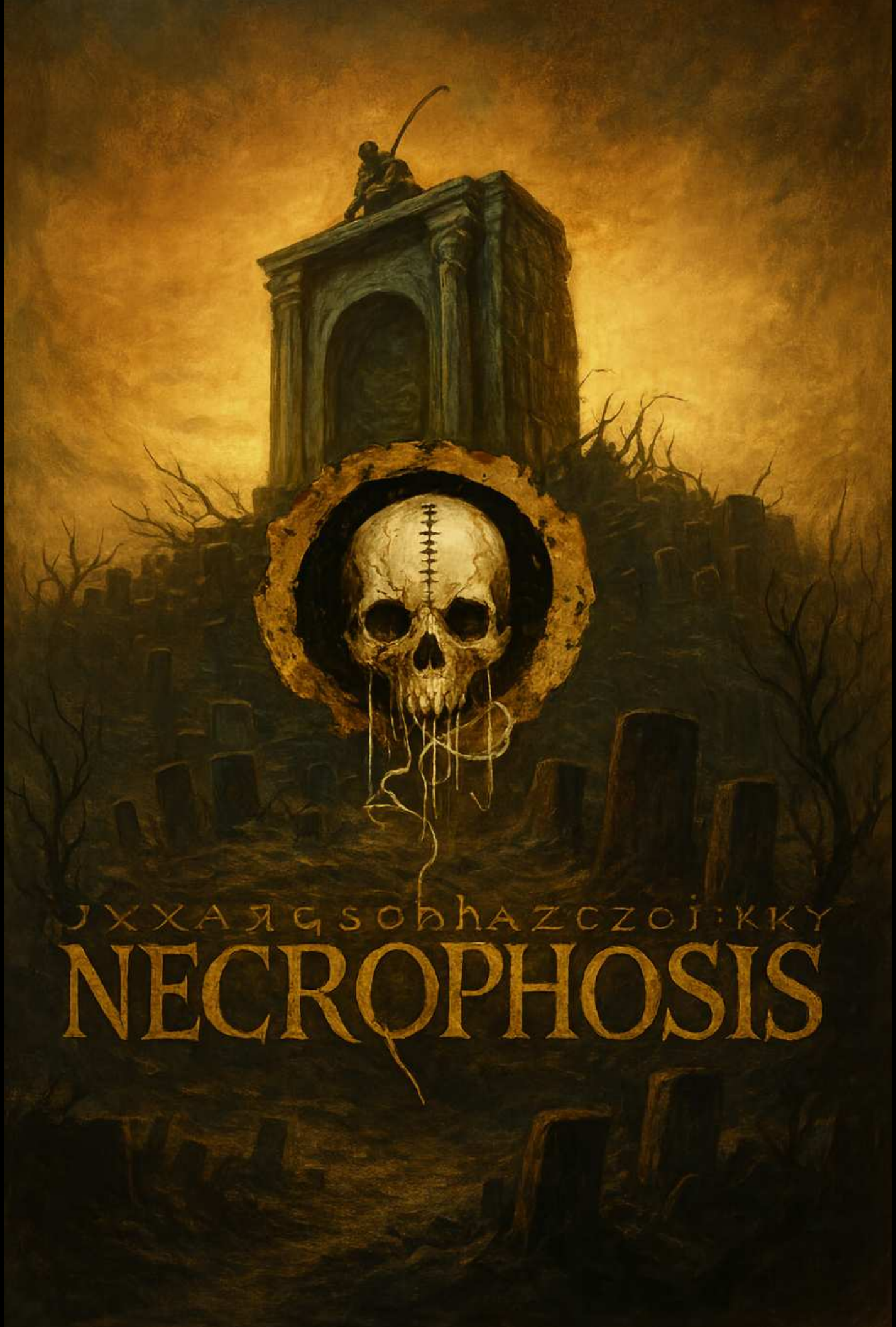

NECROPHOSIS

"In the cosmic void, I awaken from my sleep,
a ghostly form, a galaxy's sweep.

As you pass by, I stir and rise,
a spectral being with starlit sight.

I beckon you forth, with a shimmering light,
guiding you through the endless fright.

Towards the gate of death, we make our way,
but even death's gate has crumbled to decay.

I speak of a world, once death's domain,
now a museum where time's relics remain.

Old gods and monuments, from ages past,
collected here in the cosmic vast.

This realm, where death reigns,
now a museum of time's refrain.

And with strange aeons, even death may die,
as the universe's echoes fade and sigh."

PRELUDE

This is not a dead world. This is a world that has failed to die. In the time before time lost all meaning, there existed a universe so full of life and vibrancy. But it was not to last. A mindless entity of cosmic hunger was awoken and unleashed onto the universe, consuming all. From the most pitiful of mortals to the mightiest of gods.

Having served its purpose, the entity ceased to be, but there was one nameless realm that escaped its hunger. All beings who managed to escape the consumption of the universe washed up in this realm, but their suffering had only just begun. For this realm was host to the curse of Necrophosis. Those under this curse would be unable to die, no matter how desperately they might wish to. The pain of wounds, thirst, starvation, or the blazing sun would accumulate beyond all prior limits, as their afflicted bodies decay and mutate without end.

Even should one's body be completely destroyed, their soul will linger within their remains. Unable to move, perceive, think, but forced to experience incomparable agony as their very identity rots away and blends with the infity before them. The sands of those who succumbed to Necrophosis coat the realm as far as the eye can see.

However, for the first time in incalculable eons, something is about to change. The countless wisps of consciousness within these sands have coagulated into a single entity, a single mind. This form is Consciousness Itself. Perhaps this Wanderer may be able to grant these tortured immortals the death they desperately seek.

Thanks to the curse, you will be unable to truly die for your time here. You arrive one year before the Wanderer is born, assuming you aren't taking their place entirely, in which case you start at the same time. You receive 0 Necrotic Coins to start. You must saddle yourself with even further suffering to obtain any more. You will be unable to use your abilities or other advantages from other worlds here.

AWARENESS

You may choose only one. Age and gender are irrelevant.

The Burden of the Conscious: -0 NC

You are like the Wanderer, a new life. You have no memories of time spent in this grotesque realm. This leaves your mind more lucid than most, but less equipped to comprehend and respond to the horrors that await you.

The Burden of the Unconscious: -0 NC

You've always been here. Since the universe died and time lost all meaning. Perhaps at one point the passing of countless eons drove you mad, but you've had more than enough time to adapt and piece your psyche back together.

FLESH

Many different beings found their way to this realm. Immortal humans, mighty gods, advanced alien civilizations, anomalies born from the void itself. It matters little. While gods can somewhat resist the rot of Necrophosis, this only slows its progress. In the eons that have transpired, the difference between man and god matters little. Even if you were a lesser god before the curse, your power has long since rotted away, never to return. Even the divine rot eventually. Those primordial gods of the void fared far better than most, even now, but you were never such a mighty being.

You may freely choose the appearance of this form, though most beings bear some distorted resemblance to the human form. Your body could be as small as a rat or as large as a palace. However, most paths are carved with the scale and proportions of a regular man in mind. You may find being exceptionally large or small to hinder your progress far more than it helps. You will not be charged for whatever you choose.

You may treat your decayed body from this world as an altform going forward.

TORTURES

Blight yourself further for Necrotic Coins.

Lost All Meaning: +0 NC / +100 NC / +200 NC / +400 NC

Normally, you would start one year before the birth of the Wanderer. Depending on how many points you receive, you may extend the time you have to wait. You only receive points for this if you allow it to negate any perks or powers that might immunize you to the mental ravages of such obscene spans of time.

For 100 NC, you must start at least 1D8 decades earlier.

For 200 NC, you must start at least 1D8 centuries earlier.

For 400 NC, you must start at the very beginning. You will endure the countless eons between the death of the universe and the birth of the Wanderer.

Forgotten Tongues: +100 NC

You'll find that only a small fraction of the spoken or written words you come across will be in a language you can recognize. Even those that do will be drowned in so much prose and metaphor as to be almost indecipherable.

Spilled Entrails: +100 NC

You are comically intolerant and squeamish, no matter how many eons you've had to adapt. Seeing the pathetic state of those around you instills a hatred and repulsion towards the victim and perpetrator alike of such corruption.

The Burdon is Overbearing: +100 NC

In a world where even violence has lost all power, what good is strength? Even then, you are absurdly weak. You'd struggle to lift a child's corpse for long, and running for more than a few minutes will bring you to your knees.

Desolation of the Soul: +200 NC

Even in a world like this, cooperation is an invaluable resource, one you are consistently denied. For some reason, others of this world instinctively dislike you. They will be unwilling to assist you in any way, unless left with no other alternative. Even then they will often try to wiggle out of any deals with you.

Eternal Stillness: +200 NC

The corruption of Necrophosis has filled you with a yearning that can never be sated. Whether it be thirst, hunger, companionship, or simple stimulation of any kind. No matter how much you indulge in the object of your desire, you will feel as if you have been continuously denied it for eons.

Four Lives, Four Faces: +200 NC

Your soul has been split into four pieces, represented by four faces. Somehow, one of these faces has been stolen, containing what little joy and hope your soul once held. You must explore these endless deserts if you wish to be made whole again. Your mask will be returned at the end of the Gauntlet, even if you fail.

The End of Thought: +300 NC

Your arrival perfectly coincides with that of the Wanderer. However, you must not allow them to complete their quest. Should they succeed in playing the pipes of creation, it will be treated as if you failed the Gauntlet, losing everything you gained here. By threatening the cycle in such a way, you will be making enemies of the greatest gods that still roam these sands.

The Unmaking of Self: +300 NC

For whatever reason, your corruption at the hands of Necrophosis was exceptionally cruel. Perhaps you are infested with flesh-eating worms, or have brittle bones that collapse under your own weight, or have your skin flayed and glass-like thorns form between every joint. Whatever form it takes, your every moment in this world will be spent in unmitigated agony.

Life in Death: +300 NC / +500 NC

The probability of remaining both mobile and sane after eons of corruption through Necrophosis border on miraculous. You were not one of the lucky few. This can take one of two forms. The first option causes your physical mutations to render you completely immobile. The second option robs you of your brain, and with it any capacity for conscious thought beyond that of a beast.

In either case, this renders it functionally impossible for you to enact any real change in this realm. All you can do is suffer as your body breaks down. You can take this twice for both effects, but for only 200 NC more.

Outsider to the Cycle: +1000 NC

This is no longer a Gauntlet. You gain a stipend and retain the use of any perks, items, or any other such advantages for your time here. In return, you will be unable to qualify for any of the scenario rewards, even if you manage to accomplish the associated task.

AMBIGUOUS MERCIES

Necrophosis: -0 NC this Jump / -400 NC to keep

You are unable to die by any means. Age, poison, starvation, sickness, injury, etc. Even if you are ground to dust, your essence remains within. The reason this is called a "curse" is that it doesn't actually allow you to recover from such harm. You will feel all the thirst, hunger, and mutilation, as your body shrivels away to an almost mummified state. Your brain is no longer required for your body to function, but it is required for conscious thought. Without it, you will be reduced to a mindless zombie-like state until it is returned.

Undeath: -0 NC this Jump / -200 NC to keep

The laws of biology are softer than they once were. Adding and removing body parts is as simple as jamming them into or tearing them out of your body. Implant an eyeball by shoving it into your socket, or a heart by jamming it into your chest, or new brain by stuffing it into your skull, etc. However, brains other than your own will be rejected if you have been too long without one.

You can only use this to replace lost body parts. So you can't fill your ribcage full of hearts if you already have one working one, or use one missing arm as an excuse to graft several limbs onto the one stump, etc.

Planter: 200 NC

Much like the Wanderer who seeds the new universe with consciousness, it is the titans who seed it with pain, faith, and void respectively. Whenever you find yourself near the birth of a new universe, you may sacrifice yourself to seed that universe with an idea or phenomena of your choosing, becoming one of its defining concepts. Rather than needing to sacrifice your entire being, by buying this you can make due by sacrificing ⅓ each from your mind, body, and soul.

CONSCIOUS MERCIES

Discounted to those burdened by Consciousness. Discounted 100 NC Perks free.

Whispers of Meaning: -100 NC

You possess an ability akin to empathy, but a bit more intense. You are able to interpret the core meaning of any words spoken at you, even if it's unlike any language you've ever heard before. This doesn't allow you to understand every detail, nor does it provide the means to actually respond.

The Absolute Mind: -100 NC

You are absurdly cool-headed and decisive. You rarely find yourself fluttering over what is right or wrong. Even when what must be done requires delving into the unknown or making a great personal sacrifice, it takes you barely a few seconds to take whatever actions you know must be taken.

The Retread Path: -200 NC

You always feel an odd sense of deja vu. A guiding sense of how to interact with your environment. This often manifests in the form of visual hallucinations. It could be illusionary walls barring dangerous areas, shadows of your form near mechanisms you can interact with, a glow highlighting important objects, etc. This insight only applies to things in your immediate surroundings.

Goods and Services: -200 NC

Even after eons, the power of cooperation survives. You'll regularly come across individuals that will be able to provide you with objects or services that will somehow assist you on your current quest, in return for a small favor. These favors are often easily achievable within the immediate surroundings. Leaving one to wonder why they needed your help in the first place.

To Dust and Back: -400 NC

You are able to store objects and even living beings in a kind of personal “inventory”. These objects vanish into dust before reforming in your hand as needed. There is no known limit to the quantity of items you can store, but the more objects you store the more you have to cycle through to find whatever you're looking for, so try not to hoard too much. You also cannot store any object that a normal human couldn’t carry in one or both arms.

Consciousness Itself: -400 NC

Much like the Wanderer, you are able to control the bodies of other beings, either by placing your own brain in an empty skull, or by directly touching their exposed brain. Not only is your brain easily removable, but as long as you are directly touching it, you remain in full control of your body. Even if you become separated from your body, your brain will always inexplicably find its way back to it. Your brain now resembles a glass orb holding a starry cosmos.

The Crown of Purpose: -600 NC

Within your very essence is an aura of significance that others can intuitively sense. Even the haughtiest of kings and the most eldritch of gods will show you a modicum of respect and be willing to provide their wholehearted assistance, as long as your goals roughly align. This won’t make them necessarily like you, or put your needs above their own, but not even the mightiest beings in existence can wholly dismiss your presence.

Temporary Salvation: -600 NC

You will occasionally come across peculiar “respawn points” marked by a silhouette of your form. At will, you may choose to teleport your brain to the closest respawn point, causing a new, perfectly healthy copy of your old body to be rebuilt around it. Whatever body you leave behind will crumble into dust. Oddly, you also keep everything you had on your person. Your brain is the only part of you that cannot be restored through this process.

UNCONSCIOUS MERCIES

Discounted to those burdened by Unconsciousness. Discounted 100 NC Perks free.

Broken Nostalgia: -100 NC

You are able to force hallucinations onto yourself and the desperate in order to transform even the most hopeless situations into something more palatable. A cold pile of wood becomes a jovial campfire, a field of corpses becomes a regal ball, screams of agony become a beautiful orchestra, etc.

Oracle: -100 NC

In any world you find yourself, you will be a treasure trove of forgotten lore. Whether it be the lost history of a fallen civilization, or the nameless gods that reduced the world to its current state. This knowledge will rarely be anything immediately practical like how to cast old magics or contact obscure demons.

Gears of Bone: -200 NC

The residents of this world have had to get quite creative in this realm where the only resources available are each other. Whether it's skyscrapers of dried skin, pigments of ground organs, or canons of fused bone. Through extensive research and experimentation, you can figure out how to replicate anything you know how to construct conventionally using nothing but corpses.

Angelic: -200 NC

Your mind is more than human. Not even eons of despair and the worst tortures of Hell can have the slightest impact on your mental and emotional state. Your sense of self and compassion are immutable. Depending on the situation, denying yourself the sweet release of madness or apathy could itself be a torture without equal. You may choose to grant yourself shimmering golden skin.

Undeathly Wails: -400 NC

Though death is unreachable in this land, there are far crueler alternatives. Perhaps your touch can infect others with a curse that painfully eats away at their mind and body, or your screech can leave someone permanently petrified, but fully conscious. The target must be fairly close and is ineffective on anything significantly more powerful than a regular human being. In future worlds, those afflicted by this fate will be unable to die from it, even if they want to.

The Circle of Death: -400 NC

There is an odd form of rebirth possible in this realm. The components of a being are mind, body, and soul. You can either consume a being to extract one of these components, or with all three within you, they can be merged and regurgitated as new life. The nature and potency of the components gathered will be somewhat reflected in the new birth. However, this is fundamentally a new living being with no recollection of anything prior to their birth.

The End Without End: -600 NC

You may not be one of the old gods, but you seem to possess some of their hardiness. As long as you remain conscious, you are able to ward off all forms of physical decay or corruption, even from the passing of eons or the mightiest curses in existence. Even if you lose consciousness, its return will void any degradation accumulated in that time. Be aware that mundane physical injuries do not qualify as “corruption” for this ability.

Crumbling Deity: -600 NC

A power that would be far more useful if there weren’t so few places worth being in this endless wasteland. With a mere thought, you are able to dematerialize into a cloud of dust before rematerializing elsewhere. You can teleport in this way to anywhere you can currently perceive or anywhere that you can remember being previously. This transition must be initiated consciously, and you have no awareness of yourself until you rematerialize.

DECAYING RELICS

Floating discounts. You may either choose to discount any one 800 NP Item, or two items of any other tier. Discounted 100 NC Items free.

Wisdom and Payment: -100 NC

Wherever you go, you will frequently come across strange tablets or notes carved into deformed remains containing traces of ancient lore. You'll also occasionally come across peculiar ancient coins and petrified oracles who will provide similar insight in exchange for this seemingly worthless currency.

Parasitic Chariot: -100 NC

Two strange creatures resembling spiders made of human bones. On contact, you are able to transfer your consciousness into it to seize direct control of it. This leaves your body defenseless, but you can sever the connection and return to your original body at any time.

Shared Damnation: -100 NC, Can take multiple times

With each purchase, you may try to convince one of the locals of this realm to join you on your future journeys. Considering how rare sapience is in this world, this may be more difficult than you expect. Alternatively, you may import one of your own past allies into this damned world with 400 NC to spend.

Malnourished Soul Eater: -200 NC

A severed head in a small cage resembling a lantern. This head has an insatiable hunger for souls but can be prompted to regurgitate them as needed. Paired with it is a strange giant that is just as ravenous for flesh. It will consume any living flesh, before fishing out that being's soul to give to you. That said, this alone won't provide you with a practical use for these souls.

Nameless Necropolis: -200 NC

The strange necrotic machines and architecture should be ample proof that flesh can be quite the valuable resource with some creativity. Within your warehouse is a door to a small slice of this realm, containing an inexhaustible supply of corpses of countless different sizes and species. No matter how many you remove, this mountain of corpses will never be fully exhausted.

Necromantic Mechanism: -200 NC, Can take multiple times

One of the many peculiar feats of technology found in this land. Perhaps it is an enormous colossus you can pilot, a crab-like automaton to act as a beast of burden, a strange cannon that can focus sound into a laser-like concussive force, or some similarly powerful and technologically baffling contraption. Can be purchased multiple times for different constructs.

Soulless Womb: -400 NC

A rather peculiar organic structure can now be found in your warehouse. Within it is a cavity, just large enough for a humanoid to fit. As long as one is still living when they crawl inside, their flesh will be almost instantaneously regenerated and restored to peak condition. One can even recover from more abstract forms of harm like petrification or mutations caused by a mystical curse.

Barren Solace: -400 NC

Either within your warehouse or placed in a location of your choosing is a portal to a small pocket dimension. Be it an ocean of blood or an asteroid orbiting a black hole. Its appearance and to a lesser extent the laws of physics are wholly dependent on your whims. This space cannot create life, and nothing created within can exist outside, but it can sustain beings and items from outside.

Relics of the Titans: -400 NC

Three artifacts associated with the three titans. Truthfully, what power they held has long since been exhausted, and their worth is primarily symbolic. Perhaps with the resources in other worlds, you can figure out how to reawaken whatever latent potential still sleeps within them.

From the titan who embodies pain, is the brain from the wanderer of a past cycle who sacrificed themselves to birth a new universe.

From the titan who embodies faith, is an eyeball belonging to a being said to have withstood the most maddening sights the universe could provide.

From the titan who embodies void is a staff forged from an unknown black metal. Nothing is known of what powers it once or may still have.

Broken Seal: -800 NC

A peculiar artifact. It is said that this small stone disk once held the power to seal away a cosmic god or craft entire worlds. However, it has long since been damaged to the point that it is little more than a paperweight. Even in its prime, the world created by it was unstable and quickly rotted away. Perhaps that realm is the very one you find yourself in now, who can say. Perhaps with the knowledge and techniques of other worlds, you can somehow restore this artifact to its former godlike capabilities.

Pipes of Creation: -800 NC

An immense tower filled with eldritch magic and biomechanical machines resembling some kind of colossal instrument. This machine is the key to restarting the cycle, ending the curse of Necrophosis by recreating the universe once more. However, the pipes of creation require a catalyst, a spark of divine power to set the process in motion, and a powerful mind to sacrifice itself to seed the new universe with life. Without the assistance of a being like the Wanderer, you will need to seek out some form of substitute.

Blasphemous Conduit: -1000 NC

The ancient face that once belonged to the being that first seeded the universe with consciousness, now shaped into a grotesque mask. This gives your voice power. The world feels compelled to obey your commands. Weak-willed beings move out of the way, prison bars crumble, and eldritch seals shatter just from you saying the word. You are limited to simple commands with localized effects. Sufficiently powerful beings can resist your influence and far-reaching changes to the universe on the whole require some means to focus and project that power, such as the Pipes of Creation. Long gone are the days where a whisper from these lips could bend the universe and the gods within to your will.

THE CHOICE

By taking part in any of these, you are choosing to take the place of the Wanderer as the embodiment of "Consciousness Itself". You will be embarking on a journey through this realm in order to birth the new world at the cost of your own sense of self. You will start at a far greater distance from the Pipes of Creation, meaning your journey will be far longer and more treacherous than what the Wanderer would normally endure. Your quest will likely span weeks, if not months, rather than just a few days or even hours.

No matter your choice, completing any of these quests will allow you to retain the Perks Necrophosis and Undeath for no cost.

Prolong the Cycle

As has been done in countless prior cycles, you must reach the Pipes of Creation, regain your old face, and bring death and rebirth to this universe. As a reward, you will be blessed with almost an inversion of the curse. Simply put, you are able to bestow death onto the immortal, undead, or those for whom such a concept simply doesn't apply. This doesn't do anything to dull passive regeneration, durability, or any other defenses. But if you can bring them to a state that would be fatal if not for their immortality, then they will stay dead.

Break the Cycle

The fact that you were born means that in however many cycles transpired before you, all have chosen to sacrifice themselves. You have decided to break that cycle. This involves finding the Pipes of Creation, but in this instance you must destroy it, or do whatever is in your power to ensure that the new universe will never be born. For this unmatched display of avarice, you have become an avatar of Necrophosis, allowing you to freely bestow it onto others. Mutations are still an issue, but it's a price many will pay for immortality.

Redefine the Cycle

What you are attempting is unprecedented in the whole scope of existence. You aren't trying to continue the cycle, or even break it, but to render the old cycle completely redundant. Whether that be preventing the destruction of the universe entirely or creating a new cycle that doesn't necessitate eons of decay under Necrophosis before the congealed consciousness of those lost to the sand must sacrifice themselves to reset the status quo.

To make this even possible, your time here will continue until you either give up, succeed, or manage to die in spite of the curse. You will retain your memories between each cycle, but only from your time spent as a singular being following the death of the last universe.

Should you succeed, then you will no longer need the mask to tap into your divine voice. You will be able to demonstrate power akin to the Blasphemous Conduit through your own voice. Once you finally complete your Chain and achieve your Spark, you will finally awaken to your original godly power

Your voice is again that which birthed stars and unmade gods.

FINALITY

"To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour."

Birth: Go Home

You leave this cycle behind to return to your original world.

Death: Stay Here

You remain in this cycle, parting with the multiverse of unknowns.

Rebirth: Move On

You close one cycle, only to start another. Your wanderings continue.

WHISPERS

Gauntlet by Gene