The Luminous Campaign Engine

Weaving Narrative Into Your Tabletop Campaign

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The Luminous Campaign Engine

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Introduction

The Luminous Campaign Engine allows gamemasters to weave narrative story patterns into their tabletop experiences. Luminous marries storytelling techniques from myths, books, and television to a simple framework for outlining your campaign's adventures.

The Luminous method focuses on good story, just-in-time planning, and creating amazing roleplaying game sessions — rather than writing reams of full-length campaigns and adventures.

The Platinum Rule

The Core Principle

The core principle behind the Luminous Campaign Engine is not to plan an entire campaign and fill it with fully realized adventures. It is to develop a creative toolbox of building blocks which you will use every game session to stimulate your players — then react to their choices in a consistent way that builds a larger narrative.

When writing adventures and campaigns for tabletop role-playing games, remember that the gamemaster is only one small part of the storytelling equation. The adventures we enjoy often stem less from pre-written content and more from the decisions, actions, and interactions of all of the players.

The Luminous Campaign Engine uses the same principles and concepts as our Shine Storytelling Engine, but the outline is vastly different. Without control over decisions made (or successes earned) by players, the gamemaster instead focuses on the possibilities of adventure.

The Golden Rule

A good campaign is not written, it is rewritten. The sage advice given to novelists holds true for gamemasters, but for entirely different reasons. To give players consequential choices you must be prepared to toss parts of your campaign outline out the window. You must revisit your Luminous campaign outline after every game session to add, remove, and change what needs to be adjusted.

The Silver Rule

Luminous is not a formula. Just as you must be flexible and not railroad your players into sticking to a pre-written story, Luminous will not railroad you into following its guidance. If advice is offered that doesn't make sense for you or your campaign, toss it!

Two Modes

There are two ways to use Luminous to create your RPG campaign:

❖ **Your Way:** If you already have your own process for making RPG campaigns, use the Luminous cards in a way that supports your creative process. Use Luminous cards to stoke your creativity and add some narrative story techniques to your campaign.

❖ **The Luminous Method:** If you are interested in trying a new way to create and run a campaign — or are new to the craft — consider trying the Luminous Method. The end goal of this method is to create a flexible campaign with a story structure backbone, vast amounts of player choice, and a measured amount of prep work for the gamemaster.

The rules, from this point on, detail the Luminous Method.

Building Blocks

The Luminous Method works best with a modular approach to your campaign and adventure design. Using wikis, mindmaps, journals, index cards, you will maintain lists of NPCs, adventure locations, adventure hooks, story events, and other details. Think of these as the building blocks of your campaign, and you will develop them in two ways:

1. During campaign design, record only essential details for these building blocks.
2. During session preparation, you will pull these building blocks from your campaign outline and detail them enough to be used during play sessions.

In other words, activities such as adding maps, writing stat blocks, balancing encounters, and writing detailed descriptions should wait for later. For example:

❖ **People:** For NPCs, consider writing only four bullet points: background, emotional makeup, physical description, and (most importantly) motivations or goals. Who they are, where they come from, what they look like, how they behave, and what they want.

❖ **Groups:** Species, cultures, nations, organizations, religions, and other social entities should have just a few key bullet points. Understanding the groups' motivations and agendas is vital. You may also want to record their strengths and weaknesses, key details that identify the group's members, and the like.

- ❧ **Locations:** Describe the location, any essential dangers, denizens, and potential adventure opportunities players may find there.
- ❧ **Events:** For events, record the trigger, the effect, and whether or not it happens independent of players or happens as a result of their actions.
- ❧ **Mandatory Adventures:** These are adventures your players will be forced to undertake at intervals. "Railroading" players into mandatory adventures should happen sparingly, but they are a critical method of moving the campaign forward.
- ❧ **Adventure Opportunities:** Also known as "adventure hooks," an adventure opportunity is a potential adventure that your players may choose to undertake (or avoid entirely).

Adventures and Adventure Opportunities

As with other building blocks, you only need adventure highlights right now. Detail can be added later during session prep. Here are six details you can capture now and save the rest for later:

1. **The Hook:** How do the players discover the adventure?
2. **The Motivation:** What motivates the players to take on the adventure?
3. **The 4th Act:** What is the dramatic final action sequence of the adventure?
4. **The 1st Act:** What dramatic opening sequence introduces the adventure's core challenge and motivates the players to tackle it?
5. **The 2nd Act:** What journeys, obstacles, encounters, or investigations will the players undertake to get to the final obstacle? What resources, allies, lessons, clues, or powers can be won to aid them?
6. **The 3rd Act:** What twist happens halfway through the adventure that surprises players and/or changes the adventure? What is the impact of the twist and how does it ratchet up the difficulty?

Note: by action scene, we don't always mean combat. Disarming bombs, archery contests, chases, election debates, and escaping a burning building all qualify.

The Luminous Method, Step-by-Step

The following steps give suggestions not only on how to design your campaign, but also to run it.

Prepare

Decide on how you will record your campaign detail: wiki, writing software, journal, mind map, binder, or by spreading the Luminous cards out on a floor or whiteboard and then using index cards as you would in an old-school writers room.

Setup

Review each Luminous Setup card, follow the instructions, and answer the story prompts to flesh out your basic campaign idea.

Outline Synopses

Review the 4-Act Campaign Step cards in order. For each card, write a brief synopsis of the independent events happening in that portion of the campaign.

Focus on monumental events that affect what adventures are available, what dangers are faced, the status of prominent NPCs, and so on. Try to avoid synopsis statements that make requirements of your players!

Begin the World Wiki

Going back through the cards and your outline to date, begin to list the essential building blocks for each step of the campaign. Loosely outline your major NPCs, locations, items, social groups, and similar that you want to be a part of your campaign.

At this stage, it is quite helpful to have a system in place for organizing the elements of your campaign. You can use whatever method suits you, however we highly recommend auto-linking wikis such as Obsidian.

Build Your Heroes and Arcs

This step involves character creation, developing backstories and character arcs with players, and other session zero activities. If you start character development earlier in your campaign design, it will help you customize the campaign to your players' goals and desires and allow their creativity to enhance it.

After you have a good idea of the characters your players will play — particularly backgrounds and motivations — go back to your Luminous outline. There are many ways you can enhance your campaign with player-centric content:

- Consider adding one or two mandatory adventures per campaign step that focus on the character arc of one of your characters.
- If a player doesn't have a clear story arc, draft one or two adventure opportunities that suggest interesting paths they could take. Do not make them mandatory.
- Add NPCs to your lists of building blocks that each player may already know, have a relationship with, or have a dramatic reaction to.
- Add organizations to your lists that each player might be interested in serving, joining, or opposing.
- Add locations of interest to each player: home towns, places where significant events happened, etc.
- Add coming events of importance to each player: birthdays, family tragedies, due dates for admission to a college of magic, etc.

Write Entries and Exits

Go back through each campaign step card and draft an entry and an exit for each. The exit condition is the event or condition that determines when a step ends. The entry adventure is the opening adventure

of that campaign phase and directly ties in with the previous step's exit condition. You do not need to detail the entry adventures at this time — a synopsis is fine.

Detail the Current Story Step

Until now, you have focused on the whole Luminous outline. Now, drill down into each story step and flesh it out. In this phase you will come up with exciting adventure hooks, NPCs, locations, and events for the next several game sessions. As you near the end of the current story step, feel free to extend your planning into the next story step.

Session Plan

Once you are ready to begin the campaign, it's time to plan your first few sessions. Here is where we finally stop telling you to avoid adding too much detail to your adventures and building blocks!

The Luminous Engine is predicated on the principle that the single most crucial resource for a gamemaster is the session outline and notes. These are recorded in what we call the *session document*. You will use this to both plan for that session beforehand and write a brief synopsis of what happened during the session afterwards.

Start by reading the session synopsis from your previous session document. Taking a few brief notes during or immediately after each session is key to helping you keep important events and details straight week after week.

Next, determine your opener: an event, encounter, problem, situation, or question that will propel the session forward. Sometimes the opener is determined for you, such as if you stopped the previous session at a dramatic point. The goal is to grab your players' attention and not let go.

Here is the hard part for many gamemasters: you don't need to have every step of a session planned out in sequence. Every gamemaster has an ideal amount of planning required for each session. However, a fundamental truth of gamemastering is that it is an improvisational art. Even the best-laid plans will go awry once your players start making their own decisions.

The key to supporting your improvisation is a session document populated by lists of your building blocks! During the session, you will pull these out to keep the adventure moving forward.

- ❦ Make a short list of adventure opportunities. After you are done with your session document, go back to each adventure opportunity individually and make sure you have the maps, stat blocks, etc., required to run that adventure — should your players take the bait.
- ❦ Make a short list of locations your players might be interested in exploring.
- ❦ Make a short list of NPCs and social groups your players may encounter.
- ❦ Make a short list of events your players may witness or hear about.
- ❦ Looking at the options in your session prep doc, make a short list of events that may occur as a consequence of your players' actions.

You don't need to make huge lists of options. Just pick a few and trust your creativity (and that of your players) to carry you through.

Flow

Now comes the hardest — and most rewarding — part of being a gamemaster: playing. Your opener will get the session started. Your interactions with your players will generate a steady stream of adventures. Your players will help you by coming up with zany ideas on their own. And when things get a bit slow, you have a giant toolbox of building blocks to pull adventures from!

Review

The final step of the Luminous method is to sit down with your session document shortly after the session completes. Review any notes you took during the game, fill out additional details as you see fit, and turn any great ideas into new building blocks.

Next, review the Luminous outline you have going forward. Does it still make sense? Do you need to modify it to match events that have just occurred? Are there some fun new blocks — particularly adventure opportunities — to add?

Setup

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Building the foundation of your campaign

Understanding the Setup Cards

The setup cards both flesh out your basic campaign idea and teach concepts and terminology used later on. Each card highlights an essential aspect of your campaign. By answering the story prompts for each, you will develop a solid foundation that will make designing your campaign easier.

To get started, you need nothing more than your basic idea and a method of recording the answers to the story prompts and questions on the following cards.

The Campaign Wiki

Throughout these cards, we will refer to the place where you organize your campaign as your "Campaign Wiki."

The method of organizing your ideas, session notes, and campaign building blocks doesn't have to involve an actual wiki. It can just as easily be a notebook, index cards, gamemaster's journal, bullet journal, note-taking program, or digital document.

Building Blocks During Setup

In addition to answering the writing prompts during setup, you will want a place to store ideas for details that you'll want to include in the campaign later. These details, or "blocks," are simply objects — people, places, items, adventure ideas, world details, and events — that will form the building blocks of your campaign.

For each block type, make a list. As you complete the setup, write the name and a brief description of any block ideas that crop up. No need to add meaningful detail to these blocks just yet — a sentence or two is plenty at this stage.

INITIAL IDEA

So, you want to write a campaign for your favorite roleplaying game? You probably have some idea of what you want your story to be about, no matter how small. That idea probably comes from one of the categories below.

PLOT: You have an idea for a specific set of events, a situation, or a conflict, that your players will experience during a campaign. *Example: you want your players to face a world-ending apocalypse, or challenge a galaxy-spanning empire.*

SETTING OR GENRE: You have an idea for a specific world or setting for your campaign. *Example: a world based on your favorite novel, or a campaign that takes place on an alien world.*

CHARACTER: You have an idea for certain characters, groups, or villains in your campaign. *Example: a heroic party of young wizard pupils going to magic school for the first time, or a villain who used to be a storied hero themselves.*

OBJECT: You have an idea for an object as the target of the campaign. *Example: a magic ring that must be destroyed, or defending the last living city on a dead world.*

THEME OR CONCEPT: You have an abstract notion of what you want the campaign to be about. *Example: the evils of slavery or the bond between soldiers.*

What is your initial idea?

Expand on your initial idea a bit. Can you pull one or more additional idea types from the list above to make your concept more engaging, complicated, mysterious, dramatic, hilarious, or enjoyable for yourself and your players?

Could you get at least one or two ideas from each category?
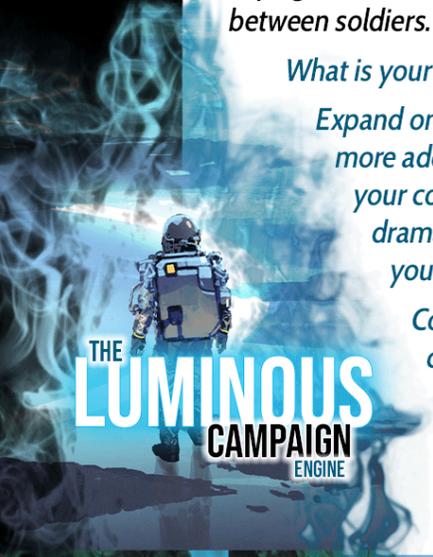
THE
LUMINOUS
CAMPAIGN ENGINE

The Initial Idea

Jot down the basic idea — no matter how small or undeveloped — that inspired you to write this campaign. Then, write down some additional ideas that complicate the basic idea and make it truly interesting.

Every campaign starts somewhere. That somewhere is usually one of these categories:

❧ **Plot:** You have an idea for a specific set of events, a situation, or a conflict, that your players will experience during a campaign. Example: you want your players to face a world-ending apocalypse, or challenge a galaxy-spanning empire.

❧ **Setting or Genre:** You have an idea for a specific world or setting for your campaign. Example: a world based on your favorite novel, or a campaign that takes place on an alien world.

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❧ **Theme or Concept:** You have an abstract notion of what you want the campaign to be about. Example: the evils of slavery or the bond between soldiers.

CARD 01 SETUP

The Initial Idea

The seed of your campaign — the basic concept that everything else grows from.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What is your initial idea?*

2. *Expand on your initial idea a bit. Can you pull one or more additional idea types from the list above to make your concept more engaging, complicated, mysterious, dramatic, hilarious, or enjoyable for yourself and your players?*

3. *Could you get at least one or two ideas from each category?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

If you like, take some of those people, places, things, events, and adventure ideas and add them as building blocks to your campaign wiki.

INNER AND OUTER JOURNEYS

Throughout your campaign, there are two sets of main stories. The chronicle of your characters' actions is the outer journey. The narrative of their inner feelings and motivations is the inner journey. While a novel's author would write both stories, the gamemaster only gets to write part of the former and none of the latter! Your job, instead, is to create a framework around your players and suggest inner and outer journeys for them to follow.

THE CORE CAMPAIGN PROBLEM

Most campaigns involve players tackling either a problem to solve or an opportunity to take advantage of. Either way, we refer to this as the core campaign problem.

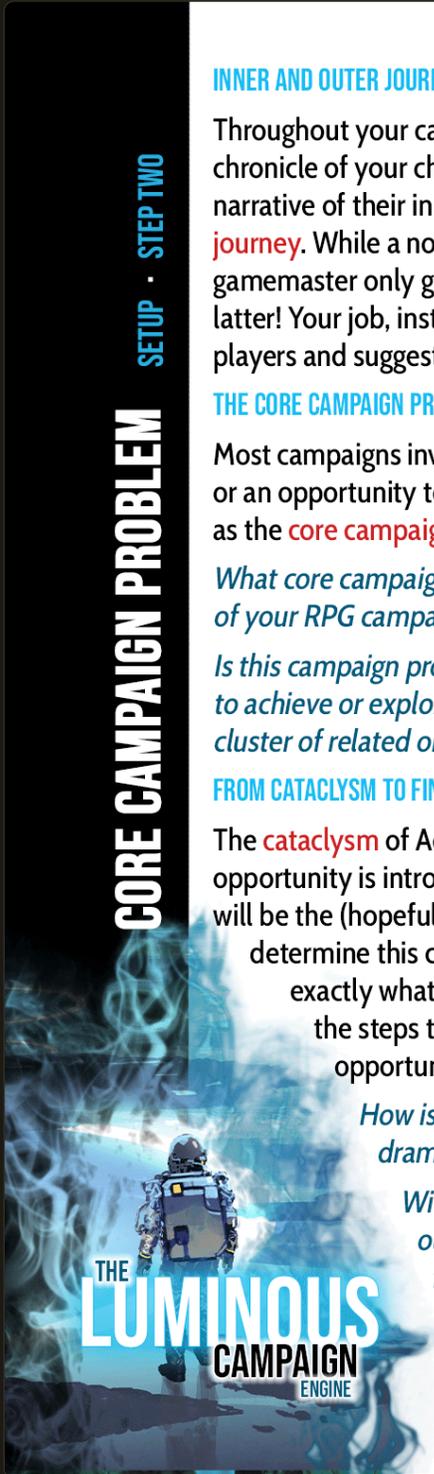*What core campaign problem or opportunity will act as the center of your RPG campaign?*

Is this campaign problem an actual problem or is it an opportunity to achieve or explore? Is it a single problem/opportunity or a cluster of related ones?

FROM CATACLYSM TO FINAL BATTLE

The cataclysm of Act I is where the core campaign problem or opportunity is introduced to the players. The final battle of Act IV will be the (hopeful) resolution of it. Your players' choices will determine this campaign's course, so you cannot determine exactly what the final battle will look like. For now, focus on the steps to overcome the problem or achieve the opportunity.

How is your core campaign problem introduced in a dramatic or cataclysmic way?

Without forcing your players toward a specific outcome, what are the minimum requirements for a successful resolution of the core campaign problem or opportunity? What will be the consequences of success or failure?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

The Core Campaign Problem

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CARD 02 SETUP

Core Campaign Problem

The central problem or opportunity that drives the entire campaign.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What core campaign problem or opportunity will act as the center of your RPG campaign?*

2. *Is this campaign problem an actual problem or is it an opportunity to achieve or explore? Is it a single problem/opportunity or a cluster of related ones?*

3. *How is your core campaign problem introduced in a dramatic or cataclysmic way?*

4. *Without forcing your players toward a specific outcome, what are the minimum requirements for a successful resolution of the core campaign problem or opportunity? What will be the consequences of success or failure?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Not every campaign needs a problem. Some of the best campaigns are about exploration, discovery, or simply surviving in an interesting world. If your "problem" is really an opportunity, lean into that.

KEEPING THE STAKES HIGH

The opposing force is that which opposes your players as they tackle the core campaign problem or opportunity. If the core problem is a passive obstacle, the opposing force is active.

The force that opposes your players must be compelling, terrifying, fascinating, and worthy of their awe. Without a core problem and opposing force that seem insurmountable, the campaign may fall flat. If the opposition is so overwhelming that even you don't know how to beat them, you've done your job.

What is your opposing force's relationship with the core campaign problem? Could they be the cause of it, an agent of it, or a metaphor for it? How do they complicate the core problem?

Who are these opposing forces? Are they classically evil, uncaring, and monolithic? Are they well-intentioned, but misguided? Is the opposing force revealed early in the campaign? Or late – as in a mystery? What has to be done to overcome them by the end of the campaign?

What lesser obstacles and opposing forces must the heroes overcome to reach the end of the campaign? How do these oppositions interact with each other?

If you want to run a more open campaign with a core adventure opportunity, then the "opposing force" are the types of obstacles that your players will encounter.

DARKER SHADOWS

In some campaigns, the opposing force through much of the story turns out to be but a lieutenant or proxy of something more malevolent and sinister.

Does your campaign have one of these darker shadows? Who are they and what relationship do they have to the core campaign conflict? What relationship do they have with the opposing force?

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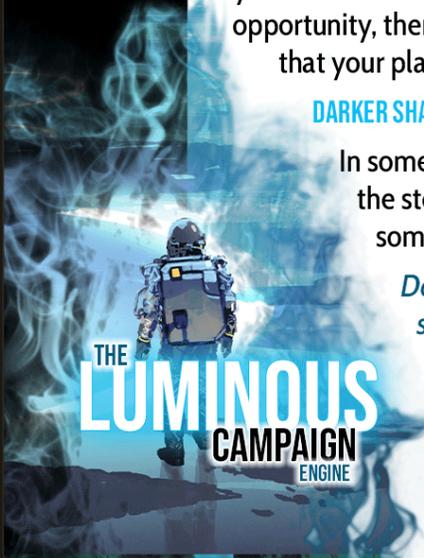
Opposing Forces

The force that opposes your players must be compelling, terrifying, fascinating, and worthy of their awe. Without a core problem and opposing force that seem insurmountable, the campaign may fall flat. If the opposition is so overwhelming that even *you* don't know how to beat them, you've done your job.

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CARD 03 SETUP

Opposing Forces

The forces that stand between your heroes and the resolution of the core campaign problem.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What is your opposing force's relationship with the core campaign problem? Could they be the cause of it, an agent of it, or a metaphor for it? How do they complicate the core problem?*

2. *Who are these opposing forces? Are they classically evil, uncaring, and mono-lithic? Are they well-intentioned, but misguided? Is the opposing force revealed early in the campaign? Or late — as in a mystery?*

3. *What lesser obstacles and opposing forces must the heroes overcome to reach the end of the campaign? How do these oppositions interact with each other?*

4. *Does your campaign have a darker shadow? Who are they and what relationship do they have to the core campaign conflict?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

If you want to run a more open campaign with a core adventure opportunity, then the "opposing force" are the types of obstacles that your players will encounter.

SUITING HEROES (AND PLAYERS) TO THE CAMPAIGN

Think about the kind of campaign you want to run - what kinds of heroes are best suited for it? To ensure that characters fit into the context of your campaign, you may need to provide players with guidelines. Communicate these requirements early to avoid player frustration. And, if you know the kinds of characters your players love, it never hurts to suit the campaign to your audience.

Will this campaign benefit from certain character archetypes, such as military characters, shady characters, special, or magical characters (like superheroes or wizards)?

What story requirements might you have for your characters, such as origin stories, motivations, belief systems, etc.?

What mechanical requirements might your campaign have for your characters, such as professions, skills, abilities, equipment, factional allegiance, etc.?

Think about your gamemastering style (if you know it) and communicate to your players the kind of game you will run. Ask your players for the kind of content they would enjoy.

What kind of game are you going to run? Open world or structured story? Combat-heavy, exploration-heavy, or social-heavy?

ON CONTROVERSIAL THINGS

Roleplaying games often deal with challenging topics: death, violence, sexuality, racism, hate, and other things that players may find challenging.

What topics have players identified as uncomfortable or out-of-bounds? What system will you use to allow players to immediately bow out of content they are not comfortable with?

Knowing the answers to these questions allows you to avoid problems as you design your campaign.

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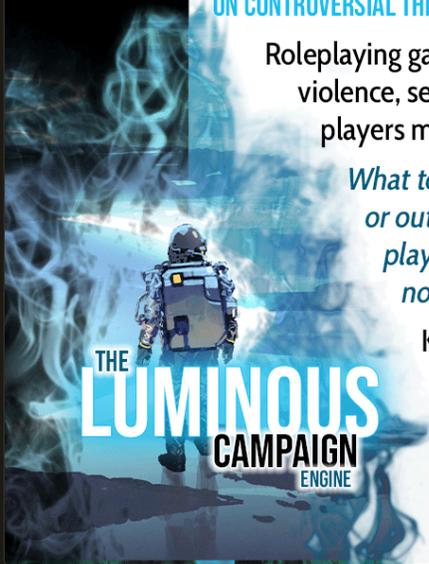
Heroes

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On Controversial Things

Roleplaying games often deal with challenging topics: death, violence, sexuality, racism, hate, and other things that players may find challenging. Knowing your players' boundaries allows you to avoid problems as you design your campaign.

CARD 04 SETUP

Heroes

The player characters and the players behind them.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *Will this campaign benefit from certain character archetypes, such as military characters, shady characters, special, or magical characters?*

2. *What story requirements might you have for your characters, such as origin stories, motivations, belief systems, etc.?*

3. *What mechanical requirements might your campaign have for your characters, such as professions, skills, abilities, equipment, factional allegiance, etc.?*

4. *What kind of game are you going to run? Open world or structured story? Combat heavy, exploration heavy, or social heavy?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

What topics have players identified as uncomfortable or out-of-bounds? What system will you use to allow players to immediately bow out of content they are not comfortable with?

MOTIVATIONS

Unlike a novelist, the gamemaster does not craft the main characters. Instead, they must settle for luring players into taking action in several ways:

1. Events can influence players and motivate them to action.

2. Locations may attract players to explore or investigate.

3. People and groups can draw players into positive or negative relationships.

4. Adventure opportunities can hook players with mysteries or promises of reward.

Note that these are also examples of blocks mentioned previously. **Each block you create for your game, regardless of type, offers a chance to motivate a player.** Roleplaying games are not about forcing players to follow a path. They're about giving them choices and letting them decide for themselves.

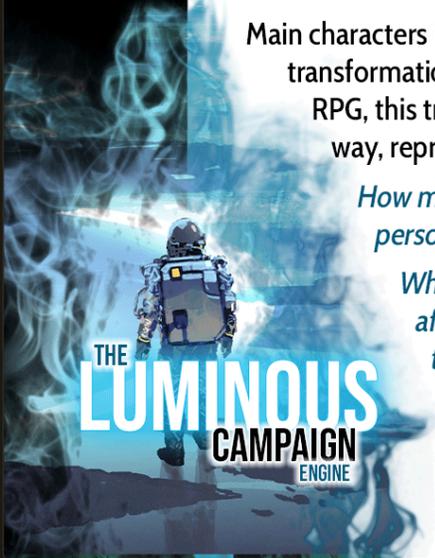*What events, locations, people, groups, items, adventures, and the like will this campaign feature?*

What motivations can you draw on to keep players specifically engaged in the core campaign problem or opportunity?

METAMORPHOSIS

Main characters in written fiction often go through a transition, transformation, or opportunity to learn and change. In an RPG, this transformation takes place in a more general way, represented by the growth of your characters.

How might your heroes grow – in power and personality – across the length of this campaign?

What difficult or dangerous experiences – which affect them internally – must the heroes undergo to overcome the core campaign problem?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

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CARD 05 SETUP

Motivations

The methods you will use to keep players engaged and oriented toward the core campaign problem.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What events, locations, people, groups, items, adventures, and the like will this campaign feature?*

2. *What motivations can you draw on to keep players specifically engaged in the core campaign problem or opportunity?*

3. *How might your heroes grow — in power and personality — across the length of this campaign?*

4. *What difficult or dangerous experiences — which affect them internally — must the heroes undergo to overcome the core campaign problem?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

In your list of campaign blocks, note briefly how each of these blocks might be used to motivate one or more heroes towards some new possible adventure.

THE MUNDANE VS THE EXTRAORDINARY WORLD

Every campaign begins with our heroes in a state of normalcy. This status quo is called the mundane world. We identify the mundane world only to contrast it with the world after the cataclysm: the event which presents the core campaign problem.

What world does your campaign take place in, and what are some of its critical details? How do those details affect the campaign? Where and in what situation do your players start this campaign?

The extraordinary world is the world of adventure after the core campaign problem is thrust upon players. Contrasting with the mundane, the extraordinary world is full of danger, mystery, fear, and uncertainty. Yet, it's also full of opportunity and excitement.

After the cataclysm, how do your players perceive that the world is changed, dangerous, troubling, or exciting? Explain why some might say, "things will never be the same"?

What are some defining characteristics of this new reality? How is it uniquely challenging, terrifying, or exciting?

What details of this world will play a part in your adventures? Are there any world systems that will prominently come into play? How will those systems affect the world?

Key to players' enjoyment are the feelings of power and importance that come from seeing their influence on the world.

How might your extraordinary world shift dramatically as the players make decisions throughout the campaign? What will be the scope of their power?

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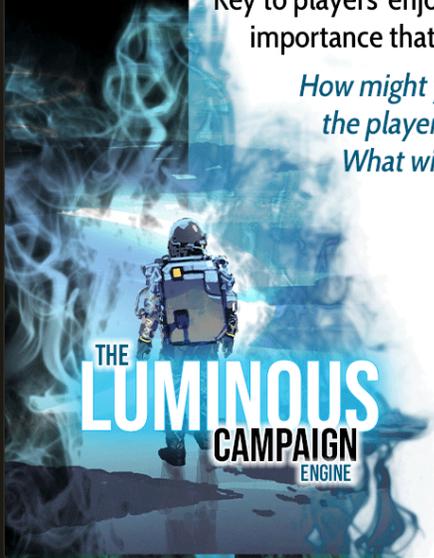
Extraordinary Worlds

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CARD 06 SETUP

Extraordinary Worlds

The world of your campaign — both before and after the core problem arrives.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What world does your campaign take place in, and what are some of its critical details? How do those details affect the campaign? Where and in what situation do your players start?*

2. *After the cataclysm, how do your players perceive that the world is changed, dangerous, troubling, or exciting? Explain why some might say, "things will never be the same"?*

3. *What are some defining characteristics of this new reality? How is it uniquely challenging, terrifying, or exciting?*

4. *How might your extraordinary world shift dramatically as the players make decisions throughout the campaign? What will be the scope of their power?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Don't just note interesting places when worldbuilding. Think about the people and the organizations that inhabit those locations. Think about the events that might be relevant. And think about what the "rules" of the world are and how they will affect play.

FIND THE PREMISE

By now, you should be able to state your campaign's basic premise and draft a concise act-level synopsis. A premise is a single sentence that states what the campaign's story is about:

When players are beset by a core campaign problem and opposing forces, they adventure through an outer journey, grow via an inner journey, and attempt to find a way to resolve the core problem and overcome the opposition.

Note the intentional lack of a resolution. *Never force your players into the story you want.* Next, briefly note what might happen in each act.

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT I

Start with the core problem your heroes are facing. What cataclysmic events and opportunities for adventure will propel them into the larger story? What could motivate them to see the resolution of the core campaign problem through to the end?

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT IV

Jump to the end and look at story outcomes. What events and opportunities could bring your campaign to a climax without forcing you players down a path?

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT III

Act III is where the road will become the most difficult. For the heroes to bring the campaign to a successful close, what events and opportunities must they survive to gain the upper hand on the core problem?

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT II

What else might happen during the campaign to challenge your players and help their characters grow?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE
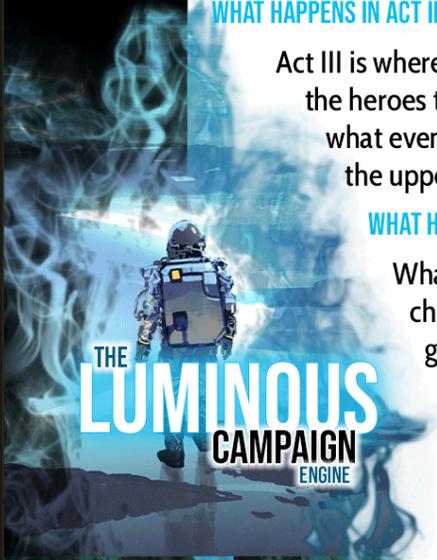
Four Acts

Based on your fleshed-out idea, jot down a few notes about what you expect to happen at a high level in the four acts of your campaign. This step is about looking at your campaign's entire length and noting how you expect the world to change during that time. Focus on events that provide your players with opportunities for adventure.

Remember, you cannot write down what your players will do. The more you outline your campaign with adventures and events that require your players to do something first, the more you will have to come back to your outline between sessions and make changes to match actual player decisions.

Find the Premise

By now, you should be able to state your campaign's basic premise and draft a concise act-level synopsis. A premise is a single sentence that states what the campaign's story is about:

> *When players are beset by a core campaign problem and opposing forces, they adventure through an outer journey, grow via an inner journey, and attempt to find a way to resolve the core problem and overcome the opposition.*

Note the intentional lack of a resolution. Never force your players into the story you want.

Four Acts

A high-level overview of your campaign's arc across four acts.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What happens in Act I? What cataclysmic events and opportunities for adventure will propel the heroes into the larger story?*

2. *What happens in Act IV? What events and opportunities could bring your campaign to a climax without forcing your players down a path?*

3. *What happens in Act III? What events and opportunities must the heroes survive to gain the upper hand on the core problem?*

4. *What happens in Act II? What else might happen during the campaign to challenge your players and help their characters grow?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Note: we draft Act IV before Act III and Act II. The ending informs the difficulty of Act III, which in turn informs the journey of Act II.

Act I

The beginning of a new campaign

Understanding Act I

Welcome to the beginning of your new campaign! To get things started, you must first find a way to hook your players into the overarching story you have (loosely) planned. Act I aims to make your heroes — and by extension, your players — care deeply about the campaign, its themes, and outcomes.

The Butterfly Effect and Roleplaying Games

A critical skill in campaign design is recognizing that as you and your players make decisions at the game table about where the story is going, your outline will become increasingly incorrect. Latter portions of your outline, particularly the very end, will need to be adjusted or outright rewritten.

Sometimes, as you are running your game, you may find that the players go in a completely unexpected direction. You may also find inspiration in the moment and decide to let the story move in an unexpected way. It's essential for a successful gamemaster to be flexible.

Thus, revisiting and updating your outline after every game session or two will be vital to keeping it relevant and preventing significant plot holes as the campaign progresses.

Understanding the Step Cards

The remaining Luminous cards are broken into four acts and help you apply narrative story principles to your campaign. Each card is a step — a series of one or more adventures and events — of that campaign. As you review each card in order and answer the story prompts, you will typically define:

- ❧ **A Synopsis:** Draft a few sentences about significant events during this step that are outside of player control but shape the world around them.
- ❧ **Entry Adventure:** A "starting adventure" provides the first obstacle players must overcome when this campaign step begins.
- ❧ **Exit Condition:** This is the condition or event which must occur for this campaign step to end and the next to begin.
- ❧ **Building Blocks:** List a few key building blocks in this campaign step, including NPCs with a role to play, important locations, possible adventure opportunities, and other key events.

TO PROLOGUE OR NOT TO PROLOGUE

There are a number of ways to start a campaign.

• An adventure that has nothing to do with the campaign's core conflict but brings your heroes together.

• An adventure that foreshadows the coming conflict via a "herald" - a person or event that gives a taste of the core campaign problem.

• An adventure that thrusts the players directly into the conflict. (If this is the case, skip this card and go to Step Two.)

AN INTRODUCTORY ADVENTURE

Often gamemasters choose to have an introductory adventure to allow their players to roleplay the group coming together for the first time or similar.

What adventure do you present to your players to kick off this initial gathering of heroes?

Is this adventure related to the coming core campaign problem or unrelated?

THE HERALD OF APOCALYPSE

This kind of adventure hints at a coming cataclysm - the arrival of the core campaign problem in the next adventure. The herald, be it a person or event, signals to the players that their lives are about to change and hints at what that core campaign problem might be.

Will this herald appear as an event that the heroes witness or a person who appears during an adventure?

Does this herald come forth with hints and whispers or with sirens blazing?

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The Calm Before the Storm

There are a number of ways to start a campaign:

- An adventure that has nothing to do with the campaign's core conflict but brings your heroes together.
- An adventure that foreshadows the coming conflict via a "herald" — a person or event that gives a taste of the core campaign problem.
- An adventure that thrusts the players directly into the conflict. (If this is the case, skip this card and go to Step Two.)

An Introductory Adventure

Often gamemasters choose to have an introductory adventure to allow their players to roleplay the group coming together for the first time or similar.

The Herald of Apocalypse

This kind of adventure hints at a coming cataclysm — the arrival of the core campaign problem in the next adventure. The herald, be it a person or event, signals to the players that their lives are about to change and hints at what that core campaign problem might be.

STEP I ACT I

The Calm Before the Storm

The opening of your campaign — before the core problem arrives.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What adventure do you present to your players to kick off this initial gathering of heroes?*

2. *Is this adventure related to the coming core campaign problem or unrelated?*

3. *Will this herald appear as an event that the heroes witness or a person who appears during an adventure?*

4. *Does this herald come forth with hints and whispers or with sirens blazing?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

To prologue or not to prologue. If your campaign's core conflict arrives immediately, skip this card and go straight to the Cataclysm.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Introduce the players to the core campaign problem - the massive struggle which defines this campaign at its heart.
- Introduce the players to an opposing force that actively opposes the heroes throughout this campaign.

THE CORE CAMPAIGN PROBLEM

Something happens that presents the players with the core problem that the rest of the campaign is about. This core campaign problem is what your players will spend many adventures between now and the end trying to overcome.

When that problem arrives, it needs to be cataclysmic. This cataclysm - directly or indirectly - shakes up the heroes' status quo and pushes them to a place of fear, uncertainty, or other negative emotion.

What is the core campaign problem, and how are the heroes introduced to it? What event or adventure opportunity brings this campaign problem to light?

AN OPPOSING FORCE

The opposing force is that which actively opposes your players as they tackle the core campaign problem. If that problem is the passive obstacle, the opposing force is the most active obstacle.

The opposing force need not necessarily be introduced here, but it is commonplace.

In what way is this cataclysm and the core campaign problem tied to the opposing force? Are they revealed now or later?
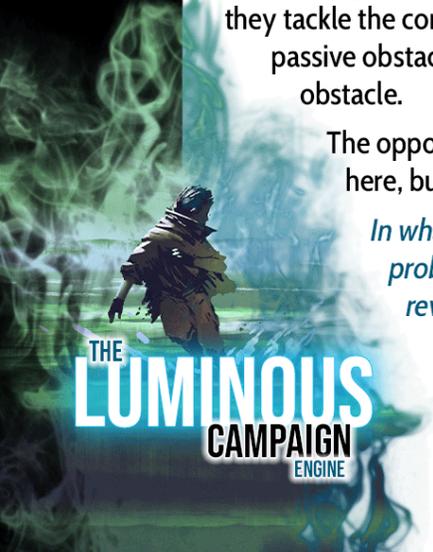
THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

Cataclysm

Something happens that presents the players with the core problem that the rest of the campaign is about. This core campaign problem is what your players will spend many adventures between now and the end trying to overcome.

When that problem arrives, it needs to be *cataclysmic*. This cataclysm — directly or indirectly — shakes up the heroes' status quo and pushes them to a place of fear, uncertainty, or other negative emotion.

An Opposing Force

The opposing force is that which actively opposes your players as they tackle the core campaign problem. If that problem is the passive obstacle, the opposing force is the most active obstacle.

The opposing force need not necessarily be introduced here, but it is commonplace.

STEP II ACT I

Cataclysm

The arrival of the core campaign problem.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What is the core campaign problem, and how are the heroes introduced to it? What event or adventure opportunity brings this campaign problem to light?*

2. *In what way is this cataclysm and the core campaign problem tied to the opposing force? Are they revealed now or later?*

> THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
>
> *The cataclysm doesn't have to be literal destruction. It can be a revelation, a disappearance, a political upheaval, or anything that fundamentally changes the status quo.*

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Motivate the heroes to deeply care - for whatever reason - about the core campaign problem or defeating the opposing force.
- Align with the heroes' motivations and mores that push them back to the campaign or give them options to go in different directions.

THE CALL TO SOLVE

In the previous step, an event or adventure exposes the core issue that the campaign is about. The question is, do they care?

What events and opportunities will lend a sense of urgency or importance to the heroes tackling this core campaign problem?

*What will call the heroes to take action in favor of solving the core campaign problem?*

How are the heroes impacted by events so far in this campaign? Did the cataclysm levy an emotional toll?

REFUSAL OF THE CALL

There is always the option that your heroes are less... heroic. Maybe they have an alternative morality to what you expected. Or, perhaps, they have their own ideas about how to live their lives.

What events or adventure opportunities can you offer up to allow your heroes to tackle the problem in different ways?

What might be a way for you to offer up events or adventure opportunities to allow your heroes to redefine the core campaign problem?

THE **LUMINOUS** CAMPAIGN ENGINE
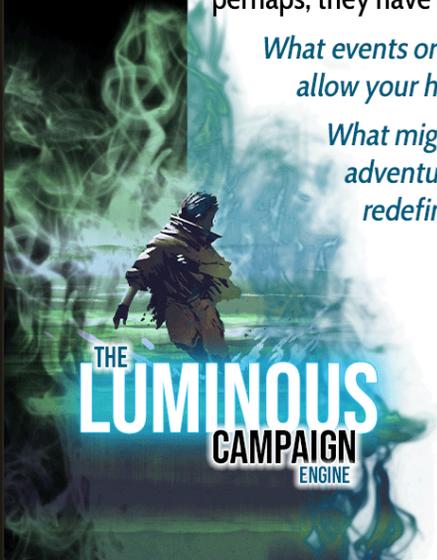
The Call to Adventure

In the previous step, an event or adventure exposes the core issue that the campaign is about. The question is, do they care?

The Call to Solve

The heroes need reasons to engage with the core campaign problem. This is where you ensure they have motivations — personal, moral, practical — to take action.

Refusal of the Call

There is always the option that your heroes are less… heroic. Maybe they have an alternative morality to what you expected. Or, perhaps, they have their own ideas about how to live their lives.

STEP III ACT I

The Call to Adventure

Motivating your heroes to engage with the core campaign problem.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What events and opportunities will lend a sense of urgency or importance to the heroes tackling this core campaign problem?*

2. *What will call the heroes to take action in favor of solving the core campaign problem?*

3. *How are the heroes impacted by events so far in this campaign? Did the cataclysm levy an emotional toll?*

4. *What events or adventure opportunities can you offer up to allow your heroes to tackle the problem in different ways — or even redefine the core campaign problem?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Players often surprise you with how they choose to engage. Build in multiple paths to the same destination.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Encourage your players to prove their worthiness to proceed with this campaign they have committed to.
- Encourage players to develop goals and plans based on their motivations.

THE THRESHOLD TO THE EXTRAORDINARY WORLD

The threshold is that bridge between the mundane world - the world before the cataclysm - and the extraordinary world. In the extraordinary world - the world of danger and adventure - the heroes will take on the core campaign problem rather than hide from it. To do this, they need a commitment and a plan (even if that plan is probably going to go awry.)
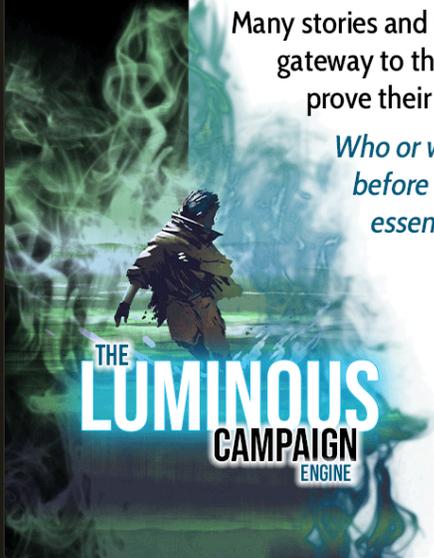
Are the extraordinary and mundane worlds just metaphors for what things were like before and after the arrival of the core campaign problem? Or are there literal changes to the world that one can experience?

What plans might your players be encouraged to make? What motivations might you take advantage of to propel them forward?

THE THRESHOLD GUARDIAN

Many stories and adventures have someone or something at this gateway to the extraordinary world that makes the heroes prove their worthiness to tackle the core problem.

Who or what might want the heroes to prove themselves before the campaign continues? Why would it be essential to do so?

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The Threshold Guardian

The threshold is that bridge between the mundane world — the world before the cataclysm — and the extraordinary world. In the extraordinary world — the world of danger and adventure — the heroes will take on the core campaign problem rather than hide from it. To do this, they need a commitment and a plan (even if that plan is probably going to go awry).

The Threshold to the Extraordinary World

Many stories and adventures have someone or something at this gateway to the extraordinary world that makes the heroes prove their worthiness to tackle the core problem.

STEP IV ACT I

The Threshold Guardian

The gateway between the mundane and extraordinary worlds.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *Are the extraordinary and mundane worlds just metaphors for what things were like before and after the arrival of the core campaign problem? Or are there literal changes to the world?*

2. *What plans might your players be encouraged to make? What motivations might you take advantage of to propel them forward?*

3. *Who or what might want the heroes to prove themselves before the campaign continues? Why would it be essential to do so?*

> THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
>
> *The threshold guardian doesn't have to be a person. It could be a test, a journey, a sacrifice, or a hard choice that separates those who are committed from those who aren't.*

Act II

The extraordinary world of adventure

Understanding Act II

Choice and Progress

A good campaign requires a delicate balance of two things: freedom of choice and a feeling of progress.

If player choice outweighs a sense of progress in your campaign's story, you must find ways to make your players feel like they are growing or achieving something. Encourage players to set their own narrative and character development goals.

If progress is more important than freedom of choice in your campaign, allow players to make their own decisions whenever possible. You're not writing a novel, so ensure that your players impact both the world and the story!

A Luminous campaign seeks to balance both play styles as much as possible. Yet, even within a campaign, some acts will lean more towards being story-driven or more towards freedom of action. In Act I, we focused on setting up the story through carefully engineered events and adventures. In Act II, your players will want to stretch out and play in the sandbox you have introduced. You've shown them this massive, detailed, dramatic, and enticing extraordinary world — now they get to explore it.

The Non-Linear Act

The cards of Act II need not be treated as linear steps. Act II contains events and adventure opportunities that fall under themes: "the world is strange" (extraordinary world), "let's move forward" (road of trials), and "this is more difficult than I thought" (scale & complexity). Instead of taking it one step at a time, choose blocks from any Act II card as inspiration takes you. For narrative reasons, however, the act should end on False Summits as this sets up the drama of Act III.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Highlight the world's changes after the cataclysm.
- Highlight how the world will be changed for the worse if the core problem is not solved or opposing force defeated.
- Give the heroes opportunities for something positive.
- Offer the chance to express the campaign's themes in physical form as the world becomes a metaphor.

THE EXTRAORDINARILY CHANGED WORLD

The world has changed due to the effects of the core campaign problem and it often has an impact on the heroes' adventures. *How has the world changed due to the cataclysm and what tangible effect or challenge does it offer to the heroes?*
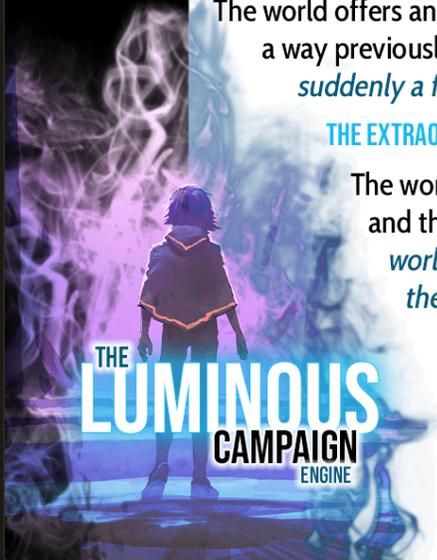
THE EXTRAORDINARILY CORRUPT WORLD

The world after the cataclysm represents how awful or dangerous the world would be should the problem go unfixed or the opposing force go undefeated. *What is so traumatic about this world, and what will it take to reverse its change?*

THE EXTRAORDINARILY OPPORTUNE WORLD

The world offers an opportunity for the heroes to grow or profit in a way previously unimagined. *In what way is the world suddenly a font of opportunity for the heroes?*

THE EXTRAORDINARILY THEMATIC WORLD

The world can also act as a metaphor for the conflicts and themes of the campaign. *In what way does the world represent a theme that flows strongly through the campaign?*

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The Extraordinary World

The world has changed due to the effects of the core campaign problem, and it often has an impact on the heroes' adventures.

The extraordinary world is not just a setting — it's a mirror of the campaign's themes and a crucible for the heroes' growth. It can be:

- **Extraordinarily Changed:** The world after the cataclysm, showing how awful or dangerous things would be should the problem go unfixed.
- **Extraordinarily Corrupt:** A world infected by the opposing force, showing the stakes of failure.
- **Extraordinarily Opportune:** A world offering unprecedented chances for growth and discovery.
- **Extraordinarily Thematic:** A world that acts as metaphor for the campaign's deeper themes.

STEP I ACT II

The Extraordinary World

The changed world after the cataclysm — strange, dangerous, and full of possibility.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *How has the world changed due to the cataclysm, and what tangible effect or challenge does it offer to the heroes?*

2. *What is so traumatic about this world, and what will it take to reverse its change?*

3. *In what way is the world suddenly a font of opportunity for the heroes?*

4. *In what way does the world represent a theme that flows strongly through the campaign?*

> THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
>
> *The extraordinary world can shift and evolve as the campaign progresses. It doesn't have to stay static.*

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Allow heroes to take on weaker minions of the opposing force or chip away at lesser aspects of the core campaign problem.
- Take on challenges that equip the heroes for future adventure by gathering allies, resources, experience, and knowledge.
- Take side adventures to intriguing locales, to meet interesting characters, or experience unusual circumstances unrelated to the campaign.

WIND ON THE MOUNTAIN

Some adventures your heroes experience may involve taking on the opposing force or the core campaign problem - though any successes during Act II are relatively small.

In what way are the heroes moving the ball forward a few yards at a time against the core problem or opposing force?
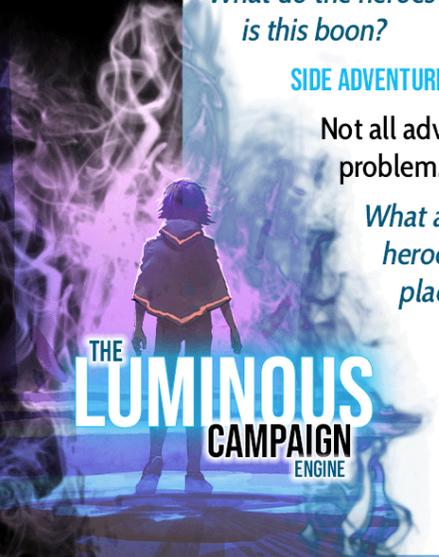
TRAINING MONTAGE

Some adventures involve the heroes taking on tasks that allow them to improve themselves or their lot by gathering experience, allies, resources, or intel about the core problem or opposing force.

What do the heroes stand to gain from this adventure? How critical is this boon?

SIDE ADVENTURES

Not all adventures have to relate to the core campaign problem.

What are some possible side adventures that your heroes might enjoy, such as interesting people, places, things or events to experience?

THE **LUMINOUS** CAMPAIGN ENGINE

The Road of Trials

This is the meat of Act II — the adventures, encounters, and challenges that make up the bulk of play. Some adventures involve taking on the opposing force or the core campaign problem — though any successes during Act II are relatively small. Some involve the heroes gathering experience, allies, resources, or intel. And some are simply interesting side adventures.

Wind on the Mountain

The heroes move the ball forward a few yards at a time against the core problem or opposing force.

Training Montage

Adventures that allow the heroes to improve themselves or their lot by gathering experience, allies, resources, or intel.

Side Adventures

Not all adventures have to relate to the core campaign problem.

STEP II ACT II

The Road of Trials

The adventures that fill Act II — progress, growth, and exploration.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *In what way are the heroes moving the ball forward a few yards at a time against the core problem or opposing force?*

2. *What do the heroes stand to gain from this adventure? How critical is this boon?*

3. *What are some possible side adventures that your heroes might enjoy, such as interesting people, places, things, or events to experience?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The road of trials is where player agency matters most. Let them choose which adventures to pursue. Your building blocks give you the flexibility to respond to whatever they decide.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

• Expand the scale of the story by slowly revealing new details about the core campaign problem and opposing force that ratchet up the tension and stakes of the story.

• Add storylines around important characters and settings that adversely affect the heroes' central efforts.

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

The heroes will need to be reminded from time to time of the core campaign problem and opposing force, especially if they go on an adventure or two without encountering them. More importantly, you will want to slowly increase the power and difficulty of the two to ratchet tension and stakes over time.

How can you dial up tension over the act by revealing new ways in which the opposing force menaces and new complications around the core campaign problem?
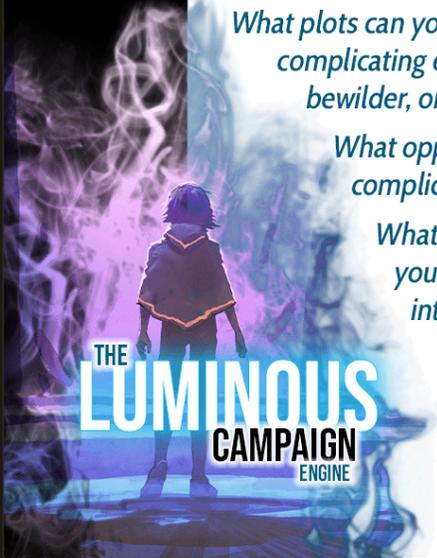
SIMPLISTIC PLOTS NEED NOT APPLY

One of the glorious aspects of epic storytelling is the use of multiple layers and arcs of stories, each interacting with the others in new and fascinating ways.

What plots can you spin around major characters that offer complicating events and opportunities to enrich, trap, bewilder, or stymie your heroes?

What opportunities can you offer your heroes to explore complicating storylines in important locations?

What parallel storylines are happening alongside your heroes' story that can be pulled in and interwoven to add complexity and interest?

THE **LUMINOUS** **CAMPAIGN** ENGINE

Scale & Complexity

The heroes will need to be reminded from time to time of the core campaign problem and opposing force, especially if they go on an adventure or two without encountering them. More importantly, you will want to slowly increase the power and difficulty of the two to ratchet tension and stakes over time.

The Scale of the Problem

How can you dial up tension over the act by revealing new ways in which the opposing force menaces and new complications around the core campaign problem?

Simplistic Plots Need Not Apply

One of the glorious aspects of epic storytelling is the use of multiple layers and arcs of stories, each interacting with the others in new and fascinating ways.

STEP III ACT II

Scale & Complexity

Ratcheting up the tension and weaving multiple storylines together.

STORY PROMPTS

1. How can you dial up tension over the act by revealing new ways in which the opposing force menaces and new complications around the core campaign problem?

2. What plots can you spin around major characters that offer complicating events and opportunities to enrich, trap, bewilder, or stymie your heroes?

3. What opportunities can you offer your heroes to explore complicating storylines in important locations?

4. What parallel storylines are happening alongside your heroes' story that can be pulled in and interwoven to add complexity and interest?

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Complexity should serve the story, not complicate the game. If a subplot isn't generating interesting play, let it fade.

FALSE SUMMITS

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Bring your players back to the core campaign problem and the opposing force.
- Give your players the false sense that they may actually overcome the core campaign problem - or at least a major portion of it.
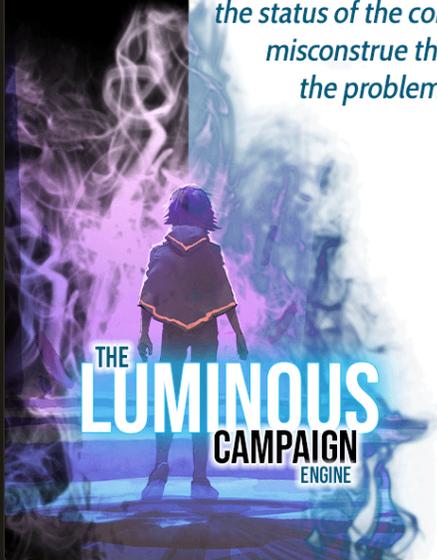
THE MIDPOINT

At this, the midpoint of the story, the events and opportunities presented to your players should give the appearance that the heroes could win this. This misconception comes in the form of mistaking a win for something more substantial than it really is or seeing an opportunity for a quick victory that is not what it seems.

Even if your heroes stumble at this point of the campaign, an event or another adventure opportunity should be erected to give them a false sense of security or progress.

What state are the heroes in at the midpoint of the story and how can you make them feel better about the job they are doing - in preparation for ripping that good feeling away in Act III?

What is the state of the opposing force at the midpoint? What is the status of the core campaign problem? How might your heroes misconstrue the opposition as weaker than they really are or the problem simpler than it really is?

THE **LUMINOUS** CAMPAIGN ENGINE

False Summits

At this, the midpoint of the story, the events and opportunities presented to your players should give the appearance that the heroes could win this. This misconception comes in the form of mistaking a win for something more substantial than it really is or seeing an opportunity for a quick victory that is not what it seems.

Even if your heroes stumble at this point of the campaign, an event or another adventure opportunity should be erected to give them a false sense of security or progress.

STEP IV ACT II

False Summits

The midpoint — where heroes think they might be winning.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What state are the heroes in at the midpoint of the story and how can you make them feel better about the job they are doing — in preparation for ripping that good feeling away in Act III?*

2. *What is the state of the opposing force at the midpoint? What is the status of the core campaign problem?*

3. *How might your heroes misconstrue the opposition as weaker than they really are or the problem simpler than it really is?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The false summit is one of the most powerful tools in campaign design. The further you can push the illusion of victory, the more devastating the reversal in Act III will feel.

Act III

The darkest timeline

Understanding Act III

Welcome to Act III. In this act, the story turns darker, more difficult, or both. It all begins with the heroes being rudely reminded that they are not winning, and the chances of them doing so are shrinking by the day. Act III then highlights a descent into increasing difficulty and, for darker stories, increasing darkness. The act wraps up with the heroes facing the most challenging obstacle or situation they have ever faced.

Note the superlative. Yes, each time you run the same RPG characters through a campaign, each new end-of-Act-III test should be the most difficult thing they have faced yet!

Perfection is a Moving Target

While traditional stories show how people in difficult situations react to stress and pressure, in an RPG, you don't have control over those characters. Instead, you are going to focus on putting your heroes in situations where they hopefully will experience fear, strain, and uncertainty. This requires two things from every gamemaster:

1. Since no gamemaster in history has mastered the art of perfect encounter design, you must be willing to alter your obstacles and encounter difficulty on the fly to create the desired effect: an increasing level of tension and excitement.
2. Just as gamemasters must not stubbornly refuse to adjust difficulty on the fly, they must also do it sparingly. Even more importantly, your players must never see you adjusting the difficulty, or it will drain the tension from the experience and render your hard work pointless.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that do one or more of the following:

- Reverse the forward progress of the heroes or expose their forward progress as false.
- Reveal the core campaign problem to be misunderstood or something other than what was previously thought.
- Expose the core campaign problem, the opposing force, or both to be significantly more difficult than previously believed.

REVERSAL

Often, the heroes discover that their victories are in vain due to a setback, such as the opposing force striking back and reasserting its dominance.

How are your heroes disabused of their forward progress? Did they overestimate their victories? Or did the enemy simply smack them down, forcing them to start from scratch?

REVEALS

Sometimes, the heroes have been chasing the wrong core campaign problem or opposing force. Alternatively, they have not understood the opposition or core problem's true nature.

What is the new (or reimagined) core campaign problem? Or the new opposing force?

REASSESSMENTS

In this case, the heroes discover that there's more to the core campaign problem or opposing force's difficulty level.

What was hidden about the core campaign problem or opposing force til now? How is this new level of danger revealed?

THE
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ENGINE

Undoing

The false summit of Act II collapses. The heroes discover that their victories are in vain, that the problem is not what they thought, or that the opposition is far stronger than they believed.

This can take several forms:

Reversal

The heroes discover that their victories are in vain due to a setback, such as the opposing force striking back and reasserting its dominance.

Reveals

Sometimes, the heroes have been chasing the wrong core campaign problem or opposing force. Alternatively, they have not understood the opposition or core problem's true nature.

Reassessments

The heroes discover that there's more to the core campaign problem or opposing force's difficulty level than previously known.

STEP I ACT III

Undoing

The reversal — where forward progress is exposed as false or insufficient.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *How are your heroes disabused of their forward progress? Did they overestimate their victories? Or did the enemy simply smack them down?*

2. *What is the new (or reimagined) core campaign problem? Or the new opposing force?*

3. *What was hidden about the core campaign problem or opposing force til now? How is this new level of danger revealed?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The undoing doesn't have to be a single dramatic moment. It can be a slow dawning realization across several sessions.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Challenge the heroes to commit to a dark and dangerous path that is the only way to solve the core campaign problem.
- Continue to dial up the pressure and strain on the heroes as the campaign gets harder and more perilous.
- Help heroes find ways to role-play the increasing stress and strain on their characters in interesting ways.

A REASON TO ENTER THE UNDERWORLD

In this case, the heroes see that there is a critical obstacle to overcome by the end of this act. The path to this obstacle is fraught with a level of difficulty they have never attempted.
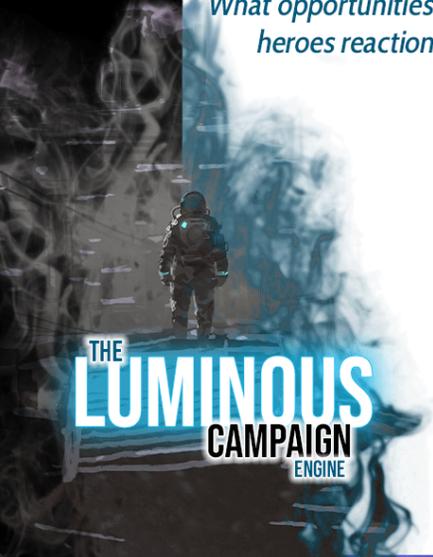
What arduous path are the heroes committing to? How will it challenge them?

PRESSURE BUILDS CHARACTER

The heroes should be feeling the strain of the difficulty or scale of their task.

What situations can you put your heroes in that will test their endurance and willpower?

What opportunities can you give your players to role-play their heroes reactions to these pressures and fears?

THE
LUMINOUS
CAMPAIGN
ENGINE

Descent into the Caves

The heroes see that there is a critical obstacle to overcome by the end of this act. The path to this obstacle is fraught with a level of difficulty they have never attempted.

A Reason to Enter the Underworld

The heroes must commit to a dark and dangerous path that is the only way to solve the core campaign problem.

Pressure Builds Character

The heroes should be feeling the strain of the difficulty or scale of their task.

STEP II ACT III

Descent into the Caves

Committing to the hardest path — the only one that leads to resolution.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What arduous path are the heroes committing to? How will it challenge them?*

2. *What situations can you put your heroes in that will test their endurance and willpower?*

3. *What opportunities can you give your players to role-play their heroes' reactions to these pressures and fears?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The "caves" are metaphorical. The descent might be into a political nightmare, a moral quandary, or a physical wasteland.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Take the players to their darkest moment, hardest opposition, or toughest obstacle.
- Develop an inner journey story for one or more heroes.

(MORE) PRESSURE BUILDS (MORE) CHARACTER

The darkness, difficulty and strain should continue to crescendo. It will climax in the next step of the act.

What situations can you put your heroes in that will test their endurance and willpower even further? What opportunities can you give your players to role-play their heroes reactions to these pressures and fears?

AN INNER JOURNEY

Often, fiction characters in Act III are required to undergo a significant internal change to find the power to solve the core story problem. Heroes in role-playing games are by no means required to have such an inner journey. But if you and your players are interested, you can work together to make this happen.

What is the difficult lesson that needs to be learned in the next step of the act? Or, what traumatic transformation is required? Or, what hard truth must be accepted?

Why have the heroes resisted this transformation so far?

Why must this happen for the heroes to move on to Act IV? What do they get out of this lesson or transformation?

What happens during this step that sets up the critical lesson or transformation in Step Four?

THE
LUMINOUS
CAMPAIGN
ENGINE

Dark Night of the Soul

The darkness, difficulty, and strain continue to crescendo. It will climax in the next step of the act.

Pressure Builds More Character

The situations testing endurance and willpower must intensify further.

An Inner Journey

A novel character in Act III is required to undergo a significant internal change to find the power to solve the core story problem. Heroes in role-playing games are by no means required to have such an inner journey. But if you and your players are interested, you can work together to make this happen.

STEP III ACT III

Dark Night of the Soul

The crescendo of difficulty and the possibility of inner transformation.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What situations can you put your heroes in that will test their endurance and willpower even further?*

2. *What is the difficult lesson that needs to be learned in the next step of the act? Or, what traumatic transformation is required? Or, what hard truth must be accepted?*

3. *Why have the heroes resisted this transformation so far?*

4. *What happens during this step that sets up the critical lesson or transformation in Step Four?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The inner journey is always optional in an RPG. But if your players are engaged with their characters' emotional arcs, this is where those arcs reach their breaking point.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

• Take the players to their darkest moment, their hardest opposition, or their toughest obstacle.

• Strip away any resistance to heroes who are undergoing an inner journey to the change or lesson that they are forced to face.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The purpose of all of the difficulty, failure, and darkness of Act III is to dial up that all-important tension in your heroes (and players) to its highest level. The end of Act III is when the tension and stakes are highest, and - here, it will plateau until the final battle is resolved and the core campaign problem solved (or not).

What is the situation your heroes find themselves in, and how is this the most challenging thing they've ever faced? What can you do to put your heroes in a position to hit an emotional rock bottom?

STRIPPED BARE

If you have heroes who are pursuing some inner journey (with the cooperation of your players) then this is the moment where all resistance to the necessary change or to the hard truth is stripped away. This lesson or change is hugely profound for the heroes and equips them with the tools they need to tackle the core campaign problem.

What happens to finally strip away the last of your heroes' resistance to transformation or hard truths?

What about this change or hard truths is transformative to the heroes?
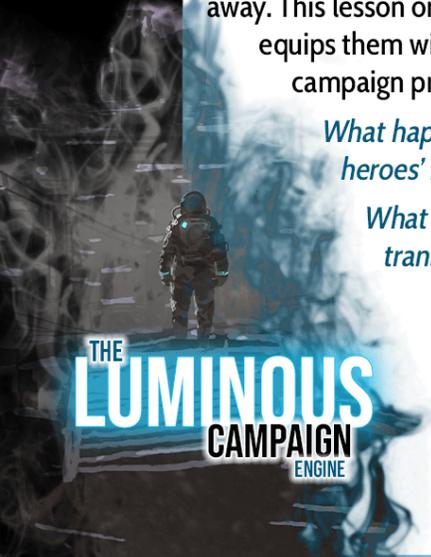
THE **LUMINOUS** CAMPAIGN ENGINE

Death & Rebirth

The purpose of all of the difficulty, failure, and darkness of Act III is to dial up that all-important tension in your heroes (and players) to its highest level. The end of Act III is when the tension and stakes are highest, and here, it will plateau until the final battle is resolved and the core campaign problem solved (or not).

The Beginning of the End

The heroes face their darkest moment — the most challenging thing they've ever encountered.

Stripped Bare

If you have heroes who are pursuing some inner journey (with the cooperation of your players), then this is the moment where all resistance to the necessary change or to the hard truth is stripped away.

STEP IV ACT III

Death & Rebirth

The absolute lowest point — and the transformation that makes victory possible.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What is the situation your heroes find themselves in, and how is this the most challenging thing they've ever faced?*

2. *What can you do to put your heroes in a position to hit an emotional rock bottom?*

3. *What happens to finally strip away the last of your heroes' resistance to transformation or hard truths?*

4. *What about this change or hard truths is transformative to the heroes?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Death and rebirth need not be literal. The "death" might be of a belief, a relation-ship, a way of life. The "rebirth" is the emergence of something stronger.

Optional Cards: Act III

Optional cards add common — often dramatic and emotional — story patterns to the campaign. You can insert these cards as steps in this act or pull adventures and building blocks from them to be used at any time during the act.

HOW TO USE THIS OPTIONAL CARD

Optional cards add common - often dramatic and emotional - story patterns to the campaign. You can insert this card as a step in this act or pull adventures and building blocks from this card to be used at any time during the act.

To elicit the strong emotions within this card, write adventures and building blocks that:

- Require your heroes to do "whatever is necessary" to solve the central campaign problem.
- Ratchet up the pressure to ridiculous levels on your players. Push their heroes into militancy, radicalism, and poor decisions just to survive or make it through.
- Emphasize that the adventure - at least for now - is deadly serious.

THE WARRIOR

Act III is often where our heroes are stripped bare, beaten down, and hit rock bottom. The aggressive or militant mindset is a coping strategy, but, like all coping strategies, it can be taken too far.

In this situation, your characters may begin to develop radical views and take extreme actions. Their desperation forces them to darker and darker paths and a win-at-all-costs mentality. These extremes can cause rifts with allies - or amongst the heroes themselves.

What desperate acts or extreme mindsets will our heroes or players adopt to retain control over the situation?

How do these mindsets fracture relationships and cause more harm than good?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

In Extremis

Act III is often where our heroes are stripped bare, beaten down, and hit rock bottom. The aggressive or militant mindset is a coping strategy, but, like all coping strategies, it can be taken too far.

In this situation, your characters may begin to develop radical views and take extreme actions. Their desperation forces them to darker and darker paths and a win-at-all-costs mentality. These extremes can cause rifts with allies — or amongst the heroes themselves.

OPTIONAL ACT III   OPTIONAL

In Extremis

When desperation drives heroes to extremes.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What desperate acts or extreme mindsets will our heroes or players adopt to retain control over the situation?*

2. *How do these mindsets fracture relationships and cause more harm than good?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Require your heroes to do "whatever is necessary" to solve the central campaign problem. Ratchet up the pressure to ridiculous levels. Emphasize that the adventure is deadly serious.

HOW TO USE THIS OPTIONAL CARD

Optional cards add common – often dramatic and emotional – story patterns to the campaign. You can insert this card as a step in this act or pull adventures and building blocks from this card to be used at any time during the act.

To elicit the strong emotions within this card, write adventures and building blocks that:

- As you near the end of Act III, provide players with plenty of options to push off the cataclysmic events they know are coming.
- Make it clear to players that if they do resist moving forward into the difficulty of this act, this will only make things harder on them!

FEAR AND AVOIDANCE

In a novel, the end of Act III is often where the main character faces a titanic lesson or transformation. It is both terribly painful for the character and enables them to fight the final battle. This story step revolves around that character avoiding that transformation or lesson at (almost) all costs.

It could be argued that *all* RPG campaigns involve offering players "necessary" and challenging tasks, which they will often ignore for more fun adventures. The gamemaster must make it clear to players that there is a consequence for avoiding the "necessary" path.

In what ways can you build in your players a sense of fear about the end of this act?

Then, how can you motivate your players to get back on the path? How does avoidance make the path harder? Or cause damage to the characters or their world?

THE
LUMINOUS
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ENGINE
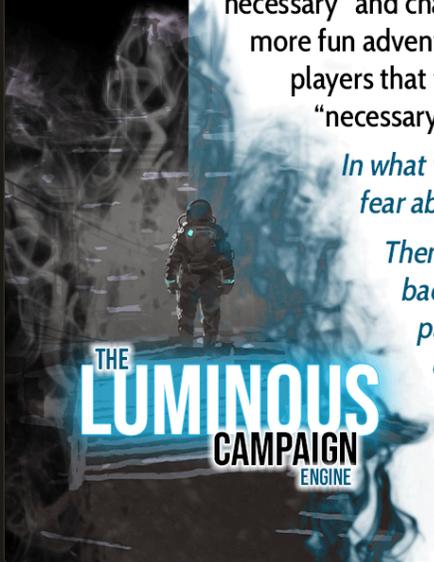
Induratus Stultum

This story pattern revolves around the heroes avoiding the transformation or lesson that Act III demands — at almost all costs.

It could be argued that all RPG campaigns involve offering players "necessary" and challenging tasks, which they will often ignore for more fun adventures. The gamemaster must make it clear to players that there is a consequence for avoiding the "necessary" path.

OPTIONAL ACT III   OPTIONAL

Induratus Stultum

Fear and avoidance — resisting the necessary path.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *In what ways can you build in your players a sense of fear about the end of this act?*

2. *How can you motivate your players to get back on the path? How does avoidance make the path harder?*

3. *Or does avoidance cause damage to the characters or their world?*

> THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
>
> *Make it clear to players that as they push off the cataclysmic events they know are coming, this will only make things harder on them!*

HOW TO USE THIS OPTIONAL CARD

Optional cards add common – often dramatic and emotional – story patterns to the campaign. You can insert this card as a step in this act or pull adventures and building blocks from this card to be used at any time during the act.

To elicit the strong emotions within this card, write adventures and building blocks that:
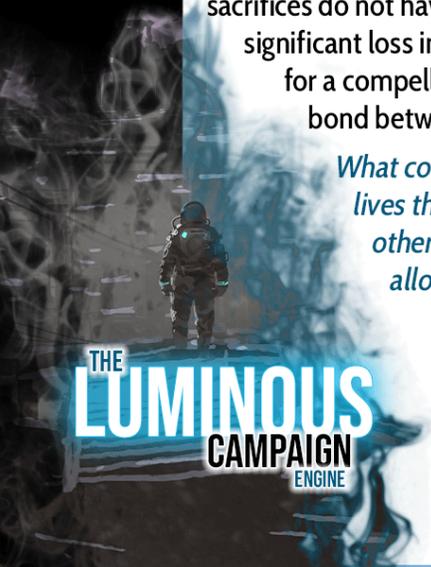
- Give players a chance to make true sacrifices and "go down fighting". Ensure that this is an option and that you are not just killing your players willy-nilly.
- Put players in situations of great peril, where their bare survival makes them appreciate a bit more their lives, their friends, and all the rest.

DEATH AND MEANING

In a novel, a main character can face the extreme challenges of Act III with a "go down fighting" mentality. In a roleplaying context, the choice to adopt this way of thinking is dependent on your players.

To encourage them – or to take advantage of players who already think this way – the gamemaster can create situations where players have a chance to make meaningful sacrifices. These sacrifices do not have to result in death to be meaningful – but significant loss in some form is required. These sacrifices make for a compelling story and result in a (hopefully) tighter bond between your players.

What could your players sacrifice without losing their lives that would have meaning to themselves and each other? What situations could you put them in that allow them to make these sacrifices?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

Mortale Est

To encourage heroes to face sacrifice — or to take advantage of players who already think this way — the gamemaster can create situations where players have a chance to make meaningful sacrifices. These sacrifices do not have to result in death to be meaningful — but significant loss in some form is required. These sacrifices make for a compelling story and result in a (hopefully) tighter bond between your players.

OPTIONAL ACT III   OPTIONAL

Mortale Est

Meaningful sacrifice — going down fighting.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What could your players sacrifice without losing their lives that would have meaning to themselves and each other?*

2. *What situations could you put them in that allow them to make these sacrifices?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Give players a chance to make true sacrifices and "go down fighting." Ensure that this is an option and that you are not just killing your players willy-nilly.

NOVI UMBRA

HOW TO USE THIS OPTIONAL CARD

Optional cards add common - often dramatic and emotional - story patterns to the campaign. You can insert this card as a step in this act or pull adventures and building blocks from this card to be used at any time during the act.

To elicit the strong emotions within this card, write adventures and building blocks that:

- Emphasize the similarities between your players' characters and the force that opposes them.

- Show your characters and their opposition making similar choices or undertaking similar paths.

- Yet, still retain a key difference between the characters and the opposition - one that is the source of the conflict.

HEROES AND SHADOWS

In a novel, this story pattern is one where the main character and their primary opposition have a lot in common, are forced to make similar choices, etc.

In an RPG, this can make for interesting storytelling. The players and the opposing force can have similar goals, have similar feelings, or undergo similar transformations as the campaign progresses. There does, however, have to be an essential difference between your players and their enemies: such as different approaches, different choices, or different moral compasses.

What similarities exist between the heroes and the opposing force? Does this put a more human face on the opposition? How does this affect the campaign, their relationship, and their conflict?

What would happen if the heroes won over the primary opposition to their side? What would take over as the opposing force?

THE **LUMINOUS** **CAMPAIGN** ENGINE

Novi Umbra

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This story pattern is one where the main character and their primary opposition have a lot in common, are forced to make similar choices, etc.

In an RPG, this can make for interesting storytelling. The players and the opposing force can have similar goals, have similar feelings, or undergo similar transformations as the campaign progresses. There does, however, have to be an essential difference between your players and their enemies: such as different approaches, different choices, or different moral compasses.

OPTIONAL ACT III   OPTIONAL

Novi Umbra

Heroes and shadows — when the opposition mirrors the heroes.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What similarities exist between the heroes and the opposing force? Does this put a more human face on the opposition?*

2. *How does this affect the campaign, their relationship, and their conflict?*

3. *What would happen if the heroes won over the primary opposition to their side? What would take over as the opposing force?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Emphasize the similarities between your players' characters and the force that opposes them. Show them making similar choices. Yet retain a key difference — one that is the source of the conflict.

HOW TO USE THIS OPTIONAL CARD

Optional cards add common - often dramatic and emotional - story patterns to the campaign. You can insert this card as a step in this act or pull adventures and building blocks from this card to be used at any time during the act.

To elicit the strong emotions within this card, write adventures and building blocks that:

- Place our heroes into situations of intense loss and despair.
- Extinguish all hope of success. Put players into a situation where the only action they can take is to face this hopelessness and keep on.
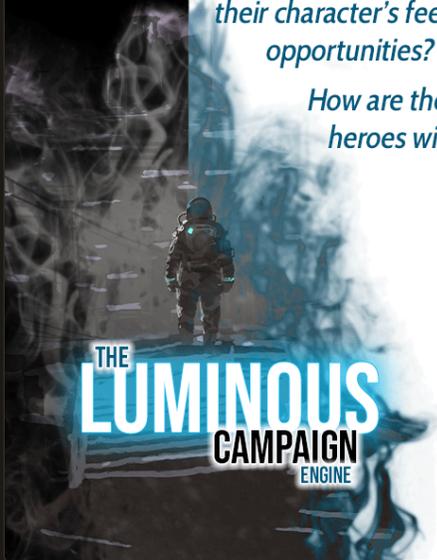
DESPAIR

Our heroes, having hope up to this point, are overwhelmed by loss and despair. Since you cannot make your players (or their characters) feel this, you must put them in situations where the hope of success is completely extinguished.

The benefit of these types of situations is the extreme level of relief and pride that players and their characters get for making it through trying times.

Do any of the players' earlier successes appear as hollow? How do their character's feelings manifest as actions and adventure opportunities?

How are these feelings still pale compared to what the heroes will go through by the end of the act?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

Perdita Spe

Our heroes, having hope up to this point, are overwhelmed by loss and despair. Since you cannot make your characters feel this, you must put them in situations where the hope of success is completely extinguished.

The benefit of these types of situations is the extreme level of relief and pride that players and their characters get for making it through trying times.

OPTIONAL ACT III   OPTIONAL

Perdita Spe

Despair — when all hope of success is extinguished.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *Do any of the players' earlier successes appear as hollow? How do their character's feelings manifest as actions and adventure opportunities?*

2. *How are these feelings still pale compared to what the heroes will go through by the end of the act?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Place your heroes into situations of intense loss and despair. Extinguish all hope of success. Put players into a situation where the only action they can take is to face this hopelessness and keep on.

PERTINAX INNOCENTIA

HOW TO USE THIS OPTIONAL CARD

Optional cards add common - often dramatic and emotional - story patterns to the campaign. You can insert this card as a step in this act or pull adventures and building blocks from this card to be used at any time during the act.

To elicit the strong emotions within this card, write adventures and building blocks that:

- Take your players down a road where the reversal, reveal, or reassessment, of the UNDOING card are ignored, refused, not understood, or disbelieved.
- Add a sense of frustration and resistance to the world around the players over this reversal or change.

HOW COULD WE HAVE BEEN SO WRONG?

In a novel, this story pattern is one of intense frustration to the main character as they refuse to adjust to the reversal of fortune, revelation of a change in the core story problem, or the revelation that the opposing force is different and more potent than previously thought.

Since this level of frustration isn't fun for players, its best to shift the refusal or disbelief to the people around them. Let your players decide whether they buy into the change in the campaign that seems to be happening.

What happened that altered or changed the core campaign problem and why is the world around your players are so attached to it?

How are the actions of those resisting the change either not helping or are actively making things worse?

When the truth is finally accepted, how will the fact that they were so wrong affect them?

THE
LUMINOUS
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ENGINE

Pertinax Innocentia

This story pattern is one of intense frustration as the heroes refuse to adjust to the reversal of fortune, revelation of a change in the core story problem, or the revelation that the opposing force is different and more potent than previously thought.

Since this level of frustration isn't fun for players, it's best to shift the refusal or disbelief to the people around them. Let your players decide whether they buy into the change in the campaign that seems to be happening.

OPTIONAL ACT III   OPTIONAL

Pertinax Innocentia

How could we have been so wrong? — Refusing to accept the new reality.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What happened that altered or changed the core campaign problem and why are the people around your players so attached to the old understanding?*

2. *How are the actions of those resisting the change either not helping or are actively making things worse?*

3. *When the truth is finally accepted, how will the fact that they were so wrong affect them?*

> THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
>
> *Take your players down a road where the reversal, reveal, or reassessment of the undoing card is ignored, refused, not understood, or disbelieved — by NPCs and factions, not necessarily by the heroes themselves.*

Act IV

The end is nigh

Understanding Act IV

There is only one direction for your heroes to go from here: up. Act IV involves three primary activities:

- ❖ Resolving the core campaign problem.
- ❖ Overcoming the last of the opposing force's strength.
- ❖ Wrapping up any storylines that you started.

Revisionism

The fundamental problem of "writing" a campaign is that you are not in control of where the campaign goes — or, at least, you shouldn't be. A good gamemaster allows the players to make decisions and go in their own direction. A better gamemaster gently nudges players to bring them closer to a cohesive storyline. The best gamemasters can revise their core story on the fly, no matter how crazy their players get.

In Act IV, this problem becomes particularly acute. Very rarely will an outline of events in Act IV — written before the campaign begins — survive intact. Be prepared to gut your Act IV designs completely!

The most crucial element of the act is the heroes' attempt to overcome the opposing force and solve the core campaign problem. One thing to note, just because the heroes survived the end of Act III and walked away with newfound abilities doesn't mean that the final battle is a foregone conclusion. As tough as Act III is meant to be, that final battle should be as tough — or tougher.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Allow the heroes to recover from the extreme difficulty of the end of Act III and focus on the coming final battle.
- Secure, analyze, and protect the resource, knowledge, ability, or other forms of power they earned by undergoing the lesson or transformation of the end of Act III.

I CAN DO THIS ALL DAY

Act III is the storytelling equivalent of knocking someone down and kicking them repeatedly so they can't get back up. But that's what heroes do - they get back up.

What reservoir of internal strength or outside aid allows your heroes to recover from the rock bottom they just experienced?
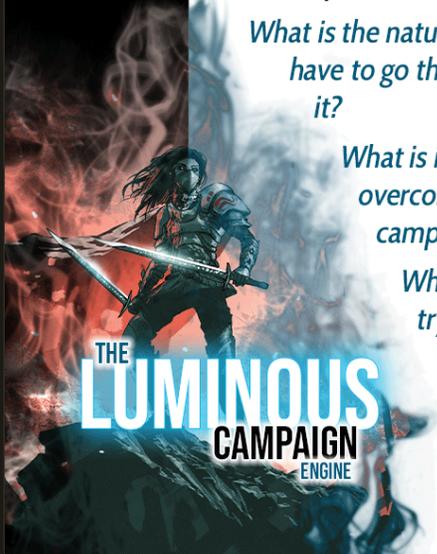
THE BOON

The heroes have not gone through hellfire and misery for nothing. Coming out of Act III, there is a boon that they have acquired for the trauma endured.

The boon can be just about anything: an ally, a bit of knowledge, an ability, a magical sword, precious intelligence on the enemy, or a doomsday device.

What is the nature of the boon acquired? Why did the heroes have to go through the hell of the end of the last act to get it?

What is it about this boon that makes it critical for overcoming the opposing force, solving the core campaign problem, or both?

What forces, knowing the heroes have the boon, try to prevent them from keeping it?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

Boons

Act III is the storytelling equivalent of knocking someone down and kicking them repeatedly so they can't get back up. But that's what heroes do — they get back up.

I Can Do This All Day

The heroes need a reservoir of internal strength or outside aid to recover from the rock bottom they just experienced.

The Boon

The heroes have not gone through hellfire and misery for nothing. Coming out of Act III, there is a boon that they have acquired for the trauma endured.

The boon can be just about anything: an ally, a bit of knowledge, an ability, a magical sword, precious intelligence on the enemy, or a doomsday device.

STEP I ACT IV

Boons

Recovery and the reward for surviving Act III.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What reservoir of internal strength or outside aid allows your heroes to recover from the rock bottom they just experienced?*

2. *What is the nature of the boon acquired? Why did the heroes have to go through the hell of the end of the last act to get it?*

3. *What is it about this boon that makes it critical for overcoming the opposing force, solving the core campaign problem, or both?*

4. *What forces, knowing the heroes have the boon, try to prevent them from keeping it?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The boon doesn't have to be a physical object. It might be knowledge, a change in perspective, an alliance, or simply the will to continue.

THE FINAL BATTLE · ACT FOUR · STEP TWO

NOTE

A gamemaster and their players can choose to tackle the core campaign problem first, fight the opposing force first, or take both on at the same time. To reflect this, Act IV has a card for each option for step two: THE FINAL BATTLE and THE SOLUTION. You will pull events and opportunities from both cards in the order your heroes decide to tackle the opposing force (THE FINAL BATTLE card) or tackle the core campaign problem (THE SOLUTION card).

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Set up the final battle or conflict between the players and the opposing force.
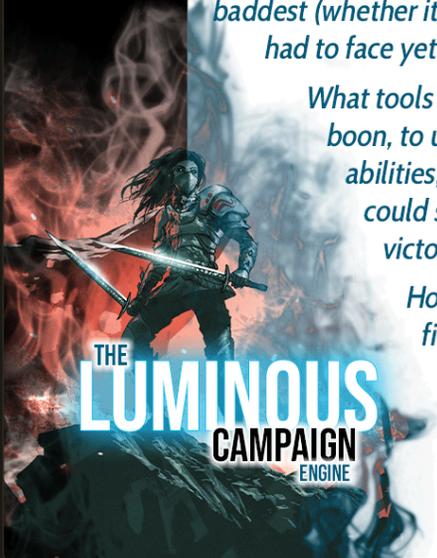
THE LAST FIGHT

During this step, the heroes take the fight to the opposing force, or the opposing force tries one last time to prevent the heroes from solving the core campaign problem.

What last-ditch efforts or unrevealed might does the opposing force still have to throw at the heroes?

How do you show your heroes that this fight is not a foregone conclusion? In what ways can you make this fight the biggest and baddest (whether it involves combat or not) thing the heroes have had to face yet?

What tools do the heroes now have, most notably the boon, to use against the opposing force? What weapons, abilities, or allies does the opposing force have that could spoil the boon and prevent the hero's final victory?

How does the final battle resolve? What is the final fate of the opposing force?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

Final Battle

A gamemaster and their players can choose to tackle the core campaign problem first, fight the opposing force first, or take both on at the same time. This card covers the confrontation with the opposing force.

The Last Fight

During this step, the heroes take the fight to the opposing force, or the opposing force tries one last time to prevent the heroes from solving the core campaign problem.

STEP II ACT IV

Final Battle

The confrontation with the opposing force.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What last-ditch efforts or unrevealed might does the opposing force still have to throw at the heroes?*

2. *How do you show your heroes that this fight is not a foregone conclusion?*

3. *What tools do the heroes now have, most notably the boon, to use against the opposing force? What could spoil the boon and prevent the hero's final victory?*

4. *How does the final battle resolve? What is the final fate of the opposing force?*

> THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
>
> *The final battle doesn't have to involve combat. Disarming bombs, archery contests, chases, election debates, and escaping a burning building all qualify as climactic confrontations.*

THE SOLUTION

NOTE

A gamemaster and their players can choose to tackle the core campaign problem first, fight the opposing force first, or take both on at the same time. To reflect this, Act IV has a card for each option for step two: **THE FINAL BATTLE** and **THE SOLUTION**. You will pull events and opportunities from both cards in the order your heroes decide to tackle the opposing force (**THE FINAL BATTLE** card) or tackle the core campaign problem (**THE SOLUTION** card).

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

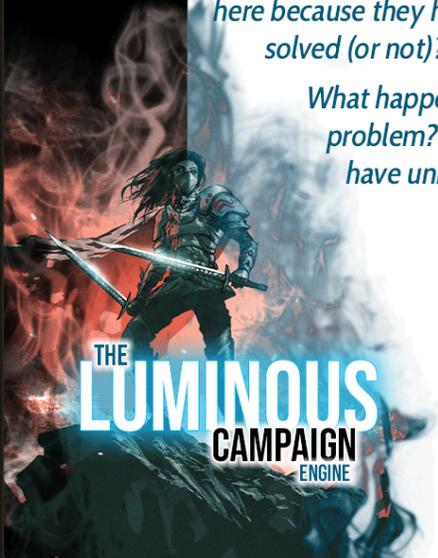• Pit the players against the core campaign problem one last time.

THE LAST FIGHT

During this step, the heroes attempt to solve the core campaign problem once and for all.

What final steps are required to solve this problem? What difficulties remain that prove to the heroes that success is not a foregone conclusion?

Are forces of the opposition still complicating the final solution? Does the boon play any part in solving the core campaign problem? What other characters and storylines become entangled here because they have a vested interest in the problem being solved (or not)?

What happens immediately upon the resolution of the problem? Does the resolution itself cause a cataclysm or have unintended consequences?

THE LUMINOUS CAMPAIGN ENGINE

The Solution

This card covers the resolution of the core campaign problem itself — separate from the opposing force. A gamemaster and their players can choose to tackle the core campaign problem first, fight the opposing force first, or take both on at the same time.

The Last Fight

During this step, the heroes attempt to solve the core campaign problem once and for all.

STEP II ACT IV

The Solution

Resolving the core campaign problem.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *What final steps are required to solve this problem? What difficulties remain that prove success is not a foregone conclusion?*

2. *Are forces of the opposition still complicating the final solution? Does the boon play any part in solving the core campaign problem?*

3. *What other characters and storylines become entangled here because they have a vested interest in the problem being solved (or not)?*

4. *What happens immediately upon the resolution of the problem? Does the resolution itself cause a cataclysm or have unintended consequences?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

The Solution and the Final Battle can happen simultaneously, sequentially, or in any order. Let your players drive the sequence.

ADVENTURES & BUILDING BLOCKS

Develop adventures and building blocks that:

- Show the immediate consequences of the destruction of the extraordinary world, solution of the core campaign problem, and elimination of the opposing force.

- Show or hint at the long term consequences - unintended, intended, positive, negative, etc - of the end of the campaign.

- Give the heroes their reward - positive or negative - for their efforts in this campaign.

- Wrap up any additional storylines that need it.

END OF THE EXTRAORDINARY & BEGINNING OF THE MUNDANE

The end of the core campaign problem means the end of a world infected with its difficulties. *Is there any tangible effect on the world now that the core campaign problem and opposing force are gone? Is their passing a cataclysm in its own right?*

The loss of these difficulties also means the world has returned to a new "normal state." *What does the world look like now that peace and tranquility have (hopefully) returned? How does this impact the heroes?*

REWARDS

All good deeds must not go unpunished. *What rewards do your heroes acquire for their heroics (or lack thereof) in the campaign? What punishments?*

WRAP-UP

All loose ends should be wrapped up. *What other characters, places, and objects have stories that need to be wrapped up?*

THE **LUMINOUS** CAMPAIGN ENGINE

Consequences

The end of the core campaign problem means the end of a world infected with its difficulties.

End of the Extraordinary and Beginning of the Mundane

The loss of these difficulties means the world has returned to a new "normal state." What does the world look like now that peace and tranquility have (hopefully) returned? How does this impact the heroes?

Rewards

All good deeds must not go unpunished. What rewards do your heroes acquire for their heroics (or lack thereof) in the campaign? What punishments?

Wrap-Up

All loose ends should be wrapped up. What other characters, places, and objects have stories that need to be wrapped up?

STEP III ACT IV

Consequences

The aftermath — rewards, consequences, and the new world.

STORY PROMPTS

1. *Is there any tangible effect on the world now that the core campaign problem and opposing force are gone? Is their passing a cataclysm in its own right?*

2. *What does the world look like now that peace and tranquility have (hopefully) returned? How does this impact the heroes?*

3. *What rewards do your heroes acquire for their heroics (or lack thereof) in the campaign? What punishments?*

4. *What other characters, places, and objects have stories that need to be wrapped up?*

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Show or hint at the long-term consequences — unintended, intended, positive, negative — of the end of the campaign. The best endings plant seeds for future stories.