in this garden inmemorial

In This Garden Inmemorial
by some guy named Andrew

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Foreword

This is a TTRPG system intended to create one-shot adventures in a style akin to old, almost formulaic stories like mythological tales, fables, Tolkien fantasy, and fairy tales.

What drew me to this theme was that, after playing many original fantasy settings, I was interested in doing something basic and to return to fundamentals. I was also interested in these highly constrained narrative situations. My favorite example is Oedipus Rex. Oedipus is doomed by prophecy within the story, but he is also metatextually doomed because his story was culturally ubiquitous at the time, and so the audience already knew the ending. Hence the goal of this game is to tell a story where the ending is already fixed and where the meat of the game comes from figuring out how to get there.

I also wanted to address a personal issue that there are no systems that are good for teaching people how to roleplay. I wanted the system to saliently address a few fundamentals of roleplay and group improvisation by codifying them into the rules of the game, and then leaving everything else as simple and abstract as possible to not distract from these fundamentals. This was another reason for picking classic fantasy as the theme—I wanted to create a game where people could focus on their improvisation without fear of being uncreative or unoriginal.

I think the most stand out part of this game's design philosophy is that it is written to be collectivist; it deemphasizes player individuality in order to emphasize group storytelling, improv, and player interplay. The system also more explicitly divides the "burden of writing" among the four players and the Game Master; again, to emphasize group storytelling and improv, and to avoid overburdening the Game Master as frequently happens.

I can see myself using this system to try to teach new role players how to. I can also see it as a nice way for seasoned role players to run a bite-sized adventure.

<div align="right">– Andrew</div>

Overview

In This Garden Inmemorial is an adventure game where the fate of the adventure has already been fixed by prophecy, and the players must reverse engineer the events that take them there.

A group of five players will collaborate to tell a five arc adventure by improvising and acting out events to discover how they fulfill their prophesied fate. Four players fill four character archetypes—the EVERYMAN, the SCOP, the WIZARD, and the KNIGHT—who act as the story's major movers and shakers. A fifth player acts as the POWERS THAT BE who referees the game and controls the story's enemies where necessary.

The players then play through a series of arcs, each of which has a predestined fate that describes how the arc will conclude. Progress toward this fate is tracked by a clock, which the players progress by PUSHING and spending VIM.

SCOPE helps players quickly compare objects of mythological scale.

Game Systems

Vim and Scarring

VIM represents a character's life, stamina, mana, and general capacity to succeed and to keep pushing forward.

Players start with 20 vim, represented by a bar with 20 slots:

When a player performs an action where there is a possibility of failure, she should roll a d20 to determine if the action succeeds or fails. The player succeeds if they roll less than their current vim.

Whenever a player loses vim by pushing, taking damage, or because the POWERS THAT BE willed it, that player must mark off slots as USED on the vim bar. This represents the character growing weaker.

Pushing

Players can decide before rolling if they will PUSH to increase the success cutoff for an action. General actions have a maximum of PUSH 1, but some abilities allow characters to push more at once. Pushed vim is USED (*after* determining whether the roll succeeds).

Complications

When rolling:
- On a success, the player's desired outcome occurs.
- On a failure, there is a complication. The player should discuss with the powers that be and create a complication related to the failed roll (perhaps an unintended outcome, or the reason for failure in the first place). If the player pushed, then the consequences are dire.

Rest/Scarring

After each arc, the player characters rest. They must SCAR half the vim used in that arc then SCAR 1 additional vim. They then recoup all remaining vim. SCARRED vim is permanently marked off on the vim bar, inaccessible for the remainder of the adventure.

Example Vim

A character who has scarred 7 vim and used 3. This character only succeeded a check if they roll under 9, and would scar 2 when resting: (todo graphic)

A character who has scarred 2 vim and used 6. This character only succeeded a check if they roll under 12, and would scar 4 when resting: (todo graphic)

Scope

SCOPE is a way to generally define, compare, and contextualize the scale of something. Scale in fantasy is often whimsical or inconsistent; this system puts that into context.
- Can Mjornir punch a hole in a building or an entire mountain?
- Do the Seven League Boots let one travel as fast as a horse or like the wind?

See the Scope Reference Table ahead.

The Course of Play

This game is played over several phases.
- Player safety
- Arc 1: Prologue
- Arc 2
- Arc 3
- Arc 4
- Arc 5: Climax

Player safety

- Use a system like veils and lines.
  - At the very least, give players an opportunity to ban sensitive topics and dark themes.
- Agree on a tone ie. g, pg, teen, M.

Prologue

This phase is for establishing the broad strokes of the adventure and character creation.
- Decide among the group what kind of adventure should happen.
  - This should include the ultimate fate of the adventure. This establishes the ending that everything else is building to. Record this as the fate of Arc 5.

    The fate can contain details that don't yet make sense. Give specific names to places or people if they appear in the fate. This establishes how the adventure ends and what all other events are working toward. e.g. the One Ring is cast into the fiery maw of a volcano; Arthur becomes king of the Britons.

- Create characters.
  - Divide archetypes among players and do archetype prologue setup (see EVERYMAN, KNIGHT, SCOP, WIZARD)
  - Pick a KIN
- The SCOP then communes with the POWERS THAT BE and prophesies the fates of the remaining arcs. This establishes major beats of the story leading up to the climax. For example: Excalibur is found, Olgog Temple is destroyed, the heroes escape the world labyrinth. The SCOP is encouraged to make up proper nouns and names for things.

Arcs

There are five arcs, starting with the Prologue and ending with the Climax.

Setting the Scene

To begin each arc, the POWERS THAT BE set the scene.

Each player then suggests at least one reason why the arc's fate is hard to achieve (the presence of defences, powers, geographic interference, various complications).

This both establishes the states and populates the arc with details.

Fate

Each arc has a fate that must be reached before the player may move on to the next arc. The SCOP and POWERS THAT BE divine this fate.

Table 1: Scope Reference

	Scope 0	Scope 1	Scope 2	Scope 3	Scope 4	Scope 5
People	Zero	One	Small Group	Crowd	A Huge Croud	Thousands of People
Distance	Touch	Arms Reach	Shouting Distance	Across Town	Visual Range	Over the Horizon
Area	Handspan	Personal	Entire Room	Whole Building	A Town	A Forest
Size	Fist	Man Sized	Large Beast	Building	Hill	A Mountain
Speed	Snail's Pace	A Fast Sprint	Horse	Hawk	Wind	Lightning
Magnitude	Minute	Small	Noticeable	Large	Massive	Overwhelming

Progress toward that fate is represented by a clock with $10 +$ Arc Number slices. That is, Arc 2 has $10 + 2$ slices, Arc 3 has $10 + 3$, and so on.

The fate is achieved after the clock is filled.

Players can only fill the clock by PUSHING, which represents a character extending herself to achieve her goals. Increment the clock for each push. That is, PUSHING x increments the clock by x.

Player Characters

The Powers that Be

A player should act as the POWERS THAT BE. They will referee the game and control the story's enemies where necessary. They will also work with the SCOP, who needs to divine the fate of the story.

For those familiar with table-top roleplaying, this player may be recognized as the Game Master role.

Kin

Your kin can be of Mankind or Magickind. (todo:)
- Mankind
  - ‣ Human
    - Your people are known for [ropemaking, silver work].
    - You have [number] family members.
    - To represent your clan, you always wear a [red shash, green beret, gold thread].
    - You have always wanted to [].
  - ‣ Hobbit
    - You collect [].
    - You believe the best thing in life is [].
    - You have a terrible fear of [].
    - You cannot be without [].
- Magickind
  - ‣ Fae
    - You are made of [concrete noun]
    - You are the embodiment of [abstract noun]
    - You are defeated by [iron, running water, washing hands].
    - You are bound by the fae court such that you cannot [run, jump, turn left]
  - ‣ Dwarf

- More than anything, you covet [valuable noun].
- You cannot stand [subject of ire].
- You are most proud of [accomplishment].
- You have never been beaten at [feat]

Archetypes

Archetypes are characterized on two axes: Ignoble vs. Noble and Mundane vs. Magic:

- Everyman
  - ‣ Someone ordinary and relatable thrust into adventure (not necessarily a generic person; think Frodo).
  - ‣ The most important character.
  - ‣ Characterized by their **Relationships**.
- Knight
  - ‣ (todo)
- Scop
  - ‣ A mystical prophetic storyteller (somewhere between a bard and a cleric).
  - ‣ The most influential character.
  - ‣ Characterized by their **Fates**.
- Wizard
  - ‣ A wielder of overwhelming power (Gandalf).
  - ‣ The most capable character.
  - ‣ Characterized by their **Scope**.

Everyman

Art by Jan Pospisil

The EVERYMAN is someone ordinary and relatable thrust into adventure (though, not necessarily a generic person—think Frodo). They are the most important character, and are characterized by their **Relationships**.

Prologue

Assign each of the other archetypes an appropriate relationship with the Everyman. e.g. that archetype is the Everyman's mentor, old friend, rival, idol, etc.

Passives

The Hero's Journey

The Everyman must play the hand that is dealt to them.

Actions

Teamwork

PUSH 3 and describe how you and another character work together to attempt something.

Heart

When you feel that another player has done a good job role-playing or has acted in a way aligning with their relationship, you may SCAR 2 of your vim and UNUSE two of that player's VIM. You may do this for each character once per arc.

Knight

Illustration by Jan Pospisil

The KNIGHT is a pretty cool dude. Yeah, he just chills out, man. (todo)

Actions

Know Thy Enemy

Knights are clever. PUSH 2 and reveal something about your enemy. Any action that interacts with the revealed fact has +1 push cap

Examples: trolls are vulnerable to fire; the floor of the labyrinth has an imperceptible slope that can guide you to the exit; the enemy general is hot headed.

Lay of the Land

Knights are resourceful. PUSH 2 and reveal something about the area you are in or the people who live in it. Any action that interacts with the revealed fact has +1 push cap.

Examples: These rolling planes have sinkholes; the people of the village to the north are known for their woodcraft; there is a fallen tree around the back of the encampment that could be used to scale the wall; the storehouse contains explosive red barrels.

> Prologue
> Decide what kind of people you come from. What were they known for? What must the knight live up to?

Scop

The SCOP is a mystical prophetic storyteller, somewhere between a bard and a cleric. They are the most influential character, and are characterized by their **Fates**.

> Prologue
> Start thinking about FORETELL FATE.

Actions

Foretell Fate

At the start of each scene, after difficulties are suggested, the Scop communes with the POWERS THAT BE and declares three fated events that bring about the arc's fate. Any action that fulfills an event fills 1 extra CLOCK slice.

Examples: legendary items needed, "eating your tables", what the trials are, what fated events occur.

Boast

PUSH 2 to boast: choose from one of the actions below.

Weird Weather

Control the weather.

Examples: Summon a haunting fog, halt a terrible storm, call a mighty wind.

Ward Space

Draw a warding Rune to contain or abjure.

Examples: seal a spirit in a tomb, dispel magic, erect a magical shield, turn the undead
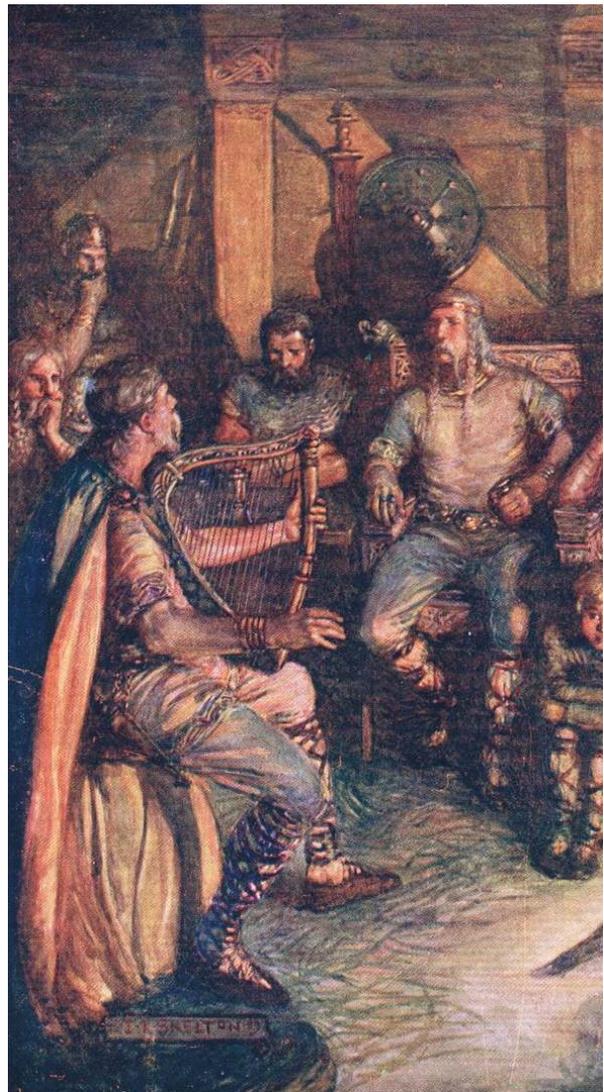
See Truth

Drink deep and descend to see what others cannot.

Examples: read the thoughts of the week willed, view far off places.

Spin Illusion

Only fools fall for illusions, and men are fools.

Examples: Make a dark forest seem to close in, summon a terrifying visage, illusory dragon.

"A minstrel sings of famous deeds", c. 1910, by Joseph Ratcliffe Skelton, in *English Literature for Boys and Girls*

Wizard

The WIZARD is a wielder of overwhelming power (think Gandalf). They are the most capable character, and are characterized by their **Scope**.

Actions

Make Final
The wizard has the final say in all matters and can magically intervene to guarantee events.

Once per adventure, magically intervene to change a failure to a success, but you can no longer PUSH when casting spells.

Cast Spell
Pick one of the spells below.

Without pushing, the spell will produce an effect with scope equal to your CHARACTERISTIC SCOPE.

You can cast an especially powerful or precise spell by PUSHING X. Increase or decrease the SCOPE of the spell effect by 1 step for each push.

Describe your desired effect. This can be anything. Immediately SCAR any VIM used to push the spell.

Will Elements
Command one of the 6 elements in the world around you: Fire, Water, Stone, Lightning, Wind, Wood

Examples: Call a storm, Smite the wicked, Extinguish a fire, open a rift in the ground, Freeze water.

Mutate Matter
Transmute an object, person, etc.

Examples: Make them bigger, smaller, blue, heal, a frog, animate a teapot, etc

Bestow Ability
Grant a supernatural boon to another.

Examples: Flight, Bull Strength, Protection from wounds and bloodloss.