

THE SILT VERSES

A GAME OF FOLK HORROR
& MONSTROUS DIVINITY



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THE SILT VERSES

RPG

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The Silt Verses RPG is based on the audio drama by Jon Ware and Muna Hussen, and is adapted with their permission.

The game's mechanics are based in part on *Apocalypse World* by Vincent and Meguey Baker, *The Between* and *Public Access* by Jason Cordova, and *Ghosts of El Paso* by Daniel Qualls and Jason Cordova.

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INTRODUCTION



OVERVIEW

The Silt Verses RPG is a tabletop roleplaying game of folk horror and monstrous divinity, where strange gods haunt the landscape and civilization is fueled by ritual sacrifice. In this game, a group of conscripted agents called Custodians are sent into isolated territories to deal with these monstrous gods, terrifying angels, and other divine manifestations in order to appease them, neutralize them, or otherwise engage with the locals to find a solution to the threats they present.

The Custodians are sent on dangerous missions with little resources and the threat of dire repercussions should they break their contract. But something more sinister looms over their operations—a secret organization conspires to manipulate them for its own agenda. The Custodians must ultimately decide how to confront this organization, all the while struggling with their complicated relationship to faith and the strange gods of their past who won't let go of them so easily.

The Silt Verses RPG is based on the audio drama series by Jon Ware and Muna Hussen, and further expands on the world presented in the show. It also takes inspiration from folk horror, weird fiction, and dystopian or post-apocalyptic media (see Media Touchstones on page 84). You do not need to be familiar with the audio drama to enjoy the game, and no prior knowledge of the setting is necessary, but if you're curious, the *Silt Verses* audio drama reference (page 85) lists chapters and moments from the show that we especially recommend. *The Silt Verses RPG* does not seek to recreate the plot of the show, but rather encourages players to explore the setting and make it their own.

The Silt Verses RPG is Powered by the Apocalypse, meaning its mechanics are inspired, in part, by Vincent and Meguey Baker's *Apocalypse World*. It is also Carved from Brindlewood, meaning the mystery mechanics and procedures are inspired by *Brindlewood Bay*.

THE SETTING

The story of *The Silt Verses* takes place in a world much like ours, but with some extremely noticeable exceptions. Gods inhabit the world as embodiments of a particular element or concept. Some are ancient, while others are modern creations. Some haunt a particular landmark or natural object, while others are widespread. There are said to be tens of thousands of known deities worshiped throughout the Territories of the Ignathian Peninsula. Rural communities tend to worship smaller gods in ways considered horrific or bizarre by more “civilized” society. Residents of Glottage and other cities often worship in ways that are safe, commercially-licensed, or tokenistic. These many deities may be broadly categorized as falling under licensed faiths, forbidden faiths, and stray gods.

As poverty or desperation take hold, folk may find themselves worshipping more specific and terrible things, falling into patterns of ritual and behavior impossible to escape from. Sacrifice is understood as a necessary thing, for all gods must be fed, and everyone must make concessions for the greater good of society. Transformation is also a key part of many faiths. Human forms can be painfully shaped into bewildering and terrible expressions of a god’s will—inevitably becoming something that is both more and less than human and often monstrous, dangerous, or impossible to reason with—in the process. These “saints” and “angels” also haunt the landscape, and one faith’s miracle is another’s nightmare.

The Custodians will explore a landscape littered with abandoned buildings and abandoned gods. The world has been shaped and polluted by strange divinity at every level, leaving it broken-down, blasted, and wild. This is largely a gloomy place of moors, rivers, valleys, farmland, forest, and marshland, of rain and mist. Other landscapes—desert or snowy peaks or grand vistas—are outside the scope of the story we’re trying to tell here. The sea is the purest, deepest thing we see, and it’s dark and polluted and monstrous.

Modern technology exists in this world, but it is usually in disrepair, inaccessible or highly localized, and inextricably linked to a god in some form. Any scientific discoveries and technological advances are similar to ours, except they often involved the rise of an inconvenient or outright destructive god, which in turn required continued worship—and sacrifices.

Above all, the levels of technology in this world are socially and geographically unequal. While middle class neighborhoods in larger cities like Nesh may have dial-up internet, other towns have been nearly wiped out by unsustainable sacrifice. You will find abandoned vehicles and homes, empty office buildings and crumbling infrastructure almost everywhere in some form. This dissonance and inequality is felt at every level, between a central government and rural territories, between widespread commercial faiths and stray, forgotten gods.

While these concepts are key to establishing the setting of the game, there is plenty of room for interpretation at your table. For example, characters in *The Silt Verses* audio drama use pay phones, or get news from the radio. Do the Custodians have access to mobile phones in your game? If so, what off-shoot of the Saint Electric is associated with them? How might other faiths view this technology? What ritual contracts, sacrifices, or unintended complications might be a result of mobile phones existing in this world full of strange gods?





THE CUSTODIANS

The player characters in *The Silt Verses RPG* are tasked as "Custodians," sent out into the rural territories to investigate and resolve disturbances of stray and feral gods. As agents of **THE BUREAU FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND ASSIMILATION OF STRAY DEITIES**, they are expected to resolve localized problems that are too dangerous for other agencies to handle—or too politically damaging for the government to even acknowledge directly. This is largely thankless work, with little to no resources or guidance provided beyond an initial report and directions. Each member of the group has their own reasons for joining the Custodians, though it is rarely by choice.

Most Custodians are former prisoners who have been drafted into their service as a means to redeem themselves as "reformed" worshipers of illegal gods; however, corruption is rampant at all levels of government, and these Custodians may just as easily have been pressed into service by other officials who secretly worship the same god. Some Custodians may actually be volunteers—those who have lost loved ones to an illegal deity, or nationalists who want to see the Peninsula united under a single pantheon of legal gods. Other "volunteers" may be corporate stooges, sent on behalf of one of the licensed faiths to protect their interests and quietly pass on government information. The action of bringing together so many overt disciples and ex-disciples of various faiths is, for the Legislatures, a propaganda coup.

Publicly, the Custodians are hailed as heroes—featured in official posters and advertisements as a motley group of reformed false-faith worshipers, now proudly serving their communities, finding common ground with dangerous stray gods and their followers, and appeasing them with the power of heartfelt dialogue. The reality is far less glamorous. The Custodians are all under contract, and might face debt, punishment, or consequences far worse should they fail to complete their assignments. Each Custodian has also been chosen for this work, in part, because of their complicated past with gods—the fact that they have an ambivalent stance towards their faith is viewed as an asset when dealing with the fringe elements of divinity throughout the Territories.

As far as the Bureau is concerned, the Custodians are particularly useful for this work, both as a propaganda tool and as an indirect means to handle inconvenient problems—but they are ultimately disposable. While the Custodians supposedly possess jurisdiction across the entirety of the Peninsula, they are entirely on their own, with no tangible way to leverage their status—and local law enforcement is far more likely to view them as a dangerous rival to be aggressively chased out or quietly eliminated.

THE CONSPIRACY

The Bureau which sends the Custodians on their assignments is poorly funded, wildly disorganized, and rife with corruption. The Peninsula, where they conduct their investigations, is a decentralized collection of squabbling and religiously-divided territories which pretends to be a unified nation-state. Local law enforcement agencies are rarely in formal communication with each other—in fact, they are in frequent competition over crime scenes and resources which fall outside any jurisdiction. Then there are the Adjudicators—or their paymasters in the larger commercial faiths—who trust neither local law enforcement nor the officers of the Greater Glottage Police Force to handle a crime with the appropriate discretion or the desired outcome.

In this tangled web of competing powers, it's hardly surprising that a powerful and influential organization has found a way to manipulate the Custodians for its own agenda. During the course of the game's campaign, the Custodians will uncover clues about the nature of this organization, and ultimately confront them. There are a number of such groups in this setting—government organizations, corporations, research institutes, wealthy families—and options to present each during the course of a campaign. Importantly, this organization is not a central villain or mastermind. It is a threat because of its tremendous wealth, political influence, military power, connection to a powerful god, or some combination of these things.

A HAUNTED PAST

If you've listened to *The Silt Verses* audio drama, you might have noticed that we don't learn about the main characters all at once in a lengthy introduction. Instead, they reveal themselves in layers, through intimate conversations and flashbacks. Similarly, the Custodians come from many walks of life, and their past is kept intentionally mysterious in the game at first. They enter the story caught between the faith they once had and the contract they are indebted to fulfill. We aim to explore their past, but only at the right time—dramatically-speaking—and only when the game's rules tell us to.

As a player, you should try to avoid speaking about your character's past in detail—in character or out of character—unless a specific mechanic in the game demands it (such as the Journey Move or the Verse of History, both of which will be discussed later in this text). If a Side Character asks a Custodian about their past, they should deflect or change the subject; if a player asks another player about their Custodian's past, they must remind them that they're not allowed to say, but they are open to using the Journey Move in order to get the character to talk.

It's sometimes impossible to avoid talking about the Custodians' pasts, regardless of the game's intentions. In those cases, don't fight it—say what you need to say—but try to give the minimum amount of information needed to satisfy the circumstance.

You should always strongly resist talking about elements of the Custodian's past suggested by a part of their faith sheet—it will be much more exciting and impactful to discover it during play!

a FEW POINTS to REMEMBER

The world of *The Silt Verses* is full of horrors, and while it has many similarities to our own, this game has a very intentional focus for the story it explores. It's important to note that in the default setting of *The Silt Verses RPG*, things like race, gender, sexuality, disability, or neurodivergence are not a social barrier. As with the characters portrayed in *The Silt Verses* audio drama, the source of conflict for the Custodians comes from their complicated history with strange gods, personal conflicts with each other, and the power structures they find themselves caught within—but not necessarily from facing any sort of discrimination based on their identities.

When presenting gods, their manifestations, and their followers, keep in mind that no matter how awful or perverse a particular faith is, it should always have a clear logic and a human need underpinning it. There are no purely “evil” gods or cults, though many faiths commit evil acts. All participants in this world are human—initially, at least. *The Silt Verses RPG* is much more interested in exploring why people are drawn to such groups, the things they are willing to sacrifice for their faith, and the horrors they may accept as normal, even divine, as they seek transcendence.

CONTENT WARNING

The Silt Verses RPG contains some dark subject matter which may not be suitable for everyone, including intense themes of religious horror, human sacrifice, graphic violence, body horror, cults, implied harm to children and animals, family trauma and mental illness, government oppression and police violence, war, and natural disasters. The section on safety tools will address these issues in more detail.

All that said, you may decide that this game isn't for you, and that's fine! There are other excellent mystery-horror games out there for you to read and play which are lighter in tone, such as *Brindlewood Bay*, *Monster of the Week*, and *Public Access*.





*GAMEPLAY
BASICS*



THE CONVERSATION & THE MOVES

Gameplay in *The Silt Verses RPG* is mostly a conversation. One participant, the Keeper, says how the world behaves; they frame scenes and present challenges to the other participants, the players, who are responsible for saying how their character, a Custodian, reacts. This is all largely done via a back-and-forth conversation between the Keeper and the players; the narrative authority—who gets to say what—changes from time to time, but it's always within the confines of the conversation.

The conversation ends when a player describes their Custodian doing something that triggers a move. At that point, you read the text of the triggered move, do what it says (usually rolling dice and interpreting the results), and then narrate that part of the story, as needed. Once the move is resolved, you return to the conversation.

It won't always be as clean as that when you sit down to play—the Keeper may prefer to shift the spotlight to another character in the middle of resolving a move, returning later when it's dramatically interesting—but that is generally how the game should go.

ABILITIES

Abilities are the Custodian attributes that are applied to most die rolls in the game. They each have a modifier from -3 to +3. The abilities are: Vitality, Focus, Insight, Presence, and Communion.

-  Use **VITALITY** if the Custodian's action involves strength, dexterity, endurance, athleticism, or raw physicality.
 -  Use **FOCUS** if the Custodian's action requires a steady hand, a calm disposition, or intense concentration; or if they are trying to avoid a fear-based reaction.
 -  Use **INSIGHT** if the Custodian is studying books, researching a problem, examining a crime scene, or otherwise engaging their mental faculty.
 -  Use **PRESENCE** if the Custodian is trying to charm someone, intimidate someone, or capture someone's imagination.
 -  Use **COMMUNION** if the Custodian's action involves divine forces; the Keeper may decide that any action that is seemingly governed by a different ability is actually governed by Communion because of the divine nature of what is being undertaken, or because of the involvement with gods in that specific scenario.
-

ROLLING DICE

In most cases, when you roll dice because a move has instructed you to do so, you roll two six-sided dice, sum them, and then add the modifier from the relevant ability. You then check the result against the text of the move. If a move refers to a “hit,” it means a result of 7+. If a move refers to a “miss,” it means a result of 6-. Moves also frequently have success tiers: a miss, 7-9, 10-11, and 12+.

ADVANTAGE & DISADVANTAGE

When you have an advantage, you roll three dice, keep the two highest, sum them, and then add the modifier of the relevant ability. You will most often have an advantage because of the following:



A move gives you an advantage.



The Custodian is using an unmarked item from their Altar in their action (see Anatomy of a Character Sheet, Altar page 25).

When you're at a disadvantage, you roll three dice, keep the two lowest, sum them, and then add the modifier of the relevant ability. You will most often be at a disadvantage because of the following:



A Condition negatively impacts your Custodian's action (see Anatomy of a Character Sheet, Conditions page 24).



The Keeper believes it's appropriate under the current circumstances.

If circumstances would cause you to both have an advantage and be at a disadvantage during an action, they cancel each other out and you roll as normal. Note, however, that advantage and disadvantage do not “stack,” nor can one outweigh the other.

For example, if you have two Conditions, each of which would plausibly put you at a disadvantage, and one faith sheet move that gives you an advantage, you would simply roll as normal, without advantage or disadvantage.

WRITING A VERSE

The Keeper will be very hard on Custodians when describing adversity because players have a powerful tool that allows them to resist: Writing a Verse (see Anatomy of a Character Sheet, Writing a Verse page 25).

After a die roll, and after an outcome has been narrated, the player can choose to change the course of history and instead Write a Verse about how things actually happened.

Mechanically, they then raise their die result by one success tier (so, a miss becomes a 7-9, a 7-9 becomes a 10-11, and a 10-11 becomes a 12+). We now narrate a different result, and what was previously narrated does not occur.

An example:



Amanda's character, Sedna, is attempting to escape the grasp of an immortal saint, triggering an appropriate move. Amanda, understanding that Sedna's death is a distinct possibility, rolls her dice and gets a miss. The Keeper describes how the saint catches Sedna in its claws and transforms her, turning her into a monstrous saint as well. Amanda decides she doesn't like this outcome and writes the Verse of History, making her die roll a 7-9. This time, per the move's text, Sedna escapes but the saint leaves a mark in her skin, which may become a problem later.

You may be asking yourself: "Why does the Keeper fully narrate a result they know the player is just going to discard by Writing a Verse?" Answer: because it's fun! Writing a Verse lets us glimpse different scenarios, play them out, feel them, experience the anguish and terror, and then... do something different. It's sort of like one of those old Choose Your Own Adventure books: part of the fun is making the wrong choice so you can see the disaster that befalls your character (and declaring that you're Writing a Verse is like putting your thumb on the page of those old books, so you can go back and choose something else if things turn out poorly).

Elder N,

I think I've found it. The search took me much further inland than I expected, but the nest is there, in the rafters of an old textile factory outside the Trembling Vale. I haven't tried to approach it yet, but I've made my presence known with a small offering, and left my marks around the perimeter. If an angel waits here, it really could be the birthplace of a new miracle. Just like one of the Prophecies! I'll write again soon.

Your student, K

P.S. Don't worry, I'm being careful this time.



MOVES

There are three types of moves in *The Silt Verses RPG*: basic moves, faith moves (a “faith sheet” is what we call the custom part of your character sheet in this game), and custom moves. This chapter focuses on the basic moves: the Veiled Move, the Revelation Move, the Information Move, the Journey Move, and Answer a Question. The Keeper chapters contain a more in-depth treatment of the moves.

There are references in this section to the phases of the game, such as the Journey phase and the Investigation phase. Please see Play Structure on page 27 for more details on phases.

— ❧ BASIC MOVES ❧ —

THE VEILED MOVE

When you do something risky or face something you fear, name what you’re afraid will happen if you fail or lose your nerve, then roll with an appropriate ability.

- ❖ On a 10+, you do what you intended or you hold steady; describe what it looks like.
- ❖ On a 7-9, the Keeper will tell you how your actions would leave you vulnerable, and you can choose to back down or go through with it. If you go through with it, the Keeper describes what it looks like.
- ❖ On a 12+, you do what you intended or you hold steady, and the Keeper will tell you some extra benefit or advantage you receive. Describe what it looks like.

The Veiled Move is a general purpose move used when Custodians take risky actions or face something they fear and another move isn’t more suitable. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.

THE REVELATION MOVE

When you do something risky or face something you fear, name what you’re afraid will happen if you fail or lose your nerve. The Keeper will tell you how it’s worse than you fear. You can choose to back down or go through with it. If you go through with it, roll with an appropriate ability.

- ❖ On a 10+, you do what you intended or you hold steady; describe what it looks like.
- ❖ On a 7-9, you do it or hold steady, but there is a complication or cost; the Keeper describes what it looks like.
- ❖ On a 12+, you do what you intended or you hold steady, and the Keeper will tell you some extra benefit or advantage you receive. Describe what it looks like.

The Revelation Move is a general purpose move used when Custodians take risky actions or encounter something frightening or unnerving when a god is involved and another move isn’t more suitable. In The Silt Verses RPG, you never know when a god is nearby or may reveal itself, so the Revelation Move is written to have more perilous outcomes for the Custodians than the Veiled Move. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.

THE JOURNEY MOVE

While traveling to another Assignment, when you and at least one other Custodian share a scene where you discuss your personal history or relationship to divinity, you each clear a Condition. Then, stumble on a Clue; Custodians in the scene should tell the Keeper what the Clue is and how they came across it. The Clue cannot conclusively answer a Question by itself.

Alternatively, while alone, you may engage in your Personal Ritual to clear an appropriate Condition.

Custodians can only participate in the Journey Move once per Journey Phase.

This move serves the practical purposes of clearing a Condition and/or revealing a Clue, but is principally designed to show the relationship between two Custodians. It is also one of two major opportunities to explore a Custodian's past (the other being Personal Altar, see page 25). While Custodians are formally discouraged from traveling alone per Bureau regulations, a player may choose to disregard this by having their Custodian pursue more dangerous approaches to investigation.

THE INFORMATION MOVE

When you search for a clue, conduct research, or otherwise gather information, describe how you're doing so and roll with an appropriate ability.

- ❖ On a hit, you find a Clue. The Keeper will tell you what it is.
- ❖ On a 7–9, there's a complication—either with the Clue itself, or a complication you encounter while searching. The Keeper will tell you what the complication is.
- ❖ On a 12+, you also find a Conspiracy Clue or otherwise learn something fundamental about the Conspiracy (Keeper's choice).

The Information Move is the main way a Custodian turns up Clues necessary to resolve the dangerous Assignments. In rarer instances, it can turn up clues related to the Conspiracy. It is written to cover all types of information-gathering actions, and the ability used for the roll should match whatever action is taken. For example, if a Custodian is gathering information by sweet-talking a local law enforcement official, her player would roll with Presence. If they are gathering information by silently listening to a conversation they aren't supposed to hear, her player would roll with Composure. If they are digging through books at the local library, they'd roll with Reason. And so forth. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.



ANSWER A QUESTION

This move is only available in the Investigation Phase; the Custodians must have gathered a number of Clues equal to at least half the Question's Complexity.

When the Custodians have an open, freewheeling discussion about the answer to a Question and reach a consensus, roll plus the number of Clues incorporated into the answer or otherwise explained away, minus the question's Complexity.

- ❖ On a 10+, the answer is correct and an Opportunity can be pursued.
- ❖ On a 7-9, as above, but the Keeper will add an unwelcome complication to the answer and/or pursuing the Opportunity will be more dangerous.
- ❖ On a 6-, the answer is incorrect and the Keeper reacts.
- ❖ On a 12+, the answer is correct as on a 10+ but the events are also connected to the Conspiracy. Someone from the Conspiracy will reveal themselves to the Custodians while they are pursuing the Opportunity.

The Keeper will introduce Assignments to the story—localized problems with stray gods that endanger the community—and it's the job of the Custodians to neutralize or appease those entities to complete their Assignments. The way they do so is by first gathering Clues, then using those Clues to answer a Question about the Assignment, which then unlocks Opportunities to resolve the Assignment. As an example, here are the Questions and Opportunities for the Assignment called The Hungering Roots:

QUESTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

How is the harvest god most vulnerable? (Complexity: 4)

Resolve the Assignment by destroying or neutralizing this dangerous entity so it cannot grow back.

What resources does this harvest god offer, if appeased? (Complexity: 6)

Resolve the Assignment by working with the growers to adapt their methods and establish a more sustainable operation that does not threaten the community.

Where can this harvest god be safely transplanted? (Complexity: 8)

Resolve the Assignment by breaking the god from its confines, allowing it to grow freely, and showing the local residents how to coexist with it.

Importantly, there are no canonical answers to these Questions; players are expected to use their Clues to formulate an answer of their own—to theorize, if you will—and then roll dice to see if they are correct.

One last note about Answer a Question: the roll can never be taken with advantage or disadvantage. The success tier can be increased by invoking the Verse of Prophecy, but only if every Custodian does so.

FAITH MOVES & CUSTOM MOVES

The proper way to think about the differences between the basic moves, faith moves, and custom moves is that each represents a different level of fictional specificity. Put more simply, the basic moves cover roughly 75% of all actions the Custodians might take in the story; the faith moves are for narrower circumstances involving talents that are unique to a particular Custodian, and account for about 20% of their actions; and custom moves are for niche cases, usually for highlighting something specific to a mystery, or a dramatic, one-time action, and account for less than 5% of all actions.

Faith moves can be found on their respective faith sheets.

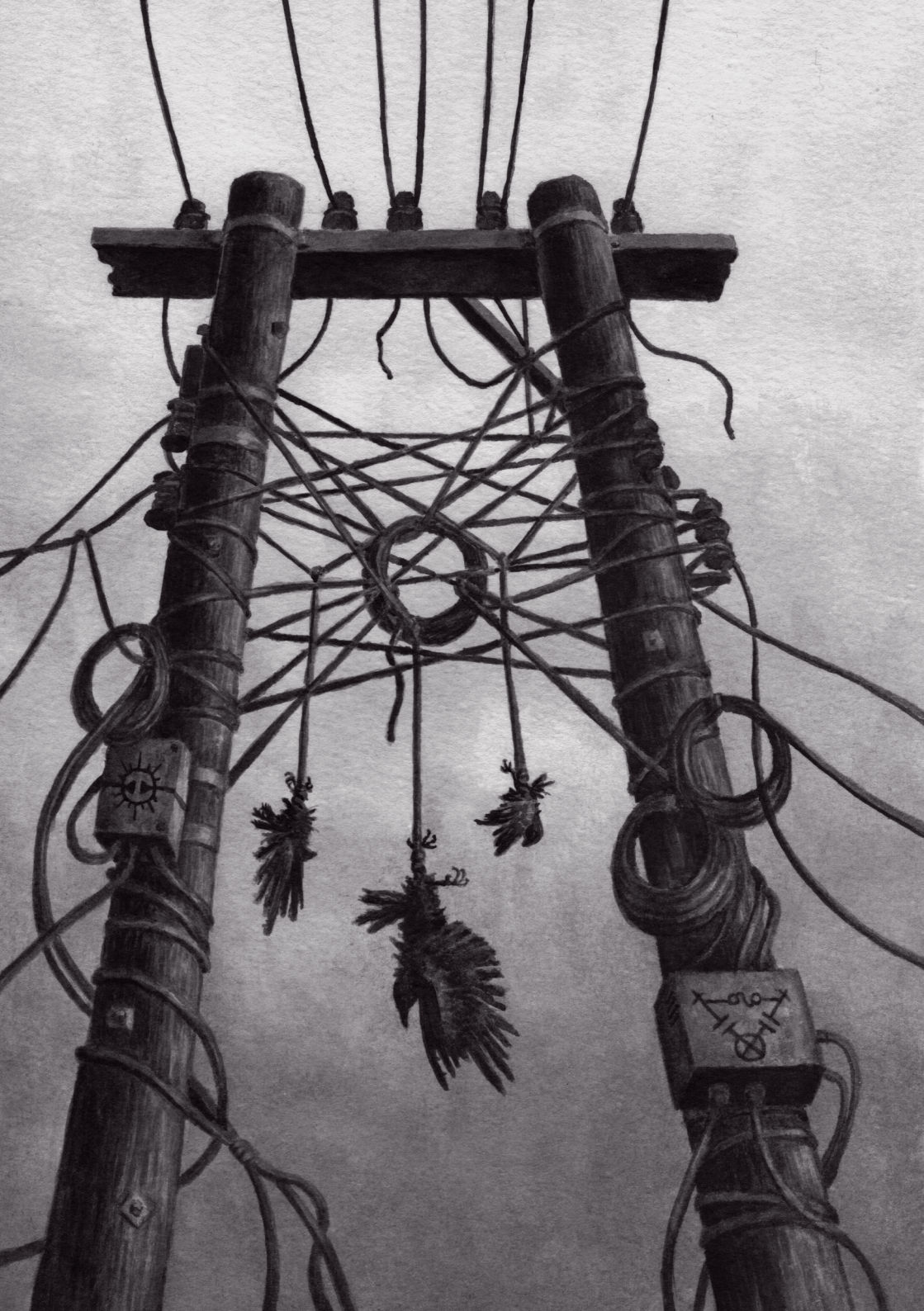
Custom moves are found on the Assignment sheets (for Assignments that have them), and can also be created as part of an advancement.

Pear K-

This sounds promising. It's entirely possible you've managed to stumble upon one of the original nests, and if it is undisturbed, we may indeed have found our revelation. But don't get ahead of yourself. Remember the lessons I've taught you. The only way to commune with such wild and pure divinities is by learning their language. I trust you understand what that means, and will embrace such blessings should they impart themselves to you. If you are reading this, I suppose we may still have a chance. Your elders await your next report with interest.

-N





ANATOMY OF A CHARACTER SHEET

This section briefly details each part of the character sheet and is addressed to players.

NAME

You should circle any given name and surname you wish, or come up with your own.

STYLE

A Custodian's personal style should reflect their basic outlook on life. Custodians don't always have to be dressed in a manner that matches their style. The options included are meant to represent a modern world in decay, where tokens of faith or representations of membership to a particular faith are common.

PERSONAL RITUAL

The Custodian's Personal Ritual represents an activity or pastime which connects them to their life before they became a Custodian. It is something they return to as a way to center themselves in between encounters with monstrous divinities. No two Custodians can have the same Personal Ritual.

END OF SESSION

These questions represent roleplaying goals for the session. You can have four questions marked, and the two questions on the list are always marked. For each marked question you answer "yes" to at the end of the session, mark an XP. At the beginning of a new session, you can unmark your two elective options and mark two different ones, or leave either or both the same.

XP TRACK

When you mark all six boxes on the XP track, erase them whenever you wish and mark an advancement (see Advancements, below). There are two ways to mark the XP track: 1) by answering "yes" to an End of Session question and 2) when the text of a move instructs you to.

ADVANCEMENTS

When you mark an advancement, immediately apply its effects to your character sheet. When all advancements have been marked, your Custodian can no longer collect XP or advance, but they are in play until forced to retire by the Verse of Prophecy or until you decide to retire them (see Writing a Verse, page 25).

ABILITIES

These are the character attributes that are applied to most die rolls.

- ❖ Use Vitality if your Custodian's action involves strength, dexterity, endurance, athleticism, or raw physicality.
- ❖ Use Focus if your Custodian's action requires a steady hand, a calm disposition, or intense concentration; or if they are trying to avoid a fear-based reaction.
- ❖ Use Insight if your Custodian is studying books, researching a problem, examining a crime scene, or otherwise engaging their mental faculty.
- ❖ Use Presence if your Custodian is trying to charm someone, intimidate someone, or capture someone's imagination.
- ❖ Use Communion if your Custodian's action involves divine forces; the Keeper may decide that any action that is seemingly governed by a different ability is actually governed by Communion because of the divine nature of what is being undertaken, or because of the involvement with gods in that specific scenario.

CONDITIONS

Conditions are traits that cause you to make die rolls at a disadvantage if they would plausibly hinder your Custodian during an action. You can have up to three Conditions. If you would ever take a fourth Condition, you instead mark one of your Verses (see Writing a Verse). Conditions are removed as the result of moves or when the Keeper instructs you to do so.

CUSTOM MOVES

Unlike the basic moves on the Reference Sheet, a custom move can only be used if you have it written on your character sheet. The custom move is one of the ways you personalize your Custodian.

over your own
your own.
or beads, protection bracelets, faith charm,
prayer shawl, necktie, sunglasses, spectacles,
hat and veil, cattleman's hat, helmet, skullcap,
robes, hooded patrol cloak, hand-stitched
button-down shirt, vintage blazer, vibrant silk
pauldrons, tactical gloves, engineer's gloves,
ass shoes, socks and sandals, forager's pouch,
briefcase

ting feathers
L Pick one or make up your own.

drawing landscapes, graffiti, birdwatching,
adding a thesaurus, local history, scanning the
maps, writing down old sayings, collecting songs

HISTORY

Them that lead
Watched by the river

XP TRACK



END OF SESSION QUESTIONS

The first two are always marked. At the beginning of a session...

WRITING A VERSE

The next section is divided into two parts, between your character sheet and faith sheet: The Verse of History and The Verse of Prophecy. You will occasionally “Write a Verse,” in which case you mark a box from one of these two sections (or, more rarely, a special option on an active Assignment). You must then do as the marked text instructs before the current session ends.

The Verse of History represents the idea of your Custodian as a person of faith, and explores how they came to have questions about their own faith and how that ultimately led them to join the Custodians. The text involves flashbacks to their early life, encounters with gods, their personal relationship to faith, and key moments which influenced their trajectory in life. The entries can be marked in any order.

The Verse of Prophecy comes from the god you are associated with. It explores a new relationship to faith for your Custodian, should they embrace this path. Whether returning to a god from your past or embracing a new one, this Verse shows you growing strong in your faith again, but at a cost. The text is always marked in order, and the last box heralds your Custodian’s retirement from the game.

ALTAR

This section of the character sheet is where you note interesting and distinctive items that can be found among your Custodian’s belongings while they are constantly on the road. Your Altar may be something portable, or a special location you return to when needed. Don’t worry too much about the logistics of how you access your Altar, though—it’s more of an abstraction that lets us get a glimpse of your character’s history and personality. This section also functions as an equipment list, since anything from the Altar that might reasonably be on a Custodian’s person in a scene, is. Items from your Altar can be marked to get an advantage on a die roll associated with their use. Generally-speaking, they cannot be unmarked, but marked items remain in your Altar for use in future scenes, in which case they add to the fictional positioning of your Custodian’s actions but do not convey a bonus to a die roll.

At the beginning of Session One, you and the other players will have an opportunity to add items to your Altar. Think of this as a sentimental or personally significant collection of some kind. It can be something portable like a satchel, or a place you return to, like an abandoned temple—choose an option from your faith sheet or write your own. After that, items can be added as the result of moves or when the Keeper instructs you to do so.





PLAY
STRUCTURE



THE SILT VERSES RPG AIMS TO CREATE A CINEMATIC STORY. THE GAME STRUCTURE SUPPORTS THIS BY DISTINGUISHING CERTAIN PHASES OF PLAY, AND OUTLINES WHEN AND HOW CERTAIN PARTS OF THE GAME SHOULD HAPPEN. THESE PHASES AREN'T TIED TO ANY TIME FRAME, HOWEVER, AND THE STORY WILL MOVE FLUIDLY BETWEEN THEM. WHEN PLAYING *THE SILT VERSES RPG*, REMEMBER THAT THE PRIMARY MODE OF PLAY IS THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PLAYERS AND THE KEEPER. THE KEEPER FRAMES UP SCENES (OR PLAYERS REQUEST THEM) AND THE PLAYERS DESCRIBE WHAT THEIR CUSTODIANS DO IN RESPONSE, WITH MOVES BEING TRIGGERED AND RESOLVED IN THE PROCESS.

BEGINNING OF SESSION

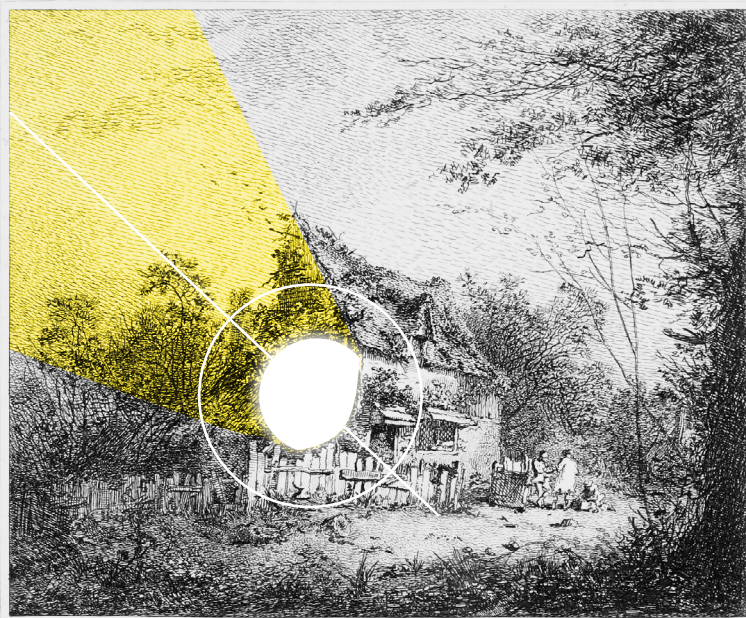
At the start of Session Two, and every play session after that, do the following:

- I. The Keeper does a recap of all active Assignments.
- II. The players mark new elective End of Session questions (or leave either or both the same).
- III. Resolve any moves that are resolved at the Beginning of Session.
- IV. The Keeper introduces a new Assignment (if there are less than three active Assignments).

INVESTIGATION PHASE

The Investigation phase accounts for the majority of gameplay. When an Assignment is presented to the Custodians, they learn what Questions must be answered, and then begin gathering Clues in order to answer those Questions. Gathering Clues can involve any kind of information gathering: talking to people, forensic inquiry, prayer, archival research, and so on. There may also be Dangers and other obstacles to overcome during this process. Once enough Clues are gathered, the Custodians can attempt to answer a Question. Answering a Question correctly unlocks an Opportunity. Once an appropriate Opportunity is unlocked, the players will be able to resolve the Assignment.

The Investigation phase should feel open-ended and, unless they have to deal with something immediately dangerous, unhurried. The Custodians can continue their investigations, trigger moves that are interesting to them, take actions that help them answer “yes” to an End of Session question, resolve a Verse prompt, or simply show how they act when exploring unfamiliar locations and interacting with locals.



Elder N,

Apologies for the delay. I'm pleased to report that not only is there indeed a presence here, but my early offerings and gestures of worship have been accepted. I have been heard, and the thing which has awoken from the nest now speaks to me. The stories of the elders do not begin to describe its magnificence. Even our prayer marks, which it heeds and responds to, seem crude compared to the variations it now traces upon the walls and calls down from the sky. These ruins, vine-covered and blossoming with new life, could soon become a new temple. I hope to show you the fruits of my labor soon. I think you'll be proud of me.

-K

PURSUING OPPORTUNITIES

Pursuing an Opportunity usually means finding a way to satiate or neutralize whatever god is the focus of the Assignment, but it can be other things as well, such as discovering new moves and resources that can be used for future Assignments. Depending on the result of the Answer a Question move during the Investigation phase, the Keeper will frame up a scene, or series of scenes, that will allow the Custodians to exploit the Opportunity. If the Answer a Question roll went well (10+), the Custodians will have the upper hand. If the roll was merely a hit (7-9), the Custodians will be on the back foot.

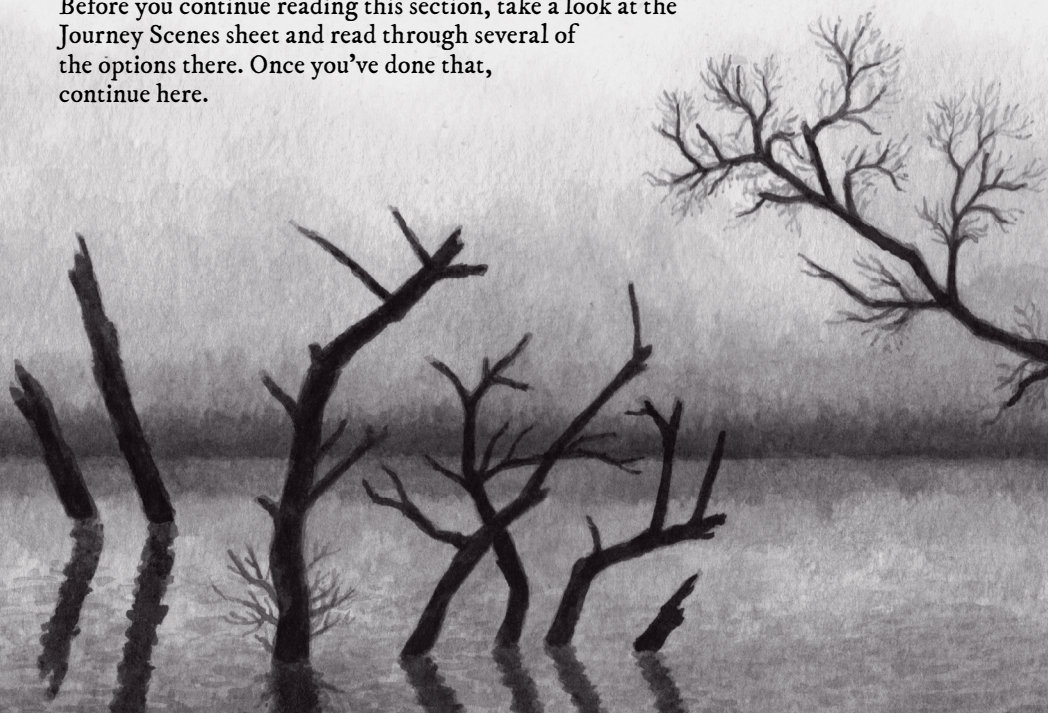
JOURNEY PHASE

The Journey phase depicts the Custodians' travel to a new Assignment, or travel between multiple active Assignments. It's a chance to show what the world is like, and to show how the Custodians interact with each other. The Journey phase is triggered when at least one Custodian travels from one Assignment to a different Assignment. There are several goals in the Journey phase:

- ❖ To memorialize the geographical transition between Assignments.
- ❖ To paint a picture of the world via Journey Scenes.
- ❖ To show the Custodians being vulnerable with one another and learning more about their past (mechanically, this leads to the clearing of Conditions and the uncovering of Clues that can be used in the upcoming Assignment).

This is accomplished through Journey Scenes, which are unique, standalone scenes that take place outside the locales of Assignments. Each Journey Scene has two types of prompts: Paint the Scene (to describe the world) and Recall a Time (to narrate a personal flashback). Some Journey Scenes are only introduced once, while others involve recurring visits to the same location. Some special Journey Scenes may be tied directly to Assignments, or be introduced when triggered by other parts of the game.

Before you continue reading this section, take a look at the Journey Scenes sheet and read through several of the options there. Once you've done that, continue here.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

During the Journey phase, the Keeper will introduce the Journey Scene and share both Paint the Scene and Recall a Time prompts to the players. This may be an ideal time to take a short break, so that the players can think about their prompts.

After the players have narrated any Paint the Scene prompts, they may make the Journey Move with another Custodian, or, if traveling alone, they may describe how their Custodian engages in their own Personal Ritual. If discussing their past during the Journey Move, players may use the Recall a Time prompt for inspiration, but they are free to discuss anything they wish.

Journey Scenes are also an opportunity to see another side of the Custodians as they take a break from the more immediate dangers of the Investigation phase. We might see them staring out the window as the group drives along, engaging in their Personal Ritual, or having a private conversation while the others are resting or stopping to gather supplies.

Once all prompts are answered and any Journey Moves resolved, the Journey phase ends and the Keeper transitions the group into the Investigation phase.

Each Journey phase should take approximately ten minutes of gameplay to complete. If the Custodians are pursuing multiple Assignments, play moves fluidly between the Journey and Investigation phases.

Note that it is possible for some Custodians to be in the Investigation phase at the same time others are in the Journey phase. This will happen when one or more Custodians stays behind to work on an Assignment while others are moving to a different Assignment. In this case, only the Custodians who are actually traveling to a different Assignment can participate in the Journey Move, though all players, regardless of their Custodians' location, answer any Paint the Scene questions that are part of the Journey Scene.



*The landscape of this
place is only ruin.*

*Follow the road down
through the foothills,
a latticework of silent
fields sodden with
snow. Watch the
wind-farms creak,
their blades bearing
rattling teeth.*

*See the boundary-posts
stamped with the
prayer-marks.*

*Pass through the
villages shining with
neon shrines to faceless
watchers.*

*There are so many
names for the hungry
and endless things that
haunt these territories
- and so many more
that have already been
forgotten.*

CINEMATIC GAMEPLAY

Journey Scenes are a chance for players to paint a picture of the world as seen through the eyes of their characters. Think about how *The Silt Verses* audio drama introduces us to the world—instead of a sweeping introduction or a massive “lore dump” at the beginning, we experience the setting one scene at a time, from the point of view of just a few characters. In the same way, *The Silt Verses RPG* is more concerned with describing these dramatic and memorable moments than attempting to simulate every aspect of the world.

This idea of cinematic gameplay extends to who has narrative authority in the game. In a traditional roleplaying game, most of the narrative authority, particularly authority over the setting, is held by the game master (the Keeper in our parlance); the role of the players is to simply inhabit their characters and say how they respond to things. *The Silt Verses RPG* rejects this by giving players the authority to describe the world at key moments. You might compare it to the writer’s room on a TV show or movie—the director or showrunner has a lot of say over the general arc of the story, but the writers get to shape the details. That’s what playing *The Silt Verses RPG* is like: it’s a collaborative experience.

The Journey Scene is the most direct and pronounced expression of this gameplay style, as it requires the players to step out of character and narrate a scene that develops the broader world, not just the corner their character occupies.

END OF SESSION

This is a short upkeep phase that takes place at the end of each session. Perform the following steps in order:

- I. Collect Rewards if an Assignment was resolved.
- II. Answer End of Session questions.
- III. Resolve any Moves that are resolved at the end of session, or answer any Verse prompts that remain unresolved.



WELCOME, CUSTODIAN

Feeling proud? You should be.

By joining the Bureau of Investigation and Assimilation of Stray Deities, you're not just becoming part of the Peninsula's most indispensable force against the encroachment of dangerous and illegal false gods. You're becoming part of a **family**.

What does this mean? As a Custodian, you'll be making the Territories of the Peninsula safer for our citizens, finding compassionate solutions to the challenges posed by stray gods, and building bridges between fringe faith communities. You'll be **making a difference**.

Of course, by signing on to join our family, you'll have received **special exemption**: this clears you from punishment for any crimes against the Peninsula which you might have committed in the past, or from any ongoing work contracts which you might have been subject to. It also grants you the authority to act on behalf of the Bureau, and by proxy the Legislatures themselves. So wear that badge with pride!

Please be advised that this exemption may be revoked at the discretion of your Supervisor, or by order of the Legislative Board, should your service with the Bureau be prematurely terminated, or should you choose to commit any future crimes against the Peninsula.

As of the First day of Fathoms, (Shrivels-Day), we are very pleased to announce that all newly contracted Custodians will receive updated and comprehensive training in Field Ritual, Identification of Emergent Sainthood, and Community Engagement with Marginalized Faiths. Please see the included pamphlets and self-study sheet.

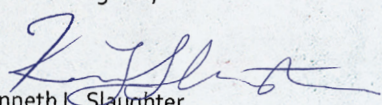
Should you break contract, or fail to maintain contact with your Supervisor (as per the Bureau Code of Conduct), or act in such a way that your exemption is revoked, these acts will be considered crimes in their own right and may open you up to arrest, summary prosecution, punishment, or in-situ sacrifice at the discretion of your Supervisor or the Board.

If you have not committed any crimes against the Peninsula and you have joined the Bureau as a volunteer agent rather than an enlisted agent, please be advised that these conditions may still appear in your written contract but should not be acted upon save at the discretion of your Supervisor or the Board, etc, etc.

The duration of your service with the Bureau will be listed in your written contract. If you do not have access to your written contract, please submit a request to your assigned Supervisor.

Once again, on behalf of the entire Western Glottage Division, welcome to the team! We have full faith that your talents will be put to great work in the field.

Warmest Regards,


Kenneth L. Slaughter
Senior Supervisor
Bureau of Investigation and Assimilation of Stray Deities
Western Glottage Division

Seventh of Fathoms, The Day of Emergence, .67



THE KEEPER

BASICS



PROPERTY OF
THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
AND ASSIMILATION OF STRAY
DEITITES

The next three chapters are presented as if the game designers are speaking directly to the Keeper, and so the tone and presentation is a bit less formal than in other chapters.

YOUR ROLE

You'll present the basics of an Assignment to the Custodians, who will then begin an investigation, gathering Clues to help them answer relevant Questions about the god or entity that is the focus of the Assignment, and ultimately putting a stop to what it is doing. If you have played other tabletop roleplaying games where the characters solve supernatural mysteries, much of *The Silt Verses RPG* will feel familiar.

However, there are three significant differences with most of those games you need to be aware of:

- I. The Clues are not located in specific places, and, in fact, can be found wherever the Custodians are looking.
- II. You don't know the explanation to any of the mysteries surrounding the story until the players do the Answer a Question move.
- III. The various cases aren't the real threat—there's another, more insidious danger, a Conspiracy by a government agency or corporation. This organization has a hidden agenda that only becomes clear over the course of multiple sessions of play.

In addition to presenting these stories and managing the Conspiracy, you are generally responsible for portraying the world around the Custodians. This means you give voice to all the various characters they interact with, you describe elements of a scene when needed, you challenge them with dangers and obstacles, and you show how the world reacts to the actions they take.

You have a lot of responsibility as the Keeper, but you don't have to be a creative genius or improvisational wizard to run *The Silt Verses RPG*. The Assignment sheets and the Conspiracy sheet not only help you keep the game organized, but also provide you with loads of inspirational details; there are many instances when it is the players' responsibility to describe the game world rather than yours; and, if all else fails, you can take a break to think about what should happen in the story, or even ask the players for their ideas.

Finally, while everyone is responsible for making sure everyone else is having a good time and maintaining each others' boundaries of safety and consent, it is your responsibility before play begins to make sure the players understand what kinds of subject matter might come up in *The Silt Verses RPG*.

This game deals with some very dark and unsettling themes—it's a game about exploring those unknown places and confronting the entities that dwell there—and you need to make sure players understand what they are getting into. If you know your normal playgroup isn't likely to handle these subjects with care or respect, you need to be honest with yourself about that (and possibly not offer *The Silt Verses RPG* as an option on your regular game night).

If you're running *The Silt Verses RPG* at a convention or in some sort of public space, like a Twitch stream, you need to exercise extra care when presenting the game to players and/or viewers.

MANAGING PLAY STRUCTURE

Running the Beginning of Session & End of Session Phases

These are short, simple upkeep phases; just do the steps listed in the Play Structure chapter and you'll be fine. The main piece of advice we would give you involves answering End of Session questions, which is: be generous. Sometimes it won't be clear if a player is able to answer "yes" to an End of Session question, and so you might have to weigh in. Strive to be expansive and open-minded—look for an opportunity to give the player credit for the End of Session question. If you still can't get to a "yes," then say so, but tell the player what they might have done differently in a scene in order to get that XP.

Running the Investigation Phase

It's really important you follow the players' leads when it comes to the Investigation phase. This is their time to explore the game and story in the way that is most interesting to them. They may want to continue their investigations, or they may want to have lower-stakes scenes that serve to develop their Custodian's personality or personal agenda. Always be honest about what is possible at any given time, but do your best to give them the scenes they want. For example, the Custodians will naturally interact with each other during an investigation, but longer and more intimate conversations between characters would be better left for the Journey phase—after all, there's work to do and the investigation could turn dangerous at any time.

The Silt Verses

After you have introduced a new Assignment (provided there are fewer than three when the Beginning of Session phase starts), the best way to get things rolling is to simply go around the table and ask: “What would you like to do?” You may want to frame up a scene immediately after they give you an answer, or you might want to hold back and hear out the other players first, especially if the first player requested a scene with another Custodian. Once a scene is framed, meaning you describe where it takes place and what’s going on when the Custodians arrive, ask them: “What do you do?” Things should pretty much take off from there: the conversation with the players begins, Custodians start taking actions, moves are triggered, and so forth.

It’s important you keep the spotlight moving; spending too long on one Custodian’s scene can make the other players get bored or feel resentful. Cut in the middle of an ongoing scene to ask another Custodian what they’re up to. Get that second Custodian’s scene going and then cut to another Custodian, or return to the original Custodian. The important thing is to just keep moving around the table; never spend more than five to ten minutes on a scene before cutting away to check in with another character.

One last note about the Investigation phase: the passage of time can be fairly abstract here. The Custodians may spend hours of in-world time investigating one Location, even days on an Assignment as they explore several Locations. They may decide to travel between Assignments, even splitting into groups to cover more ground. As long as you clearly delineate between when the players are in the Investigation phase and when the Journey phase begins, you should be fine.

Running the Journey Phase

The trickiest part of running the Journey phase is simply making sure the players understand how it works. The word “Journey” is used a lot—Journey phase, Journey Scene, Journey Move—and you’re going to be presenting them with a number of different questions and prompts, and it can all get a bit confusing. The best way to think about it (and you should help your players understand it this way) is as a series of nested events: the Journey phase leads to the Journey Scene, which then leads to the Journey Move. Phase → Scene → Move.

Another thing that can help with the management of this phase is to take a short break after you present the Journey Scene—players will feel much more confident with the roleplaying demands of the Journey phase if they have a few minutes to gather their thoughts.



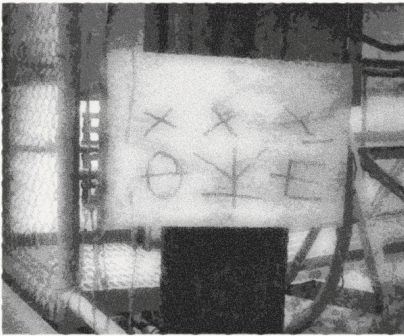
The Silt Verses

You might find a list of steps helpful for running this phase. The steps are:

- I. The Journey Phase is triggered.
- II. The Keeper presents a Journey Scene, including the Recall a Time prompt.
- III. Short break.
- IV. The players respond to any prompts or procedures contained in the Journey Scene.
- V. Custodians who are in the Journey Phase can participate in the Journey Move, if they wish.

Finally, you should strongly discourage players from taking investigation actions in the Journey phase. Keep the Journey phase focused on worldbuilding and the relationships between the Custodians, and remind players they can stumble on Clues while doing the Journey Move, and so they don't have to take direct, investigatory actions.

KNOW THE SIGNS



'Prayer-marks' are usually folk symbols carved or written in a place of significance to invoke a god's intervention, written in the god's hidden language. This is ritual magic, rather than dynamic communication, and while it can be used to attract a god's attention, it's no guarantee that the worshiper will get what they want.

ANATOMY OF AN ASSIGNMENT

You'll always have at least one Assignment to track at all times. Assignments are managed using Assignment sheets that contain all the important elements you need to run them. We recommend you spend fifteen minutes or so reading an Assignment before you actually run it, and if you can spend a little more time, all the better: the Assignment sheet is a “toy box” of elements for you to run a session, but it's also a way of learning the setting—the setting of *The Silt Verses*, and the specific setting of the Assignment in question.

What follows is a quick breakdown of each part of an Assignment sheet.

Some Assignments may deviate slightly from this structure or have elements that are unique to that Assignment; we're going to ignore that stuff and just focus on the elements that are common to all Assignments.

TITLE: The title of the Assignment is never withheld from the players—tell them what it's called.

INTRODUCTION: This section features italicized text introducing the basics of the Assignment. When you have to present a new Assignment during the Investigation phase, you do so by simply reading this text aloud to the Custodians. This section also frequently has one or more questions you pose to the Custodians; the purpose of these questions is usually to give the Custodians a story hook into the Assignment.

QUESTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES: Questions represent mysteries the Custodians are trying to solve. What does the entity in question want? Where can we find it? How can we get it to come to us? Custodians solve these mysteries by gathering Clues and triggering the Answer a Question move.

If the Answer a Question move is successful, the associated Opportunity is unlocked. Opportunities usually involve resolving the Assignment (often by neutralizing or somehow appeasing the problematic entity). In fact, the only way to resolve Assignments is to successfully Answer a Question and then pursue its Opportunity. If the Custodians encounter the entity that is the focus of the Assignment before unlocking the Opportunity, they can battle it or even attempt to destroy it, but they will never be rid of it completely—the subject of the Assignment slips away at the last moment, comes back to life at a later time, or simply... reemerges.

Additionally, the inherent danger of pursuing an Opportunity is inversely proportional to the Complexity of its Question. So, a Question with Complexity 4 is fairly easy to answer, but pursuing that Opportunity should be much more dangerous than the one whose Question has Complexity 8.

The Silt Verses

THE VERSES: Most Assignments have their own Verse, usually connected to a prominent theme. A player can choose to mark this box when writing a Verse instead of marking a box on their playbook so long as they are actively investigating or pursuing that Assignment. This Verse prompt usually requires all players to participate, not just the player who marked it.

THE ENTITY: This section contains a description of the god or other entity that is central to the Assignment. It will usually have information about what it looks like, how it behaves, and what sorts of manifestations it shows. It may contain a quote or witness account. Importantly, it contains information about what will happen if the Custodians fail to complete the Assignment in time. At the beginning of every session, review this part of the Assignment sheet; if the Custodians have gone a few Journey/Investigation cycles without pursuing the Assignment, think about how the subject of the Assignment might make their lives more difficult.

MOMENTS: These are colorful bits that you can sprinkle in wherever needed. They reinforce the Assignment's themes and, frankly, make you look like a rock star Keeper whenever you drop them into a scene.

DANGERS: These are obstacles associated with the Assignment, usually allies or followers of some sort, but sometimes the god's terrifying saints and angels, or third parties interested in stopping the Custodians, such as a company invested in a certain outcome. Importantly, this is not an exhaustive list, but a jumping off point; use it to inspire your own creations and improvisations.

LOCATIONS: These are places which might be connected to the Assignment in some way. Each contains a short description plus a Paint the Scene question to further develop them. A Paint the Scene question is a question that is posed to all players; as the players answer it, they build up an image of the place in everyone's mind, and explore an idea associated with that place.

Locations can be highly localized, such as the warehouse which traps The Hungering Roots, or spread over a much wider geographical area, such as the locations along the river in Young Jolly Junk. Again, the list of Locations is not exhaustive; use it to inspire your own creations and improvisations.

SIDE CHARACTERS: These are the characters who might be connected to the Assignment in some way. Each has three sensory details, a short description explaining their possible role in the story, and a quote. Sometimes Side Characters are connected to a certain place or circumstance, as with the Skelton family in *The Dusk Mother*, and other times they are free agents, meaning you can drop them in wherever needed, as with the various town residents in *The Sleepless Warden*. Remember, the list of Side Characters is not exhaustive—you can and should introduce characters not considered on the Assignment sheet if it makes sense in the story.

CLUES: These are uncovered during certain moves. When it's time to reveal a Clue, scan the list and pick the one that makes the most sense in the moment or is the one you find most interesting, and work it into the fiction. Clues are written to be diverse and flexible—you should be able to find something that fits. Also, you can change the Clue or add to it as much as you wish (just be careful your changes and additions don't cause the Clue to answer a Question by itself).

Consider the Clue, "A series of prayer marks in an unlikely location." Here are some different ways this Clue might be used:

- ◇ A Custodian discovers a Clue while examining a corpse. What appeared to be a series of cuts or streaks of blood on the corpse's flesh are actually, upon closer investigation, a series of prayer marks.
- ◇ A Custodian is chatting with a Side Character and notices a Clue. While gesturing emphatically with their hands, the Side Character's sleeve shifts to reveal a wrist tattoo—an unusual, stylized pattern, which forms a prayer mark.
- ◇ A Custodian discovers a Clue while searching an abandoned farm. Upon closer investigation, they discover that scratches in a fence post left by livestock are actually a series of prayer marks.
- ◇ A Custodian is searching the room of a Side Character and uncovers a Clue: random drawings in the margins of a book, upon closer inspection, turn out to be a series of prayer marks.
- ◇ A Custodian is conducting an investigation in a prison cell and discovers a Clue: chalk markings on the wall that, at first glance, appear to be counting the days are actually a series of prayer marks.

The Silt Verses

Let's work through another sample Clue, "Decorative flower pots, small offerings of animal bones visible among the stalks." Here are some ways this Clue might be used:

- ◆ The Custodian is exploring the apartment of a Side Character while the Side Character is out and discovers a Clue: a decorative flower pot on the apartment balcony, which, on closer inspection, contains small offerings of animal bones among the stalks.
- ◆ The Custodian is meeting with a Side Character in their office, who reveals a Clue. The Side Character has a small pot of flowers on their desk, which, at a second glance, contains small offerings of animal bones hidden among the stalks.
- ◆ The Custodian discovers a Clue while investigating a greenhouse. An entire row of flower pots, on closer inspection, contain small offerings of animal bones placed carefully among the stalks.
- ◆ The Custodian stumbles upon a Clue while examining a public memorial shrine. Among the offerings left there by passers-by is a bouquet of flowers, which, barely concealed under the cellophane gift wrap, is a small collection of animal bones.
- ◆ The Custodian is scoping out the grounds of a church at night and finds a Clue: decorative planters under the church windows contain small offerings of animal bones, carefully tied to the flower stalks.

As you can see, there are no real limits on how you can use a Clue. So long as the Clue doesn't automatically answer a Question, you can twist it, remix it, and add to it as much as you want.

REWARDS: Each Assignment sheet has a list of Rewards the Custodians can claim if they resolve the Assignment. Each Custodian picks a single Reward, marking it off when they do so; no Reward can be taken by two different Custodians, though some of them are repeats, and some can be used by all Custodians, such as Side Character Rewards.



KEEPER PRINCIPLES

This section explains the general principles you should bear in mind when running *The Silt Verses RPG*. You will occasionally find yourself in a situation that isn't explicitly covered by the rules or where you need to make up something on the fly. So long as you are following the Keeper principles, your improvisations will come across as authentic and fair.

THE KEEPER PRINCIPLES ARE:

Play to find out what happens.

Make the world and everyone in it seem real.

Be a fan of the Custodians.

Sometimes, disclaim decision-making.

Explore a dreary, ruined landscape shaped by strange gods.

Show the underlying horror in society's banal acceptance of the monstrous.

Present horror in a matter-of-fact way.

Evoke wonder, terror, and uncertainty in the presence of gods.

PLAY TO FIND OUT WHAT

HAPPENS: You have an Assignment sheet, a cast of Side Characters, a list of Clues, and a Conspiracy sheet, but none of it is set in stone. Be willing to let the session unfurl on its own terms. If a player has a cool idea that doesn't quite match what's on the Assignment sheet, go with it. In fact, many parts of the game will explicitly challenge your preconceived ideas—such as the answers to Paint the Scene questions—so be flexible and ready to incorporate things you hadn't considered.

MAKE THE WORLD & EVERYONE

IN IT SEEM REAL: Describe the world in sensory-rich detail. You have some help here: the Side Characters in an Assignment each come with three descriptive details and notes on how to play them, and key Locations have Paint the Scene questions to help enrich the scene. Use these as a foundation for how you approach everything in the world. Give characters not listed among the Side Characters three descriptive details to bring them alive; think of your own Paint the Scene question for a location that takes on sudden importance.

BE A FAN OF THE CUSTODIANS: This doesn't mean “let them win.” It means “give them challenges that make you root for them.” Flawed as they are, and bleak as their circumstances are, the game aims to tell their story.

SOMETIMES, DISCLAIM DECISION-MAKING: You are co-creating the story with the players. Let them chime-in to flesh out the world, describe things they see, and get invested in what's happening. Also, when you aren't sure how to react to the result of a move, ask the table for advice.

EXPLORE A DREARY, RUINED LANDSCAPE SHAPED BY STRANGE GODS: The world we see is largely broken down, decaying, and grown wild. Entire towns and regions have been polluted and warped by the manifestation of gods. Towns should feel half occupied, full of abandoned buildings and abandoned gods. The landscape of *The Silt Verses* is largely one of rain and mist, of rivers, moors, valleys, forests, marshes, and farmland. Any elements of commercial, modern technology should stand out like a sore thumb—kitschy, ugly, already falling apart. The fact that gods shape, pollute, and change this world should be felt in widely varied levels of inequality; we should always feel the dissonance between a central government and faraway cities that are equipped with televisions and computers, and a rural landscape with rusted tractors and old cars.

SHOW THE UNDERLYING HORROR IN SOCIETY'S BANAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE MONSTROUS: From the common knowledge that “a god must feed,” to the darkly humorous observation that “we get to choose the thing that devours us,” the world of *The Silt Verses* is one of contradictions and hypocrisy at every level. The players and their characters should feel this dissonance wherever they look, from the overtly gruesome practices of rural worship to the creeping dread at knowing that every modern convenience of city life was bought with equally horrifying sacrifices, just made out of sight.

PRESENT HORROR IN A MATTER-OF-FACT WAY: The temptation to present horror elements in a “scary” manner—perhaps with exaggerated, Vincent Price-esque mannerisms—is very high. Unless you feel particularly confident in your ability to be “scary” at the table, you should present creepy things in a calm, measured, matter-of-fact way. That calm, plain presentation will itself stand in contrast to the things being described, which is its own kind of creepy. The players' imaginations will do the rest. A few things you might lean on to achieve this are the ways that individual faiths view their monstrous gods and angels as divine, no matter how grotesque or horrifying, or the banal way that politicians might, say, pledge to “reduce industrial-scale sacrifice by 7% during the next quarter.”

The Silt Verses

EVOKE WONDER, TERROR, AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE PRESENCE OF GODS:

"Everyone wants a personal relationship with the divine, but none of us are really equipped to handle the consequences."—The Silt Verses audio drama, Chapter 3

In the world of *The Silt Verses*, gods inhabit the world and shape it in ways beyond human comprehension. To try and understand them, let alone communicate with and worship them, is to be changed. Recall some of the definitions of gods in this setting, which can go a long way in presenting them at the table:

- ◆ Gods speak in their own language, which must be learned to comprehend them in the slightest.
- ◆ A god must feed. When fed, it rejoices, and may offer blessings—although its notion of a gift will likely differ from our own.
- ◆ A god despises those things which stand in opposition to the pure aspect of existence it embodies.
- ◆ A god is driven to shape the devoted, and the world around it, in its own image.

BEWARE STRAY GODS



Where any god's power develops beyond the acceptable, due to certain forbidden words spoken in its secret language, or egged on by the sheer fanaticism of its followers, it may reshape entire towns or territories entirely in its own image, dragging aspects of our reality into its haunt.

KEEPER REACTIONS

You will frequently be asked to define and narrate complications resulting from a die roll, or otherwise “react” to a situation. Generally-speaking, a good reaction is one that complicates a Custodian’s life in an interesting way and follows logically from the established fiction.

If you can't think of a natural reaction based on what's happening in the fiction, choose a reaction from the list below, modifying as needed.

Separate the Custodians.

Kill a Side Character.

Inflict a Condition.

Put a Custodian in danger.

Describe a Custodian being killed.

Remove an item from their Personal Altar.

Have a rival group or an official show up.

Reveal that a god is involved.

SEPARATE THE CUSTODIANS: The Custodians will usually want to stay together, so complicate their lives by separating one or more of them from the group. Are the Custodians looking around a creepy old farm? Perhaps one of them gets locked in a shed. Are they exploring an unfamiliar town in the middle of a festival? Have them get separated in the crowd. Are they snooping around a secret chapel of an outlawed faith? Maybe a shadowy figure locks one of them in the basement. The important thing is that whatever happens next to the separated Custodian(s) should be fascinating or perilous.

KILL A SIDE CHARACTER: Nothing will get the Custodians’ (and players’) attention like having a Side Character turn up dead, especially if it’s in a gruesome manner. This reaction is particularly effective if the Custodians are starting to get close to resolving an Assignment, and the death of the Side Character in question would complicate things. Note that this is a very strong Keeper reaction, and really only appropriate as the result of a missed roll.

The Silt Verses

INFLECT A CONDITION:

This is a trusty, go-to Keeper reaction for nearly any situation.

A Condition is a one-word adjective or short phrase, and it should follow directly from whatever just happened in the fiction. For example, if a Custodian got slammed into a wall by someone fleeing a crime scene, you might give them the Condition: Bruised. If they just had a very frustrating, condescending conversation with a local authority, you might give them the Condition: Aggravated. If they have indulged in one of the more potent psychotropic teas commonly available, you might give them the Condition: Hallucinating. A Condition can be cleared by the use of the Journey Move, or because you think it's appropriate given the circumstances.

REMOVE AN ITEM FROM THEIR ALTAR:

Just like inflicting a Condition, this is a very dependable, go-to reaction for many situations. Essentially, if they were using something from their Altar, have them lose it—it breaks, is stolen, is misplaced, etc.

PUT A CUSTODIAN IN DANGER:

"Danger" can mean physical danger or something else. Is a Custodian sneaking into a private library? Perhaps a hallowed saint roams among the shelves at night and corners them. Are the Custodians hotwiring a car to escape a rural town quickly? Maybe a neighbor unleashes their terrifying "hounds" that have been transformed by a family deity of the hunt. Is a Custodian trying to pressure a local authority with questions that are a little too direct? Maybe the authority takes offense, and has a word with the organization who holds the Custodian's contract, complicating their next Assignment. circumstances.

DESCRIBE A CUSTODIAN BEING KILLED:

Kill a Custodian! It's totally fine. Make it gruesome, if you want. The players can always Write a Verse to get a fictional do-over. Note that this is a very strong reaction that is only appropriate as the result of a missed roll, and even then only if it was adequately telegraphed as a possibility beforehand, such as in the Revelation Move, or in a conversation between the Keeper and player that preceded the roll. This reaction is never appropriate as the result of a missed Information Move roll.

The Keeper - Basics

HAVE A RIVAL GROUP OR AN OFFICIAL SHOW UP: The Custodians are never the only group with an interest in gods. Local residents or followers of the god might not take kindly to the Custodians interfering in their business. This is an important genre convention in folk horror, and should be used liberally. The idea is that a prominent local, usually a long-time resident, a policeman, or religious leader shows up and issues an ominous warning—if ignored, they will find a way to interfere with the Custodians' investigation in some way. They may even seek to turn other locals against the Custodians. Note that we use the term "official" very loosely here—anyone with authority over the situation will do. An inquisitive hotelier at the front desk can be just as troublesome as a surly policeman at a traffic stop.

REVEAL THAT A GOD IS INVOLVED:

"There are times when you might be feeding a god and not even know it."

—The Silt Verses audio drama, Chapter 2

In a world with tens of thousands of gods, most of them highly localized, and many others stray or forgotten, it's only a matter of time before the Custodians will unknowingly stumble across the haunt of a god. As the Custodians explore abandoned locations and start digging up secrets, they will encounter gods. Some gods hear and answer prayers in forms beyond human comprehension. Some are starving for attention, worship... and sacrifice. This can be a go-to reaction when a player rolls a miss, especially when their Custodian is heading into danger or exploring the unknown.

TRUST NO ONE



Every faith has its lures. Sweet-faced young acolytes who are sent out into the world, to hand out the flowers, whisper kind enticements, and lead the faithless into the sacrificial grounds.

THE KEEPER

ADVANCED



This chapter contains advanced tips and techniques for being a Keeper in *The Silt Verses RPG*. Nothing in this chapter is strictly necessary to run the game, but the advice here will enrich the experience for both you and the players.

TEACHING THE SETTING

You might be wondering how much you or your players need to know about *The Silt Verses* before you start playing this game. It's something we, as the game creators, spent a fair amount of time thinking about. Ultimately, through discussion and playtesting, we figured out it's simply not that important. We have run the game for groups where the players were familiar with *The Silt Verses* audio drama beforehand, groups where the players had literally never heard of *The Silt Verses* before we started playing, and groups where some folks in the group understood the setting better than others. In all cases, familiarity with *The Silt Verses* (or lack thereof) had little appreciable impact on the play experience.

All of which is to say: don't sweat it too much. The Session One procedure gives you enough to get things started, the character sheet and faith sheets do a good job of "teaching" the setting to players as they read through them, and your Assignment and Conspiracy sheets will help you with the various setting elements you'll need to run the game. Also keep in mind that the audio drama itself leaves lots of negative space in the setting, and filling that negative space is what we're here to do when we play this game—you're going to make your own version of this world, so don't worry if you get a few details "wrong" as you play.

To the extent you want to explain the setting to your players in a little more detail, let the Introduction chapter of this book be your guide. If you or your players want to do a "crash course" on the audio drama before you start playing, we recommend listening to Chapter Three and Chapter Seven—the former because it mirrors the sorts of investigations the Custodians do in this game, and the latter because it highlights the capitalist horror and satirical elements of the setting.

THE VEILED MOVE VS. THE REVELATION MOVE

The Veiled Move and the Revelation Move will be rolled for the majority of non-investigation actions requiring a die roll, and so you need to have a good understanding of how they work, how they differ from one another, and when to trigger them.

The first thing you need to be aware of is that these moves do not have miss conditions in their text. Should a player roll a miss, they most likely fail in the action they were taking, but not necessarily—it's up to you whether they fail or succeed. In either case, you will perform a Keeper reaction. In general, this Keeper reaction should be stronger than the complication or cost they might have incurred on a 7-9, and it should flow logically from the established fiction.

Another thing to understand here is that these moves are a negotiation between you and the player. The player tells you what they are afraid will happen if they fail or lose their nerve. You are free to disregard what the player has offered when considering how to react—especially if the player's suggestion is soft or nonsensical—but if they have given a good, genuine answer to what they are

afraid of, you should do your best to incorporate it. Doing so sends a signal to the player that this is a collaborative storytelling process, and they'll be eager to give you good stuff to work with in the future.

The Revelation Move has a slight wrinkle: after the player says what they're afraid of, you must tell them how it's worse than they fear. Again, when saying how things are worse, you can disregard what the player suggested if what they suggested was too soft, but do your best to riff off what they give you. Another important aspect of "telling them how it's worse" is being honest about how it's worse. If it's possible for the Custodian to sustain a serious injury, tell them that. If it's possible for a Custodian to be killed, tell them that. They have the option of backing down after you say how bad it's going to be but before they actually roll. The player is going to feel cheated if they roll, get a miss, and then you narrate their Custodian being killed when you didn't previously tell them this was a possibility.

One final thing about the Veiled Move and the Revelation Move: they trigger whenever a Custodian is facing something they fear. This is a passive use-case (and thus easy to forget), but a very important one for a game that has horror elements.

The Keeper - Advanced

The Custodians will witness things that are shocking or horrifying, especially when it comes to gods and saints, and depending on how they handle themselves in that moment, things could get very sticky for them. Trigger the move to see if they can keep it together (in most cases, they will be rolling with Focus).

You might be wondering how a Custodian can back down or try a different way when the move was triggered passively. It's a good thing to wonder about, and the answer for how to handle it will depend a lot on the specific circumstances. It could be that backing down is not possible or that there is no good alternative option, in which case simply make that clear to the player. Generally-speaking, it probably means the Custodian has to abandon the moment, or give up the thing they were trying to accomplish in the first place. Consider this possibility, as well: they might have to react in a way that *isn't* frightened. Perhaps it's an opportunity to show what a badass they are by taking some kind of direct action in the face of their fear.

A note about "saying how it's worse than [they] fear:" just go for it. If the Custodian is trying to run away from a saint and they say they might fall down and injure themselves if they fail, feel free to say: "It's worse than that—the saint catches up to you and tears your guts out, killing you." Remember: the players have total control over whether their character actually dies via the Verses, so just go big when it comes to the stakes—it's more fun that way.

The tricky thing is if the player goes big themselves by putting death on the table when they say what they are afraid will happen if they fail or lose their nerve—what then? Well, in the case of the Revelation Move, you must still say how it's worse than they feared, but in this case, "worse" might mean long-term effects after the character is dead, such as how it affects their surviving family members or the community. If you're unsure, ask the table for their input.

A related note: sometimes players tell us they felt like they didn't have a choice when it came to Writing a Verse—that if the alternative to doing so is character death, of course they're going to do it. Our answer to that is twofold: 1) they did have a choice: *The Silt Verses RPG* embraces an ethos that players have ultimate control over when their character dies, and choosing to have them die rather than Writing a Verse is a valid choice if it's dramatically interesting, and 2) their agency took place earlier in the move (in the case of the Revelation Move) when they were given a chance to back down or try a different approach.

ANSWER A QUESTION

The text of the move says, “When the Custodians have an open, freewheeling discussion...” but, in practice, this discussion is being had by the players, not the Custodians, and you have a role to play, too. You should feel free to offer your own thoughts, challenge the assumptions being made, and interrogate theories that fail to account for certain Clues. If a player is being demure during this process, cut in and ask them for their opinion on things. If a player is dominating the conversation, go around and confirm with the other players that they agree with what the dominant player is suggesting. Importantly, you need to guide the conversation to a consensus so a die roll can take place.

Another important job you have during Answer a Question is to invite the players to add critical context to the discussion of Clues. The Clues they have gathered will frequently seem disjointed or incongruent with one another—that’s by design, so they can be used flexibly. Encourage the players to add the context necessary to make the Clues fit their theory. For example, if the Custodians found a severed finger, and their answer depends on the whereabouts of a Side Character called Elena, they need to account for how the finger might be connected to Elena if they want that Clue to count against the Complexity in the die roll. Perhaps Elena is missing a finger, but very likely no one thought to look at Elena’s hands. During Answer a Question, it’s ok for a detail like this to be added to the fiction. And so, a player might suggest that Elena was always seen wearing gloves, and that might be how she hides her wound. You should encourage this kind of “ret-conning” of the established fiction so the players can arrive at an answer that incorporates as many Clues as desired.

Now let’s talk about what happens after you know the result of the Answer a Question roll. If the result is a hit, let the players know their Custodians can now pursue the associated Opportunity (unless it’s a threshold Question that simply unlocks other Questions, in which case just reveal those new Questions). Find out what each player is interested in doing—some might want to pursue the Opportunity right away, while others might want to work on something else. In any case, it’s probably a good time to take a short break so you can think about what the next round of scenes will look like, and how dangerous any potential pursuit of Opportunities might be.

What if the Answer a Question roll is a miss? This is when things can get *really* interesting. The answer is likely wrong, of course, but also: you get to react. I love the reaction Kill a Side Character on a missed Answer a Question roll, especially if the Side Character is one that was critical to their thinking. But you could also just put the Custodians in a particularly dangerous situation—it's a great opportunity to review Dangers to see what you might be able to throw at them. There's also a question of whether and how the Custodians can attempt the Answer a Question roll again. The answer is yes, they can make another attempt, but not until you have reacted as a result of the initial missed roll and they have dealt with that reaction.

Some notes on spending Clues: Clues are spent if used to successfully Answer a Question, and cannot be used to answer another Question (although they still function as important context for the Assignment). Clues are not spent on an unsuccessful Answer a Question, and can be used on the re-attempt, or for another Question on that Assignment. If a threshold Question has an either/or answer, a wrong answer means the other option is the correct answer, and the Clues are spent.

ALTAR

If an object is particularly memorable in the story, or if a Custodian goes through the trouble of acquiring something strange or rare, and these things are not otherwise part of a procedure that causes it to be added to their Altar, tell them they can do so. Be advised that power gamers might try to take advantage of this and repeatedly ask you about adding items to their Altar. Gently remind them they are not allowed to make such requests, and that the decision for adding things to their Altar outside of the prescribed ways is entirely yours.

Also: players tend to forget about or overlook their Altar, especially in the first couple sessions. You will need to remind them about this part of the game until they get the hang of it. If a die roll is coming up—especially one where the stakes are high—ask the player how something from their Altar might be helpful so they can get an advantage (or negate a disadvantage).



CONDITIONS

Just as players will forget about their Altars in the beginning, you will forget about Conditions. Conditions are an important part of the gameplay loop, and you should be doling them out liberally. You can combine Conditions with other Keeper reactions after a die roll, or you can simply give a Custodian a Condition because it makes sense, whether there was a die roll or not. Importantly, the players won't mind. They will want to engage with the Journey Move, but if you haven't given them enough Conditions, they won't have much justification for it, and so do your part and hit them with lots of Conditions—one or two per Custodian per session is about right.

Conditions can be big or small; they can reflect major events in the story or minor, fleeting moments. If you feel a Condition is warranted in a scene but aren't sure what to call it, ask the table for their input.

The following are sample Conditions divided by type.

EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL: Unnerved, Scared, Shocked, Disturbed, Angry, Irritated, Lovestruck, Saddened, Melancholy, Embittered, Jealous, Envious, Isolated, Obsessed with [person or thing], Furious with [person or thing], Sad about [person or thing], Volatile, Desire to Lash Out, Gloomy, Shaken to the Core

PHYSICAL: Sprained Ankle, Concussion, Smoke Inhalation, Festering Wound, Claw Marks, Bruised Ribs, Clumps of Hair Torn Out, Scratched Face, Smashed Thumb, Nearly Drowned, Chilled to the Bone, Intoxicated, High, Exhausted, Drained, Severed Hand, Limp, Vertigo

SUPERNATURAL: Cursed, Hexed, Haunted, Something is Following Me, Seeing Unnatural Shapes, Magically Blinded, Ensorcelled, Blackened Veins, Strange Reflection, Rats are Whispering to Me, Sensitive to Sunlight, All Water Tastes Foul, I See Dead People, Drawn to Graveyards, Translucent Skin, Glowing Eyes

Note: If a Custodian has a Condition that is permanent, such as Severed Hand (this is a somewhat extreme example, but bear with us), clearing the Condition doesn't mean the hand is magically reattached; rather, it means the Custodian has learned to live with it enough so that it doesn't impose a disadvantage on die rolls.

Now let's go a bit deeper on why Conditions are an important part of the gameplay.

CONDITIONS COMPLICATE THE LIVES OF THE CUSTODIANS

One of your most important jobs is to challenge the Custodians with dangers and obstacles, and Conditions are your best tool for making sure the players feel the pressure associated with those challenges. Here are some ways Conditions can complicate the lives of the Custodians:

- ◇ **Die rolls might be taken at disadvantage.** When we're running the game, we check a character's Conditions before each die roll to see if disadvantage applies. For example, a Custodian with the Condition: Sprained Ankle will roll at disadvantage when trying to run away from an angel. A Custodian that is Unnerved will make the Revelation Move at disadvantage when they're trying to keep their cool in the presence of a monstrous saint.
- ◇ **Certain actions might be foreclosed altogether.** For example, a character with the Condition: Broken Leg can't run away from the aforementioned angel.
- ◇ **The player might have to Write a Verse.** If they already have three Conditions, a fourth forces them to Write a Verse, thereby pushing them one step closer to retiring the character.
- ◇ **A character might be targeted by a particular Danger.** When we're thinking of ways to challenge the Custodians, or if we just need something really dangerous to happen in a scene, we'll look at the active Conditions to get some ideas. If, for example, a Custodian has the Condition: Marked by the Hungering Roots, the god that is the focus of that mystery might send an intoxicated follower after them. If a Custodian has the Condition: Person of Interest, the police might be following her wherever she goes.

CONDITIONS ACTIVATE A CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP

Because of the way Conditions can negatively affect the Custodians' lives, their players will want to clear them. The most efficient way to clear them is by having an intimate scene with another Custodian during the Journey phase, thereby triggering the Journey Move. That Journey Move then leads to clearing Conditions and finding a Clue. All of that together is one of the core gameplay loops in *The Silt Verses RPG*: Conditions lead to intimacy, which then leads to Clues and character development.

WORSHIP IS DANGEROUS



Sainthood doesn't come unbidden. People summon such changes onto others—or bring it upon themselves.

CONDITIONS PROVIDE ROLEPLAYING INSPIRATION

Not all Conditions are negative; some, in fact, are a great source of roleplaying inspiration. Players are always looking for things written on their sheet that might tell them how to play their character. Conditions are terrific in this regard. An example from a *Brindlewood Bay* campaign one of the authors is running as of this writing: a Maven, normally mild-mannered and demure, found a bloody driftwood crown. The Keeper gave them the Condition: The Driftwood Crown to memorialize what felt like an important moment, and it turned out to be a major inflection point for the character. The player now uses it all the time to show their character's burgeoning weirdness. In fact, that Condition will never get cleared, even though holding it might eventually push the Maven to retirement, because the player loves to roleplay what The Driftwood Crown means to their character.

CONDITIONS MEMORIALIZE KEY EVENTS IN THE STORY

One of the more subtle ways Conditions operate is to help memorialize key events in your story. If, for example, a Custodian made an offering to appease the Hungering Roots but, in doing so, angered their own god, the Trawler-Man, you might give them the Condition: Ire of the Trawler-Man. What does the Condition mean? Who knows, we'll figure it out as we play. In the meantime, it's a great way of acknowledging and remembering that scene.

And now let's go over some ways to incorporate Conditions into the gameplay...

The Silt Verses

AS A KEEPER REACTION

Keeper reactions are your best opportunity for giving out Conditions, especially when the dice come up 7-9. A common complaint about Powered by the Apocalypse games is that it's difficult to think of complications on a 7-9, but in *The Silt Verses RPG*, it can be as easy as giving the Custodian a Condition. For example, a Custodian has been doing research in the library all day; when their Information Move comes up 7-9, you can give them a Clue and a simple Condition like Frustrated or Exhausted to represent how long it took them to find it. If a Custodian is chasing down a Side Character trying to flee the scene and they get a 7-9 on the Veiled Move, you can explain the way they'll be vulnerable is the Condition: Drained.

Conditions can also function as a reaction on a missed roll, especially where a somewhat softer outcome is needed. For example, in the fairly low stakes environment of a fancy corporate soiree, you might give a Custodian who gets a miss on their Information Move the Condition: Gossip Item.

Please note that Keeper reactions aren't necessarily connected to die rolls. A Keeper reaction can happen anytime the players look to the Keeper to find out what happens next in the story. Thus, you don't need a hard mechanical justification for giving a Custodian a Condition—you can do so just because it feels right in the moment (the reverse is also true: you can say a Condition is cleared simply because it makes sense in the story, no Journey Move needed).

"HOW ARE YOU FEELING?"

Our favorite tactic for giving out Conditions is to simply ask a player "How are you feeling?" after a particularly poignant or intense scene. After they describe their character's feelings, we give them a Condition based on what they said, or have them write their own Condition inspired by the feeling. This approach has the added benefit of inviting the player to explore their Custodian's inner life.

GET THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

A principle of play is that the Keeper sometimes disclaims decision making, which means they turn things over to the players. You can do a specific version of that with Conditions: "I think a Condition is appropriate here, but I'm not sure what to call it. What do you all think it should be?" This is a great way of getting players invested in the outcome.

FICTIONAL POSITIONING

Fictional positioning is a concept you should learn not just for The Silt Verses RPG, but for all your roleplaying game endeavors. Many of us grew up playing games that emphasized the power of numbers and procedures: +1 to hit, ThACo, natural 20, 5d6+1, initiative order, “exploding” sixes, rounds, turns, and so forth. Fictional positioning is the idea that the words we speak at the table and the words we write down on our sheets have just as much power as the hard mechanical and procedural aspects of the game.

Consider this: a Custodian is infiltrating a factory; she’s wearing an identification badge like the ones being worn by the factory workers. Because she is wearing the badge, she doesn’t have to make a die roll everytime she enters a new space at the factory, because the badge signals she belongs there. The badge is an example of fictional positioning. There are no numbers attached to it, nor are there any procedures that have to be performed at the table when the badge is put on: it has power simply because of what it does in the fiction. Or consider this: a Custodian has suffered a broken leg and is trying to escape from a monstrous saint trying to kill her. There is no die roll that will allow her to run away (though she can certainly try something different) because a broken leg makes such an action impossible. The broken leg is negative fictional positioning.

Fictional positioning is very important for the Altar and Conditions. After an item from an Altar is used to take advantage on a die roll, it is marked, meaning it can no longer be used to get a mechanical bonus, but it is not erased from the character sheet because it can still be used for fictional positioning. A Condition may or may not incur a disadvantage, but it is always there so long as it is written on the character sheet, and that means it has to be addressed before an action is taken to see if that action is even possible (such as in our broken leg example, above).

ASSIGNMENTS

The Silt Verses RPG is not an episodic game, and Assignments are not meant to be “monster of the week” mysteries. You will often have three active Assignments at any given time. Custodians can certainly choose to focus on a single Assignment, but there are always other dangers out there, and a bigger conspiracy looms in the background.

Related to that, Assignments are not static. Part of your job is to think about what the characters and monsters in the Assignments are doing when the Custodians are not focused on them. Take some time between sessions to consider the active Assignments and the Conspiracy, what they’re up to, and how things might start to connect. Each Assignment sheet has a section called “If the Custodians fail to complete the Assignment in time...” which is a great place to start when thinking about this stuff. Remember: the god that is the focus of an Assignment is dangerous, and until the Custodians have answered a Question that unlocks an Opportunity to resolve the Assignment, it cannot be defeated.

Let’s talk about resolving Assignments. There are two things you need to keep in mind: 1) the gods that are the focus of an Assignment cannot be captured, killed, or otherwise defeated unless an Opportunity to do so has been unlocked; and 2) once the Opportunity is unlocked, resolving the Assignment is not automatic. Make sure players understand both of these points.

To the first point, it does not matter if the Custodians have the god in question cornered or otherwise are in a strong—even logical—position to neutralize it if an Opportunity to do so has not been unlocked by answering a Question; the creature will always escape. It might seem weird or unrealistic for that to be the case, but *The Silt Verses RPG* is a game, and games have rules. Furthermore, the Assignment can only be resolved in the manner indicated by the unlocked Opportunity (though you should certainly be flexible when interpreting those Opportunities).

Secondly, resolving the Assignment is not automatic. Once an appropriate Question is answered, the Custodians have earned the Opportunity to neutralize the god or creature that is the focus of the Assignment. They will have to take necessary follow-up actions to resolve the Assignment, and those actions might stretch out over the course of several scenes or even a whole session, depending on the circumstances. They might have to engage the god in combat, attempt to trap it in their lair, perform a ritual to subdue it, defeat its minions in order to reach it, etc. This is an important aspect of the game because some faith sheets have a greater emphasis on action rather than investigation, and the actual process of defeating the god is when those Custodians get to shine.

RUNNING *THE SILT VERSES RPG* AS A ONE-SHOT

The Silt Verses RPG is designed to be played over multiple sessions, but sometimes you only have one session, perhaps because you are running it at a convention or as a short diversion for your regular group. Our advice is that you simply play the game as it was meant to be played; some aspects of the game, like the Conspiracy or the Journey phase, won't have much salience in a one-shot, but that's ok because, to some degree, you're just showing the system off, perhaps in the hope of more sessions being played in the future. We recommend following the Session One procedure at the end of this text and, no matter where things stand in the investigation, going straight to Answer a Question when you have about thirty minutes of playtime remaining. That should give you enough time to solve the core mystery and then frame up a scene or two to play out the resolution of the Assignment. If the players roll a miss on Answer a Question, encourage them to each Write a Verse in order to make the solution correct (which is also a great chance to see how the Verse mechanics work).

APPROVED BY



THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION &
ASSIMILATON OF STRAY DEITIES



Have you seen this? Found
it a few days ago. Confirms
what we suspected- someone
really is on our tail.

BE CAREFUL!

THE CAMPAIGN

DELINEATOR	G.H.B.
TRACER	"
REMARKS	
IN CHARGE OF RADIO DEPARTMENT	CH. F. C. S. SWAN
<i>PK 10</i>	<i>E.F. Abel</i>
APPROVAL	
EXPERT RADIO - DES	
RADIO OFFICER	
<i>A. Prastine</i>	

B162 044

THE CAMPAIGN

A tabletop roleplaying game campaign is a series of interconnected play sessions that constitutes an overall story for your game, one that usually culminates in a final, dramatic confrontation or challenge. In most roleplaying games, a campaign can theoretically last forever: the characters can keep advancing, and new villains and problems arise to replace the ones that have been resolved. *The Silt Verses RPG* is somewhat different in that it has distinct campaign arcs, each of which can constitute the entirety of your story, or can be strung together for a longer overall campaign. This initial release of *The Silt Verses RPG* comes with one campaign arc, *The Institute*, but others will be released in the future.

You have two tools available to you for running a campaign arc in *The Silt Verses RPG*: the Conspiracy sheet and its associated Confrontation sheet. The Conspiracy sheet is used to manage the overall campaign arc, whereas the Confrontation sheet contains information for a special type of Assignment used when the Custodians are ready to confront the conspirators working against them.

As you read through this chapter, you might come to believe that the campaign elements are more than you can handle, or that you're going to get something wrong. We're going to show you how to use and manage the various campaign elements, but at the outset: you've totally got this. Working with the campaign materials is fun, and there are no wrong answers. Just keep the following ideas in mind:

Pay attention. Manage the conversation, adjudicate moves, run your Assignments, do reactions—all the things from the previous chapters—but also: pay attention. What sorts of things are resonating with the players? Are there Side Characters or Dangers the players seem to enjoy? Did you have a big “whoa!” moment during a session? Pay attention to what's working and consider how you might weave those details into the broader campaign.

Think often and revise often. You have time between play sessions. Think about what it all means. What do the villains central to the Conspiracy want? How might the Assignments be connected to their goals? How does each Custodian's past fit into the picture, particularly their strained relationship to their faith? Take notes if you think it would be helpful, but more than anything just ponder. Come up with theories about what you think is going on, but leave room for revision based on things that get revealed from session to session.

The players want you to succeed. This is the most important thing. The players are there to have a good time, and anything you do, so long as it's honest and in keeping with your Keeper principles from the previous chapter, is going to be great in their eyes.

THE CONSPIRACY SHEET

The Conspiracy sheet is your main tool for managing the campaign arc. We're going to focus on the Conspiracy sheet that comes with the game, *The Institute*; future Conspiracies might deviate somewhat in structure and content, but the basic ideas will be the same. You will need a copy of *The Institute: Conspiracy Sheet* on hand while reading this section.

INTRODUCTION

The Institute starts with a basic introduction: who are they and how do they fit into the broader setting. This section also includes some quotes you can use for any of the Agents or important Side Characters. Most importantly, this section contains a note about why the Institute wants to exploit the work of the Custodians.

FOUR LAYERS

The Conspiracy is divided into four layers, with each successive layer representing the Custodians getting closer to confronting the Institute. Each layer of the Conspiracy is unlocked after the Custodians uncover a certain number of Conspiracy Clues (see *Conspiracy Clues*, following). Please note that the number of Conspiracy Clues needed to unlock each layer is a running total, and that opening a new layer doesn't mean the previous layer is closed—you can bounce between any unlocked layers freely when thinking about how to react in a scene.

1 LAYER ONE: END OF SESSION SCENE

Comic book movies usually have scenes that play after the credits roll. These stinger scenes are meant to keep viewers excited about where the story will go next. The end of session scene functions in the same way in *The Silt Verses RPG*: we get to be audience members for a moment, to get excited for what's coming next. Importantly, the scene is something we get to enjoy completely out of character—the Custodians have no idea what's happening.

While Layer One has a prescribed scene that happens at a specific time in the campaign arc, there's nothing stopping you from doing more. As the campaign develops, create your own stinger scenes to deepen the story, explore the lore of the setting, increase the weirdness level, and/or to get your players excited about the next session.

Layer One also asks you to start making notes about where you think the campaign is headed—in particular, your initial theories about the weapon the Institute is developing. There are no right or wrong answers here; just think on it and make some notes.

2

LAYER TWO: THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE

Layer Two is where the overall campaign narrative starts to deepen in a real and noticeable way. This section contains important historical notes about the Institute, any of which can be revealed to the Custodians as the result of a 12+ on the Information Move, or as a Keeper reaction. How do you reveal this information? Well, there aren't any right or wrong answers here; do whatever follows logically from the fiction. Maybe a Side Character reveals one of the historical details in a conversation with a Custodian, or perhaps the Custodians find a classified file that contains the information.

Layer Two also gives you access to a new Keeper reaction: **Show that the Institute has been interfering with the work of the Custodians.** As with revealing the historical details, there's no right or wrong way to go about this. Maybe the Custodians witness members of the Institute entering a Location they just left, or perhaps a Side Character warns the Custodians of the Institute's interference. You're in good shape so long as you follow the fiction and keep things dramatic; the purpose of this reaction is to show the Custodians that there is something bigger going on, that the work they're doing has caught the attention of nefarious forces.

Finally, Layer Two asks you to note some Side Characters you'd like to see return during the Confrontation, as well as to revise your notes about the weapon the Institute is developing. This is a great opportunity to start thinking about the campaign as a coherent whole, and how elements that appear early in the arc might return later on.

3

LAYER THREE: AN ASSIGNMENT BECOMES AN ASSET

Layer Three represents an escalation of the danger posed to the Custodians by the Institute. Principally, an active Assignment becomes an asset of the Institute, meaning it can no longer be resolved. When considering which Assignment to turn into an asset, keep a few things in mind: First, you don't have to decide right away—you can make the choice at any time after Layer Three is unlocked. Second, try to pick an Assignment the Custodians have been ignoring; if you choose an Assignment the Custodians are on the verge of resolving, the players might feel cheated. Finally, consider memorializing this event with an end of session scene showing the Institute absorbing the Assignment into its plans.

Let's go a little deeper here: what does it actually mean for an Assignment to become an asset of the Institute? In some cases, it will be fairly obvious: in *The Hungering Roots*, the Institute might take over the grow facility or transplant the harvest god into one of its own facilities; in *The Dusk Mother*, the Institute might capture the Dusk Mother's angel and begin experiments on it, or the Skelton family might be recruited as field agents. For other Assignments, it won't be so obvious: *The Floating Market*, for example, may depend on whether the threshold Question has been answered or whether other dangers have presented themselves to the Custodians.

In all cases, you're going to have to use some creativity, and you're going to have to consider how your story has developed up to this point. What is the Institute up to? How might any given Assignment fit into their plans? Which Side Characters or Dangers might be actively targeted or recruited by the Institute? Which gods, saints, and angels might be of particular interest?

Layer Three, keeping with the theme of enhanced danger posed to the Custodians, also unlocks a new Journey Scene: Escaped Test Subject. Additionally, you are invited to note more Side Characters you'd like to see return during the Confrontation.

4

LAYER FOUR: THE CONFRONTATION

Unlocking Layer Four means you are nearing the end of the campaign arc. You can now present the Confrontation after all active Assignments are resolved (see The Confrontation Sheet, following).

AGENTS

This section of the sheet contains characters you can use as antagonists in the campaign arc. They are structurally identical to Side Characters or personified Dangers—a few descriptive details, their role in the story, and a quote—but they are not Side Characters or Dangers, meaning they are not subject to rules or moves that affect Side Characters or Dangers. Generally-speaking, Side Characters, Dangers, and Agents are all mechanically distinct from one another, and game elements that affect one don't necessarily affect the others.

This part of the sheet also has a place to put notes about the asset from Layer Three.

CONSPIRACY CLUES

Conspiracy Clues are revealed as the result of a 12+ on the Information Move, or as a Keeper reaction because you think it would be dramatically interesting to reveal one (we like to reveal at least one Conspiracy Clue per session). Conspiracy Clues serve two purposes: to show that the Conspiracy in question is operating in the background, and to act as a timer, since the various layers of the Conspiracy unlock after a certain number of Conspiracy Clues is uncovered. Conspiracy Clues are not used to answer Questions.

One thing to note about The Institute: the first Conspiracy Clue is always the same, and is noted near the top of the sheet, after the introduction.

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BSL3 AUTH LV7

THE CONFRONTATION SHEET

The Confrontation sheet is your tool for running the final confrontation that unlocks in Layer Four of the Conspiracy. Apart from the fact it contains space to incorporate the theory you've been developing throughout the campaign, it functions similarly to an Assignment sheet, and all previous guidance for running an Assignment applies to the Confrontation.

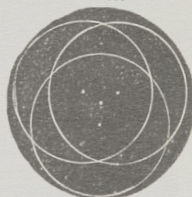
2637.



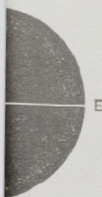
2638.



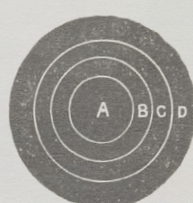
2639.



2640.



2641.



2643.



2644.



EET

MENTS

A sequence of tones and beeps over the intercom; a coded signal.

Muffled sounds of research in progress (pick one or more: roaring, screaming, gurgling, tearing, shattering, flushing, buzzing, winds, whispering, chanting, rhythmic pounding, scraping metal, crumbling stone, a deafening implosion of silence, something else).

A thunderous impact of a heavy door slamming shut. Prolonged silence.

A pair of researchers, observed at a distance, frantically reciting something from a stack of pages as a space nearby shimmers and pulsates in response.

Overhead lights flicker, then shut off in sequence, plunging the space into darkness.

Wet tapping and crunching sounds, like eggs being gently cracked and split open.

NGERS

ts of the Institute, if they are still in play. his stage, they are well informed of each odian's strengths and vulnerabilities, and will cipate opportunities to exploit them, recruiting r Institute staff and resources to separate and them by surprise.

imental saints. Miracles awakened in living flesh, ble manifestation loops localized around a single Most are contained by military-grade barriers,



SESSION ONE



Dear K,

Well done. I'll admit that some of us had our doubts about sending you on this ~~new~~ mission, but you have proven yourself capable. Return to us now, and we will prepare for what comes next. Our scribes will need to document this properly. In the meantime, I believe the Enclave has plans for you. If you can continue to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of their trust, I have full faith that you'll prove a full-fledged member of our congregation yet—perhaps even a Witness yourself, should you be chosen.

-N

SESSION ONE

PROCEDURE

The following is a step-by-step guide to running your first session of *The Silt Verses RPG*. The times listed with some of the steps are estimates—don't fret if you're taking longer to complete each step. Text in *italics* is meant to be read aloud to the players.

STEP ONE: READ THE TEXT

As the Keeper, you should read the rulebook in its entirety. Skim the other materials so you have a basic familiarity with them. Importantly, you should decide which playbooks you will make available to the group and which Assignment you're going to start with (we recommend *The Hungering Roots*). Consider watching an actual play; the publisher of the game has videos on his YouTube channel showing how the game works.

STEP TWO: GATHER PLAY MATERIALS

You will need:

- ❖ At least three six-sided dice (more is better).
- ❖ Index cards and a marker for making name tents.
- ❖ A pencil for each participant.
- ❖ A copy of the character sheet for each player.
- ❖ A copy of each faith sheet.
- ❖ At least one reference sheet, but one per participant is better.
- ❖ Your chosen Assignment sheet.
- ❖ A Conspiracy sheet.
- ❖ At least one Journey scene.

If you're playing online, you'll need virtual equivalents of all of the above, but you don't need to go fancy; Google sheets and PDFs work very well.

STEP THREE: GATHER PARTICIPANTS

The Silt Verses RPG works best with one Keeper and three players. One Keeper and two players or one Keeper and four players also work well. Avoid playing *The Silt Verses RPG* with five or more players.

STEP FOUR: PLAYER & KEEPER INTRODUCTIONS (2 MIN.)

Going around the table, each participant should state their name, their pronouns, and anything else the group might find interesting about them. You can skip this step if you're playing with a group of friends who know each other well.

STEP FIVE: CATS (3 MIN.)

CATS is an acronym that stands for Concept, Aim, Tone, and Subject Matter. It is usually presented by the Keeper and helps establish some basic expectations for how the game is going to proceed. It's also a low-stakes way for the Keeper to get accustomed to being in the spotlight. Read the following to the players:

Now I'm going to do CATS. CATS is an acronym that stands for Concept, Aim, Tone, and Subject Matter. The purpose of CATS is to establish some basic expectations for what this game is about and what we're going to be doing during this first session.

 **CONCEPT:** The Silt Verses RPG is a tabletop roleplaying game of folk horror and monstrous divinity, in which a group of indebted Custodians are sent into isolated territories to deal with stray gods and terrifying divine manifestations which threaten the nearby community.

The Custodians investigate these entities and the manifestation of their powers, and will then seek methods to appease them, neutralize them, or otherwise engage the local community to find a solution. The Custodians gradually become aware of a looming conspiracy that overshadows their work, as a powerful organization seeks to take advantage of them to fulfill its secret agenda. The Custodians will ultimately decide how to confront this organization, all the while struggling with their complicated relationship to faith and the gods of their past whose power threatens to consume them.

The game's mechanics are based on Apocalypse World and Brindlewood Bay, but you don't need to know anything about those two games before we play.

 **AIM:** The aim of the characters in the story is to pursue investigations surrounding these stray gods and powers, and come to terms with their complicated past with a particular god, deciding if they will continue on that path and be further changed by the power that god provides.

Our aim as players is the same, but also to learn more about these characters' fraught pasts and uncertain futures, as well as to paint a vivid picture of our version of the Silt Verses setting, a responsibility we all share. The aims for today's session are to create and introduce our characters, learn the basics of how the game works by playing it, and then have a debrief period at the end.

 **TONE:** The tone of The Silt Verses RPG is dark, strange, and unsettling. It presents a world where monstrous horrors are viewed as miraculous and divine, and systemic cruelties as routinely accepted by society. It exaggerates difficult themes of our world by showing them as literal gods, and this can verge on the absurd—but this is not intended to become a parody. A little bit of levity or humor from time to time is ok, but we will always strive to return to that dark, gloomy landscape the characters exist in.

 **SUBJECT MATTER:** Cosmic horror, graphic violence, ritual sacrifice, intense body horror, grotesque religious imagery, cults, religious trauma, harm to children and animals, family trauma, government corruption and oppression, police violence, war, and natural disasters are all things that may come up frequently in this game. We'll talk about safety tools in just a moment, but in the interest of setting expectations right now, you should know that this game deals with intense and often dark subject matter.

STEP SIX: SAFETY TOOLS (5 MIN.)

You can use whichever safety tools your group is most comfortable with. We recommend you use the Open Door Policy, the X-card, and Lines & Veils. You can Google each of those for more information (add “safety tools” and “TTRPG” to your query). The scripted portion of this step assumes you are using the three suggested tools.

No game is more important than the people playing it. We’re going to paint a dark, unsettling landscape of the The Silt Verses setting, but we’re going to do it in a way that respects everyone’s boundaries of safety and consent. In order to do that, we’ll be using three safety tools in The Silt Verses RPG: the Open Door Policy, the X-card, and Lines & Veils.

The Open Door Policy is very simple: you can leave the game for any reason and you don’t have to explain yourself. Just let us know you have to go; no one here will ask any questions about it.

At this point, you should point to the X-card.

The X-card is here in case something in the game makes you feel uncomfortable in an un-fun way. Just tap or hold up the X-card and we will stop play in order to change whatever just happened in the game. As the Keeper, I may ask for clarification on what is being X-carded, but I will never ask why. We’ll resume play once the change is made.

Finally, we’ll be using Lines & Veils. Lines are things that we are not going to have in the game, period. Veils are things that we’re ok with being in the game but we prefer not to roleplay them, or we simply want to keep them offscreen. Importantly, even though I earlier listed a number of dark subject matters that come up in The Silt Verses RPG, you can still include one or more of those things as part of Lines & Veils. As I said before, no game is more important than the people playing it.

One more thing—during the game we will treat our group’s Lines and Veils as a living document, meaning you can add to the list later if you need to. We will also make a point of reviewing Lines and Veils each session.

I will start by sharing my personal Lines & Veils right now. You can tell me your own Lines & Veils privately during a break and I will then convey them to the group anonymously when we’re back together.

Here you should tell the group what your Lines & Veils are. The authors of this game, for example, always list “sexual violence” as a Line and “violence towards small children” as a Veil. Remind the group before your first break that they can share their Lines & Veils with you privately and that you will then convey them to the group anonymously.

STEP SEVEN: CHARACTER CREATION (15 MIN.)

Before we begin character creation, I want to share a few more details about the setting. These characters—the Custodians—are a group of specialists sent out into the rural territories to investigate and resolve disturbances of stray and feral gods. This is largely thankless work, with little to no resources or guidance provided beyond an initial report and directions. Each Custodian has been chosen for this work, in part, because of their complicated past with gods—the fact that they have an ambivalent stance towards their faith is viewed as an asset when dealing with the fringe elements of divinity throughout the Territories. Each member of the group has their own reasons for joining the Custodians, though it is rarely by choice. They are all under contract, and might face debt, punishment, or consequences far worse should they fail to complete their assignments. Finally, each Custodian has a complicated past with a particular god—and will have to choose if they continue along that path and become changed by the powers their god awakens in them.

Another thing to know is that these characters are to remain mysterious. We should avoid talking about their pasts—both in and out of character—unless we are prompted to do so by the game’s rules. The reason we do that is because we want to learn about these characters as we play.

It’s just like listening to The Silt Verses audio drama, or watching a good TV show: we don’t learn everything about the characters at once; the information is given to us in pieces, at dramatically impactful moments in the story, often through flashbacks and meaningful conversations between characters.

With that said, I’m going to give you a quick summary of each Faith Sheet so you can decide which one is most interesting to you. The Custodians all have the same Character Sheet, but they also have a Faith Sheet, which is where their unique abilities and story prompts will come from.

Here you should give a short summary for each of the Faith Sheets you have selected. Text for each of the six starting Faith Sheets is included below.

THE TRAWLER MAN is the iconic river god of The Silt Verses audio drama, notorious for his terrifying transformations of tide and flesh. Throughout the game you’ll pursue your goals by making sacrifices to the river and discovering new wonders it gifts you in return. Play as a follower of the Trawler Man if you want to act boldly and recklessly, explore what it means to follow an outlawed faith, and explore themes of strange shifting tides and body horror.

THE SAINT ELECTRIC is the most widely known commercial god, powering most modern technologies in one form or another. Throughout the game you will channel the Saint’s divine currents to apply raw power to situations, manipulate mechanical objects, and use the front of a recognized lawful deity to avoid unwanted attention if need be. Play as a follower of the Saint Electric if you like coming up with your own unique solutions to challenges, exploring the technological side of the setting, and examining the horrors society accepts “for the greater good.”

THE CAIRN MAIDEN is a god of death, but perhaps not in the way you would think. She waits patiently in ruined places for her followers to come to her and meet at last in their final resting place. Throughout the game you will alter fate in dramatic ways, staving off death and walking the path between worlds. Play as a follower of the Cairn Maiden if you want to lean deeply into themes of death, fate, and transformation, and enjoy influencing the world in powerful and mysterious ways from the shadows.

THE WAXEN SCRIVENER is a god of knowledge—specifically of collecting knowledge and letting it be forgotten again. Throughout the game you will use ritual ink to uncover prophecies through your writing, sometimes even writing things into being. Play as a follower of the Waxen Scrivener if you like to be an unsettling practitioner of the arcane, oppose the technological world, and alter reality in dramatic ways through your rituals.

THE POX MARTYR is a god of self-sacrifice whose monks heal others by literally taking their suffering upon themselves, viewing each affliction as a blessing to learn from. Throughout the game you will take on the illnesses of other characters to give yourself advantages, and draw on the connections you have with Side Characters everywhere you go. Play as a follower of the Pox Martyr if you want to explore themes of body horror, self-sacrifice, and community, and if you like to support other characters with your abilities.

THE WATCHER IN THE WINGS is a god who thrives on spectacle, feasting on the drama and tragedy of human lives as they unfold. Throughout the game you will charm and sway other characters with your presence, and dramatically alter reality itself through your performances. Play as a follower of the Watcher in the Wings if you enjoy playing charismatic characters and want to shape the world in dangerous and unpredictable ways.

Give everyone a chance to decide which faith sheet they want to play with. Once everyone has made their decision, they can begin filling out their character sheets.

The steps are:

- I. Pick a Name
 - II. Pick elements for the character's Style
 - III. Pick a Personal Ritual
 - IV. Add 1 to one of the starting Ability scores
 - V. Mark two End of Session Questions
-



STEP EIGHT: INTRODUCE CHARACTERS & POPULATE ALTARS (10 MIN.)

Now that you've all made your characters, let's introduce them. Going around the table, everyone please introduce your character by Name, Style, and Personal Ritual. You can also tell us what your faith sheet moves do. I'll remind you that you should avoid sharing any details about your character's backstory at this time.

After everyone does this, continue with:

Now we're going to go around again and everyone is going to read aloud the color text at the top of their faith sheets. After you read your color text, the rest of us are going to name one object or piece of equipment we think your Custodian would have on their Altar based on what we know about them so far. You can veto any idea you don't like, or ask for a revision. You'll write down each item in the Altar section of your character sheet.

STEP NINE: BREAK (10 MIN.)

Now that we've met the characters, we're ready to play! Let's take a ten-minute break; I'll introduce the first monstrous Assignment when we return. Also: don't forget to find me and tell me your Lines & Veils!

STEP TEN: BEFORE WE BEGIN... (3 MIN.)

Before we begin, let me tell you some new Lines & Veils.

Communicate any Lines & Veils that were told to you on break.

Also, I want to tell you that even though this is a game set in the world of The Silt Verses, we aren't trying to recreate the story of the show. We'll do our best to recreate the setting, but we'll also be telling our own story which may be very different from the show, and that's ok. I'd also like to point out that in this setting, things like race, nationality, gender, sexuality, disability, and neurodivergence are not a social barrier. As with the characters portrayed in The Silt Verses audio drama, the source of conflict for our characters comes from their complicated relationship to faith, their personal history with terrifying gods, and the power structures they find themselves caught within—but not necessarily from facing any sort of discrimination based on their identities.

STEP ELEVEN: PRESENT THE ASSIGNMENT (5 MIN.)

If there are no other questions, let's begin!

Here you should read the opening matter of your selected Assignment (the italicized portion at the top), as well as the Questions & Opportunities.

STEP TWELVE: REGULAR PLAY (90 MIN.)

At this point you'll begin regular play following the guidelines and advice you learned earlier in the book. Start with the Investigation phase. Keep a few things in mind if this is your first time playing *The Silt Verses RPG*:

There's no rush. Do each step of each phase in a very deliberate way until you get the hang of it.

Don't worry about getting things wrong. You're probably going to forget Conditions and Altars the first time you play. It will take the players a session or two to master the Verse of Prophecy and the Journey Scene. That's all fine: just take it slow and do your best.

Focus on teaching the gameplay basics: when to use each move, how the dice work, what the Ability scores mean, Advantage and Disadvantage, and so forth.

You might only get into the Investigation Phase. That's fine, and maybe even preferable since the Journey Phase has a different feel and can be handled better during session two, after everyone's had some time to process things.

Take a five minute break at some point.

STEP THIRTEEN: DEBRIEF (10 MIN.)

Have a short debrief period at the end of the session. You can use any debrief technique you wish; we prefer a technique called Stars & Wishes because it is positive and uplifting.

Let's do a debrief technique called Stars & Wishes. Stars are things you enjoyed about the session: characters, scenes, bits of description, something from the gameplay—anything you liked can be a Star. Wishes are things you hope to see next time: exploring a part of the game we didn't get to today, following up with a character about something, having a scene with a certain character, and so forth.

STEP FOURTEEN: THE CONSPIRACY SCENE (IF APPLICABLE, 2 MIN.)

This is when you will narrate the end of session scene from the Conspiracy sheet if you unlocked Layer One of the conspiracy.

STEP FIFTEEN: HOMEWORK (1 MIN.)

Encourage the players to review their playbook before the next session. In particular, they should read through the section called The Verse of History and think about what that means for their Custodian.

SESSION TWO AND ONWARD

Begin the session by doing a light recap of the active Assignments: remind the players about any Clues uncovered and where things stand. Continue regular play from there. Save ten minutes at the end for a debrief.

APPENDIX I

ON THE NATURE OF GODS

The Silt Verses setting is built on some basic concepts of what gods are and how they interact with the world. You may find it easier to introduce players to the setting and present a consistent version of the world if you keep some basic principles in mind. The following is quoted from A Book of Gods and Territories, a lorebook supplement by the creators of The Silt Verses audio drama.



The Farragol Institute—one of the most powerful advisory boards across the surface of the Territories, dictating which faiths are legitimate and which are not—offers a formal, eight-point definition of a god:

It may be noted that the commercial regulation of worship over the centuries has rendered many of these rules obsolete, or at the very least contradictory.

For instance, the Saint Electric is one of the most popular modern deities amongst the Peninsula's populace, but few citizens attempt to communicate with her directly. Instead, prayer-marks calling for her favor are stamped en masse onto her circuit boards, toasters, radios, and televisions alike—and the Saint's sacrifices are carried out discreetly in her power plants, wind farms and hydroelectric dams, far from her people's sight.

Beyond these very basic definitions, nothing is ever certain.

As a common example, the word 'angel' is commonly used to refer to a servant of a god that appears to have been created whole-cloth from the elements or the dead world. Meanwhile, 'Saint' or 'Immortal Saint' is used to refer to those human beings who are reshaped—voluntarily or forcibly—to better represent some aspect of a god's obsession. Transfigured animals, however, may be referred to using either term, and are sometimes called both at once.

Miracles, revelations, sacrifices, mysteries, messiahs—all of these terms may be defined according to the experiences of different faiths or local communities.

A god makes its haunt in a place beyond our capabilities.

A god enters into our world through the tenuous places; ruins, lonely locations, abandoned wildernesses.

A god speaks a language that is entirely its own, and which must be learnt in order to communicate with it.

A god is pure in its intent. It obsessively embodies a particular element, locality, or aspect of existence, and despises those things which stand in opposition to its purity.

A god must feed. When fed, it rejoices, and may offer blessings—although its notion of a gift will likely differ from our own.

A god comes when it's called.

A god lashes out violently when it's left to starve, but may eventually diminish or perish as a result of neglect.

A god is driven to shape the devoted, and the world around it, in its own image.

APPENDIX II

MEDIA TOUCHSTONES

The main inspiration for the setting of *The Silt Verses RPG* is, of course, the audio drama itself. If you want to dig even deeper, we recommend the episode transcripts, interviews and additional material by the show's creators at www.thesiltverses.com.

I Am in Eskew, an earlier audio drama also by the creators of *The Silt Verses*, has also been an important influence on *The Silt Verses RPG*, and could be considered an extension of *The Silt Verses* setting as it shares similar themes and commentary.

Jon Ware, the main writer of *The Silt Verses*, has also mentioned that some important inspirations for the show include: *Til We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis, *True Detective* Season 1, *Gyo* by Junji Ito, *Riddley Walker* by Russell Hoban, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and classical transformation myths in general.

More broadly, *The Silt Verses RPG* takes inspiration from folk horror, weird fiction, and dystopian or post-apocalyptic media. You will likely find your own inspiration for the more satirical elements of the setting by simply reading the news. Some other pieces of media that have inspired the atmosphere, setting elements or mechanics of *The Silt Verses RPG* include:

Disco Elysium (2019 video game)

Heart: the City Beneath (2020 tabletop roleplaying game)

Old Gods of Appalachia (2019 audio drama)

Parasite (2019 film)

Station Eleven (2021 TV series)

The Wicker Man (1973 film)

APPENDIX III

THE SILT VERSES AUDIO DRAMA REFERENCE

The Silt Verses RPG is based on the entirety of the audio drama, and every chapter is full of details that will show you more about the setting. If you're new to The Silt Verses and want a quick "crash course" before you play, we recommend the following two episodes in particular:

- ▶ **Chapter 3: *Then I'll Speak of Champions*.** This episode mirrors the type of investigations the Custodians will carry out, and the commentary on the nature of gods is key to the setting.
- ▶ **Chapter 7: *It Carries Few, It Drowns Many*.** This episode highlights the capitalist horror and satirical elements of the show, and offers a glimpse of a modern world fueled by human sacrifice.

Faith Sheets

The following episodes of *The Silt Verses* feature specific gods associated with the faith sheets:

The Trawler Man: featured throughout the show, but especially Chapters 1-2, 5-6, 8.

The Saint Electric: mentioned in Chapters 1-2, 12 and 13.

The Cairn Maiden: Chapter 17.

The Waxen Scrivener: Chapter 2.

The Pox Martyr: Chapter 11 and Chapter 19.

The Watcher in the Wings: Chapter 20.

Conspiracies

The Institute: partially inspired by the research facility in Chapter 19.

Elder N,

Do not trouble yourself. I won't be returning to the Enclave. While I am grateful for all your lessons, they are no longer needed. I have found... a new perspective. You saved me, and kept me alive, but only as a mouse cowers in its burrow, hiding from the shadow that passes overhead. I am not a mouse. I am not even the meadow that blooms and hosts a million bugging insects. I contain worlds within worlds. I run and soar and hunt where I please. The part of me that writes this, that still remembers the sorrows which once tormented ~~x~~, feels sorry for you and all the rest who can see no further than the tunnels of dirt they dig themselves into. Perhaps someday, you too will be freed from the confines of your tiny perspective.

