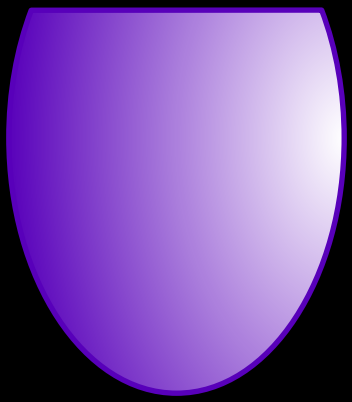


Protoplastic

A roleplaying game of
biomechanical heroes

By Rose Skye

Version 0.5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BASICS

INTRODUCTION
GETTING STARTED
TAKING ACTION
DANGER
CHARACTER CREATION
VIRTUES
PEARLS
KNOWLEDGE
MASKS
PERSONALITY
COMMANDS
BODY PARTS
PART ABILITIES
COMMON PARTS
DEBTS

PLAY

STRUCTURE OF PLAY
SAILING
EXPLORATION
DOWNTIME
VILLAGE
SCENES
COMBAT
PERCEPTION
MOVEMENT
PERSUASION
ASSISTANCE
DAMAGE
SIZE
OILS
BOATS

ADVERSITY

THE ADVERSARY
CHRONICLES
THE ARCHIPELAGO
ISLANDS
AREAS
TYRANTS
ENCOUNTERS
ADVERSARY DOWNTIME
CALENDAR
NAMES
ADVANCED SENSORS
ADVANCED ARMOR
ADVANCED ARMS
ADVANCED MOTORS

RESOURCES

CHARACTER SHEET
PART CARDS

INTRODUCTION

The People live on islands of cubic metal jutting out above a sea of iridescent black oil. Living plastic forms their mechanical bodies, and colorful masks adorn their faces. Beneath the pale tangerine sky, they tend to farms of twitching half-formed limbs, dive for glass pearls, and ceremonially assemble these pieces together to build new members of their villages. Then they dance – dance the same instinctive patterns their ancestors did long ago without quite knowing why.

You were built for a purpose you have long since forgotten.

Even so, they know the world of their ancestors deteriorates further with each passing year. Bizarre monsters, mutagenic plagues, and catastrophic storms devastate their homes and claim their lives. The elders tell a story that a dark spirit cursed the creator deity to eternal slumber, allowing the world to fall out of balance and into decay. Renewal will come, they say, when destined heroes wielding the forces of nature rise from beneath the waves and wake the sleeping god.

A century passed in fervent prayer. Then, just as the People lost their hope, the promised womb-vessels washed up on the ironsand of the beach. Yet no glorious heroes stepped out: inside, their component parts lay in ruins, lacking the pearls that would hold their courageous souls. Despair weighed upon the People like heavy chains until one of them climbed inside, removed their mask, and donned instead one of the masks meant for the stillborn heroes. One by one, others stepped forward to accept the same burden: if fate lay derelict, then they would take the task into their own hands. They would assume any form, cross any distance, do whatever was necessary to drag the world back from the brink of ruin.

Even divinity succumbs to entropy.

Seek salvation through salvage.

GETTING STARTED

Protoplastic is a tabletop roleplaying game, which means you take on the roles of characters within a fictional world and make choices as though you were them. You get to decide their backstories, personalities, and deeds, speaking for them as something between an improvisational actor and an author writing their story.

You need at least two people to play: one person (called a "hero") to play an underdog protagonist, and another person (called the Adversary) to play the ultimate antagonist of the setting, along with all the other people and things the hero meets along the way. It's recommended that you have a few more than that, though: there's always one Adversary, but three or four heroes is a good average. Any more than six is probably too unwieldy for the Adversary to manage.

At the beginning of a chronicle, every player creates a single character to take on the role of, while the Adversary creates a setting for those characters to exist within. Both of these will grow and change through play.

Playing Protoplastic is like a conversation that flows back and forth between the Adversary and the players: the Adversary describes a situation, the players say how they respond to it, then the Adversary updates the situation according to the consequences of their response. Often, the rules of the game will sink into the background as people talk and roleplay their characters, but the rules will get involved to provide structure.

A game of Protoplastic is split into individual sittings (called "sessions") that usually last somewhere from one to four hours, depending on the time and interest of your group. You can play a short adventure in a single session, and if you enjoy it, get the full experience by playing multiple sessions, like episodes of a show. Collectively, multiple sessions make a "chronicle".

Protoplastic's setting includes aspects left purposefully undefined, creating space for each chronicle to be different.

TAKING ACTION

Whenever someone takes a consequential action, resolve it in one of two ways:

Success: If you try to do something you would reasonably expect to be able to do, simply say you do it and it happens: this includes common tasks everyone knows, as well as skilled work you're trained to do.

In other words, you can always do anything that makes sense for you to be able to do, and you can't do things that don't make sense.

Failure: If you try to do something that doesn't make sense for you to be able to do, it doesn't happen. The Adversary should let the player know something isn't going to work before they commit to the action.

When you act under dangerous conditions, you also use six-sided dice to see if something bad happens as a result – this is called making a "check". The dice don't inherently determine whether you succeed or fail, but whether you avoid the danger while doing so.

At the beginning of the session, each player (including the Adversary) rolls three dice and leaves them on the table showing their results: this is their Fate Pool. Whenever a situation comes up that calls for a die, if a player is making a check, they pick one of the dice from their pool. Add any relevant modifiers (+1s or -1s) to the number on the die. Then compare the total number to this chart:

You have to take good and bad rolls, but you get to choose when they happen.

4 or more: You avoid the danger.

3 or less: The danger takes effect.

Once a die is used, remove it from your pool. Once a pool has no more dice remaining, roll another three dice to refill it.

DANGER

A danger is an unwanted consequence. Danger is set by whoever controls the target of the action being checked, so most of the time, the Adversary will set the danger of a check, describing it as the action of an creature or an environmental hazard. If a player character is targeted, their player gets to determine the danger, typically either making the action fail (with a dodge, parry, otherwise), or exploiting an opening with a riposte of their own.

When someone attacks or otherwise tries to affect you, you can choose to take the hit to get to do something to them, too, without having to risk a check.

When there's no obvious opponent doing it, think of dangers like actions the world takes in response, such falling in a hole or setting off an alarm. A low check against a danger means you left an opening, so you don't get to roll to resist it even if you otherwise would.

EXAMPLE DANGERS

- The action fails.
- One of your parts is detached.
- One of your parts is melted.
- You become stuck, grappled, or paralyzed.
- You lose something you were carrying.
- You reveal a secret to an opponent.
- You are separated from the rest of the group.
- You owe someone else a debt.
- You damage a virtue due to stress.
- Someone gets angry with you.
- Your actions cause collateral damage.
- A rival faction achieves an objective.
- You alert enemies to your presence.
- You waste a large amount of time.
- You lose progress toward a goal.
- You're fine for now, but you set up a worse danger that will happen next time you fail a similar check.

Action checks don't inherently put failure on the table, because null results are usually boring. Only use failure as a danger as a result of direct interference by an active opponent, not simply because a task is difficult.

CHARACTER CREATION

Before beginning play, each person must create a character to play as. The process is fairly simple and can be completed in a short amount of time. At each step, record your choices on your character sheet.

It can still take a long time if you have a lot of ideas, though.

PEARL

To begin, choose a pearl: this defines your calling, giving you a skill and a field of knowledge. Think about the kind of person you are. Write down a name for yourself, the one you received at birth.

Your pearl is the seat of your soul.

MASK

Next, choose one of the six heroic elemental masks – only one player can choose a given mask. Masks define your personality, virtues, and elemental power. Draw your mask in the space provided on your sheet. Then, erase your prior name and replace it with the name of the hero meant to bear your mask.

The person you once were is ritually dead.

PARTS

You start with Eyes, Skeleton, two Hands, and Legs for free. You may also pick one uncommon part, plus any oils you can carry on your person.

Pick something interesting, like antennae or a third arm.

DEBTS

Choose two debts: one you owe, and another you're owed. One of them must be to another hero – collaborate with the other players to tie your characters together. If another player takes a debt with you, mark that down as well.

You begin already connected to others.

Now you're ready to play!

VIRTUES

Each living creature possesses three virtues: Courage, Grace, and Insight. These virtues are the attributes of their souls, rated numerically at either -1 (low), +0 (average), or +1 (high). Whenever you make a check, you check the most relevant virtue: add its number rating to the value of the dice you choose.

The ratings of your virtues are set by your mask.

COURAGE

Abbreviated as "CRG". Courage measures your passion, determination, and confidence. Use it to resist danger: injury, poison, disease, fear, knockback, anything about boldness of action and endurance of trial.

Courage is most commonly used for combat, athletics, and giving commands.

GRACE

Abbreviated as "GRC". Grace measures your poise, empathy, and adaptability. Use it to evade danger: the notice of enemies, accidental insult, embarrassment, capture, anything involving social etiquette or stealth.

Grace is the most commonly used for diplomacy, stealth, and calming people down.

INSIGHT

Abbreviated as "INS". Insight measures your knowledge, awareness, and creativity. Use it to detect danger: trickery, ambush, lies, traps, secrets, and anything based on perception, education, or skill.

Insight is most commonly used for studying, crafting, and exploring.

All of the virtues can be used for physical, social, and intellectual tasks, depending on the situation. Which virtue you use is based on what danger a check is trying to avoid, not what action you're trying to accomplish.

PEARLS

To the people of the islands, a pearl is a grapefruit-sized glass orb embedded with an intricate web of tiny golden filaments woven through it at complex angles. These pearls, harvested from the bottom of the sea, contain sapient souls. When placed into a plastic body, they gain control of it, able to move and talk. Even if the body is destroyed, the person whose identity inhabits the pearl can be revived as long as their pearl is not broken.

Monsters lack pearls, and thus self-reflective minds. This is what separates People from plants and animals.

Each pearl comes with a memory of what they were meant to do, granting knowledge and a special skill.

PEARL CALLINGS

Builder: You were a mason, a shipwright, a miner, or a sculptor. With a tool, you can break a structure or vehicle to obtain a brick. If you have a tool and spend a brick, you can repair a damaged structure or vehicle.
Herbalist: You were a physician, apothecary, farmer, or cook, someone who worked with living oil. As a scene action, you can use resin, medicine, or phenol without expending the bottle.
Warrior: You were a guardian, a hunter, or a soldier. You can scout ahead as a scene action, making an Insight check to stealthily enter and return from an adjacent area, reporting what you observe.
Leader: You were a chief, an elder, or a noble scion. As a turn action, you may declare you already called in a debt earlier, and have the debtor help immediately.
Sailor: You were a pilot, cartographer, trader, or diver. You (and any allies) can return to any location (island when sailing, or area when exploring) that you've been to before as a single action.
Seer: You were a mystic, a scholar, or a storyteller. You can read and speak all known languages, including that of the ancients. With an Insight check, you can encrypt or decrypt coded messages as well.

Each person is born knowing how to perform a single type of task. They exist to perform a particular function.

KNOWLEDGE

Along with their special skills, each calling grants expert knowledge about certain subjects. You automatically know most relevant information whenever considering a matter related to a subject of your expertise: you don't make to make a check, you just know anything an expert in that field would reasonably be able to identify upon observing it. However, you can spend an action to study something to learn deeper specifics about it, such as what disease a creature is suffering from, or what part would make the bridge collapse if removed. When under dangerous circumstances, this may require an Insight check.

KNOWLEDGE FIELDS

Builder: You know about architecture, mechanics, vehicles, and geology. You can assess a structure, appraise stones, and recognize a machine's function.
Herbalist: You know about food, chemistry, agriculture, and medicine. You can identify chemicals, name plants, and diagnose medical issues.
Warrior: You know about tactics, traps, and monsters. You can point out tactically advantageous positions, as well as recognize monsters and their abilities
Leader: You know about law, politics, history. You can recite laws and dates, recognize important figures, and investigate crime scenes.
Sailor: You know about navigation, meteorology, and trading. You can read maps, predict the weather, and guess what people on an island will value.
Seer: You know about ritual, art, language, and myth. You can interpret omens, recognize the style of artists, know languages, and decipher codes.

Interpret the scope of what knowledge a skill covers generously. It's better to give information whenever you can justify it, so that players can make informed decisions.

MASKS

In the language of the People, the words for "mask" and "face" are one and the same. Each member of society wears a unique mask at all times, to denote their identity to the world. Their parent gives them their mask upon ensoulment with a pearl, and they update it with scrimshaw, remolding, and inlays throughout their lives, recording their traits and deeds.

The loss of one's mask is a small death. Putting on a replacement requires a ritual rebirth ceremony.

By the same rule, wearing the mask of a hero grants you the identity of that hero. There are six elemental masks bearing the burden of destiny, and those who wear them die to their old selves: the People know who the "heroes" used to be, but it is taboo to acknowledge that fact. Even your own parent must pretend not to recognize you as their child.

For most, their mask sets their virtues and denotes their personality: a "Melancholic" or "Passionate" mask. Heroic masks also provide limited control over their elements, but drawing upon their powers opens your mind up to their influence.

You're encouraged to alter the drawing of your mask throughout the course of a chronicle, in response to meaningful events. These differences from the standard shape are proof of your individual identity.

HEROIC MASKS

Fire: Red like flame, with a harsh, asymmetric shape. Aggressive personality, controls fire.
Oil: Green like a leaf, with a curvaceous, molded shape. Melancholic personality, controls oil.
Smoke: Orange like the sky, snaked with tubes and sinuous lines. Avoidant personality, controls smoke.
Metal: Yellow like gold, designed along right angles. Principled personality, controls metal.
Glass: Blue like cobalt, juxtaposing curves and angles. Obsessive personality, controls glass.
Lightning: Purple like a thunderbolt, jagged and angular. Passionate personality, controls lightning.

PERSONALITY

Your have two personalities: the innate personality of your pearl, and the parasitic personality of your mask. You are only allowed to express the latter.

Your personality determines the values of your virtues: record them on your sheet. Personalities also list negative behaviors that you're prone to. When someone targets you with the persuade action, they can invoke your personality to get you to take one of the listed actions, or a similar one. At any time, you may also choose to initiate an "outburst": a negative behavior suiting your personality, taken as an action. An outburst inflicts a bad outcome equivalent to a danger from a failed check, but heals a damaged virtue of your choice.

The listed behaviors are suggestions. As long as the group agrees, any behaviors that feel fitting are acceptable.

PERSONALITIES

Aggressive: Lash out and hurt an ally, break something important, ruin a friendship, earn a bad reputation.
Courage +1 Grace -1 Insight ±0
Melancholic: Give up on a task, fail to take care of yourself, isolate yourself, drink to dull the pain.
Courage ±0 Grace +1 Insight -1
Avoidant: Refuse aid, distrust an ally, get stressed planning for contingencies, flee a tense situation.
Courage -1 Grace +1 Insight ±0
Principled: Refuse to do something out of honor, hold on to guilt, cause delays with your perfectionism, frustrate someone with your inflexibility. Metal.
Courage ±0 Grace -1 Insight +1
Obsessive: Get fixated on a curiosity, unsettle others with your strange behavior, see things that aren't there, misunderstand an implication.
Courage +1 Grace ±0 Insight +1
Passionate: Overindulge in fuel or phenol, embarrass yourself, go into debt for luxuries.
Courage +1 Grace ±0 Insight -1

Remember to be considerate when exploration of emotional extremes touches upon real-world mental health. Roleplaying safety tools are available online.

COMMANDS

Just as normal masks fulfill a social function, so too do heroic masks: theirs is the authority to speak to the elements themselves. Therefore, heroes can issue commands to their elements, bending them to their will. However, using this power weakens the distinction between you and your mask, giving it some degree of sway over your mind. Therefore, while commands can enact sweeping changes to the environment, heroes must avoid using them unless necessary.

You can always use the command associated with your mask's element. Interpret the listed possibilities of a command broadly, but keep in mind you can only manipulate existing sources of your element, not create it, and the change only persists as long as you are there to maintain it. Whenever you issue a command, check Grace: if you fail, the mask takes over and makes the element do something you didn't intend, equivalent to a danger. Think of the element as possessing the same personality of the mask that represents it when deciding how the command is misinterpreted.

Seers disagree as to why the masks exhibit such extreme, undesirable behaviors. Some suggest that this is an intentional strategy on the part of fate: the purpose of the Fire hero, for instance, is to cauterize wounds in the world, so a propensity for burning things down is not undesirable from a long-term perspective. A meager comfort for the inhabitants of the torched village.

ELEMENTAL SURGES

Fire: Shape or smother an existing flame, heat or cool the ambient environment, or suppress local radiation.
Oil: Calm or redirect waves, dry something by drawing away the liquid, or locally manipulate tides.
Smoke: Change the weather, shape smoke, or alter the intensity and direction of existing winds.
Metal: Alter the landscape of the immediate area to create a hill, valley, cave, or similar terrain feature.
Glass: Counter or alter any other surges or other elemental effects happening in the area, as a reaction.
Lightning: Alter or quench magnetic fields, or redirect electricity.

BODY PARTS

The People, as well as all other living creatures in the archipelago, are made of modular components. These parts congeal out of living plastic, a process which occurs naturally but can be guided by farmers into making specific parts they need.

Parts come in a variety of highly saturated colors. You get to pick the colors of your initial parts, but after that any parts you salvage retain their original colors unless somehow modified.

You always have a pearl, the seat of the soul, typically embedded in your chest. You also always have a mask, the mark of your stolen valor. Your mask is jealous: it will not allow you to remove it. Any other part of your body, however, can be freely swapped at will. A single turn action is sufficient to pick it back up and click it back into place. Your pearl gains immediate control of any attached parts.

Each part is represented by a small square card: place it into one of the nine grid slots on your character sheet. You can have any combination of parts that you want as long as all parts fit onto the grid – position doesn't matter. Carried items like bottles snap into holes on the body, and thus take up part slots as well. Parts come in three rarities: Common, Uncommon, and Rare. Your mask and pearl are technically parts but don't take up slots since you don't swap them out.

TYPES OF BODY PART

There is no experience-based character advancement in this game, so finding new body parts to use is the path to power. Especially seek the legendary translucent, glass, and metal parts!

Sensor: Parts that grant senses, such as eyes, ears, and antennae. Usually placed on the head.
Arm: Includes normal hands, but most arm parts give up hands in favor of tools or weapons.
Armor: The core of the body, providing protection from different types of damage and other hazards. You always have at least one armor part.
Motor: Anything that grants a movement type, such as legs, fins, or wings. Motors don't generate motive force on their own, they just allow locomotion.

PART ABILITIES

Each type of part has unique special abilities, but many traits are shared between them.

If you have multiple parts of the same type, use the best capabilities of each: e.g. someone with a telescope and an antenna would still be able to see color and detail, even though the antenna says it cannot do that on its own. If you want to use a part for something outside of its intended application, check Insight to pull it off without any unintended side effects.

For example, using a flamethrower to melt a friend out of ice without hurting them.

PART TERMINOLOGY

Touch: Can target anything you can touch with a body part or held item, within a few meters.
Ranged: Can target anything in the same area that you have line of sight to.
Damage Type: Attacks come in three damage types: kinetic (crushing, cutting, piercing), chemical (acid or poison), and energy (heat, cold, electricity, radiation). Types are functionally identical except when referred to by rules text, but can be used for problem solving by clever players, e.g. lighting fires with energy attacks.
Bulky: Requires two hands if held, or two part slots if attached to your body.
Accurate: When a sense is precise enough to target objects in the area for actions like attacking and studying. By default, vision and touch are accurate. When a sensor grants a new sense, that sense is automatically accurate. If you lack an accurate sense that could detect something, you take -1 to target it.
Burst: Targets an entire area feature or group of creatures at once, one size class larger than the user.
Persistent: The effect repeats itself at the start of the source's next turn, but the target gets another check to end the effect each time, using the same virtue – *e.g.* fire deals part damage each round, ended with Grace.

COMMON PARTS

Body parts come in three tiers of rarity: Common, Uncommon, and Rare. Common parts are always available during downtime if you need them. Almost all normal People are built out of Eyes, Skeleton, Legs and two Hand parts, and the remaining Common parts are easily harvested from small, ubiquitous wildlife.

The energy that powers all your parts comes from the petrochemical engine within your body.

Rather than directly modify their bodies, the People often simply use items with their hands for the sake of versatility. The blade, instrument, and tool parts also exist in the form of holdable items. It's also possible to improvise with rocks, sticks, and the like, but these take -1 on any checks when taking actions with them.

COMMON BODY PARTS

Eyes: You can accurately see things within line of sight, in addition to other standard senses.
Skeleton: You have no particular weaknesses or resistances to damage, and can hold your breath for one round before you begin to drown.
Hand: You can hold and use objects of Tiny or Small size by placing them in the same part slot, but drop them if this part is damaged. You may use the Grab combat action as well.
Legs: You can walk and run on the ground, as well as jump, climb, swim, crawl, squeeze, open doors, and carry heavy objects at -1 to the movement check.
Blade: Can be used as a melee touch attack, or for carving.
Instrument: Can make music, allowing performance checks to affect groups at no penalty.
Tool: Contains a rotating chamber of retractable tools, including a hammer, file, and brick separator. Allows for any sort of construction.

Although it's often claimed that different colors of part carry subtle special traits, in truth the colors of parts have no functional difference. Different villages simply tend towards certain color schemes to express group identity.

DEBTS

A debt is not just an entitlement to repayment: it is a bond between yourself and another member of society. Instead of money or barter, the People operate on a gift economy, giving in order to establish a relationship. They expect a patron to take care of a client to some extent, in a manner similar to traditional ideas of hospitality and *noblesse oblige*.

Debts are used to indicate bonds of relationship, stand in for the role of monetary rewards, and act as markers when you take on a quest. The lives are the People are dictated by social obligation, with little room for individual desires.

Whenever one person does a significant favor for another person (something that would count as a major request for persuasion), they are now owed a debt. They can call in a debt by expending it, letting them make a major request when persuading – the debt isn't expended if the request is refused. However, while the debt remains unrepaid, favors are expected between them, giving them both +1 on checks to persuade one another. They also get +1 on any action to betray the other, but this breaks the debt. Both owing and being owed is called "sharing" a debt.

Below is a list of possible debts. Notice that the last one is special, and has its own rules. You can only have one debt at a time to the same subject.

EXAMPLE DEBTS

A Parent: You owe your creator an infinite debt.
A Friend: They have your back, and you have theirs.
An Enemy: They let you live, you owe them now.
An Organization: You are part of the in-group.
A Village: You saved them, binding them to yourself.
A Seer: You have yet to fulfill the destiny they foretold.
A Supplicant: You have agreed to help someone in need – the debt to them converts to a debt to you once you fulfill the promise.

It's not entirely bad to be in debt to someone. Both parties have a motive to maintain the relationship rather than force repayment.

STRUCTURE OF PLAY

Once the heroes take on their unsanctioned divine mission, they set out from their home island in search of why the world is dying and what they can do about it. The way they go about this follows a repeated loop: downtime, then travel, then exploration, followed by a return trip and the repetition of the cycle once again.

Ideally, you should complete a full loop once per session. Pace your sessions by how much time you have.

SAILING

To begin with, you go sailing, traveling the routes between islands in your boat while navigating the various hazards you come across. This is a short, special sequence setting the stage for the session's adventure.

If you run out of fuel, you'll need to scavenge or borrow it from wherever you're stuck.

EXPLORATION

Once at your destination, you switch to tracking time by scenes, moving between landmarks and investigating the island to defeat the monster or malefactor plaguing it. Some locations may require special parts to explore – you can't go underwater without oil breathing and sonar capabilities – so taking down monsters is important to salvage their useful parts. After you're done, you return to your home island.

Exploration is not completely unlike the standard dungeon crawl experience, but focused on a central foe.

DOWNTIME

Each session ends with downtime: this is time spent not adventuring. It's usually done on your home island but can be done in any safe place if necessary. Each downtime phase, every hero gets one action to spend on a crafting activity: they can either do it themselves, or call upon a friendly villager to do it for them. The Adversary also gets to take a downtime action of their own.

You can take more than one downtime turn, but each one lets the Adversary advance their schemes further.

SAILING

At the beginning of each session, the first step is reaching the island the group chose to explore at the end of the prior session. To do this, you go sailing.

Sailing is a type of group challenge. The Adversary looks at the island the heroes are sailing to and announces any hazards associated with it. Then, every hero rolls a die, which they can spend to prevent one of the hazards the Adversary declared, using the virtue the hazard specifies. If not prevented, the hazard comes to pass. Once all hazards are resolved, you reach the island.

Since you can use Aid to pass dice around, you can optimize prevent the hazards you find least desirable.

SEA ROUTE HAZARDS

It's possible for a single journey to include more than one copy of the same hazard, resolved separately.

Choppy [Grace]: Constant small, rough waves induce seasickness. All passengers damage Courage.
Vile [Grace]: The stench of rot and death permeates this region. All passengers damage Grace
Intoxicating [Grace]: Phenolic vapors waft from the sea. All passengers damage Insight.
Endless [Insight]: The sea is vast, taking weeks to travel across. The Adversary gets a downtime action.
Murky [Insight]: You get lost in fog, reset hazards and retry the sailing attempt.
Perilous [Insight]: Undersea rocks and reefs threaten the hull of your craft. Lose 1 Supply from the boat.
Viscous [Courage]: The boat gets stuck in thick oil, reset hazards and retry the sailing attempt.
Infested [Courage]: You're attacked by sea monsters. All passengers damage a part.
Eerie [Courage]: Ghost lights and disquieting omens appear over the water. All passengers damage Grace.
Scorching [Courage]: The sun beats down on you. All passengers damage Courage.

EXPLORATION

When you reach an island, you begin in a "zoomed out" mode, with all the heroes acting as a unit as per the cooperation rules: use the highest virtues among you for checks. When doing so, measure time primarily by scenes as whole units instead of turns within scenes. Each scene essentially becomes an exploration "turn", during which the party collectively takes an action, or each character takes their own scene action individually: see the list of scene actions below. You can always "zoom in" to focus a scene on the smaller-scale actions and roleplaying once something interesting happens, such as a negotiation or battle.

If you want, you can track how many turns are available in a given day, but their exact duration is fluid, so you shouldn't usually bother.

Regardless of what action you take, at the end of each scene, the Adversary checks for an encounter, a special type of scene – see the Encounter section for details. Once the encounter is resolved, a new scene begins.

At the end of any day you don't both rest and consume a bottle of fuel, damage a virtue of your choice. It can't be fixed until you rest and consume fuel again.

The People require sleep, but only an hour or so per day.

EXPLORATION ACTIONS

Traverse: Move from your current area to any adjacent area you have a path to. This is the same as the Leave movement action, but for the party collectively.
Search: Spend time thoroughly investigating the current area, revealing anything not immediately apparent.
Rest: Take a break to eat, nap, and talk. Each person may expend one bottle of fuel to fix a damaged virtue if they wish. Others may do other things while some rest.
Work: Perform a significant task, such as digging a hole, fixing a damaged part, or deciphering a map.

DOWNTIME

In between voyages to other islands, you and your allies must sail back to your home island to recover and replenish your resources. As such, each session ends with the "downtime" phase. Each downtime phase follows a sequence of events.

First, a month passes. Check the Calendar to see what event is going on during this phase.
Second, every hero fixes all damage to their parts and virtues through rest, repair, and medical treatment.
Third, each hero gets to take one downtime action from those listed below, playing out a short scene describing how they go about it. In addition, they may call in any debts they owe if they wish.
Fourth, the Adversary gets to take their own downtime action, described in the Adversary Downtime section.
Finally, the players agree on what island they want to visit next session, take any necessary notes, and end the current session.

Picking the next island ahead of time gives the Adversary the opportunity to prepare for what will happen next session.

For heroes, downtime actions are defined by the buildings in their village. When you take an action, you must pick from the buildings you have available. The list of buildings is found in the Your Village section.

To add more buildings to your village, you need to find people to staff them. Each building type lists a calling: in order to add the building to your village, you must expend a debt owed to you by a non-heroic character with that calling. This invites them to live in your village and provide the service. Once invited, the building is immediately constructed and can be used that phase.

VILLAGE

On your home island, around a hundred people live in a village – the heroes should agree on what it's named. In between adventures, you return to your village for downtime, making use of the buildings available. At the start of the chronicle, you have the following buildings:

Most islands of any significant size have at least one village on them.

Dock: Install a new part on your boat, or reconfigure the set of existing parts into any arrangement.
Farm: Acquire six parts of your choice, which must be copies of parts you already possess.
Library: Learn details about an island of your choice, including all non-secret locations, creatures, major figures, and recent history.

By gathering more people to your village, you can add the buildings listed below as well.

Foundry [Builder]: Remold a part in your possession, turning it into another part of your choice with the same rarity.
Kitchen [Herbalist]: Create bottles of oil of any set of types, up to how much the heroes can carry.
Lodge [Warrior]: Carve the mark of a hero's companion into a villager's mask. For the next session only, they will join you on your expedition, under your control, with a mask of your choice and any combination of parts that you possess.
Throne [Leader]: Offer up a rare part (or other valuable item) as a gift to gain a debt with a known person of your choice.
Outpost [Sailor]: Sail out on a hit-and-run mission to harry the Adversary. Roll a six-sided die: on a 4 or higher, prevent the Adversary's downtime action.
Shrine [Seer]: Consecrate a pearl you possess as an ancestral idol to an element of your choice. It can then be used to cast an elemental surge once per expedition.

Draw a map of your village as you play, adding new buildings and naming who's in them as you go. It's okay if the drawings don't look professional, it's a record of your group's time playing together.

SCENES

Outside of the sailing and downtime phases, the majority of play takes place in "scenes", during which the Adversary describes situations, and the heroes describe what they say and do within them. Much of the time you can simply say your character does anything they reasonably could accomplish and it happens. Unless you're unconscious or restrained from doing so, you can always talk in-character as much as you like.

It's okay if characters talk more than they might realistically have a chance to in fast-moving situations, as long as it doesn't slow down play.

However, when situations are tense and timing matters (such as combat), scenes are broken up into "rounds", in which each creature in the scene gets to take a "turn". Each creature gets one turn, then a new round begins if necessary. Likewise, during full party island exploration sequences, entire scenes can work this way, with each person taking a scene-length action before the next scene begins.

ACTION TYPES

Turn Action: An action that takes up your turn during a round – the most common type of action, including attacking, persuading, and studying. Assume any action not otherwise specified is a turn action.
Reaction: A quick action you can take at any time, even in response to actions taken by others. Reactions are resolved before the event they respond to, including other reactions. You can take as many reactions as you like, unless something specifies otherwise.
Scene Action: An action that takes an entire scene to complete, such as searching an area or resting.
Readied Action: Whenever you would take a turn action, you may use your turn to ready the action. Declare a trigger event, like "if someone walks through that door, I shoot them". If that event occurs before your next turn, you may take the readied action as a reaction.

If it's important, assume each scene takes about an hour, counting less interesting minutes before and after the important parts you play out in detail.

COMBAT

Battle is the burden carried by those who wear the mask of heroes. Ravenous monsters and vainglorious warlords terrorize the islands of the archipelago, and the People cry out for deliverance from them.

When combat begins, each hero must win a Courage check to be able to act. Those who succeeded each get to take one action, resolved as though occurring simultaneously. Then all members of the enemy side get to act, then all heroes, passing back and forth until combat ends.

Successful attacks generally damage a body part of the target, disabling the part such that it cannot be used. If a medium-scale creature has two damaged parts at once, they are incapacitated, conscious and capable of speech but unable to take actions.

Once a side feels they are at a disadvantage – typically when half of them are incapacitated – they will either flee or surrender. Very few fight to the death.

Think of combat less like trading blows and more like a puzzle: figure out your enemy's defenses and assemble countermeasures to pierce them before the fight even begins, and you will vault from triumph to triumph.

COMBAT ACTIONS

Attack: Use an equipped weapon to hit a creature in range. By default, the hit damages one of their parts – the target gets to pick which. If you accept -1 to the check, you get to pick instead.
Grab: Take hold of something in your hands, if you have them. You may immediately slot it onto yourself if it's an object, or wield it. If a creature, for each free hand you employ, choose one – they can't move, they can't use their arms, they can't talk, or you push them into an area feature. The first three last until you let go or they take an action to win a Courage check against you.
Break: Using a weapon, shatter (or melt, etc.) an object not attached to a conscious creature.

Other types of actions may also be useful in combat, such as sneaking, taking cover, and intimidating foes.

PERCEPTION

Normal passive observation requires no action nor check: you always notice obvious things around yourself. In addition, if you have a skill pertinent to something, the Adversary must provide information anyone of your training would reasonably know at a glance. However, hidden things in the area (secret doors, traps, ambushes, etc.) are not automatically observed. If something hidden tries to physically affect you (primarily attacks or movement) you get an Insight check to notice it, allowing you to attempt to dodge it as normal. Otherwise, hidden physical actions succeed automatically.

You can also declare that you're not paying attention (such as closing your eyes) on your turn, temporarily shutting down that sense.

PERCEPTION ACTIONS

Search: As a scene action, search your current area to reveal any and all hidden things within it: this typically involves poking around, opening boxes, and the like.
Study: You closely examine a creature or object you can accurately perceive and have a relevant skill for – +1 to the check if you have a relevant sensor. This reveals all hidden information about it, and the first time you or an ally acts on this information, they get +1 on the check.
Stealth: Any time you perform an action, you can try to keep it hidden by succeeding at a Grace check – this includes sneaking, legerdemain, and whispering. Stealth can only be used when others are either unaware of you or are distracted. Only check once someone has a chance to perceive you, and use that check against each observer's Insight.
Distract: Draw attention to yourself or something you control (such as a thrown rock), allowing anyone else to count as hidden until your next turn.

Studying with a socially-oriented skill allows you to ascertain if someone is lying.

Stealth modifies the base action rather than counting as an action itself.

MOVEMENT

The world is divided into “areas” and “features”: an area is a room, a pond, or any other reasonably sized place, while a feature is a landmark within an area, like a river or cliff. Be it walking, flying, riding, or otherwise, movement comes in three types of action:

Position: As a turn action, go to a feature of the current area, activating any effects it conveys.
Escape: As a turn action, leave your current area and enter an adjacent area that you’ve been to before.
Traverse: As a scene action, leave your current area and enter an adjacent area you haven’t been to before.

Declare your position in terms of preposition: say you’re putting yourself by, on, in, under, among, or between things. Grounding your placement with a landmark makes it easy to remember even without drawing a map.

You only have to make a check if something dangerous gets in your way: flowing lava, an enemy trying to block you, a guard you need to sneak past, et cetera. You take -1 on your check if you have to climb, swim, crawl, jump, open a door, squeeze through a tight space, pass through difficult terrain (rocky, uneven, sloped), or move (carry, pull, or push) a heavy object with you. When submerged, you can hold your breath for a round, but each turn afterward you must check Courage or damage your Courage.

Position “activating” a feature includes many applications. Any feature large and opaque enough to hide behind counts as cover, giving you +1 to avoid attacks and remain hidden while you’re there. You can also mount a larger creature or vehicle by positioning yourself onto it – when riding a creature or vehicle, use its movement instead of your own. If you’re positioned at a feature something else tries to pass through, you can try to prevent their movement as a reaction. If positioned over a cliff or pit, you must check Courage to avoid damaging a part of your choice from impact with the ground; if the fall is very long, a success may let you catch yourself halfway down.

PERSUASION

You can persuade a person or creature to make them do what you want as long as you can justify why they should do it in terms of their personality or what honoring one of their debts demands. In general, it has to be something they can accomplish quickly, won't put them in significant danger, and doesn't violate their basic ethical principles. Long-term, dangerous, or illegal (but still not fundamentally unconscionable) requests additionally require that you call in a debt that they owe you, expending it if they accept the request. Examples include the following.

The exact request can be an explicit declaration or an implicit prompt: a bestial roar intelligibly says "go away!" backed by a threat of violence, even without words.

Minor Requests: Flee the area, act on a guilty desire, apologize for a transgression, lend you a small item, bend the rules a little, or tell you information.
Major Requests: Fight at your side, change part of their identity, give you a rare artifact, join your crew, commit a crime, or falsely accept blame.

You may take -1 on the check to affect an entire small group instead of only one target. You get a +1 on the roll if the target owes you a debt, you owe them a debt, or you can convincingly argue that your request honors another debt they share. The target may choose to damage their Grace instead of fulfilling the request.

PERSUASION ACTIONS

Charm: The default option. Check with Grace to avoid causing offense, being asked for more in return, giving away a secret, damaging Grace by the effort, etc.
Threaten: By making a threat of harm to them or something they care about, you count as spending a debt but must check with Courage to avoid drawing their hatred and social censure.
Convince: When lying, check with Insight to maintain that you are telling the truth, or are who you claim to be.

The listed persuasion actions all use the same rules above. They only differ in what virtues and dangers they involve.

ASSISTANCE

In addition to the other major action types, there are also a few that let you help and hinder others.

AID

When one person makes a check, another may aid them as a reaction, either through directly working on the problem with them or setting up favorable conditions – describe how you do it to the satisfaction of the other players. Either way, aiding someone simply means giving them a die from your fate pool, letting them use it on the check instead of their own die. You can only aid people you share a debt with.

Aid is most believable when you have skill or part that could help, but shouting encouragement works, too, if you invoke a debt.

PREVENT

You may also parry or otherwise foil an action. As a reaction (but expending your next turn) to an action in the same area as you, make a check with the same virtue as the action you're preventing: if the result is equal to or greater than the result of the original action, that action fails. Like aiding, you must give a reasonable description of how you prevent the action.

Prevention is essentially the opposite of aiding. Use it to thwart evil deeds and shield your allies from harm.

COOPERATE

Multiple people and creatures can cooperate, combining their efforts and acting together as a group. To cooperate, you need at least four members, each of whom must share a debt with at least one other member, or with a shared organization. While cooperating, they are treated like a single entity, getting a single action on its turn, and using the highest relevant virtue among the members for checks. The group as a whole is treated as though it were a Large-sized creature. In addition, sixteen or more members can cooperate to count as a Huge-sized creature.

Cooperation makes it easy to handle hordes of monsters or regiments of soldiers, simply by treating them as collective units.

DAMAGE

Everything bad that can happen to your character is a type of "damage": physical injury, emotional stress, and so on. Damage is represented by small tokens. Whenever something inflicts lasting harm on you, place a token on the space of your character sheet referring to what aspect of you was hurt: that aspect (a part or a virtue) is now "damaged". A damaged aspect is unusable while the token is on it. A cure of a form appropriate to the type of damage removes the token.

Stress tokens can be glass beads, little wooden blocks, coins, et cetera. You can also just make pencil markings and erase them later if you don't have suitable tokens.

Too much damage makes you incapacitated: you remain conscious and can speak (weakly) but cannot take any actions, including persuasion.

DAMAGED PARTS

Attacks damage parts. Unless otherwise stated, "part damage" lets the target pick which part. When a part is damaged, any capabilities it grants cannot be used. You can fix a part by taking an action spreading a bottle of resin over it. If two of your parts are damaged at the same time, you become incapacitated until you have one or fewer damaged parts. Pearls can only be damaged by the break action on an incapacitated or willing person: this inflicts the true death.

If your mask is damaged, you can't use elemental commands or fix virtues with outbursts until it is fixed.

DAMAGED VIRTUES

Virtues can be damaged by inflicted by hunger, fatigue, sickness, curses, persuasion, and many other conditions. When a virtue is damaged, you take -1 to checks made with it. If a virtue would be damaged twice, damage another virtue of your choice. If you need to damage a virtue and they all already are, you're incapacitated until at least one is fixed. When you are calmed or rest and expend a bottle of fuel, fix one virtue of your choice.

Damaged Courage means you're scared. Damaged Grace means you're in despair. Damaged Insight means you're dazed.

SIZE

Physical size is split into broad classes to simplify how things at different scales interact. Each step up is twice the volume (and therefore eight times the weight) of the last, but exact measurements aren't important, just general scale. Size classes are relative: a Tiny creature would treat a Medium one as though it were Huge.

TINY

You can fit a dozen tiny objects in a single small bottle, and one damage can break a dozen tiny objects.

Examples: Coins, seeds, insects.

SMALL

Each small object takes up one body slot, and can be broken with a single point of damage.

Examples: Parts, tools, bottles, pets, shrubs.

MEDIUM

A medium-sized object takes four body slots to carry. Incapacitated when two of its parts are damaged.

Examples: You and other People.

LARGE

Each large-scale part counts as one medium-sized object, broken after being damaged twice. Cannot be carried. All its targeted actions (attacks, persuasion, etc.) count as burst effects, and it gets +1 to resist non-burst effects from smaller sources.

Examples: Boats, trees, elephants.

HUGE

Treated like an area – each of its parts is Large, and you must position yourself by an individual part to touch it. All its targeted actions are burst effects, and it gets +1 to resist non-burst effects.

Examples Buildings, ships, sea monsters.

OILS

Virtually everything in the world is fundamentally formed of oil: your own body is made of oil solidified into plastic. Therefore, most living creatures require regular consumption of purified fuel oil as a food source. Crude oil can be drawn from wells found on islands and processed into any other type by cooks.

Oil is a general category containing any liquid chemical of relevance. Water does not exist in this world.

Oil is typically stored in cylindrical bottles that attach to various spots on the body. Bottles can be either drunk from, poured out, or thrown, breaking and splashing as a burst effect on impact. You can also load them into certain parts for use that way. Regardless, using a bottle expends all the oil within it.

TYPES OF OIL

Crude: Basic oil, used to make all other kinds.
Fuel: Whenever you rest, you may expend a bottle of fuel to remove damage from one virtue.
Brick: The solidified form of oil. Expended as part of building or repairing structures, vehicles, and terrain.
Resin: Fills in gaps of living plastic. Expend with an action to remove damage from a single part in reach.
Grease: Anyone moving across grease must check Grace or slip, but takes no penalty for squeezing.
Glue: Until the scene ends, anything touching glue must make a Courage check to escape being stuck.
Poison: Make a Courage check after consumption or injection. On a failure, fall unconscious at the end of the scene, lasting until you consume medicine.
Acid: Acid deals chemical damage as a weapon.
Medicine: Consuming medicine ends the effects of poison and disease.
Phenol: Drink to fix damage from a virtue of your choice, but damage another virtue of your choice.
Paint: In multiple colors. Dries at the end of the scene.
Soap: Removes paint, dirt, rust, and grime on contact.

Herbalists know how to blend different colors of fuel into something delicious. Red is spicy, blue is sweet, and green is savory.

Phenol occupies a social role similar to alcohol.

BOATS

Boats are crucial to the People's way of life, as they allow travel between the various islands of their sprawling archipelago. They are also crucial to your quest, so you begin play with a single boat set aside for the use of the heroes.

Boats are made up of parts, much like creatures, but as boats are Large, their parts are Medium sized and can't be equipped normally. A boat can have a maximum of nine parts, and you can swap out any parts freely during a downtime phase.

In addition to carrying up to eight Medium sized creatures, a boat carries 1 "Supply". You can expend a point of Supply during an expedition to retrieve any part you own, having wisely stored it for use earlier.

Each year, sailors undergo a loop around the loose confederation of inhabited islands to deliver lavish gifts of food, parts, and ritual heirloom masks to one another, maintaining the good relations between one another by perpetuating the web of debts.

SHIP PARTS

Cabin: The boat can carry an additional 8 Medium creatures.
Hold: The boat gains +1 additional Supply.
Crow's Nest: All passengers get +1 on Insight checks when sailing.
Reinforced Hull: All passengers get +1 on Courage checks when sailing.
Gyroscope: All passengers get +1 on Grace checks when sailing.
Crane: When sailing, you can spend your action to make an Insight check to gain +1 Supply by pulling things up from the sea floor.
Air Bubble: Can travel to Sunken islands.
Fuel Tank: Can travel to Distant islands.
Tilt Rotor: Can travel to Flying islands.
Spiral Drill: Can travel to Walled islands.
Access Rune: Can travel to Sealed islands.
Calling Bell: Can travel to Living islands.

THE ADVERSARY

The People speak in hushed tones of "the Adversary" because they fear invoking their true name: Masuta, the dark one. Having usurped the throne of the great creator spirit, Masuta is hardwired into the mechanism of fate and therefore receives unclouded guidance on how to act in accordance with it. They use this power to spread their influence, hoping to seize the entire world. The following sections assume that you are playing Masuta.

Although powerful, you are not without limits, leaving open the possibility of your defeat. First, you are arrogant, convinced of your inevitable victory and prone to leaving gaps in your defenses. Second, you are busy, occupied with enacting your plans and unable to personally chase down the heroes. Finally, you are honorable, in your own way, seeing yourself as the bearer of divine mandate and thus unwilling to break promises you make, even with the heroes.

The person playing as the Adversary occupies the role called "game master" in many other roleplaying games, but here possesses a distinct character of their own to play.

CHARACTER CREATION

Aside from the attributes stated above, when playing Masuta you have free rein to characterize them as you like, just like creating a hero. Use the same character creation rules as everyone else, but you start play with any Uncommon parts you wish, as long as they fit into your part slots. Due to your connection to divinity, you count as Large regardless of your actual size.

Unlike the heroes, you do not appear in person most of the time. However, you always appear in the first session, to establish yourself as the antagonist, and the last session, to face the heroes in the final battle.

CHRONICLES

A chronicle is a full game of Protoplastic. By design, a chronicle lasts eight sessions in total, with a definite beginning and end. Each session takes place on one of the eight islands of the archipelago.

FIRST SESSION

The first session is a prologue of sorts: during it, all the players get together and make characters, setting up relationship dynamics and tying their backstories together, while also deciding what their home island is like. They then play out a short scenario taking place on their home island in which they interact with the Adversary: perhaps they attack the village, or were a friend who betrays them. Regardless, it gives all players a chance to interact and sets up their quest.

The first session doubles as what some might call a "session zero".

MIDDLE SESSIONS

In sessions two through seven, the heroes journey to the various islands of the archipelago, defeating tyrants and gathering the power they'll need to face the Adversary. From the outset, there are three islands to choose from, which they can do in the order they find most suitable. One of those islands contains a boat part that "unlocks" three more islands, typically more difficult than the first set. In turn, the second set includes a part that unlocks the eighth and final island.

If you're not able to finish everything within eight sessions it's okay to run into an overtime session or two, but try not to not let it go on too long or you risk losing player interest.

LAST SESSION

The heroes finally journey to the eighth island, the stronghold of the Adversary. This functions similarly to other islands, but here the Adversary acts as the tyrant, far stronger than any before. Defeating them (or being defeated themselves) concludes the chronicle.

THE ARCHIPELAGO

The world consists of a vast ocean of oil dotted with metal islands. The ocean's top layer is an iridescent black oil slick, along which the boats of the People sail.

When the chronicle begins, the Adversary draws a map of the archipelago: the small home island of the heroes sits in the center, surrounded by seven other islands further out: six islands afflicted by marauders and monsters, plus the Adversary's fortress. The heroes should name their home island and describe what it's like.

The name and traits of each island can either be randomly rolled for or chosen manually.

Next, the Adversary draws lines connecting each outlying island to the home island: these are the known sea routes between them. Each line has three one-word tags next to it indicating the hazards one has to weather to cross that route, as described on the Sailing page.

Then, the Adversary chooses three islands to bear a special trait that makes them harder to reach. They also pick a different trait from the same list for the Adversary's stronghold. Later, when setting the specifics of each island, they make sure that at least one of the first set of outlying islands contains the boat part that allows passage through the first special island trait, and that at least one of the islands with that first trait contain the boat part that allows passage to the stronghold island.

In this way, the heroes must first visit the first set of three islands, then the second three, and finally the seventh.

ISLAND BARRIER TRAITS

Sunken: Deep beneath the waves.
Distant: Too far away for fuel supplies to last.
Flying: Suspended in the air, far above the sea.
Walled: Surrounded by an impenetrable metal wall.
Sealed: Protected by an iridescent mystic force field.
Living: A mobile creature, impossible to track unaided.

ISLANDS

Each session in a chronicle, the heroes sail to a new island to defeat the tyrant residing there. Because they choose which island they wish to visit next at the end of the prior session, you have the time until the next session to develop what the island holds in store.

An island is made up of a set of areas linked by lines indicating paths between them. The heroes start in one area and then traverse the available paths to other areas, searching them for useful resources and hunting down the tyrant. In theory, an island can consist of anything the heroes would find interesting, but there's a simple set of patterns you can follow to design consistently interesting islands to explore.

Think of an island as a set of rooms linked by corridors. It's similar to a "dungeon" you might find in another game.

ISLAND CREATION

Draw six spaces and label them 1 to 6: these are the areas on the island. Starting with 1, go through each area, rolling a six-sided die and drawing a connection to the space with the number you rolled, re-rolling any connections already drawn.

Area 1 is the entrance to the island, typically a beach or other landing spot. **Area 2** is a village or other settlement, with people who can explain the situation. **Area 3** contains some sort of treasure (usually a part) guarded by hostile servants of the tyrant. **Area 4** also contains treasure, but hidden behind some kind of puzzle or environmental hazard. **Area 5** is a free space, usually containing something that adds flavor or history to the island. **Area 6** is the lair of the tyrant.

Additionally, consider making some of the paths lengthy (check for an encounter), hazardous (check to avoid a danger) or hidden (only revealed by a search).

AREAS

With seven islands to explore and six areas per island, you'll need to generate a fair number of them. Your areas should include exciting concepts that sell the feel of the setting: dense jungles, ancient temples, crystalline caves, and volcano calderae are all good options. At the same time, they should be varied, offering different challenges and sights to see. Above all, they should present situations that are interesting to play around with: think of places and the things in them as toys, with handles to pull and a variety of outcomes to trigger. Below are some example features to include.

AREA FEATURES

Cover: Anything large and opaque enough to hide behind. Grants +1 to avoiding attacks and remaining hidden.
Fog: Grants +1 to avoiding attacks and remaining hidden, but also -1 to attacking and seeing hidden things.
Drop: A cliff, pit trap, etc. Check Courage to avoid being damaged by the fall. If the fall is very long, a success may let you catch yourself halfway down.
Pool: You can hold your breath while submerged for a round, but each turn after that must check Courage or damage Courage (persistent).
Hazard: Lava, acid, etc. Succeed on a Courage check or damage a part – your choice, but you must choose motors first if you have them.
Bridge: Movement to the other side must pass through here. Grants +1 to attempts to prevent others from trying to move past.
Cave: Cramped, must be squeezed through. Even if wide enough not to squeeze, ceiling too low to fly in. Useful to lure a highly mobile tyrant in to.

Area features should always be pressed to one's advantage. The heroes should be encouraged to try to bait tyrants into terrain unfavorable to them.

TYRANTS

To aid in your ambition to control the world, you command a handful of primary subordinates, collectively called "tyrants". At the start of the chronicle, you have either dispatched or recruited one tyrant (or group of tyrants) for each of the six islands in the archipelago besides the home of the heroes and your own capital. Each tyrant owes you a debt of some kind, and is typically loyal, but may sometimes be swayed to follow their own interests in extreme cases. If a tyrant suffers a significant defeat and lives to report back to you, you may either execute them, exile them, or give them one last chance – but only one.

In game terms, a tyrant is the "boss" of an island, and functions as the primary antagonist for a given session. Tyrants are designed to match an entire group of heroes in power, so they are usually either Large (and therefore the equivalent of a group of Medium creatures) or are themselves a group with about as many members as the party of heroes. Each tyrant possesses at least one rare part, both giving them a special ability for the heroes to overcome and acting as a reward when they salvage it afterward. Large tyrants are therefore the source of boat upgrades, while Medium ones offer a upgrades to the heroes themselves.

The goal of any given session is clear: defeat this island's tyrant and claim its parts.

TYRANT CONCEPTS

An ancient titan, awoken to do Masuta's bidding.
A fallen hero, corrupted by the promise of power.
A gang of raiders, infamous for their brutality.
A gigantic monster, brought to heel by a control device.
A horde of ravenous creatures, united by a queen.
An ambitious village chief, reckless in pursuit of rule.
A mutagenic plague, its sufferers merged in a hivemind.
A squad of soldiers, executing a harsh code of justice.

ENCOUNTERS

In order to establish pacing and ensure that the passage of time cannot be ignored, whenever a scene concludes (such as when moving to an unexplored area, searching an area, finishing a fight, et cetera), check for an encounter before moving to the next scene. An encounter check is simple: roll a six-sided die, and initiate an encounter if it shows 1, 2, or 3. On a 4, 5, or 6, nothing happens.

An encounter is a special type of scene. Each encounter builds upon the next in a causal chain of events, typically set into motion by the tyrant. The name "encounter" comes from the fact that, in many cases, the scene will center around the island's tyrant taking action against the heroes: showing up just long enough to hit-and-run or deliver a monologue, for example. Each tyrant has their own set of encounters.

Although similar in name and function to random encounters from other games, here encounters follow an ordered procedure that contributes to a core narrative.

Encounters occur according to a schedule of six scenes in total. The first time an encounter is called for trigger the first scene, the next time play out the second scene, and so on. Typically the final scene brings about some sort of end state: the tyrant grows stronger, a village is destroyed, or some other undesirable outcome. Therefore, the heroes should strive to defeat the tyrant before the sixth encounter.

EXAMPLE ENCOUNTER SET

1: The tyrant is seen flying overhead.
2: A random hero is struck by lightning.
3: The tyrant's screech strike fear in all who hear it.
4: The tyrant swoops in to rake someone with its claws.
5: Spiral storm clouds gather in the sky.
6: A lightning bolt destroys the island's village.

ADVERSARY DOWNTIME

Just like the heroes, each downtime phase the Adversary also gets to take one downtime action. The Adversary's actions represent the next step of their master plan, and draw upon far greater resources than those of the underdog heroes, so their actions impact the world in sweeping fashion.

When you begin play as the Adversary, choose one of the goals below: you can either announce it or keep a secret, but should reveal it by the end of the chronicle. Choose downtime actions that suit your goal.

Adversary downtime actions are more narrative than functional: they demonstrate that the adversary is an active threat to the world. It's fine if they are simply a spectacle to show how villainous you are, or to give villagers a fearful rumor to talk about. However, you can use them to foreshadow future events, or explain why the island the heroes visit next session is a wasteland.

ADVERSARY DOWNTIME ACTIONS

- Devastate or outright sink an island.
- Steal and ransom the pearls of everyone in a village.
- Perform a dark ritual to augment your partial divinity.
- Seize an ancient shrine or other site of power.
- Obtain a legendary artifact part and add it to yourself.
- Strip an island of all its resources to fuel your plans.
- Devote all your resources on a mysterious project.
- Spread monsters or plague across the archipelago.
- Kill a character that the heroes cared about.
- Overthrow a villager's leader and install a tyrant.

ADVERSARY GOALS

Rule The World: The world is fragmented, so someone must bring order.
Destroy The World: The world is dying, so chew and eat your fill.
Change The World: There's something wrong with the world you can fix.
Transcend The World: You're trapped in a cycle you want to break.
Save The World: If defeated, reveal what doom you were trying to prevent.

CALENDAR

About a month passes between each downtime phase. For the People, there are twelve months in the year, and each month contains a unique event. Therefore, each downtime, check the months below and move to the next holiday.

The Adversary gets to pick what week the first session starts on. If you're not sure what to pick, start at the beginning of the year.

HOLIDAYS

New Year: A nighttime celebration of the new lunisolar year, on which stories are told of the constellations.
Birth Day: The day on which new pearls are traditionally given their first bodies and masks.
Vegetable Harvest: A festival celebrating the bounty of vegetables, and a blessing for future fertility.
First Planting: The start of dry season, during which fruits and flowers are planted.
Black Day: The annual trade ring commences, with sailors taking black necklaces clockwise.
Tournament: The grand ball game, determining who wears the crown until next year.
Destiny Day: An auspicious day on which each person receives a seer's prophecy of their luck for the year.
White Day: The trade ring concludes, with sailors returning bearing white necklaces in return.
Fruit Harvest: A festival celebrating the fruits of the harvest, known for copious drinking of phenol.
Second Planting: The start of the wet season, during which leafy vegetables and tubers are planted.
Spirit Day: The day in which the spirit world is said to overlap with the material. A dangerous day, on which superstitions are observed and spells are cast.
Ancestor Day: A somber day of mourning the dead, and providing offerings to the pearls of ancestors kept safe by the island's seer.

NAMES

The language of the People uses a syllabary: rather than an alphabet, each character in their written words represents a distinct sound. When you need a name for something (a person, place, or thing), randomly select a few syllables from the chart below and string them together: any sequence is a valid word.

Syllables

	A	**E**	**I**	**O**	**U**
Ø	a	e	i	o	u
G	ga	ge	gi	go	gu
H	ha	he	hi	ho	hu
K	ka	ke	ki	ko	ku
L	la	le	li	lo	lu
N	na	ne	ni	no	nu
M	ma	me	mi	mo	mu
T	ta	te	ti	to	tu
P	pa	pe	pi	po	pu
R	ra	re	ri	ro	ru
J	ja	je	ji	jo	ju
V	va	ve	vi	vo	vu

The written characters corresponding to these sounds are the ones you see spread across these pages.

For reference, here are the canonical names of myth:

Kavama, Hero of Fire
Liru, Hero of Oil
Utavu, Hero of Smoke
Onegi, Hero of Metal
Nupaki, Hero of Glass
Ijo, Hero of Lightning
Masuta, the Adversary

ADVANCED SENSORS

UNCOMMON SENSORS

Antenna: You can detect radio signals and magnetic fields. Your "vision" consists of radar: long distance, but incapable of showing color or detail.
Spectroscope: You can detect ultraviolet and ionizing radiation, letting you scan for invisible traces and see inside non-metallic objects.
Night Eyes: Detection of the infrared and microwave portion of the spectrum, allowing it to see heat, and thus detect creatures, machinery, and so on.
Pipes: You can hear very high frequency sounds, and "see" solid objects by bouncing sound waves off of them, not showing color but ignoring camouflage.
Bulb: You can smell like a bloodhound, letting you track by scent, but take -1 when relying on your dim vision. Pressure, humidity, temperature?
Gyroscope: Feel mechanical stress on things you touch as though they were part of you, as well as tiny vibrations, such as footsteps in an adjacent area.
Telescope: You can clearly see anything out to the horizon and make out tiny details with close inspection, but take -1 to seeing things in the same area.

RARE SENSORS

Branch: You can detect living things, as well as the recently dead. This works even through walls.
Sigil: You can detect spirits, the use of elemental commands, and any other magical effect, regardless of line of sight.
Clock: You can see a few seconds into the future. You may set one readied action for free in addition to any normal actions you take.

ADVANCED ARMOR

UNCOMMON ARMOR

Scales: You get +1 to resist Kinetic damage.
Shell: You get +1 to resist Chemical damage.
Exoskeleton: You get +1 to resist Energy damage.
Microbiome: You are immune to disease, mutation, and ambient heat or cold.
Camouflage: You are always considered concealed as long as you do not move or take actions.
Compartment: You have a compartment inside yourself, letting you store up to four items on this part's grid space.
Rebreather: You can breathe in oil and are unharmed by high pressure environments.
Swarm: Your body parts are remotely linked, so you can still control them while detached.
Alembic: As a turn action, convert a bottle of oil into any other type of oil that you choose.

RARE ARMOR

Force Field: You are immune to Kinetic and Chemical damage, but take -1 to resist Energy damage.
Regenerator: You are immune to Kinetic and Energy damage, but take -1 to resist Chemical damage.
Mirror: You are immune to Chemical and Energy damage, but take -1 to resist Kinetic damage.

ADVANCED ARMS

UNCOMMON ARMS

Drill: Can be used as a melee kinetic attack, or to excavate enough terrain to open a shallow passage by spending a scene action digging.
Launcher: Can be loaded with any object of Size-2 or smaller and pneumatically propel it as a ranged attack.
Pump: The arm can be loaded with a bottle of any oil, and propel its contents out to anywhere in the area.
Wire: Metal filaments let you "talk" to pearls even when not attached to a body, and can be used as a melee energy attack.
Lamp: Can either illuminate the area or a narrow space. Can be used to blind a creature as a ranged attack.
Torch: Can be used as a melee energy attack, or as a source of heat.
Cable: Can launch a grappling claw with a long cable as a ranged attack, latching securely on to anything a hand could hold.
Shield: You get +1 on checks to resist physical attacks as long as you are conscious and not paralyzed.

RARE ARMS

Flamethrower: May be used as a ranged Energy attack. Target must check with Grace to avoid being set on fire (persistent, damages a part of their choice).
Smoker: Produce thick, opaque smoke, enough to obscure yourself and anything near you.
Thunderbolt: Shoots electricity as a ranged Energy burst attack.

ADVANCED MOTORS

UNCOMMON MOTORS

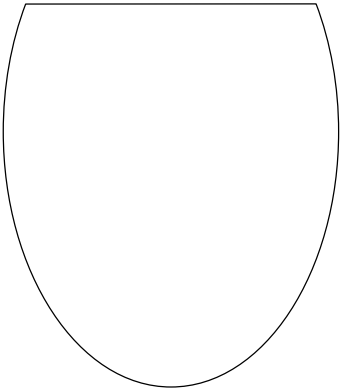
Hooks: You can freely climb, hang, swing, and keep your balance without penalty, even on sheer vertical surfaces or ceilings, but cannot walk or run.
Wheels: You can move over solid ground and take no penalty for carrying heavy objects, but cannot jump.
Tail: Your serpentine lower body lets you move freely and suffer no penalties when crawling or fitting through tight spaces, but you cannot jump.
Springs: You can move over solid ground, suffer no penalty for jumping, and are unharmed by falls, but cannot carry heavy objects.
Fins: You can swim without penalty, breathe when submerged, and are immune to high ambient pressure.
Wings: You can fly through the air, but require a relatively open area take off or land.
Thrusters: You can float up to a meter off the ground. While floating, you ignore difficult terrain and don't need an open area for flight, but take -1 to movement.

RARE MOTORS

Teleporter: When you move, you appear at your destination without passing through the intervening space, so your movement cannot be prevented by anyone in the way and you ignore difficult terrain. You must be able to accurately sense your destination.
Liquefier: When moving as a turn action, you can temporarily melt your own plastic into a liquid to pass through even tiny openings.
Excavator: You can move through sand, soil, or similar solid particulates as though swimming, at no penalty.
Rocket: You can move at incredible speed, able to take the traverse action as a turn action. However, you must succeed at a Grace check to take position actions without crashing into the target feature (part damage).

NAME

PEARL



DEBTS

MASK

COURAGE

GRACE

INSIGHT

PARTS

Eyes	spectroscope	Night Eyes	Antenna
Telescope	Bulb	Gyroscope	Pipes
Branch	Sigil	Clock	Skeleton
Exoskeleton	Shell	Scales	Microbiome
Camouflage	Compartment	Rebreather	Swarm
Mirror	Hand	Blade	Instrument

Tool	Drill	Launcher	Pump
Wire	Lamp	Torch	Cable
Shield	Flamethrower	Smoker	Thunderbolt
Legs	Hooks	Wheels	Tail
Springs	Fins	Wings	Thrusters
Teleporter	Liquefier	Excavator	Rocket

Crude	Fuel	Brick	Resin
Grease	Glue	Poison	Acid
Medicine	Phenol	Paint	Soap

Placeholder icons by Danil Polshin (CC BY-3.0 Attribution License) via The Noun Project