APOTHEOSIS BLUES

A 24-hour RPG by Michael Walton

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To learn more about the 24-hour RPG project, check out www.1km1kt.net

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HERE WITHOUT YOU

I hate being kept waiting to kill someone. I'd been sitting in my car for so long that my backside had forgotten what it was like to not be numb. The abandoned church across the street looked exactly the same now as it did when I pulled up six hours ago. An old Three Doors Down tune drifted up from the CD player – softly, so that no one could hear it outside the car while the windows were up – and tried vainly to tweak my soul in places that were as numb as my ass. I pulled out my bone-handled lighter and lit my umpteenth cigarette of the evening. As I took that first deep draw my familiar drifted up beside me. "Those things will kill you, boss," he quipped.

I gave Dyson my best "up-yours" glare and blew a smoke ring where his face should've been. Dyson was a featureless ball who usually floated at about shoulder height (on me, anyway). He appeared to be made of glass, but God knows what my mentor had crafted him out of. Glass wasn't bulletproof, and I'd seen Dyson take a .38 slug at point blank and show not so much as a scratch. His color slowly shifted to match my mood, which meant that right now he was deep, non-reflective black. "Not likely," I responded, "If guns and knives can't kill me, I don't think bad habits will." I shifted in my seat in a vain attempt to restore some feeling to my nether parts. "How much longer is this gonna take, Dyson? I have other appointments to keep."

"Don't get your knickers in a twist, boss," Dyson said jauntily, "I scan that the mark will enter the building in 11.023 seconds." I turned my gaze to the door just in time to see two figures fade out of the night shadows. I blinked the darkness out of my eyes to see them clearly. It was a girl and a boy, both Latino teens. She was a bit chunky but firm, cute if you like chubby girls, with a jiggle to her middle that suggested baby weight. He was tall and wiry with multiple piercings and the half-mohawk haircut that all the wannabe hardboys were wearing in these parts. No doubt about it, this was the mark and the expected companion. The boy jimmied the lock with the ease of long practice and pushed the girl through the door, then he slipped in behind her.

"About time," I grumbled as I tossed my half-smoked cigarette into the Shadow. I opened the car door as the church door clicked shut, unfolded my six-foot-three height from the cramped confines of the Firebird and crossed the street in what I hoped was a confident swagger. Dyson bobbed along beside me in silence, all business now that it was go-time. I stopped at the door and eyed my familiar. Dyson gave an electronic sigh and willed the sounds inside to percolate through the wood and into my ears.

"I don't know about this, Raphael," the girl whined, "Isn't there some other way?" I could hear her clothes rustle as she fidgeted and a squeaking sound that was probably one of her hands twisting a ring on the other. Various thumps and bumps told me that Raphael was moving things around. I needed more information than my ears alone could provide. I signaled Dyson to oblige, and he extended my other senses into the church. My projected vision revealed desolate absence. The pews and pulpit were long gone, probably broken up for firewood, and any curtains or hangings that had once adorned the walls had long since been converted to blankets. Such is the way of the world after civilization collapses, yet the locals retained enough piety that the stained glass windows were unbroken. Jesus remained on the wall, staring forlornly at the empty space where the sanctuary used to be. I knew how he felt. The girl stood next to her boyfriend while he knelt on the floor surrounded by boxes. He was unloading ritual paraphernalia and carefully arranging it according to some formula. A ring of candles surrounded a thin sleeping mat that lay where a more suspicious girl would've thought a sacrificial altar might go. One box remained unopened as he worked. I didn't see them carry any of this stuff inside, so Raphael must have stashed it here ahead of time. The room stank of mildew, but over that I noticed an aroma of peaches from the girl's hair. I couldn't tell if it was homemade or pre-Burn, but it was distractingly pleasant. I grabbed my attention by the scruff of its neck and pointed it back to the business at hand.

"We already talked about this, Teresa," the boy said, "The rules for rituals are real tight, you know? If we don't do it exactly right, it won't

work." Raphael turned out to be a very good-looking young man, in spite (or perhaps because) of the slightly sinister cast to his face courtesy of the candles that he was lighting and arranging on the floor. His features showed no sign of wear from sun or weather, which told me that he was clever enough to avoid field work and lazy enough to want to. It was also clear that his nose had never been broken, which meant that he either had never been in a fight or, more likely, he only picked on weaker boys. My opinion of Teresa's taste in men just kept getting lower. Raphael stood, surveyed his work, and nodded in satisfaction. From what I could see he'd followed the scrolls pretty closely; the arrangement was just right for a sacrifice ritual. Clearly Teresa didn't know what it was, but I could see from the dark spots in his aura that Raphael did. Yeah, this kid was a real charmer. He crossed to his girlfriend and took her face in his hands. The stars in her eyes flared as he leaned in, almost close enough for a kiss, and whispered, "C'mon, baby, I'm doing this for us… and for our little girl. The Ascended think that they can ignore us, that our little town isn't worth helping. But when I have the power, I can make them help us!" The missionary zeal pouring from his eyes was reflected in hers, and I could see her breath catch as his fervor lit a fire in her heart. Then again, she was young; the fire was probably quite a bit lower. "Just think," he continued, "We'll have running water again, maybe electricity! We might even be able to make guns to keep the raiders away! And me and my posse will be in charge of it all. No stupid elders to keep us from doing whatever it takes to protect what's ours! But I can't do it without you, baby. Are you with me?" He pressed his hands together, and Teresa winced at the pressure. "Are you with me?" he repeated softly. Teresa hesitated long enough for tears to flow down over Raphael's hands, then she shuddered and nodded. "That's my girl," the boy said as he patted her cheek. He flipped a peremptory gesture toward the makeshift altar. "Lie down over there," he commanded. Teresa wiped her face and complied meekly. I found myself glad that she wouldn't have to endure a lifetime of this treatment. That was something, at least.

While Teresa settled herself Rafael reached into the last box. He worked with much greater care than he used to handle Teresa, and when he turned around it was obvious why. In his hands was a small but lively snake. It looked like a diamondback, but its scales were all in shades of red and the markings on its back glowed in the semidarkness. My eyebrows quickly gained altitude. *Where did this kid get a chimerical snake?* I wondered.

The desert's not far from here, boss, Dyson answered telepathically, *And even chimerical snakes are pretty stupid. It wouldn't have been hard for him to catch one.*

It was a rhetorical question, Softball, I retorted. Dyson wisely subsided and let me concentrate on my job. I have to admit, he really is a good familiar. Too bad he's such a pain when we're not working.

Raphael stepped into the circle and knelt next to Teresa. He began chanting in a whispery voice – a rather accomplished tenor, I noted – in a language that I didn't recognize. It sounded like something Native American, which would make sense here in Texas. He raised the snake above his head as if it was an offering to the gods. When he finished the chant he lowered the serpent until it could almost reach Teresa's left arm. "This is it, baby," he crooned, "You ready?"

"Oh-okay," the girl stammered. Tears welled up in her eyes, and her bottom lip quivered, but her trusting gaze never wavered from his face. Raphael smiled his devil's smile and lowered the snake the rest of the way. It sank its fangs into Teresa's flesh and bore down to pump its deadly venom into her blood. The girl stifled a cry, but her tears flowed freely. After a few seconds Raphael gently pulled the serpent away and relaxed his grip on its neck. The snake, which was a much better judge of character than Teresa, promptly turned and bit the boy. His gritted teeth were his only acknowledgement of the pain. When the snake relaxed its grip Raphael snapped its neck and threw it across the room.

Note that he had the snake bite her first to use up most of its venom, Dyson commented.

Not to mention that he's probably been building up immunity with small doses of venom from normal rattlers, I countered. There, that oughta knock some of the smugness out of that digital know-it-all.

Raphael took Teresa's hand in both of his. Even from my disembodied viewpoint she looked cold. "How you doin', baby?" he asked, "Any visions yet?" I stifled a chuckle. Gotta give the kid credit for sticking to his story.

Teresa shook her head weakly. "I don't feel so good, Raph," she croaked, "I don't think it's working."

"Sure it's working, babe, you just gotta give it more time," Raphael lied. A sudden spasm racked his body, and he brutally suppressed a cry of pain. "But I'm not feeling so good myself. How 'bout I lie down next to you?" The boy stretched out next to his love-besotted sacrifice and pressed himself against her side. "There, that's better. Just like that night on the hill, huh?" He grinned, all charm, and Teresa answered with a flash of her own teeth. "Just relax and close your eyes, and the spirits will show us the way."

Teresa, of course, did as she was told. Her skin gradually turned pasty, and her whole body shook as it battled the venom that was attacking her blood. "I think I see something, Raph," she whispered, "I see a light." Her eyes drifted open, and the expression on her face was pure rapture. "It's beautiful," she breathed. Raphael didn't respond. His eyelids fluttered like he was in the grip of a powerful dream, and reddish vapors rose from his body.

That's our cue, boss, said Dyson. I grunted and gripped the doorknob. I poured a tiny bit of my energy into the lock to accelerate its decay, and the bolt dissolved into a cloud of rust. I stepped into the room and strode over to the ritual circle. I'd been standing over the kids for a full fifteen seconds before the girl noticed me. Her eyes slowly cleared, then widened in recognition and fear.

"Oh, no," she sobbed, "You're Keeton, aren't you? You're the Reaper."

"In the flesh, babe," I answered, and swept an arm across my whip-thin frame, "Such as it is."

Teresa closed her eyes and choked back her tears. When she opened them again her expression was one of resignation – but not of panic, and definitely not defeat. My first impression was right, Raphael did not evenly remotely deserve this girl. "We did the ritual wrong, didn't we? We did it wrong, and now you're here to claim the two of us." The girl groped until she found the boy's hand, and only then did I realize that her eyesight must be fading. Yet she could see me just fine, which meant that she was almost ready to cross over. Perfect.

"Oh, no, I'm only here to claim one of you, sweet thing," I purred, "See, you did the ritual just fine. Trouble is, it doesn't do exactly what your boyfriend thinks it does." Teresa twitched as a wave of pain passed through her body, and her tears took on a greenish tinge. She was nearly there now. "Your boyfriend only got

enough poison in him to have an out-of-body experience. But you, little lady, you got a really big dose," I continued, "Big enough to kill you, in fact. I'm afraid you won't be seeing any visions tonight."

"Oh," she said, and the word was almost a sigh, "But who will take care of my baby?"

"Don't you worry your pretty little head, darlin'," I responded, "That baby will be well taken care of."

"So Raphael makes it?" she asked, "That's good. I'm okay with dying, if it saves him."

"Yeah," I said as the mists above Raphael coalesced into a humanoid figure, "I'm sure he was counting on that." Teresa's eyes fluttered shut, and her breathing slowed. With a last sighing exhalation she lay still, and the mists above Raphael flared with a sickly green glow. His astral body was now completely.

The boy surveyed his astral self critically, then reared back and blasted a triumphant laugh into the ether. Raphael turned and looked at me. *So, the Reaper came to stop me,* he said into my mind, *But you're too late. You can't touch me now, motherf***er! I'm a f***ing god!*

"No, you're not, punk," I said, "But I am." With a mental command I summoned my shotgun from the Shadow and aimed it at the center of the ethereal form. The gun spoke, and a spray of empowered shot tore through Raphael's astral body. His howl of rage and pain cut off abruptly as his soul exploded into a cloud of etheric shrapnel. One of the pieces lodged in Teresa's chest just above her heart, and she arched her back and screamed in soul-deep agony. The last shreds of his spirit dissipated into nothingness in perfect synch with the death rattle that pushed its way out of his body. Then the corpse burned to ash in emerald flames, then the ash blew away in a wind from worlds unknown. Soon there was nothing left of the would-be god but Teresa's pleasant (and therefore distorted) memories of him. Some nights I really like my job.

Dyson looped around my head and hastily flew toward the door. "And now for the sucky part," he said, "If you need me, I'll be in the car."

"Coward!" I yelled after him, wishing that I could go with him. Unfortunately, the rules of the job said that I had to stick around for this part. Teresa convulsed and kicked as a warm radiance shone through her skin. Beams of light pierced her at random intervals, and her screams rose in pitch with each outbreak until the sound was nearly ultrasonic. Finally she exploded in a coruscating pulse of warm yellow light. The

shock wave shattered all of the windows except one. That last one broke when I was blown through it. I bounced twice on the pavement outside the church and fetched up against the wall of the building across the street. I sat up and brushed the glass and debris from my duster, then carefully hauled myself upright. I may be immortal, but stuff like that still hurts. I dismissed my gun back to the Shadow – it would be no use to me for the rest of this conflict.

Dyson floated over to me with entire spectrums swirling in his core. I knew that I was okay, but he was programmed to scan me for injuries – both physical and astral – any time something like this happened. "You're good, boss," he pronounced. Dyson had no head or eyes to turn, but I could feel his attention swivel toward the church, from which a pale glow still shone. "So, what element do you think she'll be?" he asked.

"Fire," I answered, hoping that I was wrong. Teresa stormed out of the building, bringing the glow with her. Gah, I hate it when I'm right. The light pulse had burned off all of her clothes, so she was now clad only in that golden glow and in the innocence that made her such an easy target for guys like Raphael. She was naked and unashamed, Ascension having seared away all imperfections. The transition hadn't burned any weight off of her, but it didn't matter. Before she was just pleasantly plump. Now she was voluptuous. Her honey-colored skin was smooth and flawless, and her hair, once shoulder length, now flowed down her back in glorious black waves. She'd been wearing rings before, but now the only adornment she had on was a single flower tucked behind her left hear. That somehow looked sexier than any vulgar display of gold would have. Each step that she took wafted a fruity, floral smell in my direction, and that aroma was tinged with a hint of ripe femininity. Not the tawdry, rank smell of cheap sex. It was the heady, intoxicating scent of lovemaking, and of making babies. Lord, she was beautiful.

Dyson hovered at my shoulder for her first few steps, but he drifted behind me as she approached within slapping range. I didn't blame him; I wanted someone to hide behind, myself. *Uh, boss,* he ventured, *You wanna take a wild guess as to what sort of plant that kind of flower grows on?*

I'm gonna go out on a limb and say, 'peach tree,' I replied. I groaned. *A love goddess. Great. Just what I freakin' need.* Teresa planted herself in front of me and glared, hands on her luscious hips. I cranked my bravado knob to eleven to drown out the sudden tightness in the front of my jeans as long-unused parts responded to long-forgotten stimuli. The sudden tightness in my chest as long-forgotten feelings struggled for attention was harder to ignore. "Well, lookit you, missy," I brayed, "Don't you look nice? Tad underdressed, though, doncha think?"

Now, I'm considered one of the best shots among the Ascended in Texas. I can draw, aim and fire in less time than it takes most people to just pull a trigger. In other words, I'm pretty fast. But I never even saw Teresa's arm move when she hauled off and slapped me. I didn't need a mirror to know how bad a mark she left. The heat on my cheek told me all that I needed to know. "You bastard," she snarled, "You killed my husband!"

"He was dead anyway," I replied, "He got out of his body, but the ritual didn't say how to get back in. When his body died of dehydration, the astral form would've died with it. But by then, we would've lost you, too. No point in his death being wasted."

"Wasted?" she shrieked, "Wasted! He loved me! He gave me a daughter! His life was precious! PRECIOUS!"

"To him, sure. Too bad he didn't think the same about yours." I paused to retrieve my cigarette from the Shadow, and continued. "He talked you into letting yourself get bitten by a poisonous snake – one that he'd probably been immunizing himself against for months. He was willing to kill you to get more power for himself. I believe that he was the love of your life, but were you the love of his?" I leaned in to get my face closer to hers, breathing carefully to minimize the scent of her hair, and continued. "But Ascension is a greedy mother; it always requires a death. Better you should live, because you're a better person than he was. I didn't come here to kill your man, sweet thing. I came to save you. Use those new senses that you got from Ascension and you'll know that I'm telling the truth."

Teresa glared at me like she was trying to burn a hole through my skull with her gaze – which she probably could have done if she'd really wanted to. Love has always been stronger than death. But she turned away before my eyeballs boiled in their sockets, so I knew that she had seen the truth. She shivered and hugged herself, and in the warm Texas night I knew that cold had nothing to do with the way she was shivering. "I loved him so much," she whined. "I still love him."

"And you probably always will," I commiserated.

"What do you know about it?" Teresa snapped, "You don't love. You *can't* love. All the legends say so."

"Oh, I can, darlin'," I replied, "I just shouldn't. We've all got baggage, sweet thing, remember that. What matters is how you deal with it." I swept an arm in the direction from which Teresa and Raphael had come, and her gaze followed my gesture. "Raphael was right about one thing, though. This town needs a god to watch over it. More than that, your little girl needs a mother. Are you up to the job, sweet thing?"

Teresa glared at me again. Her face slowly hardened, not in hate this time but in resolve, and she answered, "This is my town, Keeton. Don't come here again. Ever. I protect this place now."

Good girl, I thought. "I go where the job takes me," I said, "And I protect the whole state, not just one town. But I won't come here again unless the job brings me, or you invite me. That is my oath, by Stone and Bone, for as long as you watch over this place." I took a deep draw on my cigarette and smoked it down to the filter. I flicked the remains into the Shadow and locked eyes with Teresa. "That good enough for you, sweet thing?"

"Good enough," she said grudgingly, "And I promise that if you call me 'sweet thing' one more time, I'll cut your balls off." The newly minted goddess spun on her heel and marched off toward home. I stayed where I was until she got too far away for me to admire her sweet, round bottom. Then I got in my car and drove away.

"Well, that went well," said Dyson brightly, "The town got the god it's been needing, and we didn't get toasted."

"What do you mean 'we,' Softball? You spent most of that conversation hiding in my shadow!"

"Hey, I'm a scholar, not a fighter," he replied.

"Isn't that supposed to be, 'lover?'" I teased.

"I work for you, boss. A lover is not a good thing to be in this job."

"Got that right, Softball," I said with a chuckle, "Got that right." I pressed the accelerator down and sped off into the night toward my next mission. I lit another cigarette and let the sound of Three Doors Down lull me into a driving rhythm.

With luck time and the road would help me forget how beautiful Teresa was, and how her hair smelled like peaches.

PAINT IT BLACK

THE WORLD OF APOTHEOSIS BLUES

Apotheosis Blues is role-playing game set on a post-holocaust Earth. Civilization has collapsed. High technology is rare where it isn't nonexistent. Petty warlords reign where once there was the rule of law. Creatures out of nightmares roam the world seeking to devour the unwary. All of these genre cliches are familiar to anyone who has ever played a post-apocalypse rpg or watched any of the dozens of post-holocaust movies. But *Apotheosis Blues* differs from its predecessors in one critical respect. The disaster that ruined the World of Man wasn't nuclear or biological or even environmental. The world of *Apotheosis Blues* came about because of a spiritual holocaust.

In the world of this game civilization fell not under a rain of atomic death but under a crushing wave of cynicism. When a critical mass of humanity lost faith in everything save the products of human intellect a universe that turned out to run on faith as much as physics tipped out of balance. To restore that balance creation adjusted itself so that belief was more reliable than science. Most technology from after the Steam Age became so quirky and unpredictable that only those who truly understood it could make it work. The most advanced technologies – anything that required electronics, exotic chemistry or genetic manipulation – stopped working altogether. Tens of thousands of people perished in the first hours of what has come to be called the Big Burn (or simply the Burn). Planes fell out of the sky, skyscrapers fell in on themselves and ocean liners sank without a trace. Everyone who had a heart pacemaker keeled over dead immediately. Diabetics lapsed into comas and died as their insulin injections no longer had any effect. A few days later starvation started claim lives when food could no longer be trucked into the cities, and with no electricity it was harder to refrigerate perishables. Within two months after the Burn over a quarter of Earth's seven billion people were dead. City dwellers fled to the country in desperation, and the resulting resource wars killed millions more. The most advanced and populous nations suffered the worst, of course; third world nations with small rural populations hardly noticed the trouble. It was the rich, advanced countries – the ones that had grown arrogant enough to trust their prosperity more than they trusted their belief systems – that had the furthest to fall. By the current era, about 150 years after the Burn, Earth's human population has dropped to about two billion. Most of the survivors live in towns or villages containing less than 1,500 people, and almost none live in big cities.

But the loss of technology brought with it the return of something else. It brought back faith. The germs of this dark future aren't vulnerable to antibiotics, but they can often be vanquished by prayers. Amulets to ward off evil spirits do exactly that – and in this world, there are indeed evil spirits to ward off. There are reliable reports of mediums who really can speak with the dead. Creatures that were once relegated to myth now walk the Earth in flesh. Some of them are on the menu. Others have humans on their menu. All of the things that rational materialism dismissed as foolishness are common knowledge in this brave new world.

The post-Burn world is also in contact with other planes of existence. The best known dimension is the Shadow, a realm where time apparently does not pass (or perhaps passes so slowly that it can't be easily measured). There is also the Dream, the realm which all sufficiently advanced minds visit during sleep and from which all dreams and nightmares – and the wildest ideas – come. Many people believe that the afterlives of one or more religions are also real places, but no one has found a way to visit these planes while still alive and no one who died to get there has ever come back.

The most startling development in this post-apocalypse setting isn't the return of magic, however. The return of faith brought with it the return of gods. The old gods of myth, alas, are long gone. New gods were needed to take their place, so the universe arranged for those gods to be born. But the universe is nothing if not frugal, so it didn't create its new gods *ex nihilo*. Instead creation recycled some raw material that it already had in abundance (and that wasn't really good for anything else). The universe

made its new gods out of humans. A small number of people have Ascended to become beings of supernatural power. They are gods, powered by the ambient belief generated by humanity as a whole but only able to reach their true potential when belief is focused on them in particular. None of the new gods can do anything as spectacular as create a world in seven days – they are gods with a small "g," after all – but they can hear prayers directed at them and they have powers that allow them to answer those prayers. No one knows exactly how the universe chooses its new gods. Some say that the chosen ones are marked at birth. Others say that it's just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Still others believe that it's possible to bring oneself to Ascension by performing the right ritual, but no one seems to know anyone who succeeded at it.

While the new gods are new, most of them were raised in old belief systems. Those who practiced polytheistic faiths often adopt the guise of whichever god from their theology is most appropriate. Those whose belief systems are monotheistic generally refer to themselves as saints or prophets. Atheists and agnostics who ascend usually create entirely new traditions. Of all the world's religions Hinduism has had the easiest time adapting to the new status quo; already having a tradition of living people becoming avatars of the gods will do that. The syncretic faiths (Voudoun, Santeria, Candomble, etc.) were also able to accommodate the idea of mortals with divine power; the concept of mortals becoming "mounts" of the gods made that easy. The Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – are still struggling to adjust to the post-Burn world. The collapse of multinational religious hierarchies helped; individual congregations could more easily reach accommodations that worked for them if there were no regional or national officials in the way. Even so, the presence of individuals who call themselves gods (or who are called gods by others) doesn't sit will with fundamentalists.

The number of gods on Earth is small. Less than one person in 100,000 successfully Ascends (some don't survive the process). With Earth's much smaller population that means that there are no more than 20,000 gods on the entire planet at any given time. Factor in inter-god conflict and the number is usually less than that. Gods are effectively immortal – they don't age, they are immune to disease and can't be killed by mundane weapons or toxins – but they can die by supernatural means. There are god-slaying weapons out there, but gods are understandably nervous about mortals having access to such stuff. The more powerful monsters are also capable of killing gods, and some may in fact *be* gods of a sort. There are even chimerical germs and poisons that can affect gods. The Ascended have learned the hard way that unaging does not mean unkillable. For this reason many gods protect themselves from aggression with safety in numbers. Mortals quickly started referring to such groups as pantheons, and the best efforts of the Ascended can't stop the name from sticking.

One thing that the new gods have in common with the old ones is territoriality. Most gods or pantheons stake out a territory and protect it from all divine intruders. A protectorate may be as small as a single family or as large as a state or province, depending on the god's ambition and the power that backs it up. There are currently no gods strong enough to hold large nations, though there are some that preside over small countries. The only known god in Luxembourg is the reigning monarch, for example, and the members of a small Voudoun-based pantheon are the de facto rulers of Haiti.

What This Book Is (and Isn't)

This book is not intended to provide a comprehensive history and cosmology of the world of 150 AB (After the Burn); it is assumed that the game master (hereafter referred to as the GM) will fill in the details. This is intended to prevent players who read this book from gaining in-game knowledge that their characters should learn in play. The core rules for *Apotheosis Blues* provide a framework upon which to build your own game. There is enough information in this book to run an initial adventure or two, but more than that will require a little work from the GM. Future supplements – if there are any – will fill in some of the background that isn't covered here.

Apotheosis Blues is most emphatically not intended to be a serious commentary on faith and religion. Rather it is an exploration of a theme – to wit, that the laws that govern the universe include spirituality as well as physics. The basic premise of the game is that there is one kind of power that comes from knowing and another kind that comes from believing. *Apotheosis Blues* is ultimately about realizing the sustaining power of belief in a world where belief – at least in the religion that you were raised in – is no longer cool.

Welcome to *Apotheosis Blues*. Get ready to Ascend!

BORN TO BE WILD

CHARACTER CREATION

Apotheosis Blues is designed to be rules light and easy to learn. To this end character creation is simple yet deceptively rich. Making a character takes just a few steps that even first time players should be able to complete in 30 minutes or less. Players who are familiar with the system will be able to do it even faster.

There are many possibilities for type of character inherent in this game concept, but the core rules will focus on Ascended characters. This chapter and the chapter on game mechanics contain enough information that GMs who want to give players the option of chimerical (sometimes called Descended) or mortal PCs will be able to extrapolate rules for them, but detailing how to make mortal or Descended PCs is a subject for a future supplement.

Step 1: Elements and Aspects

Apotheosis Blues doesn't use the traditional attributes-and-skills model of character building. Instead each character is made up of four elements, each of which has three aspects. The elements are comprised of the four cardinal elements of western alchemy, while the aspects are physical, social and mental. Elements represent innate capability while aspects stand for training, practice or natural skill aptitude.

When creating a character the player chooses a prime element and a prime aspect to represent the character's main abilities. The prime element is dominant across all three aspects, while the prime aspect is dominant across all four elements. For gods the intersection of prime element and prime aspect determines what realm the god has power over.

Each aspect has, in addition to its mundane applications, a suite of Ascended applications. These are the supernatural powers that are available when using that aspect. The lists given here are not comprehensive; players who wish to use powers that don't appear here should discuss the matter with the GM and be prepared to justify their requests ("But… it's so *cool*!" is not sufficient justification).

A player begins with 12 points to distribute between the four elements and eight points to distribute between the aspects. That's eight points total, not eight points per element. Elements are rated 1-5, so each element must have at least one point and no more than five points invested in it. Aspects can have any rating from –2 to +3. Taking negative aspects (ratings less than 0) gives the player additional points with which to purchase positive aspects in some other area.

Element Rating	Descriptor
1	Below Average
2	Average
3	Above Average
4	Exceptional
5	Superhuman

The descriptions of the elements and aspects are rough overviews. Each contains possibilities that aren't listed here. This vagueness is intended to leave room for GMs to improvise and to reward player creativity.

ELEMENTS

EARTH

Earth is the element of stability and strength. It represents a character's a capacity for brute force, both resisting it and applying it.
Complement: Water
Opposite: Air
Physical: lifting power, carrying capacity, doing damage in close combat (with or without a weapon), endurance, resistance to stresses like disease and poison. *Ascended:* manipulating mineral matter, seismic and volcanic effects.
Social: intimidation, willpower, controlling one's own emotions. *Ascended:* life detection, controlling animals or plants, creating new species, making chimeras.
Mental: memory, deductive reasoning, resisting persuasion. *Ascended:* healing or inflicting injury, curing disease, neutralizing or creating toxins, life extension, controlling fertility.

WATER

Water is the element of subtlety and change. It represents adaptability as well as the power to erode resistance.

Complement: Air
Opposite: Fire
Physical: flexibility, climbing, swimming, stealth. *Ascended:* shaping water, controlling water currents and waves, controlling precipitation, eroding physical structures.
Social: acting, lying, hiding one's own emotions. *Ascended:* illusions, controlling visibility (i.e. creating darkness or fog), invisibility.
Mental: seeing connections between seemingly unrelated ideas, intuition, risk assessment. *Ascended:* shapeshifting (self), surviving hostile environments, breathing water, teleportation.

AIR

Air is the element of clarity and detection. It represents sensory acuity, abstract intelligence
Complement: Fire
Opposite: Earth
Physical: hand-eye coordination (precision), picking locks, using ranged weapons, surgery. *Ascended:* controlling winds and air pressure, purifying gases, lowering temperature, flight.
Social: logical persuasion, sense perception, reading body language, reading lips, detecting the emotions of others. *Ascended:* astral projection, banishing, clairvoyance, lie detection, pre- or postcognition, telepathy.
Mental: analyzing data or devices, craft and technical skills. *Ascended:* creating light or lightning, intangibility (gaseous form or phasing), transformation (others).

FIRE

Fire is the element of energy, especially the fires of creation. It represents speed and passion.
Complement: Earth
Opposite: Water
**Physical:** reflexes, agility, dodging, running. *Ascended:* flame projection, raising temperature, disintegration, transmuting elements.
Social: performing arts, oration/preaching, charisma, seduction, self-confidence. *Ascended:* controlling the emotions of others, curses, shadow control.
Mental: vehicle operation, detecting weakness, creativity, motivation. *Ascended:* accelerated aging, inflicting disease or insanity, shielding against detection, protective wards.

Each element has a complement – an element that it works well with – and an opposite with which it usually doesn't work at all. A god can use the Ascended powers of all aspects of his primary element and the prime aspect of his complement element. Working with the primary aspect is always easier, though; there is a penalty of +2 to the difficulty of any Ascended action that uses non-prime aspects of the primary element. Ascended powers using the complement element carry a +4 difficulty penalty. Gods cannot use the Ascended powers of their opposite elements, but any power of that element used against them gains a bonus of +2 to the roll. See the chapter on game mechanics for more information.
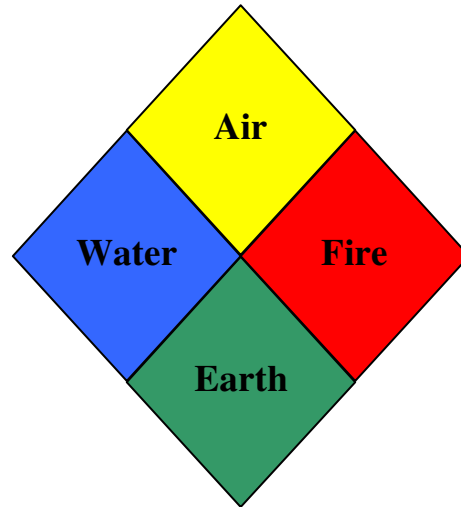
STEP 2: DERIVED VALUES

Derived values are computed using the elements and aspects. There are three derived values.

Stamina

Stamina is a character's capacity to withstand stress, fatigue and pain. Stamina loss usually results from light damage. Compute Stamina using the formula Earth + Social Earth + Mental Fire + 5.

Lost Stamina heals at the rate of one point every 15 minutes. A character falls unconscious when Stamina is reduced to zero, and any further damage (unless it is nonlethal) is applied to Health.

Health

Health is the ability to withstand actual physical injury. Low levels of Health damage represent lacerations, punctures, severe bruising and blood loss while higher levels stand for broken bones and damaged organs. Compute Health using the formula Earth + Physical Earth + Physical Water +5.

Lost Health heals at the rate of one point per day for gods. Mortals heal at the rate of one Health per week. When Health is reduced to zero the character is dead. Gods are fortunate in that mundane weapons, diseases, poisons or creatures cannot kill them. An attack from any such can never take away a god's last point of Health. Striking a deathblow on a god is only possible if the attack involves an enchanted weapon, a chimerical creature or another god.

Quintessence

Quintessence is a character's store of mystic power. Using any Ascended power of the primary element and primary aspect costs 1 quintessence. Ascended powers of the primary element but non-prime aspect cost 2 quintessence, and an Ascended power of the primary aspect of the complement element costs 3 quintessence to use. Compute quintessence using the formula primary element + complement element + (primary aspect in the primary element) + 3. Spent quintessence recharges at the rate of one point per day – but there are ways to speed this up.

Example: a character with Earth 3, Water 4 (primary), Air 3 (complement) and Fire 2 has social as the primary aspect, Physical Earth at +2, Mental Earth at +1, Physical Water at +1, Social Water at +3 and Mental Fire at +2. This character has the following derived values:

Stamina: Earth (3) + Mental Earth (1) + Mental Fire (2) + 5 = 3 + 1 + 2 + 5 = 11

Health: Earth (3) + Physical Earth (2) + Physical Water (1) + 5 = 3 + 2 + 1 + 5 = 11

quintessence: primary element (Water) + complement element (Air) + primary aspect in primary element (Social Water) + 3 = 4 + 3 + 3 + 3 = 13

STEP 3: FLAVOR

Flavor elements are primarily tools that encourage good role-playing. That they can also punish bad role-playing is a bonus. Flavor consists of Theme, Motif, Shard and Taboo.

Theme

Theme is the main descriptor of what the character is a god of. In the opening fiction piece the themes are pretty clear; Keeton and Teresa are gods of death and love, respectively. When creating a character the player should choose a word or simple phrase that sums up the character's theme. A theme song is optional, but having one can further define the character's divine prerogatives. Keeton's theme song, *Here Without You* by Three Doors Down, suggests death as a force for isolation – something that sets its victims apart from other human beings (like Keeton himself certainly is). If Teresa had a theme song it would be a sappy ballad about romance, marriage and starting a family.

The advantage of a Theme is that it defines a god's supernatural powers. Any use of Ascended powers that is consistent with the Theme has a bonus of +2 to the roll. Using a power that is somehow opposed to the Theme invokes a penalty of –2 to the roll.

The chart below lists some sample themes. This list isn't remotely comprehensive; players and GMs are encouraged to add others that fit the needs of their campaigns.

ELEMENT (Aspect)	Suggested Themes
Earth (Physical)	Mountains, strength, thunder, wealth
Earth (Social)	Beasts, monsters, trees, will
Earth (Mental)	Agriculture, healing, poison, youth
Water (Physical)	Fish, rain, the sea, thieves
Water (Social)	Darkness, despair, illusion, secrets
Water (Mental)	The abyss, luck, the moon, survival
Air (Physical)	Birds, the gun, ice, wind
Air (Social)	Logic, prophecy, sight, truth
Air (Mental)	Ghosts, lightning, purity, tinkering
Fire (Physical)	Acrobats, alchemy, fire, speed
Fire (Social)	Bards, love, pride, shadows
Fire (Mental)	Art, madness, old age, plagues

Motif

A Motif is a symbol or set of symbols with which the god identifies. The catch is that those symbols can also be used to identify the god. In the introduction Teresa has a clear Motif of peaches. Keeton's road warrior Motif is a little harder to see, but the long coat, shotgun and classic muscle car provide hints.

Spending at least an hour in the presence of symbols that are related to his Motif allows a god to recharge one extra point of spent quintessence per day. This increases to two points if the symbols in question were made by

mortals with no divine assistance or coercion and to three points if the symbols were made specifically to honor that god.

The downside of having a Motif – and every god has one – is that it makes a god and his works easier to spot; the smell of peaches heralds Teresa's presence, and Keeton's white Firebird is recognized all over Texas. Any attempt to identify a god or the effects that he causes has a +4 bonus to the roll if the observer knows that god's Motif.

Shard

The sad truth about Ascension is that someone always has to die for it. The worse news is that a piece of the person who died for a god's Ascension stays with that god and becomes part of his soul. A Shard gives a character a desire, the satisfaction of which sustains him in times of trouble. The natures of gods' Shards vary considerably, but a Shard is always clearly derived from the person whose soul provided it. Most gods indulge their Shards to relieve stress, and all of them turn to their Shards when injured.

When choosing a Shard decide whether it is fast (takes five minutes or less to satisfy) or slow (takes 20 minutes to an hour). Satisfying a fast Shard immediately heals one point of Stamina. Indulging a slow Shard heals a point of Health.

The problem with Shards is that they are often not pretty habits (i.e. Keeton's chain smoking). They can also reveal a god's psychological weaknesses; it's likely that Teresa will always be vulnerable to the wiles of smooth-talking bad boys.

Taboo

A Taboo is the opposite of a Shard; it is something that the character shouldn't do (which doesn't necessarily mean that he doesn't want to). Taboos are either simple or complex. A simple Taboo is an act that one must not perform while a complex Taboo involves a state of being that one must avoid. Simple and complex Taboos carry different penalties for violation.

Breaking a simple Taboo costs 1 quintessence for the first violation in a single game session. The second occurrence in the same game costs a point of Stamina. The third infraction costs a point of Health.

Breaking a complex Taboo invokes a penalty of –4 to *all* rolls for the next hour of game time or for the rest of the session, whichever is longer.

There is no upside to having a Taboo. Taboos just suck. Alas, gods gotta have 'em.

For this reason players should choose Taboos carefully – and GMs should closely monitor those choices to ensure that PCs' Taboos aren't easy to dodge. The GM should also discourage players who are new to the game from taking Taboos that are opposed to their characters' Shards. While playing a character who can't satisfy his Shard without risking his Taboo can be a fun role-playing challenge, it is not recommended for inexperienced players.

STEP 4: PERKS

Perks, quite simply, are resources that a character can draw on to make life easier (or keep it from being cut short). Each Perk has a rating of 1-4 that determines its usefulness and/or its reliability. A starting character gets four points worth of Perks. A player may also saddle his character with up to four points of negative aspects specifically to gain Perks. Each point of negative aspects taken for this purpose yields one point of Perks.

The following list is not comprehensive. GMs should feel free to invent new Perks according to the needs of the campaign.

AMULET

An Amulet stores quintessence for its owner's use. Each level of Perk stores 4 points of quintessence, plus the owner's ratings in her primary element and aspect. For example, a level 2 Amulet owned by a love goddess with Fire 4 and social fire +2 stores 14 quintessence ([2 x 4] + 4 + 2).

An Amulet recharges one point of quintessence per day on its own. Any intelligent being that has a quintessence rating can also spend quintessence into the item to recharge it. Rites and Motifs have no effect on how fast an Amulet recharges… but an Amulet can be crafted to conform to a god's Motif.

CONTACT

You know someone who can provide you with information. You must define the scope of your Contact when you choose this Perk, and you can have multiple Contacts. One Contact may be able to give you data on local criminals, while another might know the lore of all the gods in the region and still another has all the juicy back fence gossip (which is valuable information in a small town setting).

You may call upon your Contact a number of times per game session equal to the value of the Perk. Getting information that is heavily protected or that could get the Contact killed or

ostracized if she is caught sharing it with you counts as two uses of the Perk.

DOMAIN

You have a place to call your own. The size and security of your Domain increase with the value of the Perk. Any security beyond what is listed here must be provided in game.

1. Equal to a shack or a one-bedroom apartment. The Domain comes with basic locks on all its doors and windows.
2. Equal to a single-family dwelling and its grounds. The doors and windows all have high quality locks, and the grounds have a fence or something equivalent.
3. Equal to a mansion and its grounds, or equal to a farmhouse and its associated acreage. Has security as above plus bars on the windows (or something equivalent) and a decent alarm system.

Any of the above can be taken as a pocket dimension in the Shadow or the Dream at a cost of +1 to the Perk level. Only you and those whom you designate as friends can enter freely; anyone else must be brought in by you.

You can combine your Domain with the Domains of your fellow pantheon members if they are on the same plane. This is how realms like Olympus and Asgard are formed.

FAMILIAR

You have an animal, a construct or a chimerical creature that follows you around and serves you. Your Familiar obeys your every command – though the more intelligent ones may not do so without question, and even animal cunning will allow for some interpretation of orders. You can communicate telepathically with your Familiar over any distance as long as you are both on the same plane, and you know instantly if the Familiar dies.

You build your Familiar as a character with Perk level + 8 points in elements and Perk level + 4 points of aspects. A Familiar can use Ascended powers in its primary element and aspect if it is a construct or chimera. An animal has no powers but gains +(Perk level) points of elements and +(Perk level +2) points of aspects. A Familiar has no Theme or Motif but may have a Shard and/or a Taboo; each one adds +1 point of elements or +2 points of aspects.

FOLLOWERS

You have a group of people who serve you – as long as you take care of them. Each of your Followers in a non-player character designed by the GM (the player defines what job each Follower does, but the GM designs the actual character sheets). Each Follower is built using nine points of elements and six points of aspects. They do not have Themes, Motifs, Shards or Taboos. The number of Followers is equal to Perk level x your (Fire + Social Fire).

The downside of having Followers is that they must be fed, clothed and housed – and they will look to you to get those needs met. Your Followers will eventually leave you if you don't take care of them. It's also hard to be stealthy with all those people stomping around behind you; it will often be better to leave the Followers behind and get things done by yourself.

LEGEND

Your fame, or infamy, is known throughout the land (at least some of it). You gain a +2 bonus to any social interaction roll within the area where your Legend is known. The level of the Perk determines the size of the area – without this Perk no one outside of your home town knows about you.

1. Local area (up to six towns/villages that are close to each other).
2. Region (a single state or province, or a small country).
3. Nation (a large country).
4. Global (the entire world).

This Perk differs from others in that buying it requires permission from the GM as well as appropriate role-play. A god's Legend does not spread unless he performs great deeds while he is away from home.

RITE

You know a brief ritual that allows you to recharge quintessence faster. You must define what the Rite entails when you choose this Perk. For each 15 minutes that you spend performing the Rite you regain 1 quintessence. The Perk level is the maximum amount of quintessence that you can regain in one day using your Rite.

SHADOW/DREAM

You have a personal pocket dimension in the Shadow where you can store things. Time doesn't pass in this realm (not so you can tell, anyway), so you can even put perishables in there and retrieve them years later. Each level of this Perk allows you to store one heavy bulky item; you can convert this to smaller items as per the rules for encumbrance.

The alternate version of this Perk lets you store items in the Dream instead, but those items

may become unavailable at random as sleeping mortals access them. The advantage of storing things in the Dream is that a full night's storage repairs broken items or replenishes expended ones (i.e. reloading empty guns or refilling empty canteens).

TABERNACLE

Being in a special place gives you power. While within your Tabernacle your rates of healing and quintessence recovery are increased (this includes getting extra quintessence from Rites and Motifs and extra effect from healing powers); add the Perk level to all healing and quintessence recovery. You also add the Perk level to the difficulty of any attempt to find, spy on or remotely affect you while you are within your Tabernacle. Finally, you subtract the Perk level from the difficulty of all activation rolls for your powers while within the Tabernacle. A Tabernacle is always a single location up to the size of a small house, and it must be part of your Domain if you have one.

TALISMAN

Many gods – and sometimes their mortal followers – make use of non-technological items that are imbued with divine power. Sorcerers are also capable of enchanting items for a variety of purposes. A Talisman contains a number of specific effects equal to its Perk level. These powers need no activation rolls, but they cost the normal amount of quintessence to use and still require to-hit rolls if used in combat. The Talisman produces these effects at levels equal to the maker's Ascension Tier at the time the Talisman was created (see Ascension Tier in the next chapter).

TECH

You have a piece of gear from the pre-Burn world, and it still works. This may be because it has been carefully maintained over the generations, or because your divine power keeps it going. You must define exactly what the device does when you choose this resource; the more useful the Tech the higher the Perk level.

1. A minor, flashy item that might wow the local yokels but provides no other advantage (example: a wristwatch or portable CD player). A generous GM might grant a +1 bonus on rolls to impress the less fortunate.
2. An item with significant non-combat uses or a minor weapon (i.e. a computer or a pistol).
3. An item with major non-combat uses or a powerful weapon (i.e. a vehicle or a rifle).

Any of the above levels of Tech has +1 to its level as a Perk if it is enhanced with divine power. For example, a shotgun that can shoot astral bodies would be Tech 4 while a watch that telepathically told the wearer the time would be Tech 2. A piece of Tech may have one Ascended power per level of Perk that it would be without the enhancement. Hence, Keeton's shotgun is Tech 4 that can shoot astral bodies and has two other powers. Powers in Tech still require activation rolls and cost the normal amount of quintessence to use. Imbued Tech always produces its effects at the Ascension Tier that its maker had achieved at the time the item was made.

WEALTH

You have access to material goods. In the post-Burn world this usually means barter items, but it can also refer to useful minerals or sources of food, clothing and fresh water.

Most of the effects of Wealth have no game mechanics; Wealth simply means that the character rarely goes hungry, has decent clothes and a nice place to live. Each level of Wealth will comfortably support the character plus one level of Followers. Diverting some of that into barter goods will cause some temporary hardship, but not enough to make the Followers leave unless it happens consistently.

STEP 5: VITAL STATISTICS

This is an important step in character creation that is often overlooked. Vital statistics are just the kinds of things that you would find one a person's driver's license (not that anyone needs one of those after the Burn). Decide on the character's sex (male or female), height, weight, hair color, eye color and age. For simplicity's sake assume that all starting PCs have just become gods, so none of them are much over 40 years old – that's an elder in a post-holocaust world.

In addition to the return of faith the post-Burn world has had a resurgence of cultural identity; many communities have embraced the ways and languages of their ancestors. This trend makes a talent for languages very useful indeed. Each PC begins play with one free language (her native tongue). A player may choose to give up one level of Perks per additional language.

Once the character has vital statistics – assuming that all of the other steps of character creation are complete – you are ready to play.

WAIT! WHAT ABOUT STARTING GEAR?

Starting gear? Yeah, right. It's a post-holocaust world. Starting characters have the clothes on their backs, a pouch or backpack, a few days' water and trail rations, and whatever else the GM feels they should have based on their level of the Wealth Perk. That's all you get. Deal with it.

I CAN T DRIVE FIFTY-FIVE
RULES

TASK RESOLUTION

Most character actions won't require any special rules for resolution; the action either succeeds or not, based on dramatic necessity and what a character with those abilities and that skill set could reasonably do. For those times when success is in doubt and it is appropriate for random chance to take a hand, *Apotheosis Blues* uses a simple three-step process.

Step 1: Difficulty

The GM sets the difficulty of the task using the following table. Factors that affect difficulty include visibility, being pressed for time, the character's level of skill (hitting a target is easier for a trained marksman than it is for a novice shooter), range and quality of equipment.

Difficulty Level	Target Number
Easy	8
Routine	12
Challenging	16
Difficult	20
Very Difficult	24

Step 2: Roll

The player rolls four six-sided dice (4d6) and adds the results together. He then adds the character's rating in whatever element applies to the task, and then adds the character's rating in whatever aspect applies to the task (a negative aspect does subtract from the roll). Finally the player factors in any bonuses or penalties from situational modifiers, Themes, etc. This yields the total roll.

Step 3: Result

Compare the total roll to the target number. If the result is equal to or greater than the target number the action is a success. If the result is less than the target number the action is a failure. Simple, right?

There is also a possibility of really good rolls. If a roll exceeds the target number by four or more is a resounding success. Exceeding the target number by eight or more is a spectacular success. Enhanced successes always have some additional effect, the exact nature of which is up to the GM. The task might be accomplished faster, have a greater effect, be longer lasting, and so on.

But with the good there must also come the bad. If the roll fails by four more that is a dismal failure. Failing by eight or more is a catastrophic failure. Enhanced failures also have an enhanced effect determined by the GM, but it will always be something that works against the character – for example, not only does he miss his shot but his gun jams.

COMBAT

Combat uses the same task resolution as everything else. The kind of combat will determine what element and aspect the attacker uses and what element and aspect the target defends with. The table below gives a basic run-down on what elements and aspects are appropriate for different kinds of combat. Note that combat in this sense refers not only to physical fighting but also to social confrontation and to battles of wits. The attacker rolls against a difficulty equal to the defender's (defending element + defending aspect) x 3.

Combat Type	Attacker Uses	Defender Uses
Melee	Physical Earth	Physical Earth (resist) or Physical Water (dodge)
Ranged	Physical Air	Physical Earth (resist) or Physical Fire (dodge)
Social	Social Water	Social Air
Social	Social Fire	Social Earth
Mental	Mental Water	Mental Air
Mental	Mental Air	Mental Water

Example: the attacker swings a sword at a defender who is dodging. The attacker has Earth 4 and Physical Earth +3. The defender has Water 3 and Physical Water +2. The defender's stats generate a difficulty of (3 + 2) x 3 = 15. The attacker rolls 4d6 and gets a 1, 2, 3 and 4. These numbers sum to 10. Adding the attacker's Earth and Physical Earth (4 + 3) adds 7 to this for a total of 17, which exceeds the difficulty by two points. The defender is hit, but

at least it's not a resounding success for more damage.

Unarmed attacks do base damage of 1 Stamina. A light blunt weapon does 2 Stamina on a successful attack. A light edged weapon or a heavy blunt weapon makes the damage lethal instead; the attack does 1 Stamina and 1 Health. A heavy edged weapon does base damage of 2 Stamina and 2 Health. A light firearm (this category includes heavy crossbows) does base damage of 3 Stamina and 3 Health. A heavy firearm does base damage of 5 Stamina and 5 Health. A resounding success adds +2 damage. A spectacular success adds +4 damage. For lethal attacks this adds to both the Stamina and the Health damage.

The attacker may choose to make a called shot. A called shot imposes a penalty of +4 to the difficulty and –2 to initiative number, but if it succeeds the damage is doubled. This modifier is after the damage added for resounding or spectacular success.

Each character gets one action during a combat round. Initiative – the order in which characters state and resolve their actions – depends on the Fire element and its physical aspect. For each character in the conflict (a group of NPCs can be treated as a single character for this purpose) add Fire to Physical Fire. The player whose character has the lowest rating states his intended action first. Once everyone has stated their actions the player whose character has the highest rating resolves his action first. If this prevents a slower character from acting, such is life. In case of a tie compare the characters' ratings in Mental Fire. If they are still tied compare their ratings in Mental Air. If they are still tied consider their actions simultaneous.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

In the world after the Burn it isn't just other people and predatory animals that can kill you. Without things like antibiotics, antivenins, vaccines, scuba gear and parachutes humans are once again vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the environment.

DROWNING/SUFFOCATION

Lack of air is one of the quickest killers there is. A character can hold his breath for (Earth + Physical Earth) x 30 seconds. After that he automatically loses a point of Stamina every 30 seconds (out of combat) or every turn (in combat) until he gets some air or dies.

FALLING

Falls vary considerably in how serious they are. Damage from falls is rated according to the chart below. Falling damage is automatic; there is no way to dodge or resist it. A successful roll of Water + Physical Water will negate the first point of damage from a fall (two points for a resounding success, three for a spectacular success), but that's as good as it gets.

Fall Type	Damage	Difficulty
Low	2 Stamina	8
Moderate	4 Stamina	12
High	6 Sta/2 Health	16
Extreme	8 Sta/4 Health	20
Terminal	12 Sta/8 Health	24

TEMPERATURE

Temperature, whether high or low, kills more slowly than oxygen deprivation but just as surely. Temperatures are rated as extreme or hostile. Extreme temperature inflicts damage of 1 Stamina per hour until the character gets some relief. Hostile temperatures are more insidious and far more dangerous. Hostile temperature also does damage once per hour, but it alternates doing 1 Stamina on odd-numbered hours and 1 Health on even-numbered hours. The damage continues until the character's body temperature is brought back to normal.

IMMORTALS AND DAMAGE

It has been mentioned before, but it bears repeating; gods cannot be killed by mundane weapons or creatures, oxygen deprivation, falls, heat injury, poison or disease. A god can never lose his last point of Health to any mundane damage source. Gods are also immune to the ravages of time; they don't age past the point they had reached at the time of Ascension. Some even get biologically younger after they Ascend.

The caveat is that gods can be killed by supernatural means – indeed, their Taboos might even make them vulnerable to certain attacks. A god can be killed by an empowered weapon (even if it is wielded by a mortal), a chimerical creature, a divinely empowered poison or a supernatural illness. A god knows immediately if struck with an attack that could kill him – though if it's a deathblow that knowledge doesn't do him much good.

IMMORTAL REPRODUCTION

Where do little gods come from? Not the stork, that's for sure. Gods are made, not born,

and all attempts at breeding divine heirs have failed miserably. Gods fall into four categories when it comes to reproduction, listed here in order of decreasing likelihood. Each player is free to choose his character's fertility status, or the GM can randomly assign each character's reproductive ability.

- Sterility: the god cannot have children at all, no matter what extraordinary measures are taken or the choice of partner. That doesn't stop him from trying, though.
- Restricted fertility: the god can have children only with mortal partners, and then only if some special condition is met. This may be a restriction on the choice of partners (i.e. only green-eyed redheads or those born under a full moon) or a requirement that the joining take place under proscribed circumstances (in a specific place, only when the stars are right, etc.). Children born to such unions have a slightly increased chance of Ascension.
- Limited fertility: the god can only have children by another god… or by a monster. Children of two gods are somewhat more likely to Ascend than are people with purely mortal heritage, while the offspring of a god and a monster is almost certain to Descend.
- Normal fertility: the god can have children normally with any human or divine partner. Children born to these gods have the same chance of Ascension as anyone else.

ENCUMBRANCE

Characters in *Apotheosis Blues* will do a lot of traveling, and they will want to carry equipment and supplies if they don't have a vehicle. Rather than provide a chart that gives exact weights for a woefully incomplete list of objects and a complicated formula for calculating exactly how much weight a character can lift, carry and drag *Apotheosis Blues* has a simple system based on classification. All items are either light (they don't weight much) or heavy (they have significant weight). Objects are also either compact (they don't take up much space) or bulky (they take up a lot of space). For purpose of being human-portable a car battery is both heavy and bulky while a pack of cigarettes is light and compact by anybody's standards. A military MRE (Meal Ready to Eat) is a light bulky item – and those things are like gold in the post-Burn world.

The encumbrance system is deliciously simple. A character can carry a number of heavy compact items equal to his Earth + Physical Earth. A bulky item counts as two items of the same weight class. A heavy compact item counts as two light bulky items. This means that a heavy bulky item is equivalent to eight light compact items. The system isn't perfect, and it certainly doesn't closely simulate reality, but it is enough for plausibility.

QUINTESSENCE REGENERATION

Every god regains quintessence once every 24 hours, but they don't all get it back at the same time of day. Quintessence regeneration takes place at a time dictated by the character's primary element; consult the chart below.

ELEMENT	TIME OF DAY
Earth	Noon
Water	Dusk
Air	Midnight
Fire	Dawn

This quintessence regeneration schedule also applies to Descended creatures.

ITEM CREATION

Characters will often be able to purchase mundane equipment or have it given to them, but enhanced items like Amulets, Talismans and Tech will usually have to be made. There are six classes of things that any character can create; gear, tokens, amulets/talismans, constructs, tech and domains. Some gods also have the ability to create Chimeras by modifying existing creatures.

Item creation time is in man-hours (the amount of work that one person can do in one hour), and the work does not have to be done all at once. Any roll to craft an item (which usually employs Mental Air) is made at the beginning of the process. A resounding success halves the creation time or makes a better item, player's choice. A spectacular success does both. A dismal failure doubles the creation time or ruins the materials, player's choice. A catastrophic failure doubles the time and ruins the materials.

If creating an item costs quintessence the crafter pays that cost at the end of the process even if the attempt is a failure. Crafters can use the quintessence stored in Amulets instead of or in addition to their own.

Having one or more assistants makes item creation faster. Divide the base construction time in man-hours by the total number of workers including the leader. Assistants can also donate up to half their current store of

quintessence (round down). The bigger the project the more assistants can help; making a vehicle allows for several assistants, while making a building allows dozens and making a small handheld item might allow for no assistants at all.

GEAR

Making mundane items requires only time, raw materials and the proper tools. Being skilled in making a specific class of item isn't necessary, but the work is likely to take less time and the results will certainly be better. The GM sets the difficulty of the creation roll (probably Mental Air) according to the complexity of the item; complex items with lots of moving parts will be harder to make, as will anything that requires metal parts. Making gear from scratch takes a number of man-hours equal to the difficulty of the roll. Not having the proper tools doubles the time required. Double the time again if the item is bulky or heavy (these modifiers are cumulative). Having prefabricated parts halves the time – apply this modifier last.

TOKENS

Any god can imbue a light compact item with a tiny measure of divine power. A Token can produce a single minor effect one time, but it may continue to produce a reduced version of that effect up to once per month for as long as its owner continues to believe in it. A Token can even retain its power through a transfer of ownership if the new owner believes in it as much as the previous owner did and if the previous owner gave it up willingly without any coercion whatsoever (coercion, for this purpose, includes guilt trips and emotional blackmail). A Token only works for a mortal human, and then only if the Token is on its owner's person.

A god can instantly make a Token simply by visualizing the desired effect and spending the quintessence necessary to produce that effect. The Token will activate automatically when its holder next needs it.

Tokens can be made conditional. A simple condition inactivates the item unless a specific condition is met – the holder must say a brief prayer, tell the truth, make a ritual gesture, etc. or the Token won't work. A complex condition reverses the benefits of the Token if the condition isn't met; a good luck charm brings bad luck, a fetish for protection from evil spirits repels good spirits instead (or attracts evil spirits), a wealth charm brings financial ruin, and so on. Adding a simple condition to a Token

adds +1 to the quintessence cost. Adding a complex condition increases the quintessence cost by +2.

AMULETS AND TALISMANS

Any piece of gear can be turned into an Amulet or a Talisman. The process requires a Mental Air roll at a base difficulty equal to the level of the Perk x 4 and takes a number of man-hours equal to the base difficulty. A character's Theme can reduce the final difficulty but not the time required. Making an Amulet costs quintessence equal to the item's capacity, while making a Talisman costs quintessence equal to its Perk level x 2. The final owner of the item must spend XP (see Experience below) to buy the new Perk. The maker can only imbue a Talisman with an effect that she is capable of producing on her own.

CONSTRUCTS

A construct is an artificial being endowed with a semblance of life (and possibly some real intelligence). Dyson in the opening fiction piece is a classic example. A construct must first be assembled as a piece of gear. The process of imbuing it with pseudo-life takes 24 man-hours for every level that the construct would have as a Familiar and costs quintessence equal to three times the construct's level as a Familiar. The animation process also requires a Social Earth roll at a difficulty equal to 4 + (Familiar level x 4). The final owner pays XP appropriate to the cost of a Familiar at that level.

TECH

Turning an existing technological item into Tech uses the same procedure as making a Talisman except that the quintessence cost is doubled. Making technological gear from scratch and then imbuing it into Tech uses both procedures without the extra quintessence cost. The final owner must spend XP to purchase the new Perk.

DOMAINS

Creating a Domain means constructing one or more living areas (usually, but not necessarily, buildings) with associated facilities for food preparation, daily work and waste disposal. Making a Domain is the most labor intensive item creation possible. The entire job, from clearing the land to gathering the raw materials to the actual construction, takes a number of man-hours equal to 300 x (Perk level squared). *Example: a level 3 Domain takes 300 x 3^2 =*

2,700 man-hours. Using Ascended powers speeds the work significantly. Employing the physical Aspect of any element except Earth cuts the base time by a factor of five. Using Physical Earth cuts the base time by a factor of 10. The final owner of the Domain must spend XP to buy the new Perk.

CHIMERAS

Only gods who can use the Ascended powers of Mental Earth or Mental Air can make Chimeras. The task has a difficulty equal to the creature's level as a Familiar x 4 and costs quintessence equal to (Familiar level x 2). The base time is 24 man-hours x (Familiar level). Double the time and quintessence cost for creatures horse-sized and larger, triple them for creatures elephant-sized and larger. Add +4 to the creation difficulty and the quintessence cost if the Chimera will be able to breed true.

Creating a Chimera doesn't automatically grant any control over it. Binding the beast as a Familiar requires a roll using the social aspect of any one element at a difficulty equal to the creature's Familiar level x 4, and the one doing the binding must be able to use the Ascended powers of the element used. On a success the tamer can bind the beast to a willing person of her choosing, and the recipient must spend XP to buy the new Perk. On a failure the animal reacts in a manner appropriate to its base species.

This process can also be used to improve an existing Familiar, and the binding roll isn't necessary. When improving a Familiar the effective Familiar level for creation purposes is equal to the new level minus the current level.

On a failed Chimera creation roll any result that would ruin the materials kills the animal.

EXPERIENCE

Even gods (at least "little g" gods) learn and grow over time. Experience Points (XP) are the game mechanic that represents in-game effort at self improvement.

The base experience award for each game session is 2 XP. Increase this by +1 if the PCs made a real effort to increase their understanding of their world or their powers or if they worked toward rebuilding civilization. Increase the XP award by +2 if they did both.

There are five things on which players can spend their hard-earned XP; increased aspects, increased elements, foreign languages, new or increased Perks, and higher Ascension Tiers. The chart at the end of this section shows the XP cost for each item.

ASCENSION TIER

There are four levels of godhead that player characters can achieve. A supposed fifth tier, if the GM rules that it exists, is available only to NPCs… or to PCs on the last game session before they leave play. A character's Ascension Tier determines how durable and far-reaching her divine powers are. Any god can, of course, create effects at any tier lower than her own. Indeed, this will usually be less difficult than creating effects at the current tier; it's often easier to exert only a portion of your strength than it is to use all of it.

Demigod

All player characters start at the lowest tier of godhead. Demigods can produce effects that last for at most a few hours and cover an area no bigger than a large room. Over 60% of the gods on Earth are at this level.

Power

Powers are capable of creating effects that last for days at a time and spread across an area the size of a town. Powers comprise about 30% of all gods – most don't live long enough to reach this level due to conflicts with more powerful gods.

Archon

The penultimate level of godhood makes up slightly less than 10% of the divine population. Archon-level effects can last for months and cover a whole region.

Paragon

The highest Ascension Tier rarely has more than a few dozen occupants at a time. Gods at this level can create permanent effects that encompass an entire continent… but it's very rude to run roughshod over other gods' protectorates this way. A paragon who gets into the habit of making trouble this big will find himself on the wrong end of a divine posse intent on the Ascended equivalent of a lynching.

Demiurge

There are rumors of a fifth Ascension Tier, that of demiurge. These beings, if any exist, can create global effects that are both permanent and impossible for lesser gods to reverse. The legends say that there are always two demiurges at a time, and that they always kill each other in a battle to determine which one will become the "big G" god. No one alive has ever witnessed a

fight between beings who can wield such titanic forces, and no one sane wants to.

EXPERIENCE COST CHART

ITEM	XP COST
Aspect increase +1	4
Element increase +1	12
New language	4
New or improved Perk	6 per level added
Next Ascension Tier	36

TURN THE PAGE

RUNNING THE GAME

Apotheosis Blues is atypical of role-playing games in general, and post-holocaust games in particular, in many ways. Playing the game is simple, but the designer recognizes that GMs and players need all the help they can get. This chapter is here to provide that help.

CAMPAIGN STYLES

There are three basic styles of campaign for *Apotheosis Blues*, and each has too many variants to name here. The different styles vary in what type and scope of conflict is prevalent and in what sort of adversaries the PCs will face. The GM and players should agree on what kind of campaign they will play – or a group that trusts their GM can just dive in and let him surprise them.

DESTINY'S PAWNS

This type of campaign depends on the fact that starting characters, for all that they are gods, are only powerful when compared to mortals. More experienced gods – i.e. NPCs on higher Ascension Tiers – will be able to squash them flat. PCs in this campaign will depend more on wits, stealth and intrigue than on their power to hurl thunderbolts. Schemes and manipulation work both ways, however, and today's ally might be tomorrow's enemy (and vice versa). A truly caring GM will also insure that there are more than two sides to most conflicts.

A Destiny's Pawns game doesn't need much in the way of a bestiary, as killing beasts in the wilderness is a minor component at best. What this campaign does need is a rich social tapestry for the player characters to weave their stories into. The GM must create compelling NPCs, interesting organizations and intricate webs of alliances and animosities for the PCs to navigate. Players must be aware that when a character chooses his friends and patrons he also chooses his enemies – but it's perfectly alright for *characters* to be clueless about this – and among immortals, some of those friendships and vendettas will have lasted for a very long time. Destiny's Pawns is an excellent campaign choice for a group that prefers role-play to combat.

LEGEND BUILDERS

Gods depend on mortal belief for their powers, so they only grow in power if they can increase mortals' belief in them. A Legend Builders campaign is about doing great deeds that will live on in song and story. Slaying monsters is certainly important, but tasks like stopping plagues, ending droughts and ensuring good harvests are just as worthy. The important thing is that the characters' acts are witnessed and remembered; curing a sick child in the presence of an entire village does more for a god's reputation than does killing a monster out in the wasteland where no one sees… but killing a monster in the presence of an entire village is good, too.

Combat, role-play and strategic planning are equally important in a Legend Builders campaign. The PCs will have to build things as often as they have to kill things. The GM must provide the players with a variety of challenges that require different skills to resolve. PCs in this kind of campaign must be either well-rounded or good at covering each other's weak areas. This is the default campaign setting for *Apotheosis Blues*; it works well for mixed groups of players in which some like role-play and others prefer back-to-back combats.

RAGNAROK

A Ragnarok campaign is in many ways the opposite of Destiny's Pawns. In this type of game there is open warfare among the gods and/or their monstrous enemies, and the PCs are soldiers in that war. The emphasis is clearly on combat. While role-play certainly occurs, it's not the point of the game. Ragnarok is all about action. A skilled GM can use role-play to set up future fights or as character development that gives the combats meaning.

The GM's main responsibility in this campaign style is providing the player characters with opponents that challenge them without overwhelming them. This can be monsters, rival gods, sorcerers or Descended humans. At the lower Ascension Tiers large numbers of mortals are dangerous to gods (especially if any of them have enchanted weapons…). Ragnarok also

requires more tactical thinking from players and GM alike. The use of maps and miniatures would do more to enhance play for a Ragnarok game than it would for any other.

PANTHEONS

Gods have gathered in groups since shortly after the Big Burn, and it was only natural that mortals refer to those groups as pantheons. The gods of ancient times had common cultural referents – and often blood ties – to bind them together, but the new gods usually don't. In the world of *Apotheosis Blues* it is mutual need and common purpose that keep a pantheon together.

Just as individual players decide on Themes for their characters, the gaming group as a whole should decide on a theme for their pantheon. The PCs should have at least some goals in common, and they should have the same basic allegiances to in-game organizations (though individual PCs might be members of different factions). What do the characters want to accomplish? What enemies do they all want to defeat? What segment of humanity do they protect? Answering these questions will make it easier to choose a group theme. Having interlocking Motifs adds to the flavor; building temples to honor the pantheon as a unit is simpler if their symbols look harmonious when displayed together.

Players should also give some thought to the tactical aspects of pantheon creation. If the entire group is made up of physical-dominant fire gods, they will be weak against opponents who rely on the social aspects of water. Having characters with different primary elements and aspects gives the pantheon more tools with which to handle a greater variety of situations.

BELIEF

Human belief is the engine that drives gods' powers. With it, they can perform miracles. Without it they are just humans with a few extra tricks. Gods can glean a measure of power from nothing more than the ambient belief generated by humanity's collective belief in the idea of gods. Anything more than that – as in, anything above the demigod tier – requires specific belief in the individual god. It is perfectly reasonable for the GM to forbid players from increasing their characters' Ascension Tiers without buying additional levels of Followers or Legend.

The most potent and problematic aspect of mortal belief is its ability to shut gods down cold. A god whose behavior convinces mortals that he shouldn't be believed in will soon find himself with no one willing to believe in him. A god has penalties to use his powers against anyone who actively disbelieves in him (the size of the penalty is set by the GM based on the strength of the disbelief). A god who is actively shunned by an entire community will find himself without his godly powers while he remains in that place. Because of this the new gods have learned that mistreating mortals is risky indeed. The few that are successful at it all have armies of thugs who revel in such abuse of power – and those gods are always opposed by other gods who protect the warlords' targets.

FLEXIBILITY

The most important characteristic of this game, from a rules standpoint, is flexibility. *Apotheosis Blues* is rules light; the existing rules cover the basics with no attempt to address every possible contingency. This design philosophy is intended to acknowledge the GM's ultimate authority in regard to the rules. Any rule that the GM needs that doesn't appear in this book, the GM is free to create. Any rule that is in this book is the GM's to interpret, apply, change or ignore according to the needs of the campaign. Game designers are pretty clever fellows, but they aren't present at everybody's gaming table and they don't know everybody's players. Only the GM who is there at the game has the authority and the necessary knowledge to make rules calls that make sense for that game.

Another feature of *Apotheosis Blues* is the freedom that it gives players. The descriptions of the Ascended powers are deliberately left vague in order to allow for player creativity. The effects listed in the core rules are by no means the only ones possible, and the designer certainly didn't have time to do more than scratch the surface in the initial 24-hour design period. Some players will find the lack of a rigid pre-defined "spell list" intimidating or complicated – for some people, too much freedom of choice makes it impossible to choose. Others will find it liberating. A generous GM can always come up with a list of effects and let the former type of player choose from them (a good starting amount is the sum total of the character's primary element and all of the aspects tied to that element; learning additional effects requires in-character experimentation). It's vital that the GM remember that *Apotheosis Blues* is designed to reward players' ability to think on their feet and be creative. This doesn't mean that the GM should allow anything that players think of. It

means that players should tell the GM what they want to do, and the GM should tell them what they need to do it.

BAT OUT OF HELL

ADVERSARIES

This section is not meant to be a comprehensive bestiary of the post-Burn world. This is because players might read this book, and giving them advance knowledge of what they'll be up against would ruin the surprise. Instead this section will give a brief and simple system for determining creature statistics. There are also a few sample creatures provided so that the GM can use them in quick adventures and players have some options for Familiars.

ELEMENTS AND ASPECTS

Creatures have the same elements and aspects that human characters do. Animals also have the same range of ratings (1-5 for elements, -2 to +3 for aspects). The exact value of each element varies according to the beast's species-specific abilities. The word "animal" appears throughout these descriptions, but these rules also apply to constructs, chimeras and spirits.

The term Aspect Limits in the entries below refers to the total of all three aspect ratings for a particular element. For example, an animal with an Aspect Limit of 2 in Fire could have Physical Fire +2 and ratings of +0 in Social Fire and Mental Fire, +1 each in Physical Fire and Social Fire with +0 in Mental Fire or any other combination that added up to no more than 2.

EARTH

An animal's Earth rating is determined by its size; the bigger it is, the stronger and tougher it is. Consult the chart below to get the maximum Earth rating for a creature that size. The GM is free to assign a value less than the maximum when creating a creature.

Size	Examples	Max Rating	Aspect Limit
Tiny	Mouse, sparrow	1	1
Small	Cat, iguana	2	3
Medium	Barracuda, dog	3	5
Large	Crocodile, horse	4	7
Huge	Elephant, whale	5	9

The tiniest creatures –insects and other creepy-crawlies – aren't measured on this scale. When appearing individually or in small groups they are treated as environmental conditions. When appearing in large groups the entire swarm is treated as a single creature. In this case size is more about mass than physical dimensions; a swarm of bees can have greater volume than a horse while massing less than a large dog.

WATER/FIRE

The larger and stronger an animal is the slower and less agile it tends to be. Compute the creature's ratings in Water and Fire with the formula 6 minus its Earth. The Aspect Limit for these two elements is equal to 10 minus the Aspect Limit for Earth.

AIR

A creature's Air rating – its intelligence and cunning – is a function of what type of creature it is. Consult the chart below to get the maximum Air rating for an animal of that type. As with Earth, the GM may assign a lesser value.

Type	Max Rating	Aspect Limit
Invertebrate	1	0
Amphibian, fish, reptile	2	1
Bird, lower mammal	3	3
Cephalopod, higher mammal	4	5
Construct, spirit	5	7
Chimera*	+1	+2

*May apply to any type except construct or spirit.

TABOOS AND SHARDS

Any creature except for a mundane animal may take a Taboo to get an extra point of aspects that can exceed the Aspect Limit.

A construct or spirit may have a Shard. A creature's Shard follows the same game mechanics as a god's.

A creature's Taboo and Shard must be consistent with its Theme (see below). Example Taboos include a troll's need to live under bridges and a sphinx's inability to harm anyone who solves it riddle.

DERIVED VALUES

Creatures have the same derived values (Stamina, Health and Quintessence) that humans

do; compute the derived values using the same formulae. A mundane animal automatically has a rating of 0 in Quintessence. Chimeras, constructs and spirits can use Quintessence to fuel Ascended or Descended powers.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Animals often have abilities far beyond what humans are capable of. In *Apotheosis Blues* there are three categories of creature abilities; powers, talents and qualities. Mundane animals may only have talents, while any other kind of creature may have powers and/or talents. Spirits and constructs also have qualities.

Each animal has four Perk points that can be used to purchase powers or talents; one point buys one power or one talent. Not all Perk points have to be spent.

POWERS

A chimerical or spiritual creature can use the Ascended aspects of its elements just like a god can except that an animal has a narrower range of powers. Every chimera or spirit has a theme that dictates its powers. The entity can use any Ascended aspects that are consistent with its theme, but those are the only powers that it has. For example, the theme "dragon" gives the beast a breath weapon and possibly the ability to fly while the theme "unicorn" grants healing ability and the power to detect and neutralize poison.

TALENTS

Talents are abilities that are innate to a creature's physical body. Talents never require rolls or Quintessence expenditure to activate; they just work. A short list of talents appears below. GMs should definitely add to this list, which doesn't include anywhere near all of the abilities that appear in the animal kingdom in the real world.

- Alternate Movement: all animals can move normally in one environment. This ability gives the animal a secondary means of locomotion that is just as effective as the primary (birds don't have this talent; flight is their primary movement mode, and they suffer penalties when walking).
- Exceptional Ability: the creature has a superhuman physical or sensory capability; blinding speed, superior strength, incredible vision, color-changing skin for stealth, and so on. Any roll using this ability has a bonus of increasing the degree of success by one step or decreasing the degree of failure

one step. A catastrophic failure becomes only dismal, a normal failure becomes a normal success, a normal success becomes a resounding success, and so on. A creature may have more than one exceptional ability.

- Natural Armor: reduce the damage sustained from any physical attack by -1. This talent can be purchased multiple times to increase the damage reduction.
- Natural Weapon: the creature has claws, fangs, a stinger or some other body part that does extra damage. Attacks using a natural weapon do lethal damage, and the base damage is +1. This talent can be purchased multiple times to increase the damage bonus or to get multiple weapons.
- Poison: some animals avoid fights by using venom to weaken their prey. Others defend themselves by being too poisonous to eat. A poison attack does damage equal to the creature's Fire + Mental Fire in addition to any damage inflicted by the attack that delivers the poison (often in conjunction with a natural weapon). Once poisoned the victim continues to take damage once per cycle for an additional 1d6 cycles or until antivenin is applied. Cycles can be five minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes or one hour. This talent may be purchased multiple times; a second purchase grants a second method of delivering the poison (i.e. the Egyptian cobra's ability to spit venom as well as bite) or makes the damage lethal.
- Resistance: the creature has great resistance to something; disease, poison, cold, heat, pressure, etc. Reduce the difficulty of any roll to resist that particular stressor by -6 and apply a -2 modifier to any damage inflicted by that source.

QUALITIES

Qualities are similar to talents in that they work all the time with no Quintessence cost or activation roll. They differ in that qualities are more far-reaching and are not always helpful. There is one list of qualities for constructs and another for spirits. All constructs have every quality on the construct list, and all spirits have every quality listed for spirits.

Constructs…
- …have no need for food, water, air or sleep.
- …are immune to disease and poison.
- …are long-lived but not ageless. A construct's useful life is equal to 20 years x

its level as a Familiar with periodic maintenance. Regular maintenance doubles this time, while sporadic maintenance halves it. A complete overhaul cuts the construct's effective age in half.

- …cannot heal on their own when damaged; they must be repaired.
- …have no souls. This makes them immune to effects that target the soul and renders them incapable of using such powers.

Spirits…

- …have no need for food, water or air.
- …do need sleep, but they may have sleep cycles vastly different from those of humans. Dryads that bond with deciduous trees sleep through the winter, while some lunar spirits might be inactive during one phase of the moon.
- …are immune to disease, poison and aging.
- …spend most of their time incorporeal. While in this state a spirit is immune to damage from mundane sources but cannot affect physical matter in any way. An incorporeal spirit is also impossible to detect using mundane senses unless it wants to be noticed, and the spirit can choose who can perceive it. While manifested physically a spirit is both capable of and vulnerable to physical attack.
- …have souls, and are therefore vulnerable to and capable of making soul-based attacks.

SAMPLE CREATURES

The following creatures can be used as is or modified to fit the needs of the campaign.

ANIMALS

Bobcat

Bobcats have ferocity and fighting ability that more than make up for their small size. Luckily for humans, bobcats are solitary creatures.

Earth: 2	Water: 4	Air: 2	Fire: 4
Physical: 1	Physical: 3	Social: 2	Physical: 3
Social: 1			

Talents: Exceptional Ability (agility); Exceptional Ability (night vision); Natural Weapons (claws +1)

Horse

With the demise of the automobile the horse is now the most reliable form of transportation in the world. Vast herds once again roam free across North America.

Earth: 4	Water: 2	Air: 3	Fire: 2
Physical: 3		Social: 1	Physical: 3

Talents: Exceptional Ability (speed);
Exceptional Ability (strength);
Natural Weapon (hooves +1)

Rat

Rats aren't very dangerous individually, but they often travel in large groups.

Earth: 2	Water: 3	Air: 2	Fire: 2
	Physical: 3	Social: 1	Physical: 2

Talents: Exceptional Ability (flexibility);
Resistance (disease and poison)

CHIMERAS

Hoop Snake

The hoop snake looks like a rattlesnake with a sharp spike at the end of its tail. Hoop snakes have no fangs; they deliver venom with the stings in their tails instead. A hoop snake rolls itself into a wheel shape to travel quickly, and older animals can attack from this position.

Earth: 2	Water: 4	Air: 1	Fire: 3
	Physical: 2		

Theme: Rolling serpent
Powers: Rolling (2x overland speed)
Talents: Natural Weapon (sting +1); Poison (3 lethal damage from sting, 15 minute cycle)

Jackalope

The famous horned rabbit of the American southwest is good eating… if you can catch it. Note to GM's: these stats also work for the Middle Eastern horned rabbit the Mi'raj.

Earth: 1	Water: 4	Air: 1	Fire: 5
	Physical: 3	Social: 2	Physical: 3

Theme: Rabbit-deer (mi'raj: rabbit-unicorn)
Talents: Exceptional Ability (speed); Natural Weapons (antlers +1)

Thunderbird

The second largest bird in North America has the power to predict storms, the power to create them, or both.

Earth: 5	Water: 1	Air: 2	Fire: 1
Physical: 2	Physical: 2	Social: 3	

Theme: Harbinger of Storms
Powers: Predict (Create?) Storms
Talents: Alternate Movement (flight);
Natural Weapon (beak +1, claws +2)

CONSTRUCTS

Cumulus Horse

These small living clouds are difficult to make – only those who can use the Ascended functions of Physical Air can do it – but they are so useful that they are preferred mounts of gods.

Earth: 2	Water: 4	Air: 3	Fire: 2
Physical: 1	Physical: 2	Mental: 2	
	Mental: 1		

Theme:	Living Cloud
Powers:	Gaseous Form (can include riders)
Talents:	Alternate Movement (flight)

Iron Hound

Ordinary hounds need food, water and sleep and must be cleaned up after. An animal without those drawbacks is a truly superior watchdog.

Earth: 3	Water: 3	Air: 3	Fire: 3
Physical: 3	Physical: 1	Mental: 2	Physical: 3
Social: 3			

Theme:	Dog of Steel
Taboo:	Mustn't harm what it is set to guard
Powers:	Iron Hide (sustains half physical damage when braced)
Talents:	Natural Armor (damage –3); Natural Weapon (bite +1)

Lantern Bird

Lantern birds can look like any flying species of bird, but all types glow. Their sensory powers make them popular as Familiars.

Earth: 1	Water: 5	Air: 4	Fire: 4
	Physical: 3	Social: 2	Physical: 2
	Social: 2	Mental: 1	
	Mental: 2		

Theme:	Bird of Illumination
Taboo:	Can't abide darkness or ignorance
Powers:	Clairvoyance; Create Light
Talents:	Alternate Movement (flight); Exceptional Ability (sight)

SPIRITS

Dryad

A dryad in spirit form is a humanoid shape made of leaves, and they can manifest as young human females of unearthly beauty. Each dryad is bound to a specific tree, and she dies if it does. A dryad can merge with her tree and sleep inside it while in spirit form.

Earth: 2	Water: 4	Air: 3	Fire: 4
Social: 3	Physical: 2		Physical: 3
	Social: 2		Social: 3

Theme:	Tree Nymph
Shard:	Dance among the trees
Taboo:	Can't allow harm to her tree
Powers:	Animate trees; heal trees
Talents:	Exceptional Ability (sex appeal)

These stats also work for other nymphs. The GM need only change what aspect of nature the spirit is tied to, which affects the spirit's powers and appearance. The roster of nymphs includes Hyads (sky), Meliads (fields/flowers), Naiads (rivers/streams), Nereids (sea), Oreads (mountains) and Psameads (sand).

Marid

These powerful disease spirits appear as humanoid masses of flies whether manifested or in spirit form. They are found wherever unclean environments promote sickness.

Earth: 3	Water: 3	Air: 3	Fire:3
Physical: 3	Physical: 1	Mental: 1	Physical: 2
Social: 2	Social: 2		Mental: 3

Theme:	Plague Bearer
Powers:	Detect Disease; Cause Disease
Talents:	Poison (6 damage from bite/scratch, can be lethal or normal, 1 hour cycle)

Will o' Wisp

These deceptive spirits are floating balls of hazy light whether manifested or in spirit form. They are most commonly found in swamps, but they can appear in any place where the terrain itself is a deadly hazard
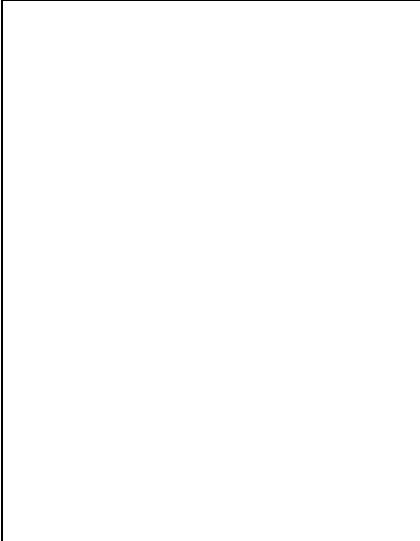
Earth: 1	Water: 5	Air: 2	Fire: 2
	Physical: 2		
	Social: 3		

Theme:	Deadly Lure
Powers:	Imitate Sound/Voice; Mask Hazard; Phantom Music

APOTHEOSIS BLUES

CHARACTER SHEET

VITAL STATISTICS

Name:		Ascension Tier:	
Player:			
Sex:	Age:	Experience	
Hair:	Eyes:	Total:	
Height:	Weight:	Spent:	

FLAVOR

Theme:	
Motif:	
Shard:	
Taboo:	

DERIVED VALUES

Stamina:	O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
Health:	O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
Quintessence:	O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O

ELEMENTS & ASPECTS

(√ = Primary)

EARTH	WATER	AIR	FIRE
Physical	Physical	Physical	Physical
Social	Social	Social	Social
Mental	Mental	Mental	Mental

PERKS

GEAR   NOTES

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Begun: 1:15 p.m. 05/21/2009
Ended: 1:14 p.m. 05/22/2009

Well, my 24 hours is up and I am far from finished. What's missing; a finished table of contents, a bestiary (or at least the beginnings of one), an index and the section on what the characters would actually do in the game. That last is a huge omission IMO. And the sad part is, I probably would've been able to get at least one of those in if I hadn't nodded off for four hours.

All in all, though, I'm rather pleased with this attempt. The game mechanics could definitely use some playtest, but the simplicity and elegance of it make it one of my better efforts. I intend to do a fully fleshed-out version of this game for later posting. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to take a shower and a nap. I do believe that I've earned them.

Michael Walton

It is one hundred and fifty years after the Big Burn.
Civilization is gone. Technology is gone.
Two-thirds of the human race is gone.
When all you have left is what you believe in,
Will you choose extinction… or Ascension?

From the designer who brought you *Immaculate* ™ and the award-winning *Alien Angels* ™ comes a bold new concept in post-apocalyptic gaming, a world devastated not by war or natural disaster but by a global crisis of faith. *Apotheosis Blues* invites you to play a higher order of being, one of the strange new gods who watches over this blasted Earth. Be a nurturer who lifts your followers up with kindness and miracles. Be a warlord who leads your troops to victory in the name of unity… or power. Be anything at all – except ordinary. When the whole world sings the *Apotheosis Blues*, will you be one of the leads, or just another voice?

Warning: this game contains religious and sociopolitical themes that may be offensive to some readers. It is intended for mature audiences.

Black Rabbit Games