

Arcadia: Our Mortal Coil

Enter the Author-of-All.

Prologue:

In the beginning, there were merely words:
Symbols that serve to touch our minds sans seeing.
And with them did the Author shape the world,
And let the cosmos spiral into being.
The Author wrote of plain and hill and dale,
Of mountains vast, of oceans wide and deep,
Of countless stars, sun brilliant, and moon pale,
That o'er the lands heavenly vigil keep.
With plant and flow'r across this broad terrain,
The Author colored o'er what they had wrought.
Fauna of ev'ry kind were given name,
And loos'd to wander thither free of thought.
Thus was the stage set for Their narration,
Which would encompass all of fair creation.

The Geographic Stage

The people of Arcadia dwell by and large on a single, semicircular continent, wrapping around the Bay of Tempests. The continent is surrounded by the Sea of Mists, which, as the name might suggests, is difficult to navigate. In the inner spiral, off the west coast of the Isle of Roses, sits a Maelstrom. Its passage is treacherous, but skilled captains have learned to navigate its currents and maneuver ships into the Bay of Tempests. Rumors persist of new lands far across the oceans; a new world it is said. Many a ship has set off to explore the outer reaches or discover new lands but none have thus returned home.

The Isle of Roses

Just off the Northern curve of the continent is a large island, often beset by storms. The climate is largely cold and dismal, a mixture of rocky moors and twisted forests. Most of the larger cities are ports, for the true rulers of the Isle are those who can guard her oceans. Waly Waly, Codswallop, Stockford-upon-Dimple, Newcastle, Dunmorrigan and Fleeceburgh are the major settlements of the Isle. The Isle is known for its tapestries, its sheep, and of course, its shipwrights.

It is known as the Isle of Roses, for two of its most prominent noble houses each uses a rose as part of its heraldry. The house of Rourke (Red Rose) and Minster (White Rose) have squabbled over the throne of the Isle for centuries, though every few generations a tertiary

house such as Burns or Stockton manages to take hold of the crown. Currently (as we approach the end of the Third Act) the Rourkish King Harold III rules from his family's stronghold in Dunmorrigan, in the south-central marshes of the Isle.

The Principalities of Begonia

On the narrower Eastern end of the continent is a collection of city-states, each ruled over by a noble house. The Mountains on the northern tip of the peninsula are rich in iron to the point where the soil itself is red and rich with clay - though some say that this is the blood of soldiers from the many battles fought there between the princes of Elan, Moldavia, and Rentua and soldiers of the Isle. The fertile valleys of Begonia are heavily forested in the north and along the eastern coast, where rivalry flourishes between the princes of Capracotta and Bastardo; they vie over the lands that abut the Sea of Mists. Towards the south and westward facing the Bay of Tempests the lands turn warm and are greatly suited for the cultivation of grapes. The wines from Gepato, Lentice, and Tiza are said to be the finest in the world.

The noble houses of Begonia eat, sleep, and breathe politics. Not a campaign season goes by without one city state declaring war on another. Some out of habit (the Capracottans and the Bastardans have been at each other's throats since the First Act), and some for more dire reasons, such as the coup in Elan. The Prince Edwardo was quite recently overthrown by his brother Leonardo with aid from the Rentuan army, and the Prince fled into exile. Meanwhile in the south, the Duke of Tiza passed away shortly after betrothing his daughter (and only heir) to a scion of House LaBonne. Said daughter, the Duchess Elandra, disappeared on her wedding night. Foul play is suspected, but it seems that the LaBonnés have made a successful coup - for now.

The Delphinium Savannah

The lion's share of the great spiral continent is the Delphinium Savannah. It is home to wide rolling plains and grasslands where most of Arcadia's grains are grown. The Hills of the north are rich in gold and other jewels, and the horses bred there are said to be the finest in the world. The Queen (Dida V of house Hellenia) rules from Scartage, across the Bay of Tempests. Her family took power in the Second Act and has held it ever since. Thus, the Savannah is a relatively peaceful kingdom for now, though the southern borders near Didonosia and Lonceia are heavily garrisoned as a precaution against the scheme hatchery of Begonian princes. Truthfully, the common folk are too preoccupied fending off lions and other wild creatures that lurk in the tall grasses to worry about political machinations.

The Lives of Mortals

Arcadians have a fairly rigid class structure that greatly influences their roles in society. There is some mobility between classes: It is not unheard of for a Countess to bestow a land and title on a favored handmaiden, or a coup d'état to tumble a Duke from his throne. The constant

squabbling of the noble houses ensures a boiling pot of intrigue, particularly in the Principalities, through which many meet their rise and/or fall.

Peasants are typically farmers, herders, and tradespeople. They lead simple lives of pastoral routine. They may own their own lands, but said lands are often under the protection of a noble. The most common exchange is a portion of crops or labor in exchange for safety in troubled times. Peasants are apprenticed at the age of ten or so, usually to a parent or relative. Most peasants are illiterate (unless their job requires such), yet even those who cannot read are extremely knowledgeable within their given trade.

Above peasants are those of the Merchant class. While they have no pedigree to tie them to a noble line per se, a talented merchant of skill may ultimately acquire more wealth than titled gentry. Others may be of more elevated trades such as a doctor or a lawyer. Merchants tend to have at least a basic level of literacy, and have the most freedom to travel throughout the three realms.

Nobility are those born into the ruling houses of the various lands. Born into extreme wealth and equally extreme intrigue, those of the Nobility lead lives of lavish paranoia. Nobles spend their early lives training to take over the responsibilities of their parents. They receive lessons in martial skill, diplomacy, and performance. Marriages amongst nobility are typically arranged by their parents, and engineered to the greatest political advantage.

Technology

The Third Act (otherwise known as the current era), has been hallmarked by a renaissance of technological ideas. Sparked by a recovery of various texts that were thought to be long destroyed in the burning of the Didonosian Library long ago, there has been a resurgence in various forms of technology and art.

Architects have elaborate pulley systems and mechanisms that have assisted in the building of castles and siege technology alike. Weapons and arms are made of steel, and much of medicine is based off Humorism - balancing the four humors of yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood within the body. The fork is a relatively new invention, as is the printing press.

Gender and Marriage

Men and women have defined roles within the realms of the social hierarchy. Neither would typically interfere upon the other's sphere of influence, though there are those who - by either preference or necessity - are compelled to do so. As long as a person dresses the part for the task at hand, very few Arcadians would bat an eye. Thus, adopting the mode of dress of another gender is fairly common, though historically this practice has led to more than one case of mistaken identity.

Marriages among those of noble birth are typically arranged by one's parents, and have more akin with political alliance than with romance. Peasants and merchants have more freedom in terms of romantic partners, though peasants do not typically have the capacity to travel and thus may have to settle for who is available locally.

Language

That being said, when Arcadians choose to woo, they do not skimp on the fancy talk. Language and its subtleties are considered the highest forms of art in the Coil. And whilst brevity is the soul of wit, Arcadians have little fear to wax eloquent whenever they see fit. Language is a living art form, and Arcadians are often experimenting with new words, or seeking out new terms to add to their vocabularies. After all, why use five words when twenty-five will do?

Exchanging poetry is a particularly common method of courtship, and the sonnet is the principle form, particularly amongst the nobility. Of course, romance is not the only means by which the Arcadians express themselves. Limericks are also quite common, whether they are used to dress up a bawdy joke or even insult an enemy. As Arcadians are well aware, a pen may indeed be mightier than the sword. Rather than resorting to swordplay, Arcadians may choose to duel with words alone, crafting insults that may strip the paint from one's shield or wound with an expert tongue-lashing.

Entertainment and Leisure

Like any society, Arcadians are not without their creature comforts, though their means of leisure are often dependent on social class. After a long day's work in the field or workshop, there are few things a rude mechanical desires more than whetting his whistle down at the local public house. Such establishments serve as hostels for travelers as well as entertainment venues. There may be games such as cards or dice, and performers may set up in a corner to play music or tell stories.

Those of the upper classes tend to hold banquets, feasts, and balls, taking turns hosting such festivities. Though to be fair, these events may be as political as they are entertaining. Far more than wagers may rest upon the outcome of a hunt or a horse race.

On special occasions, troops of traveling players may put on various plays and theatricals, and these are often attended by nobles and peasants alike. In the First and Second Acts, activities such as animal baiting and public executions functioned as social holidays, though these practices are beginning to fall out of favor.

Motifs

When a mortal child is young (somewhere between the 2nd trimester of pregnancy and the age of 12), a Soothsayer will come to the child's family and read their stars. In a moment of Revelation, the Soothsayer will discover their life's motif. In certain rare cases, the Fair Folk themselves may appear for a Revelation. Motifs can belong to one of three genres: Comedy, Tragedy, or History. It is said that the later in life one's motif is read, the more strongly one is favored by fate.

Now, one's motif does not necessarily affect one's behavior as much as it affects the way the world reacts to them. Comedians are more than capable of being severe and Tragedians have plenty of capacity for mirth. Historians often have an abundance of both.

Some choose to embrace their motif, while others struggle against it. For every Tragedian who dons somber attire and awaits the cruelties of their fate, there is one who chooses to celebrate what life they have. Some Comedians get caught up in misunderstandings (which may be hilarious to an outsider or in retrospect), yet others despair of not being taken seriously.

Arcadians know, however, that motif is not only an essential part of their life, but also of their death. In a world of intertwining narratives, a dying Arcadian understands that the life they have lived is part of a larger story. It is said that when one dies, their life's story is examined by the Author-of-All and entered into the annals of history. However, occasionally events take a turn, and if one is judged as not having lived up to their motif, an Arcadian's spirit may be sent forth into the world to influence events as a ghost until the theme of their legacy corrects itself. This may involve urging a relative to avenge a foul deed or encouraging a match between two lovers.

Yet for all the struggles of maintaining motif, Arcadians know that to reject the concept of motif entirely can lead to a far worse fate.

The Unravelers

In a sense, the Arcadian mode of thinking is built on a certain knowledge of archetypal figures, of trope and genre. The world, mechanically, functions in a web of superstitions that don't always make the most logical sense. Occasionally, unexpected circumstances and coincidences occur, turning a situation in the most unexpected and twisted way. These are often referred to as manifestations of the Author's Will, or *deus ex machina*.

However, there are mortals who choose to reject motif and narrative entirely. Some are scholars who delved too deeply into forbidden matters and found their minds recoiling from the truths recounted there. Others are soldiers who looked across battlefields and found themselves questioning their purpose, disillusioned with the notion of fighting for crown and country. Some are outspoken philosophers, advocating a rigid, unyielding sense of logic.

One such fellow was a scribe by the name of Balthasar of Didonosia, a professor in the university there. The cause of his conversion is yet unknown (though some say it was the death of a beloved pupil in the most convoluted circumstances), but one summer towards the end of the First Act, Balthasar began to publish philosophical tracts rejecting motif, narrative, or even the existence of an Author at all. The Queen of the time, Polytana I, ordered him to recant his works, but Balthasar refused. In his madness, he locked himself inside the university library and burned it to the ground. The city banded together to save what they could, but the library itself burned to nothing but ashes. This was seen as a most lamentable tragedy.

Stranger still was the phenomenon that builders found in the rubble. A gaping pit, void in blackness had manifested during the fire, and more than one worker was lost to its depths before the others retreated to safer ground. A mason who casually tossed in a pebble to plumb its depths listened and heard no sound of the rock hitting bottom. A travelling Soothsayer was brought to examine the site, and she quickly determined that this was no simple well or mine-shaft to be filled by mortal means. The Soothsayer departed quickly, and at sunset she reappeared, leading a host of Fair Folk.

The Soothsayer and the Fair Folk worked through the night, creating an ever-narrowing spiral, a net of multicolored threads over the surface of the gaping hole. When the sun rose again, the net was complete.

Thus was Balthasar's Cataclysm averted, though the seeds of his strain of philosophy began to take root underground. Other pitfalls such as the one in the University Library began to appear in other parts of the world, and dutiful Fair Folk were obliged to repair them. Rumors of a secret society began to circulate throughout the spiral realms, known as the Unravelers. Malcontents and logicians, their intent was to remake the world in the light of cold-hearted reason, even if it meant undoing the world itself and starting over.

Various Kings and Queens have attempted to purge the world of these Unravelers, resulting in the Inquisitions of the Second Act, but have thus far only succeeded in pushing subversion underground for a time.

The Holy Order of Soothsayers

On an island in the Bay of Tempests, there is a monastery dedicated to the Holy Order of Soothsayers known as Halcyon Abbey. The practitioners of the **Mystic Arts and Oaths Accorded** dedicate themselves to a lifetime of interpreting the will of the Author-of-All and bringing it to manifest. Often, heads of noble houses will send a third or fourth-born child for training at the abbey, and many an orphan has been abandoned on the monastery steps to be taken in by the brothers and sisters. Those who come to the Abbey may have started as paupers or as princes, but when they take holy orders, Soothsayers find that they stand outside the traditional social hierarchy.

Once a Soothsayer has finished their training, few stay within the bounds of the monastery. Most depart, and wander the countryside. They travel from village to village, reading motifs, saying sooth, and generally making themselves useful. Unlike most mortals, they have extensive contact with the Fair Folk, and often serve as negotiators between the two disparate cultures.

The Fair Folk: Knights of the Narrative

Fair folk are creatures of an ethereal nature, immortal in the respect that they do not typically perish of causes such as sickness, or wounding the way that humans would. The Fair Folk maintain that the Author created them as caretakers of the world, and act as agents of the Author's will (though of course, they certainly have minds of their own!).

Fair folk have a special connection to the Author-of-All, and thus receive special direction. Either in downtime (or for new PCs, at the beginning of game), Fair Folk will be granted a small insight into the upcoming chapter as well as a temporary mechanical bonus that will be useful to them for that game. In return, the Fair Folk are expected to participate in certain acts at certain times of day or certain times of year, called Knightly Duties. In addition to these duties to their liege, the Fair Folk are also bound by certain Taboos which dictate certain modes of behavior.

Knightly Duties

Fair Folk are most diligent to ensure that the tasks of day and night are completed by one Knight or another, even if they themselves have other tasks. One may not necessarily have to participate in every duty, but participating in at least one event per day is considered the social minimum. (To be otherwise seen as shirking of thy tasks may earn thee the chiding of thy fellows!) Knightly Duties are thus considered social tasks, and are typically conducted in groups of three or more, though not all participants are required to be of the Fair Folk. Examples of Knightly Duties include:

The Moonlight Revel - A circle dance is held including at least one Fair Folk. The music they dance to may be as simple as the beat of a single drum or the clapping of hands. This act of celestial maintenance ensures that the moon remain in her cycle and in rhythm with the rest of the world.

The Dewdrops and the Dawn - A Fair Folk must rise with the sun, urging it to continue its arc into the heavens. This consists of a stroll in a wide circle around all dwelling places known to the Fair Folk and any surrounding areas. Many Fair Folk use this time also for gathering dewdrops and other bits of stray magic that have been scattered during the night. ((OOC note: Obviously we don't expect people to get up before dawn. Any time before breakfast is fine.))

The Afternoon Respite - With the sun high in the sky, Fair Folk often use the time to relax. Some take naps while others gather to sit and gossip about the events of the day (for in a life so bound by duty, the ever-dramatic hijinks of mortals provide much entertainment!) Their restfulness coaxes the sun down from its high throne and urges it towards its bed below the horizon.

Drawing the Curtain of Dusk - As the sun takes its rest, Fair folk signal to the moon and the stars that it is their time to emerge by lighting lanterns along paths and near dwellings. Those fond of mortals or fauna may use small wispy lights to mark hazards and small holes where burrowing creatures dwell. The completion of this task is often ended with banquets and feasts.

The turns of the seasons - The methods by which the Fair Folk tend to the turning of the seasons varies somewhat from region to region. Common practices include painting leaves in the autumn, planting seeds and having maypole dances in the spring, scattering frost in the winter, and holding bonfires in the summer. Mortals are often encouraged to participate in these duties, as they affect the coil on a large scale.

Patching Pitfalls - This duty is not tied to any particular time of day or season. Rather, it is a reactionary rite. When Fair Folk happen upon a pitfall, or any other place where the fabric of narrative is damaged, it is most advisable to patch it as quickly as one can.

Taboos

Fair folk are bound by a series of Taboos, acts that to them are forbidden. Most Fair Folk are bound by at least three Taboos, for three is a number of significance.

Examples of Taboos include:

"I shall never violate taboo." - Every Fair Folk is bound by this Taboo.

"I shall never utter falsehood if I am asked thrice."

"I shall never shed blood."

"I shall never refuse hospitality."

"I shall never harm an innocent."

"I shall never interrupt a soliloquy."

"I shall never reveal my true name."

"If I am challenged by my true name, I must answer."

To violate Taboo is to perish utterly. There are some Fair Folk that have violated Taboo and reformed, but to do so more than thrice is to be known as an Oathbreaker. Oathbreakers have no place in the courts of the Fair Folk, but are banished from their nightly dances and glittering feast halls to wander the edges of the storm-tossed seas, bereft of company and comfort. Oathbreakers often go quite mad, or seek revenge upon their former Ken.

5 things every Arcadian knows:

- Their Motif/Taboo and its tropes - Everyone has a part to play in the interconnected narrative.
Their social status within the hierarchy - Like much things in the world, society is held in a fragile balance that must be maintained if it is to survive.
- What country and/or noble house they belong to
- The intricacies of language and its evolution - Language, poetry, and song are among the most prized art forms in the world.
- The world is actively under construction by the Author-of-all, and it has edges where only the very brave or very foolish dare to tread.

OOP Notes for playing an Arcadian:

Does this seem like a very theatrical world? It should. The fourth wall, however, is still very much intact. The only audience the characters know of is the spirits watching, or perhaps even the Author-of-all. These are not the plays as they are being performed on a stage, that are set in paper and ink, but the plays as they are being written, mutable and changeable.

Yes, the King's English is highly encouraged. Any citizen of Arcadia would gladly adapt new words into their own bustling vocabularies, but would rather die before giving up their thees and thous. Why use 5 words when 25 will do?

If thou hast need of assistance in navigating the murky waters of linguistics, thou canst download a most helpful guide [hither](#).

Costuming:

Mortals - Renaissance/Elizabethan is the general aesthetic. Basic Renfaire garb will do.

Fair Folk - Keep in mind that they need not be sparkle!pretty. Some fair folk can look downright frightening. Yet they all have some element of otherworldliness about them, be it glitter, wings, ears, a mask (or mask-like makeup), unnatural hair, etc.

Inspirations:

Anything by William Shakespeare. Duh. Also any of his contemporaries, derivatives, etc. See also Don Quixote, Ivanhoe, Hunchback of Notre Dame, and classic literature of that sort.

Also also Galavant.

Songs:

"The King's Sword" by Heather Dale

"Mordred's Lullabye" by Heather Dale

"Written In the Stars" by Three Quarter Ale

"Written In the Stars" from AIDA

"Every Story Is A Love Story" from AIDA

"O, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in't!" - Miranda, The Tempest