PALE LIGHTS



Story by ErraticErrata, Jump by Aehriman

Vesper is a world built on the ruins of countless previous ones. Inside a massive cavern that no man has yet found the edges of, empires have risen and fallen struggling for a piece of the Glare, that harsh, unending light that drove mankind deep underground in Antiquity and still blazes through what holes exist in the Firmament high above. Humanity huddles around these holes, for only the light of the Glare keeps out the Gloam, the shadow, source of magic and monsters and sickness and corruption. A world where old gods and devils stalk looking for the desperate to tempt into bargains, and Hollow darklings once men give themselves to the evil powers. In this manner the world has endured for millennia, from the reign of the Antediluvians whose miraculous machines keep so much running, to the modern days of blackpowder and great sailing ships.

In such a world, each power has their own army of monster-hunters and god-killers, but there are none to match the Watch, the Rooks who enforce the Iscariot Accords and keep the peace between the great powers. Yet the peace which has held since the Succession Wars and the fall of Liergan is fraying, the empires of the world jockeying for position, conspiracies spring up like weeds. Only

the Watch seems to know or care what is going on here, that humanity's division is all our enemies gain, and even their strength has waned considerably in the last century. They need new blood, and they need it now.

Tristan Abrascal is a thief, used to surviving by his wits and his contract with the fickle goddess Fortuna, until he accidentally burns all his remaining bridges in one night, his sole hope of escape a new life in the Watch.

Angharad Tredegar is accustomed to death. As a Pereduri mirror-dancer, she has slain herself in single combat ten times, each time knowing that one day it would be her staring helplessly up at the victor. But nothing could have prepared her for finding her entire family slaughtered, herself a fugitive. For survival and revenge, she flees to her estranged uncle in Sacromonte, leaving a trail of assassins' bodies, only to be sent to shelter in the Watch.

They, and many others, will be sorely tested at the Dominion of Lost Things, where three deadly trials await to sort potential Rooks from dead weight, and for them and a few others, the potential to jump straight to the elite covenant's school, recently reopened after many casualties shut it down, the Scholomance.

This is a hard and unforgiving world. Have **1,000 contract points** (cp) to survive.

AGE, RACE, SEX, ETC.

Depending where you start, these things can matter a great deal. Feel free to change any you may find inconvenient. Beware that pale skin is considered the mark of the Hollows, corrupted savages who serve dark gods, and paleskins are often enslaved or killed.



STARTING LOCATION

Everyone has to begin somewhere. Choose or roll a random locale for +100 cp.

1. **Sacromonte:** On the south shore of the Trebian sea, the Issan continent, by far the least territory of the great powers of Vesper, yet Sacromonte remains one of the greatest cities in the world, heirs to the glory of the old Liergan Empire, and they never tire of telling you that. With a vast fleet, and the treaty-given authority to mint all coinage used on the Trebian. The *infanzones* of Sacromonte are considered especially treacherous, grasping and useless, even by the standards of other nobility. The Six Families rule, and many lesser nobles besides.
2. **The Dominion of Lost Things:** Plotbound, are we? You start in the hold of the ship *Bluebell*, en route to the Dominion, a proving ground for the Watch and prison to a particularly terrible god. Those who can survive three trials may be assured enlistment in the Watch, if not a covenant. The Trial of Lines, where you cross an untamed wilderness full of monsters and hollow

cultists. The Trial of Ruins, a maze of the temples of countless gods, where one must risk their lives and souls in a series of rigged challenges. At least five victors are needed to open the final gates. The Trial of Weeds, a town full of devils where the survivors hold an inquisition on who deserves to be eaten, which ends only with at least one victim and the unanimous consent of the trial-takers to conclude and move on. Between each are forts to serve as safe harbor, it is common for *infanzones* to take the first two trials to prove themselves, then resign short of the Trial of Weeds and committing themselves to the Watch.

3. **Kingdom of Malan:** A maritime state, ruled for five centuries by the immortal Queen Perpetual, allegedly so pure she cannot die while her honor remains unsullied. Other rulers are, to say the least, skeptical of this claim. Malani are famous for their skilled sailors and rigorous, persnickety sense of honor. Malani have such a strong taboo against lying, they will often hedge things they entirely believe or know to be true with phrases like "It is my understanding" or "I believe." Though slavery is practiced all over Vesper, none match Malan in scale or cruelty, especially in their overseas colonies, full of pale-skinned 'savages' the Malani see no reason to respect. On the plus side, Malan is the only great power to embrace public education, though the average *iskole* graduate's understanding of history will mirror Malani propaganda. Honor duels are common, and many of the world's greatest swordmasters hail from Malan. Angharad's native Peredur is a part of this Kingdom. The Straying Sea separating it from the other powers is especially hazardous, and it is a point of pride that Malani sailors can navigate it largely without skimmers.
4. **Tianxia, the Heavenly Republics:** Nine Republics of ancient history, ten until the Dimming of Jigong, a century ago, on the Southern shore of Serica. Easily the wealthiest of all the great powers. Originally the Kingdom of Cathay, after a long history of Izcalli and Someshwaran occupation, the Republics collectively cast off royalty, pronouncing all equal under heaven. And if some families are more equal than others, well, that's the way of the world. The Republics are ever at each other's throats, yet quick to ally against foreign intrusion. The three Southernmost Republics, the Sanxing (three stars) are far larger, wealthier and more secure than those bordering Izcal and the Someshwar. The Tianxi have no large Glare pits, rather, nine Antediluvian lamps called the Illuminaries, capable of protecting hundreds of miles of farmland exist. A lottery is held every five years to see which Republic will be left in darkness and forced to rely on stockpiled

charged lamp oil and import food. A century ago, the leaders of Jigong caused one of the lamps to go dark forever, and were forever excluded from the light. There is no central government, but the religious Ministry of Rites conducts the lottery, serves as a forum for negotiations between the Republics, and often has a hand in settling foreign policy.

5. **Kingdom of Izcalli:** The vast domain of the Grasshopper King, famous for their fertile heartlands, wealth of Antediluvian treasures, many martial societies and bloody rituals. Glare in Izcali comes from Antediluvian lamps called the Candles which were damaged during the Rule of Jaguars and maintained only through human sacrifice. Flower Wars are thus constantly waged for fresh sacrifices. Izcalli noble titles are earned with valor on the battlefield: they can be passed down to a child, but only one who has earned the title can pass it on, creating a constant need for battle. Izcalli is surrounded by petty kingdoms and tributaries, buffer states. Izcalli maintains the greatest standing army in all of Vesper.
6. **The Imperial Someshwar:** In their own minds, the Third Empire destined to inherit all of Vesper. In practice, an enormous number of petty kingdoms, or rajes, divided by a common language and culture, and at least three major ethnicities. In theory, each Raja is pledged to their nominal overlord the Majaraja, but in practice the Majaraja has very little real power, even to prevent wars within his own borders. If the Someshwar ever fully united, they would command easily the largest army on Vesper. If they ever fully fractured, millions would die in the ensuing wars. The Someshwari cultivate the prized *azirvada* tree that naturally produces Glare from wood and leaf alike. Someshwari are famous for strong spices and borderline propaganda bodice-rippers in which foreign maidens submit to the charms of the dashing Someswari merchant prince, despite the best efforts of their wicked native suitor and possibly their family.
7. **Pandemonium:** Lands long since surrendered to devils and unspeakable horror. Or the ring of fortresses keeping them contained.
8. **Tolomentara:** Once, this island was called Solomentara, home to Lucifer's summer palace. It was long ago taken by the Watch and their elite school, Scholomance, built beneath the light of its Great Orrery. Scholomance was closed long ago, but recently reopened and will accept its first classes in just a few weeks.
9. **Asphodel Rectorate:** A pale shadow of a once-great kingdom, an island in the Trebian Sea, founded by the famous Odyssean. It is at least mercifully quiet. What could go wrong?

10. **Rasen:** A small island with a history of war with Asphodel. The superstitious Raseni believe their home to be the only land untainted with evil, and swaddle themselves in all-concealing robes when they must travel, so as to not bring the evil home with them.

BEING

Forget the "Who." What *are you?*

Mortal - You are one of the countless humans who live and love, laugh and die in perpetual twilight, having not even an ancestral memory of the sun. Your days are numbered, your strength limited.

Devil (-200/400 cp) Servants of Lucifer, but they don't have to be. Artificial beings created using Infernal Forges. Devils eat people, and then wear their skins to blend in, as long as nobody looks too closely at their teeth. Some devils become 'annealed' in the aether, a form of immortality where their consciousness survives death and can be reproduced with the nearest Forge, with several secondary benefits like keen supernatural senses. For an extra two hundred cp (400 total) you may have undergone this process.

God (-400 cp) You are a fourth order or higher aether entity, a god. Your power to influence the world is, surprisingly, rather limited outside of specific sanctified areas and pacts made with mortals, but one day you may manifest in the physical world again and all shall bow before your majesty or try and kill you. Your sustenance is aether tainted by powerful emotion. You have a domain in which you are specifically incredibly powerful. Gods can be counted as full citizens in Tianxia, all equal under Heaven and all that.

COVENANT

With Whom do You Stand? Pick one.

None: Well, not everyone joins a cabal. You could be a Garrison trooper, one of the Free Companies of mercenaries working for the Watch, or even unaffiliated with the only group trying to keep everyone alive. Still, pick one to get discounts for.

Academics (Stripes): The largest of the covenants, half of all covenanters, the Academy trains the officer corps of the Watch. The Stripes refer to themselves as the largest and most successful conspiracy in the world, one to keep the Watch functioning, balancing the needs of its many component parts.

Akelarre Guild (Navigators): Signifiers, mystics, witches. The Navigators are sorely needed to chart courses through the Gloam and ward off lemures. They have many traditions which predate the Watch, and seek to unravel the mysteries of how to survive long term in the dark, when the Glare fails. Though the Akelarre Signifiers practice the safest, most scientific form of Gloam sorcery, the black arts are still a poison that slowly kills the wielder. Also, their Gloam tainted souls are of little interest to gods, so they cannot form contracts.

Arthashastra Society (Laurels): The Watch's diplomats, historians and linguists. Priceless for navigating local politics or researching old legends and lost lore. Very closely tied in politics to the rest of the academic 'College' covenants.

Krypteia (Masks): Spies, thieves, assassins. The Masks are the espionage arm of the Watch. They acknowledge no borders or treaties in their mission to make sure the worst horrors of past ages stay buried, or to slay any Rook who dares turn his coat.

Peiling Society (Savants): Experts in theistic metaphysics, which usually means gods, contracts and Saints. Much of their interior workings are mysterious at this time.

Skiritai (Militants): The god-reaping sickle, the silver swords of Iscariot, the army that thrice slew Lucifer and slammed shut the gates of hell is alive and well, and it is the Skiritai Guild. The combat arm, not the garrison troopers or the free companies. All Watchmen look to the deadliest warriors on Vesper when it hits the fan.

Umuthi Society (Tinkers): Experts in mechanics and technology. Everyone gets a grounding in the basics, but usually by their second year specialize in one of two sub-groups. The Clockwork Cathedral studies dependable technology based on repeatable experiments and consistent physics. The Deuteronomicon works in the far more esoteric field of aether-based technology and rituals.



CABAL

Who are your friends? No charge.

Tristan Abrascal - An 18-year-old thief and street rat from Sacromonte. At a young age, Tristan witnessed his father's murder as part of an experiment, Theogony, in stacking multiple contracts. He survived on the streets, living for revenge, and was adopted by his abuela, Nerei Name-Eater, who taught him to sneak, steal, and kill. Tristan is 5'9", skinny with pale skin and deep grey eyes, cannot grow a beard, perpetually messy dark hair. He often wears a tricorn hat, so as to have an identifiable feature he can easily discard. Tristan has a deeply cynical worldview and an ingrained distrust of all authority. He is glib and shallowly charming, but struggles to understand and relate sincere feelings. He is asexual. He is studying poisons and medicine, and struggles to hold his own in a straight fight.

Tristan has a most unusual relationship with his contracted goddess, Fortuna. She is almost constantly around him, unseen and unheard by others, and sometimes serves as a scout or lookout. In private, they bicker. His contract allows him to borrow luck, getting a rush of good fortune on demand, but at the price of a backlash of equally bad luck the moment he releases it.

Tristan may be safely assumed to have all perks in the Mask line.

Angharad Tredegar - Militant. A tall (5'10") athletic Malani (Black) woman with many braids. On her left arm are tattooed ten silver stripes. The former lady of Llanw Hall in Peredur, part of Malan, Angharad's mother Rhiannon was a famous adventuring sea-captain, explorer and occasional pirate. Angharad was brought up to help manage the port, and pushed into swordsmanship when she showed a talent. As a mirror-dancer, Angharad faced a Grey Mirror copying her appearance and skills, and ten times defeated them. Shortly after the last, Llanw Hall was attacked in the night and all within slain, Angie's father just barely getting her to escape on a river boat. There she met the Fisher and contracted with him. From that time until the start of the story, she has been pursued by assassins, her family name stripped of all titles and honors. Angharad is hyper-competent at bladework and navigating the Malani social scene, and rather out of her depth in most settings. Angharad has a rigorous sense of honor that, along with vengeance, is the driving force in her life, but is not even slightly above rules-lawyering her own code, especially when confronted with dishonor. Angharad is rather strongly drawn by other women. Angharad's contract is with the Fisher, an ancient and terrible enemy of the Malani. In exchange for her word to one day free him, she gains the power to glimpse up to a minute or two into the future, modeling the outcomes of her choices. Like all foresight contracts, this is a crime punishable by death in Malan. Overuse of her contract can cause Angharad pain, and eventually to bleed from the eyes.
Angharad has all the perks from the Militant line.

Maryam Kholam - Navigator. Maryam is ethnically Triglau, from the Izvoric valley, the town of Volcesta, on the Juska continent. 5'8" with pale skin, black hair and blue eyes. Favors a hooded cloak, to reduce the staring and general hostility. Because of her pale skin, she and other Triglau are often mistaken for soulless Hollows and are considered savages out East. Maryam is the daughter of the king of Volcesta and his tenth wife, the fantastically powerful witch Izolda Cernik. Maryam's low status led to a fight and a temporary exile from her childhood home, which was lengthened when she discovered her gift. Her mother failed to teach her much Craft, even ritually passing on the stored mystic lore of the Izvoric called the Cauldron failed. In her early teens, Malani colonists landed on the coast and eventually conquered the Izvoric, renaming their land

Ifanje. Maryam accompanied her mother's Wintersworn but was forbidden from fighting. After her parents death, she spent a fortnight fleeing slavers before being rescued by a wandering Izcali Navigator, Totec the Feathered, who mentored her and sponsored her to Scholomance. However, realizing her skin tone would be a major hindrance, she joined the Trials on the Dominion to try and recruit someone else to fill out her cabal with Song Ren. Maryam can barely make signs work, and then only the most complicated, those affecting the mind. This is eventually revealed to be because of an aether parasite whom she names Hooks, who gained the Cauldron and all things Maryam repressed. Hooks is later revealed to be the spirit of Maryam's twin sister, unintentionally killed in the womb. Maryam is a very skilled rider and at fighting with hatchets.
As a signifier, Maryam is of no interest to gods and unable to contract. Assume she has all the perks in the Navigator line.

Song Ren - Stripe. A small Tianxia woman with silver eyes. Song is the granddaughter of Chaoxing Ren, the man blamed for the Dimming of Jigong and lashed to death. Half a million Tianxi begin and end their every day by cursing the Ren name, the most hated family under heaven. This seems to be manifesting as an actual curse, or nascent god, causing ill health and misfortune to dog their heels. Song's sole ambition is to win such glory in the Watch as to erase the stain of dishonor and save her family. Song was raised to lead, and never really socialized with her peers, making her a rigid perfectionist, though she holds herself to similarly high standards. Ever she struggles to be the master of her own destiny rather than a stick caught in the currents of life. Song is fully conversant in seven languages and literate in another. She is very familiar with tactics and strategy, but learning leadership is more complicated than issuing commands and punishments. Song is competent with a *jian* sword, and an amazing marksman, assisted by her contract. Unable to attract a cabal to lead with her infamous name, Song arranged with Maryam to join the Trials on the Dominion of Lost Things to recruit two more to fill out their team.
Song Ren is contracted to Luren, a gadfly monk who often presents visions in which he frustrates her with koans, parables and riddles. She offered 'whatever he wants' for her contracted power, the ability to see the truth of all things. Song's silver eyes can see in any light condition, penetrate most supernatural stealth, and ignore illusions. She can see many things invisible to others, like Fortuna or the text of contracts over the heads of contractors. She can even see the wind, and adjust for its impact on her aim.

Song has all the skills represented by Stripe perks.

Sakkas - A very clever bird that seems to have supernatural powers. May or may not be the reincarnation of his namesake, a Bishop of the infamous Sunless House.

Mephistofeline - A very fat black cat. He is a good buoy.

Other - Recruit anyone you want, from Francho to Evander Palliades. Tupoc if you have an irrational 'I can fix him!' urge. Wen Duan if you're a Jumper of taste and class. Or any random person you meet on the street.

Cabal - Import as many Companions as you like, each with 800 cp to spend. Companions cannot take drawbacks for more points.

GIFTS

Happy Camper (-50 cp) You know all about wilderness survival, how to fish and forage and hunt for food, to make yourself a fire or comfortable inside a tent.

Kiss the Cook (-50 cp) You're actually a really skilled cook, able to make even just rice and fish for a week with enough twist that people won't complain.

Cavalry (-50 cp) You are a skilled rider of horses, and also understand how to care for them.

Linguist (-100 cp) You are fluent and literate in all the *many* languages actively spoken across Vesper. In future Jumps this updates to local tongues.

One in Ten (-100 cp) Seventy percent of those who go without Glare for a long time just die. Twenty percent become hollows. Just one in ten is utterly fine. That's you, you have no need for the light to sustain your health, and we'll throw in immunity to mundane sicknesses on top.

Well-Bred (-100 cp) The Watch forswear all titles and nobility when joining, but maybe you aren't joining the Watch. Even inside it, connections and wealth make a difference. You come

from a privileged background, and people are more likely to be considerate towards you. Plus you know which fork to use and all the obscure manners.

Grace Under Pressure (-100 cp, free Stripe) An officer of the Watch does not have the luxury of falling to pieces, no matter what their challenges or stresses. You do not panic, you do not lash out, you do not lose your composure or self-control. You plan and then act.

Mandate (-100 cp, free Stripe) You are extremely familiar with the history, laws and procedures of the Watch. In future Jumps, you may choose a new organization to be so exhaustively knowledgeable in.

Good Treasons (-200 cp, discount Stripe) You know that there are Laws, and then there are Laws. You know which rules you need to follow, and which ones you can ignore. More than this, those around you know this as well. You don't need to worry about getting in trouble for"minor" or "excusable" infractions, and know how to find the right palms to grease to make things happen. Corruption is a fact of life on Vesper, you may as well make it work for you.

Carrot and Stick (-200 cp, discount Stripe) Sometimes people need encouragement, sometimes a boot up their behind. Sometimes harsh discipline, sometimes a blind eye. Sometimes strict boundaries, sometimes a captain who drinks and laughs and sings with the men. The hard part is knowing which approach to use, and when. This perk takes the guesswork out, you'll always know which approach to take with your subordinates. And also when to be silent, defend yourself or crack a joke to your superiors.

Hand on the Chisel (-400 cp, discount Stripe) You are stone, shaped by the chisel of life. Would you rather it be your hand on the chisel, or theirs? You have the kind of supreme will needed to face down gods and devils, the entire world, and say 'No. You move.' People will never dismiss you because of your sex, race, class, species, age, health, or lineage.

A Duty and Privilege (-600 cp, discount Stripe) You have a great strategic insight, an uncanny ability to plan a campaign. Not just to win individual battles, but to arrange it so each step brings you closer to your goals, while any loss is minimized so as to never be crippling. Your keen battlefield instincts and experience make you almost impossible to ambush or trap, while keeping

you alert to exactly how hard and far you can push your own forces and allies. You have an amazing ability to handle the minutiae of logistics, politics and diplomacy that a commander must, balancing the needs of all your subordinates, while smoothing over all the problems inherent in large coalitions. Given time, you will amass the towering reputation of a Napoleon, itself a huge asset in a fight.

Etiquette (-100 cp, free Laurel) It's important in the many cultures of Vesper, to know how not to give offense, and which fork to use and which wine goes with which meat and a thousand counterintuitive rules that are all different a hundred miles away. You always know what's expected and polite in a given social situation.

Omniglot (-100 cp, free Laurel) There are a lot of languages spoken on Vesper, even before we get into dialects and ancient forgotten tongues. You can speak and write all of them, and any future languages you encounter. Even a physician's handwriting.

Theater (-200 cp, discount Laurel) You know how to arrange pomp and pageantry, when and how to make a production to present things a certain way and get a particular result. Sometimes a dramatic gesture is necessary, like burning a throne or riding between two armies with a (unsigned) peace treaty. You can get people excited, or offended with a simple symbolic gesture, and such are far more effective when wielded by your deft hands. You take the complexities of politics and diplomacy and make them simple.

Yixin (-200 cp, discount Laurel) Alternatively, it can be very useful to know when to be rude, when to be gross, when to do unspeakable things to food. You have an uncanny sense for what you can get away with before someone is compelled to say something, or moved to violence, whether you want to stop just short of that line, or catapult over it and make the other guy start an incident.

Clear-Eyed (-400 cp, discount Laurel) A skilled courtier keeps their eyes peeled and their mouths shut, an ambassador, all the more so. You are skilled at spotting lies and flattery, but there's more to it than that. You can identify the true power structures in any organization or faction, the key players, the ones who really hold the reigns. You see the trajectory of political forces, anticipate the choices and actions of others, their fears and desires and how to find common ground.

Wordsmith (-600 cp, discount Laurel) You have the charisma to easily inspire people, the ability to bridge divides, defuse tense situations, and get mortal enemies willing to talk to each other and you. You know how to appeal to cynical self-interest, or highlight the benefits of any agreement, and can easily juggle and arrange a wealth of minor details. If it is at all possible to negotiate an agreement, you can do it. If it is not, know that none could have done better.

Grasp and Command (-100 cp, free Navigator) There are numerous ways of comparing signifiers. For simplicity's sake in training, the Watch uses a 10-point scale on two axes, Grasp - how much raw Gloam you can manipulate, and Command - your precise control, how much you can use in Signs. These two are rarely precisely the same, so the lower figure is generally used as a shorthand - because calling up more Gloam than you can control or drawing signs you can't power are both epically terrible ideas, so the lower bound is an effective cap on your abilities. A difference of 3 or 4 is usually a sign of dangerous instability and imminent death.
This perk gives you an effective rating of 5, the Watch has little interest in hedge witches. The details you can figure for yourself. Subsequent purchases, discounted for Navigators, will raise this base score by one. 10+ exist, and are usually senior Navigators.

Sailing (-100 cp, free Navigator) The Akelarre are called Navigators because of their vital role in sensing and protecting ships from Gloam storms, warding off aquatic lares, and such. It's valuable, reliable work and most seas are not navigable without a signifier unless you have a skimmer. It is expected that an Akelarre will learn to sail and navigate conventionally, for they will most likely live most of their lives at sea. So it is with you, a master sailor.

Nav (-200 cp, discount Navigator) For all serious signifiers, a third part of their soul is… detached to make a logos, or nav. Made into a tool for sensing and shaping the Gloam and Aether. You have undergone this process. Not only can you sense things of the invisible world and perform major workings, your soul is protected from the things that normally hurt those who send theirs out, getting trapped or altered, looking too deep at the eldritch and so on.

Signs (-200 cp, discount Navigator) There are other Gloam-wielding traditions, but the Akelarre are all signifiers. First you sketch an elaborate Sign in the air, then fill it with Gloam to power it up. This has the advantage of producing consistent predictable results from consistent inputs,

unlike a lot of witchery, and is safer though still prone to crippling backlash from small mistakes. You have mastered the novice's arsenal, the three most basic combat signs. Befuddlement, which causes a momentary confusion, Burden, a simple curse which can be cast subtly, and the Bayonet or Signifier's Lockpick, which drives an invisible blade into the next thing you touch.
You're a bit beyond the basics, though, and know all the commonly used Signs. These are divided into five schools; delicate Acumenal Signs affect the senses, used for both illusions and divination, like the Reverb, a kind of sonar pulse that lets a signifier find spaces and people around them. Didactic Signs involve the manipulation of abstract concepts and connections. Thalassic Signs are for large-scale workings, such as Navigaors use to leash the winds to their will, while Ancipital Signs are for small-scale manipulation of Gloam, often as a shield or weapon. Finally, Autarchic Signs affect the caster's own body and mind, and are generally understood to be the most finicky and complex, least forgiving of all.
Signs can be inscribed on an item, though it is difficult, and the item in question will most certainly be consumed by its first use.

Obscuration (-400 cp, discount Navigator) Gloam is a poison that causes madness and death, as much to its wielders as their victims, so all traditions involve ways of minimizing harm. The most effective way known is obscuration, a ritual where one organ such as the heart, liver, lungs or brain, is made into a trap and vessel for any Gloam damage to be concentrated in. Besides extending the life of signifiers, this can provide other benefits, as each organ is associated with a school of Signs and as corruption increases, so does affinity with that school.
For you, it's a little different. You can contain the damage to any organ, or all as you like. You will find they are never quite fully obscured, forcing you to move on. In future worlds, you can also choose to contain corruption or corrosive powers in a single organ, and wield their benefits without cost.

Beyond the Horizon (-600 cp, discount Navigator) Signifying is both an art and a science, and huge libraries exist of all the techniques for manipulating Gloam. You have a vast and subtle understanding of mystic forces, and intuition for what will work and what will not, that separates the true artist remembered for centuries from the workman. Learning to work your will, avoiding all the lesser perils, is easy for you. Pushing the limits of what is believed possible is an amusing

game you play. When you encounter new traditions or anomalies, you easily grasp the essentials and how to adapt them in a useful way.
In future Jumps this applies to all magical systems you can practice.

Law of Rats (-100 cp, free Mask) The hungry bite, the beggared snatch, the cornered fight. You have long since lost any hesitation or doubts about doing whatever it takes to survive, whether arranging an accident or clubbing a witness to death with a loose brick. You can sleep despite your many sins, there are no clean shoes in the Murk.

Sneak-Thief (-100 cp, free Mask) The Masks are not thieves, though they often steal. You have been drilled in how to pick a pocket, or a lock, how to climb up and force a window, or plant incriminating evidence. You could be quite the masterful thief if not for your conscience keeping you in check, eh?

Alvareno's Pupil (-200 cp, discount Mask) Alvareno quite literally wrote the book on poisons, many of them quite sneaky and vicious. You are an expert in all of them, and the many ways they may be discreetly applied and even a fair bit of medicine. After all, all drugs are poisons, it's merely a question of dosage.

Wipe It Away (-200 cp, discount Mask) A feeling is just that, just a feeling. Trace your trauma and your fear and your anger in chalk, then wipe it away. You can clear your mind just as easily as that, see things rationally.

Silver Tongue (-400 cp, discount Mask) You can talk yourself out of a grave almost as fast as you can talk yourself into one, and on Vesper, that's very quick indeed. You think well on your feet, are good at dissecting people and their motivations and convincing them you can get them what they need.

Hunt the Night (-600 cp, discount Mask) The Krypteia are not primarily spies, though they are peerless spies. Nor are they thieves, though they often steal. The Krypteia are gravekeepers. Their job is to keep a lid on the horrors of Old Night, to ensure that people digging up ancient forgotten gods and monsters stop. All the spying, stealing and assassinations are in service to this goal. You will now have a huge advantage over your fellow Masks, you understand when a hidden threat is

brewing, with a sense for how immediate - nothing as precise as a countdown, but within a day or so - how serious, whether it is city-wide, regional, or global. You know what the most likely causes of apocalypse are, and where to start in stopping them. Never be caught off guard by a cabal of cultists or an ancient superweapon again.

Curious (-100 cp, free Savant) You find it easy to maintain enthusiasm for even the driest of texts, pay attention however flawed the lecturer and keep going after an all-nighter. You never lose that spark of curiosity and wonder, and so in many ways make an ideal student.

Researcher (-100 cp, free Savant) You know how to research effectively, and have the work ethic to spend days sifting through tomes. You can find whatever you need in record time.

Lorekeeper (-200 cp, discount Savant) You know a great deal about the world. History, politics, theology, philosophy, poetry, and pretty much everything expected of a graduate of the finest universities. In future worlds, this updates with local knowledge.

Theology (-200 cp, discount Savant) You have an exhaustive theoretical understanding of the nature of divinity, how aether is tainted to become gods, how they flourish or fail or merge with others. You have an expert understanding of local legends, know all the major players and can quickly research the minor ones. You have an ear for which legends are true and which are distortions or made up from whole cloth. Naturally this updates in future Jumps.

Truth (-400 cp, discount Savant) Cheating, yes, but this perk confers the same benefits as Song Ren's contract with Luren. You see the truth of things, meaning you notice every detail within your field of view. You see fine in blinding light or total darkness, and cannot be deceived by illusions. You can even see the wind. Perhaps most importantly, you can see the normally invisible gods, and for contractors the text of their bargain floats over their heads.

Student of Learning (-600 cp, discount Savant) Many on Scholomance dismiss the Peiling Society as mere homework mules. You prove them wrong though. You have learned how to learn, and do so extremely quickly. But hwat is knowledge without practical application, without wisdom? You easily understand the links between fields and can extrapolate to an incredible degree. You could master arithmetic in the morning and have independently developed algebra,

calculus, and coordinate geomety before your lunchbreak was over. Given just a small overview of someone's goals, you can predict their likely choices in any given situation with over 90% accuracy. Finally, you have a sense for when there are holes in your data, missing information that would tie your theories together or transform your understanding of a situation. Always remember that you hardly ever have the full story.

Fighting Fit (-100 cp, free Militant) The Skiritai don't always offer the most academically strenuous classes, but the greatest warriors on Vesper can never skip leg day. You are in excellent physical shape, any disability or fault such as allergies removed.

Warfare (-100 cp, free Militant) Every covenanter is expected to be at least proficient with a musket, pistol, blade or unarmed. The Skiritai demand a lot more than mere proficiency. You are a talented fighter and killer, maybe not the best there is, not with this alone, but you're far better than most in all these fields, with a rock-solid foundation for improvement. Do not be surprised if you can handle four or five to one odds in a fight.

Tetralogy (-200 cp, discount Militant) You can identify all the common monster types of Vesper, lemures and lares both, and know quite a lot about their powers, weaknesses and what tactics are generally effective against them. Naturally this knowledge updates in future Jumps.

Uncertainty is Surrender (-200 cp, discount Militant) You don't flinch, you don't hesitate when surprised in the field. You plan when needed, and when the time comes you decide and then act. As such, you'll usually do the right thing in a crisis, even if caught completely off-guard. With a moment to plan? You draw a line from your opponent's death to where you're standing, constructing a step-by-step guide to victory. You are also resistant to the supernatural terror auras so common among some monsters and gods.

Mirror-Dancer (-400 cp, discount Militant) Peredur, a small part of Malan, produces the greatest swordsmasters on Vesper. This is because of a lemure called a Grey Mirror, which roams the coast and takes the shape, memories and skills of a man. To become a full mirror-dancer one must give the Grey Mirror a sword, duel and defeat themselves ten times, thus proving the best

version of themselves. You may or may not bear the tattoos, but you are the equal of a mirror-dancer in swordplay.

Gods Bleed (-600 cp, discount Militant) There are many forms of immortality, from the impression manifested gods and annealed devils leave on the Aether, to legends of regenerative immortality. None of these matter, however. What you kill stays dead, full stop. Doesn't matter what precautions they had in place. Doesn't matter if they were just an avatar for a vast entity. Wounds you inflict don't heal either, unless you permit them to be healed. You're just that good at killing.

Mechanics (-100 cp, free Tinker) You are skilled in the maintenance and repair of common machines, understanding how clocks work and how to make one, or cannons or a hundred other commonplace technologies.

Custom (-100 cp, free Tinker) With very little effort you can personalize your creations, or any other gear. Tailor that coat a little to fit better, change a pistol grip to facilitate fast-draws, etc. With a little tinkering, you can make standard issue gear seem like something custom designed for you and your team.

Craftsman (-200 cp, discount Tinker) You are a skilled engineer and inventor, with steady hands and the ability to conceptualize a project and how all the pieces will fit together. Your detail work with your hands is exquisite as any clockmaker.

Rites (-200 cp, discount Tinker) You are familiar with all the common rituals to summon, imprison, or bind a deity as well as several more advanced ones and how to adapt them to local traditions and conditions.

Deuteronomion (-400 cp, discount Tinker) You can build machines that interact with Aether, Gloam, Glare and other intangible sources of energy. Sure, it might look like techno-sorcery, but who cares when you can produce consistent results to, say, summon and bind a deity to power one of your devices? In future Jumps, this continues to apply to exotic energies, from the Force to chi.

A House of Steel (-600 cp, discount Tinker) The Umuthi Society prides itself on arming the Watch, but you have something better. The skills needed to actually understand and reverse-engineer the wonders of the First Empire and the Antediluvians. No matter how complex or esoteric a device, you can grasp in moments its purpose and functions from design. With time, you may even improve on them. Wars have been fought over gifts worth a scarce fraction what this is.

GEAR

Have +200 cp for this section.

Tattoos (free) Very important in some cultures on Vesper. You may have yourself inked up however you like at no charge. Just be aware if you fake something like a Malani/Pereduri swordmaster tats without earning them, someone may take offense.

Uniform (free) Five sets of a Blackcloak's uniform, signature coat included.

Knife (-50 cp) A tool and sometimes a weapon with many uses for a sailor. Yours is very well made, but most especial is that you can reach into your waistband or behind your back and always find it there.

Line (-50 cp) A surprisingly strong and well-made rope. Whenever you need it, search around the area for a moment, and you will find it coiled nearby.

Pistol (-50 cp) In many ways less useful than a knife, a gun only kills things. Convenient, in that it can do so at a distance, though period guns tend to be inaccurate at even moderate range and carry just the one shot. Nevertheless, you are difficult to imprison, for like the knife, you can always find another pistol secreted on your person.

Rum (-50 cp) A bottomless bottle of quality rum, cannot be lost or stolen.

Sword (-50 cp) A fine cutlass or rapier, the envy of any officer and handy in close quarters. If lost or stolen it will always return to you in a matter of days.

Brumal Silver Plaque (-100 cp) A brigade plaque, or badge, bearing a unit number. Brumal silver is handy for a watchman, because a possessed human will be burned by its touch. Maybe not immediately, the standard test is to hold one for 66 seconds.

Ichor (-100 cp) A small red pill, containing a god's blood. It has miraculous powers of healing - er, sort of. It banishes all injuries and illness… for exactly eight hours. That should give you lots of time to remove yourself from immediate danger and seek medical attention, just try not to be surprised when your wounds return. Replaced a day after use. You may of course purchase multiple times for multiple doses.

Candlesteel (-100 cp) A rare metal, infused with Glare. Very handy for fighting spirits, lemures, and other things vulnerable to light. You can import weapons to gain this quality, and further will receive one ingot of this precious metal every month.

Raseni Quartz (-100 cp) No stone so perfectly holds Glare as Raseni quartz, which is pretty much 1:1 in terms of exposure to emitting times. This is important, since Glare wards off Gloam sickness, and *burns* lemures (monsters) and sorcery. In future Jumps this continues to be a good source of light which is harmful to magics and monsters, and can be recharged with a few hours left in the sun.

Coin (-100/200/300 cp) For 100 cp, you get an allowance of 25 gold ramas a month. Enough for four people to live on frugally and start saving for a rainy day. For 200 cp, get a monthly sum of 500 ramas, about a year's income for a particularly fortunate merchant or a minor noble. For 300 cp, half a million ramas each month, setting you in the ranks of the truly excessively wealthy. In future Jumps this adapts to local currencies.

House (-200 cp) A little cottage with room for six people to live, and a nice garden that could entirely feed them with some work. The house is hidden by a particularly cunning Gloam sorcery and cannot be found by no one who hasn't been there.

Skimmer (-200/300 cp) A wonder of the lost Antediluvians, these speedboats require no fuel and rise up on a thing called a hydrofoil, too small and low-contact to be threatened by any of Vesper's countless sea monsters, able to zip across the most perilous seas in safety. For 200 cp, you get the demo model from Aphodel, a small galley with room for six and not a lot of armament, but blazingly fast. For 300, one of the skimmer warships maintained by every major power, some battleships of which are compared to floating islands.

CONTRACT

If human, you may make a contract with a god, getting a boon in exchange for a flaw or limitation, and feeding your god some mortal sensation they crave. For instance, Isabel Ruestra wished to be loved by all and gained an aura of charm person, but as she contracted a goddess of romance novels, all other people became interchangeable characters and she lost the ability to distinguish or identify faces. Tristan contracted Fortuna, the Lady of Long Odds, who urges him to gamble away all his money, and can give him incredible good luck in exchange for a backlash of ill fortune immediately after.

The precise details, we leave to you. Some contracts are fantastically useful or highly situational. One person has a contract to always know when they are observed and who is looking or eavesdropping. Two different people have regeneration contracts, though one is more draining health from others. Just keep in mind it should be thematic with your patron, and will include a price proportional to your boon.

Contracts come in four broad categories of types. The standard exchange (or scales) contract where you pay a price for the use of the power - pain for knowledge, for instance, or eat something weird, or kill. Could be one cost per use, or an ongoing sacrifice like giving up the ability to swim. Boon contracts, where you are given a specific power until and in payment for doing a specific task for your god. Caprice contracts, where a god requires certain idiosyncratic behaviors that lead to worship of them. Rarest of all are legacy contracts, where a whole bloodline can sign onto the same contract for the same boon and price.

The Iscariot Accords forbid certain types of contracts. Mind control is forbidden, but mental influence is allowed within some parameters. Any contract where the price of use is human sacrifice, or requiring the god to kill someone. Any contract to cause plague or effects spreading in the manner of one. Mind-reading is not

forbidden, but it is required that you register with the Watch. The Kingdom of Malan specifically forbids any contract granting precognition. You are free to ignore the laws of men, of course, just don't complain when the consequences come calling. Contracts exist that can sniff out the particulars, and you can't say we never warned you.

If not human? Price you pay, gods don't contract each other, nor with devils.

The following should be taken as examples of the kind of things contracts can do, and what they cost. By no means is this a restrictive list.

- Angharad can see the future, and perfectly remembers what she sees. Her price is her oath to free the Fisher, however if she uses it more than ten times an hour, or tries to see fifteen minutes or more, it strains her.
- Tristan gets good luck, then bad luck.
- Song can see everything, the truth. Her price is mysterious.
- Briceida could clap her hands to make a sonic boom, but had to eat a large quantity of chalk each time.
- Francho's contract with the Bibliognost let him know the thoughts and feelings of those who had touched any stone before him. The price was his inability to write any of it down, or have it written.
- Ishaan can shoot his spirit at people and beasts to knock them out, his price was vomiting whenever he lied.
- Redmond Cerdan contracted the Tiller-of-Rectitude. He could sketch circles of light in the air that were solid and burned flesh. Only circles and rings. His price was that each use would turn a tiny part of his body to ivory.
- Zenzele can see threads connecting people with relationships, the color denoting the emotion (friendship, lust, hate) and the thickness how close. Price unknown.
- Shalini has superhuman reflexes, but every time she uses them it acts like a signal fire for lemures and gods.
- Acanthe Phos could sense bone at considerable distances, but her own bones were made brittle like a bird's.

- Tupoc heals very fast, his body always being shaped towards perfection, a boon from the Grave-Giver. Touching bats or spiders, sacred animals to GG, is forbidden and will result in instant death.
- Isabel had a borderline *charm person* effect, one that highlighted her better qualities and made most people a little in love with her. Her price was the inability to distinguish anyone's faces.
- Brun had a contract with a festival god, Farolito, which let him drain the emotions from others, but killed his emotions too. In desperation to not die of apathy, they hit on murdering people as a sacrifice to Farolito, who could then share some emotion back to Brun.
- Augusto eventually contracted with the Red Maw, gaining the power to heal himself by draining the flesh from others.

–Book 2–

- Renshu by the grace of the All-Devourer can conjure a scimitar of golden flames that burns all things… including his hand.
- Huang Pan has a contract with the Six-Sided Plum Blossom. He can ask whether a given person, object or god is within nine *li* and which cardinal direction a set number of times a day. Unknown price.
- Imani knows whenever someone is watching or eavesdropping on her, and where they are. Price unknown.
- Lindiwe is protected from any information-gathering contract, and knows when someone tries to use one. Prince unknown, along with most specifics.
- Whenever Muchen He is attacked, a porcelain arm materializes from his body to intercept. This doesn't always stop it, particularly salt munitions. Price unknown.
- Nenetl has perfect awareness of her body, its position, any sickness or foreign intrusion or influence. She is regularly compelled to repeat a given action, like touching an object, 77 times.
- Salvador can leave a blue trail behind him and snap back there unharmed if wounded (like Tracer) but cannot cross his own path. Unclear if it's a price or a limit.
- Velaphi (Expendable) can turn into the most powerful lemure he's personally killed, but seems compelled to try and upgrade his form for reasons uncertain at this time. Likely price related.

- Tozi's contract with the 399th Brother gives her a kind of continuous awareness of her most likely cause of death in the next hour. She is obliged to raise a shrine to the 399th Brother each year.
- Kumar can make a bet with his god about a person's behavior in the next nine minutes. If he wins, he gets a small burst of healing, if he loses, one of his fingers is broken. They use this as a crude lie detector in the story, with Kumar betting the subject won't tell a lie in the given time.
- Cleon can turn invisible, as long as it's night and his intent to draw blood, but must answer every insult in kind.
- Hui Yu, an assassin contracted to the Skeletal Butterly, has an SEP field. Price unknown.
- Galenos the Brazen, a crime lord, gave up all sense of touch to the Crowned Charioteer, for the ability to instantly transfer heat from any object he touches to any bronze object in his line of sight.
- Ai, contracted to the Eighth Judge, can feel neither pleasure nor pain. She can transmute her skin to a kind of bone power armor that is much faster, stronger and tougher than herself.

BANES

Further points may be had. But for all things, there is a price.

One Life to Live (+50 cp) Most people only get a single life, though few would choose one in the Watch or on Vesper. You may extend your stay by five years, you may take this no more than six times.

Curiosity (+100 cp) A quality famous for getting cats and Rooks killed. You simply cannot leave well enough alone, can't turn your nose up at a mystery or a puzzle.

Eventful Journeys (+100 cp) It seems you cannot travel to any city or town, or sail the seas, without at least one lemure attack or a murder mystery or something happening.

Pure & Chaste (+100 cp) No sexy times for you, not on Vesper.

Wanted (+100/200/300 cp) You have enemies who want your head, be they nobles, coteries or governments. For 100 cp this is a local concern like the Leopard Society or Hoja Roja, dangerous on their home ground but unlikely to follow you far if you run. For 200 cp, something with government or similar resources to arrange assassins like the Ivory Library, Yellow Earth, the Lefthand House or Obsidian Society. Lastly, for 300 cp you have drawn the baleful eye of the Office of Opposition, the intelligence arm of Pandemonium, full of devils who have practiced tradecraft for five centuries or more. This perk can be taken up to three times, if you don't mind having many enemies.

Dead or Alive (+200 cp) A generous bounty has been placed on your head. Enough for even a cabal of Watchmen to retire on. Even in the most secure strongholds of the Watch, you can never entirely relax your guard.

Dark Secret (+200 cp) You have a secret, one that the Watch would gladly shoot you in the head over. Perhaps a contract with a forbidden god or an unwise liaison. Perhaps you simply robbed your fellow Rooks blind. At least one person hostile to you knows, or strongly suspects, this about you.

Lost Things (+200 cp) You have no memories of reading Pale Lights, no forecast or blueprint to understand this world and looming events. You also forget the contents of this document and your build, astonishing yourself with what you can do.

Impecunious (+300 cp) You are stripped of all your outside gear, and barred from your Warehouse or equivalent. You must face this world with no greater weapons than those possessed by the locals.

Impotent (+300 cp) Any powers or perks from previous Jumps are gone for the duration of your stay here. You may retain knowledge and non-supernatural or superhuman skills.

Alone (+300 cp) Your Companions, have you any, do not import with you but take their perks and meet up with you after the Jumps is finished, spending their time in a parallel Vesper.

The Language Of All Living Things (+300 cp) "Behold, I have learned the language of all living things, and its name is violence." So spoke the harvestman of ruin, toppler of thrones. You're a vicious little thing, inclined to solve all your problems, whenever possible with violence. This doesn't make you stupid, just highly impatient with the plodding pace of schemes and the necessities of compromise. Given the choice between waiting a few days to get everything you want and taking maybe enough of it now by force, you will invariably choose the latter.

Lessons of the Scholomance (+300 cp) You have been enlisted in a school that produces only exemplary Covenant members or corpses. If you fail out of Scholomance for any reason, you shall fail the Chain and return home. Graduate and eh, one less thing to worry about.

Wretched (+400 cp) You are cursed, and deeply unfortunate. Most things that can go wrong, inevitably will, from the weather to traffic to rocks falling from the sky and nearly killing you.

Saintly (+400 cp) All the forgotten gods want to manifest fully in the world again, to be seen and worshiped by the masses. Men with contracts sometimes become Saints, twisted monsters, their humanity overridden as they lose control. Your relationship with your patron is now hostile, a perpetual battle of wits and wills and should you fall too far behind you stand to lose… everything. But endure for your entire stay and your patron will withdraw their hostility.

END

We were not meant for happy endings. A final choice awaits.
Go Home, Remain Here, or Move On.


YOU KNOW, TRISTAN, I HAVE AN EXTRA PAIR OF NICE, MATCHING, SINGLE-TONED STOCKINGS YOU CAN HAVE.
NO NEED. THESE ARE WARM AND COMFY.
BESIDES, IT MIGHT WAKE UP MARYAM. NOBODY WANTS THAT, RIGHT?
twitch twitch
ZZZZ...
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