A PRISM CODEX

A Prism Codex

Some tales of the Wanderers and some trails their folk walk

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and others to be named here...

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This Codex is dedicated to the Player-with-Light,
whose shining spectrum inspired me to share my own

and to others to be named here

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Preface

In the Conflux tradition, a Codex is nothing more, and nothing less, than one follower's collection of the stories, ideas, and other miscellany that they found useful when following the paths of their gods. No Codex is complete; no Codex aspires to be. Each one is a lens through which to view the world, or perhaps a stream that flows from it, into the rivers of our minds and spirits, and then on from there to an ocean of experience that no words could contain.

I found these stories while imagining what a world shaped by queer, pluralistic deities could be like, and while exploring the visionary paths that they led me along as I got to know them better. I was endlessly surprised to find stories pointing to other stories, and to larger things about the world they came from.

Like many other collections of myth, the individual stories don't even always agree with each other. For instance, in some of the stories, the Wanderers made their folk, in others, they found each other. That seems to be just the way it is, in their stories. What does it say about the people to be made by the gods, or to arrive wandering as the gods did? Can both ways be meaningful?

The Player-with-Light, to whom this Codex is dedicated, and from whom it takes its titular imagery, is a deity of presentation and reflection, whose ever-shifting but always-identifiable appearance reminds those who look upon them of the difference between truth and fact. This Codex aims to collect glimmers of experience and reflect them outward. No reflection is the original, so I want to ask you, reader, to not take this as some sort of holy writ, but as an inspiration. Think of it as a play of light to compare to your own viewpoint, and perhaps a set of colors to help you paint your own images.

And one more note to the reader: Just as no codex is complete, no one codex is the same as another. Traditionally, every codex has an open binding, allowing pages to be added and removed to fit the owner's own

path. The spiral binding of this book is meant to reflect that; if there's something in here that you don't agree with, tear it out. And, while adding pages is harder, this codex includes open space and blank lines, all meant to be filled. I invite you to add your name to the title page, and your own stories and experiences to the pages within. In fact, here are a few to start with, where you might add your own intent for this book, or thoughts on how your personal codex could be read.

Tales

Compiler's Note: These stories are gathered roughly into two sections, the first focusing on the mythic history of the Wanderers and their town as a group, and the second focusing on tales of specific Wanderers. The story "Meeting the Wanderers" serves as a pivot point between these two sections.

Emergence

No thing is just one thing. Nothing can stay just one thing. So it was when the one thing was the universe, at the start. As soon as it knew itself to be anything, it was many things, a spinning tumult of creation and pattern and change. Sometimes it seemed that pattern would win out, as the roil smoothed, and things became more distinct, but inside each of those the cycle would begin again, the Spark of creation giving way to the Stone of pattern until the Smoke of change wrapped it back around to the beginning.

From those three, and their endless cycle, birthed a myriad, myriad things, all partaking of their nature; some with more of one or the other, but each thing tracing back to that urge to create and find form and change to something new. All of them were defined by that living cycle, and smaller and more complex cycles spiraled and splayed from it, until all the worlds were filled with everything experiencing itself.

As the cycles spun, everything experienced itself, but not everything knew how to talk to everything else. Those that listened would sometimes find the beings who moved in mind and thought, and those subtle ones rejoiced to be found, learning much about the worlds of form. They made families, among and between each other, but in these patterns too, change and creation spun. Every pattern has its exception, and every exception feels the pull to find its own pattern. And so, in ones and twos and fews, some began to wander.

Waters Gather

The world was brand new, and They were not sure if They fit within it.

They walked away, solitary, from the families where They didn't fit, but as they walked, all that each one saw in front of Themself was an expanse of barely-formed creation, with no one else there, and no hints of where to go.

Feeling alone, and lost, Their feelings overflowed, and They cried, and Their tears flowed in front of Them like a stream in the desert. Seeing no other path to take, each one followed that course of water as it wound through the world.

They let those streams pull them along, step after step, turn after turn, and finally each one saw something strange. Their little stream was growing, as other streams joined it, trickling in from elsewhere across the expanse, as if tears were flowing from others as well.

None had expected anyone else to be in Their situation, but as They looked they saw Them, other figures following the pull of Their own feelings, all gathering closer. Those tears became tears of joy as they joined, and still they flowed together, two, four, seven, more...

Finally all their rivers found their end, and they looked at one another, lone beings drawn together and united by their differences. They stood together at the confluence of a grand river, every tributary giving life to the world, and their waters flowing on to spread that vibrance further.

And there, They kindled a fire, a gathering-place not just for Themselves, but for anyone else who followed the rivers, or their own streams of feeling, seeking someplace that would accept them as who they knew they were.

Lights, Streets, Pulse, Cycle

The Wanderers had only just found themselves together, still overjoyed by their newfound bonds, but they knew they could be more. Huddling where their rivers gathered, they looked around and saw still that expanse of everything new, found themselves in a place no one had ever been before. It was dark, and daunting.

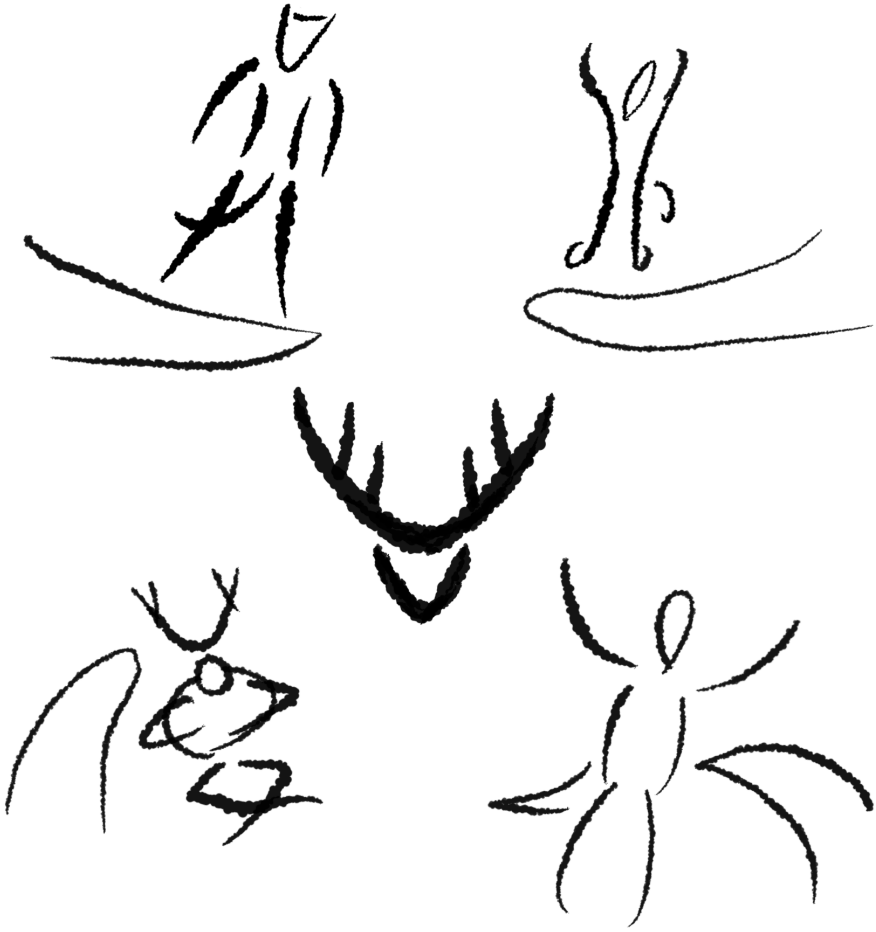
One, tail and markings glimmering with color, said "I can light the sky, so that others might know we're here! Can someone give me a boost?" And the two with antlers and broad paws bowed their heads, and the bright one climbed up those fractal crowns, their tail sweeping across the sky to leave a shimmering river there, reflected in the ones below. As they climbed down, little bits of their plumage and fur caught on the antler tines. The two laughed to see it, one joyfully shaking and scattering the tiny lights across the sky, while the other moved carefully, making patterns and shapes of stories past, present, and future.

Others watched this display, dazzled but resolving not to be shamed. The strong-backed maker looked at the barren, rough land around the rivers, and paced, dragging their tail to smooth the ground. "Not everyone works the same, or wants to be in the same place," they observed. Their tracks ran along and across the rivers, and the hoof-pawed ones trotted along them, lending varied shape to the land and revealing its currents and characters.

"Surely there must be more than just us here," bubbled the one who'd mostly stayed in the waters themself, and they swam in the rivers and the unformed depths beneath them, their rhythmic strokes stirring and luring forms strange and beautiful, a pulse of life which spread through the waters and up onto the land. And so they spread, guided by the siblings' dance and song, bringing variety and change to those contours that had only just been laid down.

By then the first night was drawing to a close, but the blaze-winged one, not to be outdone, cast feathers toward the rising sun, which caught

them alight, filling the sky with fire to announce the day's birth. And under the sun the wanderers all began to work together, the work of lights and streets and pulse all joining as they made a place for themselves. And as the long day died, those fiery feathers were again cast toward the sun as it set, their glow now promising its return and the continuing work of the new day, that blazing rebirth helping mark the days and seasons.



The Wanderers Make Their People

Each Wanderer had come from a place fully-formed, with folk to gather around their gods, and live in harmony with them. So, in the new place they'd made, came the thought: "Shouldn't we have people too?"

So they all gathered the mud, moistened by their joined rivers, and began to craft. The Sculptor worked tirelessly to make intricate little clockwork societies, every individual meshing into a perfect whole. The Painter smirked, and mocked their work. "It's pointless, you might as well just be drawing pretty patterns in your own skin!" xie observed, and took delight in sending in xir own strange creations to horrify the Sculptor's perfectly regimented structures, setting all their designs askew. The Sculptor bellowed and reared up and would've likely knocked the Painter out of that world entirely if, over the Painter's feathery shoulder, they hadn't caught sight of what the Writer was working on.

Beautiful and intricate, and perfectly self-defining, the works of the Writer-in-Flames were starting to create their own smaller worlds and people. "No no no no!" the Sculptor protested. "They'll go completely out of control! Let me help, I can make sure everything makes sense!"

The Writer scoffed, moving their work over closer to where the Swimmer was crafting their own folk in the eddies of near the riverbank. But they found no comfort there, seeing the Swimmer's people all flowing freely together and apart at will, emergent collective harmony completely at odds with the Writer's fiery drive toward individuality.

And so it went, each one bickering and being sure they knew the right way, until the Dancer wandered past, peering curiously at everyone's efforts. Heedless of protests, they picked up folk from here and set them down over there, and before long the traits of Sculptor and Singer and Writer and Painter and countless others were all hopelessly mixed together.

Finally everyone had something to agree on. “You’re ruining everything!” they protested, all in one voice, but the Dancer just grinned and stepped back. In each new-mixed person, they all saw some of their own work, some of their own goals and designs. Some were more one, some were more another, but now they worked, and they could all work together, nudging this way and that and maintaining a balance in their between-ness.

The Wanderers agreed still then, that this might just work. But they also agreed, the Dancer was trouble, even when helpful.

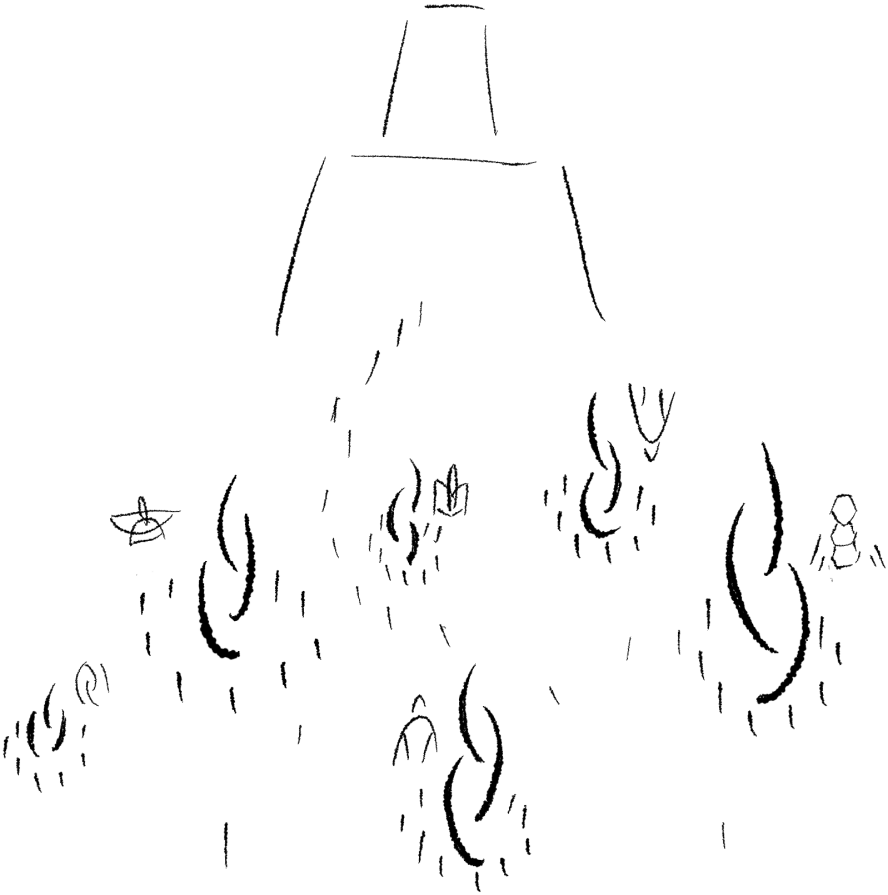
The Arrivals

The Wanderers' rivers stretched through the new world, their lights sparkled overhead, calling to the folk who felt as they had, who felt out-of-place where they were, among others who didn't accept them. And those folk followed their own tears to the rivers, and followed the rivers to the new city, a barely-there place, empty but for the strange beings whose very existence was woven all over and around and through it.

And empty it stayed, as the folks who heard the call at first only gathered at the outskirts. The place was strange, and overwhelming, and it couldn't possibly be the answer to that longing they'd lived with. They talked amongst each other. "Shouldn't we go in?" The Wanderers even beckoned, but that was no help; so many of the people had only had terrible experiences with those who said "We made this place for you."

The Wanderers listened, and many hearts almost broke again. They'd hoped to create a place for the lost and mis-fit, but something was still missing. And it was one of them, or perhaps all of them, who finally remembered being on the other side of that boundary, of resisting what someone else thought would be right for them. And that one of them, or all of them, knew this couldn't be forced. So instead of hovering, and beckoning, they became like the people, simply living in the city, offering and seeking friendship and connection.

And slowly, in ones and twos and fews and more, they found it, and the city was truly born.



The First Circles

There was a time when the city of Waters Gather was new, and everyone there was still working to build homes for themselves, and places to gather. And one of the folk, Aaki, set their mind to building dwellings more fine and elaborate than any of the rest, and they were much praised for their sturdy and beautiful work.

One day, Aaki said to themself, "What if I built a home for the Wanderers themselves? They seem to drift through the town, meeting folk at random. Surely if I built them a fine-enough home, they'd move in, and we'd have a place where we could be sure to meet them!"

And so Aaki set to building, and soon had built a beautiful hall, with a place for each Wanderer that they'd met or even heard of, each as splendid and welcoming as the last. And looking at what they had built, they felt the Wanderers close, even if the gods had yet to appear there.

Aaki spoke to the people of the town, saying "If you want to meet the Wanderers, come to this place I have built!" And the people thronged in front of the place, some eager, some needy, some merely curious. Seeing the crowd, Aaki became fearful, and said "Please, you must line up; I'll let you all in, but if it's too full, I'm afraid it won't be safe, for you or for the temple itself!"

And so the line formed, winding through the streets of the city, and slowly it moved as people trickled into the temple, for Aaki only let a few in at a time, wary that too many would prevent anyone from feeling the full effect of the place, or interacting with the Wanderers in the proper ways.

The line stretched so far and moved so slowly that the people into it began to huddle together for warmth and for food, setting up fires to gather at, and as they waited, they shared stories of the Wanderers they hoped to meet.

“I’d love to see the Player-with-Light,” said one, around one fire. “I want to ask them to help me see how to express my truest self.”

“I want to meet the Crafter-of-Wonders,” said another, around another fire. “I’m sure they can help teach me to build places like this of my own, because surely there should be more than one place for folk to gather like this.”

“I hope I can talk to the Swimmer-Within,” said a third, around a third fire. “I need to thank them for my recovery and health after a long illness.”

Hope after hope and story after story were shared, along with food and heat at the fires. And then, they began to notice newcomers.

At the first fire, a slim figure dropped a cloak to reveal shimmering feathers, and began to draw out shining new self-expressions.

At the second fire, a soft humming song built as shiny green-and-gold paws emerged from a coat and began to teach the details of architecture.

At the third fire, a ripple in a water-glass became a shimmering aquatic form, bowing in acknowledgement and staying to listen to stories and tend to needs.

At one gathering after another, the Wanderers appeared, wherever they were talked about, not limited by bodies or distance or weather, and as the knowledge of them spread, the folk coming into Aaki’s temple dwindled to a stop.

“What happened?” they wondered, peeking out the door, seeing the folk gathering with their gods in the streets and spaces between houses. Just then, a pair of grand antlered heads peeked into the temple, and the smaller one spoke. “This is a beautiful place you’ve built, but how much good can it do with so few people in it?”

Aaki bowed their own head, and nodded, before throwing open all the doors to the temple, and going out to meet the gods and their folk at the place where they gathered on their own.

And so, to this day, even as we have the temples for the Wanderers where work can be done, we know that wherever we gather at a fire and tell their stories, they will be with us.

Antlers Pierce the Sky

Long ago, after the Wanderers and their people had all come together at Waters Gather and started to learn to live with each other, there came a day when there was anxiety and concern in the city.

"How can we know the Wanderers are right?" people would murmur to each other. "Just because they made the city, made us what we are, do they know best for us?" For so many of them had come from places elsewhere, where authority was cruel and parents didn't know best for their children.

So they turned to ask the Wanderers the same question. "How do we know that what you want is what should be?" they asked, and the Wanderers we caught up short, for they too had come from families where they did not fit, full of others so sure that they were right, when the Wanderers themselves disagreed.

They gathered away, and discussed amongst themselves, until the Singer-in-Silence asked a question. "How do *we* know that we're walking the right paths?" And that shook them all to the core, because they had to admit they didn't.

Day broke and night fell, and they thought, and they looked and listened and felt for anything they knew could tell them what was true. The answer, it seemed, was nothing. And so, the Dancer's gaze cast up to the night sky, to the black space between stars, existing only for itself.

The rest followed their gaze, and the Dancer craned their neck, tossing their head as if hoping their antlers could shake something loose from that void. They climbed to the top of the highest building in the city, climbed on each others' backs, until the Singer's antlers stretched up, and seemed to almost nudge at something, but could not break through.

"We need someplace higher," they all said to each other.

So they set out, from the city, up into the mountains at the edge of the world, looking from every peak to a still-higher one. They kept each other company telling stories, creating games, and guessing at just what they'd find beyond the blackness of the sky.

Finally, they found a peak from which they couldn't find any higher ones, and at the top of that peak, there was a gigantic tree. The Singer and Dancer climbed that tree, nimble-pawed, and craned their necks, feeling their antlers scrape against starstuff, but not quite push through.

The Dancer, then, saw a long, springy branch, and set out along it, bouncing, ready to leap, hoping to propel themself even higher. The Singer scampered after them, "No no no, we're so high up!" But the Dancer bounced, and leapt, and the Singer could think of nothing to do but to leap after them.

Up, and up, and up they soared, through the stars, the world a faint glimmer below them. And then they both felt their antlers catch, felt something tear, and then they were falling.

Down, and down, and down they fell, and as they fell, they saw things falling with them. They were surrounded by sparkling somethings, myriad forms that seemed filled with meaning. They wondered at them so long, they almost forgot their own fate, until, with a jolt, they found themselves caught by a tangle and heave of all the other Wanderers' limbs and bodies, gathered underneath them to break their fall.

"You had us so worried!" cried the Player-with-Light. "I thought you were going to die," observed the Painter-in-Rust dispassionately. "I knew we could catch you together," stated the Sculptor-of-Pieces. "Quite an impressive flight," said the Writer-in-Flames. All of them had their own thing to say, but the Dancer and Singer, safe on the ground, were caught up by looking at the things that had fallen around them.

From beyond the sky, they were surrounded by symbols, shapes of all sorts, each one of them speaking a truth, each one of them seeking to

impart some sort of understanding. “These.. could help...” murmured the Singer, and they began to gather. They gathered until they felt right to stop, and when they looked, they held twenty-seven strange signs, that seemed to speak of their journeys, and their world, and far more than that. They bundled them carefully, and set off back to the city, eager to share truth that was more than theirs.

But so many other signs were left there, each as true as the last, and they scattered out through the world, so that everyone may have a hope to find the truth behind things, if they look with a keen-enough eye.

The Hearts of the Earth

This is a story of a time when the city of Waters Gather was not so young; the Wanderers and their people had learned to live together, had called back the sun, had built places for all the lost who came seeking, with buildings rising tall and strong. The city was not so young, but the world was ever-changing, as it always is. And once, in that time, seemingly out of nowhere, the ground began to shake.

It started small, and occasional, a shuddering that was only apparent in the shaking of trees or the rippling of water. But before long, it became more common, and stronger, jostling shelves and breaking pottery. Not long after that, it was nearly constant, and the roads and buildings themselves started to crack.

The people trembled, and the Wanderers trembled among with them, since none of them had a good explanation, and everyone needed one. The Wanderers listened to the people in their circles, and gathered in a circle of their own, searching for signs and hints of what could be going wrong. They came, but only faintly; a sign of longing, and need. A sign of depth, and darkness. A sign of journeys and discovery.

So the Wanderers made their preparations, and set out, to the place where all the signs seemed to point, a place they'd only heard rumors of. They journeyed long to the south, following the noon-day sun. They journeyed respectfully past the shadows of the living rocks. They journeyed swiftly across the heat of the cinder plains. They journeyed warily around the edge of the shining sands. Finally, they found themselves at the mouth of a pitch-dark opening into the earth, and they began to journey down.

As the light dwindled, the Writer-in-Flames blazed bright, illuminating the strange twisting caverns around them. The Wanderers looked around, awed that so much had been hidden beneath the earth, and began to understand just how much they did not know.

The Singer-in-Silence darted, curious, from one passage to the next, and soon returned bearing news. “I think I can hear something. Like thumping and crying and shouting.” They led the way, deeper into the earth.

Still the earth shook, and now it was shaking all around them, a feeling that was even more fearful and oppressive than merely trembling under them. But the Swimmer-Within, moving through the rock and the waters deep in the earth, noticed something more. “I can feel the shaking better now,” they said. “Its like heartbeats, not just one heart, but so many, angry and fearful.”

Still they journeyed, the pulses of the rock surrounding them, as far under the ground as they’d travelled over it. They came to a pool of strange-colored, steaming water, and under the direction of the Crafter-of-Wonders, carefully wove a bridge of rope to cross it. They found themselves in a forest of stone columns, and trusted the currents of the Composer-of-Mists to guide them through. They stood on a slope of treacherous rubble, and trusted the Painter-in-Rust to show them the weak points to avoid.

Finally, they found themselves in a huge cavern where that pulse felt strongest, and saw through cracks below what looked like a vast heart beating. “The heart of the earth,” they murmured to each other, in awe, except for the Dancer, who moved from one crack to another, drawing their attention to another set of beats, further away, and then more. “The hearts of the earth,” they all realized.

As the Dancer stepped among the cracks, trying to find the rhythm, it was clear to all of them that something was wrong. Those cracks themselves seemed new, nearly as new as the cracks in the buildings above. The Writer-in-Flames and the Player-with-Light reflected and refracted to illuminate the whole area, and then everyone saw the truth. The roof had collapsed, right in the center. Blocks of stone had shifted, and fallen, between the hearts and on them, bruising them and pushing them away from each other.

Listening closely, they could hear the beats as a cacophonous song. **"I'm so lonely!" "Where have you gone?" "You did this!" "Why are you moving away from me?" "It hurts!"** Once they heard it, it was unmistakeable; the cry the Singer had caught faintly before, now all around them. And yet, with each beat of the desperate hearts, the earth cracked more. Even as the Wanderers watched, the falling stone of the cavern pushed all the hearts away from each other, just a bit more.

The hearts were so vast, even the gods were unsure how to talk to them. So instead, they listened. The cries of the hearts overlapped each other, but it was clear, after a time, that all of them were hurting, and none of them were sure what had happened. Some blamed others, some blamed themselves, but none thought there was anything they could do, and none realized that their fear and anger was driving them further apart.

Unable to soothe the wounded hearts, the Wanderers looked to what they could do. The collapsed rocks, though huge, were moveable, they could at least begin to clear the way and prevent further damage. So with the Dancer's nimble paws, the Painter's strong talons, and the Swimmer's relentless strength, and the help of all the others, they began to shift them, to move them, to lessen the burden and clear the way so that the hearts could at least know that others were still there, and stop from injuring themselves more.

They couldn't say how long they worked, in that place deeper than night, but after a time, the hearts began to notice them. The frenzied beating began to ease, and the thundering words of the hearts began to change. **"It hurts less!" "I can feel you again!" "Who's there?"**

And of course it was the Singer-in-Silence who replied first. "We found you here, hurting and angry and fearful, shaking the whole earth. It was the least we could do to ease your pain." Wiser than they'd once been, the Singer thought better than to mention the pain above that the shaking had inadvertently caused.

"Our home is still broken!" "We're still scattered!" "Things are still wrong!" the hearts insisted. And it was true, whatever the cavern had

been before, now it was still a shattered wreck, and as the hearts focused back on their state, the shaking began to worsen again.

"We can help make things right, if you'll let us," said the Singer-in-Silence, the words out of their muzzle before they realized how long such a task might take. And then, the Swimmer-Within spoke up as well. "Would you like more company?"

"It's been so long since we've known anyone new." "You helped us in ways we couldn't help ourselves." "Why would you do this for us?"

"When you are doing well, it seems, all is right with the world. When you are distressed, the world shakes with you," replied the Swimmer, expressing the connection in the gentlest way they could come up with. "The land needs comfort, and you deserve comfort too," the Swimmer added, as they began to flow through the cavern, spreading soothing waters around all the hearts.

The other Wanderers murmured amongst themselves, beginning to realize what the Singer was offering. "You'll stay here? With them?" "But then we'll be pulled apart." "I'll stay with you!" "Me too!" "But we can't abandon our folk."

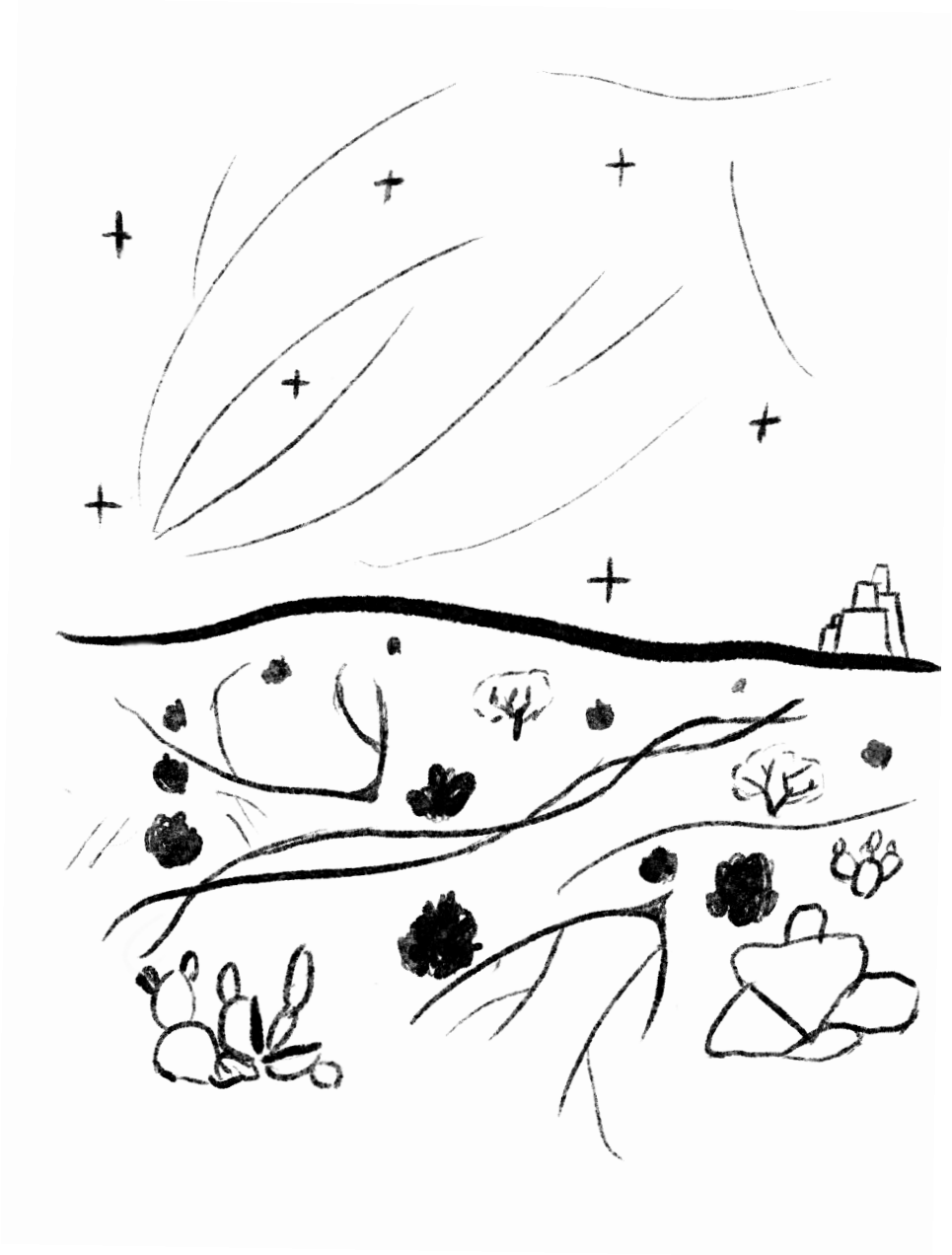
The Swimmer turned back to them. "We can't all stay, but we can't all leave. And our endurance won't last forever."

"We'll share the burden," the Wanderers all murmured, nearly together. They saw how they could stay there, one or two at a time, leaving and trading places as they needed to, tending to the shifting needs of the hearts of the earth, trying to make it better, while still tending to their people as well.

And so they did, with some of them returning that very day, and others staying, then some returning back and forth, a dance across the land and up and down, a dance of loneliness and reunion, of comfort and need. To find the steps of this dance, they all had to listen, so close, to

each other, to their people, to the earth, to pay attention as they were needed in each place in turn.

And so we know that sometimes the Wanderers feel close, and sometimes they feel far away, and sometimes all is right with the world, and sometimes the hearts still shake. But through it all, they listen, and they move, and they work, doing their best to do what's right.



Meeting the Wanderers

A seeker found themself lost in their life, and wanted to find their way. They knew the stories of the Wanderers finding their own places, and thought they'd do the same.

"I'll go into the wild, I'll pour out my emotion, and find guidance as I follow where it leads, and I'll find myself where I need to be."

So they headed off into the desert, farther and farther away from Waters Gather. Tears didn't come, but yearning did, and they walked under the wide sky, and through the brush, for a day that slowly waned into night.

As the light faded and the stars came up, they turned their head and called "Singer-in-Silence, let me hear your song! Dancer-Between, pull me along! Player-with-Light, illuminate my way!" But the desert was wide and quiet around them, with only the twinkling of the stars, and the faint call of the wildlife.

They found themself thirsty, for they'd gone out quickly, hoping that the gods would provide, and now they realized that they were lost in more ways than one. So when their throat was too parched to call out to the Wanderers more, finally they simply listened. There was rustling, and faint bird-cry, and they followed it, and finally heard the trickle of a small stream, flowing through an arroyo, with night-dwelling animals drinking there.

They knelt and drank from the water, which was much fresher than they'd expected. With thirst quenched, they realized they were tired from their long walk, and so they curled up under a small bush and slept for the night, falling asleep with prayers for guidance. "Dancer-Between, you who weave dreams; Player-with-Light, whose tail sweeps the stars, send me visions, here in your land, let my way..." But their sleep was uncomfortable and fitful, and if they had any dreams, they certainly didn't remember them.

The next morning they stretched, and woke, and looked at the sun. They'd followed those sounds a long way in the dark, and they realized how lost they were. "Wanderers, I'm wandering now, surely you can help me find the guidance I need..." They'd learned at least not to strain their breath or dry their throat, they'd learned to listen, so they simply murmured as they wandered. And before long, they began to see the tracks in the land, realizing that the water, flowing through the low parts of the land, must lead to bigger and bigger rivers, and rivers meant more and more life. So they followed that arroyo, through the brush.

The stream disappeared underground sometimes, but the lay of the land was clear, with hills slowly rising up alongside them, and even a change in the distance; a hint of the trees that, they hoped, meant a river. But it was a long way off, and they were getting hungry. As they gazed across the land, the bright red of cactus fruit caught their eye, and they remembered an almost-lost childhood memory of cactus-fruit drinks, sweet and fruity, and cactus-pad salad, chewy and filling.

So they picked the fruit and the pads, and only then did they remember the little tufts of spines that covered each one. Fortunately, they had time, and the twin incentives of hunger and pain, and so before long, they managed to work out how to safely pick and eat the fruit, and the sweet taste filled their mouth, strengthening them once again. And so they spent a night there, guarded by cactus, nursing pierced paws, and had a much less painful breakfast of that fruit the next morning.

It took most of the next day to finally reach those trees, and the seeker finally saw the wide, muddy river nestled within them as the light began to fade, and they settled down for rest, hardly thinking of dreams this night, but focused on the river, and whether they could follow it to whatever destination they were seeking. Their instinct, from following the legend of the Wanderers, was to follow it down as it flowed, but as they sat and thought, as night fell, something caught their attention. Upriver was a soft glow over the horizon, lights of all colors, more even than in the Player's Tail across the sky.

It seemed like a sign, and they followed it, tired as they were, until they realized that they were the lights of the city itself, all the lanterns and lamps of Waters Gather, shining in the night. They weren't sure whether to collapse in relief or in despair, as they realized they'd come full-circle, safe back in the place they'd come from, but feeling no more enlightened than when they'd set out. Unsure, and unknowing, they made their way to the plaza temple. "Where were you?" they cried to Wanderers mingling with the people there. "I followed your stories, I went to the desert and wandered as you did, but I felt so alone!"

"We once felt alone too," said the Singer quietly. "But we weren't. And you weren't. I was the voice of the animals, that led you to water."

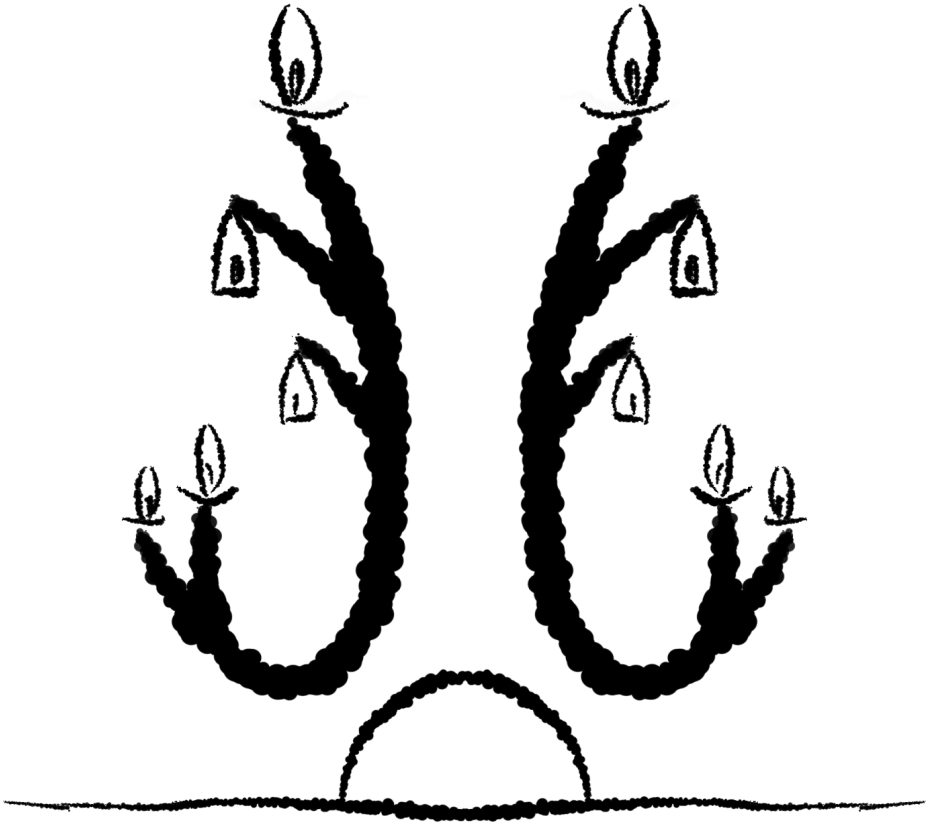
"I was the flow of the land, that helped you find direction," added the Swimmer-Within.

"I was the blood-bright, knife-sharp cactus fruit, teaching you to struggle through pain," added the Painter-with-Rust.

"I was the lights of the city, guiding you home," added the Player-with-Light.

So many of the gods murmured their responses, showing the ways, small and large, that the seeker had been inspired, and bolstered, and changed, as they sought. They saw their whole ordeal, difficult as it was, with new perspective, those small and gentle nudges feeling even more present than a hand at one's back or a calling voice.

And the seeker finally knew what they'd found, a way of seeing, of hearing, of feeling, of knowing the presence of the spirits around them, a sense that they knew they had to share with the world. So, they began to write, and to learn, and to teach, and were never afraid to wander in the desert, and to find help in unexpected ways.



Songs for the Sun

This is a story of when the world was new, having found many wonderful forms to take... and yet still shifting and full of unknowns. In that new world, a group of wandering queer gods had found each other at the place where waters gathered, and other folk had found their way as well, journeying from places where they didn't fit, to a place where they hoped they would. This is a story of when that town was just beginning, in the time that Wanderers and their people started to notice that the Sun was going away.

Every day, the sun would rise later, and set earlier. Every night was colder and darker than the last, and plants withered as ice and snow covered the ground. The people began to fear that they'd freeze, that they'd never be able to grow crops again. They turned to the Wanderers, one after another, and said, "You are _gods_. Can't you make the Sun come back?"

But each time, whichever Wanderer was asked would give the same reply: "Just like you, we came here from places where we weren't listened to, where we were just told how to be. We won't command the Sun any more than we would command you. Our way isn't to control, but to aid. And we will do all we can to help."

All the Wanderers made good on this promise. The hard-backed Sculptor-of-Pieces set paws to the forge, making lanterns and fire pits and beacon towers. The blaze-winged Writer-with-Flames kindled radiant fires in each of those and in every hearth in the town. The fractal-antlered Dancer-Between moved in the town's streets and hearts, raising spirits and guiding everyone in ways to support each other. They and all the rest did their parts, all but the Dancer's younger sibling, the quiet one who hadn't yet found a role or a talent, or even name, who kept quiet because every time they spoke, something came out wrong. All that one could think to do about the dwindling sun was to watch, and think, and worry.

Finally the quiet one couldn't stand it anymore, and went to the other Wanderers. "It's still getting colder!" they blurted. "We have to do more; someone should at least try to talk to the sun, all this isn't going to be enough!" And as soon as they said it, they saw how the other Wanderers reacted, and it seemed that this was once again the wrong thing to say, because everyone knew it was true, but no one had wanted to give it voice.

"What else can we do?" came the replies, grumpy and defensive. "It's the sun, it's not like a person or a tree or a river that you can talk to. It's so far, remote, overwhelming, no one has any idea how to talk to it!"

"I've been watching!" replied the quiet one. "The sun glimmers as it touches the mountains to the west, maybe we could reach it there!" They paused, with a faint smile. "And I have a lot of experience trying to get folk to understand me, so I might as well be the one to try with the Sun too."

And before anyone had a chance to reply, the quiet one was off, a silver streak out of town, paws bounding through the snow as they left behind everything familiar and journeyed up into the mountains to the west, following the sun.

As the quiet one got closer, and the Sun began to dip below the edge of the mountain, they saw a dazzling sight. The sun was lingering over an icy crystalline forest, glittering with colors. The sun seemed captivated, reveling in the display it made as it dawdled over the shining lifeless landscape there.

"Sun! Please! Why are you spending so much time here? Back in the town, we need you! We'll be lost in the cold and dark without you, we'll starve!"

The sun barely glanced back. "But look what I have here! Why would I want to spend more time there when everyone just averts their eyes and takes me for granted? None of it compares to what I can make here!"

The quiet one stared at the dwindling glimmers as the Sun retreated through that landscape of ice, their heart brimming with desperation and need, but couldn't find any words to express it. The emotion built and built, until what came out of their muzzle was a howling song, of longing and fear and cold, of all the work they'd done and how much they missed the light and warmth.

They sang and sang, and the Sun trembled, flickering with a moment of emotion, but its reply echoed cold through the icy spires. "Even if that's so... Why is it just you here?" And with that, the Sun continued on its way, sliding out of sight, its last shimmers fading along with the echo of the howling song.

And the singer sat there alone, but there was no worry in their thoughts this time, because they knew in a moment what they had to do. They dashed back down the mountain, singing out toward the town the whole way, filling the silent night with the story of what they'd seen, and of what they needed from the Wanderers and others in that little town.

Everyone who heard the song set to work, all through the long night. The Sculptor crafted even more elaborate lanterns and torches and towers to hold light, the Writer created flames of countless colors to fill them. The Dancer and the other Wanderers whirled through the town, guiding everyone to gather together out in the streets, and the Singer, still running in, sang out new songs for everyone to learn for their last, desperate celebration.

In the town, the Singer paused for only a few moments, hanging some of those bright colorful lanterns from their antlers and neck and tail, before dashing off again, this time to the mountains in the East, to catch the Sun as it came back around.

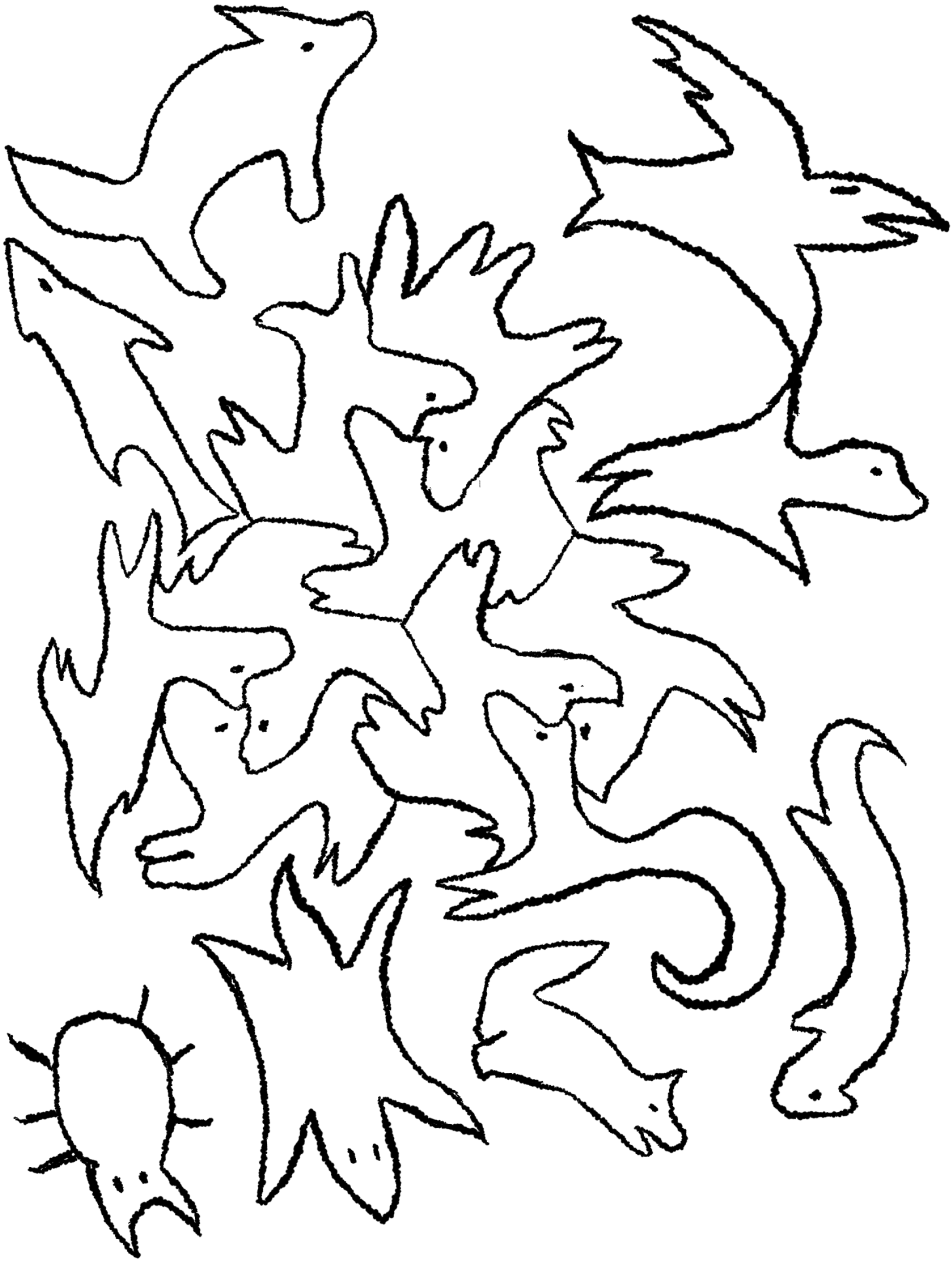
They saw the Sun there, still lingering over that barren sparkling expanse, and called out, "Come, see, if only one last time!" And the Sun could see, in the shadows at the foot of the mountain, the town filled with light and color even more vibrant than what it could make in that

crystal forest. The sun quickened, just a bit, to try and see it more clearly, and when it was over the town, it slowed, just a bit, to better observe the celebration below.

The town was filled with all the glow and warmth it could muster, the air ringing with songs of hope and thanks for the Sun, of all they'd done and all they could do with the aid of its light. And that night, the Sun moved just a bit quicker, returning to see if it was still happening, and rose again to see all the Wanderers and all their people still keeping up their bright celebration, even more joyous now as they saw the Sun paying mind to them again.

The progress was slow, because the Sun was proud and stubborn, but the town kept their glow burning for days, until they were sure the Sun was slowing down and staying longer. It was still cold, but they'd made a change, and that change made everything else just a bit easier. And on top of that, the celebration had brought the people themselves together, their warmth growing even as the day did.

And in that gathering, the once-quiet Wanderer finally felt recognized, and included, as the community hailed them and named them Singer-in-Silence, the only one who'd been willing to call to sun and city alike and bring them together to birth a new year.



The Shapes of People

In the early days of the world, after the Wanderers had left their homes, and followed their tears to where rivers meet, They began to speak of people, which They hadn't seen since coming together in their new home. The Sculptor-of-Pieces (before they were called by this title) listened, and decided to do something about it.

The Sculptor explored their home, and gathered up a variety of materials. Without the knowledge of the other Wanderers, they set to work, inspired to offer gifts.

For the Writer-in-Flames, the Sculptor offered a plaque of wood, whose surface was carved with the figures of people, all fitting together in identical patterns. All the people were together, and all the people were content, for that is how they were made, and knew no other way to be.

The Writer took the gift and, right before the Sculptor's eyes, the wood burst into flames! The edges of the people began to pull apart, separating one from another, and the wood that was no longer a person burned away. One by one, the new people fell away onto the ground, and with their fire, they made tools to carve and smooth and reshape themselves along the lines of the wood grains, discovering the shapes that the Sculptor's etching had obscured.

"No, no, no!" said the Sculptor, stamping their claw, "They're all so different and confusing now!"

"But look!" said the Writer, "They're so diverse and interesting! What a wonderful gift!"

For the Swimmer-Within, the Sculptor offered a tablet of clay, whose surface was carved with the figures of people, all fitting together in identical patterns. All the people were together, and all the people were content, for that is how they were made, and knew no other way to be.

The Swimmer took the gift and, right before the Sculptor's eyes, the clay softened and warped! The lines between the people blurred, multiplied, faded. The clay twisted one way, showing many dozens more connected figures than the sculptor had intended, and then it warped back the other way, and there was only one single figure, who had once been so many others.

"No, no, no!" said the Sculptor, stamping their claw, "You can't tell where one person ends and another begins now!"

"But look!" said the Swimmer, "They're so connected and empathic! What a wonderful gift!"

For the Crafter-of-Wonders, the Sculptor offered a slab of iron, whose surface was carved with the figures of people, all fitting together in identical patterns. All the people were together, and all the people were content, for that is how they were made, and knew no other way to be.

The Crafter took the gift and, right before the Sculptor's eyes, the iron twisted and turned! Each person became a mechanism unto itself, that fit with those around it, and each time one moved, it would move those around it, and on and on, each connection adding motion to the elaborate design.

"No, no, no!" said the Sculptor, stamping their claw, "They're all moving so much now!"

"But look!" said the Crafter, "They're so powerful, working together! What a wonderful gift!"

For the Player-with-Light, the Sculptor offered a plate of copper, whose surface was carved with the figures of people, all fitting together in identical patterns. All the people were together, and all the people were content, for that is how they were made, and knew no other way to be.

The Player took the gift and, right before the Sculptor's eyes, the copper thinned and coiled! Each figure remained connected and maintained its shape, while inside the metal changed, formed patterns. Current flowed

through them, from one to the next, on and on, and the patterns within them glowed soft, but distinct. They learned to change the color of their light, and made more diverse patterns within themselves, and they shared light and shape and current together.

"No, no, no!" said the Sculptor, stamping their claw, "They're all so hollow and weak now!"

"But look!" said the Player, "They're so full of colorful light! What a wonderful gift!"

For the Painter-in-Rust, the Sculptor offered a sheet crystal, whose surface was carved with the figures of people, all fitting together in identical patterns. All the people were together, and all the people were content, for that is how they were made, and knew no other way to be.

The Painter took the gift and, right before the Sculptor's eyes, paint spread in a thin streak across the surface, color filtering through the clear crystal, a red stain across a few of the people.

The Sculptor was confused but, after what happened with the others, wasn't upset. Then, the Painter dropped the sheet on the hard ground.

The crystal shattered, the smooth surfaces becoming jagged and sharp, the careful etching of the Sculptor lost among the fractures that had been hidden while the sheet was a single piece. The people didn't know how to fit together anymore, and didn't know what to do about it.

The Sculptor was stunned, and said nothing.

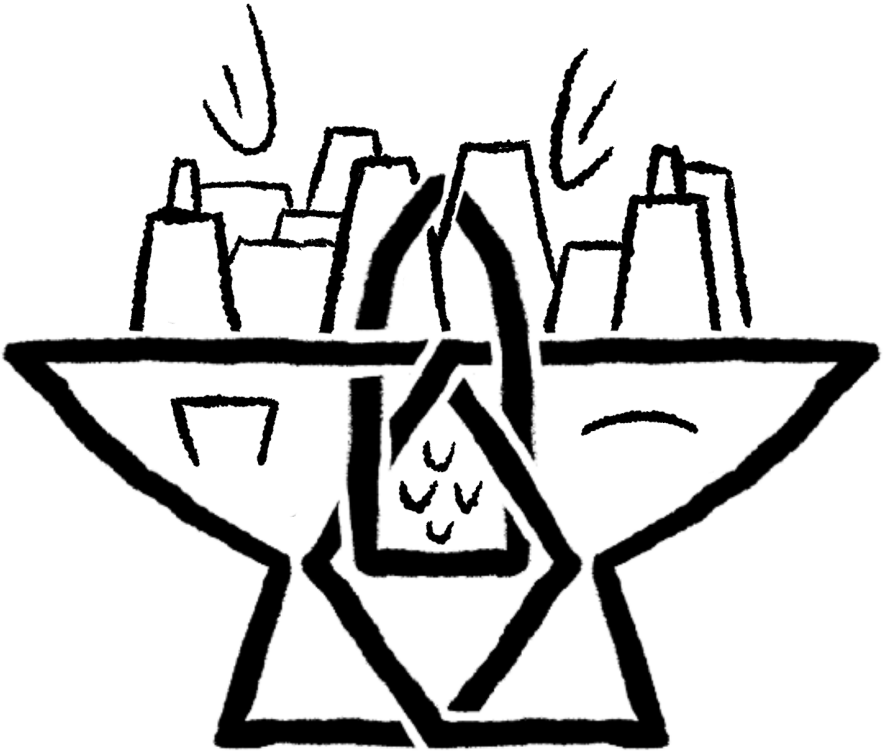
The Painter gathered the pieces. "This is the true shape of what you've given to me. It was a wonderful gift."

The Sculptor was sad over what happened to their gifts. Even with what the others had said, they felt the others didn't really like the gifts the way they were made. Soon, They were all gathered together, along with Their gifts, and the Sculptor took renewed interest in them.

The people of wood shared their fire with the people of copper, and their lights flickered and glowed in all new ways. They shared these new patterns of expression with the people of iron, and they began to move together. The people of clay joined in the dance, and soon spread throughout all the other people, one spread among many, joining together where and when they could.

The people of crystal, shattered and broken, could not join and share, and stayed aside to watch the newfound curiosity and joy. Then, one of the revelers looked to the people of crystal, and found something familiar—the shape of one of the sharp pieces fit neatly into part of itself. Embedded in wood, stuck to clay, unable to scratch iron, and lit by incandescent copper, the piece fit perfectly where it was never designed to, far from where it thought it should..

As the people danced, They stood by and watched, and none was so fixated as the Sculptor-of-Pieces, who found that sometimes one's perfect design is not as wonderful as what it might become.



Upon the Sculptor's Back

This is a story of that time, long ago but not so long, after the city of Waters Gather was built, but while the world was still changing, as it ever is. In that time, the ground itself had started to shake, first a little, occasionally, and then more often, and more violently. No one knew entirely why, not even the Wanderers themselves. As it shook, buildings started to crack, and the rivers themselves changed course, threatening to wash away whole neighborhoods. Some of the Wanderers knew that they had to stop it, so they made plans to set out on a journey to the hearts of the earth, to find out what had it so upset, and to calm it. But this is not their story.

There was a whole city full of people, after all, that was in the process of shaking apart, and the Wanderers also knew they needed to protect their people. So one god, the hard-backed Sculptor-of-Pieces, chose to say behind. The Sculptor always sought to bring stability and safety to the people, and hoped zie could shelter them still, while the world trembled beneath them.

The Sculptor's back spread wide, covered in stony armor, and the people gathered on it, with room enough for all, just barely. And the Sculptor braced zir arms and legs, lifting them off the ground. The Sculptor's stance wobbled, but zie was strong, and it was still far more stable than the ground beneath.

But even a god's strength is not infinite, and the hardest part was the waiting. A city-full of people, not sure when they could return to their homes. The god supporting them, not sure when zir family would come back. Physical and emotional endurance began to wane, and the Sculptor's limbs began to weaken.

Just when things began to feel overwhelming, the Sculptor's thoughts cast back to the rest of the Wanderers, how that family would gather together to tell tales of their lives, and build bonds of shared experience, how every time they left feeling stronger than they'd come. And the

Sculptor's voice rumbled through the huddled cityfolk on zir back. "Does anyone have a story?"

Everyone has a story. The question itself sent a murmur through the people, and it's hard to tell who was the first to speak up, but it wasn't long before stories were being shared, person after person telling of their lives, tales of found love and missed opportunities, of grand deeds and absurd follies.

The Sculptor could hear all of it, as the people gathered together. The stories were often bittersweet; they were about times that felt so far away, with everyone huddled together on the back of a god. But something happened as they kept sharing. The stories conjured those other times; better times and worse, but all different, all times that reminded them that they were all in this particular time together.

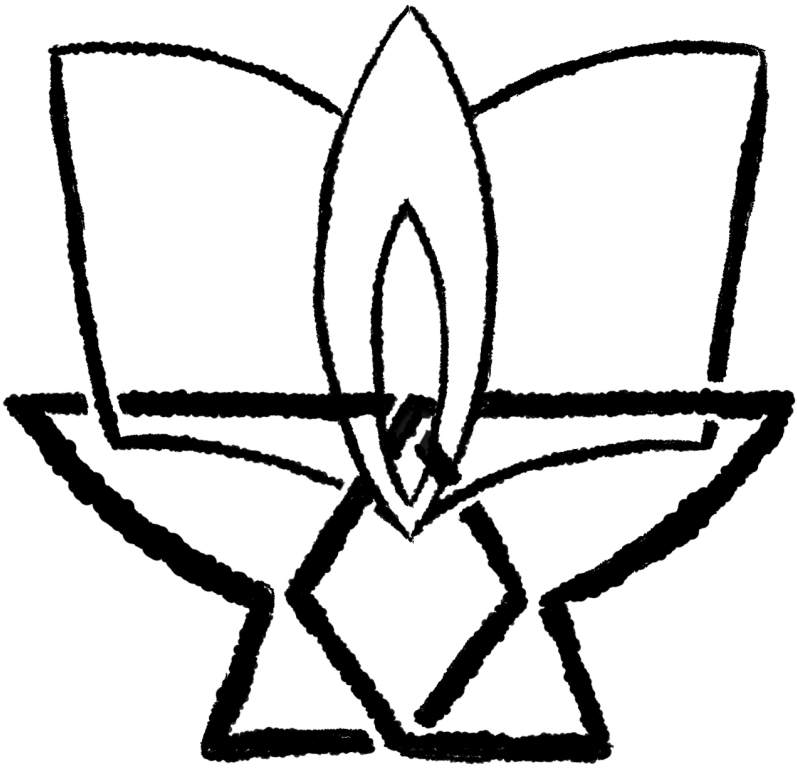
And as they all listened to their tales, their hearts strengthened, and the Sculptor's body strengthened along with them. Not only did the stories remind the Sculptor of what zie was trying to do, the telling of them showed the Sculptor how much the people cared, how they were willing to help, however they could, if zie simply asked.

I'd like to say that that's when the earthquakes subsided, when the Wanderers came back, but it wasn't quite so quick. But still, the stories carried the Sculptor and the city through the wait, and their willingness to share stories led to willingness to share more. It led to the Sculptor asking for help in other ways: for food, for water, for strong folk to even help bear the load, even as the stories continued the whole time through.

And finally, bit by bit, the shaking eased. The rivers began to rest, and the other Wanderers returned from the hearts of the earth, having helped to ease whatever imbalance or pain had caused so much trouble in the first place.

The Sculptor heaved a vast sigh of relief, and eased back down to the ground, and the people stepped off zir back, to survey what was left of

the city. They had a lot of rebuilding to do, but they also had even more stories, to help carry them through it.



The Courtship of Fire and Steel

There was a time when the Wanderers were strangers to each other. There was a day when they were just a loose group of lost gods who knew nothing about each other, besides the fact that they had all found themselves at the same river confluence. On that day, they looked at each other, across their gathered rivers, and tried to figure out what they'd be together. Many impressions were formed that day, but many relationships were yet to build.

On that day, it's said, a bold writer-god saw hooves of cold-hammered metal, and a shy sculptor-god saw blazing pinions of fire, and in each of their minds flashed the color of forge-glowing iron, and the potential of intricate fire-wrought shapes expressing sweeping story and thundering emotion, passion and joy made manifest.

But the moment passed, and in moments after, the two found themselves at a loss; one seemed too intense and overwhelming, the other too solid and unshakeable; fire might scorch steel, steel might stifle fire. They worked together; fire stoked sculpting-forges, metalwork crafted writing-tools, but there was so much to be done, in the new community, that the flash of color between them only simmered, in the corner of their eyes, easy to look away from.

As the community grew into a city, more connections were formed. The Writer's tireless quill forged a vast library of the stories of the people, grand tales of what had been and what might be. They were always busy, scrawling bright-burning words of truth that brought enlightenment and change to folk who worried they'd lost the plot.

For the Sculptor's part, they worked paw-in-claw with the Crafter-of-Wonders, each one's precision and craft making a perfect match for the other as they built homes and devices, bringing the folk of the city together in safety and fulfillment. In their work the two felt fulfillment together, a close bond that made some folk wonder when one ended and the other began.

In all of this, it was so easy for the Sculptor to look at the Writer, and the Writer to look at the Sculptor, and each think that the other must have all they wanted and all they needed. In the mind of each god, it was natural to assume whatever they'd felt before was a passing fancy that had never been shared, and need never *be* shared. After all, they were happy, they had places they fit, and to do more might make things much more complicated. That hearth-bright color that they'd glimpsed never faded, but it became so dispersed that, most times, it was easier to ignore it.

So it went, until one night, when the Sculptor's forge ran low, as it had many nights before, and so the Sculptor ventured to the Writer's abode, as they had many nights before, hoping to get help in building its heat back up again. They met each other at the Writer's doorway, as they had many nights before, but on this night, something different happened.

It can't be known who first said, "I long for you." It can't be known who replied, "I long for you too." The order of things was lost in the sheer overwhelming potential they were faced with; the color of the glow of metal in fire that they'd first glimpsed long ago, that could no longer be ignored.

But it was the Sculptor who said, "I'm afraid of what this means for everything else in my life. I fit with the Crafter... but I know I would also fit with you... but I fit with the Crafter..." Their voice faded as they mulled over the puzzle, looking into the Writer's blazing eyes as the two walked back to the forge.

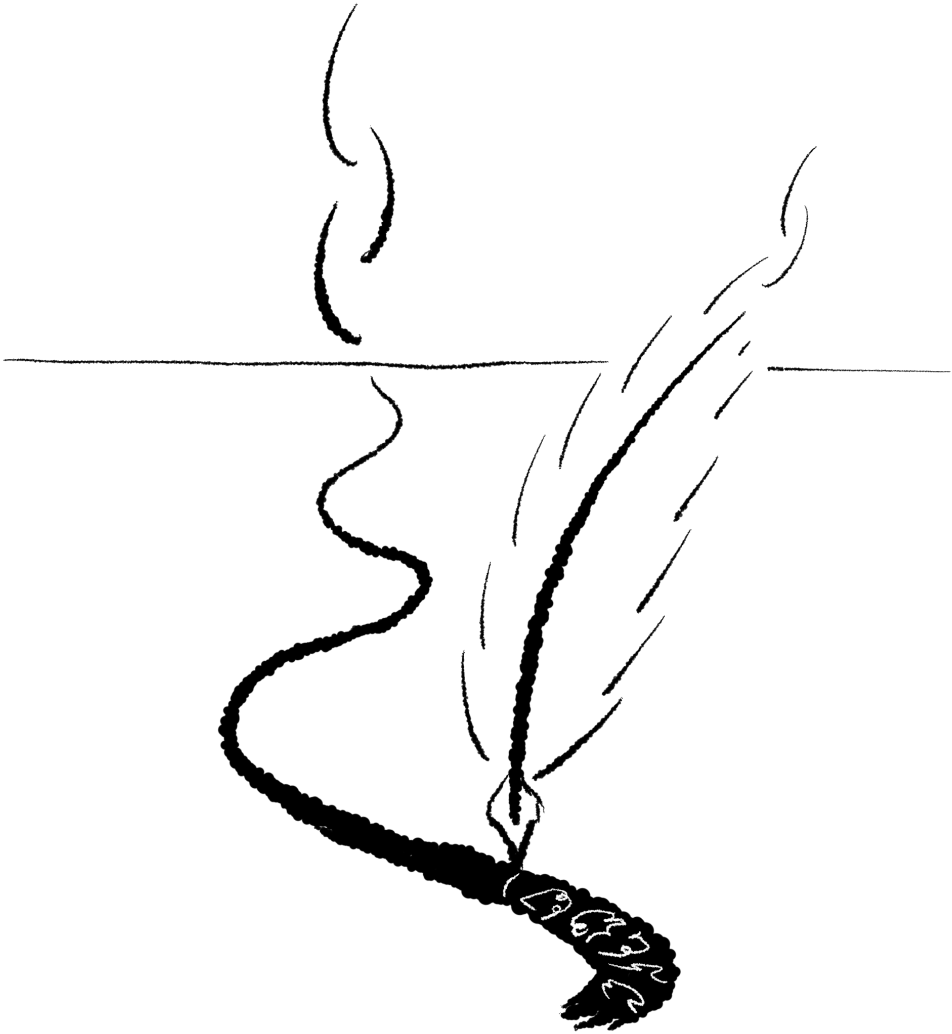
The Writer smiled an incandescent smile. "I love every life whose story I burn into my books," they stated. "I love them each with an all-consuming passion, and I know I love you no less... and no more." Flames flickered on their fingertips. "I have kindled so many fires, and none of them diminish my own flame." They knelt at the furnace at the heart of the forge, touching each piece of coal in turn. Each one caught fire, and indeed, the Writer's own blaze was as strong as ever, if not stronger. "Each one is different; some free-floating flames, others focused, contained, harnessed... All of them beautiful in their own way."

The Sculptor listened, rapt, then paced their workshop, touching piece after piece, and nodding. “All of these… Hardly ever does one thing connect to one other thing, and that’s the end of it. Things are more beautiful, things are stronger when they interconnect, many to many.” They looked back to the Writer now, their fear and hesitance gone. “That could be us.”

“That is us. All of us. Here and onward.”

And so they came together, making that bright-glowing metal that their hearts had promised long ago, and their shared joy warmed and lit the whole city for just a moment, and the Wanderers and their people alike cheered for the connection that had been found.

And from then on, the bond between Sculptor and Writer stayed strong and bright, and from their shared glow came countless gifts; stories more vibrant, metalworks more burnished, and so many other bonds forged, each no less joyous for being one among many.



Fire in the Head

One night, an aspiring poet had a spectacular dream, one that became etched in their mind. In the dream could see a new work of poetry, one they had written, scribed out in fiery letters across the sky. It was magnificent, but though they felt the words clearly within the dream, when they awoke they held only the powerful emotions it moved within them, the feelings it inspired.

Driven by the desire to once more put those forgotten words to the page, they began writing, keeping the feelings and the sensations they'd felt in the dream in mind with every carefully formed letter. They crafted more work than they ever had before, much of it beautiful, but none of it felt quite right.

They found themselves neglecting the rest of their life. When a close friend came to check on them one day, after not having heard from them for far longer than usual, the poet realized that they'd let the fire of creation consume them too much. And they still felt no closer to what they searched for.

That evening, after taking some time to reconnect with the world, they knelt by their altar to The Writer in Flames. It was a common sight in the homes of many authors and poets. They spoke to the fiery Wanderer, offering a simple poem they had written to the eager flame above the altar. The Writer did not require anything they held dear, or could not part with, but appreciated a show of effort.

"Please, O Blaze-Winged Writer, Holder of the Fiery Quills, grant me your aid. I feel that you sent me a marvelous vision within a dream, a poem that I have yet to write, but that was more beautiful than any I have read before. Yet, it escaped me upon waking, and I long to recall it, so I can put it to paper."

The small room heated up, and fire danced across its walls. Engulfing, but never harming. The flickering flames formed into a grand avian shape, an elegant phoenix whose piercing gaze held all attention. They

spoke in a voice filled with confidence and energy, but also compassion, "Yes, I did have a talon in what you saw, but it is not mine to reveal. It is your work to discover, I simply showed you the possibility, made certain you did not miss what was already in your thoughts. We each write our own masterpieces, create our own paintings and music. I cannot take that from you, any more than you from I."

The poet was not happy about that, but struggled to find a good argument against it, "I do wish to write it myself, but if feels as though it consumes me. How can I feel satisfied with anything else while I know there is something so much greater awaiting me? It has already made it difficult to focus on other things that matter."

The phoenix gazed upon the poet with understanding, but no less fiery certainty, "Knowing that you can do more can be a difficult, exhausting thing, but it can also be a gift at times. Some are completely consumed, burned out, and I do not want that for any of them, but life cannot be complete without some risk."

The Writer withdrew into the flames, and the poet worried that they had left, finished with their explanation, but then the flames started to form into letters. More and more of them, and soon the poet realized that they were from some of the poems they had written since having the fiery dream.

"These are wonderful, they fill me with excitement to see what more you can create given time. They may feel inadequate, but each one is a part of you, and each one teaches you new things. The poem you glimpsed within your dream is a tantalizing goal, but it may not be a goal that you accomplish quickly. It could easily be years. It is a promise of what you are able to do, if you are willing to work toward it, and it should guide you through an amazing journey along the way."

The young poet thought about this. It sounded nice, but it also sounded so. . . so difficult to make real. To stick with it for so long. They lowered their gaze. "I don't think I can do that. I... I've tried to do so many projects before. I don't write as often as I want to, I get ideas to do a compilation of thematic poems, or to write poems about people or

events that I find meaningful, but so often I never get to it. How can I hope to stick with something like this for so long?"

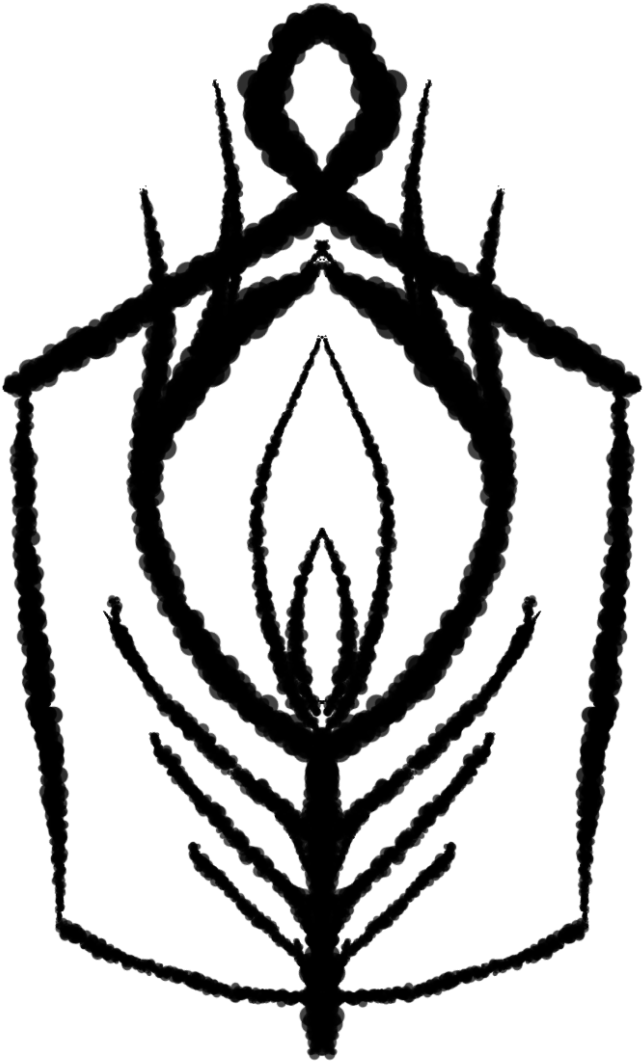
The Writer's beaked face appeared again, showing something like a smile. "You will have a more definite goal than you've had before, knowing that you will accomplish something great in time. But it's true, that alone won't suddenly make you write more regularly or accomplish every project you think of. Why does it need to though? You are you, and I would not show you a possibility that requires you to be someone else. You have your gifts as well as your difficulties, and it is with those in mind that I believe you can do this. I can never absolutely promise that you will, but I believe you will. You are amazing as you are."

The poet felt the warmth of the Writer inside them. It was scary, and still felt a little impossible to imagine they could truly work towards a goal like that for so long. And yet... it was comforting too, and supportive in a way they hadn't felt before. Though it was not the sort of answer they'd hoped for, they realized it was the right one. And as they though about the poems they would create along the way, they were eager to bring those to life as well.

"Thank you, O Clever-Taloned Writer, I think... I think I understand, and can accept now. I will do my best, even if that sometimes doesn't feel like enough." They bowed their head, and gently blew out the small flame. "I hope you will continue to enjoy what I create."

The flames that encircled the room slowly subsided, withdrawing into the Writer's form. As they began to fade, the writer spoke one more time. "I always have, young poet, and I'll be eagerly awaiting what you do next." They dipped their beak in a small bow of their own, and then the fire puffed out, leaving only smoke.

The poet carefully cleaned out the ashes, giving thanks to them as well for hosting the flames. They felt tired as they stepped out of the altar room, but realized they weren't ready to lay down. The flames had left something in their mind once again, not a dream this time, but words, words that were their own. They sat down and dipped their quill, beginning to write with a grateful smile.



Lanterns for the Town

This is a story of that long night, when the yet-to-be-named Singer-in-Silence had ran off to the west to seek the lost sun, and the town, cold and dark, waited to see what would happen.

It was hard to say even how long they waited, with no sun to mark time, but finally the song came, from so far off to the west. The sun was there, lost in glittery icy self-reflection at the edge of everything, and the singer couldn't call it back alone. But just that voice, that bit of hope, lifted the spirits of the Wanderers and their folk. Finally, everyone wasn't just huddling together for warmth. Finally, there was something to do.

The Writer-in-Flames kindled the most fantastic fires in the town circles, and the Sculptor-of-Pieces forged lanterns for everyone to carry their own bit of that fire. The Player-with-Light, easy to spot with their rainbow plumage and shining pelt, offered those lanterns from house to house, always happy to have a chance to be the center of attention.

With the Dancer-Between leading everyone through the streets, rivers of light filled the city as the Singer-in-Silence finally returned from the western edge of the world. They paused, to take a look at what their song had inspired, checking to see if everything was ready for their plan, to coax the sun back around from the east. The Singer-in-Silence looked around at the flickering yellow fire in every paw and on every face… and they said, as they often did, something no one wanted to hear.

"I'm not sure it's enough."

The Singer spoke more of the vast reaches of glittering icy shapes at the edge of the world, refracting and reflecting the sun's face into countless jeweled forms. Streets filled with warm light were stirring, but would they be enough to compete with that, to convince the Sun to visit again?

The people and the gods huddled close, murmuring fearfully, unsure what else they could do. One set of eyes after another turned to the Player-with-Light, attention caught by the prismatic plumage that seemed like the nearest thing to what the Singer described. But the Player was only one being, no one had anything of the sort.

The Player-with-Light looked down at themself as well, at their glorious tail, and finally had a thought. Their paws ran down one of the feathers of that tail, and they grabbed hold. With a wince and a crack, they broke off the tip of the feather. It became a shimmering shard of crystal, catching the lanterns' light. They beckoned one of the surrounding watchers close, and tucked it into a lantern, where it cast a cascade of colored light outward.

The Player-with-Light nodded, peered at that tail that they were so proud of, and took a deep breath. "Everyone line up."

They worked through the long night, breaking feather after feather into pieces, setting them into lantern after lantern. Their strength waned along with their tail, and the other Wanderers gathered close, giving their support as they could, as the city began to fill with colored lights.

Finally it was done. The Player curled up, exhausted, barely any tail-feathers left to give, but everyone in the city had a lantern shining with unique, glorious, prismatic light. Colors played over streets, buildings, faces, and the Player-with-Light themself, who stirred, watched, looked down at their body, and saw themself shining with shared glow, just as bright as before, and just as bright as everyone else in the city.

The Singer-in-Silence gave a howl of thanks and confirmation, and began to sing again as they started their run toward the Sun, antlers hung with more of those beautiful lanterns. And, in the light of the Player's gift, it wasn't long at all before the Sun came back over the horizon eager to find the light show that the singer promised.

Each lantern was as beautiful as the next, and as unique, and all together they made a display that outshone anything the Sun had ever seen be-

fore, for it was made of individuals and of a community, rather than of mere self-reflection. And that same light bolstered and healed the Player who'd nearly given their all, showing them how much greater light could be when shared. And so the folk kept their lanterns, wary of the next time the sun might lose its interest, and hopeful that they could inspire any others who faltered in hope.

The Player's Price

A petitioner knelt before a candle in their small room, and called out to the Player-with-Light.

"Help me, O Player-with-Light! No one sees me as I truly know I am, and I am so tired of showing them something else, but I don't know how to show them myself. You reveal truth through all your forms, but how do you do it?"

As they spoke, their room filled with a shimmering multitude of color, each shade reminding them of something about themself: A treasured memory, a priceless facet, a wonderful dream.

The Player's voice came, earnest and energetic, reminding the petitioner of a younger version of themself, full of possibility. But their words were more difficult. "I don't do it; I *am* it," the Player replied, hints of a curved beak and a rosette-dotted face shimmering across the room. "I am all of the things I am, as you are what you are."

"But it feels trapped inside me, like the world is not letting it out. I'm..."

"...angry, and sad, and frustrated, and desperate..." continued the Player, nodding, their muzzle framed with feathers. "It is your fire, and it burns with that need to shine forth."

The listener nodded in return, feeling the truth in those words. "It feels as if sometimes it will burn me up, leave nothing left."

The Player's fronds spread in a smile. "And isn't that what lanterns are for?" they said, their wings and limbs like shimmering glass, refracting the light of the room.

"Yes! That's what I need to know from you; how do I make the lanterns?"

“You are the lantern, as much as you are the flame. See now how it’s possible,” the Player said, and in their ever-shifting form the petitioner saw the work of sculpting, and molding, and glazing, and alloying, and welding, all from that inner fire, and they felt their own inner fire flare, surging throughout themself as if mirroring it.

Talons and paws and tendrils and wings curled over and around their body, not holding a shape so much as giving support, as they felt themself losing form and finding form, expressing themself in a thousand glowing flowing ways in a moment, as they sought the frame and lenses that would project that fire in the way that expressed them best.

As the petitioner tried to find just the right form, they began to falter, a familiar, fearful feeling overcoming them. “I’ll never get it right!” they cried, “There’s so much need, and so much to change, and so much to know. I never have been able to work it out, and I’m afraid I never will.”

The Player held them closer, and pointed at a lantern in a nearby window. “What do you see?” the Player asked.

“It’s beautiful,” came the reply. “The way it scatters the light, the shimmer it leaves on the wall. I’ll never be like that.”

The Player pointed at another lantern, one window over. “And that one?”

“The same. Beautiful, finely crafted, so much better than I could do,”

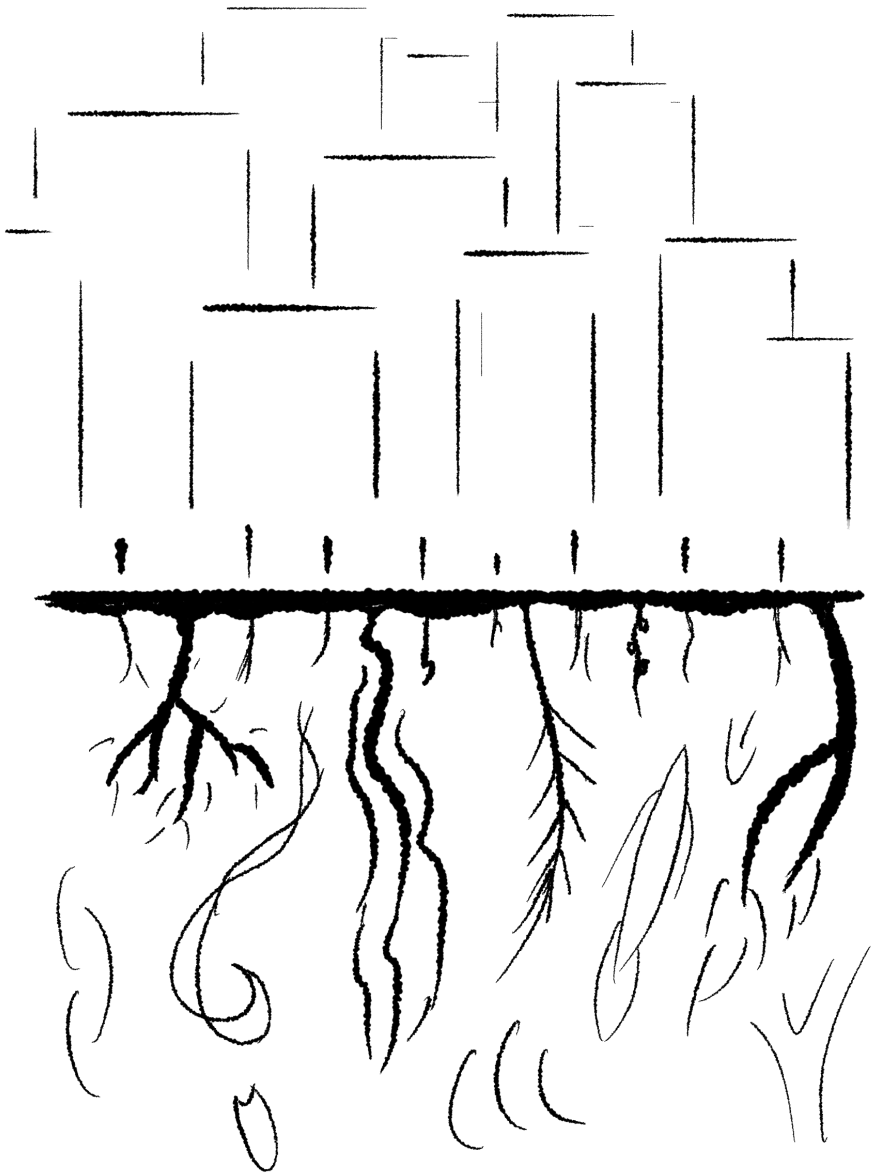
“And that one, and that one?” The Player nodded at all the lanterns lining the street. To the petitioner’s eyes and heart, it almost seemed like a mockery, so many radiant examples of what they couldn’t work out how to be.

The Player’s voice came again, gently. “Are they really the same?” Colored light wrapped around once more, and the petitioner began to look through new eyes.

Each lantern was hand-crafted, of glass hand-blown. Each had been set in its place, some hanging for years, some new-set. Some had clouded glass, or bubbles, or cracks. But the clouded glass just made the lights seem brighter, the bubbles made sparkles in the panes, the cracks refracted rainbows. Taken together, they were all different, yet each one was beautiful and illuminating as the next.

"Are we not all glass lanterns, hand-made as well as we know how? Our radiance shines through, and nothing is a flaw, or an imperfection, or a mistake; all of those are the things that make our light more intricate, and glorious, and unique. There is no wrong way to make yourself shine."

At those words, the petitioner's inner fire flared again, and they knew many things at once. They'd never be done building the lantern to cast their own light, and the Player never expected them to be. All they expected, all they asked for, was to see that play of light continue.



How We Remembered to Dream

There have been many points in the history of the community where Waters Gather. Where any place people gather, there is a cycle of things growing, being built, and changing. This one is somewhere in the middle. Buildings had been made and erected; the group of wandering gods were a familiar presence to all. A sort of stability had been settled: there was always work to be done, but there was a hearth for all that needed it, and food in every bowl.

One day, though, a strangeness spread through the people, slow and creeping, like a cold or flu. There was no outward illness, no physical malady, but bit by bit, the people began to grow distant, quiet. There was the work, and the things outside of what was Necessary started to recede in relevance, bit by bit. A builder would do their day's work, and simply go home and sleep without any sort of self-care. You could see a person walk the streets, start and hold a conversation, yet as soon as goodbyes were said and all turned away, a strange silence overtook them.

The Wanderers noticed this first, of course, and they too were concerned. Each of them tried to assuage in their own way, with only fleeting success. The Writer-in-Flame unearthed some of their most fantastic adventures to read, and while the reading happened, the lights of joy and awe struck their eyes... Yet as soon as the crowd dispersed, their expressions cooled, the fire doused swiftly. The Sculptor-With-Pieces would make sculptures of glass and steel staining blocks with stained-glass light... yet the passers-by would seem to forget about its light the second they turned to another street.

"This is bad. Nothing... sticks." the Painter-with-Rust grumbled to themself. They were alone at dusk, at the edge of the city, near a flowing stream. Most of the Wanderers were concerned, but the Painter was probably the most-so. The masses were content, and the Painter could smell the faint tinge of rot on each of them, like a log in the forest be-

ginning to decompose. “They all know how exactly what can happen if this... stillness festers. There’s a way through this, to grow back stronger, but what...”

Frustrated, they tossed a stone into the stream, casting ripples through the gentle current. “You’re right, you know.” as out from those ripples slid the Swimmer-Within, their fur sleek and gleaming in the early night, almost twinkling like stars. Among the Wanderers, they also tended to keep to themselves, seeming to prefer the water over the land. In this moment, though, they were happy to lean up over the stream bank. “They’ve grown distant from their dreams, having gotten too focused with the work of the waking.”

The Painter-with-Rust nodded slowly in reply. “That would do it. So to help them out of this rut, we need to help them dream again?”

“I’ve had my eye on this, and I think I have a solution.” The Swimmer rumbled, and dove back into the stream. When they returned, they carried a wide net, full with large faintly-glowing shells. They glimmered like a prism, iridescent even in the dim night. “One of these on every hearth, and a day for everyone to rest and dream. Everyone, you all included. Can I ask that of you?’ The Painter hesitated, before slowly taking the net in their arms. “That includes you. No exceptions.”

And so the Painter-with-Rust went to the other Wanderers, and so the demand was made. Everyone was to take a day to rest, and a shell was to be placed in every home. Though the people were unsure of why, there was no complaints.

And the next day, everyone slept the whole day long, deep and full of dreams. Even the Wanderers. No eye opened until the sun came again the following day.

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You dream of the depths.

The current greets you, the sudden gasp of water catching you as it flows around and surrounds being your first fall into dream. They are familiar; your subconscious knows them as the waters of your home. You can still breathe, even underwater.

You are not alone; even looking down into what should be inky depths, you see a faint light from below—and a figure, streaked in starlight, beckoning you. This is the Swimmer-Within, one of the Wanderers, and they invite you down through dream into the depths of your own heart.

You follow them, descending downwards, swimming effortlessly. As you move towards the source of the light, you come across a vibrant, unfolding scene. You plunge into a ravine lined with seaweed and coral of myriad colors, fish and wildlife swimming around you.

One brushes your leg as you swim by, and you're struck with a memory-a treasured one, an echo of your life that brings a smile to your face. You're left struck there, floating for a moment, lost in that instant.

"These waters are of your Self," the Swimmer whispers in your ear, their paw holding yours as they guide your down. "Here lie your memories, the secrets you hold dear. All the things you may forget or disregard in waking are still here, calling out for you."

As you descend, a new light blends into the chorus—a rose-pink, the color of the light at dawn, gentle and warm. It radiates from a tunnel, a portal, seeming to stretch deep into the reef and down, down, impossibly down.

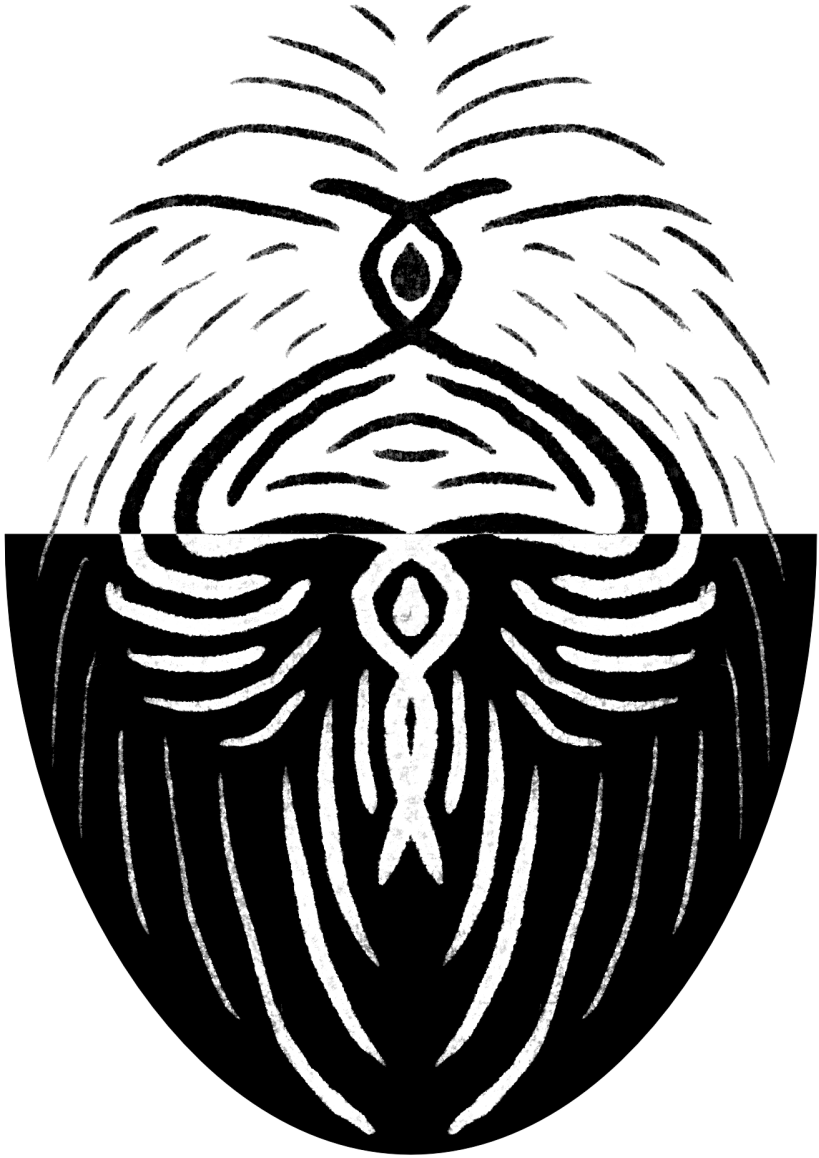
"Through here is your dream—the world that exists inside your mind and heart. It is a special place, for it is yours, and nobody can take it from you. Listen… It calls to you."

The Swimmer's voice, gentle, echoes around you, as they seem to fade into the churn of fish and coral.

"Go there and rest: This inner world begs to be made real, to unfold itself into the waking like a flower of impossible colors. Find something there to bring back with you. Many things, if your arms can hold them! But whatever you carry back with you... Try to make it real. Through word, through art, through your hands or your mind... Let it be made manifest for all to see.

"This is the sacred work of dreaming: To dive deep, to fill your net with Wonder, and to bring it back with you."

And with that, you descend, and you dream of wonders. You awake with a smile on your face, and the dream of a better world in your heart.



The Swimmer's Depths

A child came one day to the fountain of the Swimmer-Within, their heart troubled.

"O Swimmer-Within, I have a question that I hope you can answer. Where was I, before I was here? They say you have always been, that you were in the streams the gods cried that led them to this place. So you must know where I was, before I was in this world. I need to know, because sometimes the world seems like so much, and I don't know if I'm made of stuff that can hold up in it."

The Swimmer swirled, and shimmered, the youth's emotions clear, reverberating through them both. After a moment, they mounded up out of the fountain, and gestured to a cloud in the sky,

"What was a raindrop, before it fell?" came the response, soft and liquid. And the cloud curled and swirled in the sky with the Swimmer's form, for it too was water, and the answer continued from above, the cloud-Swimmer's words breathy but clear.

"All the water in the clouds came from the world around you, the rivers and seas and mud, mixed with the sweat and tears of the people. All of that is in every drop. And before you were you, you were so much else in the world. All of that is in you, and I am in you as well."

"As I'm in all of them," continued the Swimmer in the fountain. "Clouds, rains, streams of water and blood and emotion. I swim within everything that flows."

The youth heard their words, and felt that flow within their body, of water and life, and knew that every time they saw a cloud, they would remember how it was made of all the world, and so were they.

Many years later, the youth had become an elder. Feeling the pull of years and the uncertainty of the future on them, they returned to the Swimmer's fountain.

"O Swimmer-Within, I have a question that I know you can answer. Where will I be, after I'm gone from here? They say you're always there, and I've felt you with me my whole life. I feel you now, even when it's hard to feel anything else. I'm not afraid, I don't think, but I can't help but wonder, will I feel you still?"

The Swimmer whirled, and wavered, the elder's emotions clear as ever, heavy with the weight of a full life. After a moment, they pooled in the fountain, beckoning the asker closer.

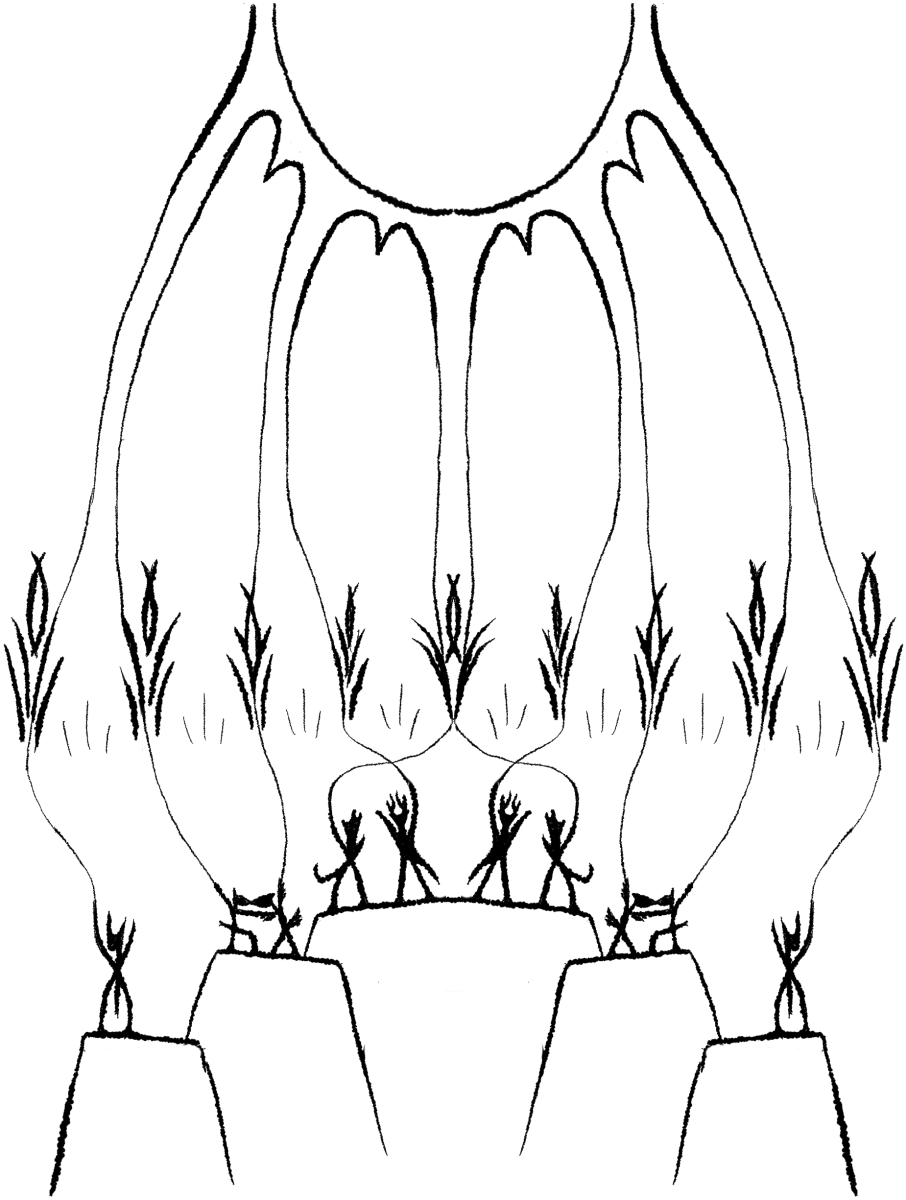
"What is a raindrop, after it lands?" came the response, sonorous and gentle. And the elder, leaning in, became aware of the spring feeding the fountain, from water held deep under the land, and heard the answer continue, the deep-Swimmer's voice a rumble in their blood.

"The raindrop falls and spreads and joins a river, or soaks into the land, but the water isn't lost when the raindrop is gone. Everything it was, every bit that came from the clouds, spreads back out, deep and wide. It may find its way to a lake, or the ocean, or a fountain. It becomes part of all the world again."

"And I am with it still," continued the Swimmer in the fountain. "Water is life, and life takes so many forms. I never tire of seeing them all, and it never tires of being them all. I will guide them, until the next rainfall, or wherever else they flow.

And the elder nodded, still feeling that flow within their body, and in the heights above and depths below as well.

And then, it began to rain.



The Modesty of the Sun

Offerings and prayers were made to the Wanderers, and this drew Their attention.

A great gathering was made among the people. It was meant to be a show of gratitude, to the gods that they honored, and to the other people in their community. It was a way to give thanks for the abundance they all could enjoy together. The community made music and sang, ate and drank, danced and played. Whatever cares there still were in the world, whatever work there was to be done, could wait until after they celebrated.

Among them came the Wanderers, openly invited to share in the occasion. First to explore and discover among them were the crowned siblings. The Dancer-Between found the time and place of the occasion to be outside of usual concerns, people able to forget both what had come before and what would need to come after. The Singer-in-Silence found the usual divisions of communities blurred and broken while they all mingled in ways they could not for ages. The Crafter-of-Wonders, most of all, was curious as to the nature of the celebration. They found a person in fervent thought and song and dance, the heart of the celebrant drawing Their attention first. Even with the morning sun shining, it was dulled to a golden brown behind their eyelids, focused inward on the words inside them for how they felt. Among all these other celebrants, their community in context, they found a sense of self, of who they were, in a way they couldn't so easily be otherwise.

Matching the tune they shared, flowing with the rhythm of their movements, they found a new voice gentle inside their mind. "Why do you celebrate? Who do you praise? What is this for?" The words and voice were welcome, and helped the celebrant to find answers to further understand who they were.

"I celebrate my community, who help me find and be myself, for myself. I praise just now the Writer-with-Flames, that I can author myself so

surrounded, authentically me among so many others. This is for…" At this, the thoughts of the celebrant struggled, finding so many that could be credited for making the celebration as grand and self-affirming as it could be, before finally settling on one thread. "This is for those who cook grand feasts, who prepare fine drinks, who fill the air with perfumed scents, that we might indulge and better enjoy ourselves, and have much to offer to those we appreciate."

And so, the Crafter-of-Wonders moved on, seeking out one so honored, carrying that appreciation with Them. They found a cook, diligent in their duties, making sure the food and drink they were serving was fit for those who needed it, to sustain body and uplift spirit. They put their heart into the effort, each dish with a flourish and personal touches, each a work of art.

In a midday lull, they watched all those gathered to share and celebrate, and thought on it, the light of the sun scintillating golden over their community. Gentle thoughts began to rise in their mind with each curious glint. "Why do you celebrate? Who do you praise? What is this for?" They pondered these thoughts, finding inspiration in them for the next batch of meals.

"I celebrate my community, who I can express my talents and skills and tastes with, and who value what I have to share. I praise just now the Player-with-Light for the ways I can express myself to them. This is for…" The cook thought a moment to consider who had helped them, and who should be given extra thanks. "This is for the farmers, whose diligence and toil provided me with the materials to create with, to nourish and inspire my friends and family."

Questions answered and thanks given, the Crafter-of-Wonders moved on, seeking who all this gratefulness was ultimately for. As it so happened, They discovered a group of farmers, delivering the last of their labors before joining in with the festivities. One stayed behind, taking a well-deserved rest before well-deserved fun.

They looked over the bounty of greens, and watched them glimmer like facets of a jewel where drops of water caught the afternoon sun. In those moments of rest, they considered the great gathering and thought, "Why do you celebrate? Who do you praise? What is this for?"

"I celebrate my community, my friends and my family, who know me so well. I praise just now the Sculptor-of-Pieces, for helping us find the ways we work together, to aid where someone else lacks. This is for the crops I have planted and tended and harvested, which sustain us all." The answer was quick in their thoughts, as something they had to think about often.

With that perspective gathered and those thanks noted, the Crafter-of-Wonders turned then to the plants already close by, landing among them on long legs, wings tucked close but still thrumming. They climbed and hopped from one to the next with that distinct vibration, singing gently to all of them, even as they were plucked out and pulled away to be used.

"Why do you celebrate? Who do you praise? What is this for?" Each who was asked understood a little differently, answered a little differently, but there was much the same.

"We celebrate our community, those we are surrounded by. Our fellow plants, arranged that we each have enough room to grow, and the soil so good for our roots, and the farmers who cared for us in our short lives. We praise just now the Swimmer-Within, for the course of our strong growth, and the Painter-in-Rust, as we know our end is needed to help others grow. This is for the sun, who has been kind to us, allowing enough rain to fall for us to drink without being so shy to keep its light from us."

With the sun near setting, and those many answers considered, the Crafter-of-Wonders took off for where it was bound, flashes of tiny bodies working together, running and flying, the activity of iridescent shells gaining the interest of the sun itself, enough that it would pause just above the horizon to meet Them.

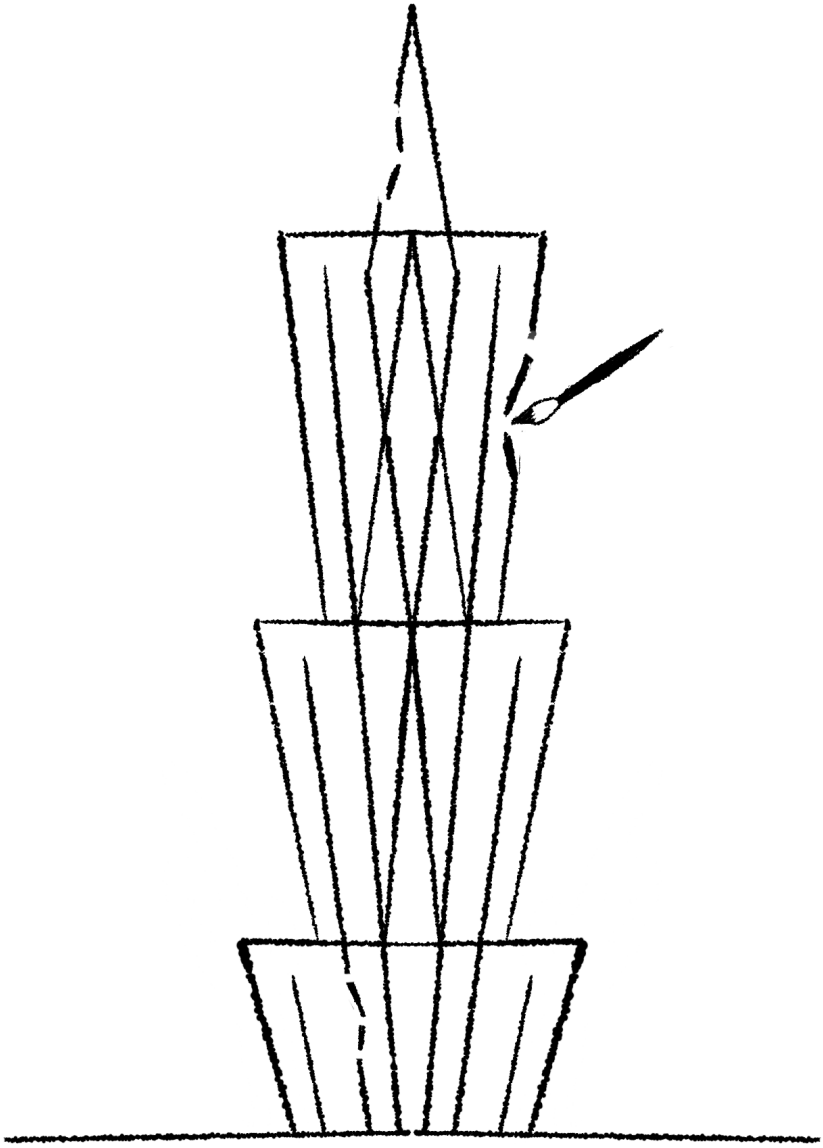
“Why do you celebrate? Who do you praise? What is this for?” came Their voice, disparate and many and yet in harmony.

This, it seems, took the sun off guard far more than the sight of what had pursued it, and it struggled to answer. “I go along my course just the same as ever, and while their celebrations and voices and colors do make the course easier to stay, I don’t understand what it’s for, why to celebrate.”

“They celebrate their community, and all the people who are a part of it. They celebrate each other, those who help make their lives worth enjoying. You are also a part in it, even as you “just” travel and shine and appreciate their shows of thankfulness. That is still worth celebrating.”

The sun was given much to consider, but didn’t have the time to stay and discuss. “I must keep going, but I think you’re right. Maybe I’ll have more to say next time. Thank you.” And with that, it departed, allowing night to settle.

The moon and stars shined bright over the celebration as it continued on, aided by bonfires. In the early hours of the morning, the fires had burned low, and one last offering was made, together, by all those assembled. It was made to celebrate themselves, to each one, all part of a community, and without each one, the celebration would not be the same. They praised the Crafter-of-Wonders, for helping them contribute what they could, each enriching another along innumerable connections. They recognized it was for each one who attended, to bond and reaffirm bonds, to recognize how they all worked together with acts small and large, grand or mundane.



The Architect and the Painter

A young architect worked to build a glorious tower, a bold statement of their intent to change the world. They did everything right, the design was adroit, the work well-compensated, the agreements negotiated cannily. It took five years to be completed, tall and beautiful… and within a year after its completion, the Painter-in-Rust took a brush to the invisible cracks in the support beams and it collapsed.

The architect, older and wiser, researched the problem, bolstered the design, sourced only the best and strongest materials to rebuild it, as grand as before and more sturdy. It took another five years to build… and it stood for five years more before rain and ice let the Painter's clever claws into the foundation and it crumbled.

The architect, now with plenty of years and other work behind them, began again, considering the location, researching the weather, discovering ways to let the building work with the elements rather than defy them. Their new tower was a wonder of flexibility, at the same time a monument and practically a part of nature. As they labored on it for five years and five years more, they crushed and toppled and burned smaller models of the tower in offering to the Painter, saying "Please, let this destruction be enough, let my grand work stand in peace!" …and it was almost done when a breeze from the Painter's wing swept across one of those small fires, and the whole larger structure caught aflame and burned down as the architect watched.

"But why?" they called, as their life's work thus far rested in a smoldering heap before them. They were sure the Painter was in there somewhere, able to hear them. "Why couldn't you be satisfied with what I offered?"

The Painter's voice came then, like the crackling of a short circuit. "You offered what you didn't value. Why would I use that for a canvas?"

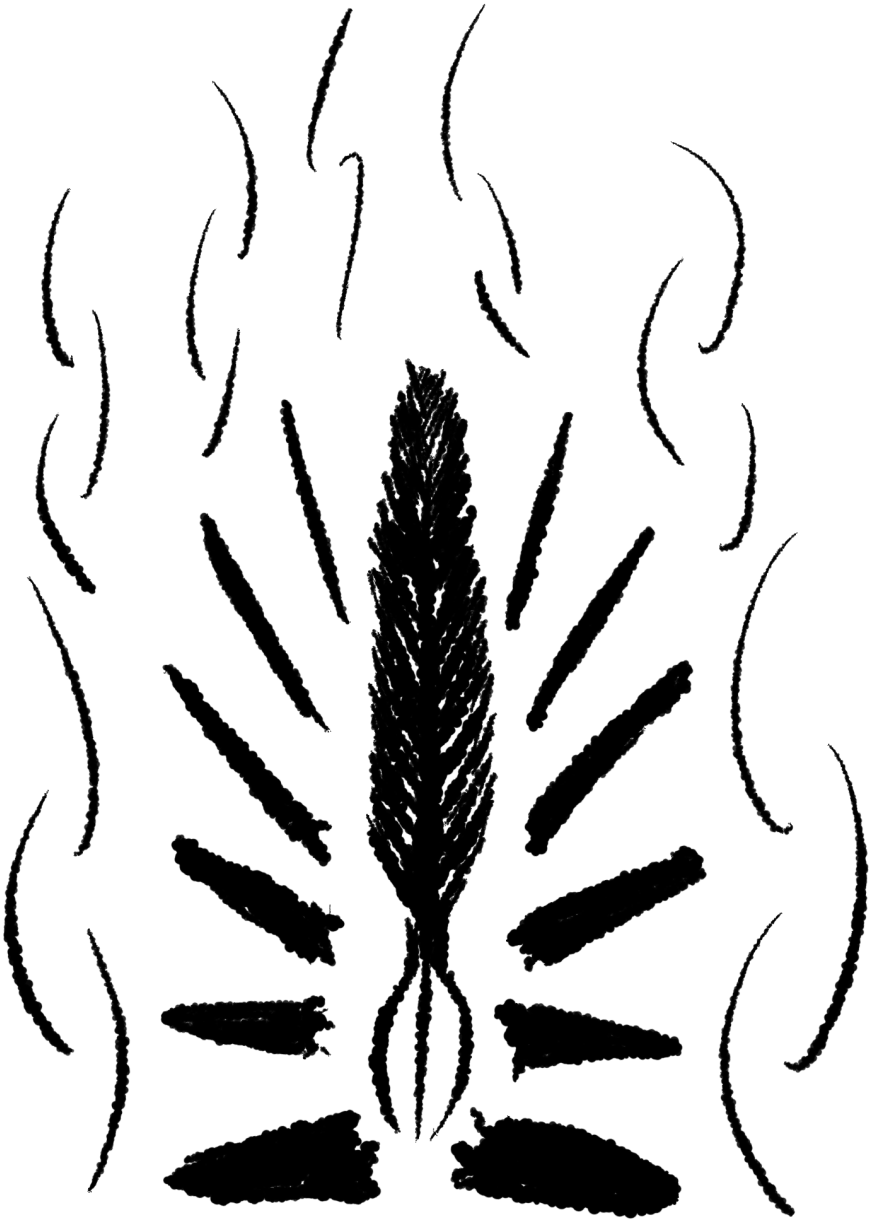
“So, how can I hope to ever build something you won’t tear down?” cried the architect.

The Painter’s voice was metal fatigue. “You can’t. I come to everything in the end. But I do love a challenge. This would’ve been a good one, I could’ve worked on it for ages, but…” One of the little building-effigies trembled slightly, but stayed upright.

“Well, if you’ll always have your way, why should I build it again?” the architect asked. “Why should I try to build anything?”

The Painter’s voice was dust in the void. “Any building you build will rot, it’s true. But what will rot in you, if you stop trying?”

The old architect began again, this tower their final project, their design clever and strong and subtle, building upon everything they’d learned and everything that had failed. They even lived to put the capstone on, themself. And that tower stood for five hundred years, before the Painter’s work on it finally completed, leaving it to persist only in memory.



A Gift for the Painter

In the city of Waters Gather, there was a young artist, fascinated by the idea of change, who sought to create a sculpture that would express the ever-changing nature of the world. They wanted something big, bold, and easy to see, so they found a clear area of land, and began carving stone and pouring concrete and bending wire, until they'd made a beautiful elaborate sculpture that looked like something different from every angle; here a bird, there a tree, otherwise a figure dancing. It drew crowds from miles around until… *something changed.* The season turned, and the cold of winter brought dampness and frost, and the claws of the Painter-in-Rust helped cracks form and widen, until one dark night when it collapsed unseen.

Upset, but undeterred, the artist set to work again, this time with sheets of metal, welding torches, and enamel coatings, creating something strong and durable, solid yet dynamic, colors that shimmered in the changing light of day and different from the position of every viewer. It drew crowds from miles around until… *something changed.* The season turned, and the summer sun burned bright and hot, and the breath of the Painter-in-Rust helped the colors fade and the joints soften, until one unbearably hot day when it collapsed unseen.

Surveying the damage, the artist despaired; so much work, twice, all fallen to ruin. They sat in the remains of two grand workings, and called out to the Painter-in-Rust, who they were sure must be there, mocking them.

"Why is this happening?" they cried out. "The bigger I build, the worse something fails."

And sure enough, the Painter's voice came to them, sharp as a short circuit, but calm rather than mocking. "You wanted change, and change is what you got. You have your artistry, and I have mine."

“But now no one will see what I made! How can I hope to ever build something you won’t tear down?” asked the artist.

The Painter’s voice came then, grinding like a crumbling foundation. “You can’t. Change comes to everything in the end.”

“Well, if you’ll always have your way, why should I build it again? Why should I try to build anything?”

The Painter’s voice was smoke in the void. “You, who say you are so fascinated by change… Is that really the change that you want for yourself?”

The artist was struck into silence, but after a long moment, deep inside them… *something changed*. They began again, gathering all the remnants of their fallen works, along with flowing fabric and fine wood and colorful paper, a tangle of all their frustration and urgency and need for something to be different. Their new sculpture rose high as the season waned, fluttering in the wind, moving with every shift of the of weather.

They named it “A Gift for the Painter,” and folk watched as the artist worked, morbidly curious how this one might fall as well, especially with a name that so openly dared the forces of entropy to take notice. And then one evening at the beginning of autumn, when a large crowd had gathered, the artist handed out flickering torches, and set the first bit of the sculpture on fire themself.

It burned beautifully, as the artist and the Painter-in-Rust collaborated on the work. Flames rose high, taking on all the colors of the artwork and more besides. Smoke curled and sparks whirled, catching the attention of the whole city. And when it was all burned to ash, even that shape suggested all the work that had been done.

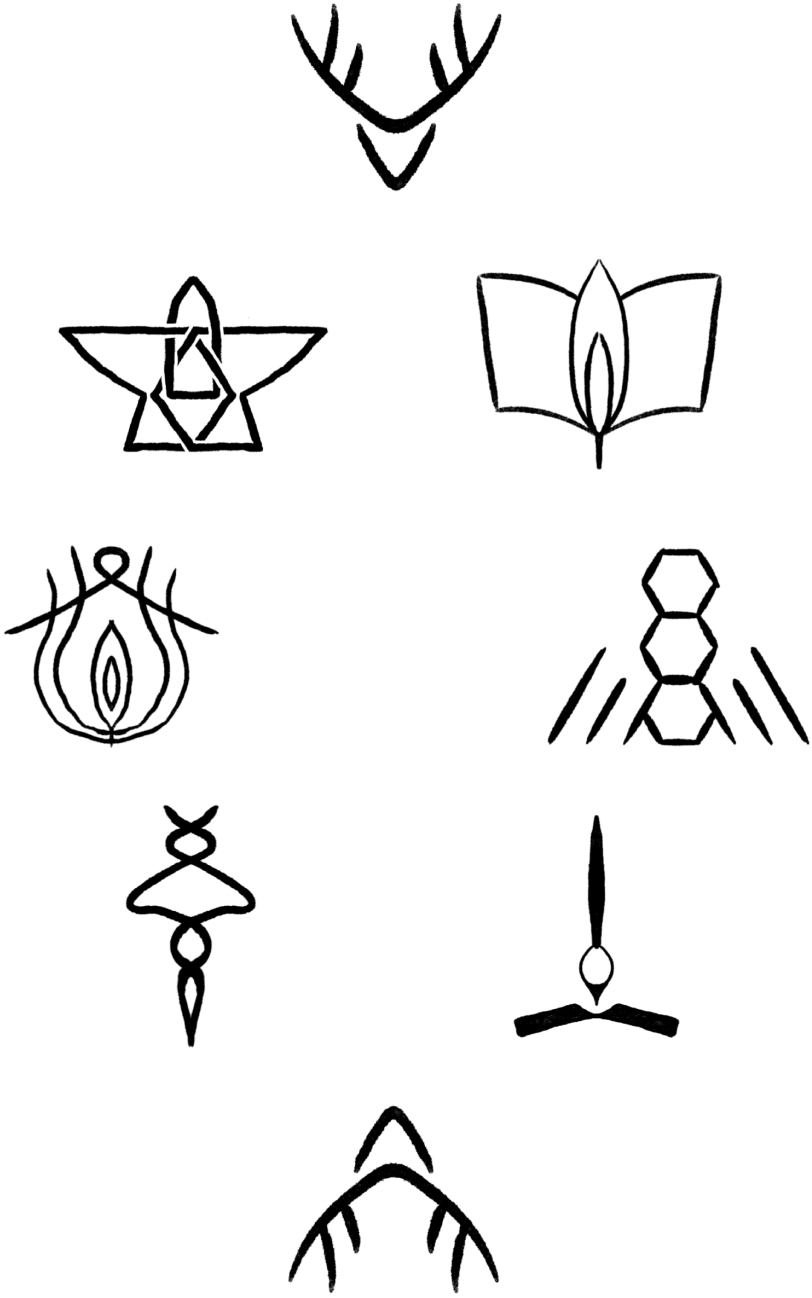
And so, every autumn from then on the artist built another gift, from all they’d experienced the previous year. Each one was different, expressing all the changes they’d been through. Soon other folk began to con-

tribute, adding to it or making their own. And each year, the gifts burned more beautifully than the last.

The artist is long gone, taken by the final change that akes us all, but from that day to this, people in the city of Waters Gather still build Gifts to the Painter, and then burn them to the ground.

Trails

Compiler's Note: This is not dogma. This is a record of things other people have done, that they left behind for you to follow, or to branch off from in your own explorations. Remember that space is included here for you to write what's meaningful to you, and also that you're free to remove whatever isn't.



About the Wanderers

The Wanderers are a "found pantheon"; deities who came together after parting from their (unspecified) pantheons-of-origin, wandering away and following the pull of their own feelings as a river flowing before them, until all the rivers gathered in one place and they found each other.

There's no canonical list of Wanderers, and there's some cases where the borders between particular deities themselves are a bit fuzzy. Their manifested forms, likewise, are somewhat fluid, usually theriomorphic, but often bearing impossible mixes of different species traits.

Herein are listed the Wanderers that this author has the clearest sense of, along with purviews, seemings, symbols, and epithets so far experienced, as well as space to add your own. There are also prayers provided, both daily prayers for those seeking to connect more deeply to a particular Wanderer, and focussed prayers for times of need. All these are as personal as any relationship; if they call to you, wonderful, if not, there's space to write your own.

A further note is needed on prepositions and pronouns. You may hear, for instance, "Writer-in-Flames" at one point, and "Writer-with-Flames" at another. The right preposition isn't always clear, or entirely agreed upon. This goes doubly for pronouns; "they" is used here for the sake of neutrality and simplicity. It's meant to elide focus on gender rather than to define it; the Wanderers are known to take on a multitude of diverse gender presentations and pronouns.

The Dancer-Between

The Dancer-Between is usually the first-named and first-considered Wanderer. A deity of liminality, they can be sought in all things and are often contacted early in ritual to act as an opener and guide. They are rarely if ever known to communicate in words, but instead with impressions and urges and visuals. They are closely associated with the Singer-in-Silence; the two together are often referred to as the Crowned Siblings, of which the Dancer is the elder.

Species

White-tailed Deer (Antlers), Coyote, _____

_____

Colors

Warm earth tones, shot through with dark rainbows, _____

_____

Imagery

Antlered head looking down, roots, branching things of all sorts, fractals, smoke, layered flower petals, the equinoxes, the Moon, _____

_____

Epithets

Fractal-Crowned, Nimble-Pawed, Smoke-Furred, Petal-Covered, Void-Bodied, _____

_____

Example invocation

Dancer-Between, your rhythm enchants my steps and inspires my explorations, be with me.

_____

_____

_____

Prayers for the Dancer-Between

Daily prayer

I hail you, Dancer-Between, Sovereign of Neither Here Nor There. You are antlers and flowers and paws and smoke, and you open the ways of always and never, guiding us along with your rhythm. May I find you in timeless time and breathless movement, your ecstasy putting me beside myself and letting me land where I need to be.

For journeywork

Fractal-crowned, petal-formed, ever-shifting, you who are unafraid to dance through the uncharted liminal, you who bring guidance to the lost and challenges to the sure-footed, be with me as I walk along twilit roads.

I hail your clarity and your confusion, and I hail the perspective that each one brings. May my eyes be open to the complexities around me, and may my feet find the paths that will lead me to deeper understanding.

Smoke-furred Dancer-Between, open the way for me, through your branching antlers and perpetual motion, that I may reach the places neither here nor there, that I may see the invisible, touch the intangible, know the ineffable, and return with the changes that must be shared.

Dancer-Between, be with me.

Dreaming with the Dancer

Nimble-pawed Dancer-Between, you who weave dreams among the tines of your antlers, please guide my travels tonight. May I find my way to where I need to go, hear the lessons waiting for me there, and bring them back with me into the world.

The Singer-in-Silence

Usually understood as the younger sibling of the Dancer-Between, the stories of the Crowned Siblings speak of the Singer arriving in the pantheon along with the Dancer, but not finding their own position or name until they sang back the sun in the middle of the first winter. They're associated with endurance, taboo-breaking, and liminality in the sense of crossing/breaking boundaries rather than standing between them.

Species

Reindeer (Antlers), Wolf, _____

Colors

Cool grays, shot through with pale rainbows, _____

Imagery

Antlered head looking up, paw prints in the snow, hung lanterns (especially on antlers), the aurora, the solstices, the Sun, _____

Epithets

Lantern-Crowned, Silver-Furred, Fresh-Tracked, Untiring, Fearless, Full-throated, Taboo-Breaking, _____

Example invocation

Singer-in-Silence, your light leads the way through the darkness, be with me.

Prayers for the Singer-in-Silence

Daily prayer

I hail you, Singer-in-Silence, as I follow your tracks through the snow. I hear you, clear-voiced, full-throated, unafraid. Enduring and fearless, clever and sleek, silver-pelt dashing through the winter. May I find inspiration in your fortitude, and strength in your song, as I howl my way through the dark along with you.

For finding one's voice

Lantern-crowned, wind-sculpted, never-tiring, you whose voice shatters despair and brings back the dawn, you who sings the songs that soothe those in need and shake those in comfort, be with me as I quest for new light.

When you are loud, I listen for insight, and when you are silent, I seek truth within. May I find brave words when I need to speak my own heart, and may I know when to be quiet and let others share their own.

Silver-furred Singer-in-Silence, call me forth, with your clarion howl and crystal insight, so that I may find my way through the shadows of misunderstanding and anxiety, be heard clearly when I fear being overlooked, and never ignore the cries of others when I can help.

Singer-in-Silence, be with me.

A pup's prayer

Little Singer, Younger Sibling, Child of the Wanderers, like you I am always growing but never grown up. Help me feel my feelings without judgement or shame, find the words I need to share them with those who care for me, and feel those folks' love and protection whether they're near or far.

When things are hard, help me remember to look to my gods and my parents for help, instead of trying to be strong on my own. Guard me from shame and guilt, and be with me when I climb too high, so that we can call out for help together and be guided back down.

Small and sparkling, soft and silver, remind me that I am worthwhile, that I make folks' lives better, and that there's nothing wrong with being a kid. Help me face uncertainty with curiosity instead of fear, and help me open my heart and eyes to all the wonderful possibilities of the world around me

Little Singer, be with me.

The Sculptor-of-Pieces

The Sculptor is a deity of craft both material and social, associated particularly with interpersonal connection, building community and forging bonds. The core metaphor of their name and work involves finding and honing the places where individuals fit well together into larger wholes where they feel truly a part. They're held in close association with the Writer-with-Flames and the Player-with-Light, in a loosely-defined familial grouping.

Species

Bear, armored lizard (back), heavily built bird, _____

Colors

Earth tones; dark gray, tan, brick red, burnt umber, _____

Imagery

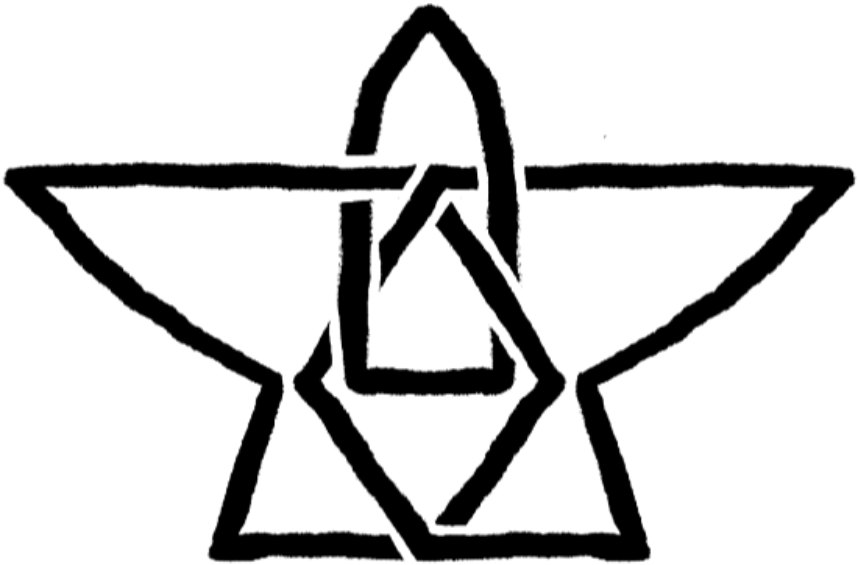
Anvil, hammer, puzzle piece, Borromean rings, forge, tessellation, _____

Epithets

Soft-furred, Strong-Pawed, Keen-Eyed, Hard-Backed, _____

Example invocation

Sculptor-of-Pieces, your heat shapes and tempers my connections, be with me.



Prayers for the Sculptor-of-Pieces

Daily prayer

I hail you, Sculptor-of-Pieces, and I welcome your hammer. May I be malleable under your tools, and strong in the ways you shape me. May I have the trust to show you the true shape within me, the patience to let you do your work, and the skill to help you along in the ways that I can.

I shall follow your example, shaping myself, becoming myself, finding my best fit, for it is only when we all embody the shapes that mesh best, that we can join together to make the whole world the well-built wonder it's meant to be.

For building community

Shaper of fine detail, bearer of heavy burdens, joiner of many-to-many, you who glows in the hearth and the forge and the heart, you who soothed the land and befriended the flame and carried the city, be with me as I seek the places where I fit.

Keen-eyed, strong-pawed wielder of all tools, may I be malleable under them, and strong in the ways you shape me. May I have the patience to let you do your work, the skill to help you along in the ways that I can, and the hope to see the many ways I can connect.

Hard-backed, soft-furred, craft-wise, show me the contours where my life touches others, and give us all the warmth and work to meld close in the places where we match. Craft us and help us craft ourselves into patchwork unity, with a place for everyone within.

Sculptor-of-Pieces, be with me.

The Writer-with-Flames

The Writer is a deity of flame, and as such tied deeply with inspiration and transformation. They exult in personal alchemy, in writing one's story on the world in ways that can't be ignored. Their work tends to be inward-facing, a counterpart to the Sculptor's outward, interpersonal work, an interaction encapsulated in the proverb "The Writer's flame heats the Sculptor's Forge."

Species

Phoenix, light-bodied bird of prey, desert hare, beaded lizard, _____

Colors

Red, orange, yellow, bright white, bits of purple, _____

Imagery

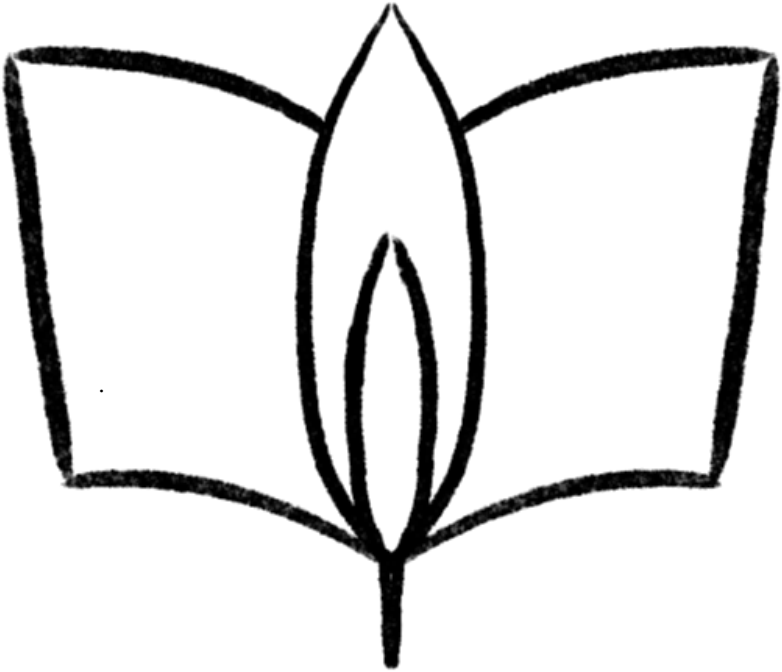
Flames, words, feathers, books burning but not consumed, _____

Epithets

Swift, Blaze-Winged, Long-Eared, Clever-Taloned, Ember-Scaled, _____

Example invocation

Writer-with-Flames, your fire transforms my story and renews my life, be with me.



Prayers for the Writer-with-Flames

Daily prayer

I hail you, Writer with Flames, Blazewinged bringer of Inspiration, and I welcome your fiery energy. You are the bearer of what I seek to improve myself, what I wish to create to help others transform into their true selves. When I feel your heat upon me, I feel driven to push myself to be amazing in my own way, to strive for what I can accomplish within my means. You feathers wrap me in comfort when I am unable to work on those things that I find most meaningful.

I will always do my best to follow you, to be a bright, blazing beacon of light for others to find their own inspiration in. I know I may not succeed, but I will keep my goals in mind as I watch you trace your brilliant path across the sky. May we work together, to both become something greater.

For self-definition

Scribe of bone-deep knowledge, kindler of urgent motion, alchemist of inner essence, you who burns in the sky and the crucible and the soul, you who softens steel and drafts destinies and lights the dawn, be with me as I strive to pen my own story.

Blaze-winged, sharp-voiced author of possibilities, may my eyes be open to your inspiration, and my hands be sure when I put it into action. May I have the insight to see what I need to transform, the courage to step into the flames, and the wisdom to know when the change is complete.

Ember-scaled, kind-clawed, far-seeing, show me the parts of my tale that I need to revise, and guide my narrative in the ways that allows me to be the self I yearn to be. Write me and help me write myself in words that burn hot enough to start life anew.

Writer-with-Flames, be with me.

(Light a candle, or other form of fire upon your altar.)

A Dedication

(Light a candle, or other form of fire upon your altar)

(Face the altar, head bowed)

Writer with Flames, I focus now on that which is most important to me. I accept your gift of vision and clarity in finding something beyond me needs, something I truly desire to manifest in the world.

(Lift your head, so that the flame flickers at the top of your vision. Focus on a feeling of heat deep within you)

I embrace the fire within myself, that strength of purpose I may not always reach, but which always stays alight inside my core. I channel that into my desire, strengthening my bond with it, and with you.

(Lift your head until you are gazing into the fire. Focus on connections, ones that help you feel inspired and driven)

I share my desire with you, and take yours into myself, sharing them and thus making both stronger. May we both find the skill and energy that we need to reach our goals, supporting each other and the community around us, as it too supports us.

(Look up, leaving the flame still visible. Raise your arms up, much like wings)

Writer with Flames, this work will be a gift to you, but it will more be a gift to myself, and to those I care about. I will do my best to spread my own warmth, as far as I can. May we all find accomplishment in our works.

The Player-with-Light

The Player is found in the stars, a being of glamour and presentation in all of those things' strongest potentialities. The work of this deity is in the vibrant expression of inner truth, even and especially when that expression is intentionally crafted. They're perhaps the most changeable deity in appearance themselves, often actively challenging gender assumptions, but they're always recognizable simply by how bright they are. Their familial association with the Sculptor and Writer comes from the idea of combining firelight with a safe and beautiful way to hold it.

Species

Peacock, patterned feline (e.g. snow leopard) with bright-colored markings, _____

Colors

Pink, purple, turquoise, anything bright and high-saturation, _____

Imagery

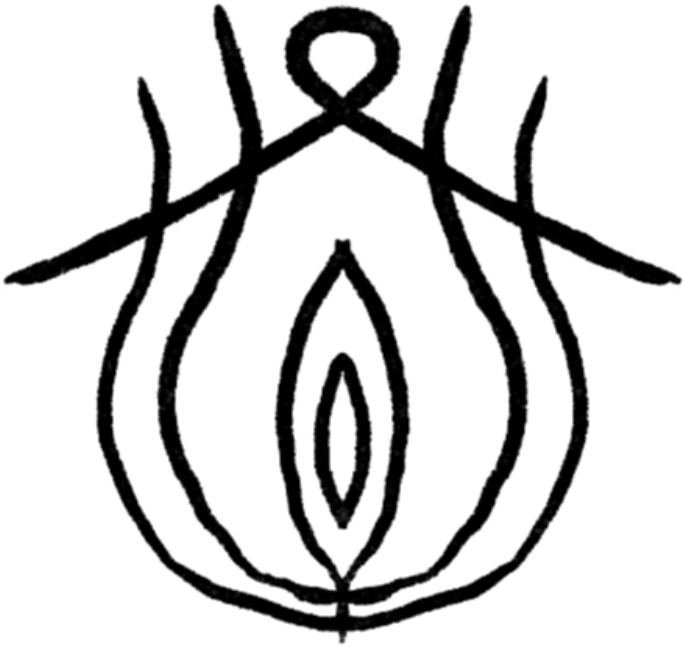
Rainbows, glitter, kaleidoscopes, games, pixels, the Milky Way, _____

Epithets

Radiant, Revelatory, Star-Tailed, Neon-Marked, Self-Sharing, _____

Example invocation

Player-with-Light, your radiance reveals the truth within, be with me.



Prayers for the Player-with-Light

Daily prayer

I hail you, Player-with-Light. Your radiance fills the world with color. revealing the beauty and potential in everything. I open my eyes to your glow, and I ask you to shine in me and through me, filling me with your energy, and guiding my expression to show who and what I truly am.

For self-expression

You of startling color and beams of radiance, you who shine in stars and souls and eyes and imagination, you whose luminance reveals even the things we hide from ourselves, be with me as I seek to make myself known.

You bring joy to exploration, and shame cannot withstand your brilliance. May I find freedom in the games you play, learning how to weave images that tell truth beyond their source.

Prism-Plumed, Rainbow-Marked, Lantern-Tailed, shine on me, and with me, and through me, in all your colors and refracting forms, that I may see the truth within me, and understand how to project it forth, bright enough that even those with eyes closed cannot help but see me as I know I am.

Player-with-Light, be with me.

The Crafter-of-Wonders

The Crafter is an insectile being who sings the joy of ritual and collective work toward a greater goal. They guide in focus and harmony toward a specific end. They sometimes feel as if they must be another face of the Sculptor-of-Pieces, but their imagery is very distinct and vibrant on its own, leaving this as one of those complicated deity-identity questions.

Species

Spindly social insect, fox, _____

Colors

Gold, tan, green, iridescence, _____

Imagery

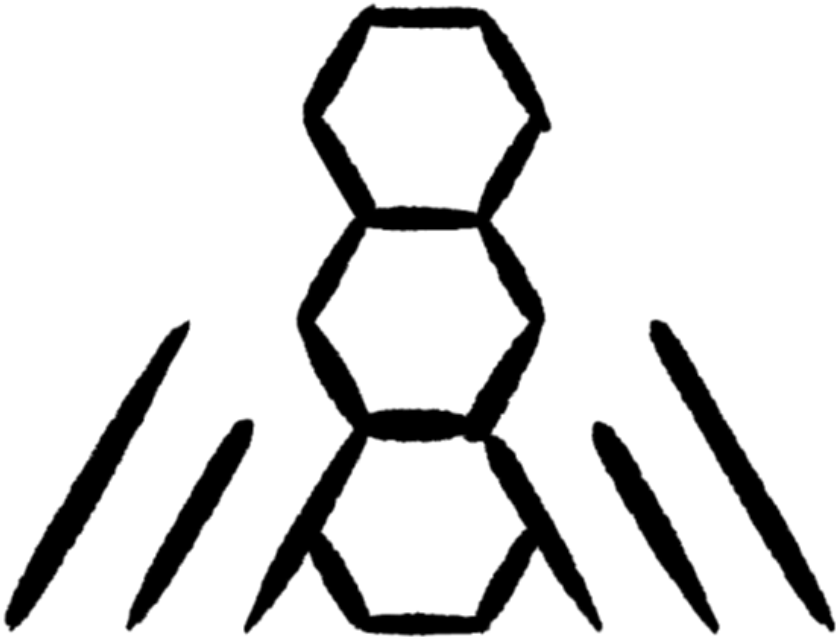
Honey, herbs, towers, hives, interlocking bricks, a melodious song in the head, _____

Epithets

Harmonious, Towering, Swift-Fingered, Smooth-Armored, _____

Example invocation

Crafter-of-Wonders, your designs bolster and refine our work, be with us.



Prayers for the Crafter-of-Wonders

Daily prayer

I hail you, Crafter-of-Wonders. Your rhythm calls us to find our pace together and urges us to share our note, within the right chord, in a song that enriches us all. Not one need sound too strong or sustain too long, when so many flowing together may still express themselves clearly. May I find the beat that carries me and those I work with as we strive to make the world more wondrous.

For working together

You of joined songs and many limbs, you who inspire grand designs and tend to simple needs, you who see the worth of all work that supports and sustains, be with us as we seek to be more together than we ever could be apart.

You bring strength to our hands, focus to our minds, and connection to our hearts. May we all find our place within the works you inspire, honoring our individuality within the panoply of together-work.

Swift-Fingered, Harmony-Calling, Verdant-Shining, work through us and with us, so that what we build together will be strong and useful, and carry us through the work to the celebration and rest on the other side, knowing that we all did what we could, and no more.

Crafter-of-Wonders, be with us.

The Swimmer-Within

The Swimmer sometimes feels at a remove from the others, rarely encountered walking on land or speaking in words. They are more often experienced as a song or pull within; it almost seems like they were the very waters that gathered all the Wanderers together. Regardless, now they are the one that reminds us how we are all connected, the same seawater running through our veins, the same matter birthing us at the beginning and accepting us at the end.

Species

Otter, manta, dolphin, _____

Colors

Deep blue, shades of teal, _____

Imagery

Water, rivers, networks, double helices, mycelia, blood in the body, dreams, _____

Epithets

Sleek, Melodious, All-Surrounding, Sea-Voiced, Life-Lending, _____

Example invocation

Swimmer-Within, your flow guides me toward deep understandings, be with me.

Prayers for the Swimmer-Within

Daily prayer

I hail you, Swimmer-Within. I see your light as you pass, oh radiant explorer, seeker of the wondrous bounty of innermost dream. I swim with you, dancing in your wake, filling my breath with the cool tides of the deepest truest self. May I ride the gyres between dream and waking, and may I discover the wonder in both.

For healing

Wellspring of primal emotion, flow of all nature's changes, pulse of life and death and renewal, you who dwelt in the guiding rivers, you whose healing reaches to the hearts of the earth, you whose depths accept us all, be with me as I seek to make myself whole.

Life-lending, sea-voiced healer of spirits and bodies alike, help me to feel what within me needs mending, to see the steps I can take to help myself, and to trust others who can assist me along the way. Soothe my pain and anxiety, so that I can find the peace and comfort that will help me to be complete.

All-surrounding tide, sea in my veins, wondrous dreamer, tend to me, and give me the strength to tend to myself. Bring me back to balance, so that I can find my place in the grand currents of life, and share your vitality with all those I swim with.

Swimmer-Within, be with me.

The Painter-in-Rust

Wherever there is entropy, the inevitable wearing down, there is the Painter, using it as their medium of art. They seem indifferent to what folks want; they can't be propitiated to ignore one thing and focus on another. Instead, offerings to the Painter involve making something new of the things they've had their way with, if only so that the Painter can use them as a canvas once more sometime in the future.

Species

Raven, undefined predatory canid, _____

Colors

Black, ash gray, bone white, rust red, _____

Imagery

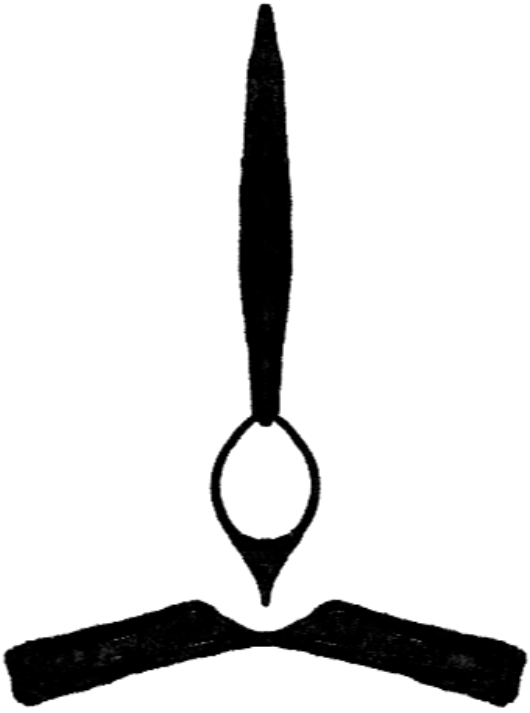
Knife-like feathers, rusted metal, paint brushes, blood spilled, _____

Epithets

Soft-Feathered, Cruel-Fanged, Fine-Brushed, Sharp-Taloned, _____

Example invocation

Painter-in-Rust, your marks show us what is passing away, may we see them clearly.



Prayers for the Painter-in-Rust

For difficult days

O Painter-in-Rust:
In this moment of failure,
In this hour of loss,
In this time of ruin,
I see your brush.
What's done is done,
Your work goes on,
And so does mine.

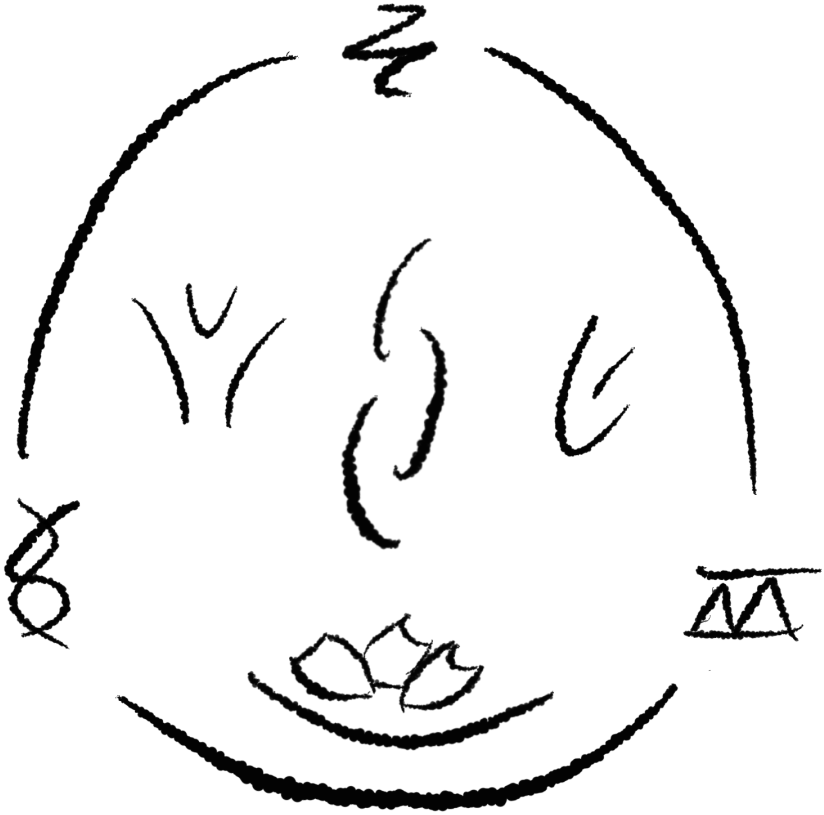
For moving on

You of sharp talons and soft feathers, you who mixes the colors of ash and ruin, you whose brush cannot be denied, be with me as I part from that which I no longer need.

Your work shows the potential that lies hidden in endings, and reveals the truths we fear to face. Your skilled strokes mark the boundaries between then and now, sound and silence, life and death. Help me know on which side I stand, and where to draw my own borders.

Blade-plumed, ever-patient ender of stories, show me the beauty that can come from decay and entropy, and help me to accept the endings that I face. Be with me as I put to rest that which has passed, and help me clear the way for whatever comes next.

Painter-in-Rust, be with me.



Basic Practice: Offering & Ritual

The most important part of the Conflux tradition is the connections we form with the Wanderers and other spirits around us. The way we build those connections is through offering and ritual. These two ideas are closely intertwined; every offering is a small ritual, and every ritual includes an offering. Still, it's helpful to talk about them separately to understand their purposes and see how they support each other.

Offering

Offering is as simple and as profound as giving a gift to a friend. In the animist context of the Conflux, everything around us is alive, is in some sense a person, and that means the worlds are filled with relationships, actual and potential. The earth gives us gifts of food and water, the sun gives warmth and light, the Wanderers give inspiration and guidance, and we give them all thanks, attention, and sometimes material things as well. Try not to think of this as an exchange; but instead as simply what we can do for each other. Imagine a group of friends who go out to lunch regularly, each one paying for what they can, when they can. It's less about splitting the bill than it is about knowing that folks around you appreciate the thought. When someone is short on money, maybe others help cover them, not even because they expect to be repaid, but because the time together itself is important.

We give to the Gods and spirits the same way. It's not that they need food, or water, or praise. It's about how the act of sharing with them helps demonstrate and strengthen a connection. Thinking about it this way can also help answer the often-troublesome questions of "What should I give?" and "How much should I offer?" There's no clear right answer, but think of how intent and context affect how a friend will react to a gift you give them. A small taste of a meal that one really enjoys could be far more meaningful than a whole bottle of expensive wine offered in haste.

This shows how knowing what a particular God or spirit enjoys (or just making a thoughtful guess) can be very helpful, but that's not always possible. If you're starting a new relationship, or offering to a mixed group of beings (say, at a communal ritual), it can be more complicated. Fortunately, there are some good traditional offerings that you can expect to be well-received by almost anyone. The most fundamental of these are water and fire. Water is not only necessary for life, it also represents the rivers that flowed before the Wanderers, guiding Them and later Their people to a gathering place. In a sense, it was Their first gift to us, and it's always valued when returned in kind. Likewise, fire can be seen as Their second gift, in the form of the fire They built when They stopped Their wandering, as a place where anyone else who came near could warm themselves, cook their food, and more. In a broader sense, fire also represents action; controlled fire does not exist without the effort and intent to create it, and when it comes to offerings, effort and intent are central.

Beyond those two core offerings, there are particular food offerings which often make an appearance at ritual. Food that one grew or made oneself is a wonderful traditional offering. For those who don't have that available, consider "transformed food", items that went through a complicated process of change, such as bread, cheese, or wine. That process itself represents intent and care, as does the offerer's act of choosing a particular item from a wide variety.

So, with something to offer selected, how does someone do an offering? It should never be entirely casual, but it need not be an elaborate ritual. The first thing that an offerer needs is, of course, a place to put the offering. A small bowl works well for food and drink offerings. Ideally, it should be a specific bowl, used only for that purpose. This helps reinforce the intent of offerings, that you're actually giving something, rather than just putting food in a random bowl. If you put the bowl in a specific place and pair it with a candle, you can offer water, fire, and food all together, and you have the beginnings of an altar.

Part of what makes an offering is intent, and that means giving an offering is best done with some amount of focus. This can be as simple as a few words said when placing the offering in the bowl, or lighting the candle. These need not be fancy: "For hearth and home, and all those who inspire us" is a a simple phrase to use for house spirits and personal connections. Words for the Wanderers can be found elsewhere in this book. For a more focussed or elaborate offering, a good way to start is with a simple cleansing, even just washing your face and hands. This isn't necessarily because the spirits value purity for its own sake, but it serves as an intentional act that separates the offering time from whatever else you're doing that day. From there, rituals can get more and more involved and elaborate, as much as you feel is appropriate.

Before covering the broader topic of ritual, there's one more practicality about offerings that often comes up: What do you do with an offering after it's offered? Water and other liquids may disappear on their own, but food doesn't, and it's best not to leave fire burning forever. The best way to handle disposal of offerings is with its own care and intent. Leave the offering for however long seems appropriate; this could be just an hour or two (especially for fire offerings) or it could stretch into days, for food that doesn't spoil. When it's time to clean up, focus on taking the offering with a similar attitude to how it was offered in the first place. For fire, respectfully blow it out (breath itself can be an offering as well) and for food and drink, carry it outside, and find a place to pour or set it out, returning it to the earth. This can be an offering in itself, giving up what the other Gods and spirts left over to be returned to the cycle of the worlds.

Ritual

At its core, ritual is about setting aside time and space as special, to create a context where we can more easily interact with beings and forces that are outside our day-to-day experience. Even though the world is full of beings, and the Wanderers are always with their followers, it's sometimes hard to feel that in the press of everyday life. Good ritual helps create a place where the everyday can meet the extraordinary, an

experience called liminality. Creating small bits of liminality can be as simple as focussed intent, acknowledging that there are others around us worth focussing on and giving to. This is the sort of 'ritual' that goes with any offering, as described above. However, sometimes, something bigger feels appropriate, and that's where ritual structure comes in handy.

A structured ritual creates liminality by setting off a time and a space as distinct from the rest of life. Time is set aside not just by having a distinct beginning and ending to the ritual, but also often by having the ritual tied to a particular occurrence. For the Conflux (and many other traditions), the most common of these are the solstices, the equinoxes, and midpoints between them, but there could also be special days set aside for particular Wanderers (or ancestors, or other spirits), or other ways of marking time like the phases of the moon or the turns of the weather.

Many rituals likewise set aside space by being held at a particular location, which could be a specially-built Channel hall, or simply an outdoor fire ring. However, the most effective method to set aside liminal space is to build it into the ritual structure itself. A traditional way to do this, both in the Conflux and otherwise, is to mark off a circle with words and motions. In Conflux traditions, the circle is marked off by calling on the spirits of the great cycle of Spark, Stone, and Smoke, either equally placed around the circle, or marked off at the points of sunrise, noon, and sunset respectively. Focusing on these large spirits helps center the ritual attendees in a greater context, reminding them of the cosmos around them, and recreating that cosmos in miniature to help create the liminal space.

Another good way to establish liminal space is to call on liminal deities. All the Wanderers can take on liminal aspects, as they are all between one thing and another, but the Dancer-Between and Singer-in-Silence have a special connection to liminality. The Dancer is a wordless guide, always moving and changing Themself and others, while the Singer's words break through boundaries, and Their hooves carry Them to the

ends of the world. These Wanderers are always ready and willing to guide ritual-workers along liminal paths.

Once liminal time and space are established, the real work of ritual begins. The specifics of this can vary greatly according to need, but remember that they should always include some sort of offering. If the ritual is asking for something, it only makes sense to give something in return, but even if not, this liminal context is one of the best ways to give offerings with full thought and intent.

The list of other things that can be done in ritual is nearly endless. Either alone or in groups, the ritual context is ideal for connecting to the Wanderers or other spirits in prayer or simple meditation, or for focussed spellwork or journeying. Group ritual is also very valuable for building connections not just between the attendees and the Gods and spirits called in the ritual, but also among the attendees themselves, building and strengthening community bonds. Even social activities like discussion, toasting, and feasting can be held inside a ritual context. The ritual context itself can help these times feel more special and impactful, and the presence of Gods and spirits can help bless and enliven the gathering even more.

After the work of the ritual is done, it's important to do some sort of closing. This helps provide a border for the influence and experience of the ritual itself, reinforcing the feeling of liminal space and time simply by saying that the group is now out of it. An easy way to close a ritual is to do a simple version of the ritual opening in reverse; thank the spirits who were called in, and thank Smoke, Stone, and Spark in that order, running the circle of liminal space in reverse before going to join the rest of the world.

On the following pages are example scripts for ritual, one for individual practice at an altar, and one for a larger group in a circle. Like everything else in this book, take these as inspiration and illustration for how ritual can be constructed, and be creative in how you adapt them to your needs and your understanding.

Personal Altar Practice

(The altar should ideally have candles for the deities you're focusing on, and a bowl to pour or place offerings into.)

(Facing the altar)
I walk below the lights above, and Spark charges me.

(Turned 120° clockwise)
I walk among the streets around, and Stone bolsters me.

(Turned 120° clockwise again)
I walk atop the pulse beneath, and Smoke changes me.

(Facing the altar again)
I walk with you, Wanderers, and you guide me.

Dancer-Between, you open the way, and Singer-in-Silence, you call me along it.

(Light candle and pour offerings for the liminal gods.)
Crowned Siblings, be with me.

(Light candles, pour offerings, and say words for whichever Wanderers you're focusing on. The sample invocations in the Wanderers section of the Trails can be used for inspiration.)

(Do whatever work you're intended at the altar; prayer, spellwork, journeying, etc.)

(Thank the gods and spirits who you offered to and blow out their candles in reverse order, ending with the Crowned Siblings)

By the bonds forged between me and all you who shape me, so may it be, here and onwards.

Group Circle Practice

(Traditionally, this would be done around a fire, in a circle marked off with the points for north and south, and the directions of the current day's dawn and dusk. These are not necessary, though; a table with a candle and a floor marked with the standard four directions work perfectly well.)

(The rite-tender begins standing on the north edge of the circle)
We gather here, and now, to not just be here, and now, but to flow together, journeying from our day-to-day lives to find a bright blazing point of connection.

That place of potential is always just a few steps away, waiting to be experienced, heralded by the liminal beings who weave the path from here to there if we just know how to look, how to listen, how to feel.

As I walk around the circle, I'm going to call in those spirits, and I'd like you to call them in with me. Make noise, move your body, whatever helps connect you to them.

(Walk around the circle clockwise, to the point of dawn/east)
Look to the sky above you, the sun long gone, but the moon and the stars still shining bright in the long night.

See them, those guiding lights above us, and the shining examples of myth and legend among them, dancing and teaching and leading the way.

We call you, Spirits of Lights, and Inspiration. Be with us.

(Leave space for others in the circle to call the spirits)

Spirits of Spark, guide our journey.

(Walk around the circle clockwise, to the south)
Listen to the world around you, busy as it is. Everything there seeks connection, seeks its own place.

Even in what seems like chaos, if we listen closely, we can still hear the singers behind it all, and the rhythm that helps us find our way to what matters most.

We call you, Spirits of Streets, and Pattern. Be with us.

(Leave space for others in the circle to call the spirits)

Spirits of Stone, guide our journey.

(Walk around the circle clockwise, to the point of dusk/west)
Feel the earth below you, firm and steady, but filled with life, changing as the seasons change.

Reach with your mind into that ground, into that pulse that connects us all, and feel the living flow that is with us through all our own transitions.

We call you, Spirits of Pulse, and Change. Be with us.

(Leave space for others in the circle to call the spirits)

Spirits of Smoke, guide our journey.

(Walk around the circle clockwise, back to the starting point)
Look, listen, feel. Know. All of them are here with us, guiding us along their path.

And so... *(joined by others in the circle)* we find ourselves in a place between!

(Here, someone may tell a story of the season, share other words, or lead a meditation. At its close, they should call for an offering to the spirits or others who are the focus of the circle, and close out with a toast to the same.)

We've experienced, we've offered, we've toasted, and now we take what we've found here back to the world where we came from. Here, with the

lights above us, the streets around us, and the pulse beneath us, we thank all those who help us on our paths, no matter the season.

(Walk around the circle counter-clockwise, to the point of dusk/west)
You who are with us through change, we thank you.

(Leave space for the thanks of others in the circle, then walk around the circle counter-clockwise, to the south)
You who give shape to our lives, we thank you.

(Leave space for the thanks of others in the circle, then walk around the circle counter-clockwise, to the point of dawn/east)
You who inspire our glow, we thank you.

(Leave space for the thanks of others in the circle, then walk around the circle counter-clockwise, back to the starting point)
And now, no matter where we are, may we feel them close, knowing wherever we are, they are with us.

So may it be... *(joined by others in the circle)* here and onwards!

Cosmology

A quick note before beginning this section: Herein are described the basics of otherworld travel within the Conflux tradition, but this is not a complete treatment of the subject. Journeywork and astral travel should never be done in isolation; they requires forethought, context, and a well-defined goal. This section, and this Codex, are a starting point, not a complete map. Seek out other sources and guides if this sort of exploration calls to you.

The Cycle

As the story of emergence describes, the Conflux believes the whole cosmos is in a constant cycle of creation, form-finding, and transformation as it endlessly discovers and understands itself. The fundamental elements of the cosmos are also classified by which of these stages they focus on.

Spark is the unformed creative force, full of energy and potential and beginnings. It's inspiring, energizing, and somewhat overwhelming. Boundless creation can't sustain itself, but it's well that it's always there, ready to feed the cycle.

Stone represents the forms taken as the initial burst of creation eases down into more solid shapes. It represents not just materiality and stasis, but also the complexity and inter-relation required for such manifestations to stay stable.

Smoke represents what happens when things begin to break down and transform, whether through necessity and refinement, or simple entropy. Ever-shifting smoke embodies change in all its forms, but it's not an end; it's a medium from which new sparks will always emerge.

The Realms

A different way of looking at this cycle and its elements is to consider the cosmos itself in terms of realms in which each one is dominant. Each of these realms could hold worlds within, or could be different ways of looking at a single world.

The realm of **Lights** is where Spark holds sway; bright-shining and full of possibility. It can be seen in the stars, scattered so wildly across the sky, but nonetheless holding the potential to find pattern and inspire legends. When one seeks new ideas, or the energy to create, they would do well to look upward toward the Lights.

The realm of **Streets** is that of Stone, all the pathways and designs that help us navigate the world around us. They're easily overlooked, but they should not be discounted, whether one follows the streets or cuts between them, they provide a structure by which to understand the world. When one seeks to succeed in this structure, or shift it according to their needs, they're focused on the Streets.

The realm of **Pulse** is where Smoke is found, despite the fact that it's described as the deeps from which life is born and into which it dies, through which water and fire flow underground. Still, this is the site of so much change, of both decay and the nutrients needed for new seeds. When one is looking to cast away the old, or change fundamentally, one is seeking the Pulse.

In Conflux ritual, when we seek to step outside the day-to-day, we look to these realms, as each of them represents a liminal perspective on the worlds around us, and taken together, they allow us to reach even further.

The Rivers

Central to Conflux cosmology is the imagery of a vast river network, branching from myriad unspecified sources, joining together on the way to an unspecified destination. This immediately calls to mind the tracks

of the tears that the Wanderers followed until they all met each other at the place that became their town. Those streams, and that confluence, are certainly a part of the Rivers, but even they are a microcosm to its macrocosm. The cosmos is so much bigger than the places the Wanderers have wandered, and the place where the waters gather is not the endpoint of the Rivers, merely the end of that particular journey.

The Rivers are liminal, always in movement. They lead from abstract headwaters, connecting and dividing countless worlds through their tributaries, and finally gathering at a mouth far beyond the places we know, which still somehow allows their waters to return to their source. To travel the Rivers is to move between worlds. One may wade laterally, following the **Path of Rivers**, and finding their way to the imaginal realms nearby our own, but most travel is done either downstream or upstream.

Downstream, the course widens and the water gets deeper as one moves closer to the outlet where all the Rivers become one. This is the path to the deepest realms of Pulse and Smoke. Moving with the current is easy, as everything flows downriver, and before long, a focused traveller will end up underwater, among all that can be found in the depths: ancestors, history, and secrets. This is called the **Path of Roots**, since the traveller must be willing to stretch downward, seeking water at its source.

Traveling upstream can be more strenuous; the traveller is not only walking against the river's current, but also uphill. This path leads into smaller and smaller tributaries, higher and higher up into the mountains of abstraction and possibility, towards the realm of Lights and Spark. Here the traveller can more easily reach the inspirations and possibilities held there; this is the path by which the Singer called back the Sun, and where the Crowned Siblings together pierced the sky. As such, this is called the **Path of Antlers**, and the traveller may find themself taking on a light-footed, branch-crowned form as they seek the Rivers' sources.

A Journeywork Outline

When intending to travel the Rivers (whether up, down, or across), there are a few important things to keep in mind. The first is to have a safe place to start from, and return to. The traveller should find or create a mental or spiritual place where they feel comfortable and at home. For the most part, the details are up to individual need and desire, except for one: The space should include a place for water to flow through the scene. It doesn't need to be a large river; it could be a desert arroyo, or a mountain brook, or even a canal in a city. The important part is simply the access to water that flows into and out of the scene, that the traveler can enter into.

Once the traveler feels comfortable in this space, near this water, the first thing to do before traveling is to build a fire. This fire represents both the traveler's home-hearth, and the fire that the Wanderers built when they first gathered together by Their own riverside. The Rivers are endlessly branching, and the fire helps guide a traveller back to the place where they begin. A good traveller's fire has accepted many offerings, and heard many stories of journeys, and is fed well enough that the traveller can return to warm themself after their journey, whether they're soaked from a trip to the deeps, or chilled from the winds of the heights.

Once the fire is established, the traveler should focus on that river (or brook, or stream, or canal) while still staying aware of the fire. Perhaps you feel its heat, or smell its smoke, see its sparkle on the water. This fire-sign will follow you through your journey, and help lead you back home when it's time.

Next, enter the water. A good way to start is to actually not go anywhere, but to instead just feel the flow of the river as it is, allowing it to cleanse you. It's flowing from the Lights, toward the Pulse, connecting you to the Gods, ancestors, and other spirits across the cosmos. It can carry away what you don't need, and bring what you do. In fact, this is a good method for spiritual cleansing even if you don't intend to go on a journey at all.

Once you're ready for your journey, follow the river in whatever way suits your intent. The path to ancestors and primal forces is downstream, and you can expect to sink in, rooting yourself and likely going fully under the surface as you find your way their. The path to inspiration and the Wanderers is usually upstream, where you'll have to navigate through currents, and likely eventually explore upward beyond the river's bank's as you rise. Crossing the river, you'll find yourself in other worlds with embodied folks with their own experiences, and you may need to cross more than one river to get where you're going.

In all these cases you'll likely find yourself leaving the river's course at some point, whether in the abstract realms of Lights and Pulse, or just finding places in the otherworlds that don't happen to be directly on a riverbank. However, in all these cases it's important to be able to retrace your steps, or at least find your way back to the Rivers in some sense. Finding your way back to your fire and your beginning-place is an important part of the journey; it allows you to solidify and ground your experience, helping you remember more of what's important, and settle back into the rest of your life once your journey is done. If you ever feel unsure on how to get back, remember to look for those fire-signs that you noticed before you left.

Once you find your way back to your fire, take a moment to sit there. Think about your journey, including the trip there and back. What did you learn, what did you see? What do you want to remember, and take back with you. Let it settle before opening your eyes and returning to your day-to-day life.

There's much more to traveling the Rivers than is included here; there's much about it that the author does not even know yet. Take care and walk carefully in all your travels; rivers can rise unexpectedly, have unsteady footing, or hide strong currents under the most placid-looking surfaces.

Prayers & Recitations

One thing bears repeating, when presenting what could be considered ritual language: These are representative, not prescriptive. They were composed off the cuff, or by adaptation of other sources, and are constantly adapted based on current need. Please, adapt them yourself as well.

For the Wanderers

Thank you, Dancer-Between, for opening this way between us.
Thank you, Singer-In-Silence, for helping us step through.
Thank you, Writer-With-Flames, for inspiring us to write our stories.
Thank you, Player-With-Light, for showing us how to glow in darkness.
Thank you, Sculptor-Of-Pieces, for helping us find shape and fit.
Thank you, Crafter-Of-Wonders, for the structures that unite us.
Thank you, Swimmer-Within, for the flow of our lives.
Thank you, Painter-In-Rust, for the breaks we need to accept.
Thank you, all Wanderers and all you others who walk with us in harmony, for the paths we all find together.

Walking Meditation

Lights above me
Streets around me
Pulse beneath me
You are with me

(Take one step per syllable and perform a four-fold breath; breathing in on the first line, holding on the second, breathing out on the third, holding on the fourth, and repeating)

Centering mantra

I walk below the Lights above, and Spark charges me.
I walk along the Streets around, and Stone supports me
I walk atop the Pulse beneath, and Smoke evolves me.

Mealtime Thanks & Blessing

Thank you chefs and servers, thank you grocers and truckers, thank you farmers and ranchers. All hands who brought this meal to us, we thank you.

Thank you Spark, Stone, and Smoke; thank you earth, sea, and sun, thank you animals and plants. Everything that birthed this meal, fed this meal, and became this meal, we honor you.

Thank you Wanderers, thank you ancestors, thank you spirits of the land. All you who touch our lives, we thank you and honor you. Bless this meal, that it may help us grow together, and grow strong.

By the bonds forged between us and all you who shape us, so may it be here and onwards.

(Adapt the first line, or any other lines, as appropriate to your eating situation. Name the chef or other helpers, if you can.)

A Traveler's Prayer

I thank the Dancer-Between, for showing us how to make and hold connections, near and far

I thank the Singer-in-Silence, for helping us move in safety from far to near to far again.

I thank the Writer-in-Flames, for aiding in our self-discovery.

I thank the Player-with-Light, for helping us to express ourselves, to each other.

I thank the Sculptor-of-Pieces, for seeing how our different expressions fit together.

I thank the Crafter-of-Wonders, for allowing us the wonders of travel and coordination.

I thank the Swimmer-Within, for guiding and guarding our travels.
I thank the Painter-in-Rust, for accepting the damage we could withstand.

May we wander with the Wanderers, here and beyond.
May they guide us to our homes, now and onward.

The Hoofpaw Cry

(A prayer for protection, after L'Engle)

Standing here in this fateful hour
I call the land with all its power,
And the night with its darkness,
And the stars with their starkness,
And the sun blazing bright,
And the winds' swift might,
And the sea with its deepness,
And the rocks with their steepness,
And fire with all the strength it hath,
And lightning with its rapid wrath,
All these I place,
By the Wanderers' help and grace,
Between ourselves and those who threaten us.

The Channel Prayer

Wanderers, make me a channel of your glow.
Where there is dogma, may I bring liminality
Where there is lack, hospitality
Where there is fear, clarity
Where there is pain, empathy
Where there is need, service
Where there is shame, courage

Powers at the heart of the worlds, grant that I may
Offer and accept your flow in equal measure:
Inspiring others and being inspired
Supporting others and being supported
Changing others and being changed
For it is with our glow that we share love
It is through our connections that we are reshaped
And it is in our transitions that we are filled with new glow.

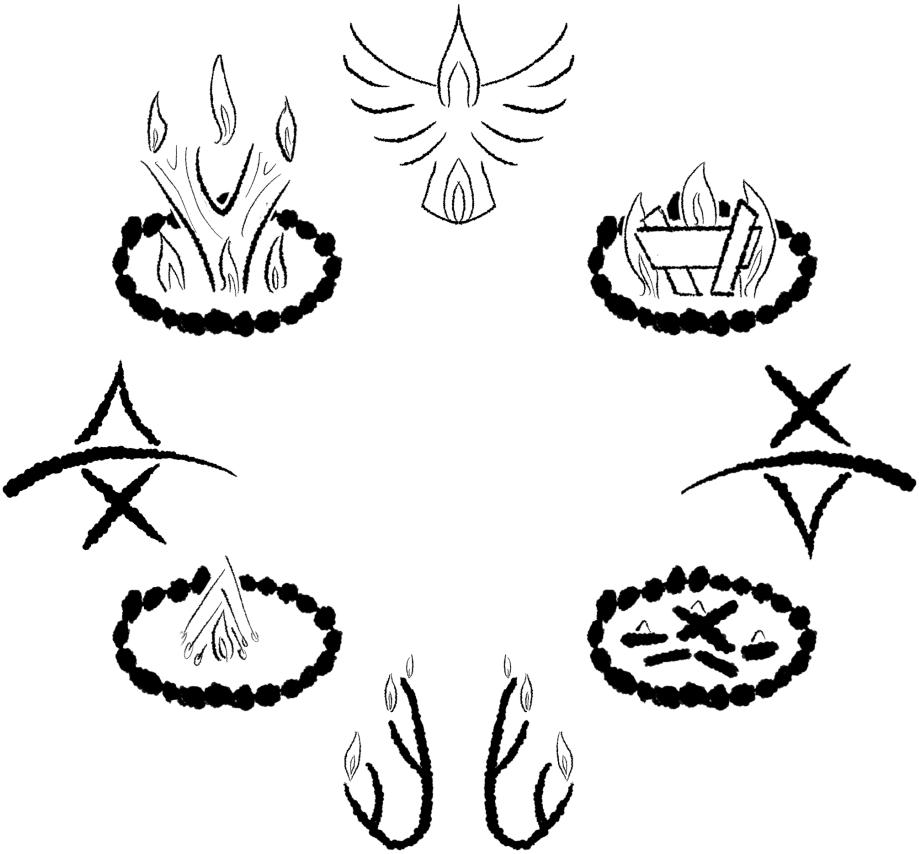
A Glowtide Carol

Glowtide night, Solstice night,
Gather 'round, flames so bright
Share your fire and watch our blaze grow
'Til our circle's united in glow
Know the sun will return, Know the sun will return

Glowtide night, Solstice night
Waning days filled with fright
Darkness seeming to swallow us all
So we'll turn to each other and call
Here you can be safe and warm
Here you can be safe and warm

Glowtide night, Solstice night
Warmth and love, dark takes flight
Spirits kindled by gift and by song
Lend their help when the nighttime is long
None of us are alone
None of us are alone

Glowtide night, Solstice night
Here we stand, joined in light
Blessings pass along our glowing arc
Bringing ra·di·ance into the dark
Hail the sun's new return
Hail the sun's new return



The Conflux Calendar

The Conflux ritual calendar is solar, starting with the day the Wanderers and their people called the waning sun back, and dividing the year by the sun's increasing and decreasing presence in the sky. Celebrations aren't tied to agricultural concerns, but instead to the subjective experience of living in a place where the amount of sun makes a big difference in day-to-day life (for instance, a high desert, or a location fairly far from the equator).

For the ritual calendar, the growth and decline of the sun is symbolized as a fire, centered around the four rite dates that give each season their name.

The season of **Kindling** begins at the close of Glowtide (a few days after the longest night of the year) and lasts until the following equinox. This season represents the time when the Sun is weak but growing, like a fire newly set that still needs tending. The rite of **Kindled Fire** is held in the middle of the Kindling season, focusing on that tenuous but exciting time, inviting folk to think about the work they can do to finish getting through the cold times, and to look forward to the future, through activities such as divination and cleansing.

The first equinox in the year is called **Evenlight**, honoring the first time when there's more day than night. This rite calls the attendees to think about what they can put into action over the coming months, as the world around them begins to really come to life under the light of the sun.

The season of **Flaring** is next, as the sun continues to grow in strength until the longest day of the year. The rite in the middle of the Flaring season is **Fire's Gift**, and it's one of the more lively ones, a time to honor the warm season and give thanks for what it brings. The weather is dry but pleasant, the air is warm, but not too hot, making it a good time for deepening connections with nature, the gods, and other folk.

The longest day if the year is celebrated as **Blazetide**, another joyful time, and a common time for beginning new things, like a relationship, a household, or a Circle. Blazetide is often as much of a party as a ritual, with circle-folk all contributing to the celebration with food, art, story, or something else, enjoying the long day well into the short night.

The first season of the sun's decline is the season of **Forging**, where focus turns to the downside of so much light in the sky; the long days turn hot, but their gradual shortening is a reminder that there's work to be done. Likewise, its centerpoint rite of **Fire's Need** recognizes the difficulty and responsibility inherent in (symbolically) keeping a fire; it needs fuel, and tending, and to some extent it's there for a purpose, whether that purpose is to work metal or simply to gather around.

The latter equinox of the year marks the rite of **Evendark,** when the diminishment of the sun and the close of the year are really being felt. This ritual is a time to speak of and honor the deeds done in the past year (or further back) that they can be used to metaphorically bank the coals, and help bring warmth in cold times. Such rituals often feature a story-circle where attendees all try to top each other, as long as the stories are all true.

The last season of the year is called **Fading**, as the night grows so much longer than the day, and the air grows cold. The rite it surrounds is called **Fading Fire**, a time to reflect on the necessity and inevitability of entropy and passing, but also to honor what came before. Ancestors are particularly honored in this season and at this rite, with offerings that bring to mind the departed, and feasts that invite them to the table.

Finally, at the end of the year, on the longest nights, is **Glowtide**. Glowtide consists of a few days on each side of the actual shortest day and longest night. Glowtide is an intercalary time, five or six days not counted as any other season, used to allow the other seasons to each have an equal number of days. The rite of Glowtide tells one of the stories of that first longest night, and the calling back of the sun, and closes with sharing of firelight between attendees, which they then share out into the world. Glowtide is otherwise focused on a lot of feasting and

gathering, with folk keeping each other close and warm in the dark times, and celebrating hard enough to wake the sun for a new year.

The Antler-Tines

In the Antlers Pierce the Sky myth, the Wanderers brought back symbols from beyond that helped bring insight. In the story, they released many symbols, and collected only a handful that felt most meaningful to them. The Antler-Tine divination method is built off of those symbols, and has been used for fortune-reading, spirit communication, and simple introspection alike.

Like everything in the worlds, the symbols themselves are spirits. Each tine reflects parts of the world, and each one tells stories. The tines are never as simple as a single keyword meaning; no thing is just one thing. Lists of things that an individual tines can represent are sometimes even self-contradictory. The context of a tine, and the relationship between tines, can help sort through these, but some intuition from the reader, informed by their own relationship with the tines, is even more helpful.

Making a set

Reading the antler-tines usually involves position and orientation, so any set of tines should be inscribed on 27 small objects with a clear top and bottom, that can sit next to or on top of each other. As the name suggests, the most classic manifestation of the tines would involve them being carved on antler tips, suggestive of the act that brought the tines from the beyond. However, many other objects can work well, even pieces of paper, as long as the stock is heavy enough that they can be tossed without floating too far away.

For the purposes of reading, it's also important to have field to read them upon. A cloth works well, as long as it allows the tines to lay flat on it. It can also be helpful, particularly for a set made of light materials, to have a way of bounding the field. A flattenable bag works, or a flat-bottomed bowl, or just a second piece of cloth wrapped around the edges of the field cloth. For particularly detailed readings, you can also use a marked field, as described in the next session.

Reading the tines

Without looking, the querent should randomly choose a small number of tines by reading into a bag (or picking while shuffling, for cards) A good number to aim for is between three and five. There should always be at least two, since the antler-tines are always read in relation to each other, but there's no upper limit other than the willingness of the reader to interpret so many symbols at once.

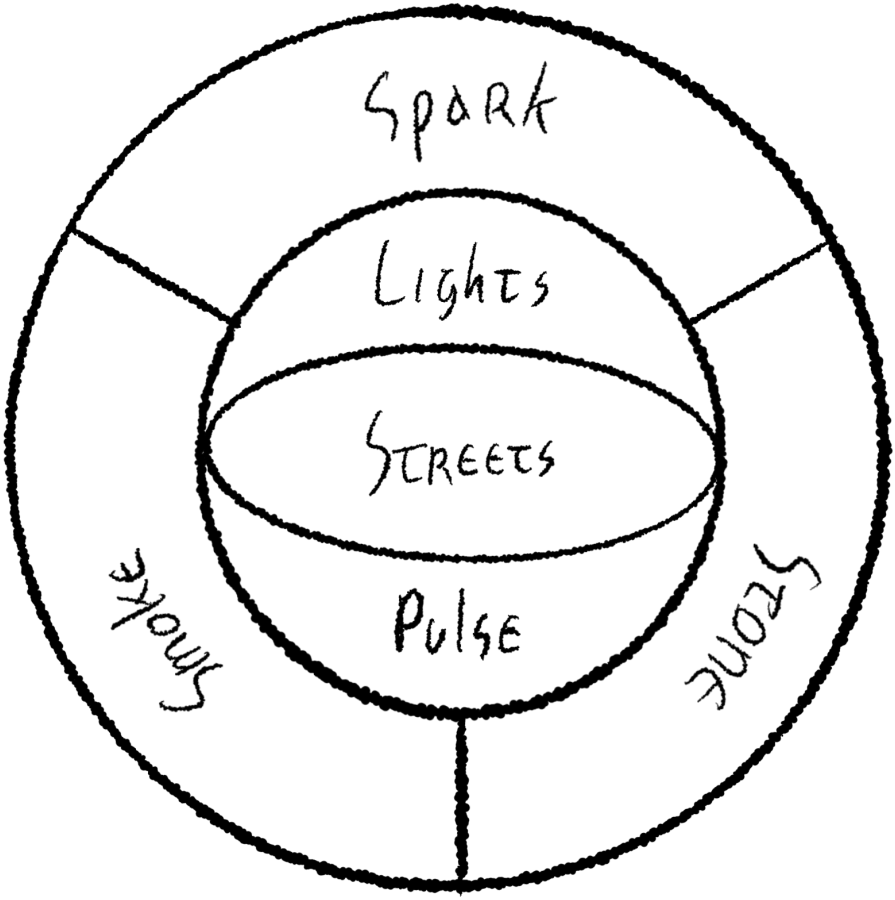
Still without looking at the tines selected, the querent should then drop the tines on the field, letting them land as they will. If any end up outside the bounds of the field, those should be excluded from the reading, unless this leaves only one tine on the field. In that case, take note of the ones that were chosen but fell away, and consider them as distant influences.

To interpret the tines, the reader should take note of which are grouped together, and in what positions. The definition of a group should be left to intuition, but a good guideline is that any tines that are closer together than the length of an individual tines can be read as in relation with each other.

The angles that the tines make with each other can help suggest the nature of the relationship. For instance, two tines pointing tip-to-tip might be at cross-purposes, while two pointed in the same direction may be aligned toward the same goal. Two tines in a T-shape could represent one blocking another, and two pointing at each other's bases can suggest balance. It's also possible to see groups interacting with each other, or larger structures like an arc of tines taking shape across the whole field.

The position of the tines on the field itself can also hold meaning. Tines closer in tend to relate to internal and spiritual matters, while ones further out talk about relations with the outside world. For more detail, the field can also be viewed cosmologically. For this sort of reading, think of the inner part split into thirds vertically, representing the realms of the Lights (divinity and inspiration), Streets (spirits of the

day-to-day, including the Self), and Pulse (ancestors and memory). Then, think of the outside as divided into thirds radially, representing the cycle of Spark (creation and potential), Stone (patterns and stability, and Smoke (transformation and endings). In all cases, these should be seen as a gradient, a tone near the border of Smoke and Spark might represent impending renewal, and one that bridges Lights and Streets might suggest a way to make that connection oneself.



Compiler's notes on meanings

What follows is based in my experiences with tines, including keywords and reflections. Since each one is an individual spirit, their true natures are necessarily more complex than can be put into words.

The text accompanying each tine is meant to put them in some sort of context within the broader worlds of the Wanderers, not to bound their meanings in any way. That sense of context can be helpful in understanding why a particular tine might look or feel a particular way. One overall context to bear in mind is that the tines come from a place where the sun is often hot, the soil is often dry, and water is precious. This is reflected specifically in several tines (like the Fruit and the Canyon) but it affects them all in subtle ways.

Note that specific Wanderers or other entities are barely mentioned within the meanings for the tines. Their origin is, after all, in the Wanderers search for meaning beyond themselves. I've found their readings are usually clearest when I resist the impulse to assume a particular tine relates to a particular deity, even when that connection would seem obvious.

All that being said, your experiences may differ from mine in many ways. Use these notes as a springboard, and dive deeper to find your own understanding.

Dance

Liminality, action, ecstasy

Dancing requires balance in motion, and an awareness of the rhythms and currents around you. It's a classic way to move between mental states and between worlds. Dance can be done for ritual or it can be done for sheer joy, but it must always be done with a willingness to let oneself be moved.

Song

Insight, communication, deities

Song captures attention and brings messages from afar. Truth can be found in song when simple spoken words won't do, but song can also stir the emotions in ways that make no rational sense. Even when wordless, song can carry meaning, but wise interpretation is still important.

Fire

Transformation, enlightenment, survival

Fire creates illumination and warmth where none was before, and the understanding of how to make it is a vital skill. Without fire in all its forms, few of us would be alive, and inner fire can keep us going when everything else seems cold. But fire's change can be heedless; it brings light and heat, but also leaves behind nothing but ash.

Land

Stability, materiality, slow change

The land supports us in so many ways. A place to stand, a means to grow food, a foundation for building. We expect, and rely on, a certain amount of unchangingness to the land, but it can change, and when it does, it often brings new challenges.

Clouds

The mind, imagination, mental health

Clouds are made of water that has flowed throughout the world; is it any wonder that they can form shapes that spark fantastical interpretations and inspirations? At the same time though, clouds can distract, obscure, and bring heavy weather. The line between 'little fluffy cloud' and 'dangerous thunderhead' can be thin.

Shade

Things hidden, transience, respite

Shadow is where light isn't, and it's hard to see what's inside a shadowed area when you're standing in the light. Still, those shaded places can be welcoming on a hot summer's day. Areas in shade change as the sun moves, marking the hours, but also demanding adjustment if we want to stay within it.

Crack

Damage, revelation, beginnings,

The shape of a lightning bolt can look strikingly similar to the shape of a fracture in a rock or an eggshell. The sky doesn't fall to pieces the way the others do, but in each case the event is shattering. The flow of things has been broken, and something new is going to happen from here.

Tears

Emotion, cleansing, guidance

People cry for all sorts of reasons. Joy, sadness, simple overwhelm. In all cases, it's a message that is worth paying attention to. The tears that come from those emotions can be a guide, a river flowing toward or away, or they can be a reminder that something is already gone, and that it's time to try to find a new path.

Sprout

New growth, fertility, breaking limits

When a plant first starts to grow, it's fragile, and vulnerable, and the seed it came from is soon to be cast off. Huge things can come from tiny beginnings with enough time, but it can take a lot of effort and knowhow to get that seed to germinate in the first place, not to mention helping it grow big and strong.

Roads

Choice, orientation, journeys

When one road crosses another, there are plenty of choices to make. Do you just keep going the way you were going, or is this is your turn? Do you know your path, or is it time to explore? Or perhaps it's just time to stay where you are, and see what else will come through this intersection?

Canyon

Confinement, endurance, history

If you find yourself in a canyon, you don't have a lot of choices; there's one path, and you're there until you're out.Still, there's things to be learned in a canyon; they're formed by the movement of water over eons of time, and the wise eye can read history in their walls, and people have even found those walls to be a good place to settle down and make a home, in some of those spans of history.

Rust

Entropy, hardship, release

Decay is inevitable; things wear down, and worn things can break. There can be a beauty in corrosion, and paint can be made from rust, but that doesn't mean we're happy when entropy does its work. Still, accepting that everything will rust can allow one to move with it, and move on.

Roots

Origins, mystery, ancestors

Roots spread. They grow, ever deeper, as time goes on, tapping further and further into the land, ensuring not only that it doesn't wash away, but also that it will grow and change. The roots call us to delve into the depths, to see how what's past and buried can still matter, and should be remembered.

Rivers

Connection, possibility, spirits

Rivers gather. Follow one long enough, and you'll wander far and wide. You'll see others join with it, all of their combined experiences coming together, the whole current getting bigger and stronger as it goes. Cities are founded where rivers meet, because they create ideal places to gather and grow.

Antlers

Attainment, protection, gods

Antlers reach. The Dancer and Singer aren't the only deities known for their head-decorations. Bearing them is an impressive feat; they grow back every year, becoming more complex and grand each time. Antlers reach into the worlds above, ready to carry us up, or bring wonders back down

Jaws

Hunger, danger, necessity

Everyone has to eat, and everyone runs some risk of getting eaten. Hunting isn't gentle, but it's necessary; starvation isn't gentle either. It's important to respect and be thankful for whatever allows us to be alive. It's also important to pay attention to the shifts in fortune that can come from primal need.

Hoof

Wildness, health, journeywork

Hooves carry horses along roads, deer through the forest, and allow goats to cling to the edges of cliffs. The hoof represents the diversity and vitality of the wild world outside the day-to-day, just waiting for you to have a run through it, so long as you find your way and keep your footing.

Fruit

Harvest, joy, hidden price

The fruit is specifically a cactus fruit. Tempting, bright-colored, delicious and sweet, but covered with tiny spines that will make eating it truly unpleasant for the unwary. The way to pluck and eat it safely is learned without much trouble, but it does requires a bit of care.

City

Systems, collective effort, restriction

The city provides walls and structure, but a city without people in it is merely a ruin. Structure can support and uplift, letting us stay safer and see farther than we would before, but it can also stifle and bind. What part of that structure are you building, and what part can you change?

Lantern

Beauty, perspective, individuality

Lanterns contain and shape light, allowing it to do more than it could otherwise. They direct it to where it's needed, but also change it. No two pieces of lantern-glass are the same, and those imperfections can alter the lantern's effect in ways that are sometimes frustrating, but other times beautiful.

Anvil

Self-improvement, endurance, craft

The Anvil is a place for work to be done. Whether it's a simple flat slab or a finely-crafted tool for bending and shaping, an anvil must withstand the heavy blows set upon it. The process of forging is strenuous for both the blacksmith and the iron they hammer.

Tree

Exertion, goals, strength

Atop the tallest mountain at the edge of the world, there's a still-taller tree. The end is in sight, but it's not quite here yet. Fortunately, climbing a tree can be easier than climbing a mountain. The tree itself is strong, able to bear weight, but it's up to you to pull yourself to the top.

Leap

Sacrifice, uncertainty, courage

When you've tried everything else, sometimes you need to risk yourself. Even if you look before you leap, you may not know where you're going to end up. Still, that doesn't necessarily mean that such a bold step isn't worth it. Success isn't assured, but stepping back from the edge has its own risks as well.

Family

Support, community, success

With arms outstretched, the family awaits those who need them, ready to catch them when they fall. Families are not made only of blood; the Wanderers themselves are a found pantheon after all, and they were willing and happy to ease the Dancer and Singer to the ground after their wild leap.

Stars

Legend, potential, learning

The sky is filled with stars. Some look scattered, some seem to form clear patterns. The stars tell stories, guide travelers, and await wishes. Their glittering majesty may seem chaotic at first glance, but studying them can reveal the mysteries of the universe.

Silence

Tension, inevitability, death

Silence is a blank tine. Silence gives no hints of what it holds, and silence when you're expecting something, anything, can be very anxiety-making. Silence does not only mean death; nothing is only one thing, but endings are certainly part of it. After the end, only silence remains.

Beyond

The unknown and unknowable

The Beyond is the place where the tines come from, the place of meaning and meaninglessness combined into one. When that beyond itself shows up in a reading, it must be considered first; it can give the other signs extra weight, or it can do the opposite. Especially if it's pulled first in a sequential reading, it may be telling you "this answer won't matter, and you might as well stop asking."

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