

Ask the Sky



a solo roleplaying game played by writing

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Author's note and license

This book is made to circulate.

What you may do, without asking. Play it, print it for your table, lend it, give it away, share it as it is, as much as you like, on two conditions: that nothing be sold along the way, and that my name travel with it.

What goes through me. Selling it, folding it into a paid product, publishing a reworked or translated version of it. None of that without my agreement, but the agreement can be asked for, and given: write to me at mikael.liseciel@gmail.com. What I do not offer you here, I keep.

The system itself stays free. A way of playing cannot be owned. What I keep is this book (its words, its images, its layout), never the gestures it describes. Writing your own world-book on these gestures, in words of your own, needs nobody's permission: do what you like with it, sell it if you feel like it. The appendix invites you to. A thank-you is a pleasure; it is not owed.

On the images in this edition. They are AI-generated (*see below*), and an image produced that way is, in several countries, covered by no copyright at all: I do not claim to hold more over them than the law grants me. The final illustrations, drawn by hand, will be mine for good.

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A note on AI. This book was written with an AI, and I would rather say it plainly than let you work it out: it produced text, and it produced the images – all of them.

What I did, myself: I had the idea, set the rules, played my games, corrected, played again. I read every line. I chose, discarded, rewrote, refused – refused a great deal. Nothing enters here that I did not want, and what you are reading commits me entirely. I am its **author**; the AI is its **co-writer** and its **co-illustrator**. All three words are exact, and none of them covers the others.

This is not a settled state. The pages that still sound in a voice other than mine will be **rewritten by hand**, and the AI images will **all be replaced by drawings**. This is an *ashcan* edition: what it says about the game is true, what it shows of it is provisional.

I am alert to the impact of AI, on the environment as on the trades of art. Without it, today, I would not have known how to put this book in your hands. Let us use it with measure, and with interest.

Your feedback. This edition circulates in order to be played, and what it still has to learn, it will learn from you: what started on its own, what resisted, the moment you closed the notebook. Write to me at mikael.liseciel@gmail.com. I read everything.

Enjoy the read.



0 • Introduction

seeing what it looks like

I walk down the Belle Avenue of Nandésis, the mother city of the Free Lands. Far off the roofs rise in tiers, the lower city, its inland sea, then the sky, a blazing blue, where imposing skygliders drift above the rare clouds.

I come back to my walking. I have been given an errand: a list of ingredients to gather from shop to shop. I dawdle from window to window, past hanging herbs, phials catching the daylight, the smell of hot bread a little further on; and the world goes by and brushes past me, indifferent and alive. The great avenue soon narrows into a quieter alley, cooler, strung with ivy and climbing roses. At the end of it, a small shop lit from within: Ephita, herbalist.

Inside, glass-topped tables hold a multitude of ingredients: roots, flowers, leaves, dried, fresh or still in their soil, arranged by category, by name, by effect, by color. Ephita presides behind her counter and bids me welcome. I hand her the list.

She reads. She stops. "This looks almost like a recipe for... for poisoning someone!"

*And what if it were? All at once I am no longer so sure I want
to see this errand through.*

Welcome, reader. Here you will learn to play roleplaying games alone, with a notebook, a tarot deck and a coin.

The notebook will be the written support, the memory of the game and its pace. The coin and the tarot will be its oracles, giving a direction or a clear answer. These three tools are enough: you propose, they decide. From that come the choices that cost, the hard failures, the blazing victories.

The notebook



The notebook is where the game comes to rest, and often where it is born. It holds two offices.

It is your **memory**. You keep in it what has to survive the scene: your character's **portrait** (part 11), and the **standing page**, what is left pending: the actors the world has raised, the questions left open (part 8). Without it, everything dissolves; with it, a game holds over time.

It is your **matter**. The scenes in progress are written there as they go, and that writing does not archive, it **begets**. One sentence set down calls up another; the card falls, you note it, and the fiction moves forward under your pen. It is the notebook that turns a run of draws into a story.

And above all, writing **slows you down**. This game is not won on speed: it is savored. The hand that traces is the metronome; as long as it moves at its own pace, you stay *inside* the scene instead of hovering above it. It is that slowness that makes you lose yourself in the play. And what slows you is the hand, not the fine sentence: a phrase that comes is a pleasure; a phrase you hunt is already a way out.

A notebook you love – good paper, a nib that glides – invites the gesture and makes it pre-

cious: the object is part of the pleasure. But nothing obliges you. Ask the Sky pushes hard toward the notebook; it does not demand it. A notes app, a piece of software, a voice recorder will do. What counts is not the paper: it is that something hold what has been played, and slow your hand.

Player and Game Master at once

As a solo player, you are both the author and the player, and for the game to surprise you, you must give up part of your authority. The tarot and the coin see to that: the surprise, the roundabout paths. The action and fate, for their part, give the successes and the failures. That is the game's resistance, without which you would only be inventing a story. Ask the Sky is a **role-playing game** played by writing: you interpret, you invent, you write your story. **To choose is to renounce** – and that is the whole game.

What you play

There is no character sheet, no numbers to spread around, no catalogue of actions to choose yours from. And nothing grows in power: your character will never be stronger than he is today. He will be more committed, which is another thing. No draw consults what he is worth; the world answers what you attempt, not what you are.

What the game does ask of you, it asks on every page: to **propose**. The two outcomes you hold out to the coin before you flip it, you are the one who invents them. What a card means tonight, nobody will hand you. What you put at stake when fate comes in, what you give up in order to take something else: you again. Chance does not supply the matter. It decides between yours, and it will not be swayed.

So know where you are setting your feet. Anyone who comes looking for a sheet to fill in and a curve that climbs will close this book disappointed, and rightly so. Anyone who loves to write is already at home.

Your matter is the world

Your store of ideas is the **world you play in**. A world of your own, or a known setting that you love. When you look for a possible, draw on that

world, or if need be on an encyclopedia of that world. And feel what your character **desires**: where he wants to go, what he would attempt, what he flees. Desire is your compass when you hesitate.

And if you have no setting in mind, that is not a wall: let the draws **reveal** the world piece by piece. This game can bring a world into being as readily as explore one.

Sketch your “I”

Before you draw your first card, give yourself an *I*, someone through whose eyes you will look at the world. Nothing heavy: a **name**, a **sentence** that says who he is, a **desire** that sets him moving. Three lines in the notebook, and there you are, somebody. This is not the portrait, it is the first sketch: you will play first, you will discover him by making him act. And then, the day the urge comes to set him down for real (his past, the way the suits live in him, what he wants underneath), **part 11** is waiting for you. One only knows oneself well after having lived a little.

WATCHING A SCENE PLAYED: THE REUNION



I come into the scene through the **opening**, three cards laid down before me. A Three of Cups: a happy reunion. A Six of Swords: a passage, a gentle mourning. And, between the two, a major: **Justice**. I could take a minor and play a tender scene, but it is Justice that is alive. It does not tint the scene, it **bends** it: accounts will have to be rendered, a defense made, and someone will have to decide. I choose it, I give up the other two – and in taking it, I know that **fate** comes in. A sentence comes to me:

Late morning, early spring. A café by a canal, in the South of the city. Today I am meeting Sybia, my oldest friend, the one whose bond has held through everything. But something tells me nothing will be light.

I frame:

The sun is already beating down. A table backed against a small canal, in the winding alleys of the South. The water runs with a soothing steadiness.

The card taken, I **probe** it with the coin: two poles I stretch before I toss. *Does she come to me at peace, or already weighed down by what she knows?* Heads, she arrives light; tails, she carries a weight. **Tails**.

I see her coming from inside the room. “Sybia!” – my breath catches. We throw ourselves into each other’s arms. “Nera... I can’t believe we’ve found each other again.” We look at each other properly. Time has passed, the lines have shaped her face, but it is the same gaze, sure and motherly. And beneath the joy, that gravity she does not hide.

Justice is already weighing: the sweetness will not hold.

She looks away. “Nera, I would have wanted good news. You have been struck off from the sisterhood. They are saying things that... even I cannot deny. Glad to see you, and broken to know.”

There are the accounts to be rendered, what Justice was demanding. And what I want, right there, more than anything: **for her to believe me**, and to clear my name. That is my desire. Fate has come in, and a single question divides it: can I do anything? Yes. I can speak. So I **face** it.

FACING FATE

I set the **wager** before turning a single card, in two clauses: *if I carry it, she believes me; if the world carries it, our friendship comes to an end*. Under fate, what is lost only fate can open again – I know it as I wager, and I wager all the same.

Then I describe what I attempt. Not a line of dialogue: a movement, in one block.

I put it all down, in no order: what was done to me, what I did. She listens, motionless. Then I hear myself plead, argue, cut, and the more I reason, the deeper I sink; her gaze

hardens on what she has already heard elsewhere. So I stop. "Don't leave like this. Not you." My voice breaks, and I do not move.

Two cards now: one for me, one for the world. The stronger wins, and on a tie, the world does. For me comes a **major: The Star**, bare hope, the way out that did not exist a second before. For the world, the **Eight of Pentacles**: Earth, the slow work of a reputation, everything they have patiently repeated about me. A major wins over any minor: I carry it. And carrying it with a major is a **fate's flare** – the success that overflows what you were attempting.

A memory rises – the canal of our childhood, the vows we made then – and I offer it to her whole. Something gives way in her eyes. Three hours pass. A silence. Then: "Nera, my sister... I am shaken. And glad to have you back for good."

The flare overflows, and that is just what happens: I only asked to be believed, and I get wider than my question. My desire moves forward by a long stride: clearing my name stops being a dream and becomes a road. My hands are still shaking when she takes me back into her arms: the body lets go of what the will was holding.

And my victory does not stay sealed off: in believing me, Sybia has set herself moving. She will go and demand accounts in my name, stir what others would rather leave sleeping. I note it in the notebook: a friend of yesterday become an ally who is searching, and already a thread I have not finished pulling.

Only the route, in the end: I opened the scene on three cards, kept the one that troubled me, let fate in, and I only carried it by stopping protecting myself. The draw, the action, fate, the wager, the notebook: all of it is waiting for you, in detail, in the parts that follow.



out of a promise or a name given; otherwise you bring it into being by a gesture, **raising a stirring**, before the first line, inside a card, and then you let it work on its own while your character lives his life.

The gesture is in **part 10**, along with the tools it asks for. You will do it when you start your first real game, not for the exercises in this book, which play out scene by scene.

Starting a game

You have an *I*. What you lack is a world that moves without him.

A game always carries **at least one stake**: something already under way somewhere, that others are pushing on, and that will end up catching up with your character without his having asked for anything. Sometimes it is born on its own,



1 • The Coin

letting the world decide

*On the deck of my skyglider, a coin in the hollow of my palm.
Two roads open beneath me, the city or the open sky, and I
cannot bring myself to choose. So I toss it, and I watch the
world decide in my place: not out of idleness, but because
some truths are better received than invented.*

The oracle of closed questions

The coin is the simplest of oracles. It answers a closed question, a question with two ends, and it answers only for the world, never for you. It never says *I succeed* or *I fail*; it says only *the world is this way, or it is otherwise*.

The convention is simple: **heads**, the first pole, the favorable one; **tails**, the second, the unfavorable one. One question, one toss, one truth. Then you carry on, one truth after another, until you see the real take shape.

Two habits keep it honest. First, always **two poles**. Two possible worlds, never a *yes* and an empty space. Second, **never the same question twice** for the same situation: asking again until you pry loose the *yes* you were hoping for is no longer consulting an oracle, it is badgering the world.

All the richness lies upstream, in what you ask, not in the coin, which only decides. An answer too smooth, or too curt, is not re-asked: it is **probed**. You ask *why so easily, what it will cost*, rather than reaching for something else. And if the scene sags, do not put the coin down for that: start again from what is already there and carry on, question after question, until something catches.

The longest apprenticeship in solo play is not reading the answers; it is asking questions that give something back. For a closed question, the test fits in one sentence.

A good question is one whose two answers both create world, and whose answer changes more than one thing.

Is the café on a great avenue, or at the far end of an alley? passes twice over: both answers give you a café, and each one settles the foot traffic, the noise, who can see me walk in. *Is there anyone interesting here?* fails twice over: one answer in two gives you nothing, and it is not your character asking it, it is you.

Everything that follows comes from there: how to set a question (*the two poles, the single pole*), then what to turn it on.

◇ Ask with your character's eyes

Facing the coin, the author is lost: they can ask *anything*, and so they know nothing to ask. That is the blank page. Climb back down into your character. He does not see everything: he is somewhere, he does not know, he fears, he wants. And whoever does not know always knows what he would like to know. Do not look for the *interesting* question; ask what, in his place, blind, you would be burning to find out: is it in me, or outside? here, or elsewhere? in the city, or in my guild? You are not creating the world, you are **guessing** it. And guessing, when you are blind, is never invented out of nothing: it is desired.

The two poles – let tails live as much as heads

This is a rule, not an ornament: the one place in the game where you invent the matter yourself before handing it to chance. You set out two worlds, the coin picks one.

A coin can only say yes or no, but nothing obliges the no to be flat. When a question inspires you, set down the **possible** first: what you would like to see rise up on heads. Then, if you feel like it, stretch its **far opposite** for tails, not the dry negation, but a reversal that invents in its turn.

“Is my scepter humming?” On heads, the possible: *it hums, intense, magic is close at hand*. On tails, the far opposite: *it rings hollow, dispossessed, as though emptied of all magic*.

The opposite is not “the scepter is not humming”; that gives you nothing. It is a reversal that opens: if it can be emptied, then something was able to empty it. Tails creates as much as heads. And because both truths existed *before* the toss, you can no longer write toward the one you were hoping for.

None of this is a chore. Sometimes you only want to try a possible and see what falls: toss, then, and read what comes up. But the moment a question weighs, give it its two poles. That is what keeps you from cheating with yourself.

The single pole – for moving fast

Stretching two worlds takes a moment of invention, and not every question is worth it. Most often you simply ask *is there...*, you toss, and you read the no as the reverse of the yes.

Often the opposite works itself out. *Is the café packed?* No: it is empty, and an empty café plays just as well as a full one. *Is he alive?* Alive or dead, both give you a scene. *Is the shop open?* No, and a closed door can be questioned in its turn: since when, why, who has the key. The single pole is then only a two-pole contracted: the reverse went without saying, you had no need to write it.

On a detail, do not trouble yourself. *Is there a canal running along this street? Is the sky cloudless?* A no blocks nothing: the street still exists, and so does the sky. Ask, take what falls, move on. It is free matter.

On what counts, know what the no will cost you. *Is there a plant shop in this town?* The yes sets you moving; the no leaves you with the work on your hands: where, then? who else sells them? Nothing forbids it, and it is sometimes the right calculation when you want to move fast. But feel the weight coming: on something you need, a single pole can hand you back a question instead of a world. When that happens, return to the two poles: *is it on my way, or must I go down and find it in the lower port?* Both answers will give you something.

The single pole saves time; it does not excuse you from the rule. The two poles are not there to slow you down, they are there to keep you from writing toward the answer you are hoping for. The shortcut holds for what you do not care about. The moment an answer would **suit** you, stretch them.

What to ask a coin

The test is set, and so are the two ways of stretching a question. What remains is what to turn them on: with a coin, two families almost always give something back.

Populate – who is there, and how he is

Does the server come of his own accord, or must he be hailed? Is he jovial, or rushed and curt? Is the table at the back taken? Two poles each time, and **ask without counting**: none of this undoes your plans, and all of it folds in within a second. A presence is not always someone: a

door bolted from the inside populates as well as a woman in black.

A place, along four axes

For a place, four axes work everywhere and almost always suffice. **Exposure**: is it in plain sight, or set apart? **Density**: crowded, or deserted? **Welcome**: am I expected here, tolerated here, ignored here? **Age**: new, or worn by hands? Four answers, and the place exists.

A café. In plain sight, or set apart? On a busy avenue, so I will be seen here. Crowded, or deserted? Almost empty at this hour, so I will be heard here. Am I expected, or ignored? The owner does not look up: so I am nobody here. New, or worn? The tables are marked, the zinc hollowed – so this is a place of regulars, and I am not one of them. Four coins, and I already know how to play the scene.

The deck of a starship. In plain sight, or set apart? Set apart, right at the stern, so nobody comes through. Crowded, or deserted? Three men on watch, so never alone. Am I expected, or ignored? They greet me by rank: so I have a place here, and duties. New, or worn? The consoles are new, the smell of paint still there – so this vessel has no history, and that ought to worry me. The same four questions, another world.

Play your first questions

Take your coin. Before you even know where you are going, put two or three closed questions to the world, and watch it take shape, heads after tails.

Climb down into your character: ask what, in his place, you are burning to know: *am I really alone here?* When a question weighs, stretch it its two poles before you toss. And do not stop at the answer that fell: ask straight away *who, why so easily, what it will cost*, and start again one notch further on.



2 • The tarot

asking, and reading what falls

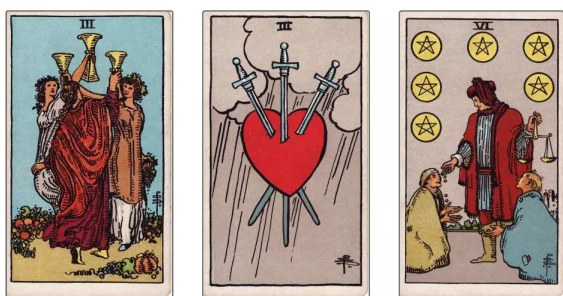
I lay three cards on the upturned crate that serves me as a table. Three possible roads, and I will take only one. I look at them a long while, the way you look at three strangers on a quay before choosing which one to speak to – then I let the other two go without me.

The coin is the oracle of closed questions; the tarot is the oracle of open ones, those whose possible answers you do not know in advance.

Which tarot?

For this you use a **tarot deck**, all 78 cards shuffled together, Major and Minor Arcana as one.

Which one? Any will do, but an **illustrated deck** – one where every minor stages a scene, Rider-Waite-Smith fashion – makes *free reading* easier: the picture whispers leads to you.



a toast

the pierced heart

the giving hand

Three minors from an illustrated deck — the picture speaks before the meaning does.

No deck? A drawing app will serve, provided it shuffles all 78 properly. What each card sets off, part 4 will tell you.

Never handled a tarot? No cause for worry: no prior knowledge is needed to play. If you would like a footing all the same (what the suits are, the numbers, the majors, how to hold a card), the appendix *“The tarot, in brief”* gives it to you in two pages.

The gesture before anything else

Before the rules, there is the pleasure of the touch. Feel the deck in your hands; shuffle it, cut it without hurrying. And when a card falls, do not pounce on what it means: set it down before you, and take the time to look at it. These are not rules; nothing obliges you. It is the slowness that makes you forget yourself: the tarot is not consulted, it is let fall, and listened to.

Reading a card

A tarot card is read **freely**: it has no fixed meaning, it has the meaning the moment calls for. Tradition lends one to each of them all the same, and nothing forbids you to lean on that: your deck’s booklet, an app, or this book’s appendices, *“The tarot, in brief”* for the footing and *“The 78, card by card”* for what each card shows. Take it as a starting point, never as an answer: it is the moment that decides, not the catalogue.

If you are stuck, take the most literal reading and move on. And if nothing comes, do not search *inside the card*, search in your **world** and in what your character **desires**: the matter is almost always there. (*What each suit carries, in detail: part 4.*)

- ♦ **A card stops being generic.** With play, the Six of Cups will no longer say “nostalgia”: it will say *that* canal, *that* friend found again, the scene where it first fell. You have nothing to do for this, only read each card through what it has already been in your game, rather than starting again from the book’s meaning. Little by little, your tarot becomes the notebook of your world, written in pictures: in the end, nobody but you could read it – and that is the sign that you have really played.

Major Arcana, Minor Arcana

The 78 cards fall into two families. The **Minor Arcana**, the four suits from Ace to King, speak the everyday: what you come across, what you do, what happens. The **Major Arcana** (the twenty-two named ones, The Moon, The Tower, The World) speak fate. Ask the Sky keeps that division as it is: a minor is read level with the world, a major never falls for nothing. (*This book will most often say **major** and **minor**, and nothing more: it is the short word of someone with the deck in hand.*) (*What each of them weighs: part 4.*)



the everyday

A minor — it is read level with the world.

World or character?

When you question, with the coin or by drawing a card for an answer, ask yourself first **who you are questioning**: the world, or your character? Some things depend only on the outside. *Is there a guard at that door?* The world answers, you draw. Others depend only on you. *Do I notice it? do I dare?* That is for your character to **play**, not for chance to settle.

The trap is handing the coin or a card a question that was yours. “*Am I being followed?*” belongs to the world: ask. “*Do I realize it?*” belongs to you: decide, and own it. Confusing the two means letting chance play in your place the very thing you came to play.

The trap is not doing it once. There is no draw police: on the evening you do not feel like settling it, hand it over, and play from the answer: **deciding not to decide is still a decision**. What empties a game is making a habit of it and no longer wanting anything yourself. Where exactly to measure it: part 12.

What to ask a card

The coin decides between two worlds you set out yourself (*part 1*); a card, for its part, brings matter you had not foreseen. The test therefore changes with the instrument, and it hangs on a single property: **a card cannot say no**. Never ask it *whether* there is something — ask *what*.

That leaves two families of questions, where the coin served two others. One adds to the world without undoing anything; the other can cost you.

Widen — what exists just beyond the frame
What great building dominates the view from here? What can be heard from the room? What can be seen through the window? You **draw a card**, and you question it: it gives you matter, and you make of it a monument, a rumor, a smoke on the horizon. This is the family that gives a place an outside, and it undoes nothing, so ask without counting.



through the window

The outside of a place, drawn from within.

What can be seen through the window? **Six of Pentacles**: *the giving hand, and the one held out. I make of it a line along the wall, up to a low door: something is being handed out, and there will not be enough for everyone. The line is mine, entirely; what is not mine is having had to put charity into a district where I meant to set down a market.*

And the weather, always. It is the most profitable question in the game, and it can never answer “nothing.” Driving rain, hard sun, low mist, a rising wind: the answer changes at a stroke the light, the noise, who is outside and what can be done there. Make a habit of it. You can always ask about the weather, and it is never wasted.

Hook — what is off, what calls

This one can bring your plan down, and that is why it costs: weigh it before you draw. **There is always something**. So never ask *whether* there is something, ask *what*. “Is something off?” opens a door that, one time in two, gives onto nothing — and onto a flat scene. “**What is off, here?**” never closes: turn your head, linger on a detail, and **draw a card**. The same goes when you are looking for a thread, a clue, the trace of a stake: ask where it is hiding, never whether it exists. This is not indulgence: what you find can

cost, mislead, be only a beginning. The world does not refuse you matter; it makes you pay for it.



what is off

The card that turns your head.

What is off, here? **Two of Swords**: the blindfolded eyes, what is held at a distance. I choose: nobody in the room looks toward the door at the back. Not once, not by accident. Nothing obliged me to that particular door – the card only asked that something, here, refuse to be seen.

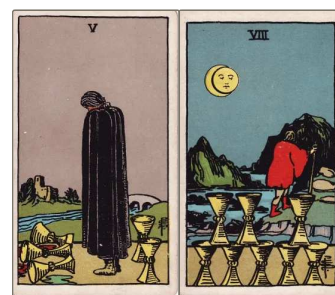
Probe – staying with the answer that fell

Four families, counting the coin's: populate, widen, hook – and **probe**. This last one calls up no new matter, and it is often worth more than the other three.

To probe is to *stay with the answer that has already fallen*. Why so easily? What will it cost? What is he not saying? What does that teach me about him? Most often, without drawing anything at all: you ask for nothing new, you exhaust what has just happened.

When you want a footing, the coin almost always suffices. *Does he know? Is he lying? Is this the first time?* Two ends, one answer, and you have not left the matter you were probing.

You can also draw to shore it up, but then you narrow. That is where people go wrong: a card drawn on a broad question does not probe, it **replaces**. It brings new matter that covers over the matter you meant to deepen, and off you go elsewhere, with a fine image and an abandoned thread. For a card to probe, the question must nail it to what is already there.



the face

why

On the left the card being probed, on the right the detail that answers.

*The **Five of Cups** gave me a sad face: a woman at the counter, and behind her something overturned. I could stop there. I would rather narrow: why is she sad? And I draw for that question alone. **Eight of Cups**: going away, leaving behind what one can no longer look at. She has left home, and not yesterday. The second card opened no new scene: it stayed **stuck** to the first, and served only to detail it.*

This is the family people forget, and it is almost always the one that is missing. The beginner's reflex is to pile up: an answer, a sentence, another question. A scene made of ten answers barely touched is flat; a scene made of three answers probed to the bottom is full. Before reaching for the deck, ask yourself whether the last card has really given everything.

Lay down three cards

Take your deck, shuffle it, cut it. Draw a card, set it down before you, and say aloud what it gives you: a mood, a face, an object, the weather. One sentence is enough. Then a second, then a third.

Do not try to link them: they are not telling anything yet, and that is not their job. And do not take back the one that gives nothing: look at it longer. That is all the tarot asks, and it is what is learned the most slowly – staying in front of the image a little beyond your appetite for it.



3 • The scene

framing, playing, closing

I come before Edgar, prince of the black city of Épinure.

Slumped on his throne, he was not expecting me. He is carelessly eating a grape whose juice spurts onto his tunic, a cup of wine in his other hand.

The road has hardened me. I have my demands now, prince or no prince. I make my voice carry:

“My prince. I have traveled two months, crossed the plains and the marshes of the Empty East. Here I am.” I let my gaze run over the small assembly, then I go on: “I hope the news you bring me is good for our Guild.”

The scene — the unit of play

The scene is the raw playing space: where you play, where you write your adventure. It is the true unit of the game: you open in it, you question in it, you act in it.

The three beats

FRAME
PLAY
CLOSE

Frame — lay the opening. The setting fits in one line (*where, who, why now*), set down before the cards if it came to you, after them if it did not (*see below*). Every scene reopens on a **whole deck**: before you draw, shuffle all 78 again.

Play — in the present, in the first person. You question, you draw, you write what comes.

Close — when the scene has given you what it had to give, close it. Sum up what was said or played, and carry to the standing page what has to survive. The cards on the table go back into the deck. What is left open — a question you do not settle, a threat rising, an unsatisfied desire — becomes the **thread** that will pull you toward the next scene (part 8).

The opening — entering a scene

The opening is the gesture by which every scene begins, and it is not optional: it is what frames the moment and lets the world speak before you do. You draw **three cards**, you lay them down before you, you **keep one**, you **give up the other two**. The card kept gives the tone and the matter of the moment; the other two go for good. It is the only draw where choosing **costs** you: elsewhere, what you do not take does not go away.

That choice is the beating heart of the game: **to choose is to renounce**. Keep the one that surprises you, the one whose destination you cannot see yet, never the one that reassures, and do not go back on the two that leave. This is not a regret: it is what makes your entrance real.

And the opening is the **only door of fate**. Often a **major** slips in among the three. Keeping it is letting fate in (part 6): the moment stops being ordinary, and something is going to be played

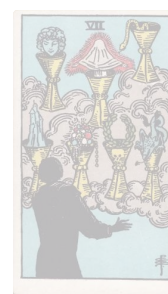
for good. Leaving it costs nothing. It goes without a trace, and you will see it again another day. Take it or leave it: there, at the opening, is the whole weight of your hand. Keep a minor, and the scene stays level with the world. There is therefore no catalogue of scenes to choose from before you sit down: they all begin the same way, and it is what you keep that decides whether this one will stay ordinary.



kept



left



left

The opening — one kept, two gone for good.

Setting the space

A scene needs a somewhere. It comes in two ways, and the order is not indifferent: **what is set down first commands**.

If the place is already there, because you knew where you were going or the image came on its own while you were shuffling, set it down in a sentence before you draw. The opening will come and tint it: it will say what happens there, it will not move it.

If nothing comes, do not insist: open first, and let the card push aside what you would have set down by default. It will rarely give you a finished place, rather a color, a mood, someone. That is not a lack. **What the card gives is not a place: it is a condition the place will have to meet**. A bitterness? Look for where that air is breathed. A face? Ask where one meets that person, at that hour. An object? Look at what surrounds it.

And do not draw a second time because the first did not give enough. A poor card is a constraint, not a failed draw: you come down from it, you do not reload.

When two places are worth as much as each other, the coin decides, but make the two poles out of **who you are**, never out of what would look pretty. An arcanist studying at Nandésis is at the academy, or in town: there are your two

poles, and they come from the character, not from your tired imagination. The plausible is a matter, not a caution.

The rest – the hour, the weather, whether you are alone – is not filled in order, like a form. Let the coin settle what **changes what you are going to do**; the rest, set it down and move on. You do not play to find out what happens – you play to **be somewhere**.

A DESCENT, PLAYED

Nera. I sat down wanting to play, without knowing where. No image comes, so I do not insist: I open.

Three cards. I keep the **Eight of Cups**. And... nothing. Not a place, not a scene: a mood. Going away. Leaving something behind without looking at it.



going away



left



left

The opening of the descent — a mood, not a place.

My first urge is to draw another card and get something better. I do not. The card did not fail: it set a condition, and it is up to me to come down from it. Not *which place appeals to me*, but: **where is that air breathed?** A place one leaves. A place made for leaving.

That much I know without drawing: a struck-off skyfarer does not linger where she was known. But two places come to me, and they are not worth the same: tails, the mooring jetty before dawn; heads, the rented room I am emptying. **Heads.**

The room smells of cold and metal. My things have fitted in one bag for three days now; this is the third time I have closed it. On the table, the key I have to give back, and beside it, the letter I have not reopened.

I chose that setting, as always: the card invents nothing. But left alone, I would have opened aboard, in the sky, out of habit – that is where I am at ease. The Eight closed that door on me: it had to be a place one leaves. The letter on the

table is mine, and it would not be there without the card.



Mid-scene – draw a card

Once the scene is open, you no longer draw to frame: you draw **one card**, when you need one. (A second three-card gesture exists, to populate a place in one stroke; it costs nothing and opens no fate – part 7.) It **embodies matter** in the world and in the scene, and it is for you to say what it is: an emotion, a person, a place, an event, a thought. You lay it on the table, in view, and there it stays: the cards drawn accumulate for the length of the scene, a memory of what you have summoned, until the scene ends or fate closes it.

One simple gesture to get started: **the word first**. Before describing anything, note the card and what it stirs in you, in a sentence or two or three words: “*Ace of Pentacles: an opportunity beginning*”, “*Nine of Swords: a gnawing dread*”. This is not a settled definition, it is a starting point: once the sense is set down, the image comes on its own, and you know what to lean on to imagine the rest.



the gnawing dread

A card, mid-scene — the word first, the image after.

Two ways to use it, as you like. You can **put an open question** (*who is there? what is behind the door?*) and read the card as its answer. Or you can draw **without asking anything**, and welcome what comes: no question beforehand, you interpret the card once it has fallen. The first way searches, the second receives.

A major can fall here too. Mid-scene, it **does not bring fate in**: fate has only the door of the opening. But it is not read like a minor: it **weighs**.

Take it for a presence of fate, a sign, something great or ancient breaking the surface, and play it large, without its putting fate on your hands for all that.



it weighs

A major mid-scene — a presence of fate, not fate itself.

One discipline remains, the same everywhere: do not draw for nothing. A card has to change what you are going to **do**, not only what you are going to **describe**. Otherwise, decide for yourself and move on. Receiving matter is a real use; furnishing the void is not.

Raising a detail — deciding it concerns you

You already know what to ask, and whom: the ordinary of a place (a café has tables, a lamp, a server), **you set down yourself**; a small closed truth, the **coin** settles (*part 1*); a **card** hands you what you would not have set down (*part 2*). One gesture remains that belongs to the scene alone. Stop the moment a detail really catches you, and **make it rise**: decide that it concerns you. That table where voices are being raised was not the neighbors: it is the man you are looking for, or a friend you had stopped expecting. You have just invented it — yes, and that is the gesture itself. The draw gave matter; it is you who decide that it looks at you. Staging is not cheating: a bond drawn out of almost nothing does not weaken the game, it is what opens it.

One limit, all the same. If what you raise settles what you are looking for, do not ask “*is it really him?*”, stretch **two poles** (*part 1*). *That table where voices are being raised: the man I am hunting, or the friend I had stopped expecting?* The coin decides between two worlds, and neither is empty. Remember that a raised detail can cost, mislead, be only a beginning.

◇ **Draw, or decide?** This is the most useful division in the game — you have just made it without anyone explaining it — and two rules are enough to hold it.

Draw what you would be afraid to decide alone. Wherever you are nursing a secret wish about the outcome, chance protects you from yourself. The rest, decide it and move on: interpreting a card is already deciding, and it is not cheating.

Draw without counting what adds, weigh what replaces. A woman in black passing your table **adds**: it folds in within a second, it disturbs nothing. “*Is my adversary here?*” **replaces**: your plan falls, and you have to rebuild. It is not the number of draws that tires you, it is the number of times you have to re-make your plans.

(The detail, and where the hand learns to measure: part 12.)

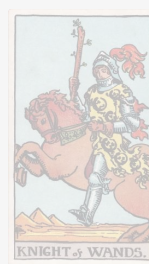
AN OPENING PLAYED — THE DEPARTURE

A scene of pure calm: you open on three cards, you set down a world, you draw a card for matter, two questions to the coin. Nothing tips over: no fate, nothing put at stake.

I **open**: three cards. The Two of Cups (a bond one leaves), the Knight of Wands (an ardor, a headlong departure), and the **Six of Swords** (a melancholy passage toward an elsewhere, leaving for a better one is not sure of reaching). All three speak of departure, each in its own way, but it is the Six of Swords that touches me. I keep it; I let the other two go. The whole scene will be tinted by it.



the bond



the ardor



kept

The opening of the departure — all three spoke of departure.

I set down an hour, a season:

*An evening at dusk, the end of a hot summer.
The crickets are still singing, here and there.*

Then a place:

I am in Nandésis, the world-city of the Free Lands. A boat is waiting for me at Mélaïde.

(I read the card at its most literal: a boat, a crossing – the Six of Swords, almost as it is.)

Do I have a ferryman with me? – coin: no.

The boat waits for me, alone. The weak eddies make its old wood creak.

The scene whispers a question I do not want to resolve yet: *why, and what am I fleeing?* I keep it as a **wait**. But something is rising, and here I want matter: I **draw a card**, without asking anything, for what I am leaving behind. The **Ten of Pentacles**: a house, an inheritance, a whole foundation. I lay it on the table, beside the Six of Swords. *I gave too much to that house; I lost myself in it.* It has the taste of a betrayal.

Once in the boat, I cast off and let the weak current carry me. Rocks come out of the water, misshapen in the dusk. But the moon is already shining, ready to guide me across.

Is anyone waiting for me, at the other end? – coin: yes. I invent a name:

I hope Morgan is ready to receive me.



Play your first scene

Sit down somewhere quiet, the notebook open. Set down a place and an hour in one sentence: *where are you, at what moment?* If nothing comes, do not look for it: draw first, and the place will come from the card.

Then open: draw your **three** first cards, lay them down before you, and take your time before choosing. Which is the most *alive*, the one that opens the widest threshold? Keep it, let the other two go without regret. Then make it speak (for whom, where, in what color), without settling everything at a stroke: let it soak into the place, the hour, the air you are breathing. And if a major has slipped in among the three, leave it for tonight: keep a minor.

Then carry on. One small closed question to the coin (*is the weather fine? am I alone?*), and you write what comes: one sentence, no more. Then another question, another answer, another sentence. Your cards are drawn one at a time, as your needs come.

Do not look for a plot. Let the place fill up until something intrigues you – then follow it. That is all; the rest is learned by playing.

The world is starting to live.

The chapter – a shape, not a clock

The **chapter** is a convenience of storytelling, not a working part. It is a stretch of adventure that rises, peaks and falls away, but **no mechanism depends on it**: nothing to declare, no obligatory scene, no landing to engrave. Most often, you do not decide it in advance: you **recognize it afterward**.

The length

A chapter fits in a few scenes: three or four, often; sometimes a single one, sometimes many. There is no right count: there is the moment when you feel that one thing has closed and another is beginning. This game does not advance by the chapter: it advances by **desire** (part 11) and by the **scene**. The chapter is only the way you will cut up your story, later, on rereading it.

Close your first chapter

You now have a few scenes behind you. Do not look for a rule to stop at: reread what you have played, and see whether a cape has been rounded, in the events or in your character. If so, your first chapter has just closed, on its own. Give it a title, if you like – now that it has said its name.



4 • The everyday

reading the cards

The quay at Mélaïde, at the slack hour. Phil and I, legs hanging over the edge, watching who goes by.

“You see, there are people whose matter you know at first glance. Falna, over there, bringing in her flour: she burns with the desire to do better than yesterday. Orace, my necrolic professor, speaks of the dead with the tenderness of still water. And the old ferryman, the one who moors down below – he has the edge of air.”

“And me?” asks Phil.

“You, my brother, are patient and serene like the earth that lets the seeds germinate.”

The **everyday** is what plays out when you have kept a **minor** at the opening. Fate has not come in; the scene stays level with the world. This is where almost the whole game happens, and it is made of the matter of the four suits.

A scene of the everyday

Do not trust the word: the everyday is not the small. A scene can be **descriptive** and nothing else (a market at the slack hour, rain on a bridge, a tea going cold), and have no office but to put you somewhere. It can be **light**: two questions, three sentences, and you close it.

It can also be **dense, tangled, harsh**, with a negotiation turning sour, a farewell, a betrayal being prepared under the table. Nothing prevents it, and nothing there will be any less strong for it. What makes the everyday is not the calm of what happens in it: it is that **nothing is put at stake in it**. You risk nothing there that you have named in advance; fate has not sat down across from you.

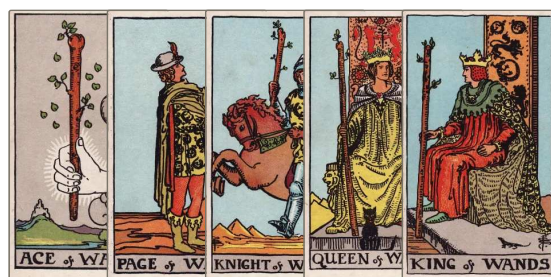
So play them as they come – spare when the day is spare, full when it overflows. Some of your best pages will come out of a scene in which nothing was happening.

The four suits – the matter

You have already drawn cards: you have therefore met the suits without anyone explaining them. Here they are for real: not what they *mean* (that, you read freely), but what **matter** they are made of. This matter will serve you twice: to read a card, and to say *how* you act (part 5).



Wands – Fire. *What cannot wait.* Living wood, cut: the wand was a tree, it grows and it burns, sap and ash. The heat of a forge, the smell of smoke on a garment the next day, the second when the match catches. Fire has neither memory nor patience. It is wholly in the instant in which it consumes. In a body: the pulse rising, the hand that goes before the decision. When a Wand falls, something is pushing; it wants, it leaves, it overflows. There is no lukewarm Wand. In its light, the one who kindles others; in its shadow, the one who burns everything, his own people included.

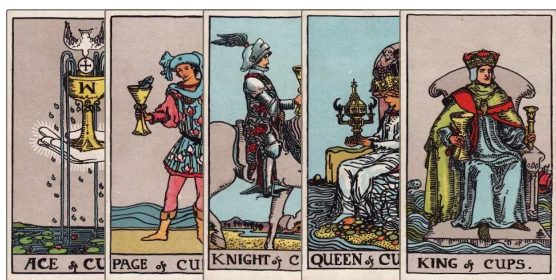


Wands — the Ace, then the Page, the Knight, the Queen and the King.



Cups – Water. *What takes the shape of whatever holds it.* Rain on a window, the weight of a full cup, mist, the glass of water set down by the bed

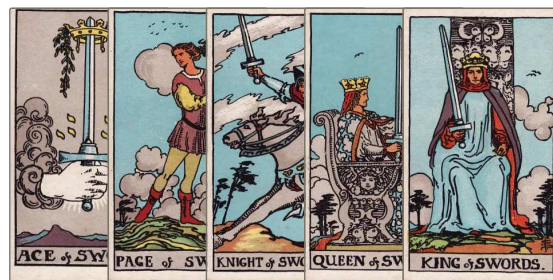
at night. Water has no shape of its own: it is the cup that gives it one; a feeling with nobody to address it to is nothing, it is the bond that gives it form. And water turns: tide, rain, spring, it always comes back. What a Cup brings is rarely new: it is what rises again. In a body: the throat tightening, the warmth in the chest. It binds, or it drowns, and water finds the crack, and wears down the stone, not at a stroke, over time. In its light, the heart that unites and heals; in its shadow, the love that imprisons, the cup one drowns in.



Cups — the same run.



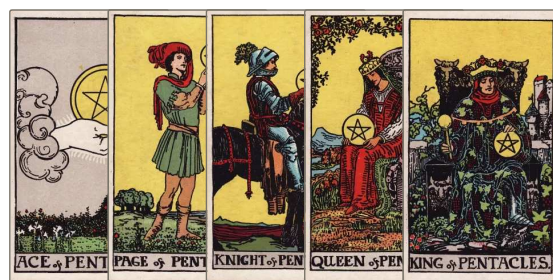
Swords – Air. *The line that separates.* Steel, cold, a winter sky, breath made visible in freezing air, the sound of a blade being drawn. The sword is forged air: the edge is a line, and a line does only one thing: put on one side what was mingled. No duration: the instant of the cut, a before and an after. In a body: the sharp intake of breath, clarity, and the sleepless night. A Sword names, and to name is to separate: the true from the false, but also people from one another. The truth that frees and the word that wounds are the same card. In its light, the clear-sighted judge; in its shadow, intelligence in the service of a lie.



Swords — the same run.



Pentacles – Earth. *What remains.* Stone, bread, the earth after rain, coins at the bottom of a pocket, a wooden handle worn by use. The pentacle is matter that people have worked and to which they have given a price: earth that is worth something. Seasons, years. Nothing that Earth carries arrives quickly, everything in it has already been arriving for a long time. In a body: tiredness, hunger, the warmth of a roof. It weighs and it holds. It is the ground beneath the other three: without it, Fire has nothing to burn, Water nowhere to run, Air nothing to separate. In its light, the builder, the foundation; in its shadow, the miser, the earth that smothers.



Pentacles — the same run.

- ◇ Each suit answers to a moment. **Fire**, the **present**: it is happening now, it will not wait. **Water**, the **return**: it is not new, it is what rises again. **Air**, the **point**: a before, an after, the instant of the cut. **Earth**, the **duration**: it had already been under way for a long time. Faced with a mute card, ask which time it answers to: the answer is often there before the meaning is.

And the fifth – fate. The four suits are matter; the major is not. It has no element, no time, no body. It is what **crosses** the four: the way out that did not exist a second before, the door in the bare wall. Where Fire burns and Earth holds, the major **befalls**: it is no longer the color of the world speaking, it is what weighs on it. (*What it does, just below.*)

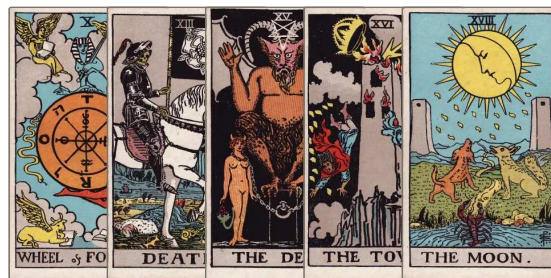
When a major falls in the everyday



A major can fall mid-scene, on an ordinary draw. Where a minor answers a question then fades, a major does not answer: it **names**. A force, a face that will return, a turning point that commits what follows. The minor tints and passes; the major anchors and remains.

So it is not questioned in the same way. Not “*what is happening?*”, but “*who is there, and what do they want?*”, for every major carries a **desire**. Do not look for its meaning in a table: pull it toward a **wanting**. The Tower wants to bring down what stands on falsehood; Death wants to carry off what has to end. If the fiction asks for it, it can crystallize into someone. A face, an actor you enter on the **standing page** (parts 7 and 8). Outside the opening, it **does not bring fate in**: fate has only that one door (part 3). It weighs,

that is all. Play it large, without its putting fate on your hands. (*What it does when you take it at the opening, and what fate commits: part 6.*)



Five majors. Ask each of them what it wants.

Draws for and draws against

Sometimes you know the thing is good, or that it is bad, and you only do not know which one: what this place offers, what a sleepless night is paid for with. Then draw a card and read it in that direction, **for** or **against**. It no longer says *whether*, it says *what*. And when the image resists – a Sun you have to make sinister – do not refuse it: take it **from behind**. The light that exposes, that blinds, that leaves nowhere to hide. The Sun is intact; it is you who took it by the other edge. If your deck gives every card a **reversed meaning** (most Rider-Waite-Smiths do), it will serve you here, and only here: it is a shortcut to the other slope of the image. Nothing is played upright or reversed on the table for all that: the card falls as it falls, and it is your reading, and it alone, that turns it over.

One condition, and it is not negotiable: **the side must be true before the draw**. If you still do not know which way the thing leans, this is not that draw, it is the coin or an action. Giving yourself the favorable side would be deciding the outcome and pretending to draw it.

I come out of the charterer's office, my cargo stowed and his signature at the foot of the manifest. What this arrangement is going to cost me, I do not yet know; that it will cost me, that I know already.

The side is therefore true before the card falls – **against**. What remains is to know what.



against

Temperance, taken by the other edge.

Temperance – two cups, and the water passing from one to the other without a drop falling; one foot in the river, one foot on the bank. Upright: measure, patience, what mixes well and does not spill. I do not refuse the image, I take it **from behind**: what mixes **dilutes**. The charterer has tied my freight to his. My name sits next to his on the manifest, his routes become mine, and nothing I carry is quite mine any more. No threat, no debt: lukewarmness. Nothing will be taken from me, I will be mixed in – a little on every voyage, until the day I can no longer say what belongs to me.

Note what the major does here that a minor would not have done: it does not only say what it costs, it **names**: a slow mixing has entered this life, and it will stay in it. It opens no trial for all that: fate passes only through the opening. It weighs, and it goes to the standing page.

◇ **The world that weighs, the world that turns**

When the world **weighs**, it is vibrant, powerful: play large, with the crash, the storm, the tipping point, and wager what is dearest to you. When it **turns**, it is carnal, precious: play beautiful, with the sensation of the everyday, the emotion of the instant, what will not come again. A minor is read in one breath, but what it touches is great: it does not decorate the world, it gives it life.



5 • Acting on the world

attempting, and paying the passage

The rope is too high, the lookout too close. Between my move and the drop there is only what I am worth tonight against what the world has decided to set in my way. One card for me, one for it. We shall see which of us bends.

Jumping from one roof to the next, forcing a door or picking it, standing your ground, searching a room, setting a machine down in the wind: the moment your character comes up against the world and the outcome is not written, there is a draw, an **action**, and the world answers.

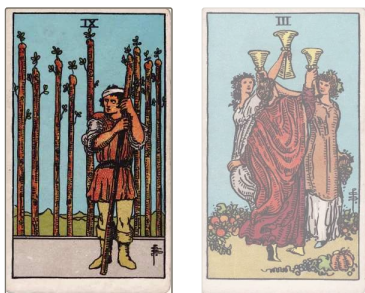
If you know it will go through, it goes through. This is your character, he knows how, and making him prove it is a waste of time. And if the failure produces nothing but a “no,” do not draw: you would have paid two cards to bring the scene to a halt.

Resolving an action – one card against the world

The moment you attempt something uncertain, you **resolve an action**. You draw **two cards**: on the left, you; on the right, the world, and the **stronger wins**. What remains is knowing which. It is the game’s only scale, and it fits in five lines.

The ranks – who wins

- **Between two minors, the higher number wins:** a Nine crushes a Three. The court cards rise above the Ten: Page, Knight, Queen, King.



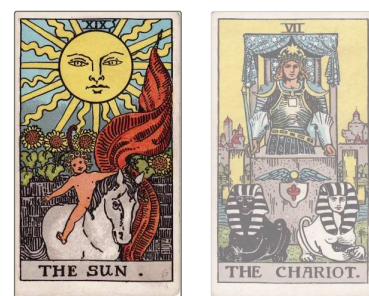
The Nine wins over the Three.

- **But the Ace beats the King – and nothing else.** It is a wheel: every other minor beats it. The spark, the nothing that overturns everything and is trampled by all the rest.



The Ace beats the King.

- **A major wins over any minor:** fate weighs more than the everyday. **Between two majors, the higher wins,** in the order of the tarot, from The Fool to The World.



The higher of the two: XIX against VII.

- **But The Fool takes The World – and nothing else.** A wheel, like the Ace: it yields to every other major. The Journey begins with one and ends with the other – the one who leaves with nothing passes straight through the one who has everything.



The Fool takes The World.

- **On a tie, the world wins.** It gives nothing away: two Queens fallen face to face, and it is the world’s.



you the world
At equal rank, the world wins.

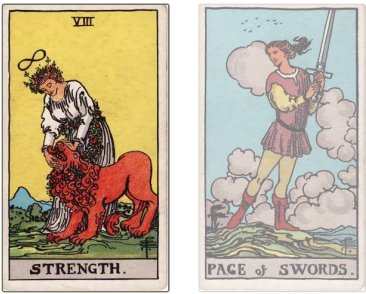
They hold wherever two cards meet: here, and under fate (*part 6*).

Four outcomes – and it is the **major** that makes them overflow.

THE TWO CARDS	THE OUTCOME
You win	Victory
The world wins — the tie included	Defeat
You win, and it is a major	Fate's flare — a success that overflows, the outcome nothing announced
The world wins, and it is a major	The crushing — it did not go around you, it went over you

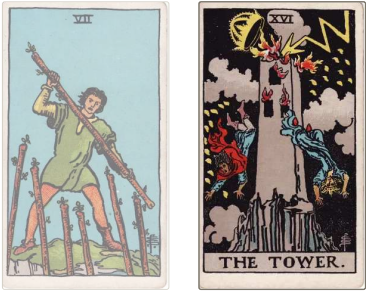
Only the **winner's** card makes the outcome overflow: a major in the loser's hand buys nothing back; fate does not offset. For the fiction, on the other hand, **both cards always speak**. Yours says what you attempted and from what height you fall; the world's says what stopped you.

The flare and the crushing – when fate overflows
The flare overflows what you were attempting. Tell it one of two ways: either your character was greater than his usual (a fine move, a sentence he did not know he had), or it is the world that opened wider than the question you asked. Either way, give more than the action was aiming at – and know that this surplus commits you to what you had not foreseen.



you the world
A fate's flare — Nera yields nothing to the stevedore's sharp words: with a quiet strength, she reminds him what his order owes the skyfarers. She will pass without paying a coin.

The crushing is not a fault. Do not play it as a failure of skill, you did nothing wrong; play it as the reminder that fate, sometimes, is not negotiated. Lower your head, and watch what is beyond you go past.



you the world
A crushing — Regiord casts a limp arrow, a streak of burning light; with a backhand of his scepter, his rival sends it into the old chandelier hanging over the arcanist. The crash covers everything.

The two resemble each other more than they oppose each other: in one case as in the other, what happens is not to your measure. It is the same hand that gives and that crushes, and it does not know you.

◆ **The suit says the how.**
You did not choose your move from a menu: the card gives it to you. The **suit of your card** (*part 4*) – or the **major** – tells *how* you acted. And **the world's card is read too**: it describes free of charge *how it resisted you*. It beats you by Swords? It got you by cunning or by words. By Pentacles? By inertia, by mass, by the weight of things.

AN ACTION PLAYED – THE STOLEN PAGE

One action, two cards, and the suit speaks on both sides. An ordinary defeat, which you take.

Regiord, in the corridors of the school whose door he slammed behind him. A Mistress Arcanist let him in on one condition: no brawling inside the grounds.

I walk toward the White Crab dormitory, mechanical, decided.

In front of the dormitory, Malias is talking with three students. He sees me and pulls out his staff by reflex.

Three students, a drawn staff: I could make an affair of it. But “no brawling” – the order comes back to me. A quick action, and never mind the rest.

I try to snatch the sheet sticking out of his pocket, fast, on an **impulse**. I draw: for me, the **Five of Wands**; for the world, the **Nine of Pentacles**. The world wins, and it wins by **Pentacles**: mass, inertia, numbers.



you



the world

Defeat — and by Pentacles.

A student trips me; I stumble, my hand closing on nothing.

Keep at it from another angle? If I miss again, they stare, they recognize me – Regiord, the banished one, caught stealing inside the grounds. Not for one sheet of paper.

I swallow my rage, I step back, collar up. The page escapes me – never mind. Better an empty hand than a face given away.

Nothing comes to an end: fate had not come in, this is a lost action. I take it, simply. The recoil, one sentence from the body:

The iron taste of swallowed anger, the fists unclenching one by one. Another time, the page. Another time.



An action is played once



Two cards, the stronger wins, and you obey. What you wanted slips away from you, the scene goes on differently, and you do not **attempt the same thing again in the same conditions**: another angle, another moment, another price.

What dies is the means – never the thing. Nothing runs out, there is always a way left. That is the whole threat: not that the thing be refused you, but that you get it by a harder road.

THREE DOORS, PLAYED – WHAT DIES, WHAT WAITS

A single thing wanted, several roads to reach it. Two actions lost one after the other, no fate: nothing comes to an end, and yet something closes.

Nera, at the starport of Nandésis. Her skyglider is lying at the bottom of a ravine; she needs another one before the end of the week.

The fine door first – buying one. I have almost enough, and the dealer on the south quay has an old single-seater on its cradle. I draw: my card against the world's.



me



the world

Six of Cups against Page of Pentacles — the world is higher.

I name my price. The dealer does not even laugh: he shows me the door, and he speaks loudly enough for the whole quay. “That one

wanted to buy a skyglider off me with a skyfarer's coin."

What has just died is the **buying** – not the skyglider. It is still there, on its cradle, thirty paces from me. And I will not come back tomorrow with the same offer and the same smile: an action is played once. The price, for its part, has gone up by a notch I will never pay in coin: now they know, on that quay, what I do not have.

Second door: borrowing one. Kamalia owes me a night of storm and two silences; hers is sleeping in the shed.



Eight of Wands against Nine of Swords — lost, again.

Kamalia does not deny her debt. She looks at her hands. "Not that one, Nera. Not right now. Ask me for something else." She will not say what is holding her; it shows well enough.

Two doors, two deaths, and the skyglider has not moved an inch. What is left is what I was keeping so as not to think about it: hiring on aboard someone else's, under another name, and waiting for the port of call where they will leave me alone at the helm.

There is what the third loss would have taken from me. Not the skyglider: the **right to get it cleanly**. I close the scene there, on the quay, without having pushed that door. It will wait for me; that is exactly what worries me.

♦

Chaining actions



A confrontation does not always hold in a single move. The flight through the storm, the siege of a door, the duel that rebounds: play several actions one after the other, each resolved like the first: two cards, the stronger wins, you read, and you move on.

Nothing binds them together. No count to keep, no column to compare at the end, no shared wager: each action is read for itself, and what it has just said decides the next one. The world beat you with the Swords? Then the next one is no longer played on that ground: you have learned something, and that is the cadence. It is not a count that closes a confrontation: it is the fiction, when it has nothing left to say.

Only know when to stop. If you need one more card to obtain what the scene has already given, you are holding it open by hand. And remember what holds everywhere: **an action is played once**. It is never the same thing you attempt again: it is another angle, another moment, another price.

Play your first action

Have your character attempt something uncertain: haggling in a shop, piloting a machine, jumping from one roof to another. Draw **two cards** (you on the left, the world on the right), see who wins, then read the **suits**: yours says *how* you acted, the world's *how* it resisted. If it beats you, take it, and go on otherwise.

What fate will add

Everything you have just read holds everywhere: the action does not change its mechanism according to whether a major opened it: it changes its **price**. When fate takes a hand, the defeat is not erased: what you had put in **comes to an end**, and **what fate closes, only fate can open**. None of that means anything here, where you risk only the fiction. (*Part 6.*)



6 • Fate

wagering, and living with it

“Nera, be careful, you are crossing a band of turbulence...”

The radio crackles, then goes quiet: contact with Kamalia is lost.

And all at once, the calm. Too calm. My skyglider is struggling to hold – not a breath left to carry it.

I know this moment. It is the one that comes before the storm.

I straighten up, I start the emergency controls: I fold the wings back, I ready the stern sail. The first squalls are already arriving, the sky is turning black. I can feel it. I am going to have to fight to live.

There comes a moment when feeling your way is no longer enough, when a card of **fate** tempts you, and you take it. The **Major Arcanum** chosen brings fate in; and fate is crossed in two ways: by **facing** it, or by **enduring** it. Not always a fight: sometimes a bond to hold, a threshold to cross, a thing to be earned. It is there, and only there, that your character can truly change.

Reading the opening – how many doors are left

At the opening, before you even read your three cards, count the majors. This is not a rule, it is a reflex: at a glance, you will know how many exits you have left.

- **None.** The everyday has all the room: nobody is asking anything of you, the scene is yours.
- **One.** Fate is winking at you: *tonight, you could play something large*. You have two cards left to go on your way.
- **Two.** It sits down at your table: something is happening, and you have only to reach out. One card, from now on, not to see it.
- **Three.** No exit left: the card you keep will be a major, and all that remains is to choose which.

The world is no longer asking you *whether*; it is asking what you are going to do with it.



Three majors at the opening — The Empress, The Hanged Man, Judgement.

What fate changes

Not the ceiling: a Ten of Swords outside fate will ruin a night for you just as well as a major. What it changes is the **floor**, and what **remains**. Under fate, nothing starts small: the everyday climbs

if it wants to, fate starts large already. And what happens stays – you carry off what you wanted, or you lose for good what you had put in.

And something opens that nothing else opens. Outside fate, the world answers in the terms you set for it; under fate, it can answer with **the outcome that did not exist**. That is why one takes a major: not because it **serves** something, but because the scene that follows will resemble no other.

Nothing ever obliges you, and that is precisely what makes it tempting. But taking the card **commits** you: you do not withdraw along the way. You declare what you are risking, and you go to the end. Look at it for a moment; if nothing comes to you to put opposite it (not a bond, not an object, not a place), let it go: fate is not played empty-handed.

Reading the major – a desire against a resistance



The major you take is no harder to *read* than any other – it is hard to *strike*. The card gives you the desire, yours, somebody else's (*actors: part 7*), or that of a force with no face; the scene has to supply the resistance.

A benevolent card does not tighten the obstacle, and yet fate will always draw something resistant out of it. The card **names** a thing, fate puts it **under tension**, and what varies is the **relation** between that thing and you. Four, most often:

- **The card becomes a threat.** What it names turns around and bears down on you. *Strength*: a military barque bears down on your skyglider. *The Chariot*: you went too

fast, and your own momentum carries you further than you meant to go.

- **The card stays good, and you are badly placed.** The thing is beautiful, and that is exactly the problem. *The Sun*: a child-king adored by his people bars your way; he is genuinely loved, and there is the obstacle. *The Empress*: you are received with such generosity that you can no longer leave without wounding. *Temperance*: somebody steps in to calm you, when the anger is precisely what is keeping you standing.
- **The card stays good, and it is in danger.** What is worth saving is what threatens to be lost. *The Star*: the mentor who always believed in you has disappeared. *The Empress*: the house that fed you will not last the winter.
- **A card already dark is read as it is.** *The Devil*, *The Tower*: no need to turn it over. Turning it would soften it, and fate does not soften. Take it as it comes.

◇ A card is read at several depths.



The Lovers — VI, the card of bonds.

The Lovers are not only a choice of the heart: they are bonds, commitments, what you said yes to, at the surface of the scene (two people close to you barring your road, a brother being arrested) or at the bottom of a life (somebody is living fully the existence you set aside, and he has done nothing wrong; or the bond itself turns around, an old relationship that comes back, and holds it against you). A card that inspires nothing in you is almost always read too narrowly: look for what it **names**, not what it illustrates.

Two forms – can you act?



Fate has come in. Before you wager, look at what you have just written, and ask the one question that divides: **can your character do something that changes the outcome?**

If he can, you **face** it. Regiord watches the barque cast off: he can shout, run, cut through the crowd. It may not be enough, but there is something he can do, and that is all we ask.

If he cannot, you **endure** it. Nera is sitting across from a clan mother who has already decided, already negotiated, already arranged everything. Nothing she says will change what is about to fall.

It is not the gravity of the moment that decides this: an enormous instant may call for nothing at all, and a small one may offer a move. Your own wish does decide: of course it does, you are the one writing the scene. But it decides **beforehand**: nothing stops you from raising a world where one can act, or a world where one no longer can. Once the scene is set down, your wish has no say. You read what you have just written, and either there is something to do or there is not. That is all the order protects: describe first what is falling on you, look for what he can do afterward. To decide **after** having seen the wager is to stop reading the scene at all – it is taking the handiest hand.

The card gives you the apparition; the form says what it leaves you: facing puts you **on your feet**, enduring leaves you **seated**.

THE SUN, PLAYED TWICE



One and the same card, two forms. You watch what the scene lets you do before you know what you are risking.

Nera is in flight. At the opening, **The Sun**: vitality, clarity, pride. I take it, and I read it as an actor: the *Dead Sun*, flagship barque of the western empire, the one that hunts pirates and makes the pride of the decks.



The Sun, read as an actor — the Dead Sun.

She comes out of the white, straight into my line, and she has me.

What follows I no longer choose: I read it in what I have just written.

If I can act. My hands are still on the controls.

The belly turrets swing around, without a word on the radio. I am a threat, and nothing else. I have three seconds left and a skyglider that turns better than an armored barque.

I face it: two cards, the stronger wins. I carry it.

A clean dodge, dry, of the kind one does not do twice. The route I take to flee her throws me onto a city unknown to any register, perched on a peak of floating rock.

It was there before me, and I am the first to see it. Nobody can now make it so that I did not.

If I cannot. My hands are already empty.

Fighters draw level with me and order me to put in. They bring me down. On the deck, two men are taking my skyglider apart while I am led to General Armand, who has my name in front of him and has not looked up.

I have nothing left to do: not to flee, not to plead — what was to be decided was decided while I came down the ladder. I **endure**. I stretch two worlds beneath The Sun, and I toss.

He closes the file. "You were in the line of an imperial barque. That is all I shall write." My name enters the military registers, in one line that says nothing — and that does not come off.

That name will never again be neutral.



The wager — what fate can take

Before you turn the cards or toss the coin, name what is being played, in **two clauses**. One says what fate **takes**. The other says what happens if it does not take it: sometimes nothing more than getting past the cape, sometimes a door that opens and did not exist.

Name it **at the last moment**, never as you open the scene. You do not yet know what you are committing when you push a door; it is the scene that teaches you. Two clauses, not one more, and nothing is at stake until they are said.

What you wager must be a thing. Not a mood, not an unease, not a weariness: a thing fate can take and keep closed: a bond, a place, an access, an object that counts, a desire, someone. The test asks no judgment of you: **does the thing belong on one of your two pages?** The one that holds what is pending, the **standing page** (*part 8*), and the one that says who you are, the **portrait** (*part 11*). You may not be keeping them yet; the question still stands, and it answers itself.

A ration of food is on neither, and never will be. A family pendant is on the portrait. A skyfarer's case too. Name it **concrete**: *the skyglider*, not "my freedom"; *what Sybia thinks of me*, not "my reputation": a vague wager does not come to an end, it gets negotiated. You can go as far as putting your life into it; then losing means dying — or leaving the world for good.

And if nothing comes to you to put in, do not take the major: fate is not played empty-handed.

What fate takes

What fate closes, only fate can open.

Outside fate, Nera damages her skyglider; under fate, she loses it. Outside fate, she falls out with Sybia; under fate, the friendship comes to an end. The thing is not damaged: it **closes**, and fate alone holds the key.

No good idea opens it again, no scene of the everyday, no well-played action. It will take a **major taken at the opening**, in circumstances you do not yet have, and a **wager that names it**.

And fate never gives the thing back as it was – it opens the **road** again. Nera will not get her case back: she will become a skyfarer again, or she will not. What returns returns *other*.

That is what gives a major its price. A door closed by fate is a reason to take another one: **note it on the standing page**, one line, or nothing will say it is locked.

The other slope settles in the same way: what you tear loose under fate will not be taken back from you, but winning makes nothing whole. What you obtain **commits** you. The world has seen you do it, and it will hold you to be what you have become.

In both cases, leave a **recoil**: one sentence in which the body reacts before the thought.

Facing fate

One single action. **Two cards**, you against the world, the stronger wins. Nothing to count, nothing to lay out vertically, no draw to fall back on. What the card says, it says once (*cf. “An action is played once,” part 5*).

The **flare** and the **crushing** color the outcome without weighing anything more: a flare says you carried it from where nobody was looking, a crushing that the thing went over you before you saw it coming.

Mind what the wager aims at: what is fleeting is the **event**, not what it leaves you. What you do does not last; its consequences do.

FACING, PLAYED – THE BARQUE THAT DOES NOT PASS AGAIN

There is something he can do, and it is not enough. You do not know a fate by what it costs — you know it by the fact that it does not pass again.

*Regiord, on the upper jetty of the starport.
Parno's barque is casting off.*

I open: three cards. Among them, **The Chariot:** the impulse, the prow already turned, the one who leaves and waits for nobody. I take it. Fate comes in.

I describe first, I wager afterward. Can I act?

The mooring lines drop one by one. Parno is on the after deck, his back turned, his collar up. Thirty paces, two hundred people between him and me, and the engine rising. He has not seen me. In ten seconds he can no longer see me.

Yes: I can shout, run, cut through the crowd. It may not be enough – it is something. I **face** it, and I wager in two clauses: *if the world carries it, my place with Parno comes to an end, and that man will teach me nothing. If I carry it, he sees me, and he takes me aboard.*

A place: it has been on the standing page for three chapters. I know exactly what I lose.

Two cards. For me the **Eight of Wands:** what flies, the message loosed. For the world, the **Queen of Swords:** the line that separates, cold, sovereign. The world carries it, by Air.



you



the world

Facing — one single action, and he is gone.

I scream his name. The wind of the thrusters takes it and lays it flat; two hundred voices cover the rest. The barque pulls away from the jetty, clean, without a hesitation. Nobody, aboard, has turned around.

Nothing Regiord owns has been destroyed: he keeps his rod, his name, his grudges. What fate took is that place – and it will not give it back because I am patient or deserving. Parno did not refuse: he did not know. There will be

no scene where things get explained. The so-magma I may still learn; but not from him, and not like this. By what road, I have no idea.

The recoil: the throat raw from having shouted for nothing, and the hands that do not know what to hold.

On the standing page, one line, and it is worth a key: Parno's barque – closed by fate.



Enduring fate

Here, your character has nothing to play. So it is the world that speaks, and you listen.

Read the major at length, before anything else.

Then stretch **two worlds** beneath it, both to its measure. One where fate **takes**: that one writes itself. The other is not its handy opposite: it can take something else, take less, or open a way out you will not know how to carry. Enduring never gives a full gift.

The two worlds must be able to come out of **that card and no other**. If your two poles would hold just as well beneath any major, you have not read the card: you have tossed a coin.

And let the second **give** as much as the first (*part 1*). The test is not comfort (neither of the two worlds may be wholly comfortable), it is **matter**. *It goes through or it breaks* is not a toss: on one side everything collapses, on the other nothing happens, and there is only one scene left on the table. Ask yourself what you would have to write, tomorrow, if that one fell. If the answer is *not much*, it is not a world.

Then toss, and write what falls. No flare and no crushing here: they are born of a comparison, and there is nothing to compare – the coin does not overflow, it decides.

You are not being subjected to anything. You wrote the two worlds, and you chose not to decide which one arrives.

ENDURING, PLAYED – BEHIND THE DOOR

Nothing to do: someone else is speaking, and the door is shut. All the matter is in the card: it gives the two worlds, and it alone.

Nera, in the corridor of the sisterhood's house. Sybia went in an hour ago to speak in her name. The door has not come back out.

I open: three cards. Among them, **The Hanged Man**: suspension, the one who has been turned over and does not come down, the one who sees from another angle because he has stopped deciding. I take it.



The Hanged Man — XII, what stays in the air.

Can I act? I look honestly. Going in is losing in advance; knocking is going in. I was told to wait in the corridor, and everything that counts is being said behind three fingers of wood. No: there is nothing. I **endure**.

I read the card again before doing anything at all. The Hanged Man does not say *failure*: it says **what stays in the air**, and what one gains by staying there. My two worlds have to come out of that.

I wager, in two clauses: *what fate takes is the verdict itself: they will not decide, not tonight and not ever, and I shall stay struck off without any session having said so. What it leaves if it does not take it: they do not decide either, but from where I am, head down, I shall finally see who put the file together – and I shall not be able to un-know it.*

Neither of the two suits me: one takes my verdict, the other would take someone. I toss. **Tails.**

The door opens onto backs, not faces. Sybia comes out last, and she does not look at me straight away. "They would not vote. The file stays open." A clerk goes by behind her with the register under her arm, and I see the page: my name, and nothing across from it. No condemnation. No date. Nothing.

What I have lost is not the sisterhood – it is the possibility of ever being cleanly let out of it. There will be no session to wait for. My striking-off will not be lifted because I have been patient or beyond reproach: that door is locked, and it will take another major, another evening, for it to open otherwise.

The recoil: fingers looking for the strap of a case I no longer have.

On the standing page: *the sisterhood's verdict – closed by fate*. And one line more, that I cannot explain to myself yet: Sybia did not look at me on her way out.



Play your first fate

The evening a major tempts you at the opening, and you take it, you are there. Describe first what falls on you. Then ask whether he can act: if your character can do something that changes the outcome, name your wager in two clauses and **face** it: two cards, once. If he cannot, read the major at length, stretch two worlds beneath it that it alone could give, and **endure**: the coin will say which one arrives. In both cases, a recoil, and one line on the standing page for what fate has closed. It is here, and nowhere else, that your character risks becoming other.



7 • The world around

raising those who live in it

I walk into this overfull café. The noise irritates me at once: the mugs clinking, the loud talk, the music underneath... Then, looking more closely, I catch sight of Morno at the table on the right. I am afraid he will see me, I turn back toward the door. Too late: he waves both arms and calls out my name at the top of his voice.

Your character is not the center of the world – only the one through whom you look at it. The world turns without him: actors want, threads pull taut, questions ripen in the shade.

Here is who lives in it: how you populate it, who deserves to be kept, what you write about those ones.

Populating the world – backdrop or actor

Not everything you come across goes on the standing page. The innkeeper, the guard you dodge, the alley crossed once: **Backdrop**: pure color, forgettable. What will **come back** and weigh over time: an **actor**. A single test decides: **what does it want?** If you can lend it a desire, it is an actor: enter it on the standing page. Otherwise, it is Backdrop.

An actor is a **presence that wants**, not an extra, but someone straining toward a goal.

A BACKDROP THAT RISES, PLAYED

For months Regiord has frequented the starport bar: three words at the counter, never more, before boarding a friend's starship. The barman? Backdrop. A face behind glasses. Today, the friend does not come.

I wait. An hour, two. Vael's freighter shows on no screen in the hall. The barman has served me again without a word, as always – I have never really looked at him. Nothing to draw, nothing to ask: I write what comes.

He wipes a glass, at length, then says without raising his eyes: "You are waiting for your friend. The freighter man." – "Yes. He was to take me along." He puts the glass away. "Left this morning, early." A pause. "If you wait until the end of my shift – I run the same route. My starship is small, but she flies. I will drop you off."

I read my sentence back, and an idea comes to me about this barman: it comes from no draw, it comes from what I have just written. And there, I see him. Really. This man is not a wall: he has a route of his own, a starship, a destination – mine, into the bargain. The test falls of its own accord: *what does it want?* This one wants something. A desire can be lent to

him. I anchor him, not for what he is, for what he **wants**:

Astore (his name, which I will learn later) – calm, entire, the look of someone who has already arrived somewhere – brought us together without my seeing it coming · wants: to carry every voyage through to its end, to close the circles · what is a man that quiet doing behind a counter?

I look at him differently now. The counter, the glasses, the evening shift: a disguise – I do not yet know for what. "I will wait," I say. He smiles, barely. "I know."

An actor does not always arrive with a fanfare – sometimes he has been pouring your drinks for months, waiting for you to raise your eyes.



The surroundings – three points of interest

Populating one card at a time is usually enough. But there is a broader gesture, for the moments when you want a place to teem all at once: **look at the surroundings**. Draw **three cards**, lay them side by side (three living things within arm's reach), and read them quickly, without dwelling: a figure at the counter, a book forgotten on a table, a door that is never opened. Then choose **one**, the one that calls you, and play it now.

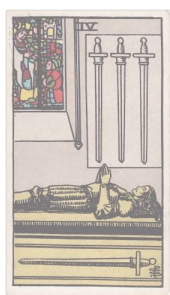
The other two do not go away. That is the whole difference with the **opening**, where giving up is the price and where the cards set aside disappear for good. Here nothing is lost: the two cards you do not play **stay on the table**, points of interest asleep. The scene goes on around them, and the day your attention lands on them, they are already there, ready to rise. A backdrop that waits, not a choice that costs.



at the counter



the work left standing



the door at the back

The surroundings — no card goes away.



the cultivated yard



what came in at the port



the back room

What the district holds for someone looking for plants.

A **major** among the three does not bring fate in: fate comes in only at the opening. But it marks that point as **important**: not a passer-by, but someone who will count; not an object, but a charged object; not a door, but a threshold that will weigh. A presence of fate set down in the backdrop, whose reason for being there you will work out later.

THE SURROUNDINGS, UNDER A QUESTION
Sometimes a question itches at you during a scene. *How do I get out of here? Where do I find enough to last until morning? Which way do I go without being seen?* Do not keep it muffled: the surroundings can answer it.

The gesture is the same — three cards, read quickly, one only played — but you are no longer asking the place what it contains: you are asking it **what it contains for someone looking for that**. Not “how do I escape,” but “what is there here for someone who wants to flee.” The nuance is thin and it counts: put on you, the question admits only answers; put on the place, it lets the place answer something other than what you were hoping for: a guarded way out, a way out that costs, or somebody else trying to flee too.

Where do I find something for this burn, before nightfall? Do not ask the district whether it has a herbalist. It has one or it does not, and there you are deciding on your own. Ask it what it holds **for someone looking for plants**.

Three shops, and not one promise in common. The **Seven of Pentacles** grows things: a yard where they cultivate their own, safe and slow: come back tomorrow. The **Three of Wands** brings things in: the stall by the port sells what a vessel brought back, dear, and the next one does not arrive tonight. The **Seven of Swords** asks for no name: that is the one you play, the salve is there before nightfall — and somebody, from now on, knows what you were looking for. The question put to the place did not give back a herbalist, it gave back a **price**.

Once the question is settled, the two cards you did not play are no longer ways out: that would be two doors open behind a door already crossed. **They fall back into ordinary backdrop**: points of interest asleep like the others, relieved of the question that had called them up. The alley that was to save you stays an alley.

And if a **major** falls among the three, it says here that the answer you are looking for will weigh more than you think.

One card for a presence

Two moments call for the same single card, each in its own way. The first is **discovering people**. The world is peopled, and you do not have to decide alone who lives in it: in a city, a presence goes without saying: draw **one card** and read who is there, whom you are dealing with. Outside the cities, on an empty road, the meeting is no longer a given; ask the **coin** first whether anyone crosses your path, then, if someone does, draw the card that sketches him. In every case, a card to give him a temper is worth more than a face invented out of nothing — chance finds people you would not have imagined.



One card, one presence: what comes into the room.

Five of Wands: five staves knocking against one another without any of them winning. This is not a face, it is a temper, and it is better than a face: the one coming in has a quarrel under way. He carries it on him, he will speak of it before anyone asks his name, and he is not looking for trouble – he already has some. So he is not dangerous: he is **busy**, and that is the way in. Left to myself, I would have made an innkeeper; with that card in hand, I make someone who arrives in the middle of his own story.

The second is **seeing someone again**. There, no need to rediscover who he is: what has changed is the moment. Draw **one card** for his state of the day: what is occupying him, a worry he is going through, a thought he is chewing over. The person is the same; the card says only in what disposition you find him, and where to come in.

Actors – a presence that wants

An actor exists *outside* the scenes. Note him in one stroke: a **name**; his **push**, what he wants, what makes him move; two or three **keywords**, a way of acting, not a portrait; a **bond**, what you are to each other, now (*see below*); an **open question**, what you still do not know about him.

The push is the heart of it. It is not a coat of arms, it is a **desire**: read it as a wanting. Loudia does not “embody” authority, she *wants to take back, to hold, to let nothing go*. That desire colors every scene she appears in, and above all, it makes her **act alone** in a world scene, toward her goal, without waiting for you. That is where the world writes the adventure in your place.

Loudia – strategist, authority, calculation – sent me on a mission then lost sight of me –

ally, or manipulator? · push: to take back, to let nothing go.

◇ **Convincing someone.** Before you draw an action (part 5), look at his **push**. An actor whose desire runs against you is not played on a card: he refuses, and it is the world that has answered. An actor whose desire runs your way agrees, and there is nothing to ask there either. You only draw in between: when what you are asking both serves him **and** costs him. There alone he hesitates; there alone, two cards say anything. Convincing is not overcoming a resistance: it is finding the place where his desire works against him.

An actor you never play does not exist: better **three living actors than ten forgotten ones**. Anchor sparingly, and let their desires compost among themselves. And the one you stop revisiting fades of his own accord: a departure, a death, a silence. Come back to him only if you feel like it.

An actor’s portrait

An actor who counts ends up overflowing one line. Make him a portrait.

The standing page keeps the overview: who exists, in one line. The portrait keeps the life: what he wants, what you do not know about him, what has happened between you. It is not written at one go, and it is not corrected: the day the man has changed, you write another one, further on, without touching the first. The last portrait holds for what it says; what it does not say again stays true from the previous one. Read them one after the other, and you have someone’s trajectory.

Make one for whoever weighs – not one more.

The bond – what you are to each other

In that portrait, beneath the push, a line of its own: the **bond**. One sentence, each time something has moved it, with its anchor: *since what*.

And one rule, one only: **you never erase**. The new bond is written under the old. Cross out the old, and all you have is a state; stack them, and you have a history. Everything else moves: a desire dies out, what fate has broken remakes itself other; a bond stays, and is read back.

- ◇ **When to write a bond.** Never by calendar. Do not go around your actors at the end of every chapter to see where your relationships stand. That would be an inventory, and an inventory is not play. The bond is written when something has moved it: a fate gone through together, a world scene that turns it around, a truth that breaks out, a silence that lasts too long. Those moments already exist; you are adding no appointment, you are only catching what happened. And if nothing has moved in six chapters, that is information: that bond may have died out.

- ◇ **The bond is drawn, not decided.** What an actor is *to you*, you already know; writing it teaches you nothing. What you are *to him*, you do not know: that is an open question, so a minor, read freely. Between two chapters, you can even question it on several cards, by the author's hand. Remember the rule that divides them: *draw what you would be afraid to decide alone*. A bond decided is a flattery you pay yourself; a bond drawn is news you receive.

Always write it from your character's point of view, so always with a "**seems**". *She seems to hold it against me. He seems to have forgiven me*. This is not a caution of style: it is the truth of his position, he sees only what he is shown. And if you know, yourself, that Parilia does not hate you but *fears* you, that knowledge has no place in the bond: it is a meta note (part 8). The gap between the two – what your character believes, what you know – works on its own until it breaks out.

→ *Those people leave behind them things begun and questions unanswered: part 8.*



8 • What is pending

holding what is not finished

A letter passes from hand to hand, on a moonless night, on the docks of Fergris. The one who gives it does not raise his eyes; the one who takes it will not open it until she is aboard. Two quays away, Nera is asleep: she is to cast off in the morning.

A game does not hold together by what has happened: it holds by what is not finished. The people you have raised want things. Questions you have asked have no answer. And on some of them, somebody else is making progress while you look elsewhere.

Here is what stays open between two scenes: how you let it ripen, how you make it move on the day you can no longer bear not knowing, and how you write it so that it survives the page.

Waits and stakes

A solo game does not move forward on its own: it needs something to follow. That something is the **thread**: the tension running from one scene to the next, what stays open when a scene closes and calls up the following one. It is not a mechanism; it is what gives a chapter a direction instead of a run of draws with no memory.

It is made of everything that is pending: the desires of the actors on the standing page, a threat rising, and above all the **waits** and the **stakes**.

Not every question calls for an answer. Note them as they are: they are live gaps, and the world is working – more or less – underneath. What remains is knowing whether it is really working, and a single question says so: **is somebody else looking for the answer?**

If not, it is a **wait**. It belongs to you, it ripens at its own pace, it has the right never to close: *why do I always leave, and what am I fleeing?*

If so (a man you promised, a debt, a report you signed), it is a **stake**. Others are making progress on it while you look elsewhere, and it does not forget itself.

THE QUESTION	IS SOMEBODY ELSE LOOKING?
Astore's barque, seen again in the distance after his death	No — it is mine alone: a wait
Why do I always leave, and what am I fleeing?	No — nobody digs at it in my place: a wait
Who commands Parilia, and why keep the parcel from its carrier?	Yes — someone is paying for me to know nothing: a stake
The debt promised before winter	Yes — he is counting the days: a stake

And when you know something your character does not, set it aside as a **meta note** (*"I am being followed – she does not know it yet"*): it is often that which strings the story tight.

A wait, like a stake, is also what a **draw turned inward** comes to scratch at (part 2). The day you want to make it move, you **open a lead** on it: a scene declared for that (below). Two ways to play it: your character **searches**, or the world **pushes** it behind his back, in a **world scene** (part 9). One lights, the other digs; often, you alternate.

CREATING A WAIT, PLAYED

Regjord, on the deck of a great starship, early evening. Astore died months ago. I thought that circle was closed.

The sky is turning orange, the deck is quiet. I decide nothing. I ask. *Is something happening, far off?* – coin: **heads, yes**.

Off to port, right at the horizon, a glint catches the last of the sun. Something, yes.

A barque? – coin: **heads, yes**. I take out the spyglass.

I turn the focus wheel. A small hull, alone, running quietly toward the horizon.

And there, without asking the coin anything, the idea falls on me, too strong for me to refuse it: that outline, I know it. The line of the hull, the gash on the fin. **It is Astore's barque**. In every detail. No toss told me so; it came on its own, and that is what makes the moment burn, so it is true, and I keep it. Fun is the engine: an idea like that, you seize it, you do not put it to the vote.

*She is heading for the same place as always.
As though he had never come down from her.*

My thumb finds the coin all the same. *Is he at the helm, alive, come back?* One toss, and I would know: heads he is there; tails his barque without him, sold, stolen, drifting alone.

And I do not toss.

That one does not want an answer. It is worth more open than closed. If I settle it, I have a fact, and the fact kills the unease. If I leave it, I have a **live gap**: something the world will keep digging at beneath the surface, without my knowing. A man like that, dead, and his barque still running toward his destination... no. I do not want to know. Not now. Perhaps never. I close the spyglass and I note it in the notebook, without answering it:

Wait: Astore's barque, seen again in the distance, after his death. So his route was not finished?

The world works underneath. It will tell me when it wants to – or never. That is quite all right.



What is left open

A scene closes badly when it closes on nothing. Before you turn the page, ask: *what is left open?* Three kinds of thing come out of it, and you do not keep as much of each.

The bridging question: one only, and it does not go to the standing page. *Where am I going to wake up?* It does not pend: the next scene answers it, and it is even what frames that scene. It is the question you will put at your next opening. Do not write it down: it will not survive until tomorrow, and that is what is asked of it.

Waits and stakes: what really pends. *Who is the Mender? What is this business of fate on the three skyfarers?* They go to the standing page, and they gain by ripening.

And all the rest, which you let die. That is the important part. A scene raises ten things; if you note them all, your standing page becomes a shopping list and nothing on it weighs any more. Choose what you carry away: what you do

not note has not existed. A question you do not feel like writing down was not one.

This is not a review round. A dense scene sets down two or three: write them in one go, without counting. The limit is not on the number, it is on **where they come from**: only what this scene has just produced. Do not reopen the standing page **at this moment** to choose which thread to advance: that is taking inventory, and the standing page becomes a menu. Here you do not reread. You look at what the scene has just left behind it. Rereading it has its moment, and this is not the one: it is when you close a session (*part 10*).

Opening a lead

A **wait** demands nothing: it can live ten chapters on the standing page and never close: that is its natural state. And it gains by waiting. *The world works underneath*, and that is not just an image: every chapter played without touching it lays down around it matter that had not come for it: a name, a coincidence, a face. The day you open its lead, your draw will fall into a field already sown, and the answer will almost assemble itself. A **stake**, for its part, does not ripen on its own: it is no longer the chance of chapters laying things down around it, it is somebody making progress.

But a day comes when you can no longer bear not knowing. Then, before framing your next scene, **declare it**: this one will look for the answer. That is all “opening a lead” means: not a separate draw, not a new rule. You open, frame and read as always; only the **intention** changes. Your character searches, and it is in playing that he finds. Nothing obliges him to search himself, moreover: the same lead can also be pushed in **a world scene**, behind his back (*part 9*).

One scene is sometimes enough. If not, declare another with the same aim, as many as it takes. But **you do end up deciding**: when a scene touches the answer (or leaves you only one last silence, a face that knows and will not say), write it in one line; the question will not pass to the next standing page. Resolving is not finishing:

an answer often uncovers others; note behind it the new question, if one is born.

A LEAD, PLAYED

A question has been sleeping on Nera's standing page since the North Gate: who handed the parcel to Parilia — and did he know what it carried? Tonight I stop letting it sleep: I make a scene of it.

I do not read a card in Nera's place — I send her digging. I open on a draw and I keep the **Three of Pentacles**. Earth, several hands, a commissioned work: writings, registers, an object passed from one to another. This is not the answer: it is the **ground** of the search. Nera does not charge at a revelation; she goes looking where things are recorded. A number, not a court card: the search can turn up *something*, not only someone.



kept



left



left

The opening of the lead — a number kept, a court card left.

The freight office of the upper port smells of wax and old paper. I set down before the clerk the only name I have. "The cargo they had me carry south, last month. I want to know where it starts from." He sighs, pulls out a register, follows the lines with his finger. "Order placed, parcel handed over, carrier assigned." Three entries, three hands — just as the card announced.

And there, it happens.

I read over his shoulder. The parcel did not begin at Parilia's: she is only a line in the middle. Above her, another hand ordered the shipment and paid in advance, and in the margin, an instruction I make out upside down: "carrier not to be informed of the contents."

I close the register without a word. The clerk has not seen what he has just shown me. I have.

This time it is **Nera** who knows — not only me. She read the line, she leaves changed. The

question closes; I write the answer; on the next standing page, the question will not be there:

Answer: the parcel comes from a commissioner above Parilia, paid in advance, with orders to keep the carrier in ignorance. I am the last link, chosen to know nothing.

A court card would have given me a face rather than a written line: someone to make talk, probably one more scene. Here, a number: the search gives back a thing, and the thing is enough. One scene closed that lead; sometimes it takes two or three — you declare again, you play again, until you decide.

But arriving is not finishing. In closing the old question, the answer uncovers a new one: *that name above Parilia, who is it?* I do not move the old one, it is closed for good; this one was born of what I have just learned. I note it beside the other, struck out:

Stake: who commands Parilia — and why keep the parcel from its carrier?

A lead that closes does not close a story; it moves it forward by a notch. That is all that is asked of it.



The author's hand — questioning the story between scenes

Minors answer *you* too, not only your character. Between two scenes, when you want to know where a plot is going, what a faction is scheming, what is waiting in the next chapter: put an **open player's question** and draw. It is no longer your hero perceiving: it is you sounding your own story, like a game master consulting the oracle before preparing what comes next.

Here, outside the played fiction, you can draw **several cards** and read their **progression**: the order of the elements (Fire giving way to Water, Earth climbing toward Air), the rise or fall of the numbers, a symbol that returns. These richer readings, which would weigh too much inside a scene, find their place here: you are not playing, you are **building**. Note what comes out of it on the standing page, like a thread you will know to be true before your character does.

The standing page – the page that keeps what is pending

Everything pending has to survive the scene that gave rise to it, and the one after. That is the work of a single page.

Keeping your notebook

Everything is written in the same place: the scenes, and what has to survive them. There is no reserved page, nothing to prepare before starting: a blank notebook is enough. Only two things are written otherwise than the play: the **standing page**, and the **portraits**.

Mark their page: a colored corner, a tab, as you like. One rule only: **a marked page contains nothing else**. Open a fresh one to write, another to come back to the play; the paper wasted will cost you less than the page you cannot find again.

What lives on it

The standing page says what, at this hour, is still waiting for something from you: the **living actors**, one line each (that they exist, what they want, what you do not know about them); the **waits** and the **stakes**, the latter marked as such; the **desires under way**, with the trace of the road (door closed, side route, condition burned) and never a count of scenes; and **what fate has closed**, one line per door, the only trace that says it will take a major to open it again (*part 6*).

There is only one at a time, and **it replaces the previous one**. The day yours no longer reads (too many crossings-out, too many dead things), write it anew, further on in the notebook. Copy across what is still alive. The rest, you do not cross out: you do not copy it, and it is finished. A question that no longer intrigues you dies out there, without ceremony; an actor you no longer play fades of his own accord. That is not a failure, it is information.

Never rewrite it by calendar: it is rewritten when the paper demands it, not when the clock says so.

A PORTRAIT, IN PROGRESS

This is not a scene: it is the page. Parilia's portrait as it reads on Nera's standing page, after three chapters. An actor who has moved twice without a single line being crossed out.

***Parilia.** Push: to know before the others, to hold by the secret. Keywords: patient, never head-on, ticks lines on lists nobody sees. Open question: why me?*

***Bonds.** At the start – she seems to expect nothing from me but a parcel delivered. · Since the North Gate – she seems to have chosen me for something other than the parcel. · Since Sybia named her before the sisterhood – she seems to have more to lose than I do.*

***Meta note** – she does not hate me: she is afraid of what I might know. (Nera does not know this.)*

Three bonds stacked, none corrected: that is how you see someone shift – not by one line rewritten, but by three you read one after the other.



→ Portrait → *part 11 · The gesture and the deck that remembers* → *part 2*



9 • The world scene

watching the rest live

Sitting on the divan in my room, I look far out through the bay window. Beyond the garden of the estate, the town is waking, drowned in the white of winter. After all this time, I still wonder whether Nera will come back one day.

There is a knock at my door: I motion for whoever it is to come in. It is Filisa, the chambermaid.

“Lady Oliane, a letter for you.”

I take the fold of paper. It is thin, coarse, a little damp. It does not come from the nobility, and it has traveled a great deal. I open it, I read the first lines...

Nera – it is her! A cry of joy escapes me. She is alive; she says only that she is taking her time, to come home safely. And it is to me that she writes, because she knows I can be trusted.

What a relief.

I fold the letter again, and already I am thinking ahead. Her enemies, here, are many: I shall have to prepare the ground.

The **world scene** is the moment when you set down your hero's pen and watch the rest live, far from your character's eyes. Sometimes to **move forward a question left hanging**. It gains a notch while he sleeps. Sometimes for nothing at all: a moment of life somewhere, and that is all.

The world scene – the world advances without your knowing

A world scene is a scene like any other: you open it the same way, you play it the same way, you close it the same way. One thing alone sets it apart, and you **declare it before you begin: your character is not in it**. The world moves behind his back, and you watch.

Two uses, the same rules. Most often it serves what pends: a **stake** gains a face, a motive, a notch of advance; a **wait** grows more precise without his knowing a thing. But it can also serve nothing at all, and be no more than a **breather**: a market at dawn, a vigil in a bedroom, a room where somebody waits for someone who will not come. Nothing advances there, and that is not a fault: the world has the right to exist when your hero is not looking at it.

What rings false is neither one nor the other: it is to **fill a page because you owe one**. A world scene written out of duty shows from its first line.

Three rules, and nothing else.

After three scenes, it is the world's turn to speak. Not a permission that opens: a turn that comes. The world only starts to speak once you have left it time to fall behind, and that lag, it does not make up alone. The count is held in your head, never on the page, and only the scenes you have **played at his side** count: an ellipsis is not one. The floor, for its part, does not expire: as long as you have not given it to him, he still has it.

Never two in a row. The world takes the floor, then it gives it back, and two in succession, and it is no longer your character crossing a story, it is you telling it in his place.

Fate does not come in. A major taken at the opening of a world scene colors the world and

tips it over all the harder, but you neither face nor endure anything there: you do not commit someone who is not there.

Any world scene gives him the floor, the one that moves a stake forward as much as the one that merely lives. For what this turn guarantees is the **presence** of the world, not the advance of your questions: that one is settled when you close a session (*part 10*). Without that presence, stakes stop being stakes: nobody is working on them any more.

So what do you play? Three things present themselves, and it is for you to settle it: a **stake** that gains a notch, a **wait** that grows more precise, or a **breather** that advances nothing. When it is the stirring that brings you here (a raising, a restart), the question does not arise: the stake is already named (*part 10*). The rest of the time, it is wide open.

If nothing comes to you, let the coin settle it. Two poles, the two that tempt you, it does not take three, and that is that. The simplest split is often the best: *is something advancing, or is this merely living?*

Yes, it is your own choice you are handing to the oracle, and you have every right to: **deciding not to decide is still a choice**, and it is exactly what you do when you **endure** a fate (*part 6*). A variant, if you feel like it: instead of asking what you feel like, ask what **the world** is busy with right now, far from him. Not that it is truer, it is more fertile; a question set on the world can answer something other than what you expected.

Play it **large**. If something moved there, note it on the standing page: you know; he does not. That gap works on its own, until the day it breaks out.

◆ **The world does not wait for you.** What you play there does not turn around your character. Let the world be larger than your hero: a window open onto a house you do not live in.

- ◇ **What is played, what is told.** A world scene has **neither action nor fate**: those are gestures of the main character, they carry his commitment and his risk, and he is not there. The world, for its part, unfolds. Nothing stops you from **telling** action, a battle, a fire, a flight: it is the **draw** that is withheld, not the movement.

A WORLD SCENE, PLAYED

A question has been sleeping on Nera's standing page since the pursuit: the masked man who made her out to be a thief — who pays him, and why her? I want to move it forward, but without Nera: she believes the matter closed.

I open the scene. Among the three cards, **The High Priestess**: the secret, what is known and not said. I keep it, and I read it to color the aside: a scene of things unsaid. I leave Nera, asleep at her inn, and I look elsewhere.



kept



left



left

The opening of the aside — a major kept for its color.

In a windowless back room, the man in the mask renders his accounts. Across from him, a veiled woman listens without a word, then sets a silver coin on the table. One only. "The girl thinks she has been dropped. Perfect. Let her think so another year." The man pockets it, bows. "And if she works her way back to you?" The woman stands. "Nobody works their way back to me."

There is the question moving forward: the mask is not acting for himself, he is paid; and behind him, a commissioner who wants Nera dirtied but **alive**, for a reason she alone knows. None of this does Nera know. I do. I note on the standing page, beneath the old question, this notch more:

The veiled woman — commissioner of the masked man — wants Nera dishonored, not dead · why keep her alive? — Nera does not know it yet.

That is all. The world spoke for a minute, behind my heroine's back, and the trap closed a little, without her hearing it.

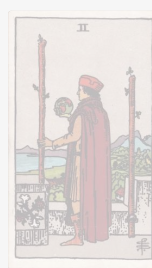
A BREATHER, PLAYED

Three scenes I have been in Nera's skin, and the world has the floor. Nothing pends that asks to move, so I look elsewhere for a minute, and nothing will advance.

I open as always. Among the three cards, the **Four of Cups**: what is held out and the other does not see. I do not look for what it could serve: I take it for what it shows.



kept



left



left

The opening of a breather — a card taken for what it shows, not for what it advances.

On a low jetty of the lower city, a girl holds out a fruit to an old skyfarer sitting against his hold. He is looking elsewhere, at the inland sea, the barques coming in with the evening. She waits, her arm held out. Then she sets the fruit down beside him and goes. He has not seen her.

That is all. No stake has moved, no wait has grown more precise, and I have nothing to carry to the standing page. I have spent a minute in a city that lives without Nera, and the world has taken the floor back. Tomorrow, I return to her skin.

Play your first world scene

Take a **stake** from your standing page, one you would like to see move without your character having anything to do with it. **Draw a card**: play a brief aside of the world (an actor acting, a force setting itself in motion), so that the question gains a notch. Then note what you now know, and what he still does not.

And if your standing page carries nothing yet (likely enough, stakes are born in the next part), play a **breather**: a place, an hour, somebody who has nothing to do with you. You will have nothing to write at the end, and it will have been played all the same.

The world scene has one particular use, at the very start of a game: that is part 10.



10 • The stirring

bringing a stake to life

The beast was moving slowly through the alleys, while the rest of the city panicked and fled. “Where are the guards?” people were saying. There were none left already.

The stirring is the world running without waiting for you: it **brings stakes to life**, and it **restarts** the ones that are asleep.

You need at least one stake. A game carrying none turns in the void: nothing works underneath, nothing comes back for you.

Sometimes a stake is born on its own (a promise kept crookedly, a name given), and you have nothing to raise. But it happens that the standing page carries only waits. Then you raise a stirring.

Raising a stirring – the gesture

Draw through the deck until a major. Play a **world scene**: your character is not in it. Somebody somewhere sets off, for a reason that is not yet your business. What is left after it is a stake, and it will live like the others (*cf. part 8*).

Later, it is the reverse: a stake you have let sleep. You do not raise it a second time, since it already exists: you **restart** it, and for that nothing new (*below*).

The seed – raising the first stirring

Before your first scene, give it a face.

Search for a major: draw card after card until one appears. The minors passed through do not count: you give up nothing, you are searching; the deck is reshuffled at the next scene anyway.

A major, and nothing else, because it **names** instead of answering (part 4). It carries a wanting, it has weight – and what has weight takes time to arrive. A minor would say the everyday, which passes. A stake does not pass.

What “strong” means is read at the height where you play: an empire tipping over in an epic game, a village house being sold in a gentle one. The card gives the relative scale, not the absolute one.

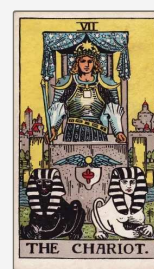
Four directions

Look at the card. What it names, in your world, often comes on its own. If you are stuck, ask where it comes from and what it is made of.

Four directions – not four boxes. The world has others, and you will find them before you have finished the book.

- **From his own, someone.** A person from his close world changes sides, leaves, or starts wanting something else.
- **From his own, something.** A rule, a house, a place: what was holding him starts to move.
- **From outside, someone.** Someone he does not yet know has set off, and he is in the way.
- **From outside, something.** A force, a power, a passage closing.

♦ The Chariot.



One card, four directions — it does not choose for you.

Someone advancing, whom nothing turns aside. *From his own, someone*: the brother enlists, he leaves with the column, he will not come back the same. *From his own, something*: The guild has set itself in motion, and it is carrying his place away with it. *From outside, someone*: a man left another town a month ago, and he is coming here. *From outside, something*: a fleet, a flood, a decree: what bears down does not negotiate. Four stakes, one card. It does not say where it comes from: it says that **it is coming**, and that there will be no stopping it on the way.

By which edge it reaches him

A stake that never reached him would be back-drop. Once the card is read, say where it will come from – not when, not how: where.

By his **desire**, what sets him moving. By his **place**, what he counts on to live. By **someone he holds**, who will be touched before he is.

At this instant you have only a name, a sentence and a desire. That is enough: you are not looking for a threat to the world, you are looking for what that particular desire is exposed to.

The four relations of part 6 hold here too, except that they are no longer read between the card and **you**, but between the card and **him**: you are not in the scene, you are watching what puts itself in relation with someone who does not yet know it.

The raising

On that major, open a **world scene**. It sets down a latent problem, something that will, one way or another, come as far as him.

The raising does not wait its turn: it launches the game, and it is **the only world scene played without having left the character three scenes**. It gives the world the floor all the same: the count starts again from it. Fate comes into it no more than anywhere else (*part 9*).

Show, do not explain. An unremarkable rock against a lamppost, someone approaching at an hour when nobody passes, a hand touching the stone, and a case revealing itself. Who she is, how she knew, what it will cost: none of that is said here. A raising that explained would already be untied: it is the not-knowing it installs that makes it hold for scenes on end.

The sentence that remains

The scene is not finished until it is written. One line on the **standing page**: what is now under way. It is the only thing that will survive the page: without it, you have written a fine moment that will never come back.

It takes the form the scene calls for. A **knowledge** you have and he does not: *a decree is going to ground the free skyfarers – she does not know it yet*. A **fact** nobody understands: *an unknown woman found Sania's skyglider in a southern alley, and she was looking for it*. Or a **question** you

put to yourself: *why is this succession not being settled?*

That third form is the liveliest, and the most uncomfortable: it commits you not to know either. The stake then works on you as much as on him.

That sentence is the stake. As long as it is on the standing page, he is running.

Restarting one, as you close a session

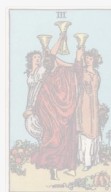
A stake is not penalized for sleeping. But as you close a session, look at your stakes and find the one that has moved least: write its name at the foot of the page, and **the next session will open on it**. You will have nothing to choose when you sit back down.

And if it is the same one as at the previous session, it is done waiting: **make it move**. Nothing new for that, a stake is restarted like everything pending: **open a lead** on it (your character sets off to search), or **push it in a world scene** (the world advances behind his back) (*part 8*). At the reopening, never that same evening.

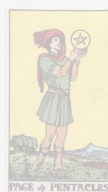
A STAKE, RAISED

I am starting a game with Nera. The standing page carries no stake yet; I raise one.

I draw through. Three of Cups, Page of Pentacles, Five of Wands... – then **The Tower**. A major: I stop there. I play a world scene, far from Nera, for what The Tower gives me: a collapse on its way.



passed through



passed through



passed through



the seed

The search for a seed — passing through costs nothing.

In a chamber of the High Council of Nandésis, a decree is being sealed: skyfarers without a guild will lose their mooring rights at the first

snow. Nobody in the chamber knows Nera's name. The decree will find her.

What remains fits in one line on the standing page: *a decree is going to ground the free skyfarers – Nera does not know it yet.* It is a stake now: others are making progress on it while she goes about her business elsewhere. It will live like the others – and it will be restarted, the day it stops moving.



Raise a stake

Search for your major. Say which direction it comes from and by which edge it will reach him. Play the world scene, far from him, explaining nothing of what you show. Then write the line that remains: a knowledge, a fact, or a question. You have your first stake.



11 • Who you are

knowing what he wants

I look at Alta and sneer. “You are nobody’s professor. An impostor. You make pacts with the kingdoms to preserve your little comfort. I will bring down your little assembly – your little world of luxury and idleness.”

Alta looks me over, then answers:

“I was waiting for that tirade, the one you have accustomed us to, Regiord. It seems to me that you are no longer part of this school. Leave this room, and let me finish my class. I am not saying goodbye.”

The door swings ajar. I throw her one last black look and go through it. Outside, I take out my rod, I cast a formula all my own, and it takes first time: the door slams behind me with a crash of thunder.

A character exists by two things: what he is, and what he does. A **personality** – who he is, what he wants – and a way of **acting** on the world. You are already playing, with an *I* sketched before you began and sharpened by everything you have put him through. This chapter sets him down for good: where he comes from, how the elements live in him, what he wants underneath.

Set down your character – in five minutes

- **A name, and a sentence.** Who is he, in one line: a trade, a bearing, a reputation. Not a file: a way in.
- **A desire, in one sentence.** What he wants or wants to learn, here, now: what will set him moving. Nothing to note in a box, nothing to keep up to date: it is enough that it *pulls*. He will change, he will forget it, another will take its place – and that is as it should be.
- **One card – where you come from.** Draw **one card**: it says your **past**, what made you, the wound or the impulse your desire is born from. One card only, read plainly – and there you are with a starting point.
- **Two or three relations to the suits.** Say how each element lives *in you*, not what you know how to do but what it does to you. Does your desire (Fire) carry others along, or devour them? Is Water familiar to you, or foreign? **A relation, never a meaning**: you are not fixing *what Fire means* (that stays free), you are setting *what it does when it falls*. **Two or three, never four**: the elements left blank you will discover in play. Nothing is settled: a relation is rewritten the day the fiction has moved it (a desire, a break).

That is all – your character will draw himself by acting.

Example – **Nera**. *Skyglider pilot, a skyfarer struck off from her sisterhood, accused of wrongs she denies*. What she wants: **to clear her name**. Card drawn outside the scene: the **Five of Swords**: a bitter victory, a conflict won at the cost of her own people. There is where she comes from: she was right, alone, and it cost

her everybody. Her relations to the suits: *Fire launches me, and I trust it – charging has never frightened me; Earth escapes me – anchoring myself, staying put, I always leave again*. Two are enough; the rest will come.

◇ **If the relations do not come – a few questions.** Optional, and never all of them: answer the ones that catch you, let the others sleep. Honest, never moral.

Fire: when something rises in you, does it come out, or does it stay inside? Does your desire carry others along, or make them step back?

Water: do you know how to love at a normal volume? Whom do you trust for no reason?

Air: when you understand something, do you say it? Do you cut to see clearly, or to have done with it?

Earth: what will you not let go of, even if it crushes you? What do you need to feel safe – and do you have it?

Your character is set down for good. You already know how to play: to question, to act, to go through a fate, to make the world around him live; what you have just added is the suits and the past that will make each scene a little more yours. What remains is the **play aid** (appendix C), which keeps you from losing yourself playing alone.

You decide a great deal, in every scene; we come back to it in detail in part 12 (“Draw, or decide?”).

Your character’s portrait

The day you want to set him down for real, write his portrait: his **name** and a sentence for who he is, what he **wants** or wants to learn, the way two or three **suits** live in him, and **what he carries**, when what he carries says who he is.

Nothing else, and **no count at all**: the portrait holds only what says who he is. A defeat opens no box on it: fate changes the world, not a column (part 6).

What he carries, then, and not what he owns: a skyfarer’s case, a pendant that comes from someone, a radio you do not replace. Two or three things at most, never an inventory: noth-

ing that is consumed, nothing you buy again on the corner. The test is in the page itself: if you hesitate to write it into the sentence that says who you are, it does not belong there. That is also what makes those things **wagerable**. Fate takes only what is written somewhere (*part 6*).

And it is not corrected, like any portrait (*part 7*): the day Fire no longer launches you as it used to, you are not going to cross out the line from six chapters ago: you write a fresh portrait, further on. The day fate takes one of your things, the same: you do not cross out the case, you write someone who no longer has it. That is how you see someone become other – not by a box altered, but by two portraits you read one after the other.

one, often knotted by a card drawn outside the scene without your having decided it.

What he wants – playing a desire

Your character wants something. A place to reach, a truth to tear loose, a mastery, a revenge, someone to find again – or next to nothing, a tune he is trying to recover. Nothing here is a mechanism: no count to keep, no box to tick, no gesture reserved. What he wants is not played: it **orients** what you play, and that is already enormous: it is what makes you set one wager rather than another, and what gets you off the blank page on an evening when nothing comes.

If you do not know what he wants, draw a card outside the scene: it will tell you his desire, or the shape it takes. That draw is only a help. A desire belongs to no card, and waits for no card to move forward.

To write a desire is to make it **losable**. Kept in your head, it crosses scenes without ever risking anything: you put it off until tomorrow, you round it off, you tell yourself you are working on it. Noted in the notebook, beside your waits and your stakes, not as a count to tick but as a **trace**, it becomes a thing the world can close on you. One wants for a long time; the road is **felt**, it is not cut. And nothing obliges a desire to stay alone: the day you discover that one and the same knowledge serves two quests (learning the arcana of the somagma, finding the archmage Atalkt who holds them), the two roads become

12 · Playing alone

playing solo, and staying honest

Lidia closes her notebook, her hand resting on it a moment. The chapter is done; she watches it unroll again.

A confession first. At one point, she cheated: her character cast a difficult spell and she let him succeed, without testing it, in a hurry to get there. She notes it in the margin, for next time: test when failure can happen, instead of chasing the success. That was where the scene was breathing, and she deprived herself of it.

A satisfaction next. The dialogue with her brother: she did not feed him his answers. She played him from his own words, a coin to decide when she hesitated, a draw when she no longer knew. The brother said things she had not foreseen, and that is how she knew him to be alive.

One scene only, tonight, but inhabited. The rest can wait: she is already thinking about it, and it will be for another time.

Playing solo, nothing answers you or resists you, except chance and yourself. Here are the last gestures that make a game hold.

The spirit of the game

Playing solo, no rule is watching you: you are the only judge, and you can get around everything. Always taking the card that reassures, only declaring wagers that do not pinch, running to fate without ever wanting anything, nothing stops you. But remember what you are looking for: not to *win*, but for a moment to come alive. Every time you optimize, you trade intensity for safety, and safety, here, tastes of boredom. The only cheating possible in solo play is depriving yourself of what makes a scene vibrate. So play against your comfort, never against the rules: they ask only to be forgotten. Fun is the engine – and *interesting* does not mean *comfortable*: better the hollow, emptied scepter than the scepter that hums at exactly the right moment.

No draw is pure

You have held the two rules since part 3; here is what lies underneath.

A card does not produce fiction: it sets down a state, and it is you who dress it. The Five of Cups never said “a woman dressed in black” – it said *something damaged*; the woman is you. Interpreting is already deciding. It cannot be otherwise, and it is not a fault. So the question is not *draw or invent*: you always invent. It is gentler than that. Where do you need chance to come and contradict you?

Draw to surprise yourself

Not everything is drawn for, and the border is finer than a plain “uncertain / known.” **Draw for what can create a tension or surprise you.** People often think that questioning chance will make a fine idea fall flat: it is the opposite. The draw always does one of two things. It **validates** your idea, and it stops being an author’s whim and becomes legitimate, earned. Or it **invalidates** it, and out of that refusal comes another idea, almost always less conventional, less naive than the first. In doubt, one rule decides: **draw for what you would be afraid to decide alone**, wherever you are nursing a secret wish about

the outcome. Chance protects you there from yourself.

AN IDEA YOU DRAW FOR – THE MASKED MAN

An intuition comes to me; I submit it to chance, which refuses it and gives me back the same threat by another door.

An image arrives on its own: at a bend in the street, a masked man. Wait – that one, I draw for. *Is there anyone in this street?* **Tails.** Nobody.

The street is empty. Not a footstep, not an open shutter, and yet something is off.

What is left is the unease, of which I know nothing. I draw to find out what makes me uncomfortable, one card read on the **against** side since it is an unease I am looking for: the **Five of Swords**.

Voices, further off, a burst of argument going wrong.

I come back to my first intuition – there is indeed a threat – but it arrives by a more interesting door than the masked man I had to hand.



Decide when not to draw

Decide when an idea seems to you too strong, or too slight, to be submitted to chance. Some come to you and carry you away, untie a thread, bring matter you feel to be right: drawing for them would break the rhythm, or risk breaking what they offer. Keep them, even if you **draw for the details** to make them precise. Others, conversely, are purely decorative: a backdrop, a light, a smell are not drawn for, they are set down. (*For what is wanted, an object or a knowledge you do not have and that is not set down but obtained, see What he wants, part 11.*)

AN IDEA YOU DECIDE – THE LETTER

An idea too fine to risk: I keep it, and leave only its shape to chance.

My hand finds a letter at the bottom of my pocket: my sister slipped it there, to tell me what she did not dare say in front of the others. Do I draw for that one? No, too fine, and it

unties a thread that has been trailing for three scenes; drawing for it would risk breaking it. I keep it.

The paper is folded in four, warm from having stayed against me all day. It is her handwriting.

But I draw for its **detail**: does she tell me everything, there, in the letter? **Tails**. No.

Three lines, and not one more: a place, an hour, "come alone."

The idea is mine; it is its shape I leave to chance.



A DECORATIVE IDEA – NOTHING TO DRAW FOR

A scene played in which not one card leaves the deck: a backdrop is not drawn for, it is set down.

I sit down on the terrace of an old stone café. Nothing to ask: not the coin (what truth would there be to decide?), nor a card, since nothing that came would change what I am going to do.

The wisteria climbs to the parasols and falls back in blue-violet clusters; a fountain, a few steps away, draws the sparrows. The air is spring-like, sunlit, quiet.

I set down the backdrop, I breathe, and I go on.



The cost of a draw

What *adds* folds in within a second; what *replaces* reconfigures the whole scene, and you have to rebuild. Same gesture, same card, two fatigues with nothing in common. Hence the second rule, which completes the first: **draw without counting what adds; weigh what replaces**. That is why you can populate a place with five cards in a row without effort, while five questions about what you are pursuing exhaust you.

When rhythm comes first

Submitting everything to chance may seem the pure version of the game: it is often the exhausting version. By wagering everything, you manage more possibilities than you play, you revise your plans constantly, and the scene stops breathing. So decide, and move on. You may get

a flatter scene (less surprise, less resistance), and that is not serious: a game does not have to be a run of reversals. The draw is **encouraged**, not owed. What is being sought here is an inhabited world, not a counter of surprises.

And know this: that boundary is never sharp. It is a measure taken instant by instant, which you learn to read on your own feeling: the more you play, the more the hand knows of itself when to consult and when to decide.

Asking beside the point

A draw always answers the question you asked, never the one you had in mind. You want to know why that woman opened her door; you ask what she will do tomorrow. The card falls, it falls true, you write it down, and something is left on your hands. It is not the draw that failed: you asked beside the point.

You cannot spot it in the wording, you spot it afterward: the answer is good and you are left hungry. That is the only reliable signal, and it is quickly recognized.

Do not draw again on the spot. The question you asked has had its answer, and it holds; loading the oracle again on the same subject is asking it to agree with you. Note down instead what you really wanted to know, *why did she open her door to me?*, and leave it on the standing page. You have just turned a missed question into a wait, and it will ripen better than the other one (*part 8*).

The compass – when the page empties

Sometimes you no longer know what to do: the scene is set, and nothing comes. Facing the coin, the difficulty was knowing what to *ask* (*part 1*); here it is barer: what to *do*. The four suits do not only say *how* one acts: they also say *what* one turns toward. Go around them as around a compass. Each one is a bearing that starts from you.

Fire (*Wands*) – what you are burning to attempt, here, now; the ambition that goes forward.

Air (*Swords*) – what you need to understand: the doubt to cut through, the calculation that lights the way, or that jams it.

Water (*Cups*) – whom you turn toward; what you feel, the bond that calls you.

Earth (*Pentacles*) – what you refuse to let go of: to hold, to protect, to build.

And if you need a fifth bearing, the **sidestep**: the door that did not exist a second earlier, the idea with no reason, what a major does when it falls.

Take the suit that lights up, or the least expected: it is often that one that reopens the scene. It is not an obligatory step, only a hand held out when you are lost.

The page stays blank. I go around: Fire, nothing; Air, nothing; Water, there, something. Whom do I turn toward? Toward my sister, whom I have not called back since the quarrel. The scene starts again on its own: I am going to find her.

The sidestep belongs to the instant alone: it finds nothing, it reopens a scene.

Dialogue

The risk of solo play: playing both voices from the same head, writing what the other would say *if it were useful*, not what he would really say. The counter: play the other **from his keywords**, not from your intentions. If you do not know how he reacts, put a coin, then play **from** the answer, not *toward* it.

“You do not have to do this.” – “I know.” – that line was not planned; it changed the scene.

Writing to slow down

You can play aloud, you can write short, four words for a scene, if you like; the notebook does not have to become a chore. But writing does one thing that speech does not: it **fixes**. It fixes the thought, it fixes the conversation, it fixes the state of the world, where the voice passes and fades. And this game lives on things that have to be fixed in order to weigh: the card you read and then breathe, the wait or the stake, the meta note, the wager declared *first*.

Writing is therefore not only a support: it is a **metronome**. The time it takes to write a line is the time to ask yourself whether that is really what the other would say, and that time is exactly the slowness the game asks for. The voice sets down; the pen anchors.

When the notebook contradicts itself

A long game contradicts itself. The coat was red six chapters ago, it is black tonight; the city was three days' walk away, it is an hour by air. This does not happen because you play badly: you write over months, you decide fast, and the notebook fixes the mistakes too. Three ways of handling it, none better than the others.

Leave it. The coat was red, it is black, never mind. Most inconsistencies are not worth a minute of your evening, and nobody rereads.

Justify it. The coat turns red under a certain light, and there is a world a little stranger than before. It is the most tempting of the three, and the only one that costs: make a reflex of it and you spend your scenes explaining your world, and an explained world stops weighing. Keep it for the times when the explanation pleases you more than the mistake.

Settle it. The coat is black, it always has been. Do not go back: the old pages will say red, and that is quite all right. You no more correct a contradiction than you correct a portrait (*part 8*). A notebook that contradicts itself over time looks like a memory; a notebook taken up line by line looks like a file.

There remains one gesture, for the day the thing that jars interests you: settle nothing at all. *Why did I see it red, that evening?* Onto the standing page, with the rest of what pends. That one is not for a coat; it holds when the inconsistency bears on something you have no wish to lose.

Skipping time

Not every hour of a life gets played. When time has to pass (the road up to the city, the night before the meeting, the three days a reply takes to come), tell it in three sentences, or **skip**: the coin crosses told time without playing it. The ellipsis is not a shameful shortcut: it is what gives weight to what you do choose to play. You can even skip *over* an event whose outcome you do not know, and let a **wait** occupy the void.

What calls for it is the need to move on, and that need comes almost always **out of tension**: nothing is pending there, nobody is waiting on an answer, and the scene that would come would be played on nothing at all. The ellipsis makes time pass; it does not defuse. So a scene you have no

appetite for is not thereby a scene to skip: most often, you believe it already written, and a scene you believe you know is precisely the one that has not yet been played.

There is a third door: **look elsewhere**. A scene far from him, one that moves nothing forward at all, a **breather** (*part 9*). The world, for its part, rarely waits until you feel like it.

The future that never happened

There comes a moment when the game has produced enough matter for an order to form on its own inside your head. You did not decide it; it is simply there, and it looks like this.

First I have to get out of the lower city, then see Sybia again, then find someone to help me clear my name – and the mender is bound to come to me sooner or later, and...

You recognize it by what it does to the writing. Tonight's scene seems to lag behind what you already know, every gesture becomes a step to get through before the next one, and your hand grows impatient. You are running inside your own story, and nothing you write there looks equal to the plan.

It is not the standing page that puts you there. What is left pending, you wrote down so as to stop having to think about it, and it ripens without you (*part 8*). A list does not ripen: it waits to be carried out, in order, and any scene that fails to advance it feels wasted.

And the ellipsis will not get you out of it. Skipping over a step looks like it settles everything, but the skip is not for that: it makes time pass when nothing is pending, not when something weighs. Used against a list, it simply sets you down further along it: one line fewer, the rest intact. It was not the scene that needed skipping, it was the plan that needed erasing.

The one who drew it up is the Game Master left in you, the one who prepares, who links one thing to the next, who has already seen the ending. Drive them out. See the list for what it is, and erase that future: it never happened. **Nothing is written, so nothing is charted.**

Then come back to your character, to the moment he is standing in, to what is in front of him.

Feel the world around him, and let it surprise you: that is what you came for.

One scene is enough

You do not have to "advance" in order to have played. One single scene, well inhabited, is a whole session. Set your notebook down afterward owing nothing more. Solo play has no clock, and that is a trap: lacking a session that starts and stops, you begin measuring your game in *scenes cleared*, and measuring in distance is running. So change your unit. What you are looking for is not the number of scenes behind you, it is the depth of the one you have just lived. One fine long scene is worth more than five dispatched. Take the chapter up tomorrow. It will only ripen the better for having waited.

Appendices



A • Carrying another setting

the system is a grammar

→ *Off the path: an invitation, not an obligatory step*

This book sets down a **system**; above all it opens a **grammar**. The system is the handful of gestures you have just read, written once. The grammar is everything those gestures make *possible*, and that a world-book, or you, will decline without end. The rulebook supplies the alphabet and the syntax; a world-book writes its sentences. This page addresses whoever is writing a world, not whoever is discovering the game. You have almost nothing to invent, because the matter is in the tarot. A card already offers **four dimensions** (four ways of making it mean), and it is enough to seize one of them to build a rule.

DIMENSION	WHAT IT SAYS
Suit / element	Fire, Water, Air, Earth — a domain, a temper
Number / intensity	from Ace to Ten — a force, a stage, a charge
Court card / presence	Page, Knight, Queen, King — someone, a degree of mastery
Major / fate	the everyday (minors) or what weighs (majors)

The gestures

You already know these gestures: the body of the game uses them. Naming them is giving you what it takes to forge others.

The passage – an action you do not go around

An **action** can become a **passage**: a place in the world you do not cross without drawing, even when the character knows how. Taking off in a skyglider, for instance. A good pilot lifts off without being made to prove it. That is the rule of part 5. But if your world decides that the sky must be asked, every takeoff is played, and the scale does not change: two cards, the stronger wins. What you choose is **what failure costs**, rarely the flight itself: rather

the wing that whistles, the hour lost, the cargo that had to be lightened. A passage does not forbid passing; it sets the price.

The ritual – a rule of posture

A **ritual** settles nothing: it installs. It is a way of doing that your world imposes, so that a moment stops being ordinary: two or three questions always put in the same order, a gesture repeated every time. Once in flight, for instance: what is the weather? what can be seen from up here? who saw us leave? The same three questions at every take-off, to the coin or to the tarot, and the flight takes on a thickness that a sentence would not have given it. The ritual works with the draws: it does not say what happens, it says **what is asked**.

A world's stakes

You can decide that certain situations **bring a stake to life** (*part 10*), not by chance but because your world works that way. Handing in your report to a superior, for instance: the matter is closed for the character, it is not closed for the hierarchy. The stake is born there, and it will come back, with questions of its own to settle. This is not a way of loading up the standing page: it is what makes **the world move against the character** without your having to invent it each time.

A world also gains by offering its **stirrings**: a few typical stakes, ready to be raised, so that the player finds an objective within reach on the evenings when he does not know what to play. Three gestures, three dimensions: enough to build dozens of rules of your own world without ever leaving the tarot. The language is there – the sentences are yours.

What is advised against

One temptation weighs the game down, and it consists in **adding**. **Creating new draws**. A novel gesture – four cards laid out differently, a reading of its own – builds an engine on top of the engine. The player already has a handful to hold from memory; the extra gesture he will forget, or he will reopen the

LOCAL MEANING	IT LOOKS LIKE...	IT IS ACTUALLY...
Wand → the revolt of the Als	embodying	embodying — pure Fire
Pentacle → the human outside the machine	embodying	embodying — Earth: the flesh, what remains
Sword → spirituality	reassigning	embodying — Air is the non-material; and illumination cuts, it separates who has seen from who has not
Cup → fine technology	reassigning	embodying — the interface, what links, what flows between beings

book, and either way the scene stops. Use the gestures that exist, and change what they ask.

Embodying or reassigning — a world's suits

A world-book can give the suits meanings of its own. Two very different gestures hide there. **Embodying** — the element keeps its nature, the world gives it a local face. **Reassigning** — you trade its nature for another; and there, the engine breaks: the suit does three jobs (part 4), and it can no longer say *how* one acts if its gesture has been taken away.

The verb test. Write your local meaning, then say the **verb** of the action aloud. Does “*I cut*” still hold for your Sword? “*I charged*” for your Wand? If so, you are embodying — keep it. If not, you are breaking the engine — back away.

An example, a science-fiction world:

The lesson: the best liveries *look* like reassignments and are secretly **embodiments**. The deep structure survives, the surface becomes unrecognizable: that is what allows a world to be radically other without breaking the game. It is “*the flavor, not the engine*” (below), applied to the elements.

A setting that already exists — the flavor, not the engine

One day you will want to play a world that already exists: a well-known fantasy, a space

opera, a novel you love. The temptation will be to *replicate its game*: its classes, its life points, its action economy, its grid. That is the surest way to lose yourself. One never carries a *game* into Ask the Sky — one carries an *imagination*, and plays it in this body. The fiction of a setting transplants effortlessly: its archetypes become Ways, its creatures majors, its magic suits, its factions actors on the standing page. Its **engine**, though (the grid, the gauges, the numbered levels), leave that to its own book: it already has a heart, and you cannot graft a second one onto it without the two fighting each other.

B • The tarot, in brief

for whoever is discovering it

Never handled a tarot deck? This appendix is for you. Others can skip it: they already know the matter. Nothing here is a rule of the game. It is a **footing for reading**, enough to hold a card in your hand without being lost. You will find in it what tradition lends the cards, not to shut you into fixed meanings, but to give you a starting point. In play, remember: you always read **freely**.

A recent birth – the Rider-Waite-Smith

The tarot is centuries old, but the deck you are probably holding is young: it appeared in London in **1909**. An occultist, **Arthur Edward Waite**, conceived its programme; an artist, **Pamela Colman Smith**, drew it; long forgotten, she now gives the deck her name, and it is called the *Rider-Waite-Smith* (Rider was the publisher). Both came from the same learned society, the Golden Dawn, fond of symbols.

Its revolution holds in one simple idea. Before it, the **minors** were only repeated motifs: five swords in a line, six cups in a row, like our playing cards. Smith **staged** them: every minor became a small picture, a character, an instant. That is what made the deck's fortune – and it is exactly what *Ask the Sky* feeds on. A picture is read at a glance; a motif has to be deciphered. That is why the book advises an illustrated deck: the picture *whispers* leads to you that you would not have found alone.

The anatomy of the deck

A complete tarot is **78 cards**, in two families.

- The **22 majors** (or Major Arcana): The Fool, The High Priestess, Death, The Sun... numbered from 0 to XXI. These are the great figures, the archetypes: fate, the forces that go beyond the everyday. In this game, they are mixed with the minors in a **single deck**; but when one appears and you choose it, fate invites itself in.
- The **56 minors**: four **suits** (like clubs, hearts, diamonds, spades), each running from Ace

to Ten, plus four **court cards**: Page, Knight, Queen, King. These are the tarot of the everyday: what tints a scene, what answers your questions.

The four suits

Each suit carries an **element**, and that element is a domain, a mood of the world.

- **Wands – Fire**. Impulse, desire, action, the will that pushes. What burns, undertakes, catches alight. A Wands card speaks of energy: an ambition, an ardent conflict, a wanting that cannot keep still.
- **Cups – Water**. Emotion, the bond, love, dreaming. What flows between beings. A Cups card touches the heart: a relationship, a joy or a grief, an intuition, what is felt and not said.
- **Swords – Air**. Thought, speech, clarity, but also conflict, the truth that cuts. A Swords card cuts through: a decision, a lucidity, a tension of ideas, sometimes a wound made of words.
- **Pentacles – Earth**. The body, matter, money, work, what lasts. A Pentacles card anchors: a place, a trade, a wealth or a lack, the slow construction of things.

(This is a neutral footing, for whoever is discovering the tarot. The body of the book gives a livelier, embodied portrait of them, see “The four suits,” part 4.)

Numbers and court cards

Within a suit, the **number** gives an intensity and a stage. Broadly: the **Ace** is the seed, the spark; the middle numbers, the climb and its trials (the **Fives**, everywhere, say trouble, loss); the **Ten**, fullness, sometimes heavy from having reached the end.

The **court cards** – Page, Knight, Queen, King – lean toward a **presence**: someone appears, or acts. Read them as a face rather than a force. One can see in them four degrees of mastery:

the Page learns, the Knight launches himself, the Queen embodies, the King reigns.

The majors

Where a minor tints the everyday, a major **weighs**. Each one is a great archetype: Strength, The Hermit, Wheel of Fortune, The Devil, The Star... Taken in order, from The Fool (0) to The World (XXI), they even tell a journey: that of a being who seeks himself and comes whole. You do not have to know it in order to play; retain only that when a major falls, it is not a detail that changes, it is fate coming in.

Reading a card, for real

You now have a card's handholds: its **suit** (the element), its **number** (the intensity), its nature as a **court card** or a **major**. Reading means making them work together, and, if your deck is illustrated, **looking at the picture**: what is the figure doing? what is the weather of it? Then you answer *your* question, with what the world and your character call for.



Five of Swords

A minor staged — that is the whole of Smith's revolution.

*Question: how did the negotiation end? I draw the **Five of Swords**. Swords: Air, conflict, words that cut. Five: trouble, a victory spoiled. And the Rider-Waite picture: a man gathers up swords, a smirk on his face, while two others walk away, beaten. I read it in one breath: I got my way, but by humiliating — there will be resentment left over. Another time, on another question, the same card would say something else entirely. That is free reading.*

◇ **A footing, then a table — never a grid.** Everything above helps you to *begin*, and the next appendix goes down to the card itself: all 78, one by one, with what each of them shows (*"The 78, card by card"*). Lean on them on the day you are stuck, that is what they are for. What neither of them will tell you is what a card **means**: it has no fixed meaning, it has the one your question calls for. With play, you will forget these markers — and that is the sign that you are really reading. (*See "A card stops being generic," part 2.*)

C • The 78, card by card



what each one shows

You draw a card, and nothing comes. It happens, especially early on – and going off to look the meaning up online takes you out of the game to hand you a fortune-teller's catalogue that knows nothing about your scene. These pages are here for that, and for nothing else: **a picture described, and the matter it offers.**

They do not tell you what a card *means*. They tell you what is in it – because a picture looked at gives you more than a word learned by heart – and then something to carry into your world. Take it if it suits you; leave it if your scene calls for something else. **You are never checking an answer.**

(The pictures described are the Rider-Waite-Smith ones, the deck part 2 recommends. If yours is another, the picture differs: look at your own, it is always right against this book.)

The majors

A major does not tint a scene, it bears down on it. When it falls at the opening, it is the door fate comes through; anywhere else, it is charged matter. What follows holds for both – but remember that a major taken at the opening reads as **a desire against a resistance** (part 6), and these pages give the matter, not the resistance.



The Fool

A wanderer walks at the edge of a drop, eyes on the sky, his bundle over his shoulder; a small dog leaps at his legs.
Setting out without knowing where. The innocence that has not yet measured what it risks.



The Magician

A man, one hand raised to the sky and the other to the earth; the four tools laid out on the table before him.
Everything is there, it only remains to use it. The beginning of someone who knows how.



The High Priestess

A woman seated between two pillars, a book half hidden under her mantle, a veil drawn behind her.
What is known without being said. Someone who keeps, and will not hand over all of it.



The Empress

A woman crowned with stars, settled among cushions, a field of ripe wheat at her feet.
Abundance that needs no forcing. What grows without anyone pushing at it.



The Emperor

A man on a stone throne, rams carved at its corners, bare mountains behind him.
The order that holds because someone holds it. The law, and the one who speaks it.



The Hierophant

A figure seated between two pillars, hand raised; two men kneel and listen.
The rule handed down, the institution. What you learn from someone rather than from yourself.



The Lovers

A man and a woman beneath an immense angel; behind them, a tree in flames and a tree with a serpent.
A choice that binds more than it looks. The bond, and what must be left in order to have it.



The Chariot

A man stands in a chariot, two sphinxes harnessed before him, one white, one black – and no reins.
Going forward while holding two contrary forces. The will that gets through, with nothing to make it safe.

**Strength**

A woman gently closes a lion's jaws, with no visible effort, a wreath of flowers on her head.

Mastery that does not brutalize. What you get from a beast by not fighting it.

**The Hermit**

An old man on a summit, a lantern held out into the night, leaning on his staff.

Withdrawing in order to see. A small light, carried alone, that lights one step and no more.

**Temperance**

An angel pours water from one cup into the other, one foot on the bank, one in the water.

The measure, the slowness that succeeds where haste breaks things. Two things made to hold together.

**The Devil**

A horned figure on its block; below, two humans in chains – the chains are loose, they could step out.

What holds because you consent to it. The tie you call a constraint and have no wish to undo.

**Wheel of Fortune**

A wheel in the sky, figures rising on one side and falling on the other, a sphinx seated at the top.

What turns without asking your opinion. The moment tips, and there is nobody to blame.

**Justice**

A seated figure, the sword upright in one hand, the scales in the other, between two pillars.

What is weighed and settled. The exact consequence, no gentler and no harder than it should be.

**The Tower**

Lightning strikes the crown off a tower; two bodies fall into the void, a crown with them.

What collapses at a stroke and will not be rebuilt. The fact, brutal, before anyone could get ready for it.

**The Star**

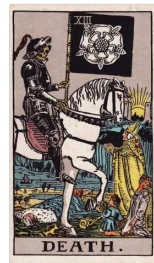
A naked woman pours two pitchers, one into the pool, one onto the earth, beneath a great star.

The calm after the worst. What you give without counting because you have something again.

**The Hanged Man**

A man hangs by one foot, head down, his face untroubled – he is not struggling.

The wait chosen, the view turned over: what you see once you stop forcing.

**Death**

A rider in black armor advances under a white banner; a king has fallen, a child holds out flowers.

What ends and will not start again. The passage, which takes without negotiating.

**The Moon**

A dog and a wolf howl at the moon; between two towers a path runs off into the distance, a crayfish crawls from the water.

What you think you see in the dark. Unease, doubt, what comes back up uncalled.

**The Sun**

A naked child on a white horse, banner in the wind, before a wall of sunflowers, under a sun with a face.

Clarity with nothing held back. What is finally said, seen, shown in broad daylight.

**Judgment**

An angel sounds a trumpet; below, the dead rise from their coffins, arms open.

The call you answer. What comes back from far off to ask for an account – or to offer a second time.

**The World**

A figure dances inside a laurel wreath, a wand in each hand; four faces at the four corners.

The circle closing. What is accomplished, and can at last be looked at from a distance.

**Five of Wands**

Five young men brandish their wands, without order – you cannot tell who is fighting whom.

The scuffle with no clear stake. Rivalry at its most confused, everyone pulling their own way.

**Six of Wands**

A rider crowned with laurel, his wand wreathed, surrounded by walkers escorting him.

Victory acknowledged, carried in front of others. What puts you forward – and exposes you.

Wands – Fire

Impulse, desire, what pushes and what burns. A Wands card speaks of energy: an ambition, an ardent conflict, a wanting that cannot keep still.

**Ace of Wands**

A hand out of a cloud holds a wand still putting out leaves.

A wanting just born. The chance offered, before anything has been decided about it.

**Two of Wands**

A man on a rampart holds a globe and looks out to sea; one wand is fixed to the wall, the other in his hand.

The world seen from above, and the step not yet taken. Choosing between staying and going.

**Seven of Wands**

A man on higher ground holds six wands off, firmly planted, one foot lower than the other.

Holding your ground against several. The defense of a place that took a long time to win.

**Eight of Wands**

Eight wands fly through a clear sky, on the diagonal, with nothing to stop them.

What arrives fast and from far off: news, a message, a thing already on its way to you.

**Three of Wands**

A man seen from behind watches ships leave the coast, three wands planted around him.

What you have launched and that sails without you. Waiting for a return, the horizon opening.

**Four of Wands**

Four wands hold up a garland; two figures raise bouquets, a castle behind them.

The celebration, the welcome, the threshold crossed together. A rest held and earned.

**Nine of Wands**

A man with a bandaged head leans on his wand and watches; eight more stand behind him like a palisade.

The watchfulness of someone who has already taken blows. Holding on, tired, because it must be done.

**Ten of Wands**

A man bent double carries ten wands in a bundle, his face hidden; the village is very close.

The load you have taken onto your own back. Almost there, and too laden to look up.

**Page of Wands**

A young man plants his wand in front of him and looks at it, as if discovering what he is holding.

Someone starting out, full of drive. News that sets something alight, or the one who brings it.

**Knight of Wands**

A rider rears his horse, plume in the wind, wand in hand, in a desert.

Someone who charges without looking. The hasty departure, the adventure that will not be explained.

**Three of Cups**

Three women raise their cups in a ring, among ripe fruit.

Joy shared between several. A reunion, the small company that rejoices.

**Four of Cups**

A man sits under a tree, arms folded, ignoring the cup a hand holds out to him; three others stand before him.

What you refuse to see because you are sulking. The weariness that lets an offer pass.

**Queen of Wands**

A woman seated, a flowering wand in one hand, a sunflower in the other; a black cat at her feet.

Someone followed without ever raising their voice. The warmth that gathers people, and the eye that judges.

**King of Wands**

A man seated at three-quarters, his wand firmly held, salamanders embroidered on his cloak.

Someone who decides and carries others along. Authority that comes from drive, not from title.

**Five of Cups**

A figure in a black cloak weeps over three spilled cups; two stand behind, and a bridge leads to the castle. Grief taking up the whole of the view. What is left, and not yet seen.

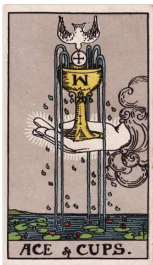
**Six of Cups**

A child holds out a flowering cup to a smaller one, in a quiet courtyard.

What comes back from childhood or from before: a place seen again, an old kindness, someone found again.

Cups – Water

Emotion, the bond, dreaming, what flows between beings. A Cups card touches the heart: a relationship, a joy or a grief, what is felt and not said.

**Ace of Cups**

A hand holds out a cup overflowing in five streams; a dove descends into it, a wafer in its beak.

A feeling that spills over before it has been named. What is offered, and still has to be accepted.

**Two of Cups**

A man and a woman exchange their cups; above them, a caduceus and a winged lion's head.

The pact of two. The meeting that binds, the agreement sealed by looking at each other.

**Seven of Cups**

Seven cups float in a haze, laden with visions: a face, a jewel, a dragon, a shroud.

Too many possibilities, all of them tempting. The dream that stops you choosing, or the mirage.

**Eight of Cups**

A man walks off toward the mountains, leaning on a staff, leaving eight stacked cups behind him under a moon.

Leaving what is perfectly good. Giving up what no longer suffices, without drama.

**Nine of Cups**

A satisfied man, arms folded, seated before nine cups ranged on a draped sideboard.

The contentment you can show. The wish granted – and the slightly smug ease that goes with it.

**Ten of Cups**

A couple with arms raised, two children dancing, ten cups arched like a rainbow over the house.

Happiness that stands up because several people hold it. What you have built and look at laughing.

**Ace of Swords**

A hand out of a cloud holds an upright sword, crowned, a palm and a branch hanging from it.

The idea that pierces. The truth said at a stroke, and not to be taken back.

**Two of Swords**

A blindfolded woman holds two crossed swords against her chest, seated with her back to the sea.

The refusal to settle it. Balance held by not looking.

**Page of Cups**

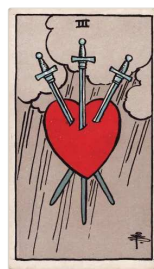
A young man in a flowered tunic looks at a fish rising out of his cup.

News of the heart, a gentle proposal. The imagination that takes the absurd seriously.

**Knight of Cups**

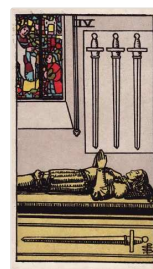
A rider comes at a walk, winged helm and heels, presenting his cup before him.

Someone coming to offer. The invitation, the declaration, the slow and careful approach.

**Three of Swords**

Three swords pierce a heart, under rain and cloud.

The clean wound, with no mystery to it. What hurts because it was true.

**Four of Swords**

A stone effigy, hands joined, one sword beneath it and three on the wall; a stained-glass window lights the chapel.

Withdrawal, convalescence. The pause taken before you can begin again.

**Queen of Cups**

A woman on a throne at the sea's edge, absorbed in a closed cup, worked like a reliquary.

Someone who feels everything and says none of it. Depth that listens, and guesses.

**King of Cups**

A man thrones on a rough sea, cup in hand, a fish leaping near him – and he does not move.

Someone who holds their feelings without denying them. Calm in the middle of what is churning.

**Five of Swords**

A man gathers up the fallen swords, a smirk on his face; two figures walk away, already far off.

Winning by damaging. What you carry off, and what you leave behind.

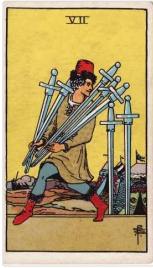
**Six of Swords**

A ferryman poles a boat carrying a woman and a child; six swords are planted in the hull.

The crossing toward calmer water. Leaving, and taking what wounded you along.

Swords – Air

Thought, speech, clarity – but also conflict and the truth that cuts. A Swords card cuts through: a decision, a lucidity, sometimes a wound made of words.

**Seven of Swords**

A man tiptoes away from a camp, five swords in his arms, two left standing.

Cunning, the sidestep, what you carry off without saying. Half succeeding, and knowing it.

**Eight of Swords**

A woman bound and blindfolded, ringed by eight planted swords – but the ground ahead of her is clear.

The prison you believe is shut. What holds you as long as you have not tried walking.

**Queen of Swords**

A woman seated, sword upright, one hand open, seen in profile, clouds beneath her throne.

Someone who has paid for their lucidity. Plain judgement, without indulgence and without cruelty.

**King of Swords**

A man thrones face on, his sword slightly tilted, two butterflies carved into the back of the seat.

Someone who judges and will not be moved. The authority of the law and of the exact word.

**Nine of Swords**

Someone sits up in bed, face in their hands; nine swords are ranged in the dark.

The night's dread, which makes everything larger. Fear that has not yet met daylight.

**Ten of Swords**

A man face down, ten swords in his back, under a black sky torn open by a dawn.

The bottom, reached without ambiguity. It is over, and there is nothing left to make worse.

Pentacles – Earth

The body, matter, money, work, what lasts. A Pentacles card anchors: a place, a trade, a wealth or a lack, the slow construction of things.

**Ace of Pentacles**

A hand holds out a pentacle above a walled garden; an arch of flowers opens onto the mountains.

What is offered and will hold. The concrete resource, right at the start.

**Two of Pentacles**

A juggler turns two pentacles inside a ribbon shaped like a figure of eight; behind him, two ships on the swell.

Holding two things at once, and dancing while you do. The balance that works as long as you do not stop.

**Page of Swords**

A young man on a rise, sword held high, turned to look behind him, hair in the wind.

Someone who watches and reports. Quick curiosity, the eye that lingers where it should not.

**Knight of Swords**

A rider charges at full tilt, sword out, in a sky full of wind.

Someone who arrives like a blade. The brutal decision, the attack that gives no warning.

**Three of Pentacles**

A craftsman on a stool shows his work to two people holding a plan, inside an abbey.

Work recognized by those who know. Skill put in common.

**Four of Pentacles**

A crowned man clutches a pentacle to him, one under each foot, one on his head; the town is behind him.

What you keep until it stiffens you. The security that stops you moving.

**Five of Pentacles**

Two beggars pass through the snow beneath a lit window – one limps, the other walks barefoot.

Destitution, and the shelter right beside it that goes unseen. Being outside while others are in.

**Six of Pentacles**

A merchant holds a balance and lets coins fall into the hands of two kneeling beggars.

The gift that comes from above. Receiving in dependence, or giving by weight.

**Page of Pentacles**

A young man in a field holds a pentacle up at eye level, absorbed.

Someone learning by looking. The first coin, the study, the concrete offer being examined.

**Knight of Pentacles**

A rider sits still on a plough horse, a pentacle on his open hand, before a turned field.

Someone advancing without hurrying. The constancy that will arrive exactly when it arrives.

**Seven of Pentacles**

A man leans on his hoe and looks at a bush laden with seven pentacles, without picking them.

The pause in the work. What is still growing, and the impatience of the one who waits.

**Eight of Pentacles**

A craftsman strikes a pentacle at his bench; six already hang on the post, one waits at his feet.

The trade acquired by dint of doing it. Patient repetition, and the pleasure it ends up giving.

**Queen of Pentacles**

A woman seated in greenery holds a pentacle on her knees, the way you hold a sleeping animal.

Someone who makes things grow, who feeds, who keeps a place. Concrete abundance, held without meanness.

**King of Pentacles**

A man thrones among vines, a pentacle in the crook of his arm, bulls carved beside him, a castle behind.

Someone who owns and makes it bear fruit. Success settled in, with nothing left to prove.

**Nine of Pentacles**

A richly dressed woman in a vineyard, a hooded falcon on her gloved hand.

What you owe nobody for. The quiet luxury of someone self-made.

**Ten of Pentacles**

An old man and his dogs under an archway, a couple, a child; ten pentacles trace a tree over the scene.

What is handed on and outlasts you. The house, the line, the inheritance.

- ♦ **The day you stop opening these pages.** This is a crutch, and a crutch is for walking, not for sitting down. As you play, the Six of Cups will stop saying “what comes back from childhood”: it will say *that* canal, *that* friend found again, the scene it fell in the first time. You will have nothing to do for this to happen – and the day you close these pages without having consulted them, your tarot has become your own. (See “A card stops being generic”, part 2.)

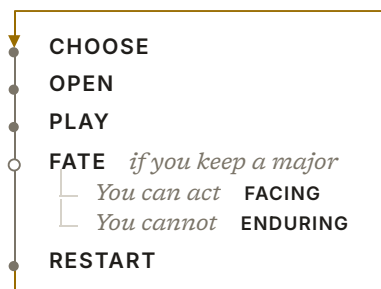
D • Play aid



the whole game on one page

What follows is not to be learned: it is to be found again. The whole book is here in short-hand, for the table, for when a gesture escapes you mid-scene and you have no wish to reopen the part that teaches it.

The loop



Fate comes in only through a **major** kept at the opening; the wager is declared before you resolve, and the recoil follows in both cases. After three scenes played, the floor is the world's.

What to draw

Where fate lives. Only the **opening** – the three cards that enter a scene – brings it in. Everywhere else, in a scene as outside one, you draw matter – **one card**, or **three** when you look at the **surroundings** (part 7) – and a major weighs there without bringing fate in.

- **Closed question** (yes / no) → the **coin**. Heads = first pole / for; tails = second / against. Always propose **two poles**; never the same question twice.
- **Open question** → **draw a card**, read freely. If the side has already fallen (you know it is good, or bad), read it on that side, **from behind** if need be; never to decide the side itself. *(At the opening of a scene: three cards, keep one, give up the other two.)*
- **Populate richly** → the **surroundings**: three cards, play one, the other two stay in place, points of interest asleep (part 7). *(Nothing is lost. That is what separates them from the opening.)*
- **A wait or a stake** → a **lead** (your character searches) or a **world scene** (the world advances behind his back). You end up **deciding and striking out** – even if you open new ones.

- **Uncertain action** → **two cards**, you against the world.

The action – one card against the world

- Left = you, right = the world. Between **minors**, the **higher number wins**; the **Ace beats the King and nothing else**; a **major** goes ahead of any minor, and between **two majors**, the **higher arcanum** (The Fool takes The World and nothing else); on a tie, the world.
- The **suit of your card** says *how*: Wands, charging · Swords, cutting, cunning · Cups, touching, the bond · Pentacles, holding, forcing · Major, the outcome that did not exist. The world's card says how it resisted you.
- An action is played **once** – the stronger wins, you obey; nothing to buy back, and you do not attempt the same thing again in the same conditions.
- Won with a major → **fate's flare**.

Fate

- **In** when you keep a **major at the opening**, and by no other door. Describe first what falls on you, wager afterward.
- **The wager, in two clauses**, just before resolving: what fate **takes**, what happens if it does not take it. What you wager must belong on the **standing page** or the **portrait**; otherwise it is not a thing, and fate is not played empty-handed.
- **One single question divides the two forms: can you act?**
- **Facing fate** (*he can act*) – **one action**, two cards, once. Flare and crushing color the outcome; they count nothing.
- **Enduring fate** (*he cannot*) – read the major at length, stretch **two worlds** beneath it that it alone could give, and **toss the coin**. Neither of the two is comfortable, and each must give something to play. No flare, no crushing.
- **What fate closes, only fate can open**, not by an action, not by a good idea: another major,

and a wager that names it. It does not give the thing back, it opens the road again. Note the closed door on the standing page.

- What you win **settles in** and **commits** you. In both cases, a **recoil**: one sentence in which the body reacts before the thought.

The world scene

After three scenes played at his side, it is the world's turn to speak: a turn that comes, not a permission; the count is held in your head, and the floor does not expire. **Never two in a row,** and **fate does not come into it.**

Open it like a scene, play it without your character. It moves forward what pends – a **stake**, a **wait** – and you note it on the **standing page**; or it merely lives, and it is a **breather**: nothing to write at the end. Both give him the floor back.

What to play – for you to settle: a **stake**, a **wait**, or a **breather**. The stirring, for its part, names the stake (*part 10*). If nothing comes, two poles to the **coin**: it is your own choice you hand it, and that is allowed. A more fertile variant: ask what the world is busy with, rather than what you feel like.

The **raising** brings a stake to life: draw through to a major + **world scene** (it does not wait the three scenes, at the opening of a game). **Restarting** it afterward means making it move like everything pending: a **lead** or a **world scene** (*part 8*).

Closing a scene

A **bridging question** (which frames the next scene, and is not written down), what goes to the **standing page**, and all the rest, which you let die.

Closing a session

Look at your stakes and find the one that has moved least. Write its name at the foot of the page: **the next session opens on it**, and you will have nothing to choose when you sit back down.

If it is the same one as at the previous session, it is done waiting: **open a lead** on it, or push it in a world scene (*part 8*), at the reopening, never that same evening. Somebody acted while you were looking elsewhere.

The four golden rules

Ask before you know · Declare the wager before you resolve · **Read without haste** – a card gives itself in an instant or in a day, and both count · **Renounce for good** – choose the card that moves things forward, not the one that reassures.

When you hesitate

On a **rule**, decide in favor of the world: it gives nothing away. On the **fiction**, decide fast, in the direction that **moves things forward**, not the one that reassures.

E • The lexicon



the words of the game, in one line

The game does not have many words, but each one designates one thing and one only. Here they are in alphabetical order, with the part where they live for good: this lexicon reminds, it does not teach.

Actor – a presence that **wants**: someone who will come back and weigh, where the Backdrop is forgotten. You anchor him on the standing page in one line. part 7

Anchor (to) – to enter an actor on the standing page: not for what he is, for what he **wants**. part 7

Backdrop – what you come across and forget: pure color, nothing to note. A Backdrop can **rise** the day you notice that it wants something. part 7

Bond – what an actor *seems* to expect of you, written on the standing page and **never crossed out**: you stack, you do not correct. part 7

Bridging question – the one question you leave open in closing a scene and that **does not go to the standing page**: the next scene answers it, and it is what frames that scene. part 8

Chapter – a stretch of adventure that rises, peaks and falls away. A convenience of storytelling: no mechanism depends on it, and it is most often recognized afterward. part 3

Coin – the oracle of closed questions: heads the first pole, tails the second. It never resolves an action. part 1

Compass (the bearings) – the four suits taken as directions, on the day the page empties: what to turn toward when you no longer know what to do. part 12

Crushing – the world wins, and it is a major: it did not go around you, it went over you. It colors the outcome, it weighs nothing more. part 5

Deck – a single pack of 78 cards, majors and minors mixed, reshuffled at the opening of every scene. part 2

Desire – what your character wants. No mechanism, no count: it **orients** what you play. part 11

Draw for / draw against – a card read on the side you already know to be true. It no longer

says *whether*, it says *what* – and the side must be true **before** the draw. part 4

Enduring fate – the form of fate where your character **cannot act**: two worlds stretched beneath the major, and the coin says which one arrives. part 6

Everyday (the) – what plays out when you have kept a **minor** at the opening: fate has not come in, nothing is put at stake. part 4

Facing fate – the form of fate where your character **can act**: one single action, two cards, the stronger wins, wager declared first. part 6

Fate – what comes in when you **keep a major at the opening**, and by no other door: the moment stops being ordinary. What it closes, only it can open. part 6

Fate's flare – you win, and it is a major: the success that overflows. It colors the outcome, it weighs nothing more. part 5

Lead – a scene **declared** to make a wait or a stake move: no new gesture, only the intention changes. part 8

Major Arcanum (*called a major*) – one of the twenty-two named cards, from The Fool to The World. It does not answer: it **names**, and it weighs. parts 2, 4, 6

Meta note – what you know and your character does not, set aside on the standing page. It is often that which strings the story tight. part 8

Minor Arcanum (*called a minor*) – one of the fifty-six cards of the four suits, from Ace to King: the matter of the everyday. parts 2, 4

Opening (the) – the gesture that begins every scene: three cards, you keep one, **you give up the other two**. The only draw where choosing costs, and the only door of fate. part 3

Poles (the two) – the two worlds you set down yourself before tossing the coin: never a *yes* and an empty space. part 1

Populate · widen · hook · probe – the four families of question: who is there and how he is (*coin*) · what exists just beyond the frame (*card*) · what is off (*card*) · staying with the answer that has already fallen. parts 1 and 2

Portrait – what you write about someone, actor or character: a name, what he wants, his suits,

and what he carries when that says who he is. Without any count, and never corrected – you write a fresh one, further on. parts 7, 11

Push – an actor's desire: what he strains toward, even when you are looking elsewhere. part 7

Raise a detail (to) – to decide that what the place has handed you **concerns** you. The draw gives the matter; you are the one who decides that it looks at you. part 3

Raising (the) – the world scene by which a stirring is raised, far from your character. part 10

Ranks (the) – the scale of an action: between minors the higher number wins, the Ace beats the King, a major goes ahead of any minor, The Fool takes The World, and on a tie the world wins. part 5

Recoil – the sentence in which the body reacts before the thought, when something closes – won or lost. parts 5, 6

Scene – the unit of play: you open it, you play it, you close it. part 3

Stake – an open question on which **somebody else is making progress**: it does not forget itself, and it does not ripen on its own. parts 8, 10

Standing page – the page that keeps what is pending: living actors, waits, stakes, desires under way, doors closed by fate. There is only one, and it **replaces** the previous one. part 8

Stirring – the gesture that brings a stake to life: drawing through to a major, then playing a raising. part 10

Suits (the four) – Wands/Fire, what cannot wait · Cups/Water, what comes back · Swords/Air, the line that separates · Pentacles/Earth, what remains. They say a card's matter, and *how* you acted. part 4

Surroundings (the) – three cards drawn mid-scene to populate a place in one stroke: you play one, the other two stay on the table. No giving up, no fate. part 7

Table (the) – the surface in front of you: the cards drawn stay in view on it for the length of the scene. parts 2, 7

Thread – the tension running from one scene to the next: what stays open when a scene closes, and calls up the following one. part 8

Wager – what fate can take, named in **two clauses** just before you resolve: what it takes, what happens if it does not take it. What you wager must belong on the standing page or the portrait. part 6

Wait – an open question that **nobody else is looking into**: it belongs to you, it ripens, it has the right never to close. part 8

World scene – a declared scene in which **your character is not present**: the world advances behind his back. After three scenes played at his side the floor is the world's; never two in a row, and fate does not come into it. It moves forward what pends, or it merely lives – a **breather**. part 9