



**THE CITY OF THE
OWL GOD**

The City is of Night; perchance of Death
But certainly of Night; for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air:
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity;
The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away;
Though present in distempered gloom of thought
And deadly weariness of heart all day.
But when a dream night after night is brought
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
Recur each year for several years, can any
Discern that dream from real life in aught?

James Thomson

Dark forms move around me;
waiting for them to subside
a small blue fish
died.
It passed out of my mouth
with yellow and green sea grasses.
There is no where to hide
until this passes.

Barbara Weekes

OLD MYR

Clinging tightly to the rain battered southern coast, sprawling over the stony islands that face the dark sea stands the eternal City State of Myr.

Set against the grey sky, its bleak spires rise from moss covered roofs, dwarfed themselves by glittering black pillars that seem to hold the roiling clouds at bay. Dark streets and rain soaked market squares braid through the cigarette smoke filled complexes that house uncountable souls. Vents and water pipes fill the cramped apartments like needlework. Cities unto themselves, their inhabitants play cards and sleep behind the doors of the mouldering stairways, adorned with tiny brightly coloured shins to that terrible Owl. Offerings of lunate coins and pungent tobacco litter every hall. To what avail, none can remember. Beneath their windows, deadly alleys and ancient pilgrims paths criss-cross like scratches in glass between the buildings, through parks littered with overgrown cemeteries, their headstones eroded to stumps by countless centuries of pounding sea rain.

Along cobbled streets, singing drifts from eventide church services while beneath the ground, iron trains hiss and whine, thundering through tunnels whose ancient builders and purpose is long forgotten by the masses packed inside them. Huddled in their carriages, they dare not dream of the world beyond. It is said that scintillating things prowl the woods that surround the cyclopean and gun bristled walls which demarcate the supremacy of the law of man. And above it all, the monstrous Owl swoops low, silhouetted like a black abyss set against the great white moon.

Here, a wild eyed outsider is a prince, where ancient nobility dutifully serves the alien designs of its own hounds. It is a place where secrets are more precious than silver, where one's own memory can be bought or sold. A city where sleep itself offers no refuge from the state. In the gilded trading halls and in the gatherings of the elite, the beatific visions of the desperate poor change hands like currency, and every face betrays its fear of what is one day to come.

For this is the City of the Owl God, mankind is merely its tenant, and the sea shall settle all debts in time.

THE GAME

An aberrant disappearance.
A city fit to tear its own flesh.
Strangers cross the great walls of timeless Myr.

The Owl roosts.
Patient.

THE RULES

The game system presented here is a hack of the Powered By The Apocalypse (PbtA) system.

PbtA is a generic, narrative focused system, designed to allow for play and storytelling to take centre stage by aiming for abstraction where more rules heavy systems strive for simulation.

The system is based on Moves, which operate as the units of action the players can take in the world. Characters share a pool of basic moves, and each have a pool of unique moves. Moves are triggered in response to actions and storytelling, not the other way around. Dice rolls will only be triggered where there is some probability of failure. This means you just need some awareness of your moves, and can focus on simply describing your characters actions, the system will respond to your choices, not the other way around.

The stats we will use in this game are as follows:

Stat	Description
Blood	Physical strength, fitness, presence.
Wine	Observation, empathy, cunning.
Honey	Persuasiveness, charm, charisma.
Ink	Learning, reasoning, abstract thinking.
Mercury	Creativity, mysticism, spiritual intuition.

ROLLING DICE

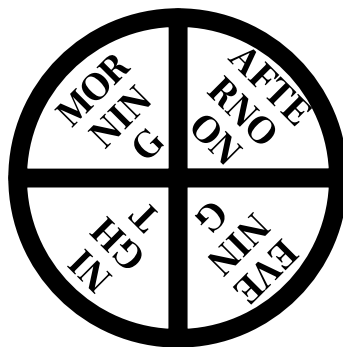
The game uses a 2d6+stat for rolls and relies on standard PbtA rules for resolution. That is:

- 10+ Total success
- 7-9 Partial success
- 6- Failure

Exactly what these categories mean will change depending on the move and the fiction. In general, a partial success means the GM names some cost in exchange for success, and a reduced cost if the player wishes to relegate their roll to a failure. On a failure the player will not succeed and will pay a cost. In PbtA failure is not static, it always has a cost associated with it.

TIME

Myr itself is timeless, but the lives of its inhabitants and it's visitors (you) are not. Each day is split into four time slots. These will tick forwards when the group feels that enough has transpired, when certain moves are triggered, or as cost for a moves partial success. Some moves also require time to be spent in advance of being triggered, this will be marked on the move description. Days will also be tallied throughout the game. It is worth remembering that the city is not a static thing, and will respond to the passage of time.



Sleep takes one time slot, but can be avoided. After 2 days of missed sleep, a player will roll with disadvantage on all rolls, and after 3 days will collapse from fatigue or else move down one health step.

CLUES

There are no moves or rolls for the finding of clues in this game, there are only rolls to help you interpret them and ask questions about them. The reason for this is that rolling for perception in most games is extremely boring and pointless. When you enter a space or scene, you can be confident that there is nothing that is hidden behind a perception check or gated behind a simple dice roll. Information may be gated off through location, npcs not cooperating, a locked drawer/door, or through other systems in the story but never on your ability to properly search the room you are in. It is up to the players to work out where to go to look for clues and how they connect together in the context of the story. The moves are designed to reflect this.

DAMAGE AND DEATH

Myr can be a dangerous place for nosy investigators, and the body is a fragile thing. There is no hit point system in this game. Each character exists in one of the following states:

- Invigorated
- Healthy
- Harmed
- Incapacitated
- Dead

Invigorated is a temporary state only available under certain circumstances, whereas the others are fixed unless some special action is taken. An invigorated character always rolls with advantage. A healthy character rolls normally. A harmed character will roll with disadvantage on all rolls which might be affected by the harm taken, but otherwise rolls normally. An incapacitated player is either unconscious or otherwise unable to act, and must be resuscitated or receive medical attention to return to a harmed state.

Once a character is dead, they are dead.

INSIGHT

Insight operates in CotOG in the way that bonds operate in most PbtA games. It is tracked with each non player character, group, or organisation separately and can be thought of as your ability to read a person's

tells, knowing what will make a person respond to questioning, or your sense of intuition about them. Insight on a character is shared by all party members, you do not track it separately. Insight is obtained in the following ways:

- When you uncover a secret about a person.
- When you discover something about a person's past.
- When a person confides in you.

Some playbooks can generate insight on characters, others are better at utilising it, so be sure to communicate and work together to gain insight on characters you are interested in. There are no shared moves which spend or gain insight when triggered, but you can spend insight to obtain advantage on a roll when narratively appropriate.

PAY A COST

When a move fails, or when you achieve a partial success you will sometimes be asked to **pay a cost**. This includes but is not limited to:

- Invoking a **cut**
- Losing insight
- Taking harm

In some cases the GM will discuss the cost with you and ask what you feel is appropriate. Other times you will be offered a devil's bargain where you can forgo the cost and the partial success if you choose to do so. Other times you will not be offered a choice. Keep cost in mind when you trigger moves; failure can be painful.

CUTS

The GM has various cuts and heavy cuts available. These are not explicitly described in this playbook. The name of a cut will never be said allowed, but you can imagine it as the basic prompts for the GM to use to make the game harder. If the party is ever without leads for too long, a cut will also be invoked.

- Do harm
- Escalate tensions
- Split the group

- Deepen a mystery
- Take a pawn

Cuts are not limited to these choices, but should give you some idea of the sort of things that can happen when a cost is paid or a cut invoked.

BASIC MOVES

Basic moves are available to all characters. These represent the most common interactions that players will be having with the world. Most require a roll, but some do not. You should be aware that these moves are available to you as well as those on your sheet.

OPEN A DOOR

Sometimes the path may lead you to unwelcoming places, but every door can be opened with the right knowhow. This could be literal, or it could be figurative; a sealed portal and the mistrust of a stranger are simply doors of a different kind. Disguise, guile, and persuasion are after all just as effective as lockpicks, bullets, or sledgehammers for opening the way, and draw a lot less attention.

When you attempt to open a door, roll with a **blood** if strength is required, or **honey** if persuasion is needed, or in rare circumstances other skills may be applied.

On a **10+**, that door will stay open to you until it is closed again. On a **7-9**, you may **pay a cost** of entry, which can be anything, may arouse suspicion, or worse. On a **6-**, the door is firmly sealed, suspicion is aroused, and a new path must be found.

ESCAPE FROM DANGER

The city of Myr is full of dangers, some far too great to face head on. Escape is always an option.

When you attempt to make an escape, roll with a skill that makes sense. If outrunning someone, **blood** is usual, if slipping into the shadows **wine**, but other skills may apply.

On a **10+** the danger is escaped exactly as described by the player. On a **7-9** you **pay a cost** to accomplish the escape, or not everyone in the party escapes. On a **6-**, the escape has failed and the attempt is noted.

ACT UNDER PRESSURE

Everyone has a plan until they meet resistance. When you are in a stressful situation even simple tasks can become monumental undertakings. When you are taking an action that otherwise would not require a move, but are doing so under adversity, you invoke this move.

On a **10+** you act as normal, on a **7-9** you are given the opportunity to **pay a cost** in order to achieve your goal, or you are incapable of doing so. On a **6-** you fail, and your situation gets even worse.

PATCH SOMEONE UP

It's a dangerous line of work you're in, and you can't pay the bills if you're dead. When you try to heal another characters wounds you can roll with **ink** if relying on medical skill or surgery, or **mercury** if expelling poison or malevolent presences.

On a **10+** you can shift someone up by one harm state, on a **7-9** you do so, but the treatment may have unintended side effects, or you **pay a cost**, on a **6-** you fail and **pay a cost**. This move can never be used to elevate anyone above the "healthy" status.

CAUSE DAMAGE

Sometimes diplomacy, escape, and the usual paths fail, and violence becomes a beguiling refuge. **This move requires a weapon or tool.** Physical combat rolls with **blood**, striking from the shadows rolls with **wine**, poisoning rolls with **ink**, but other skills may be deemed appropriate.

The player begins by announcing which state from the damage and death section they want to place the target of this move in. You may only move down the list, a harmed person may be incapacitated or killed, but not made healthy with this action.

On a **10+** the target of the move is in the state chosen. On a **7-9** the game master will offer to place the target in a different state than the one chosen, or in the state chosen but with a cost. On a **6-** the game master may choose to kill the target, or to have the target escape knowing their assailant, whichever seems appropriate.

This move can backfire and escalate situations extremely quickly, and the group can find themselves shut out of many of their usual options. Use it sparingly, if at all.

HOTEL MOVES

Some moves can only be performed in a safe environment where equipment or a complementary breakfast are available. These moves are marked on the playbooks with a ★, and cannot be performed outside of the hotel. They are also listed on the hotel playbook itself. The hotel can be thought of as a character in its own right, with its own playbook, which is shared between the players rather than controlled by a single player.

PLAYBOOKS

THE MUSCLE

The brawn of the group. The muscle's particular talents are best employed where combat, intimidation or breaking stuff is required. They can be thugs, martial artists, brutes with a heart of gold or even a sword wielding member of mainlander nobility. The only defining characteristic is their capacity to use the threat or application of physical confrontation to get what they need.

Fictional Examples: Batman (DC), Deckard (Blade Runner), Starsky & Hutch (S&H)

Affects

- An out of place item of clothing.
- A weapon or tool of the trade.
- A storied past you sorely miss, or deeply regret.

PLAY THE BAD COP Violence isn't always the solution to your problems, sometimes the implication is sufficient. When someone else is doing the questioning you can play the bad cop to get them to talk. When you invoke this move you roll with **blood**, on a **10+** the party gains **1 insight** on the target of the questioning. On a **7-9** you gain **1 insight** but **pay a cost** for it. This might be that the target **escalates tensions** or it might be that you scare the person so much that they go into hiding. On a **6-** you **pay a heavy cost** and gain nothing.

PROTECT SOMEONE You don't die easily, sometimes it's your business to get hurt in the place of others. You can trigger this move to take damage in the place of someone else if you could feasibly do so. This damage does not need to be physical, saving someone from social harm or embarrassment could also fit this move, but remember you will take the brunt of the harm if you choose to step in. You usually roll with **blood** but other stats might apply.

On a **10+** you take the harm in place of the target unless the harm would incapacitate or kill you, in which case you brush it off. In addition you gain advantage if you choose to **cause damage** in retaliation. On a **7-9** you take the harm in the place of the target even if it kills or incapacitates you and may **pay a cost** in order to gain advantage on **cause damage**. On a **6-** you fail, and the target takes damage, and you also **pay a cost**.

TAKE IT EASY ★ When you are at the hotel and are healthy or harmed, you may take an extra time slot to take it easy. You should describe how you spend your off time (remember moves are triggered by fiction, not the other way around.) If you do so you will move up an additional harm status category, even up to invigorated. You do not need to roll for this move. You can use this in conjunction with the **patch someone up** move to spend most of your time in Old Myr very healthy. If you are incapacitated this move cannot be triggered.

INVESTIGATOR

The investigator excels in reading social cues, connecting seemingly disparate information, and gathering intelligence. While sometimes former members of law enforcement, they are more often private detectives. Defined by keen senses and a sharp intellect, they can see things others believe they have hidden, and draw information from people with only their words.

Fictional Examples: Hercule Poirot (Poirot), Lieutenant Columbo (Columbo), Miss Marple (Miss Marple).

Affects

- A pen and leather bound notebook.
- A very stylish, but old fashioned outfit.
- A peculiar habit or vice.

CONNECT THE DOTS Sometimes you've already seen the truth, all it needs is to be made clear. When you want to see how a person is connected to the broader mystery you may spend an insight on that individual to trigger this move outside of questioning or conversation with that person. Roll with **wine**, on a **10+** you will recall a detail connecting that person to either an organisation or another individual that you also have insight on. This could be a detail like remembering a line in a newspaper or connecting a clue with a person. On a **7-9** you obtain this information but will also lose your insight on the connected individual or an organisation. On a **6-** you lose your insight but gain no information.

ONE MORE THING... Most people can't keep their stories straight, you're exceptionally good at teasing inconsistencies out of people. You can invoke this move on a character during questioning in order to force a mistake from them or get them to answer a question they might not want to answer. Roll with **honey**, on a **10+** the person says something they shouldn't have said and is none the wiser, on a **7-9** the person slips up, but realises their mistake. This might lead to a **paying a cost** depending on the severity of the secrets spilled. On a **6-** the person sees through your game, and you **pay a cost**.

HIT THE BOOKS ★ Sometimes a text needs to be read in detail, and you have an eye for detail others lack. If you have an book or item or other item which would take a while to read, you can spend time

units reading it. These do not need to be contiguous. In doing so you will obtain either an insight into something/someone contained within the text, or an insight into the text itself if it contains no information about an individual or organisation. You do not get to choose who or what you gain insight into, but you do of course get to choose what you read. You do not need to roll for this. Depending on the length of a text this move can be repeated up to three times. A newspaper or pamphlet will be exhausted after one time unit, a complex work will be exhausted after three.

CHEMIST

Chemists are experts in deduction, discerning truth from material evidence. They can use their skills for forensics, but also for determining the nature of various plants or drugs. Former academics, ex-drug manufacturers or just hobbyists, to a chemist the past is an open book.

Fictional Examples: Gil Grissom (CSI), Albert Rosenfield (Twin Peaks), Dr. House (House M.D)

Affects

- A large suitcase containing lab equipment.
- A film camera and developing tools.
- An esoteric topic that has drawn your obsession.

ANALYSE A SAMPLE Science is the only candle mankind has against the dark. This move can be used in two ways, either to ask questions of a sample with a known origin, or one with an unknown origin.

If analysing a sample with a known origin you gain an insight on that origin. For example, a hair, fingerprint, or blood sample from a known individual can be analysed to obtain insight on that person. This move does not require a roll. You will end up with a very long list of known samples, so keep notes!

If analysing a sample with an unknown origin you must roll with **ink**. On a **10+** rather than gain insight on an individual you gain it on the sample. Once the sample has been matched to an individual, all insight on the sample is transferred to the individual in question. Other party members can spend insight on a sample if it seems appropriate. On a **7-9** you gain no insight on the sample but you may write it down and compare it to future samples. On a **6-** the sample is destroyed and you gain no information on it, the test cannot be compared with known samples in the future. Do not record it on your sheet.

INTERROGATE THE PAST Every event, however small, leaves a mark on reality. You can use this move to ask questions of a scene in the same way others might ask a person. This move can be triggered either at a location (such as a crime scene), or using developed photographs of the location or subject of interrogation.

Roll with **ink**, on a **10+** you may ask two questions about the scene or subject which could plausibly be asked with expert knowledge "How

long ago did this person die?", "How tall was the shooter?", "What kind of shoes were they wearing?". On a **7-9** you may ask a single question about the scene or subject, and further questions become closed to you. On a **6**- your data or the crime scene become tarnished by your questioning, and you **pay a cost**.

Note that questions that do not require expert knowledge do not require this move, "was this window forced?", "was this person shot?" could be asked by anyone, and does not require a move. This move invokes expert forensic learning, so ask the right questions.

DO SOME SCIENCE ★ When at the hotel you may use your lab setup to do the following in a unit of time.

- Develop photographs.
- Synthesise a substance.
- Do some experiments
- Perform an autopsy.

These actions do not require rolls, and can be used in any number of ways. You can use these actions to gain insight or assist other moves, whatever makes sense narratively.

CLAIRVOYANT

Clairvoyants are mortals who walk a path few have the tools to tread. Theirs is a world filled with spirits, watchful gods and arcane whispers. Living at the boundary between worlds often leaves a person mad, and their ability to apparently foretell events is uncanny to the materially minded. The future and the past are after all, not as different as people suppose.

Fictional Examples: Dale Cooper (Twin Peaks), L (Death Note), Dirk Gently (Dirk Gently's Hollistic Detective Agency).

Affects

- An item with profound sentimental value.
- A set of fine silk pyjamas.
- A favourite food or drink which brings you incommensurate joy.

SENSE THE TRUTH Your ability to sense when someone is lying hasn't won you many friends, but it's pretty invaluable in your line of work. When you feel someone is lying you may spend an **insight** to attempt to uncover the truth. Roll with **wine**, on a **10+** you determine not only whether they're lying, but what the truth might be. On a **7-9** you determine whether or not they are lying, but not what the truth might be. On a **6-** you determine nothing new and you **pay a cost**.

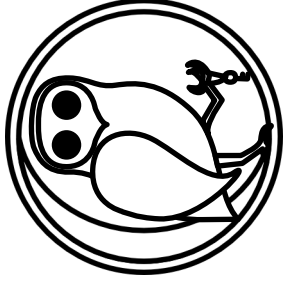
THE TIBETAN METHOD When the way is unclear it falls to you to find a path. Through elaborate ritual taking a unit of time you may rule out leads or theories you are uncertain about. Your ritual can only give "true" or "false" responses, it may not offer any details. You select a target of your questioning by spending an **insight** on that person or object, then ask the ritual up to three names, if there are still connections between the two characters you have named, the ritual will tell you truthfully. On a **mercury** roll of **10+** all three questions will be answered by the universe correctly. On a **7-9** only one will be answered correctly, and two will fail to offer a response, you may not choose which. On a **6-** you lose the insight and none of your questions are answered.

CROSS THE THRESHOLD ★ When at the hotel you may spend your sleeping time crossing the threshold to the world beyond the real. Here you will be shown hints, visions and secrets. You may ask a question before sleep, and the clues may be related to that question, but will never answer it outright. These clues and visions might be obtuse and

strange, but such is the nature of the dream, it falls to you to unravel them.

NAME

BASIC MOVES



THE CITY
OF THE
OWL GOD

- OPEN A DOOR
- ESCAPE FROM DANGER
- ACT UNDER PRESSURE
- PATCH SOMEONE UP
- CAUSE DAMAGE



BLOOD

WINE

HONEY

INK

MERCURY

STATE

AFFLICTIONS

INVIGORATED

HEALTHY

HARMED

INCAPACITATED

DEAD

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

1

2

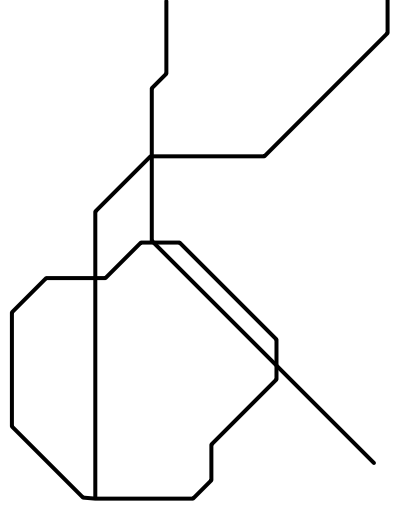
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INSIGHT

PLAYBOOK MOVES

MAP

NOTES





MYRISH TRANSPORT

GREAT SOUTH
RAILWAY

CENTRAL
LOOP

SALTPETRYR
LINE

PROVIDENCE
LINE

ANCHORAGE
TRAMWAY

FERRY SERVICE

