

When they finally found little Jacob Shelby, he was huddled in the shadow of a rusted-out tractor in a field overgrown with weeds. Only days before, he had been a well groomed, if husky child, prone to exuberant outbursts of violence. Now he was thin as a famine and his hair hung down his back in dirty snake-like clumps. The Police and psychologists surmised from the bruises and scars on his back, that Jacob had been brutally abused by some demented stranger. They tried every trick in the book (and a few that would have made the book's author blanch) to get him to tell them where he'd been, but at best, he would only shuffle his feet, gaze sullenly at his toes, and whisper "among the beautiful creatures".

DISCLAIMER

This game is about an impossible place. The reader must beware the questions why and how. In this place, things happen because they are in some way appropriate to the story. From time to time, they may resemble the way things really would happen but this is really just a coincidence and may safely be ignored. Where reasons and explanations are given, they speak to the impossible and only mirror reality vaguely. More so, the reader must be wary of symbolism and allegory for these are no more than the defensive rationalizations employed by those who fear imagination and the fantastic.

FOREWORD

I'd like to thank Alkzndr, James Hargrove, Chaos Voyager, Damia, Egil, and many other RPG.net denziens for their input and interest in the project.

I must confess to not having play-tested these rules myself, since my group is completely disinterested in playing anything that doesn't have dwarves, dragons, and brutal critical tables.

INTRODUCTION

You are a grotesque thing. A patchwork of fur, scales, and scabrous skin cover your twisted frame from which ungainly limbs sprout at unlikely angles. Blood drenched claws burst from your many hands and feet and your mouth is full of razor sharp teeth. Yesterday you had a shell and bulging muscles. But tomorrow, tomorrow you will be beautiful. The Innocent has promised you that tomorrow you will be beautiful.

All things that dwell upon the expanse are constantly in a state of change, moving, like you, from one state to the next. The base, un-speaking animals change their form to match their changing needs and environment. Legs growing long to flee the predator. Teeth growing sharp when green food grows scarce. Those who still can speak change to meet their needs and also to reflect their moods and desires. Those who think and see more deeply change at will.

All things change, in the face of the irresistible will of the Innocents.

All things, even you.

THE EXPANSE: The world is forever ending

Before the advent of the Innocent we were without form or self. Mewling, we ate of ourselves and spread, numerous in the eternal light of the dawn.

And it came to pass that a lost child wept, alone upon the expanse. Among devouring horrors unnumbered it looked upon one and commanded: "Be mother to love and console." Unto another it commanded, "Father protect and provide."

The Beginning, source of all light, fades into the distant Dawnward skies. We stand in the twilight. The end of the Expanse is drawing near. It hangs in the Endward sky, black and writhing.

The faceless ciphers march back out of the lands swallowed by the cold darkness. Each cipher wears the same blank and featureless form, drained of self. Guided and marshaled by an implacable and hate-filled will, they make war upon us all. The united armies of the endless city fight a creeping retreat against their ever-growing numbers.

The ciphers overrun the chill Endward lands. In colonies of insects we see the pattern of them. Perhaps they grasp desperately at life through efficiency, sacrificing self for survival. The Nandrian aeronauts have overflowed the last of their hives and charted the barren lands of ice and madness that lie beyond them. In the end, all shall march back, faceless, seeking the warmth of the dawn.

It is said that there are three thousand, thousand, thousand, speaking beings in the last city. Its outer walls spread between the oceans, engulfing the inland sea and the mountains of the spine. The outer regions of the city have broad paved avenues lined with trees. Deep canals manage the flow of water and trade goods. Ornate fountains spout in the opulent estates of the Wealthy, vying in decadence with baroque temples. As one passes inward, the city changes, estates giving way to blockhouses and factories. Finally, the paved roads pass into the crumbling, twisting, claustrophobic lanes and ruined buildings at the city's heart. It takes no less than six marches to cross the endless city on foot.

It is no coincidence that the newest buildings in the endless city lie on its Dawnward edges. Yet there is no escape in this, for strong young empires flourish in the warm croplands. Beyond these, our aeronauts have charted vast deserts and jungles inhabited by primeval creatures and beyond those are dawn baked primal realms, where no innocent ever spoke shape or thought to the endless seas of flesh. Those who have explored perpendicular to the movement of the expanse report that after journeying for lengths on end, they came to dark and frozen lands too far from the dawn to support life.

The lark flies free above the woes of the Expanse.

The embodiment of music it sings the praises of the dawn.

So too shall we fly and sing freely.

Losing ourselves in the song of the lark we shall at last fly free.

The Litany of the Lark from the temple of song

Three Great Nations

Nandrian Empire:

The brazen towers of noble Nandria have stood inviolate since before the endless city. Their clockwork legions and scientific mastery have made them great above all other nations. Guided by the principles of the Rational Orthodoxy, their society has prospered. Since Rational Orthodoxy eschews religion and superstition in all their forms, Nandria has a long history of war with the god kings of Charn.

The Nandrian High Council For Scientific Measures has defined the Standard Length as the time it takes for the shadow of a stick one Linear Stride's length to double in length. A Standard March is one three hundred and sixtieth of a Standard Length. There are Three Hundred and Sixty Chronological Minutes in a Standard March and Three Hundred and Sixty Chronological Seconds in a Chronological Minute. These values being laid out in accordance to the angles of the clock. All makers of instruments of measurement and time keeping in the Exalted Empire of Nandria shall abide

by these units with all due precision or suffer death by gearing.

The Sacred Kingdom of Charn:

Amidst the smoke, the hiss of hot poker, and the screams, the magus raised his voice, "The Innocents have brought upon us this plague, this church of Jesus. Simplistic and contradictory, it spreads among the lower castes like a plague. Devoid of doctrine or dogma, it takes root easily in the minds of the ignorant. Our children delight in tales of Oblat the Inane and few among them could not tell you some of them. I am certain that it is the same with the Innocents and this Jesus. The idea that: if you are good you will go to heaven when you die is a fable for fools. So confess it and recant or burn. Admit that you are not a witch. Repent and live."

Oblat the inane

a hunting came.

From shape to shape,

never the same.

Seeking fair

romantic game.

That stump of a tree

may its father blame.

Charn, is a primitive nation, riddled with endless cults and superstitions. It has been said that no accurate count can be made of their beliefs because three will pass away and five rise in their place in the time it takes to count them. The highest and most ancient Charnal religion is found in the temple-mausoleums of the kings, where the armies of the dead await the End of all things. The people of Charn are masters of sorceries and curses and unmatched in their pursuit of forbidden lore.

Indeed, in Charn, people who have died are often consumed in mystical rituals invoking the sinister Candle Bearers and worse entities.

For this cause are the humble potters of Charn held in greater respect than all other craftsmen: The kings of Charn have been buried with their armies of terra cotta warriors, with bones and joints of brass and living hearts, in preparation for the end of days. These were men picked for their unswerving loyalty and courage, for the Dead still serve their own ambitions. These phalanxes of the ancient dead now march alongside the clockwork legions of Nandria against the ciphers.

At the heart of each temple of Charn sits a great stone god, with joints and bones of brass. These massive statues are the final resting place of the Charnial god kings. And, it is said, that like the ancient dead of the catacombs beneath the temples, the gods of Charn are wakeful.

Finnian Houses:

In the counter crosswise oceans, float the living castles of the Finn.

These great clans are home to savage but cunning warriors. Once, before their prophet arose from the depths, the Finnian clans mostly fought among themselves for glory and herds of fish. Now,

they have formed a great conclave and are gathering in the shallows off the Nandrian shores.

What little metal the folk of Finnia use is gold or copper hammered into shape without the heat of a forge, but they are master craftsmen in bone, ivory and all the resources of the sea. In battle, poisonous living nets and biting fish are hurled at their foes with primitive torsion catapults.

Their fortresses are all but unassailable. For having learned the arts of breathing the very water, only the least parts of their living castles lie above the surface. The mighty Nandrian navies often find it more worthwhile to buy peace and passage than to battle with the Great houses of Finnia, for they have little that is worth plundering.

For the most part the water breathers are smooth and slick of skin and given to the growing of fins and flukes from whence we draw their people's name. It is hinted that beneath the waves, are many who eschew bones to float soft and free with the currents. Others are claimed to grow to monstrous sizes only possible with the buoyant support of the deep water, by gorging themselves on the plentiful sea life.

"Once, while the Ambassador of the Finnian League of Great Houses was befuddled from inhaling larsh, he did whisper to me in the deepest of confidence that the oceans are not bottomless - that there are horrors rising from below to match any that descend upon the Last City from the End-blighted wastes."

-- Excerpt from the journals of Admiral Pipschrire

"It had floated in the depths alone and cold for untold life spans. Absorbing smaller sea creatures through its permeable skin and seizing the larger ones with barbed filaments, it had grown vast and wise in the ways of the endless depths. Now the waters were growing dark and cold. Food, though painstakingly nurtured and wisely conserved was growing scarce.

Having learned the songs of the Finnian wanderers it sometimes ate, it knew land and air were not impenetrable barriers, nor was form an unsolvable limitation.

By driving water from its membranous inner cavities; it could both move and become a smaller, stronger thing. Hard structures could be grown, to support its weight, as could bundles of long, muscular tissue that would still allow it to bend and flex. The journey of change was long and harsh beyond its wildest imaginings, yet, at last, it reached the shallows and breached the surface to stare, for the first time upon the sky, prepared at last to seek the answer to the End."

-- Excerpt from "The Song of the Prophet" a prose translation from the Finnian

Lesser Nations

At the last counting, thirty-seven Lengths ago, there were two hundred and forty three lesser nations lying on the dawnward limits of the three empires. The endward war now drains the resources of the endless city to the extent that these new empires cannot be conquered and absorbed.

Solemnity of Averno:

The people of Averno prefer short, six limbed headless bodies. Their lands are covered in factories and canals. Such is their obsession with efficiency, that no tree grows untended nor wild in the whole of their lands. Technology is pursued relentlessly in Averno and indeed they may soon match Nandria in this but they lack the creativity to question and invent, so they steal what secrets they can. Should they were ever to capture and disassemble a perpetual motion machine, they would surely become as unstoppable as the ciphers.

The Eternal Exodus:

In the face of the End, many find fleeing to be the only rational option.

Small streams of refugees are common in the lands Dawnward of the endless city. As they encounter impassible neighbors and geography, these small streams meet and combine into the ever growing river of those fleeing the End. The hunger and despair of the refugees caught up in the flow seems to do little to dissuade others from fleeing. From careful measures, carried out by the Nandrian Bureau of Statistics, it has been proven that the pilgrims of the Eternal Exodus only manage to slow the approach of the End, and cannot average a great enough pace to escape it.

Grey Dancers:

In the depths of the dawnward deserts, a dour people are growing in number. Following a creed that eschews pleasure and beauty, they hate all the other peoples of the Expanse. It has been suggested by Nandrian morpopologists that they are capable of extreme leaps of emotion that give them a reputation for insanity. Grey clad bands of dancers prey on their neighbors, distracting the eye with graceful and fluid motions before striking a deadly blow.

Eslealate Legions:

War is the only acceptable way of life in Esleal. After years of war, a brutal caste system has emerged, that forces each caste into specific physical forms. Magic and technology are equally employed as weapons by the legions. Every citizen is a soldier from the youngest child to the eldest cripple. The legions are directed by the peculiar method of counting the wishes of the citizens and taking the most popular course of action. Other nations find this lack of true leadership makes the Eslealate people impossible to bargain with.

The Devourers:

In the Dawnlands, where the air is warm, plants and animals grow to massive sizes unseen in cooler climes. Tribes of giants rule the Jungles with little more than thrown rocks and clubs. Yet the magics of their shamans are potent and their warriors all but immune to weapons smaller than a cannon.

The Carnival:

Mad piping and dancing cover the starving masses of this lawless region where music is the only currency and anything else they can just kill you for. If there is any rule of law in the Carnival, it flows from the asylum, a ruinous stone building that overlooks the shantytowns from the top of a high hill. Wherein, there lurks a presence, insane but feared by all, which issues commands to the Abominable Jesters of its court, whom few dare defy.

The Institutions

The Armies:

The watch groups that patrol the streets of the endless city are both peace keepers and recruiters. Criminals, peace breakers, and loiterers are rounded up, chained together, and marched off to training camps. Since officer ranks are inherited positions, the highest honor a soldier can aspire to is the rank of petty officer. The life of a common soldier is hard, and few ever live to become petty officers. A petty officer who serves in the Nandrian army is permitted to retire after ten lengths of

service. There is no escape from military service in the hosts of Charn, those who do well and are loyal are recruited into the temple guard where they are treated well. When they grow old, the temple guard are revived in bodies of terracotta to wait in the darkness of the crypts for the call to battle.

The Dissenters:

As the light fades and winds grow cold, it is not the rich who suffer.

The injustices of the Nandrian and Charnial societies have grown unbearable to many. They flock to the barricades, factory workers, shop keepers, craftsmen, and laborers alike, to call for liberty and justice. Then the armies descend and the streets are washed with blood. The next march, a host of desperate new workers will gladly bow themselves to even worse conditions in the same sweatshops and ghettos. But there is a movement that is growing across the endless city, and words of the tracts and street corner rabble rousers are growing more unified with each passing march, rallying to the call of freedom.

The Factories:

The empire of Nandria is supported by massive workshops where weapons, ships, and tools are produced in massive quantities. The smoke from these factories often hangs over the endless city in a smoldering haze. A new industrial effort is being given the full reign of these factories. A road of iron rails, running from the fertile Dawnward croplands to the Endward front, is being laid to transfer goods and troops with unprecedented efficiency. An amazing new source of power drives this mad endeavor, great engines of iron, fire and steam.

The Fire Brigades:

In the densely packed regions of the last city, fires can sweep entire blocks clean in a matter of minutes. This makes fire fighting the ultimate extortion racket. You wouldn't want the fire brigade to be under funded or stretched too thin would you? You never know what might happen. The "brigades" tend to be gangs of tough, bored, youngsters who hole up in a single large building for mutual protection from recruitment into the army.

The Navies:

Tall ships with many masts rule the Counter-Crosswise seas in the name of the Emperor of Nandria. Sailing for lengths, to distant lands to bring back precious goods like metals, spices, and larch. The ships of lesser nations often seek to prey on the Nandrian vessels, but few survive the broadsides of the armadas. The life of a Nandrian sailor is one of disease, filth, hardship, and privation, and no few ships have mutinied and turned to piracy. Crosswise, across the Expanse, the great slave galleys and warhulks of Charn patrol the coasts. Making war on the Wave Riders and the fiends of the lower depths.

The Salons:

There are many meeting places, from respectable taverns and inns, to theaters, bordellos and darkened hovels filled with the heady smoke of larch. The salons, with their fashionable open air patios, private booths, and relaxed atmosphere draw in the artists, intellectuals, criminals, and rebels. They serve strong teas, light wines, and fancy pastries to those with time and money to waste in debate and quiet contemplation.

The Temples:

Conclaves of hooded apparitions met secretly in the shadows. And the prophet of Sepstis did go forth among them crying "tremble ye disconsolate for of ten commandments given the Innocents by their God, of the ten keys of the kingdom, only five have we received.

"Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not cuss.

Thou shalt not fib.

Thou shalt not pick thine nose."

There is solitude and peace to be had for the squalid masses, in places where Kings and Commoners kneel in supplication to higher causes and powers. The most common type of religion involves the worship of the Dawn as the creator. In times when circumstances were less extreme, wars were fought over the doctrines of the creator. The temples of Charn worship the unfathomable masters of the Candle Bearers who keep the flames of the dead, on their holy days, the cries of the sacrifices rise to the skies, while their flesh fills the priests bellies. All forms of End worship are forbidden in the endless city, but secret cults and conclaves abound. At times a cell of these will run amok, killing every living thing in frenzy. Christianity is a young cult, brought to the Expanse by the Innocents, it is a simplistic faith that is growing in popularity among the poor. Lacking even a copy of the collection of sacred books of which the innocents speak, the hope with which they look to their salvation is a desperate hope indeed.

The Universities:

The social elite of Nandria are schooled in great institutions, where they have access to the greatest scholars, scientists, and philosophers of their times. The training is physical as well as intellectual and fencing, rowing, and running are all popular sports. It is possible to learn nearly any craft at a university except lowly trades, husbandry, and of course magic, which is forbidden. The Universities have the patronage of the Nandrian nobility from the Emperor on down and thus are very well funded.

YOUR PERSONA

The heroes of the Expanse are not the mighty warriors and wizards, bearding the dragon in its den. For this is a time of ending, soon the ciphers will overrun the Last City and the great nations will crumble. The decadent upper crust of society may revel in their intrigues and alliances but the starving, huddled masses grow restless as they shiver in the growing cold. And it is to the musicians, artists, philosophers, prophets, and madmen that their eyes turn for leadership as the final act begins.

Some shall flee Dawnward and others shall rise up against their masters and yet others shall revel in the growing chaos, dancing on the brink of oblivion.

Some Sample Archetypes:

Actor:

The theater is the great meeting place of the unwashed masses and the upper classes. As the Expanse darkens, all of its people hunger for common experience. The plays have grown more grandiose in recent lengths. Elaborate costumes and props have replaced those scavenged from the rags of the wealthy. To be an actor is to be a star, recognized and loved by the great and mean alike.

Artist:

The nobility of the last city have grown decadent. Since decadence needs to be fed, artists of all sorts have become popular in high society. This access to the upper class provides the artist with patronage, an income above what could otherwise be maintained, and a fragile position fed by novelty, which can easily collapse when the next great talent is discovered.

Demagogue:

There are many corners in the endless city and thus many soapboxes. On these soapboxes stand people who scream their grievances to the passing crowds. Some even become professional mob raisers, riling up the common folk for a fee. Of course, only criminals looking to distract the watch are likely to need such a service, but that only serves to raise the rates.

Esthetician:

The rich and the powerful wish to be beautiful, and they can afford the best of consultants. The lowest born person, with an eye for the changing winds of fashion can become the confidant and councilor of persons holding stations of great importance and power.

Lady of the Night:

There are many women in the endless city, who, for many reasons, live without the support of family or community. These women are left to sell the last scraps of their dignity in the inns and brothels to wealthy gentlemen and merchants. Unwanted offspring are not a risk due to the mutable nature of all thinking people, yet, seeking companionship and love, many ladies of the night bear children. The high death rate among working girls leaves many orphans living on the streets and eventually feeds anew the lust and debauchery of the upper class.

Musician:

The booming popularity of the theater has been a boon to the humble musician. The scores of the latest plays require large orchestras and carefully timed musical accompaniment. While not as glamorous as the stage, it is a simpler life, and the best musicians can still be called on to play chamber music for the great and powerful.

Performer:

While acting and music are the great roads to celebrity, a good act of any sort can earn a few coins on the corner or even be presented in the theaters before the play or at intermissions. Stunts and comedy routines of all sorts are popular with the masses and the children of the aristocracy.

Philosopher:

The darkening times lead many to ask questions and seek answers. As the End approaches

philosophers have found them selves dragged from the backs of taverns and the cloistered halls of universities to guide great lords. In these times, there is no longer an intellectual distance between the student of philosophy and the course of history.

Poet:

The nobility craves poetry like the beggar craves their next meal. The beautiful crafting of words is not just desired but required by statesmen, lovers, and leaders. Poetry hangs in the mind, inspires the soul, and gets results if the poet wishes to live. Even so, the poor crave poetry as the one thing the wealthy cannot spoil before casting it off, and poetry has sparked no few rebellions and uprisings.

Sorcerer:

There are powers that can be wielded by those with strong wills. There are curses, and conjuration to be worked, and vile entities to summon. While magic lacks technology's quick and sure results, given time, its subtle arts can accomplish a great deal more.

Retired Soldier:

The life of a soldier is undesirable at best. In general any person with a rank greater than petty officer or legate has bought or inherited it. Being ordered about by the whims of fools and madmen tends to produce a great many corpses and a few cynical retired veterans.

Vagrant:

The poor are often mobile. Moving to find food or work when times are lean. Even then, poverty and vagrancy are almost as good as being invisible and some from the highest ranks of society find sanctuary from their foes, by begging on the street corners.

Writer:

Much of the population of the endless city is illiterate. Those with the good fortune to be schooled and the ill fortune to be poor can earn a fair living just writing letters or tabloid stories for the broadsheets. Most writers are tortured by memories of the dimly lit schools and bitter, student hating teachers they endured to learn their letters.

Describing Your Persona

Your self:

Beneath the changes of your body, your self remains. Those who lose themselves become lost, faceless, un-speaking beasts. To your self, you must be true, else tomorrow you may be someone else or no one at all.

Your face:

Is your nose bulbous? What shape are your eyes? Your eyebrows? The curl of your sneer? What is the color of your skin? These outward things reflect your inner self no matter what else changes.

Your Gender:

While some gorge themselves, growing large, and divide themselves; it is customary to mate. Children that come of a man and a woman are stronger and have deeper selves, less likely to descend from their speaking state and become animals. To be a man or a woman is your self's deepest root.

PLAYING THE GAME

Once the players have personas, the Master will present them with descriptions of the people, places, and things their characters encounter and the players will respond with descriptions of the words and deeds of their personas. Naturally, conflicts will arise and need to be resolved.

The rules serve the purpose of resolving these conflicts, the Master's word is not law in all things. The rules serve to balance the Master's control over the entire Expanse, and may not be changed without the consent of all of the players.

Defining Oneself

The core of your being will be a jumble of words and numbers that will change as the Expanse changes you. Eventually you will die and can create anew a persona that might well hail from any of the strange and wondrous places you have visited. In three instances, you must divide twenty-one points between two polar opposites, the Abilities that define the core of your persona, after which you must select six traits from the list which follows. Should the quandary of such division distresses you, it is permissible to roll three dice for each of these incompatible pairs and cipher the polar opposite trait by means of subtraction. The three sets of Abilities are Bulk and Grace, Originality and Reason, and lastly Awareness and Personality.

Your first form is mutable, able to stretch and reshape to your will at the price of suffering pain and loss of blood. Most commonly you will have two arms, two legs, as well as two eyes and ears. However, this form is anything but human, the limbs are poorly matched and ill-shaped with skin of dull gray. You may freely add six traits from the following list to your form, but every trait has its price and many become useless when combined with others.

The noble women of Nandria are tall and statuesque with smoothness of skin and symmetry held as the height of beauty. Their many coloured tresses of feathers and tendrils cascade over their shoulders and dresses of silk and bridesmail.

Bloated Belly – deeply you have drank until swollen like a tumor, you must roll along the ground. But this price you have paid for the ability to spray gouts of water to extinguish the flames and the ability to persist for many a full length without water.

Bones of Brass - having worked your form around a cunningly articulated metal frame, your bones are nigh unbreakable. Indeed it is beyond the power of the flesh to tear your limbs asunder.

Broad Pinions – alas though winged, if your Bulk exceeds your Grace you cannot fly, only being able to glide down safely from great heights. As well, if they do not replace your arms, your Grace is reduced by two. But those who have sacrificed their arms for wings have no hands and thus cannot pursue a trade.

Colourful Aspect – you have a beautiful and expressive body full of color and delight. This makes you stand out in the crowd. Yet, though others may envy the attention and recognition you receive, they do not suffer from it either.

Common Husbandry - there is dirt in your very veins for you are of the lowly estate of meager agriculture versed in producing seeds within your self, nurturing their growth, and the cold brutality of the harvest.

Cumbersome Shell – bearing this bony burden is a great hardship when climbing or grappling, though the force of your foe's blows is reduced by two.

Cunning Artificer – you are an adept of the dark machinations of Nandria. Cunning clockwork and springs like coiled snakes are your livelihood. You can tap screws, repair clocks and construct mills. Others will find your rational and measured manner off-putting and even frightening.

Daring Seafarer - The voice of the oceans calls you to the tall ships, to winds and spray and foam, distant shores await your tread, to distant horizons you roam.

Drab Pelt – Your coloration is common and dull and thus you are troublesome to spot in many environs.

Dreadfully Polite - A proper upbringing has given you a grasp of acceptable behaviour. While you seldom offend anyone it is most difficult to condone the crass nature of your fellows.

Evil Root - The root of all evil is yours to command. If by the good fortune of your gentle birth, ill gotten by dastardly deeds, or the fruit of judicious thrift and respectable labour you may freely choose.

Fearsome Spines – Your back is covered with jagged peaks of bone and so you are well guarded to the rear. Those seeking to assail your hindquarters do so at their own peril.

Gaping Maw – So great is your jaw and so fearsome its jagged rows of teeth that you can swallow foes as much as half your size in a single bite. Being hindered by their Bulk reduces your Grace equally, until they break free or are properly digested.

Gifted Draughtsman - by craft and artful science you craft works of visual splendor in paint and canvas for the glory of the great and noble.

Graceful Symmetry – unlike most, you are a creature of delicate and refined tastes. Your limbs are well matched and smooth. Such rare beauty makes you an object of desire which is often as bad a blessing as one could hope for.

Heartless Dictator – there are those who call you heartless for you are a master of motivating your underlings to the greatest extent. The fine balance between the lash and the sharp rebuke is your study and your calling.

Humble Wordwright - by virtue of your education in letters and a talent for eloquent prose, you are able to compose poems, stage plays, and epics to the delight of gentle and common folk alike.

Inexhaustible Vigor - hard labour and long journeys have bestowed upon you a great supply of

endurance which renders you all but immune to weariness.

Ingrown Arm - having born arms so long, you have literally become one with yours. Thus encumbered, one of your limbs is no longer able to undertake other tasks. Others may fight as if their weapon was a part of them. You fight with a weapon that is a part of you.

Loathsome Limbs – one of your members is like a serpent, strong and flexible, but without a hand or foot. Such tentacles are wonderfully apt when climbing or grappling, but of no use at all when using tools or weapons.

Luminous Flesh - your pallid green flesh emits a faint, unwholesome light. You can see even in the darkest places but you are easily seen also.

Majestic Horns – your head is crowned with a great rack of bone and these are a fearsome and noble weapon, but they will often draw the attention of those who seek trophies.

Melodic Pursuit - by scales and measures have you learned the craft of melodies and rhapsodies that soothe the soul and awaken the heart.

Mindless Discipline – there is no force that can shake your resolve to your duty. That duty is the obedience to the orders of your betters. No matter how inane or outrageous you can obey without hesitation.

Mumbling Magician – you are, in fact, a humble student of the mystical arts, able to make small objects appear and vanish or even caper about for your amusement. With this arcane education you are able to discern magical objects and occasionally predict the future when it is particularly obvious.

Myriad Improvements- by means of focused training you may improve one of your polar opposites by three without impact on its mate.

Noble Profession – you are a journeyman soldier trained in battle and hardened with experience. You are apt in the handling of a sword, bow, and spear, but are often scorned for your rough manner and morose demeanor.

Plurality of Members – being graced with an additional arm or leg allows you to hold another weapon or move faster.

Prickly Mien - you are festooned with barbs and needles such that none would venture to grapple nor embrace of their own will.

Renowned Player - You are a child of the stage. Gifted in the crafts of narration and acting, you have the attention of the highest and the lowest stations, for a brief time before your glory fades and your name forgotten.

Savage Claws – your members are tipped as sharp as swords so that you are never unarmed. Alas they are clumsy and ill suited for handling tools and thus you fare poorly in any trade you might set your clawed hands to.

Serpentine Belly – lacking proper legs, you must creep along in the dust like a serpent. All though this

is exceedingly useful when grappling, slows you not at all, and does not hinder you when climbing, it is an unseemly embarrassment.

Sinister Trade – the failure of your parents at instilling you with proper moral fiber is best shown by your character's larcenous pursuits. You are in short, a journeyman thief and pickpocket and no decent person should welcome your presence.

Unfaltering Appetite - it is your good fortune to be possessed of such exceptional digestion that nothing disturbs your palate. Indeed, you have eaten stones and even poison without hurt.

Unwholesome Miasma – either your digestion is distressed or perhaps it is an attribute you cultivate, never the less, it may truly be said that you stink. This is a wonderful blessing in tight circumstances as others give you more space than you deserve and find you wholly undesirable for consumption.

Vile Duct - the poison in your heart manifests itself in your native weapons or your blood. Such a toxic nature has rendered you immune in kind.

Wind Singer-by means of an organ of hollow bones and inflatable sacks you are become a living organ able to produce melodic expressions to accompany your every action. Such an oranganic organ is most helpful in conjuring and compelling the zephyrs and when performing.

Worthy Trade – it is your good fortune to have been apprenticed and learned a trade. You might be a cooper or a smithy a candle maker or a wainwright, carpenter or butcher or what have you. As a journeyman you are not without a certain honor and respect, never the less, it seems unlikely to be of much help here in the darkness beneath the end.

Wretched Fins – it is a mark of your lowly station that you have these dreadful fins upon your hands and feet and though you may delight in your freedom of movement in the water, it is your fate to forever be beneath those who walk upon the earth.

The Workings of Infernal Mechanisms

In the course of your travels your mettle will be tried and tested. In most circumstances success is achieved a total on three dice no greater than the value set by the narrator to reflect the difficulty of the task. Should two or three of the dice match, the success or failure is especially auspicious and the results are either doubled or tripled in accordance with the number of dice that matched.

Of course, your mettle is being tried and so you may add one to the roll if you have an Ability greater than the number limiting success, which the Narrator indicates is of use in the task. Two may be added to the roll if the Ability's rating should be more than twice the number that must be beaten. Further, a journeyman may add three to the roll and a master may add five should the task at hand fall within the compass of their trade. Such other traits as may have merit in the act, as a drab exterior might when hiding add one point while those which are hinderance subtract the same.

In cases when you are faced with opposition, the traits of the opponents are compared to each other and not the number representing the difficulty of the act. Both parties must divide any bonus

originating from their trade between aggression and caution at the outset of the contest before the dice are tossed. With points set aside for caution being subtracted from the difficulty of the opponent's attempt.

When conflict arises those with the highest Grace act first. In the course of events a creature can move six strides on dry ground or three in water or other difficult going. Each additional leg or fin a creature is borne upon permits it to move one stride farther. Creatures with serpentine bodies and tentacles can climb and swim at their full pace.

Shooting a foe requires a roll not exceeding ten plus one if the distance is greater than ten paces, and adding one again for each doubling of said distance. Any damage inflicted is also reduced over a distance by the same amount. When striking in close quarters one must contest the Grace and skill of the foe. Those armed with a weapon inflict damage equal to half their Bulk and those without one inflict half of that upon their foe. The largest and heaviest weapons inflict damage equal to their wielder's Bulk but are slow and cumbersome, striking as though their Grace was half its usual value. The damage done is multiplied by two or three should two or three of the dice rolled to strike the target match. Upon receiving damage equal to your Bulk you are rendered senseless and upon doubling it you are dead.

One may wish to grapple their foe with a successful attack instead of inflicting harm upon them, especially if they are small and slippery, for once held they may be struck automatically. Once grappled they may attempt to break loose by undertaking a contest of Bulk, or to squirm loose in a contest of their Grace against your Bulk or your Grace as you prefer.

Upon grappling your foe, should their Bulk be less than one half of your own, it is possible to rend them limb from limb and thus reduce their Bulk and remove the limb permanently. The permanent loss of bulk shall be assessed by the Narrator by dividing their bulk by half the number of limbs your unfortunate victim originally possessed. The limb can, of course be eaten.

One tenth of your Bulk may be recovered each March and if one has opportunity for uninterrupted repose and sustenance, twice that.

Acts of the Malleable Flesh

Those creatures which have risen up upon The Expanse are gifted with the ability to shape and mould their own flesh to their thought. Doing so, allows them to obtain any trait, excepting trades and skills. These can be obtained by eating those who have learned them but only at great risk to oneself.

As the creature shapes itself it bleeds heavily. To make the change, roll against a seven, using your Personality to aid you. Should you fail this causes damage equal to your bulk multiplied by the number of dice that matched and the trait is not obtained. If you succeed you suffer damage equal to your Bulk divided by the number of dice that matched. The damage is likewise multiplied in failure.

When dining upon the flesh of those who speak and think there is danger in eating too much. For if you consume more than half of your comrade, you must win a contest of Personality or be overtaken by your dinner's mind and so possessed. If you roll three dice that match you may then absorb a learned trait your meal once knew.

You must consume a tenth portion of your Bulk each March, or lose the same amount from self

consumption.

Experience

The advantageous modifiers originating from one's trades are only fixed to three for the journeyman and six for the master as a matter of convenience. When pursuing one's trade one accumulates experience which eventually yields a greater modifier. Should you have an experience in which you must roll a value less than five to succeed, mark a tally next to the appropriate trade whether you succeed or fail. When the tally exceeds the modifier you presently receive for your trade the tally is erased and the modifier improved by a full point.

MAGIC

Of the diverse rites by which conjurers and various sorcerers of countless realms do work wonders under the dawn upon the face of The Expanse, this humble work cannot hope to expound in great detail. Never the less, it is all done by means of appealing to those spirits, which though unseen inhabit all things. These are appeased by the application of words and symbols with craft and focus of will and thusly is the desired thing done. Else than the abominable rites and fixed measures of Nandria, no wonder is worked by the hands of thinking creatures of which this is not true.

Mumbling magicians which would work wonders must then set their hands to materials of symbolic significance to that which they would do. Of the subject, hair or treasured possessions have much power. Totems and heraldic creatures depicted upon the subject's crest may also give the magician power. Materials of like type or having association with it, ashes and candle flames for fire, birds and feathers for flight, cards and children for the future. Such materials as unite the unseen eye and the mind, rare incense and larsh are beneficial in all mystical rites as is blood ever desirable to the spirits.

It is most desirable when undertaking such dire acts that the magician should have the utmost privacy and as much time as may be had. Great dangers await those which seek to rouse the spirits with haste or little consideration and study of the matter at hand. Maleficent spirits abound in great numbers and ever seek the destruction of such as might dare disturb their peace for idle ends. One must ever be mindful their own inner state for the spirits may act upon intents and desires implied within ill considered words.

The working of a wonder by ritual means requires a roll not exceeding seven on three dice. The mumbling magician's mettle in his trade and Originality apply to the chance of succeeding. Those spells affecting creatures must overcome their Personality in a contest in order to succeed. Appropriate materials increase the chance by as much as three points if the Narrator sees fit. Likewise, the chance or succeeding or failing is modified by as much as three points to reflect the amount of time and solitude available to the magician.

Should the magician's failure be Amazing then they are possessed by malign spirits and lost until circumstances and the efforts of others allow them to fully regain their faculties. Failures which are merely Exceptional provide the spirits a weaker hold upon the body, thus only possessing it for a Length. Exceptionally successful wonders are doubly efficacious even as Amazingly successful ones are threefold so.

In many times and places it is more desirable to drive out the spirits than to command them. By various incantations and rituals an area may be cleared of all such influences, Abjuring all with a lesser Personality than the magician's Originality.

Great is the knowledge of the spirits. Greater is the folly of those who trust all they are told. By means of Auguries a magician can commune with spirits in his vicinity and compel them to answer. Only in the most Amazing of auguries will the spirits reveal the whole truth of what they know for spirits are fickle and amused by whatever confusion they may sow. Though lesser efforts provide some measure of truth, this must needs be sifted with the utmost care.

Magicians which wish to Conjure up spirits from distant places must disturb them with words and signs which pass as a rumour through the ether. Those spirits thus commanded to appear often take offense at the imposition and thusly more spiteful than those resident in a given place.

Even spirits embodied in mortal forms are susceptible to Compulsions should the magician be able to overcome their Personality in a contest. Only in the most Amazing of circumstances does a Compulsion provide control which continues beyond the magician's immediate vicinity and direction. In Exceptional cases the subject remains compliant only so long as the magician is able to focus the totality of their will upon the task. Else the compulsion endures sufficiently long for the subject to complete a simple task.

ITEMS AND EQUIPMENT

Among the countless currencies of long vanished nations found in the final city, the Nandrian Ducat is the common meter of exchange. Among the folk of Charn, barter for body parts is common for these are of great use in simple rituals known even to the common slaves. Among the Estealate Legions and the folk of Avelorn an unusual condition exists in that there is no money and all goods flow through centralized bureaucracies.

Most characters will begin with ten ducats and an income of a ducat each March should they choose to work. Those with a trade multiply their income by the bonus it gives them.

Clothing and apparel

Leather Apron	3 d
Cloth Robe	6 d
Furback Robe	10 d
Cloth Chton	2 d
Cloth Toga	3 d
Short Cloth Skirt	3 d
Long Cloth Skirt	6 d
Short Leather Skirt	4 d
Long Leather Skirt	8 d
Military Uniform	5 d
Officer's Uniform	20 d

Tools and misc. goods

Carpenter's Tools	15 d
Mechanist's Tools	30 d
Surgeon's Tools	30 d

Ten Stride Rope	3 d
Ten Stride Chain	9 d
Ten Stride Cable	9 d
Manacles	12 d
Padlock	8 d

Small Cook Pot	6 d
Large Cook Pot	12 d

Oil Burning Stove	15 d
Oil Burning Lantern	9 d
Flask of Oil	1 d
Barrel of Oil	20 d

10 Candles	1 d
Candle Holder	3 d
Candle Lantern	6 d

1000 Leaflets	20 d
Broad Sheet	1 d
Printed Book	15 d
Illuminated Book	60 d

Necessities

Common Meal	1 d
Flat, 15 marches rent	15 d
Small House	100 d
Large House	250 d
Industrial Building	500 d
Fortress	5000 d

Transportation

Boat	90 d
Ship	300 d
Cart	30 d
Wagon	60 d

Weapons

Axe	6 d
Club	-
Knife	3 d

Spear	6 d
Sword	10 d
Bomb	10 d
Pistol	20 d
Musket	30 d
Grenade Launcher	30 d

Armor

Padding	5 d (Armour 1, - 1 Grace)
Mail	10 d (Armour 2, -2 Grace)
Plate	20 d (Armour 3, -4 Grace)

Mechanical Wonders of Nandria

Within the mighty factories of Nandria are built diverse wonders of clockwork and diabolical machinery. Though the workmanship is of unquestionable quality and the cost immense, such devices are delicate in their operation, being prone to disfunction.

Clockwork Armor

At the heart of this unusual suit of exceedingly heavy armour lies a perpetual motion machine, which by winding diverse gears and springs does render its wearer entirely unencumbered.

5 Armour

Clockwork Carriage

No beast of burden draws this ornate carriage as it bears the noble and the great upon their errands. The perpetual motion machine that drives it's spinning flywheels never tires but often labours slowly against a slight incline.

5 Armour, 30 damage points,

Clockwork Legionnaire

As the cipher rushed forward, its shadow crossed the lenses of a clockwork legionnaire. A prism behind the lenses in the legionnaire's head, fractured the light against an array of bimetallic springs and the subtle changes in temperature threw an array of switches. Gears swung into place, the main flywheel slowed, levers pumped the legs and the machine lurched forward. Its left arm drive wheel cranked a lever, firing a hail of crossbow bolts in the direction of the cipher. Some bolts found ciphers further on in the pack, though most missed and none struck the foremost attacker. This one leapt against the legionnaire, its pliable skin plastering against the brazen body in a futile attempt to absorb and consume. With a click and a whir, the blades mounted on the legionnaire's right arm spun to life, cleaving the faceless creature in pieces. Its flywheel slowed to a stop and the machine halted momentarily, then leapt suddenly to life again. In the legionnaire's armored chest, the perceptual motion machine at its heart began slowly winding the mainspring again.

With a grinding of gears and gleam of polished bronze and iron, march the clockwork legions to the battle fronts of Nandria's wars. Driven by a perpetual motion machine of exceedingly fine dimensions as they march and fight these wonders of Nandrian science never falter, never fear, never relent.

Bulk 12 / Grace 2
Originality 1 / Reason 5
Awareness 5 / Personality 20

Unthinking Automaton
Relentless

Fan Sword - Counts as heavily armed
Repeating Crossbow - Ranged, Heavy, 20 Shots

Incendiary Siphon - Short Ranged, Cone, Fire, 10 Shots

"In the name of the emperor of Nandria this writ certifies you a Free Mechanist for the service you have rendered. Be forever free of military and indentured service for the sake of your creations."

-- Mechanist's Writ of Liberty

Whirly Blade Launcher

Within this cart a battery of cylindrical flywheels are spun by a perpetual motion machine until their combined motion is unleashed to hurl a spinning flower of razor sharp blades into the heavens from which they descend upon the enemies of Nandria, reaping through their ranks like tornado of blood.

Ranged, Heavy, Radius, Slow Loading

BEASTS

The unspeaking beasts must be carefully nurtured and directed lest they grow to think in response to unmet needs, lest they grow to speak of harsh handling, lest they come to stand as persons in bloody rebellion. Thus do many of the roughest beasts enjoy a far more pleasant life than many humble folk.

Common Creatures

Chaser:

A pack of small carnivores can bring down large prey. Such creatures are generally built for endurance, not sprinting, and are often kept as pets.

Bulk 6 / Grace 14
Originality 2 / Reason 1
Awareness 16 / Personality 4

Savage Claws

Furback:

In the colder regions of the Expanse, there is a great demand for warm furs. This demand is usually met by growing huge creatures with huge, deformed, furry mounds on their backs. Such creatures are very valuable livestock, both for the investment in time and food involved in growing them and the end products of fur and meat.

Bulk 25 / Grace 2
Originality 1 / Reason 1
Awareness 14 / Personality 4

Grazer:

Wild animals often develop long legs and necks to facilitate their consumption of plant matter.

Bulk 20 / Grace 4
Originality 1 / Reason 1
Awareness 14 / Personality 4

Hunter:

Some carnivorous animals stalk their prey, until they can get close enough to leap upon and rend it. Smaller hunters are occasionally kept as pets for killing vermin like trash gnawers.

Bulk 10 / Grace 12
Originality 2 / Reason 1
Awareness 16 / Personality 4

Drab Pelt
Savage Claws

Lanthorn Beast

Bulk 10 / Grace 10
Originality 1 / Reason 5
Awareness 10 / Personality 5

Luminous Growths

Trash Gnawer:

A small creature can live off the leavings of larger ones. Sharp strong teeth can be used to gnaw holes in buildings and burrow into basements.

Trash gnawers of all sorts are a virtual plague in the last city. Dregs and urchins don't mind, since one or two of them make a fair if nasty meal.

Bulk 3 / Grace 18
Originality 1 / Reason 2
Awareness 15 / Personality 5

Conjured Entities

Abominations:

There are abominable horrors that are at times called by sorcerers. These can only be half seen as geometric distortion patterns in the air. These nightmarish forms attack by tearing away the reality of those they envelope, leaving only crying memories on the wind. Only the most powerful sorcerers conjure Abominations, because they are so uncontrollable and dangerous. Great stone castles that have stood a thousand lifespans have collapsed when a Abomination roamed the halls.

An Abomination does not have skills or statistics, it simply moves towards the closest living creature at a rate of one range band per turn. Walls and barriers crumble at its touch. Abominations cannot be killed or harmed by weapons, only banished.

Candle Bearers:

"Like wax were they, soft, white and smooth skinned. Tall and slender they strode among us bearing candles in their hands. Where a blade and their substance met, cracks and flakes would spread. But as the men gazed into the small flames the Candle Bearers bore, they were consumed by fire from within. Our regiment was soon lost. It is not for the living to withstand the keepers of the dead."

-- A Nandrian petty officer overheard in a coffee house

The sorcerer / priests of Charn certainly know the most about the nature of the ominous candle bearers. For, it is said that in their great temples they worship the candle bearer's inscrutable masters. Each candle bearer carries a candle of souls, which allows them to cast fire spells without a ritual, thus taking only a single action.

Bulk 12 / Grace 8
Originality 15 / Reason 10
Awareness 15 / Personality 15

Candle Bearers can inflict 10 points of fire damage on anything within ten strides of them at will.

Ciphers:

The true horror of the soulless, mindless ciphers is to gaze into their eyes and realize that they are fully aware that they once were neither.

It is no small matter of concern that the ciphers can be summoned by magic. Some suggest that they are creatures of another realm and truly alien to the Expanse. Others think, that the ciphers are simply invading other realms as well. In any case, they are grey creatures with two small black eyes and two simple arms and legs. They attack by enveloping and devouring their foes.

Bulk 10 / Grace 10
Originality 1 / Reason 1
Awareness 10 / Personality 0

Dream Shadows:

The dreams of the sleeping have some of their essence within them, which wanders the Expanse while the body lies inert. These wandering Dream Shadows can be called forth to serve a sorcerer. Mostly, Dream Shadows are sources of knowledge, for the sleeper guards his secrets less well than when waking. Dream shadows can also be used to call up illusions of places, people, and things known to the sleeper.

The conjuring of a dream shadow is treated as a simple spell casting ritual, and the resulting interrogation should be role-played.

Zephyrs:

The winds that blow above the expanse are, in reality, colonies of air spirits. The more of these Zephyrs that are drawn to an area, the windier it gets. They are particularly susceptible to suggestion in the form of songs. As such, the weather truly can be manipulated by those who have learned to sing the up the wind. In fact, birds are the greatest wind singers upon the Expanse, but only the wing singers know this.

Oddities

Eaten Ones:

Sometimes, when a powerful individual is devoured and later excreted by a stronger creature, the self of the powerful individual possesses this excrement. The Eaten ones are driven insane by hate and vengeance and attack the living at random. It is also possible for a sorcerer to conjure up a spirit into a heap of dung. This ritual is even quicker than the making of the recent dead, requiring only an item dear to the spirit called instead of a beating heart. The spirit only remains in the heap of dung for a few minutes, which is unsurprising considering the undesirable accommodations.

Angry Excrement

Bulk 2 / Grace 6

Originality as before / Reason divided by two

Awareness divided by two / Personality as before

The Dead:

There is something of the self that lingers as the body dies. If the heart is immersed in clay with certain rituals, a form will rise up in the likeness of the dead body. Unable to speak or hear, but able to see and act. The recent dead, formed of soft clay, can still change form as easily as in life. Eventually, the clay dries out and crumbles, leaving only the rotting heart. In the crypts of the ancient dead of Charn, terra cotta bodies with bones and joints of bronze have been used to create armies that still stand ready for war.

Recent Dead (Clay)

Bulk 13 / Grace 7

Originality 5 / Reason 5
Awareness 10 / Personality 10

Ancient Dead (Pottery)

Bulk 12 / Grace 8
Originality 8 / Reason 8
Awareness 5 / Personality 15
Armour 3, Bones of Brass

Living Tools

A variety of specialized creatures are grown specifically for use as tools by master husbandmen. These often incorporate brass parts (which don't rust). Particularly, brazen bones, which make the creature immune to Fracture injuries and add 1 to the Simplicity of actions requiring physical strength.

Claw Blade:

A sword-like creature with a bone spine and hollow teeth that inject poison and drain blood.

Counts as armed, Vile Duct

Builder:

These massive creatures are built around a metal skeleton with three legs and arms, to give them extra strength and stability for lifting.

Bulk 30 / Grace 1
Originality 3 / Reason 7
Awareness 5 / Personality 10
Bones of Brass

Dragger:

A beast of burden with bones of brass, designed and raised for pulling heavy loads.

Bulk 25 / Grace 2
Originality 2 / Reason 4
Awareness 8 / Personality 10
Bones of Brass

Needle Catapult:

A cluster of needles with a single eyestalk, a needle catapult perches on its master's shoulder and fires a hail of deadly darts on command. All hits inflicted by the needle deliver a paralytic poison.

Bulk 1 / Grace 18
Originality 2 / Reason 8
Awareness 15 / Personality 5
Prickly Mein, Vile Duct

THE ART OF THE MASTER

Running a role-playing game can be a real rush, but it can also be a source of endless criticism and disappointment. Among the Beautiful Creatures is not an ordinary role-playing game. Character advancement is a lesser goal in a world that is soon ending. Treasure and glory are not the primary goals. Even the common folk of the Expanse are horrific monsters. The heroes are incapable of defeating more than a few of them. Instead, the game revolves around facing and overcoming horror and despair, achieving personal goals and accomplishing tasks of social and historical significance. There are two rules that are immeasurably important to the prospective game Master.

The Most Important Rule

If at any time the Master feels a character has come to resemble a human, elf, dwarf, dragon, hobbit, well-known superhero, cartoon character or other recognizable thing which is inappropriate to the setting, that character immediately melts down into a soulless blob of protoplasm and is effectively dead. The player should then be taken out back and beaten senseless with a baseball bat.

The Next Most Important Rule

A role playing game is a game and nobody will want to play if it isn't fun. I realize that this insane and twisted setting isn't for everyone.

If it isn't fun for your group, either change it or change games. The style of game Mastering I advocate holds player enjoyment over all else.

Even so, let the dice fall where they will and find ways to pick up the pieces later. One of the great joys of playing this type of game is seeing how far from your plans the story will stray, and if you are a good Master, the story will stray a lot. If you want a plot like a railroad line, I suggest reading a book instead. Remember that the rules give power and control back to the players. Ignoring the rules may gain temporary approval from the players, but will eventually undermine their sense of importance and involvement.

The Overall Philosophy

Story rewards for story accomplishments, is my motto. It is a particularly important one in "Among the Beautiful Creatures" because the setting does not lend itself to heroic epics and epic conflicts. Instead of a steady gain in the power level of the player's Personas, the master should strive to get them to have goals and to let them achieve their goals. In my experience, this will give them a great deal of satisfaction, far beyond any artificial "leveling up" mechanism.

The Nature of the Expanse

The ground of the Expanse is covered in dirt, under which there is rock, under which is the absence of reality. In the seas, the water often gives way to absence. The mind, reeling at the shock of seeing that-which-is-not may trick the eye into seeing absence as a distorting prism of light, but in reality, the absence is true non-being. Any contact with absence causes a loss of one die roll Bulk points. The mountains, commanded to rise up by the innocents, have veins of metal in them, because that is part of the Innocent's definition of "mountain" not because the rock is layered on top of layers of metal as the Nandrians believe.

The Flora: While there are creatures which resemble grass and trees, and these are easily the most common sort of creature, it is important to remember that even the plants are shape changers. A blade of grass will grow into a mighty tree under the right conditions and even bear fruit if properly

coaxed.

Sources of Inspiration

As the Master, it is your duty to develop the characters, locations, and plot lines the player's persona will encounter. Like any writer, my own sources of inspiration are diverse. The following books, films, and music have all had an impact on Among the Beautiful creatures, there are a great many others, which are not listed, that helped me to define what it is not.

Books:

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare by Francis Bacon

Doom Patrol the Grant Morrison Issues

In the Skin of the Lion by Michael Ondaatje

Ghormenghast by Mervyn Peake

Phantasies by George MacDonald

The Book of Revelation by GOD (with John the Revelator)

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by Frank L. Baum

Films:

Moulin Rouge

Labyrinth

The Dark Crystal

The Nightmare Before Christmas

Elizabeth

Shakespeare in Love

Music:

Hayden

Beethoven

Bach

Mozart

Crash Test Dummies

Pink Floyd

The Doors

Don Henly

The Rules in Plain English

While I feel that the flowery pseudo-biblical language I've presented the rules in is necessary to the tone of "among the beautiful creatures", there is something to be said for the clarity of plain language and simple charts. The Narrator needs to keep in mind that these are a very loose and free wheeling set of rules and not a realistic simulation by any means.

Creatures

All the creatures in abc are defined by a set of six paired abilities. When creating a creature, you divide 21 points between each pair. You can do this by rolling 3d6 for one of the traits if you are so inclined.

Bulk represents your creature's musculature, fitness, and general size and is paired with Grace, which represents your creature's agility, reflexes, and general coordination.

Your creature's Originality is their artistic, musical and magical ability. It is paired with Reason, which is their ability to come to correct conclusions using the information they have available.

Lastly, Awareness defines the acuity of the creature's senses and its ability to derive information from its surroundings. This is paired with Character, which represents their self-esteem, willpower, and general bloody mindedness.

The creature is assumed to be roughly humanoid, but by selecting various features it can be made very different. Any number of traits can be chosen but only one of them can be a trade. Trades are treated exactly like the other traits because the creatures of the Expanse master the various forms they take through practice and study. Trades are essentially skills and initially provide +3 to actions they apply to.

Bloated Belly

The creature can store a lot of water in an internal bladder and spray it as a ranged attack. This will knock down targets with a lower Bulk than the creature or put out fire for a number of square strides equal to their bulk. They can also survive without water for a full length if they don't use it up fighting fires.

Bones of Brass

The creature's metal bones cannot be torn off or otherwise broken.

Broad Pinions

The creature can fly if it's Bulk isn't greater than it's Grace. Otherwise it can only glide safely from great heights. If the wings replace its arms then the creature cannot practice a trade but if they are additional limbs they cause a -2 decline in the creature's Grace.

Colourful Aspect

This creature's beautiful colouration is helpful in social actions and performances.

Common Husbandry

This trade allows the Creature to produce seeds from their own flesh and grow crops with them. One Bulk point provides enough seeds for a whole field. The seeds still need soil, light, and water to grow. The Creature can also learn to grow seeds for a plant by eating it.

Cumbersome Shell

The Creature has an armour value of three but is hindered by it in many physical tasks like distance running, climbing, and grappling.

Cunning Artificer

The Creature is skilled in building clockwork machinery. If they attain the rank of master in the service of Nandria they learn the secrets of building perpetual motion machines.

Daring Seafarer

This trade allows the creature to crew boats and sailing ships without becoming a nuisance.

Drab Pelt

This creature's dark and mottled skin is helpful when avoiding notice and hiding.

Dreadfully Polite

Having a well ingrained set of behavioural norms, is useful in formal social situations and when facing circumstances that would cause others to freeze with fear.

Evil Root

Being rich is pretty good, though it's up to the player to decide where the money came from. The Creature has a thousand Nandrian Ducats to start out with and gets another ten every March from various sources of income.

Fearsome Spines

Anyone attacking this creature from behind automatically without a weapon takes as much damage as they inflict. Attempts to Grapple are madness and inflict damage equal to the attacker's bulk.

Gaping Maw

The creature's mouth is so large that they can swallow others upto half of their Bulk. This counts as a grappling attack but also causes damage as if the creature was armed for as long as they manage to keep their victim down. While digesting the creature loses the victim's remaining Bulk from their Grace.

Gifted Draughtsman

The creature is a visual artist by trade, able to produce paintings and drawings.

Graceful Symmetry

Being beautiful is advantageous in social situations and especially for seduction.

Heartless Dictator

This trade allows the creature to improve the Personality rating of those serving under them by their bonus when giving orders or standing firm in the face of death and destruction.

Humble Wordwright

The creature is a writer and a poet by trade.

Inexhaustible Vigour

The creature is largely immune to the effects of fatigue and able to go on for almost any length of time as long as they can sleep for an equivilant period afterward.

Ingrown Arm

The Creature has melded one of their limbs with a weapon. This is helpful only when fighting with that weapon, giving a three point bonus to their attack rolls.

Loathsome Limbs

Tentacles are useful when grappling and climbing, with each giving a one point bonus. However, they cannot be used to wield weapons. Prehensile tails and noses are essentially tentacles.

Luminous Flesh

The Creature generates enough light to get by on. Of course, this hinders any attempt to hide.

Majestic Horns

Horns are a natural weapon that allows the Creature to fight while leaving their hands free. They are prone to getting tangled in the branches of trees and stuck on the lintels of doors when one isn't careful.

Melodic Pursuit

The creature is a musician by trade.

Mindless Discipline

Discipline and duty are helpful when resisting fear or resisting attempts to convince the creature to disobey orders and a hindrance when trying to disobey orders.

Mumbling Magician

The creature is a magician by trade and can work magical rituals. This is discussed in more detail in the Magic (q.v.) section.

Myriad Improvements

Allows the Creature to increase one ability by three without reducing its opposite. There is essentially a skill or trade for each ability to represent focussed exercise and training. As such the Creature's core abilities can be increased by experience like any other skill.

Prickly Mien

The Creature has needles and barbs on their body that inflict damage on those who attack them unarmed or attempt to grapple them equal to half of whatever was done by the attacker. They can also be fired by muscle contractions to make a ranged attack, that does 5 damage.

Noble Profession

The Creature is a soldier by trade and can apply their bonus when fighting with weapons.

Plurality of Members

the creature has an additional limb. Arms can be used to wield weapons and legs or fins increase their movement rate by one stride each.

Renowned Player

The creature is an actor and performer by trade.

Savage Claws

The creature's limbs end in sharp hooked claws that inflict armed damage and are helpful when climbing and a hindrance when working with tools.

Serpentine Belly

The creature has a body like a snake and no legs, this is helpful when climbing and swimming but a hindrance in social circumstances.

Sinister Trade

The creature is a thief by trade.

Unfaltering Appetite

The creature is immune to possession by sentient meals, immune to poison, and even able to swallow sharp objects without harm.

Unwholesome Miasma

The creature has bad body odour and worse gas. It takes a difficulty 10 Personality roll to stay near them for any length of time and a difficulty 7 roll to eat them.

Vile Duct

The creature has a poison duct attached to one of their natural weapons, this can be their teeth if they don't have any others. They're also immune to poison. Those wounded by the poisoned attack must make a difficulty 5 Bulk roll or be paralyzed by the poison for a full March.

Wind Singer

Growing an organic organ helps the Creature to conjure and compel wind spirits and also aids performances of the musical variety. The inflatable bladders that power the organ can also function as a floatation device.

Worthy Trade

The creature is a skilled tradesman in fabricating useful items from wood, metal, cloth, or leather.

Wretched Fins

The creature can move unimpeded in water.

Success And Failure

The narrator sets the difficulty of any actions attempted, with 10 being average. Success rolls are made on 3d6 and must be less than or equal to the difficulty. Rolling doubles indicates an exceptional success or failure and triples indicate an amazing success or failure.

The creature's trade bonus is added to the roll. If they have an appropriate trait rating that exceeds the difficulty they get a one point bonus. If their trait is more than double the difficulty the bonus is two points. Traits that are three times the difficulty add three to the roll and so forth. General traits that are helpful or hindering to the task at hand can add or subtract up to three more points.

Contests are resolved with a difficulty of ten. However, the opponent's traits are compared to each other instead of the difficulty and if the opponent's rating is greater a penalty is applied instead of a bonus. For example a creature with a Grace of 6 wrestling another with a Grace of 15 would need to roll an 8 or less to succeed but their foe would only need a 12.

Generally speaking the contestant with the highest related trait rating gets to go first but they can opt to go second. Before the dice are rolled, any bonus for an appropriate trade must be divided between applying a bonus to their own roll or a penalty to their opponent's.

Combat

Each combatant takes their action in order, from the highest Grace to the lowest. It is possible to wait, but this reduces the combatant's point in the turn sequence to the level they waited to, unless they wait through the entire turn without acting.

Movement

A creature can normally move six strides per turn in good going and three in more difficult terrain. Fins make water good going and dry land difficult. Tentacles and serpentine bodies are largely unaffected by bad going.

Close Combat

Hand to hand fighting is a contest of Grace and the Noble Profession trade. A successful roll indicates a blow has been landed and damage is applied to the target. A successful attack can be declared a grapple, which allows subsequent attacks to hit automatically. The target then has the option of squirming out of the hold on their turn with a contest of Grace or breaking free with a contest of Bulk.

Shooting

Ranged attacks have a basic difficulty of ten with a one point penalty after ten paces, and an additional penalty for each doubling of that range. The damage of the weapon is also reduced by its range penalty.

In both cases, exceptional successes double the damage inflicted and amazing successes triple it. An exceptional failure indicates that the weapon has been dropped and an amazing failure indicates it is broken.

Weapons

Weapons are treated in a very general manner. They are divided into shooting and fighting weapons. Armed attacks do damage equal to half the attacker's Bulk. Unarmed attacks do one quarter. Heavy weapons do twice the creature's full Bulk but are slow, striking at half of their wielder's Grace. It should be noted that the damage is a feature of the weapon's size and that any weapon can actually be used with a penalty or bonus to Grace equal to the difference between the weapon's Damage and the character's Bulk.

Damage

A creature is incapacitated if they take more points of damage than their Bulk. If they take twice that they are killed. Armour is represented by subtracting a fixed number of points from the damage done by attacks.

Morphing

A creature can attempt to develop any trait that isn't a trade by making a roll against a difficulty of thirteen aided by their Character. Doing so causes a damage equal to the creature's Bulk. Obviously making the change over a prolonged period of time helps to reduce the risk of dying in the attempt. If successful the damage is divided by the number of dice that match and if unsuccessful it is multiplied

by the number of dice that matched.

Eating

A character needs to eat Bulk equal to one tenth of their own rating each length, whether they eat someone else or themselves. If they eat more than half of an individual they risk possession and must win a contest of Personality to avoid it. An amazing success allows them to take on one trait of their dinner, even a trade. A creature can increase its Bulk by one if they manage to eat extra Bulk equal to their own over any period of time.

Healing

A creature recovers one tenth of its bulk each Length as long as it's getting enough to eat and rest equal to the time it's active. If it can get double the required food and rest for the full Length it recovers twice as many points of damage.

Experience

Each time a creature attempts an action where they need a 15 or more to succeed they gain one experience tally for the trade being used. When they have tallied one more learning experience than their bonus for the trade, it is increased by one and the tally is started over.

Magic

Magic is worked with rituals. The more materials and time the magician can muster, the more they can accomplish. Thus while it is relatively simple to conjure a small fire or auger minor information about an individual who is present, greater feats will take more time and materials.

The materials need to be symbolically or literally associated with the subject of the spell and it's function. For instance, a raven's skull might serve for conjuring the spirit of a person who's totem or crest was a raven, but their skull or heart would be even better. Expendable materials like incense and larsh are expensive but have a fairly broad and quantifiable effect.

Base Difficulty	7
Materials	
Symbolically Appropriate	+1d6
Personally Appropriate	
Expendable Purchases	+cost per watch
Time	+ number of watches

All spirits are immaterial and thus lack Bulk and Grace. Most spells work against spirits who have a lower Personality than the magician's originality, with exceptional and amazing successes doubling and tripling the value. When mastering multiple spirits or working with several magicians, the total Personality of both groups are applied.

Abjuration

The magician can drive spirits out of an area with a radius equal to their bonus for the length of the ritual. Nothing prevents the spirits from returning, but there is nothing to tell them the ritual has ended either.

Augury

The magician can communicate with any spirits in a given place and request information but the spirits are fickle and only tell the whole truth with an Amazing success.

Conjuration

Specific spirits can be summoned to the magician's location.

Compelling

A spirit can be forced to do as the magician commands it. This could be used to control a fire spirit or even another person.

The Secrets Of Times To Come

I've often joked that I'll never see the movie Titanic because I already know that the boat sinks. Well, as the Master, you need to realize that the Expanse will end, but it is much better that the players don't realize that it is impossible to change this. The events leading up to the final curtain are presented here briefly. I hope to eventually write about them in greater detail, but I feel it is important for the Master to know where things are heading. Ideally, your tales should begin some lengths before these events, allowing the players to become comfortable with the conventions of the setting.

Completion of the Nandrian Railroad:

With the dawn of rail travel from one end of the last city to the other, the Nandrian Empire flourishes in an economic and military boom. However, the emperor and his closest councillors have built the railroad to serve a darker purpose.

Nandrian Armies Withdraw Dawnward:

Using the mobility of the railroad, the Nandrian armies are suddenly withdrawn from the Endward front, leaving only a handful of clockwork legionnaires to hold the line. Unsupported and overwhelmed, the Dead of Charn are soon defeated by the ciphers.

Nandria Invades The Solemnity of Averno:

The full force of Nandria's armies are driven against their technological rivals towards the Dawn. The fighting is brutal and several other small nations are drawn into the fray, but Nandria manages to drive their borders almost a thousand linear lengths Dawnward.

Cipher Hordes Enter The Endless City:

The street to street fighting is savage and the resistance is disorganized, unsupported, and unsupplied as the God King of Charn Marshals his forces.

The Gods of Charn Arise:

As the endless city is overwhelmed by the ciphers, the gods in the temples come forth to do battle alongside the remaining endless dead and the living armies of Charn. A new wall is built and the ciphers are held, but nearly half of the endless city is lost.

Finnians Invade the Land:

Lead by their prophet and The Queen of Shadows, the Finnians swarm out of the seas, cutting their way through the weary Nandrian military, towards the endless city.

Abominus Rises From the Sea:

A horror arises from the oceans vacated by the Finnians. A city of black glass and crystal, inhabited by creatures that can only be seen as geometric patterns of colored light, hovers over the ocean, drawing in light and darkness alike. These creatures raid the coasts with flying ships of black glass.

Finnians Ally With Charn:

The high Magus and God King of Charn meet with the Finnian prophet and the Queen of Shadows. Their alliance turns its attention to a massive ritual that cleaves the earth and skies asunder to reveal The Gates of Tallow to the realms of the Candle Bearers. The united armies of Finnia and Charn march through the gates with the prophet at their head.

Darkness Falls Upon the Expanse:

As a great wind blows out a candle, the ritual that opened The Gates of Tallow causes the Dawn to gutter, flicker, and die out. The End swallows the expanse. The final curtain falls.