p. 56 – but only applicable to animals.*)

Artifice

Affiliated Songs: Artifacts; Machines (only for Primal Artifice spirits, *or* those with an appropriate "bonus category"; see below)

The spirit is talented at making things, and gets a bonus to manufacture items that fall within its purview in a dream. These spirits are most often responsible for creating artifacts.

Rite: Create or repair something.

Powers:

✧ Only spirits with an affinity for artifice may form vessels of inanimate objects (see p. 68). (No roll)

✧ Choose one narrow category of things (such as Pots, Swords, Motors, Clocks, Rings, Dresses, Furniture, Ships, Paintings, etc.); the spirit receives a +1 bonus on any skill roll to create or repair appropriate items. (No roll)

✧ Add Ethereal Forces to any roll to create or repair any mundane item (1 Essence; No roll for the spirit's "bonus category," above)

✧ Add Ethereal Forces to any Enchantment roll (see the *Liber Reliquarum* for complete rules on making artifacts). (No roll, 2 Essence for talismans, 3 Essence for celestial artifacts; subtract 1 Essence from the cost if the item is in the spirit's category, above)

Primal: Primal artifice spirits can choose a broader category of things (such as Weapons, Metal, Clothing, Machines, Art, etc.) with which they get a permanent bonus as described above.

Books

The spirit gets a bonus to create (or alter) books in a dream.

Rite: Read (or write) a book.

Powers:

✧ Read any book, regardless of language. Lasts until the spirit finishes the book, or puts it down. (1 Essence)

✧ Alter the contents of any book. Each application only affects 1 page, and lasts for check digit days. (1 Essence)

Primal: A Primal Book spirit can pick up any book, and cause it to become any book that's ever been written, as long as the ethereal is reading it. (The book must have actually been written – this affinity doesn't give access to all the hypothetical and dream-books that are in Yves' Library or in the Marches!) The spirit must *know* the title of the specific book it wants to read; it can't simply declare "I want a guidebook to New York City" or "a book of Kipling poems." (2 Essence)



Cold

Affiliated Songs: Ice

The spirit gets a bonus to turn any dreamscape colder, or introduce ice or snow.

Rite: Spend all night in sub-freezing temperatures.

Powers:

- ✧ Conjure ice out of the air, shaped any way the spirit likes; the ice can form anywhere within line of sight, and will last for at least check digit minutes unless heat is applied directly. It will last indefinitely in freezing temperatures. (1 Essence per pound of ice)

- ✧ Lower the temperature to freezing (or by an additional 10 degrees × the check digit if it is already freezing) within a number of yards equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces, lasting for 10 minutes × the check digit. (1 Essence)

- ✧ Gain immunity to cold for check digit hours. (1 Essence, +1 to grant this ability to another)

Primal: Primal spirits of cold cannot be harmed by cold temperatures; they have the above immunity automatically. (They must still make an affinity roll and spend 1 Essence to grant immunity to someone else.)

Deception

Affiliated Songs: Concealment, Deception

The definitive quality of trickster-spirits, an affinity for Deception gives the spirit a bonus to make things appear other than they are in a dream; this includes rolls to alter the spirit's own appearance (p. 92).

Rite: Fool someone, either with a trick, a simple act of deception, or just an ordinary lie. Pulling off a *great* deception (GM's judgment, but it should be an impressive trick, or something that leaves the victim looking *really* stupid) earns the spirit 2 Essence.

Powers:

- ✧ Penalize anyone rolling to see past one of the spirit's deceptions by the check digit. This includes Detect Lies

rolls and Perception rolls to spot something the spirit has hidden or camouflaged (including itself). It does *not* apply to deceptions so obvious as to require no roll, or those which can be undone with simple deduction (e.g., which a *player* figures out). It is also not cumulative with any other supernatural abilities, nor does it interfere with them. For example, it does not interfere with the resonance of a Seraph, or with the attunement of a Cherub or Djinn or the Celestial Song of Attraction, and the spirit cannot add his Ethereal Forces to the penalty to detect it when using the Ethereal Song of Form. The GM should use his own discretion in fuzzy situations, but the affinity makes it more likely that the spirit can *fool* someone; it does not create illusions or magically cloak the senses. (2 Essence)

Primal: Primal spirits of Deception can pull off seemingly obvious capers, leaving their victims wondering how they could possibly have fallen for something so foolish. Within the restrictions cited above, the spirit can lie with almost Balseraphic skill, and even transparent deceptions require a d666 roll (based on whatever characteristic or skill the GM deems appropriate) to see through. For example, the spirit could hold a rock wrapped in a blanket and tell its victim "This is a baby," and the victim will be obliged to make a Detect Lies roll (at the penalty described above) to disbelieve that the oddly-shaped, strangely-silent lump is not in fact an infant. Should the spirit hand the rock to the dupe, an Intelligence roll (at the same penalty) would allow the victim to realize that he's not holding a baby. If the victim actually unwraps the blanket and *sees* the rock, however, he will no longer be fooled. Likewise, the spirit could disguise itself with nothing more than a Groucho Marx nose-and-glasses, and anyone who sees it would have to make a Perception roll to recognize it (but if they fail, they will think it's a stranger wearing a Groucho Marx disguise; they won't fail to actually see the nose and glasses). (2 Essence)

Destruction

Affiliated Songs: Entropy

The spirit receives a bonus to destroy dream-images or introduce scenes of destruction in a dreamscape.

Rite: Destroy something (with at least 1 Force or 4 Body hits) beyond repair.

Powers:

✦ Inflict damage equal to the check digit on anything within sight; in the Marches, this can be ethereal or celestial damage. This power cannot be Dodged, but Protection reduces damage normally. (1 Essence)

✦ Weaken the structure of an inanimate object; each successful application has the effect of aging the subject by a number of years equal to the check digit. This can affect *any* single object the spirit can see, even such massive objects as mountains. A mountain, of course, could absorb thousands of years of aging without significant effect, but an already unstable hillside might be pushed to collapse with just a decade or two of erosion. (2 Essence)

✦ Weaken a living organism. Reduce the Strength of a living creature by the check digit, only for purposes of resistance rolls, both against supernatural effects and mundane hazards, such as poisons, disease, or any other health-related threats. The victim's effective Strength will recover at a rate of 1 per hour. (2 Essence)

Divination

Affiliated Songs: Symphony

The spirit gets a bonus to shape prophetic or clairvoyant dreams. (Note that in such dreams, the dreamer *believes* he's seeing visions of the future or remote events – such visions aren't necessarily true!)

Limited Divination: Some spirits may *only* spy with one sense, related to their elements or other affinities. (For example, a Wind spirit might be able to hear rumors on the wind, while a Moon spirit might see anything that takes place under the moon, and Jewels spirits could know the location of any gemstones they focus upon). If the spirit chooses a "limited" affinity for divination, then it may spy on the corporeal plane even while it is in the Marches, or vice versa. (An affinity for divination will never allow the spirit to spy on the celestial plane.)

Rite: Successfully predict a future event (earn 1 Essence *when it comes true*)

Powers:

✦ Receive a vision, a snatch of conversation, or some other impression from an event occurring elsewhere that is relevant to it. The check digit determines *how* relevant the divination is, and how long the vision or other sensory impression lasts. (A check digit of 1 might

merely provide something random that is interesting but not immediately useful; on a check digit of 6, the spirit should get exactly the information it's hoping for, such as a minute or two of conversation between its enemies, or the exact location of something it is searching for.) (1 Essence for a single sense; 3 Essence for all senses)

✦ As above, but a vision of the past or future (+1 Essence)

✦ Spy for check digit minutes on any location where the spirit has been before. (2 Essence for a single sense; 4 Essence for all senses)

Drowning/Suffocation

Dreams of being unable to breathe are common and terrifying, so this nasty affinity is common among spirits who like to terrify mortals. The spirit gets a bonus to put a dreamer into a situation where drowning or suffocation is possible.

Rite: Drown or suffocate someone (either corporeally or in a dream)

Powers:

✦ Make someone feel like he is drowning or suffocating. The victim must make a Strength roll (or in the Marches, either an Intelligence or Dreaming roll) or begin losing 1 point of Strength per turn (on Earth) or 1 Intelligence per turn (in the Marches), until he reaches 0, whereupon he will black out or be expelled from the Marches, respectively. Upon awakening (or somehow ending the attack), the victim will have suffered no real damage. Destroying the spirit or sending it to another plane will terminate the effect. (2 Essence)

✦ As above, except that the drowning or suffocating is *real* unless the victim resists. Follow the rules above, except once the victim's characteristic reaches 0, on Earth he will take 1d6 Body hits per turn until he dies; in the Marches, he will be expelled as above, but he will also suffer Discord as if he'd been reduced to 0 Mind hits (p. 98). (4 Essence)

Primal: If the spirit drowns or suffocates a mortal, it will make no disturbance! (No Essence, but requires an affinity roll)

Emotions

Affiliated Songs: Attraction (Ethereal only) – Love; Laughter – Joy; Nightmares – Fear; Revulsion (Ethereal only) – Hatred; Sensation (Ethereal only) – all

This is actually a category of affinities; each emotion (Anger, Fear, Hatred, Love, Greed, Bravery, etc.) is a separate affinity. Spirits with an emotional affinity get bonuses to influence the mood of a dream towards that emotion.

Rite: Cause someone to feel the appropriate emotion.

Powers:

✧ Detect all individuals within sight (but not through media) who feel the specified emotion very strongly with a Perception roll. Appropriate Discords or human disadvantages, such as Fear, Lustful, Angry, etc., add their levels to the roll. (No Affinity roll)

✧ Afflict someone with the emotion; treat this as a Discord at a level equal to the check digit. (If there is no Discord that corresponds to the emotional affinity, assume the subject feels that emotion very strongly and must make a Will roll minus its “level” to behave otherwise.) The victim may make a Will roll to avoid being afflicted. In a dreamscape, the spirit may reduce the dreamer’s Will roll by the check digit of a successful Dreaming roll; the effect will last until the victim wakes up, or transports himself to Blandine’s or Beleth’s Marches (depending on the emotion; Blandine’s Marches would erase Fear or Hatred, while Beleth’s would erase Mercy or Love). In the corporeal realm, the effect will last for 24 hours, or until the victim sleeps and enters whichever side of the Marches works against the emotion. (2 Essence)

Entrancement

These hypnotic spirits are capable of diverting attention . . . toward or away from themselves.

Rite: Spend 10 minutes distracting someone from what they were doing.

Powers:

✧ Create a momentary distraction that draws one person’s attention in the direction of the spirit’s choice. Both the subject and the object of the entrancement must be within line of sight, and the subject can avoid being affected with a Will roll. For a number of seconds equal to the check digit of a failed Will roll (or until something more urgent calls attention to itself – such as a threatening foe), the subject will stare at whatever the spirit chooses. (1 Essence)

✧ As above, but the spirit can entrance a number of people equal to his Ethereal Forces. (2 Essence)

✧ Entrance a single person to such a degree that the victim will continue staring at the object of fascination until struck or forcibly drawn away from it (or the object leaves his field of vision). Victims may make a Will roll to resist; failure means they are affected for a number of hours equal to the check digit of the failed roll, whereupon they may roll again. Mortals can literally waste away in a trance if they can’t break free and aren’t snapped out of it; immortals could theoretically remain entranced forever (though anyone with a Will of 2 or higher will make his roll *eventually* . . .). (3 Essence)

Fertility

Affiliated Songs: Fruition

The spirit gets a bonus to create dreams of childbirth or growing. Because they can engage in forbidden acts of procreation (see below), spirits with an affinity for Fertility generally hide that fact, as it’s grounds for immediate termination by any angel who discovers it.

Rite: Plant something, or facilitate or participate in an act of conception.

Powers:

✧ The spirit may learn any of the Songs of Fruition (*Liber Canticorum*, p. 70) without a teacher (but must pay character points for them as usual). (No roll)

✧ Bless plant or animal life (including humans) with fecundity, or curse them with barrenness. One animal, or an area of soil with a radius in yards equal to the spirit’s Corporeal Forces, will be unusually fertile for a number of weeks equal to the check digit. This won’t cause impossible conceptions, but any attempt to conceive or plant that *might* be successful, will be (and the offspring will usually be particularly healthy and fecund). Conversely, a curse of low fertility will balk all attempts at conception, or turn soil barren, for the same duration. (5 Essence)

Primal: Primal Fertility spirits can interbreed with mortals without using the Ethereal Song of Fruition. If they do know the Ethereal (or Celestial!) Songs of Fruition, they may use them on *others* (normally those Songs only allow the *performer* to breed with mortals). (3 Essence, plus any spent on the Song)

Filth

Affiliated Songs: Pestilence

These spirits are comfortable in mud, muck, sewage, smog, and other kinds of filth, and get a bonus to pollute any dreamscape with these images.

Rite: Befoul a structure, stream, pond, glade, or similar-sized area.

Powers:

✧ Filth spirits are unbothered by foul smells and tastes; they can eat anything that’s not actually toxic, and aren’t repelled by material that would nauseate anyone else. (No roll)

✧ Generate an unpleasant odor permeating an area with a radius equal to the spirit’s Ethereal Forces in yards. The stench will last for check digit hours. It’s not strong enough to make someone vomit or otherwise hinder them (unless they have a weak stomach), but it is *very* unpleasant. Alternatively, permanently contaminate a number of pounds of food or drink equal to the spirit’s Ethereal Forces with a foul taste. It’s not poisoned and can still be eaten . . . but no one would want to. (1 Essence)

✧ Coat any one object (or creature) within sight with a layer of grime, mold, and rot; maximum surface area with one application is equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces in square yards. This muck isn't immediately harmful, but it's certainly not healthy, and it will gum up electronics and moving parts if not cleaned away quickly. And it's *very* difficult to clean away. (2 Essence)

✧ Turn an area with a radius equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces in yards "dirty." The effect is not as drastic as the conjuration of filth, above, but it will hasten the growth of mildew and fungus, attract dust and dirt and bacteria, and generally make the area look grimy, no matter how many times it's scrubbed. This effect lasts for check digit days. (2 Essence)

Primal: Primal filth spirits are actually immune to poison and disease, and can breathe pure smog, swim in toxic waste, or eat food loaded with deadly bacteria (and the toxins they generate).

FIRE AND DARKNESS

He staggered out of the burning building to a constellation of camera flashes. His clothes were intact and his hair unsinged. A look of hate and fear spread across his face, and he stepped forward to dash the camera from a reporter's hand.

"There are people dying," he snarled, "and you take pictures of me?"

Lenses followed him like the eyes of a crowd as he stalked away. When he stood safely in darkness, he made a vigorous, angry gesture with one hand. Camera after camera burst into flame.

Fire

Affiliated Songs: Fire; Numinous Corpus: Flame
Spirits with an affinity for Fire get a bonus to create fires or warmth in a dream.

Rite: Consume something valuable with fire.

Powers:

✧ Ignite something flammable within sight. This can't do damage directly; it's the equivalent of applying a match. Igniting someone's clothing can cause damage if the fire isn't extinguished quickly, though. (1 Essence)

✧ Create fire that does damage (corporeal or ethereal, depending on the plane) equal to the check digit of the roll, and will also ignite any flammables. (2 Essence)

✧ Radiate heat extending a number of yards equal to the spirit's Corporeal Forces, lasting for 10 minutes × the check digit. The heat cannot do damage, but can turn an enclosed space swelteringly hot. (1 Essence)

✧ Gain immunity to heat for check digit minutes. Fire and other direct forms of heat cannot damage it (but this does not confer immunity to electricity or lasers, or to artifacts such as Fiery Swords). (2 Essence; for an additional +2 Essence, this immunity can be conveyed to another)

Primal: Primal fire spirits increase the duration of their immunity to fire (above) to check digit hours. Immunity given to someone else still only lasts for check digit minutes.

Glamour

Affiliated Songs: Nimbus (Ethereal only)

The spirit is charming and has a knack for making good impressions; it gets a bonus on any Dreaming rolls to improve its own appearance or create a favorable reaction.

Rite: Impress someone important.

Powers:

✧ Get a reaction bonus equal to the check digit (1 Essence)

✧ *Ensure* a favorable reaction; get a bonus as above, and even a failed reaction roll is treated as having a check digit of 0. (2 Essence)

✧ *Force* a favorable reaction from someone. The target must make a Will roll, or be favorably disposed toward the spirit for check digit minutes. (Treat this as having the same effect as the Impudite charming ability, *In Nomine*, p. 154.) (2 Essence)

Hunger

Affiliated Songs: Hunger

The spirit hungers for nourishment, and is drawn to others who do as well. It gets a bonus to create dreams of hunger, or food. (The hunger must be physical – it is not the same as desire or greed.)

Rite: Satisfy its own hunger, or help someone else satisfy theirs.

Powers:

✧ Recognize someone who is hungry with a Perception roll. (No roll)

✧ The spirit can "devour" people ethereally; if it successfully reduces someone's Mind hits to 0 in ethereal combat (see p. 98), it gets all the loser's remaining Essence (and earns a point of Essence even if the devoured victim had none left). (No Essence, but must make a normal roll)

Primal: Primal Hunger spirits can swallow other entities whole on the ethereal plane. This functions as a contest of Dream-Shaping (with all appropriate bonuses; see p. 93), at a cost of 3 Essence. If the victim is unable to resist, the ethereal has effectively “devoured” its opponent in ethereal combat. The victim doesn’t take any actual ethereal damage, but is otherwise treated as if he had been reduced to 0 Mind hits (see p. 98); humans and celestials are expelled from the ethereal plane (with Discord), ethereals are dissipated, and the spirit gets its victim’s Essence as noted above.

Light

Affiliated Songs: Light

The spirit receives a bonus to illuminate a dream.

Rite: Spend a full day (or an entire night in a dreamscape) under full sunlight or the equivalent.

Powers:

- ✦ Receive a +1 to all target numbers while in bright daylight, and a -1 in darkness. (No roll)
- ✦ Avoid being blinded by any light (including the Celestial Song of Light – but this does not prevent damage) (No Essence, but make a normal affinity roll)
- ✦ Glow for check digit hours. (1 Essence)
- ✦ Generate a blinding flash of light (like the Celestial Song of Light, but without the damage). (2 Essence)
- ✦ Become immune to harm from light in any form for check digit minutes. (This includes the Celestial Song of Light, and lasers, but not fire, electricity, or other forms of heat.) (1 Essence)
- ✦ Shine like the sun, blinding any who look directly at the spirit and fail a Strength roll. This extends for 10 yards × the spirit’s Ethereal Forces (or can fill an entire dreamscape, with a Dream-Shaping roll). The duration is check digit rounds. (2 Essence)

Lightning

Affiliated Songs: Lightning

The spirit gets a bonus to introduce lightning storms or electricity into a dream.

Rite: Spend the night in a thunderstorm.

Powers:

- ✦ Become luminescent and discharge sparks at will for check digit hours. (1 Essence)
- ✦ Generate electricity with a touch, doing damage equal to the check digit. With a Precision roll, it can also start a car, or power appliances and equipment for check digit minutes. (1 Essence)
- ✦ Project miniature lightning bolts, doing damage as above, but with a range of 10 yards × the spirit’s Ethereal

Forces (or anywhere within a dreamscape). They automatically hit, but can be Dodged. (2 Essence)

✦ Become immune to electrical damage for check digit minutes. (2 Essence; for an additional +2 Essence, this immunity can be conveyed to another)

Primal: Primal lightning spirits increase the duration of their immunity to electricity (above) to check digit hours. Immunity given to someone else still only lasts for check digit minutes.

Luck

The spirit is lucky. It gets a bonus to arrange improbable “random” events in a dream in order to specifically benefit or harm someone.

Rite: Escape a bad situation, or obtain some benefit, completely by chance.

Powers:

- ✦ Whenever the spirit spends Essence to improve a d666 roll, it gets an extra +1 bonus. (No roll)
- ✦ Cause good or bad luck for itself or anyone it sees. The exact result is up to the GM’s imagination, and it can occur immediately, or any time within the next 24 hours. The check digit indicates how immediate, relevant, and/or beneficial or harmful the fortunate event is; a 1 might mean the recipient finds a book he was looking for later that day, while a 6 might cause a truck to come careening around the corner and hit the angel who was pursuing the spirit. A failed roll has the same effect, *but* the *spirit* will *also* suffer bad luck at the same level of effect! Playing with fortune is dangerous, and even Luck spirits can’t avoid karmic payback. (3 Essence)

Primal: The spirit is simply ridiculously lucky. The GM should allow lucky things to happen to the spirit on a regular basis, and almost never will a random event cause harm to it. Whenever the GM is deciding the

FAITH AND MOUNTAINS

“This is what you must believe,” she told me, pointing toward the horizon. “That a girl can be like that mountain: immortal, untouchable, beyond the power of the sorrows of this world.”

“Is it true?” I asked her.

“No,” she said, “but it is what you must believe.”

I did not believe. Not at first. Then my father came home and I saw a wonder. All his strength could not move her from her stance, nor so much as bruise or brush aside a single hair from her head.

outcome of a situation, any random decisions should almost always favor the spirit. An affinity for Luck has no effect on Interventions, though – no mere ethereal can thwart God or Lucifer! (No roll)

Minerals

Affiliated Songs: Stone (only for stone affinities); Numinous Corpus: Rock (ditto)

Each mineral affinity applies to a particular form of mineral (such as stone, metal, gems, etc.). These spirits get a bonus to create their preferred form of material in a dreamscape.

Rite: Spend a night surrounded by stone/metal/gems/etc. (This includes sitting inside a concrete parking garage, for stone spirits, or inside a car or a metal vault, for metal spirits.)

Powers:

✦ Become heavy and difficult to move. Subtract the check digit from any Strength rolls that directly oppose it, whether it is a Contest of Strength, or an attempt to lift or move the spirit. This lasts for the duration of a single encounter (or for an entire dream). (2 Essence)

✦ Become hard as stone or metal, adding Protection equal to the check digit. (In the Marches, this reduces ethereal damage; divide by 2 and round down for celestial protection). This lasts for 10 minutes × the spirit's Ethereal Forces, but can be extended for the same duration by spending 1 Essence. (2 Essence)

✦ Create mineral vessels. Such vessels have Protection equal to their Forces (p. 10) (maximum Protection of 6), +2 Power with bare-handed attacks, and are immune to anything that wouldn't harm a statue (such as temperature extremes, poison, or drowning). However, reduce movement, and Agility for initiative purposes, by half. (No roll)

Motherhood

The archetypal nurturer, the spirit gets a bonus to bring images of motherhood into a dream, including any attempts to protect children. These spirits tend to like Cherubim.

Rite: Defend a child from harm, or care for a child for one day.

Powers:

✦ Choose anyone it likes as its "child." While someone is so designated, the spirit will get a +1 to any action to protect its child. However, it also develops a Dread (p. 48),

equal to its Ethereal Forces, of its child being harmed. The spirit must make a Will roll (or a Dream-Shaping roll) to "detach" itself from a child. (1 Essence)

✦ Know exactly where its "child" is; in the Marches, it can instantly go there. (1 Essence)

✦ Create Soul Links (p. 64) with a designated "child." (3 Essence)

Primal: The spirit's maternal bond is so strong that its "children" also feel it. There are no definite mechanical effects, but "children" will feel toward the spirit as they would toward their real mother, and may be required to make Will rolls to harm her, disobey her, etc. (The reactions of celestials and ethereals will vary, since most don't have a real "mother," but if they feel any kind of maternal affection, they will have trouble harming the spirit.)

Obscurement

Affiliated Songs: Concealment; Form (Ethereal only)

The spirit is good at hiding. It gets a bonus to hide itself or others; the bonus it gets on Dream-Shaping rolls (p. 93) also acts as a bonus to its Move Silently skill in the Marches.

Rite: Successfully hide something from a searcher for a day (hiding oneself definitely counts!).

Powers:

✦ Avoid notice for check digit hours.

Anyone who fails a Perception roll will simply not take notice of the spirit, unless they are looking for it or being particularly alert (GM's discretion), or the spirit calls attention to itself. The spirit can't simply walk past a guard, and it will certainly be noticed if it makes any hostile moves, but on Earth or in the Marches, it can easily "fade into the background" and be ignored. (1 Essence)

✦ As above, but subjects must make a Perception roll even if they *are* alert or looking for the spirit. They'll still automatically perceive it if it threatens them (but it can easily maneuver into a position to get a surprise first strike). The duration for this power is only check digit minutes. The spirit can also bestow this property on others (objects and people) for the same cost. (2 Essence)

Primal: The spirit can become truly invisible at will. This functions like the Ethereal Song of Form (*In Nomine*, p. 80), using the spirit's Ethereal Forces in place of the Song's skill level. The spirit can remain invisible for 1 minute × its Ethereal Forces × the amount of Essence it spends. For 3 Essence per minute, it can make another person or object invisible.



Plants

The spirit gets a bonus to introduce or control plants in a dream.

Rite: Spend all night in contact with plant life.

Powers:

✦ Only spirits with an affinity for Plants may have plant vessels. (No roll)

✦ Accelerate plant growth. For a number of days equal to the Essence spent, any plants within a radius in yards equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces will multiply their rate of growth by 1 + the check digit (i.e., a check digit of 2 will cause plants to grow twice as fast, while a check digit of 6 will cause a week's worth of growth every day). (1 Essence minimum)

✦ The spirit can "possess" plants. The spirit's corporeal vessel will vanish and the spirit can occupy any plant it can touch for up to check digit hours. This makes a disturbance just as if the spirit were changing vessels; the plant is treated as being a host. The spirit *cannot* animate the plant; it can only passively remain in "plant form." It can use all of its senses, however, and it can use Songs and affinities. If the plant it is possessing is destroyed, the spirit will suffer trauma (p. 18). The spirit can leave its plant host at any time, automatically reverting to the vessel it was wearing previously (making another disturbance) (2 Essence)

✦ Identify a plant and know its properties and all purposes for which it can be used (actually using it, such as preparing a healing herbal brew, may require a skill roll). (1 Essence)

✦ Move unhindered through any form of vegetation, as per the Terrain affinity (p. 61). (2 Essence – cannot be bestowed on others)

Primal: Bless plant life with fecundity, or curse it with barrenness. An area of soil with a radius in yards equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces will be unusually fertile for a number of *months* equal to the check digit. This won't cause impossible plant growth (such as rosebushes sprouting from concrete), but any attempt to plant that *might* be successful, will be (and the plants will usually be particularly strong and fecund). Conversely, a curse of low fertility will turn soil barren for the same duration. (5 Essence) (*This is similar to the Fertility affinity – p. 56 – but only affects plants.*)

Puissance

The spirit has an affinity for striking things. Bonuses to Dream-Shaping are applicable when the spirit wants to create a weapon, or create conditions favorable for using its weapon (a spirit Puissant with bows would get a bonus to turn an indoor dream into an outdoor dream, for example).

NESTS AND BATTLE

I didn't see it until I drew my gun, but nothing about this guy was human.

He moved toward me as if the wind were shoving at his back. His eyes were black and gold, like a honeycomb. His nails were thick and dark. His waist was as thin as a wasp's and his upper body bloated.

The sword in his hand licked out and knocked aside my gun, then reversed to lay open the back of my hand. "This street is mine," he said. "Never return."

Rite: Hit a target with a natural check digit of 6.

Powers:

✦ Each Puissant spirit can choose a specific weapon (such as Pistols, Throwing Stars, or Swords), and get a permanent +1 bonus to skill with that weapon. (No roll)

✦ Create an ethereal weapon (p. 98) of an appropriate type (above) in the Marches, with a Power equal to the check digit. The weapon will remain until the spirit banishes it or leaves the ethereal plane. (2 Essence)

✦ Multiply the power of a single attack with the spirit's bonus weapon by the check digit. This applies not only to ethereal attacks, but to physical attacks on the corporeal plane, or with celestial combat (if applicable) as well! (2 Essence)

Primal: Primal spirits of Puissance can expand their "bonus weapon" to an entire category: either Ranged Weapons, Melee Weapons, or Unarmed Combat. (Or at the GM's option, more diverse categories such as "samurai weapons" or "sharp objects," etc.) (No roll)

Speed

Affiliated Songs: Motion

The spirit is fast, and gets bonuses to Dream-Shaping rolls to outrun or outmaneuver another.

Rite: Beat someone else in a race or other contest of speed (fast-drawing, etc.).

Powers:

✦ For initiative purposes, add the check digit to the spirit's Agility. This lasts for an entire fight. (1 Essence)

✦ Add the check digit to the spirit's movement per turn, in any realm. This lasts for a number of hours equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces. (1 Essence)

Primal: The spirit *automatically* wins any initiative contest, except against other spirits with an affinity for Speed, or Ofanim. In the Marches, it will automatically

win any race or outrun any other being, unless its competitor can beat it at a Dream-Shaping Contest. (No roll)

Terrain

This is a category of affinities; each type of terrain (Sea, Mountain, Forest, Arctic, Desert, City, etc.) must be chosen separately. Terrain spirits get a bonus to create such terrain in dreams.

Rite: Spend the night in the given environment.

Powers:

✧ Add the check digit to any Survival roll in the appropriate terrain. (1 Essence)

✧ Move unhindered through the spirit's terrain (walking easily over snowfields, or through marshes, or passing through heavy jungle) for check digit hours. This doesn't automatically avoid other natural hazards, but nothing will reduce the spirit's movement rate. (2 Essence, +1 per person to bestow this power on others as well)

✧ Substitute the check digit of an affinity roll for an Area Knowledge roll within the spirit's native terrain, even if it doesn't possess knowledge of the area it's actually in. (1 Essence)

Primal: Primal terrain spirits *automatically* make their Survival rolls in their native terrain; if a check digit is necessary, treat it as being equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces. (No roll)

Water

Affiliated Songs: Water

The spirit gets a bonus to bring water into a dream, and to shape dream-water to its desires. Some mischievous water-spirits are responsible for bedwetting . . .

Rite: Spend the night in or next to a body of water.

Powers:

✧ Divine the nearest water source. (1 Essence)

✧ Breathe water for check digit \times 10 minutes. (1 Essence; +1 Essence to grant this ability to another)

✧ Walk on water, or move through it in any direction at normal running speed, for check digit hours. (1 Essence)

✧ Create and/or purify water, 1 gallon \times the check digit. The water can materialize anywhere (but not *inside* a living being!). However, with a Precision roll, the spirit can upset the water in living beings. If the victim fails a Strength roll, he will feel nausea and dizziness, suffering a -2 to *all* rolls for a number of minutes equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces. Alternatively, the spirit can afflict someone with extreme thirst or a bloated sensation. There is no mechanical effect over the short term, but it will make most beings *very* uncomfortable. (2 Essence)

✧ Quench fires, dampening flames over an area equal to check digit square yards. Particularly fierce blazes may cost twice as much Essence, and those that can't be put out with water (such as oil fires) will be unaffected. (2 Essence)

Primal: Primal water spirits can breathe water naturally, in any vessel. They can also create vessels of water. The number of Forces of size (p. 68) represents the watery mass of the vessel; a 1-Force vessel would be only a gallon or two, 3 Forces would fill a bathtub, and 6 Forces could fill a small swimming pool. Watery vessels can move freely through bodies of water, but are at half speed when rolling over dry land. Most physical attacks will pass harmlessly through a watery vessel; the vessel can only manipulate things physically with difficulty (and a Precision roll), but if it is large enough, it can engulf someone and attempt to drown them (win a Contest of Strength to escape).

Wealth

An affinity for wealth gives a spirit bonuses to shape a dream toward images of riches, or a quest for wealth.

Rite: Acquire something more valuable than anything else currently in one's possession.

Powers:

✧ Know an item's value (relative to the local market) (1 Essence)

✧ Judge how wealthy a person is. (1 Essence)

✧ Bless someone for check digit days. This blessing can manifest in any way the GM desires, but it will generally cause economic transactions to go well for the recipient, and bring good luck financially. It won't instantly turn a pauper into a millionaire, but it usually *does* provide sufficient opportunities that the recipient can gain at least a level of Status, if he takes advantage of them. (2 Essence)

✧ The spirit has a Midas touch – sometimes literally. The exact manner in which this power manifests depends on the spirit's elemental strand (a Gold spirit could turn objects to gold, a Jewel spirit would conjure gems, a Luck spirit might choose winning lottery tickets or hot stock picks), but it can generate small fortunes at will. (The size of a "small" fortune is up to the GM, but anything under a million dollars is appropriate.) (4 Essence)

Weather

Affiliated Songs: Storms

The spirit receives a bonus to alter the weather in a dream, and may affect weather on Earth.

Rite: Spend all day exposed to severe weather.

PACK AND DROUGHT

It was hot. It had always been hot, since Amelia came. I went to speak to her. As always, she knelt digging at the weeds. "Why do you do this?" I said. "I know what you are. You are a thing from beyond our reality. A goddess. Why you do spend your life weeding the society's gardens?"

She looked up. "I am a goddess," she concurred, crumbling a weed in her hand. "It is my dharma to kill in my people's name. Why should I wish for more?"

Powers:

✦ Become immune to any weather or temperature extreme, including lightning bolts (but not other electrical attacks) for check digit hours. Even tornadoes, blizzards, and sandstorms (but not indirect *results* of weather, such as floods and mudslides, nor natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions) will blow harmlessly past the spirit. (1 Essence)

✦ Predict the weather for the next 24 hours. (1 Essence)

WEATHER SEVERITY

| Level | Temperature | Weather |
|-------|----------------|---|
| 1 | Arctic | Catastrophic; hurricanes, blizzards, etc. |
| 2 | Freezing | Severe; thunder/snowstorms, etc. |
| 3 | Cold | Serious; strong wind, heavy rain, snow, or hail |
| 4 | Cool/Temperate | Moderate; mild winds and/or precipitation |
| 5 | Warm | Mild; slight breeze and/or light precipitation |
| 6 | Hot | Dead calm; no wind or precipitation |

✦ Change the weather. See box; each level of change in severity and/or temperature costs 2 Essence, and the spirit cannot effect more levels of change than the check digit of its affinity roll. The effects last for 1 hour, and have a diameter of effect equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces in miles.

(**Example:** Changing a mild, slightly breezy spring day into an arctic snowstorm would cost 6 Essence to shift the temperature from *temperate* to *arctic*, and 6 Essence to shift the severity from *mild* to *severe*, or 12 Essence total. This would also require a check digit of 6 on the affinity roll.)

OPTIONAL SKILL BONUSES

If the Game Master wishes to make affinities even more useful in the corporeal realm, he may decide that an affinity will grant a +1 bonus to appropriate mundane skills, as well as affiliated Songs. The GM is free to change the suggested skills below, or add other relevant ones (especially when the only skill bonuses are to esoteric Knowledges).

Affinity Suggested Skills

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Air | Driving (Piloting Aircraft) |
| Animals | Tracking |
| Artifice | Engineering; cumulative with any Ethereal Forces bonus, p. 53 |
| Books | Languages |
| Cold | Knowledge (Meteorology) |
| Deception | Lying |
| Destruction | Engineering; to find weaknesses and build devices of destruction |
| Divination | Knowledge |
| Drowning/Suffocation | Swimming |
| Emotions | Emote |
| Entrancement | Seduction |
| Fertility | Medicine |
| Filth | Survival (Swamps and other mucky places) |
| Fire | Knowledge (Arson, Firefighting, etc.) |
| Glamour | Seduction |
| Hunger | Knowledge (Cooking) |
| Light | Emote |
| Lightning | Electronics |
| Luck | Escape |
| Minerals | Climbing; only for mineral surfaces |
| Motherhood | Medicine |
| Obscurement | Move Silently |
| Plants | Survival (Forest, Woodlands, etc.) |
| Puissance | One weapon type; see p. 60 |
| Speed | Running |
| Terrain | Survival (Terrain type) |
| Water | Swimming |
| Wealth | Knowledge (Finances, Stock Market, etc.) |
| Weather | Knowledge (Meteorology) |

ELEMENTS AND THEIR AFFINITES

Each element (pp. 24-25) lists suggested affinities. For those who prefer to design a character by choosing affinities first, and then elemental strands that harmonize with them, here is a summary. (Affinities do not *need* to mesh with elements, nor does a spirit have to be initiated to gain affinities. It's merely an aesthetic choice.)

| <i>Affinity</i> | <i>Elements</i> |
|--------------------------|---|
| Air | Classical Elements (Winds), Emotions, Weather |
| Animals | Life, Society (Pack/Tribe) |
| Artifice | Structures, Tech |
| Books | Information |
| Cold | Classical Elements (Water), Weather (Snow/Hail) |
| Deception | Astronomical Concepts (Moon), Information (Imagination/Faith), Senses, Society |
| Destruction | Struggle, Weather |
| Divination | Astronomical Concepts, Information, Tech |
| Drowning/ Suffocation | Classical Elements (all but Winds), Structures, Terrain (Seas/Lakes, etc.) |
| Emotions | Emotions, Weather |
| Entrancement | Senses, Society, Wealth |
| Fertility | Life, Weather |
| Filth | Struggle, Terrain (Landfill/Swamp), Wealth |
| Fire | Classical Elements (Flame) |
| Glamour | Astronomical Concepts, Senses, Society, Structures, Wealth |
| Hunger | Life, Struggle |
| Light | Astronomical Concepts, Senses |
| Lightning | Tech, Weather (Storms/Lightning) |
| Luck | Astronomical Concepts, Senses |
| Minerals | Classical Elements (Rock), Structures, Terrain (Mountains/Caves, etc.), Wealth |
| Motherhood | Society, Structures |
| Obscurement | Astronomical Concepts, Information, Life, Senses |
| Plants | Life, Terrain (Forests/Grasslands, etc.) |
| Puissance | Struggle, Tech |
| Speed | Emotions, Information (News), Life, Struggle, Tech |
| Terrain | Terrain |
| Water | Classical Elements (Water) |
| Wealth | Wealth |
| Weather | Weather |

proven themselves immensely valuable and completely beholden to her.

Choir and Band Attunements can be given to ethereals, in the same manner that they can be given to corporeal beings (*Corporeal Player's Guide*, p. 23) – by giving the ethereal a Force taken from an angel or a demon. Naturally, ethereals are even more unlikely than humans to receive such a gift; Demon Princes know they'll eventually see a Soldier in Hell, but ethereals might run away, and Archangels just generally disapprove of "pagan spirits."

Certain of the pagan gods are also capable of granting Servitor Attunements, but these are rare (see *Greater Gods*, p. 82).

The attunements below can be granted by any greater god, and some lesser gods or other spirits. Attunements specific to a particular deity will vary in power and cost, and usually carry some continuing duty to the god who granted them. (Therefore, it's recommended that no ethereal PC start out with an attunement, unless the player provides a *very* interesting explanation – probably one which makes him totally dependent on the gifting Superior . . .)

Ethereal Connection

This attunement can be granted by a Superior, or by certain very powerful ethereal spirits. It allows mortals to perform Ethereal Songs (and, because of its unique connection to the ethereal plane, the Celestial Song of Dreams).

Among celestial Superiors, only Blandine and Beleth normally grant this attunement. Ethereal gods also grant it to their own Dream Soldiers (p. 122). Non-mortals do not need this attunement.

Characters with an Ethereal Connection must still meet all the other criteria for performing a Song.

ATTUNEMENTS

Ethereal spirits can be granted Servitor Attunements by a Word-bound celestial, but it's rare. Beleth is the only Superior known to do so, and she only grants Nightmares attunements to ethereal spirits who have



SOUL LINK

Sometimes ethereal or celestial beings acquire a special kind of Discord; a Symphonic link to a human soul that obligates them to that mortal. Occasionally pagan gods grant such links voluntarily, and it's rumored that advanced sorcerous rituals can force one upon a spirit . . . or even a celestial. For a celestial, a Soul Link is an Ethereal Discord, but for the human, it's an advantage, costing 3 points per level. (For ethereals, it may be an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on the circumstances. It is worth 3 points per level either way.)

The spirit or celestial is linked to the human as per the Djinn resonance (*In Nomine*, p. 142), with exactly the same benefits and restrictions, but the attunement is *permanent* until the Discord is removed. The human will always recognize the being that is Soul Linked to him, and may ask for a favor if they meet. The other being must roll vs. Will minus the level of the Soul Link, or feel compelled to fulfill the request as if it were a Geas. These "boons" don't disappear like a Geas when they're fulfilled, though – the human can ask for another the next time they meet! (The human cannot demand further boons while his "patron" is still working on the last one . . . though he can *ask*.)

Once per day, the human can *voluntarily* give Essence to his patron (even if they are on separate planes), up to an amount equal to the level of the Link. He may do this even if he is not Symphonically aware (in which case he'll automatically give all the Essence he has or the maximum allowed, whichever is less). The patron *cannot* send Essence to the human through a Soul Link.

SKILLS

Ethereals can learn any skill (see p. 11), but some skills work *differently* in the Marches.

AREA KNOWLEDGE (THE MARCHES)

Navigating the Marches is always an adventure, since location and distance are relative and mutable. Any attempt to map even a small section of the Marches would be obsolete by the next night. An Area Knowledge of the Marches gives a general familiarity with the most important Domains, where they are most *likely* to be found relative to one another, and what signs indicate their proximity. See p. 90 for more on ethereal navigation.

More specific Area Knowledges on the ethereal plane (such as Beleth's Marches, the Vale, Olympus, etc.) apply only within those Domains, but should allow travelers to navigate them with confidence. Usually.

Ofanim can use their resonance to increase this roll, as usual. However, not all Domains are "established locations that exist in the public consciousness" (*In Nomine*, p. 97). It would be appropriate for the GM to assign the same penalties to the resonance roll as those given to the navigation roll itself – especially if the Ofanite is not a Servitor of Dreams and/or has little experience in the Marches.

DREAMING (PRECISION/WILL -3)

This is the skill of manipulating the imagery of dreams – in mortals, this is lucid dreaming, which allows a dreamer to manipulate his own dreamscape. Lucid dreamers may shape their own dreamworlds with Will effect similar to the Ethereal Song of Dreams – this is possible *only* in the human's *own* dreamscape. Finally, a successful Dreaming roll at -2 (totaling -5, by default) allows dreamers to “collapse” their dreamscapes about themselves like a deep-sea diver's suit, and wander the Marches, traveling between Blandine and Beleth's sides of the Vale, or even into the Far Marches.

For non-mortals, including undead who somehow wind up in the Marches, this skill is also known as Dream-Shaping. It allows the user to attempt to manipulate the local environment, be it dreamscape, Marches, or an ethereal Domain.

A Dreaming roll can be substituted for a Will roll to fall asleep or wake up. It does *not* allow entry into another person's dreamscape, nor does it permit undead to form a dreamscape. A Dreaming roll can also alter one's own ethereal self-image. (See *Dream-Shaping*, p. 93, for guidelines on personal Dream-Shaping.) See p. 91 for more on lucid dreamers and Dream-Shaping.

*We are not always what we seem,
and hardly ever what we dream.*

– Peter S. Beagle,
The Last Unicorn

KNOWLEDGES

Ethereals gain a Knowledge skill, based on their Image (see p. 125), of how to be that Image. See p. 128, *Image Fulfillment Bonuses*.

LANGUAGES

There is no common ethereal language; spirits either learn one from their strands (see p. 23), or are granted one by virtue of their creation within a dream. An ethereal may have one free Language/3, and spend points to learn others normally. Most ethereals will learn a “trading language,” which tends to parallel human trading languages or human populations. Chinese is, therefore, a

OPTIONAL FREE SKILLS

If the Game Master feels that ethereal spirits should be more competent in the realm of their creation, he may rule that they receive certain benefits, much as humans may be given free skills in the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, p. 24. Suggested free skills for ethereals would include:

- ✧ Area Knowledge/1 (home Domain or local area of the Marches)
- ✧ Dreaming/1
- ✧ Language/1 (Chinese, French, English, Helltongue, or the dominant language of the Domain they live in; this is in addition to their free Language/3)
- ✧ Song of Draining (Celestial/1); see p. 66 for the variants
- ✧ Survival/1 (The Marches)

good choice, as French was historically. Since the Purity Crusade, the choice of “Helltongue” – the language of demons – has also become a relatively common second language for ethereals. There *are* many Domains which permit automatic translations (p. 106), though!

MOVE SILENTLY

This skill allows one to do the same thing in the Marches that it does elsewhere; avoid being noticed (*In Nomine*, p. 76). However, when attempting to Move Silently in the Marches, add your skill to Precision instead of Agility.

SURVIVAL (THE MARCHES)

While physical needs are at most illusory in the Marches, the ethereal plane has unique hazards that can threaten the life and sanity of those who wander ignorantly about, especially in the Far Marches. Area Knowledge (see above) is helpful in getting where one wants to go, but Survival skill in the Marches will help one avoid hazards along the way. A successful roll should allow one to avoid ethereal predators and environmental hazards (which can take *any* form imaginable) for a number of hours equal to the check digit. A failed roll means the traveler has no idea what dangers he might be stumbling into; the consequences are up to the GM, and could range from becoming trapped in a god's Domain to running into one of the Tsayadim. Angels of Dreams and demons of Nightmares get a +4 bonus to this skill when in their Superior's Domain or the Vale, as do ethereal spirits in their native Domains.

TRACKING

It's possible to track someone on the ethereal plane, but the rules of local Domains may make it difficult or nigh-impossible . . . or frighteningly easy. The trail one leaves in the Marches will always vanish within a night; trackers must make a Tracking roll with a check digit not less than the number of hours it's been since their quarry passed that way to detect traces of their passing. In particularly chaotic Domains, the time period may be reduced to minutes or *seconds*. On the other hand, a Domain of Endless Winter might force one to leave obvious footprints in the snow, clearly visible to anyone who follows for the rest of the night, unless a blizzard appears to sweep them away. If the prey has Survival (Marches), then in addition to beating the time, the tracker must win a Contest, as described in *In Nomine* (p. 78).

SONGS

All ethereals are Symphonically aware, and are capable of performing Songs in all three realms. (Like other characters, however, they cannot perform Songs in a realm in which they have no Forces.) They prefer Ethereal Songs; if a spirit knows multiple versions of a Song, its skill will usually be highest with the Ethereal version. A few Songs are known *only* by ethereals, and some others are particularly favored by them.

Learning Songs can be difficult for ethereals, since they generally don't have a Superior who will teach them. While they can discover Songs within their strands (see p. 24), not all of the ones they *want* are available. Thus, Songs are a common currency in the Marches, and a Song not commonly known is a very valuable commodity. When ethereals bargain with celestials, Songs are what they will frequently ask for. (Detailed rules for Song-learning are found in the *Liber Cantorum*. For simplicity, assume that with a teacher – who must perform the Song once a week for the student – it will take about 12 weeks for the Song to be taught. This will bestow the Song at level 1; the student should pay the character point then.)

Older spirits, especially the gods, may know some of the “secret” Songs that celestials try to keep from one another . . . or even possess secret Songs that are unknown in the celestial realms! (They will also be wise enough not to boast about their secrets.) Acquiring such a Song should be an adventure.

And then there are the more common ethereal-specific Songs.

DRAINING

The Songs of Draining are described in the *Liber Cantorum* (pp. 32-33). There are two variants of the Celestial version, however, which are commonly known on the ethereal plane and used by many predatory spirits. Note that each variation must be learned separately, as described in the *Liber Cantorum* (p. 24). Unless stated otherwise, if one of an ethereal spirit's listed Songs is the Celestial Song of Draining, it will be the *Dream-Draining* variant described below.

Dream-Draining

This Song allows the performer to turn a single dreamscape into an Essence trap. Anyone who spends Essence within that dreamscape (including the performer!) must make a Will roll, or else the Essence will be transferred to the performer instead! (If the performer was trying to spend Essence, his action is simply aborted.) The Song will last for a number of hours equal to the check digit plus any Essence spent, or until the dreamscape fades, whichever comes first. The performer cannot hold more Essence than normal; excess is lost. (Spirits can transfer Essence to their Essence cache, of course – see p. 17. Making transfers to one's cache is *not* considered “spending Essence.”) All Essence drained, whether or not it goes to the performer, creates a disturbance in the Symphony. The performer must actually be within the dreamscape also in order to gain the Essence – otherwise, drained Essence just bleeds off into the Symphony.

Draining Touch

The touch variant allows the performer to drain Essence from anyone he touches for the duration of the Song (check digit hours plus any Essence spent). Victims must spend Essence *while the performer is touching them*, and get a Will roll to negate the drain, as described above. The performer himself will have to make a Will roll every time *he* wants to spend Essence, or the Song will create a loop that negates the expenditure.

Essence Requirement: 2.

Disturbance: the check digit plus the performer's total Forces.

EXCHANGE

Only the Ethereal Song of Exchange has been witnessed, though there have been dark rumors of a Celestial version as well. Only ethereal spirits can perform the Ethereal version, and the Host ruthlessly hunts

down any spirit known to possess it (even Blandine supports the effort to eradicate this Song). All those who know it have supposedly been eliminated several times since the Purification Crusade, but it keeps popping up again . . .

Ethereal – The only known version of the Song of Exchange allows an ethereal being to fully manifest on the corporeal plane without the need for a Tether, or spending Essence on a vessel. It does this by taking over an existing corporeal form – namely, an unsuspecting human or animal! (Celestial vessels, or those of other ethereals, cannot be taken over in this manner.) The ethereal *cannot* choose whom (or even what) it will possess. The Symphony conducts the exchange “randomly,” putting the ethereal in the body of a living being whose Forces are equal to the amount of Essence spent on the Song. The amount of Essence spent (and thus the Forces of the host) may not exceed the spirit’s total Forces.

While inhabiting a mortal in this manner, the ethereal is treated as having a vessel at a level equal to the mortal’s Forces. The victim takes the performer’s place in the Marches. The Song lasts for check digit days, but the spirit can prolong it automatically for another 1-6 days by spending the same amount in Essence again. There is no limit to how long the Song can be maintained, as long as the performer can continue spending Essence. If the spirit’s host body is killed, the spirit suffers Trauma (p. 18). The hapless original owner, however, will become a dream-shade (p. 122), wandering the Marches until he finally ascends to his last reward.

It is said that there are poor exchanged souls still wandering the Far Marches. Some were mistakenly slain as ethereals during the Purification Crusade. No one knows how the Symphony “chooses” who will be exchanged with the ethereal spirit; this is completely up to the GM. Since this aspect of the Song is therefore a plot device, the victim does not get a resistance roll.

Essence requirement: 1.

Degree of Disturbance: the performer’s total Forces.

SPIRIT SPEECH

Ethereal spirits and their servants often communicate through the Songs of Spirit Speech. Only humans and ethereals may use them; celestials cannot learn or be affected by them. Most humans who know these Songs are agents or worshipers of pagan spirits; some are sorcerers.

All of these Songs require that the performer have met his target at least once, though he need not reveal his own identity when he sends a message. He must visualize the soul to whom he wishes to speak, and then perform the Song. The target may be anywhere in the corporeal or ethereal realms, except when noted otherwise.

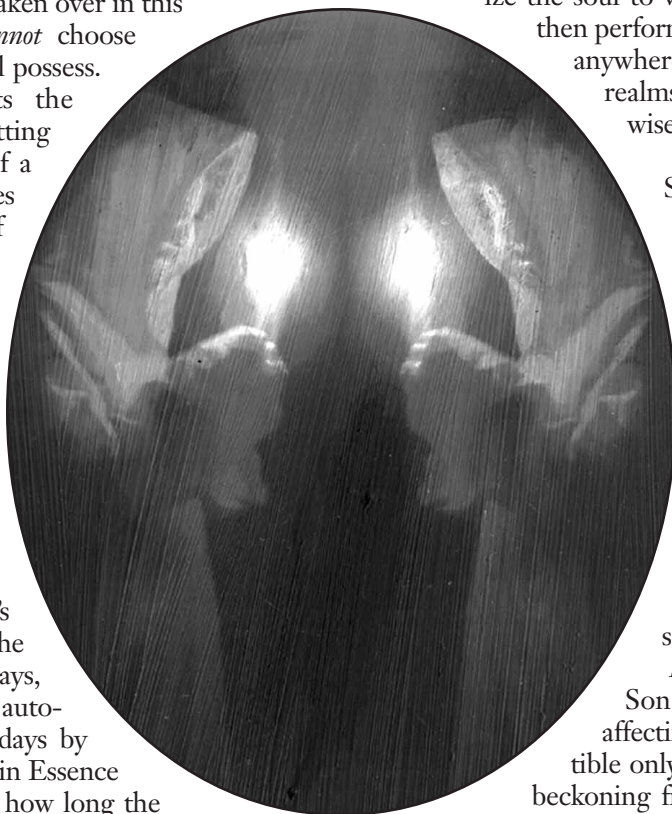
Corporeal – The Corporeal Song of Spirit Speech only works on targets in the corporeal realm. It will send a verbal message – in the performer’s voice, audible to anyone within hearing range of the target – no longer than a number of words equal to the Essence spent \times the performer’s Corporeal Forces. If the target is sleeping, he must make a Perception roll to awaken instantly and hear the message.

Ethereal – This version of the Song creates a minor illusion, affecting only one sense and perceptible only by the target. For example, a beckoning figure could be seen, text on a page could be altered to read differently, or a soft voice could be heard. The effect lasts for a number of minutes equal to the performer’s Ethereal Forces.

Celestial – The performer will manifest briefly in front of his target, for a number of rounds equal to the performer’s Celestial Forces. He will not be seen by anyone else. If an ethereal spirit uses this Song to manifest on Earth, it may materialize there if it has an available vessel, ending the Song’s effects. This Song may be maintained indefinitely by spending additional Essence; the target may contribute some or all of the Essence if he wishes.

Essence Requirement: 1.

Degree of Disturbance: none when used wholly within the ethereal realm; the check digit when either the performer or the target is in the corporeal realm.



OPTIONAL VESSEL RULES

Since ethereals can store Essence to make a vessel, unlike celestials outside of Limbo, it is more in keeping with their themes that they pay Essence, not character points, to own vessels. However, figuring the vessel's Essence costs can be tedious and complex. The GM may decide to charge character points for starting vessels, as with celestials – but assume that once a vessel is bought, the spirit may create an exact duplicate of that vessel whenever it has the Essence to do so!

VESSELS

"I could swear I saw it."

"Who?"

"The thing from my dreams."

"What did you do?"

"I looked away. It is not safe to see such things awake."

Ethereals have a special means of creating vessels for themselves out of Essence, using their Essence cache (p. 17). The Essence cost of a vessel is based on its size (see below) and vessel level. Like celestials, an ethereal vessel is rated from level 1 to 6 (and the Body hits of an ethereal vessel are figured the same way). As with celestial vessels, an ethereal vessel will duplicate the natural abilities of whatever creature the vessel is patterned after; a bird vessel can fly, a fish vessel can breathe water, a wolf vessel will have a nasty bite and excellent sense of smell, etc. Like celestial vessels, ethereal vessels are unaging, and need no food, water, or sleep.

Note that only spirits with an Artifice affinity (p. 53) can have inanimate object vessels.

The cost of a vessel is $15 \text{ Essence} \times \text{the vessel's size} \times \text{the vessel level}$.

Example: A rat (1-Force) Vessel/1 would cost $15 \times 1 \times 1 = 15 \text{ Essence}$.

Example 2: A human (5-Force) Vessel/3 would cost $15 \times 5 \times 3 = 225 \text{ Essence}$.

Example 3: An elephant (6-Force) Vessel/6 would cost $15 \times 6 \times 6 = 540 \text{ Essence}$.

Vessel Size

An ethereal's corporeal form is limited by the power of the spirit. Celestials can inhabit any vessels they're given, regardless of size, but an ethereal spirit can only animate so much corporeal matter. Ethereal vessels are rated by

their "size," which is the minimum number of Forces required to occupy them. The size of *most* vessels is equal to the number of Forces possessed by a normal corporeal being of that type. E.g., an adult human vessel has a size of 5, and cannot be used by an ethereal spirit with less than 5 Forces. If a spirit should lose a Force, it will be unable to manifest in any vessels requiring more Forces than its new total.

Physical size does not always directly correlate to Forces in *In Nomine*, however. A large animal won't necessarily have more Forces than a human. But because vessel size is a function of both complexity of form and physical mass, large vessels require more Forces to animate.

Some typical vessels are given below:

1 Force (15 Essence per level): Tiny things, from tarantulas up to rats, mice, or small birds. Can also be small, portable objects like cups, knives, or jewelry.

2 Forces (30 Essence per level): Small creatures; a cat, a small dog, or a raven. Objects that can be carried in one hand: a large book, a briefcase, a sword, or something of equivalent size.

3 Forces (45 Essence per level): Medium-sized creatures, such as an ordinary dog, wolf, or coyote, or an eagle. "Manikins" – small humanoid creatures, up to 3 feet tall – fall into this category. So does a very small child. Small pieces of furniture like chairs or TV sets are also possible.

4 Forces (60 Essence per level): Large creatures, such as a *big* dog, a deer, or a kangaroo, as well as a large child or very small adult human. Objects too large to carry easily, such as tables, couches, or a suit of armor, can also be vessels.

5 Forces (75 Essence per level): Human-sized up to about horse-sized. Includes normal-sized people, adult bears, lions and other big cats, dolphins, horses, cows, etc. Objects too large to lift, such as a motorcycle, a heavy bookcase, or a vending machine.

6 Forces (90 Essence per level): Really big creatures, such as elephants, small whales, and monstrous forms like 9-foot tall ogres or wyverns. Also *large* inanimate objects, like a car or a tool shed.

Really Big Vessels: It takes a lot of Forces to animate a blue whale or a dinosaur. If an ethereal really wants to manifest on Earth in the form of a 50-foot long dragon, and the GM wants to allow it, just charge as many additional Forces as seems appropriate. (Remember that even a Godzilla-sized vessel – which should only be allowed in seriously over-the-top campaigns – won't have any more Strength or Body hits than the ethereal's Corporeal Forces provide.) And keep in mind that ethereals don't *want* to attract attention, so gigantic and/or unearthly vessels are expensive investments that will probably just get them killed.



Charisma and Other Vessel Features

Ethereal vessels can have Charisma, or Limited Charisma (such as Sex Appeal), up to a total of +3. Each point of Charisma increases the vessel cost by 15 Essence per vessel level (so Charisma +3 on a level 6 vessel would cost an additional 270 Essence!). Each point of limited Charisma/Sex Appeal costs 10 Essence per vessel level. Each point of negative Charisma is treated like 1 level of Vessel Discord (see below).

If the GM wishes to permit unusual vessels, with tough skin, night vision, or other special abilities, see the *Game Master's Guide*, p. 19. Each point of Vessel Features costs 15 Essence per vessel level.

Vessel Discord

In order to create a vessel more cheaply, ethereals may accept Vessel Discord. Unlike normal Discord (p. 13),

Vessel Discord is attached to a specific vessel; the spirit only suffers from that Discord while manifesting in that vessel. Vessel Discord does *not* give the spirit any character points, but it reduces the Essence cost to create the vessel by $3 \text{ Essence} \times \text{the vessel level} \times \text{the level of Discord}$. Celestial Discord reduces the vessel cost by $5 \text{ Essence} \times \text{the vessel level} \times \text{the level of Discord}$. No amount of Discord can reduce the cost of a vessel below 1 Essence.

Example: An ethereal spirit creates a level 4 human vessel, which would normally cost 300 Essence. However, this human vessel is grossly fat (Obese/4), reducing the cost by $3 \times 4 \times 4 = 48$ Essence, for a net cost of 252 Essence.

Example 2: A level 1 snake vessel (2 Forces) costs 30 Essence. With the Celestial Discord Murderous/6, the cost is $30 - (5 \times 1 \times 6) = 0$ (raised to the minimum of 1).

Multiple Vessels

Ethereals may have multiple vessels, but the total *base* Essence cost of all their vessels (*before* factoring reductions from Vessel Discord) may not exceed the size of their Essence cache (p. 17). They may switch between vessels as celestials do (*In Nomine*, p. 49), by spending 1 Essence.

Vessels from Other Sources

A celestial Superior can give a vessel to an ethereal. They rarely do, of course. Some of the ethereal gods can also make vessels and give them to other ethereals. The advantage of getting a vessel from a Superior is that it doesn't count against the ethereal's limit on multiple vessels (above), and a celestially-created vessel has no "size"; i.e., an Archangel or Demon Prince could theoretically give a 1-Force ethereal a human vessel.

STARTING VESSELS

Ethereals don't pay character points for vessels, so an ethereal PC may want to start play with vessel(s) as powerful as its Essence cache will allow. The GM may allow this, if the ethereal has been around long enough that it could reasonably have saved up that much. (A very recent spirit is unlikely to have accumulated 600 Essence!) Ethereal characters will find it easier and cheaper to have powerful, multiple vessels than celestials; considering that physical death has a more dire effect on ethereals (p. 18), this is a fair tradeoff.



ETHEREAL BEINGS



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ETHEREAL BEINGS



BIRTH

I am a killer. I am a wolf whose mouth drips with blood. I am as large as a tiger. Guns do not hurt me. Knives do not hurt me. I am hungry. Always. I have chased down another man. He is hamstrung. He is sprawled on the ground. He pleads for mercy. In the background, I can see them – my keepers. The six-eyed black serpent. The green lady. They drive me across the Marches, from dream to dream, and watch as I hunt and kill.

I do not understand the man's words. I do not understand what "mercy" means. The concept is null; it cannot exist inside my mind. Perhaps it is a sign of hunger: I am sorry for the man, who will not eat today.

"Please," he whimpers. "No."

I recognize that last word. It is a word my keepers have used. When they use it, they also bring me pain. Yet the man does not bring me pain. I begin to chew on his leg as I think. Is he trying to discourage me from the hunt? Is there some circumstance of which I am not aware?

I raise my head for a moment and look around. There could be danger. I have a small understanding of danger. It is best avoided. But no. That is not his intent.

I look at him again. There is a strange look in his eyes. My eyes have never looked like that. "No," he says, again.

Suddenly I understand. It is impossible, but I understand. He is asking me not to eat him.

*It is a possible thing that I will **not** eat him.*

I have a choice. I can kill or not kill. This knowledge is blinding: the greatest and deepest revelation I have ever known.

*I am grateful to the man. I will **not** kill him. I turn to leave the dream. My keepers are saying something. They are angry. I will hurry, leaving. They have a look in their eyes. My eyes have looked like that.*

They are going to begin a hunt.

Anything that can be imagined (and some things that can't) can come to life in the Marches. "Ethereal spirit" encompasses everything from singing beer bottles that will vanish when the dreamer awakens to the mighty pagan gods of old. They have in common only that they are of the same substance. A lowly figment (p. 74) is like unto a god in the same way that a reliever is like unto an Archangel.

ETHEREALS, CELESTIALS, AND HUMANS

A frequent topic of debate in the Marches is whether angels and demons are just a kind of ethereal (as many spirits claim) or not (as celestials categorically state). Celestials typically claim the differences between them prove that they are different from "soulless images given form by dreams," while those ethereals who care will reply that celestials are merely partaking of a vastly powerful element, the Almighty-strand. Right or wrong, the differences do exist. (Though there are *always* rumors of a spirit who went to Heaven/got a Word/became a Malakite. Rumors are like that.)

✠ Ethereals cannot enter the celestial realm, either by nature or by God's power over "the celestial Domain." Even in one of the three ethereal-to-celestial Tethers (pp. 101-102), they merely continue to climb the ethereal portion of it, forever. (The Celestial Song of Projection does work on them.)

✠ Yves pronounced, long before the Fall, that ethereals *cannot* be given Words. Whether or not Lucifer has attempted it is unknown, but in light of his rebellion against God, the lack of an ethereal Prince is suggestive.

✠ Ethereals, while able to Dream-Shape their outward appearances, cannot become either celestials or humans. Neither can humans become ethereals. However, it has been known for a powerful being to strip away the Ethereal Forces of a human and bind them into a small spirit, producing an ethereal being with fragmentary memories of "being" a human. (Heracles is one of the most famous ethereals who is rumored to have been so "born" of a mortal dream-shade.) Likewise, the Forces of a spirit can be stripped and bound into a small celestial – usually a demonling – with similar effects.

✠ Only ethereal spirits have been able to use Dreaming skill to form a micro-Domain (p. 105). Still, mortal sorcerers frequently pursue rituals which allegedly will duplicate the ability, usually in search of an "afterlife retirement resort."

(As always, GMs may choose to make rumors true; a campaign might focus on thwarting – or becoming – an ethereal Prince, Initiating as an angel, or entering the celestial realm by aid of a mystic relic in the Farthest Marches. That Which Breaks The Rules is often possessed of exactly the mythic feel which the Marches favor. And even if the quest is futile, the questing is enough for many spirits.)

Ethereals are more mutable than corporeals or celestials. They are formed from Earthly Essence, and reflect Earthly dreams. Often their nature is imposed upon them, and sometimes it can be forcibly changed. And just as an infernal spirit can someday become a Demon Prince, so can a puny dream fragment someday become a god.

Ethereal spirits can be categorized by their natures and origins, but no classification is definitive or completely accurate. Spirits can assume any guise they like; there's no way to be sure whether the Santa Claus you encounter in the Marches is just a fragment recently escaped from a child's dreamscape, a full-fledged spirit subsisting on the belief of children worldwide (one of many such "Santas"), a pagan god attempting to

subsume the image of St. Nick into his own Image (see p. 125), or even an elemental temporarily adopting the guise of Santa for its own purposes.

All of the following spirit types are created using the same rules (p. 12 for an overview). They are not “character classes,” but descriptive categories. An elemental can also be a figment; a pagan god might be a primal spirit or a dream spirit, both or neither. These categories are neither exclusive nor all-inclusive. You do not have to choose one for your character; use them to give you an idea of where to start, but they are not how the character *must* be defined.

ELEMENTALS

“Elementals” are ethereal spirits defined primarily by their elements (p. 22). Most of the older ethereals are elementals; the oldest elementals predate humanity. Elementals may be born in a mortal’s dream, but they are more likely to materialize spontaneously out of the environment of the Marches. Some say that the first elementals were born as the Earth cooled and began to dream of solid rock and liquid water, and later of storms, mountains, and life.

The term “elemental” should not be confused with the classical elements (see p. 25); while ethereal spirits of Earth, Fire, Wind, and Water (and Sea, Mountain, Storm, and other natural elements) are often elementals, so are ethereals made of more contemporary and humanocentric strands, such as spirits of Lust, Mothers, Automobiles, and Philosophy. The defining feature of an elemental is that it strongly embodies only one or two strands, and typically embodies them in a simplistic manner. Elementals tend to have very thin, if not transparent, masks (p. 126); they define themselves *by* their strand(s), and not by some external sense of purpose or an Image fashioned for them in mortal dreams. Sometimes they assume unlikely guises; a Fire elemental might manifest in human form and behave like a scholar, and an elemental whose primary strands are Battle and Rivers might assume the Image of a tree or spider. This is most common when an elemental is *trying* to change its Image or expand its affinities (see p. 129). However, elementals prefer more intuitive forms, that resemble their stereotypes. A fire elemental usually manifests as a creature of living flame. If it does take human form, it will have glowing eyes, a fiery temper, and a propensity for combustion. An elemental of Battle and Rivers might appear as a warrior (usually standing on a riverbank), or in watery form, raging like a flood. It’s usually easy to guess an elemental’s strands, unless it’s making an effort to obscure them. Primal spirits (p. 73) are frequently elementals.

CREATING AN ELEMENTAL

The most important feature of an elemental is the composition of its being, so creation should start with choosing a strand (p. 22). Most elementals have only one or two primary strands; those with two strands have strongly complementary ones. (“Fire” and “Hailstorms” are unlikely to be combined in an elemental.)

After choosing the character’s elements, design the spirit using the rules outlined on p. 12. For a typical elemental, choose a straightforward Image (“Fire Spirit” is a perfectly fine Image) and the most obvious affinities. Even atypical elementals rarely vary too much from their archetype. Elementals come in all sizes, from the puny 1-Force spirits that swarm across most Domains to powerful, ancient spirits with godlike powers.

SAMPLE ELEMENTAL: McCORMICK THE GUNSLINGER

Spirit of Guns and Duels

Corporeal Forces - 2 Strength 3 Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 4 Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 2 Will 4 Perception 4
Elements: Guns (a subset of Technology, p. 39) and Duels (a subset of Struggle, p. 37)

Affinities: Puissance (Guns) (Strong), Speed (Moderate)
Vessel: Human/6 (male gunfighter – Essence cost: 450)

Skills: Area Knowledge (Marches/1), Fighting/2, Dodge/2, Dreaming/2, Ranged Weapon (Pistol/6, Rifle/2), Riding/2, Survival (Marches/1)

Artifact: Pistol talisman – Ranged Weapon/3 (Pistol)

Dread: Losing a Duel/3 (This is a moderate Dread, worth 2 points per level.)

Born in the 50s, McCormick is a cowboy gunslinger. He prefers to appear in dusty Western dreamscapes riding a horse, with a hat pulled down to shade his eyes. He follows (inconsistently) a “cowboy’s code of honor;” he’s polite to ladies and won’t attack defenseless people, but he lives for gunfighting and is equally happy playing the good guy or the bad guy in a dream. He will attempt to manipulate any dream to bring about a duel, usually against the dreamer. Clever dreamers can avoid going up against McCormick directly by introducing new entities for the spirit to confront; McCormick will willingly play the role of the heroic defender, as long as he gets to gun someone down. The other option is to simply refuse to fight the gunslinger, as he won’t shoot an unarmed person. But without other targets, the spirit will go to great lengths to

goad and/or frighten a dreamer into taking him on – he'll even conjure a gun into his "opponent's" hand.

McCormick always wins his duels in the Marches, but this no longer satisfies him. Since he must (according to his own self-image) be the "fastest gun in the West," he believes that he can only truly claim this title if he proves himself in the corporeal realm as well. He's not so overconfident that he wants to have a posse of angels hunting him, so he'll carefully plan any Earthly duels, trying to arrange one-on-one gunfights in remote areas, where the disturbance he makes shooting his opponent is unlikely to be heard.

(McCormick is a balanced 7-Force ethereal who has initiated; he's a bit one-dimensional for a player character, but as an NPC he'd make a formidable opponent or sidekick.)

PRIMAL SPIRITS

Primal spirits are made up of a single element; they have one strand, and one strand only. This allows them to have primal affinities (p. 50). Most primal spirits are elementals (above), manifesting their single element in the most straightforward manner possible. However, some take on more complex Images.

CREATING A PRIMAL SPIRIT

Creating a primal spirit is much like creating an elemental (p. 72); but simpler. Choose one element and one affinity, and emphasize it. With few exceptions, the spirit will be designed around its primal affinity (assuming it's powerful enough to have one). Many of the gods started out as primal spirits.

SAMPLE PRIMAL SPIRIT: AUREM

Spirit of Gold

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 3 Agility 1
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 6 Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 2 Will 3 Perception 5

Element: Gold (a subset of Wealth, p. 42)

Affinities: Wealth (Primal), Light (Slight), Greed (Slight)

Vessel: Human/1, Sex Appeal +3 (female – Essence cost: 85)

Skills: Emote/1, Lying/2, Savoir-Faire/2, Seduction/5

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal/3), Draining (Celestial/2), Spirit Speech (Ethereal/1)

Dread: Losing Value/3 (I.e., being found unattractive by someone to whom she is attracted, or being "dumped" by a current paramour . . . which is why she always dumps them first. This is a moderate Dread, worth 2 points per level.)

Gold spirits can manifest in many ways in the Marches; fat, good-natured Oriental men, gruff and belligerent lumps of rock with veins of gold running through them, fast-talking con-men with beaming smiles. Aurem's Image is that of a sultry, beautiful girl with a taste for the finest things in life. Discovering that she could attract more Essence by catering to greed than fear, she began appearing to wealthy men in their dreams, learning what drives those who already have everything to want even more. The luxury and hedonism of their dreamscapes appealed to her, giving her a desire to experience corporeal pleasures in the flesh. Finally, she mustered the courage to create a vessel modeled after the most beautiful women in her subjects' dreams. Now she is often found on the arm of a business tycoon, aristocrat, or high-stakes gambler, living the good life and showering her mortal paramour with good fortune when it pleases her. But Aurem is a fickle spirit, and cannot be permanently satisfied by her wealthy lovers, any more than they can be satisfied with the wealth they have or the riches she bestows upon them. Inevitably, she grows bored, and seeks someone handsomer, more exciting, and most importantly, richer.

(Aurem is a balanced, 6-Force ethereal who has not yet initiated (see p. 46); that she has a Dread suggests she may have tried, but failed to completely "find herself." In any sort of Symphonic confrontation she'd be out of her league, but she is well-positioned for moving in high circles in mortal society.)

SAMPLE PRIMAL SPIRIT: THE FINAL EXAM

Fear Spirit

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 2 Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 6 Precision 2
Celestial Forces - 2 Will 5 Perception 3

Element: Fear

Affinities: Fear (Moderate)

Skills: Knowledge (History/1, Math/1)

Songs: Charm (Ethereal/4), Draining (Celestial/4), Dreaming (Ethereal/3), Entropy (Ethereal/2)

Remember that dream where you forgot to attend a class all semester, and then suddenly had to pass the final exam to graduate? It's been going around – someone dreamed it vividly enough to bring it to life.

GOD-CREATION MADE SIMPLE

What makes a dreamed figment survive past the dream that created it, and what makes a figment become self aware (see below) is ineffable. A lucid dreamer *could* create figments and attempt to eject them from his dreamscape all night. While the laws of probability suggest this would eventually work, only the GM decides if any of them will persist, or if the dreamer is courting an Intervention with all those Dreaming rolls. (Even the Song of Life (*Liber Canticorum*, p. 91) requires luck, or a lot of Essence, for the created spirit to last more than a few days.)

Should a figment actually persist, there's no guarantee that it will become sapient, and even less that it'll be *friendly* to its creator. With self-will comes the ability for choice, and a spirit might not like its original Image! Nevertheless, some lesser gods of tribal societies claim that they were born of an ambitious shaman's need for a god to serve; such loyalty to a people would only persist among spirits who incorporate Society (Tribe) strands, who are unlikely to tolerate too much selfish ambition in their chosen servants . . . Creating gods is a risky business.

The Final Exam is a primal spirit of Fear (though it prefers to call itself an "Anxiety Spirit"). It's not yet strong enough to have a primal affinity, but after terrorizing a few more campuses (and perhaps after being initiated, p. 46), it will. Its method is very simple: it generates nightmares in which it forces a hapless dreamer to take an exam he hasn't prepared for. It does its best to cause enough anxiety that the dreamer will spend all his Essence trying to pass. If he does pass, the Final Exam will suffer from its own fear (p. 48), but it often attacks students who defeat it with the Song of Entropy, in revenge.

Dreamers trying to pass the spirit's exam must beat it in a Contest of Knowledge skills. Of course it's not a fair contest; the spirit can use its Fear affinity and Songs to stack the deck.

(The Final Exam is dangerous in its own way, and would make a good threat for Dream Soldiers or sorcerers. It could also plague a student whom an angel is watching over . . .)

DREAM SPIRITS

Dream spirits (sometimes called, derogatorily, "dream fragments") are born in a dream; their Image is that given to them by a mortal dreamer. Most dream spirits are quite weak (and short-lived), but a few endure by gathering Essence from other dreamers who feed their Image (see p. 16), and some have become powerful in their own right.

FIGMENTS

Whenever someone dreams, he animates his dreamscape with numerous images, from the straightforward to the ridiculous to the incomprehensible. These images are given temporary ethereal "life," but they are completely non-sentient, non-sapient beings who exist only to perform the role assigned to them by the dreamer's subconscious. From talking appliances to people the dreamer knows in the waking world to erotic Oedipal images to colorless green dreams that sleep furiously, and whatever metaphors they embody, these *figments* are in fact a kind of dream spirit. Almost always, a figment is made up of but a single Ethereal Force, and they *never* have any Celestial Forces (if such a spirit does gain a Celestial Force, it ceases to be a figment, and becomes a true ethereal; see below). Figments can behave quite intelligently – even more intelligently than the dreamer. They are Symphonically aware (albeit unlikely to perceive much with a 0 Perception), but they cannot voluntarily transfer Essence to others. They could theoretically acquire affinities and Songs. But they have no self-awareness, and will vanish when the dreamscape does.

Usually.

Every once in a while, when a dreamer has an extremely vivid dream (particularly when he blows all his Essence), one of the figments from his dream will detach itself from the dreamscape and remain in the Marches after the dreamer awakens. These figments wander about doing whatever fits their Image, often stepping into other dreamscapes, oblivious to their origins. Most of the time, they are quickly devoured by other ethereals, since a spirit with no Celestial Forces is safe and easy prey (see *Dream-Eating*, p. 17). Occasionally, a lucky figment will actually grow in power and accumulate more Forces – making it that much better a meal when it's finally caught. And *very* occasionally, a figment will survive long enough to gain a Celestial Force. This makes it a true, self-aware ethereal spirit. While it still might be eaten, even 1 Celestial Force makes a spirit capable of fighting back . . . and since ethereals are highly averse to losing Forces, many predators will avoid even a puny spirit, in favor of much safer figments.

Figments usually fall into one of the following categories:

Background Animations

Animated fragments appear in the background of a dream, rarely noticed. They may be random passersby on a city street, or a band of penguins playing jazz, or trees

growing from the sky and throwing baseballs at the dreamer. They do the same thing over and over again, and if they escape their original dreamscape, they just continue doing the same thing until they're noticed and/or somehow expand to take on a greater role. Background animations, almost without exception, are 1 Ethereal Force figments.

Foreground Figments

These figments usually have a bit more personality, as they interact directly with the dreamer – the pretty girl who flirts with you, the tiger who chases you, the smoking alarm clock that jumps on your stomach to wake you up, or the giant butterfly that quotes Ayn Rand and symbolizes your repressed childhood. A background animation (above) can be compared to a fairly simple computer program, running in an endless loop. A foreground figment has a more sophisticated “algorithm,” and might even pass as an autonomous entity – briefly. Most are only 1 Ethereal Force, but a rare one might manifest with a second Force (either Corporeal or Ethereal).

Central Characters

A figment that is the focus of a dream, and thus takes on a major role, is the most likely sort to break free (and eventually, become an autonomous being). The vast majority are still 1-Force spirits, but some might start out with as many as 3 Forces (but still no Celestial Forces). They may be family members or other important figures in the dreamer's life, or the man-eating car that stalks and terrorizes him all night. These figments are comparable to an artificial intelligence routine; still not truly free willed, but smart enough to fake it.

AUTONOMOUS DREAM SPIRITS

Once a figment gains a Celestial Force, it becomes an independent, self-aware being. It may not immediately realize that its nature has changed; most dream spirits continue acting out the roles given to them in their “birth-dream” for a long time. (And most new dream spirits aren't that smart to begin with.) But any entity who acquires a Celestial Force has the ability to act independently, even to violate its nature and pursue different agendas. The most

willful, intelligent, and lucky of escaped figments become autonomous spirits.

A former figment can be absolutely anything that can appear in a dreamscape. The more “rational” the spirit, the greater the likelihood that it will be able to interact meaningfully with other spirits, and increase its own power. Talking bears who play racquetball, singing furniture, and animated cigarette packs are all pretty normal by ethereal standards. But psychopathic inverted kidneys, invisible Mysterians who can only communicate in colors, and black holes who sing the blues probably won't survive long unless they find a very unusual Domain where they can fit in.

Each of these spirits is unique. Another dreamer might dream something like them, which is why there's more than one racquetball-playing bear or talking cigarette pack in the Marches. However, if an autonomous spirit is destroyed, it's gone. If a new one appears, it's a coincidental similarity from another dream.

GESTALT DREAM SPIRITS

Autonomous dream spirits are born in the mind of a single dreamer. Gestalt dream spirits are born in the strange synergy between an escaped figment and the ambient belief (p. 15) of many dreamers. Dream images that are very common might pop up every night as figments in thousands of dreamscapes; there are probably millions of Queen Elizabeth figments for every one that escapes into the Marches to become a true Queen Elizabeth spirit.

Because gestalt spirits can benefit from ambient belief, they tend to be stronger and more likely to survive than autonomous spirits. However, they're in vicious

GENII LOCORUM

A *genius loci* is a type of gestalt spirit, born of the love or ideal of a place. Most of them have a strand of City in them, or Nations, and they are created with a mask that ties them to their place and makes them want to protect it. Some assume an Image of a dead hero and walk the streets, while others take on a composite appearance. The *genius loci* known as Uncle Sam is one of the most powerful of these spirits, and Britannia, though less open about it, has shown similar potency. Smaller *genii locorum* may be called *lares* and *penates*, spirits of home and fields, and have elements of Home or Family instead.

Genii locorum are almost always hostile or indifferent to celestials, wanting only to protect “their” place and the people who live there. Twisted ones (e.g., a spirit of Fear and Cities) will stifle humans, or use them for sport. More noble ones might accept angelic assistance in removing a demonic threat, but are rarely inclined to offer alliances.

competition with others who have the same Image (unless they form a tribe; see p. 17). Functionally, a gestalt spirit isn't much different from an autonomous spirit. The difference is that when a gestalt spirit is destroyed, a new one will probably replace it, and the replacement sometimes even duplicates the memories and abilities of previous incarnations! This makes it very difficult for celestials and other ethereals to keep track of which "version" of a spirit is being encountered, or how many versions there have been.

CREATING A DREAM SPIRIT

Figments don't make very good player characters, since they are weak, non-sapient, completely lacking in Celestial Forces, and unable to travel to the corporeal plane. However, a dream spirit who started out as a figment can make a fine PC. With dream spirits, Image is the most important attribute, so decide on this first. The elements that draw together to form a dream spirit are more random – it's easiest to choose appropriate affinities and then assign compatible elements accordingly. New dream spirits have rarely learned any Songs. The Songs of Dreams and the Celestial Song of Draining are exceptions, as dream spirits have a knack for acquiring these naturally.

Autonomous dream spirits offer the greatest individuality, since they can be literally *anything*. However, they are the least likely to receive any Essence from ambient belief (p. 15). A gestalt spirit can be fun to play, especially as a satire, since you can pick any figure from popular culture or history. However, such spirits should closely resemble whomever they are imitating, at least initially; the more individuality a gestalt spirit develops, the more its Image diverges from the original, making it less likely to receive Essence from the beliefs of fans, devotees, and devoted enemies.

SAMPLE FIGMENT: MANNY

Escaped Foreground Animation

Corporeal Forces - 0 Strength 0 Agility 0
Ethereal Forces - 1 Intelligence 2 Precision 2
Celestial Forces - 0 Will 0 Perception 0

Element: Animals

Affinities: Hunger (Slight)

Manny is a talking chihuahua, much like the mascot of a popular fast-food chain, seen on TV commercials worldwide. In the dreams of the person who created him, Manny was also a chain-smoking, tequila-guzzling little mongrel with a *filthy* mouth. Besides speaking in a

grossly exaggerated Mexican accent (Manny's Spanish is limited because the *dreamer* didn't speak Spanish), every third word out of the chihuahua's mouth is an obscenity. He's a trivial spirit, but he escaped his original dreamscape, and for the time being he's trotting around the Marches swearing at anyone he meets. He's too weak and too obnoxious to survive long, but he's clever enough to have slipped into several other dreamscapes and offended the dreamers with his vocabulary, while making them wake up with a craving for greasy tacos.

(Manny can be an amusingly annoying encounter in the Marches. He's unlikely to ever become a true dream spirit, but if he does, he could continue to shill for his restaurant, take on additional obnoxious ethnic stereotypes, or develop in a completely unanticipated manner.)

SAMPLE DREAM SPIRIT: MARYGOLD

Autonomous Spirit

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 1 Agility 3
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 4 Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 3 Will 7 Perception 5

Elements: Plants, Moon, Fear

Affinities: Fear (Moderate), Motherhood (Moderate)

Skills: Detect Lies/1, Emote/2

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal/2), Draining (Celestial/2), Dreams (Ethereal/2, Celestial/1), Harmony (Ethereal/3), Healing (Ethereal/1)

Marygold was the result of a single woman eating too much pepperoni pizza late at night, after getting off the phone from another "When am I going to have grandchildren?" speech from her mother. The woman (who had a mild phobia of flowers) dreamed about a giant anthropomorphic sunflower who had come to take her children away because she was a bad mother. As the dreamer kicked and screamed, the sunflower proceeded to open its gaping maw, lined with sharp teeth, and swallow her children whole.

The dreamer woke up shaken and sweating, then chuckled at the absurdity of the dream and blamed it on her mother's nagging. But the sunflower had escaped into the Marches.

Marygold has strong mothering instincts, combined with a predatory disposition that makes her far less pretty than her Image. She invades dreamscapes and generates fears about the dreamer's children. (It's appropriate to assign the dreamer penalties if he actually *has* children, so Marygold targets real parents when possible.) Marygold becomes quite attached to these dream-children, and honestly

believes she is rescuing them from bad parents, even though in many cases, *she* conjures the children and the dangers that threaten them. By human standards, Marygold is quite insane, but she behaves entirely rationally according to her strands.

So far, it hasn't occurred to Marygold to look for children to protect on the corporeal plane, but it won't be long before she does, and then she'll probably create a human female vessel and start "rescuing" children from "bad" parents who don't deserve them.

*(Marygold might easily be mistaken for an innocuous, benevolent dream spirit at first; what could be harmful about a talking flower who loves children? She has **not** been initiated, and is deluded enough to believe that she **is** benevolent. If demons of Nightmares discover her, they just might decide to let her bloom . . .)*

SAMPLE DREAM SPIRIT: SANTA CLAUS

Gestalt Spirit

Corporeal Forces - 2 Strength 5

Agility 3

Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 6

Precision 2

Celestial Forces - 2 Will 4

Perception 4

Elements: Toys (a subset of Wealth, p. 42), Children, Happiness

Affinities: None

Vessels: Human/6, Charisma +1 (jolly old man – Essence cost: 540)

Role: Janitor/2, Status/1 (Marty Lapowski, Polish immigrant)

Skills: Acrobatics/1, Artistry/2 (Toymaking), Climbing/2, Detect Lies/2, Emote/1, Escape/1, Move Silently/2, Survival (Marches/2)

Songs: Dreams (Corporeal/1, Ethereal/2), Form (Ethereal/3), Light (Ethereal/1), Motion (Corporeal/2, Celestial/1)

There are lots of Santas in the Marches. Most of them don't live long. One did, because he realized that his Image made him nothing more than bait on the ethereal plane, and the only way to survive would be to get out of the Marches and become invisible. He came to Earth about 100 years ago, and has lived the quiet life of a poor custodian ever since.

It's not that "Marty" wouldn't *like* to become wealthier and enjoy all the good things that a higher-Status Role can provide. He's just too afraid of attracting notice. He has all the essential elements of a real Santa Claus – the dreams

ETHEREAL TAXONOMY AND INCONSISTENCY

Look at the sample characters in this chapter, and it may occur to you that some of them fit in more than one category. For example, Manny the Chihuahua (p. 76) has only one elemental strand; doesn't that mean that technically he's a primal spirit? Santa Claus (on this page) is described as a gestalt dream spirit, but isn't Santa also a creature of mythology? And since his nature is very much set by his elements (however much this particular Santa may wish otherwise) couldn't he be considered an elemental as well?

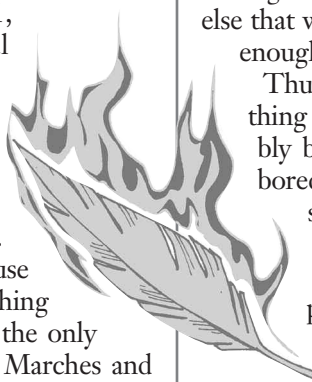
Sure. It's not at all unlikely that an ethereal can fit in several different categories, and many spirits go through different phases during their existence. Manny (if he somehow survives) could "grow up" to become a primal animal spirit, then an icon of modern myth, and even a pagan god of fast-food consumer culture . . . if he actually attracts worshipers.

It's worth emphasizing again: *the spirit types in this chapter are simply descriptive labels, not absolute categories.* Describing an ethereal as a "gestalt dream spirit" or an "elemental" is not like describing a celestial as a Seraph or a Djinn. The categories are not fixed; the labels are not absolute. If you think of a character concept that isn't neatly described by any of these spirit types, don't worry about it; just create the character.

that created him were quite detailed. But he lacks any affinity for his Image; he knows what he is, but he has no real desire to ride a magic sleigh pulled by flying reindeer, or to give toys to good little children, or to do anything else that will paint him as a target. He likes children well enough, but he likes his own existence more.

Thus, for nearly a century he's avoided doing anything that would characterize him as Santa and possibly betray his true nature. But he's getting awfully bored, and awfully tired of a janitor's wages. He *has* supernatural powers which could surely be used to his advantage . . . if only he could be sure that using them won't attract angels, demons, or predatory ethereals.

(This secret Santa is a balanced starting character who has deliberately chosen not to go through Initiation. If he can muster the courage to do something besides merely living, he can take any number of active roles in a campaign. Depending on his encounters with others, he might become a force for good, or a selfish spirit pursuing his own agenda.)



IMPOSSIBLE IMAGES – THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

While anything that can be imagined can become a dream spirit, some Images are too closely connected to beliefs that touch upon the Divine or the Infernal. The hapless spirit that assumes such an Image is doomed from the moment of its creation.

This definitely includes angels and demons. People dream of angels and demons all the time, of course, and a dreamer's conception often has little resemblance to the real thing. But while an angel figment might animate a dreamscape, it *cannot* become self-aware (i.e., gain a Celestial Force), ever – and if it should escape the dreamscape where it was spawned, it will fade almost instantly, its Essence drawn out of it by the overwhelming power of Heaven. *Occasionally*, a figment originally dreamed as an angel or demon might be so unlike an actual divine or infernal being that it is able to persist on its own, but anything that pushes its Image closer to the real thing will cause its demise. Thus, one will not find ethereal Seraphim or little red devils with horns and pitchforks populating the Marches. Naturally, this also means that there are no ethereal Satans or Archangel Michaels or anything else resembling a Superior, much less any ethereals in the Image of Jehovah!

Angels claim that this is proof of the supremacy of God and the qualitatively different nature of celestials. Ethereals claim it's just a restriction imposed by the forces that have currently gained control over the Symphony.

Some humans have been so closely and ineffably tied to a divine religion (see the *Game Master's Guide*, p. 66) that they also are “excluded” as ethereal spirits. Jesus, Muhammad, and the Buddha fall into this category, as does the Virgin Mary. (Other notable and revered religious figures, such as Moses, many Catholic saints, and

Muhammad's wives and daughters, might also be “off-limits,” but such decisions are left up to the GM.) People dream about such figures often, but aside from temporary figments, none can become true spirits.

This doesn't mean that a spirit cannot take on the *appearance* of such beings, of course. On the ethereal plane, anyone can assume any guise (see p. 92), so an ethereal can appear to someone in a dream and deliberately make itself *look* like Jesus . . . or Lucifer. But if its true Image is even remotely similar to a holy or infernal entity, it will melt like an ice cube in hot chocolate.

Dragons

Uriel's Servitors killed all the dragons. They killed them physically, on Earth, and they hunted the last dragon to extinction in the Marches, and none have been seen since. (Though there are *always* rumors . . .)

No dragon-figments survive outside their originating dreamscapes. Ethereals can adopt a draconic guise, but if their Image becomes too dragon-like, they fade with amazing speed. Dragons, for some reason, have become proscribed by the Symphony, and no one knows why. Popular theories include: dragons were originally divine (or infernal), but for rebelling against God were punished with extinction; there is a powerful dragon-god (or collection of draconic deities) hiding in the Far Marches, capable of annihilating any who assume the dragon Image at a distance; God (or Uriel, or the Seraphim Council) decided dragons were just too dangerous and powerful to live, and exercised some unknown power to prevent any from returning; Uriel's Servitors were very, very thorough, and Heaven has remained so vigilant that no dragons have been seen since.

CREATURES OF MYTH AND LEGEND

Some beings are so prevalent in the collective consciousness that they arise independently in the Marches. And, argue the ethereals, sometimes the cause and effect is reversed; certain spirits existed *before* humans dreamed them, and popular belief only made them stronger. Some were spawned in the days before Uriel's crusade, when ethereals manifested on Earth more often, assuming the Image and corporeal form of humanity's myths. Some

interbred with corporeal beings, human or animal (and the odd plant), creating half-breeds who were not ethereals, but whose appearance could generate spirits dreamed in their image.

The difference between a “mythical” being and a gestalt dream spirit (p. 75) is that the latter begins life as a figment in a single dreamscape, then becomes stronger because of ambient belief, whereas creatures of myth were born in the Marches without needing a dreamer as a “midwife.” However, the distinction can be a fine one, and spirits themselves obscure the differences. A faerie who began life as a figment but later grew to conform to popular fairy tales may be indistinguishable from a faerie

who coalesced out of the Essence of popular belief in fairy tales. And some creatures of myth were “born” in a dreamscape, but began life fully-formed as autonomous spirits, not soulless figments, and simply stepped out of the dream that gave them life.

These spirits are identifiable by their popular Image, which may vary significantly from the archetype, but always shares enough features in common to be identifiable. Some Santas are jolly old elves, others are malicious pranksters, but they cannot escape conforming to the public’s conception of them to some degree.

CREATING CREATURES OF MYTH

Like dream spirits, a creature of myth is largely defined by its Image, but its elements also play a strong role in its personality. Mermaids inevitably have a strand of Sea in them, while fox spirits always seem to have a touch of Moon. Elements and affinities need to be selected carefully – which is not to say that some spirits of myth aren’t atypical. (There are a myriad of traditional interpretations of Merlin, to say nothing of non-traditional ones.) These spirits don’t *have* to acquire Songs that enhance their traditional abilities, but they often do.

CLASSICAL MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Creatures of classical mythology are the most numerous, even after the Purity Crusade, because they’ve had thousands of years to imbed themselves in the collective dreams of mankind. Uriel’s crusade swept most of them off the Earth, and wiped out many who fled to the Marches, but even the zealous Archangel of Purity couldn’t get them all . . . nor could he prevent humanity’s dreams from bringing back unicorns, faeries, ghosts and goblins, wyverns and rocs, and other creatures of myth and legend. Of course, all of these beings are much rarer now, very wary of manifesting on Earth, and almost never dare to do so in their true form. But they endure.

SAMPLE SPIRIT: THE KRAKEN

Creature of Myth

Corporeal Forces - 4 Strength 12

Ethereal Forces - 4 Intelligence 12

Celestial Forces - 4 Will 12

Element: Sea

Agility 4

Precision 4

Perception 4

Affinities: Hunger (Primal), Weather (Strong), Drowning (Moderate), Fear (Slight)

Skills: Fighting/6, Swimming/6

Songs: Dreams (all/4), Entropy (Ethereal/2, Celestial/2), Form (Corporeal/6), Plates/6, Projection (Ethereal/6), Storms (Corporeal/5)

Dread: Sunlight/4

The kraken had lived in the depths of the ocean longer than humanity’s ancestors had crawled on land. It was born of primal ocean, and some say it took corporeal form before the angels learned to do the same thing. The kraken slumbered at the bottom of the sea, visited the Marches and saw what humans dreamed of the sea, and its Image altered slowly, over eons.

*Good things of day begin to droop
and drowse, While night’s black
agents to their preys do rouse.
– Shakespeare, Macbeth*

Then came Uriel’s Crusade. Angels of Purity tracked the kraken to its corporeal vessel at the bottom of the ocean, and they slew it. The Trauma itself lasted only a few weeks, but the beast, accustomed to thinking and acting over periods of years, took a long, long time to regroup itself. Now it is aware again, in the oceans of the ethereal plane. It seeks to go back to Earth, but it will take a long time for it to accumulate enough Essence to reform its enormous vessel. It is a vast and alien being, cunning and mighty. It has learned that angels, however small they appear, are not to be trifled with; it knows that demons would only use it. It thus avoids celestials – and humans for the most part, though it will certainly devour any lone dreamer it encounters in the Far Marches. The kraken does not communicate in any conventional manner, but it is not just a big dumb animal; it is an ancient, primal force.

(The kraken is a nearly godlike spirit; as such, it doesn’t follow all the normal rules of character creation. For instance, its primal Hunger affinity does not match its Sea strand. When the kraken fills its Essence cache, it can reform a vessel, at a cost of 1,200 Essence! Its corporeal form should be all but unkillable; give it enough Protection and Body hits to ignore conventional weapons. It took a whole host of Uriel’s angels to destroy it, and they brought powerful relics. Fortunately, the kraken prefers the sea bottom, and could disappear for another thousand years without being seen . . . except in sailors’ dreams.)

"INANIMATE" IMAGES

Some spirits have the appearance of items: singing swords, living garden hoses, weeping willows, or actual mountains. If they choose a vessel to duplicate their Image (and have the appropriate affinity to do so), then they will be restricted somewhat. Bendable objects can bend, and hinged ones can open and close, but stiff, inflexible items will just lie there unless the spirit knows a Song to grant itself limbs or motion.

In the Marches, of course, they are not necessarily so limited. A sword-spirit might float about on its own, picking fights, while a tree could walk on its roots, and a living cigarette might crawl around like an inchworm. GMs should prevent flagrant abuses of this, of course; a self-motivated sword can still be hurt, even if it's fighting with its own blade!

Weapon Images

Spirits who use themselves to fight use Fighting skill. If they take an affinity which would allow them to affect a weapon, they may affect themselves in the Marches or if they have a weapon-vessel. The Game Master is encouraged to let affinities (but not skills) "stack" – if the weapon-spirit is used by a fighting-spirit, they can be extremely puissant! (If the weapon or the wielder is an NPC, it must be bought as a Servant if this situation is to continue long. If both are player characters, then the GM may well try to test the partnership – or simply rule the combination abusive and forbid cumulative affinity effects after all.)

MODERN POP ICONS

It takes a *lot* of belief to create a legend, and few entities of recent vintage qualify. The latest hot movie idol, or an infamous and globally-despised dictator, might generate more Essence in raw numbers than Gilgamesh or Galahad, particularly given the increase in the world population. But a temporary surge in Essence will only create a temporary surge in ethereals . . . once their Image has been forgotten in the mortal world, most of them will fade. So Attila the Hun, Robin Hood, and Mulan endure the generational "fads" that flood the Marches with Cromwells, Nobunagas, Benjamin Franklins, and Dudley Moores. The spirits who are strong and plentiful now aren't necessarily the ones who will have staying power.

But in the meantime, pop icons are avoided by older ethereals, because they're strong and aggressive during their 15 minutes of fame . . . and they lack manners. Pegasi and *gaki*, King Arthur and Cleopatra, look upon young mutant combat animals and puppet monsters, Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, with the same disdain and veiled envy with which "old money" looked upon dot.com billionaires.

SAMPLE SPIRIT: ELVIS

Pop Icon

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Corporeal Forces - 1 | Strength 2 | Agility 2 |
| Ethereal Forces - 2 | Intelligence 3 | Precision 5 |
| Celestial Forces - 3 | Will 5 | Perception 7 |

Elements: Sun, Music

Affinities: Glamour (Moderate)

Vessel: Human/1, Charisma +1, Sex Appeal +2 (young Elvis – Essence cost: 110)

Skills: Area Knowledge/1 (Marches), Artistry/1 (Songwriting), Dancing/3, Emote/5, Singing/3

Songs: Form (Ethereal/2, Celestial/2), Nimbus (Ethereal/2)

This spirit has something most ethereal Elvises don't; real talent combined with originality. He writes his own songs! (They aren't very good yet, but he'll improve.) Meanwhile, his performing ability is approaching (some might even say exceeding) that of his namesake.

This particular Elvis has a problem. There is a tribe of Elvises already (see p. 17), and they don't like competition. The spirit was given the opportunity to join the tribe, but declined; those poseurs weren't *real* singers like he was! (And they didn't appreciate his originality; Elvis should sing "Jailhouse Rock" or "Love Me Tender" – new tunes by definition can't be Elvis.)

Elvis formed a vessel and fled to Earth. He looks *exactly* like a young, handsome Elvis Presley. He's been traveling around, getting minor gigs at bars and nightclubs as an "Elvis impersonator" – and creating no few Elvis sightings – but both celestials and (he suspects) his rivals on the ethereal plane are on his trail. The spirit has realized there's only one way he can secure his status as the One True Elvis: he's headed for Graceland!

(This spirit is a balanced starting character who has not yet Initiated. He's probably best in a light-hearted game or for a humorous encounter, though if he survives, he may prove surprisingly durable. What if Elvis actually finds the makings of an ethereal Tether at Graceland, and asserts himself as the God of Rock and Roll . . . ?)

PAGAN GODS

Once, the old gods were strong, with temples dotting landscapes around the world. Essence flowed to them like rivers, and they walked openly on the Earth. Angels, if the gods were aware of them at all, were a distant presence that only rarely intervened in their affairs.

Then an obscure Semitic tribe became infected with the “monotheism disease” (as the gods contemptuously called it), and within a few centuries, Yahweh-worship was eclipsing many of the Middle Eastern deities. Nowadays, some of the gods (with the typical imprecise and selective memory of ethereals) describe it as a sudden assault on their worshipers that left them stunned and weakened, but it was actually a process that took almost 3,000 years. During that time, some gods declined, but others arose and remained strong right up until the Purity Crusade. It was Uriel’s campaign in the 8th century that broke or banished the surviving gods.

However, not all the gods died in the Purity Crusade. Most of the survivors have lost their worshipers, their temples, and their Tethers, but thanks to their enduring legends, or sheer stubbornness, they survive. Some still receive a trickle of Essence, and some have had their hopes rekindled by the neo-pagan movement. This makes them a continuing force in the Marches, and an occasional presence on Earth.

There are also a few gods who somehow successfully *share* their power with Archangels, such as the Hindu deities and the Loas (p. 114). They are too benevolent to be classified as the Enemy, and too durable to be eradicated; Heaven grudgingly accepts their existence, and even allies with them from time to time . . . but that doesn’t prevent Dominic and Laurence from trying to undercut them at every opportunity.

BECOMING A GOD

True godhood requires a *minimum* of 9 Forces (and very few spirits have actually achieved godlike status with so few). Assuming a spirit meets this basic requirement, all he needs to do is make his Image so strong that it is an element in itself – a defining component of the spirit’s being.

This is rather like saying all one needs to do to become a head of state is get elected.

A godlike Image is referred to as a “godhead,” and there are two ways to get one. The first way – *assumption* – is very fast and very, very dangerous. The second way – *transfiguration* – is very slow and only very dangerous.

Assumption

Assumption is covered on p. 133; it is the process of taking another deity’s godhood. Success means you become a god in one fell swoop; failure means you cease to exist.

To achieve godhood, a spirit needs to make his Image so strong that it is a defining component of his being. This is rather like saying that all one needs to do to become a head of state is get elected.

Transfiguration

Transfiguration requires establishing one’s Image as synonymous with a particular concept. The concept may be anything, but is most often one of the god’s elements or affinities. (It’s difficult to establish oneself as a god of something for which one has no affinity.)

Establishing this connection to godhood requires that a very large amount of Essence supporting the godlike Image permeate the ethereal realm. When thousands dreamed of Amaterasu in conjunction with her role as sun-goddess, and hundreds of motes of Essence were sent to her through worship rites, she swelled in power and was transfigured from a mere elemental sun-spirit to the Japanese Kami of the Sun.

There are no hard mechanics to define what it takes to become a god. The usual way is to acquire a lot of worshipers and become famous throughout the corporeal and ethereal realms for representing whatever you purport to be a god of. Only when the GM decides that a spirit’s place in the ethereal plane is sufficiently established will he become a divinity. If Elvis (p.

80) wants to become the God of Rock and Roll, he needs his Image to not only be associated with rock and roll, but he needs to be *worshiped* as such. Furthermore, he has to be the *only* “Elvis” so worshiped – if any other ethereal shares his Image, the Essence of belief will be distributed among them (p. 15). His godhood will not be established until all potential challengers have been

eliminated.

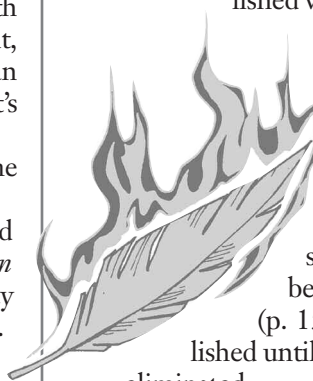


IMAGE AND DREAM-SHADES

Rarely, someone will become a dream-shade and discover that his life has spawned ethereals with his Image. (Indeed, some trickster gods claim that the leader of the tribe of Elvis *is* Elvis!) However, no one has discovered whether a dream-shade's existence would prevent an ethereal's attempt at transfiguration or the creation of worship rites. The few times it's happened, the spirit has – allegedly – attempted assumption combat with the human soul, and the survivor claimed to be the ethereal . . .

LESSER GODS

Any 9-Force spirit with a godhead can claim a divine mantle. These “lesser gods” are mighty by ethereal standards, and formidable even by celestial standards, but they come nowhere near the power of an Archangel or Demon Prince. They are created like normal characters, and they can be destroyed like normal characters. Many gods who were once far more powerful lost so many Forces during the Purity Crusade that they have been reduced to this level; others have diminished as a result of fading (p. 19).

Besides being much more powerful than other ethereals, and receiving extra Essence from their believers, achieving godhood gives even the weakest deity a couple of special abilities.

Divine Affinities

A god can break the normal rules for primal affinities (p. 50); *any* affinity that is compatible with the deity's godhead (GM's option) can be raised to a primal level, even if the god embodies multiple elements.

Rites

A god may devise personal Rites which he may use to acquire Essence. These Rites should be compatible with his nature (see the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, p. 66, for some examples). The god may also give these Rites to others, but must do so sparingly; every time someone *else* uses a god's Rite, the Essence comes directly from the god.

There are no rules for how many Rites a single deity can have, but the list shouldn't be too long. For PC deities, the GM can control rampant creation of Rites by charging 3 character points each.

Gods also create worship rites (p. 15), but one does not need to be a god to do so.

GREATER GODS

The most powerful gods can transcend the limits of normal beings, much as Superiors do – albeit on a smaller scale. “Greater gods” have powers beyond the scope of angels and demons; the most powerful of them are unquantifiable. Very few are left – the Purity Crusade destroyed or reduced most of them. Continuing persecution by Heaven and Hell, and a decline in worship, took care of the rest.

The GM can give these most powerful of ethereal spirits any abilities he likes, but several are common to all of them.

Attunements

Only the most powerful deities can grant attunements. The Ethereal Connection Attunement (p. 63) is how they create Dream Soldiers, while the Seneschal attunement (*Liber Castellorum*, p. 24) allows their Tethers to be defended – and it's suspected that they can make Songmasters (*Liber Canticorum*, p. 25), too. But some greater gods have *Servitor Attunements* of their own, which they give to their most devoted followers.

Create Domains

Any spirit can theoretically assert control over an ethereal Domain (p. 103), but greater gods can *create* Domains. The god is automatically the master of the new Domain, until such time as someone else usurps the position.

Ethereal Tethers

There aren't many ethereal Tethers left; most were destroyed during the Purity Crusade, their physical loci razed and their connections to the ethereal plane broken. The few that remained became weaker and weaker without worship, or without a god to sustain them, and they faded.

But a few remain. Only a greater god who possesses a Domain can stabilize an ethereal Tether and claim it for his own. The few that are left are usually weak and hidden in remote places, and their owners can spare little energy to defend them. However, even a weak Tether provides significant extra Essence (see p. 16), so the god who has one treasures it.

CREATING A GOD

It's not recommended that any player character start out as a god, and the GM may regard PC deities as

beyond the scope of the campaign. If a PC does want to become a god, the quest should be long, exceedingly difficult, and with numerous rivals and opponents to overcome. Achieving godhood is the ethereal equivalent of gaining a Word and a high Distinction at the same time, and the difficulty should be comparable. (If the GM *does* wish to have a PC god or gods, this could be the basis for the entire campaign . . .)

Lesser gods are built like other ethereals, with a minimum of 9 Forces. They have *very* strong Images, and usually many affinities and Songs. Greater gods can be quantified if the GM so chooses (most should be in the 15-18 Force range), but he's also justified in treating them like celestial Superiors, and not bothering to make a character sheet for them. Even the most powerful gods are no match for an Archangel or Demon Prince, but some of them are powerful enough that from the perspective of an ordinary ethereal or celestial, the difference is irrelevant.

SAMPLE LESSER GODDESS: CERIDWYN

The Bright Lady

Corporeal Forces - 3 Strength 5 Agility 7
Ethereal Forces - 5 Intelligence 10 Precision 10
Celestial Forces - 5 Will 8 Perception 12

Elements: Light, Moon, Femininity

Affinities: Light (Primal), Luck (Strong), Glamour (Moderate), Motherhood (Moderate), Fertility (Slight), Love (Slight)

Vessel: Human/6, Charisma +3 (female - Essence cost: 720), Human/2 (female - Essence cost: 150), Owl/3 (Essence cost: 90)

Skills: Area Knowledge (Marches/4), Dancing/2, Emote/1, Escape/3, Knowledge (Neo-Pagans/4, Celtic Traditions/2), Languages (English/3*, Welsh/2), Move Silently/5, Seduction/2, Singing/2, Survival (Marches/4)

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal/2), Charm (Ethereal/3), Dreams (Corporeal/4), Entropy (Corporeal/1), Form (Ethereal/6, Celestial/3), Light (all/6), Spirit Speech (all/5)

Dread: Darkness/2 (This Dread remains from the time when she was a mere spirit of Light, before she became a goddess.)

Personal Rites: Light a bonfire beneath a full moon; Shed light that causes evil to flee.

Worship Rites: Dance skyclad under the night sky; light candles to the four directions in a ritual ceremony.

Ancient pagans would find little to recognize in this goddess. She purports to be the original "Bright Lady" worshiped by the Celts, but she's actually a relative newcomer, a spirit who managed to establish herself as the goddess prayed to by *modern* pagans. She has carefully researched her followers' expectations, and while she usually contacts mortals only in dreams, a very small number have met the goddess personally. She uses the Songs of Spirit Speech and Soul Links to communicate with her most favored priests and priestesses, and has succeeded in recruiting a few pagan Soldiers, to whom she teaches a Song on occasion. The goddess is not yet powerful enough to grant the Ethereal Connection attunement and create Dream Soldiers. Her current goal is to establish a Domain while increasing the number of worshipers she has - only a small fraction of modern neo-pagans are actually performing rituals to Ceridwyn, and she wants to spread her Image to more of them.

She has three vessels for manifesting on Earth. Her most beautiful vessel is for when she appears as the Goddess, while the owl is for delivering more cryptic messages (often in response to a ritual). She has a much plainer vessel with which she mingles with humans incognito, often infiltrating pagan circles and trying to encourage worship of the Bright Lady.

Laurence and Blandine are both aware of Ceridwyn and her growing following. Blandine regards her as mostly harmless - there are far more malevolent gods and spirits for the Archangel of Dreams to worry about. Laurence is not pleased by the resurgence of paganism, and his angels would certainly try to slay her vessel if they found her on Earth. However, the principles espoused by the Bright Lady's followers are essentially benevolent, and they do choose to follow her of their own free will, so while Laurence might request greater efforts by the Church at converting these "lost sheep" back into the fold, the Sword also does not regard opposition to Ceridwyn as a high priority. Should she ascend to the status of a greater goddess, Laurence might reevaluate the situation.



(Ceridwyn would make a good minor patron for lesser ethereals or pagan humans. She's basically friendly and benevolent, though selfish – she'll aid and protect her followers to the extent she is able, without risking her own safety. She could also be a minor thorn in the side of angels and demons – she'll avoid direct confrontation with celestials, but her followers might hinder the plans of either side.)

SAMPLE GREATER GOD: ODIN

The All-Father

I hung on a tree forty days, a sacrifice, myself to myself.

– Odin, “the Elder (Poetic Edda)”

Even a thousand years after his heyday, Odin remains the chief deity of the Norse pantheon. Ancient Germanic tribes called him Woden and Wotan, but the Vikings did the most to strengthen him, and Viking legends (romanticized all the way up through the Victorian period and into the present day) kept his Image strong.

The Purity Crusade weakened the Norse gods, but they survived better than many other pantheons, thanks to Odin One-Eye. (See *The Marches*, pp. 96-97.) Odin avoids conflict with celestials, not wanting the Aesir to be further weakened by clashes with Heaven, but knowing that Hell is not to be trusted either. Instead, he marshals the few resources he has left, and keeps his eye on the corporeal plane and any opportunities that might arise there.

No *In Nomine* characteristics are given here for Odin. He's more powerful than anyone else he's likely to meet except a Superior. It's safe to assume that Odin will prevail in any direct confrontation against small groups of ethereals and celestials, but he's not so powerful that a host of angels or horde of demons would pose no threat to him. Odin *provokes* battles, but he rarely engages in them himself, so he's not likely to stand still in a slugfest. Instead, he will use his vast repertoire of affinities and Songs to confuse and evade enemies. He much prefers to work through intermediaries, but he will sometimes deal with celestials, if they have something to offer. Odin is capable of creating Dream Soldiers (p. 122), and he's even rumored to have a few Tethers left.

WYRD

While not an attunement that a character can *use*, a Wyrd may be *imposed* upon characters by Odin. A Wyrd is a combination of fate and destiny; those who have one are destined to do great things, but often die tragically after seeing everyone around them suffer.

Odin can place a Wyrd upon anyone; mortal, ethereal, or celestial. In ethereals and celestials, it takes the form of a Discord, and can be removed by a Superior. The *Divine Destiny* and *Fated Future* attunements can both detect Wyrd (on anyone), but it's unknown whether even Yves or Kronos can remove one from a mortal.

Someone with a Wyrd receives a +1 bonus to *all* non-social skill rolls, including combat ones. (This bonus does *not* apply to resonances, Songs, or affinities.) However, he also receives a -1 penalty to *any* social interaction, including reaction rolls and the use of Detect Lies, Emote, Fast-Talk, Lying, Savoir-Faire, and Seduction. (Again, this penalty does not apply to resonances, Songs, or affinities.)

A Wyrd has no character point cost; Odin grants them for his own reasons, and never on request. He either cannot or does not give others the ability to place Wyrd.

(As one of the most powerful of the surviving pagan gods, Odin could be a major patron – or opponent – in an ethereal campaign. He can appear as an ally or enemy of ethereals, celestials, and humans alike. It's recommended that he, and other gods like him, not be explicitly quantified. Like Superiors, the greatest gods do have limits on their powers, but player characters should never be certain what those limits are.)

Even the most powerful deity could be brought down by enough Malakim, but a pantheon standing together might balk anything but a direct assault by Superiors.

Odin's Servitor Attunements

Odin, as one of the most powerful survivors of the Purity Crusade, may grant attunements to worshipers and allies. Those listed below can be used as examples when making up new attunements for him or other greater gods.

Ill Words

While Odin isn't quite the troublemaker he once was, he still has a reputation for stirring up feuds and lying like a Balseraph. Nowadays, he only grants this attunement to other ethereals, and usually only to close allies. Loki is known to possess it, and may or may not be able to grant it to others.

Ill Words can be spoken to bad-mouth another person, object, or idea. Everyone who hears them must make a Will roll; failure means the listener must make a new Reaction roll (*In Nomine*, p. 44) toward the subject, at a penalty equal to the speaker's Ethereal Forces. Anyone who makes his Will roll makes a new reaction roll toward the *speaker*, at the same penalty.

Cost: 10 points.

One-Eye

Odin plucked out his own eye as a sacrifice to Mimir, the well of knowledge. In exchange, he received wisdom and foresight. He offers a similar bargain to select followers; to receive this attunement, the recipient must pluck out an eye! (This may require a Will roll.) For ethereals and celestials, this has an effect similar to Discord; *any* vessels or hosts will be missing an eye, as will celestial forms. For an ethereal, the missing eye will become part of its Image (though like anything else, this can be disguised with Dream-Shaping). There are no defined game effects for losing an eye, though a penalty to Perception or skill rolls whenever depth perception comes into play would be appropriate.

In exchange for losing the eye, the recipient may attune himself to a number of other creatures equal to his Ethereal Forces. It only takes a touch to attune, but the subject cannot be unwilling. (The subject doesn't have to be *willing* either – a non-sentient or unsuspecting target can be used, but if someone later becomes aware of the attunement and doesn't desire it, it will disappear.) Each attunement lasts until either the One-Eyed one or the subject dispels it.

One-Eye grants sight through the eyes of any creature to whom the character is attuned. The One-Eyed character can see through the eyes of all his subjects simultaneously, even on different planes, as well as through his own remaining eye, without confusion.

It is rumored that Odin himself is attuned to everyone who accepts this attunement. Celestial Superiors will obviously not be pleased with a One-Eyed Servitor. Since the attunement manifests in celestials as a sort of Discord, a Superior can easily see and remove it, and probably will – quite possibly *without* restoring the eye.

Cost: 5 points, and the loss of an eye.

PANTHEONS

In the old days, gods usually banded together because they had a common pool of worshipers. While individual deities might have little in common (and in fact, might be deadly rivals), they had a common interest in keeping their worshipers from succumbing to the "monotheism disease," or from being lured into the service of foreign gods. Keep in mind also that, contrary to a common fantasy trope, pagans usually did not worship a single god in their pantheon exclusively. The average Greek would pray to Zeus if he wanted enlightenment (or rain), Aphrodite for help with romance, Ares for good fortune in battle, and Poseidon for a safe sea voyage. The Greeks believed in (and thus supplied Essence to) *all* of the Olympians. Even those pagans who were devoted to a single deity would probably believe in other gods in the pantheon, and regard them as allies or enemies.

Another reason for gods to form pantheons, which was emphasized during and after the Purity Crusade, is mutual protection. Even the most powerful deity could be brought down by enough Malakim, but a pantheon standing together might balk anything but a direct assault by Superiors. The few remaining gods who actively receive worship from pagans are almost all members of a pantheon . . . though the pantheon's membership may have changed by necessity.

One option for ethereal characters, if the GM is permitting PC deities, is a pantheon campaign. All the player characters are members of a pantheon, which means they should probably share some elements, affinities, and/or aspects of their Image in common. They can engage in competition for power and worshipers while simultaneously cooperating against celestials and rival ethereals. Another option is for a newly-transfigured god to apply for membership in a pantheon. The advantages of mutual protection are attractive enough for a young god not to want to stand alone, and gods are so weakened nowadays that few pantheons are in a position to turn away prospective allies. However, any pantheon will have certain expectations of its members, and any spirit who aspires to be one of their number will have to prove itself, possibly by passing a number of tests, possibly by going through a period of trial and initiation. Other options for godling PCs are discussed in the *Options for Pantheon-Level Games* box on p. 137.

RULES OF THE ETHEREAL



86

RULES OF THE ETHEREAL

RAVENS

Caadacobot knelt in prayer among the mists, and five ravens came to land upon a tree. "I am in communion with the Lord," he said politely. "I have no wish to speak to the spirits of this realm."

One raven spoke. "He carries home a relic seized from this land, but he has not got it home yet."

Caadacobot did not look up. "Do you wish to stop me?"

Another raven said, "But he is strong, and he has it with him. Surely he will bring it back to Heaven."

"What good will that do him?" said the first raven. "When he has gone halfway to the Vale, a forest shall rise to bar his path; and when he steps within its borders, the plants shall wash over him and Caadacobot will be no more."

Caadacobot looked puzzled. "A strange prophecy. Can I not avoid this fate?"

"Perhaps," the raven admitted. "If when you see the forest, you stamp your foot three times, it shall sink again into the Marches; and you may cross safely."

Caadacobot rose, looking thoughtful. "If this is the nature of things, then I accept it; but I must insist that you accompany me, as I sense something peculiar in this arrangement." He began his walk back toward the Vale, and the ravens flew beside him. In good time, a forest rose before him, and he stamped his foot three times. After a short delay, it sank into the Marches.

"You have advised me well," he told the ravens.

"It will do you no good," answered one of the birds. "When you have gone halfway to the Vale from here, you shall see a gate of silver and gold; and when you open it, it shall pull you through to the land of Never-Was, and you will never have been."

Caadacobot frowned. "You may continue to advise me."

"If you do not open the gate, but use your powers to strike it to the ground, then perhaps you shall be safe," the raven said, sadly.

Caadacobot nodded. "If this is the nature of things, then I accept it. Come along." He continued his walk toward the Vale, and in good time, came upon a gate of silver and gold; and with a clangor of Song and fist, brought it down.

Once again, you have aided me," he said.

"It will do you no good," a raven sulked. "For when you leave this spot, a hideous beast shall rise to confront you, and there is nothing that shall save you from its wrath."

Caadacobot said, "Nothing at all?"

The raven shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot. "If you should pull a stone from your pack and place it in my beak," it admitted, "and force me then to fly away, then the beast should rise to destroy me rather than yourself; but such behavior would not suit an angel."

Caadacobot frowned, removed his pack, and began to search through it. "Why," he said, "I do have a stone, though I do not recall putting it there."

"Such is the nature of things," the raven grouched, "and we must both accept it."

"Then so it shall be," Caadacobot said, and forced the stone into the raven's beak. He waved. "Fly away. Get."

The bird fluttered awkwardly off. The other ravens landed nearby, watching him.

"What is it?" Caadacobot wondered.

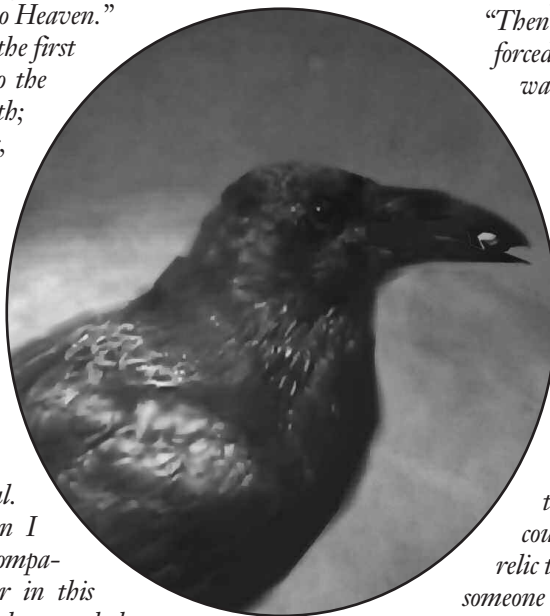
"It is a wonder like we have scarcely seen before," a raven said.

"A creature that sees a forest rise and sink, and does not think, 'Which of my companions crafted this dream?' A creature that sees gates of silver and gold, and batters them down for no reason at all! And, of course, a creature that gives a hard-won relic to an agent of the enemy, simply because someone dreams a stone's shape around it."

"Bah," said Caadacobot. "It was only a training mission."

The ethereal realm is sometimes spoken of (probably inaccurately) as being "between" the corporeal and celestial realms. The ethereal plane is accessible from both the corporeal and the celestial planes. There are Tethers from the ethereal plane to Earth, and one can walk straight out into the Marches through the Tethers of Gabriel's Volcano or Blandine and Beleth's Towers. (Those three ethereal-to-celestial Tethers are the only ones of their kind known – thus far. See the *Liber Castellorum*, p. 14.) For those who cannot pass those Tethers, the staircase (or path) seems to go upward forever. Some spirits maintain that they are not actually Tethers, but ethereal Domain-borders; celestials just *think* they have unique features, compared to Tethers which connect the corporeal and celestial realms.

Many of the things that hold true on the celestial plane also hold true on the ethereal. Spirits who argue that celestials are merely empowered ethereals point out that the ethereal plane itself has many of the characteristics of Heaven and Hell.



ENTERING DREAMSCAPES

Celestials and other humans need the Corporeal Song of Dreams or the *Dreamwalking* attunement (*In Nomine*, p. 110) to enter a human dreamscape, even if they're already in the Marches. Otherwise, the border of a dreamscape acts as a translucent but impenetrable barrier.

Ethereal spirits, however, are creatures of dreams and the mind. They can penetrate this dream-barrier with a successful Precision roll. Multiply the spirit's Ethereal Forces times the check digit to determine how many minutes it may remain within the human's dreamscape. On a failed roll, it cannot attempt to enter that dreamscape again by this method. (Once the dreamer wakes up, a spirit could try to penetrate his dreamscape the *next* time it appears.) A spirit can still use a Song or attunement to enter a dreamscape that's resisted its entry, though.

Note that this *only* works if the spirit is already in the Marches, and can make contact with the dreamscape. Entering a human's dreamscape from the corporeal plane requires using the same methods that celestials use.

Waking Up

Anyone who entered the Marches by sleeping may leave by waking up. A Dreaming roll (or its default) will allow a dreamer to force himself awake instantly. On a failure, ethereals and celestials may simply try again the following round, but humans must wait a number of minutes equal to the check digit of the failed roll. An ethereal or celestial will awaken instantly if his vessel is disturbed back on Earth, even by something as minor as a touch (he may make a Will roll if he doesn't *want* to be yanked out of the Marches). Humans make a Perception roll to wake up if disturbed, with whatever bonuses the GM thinks are appropriate; some disturbances, such as being hit or violently shaken, should automatically awaken a sleeper except in unusual circumstances. If not disturbed, an ethereal or celestial vessel can remain asleep as long as its owner wants to stay in the Marches; mortals, of course, must wake up eventually. (A human who wants to prolong his dreaming may make a Will roll when the GM deems he should wake up; each successful roll will extend his slumber by check digit minutes.)

ENTERING AND LEAVING THE MARCHES

Anyone can visit the ethereal plane. Most mortals do so every night. It takes an act of will to *control* one's journey, however. While ethereals and celestials have several means of traveling to and from the Marches, mortals are usually only able to do so by dreaming.

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Any non-mortals in corporeal form may try to force themselves to sleep with a Will roll (or use their Dreaming skill, p. 65). Failure means waiting 30 minutes before they can try again. If successful, ethereals and celestials are transported instantly to the Marches, leaving their corporeal vessels behind. (Ethereals can ascend *without* leaving their bodies behind, but that method costs Essence; see p. 89.) Humans do likewise, but the process takes 30 minutes divided by the check digit of their roll.

Humans will enter the Marches in their personal dreamscape, which will usually materialize in the Vale of Dreams (p. 101). Celestials also appear in the Vale, angels appearing on Blandine's side, demons on Beleth's. Ethereals will return to where they are anchored (p. 18).

THROUGH A DREAMER

Anyone who knows the Corporeal Song of Dreams, or possesses the *Dreamwalking* attunement, can enter the Marches through the mind of a human dreamer. Celestials sometimes call this "ethereal hitchhiking." The "hitchhiker" will appear in the Marches *inside* the subject's dreamscape. As with dreaming, this leaves the traveler's corporeal form behind. Unlike dreaming, the visitor is anchored to the dreamscape he entered; he cannot exit that dreamscape to go wandering in the Marches. If expelled from the dreamscape (such as by the dreamer waking up), the intruder wakes up back in his corporeal vessel. His body can also be awakened as above; otherwise, he remains in the dreamscape for the duration of the Song or attunement (either may be terminated early with a Will roll, as usual).

Kyriotates, it should be noted, may enter the Marches via "sleeping" as other non-humans do. They appear next to their host's dreamscape, and must have the appropriate attunement or Song to enter. The human may remain asleep or wake up, depending on how rested he is. A Shedite's location depends on whether it willed itself to sleep (in which case it appears next to the dreamscape) or allowed the host to sleep (in which case it is within the dreamscape).

ASCENDING AND DESCENDING

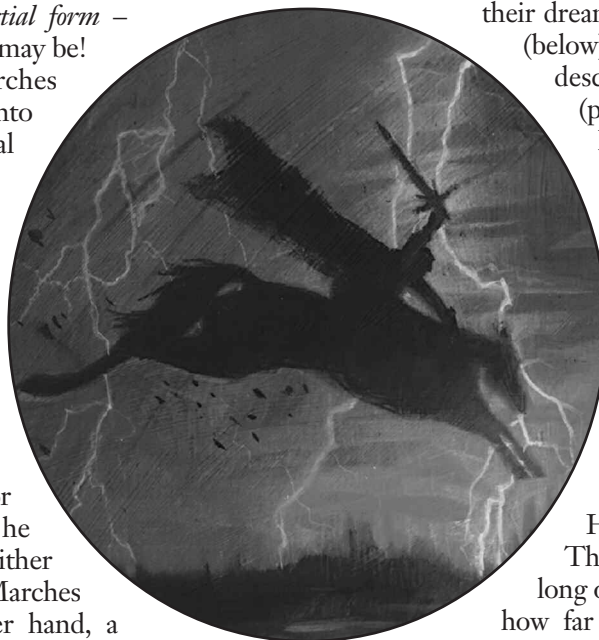
Ethereal Spirits

Ethereal spirits who possess a vessel may descend to the corporeal realm, anywhere they have been before, by making a Will roll and spending 1 Essence. Returning to the ethereal plane requires another 1 Essence and a Will roll. A spirit will return to its anchor (p. 18). Unlike celestials, ethereals don't have to leave their bodies behind to get to the ethereal plane without a Tether – though they may “sleep” normally if they wish.

Celestials

Celestials cannot ascend directly from the corporeal to the ethereal plane except through an ethereal Tether (below). However, they can walk across the Tether-borders between the ethereal and celestial planes: the edges of Blandine and Gabriel's Cathedrals (p. 101), and Beleth's Principality (p. 102). An angel or demon who leaves the celestial plane and enters the Marches *is no longer in celestial form* – even though his visual image may be!

Upon exiting the Marches through one of the passages into the celestial realm, his celestial form reappears; this requires a Will roll, but no Essence. (It is said that those who follow the shifting path up Gabriel's Volcano have sometimes found themselves celestial without willing it.) A celestial who traveled from the celestial plane to the ethereal may *not* ascend directly to Heaven or Hell, or descend to Earth; he must find a portal back to either plane, and cannot leave the Marches until he does. On the other hand, a celestial who willed himself into the Marches may pass through an ethereal Tether and return to Earth elsewhere, or he may walk across the border into the celestial realm. With another Will roll, he may de-manifest his vessel back into potentiality, as if he had ascended normally. If he does not “vanish” his vessel, he *must* go to it when next he returns to the corporeal plane. Till then, it lies comatose. If such a vessel is killed while the celestial is in Heaven or Hell, there will be no Trauma; in a sense, he's not linked with his vessel.



ETHEREAL TETHERS


A few rare Tethers still connect loci on Earth with ethereal Domains. Any ethereal or celestial who finds one may use it to travel between locations. On Earth, a celestial must first assume celestial form (at the normal Essence cost) before ascending through an ethereal Tether; this is the only way a celestial can ascend directly to the Marches from Earth without leaving his body behind. Ethereals may also use ethereal Tethers; for them, there is no Essence cost. An ethereal may descend through an ethereal Tether to its corporeal locus, also at no Essence cost, but only if it has a vessel, in which it will manifest upon arrival. Descending celestials initially manifest on Earth in celestial form.

ETHEREAL TRAVEL

Once in the Marches, unless one is anchored to a dreamscape, it's possible to travel from one Domain to another. Most mortals, of course, are anchored to their dreamscapes; to become a lucid dreamer (below) requires the Dreaming skill. As described under *Through a Dreamer* (p. 88), using the Corporeal Song of Dreams or the Dreamwalking attunement also anchors one to a particular dreamscape.

Traveling through the Marches can be a mind-bending experience. In the Vale of Dreams, the geography remains fairly consistent, and the twin Towers of Blandine and Beleth, and Gabriel's distant volcano, are unmistakable landmarks. Once one leaves the areas controlled by Heaven and Hell, nothing is certain. The GM should make any journey as long or as short as he likes. No one knows how far the Marches extend. Most spirits believe they are infinite, though there are tales of travelers who have journeyed to the Farthest Marches and beyond, and returned reporting only a vast gray emptiness. (No one ever seems to have spoken personally to one of these returnees, though, and many believe these are rumors spread by Judgment or the Game, to discourage exploration of regions of no interest to the War . . . or rumors spread by pagan gods, to discourage celestials from finding what's out there.)

If you fail to get where you wanted to go, it's because you didn't know the way there, not because you haven't gone far enough yet.



Time and space are relative in the Marches, so there is no such thing as an ethereal "movement rate." You are only fast or slow in relation to other ethereal travelers, and that may change depending on the Domain. However, no journey takes more than a single night, even to the Farthest Marches. The nature of the Marches is such that while someone might remain there indefinitely, and even be "lost" for days, weeks, or years, a journey with a destination always ends within a single night . . . it just doesn't always end *at* the intended destination. In other words, if you fail to get where you wanted to go, it's because you didn't know the

way there (or because it's avoiding you . . .), not because you haven't gone far enough yet. An angel might search forever, arriving in different Domains night after night, trying to reach the fabled Mount Shem (from whence many ethereals claim God originated), while a spirit who knows the way will have no trouble getting there in one night. Area Knowledge and Survival skills (pp. 64-65) can both be quite useful in navigating the Marches.

An ethereal journey should usually be story-driven; if the GM wants the characters to get somewhere, they will, and it can take as many nights as the GM likes before they reach their ultimate destination. However, for quick jaunts, or when the GM has no plans for the journey or just wants to let fate decide, characters can make an ethereal navigation roll.

NAVIGATION

Navigating the Marches requires an Area Knowledge (Marches) roll (p. 64) – the default is Intelligence -4. A successful roll means the traveler will reach his intended destination in six hours minus the check digit; a check digit of 6+ means he finds it almost immediately. A failed roll means he will wander the Marches for a number of hours equal to the check digit, and arrive in a Domain other than the one he sought. At that point, once he leaves the Domain (which isn't always a straightforward as simply walking back over the border . . .), he may try again. A failed check digit of 6+ means he spends the entire night wandering before coming to the wrong place.

If the destination is very near to or far from the starting point, the GM may assign an arbitrary modifier to the check digit (the recommended range is -4 to +4). Adjacent Domains might add +4 to the check digit of a successful roll, and subtract 4 from an unsuccessful check digit, while Domains that the GM decides are across the Marches from one another tonight might subtract 4 from a successful check digit, and add +4 to an unsuccessful one. See the box (below) for additional modifiers to the navigation roll. Remember that traveling through

ETHEREAL NAVIGATION MODIFIERS

- ✧ Destination is the traveler's home Domain or anchor (Beleth's or Blandine's Towers, for angels of Dreams and demons of Nightmares, respectively) . . . +4
- ✧ Destination is a place very familiar to the traveler (the Vale of Dreams, for humans and celestials – even if they've never consciously been there) . . . +2
- ✧ Destination is nearby and has visible landmarks or signs leading to it (an angel trying to get from Beleth's Marches to Blandine's, for example, can always see Blandine's Tower off in the distance) . . . +2
- ✧ Destination is famous and easily recognizable even by those who've never been there (Olympus, Tir na Nog, etc.) . . . +0
- ✧ Destination is somewhere the traveler has never been, but he has a very good idea of what it looks like and how to find it, from someone else (including by seeing the path in a mortal's dreamscape) . . . +0
- ✧ Destination is somewhere the traveler has never been, and he has only a vague idea what it looks like . . . -2
- ✧ Destination is a mystery to the traveler; he knows it only by name, or by an obscure reference ("There you will find the Last Dragon, slumbering beneath a mountain that reaches to the sky . . .") . . . -4
- ✧ Some Domains have features (p. 106) that make them easier or harder to find.

the Marches has its hazards; see the Survival (The Marches) skill (p. 65).

MAPPING THE MARCHES

When laying out the Marches for his campaign, the GM may want to think in terms of relationships between Domains, rather than trying to draw a map. Domains shift and move about, fade in and fade out. Some even seem to merge and divide again, the borders between them becoming thin enough to confuse the unwary. While the most powerful and well-established ones may be easy to find, and are generally found next to the same Domains they were neighboring last time . . . sometimes they're not. Niflheim and Valhalla are *usually* in close proximity, such that one can travel from one Domain to the other simply by stepping across the border – but some nights, Niflheim is dangerously near the border to Hell, while Valhalla is nowhere to be found. One night, Olympus and Tir na Nog may be adjacent, while the next, they may be so far apart that it will take an entire night's travel to get from one to the other.

As a general rule, Domains close to the Vale tend to be small and inconsequential; there are too many celestial incursions for an ethereal stronghold to take root within sight of Blandine and Beleth's Towers. The larger, established Domains, particularly those ruled by pagan gods, are found in the Far Marches, where an angel or demon must go far out of his way to reach them.

LUCID DREAMWALKING

Any human may have a lucid dream, though it's difficult without training. The Dreaming skill (p. 65) allows a human to shape his own dreams. This is all that a mortal is likely to do if he manages to make a default Dreaming roll. However, a Dreaming roll (at -2) can also allow a human to perceive the realm that exists beyond his personal dreamscape, and travel the Marches by himself.

Lucid dreamers do *not* leave their dreamscapes behind; a mortal's dreamscape is always a part of him. From the dreamer's perspective, he may seem to "step out of his dream," but what he's actually done is caused his dreamscape to merge invisibly with the ethereal realm around him. Everything he can perceive in the Marches proper is now effectively a part of his dreamscape . . . and vice versa! (Some humans describe it more as collapsing the

DREAMING AND REM SLEEP

Humans don't actually dream from the moment they fall asleep until the moment they wake up; *REM* (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, which occurs during dreams, only makes up a small portion of a person's total time asleep. However, it would be cumbersome to say that Songs and attunements to affect dreams can only be used on a human when he happens to be in REM sleep.

The simplest assumption is that any successful attempt to affect a human's dreamscape will automatically stimulate him into dreaming. Because time flows differently in the Marches, a person might spend eight hours of subjective time in the realm of dreams, even though he only slept for six hours in the corporeal realm, and only spent two of those hours dreaming. It's possible to distort time even further, but this should require Dream-Shaping rolls (p. 93); it's not natural for a human to experience eight *weeks* of subjective time in one night.

If the GM wants to be realistic, he *can* rule that a human's dreamscape is only active when he enters REM sleep on his own. This would require angels of Dreams, demons of Nightmares, and ethereals to be more patient, as they'll need good timing when attempting to influence a specific mortal.

dreamscape into themselves, wearing it like an invisible spacesuit; the potential abilities of the dreamer are still the same.)

This gives humans the unique power to use and maintain personal Dream-Shaping wherever they go in the Marches. If a human creates a dream-object, he may carry it with him, even between Domains, because that object is a part of his *personal* dreamscape. (Alas, this does not include figment retinues, or anything else that leaves the creator's person.) A human trying to alter his *own* dream-self is also immune to any penalties that the Domain he is in might inflict! (See p. 108.)

The Dreaming skill can also be used to grant the *dreamer* (not intruders in his dream) a bonus to his skill rolls, just like the Ethereal Song of Dreams, but at no Essence cost: on a successful roll, the dreamer gets a bonus to all skill rolls (*not* including further uses of the Dreaming skill, or Songs) equal to the check digit, for a number of minutes equal to the check digit plus his Ethereal Forces. Failure is treated like any other failed Dream-Shaping roll (p. 93), except that a failed check digit of 6 automatically moves the dreamer to Beleth's side of the Marches as well. This power to enhance oneself at will makes lucid dreamers particularly potent, which is why trained Dream Soldiers are a highly-desirable resource for Superiors and pagan gods alike.

Lucid dreaming can also be dangerous, though. Just as the dreamer makes the Marches part of his dream, his dream becomes a part of the Marches! That means that anyone who sees him, including ethereals, celestials, and other lucid dreamers, may use Dream-Shaping against him – they do not have to “enter” his dreamscape first (see p. 88). And any Dream-Shaping bonuses that a spirit gets for being in its native Domain are fully applicable. Lucid dreamers are also fully exposed to celestial attacks (p. 98).

A lucid dreamer can “return” to his dreamscape (causing it to become a protective, self-enclosing bubble once more, shielding him from the rest of the Marches), by making another Dreaming roll. However, *he cannot do this within an ethereal Domain!* The human must escape the Domain he’s in before he can return to his dream-bubble. (Of course, he can always attempt to wake up instead – see p. 88.) Human dreamscapes “left behind” outside the Vale of Dreams when the dreamer awakens may reappear in the Far Marches, close to where they were the night before, or they may manifest elsewhere in the Marches . . . or the dreamscape may pop up right back in Blandine or Beleth’s Domains. This is up to the GM, and largely determined by the dreamer’s emotions and thoughts when he goes to sleep. Note that a check digit of 6 on a Dream-Shaping roll (p. 93) can move a dreamscape, and the dreamer himself may attempt to determine where his dreamscape will appear when he first starts dreaming.

ETHEREAL PHYSICS

The ethereal plane does not operate according to corporeal physics. Everything is a dream; appearances are mere guises, and reality is only what the most potent intellect says it is. Some say everything is an illusion on the ethereal plane, and nothing is real; others say there can be no illusions in a place where *everything* is real.

The mutability of the ethereal plane can be a blessing; it can also make the Marches a very dangerous place.

APPEARANCE

There’s no such thing as an “ethereal form.” Occupants of the Marches are mental constructs; “icons” marking the point where their intellect is focused, relative to other ethereal travelers.

This adequately explains how humans and celestials can travel the Marches while leaving their bodies behind on the corporeal plane, and even celestials who enter the Marches directly from Heaven or Hell are said to be

projecting their consciousnesses, when their real selves are centered on their Hearts. However, ethereal spirits are unsatisfied with this axiom; if there is no true ethereal form, then what are they? Celestials say they are merely dreams animated by Essence from the corporeal and celestial realms. Ethereal philosophers prefer to think that their true selves are part of the Marches, their “Hearts” made up of the interwoven strands of the ethereal realm.

Whatever the case may be, appearances in the Marches are created by thought, and can change as easily as thoughts do. Likewise, one’s environment and “possessions” are often but a matter of perspective, and as malleable as any ethereal perspective.

Entities

Entities – namely, independent living beings, including figments (p. 74) – all have a “natural” appearance in the Marches. This is the form they always take when first manifesting on the ethereal plane, and it’s how they appear to others unless they use personal Dream-Shaping (p. 93) to alter it.

An ethereal spirit’s natural appearance is that of its Image (p. 125). A celestial’s natural appearance is *either* its celestial form, or the appearance of the last vessel it was wearing (depending on whether the celestial entered the Marches from the celestial plane or Earth). A human’s natural appearance, of course, is his corporeal body.

Because all appearances in the Marches are ethereal illusions, a Seraph can’t necessarily divine whether or not an ethereal entity is presenting its natural appearance. However, a deliberate attempt to masquerade as something one is not *is* a form of lying, and Seraphim of Destiny, as always, see through concealing “illusions” with a touch.

Objects

Anyone can conjure an ethereal object with a Dreaming roll (p. 65). *Personal* Dream-Shaping will create an object that only remains with the person who created it, while an *environmental* Dream-Shaping can create an item that can be given to someone else, and taken elsewhere in the Domain. In no case will a mere Dream-Shaped object persist if the shaper leaves that Domain. Nor does a Dream-Shaped sword or gun necessarily function as an ethereal weapon (see p. 98).

Actual artifacts have a reality that surpasses their ethereal image. Like entities (above), they have a natural appearance; artifacts Enchanted on the corporeal or celestial plane have an ethereal appearance identical to their true form. Artifacts enchanted on the ethereal plane

have a natural appearance given to them when they were created. The owner of an artifact can alter its appearance (but not its function) with a Dreaming roll. Anyone else may alter the appearance of an artifact they find with an environmental Dream-Shaping.

Places

Places – primarily Domains (including dreamscapes), but also the areas between Domains in the Near and Far Marches – take on a natural appearance when they are created. Sometimes they are self-sustaining; sometimes the ruler of a Domain defines its appearance (and may change it as well). Anyone else may attempt to change a Domain's appearance, but this is an environmental change which can be contested by anyone else within the Domain, especially its ruler (p. 103) . . . and even if successful, such alterations usually vanish when the shaper leaves the Domain.

DREAM-SHAPING

The ethereal realm is the stuff of dreams – not just *human* dreams, though humans have the greatest effect on it. Anyone can influence their environment on the ethereal plane, whether it's to create a small dream-object, or to shape the events of a human's dream, or even alter the fundamental properties of a Domain.

The Dreaming skill, used for Dream-Shaping, is described on p. 65. The more dramatic the change, the higher the penalty to make it! Note that *personal* changes are different from *environmental* changes; the latter are greatly affected by the environment in which they are attempted (see below). An unsuccessful roll means the shaper may not attempt any more changes for minutes equal to the check digit; a failed check digit of 6 means the Dream-Shaper may not attempt any more Dream-Shaping rolls within his current environment for a full hour. (If this happens to a human, he is unable to make *any* Dreaming rolls for an hour, since he is always within his dreamscape – see p. 105.) The check digit of a successful roll determines how close to the Dream-Shaper's intent the change was; a Dream-Shaped sword would be perfectly serviceable with a check digit 1, while a check digit 6 makes it exactly the sword that the creator intended, matching that ideal in every way. (The check digit is also important in contests; e.g., whether a "forged" guard's uniform will be detected as wrongly imagined.) Any successful Dream-Shaping will last either until the dream ends, or until something else alters it, whether it's another Dream-Shaper, or the environment itself. (This allows incremental changes in the environment – it takes longer, but the penalties are less severe.)



DREAM-SHAPING PENALTIES

Note that a human is always the “Domain Ruler” of his dreamscape; divide penalties by half (round up) for the human’s environmental changes there. (It’s much easier to take control of your own dreamscape than to modify someone else’s.)

0 . . . Personal: Make a single minor alteration in your appearance (become a little shorter, a little taller, change your clothes or skin color, etc.).

Environmental: Transfer *and accept* a minor, personal Dream-Shaped item to/from someone else which will not vanish if the creator leaves the Domain (p. 92); both must make their roll (this includes things such as turning your gloves into meaty bones, to give to a Hunger spirit).

-1 . . . Personal: Make any changes in yourself you like, while still remaining recognizably “you” (you can become taller, prettier, and blonder, wearing any clothes you like, but a black man can’t turn into a white woman, for example). If you possess multiple vessels and want to “swap” appearances between them, or change to or from the appearance of your celestial form, a Dreaming roll with this penalty allows it. **Environmental:** Make a minor change in the immediate environment: light to dark, hot to cold, cloudy to sunny, etc. Changes that are impossible (or highly unlikely) in that environment (such as turning it sunny underground) are not “minor”!

-2 . . . Personal: Alter your appearance into any roughly humanoid form you desire (or anything else similar to your natural form, if you are not humanoid; a Seraph could become anything humanoid or serpentlike, and ethereals treat their Image (p. 125) as their natural form). You may also *create* small inanimate objects; this allows you to conjure an ethereal sword or gun, for example (see p. 98). **Environmental:** Make several minor changes in the environment (for example, turn a cold, dark night into a warm, sunny day, or add chirping birds to a previously empty forest), or transform a single small object (about 5 lbs. in weight, or a yard in size) into anything else of similar size: a branch into a gun, a staff into a snake, a rock into a pile of dust, etc. (This will not affect other creatures, even figments.)

-3 . . . Personal: Take on the appearance of any living thing you can imagine. (Becoming a truly huge creature, however, is effectively an *environmen-*

tal change.) **Environmental:** You may create animated entities, which become *figments* (p. 74). At this level and above, you can also alter figments.

-5 . . . Personal: Assume any form you can imagine (again, within limits – trying to become a planet would be an environmental change requiring at least a check digit of 6!). You may also create any inanimate object that you can carry with you (including vehicles). **Environmental:** Transform any larger object (within reason – trees or elephants, but not mountains or aircraft carriers, which are large enough to be environments in themselves) into anything else. You can turn an elephant into a mouse or tree or car, or vice versa. You may alter the appearance of other beings at this level; they may resist with a Contest of Dreaming rolls (and even if you win, they can transform themselves back on the following round).

-7 . . . Personal: Relocate yourself anywhere within the current environment (lucid dreamers can instantly move themselves back to the Vale of Dreams, or to any ethereal Domain they *know*!). **Environmental:** Radically alter the environment, such as making it snow on a summer’s day, or turning a dark and spooky forest full of gnarled, evil-looking trees into a bright, sunny glade. You can also alter subjective time within the environment by a ratio of up to 2:1, relative to the corporeal realm and the rest of the Marches; this will affect everyone in the environment.

-10 . . . Personal: Your “form” may affect anyone touching it! This can do damage (up to the check digit, per round, for check digit rounds), heal (ditto), spread an appearance effect such as “turning blue” or “growing moldy,” or whatever else seems reasonable. The affected person may negate the effect with a round of concentration and a personal Dream-Shaping roll. **Environmental:** Transform the environment to anything you want; a human dreamscape effectively becomes a whole new dream. You may instantly transport a dreamer to Beleth’s or Blandine’s Marches, or to any ethereal Domain you know. Alternatively, subjective time may be accelerated by a factor equal to the shaper’s Ethereal Forces (i.e., with 5 Ethereal Forces you could make time pass 5 times more slowly, or 5 times faster, relative to the Symphony outside this environment).

Environmental Dream-Shaping can be directly opposed by anyone else in the same environment; the winner of a Contest determines what changes occur (or don't). If multiple Dream-Shapers are trying to change the same thing (including when one shaper is opposed by multiple adversaries), the highest check digit wins; on a tie, the "defender" is whomever is trying to preserve the status quo.

There are many factors that can modify a Dream-Shaping roll.

Affinities

Ethereal spirits may add any bonuses granted by their affinities (p. 50). A *slight* affinity gives a +1 bonus to Dream-Shaping rolls, a *moderate* affinity grants a +2 bonus, a *strong* affinity grants a +4 bonus, and a *primal* affinity grants a bonus equal to the spirit's Ethereal Forces, and raises the target number to 10 if it is below that. (Penalties are applied *after* determining the basic skill level.) Affinities only apply when they are applicable, but they *are* cumulative! Thus, a spirit with a primal affinity for Lightning and a moderate affinity for Weather, attempting to create a lightning storm in a dream, would get a bonus equal to its Ethereal Forces +2, with a minimum target number of 10, before the penalties (p. 94) for such an environmental change are applied.

Songs

The Ethereal and Celestial Songs of Dreams affect dreamers as described in *In Nomine* (p. 79); the check digit of the Celestial version is added to the performer's next Dreaming roll. Note that anyone can target a lucid dreamer who is "outside" his dreamscape (p. 105) with either Song, but the Songs can *only* affect the dreamer, not the environment or other beings around him.

Environment

For Dream-Shaping purposes, there are four different "environments" in the Marches: the Vale of Dreams,

ethereal Domains, human dreamscapes, and everywhere else.

Dream-Shaping in the Vale

In the Vale of Dreams, anyone can alter their own appearance or the appearance of artifacts they are carrying. However, Beleth and Blandine are the masters of this Domain, and no lesser beings can alter it without directly affecting the Words of Dreams or Nightmares (which would take far more than mere Dream-Shaping). Thus, environmental changes are not possible here.

Dream-Shaping in an Ethereal Domain

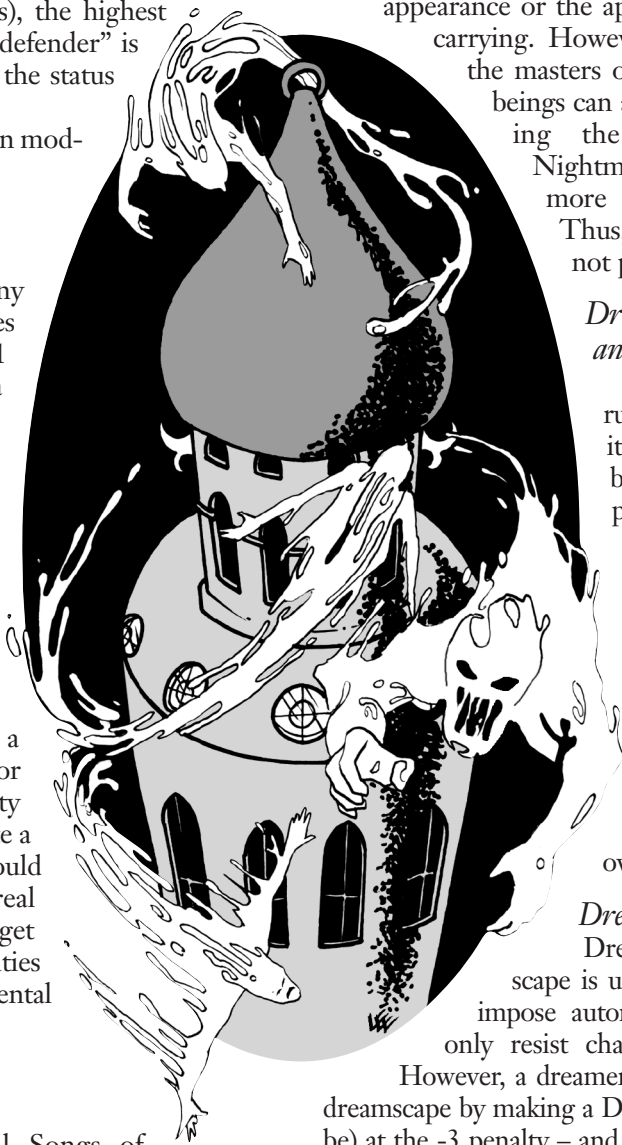
Ethereal Domains are usually ruled by a powerful spirit or spirits. Personal changes are possible, but may be resisted by the properties of the Domain (p. 106). Environmental changes are resisted not only by any Domain properties, but by those who control the Domain; the ruler(s), if they are present in the Domain, will immediately know that someone is trying to alter it, and may negate the change with a Dreaming roll of their own (this is *not* a Contest).

Dream-Shaping in Dreamscapes

Dream-Shaping within a dreamscape is usually easy, since humans can't impose automatic penalties, and they can only resist changes by winning a Contest.

However, a dreamer can force intruders out of his dreamscape by making a Dreaming roll (at default, if need be) at the -3 penalty – and even an Mundane may unconsciously spend Essence. Moreover, a lucid dreamer who is within his dreamscape can use his Dreaming skill to reduce the skill rolls of intruders, just as he can use it to enhance his own skill rolls (p. 91). Subjects may resist normally.

Lucid dreamers wandering the Marches (p. 102) are treated as being within their own dreamscapes when making personal changes (which means they are immune to Domain penalties), but they are within their surrounding environment when attempting to make environmental changes.



Dream-Shaping in the Marches Proper

In the Border and Far Marches, in the empty spaces between Domains, no restrictions apply. Anyone may shape their local environment in any way they like, but all changes will fade when the Dream-Shaper leaves. Personal alterations will vanish and must be re-shaped upon entering a Domain.

ETHEREAL DISTURBANCES

It is possible to disturb the Symphony in the Marches. Songs and conscious Essence expenditures make a disturbance no matter who is responsible. Ethereal combat (p. 97) does *not* create a disturbance – it's not “real,” as far as the Symphony is concerned. Entering and leaving the ethereal plane, by whatever method, also does not create a disturbance. (This includes Superior manifestations, which is one reason why the Marches are popular for clandestine meetings between Archangels and Demon Princes.)

Truly destructive actions – namely, destroying Forces in celestial combat – do create a disturbance. In the Marches, *every* Force destroyed by a celestial will create a note of disturbance (unlike on Earth, where only destroyed *Corporeal* Forces register loudly enough to be perceived – *In Nomine*, p. 55). Soul-killing a human (but not an ethereal or a celestial) will generate an additional 10 notes of disturbance.

The above *only* applies when an ethereal or a celestial harms a human, or a celestial harms an ethereal,

however! Humans can damage anyone, and ethereals can damage celestials and one another, without making any disturbance.

When an ethereal or a celestial alters a human's dreamscape (p. 105), this also creates a single note of disturbance.

Perceiving Disturbances

There is no linear distance in the Marches. Disturbances become weaker as they cross Domain boundaries, but any disturbance will echo throughout a Domain, regardless of its subjective size, and a large enough disturbance can theoretically be heard throughout the Marches (just as a large enough disturbance on Earth could be heard around the world).

For each Domain “border” between the source of the disturbance and the listener, there is a -5 penalty to the Perception roll to sense it. The theoretical line between Beleth's and Blandine's territories in the Marches counts as a border, as does the ill-defined one between the Border Marches and the Far Marches (p. 102).

Example: A demon of Nightmares, patrolling her mistress' Marches, pursues an ethereal spirit into a human's dreamscape, and there destroys the spirit in celestial combat. This disturbance (equal to the spirit's total Forces) is perceptible at no penalty to anyone else within that dreamscape (including the dreamer, if he's Symphonically aware). Everyone else in Beleth's Domain will be able to hear it at a -5 penalty; those in other dreamscapes within Beleth's Marches could perceive it with a -10 penalty, since it must penetrate into the second



dreamscape. Crossing the border into Blandine's territory, those on her side of the Vale can also hear the disturbance at -10, while anyone in a dreamscape in Blandine's Marches can hear the disturbance at -15. Anyone in the Border Marches can hear the disturbance at -10 (it crosses two borders: that of the dreamscape, and that of Beleth's Marches), and -15 in the Far Marches. Add another -5 to Domains within the Border or Far Marches, respectively.

Obviously, few disturbances will carry as far as suggested in the above example, but echoes (*In Nomine*, p. 55) do carry in the Marches, and those who hear them can follow them between Domains, for as long as they last. As on the corporeal plane, ethereal disturbances are cumulative, so a brawl between gods out in Asgard or Olympus may well generate noise that angels and demons can hear in the Vale of Dreams.

Disturbances do not normally cross between realms. Those within Blandine's and Beleth's Towers *can* hear disturbances in the Vale (at a -5 penalty) because their owners have made it so, but the celestial ends of the Towers are part of the celestial plane; disturbances there are not perceptible in the Marches. The only other exception is when a human is soul-killed in the Marches; this will create a disturbance centering both in the Domain where it happened, and on the human's body back on Earth.

Tracking Disturbances

Symphonic disturbance provides an excellent means of tracking someone. Anyone who has heard the echoes of a disturbance may travel toward it, adding the level of the disturbance *at the point where the tracker perceived it* to his ethereal navigation roll (p. 96). Even if the echoes fade before the tracker reaches his destination, the bonus still applies, as they will help him find a more direct route.

Example: *A lucid dreamer has gotten lost in Tir na Nog, out in the Far Marches. A malevolent faerie attacks him with a Song that generates 8 notes of disturbance. Fortunately for the mortal, there is a Malakite of Dreams hunting the Far Marches this night. At a -5 penalty, the Malakite is able to hear the disturbance, and chooses to follow it. She'll need to make an ethereal navigation roll to determine how long it will take to arrive in Tir na Nog, but she'll get to add (8 - 5 = +3) to her roll.*

COMBAT

Corporeal combat is impossible on the ethereal plane. Spirits can fight each other ethereally, and occasionally duel to the death in celestial combat, but Strength,

OPTIONAL RULES

*The first two optional rules first appeared in the **Game Master's Guide**, p. 120.*

Mind Hits: GMs may prefer to use a different formula to calculate Mind Hits, in an ethereals campaign. Instead of Ethereal Forces \times Intelligence, use Total Forces + Ethereal Forces + Intelligence.

Mental Toughness: This costs 4 points per level, up to two levels, and adds to Mind hits, which become (Ethereal Forces + Mental Toughness) \times Intelligence. If using the optional rule above, add 5 hits per level of Mental Toughness.

Mind Hits and Discord: When a character is reduced to 0 Mind hits, gaining the ethereal Discord immediately "heals" them to full Mind hits again. (This keeps characters from remaining below half their total Mind Hits, and thus immune to further Discord.)

Agility and Corporeal Forces never play a part in dream-combat.

Celestial attunements that do corporeal damage can inflict *either* ethereal or celestial damage in the Marches (user's choice). Dominic's *Heavenly Judgment* and Gabriel's *Smite* attunements, for example, can destroy either mind or soul, as can the Calabite resonance. Songs that normally do corporeal damage, on the other hand, have no effect in the Marches unless their description specifies otherwise. (Songs with non-damaging effects, such as the Song of Thunder, function normally. Likewise, while nominally Corporeal, Numinous Corpus Songs will work in any realm.) Unless specified otherwise in their descriptions (such as Numinous Corpus), none of these attacks are considered normal ethereal combat, and thus cannot be Dodged.

ETHEREAL COMBAT

While ethereal spirits and dreamers may *appear* to wrestle, hack at each other with swords, or exchange fire with guns or rocket launchers, all combat is ethereal in nature, and all damage is inflicted in the form of Mind hits. Ethereal spirits are naturally able to make ethereal attacks. Humans and celestials can do so *if* they know any of the Songs of Dreams, or possess the Dreamwalking attunement. (Anyone with an ethereal weapon may also use it to attack – see box, p. 98.) Lucid dreamers can also attack ethereally. (*Default* use of the Dreaming skill only counts within the human's dreamscape.)

ETHEREAL WEAPONS

Anyone capable of Dream-Shaping (p. 93) can create a weapon for himself. Normally, the only effect this has (aside from psychological) is that you can add an appropriate skill to your attack roll. Thus, an angel who uses Dream-Shaping to give himself a sword won't do any extra damage, but he *can* add his Large Weapon (Sword) skill to his attack. Note that dream-weapons may also be forced to conform to local Domain rules (p. 106).

Ethereal artifacts can also be used as ethereal weapons, with both benefits and penalties. On the plus side, the weapon is available without having to make a roll, and the talisman adds its skill normally. Further, it cannot be "stolen" if one is in the Marches via dreaming if the physical portion of it is in the owner's keeping. On the minus side, the *maximum* check digit of a successful hit is equal to the level of the talisman. For example, a talisman/3 in the form of a sword will inflict 3 Mind hits, or the check digit, whichever is lower, on a successful attack. (Bonuses due to an effective skill over 12 still add to this.) This special property is *only* true of actual talismans. While celestial artifacts can also be brought to the Marches, they grant no special bonuses unless they have ethereal properties as well.

Ethereal Fighting

Fighting skill isn't normally applicable to ethereal combat, but with the GM's permission, an "unarmed" attack in the Marches that fits the style of the attacker's fighting skill (which may require shaping one's appearance appropriately) may be treated as an ethereal "weapon," allowing the attacker to add his Fighting skill to the attack roll.

For the most part, ethereal combat follows the rules in *In Nomine*, summarized in the box on p. 68. Note that affinity powers are supernatural, like Songs, resonances, and attunements, while Precision substitutes for Agility. Contests of Dreaming may be used to create (or destroy) weapons, change the environment, etc.

An ethereal attack is rolled against the attacker's Intelligence + Ethereal Forces. Damage in Mind hits is equal to the check digit. Someone using an ethereal weapon (see box) adds the appropriate weapon skill to his target number (which can result in a *lower* target number, if the attacker doesn't actually possess the appropriate skill . . .). Ethereal attacks can be Dodged,

even by individuals who can't make ethereal attacks themselves; use normal Dodge rules (*In Nomine*, p. 66), but base the Dodge roll on Precision instead of Agility.

There is no "range" per se in ethereal combat; if you can perceive someone in the Marches, you can attack him, and vice versa. You do have to follow the rules of the Domain you're in, however, and *most* Domains default to "rules of engagement" that approximate those of the corporeal plane (typically substituting Precision for Agility, and Intelligence for Strength). Thus, if you see someone at a distance, you can't hit him with an ethereal sword; you must use a ranged weapon. It only takes a moment for an experienced ethereal combatant to shape a dream-gun, of course, but an actual ethereal weapon is limited by its form; to attack someone with a sword talisman, you need to get within subjective "melee range."

Some Domains have vastly different rules – in some, a sword *can* strike someone who appears to be a mile away, while in others, ranged weapons just don't work . . . and some strange Domains might turn all swords into sticks, or cause guns to shoot only harmless gumdrops. Crafty ethereals take advantage of peculiar local rules when fighting opponents who may be ignorant of them . . .

Losing Ethereal Combat

Every sentient being has *Mind hits* equal to their Intelligence × Ethereal Forces (see *In Nomine*, p. 63). Anyone who is reduced to 0 Mind hits in the Marches immediately loses consciousness. Ethereals are dispersed, and will reform at their anchors (p. 18). Humans and sleeping celestials are sent back to their bodies, while celestials who entered the Marches from the celestial plane will be sent unconscious back to their Hearts. They will wake up after seven hours minus their Ethereal Forces (or upon being healed to positive Mind hits), whereupon they will have acquired one level of Ethereal Discord. Someone who's suffered Discord in ethereal combat and returns to the Marches before he's completely recovered won't suffer more Discord unless his Mind hits have healed above half his full amount, though he'll still suffer the other effects of being reduced to 0 Mind hits again.

CELESTIAL COMBAT

While there are no celestial forms in the Marches, the ethereal plane is still a place where one's soul is bared . . . and thus can be attacked. Celestial combat is much deadlier than ethereal combat; combatants risk losing Forces, or their very existence. Spirits rarely engage in celestial combat unless they're very sure of victory.



They consider angels and demons to be bullying marauders because celestials usually outmatch ethereals considerably in Celestial Forces, and thus are often quick to initiate celestial combat if they're being outmaneuvered ethereally.

Although humans can also be attacked celestially, they do have one protection: a human who is still ensconced within his dreamscape can only be attacked celestially if *he* initiates celestial combat, and few dreamers know how. A lucid dreamer who has "left" his dreamscape (p. 105) is exposing himself to the greater Marches, and no longer has this protection, and still may not know how to initiate combat (but may defend himself if attacked). Few ethereals will take on even a mortal in celestial combat; they gain nothing by destroying a human's soul, and have too much to lose. Demons, however, have been known to lure Dream Soldiers to their deaths out in the Far Marches, and woe to the sorcerer or Soldier of Hell caught wandering the Marches by one of Laurence's March Guardians (p. 120).

As with ethereal combat, celestial combat in the Marches is rangeless; barring Domain conventions, if you can see your foe, you can attack him, and vice versa. Ethereal weapons and relics (p. 98) have no effect here in celestial combat, unless they possess specific properties for that purpose (such as Fiery Swords – *Liber Reliquarum*, p. 60). Celestial combat in the Marches is otherwise conducted as described in *In Nomine* (p. 64).

*(To salvage a Game Master's sanity, he may always rule that the Vale has the Domain convention that celestial combatants must be within what passes for a few yards of each other – they must be able to see each other **clearly**.)*

Losing Celestial Combat in the Marches

Ethereals and celestials who lose all their Corporeal Forces in the Marches will not be immediately affected, but they cannot take corporeal form again until they regain at least 1 Corporeal Force. If they left a vessel back on Earth, that vessel will die (unless it is in a Body Bag), as will the body of any human stripped of his Corporeal Forces. (Some mortals who meet this fate become *dreamshades*, p. 122). Loss of Ethereal Forces takes effect as described in *In Nomine* (p. 68). (A human waking up after losing all his Ethereal Forces will behave like a victim of severe brain damage, having lost all his memories and intellect.) Loss of Celestial Forces destroys the soul; in a human's case, this will create a disturbance as if he had died, though his body may remain alive back on Earth . . . in a vegetative state from which it will never recover. Celestials are immediately expelled from the ethereal plane and wake up back on Earth as Remnants . . . or are destroyed completely if they have no vessels to return to. Ethereals who lose all their Celestial Forces become figments (p. 74), unless they can make it to Earth or left a vessel "sleeping" there – then they become Remnants.



DOMAINS



100
DOMAINS



DANCING AROUND THE MOUNTAIN

At the center of the storm, the lost ones chant their mantra, holding back the winds with the force of their belief. "There is no chance," they say. "Not here. Our physics does not require it."

One of them is seized by doubt. He thinks of the Venial Moieties, whose actions and choices have always perplexed him. His certainty that life has an order to it wavers. We plunge at him and carry him away.

"This is a systematic world," they say. "Everything has a meaning. Everything is to a purpose. In such fashion does the Marches construct the stories of our lives."

Two of them falter, remembering the chaotic dreams that gave them birth. I am the first to reach the male, and take some pleasure in deconstructing him into the elements of his being.

"Choice and necessity determine our paths. There is no chance."

Most of those I get to kill are the new ones. They're smart enough to start the chant when they see what it does for the others, but they don't integrate it into their being. They can't hold me off with the force of their belief. The old ones can; there's one mantis-like creature in the middle who has maintained the chant for 700 years.

If this weren't our land, they'd be right. I can feel the nice orderly structure of their lives when I tear them open. I don't know how much randomness there is elsewhere in the Marches, but I suspect it isn't much.

But we are a dream of chance, and we are built into this Domain. There is no order to whom we snatch and carry to this mountaintop. There is no sense or structure to it. There is only the ineluctable sentence we pass upon those whom our whimsy picks out. They will come here, will they or nill they, and we will scream about them in the storm.

When their faith in order and reason fails, when they lose their inherent belief that pure chance cannot end their life, they die.

Mist and emptiness fill the Marches. Most of the landscape appears featureless to the untrained eye – gray, flat, cloudy sand stretching in all directions, covered in gray, roiling, cloudy dream-fog. A spirit can walk for hours without encountering anything of substance and days without encountering more than scattered nooks of landscape and long-abandoned Domains. The darker regions of the Far Marches have bits and pieces of unpleasant turf scattered through them – houses built of bones, segments of polluted river, cliffs over stormy seas. They have monsters roaming them, not to mention the scattered dreamscapes of humans in the throes of nightmare. Yet most of the Marches remains empty. For every idea that a human imagines, there are millions of ideas that no human has *ever* imagined. In like manner, for every *place* in the world of mind, great empty stretches of nowhere sprawl, occupied by nothing but roving ethereals and the potential for dream. Even the spirits, alert to subtle differences in the soil, mist, and dreamscape

perambulations, need specialized expertise to find their way around outside their regular haunts.

Spirits call the breaks in the emptiness *Domains*. Some are huge. At least one range of mountains hides in the far mists. Hundreds of spirits live on the hydra-tree, a ferocious wooden creature larger than a human city. Other Domains, the "micro-Domains," can usually fit in a being's fist, and hold about as much *on the inside* as a house. Domains move through the Marches like icebergs, drifting in a stately manner through the mist; the larger the Domain, the slower its motion.

Some Domains occur naturally. Spirits call these "oases," and do not understand the process that forms them. Greater gods and Superiors create other Domains through sheer force of will. Lesser spirits must cobble together a collection of micro-Domains if they wish to create a shared world. Humans have the easiest time of it. They transform their dreamscapes into inhabitable, manipulable Domains whenever they dream.

THE VALE OF DREAMS

In all the ethereal realm, no region can rival the Vale of Dreams, the pearl at the Marches' heart. No other land attracts so many dreamscapes and so much dreamer-Essence. The vital quality of beautiful dreams manifests more purely in Archangel Blandine's region of the Vale than it does anywhere else. The stuff of nightmare infests nowhere else so thoroughly as it does the lands of Demon Princess Beleth. The Vale of Dreams is the pride of the spirits' land, and celestials have subjugated and conquered it, dividing it between Heaven and Hell as casually as Europe split up the New World.

BLANDINE'S MARCHES

At the center of the beauteous Vale stands Blandine's Tower, a Divine Tether. Rumor has it that spirits once visited this Tower and spoke to its Lady. In the modern Marches, the Tower represents death. The Tower's guards might hear out a messenger, but they turn visitors away and meet intruders with the points of their swords. The ancient spirits mourn this as a pity – the Tower reportedly contains the greatest library in all the lands of dream.

Approximately half the Vale is Blandine's Domain – a stretch of territory greater than any pagan god commands. However, even Archangels have limits. Though her will influences every part of her Domain, it does not completely *define* it. Most of Blandine's realm remains mist and potential, slightly flavored with inspiration and hope. There are even a few tiny spirit-crafted Domains hidden in its expanse.

GABRIEL'S FORTRESS

The celestial Cathedral of Archangel Gabriel also manifests in the Marches. It is a huge volcano, dimly visible from the Vale. Usually it is directly opposite Beleth's Tower, with Blandine's Tower between them. Sometimes it seems to move, though; in particular, sometimes it almost seems to loom over Beleth's Domain, as if to say "Someday I shall come down and *burn you out!*"

Walking to the foot of Gabriel's mountain is usually not hard. A narrow path runs up to the caldera at the top; this is a Tether between the ethereal and celestial realms. Sometimes the path is hard to find . . . it *definitely* moves . . . but it is always there. Those who can sense the strength of a Tether say there are no greater ones; conceivably, almost any number could use it. There is always talk of an invasion of Heaven by this route, which is one reason Gabriel built her Cathedral as a fortress. Other prophecies, less clear, speak of a day when myriads of supplicants or refugees will take this route from the Marches into Heaven, and the Archangel's forces will cover their retreat . . .

BELETH'S MARCHES

Beleth's Tower stands tall in the region of nightmare, an Infernal Tether leading into Hades. Spirits still visit this Tower on rare occasions, usually with great reluctance, and report that it lives up to Beleth's demonic

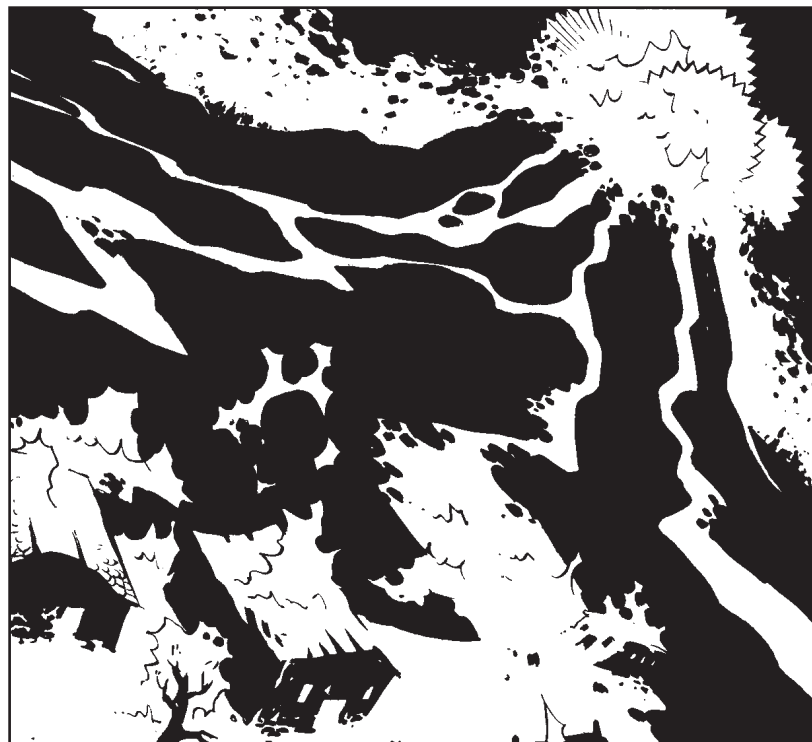
nature – a dark maze, full of horrors, where visitors had best not leave the path. Features include the amphitheater where dreamers are publicly tortured, a library of nightmare that almost matches Blandine's in its quality, and the top of the Tower, where one can find the Demon Princess herself.

Approximately half the Vale belongs to Beleth. Like her angelic counterpart, Beleth cannot dictate the form of such a vast Domain. Some regions of Beleth's Marches have cartography of her design, horrid sub-Domains capturing one brand of terror. Others remain a blank land of mists, tinted ever-so-slightly with the color of fear.

THE BORDER MARCHES

The Border Marches surround the Vale of Dreams, patrolled by a force of Laurence's Malakim. These warrior angels, the Guardians, protect the Vale and human dreams from spirits who would enter them. For Malakim, they appear to be reasonable souls – they prefer driving spirits back to destroying them. This does not stop spirits from resenting them bitterly.

The Guardians defend Blandine's Marches vigorously. They also *try* to keep spirits from entering Beleth's Domain, but politics makes this difficult. They do not have the authority to start a war with Beleth herself.



THE FAR MARCHES

Beyond angelic and demonic influence lie the Far Marches, a land built from the depths of the human unconscious. Like the Vale of Dreams, the Far Marches is a barren landscape with pockets of substance – but so *many* pockets! Endless thousands of micro-Domains, hundreds of large oases, and more than a few spirit-made Domains litter the Far Marches' endless expanse. The farther one travels from the sane Vale of Dreams, the less the Far Marches resembles the corporeal realm. Beyond the Domains the angels know are regions dominated by allegory and myth, where the superstitious and ritualistic worldviews of premodern humanity accurately describe reality. Beyond *those* regions lie the Utgard stones, and beyond that either chaos or nothingness – or so travelers say.

DOMAINS

*"Peace brooded o'er the bushed domain;
Apollo, Pallas, Jove and Mars
Held undisturbed their ancient reign
In the solemn midnight,
Centuries ago."
— Alfred Domett*

Greater gods create some Far Marches Domains. Others occur naturally. Lesser spirits create a tiny fraction of these Domains, laboriously constructing them from stolen dreams.

Domains do not always run on the same natural law as the rest of the Marches. The "physical" reality of the Domain, set at the time of its creation, can operate in whatever manner its creator desires. Glaciers can flow uphill; inanimate objects can weep in the presence of lies; a cry of "Uji!" can cause a river's course to bend. Spiritual reality is immutable, however. Spirits cannot design Domains that alter the mechanics of celestial combat, the nature of Songs, or the fundamental selves of the creatures within the Domain. (A few Domains *do* change these things, but this is a spiritual feature of the Domain, and thus beyond an ethereal's direct power.)

The natural law of a Domain cannot discriminate between one individual and another. Thus, a god can create a Domain where whomever sits upon its throne controls the weather, but cannot create a Domain where *that god* controls the weather. (Unless it has the Weather affinity, of course.) Knowing that someone will always find a way to sit on a god's throne, or read the Sacred Book, or wield the god's sword, or answer the Riddle of the Beast that Crouches Under the Stone, most gods avoid building their power base into physical law. Instead, they design Domains that play subtly to their strengths.

A created Domain has a "master" or "ruler." A god who creates a Domain is automatically its master. If a group of spirits create a Domain, the most powerful spirit becomes its master. When the master of a Domain formally grants a spirit residency in its Domain, the spirit gains a permanent anchor (p. 18) within the Domain. If the master also assigns the spirit a position in the Domain, such as "Seneschal" or "craftsman," it gives that spirit a bonus when performing its duties. (See *Assertion*, p. 132). The Domain's master itself receives this bonus on *all* activities within its Domain. It can delegate portions of this authority, allowing its warleader to appoint officers, those officers to recruit soldiers, and so forth.

If a Domain's master is destroyed or enters Trauma, the most powerful spirit in the Domain at the time becomes its master. A polite usurper defeats the old master in ethereal combat, leaving it alive. More ruthless sorts strip away

FIGMENTS IN DOMAINS

Domains, like dreamscapes, can have figment inhabitants. Like dreamscape figments (p. 74), they have 1 Ethereal Force. If something destroys the Domain, some of its figments might survive and become independent entities. Otherwise, they never leave the Domain. Dream-shaping can transform or annihilate figments associated with a Domain. Many created Domains have a small army of figments on hand to serve as front-line troops in the event of an assault on the Domain. When ethereals *launch* such attacks, they usually bring a corps of spirits whose sole duty is to Dream-shape figment warriors into allies or piles of dust.

their rival's soul. If a spirit assumes the godhead of the Domain's master (see p. 103), it becomes the Domain's master in turn.

Domains have other properties that make them valuable resources in the spirit world. They can become the "upper" locus of an ethereal Tether, giving spirits easy access to the corporeal world. Ethereal craftsmen can build vehicles capable of traveling the Marches out of the substance of a Domain. Similarly, they can make high-quality clothing, weaponry, and other material goods.

Spirits can use Dreaming skill (p. 65) to sculpt a small region of most Domains. This lets them, for example, create a home and a figmentary watchdog for it. Generally, they can only make changes thematically suited to the Domain. The GM might allow a resident of Olympus to build a small ice mansion on its slopes, but a peppermint-candy bulldozer is right out. The more powerful the spirit, the larger the region it can affect. Thus, Tyr can Dream-sculpt vast sweeps of Asgard with a thought. A Valkyrie can change no more than a few square yards of the Domain at a time. The Domain's master has the most influence of all. Not only can it shape the Domain, it can veto any other spirit's changes, if it so chooses, with a successful Dreaming roll.

Most Domains are defensible. This is possibly the most valuable property of all. Few gods construct an impregnable iron dome around their Domain, but neither do gods create unvalled towns with streets broad enough for an army. Spirits in mountain fastnesses or cloud castles have a better guarantee of surviving from one midnight to the next than spirits at large in the Marches. Spirits in Domains where the land itself rises against murderers have the best guarantee of all!

RAW RESOURCES

In the Marches, the only permanent items are artifacts. This can pose a significant problem for the GM. On the one hand, many ways of flavoring the Marches – from illuminated manuscripts recording the thoughts of spirit philosophers to blunt-edged swords with riddles on their blade – take material form. On the other, artifacts in *In Nomine* are rare and mighty creations, requiring a significant investment on the part of their makers.

Game Masters who want to capture the ever-changing nature of the Marches should focus on this rarity. Craft spirits go to the effort of creating illuminated manuscripts and blunt-edged swords *because* even the simplest 1-point artifact is a rare and mighty thing in the Marches. The wealthiest merchants trade in knowledge, with a collection of at most two or three *possessions* at a time. A powerful spirit can hope to own a few keepsakes and mementos of its travels, but treats them with reverence, even if they have no practical use. A simple wooden flute (a Level 1 Artistry talisman with a -1 artifact feature) is a thing of wonder. Spirits kill and die for such things.

Game Masters who want a strong sense of continuity in their game, where spirits carry with them tangible records of their journeys and merchant ships groan with cargo, should take a different approach. Spirits, including enchanters, pay character points only for the artifacts they intend to keep. Domains produce up to 20 character points worth of artifacts per year – though usually no more than one or two. The craft spirits employed by the Domain can carve off bits of the Domain and give them tangible form, allowing them to create artifacts without the normal cost. The blacksmiths in Hephaestus' forge and the weavers of Rose Point's "essential thread" can create many artifacts for their Domain; only when they craft for themselves should the GM charge a character point cost.

Armor

Many ethereals value protection during combat of the mind – it isn't Trauma, but losing ethereal combat still hurts. Further, dream-sculpted armor is showy, but ineffective. Thus, many combative spirits seek out and prize armor. Some armor is simply crafted from the proper materials in the proper Domain, and retains its Protection even when removed.

Some armor only works in the Domain where it was created.

And some armor is actually enchanted, a relic bound with strange variants of the Song of Form. It is all rare and expensive, and a spirit who owns ethereal armor will likely be targeted by greedy thieves.

(Because armor is so valuable, GMs may always create mysterious rituals and ingredients, and send player characters to spy on the master smiths of various Domains . . .)




Non-Corporeal Artifacts

Some talismans and relics in the Marches *have* no corporeal form. These talismans cannot be used save in the Marches, and relics with this Limitation can only be used when the owner is either in the Marches, Heaven, Hell, or in celestial form. This Limitation reduces the total cost of such an artifact by -2 (minimum cost 1 point).

Domain-Only Artifacts

If a talisman or relic *cannot* leave the Domain it was crafted in (or cannot enter any Domain at all, for something made out in the gray sands between Domains), the total cost of the artifact is reduced by -3, or -4 if the item will be *destroyed* if removed. (Minimum cost for the artifact is 1 point.) This Feature is not cumulative with any negative artifact Convenience Features (see *Liber Reliquarum*, p. 22), nor Non-Corporeal, above.



Some Domains, and nearly all micro-Domains, appear very different from outside. From the Marches, a great castle might resemble an archway of flowing water. A vast wildland might look like a spirit-sized glowing sphere. Other Domains look exactly like what they are. A mountain oasis can be a mountain rising from the mists, every bit as big on the outside as on the inside.

DREAMSCAPES

Each human mind creates a *dreamscape*, a reflection in the Marches of that mind. A dreamscape looks like a strange and gaudy artifact, often reflective – a crystal, a bubble, a mirror, an arch, or any of a thousand other forms. Inside, one can see a flickering representation of the human's mind.

The vast majority of these dreamscapes, at any given time, float inside the Vale of Dreams. With billions of humans in the world, however, a spirit can expect to stumble across one or two dreamscapes in a typical day's travel in the Far Marches.

When a human sleeps, his dreamscape becomes a micro-Domain – a pocket universe where his dreams are real. As long as the human remains asleep, spirits and celestials can enter and manipulate this dreamscape (within the limits described on p. 95), as can the human's unconscious will. One can look into a dreamscape from the outside and see faded images of the contents.

If a human in Beleth's realm makes a skill roll inside his dream and succeeds with a check digit of 6, the dreamscape instantly moves to Blandine's Marches. If a human in Blandine's realm fails a skill roll with a check digit of 6, it moves instantly to Beleth's Marches. Otherwise, the dreamscape drifts almost at random, based on the flow of events within the dream. (Dreamscapes in the Far Marches are typically very *strange*, but neither greatly uplifting nor troublesome.) Normally, when the human wakes, the event ejects all intruders in his dream.

MICRO-DOMAINS

Many ethereals, unable to find a place in an established Domain, build themselves a "micro-Domain" as their headquarters. This is a tiny region of stable reality, usually no larger than a human house, which the ethereal can use as a shelter, a home base, and a place to keep its possessions. Three common forms of micro-Domain exist.

The first type is the fabricated micro-Domain – a boat, truck, chicken-legged hut, or other spacious vehicle

manufactured in a Domain but capable of traveling into the Marches at large. A reasonably competent artisan can make a vehicle that doesn't mysteriously eat the cargo or change shapes while no one is looking. A *good* craftsman can make a micro-Domain that abides by consistent natural laws, protecting passengers and cargo from the vicissitudes of the Marches.

Crafting a micro-Domain requires at *least* a successful Dream-shaping roll with a check digit higher than 4. (If the GM has the *Liber Reliquarum*, he may treat this as crafting an artifact *as well*, and require an appropriate time and Enchantment roll.)

The second common form of micro-Domain begins as a human dreamscape. When the human dreamer wakes up, any ethereal present can make a Dreaming roll to prevent the dreamworld from disintegrating. (The dreamer cannot aid with this, since he is *waking up*! He can prevent it only by ejecting everyone before awakening.) If a spirit succeeds with a check digit of 6, the dreamer wakes and his dreamscape splits – one part becomes his waking dreamscape, and one part becomes the spirit's new micro-Domain. The spirit can remodel to its heart's content and even "drive" the dreamscape as if it were a conveyance. Unless the spirit is actively moving the dreamscape, however, it hovers in the Marches, absolutely still. Celestials can recognize such unnaturally still dreamscapes for what they are. Laurence's Guardians (see p. 120) can spot an ethereal-driven dreamscape if it attempts to buzz past them into or out of the Far Marches. Most spirits believe that making a micro-Domain out of a human's dream does the human no harm. Heaven suspects that it damages that human's capacity for dreams, hope, and fear.

Most oases are micro-Domains, although some giant oases are Domains in their own right. As mentioned earlier, no one is quite sure where oases come from – spirits and celestials just stumble across them from time to time, hidden in the mist.

Spirits can "merge" two micro-Domains by spending 10 Essence and succeeding at a Dreaming roll. (Any number of spirits can contribute Essence. The spirit with the highest Dreaming skill makes the roll.) The usual result is a larger micro-Domain, but by cobbling together *many* micro-Domains, spirits can create small Domains. It usually requires decades of work to create a Domain worthy of the name. The Game Master is the final authority as to how the micro-Domains integrate in imagery and Features (see below) in each individual case; the result may be a merger of all the previous attributes, one might "swamp" the other, or it could become something almost entirely new!

DOMAIN FEATURES

Every Domain and micro-Domain has a few quirks that make it stand out from the pack. Many have significant positive features, offering benefits to the Domain's master or the spirits who live therein. Some have significant negative features. The residents tolerate them only because they cannot find a place anywhere better. Other Domains are just weird.

As a rule of thumb, every full Domain should have at least one "weird quirk," and no more than three positive or negative Features. Of course, the farther into the Far Marches a Domain is, the weirder the quirks, and the more numerous the Features. Removing or adding an established Feature is best done by roleplaying; to change the nature of a Domain so profoundly is no easy or mechanical task, but instead requires ascertaining why the Feature exists, and how to work with-

in the Domain's internal rules to alter it. Being a Domain's master may make alterations easier – or impossible.

(And, naturally, a GM may choose to make "no unusual Features" the *default* condition for a Domain. This will make Domains with unpleasant Features less populated, as only the dregs will want to live there, and Domains with helpful Features will have many would-be immigrants – and would-be conquerors.)

EXAMPLE OF DOMAIN CREATION

Jane is setting up an ethereal campaign. Her players want to start out as the lieutenants of a powerful Far Marches Domain ruler. Jane decides to build two Domains in close proximity. Right now, they have a tense alliance; it will degenerate over the first few sessions into armed conflict. The PCs can either participate in this conflict or try to prevent it.

Lesser spirits constructed the first Domain, the one Jane plans to make the PCs' home. They joined the first two micro-Domains in 1265. The construct became a true Domain in 1581, and has grown slowly ever since. Jane decides that this Domain grew a dream-caul on its completion. On the inside is the Six Isles Domain, an archaic land of understated magic and temperate climes. Water surrounds each of the Domain's six regions. The only way in or out of the Domain is beneath the water's surface; at a depth of 50 feet the water gives way to thick blue air. The ocean floor becomes an icy tundra. This is the caul. Figmentary wyverns and barbarians dwell here, as well as a few exiled spirits. Occasionally they emerge to assault the people of the Isles.

A dead god carved Redcap, the other Domain, out of the Marches mists. Bones from his ribcage decorate its gate and give this land its strength. The tips of each rib burn, and the element of flame permeates the realm. As for the Domain itself, it takes the form of a necropolis. Spirits who understand the Domain's laws (with Knowledge: Redcap) can rouse the corpses from their biers and make figmentary zombies. They can even disturb the "rest" of residents in Trauma, creating a figment duplicate of the Traumatized spirit. It has only 1 Force but all the spirit's skills. Spirits who remain in Redcap too long tend to develop the Pallid Discord – not a problem, of course, for those who do not visit the corporeal world.

The Six Isles have the "Dream-Caul" Feature (p. 108). Redcap has the "Aspected Domain (Flame)" positive Feature (below) and the "Intrusive Domain: Discord (Pallid)" negative Feature (p. 109).

POSITIVE FEATURES

*"I took it for a faery vision
Of some gay creatures of the element,
That in the colors of the rainbow live,
And play i' th' plighted clouds."
– John Milton, "Comus"*

Aspected Domain (Uncommon)

One element (p. 22) dominates the Domain's makeup – e.g., "the Snow," for a Domain

locked in eternal winter. Those within the Domain, when performing the Songs or using the skills associated with that element, receive a bonus of +1 to their target number.

Common Tongue (Common)

Normally, languages must be learned. In a translating Domain, the mental concepts behind words will come

The features found below are separate from the natural law of the Domain. Domain creators can *try* to create a Domain with one feature or another, but there is no guarantee of success. (One exception is Hostile, p. 109. Any Domain creator can make an unpleasant Domain.) Many other possible Domain features exist, including limited versions of the ones below (e.g., "Malleable Weather" instead of just Malleable, or "Deceitful Seemings" to fool vision and nothing else).

across to anyone who reads or hears them, regardless of the actual language. Unlike most other Features, a Domain's Master *can* "turn on" translation easily. Turning it off again is sometimes more difficult.

Deceitful (Rare)

The Domain lies under a glamour. To see the true nature of the Domain requires specialized knowledge or equipment. For example, the Domain might reveal its true nature if a visitor regards it through a mirror or with brandy in his eye; if he calls anything in the Domain by its true name; or if he answers a riddle carved into its gate. Otherwise, everything in the Domain looks and sounds like something else. The speech of spirits might sound like the hissing of snakes to an outsider. The walls of a castle might seem like a hill, or a bank of mist, or the empty air.

A Domain can also be *susceptible* to glamourie, as Faerie is. In such Domains, Dreaming can both create and dispel glammers – masking or revealing something without actually affecting its true form.

Domain Artifact (Uncommon)

The Domain contains a *powerful* artifact that, for one reason or another, cannot leave the Domain. The Domain's creator or creators must pay character points for this artifact. The artifact Feature "Unable to leave Domain" is worth -3 points (or -4 if the item will be destroyed upon removal), so a relic normally worth 18 points would be worth 15 (or 14).

Dream Magnet (Uncommon)

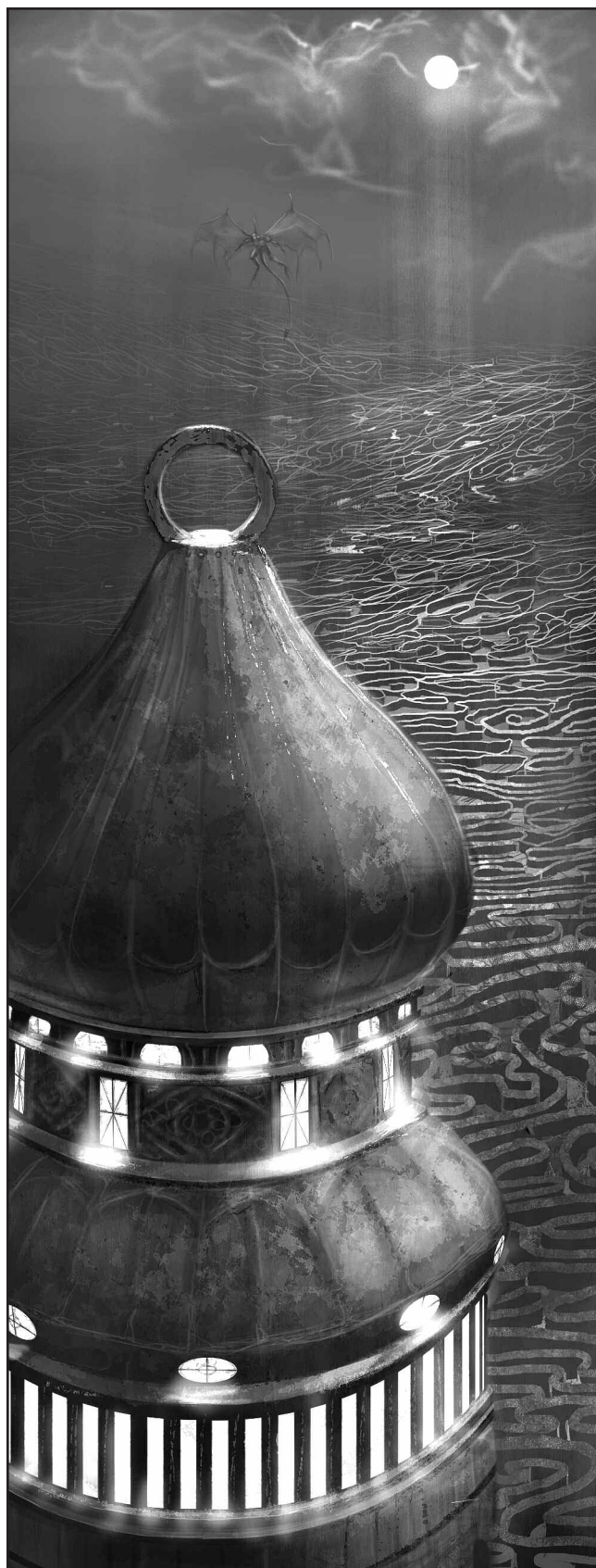
The Domain attracts dreamscapes in great numbers. A labyrinthine Domain might attract claustrophobic dreams and dreams of being lost – several a night, even in the Far Marches. Obviously, dreamscapes pulled into a Domain are easy prey.

Fierce Figments (Rare)

A typical figment in this Domain has 2 Ethereal Forces. People can still Dream-shape these figments away, taking a fixed penalty between -1 and -6 to their target number.

Healall (Rare)

The Domain, built from the stuff of brightest dream, serves as a balm to those who visit it. They recover Mind and Soul hits at twice the normal rate while within such a Domain.



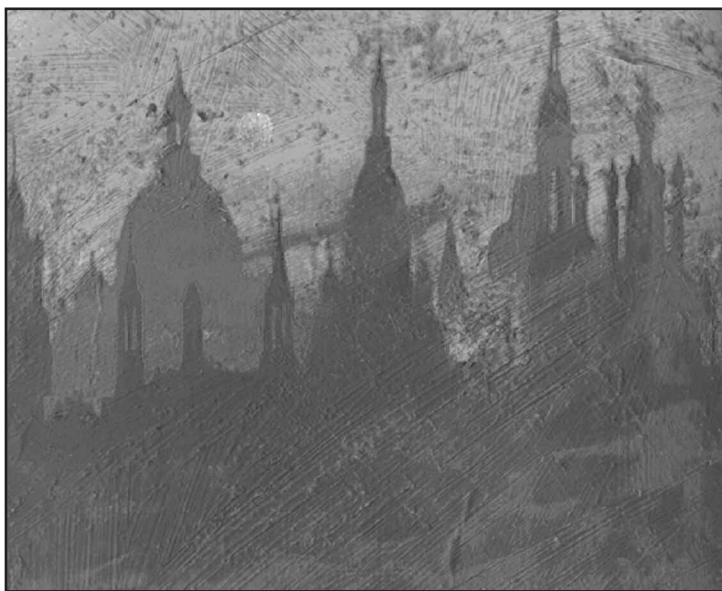
Infinite (Rare)

The Domain is millions of times larger on the inside than on the outside, or even infinitely large in one or several dimensions. Explorers can travel the Domain for years without ever seeing its end.

Intrusive Domain: Attunement (Rare)

The Domain can actually change the nature of the spirits who live there, giving them the functional equivalent of an attunement. Spirits must spend 10 character points to buy a Domain Attunement. *In addition*, the Domain's master must spend five points to issue it to them. Both costs must be paid. Domain Attunements are much rarer than Servitor Attunements, but have as much variety and power. The most common Domain Attunement is "Universal Assertion," which permits a spirit to gain its assertion bonus from that Domain (see p. 132) no matter where it might be.

Spirits cannot normally take Domain Attunements at character generation. The GM can *optionally* design a short list of Domain Attunements and make them available to starting PCs in a high-powered game.



Malleable (Uncommon)

This is an easy Domain to reshape. When making a Dreaming roll to change the Domain, the dream-shaper receives a fixed bonus of between +1 and +6 to the target number.

Mobile (Rare, but Typical for Micro-Domains)

The will of the spirits inside the Domain can move it from place to place in the Marches. Each spirit's will accelerates the Domain equally, so if three spirits "push" respectively up, down, and sideways, two spirits' efforts cancel out and the Domain moves sideways.

Without this property, a Domain moves through the Marches either randomly or on a course set at the time of its creation. It also moves more slowly than a mobile Domain.

Micro-Domains are mobile by default, but mobile Domains are rare.

Visible Anchors (Common)

The Domain master can sense anchors within its realm, and destroy them or move them to somewhere else within its Domain with a successful Will roll.

NEGATIVE FEATURES

*"The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,
And the earth's base built on stubble."
— John Milton, "Comus"*

Acidic (Rare)

The Domain actively unravels those who spend time therein, draining their life to replenish itself. Any sapient being inside the Domain at midnight loses two Mind hits.

Doomed (Uncommon)

The Domain faces destruction. It might be fading as mortals forget its legends. Alternately, a prophecy of doom or imminent disaster might hang over its head. Sooner or later, it will become uninhabitable – or vanish completely. A Divine (or Infernal) Intervention can be *very* bad news in a doomed Domain!

Dream-Caul (Rare)

A "caul" made from another reality surrounds the Domain. To enter the Domain from the Marches, or exit *into* the Marches, one must pass through a border reality that the Domain's creator did not design. This borderland could be as innocuous as an open prairie or as hostile and deadly as Gehenna.

Hostile (Uncommon)

Spirits reasonably consider the Domain a hostile environment. Destructive weather, ground that tries to swallow intruders, or deadly curses can all earn a Domain such a designation. Unlike most Domain Features, a Domain's creator can deliberately design a Hostile Domain. (It will be hostile for the creator, as well!)

Incomplete Mastery (Rare)

The Domain's master cannot automatically sense or prevent attempts to use Dreaming within its Domain. Usually, this means that the Domain's creator deliberately "spread itself thin," creating a vast and powerful Domain at the price of reduced control.

*I have secluded myself from society;
and yet I never meant any such
thing. I have made a captive of
myself and put me into a dungeon,
and now I cannot find the key to let
myself out.*

– Nathaniel Hawthorne

Intrusive Domain: Discord (Rare)

The Domain can change the nature of the spirits who live there, distorting them with Discord! Every week spent within the Domain, a spirit must succeed on a Will roll or gain one level of the appropriate Discord. The level of that Discord the spirit already has serves as a bonus to the roll. Therefore, after spending a week in a Domain dominated by rage, a spirit with 8 Will might have to roll against a target number of 8 or gain a level of Berserk. If the spirit fails, it gains Berserk/1, and its next roll is against a target number of 9. With Berserk/4, it rolls against a target number of 12, and will not gain any further Discord unless God or Lucifer takes an interest.

After character creation, a spirit does not receive character points for Discord received from an intrusive Domain.

Oasis (Uncommon, but Common for Micro-Domains)

The Domain appeared naturally. No spirit crafted it. Accordingly, no spirit rules it! Spirits can find *jobs* within

an oasis, but no one can formally invest them in their position. They therefore receive no assertion bonus. Similarly, they must anchor themselves to the Domain on their own.

Unbound (Rare)

Something has cut the Domain loose in time. Every now and then, it skips "forward" into the future. It vanishes from the Marches for days or even years and then returns. For the spirits inside, no time has passed at all. At the GM's option, some unbound Domains may occasionally skip *backward* through time, reappearing days or years before their departure – or it may even "time travel" randomly, never *vanishing*, but replacing itself so that one can never quite be sure where on the "timeline" it was last.

MIXED FEATURES

*"Was I deceiv'd, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?"
– John Milton, "Comus"*

Bilocalational (Rare)

The Domain exists in two places in the Marches at once. Spirits can enter from either location. Exits from the Domain lead to one location or the other.

Bonded Mastery (Uncommon)

On the one hand, the Master of the Domain can alter it with a thought, only rolling if another contests the changes directly. On the other hand, the Domain's ruler cannot leave! Further, the ruler's moods affect the Domain; depression causes the landscape to become bleak and forbidding, while anger generates volcanoes, and joy inspires a delightful spring!

Living Domain (Rare)

The Domain is alive – it even has a soul (at least as much as any ethereal being does), complete with Celestial Forces. Sometimes, the Domain has good relations with the spirits who live within it. Other times, the spirits have to bind the Domain to keep it from shaking them off and eating them. One such Domain sits on the shoulders of a giant, turned by a long-dead god into immovable stone. A small colony lives on Fenris Wolf's back, relying on the wolf's fierceness to deter their enemies and his ribbon-fine chain to keep them alive.



Multiple Mastery (Rare)

The Domain has two or more masters, with two separate lines of authority descending from them. A spirit can only hold a position under one Domain master at a time, and its final loyalties theoretically lie with that master. At the same time, the spirit is a resident of both rulers' Domain, and must therefore honor them both.

Primal Force (Rare)

Part of the fabric of the Domain has incarnated itself into a primal force – a guardian or bane of the land. It has no independent existence and cannot leave the Domain. Within the Domain it has the power of a god. Its behavior is predictable. It follows very precise rules. At the same time, its strength often exceeds that of the Domain's master. It might be a monster in the hills guaranteed to ravage the Domain if not given sacrifices of some kind. It might be a “moral guardian” of the

Domain, working unstoppable justice on those who violate its tenets. (This may include such things as torturing the wicked, binding the foolish into the shapes of donkeys, or demanding responsibility from those whose actions have caused harm.) It might be the local incarnation of death, coming for those “killed” in ethereal combat, who, by the Domain's laws, cannot pass into unconscious dispersion until its arrival. Just as even the gods must bow to death, and even the Archangels must bow to God, the Domain master can rarely oppose this primal force in the execution of its duties.

Canonically, although these creatures have power rivaling the weakest greater gods, they have no Celestial Forces. They therefore have no true free will, cannot engage in celestial combat, cannot use Celestial Songs, and cannot hear the Symphony. Like inanimate objects, they cannot be affected by powers directed against their Will.

Quirky (Ubiquitous)

The stuff of dreams is rarely logical, and only the rarest Domain is without a few weird attributes. These may include visual effects: a constant mist obscures everything beyond two paces; everything appears as a shade of green; artifacts shine with their power. The quirks may be audible: a constant chirruping of invisible, intangible crickets; the chime of bells whenever someone takes a step; soft weeping whenever someone is alone. They may be physical: the world is an ocean; the fish-figments soar on feathered wings; houses grow upside down from hillsides.

Regenerates (Rare)

When manipulated physically or with Dreaming, the Domain slowly returns to its previous state. Figment inhabitants come back from the dead. Breached walls repair themselves. Trees cut down grow back in a matter of hours. Homes created by Dream-shaping dissolve away overnight. Homes destroyed with Dreaming reappear.

Serendipitous/Hidden (Uncommon)

A Serendipitous Domain has a tendency to be located exactly where someone looking for it thinks it will be. This gives an ethereal navigation modifier on attempts to locate the Domain of +1 to +4. Moreover, Serendipitous Domains are unusually easy to discover by those failing their roll to locate somewhere *else*. Hidden Domains,

conversely, have an ethereal navigation modifier of -1 to -4. Spirits discover such Domains “by accident” once every few centuries, at most.

Sticky (Rare)

Spirits automatically succeed when attempting to anchor themselves to the Domain. It’s *breaking* the link that’s difficult – once anchored to the Domain, the spirit is at a -2 penalty to the target number when anchoring itself elsewhere. A Domain ruler must make a Will roll, at the same penalty, to successfully grant the spirit residency elsewhere. It will not be aware of failure unless *its* Domain possesses the Visible Anchors property.

Time Effects (Common)

The Domain runs at a faster (or slower!) time than the rest of the Marches. (Essence is still gained at “Marches midnight,” though!) This effect may not be regular, either – exciting times may be sped up while boring events drag past, allowing someone to spend Domain-years meditating while only a single night passes by, or vice versa, causing a battle to last for multiple midnights (and therefore multiple Essence replenishments).

Transcendental (Unknown)

The Domain exists on a different level of reality than the Marches. If God started out as a spirit, Heaven and Hell would be a single Transcendental Domain. Spirits do not know of any such Domains, and they definitely do not know how to *construct* such Domains, but they keep looking!

Young (Rare)

The creation of the Domain is incomplete. Its physical law is not yet set in stone. Like unfired clay, it remains extremely vulnerable to the artist’s touch. When someone succeeds on a Dreaming roll within the Domain with a natural check digit of 6, an amplified version of the effect spreads throughout the Domain. When someone *fails* a Dreaming roll with a natural check digit of 6, the same thing happens – but the effect is twisted into a malevolent form.

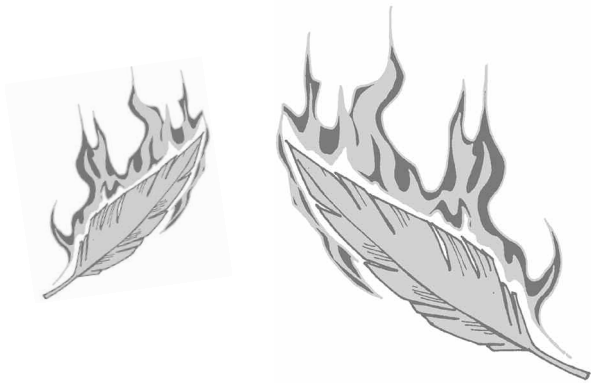
For example, if a spirit trying to create a garden succeeds with a natural check digit of 6, the whole Domain might burst into glorious bloom. If a visiting lucid dreamer tries to conjure up a sword and fails with a natural check digit of 6, he might instead summon a hostile legion of sword-bearing figments! The Domain master cannot overrule such changes.

LAB 26

Somewhere in the Far Marches is a Domain once ruled by the Ice Queen, thief of children’s ability to love. Formerly a dark fairy-tale realm, it is now (secretly) in the possession of a group of Vapulans who use it for various experiments (see *Superiors 4: Rogues to Riches*, p. 128). However, though the demons have warped the Domain with their own biases – the figment-monsters have syringes and jetpacks instead of fangs and wings – they are affected in turn, their personalities warping into dark fantasy archetypes of royalty, knights, and stepmothers. The Laboratory Director, a Balseraph, is now rarely seen; when she does appear, she seems more and more like the Ice Queen she slew. If the Lab is not closed, perhaps the line between ethereals and celestials will be studied more closely than the resident demons would like . . .



RESTLESS DREAMS



112

RESTLESS DREAMS



DESTINY

The uncomfortable silence held for seven minutes and change.

"I'm sorry," Hesemybel said. "I didn't know he was here in peace."

"Neither did I," Jaspsiel answered, "and I didn't kill him."

"Ethereals are dangerous. My Bright Lord says so. We can't allow them to get any kind of foothold on Earth."

"Or in this coffee shop."

"Or . . . yeah. In this coffee shop."

"He just wanted to know his destiny."

"Hm?"

"He knew there was an angel of Destiny who worked here. He came because he wanted to know. I don't even know if he wanted to achieve it or just had some kind of philosophical concern. But he wanted to know."

"What was it?"

"I couldn't tell," Jaspsiel admitted. "I don't have that attunement."

"Oh." Hesemybel prodded the corpse with his foot. "Well, it's just a vessel. He'll probably be all right."

The Marches are populated primarily with dream spirits and dreamers, but they are not alone. Angels, demons, gods, and other beings can all be found here, carrying the War to the ethereal plane or pursuing their own agendas.

ETHEREAL RELATIONS

Ethereal spirits are the native inhabitants of the Marches. They coexist, but not harmoniously. They may band together for mutual support or even out of friendship, but an ethereal spirit's worst enemy is often its own kind.

Unlike celestials, ethereals have no unifying goals. The War is irrelevant to most of them (see p. 121), and they have no supreme leaders, no Seraphim Council or other governing body. They are much like humans; fragmented into countless tribes, often solitary, working at cross-purposes more often than not. Some megalomaniacal spirits dream of rallying the whole of the ethereal realm under one banner – to throw celestials out of the Marches, to bring down Yahweh, to reclaim Earth, or just to worship the would-be leader – but such a degree of unification is no more practical in the Marches than it is on Earth. Spirits are a contentious lot, and often have less in common with one another than the average human does with a person from another country.

If there's anything all spirits have in common, it's a desire to grow and become more powerful, and a

simultaneous fear of being consumed by a more powerful spirit. Every ethereal is a potential predator, and every ethereal knows what it's like to be prey.

ALLIANCES

There are a number of reasons for ethereals to cooperate. Ethereal alliances may be brief conveniences, or bonds as deep as their strands, lasting millennia. They are significant to player characters because an ethereal spirit with no allies is in a very dangerous position. Players should give some thought to their characters' relations with other spirits. A typical ethereal campaign will have the PCs allied in some fashion.

ETHEREAL SOCIETY

There is no "overarching" society of ethereal spirits, beyond that which their nature as strand-woven entities grants them. Various Domains have laws (both dictated by rulers and innate to the Domain), and perhaps relations with other Domains, but an ethereal cop answers more to its own Image than the Far Marches Highway Patrol. For all that many Domains and pantheons profess to rules and civilized behavior, the bulk of the Marches is a no-spirit's-land, and what happens there . . . is known only to those to whom it happens, and to those who make it happen.

Gangs

Most spirits are weak individually, particularly compared to celestials. This motivates them to band together for mutual protection and/or predation. These "gangs," like human gangs on Earth, may become quite a potent force, but are more likely to fight rival ethereal gangs than celestials. (Any gang of ethereals that becomes a serious problem for Heaven or Hell draws more celestial attention than it can survive.) Being made up of many different kinds of ethereals, they don't hold together well unless they have a very strong and charismatic leader. Ethereal gangs can mostly be found in the Far Marches; a few even have their own Domains. An ethereal gang is the easiest way to bring diverse PCs together, but without an external threat to unite against, it will be hard to keep them together.

THE OLD GODS

The Archangel of Purity's crusade against the natives of the Marches wiped out some pantheons completely and decimated others. No one is exactly sure who's dead and who's hiding; the wary gods conceal their strengths – or weaknesses. Still, the strongest among them are active, both in the Marches and in attempts to reach Earth and encourage worship. The following groups are considered the *least* affected by the Purity Crusade, and even they are less powerful than they were.

The Aesir: Due to Odin's canny retreat and fortification of the Bifrost Bridge, the Norse gods got off "lightly." They lost only Thor – last seen holding off six Malakim – and many of the souls and lesser spirits who populated their "afterlife." However, this defensive tactic has made it hard for them to recruit new worshipers; they have few defenders to spare, and rarely risk their fortifications to let spirits travel in or out of the Domain.

Faerie: Though they lost many outposts, the Seelie and Unseelie Courts are rebuilding their numbers and still have minor Tethers, but their relative prosperity is the result of their bargains with Beleth. They do, indeed, pay their Teind to Hell (preferably with human dreamshades or even living mortals, instead of their own numbers).

The Olympians: The Greek gods suffered both during the Crusade and in its aftermath, losing most of their aggressive members: Zeus, Ares, and Hades are all gone (leaving Athena and Persephone as the major rulers of Mount Olympus and Erebus), while Hermes has vanished and Apollo become a hermit. Poseidon, too, has been seen vary rarely since Athena bested him for the leaders' mantle.

The Aztecs: Time is a funny thing in the Far Marches; in particular, Purity claimed to have severely damaged the bloodthirsty gods of the Aztecs – long before their apparent power waned in the corporeal realm. Naturally, the modern-day survivors find refuge with Beleth; they rend dreamscapes for Essence, apparently with little ambition for anything greater again.

Native American spirits: If the Amerindian ethereals had not been kept from Earth, perhaps the Ghost Dance would have worked . . . Still, they persist in attempting to return, often as animals. It

is rumored that Jordi, Archangel of Animals, favors some of these spirits, gifting them with Essence.

The Dreamtime Spirits: The worst damage to these ethereals was done mundanely, but celestials interfered with their attempts to visit Earth and rescue themselves. They fade, slowly, amidst their own dreams of the time when they walked at will in Australia. Some of them, however, remember their legend-history of how the ancestors created humans, animals, and all else. And some of them murmur that they could reclaim their power and more, as Yahweh did. If only they could re-create the myths, plunge the continent into the Marches, and reshape it to their wills . . .

The Heliopolitans: While Isis and Set remain relatively powerful (seeding New Age books with worship rites), Osiris, Horus, and many other Egyptian gods are gone. Others, such as Bast and Anubis, simply fade. Anubis and Set are both rumored to be in contact with Saminga's minions, either hoping for some residual gratitude or attempting to barter further refinements of mummification to the Demon Prince of Death.

The August Prosperity Collective: The Shinto *kami* are known to have made deals with Nybbas, the Demon Prince of the Media, seeking to garner the more diffuse Essence of fantasy instead of rekindling worship. (There are rumors that the appearance of "angelic" imagery in *anime* and *manga* are the *kami*'s attempt to subvert Heaven's natives into their own Domain's aegis!)

The Loas: Through loa meddling, or human adaptability, syncretistic religions such as Voudoun and Santeria have straddled the divide between Heavenly and ethereal religions. (See p. 66 of the *Game Master's Guide*.)

The Hindu Gods

These gods were hardly touched during the Purity Crusade – either because the faith that spawned them was also a Divine religion, or (as some ethereals snigger) because even Uriel was afraid of the power that the Hindu gods could command.



Tribes

Ethereal tribes (p. 17) are made up of spirits sharing the same Image or general motif. They function much like gangs, but they are also explicitly trying to foster belief amongst humanity, so as to increase their Essence. Tribes differ from gangs in that they have an intrinsic reason to band together, and are more likely to remain loyal to one another even without a strong leader. They also are much more concerned with humanity (and thus may be more likely to attract celestial attention). Some tribes also join larger gangs, and tribes often war with one another much as gangs do (the Benevolent Space Brothers, for example, are rivals of the Greys – see the *Liber Servitorum*). An ethereal tribe is certainly a viable option for player characters, but it will require that they all be members of that tribe, or have some reason to ally with it, which may limit some character concepts.

Pantheons

The most famous and powerful tribes of the Marches, of course, are pantheons (see p. 85). Pantheons are the most potent forces native to the Marches. No one wants to cross the Olympians or the Asgardians, even in their weakened state. If the GM allows gods as player characters, a pantheon-based campaign has as much potential range as a celestial one; it might be a gritty, metaphorical tale of fading gods trying to stay alive in the modern age, or a sweeping epic of deities who war against Heaven and Hell.

Domain Affiliations

Some Domains foster cooperation among their inhabitants, and some actually recruit new “citizens.” These may be Domains ruled by ideological rulers, or they may be mercenaries who offer benefits in return for services (or just a monthly Essence tithe). Being a “citizen” of a powerful Domain is much like being a member of a powerful gang; this may or may not extend to offering protection outside the Domain, but at the very least, having a safe place to anchor (p. 18) is worth a great deal to most spirits.

RIVALRY

In the Marches, anyone who isn’t your friend is a potential enemy. Not all ethereals are immediately hostile to strangers, and not all of them *want* to prey on weaker spirits . . . but it’s a common enough practice to make the Marches a generally paranoid place. Besides fear of ethereal predators (see below), there’s reason to

fear angels, Tsayadim, Beleth’s servants, and territorial deities and other Domain rulers. Given the fact that anyone can appear to be anyone else in the Marches, trust is as rare among spirits as traps and tricksters are common.

While this atmosphere of paranoia may seem to make for a gloomy setting, remember that spirits who *know* each other, or have some common bond (such as being members of a tribe, or citizens of the same Domain) may be quite friendly and trusting (once they’ve established each others’ identities, of course . . .). Still, only the most powerful spirits are immediately friendly with strangers; no one else can afford to forget that the most innocuous dream-spirit might tomorrow be trying to devour your very essence.

PREDATION

Few powerful ethereals are active predators; at a certain point, eating other spirits is less effective, and less satisfying, than trying to increase one’s potency by other means. Most predators are potent in their area of expertise, which is dream-eating (see p. 17), but not many have a lot of extra Forces, nor do they usually make well-rounded characters.

Many of the most successful ethereals started out as “dream-stalkers,” however. These hunters prowl the Marches, hunting for figments or the occasional weak spirit that’s slipped out of a Domain. Some hunt *inside* Domains, but this is risky unless the Domain has no rulers or defenders. The most bountiful prey is to be found in the Vale of Dreams, of course – there, human dreamscapes swarm in the millions, and figments are constantly emerging from them, usually to fade or be squashed by Servitors of Blandine or Beleth. But this is also the riskiest hunting ground; most dream-eaters are only daring enough to skirt the edges of the Vale, hoping to catch a stray figment and not a stray Malakite of Dreams.

Some spirits are embarrassed by their past as an ethereal cannibal. Others accept it as part of the natural order. A few revel in it, and even continue to devour weak spirits when the opportunity presents itself. Consumption of disobedient minions, vanquished rivals, and anyone who’s irritated a powerful spirit is commonplace even at the upper levels of ethereal society. While there are ethereals who don’t like living in an “eat-or-be-eaten” environment, it’s never far from their thoughts. And few spirits can claim never to have indulged in a “snack” when an obnoxious stray figment crossed their paths . . .

PANTHEONIC RELATIONS

Many “relations” between pantheons depend entirely on who’s doing the bargaining with whom, individually. (E.g., trickster gods have a tendency to gang up on everyone else, only squabbling with each other after laughing themselves sick at the jokes they’ve played, while Anansi the spider-god is fond of the spiderish Domain (*You Are Here*, p. 114) that some believe spawned it.) Those spirits who have alliances with major celestials are also more likely to be treacherous or hostile to their ethereal brethren – perhaps to long-term tactical disadvantage – lest they lose patronage. Nevertheless, there are official positions and preferences.

The Aesir are mostly isolationist, though Odin will deal with anyone if it benefits him in the long run. Despite the problems they’ve had, there are rumors that the Norse gods *are* regaining worshipers, and this expectation of new Essence and personal power (which they would not want to share) is why they are so standoffish.

The Faerie are rarely considered to be in the same league with the other pantheons. The Celts knew the Fair Folk were not spirits to be trifled with, and their current status puts them on a more even footing with their rivals. Still, gods who once had temples, and even entire cities, dedicated to them tend to look down on creatures which the modern mortals view as cute little pixies with butterfly wings. The Sidhe do not appreciate this lack of respect, of course, and some gods have come to regret taking them lightly.

The Olympians have always welcomed any other gods or pantheons who cared to bow to Zeus. Athena continues in this tradition, though the favors they can offer are much smaller than before. Primarily, there is an often-uncertain alliance maintained with the Heliopolitans, by Isis’ will. (Others of the Egyptian pantheon are less impressed with the Greek gods.)

The Aztecs, lackeys (or lapdogs) of Nightmares, are hostile to everyone else, and bitter about the lack of blood to feed them. There are occasional covert exceptions.

Native American spirits are stoic, either fading with what dignity and honor they can, or embracing and enhancing their animal-manifestations and fueling



the rumors that they are trying to cut a deal with Jordi, the Archangel of Animals. (There are, of course, so many different Native American spirits that exceptions abound; so do battles over Images.)

The Dreamtime spirits are generally not powerful enough to offer much to an alliance with anyone else. They are also hard-pressed to guard themselves against being eaten for their Essence by a prospective ally. Many other ethereals fear the radical Australian spirits’ talk of regaining the world – where would that leave other pantheons?

The Heliopolitans do their best to maintain tattered glory; many of them seem unable to believe (or unwilling to admit) that their time in the sun is over, or that they might have to do anything else to survive. Isis maintains relations with the Olympians, but seems unwilling to consider more than brief alliances with others.

The August Prosperity Collective appear friendly enough, but elements of other religions (filtered through the *kami* mindset) tend to appear in manga and anime. The *kami* claim this is due to unfortunate “executive decisions” by Nybbas or his minions, but it makes others nervous, suspecting that the *kami* are trying to soften up other gods’ Images, the better to add them to their Collective.

The Loas are also very friendly, but their obvious (to ethereals) attempt to take the Image of celestials for their own makes the other pantheons even more wary of them than of the *kami*. (For even if they are not planning to consume other pantheons, their power now rides partly on the coattails of Heaven. Might they not betray “allies” to the celestials they are now tied to?)

The Hindu gods are the most aloof of the pantheons. Many ethereals believe the Hindus despise them and hope to “ignore them to death.” Some suspect Shiva and his cohorts of more active malice . . . like betraying occasional ethereal Tethers to the angels, just to harm their rivals with minimum effort.

CELESTIALS IN THE MARCHES

Ethereals probably outnumber all celestials put together, and they certainly outnumber all the angels and demons in the Marches by a vast ratio. But few can deny that celestials are the most powerful force in the Marches. Individually, an angel or a demon can usually take on spirits totaling several times his Forces without difficulty, and their willingness to engage in celestial combat makes them particularly fearsome. There *are* ethereals who are a match for celestials, but they are rare. Even rarer are spirits who are a match for a *powerful* celestial, let alone a Word-bound one . . . and weak celestials rarely venture into the Far Marches. Moreover, if an angel or demon gets mugged in the Marches, his friends will soon show up to squash the ethereals who dared offer this affront to Heaven or Hell.

(While there are denizens of the Marches who claim that the power of celestials is exaggerated, the fact still remains that the Purity Crusade broke the power of many gods. Even ethereals who have never *seen* an angel or demon will cower at the thought of being confronted by one – whether or not it's *really* more powerful!)

Thus, most spirits regard celestials as dangerous rivals if not actively hostile, and want as little to do with them as possible. The exceptions are privileged honorees, bootlicking sell-outs, or suicidal maniacs, depending on who you ask.

CELESTIAL RELATIONS

The majority of celestials encountered in the Marches serve Beleth or Blandine, but other Superiors occasionally have reason to send a Servitor to the ethereal plane. Most ethereals don't distinguish between the servants of different Archangels and Demon Princes; only a few even have a working knowledge of celestial politics. However, some have cultivated a relationship (friendly, neutral, or hostile) with particular Superiors. Below is a brief summary of the dealings each Superior has with ethereals, if any, and what sort of a reputation that

Superior has among knowledgeable spirits (which will affect what sort of reception their Servitors might expect in the Far Marches . . .).

Archangels

Blandine: Every ethereal knows who the Archangel of Dreams is. Her servants are loathed by predators who see humanity as a big Essence farm, but most others are neutral toward her. Blandine isn't much interested in ethereals except when they threaten humans. A few spirits have even cultivated good relationships with angels of Dreams, helping to keep hostile spirits out of the Vale. This sort of relationship only works when the spirit is motivated by genuine benevolence, though; those who think they might be rewarded with Essence or the privilege of taking a few corporeal liberties are turned away (and usually seek Beleth instead).

David: David considers the ethereal realm peripheral to his Word, and doesn't encourage his Servitors to spend much time there. He's taken a "live and let live" attitude toward ethereals who don't encroach on Heaven's territory, or cause harm to humanity. While no spirit would consider David *friendly*, his Servitors are less threatening than most angels.

Dominic: The Archangel of Judgment is the one who laid down the law forbidding ethereals to come to Earth. That and his enforcement of orthodox monotheism mean that Dominican angels are feared and loathed in equal measure – though not as much as Laurencian ones (see below), for the Judges rarely venture into the

Far Marches. Instead, triads are more corporeal threats. Rumors that Dominic has sometimes collaborated with spirits, much as he does with the Game, are no doubt malicious lies spread by either ethereals or Asmodeus . . .

Eli: Eli spent a fair amount of time in the Marches, and according to some accounts, had close relations with many of the old gods, back before he helped build monotheism. (Rumors that his relations didn't end then are among the many that Dominic is investigating.) Servitors of Creation are considered to be among the few angels with whom ethereals can deal in good faith, but gods with long memories despise Eli and his Servitors nonetheless, for his promotion of the Yahweh cult.



THE ISLAMIC DJINN

In folklore, it is said that the Arabian djinn (or genies, or ifrit) sometimes embraced Islam as a religion. They would answer the commands of sorcerers who spoke in the name of Allah, and were bound by the Seal of Solomon.

The truth is quite complex. Undoubtedly, some of the rumors relate to the demonic Band of Djinn, and members who redeemed. Others stem from ethereals who sought to adopt the beliefs of the conquering “pantheon” of angels, during the Purity Crusade. In particular among the “converts” were those who knew that Khalid, Angel of Faith and Servitor of Uriel, favored Islam – and that becoming a Muslim required only sincerely uttering the *shabada*, “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.”

Naturally, as Angel of Faith and EloHITE of Purity, Khalid frowned upon false protestations of conversion, and struck down converts of convenience. Yet there are tales of Domains where the ethereals worship Allah with sincere fervor; considering the Archangel of Faith’s intolerance toward the spirits of the Marches, such beings would have to be devout indeed if they actually exist. Indeed, Muslim ethereals would be just as dangerous to their fellows, if not more so, than the oft-feared (but rarely seen) Tsayadim . . .

Gabriel: Gabriel is *admired* by ethereals, but she is also feared. Her volcano is a glowering presence on the Marches horizon, and spirits regard her as the most elemental manifestation of God’s power. She is visionary and inspiring, a spark seen in millions of dreamscapes, and thus she has indirectly given life to a multitude of dream-spirits herself. But she is also a deadly instrument of Yahweh, and wise ethereals steer clear of her Servitors.

Janus: Not much seen in the Marches, angels of the Wind are willing to deal with ethereals on an individual basis. A daring and clever spirit with a sense of honor may win the respect of a Servitor of Janus, and vice versa. Like other “elemental” Archangels, Janus shares a great deal in common with many primal spirits, and so they see him as a kindred spirit, albeit a member of the enemy camp. If Heaven needs something “acquired” from a pagan god, or from Beleth’s side of the Marches, angels of the Wind are the ones usually sent, and for this reason, some of them cultivate relations with ethereal allies.

Jean: Most of Jean’s research is grounded in the corporeal realm, but he’s had occasional secretive projects in the ethereal plane; perhaps he values imagination and intuition more than he’s given credit for. Jean has little tolerance for ethereal spirits, however; his Servitors usu-

ally enforce Heaven’s ban on ethereal visits to Earth quite strictly. Jean *might* authorize dealing with ethereals for a particular bit of knowledge or something else he needs, but angels of Lightning are otherwise instructed to limit their contact with the capricious spirits of the Marches.

Jordi: Animals dream, but Jordi trusts Blandine to protect their dreams as she does those of humanity. The Archangel of Animals doesn’t consider spirits good or bad; they just are. He rarely has reason to deal with them, but he doesn’t care if his Servitors befriend them, and some get along quite well with animal spirits.

Laurence: Ethereals hate no Archangel more than Laurence, with the exception of his former master, Uriel. Laurence has commanded that all of his Servitors enforce the edict against ethereals on Earth; they are to be hunted and evicted. He allows no “arrangements” to be made with ethereals, and does not sanction temporary alliances. The presence of an angel of the Sword practically guarantees a breakdown in negotiations where ethereals are involved.

Marc: Marc has a pragmatic view toward ethereals, and is known to have a few channels open for communicating with potent spirits and pagan gods. If angels want to negotiate something in the Marches, Servitors of Trade know whom to talk to, and ethereals know that Marc is the one to go to if they want to negotiate with the Host.

Michael: The Archangel of War is uncompromising about keeping ethereals in their place . . . but as long as they know their place, he’s willing to leave them be. He even respects some of the old gods, a little. To ethereals, Michael is the boot that grinds them under Jehovah’s foot – albeit not the blade of genocide they deem Laurence. A number of war gods and spirits of Struggle admire Michael nonetheless, and those who hate Lucifer’s minions have even allied with angels of War on occasion.

Novalis: Novalis is kind to ethereal spirits, naturally. Her angels never harm those who aren’t harming anyone else. Spirits discovered on Earth will be “encouraged” to return to the Marches, but Flowers’ agents refuse to use violence to force them off the corporeal

plane, however much Dominic scolds her. Her Servitors aren't common in the Marches, but they get as friendly a reception as any angel can expect in ethereal Domains . . . except from those spirits foolish enough to equate kindness with weakness.

Yves: Yves has said that ethereal spirits may have fates and destinies too, making them a part of God's plan. But he hasn't assigned any of his angels to minister to ethereals, which most take to mean that ethereal fates and destinies are irrelevant to mankind. His angels generally take a neutral stance toward ethereals, who regard Yves with a mixture of awe, unease, and contempt.

Demon Princes

Andrealphus: Andrealphus has had cozy relations with certain love and fertility deities . . . but always with the "partner" in a subordinate position. Some of his Servitors satisfy their more exotic desires in the Marches, so there are ethereal "brothels" which cater to demons of Lust. Most ethereal gods know that Andrealphus is a user and abuser, but some consider him a better master than Beleth.

Asmodeus: The Game's Prince is concerned with keeping ethereals in their place. He's quite willing to grant corporeal privileges to subservient lackeys, but the Game will destroy any ethereal they find on Earth who's *not* in league with Hell. Asmodeus is believed to have a network of ethereal spies who report goings-on in the

Marches to him; he does seem awfully well-informed about Beleth's activities . . .

Baal: Baal was once worshiped as a god; ethereals claim he *was* a god, just like them, and only became a celestial when he threw in with Yahweh (and subsequently rebelled). The old gods regard Baal with mixed feelings – his sentiments toward God are similar to theirs, but he treats them as inferiors in no uncertain terms. Nonetheless, demons of the War occasionally ally with warlike spirits. They've even conducted a few joint operations to ambush angels in the Marches.

Beleth: Of course, the Demon Princess of Nightmares has the greatest presence in the Marches. Many ethereals serve her, receiving protection and Essence in exchange for obedience. Those who choose not to serve her, she leaves alone . . . as long as they don't aid the Host, and don't poach in her territory. Demons of Nightmares are usually treated with respect in the Marches. The respect may be mixed with loathing, but few spirits dare to be openly hostile to Beleth's servants.

Belial: Things don't burn well on the ethereal plane, so Belial has little interest in that realm. His Servitors sometimes invade the Marches just to light up a few dreamscapes, torch some spirits, and harass angels. This earns them a lot of enmity from ethereals, and few spirits would see much point in dealing with Belial.

Haagenti: A few demons of Gluttony have adopted Hunger spirits as "pets," and some of Haagenti's servants enjoy bullying ethereals. For this, they have a bad reputation, being among the worst of celestial predators. Haagenti finds *real* consumption much more satisfying than dreams of consumption, though, so his Servitors aren't often seen in the Marches.

Kobal: A lot of twisted jokes have originated in the Marches, but Kobal disdains Beleth too much to make use of this resource very often. The darker trickster spirits sometimes ask Kobal for support – which he provides, but usually in such a way that the spirit gets expended – then *Kobal* has a laugh. Demons of Dark Humor are good at ingratiating themselves with ethereals when they want something, but the wiser spirits know never to trust Kobalites.

Kronos: Kronos is concerned with human fates, and doesn't care about ethereals. His Servitors are free to use ethereal spying missions or spirit minions to accomplish their goals, but spending too much time in the Marches is generally considered unproductive in Kronos' organization. Ethereals know that Kronos dismisses them, and are just as glad of it.

WHEN TO RUN, WHEN TO DEAL

The first instinct of any wise ethereal, confronting an angel, is to run. With demons, a bit of groveling is in order while one looks around for the back door. However, some angels will deal, and some demons are better than others. For instance, Novalis is just plain nice; Lilith will cut deals without even blinking; and Michael will use any tool he deems necessary, and an ethereal (especially one who doesn't try to claim God is just an overpowered spirit) can be useful – though ethereals are also good cannon-fodder.

Because of these exceptions, it's possible for ethereals to find employment with celestials as cat's paws, allies, or just supporting roles. Still, between hardline angels and sadistic demons, it's always a good idea for a wise ethereal to keep a few tricks up its sleeve and know where the exits are.



Lilith: Lilith, naturally, deals extensively with ethereals, sometimes even sending “ambassadors” to major Domains. Many of the old gods owe her favors, but so do many lesser ethereals. Spirits who are afraid to deal with demons directly will deal with Lilith, because they know she can get some other demon to do what the spirit wants. She is Hell’s most accessible face, and because of that, she’s welcomed in most Domains, and Lilim (particularly free Lilim) are more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt by ethereals.

Malphas: The Prince of Factions talks to ethereals; more than once, he’s convinced some bitter coterie of fading gods that he understands their anger and wants to help them strike back at the Host. Of course, he uses them, sets them against ethereals who aren’t cooperative, or just foments divisions between and among pantheons.

Nybbas: Nybbas is powerful in the Marches; he is second only to Beleth in his patronage of ethereals. In exchange for cooperation, he will promote ethereal Images in the media. Those who displease him vanish from the public eye. Thus, he can strengthen or weaken any spirits he likes . . . but human Essence isn’t channeled exclusively through the Media, however much Nybbas pretends otherwise, and some of the old gods resist his temptations.

Saminga: Bereft of imagination, Saminga regards all spirits as figments, inconsequential and uninteresting. Some demons of Death once tried establishing “Death Domains” in the Marches, places of transcendent horror which they could use as inspiration for massacres on Earth. While the Domains were successfully created, the demons were unable to do more than spawn a few


nightmares; they abandoned the Domains and the spirits created by them.

Valefor: Demons of Theft usually go to the Marches to steal things, such as artifacts or information. Spirits don’t trust Valefor’s Servitors, for good reason, but they do sometimes make deals with Theft, either for joint heists or to have something stolen from the corporeal plane (or from angels).

Vapula: Vapula conducts a little research in the Marches, but he treats ethereals much the same way he treats humans: as test subjects. There are occasionally exchanges of ideas and artifacts between Vapulans and artifice spirits, but most ethereals stay far away from demons of Technology.

ENCOUNTERING THE HOST

Angels rarely get a friendly reception in the Marches. Those who have the greatest presence, Servitors of Blandine and Laurence, are considered to be there for the express purpose of keeping ethereals in line. In fact, the angels who guard the Marches are mostly concerned with protecting humans in the territory Heaven has staked out; even Laurence’s March Guardians rarely pursue the spirits they drive away. But occasionally, a few angels will come hunting for ethereals who’ve made Heaven’s “wanted” list . . . and these teams delivering divine vengeance have been known to dispense that vengeance rather indiscriminately, figuring that it’s good to put a little fear of God into the Far Marches now and then. Thus, when spirits see angels coming, they expect trouble, and either hide or prepare for battle.



There are exceptions; a few spirits have been cooperative with Heaven, and occasionally an Archangel will want to deal with a pagan god, for information or an artifact or a favor. Since ethereals can't travel to Heaven, angelic emissaries must travel to the Marches to conduct their business. If invited, such messengers will be given safe passage through the god's Domain, and he may even provide a guide through the Marches. Angels who show up unexpectedly, asking to talk to someone in the Marches, must overcome a lot of built-in fear and resentment. First they have to convince the spirits that they haven't been sent to smite someone. Then they have to convince the spirits that there's some reason they'd *want* to cooperate with angels.

There are spirits who hang around the Near Marches, ready to be helpful to angels, in exchange for Essence (and for the protection from predators that hovering close to angels provides). These spirits are weak and rarely know anyone important in the Marches, but they'll at least know their way around and can act as guides. If more specific and influential assistance is needed, an angel would be wise to consult an experienced "ethereal negotiator." Blandine's servants do have a few contacts, though they are loathe to share them with Servitors of other Archangels. Marc is known to do some business with the gods, and can probably provide a guide if successfully petitioned. Other Archangels have few contacts, and only with spirits whose interests are aligned with theirs. Laurence's Guardians are often quite knowledgeable about local spirits and ethereal politics . . . but they're not likely to admit that they actually *know* any ethereals.

DIABOLICAL ENCOUNTERS

Like angels, demons are feared in the Marches, but they're more likely to find spirits willing to negotiate with them. Hell is known to be a place of self-interest, and if Hell wants something from the Marches, there will be spirits willing to provide it. Some ethereals are automatically hostile to any minions of Lucifer ("Yahweh's Fallen handmaiden"), but most will hear what a demon has to say. Of course, since they expect demons to be selfish, treacherous, and exploitative, they'll demand everything they can possibly get away with for any service.

Ethereals in thrall to Beleth are always friendly (or at least "friendly") to her Servitors, and even those who've remained independent rarely dare to offend a demon of Nightmares. Demons seeking guides or favors in the Marches will have the best luck if they can get a demon of Nightmares to help them. Lilith can always find an ethereal to help . . . for a price. Servitors of the Media

have no trouble finding weak spirits willing to suck up to them, but aren't much respected by the most powerful ethereals.

One thing that makes it harder for demons to enlist allies in the Marches is that some Princes deliberately antagonize ethereals. Demons of the War sometimes go spirit-hunting just for fun, and after one of these episodes, demons are given a wide berth in the Marches for a long time. Malphas sends minions to do the same thing, just to make sure cozy ethereal-diabolical relations are never developed too easily. Kobal has been known to lure gods into conflict with angels; one of his best gags was sending a demon disguised as an ethereal "messiah" who actually recruited a large number of spirits for a crusade to storm Heaven. The messiah disappeared just before the Crusaders arrived at Gabriel's Volcano, and messiahs have had a hard time gaining credibility since.

ETHEREALS AND THE WAR

Most ethereals consider the War irrelevant, since human souls do little for them, and they don't expect they'll win, whoever is victorious in the final battle. They'd just as soon postpone Armageddon indefinitely; there is no consensus among ethereals as to whether it would be better for them for Heaven or Hell to win the War. Most believe the victor would eradicate them afterward, regardless.

However, spirits know that celestials are obsessed with the War, and they'll take advantage of the conflict between angels and demons when it benefits them. Some even have ideological affinities with one side or the other, and will lend aid to Heaven or Hell on principal. The Hindu gods, for example, are often considered unofficially allied with Heaven, and some believe they will actually join the angels on Judgment Day. Some spirits will simply lend aid to whichever side seems to be losing, hoping that will prolong the War and keep celestials at each others' throats. Then there are those who have their own apocalyptic myths (particularly among the Aztec and Norse Domains), and want to position *themselves* to benefit from the War, believing that Heaven and Hell will *both* be brought down in the end.

Ethereals who sign up with one side to take part in the War are rare (except for Beleth's minions), but they are given special privileges. Much like human Soldiers, they are never accorded the same status as celestials, but they can earn rewards for meritorious service. Dominic does not officially permit "ethereal recruits," but Judgment rarely smites an ethereal who is *clearly* aiding Heaven.

HUMANS IN THE MARCHES

The vast majority of humans in the Marches are dreamers, bottled up in their own dreamscapes (p. 105). There are a few who travel outside these personal Domains, and interact with spirits and celestials on their own terms. All the character types described below are covered in much more detail in the *Corporeal Player's Guide*.

ETHEREAL HALFBREEDS

Most creatures of myth (p. 78) are assumed to be ethereal spirits, but at one time, ethereals interbred frequently with mortals, producing many of the fabulous and monstrous beasts of legends, and some of the great heroes and villains of myth as well. Most of these beings were wiped out during the Purity Crusade, but ethereal blood still flows in some mortal veins. Such a heritage rarely makes one unusual, but “demigods” have been born with special abilities, particularly a talent for lucid dreaming. (Celestials believe that this is not possible without an ethereal parent, while the accused spirits declare they are as surprised as anyone.) Some of these unfortunates become monsters, the dreaded gorgons who once plagued mankind. Both Judgment and the Game keep a close eye on any mortal suspected of ethereal ancestry; Judgment is tasked with hunting gorgons (to contain or eliminate them, depending on what is just), while the Game will slay any who show signs of allying with Heaven. But ethereals try to identify and conceal or otherwise protect their “children,” and will teach such halfbreeds how to function in the Marches and how to avoid celestial attention.

LUCID DREAMERS

Any living human can learn the Dreaming skill (p. 65) and become a lucid dreamer. Most lucid dreamers remain unaware of the nature of the Marches, since they use their Dreaming skill only to shape their own dreamscapes. Those who serve Heaven or Hell are taught to walk the Marches, however, and a few learn how on their own. Without a guide, such dreamers are likely to fall prey to hostile spirits, but some become pagan followers of the spirit lucky enough to discover them.

SOLDIERS AND SORCERERS

Most Soldiers and sorcerers aren't taught to become lucid dreamers, but some learn on their own. Without a celestial to accompany them, they can easily get in over their heads in the Marches. Both Dreams and Nightmares, however, train their best Soldiers to be *Dream Soldiers*, not only teaching them Dreaming and the Songs of Dreams, but granting them an Ethereal Connection (p. 63) so that they can be as potent in the Marches as they are on Earth. Sorcerers with ethereal patrons often learn rituals to help them deal with spirits of the Marches. Like demons, of course, spirits are prone to letting sorcerers *think* they have more power than they do.

My mother has never made any attempt to keep from me the fact that I'm a Martian. I've known it since I was a very small Martian.

— Armin D. Sykes

SAINTS

Saints usually use Dreaming skill to send themselves to sleep and walk the Marches much as celestials do. They are still humans, though, and can retreat into their personal dreamscapes, with all the protection that offers (p. 105). Most Saints, with the exception of Blandine's, don't spend much time in the Marches.


UNDEAD

Undead don't *have* dreamscapes. Willing themselves to sleep doesn't send them to the Marches; it puts them in a trance. The only way they can enter the Marches is with the Corporeal Song of Dreams or the Dreamwalking attunement. Once there, they may Dream-Shape.

DREAM-SHADES

Human souls who remain on the ethereal plane, these are most often worshipers of a pagan god, but some are ethereal “ghosts” who clung to their dreamscapes when they died. They are always anchored somewhere, as spirits are (p. 18), and function like ethereal spirits in many ways. While they do not have element-strands or affinities, they can learn Songs, be granted some attunements, and even gain Forces up to the human maximum.

Although they can “let go” at any time and travel to their final reward, some dream-shades forget they were ever mortal, and they can be hard to distinguish from true ethereal spirits. Many of the more powerful gods have a fair



number of dream-shades dwelling in their Domains, but a few have become formidable enough to wander the Marches on their own errands. (For more information about dream-shades, see the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, p. 82.)

CORPOREAL RELATIONS

Most ethereals want to go to Earth. It is a source of Essence, and it represents freedom. While a spirit who successfully manifests on Earth has many powers at its command, thriving in the corporeal realm is much easier with human assistance. Spirits who remain in the Marches also benefit from humans who further their interests, even if only by sending them Essence. There are a number of ways in which ethereals can interact with mortals.

COLLABORATORS, VICTIMS, AND DUPES

Not all humans who help ethereals know who they're helping. Spirits create phony cults, dupes who believe they've suddenly been gifted with psychic powers, and even knowing collaborators who make deals with spirits in exchange for help with business matters, affairs of the heart, or any number of other mortal desires. (A being who can spy on someone's dreams, and even influence them, would have much to offer a corporate intriguer or a desperate suitor . . .)

Besides Essence, spirits benefit from these arrangements by having a network on Earth to provide them with material assistance. In corporeal form, they need shelter, allies, and funds, just as celestials do. Some have ambitions of building a power base that will eventually let them walk openly on Earth, unafraid of the Host's edicts. But most spirits have much more modest desires; wealth, influence, sex, or whatever desires motivate them to come to Earth in the first place.

PAGANS

A few of the old gods still have worshipers. Some are even enjoying a resurgence in popularity, thanks to the neo-paganism fad in the West. Most of these worshipers, with their rituals out of New Age paperbacks, never have contact with an actual spirit. However, ethereals do pay attention to mortals who believe in them – if they can locate them. (Even if a god receives Essence from a proper worship rite, remember that it doesn't automatically know where the Essence is coming from!) And worshipers who are both sincerely dedicated and have the potential to

be useful (*especially* if they show signs of being potential Soldiers) may be visited by their god, either in their dreams, or by means of the Songs of Spirit Speech (p. 67). Of course, such worshipers may also be visited by someone *pretending* to be their God; "poaching" worshipers isn't uncommon, given the limited supply of pagans in the modern world.

The ethics of pagans in actual service to a god vary. Most consider themselves benign, but they may be led into doing bad things their god tells them to do. While some gods are benevolent and/or genuinely concerned with their worshipers' welfare, others just want Essence and power. Most will try to keep their followers away from the Host, and they tend to seek out the most fanatically anti-Christian pagans as their servants. Most gods prefer not to have their worshipers getting mixed up with diabolicals either, but a few will ally with sorcerers or Soldiers of Hell, and some of the spirits beholden to Beleth will lead their worshipers right into the clutches of demons of Nightmares for indoctrination and training.

BELIEVERS

Worship is not the only way to send Essence to spirits; the right kind of deeply-held belief will do just as well. The Marches hold at least two tribes of ethereals who take advantage of UFO beliefs by masquerading as space aliens. They prepare future helpers by visiting them in their dreams first, priming them to believe whatever message the spirit wants to deliver. Likewise, the numerous Santa Clauses, Easter Bunnies, Sherlock Holmeses and cartoon characters all benefit from human believers who are not "worshipers," in the true sense. Santa Claus and cartoon beings are unlikely to manifest as such corporeally – except to children – but they can manipulate people (including children!) into doing things that will aid them on Earth.

SORCERERS

Sorcerers tend to be egotistical, amoral, and damned, but even within that category, they range from once-well-intentioned "psychics" to occult practitioners to practicing pagans to formally Hellsworn servants. The latter are off-limits to ethereals, but those who aren't yet owned by demons are valuable resources for a spirit willing to trade a little sorcerous knowledge for Essence and corporeal assistance. Ethereals rarely establish long-term relationships with sorcerers, because Servitors of Kronos are zealous about hunting down and killing any sorcerers they don't control. Given that sorcerers aren't stable enough to avoid attention indefinitely, their ethereal patrons prefer not to be around when the demons catch up with them.



ETHEREAL LIFE



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ETHEREAL LIFE



ETHEREAL MOTIVATIONS

"Do noble things, not dream them,"
– Charles Kingsley, "A Farewell"

Ethereals are explicitly the characters of story and dream – essentially fictive in nature. The trick to role-playing spirits is to remember that it's not fiction for *them*. They don't abide by the conventions of their myths and stories and archetypes because those are the conventions. Insofar as they abide by any convention, they do so because it is a part of their nature. They take their lives in deadly earnest. Just as humans can acknowledge the inherent absurdity of sex while retaining a healthy sex drive, a minotaur can *grasp* the humor in spending his whole life guarding a labyrinth – but considers it a very serious matter indeed!

The stuff of dream and legend ultimately relies on the human ability to reach for *and successfully seize* the unreachable star. Ethereals, built from this selfsame stuff, do not think small. The other half of their heritage, the stuff of nightmare, tempers them with a fear of extinction and loss. This keeps many spirits from ever rising above their origins – but it cannot make them *petty*. If a spirit sees a chance to achieve a greater goal, it can rise above immediate gratification and even the desperate scramble for survival. The smallest 3-Force brownie will turn up his nose at a lucrative position if thanked for his work, on principle alone. Even the squabbling animated teeth of the Chancrous Pits at Bellengard, that rip apart travelers and argue over the unlucky spirits' shoes, have a higher purpose – to them, shoes are magic of the highest order.

Ethereals do not have Words to serve. Usually, their ambition relates to personal power or fulfilling the purpose of their Image – the dream- or myth-image worked into their nature. (The next few sections describe the quest for Image fulfillment and personal power in more detail.) Some ethereals also seek to advance belief in the world at large – a pantheonic figure might spend a lot of time with neopagans, while a classic Victorian nobleman might push his code of *values* back towards prominence. Since gods tend to have a few concrete Word-like concepts associated with them – Apollo having links to the Sun, for example – gods and their Servitors may also want to increase the prominence of those concepts in the world.

IMAGE

"What is bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh."
– translated from the 14th Fable of the Brahmin
gymnosophist Pilpay

Ethereals come into existence complete with a sense of purpose. An average ethereal begins its life as an integral part of a human dream or a culture's legendry. It knows who its enemies and allies are. It knows what role it ought to play in the world. It carries with it a little piece of its original environment wherever it goes. Laura Jacobs, dreamed into being 70 years ago as a two-fisted heroine in a far-future dystopia, has yet to put aside her brass knuckles and fox fur overcoat. She finds herself drawn to situations where a hero is needed. The dream image of her lover never "woke up" and gained free will, but she remains connected to him. Sometimes her presence in a Domain or dream is enough to incarnate him

out of the surrounding dream-stuff. (Laura's player purchases this figment as a Servant (Class/1).) Laura left the cradle of the dream that created her for the vast and dangerous world of the Marches – but that dream remained a part of her. Where humans sometimes spend their whole lives trying to find themselves and their

*Ah, but the choice of dreams to live,
there's the rub.
For all dreams are not equal,
some exit to nightmare
most end with the dreamer
But at least one must be lived . . .
and died.*

– William Shakespeare

place in the world, ethereals like Laura struggle instead to transcend a role and nature built into the very core of their being.

The inhabitants of the Marches refer to an ethereal's original nature as its "mask" or its "Image." The dream image of a police officer can wake up and become its own person, but it still "retains the Image" or "wears the mask" of a cop. Multiple ethereals can share the same Image, although the details usually vary. There are three ethereals wearing the mask of Theseus the hero. Dozens of dream-creatures wear the mask of Mr. Right. In her heyday, Aphrodite was able to collect over 30 dream-images of "the most beautiful woman in the world" and keep them, transformed into humbler shapes, in her garden. Ethereals who share the same Image tend to become devout allies or deadly enemies, with few stances in between.




Image describes something far more important than a spirit's visible appearance – which is mutable, in any case. An ethereal's Image defines its inner self. It can grow beyond its Image, and most important ethereals do. What it cannot do is *escape* that Image. If a young girl dreams up an intrepid master spy, and that devious individual escapes the dream, it retains the heart of an operative. If it chooses to settle down in an out-of-the-way Domain and become a gardener, it can certainly do so – but its old identity and skill at espionage are never more than a thought away. In a situation requiring its old skills, the world of intrigue and violence will beckon like a siren.

THE MEANING OF THE MASK

Images, figments, and fancies fill every human dream. Living things, and even *humanoid* things, are as common as dirt in the Marches. At any given moment, a billion made-up personalities inhabit 1-2 billion human dreamscapes. Only a few, however – the “awakened” spirits – possess self-awareness. In recognizing its own nature, an ethereal transcends the dream that created it. Glen Summers, at one time the firefighter plenipotentiary of a sunless arboreal world, survived the demise of that dreamscape by stepping out of his role in the dream. A simple, ordinary dream of a firefighter plenipotentiary would have gone out like a candle when the dreamer woke. This leaves Glen with the question, “If I’m not such a dream, what am I?”

The most common ethereal philosophy, many variants of which exist, defines the typical unaware dream- or myth-creature as an automaton – an organism with complex but ultimately finite behavior patterns. An ethereal gains self-awareness when a new layer of complexity somehow infuses that behavior pattern, opening up an infinite number of possible actions and making its behavior fundamentally non-deterministic. Ethereals, as a matter of religious, philosophical, or scientific conviction, argue about the nature of this “new layer.” Some suggest that it represents a formless, mindless consciousness that blends with the dream from outside normal reality. Some claim that awakened ethereals are the dreams of the Marches itself. A few offer modern theories of emergent properties, or suggest that an awakening ethereal steals the soul of the dreamer who dreamed it.

Almost every ethereal comes to the conclusion that transcending its Image and “natural” behavior is both philosophically important and a necessity of survival. That established, ethereals regard their native Images in many ways.

Nacreous Seeds of Dream


“Young man, I take no bribes. This dismal bureau, with its creaking walls and its gray, mist-filled halls – it strikes you, I have no doubt, as a higher branch of Hell, and myself as a woman desperate to escape it. Nothing could be further from the truth. A human named Lucy Fairland dreamed me into existence as a faceless extension of the system, as a bureaucrat of mechanical perfection. I do not reject this function. I only left her dream because I judged that she dreamed too small. She could not conceive of a system as harsh and unforgiving as I sought – and so I came here. You may leave the Hall of Chronicles and the Bureau of Monitoring within it, but your record never will. I am proud, sir, to be a dreary, mindless drone, provided that I may live that life at a sufficiently vital pitch.”

Many ethereals treat their Image as the “seed” of the person they should become. The awakened dream of a mail carrier naturally seeks employment as a messenger for one pantheon or another. As its strength and ambition increases, it might set its sights higher. It could look into delivering diseases and curses to mortal enemies of its master's faith. It could even become the charioteer that pulls the moon – come rain, come sleet, come gloom of night – on its endless course through one Domain's sky. In short, ethereals of this attitude take their Image as a microcosmic version of their macrocosmic “destiny.” They do not want to forsake their assigned purpose, but rather to realize it on as large a scale as possible.

The Divers' Metaphysic is a fringe belief touching on these matters; its terminology has leaked out into common parlance. It suggests that the Marches abhor self-awareness. Like an oyster, the Marches strive to smother ethereals by covering them in layers of dream. An ethereal cannot survive as “grit in the gears” of the Marches. Ultimately, it either absorbs the dream-layers into its original self, becoming epic in scope – “pearlescent” – or it dies, as the weight of dream becomes too much for it. This Metaphysic captures a common theme in post-Crusade ethereal beliefs: stasis and contentment with one's lot leads to death.

Chains of the Flesh

“You have no conception, my lady, how much you tempt me. I am not immune to the mortal passions. I am not proof against your eyes, or your mouth. Or your courage. If I reject you, it is because I do not trust myself. I stand before you a gentleman in the service of the crown, but this is not my nature. I was born, my lady, humbler. I do not mean a peasant. I do not mean a thief. I am a scorpion, my lady, that has become a man – and I cannot escape that terrible truth. If I relax my vigilance . . . if I should give in to passion . . . it does not bear thinking about, dear heart. My sting is a fatal one.”



Ethereals whose Image contains serious inconsistencies – junkyard naiads, vicious beasts with human personalities, and Caucasian Australian aborigines – face a difficult choice. On the one hand, they can live with the burden of a contradictory self-definition, making it harder to find a suitable home, lifestyle, and occupation. The alternative is to reject part or all of their Image, casting aside the “chains of the flesh.” Of course, rejecting part of their inner nature does not make it go away! Often the missing aspect of the ethereal’s spirit lurks just beneath the surface, ready to seize control if the ethereal’s will wavers. (This can produce a number of interesting Discords, Dreads, or disadvantages.) It also manifests in small ways: on Earth and in relevant Domains, such an ethereal’s shadow might not match its form. Its footsteps might make sounds evocative of its other self.

Ethereal “messiahs” appear every few centuries to denounce Images as base and horrid constraints on the ethereals’ “higher selves.” They argue that an ethereal sentience can detach itself from the dream-stuff that defines it and become a creature of pure will and perception. Some describe this as enlightenment; others suggest that this was God’s route to power. No one faults their motivations, but their evangelizing usually founders on two points. First, few ethereals can conceive of a life that transcends their Image *completely*. Second, most of these messiahs have some variant of “Holy Martyr” as their Image – lending an air of hypocrisy to their declarations.

Founts of Inspiration

“Do not bother struggling, little lord. Only one creature under the stars has ever broken my grip, had I not willed it – and he is not with you. Your King has given you over to me. He has offered you, in the message you so faithfully delivered, as a tasty morsel to slake my eternal hunger. I thank him. I thank you. Make your peace with the Marches; I measure the span of your life in moments.”

“Of course, let it not be said that I am unsporting. I have become the lord and master of these mountains, their undisputed King; I have turned my flesh to stone and my eyes to ice. Yet I will not have it said that I have forgotten my origins – forgotten Jack of the Embers, the gambler and rake in whose flesh I was born. The cards are marked. The dice are loaded. You gamble for your life, and I for a meal. Yet we will game before you die.”

Some ethereals conceive of their Image as a symbol of and a metaphor for their nature. It does not define them, but it represents them – much like a human’s totem animal or a country’s flag. Such an ethereal cherishes its Image as a sacred truth about itself, rather than a bit of

secular dreamstuff that shapes its appearance and skills. Dana Donovan, originally an eighth-grade teacher in a young man’s nightmare, has no interest in teaching or horrifying others. Rather, she acts on Earth as a patron to teachers, silently “removing” insolent school board officials and nosy parents who try to interfere with their duties. When the Far Marches Domain known as the Port of No Regrets offered Bellerophon its crown, the Greek hero and Pegasus-tamer leapt at the chance – but he still treasures his identification with apolitical heroism and flight.

One ethereal myth – for even the creatures of legend and dream have their own stories – ascribes the creation of life to the mindless demiurge Chaos. Wielding a sword as sharp as a shadow’s edge, Chaos cut a hole in the fabric of the Marches. Through that hole the primal power of imagination and inspiration began to bubble into the ethereal realm. It takes only one small drop, carried to a mortal’s dream by the winds of the Marches, to create an ethereal. To bathe in its waters is to achieve perfection. Some ethereals refer to their Image, metaphorically or literally, as the “key” through which they access this fount’s power. By meditating on their Image, they open the door to an endless well of passion and invention.

Voices of the Wild

“Worry no more, sir. When you put your affairs in the hands of Johnny Stevens, the Living Bomb, you know that your opposition will be removed with efficiency and poise. I am not, if you will pardon the expression, a Johnny Come Lately to this business . . . from the moment I was born, I was in the extralegal troubleshooting business up to my eyebrows. You may trust that, had my target’s life not already been compromised by the impending demise of our shared dream, I would have made the supreme sacrifice . . . exploding . . . in my client’s name! Now, I do not offer self-immolation on my services list at the moment, but do not think I have lost an inch of my aplomb when it comes to the world of dreamscape terrorism!”

Kelinci, an ethereal noble martyred in the Purity Crusades, was the first to formally identify a truth present in the Marches from the very beginning: when an ethereal is in an environment resembling that of the dream or story that created it, it makes that ethereal just a little bit more real. The experience invigorates it, just as a jot of new evidence can invigorate a theory. It makes the ethereal feel good. Some ethereals even get addicted to the sensation, which can cause problems when their native environment is “high adventure,” “near a tornado,” or “a ruthless environment of criminal double-dealings.”

IMAGE FULFILLMENT BONUSES

Ethereals receive a +1 to their target numbers and check digits when acting in a manner directly befitting their Image. This bonus applies, for example, when a household god acts to defend the human lineage it sponsors or when a monstrous Ubiwami tries to swallow a human whole. It would *not* apply when the monstrous Ubiwami attempts to cook a three-course dinner – or when the household god attempts to swallow the Ubiwami.

Ethereals also receive a free Knowledge that covers the basics of how to be their Image, at a level equal to their Ethereal Forces. Ogres have Knowledge: [How to be an] Ogre, which enhances their ability to survive in fairy-tale environments, keep small villages paralyzed with terror, cook human flesh sumptuously, and collect magical treasures. Ethereals can buy this skill to a higher level normally. This skill resembles a Role skill, and like a Role skill does not include any of the skills listed in *In Nomine*. (See *In Nomine*, pp. 44 [*Using Roles*] and 71.)

In a light, over-the-top game, Game Masters can give ethereals an extra Image-related bonus. For relevant rolls, on an adjusted check digit of 7+, the ethereal succeeds beyond all reasonable expectations. This covers the same territory as a Minor “Amplification” Divine or Infernal Intervention (see the *Infernal Player’s Guide*, p. 77). The ethereal’s performance defies probability and takes on the aspect of legend. It does not Seduce; it enthralls. It does not Dodge; it slips from the room or destroys its enemy’s weapon. In the Marches, where almost anything is possible, it does not just build a car – it builds a car with a rudimentary intelligence of its own!

Ethereals receive these bonuses because their Image and its associated purpose are quasi-physical parts of their being. Calling a human “a doctor” describes only the smallest fraction of his complicated being. An ethereal with the Image of a doctor, contrariwise, has the medical profession as part of its body and its spirit.

Many ethereals regard their Image as the “bond” between themselves and the environment where they belong. A unicorn may reject the sylvan woods and become a prospector, roving the Far Marches in search of unique lands and resources; it could take on a human vessel and become a podiatrist; it might become the warrior guardian of an ethereal monastery. Nevertheless, through its identity as a unicorn, it retains its tie to the wild and the fae. It knows that, if hunted by a terrible adversary, it need only reach the woods or any faerie kingdom to have a home field advantage. Unless it perverts its nature so thoroughly that it no longer remains a unicorn in spirit – a difficult task! – it retains a sense of “place” in those environments.

The unicorn’s choice is not binary. It does not have to live its life as either a nickering resident of the Enchanted Forest or an apostate creature that has forsaken its character. It can draw on its natural understanding of forest environments and Faerie to become a guardian spirit of the woods or a respected librarian of Avalon. It can abandon its form, spending most of its days as a hoofed and one-horned man of distinguished visage, without abandoning its integration into a unicorn’s natural environment. This is roughly equivalent to a human changing his job and area of focus without changing the general field he works in – only a portion of his competitive advantage and experience is lost.

IMAGE FULFILLMENT

As a general rule, nightmarish monsters are extremely good at catching and eating screaming children. It’s a rare dream-gunslinger who can’t pull off a *mean* fast-draw. A unicorn incapable of distinguishing virgins from prostitutes would be the laughingstock of any Enchanted Forest. In short, ethereals tend to be good at the kind of things people would expect their Image to do. Ethereals receive several bonuses from their Image when attempting such feats. Players should also buy appropriate skills.

Some ethereals have the Image of a screw-up. If a player wants to play a dream-samurai who cannot draw its wakizashi without slicing itself open or an apparently terrible monster that a dreaming six-year-old easily defeated, he can do so. The human imagination has an infinite capacity for slapstick and for satire. Similarly, if a self-loathing drug addict dreams, and his mental image of *himself* becomes an ethereal, that ethereal would have very few areas of excellence. These ethereals usually receive an Image bonus only when they’re doing “the wrong thing.”

When an ethereal fulfills its Image in a magnificent, legendary manner, it often becomes more powerful. This process is known as *Image enhancement*. Heroic Images are difficult to enhance. Enhancing a screw-up Image, however, is easy – the character need only make a few colossal blunders. A few incompetent ethereals have failed with such frequency and majesty as to become immortal and nearly omnipotent. The jinx effect surrounding these bumbler now foils any attempt to destroy them, as well as any attempts they make to destroy themselves.

IMAGE CONCEPTS

This box suggests some possible Images, describing their benefits and drawbacks, explaining how to apply the Image bonus, and characterizing what qualifies as image enhancement. This section is purely advisory. If it does not seem to apply, talk to the GM.

Career Images are defined by an ethereal's natural job: e.g., medic, lawyer, house servant, soldier, sailor, archivist, retailer, or bodyguard. The ethereal held this job in the cultural myth or dream that created it. Usually, the player should think up a "twist" to make a career Image more interesting – playing a *rene-gade* cop or an *arboreal* butler. Ethereals with career Images can find employment in almost any Domain, have a well-defined area of competence, and clearly understand what kind of heroic accomplishments enhance their Images. On the negative side, their area of competence is narrow and they face prejudice when working outside their Image's specialty.

Species Images are defined by an ethereal's natural shape: e.g., nymph, basilisk, sea serpent, fox spirit, Cyclops, centaur, kobold, Sidhe, giant boar, sphinx, three-headed dog, or cinema-style mummy. These ethereals usually receive their Image bonus in their native environment and with a few appropriate skills. Their innate Knowledge skill tends to have broad applicability – a salamander understands everything about fire, and a fox spirit has a library of tricks and subterfuges at its fingertips. These ethereals have trouble enhancing their Image – it's hard to pull off a transcendent feat of three-headed doggery, although successfully guarding a gate to Hell, or something akin to such a gate, might do it.

Role Images are defined by an ethereal's natural function: e.g., hero, villain, minion, mercenary, entertainer, mediator, trickster, visionary, councilor, scholar, Queen, slave, adjutant, sorcerer, druid, or Yin-Yang Master. Ethereals with role Images receive their Image bonus on every skill when directly fulfilling their function, and on no skill at all otherwise. Thus, a hero receives no bonus at all when engaged in sordid combat with a lover's husband, but receives his Image bonus when crafting a disguise to penetrate a powerful enemy's court.

Gestalt Images represent cultural or mythic icons: e.g., Hercules, John Henry, John F. Kennedy, Susan B. Anthony, the August Personage in Jade, and Icarus. Such spirits receive their Image bonus on rolls that fall under their myth's area of greatest strength – for example, Schehezerade would get her bonus when manipulating others and telling stories. Usually, an ethereal with a gestalt Image gains power from feats "true" to the old myths. Ethereals with gestalt Images tend to attract the hostile attention of other ethereals with the same or a similar Image.

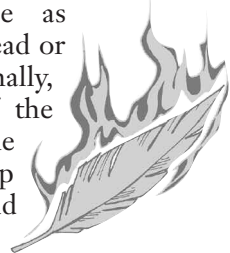
See *Ethereal Beings*, p. 70, for more ideas.

CHANGING YOUR IMAGE

Under normal circumstances, an ethereal's Image does not change. Dreamed into existence as a woodchopper, a dream spirit remains a woodchopper. Spawned by the legends of Daedalus, an ethereal remains Daedalus. Even the gods, whose lives are filled with reversals, rarely change their stripes. Usually, those rare ethereals who *want* to change their Image just assume a new shape and start lying about what they are.

Ethereal PCs who become dissatisfied with their basic nature do have a few options open to them. The most skilled surgeons among the dreamfolk know surgical techniques that can change an ethereal's nature. The results are crude and fatalities are common – but such doctors as Asklepios, Avicenna, Chiron, Hiawath'a, and the ethereal recreation of Samuel Hahnemann have all reported success. An ethereal who attempts to "assume" a god's place in the world, using a ritual challenge as described below, ends up dead or massively transformed. Finally, certain natural features of the Far Marches (including the river Proteus, the wind atop the Pamphylian peaks, and the vortex at Morcaster) can change every aspect of a spirit's constitution.

If a player becomes dissatisfied with his ethereal's Image, he has several options. The character may seek change, using one of the methods above. The player can request the Game Master's permission for a retroactive change, in which it turns out that the spirit has lied about its Image all along. The player can adjust the concept slightly, allowing a "new facet" of the character's Image to emerge. With the Game Master's assistance, this can be done within the framework of the campaign – an enemy might douse the spirit in the water of Proteus, or an incredibly strong dream might reshape his nature.



HOW FAR CAN YOU GO?

GMs establishing NPC power levels, and overseeing the increase in PC power, may wish to apply the following standards.

1-4 Forces: These ethereals rarely have influence. In Domains, they make good laborers and minions. In the Marches at large, they are prey.

5-6 Forces: 5-Force ethereals and most 6-Force ethereals qualify as weak. In groups they can pose a threat or participate in Far Marches politics.

6-7 Forces: Strong 6-Force ethereals, and almost all 7-Force ethereals, qualify as significant. They can hold down important positions in Domains, claim small regions of the Marches as their “turf,” and survive as wanderers.

8 Forces: This level represents the apex of most ethereal ambitions – the highest level to which an ethereal can reasonably expect to climb. Simple approaches to self-empowerment rarely take a spirit above this plateau: an ethereal must have extreme self-discipline or a naturally stellar nature to rise higher.

9-10 Forces: The most glorious dreams and myths in the ethereal realm – movers and shakers, the great ones whose footsteps metaphorically shake the Far Marches Domains – cluster at this level. Weak gods, such as the gods who have suffered greatly from fading (p. 19) and the patrons of small tribes, also cluster here. An ethereal cannot transfigure or perform a successful assumption with fewer than 9 Forces.

11+ Forces: Strong gods have 11 or more Forces, as do mythic figures on a level with gods (such as the Kraken). Other ethereals could theoretically reach this level, but this is unheard-of – ethereals with that much potential tend to *become* gods, instead. (At their most powerful, pagan gods likely possessed 16-18 Forces. Now only the Hindu ethereals, with their semi-Divine connection, are said to be at that level. See the *Game Master's Guide*, pp. 83-84.) Of course, with sufficient affinities and Songs (and perhaps a small Tether to supply Essence), an ethereal god can still be more potent than a celestial would expect from something with definable Forces.



POWER

“The desire of power in excess caused the angels to fall.”

– Francis Bacon, “Of Goodness”

Pagan gods can pack a lot of punch, but they offer second-rate patronage compared to the celestial Superiors. Unlike Archangels and Demon Princes, the pantheonic rulers cannot hand out character points and Resources on a whim. An ethereal’s ability to prosper ultimately depends upon inherent strengths – Forces, affinities, and Songs – that its master cannot easily give it. Alchemists and natural philosophers among the dreamfolk have striven for millennia to create the Crucible of Perfect Conception, a device for reworking and empowering the stuff of dreams. The ancient dream spirit Menkheperre leads a nomadic warrior cult known for its gruesome practice of kidnapping and dissecting angels it catches alone – in hopes of isolating their connection to God’s power before they die. (Blandine and Laurence both want him very dead, but a traveling band is hard to pin down in the ever-shifting Far Marches.) Ethereals also pursue more prosaic routes to personal power, from selling out to Beleth to stealing the power of the gods.

IMAGE ENHANCEMENT

“Hi! I’m Anit Lee, you’re dead, and I’ll be your psychopomp for the day. I’m guessing, from the fact that you came here at all, that vaguely squelchy fish-people from the planet circling Sirius B have visited you in your dreams and taught you to worship them. Hey! Don’t get excited, there’s no judgment here, they’re an old and respectable Mali legend and I have nothing but the highest respect for them. Bless their little sushi hearts. Anyway, you probably hoped they’d come for you themselves, but they’re busy. Tough luck! You get a cab. My cab. She’s named Bessie. And believe me, it’s a long hard journey from here to Sirius B. You’ll be blessing the air-conditioned interior and the nifty pine scent by the time you get there!”

*“Now, look, when we arrive, put in a good word for me, okay? This is the best gig I’ve ever had. It’s a thousand times better than real taxi work! If some snot-nosed passenger were to blow it for me, he’d wind up sleeping with a very **different** kind of fishes, if you get my drift?”*

Julia Martin, a dream spirit with the Image of a physician, derives a purpose from that Image. She exists to heal. It does not matter that she received that purpose from a dreamer’s imagination rather than from some cosmic fate or destiny. The purpose is woven into the fabric of her being. When Athena took it on herself to bring the long-dead Medusa back into the world and brought Julia the

gorgon's still-bleeding head and desiccated body, Julia could not refuse the case. She stitched Medusa's neck together and recreated a monster. This was not an impossible act, given the gorgon's nature, but it was a heroic one. This act of medicine suffused Julia, a woman *defined* as a physician, with new strength and power. Conversely, if she ripped up the Hippocratic Oath and danced on the pieces – if, for example, she took a corporeal vessel and developed new biological weapons for the government – it would inevitably weaken her.

Ethereals treasure their Images for practical reasons as well as sentimental ones. By fulfilling their purpose heroically, they gain power. Horrible betrayals of the principles woven into their being denature them. For this reason, even those ethereals who deny their Images usually choose a lifestyle *unrelated* to rather than opposed to their nature. A spirit born from dreams as a “river repairman” might join the U.S. Army, but would never become a dam-building river-breaking civil engineer.

Game Masters may wish to assign character points at the end of each story based on how truly and how grandiosely the PCs lived up to the purposes within them. See *Rewards and Punishments*, on p. 132.

IMAGE CONSUMPTION

“There’s no point in struggling, Santa. I’ve been hunting down second-rate imitation Clauses like you for centuries. It is the way of the world: the life force of the weak goes to feed the virile. The pathetic pretenders to the Christmas Man’s mantle die that he might become strong. Lo! I drink your life! Take my greetings to the lords of the land where dead dreams go!”

An ethereal can increase its natural strength by consuming another spirit whose Image resembles its own. The greater the resemblance, the more power the ethereal gains. For example, if one Hercules kills another, he generally feels a noticeable increase in his strength. If one gibbering dream “monster” consumes another, the effect is much subtler – the only thing the two creatures share is their basic monsterness. The surviving incarnation of Jack the Ripper claims that he must kill ten thousand human-like

LITTLE ETHEREALS, BIG MINDS

Some spirits have the Image of a small pixie or sprite, or other little creature. Their Image is physically weak, but potentially quite smart – but in the Marches, Intelligence *is* potency in combat! (Corporeally, there is little problem; few Corporeal Forces, or even a small vessel with no leverage (probably represented via a Corporeal Discord), create physical weakness.)

To make a “weak yet smart” ethereal, one could select a Dread of Using Brute Force. Thus, Peaseblossom the Flower Fairy can be quite a clever creature, but if confronted with the Big Bad Wolf, she’d rather run away instead of using her substantial Intelligence to battle with him in mind-combat. Alternatively, she may simply role-play her Image (and receive bonuses for doing so, both after the fact in character points, and during; see the *Image Fulfillment Bonuses* box, p. 128) as “combat weak, but clever.” A character might even combine both rationales!

However, even though it might cost Peaseblossom character points (for bad Image-playing) or Essence (for a Dread), if the Big Bad Wolf corners her in the Marches, she *could* turn and fight.

Sometimes, that little figment isn’t so little, and isn’t a figment . . .

spirits to get the satisfaction that killing *one* fellow Whitechapel Murderer brings him. Although some ethereals like to use the Song of Draining or physically eat their victims, it is widely acknowledged that direct responsibility for the death of one’s double is enough to consume the power of its Image. (See box, p. 132.)

As a rule, spirits would prefer to avoid a mad free-for-all where every spirit hunts its closest kin. Life in the wilds of the Marches, where such conditions hold, is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Most Domains respond by regulating and ritualizing conflict between ethereals of similar Images. They prosecute murder and limit the right to duel. Law governs the space between Domains as well – the “Traveler’s Dictat,” penned by Hermes in the Hellenic era, theoretically governs behavior in the Marches at large. In practice, however, Domains rarely prosecute crimes committed outside their borders, and the space between Domains is a lawless wasteland. One or two Domains, including the highly mobile Floating City, even *welcome* bandits and murderers, as long as they leave the Domain to practice their illicit activities.



REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

In a celestial game, PCs receive rewards and punishments from their Archangel or Demon Prince. Pleasing a pagan superior has political rewards, but it rarely makes sense to distribute Songs, affinities, character points, or Forces on this basis. The deity just isn't powerful enough to hand such things out for less than *extreme* success in its service.

Instead, Game Masters should base rewards and punishments on the *Image enhancement* concept. Characters who played to their Image – as when a treacherous scorpion thoughtlessly betrays a friend despite its intention to remain honorable, or a centaur takes time out for a drunken revel – receive small bonuses at the end of an adventure. A character who put its Image's "spin" on the adventure receives a substantial reward. A character who lived out its Image's purpose magnificently might receive an additional Force. A character who betrays its Image's purpose, on the other hand, might fall under a temporary curse of blindness, lameness, or ill luck as its nature wars with itself.

The end of an adventure is also a good time to reward ethereals for a successful Image consumption. In cases of great valor, where the spirit ruthlessly consumes a much stronger spirit with an almost-identical Image, the GM may elect to give the spirit a new Force. The normal reward for consuming one, several, or even a whole tribe of spirits during a story is one to five character points.

ASSERTION

"You may not pass until you pay the toll. The toll you must pay is the dead and forgotten. Something you have that your fire has died for. A piece of your heart that you wouldn't mind losing. A love you once held that has faded to nothing, to feed those who feast on the pale and loveless. Give us your dead and we'll eat and you'll pass in peace; treasure your past and you'll founder and fall. The highest of lords has yielded to us this right: to crouch on the cliffs and take from the passersby. By this right that is vested we hold true possession here. None may oppose us or their spirits will die."

Domain rulers buy loyal service using the *right of assertion* as their currency. When a Domain's master formally appoints an ethereal to a position within its realm – librarian, assassin, war leader, minister of the right, janitor, palace guard, or masseuse – the ethereal can call upon the power of the Domain to better perform those duties. "Just as Titus Clemens dreamed me into existence as a merchant of wonders," explains Quintus Valgus, a craftsman in Hephaestus' service, "Olympus began to dream of me as an artisan and a smith. My skills improved at once."

When performing the duties associated with his position, a spirit receives a +1 bonus to relevant target numbers and check digits.

The assertion bonus is cumulative with the Image bonus. An ethereal can receive an assertion bonus from only one Domain at a time, although it can "quit" its position at will preparatory to taking a more interesting position elsewhere. Spirits seek the highest and most broadly defined positions that they can – a lowly ratcatcher receives the assertion bonus only when catching rats, whereas the war leader of a Domain receives bonuses when doing battle, leading troops, planning tactics, and intimidating its subordinates. Domain rulers, however, cannot give every ethereal in their service a broad and powerful position. The surplus of authority would paralyze their Domain. The assertion bonus does not normally apply outside the relevant Domain (but see p. 108).

SELLING OUT

"Don't worry. The Big Book of Hell says that this kind of demon isn't dangerous. Just hold out your hand and let her sniff it."

Beleth does not extend patronage and rewards to the spirits who spread fear in her Marches in exchange for her protection. (That protection should be enough for them, *shouldn't it*.) Nor does she reward those who serve her vassals faithfully – if Tetzcatlipoca can't fete a lesser Aztec spirit properly, she won't do it for him. The most an ethereal can get from her without a pledge of eternal service is a little Essence now and again. Even after receiving such a pledge, the Princess of Nightmares prefers to give only meager rewards to her ethereal lackeys. However, she *can* give spirits Forces and Resources if she so chooses. This is the carrot she dangles before those who might serve her – the chance at a fast track to power.

The low status of ethereals in Beleth's service is not universal. By allowing her to "own" them, competent spirits can rise almost to the status of demons. Rolf Bjornstad, the Traitor at Bifrost, earned Beleth's favor and command over several Servitors when the Aesir put a blood-price on his head. The knowledge that he cannot survive without her patronage – that he is, in short, her competent but utterly dependent possession – inspires the Djinn Princess to regard him favorably. A number of ethereals, seeing Rolf's example, have sworn to Beleth in hopes of duplicating his success.

INITIATION

Ethereals on the road to power almost always start with their initiation. Spirits return from initiation with an enhanced knowledge of themselves. More importantly, over the months that follow, they can develop Songs, skills, and affinities otherwise out of their reach. See *Initiation*, p. 46, for more details.

ASSUMPTION

*"Here we may reign secure; and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell"*
— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Any spirit of sufficient personal strength can challenge a deity to ritual combat, in hopes of seizing the deity's godhead. If it wins, it steals the god's Image and potency. Some of its original nature must perish when deific power suffuses it, but a successful ethereal can retain its name, its memories, and part of its Image. The narrower the victory, the more of its nature the victor forsakes.

This ritual combat is called "assumption combat," because the challenger attempts to assume the god's place in the world. The challenged god swallows its rival, drawing the other spirit into its own Image. As the two duel inside that Image, it twists and mutates, showing facets of both their natures, casting off the slivers of spirit that the combatants cut away – personality quirks, memories, motivations, and loves. It is easy to cut away a trait *unworthy* of the god in question. Cutting away the enemy's worthiest traits is arduous. Eventually, one spirit loses enough of its *self* that its ego dies. The winner absorbs the best of the loser's remaining traits and casts off the rest as detritus. "Worthy" traits are defined relative to the Image in question – a strong treacherous streak would actually *help* when fighting Loki for his godhead!

Any two ethereals can engage in assumption combat, if both consent. This is normally a losing proposition for both parties. Almost invariably, the challenger dies and its opponent loses part of its selfhood. An ethereal might accept an assumption challenge, however, in order to absorb part of the spirit of a dying friend or a defeated but respected foe.

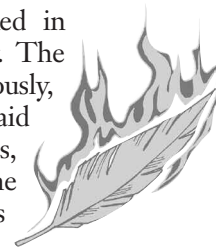
When assumption combat is *not* used as a plot device, run it as an ethereal combat, assigning the worthier ethereal an appropriate bonus on each roll – between +1 to +6 to combat target numbers. An ethereal who successfully assumes the power of a lesser god gains a Force, the Strong version of any primal affinities that god

possessed, and the Moderate version of the god's non-primal affinities. (It may have to discard some of these affinities subsequently, or reduce them to Slight, to remain within the normal limits; p. 50.) The spirit also receives the natural benefits of godhood (p. 81) and can convert any saved character points into appropriate Resources immediately. An ethereal who successfully assumes a greater god's godhead gains 3 Forces (to a maximum of 18) and the basic power package of the greater god. Given a few decades to work on its new abilities in peace, it rises to a power level where game statistics no longer have meaning. (Naturally, celestials rarely give new gods the peace to rise to such levels.)

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

The Greek gods represent the product of a highly successful assumption. They stole power from the Titans but remained independent individuals. Their character and fundamental temper does not resemble that of their predecessors. Various factors worked in their favor and allowed this great victory. The Greek gods engaged the Titans simultaneously, so that no Titan could surreptitiously aid another. Zeus had allies: the Hecatoncheires, who cast missiles at the sanctums of the Titans; Prometheus and Themis, turncoats who undermined the Titans' war effort from within; and the Cyclopes, who gave Zeus the thunderbolt, Poseidon his trident, and Hades his helmet. Finally, the Greek gods cheated: they spread myths on Earth both that their victory was a prophesied inevitability and that it had *already happened*. These myths gave them strength, and, in the process of assumption, became the truth.

The Roman gods, on the other hand, represent an unsuccessful assumption. When Jove and his fellow gods were created, they faced an awkward predicament: they *knew* they belonged atop Olympus, but they were far weaker than the Hellenic deities. Relying on Rome's ascendancy and their own bravado, they challenged Zeus and his brethren for the Olympian throne. Two of them succeeded in replacing the gods they challenged, at the cost of their memories and sense of self. Eight of them died. The others managed to force a small part of their nature onto the Greek gods before the Olympians annihilated them. The Greek gods can now wear the Roman names. Almost nothing of the Roman spirits remains. For centuries, the head of Jove hung on a pike outside Zeus' court. This was a grim warning to any spirit who dared to face an established god just because mortal legends thought it should!



CHALLENGING THE GODS

"Having observed one successful assumption and 84 unsuccessful attempts, I have devised two sagacious rules which all those hoping to seize a god's power should heed.

"The first rule of challenging the gods, then, is: be prepared.

"The second rule of challenging the gods is: don't do it, you bloody fool.

"If you abide by these rules, and in particular the second, your attempt to seize divine power will bear no ill fruits."

— Emelricus, "The Annals of Godhood"

Ethereals who hope to steal a god's Image naturally worry that the god will refuse the ritual duel and just smite them instead. Fortunately, the historian Emelricus, in his seminal "Annals of Godhood," describes three methods *almost* certain to make a god accept an assumption challenge – defiant atrocities, acts of dominance, and significant reenactments.

Defiance

Gods have a strong motivation to accept challenges to assumption combat. The idea that a god is more worthy of its particular godhead than anyone else in the Symphony is typically *part of its Image*. Sometimes, a challenger need only make its intentions clear and the god will begin an assumption combat. Anything else, including smiting the challenger, would require the god to accept the possibility that it *could* lose an assumption battle – which is a terrible disservice to its Image, and might well weaken the god!

Normally, one challenges a god by issuing a mortal insult. (Stealing from its regalia, spitting in its direction, and stating an intent to steal its godhead all work.) Unfortunately, not *every* god will feel obliged to accept the challenge – some might just penalize the insult by having the challenger tortured. Even a god who accepts challenges as a matter of course might judge the challenger too unimportant to stain its honor, or decide that the challenge is offered under false pretenses.

An ethereal can improve its odds by replacing its initial defiance with a *defiant atrocity*. This is an act that strikes so fiercely against the god's Image that the god cannot afford to answer it inadequately. Putting a nude picture of Artemis on the web or rendering Sleipnir down for glue would qualify. The relevant god cannot erase the insult without first proving that the challenger is not meaningful enough to shame it. If the challenger passes the god's sternest test of worth (see *The Trial*, below), the god must prove this through assumption combat and take its revenge against the challenger's heirs.

Dominance

An ethereal can force a god to agree to assumption combat by showing some form of dominance over that god. It might conquer the god's Domain, rather than defiling it, or bend the minds of the god's mortal worshipers. Eventually, the god must agree to an assumption battle simply to reclaim its own.

Reenactment

Ethereal challengers often reenact the stories of a god before issuing challenge, putting themselves in the god's place. If an ethereal spends significant time on this process, facing genuine danger and difficulty, the process attracts the god's favorable attention. It also tinges the ethereal's nature with the god's. The god has a hard time hurting such a challenger – it feels like aiming a blow at itself. (The god can, however, surreptitiously intervene to add more "realism" to the dangerous parts of a reenactment.)

The underlying truth of the stories matters more than the little details. Emelricus the historian, discussing the myth of Fenris, advises ethereals to bind a real monster – even if it's a fanged giant carp – rather than a friend dressed up as a giant wolf. He adds, "the Marches are *built* on stories. You will find many details taking care of themselves."

THE TRIAL

When an ethereal offers challenge, even if the god feels bound to accept, the god can first face the challenger with a quest or ordeal to "prove that it deserves to be a god." Failing an ordeal usually means death. Failing a quest erases any respect or protection the ethereal has earned. (A wise ethereal immediately swears to serve the god for seven or even seven times seven years, hopefully defusing the god's wrath.)

Some gods subject rivals to horrid ordeals designed to punish challengers and minimize the chance of their survival. Others assign arduous quests that they *hope* to see accomplished. After all, if the challenger succeeds, the god still has an excellent chance of winning the assumption combat. Some gods even offer challengers tasks designed to "groom" them for the position. The god does not intend to *lose*, of course, but rather to absorb the challenger's carefully developed traits.

The god must believe that it itself could survive the ordeal or complete the quest. Otherwise, the god proves that *it* is not worthy of godhood – a terrible blow against its Image. Therefore, since the god cannot make the trial impossible, the more treachery it plans, the easier the

“official” trial must be. Similarly, killing the challenger outright or locking the challenger up in the deepest pit of Olympian Tartarus is normally out.

The god need not share all of the details of the trial with its rival. Sometimes, returning to the god with proof of “victory” is the hardest part. The god can even announce the end of the trial and then spring a surprise on its “triumphant” enemy. The only definite end to a trial is when the god engages its rival in assumption combat. This has one salutary effect: declaring the trial over does not remove the challenger’s limited protection against treachery and murder.

TRANSFIGURATION

Spirits can also become gods through transfiguration. This process usually takes much longer than an assumption, but it is significantly safer. See p. 81.

If the ethereal used extreme means to make sure the god would accept its challenge (e.g., a significant reenactment), successfully completing the trial makes an assumption combat almost certain. If the ethereal simply challenged the god and the god countered with a trial, the god might not acknowledge the challenger’s success. (Zeus answered Jove, after his trial, with “I hear a voice boasting of great deeds, but I see no one of any consequence.”) The ethereal must now use extreme methods to engage the god’s attention. If it attempts an act of dominance, the god will (probably) hesitate before moving directly against it – the trial isn’t really over. If the god catches the ethereal attempting a defiant atrocity, all bets are off.

HOW DO ETHEREALS SPEND THEIR TIME?

“A sense of duty pursues us ever. It is omnipresent, like the Deity.”

– Daniel Webster

Creatures of all three realms have certain activities in common. Like humans and celestials, spirits can study, converse, travel, and do their “job,” if they have one. Spirits with roughly human mindsets also intrigue, plot, and gather socially. (Certain unmarked regions of the Marches are, by convention, safe gathering places. Only the most uncouth celestials and monsters take advantage of these hallowed spots to perform mass murder on the weak.)

Ethereals visit human dreamscapes to steal Essence, perform Rites, recruit worshipers, entertain themselves, and get a sense for events in the mortal world. (This is not an exclusive list.) Some ethereals have an agenda in the mortal world and use dreams to influence humans in support of that agenda.

Ethereals visit Earth for similar reasons: to recruit worshipers, to gather Essence, to play, and to update their understanding of the world that creates their own. Many also live on Earth to keep themselves safe from marauding monsters and celestials, and must therefore establish and maintain a solid Role.

Ethereals also have activities specific to their Image, profession, and elemental nature. Faerie lords ride on the hunt. The gods’ diplomats bargain with one another. Ethereals with a strong Light element spend hours redesigning their appearance, often in ways too minuscule for the untrained eye to observe.

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Image enhancement doesn’t just make an ethereal more powerful. It also feels good. If an ethereal temporarily sets the quest for power aside, it can get that sense of well-being without risk – living up to its Image in a safe artificial environment. For example, a spirit might use the Dreaming skill to recreate the dream or legend that formed it and then reenact part of that dream. Baldur might host a “throw weapons at Baldur” contest with the stipulation that attendees check any mistletoe, the one thing that can kill him, at the door. This is called “indulging” the ethereal’s Image. Ethereals not immediately worried about their survival spend as much as a third of their day indulging their Images. It’s not unusual, in some Far Marches Domains, to enter a soldier’s home and discover the occupant engaged in *apparently* lethal battle with Dreamed figments copied from the dream that created it. (A good reason to knock . . .)

CAMPAIGN GROUPS

As with celestial-oriented games, it serves ethereal games well to define the nature of the PC group before individual character design. Common groups include local figures in a region of the Far Marches, dream teams in Beleth's service, troubleshooters or elite servants of a given pantheon, packs of ethereal scavengers who have finally become "worth notice" after years clawing their way in that direction, travelers and tribes banded together for protection, and dreams and myth figures gathered under the banner of some glorious cause. Such causes include the hunt for the Unspeakable Name that some say Yahweh used to become God; the fight against Heaven, Hell, or some dark Far Marches force; and the desire to protect the gravesite of Enkidu, first martyr of the Purity Crusade.

A typical ethereal spends about a fifth of its time in a "dissipated" state resembling a controlled Trauma. It dissolves its consciousness into the entirety of the Marches – particularly into those dreams where its primary element plays a significant role. A tiny portion of its will and perceptions remains with its Image to maintain its link to independent existence (which also means it is vulnerable to attack, unlike true Trauma). While dissipated, the spirit experiences a confusing melange of thousands of dreams. No ethereal, with the possible exception of the greater gods, has the intellect necessary to remember a specific dream. The best a spirit can hope for is an occasional portent or a sense for events that affect the entire Marches. Ethereals dissipate despite the dubious benefits because they find it restful. Its analogue in the corporeal world is a good night's sleep. Ethereals experience portents only at the GM's option. Getting a sense of the Marches' general status requires an Intelligence roll. Waking up quickly in an emergency requires a Will roll.

ETHEREAL CAMPAIGNS

*"Ne'er had been read, in story old,
Of maiden true betray'd for gold,
That loved, or was avenged, like me."
– Sir Walter Scott, Canto ii*

Heaven has glory, Earth has complexity, Hell has a sinister majesty – but none of the other realms breathes the stuff of stories and myth as the Marches do. Ethereals

live in a realm built from primal images, threads of dream, and the gravel of broken legends. In the saner regions of the Marches, Game Masters can draw on the classic cycles of myth. In the wild regions of the Far Marches, elements of a thousand ancient and modern stories fuse. The ethereal realm is a place of terrible passions, great sacrifices, dreadful betrayals, and the purest stuff of fable. Game Masters running an ethereal campaign can incorporate as much complexity as their gaming style requires, but should not be afraid to employ simple, primeval narratives. Grandeur serves these campaigns better than intricacy.

Game Masters who want a specific mythic "hook" to hang ethereal games on – as celestial games revolve around the War – can use what ethereal tradition describes as the Two Pillars of the Sky. Tradition has power in the Marches. Any ethereal whose Image includes the customs and "rules" of a story cycle or mythic culture will find it uncomfortable to flout those rules. Others can use this to manipulate them. This is the Pillar of the Past, or Tradition. Second, the Marches embody thought. Intellectual development builds on itself, producing an ever-accelerating evolution of the mental world. Ethereals therefore live in a context that develops faster than the Earth itself. Although the ancient gods still hold court, technological primal spirits and unheard-of monsters are now appearing – and the future *will* be stranger. This is the Pillar of the Future, or Endless Change. These Pillars yield themes and events that can drive a Marches game.

REALISTIC CAMPAIGNS

"The angel's eyes were very cold.

"Please," I said. The word hung naked in the air. 'Let me call my wife before I die. She – doesn't know. She won't know I'm still alive.'

"The angel grimaced, and his eyes flicked skyward. No doubt he was asking God for guidance. Which was worse? he must have been thinking. To deny me that last goodbye, or to risk my pulling some ethereal stunt and getting away from his avenging blade? But he was an angel of the God of love and mercy, and there was only one choice.

"The blade drew back, and fell forward. I could still see for another few seconds as my head rolled across the ground."

A realistic campaign puts the ethereal characters in an environment where mortal lives and decisions have the greatest meaning. Earth is not just an Essence farm for ethereals – it is the home of their progenitors, the land where dreams are born. It is the greatest playground of them all. Every passing man, woman, child,

and beast radiates emotion, thought, and the energy of belief – the building blocks of ethereal life. For a realistic campaign to work, the PCs must respond to this wonderland by *caring* about the human lives around them. Some care about their human associates as if they were ethereals – treating them like *real people*, as potentially significant friends and enemies. Other ethereals, creatures of story, try to fit the humans who fascinate them into sweeping stories of their own design, often in roles that support the ethereal's Image or elemental nature. Dana McCullough, a dream-fragment animal trainer, treats some of her Role's human associates as genuine friends or foes. Others she regards as trainable animals. Conditioning two coworkers to play the roles of mongoose and cobra occupies much of her time. Her grandest experiment is the love story between her human employer and herself, made tragic by a family unwilling to see them

together. Two ethereal friends and a human actor play the role of family members when needful.

The regular rounds of relationships and interpersonal politics, work and scholastic crises, household maintenance, and “having fun” can occupy most of a realistic game, particularly if the PCs have interesting Roles. GMs should bear in mind that, unless the PCs are extremely eccentric, ordinary lives should be seasoned with significant disasters. Otherwise, the campaign will wind down and become dull.

DARK CAMPAIGNS

“It was him or the cause. Without the cause, he'd have had nothing to live for. Without him, the cause has one more reason to fight. It was the right choice at the right time for the right reason, Sitalces. Hold your tongue. Be satisfied. And have a boy sent up to my room. I'm tired.”

OPTIONS FOR PANTHEON-LEVEL GAMES

An ethereal game can focus around an extremely strong pack or an established pantheon. Characters with 7 or more Forces are able to serve as major powers within Far Marches Domains. More generally, throughout the land of myth and story, they can easily serve as heroes, villains, and primal forces to be respected and feared. These are characters worthy to live in legend, and their nature should reflect this. Characters with 9 or more Forces and a godhead are even more imposing. They can serve as meaningful objects of worship on Earth and devotion in the Marches, able to protect their followers and encourage them in their service. The most suitable stories for all these characters include investigation of the great mysteries of the Marches, battles with its monsters and tyrants, exploration of its farthest corners, and the construction of great strongholds in its midst.

The GM should remember that in the ethereal context, angels and demons are creatures of immense power and terrifying aspect. A single 9-Force celestial warrior is generally a match (or more!) for a martial 9-Force god – and the celestial probably has a lot more backup. In other words, for a high-powered game, the GM should either use angels and demons with discretion or start the characters at 10 or more Forces.

GMs interested in running a specific pantheon should feel free to ignore its canonical status (e.g., dead or almost-dead) if desired. Similarly, they should generally make the full range of characters from that pantheon available to the players, including apparently minor figures. *Every* deity is a massively unlikely success story – characters who don't seem that important in the legends are only slightly less probable. For example, if a character wants to play Calliope, the Muse of Epic Poetry, in a Hellenic game, perhaps Calliope earned her godhead through assumption or a mystery cult now forgotten. The necessary Forces require only effort and excellence.

If the GM wishes to run a pantheonic game without using historical deities, several options are available. The simplest assumes that the characters have just defeated an old pantheon in assumption combat. Hermes is no more; the new god of thieves and messengers is Laodameia, the Wind of Needles and Thorns. Hades fell; the new god of death is Phaedyne, the Censor of the Final Record. The other characters have each seized a post. Alternately, the GM can postulate either a successful new religion or an alternate method to create godheads *en masse*. Perhaps if the characters command a Dream Magnet Domain, pumping their Image into the minds of thousands of dreamers could suffice.

CAMPAIGN CONCEPTS

A skillful GM can involve PCs in a Far Marches power struggle. They would play the roles of conciliators, mediators, power brokers, *aides de camp*, or even participants in their own right. The events around them might include succession politics in the court of a failing god, rooting out traitors and assassins, fighting off a military invasion, managing domestic affairs, and trying to suppress guerrilla revolutionaries or a forbidden philosophy. The PCs might even engage in something esoteric like overseeing the trial of the Domain's creator for its recently-discovered collaboration with the Crusade.

On a grander scale, GMs can involve PCs with the affairs of celestials and ascendant gods. The decline and fall of Blandine or Beleth makes a strong story, as does a new Crusade – particularly if the PCs have advance warning. An ethereal attempting to become Yahweh Mk. II might throw the ethereal realm out of balance, with effects felt throughout three worlds. If Armageddon looms, or a mad god goes on a rampage, the players' group will want to protect the humans and spirits they care about.

A two-part campaign could begin with the band making a name for themselves and earning respectable positions in a Domain. The obligations of that position then become the focus of play – a patron god might hire them on as spies, to ferret out the secrets of angels and demons; as diplomats; as explorers; or as traders. In a well-conceived Domain, the PCs might have fun as judges, soldiers, or even shopkeepers.

An attempted assumption is good fodder for a short campaign. The protagonists start off as employees of a high-Force spirit who is ready to challenge a god for its Image. They help the spirit perform a defiant atrocity, reenact the stories of the god, or maneuver itself into a position of dominance. If they succeed, the god sends their employer off on an elaborate quest and permits the PCs to help . . . or makes it a condition of the trial that they try to stop their boss! The trial should have some sort of twist at the ending, designed by the god, the challenger, or the GM, so that their employer's assumption combat does not end up as an anticlimax. For example, the challenger could have its minions poison the god before the battle, or the quest weakens the challenger so that it must merge with willing PCs – also using assumption – if it is to stand a chance.

Ethereal travelers in the Far Marches – perhaps on a “ship of fools,” searching for a mythical spirit's paradise – make fine PCs. A game focusing on such characters would be adventurous and bizarre, with each new story set in a new Domain.

A dark campaign focuses on the compromises “good” ethereals make in order to survive in monstrous Domains and Beleth's Marches, as well as the horrors they come to accept as a matter of course. An atmosphere of moral compromise and decay shows off starkly hideous dreamscapes and Domains to their best effect. Such places can be found in any game, and abound in a dark campaign's Marches.

Uncompromisingly evil PCs do not serve a dark game well. Ideally, they should be strong enough to dish out atrocities, weak enough to suffer occasional nasty reversals, cruel enough to add to an atmosphere of horror, and virtuous enough that ethical compromise is a realistic danger.

HUMOROUS CAMPAIGNS

*“First, I recognize the abhorrent nature of sacrificing a virgin to the One Who Waits On the Threshold. Second, I recognize that we do not have any virgins to sacrifice. Third, I understand that, as your emissary, I was expected to prevent this sticky mess. However, Iason, what you do not grasp is the scale of that monster's diplomatic talents! Had anyone else been bargaining, it would surely have cost us at least **two** of the virgins we do not have.”*

Running *In Nomine* in a slapstick fashion requires nothing more than exaggerated characters and ridiculous situations. (These are easy to come by in the Marches, where surreal dreams can come to life.) Hard-edged satire, where the players laugh but the characters act in deadly earnest, is more difficult. The main weapon in a Game Master's arsenal is the landscape of the Marches. Dreamscapes allow humans to express aspects of society that they would never admit to while awake. In a legal satire, a cop's nightmare might reveal his desperation to reach his quota of drug-related confiscations – how else will his precinct stay financially afloat? Meanwhile, criminals dream of a nightmarish early parole that cuts short their state-sponsored criminal education. Postmodernist Domains can satirize stories and dreams by strictly enforcing their genre rules. Within their borders, characters must conform to the clichés and conventions of high-budget action movies, low-end romance novels, or stories of occult conspiracy.

Humorous campaigns can be combined with mythic campaigns (below). In this case, the natural subject for satire is the structure of myth. Run one way, ethereals might go on epic quests for “the Shoes That Go Faster Than Most Bicycles.” Run another way, everything, right down to buying tampons on Earth, becomes an epic quest, full of monsters, riddles, tests of character, and the meddling of gods and Heaven.

MYTHIC CAMPAIGNS

“This game,’ the kid said. Not kid. Guy. Young man, I guess. ‘It’s called the Sangreal Quest?’ His face shone with this kind of quiet joy. Peace. Like living peace.

“So I said, ‘Sure. I can do a demo for you if you like.’

“You do not need to do this thing,’ he said, very assuredly. He bent over the box. His pale hair gleamed. ‘Wake thee, spirit of the Sangreal,’ he said. And the box started glowing.

“I got out of there. I mean, I dunno what I was thinking. What? That it was going to explode? But the boxes aren’t supposed to glow. They’re definitely not supposed to glow.”

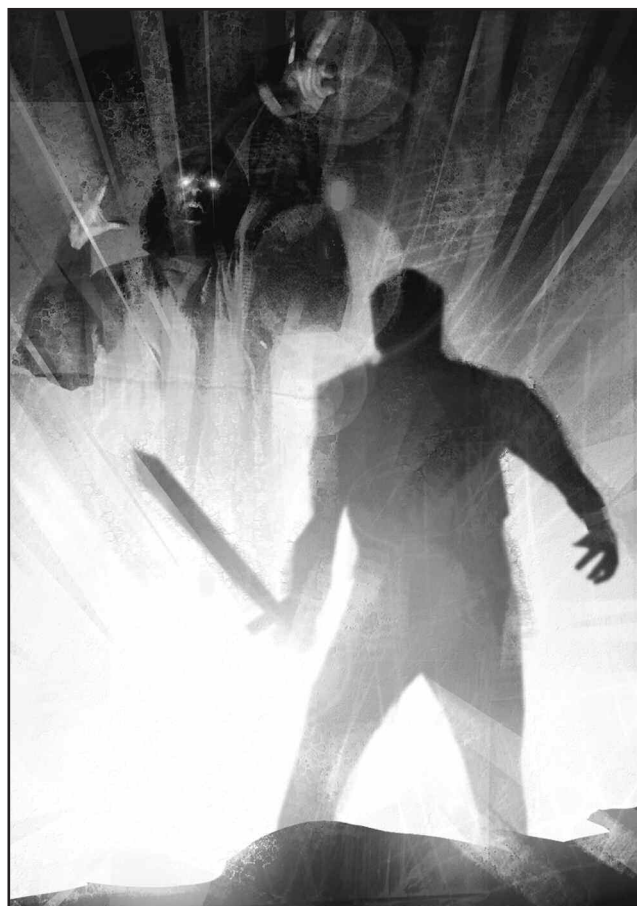
The Marches abound with the trappings of myth. A significant number of ethereal spirits qualify as archetypal characters. Ethereals have plenty of reason to go on quests – as part of an assumption attempt, to recover treasures lost during Uriel’s Crusade, or to enhance their Image. (Ethereals with some cultural backgrounds may seek out Great Deeds to perform as a matter of course.) There is no shortage of horrible enemies to oppose. An aspiring hero can pit itself against the gods, Beleth’s demons, and even the bright and terrible angels. Talking animals, trees laden with bewitched fruit, ordeals, great terrors, bridges of knives, mysterious sages, enchanted princes and princesses, ants and lions capable of remembering a favor, monsters that can be bought off with honey . . . these elements are not hard to come by. The ethereal realm is a rich and textured place.

Game Masters should remember that it takes more than the *components* of fairy tales and mythic cycles to create a truly mythic feel. Humans turn to myth when dealing with subjects where pragmatism and realism are unsatisfactory. Myth is about the world as people *want* it to work. For this reason, most actions have consequences and (ultimately) closure in a mythic game. The causal chain can be direct or indirect, but heroic sacrifices and “taboo” violations always come back to reward or haunt the perpetrator. Neither are small actions forgotten. The Game Master need not build a plot around every little thing the characters do, but thoughtless remarks and tiny acts of kindness should regularly yield dramatic outcomes.

INCORPORATING ETHEREALS INTO CELESTIAL CAMPAIGNS (AND VICE VERSA)

Ethereal PCs in a celestial game are less powerful than their celestial peers. They have little reason to care about the course of the War. Demons seek to dominate them. Angels have reason to drive them from both Blandine’s Marches and Earth. With so much stacked against ethereals, GMs should carefully provide the means, motive, and opportunity for such PCs to play a meaningful role in the War.

Ethereals who go over entirely to Hell (that is, Beleth, although few Princes would ignore a chance to have an agent in Beleth’s Marches) can involve themselves in the War as weak demons would. The trick is to put them in a group with other weak demons and Soldiers of Hell – or to give them access to a resource that their celestial colleagues and rivals don’t have. This keeps the ethereal character(s) competitive.



THE TSAYADIM

The Purity Crusade remains vivid to those ethereals who survived. They regard it as an abhorrent event, comparable to the Holocaust on Earth. Thousands of ethereal spirits were put to the sword, hundreds of Domains were eradicated, and most pantheons were crippled or wiped out entirely. Uriel, Archangel of Purity, is remembered as a monstrous villain, a butcher so terrible that even God was ashamed.

(There are those ethereals who claim, however, that God did not call Uriel back to Heaven to stop the slaughter, but because Uriel's crusade was actually a quest for the secret source of God's power.)

After Uriel was recalled, his most fanatical followers refused to take up service with another Archangel. Instead, they remained in the Marches, continuing their Superior's crusade against pagan spirits. (Or, say the cynics, continuing their search for the secret that will elevate their master to omnipotence.) These Purity loyalists are known as *Tsayadim* – Hebrew for “hunters.”

There are not many Tsayadim, and they do not attack every spirit they meet. They primarily hunt the old gods whom Uriel failed to eliminate, and their servants, as well as any ethereals known to visit Earth. Because they are Outcasts, the Tsayadim avoid contact with other angels, and thus are rarely seen in the vicinity of the Near Marches. They are believed to have “camps” in the Far Marches consisting of ethereal Domains that they conquered by slaughtering the previous inhabitants.

The Marches are vast, and Purity's orphans cannot be everywhere. Thus, Tsayadim are like sharks – greatly feared, but the chances of actually being attacked by one are extremely small. The GM may choose to make the Tsayadim the primary adversaries in an ethereal campaign, or he might use them as an occasional encounter, or they might never show up at all, except as tales in the night.

Since the Tsayadim have been actively waging their Crusade for over 12 centuries, they are all formidable. Most will have Forces well above the angelic average, concentrating in the Ethereal and Celestial realms.

In the Marches, Tsayadim usually hunt in groups, so they are less likely to be ambushed and their quarry are less likely to escape. If a spirit flees to the corporeal plane, it will usually be pursued by a single Tsayad.

ORPHANS OF PURITY

The majority of Tsayadim are Malakim, and of the remainder, most are Seraphim or Cherubim. Few members of other Choirs had the fanaticism or determination to exile themselves from Heaven.

A trait that all Tsayadim share is that the Word of Purity still protects them from Falling. A Tsayad *cannot* Fall, no matter how much dissonance he accumulates. However, dissonant Tsayadim also do not live long. Uriel's dissonance conditions forbid a Servitor of Purity to ignore corruption in any form – all corruption must be purified or destroyed. (And demons claim that the Tsayadim just don't get a *chance* to Fall before their fellows kill them.) Uriel defined “corruption” as dissonance or Discord. Diabolicals are also considered “corruption,” as are any ethereal spirits in a human dreamscape or on the corporeal plane.

Since the Tsayadim are intended to be NPC encounters rather than player characters, only a few sample attunements are given below. In general, Purity attunements gave Uriel's Servitors the ability to detect and destroy various forms of corruption. (Masters of Purity were known to have the ability to *remove* Discord, though they only did it for other Servitors of Purity, and it was rumored to strip Forces from the subject.)

They also have a very similar version of the attunement that Laurence now grants as *Hunt (In Nomine, p. 127)*. It is not activated by combat; instead, the angel may home in on anyone he detects corrupting the Symphony – i.e., generating more than 10 notes of disturbance in any given ripple (*In Nomine, p. 55*).

Seraphim (Choir Attunement)

Seraphim of Purity have a heightened ability to detect Symphonic disturbances – whenever making a Perception roll to detect such a disturbance, they are automatically successful (if success is possible, i.e., if the base target number is 2 or higher), but roll for the check digit or Interventions.

Continued on next page . . .

A few rare ethereals develop a genuine faith and devotion to God's will. This is a separate emotion from the pseudo-faith that ethereals with preacher/devotee Images possess. If you want to mix spirits and angels, then Heaven should not turn up its nose at ethereal believers, any more than it rejects hopeful Soldiers. Instead, applying the deepest level of strategic secrecy, Archangels should take these spirits into service. They give out no "signing benefits" (no free character points, attunements, or Forces) but they do allow these spirits to work with angel groups and they do provide small mission-related rewards. The angels involved are rarely (if ever) told that Heaven has ethereal Servitors. Instead, their Archangel usually explains that "special circumstances apply" and "you may trust this spirit if and when your celestial instincts so suggest." Ethereals working with angels can get by without extra perks, as they have unique powers and are not in active competition with their angelic peers.

Rarely, individual ethereals become important in the war for any of a number of reasons. A Gabrielite prophecy can make a spirit a pivotal figure. Being the only witness to the apparent death of an Archangel gives a spirit indefinite sanctuary with the forces of Heaven – in such ineffable matters, even Dominic can't be sure he's gotten all the relevant details out of a witness. Naturally, demons will want to get their hands on the spirit too! A group of ethereal diplomats can represent an isolated Domain that has control over a terribly powerful resource. An individual ethereal can temporarily become a Superior's "favorite," in a light game – impressing (e.g.,) Lucifer, Andrealphus, or Eli, and thereby becoming the focus for celestial politics.

Celestials, in turn, need a reason to participate in ethereal stories. Outcasts and Renegades might hide in the Marches, becoming normal (if powerful) denizens.

THE TSAΨADIM (CONTINUED)

Cherubim (Choir Attunement; Restricted)

Uriel's Cherubim are pure trackers; they do not need to make physical contact to attune themselves to something. They can attune themselves to the trail their target left behind. This can be any physical remains, from a fingerprint to a discarded candy wrapper. (In the Marches, this can be a problem; see *Tracking*, p. 97.) They do not necessarily know who or what they are attuning themselves to, but once they're on the trail, they can follow it to the ends of the Earth . . . and beyond. If the target leaves the plane, then when the Cherub gets to the location where this took place, he must make a new resonance roll. If he fails, he's lost the trail. If successful, he can continue following his quarry, whether to the corporeal realm, the Marches, Heaven, or Hell – even if it's been longer than a minute! (See *In Nomine*, p. 53.)

Since the objects of their attunements are often prey, Cherubim of Purity get a bonus, equal to the sum of the attuned person's dissonance and Discord (but not Dread), when making a Will roll to dissolve a bond.

Malakim (Choir Attunement)

Malakim of Purity were the scourges of Heaven – they add a target's dissonance to the Accuracy of their attacks, and the target's Discord to their Power. (Fortunately for ethereals, their Dread level *doesn't* count as either dissonance or Discord!)

RIPPLES (SERVITOR ATTUNEMENT)

More perfectly attuned to the Symphony, the angel adds his Celestial Forces to his Perception for purposes of detecting ripples in the Symphony . . . and subtracts the same amount from the degree of disturbance his own actions cause. (No disturbance can be reduced below 1, however.)

Otherwise, even for Dreams/Nightmares Servitors in the Near Marches, the affairs of the ethereal PCs must take on strategic importance to make long-term celestial involvement practical. Game Masters should also take care to keep celestial characters from overpowering their weaker associates, by playing up the fact that ethereals are at home in the Marches in a way no celestial will ever be.

NEAR THE END

Declaration of Defiance:

I, Caraculiambo, do solemnly declare that until the mists turn clear and the last dream dies, the spirits of the Marches shall not kneel under angelic rule. The spirits of the Marches shall build our own Domains, and live in our own societies, with our own laws, and we shall not bow before the laws of God. We will do battle in our own name, against each other and against Heaven, but we will not fight in the cause of God. We shall ferret out the mysteries of our land, explorers and scholars both, but we shall not give ourselves to the mysteries of God.

Spirits shall create, destroy, love, hate, trade, live, and struggle to survive, and we shall not once turn our thoughts to God. For we shall not serve a God who murders us, who Crusades against us, who fears us, and who hates us. We shall not serve a God unfit to lick the meanest spirit's boots.

We will serve our petty lords, but not your God. Our deities, but not your God. Ourselves, but not God. For even the most terrible of our gods is of our own flesh.

I, Caraculiambo, speak these words of defiance. And if God is not a coward, I challenge him to face me in the flesh and prove them wrong.

Zeal-for-the-Lord set the scrap of paper aside. Night-black lips tightened. "How did this come into your hand, Intercessionist?"

"A spirit, sir. One of the smaller mythic giants. We challenged him, and he said that he would speak to none but the Archangel. He would not stop advancing, even when we drew steel – he spitted himself upon our blades."

"Dead?"

"Hocequin's blade took him through the eye and killed his soul."

"He carried this?"

"He did."

Zeal-for-the-Lord straightened. "Build a cairn for him," he said.

"Sir?"

"Such heresy as his would damn a human a thousand times over. It sickens me to read his 'declaration.' At the

same time, we must acknowledge a selfless act of sacrifice. Every such act serves God."

"I do not see how his act did so. Nor, I suspect, did Caraculiambo."

Zeal-for-the-Lord drew back his lips in a faint, ironic smile. "Perhaps that is why I command this camp and not the late Caraculiambo." He waved the Mercurian away. "Build him a cairn. Put his message there. Let him rest in honor."

To the Archangel of Dreams, Her Hand Alone, Ab Urbe Condita 1497.

Bright Lady,

I write this missive with the utmost reluctance. In doing so, I betray the Most Virtuous Lord I serve. Do not look for me on the morrow. I shall arrange my own death, before you read this, in battle.

I do not know if you understand what is being done here in the Marches. I did not understand it myself until today, and I am a Crusader, a warrior of Archangel Uriel's. But, Bright Lady, we are not waging a war.

We are crushing hope and nobility. We are beating every last virtuous trait out of these spirits, bleeding it out of them with our blades and our Songs. We hunt the most poisonous and vile creatures of the Marches, and this is just, but we are teaching the best and brightest spirits to hate the Lord. We are stamping out whatever plans God had for these creatures. We are destroying dreams.

A spirit named Caraculiambo gave his life to send a message to Heaven. I have taken it from his cairn, and I am sending it to you.

Stop us, Bright Lady of Dreams, in God's name.

*Help us do something **better** in these Marches than kill.*

– Roscelin, Cherub of Purity

** The Catholic Church, specifically the Papacy, did not use the Dionysian method of reckoning (using A.D.) until the 10th century C.E.; they used instead AUC, **ab urbe condita** ("from the founding of the city"), which refers to the founding of Rome in 755 BCE. The year in which Uriel was recalled, therefore, would have been 1500 AUC to the Catholic Church of the time, so Roscelin wrote his letter in 742 A.D.*

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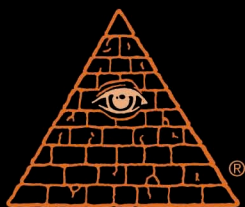
THESE DREAMS . . .

Once they were gods who ruled the lands of sleep. Once they were spirits who sent their images to slumbering mortals. Once they were elves, unicorns, dragons, and more.

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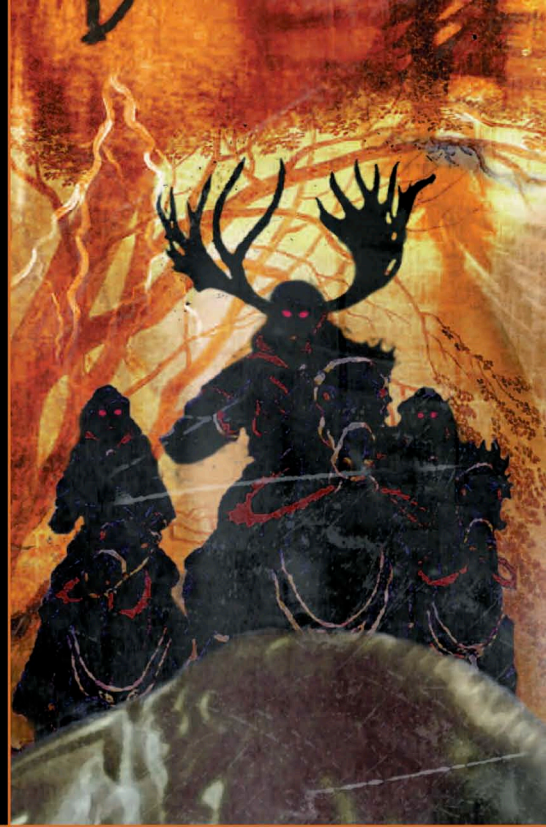
Play ethereal spirits in their home territories of the Marches . . . or in the corporeal realm, as they try to regain the glory and worship that was theirs before Uriel's Crusade.



WARNING: This book is intended for mature readers. It contains interpretations of religious themes which some readers may find unsettling.



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