

The Perilous Realm

An Apocalyptic Fantasy

by Bill White
Consensus Games

Playtest Draft 0.4

Table of Contents

Act One: By What Strange Alchemy Are We Governed	5
Mise en Scene	6
Dramatis Personae	6
The Character Creation Process	7
Character Examples	11
Prester John and Wormwood	13
Initial Position	13
Summary	14
Act Two: We, In Some Unknown Power's Employ,	
Move on a Rigorous Line	15
Order of Play	15
A Character Turn Begins	15
Scene Framing Example	18
The Dice You Roll	19
Playing Out the Scene	19
Making Progress	22
Act III: Well Met Are We Upon Megiddo Plain	23
References and Inspiration	25

Act One: By What Strange Alchemy Are We Governed

TO GET READY FOR THE GAME, the Game Master (GM) should prepare a “map” of Prester John’s kingdom consisting of an eight-by-eight grid of Tarot cards. The cards should be thought of as occupying eastings and northings as in the following chart. The cardinal directions are numbered, thus:

		North (1)										
		1, 8	2, 8	3, 8	4, 8	5, 8	6, 8	7, 8	8, 8			
		1, 7	2, 7	3, 7	4, 7	5, 7	6, 7	7, 7	8, 7			
		1, 6	2, 6	3, 6	4, 6	5, 6	6, 6	7, 6	8, 6			
West (4)	1, 5	2, 5	3, 5	4, 5	5, 5	6, 5	7, 5	8, 5	East (2)			
	1, 4	2, 4	3, 4	4, 4	5, 4	6, 4	7, 4	8, 4				
	1, 3	2, 3	3, 3	4, 3	5, 3	6, 3	7, 3	8, 3				
	1, 2	2, 2	3, 2	4, 2	5, 2	6, 2	7, 2	8, 2				
	1, 1	2, 1	3, 1	4, 1	5, 1	6, 1	7, 1	8, 1				
	South (3)											

Each square represents a province in the kingdom of Prester John, in truth an empire of many peoples spread across the regions of Sind, Hind, Zabajji, and Zanj; that is, central and south-central Asia, south-western Asia and the islands beyond, and parts of eastern Africa. The precise geography is, to be sure, not terribly important.

Swords (Chole) Open Plains, Steppe, or Desert
 Wands (Melanche) Forest, Jungle, or Valley
 Cups (Sange) Swamp, Marshland, or Coastlands
 Pentacles (Pneuma) Mountains, Highlands, or Hill Country
 Major Arcana (any) Town or Island

Additionally, the GM should assemble sufficient markers, tokens, pawns, chessmen, miniature figurines, and the like to represent various characters and locations on the map – perhaps a score of such counters, all told. Pennies or poker chips may be useful for keeping track of the in-game currency of “humours” (see below), but this may also be tracked with pencil and paper. Players will need copies of the individual play sheets in any case, as well as a set of polyhedral dice (d4, d6, d8, d12, and d20, to be specific;

the ten-sided and percentile dice often included in such sets are not required for this game).

Mise en Scene

The time is the 12th century. The place is the Kingdom of Prester John, the much-storied Christian monarch of the Far East, Lord of the Four Indies. His empire is divided into the four domains of Hind, Sind, Zanj, and Zabajji, each with 16 provinces therein. The many provinces of Prester John's empire range across deserts and jungles and include sun-soaked islands in the glimmering sea as well as snow-capped mountains at the top of the world.

This empire is ruled from the grand and glorious city of Nysse, at whose center stands a palace of marvels, in which may be found all manner of wonders and a court that is peopled by men and women from across the known world, content in the king's service and eager for his praise.

Prester John is reknowned far and wide as a great and wise lord, ruling justly over many nations with kindness and mercy. The grandeur of his presence and the benign dignity of his gaze has caused strong men to weep and wicked men to flee. He is the latest in a dynastic line converted to Christianity by the apostle Judas Didymus, whom apocryphal legends say was twin brother to Jesus.

But the *Apocalypse of Judas Didymus* foretells a time when great tribulation and calamity will befall the Four Indies and the world beyond. It tells of "a star called Wormwood" that will fall upon the land and unleash beasts of war, plague, famine, and poison to devour the people. The prophecies of Judas say also that heroes from far-off lands will rise to oppose those beasts, at great cost to themselves, and ultimately to little avail, for both they and the kingdom of the Four Indies will perish from the earth.

This game is the story of that time.

Dramatis Personae

Each player creates a character who is a traveler to the kingdom of Prester John, headed there for some reason or another. It is not necessarily the case that the characters will begin the game together; in fact, it is likely that they will start quite separate in space.

Begin with your four humours (Chole, Sange, Melanche, Pneuma) each set at 3. Your humours, which together are referred to as your *temperament*, act as a resource and

constraint in play. During character creation, each step has an effect on the distribution of your humours as well as determining some in-game facet of your character.

Chole (KOH lay). This humour, also called “green bile,” is associated with the digestive tract and internal organs, particularly the kidneys and spleen. Its element is fire. Its virtue is cleverness; its vice is cynicism. An excess of Chole is said to result in excitability, rage, and anger. A deficiency of Chole produces episodes of gullible foolishness. A character with high Chole is excitable, irascible, volatile, energetic, prone to enthusiasms and manias, given to angry outbursts and susceptible to rage, jealousy, and envy – but also alert, daring, keen of sense and sharp of mind. The elemental form associated with Chole is a tetrahedron (i.e., d4).

Sange (SAN gay). This humour is said to be the major component of blood. It is associated with the heart and the circulatory system. Its element is water. Its virtue is bravery; its vice is foolhardiness. An excess of Sange is said to result in high-spirited giddiness. A deficiency of Sange occasions cowardice. A character with high Sange is outgoing, gregarious, equanimous in adversity and content in prosperity; but he or she is liable to placidity and indolence, and susceptible to the pressures and blandishments of ostensible friends. The elemental form associated with Sange is a dodecahedron (i.e., d12).

Melanche (mel AYHN kay). This humour, also called “black bile,” is associated with the digestive tract and internal organs, particularly the liver. Its element is earth. Its virtue is wisdom; its vice is a tendency to abstraction. An excess of Melanche is said to produce fits of depression, grief, and sadness. A deficiency of Melanche shows itself as ignorance. A character with high Melanche is withdrawn and morose, given to black moods and sullen funks; he or she also tends to be strong-willed and self-disciplined. The elemental form associated with Melanche is a cube (i.e., d6).

Pneuma (NOO mah). This humour is associated with the lungs and respiratory system. Its element is air. Its virtue is piety; its vice is cruelty. An excess of pneuma is said to cause emotional detachment and withdrawal. A deficiency of pneuma produces irreverence. A character with high Pneuma is serene and contemplative, but often naive and impractically idealistic. The elemental form associated with Pneuma is an octahedron (i.e., d8).

The Character Creation Process

Roll 1d4 to determine your character’s **purpose**. This roll will add 1 point to one humour. A *pilgrim* journeys to find and visit a holy site or sacred relic. A *emissary* is someone who comes with something to say – a missionary, envoy, or ambassador, or

1	Pilgrim (+1 Pneuma)
2	Emissary (+1 Melanche)
3	Merchant (+1 Sange)
4	Warrior (+1 Chole)

perhaps a wild-eyed prophet. A *merchant* seeks a market or a source of goods; he or she may be a caravan master or a humble peddler. A *warrior* may fight for love or money, and may be an adventurer or a mercenary, or have taken crusading vows of monastic ascetism out of piety.

Next, roll 1d6 to determine your character's **destination**. This is the place that he or she *wants* to go, or where he or she *must* go, or the landmark nearest to his or her true

1	The Castle of Gathonolabe (P) +1 Melanche
2	The Wall of Gogmagog (Kt) +1 Chole
3	The Tomb of St. Judas Didymus (B) +1 Melanche
4	The Fountain of Youth (R) +1 Pneuma
5	The Firesilk Bazaar (Q) +1 Sange
6	The Court of Prester John (K) +1 Pneuma

destination. Again, note that the roll affects the character's temperament, adding a point to one humour. The *Castle of Gathonolabe* is a mountain fortress wherein a rich and evil sorcerer trains an order of assassins, rewarding them with hedonistic and sybaritic pleasures. The *Wall of Gogmagog* is a fortification built by Alexander the Great across a great mountain pass which pens beyond it tribes of

cannibalistic nomads prophesied to someday serve as soldiers of the Antichrist. The *Tomb of St. Judas Didymus* is an ornate cathedral that houses the relics of the apostle sent to the Indies. The *Fountain of Youth* is a clear pool of sweet water somewhere in the middle of a tangled marsh or deep within a lonely grotto; those who drink from it three times in as many days are granted youthful vigor for the remainder of their lives. The *Firesilk Bazaar* is where an iridescent, multi-colored fabric of the same name is woven by women of the city of Nysse from the silk of the fire-loving salamander. The *Court of Prester John* is the Emperor's throne room and receiving hall, set within a palace that is graced with wonders from across the lands subject to the Emperor and those who have pled for his indulgence.

Roll 1d8 to determine the character's primary (or father) archetype. Use the result a trait, feature, or aspect of the character, and assign that trait to one of the character's humours according to the virtue or vice it best expresses. For example, a character who was *hot-tempered* would probably make that a Chole trait, while one who was *widely traveled* might make that a Melanche trait. Adjust the character's humors as indicated.

Roll 1d8 a second time to determine the character's secondary (or mother) archetype; if the result is the same, the character has only a single archetype. Give the character a second trait, and adjust his or her humours once more.

	1	0 0 0	Youth (Maiden). Departure, initiation, potential. Sange +2, Melanche -1.
	2	0 0 1	Knight (Priestess). Pursuit, conflict, struggle. Chole +2, Pneuma -1.
	3	0 1 0	Mentor (Mother). Giving, sheltering, waiting. Pneuma +2, Chole -1.
	4	0 1 1	Hermit (Witch). Gathering, resistance, obscuring. Melanche +2, Sange -1.
	5	1 0 0	Bishop (Seeress). Judgment, revelation, command. Chole +2, Sange -1.
	6	1 0 1	Vagabond. Seeking, failing, wandering. Melanche +2, Chole -1.
	7	1 1 0	Hero(ine). Mastery, transformation, victory. Sange +2, Pneuma -1.
	8	1 1 1	King (Queen). Completion, arrival, totality. Pneuma +2, Melanche -1.

Now roll your d12 to determine your character's zodiacal aspect, or **star-sign**.

	1	Capricorn (Melanche). Death, old age, failure, destruction.
	2	Aquarius (Pneuma). Magic, treasure-seeking, camaraderie.
	3	Pisces (Sange). Mysticism, religion, treachery, traveling.
	4	Aries (Chole). Strength, combat, valor, action.
	5	Taurus (Melanche). Health, rest, healing, endurance.
	6	Gemini (Pneuma). Messages, gathering knowledge, things hidden or concealed.
	7	Cancer (Sange). Fortune, luck, madness.
	8	Leo (Chole). Worldly power, justice, leadership.
	9	Virgo (Melanche). Worldly knowledge, mercy, love, sex.
	10	Libra (Pneuma). Peace, cooperation, commerce, working together.
	11	Scorpio (Sange). War, vengeance, evil deeds, scheming.
	12	Sagittarius (Chole). Laughter, teaching, protection, resurrection, rebirth.

Finally, roll your d20 to determine your **origin**; that is, where you come from.

1 Byzantium	6 Fatimid Egypt	11 Leon & Castile	16 Scotland
2 Cathay	7 Frankish Lands	12 Moorish Empire	17 Seljuk Sultanate
3 Cipango	8 Holy Roman Empire	13 Outremer	18 Sicily & Apulia
4 England	9 Kiev	14 Rome	19 Syria
5 Ethiopia	10 Languedoc	15 Scandinavia	20 Venice

Byzantium is the hard-pressed and much-shrunken eastern Roman Empire, whose people are called Greeks by those from the Latin West and known for their subtle duplicity. The Emperor rules from the city of Constantinople.

Cathay is the great kingdom of the far east, whose Song Emperor presides over an elaborate bureaucracy and whose vibrant culture produces many marvels.

Cipango is an insular island-kingdom beyond Cathay where the Heike and Genji noble families vie for influence with the emperor of their land.

England is a kingdom in the far West conquered a generation or two ago by Norman princes from the continent, who retain lands in Normandy and Brittany.

Ethiopia is a Christian kingdom in the far South whose ruling dynasty is descended from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba; it has been cut off from the rest of Christendom by the expansion of Islam along with other Nubian kingdoms such as Alodia, Blemmyes, and Makuria.

Fatimid Egypt is the center of one of the chief powers of Islam, with important cities such as Cairo and Alexandria in its domain. The rule of its weak caliphs is supported by cunning eunuch viziers and mighty generals.

The Frankish lands include the Kingdom of France and its important principalities: the Duchy of Anjou, the County of Blois, and places such as Flanders and Aquitaine.

The Holy Roman Empire encompasses much of what is now Germany and northern Italy and comprises a network of semi-autonomous city-states, principalities, baronies, bishoprics, and other sorts of polities, united under an emperor whose authority is at most symbolic.

Kiev is one of the principalities that rules over the Russian steppes, and is an important corridor for trade between the far north and lands to the south. Its golden age is recently passed, and it faces pressures from rivals and nomads from the east.

Languedoc is the name for the regions of southern France like Provence and Toulouse where a particular Frankish dialect is spoken; its people are proud and assertive.

The Kingdom of Leon & Castile is the bulwark of Christendom against Moorish conquerors from the south, and is chief among the Spanish principalities that also include Valencia, Saragossa, Aragon, and Navarre.

The Moorish Empire of the Almoravids includes large portions of northwestern and sub-Saharan west Africa as well as southern Spain, and consists of numerous fractious and rebellious peoples ruled from the city of Marrakech.

Outremer is the name given to the imperilled crusader kingdoms established in the Holy Land by Norman and Frankish nobles late in the last century. It includes the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Principality of Antioch, and the County of Edessa. Rome is the seat of the Papacy, chief ecclesiastical authority of the Latin rite of Christianity and ruler of the surrounding Papal States. Scandinavia includes Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the Orkneys, whose far-traveling vikings were once the scourge of the North. Scotland is a kingdom in the far north of the British islands. The Seljuk Sultanate is the chief rival of the Fatimid dynasty for control of the Muslim world. It has many fractious client states who owe their allegiance to the Sultan in Baghdad. Sicily and Apulia in the south of Italy have been conquered by Norman adventurers who cagily play off Muslim and Byzantine influence to open up opportunities for themselves. Syria includes numerous provinces and principalities nominally under the sway of the Seljuks but which seek to preserve their autonomy by subtle diplomacy; the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Mosul are prominent among them. Venice is a mercantile city in northern Italy whose sailors move aggressively to acquire rights and privileges in markets far from home.

Character Examples

One player rolls d4:3, d6:2, d8:2, d8:4, d12:5, d20:8. The character is a merchant from the Holy Roman Empire headed for the Wall of Gogmagog. The d8 rolls produce the primary archetype Knight or Priestess, with a secondary archetype of Hermit or Witch. The d12 roll gives the character the sign of Taurus.

The character's humours are calculated as follows:

The d4:3 adds +1 Sange (Chole 3, Sange 4, Melanche 3, Pneuma 3).

The d6:2 adds +1 Pneuma (Chole 3, Sange 4, Melanche 3, Pneuma 4).

The d8:2 adds +2 Chole, -1 Pneuma (Chole 5, Sange 4, Melanche 3, Pneuma 3).

The d8:4 adds +2 Melanche, -1 Sange (Chole 5, Sange 3, Melanche 5, Pneuma 3).

So the character's temperament starts at Chole 5, Sange 3, Melanche 5, Pneuma 3, signifying a character who may be given to alternating bouts of mania and depression. The player starts from the notion of healing present in her character's sign of Taurus to decide that her character is an itinerant surgeon – a medieval doctor *skilled with a scalpel* (a Sange trait from the Knight archetype) and who has *spent long hours in solitary study* (a Melanche trait from the Hermit archetype) at a university in northern Italy – who has been sent to the Wall of Gogmagog by his elderly teacher in response to a letter from the general who commands there (a German in the service of Prester John

who happens to be an old friend of his instructor); the general needs a physician to tend to the chronic illness of his daughter, and the local doctors are stumped. Selling his services as a surgeon satisfies the requirement that the character be of the merchant type, and his character traits are sufficiently connected to the archetypes generated by the d8 rolls. The player also gives her character an Italian-sounding name: Dottore Giacomo Abbrenzi of Milan.

A second player rolls d4:4, d6:3, d8:4, d8:2, d12:4, d20:3. The character is a warrior from Cipango with the primary archetype Hermit/Witch and the secondary archetype Knight/Priestess who is headed for the Tomb of St. Judas Didymus. The player likes the idea of a ninja assassin for a powerful warlord or *daimyo* of whom he is the *sworn servant* (a Sange trait from the Knight archetype) and in whose service he has grown *cunning and cruel* (a Pneuma trait from the Witch archetype) sent in pursuit of a thief whose location he has been told will be indisputably revealed in the waters surrounding the tomb. The character's name is Tanaka Ichi, with the temperament Chole 6, Sange 2, Melanche 6, Pneuma 2.

A third player rolls d4:1, d6:3, d8:6, d8:8, d12:2, d20:13. The character is a pilgrim from Outremer journeying to the Tomb of St. Judas Didymus with the primary archetype Vagabond and the secondary archetype King or Queen, with the star-sign Aquarius. The player decides that his character is Baldwin the Leper, prince of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, traveling to the saint's tomb to visit its healing waters. His Melanche trait of *leprous taint* comes from the Vagabond archetype, and that of *regal bearing* (a Sange trait, the player decides) from the King archetype. His humours are Chole 2, Sange 3, Melanche 5, Pneuma 6.

PRESTER JOHN	
Chole 16 PEACE	Sange 16 HAPPINESS
Melanche 16 PLENTY	Pneuma 16 HARMONY
<p><i>This grid represents the resources available to Prester John and his empire.</i></p>	

Prester John and Wormwood

The "metagame" or background against which the character's actions take place is the apocalyptic struggle between Prester John and Wormwood, representing the forces of good and darkness respectively.

Create two grids representing the resources available to Prester John, Emperor of the Four Indies, and to Wormwood, Angel of the Apocalypse, during the game.

Prester John begins with 16 of each humour while Wormwood begins at 0.

During the first part of the game, however, Prester John will expend some of his humours while Wormwood will accumulate them. Once the final stage of the game is reached, the relative disparity between Wormwood and Prester John in each humour will shape the nature of the calamity that befalls the empire and the characters, and the difficulty of escaping or remedying it.

At the beginning of the game, all squares are under Prester John’s control; as the game progresses, squares may fall under the control of Wormwood.

Initial Position

Place a token representing each character on a square along the edge of the game-map. Roll 1d4 to determine the map edge from which the character enters (1 North, 2 East, 3 South, 4 West) and 1d8 to determine the specific square in which he or she arrives.

For each destination, roll 1d8 twice (first for the easting, and then for the northing) to determine its tentative initial location.

Summary

At the end of Act One, all the important characters have been described and have made their entrance upon the stage. Each character comprises at least a temperament of four humours; the ones controlled by the players (as compared to the ones controlled by the Game Master, or GM) also incorporate (a) two “alchemical” archetypes that in turn give shape to one character trait each, and (b) an astrological aspect or “star-sign.” Each alchemical trait is associated with one of the four humours.

WORMWOOD	
Chole 0 WAR	Sange 0 PLAGUE
Melanche 0 FAMINE	Pneuma 0 POISON

This grid represents the resources available to Wormwood and his minions.

Act Two: We. In Some Unknown Power's Employ. Move on a Rigorous Line

AS ACT TWO BEGINS, the characters created by the players have just entered the stage; that is, they are at the edge of the game-map, having entered severally from various directions. We already know a little bit about them, but the main function of Act Two is to develop the characters via role-playing their interactions with each other and with the Kingdom of Prester John. In addition, the progress of Act Two develops the apocalyptic metaplot as the power of Wormwood grows and that of Prester John weakens.

Order of Play

Determine the order of play by comparing characters' temperaments: highest Chole goes first, resolving ties in order of highest Sange, highest Melanche, highest Pneuma. Keep this order throughout the game, even though the temperaments of the characters will change.

For example, in a game involving the three sample characters created above, the order of play would be Tanaka Ichi, Dottore Giacomo Abrenzi, and Baldwin the Leper.

A Character Turn Begins

A character turn begins with the *active player* (i.e., the player whose turn it is) selecting an *interlocutor*; that is, another player with whom to interact via the medium of their characters. Usually, or at least at first, the interlocutor will be the GM, but when player-controlled characters are in the same square, the active player may choose the player of a co-located character as the interlocutor. Additionally, the player may choose as interlocutor any other player with whose character his or her own character has a tie (i.e., a connection of love, hate, fear, or reverence – see the rules below), even if that character is not in the same square.

Each player then secretly chooses one humour whose interaction will determine the “plot point” that begins the scene (see the table below), taking a point from that humour and transferring it to Wormwood.

The GM chooses **randomly** by drawing a card from the remaining cards in the tarot deck, such that Swords = Chole, Wands = Melanche, Cups = Sange, Pentacles = Pneuma, Major Arcana = mirror the player's choice. He transfers the relevant humour from Prester John to Wormwood unless Wormwood himself is the interlocutor, in

which case the transfer moves in the opposite direction, from Wormwood to Prester John. The amount transferred depends on the value of the card being drawn.

If the card is a 2 or 3, transfer 1 humour from the relevant suit from Prester John to Wormwood (Swords = Chole, Wands = Melanche; Cups = Sange; Pentacles = Pneuma). If the card is between 4 and 8, transfer 2 humours. If the card is a 9 or 10, transfer 3 humours. If the card is a face card or major arcana, transfer 4 humours.

The interaction of the selected humours determines the initial plot point for the scene. There are ten different plot points, each of which is broadly defined so as to potentially incorporate a wide variety of fictional events and which also specifies possible game-mechanical effects.

HUMOUR	Chole	Sange	Melanche	Pneuma
Chole	Struggle	Loss	Victory	Masking
Sange		Arrival	Obstacle	Pursuit
Melanche			Departure	Recognition
Pneuma				Remedy

Arrival (Sange-Sange). The active character arrives at a destination; the active character overcomes an obstacle; the active character is joined by or reunited with companions. *Move the character one square in a cardinal direction chosen by the active player; OR add a trait reflecting the event; OR move Prester John or another non-player character to the character's square; OR move Wormwood to the character's square if within the apocalyptic region (see below). Negate the effects of Obstacle.*

Departure (Melanche-Melanche). The active character begins or continues a journey, is dispatched by some authority or by his or her own initiative on a mission or other endeavor, or slips free of his or her current circumstances. *Move the character one square in a cardinal direction chosen by the interlocutor; OR add a trait reflecting the event. Negate the effects of Obstacle. Choose a new destination for the character, if desired. Leave pursuers and other characters behind, if desired.*

Loss (Chole-Sange). The active character loses a fight; something valuable is stolen or taken from the active character; the active character is hurt or injured. *Define the character as in a physical (Chole), intellectual (Melanche), social (Sange) or moral (Pneuma) conflict. Remove a tie or a trait or reduce one humour by an amount depending on the interlocutor's relevant humour: 1 to 3, 1d4; 3 to 8, 1d6; 9 to 15, 1d8; 16 or more, 1d12.*

Masking (Chole-Pneuma). The active character dons a disguise; the active character is marked, scarred, or branded; the active character hides from pursuers or other

- foes; the active character is forbidden to undertake some action or is otherwise constrained. *Give the character a new trait or tie reflecting the event.*
- Obstacle (Sange-Melanche). The active character faces a challenge, obstacle, obstruction, or other constraint; the active character is separated from companions; the active character is captured by foes. *The character cannot move until Arrival, Departure, or Remedy is played.*
- Pursuit (Sange-Pneuma). The active character is chased, tracked, followed, or shadowed by foes. *Create a new pursuer or move an existing pursuer into the character's square. Until Masking, Struggle, or Victory are played, expend an additional Chole humour in order to move, and the pursuer follows.*
- Recognition (Melanche-Pneuma). The active character abandons a disguise; the active character reveals a flaw or weakness; the active character's brand, mark, or scar is noticed or otherwise proves in some way consequential. *Add a new trait or tie to the character reflecting the event; OR tie another character to the character; OR remove any trait added by Masking.*
- Remedy (Pneuma-Pneuma). The active character girds for war; the active character receives a useful gift; the active character learns how to overcome an obstacle. *Add a new trait to the character reflecting the event; OR give the character a new special gift; OR negate the effects of Obstacle; OR restore a trait, tie, or special gift removed by Loss, OR add to one of the character's humours by an amount depending on the interlocutor's Pneuma: 1 to 3, 1d4; 3 to 8, 1d6; 9 to 15, 1d8; 16 or more, 1d12;*
- Struggle (Chole-Chole). The active character comes face-to-face with a foe or otherwise becomes engaged in some kind of conflict. *Define the character as in a physical (Chole), intellectual (Melanche), social (Sange) or moral (Pneuma) conflict. Reduce one of the active character's humours by an amount depending on the interlocutor's humour: 1 to 3, 1d4; 3 to 8, 1d6; 9 to 15, 1d8; 16 or more, 1d12. The character cannot move until Loss, Masking, Pursuit, or Victory are played.*
- Victory (Chole-Melanche). The active character defeats a foe; the active character receives a reward; the active character gains the respect, admiration, or love of another character; the active character is transfigured or transformed. *Add a new trait to the character reflecting the event OR tie another character to the character OR add a new archetype to the character. Remove one apocalyptic designation from the square, if any.*

The player of the moving active character can choose to take other characters with him or her as long as that is warranted or supported by the game-fiction.

If there is no other character in the square available to the interlocutor (i.e., if no character is in the square that doesn't already "belong" to someone other than the interlocutor), the interlocutor must generate one on-the-fly for the active character to interact with. Roll 1d8 and 1d12 to generate a character with an archetype and a star-

sign. Use the results of these rolls along with the terrain of the square and the plot point shaping the scene to inspire the beginning of the scene.

Kibbitzing from other players is encouraged, as is soliciting the input of the active player about what challenges and risks he or she is interested in having the character pursue.

The scene framing shades into a bit of “open role-play” between the interlocutor and the active player in order to more fully get at the heart of the scene. The interlocutor is trying to get the active player to commit his or her character to a course of action whose resolution will engage the game mechanics as well as move the action of the game forward.

Scene Framing Example

Tanaka Ichi begins his turn in a farmland square. His player chooses the GM to be interlocutor, as he must. The GM secretly chooses Chole while Tanaka’s player secretly chooses Pneuma, resulting in the plot point of Masking (*the active character dons a disguise; the active character is marked, scarred, or branded; the active character hides from pursuers or other foes; the active character is forbidden to undertake some action or is otherwise constrained*). The GM rolls a 2 for the interlocutor character’s archetype and 10 for the interlocutor character’s star-sign, making that character a Knight/Priestess of Libra, one whose activities involve pursuit, conflict, or struggle associated with peace, commerce, cooperation, or working together in some way.

In the GM’s mind, a “knight of commerce” associated with farmland is a wealthy land-owner, with many bondsmen in service to him working the fields. Since Tanaka Ichi is a ninja, the GM absolutely wants him to don a disguise for this plot point, so the question becomes what sort of disguise would best drive the scene, and what rationale for that disguise would make the most sense. The GM tells the Tanaka’s player, “You’ve arrived at the fortified home of a wealthy farmer with many servants who is preparing to go on a pilgrimage to the Tomb of St. Judas Didymus; your plan is to join his party in disguise so that you can make your way to the tomb more easily and avoid alerting the thief you’re after, because he has powerful friends in Nysse. How did you disguise yourself so that the wealthy farmer – his name is Panil Veda – will accept you as a member of his pilgrimage?”

Tanaka’s player says, “I disguise myself as a blind beggar who thinks that the relics of the saint can cure him, and play upon the rich man’s sympathies so that he’ll take me along.”

The GM tells Tanaka's player to add *disguised as a blind beggar* to the character as a Chole trait (i.e., something that helps the character when he's trying to be clever). He says, "The scene opens up with Tanaka Ichi coming at dusk up to the great mansion where Panil Veda makes his home. There is a great big front door, wide enough for a chariot to drive through; it is ornately carved and inlaid with panels of ivory. Around the back is the kitchen entrance, a small doorway at which beggars gather to receive whatever largesse the head cook is permitted to distribute to those who wait. What do you do?"

"I knock on the front door with my stick and wait to be admitted," says the player of Tanaka Ichi.

"Okay," the GM replies. "Let's see what happens. Roll your dice."

The Dice You Roll

Each participant in the scene rolls his or her d4 (Chole), d6 (Melanche), d8 (Pneuma), and d12 (Sange). He or she may also roll a d20 if during the "open role-playing" of scene framing, it became clear that the scene touches upon an aspect relevant to the character's star sign. In this case, the d20 is called the player's "Quintessence die." The Quintessence die may be used *in place of* any other die during the scene.

Playing Out the Scene

Once the scene is set, participants play it out by describing their actions and giving their words and deeds mechanical weight by assigning dice associated with their humours to the "scene grid" that characterizes those words and deeds.

The Action Round Beginning with the active player, each player describes his or her character's deeds or words and moves a die to the appropriate box on the scene grid, role-playing appropriately.

The action round continues going around the table until all dice are placed or everyone has passed (i.e., one may refrain from playing a die if one does not wish to characterize one's actions as it requires).

If, when playing a die, one can narrate in a trait associated with the same humour (whether that trait belongs to your character or not) to one's own advantage, one may use that trait to "roll up" (or roll down) one's own die by one point. You may also spend points from the corresponding humour in order to increase your roll up to the

maximum die result. You may add points to the corresponding humour if you roll down to the minimum die result.

Words and Deeds

During the action round, when you place a die, narrate or role-play your corresponding behavior as either *words* (i.e., expressions intended to convey something to a hearer) or *deeds* (i.e., actions with some sort of non-expressive physical purpose). Note that there is some overlap between the two types of behavior – e.g., a physical action not intended to signal anything but which in fact does, albeit inadvertently) – and clever players will leverage that overlap to their advantage when necessary.

Depending on the value of the die, the words or deeds being described need to be able to be characterized in a particular way. In general, when the die shows its highest value, the behavior should match the positive aspect of the corresponding humour; when it shows its lowest value (i.e., a 1) it should match some negative aspect of the humour, associated either with a superabundance or a deficiency, at the player's option.

If your Chole die shows a 1, your words are either foolish or cynical.

If your Chole die shows a 4, your words are clever.

Otherwise, your words are honest.

If your Sange die shows a 1, your deeds are either cowardly or foolhardy.

If your Sange die shows a 9 through 12, your deeds are brave.

Otherwise, your deeds are prudent.

If your Melanche die shows a 1, your words are either ignorant or abstruse.

If your Melanche die shows a 6, your words are wise.

Otherwise, your words are innocent.

A Note on Ties

Ties are a special kind of trait that characters may gain as a result of their travels in the kingdom of Prester John. A tie is an emotional relationship with another character, categorized as either Hatred, Friendship, Fear, or Reverence and associated with Chole, Sange, Melanche, and Pneuma, respectively. Whenever that other character is present in a scene, the character with the tie may use it as a trait to add one to the die for that humour when it is played during a scene. Ties are unilateral (they go from one character to another), potentially multiplex (a character may have more than one kind of tie to another character), and may be reciprocated asymmetrically (hating another character does not prevent that character from loving you).

If your Pneuma die shows a 1,
your deeds are either
blasphemous or cruel.
If your Pneuma die shows an 8,
your deeds are righteous.
Otherwise, your deeds are
proper.

As you narrate your action,
move the relevant die to its
proper place on the scene
grid.

As a plot point (Departure), the character may be assigned a new destination. This may be (a) a location already on the map; (b) a new location invented during the scene or prior to it, or (c) off the map by a specific map edge. Having left the map, the character may return to the map on his or her next turn, or may take one or more scenes "off the map," presumably in his or her home country, and return with an Arrival or Departure plot point.

If your narration invokes any of your traits or ties listed under that humour you may increase the relevant humour; traits and ties may be invoked once during any given turn and must be narrated in a different manner each time they are subsequently invoked. Invoking a trait or tie gives you a +1 to the relevant die result.

The box on the scene grid in which you place your die to characterize your words or deeds will also show if you should raise or lower the humour associated with the die.

Furthermore, you may gain humours depending on the way you role-play:

If you roleplay fierce rage or intense passion, +1 Chole.
If you roleplay giddy elation or childish high spirits, +1 Sange.
If you roleplay deep and woeful sadness or black depression, +1 Melanche.
If you roleplay serene and dispassionate placidity, +1 Pneuma.

Use the humours associated with the dice played that round to determine the plot point that results from the actions of the round. If there are more than two participants in the round, the player with the highest total die result (i.e., looking at the sum of the dice) gets to choose which dice of those played determine the next plot point. The player with the highest result on the die between the two selected narrates the plot point; the GM adjudicates the game-mechanical result.

At the end of the action round, the narrator of the round may choose to end the scene or let it continue for another round, if there are still dice to play. If the result of a plot point is to move the active character into a new square, the scene (usually) ends.

Making Progress

When a character enters a square containing a destination, roll 1d8 and consult this chart:

1	2	3
Direction →	➕ Destination (8)	4
7	6	5

If the die roll is an 8, the destination is in the map-square as supposed. Otherwise, it is potentially in a different square. If the number on the die corresponds to a square that has not been entered by any character yet, move the destination to that square. If the corresponding square has been entered, the destination remains where it is.

When a character finally arrives at his or her destination, the player may immediately spend his or her humours in order to introduce a plot point that resolves or brings closure to the character's journey. This plot point may be taken as an extension of scene framing or as the resolution of the scene.

Act III: Well Met Are We Upon Megiddo Plain

As the game progresses, humours from Prester John's temperament will diminish and accrue on Wormwood's plexus; i.e., his grid.

At the end of every scene, check to see if any of the dark angel's humours exceed Prester John's. When this happens, randomly select a map-square and designate it as the center of the apocalypse. Place a token representing Wormwood in that square, which becomes the center of the "apocalyptic region," which consists simply of those squares upon which the evils of war, plague, pestilence, or poison (that is, malicious strife among neighbors as well as an unclean and debilitating environment) have been visited.

War squares require a character to expend Chole to move out of.
Plague squares require an additional Melanche to move out of.
Pestilence squares require an additional Pneuma to move out of.
Poison squares require an additional Sange to move out of.

Place another token representing Prester John at the court of Prester John (or, if he's been determined to be elsewhere, where ever he's been determined to be, or in a random location).

Have each character on the map declare for Prester John or for Wormwood. Players of course decide for themselves. Other characters declare based on their ties to the players' characters, siding with the character if they have ties of friendship or reverence and against the character if they have ties of fear or hatred. Characters without ties remain neutral until they have ties.

A player whose character declared for Prester John may choose whether Prester John moves or not during his or her turn, one square in any direction. The GM decides whether or not Wormwood moves, and whether or not to expend humours in order to introduce war, plague, pestilence, or poison to the square.

If a character is in the same square as Prester John, the player may expend Prester John's or his or her own humours in order to introduce a plot point before or after his or her turn. The player must have declared for Prester John in order to do so. The "active character" for the plot point may be any character.

If a character is in the same square as Wormwood, the GM may expend Wormwood's humours in order to introduce a plot point before or after the player's turn.

If Prester John and Wormwood are in the same square, then at the end of each scene, have the active player and the GM secretly decide how many humours to expend, from one to five, and then roll a die based on the amount expended (1=d4, 2=d6, 3=d8, 5=d12). Each side must lose humours equal to the opponent's die roll; non-player characters may be sacrificed, counting as 1 humour each.

A character is defeated when his humours are reduced to zero.

During this phase, if a character leaves the map, he or she may not re-enter.

The game ends when (a) Wormwood is defeated, (b) Prester John is defeated or leaves the map, (c) all the characters who've declared for Prester John are either defeated or have left the map, or (d) there are no more cards in the deck.

Once the game ends, a final round of narration takes place. The player with highest Pneuma narrates the outcome of the apocalypse, based on a comparison of Prester John's and Wormwood's humours:

If Prester John has higher Chole, then peace comes; otherwise, war will spread across the nations.

If Prester John has higher Sange, then the people obtain health and happiness; otherwise, plague devastates the nations.

If Prester John has higher Melanche, then there will be a time of prosperity and plenty; otherwise, the people face famine and starvation.

If Prester John has higher Pneuma, then the people live in a spirit of harmony and good-neighborliness; otherwise, there is internecine strife and secret murder.

Each player may narrate the final fate of his or her character, as desired.

References and Inspiration

- Calvino, Italo (1974). *Invisible Cities* (William Weaver, Trans.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Chabon, Michael (2007). *Gentlemen of the Road*. New York: Del Rey.
- d'Ormesson, Jean (1974). *The Glory of the Empire* (Barbara Bray, Trans.). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Eco, Umberto (2002). *Baudolino* (William Weaver, Trans.). New York: Harcourt.
- Philips, J.R.S. (1988). *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Wright, John Kirtland (1925/1965). *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe*. New York: Dover Publications.

The Perilous Realm Scene Grid

W O R D S a n d D E E D S			
CHOLE +1 1 Cynical	CHOLE -1 1 Foolish	CHOLE +0 2-3 Honest	CHOLE +1 4 Clever
MELANCHE +1 1 Abstruse	MELANCHE -1 1 Ignorant	MELANCHE +0 2-4 Innocent	MELANCHE +1 5-6 Wise
PNEUMA +1 1 Cruel	PNEUMA -1 1 Blasphemous	PNEUMA +0 2-5 Proper	PNEUMA +1 6-8 Righteous
SANGE +1 1 Foolhardy	SANGE -1 1 Cowardly	SANGE +0 2-8 Prudent	SANGE +1 9-12 Brave

HUMOUR	Chole	Sange	Melanche	Pneuma
Chole	Struggle	Loss	Victory	Masking
Sange		Arrival	Obstacle	Pursuit
Melanche			Departure	Recognition
Pneuma				Remedy

DIRECTION

to move south – -1 Melanche
to move west – -1 Pneuma
to move south – -1 Sange
to move east – -1 Chole

TERRAIN

into Cups – -1 Sange
into Swords – -1 Chole
into Wands – -1 Melanche
into Pentacles – -1 Pneuma
into Arcana – -1 player's choice