

# *Archipelago*



*Matthijs Holter*



# ABOUT ARCHIPELAGO

Archipelago is a story/role-playing game where each player controls a major character. Player take turns directing and playing out a part of their character's story, leading them towards their selected point of destiny, while other players interact with and influence that story.

## Who is this game for?

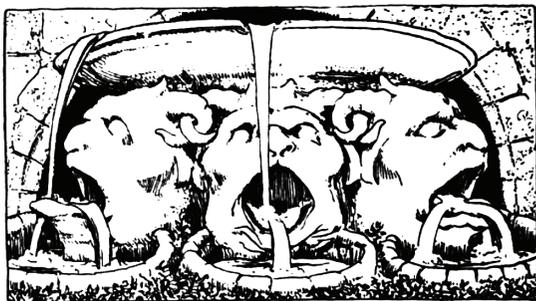
If you like the story-telling part of games, and enjoy the creative challenge and inspiration that comes from working with others, this game is for you. If you like tactical mechanics, resource management, or player-vs-player competition, there are other games that might work better for you.

## The vibe I'm aiming for

I wrote this game trying to capture the feeling of Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* books. I wanted a game of grand destinies, that at the same time had time to dwell on the details of plants, words, everyday lives. I wanted a game that was about great conflicts, but at the same time treated its characters' stories with respect. I wanted not a steel framework, but a spider web of thin threads creating subtler stories.

This game works best if you play it slow. Sometimes, the best thing to do is wait a little and see how things unfold. Ged stayed with Ogion for years, learning about the old language, the names of flower petals and bugs. There's time to let the characters evolve.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Take your time.



## Third edition

By Matthijs Holter

Layout and editing by Jason Morningstar

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The global players: Chris Bennett, Robert Earley-Clark, Willem Larsen, Chris Peterson. I'm glad these people picked up my game, played it, and talked to me about it; they helped me shape the game into something that, hopefully, works for everyone.



## WHAT PLAY IS LIKE

If you're dissatisfied with something that another player narrates, because you don't think it fits into the story, you can tell that player: *Try a different way.*

If another player narrates something you'd like to hear about, you can say *Describe that in detail.*

If another player narrates something you'd like to add more dramatic tension to, you can say *That might not be quite so easy.*

If you want to maintain a scene's intensity and others are avoiding it, you can say *Harder.*

If you are stumped or out of inspiration, you can say *Help.*

Finally, if you have a small episode you want to narrate right after another player finishes narrating, you can say *I'd like an interlude after that.*



On your turn, you'll set up and direct a scene where you narrate the actions and thoughts of your character. All the players (both you and the others) will narrate the other parts of the fiction – for example, the actions of other characters, descriptions of the environment, events beyond your character's control etc. Since it's your scene, you should help activate the other players, and get them to help you make the sort of story you like. Ask them to play specific characters, control certain events etc.

At the start of the session, you'll have chosen a point of destiny written for your character by another player. This is an event that your character will experience during this session. You'll be guiding your character's story toward that point, with the help of the other players.

On your turn, you can draw a Fate card if you want some random input in your story. This card will then be interpreted by another player. In addition, there are some things you can always do, no matter who's turn it is.

Some players have ownership of certain elements of the fiction – such as magic, geography and culture. That means they have a limited veto power when these things are mentioned in narration. In addition, they'll be making up random events about these things when they're asked to interpret Fate cards.



# SETTING UP THE GAME

The first time you play, you'll need to do two things: Define the setting and create your characters. The setting you define as a group; characters are created individually, but you will want to talk to each other while creating them – to get feedback, to make sure you're more or less on the same page, and just for fun.

You should decide on one of two options for defining the setting: Either use an existing one, or define something new.

## Using an existing setting

If you're using an existing setting, you should find a map for that setting and place it on the table. Talk about the setting a little bit – what's cool about it? How does it all work, again?

Set the game in a time or place that's not thoroughly defined in the setting. You want some space to explore and invent new places, people and cultures.

Decide what elements of the setting are central, and need someone to take ownership of them – someone who can say what fits and what doesn't.

You might want to set the game in a time period a few hundred years before the events described in the books. Otherwise, you'd easily end up just retelling the stories of the books' major characters Ged and Tenar, and having to make your stories fit in with theirs.

It's often a good idea to expand the setting a little, to help the group feel more invested in the setting. As you do when defining a new setting, you can create new islands with names and descriptions.

In Ursula LeGuin's *Earthsea* books, areas of ownership might be magic, culture and geography. If a player narrates something that's completely at odds with the books' descriptions of magic, someone should have the power to say: *That's just not right.*



"I like to use a white-board and color markers for drawing our map. We keep updating as we play!"—*Mark Causey*



"The Map is more important that it seems. Your game's geography is the primary structure the other pieces work within."—*Remi Treuer*



## Defining a new setting

You decide to go for a science fiction setting where your spaceship has crashed on a foreign planet that's almost completely covered in water, and your characters only know a few islands. You decide that the areas of ownership are geography, technology, culture – and the submarine environment, which you have a feeling may become important later.

The group names a few islands - Big Nose, Cedaal, Pariolish, six more. One of the oceans is declared the Silvery Ocean. Someone says Cedaal is where you crashed; it has big cities, shining like the sun. You say "Yes, at night it's the only visible island – all the others are dark".

Someone else says "Everyone there looks like little green men". You don't like that, so you say "Try a different way". They say "People there look like humans, only slightly taller and darker".

You say "Shining cities... Describe that in detail". The player describes how the city is based on subterranean generators, and the buildings are some sort of organic crystalline structure.



"Archipelago works well for almost any setting idea you might come up with. We've played science fiction, urban high weirdness, all sorts of things. My favorite setting was contemporary Moscow, from the perspective of Watership-Down-inspired stray dogs!"—  
*Jason Morningstar*



Talk about what sort of setting you want. High fantasy or science fiction are suitable genres, though if you want to experiment with other genres, go ahead.

Decide what elements of the setting are central, and need someone to take ownership of them – someone who can say what fits and what doesn't. This is to make sure that the setting has integrity, that there's a unifying vision for these elements. Decide who owns what. Ownership is a responsibility, so make sure the right people own the right things.

Grab a big piece of paper to draw a map on. To begin with, this map will help you get a common vision of the setting – it's a dramatic focus. Later, you'll be using it to mark where the characters are. The map will affect, and will be affected by, the Fate cards you draw during the game.

Those who want to draw, get a pen or pencil and start drawing locations. You should draw at least five locations, more if you're going to play more than one session. Leave some space on the side of the map for noting down names of characters that appear during the game.

Give the locations names. Name other things on the map, too – oceans, currents, winds, villages, star clusters, deserts...

Give a few short descriptions of some of the locations. Provide one or two details, but make sure a lot is undefined and open for exploration.

During this stage of the game, the usual rules for narration apply except "That might not be quite so easy". That means anyone can say "Try a different way" or "Describe that in detail". It also means players with ownership can try to veto things.

## CREATING CHARACTERS

You should each think about what sort of character you want to play. Think out loud! Find out where your character comes from, and describe a few people that are important to them or their story. You should have the start of a story in mind; don't create characters that will just stay in one place and do nothing. Remember that these characters will be bearers of destiny; they're figures of note, major players, fated for greatness or tragedy. They might start out small and insignificant, or mighty and powerful, but they'll be in the center of events.

Each character should have an indirect relationship to at least one other character. An indirect relationship means both characters are emotionally tied to a third character, event, place or other element. These ties must be meaningful and strong to your character. You can figure this out for each character in turn, or after some or all the characters are done, but you must have the relationships in place before the game begins.

If there's a central conflict in the session – a major feud between factions, a war, a race for a sacred object – it's a good idea to have an indirect relationship through that. These conflicts tend to come into play, and characters who are involved tend to become central to the story.

For many, it's helpful to have a list of names that can be used for secondary characters during the game. Write such a list together – about ten male and ten female names should help you get started.



You're playing in the *Earthsea* setting. You want a character that has been mighty, but has fallen. He's called Albiorth. You tell the group, and another player suggests that your character has been ostracized – thrown off his island of birth. You go with the idea, and tell the group that your character was rich and powerful, but had many enemies. Now he's alone in a boat, and very, very angry.



Herran has been struggling to become a Daughter of the Church. That's a good flag – anything to do with that struggle should bring interesting play. You note it down as a flag. Herran also has a pet bird; perhaps not so much story material, so you don't note that down as a flag.



After talking with the others a bit, you decide that Albiorth was ostracized by his brother – who's married to Herran, one of the other characters. Albiorth and Herran now have an indirect relationship. Herran participated in the Theocratic Revolution in her youth; another character, Pelk, was badly hurt in that same revolution. Herran and Pelk now have an indirect relationship. Take some time to think about the other characters. Note down a few flags you've noticed – things about their personality or history that seem to say "play me out!" These are excellent for when you write destiny points later.



## STARTING THE SESSION

You're playing with two others – one plays a young boy looking for his brother at sea; the other plays an old necromancer. For the first character you write down “He finds his brother dying of thirst in the West Reaches”. For the second you write “He opens the portal to the Land of the Dead”.



You're playing Albiorth, an ostracized, wealthy man. The others suggest “He finds an ancient pirate treasure” and “He returns to wreak terrible revenge on his town of birth”. You choose the second destiny point. For example, if another player had the lost brother as a character, the destiny point “He finds his brother dying of thirst in the West Reaches” would have to be approved by both players – otherwise, the player would have to choose another destiny point.



In your third scene, Albiorth disembarks on a small, barren island and meets a little girl. In an earlier scene, another player described how this girl was the carrier of a horrible disease. Albiorth is supposed to “wreak terrible revenge on his town of birth” - so you narrate how he takes the girl with him on a small boat and sails toward the town that ostracized him. His plan is to infect them with the disease.



Each session, before you start playing, you each need a destiny point for your character. This is an event that will occur in the life of the character – something dramatic, significant, perhaps something that changes their life.

You'll create destiny points for each other. Everyone writes down one destiny point for each of the other players' characters – so if you're playing with four other people, you'll be writing down four different destiny points, one for each of them.

These destiny points are things that would be interesting to hear about, and of some (perhaps major) importance to the character. You're free to do anything you want when writing them; after all, the player is free to ignore your destiny point if they want. Some players have called them “undiscussed creative space” - they can be used as is, or thrown away.

When everyone's done, choose one of the destiny points the other players suggested for your character. For a two- or three- player game, each player writes down three destiny points for the other player's character.

When you've chosen your destiny, write it down on a sheet of paper and fold it up so that the others can see it at all times. Alternatively, everyone can just note it down on a sheet of their own for easy reference. However you choose to do it, it's important that everyone can read your destiny point at all times.

If any of the destiny points affect more than one major character, all the players involved must agree to use it.

## USING DESTINY POINTS

The destiny point is one of the most important parts of the game. It's what keeps your stories tight, what stops them from just flowing out and ending nowhere. You know what your character's destiny is for this session – play towards it! In each scene you'll be steering your character towards their destiny, and on the third or fourth turn you play, they should face that destiny.

Other players should help you get to the destiny point – by playing relevant secondary characters, describing fitting events etc.

After your destiny point has been played out, you may choose to let your story rest for this session. If so, you still participate in the others' stories as always, but when it's your turn to portray your character, just skip your turn.

When all characters have faced their destiny points, it's probably a good time to end the session.

The best destiny points are often those that surprise and challenge the player. Here are some tips:

A destiny point might show the character from an unexpected side. For a pacifist character, "You kill three people with a found gun" is a scary and interesting destiny point. We'll all be wondering how that's going to happen.

A destiny point might kill darlings and be anticlimactic challenges. For a character who's spent two sessions looking for her long-lost father, who she believes to be a Supreme Technomancer, a destiny point saying "You find your father, who works as a shopkeeper in some anonymous suburb" would certainly be a twist. We'll be wondering how the character reacts to that.

A destiny point might give the character a chance to really shine. For a character who's been second-in-command for a long time, a destiny point saying "You prove your competence in a dramatic battle and are given command of your own special unit" would make us all cheer for the character.



# YOUR TURN

If you feel like it, you can also give more specific directions for the scene. This is entirely optional, but can be fun. My group sometimes specifies what techniques to use, or how things should be narrated. Here are some examples:

“Play out this scene as a flashback or dream sequence”.

“This scene is identical to the previous one, but seen from a different character’s viewpoint”.

“There should be no conflict at all in this scene. It’s all about being in the moment, immersing, describing”.

“In this scene, the Emperor will try to look dignified, but a series of silly accidents will make him lose face”.



On your turn, when your character is in focus, you do the following things.

## Set the stage

Describe where your character is and what’s going on. You’re the director, so make sure to ask other players to describe settings, portray specific characters etc.

The first time you play, you should pay special attention to this part. It’s easy to feel that you’re responsible for providing all the content. You’re not; you’re responsible for providing the starting structure. You don’t have to decide where you are at the start of the scene, or what happens – but you have to make sure that someone does.

## Portray your character

You control your character’s actions, thoughts and dialogue at all times. The only exception is when someone tells you *That Might Not Be Quite So Easy* – then whoever gets to narrate the outcome of the situation can narrate what your character does, and what happens to them. Nobody can say *Try A Different Way* when you narrate about your character.





## Draw a Fate card

Once each session, you can decide to draw a Fate card on your turn. These cards are for when you want or need some narrative random help – if you find your character’s story is floundering, for example, or if you think the plot you’re following needs an unexpected twist.

The Fate cards are often tied to the map, or to setting elements that someone owns (i.e., ownership). When you draw a card, you don’t look at it, but give it to someone else to interpret. Their job is to make sure fate throws you – either just your character, or all the characters – a curveball.

When someone interprets a card that talks about an owned element, that means their owned element comes into play.

## Finish the Scene

When you feel ready, you can end your turn and let the next player take their turn. It’s important to remember that nobody else can tell you when to end your turn – it’s completely up to you, so you have a lot of space and freedom to narrate in your own style and pace.

You draw a Fate card and give it to a player who has ownership of the magical weather and atmosphere. The card says “The element you own is interfering with this character’s desires, wishes or needs”. The player describes how your character, on her way to the City of Love, is picked up by a magical storm that carries her to a desert island far away. They also describe how this storm affects several other major and minor characters.



I’m starting my scene, but have no idea what to do, and the other players are looking at me expectantly. I’m going to ask for their help. “My character is in... um... Morten, where am I?”

Morten thinks for a moment, then points to the map. “You’re in the swamp, right here. You’re looking for something you dreamed about last night.”

I have no idea what my character dreamed about, but that’s okay, we’ll find out. “The swamp, okay. Monica, could you play the weird little boy that we met last session?” Monica nods. I don’t know what that boy is doing there, but again, we’ll find out. I start narrating for my character. “I’m wading through the swamp, swatting flies left and right...”



## WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Someone else says “The man who fell overboard comes out of the water again. His body is covered in blood, and he has a huge dead shark under his arm.” This is a bit over the top in your opinion, so you say “Try a different way – can we drop the shark?” The other player nods. “Okay, he comes up covered in blood. I had to fight off some sharks”, he says.”



You say “The master talks about some rituals.” Another player says: “Describe that in detail!” You say: “Okay... He says: “The water ritual that binds two people in marriage demands that they both carry a small bottle of water; spring water for the woman, well water for the man...””



“Use the phrases a lot! Look for excuses to throw them in. Use the first half-hour of play just to get to know them. This will have two added effects: The first is getting the group together, letting everyone know what's cool and what's not. The second is that all sorts of things will happen that nobody had predicted!”—  
*Matthijs Holter*



“Codifying the specific phrases players can say whenever they want to builds permission into the game in a way that brings quieter players forward. This can serve to make play more equitable, varied and fun for all the players.”—  
*Matthew Gagan*

There are some things you can always do – whether it's your turn or not. Always have these options in mind – the game relies on your participation when it's not your turn.

### *Say Try a different way*

If someone narrates something you don't think fits in the story or the situation, for whatever reason, you can say *Try A Different Way*. They then have to narrate something else – a variation on what they just said, or something completely different. You can specify exactly what you want different - “stop being silly”, for example, or “I don't want my character in jail”.

Don't be afraid to use this rule. In the beginning you might find yourself using it quite often; but after a while, when everyone starts getting a feel for what sort of narration fits in with the group's expectations, you'll probably find that you don't feel the need for this rule so much. It's a way of drawing a chalk line, saying to the other players: “This is cool, this isn't”.

### *Say Describe that in detail*

When you want to hear more about what someone just narrated, you can say *Describe That In Detail*. This is a great tool to make sure you're all telling a story together, not just throwing out a synopsis. It also gives you the opportunity to test what the group wants to hear – if you gloss over an area you're unsure about, you'll know it's important to the others if they ask you to describe details.

A great tip for describing detail is: Don't be creative. Don't try to make things up. Just pretend you're visiting the place, seeing things around you, and describe what you see. The gleam of a button on a uniform, the short yellow hair of the young, steely-eyed guard... Often it doesn't really matter what details you describe, as long as you describe something.

## Say *That Might Not Be Quite So Easy*

If there's a challenge or a conflict, you can say *That Might Not Be Quite So Easy*. This can only be done once per turn. The current player decides what the character is trying to do right now. It's good if you pose it as a question - "Can Albiorth swim across the lake?", "Can Mira convince the Emperor that the disease is deadly?", "Is Arlo able to kill the seagull that contains his wife's spirit?" Then the current player selects another player to draw a resolution card and interpret it. This is important - you never interpret a resolution card for your own character!

## Say *I'd like an interlude*

If you have something you really want to narrate, that would fit just right after the current turn has ended, you can ask for an interlude. If the group agrees, you get a minute after the current scene has ended to narrate. Make it short - it's not your turn, you're just squeezing in with a cool, brief moment!

There can't be more than one interlude scene in a row, either. When your interlude is done, the next player takes their turn.

## Say *Harder*

If you think someone's wimping out, trying to cut a scene too early to avoid tension, avoiding an obvious and cool conflict with their character, or not fulfilling the potential of a scene of horror and drama, you can say "Harder!" This means the player should be more edgy, more direct, go for the max.

Don't use this phrase if things are going well - that just gets confusing. Use it if you see something specific that needs to be done.

## Say *Help*

If you're stumped or out of inspiration, or just want some input from the others, you can always say "Help". The group will give you ideas to get you started, or to make your own ideas better.

Albiorth's player picks you to draw a resolution card. It says "Yes, and..." You decide that not only does Albiorth swim across the lake, he discovers a sunken treasure along the way. Later, Mira's player picks you to draw a resolution card. It says "No, and..." You decide that not only does the Emperor not believe Mira, he becomes so infuriated at her insolence that he sends out his soldiers to kill her family.



Mira is old and dying. The player describes how her children have abandoned her, and will probably return to take the farm once she's gone. The scene is going nowhere - it's just Mira lying there and reflecting on her fate, and it gets tedious. You say: "Harder! They're coming back right now - no chance they'll let you die in peace!" Her children enter Mira's house and start dividing up her possessions while she's gasping for breath, trying to talk to them.



It's your turn, and your character Albiorth was last seen sitting on the beach looking at passing ships. You have no idea what to do with this melancholic man, so you say "Help! I need something to happen here, but what?" One player suggests having Albiorth meet an old lover, another says the sea might rise due to mysterious forces. Combining the two, you narrate how the sea washes up Albiorth's old lover, who is barely alive. She is played by another player



"Treat your map locations and NPCs like pots and pans, don't reach for a new one if an old one works."—*Remi Treuer*

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"Don't go along with things you know are wrong for you. Whether it be jokes that destroy your immersion and the game's atmosphere, or themes that trigger strong emotional reactions in you. Use the phrases to stop that shit."—*Matthijs Holter*

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## Create or play a secondary character

You can play a suitable supporting or secondary character at any time – either because someone asks you to, or because you feel like it. The current player can say “Try a different way”, of course, which means you either change your portrayal of the character, or just play a different character. Nobody owns secondary characters – anyone can take them over at any point.

## Describe events and the environment

At any time you can narrate events, describe the surroundings, and so forth.



# OWNERSHIP

Some players have ownership of certain elements of the fiction – such as magic, geography and culture. You decide what elements require ownership when you choose or define the setting.

## Be an active owner

Everybody likes a little setting detail. When you see an opportunity to describe your element, do so. It can be as little as a sentence or a phrase, or you can draw up maps and give a short explanation of the local physics. Try to do some active ownership at least once every session.

# FATE

When you're asked to interpret a Fate card, that card might ask you to narrate something about the element you own. You're free to interpret this as you want.

# VETO

If someone narrates something that you disagree with within an element you own, you can veto their narration. This is something you can do for example if the narration contradicts existing knowledge, if it dilutes your vision of the element, or if it changes the element in a way you don't think works.

You're free to discuss the veto with the other players, if you want; however, the final decision is yours, and yours alone, and you don't need to explain it to the group if you don't want to. Just say "no, sorry, I'm vetoing that", and go on with the game.

When playing in the *Earthsea* setting, the group decided that magic, geography and culture all required ownership. You define magic as the Balance, the Pattern, dragons, Pelnish lore, witch magic, weather magic – all those things. Geography covers the map, the islands, weather, plants and animals of the Archipelago. Culture is defined as literature, music, history – and also hierarchies, societal norms and rules.



A Fate card says "An unbalance or disharmony appears in your element. It might seem small or large; it might not be what it seems." Your element is Geography. You decide this means that there's a tremor in one of the central islands, shaking the houses and frightening the goats. What this will lead to later... we don't know yet.



Another player narrates how a young goatherd throws an enormous fireball at a pirate ship. You say "Veto. That just doesn't feel right. Who taught him that?" Note that a veto is different from saying "Try a different way". A veto shouldn't be used just to reflect your personal taste in narration and plot – it's meant to make sure that the integrity of the setting is intact. It's a responsibility you have toward the group.



## IMPORTANT TECHNIQUES

To make the game work, the players should understand and use the following techniques during play. These are mostly basic skills for improvisation and group storytelling.

Someone says: "Your character trips over a rock and starts tumbling down the hill!" You answer: "Yes, and while he's rolling, his shoulder strikes a rock hard. He yells out in pain."

You're not sure what happens after the tumble, so you say: "Um, ideas, anyone?" One of the players says: "A young man says, 'Are you hurt, master?' He helps you get up. His eyes have no irises." Suddenly you have something to work on.



"You may be scared at first to say too much in someone else's scene but contribute, provide opposition and challenges for their character - they can always use 'try another way' to re-direct your input. This is better than them having insufficient material to work with."—*Rob Brennan*



"It's less important to find elements of Ownership that are totally equal in power, than it is to find elements that the owning players really care to control."—*Chris Bennett*



**Accept input.** When someone says "such and such happens", always try to accept it into your narration. If you're not sure how to do this, start your answer with "yes, and..." and go from there.

**Provide input.** Don't wait for other people to ask you to portray characters or describe things – just jump right in when you feel like it. Don't force it, but if you have an idea, talk first and think afterwards. Free your ass and your mind will follow, as a wise person must have said at some point. Ask for input. If you're stuck in your narration, and just don't know exactly what to say or do, ask for input from the other players.

**Know when to talk and when to be quiet.** Don't push it. If you feel like you have to perform, to be super-smart and creative and original, you'll probably end up with weird, stilted or clichéd narration. Better to sit back and relax, and talk when you feel like it. Remember, even when it's your turn, you don't have to do all the work.

**Open your story.** If you're talking all the time on your turn, providing all the detail and plot, describing all the secondary characters, and never stopping for breath – it's going to be very hard for anyone else to influence your story. Take a break, ask for input, give the other players secondary characters to play.

**Avoid big time jumps.** In a game like this, the characters' stories can easily get interwoven. If you then suddenly decide your next scene should take place ten years later, it can be hard for the other players to match their stories to yours. Check with the other players to see if they're okay with such jumps.

Don't steal other players' destiny points. Be very wary of this: You usually don't want other players to narrate your destiny points, nor should you usually narrate theirs. If you find yourself doing this, check with the other players if it's okay.

"Use the NPCs to push the other character's buttons. That's what they are there for."—Chris Bennett



Keep the story about the characters. Sometimes secondary characters have a life of their own. That's okay; but if you find yourself in epic scenes where none of the main characters are active, it's time to kill your darlings – sometimes literally.

"It's OK if your characters never meet. Let their stories inform each other as they wander in parallel."—Remi Treuer





# RESOLUTION CARDS

These generic resolution cards are similar to those printed in the *Norwegian Style* book. There, they're used for the game *Itras By*. Feel free to use them for other games, if you like. The cards that follow are laid out for double-sided color printing.

## *Yes, and...*

...you earn a friend, reward or good reputation in the process.

...something completely unrelated is a smashing success.

## *Yes, but...*

...you earn a new enemy, debt or bad reputation in the process.

...something entirely unrelated goes badly wrong.

...your success will cause great personal harm.

...your success has dangerous and unintended consequences.

...your success will harm a friend, ally or loved one.

...in order to succeed you must sacrifice something dear to you.

## *Perhaps...*

...but this isn't something you can do alone. Help is needed.

...but if you want this done, someone more suited to the task must do it.

## *No, but...*

...your failure helps another succeed.

...you gain insight or knowledge that will be useful in the future.

...you earn a friend, ally or goodwill in the process.

...your failure has unexpected positive consequences.

## *No, and...*

...something entirely unrelated goes badly wrong.

...someone or something dear to you is harmed, lost or destroyed.

# FATE CARDS

## The rules, short version

On your turn:

### You must...

- Set the stage – give initial directions to the other players
- Move your playing piece, if necessary
- Portray your character
- Finish your scene when you're ready

### You can...

- Draw a fate card (only once per session)

On anyone's turn, including your own:

### You can...

- Create or play a secondary character
- Describe events and the environment
- Say "Try a different way"
- Say "Help"
- Say "Harder"
- Say "Describe that in detail"
- Say "That might not be quite so easy" (can happen only once per turn)
- Say "I'd like an interlude after that" (can happen only once per turn)
- Veto narration related to elements you own

Somebody important to this character faces trouble because of the element you own – severe illness, bankruptcy, doubt in their faith or similar.

This character does something rash that causes them a lot of trouble with the element you own. An unwise sexual liaison; insulting an ally; destruction of property.

An area on the map is threatened. An attack by enemies, a natural disaster, a change from within or similar.

Someone from this character's past suddenly appears in an area on the map, with a request or demand.

The element you own is interfering with this character's desires, wishes or needs.

Something important is stolen from this character by someone connected to the element you own.

The element you own changes allegiance, motivation or direction.

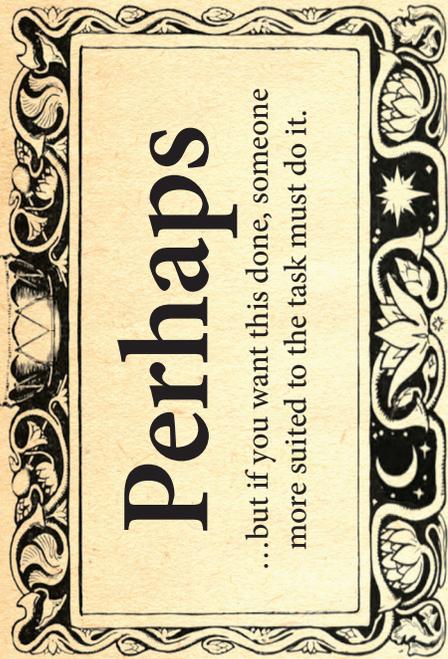
This character receives an unwanted and troublesome gift from an area on the map.

The element you own claims something from you that you might not be able to give.

This character makes an enemy in the element you own.

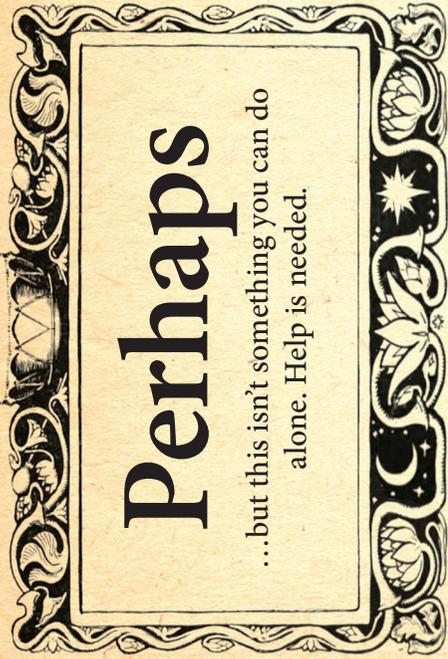
This character must come to terms with the element you own, either mastering it, co-opting it, or accepting the element's control.

The element you own comes to this character's aid in some unexpected and surprising way. This is not without consequences.



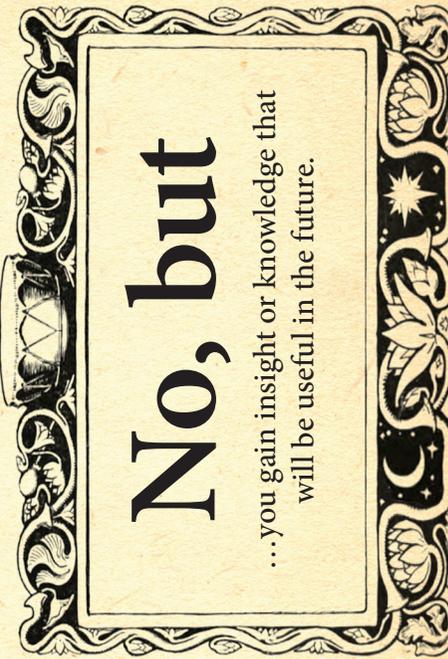
# Perhaps

...but if you want this done, someone more suited to the task must do it.



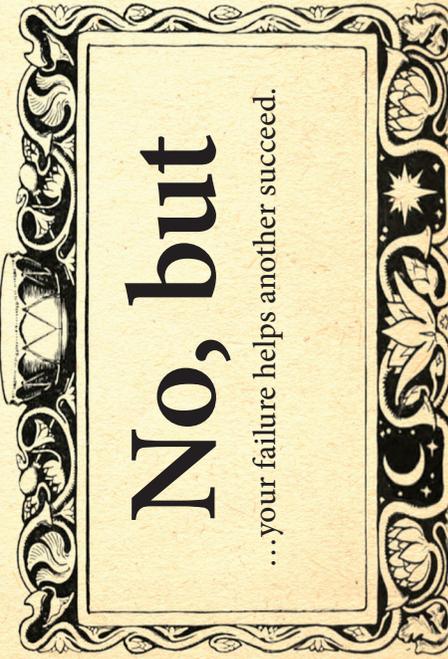
# Perhaps

...but this isn't something you can do alone. Help is needed.



# No, but

...you gain insight or knowledge that will be useful in the future.

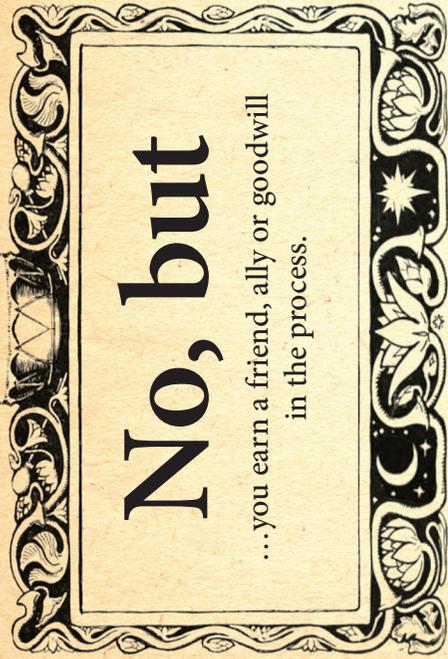


# No, but

...your failure helps another succeed.

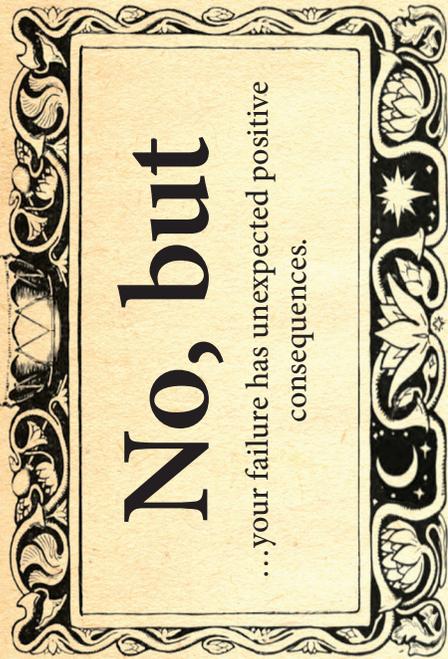
"Be bold when writing Destiny Points for the other players. It's your job to provide interesting possibilities for the players to choose from."—Chris Bennett





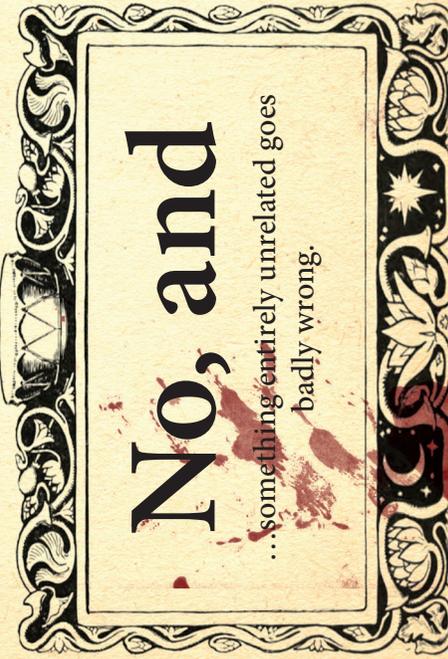
**No, but**

...you earn a friend, ally or goodwill  
in the process.



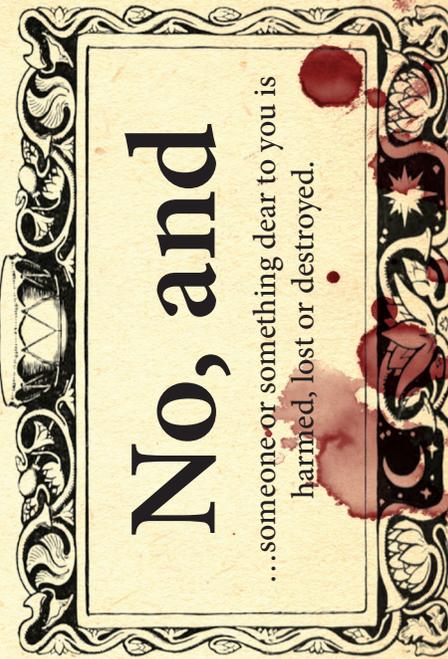
**No, but**

...your failure has unexpected positive  
consequences.



**No, and**

...something entirely unrelated goes  
badly wrong.

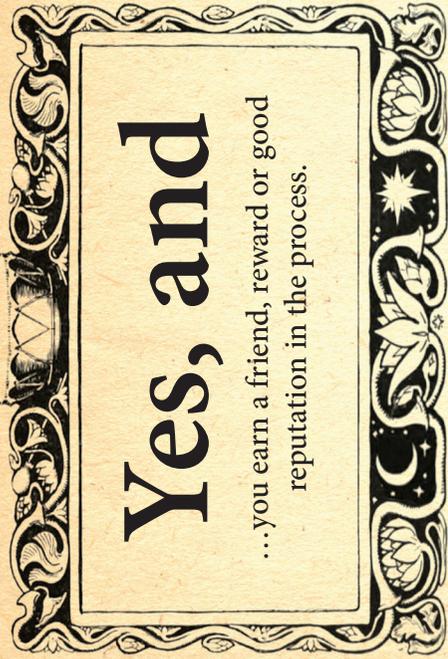


**No, and**

...someone or something dear to you is  
harmd, lost or destroyed.

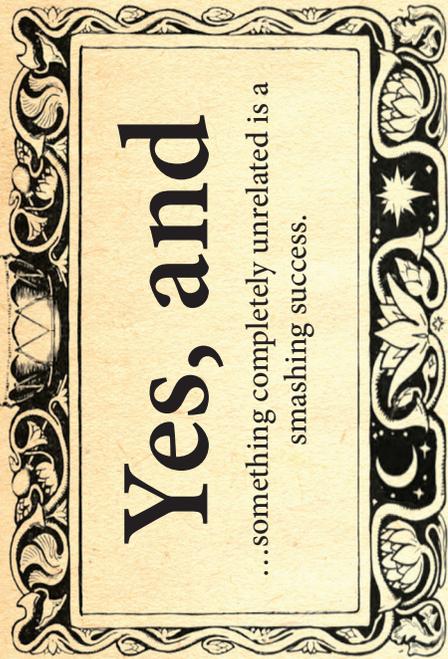
"Use *Try A Different Way* more than you think you should. The harder you push it the better your game will be."—Jason Morningstar





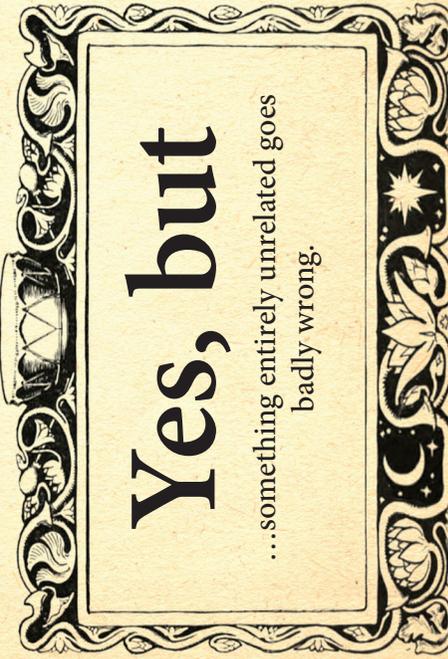
**Yes, and**

...you earn a friend, reward or good reputation in the process.



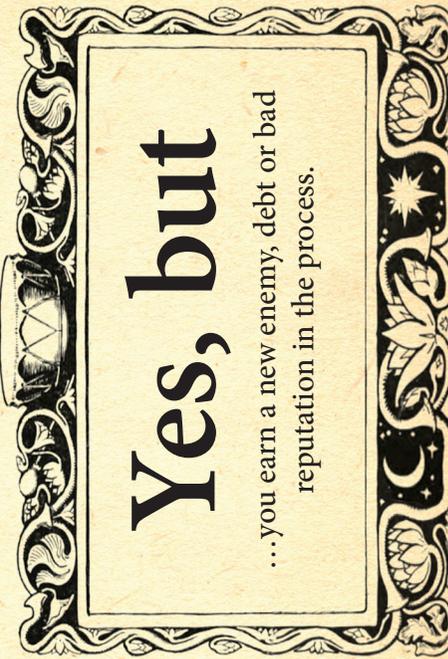
**Yes, and**

...something completely unrelated is a smashing success.



**Yes, but**

...something entirely unrelated goes badly wrong.



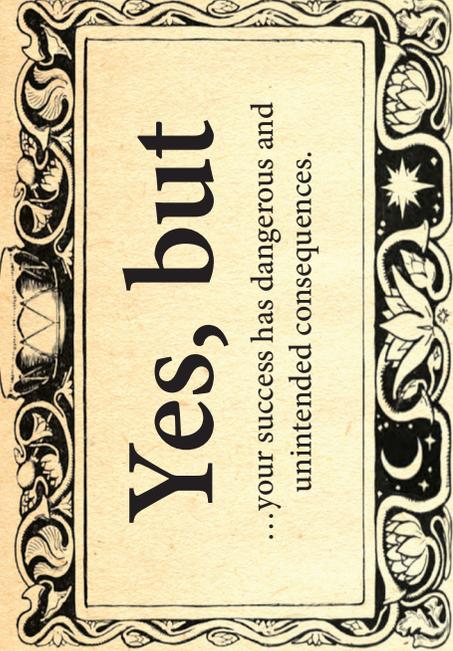
**Yes, but**

...you earn a new enemy, debt or bad reputation in the process.

"For a one-shot game, don't create more than one Destiny per character, and write each one as a group. Write it on a note card to remind people to play towards it."

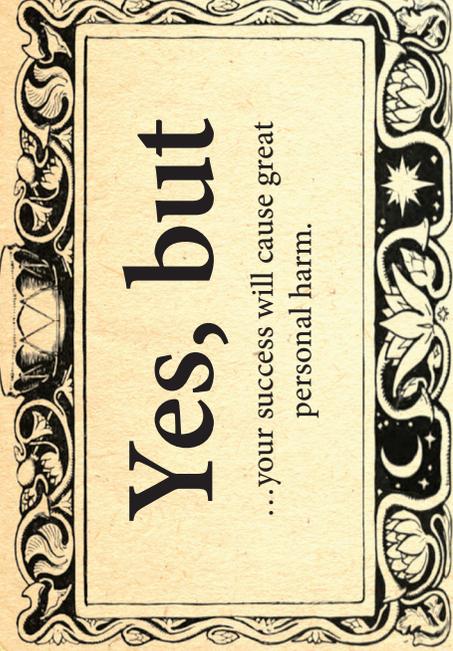
—Mark Causey





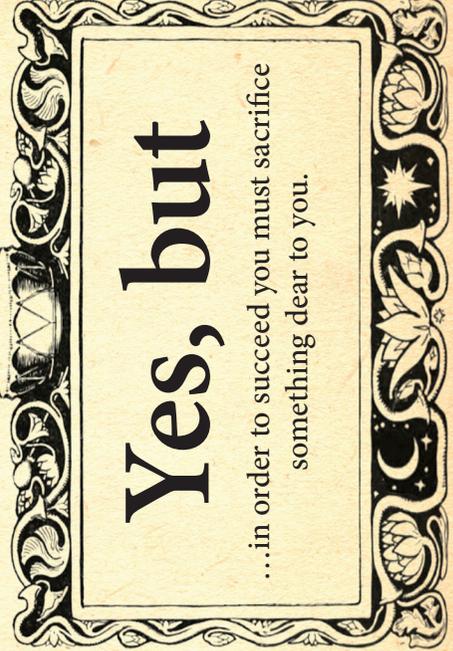
**Yes, but**

...your success has dangerous and unintended consequences.



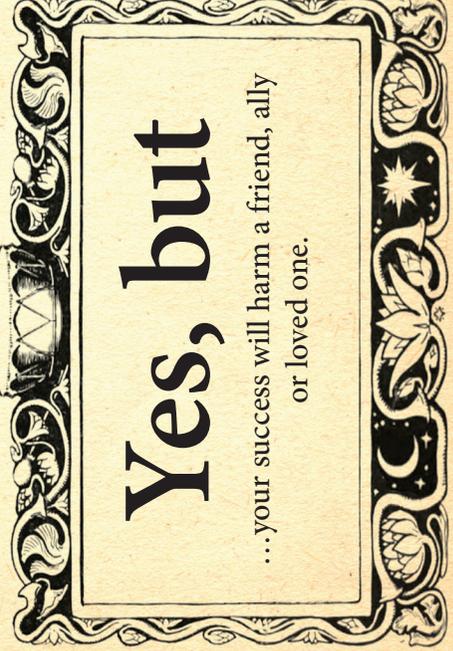
**Yes, but**

...your success will cause great personal harm.



**Yes, but**

...in order to succeed you must sacrifice something dear to you.

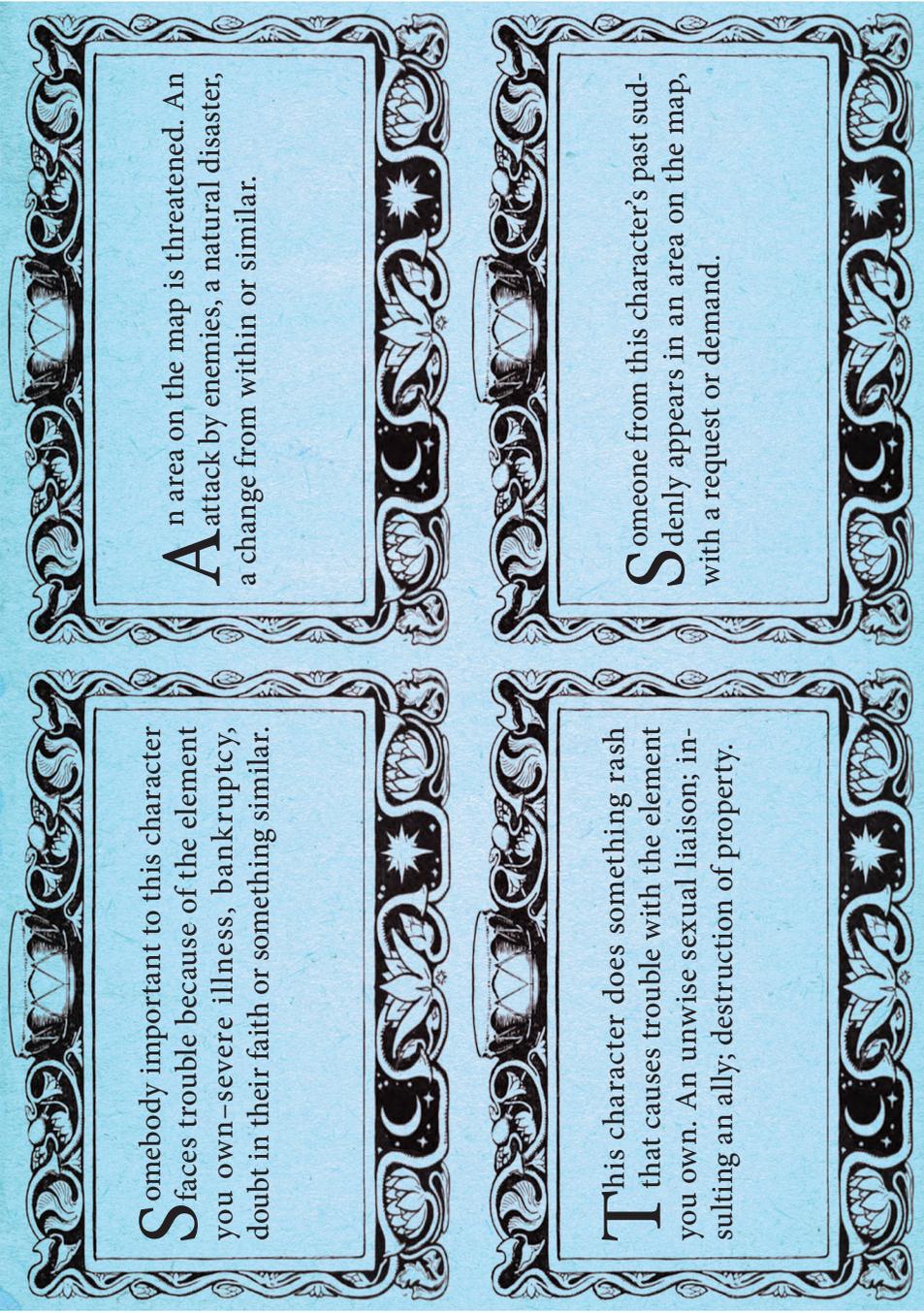


**Yes, but**

...your success will harm a friend, ally or loved one.

"More detail!" in particular helps to create an imagined space that feels real where things might have otherwise been glossed over. Archipelago II sessions are memorable later for their detail."—*Matthew Gagan*



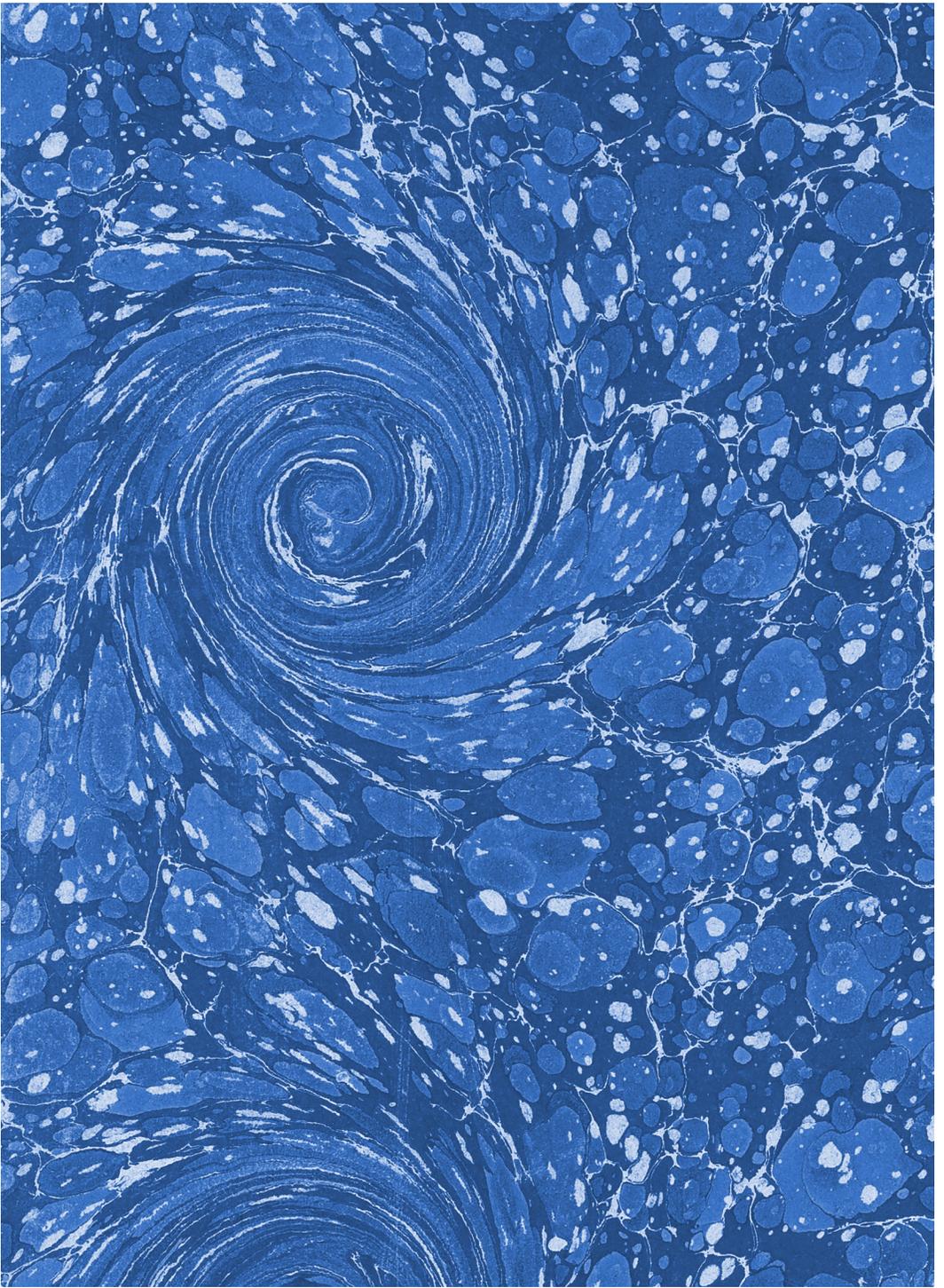


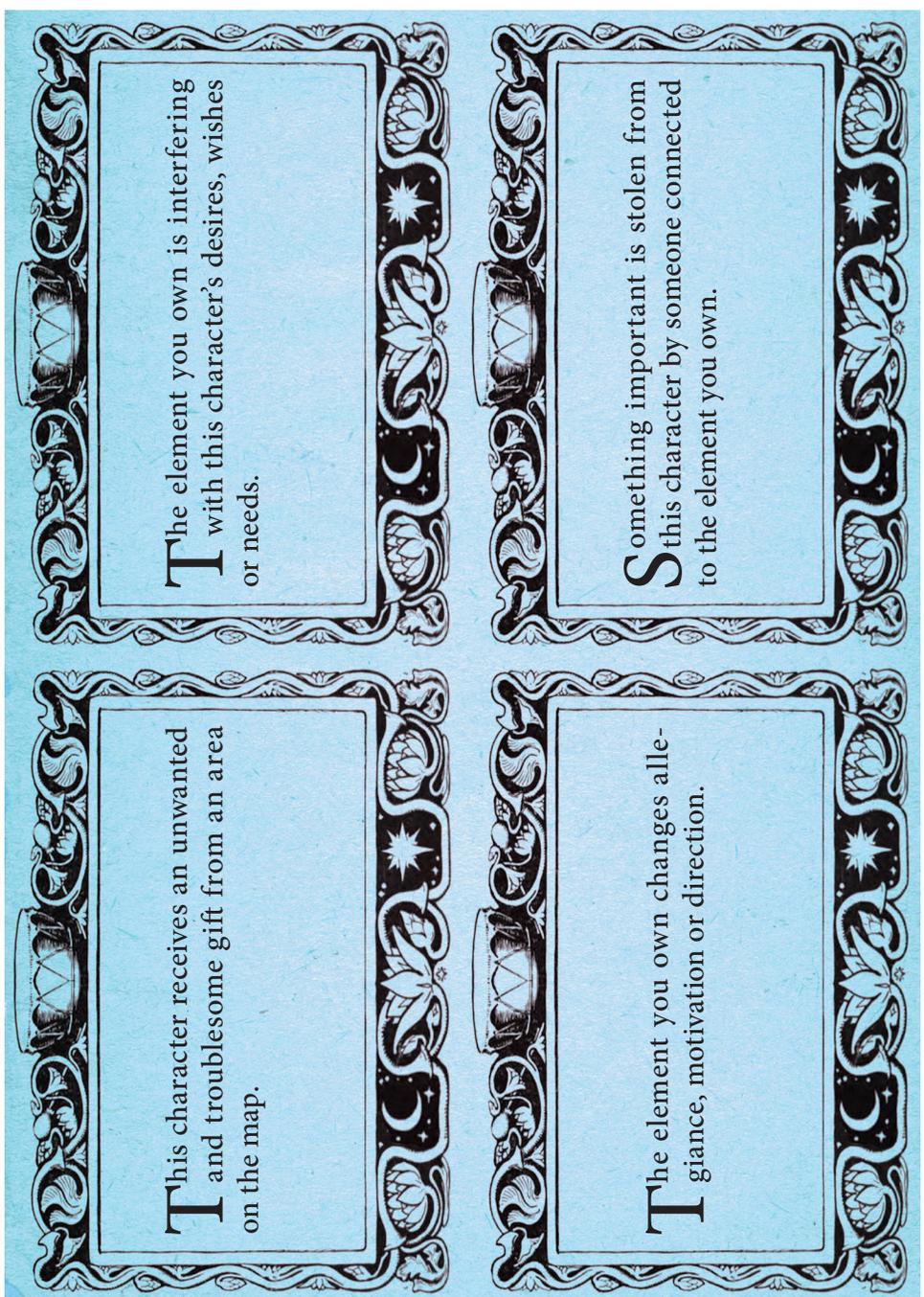
Somebody important to this character faces trouble because of the element you own—severe illness, bankruptcy, doubt in their faith or something similar.

An area on the map is threatened. An attack by enemies, a natural disaster, a change from within or similar.

This character does something rash that causes trouble with the element you own. An unwise sexual liaison; insulting an ally; destruction of property.

Someone from this character's past suddenly appears in an area on the map, with a request or demand.





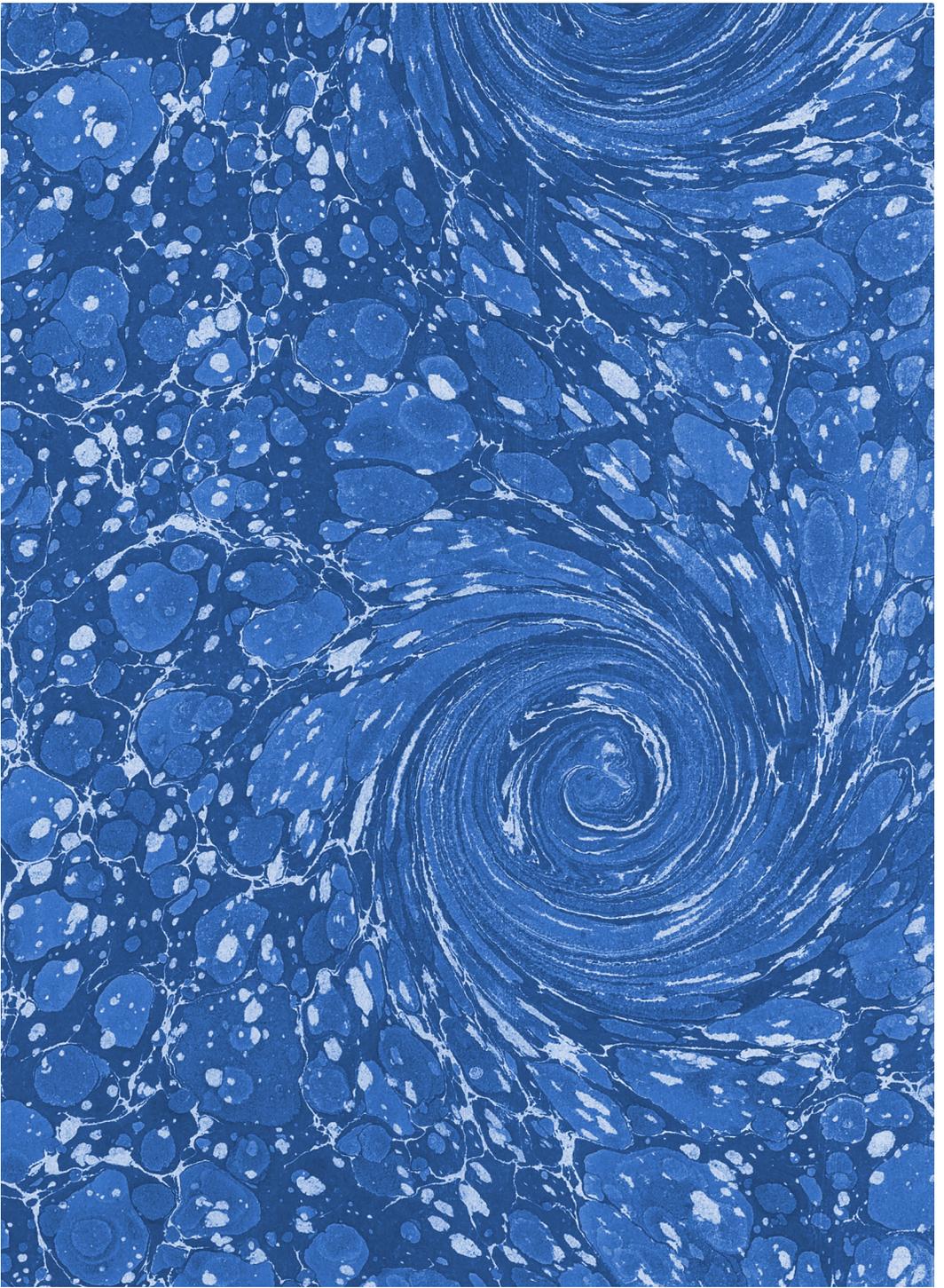
The element you own is interfering with this character's desires, wishes or needs.

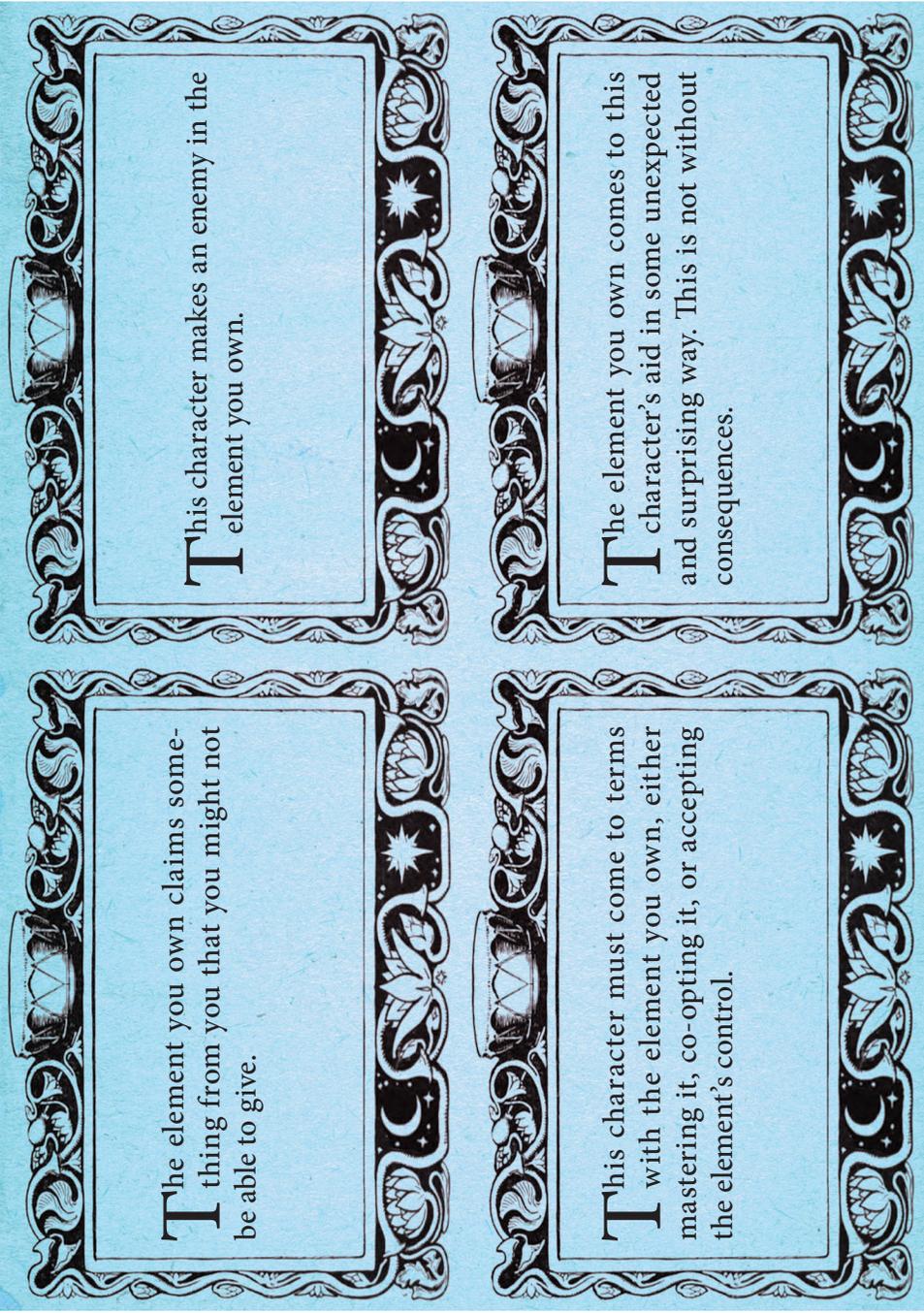
Something important is stolen from this character by someone connected to the element you own.

This character receives an unwanted and troublesome gift from an area on the map.

The element you own changes allegiance, motivation or direction.

"If you reach a moment where you don't know what to do, draw a Fate card. That said, Fate cards are powerful stuff. It's OK if you don't all draw one."—Remi Treuer





**T**he element you own claims something from you that you might not be able to give.

**T**his character makes an enemy in the element you own.

**T**his character must come to terms with the element you own, either mastering it, co-opting it, or accepting the element's control.

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