


The Paperflesh Advent

a Trophy Dark incursion by Speak the Sky





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The Paperflesh Advent, v1.1

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Credits

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GUIDANCE

Questions

Questions marked ❖ (four diamonds) help define the world, the journey, and the hunters as a group, and should be asked to the group as a whole. Some invite answers from everyone; others require a single answer. For example:

- ❖ Who does the mob see as a leader?
- ❖ What supplies do you discard in periodic flight from the swarms?

Questions marked ◆ (one diamond) probe each hunter's individual thoughts and actions, and should be asked to each player in turn (or a single player depending on the question). For example:

- ◆ Which plea catches your attention?
- ◆ Who did you promise you would be safe?

Moments and Conditions

Each Ring in this incursion features a short table of its own Moments and the incursion as a whole has a single table of Conditions. You can roll on and/or choose from them as you prefer.

Historical Notes

Mellified man was an apocryphal Arabic medicine made by voluntary human sacrifice, reported by Chinese scholars. The sacrifice ate only honey for weeks until all their excreta turned to honey. After death, their body was steeped in honey and sealed to mummify over a hundred years until it became a sweet medication capable of healing broken bones, and other conditions. Give the players this information before beginning play.

Content Notes

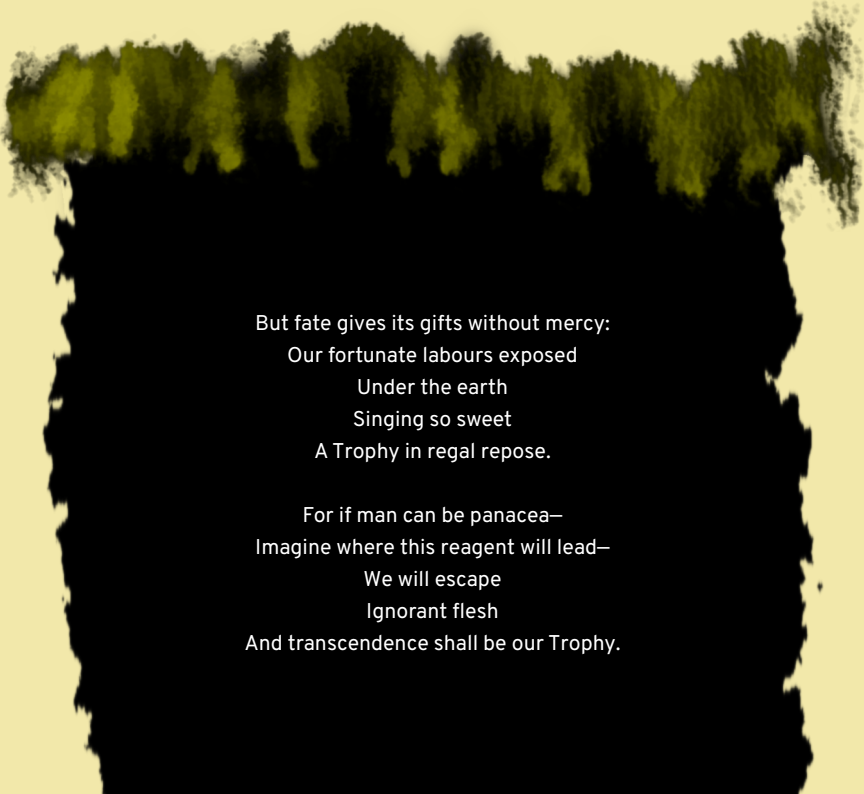
This incursion includes body horror, psychological horror, insects, unreliable narration, and potentially claustrophobia-inducing situations.

I heard a far tale from a trav'ler
I heard of the mellified man
I heard of the sweet panacea
That cannot be found in this land.

I saw only rot in the city
I saw all its glories dissolve
I saw death's pale face in each mirror
A Trophy too withered to hold.

So I went out into the forest
I went through the veil of black leaves
I went out to cultivate heaven
A Trophy 'til sunlight shall cease.

And they came, the ageing, the desp'rate
They came to see hope in my plan
They came to partake panacea
A Trophy we built hand in hand.



But fate gives its gifts without mercy:
Our fortunate labours exposed
Under the earth
Singing so sweet
A Trophy in regal repose.

For if man can be panacea—
Imagine where this reagent will lead—
We will escape
Ignorant flesh
And transcendence shall be our Trophy.

INTRODUCTION

Half the alchemical charlatans in the world promise gold, and the other half promise immortality.

A dissenting fraction, drunk on mead and ambition, decided to outdo their contemporaries. They went into the forest to build a place where they could combine gold *and* immortality in their own transcendental way. That was generations ago and nobody remembered those hungry souls much, until the first deliveries made their way across the tree line.

The black market rumours started out simply enough: midnight deals with cloaked apothecaries. Then word got out about the precise nature of the new merchandise: crystallised scraps of skin; a candied thumb or eye; sweet unthinkable delicacies exchanged for gold coin. The word on everyone's lips? Panacea.

There's hefty disagreement between skeptics and believers, and no evidence of its curative properties as of yet, but one thing's for sure: Mellified man is worth more than its weight in gold and rarer than a cat's footfall. A century-old limb or body could set you up for life and longer, and who knows—if it really is a panacea, that could solve plenty more problems for you.

The only clue you have is the deep and colourful stains on the flanks of the couriers' horses. There can only be one source: the Bleeding Kaleidoscope, a fabled flower meadow so tortuously dazzling that people say even an angel could get lost among the colours and never return.

Keep a clear head, now. The forest sings a sweet song of promises, true and false alike.

THEME: PROMISES

CHARACTER CREATION

Occupations

- Robber (*skilled in killing, hiding, thieving*)
- Apothecary (*skilled in herbs, chemistry, barter*)
- Scholar (*skilled in alchemy, rituals, history*)
- Tracker (*skilled in pathfinding, beasts, bow*)
- Agent (*skilled in thuggery, espionage, knives*)
- Priest (*skilled in scripture, condemnation, abjuration*)



Backgrounds

- Debunked Quack (*skilled in rookery*)
- Faithless Servant (*skilled in sabotage*)
- Bankrupted Merchant (*skilled in acquisition*)
- Disgraced Diplomat (*skilled in provocation*)
- Tormented Saint (*skilled in charity*)
- Harrowed Deserter (*skilled in paranoia*)

Drives


- Cure the xanthous pox in Fort Duhrin's slums
- Bribe the Flaxenskin Hounds to lose your trail
- Disprove the heretical miracles of the Barsul Saint
- Buy your family passage through Gallows Pass
- Prolong the torture of the usurper of Gul Sarmeh
- Secure a position at the Chirurgeon's Court





Rituals



- Mollify (*entreat a creature*)
- Siphon (*empty a creature of a fluid*)
- Lantern (*light a path to treasure*)
- Drench (*heal wounds with colour*)
- Concord (*enforce a promise with a curse*)
- Jubilate (*create kaleidoscopic illusions*)


CONDITIONS

 Your saliva, mucus, and tears sweeten. A congregation of bees swarms presumptuously around your face, seeking satisfaction.

  Sounds grow dull and distorted, as if smothered under heavy water.


or  The skin of your left hand begins to droop like an ill-fitting glove.



  You feel a barbed and cankerous *thing* maturing under your navel.


 Your blood thickens and sharpens and stings in your veins.



 The cartilage of your nose melts and drips away. The skin follows.


 Your mouth waters, stomach tightens, when you see anything gold.


 You hear beautiful singing at all times, but can't place the words.


  You can't help but scan the horizon in anticipation. Your vision doubles up anything closer than your own outstretched hand.



or  Your skin breaks out in burning hives the colour of the flowers you touched.


  You can feel words being written on your skin with sharp quills.


 Your balance warps. You scuttle over the earth like a wingless bee. It feels safer there.


 You hear implicit, alluring promises in everything said to you.

 You instinctively take others at their word now. It takes a strong effort to dislodge your certainty and reconsider.

  You have a deep conviction that a talent that you abandoned long ago has nevertheless matured within you.

or  You refuse to make or keep promises here. A promise is a trap, and you feel you must be ready to do anything.

 Things feel unreal unless you write them down.

 You feel that you are becoming what you were always meant to be.

RING I: THE FOREST

Terrors

Before sunrise. The hunters approach the tree line across an exposed stretch of muddy ground, chased and surrounded by a mob of desperate petitioners. Somehow, word spread of their intentions. Now those unable or unwilling to enter the forest themselves foist heavy desires upon the hunters' backs.

- ◆ What rumours do they whisper about the hunter to your right?
- ◆ Is it really true, what they say about you?

These people are passionate, their desires personal and sympathetic. Some beg for cures—for leprosy, cancer, pox, the like—and others plead with them to find loved ones who went missing on the same foolhardy quest. The mob grows more agitated and prone to violence as the treasure-hunters force their way closer to the forest, but any petitioners who the hunters promise to help will gratefully turn on the others to assist their passage. One such assistant per hunter will make for an easy trip. That said, the members of the mob are not trained soldiers or ruthless bandits. They can be discouraged and dispersed with a little violence. Their only advantages are numbers and



unbridled woe, and they will slough away as the hunters pass the tree line.

- ◆ Which plea catches your attention?
- ◆ Why can't you ignore this petitioner like all the rest?
- ❖ Who does the mob see as a leader?

Temptations

Anonymous laughter and song filter through the bristles of the bushes and trees. Sun worshippers in white robes messily stained with vivid colour dance in sacred procession and cheer as the treasure-hunters pass. They're helpless in their inebriation and delirium, and babble prophetically.

- ◆ How do they cryptically refer to the hunter to your left?
- ◆ What symbols do they speak or use to foreshadow that hunter's twin fates of glorious success and terrifying failure?
- ◆ Why do you put little stock in the promises of gods and their followers?

Glimmers in the distance, over ridges and through gullies, suggest that the forest opens up into a riotous meadow—surely the Bleeding Kaleidoscope.

- ❖ Which hunter first planned the journey here?
- ◆ Who did you trust with the knowledge?
- ❖ How did word of their plans spread out of control?

Moments

◻ A spider slowly spirals round its web to a captive bee at the centre, whose struggles only entangle it further.

◻ A veiled figure in mourning black points the way on. When the hunters look again, they see only a gnarled black tree with one heavy limb.

◻ A wax seal marked with an illustrious emblem sits discarded in the mud.

◻ A filthy hunting dog lies sleeping in the embrace of a severed arm.

◻ Fresh flowers rest on gravestones scattered askew between the trees.

◻ Rows of lily-of-the-valley bow and toll like little bells as the hunters pass.

RING II: THE APIARY

Terrors

The forest opens into a vast and rolling expanse. Grasping ink-black trees and towering paper-white wooden beehives pierce a flower meadow saturated with bleeding colour. Light deceives the eyes here: Things seem to appear and disappear, stand twisted or off-angle, or exist in more than one place at a time. It's exhausting to walk through this living kaleidoscope, and so easy to get lost, to wander between the towers and never return.

- ❖ When you look back, what landmarks have treacherously shifted?
- ❖ What ill omen stubbornly remains, to your dismay?

Swarms of bees ripple with glittering patterns and overwhelm with venom. Most tend to their hives, but some have the tautest of tempers.

- ❖ What supplies do you discard in periodic flight from the swarms?
- ◆ What special object draws their ferocious attention?
- ◆ Why can this thing not be so easily abandoned?

Venom-inflamed, slaving beasts menace from the corpses.

- ❖ How do you miss seeing their approach, though you know the danger?
- ◆ Who do the beasts remind you of, and therefore why do you fear them?
- ◆ Who did you promise you would be safe?

Temptations

Shelter. The jagged, blasted hull of one of the beehives, blackened by terrible flame, points accusingly at the sky. Inside are the roasted remains of a person. They grip a map in their charred hands, fragile cinders now except for a few preserved fragments that show a way on—a road to nowhere.

- ❖ Which dangers marked on the map have you unknowingly avoided?
- ❖ What trinket glisters in the ash, ready for the taking?

A dozen field mice tumble and stagger around the sticky shards of a glass jar wrapped in wax paper—the very same as the deliveries are made in. The mice have gorged themselves on the contents. Only smears of honey and a few gnawed fingernails remain.

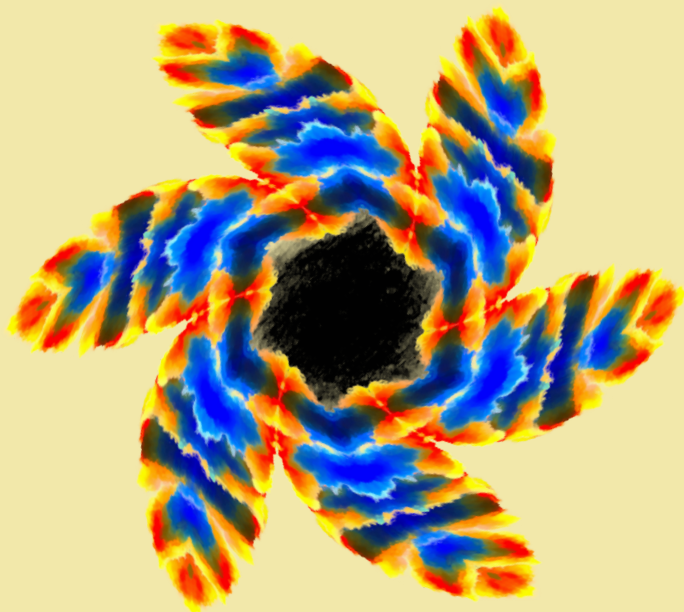
◆ Who pockets one anyway?

The nearby hives grow taller—first three mighty segments, then four, then five, then six. Taller, and denser. A mellifluous song winds its way between the towers, indistinct but enchanting. It beckons the hunters on and they're compelled to listen over the drone of the hives.

- ◆ Whose voice do you hear, and therefore why do you trust it?
- ◆ What daydreams do you surrender to as you follow the song inward?

Moments

-
- A boot sits empty save for rainwater and fragrant petals.
-
- Someone stumbles over a cache under loose rocks: dried fruit and meat scoured by insects and a note whose words are distorted by rainwater.
-
- Flowers grow from the kneeling husk of a sun worshipper. Their head sags back under the weight of a heavy stand of amaranth stemming from deep inside.
-
- A body hangs from a gallows built into one of the hives, crimes inked on dry skin.
-
- A swarm of bees erupts from the earth at the hunters' feet and roars into the sky. When the hunters turn back to the trail ahead, it has changed beyond recognition.
-
- Two bodies lean together in jocular embrace, smiles stretched taut on their bone-dry skin. Each holds a knife in the other's back.
-



RING III: THE CATACOMBS

Terrors

The hunters are walking through a pitch-black subterranean maze lined with metal cisterns, each engraved with dates running back through time. Gape-mouthed side passages reveal new ways forward, while tightening gaps between cisterns force the hunters to backtrack. Gold-leaf statuettes of grotesque angels hang from stone arches.

- ❖ Who's most comfortable taking the lead in these halls of the dead?
- ❖ Who refuses to act as rearguard?

It's dark, cold, and tiresome.

- ❖ Who lacks provisions?
- ◆ Whose need can you meet and what price do you require, now or later?

There's something in here with them, jaggedly humming the melody they heard before as it stalks between the cisterns. The first sight of danger is a pale lantern's light that sways round a corner.

- ❖ The silhouette that follows couldn't possibly belong to a human. Why?
- ❖ Who alerts the **abysmal watchman**?

It promises a way out, if only they submit to its inspection—and come closer, into its light, where it can see them better (and they can see it not at all)...

- ◆ Who does its voice and words remind you of, and therefore why do you *not* trust it?
- ◆ What will happen to all those you made promises to if you die, or worse, deep in the earth?
- ◆ What selfish risk does another hunter take that puts you in danger in their haste to escape through the stumbling dark?

Temptations

After the flight, there's time and space for rest in a cramped side-passage. The hunters make camp, and have the opportunity to eat and drink.

- ◆ What provision stirs your soul?
- ◆ Where did you obtain it?

The faintest of breezes carries warm air and a hazy, luminous song from unknown reaches. The song is a fine lullaby. What word or phrase does each hunter think they hear? Those who sleep dream of the apex of their lives—moments of pride, love, or bright futures.

- ◆ Who wakes you at the worst time?
- ◆ What final image sticks in your mind?
- ◆ How will leaving the forest with a suitable trophy ensure your ascent to new heights or a return to what you once had?

The further they go, the more cisterns are engraved with names and kind epitaphs. Eventually, they come across one with its lid unfastened and left to one side. It drips sparse honey from the rim and contains a finger or two, or some other scraps, deep at the bottom. The date engraved on the cistern is just more than a century ago. The next few cisterns, last in line, are stripped clean—but there's a dazzling white light at the end of the tunnel up ahead, and the song leads that way.

Moments

- An emaciated figure sits caged in a barred alcove, gnawing on tatters of mellified flesh. Their skin glistens; their eyes are glazed. A notebook hanging by twine from a nearby hook records an experiment's progress.

- Eyes stare silently from a metal grate in the floor. One pair, then two, then more, accompanied by the jostling of naked bodies. The captives size up those who stop to look and hastily plead for freedom with anyone who appears strong.

- A sludgy trail of immiscible russet and gold leaks from a cistern's base.

- A cistern breathes. Quiet prayer echoes. Soft weeping follows.

- An alcove, stuffed with unsent letters written by many hands.

- Papery human skins inked with crimes hang on hooks along a passage.

RING IV: THE FOUNDRY

Terrors

The tunnel leads out to a wide, chalky excavation open to the scorching midday sun. Millions of soporific bees drift like embers and a ragged banner the colour of bleached skin flutters high overhead. The path spirals to the bottom, where workers in heavy leather garb attend to a massive dewar—an insulated, double-layered vessel—in a complex iron frame.

Waves of heat roll up the verge and crash against the hunters, as well as other workers on the higher levels who toil at alchemical apparatus. Through the dewar's two layers of glass they see black muck—and a skeleton dressed in shorn flesh, though these are surely not the flesh and bones of any human creature.

- ❖ What animalistic shapes do you see?
- ◆ Why does that strike fear into your heart?
- ❖ What signs of devastation show that it was not imprisoned willingly?

Temptations

The workers are vividly young, but raggedly tired. They speak with old dialects like the hunters' grandparents or ancestors.

- ❖ What overheard ancient oaths give away their true ages?
- ❖ What physical feats do they achieve thanks to their youth?

A few workers stack wax paper packages in a little cart by a storage shack at the bottom of the pit. The hunters catch glimpses of fragments of mellified man in glass jars: digits, limbs, and viscera with translucent, golden-white flesh. Just one chunk would be worth a fortune for the right buyer. There must be even more valuable components in there, somewhere.

Two songs are sung in counterpoint: a heavy sledgehammer of a work song and that same deliriously wonderful melody.

- ◆ What promise do you pick out in the chaos of overlapping lyrics?

Note: the following Terror should happen after the Temptation(s).

Terrors

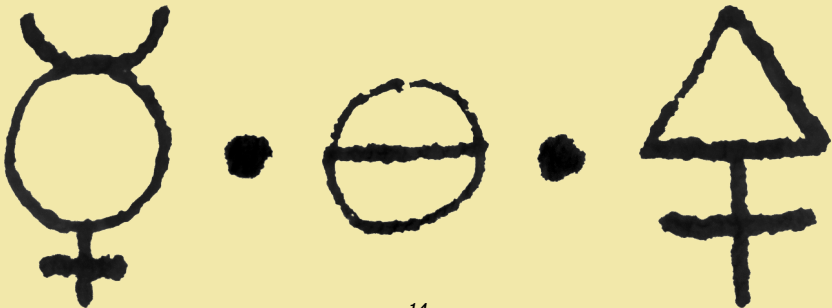
The workers notice the hunters, whether or not they try to hide. Some turn away from their tasks to drive the hunters down towards the bottom with masterful violence and unseemly rituals. They inflict harm brutally and deliberately, but stop short of killing.

- ◆ What can't you help but admire in these supernally competent and merciless adversaries?
- ◆ Which of your own companions' shortfalls are painfully obvious?

All eyes are on the hunters for the briefest of moments...

Moments

-
- ◻ An incomplete painting sits on an easel overlooking the apparatus at the bottom. The subject is a black sun overwhelming a struggling mass of people below.
-
- ◻ A ledger left open on a barrel details customers noble, ignoble, and strange. Credit is marked in gold, as well as less conventional offerings.
-
- ◻ A fermenting, bubbled-over cistern overflows with animal body parts.
-
- ◻ An exhortation engraved in iron: *Labour in the earth, Claim the sky above.*
-
- ◻ Emblems of long-declined houses and cities hang from the workers' belts and necks.
-
- ◻ A few weary workers sit on the dusty verge drinking honey-wine, talking, laughing, singing, leather coveralls stripped off to the waist.
-



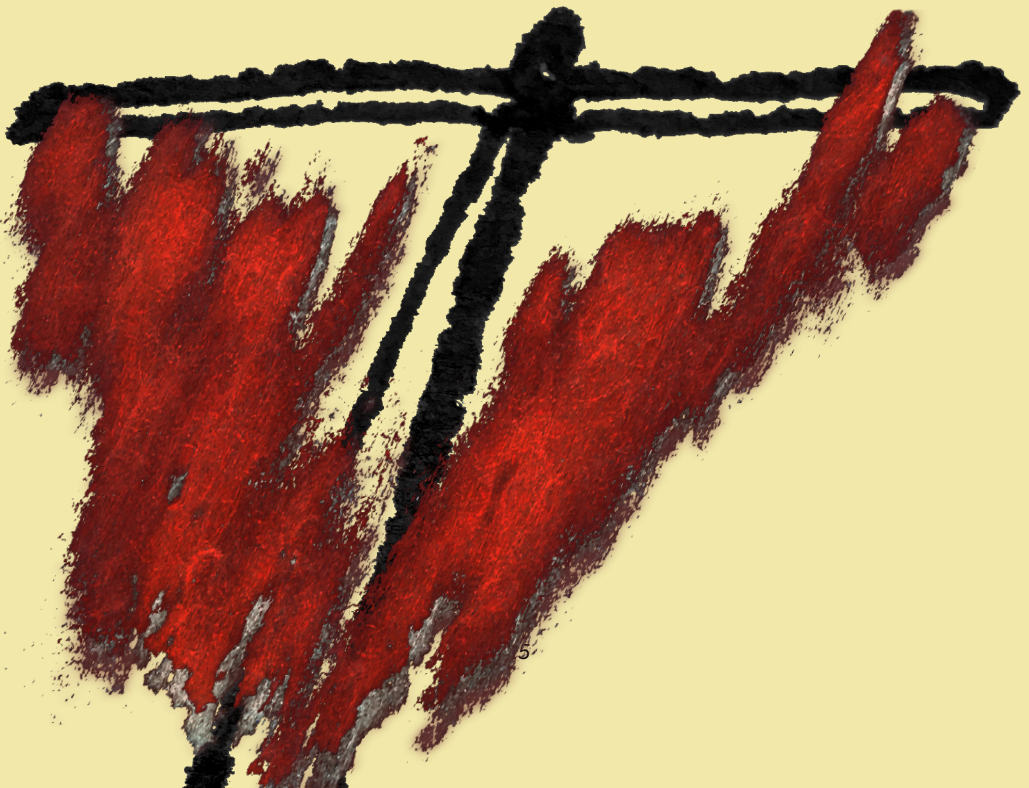
RING V: THE PIT

Terrors

The dewar cap explodes in a fury of broken iron and burning sugar that sticks like tar to all it touches. All present are faced with the incandescent rage of the **mellified angelic corpse** rising from the dewar: burning, skinless, terribly holy; a white abomination drenched in black honey that towers above in glory. The swarm gathers over its head in apocalyptic whorls, blotting out the unnecessary sun. The cisterns boil and bleed and turn to molten metal and fleshy slag under its gaze. The angel casts burning judgment with animal intelligence.

- ❖ What dreadful rituals do the workers employ to restrain the corpse?
- ❖ What price do they pay when the rituals fail?

The only way out is up, through the fire and the swarm, into the desolate air above the workman's pit. The familiar song guides them up to the rim of the excavation towards the fluttering banner that looms larger with every step. From this high vantage point they look down over endless black trees beyond the rim. Still, the smoke and heat is rising. So is the angelic corpse.



Temptations

The banner looms over them, but even through the haze they see it's no banner at all. Bone-dry to the touch, it's a rustling, twitching, *singing* mass of skin blotted with mouths, feathers, and eyes. This **sordid angelic slough** is what they heard through the Bleeding Kaleidoscope, the catacombs, and the foundry, and followed all the way here. Now, it sings directly to them in the voices of those they cannot ignore: *Wear me. Grant me blood and warmth and I will grant your wishes.* The parched remnant will promise whatever it needs to. It has been singing, but it has also been listening to what is thought and dreamt and said. It promises unimaginable power and the fulfilment of every promise that burdens their bodies and minds.

- ◆ What makes your own dreams and promises so much more worthy and precious than the others'?
- ◆ What about the others' desires strikes you as petty or absurd?

All you need to do is wet its tongue and wear its skin—moisten its throat and draw its breath—*give everything you are to me and I will give everything I am to you.* The blood of humans has no substitute in this infernal alchemy. After all, man is the closest earthly creature to god. Only one can wear the withered raiment, however. Who will dare?

Moments

-
- ◻• Drops of burning sugar-pitch fall like rain, setting everything alight.
-
- ◻◦ Two of the workers hold each other tight and whisper in each others' ears as doom descends upon them.
-
- ◻◦ Wild theophanies sprout into being: pillars of fire and smoke; burning trees that babble prophetically; caustic kaleidoscopic rainbows.
-
- ◻◦◦ Roiling shapes in the pit below send up grasping crepuscular shadows.
-
- ◻◦◦ The angelic corpse's heart beats like a tremendous thunderclap drum.
-
- ◻◦◦◦ A hale man with deep-set eyes and white robes over leather gear exhorts the workers to fight, because their victory, he claims, is assured.
-

THREE DOZEN FLOWERS

□ hangman's garland

□ tongue-of-the-sky

□ rusalka's locks

□ remember-the-viper

□ witch skinner

□ radiant horn

□ canker candle

□ humming throne

□ wastrelmouth

□ fairies' fingers

□ misbegotten rose

□ winking poppy

□ slumbering glory

□ flags of Lost Kalduhr

□ petal barnacle

□ mouse's cradle

□ huntsman's corpse

□ lily-of-the-fissure

□ sigil flower

□ tendrilline

□ organ grinder

□ blasphemer's quill

□ vernal gorebride

□ jealous prophet

□ aleph dripper

□ messenger's mirth

□ crucible pearl

□ soberstem

□ friar's bridle

□ yawn smother

□ kaleidoscope's gaze

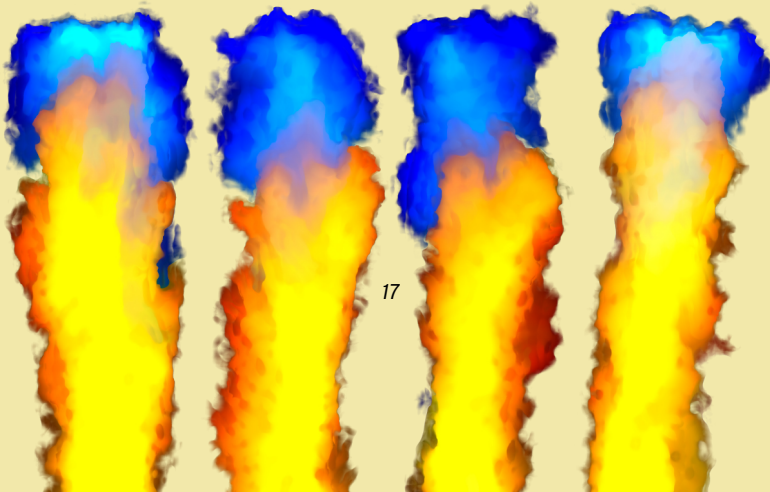
□ weeping wick

□ inkwell drinker

□ winter bellows

□ dulcimer-of-the-moon

□ crone's library





Half the alchemical charlatans in the world promise gold, and the other half promise immortality. A dissenting fraction went into the forest to combine both in their own disturbingly transcendental way.

Their creation? Mellified man. Human bodies steeped in honey for a hundred years that become a panacea, or so they say. It's worth far more than its weight in gold and rarer than a cat's footfall. Steal just one fragment and you could be set for life and longer.

Be careful, mind. The forest sings a sweet song of promises, true and false alike. The bones of those who came before you may be closer than you think.

