



Egregore

EXILES IN THE CITY OF SHADOWS

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By Baxil

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?"

Egregore

WARNING: This is a game about characters confrontating 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.

Table of Contents

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|---|----|
| 1. Getting Ready..... | 5 | Willpower..... | 14 |
| Premise..... | 5 | Edges..... | 14 |
| Basic Gameplay..... | 5 | Insanity..... | 14 |
| Setup..... | 5 | Insecurity..... | 15 |
| Tone..... | 6 | Injury..... | 15 |
| Themes..... | 6 | Iniquity..... | 16 |
| Setting..... | 6 | 3. Gameplay..... | 17 |
| The City..... | 7 | The Scene..... | 18 |
| The World You Left Behind..... | 7 | Passing Ownership..... | 18 |
| 2. Characters..... | 9 | Goals..... | 18 |
| Character Creation..... | 9 | How to Achieve a Goal..... | 18 |
| Self..... | 10 | Failing at a Goal..... | 19 |
| Skin..... | 10 | Succeeding at a Goal..... | 19 |
| Damnation..... | 10 | City Goals..... | 19 |
| Attachment..... | 10 | Destroy..... | 20 |
| Drives..... | 11 | Control..... | 20 |
| Fear..... | 11 | Protect..... | 20 |
| Need..... | 11 | Choosing a City Goal..... | 20 |
| Sin..... | 11 | Epiphanies..... | 20 |
| Guilt..... | 11 | Pursuing a City Goal..... | 21 |
| Goal..... | 12 | What To Do When You Own A Scene..... | 21 |
| Traits..... | 12 | Rolling For Success..... | 22 |
| Power..... | 12 | Giving in to Sin..... | 22 |
| Athletics..... | 12 | When Someone Else Owns A Scene..... | 23 |
| Combat..... | 12 | Inter-player Conflict..... | 23 |
| Tinker..... | 12 | 4. Notes for The City (GM section)..... | 24 |
| Persuasion..... | 12 | Your Job As City..... | 24 |
| Spells..... | 12 | Your First Scenes..... | 24 |
| The Spells trait..... | 13 | The Three-Sentence NPC..... | 24 |
| Buying Bonuses..... | 13 | The City's Manifestations..... | 25 |
| Finding Items..... | 14 | Handling Iniquity..... | 25 |
| Healing..... | 14 | Credits..... | 25 |

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 challenge 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, change or protect it. Only one of those is possible, and once that goal is accomplished, 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 can volunteer to roleplay NPCs.

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 fill out their character sheet (see Section 2). The City should create a few of their own Manifestations (NPCs) that will interact with the characters (see Section 4).

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 will 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.



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

Egregore 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**. Egregore 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 Character Creation.

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 information.
- Fill in Self and Drives (except for Goal).
- A starting Mage has 10 points to allocate between their five Traits. No Trait may be lower than 0 or higher than 6.
 - Note those Trait numbers as your maximums. Your Traits will rise and fall during gameplay, but may never be higher than your maximum.
- Choose three different Foci for your Traits: one at +3, one at +2 and one at +1.
- All Edges start at 1. You start with three Willpower.
- Buy any Abilities relevant to your Skin at their full cost. You may, if you wish, also cast one Ritual on yourself at its full cost.
- 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 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

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 can take any form, and may 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 relative 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. A Manifestation is likely to take this form due to the powerful emotional resonance.

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

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.

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 an Item or Ability.)*

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

Physical feats.

FOCI: Stealth, Speed, Acrobatics, Defense

Combat

Hitting things.

FOCI: Melee Weapons (Light or Heavy), Unarmed, Ranged (Light or Heavy)

Tinker

Manipulation of your surroundings.

FOCI: Repair, Lockpick, Search, Drive/Pilot

Persuasion

Force of personality.

FOCI: Trickery, Diplomacy, Intimidate

Spells

Spur-of-the-moment magic. See below.

FOCI: Enchantments, Combat, Occult/Mythology

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 “Muscular Physique: +1 Athletics”.
Cost: 1 Insanity per +1 bonus. Limit +2 bonus.
- Permanent numeric bonuses to a Focus, like “Fire Breath: +2 Ranged Combat”.
Cost: 1 Insanity per +2 bonus. Limit +4 bonus.

Abilities from your **Skin** are bought at character creation. For every 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.)

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.
- 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 then are left unaccompanied disappear into the city, never to be seen again.

Insanity

As characters move from Grounding to Insanity, they lose the ability to distinguish between characters with external reality (the PCs) and

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.

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.

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 number of challenges and amount of roleplaying, the average scene should run from 15 to 25 minutes (this should allow an entire game to be played in a one-evening session). 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.

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. However, **simply roll a 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 can leave your mage in a 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 the best ways to recover.

If 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 may continue to tie up plot threads and character stories, 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 past of the city that suggests which fate should be chosen. It should be a concrete piece of information about the city's origins, or the fate of former visitors, etc. You will use these Epiphanies to convince the other players to follow your city goal – or to add consequences of them choosing a different path. So make them as compelling as you can, and try to make them suggest your 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 simply reads: 'I see home'”

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

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

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 Challenges (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

Rolling For Success

To overcome a Challenge with a Trait, first calculate the difficulty. The base difficulty for Challenges is 10. This is higher if:

- The Challenge involves a Manifestation with a Power over 10. Use the Power instead.
- There are already more than 10 successes on the character's Goal track. Use the number of successes instead.
- Two characters are fighting each other. See "Inter-player Conflict."

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

You may also 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 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 based on the cleverness, flair, and daring of the solution. (+3 should be reserved for solutions that make the whole room applaud, wince or laugh.)

Roll a d20.

If the RAW ROLL is less than or equal to the character's Insecurity, then a Complication will be automatically introduced.

Now add (or subtract) the character's Trait score; their relevant Focus, if any; and item/ability bonuses, if any. Compare it against the Difficulty.

If the modified roll is greater than or equal to the Difficulty:

- The challenge is overcome. Subtract 1 from the relevant Trait (this can send it negative).

If not:

- The challenge is not overcome. Add points to the most relevant Edge:

Athletics – Injury

Combat – Injury

"Manip" – Insecurity

Persuasion – Insecurity

Spells – Insanity

The failure penalty will be +1, except in cases of Injury where the damage is particularly grievous.

Giving in to Sin

When Someone Else Owns A Scene

x

Inter-player Conflict

x

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.

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, individual introduction scenes: a simple area to explore with a few items to trigger personal responses, and information leading them deeper into the city.

Find a way to remind the character of their Attachment (or better yet, force it on them: “How does that chair remind you of your brother?”) Then you can immediately introduce the Attachment as an NPC. “Volunteer” one of the other players to take that NPC card, and play through a short conversation.

Then introduce one of your own NPCs – a mysterious figure generated by the City. Have them set up a simple sample Challenge for the character. Then the character can use the provided information 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 Three-Sentence NPC

Any time a new Manifestation is introduced, grab an index card and hand it to the player whose

Complication created him/her/it/them. On the index card, have them write down:

(NPC Name)

Skin:

Fear:

Need:

Notes:

... And then fill in the first three (Skin, Fear, Need) as per the Drives section. The Notes field is for writing in character background, motivation, quirks, etc., that *come out during gameplay*, so that if control of the NPC is passed around the table, they are able to play the character consistently with what has already occurred. Under no circumstances are "Notes" to be used for hidden character information.

The City's Manifestations

X

Handling Iniquity

x

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