

The Handbook

Proposed revisions & open proposals — marked for your review

HOW TO GIVE ME NOTES YOU'VE HANDWRITTEN

This whole document was rebuilt from notes you wrote by hand. Here's how to make the next batch read cleanly:

1. **Use pen, and use colour.** Blue, red, green — any non-black ink. Colour lets me lift your marks cleanly off the black print. Pencil works but is fainter; a coloured pen is best.
2. **Point before you talk.** Circle or box the exact word/line you mean, then draw a short line out to your note in the margin. That tells me *what* the note is about, not just *that* there is one.
3. **One mark, one meaning.** Highlight = “this matters.” Strike-through = “cut this.” Caret (^) with a word = “insert here.” A question in the margin = “decide this with me.”
4. **Export as PDF, not a photo.** Annotating on the reMarkable and exporting a PDF keeps your ink as crisp vector strokes — those extract perfectly. A phone photo of paper works too, just less sharp.
5. **Big decisions in words.** For the 📌 proposals, a margin “yes,” “no,” or “option (a)” is enough — or dictate them to me like you did this round, which worked great.

Then just upload the marked-up PDF and say “read my notes.” I'll pull every mark, apply the settled ones, and bring the open ones back to you.

A ROLEPLAYING GAME · PLAYED WITH WORDS, NOT
DICE

COUNCIL

A Player's Handbook

PRINTED EDITION · ONE VOYAGE, ONE
VOLUME

*strive and pay, or be given — but keep hope, whatever the
weather*

Where to find things

How to Play FIVE MINUTES · READ THIS FIRST

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HOW TO PLAY · A GUIDE FOR THE CREW · FIVE MINUTES

Before You Sit Down

There are no dice here, and no character sheets. There is only the story we tell together — and a handful of promises about how it answers back.

- 1 You live a scene. You speak and act as your character, and the keeper plays the world around you. Most of the time, that is all there is — and it is enough.
- 2 A need arises the table can't just wish away. A locked door. A hidden truth. A thing that must be built or found. Under dice you'd roll. Here, you don't guess the magic question — you simply *reach* for the answer, and the world provides it by one of two ways below.
- 3 What comes back changes the next scene. And the tale sails on. That wheel — scene, answer, scene — is the whole of the game.

By Price

What you *pay for*. You may seize an answer by spending something of your own — a truth confessed, a new trouble taken on, a little time lost. Price is yours to demand. It always costs the self, and it is always true.

By Grace

What you are *given*. The keeper may hand you an answer freely — unearned, unasked, because you are stuck and the story loves you. Grace cannot be bought or demanded. It falls where it falls, and it falls most on those who keep trying and keep hoping.

Strive and pay, or be given. Most tales are told in the weather between the two.

YOU CANNOT BE TRULY STUCK

Behind every real obstacle the keeper has already written three clues — a gentle *nudge*, a plain *bearing*, and, at the last, the *answer* itself. They are never improvised and never withheld forever. However you reach for help — by cleverness, by price, by grace — one of these comes. No riddle in Council is a locked room with no key. That is a promise.

THE ONE THING WORTH KEEPING

Council is built to reward *hope*. The world bends kinder to a crew that believes it can be made better, and grace runs toward them like water downhill. The game can wound you — it can cost you dearly, and grieve you truly — but it only truly breaks the one who has stopped hoping. Keep hope, and you are never past saving.

Despair is the only door that locks from the inside.

ONE STRANGER YOU SHOULD KNOW

There is a madman named *Landis*, who is real only in water. Find still water in any world — a sea, a cistern, a cup — look in, and ask him with grace, and he will sell you a true answer at a steep and personal price. He is not the main road, and you will not need him often. But he is always there, in every water, and every answer he gives is true. More of him waits in the pages that follow.

FOUNDATIONS

BOOK THE FIRST

being the whole of the game, set down plain, that any hand aboard may read it

§ 0.1 THE THESIS

Council is for tables who left the dice behind — and found they had left something else behind with them.

When a crew stops rolling and starts telling, the story runs warmer and the arithmetic goes quiet — and then, one night, a locked door appears that no one at the table happens to be clever enough to open. Under dice, a character *rolled to know things their player did not*. Take the dice away and that quiet gift goes with them: now a player can learn only what they personally thought to ask, and the keeper is left dangling hints, praying someone guesses the shape of the answer.

Council exists to hand that gift back without handing the dice back. It is a game of insight, consequence, and shared command that runs entirely on words. One question steers every rule in this handbook: *how does a soul come to know a thing without guessing the exact right way to ask?* All that follows is an answer.

You will not roll to see if you succeed. You will decide what you are willing to pay to find out. — the first principle

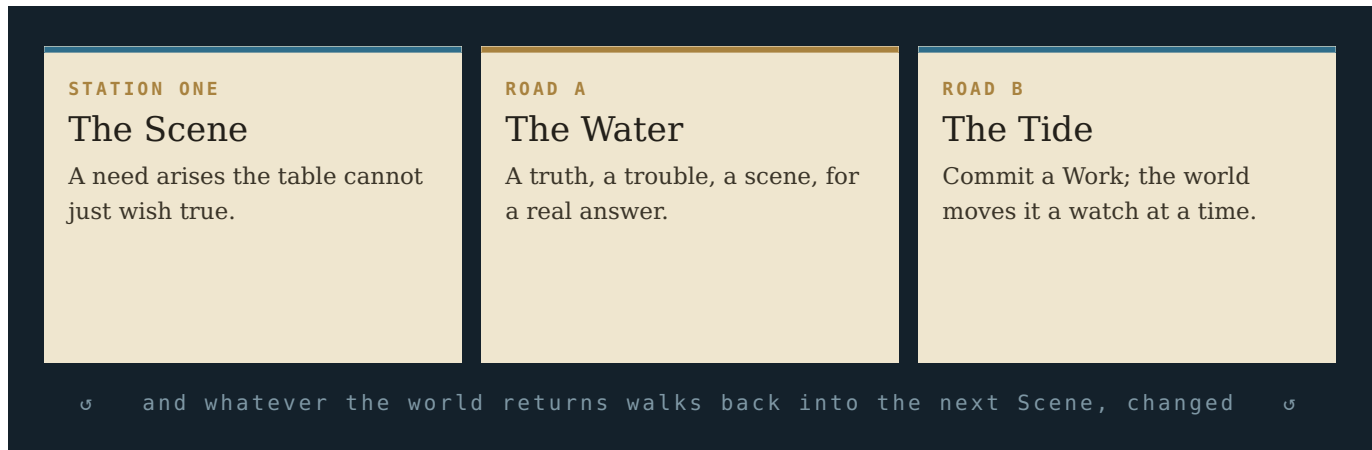
§ 0.2 WHO SAILS UNDER IT

Crews who have already drifted. Long campaigns that quietly abandoned sheets and initiative and now live on narration and trust. Council names what they are already doing and gives it teeth.

Keepers weary of dangling hints. Game masters who love the shared story but keep striking the reef where a puzzle stalls because no one has yet said the magic thing.

§ 0.3 THE TURN OF THE TIDE – THE CORE LOOP

Play turns through three stations. A *Scene* raises a need the table cannot simply declare true. The world answers by one of two roads — *the Water* (buy insight now, at a price) or *the Tide* (commit the work, let time carry it) — and whatever comes back walks into the next Scene, changed. That is the entire machine. All else is rigging hung upon it.



§ 0.4 THE EIGHT TIMBERS

The fixed vocabulary of the game — the timbers of the hull. These words mean the same at every Council table; a keeper may re-rig the world above, but not rename the timbers below.

I	The Water	Landis, real only in water, who sells true answers at a price.
II	The Council	Shared command with a final say; every vote and dissent minuted.
III	Works	What a crew sets in motion between scenes: an aim, the hands, the stakes.
IV	The Tide	Time itself. Every session advances every open Work one watch. <u>The keeper turns the watch; a session may pass one, or several.</u>
V	The Ledger	What a Work spends: Hands, Power, Standing. Nothing pinned twice.
VI	Squalls	Sealed complications carried by the larger Works, breaking when the weave turns against you.
VII	The Seals	Pre-written clues — Nudge, Bearing, Answer — sealed and shown, in order.
VIII	Price & Grace	The two ways an answer comes: seized with a piece of self, or given freely.

§ 0.5 THE KEEL & THE RIGGING

Council is a keel, not a world. A table brings its own fiction — a drowned empire, a generation ship, a haunted county — and rigs it to the timbers below. But one timber is not the table's to swap. *Landis is fixed*. The madman on the sea, real only in water, who sells true answers at a price, stands in every Council game that has been or will be run.

THE KEEL — FIXED

Landis & the Water. The eight timbers and their names. The turn of the tide. Price and grace. The Seals. Mercy.

THE RIGGING — YOURS

The world, its peoples, what Power and Standing are made of, what the riddles guard.

Change everything you like. Leave me the water. — L.F.

THE RESOLUTION CORE

BOOK THE SECOND

how the game answers, when there is no die to throw

A die answered a question the table could not: what is true, and what do you learn? Council keeps the question and throws away the die. In its place stand two hands — one that takes, and one that gives. Learn these two and you have learned the game.

§ 2.1 THE TWO ANSWERS

When a scene raises a need the table cannot simply declare true, the world answers in one of two ways, and only two. An answer is either *seized* — bought with something of your own — or it is *given*, freely, by the hand that made this world. The first is *price*. The second is *grace*.

Price

You pay, and you may demand. It costs the self and is always true.

Grace

You are given, and may not demand. It costs you nothing and cannot be earned.

§ 2.2 GRACE – THE GIVEN ANSWER

The keeper is the god of this small creation — not a tyrant, but a maker, who set its laws and largely lets them run. *Grace is the maker's one free hand:* the single thing in the game not bound by the world's own rules. An answer given as grace is unearned and unpriced.

Grace cannot be bought, banked, or demanded. A good-faith struggle *invites* it, and hope draws it near — but nothing compels it. It may fall on the crew who tried hardest; it may fall, just as well, on the one who tried least and needed it most. It falls where it will.

Grace is *not counted*. There is no pool, no token, no tally at the table's edge. It has exactly one law that binds it: *mercy*. If a crew is truly aground, grace comes, because the maker will not let the story drown.

And grace comes *quietly*. It is a nudge slid across the table, unremarked. The keeper need not announce it, and mostly should not. The crew will feel they were lucky. Let them.

Grace is not the keeper being kind against the rules. It is the one rule that kindness was allowed to keep.

§ 2.3 PRICE – THE SEIZED ANSWER

Where grace is given, price is *taken* — by you, from you. When you must know a thing now and are willing to bleed for it, you may seize the answer and pay in the only coin the game accepts: something of your own self.

The dearest altar of price is *the Water* — Landis, real only in water, who trades true answers for pieces of the one who asks. But mark this well: *the Water is a rare road, not a daily one*. When you do go down to the water, the price climbs with each answer of a single visit:

FIRST	<i>A truth.</i> Confess a secret, or commit a new fact about yourself, aloud. Canon the moment it is spoken.
SECOND	<i>A trouble.</i> The answer is true, and arrives lashed to a fresh complication.
THIRD	<i>The madness bleeds.</i> You glimpse a thing the keeper knows and you should not, and cannot say why.
ALWAYS	<i>A scene.</i> To sit with Landis costs time; the weave moves on while you do.

§ 2.4 THE SEALS – WHAT BOTH HANDS REACH FOR

Price and grace do not invent their answers on the spot. *Behind any obstacle worth being stuck on lie three clues*, set face-down on the table, in order.

THE FIRST	THE SECOND	THE THIRD
The Nudge A single honest word or image.	The Bearing What to do next — never why.	The Answer Plain as porridge.

They open *in order*, one at a time. Price opens the next by paying for it. Grace opens the next by giving it — **most often the Nudge, for nothing.**

§ 2.5 THE ROADS TO A CLUE

A crew that means to pay has more than one road to the next seal — the Water, being dearest, is the one they should walk least:

Honest search

Dig, read, question, pry. Paid in effort and a scene's time. — call it wit by another name.

A Work

Let the Tide carry it (Book III). Slow, priced only in watches.

A letter

Ask one who is absent but would know. ~~Slow as the post.~~ Slow as the post — and those who carry it may read what it says, unless it is sealed.

The Water

Landis, and his climbing price. Walk it least.

The rule that binds every road: it opens *the next Seal in order* — never a later one, never two at once.

§ 2.6 THE REWARD OF CLEVERNESS

Sometimes a crew closes out a whole labour — a Work, a mission, an obstacle worth being stuck on — with its Seals never broken: no price paid, no grace needed. Each Seal left closed is banked as *Slack*: a due at the Water. The next time the crew comes to Landis, that much of his usual price is simply *waived* — one price forgiven for every Seal they earned — and he throws in something past the ordinary menu besides, a thing he judges cool enough for the doing, never named in advance. Slack is spent only there, only with him, and does not linger forever unspent.

Solve it yourself, and the madman remembers you the next time you're wet.

Your margin: *what kind of thing could Landis give when Slack is due?* Slack already waives price; the ‘something extra’ should be a thing money/price can’t buy — strange, true, and never named in advance. A keeper’s stock to draw from:

- *A name not yet earned* — the true name of a person, ship, or thing the crew hasn’t met.
- *A glimpse down the tide* — one honest image of a Work’s next squall before it breaks.
- *A ward* — a one-time ‘this once, the water lies for you’: a single future price refunded.
- *A door* — the location of still water somewhere it shouldn’t be (behind enemy lines, aboard a ship).
- *A dead man’s sentence* — the last true thing someone said before the crew could ask.

Rule of thumb: the gift is *knowledge or leverage*, never raw Power — Landis deals in truth, not drones.

WORKS & THE TIDE

BOOK THE THIRD

*how the world keeps moving **even** while the table sleeps*

A scene is what the crew does with their hands. A Work is what they set in motion and must then wait upon. Everything in this book is bought with the one coin the game keeps honest for everyone at once — time.

§ 3.1 DECLARING A WORK

A Work is any labour too large for a single scene — a bomb built, a treaty struck, a ruin excavated, a wound healed. It is written on a card the whole table can see, and it carries three lines and no more:

- **THE AIM** — the plain thing wanted, stated so plainly that its finishing cannot be argued.
- **THE HANDS** — who does it: a person, a department, a people.
- **THE STAKES** — what is pledged from the Ledger to make it possible.

§ 3.2 THE TIDE — WATCHES

Time in Council comes in like a tide, on its own, needing no one's permission. *Every session, every open Work advances one watch — whether the crew touched it or not.* A watch is a unit of fictional time, not a unit of table time. When the keeper turns the watch, every open Work advances one — whether the crew touched it or not. A session may pass one watch, or several; a night's sleep passes a watch, and a long journey may pass more. Spend a whole scene labouring at a Work, and it takes *one watch more*. The counts are public.

SMALL WORK 1 watch	A WORK 3 watches	GREAT WORK 5 watches
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► PROPOSAL 1 – TURNING THE WATCH – KEEPER GUIDANCE

for your sign-off

You decided a watch is fictional time, not table time. Open question from your margin (p.12): *how many watches does a session pass?* My recommendation — don't hard-quantify it; give the keeper three anchors and let fiction do the rest:

- *Sleep = 1 watch.* A night's rest always turns one.
- *Travel by distance.* A hop across the city = 0. A trip off-world and back = 1. A long expedition = 2-3, keeper's call.
- *A full scene of labour = +1* to the Work worked (already in the rules).

So a quiet session might pass one watch; a session that sleeps, travels, and labours might pass three. *Your boxed note* ("multiple Works per session, keeper's discretion") is already true under this: turning a watch advances *every* open Work at once. The thing to decide is whether players can ever *force the keeper to turn a watch* — I'd say no; only the fiction turns it, and Forcing (§3.5) is the one player lever on pace.

§ 3.3 THE LEDGER – STAKES

A Work spends more than time; it spends the crew's finite holdings, pledged under three headings:

HANDS people & their labour	POWER resources, the means	STANDING goodwill with peoples
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A stake cannot be pledged twice — and **to wound a pledged stake is to stall everything pledged to it.** This is how a single blow lands everywhere.

► PROPOSAL 2 – GIVING THE LEDGER MEAT – HARD HANDS & POWER, HIDDEN STANDING

for your sign-off

Your notes (p.2 “needs meat,” p.11 “quantified ... city resource management”) and your answer both point the same way. Proposed split:

- *Hands & Power are counted, and public.* Give the expedition a pool — e.g. Hands as named departments/teams, Power as concrete stores (ZPM charge, C4, jumpers, drones). A Work pledges specific units; the crew can always see what’s committed and what’s free. This is the ‘city resource management’ layer.
- *Standing is not a number the players see.* Per your answer: the keeper tracks each people’s regard (Genii, Hoffan, Athosian...) on a hidden scale; players must *intuit* it from how factions behave. The keeper knows whether a faction will lift a hand; the crew has to read the room.

Open sub-question I’d flag: do you want Standing tracked per-faction as a small hidden dial (e.g. -2...+2), or purely as keeper prose? A dial makes “will they help?” rulings consistent; prose keeps it loose. I lean *hidden dial, prose to the players*.

§ 3.4 SQUALLS

~~Every Great Work~~ Every Great Work — and, at the keeper’s discretion, some lesser Works — is declared with *one sealed complication* — its squall — set face-down beside the card. It breaks at the *halfway watch*, or sooner if the weave calls for it.

§ 3.5 FORCING A WORK

Once per session, a crew may drive a single Work *one extra watch* by paying one of two coins:

A TRUTH — confessed aloud, canon the instant it is spoken. Or a truth made true of the Council — a new law passed.

A FAVOR OWED — sealed, called due whenever the keeper pleases.

Note the mark of haste: a forced Work ~~always~~ still delivers its squall.

► PROPOSAL 4 – “A FAVOR OWED – SEALED.” WHAT IS SEALED?

for your sign-off

You struck ‘sealed’ and asked *what is there to seal?* Two clean readings — pick one:

- (a) *Sealed = undefined-until-called*. The favor has no named price now; the keeper writes it face-down and reveals it whenever they call it due. What’s ‘sealed’ is the *cost*. (Keeps the dread; matches Squalls.)
- (b) *Drop the seal*. A favor owed is just an IOU the keeper can call anytime — no envelope, no mystery. Simpler at the table.

I lean (a): it makes ‘a favor owed’ scarier than ‘a truth’ and gives you a sealed prop to hand over, which fits Council’s whole reveal aesthetic.

§ 3.6 COMPLETION & WORK ORDERS

A finished Work stops being a card and becomes a *plain fact of the world*. Between sessions the crew may send *Work Orders* — written instructions to the hands who do the labour — and the keeper answers in those hands’ own voices next the table sits.

► PROPOSAL 5 – BETWEEN-SESSION PLAY – ORDERS THAT RESOLVE OFF-TABLE

for your sign-off

Your green note (p.13): *a way for things to progress between sessions without wrecking the timeline, and encouraging between-session play*. Work Orders already point here; proposed expansion:

- Between sessions, any player may file *Standing Orders* to the hands they command — written instructions (build, scout, treat, dig).
- These *don’t turn extra watches* (the timeline is safe): they resolve as of the *next* watch the fiction turns, and the keeper answers in the hands’ own voice (letterhead) at session start.
- A player who files orders may open the session already mid-scene on their result — the reward for playing between sessions.

This is a natural fit for the Council website: orders in, letterhead replies out.

§ 3.7 THE DIVINE WORK – THE GREAT TIER

Above the Great Work stands one tier more, reserved for labours that span a whole telling, or a season. A *Divine Work* is not a card the crew declares; it is a weather the keeper sets moving beneath everything:

No fixed count. No watch-total set at declaring, no countdown shown — even if one is quietly kept.

Many squalls, not one. Several sealed *beats*, opened one at a time.

A beat may rewrite the card. A beat can recast the aim, add a stake, release another.

Stakes bind and loose over time. Hands and Standing attach and detach across its length.

A Divine Work ends not on a watch but on a *turning*. Even here the one law holds: *mercy*.

HOW A STORM SPEAKS – A STANDING HOUSE STYLE

Every squall, every beat, every hard turn is delivered as an *in-fiction report on the letterhead of whoever bore it*. Never an omniscient voice from the clouds. In Council, the bad news always arrives *signed* — witnessed, not narrated. Testimony is king.

► PROPOSAL 6 – TRIGGER POINTS & NON-STEP-ABLE COUNTDOWNS – THE DIVINE WORK ENGINE

for your sign-off

You don't have the shape yet and asked for options. Here's a model that fits 'The Storm shouldn't tick until the Genii are ready to be enemies.'

The idea. A Divine Work is a chain of *beats*. A beat does nothing until its *Trigger* is met. When it fires, that beat's *watch-clock* starts counting — and only then does time bite.

A beat has three lines: *Trigger* (the fictional condition that arms it), *Clock* (how many watches once armed), *Break* (what the beat does — usually a signed squall, sometimes a rewrite of the card).

'*Non-step-able*' means two *guarantees*: (1) an *un-armed* beat can't be advanced, forced, or grace'd forward — no lever moves a clock that hasn't started; (2) once armed, the clock is the keeper's, not the tide's default — it ticks on its own terms.

What arms a trigger? Options (mix freely): a *story condition* the keeper watches for (Genii reach striking distance); a *completed/failed Work* (the well is poisoned); a *date on the hidden countdown* (§3.7, 'even if one is quietly kept'); or a *player action* that pokes the sleeping thing.

Storm, worked example: Beat I *Outer Bands* — Trigger: Genii gain a foothold · Clock: none (mood only). Beat III *Eye* — Trigger: storm makes landfall on Atlantis · Clock: 3 watches · Break: shield fails, signed by Radek. Beat IV — Trigger: Beat III resolves · Break: Earth's ship arrives with McKay + partial ZPM. The early beats set weather; the clock only bites once the fiction says it's time.

Decision I need: is a beat's clock *visible* to players once armed (a ticking dread they can race) or *hidden* (they feel the squeeze but don't see the number)? I'd make it the keeper's choice per beat — visible clocks create urgency, hidden ones create unease.

► PROPOSAL 7 – THREE TIERS OF DIVINE WORK – KEEPER GUIDANCE (NOT HARD TIERS)

for your sign-off

You want these as guidance, not a rigid parallel to Small/Work/Great. Proposed as a keeper sidebar:

- *An Episode* — one session's worth; a single strong beat. *Ex: the dying ZPM on the children's planet.*
- *An Arc* — spans several sessions; a handful of chained beats. *Ex: The Storm; poisoning the well; the first Wraith siege.*
- *A Saga* — one or more seasons; beats that sleep for a long time between arming. *Ex: the Wraith threat; Taxe's Federation; powering the city and getting home.*

Same engine (beats + triggers) at every tier — only the span and the patience differ.

► PROPOSAL 8 – “DEPENDENT VISIBLE WORKS” – WHAT I MEANT, AND MY RECOMMENDATION

for your sign-off

This was my jargon; here’s the plain version. A Divine Work is *weather* the players can’t grab directly. A *dependent visible Work* is an ordinary Work card the storm throws off that they *can* grab — the handhold. The Storm (Divine) can’t be ‘solved’; but *Shield’s Heart*, *Project Hammer*, and *The Catch* are visible Works the crew can pour Hands into to change how the storm lands. *My recommendation, not a hard rule*: every armed beat should expose *at least one* visible Work the players can act on — otherwise the beat is something that happens *to* them, which is railroading by another name. Make it a keeper habit, not a law.

GOVERNANCE

BOOK THE FOURTH

who may command a thing to happen — and what it costs to choose

The game is named for this book. A Council is not a throne — it is a table, where authority is shared, choices are witnessed, and the cost of command is that everyone remembers what you decided.

§ 4.1 THE COUNCIL

A Council is a body of shared command **with a single seat** that holds the *final say*. Its virtue is not efficiency — it is *the record*. Every vote and every dissent is entered and remembered; a voice overruled is not silenced but *minuted*.

A king may be wrong in private. A chair may only be wrong in front of the table.

► PROPOSAL 9 — THE FASCES — AN OPTIONAL NAME & RULE FOR THE FINAL SEAT for your sign-off

Your p.15 note: call the single-seat holder the one who *holds the Fasces*, rotating each session, and — like the Roman consuls — the others in rotation may *veto*. Proposed optional rule:

- The final-say seat rotates each session among those eligible.
- Any other rotation-holder may spend a *veto* to block a single ruling (once per session), forcing a Council vote instead.

Your wide/narrow question: yes — at a *wide table* the keeper can absolutely take the Fasces on some sessions (an in-fiction chair, not the GM hat), which is a lovely way to put the keeper's avatar on the record. At a *narrow table*, rotation is usually just among the player-principals and the keeper stays the world. Tie it to the §4.2 dial.

► PROPOSAL 10 – THE MINUTE – RECORD-KEEPING (AND YOUR VOICE-MEMO QUESTION)

for your sign-off

You circled ‘on the record’ (§4.5) and asked if minuting is practical — *can we use voice memos?* Proposed light system, *The Minute*: after any vote, override, or Directive, one line goes in the log — *who decided, what, who dissented*. That’s all ‘minuted’ needs to mean. A phone voice-memo is a perfectly good Minute.

On tooling — straight answer: I can’t transcribe an audio file directly in this workspace (no speech-to-text here). But the loop you want works fine: run tonight’s recording through any transcription app, upload the *transcript* (txt/doc), and I’ll keep a running game log *and* a formal Council Minutes ledger from it — votes, Directives, Works advanced, squalls broken. If you’d rather, dictate a recap (like you just did) and I’ll minute that. I’d suggest we start a `Council_Minutes.md` in the project and append after each session.

§ 4.2 WHO SITS – A DIAL SET AT SETUP

Council does not decree who holds a seat; the table sets that dial when it seats its own Council:

THE WIDE TABLE

Every standing head holds a seat and a vote. Loud, slow, truly divided. Choose this for intrigue.

THE NARROW TABLE · DEFAULT

Only the few at the heart of the story sit and vote; the heads report and advise. Choose this for pace — and by default, *this is where a Council begins*.

Council seats a narrow table by default, and widens only when a table decides the intrigue of a true vote is worth the pace it costs.

§ 4.3 THE SECOND CHAIR – DEPUTIES

A deputy may *hold* a Work at its present watch, but may not *advance* it. To move a Work forward wants a Work Order or a Directive from the seat of command.

Your p.15 question: *without a deputy, does a pulled Work revert one step each watch?* I think your instinct is the right rule, and it's better than a flat 'freeze' — it gives interrupts real teeth. Proposed:

- A Work whose head is *pulled* (§4.4) and left *unheld slips back one watch* each watch that passes — the labour decays without its hand.
- A *deputy* holding it stops the slip (freeze at present watch) but can't advance it.
- A *Directive* (§4.5) keeps the head on task, so it neither slips nor pauses.

This answers your 'what about Carson pinned on the Hoffman cure?' — pull Carson to an emergency and, unless Keely (deputy) holds it, the cure work rots a watch at a time until he's back or you *Directive* him to stay. That's a real cost, which is the point. (Edit E14 in §4.4 already wires this in.)

§ 4.4 INTERRUPTS

An emergency that names a head *pulls them off their Work automatically*. The card *freezes* until released, or a deputy steps in to **hold it** — keeping it from slipping back.

§ 4.5 THE OVERRIDE

Only the seat of final say may keep a pulled head at their task regardless, by issuing a *Directive* — a *truth committed aloud, on the record*.

§ 4.6 ABSENCE BEYOND REACH

When a head is truly beyond word, the need is met anyway, by whoever stands present, *without that head's insight* — it shows as something *concrete and specific*, never a clean sealed squall.

You flagged this as thin. It's the twin of Interrupts: Interrupts pull a head who's *here*; Absence covers a head who is simply *unreachable* (off-world, ascended, missing). Proposed replacement text:

When a head is beyond all word — off-world, ascended, or lost — the table cannot wait on their insight, and the need is met by whoever stands present. The answer still comes, but it comes rough: concrete and specific, shaped by the wrong hands, never the clean sealed squall the absent expert would have drawn. A botany question answered by a soldier gets a soldier's answer. Mark such Works: when the head returns, they may find the labour done crooked, and worth re-doing.

The distinction to keep: Interrupt = freeze/slip (they're here, just busy); Absence = it happens anyway, badly (they're gone).

TEACH & SHIP

BOOK THE FIFTH

for the keeper — how to raise a Council game from nothing, and run it well

The first four books are the game. This one is the craft of it — how to stand a table up in an evening, and the three small arts that make a keeper of you: writing Seals, giving grace, and wounding without cruelty.

§ 5.1 SESSION ZERO — RAISING A GAME IN ONE SITTING

Council boots in a single evening. Five moves, in order:

- 1 *Rig the world.* Agree the fiction — the setting, its peoples, what Power and Standing are made of here.
- 2 *Seat the Council.* Decide who holds the final say, and set the dial of §4.2 — *narrow by default*, or wide for intrigue.
- 3 *Lay the first Ledger.* Write two or three opening Works.
- 4 *Teach the Water.* Tell the crew, plainly, of Landis.
- 5 *Promise hope.* Say aloud the one creed. Then begin.

► PROPOSAL 13 – THE ONE CREED – A POETIC DRAFT, & THE SESSION-ZERO LEDGER *for your sign-off*
STEP

Two things land here. First, your ‘write a poetic creed’ — a first swing, to be said aloud at Session Zero (§5.1, move 5):

*We keep no dice, and we keep no fear.
What we cannot answer, we will pay for true;
what we cannot pay, we will be given.
No door is locked that hope can't open —
and the only door that locks from the inside is despair.
So we strive, and we pay, or we are given —
and we keep hope, whatever the weather.*

Second, move 3 (‘Lay the first Ledger’) needs expanding once P2 lands — it should walk the keeper through setting starting Hands/Power pools and, if you want them, *research tiers* (what the expedition can build now vs. what needs a Work first). Flagging; I’ll draft it after you rule on P2.

§ 5.2 THE FIRST ART – WRITING SEALS

For any obstacle worth being stuck on, *write three clues before play and seal them*: the Nudge, the Bearing, the Answer. Write them *before* — never under the pressure of a stuck table, when your judgment is worst.

► PROPOSAL 14 – SOURCING CLUES – AND WHICH LETTERHEAD THEY RIDE IN ON *for your sign-off*

Your p.17 note: clues can come from many sources — prep them too, at least which source and which letterhead. Proposed addition to §5.2:

- When you seal a clue, also note its *source* — who knows it, and how it would reach the crew.
- Give it a *letterhead*: a clue from Beckett arrives as a medical note; from the Genii, as an intercept; from Landis, as a line in still water. Same clue, different voice, different trust.

This dovetails with the Signed Squall (§5.4): in Council, *everything* that arrives — good news or bad — arrives signed.

§ 5.3 THE SECOND ART – GIVING GRACE

Give it *quietly*. Give it toward the *stuck and the hopeful*. Do not tally it, do not let it be demanded. Its one hard law is that a truly aground crew always receives it.

§ 5.4 THE THIRD ART – THE SIGNED SQUALL

Deliver bad news as a *report on the letterhead of whoever bore it*. In Council, bad news always arrives signed.

§ 5.5 ON HOPE & HARM — THE TONE OF THE GAME

Council is built to reward hope. The game *may wound* — it may cost dearly, and grieve truly. But it breaks only the one who has *stopped hoping*.

Despair is the only door that locks from the inside.

§ 5.6 WHAT TO PRINT, WHAT TO KEEP

Two bundles make a Council game ready for a table:

The Crew's Packet

This handbook, and Landis's two handouts. All a player needs. ([For the Council of Un: the crew's Standing Orders for the expedition ride here too.](#))

The Keeper's Papers

Sealed Seals, hidden stakes, Divine Work beats. Shown to no one until its watch turns.

The Living Ledger — a place to run Works between sessions: on paper, or (better) online at the Council website, fuckinphilosophers.com.

Print the first. Keep the second. [Run the third.](#)