

SCF

**NOT RECOMMENDED FOR READERS UNDER 18**

## Warning!

KUF handles serious & mature issues in offensive, harmful and irresponsible ways.  
The game can therefore not be recommended to anyone at all. Return the book  
where you found it and go about your business.

Remember to wash your hands.



KUF is based on Knave version 1.0 by Ben Milton.

[questingblog.com/knave](http://questingblog.com/knave)

Design by Wilhelm Person.

With help from Henrik Bergendahl, Dani Cox, Sebastian Lindeberg and  
Mattias Lundmark.

Play testers Malin Forsberg, Andreas Lindström, Mattias Lundmark, Kalle Ruuth  
and Mats Ruuth.

Copyright ©2019 Wilhelm Person.

[wilhelmsgames.wordpress.com](http://wilhelmsgames.wordpress.com)



---

# Contents

---

I	The players' handbook	7	II	The confrontation phase	45
1	Rules summary	8	12	The recovery phase	48
2	Characters	11	13	The barrier and beyond	52
3	Equipment	16	14	Ritual magic	54
4	Rules	21	15	Creatures from the nightmare	58
5	Combat	24	16	Artifacts	66
6	Body and mind	27	17	Books	68
7	Insight into the mysteries	32	III	Examples of play	74
II	The referee's handbook	36	18	Prep	75
8	The referee	37	19	The exploration phase	84
9	The maelstrom	41	20	The confrontation phase	90
10	The exploration phase	43	21	The recovery phase	104



---

# Foreword to the English edition

---

Welcome to KUF.

## What is a Kuf?

A »kuf« is a weirdo, an oddball or an eccentric. The word is derived from the city of Kufa in present day Iraq. In English there's the word »Kufic«, meaning a seventh century calligraphic Arabic script. To the Swedish eyes the writing looked odd or strange, and in the 1880s students in Uppsala started using it for people who shared those properties as well.

KUF borrows a lot from Knape, which in turn is a translation and adaptation of Ben Milton's OSR game Knave. Starting with the letter »K« and describing an outsider I found it a good name for a horror RPG about cultists and fumbling magicians.

## Set where you live

There is something about the shift from the familiar environment to the horrors that makes the stories resound in a special way for me. I live in Sweden and when I play the game it is set here.

If you're a fan of Sweden as an »exotic setting« after enjoying some of the many movies, books and games that have come out of the Nordic countries in the last couple of years, go ahead and keep everything as written. But if you want to play it as it was *intended*, spend a few moments before your first session to tweak it a bit. The random table of names is pretty much a list of the most commonly used names in my parts of the country. The prices in the equipment lists were derived from an afternoon of research, they're in Swedish krona. Divide by ten to get an approximate cost in US dollars or Euros.

If you live in one of the places where you can pick up an SMG while getting a bottle milk at the supermarket I'm sure that you'll find the prices on firearms outrageous. But over here you'd have to turn to the black market for such things. If culture gaming Swedes isn't your thing, do some tweaking before you start.

---

# Prelude to the end of time

---

The old scriptures only describe a fraction of cosmos. They speak of that which lies within the barrier which separates us from the surrounding the primordial chaos. That space from which both the Gods and their worlds are born.

The barrier is order, it gives us the laws of nature, consequence and continuity. Beyond the barrier waits the nightmare with places and creatures beyond comprehension, things of which a mere glance would cause our minds to wither.

But the barrier is breaking down at an ever quickening pace. It is already possible to get lost in the nightmare, and creatures from beyond have found ways into our gilded cage.

## The story

In KUF we follow people who sense that all is not what it seems. They experience things that don't fit into the rationales they've been taught of the workings of our world. Even if they don't yet have the answers to their questions, they know that the rational teachings from schools and authorities don't give all the answers. That the explanations of the world's mysteries preached in churches aren't complete.

But this understanding has sown a seed that puts them in danger. For their search for truth will disturb old orders and they will come to compete with forces from both sides of the barrier.

With their lives at stake they're pulled into a frantic chase for knowledge and power, challenging powers from both this and other worlds who seek to strengthen their positions in anticipation of the chaos that will follow the end of times.

## The barrier

The main characters of the story have grown up and live in our reality. They have seen the laws of nature as unyielding truths where time and space are constant, the only way to other worlds is to travel deep into space. But the world is infinitely more multifaceted and complex than they can perceive or imagine.

They live sheltered behind a barrier, raised by a since long gone god. A prison for their bodies, souls and spirits.

Their senses are too limited to grasp the cosmos. But sometimes, when they

experience strong feelings or are under the influence of drugs they can perceive angles of something else. For a couple of moments they gaze beyond the barrier and see things for what they are.

The barrier can be weakened, especially if the contained world shares properties with the borderlands beyond. Then it is possible to get lost, to wander into the nightmare beyond. Or even for creatures from the beyond to penetrate into our world. War zones, refugee camps, and other places where the suffering is great can open gaps in the barrier large enough for things from the other side to find lasting residence among us. There they usually try to increase the suffering to widen the gaps so that they can increase their influence further.

The barrier is imperfect. It is cracking and holes open. Even if they close again the barrier never truly heals, each crack leaves it weaker than it was. The end of times is coming, relentlessly approaching. An hour, a day, an eon. No one knows when the barrier will finally fall down and the horrors of the beyond wash over us. Yet, every moment we move closer to that moment, and have done so since the snake first spoke to Eve.

## Playing

KUF is a horror RPG, and flirting with the uncomfortable is part of the game. Already when the game starts, the main characters bear the scars of encounters with the supernatural and abuse. The road they walk will only carry them deeper and deeper into the darkness.

This does not give us a free pass to harm each other. Play carefully, keep an eye open to the well being of your fellow players. Suggest taking a break if it seems it is needed, and nurture a culture where it is OK to say »stop«. What is acceptable to one might be over the edge to another. The most vulnerable must be setting the limits for the story. Cut when necessary.

It is possible to play with a certain distance between the players and the characters and their misfortunes, and focus on their meetings with exciting monsters and exotic locations. But it is also possible to let oneself sink into the characters and the story, to let it come close to the heart. To focus on how the minds of the characters are affected by their experiences. The latter can prove to be very uncomfortable.

## Preparation

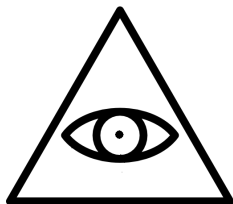
Before you play you need to appoint or find a referee, who should read the whole game. For the rest of the players it will suffice to read just the player part of the book, or at the very least the player summary (pg. 8). You can choose to not let the players read more than that before the game starts, so that they can learn about the game's setting through the eyes of their characters, instead of simply reading about it.



Copy or print character sheets for all the players. Make some extras, because the characters are fragile and the world around them is harsh and inhospitable.

Have dice, pens and note paper enough for all.

Make the game into a ritual. Wait for a story night, wear black, put wilted flowers on the table and Sisters of Mercy on the stereo. Whatever you find best puts you in the mood. When the game is over and the ritual done, stay at the table for a while and talk about what happened and what you'll do next time you meet.



## Part I

# The players' handbook

---

# Rules summary

I

---

You play someone who has had a supernatural or frightening experience that has made them question the way they have viewed the world. The character is driven by their search for truth.

By studying the supernatural and reading occult books the character gets insight in to the mysteries and *experience points*. For every 1000 experience points earned the character goes up a level and gets to raise their stats.

## The game is played in three phases

An adventure cycle in KUF consists of three phases, played in order. Together they make a complete adventure.

In the *exploration* phase the characters explore the world. The exploration leads to an encounter with the unknown.

In the *confrontation* phase the characters face great dangers.

In the *recovery* phase the characters rest and prepare for their next adventure as their wounds heal.

## Doing things

It's not certain that the referee describes everything when you arrive somewhere, so ask for more details if something seems interesting.

Be detailed and clear when you describe what your character does. The numbers on the character sheet is more of a fallback for when things go wrong, the real problem solving is done by you as a player.

## Equipment

The characters can only carry a limited amount of equipment. If you find interesting artifacts you might be forced to leave other equipment behind to take it with you. Choose wisely what to leave and what to carry.

## Combat

The first rule of combat is to not fight at all. Combat is frightfully dangerous. The monsters that wait in the shadows aren't made to form well balanced encounters. They are what they are, and that might mean that some can destroy the characters in a blink of an eye.

The second rule of combat is to try to tilt the odds in your favor in every way possible if you absolutely have to fight. The best combat is the one that is over even before it started. Have a prepared escape route, and know where your rendezvous point is in case you get separated. Run away if things don't go your way, don't fight to the end.

The characters have *hit points* to measure how well they are in a physical sense. If they run out of hit points the characters can become unconscious or even die. In a similar way they have *mind points* to measure their current mental state.

## Saving throws

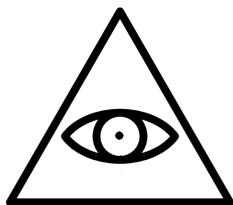
Sometimes you will roll dice to see how things go, and probably you have failed in some way even before the dice are rolled. It is better to do things that you can control than doing things that are left to chance.

The basic method of rolling saving throws is to roll 1d20 and add the stat bonus that fits the situation the best.

- If there is no external opposition the must be over 15 for the roll to succeed.
- If there is external opposition, the roll must be higher than the opponent's or target's defense for the most suitable stat.

If you have managed to get an advantage in the situation, roll two dice and only count the best. If you are at a disadvantage, roll two dice and only count the worst result. Being at a disadvantage is bad.

If the unmodified die shows 20 it is a critical success, such rolls usually carries some sort of positive side effect or greater impact. Rolls of an unmodified 1 are critical failures and carry further negative side effects than simply failure. As each roll of the dice can become a critical failure it is wise to avoid rolling dice as far as possible.



### Strength (STR)

Strength is used when making melee attacks and for saves depending on physical power, like forcing doors open.

### Dexterity (DEX)

Dexterity is used for saves testing balance, speed or reflexes, like dodging, climbing, moving stealthily and balancing acts.

### Constitution (CON)

Constitution is used for saves to resist the effects of poisons, disease and cold, and to continue acting in spite of wounds.

A character can carry a maximum of their constitution defense objects.

### Intelligence (INT)

Intelligence is used for saves requiring concentration and precision, like performing rituals, resisting magical effects, remembering things, building things, repairing machines and pick-pocketing.

### Wisdom (WIS)

Wisdom is used for ranged attacks and saves requiring observation and intuition, like tracking and navigation.

### Charisma (CHA)

Charisma is used for saves made to convince, deceive, seduce, scare, charm, provoke and so on. A character can have a maximum of their charisma bonus companions.

Charisma is also used to resist the effects of terror.

In KUF the characters are outsiders and eccentrics. They are ordinary people with extraordinary experiences. Before the game starts they have experienced something that makes them question their conception of the world.

## Background

When the game starts the character has a profession. The profession gives the character access to connections in the area. Experiences from the profession can sometimes give advantage to saving throws.

It is hard to keep an employment, or even live a normal life, when the mysteries and terrors of the cosmos start dominating your life. But you are of course welcome to try, perhaps you'll even succeed for a time.

Roll on the table below to determine the character's background.

- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Student        | 11. Craftsman       |
| 2. Artist         | 12. Police          |
| 3. Musician       | 13. Journalist      |
| 4. Actor          | 14. Public official |
| 5. Criminal       | 15. Priest          |
| 6. Factory worker | 16. Engineer        |
| 7. Nurse          | 17. Scientist       |
| 8. Mechanic       | 18. Entrepreneur    |
| 9. Farmer         | 19. Doctor          |
| 10. Writer        | 20. Idle rich       |

## Stats

A character has six basic stats: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. The stats consists of pairs of values, one for *defense* and one for *bonus*.

To determine the stats, roll 3d6 for each of them, the lowest die gives the stat's bonus. The higher the better.

After all the stats have been rolled two of them can swap places.

The stats' defense is calculated from their bonus + 10.

## Hit points (HP)

The sum of the three physical stats' bonuses (Strength, Dexterity and Constitution) give the character's hit points (HP).

## Mind points (MP)

The sum of the three mental stats' bonuses (Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma) give the character's mind points (MP).

## Level

Level is a measure of how deep into the mysteries the character has reached. When the game starts the Level is still at 0.

## Experience points (XP)

In the descriptions of the results of the maelstrom table below it is given how many experience points (XP) the character has at the start of the game. Each time the characters collect 1000 XP they go up a level.

## Armor (AB/AD)

An unarmored character has 1 in armor bonus (AB) and 11 in armor defense (AD). Armor bonus and defense go up if a character dons some armor, see the table on page 19 for details.

## The maelstrom

When the game starts the characters have been pulled into a maelstrom, dragging them inexorably towards their doom. They sense that there is something out there, that there is a more frightening truth out there. The search for that truth just pulls them under quicker and quicker.

Decide together with the referee how the character was first pulled into the maelstrom. Use the table below if needed.

- |                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Heritage      | 5. Member of a cult  |
| 2. Family secret | 6. Victim of a crime |
| 3. Test subject  | 7. Insanity          |
| 4. Haunted       | 8. Witness           |

### Heritage

The character has recently inherited an object of significance. The referee creates an artifact that the character starts the game with. It is not certain that the character understands the properties of the artifact.

### Family secret

The character's family has strange or disturbing traditions. As an adult the character has started to reflect upon this and question their experiences. Start the game with 1d100 XP.

### Test subject

With or without their knowledge and approval the character has been the subject of unethical medical or scientific experiments. Lower one stat one step and raise another one step. A stat can't be lowered below 0 or raised above 6. Start the game with 1d100 XP.

### Haunted

The character has caught the interest from something from the other side of the barrier. Sometimes the character gets a feeling that they're being watched, yet not seeing anyone there. Start the game with 1d100 XP.

### Member of a cult

The character is a member of a cult. The referee creates a cult and describes what the membership entails. The character is still regarded as a newcomer to the cult and is not given full insight into the mysteries, but the first contact with the cult's traditions and symbols has given the character 1d100 XP at the start of the game.



## Victim of a crime

The character was recently the victim of a crime. The perpetrator has not yet been identified. The event left the character with a *critical trauma* (pg.10 30) and nightmares. There was something unnatural about the whole thing and the character starts the game with 1d100 XP.

## Insanity

The character wrestles with mental health issues and starts the game with a *permanent trauma* (pg. 31). During darker episodes the character has started to think in new patterns and starts the game with 3d100 XP.

## Witness

The character has seen things that shouldn't exist, this has raised their curiosity and desire to find an explanation. Start the game with 1d100 XP.

## Equipment

A character can carry a maximum of their constitution defense objects. Ordinary clothes and shoes don't count against this maximum, but e.g. thick winter clothes or armor does.

Some large objects count as if they were many, and a character can carry several small items as if they were one. If needed the referee decides what counts as a large or small item.

When the game starts the character has any equipment of their choice taken from the list on page 17.

## Languages

All characters speak the language of the place where the campaign or adventure starts. Beyond that all characters can speak their intelligence bonus further languages. The player chooses which, or rolls on the table below.

- |                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Arabic        | 6. Latin      |
| 2. English       | 7. Portuguese |
| 3. French        | 8. Russian    |
| 4. Hebrew        | 9. Spanish    |
| 5. Classic Greek | 10. German    |

# Name

Give the character a name. If necessary, it is possible to roll on the table below to generate names.

1	Maria	Erik	Johansson
2	Anna	Lars	Nilsson
3	Eva	Karl	Larsson
4	Margareta	Johan	Andersson
5	Elisabeth	Nils	Eriksson
6	Kristina	Per	Karlsson
7	Alice	Anders	Isaksson
8	Karin	Jan	Jonsson
9	Birgitta	Mikael	Pettersson
10	Sofia	Hans	Lundberg
11	Helena	Sven	Persson
12	Marie	Peter	Olsson
13	Lena	Lennart	Vikström
14	Ingrid	Bo	Olofsson
15	Johanna	Gunnar	Lundström
16	Inger	Ulf	Henriksson
17	Emma	Bengt	Berglund
18	Linnea	John	Hansson
19	Marianne	Fredrik	Lindgren
20	Ida	Carl	Sandberg

---

# Equipment

3

---

A character can carry a maximum of their constitution defense number of objects. Books, bottles, light weapons, tools and similarly sized objects counts as one object each. Very heavy or large objects, like armor and heavier weapons, can count as two or more objects. Several smaller objects of the same type can count as one, for the purposes of encumbrance.

Most characters have until recently lived common lives, like common people do, and therefore have access to most things that can be found in ordinary homes or garages, and going to the supermarket, sporting goods or hardware store isn't difficult or expensive.

Use the grid on the character sheet for equipment for those things that the character is currently carrying. If they walk among other people it can be wise to be a bit careful with what gear they carry, to not draw unnecessary attention.

In the lists below there are some examples of equipment and how many objects they count as when carried. But the characters aren't limited to just those items. Mail order catalogs and such can be good sources for more equipment for your game.

# Equipment

	Objects	Price
Binoculars	1	500
Bolt cutter	2	200
Coveralls	1	500
Crowbar	1	500
Emergency rations 48h	1	300
Entrenching tool	1	200
Fire blanket	1	250
First aid kit	1	1000
Flashlight	1	100
Gaffer tape 25m	1	50
Gas mask	1	1000
Geiger counter	1	2000
Glow stick 2pcs 12h	1	100
Headlamp	1	500
Multi tool	1	500
Personal belongings	1	-
Portable stove	1	500
Ritual kit	2	1500
Rope 10m	1	200
Sleeping bag	2	1000
Smoke grenade	1	100
Stethoscope	1	100
Survival kit	1	500
Towel	1	100
Umbrella	1	100
Walkie-talkie	1	1000
Winch with 10m Wire	2	500
Winter clothes	3	2500

## Multi tool

Collapsible pliers with a small saw, a knife, can opener, bottle opener, a couple of screw drivers and maybe some other features. None of the tools can compete with the real deal, but for minor repairs they can do in a pinch.

## Ritual kit

The ritual kit contains various odds and ends that can come in handy in when performing magical rituals. It contains a (rather crummy) dagger, a couple of silver coins, a couple of tea lights, some incense, a lighter, a cup, a small mirror, a tarot, a pouch with salt and a crayon. All packed in a plastic bag.

## Gas mask

The gas mask covers the face and protects the eyes, nose and mouth. It has a filter that removes many kinds of harmful particles from the air. But it is harder to breathe through the filter, and it isn't possible to eat or drink when wearing it.

## Winter clothes

Good boots, winter trousers and jacket, a knitted sweater, wool socks, mittens and a cap. It takes a lot of space in the pack, but only counts as two items when worn.

## Personal belongings

The character's personal belongings count as one item. It includes a wallet, keys, cell phone, driver's license/ID/passport, some cash and a pack of gum or cigarettes. They can be kept in the pockets, or a small purse.

## Survival kit

The survival kit contains band-aids, fishing line and hooks, water purification tablets, waterproof matches and some other practical items that can be used to busy oneself while waiting for the rescue.

## Weapons

	Damage	Items	Hands	Price	Special
<hr/> Melee weapons <hr/>					
Kicks and strikes	1d4L				
Baton, crowbar	1d6L	1	1	500	
Dagger	1d6S	1	1	500	
Spear, Sword, Axe	1d8S	2	1	1000	
Two-handed sword	1d10S	3	2	2000	
Katana	1d8S	2	1	20000	Does 1d10S two-handed.
Chainsaw	1d8C	4	2	5000	Takes one full round to start.
<hr/> Ranged weapons <hr/>					
Pistol	1d6S	1	1	10000	
SMG	1d6S	2	2	50000	Can attack twice per round.
Rifle	1d8S	3	2	10000	
Automatic rifle	1d8S	3	2	100000	Can attack twice per round.

## Protection

Type	AB	AD	Items	Price	Special
Unarmored	1	11	-	-	
Leather coat	2	12	1	2000	
Motorcycle leathers	3	13	2	5000	
Bulletproof vest	5	15	3	5000	
Full body bulletproof suit	7	17	5	20000	
Helmet	+1	+1	1	2000	
Riot shield	+1	+1	1	2000	Requires one hand.



The rules cover some situations, but far from all. The referee is expected to fill in the blanks and make rulings when you encounter situations that the rules don't cover.

## Stats

The characters start the game with stat bonuses stretching from one to six, with two being the average. A stat bonus of zero marks a disability in that area, and a character in need of aids and some sort of support.

For humans the maximum stat bonus is six. But as the characters rise in level and gain greater insight into the mysteries they can raise their stats even beyond that to a maximum of ten.

Some creatures from beyond the barrier can have stat bonuses even in excess of ten, but for the character ten is the limit.

### Strength (STR)

Strength is used when making melee attacks and for saves depending on physical power, like forcing doors open.

### Dexterity (DEX)

Dexterity is used for saves testing balance, speed or reflexes, like dodging, climbing, moving stealthily and balancing acts.

### Constitution (CON)

Constitution is used for saves to resist the effects of poisons, disease and cold, and to continue acting in spite of wounds.

A character can carry a maximum of their constitution defense objects.

### Intelligence (INT)

Intelligence is used for saves requiring concentration and precision, like performing rituals, resisting magical effects, remembering things, building things, repairing machines and pick-pocketing.



## Wisdom (WIS)

Wisdom is used for ranged attacks and saves requiring observation and intuition, like tracking and navigation.

## Charisma (CHA)

Charisma is used for saves made to convince, deceive, seduce, scare, charm, provoke and so on. A character can have a maximum of their charisma bonus companions. Charisma is also used to resist the effects of terror.

## Saving throws

If a character attempts an action of uncertain outcome, and failure could have negative consequences, they roll a saving throw. Saves are rolled as 1d20 plus the bonus from the most suitable stat. If the sum is over 15 the character has succeeded, otherwise the action failed.

## Resistance throws

If someone actively attempts to prevent the action, the roll is instead made against their defense for the most suitable stat. If the the roll plus the bonus exceeds the opposition's defense the action has succeeded.

## Advantage and disadvantage

If there are factors that would be seen as being a great help or hindrance to an action the referee can rule that the roll should be made at an advantage or disadvantage.

With advantage two dice are rolled instead of one, and the highest result is used. With disadvantage two dice are also rolled, but then the lowest result is used instead.

A character's earlier profession is an example of something that could give an advantage in certain situations.

Keep the game simple and let advantages and disadvantages stay at two dice at the most. If you are tempted to roll even more dice the situation probably means an automatic success or failure instead.

## Critical success and failure

A successful roll where the die shows 20 means that the results are especially good. A critical success gives some other benefit beyond that which was targeted for the roll.

A roll where the die shows 1 fails and the result is especially bad. Such a critical failure has greater consequences than first expected. E.g. equipment can be damaged or

destroyed or the situation can draw unwanted attention.

## Encounters

If the characters make an encounter whose reaction isn't obvious, the referee can roll on the table below to determine how they react. The table is only used for persons and creatures played by the referee, the players determine their characters' reactions themselves.

2d6	Reaction
2	Hostile
3-5	Unfriendly
6-8	Uncertain
9-11	Talkative
12	Helpful

## Companions

In the recovery phase the characters can recruit companions. The companions can be anything from lovers and family members, to employees or members of a cult that the characters are building. Companions are usually assumed to be on the characters' side in conflicts.

Each characters can maintain relationships with their charisma bonus number of companions. If they recruit beyond that number they have to neglect the relationships previous companions until they again have a maximum of their charisma bonus companions. Such neglected companions can still be a part of the game, but they are no longer positively predisposed to the characters in the same way as before.

Companions have stats as an ordinary human (pg. 59), but can be given full custom stats like ordinary characters in a recovery phase if desired.

The companions are loyal, but not without their limits. They can take risks for the benefit of the characters', but they expect the same in return. All companions expect something from the characters, be it time, money or something else. If the characters form a cult, companions can be recruited with promises of the insight into the world's mysteries that membership offers.

Companions who partake in the characters' adventures gain experience as if they were characters themselves, and can increase their level in the same way. During the recovery phase companions are assumed to seek treatment for their injuries if they have suffered harm, and otherwise they will work.

In the event that a character dies during the game, the player can immediately take one of the group's companions as their new character.

Avoid combat like the plague. If you have to fight, use every dirty trick in the book to get an advantage. Fighting is dangerous, and even if you survive healing will take a long time.

## Initiative and order

At the start of every round determine initiative by rolling on the table below.

- 1-3 All opponents act first.
- 4-6 All the characters act first.

On their turn everyone can make one move and take one action. The action can be to make another move, make an attack, attempt a trick, or something else under guidance from the referee.

## Time, distance and movement

A combat round can be of varying length depending on the situation. In a drawn out fight in a smoke filled warehouse a single round can last minutes, while the characters and their opponents maneuver. But a desperate melee in a cramped space can be over in less than a minute.

In the same manner »neighboring« in the descriptions of combat is a bit of a fuzzy concept. In a clear and open space, it can be up to ten meters, a distance easily covered by the characters in less than a round. But in a crowded room even three meters can be too far if someone is standing in the way.

Movement during the turns is governed by the same principle, just putting a fixed distance would be misleading. The referee must make rulings on how far a round's movement will take the character. A guideline is that moving to another named location within a larger space is one or two movement actions, if the movement can be made in a straight line, and without the need to dodge attacks.

## Attack

In close combat it is possible to attack neighboring opponents, but ranged weapons can't be used if the shooter is drawn into closed combat. To attack, roll  $1d20$  and add the attacker's strength bonus (melee) or wisdom bonus (ranged). If the sum exceeds the opponent's armor defense the attack has struck home.

It is also possible to resolve attacks »in reverse« by having the defender roll 1d20 and add their armor bonus, seeking to exceed the attacker's strength defense or wisdom defense to avoid being hit.

Unarmored characters have an armor defense of 11 and armor bonus of +1. Armor will give higher values of armor defense. The armor bonus is ten lower than the armor defense, as usual.

To save time it is possible to combine both resolution mechanisms to have the players do most of the dice rolling in combat.

## Damage

If an attack hits, roll damage according to the weapon's damage rating to determine how many hit points the defender loses. Taking damage is bad, avoid it if possible. For more details on the effects of damage see the page 27.

## Tricks

Tricks are combat actions other than pure attacks, e.g. stunning, shoving, disarming, tearing off armor. They are resolved by resistance rolls. Tricks don't cause direct damage, but can cause indirect damage like the damage caused by falling after being pushed out a window. The referee makes rulings how to handle tricks, be creative in suggesting them.

## Advantage in combat

Characters can get an advantage in combat by surprising their opponents, standing on higher ground, fighting an unarmed or distracted opponent. The referee makes rulings if a certain situation is sufficiently advantageous to grant the characters the advantage.

Those who act with advantage have the option to either roll two dice on the attack roll, or to just roll one attack die, but also make a trick at the same time on the same opponent.

## Critical hits

If the attacker rolls 20 on the die for their roll to attack (or the defender rolls 1 if you use the alternate mechanic) the defender take another die of damage, or that the damage roll is made as usual, but the damage given is increased by one degree (see pg. 27).

If the attacker rolls a 1 on the die for their attack (or the defender rolls 20) the defender can make a riposte, roll immediately. Ripostes don't count towards the defender's attacks in the round.

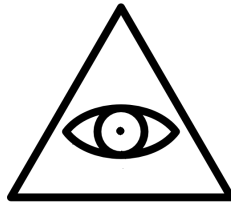
## Morale

All monsters and persons played by the referee have a morale value, usually between 5 and 9. If they meet a greater danger than they had expected the referee rolls a morale roll with 2d6. If the roll is higher than the morale value they will attempt to flee, retreat or negotiate, rather than continuing the fight.

Morale rolls can be triggered by a group losing half their number or their leader, or when a single enemy has lost half their hit points. The referee can make rulings for other events that might trigger morale rolls.

Companions roll for morale if they aren't paid, if their contact within the group dies or they meet extraordinary danger. The morale value can be increased by paying and treating them well.

The players never roll for morale, though their characters can be forced to flee as a stress reaction.



Protected from the nightmare of the cosmos the humans live behind the barrier. But the bodies and souls are also prisons for spirits, sparks emanated out of the original divine.

In the modern era the humans are more numerous than ever before, far more than the sparks that they have been created to keep. Therefore most are now just body and mind, and not more divine than the beasts they consume. But a fraction of the humans serve their true purpose. They are whole, consisting of body, soul and a fettered spirit.

Unknowing of their role they work, eat, drink, sleep and breed at a constantly increasing rate.

This chapter describes how damage upon the body and mind affects the characters.

## Hit points and wounds

Hit points are calculated as the sum of the bonuses for the stats strength, dexterity and constitution. They are an indicator of how resilient the creature is to violence and other physical wear.

Along the character sheet's left edge there are boxes where the character's wounds can be tracked. As wounds are marked, use the symbols below according to the source of the injury.

	Degree	Source	Save
/	Light	Blunt trauma	-
×	Serious	Shots, cuts and stabs	CON with adv.
✕	Critical	Destructive	CON
■	Permanent	-	CON with disadv.

If all the character's boxes have been filled, but there are more wounds remaining to mark, existing boxes have their degree of damage increased according to the table below.

Prio	Box's degree	Effect
1	Empty	Enter the new damage.
2	Lower	Replace with the new damage.
3	Same	Increase the degree.
4	Higher	Increase the degree.

## Down and out

Every time a damage results in at least one box is reused according to prio 2-4 above, the wounded character shall make save for constitution with advantage or disadvantage as per the table.

If the save fails the character is out and can no longer act. Roll again on the same terms, if this second roll also fails the character is struck unconscious for 10 minutes for each point of damage taken in the attack which caused the unconsciousness. If the second save succeeds the character is only rendered unable to act for as many rounds as the number of points of damage rolled.

When the character recovers they make all rolls requiring physical activity at a disadvantage until at least one hit point has been entirely recovered.

## Light wounds

Light wounds are usually not too much of a problem. After a couple of hours of rest and maybe some painkillers they will heal automatically. All light wounds are healed in the recovery phase (pg. 48).

## Serious wounds

Serious wounds heal at a rate of one point of damage after each full night's rest. In the recovery phase at least half the points of taken serious wounds heal, round up.

## Critical wounds

If a character has lost all their hit points and has taken at least one critical wound most physical actions are made at a disadvantage. Each recovery phase one point of critical wounds heal.

## Permanent wounds

For each point of permanent damage taken, one stat must be reduced by one step according to the table below. If a stat's bonus is lowered below zero the character dies immediately. Permanent wounds can't be healed under normal circumstances, even if the stat is later raised to its original level, the box remains filled.

1d6	Stat
1-2	Strength
3-4	Dexterity
5-6	Constitution

## Mind

The characters have the sum of the bonuses for intelligence, wisdom and charisma in mind points (MP). The mind points describe how resilient the mind is to psychological harm. Fatigue and damage to the mind is called trauma. The stat charisma describes how mentally stable a character is, and it is against it that most saves to avoid trauma are rolled.

Merely seeing certain creatures can cause trauma, other creatures can cause trauma from special attacks. To see creatures of a lower level than the characters themselves have usually doesn't cause trauma, as the the characters become tougher with experience. The referee determines if a source of trauma is applicable to the characters.

Below follows some examples of sources of trauma, and what degree of trauma they correspond to. Those who are threatened by trauma can usually attempt to roll charisma saves to avoid harm.

Source	Trauma
To see beyond the barrier for the first time.	1d6L
To see a frightening monster.	1d6L
To be subjected to a phobia.	1d6L
To see someone close killed or seriously harmed.	1d4S
To be the victim of a crime.	1d4S
To suffer from insomnia from nightmares several nights in a row.	1d4S
To see an absolutely terrifying monster.	1d6S
To be the victim of torture.	1d6K

	Degree	Source	Save
/	Light	Scary	-
×	Serious	Terrifying	CHA with adv.
✱	Critical	Destructive	CHA
■	Permanent	-	CHA with disadv.

For each point of trauma taken mark a box on the character sheet as per the table



below. Note that if all the character's boxes are already marked, the degree of the trauma increases.

Prio	Box's degree	Effect
1	Empty	Enter the new trauma.
2	Lower	Replace with the new trauma.
3	Same	Increase the degree.
4	Higher	Increase the degree.

### Stress reaction

Every time trauma results in at least one box being reused by prio 2-4 the victim must roll a save for CHA, with advantage or disadvantage as per the last marked box. If the save fails the victim has a stress reaction according to the table below.

1d6	Stress reaction
1-2	The victim freezes and becomes passive.
3-4	The flight response triggers and the victim must flee the source of the trauma at any price. Being prevented from escaping causes a further 1d4L trauma.
5-6	The fight response triggers and the victim attacks the source of the trauma.

The stress reaction lasts for as many rounds as the victim took trauma in the event that caused the failed roll.

### Light trauma

Light trauma isn't usually such a big deal. They go away after some rest and maybe a cigarette or a cup of coffee. All light trauma go away in the recovery phase.

### Serious trauma

In the recovery phase half of the taken serious trauma goes away, round up.

### Critical trauma

For every incident that causes at least one point of critical trauma the character must make a charisma save. If the roll fails the character gets a lasting effect according to the table below. Note the effect on the last box that was marked, once it has healed the effect also goes away.

1d6	Lasting effect
1-2	Nightmares of the event.
3-4	Develops a phobia connected to the event.
5-6	Develops a fetish connected to the event.

In the recovery phobia one point of critical trauma can be healed with a successful charisma save. If the character lacks qualified help the roll is made at a disadvantage.

## Permanent trauma

For every point of permanent trauma taken one stat must be reduced by one step according to the table below. If a box that gets a permanent trauma also has a lasting effect from earlier, the effect will also be permanent.

If a stat's bonus is reduced under zero the mind is destroyed. The body can remain alive under care, but the person is forever gone. Permanent trauma can't be healed under normal circumstances. Even if the stat is raised to its previous level the box remains filled.

1d6	Stat
1-2	Intelligence
3-4	Wisdom
5-6	Charisma

## Drugs

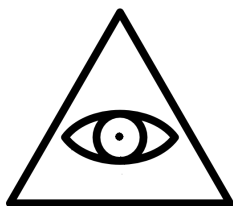
The characters act under heavy pressure, and sometimes they don't have the time or resources to recover properly. With the aid of drugs they can buy some time, a couple of hours more of activity, which could be enough to save their lives.

Pain killers lets them act in spite of frightful injuries. Stimulants can help them overcome fear and lack of sleep. Some rituals demand that the participants are taking psychedelic drugs.

Drug	Time	Effect
Painkiller	4 hours	1d6 extra HP
Stimulants	1 hour	1d6 extra MP

Wounds and trauma are first marked on the natural HP and MP boxes. Only when they have been exhausted can the boxes given by the drugs be used.

When the effect of the drugs wear off the HP and MP that they gave also go away. Wounds and trauma on boxes granted by drugs are also removed, but any permanent wounds, trauma and lasting effects from trauma are moved to the standard boxes.



To arm themselves against the forces that wish them ill, the characters need to understand what's going on. They need to learn about the creatures from the nightmare and places beyond the barrier. There are several ways to get such knowledge, but they come with great danger.

Good sources of knowledge attracts collectors, cultists, magicians, inquisitors and even creatures from the nightmare. All want the knowledge for their own, or to destroy it to prevent others from benefiting from it.

## Sources of insight

### Occult books

There's lots of occult literature. Through the centuries thousands of works have been written, copied, translated and modified. Most are of course only nonsense, pure imaginings of their authors, or deliberate forgeries. But there are books with true knowledge out there. Books to stumble upon in dusty second hand book stores, libraries, collections and auctions. They are books that are best left unspoken of, to not draw unwanted attention.

The real treasures must be sought beyond the barriers. There are books written by creatures beyond our understanding, books never subjected to the clumsy transcriptions from translators or corrections done by vain amateurs.

Most books containing occult knowledge have a number of values listed for experience. Each represents the XP gain of a week of study of the work.

- See the rules for each book.

### Encounters

Encounters with others who have a greater insight into the mysteries of the cosmos can give access to forbidden knowledge. The same goes for creatures from the nightmare, to study them, learn from them or defeat them.

Creatures that can give insight have an XP value in their profile. It is possible to gain that up to three times, once for each level of achieved knowledge.

- The first contact with a creature from beyond the barrier.
- The first longer meeting with the creature, deeper study or defeating it in an extended battle.
- Intimate knowledge of the creature's origins, abilities and secrets.

It is only possible to collect experience once at each level. For creatures of the same type it isn't possible to collect experience from more than one individual at each stage, but all levels don't need to come from the same individual.

To gain experience the character must understand that they are facing something from beyond the barrier. Meetings with a creature that has disguised itself as a human will not give any experience until the disguise is revealed.

The characters don't get XP from encounters with creatures of a lower level than their own level of understanding of the mysteries.

### Performing rituals

Magic is true power. To change reality is intoxicating, no matter if it is done with the power one's own mind, or through bargains struck with powers from beyond the barrier.

Altering the cosmos gives insight and knowledge. But magic is dangerous, the smallest of mistakes can mean the difference between life and death. Those creatures that lend their powers to cultists rarely does so willingly, or without ulterior motives. Pacts will soon draw cultists deeper into the maelstrom than they can imagine.

- Successfully performing a ritual gives at least 10XP.
- Making a pact with a creature from beyond the barrier can be a way to reach the third level of familiarity get the associated XP.

### Travel to places beyond our reality

Better than reading about something is to see it with your own eyes. To visit and study places beyond our reality gives insight. We are deemed to remain in our golden cage, and leaving it can cause ire among both creatures of the nightmare and those who try to keep humanity in the dark regarding the true nature of the cosmos.

- The first journey beyond the barrier 100XP.
- Each new location visited after that gives another 10XP.

## Increasing the level of insight

Each time the characters have gathered 1000 experience points they reach a breakthrough in their understanding of the cosmos, and increase their level of insight.

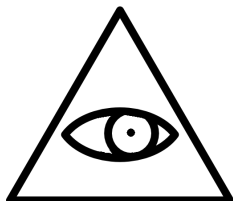
Every time they increase their level they can raise three stats of their choosing one step each.

A stat bonus of 6 is the very peak of human capacity. Every step a stat is increased beyond that takes the character further and further into the domain of the inhuman as the realization of the world's true nature starts to manifest. No stat bonus can be raised above 10.

## Powers

Every time a character gains a level and at least one stat bonus is raised to 7 something fundamental changes in what the character is. Roll on the table below to see how.

Every time a character gains a power one point of constitution is lost permanently. Points lost this way can't be recovered even by supernatural means.



1. Dark vision. Can see without any penalty in darkness. The eyes glow red in the dark.
2. True sight. With careful study the character can see through the disguises of creatures who have taken human form. The power does not protect from any horror effects caused by seeing the creature's true form.
3. Marked. Otherworldly symbols appear on the character's skin.
4. Claws and fangs. The character does 1d6S damage if unarmed.
5. Bulletproof. The character takes half damage from firearms.
6. Punchproof. The character takes half damage from blunt trauma.
7. Bladeproof. The character takes half damage from cuts and puncture wounds from weapons made of steel.
8. Fireproof. The character takes half damage from fire and other sources of heat.
9. Speed. The character can act twice in one round per combat.
10. Mind of steel. In the recovery phase the character can heal one point of permanent trauma on themselves. If this raises a stat above 6 no roll is made on this table.
11. Heart of steel. In the recovery phase the character can heal one point of permanent wounds on themselves. If this raises a stat above 6 no roll is made on this table.
12. Weightless. With mild concentration the character can reduce the pull of gravity on their body, and therefore climb any surface that offers the slightest of grip, or (slowly) fall even from high altitudes without taking any damage.
13. Healer. In the recovery phase the character can heal one point of damage or trauma on another person as a planned action. The healer can heal even permanent trauma and damage. Stats can never be raised above six by a healer.
14. Hardened mind. Increase MP by 1d6.
15. Hardened body. Increase HP by 1d6.
16. Timeless. The character is no longer affected by natural aging.
17. Visitor of dreams. The character can read and affect the dreams of someone who sleeps within their reach.
18. Telekinesis. The character can will smaller objects in their field of view into motion. Moving something causes one point of light trauma to the character.
19. Forgotten. By focusing the character can become inconspicuous and easily forgotten. The character does not become invisible, but it makes it hard for other to remember seeing them or describe them.
20. Halo. A halo of light appears around the character's head. It can be suppressed with light concentration, but will return as soon as the character relaxes, sleeps or experiences strong emotions.

## Part II

# The referee's handbook

The referee faces a challenge: to both be the greatest fan of the characters and cheer them on in their adventures, but also to be an objective referee of the game and the setting.

The characters are caught in a dark trajectory leading to their demise. But it isn't the referee's job to quicken that process. Instead the difficulties shall be described objectively. The characters shall get the information they have deserved, and their opponents should be played in a plausible way.

A fair loss against forces beyond their comprehension is the likely fate of the characters, but also a well deserved one. The victories they win, the days of continued life they buy with desperate bargains, postponed judgment after unholy pacts and overcome challenges shouldn't be made into hollow victories because the referee cheats or intercedes on their behalf.

The referee can prepare adventures and challenges in advance, and stage them with the players. Or improvise and fill in the gaps with the results from random tables and lists. Both methods are good, even if most after a while find that they prefer one over the other. Don't trip the characters just because things seem to go too well for them, if they through luck or cunning manages to win an advantage or a moment of respite it is well deserved. Just continue running the game honestly, in time the horrors will catch up with them.

## Making rulings

KUF consists of a union of rules, referee and players. It only provides a handful of rules, but the characters and their adventures can take an infinite number of paths. You will repeatedly find yourselves in situations where this book doesn't provide you will exact rules to resolve that particular situation.

Perhaps it is just a matter of rolling a save. It is up to the referee to decide how to handle those situations. Perhaps the consequences are obvious and no roll is needed. Perhaps the outcome is independent from the participants' skills or equipment and it simply a matter of rolling eleven or more on the die to succeed.

The characters may want to employ something in a way it never was intended. It is the referee's job to make a ruling for how to handle the situation.

In play the characters will encounter creatures, places, books and artifacts that aren't described in detail. The referee decides with which rules to govern them.



## The gauntlet

The characters really never have the time to rest or recover properly to plan their next move. They run a constant gauntlet between forces bent on destroying them. When the game starts they are already caught in the maelstrom.

If they stop they will soon be destroyed by forces larger than themselves. »Soon» could be anything from minutes to months, but sooner or later they will be forced into action, and by then it can already be too late.

As they learn more about the true nature and mysteries of the cosmos they will also draw interest from stronger and stronger forces and be pursued by more and stronger enemies.

## Using the rules

The rules in this book covers many situations, but far from all that can appear in play. It is the referee's job to cover the gaps as the story takes you into the unknown. Below are some methods to manage new situations.

### Trivial actions

If the characters or those around them do anything that has a guaranteed outcome, or if there is no risk for a critical failure, the referee can decide that the action succeeds without any need to roll the dice.

In an ordinary roll the risk for a critical failure is 5%. If everything we did in our lives had a one in twenty risk disastrous consequences the world would stand in flames. If an action is dangerous, or something that usually is safe is done under poor conditions, it can be justified to call for a die roll. But it isn't wrong to let things pass without rolling.

### Saves

If the outcome of an action is uncertain the save is the natural way to resolve it. Saves are a way for the characters to avoid disadvantageous consequences of their actions. E.g. let the player roll a save for dexterity to avoid detection when sneaking past a guard.

### Probability

Some situations are uncertain, but not possible to affect. Then the referee can distribute the various outcomes over the results of a die roll. E.g. It might be a 50% chance of a certain book being available from a used book store when the characters go there. The referee can then take a d6 and declare that the book is there on a roll of four or higher, and then roll the die to see if it is there.

Perhaps this is the very essence of being a fair referee. Not to give the characters the book because it would help them, nor to refuse them the book because it is fun to see them fail. But to objectively decide the odds of something and then rolling to determine the order of things in this very moment.

## Adventures and campaigns

Below follows some examples of themes around which the referee and the group can build their games.

### Victims

A group of characters are constantly on the run from cultists and monsters from beyond the barrier can make for an easy to run game. Before every exploration phase the referee only needs to determine what or which threats that will be the most urgent one for this cycle and then play to find out if the characters can survive another meeting with the unknown.

### Cultists

It is practical to have a cult to support you. A stream of recruited novices provide a source of suitable companions to upgrade to characters as the old ones perish. At the same time a cult can be drawn into conflicts with other organizations which will keep the torch under the characters' feet. Starting and running a cult can become a fun frame story for the characters' rituals and encounters with horrors from beyond the barrier.

### Explorers

A group of characters who have achieved some means of safe travel through the barrier can be the basis for a whole campaign. Every session takes the characters to a new place to explore and plunder for treasure.

### Nightwatch

The characters taking the roles of vigilantes and protectors of the civilians can be the basis for a campaign. They might be police who during a murder investigation find clues that the murderer has been using a very peculiar method, or seems to have strange motives.

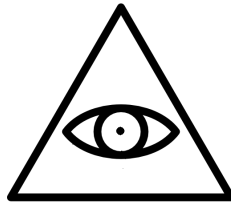
### Magical boarding school

Making all the characters students of a magical institution of learning might take some work in preparation. On the other hand the division of the school year into semesters gives cycle of adventures a natural framing. At the same time the ancient

institutions are chock full of strange traditions and mysterious cabals that give the story a rich background.

### The dark canvas

An exciting introduction to the setting for new players is to make characters without rolling on the maelstrom table (page 13). Let instead their adventure start with the first encounter with the supernatural as they are caught by the maelstrom together.



The problems started when they got the first spark of forbidden knowledge. It made them question old truths and seek answers to question previously unasked. They left the path and threw themselves into the darkness.

Now they are caught in the maelstrom, and it draws them towards their doom. They have woken powers who will not quit even if they abandon their search. If they stop, they will be consumed. To face the powers that pursue them, they need more knowledge, the pursuit of which will draw further attention.

They run a gauntlet deeper and deeper into the darkness, chasing a light that only grows dimmer with each step.

## The maelstrom and the cycle of play

It is possible to play one shot adventures. Follow the characters for a few, but significant, hours of their lives. Never to return to neither them or their story.

But it is also possible to weave several shorter stories into a longer narrative or campaign, when their development and their deepening understanding of the mysteries in itself is an important component, not only the encounters with cults and creatures from beyond the barrier.

In KUF such a campaign follows a repeating cycle consisting of three phases, each with different principles, objectives and rules:

1. Exploration
2. Confrontation
3. Recovery

### Exploration

The maelstrom has grabbed the characters and relentlessly carries them towards their doom. But by seeking information, forming alliances or running, they try to make time and prepare so that they'll be better equipped for their next encounter.

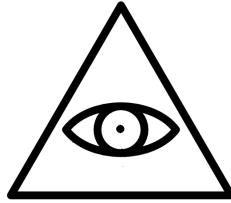
### Confrontation

The characters will sooner or later end up in tangible danger. A cult may catch up to them, they may encounter a creature from beyond the barrier, or seek a path through the barrier on their own accord.

If you're playing a one shot adventure it will be a stand alone confrontation phase, or possibly an exploration phase and a confrontation if you're looking for a more elaborate framing of the session's story.

### Recovery

The characters who survive the confrontation retire to recover and lick their wounds. Perhaps they have acquired some books or artifacts to study to stand better prepared for the next cycle.



---

# The exploration phase

10

---

During the exploration phase the characters can travel, seek information, make connections, acquire equipment and so on. The phase serves to let them prepare for future confrontations, but also to introduce new characters and leads.

But the characters aren't necessarily safe in the exploration phase, their enemies are always near and danger can strike suddenly.

A group that focuses on action and the exploration of dangerous locations can play the exploration by simply having the referee describe the events leading up to their next confrontation. But a group that is more interested in exploration and character development may spend much time in the exploration phase, investigating and preparing, before finally entering the confrontation.

After playing a couple of sessions you will find a balance between the two phases that fits your play style.

## The referee's prep

Look over the characters and consider their situation. What are their contacts up to? What powers, individuals or groups are on their tails, and what would be their next move? Pick one or a couple of them and prepare encounters with the characters.

If you have a plan for an upcoming confrontation for the characters you must find a way to lead their story to it. Below are some examples of situations that can be used to lead up to confrontations.

1. A character's background becomes relevant again.
2. A group, individual or creature from a previous adventure returns.
3. An interesting article in a newspaper.
4. A friend is in trouble.
5. A cult interests themselves in the doings of the characters.
6. The authorities become interested in the doings of the characters.
7. Criminals become interested in the doings of the characters.
8. Someone steals or attempts to steal a book or artifact from the characters.
9. A nightmare warns of approaching danger.
10. A companion is in trouble.

Draw or get a map of the city where the characters are, and any other cities or places that they are likely to visit in the near future. Mark places, people and other

important things on the map. Having a map at hand is both a good aid to making the world around the characters come alive, and good support in case they leave the anticipated path and you need to improvise on the spot.

It can be convenient to have two maps, one for the referee with all the information, and one for the players where they can mark important things as they learn about them.

## Playing the exploration phase

The referee's role in the exploration is mainly to make the world around the characters come to life in the minds of the players. Play encounters with interesting people and describe the various places the characters visit.

In the recovery phase the characters can prepare and recover in relative peace, but in the exploration phase the maelstrom is always looming over them. If they have enemies they will try to strike against the characters. If they have drawn the attention of the authorities police will follow in their steps. Creatures from beyond the barrier can make moves against them. At the same time the characters can travel to new locations, seek rare books in dusty book stores, visit experts and many other things.

If the characters want to prepare in the exploration phase by acquiring important equipment or getting information from experts they may have found an adventure in the adventure. Explore their thread, but don't forget that while the characters prepare, so do their opponents.

## Ending the phase

The exploration phase can end and shift into confrontation in several ways, but it is usually obvious when it happens.

- The characters descend into tunnels, sewers, old ruins or similar and start exploring them.
- The characters face a situation where they start reaching for their guns. The loose structure of the exploration phase isn't very suitable for extended combat, so move on to the confrontation.
- The characters cross the barrier and start exploring the world on the other side. The confrontation phase's more detailed level of play gives a better overview of what's going on.
- The characters perform a ritual, especially one with large consequences.

---

# The confrontation phase

II

---

The confrontation is the apex of the cycle. Here the characters face greater opposition and learn more about the true nature of the world. The story becomes more focused on their situation, in that very moment. Exactly where in a room a character stands starts becoming interesting. Exactly how long it takes to do something might be important. Even if there might be some level of danger in the exploration phase, the confrontation is played with the characters' lives on the line.

## The referee's prep

In the confrontation the referee's role becomes most like that of an impartial referee. The characters and players face challenges and problems, the referee describes their surroundings, interprets the rules and make rulings if there are no game rules for the particular situation.

To make it easier to be that kind of impartial referee that the game needs it is good to prepare the stage for the confrontation in advance by drawing a map and making notes on who and what can be found in the various locations. It is also good to prepare various kinds of creatures that the characters can interact with, learn from and fight.

## Maps

No matter if the confrontation is set in dark tunnels, in a dense forest, the ruins of a bombed factory, an ancient temple beyond the barrier or someplace else. a map is worth its weight in gold. The map lets you keep track of where the characters are and makes it easier to give clear and consistent descriptions of the various locations.

There's no need to spend too much time on drawing the map, the players should never see it anyway. The important thing is that you can read it yourself. Keep an eye open for interesting maps and hoard them. With small changes or additions any map can become the base for an exciting confrontation.

To make the map more interesting to explore, make sure that all the locations aren't lined up in a straight line. If there are doors, crossings, stairs and openings in many places the players are forced to make decisions on what to explore first. And at the same time it becomes possible for any monsters or opponents in the location to move in interesting ways.



## Traps

Traps make places both more dangerous and exciting to explore. Some traps can be prepared specifically to protect something in the location, or to warn those who are there of intruders. Others can be unintentional, e.g. a damaged building can collapse, technical malfunctions can run electrical currents through unexpected places, and there can be toxins in both the air and water. A trap can be as simple as a lock on a door that jams once the characters have passed through it blocking a speedy retreat when they later try to escape a monster.

## Encounters

Having several varied encounters in the confrontation makes it come alive. Prepare the people or creatures that inhabit the location. Give them abilities, equipment and agendas. Some might have the goal to kill the characters at any cost, but others might very well consider helping the characters - especially if they themselves have something to gain from doing so. The more you know about the different agendas and goals of those that the characters meet, the easier it will be to play them.

One way to make the game more challenging for the referee is to not decide exactly where each encounter is to take place, and instead make a random table of possible encounters, and not rolling on it until the characters arrive. Interpreting the results of such rolls can give unexpected challenges and opportunities for the characters.

In the chapter on encounters (page 58) there are a number of prepared groups and creatures that the characters can meet. Use them as they are or with modification, or write your own entirely. Make the location come to life.

## Treasure

Some who the characters encounter may have equipment that the characters might be interested in. Other items can be found around the location. Maybe the location's primary purpose is to keep an important artifact safe. While preparing the game it is good to mark such treasures on the map.

The characters will likely be interested in acquiring occult books and magical artifacts, as those can be studied for experience. But for variety more traditional treasures can also be used, like guns, money and suitcases full of drugs.

## Example treasure

1. An artifact.
2. An object that looks like it could be an artifact, but isn't.
3. An occult book.
4. A weapon.
5. Cash in a bag.
6. Drugs.
7. Clues on where something valuable might be found.
8. A useful item.
9. An article of clothing.
10. A work of art.

## Playing the confrontation

Don't show your map to the players. It can be good to build a screen out of cardboard or a couple of binders to hide the map behind, so you can study it without exposing it to the players by mistake.

Play honestly to the players and your prep. If they players come up with a clever way to bypass or defeat a powerful creature, let them. If they make mistakes or fail die rolls so that their characters die, let them. The referee is an impartial judge. Sometimes it hurts when things go badly for the characters, but then the more fun it is when things go well after they came up with a good plan.

Keep your descriptions light, let the players ask for details if they want them. There's an element of player skill here. Players who are sloppy risks missing important information or even the lives of their characters, but at the same time there's a certain feeling of accomplishment when they ask the right questions and come across important clues. Don't make saving rolls to determine if the characters find a particular clue, if they describe how they look in the right place and in the right way they have also deserved the clue.

## Ending the phase

When (if) the characters have managed to return to safety again inside the barrier and the immediate danger is over it is time to proceed to the recovery phase.

Hand out experience points for experiences and knowledge they've made in the exploration and confrontation phases if they haven't been given out already.

After a confrontation comes a period of rest for the characters to recover before facing another adventure. The recovery phase is divided into four phases

1. Make plans for a full month of recovery.
2. Determine how much time actually is available.
3. Recover damage and trauma.
4. Resolve the weekly activities.

## Planning

Each player plans the next four weeks of their character's recovery from the list of activities below, one activity per week. The same activity may be chosen multiple times. It is not certain that they'll get to complete them all before the maelstrom drags them down into the darkness again.

- Work
- Study a book
- Study an artifact
- Seek an answer to a question
- Seek medical care
- Buy illegal equipment
- Recruit companions
- Other

### Work

The natural choice for ordinary people. Work and make money.

### Study a book

The character focuses on studying an occult book, see rules on page 32.

## Study an artifact

The character focuses on studying an artifact, see rules on page 67.

## Seek the answer to a question

The character does research to find the answer to a question. Make a saving throw for INT.

- CS The character finds an answer to the question, and also some extra information on the topic.
- S The character finds an answer to the question.
- F The character doesn't find an answer to the question.
- CF The character get erroneous information, or draws unwanted attention.

## Seek medical care

The character seeks qualified medical care. Roll for CHA.

The roll is normally done at a disadvantage and costs nothing. For a 10.000 SEK fee the roll can be made without disadvantage. For 100.000 SEK the roll can be made at an advantage.

- CS The character gets to recover again this phase, both for wounds and trauma. The character is considered to be getting qualified help for this roll.
- S The character gets to recover again this phase, both for wounds or trauma. The character is considered to be getting qualified help for this roll.
- F
- CF The character doesn't get the needed help.

The character's injuries draws unwanted attention. The authorities start an investigation into the matter. The character doesn't get the needed help.

## Buy illegal equipment

The character tries to buy something illegal or restricted, e.g. drugs, weapons or classified information, on the black market. Roll for CHA.

- CS The character makes the deal without leaving a trace.
- S The character makes the deal, but leaves a trail behind that can be followed by police investigators or other cults if they take an interest in the character's activities.
- F
- CF The character fails to make the deal.

The character fails to make the deal, and draws unwanted attention, is arrested by the police or traced by a competing cult.

If the players want to roleplay the acquisition of new equipment instead it would be a suitable activity for the exploration phase, or even the confrontation.

## Recruit companions

The character attempts to recruit a companion. If the characters have made connections during the previous phases it might be suitable to make the recruiting there. The referee rolls for the character's WIS.

- CS The character manages to recruit 1d6 companions, but no more than their charisma bonus.
- S The character manages to recruit 1d2 companions.
- F The character fails to recruit a companion.
- CF The character draws unwanted attention in the process, or the companion is actually an infiltrator.

## Other

It is possible to engage in other activities than the ones that have been listed above. The referee determines if a save is needed, and what the effect or consequences are at different levels of success.

## Time until the next cycle

Once all the characters have made their plans, roll on the table below to see how long they get to recover before they are pulled back into the action again. The roll is made at -1 if they were pursued at the end of the confrontation phase.

- 0 The next cycle starts immediately! Continue to the next exploration phase without recovering any wounds or trauma.
- 1 The characters get to recover for one week.
- 2 The characters get to recover for two weeks.
- 3 - 4 The characters get to recover for three weeks.
- 5 - The characters get to recover for four weeks.

The roll is in a way an high level initiative roll and answers the question of how good control the characters have over their situation.

## Recovering wounds and trauma

With the exception of the roll being zero the characters recover wounds and trauma according to the rules on page 27) and 30.

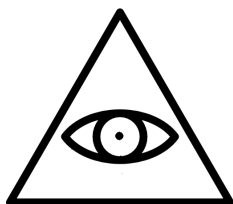
## Execute the activities

The characters then do as many of their planned activities as they have time for. It is allowed to make minor adjustments inside the category each week. E.g. a character has planned to study a book for all their weeks, but halfway through the phase they discover that they have learned everything it has to give. They may then choose to study another book for the remaining time.

## The end of the phase

Once all the characters have done their activities the cycle is over, and the next cycle can begin, starting with an exploration phase. This is usually a good time to break between gaming sessions so that the referee gets the time to prepare.

If the characters didn't manage to complete their four weeks of recovery, see what they had planned on doing when they were interrupted, it might give an idea of how to start the next cycle.



Unwittingly some carry within themselves a captive, a spark of the divine. It is bound inside the soul at the first moment of life, and there it remains until the life ceases, and it is immediately caught again, inside another soul.

It is for these sparks of the divine that this world has been made. Love, butterflies, world wars, cigarettes and all the rest, it is just part of a captivating mirage - the barrier.

The barrier is all that we see, all that we touch, all that we hear and all that we sense. The barrier is our world and a part of the prison that keeps the spirits caught within us. But our world isn't more than a bubble inside the nightmarish true reality.

## The nightmare

The nightmare looms just beyond the barrier. First in the form of borderlands that look like our world, but the further away the more alien and chaotic the universe becomes.

Before our world was created several other attempts to trap the sparks of the divine were made, but they were imperfect and the prisoners managed to break free. The ruins of these attempts remain beyond the barrier. They're all unique, but some of them are still inhabited by creatures who seem human but never are. Usually the divine creatures that were trapped are long gone, but there are places where they still remain and have made themselves into gods. In some places they rule directly as god emperors.

The characters might seek paths through the barrier deliberately and on their own accord. But they can also pass through the cracks by mistake, or even be pulled through by forces from the other side.

The transition is usually obvious to the characters, what lies beyond is strange, surreal and terrifying. But sometimes the change is creeping, small alterations and deviations, they might even live days or months believing that everything is as it should, when they really have been transported to the beyond.

The table below gives some suggestions on what the world on the other side might look like. Expand it with more options yourself.

## The nightmare

1. The horizon curls upwards.
2. Everything is decrepit.
3. Night becomes day and day becomes night.
4. Distances increase
5. It rains blood.
6. The surroundings are enveloped inside a gigantic cathedral.
7. Time stands still.
8. Time runs backwards.
9. No sounds can be heard.
10. There's a constant ringing of church bells in the distance.
11. The temperature suddenly drops to far below freezing.
12. Everything is covered by rust colored mold.
13. Blindingly strong light.
14. Statues or propaganda for a long forgotten god.
15. A darkness so thick that only open flames can keep it at bay.
16. The world is on fire.
17. The world is monochrome.
18. The world is caught in a time loop where the same events repeat over and over.
19. The world seems to recreate a historical period from the characters world.
20. The shape of the world is weak, occasional more firm locations are like islands in a mist covered wasteland.

In all worlds but our own the divine sparks have freed themselves. The table below offers some suggestions to what has become of them.

## The prisoners

1. The prisoners have disappeared without a trace. Their prison remains but it is empty. Perhaps creatures who look like humans live there. The protective barrier is weakened and creatures from the chaos beyond hunt inside.
2. The prisoners broke free, but before they left they turned their anger towards their keepers. The world is in shambles. The barrier is broken and creatures from the beyond roam freely.
3. The prisoners are gone, and with them their keepers. But the barrier remains in place. No human like creatures remain, but perhaps others have made it their home.
4. A trapped god broke free but chose to stay and now rules its previous keepers.
5. A trapped god broke free, killed all the vessels and still haunts the world inside the barrier.
6. The prison was never put to use and still stands ready, waiting for the return of it's creator.



Humans were never meant to use the tools of creation. Performing magic is time consuming, difficult and dangerous. Every step of a ritual is to break something that never was intended to be broken, sometimes irrevocably.

Magic leaves traces in the barrier, sometimes even cracks through which forces that should have been kept out can seep in, but magic also gives power and opportunities.

The characters can perform magic through rituals - long complicated procedures - where specific actions performed in the correct order give results beyond the expected. The steps affect the creation and the barrier that contains it, they widen the cracks and bend them open so that the laws that govern the worlds beyond the barrier can affect the world inside as well.

## Origins

The rituals come from the outside, taught to humans by forces from beyond the barrier, or stolen from them. Some rituals are kept by ancient secret societies, others can be found in old scriptures, or in the rambling notes of madmen. Many have been degraded and details have been lost over a sequence of translations and interpretations.

It is wise to seek as original a text as possible, to get closer to the initial source. But the older something is the harder it is to track down. Books containing true power are watched greedily by cults, magicians and collectors, or lie forgotten in the closed collections of libraries or museum basements.

## The steps and components of rituals

Rituals consist of a large number of components and steps to be executed in a specific order. A central component of many rituals is to recreate the conditions of a specific place beyond the barrier to weaken it. k

## Aborted rituals

Even if a ritual takes effect after the critical step, there can be further steps in a ritual to restore the barrier again. The critical step is the point of no return, once it has been reached aborting is dangerous, forces from the other side can remain, magical contracts risk being broken, or worse.

## The effects of rituals

Each ritual is unique. The impact of the components is beyond human comprehension, do something wrong and usually nothing happens at all. But in the worst case the ritual can have unintended and unexpected effects.

In the critical step the leader of the ritual rolls INT to determine how well the ritual has been executed.

CS The ritual was successful and it takes effect according to the description. All who participated get 10 experience points. The first time the leader achieves a critical success they understand some way that the ritual can be simplified.

Some rituals can have further special effects if the roll is a critical success, as per the ritual's description.

S The ritual was successful and it takes effects according to the description. All who participated and succeeded for the first time get 10 experience points.

F If the ritual fails nothing happens. Any sacrifices are probably lost in the attempt but there are no magical effects.

CF In a critical failure the ritual has effect, but not in the way that was expected. Those who survive get 10 experience points the first time they suffer a critical failure in each ritual.

## The rituals' role in the story

Each ritual is unique and there is no formula to calculate the steps and their effect. And each ritual has a history that has shaped it and affects what information the characters can learn. A ritual is never simple, or completely safe. A single ritual can be the focus of a whole story.

When the referee prepares the rituals that will be part of the story it can be convenient to first consider their original form. How did become part of human knowledge? Who used it first? To what end? Then trace the ritual's way through history. What information has been distorted, been added or lost?

The referee should also consider what form the ritual has when the characters encounter it. The description is likely incomplete, and only the effects of a successful execution are described. To complete their understanding of a ritual and gather the necessary tools to perform it can be the base of many an adventure.

Cautious characters don't immediately perform every ritual that they lay their hands on, but do careful research and try to gather as complete as possible view of the ritual's steps and effects before any attempt is made. Desperate or hasty characters will soon find that even if a ritual solves one problem it has left them with two.

# Ritual: Encounter with Isis

## Introduction

Before WWI different versions of this ritual circulated among German esoteric societies, usually under the name *Encounter with Isis*. Most are pure spectacles, parlor games for artists and eccentrics, rather than actual magic. But those who trace it back to its origin can find this version which was brought to Essen from Egypt around the turn of the century.

The ritual takes two hours.

## Participants

- A priest to take the role of the mummified Osiris.
- A priestess to take the role of the grieving Isis.
- A choir of two or more helpers.

## Components

- Wrappings.
- Fragrant oils.
- Incense.
- Chants to be read by Isis at each step of the ritual.

## Steps

1. The lights are extinguished. The incense lit. The choir wraps the body of Osiris and anoints him with oil.
2. Isis declares her grief over the death of Osiris.
3. Isis lowers herself onto Osiris and declares her longing. (Critical step)
4. Isis rages against Osiris for being dead.

## Effect

CS The barrier opens and the cultists are temporarily taken to a temple on the other side.  
The Veiled Lady possesses the priestess and chants in Egyptian.  
The priestess will later find that she is with child.

S

F The Veiled Lady approaches and passes through the gathered cultists before disappearing into thin air.

CF -

The cultists open a temporary crack in the barrier and something from the other side breaks through.

## Furthermore

The ritual can bring the dead to life. A recently deceased man can be given the place of Osiris, and on a successful result he will be brought back from the dead if the cultists have done at least two of the following things.

- The body has been properly embalmed.
- The ritual is performed in the domains of the Veiled Lady, or in the ruins of a temple dedicated to her.
- The cultists use the proper regalia for a priestess of the Cult of Isis.

The resurrected wakes with a permanent trauma and with it nightmares of the meeting with the Veiled Lady. Any other non-permanent wounds and trauma heal.

In both the exploration and confrontation phase the characters will make many encounters. Some will be amiable, others hostile. Some will be with other people, some with other creatures. In this chapter there are some examples of people and powers that the characters can encounter. Let them serve as inspiration for your interpretation of the game world, but don't hesitate to tweak them so they fit your stories. Give them unique abilities, powers that the characters don't have access to, and that no other monster they've encountered before has had. Every encounter is adventure in itself and every creature is a mystery to be solved.

Interesting monsters don't just sit still in their lair and wait for the characters to arrive so they can eat them. Give them agendas and goals, find out what they want and what they fear. Fighting a monster is the least interesting way to interact with it, and by itself it doesn't give any experience points that couldn't also have been gained in some other way. Killing things on sight is a good way to hold back one's own development.

But of course, it will be more fun if *some* monsters actually have the goal of eating the characters. Just enough to keep things interesting and leave the question if this monster will be their doom be part of every encounter.

Level	What level of insight the creature has. Humans usually don't have any insight at all.
AD	Armor defense. Usually people don't wear armor, but if they do some the value will increase. (Page 19)
Damage	How much damage the creature deals. People are usually unarmed, but if they arm themselves they can quickly become very dangerous. (Page 18)
MV	Morale value. If the situation suddenly becomes threatening the referee rolls 2d6. If the sum exceeds a creature's morale value it will attempt to withdraw. (Page 26)
Bonus	The average stat bonus. First for STR, DEX and CON; and then for INT, WIS and CHA. The span for humans is zero to six, with an average of two.
HP/MP	How resilient the creature's body and mind is, respectively.
XP	How many experience points that can be earned by studying the creature. Humans usually don't give any XP at all. (Page 32)

## People

The most common encounter for the characters is other people. They are family and friends, lovers, passers by, competing cultists, police who investigate mysterious events, TV license enforcers, sacrifices in rituals, booksellers and many other things. Most are unaware of the role they play in the metaphysical prison. They just want to live their lives, breed, have a beer and watch TV, not be drawn into dangerous confrontations. They will alert the police if they feel threatened.

### ORDINARY HUMAN

Level	AD	Damage	MV	Bonus	HP/MP	XP
0	11	Punch 1d4L	6	+2/+2	6/6	0

## Cultists

There are innumerable cults, sects, orders and other congregations that actively seek otherworldly powers. Some are cabals of enlightened members who actively support each other in reaching the common goal. Others stand under a leader who uses the cult's resources for their own means. Others again have lost their true purpose and blindly perform their rites without understanding their deeper meaning.

### Leader

Every cult has a leader or some sort of leadership that decides which rituals to perform, and guide the believers.

1. The cult stands under the control of a human leader who is aware of the mysteries of the cosmos.
2. The cult appears to have a human leader, but their body has been taken over by a creature from beyond the barrier that uses the cult's resources for their own purposes.
3. The cult has lost its leader and no one has filled the void. They still perform their rites according to the instructions given by the old leader, but the cult is stagnating and the old scriptures are studied without any new discoveries being made.
4. The cult has fallen into the hands of an impostor who promises miracles but lacks the ability fulfill them. Such a cult can still be vibrant if the members are strong enough in their desire for the leader to have true power that they see their hand behind anything that goes them well.
5. The cult is in contact with a power from the other side of the barrier. They can be aware of the true nature of the cosmos and worship their leader as a god. But they can also have stumbled across a creature from the other side without being aware of it, e.g. the cults that worship The Veiled Lady under the guise of the Virgin Mary or the Wiccan Goddess.
6. The cult is lead by a magician who might be hiding their powers from the

other cultists.

7. The cult is a part of a larger sect and gets their doctrine and orders from above. Roll again to determine how the sect is governed.
8. The cult has fallen victim to an intruder from the other side of the barrier and is now nothing but a tool used by the intruder to strengthen its position.

## Promises

To attract and keep its members the cult makes promises of things that they will get if they submit to the will of the cult or its leader. If the cult actually lives up to these promises is another matter, but under a strong leader even the promise of future rewards can be enough to keep the members. Roll 1d3 times on the table below to find out what the cult promises.

1. The cult promises power. Perhaps via supernatural intervention, but it might just as well be that senior members help the junior ones to positions of power.
2. The cult gives access to sex. Perhaps through prostitutes, slaves or novices of the cult. Perhaps the success shown by the cult or the charismatic leader is enough to attract suitable persons. Some cults arrange orgies, which in itself can attract members.
3. The cult promises wealth. It might be wealthy and employ its well filled coffers to buy the interest and loyalty of prospective members.
4. The cult offers access to contacts in the form of other cultists, that members may leverage for success. Or membership simply gives a sense of purpose and belonging.
5. The cult gives access to celebrities who are tied to the cult. The association with the rich and famous is seductive in itself.
6. The cult promises beauty, rejuvenation or eternal life. Anything is possible through rituals, but they are dangerous rites. If the cult actually performs such rituals they are rarely open with, or even aware of, the dangers involved.
7. The cult's rites and understanding of the secrets of the cosmos is an attraction in itself. Knowing that which others don't is seductive in its own way.
8. The cult blackmails its members. It is common that the cult makes its novices commit crimes or abuse, and threaten to report them to the police if they leave. Or abuse them and threaten to publish recordings of the event should they falter.
9. Membership in the cult also means employment in a company owned by the cult.
10. The cult gives its members access to drugs.

## Cover

The cult hides in plain sight in some way, or draws its membership from a certain social group.

1. The cult is a part of an organization with local ties. Parent-teacher associations, local historical societies, mundane clubs and so on.
2. The cult hides inside a larger religious congregation.
3. The cult is more or less open about its existence, usually as an order, but keeps its rites secret.
4. The cult hides inside some other group or organization. Roll on the background table (page 11) to see where.
5. The cult is completely hidden. The members have no obvious ties to each other except their membership in the cult.

## The inner circle

»The inner circle« is a cult that hides inside the Fridhem Baptist Church. Since pastor Ulf Öholm (page 62) took control over the congregation its profile has changed somewhat. The church arranges bible study groups under the leadership of the church's inner circle, who besides their teaching duties also keep an eye open for suitable candidates among the students.

New members are successively introduced to the activities of the inner circle's preparations in anticipation of the end of times and the return of Jesus Christ. Once found worthy they are allowed to attend separate service with the circle where they witness pastor Ulf Öholm perform miracles as evidence of his divine mission.

For now the cult's main focus is to grow by recruiting more members to the congregation, and pulling the best candidates into the inner circle. But they also try to collect artifacts and occult books for their leader.

The cult's members have strong faith and see pastor Öholm as sent by God to give them their sacred mission. The cult has taken all leading positions in the congregation and now has full access to its resources.

### CULTIST OF THE INNER CIRCLE

Level	AD	Damage	MV	Bonus	HP/MP	XP
1	11	Punch 1d4L	7	+2/+3	6/9	0



## Magicians

Those who reach a enough insight into how the world is constructed can create their own rituals, and at even higher levels of insight affect the world directly without resorting to rituals. Few cultists have the persistence, luck and skill to survive long enough to become magicians, and those who do usually keep their powers to themselves. Becoming a magician is to enter a larger world, one with significantly more powerful creatures, and most don't care much for sharing their domains.

In KUF the characters rarely encounter magicians. And even if they come into conflict with one they aren't likely to fight their battles themselves but will act from the shadows. Each magician is unique, they have all gambled with dangers unfathomable to the characters, and they all have unique abilities and artifacts in their possession.

Some magicians take over an existing cult, or build a cult of their own for protection. Others become reclusives and try to disappear. Some manage to claim a domain outside the barrier as their own where they can build a stronger base of power and from which they can continue their pursuit of more power and knowledge. A magician can be a patron or mentor to worthy cultists, but it isn't certain that they'll show the cult their true nature.

### Pastor Ulf Öholm

The charismatic cultist and baptist Ulf Öholm made great progress in his studies of the occult at the same time as he rose in prominence in the church he was attending. After a turbulent period he took control of the congregation. The congregation stands 500 souls strong, and its circle of elders consists only of those who are also part of his cult.

For most of the members the shift in the order hasn't been noticeable, and they aren't aware of their pastor's dual roles. The cult grows by drawing new members from the bible study groups that are lead by the cult.

Ulf Öholm sees magic as a blessing and a sign that he is sent to prepare for the end of days. He has demonstrated his powers for the cult and they consider him to be sent by God and support him wholeheartedly.

#### ULF ÖHOLM

Level	AD	Damage	MV	Bonus	HP/MP	XP
10	11	Punch 1d4L	9	+4/+8	12/24	30

Powers: Halo, Healer and Bladeproof

## The soulless

Humans are destined as vessels for the divine sparks, but now there are more of them than the sparks that they were made to keep. They don't notice that anything is amiss, and can lead full lives. But they are incomplete and the missing spark leaves them susceptible to influence. Powers from beyond the barrier can possess them to then walk freely among the humans.

The vessels are but temporary. Initially a possessed and soulless body is impossible to tell from an untainted one. But with time it is twisted and corrupted by the true shape of the thing it holds.

The the creature shows great restraint a human body can remain almost unchanged for years, but it can be transformed beyond recognition in a matter of moments is the creature doesn't hold back and acts beyond the nature of its temporary form.

Possessing a body is a way to circumvent the protective power of the barrier. As a creature gradually returns to its true shape it becomes harder for it to remain inside the barrier. Once fully returned to its original shape most can only endure but a few minutes unless the barrier is very thin in that location.

### Anna Öholm/Marus

Anna Öholm is married to the baptist pastor and magician Ulf Öholm. During one of her husband's rituals her soul was consumed by a creature named Marus, who then proceeded to possess her body. Ulf is still not aware of this, and the two still live and work together as before. In the guise of Anna Öholm Marus is still active in the work within the church and unknowing of her husband's magical activities and the cult he builds in the inner circle of the church. But Marus knows of all of it, and whispers advice and instructions to Ulf when he sleeps. Slowly Marus is shaping the cult to its own needs.

This far Marus has been able to restrain itself and has been using its powers cautiously, so Anna's body is largely unchanged even if it looks a bit thinner.

#### THE POSSESSED ANNA ÖHOLM

Level	AD	Damage	MV	Bonus	HP/MP	XP
0	11	Punch 1d4	7	+2/+3	6/9	-

- Revealing that Anna Öholm is possessed is worth 50 experience points.
- Marus' main priority is to preserve the disguise and will attempt to remove any threats.
- Marus can whisper instructions to those who sleep. Saving throw against CHA to resist the influence.

Marus' true shape is a spidery humanoid covered with black stubby hairs.

### MARUS

Level	AD	Damage	MV	Bonus	HP/MP	XP
12	15	Claws 1d6S	11	+7/+7	25/25	50

- In its true shape Marus can move in absolute silence and pass through very narrow openings.
- Marus can whisper instructions to those who sleep. Saving throw against CHA to resist the influence.

## Intruders

Intruders are creatures from beyond the barrier who have managed to break through it. They don't remain for long as the barrier continues to affect them, and the more powerful they are the stronger effect the barrier has. But in locations where the barrier has been weakened, in places charged with strong emotions and suffering, the border between inside and outside becomes fluid and there intruders can act freely for years on end.

The soulless could be considered intruders of sorts, but they are initially only present in mind and use the host body as an anchor. A »real« intruder is fully inside the barrier, in body and mind.

The creature Marus is soulless when it has possessed Anna Öholm, but will shift into an intruder once the host body has fully transformed into Marius' true shape. And soon thereafter the barrier will evict Marus, a creature never meant for this world.

## Wharf wolves

Wharf wolves look like large dogs, their shaggy fur stained with oil and rust. But they are as intelligent as humans. They are hunters from beyond the barrier. Their domains are similar to abandoned wharves and they can loose their way through the barrier during the night when they hunt. They are pack animals with 2d4 individuals to a hunting party. They hunt to feed, but also for sport. Their barking sounds like it has been picked up by a radio with poor reception.

### WHARFWOLF

Level	AD	Damage	MV	Bonus	HP/MP	XP
1	12	Bite 1d6S	6	+3/+1	9/3	30

## The veiled lady

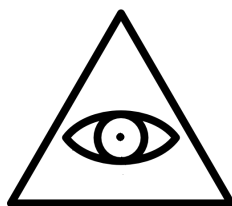
The veiled lady used to be worshiped as Isis in the old Egypt and around the Mediterranean Sea. Open worship ceased around 1500 years ago, but through esoteric societies and cults several of the rites have been preserved. Many rituals are also preserved in scrolls kept by museums and collectors, some of which have been translated into modern languages. The veiled lady has also found followers among those who worship the feminine divine in various forms, e.g. Maria cults and certain new heathens who see manifestations of the veiled lady as proof of the existence of their own objects of worship.

The veiled lady no longer acts inside the barrier, but she has several domains just beyond it. In old temples or with ancient regalia it is relatively easy to perform the rites and open gateways through the barrier to her domains. Since she is significantly weaker these days she has abandoned several of her old domains, which are now vacant or have found new inhabitants.

### THE VEILED LADY - AVATAR

Level	AD	Damage	MV	Bonus	HP/MP	XP
20	20	-	11	+6/+16	20/50	100

- The avatar is mortal, but the veiled lady is divine and eternal. Should the avatar be killed it is reformed within one of her domains within a year.
- She carries a veil that obscures her face. Those who see her unveiled must save for CHA or take 2d6S trauma. Seeing her face is the criteria for reaching the third level of insight into her mysteries.



Artifacts are objects that don't belong in our world. They give powers that were never intended for human hands. They were created beyond the barrier and most are still sought by strange powers that want to take control over them.

## Shape

- |                       |                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. A weapon           | 5. An everyday use object |
| 2. A statuette        | 6. A garment              |
| 3. A painting         | 7. A creature             |
| 4. A piece of jewelry | 8. A book                 |

## Who seeks the artifact?

Few artifacts are entirely forgotten. Their powers are remembered, and forces want to regain control. Decide who is actively searching for the artifact, or roll on the table below.

1. No one is searching for the artifact.
2. A cult from our world is searching for the artifact.
3. The artifact is also a significant archaeological find or famous piece of art, and is therefore searched for by mundane authorities.
4. A power from beyond the barrier seeks to gain control of the artifact.
5. An intruder is searching for the artifact.
6. The artifact beacons one or more creatures from the other side of the barrier.

## Power

Each artifact carries a special power or ability. Construct one yourself or roll on the table below.

1. The artifact allows the owner to move to a specific point beyond the barrier.
2. The artifact can be used to summon a creature from beyond the barrier.
3. The artifact gives the owner nightmares full of insight. 1d6 XP per night of sleep spent under the influence of the artifact.
4. The artifact attracts a certain kind of creatures from beyond the barrier. It does not give the owner any control over them.
5. The artifact allows the owner to understand a long dead language or a language spoken beyond the barrier.

6. The artifact allows the owner to see through some of the disguises used by intruders from beyond the barrier.
7. The artifact lets the owner commune with a specific force beyond the barrier.
8. The artifact is a weapon that harms the mind, and deals trauma instead of wounds.
9. The artifact makes the owner susceptible to influence from a specific power from beyond the barrier.
10. The artifact gives the owner an advantage when performing a particular ritual.
11. The artifact imprisons a creature from beyond the barrier.
12. The artifact prevents the owner from taking any damage from open flames.

## Studying artifacts

During the recovery phase artifacts can be studied to learn their secrets and powers. Roll for WIS.

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| CS | The character understands exactly what the artifact does.  |
| S  | The character understands roughly what the artifact does.  |
| F  | The character fails to solve the mystery of the artifact.  |
| CF | The character manages to harm the artifact, activate it in an unfortunate manner or draws undesired attention. |

## The artifacts' role in the story

From the maelstrom table new characters can start the game with artifacts, and during their adventures they can come across more. The artifacts have amazing properties and opens many new options for the characters. But they're a double-edged sword as they make the characters targets of those who'd like to come into possession of their artifacts, also artifacts make it much easier for the characters to put themselves in dangerous situations.

Should the characters come across powerful artifacts, let them use them. But be also the impartial referee and consider the consequences of their actions even if they don't do it themselves.

In the long run the best artifacts are those that the characters didn't even touch, so put artifacts that invite use and abuse in their path.

The next best thing to doing something is to read about it, and reading is usually significantly more safe than experiencing everything first hand. This is why cultists collect occult texts.

Books are described according to the template below:

NAME OF THE BOOK

*A quote from the book.*

Language : What language is needed to understand the book.

Experience : Each number marks the insight to be made from a week of study.

Rituals : Which rituals are described in the book.

Description : Something about the physical appearance of the book.

Further : Any additional details about the book goes here. It might have special properties or a note on who else is seeking it.

If a book contains rituals they can be performed even if the book hasn't been studied yet, but it still takes a while to check if a book contains any rituals.

## Copying books

Making copies of magical texts is hard and time consuming. First the copyist must study the book and gain all the insight that it can give. Then every attempt to copy the book takes four weeks of recovery. After the fourth week the copyist rolls for WIS, with results according to the table below.

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| CS | The book is copied with 90% of its XP contents preserved. Any rituals are perfectly copied.  |
| S  | The book is copied with 75% of its XP contents preserved. Any rituals are vaguely altered and any attempts to perform them from the book are made at a disadvantage. |
| F  | The book is copied with 20% of its XP contents preserved. Any rituals have been changed so much that they will not work.   |
| CF | The work has affected the copyist negatively who takes a critical trauma as a result, including one lasting effect affected by the contents of the book.             |

## Translating books

To translate occult texts is even more difficult than simply copying them. Any attempt to translate demands that the translator knows both the source text's language and the destination language. The roll is then made at a disadvantage and it is interpreted as per the copying results above.

### Scan, photograph and xeroxing

It is of course possible to use modern technology when copying a book. Such a copy retains 10% of its XP content. Roll for WIS at the table above to determine how any descriptions of rituals have turned out.

## Books' role in the story

The search for occult books is a central element of KUF. Books are the most valuable treasures the characters can find during their adventures. In the books they find both knowledge and insight in the mysteries in the form of XP. Some books contain rituals which offer the characters new ways to approach their problems, and will give them new problems to feed back into the story.

The need to manage a collection of books so that future characters will have access to them can be the reason that a group of players decide to form a cult, which in turn can give continuity in the story even if the characters are lost at an alarming pace.

### THE ISABELLA BOLANDER DIARIES

*... I lay perfectly still and pretended to sleep, hoping that the air again would start smelling of salt and smoke. That I would get to meet him again. That he would come to me one more night.*

Language : Swedish

Experience : 50/50/50

Rituals : -

Description : The diaries consist of four booklets of brown paper bound by hand. They are held together by a red silk ribbon. The booklets are numbered I, II, III and V. Initially the young Isabella writes about her summer holidays in Åre in 1942. The text is illustrated by her hand and through the books the illustrations become more and more vulgar and grotesque. Starting from the second booklet a man (?) named *Bel-shar-uzur* starts to appear in the text, and through Isabella's writing there several transcribed dialogues on the world's true nature.

Further : -



---

# The adventure continues

---

In KUF the characters can't raise their stat bonuses above 10. But they meet monsters and creatures with significantly higher stats. Sooner or later the question will be raised how they can act on the same level.

The game doesn't end with the characters forming a cult that helps them gather insight into the mysteries. That is only the beginning.



In KUF2 the characters advance and become magicians who no more are limited in their shaping of reality through cumbersome rituals. They become true masters in this world and conquerors of the worlds beyond the barrier where they now can claim domains of their own. No longer simple thieves who hurriedly scramble through the barrier to steal a book or two before anything notices their presence. In KUF2 new layers of the mysteries are exposed, the encounters become more dangerous and the stakes higher.



The end of days is approaching. The barrier is withering and beyond it the threats grow stronger every day. But while the characters try to strengthen their positions and protect that which they hold dear they will need to face their most dangerous threat yet, and it comes from within themselves.

The spark of the divine that until now has been the source of their magical abilities threatens to break free. The magic that previously has served them, has now transformed them into something that no longer is human. Their bodies and souls no longer form perfect prisons. The final struggle can begin.

---

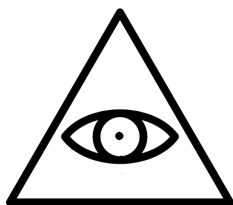
# Postscript

---

The whole KUF project started with a vague question of what would be the most odd pairing of rules and setting that I could imagine, but still one that would be playable after the first quick laugh had been had. It should be more than just a gag, something actually playable and enjoyable, something that made sense in its own way. As this book demonstrates I landed in letting the principles of early RPGs blend with psychological terror and a questioning of the true nature of our world on a metaphysical level.

There lies something absurd in applying the early form of the hobby with its treasure hunts, monster bashing and player skill among elves and princesses to the Gnostic nightmare visions of the 90's. In some way they are each others' opposites. Yet they are joined in the extreme vulnerability of the main characters, the desperation that drives their actions and the cruelty and maleficent indifference of the world around them.

The thoughts lingered on my mind over a couple of years until I ran into Ben Milton's game Knave (Questing Beast Games). Knave was a simple reimagining of the early RPGs and it had a license that allowed derivatives to be made with nothing more than an acknowledgment of the source of inspiration. After a weekend of translation the original Knave had become Knape, and from there I recast it as KUF.



This book tells a highly focused story about common people who are pulled into a maelstrom fueled by the occult and things beyond their understanding. Once caught they are trapped in their situation and are constantly being pulled towards their demise. No matter what route their fate takes them on, their destiny is final and unforgiving. Perhaps they'll be devoured by monsters after a fatal mistake beyond the barrier. Maybe they don't even reach that far, but end their days on a cult's altar, sacrifices to an otherworldly horror.

We can imagine a continuation of KUF, one where the characters get to enjoy the harvest of their labors, thirst for knowledge and the dangers they have overcome. A

game where they themselves would become magician, free to wield supernatural power without the clumsy rituals to hold them back. And later, when they have overcome also the trials of magicians they would confront the divine sparks that they keep inside themselves, the power that they have been relying on through all their journey. But those stories would never be as exciting as those of common people facing the sinister supernatural.

Build a cabal and fill it with weirdos that are trapped in the escalating maelstrom. Let them burn brightly in the dark night, and then go out forever.

Wilhelm  
Luleå, May 14 2019



## Part III

# Examples of play

The friends Val, Max, Sam and Jay have gathered to play KUF for the first time. Val is referee and has prepared an adventure. The players Max, Sam and Jay are just about to get started with character generation.

JAY: What are we playing tonight?

VAL: Kuf. Gnostic modern horror with OSR rules.

JAY: Eh, Gnos-what?

SAM: Gnostic, that is the humans are really gods, trapped in reality. And reality is just a construction put in place by an evil god. Sort of like the Matrix.

MAX: At the start of the film Neo thought that he lived in the real world, but then he ate the red pill and woke up in a robot womb with wires and pipes all over his body. Scary, scary.

JAY: OK! I'm in.

VAL: Well, sort of, but a bit different. I thought we wouldn't really dive into the details at this stage, so you can discover them in play.

SAM: OK!

MAX: That works for me.

VAL: The bit about the real world is true at least. It is the present day, and you'll be playing some random Joe's who have been afflicted by some sort of misery. There's a whole table to roll on for what kind of misery. There are tables for pretty much everything. You can roll up your characters without making a single decision beyond what kind of gear you want to take.

JAY: My kind of game.

VAL: I thought you'd like it. The rules are easy as pie. The only bump lies in how to calculate wounds and mental trauma. They have different degrees of seriousness, and can become permanent quickly.

SAM: Miserly doesn't seem to end with that table in chargen.

VAL: No. It seems to go down hill once the game has started. An unfortunate encounter and a failed roll later and the characters will be committed to an institution for the rest of their lives.

MAX: So the goal is to see how long they can survive?

VAL: Perhaps, in a way. But they can start a cult or something, so that the new guys can inherit their books for a head start. Experience mostly comes from reading old books and getting intimate knowledge of monsters.

JAY: »Intimate?»

VAL: *Intimate.*

MAX: Bizarre.

JAY: That sounds pretty grim dark.

VAL: It is pretty grim dark. You play traumatized people who are pursued by the supernatural. The expectation is that you succumb pretty soon.

MAX: So it would be a victory to survive even the first adventure?

VAL: Yes, that's pretty much it. You play ordinary folks who have been afflicted by dark misery. Having high stats isn't enough, the characters will die anyway. It is you, the players, who'll have to outsmart the adventures and pick your battles.

SAM: That's so OSR.

MAX: How about we get started? We were supposed to find out about the details in play anyway.

VAL: Yes! Let's get started with chargen.

## The characters

VAL: Grab the character sheets and roll 1d20 to learn the background of the characters.

JAY: Two, I'll be playing an artist.

VAL: Good! Next comes the stats. You roll the bonus by rolling three d6s, and then only keeping the lowest of the dice. So if you roll one, five and six, that stat will have a bonus of one. The defense for each stat is the bonus plus ten. Once you have rolled all six you can swap places of two of them, if you want to.

SAM: Harsh, what's the average on this way of rolling?

MAX: Two.

VAL: Yes, two is the average. Common folk have two in everything. If you drop to zero in play that means you're disabled to such a degree that you need support and aids for pretty much anything that involves that stat.

JAY: OK. [Rolls the dice.] Three, four and six, so my strength is three.

VAL: Great! Keep rolling, all six basic stats are rolled in the same way. And when you're done you can swap two of them.

JAY: [Roll, roll, roll.] It came to three, one, two, four, two and two.

SAM: Four in intelligence.

VAL: The total is a bit over average, nice rolling.

JAY: The one is in constitution, but I can't think of anything I'd rather have one in, so it stays.

VAL: Are you sure? According to the rules you can only carry your constitution bonus items when you're on an adventure.

JAY: I can live with that. If I'm leading our rituals the others can haul the loot.

VAL: The sum of the three physical stat bonuses, STR, DEX and CON gives the hit points of the character. And the sum of the mental bonuses, INT, WIS and CHA gives the mind points.

JAY: Six HP and eight MP.

SAM: Average physical, a bit more stable when it comes to the mind then?

VAL: Exactly. Since you're player characters you don't need to make morale rolls to keep going when it gets scary, but Jay's artist can endure some more mental strain before breaking down.

MAX: OK.

VAL: Level, everyone starts at zero. you don't have much insight into the mysteries of the world yet. Your armor bonus is one, and armor defense is eleven, since you're not wearing any armor yet. The next item is to see how you've been affected by the supernatural maelstrom, roll 1d8.

JAY: Five.

VAL: Interesting! You're a member of a cult.

SAM: I thought we were a cult already.



VAL: Sort of, you can choose to form a cult. But Jay's character starts the game as a member of a different cult.

JAY: What kind of cult?

VAL: I'll roll up the cult your character just joined.

MAX: Could my character also be a member of that cult? So we have a connection already at the start of the game.

VAL: Sure. Are you in as well, Sam?

SAM: OK. That's fine. We start the game as members of a cult, but we will also star our own?

VAL: You don't have to start a cult. But you are only novices in the cult you start the game in. Perhaps you start your own cult on the side, or try to climb the ranks of the one you're already part of and take control over it. Or you die long before you get to that point, that is the probable scenario. Note that you are members of the cult, and you can roll *1d100* as well, to see how many experience points you have at the start of the game, your first contact with the supernatural.

JAY: OK. [Roll.] 56. So my PC has 56 XP when the game starts.

VAL: Next are languages. The game is set in Sweden, and I haven't bothered to localize it yet, so all your characters speak Swedish. Then you get your intelligence bonus extra languages. Choose freely, or roll on the table.

JAY: I choose English. And then I roll for three more languages. [Roll.] Three, five and ten.

VAL: French, Classical Greek and German.

JAY: OK. Good combination.

VAL: There's a table of Swedish names if you don't want to come up with your own. Three d20s in that case.

JAY: [Roll.] I got eight, three and fifteen.

VAL: Karin, Karl, Lundström. Mix and match.

JAY: The artist Karin Lundström, or the artist Karl Lundström? I'll go with Karl then.

VAL: Great! You can carry up to your constitution defense items as well. Pick and choose from the equipment table. There's arms and armor there too. If you want something out of the ordinary check with me, laws and regulations apply.

JAY: Right, I'll grab some stuff.

VAL: How about the rest of you?

SAM: Just getting some equipment and then I'll be done.

MAX: Same here. Do you have something on that cult that we're in?

VAL: I'll roll up a cult while you finalize your load outs. And then we'll do a round of introductions for the characters after a short break.

## Background

VAL: Let's get started, would you like to start by introducing your characters?

JAY: I'll be playing the artist Karl Lundström. Karl works in many different media, but he's mostly known for his sculptures. The municipality has bought one that now sits in the park near Fridhem.

SAM: What kind of statue?

JAY: Karl calls it »Without Return«. It is an expression of his state of mind ten years ago when he lost his wife in a traffic accident. It consists of metal beams welded together with rusty car parts. Karl is in his forties.

KARL LUNDSTRÖM - ARTIST		
	Bonus	Defense
STR	3	13
DEX	1	11
CON	2	12
INT	4	14
WIS	2	12
CHA	2	12
HP	6	
MP	8	
Member of a cult		56XP

MAX: I'll be playing Sofia Vikström, journalist. She works freelance and usually writes deep investigative reports on various social issues for left wing magazines. And she's on the lists with the municipality's temp

agency, so she works as a temp teacher a couple of days every month as well.

JAY: Did you ever write about me?

MAX: Yes. You didn't like the article and raised a lot of fuss. But a couple of years ago we met at an art exhibition, drank some free wine and made peace.

JAY: Sounds good!

SAM: I'm the nurse Peter Isaksson. Peter left his job at the hospital and got a position as company nurse at the factory. It doesn't pay better, but the hours are much better and there's no problem to get vacations in the summer. The whole place shuts down for four weeks every summer.

SOFIA VIKSTRÖM - JOURNALIST		
	Bonus	Defense
STR	1	11
DEX	1	11
CON	4	14
INT	1	11
WIS	1	11
CHA	3	13
HP	6	
MP	5	
Member of a cult		63XP

MAX: Maybe I wrote an article about the factory, I could have interviewed you then.

SAM: Sure! And I think there's a piece by the local artist Karl Lundström in the office lobby as well.

JAY: Perhaps I cut myself when I mounted it, and you patched me up?

SAM: Makes sense.

VAL: You have met already? Good. You're also members of the same cult, even if you might not see it as a cult. You have all joined a meditation group led by gurva Elsa Joshi. She as opened a clinic where she offers workshops and holistic treatments. It was when you met there that you reconnected.

MAX: I think I wrote an article on Elsa and her clinic, and just kept showing up for the meditation classes even after it was done.

PETER ISAKSSON - NURSE		
	Bonus	Defense
STR	2	12
DEX	1	11
CON	4	14
INT	3	13
WIS	1	11
CHA	1	11
HP	7	
MP	5	
Member of a cult		23XP

JAY: Karl seeks to fill a void left by his wife's passing, his art doesn't seem to manage.

SAM: Peter doesn't believe in that holistic stuff, but the meditation seems good. So he only attends those sessions and tries to keep clear of the rest.

VAL: Sounds like you have good ties between both each other and the crowd around Elsa Joshi.

JAY: Do we need something else?

SAM: I think we'll take it when we get there. We have the characters and their stuff. If we're playing OSR we shouldn't need much more.

VAL: The game is played in three phases, which repeat over and over again in the same order. Exploration, confrontation and recovery. In the exploration phase we just do unstructured role playing. The characters can travel, do stuff and meet people. Once we approach a more critical or dangerous situation the game shifts into the confrontation phase, and that is really traditional OSR. Those who survive the confrontation get a phase of recovery where they can heal injuries, read occult books and do other things to prepare for the next round of phases.

JAY: It sounds like the exploration phase is more common role playing, and the confrontation is dungeon bashing.

VAL: Not a bad way to put it. We play by that cycle, you try to keep your characters alive, and I'll try to keep the setting interesting and consistent.

MAX: The referee isn't really in opposition to the characters, but more like an unbiased judge?

VAL: Exactly. But in the exploration phase I'll probably be more of a story teller. Things can get dangerous in that phase too, but it is mostly intended as a background to the adventures in the confrontation phase. And in the recovery phase you tend to your characters while I prepare for the next round.

JAY: Nice. But then we start with an exploration phase then?

VAL: Yes, you got it!

## Play as a ritual

JAY: Cozy! Candles, music, black table cloth and glasses of wine.

MAX: I don't know if the fear that someone will spill their wine across the rules is the kind of horror we were going for, but if it's fine by you I'm good.

SAM: Works for me.

VAL: It is supposed to be a horror game. I thought we'd try to make a ritual of it. Like, we light the candles, play the story and focus on that and the characters, and when we're done we extinguish the candles and do a short post game talk.

SAM: Could you turn down the music a bit so we can hear each other?

JAY: But not so quiet that we can't hear the music.

VAL: Better?

SAM: Thanks!

VAL: We're about to play a horror game. The horror comes from within ourselves, and we might skirt our boundaries a bit. Take it easy, focus on the game, let the events pull you into the story. And if things get too intense, just make the timeout sign and we'll take a break. If we stumbled into something that prevents you from enjoying the game we'll back up a bit or doctor the situation. Just let me know, OK?

SAM: OK!

MAX: OK!

JAY: OK!

Once the prep is out of the way, the group can start their first exploration phase.

VAL: It is nine o'clock in the evening, a Friday late in October. The summer is long gone and it was followed by gray skies, and a wind that chills to the very bone has been blowing for what seems like a whole month. But there is a candle in the proverbial dark, a 90's Night at The Theater, one of the town's nicer clubs.

JAY: Goth on Halloween, a good start.

VAL: Are you going out together, or is it a coincidence that you happen to have the same plans tonight?

MAX: I think that Elsa's meditations are getting to me. Drinking beer and dancing to loud music all night feels like a good way to prove to myself that I haven't turned into a New Age wuss, but still have the cool.

SAM: That stands to reason. I think Peter lives down town, close to The Theater, and has invited colleagues and friends over on a warm-up party. Including Karl and Sofia form the meditation class, as I think they would be great people to have a beer with.

JAY: I show up. I have brought everything that I need to start some large scale gin'n'tonic-making. It has been quite some time since I went to an event like this, it is pretty far from white wine vernissages and beer soaked BBQs. Karl wears jeans and a nice jacket over a black t-shirt.

SAM: »Welcome!« The beat from the stereo washes over you when I open the door to the apartment, it's Sisters of Mercy. I think I have a two or three beer head start already.

JAY: »I brought a little to drink.«

SAM: »Cool! There's beer in the fridge, help yourself.« I wave in the direction of the living room.

JAY: I go and say hi to the other guests, but I don't know any of them from earlier, so I hit the kitchen and start a batch of gin'n'tonics.

MAX: Sofia arrives at the party. I've gone full goth and 90's with a short black dress and monochrome makeup. I've had a couple before showing up so I fit right in as I make my round and greet everyone.

Later that night the characters arrive at the club.

VAL: Once you finally get inside The Theater, you have cooled down significantly, there was a light rain and the line seemed to take forever. As the name implies the place once was an actual theater, but now it has been converted into a club. There's a large wardrobe where you can leave your coats before heading inside. There's a constant stream of people here, mostly heading inside. Look through your equipment, what are you actually taking with you inside the club, and what do you leave in the wardrobe? There's two rather grim looking bouncers keeping an eye on the guests.

MAX: My clothes, and my valuables. I leave my pack in the wardrobe.

SAM: Me too.

JAY: The same.

VAL: Check. You pay for entry and leave your bags in the wardrobe. you get tokens to show to get them back when you want to go home. What do you do?

SAM: I'll have a beer.

VAL: They don't sell beer in the wardrobe, unfortunately. But you hear the rhythmic pounding of the music and the air is thick with the smell of sweat and perfumes. Surely there's a bar further inside.

JAY: We'll follow the stream of guests.

VAL: The lights were a bit subdued right when you entered. But as you pass through the large double doors it gets even darker. The old lobby is crowded with mingling guests, talking and drinking. There are red lanterns with tea lights on the high tables. Along the far wall there's a bar served by several bartenders, and behind them there are hundreds of bottles on lit glass shelves, stretching all the way to the ceiling.

SAM: I want a beer, so I elbow my way to the bar.

JAY: The same.

MAX: I want to dance, do they have a dance floor?

VAL: Not here. They're playing music, but it's not really dance music. However, on your left there's another doorway, and through it you see flashing lights.



MAX: I tap Karl on the shoulder and give a sign towards the doorway, so he'll know where I am, and then I make my way in that direction.

VAL: OK. Karl and Peter, you reach the bar. They keep a good pace, and the patrons don't seem drunk enough yet that there will be any issues, so things run really smoothly. The bar itself is glowing illuminating the bartenders in deep red light. They are dressed to fit the theme of the evening.

JAY: I try to get their attention.

VAL: After a while one of them leans over the bar to take your order.

JAY: »A pint.»

SAM: I nudge you.

JAY: »No! Two pints!» I make a two finger gesture as well.

VAL: She pours two Stellas in tall glasses and swipes your card.

Sofia, meanwhile you've reached the large dance floor. The chairs have been removed, and instead of an incline towards the stage, the floor has been divided into two levels. The music is so loud that you can't make yourself heard without shouting, but few are trying. Most dance in the light of the flashing lights. The smoke is thick and above your heads it is criss-crossed by dancing green laser beams.

MAX: Where is the dancing the most intense?

VAL: Both the flashing of the lights and the dancing is more intense on the lower level. On the old stage there's a DJ booth where a woman in heavy makeup and black clothes is spinning records. Dancing guests have claimed the space surrounding the booth on the stage, mostly very well dressed women and rather inebriated men.

MAX: I head to the lower level of the dance floor, and start dancing.

VAL: You are soon engulfed by the rhythm, lights and pulsating mass of bodies.

At the same time at the bar. You got your beers, and you have said hi again to the other folks from the party that also have made it here now. What do you do?

JAY: What does the place look like?

VAL: The bar is built in the lobby of the old theater. From the entrance the bar is straight ahead, and that is where you now are pushed away by other thirsty guests. To the left is the large opening to the dance floor, that was where Sofia headed. To the right there's both a dim corridor

leading to the restrooms, and the stairs to the balcony. The stairs blocked by a red velvet rope and a bouncer who's keeping the crowd out. The room itself is full of tall tables and guests.

SAM: »Up?»

JAY: »Up.»

SAM: We'll head upstairs. So we head in that direction looking like it was the most natural thing in the world.

JAY: Yeah!

MAX: The bouncer doesn't seem to be fooled, and stops you respectfully.  
»Sorry guys, private party tonight.»

JAY: »We know, we're a little late.»

SAM: Can we take him?

MAX: Perhaps, he looks pretty tough. »Sorry, you're not going upstairs.  
Please enjoy the evening here on the lower level.»

SAM: I don't think we're drunk enough to pick a fight with the bouncer, yet.  
Perhaps after another couple of beers.

JAY: We leave him, but not further away than that we can keep an eye on the stairs. If he leaves his post we'll sneak up, and we want to see what kind of people he's letting through.

SAM: And I'll go and get two more beers.

MAX: OK!

\* \* \*

Sofia has made a find, and Peter and Karl have been waiting by the stairs, when suddenly an opportunity presents itself.

VAL: When you approach the stairs the guard notices the pendant around Sofia's neck and immediately unhooks the velvet rope from the hook so that you can pass. »Welcome.»

MAX: I nod in reply and start climbing the stairs. I take it slow, but try to avoid looking like I'm taking it slow. As soon as I can see what's upstairs I want to know before I proceed further up.

JAY: I ignore the guard and follow Sofia.

SAM: This isn't the same guard as before? The one who rejected us?

VAL: No, this is the new guy.

Sofia, the stairs is divided into two sections, with a platform at the halfway point where it changes direction. Once you're there I you can see the room upstairs. It is furnished like the one below, but the lights are even more subdued, there are no guests visible here.

JAY: Any staff?

VAL: No, not that you can see. There's some smoke here too, but not worse than that you can see the other side of the room with ease. It is empty.

MAX: I slowly climb the last couple of steps and keep an eye open.

SAM: I follow.

VAL: It's empty. There's a bar here too, although less impressive than the one below. It is closed but there's food and drinks prepared. On the tables there are more of the same red lanterns that you saw below. There's music on the speakers.

JAY: Are there any doors or openings?

VAL: Yes, there's a similar passage as below leading to the bathrooms. And two large double doors seem to lead to the balcony over the dance floor.

JAY: I saunter off to the bathrooms, I want to check if anyone's hiding there.

SAM: I want to check the food on the bar.

MAX: Are there any cameras?

VAL: Sofia, where do you look?

MAX: I thought if there were any obvious cameras in the ceiling, like one of those glass spheres that hold cameras. Something like that.

VAL: OK. No, not any obvious cameras here.

Peter, there are two trays with sandwiches under wraps. One is half full, the other is full. And on the bar there are several bottles of sparkling water, beer and soda. There are a couple of emptied bottles on the tables.

SAM: It's neat and tidy here, not like there's been much of a party at all, right?

VAL: No, more of a corporate lunch.

Karl, you walk towards the dim passage. The short corridor holds four separate bathrooms. The door to the closest one is ajar, its light is off. At the far end there's a door marked »Staff only«.

JAY: I peek inside.

VAL: The motion sensor triggers the light when you come close. As outside it is neat and tidy in there. A couple of paper towels in the bin, that's all.

JAY: I check the other bathrooms as well.

VAL: They are also empty.

JAY: The staff only-door?

VAL: It is locked.

MAX: There's only one way left, right? The one that we think leads to the balcony.

VAL: Yes.

MAX: I put my ear against the door and listen.

VAL: There's music playing here, so its hard to hear any details. But you'd guess that there's dance music playing on the other side.

SAM: So it is empty here. Did we see anyone leave while we waited for the guard to leave?

VAL: No. Right at the start there were a couple of people who came, but no one left while you watched.

MAX: Slowly and with care I depress the handle for the door to the balcony. I try to be quiet so they won't hear me.

VAL: Sure! It is pretty loud here because of the music, but you notice that the door is locked.

MAX: Go and see if you can find a key behind the bar or something.

JAY: I search the bar.

VAL: How?

JAY: Do I see any key when I stand behind the bar?

VAL: No. It is pretty tidy. Except the food on the bar itself there are only some basic kitchen stuff there, things for mixing drinks, and some office stuff there.

SAM: I open all drawers and cabinets, looking for a key.

VAL: In one of the drawers you find a key attached to a soup ladle.

SAM: I try it on the lock to the balcony.

VAL: It fits, and when you turn it the door unlocks.

SAM: I open the door slowly and peek through the gap.

---

## The confrontation phase

---

20

VAL: The pounding of the dance music grows stronger when the door opens, and you see the balcony, as expected. There's a group of people there, standing in a circle holding hands. Both men and women, dressed for a night out, but not dancing. They seem to chant or sing something, but you can't make it out over the noise of the music.

SAM: Do they see us?

VAL: Yes. Or rather, one of them notices you, her eyes open wide. First she stares, and then she looks at the others, as if to check if they have also noticed you. But she keeps chanting.

SAM: I shift my grip so I can pull the door shut quickly in case something happens.

MAX: Do I recognize any of them?

VAL: They look like completely ordinary people at a party. Most wear the same pendant as you around their necks. You might have seen any of them on town, but you don't know the name of any one. The woman who noticed you gives her hands a shake, to call the attention of her neighbors. There's fear in her eyes.

JAY: I keep watch in the direction of the stairs, if anyone should come.

VAL: OK. Peter and Sofia, it starts to smell of ozone. The music grows more muted, like someone put a blanket over the speakers.

SAM: Should we do something?

MAX: No, I want to see what they do.

VAL: A shock wave pulses out from the circle towards you. It threatens to slam the door shut. Peter, you can roll for strength to see if you can resist.

SAM: How would I do that? I have three in bonus, and thirteen in defense in strength.

VAL: Roll *1d20*, add your bonus of three and the sum should be over fifteen.

SAM: [Roll.] Twelve, plus three is fifteen.

VAL: Close, but you needed to get more than fifteen. The door slams shut by the shock wave, sending you reeling backwards.

SAM: Does it cause harm?

VAL: No, it wasn't that force full. But there's a loud bang when the door slams shut. Karl, even if you didn't react before, you definitely hear the door.

JAY: »Curses!«

MAX: »What do we do?«

SAM: »What was that?«

VAL: The voices of the others can be heard now, muted like the music was, and the music is entirely gone. The smell of ozone is so strong that it stings your nose and there's a taste of metal in your mouth. The wall with the stairs and bathrooms seems to lose its depth, it looks like a theater backdrop hanging in the thin air.

SAM: I tackle the door!

VAL: It springs open with great force!

MAX: Are they still there?

VAL: Yes, they're still standing in a circle. The hole beyond the balcony, the one that leads down to the dance floor on the lower level has also lost its sense of depth, looking distinctly two dimensional.

Karl, it seems like the backdrop is closing in, as the world is closing in on you and the circle. Then it starts flaking, like the paint on an old wall.

JAY: »Damn it!« I rush towards the circle, and if Sofia hasn't moved when I pass I shove her in front of me, so she gets through the door too!

VAL: All sounds fade away, your skin stings, your eyes tear up. Then, out of thin air over the dance floor a shape materializes, moving, sharp broken glass. It is such a frightening vision that you must save with charisma or take trauma.

JAY: What's the defense value used for, it is much higher!

VAL: If someone actively tries to affect you in some way they should roll  $1d20$  plus their bonus and exceed your defense to succeed. But right now you don't have an active opponent, just the situation itself, then it's the  $1d20$  plus the bonus that should be over fifteen. And for courage stuff we use the bonus for charisma.

JAY: Ah! OK! [Roll.] Seventeen plus my charisma bonus of two, nineteen in total!

VAL: That is over fifteen. You aren't affected.

MAX: [Roll.] Five plus three, eight in total.

VAL: Ouch! Then you take trauma. I rule that seeing this creature causes 1d6L trauma. Where the L stands for Light. [Roll.] I rolled a two, so you take two light trauma. Mark two MP boxes on your character sheet with simple dashes.

MAX: OK. What does that mean?

VAL: It depends. Light trauma goes away once you get a chance to calm down, like smoking a cigarette in peace and quiet, something like that. And since you still have empty boxes on your character sheet you're fine for the moment, a bit shaken perhaps, but nothing that affects you. You're still in control. It gets worse if you have to mark a box, but there are no empty boxes left. But we'll take that when we get there.

SAM: When we get there, right. [Roll.] Fifteen, that's not good enough is it?

VAL: Well yes, add your charisma bonus and you'll exceed fifteen and be fine.

SAM: That is good.

VAL: Those who are in the circle can also be affected by the creature to varying degrees.

JAY: How many are they?

VAL: They're eleven, and five of them can also see the creature. [Roll. Roll. Roll. Roll. Roll.] I'll note trauma for those who failed.

MAX: Ouch! What does it do?

VAL: It seems to be walking in the air, like painted on the flaking back drop that surrounds you.

JAY: I shout at them »Watch out!«

VAL: No sounds can be heard. But those of them who can see it desperately are pulling on the others to move the circle in your direction. I think it's time to roll initiative to see who acts first. You can roll a d6.

SAM: [Roll.] Three!

VAL: On a one to three the opponents act first. Four to six you go first. For now I'll have the guys in the circle act on your turn, so all of you act after the creature.

The creature can make a move and an action. Now the back drop has gotten so close that it is past the railing that prevents people from falling down on the dance floor below. It frees itself and with a leap it bounds towards the circle and claws against those who are there, targeting the woman who first noticed you.

I rule that it has an advantage since she's standing with her back at it, and is held in place by the ones beside her. If you're at an advantage you roll two dice and use the highest. [Roll. Roll.] Five and seventeen, so seventeen then. To that it adds its strength bonus as it is attacking in close combat. I won't tell you how high its strength is, but the result is over eleven anyway, the standard for humans without armor. So that's a hit.

The creature has claws which make 1d8S harm. S for »serious«. [Roll.] Six, so the woman takes six points of harm from her hit points. Since they are serious they are marked with an »X«.

SAM: How many does she have?

VAL: People in general have two in all the stats, so six each of HP and MP. I won't tell you how many each and everyone of these people has, but she has six HP, and have taken serious harm to all of them.

MAX: She's dead?

VAL: No, far from it. But she's not well. She has just filled all her boxes, if she takes even the smallest of harm now she'll have to roll a constitution save to not be knocked out.

JAY: Curses.

VAL: Your turn. The crowd in the circle stay still, holding hands and chanting. But it looks like several of them have started to falter.

MAX: I won't attack it with my bare fists. Is there anything around that I could use as an improvised club or something? My hammer is in my backpack in the wardrobe.

VAL: There were some tools and furniture in the bar. There's a stack of backpacks and purses in a pile just inside the door.

MAX: I can do one move and one action?

VAL: Yes.

MAX: I want to run to the backpacks, and look in the closest one for something that might serve as a weapon.

JAY: Me too!



SAM: Me too!

VAL: OK. I rule that you need a successful intelligence roll to find something this turn. Roll 1d20, add your intelligence bonus and get more than fifteen.

JAY: [Roll.] One plus my bonus of four. Five in total, not enough.

VAL: It's even worse than that. If you roll a one you have a critical failure. That's a fumble, breaking something, getting hurt. Something bad. I'd say you trip and take 1d2L harm.

JAY: [Roll.] Two. Fuck. Light harm. Then I just put a slash in two of my HP boxes. I have four left, so I'm still good?

VAL: Yes.

MAX: [Roll.] Twenty! Plus my bonus of one, so 21 total.

VAL: Congratulations! If the die shows twenty you have a critical success. It is perfect, or you get some other sort of bonus or advantage. I'd say you get a really scary ice pick. The kind people use when climbing glaciers. It counts as a real weapon and does 1d8S harm.

MAX: I'll note it as one of my objects in the inventory. I only have my valuables since before, everything else is downstairs in the wardrobe.

SAM: [Roll.] Seventeen, plus my bonus of three. Twenty in total, success!

VAL: Nice! But it isn't a critical success, to get that you have to roll twenty on the die itself. But it is a success. You find a hunting knife, 1d6S harm.

SAM: Nice! I'll add it to my character sheet.

VAL: The first round is over as everyone has had a chance to act. Time for another initiative.

JAY: [Roll.] Three, again. The monster goes first.

VAL: The situation is the same. Except now the creature doesn't have to move, but can strike again. It takes the same target and rolls two dice again. Two and twenty. That is a critical roll, so it rolls another die of the same kind for harm, 2d8S harm. Four and Five, for a total of nine serious harm.

SAM: But she already had six serious harm, and a full meter.

VAL: Let's take it one step at a time. As you say she has six serious harm already, and her meter is full. Then one serious harm is upgraded to a critical, then the next is upgraded to a critical, and so on. So the first six

serious harm of that hit are converted into six critical harm. The X's from before are upgraded into stars.

JAY: Doesn't sound that good.

VAL: That's the first six, three more to go. The next step up from critical is permanent. So three of her stars are upgraded to completely filled boxes.

SAM: That really sounds horrible.

VAL: For each permanent harm she takes, one physical stat is lowered by one. There's a table to roll on to see which stat is affected (pg 29). [Roll.] One, two and five. Her strength is lowered by two, and her constitution by one.

JAY: Ordinary folk had two in their stats, right? What happens when they go to zero?

VAL: It isn't lethal, but it disables the person so that they'll need assistance or special aids to continue. Right now her strength is at zero and constitution at one.

Since she took harm that resulted in at least one HP-box was upgraded she also has to roll a save for constitution. It was serious harm that caused it, so she rolls an ordinary constitution roll. [Roll.] Fourteen, plus her bonus of one. So a total of fifteen, close, but not enough. She collapses in a heap.

She gets to roll again at the same difficulty to see if she stays conscious. [Roll.] Two. She faints and will be out for over an hour.

SAM: Damn it!

MAX: Is it our turn now?

VAL: Yes. You and the circle. They close in on each other and leave the woman on the floor outside. The back drop is closing in, but there's almost nothing left of it. The flakes are flying in the air like fall leaves in a storm. They are illuminated by a light from within themselves. Beyond them there is an absolute darkness, completely void of nuance.

MAX: I rush around the circle and stab it with my ice pick! [Roll.] Twelve plus my strength bonus of one. So thirteen.

VAL: That is not enough to harm it. Your pick bounces against the crystalline skin.

SAM: I'll do the same. But I'll go the other way, so I can stab it in the back since it turned to Sofia.

VAL: Smart! You get to roll with an advantage.

SAM: [Roll.] Seven and sixteen. Sixteen plus two makes eighteen.

VAL: That is good enough. Roll harm.

SAM: My knife does 1d6S. [Roll.] Four, not too shabby.

VAL: OK. I'll note that it has taken four serious harm.

JAY: I want to search again.

VAL: You find another hunting knife. 1d6S harm.

\* \* \*

VAL: Out of the black a shock wave hits you, and it scatters the last flakes of the old reality that had been lingering in the air. Your ears are ringing. The smell of ozone is replaced by that of fire. The ground beneath you is cobble stones. In the distance there are whole city blocks on fire, and in the distance you can hear the low pitched rumble of engines and thuds of explosions.

Roll saves for charisma.

SAM: [Roll.] Sixteen, success!

JAY: [Roll.] Three, failed.

MAX: [Roll.] Eight, failed.

VAL: Karl and Sofia take 1d6L trauma each.

JAY: [Roll.] Three.

MAX: [Roll.] Four. I had three of of my five since before. So first I mark two, and then I upgrade two of the old ones serious trauma on my MP track?

VAL: Exactly. And you must roll another save for charisma, since you risk having a stress reaction. You roll with an advantage.

MAX: [Roll.] Three and nine. My charisma bonus is three, so I get twelve. But that isn't enough is it?

VAL: No. [Roll.] Three, you flight response. You panic and must escape the source of the trauma. What do you consider as the source?

MAX: Hmm. Right now it's probably these scary folk who stood in the circle. I run away! »Gahh!«

JAY: What just happened?

VAL: Well, you have been under great mental strain. Sofia couldn't handle it and ran off. What do you do?

SAM: We're in a city that is under aerial bombardment?

VAL: Seems like it.

JAY: What happened to the others?

VAL: They're still here. At least those who still stood up in the circle after you killed the creature that attacked you. They're six now, several of them bleed from injuries from when the creature exploded. Around you there are four deformed bodies and the backpacks lie scattered on the ground.

SAM: Can we follow Sofia?

VAL: You saw which direction she headed, but it is pretty dark here. It is easy to get lost or injure oneself.

JAY: »We must follow her!«

SAM: »Not without lights, we'll just get injured and then we'll be of no help to anyone.« Were there any flashlights or something in the backpacks?

VAL: Yes

JAY: We start looting.

VAL: The people from the circle see that you start rummaging through their gear. [Makes a reaction roll.] They don't look very pleased.

JAY: Do we find any lights?

VAL: Yes, you have a torch each.

SAM: They won't need all the backpacks. I take the one I found my flashlight in and put it on. I'll investigate more carefully later, but now we must find Sofia.

JAY: I take mine as well. Then we split. They don't seem very friendly.

VAL: OK. They don't attack or try to stop you, perhaps they are to choked and injured. But you follow in the direction that Sofia left.

MAX: Where am I? Have I calmed down?

VAL: You're in a city in the middle of the night. Above you hear bombers, and in the distance also explosions. There's a fire on the horizon. You don't know which way you came, nor where your friends are.

MAX: That's a bit scary. I want a weapon, can I see one?

VAL: You look around, it is pretty dark, finding something will be difficult.

MAX: I have my personal belongings. There's cigarettes among those. And with the cigarettes there is a lighter. So I light it and look around for something to use as a club or something.

VAL: I'd say there's a fifty-fifty chance of you finding anything better than a pointed rock here. On an odd result you find a weapon. [Roll.] Five. OK, you find a piece of wood. It has some sharp edges and has been broken off, but it would serve as an acceptable club at 1d6L damage.

MAX: As soon as I found it I light a cigarette and sit down on a stone to try and calm down.

VAL: OK.

SAM: Has she left any tracks behind?

VAL: Not really.

MAX: Are you sure? I've been running in heels. There would be a neat line of small holes in the dirt

VAL: Heels? That would make sense, about those marks. There's dirt and garbage everywhere. You have good flashlights. OK. If you manage a save for wisdom you'll find tracks.

JAY: I have two in wisdom. [Roll.] Sixteen total!

SAM: Sweet!

VAL: You look for a while before you find tracks, but once you've found them they're not very hard to follow. The escape seems to have followed the easiest path, no detours into the bombed out buildings or heaps of rubble.

SAM: »What the fuck happened?«

JAY: »No idea! We're they doing magic? What was it that attacked us? Where are we?«

SAM: »I would believe in that bit about magic anyway.«

JAY: »How can we get back home again?«

SAM: »Good question, perhaps we should ask the others.«

JAY: »They didn't seem very happy to see us.«

MAX: Have I calmed down now?

VAL: Yes. Your light trauma disappears, but the serious ones remain.

MAX: I flick the cigarette butt into the darkness. Do I hear anything more than the airplanes and distant bombs? Any signs of people around here?

VAL: No, you can't see or hear anything like that.

\* \* \*

VAL: When you return to the place where you first arrived it is empty. The bodies and the bags are gone. But when you look around you see some lights from a building in the distance.

MAX: »We should ask them. They took us here, they should be able to get us back home again.»

SAM: »Yes. Do you have a plan? Just to walk up to them and say hi?»

MAX: »Sounds like a good start.»

JAY: We start walking in that direction.

SAM: Wait. Shouldn't we check on them a bit first. How far away are they?

VAL: Fifty meters or so.

SAM: I give Sofia my flashlight. »Stay here and let them see you, while I sneak up on them in the dark.»

JAY: »OK.»

MAX: »Sure?»

SAM: »I think we should know more if we're to trust them.» I sneak in a semi circle, so I don't cast a shadow by mistake and they see my silhouette.

VAL: OK.

## The ritual

The characters have come across a book which describes a ritual which they hope can take them back home again.

## Ritual: Following the guide

The ritual takes an hour.

### Participants

- A guide.
- Two to twelve travelers.

### Components

- Blindfolds
- A bell.
- A bottle of alcohol.
- Thirteen coins.

### Steps

1. The travelers seek out the guide and asks him to lead them home.
2. The guide refuses.
3. The travelers offer the guide silver.
4. The guide refuses.
5. The travelers offer the guide alcohol.
6. The guide refuses.
7. The travelers offer the guide everything he wants.
8. The guide blindfolds the travelers.
9. The guide takes everything he wants.
10. The guide drinks the bottle of alcohol.
11. The guide takes one, three, five, seven and thirteen steps and stops after each group to call on the travelers with the bell.
12. The travelers follow the sound of the bell.

### Effect

The travelers return home.

JAY: I sit down and study the bit with the ritual carefully to make sure I got it all right.

VAL: Well, it's not easy. The book builds on concepts and ideas which are totally unfamiliar to you. Really understanding everything must take weeks of studies. But the bookmark that marked the ritual indicates a section with lots of notes in the margin, you think you understand at least that part.

SAM: That's not very comforting.

JAY: For real. What does it do?

VAL: Here, read for yourself. The book is a bit more wordy in the descriptions, but these are the central points.

JAY: OK. I suppose we can manage this one.

SAM: What should we do?

JAY: We'll need some equipment. A bottle of alcohol, blindfolds, thirteen coins and a bell.

MAX: There was whiskey and bells in almost all the backpacks. I thought it was strange, but if they were planning on using them for this ritual it makes sense.

VAL: We should be able to scrounge up thirteen coins. I rummage in my purse.

SAM: We can cut blindfolds out of their clothes. I'll do it, three?

JAY: It says we can be up to twelve travelers.

MAX: Twelve? Should we bring someone else with us?

SAM: Let them rot.

MAX: I'm inclined to agree with that.

JAY: What if they follow us and are angry?

SAM: Kill them before we leave?

JAY: We don't even know if we can make this ritual.

SAM: Sure we can, you have high intelligence.

JAY: Do we get multiple tries?

VAL: You have the description of the ritual.

SAM: Should we leave them here for now, try it, and if it doesn't work we'll come back and have a talk with them?

MAX: Works for me.

JAY: OK.

SAM: Should we get started? You're the one to do the magic, right?

JAY: Mm. Should we go back to the point where we arrived? Perhaps it is easier to find our way home from there?

MAX: Sounds good to me.

SAM: We'll head over there, and leave the others tied up here for now.



JAY: I'll go first, so you can look for me? I think I'm supposed to be the guide if I lead the ritual, and the travelers start by seeking out the guide.

MAX: OK. You get the blindfolds and the bell. We'll bring the whiskey and the coins.

JAY: You ask me to show you the way home. I refuse. Then you offer me silver, and I refuse. Then you offer me the whiskey, and I refuse. Then you offer me everything. I blindfold you, take the money, drink the whiskey and start walking. You follow the sound of the bell.

MAX: Yes, easy as pie.

\* \* \*

JAY: I take the cap off and drink.

VAL: It tastes like whiskey.

JAY: I think I'd like to wrap this up before the alcohol hits me. So I take a step and ring the bell.

VAL: In what direction?

JAY: Forwards? I think I'll head in some direction where there's plenty of room.

VAL: OK. What do the rest of you do?

MAX: I take a step towards the sound of the bell.

SAM: Me too!

JAY: I take three steps and ring the bell.

MAX: I follow.

SAM: Me too!

JAY: I take five steps and ring the bell.

MAX: I walk towards the sound of the bell.

SAM: Me too!

JAY: I take seven steps and ring the bell.

MAX: I walk towards the sound of the bell.

SAM: Me too!

VAL: You can make that roll for your intelligence now.

JAY: [Roll.] Twelve plus fyra, sixteen. I walk thirteen steps and ring the bell.

VAL: For every step you take the world seems to grow more distant, its like it stretches out ahead of you, thin. A faint wind caresses your cheek, the air grows hazy. You start to feel your blood rush in your ears and your body feels warm from the whiskey. The sounds of planes and their bombs fada away. You stand in a thick fog, so dense that the world itself is white and nothing. When you ring the bell after the thirteenth step you can't hear the sound yourself.

MAX: What? Can we hear it?

VAL: Yes. The world around you has grown silent, the bell is far away you can barely hear it over the sounds of your own breathing.

SAM: We walk towards it.

MAX: Yes, I take care to walk in the exact direction where I heard it.

VAL: You think you should have arrived there by now, but there is nothing but silence around you. Your steps are without sound. But then you hear music in the distance.

SAM: I walk towards the sound.

MAX: Me too.

VAL: Peter and Sofia, the smell of smoke, sweat and perfume lies thick in the air. After the long silence the dance music is absolutely deafening. When you dare lift the blinds you stand on the second floor of The Theater. Colored spotlights blink to the beat of the music.

Jay, you can start rolling up a new character.

MAX: He's gone?

VAL: Yes.

Val gives out experience to Max and Sam's characters, and then the game proceeds with the recovery phase. Neither of the characters has managed to reach one thousand experience points and the next level.

---

# The recovery phase

---

21

VAL: It's time for the fourth and final phase of the game, the recovery phase. You should plan the next four weeks for your characters, one activity per week. What are you doing? You'll heal all light wounds and trauma. And half your serious trauma, Max.

MAX: Can I heal the rest as one of my weekly activities?

VAL: Yes, you can seek care. Here's the list of things you can do. (Pg 48) Note the order of the activities, you might not have time for all of them.

MAX: OK. I start by seeking treatment for my trauma. Then I want to research the question »Who were the people in the circle at the Theater?«

Who had the book? Can I study it?

JAY: I had the book, perhaps you'd like to find a way to rescue me?

MAX: Bummer. I would like to recruit a companion the third week, and I'll go to work on the fourth week, I guess.

SAM: I'll recruit first. Then I'll seek the answer to the question »Where is Karl?«. Then I want to go to work for two weeks. Next time we should make sure that it is the people who make it back that carry the books.

VAL: OK, let's see how things go. [Roll] Two, you can do the first two of your planned actions.

MAX: OK, I roll for recovery.

VAL: I guess you don't have the money to buy the good private care, but are stuck with the health center. Roll at a disadvantage, two dice and only count the lowest one. Save against charisma.

MAX: [Roll.] Five, that is a failure.

VAL: You meet a doctor who prescribes some pills, but they don't seem to help.

MAX: Biting social commentary.

JAY: Horror RPG, you know.

VAL: Then your question. Roll for intelligence.

MAX: [Roll.] Seventeen, success.

VAL: That night the top floor of The Theater was booked for *The Friends of the Fridhem Museum*.

MAX: OK.

SAM: My attempt to recruit.

VAL: I should make that roll, what's your wisdom bonus?

SAM: One.

VAL: [Makes a hidden roll, it succeeds.] Right, you make friends with a woman called Maria Lundström, she's a mechanic. She's your companion now. You can have a maximum of your charisma bonus companions at a time. So don't get any more before you have raised that stat, or lost Maria.

SAM: Fine. Maria works at the factory?

VAL: Next your second activity, the research about where Karl is.

SAM: [Roll.] Two. No luck there.

[: Val] Too bad. But next time we meet Peter has returned to work, and Sofia is looking to recruit a companion. Our story continues there. Are you done with your new characters, Jay?

JAY: Yes! Police officer Gunnar Andersson, at your service.

## Post game chat

VAL: How about we take a couple of minutes and review the game?

What was good? What was bad? Should we change anything for our next session?

SAM: It was easy to roll up the characters.

JAY: Perhaps they could have had a bit more depth. But that might be unnecessary if they're dying at this rate.

MAX: We could have spent more time on them. Writing some background and describe their appearance and so on. It would have made them feel more real, without changing the rules.

SAM: Yes, I really liked that the rules were so simple. Typical OSR.  
The wounds and trauma got a bit complicated, but I see the point with having the rules to wear down the characters.

JAY: Should we add more depth to the characters before the next session?

MAX: Yes.

SAM: That's OK. Now that I've had the chance to play Peter a bit I have a better feeling for who he is as well.

VAL: What did you think of the horror elements? Were they at the right level?

JAY: More!

VAL: More of what?

JAY: Horror! Or, the places and monsters were cool. But we hurried past them, sort of.

MAX: Yes, it would have been fun to slow down a bit, so we could have a bit more of a narrative to the story.

VAL: That would be easy to fix. Maybe we'll get more of a horror mood to the game as well.

JAY: That ritual was fucked up.

VAL: True, the rituals are nasty, and then you succeeded.

MAX: In a way I like that bit, that magic is so dangerous.

SAM: Yes. The magicians in this game aren't any standard artillery pieces, like they usually are.

VAL: But you are more of cultists than magicians, really.

JAY: When I read the ritual I did notice that the guide wasn't mentioned in the result.

VAL: Most rituals you'll come across are incomplete and have been corrupted during the ages. You could try to research more details in the recovery phase, there might be more versions or other translations that you can try.

SAM: We'll keep that in mind when we come across some books.

MAX: I thought it was a bit eerie with the step where the guide should take all what he wanted. There was nothing about a limitation to just the money and the whiskey.

JAY: I didn't even think of it. But yes, that could have turned really ugly.

MAX: I didn't say anything at the time, thinking I could call a timeout if things were getting out of hand.

VAL: I think I understand. But would it have been wrong if it had? For future reference, I mean.

MAX: I don't know, it's a horror game after all. Feeling a bit uneasy is part of the experience. To me the ritual was the most disturbing event in the entire session, due to that bit.

I don't want to change anything, it's still OK to call a timeout if things go too far. That's good enough for me, for now.

JAY: OK by me.

SAM: Yes, me too.

VAL: I had fun anyway. It will be fun to play again. Now you got interrupted in the recovery phase, so I have the initiative for the next stage of the story. By the way, Jay, what maelstrom event did your new character get?

JAY: Victim of a crime. I thought that perhaps you could think of something regarding that?

VAL: Absolutely! Perfect! But then we'll meet again in two weeks.



