



Egregore

EXILES IN THE CITY OF SHADOWS

Version 1.beta (GameChef 2010)

By Baxil

NOTE: This is the first-draft version of the game. Since Game Chef 2010, it has been revised and new content added. For updates and downloads, visit <http://www.tomorrowlands.org/gaming>.

THE PHANTASMS were brushing past his senses ever more often, now. Half-remembered scents floated on intangible breezes; distant voices buzzed and whispered and roared from around corners; imperceptible forms flitted between the bright but indistinct areas that passed for shadows.

Ben could almost mistake the city for alive.

But these latest voices troubled him. The mocking laughter of children. It was close – in the alley around the corner. And there was one voice not laughing. A young, tormented voice – all too familiar.

He glanced into the empty parking garage, sighed, and abandoned his post. He had a few minutes before Emily returned, and if she ran into trouble, he'd still be in earshot anyway.

Rounding the corner, he recognized the scene instantly. Half a dozen sixth graders encircled a younger boy, almost within arm's reach. He'd been that younger boy, once upon a time, a world away.

One was holding the boy's lollipop tauntingly overhead. "You want it back?" their ringleader sneered at the frightened kid. "Fight me for it. Or are you too chicken? Ben the hen."

"Hey," older Ben interrupted, drawing himself to his full height.

The alley went still. Seven pairs of dark eyes lanced into him, and a long-forgotten fear chilled his bones. But he met the gaze of the diminutive bullies. A bunch of pathetic kids. *I don't have to be scared of them any more. I could kick their asses with a wave of my hand -*

He stopped that thought in its tracks. *No. That's exactly why I'm here.*

"You guys must be feeling pretty good, huh?" he asked with forced gentleness. "Taking that lollipop away. Makes you feel strong." He crouched down and locked eyes with the leader. "But you know what makes you even stronger? When you're able to give. Taking means you're ruled by your needs. Giving means that you've conquered them. And once you've conquered yourself, you've beaten the only opponent who ever mattered."

"I don't care what you say, mister," the bully retorted. "This is my sucker."

"And so are these." Ben reached inside himself for power and outside himself for raw material. Six more lollipops coalesced from darkness into substance in his outstretched hand. It was a risk ... but one he knew he had to take.

"Take them," Ben said, and the bully did, suspiciously. "No, really. They're yours. No strings attached."

"I know what you're going to say, and I'm still not giving any of MY suckers to that kid," the bully snarled.

"You don't have to," Ben said with a smile. "There's more where those came from. I could give him one myself. Even if you take it, I could simply give him another one, and another. I can make more lollipops than you can carry. But all that would do is humiliate you in front of your friends. Is that what you want? Or would you rather show everyone here that you're strong enough to decide who goes home happy?"

The bully stared in defiant silence, then dropped young Ben's lollipop on the ground. "I didn't want it anyway. C'mon, guys, let's go."

The children shimmered and faded away, mirages in the asphalt desert, and Ben let out a long breath.

He had won. And maybe – *maybe* –

– no. He didn't dare to turn around to check. But he didn't have to. He knew she was there.

"I hope you weren't expecting to hide the scent of your magic from me," Jenny's voice said.

"Mahathallah, archangel of the ancient temple." Ben began the invocation for the ritual of banishing, already knowing it was pointless. "Great Lady of Deception. Mother of the succubi --"

"Is that any way to treat a guest you just invited over?" she interrupted, feigning insult. "And after you've just sacrificed some of the last of your magic for the fleeting happiness of a phantom, too. If I didn't know better I'd think you're going as soft in the heart as you are in the head."

Ben turned around to Jenny's form, leaning casually against the building, looking the same as the last day he'd seen her. But no – it wasn't Jenny. Another phantasm ... one he couldn't shake. And she was becoming more and more substantial, more *her*, with every visit. Twisting the knife.

"It's not about real and fake any more," he said. "It's about right and wrong."

"Is it?" Jenny asked innocently. "Is that what you're going to tell yourself when you help your ladyfriend blow us all up?"

WARNING: This is a game about characters confronting their inescapable inner demons.

Some players may find this uncomfortable or triggering. If you think this game may raise real-life issues, please discuss them beforehand with your gaming group. If you think it is *likely* for real-life issues to arise, this may not be a good game to play.

Please roleplay responsibly; the goal of all games is to have fun.

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I. Getting Ready

Premise

A typical roleplaying game is about growing into heroism: taking a character of little capability and discovering how they adapt to power. Egregore upends that trope and shakes the box.

Your characters start out as powerful heroes – mages who have pushed the rules a little too far, and find themselves exiled into a hell of their own design surrounded by featureless desert. They must adapt to their decreasing control as the self-created world around them eats away at their health, confidence and sanity.

Will they be able to come to terms with their own transgressions, and discover the secrets of the city around them, in time to find a happy ending? There's nowhere to escape to but endless wasteland – so they'd better darn well try.

Basic Gameplay

During a game of Egregore, characters will attempt to accomplish their goals by rolling to overcome challenges. One player at a time will “own” the scene and confront challenges. Other players may assist with their own characters, describe the nature of the opposition, or take over the role of a NPC (either friendly or hostile) in an effort to persuade the active player to tackle the challenge in a certain way. Players who influence the active player's actions accumulate minor bonuses for themselves.

When the active player has accumulated enough successful challenges, they may narrate one final task and make one final roll in order to accomplish one of their goals. A success also renews the character and uncovers an epiphany about the city in which the characters all find themselves. At that point, a new player steps up to “own” the scene and play continues with them.

As players uncover more of the city's secrets, they must individually decide whether they wish to destroy, control or protect it. Once someone has accomplished one of those 3 goals, the game ends.

Setup

Gather 3-7 players (it probably works best with a standard roleplaying group of size 4-6). Choose one of these players to be the "City". This is Egregore's equivalent to a GM – the City adjudicates rules, describes settings, and mediates player conflicts.

Everyone else will play the role of a Mage (PC). However, Egregore is a collaborative storytelling game – everyone has the opportunity to create events and obstacles in a GM-like fashion, and will roleplay NPCs throughout the game.

You will need one character sheet for each Mage; a few d20s; some scratch paper for the City; and blank paper (preferably index cards) for the NPCs you encounter. Mages should create their character and Attachment (see Section 2). The City should create a few Manifestations that are not specific to any of the characters (see Section 4).

It is possible for experienced roleplayers to distribute the City role between themselves, so that every participant has a Mage, but we do not recommend this for your first game of Egregore.

Game Length

Egregore's default rules (overcome three Drives before your City Goal) may make the game run as long as 2.5 hours per Mage. For games with more players or lots of character-driven digressions, you can plan to split a game up over multiple sessions; or you can play an abbreviated version.

Reducing the number of Drives required to begin your City Goal will make the game both slightly shorter and significantly easier. Another option is to double the effects of every Challenge (each success counts as 2 toward your Goal, but double Trait loss and Edge gain); this cuts game time roughly in half, and is recommended especially for Game Chef evaluation play.

Tone

Before the game starts, discuss among yourselves how grim and gritty you want Egregore to be. Do you want to focus on the struggles of doomed characters, or flawed individuals who can find salvation? Do you want the mages' Damnations to be truly evil acts, or potentially justifiable acts in moral grey areas? This can be set on a character-by-character basis, or decided by the group as a whole.

Grittier games, or more experienced roleplayers, can require that more Drives be overcome before the City can be dealt with; this can significantly increase character lethality.

Themes

The basic dilemma of Egregore is that *anything is possible – except escape*. The characters are creating the world around them; they are, in some literal sense, walking gods. Balanced against this, though, is the Sin that got them banished to the Shadowlands – and the unresolved emotions that relentlessly wear them down by externally manifesting their inner struggle.

Another of the characters' struggles is to figure out the line between reality and illusion. In a world where they appear to be both creating and animating everything that occurs around them, to what extent should they treat their surroundings as real?

And what the game ultimately boils down to is **purpose**. Faced with no apparent future beyond a slow degeneration into insanity, how will your characters make those last moments count?

It's important to note that Egregore does NOT have to be played as an experiment in relentless futility – and in fact will be a lot more fun if you don't. Yes, the game's likely to end in character death or insanity, but simply by existing and chasing their goals, characters are affirming the value of life. And in the defiant actions of a person facing their doom, you might find some meaning yourself.

Setting

The Shadowlands are a place outside reality – and the journey there is a one-way trip.

Ironically, given its name, it is actually a place of no shadows. It is always evenly lit. There is no sun, or other visible light source; the illumination simply exists. Stand in the Shadowlands and flat, barren, dusty earth stretches out in all directions to the horizon, where unreal purple-hazed mountains sit like cardboard cutouts. Walk, and you leave footprints – but ignore them for a few seconds, and you can't ever find them again.

When you first arrived in the Shadowlands, it looked exactly like the world you left behind. Your first clue something was wrong was either the lack of people or the lack of sun. And then you walked around a bit, and discovered that your world ended a block away – and the endless desert started.

Within your little pocket of normality, everything looked normal. You discovered that that was because you *expected* it to look normal. Things always met your expectations – as long as you were actively interacting with them. Clocks ticked forward when you looked at them, and reset themselves when you looked away. Lights turned on – until you realized that there was no power plant in your two-block circle. And then you wondered how they had ever turned on in the first place if there was no power source, and they started turning on again.

You have started seeing people. But they are figments of your imagination. They only know the things you know; they show no trace of being around when you're not there. You call them “manifestations.” Like your two-block home, they're just a product of your own brain.

And with that epiphany, you realized you needed to leave.

You walked the wastelands. You found friends – other exiles. And now you've found the city.

The City

The envelope smells faintly of jasmine, and is sealed only in the center, with a precise dab of the tongue. There is a note inside, crisply folded, in handwriting that seems at once familiar and strange.

It reads:

TRAVELER:

The rules are different here.

Everything in this wasteland vanishes as we die or go mad. Nothing outlasts our fleeting consciousness.

But this letter has outlasted me.

So I probably do not need to tell you that there is something special about this city.

The city was here when I arrived. It was empty then – miles and miles of empty. A far bigger place than I ever thought to find here in the endless desert. Every type of building imaginable, in all shapes and sizes. Homes and businesses and factories; skyscrapers and parks and cemeteries. Everything I could think of to look for. Yet I searched, and found not a soul I did not bring here with me.

So who created it? Where are they? And why did the city not disappear without its owner?

As I investigate these questions, I believe the city is beginning – I do not say lightly – to awaken.

The fact you are reading this letter suggests that the process is further along than I had anticipated. I put a notification spell on the envelope. I have not teleported here to talk to you, so I am not able to respond.

This place might have saved me. Or it might have killed me. Alas, this note will not be able to tell you which was my fate.

I am going to explore the Center. I would describe it for you, but the heart of the city holds such personal meaning for me I cannot help but conclude that it changes for each visitor. I am not even certain I can tell you how to get there.

But – whether it means salvation or death – you must try. Either fate is better than the wasteland.

- C.

p.s.: hello too! she was fun. will you play with me as well? - muse

The World You Left Behind

Egregore's Shadowlands are compatible with virtually any starting point that includes magic use. Please feel free to adapt it to your own setting! All that is required is some force, or higher power, that monitors magic use and exiles misbehaving mages.

(In fact, neither players nor the City need to know much about the mages' previous life in order to play. But it can enrich the roleplaying experience for characters to be able to talk about their old lives. So the following information is included for completeness.)

The default setting for Egregore is known as The Tomorrowlands Universe (<http://ttu.tomorrowlands.org>). The reality that Shadowlands exiles were once from is a world much like our own, except that in December 1996, magic slammed into everyday consciousness when a dragon walked down a street in the background of a live news broadcast in Kansas.

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Mages, and the people who were changing into dragons, werewolves, and beasts both mythical and mundane (collectively coined “therianthropes”), quickly became the center of a worldwide political and religious firestorm.

In the United States, widespread public fear that the shift heralded the End Times led by the weekend to demonstrations, protests, and a major riot in Los Angeles – in which mages helped overworked authorities maintain order, and came out looking like heroes.

In the early days after The Changes, in fact, it was almost unheard of to find bad behavior among the newly empowered. Which isn't to say that bad behavior didn't happen. It was merely suppressed.

Egregore's characters are part of this unwitting diaspora. Shortly after performing the act that led to their exile, they found that reality faded away into an endless wasteland if they traveled more than a block or two in any direction – and that they were alone, save for the manifestations that tormented them. That was the last they saw of Earth (or your setting).

2. Characters

Egrefore characters are created from four major building blocks.

A Mage's **Self** is facts about who they were before entering the Shadowlands. This includes their Damnation – the act that exiled them.

Whether Mages or supporting cast, the foundation of any character is their **Drives**. Egrefore is fundamentally a narrative game. Every role – even the simplest, throwaway NPC – is defined in terms of the passions, desires, etc., that the character bring into all of their interactions. One of the PCs' goals is to overcome their Drives.

<p>SELF: Past influences. DRIVES: Behavioral influences. TRAITS: Skills and abilities. EDGES: Mental and physical health.</p>

PCs and major NPCs will also possess **Traits** – numeric ratings of the skills and abilities that let them affect the world. These are the statistics that influence success during dice rolls. The catch is: Every time you use a Trait successfully, the world around you adapts a little more to your expertise, making failure more likely.

Player characters – and *only* PCs, since everyone else is a manifestation that their minds create – also have four statistics called **Edges**. These statistics measure how "close to the edge" a PC is: when any of them builds up to 20, that character has fallen too far out of mental balance to effectively influence the Shadowlands any more. They can be thought of roughly like hit points – though as your character accumulates "damage," the chance (and severity) of unintended gameplay effects rise. Edges rise every time a Trait roll fails, and at some other times.

We'll go through all of those in more detail after the Character Creation process.

Character Creation

- First, come up with the Mage's **Damnation**: the act that exiled them to the Shadowlands. This is the core of the character, and virtually everything else will be built around it. See "Self" and "Drives" for more detail.
- Fill in your Self and Drives sections (except for your Goal). Your Goal checkboxes start empty.
- A starting Mage has 5 points to allocate between their five Traits. You may lower Traits below 0 for additional points. No Trait may be lower than -1 or higher than 5.
 - Note those Trait numbers in the shaded box as well; they are your maximums. Your Traits will rise and fall during gameplay, but may never be higher than your maximum.
- Choose three different Foci: one at +3, one at +2 and one at +1. It is recommended, but not necessary, to put them all in different Traits.
- All Edges start at their minimum (0 for Injury; 1 for others). You start with four Willpower.
- You may buy any Abilities relevant to your Skin at their full cost (see the "Buying Bonuses" section). You may, if you wish, also cast one Ritual on yourself at its full cost.
 - Note that Skin Abilities are not designed to be an integral part of a character. Many characters will start with none at all. They represent innate supernatural capability.
- You do not start with any bonus-granting Items. You may declare that you have any equipment that would be reasonable for you to carry; however, only items that have been found and paid for (see "Buying Bonuses") will give you abilities or Trait augmentations.

Self

The Self is basic information about a character. Everyone, both PCs and NPCs, has a Skin. Damnation and Attachment are specific to Mages.

SKIN: Physical appearance.
DAMNATION: (PC Only) The immoral action the character did with their magic that caused their exile.
ATTACHMENT: (PC Only) A person (real or fictional) the character feels a bond of love or trust toward.

Skin

The most important and recognizable aspects of a character's or manifestation's physical appearance. Characters will tend to look as they did before entering the Shadowlands (however, this explicitly does not have to be human).

Manifestations' Skins can take any form, and may even be more than a single "being" as long as they move and act as one unit for gameplay purposes.



Examples: Slightly overweight brown-haired human female who is always smiling; draconic male humanoid with wings and green scales; six children, of whom only the leader ever speaks; a blue mailbox with peeling paint and a disembodied voice; a shapeshifter immediately recognizable by its solid red eyes

NOTE: Mages may choose Skins that provide special capabilities unavailable to normal humans (such as flight, fire breath, etc). However, these capabilities must be paid for in the same way as magical augmentations. See "Buying Bonuses" for more.

Damnation

The **single act** that sent them to the Shadowlands. In the default setting, this will be some magical act that:

- 1) a neutral observer would find immoral, even if the character has justified the act to their own satisfaction;
- 2) would have negatively affected people's attitudes toward mages or magic;
- 3) would have received media attention.

Examples: Teleporting a large bomb into the White House; mind-controlling a celebrity into a dramatic change of heart on a topic of popular interest; murdering an abusive parent; organizing a tantric sex cult; raising an army of zombies; cleaning out a bank vault

NOTE: This does not *have to be* an action with large consequences; sometimes a great deal of attention can be focused on otherwise small issues that blow up into national news. However, most mages damn themselves through something pretty dramatic.

NOTE ALSO: As with some of the examples above, this does not necessarily need to be a clear-cut evil, or a crime with a victim! The severity of the Damnation will have a large effect on game tone.

Attachment

Some person (real or imaginary) from before the Shadowlands who inspires trust, protectiveness, or devotion. Your first Manifestation will take this form, due to its powerful emotional resonance. The City will help you create an NPC card for your Attachment.

Examples: His girlfriend Jenny; her favorite teacher Agatha; Special Agent Dana Scully of the X-Files

Drives

A Drive is a *behavioral* attribute – one not set by numerics but by definition. It doesn't have any quantitative gameplay effects, but it will influence everything the character does.

Fear and Need are universal. Sin and Guilt are specific to Mages, and relate to their Damnation.

Fear

A character's most powerful weakness. Some object, action, state of being, etc., that they will go to great lengths to avoid.

Examples: *Dogs, heights, hurting a friend, admitting error, being alone*

NOTE: Because of the self-created nature of the Shadowlands, this is something that is virtually guaranteed to come up throughout the course of play. Picking an obscure fear will just encourage strange circumstances that bring it about to manifest. Don't think that choosing an esoteric fear will let you avoid confrontation.

NOTE ALSO: Because fears are going to come up often, please don't choose something that in real life is going to be trigger-y. If any players have problems with a particular fear, respect that and choose something else.

FEAR: Strong aversion.

NEED: Strong attraction.

SIN: (PC Only) The negative character trait that drove the mage to their Damnation.

GUILT: (PC Only) A consequence (real or imagined) of the mage's Damnation that they genuinely regret.

GOAL: *Chosen during play.* Whether the character wants to Destroy, Control or Protect the city.

Need

A character's most powerful craving. Something they will go to great lengths to obtain.

Examples: *Cigarettes, emotional validation, control over others, discovering truth*

NOTE: Some Drives work as either a Fear or Need (e.g. "Fear: Loneliness; Need – Companionship"). If so, take it in whichever category you prefer, but not more than once. Remember that a Fear is more immediate, due to working via negative reinforcement – a character in a situation which triggers both their Fear and Need should resolve the Fear first.

Sin

The hubris that drove them to their Damnation. A character flaw that may cause them to commit similar immoral acts.

Examples: *Greed; racism (dragons are superior to humans); vengeance; unquestioning obedience to religious law*

Guilt

What aspect of that Damnation they most wish to atone for. This may be a natural consequence of the act, or something unexpected that occurred during its commission – as long as it's something that makes them truly regret their actions.

Examples: *Killing a child who wasn't supposed to be at the bomb site; destroying the celebrity's career amid the controversy; having her sister discover the dead parent; the VD that spread after finding out magic couldn't replace condoms; the rash of copycat crimes that destabilized the economy*

NOTE: This consequence may be real or imagined – as long as it has a major emotional impact on the character. In the default setting, the Mages would have been yanked from reality before being able to see the true results of their actions – but they would have had visions of the consequences once

isolated in the Shadowlands.

Goal

As the game progresses, players will get to choose whether they wish to ultimately Destroy, Control or Protect the city. **Do not choose this at character creation.** It is covered in the Gameplay section.

Traits

These are numeric attributes that govern the character's performance in challenges.

Each Trait also has several **Foci**. A **Focus** represents additional training or expertise in a specific sub-area of that Trait. A Focus bonus provides a permanent boost during rolls in that sub-area only.

***Example:** Ben's Combat trait is currently 3 and he has a +2 Focus in Unarmed. If he gets in a fistfight, he acts as though his Combat is 5. (This can be further boosted by a single Item or Ability.)*

Listed Foci are examples; your City may approve others.

Manifestations (created NPCs) have a single Trait:

Power

This is used when the manifestation directly confronts a Mage, or attempts a Challenge on the Mage's behalf. Power is based on the Insanity of the manifestation's creator.

Mages (and other "real" beings) have the following Traits.

Athletics

Any roll requiring physical movement or exertion.
FOCI: Stealth, Speed, Acrobatics, Defense

Combat

This is used specifically for attacking people or causing damage.
FOCI: Melee Weapons, Unarmed, Ranged

Tinker

Manipulation of your surroundings.
FOCI: Repair, Lockpick, Search, Drive/Pilot, Computers

Persuasion

Force of personality.
FOCI: Trickery, Diplomacy, Intimidate

Spells

Spur-of-the-moment magic. See below.
FOCI: Enchantments, Combat, Occult/Mythology

ATHLETICS: Physical feats.
COMBAT: Hurting people.
TINKER: Physical manipulation.
PERSUASION: Social manipulation.
SPELLS: Magical challenges. May also substitute for other Traits at a slight cost to Health.
WILLPOWER: Limited, powerful ability to impose your own reality on the city.
POWER: (NPC Only) A Manifestation uses this for ALL traits listed above.
FOCUS: An area of specialty within a Trait; Mages may pick 3 Foci to get a permanent bonus in.

The Spells trait

“Spells” is a special trait: it represents both magical knowledge and the spells that Mages can cast.

A spell invoked via the Spells trait has a duration of “active concentration”, and applies for the current Challenge only; longer-lasting spells must be cast as Rituals and their effects paid for. See “Buying Bonuses” below.

Sometimes a challenge will specifically use the Spells trait (such as the challenges suggested by the foci: breaking an enchantment; fighting a magical duel; or anticipating the nature of the Shadowlands). But what if you want to, say, cast a “Jump” spell to leap over a chasm instead of taking a running leap?

You're a mage – you can *always* use magic for challenges. Simply narrate how you're solving your problem through magic, and act as if the challenge used your Spells trait instead of the intended trait. (The Focus of the challenge remains the same.)

However, note: Overusing spellcasting is a strain on your psyche. If you substitute Spells for another trait when your Spells trait is not at its maximum, then *whether you succeed or fail* in the challenge, add 1 point of Injury (on top of the other effects).

Buying Bonuses

Bonuses come in two types: **Abilities** and **Items**. You may have any number of Bonuses, but only the best single one on a given roll is applied.

Abilities (like flying, fire breath, a strength enchantment, etc) are permanent and non-transferable.

They may confer:

- The ability to do something beyond normal human capability, like “Flight”.
Cost: Adjudicated by City. Typically 1 Insanity.
- Permanent numeric bonuses to a Trait, like “Four Arms: +1 Tinker”.
Cost: 1 Insanity for a +1 bonus, or 2 Insanity for a +2 bonus.
- Permanent numeric bonuses to a Focus, like “Fire Breath: +4 Melee Weapon”.
Cost: 1 Insanity for a +2 bonus, or 2 Insanity for a +4 bonus.

Abilities from your **Skin** are bought at character creation. For every different Skin ability beyond the first, the Insanity cost of the Ability increases by 1. (Abilities that provide no numeric or capability bonus may be noted down for flavor, and cost nothing.)

Note that Skin Abilities represent truly *supernatural* capability; something like “Great Dexterity: +1 Athletics” should simply be represented with a high base Athletics score.

Lasting spell effects (**Rituals**) are Abilities, but you may also cast them on someone besides yourself. A character (Mage or otherwise) may only actively maintain two Rituals at once. If you want to cast a third, you must cancel one of the existing two. (Costs are nonrefundable.) A character may have any number of Rituals cast upon them by other Mages.

Items are losable and transferable. They may confer:

- The ability to do something beyond normal human capability.
Cost: Adjudicated by City. Typically +1 to any three Edges.
- Numeric bonuses to a Trait.
Cost: +1 to any two Edges for a +1 bonus. Limit +1 bonus.

- Numeric bonuses to a Focus.
Cost: +1 to any two Edges for a +2 bonus. Limit +2 bonus.

Finding Items

Items may be "found" in the city through exploration. Such Items may be made cheaper by overcoming Challenges. For every Challenge overcome for the direct purpose of getting the item, reduce the cost by 1 (minimum is 0).

Remember that only the best Item or Ability that applies to a given roll is counted; they do not "stack."

Healing

Healing is a special case of buying bonuses. Injuries do not heal normally in the Shadowlands; there is no way to reduce Injury except through spells, and due to belief governing the rules, your own mind works against you when trying to heal yourself.

In order to heal, you **MUST** get a healing spell from another Mage. The cost of the spell is that they gain Insanity, **AND** you gain Insecurity. For every 1 point gained in those Edges, you can heal up to 3 points of Injury.

Willpower

Each character starts with three Willpower. **Willpower does NOT refresh with other Traits**; you get 3 the whole game. These rare but powerful points represent a surge of primal determination: you may spend one to reshape the world to your whim. This can allow you to do one of the following:

- Immediately resolve any one Challenge without rolling. Simply narrate your desired result. You do not gain Edge nor lose Traits.
- Take one action when on the Edge of Injury (see Edges).
- Have one immediate Epiphany about the city. (See City Goals in Section 3.) This does not otherwise accomplish any goals.
- If a fellow mage has just failed a roll to overcome a Drive, you can perform a sort of "psychic first aid" against the shock of their failure. This lets them save 4 of the accumulated successes they would otherwise erase from their Goal track. Multiple mages can do this, once apiece.
- Immediately end the current scene and own the next one (out of sequence). If the current owner does not wish to relinquish control, you become a Challenge, and they must immediately confront and defeat you before proceeding. (This is the same as Turning when your mage is assisting in a scene. However, when spending Willpower, your mage doesn't need to be present.)

Edges

All Edges start at 1. When ANY Edge reaches 20, normal gameplay stops: that character is **On the Edge**, as described below, and their final scene is played out. After that scene is resolved, the character is **Over The Edge** and no longer meaningfully affecting play.

Characters who go Over The Edge and are subsequently left unaccompanied disappear into the city, never to be seen again. Their ultimate fate is likely to be determined by the nature of the city (see "Epiphanies" in Section 3).

INSANITY: Detachment from real people into the city's world of phantoms.

INSECURITY: Expecting failure so strongly that the mage self-consciously sabotages everything they try.

INJURY: Physical damage to the point of death.

INIQUITY: Giving in to the mage's base impulses until morality no longer restrains their actions.

Insanity

As characters move from Grounding to Insanity, they lose the ability to distinguish between characters with external reality (the PCs) and characters that their mind has generated. Created people become more real, and the other PCs lose their significance.

Effects During Gameplay: All Manifestations have a Power equal their creator's Insanity. This makes them more dangerous adversaries (or more useful allies, if you can come to terms with them).

On the Edge of Insanity: The Mage is struck with a revelation about the city that makes their goal seem especially urgent. Immediately halt your progress on your current Goal (unless that goal is to destroy, change, or protect the city). Give your new revelation about the city to the other players, and immediately resolve Challenges toward your city goal until your first failure. You can't do anything with those successes (unless you're the final surviving player), but you may donate them to any other player attempting to accomplish a city goal.

Over the Edge of Insanity: Unable to engage with consensus reality. The character will continue to take actions, but with no effect on the game state – reacting to invisible phantoms, and talking to themselves about things that seem important to them.



Insecurity

As characters move from Confidence to Insecurity, doubt about their ability to prevail creeps in. No matter how strong they are, the Shadowlands' relentless challenges are stronger yet. This downward spiral leads them to expect the worst from the city ... which graciously obliges.

Effects During Gameplay: Any roll that is less than or equal to the character's Insecurity immediately generates a Complication. Note that this does not change success or failure: characters with high Insecurity may cause Complications when they succeed!

On the Edge of Insecurity: The character's growing feelings of powerless drive them to take on one final Challenge ... except that, with an Insecurity of 20, this leads to an endless Complication loop that can only end with failure. Immediately resolve their current Challenge, and the next one, and the next one, as long as they keep succeeding ... they can't do anything with their own successes (unless you're the final surviving player), but may choose to apply them toward the current goal of any character who was with them at the time.

Over the Edge of Insecurity: The character is overwhelmed by their failures and useless. This can take a few different effects based on the character's emotional state and/or Sin.

***Examples:** Fear/despair – they are paralyzed and refuse to attempt anything.
Rage/pride – They are stuck on a simple task, unable to complete it, but obsessed with its completion to the exclusion of everything else.*

Injury

This simply represents physical damage. Manifestations – or other mages! – can physically affect characters. Increasing this Edge should be rare, but is also dangerous: it can jump by many points in a single roll.

Effects During Gameplay: Add your Injury to *all target numbers* during challenges. **This**

makes EVERY roll you make harder. However, target numbers still cap at 20 – and note that your Injury can be healed by your fellow mages, at the cost of both of you raising other Edges. (See “Healing” under the Traits section above.)

On the Edge of Injury: Dying. The character may immediately take one simple action (requiring no great physical exertion, and describable in a brief sentence) for each Willpower they have remaining. If this action is to confront a non-physical challenge, make the roll as if their Injury was 0. If the character has not been healed before they run out of Willpower, they are beyond help. However, as they die, they may narrate one final action, which automatically succeeds.

Over the Edge of Injury: Dead. Totally unresponsive.

Iniquity

This represents giving in to the character's worst instincts – the ones that got them in trouble to begin with. **This is a special Edge, tracked by the City on your behalf.** You will never know your exact Iniquity value, but there are warning signs which will alert you when it's becoming problematic. Solving Challenges in evil ways, and giving in to your Sin, will raise Iniquity; self-sacrifice and giving in to your Guilt can reduce it.

Effects During Gameplay: The world around you will react to you more aggressively – and become more deadly – as you give in to your Sin. The City will adjudicate this.

On the Edge of Iniquity: The pursuit of your goals has overcome the fragile bond with your fellow exiles. Immediately choose a Challenge to overcome in a way governed by your Sin. The catch is: This must require taking direct action against your fellow Mages.

Over the Edge of Iniquity: If you survive turning on your fellow Mages, you desert the party and become an adversary consumed with the pursuit of your original goal. The character may still be used as an NPC, but progress is no longer tracked.

3. Gameplay

“Is THAT what you're going to tell yourself when you help your ladyfriend blow us all up?”

“No, it's –” Ben suppressed his irritation with an effort. “I'm not going to argue philosophy with a ghost. Emily's real, and I'm going to help her find some peace.”

“Through creative mass murder?” Jenny asked, sitting at his side and staring into his eyes.

“She agreed to help evacuate the city first, so nobody *real* gets hurt.”

“There you go talking about 'real' again,” Jenny said. “But you're not entirely convinced of that, are you, Ben? Or are you admitting you just threw away your precious magic to give lollipops to a figment of your imagination?”

“Screw you! I don't have to answer to you for what I do.”

“Nope, just to yourself. And little Ben.” Jenny leaned forward, exposing more bosom than Ben was comfortable with. “Who's going to die when your bomb goes off. Buuut ... as much as I'd love to continue this discussion, don't you have a really awkward conversation to start?”

“Huh?” Ben asked, confused, as her form dissolved into shadow.

He looked around for the being that had been tormenting him in Jenny's skin – then did a double-take. There was a dragon looming at the entrance of the alley, silver scales gleaming dully under a fresh layer of dirt, staring at him through shock-wide eyes.

“... Emily?” Ben said, then realization hit. He let out a deep sigh. “Let me guess. You arrived and asked me a question just in time to hear the last thing that I said, didn't you?”

“That's about the size of it,” the dragon rumbled, recovering, “but as much as I'd love to comically misunderstand you and have a fierce argument that leads to bitter dissolution of our alliance ... *I saw her*, Ben. She was sitting there, as solid as you.”

Ben swore. “That's worse. She gets more real every time. I don't think I have much time left. We've got to nuke this place before it's too late.”

“It's ...” the dragon halted to clear her throat, uncharacteristically uncomfortable. “It's not that simple.”

“What do you mean?” Ben asked. “You're not having second thoughts, are you?”

She said nothing.

“You can't stop now, Em. Please. Look at how hard the city is trying to stop us. It's running scared. If we give up now, all its crimes will go unanswered.”

“It's not the city,” she said. “Look ... when I found the car battery for the radio ... there was another diary.”



The Scene

Gameplay proceeds in units of time called **Scenes**. A scene is a string of challenges attempted by one character toward a specific declared goal, culminating in a roll to see whether that goal gets accomplished. The character who is doing so is said to “own” the scene. They are the protagonist for that effort, and other players may either bring their mages in to play a supporting role or may temporarily assume GM-like duties (roleplay important NPCs, or invoke challenges).

It's possible for mages to overtake each other's scenes, or for the owner to voluntarily cut it short; but in general, the scene owner will walk away with either a success or a failure on one of their overall goals.

Depending on gamer experience, number of challenges and amount of roleplaying, the average scene should run from 15 to 45 minutes. If individual scenes drag on too long for your tastes, talk with your group about the best way to streamline the game to everyone's preference.

Passing Ownership

When a Scene ends, the chance for control passes to the player on the owner's left; they may either own the next scene or pass, and so on until someone volunteers. Control may return to the current owner if everyone else at the table agrees (usually this is to compensate for a too-short scene or to resolve unfinished roleplaying).

Be careful of declining scene ownership too often – this will lead to the game ending without you getting to accomplish your personal goals. On the other hand, starting a scene out with badly damaged traits can end up raising your Edges significantly.

Goals

There's no simple "win" or "lose" in Egregore – there are multiple accomplishments to shoot for, and characters will have to choose which are the most important for them:

1. Overcome their Drives (come to terms with themselves).
2. Successfully Destroy, Control or Protect the city (depending on which they choose).
3. Survive to the end.
4. Help your fellow Mages reach one or all of those accomplishments.

(It's hypothetically possible to accomplish all of those in a single game, but a character's Edges are almost certain to overtake them first. And the only way to “lose” is to go Over The Edge without meeting any goals. This should be rare.)

When a player owns a scene, they will be accumulating successes toward #1 or #2. The mechanism for both is the same, but the “city goal” (Destroy, Control or Protect) is only available later in the game, after Drives have been overcome.

How to Achieve a Goal

In order to overcome a Drive or influence the City, Mages must overcome various Challenges. But coming to terms with oneself is not simply a matter of declaring yourself done. The more effort expended toward a particular task, the more likely the change is to be real.

In game terms, every time a Challenge is completed toward a Goal, mark off one of the boxes in the “Goal” section of the character sheet: you have accumulated that success toward your attempt.

At any time, you may declare that you wish to accomplish that goal. Narrate this attempt as if it were a Challenge, but ham it up a bit: it's a climactic event. Then, **simply roll an unmodified d20**: less than or equal to your accumulated successes, and you've done it. (Yes, if you have accumulated 20 successes, it is impossible to fail.)

This is an all-or-nothing roll. Whether you succeed or fail, your accumulated successes reset to zero.

Failing at a Goal

Failing at a Goal leaves your mage in a very precarious situation: your Traits are still drained, and you have a long string of Challenges ahead of you in order to tackle another Goal. When this occurs, aid from your fellow mages – and/or taking supplementary roles for a scene or two, to gain bonuses from modifying their behavior – are necessary to recover.

Feel free to take a few moments to properly roleplay the crushing blow of your manifestations rejecting your rehabilitation attempt. This is every bit as significant a moment in your character development as if you had succeeded.

When you fail to overcome a Drive, add 1 Insecurity and put an X by it. If you fail twice at the same Drive, then you are simply unable to overcome it this game; add 3 Insecurity.

There is no additional penalty for failing at a City Goal.

Succeeding at a Goal

Overcoming a Drive has four major game effects:

1. **Put a check mark by that Drive.** It can still come up during gameplay, but it no longer rules you as it did. You have reached a revelation that lifts the weight of the emotions around it. You may ignore penalties to Trait rolls from opponents invoking that Drive.
2. **Refresh all of your Traits to their maximum.** Your rush of accomplishment has caused you to feel that you can once again face the Shadowlands on their own terms. (Note that this has no effect on Insecurity, which measures your convictions about the *city's* power.)
3. **If you have just overcome your first Drive, secretly choose a City Goal.** See the City Goals section.
4. **Reveal an Epiphany about the city.** Roleplay out how you discovered this information in the course of resolving your original goal. See Epiphanies in the City Goals section.

Accomplishing a City Goal is the game's final Challenge. After that, roleplaying to tie up plot threads and character stories may continue, but the game will provide no more Challenges.

City Goals

The path to self-improvement that comes from exploring the city also leads to answers about the city's nature:

- Why has it not disappeared into the desert of the Shadowlands?
- Who created it?
- Is its ultimate purpose good or evil?
- Will submitting to it redeem or destroy you?
- Can its power be harnessed for other purposes?

- Does it have a reality beyond what its visitors have created for it?

These questions, and others, ***will be answered by players over the course of the game***. There is no “real” answer for them in the game rules. You will collaboratively decide your own city's past, present, and future.

And as you start learn the city's true nature, your characters must decide whether to **Destroy**, **Control** or **Protect** it.

Destroy

If you want to **Destroy** the city, you are convinced that it is a source of suffering: whether or not it has helped you achieve your own goals, the Shadowlands are better off without it. You achieve your goal if anyone Destroys the city. You *partially* achieve your goal if anyone Controls the city: if it can't be wiped out, then perhaps it can be harnessed and its nature changed. You fail your goal if the city is Protected.

Control

If you want to **Control** the city, you are convinced that the city's power could be put to a greater purpose: your redemption was a mere side effect of its true capabilities. You achieve your goal if you, or someone you have allied with for this purpose, Controls the city. You *partially* achieve your goal if anyone Protects the city: that at least preserves it for a future attempt. You fail your goal if the city is Destroyed, or if an adversary Controls the city instead.

Protect

If you want to **Protect** the city, you are convinced that it is doing exactly what it was put here for, and that any attempt to harness it will corrupt that which redeemed you. You achieve your goal if anyone Protects the city. You *partially* achieve your goal if anyone Destroys the city: better that its power be lost than misused. You fail your goal if anyone Controls the city.

Choosing a City Goal

When you have successfully overcome your first Drive, your mage has gained enough experience with the city to come to a conclusion about it. **Secretly** decide what your character's goal for the city will be. Mark it down on your character sheet, but *do not discuss it with other players yet*. Once everyone has independently overcome their first Drive and made that choice, *then* you may begin discussing your goals and convincing others on the best course of action.

Choosing the “right” city goal, or achieving your city goal, is **not** necessary to “win” the game. You do not “lose” if something else happens to the city. So don't despair if you're the odd man out with your city goal – depending on how important you feel the city goal is, you can choose to focus on your mage's personal improvement; abandon your city goal in order to further your friends' plans; or make a single-man effort to achieve your city goal in the face of opposition.

Which ultimate fate your group pursues for the city will be decided not only by those secretly chosen goals, but also by the **Epiphanies** that are uncovered during characters' explorations. Each epiphany will provide players with a new reason to destroy, control or protect the city. They are evidence to fuel the debates that your inner desires draw you into.

Epiphanies

An Epiphany is a **single-sentence fact about the character of the city** that suggests which fate should be chosen. It should be a concrete piece of information about the city's origins, its current operation, the fate of former visitors, etc. Think of these as the city's "character sheet."

You will use these Epiphanies to convince the other players to follow your city goal – or to suggest the consequences of them choosing a different path. So make them as compelling as you can, and try to make them imply your preferred course of action.

Examples:

"At the heart of the city lies a massive boneyard, full of skeletons contorted in silent torture."

"Marcus' last journal entry, after he gained control of the city's heart, reads: 'I see home'"

"The history book laments the empire's destruction at the hands of a living city which strode from the desert on legs of stone."

"On the wall is written: 'I may grant any desire, but only at the cost of your own life.'"

"The spirit speaks softly: 'The wastelands only exist because the city is here.'"

"All souls who enter Heaven speak of passing through a great city in the desert."

Write down all Epiphanies on a sheet of paper, so players can refer to them at any time.

There is one catch: **Your first Epiphany may not support your chosen goal.** You must play your own Devil's Advocate. The character's discovery of a genuinely unexpected fact is their first real clue that the place has its own reality and agenda.

After that, all subsequent Epiphanies may support whichever city goal you like. You can roleplay the discovery of an Epiphany every time you overcome a Drive, or at any time by spending a point of Willpower.

Pursuing a City Goal

City Goals are accomplished just like any other Goal: Overcome challenges to accumulate successes, and then roll that number or under on a d20. However, there are a few special rules for City Goals.

1. **You may not pursue a City Goal until you have overcome your Damnation.** In a normal game of Egregore, overcoming your Damnation first requires overcoming your Sin and Guilt, so the City Goal can be addressed (at earliest) on your fourth turn. For shorter/easier games, you can make Damnation a freebie once Sin and Guilt are overcome; for longer/harder games, you can make additional Drives a prerequisite.
2. **Multiple players may collaborate on a single City Goal.** Their successes are pooled together, as long as they continue their alliance. The difficulty of Challenges is based on their combined successes.
3. **When pursuing a City Goal, your Scene lasts for five Challenge rolls (successful or not).** You may "bank" any successes until you actually roll to accomplish the Goal. This is to allow multiple groups of competing players a chance against each other.
4. **Rolling to accomplish a City Goal requires a Scene of its own.** It should be played up for appropriate drama.

What To Do When You Own A Scene

Your job as a Scene owner is straightforward: Overcome challenges and try to meet one of your Goals. You will roleplay your Mage; your fellow players will try to help the City make your job easier or harder.

Framing Your Goal

The first – and hardest – thing you must decide is what Goal you wish to accomplish. (See the Goals section, above.) This will usually be to overcome one of your Drives. But it's more complex than saying “I'm going to overcome Guilt.”

A good statement of Goal should include as many elements as possible from:

What - Who - Where - How

(“When” isn't relevant. “When” is “now.”)

The reason is that a little bit of thinking ahead can provide everyone with rich roleplaying hooks.

If you're trying to overcome a Guilt of “killing an innocent person,” do you plan to ask their Manifestation for forgiveness, or demonstrate how you have repented your error, or reach some insight which makes you reassess the situation?

Is the key to your guilt your victim? Is it yourself? Is it someone who disapproved of your actions?

What part of the city will most meaningfully represent your release? Symbolically representing the mental journey as a physical journey not only demonstrates your commitment, but also helps bring the city to life.

You don't have to go into the Scene knowing all of these elements – and if you need inspiration, it's OK to ask the City or your fellow players for ideas. But the more you have at least *some* idea on, the easier it will be to choose meaningful Challenges that add moral weight to your attempt.

If you're totally stuck for ideas, then at least pick a destination. It's easier to find Challenges to overcome if you're moving than if you're sitting in a room talking your problems out.

Your City may also ask you how many successes you plan to accumulate before rolling for your Goal. You're not required to stick to your plan, but if you do, it can help you (and them) get you to the right place in time for the big climax.

Looking For Trouble

Your entire goal is to overcome Challenges. So it stands to reason that you have to find some!

The City, and any players taking on adversarial roles, will put various threats and obstacles in your way. ***Almost none are mandatory.*** (Complications, Manifestations that can invoke your Fear, and consequences of high Iniquity are the exceptions.) So if you wanted, you could simply wander the city avoiding trouble. It would get boring, though, and you won't make any progress.

Choose challenges from among those offered to you, or make up your own. Then state a proposed solution involving testing one of your Traits against the challenge. The City will approve it if your

proposal is reasonable and relevant. At that point, you roll for success, and then move on to the next Challenge.

Be proactive in seeking out the sorts of Challenges you want to tackle! You are writing your own character's development. This is *your* scene. That's why we say you "own" it. Everyone else, even the City, is just here to facilitate that.

Rolling For Success

To overcome a Challenge, first figure out its difficulty. The base difficulty for Challenges is 10. This is higher if:

- There are more than 10 check marks for successes on the character's Goal track. Use the number of successes instead.
- You're opposed by a Manifestation with a Power higher than your current difficulty. Use its Power instead.
- Two characters are fighting each other. See "Inter-player Conflict."

Next, add your Injury to the difficulty. If this raises it higher than 20, make it 20 instead.

After that, you may also optionally **Push** the challenge onto another already-established challenge – trying to kill two birds with one stone. You must narrate how you are using the results of the first challenge to overcome the second. Pushing adds +5 to the difficulty, and this CAN raise the total difficulty above 20. The benefit is that if you succeed, you overcome both challenges with a single roll.

Even if you're not Pushing, you should still narrate how you are using your Trait to overcome the obstacle. Be creative! The City is allowed to award you an extra bonus from +1 to +3 if your solution demonstrates exceptional cleverness, flair, and daring. (+3 should be reserved for solutions that make the whole room applaud, wince or laugh.)

Roll a d20.

If the RAW DIE RESULT is less than or equal to the character's Insecurity, then a **Complication** will be introduced immediately after this Challenge is finished. See next section.

If the RAW DIE RESULT is a 20, your performance was effortless. If you succeed, you do not subtract a point from the Trait you used. If even this result will not succeed, then you take no Edge damage and may escape this Challenge with no further penalty.

Now add (or subtract) the character's current Trait score; their relevant Focus, if any; and the single best applicable item/ability bonus, if any. Other players' actions, and the quality of your problem-solving, may offer additional modifiers (the City will let you know).

Compare this final number against the Difficulty.

If the modified roll is greater than or equal to the Difficulty, the challenge is overcome. Add a check mark to your Goal track.

CHALLENGE DIFFICULTY:

Base Difficulty + Injury

Base Difficulty: 10, unless foe's Power is higher, or you have >10 Goal successes accumulated.

Injury: Add your Injury edge. Cap total difficulty at 20.

Pushing: Try to solve two Challenges for the price of one. +5 to difficulty (can raise over 20).

CHALLENGE RESULTS:

Roll a d20.

Complication: If your *raw roll* is \leq Insecurity, the city ups the ante. If your *raw roll* is 20, take no Trait damage for this Challenge.

Bonuses: Now add/subtract your **Trait, Focus**, your *one* best applicable **Bonus** (Ability or Item), and any bonuses/penalties from your fellow players' **interference**. The City can also award an extra +1 to +3 for **creative thinking**.

Result \geq Difficulty: You win.

- +1 success to Goal track.
- -1 to the Trait you used.

Result $<$ Difficulty: You lose.

Unless an allied mage intervenes:

- No change to Goal track.
- Add damage to one Edge.

The City responds to your success by dealing with you more harshly; subtract 1 from the relevant Trait (Traits can be negative numbers), and write the new, current value in the non-shaded area on your character sheet.

If not, you have failed the challenge. Another mage accompanying you may attempt to save you from the consequences of your actions (see “When Someone Else Owns A Scene”); however, if that doesn't happen, you're closer to the Edge.

Narrate the manner in which you failed. Based on that, and the nature of the challenge, the City will decide which Edge is the most relevant one to raise (and by how much). Insanity and Insecurity will go up at a flat +1 per failure, but Injury often rises by +2, and may jump by several points at once in severe cases. (This is less bad than it sounds, because Injury has a mechanism for recovery.)

Giving in to Sin

If you don't like the odds of a Challenge – or for roleplaying reasons – you may decide that you wish to tackle a Challenge in a manner that reinforces the Sin you chose. The rush of emotions from this act changes the repercussions of your action.

When you give in to Sin, **you neither lose Trait for success nor gain Edge for failure.** However, in place of these penalties, you are reinforcing the Damnation that brought you here. The City will add one or more points to your Iniquity. This will result over time in greater danger for you.

Being tempted into Sin by a Devil also gives additional bonuses (and an additional penalty for failure). See “When Someone Else Owns A Scene.”

There are ways to reduce Iniquity – in general, to do the opposite of what brought you there. Going out of your way to atone for your actions will get the city off your back.

Complications

A **Complication** refers to a mage's fear of the city's consequences bringing about exactly the situations they were trying to avoid. The chance of a Complication rises with the mage's Insecurity.

After the success or failure of a Challenge is resolved, the City **immediately** introduces a new Challenge. The process of attempting the Challenge had unexpected consequences.

This Challenge **must** be immediately dealt with, on its own terms. The City may set a Trait to be used, or let the player choose as usual, but in either case it cannot be circumvented.

Note that if the original Challenge was failed, it still exists on the scene. If the mage feels sufficiently lucky, then either the original Challenge or the new Challenge may be Pushed onto the other.

If the roll to deal with the Complication fails, then Edge damage is dealt, and the challenge must be immediately re-confronted. **No progress is possible until the Complication is resolved.** However, after every failure, the mage may call for help, and other players may switch their Roles in response.

On the bright side, Complications do not generate Complications of their own (until you hit an Edge).

When Someone Else Owns A Scene

It's the goal of the player who “owns” the Scene to accomplish things. Your goal is to *make their life interesting*. Think of it as a movie. The film has a protagonist: the guy the camera follows around.

That guy might have buddies, adversaries, lovers, arch-rivals. It's your job to play the supporting cast.

You can do this by playing your own character – and in fact their job will be a lot easier if they have help. But you can also do this by taking over some GM responsibilities and playing the world around them. In Egregore, unlike traditional RPGs, scenes work as if there was one player and multiple GMs.

Supporting Roles

As extra incentive for helping create the active player's world, your own mage gets **Benefits** for stepping into certain **Roles**. Don't take this as a comprehensive list – the goal is to keep you fully engaged during their scene, and we don't want to do that by limiting your contributions – but these are some excellent ways to have a direct impact on their character choices and development.

When you step out of a Role, you may step into a new one, without limit.

Ambitious players may take on more than one Role at once, but only one at a time receives Benefits.

Conscience

Play a Manifestation whose goal is to get them to give in to Guilt – and do something dangerous to repent for their misdeeds.

Effect: At your urging, the active player may attempt a Challenge with a voluntary penalty of up to -6. Half of their penalty (round down) is removed from their Iniquity. If they fail that Challenge, add half that penalty to Injury, *on top of* whatever Edge damage they take from their failure.

Benefit: Your mage recovers +1 to one Trait each time you convince them to take penalties.

Devil

Play a Manifestation whose goal is to get them to give in to Sin.

Effect: At your urging, the active player may give in to Sin on a Challenge. They get the usual effects of doing so, AND an additional +2 to +5 bonus based on how heinous what you talk them into is. If they fail that Challenge, add +1 Insecurity, *on top of* whatever Edge damage they take from their failure.

Benefit: Your mage recovers -1 Iniquity each time they accept your offer. (You start looking like a saint by comparison.)

Rival

Play a Manifestation whose goal is to toy with them – goading them on to challenges beyond their capability.

Effect: You may point out a Challenge that would require a more difficult roll than the one they chose – and taunt them for taking the easy way out. At your urging, the active player may switch Challenges, and they get a +3 bonus to the new one, to show you up. *However*, if they fail, they take an additional +1 damage to one Edge on top of the normal penalty.

Benefit: Your mage recovers +1 to a Trait each time they accept your offer.

Temptation/Nightmare

Play a Manifestation whose goal is to get them to give in to their Need instead of accomplishing their

goal. (The City may also authorize you to play a Nightmare if the active mage's Iniquity is high enough; that option allows you to target the mage's Fear instead.)

Effect (Temptation): Your lures give the active player a -2 to their current roll. After they resolve the current Challenge, they may attempt to Banish you at no penalty (see Banishing section). If their Challenge fails or they neglect to Banish you, you may also penalize them on their next Challenge, and so on.

Benefit (Temptation): Your mage recovers +1 to a Trait per roll you penalize them on.

Effect (Fear): Immediately interrupt them with an inescapable Challenge related to their fear, as if you were a Complication. They take a -4 penalty to that Challenge, and must resolve it before they can move on. Once that challenge is successful, you are automatically Banished.

Benefit (Fear): Your mage recovers +1 to a Trait each time they attempt the challenge (succeed or fail).

Obstacle

Describe things that might hinder the active player, or interesting facts about the scene which might provide them with Challenges. You may not put anything inescapable in their path, but you are free to make the path they *thought* they were going to take as interesting as possible. (If the active player gets bogged down with challenges, the City should collaborate with you to ensure that proper pacing is maintained.)

Effect: None; your duties are descriptive.

Benefit: Your mage recovers +1 to a Trait for every two Challenges your ideas led to.

Coach

Play a Manifestation whose goal is to persuade them to change their end goal (i.e., compromise to support a different City Goal than what is on their character sheet). Pick at their conscience mercilessly. Remind them of Epiphanies.

NOTE: You may not do this until after all players have chosen their Goal.

Effect: None; your duty is roleplaying.

Benefit: No numeric bonuses, but if your roleplaying makes them change their plans, that can be a very big deal for your mage.

Flavor

Roleplay. Add description to scenes. Play tour guide (either via descriptions, or as a Manifestation talking). Show off various locations in the city and suggest paths to their destinations.

Effect: None; your duties are descriptive.

Benefit: Once per scene, if you have helped describe an area the active mage visits or explores, your mage recovers +1 to a Trait.

Being Yourself

There's nothing stopping the mages from sticking together as they travel throughout the city – and several factors encouraging it. Not least of which is that it's easier to face the unreality of the Shadowlands when something that *didn't* come from inside your head has your back.

Any number of players can accompany the active mage, for roleplaying purposes. However, **only one**

(chosen by the scene owner) **will receive the Benefit** of accompaniment, and the active mage may only use the effects of that one friend. (This is to encourage other players to step into the role of NPCs, and keep the City from getting overwhelmed.)

Effect: Your presence gives the active mage a +1 morale bonus to all their Trait rolls. Also, every time they fail a Challenge, their panic immediately draws you into the conflict.

When their mage fails a challenge, you must choose one of the following:

Protect – Your mage takes Edge damage in the active mage's place – add +1 to any Edge of your choice. The Challenge fails, with no penalty for them.

Assist – Immediately take the Trait damage they would have sustained if successful: this replaces the consequences of their failure. Then, you face that Challenge as if you were the active mage. BOTH of you take the Trait/Edge damage appropriate to your result. If you succeed, the Challenge is overcome, and they take the success.

Abandon – Leave them to their fate. You depart, and can no longer help them during this Scene.

Turn – Betrayal! You become a Challenge. See “Inter-Player Conflict.”

Benefit: If you're with them from the start to their Goal roll, recover -1 lost Insanity. If you're with them for only part of the Scene, recover +1 to a Trait when you leave.

Banishing

If a Manifestation is getting on the active player's nerves, they do have some recourse. Don't forget that they're here because they're skilled at manipulating reality.

At any time, the active player may treat any present Manifestation as a Challenge. They may try to persuade it to leave, or cast a banishing spell, or find some other creative use of a Trait to drive it off. This roll is made as a normal Challenge; however, if they succeed, that Manifestation is also driven off for the remainder of the Scene. Give the NPC card back to the City and choose someone else to play.

As an extra perk for spirit-beleaguered players, succeeding at a Banishing Challenge does not cost them the usual -1 Trait penalty. (Failures accrue Edge damage as usual.)

Abusing this by Banishing friendly spirits will cause that Manifestation to return later in a more hostile Role.

Inter-player Conflict

In rare circumstances, mages in the same Scene will want to Challenge each other. When this occurs, the Active Player and the challenger both choose a Trait for their respective part of the confrontation. They both roll, and directly compare their results. The winner takes no damage (and achieves no success toward goals); the loser takes damage of the winner's choice (+1 Insanity, +1 Insecurity, or +2 Injury).

At that point, the loser may choose to retreat or continue. Another roll is made, with the previous loser taking a -1 penalty. The new loser takes damage determined by the winner, and so on. Every subsequent round, the dice penalty is fully transferred to the latest loser, and becomes worse by -1.

The fight ends when one mage retreats (and may not reappear in that Scene) or sustains enough damage to go On The Edge (at which point gameplay stops and their Edge scene is played out).

If the Active Player is the losing party, their scene immediately stops, and the winner takes a new scene out of turn.

4. Notes for The City (GM section)

Your Job As City

The players are coming up with their own challenges and, largely, running their own NPCs. So you just get to kick your feet up and sit back, right?

Wrong! The City's job is still the most important in the game. **Your job is to both set the scene, AND prompt for direction.** Many players – especially roleplayers who are unused to the creative acts inherent to the GM chair – will play their characters to react to external circumstances. You need to help them adjust their expectations to the flavor of Egregore.

If you say,

“You're in a room. There is a teddy bear and a note.”

Then a really exceptional player might respond with:

“A teddy bear? My mind wanders back to the last day I saw my son.”

But you can't count on that. You're more likely to get something like:

“Uh, okay, I take the bear and read the note.”

Your next sentence, before the player has time to react, should be something like:

“The teddy bear looks familiar. Why?”

Then the player will know it is incumbent on them to bring their character out into the open.

Take the same tack when keeping everyone involved in the Active Player's scene. If another player seems to be losing interest, or is having trouble coming up with ways to interact, then directly provide them with an opportunity to contribute.

“You walk into the warehouse. However, something unusual greets your eyes. Jim, do you want to tell her what she sees over by the stack of pallets?”

Your First Scenes

When you're starting a new game of Egregore, one tack for getting everyone into the mood might be to give everyone very similar, short, individual introduction scenes: a simple area to explore with a few items to trigger personal responses, and some challenge leading them deeper into the city, where they can meet the whole group. Rather than playing through a whole Scene for each player, you can give them 1-3 Challenges apiece as a way to get used to the game and start everyone off on an even footing.

Once you set the scene, find a way to remind the character of their Attachment (or better yet, prompt them to come up with it themselves: “How does that chair remind you of your brother?”) Then you can immediately introduce the Attachment as an NPC, using the emotional link to make the Manifestation show up.

Ask for one of the other players to volunteer to take that NPC card, give that player a starting point (like “Her brother wants her to go to the rose garden in the center of the town. Would you like to come up with a reason why?”) and let them play through a short conversation. If your players balk, you can do this yourself for the first scene, and phase in the use of players for NPCs gradually.

Then introduce one of your own NPCs – a mysterious figure generated by the City. Have that Manifestation set up a simple sample Challenge for the character (either by obstructing their progress, or by spurring them to begin moving in the desired direction). Once that challenge is overcome, the character can use the information provided by one of the Manifestations to head to the meeting place.

That way, by the time the party has assembled and people are ready to go on their goal arcs, everyone has their head in the game, and there are a good variety of side characters ready to interact with the main troupe.

The Seven-Word NPC

It's simple to create a new NPC during gameplay. Even simpler for you, because your players will be doing most of the work for you! On a Manifestation's index card, simply write down:

Name:
Skin:
Fear:
Need:
Goal:
Role:
Notes:

Any time a significant new Manifestation is introduced, hand an index card to the player who created him/her/it/them. The player should write in the Name (and the Mage they are specific to, if any, in the top right for easy indexing). And then fill in the first three lines (Skin, Fear, Need) as per the Drives section. Goal and Role will come out during gameplay.

Goal is what that Manifestation is attempting to accomplish by their presence. If you are using a small number of NPCs for a wide variety of roles, it may be easier not to write this down at all; but games with a lot of supporting cast to keep track of may find it useful to have each bit part appear only when their specific interest comes into play.

Role corresponds with the Roles available to players in others' Scenes. Again, this is most useful if you have a big cast, and (say) Jimmy always shows up as a Rival, or Helen always shows up as a Coach (Destroy). This offers easy sorting for players looking for a specific role to play.

The Notes field is for writing in character background, motivation, quirks, mannerisms, etc., that *come out during gameplay*, so that when control of the NPC is passed around the table, they are able to play the character consistently with what has already occurred. Resist the temptation to give Manifestations detailed notes before their introduction themselves to the mages.

The City's Manifestations

While the Mages are assembling their character sheets, you should create at least three Manifestations that will be shared in between all of the characters. These will be among your most important tools, not least of which is because they will be the first NPCs that every one of the players can see.

Your manifestations give you – which is to say, *the city itself* – a way to make its presence known. The world around the mages is *not* entirely a creation of their own heads. The city is too asleep to *actively* play a role in mages' redemption, but it's certainly watching and trying to steer events for its own ends.

It's also important to balance your Manifestations so that you don't give an unfair advantage to one set of players. In particular, make sure that you have at least one city Manifestation for each of the three City Goals (Destroy, Control and Protect). You should be impartial as to the players' final solution, and this allows all PCs playing the Coach role to speak "with the voice of the city."

If you take sides in the City Goal at all, you should be taking the underrepresented voice, and bringing out a side of the debate that is otherwise ignored.

Handling Iniquity

It's pretty simple to track Iniquity; just make a note of it somewhere on your scratch paper for each mage.

It starts at 1 for everyone, and can never drop below this value.

Iniquity goes up between 1-5 points when the mage gives into their Sin, depending on the consequences of that Challenge. (1 point is shooting a dog. 5 points is the genocide of a continent.) Evil acts against Manifestations don't automatically cause it to rise, but killing Manifestations that are clearly friendly, and betraying fellow Mages, are grounds for instant Iniquity as well.

Mages can drop Iniquity by doing the reverse. In general, sacrifice of some sort is required to remove Iniquity, but Challenges where they do a good job of roleplaying a confrontation with their Guilt are be worth a 1-point reduction even if no sacrifice is made. Going out of their way to assist a fellow mage – especially if this involves spending Willpower – can reduce Iniquity as well.

When Iniquity reaches certain values, the city will react to them in different ways. These consequences are not permanent; later reductions can remove the penalty.

Iniquity 5: At this level, they have generated enough disturbances in the city's psychic space that their fears are seeping out into reality. You, or any character playing a Temptation, may instead challenge the mage with a Nightmare once per scene.

Iniquity 10: The city is starting to aggressively seek out the negativity the mage is creating. Once per scene when that Mage is the active character, you may impose an arbitrary Challenge on them, as if they had just created a Complication. Note that this explicitly may stack onto an existing Complication, if you're feeling cruel.

Your ability to do this refreshes if the mage's Iniquity rises later on in that Scene. They should hopefully catch the connection between their rising Iniquity and the attacks pretty quickly.

Iniquity 15: Give the character a verbal warning, something like: "In a moment of lucidity, you think you're beginning to feel yourself succumb to your sin." If the player is unaware of the consequences of going Over The Edge of Iniquity, make sure to point it out in the rules, and let them know how to reverse it if desired.

At Iniquity 15, the city also starts actively dealing more harm: the mage, *and all characters sharing a scene with them*, receive +1 damage every time something causes damage to their Injury edge. Make sure to point this out in a fairly obvious manner.

Contact/Credits

For problems, questions, etc., drop the author a line.

E-mail at baxil (AT) tomorrowlands. dot org, or via <http://www.tomorrowlands.org/contact.html>

Frequently Asked Questions will be posted on the website: <http://www.tomorrowlands.org/gaming>

Game design, layout, writing:

Tad "Baxil" Ramspott

Playtest and Ideas:

"Ace," Makayla Confer, Cookie, Mike Darby, Aaron Hernandez, Angelique Logan, Steve Thomas

Game Name Vocabulary Assistance:

Corin Arkadios

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Egregore Character Sheet (v.GC10)

Name _____ Player _____

SELF

Skin -
Attachment -
__ **Damnation** -

DRIVES

__ Fear -
__ Need -
__ Sin -
__ Guilt -

Goal:
(Above: Difficulty 10. Below: Difficulty = # of boxes checked)

Destroy
 Control
 Protect

TRAITS

Athletics _____ Combat _____
Tinker _____ Persuasion _____
Spells _____ Willpower
Foci: +3 _____ +2 _____ +1 _____

Skin Abilities: _____

Active Rituals: _____

Items: _____

Rituals being maintained: _____

EDGES

Grounding 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 Insanity
Confidence 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 Insecurity
Health 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 Injury
Morality (----- tracked by City -----) Iniquity

NOTES