

# Chapter 7

## An Example of Play

### Dramatis Personae

- ☞ Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God
- ☞ Heather Sullivan, playing Julianna Avram, Domina of Strength
- ☞ Edward Jordan, playing Marsiglio Tendi, Dominus of Treachery
- ☞ Diane Firth, playing Rook Catchfly, Domina of Eternity

### and a cast of NPCs including

- ☞ Ada Willamette, Power of Strife
- ☞ Benjamin, murderer
- ☞ Bethany Scofflaw, traitor
- ☞ Faith Bernham, murder victim
- ☞ Genseric Dace, Deceiver
- ☞ Hope Carstens, an agent of Rook's
- ☞ Pandareos Panagiotis, Power of Conspiracy
- ☞ Shelley, Anchor to Julianna Avram
- ☞ Sundry Deceiver-shards, humans, spirits, and thugs

### UNWORTHY CAUSES

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Following this example of play requires relatively little knowledge of the *NOBILIS* setting and rules. A few bits of background information follow. Later chapters should explain anything that may remain unclear.

- ☞ **Anchors.** The Servant's Rite, that transforms a mortal into an Anchor, requires that a Power love or hate the victim. The prospective Anchor must also swallow the Power's blood or tears. Excrucians can create Anchors without hate or love.
- ☞ **Deceivers.** One class of Excrucians, the Deceivers, can spiritually disguise themselves as specific Powers. Deceiver-shards can also don such a disguise. When disguised, a Deceiver or Deceiver-shard has access to the relevant Power's abilities as well as their own. Deceivers also have a weakness: once per scene, a servant of Creation can command them by invoking the name of their disguise. This is called "the truth of the name".
- ☞ **Miracle Points.** Players often refer to Aspect miracle points as AMPS, Domain miracle points as DMPS, Realm miracle points as RMPS, and Spirit miracle points as SMPS.
- ☞ **On the Campaign.** The campaign is *Treachery* (see pp. 249-276). The characters have weathered a few stories but the grande campaign arc that Madeline envisions has not yet begun.

This game has three PCs. Their full descriptions and game statistics follow on the next page. The three are:

- ☞ **Julianna Avram**, Marchessa of Strength, a woman of courage, endurance, and integrity, whom the Power of Conspiracy hopelessly loves.
- ☞ **Marsiglio Tendi**, Duke of Treachery, a man feckless and cruel, whose clawed finger can injure or cut through anything — from flesh to stone, from light to beauty.
- ☞ **Rook Catchfly**, Viscount of Eternity, a smiling gamine who can take or give eternal life with a touch, hopelessly in love with Pandareos Panagiotis, Power of Conspiracy.

At the end of the last session and story, these Powers uncovered a mole within their Chancel — a woman named Bethany Scofflaw, in service to Lord Entropy.

## SCENE I: BETHANY

HG (MADELINE): Let's get this started. You've flushed out Bethany Scofflaw, which hopefully means that Lord Entropy no longer has an ear in your Chancel; what are you going to do with her?

EDWARD: Can we turn her against Lord Entropy?

HEATHER: I don't think we scare her more than the Darkest Lord does.

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### JULIANNA AVRAM

| ATTRIBUTE                  | LEVEL   | MIRACLE POINTS |
|----------------------------|---|----------------|
| Aspect                     | 1: Metahuman  | 5              |
| Domain                     | 3: Marchessa  | 5              |
| Realm                      | 2: Realm's Heart  | 5              |
| Spirit                     | 2: Incandescent Flame   | 5              |
| <b>Gifts and Virtues</b>   | Durant  |                |
| <b>Limits/Restrictions</b> | Restriction: Cannot harm the honest<br>Affiliation: Code of the Light |                |
| <b>Wound Levels</b>        | 1 Deadly Wound<br>2 Serious Wounds<br>2 Surface Wounds                |                |

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### MARSIGLIO TENDI

| ATTRIBUTE                  | LEVEL  | MIRACLE POINTS |
|----------------------------|--|----------------|
| Aspect                     | 1: Metahuman   | 5              |
| Domain                     | 4: Duke  | 5              |
| Realm                      | 0: Citizen   | 5              |
| Spirit                     | 0: Candleflame   | 5              |
| <b>Gifts and Virtues</b>   | Immutable<br>Claw (Aspect 7 for cutting/injuring, 5 Penetration, simple, local, limited, uncommon)<br>Virtue: Egocentric |                |
| <b>Limits/Restrictions</b> | Affiliation: Code of the Wild  |                |
| <b>Wound Levels</b>        | 1 Deadly Wound<br>2 Serious Wounds<br>2 Surface Wounds   |                |

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### ROOK CATCHFLY

| ATTRIBUTE                  | LEVEL   | MIRACLE POINTS |
|----------------------------|---|----------------|
| Aspect                     | 4: Celestial  | 5              |
| Domain                     | 2: Viscount   | 5              |
| Realm                      | 1: Radiant  | 5              |
| Spirit                     | 0: Candleflame  | 5              |
| <b>Gifts and Virtues</b>   | Eternal<br>Unblemished Guise (Penetration 1)  |                |
| <b>Limits/Restrictions</b> | Restriction: Eternally underage<br>Restriction: Possessive<br>Affiliation: Code of the Angels |                |
| <b>Wound Levels</b>        | 2 Deadly Wounds<br>3 Serious Wounds<br>3 Surface Wounds                                       |                |

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EDWARD: Well, no, but we could fiddle with her brain or something.

DIANE: That could make Lord Entropy upset.

EDWARD: It's well within the boundaries of Sevenfold Vengeance, altering her, I mean. He wouldn't want to break his own law just to preserve the sanctity of a mortal servant.

DIANE: Good point.

HEATHER: Please. It's against the law if he decides it is. Besides, she's probably already sent him a quick prayer — he knows we have her.

DIANE: That is a bit worrisome. Can we give her back to him?

EDWARD: That'd imply publicly that he went around putting spies in other Imperators' Chancels. Do we want to embarrass him that way?

DIANE: We can't just let her walk away.

HEATHER: I agree. Our own pride's at stake, too.

DIANE: Maybe we could promote her?

HEATHER: Huh?

DIANE: You know. We could ...

HG: Maybe you should discuss this IC? She'll be conscious again soon; I want to know what she's hearing when she wakes up.

DIANE: Oh, sure.

ROOK (*as voiced by Diane*): 'Ey, Marsiglio. What say we move her to greener pastures? 'Stead of hurting her, give her something she can't refuse that'll get her out of our hair.

MARSIGLIO (*as voiced by Edward*): In strictest fact, dear sister, we own no such pastures; the Chancel is the extent of our holdings.

ROOK : Not lit'rally. I mean, in spirit.

MARSIGLIO: You wish us to promote her in spirit?

JULIANNA (*as voiced by Heather*): She's right, Marsiglio. Let us show our generosity to the poor scofflaw; let us endow her with a gift that will occupy the rest of her days. Shall I take care of it?

MARSIGLIO: You are better at gifts than I.

HG: Bethany twitches a little. You think she's drifting into consciousness.

JULIANNA: Rouse her, Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I tap the back of her hand with my claw, dragging it ever so lightly down the middle. [*illustrates, with his own hands.*] Not quite enough to pierce the skin.

ROOK: Br. [*as the other players look at Diane*] I can't help it! I hate it when he does that.

HG: She's pretty definitely awake now, but not moving a muscle.

JULIANNA: Open your eyes.

HG: Very slowly, she does.

JULIANNA: Good morning, Bethany. Glory to the day! You have come to the attention of the viceroys of his Imperial majesty, Ram-Khvastra; and we look upon you with favor.

ROOK: Oh, listen to who's all mannerly now. How come you don't talk like that to us?

JULIANNA: [*frowning sourly at Rook.*] Have you been loyal to us, Bethany?

BETHANY (*as voiced by the HG*): ... yes?

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*It is terribly hard, when my darlings turn upon me — when the treachers who serve my Estate think to practice their arts on its Duke. Then I am torn. Do I reward them for their service, or punish them for their betrayal?*

*In truth, the question is not difficult. To reward treachery is contrary to the nature of the beast.*

*Ultimately, everyone who serves my Estate suffers for it. That is the beauty of my work. Therefore, to revenge myself on those disloyal to me is not cruelty. It simply advances the natural timetable of Creation.*

*—His Grace, Marsiglio Tendi, Duke of Treachery, as written by Edward Jordan*

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*We spent most of the previous story chasing after Bethany. You'd think catching a single mortal mole would be easy, but she had protections against divination that kept throwing us off the scent. More importantly, Madeline had been reading spy novels and we hadn't.*

*—Heather Sullivan*

*Sometime in the future, when I know all the pieces, I'll let them hear Bethany's legend in a Chancel bar.*  
—Madelaine Rush, *the Hollyhock God*

JULIANNA: In recognition of your great devotion and loyalty, I grant you the greatest gift within my power to give. Bethany, I free you from your chains. No fear shall constrain you. No doubt shall hold you back. You shall know the personal strength that allows you to face any obstacle and constraint. If you dare to wish for it, I give you the will to strive for it. Without reservation, without deviation, without hesitation. You will rise like a bird, like a spark climbing the lightning, like a firework; and when you rise too high, reach too far, and fall, you shall tumble into the darkness without regret or sorrow. That is the gift I give you. [*as Heather*] Lesser Creation of Strength, I DMP.

DIANE: Geez, Heather. That's cold.

HEATHER: I know. [*smiles*]

MARSIGLIO: Sister, do we really need a hero in our Chancel?

HEATHER: Looking at Bethany as she sits up with new strength and purpose in her eyes, I'll answer, [*as Julianna*] We won't have one for long.

HG: Fair enough. The miracle works. You realize that her first use of her new strength of purpose is probably going to be taking you all on? She can't like you very much or she wouldn't have sold out to the enemy.

DIANE: Rook'll grab her if she comes at us and frog-march her to somewhere distracting. Um, lesser divination of ambition — what're her unfulfilled dreams?

HG: She wants to learn to paint. She'd like to kill you and Ram-Khvastra for turning her home into a Chancel, and Lord Entropy for forcing her into his service. She wants to be a prize-winning journalist, and, um, an actress. And she'd like to climb Mt. Everest. She has political aspirations. She wants to have three children — two boys and a girl. She wants to win the heart of her personal hero, some musician or other. She'd like to take out the Columbian drug cartels, possibly tearing through their mountain headquarters knocking out their thugs left and right. She wants to be amazingly rich. She'd like ...

DIANE: And there are probably a whole bunch of things she's always wanted to say and do to the people in her neighborhood, right?

HG: Oh, yes, thousands.

DIANE: I'll just get her back home, then. One'll get you ten they kill her by dawn; if not, she'll be off to the closest mountain.

MARSIGLIO: Fare ye well, Rook.

HG: Okay. Scene closed.

### INTERLUDE: FAITH

*I did not see a white light. I did not hear voices calling me home. When I died, the pain ended very abruptly. The next thing I saw was the most beautiful man I have ever known. He had black hair and calm eyes and I fell instantly in love, even though he was my enemy.*

*"Lady," he began, without preamble, "the Buddha said that souls are bound to an endless cycle of reincarnation, to suffer life after life among the many worlds of Creation, until they free themselves from the chains of ignorance and desire and permit themselves to achieve Nirvana. This seems to me a terrible waste;*

*untold millions of years suffering the lash of existence, followed by an extinction in which no quality of yourself endures. Would you agree?"*

*It took me a few moments to pull myself away from his eyes; I sensed something important happening in their depths, some vast and important secret, but could only make out glitter and darkness. When I spoke, however, I did not fumble my words. My head felt very clear. "Either the Buddha was correct, sir, or he was not. If the choice of theologies is mine, I would as soon go to Heaven."*

*His smile was brilliant and sad. "I cannot give you that option," he said. "The moon will fall into the sea and the sky will turn to gold before a soul such as yours is allowed in Heaven. The tree of worlds will shake and planets will fall from its branches like dust. Lucifer shall repent and the world will crack before you are granted entry there."*

*I felt no fear. I was calm. My betrothed had cast me down the stairs and my body lay below me broken. I had no room for fear. "What do you propose?"*

*"Rather than proceeding to your natural afterlife," he said, "grant your allegiance to me. You will not suffer rebirth. At the proper time, I shall swallow your spirit; and you shall ride with me into a place beyond suffering."*

*I am not entirely naïve. "What is the price?"*

*"To ally with me is named treason," he answered, "in all the worlds there are. If I should fall on some world's soil, there is no place that will accept your spirit. Neither Hell nor Heaven will bear your touch, nor any world in between. You shall be cast, alone, a traitor and an exile, into the places beyond Creation; and I can not say what fate will meet you there."*

*The death of worlds shone in his eyes. But I loved him.*

—from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

## SCENE 2: MARSIGLIO RANTS

HG: Rook is on her way back from her errand when a set of sharp, shooting pains run down Marsiglio's side.

MARSIGLIO: Erp?

HG: Marsiglio's world wavers. His Estate is screaming. Something incoherent, something about justice.

EDWARD: Wait, do I have any idea why this is happening?

HG: It could be an Excrucian attack on your Estate. That often affects the Power directly, causing pain, deformity, injury, or hallucinations.

EDWARD: Deformity? [*as Marsiglio*] God's wounds! [*as Edward*] Or whatever that is in Italian.

JULIANNA: Pardon?

MARSIGLIO: It is an attack on Treachery! [*as Edward*] Marsiglio starts pacing. [*as Marsiglio*] It is my doom. Surrounded! I am surrounded by enemies! Under attack at every turn! The universe hates me. It has singled me out for persecution. For, um, destruction!

JULIANNA: Brother, there is a war on.

MARSIGLIO: So they say. The evidence does not support this. Rather, it indicates an, ah, vendetta against myself! I! Marsiglio! That the Excrucians attack other regions of Creation ...

*Weird gents, my Familia are. Marsiglio thinks the world's all 'bout Marsiglio. Julianna thinks it's all 'bout how you face what comes to you — whether you choose to fear or love your fate.*

*Let me tell you what it's about. It's about the moment when a golden flower opens to the sun. I've seen it. The flower's got dew on it, it's all warm colored, but that's not the thing. The thing is that there's this moment when the flower opens when the whole world holds still. What will come? the flower wonders. What'll the day bring? It doesn't matter what the answer is. It's that moment when anything could happen. That flower's eternal. That moment's eternal. That's what the world's all about.*  
—The Lady Rook Catchfly, Viscount of Eternity, as written by Diane Firth

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*It astounds me, the depths of cruelty and depravity that Madeline sinks to to keep the game fun.*  
—Edward Jordan

HEATHER: [*raises an eyebrow at Edward as the silence stretches*]  
MARSIGLIO: A diversion! It is nothing more than a diversion.  
DIANE: Oh, there's a cunning plan.  
HEATHER: [*holding up a finger*] Give me a sec.  
EDWARD: Sure.  
JULIANNA: [*after a moment*] It pleases my brother to indulge in hyperbole.  
MARSIGLIO: [*snarled*] I am in pain, cousin. It would please me to have it cease.  
JULIANNA: Behave yourself, Marsiglio. You're embarrassing us both.  
HG: Rook returns about now. She probably heard bits and pieces of the rant from the hall.  
ROOK: Over and done, gents. 'Sup with Marsiglio?  
HEATHER: He's been hitting the hard drugs again.  
HG: Was that ic?  
HEATHER: [*after a pause*] No, not really.  
MARSIGLIO: I am under attack.  
ROOK: [*pauses, then elaborately looks around the room*] Fierce dust mites, are they, then?  
MARSIGLIO: Not here. Somewhere ... [*as Edward*] Er, do I know where?  
HG: You can find out with a divination.  
EDWARD: Major?  
HG: [*flips through the book*] No. Level 0 for the general area, level 2 to pin it down.  
EDWARD: Oh, that's easy. Um. I reach out my arm and cry, "Treachery! Speak to me! Tell me about your problems!" And do the divination thing.  
DIANE: Did you have an unhappy childhood? Do you sometimes feel undervalued?  
HG: Hush, Diane. Edward, your mind spans the vast extent of treachery, the seas and tides of it that wash over the world, and spots the blemish. You're pretty sure that the problem's in Washington, D.C.  
MARSIGLIO: As I was saying, not here. Somewhere in ... D.C.  
ROOK: [*coughs*] Should be easy to spot, then. Not much treachery going on there.  
MARSIGLIO: I could home in more carefully if I were there.  
HG: You can.  
HEATHER: I'm going to step into my Anchor Shelley's mind for a moment. [*as Julianna*] Shelley, drop whatever it is you are doing right now. We're on our way to the airport. Ready our jet, and clear a flight path to the air exit from the Chancel. [*as Heather, gesturing grandly at the other players*] To my partners in crime, here, I add, [*as Julianna*] I say we move on it quickly, then.  
ROOK: 'Ey, don't order me about.  
JULIANNA: Don't be childish, Viscount.  
HG: Is anyone seriously protesting Julianna's plan?  
EDWARD: Not really.  
DIANE: No.  
HG: Then I'll skip ahead a bit. You're on the jet — usual pilot, I assume? — sipping drinks and breaching the barrier between the Chancel and normal reality. It's just as the skies clarify into the blue skies of Earth that you see the cruise missile wending its way towards the plane...time for a short break.

So, who's paying for pizza tonight?  
EDWARD, HEATHER: Hey!  
DIANE: Mean.

### INTERLUDE: HOPE

*I will not let the enemy break me.*

*She found me on the streets. I was a killer, then. I needed it, like a drug, the feeling I got when they died. I thought she was going to be my next victim. Her name was Rook. I told her that my name was Hope.*

*I understood that killing was wrong. I simply knew that it did not matter. One more splatter in humanity's long blood-drenched history. One more pointless crime that'll be forgotten forever when our sun goes out. It didn't matter that killing was wrong, because right and wrong didn't mean anything.*

*Then I cut Rook's throat, and she smiled at me. "Thought you might do that," she said. Her voice had a weird quality to it. I suppose it would, I mean, if I'd messed with her windpipe. "Got some issues to work out, you do. Like to talk about it?"*

*It's fair to say that I could have gone insane, right there, right at that moment. There were so few things I trusted. If I stopped trusting my own eyes, I might have just — stopped. Stopped caring. Stopped acting. Sat down and waited to die. But her smile, God, her smile was like the sun. It gave me something to cling to. So I sat down. And I told her about it.*

*She wasn't nice, at the end. She didn't tell me it was all right. She said, "Good lord, you're a fool." Then she took me by the collar, and she dragged me out into the night. And it was different.*

*The light — the light from the street lamps was alive. It whirled. It danced. It spun in little rings, like fairies in the old books. The cars parked on either side of the street were grumbling in their sleep. The fire hydrant struggled in its moorings, trying desperately to tear itself free so that the relentless pressure of the water would stop. The buildings looked down on me with their great gloomy eyes, and they said nothing, but they judged me.*

*There was a road. It was golden. She dragged me, stumbling and cursing, down that road for a day and a night, until we stood in a place far above the Earth, and I looked at the tree whose branches held worlds. She waved at it all and said, "This is what you think don't matter."*

*Everything was still. Everything was quiet, and cold, and frozen, and beautiful. I struggled. "So the world's a little bigger than I thought," I said. "It still goes on forever. It's still gone on forever. Nothing really means anything. My neck hurts."*

*Then she pointed at the blackness that gnarled at the tree's branches, and my heart turned as cold as the void between the worlds. "Eternity don't make itself," she said. "Things don't just last forever on their own. It lasts forever if we fight."*

*I didn't have to ask what we had to fight. I could see it. Eating at the tree of worlds.*

*"I claim you, Hope," she said. "You gonna fight for me, now." I didn't argue. I loved her. I would always love her.*

*I will not let this man break me. Not with his knives. Not with his eyes. I will not tell.*

*Oh God.*

—from the Thought-Record of Hope Carstens

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OPPOSITE:

*The Power of Greed demanding repayment of third-word debt*  
by Bryan Talbot



### SCENE 3: WAR IN THE SKIES

*The human mind likes limits a great deal. It likes to categorize the world; and once it has made a categorization, it resists a change in the pigeonholes it has built. Stupidity gets in the way. So does pride. Most of all, however, the servant of limits is fear. The fearful, the cowardly, the weak — they would rather die than understand that the world exceeds all boundaries.*

*Strength, then, is simply this: the calm acceptance of the improbable.*

*—The Lady Julianna, Marchessa of Strength, as written by Heather Sullivan*

HG: So you're entering normal skies, just smoothly gliding through the space between realities, when this missile comes streaking for you. It doesn't look like the sort of thing you want impacting against your plane at high velocity, assuming that you have choice in the matter.

DIANE: Darn right we have choice. I'm going out there.

HG: Okay ...

DIANE: Don't planes have doors that lead to the outside?

HG: Right. Conflict begins! Rook's running for the door. Julianna?

HEATHER: Strengthening the hull integrity of the plane.

HG: That's a lesser creation. It costs you a DMP. Marsiglio?

EDWARD: Can I make the missile turn against its creators?

HG: Um. Oh dear. You can, yes.

EDWARD: Problem solved. Can we see where it came from?

HG: Not visible through your window at the moment. You are in the cabin of a jet, you know...Okay. Some NPCs do mysterious actions that you're not aware of. Rook, you reach the door, shove it open, and — there's not actually an outside to go, you know.

DIANE: I'm going on the wing. It's just a short hop.

HG: What's your Aspect?

DIANE: Four.

HG: This is not a problem. As you're leaping, you catch sight of the helicopter that fired the missile. Presumably it's been waiting for you. It's got two missile holders, one empty, a pilot, and a handsome young fellow holding a machine gun.

DIANE: I can take them.

HG: Then, of course, there's the other helicopter, which you can't see at the moment, but which you can hear on the other side of the plane. And a great deal of wind in your hair.

EDWARD: Okay, problem not taken care of. But problem partially alleviated!

HG: The missile is beginning to curve in a great arc back towards the helicopter that fired it. Marsiglio, it's your action.

MARSIGLIO: Stewardess! More wine!

HG: ... Right. Rook, the man with the machine gun is leaning out the side. His gun's tracking you as you leap; there's a spray of bullets fanning out from it. Julianna, your action.

HEATHER: If Marsiglio thinks the problem's taken care of, it's not. I'm going to the door. And pumping my senses up a notch with an AMP.

HG: The helicopter pilot's swerving towards the missile as it streaks back towards the copter. Rook, he's shouting, "The ones you want are over there!" And you land neatly on the wing. No doubt your balance is perfect, too. You can hear another missile launch, from the other side of the plane.

DIANE: Decisions, decisions. I can pinpoint its location pretty accurately, right?

HG: Yah.

DIANE: I'm going to backflip off the wing and kick that missile out of the way.

HG: ... First, that's more than Aspect 4.

DIANE: 6?

HG: [*flips to the Aspect Miracle Index on p. 89*] Looks about

right. Okay, it's a hard miracle — you realize that that'll leave you in midair, right?

DIANE: Okay, so I use the kick to knock myself back to the plane's other wing.

HG: Got it. The whole plane dips and wobbles as you kick off; the bullets spatter off the hull, seconds behind your path. Marsiglio?

EDWARD: If the plane's going to start jolting about...I locate a parachute with rapid efficiency.

HG: Rook, you're in midair above the plane when you notice the first missile turning around — it's arcing back towards the plane again.

EDWARD: Some days, you just can't get rid of a missile.

HG: Julianna, you see, um, much the same thing. And a stray bullet from earlier wings past your ear.

HEATHER: I affirm its strength of purpose in its mission to destroy that helicopter!

HG: Lesser creation?

DIANE: It's like pinball!

HEATHER: Yah, lesser creation.

HG: Rook, the second helicopter is outfitted much like the first. You can see others in the distance, too — it looks like they weren't sure exactly where the plane'd come out of the Chancel. There's no passenger in the second one, though; I mean, the second person on it has edged his way out along the strut. As your feet come down towards the missile, he leaps for you; the rotor scissors through the space just ahead of and behind his neck. You manage to hit the missile with both feet and kick it down towards the ground, but this guy is fast — he'll be on you before you flip back to the plane.

ROOK: What kind of suicidal idiot is he? [*as Diane*] Hell. I'm not going to stand on an armed missile that's just been jolted and fight him; I'm heading back to the plane, defending myself en route.

HG: With what level of Aspect?

ROOK: I don't know. Level 3, Penetration 2. Normal miracle.

HG: Gotcha. The man with the gun is firing at Julianna. Marsiglio, you have a parachute on. What next?

EDWARD: Going after the others. Much as I'd like to abandon ship, I need the other two alive to save my Estate!

HG: Clouds begin to gather heavily in the empty sky. Julianna? You're being fired at, by the way.

HEATHER: I have to use Aspect to dodge them, anyway; I might as well make it good. I'm going to grab the top of the door and flip myself up to cling to the plane above the door.

HG: That's ... pretty improbable.

HEATHER: Then it should fit fine under Aspect 3! For 2 AMPS.

HG: ... If you like. Rook, the man's fists are like lightning, almost impossible to block. He's better than you are — at the moment, at least. He's trying to press you hard enough that you'll miss the plane, which is looking awfully likely. Someone's praying to you.

DIANE: Yah, um, right, busy signal on that prayer, okay? This guy has got to have some way to survive. I'm kicking up to level 5, Penetration 1 — a hard miracle of Aspect — to get a clinch on him from behind. That's my last two AMPS; I hope he doesn't have Spirit 2.

*I didn't know when I wrote her up that Rook would be a combat character. I didn't find out until the session when Marsiglio told her, "Hey, the fight's over," and she answered, "Just 'cause they're dead?"*

—Diane Firth

HG: Julianna, the bullets start curving up after you as you pull yourself out of their way. That reminds you of something, but you're not sure what. I'm altering the order of action; you get to go next.

HEATHER: [*philosophically*] Maybe my Rite of Holy Fire will protect me from hitting the ground at terminal velocity. I'm shoving myself away from the plane into free-fall with a mundane action and spending an AMP to hype up my memory with my miraculous action.

HG: How's this? That is a trick that the Power of Guns is known for.

HEATHER: The Hell? We're under attack by the Power of Guns? I shout that, I think. [*as Julianna*] The Hell? We're under attack by the Power of Guns?

HG: The first missile wavers in the sky. It seems confused. The sky finishes storming over; in seconds, it's gone from clear and bright to dark and ominous. Marsiglio, you hear Julianna's yell and see the bullets curving down after her as she falls.

MARSIGLIO: This is just unacceptable.

DIANE: You idiots. It's a Deceiver-shard.

MARSIGLIO: Yet it has just become more so. Insight strikes! My muse has spoken from afar!

HG: What exactly are you doing, Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I'm pumping up the volume of my lungs and ... do I know the name of the Power of Guns?

HG: You've met, socially. [*The HG attempts to come up with a name rapidly.*] Roger Eber ... Roger Eeb.

MARSIGLIO: In Roger Eeb's name, get us out of this blasted mess! [*as Edward*] I'm spending 4 AMPS to yell really loudly.

HG: Fair enough. Rook, you get your clinch. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to help — you're still falling, only now you're falling with a struggling man in your arms. His survival plan, if any, is not obvious.

DIANE: Hey, can we have the missile explode around now?

HG: ... Sure.

DIANE: I'm going to spend 2 DMPS to make the explosion eternal — to freeze it in its moment of transcendent glory. I want to land on it.

HG: I'll have to come back to you on that. Julianna, you're falling from the sky, without a convenient explosion to land on. On the up side, the bullets seem to lose their malevolence and stop chasing you; Roger, or the Deceiver wearing his skin, is otherwise occupied trying to knock the pilot out of the compartment. What do you want to do?

HEATHER: I'm shifting into the mythic world and grabbing a double handful of the nearest wind spirit.

HG: Um, slight problem. Sylphs — air spirits — are about as tangible and sturdy as, well, the air. Your double handful is really just about enough to goose them really badly.

HEATHER: Can I do a preservation on their structural strength just before grabbing hold?

HG: Um, no, still. I mean, you can, but that'll just keep their structural strength from decaying, it won't protect the structure itself.

HEATHER: Damn it, a lesser creation then. I'm going to buy my way up to Duchess and then you'll be sorry.

HG: [*grins*] Okay. I'll be nice and let you shift perceptions for free. A third DMP goes the way of the dodo as you grab the tails of two wind spirits and hang precariously in midair. The indecisive missile, that's been wobbling back and forth, gives up and explodes; the wash of heat singes your eyebrows and hair.

HEATHER: Curse you, Excrucians!

HG: The pilot of that helicopter pretty much just struggles to keep from being forced out the window; the helicopter, without his hands on the controls, begins listing vaguely in the direction of the plane. Marsiglio, you're in a position to see this, including Julianna improbably suspended in space with her hands outstretched like, um, some kind of actor gathering applause; what's your next move?

EDWARD: Oh, my eyes are fixed on the battle in the helicopter cockpit. [*as Marsiglio*] It does my heart good to see such falling out among the foe. [*as Edward*] Julianna can't possibly just hang around in the air forever doing nothing. I'm a bit ticked about the missile not following the game plan ...

HG: For reference, Deceivers do have several ways to confuse the missile as to its target, which would render both your and Julianna's miracles moot.

EDWARD: Right, then. I've seen enough from the door; I'm going to hit the cockpit and take the plane down.

HG: You're over the ocean.

EDWARD: Not all the way down. I just want to give Julianna somewhere to fall to.

HG: Okay. Rook, the missile explodes in a brilliant wave of light and debris — which freezes, elegantly, into a still-frame shot of, um, frozen plumes of flame and shards of metal. Hold on a sec. [*thinks, then flips through her notes*] You're about five feet away from a perfect landing when the bit just beneath you turns all explosive and gruesome again.

DIANE: What? It shouldn't be affected by my Auctoritas, should it?

HG: Nope.

DIANE: Then ... oh, Hell. I'm in his Auctoritas, aren't I? I shove him away hard before I fall out of the cloud entirely.

HG: Heat. Fire. Steam. Shards of metal banging into your sides and skimming into your ribcage. Rook loses a Deadly wound level. For what it's worth, so does the other guy.

DIANE: Do I get out of range in time?

HG: I'll get back to you on that.

DIANE: Mean.

HG: Julianna, you're just barely stable, the wind spirits whipping about, trying to get you to let go. The pilot of the helicopter is shoved free and falls; after a moment's flailing, he adjusts his position into a swan dive. A cloud is beginning to coalesce below him, directly in his course. Speaking of clouds, it's beginning to rain. Your action, then Marsiglio's? JULIANNA: Mush!

HG: I don't think wind spirits obey voice commands.

HEATHER: I don't know. I can't think of anything.

HG: Okay. I'll come back to you after Edward, since Julianna can probably think faster than any of us mortals. Marsiglio?

EDWARD: The cockpit has a pretty wide-angled view, right?

HG: Tell me what you want to see, I'll tell you if you see it.

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*I came very close to naming a major movie critic the Power of Guns. This is why one should always have some spare names handy at the beginning of a session.*  
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

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*It's easy to forget little established details in a heavy miraculous combat. That's why missiles and such often explode only when someone remembers that they should.*  
—Diane Firth

*Fortunately, in an animistic world, that's only right and proper.*  
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

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*The first time Rook wanted to toughen herself up with a creation miracle, I had to stop and think. It's legal, but it's also a lot like a free Gift. Then I realized that she's much more likely to do a lesser creation than a major creation, and so I decided what makes it lesser: she's buying herself a finite bit of eternity, and at the end of the scene, it runs out. If she ever puts the MPs together for a major creation of personal durability, I'll let it stand until something happens to disenchant her.*  
—Madeline Rush, *the Hollybock God*

EDWARD: The guy swan-diving into the cloud.

HG: Sure.

EDWARD: I want to suck him into the jet engine.

HG: Pardon?

EDWARD: I'm going to use the Rite of the Last Trump, turn 4 RMPS into an extra AMP, and wheel the jet around to suck him into the engine.

HG: While a Noble can certainly whip a jet plane around and use it as a precision vacuum, I'm afraid that you'd need at least a deep miracle — you're only Aspect 1. You want to convert another eight miracle points to AMPS?

EDWARD: Harrumph. No. Okay, I'm going to bet my shirt that the guy diving into clouds is the guy who made the sudden storm, and I'm going to turn the skies against him.

HG: Lesser Creation of Treachery, again?

EDWARD: Yup. Penetration 1, so I'll need a DMP.

HG: You don't need Penetration; there's no one within Auctoritas range of the clouds up above.

EDWARD: Well, I was thinking that if they were going to strike him down with lightning or something, it would need Penetration.

HG: Ah. That's up to you; you can just make them generically turn on him, in which case what happens is out of your hands, or you can make them turn on him and blast him with lightnings — assuming that they're on his side right now — in which case Penetration is useful.

EDWARD: I want the lightning.

HG: Gotcha. Julianna?

HEATHER: Okay. This is tricky. Can I preserve the integrity of the cloud that the guy is falling into, to make it resist miracles that make it do uncloudlike things? Like, I dunno, cushioning falling Excrucian-shards?

HG: I'll have to think about whether you can do that in general. For now, sure, I'll let it slide. Rook, you shove the Deceiv — er, the Excrucian — away just in time; you're almost at the bottom of the explosive cloud when it stabilizes enough for you to hook one hand onto a plume of fire and a foot on a white-hot shard of metal. You're at risk of searing through your hand and foot, though, and taking another Deadly wound at any moment. The Excrucian, meanwhile, turns sideways in the air and vanishes.

HEATHER: It's Grommet Claus! [*see p. 271, describing their first adventure*]

ROOK: Ow. Ow ow ow. Ow. [*as Diane*] I'm going to toughen myself up with another Lesser Creation of Eternity. And about bloody time, too.

HG: Okay! As usual, that costs 2 DMPS and'll last through the scene. Julianna, Marsiglio, cloud guy executes a perfect roll and twist, lands with both feet on the cloud, and then passes right through its bouncy surface with a startled yelp and a few trails of vapor.

JULIANNA: Ha!

HG: Moments later, a jagged bolt of lightning dashes vigorously from the clouds way above and spears right into him.

MARSIGLIO: Vengeance is mine! [*as Edward*] Only, in Italian.

DIANE: We must get you a phrase book.

HG: The Power of Guns is at the controls; he skirls the helicopter just barely over the jet's surface towards the other side of the plane. Come to think of it, between Julianna's enhanced senses and Marsiglio's cockpit view, you probably both notice that there's stuff going on over there, too. Marsiglio?

EDWARD: Is cloud guy dead?

HG: He's obviously lost his last Deadly wound level. Blackened, twitching, stunned, falling at great speed towards the ocean surface below — but you can't be sure he's done for, if you know what I mean.

EDWARD: I have enormous faith in Rook's ability to handle the other helicopter, particularly since its pilot doesn't seem to be doing anything worthy of note. Hey, is this other guy wearing Jameson Black's skin?

HG: Sadly, even if he were, Marsiglio has not read *NOBILIS* and would not be familiar with the name. [*See p. 110–112.*]

EDWARD: I'm still piloting the plane downwards. For my miraculous action, um. I don't want to just electrocute him again. That'd be dull. Can I steal his clouds? I mean, not just make them turn on him, make them actively our allies?

HG: Under the circumstances, where they're an Excrucian weapon against you, I'd have to say "yes."

MARSIGLIO: Surely, dear clouds, you realize that Excrucians are feckless and roguish; would you not rather serve a kinder, gentler master?

HG: Mm-hm. Julianna?

HEATHER: I want to sort of paraglide down and kick the git.

HG: That'll be your last 2 AMPS, please.

JULIANNA: Creator, please let this be the extent of our enemy's malice.

HG: Rook, two more helicopters are coming into missile range; and the one from the other side of the plane is moving into position behind you.

DIANE: Did I meet Roger Eeb? I mean, the real one?

HG: Probably.

DIANE: Marsiglio shouted the truth of the name pretty loudly. I think I'm not worried about that helicopter. I'm going to run up the frozen explosion and leap to the rotor of the second helicopter — the one turn-sideways guy leapt out of.

HG: Onto the rotor.

DIANE: Yup! I can do that; I've got celestial Aspect and I'm as tough as nails.

HG: Right. You — just Rook — hear a thump of two feet just above the pilot's compartment on the plane behind you. Roger Eeb discharges his helicopter's second missile towards one of the copters coming into view. The partially fried cloud Deceiver makes a convulsive gesture with his hands and the wind spirits that Julianna's holding dissolve into nothingness with two high-pitched screams just before her feet hit his ribcage full-force.

JULIANNA: Glack. [*as Heather*] Just level with us, Maddy — everyone's going to end up in the ocean, aren't we?

HG: [*smiles*] What's your action? After breaking his ribs, that is.

HEATHER: I, um, is he still moving?

HG: He looks to be in the very process of giving up the ghost.

---

*The clouds Marsiglio converted to our cause showed up in a later story and helped us out. I thought that was pretty cool.*  
—Heather Sullivan

HEATHER: Thank Heaven. Is there any chance I can preserve whatever potency in him makes him think he can land on clouds?

HG: I, um. [THINKS] You can try. If it's a part of him, then it's exempt from your Domain; if it's something he did, then you can preserve the strength of the effect itself.

HEATHER: I'm going to try and ride his corpse into a low-lying cloud over the ocean. If he's dead, I don't have to worry about his Auctoritas and spending an MP, right?

HG: Right.

HEATHER: Then that's my plan.

HG: Rook, Roger Eeb's missile blows up one of the two new helicopters. You land neatly on the rotor of the one you were jumping for, and whirl around and around and around.

ROOK: Whee! [*as Heather*] Er. I snap it and leap for the next helicopter.

HG: This is pushing the boundaries of what you can do without miracle points, but okay. Marsiglio, bare hands rip open the metal above the cockpit and a wiry man drops in through the hole. Turn-sideways guy, for reference.

MARSIGLIO: I am surrounded! My enemies are everywhere!

HG: Clouds loom downwards towards the other helicopters coming up from the distance. The sky above the plane begins to clear. Marsiglio, it is your turn.

EDWARD: Much as I would like to do something really clever, I think I claw his eyes out.

HG: Julianna, you're rapidly approaching a low-lying cloud, but haven't gotten there yet. Any extra actions?

HEATHER: Hanging on for dear life about covers it.

HG: Rook, you land neatly on another helicopter rotor. This is the last one currently in range, although there are others in the skies.

DIANE: If I break the rotor and jump back, can I make it to the plane?

HG: Not without AMPS. There's improbable and then there's egregious.

DIANE: Curses. Okay, I drop from the rotor to smash into the cockpit; time to take the controls.

HG: Okay. Marsiglio, this is unstoppable force meets unstoppable force time. You don't have the AMPS to muster the slightest defense against this guy; on the other hand, he apparently doesn't quite realize that your claw is effective Aspect 7. Your hand sweeps clean through his face, cutting both eyes open; his hand casually knocks you through the cockpit onto the nose of the plane, in an explosion of glass. It's your action.

EDWARD: I scabble for a handhold!

HG: Okay. Julianna, you thump neatly onto the cloud, suspended above the ocean by a mass of vapor and a dead body.

HEATHER: I step into Shelley's head again. [*as Julianna*] 'S me. Drop what you're doing again; muster the Chancel's air defense. Hostiles in the sky just outside the border; we may need help fending them off. [*as Heather*] Hey! Clever idea. I'm going to use a deep Realm miracle through her for a quick Lesser Change — drastically accelerating the scramble speed and airspeed to the Chancel border. 2 SMPS, 2 RMPS.

EDWARD: Nice!

HG: Okay. You can expect reinforcements any minute, then.

DIANE: Let's just survive until then!

HG: Rook, you're swinging down into the cockpit when a wave of blackness and emptiness explodes to fill it. Like, um, visualize a chunk of outer space sort of blossoming into existence from the cockpit outwards.

DIANE: Do I know the name of the Power of Space?

HG: Nope. But even if you did, sound doesn't travel in a vacuum.

DIANE: [*moves her lips like Rook shouting profanity in a vacuum*] I could, actually, invoke the Truth of the Name via the mythic world, but, um, I guess not in this case .... Wait. Rook's Eternal. Does a vacuum even affect me?

HG: [*grinning*] No.

DIANE: Thank you, Heaven! Someone in here is creating ... nothing; and since these things seem to hold two people, they're both going out the far door.

HG: For reference, what level Aspect, what level Penetration?

DIANE: I guess it better be two and two — I'm in both their Auctorita.

HG: Fair enough. Julianna, Shelley hears and obeys. What's next?

HEATHER: I'm done, for now.

HG: Marsiglio, the blinded guy's eyes begin knitting themselves back together. He doesn't take any obvious action, though. You're slipping off the nose of the plane, one hand scabbling for a handhold and the other casually slicing up the plane as it gropes around.

EDWARD: I am Noble! I do not panic! Rather, I attempt to cut open a hole in the plane's nose big enough to grab with my other hand. And I hope that the reason he didn't do anything is that he was burning AMPS to heal.

HG: Rook, you manage to knock one of them into the far door hard enough to shove it open and leave him scrambling for a hold. The other one, though, casually grabs your arm as you push her and twists, slamming you into the instrument panel. Your action?

DIANE: Is Eeb doing anything?

HG: Um, I'd forgotten Eeb. I think he's angling for a shot. You're not making it easy.

DIANE: He's the bloody Power of Guns! Sort of.

HG: Okay, point. A bullet scissors between your arm and body, slamming neatly into the woman's temple.

DIANE: I take credit for it.

HG: [*laughs*] Okay. Your action?

DIANE: I experimentally bump up to Aspect 3, Penetration 1, wrestling with her.

HG: Oops, pushed your luck too far. Your moves are still technically precise, and nobody's Auctoritas is going to interfere with your ability to defend yourself, but you feel the strength ebbing out of you every time you move against her. Someone in the cockpit's Spirit 2. Julianna, anything you want to do yet?

HEATHER: Nope.

HG: Marsiglio, you think you have a handhold. Turn-sideways guy throws the controls out of whack; the plane begins

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*I kept thinking, "See? See? Marsiglio's right! The universe is out to get him!"*  
—Edward Jordan

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*It took me a few stories of play to understand just how powerful Spirit was, and then I promised myself I would buy some someday.*  
—Diane Firth

accelerating downwards. Then he bounds out onto the nose and scissors his hand down to knock you off. Your action?

EDWARD: I slice his hand off at the wrist.

HG: Rook, it's a standoff so far, but the helicopter's controls aren't doing too well in the vacuum, and it's spread far enough to keep the rotor from doing any good. The chopper's falling from the sky, and it isn't going to be flyable for much longer in any case. Eeb picks off the guy hanging from the door with a clean shot; he falls into the sea. Your action?

ROOK: Abandon ship! [*as Diane*] I'm going to try and leap out hard enough that Eeb can pick me up.

HG: You leap! Marsiglio, you slice off the guy's hand; it's already falling off the wrist as it hits your forehead with the force of a jackhammer. Your choice: lose a Deadly wound level, or fall.

EDWARD: I'll take the Deadly, oh vicious Madeline; it'd be terribly embarrassing to lose my private jet to this rabble.

DIANE: Our private jet.

EDWARD: Details, details.

HG: A blinding pain blossoms in your forehead; the ragged edge of the plane digs into your hand; but somehow you manage to hold on. And just about then, a hailstone the size of a television set plunges into the Excrucian-shard's forehead. He totters.

EDWARD: My glorious treacherous storm! I cut off whatever I can reach of his foot.

HG: He falls!

EDWARD: Yes!

DIANE: Big deal. I got him to fall, and look where he is now.

EDWARD: Mean. [*smiles*]

HG: Rook, Roger's helicopter is swooping towards you — Excrucian to the rescue! — but a tendril of vacuum is washing out towards it. You're not sure that by the time it reaches you, it won't be out of, well, lift.

DIANE: Look, I'm pretty short on miracle points here. I swim really hard through the air. Kick kick kick!

HG: And the Chancel's air defense force, majestic, glorious, and extremely heavily armed fades into view at the Chancel exit point!

JULIANNA: Hurrah!

HG: Clods of hail pummel turn-sideways guy as he falls towards the ocean; he's pretty limp at this point. Unfortunately, Marsiglio, the jet's also heading almost straight down, and you're clinging to a cut in its nose by one hand. Your action?

EDWARD: What did I do with the original pilot?

HG: Your choice. Probably sent him back into the cabin.

EDWARD: Then I don't have to steer the plane, just keep it from slamming into the water before he gets back to the controls, right?

HG: Assuming he's desperate enough to go back into a cockpit where an Excrucian-shard and a Power were just fighting, yes.

EDWARD: I yell for him to do this thing. Converting some RMPs into an AMP to yell that loud enough for him to hear.

HG: You don't think he can pull the jet out in time.

EDWARD: I have a plan!

HG: Okay. Mark off 4 RMPs and 1 AMP for a level 3 Aspect miracle. Rook, you hit a strut of Roger Eeb's helicopter a few moments before the vacuum reaches the rotor, and catch hold. The helicopter with the wounded woman at the controls is still falling, but she hasn't been shot again — Roger's been too busy maneuvering to save you. Any plans?

ROOK: Ally-up! [*as Diane*] I'm going to swing up and grab the controls. I'm probably a much better pilot than this twonk.

HG: Marsiglio, you're almost to the water.

EDWARD: I can cut anything with my finger at effective Aspect 7, right? I mean, I'm not limited by reason — this is "Impossible for Anyone" territory cutting, right?

HG: Yes.

EDWARD: I narrow my eyes, strain to reach past the end of the nose, and just before we slam into the water, I use my claw to rip open the sea.

HG: ... I'll get back to you. Rook, you jerk the helicopter back in a complicated and improbable maneuver just as Roger Eeb nails the last remaining shard in the heart. Several of the Chancel's planes are heading for you; the others are heading towards the Excrucian reinforcements. Any action?

DIANE: Darn right! I pick up Eeb by the neck and chuck him into the sea.

HG: And, behind you, Marsiglio tears open the sea at its seams. The water washes back, startled sharks and fish falling from its sides, opening a pocket of air just big enough for the pilot to level off!

MARSIGLIO: I rock.

HG: Okay. I think I'll cut scene there.

EDWARD: [*grumbled*] The Excrucians were never this organized when they went after Julianna's Estate.

HG: Maybe whomever's responsible for this Breakthrough didn't need all the available shards.

HEATHER: Oh, there's a pleasant thought. I assume someone swings by and picks me up?

EDWARD: Would we leave you sitting on a dead Excrucian on a cloud high above a parted ocean?

HEATHER: Well, I suppose Rook wouldn't.

EDWARD: There you go.

## INTERLUDE: FAITH

*Time does not pass normally when you are dead. I did not sleep, or "miss" time, or enter a daze; nevertheless, the next thing that happened was over forty-six hours later.*

*I coalesced at the base of the stairs, hovering above a chalk outline of my flesh, and two creatures faced me. In all physical respects save one, they looked human, but they were not human. I did not have to be dead to see that. Their souls were like torchfires, casting echoes of their nature across the room.*

*One — her frame was slight and her movements fluid, and all the strength in the world converged within her soul. I do not mean that she was strong. I mean that she was Strength. She was the principle of integrity and power made flesh.*

*The other, with his wild hair and his burning eyes — I named him Treachery. His left forefinger was fleshless, a barren spear of bone.*

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*Worship the claw.*  
—Edward Jordan

*Geek.*  
—Diane Firth

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*It's interesting to compare these events to the flower rite against Strength a couple stories ago. That story didn't have a pitched battle to bleed off all our miracle points early, just a steady horrible drain of resources and energy as the net closed about us piece by piece. It took us a while before we even saw our first Excrucian-shard.*  
—Heather Sullivan

*I found it strange that two such varied genii would visit me together, but it was not for me to pass judgment on the world. "Hello?" I asked them.*

*Treachery spoke first. "Dear child," he said, "my name is Marsiglio Tendi, and you belong to me. Through some betrayal or deceit, you have become a part of my estate; for traitors and their victims are in my keeping. No one in all the worlds will dispute my claim to you. No one will protect you, should you incur my anger. Bearing these consequential facts in mind, I ask that you tell me how you became one of mine, and save me the effort of divining it through other means."*

*"I am not yours," I said. My voice was clear and the words came drifting up from some place deep within my soul. "I am my own; and if I am anyone's, I am the servant of Genseric Dace."*

*Treachery hooked his bone finger into my arm and dragged it towards my palm. For the first time since my death, I experienced pain, as the substance of my soul gave way. The pain did not frighten me.*

*"Tell me," he said.*

*I would have resisted, but Treachery's gaze awakened a serpent within my heart, a coil of anger and betrayal, and my secret poured free. "Benjamin. He pushed me. Down the stairs. I trusted him. I would have carried his child. But I wanted a job and just a little bit of freedom. He killed me."*

*It could have broken me, the emotions he raised. It did not. The first tear had hardly broken from my eye when the woman who was Strength looked up; and suddenly it did not matter what Benjamin had done. The deeds of others were as nothing. It only mattered that I had acquitted myself well.*

*In that moment, I loved her; but not so much as I loved the man I saw upon my death, whose name I now knew to be Genseric Dace.*

—from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

## SCENE 4: TREASON AND VIOLENCE GO AWRY

HG: Okay. You arrive at Washington, D.C. The Marquis of Transportation has a small airfield somewhere in the area that Nobilis have access to; you aren't the only ones to come into a major city like D.C. in a plane that looks like it's been to Hell and back. Naturally, all fees are waived for Inquisitors. You get your wounds cleaned and patched up, although I'm afraid they won't heal for a while. What do you do from there?

DIANE: Does Rook have an agent in D.C.?

HG: Indeed. Someone named Hope Carstens, rough-looking fellow, loyal as the day is bright.

EDWARD: Loyalty. Pah.

ROOK: Got someone in town. Watches for odd activity, talks to the spirits — you know.

MARSIGLIO: Dear cousin, I'm quite able to do my own investigating.

ROOK: How, 'xactly?

MARSIGLIO: I can ... talk to contacts, bribe officials, and such. A man of my caliber should be able to pick it up as I go.

ROOK: Gotcha. Hey, I just realized, I've got a contact. Want ta talk to him?

MARSIGLIO: Don't patronize me, *Viscount*.

JULIANNA: Give him a call, Rook. Do you need to borrow my cell?

ROOK: [*a bit embarrassed*] Probably. I was in an explosion. A little one.

HEATHER: I fish it out of my purse and give it to her.

HG: What's the password in D.C.?

DIANE: I say "fish bread," and he's supposed to say, "Name three things Jesus really liked."

HG: That's only two.

DIANE: Rook's not much of a Biblical scholar.

HG: Glick.

DIANE: So okay, I dial up, someone answers and says, "Hello?" and I say "fish bread," at which point a wrong number would be really embarrassing, and then he says ...

HG: Name three things Jesus really liked.

ROOK: 'Ey, Hope. Need a place to stay, reservations for three at a massive cool restaurant, and the scoop on Excrucian activity in town.

HOPE (*as voiced by Madeline, the HG*): Hi, Rook. I don't know about any Excrucian activity, per se, but I can get you my notes on recent events. How 'bout I book you a room at the Watergate Hotel and meet you at its restaurant at six?

DIANE: What time is it now?

HG: About four thirty.

ROOK: Beautiful. I'll see you there. [*as Diane*] I'll hang up. [*as Rook, to the others*] Watergate Hotel 'kay with you?

HG: Marsiglio, you remember hearing something about the Watergate Hotel. Something about it being the site of a successful flower rite 'round about the end of Nixon's term in office —

EDWARD: Gosh, could there have been a connection?

HG: — but, more importantly, that these events extinguished the spirit of the place. All that's left is a gaping void, a spot of non-Creation that looks like a hotel. A hungry void. Nasty, angry, that sort of thing.

EDWARD: Oh, excellent.

HEATHER: Pardon?

EDWARD: Marsiglio's happy. He gets to twit Rook after her patronizing him earlier.

DIANE: Don't let it go to your head, Ed.

MARSIGLIO: Dearest sister, glory of my life, don't you think that perhaps it would be better to meet this "Hope" of yours somewhere that isn't a death trap?

ROOK: Eh?

MARSIGLIO: It just seems that dining in a gray, Excrucian-made void full of anger and hatred would tend to suck the conviviality out of the occasion.

ROOK: Eh?

MARSIGLIO: [*after a moment of floundering*] Watergate bad.

ROOK: Oh.

JULIANNA: Would your Hope have known this, Rook?

HG: [*as Diane looks at her*] Probably.

ROOK: Hm. [*as Diane*] I call him back.

HG: Hello?

*Oddly enough, Viscount is the feminine of Viscount. Or so Diane asserts.*

—Edward Jordan

*As time goes by, I become increasingly convinced that the root of all strife is the human desire for vengeance. No one ever thinks of themselves as striking the first blow, not really. Their victim has done something to hurt them. Or the world has done something to hurt them. Or, perhaps, God has simply done them wrong by placing them in a world where such acts are necessary. People who say, honestly, "I am hurting you because I want to hurt you" — they are as rare as hen's teeth, and society calls them mad.*

*I hurt people because I want to hurt people. I am honest. But I am also enamored of vengeance, for it is bound up in my Estate. I am Strife.*

*Strife pays its debts.  
—the Bright Lady Ada Willamette, Domina of Strife, as written by Madeline Rush*

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*I eventually figured out — well, Madeline told me — that the prayer Rook didn't answer during the air battle was from Hope. Rook's been kicking herself ever since.*  
—Diane Firth

ROOK: Fish bread.  
 HG: Hope gives the counterpassword.  
 ROOK: Watergate, right?  
 HOPE: That's right.  
 DIANE: Is there any tension in his voice?  
 HG: Not the least.  
 DIANE: I mean, any sign that he's nervous about betraying us, or anything?  
 HG: Nope.  
 DIANE: I hang up. [*as Rook*] They got to him.  
 JULIANNA: How do you figure that?  
 ROOK: Hope knows the mythic world 'round here. He's got to know 'bout the Watergate. How come he's not nervous?  
 JULIANNA: Because he's been Deceiver-brainwashed.  
 EDWARD: I'm doing a lesser divination; I want to find out just how badly this Hope character is compromised.  
 HG: He doesn't turn up on the divination.  
 EDWARD: He's an Anchor.  
 HG: Or he hasn't betrayed anyone recently.  
 MARSIGLIO: He's been Anchored.  
 ROOK: Not by me, he's not!  
 JULIANNA: Never mind him, then. Let's just criss-cross D.C. until we hit somewhere where Marsiglio's Estate seems particularly pained; then home in?  
 ROOK: I will not nevermind him. He's mine. I want him back.  
 HG: How do you plan to go about that?  
 DIANE: Give me a few minutes.  
 HEATHER: While she thinks about that, I'm getting us a car.  
 EDWARD: I turn the ground crew against their oppressive superiors.  
 HG: Okay, the ground crew turns viciously against their bosses, staging sit-ins and waving planes to the wrong places. Mechanics sneak into administrator offices with wrenches.  
 JULIANNA: Some people have sane Powers in their Familia, you know.  
 MARSIGLIO: It pleases my sister to indulge in whining.  
 DIANE: I shift perceptions to the mythic world and call up Hope again.  
 HG: Ring. Ring. "Hello?"  
 DIANE: Okay. If I'm right, there's a spirit of our phone connection sort of stretching between my phone and his. I'm going to take a directional reading on it, using my buff Aspect 4 brain to memorize the heading precisely.  
 HG: Oh, okay. Gotcha.  
 ROOK: [*gruffly*] Hi, is this Domino's?  
 HG: There's a pause. Then Hope says, and his tone is old and mocking, "Fish bread."  
 DIANE: I hang up and hop into the driver's seat of the car Julianna has so thoughtfully brought us.  
 HEATHER: Er, I'm in the driver's seat. I mean, if I've brought it back by the plane.  
 ROOK: 'Ey, move. I'm better.  
 EDWARD: I'm an excellent driver.  
 JULIANNA: As you like, sister. But you get to explain your age to the cops.  
 DIANE: I'm going as close to a straight line as I can manage, driving all out. If any cops pull me over, I stop nicely, get out,

beat them up and take their guns away, and then get back to driving.  
 HG: Two cops and a lot of D.C. later, Marsiglio feels a sudden intensification in the pain of Treachery's desecration. You're coming close to the site of the flower rite.  
 MARSIGLIO: Urgh.  
 DIANE: "Mm?" I wonder politely as I dodge a pedestrian who somehow does not understand that the sidewalks are for drivers.  
 MARSIGLIO: Stop. Stop.  
 ROOK: We're not there yet.  
 MARSIGLIO: Close enough. Can track the rite. [*as Edward*] I'm pulling together some self-mastery here and banishing the pain from my mind. Taking a deep breath. [*as Marsiglio*] Obviously, the enemy is keeping your Hope close at hand. We must use caution. Strategy! These are our watchwords.  
 ROOK: Aw, hell. [*as Diane*] I brake until we're stopped, and then hop out. [*as Rook*] So, talk. What's the plan?  
 MARSIGLIO: We abandon the car before the police find us. You, Rook, continue after Hope on foot. With luck, it is a trap, and your triggering it shall divert the enemy's attention. I, and Julianna with me, shall trace the damage to Treachery to its source. We shall meet at yonder Korean grocer when these tasks are complete.  
 ROOK: [*dubiously*] 'f it's a trap, I want Julianna.  
 MARSIGLIO: Naturally, dear child. This is understandable. Still, we all must bend with the whims of circumstance. You are the mighty Rook; I am merely Marsiglio! I have the greater need of aid.  
 JULIANNA: It pleases my brother to affect humility when he wants something.  
 EDWARD: I make a face at her.  
 ROOK: You are just Marsiglio, I 'spose. [*as Diane*] I vault off in the direction of Hope, running along rooftops and fencetops and the like.  
 MARSIGLIO: The pain is blinding. Our enemy lies this way. [*pointing*] I shall lead.  
 HG: Okay, one at a time. Rook, you're on top of an apartment building when you hear a man screaming. Doesn't sound like Hope, but from its location — one floor down, a few rooms to the right — it could be the other end of the phone call.  
 DIANE: I'll get right over it and break through the ceiling, landing in the room in a hail of rubble.  
 HG: You crash through the floor and into a room full of men and woman with guns. Over by the television set, a woman you recognize as Ada Willamette [*pp. 261-262*] is administering correctional behavioral therapy to a burly fellow with a bad haircut.  
 DIANE: "Correctional behavioral therapy?"  
 HG: It involves a great deal of pain. Your entrance seems to have confused the room, but a great number of the guns are coming up to point in your direction. Meanwhile, Marsiglio, Julianna. Treachery's pain has led you straight to the base of a set of tenement stairs, where police tape surrounds the chalk outline of a body. Since you have Aspect 1, I suppose your deductive skills are sharp enough to figure out that the dead person fell — from the position of the outline, I mean.

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*Breaking in through the ceiling isn't always the right solution. Who knew?*  
—Diane Firth

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OPPOSITE:  
*Excrucian Deceiver*  
by Rik Martin



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*When I let Marsiglio examine a lie with a lesser divination, it metaphysically classified lies as small treacheries. In doubt, of course, say yes, and unusual circumstances came into play — but do I let this ruling stand as a general principle? I need a book on moral philosophy.*  
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

EDWARD: Aha. I hammer on the nearest door.

HG: The peephole opens briefly, then closes. There's no response.

MARSIGLIO: I suppose we do look rather a mess, even with wounds cleaned. Sigh. [*louder*] Please, sir or madam, we must speak to you; our business is important and our manners are impeccable. We pose no threat.

HG: Tentatively, a woman's voice says, "What do you want?"

EDWARD: I put all Treachery's charm in my voice and say, [*as Marsiglio*] We are special investigators with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, ma'am, following up on some details regarding the recent murder. We were informed that you knew the victim?

HG: The door pulls open a bit, but it's still chained. "I knew her, yup. Nastiest bitch I ever met. What do you need to know?"

EDWARD: I casually flick my claw through the chain, fast enough that she doesn't have a chance to focus on it and realize what she's seeing, and then open the door all the way. [*as Marsiglio*] Thank you for letting us in. Why don't we start with basic biographical data? Her name, age, the nature of your relationship, the things about her you find so nasty?

HG: She blinks a couple times at the chain and the door, but then seems to decide that she must have in fact let you in. [*as the woman*] Faith Bernham. What, they didn't give you her name? I don't know how old she was. Late 20s? Early 30s? She was a friend, I guess. I don't really remember why. I mean, I guess she must have been okay, sometimes. But mostly — she ... stole things, and ... made nasty comments all the time, had a mouth like a sewer, completely sacrilegious, and slept around, and I had this friend once who she scarred with a broken whiskey bottle, and —

MARSIGLIO: Sounds like my kind of woman.

WOMAN: Pardon?

MARSIGLIO: Never mind. How did she die?

WOMAN: She fell. [*as HG*] She's lying, you're pretty sure.

EDWARD: Can I sniff out the lie with a lesser divination?

HG: I suppose I'd allow that. She seems to think that Faith was pushed down the stairs, but that whoever did it probably did the world a favor. Rook!

DIANE: Erp.

HG: Lots of guns. Ada Willamette in the corner. What do you do?

DIANE: Well, I figure, it's not polite to do anything about Ada until she makes the first move, and frankly, I'm not sure I'm up to taking her on. So I figure I'll just deal with the men with guns. [*as Rook*] 'Ey, Ada! [*as Diane*] I'm taking them down. Converting 2 RMPS and 2 SMPS into an AMP so I can put a level of Penetration on the Aspect 4 miracle "taking down a bunch of thugs without a scratch."

HG: I'm willing to believe you can take them all down with a level 4 miracle. Um, any interesting special effects you want to show off?

DIANE: At various points, I suppose I yank them off their feet with strips torn from the carpet, pick one up and use him to knock a bunch of them over, snatch a couple of guns — one for each hand — and spin in the air plugging

bullets into all of them, and um —

HG: At that point, Ada finishes up with what she's doing, looks over, and says, "Enough." The tone's chilling, perfectly modulated; it cuts across the thugs, even in their panic and anger, and they go still.

DIANE: I finish the spin and land neatly, finger withdrawing from the trigger. "Why're you here?"

ADA (*as voiced by the HG*): [*quiet and calm*] I'm paying off a debt, Rook. The Cammora asked me to guard a dignitary of some sort. Apparently goes by Hope Carstens. I'm afraid I can't let you have him.

ROOK: Cammora, Hell. He's in 'scrucian hands.

ADA: The term is "Excrucian", Rook, and I'm quite sure you're mistaken.

ROOK: What's the Cammora want?

ADA: I believe it's an ordinary mercantile transaction — someone's offered the local chapterhouse a significant miraculous enhancement. Some Power or other called Genseric Dace.

ROOK: Bloody Hell. Deceivers. 'E's a fricking Deceiver, and you're going to do his work?

ADA: [*meditatively*] I suppose you could explain what you believe his purpose is; then I will evaluate whether interfering with this purpose is worth remaining in debt to the Cammora further. I am not inclined to be generous; you have showered me with rubble and killed many mortal servants of my Estate.

ROOK: He's ... he's ... it's a blasted *flower rite*, Ada. Against Treachery. [*waves her hands around*]

ADA: And how does Hope Carstens figure into this?

ROOK: ... as a distraction. [*glumly*] And a chance f'r y' to accidentally poke one of us with that blade o' yours.

ADA: Excellent. Then we have thwarted his plan. It serves as a distraction no longer. I have not poked anyone with Kottos. You may go about your business, and I will protect Hope against both the Deceiver and yourself.

ROOK: But ... but ... aw, man!

HG: Marsiglio. Julianna. Talk to me.

EDWARD: I'm going to finish pumping this woman for information. Then I'm going to do the same for everyone else in the building.

HG: From all accounts, Faith was pretty much the most horrible woman this side of Timbuktu. She had a boyfriend, Benjamin, with whom she was living in sin; he's not in at the moment. No one knows quite who killed her, although the general consensus is that someone like that has to have made someone mad enough to murder her.

MARSIGLIO: It is a wonder! Why have I not heard of this Faith before now? I would have claimed her as an Anchor.

JULIANNA: Just what we need, a female you hanging around the Chancel.

MARSIGLIO: We are in agreement!

HG: You're trooping down the stairs when the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. There's something funny about the chalk outline.

EDWARD: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

HG: Hairs, back of neck, standing up.

EDWARD: Strange. Right. Um ...

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*So Ada has this Abhorrent knife, Kottos. I almost protested once that Maddy would never let one of us have an Abhorrent Weapon. Then I realized that she probably would, if we asked her to work it into the campaign and gave her brain some time to stew over it, and that we wouldn't like the results one bit.*  
—Diane Firth

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*Never be afraid to make up a new Simple Rite on the spur of the moment, if you feel that it does something *Nobilis* should be able to do.*  
—Madelaine Rush, *the Hollyhock God, to other Hollyhock Gods in the audience*

HEATHER: I peer at the outline.

HG: Either of you using the Sight?

EDWARD: Oh! Yes.

HG: It doesn't look like Faith's spirit has passed all the way to her next life yet ... there's something like a rope, a thread, an anchor, a magical anchor sort of sitting where her body was, a thread trailing off to a sleeping spirit.

EDWARD: Can we rouse it?

HG: Yes.

EDWARD: How?

HG: I don't know. You just can. There's some standard method. Chanting in Latin or something.

HEATHER: We do it, then, I think.

HG: Slowly, as you chant, the spirit forms; a woman, plain and pale, hanging in the air above the site of her death. She peers at you, puzzled, as if she were expecting someone else. "Hello?"

HEATHER: Someone else? Oh, dear.

MARSIGLIO: Dear child, my name is Marsiglio Tendi, and you belong to me.

HEATHER: She belongs to you?

EDWARD: Well, sort of! I mean, she's at the epicenter of a flower rite, so she must have some kind of tie to Treachery. Um, [*as Marsiglio*] You have become part of my Estate, um, through some betrayal or deceit, for all traitors and victims are in my keeping. No one in all the worlds will dispute my claim to you. No one will protect you, should you incur my anger.

HEATHER: Geez, Ed, isn't intimidating a dead woman kind of low?

MARSIGLIO: I ask that you tell me how you became one of mine, and save me the effort of divining it through other means. [*as Edward*] And I'm using a lesser divination to draw the truest answer out of her, assuming that she does fall under my Estate.

HG: You hook deep into her soul with your Estate and draw out words — "I am not yours," she says, "I am my own; and if I am anyone's, I am the servant of Genseric Dace."

EDWARD: [*blinks*] I ask her how she became one of mine, and she answers that she serves this Genseric character?

HG: Yup.

HEATHER: That's probably the treachery, then. I mean, serving Dace.

EDWARD: I think she's resisting. I cut her arm open and ask again.

HG: Still pressuring her miraculously?

EDWARD: Yup. And I'm combining the divination with a little lesser creation push to help her give up whatever this Genseric doesn't want her to.

FAITH (*as voiced by the HG*): Benjamin. He pushed me. Down the stairs. I trusted him. I would have carried his child. But I wanted a job and just a little bit of freedom. He killed me. [*as HG*] Marsiglio's miracle seems to have really gotten to her — from confident and calm a moment ago, she's almost on the verge of breaking.

HEATHER: I give her strength. I DMP.

EDWARD: What in the world did you do that for?

HEATHER: [*sbrugs*] You make airport ground crews turn traitor, I make weak people turn strong.

EDWARD: Geez. You're so helpful.

HG: She's fading away again.

MARSIGLIO: Wait a second. You're not ... you didn't betray someone yourself?

HG: She's gone.

EDWARD: Shouting at the wall, I add, [*as Marsiglio*] I had such high hopes for you! You were supposed to be a proper traitor!

HG: Rook, what's your next move?

DIANE: I'm not fighting the Power of bloody Strife without my Familia at my back. I head back to the Korean grocer.

HG: How 'bout you two?

HEATHER: I think we do the same. We need to think about this.

EDWARD: Yup.

HG: Okay. That's it for the night; same time next week?

VARIOUS: Okay!

### INTERLUDE: FAITH

*"I had visitors," I told Genseric Dace, two hours later.*

*"It would be surprising," he said calmly, "if you had not."*

*"I do not understand why I should attract so much attention from such strange folk."*

*"Consider the essence of treachery," Genseric said, absently. His hands and eyes were busy: he was weaving some sort of net. I could not see where any of the fibers ended or began. "It is not simply betraying expectations or breaking promises. There is no one who does not betray a thousand expectations in every moment of their life. As for promises, some of them matter; some of them do not. One can break a promise as a favor to the recipient, or as justified retribution for another broken promise; it is not always a terrible thing. The essence of treachery is the unforgivable nature of it. Its monstrosity. Its criminality."*

*"He was unpleasant," I said, "but did not seem defined by his monstrosity."*

*Genseric's hands moved over the net. "I do not speak of Marsiglio. Before he was Treachery, he was human. That tempers his power with weakness and his malice with conscience; he is neither fish nor fowl. I speak rather of the concept as a whole — the Platonic ideal of treason, which Marsiglio would call his estate. The quality that made you see him and say, 'There; he is Treachery.' That quality is not merely monstrous and criminal. It depends on malevolence for its very existence. If Treachery itself were to become justified, it would cease to exist — vanish like smoke. There would be no more treason; only justice."*

*I frowned at him. "If you define Treachery as criminal, then you cannot also find a universal justification for it. Wordplay cannot make malice and betrayal disappear."*

*The glitter in Genseric's eyes grew brighter, like great lights falling — a very long way away. The stairs flickered with that light. "That is why such folk as Marsiglio consider me dangerous, lady. My existence tests the world. If I can make but a single act of unforgivable treachery into an act of justice, the consequences echo throughout all existence. Every act of betrayal becomes more*



EDWARD: How come I'm the only one who didn't notice the missing cat?

HG: You're in pain.

EDWARD: Oh, yeah. [*as Marsiglio*] Ow.

HG: Pandareos peers at you.

JULIANNA: You thought? She did not lie to you in truth?

PANDAREOS: She believes firmly that she had a cat until a week ago. [*gestures around the apartment*] As you see, she is deceived; but I could not shake her conviction.

MARSIGLIO: Then she is evil.

HG: She starts. [*as the woman*] Hey! [*as HG*] Pandareos quickly assures her that he likes evil, and she subsides.

JULIANNA: Or a Deceiver has taken the trouble of convincing her that Faith Bernham tortured a nonexistent cat to death.

ROOK: That doesn't make sense.

JULIANNA: Unless he wanted us to think that Faith were a monster, when in truth she is not.

PANDAREOS: Ah, lady, your insight exceeds my deepest expectations.

MARSIGLIO: It would explain the affront to Conspiracy.

PANDAREOS: And you have surprised further wisdom from the oaf Marsiglio! Julianna, has your talent no bounds?

MARSIGLIO: Hey!

JULIANNA: How would it explain that?

MARSIGLIO: [*grumpily*] A conspiracy to defame. They have essentially been tricked into tarnishing the name of an innocent woman.

PANDAREOS: Wonder of wonders.

ROOK: 'Ey! I can make him have insights, too.

EDWARD: Usually by beating me up.

DIANE: Well, yah.

EDWARD: Oh wow! It hurts when you do that! What an insight!

HG: Pandareos smiles charmingly at Rook, but his attention is clearly elsewhere.

JULIANNA: So we know that she's actually a good person. Then ... her murder was the betrayal. The treachery.

MARSIGLIO: Which is being corrupted somehow.

HG: Marsiglio, it seems to you that there's something about this situation which is already, in a way, a perversion of treachery. Something about — treachery against the truly unworthy.

EDWARD: You can't betray the truly unworthy; they haven't earned any loyalty. [*There is a brief silence*] Oh my God.

DIANE: Mm?

EDWARD: You're a bastard, Maddy.

HG: Thank you.

EDWARD: It's from some musings of Marsiglio's I wrote up a few weeks ago. The true antithesis of Treachery is Justice. He's not trying to convince us that Faith's a monster. He's trying to retroactively make her a monster.

HEATHER: Can he do that?

HG: Well, Prosaic Reality doesn't really care what people believe — but it does have to have an explanation for why they believe it. If people start turning up all over the place remembering that Faith Bernham was the greatest monster who ever lived ...

HEATHER: It decides that that's the real history, and creates evidence for it. And lo, next week this place will have cat smell.

HG: Got it in one.

MARSIGLIO: This Genseric Dace — he is monstrous. Unspeakable.

ROOK: Eh?

EDWARD: I explain what I've realized.

JULIANNA: We have to free her. Before he finishes.

MARSIGLIO: Free her?

JULIANNA: Her ghost. It won't be vulnerable to this sort of thing once it leaves the mortal plane. Otherwise, why would he keep it here?

MARSIGLIO: Go. Free her. We'll try and shake the minds of those Genseric's tainted. Free of him, I mean.

JULIANNA: On my way.

HG: Julianna, just how do you plan to free her ghost?

HEATHER: Catholic rites of exorcism?

HG: She's a ghost, not a demon, and she's bound here by an Excrucian, not her own malice.

HEATHER: Can't I chant in Latin or something?

HG: I suppose you could go back to the Chancel and look for the right invocation in the library.

HEATHER: Heck with that. I'll call her up and talk her into renouncing him.

HG: Okay. Meanwhile — let's see. We have a fairly major scene ahead elsewhere in the building. Want to play Pandareos, Heather?

HEATHER: Sure.

HG: Cut scene and fade to black.

## INTERLUDE: FAITH

*Twelve minutes later, Strength was watching me.*

*"Thank you," I told her.*

*"It is strange," she said, calmly, "how the future becomes dark and dangerous when one allows fear and doubt to constrain one; whereas, determination to overcome all obstacles often puts one in the safest and most effective position to handle what may come."*

*"Is that strange?"*

*"It is," she answered. "There is no sensible reason for people to doubt themselves and fear the world. It creates the weakness and the danger that that fear and doubt protects them against. Yet people do."*

*I was dead, and the strangeness of this conversation did not disconcert me.*

*"Perhaps there is some drawback to excessive accomplishment," I suggested, "that this fear and doubt prevents."*

*Her face warmed from the inside. "Perhaps. My name is Julianna Avram, and I am the Marchessa of Strength. I am here in the hope that I can persuade you to abandon your service to Genseric Dace. Assuming that I am correct, and he has left you capable of making this choice. Has he?"*

*"I have given him my allegiance freely."*

*"Are you aware of what that may mean?"*

*I hesitated. "I believe that he intends to in some way remove or undermine the possibility of treachery in this world."*

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*I developed much of Marsiglio's character in small pieces I've written, mostly from his perspective, about the parts of his life not covered in the game. The group likes reading them, and Madeline doesn't always use them in horrible devious monstrous nasty ways against Marsiglio.*  
—Edward Jordan

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*It's not that Julianna finds Pandareos' attentions unwelcome. It's just that Conspiracy exists in the communion of souls and Strength lives in their individuality. That kind of mixed marriage never works out.*  
—Heather Sullivan

*Strength made a slight face. “A project that you, naturally, laud.”*

*“Who would not?”*

*“Arguably,” she said, “treachery is a weapon that any hand may use: the good, the bad, the righteous, the vile, men, women, children, beasts — the tool of treachery can be used towards just ends.”*

*I stood, or floated, my ground. “For every good use of treachery, there are a thousand crimes of betrayal. Is that not the nature of the beast?”*

*Her expression grew more sour. “I take your point. So it is the villainous quality of duplicity that in your mind justifies its removal from Creation?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“If Genseric were, then, acting to undermine my estate — strength, integrity, power and endurance — would you refute your allegiance to him?”*

*“He is not.”*

*“Granted,” she answered, reluctantly. “He is not; and it is possible that he may never; yet he and his allies have a stated intention to destroy all things of our universe, dark or light. Weakness and strength, evil and virtue, courage and pride. The fact that it is my brother Treachery who stands now in his sights is at best circumstantial.”*

*“So you would have me abandon him while he fights to destroy the very existence of betrayal, in case he afterwards turns on something I value? The idea seems laughable. Why shouldn’t I serve him while he works towards an admirable goal, and abandon him if he then pursues an unrighteous cause?”*

*“For one,” Strength said wryly, “the option of betraying him might have already been eliminated from the world.” Her posture was already perfect, but somehow she managed to straighten her spine. “I shall tell you what he has done to you to merit your rejection; then I shall leave you to contemplate.”*

*“When I came,” she said, “that first time, I expected the worst sort of creature: a harlot and a thief; an animalistic beast; a rabid dog whom some generous soul had put down. I did not expect your Benjamin to be the traitor, but you. I had good reason, for this is the story told by all who knew you: your family; your friends; your coworkers; your loves. Why did they tell me such stories? Because they believed them.”*

*“Your Genseric Dace has gone from one to the next, speaking not to their ears but to their spirits — spreading these lies. And slowly, those lies are bending the world. Slowly, the world is beginning to wonder, ‘These people — they are not fools. How can they all remember her as wicked, when she was not? How can they all hate her, did she not deserve their hate?’ And when Genseric is done, the world will change — and you will deserve every inch of the betrayal, every drop of the pain, that ended your life. That you serve him, that you betray Creation itself — that is only the afterthought. He is creating justice out of your death. That is his tool to destroy Treachery.”*

*I did not waver. Many things were clear to me. I was dead, after all.*

*“I know,” I said.*

—from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

## SCENE 6: GENSERIC DACE

HG: Out of curiosity, do Marsiglio, Pandareos, and Rook check Benjamin’s apartment? Where Faith lived until she stopped living?

EDWARD: Sure.

HG: Rook is just raising her hand to knock on the door when she hears Hope’s voice inside. Saying something or other about Faith.

DIANE: I shatter the door into sawdust with one blow of my fist and stride in.

HG: Ffssst! It drifts down in a shower of little tiny bits of wood. Hope’s standing in the room, casually chatting with someone who must be Benjamin. He turns instantly to look, his eyes narrow.

ROOK: Hope! C’mere now.

HOPE: [*smiling*] I’m afraid that Hope’s not in right now. I’m Genseric Dace, and I’m terribly sorry that we must meet under these conditions.

PANDAREOS (*as voiced by Heather*): An Excrucian-shard?

MARSIGLIO: Indeed.

HEATHER: What’re my stats?

HG: [*flipping through the book*] Aspect 1, Domain 2, Realm 3, Spirit 1, Invisibility, Glorious, Unblemished Guise, and you’re down 2 AMPS.

HEATHER: I’m going to hit him in the throat with a knife. Aspect 1. He’s in an Anchor, so it’ll cost extra MPs to dodge.

HG: How does Pandareos know he’s in an Anchor?

HEATHER: ... from “Hope’s not in right now”?

HG: I’ll allow it. Okay. Pandareos is throwing a knife at Hope’s throat. Rook?

DIANE: Augh. This is terrible. I kick him in the stomach — do Anchors have an Auctoritas when an Excrucian-shard’s in them?

HG: Yes.

HEATHER: The Auctoritas. I forgot the bloody Auctoritas.

DIANE: Then Aspect 2, Penetration 2.

HG: Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I turn Benjamin against him.

HOPE: Rook, I’m not here; in fact, I was never here. [*as HG*] Rook, you kick the empty air; it doesn’t seem very effective. As for Hope — he’s gone. You can’t see any evidence that he was ever here. Marsiglio, Pandareos, you can still see him; and see Pandareos’ knife shatter on thin air five feet from him; and see Rook’s kick sort of lose strength and peter out just before touching him.

DIANE: Oh, Hell. He’s got the Blind Lie. I flail in all directions, trying to hit him.

HEATHER: Okay. Another knife — I assume Pandareos has a spare knife? — goes at him, Penetration 4. I know, I don’t have enough AMPS, I’m burning some RMPs on this.

HG: That’s what I like about you, you’re so careful with my NPCs’ miracle points. [*grins*] Okay. Marsiglio? Benjamin’s jumping on Hope from behind.

EDWARD: I rip the floor spirit open, splitting it apart under him.

*The Earth is a wonderful place. I wish that my work did not keep me so busy on the rare opportunities I have to visit.*

—Genseric Dace, Lord of Untruth, as written by Madeline Rush

*I think I made a tactical error here. The knife couldn’t really hit him, and I knew it, but I needed him to waste a miraculous action dodging. So I should have gone with Aspect 0 and Penetration 5 from the beginning, just in case — I just couldn’t imagine that it would be necessary.*  
—Heather Sullivan

HG: Pandareos' second knife shatters. Rook flails more. He neatly punches her in the larynx, hard; she takes another Deadly level, even as the floor opens and he falls. Rook, you feel sort of a very distant, dull pain; after all, there's no one here to have punched you.

HEATHER: My second knife broke? This guy's a bloody Inferno?

HG: It sure looked like an Auctoritas effect, so . . . yes. Rook?

DIANE: I flail some more. I have to be doing some damage; at least, so Rook thinks. Do I see the floor open?

HG: Yup. Marsiglio's allowed to tear floors open, even when Hope isn't here. Pandareos?

HEATHER: I grab Rook and dive out the window before she gets herself killed.

HG: Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I'm not afraid of Infernos. Inferni? I move out into the room; can I save my miraculous action until I see what he does next?

HG: Sure. What that is, in fact, is leaping back up into the room, landing facing you. He spits out, "Whoever you are,"

EDWARD: Stop!

HG: Hm?

EDWARD: Before he says anything, I try and cut his throat. Turnabout is fair play.

HG: Okay. I'll pause you there for a moment. Rook, Pandareos is trying to tackle you and drag you out the window.

ROOK: My hero!

HG: For some reason, that comes out, "chtuck wsudgo."

DIANE: Frog in my throat. I cling tightly to him as we jump.

HG: Okay. Pandareos, you land on the street below, stumbling and nearly twisting your ankle, but all right.

PANDAREOS: You have a crushed throat, little one. Don't talk. Stay put. I have to go back.

ROOK: chtuck wsudgo! [*as Diane*] That is, I'm not that little. And you're not going anywhere — and I'm not letting him face that thing alone.

EDWARD: Marsiglio's there.

DIANE: I'm not letting him face that thing with Marsiglio.

PANDAREOS: I'm touched. But Julianna's in the building, too. Don't you want us to rescue her?

DIANE: Rook looks torn. Then nods, and waves Pandareos into the building.

HG: Okay, Marsiglio, his hand comes down on your wrist, powdering the bones inside. Your claw scores across his throat, taking his head half off, but you're not sure you can use that hand again with the wrist in so much pain. He wobbles.

EDWARD: That's right, Infernos can use Aspect miracles through Anchors for free. Still — he's got to be hurting. Maybe . . . what happens if you try to Anchor an Anchor?

HG: Good question. You don't know. Why?

EDWARD: Look, this guy seriously wounded Rook, turned my wrist to powder, and is trying to destroy my Estate. I think I hate him enough to do the Rite if I can get any blood down his throat. Is his mouth open?

HG: I suppose . . .

EDWARD: Oh, heck, that doesn't matter. I lick my shattered wrist and spit the blood into his open throat.

DIANE: Edward, you're disgusting.

HG: His eyes roll and his face contorts for a moment. You're not sure whether it's working or not. It seems to be distracting him, though.

EDWARD: I leap on him and try and finish him off somehow while he's distracted.

HG: That you can definitely do. He's half-dead as is. Twenty seconds later, you're standing above a broken corpse.

EDWARD: I'm going to grab Julianna and get out of here. That was the Anchor; I don't want to see the real Genseric.

## INTERLUDE: HOPE

*This is the price of my treachery.*

*I betrayed my love but little. One password and counter-password, shared. One description of my lady and her family, given. These are small things, and my pain was great. But I do not make excuses. That is one of the things I learned, standing on the Ash. There are no excuses. There is only what you do. And, at the end of your life, what you have done.*

*I opened the gates to my soul, and Genseric Dace crept in through them. He used my mind and body like a suit of clothes. I walked. I talked. I fought. And my movement was Genseric Dace's movement. My words were Genseric Dace's words. My fight was Genseric Dace's fight. I could not act. I could only watch, and wait for an opportunity to stand up. An opportunity to say, "I serve at the pleasure at my lady Rook Catchfly," and strike the Deceiver down.*

*So I watched, as he used my body to spread vindictive lies.*

*I cried, as he sought to lure my lady into a trap. I smiled, as he failed.*

*I trembled, as he hired the lady of Strife to guard him. I cheered, when she tricked his name from him and called the contract void.*

*Then, as he went about his deadly work, my lady found him. With my hand, he broke her throat.*

*My lady's brother — the one whose hand is like a knife — he cut my throat, in turn. Still Genseric fought him. It was not until my spine was broken and my ribs were snapped that Genseric abandoned me, and left me to die alone.*

*It hurts a great deal, but I do not mind.*

*It is a grace, this pain. It is a justice that quiets my soul. It is freedom from treachery.*

*It is more than I deserve.*

—from the Thought-Record of Hope Carstens

## SCENE 7: CONCLUSIONS

HG: Julianna, you've rejoined the group, after a pretty fruitless conversation with the ghost — she's firmly on Dace's side, now, though you're not sure why. Pandareos has drifted off, just as glad to be out of this mess. You've all hurried away from the building — a few miles to be safe?

DIANE: Yes. Can I work out some way to speak properly with a damaged throat — without spending the AMPs to heal faster, I mean? It'll be boring not saying anything.

HG: With Aspect 4, you can probably figure out some way to, er, speak around it, or something. Or you could always use pantomime!

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*Genseric planned to use the Blind Lie on Marsiglio: "Whoever you are, it has nothing to do with Treachery." It wasn't going to work, and I expected Edward's face to just light up when he realized why — that Marsiglio has the Egocentric Virtue and that nothing can blind him to what he is. Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance — this time.*  
—Madeline Rush, *the Hollyhock God*

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*Looking ahead, I see the mountain. It is very tall, and very cold, and its peak is very sharp. I fear the mountain. But fear has no power to stop me now.*

*In climbing, I forget about Lord Entropy. He will think I have betrayed him. He may come for my spirit, hold me back from death and cast me into some torment pit. I fear his wrath. But fear has no power to stop me now. It does not matter whether, in climbing, I serve him or betray him. That is a judgment on my actions; and judgment is meaningless. It does not matter whether I climb well or poorly, loyally or disloyally, fearfully or bravely, in pain or in exaltation. It only matters that, before I die, I will have climbed.*  
—Bethany Scofflaw, as written by Madeline Rush

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*Later, Madeline let me read Hope's story. I think Rook knows it, too, by now. She also knows that it doesn't end there. It doesn't matter what happens to Hope's flesh. He lives forever in service to her.*  
*The Domina of Eternity requires that it be so.*  
 —Diane Firth

DIANE: Right.

MARSIGLIO: This is unacceptable. We are beaten. With but a single shard left, and we are beaten.

ROOK: Not talkin' to you. You killed Hope. And I can take Genseric if I hafta.

JULIANNA: It's possible. I've heard that the Lie rarely works twice in a day on the same person. Still, he seems awfully tough. Could he have been a full Deceiver?

MARSIGLIO: It would explain the level of malevolent competence he's shown. Setting up forces to stop us at the Chancel entrance; compromising Rook's network before we even arrived; holding off three Powers at once — I like the thought that this isn't just a bunch of shards. But still! If he's a full Deceiver, he'll be even deadlier in person. How are we supposed to stop him?

HEATHER: Fighting him isn't the answer.

EDWARD: Oh?

HEATHER: You're the Duke of Treachery, and that's what at stake. Do something treacherous.

EDWARD: Hm.

DIANE: It's difficult to betray him when we're not actually allied to him.

JULIANNA: I have it!

MARSIGLIO: Do tell.

JULIANNA: Do not waste your efforts fighting against this monster. He wishes to make Faith Bernham out as treacherous — so be it! Use her as a lever to corrupt those around her. Make her an epicenter for treachery. Then everyone whom she has been discredited to will be themselves discredited — in reality's eyes, and in mankind's.

MARSIGLIO: *[after a pause]* I have it!

JULIANNA: *[resigned]* Do tell.

MARSIGLIO: I shall make Faith Bernham an epicenter for treachery. Then everyone that Genseric has talked to —

JULIANNA: Say no more! The notion is brilliant.

EDWARD: Maddy, can I pull this off with a lesser change?

HG: You can indeed.

EDWARD: Then I do so; 2 DMPS.

HEATHER: I stand ready to nettle the Excrucian, should it work.

HG: It only takes three hours. Everyone in that tenement, everyone she knew in the broader world — they turn traitors to Creation, and commit horrible crimes. They become unreliable witnesses, and Genseric's work goes down in flames. Congratulations; you can nettle him for most of his remaining MP's. Julianna regains 2 temporary Miracle Points and your Emperor gains 2 Dynasty Points.

EDWARD: Ha!

JULIANNA: Amazing, the things Marsiglio thinks of.

EDWARD: I do the dance of victory and ignore you.

HG: And that's it for the story. Anyone not enjoy themselves? *[silence]* Great. An extra character point all around.

## FINALE: FAITH

*Four hours later, sirens raged through the streets.*

*I watched in silence as the police hustled Benjamin out of his apartment, hands cuffed behind his back.*

*I heard shots in the distance. I could see, through the walls, souls of my friends pouring from their bodies at the hot touch of death. They had no Genseric to hold them back; before I could call to them, they were gone.*

*Another hour passed before he came for me.*

*"It is over," Genseric said. His face was full of rue and sadness.*

*"I do not understand."*

*"There is something about the character of treachery," he said, "that I had not considered. It is contagious. One betrayal leads to another. Fear of treachery and malice sparks malice and treachery. It spreads from a single traitor like an epidemic, washing across the population."*

*"It is truly a pestilence," I agreed.*

*"It is within Marsiglio's power," he said, "to adjust the degree of this contagion. It seems, lady, that you have become quite a potent vector."*

*That giddy strength still filled my heart and kept my head high. "Oh."*

*"Everyone to whom I have so carefully spread the new truth about your being — your family, your friends — they have committed crimes against human nature. They are discredited, even in the eyes of reality; and many are dead."*

*"I do not see how I can redress the situation."*

*"You must commit a grave act of service," he answered. "You are a traitor to your Creation, and the epicenter of a virulent plague of treachery and ill manners. If this in some way produces a favorable outcome — or even one deed as glorious as the sun is bright — why, then, that also strikes at treachery's foundations."*

*"What deed do you suggest? I am a ghost."*

*"Kill me," he said simply. "There is no act so far from treason as destroying one of my kind."*

*I did not hesitate. I answered him.*

*"No," I said, for I loved him.*

*He closed his eyes for a moment. "I thought as much," he said, and pulled a blossom from his coat: long-stemmed, purple, with clusters of small flowers along its length.*

*"This is monkshood," he said softly, "the flower of treachery. As poisonous as Marsiglio himself. I had hoped that when this flower died, treachery would die with it —"*

*He crumbled the flower in his hand. "But I think I have failed. I will leave now."*

*"Leave me?" I said. There was pain in my heart. But I knew I had failed him.*

*"I have offered you eternity," he said. "And I do not betray."*

*And he held out his hand, and it was a net that could swallow worlds, and I stepped into him and he into me. There was darkness.*

— from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

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*The condemned man cries, "I hate the headsman's axe," for the condemned man knows of life and death.*

*The axe has no hatred in its soul, for it knows only of its rise and fall.*

*In my game, I think, the Excrucians are the axe. Perhaps I will change my mind.*

—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God