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Eldritch High

A Little Game about
Little Wizards,
Witches & Warlocks

John Wick

Eldritch High

A Little Game about
Little Wizards,
Witches & Warocks

Written & Designed by
John Wick

Fair Credit

The “Necromancy” magic found in this book was inspired by an idea by

Jess Heinig

I hope he accepts 无所不能功夫 as a fair trade.

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Welcome to Eldritch High

Good morning, students and welcome to the Alexander Circe Academy for the Study of the Esoteric and Eldritch Arts. My name is Dominic Vex. I am the Head Master here at Circe's and I want all of you to feel welcome in your new home. I hope your journey was comfortable. If you are suffering from any ill effects from passing through, please notify your Hall supervisor immediately. We don't want any of you getting sick on your first day.

You will spend the next four years of your life here, so let's all make sure you make the most of that time.

After you've eaten breakfast, you will be assigned to one of the many Halls here at Circe's. You will meet the Hall Supervisor as well as the other students who have been assigned there.

The next four years will not be easy. Your instructors will demand much of you and your studies will devour most of your time. You will learn many skills here. Of course, you will also learn the mysteries of magic. If you are diligent, you may become a true magician.

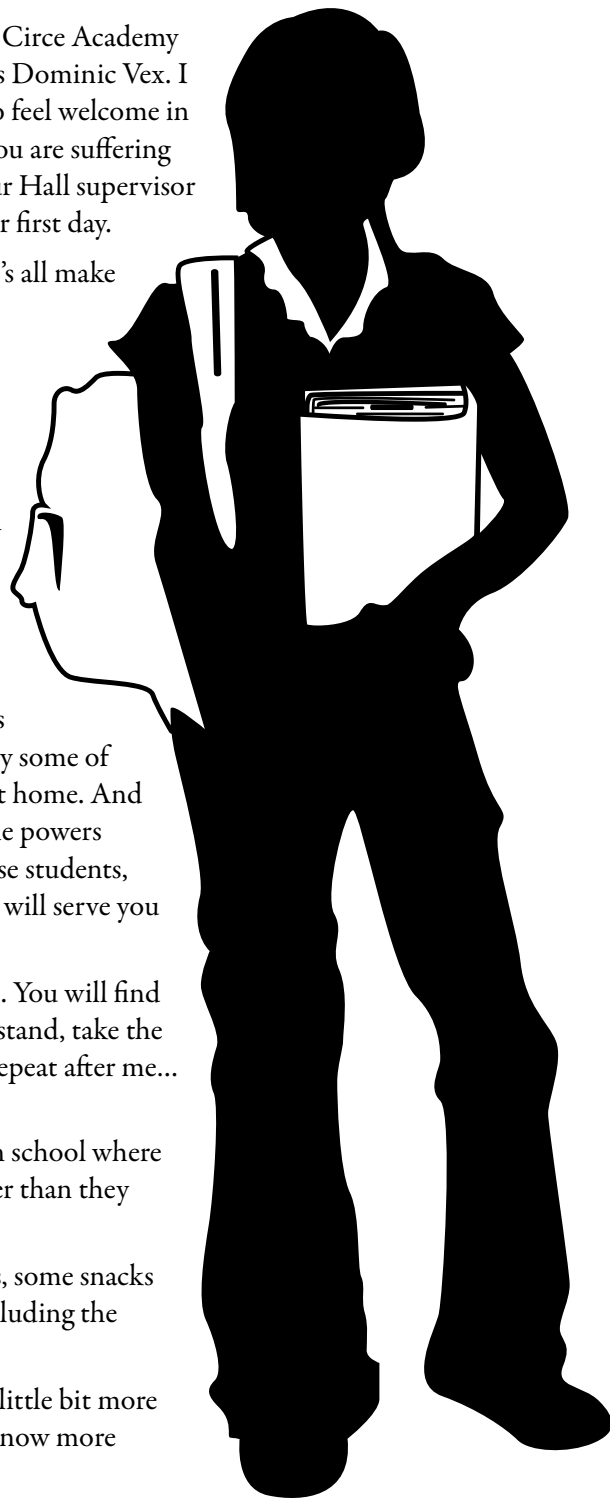
However, I must warn all of you. There are many dangers on the road to graduation. All of you will be tested but only some of you will succeed. Those who are found wanting will be sent home. And there is the possibility that one or two of you may... find the powers of darkness more alluring than the powers of light. For these students, these... *warlocks*... there is only one fate. Remember this. It will serve you well when temptation tests your souls.

But now, before anything else, it is time to take the Oath. You will find it on the magical parchment sitting in front of you. Please stand, take the Oath into your left hand and raise your right hand. Now, repeat after me...

Eldritch High is a roleplaying game about a magical high school where children are thrust into an invisible war with powers greater than they could ever imagine.

To play this game, you will need character sheets, pencils, some snacks and drinks and a deck of playing cards for each player (including the GM).

But before you can play the game, you'll need to know a little bit more about the world *outside* the school. In fact, you'll need to know more about the world outside the world.



The Shadowrealm

There is a world that exists beside our own. A world identical to our own. A world of magic.

Wherever you are right now—sitting down in your living room or lying on your bed or sitting in the library or reading these words on your pad while waiting for the bus—there is a battle going on around you. You cannot see the combatants, but you can feel them.

A deadly fire strike passes within inches of your face and you feel a whisper of breath on your cheek. A dragon roars overhead and you hear a whistle in the sky. A secret war happening all around you, hundreds of men and women losing their lives... and a chill runs down your back.

As you sit and eat dinner in a restaurant, a guardian angel sits beside you. And when she's busy, a demon whispers in your ear, tempting you to petty acts of evil.

It works like this. You're sitting on a bus. On your way to work. You have your coffee and your newspaper. You know nothing of the Shadowrealm. You think you are sitting alone, but next to you, completely unseen, is a specter. A shadow that whispers to you.

Your wife never listens to you, it says.

She is sleeping with your best friend, it says.

They deserve to die, it says.

The whispers enter your brain and take root. Then, they grow. It follows you wherever you go, feeding those seeds with more poison. It may take weeks or days or hours, but the roots reach deep into your mind and the next thing you know, you're holding a bloody axe.

The Veil

Most of the people in the world cannot see the Shadowrealm. But every once in a while, someone has an encounter with the arcane and

their eyes are opened. It usually takes direct contact with someone (or something) that can already see the Shadowrealm. But once that contact is made, the eyes are opened and they cannot be shut.

Once you can see beyond the Veil, you see a shining world. It occurs beside our own. To step through the Veil is to step into what seems to be our own world, but all those who cannot see—the blind—are like ghosts. Phantom images. The buildings are the same, the streets are the same, the cars are the same. They shine with a silver fire halo. The whole world through a ghostly lens. But there are things that are real here. Things that are only whispered specters in our own world. They cannot touch us while they are here, but once we cross the Veil, they are just as real as you and me.

And every once in a while, one of *them* has the strength to cross over into our world. Here, they are unbound. The rules of our world do not apply to them. They cease being wicked whispers and become real dangers of teeth and talon. And this is why you have come to Circe's: to learn the skills you need to stop the *things* from the other side of the Veil.

The Academy

At Circe's, we have a mission. We seek out children who have the Sight and train them to be the front line against the daemons from the Shadowrealm. We only accept children; anyone above eighteen rarely acquires the Sight, even when directly confronted with the Deep Terrors beyond the Veil.

Students spend four years at Circe's. They do not return home for summer or winter break. Once they enter the Academy, they rarely see their parents again. We implement this policy for one reason alone: security of the child. Once they gain the Sight, children are in danger. If you

can see beyond the Veil, the things beyond the Veil can see you as well.

That's why students are protected at the Academy. When they first gain the Sight, they are vulnerable. The Academy's Shadow Watch acquire such students as soon as they are detected. Their families are also relocated so the daemons from the Shadowrealm cannot use them as hostages or bait against the students.

Because of the Academy's resources (both mundane and magical), Circe's takes in approximately one hundred students per year. An average of fifty percent make it to graduation. If a student is expelled from the Academy, they are marked with a ritual that forbids them from ever using magic again. Some students attempt to escape the Academy before the ritual can be put upon them. Administration officials claim no one ever escapes the Shadow Watch. That's what they claim.

The Place between Places

The campus exists somewhere between our world and the Shadowrealm. Doors open to both worlds. To find the Academy, you must have the Sight and you must have visited the Academy before. Once you know where it is, any door can become a door to the Academy. That's why Circe's location is kept secret. It should be said that the Academy has multiple security systems, both magic and mundane. Shadow watch guard all the entrances.

It is rumored that some doors—locked and hidden away—open to even more worlds than just our own and the Shadowrealm. Of course, the Faculty denies their existence... and expressly forbids any student from opening such doors if they find them.

The Ruins

Long ago, the Academy was attacked by an organized army of Shadowrealm daemons (a rare event). The attack not only wrecked an entire wing of the Academy, but also left it...

uninhabitable. No mortal mind can survive long in the halls. The wrecked and ruined buildings share their pain and horrors. The wing has never been restored and students are forbidden from entering.

The Dojo

Also known as "the House of Pain," the Academy's dojo is a restricted building; only Black Watch students and alumni may enter.

It is a simple building. A large room with a floor made of wooden panels. There are no mirrors on the walls, no desks and no chairs. Not a single weapon can be found.

On the East wall is the only window, positioned to catch the rising sun. Just under the window is a banner written in an ancient and magical language that every student who entered the Dojo has been able to read. The words written upon it, when spoken outside the Dojo, sound like gibberish. Only those who have studied within the hall understand them, and Shadow Watch speak the words as a greeting to each other.

The banner reads, *Shufa tujin fa nama tan tengiu*. The translation is, "You will suffer if you touch him/her."

Ian Straun Memorial Library

Dedicated to one of the wealthiest families trained at the Academy—four generations of them—the Ian Straun Memorial Library is a towering edifice in the center of the campus. The Straun family demanded it be the tallest building and they got it.

The Library itself is like a puzzle with the tiles on the floor as the only guide through its labyrinthine corridors. The librarian—silent and invisible—wanders through the Library making certain there are no shenanigans.

No student can speak in the Library—although faculty can. The only way to communicate is through written messages.

The Student Dorms

The Academy has five dorms to house its students. Each dorm can hold up to one hundred students.

Standing on the front lawn of each dorm is the statue of one of the school's five founders. Many of the faculty—ex-students themselves—have noted that the character of the founders seems to influence the character of those who reside in the dorms.

Fraser Court

Colors: Blue & White

Fraser Court was once a library, but was refurbished a few years ago. Named after Marie Fraser, a statue of “The Highlands Lady” stands in repose before the building holding a wand and a book. At her feet is a wreath of roses and thistles. The statue’s inscription, in Gaelic, reads, *Tá mé réidh* (“I am Ready”). Fraser’s holds the record for the highest academic achievement in the Academy. Members are consistently on the Dean’s List and seldom gain Demerits.

Residents of Fraser Court gain two bonus cards for any knowledge risk.

Fogg Hall

Colors: Gold & Grey

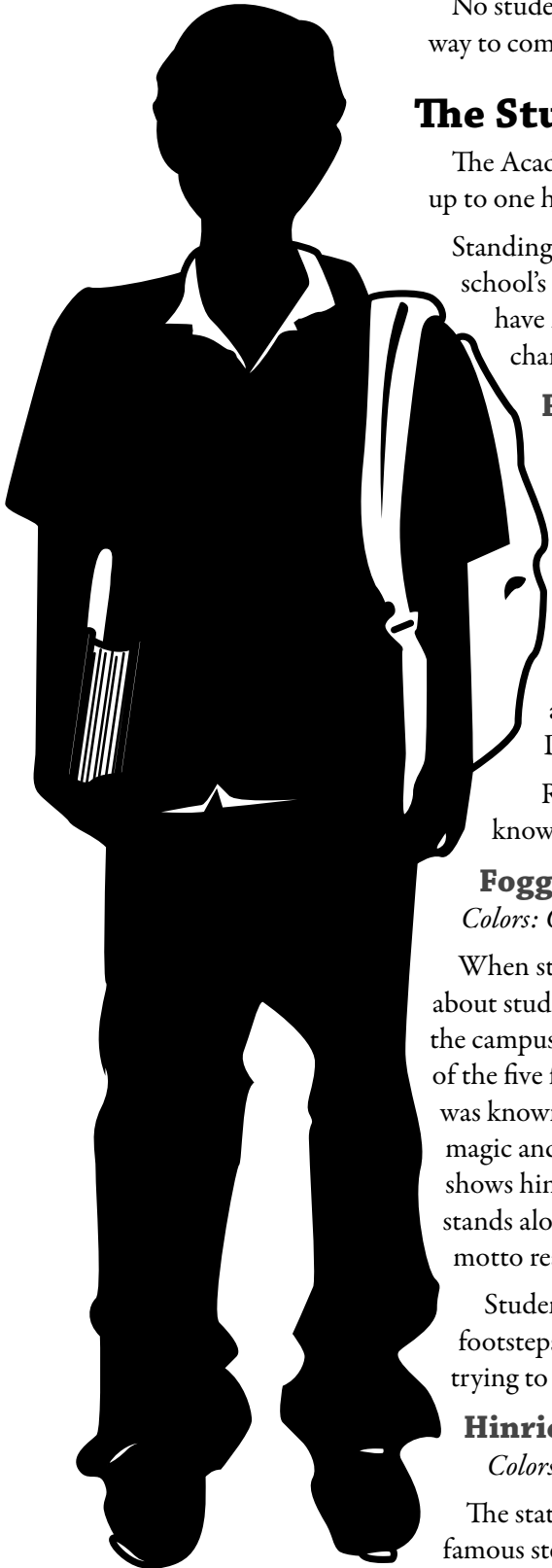
When students and faculty talk about “a Norwest man,” they’re talking about students from Fogg Hall. Situated in the far Northwest corner of the campus, Fogg Hall is the namesake of Tam “Odysseus” Fogg, another of the five founders of Circe’s Academy. Among his four compatriots, Fogg was known as more of a confidence man than a magician. He relied less on magic and more on his cunning and guile. His statue in front of the Hall shows him with no wand, no book or any other wizard’s tool. Instead, he stands alone, a slight grin on his face and a knife on his belt. The Hall’s motto reads at the base of the statue, “Another one every minute.”

Students from Fogg Hall have a reputation for following in Fogg’s footsteps. Residents of the Hall gain two bonus cards whenever lying or trying to be sneaky.

Hinrichs Hall

Colors: Purple & Green

The statue in front of Hinrichs Hall is that of Anne Hinrichs on her famous steed, Grimm (short for “The Great Grimsby!”). At the base of



her statue reads the Hall's motto, "Home is My Kingdom." After the others offered her a place as one of the five founders, Hinrichs moved her family castle (complete with the family stables) to the Academy grounds. Not only a stables but a collection of animals... every animal you never imagined. The Hall is that same family castle and the students who reside there swear the spirits of Hinrichs and her family haunt the castle's rooms. The ghosts are not malevolent but helpful... unless you enter the castle without a proper invitation.

The students of Hinrichs Hall gain two bonus cards for any risk involving animals or creatures from beyond the Veil.

Circe's Hall

Colors: Silver & Burgundy

The oldest building on the campus, Circe's Hall was originally the Academy's main building. As attendance grew, the Hall was converted into a dorm for students. As the oldest building, it is also the most prestigious dorm. Only the wealthiest and most respected families have students in Circe's Hall. The statue in front of the Hall shows the first founder of the Academy. Unlike the other statues, Circe's faces the Hall and not outward toward the campus, but that is not the most distinct element of the statue. Circe's monument is a puzzle. There is no motto at the base, but instead, a series of strange symbols. He holds a book turned to a specific page in one hand and points toward something in the distance with the other. Residents of the Hall must solve the puzzle within one week or find themselves a new dorm.

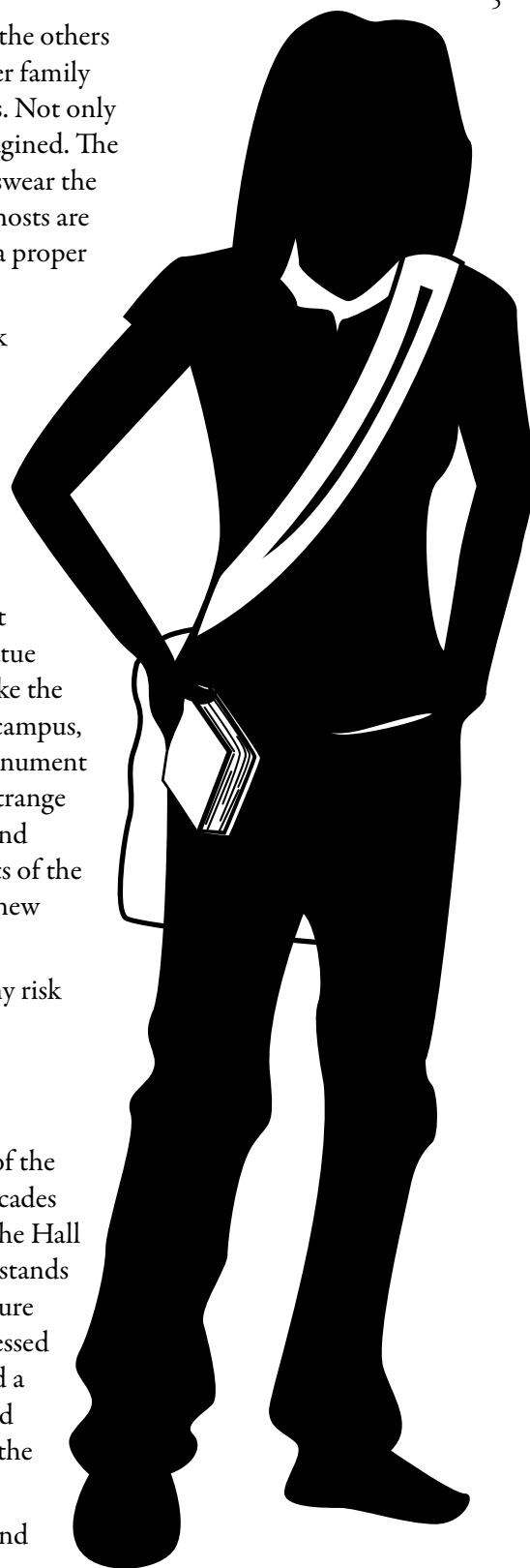
Students who reside at Circe's Hall gain two bonus cards for any risk involving puzzles or riddles.

Savage Hall

Colors: Black & Red

The newest building on the campus is a reconstruction of one of the oldest. Savage Hall was completely destroyed during an attack decades ago. Under the direction of the Academy's current Headmaster, the Hall was restored to its previous glory. The statue of Benjamin Savage stands on the fresh, green grass dressed in fine clothes holding his signature walking stick. Savage had a reputation as a lady's man. He was dressed in the finest clothes, walked with a stylish swagger and always had a witty quip on his lips. He was a figure who was larger than life and his presence can still be felt in the halls and rooms. The motto at the base of the statue is, "*Quam vos effectu.*"

Residents of Savage Hall gain two bonus cards for persuasion and charm risks.



Making A Character

Before anything else, you should think about who your student is, where he came from and what he looks like.

Step 1: Who Are You?

First, nearly all students admitted to Circe's are 14 years old, but there are a few details that make your character distinct from the rest.

Where are You From?

The faculty recruits students from all over the world, so you may be from America or Britain or China or even Afghanistan. Where do you come from?

When Did You Gain Sight?

Also, your character had a "magical awakening" at some point. A moment when he began to see the Shadowrealm. For most folks, the world of magic cannot be seen. In fact, they spend most of their time and effort trying to ignore it. But for a magician, the world of magic is something that cannot be ignored. A magician can sense when magic is present, and with concentration, can even determine its source.

A novice such as your student had a moment when the Shadowrealm became visible. He could have been attacked by a ghost or a goblin, touched a magical artifact or somehow otherwise came into contact with the magical world. How did it happen for your character?

What Do You Look Like?

Don't elaborate on details. List three things that make your character distinct from other students at the Academy. Just three things. That's all.

What is Your Stereotype?

Movies and TV fill us full of high school clichés. The geek. The jock. The popular girl. The weird one. The schoolahaulic. Pick a stereotype. This will be important later in the game.

Step 2: Willpower

Those who can use Magic rely on their willpower to summon, bind and release the energies from the other side of the Veil. This is represented by the Willpower trait.

All characters start with three Willpower.



Step 3: Fumbles

As a Freshman, you start the game with three Fumbles. A Fumble is a kind of “mandatory mistake” your character must make during the semester. It represents your student trying to figure things out. Magic is a complicated thing, after all. I’ll explain more about Fumbles later in the book.

Step 4: Required Courses

Now, it’s time to consider your course schedule at the Academy. You can take six courses per semester. In order to gain access to the many spells taught by the faculty, you’ll need to take classes from as many of the departments as possible.

Alchemy

Alchemy is the study of the four basic elements of the universe: air, earth, fire and water. It teaches a student how to purify these elements and command them. (Recent researches have discovered electricity, gravity and atomic elementals as well.)

To use Alchemy, the wizard must have some of the element in question available. He must also have a bit of mercury (a drop is all that’s needed). The wizard drops the mercury on his tongue and whispers the secret name of the element. He may then give the element a single command.

He can command air to gust up around him or for a lick of candle flame to erupt into an inferno. He can also ask questions of the present element. (One question plus a number of bonus questions equal to his bangs.)

Bewitchment

The study of Bewitchment is the study of using charming spells and other tricks to see what you want them to see and believe what you want them to believe.

To use Bewitchment, you must look into the subject’s eyes and speak an audible command. Your target must be able to both see your eyes and hear (and understand) your command. They will follow one command plus a number of bonus commands equal to the bangs you play.

Conjuration

Conjuration teaches students how to mark certain items so they can be summoned to the magician at any time. Conjuration only summons inanimate objects large enough to hold in one hand. To perform Conjuration, the wizard closes his palm, closes his eyes, imagines the object and then opens his palm to discover the object is in his hand.

You may Conjure specific objects. Need a key to a door? You can Conjure *that* key. Need a one hundred dollar bill? You can summon a one hundred dollar bill.

Often, a novice conjurer will summon incorrect items. Let’s use that example of the key.

The Shadow Watch

There are students at the Academy who are not training to be magicians. Instead, they are training to become members of the Shadow Watch.

Students who are trained to become Shadow Watch have no affinity for magic, but instead, demonstrate a powerful resistance to magic. Each Shadow Watch trains to protect a magician against

enemies and physical threats. They undergo rigorous physical training, weapons training and learn the ways of warlocks and their dark magics. Playing a Shadow Watch is an option for players, although their class schedule is different. See the *Playing a Shadow Watch* section at the end of the game.

You want to Conjure the key... you want to Conjure the key... you open your hand and you have the lost glasses you've been looking for all week.

Conjured items only remain for one hour. After that hour, they vanish (presumably back to where they were before you Conjured them). You can use bangs to extend that time by one hour per bang.

Crafts

One of the most important courses at the Academy, Crafts teaches students how to create their own magic items, potions and weapons.

Divination

The study of Divination does not only teach the student how to see into the future, but also the past and distant locations in the present.

To use Divination, the character must use the proper tools: a Tarot deck, still water, a crystal ball, etc. You also need a question. Successful

Divination allows you to say one thing that's true about the question. Bangs give you additional details.

As a Freshman, you learn how to use one set of tools. Each grade teaches you a different set of tools. As a Sophomore, for example, you can use both the cards and tea reading.

Shape Shifting

In this Class, students learn how to change into other animal forms. The animal you change into can survive its native habitat. Polar bears, for example, are immune to the cold. Fish can swim and survive under water. Also, you have any abilities—such as flight and radar, in the case of a bat—that your animal form has.

Bangs give you bonus cards to use while in that form. If you change into a wolf, for example, you can apply your bangs to your sense of smell or your fangs. Or, in the case of a bat, you could apply those bangs to flight attacks or radar sense. The bangs last as long as you are in that form.

Wards

Wards protect you against Magic and its effects. Wards have a few basic rules.

First, wards must be cast on objects or people. The caster draws a magic circle on either the person (their skin) or a door or a wall. The ward is easily seen unless it is concealed in some way. Wards can be drawn on the ground, protecting anyone inside its circle.

Second, the ward protects the target from one specific thing. The ward could protect against dogs or shadow creatures or fire or any other *one specific thing*. Bangs allow you to add to the list of things a ward can protect you from. Cannot enter circle, cannot be touched.



Step 5: Electives

Your student may also take elective classes. These do not necessarily add to your ability to perform magic, but they are still important in building character at the Academy.

The classes listed below do not make up a comprehensive list. If you can think of more electives, please share them with the Headmaster and see if you can add them to the school's curriculum.

Arcane Athletics

Climbing, lifting and dodging magical projectiles are all a part of Arcane Athletics.

Creative Writing

Learning the skills authors use to trick their readers also teaches you how to lie with conviction. When lying to others, you get a bonus based on your Creative Writing.

Crypto Zoology

Zoology is the study of the various magical beasts in the world.

Fine Arts

Painting, sculpture, illustration. All of these provide additional means of communication for students.

Games & Puzzles

Learning how games work helps with critical thinking. Learning to solve puzzles does, too. This class teaches you how to solve riddles and get out of tricky wickets.

Health

Knowing how the body works also helps for stitching together wounds and recovering from injury.

Herbology

Knowing plants and their (seemingly) miraculous powers can help in all kinds of situations.

History

While History may be the most mundane of all classes—and thus, the most boring—those who do not learn history...

Music

Music has all kinds of effects on the human mind. Music helps us remember, sets our minds at ease and makes it easier to convince people to pick a side they may not already agree with.

Psychology

Psychology is the study of human thought and decision-making. How do we think? Studying Psychology can help you better understand the human mind... and how to manipulate it to what you want it to think.

Public Speaking

Standing in front of a crowd and making your voice heard is not easy. What's even harder is making those people agree with what you're saying.

Semiotics

No, not "symbolology." And if you use it again, it will come off your final grade. The study of symbols, myth and epic can help students understand the strange symbolic reality of the Shadowrealm as well as the more cryptic curiosities of our own world.

Spywork

The faculty at Circe's knows the reality of the world outside its walls. Every once in a while, a less direct approach to a situation may be wiser.

Student Council

Political maneuvering is one of those skills everyone thinks they can do... until they get into an environment with folks who *really* know how to do it.

Theater

Theater teaches you how to become someone else. It teaches you accents, how to change your

mannerisms, disguise your features and all other kinds of subterfuge.

Weapons

The use of arcane weapons—swords, pistols, axes, etc.

Wrestling

When you have no weapons and an enemy who wants to kill you, what do you do? Use your arms, hands, legs and anything else to overcome your opponent.

Step 6: Your Freshman Schedule

Circe's Academy divides the school year into two twelve-week Semesters. For the first Semester, you will take three Required Classes and one Elective. Then, second Semester, you can choose three more Required Classes and one Elective.

During your Freshman year, you cannot repeat Classes. That is, during the first Semester, if you take Alchemy 1, during your second Semester, you cannot take Alchemy 2.

All of that changes when you graduate to a Sophomore, but for now, those are the rules. Pick four Classes (three Required and one Elective).

Step 7: Prodigy

You should know that every character is a prodigy in one Class. That means you draw one bonus card (a total of two cards for Freshmen, three cards for Sophomores, etc.) instead of just one card in any Magic risks with that class and any cards you draw can be used for bangs. I know that doesn't make any sense right now, but it will in a little bit. I'll also remind you again after I explain how Magic works.

Step 8: Gifts

Each magician also has a Gift. Gifts distinguish your student from the others, giving him a unique ability that no other student has. All Gifts begin at rank 1. Your student can improve his Gift, increasing its rank, with *Homework*, discussed later.

Beast Tongue

You can speak with any and all animals.

Dwarven Blood

You begin the game with five Willpower rather than three.

Elven Blood

Whenever your student tries a quickness risk, add two cards to his pull.

Familiar

You have a Familiar: a magical pet that you can communicate with. Your Familiar cannot be killed

Family Heirloom

You come to the school with a family heirloom that holds a little bit of magic. Your heirloom has one effect and an unlimited number of charges. See *Magic Items*, below for more information.

French

The French are exceptionally cultured, sophisticated and well-groomed. Gain a bonus card for any Elective. Also, if your character is French and you learn the forbidden Sorcery of Nihilism, you gain Existential Nihilism: draw an additional card for any Nihilism effects.

Giant Blood

Whenever your student tries a strength risk, add two cards to his pull.

Invisible

You already have one Invisible Point (see below).

Lucky

Your student always starts a Semester with one less fumble. Also, your character always wins ties.

Numerologist

You have an uncanny understanding of the magic of numbers. Before any pull, you may call out one card (face cards included). If you draw that card, regardless of suit, you may draw an additional card.

Studious

You actually enjoy studying from moldy old books and dusty tomes. During Homework, you have an additional point that you can only devote to Studying.

Teacher's Pet

You have a special relationship with the faculty that gets you "bonus time" after classes. During Homework, you gain one additional Homework Point you can apply only to Practice.

Warlock Taint

You begin with 1 Warlock Point and one rank of Dark Magic (see below).

Wealthy Family

Your family contributed greatly to the Academy, and thus, you have a little leeway in regards to getting in trouble. During Homework, you gain one additional Homework Point you can apply only to Goofing Off.

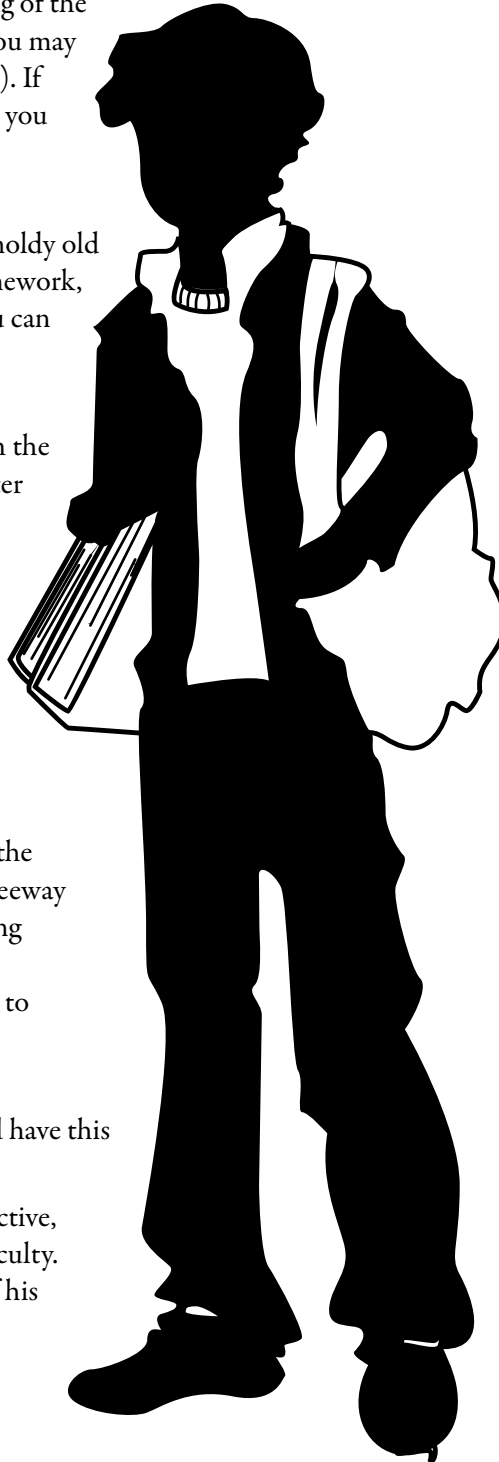
Wealthiest Family

(I'd say that only one student could have this Gift. Fight over it.)

Once per game, you can give a directive, within reason, to a member of the Faculty. Once per Semester, he can kill one of his Demerits.

And You're Ready!

Your character is done. All that's left to do now is to jump into the wild world of academia. Enjoy!



Risks

Whenever your character wants to do something risky, you draw cards from a deck. This is called a **risk**. Each player has a deck of their own. Don't draw cards for actions that are simple or don't have any consequence on the story. You only need to pull cards for a risk if the action is important.

The total number of cards you draw from the deck is called your **pull**.

There are two kinds of risks in this game: mundane risks and magic risks.

Mundane Risks

When your student takes a mundane (non-magical) action that is risky, make a pull (draw cards from the deck).

Grade Cards

Because your student is a freshman, you draw one card from the deck to determine the success or failure of your risk. This is called your *grade card*. (As you progress through the school, you will be able to draw more than one class card.)

Freshmen draw one grade card.

Sophomores draw two grade cards.

Juniors draw three grade cards.

Seniors draw four grade cards.

Faculty and Graduates draw *five grade cards*.

Bonus Cards

You may also draw a number of *bonus cards* from various sources.

Stereotype

If your Stereotype is appropriate, you may draw one bonus card.

Courses

If one of your Courses is appropriate, draw bonus cards equal to the level of any Courses that may be appropriate to the risk. If you've only taken one level in a Course, you get one bonus card. If you've taken two levels in that Course, you get two bonus cards. You may find other ways to draw bonus cards as well.

Magic Items

If you have a magic item that gives you bonus cards, you can use those as well.

Others

The Headmaster approves any and all additional cards as he sees fit.

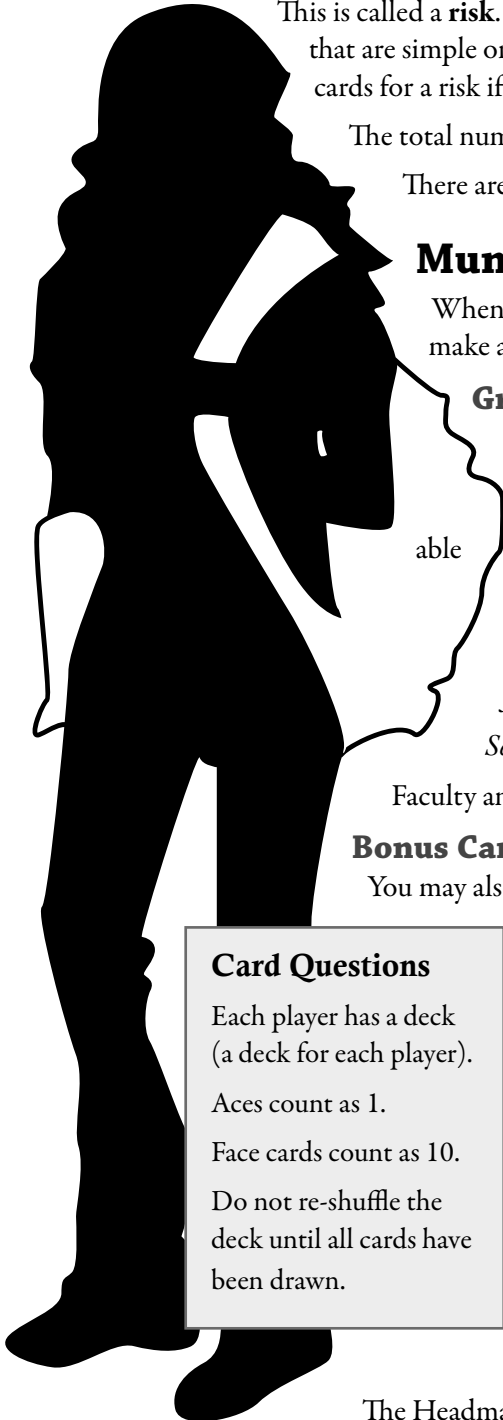
Card Questions

Each player has a deck (a deck for each player).

Aces count as 1.

Face cards count as 10.

Do not re-shuffle the deck until all cards have been drawn.



Add up the value of your cards. If the sum is equal to or greater than 10, you get to narrate the success of your character's risk. If the sum is 9 or less, you describe how your character fails in the risk.

Bangs

During a risk, if you hit your target number and you have some cards you didn't use, hold on to them! They turn into bangs.

Every card you didn't use to hit that target number becomes a bang. Set it aside from your pull.

Bangs provide you with big bonuses for risks (particularly Magic risks), but there is always one thing you can do with a bang: you get to narrate one additional fact about the outcome of your risk. Even if the Headmaster has narration rights, a bang allows you to add details after he's done. Each time you use a bang, put it in your discard pile.

Aces: Big Bangs

When you use an ace card for a bang, it becomes a big bang! Any ace used for a bang counts as two bangs.

On the other hand, if you use an ace to beat the target number, it counts as a Practice Point for that risk. It represents your character getting a moment of insight into what he's doing. Immediately record it on your sheet. You'll see how to use Practice Points in the Homework section, below.

Magic Risks

Magic risks are handled a little differently than mundane risks. Magic risks are those that invoke the Required Classes.

The system for casting magic is pretty simple. You draw your *grade* card plus any bonus dice you get from your class rank plus any other bonus cards. If your total equals or is greater

than 10, you describe the successful casting. If it is less, the Headmaster describes the outcome.

Every class of Magic describes how it can be used, how it can't be used, what it can and can't do. Other than those guidelines, everything is on the table.

Prodigy

I told you I'd remind you about this.

Every character is a prodigy in one Magic Class. That means you automatically succeed whenever making a Magic risk with that Class and any cards you draw can be used for bangs.

Spell List

Now, you're probably thinking, "John, where's the list of spells I can cast?"

There isn't one.

That's right. There are no spell lists here. No long list of effects to memorize. Instead, I'm giving you the ability to make your own spells. I'll explain that in a bit.

The Magic System

Each kind of magic allows you to create effects that break the rules of reality. You draw energy from across the Veil—from the Shadowrealm—and use that energy here. This is a dangerous undertaking and can go wrong in many ways. But, if you are skilled in its use, you can invoke the energies of the other world, bind them and release them in our own world.

When you cast a spell, you must fit your spell with the theme of one of the Classes. For example, if you want to bring something into existence, you must use Conjunction. If you want to change inanimate object into something else, you can use the forbidden magic of Transmutation. (Not that the Academy teaches Transmutation...) You must meet the qualifications for the Class. You cannot create effects that violate the rules of that Class. Everything else is fair game.

If you want to brew a potion or create a magic item, you are going to use special rules we'll discuss later in the book.

Using Bangs

You can use bangs to modify your Magic. Every bang allows you to add one detail to the effect of your spell. You can also use bangs to increase the duration of a spell and its damage (if any).

Duration

Most spells have a duration of *instantaneous*. Once you successfully cast a spell, each bang you discard extends the spell's duration an additional hour. Or Caster dismisses it.

Some spell effects are longer, lasting until sunrise or sunset. You can extend the effects of those spells by *one day* with each bang.

Additional Damage

Some spells—such as spells that damage your opponent—can have bonus effects. Use the same mechanics for *Duration*, above. Draw an additional number of cards equal to your class in that spell. Each bang adds one more point of damage to the spell's effect.

Aces

Like mundane risks, aces count as Big Bangs for magical risks as well. You can either use the ace for two bangs or use it to beat the target number for a Practice Point.

Rituals

When two wizards work together to cast a spell, they are casting a *ritual*. The rules for a ritual are the same as casting a spell by yourself except the wizards involved add their cards together to generate the energy for the spell.

Every player must beat ten, but all players involved can share cards to beat the target number.

Everyone who beats ten can say one thing about the effects of the Ritual. If a Prodigy is involved, they get to go first. Otherwise, the player with the highest pull goes first, followed by the person sitting on his left, and then around the table (this includes bangs).

This means wizards working together can create *huge* effects.

Anti-Magic

Wizards can try to cancel Magic effects cast at them by disturbing the rush of magical energy with a counter rush of magical energy. This is called *anti-magic*.

If you are the target of a magical effect, you may make a pull of your own to counter that effect. Draw your usual number of cards. If your pull is greater than your opponent's pull, you describe the outcome of the spell. After you have, if your opponent has drawn ten or higher, he may add a detail to the outcome. Then, you spend your first bang, followed by your opponent's first bang and so on until both players no longer have bangs to spend.

Shadow Points

Whenever a wizard uses Magic, he invokes energy from the Shadowrealm. This has a tangible effect upon the magician, further separating him from our world.

When you make a Magic risk and get a big effect, you gain Shadow Points. A Magic risk with three or more bangs adds one Shadow Point to your sheet.

Do Classes Stack?

Depending on what kind of game you want to play, you may want to consider whether or not classes "stack." In other words, can a student invoke two different classes for one risk?

For a low-powered game, I'd say "No." One class per risk.

For a bigger game, with bigger bangs, I'd say "Yes."

I'll leave it up to you.

Every Shadow Point makes it more difficult to interact with those who know nothing about Magic.

To interact with anyone—or anything—from our world, you need a number of bangs equal to your Shadow Points.

On the other hand, every Shadow Point allows you to draw an additional card when performing a Magic risk.

Remember: you don't *have* to use your bangs.

Prodigy in Risks

If you are a Prodigy in a particular school of magic and you use that school in a risk, you gain *two bonus cards*.

Jokers

A joker can count as any card. However, if you use it in your pull or as a wager, it also gets you an Shadow Point. That's even if you are Shadow Watch.

Cheating Risks

You may, if you wish, attempt to cheat at any risk. You may get caught, and there are consequences for getting caught, but cheating gives you *huge* bonuses for risks.

After you have drawn cards for a risk, you may choose to cheat. Choose all your dice before you roll. Roll up to three ten-sided dice (yes, dice!) and add the result to your total. You don't have to roll all ten-sided dice; you can roll one or two if you like. Also, if you roll a 10, roll that die again and add the result.

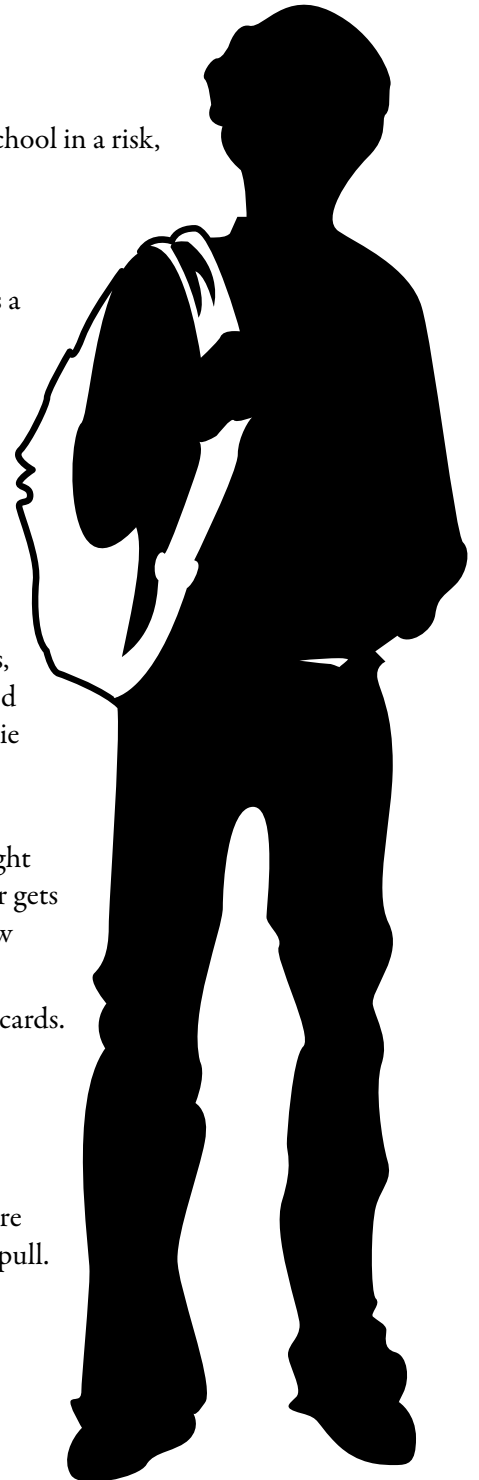
Now, if any of the dice rolls a "1," you get caught cheating and the Headmaster describes the outcome of your risk. Every time you get caught cheating, you get one Demerit. If you get three Demerits, your character gets himself expelled from the school. That means you have to write up a new character.

To be clear about this, Dice add to your pull, but they do *not count* as cards. In other words, you can't use dice as bangs.

Willpower

Wizards and witches can use Willpower during risks and when using Magic. Using one Willpower allows a wizard or witch to draw three more cards and add them to their pull. You must spend Willpower *before* the pull.

You may only spend one Willpower per risk.



Zero Willpower

A character who begins a risk with zero Willpower cannot narrate the outcome of that risk, regardless of his pull. Also, anyone targeting a character with zero Willpower with any risk (magic or mundane) gains three cards to their pull.

Getting Willpower Back

At the beginning of each game, players recover all their Willpower.

Contested Risks

When two or more characters engage in the same risk, everyone pulls at the same time and announces their totals. The character with the highest total narrates one truth about the outcome of the risk or may “pass.” The second highest pull narrates the second truth or may “pass.” And, so on down the line.

Any player who passes may interrupt another player’s turn and narrate his fact before they can narrate theirs. If timing becomes an issue here, the player with the highest pull goes first.

Contested risks are where Willpower gets spent, so don’t forget it!

Injury

Injuries represent your character’s ability to absorb physical damage. Your character can take only five points of Injury. After that, he is *helpless* and may die.

Any other character can approach a *helpless* character, spend a Willpower and say, “I kill this character.” After that action, the character dies.

Because of the Academy’s magical healing facilities, all Injuries can be cured with one night in the Infirmary. Otherwise, your character heals one Injury per game session.

Students can also cure Injuries if they have the right classes (Health and Herbology are appropriate when I run the game). A success means you can heal one Injury and each bang heals an additional Injury.

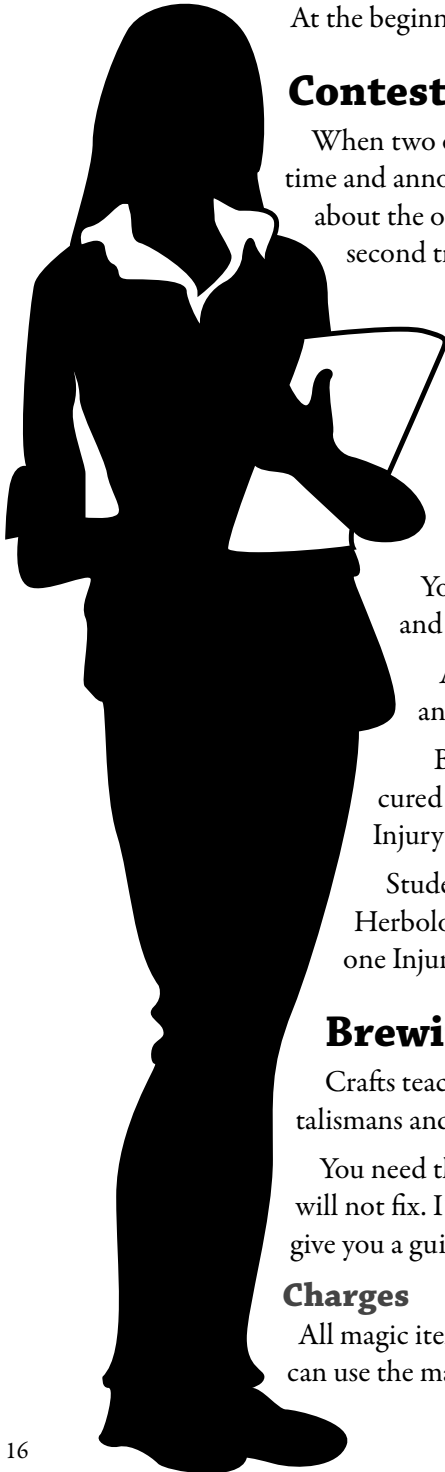
Brewing Potions & Crafting Magic Items

Crafts teaches students how to create magic items such as potions, wands, brooms, talismans and other miscellaneous magic items.

You need the correct materials for making a magic item; without them, the magic will not fix. I’ve given you a sample of the most common items below. They should give you a guideline for the kind of materials you’ll be looking for.

Charges

All magic items you make have a number of *charges*. This is the number of times you can use the magic item before all the magic you invested in it is gone.



When you make a magic item, the face value of the cards you use to beat the TN equals the item's charges. Bangs equal additional effects specific to each item type, listed below.

If you pull an ace (a big bang) for your item and you use it to beat the target number, your item is permanent. It has no charges because it needs no charges. Your item is permanently linked to the Shadowrealm. This also means the item is invisible to anyone without Sight. They cannot see it, cannot touch it, cannot interact with it at all.

Potions

A potion holds a spell in liquid form until someone drinks it. Then, the drinker can cast the spell. Creating a potion requires three steps.

First, you must have a decanter (a glass container), a means to seal the decanter (such as a cork or a wax seal) and at least sixteen ounces of pure water.

Second, cast the spell as usual. You must successfully cast the spell (beat the target number), or the potion will not work. You may add any bonus cards from the Craft Class to this pull. In other words, if you are trying to make a Summon potion, you add your Summon and Alchemy bonuses together for the pull.

Third, if both steps are successful, seal the decanter. Once you break the seal, the potion must be drunk within ten seconds or the power of the potion evaporates.

Potions have two benefits. First, you don't have to pull cards to use them. Second, like some alcohols, potions gain potency over time. For every year a potion remains distilled, add one card to its effect when opened.

A Potion's charges are called *draughts*. A Potion cannot have more than three draughts.

Wands

One of the first items a wizard learns how to make is a wand. The wand must be carved from a tree limb. The tree must be auspicious. It cannot be an ordinary tree. The best wands are crafted from trees that have been struck by lightning. Of course, the limb must not have touched the ground. Warlocks look for trees at crossroads where murderers have been hung.

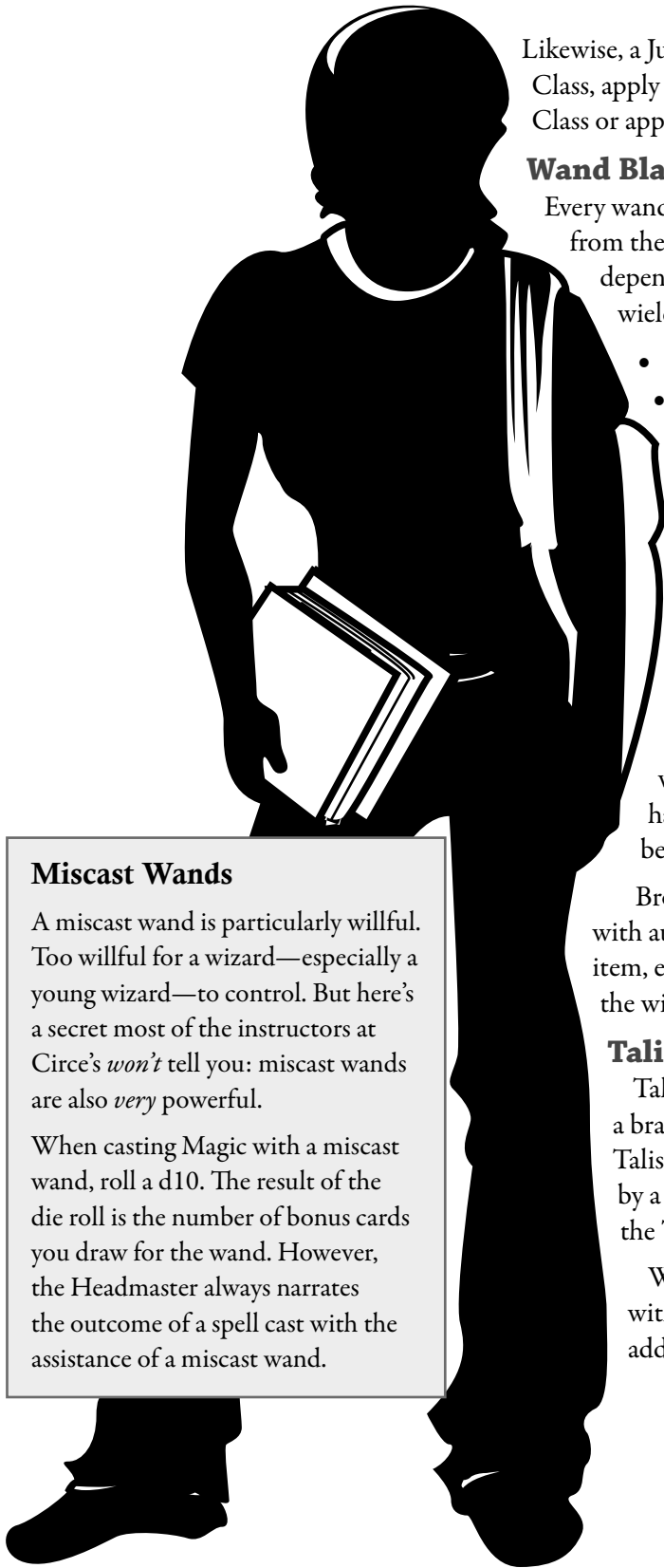
Wands have a nature of their own depending on who made them and from what kind of wood they were made. After you have crafted your wand, you must enchant it with a particular kind of Magic. Cast a spell as usual. If you pull ten or higher, your enchanting was successful. If you do not pull ten or higher, you must break the wand, burn it and craft a new one.

You must *never* allow a miscrafted wand to exist. Not *ever*. Miscrafted wands are dangerous, treacherous and wicked. Destroy them *immediately*.

When first made, a wand has a particular knack for casting spells from a particular Class. As its creator gains in strength and knowledge, it also gains a greater ability to assist its creator. Hitting a target with a wand blast is a Wizard Duel risk, but your wand gives you a bonus.

- Freshmen wands grant the wielder one bonus card for any one Class of Magic.
- Sophomore wands grant the wielder two bonus cards for up to any two Classes of Magic.
- Junior wands grant the wielder three bonus cards for up to any three Classes of Magic.
- Senior wands grant the wielder four bonus cards for up to any four Classes of Magic.

That is, if you are a Sophomore, you may apply both your bonus cards to one Class of Magic or you can apply one card to two Classes, each.



Likewise, a Junior may apply all three of his cards to one Class, apply two cards to one Class and one card to a second Class or apply one card to three Classes each.

Wand Blasts

Every wand can create a magical blast of energy summoned from the other side of the Veil. The strength of the blast depends on the strength of the wand and the wizard wielding it.

- Freshmen wands create a **one card blast**.
- Sophomore wands create a **two card blast**.
- Junior wands create a **three card blast**.
- Senior wands create a **four card blast**.
- Faculty or Graduate wands create a **five card blast**.

Generating a blast costs one Willpower.

Brooms & Carpets

While it is traditional for witches to fly on brooms and wizards to fly on carpets—and that’s the way Circe’s *teaches* flying and that’s the way you’ll *learn* it—a few adventurous students have chosen to break with tradition and “gender bend” the rules.

Brooms and carpets, like all magic items, are made with auspicious materials. After you’ve created the item, enchant it. As usual, the item will only work for the witch or wizard who created it.

Talismans

Talismans are objects you wear—a necklace, a ring, a bracelet—that carry Magic. You can empower a Talisman with a single Spell, but the Spell is limited by a number of uses, or *charges*. Each time you use the Talisman’s Spell, it uses one of the charges.

When making a Talisman, you empower it with a single charge. Each bang you get gives it an additional charge.

Miscast Wands

A miscast wand is particularly willful. Too willful for a wizard—especially a young wizard—to control. But here’s a secret most of the instructors at Circe’s *won’t* tell you: miscast wands are also *very* powerful.

When casting Magic with a miscast wand, roll a d10. The result of the die roll is the number of bonus cards you draw for the wand. However, the Headmaster always narrates the outcome of a spell cast with the assistance of a miscast wand.

Homework

At the end of each game, it's time to decide how your character will spend the downtime. You can spend it studying, practicing or goofing off. Really. Those are your three choices.

At the end of each game, your character gets **five Homework Points**. You can use these in one of three ways: Studying, Practicing or Goofing Off. All have benefits. How you spend these points is completely up to you.

By the way, you can only put up to three Homework Points into any category. You can't put four or five. Only up to three.

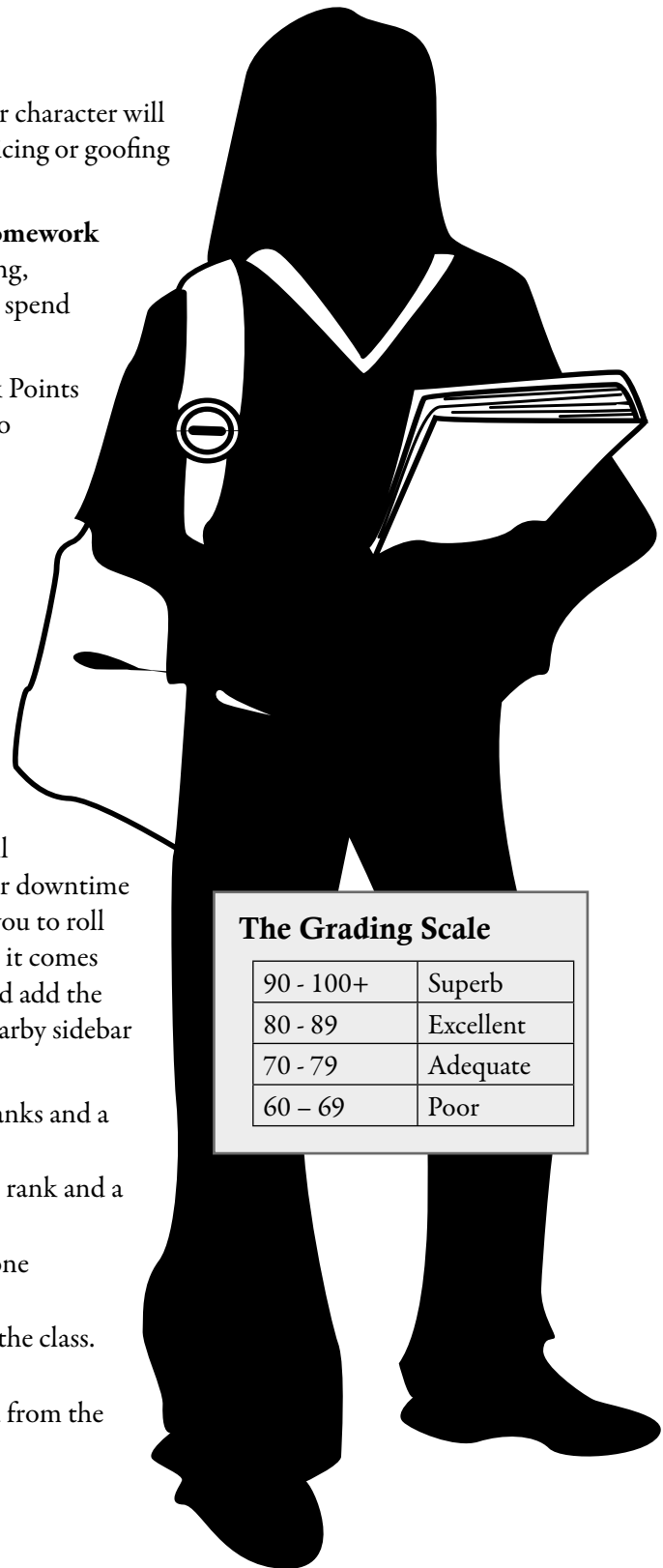
Studying

Each game session counts as one week of a Semester. Each Semester is twelve weeks. At the end of first Semester, you get to take the Mid Term Exam. Your grade on the Mid Term is important because it counts as fifty percent of your final grade. Then, twelve more weeks of the second Semester and the Final Exam. Add your scores in the Mid Term and the Final Exam for your Final Grade.

Look at your character sheet. Under each class, you'll see a spot for Study Points. You may choose to use your downtime between games to devote to study. Each point allows you to roll $1d10+5$ (roll one d10 and add five to the result) when it comes time for the Mid Term. If you roll a 10, roll it again and add the two results together. The sum is your grade. See the nearby sidebar for the grading scale at Circe's.

- If you end the class with "Superb," you gain 2 ranks and a free Specialty in that Class.
- If you end the class with "Excellent," you gain 1 rank and a free Specialty in that Class.
- If you end the class with "Adequate," you gain one Specialty in that Class.
- If you end the class with "Poor," you don't pass the class.

Every Class you do not pass earns you one Demerit. Remember, if you get three Demerits, you are expelled from the Academy.



The Grading Scale

90 - 100+	Superb
80 - 89	Excellent
70 - 79	Adequate
60 - 69	Poor

Practice

Practice allows you to refine and specialize particular skills and spells. (Note that practicing does not add *anything* to your Study Points or help you pass your classes.) See the “Practice List” section of the character sheet?

That’s where you list the Specialties and Spells you’ll get from practicing.

Specialties

A Specialty allows you to draw an additional card when you do something that applies to the skill you are practicing. For example, if I put a Practice Point in “Fire Effects,”

whenever I cast a spell involving fire, I get to draw an additional card. If I put a Practice Point in “Swords,” I get a bonus card whenever I try a risk with swords.

Specialties cannot take the place of Classes. In other words, you can’t have an “Alchemy” Specialty. You must pick a particular kind of alchemy in which you excel.

Specialties can have ranks from one to three. Each rank in a Specialty costs one Practice Point.

Spells

Spells are Magic risks that you’ve rehearsed so many times, they’ve become reflexive. For three Homework Points, you can

add a Spell to your Practice List. Any Spell you cast from your Practice List gains **three bonus cards** to your pull.

Goofing Off

Instead of Studying or Practicing, you can just choose to Goof Off. Goofing Off does not add anything to your Classes, but unlike the kids who spend all their time in the dorms with their noses in books, you do gain access to some very special benefits. Goofing Off does have its drawbacks, however. It means you put fewer points toward Studying (which lessens your chances of graduating) and it can also get you into Trouble. We’ll talk about that in a bit.

Dark Magic

You can learn a level of Dark Magic, but of course, you also get a Dark Magic Point. Studying Dark Magic costs three Homework Points.

Demerits

Instead of wasting time around campus, you do extra work around campus, thus eliminating one Demerit from your record. One Homework Point gets rid of one Demerit.

Explore

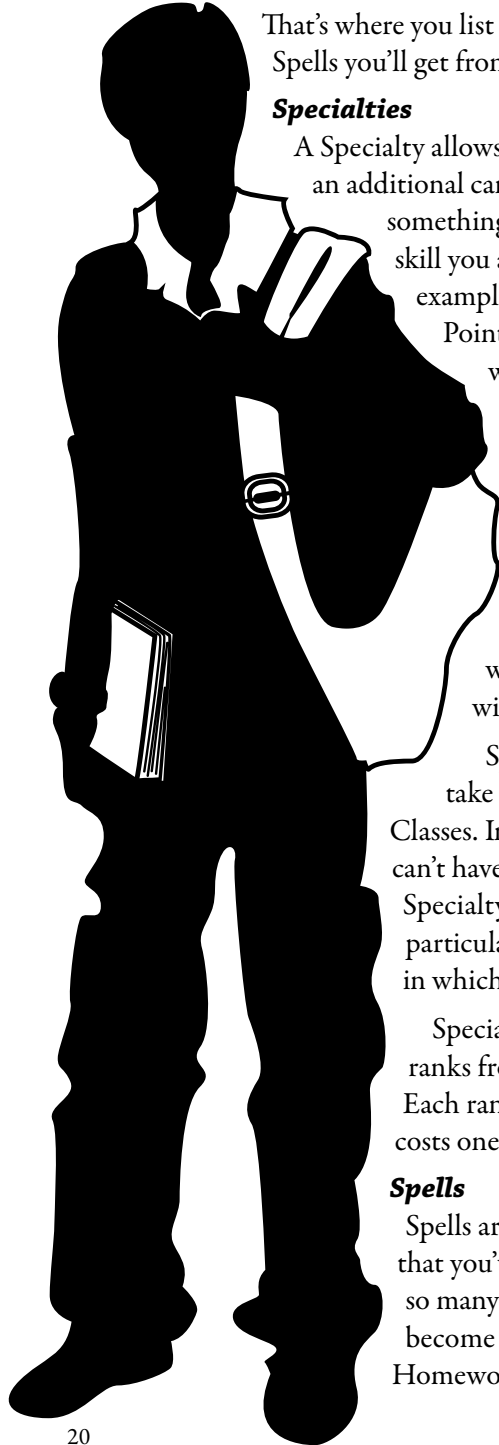
Exploring around the school and its grounds unlocks all kinds of secrets. You get to say things are true about the school. Exploring costs one Homework Point.

Magic Item

You can spend your time Goofing Off making your own Magic Item. You may only make one Magic Item per Homework period. Creating a Magic Item costs three Homework Points.

Willpower

Exploring the World Doors makes you a rougher, tougher wizard or witch. Every five Homework Points spent in this category adds one rank of Willpower to your character sheet. Students cannot have more than ten Willpower.



Headmaster

This chapter is for the Headmaster alone. If you are a player and read this chapter, you'll encounter a few surprises waiting for you. Spoilers lurk ahead. You've been warned.

Stories

“Nice idea. What do you do with it?”

That's the question I get for a lot of my games. And for this game, I had a real problem with that question. I went to my friends and asked them, “What would *you* do with this game?”

These were the answers I got. So, a special thanks to those folks for helping me out with this section. You can find their names on the credits page.

Metaplots & Personal Stories

Eldritch High uses a specific method for creating storylines in the game. We break this down into two parts. There's the “metaplot” which focuses on school-wide stories that affect all the students and “personal stories” that only affect individual students.

As the Headmaster, it is your job to come up with a metaplot. Metaplots should put the entire Academy in crisis. You need to come up with antagonists that can threaten the way of life at the school. Every student and faculty member becomes a part of the plot. Metaplots should take the entire scholastic year to resolve.

Meanwhile, your students (players) each choose a plot that their character has to deal with. Again, these should be personal. They may be shared with friends, but generally, you want personal plots to be something only the character can resolve.

For personal stories, allow your players to pick one per Semester (or Year, if you think you can drag it out that long).

In other words, you pick the metaplot and your players pick their own personal stories.

Bullies

So much of high school is devoted to learning how to be an adult. I mean, you aren't an adult yet, but everyone expects you to act like one. What's more, you've got a brain that's fighting every responsible impulse you may have. One of those impulses perfectly illustrates the darker side of human nature. Beating up the weak.

Back in humanity's less civilized days, physical violence was the way we established social dominance. The strongest of us took the best food, kept the best mates and generally ran the tribe. In high school, that mentality still exists no matter how hard the faculty try to kill it. Bullies have always been with us and, perhaps, they always will be. And don't you think for one moment that in a school devoted to arcane academics that bullying doesn't happen.

You don't need to study for endless hours to know how to threaten someone when they're alone in the bathroom. You just grab a couple of friends with equally low moral character as yourself, wait in the stalls until some pipsqueak comes in and then you hold his head in the toilet until he can't breathe. Then, you take whatever money he's got on him and tell him he'd better hand over anything else his folks send him or he'll get more of the same.

You know, thinking about it now, right now as I'm typing, I've come to the conclusion that the word "bully" is too friendly. It's like the word, "flake." You know, as in you expect someone to show up at a certain time and they never do and it means all your plans are wrecked for the night. And when you confront them, they say, "Sorry, dude. I'm a flake."

No, you aren't a flake. You're irresponsible. Say that with that cute and cuddly dismissive tone.

"Bully" is the wrong word. It's a harmless word. It's something you call a friendly dog. "Here, Bully! Who's a good dog?" No, I don't think "bully" really works for me anymore.

No, you aren't a *bully*. You're committing assault. And that makes you a *criminal*.

Dating

Finding someone else to spend private time with can be fun but it can also lead to a lot of pain. This is *high school*, remember. Kids with raging hormones, emotionally-charged and hyperbolic. So, the seemingly harmless idea of dating—especially dating someone with magic powers—should be worth at least one Semester of melodrama.

Players have a desire, an understandable desire, to ensure that all their character's actions and decisions make sense. They almost always do what's safe. There's a problem with that attitude: drama is about people making bad decisions. There are even times when we, the audience, know that they are bad decisions. But drama works best when we watch our favorite character make what we thought was a great decision only to find out it was a *terrible* decision. That creates *pathos*: when the audience feels the same emotions as the character. And in a roleplaying game, that's easy. That's because the player and the character are the *same person*.

So, dating represents a kind of dangerous opportunity for you, the Headmaster. It represents an opportunity to give the player someone to care about. And then, once you've

Romance Ven Style

In *Houses of the Blooded*, I gave the players a mechanic for romances. I'm going to share it with you here, just in case you haven't read that 400+ page monster.

In a nutshell, whenever two kids start a romance, it starts at rank 1. That means both the kids get one bonus card whenever they're taking any risk involving their partner. Each Semester (or week, depending on how long you want

this to go), the Romance increases by one rank. The highest rank a romance can have is five, and then, it starts decreasing. (These are high school kids, after all.) That means someone is going to have to break the Romance.

If another student breaks a romance on you, you get the trait, Heartbroken. That means you get three bonus cards to hurt, insult or even injure (dangerous ground, here) the one who broke your

heart. That bonus lasts until the end of the Semester or until you start a new romance that grows to a rank 3 or higher. You need a rank 3 or higher romance to get the old one out of your head. Also, as long as you have the Heartbroken trait, you need to play one extra bang for any risk. You need to play two extra bangs if the source of your heartbreak is present.

Ain't love grand?

got your hooks in their emotions, you can endanger that special someone. You don't have to kill them or maim them or scar them emotionally. Just the threat of danger is enough to get a player moving.

Of course, there's also the issue of break ups. That kind of emotional mess is enough to wreck any teenager's Semester.

This is almost so obvious that it goes without saying, but there are a lot of players who aren't at all interested in this kind of story. You won't hook them no matter how attractive you make the bait. Luckily, we're giving the players the opportunity to pick their own stories, so you won't have to worry about them at all. If someone puts "dating" down on their list of personal stories, you know you don't have to bait the hook. In fact, they're already in the boat.

Exploration

Circe's Academy is huge. What's more, it shifts and changes. Corridors become lost within the walls, doors appear and vanish. Students are encouraged to stay on reliable paths and not to wander too deep into the Academy's labyrinthine corridors.

The Academy also contains "Riddle Doors." These Doors open to other worlds, an experiment the Academy's faculty researched long ago. The experiment was declared a failure and the Doors were locked with complicated riddles. Of course, opening one of these Doors is a serious infraction of the rules but students have been known to open them, step through and have some incredible adventures.

Finding Out Grown-Ups Make Mistakes

My favorite movie director is David Fincher. Now, I have found that many people don't know this, but the same director who made the films *Se7en*, *Fight Club*, *The Social Network*, and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* also made *Alien3*. That last film, his first, was such a painful

experience, he nearly quit directing all together. When asked about making *Alien3*, he said it was the emotional equivalent of discovering that grown-ups lie.

Delivering this kind of emotional bomb requires time, effort and judgment. You have to create an NPC the players love, and then make them fail in a spectacular way. Not just fail a card draw. No, no, no. That's insignificant compared to the kind of failure I've got in my head. We're talking about failures of *trust*.

One of the students gets caught in a bad circumstance. He's been framed. Another student has set him up. Of course he wasn't cheating. Of course he wasn't trying to sabotage another student's project. Of course he wasn't using his crystal ball to scry the girls' showers. And our beloved adult has been put in the position of trusting the student's word or trusting the evidence. And instead of trusting the student, he trusts the evidence.

A failure of trust. A mistake. He should have trusted the student but he didn't. The more the players adore the NPC, the bigger the betrayal will be.

And, of course, after the decision has been made, evidence arises that clears our student of the crime. Of course.

Lost Magic (finding out the Academy only knows a little of what is out there)

There are secrets in the world the Academy does not know about. Secret artifacts, secret magic items, secret magics. As the Headmaster, you have the opportunity to introduce new kinds of magic into the world. New kinds of magic your players discover.

For example, while designing and playtesting the game, I had a kind of magic called *Transmutation*. In short, the Class gave you the power to transform one thing into another. I

tried it out but quickly discovered that it was just too powerful; students could do anything with it. If they ran into an enemy, they turned him into a soap bubble. If they needed a gun, they transformed a lump of clay into an AK47.

I found clever ways to limit the other schools (like opening and closing your hand for Conjunction), but I could not find a clever way to do the same with Transmutation. Nothing seemed elegant enough. My players were too clever for such a powerful tool. Therefore, I dumped it.

However, it may fit as a kind of secret magic the Academy doesn't know about. It's incredibly powerful and dangerous. The rules are pretty simple. You can only transform one element into the same element. That is, you can only transform earth into earth, fire into fire, metal into metal, etc. And you cannot add or subtract mass. Also, once something has been transformed, it cannot be transformed again. And the transformation only lasts one hour (additional hours with bangs).

Once the faculty gets wind of what's going on, you can be sure they'll put the kibosh on Transmutation until they can take a look at it. And what do you know? There's a problem the students never anticipated. Every time you use Transmutation, you earn a Transmutation Point. As a student gains TPs, they become less substantial. In fact, they're becoming Shadow Daemons. Yikes!

Now, this trick only works if you foreshadow it. Give your players some kind of warning. The first time they use the magic, they feel woozy. Perhaps they break a finger or knock a shoulder out of its joint. They're becoming less tangible. And, as time progresses, these symptoms become more prominent, some instructor will notice. And that's when the fun begins.

Parents

Let's be honest here. Students have to deal with a lot of things at Circe's. They have to deal with professors, daemons from the Shadowrealm, strange and new magics, and the mysteries of the universe. But there is one thing that is more terrifying than all those put together. That's your parents.

The absolute horror of parental disapproval haunts every child. What makes it worse is you never seem to outgrow it. (Trust me: I've been on my own for two decades and there are times my mother still thinks I'm fifteen.) But how do you work that into a story that's fun for the players?

The most important thing to remember here is that the students are all under 18 years old. In their minds, parents are still... well, there's really no word for it, is there? Your parents have complete control of your life.

A student's relationship with his parents is an important question to ask. You don't have to ask it right away—you can wait until they show up at the Academy.

Of course, the easiest story to throw at the students is threatening their families. Sure, they've been relocated so the Shadowrealm daemons can't find them, but there's always a mistake somewhere. I'm personally fond of the idea of a daemon seducing the parents with the "I can bring you to your child" lure. That makes the student indirectly responsible for their disappearance and endangerment. The Academy tells the kid, "Don't go looking for them; we have this covered." The Academy tells that to a teenager who recently discovered he can do magic. Yeah, that's gonna work.

There's also the option of a child who has a parent working at the school. Not just a professor but perhaps a Shadow Watch guardian or even something as mundane as a janitor.

Ask your players about their characters' parents. Their answers will tell you what kind of stories they want.

Protect the School

Part of Circe's lays in haunted ruin because of an organized attack. It could happen again. Daemons have infiltrated the school and possessed professors and students before. It could happen again.

School Rivalries

Circe's is not the only Academy teaching students the art of magic. There are other such "invisible colleges" all over the world. Some are larger than Circe's and some are smaller. Some have different philosophies on how to instruct their students.

Many of the Academies—Circe's included—participate in a student exchange program for the most gifted wizards and witches to demonstrate how others are learning the invisible art.

Shadowrealm Spills

There are also circumstances of the Shadowrealm spilling through the Veil into our own world. Most places we consider "haunted" are examples of these spills. Creatures horrible beyond imagining find their way into homes and wreck the families. Spills are most often in places where the Veil is extremely thin... like Circe's Academy.

Dark Magics

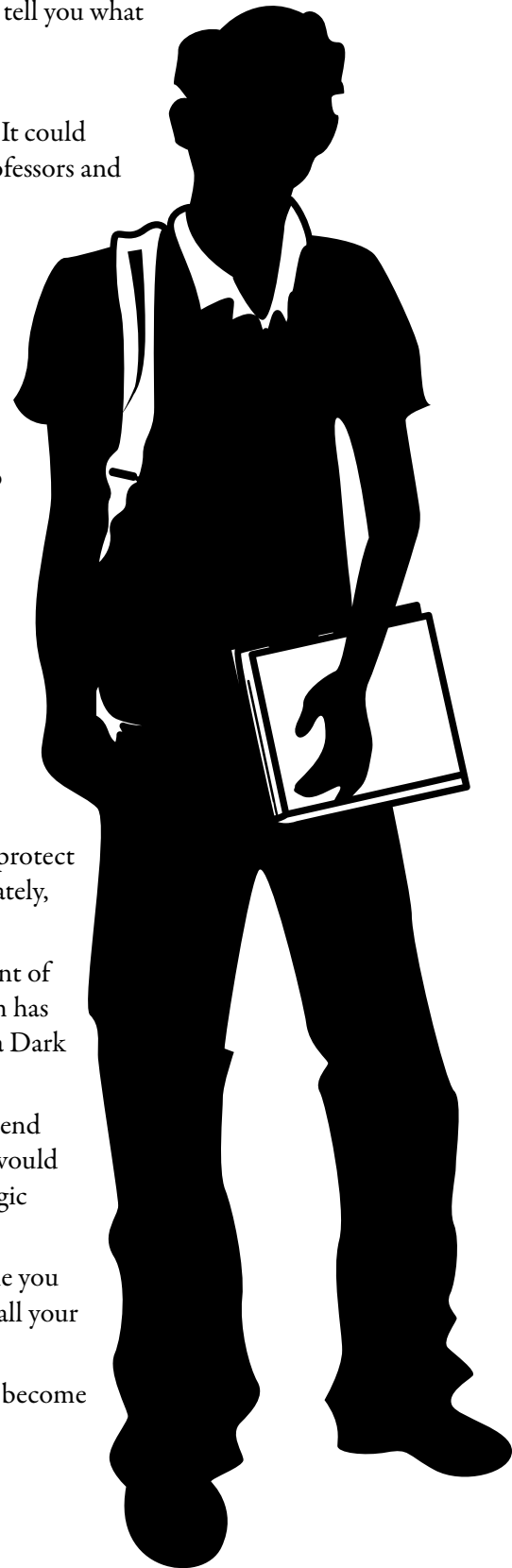
Circe's does not teach Dark Magics. It teaches its students ways to protect themselves from Dark Magics, but it does not teach them. Unfortunately, the knowledge is out there and easy to obtain.

Every time you use Dark Magic, you have a chance of gaining a point of Dark Magic Taint. A little shard of the energy from the Shadowrealm has gotten into your soul. Flip a card. If that card is a face card, you gain a Dark Magic Point.

Dark Magic Points can be used to power any kind of magic. You spend it just before casting a spell and you *double* the number of cards you would normally draw. At the end of each game, you refresh all the Dark Magic Points you spent during the game.

Using Dark Magic Points counts as using Dark Magic, so every time you spend one, you get a chance of earning another one. And remember, all your Dark Magic Points refresh at the end of the game.

Flip a card. If the number is equal to or lower than your DMP, you become a Warlock.



Dark Traits

Whenever you gain a Dark Point, you also gain a Dark Trait. Dark Traits are physical transformations that manifest when you use Dark Points or Dark Magics. A Dark Trait may be glowing red eyes, horns, wings, claws or are otherwise very scary and inhuman.

Chaos

Chaos Magic is incredibly powerful and incredibly dangerous. Practitioners of this kind of magic can alter probabilities to make things go their way. The warlock asks a question prefaced with the phrase, "What are the chances...?" and the question happens. "What are the chances I'll win the lottery?" "What are the chances his gun will misfire?" "What are the chances the hot water heater will explode?"

Make a standard magic risk. Every bang allows you to add another detail to the outcome.

Daemonic Traits

Whenever a warlock uses Chaos Magic, his body pixilates, flashing in and out of existence.

Curses

Placing a Curse on another makes a particular kind of task difficult and even painful. Make a magic risk and announce a particular activity. "Sleeping in the same bed twice," or "Be honest with the one you love the most." In order to accomplish that task, the target must spend a Willpower. Each bang means the target must spend an additional Willpower to perform the task.

Daemonic Traits

Casting Curses makes your eyes turn to blood red flames.

Necromancy

Necromancy is the magic that gives warlocks the ability to speak with and animate corpses. To use Necromancy, you must first create an unguent from the skin and bone of corpses. This requires a magic risk. Success equals a

single application of the unguent. Bangs provide additional applications. The unguent may be used in three ways.

First, you can rub the unguent over your eyes to see ghosts.

Second, you can rub the unguent on your tongue to speak to corpses and ghosts.

Third, you can wipe the unguent on a corpse to reanimate it. The corpse remains animated until sunrise or sunset (whichever comes first).

Daemonic Traits

Those who use Necromancy look thin, pale and gaunt. Their skin ashen, their eyes sunken and their hair long, black and greasy.

Nihilism

The murder of imagination. The murder of symbols. This is the Dark Art of Nihilism. "Nothing means anything." Those who practice the Dark Art of Nihilism are truly the assassins of the fantastic. When a practitioner of Nihilism walks into a room, everything seems duller. Greyer. You see the flaws. The subtle cracks in the paint. The faults in the painting. Everything is falling apart. Everything is dying.

Nihilists create this aura wherever they go. Every rank of Nihilism they possess adds a necessary bang to any Magic risk. That is, if a Nihilist is present, you need a number of bangs equal to his rank in Nihilism to gain even a single success.

Nihilists can also use their Magic to kill the bangs in Magic Items. Every bang they get while targeting the Item kills a bang in the Item.

Existential Nihilism

What's more, Existential Nihilists (Nihilists who also have the French Gift) can use their Magic to cancel out an opponent's bang. Whenever you cast Magic directly at a Nihilist, he draws cards as well. Any bang a Nihilist gets devours a bang their opponent gains.

Daemonic Traits

Wizards call Nihilists “greyfaces.” That’s because Nihilists’ faces turn ashen grey. They lose their eyes, their noses and their mouths until their faces are just blank sheets of grey.

The Shadow Watch

A player who wants to take the role of a Shadow Watch can do so, but he should know that he will never have access to the standard curriculum. He won’t ever be able to cast spells. He will, on the other hand, have access to abilities the other players do not have. He will stand alone. He has the Sight, but cannot channel the energies from the Shadowrealm.

Use the same procedure for creating a wizard character, however, there are a couple of important changes.

Shadow Watch characters completely skip **Step 5**. They have no access to those classes. They have a different set of classes.

Shadow Watch may only take Electives, but as Freshmen, they are required to take one class...

WUSU

“Wusu” (properly known as “wusuobùneng gōngfu” or “无所不能功夫” or “Arcane Asskicking” by the students who learn it) is a secret martial art taught only to the Shadow Watch. It is not only a fighting system, but a method of physical perfection. Through Chongfen, the Shadow Watch are capable of incredible physical feats. A Shadow Watch can survive falls up to ten times their own height, leap twelve feet into the air and move faster than the eye can see and suffer injuries that would kill a mortal man. They can dodge bullets, run up walls, suspend themselves from the corners of ceilings for hours at a time. If you’ve seen it in an action movie (East or West), the students of Chongfen can do it.

Because of their physical training, the Shadow Watch refuse to use weapons. Practitioners of

Chongfen view wielding a weapon as a sign of weakness, using only their bodies to defend the wizards of the Academy.

When using Chongfen against any other character who is not trained in the art (a character using Wrestling, Arcane Athletics or Weapons), the user of Chongfen gains **three bonus cards**. When two characters who have been trained in Chongfen, face off neither gains bonus cards.

Chongfen also allows Shadow Watch characters to attack insubstantial creatures and negates any bonuses an invisible creature might gain.

Can Shadow Watch use Magic Items?

Shadow Watch characters can only use magic items that do not target them. Otherwise, yes. Here’s an example: a Shadow Watch character can sit on a flying carpet, but cannot command it. If a wizard casts a sphere of protection around himself and his guardian, the sphere will not protect his guardian.

Yes, that’s a bit of hard luck, but the Shadow Watch are tough. He’ll figure out a way to survive.

Magic Resistance

Shadow Watch are chosen for a particular resilience against energies from the Shadowrealm. There is no risk for this. Shadow Watch are immune to any and all magical effects. They can walk through magic fire storms, ignore magical commands, do not see magical illusions or are otherwise affected by magic in any way.

The Oath

Here is the Circe Academy’s Oath that every student speaks every morning at breakfast, every noon at lunch and every night at dinner. The

first time a student takes the Oath, his picture appears on his student ID.

I (insert name here) do solemnly and devoutly swear that I shall use my gifts and abilities to help and heal and hinder all those who would cause harm.

Furthermore, I swear I shall never use my gifts to cause undo injury or suffering, but shall only raise my hand in self-defense.

I shall stand as an example to others. I shall protect those who cannot protect themselves.

When I find those in pain, I shall bring them relief.

When I find those who are afraid, I shall bring them courage. When I find those lost in dark, I shall carry the light.

So I do swear.

Extra Credit

While running *Eldritch High*, my players—who are used to games that reward creative thinking, entertaining scenes, etc.—lamented on the lack of such a mechanic in this game.

I quickly adopted a bonus point mechanic I called “extra credit.” I gave out points here and there for good behavior, great roleplaying, etc.

Each extra credit point is worth one bonus card or one Homework Point. Players can use them as they wish.

Discards & Draws

This is another mechanic I discovered during playtest. One of the players asked if they could discard from their deck for the opportunity to narrate a fact into the scene. I told them, “Sure. Discard five cards and you can add a fact to the scene.”

This inspired a mini-system involving drawing and discarding and shuffling the deck. Discarding five cards from your deck removes possibilities. You may discard aces or face cards. At the same time, you want to pull cards from your discard pile—aces and face cards—back into your deck for the opportunity to use them again.

Players can use a point of extra credit to draw three cards back into their deck. Players can pick the cards they want but have to re-shuffle their deck.

Also, whenever a player uses a Fumble, he can re-shuffle his discard pile back into his deck.

Demerits

And then rose the question of making Demerits a real mechanic in the game. Not just something that got written down on your character sheet, but something that *affected* your character as well. So, I came up with this.

When a student receives his first Demerit, he takes all the Aces out of his deck.

When a student receives his second Demerit, he takes all the face cards out of his deck.

When he receives his third Demerit, he is expelled from the Academy.



Playtesting Notes

While playtesting the game, I let players define a lot of Circe's. Everything they came up with, I'm throwing in here at the end. While the notes are incomplete, they represent Extra Credit the players spent to define the kind of Circe's Academy they wanted to play in.

The Students

I had a ton of players show up for the playtests I ran. Here's a few of the characters. Please note that the formats for their character descriptions are not the same. At first, I thought about formatting them so they would match, but then I reconsidered. They are listed here as the players listed them. They highlight different areas, write down different information and some spend Extra Credit on things the others did not (like roommates, for example). I liked that each character had his or her own... character. Enjoy!

Paul Levesque (Player: Fabien Badilla)

Stereotype

Cool French foreign exchange student.

Appearance

- Charming smile
- Messy hair
- No left ear

How did he gain sight?

He got lost in a dream after going through his grandfather's portable alchemical powder kit. A Shadow started whispering things in his ear. Paul's mother banished the Shadow with Alchemy but the Shadow took Paul's ear along with it.

Gift

French

Prodigy

Alchemy

Classes

- Alchemy
- Shapeshifting
- Wards
- Games and Puzzles

Dorm

Fogg Hall

Roommate

Josh Hammond (Shadowguard; small guy; his sister is the hottest girl in school)

Ilya Vynnchenko (Player: Luther Belk)

From

Ukraine

When did you gain the sight?

After getting a concussion while wrestling.

What do you look like?

- Short and wide
- Doesn't tolerate bullies
- Black hair and green eyes

Stereotype

Average Student. The Compassionate Jock.

Courses

- Alchemy: 1
- (Prodigy) Shape Shifting: 1
- Wards: 1
- (Elective) Music: 1

Gift

Dwarven Blood

Colleen O'Connor
(Player: Jessica Kauspedas)

Hall

Hinrichs Hall

Stereotype

Weird kid

Familiar

Bee Swarm (carries hive with her)

Look Like

- Bed head black haircut with yellow highlights that looks like I had hacked it with a pair of scissors, bits of red roots showing.
- Always wearing Vibrantly colored clothes.
- Big Clunky Boots

Classes

- Games & Puzzles
- Bewitchment
- Crafts
- Wards

Prodigy

Bewitchment

Calaban "Cal" Straun
(Player: Ben Woerner)

Concept

4th Generation English student from Hong Kong

Gained Sight

Born with the Sight

Appearance

- Young British Gentleman in gray three piece suit

Hall

Circe's Hall

Classes

- Chongfen Jiechu Mofa - Siefu Kage
- Spycraft
- Games and Puzzles
- History

Gift

Wealthiest Family

Kalian "Kali" Pearson
(Player: Gillian Fraser)

Stereotype

The Rebel

From

Edinburgh

Awakening

Was in underground cities of Edinburgh. Was fooling around and tapped on some glass. Saw writing on walls. Felt compelled to touch writing on the wall. The writing read "Do not tap on glass", and a demon attacked her.

What she looks like:

- Four Scars running from forearm to fingers on right arm
- Bright Blue Eyes
- Always wears big earrings

Classes

- Bewitchment
- Craft (Prodigy)
- Shape shifting
- History

Gift

Numerologist

Dorm

Fraser Court

Weapons

Fraser Court Dagger

Cassandra Fairfeather
(Player: Charlotte James)

Stereotype

"Neo Hippy"

From

Canada

Awakening

She was at summer camp. It was a rainy night and her cabin mates decided to use a Ouija

Board. When she used it she saw through the veil and was awoken

What she looks like:

- Blond/Red/Brown Dread Locks
- Flip Flops
- Silver Eyes

Classes

- Divination (Prodigy)
- Craft
- Shape shifting (one practice point)
- Herbology

Gift

Familiar - Ferret

Dorm

Hindrix Hall (Colors: Purple and Green)

The way she came to the school

Doorway in a Coffee Wifi Bar

Other Notes

- Vegetarian (but not Vegan)
- Parents are rich but give most of their money away and live simple hippy lives for the most part
- Only child

Mark Dallas

(Player: Chris James)

Stereotype

“The Jock”

From

Texas

Awakening

While playing football and demon attack as Mark made the winning touch down. He was the only one who could see the creature and that is how he got the scars on his face.

What he looks like

- Dirty Blond Hair
- Athletic Build
- 3 claw marks across face

Classes

- “Arcane Asskicking” (he don’t call it that foreign word)
- Student Council
- Psychology
- Spywork

Gift

Giant Blood

Dorm

Savage Hall (Red and Black)

The Faculty

I was fortunate enough to have each player pick a different Prodigy. Because of that, I let each player name and then say three things about the professor in charge of their Prodigy. This is what I got.

Wards

Dan was our Wards Prodigy and when I asked him to give a name and say three things about the Wards professor, he only gave the name.

“Egg Shen.”

Of course, he was invoking the Greatest Movie Ever Made: *Big Trouble in Little China*. He didn’t want someone who was *like* Egg Shen, he didn’t want someone who *said* he was Egg Shen, he wanted *Egg Shen*.

Be careful what you ask for.

Crafts

The Crafts Professor is Eleanor Schmidt. Schmidt is best known for her maul, which she calls, “Due Diligence.” No student has ever seen her with a wand. Only the maul.

She also wears a leather apron, although no student (or faculty member, for that matter) knows what kind of leather it was made from. Yes, there are blood stains on the apron.

And finally, for some unknown reason, there are many (apparently harmless) doppelgangers on the campus who like to pretend they are Professor Schmidt. Perhaps they were created by the Professor herself and keep a track on the students. Nobody knows for certain.

Alchemy

The Alchemy Professor is a jerk. He’s mean, he’s cruel and he doesn’t care if you pass or fail. The highest praise he has given anyone is, “That was adequate.” And he doesn’t give it often.

He is also the grandfather of Paul Laveque—see *The Students*, above—and as cruel and heartless as he is to other students, he is doubly so with his grandson.

Shape Shifting

Nobody calls her “Ms” or “Professor.” Call her “Lady Bast.”

While her skills at shape shifting are beyond the imaginings of students, her preferred form gives her the features of a feral cat. Sometimes, she even runs the class in complete feline form. She is the newest faculty member—some say she got the job through less than honorable means—and she insists that all her classes take place at night. In the courtyard. Under the moon.

Divination

Professor Virgil Atolian is one of the most beloved Professors on the campus. He is young, handsome and goes out of his way to encourage the young freshmen. His favored means of forecasting the future is with cards—tarot or

standard. He does not use his gift often, knowing the dangers of looking forward, but when he does, he is never wrong.

Bewitchment

The dazzling and enigmatic Professor Thon (first name, Sidney) is quite a puzzle for the students and the faculty. Boys see a dazzling blonde female when they look upon the Professor. Women see a handsome older man with crystal blue eyes and a disarming, but rakish, smile. But when Professor Thon is present, nobody can describe what the Professor looks like...

Thon likes lurking around the campus in various guises—including a janitor named “Herb” and a plain-looking freshman named “Eleanor”—listening in on conversations. But there is one identifying feature that’s always present: Thon always wears a ring in the shape of a cat wrapped around his/her finger.

Shadow Watch

Shadow Watch students have the honor of serving under a man who calls himself “Kage.” (Pronounced *kah-gay*.) He looks as ancient as a mountain... and anyone who tests him will soon learn he is as strong as one. He wears a necklace made from the teeth of every creature he has ever killed. (It wraps around his neck five times.)

He belittles the students, pushing them to the point of blood, pain and injury. He is relentless, ruthless... and compassionate to what he calls “honest pain.” Not the temporary pain of broken finger bones or wrists or bleeding lips, but the loss of a family member. He detests weakness and seeks to “purge it” from his student’s blood.

The Building not on the Map

For the playtest sessions, I came up with an improvised “adventure.” I had a single phrase in mind: “The Building Not on the Map.”

When my players went wandering around the campus after dark—sneaking after curfew—they came across a building that was not on their little “Welcome to the Campus!” maps. It looked like an old Southern plantation house. Of course, being precocious teenagers who just learned they can perform magic, they walked right in.

One of them spent extra credit to say that there was a legend of a “veiled hall” on the campus that only appeared under specific circumstances. He also knew that four students wandered into the house never returned.

Another student knew that the place was called “The House of Forbidden Doors” and that doors in the house led to different worlds.

The “adventure” involved the following elements:

A closet filled with hanging coats and jackets that seems to go on forever. The further they walked into the darkness, they felt a growing fear. Eventually, my players turned around... and found themselves standing as if they had only taken a single step into the closet.

They found evidence that the place may have indeed been the “lost sixth hall,” with a banner with a lion rampant. The colors were too faded to identify.

In the kitchen, they found a meat cleaver with fresh blood on the blade. One of them picked up the hatchet and found themselves possessed by a spirit of a weeping woman. She saw one of the other students, shouted the name “Thomas!” and attacked the student. As soon as she drew blood, the cleaver dropped to the floor and the spirit departed. Another student tried picking up the cleaver but was also possessed. Again, he attacked another student with the meat cleaver.

My players decided that as soon as the cleaver had bled five injuries (the total injuries from two attacks), the spirit of the weeping woman manifested, picked up the cleaver and began attacking the students. They survived the attack by fleeing from the building, finding themselves back on the campus just before dawn.

Ninety percent of this “adventure” was player generated. The details I listed above came from my players adding details. All I did was throw them “The House Not on Your Map” hook. They provided both the line and the sinker. Give your players the same trust and you should get similar results.

