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## Creation Process

### *Nobilis*

Early on in the process (and after consulting with Jesse to see if I could make my own rule set) I decided I wanted to run an adventure based on the [Nobilis](#) rules and world. This is mostly

because I found Nobilis to be a brilliantly easy game to pick up, rule-wise, and the world is just so much fun! I had a feeling that my players would be keen on the idea of having power over an aspect of reality. Plus, I felt that by creating a one-shot, beginner-oriented Nobilis rule set, I could use this assignment as a play-test for it, in preparation for future games.

## ***Consulting with GMs***

One of the first things I did to prepare for this adventure, [beyond blogging about it](#), was to consult my two favorite game masters. Both of these people are extremely creative and talented, and I have done Nobilis one-shot adventures with both of them, so I was anxious to get their advice. I explained the assignment to them, including the bit about needing a puzzle, and asked if they had tips for one-shot adventures in general. Here were their responses:

### **Ben Wray:**

Hmmmm!

Start off right where the action is. In a long-term campaign, you can afford to start off in the tavern and mess around a little bit introducing the characters. In a one shot, start them off rolling for initiative fighting Nazis on the zeppelin or whatever.

Make your plot simpler than you think it needs to be. Remember you've only got a single session to wrap things up, and at least in my experience, things always take longer than I expect them too. And A) It's generally a lot easier to make a simple situation more complicated than vice versa and B) Sometimes it's actually fairly pleasant to finish an hour early or so, as long as you get a satisfying conclusion out of it.

The same goes with puzzles. If playing [Zendo](#) has taught me anything, it's always always *always* err on the side of "too easy". When you see the solution, the solution looks obvious. When you're trying to figure out what all the black-stone-marked arrangements of Stuff have in common with each other that isn't true of the white-stone-marked arrangements of Stuff, it's a lot harder. Start with a really simple puzzle, one you think would be almost trivially easy. ("Aha, the gold statue goes in the gold pedestal!") Then get a bit more complicated. But point B applies to puzzles as well as plots: It's a lot more satisfying to solve an easy puzzle than it is to be thwarted by a hard puzzle.

## **Brendan Adkins:**

Playing off Ben's last paragraph, I would definitely advise you to come up with puzzles with MULTIPLE SOLUTIONS. I nearly bored Ian and Yale (and myself) to death once with this complicated time-shifting cavern puzzle and it would have been so much fun if I'd thought of more than one way out of it. Even the gold-statue-on-gold-pedestal puzzle can very well yield things like

PC 1: Okay, so what's in here?

DM: Just a big door and a plain gold pedestal. The base is about the same size as that statue you picked up in the last room.

PC 2: Oh, I get it. I want to set the statue on the pedestal--

DM: Okay--

PC 2: Upside-down.

DM: What?

PC 1: If that doesn't work I want to try it facing all four of the cardinal directions.

DM: No.

PC 2: I want to stand on the pedestal, making the same pose as the statue.

DM: You can barely fit on it.

PC 1: Aha!

DM: Get it now?

PC 1: We go back to town and recruit a halfling.

Players are smart, but infinite problem space will yield infinite avenues of attack.

I agree about leaping straight into the action; I would also suggest pre-generating characters, if that's an option. Custom-made characters are fun but can take hours just by themselves, especially when you actually have to roll for things. Put together at least six so everybody has a backup. (If you have mages, houserule the CRAP out of them in order to make them actually fun and worthwhile in combat.) One great tip I used in Nobilis and Iron Heroes is to have a set of index cards with condensed information on the PCs right on your side of the table, so you never have to ask to see their character sheets. Give each character a couple special skills or pieces of equipment (climbing gear, lockpicks, etc) and make sure you have obstacles specifically designed to require them somewhere in the story.

Oh, and speaking of that, I suggest thinking of your adventure plot more like the grand foyer in the Betrayal at House on the Hill game than like a movie plot or even a Choose Your Own Adventure--not because you want them to split up, but because it's cool (after the initial zeppelin-

fight) to have lots of options and to have any of them possibly lead to the goal, once enough clues / signposts have been uncovered. And as Ben points out, that shouldn't be too many.

Finally, never be afraid to improvise! You're good at that and it's not like the players are going to be nitpicking about internal consistency if you switch things around. And one of the most important rules in improvisation is never to block your partner's input; if your players come up with wacky ideas you didn't anticipate (and they will), it's always more fun to just roll with it than to say "no."

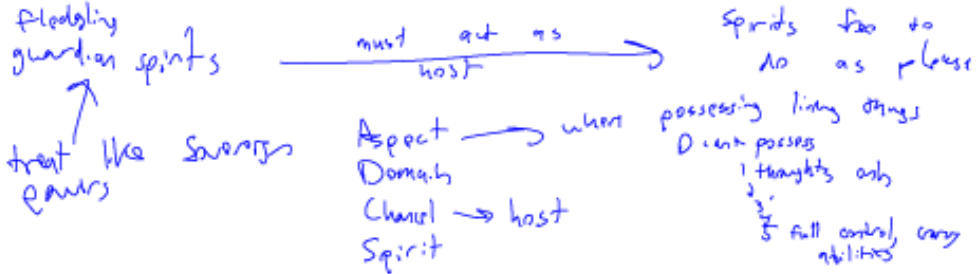
## ***Story Ideas***

- 1) Nobilis Witness Protection
- 2) Being spirit-bound to a mortal
- 3) Being imprisoned somewhere, and having to escape
- 4) Blues-Brothers style escape/chase scenario
- 5) Nobilis training school

# Adventure Game

Friday, February 15, 2008  
 2:49 PM

Guardian spirits attached to host in danger  
 • assigned to host b/c he's important, spirits don't know why  
 • if Charlie dies/goes insane, spirits will lose their host



## Organization

- scientist is suspicious of existence of spirits
- rest of organization is after girl?
- organization is kind of silly



Can communicate  
 • dreams  
 • suggestions  
 • possessing living things

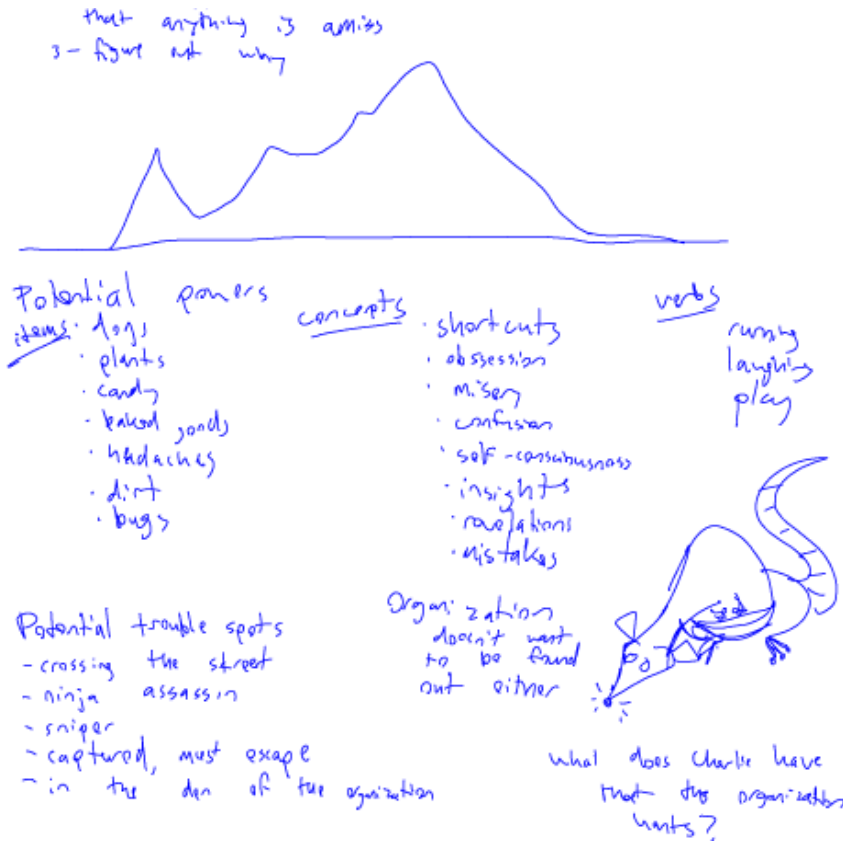
in order to possess something, must be in a low-control state  
 • scared  
 • sleep  
 • under the influence

## Sanity checks



## Goal

- 1- keep Charlie alive/sane for 2 days
- 2- don't let him know



## **Puzzle Brainstorming**

### Puzzle ideas

- 1) Having to align mirrors in a certain way
- 2) Placing items in the correct slots
- 3) Following a light
- 4) Collecting bones and reassembling them
- 5) One of your goals can be to find a certain Nobilis, but when you get in the room where he's supposed to be, there is only a skull, or torso. Bones can be scattered around throughout the area
- 6) Simple "arrange the pieces" puzzle
- 7) The "gold statue in gold pedestal" puzzle

### My favorite puzzles

- 1) the zodiac grouping on in Silent Hill
- 2) the key and ball bit in the school in Silent Hill
- 3) Soul Reaver block-positioning puzzles

- 4) Path connecting puzzles in FFX
- 5) Bloom all the trees in Okami, when the last tree is on the stupid guy's hat!

---

## Bits for the Game

These are all the “pieces” to the game that ended up taking physical form. Some of them were my own notes, and some of them were for handing out to my players. For the rule-set below, I’ve italicized major changes I made from the original Nobilis rules. These were not included in what I gave to my players.

### ***Nobilis 101 Rule Set***

#### **Summary of World**

This is a modified rule set of the game Nobilis, scaled down and simplified to be used for beginners in one-shot adventures.

Nobilis are somewhere between Gods and Mortals, typically they are mortals who have been granted special abilities. They are usually not immortal or invincible, but they are very tough, and each one controls a specific "domain", or aspect of reality. This can be something huge and serious, like "nature" or something generic and trivial, like "hats." Nobles can be human in form, but also animals or mythological creatures.

Typically they are charged with the protection and spread of their own domain, but larger groups will band together when greater dilemmas or threats to reality occur. These groups are known as “families” and are lead by an Emperor, which is basically a being more powerful and badass than an entire group of Nobles. *(Here I’ve sort of simplified the Emperor/Noble relation. In the original, an Emperor manages a group of Nobles, who he creates by imbuing once-mortals with a piece of his own soul.)*

Beyond the day-to-day maintenance of their domains, Nobles must always be on the alert for Excrucians, which are beings who are trying to erase reality, one aspect at a time. The challenge in the everyday life of a Noble comes in that he must adhere to strict Laws set forth to govern the

Nobilis, most of which revolve around “don’t make the mortals go insane by performing magical miracles in front of them.” *(Again, I’ve highly simplified the role of Excrucians in the world, as well as the rules for Nobilis behavior. I stuck with the most relevant rule to my particular story, that driving mortals insane is a criminal, punishable offense. During the actual game-play, I referred ominously to the Locust Court. This is a significant entity in Nobilis, but in my game I tried to use it as a “distant mountains” sort of thing.)*

Each character will portray a Noble who is part of one family and have the following statistics:

**Attributes, Gifts, and Handicaps**

## **ATTRIBUTES**

Every Noble has three attributes:

**Aspect, Domain, and Spirit**

These attributes are represented by a number between 0 and 5, where 0 is of average human ability and 5 is of near-godlike ability.

- **Aspect** represents the degree to which your body itself is imbued with power. High aspect characters can perform impossibly difficult mental and physical tasks. Low aspect characters are of typical human ability.
- **Domain** represents your control over the part of creation you embody. High Domain characters are veritable gods of what they represent. Low Domain characters are not in command of their estate, and may even be controlled by the estate without their regard!
- **Spirit** is basically your defense against miracles performed against you.

When creating the characters for the game, the Storyteller can distribute 6 points among the 3 attributes, with a maximum of 5 in any one.

*(My biggest change to the attributes was to leave out one altogether. Realm is an attribute regarding a Noble’s control over their Chancel, which is the mythical pocket of reality where their Imperator is based and where they hang out when not in the mortal world. Chancels and Realms are a big part of Nobilis, but simply outside the scope of a one-shot adventure. Again, I used references to “graduating and setting up a Chancel somewhere” as a “distant mountains” sort of deal in my story.*

*I also drastically reduced the role of spirit. In the original game, it has much more of a role in regards to Anchors, which was another element of the game I eliminated for simplicity. There are*



*other things that spirit does, but it's complicated, and it was best for my purposes to use it as a sort of "miracle defense" stat)*

## **GIFTS**

Each Noble gets 2 points worth of Gifts. You can either have 2 1-point gifts, or 1 2-point gift.

This is in addition to Durant, which I just gave to everybody.

*(In the original game, Gifts are determined from leftover attribute points, and have a range of costs. My change was so that a character could easily have either 2 "simple" gifts or 1 major gift).*

**Durant** (default for all characters for the purposes of one-shots): free. You are difficult to injure and heal quickly.

**Venomed bite or acidic spittle:** 1 point. Good for a variety of beasties.

**Fire-breathing:** 1 point. Popular with characters who are dragons in their true forms.

**Flight:** 1 point. Handy for winged characters. Unnecessary for winged characters with an Aspect of 5, who get it automatically.

**Petrify with a look:** 1 point. A must for cockatrices, gorgons, basilisks, etc. Does not affect Nobles, Excrucians, or Imperators.

**Shapeshifting:** 1 point for one or two shapes.

**Shapeshifting–advanced:** 2 points for comprehensive shapeshifting ability. Very chic for dragons, vampires, werewolves, etc.

**Glorious:** 2 points. Your physical appearance, in some ways, stirs strong emotion in all mortals and (to a lesser extent) Powers. The emotion could be lust, fear, respect, a desire to cause you no harm, etc.

**Elemental:** 2 points. You are so close to your estate that you can replace your body with a construct of your domain, and turn yourself into living lava or telephones or bacteria or angular momentum or whatever your domain happens to be.

**Constant Domain:** 2 points. Your estate will serve you even without your explicit command, acting in your best interest and protecting you.

**Unblemished Guise:** 2 points. You can disguise yourself as a human, more or less impenetrably.

You can also make up other gifts as you see fit

## HANDICAPS

Handicaps are flaws that your character has. Each character can have 1 handicap. If your handicap comes up in the role-playing setting and causes some sort of obstacle, then you gain miracle points back (miracle points are how you “do stuff” in the game, more on them later)

*(In the original game, you can have several handicaps. A lot of people choose to leave out handicaps when they run Nobilis one-shots, but they are one of my favorite parts of character creation in Nobilis. Forcing your character to have a flaw can make for great role-playing opportunities. I did, however, simplify the amount of miracle points you receive from each handicap, and simplified the original division between “limits” and “restrictions”)*

Sample Handicaps :

**Cannot lie.** 1 MP refreshes when a lie would have been very useful.

**Cannot enter a house uninvited.** 1 MP (depending on circumstances)

**Cannot cross running water.** 1 MP (depending on circumstances)

**Can be summoned and can't leave an unbroken pentagram.** 2 MP paid whenever it comes up. (I love this one.)

**Cannot kill.** 1 MP (depending on circumstances)

**Cannot use modern technology.** 1 MP, but it comes up often.

**Must feed of human blood or no reflection.** 1 MP when it gives you away.

**Hated (or loved too well) by animals.** 1 MP when they're a threat, or when they give you away.

**Bound to friendship with anyone they share a smoke with and cannot resist an offered smoke.** 1-3 MP depending on who or what they end up bound in friendship to . . .

You can also make up other handicaps as you see fit

## **MIRACLE POINTS and “DOING STUFF”**

Miracle points are magical energies which can be expended to perform magical feats beyond the natural abilities represented by your attributes. So if you are an aspect 2 character and want to perform an aspect 4 miracle, you have to spend a few miracle points to do it.

Each character gets 5 Miracle Points for each attribute to spend throughout the adventure. The maximum amount of Miracle Points you can spend to increase one of your attribute levels at a time is 4. For example, if you are an aspect 2 character, you can't perform an aspect 7 miracle, because that would require you spend more than 4 miracle points.

If you are fighting with another Nobilis, or an Excrucian Shard, you can use Miracle Points to break through their Spirit defense. For example, if you performed the Aspect miracle of throwing a bus at another Noble who had a Spirit of 1, it would bounce off their Spirit defense, like a force field (called an Auctoritas). If you spent 2 Miracle Points, it would break through the defense and hit them, ouch!

There are a couple of ways to replenish your supply of Miracle Points throughout the game.

- 1) If your Noble's handicap comes up as an obstacle in the game, you get Miracle Points back
- 2) If you find a particularly clever way to use your domain, the GM (Lisa) may award you Miracle Points.
- 3) If you do anything role-playing-wise that Lisa feels is extremely clever and worth of reward.

For the GM: this cheat sheet is a handy guide for figuring out how many action points a particular miracle should cost:

<http://thedeadone.net/moc/wp-content/Nobilis%20-%20Cheat%20Sheet.pdf>

*(My way of using Miracle Points is fairly close to the original game, but I left out some of the more complicated tricks you can use to convert them.*

*As far as the rest of Nobilis, there were huge chunks I left out for simplicity's sake: Anchors, Bonds, Affiliations, the role of the Chancel and other Nobles, the World Tree, the role of Flowers and the Nettle Rite, the distinction between Mythic Reality and Prosaic Reality, etc. These all make Nobilis a rich and engaging world, but for the purposes of a one-shot, especially with beginners, they were not necessary to my story.)*

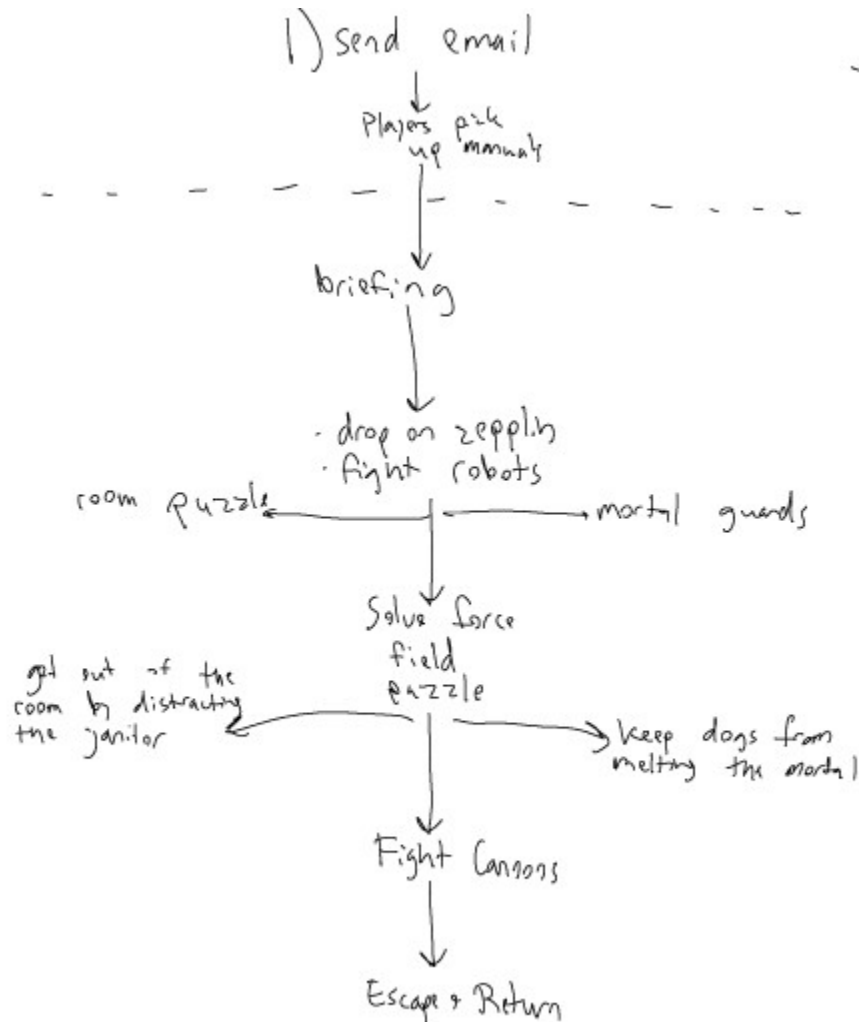
## Notes and Maps

### Story Layout

I arranged my story notes as a series of note cards for my own reference during the game. The central line included the “main” parts of the story, as in the beginning/middle/end pieces that I HAD to hit to make it a complete story. These parts took priority.

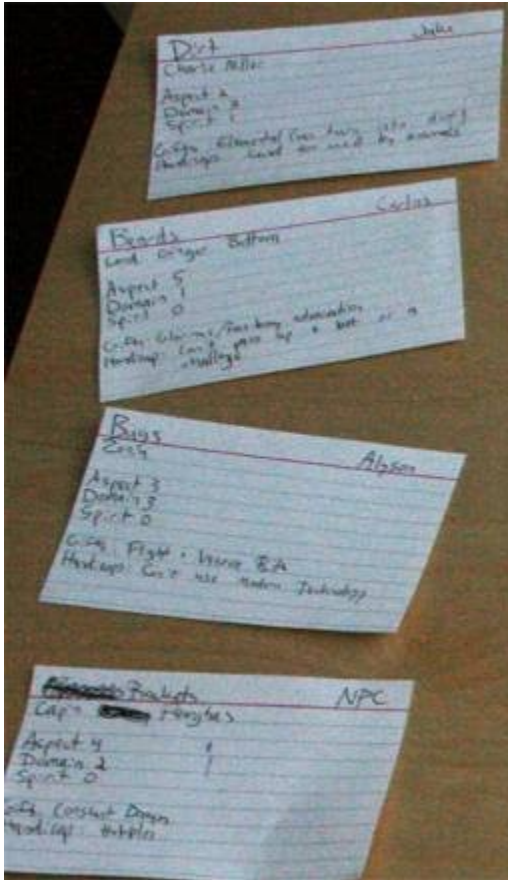
The pieces on the side were “extra” parts. As in, the story could advance without them, but they could be introduced at those moments to provide more complexity to the story. I chose whether or not to incorporate them based on time and player interest (if things were starting to lag, I’d introduce one. If my players were excited and pressing forward, I left them out).





## Character Stats

Also on hand I kept a note card with stat information for each character, plus one extra for the boss. This was a quick reference for me, so I could take a glance to see how many Miracle Points someone needed to spend to do a particular task.



Also relating to characters, I made sure to consider each character's gift and special power, and tried to come up with scenarios in which those could be used.

Things to address:

Flight - drop into sky, maybe has to fly friends to safety

Dirt Elemental - Makes a door that is hiked, or include air ducts, as a way out of a room

Venom Bite - need hostile, mortal guard

Glorious - non-hostile humans

Can't use modern technology - sequester Bugs, if she breaks off, put her in the computer room  
Can't pass up a bet - maybe some guy affected by glorious

Lead by animals - rat dogs

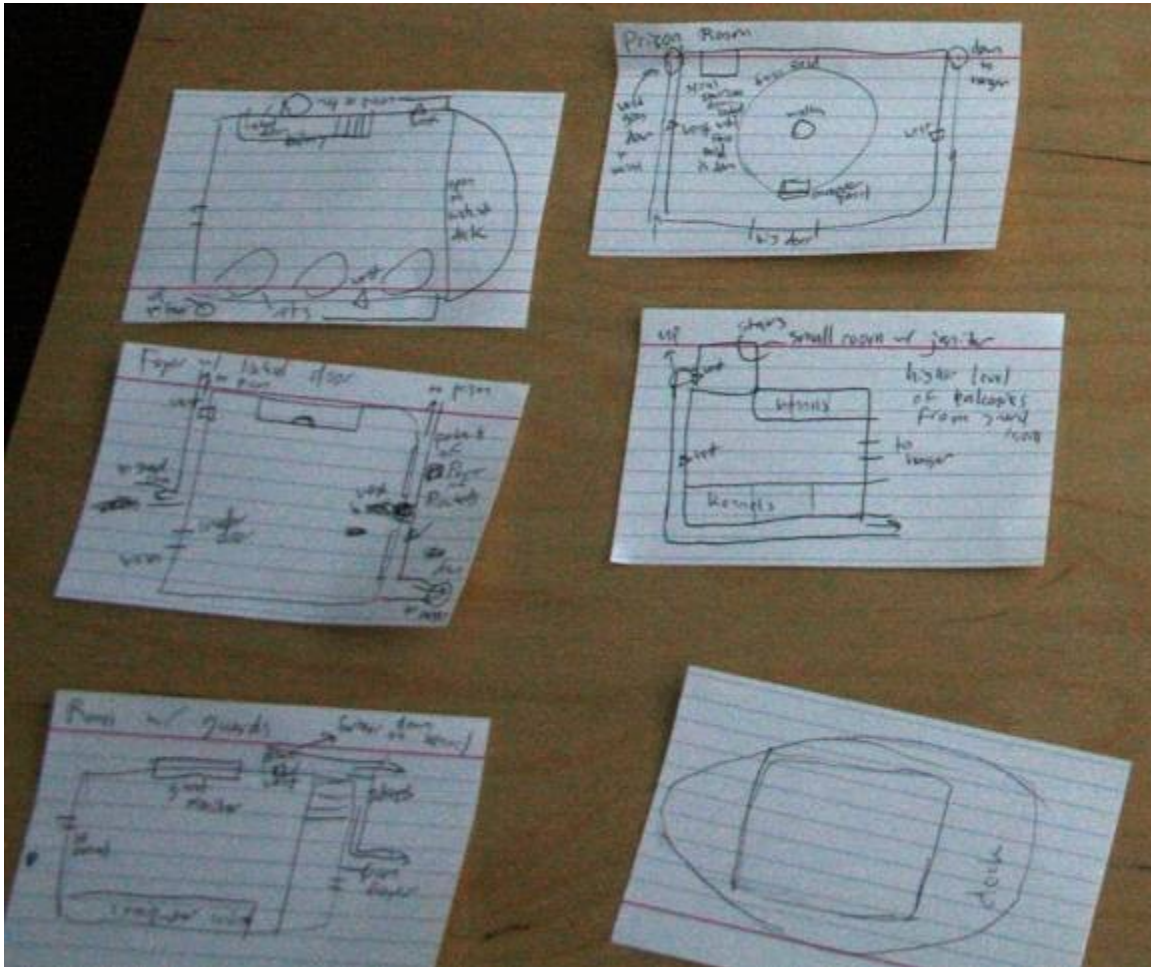
Dirt - distract the janitor

Bugs - mortal guards

Beards - Cannons has stubble?

## Maps

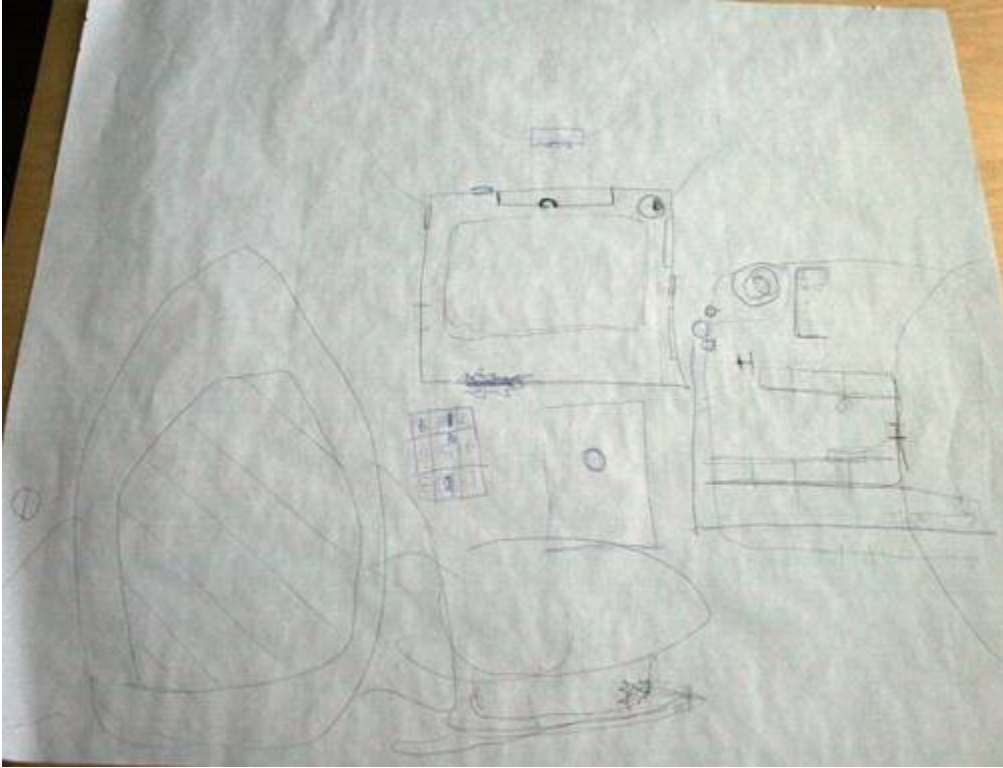
These were my map parts. I prefer to create maps as stand-alone rooms, so if the players go through a particular door, I can just lay down whatever room is appropriate for the story. This works well in Nobilis, because an interior that's a little weird or seems larger than it should be for the exterior of the building is all commonplace in the Nobilis world.



Below are the maps that I drew out during play time. I used a gigantic piece of paper to draw out map portions, so that I could place the character markers on the map where the characters should be. I also used this to scribble out other important information (like what a giant flea looks like).

I have never been one for accurate maps. I find it much easier just to sketch out a general shape for a room, and let the players' imaginations fill in the blanks. Plus, it goes much faster than trying to draw something to scale.







## **Character Creation**

Although I had pre-generated characters, I consulted with my players on several fronts to gather their input, just because it's been my experience that a character is much more fun to play when it's "yours" in some way. I met with my players first to give them an overview of the Nobilis world and what Nobles were, and to get ideas from them about what sorts of domains they might enjoy and what kind of playing style they might like (or rather, whether I should give them high Aspect, high Domain, or a balance between the two).

After this, I pre-generated 5 character sheets and let them pick which character they wanted to be. I then instructed them to email me with their character's name, appearance (Nobles don't have to be human) and a brief description of their personality. This process seemed quite successful, as each of my players quickly took ownership of their characters. I think this was a happy medium between handing them a pre-built character with no consideration, and having them go through the confusing (for beginners) process of creating their own characters.

## **Carlos's Character**

**Character Estate:** Power of Beards

**Attributes:**

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Description of what this number means</i>	<i>Miracle Points</i>
Aspect: 5	You are an exemplar. If it can be imagined that a being could do a thing using physical power alone, you can do exactly that.  You can perform feats impossible for humans, including catching bullets, running across water, and throwing cars.  You have the ability to disguise your body so that it appears to be human (including fitting it into places it couldn't normally fit)	5
Domain: 1	You have a small mastery of your estate, enough to work a small miracle or two on occasion	5

	You can naturally perform the following estate-related magics: - you can tell when your estate is in danger (someplace mandates that no facial hair is allowed)	
Spirit: 0	If someone casts a miracle against you, they must spend 1 additional Miracle Point to break through your defense.	5

**Gifts:** Glorious: Your physical appearance stirs strong emotion in all mortals and (to a lesser extent) Nobles. We'll say the emotion is fanboy-like admiration

**Handicaps:** Can't pass up a bet or challenge. Every time this causes a delay or distraction, you get a Miracle Point back.

## Alyson's Character

**Character Estate:** Power of Bugs

**Attributes:**

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Description of what this number means</i>	<i>Miracle Points</i>
Aspect: 3	You are inhuman, made of ether and astral energy. Even if you look somewhat human, people can tell you aren't one unless you're disguised.  You can perform improbably feats: things that are physically possible, but unreasonable for a normal human to attempt: Running on fence tops, punching through steel, out-computing a PC...  You have the ability to disguise your body so that it appears to be human (including fitting it into places it couldn't normally fit)	5
Domain: 3	You are entrusted deeply with the maintenance and continuation of your estate. Your estate likely has a weighty influence on your personality and physical appearance.  You can naturally perform the following estate-related	5

	magics: - You can tell when your estate is in danger (some place has called the exterminator) - You can perform “ghost miracles” with your estate, which are easy-to-see-through illusions. You could make a person feel like bugs are crawling all over them - Lesser Divinations – you can get mundane information related to your estate, like knowing everything about every bug you see, or know where there are bugs located in an area - Lesser Preservations – this is magic of protection and extension. You can make a group of bugs more resistant, or increase the lifespan of bugs	
Spirit: 0	If someone casts a miracle against you, they must spend 1 additional Miracle Point to break through your defense.	5

**Gifts:** Venomed bite, Flight

**Handicaps:** Can't use modern technology. Every time a situation comes up where it would have been REALLY helpful if you could use modern technology, you get a Miracle Point back.

## Jake's Character

**Character Estate:** Power of Dirt

**Attributes:**

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Description of what this number means</i>	<i>Miracle Points</i>
Aspect: 2	You are of legendary human ability, on par with mythical heros.  Your appearance is mythical.  You can do things at World Record performance, like exactly measuring distances by eye or remembering everything you've ever heard.	5

	You have the ability to disguise your body so that it appears to be human (including fitting it into places it couldn't normally fit)	
Domain: 3	<p>You are entrusted deeply with the maintenance and continuation of your estate. Your estate likely has a weighty influence on your personality and physical appearance.</p> <p>You can naturally perform the following estate-related magics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You can tell when your estate is in danger (some place is about to be sanitized)</li> <li>- You can perform "ghost miracles" with your estate, which are easy-to-see-through illusions. You could create the illusion that something is dirty</li> <li>- Lesser Divinations – you can get mundane information related to your estate, like knowing everything going on at a particular patch of dirt</li> <li>- Lesser Preservations – this is magic of protection and extension. You can make dirt more resistant, harder to remove, and longer-lasting</li> </ul>	5
Spirit: 1	If someone casts a miracle against you, they must spend 2 additional Miracle Points to break through your defense.	5

**Gifts:** Elemental: you can turn yourself into dirt

**Handicaps:** Loved too well by animals. If this ever gives you away, you get a Miracle Point back.

## ***Illustrations***

After I got their character descriptions, I drew a sketch of each of them, as I'd interpreted them. This ended up being a big hit, and everyone kept their drawing afterwards!

**Zenia (Alyson's character)**



**Charlie Miller (Jake's character)**

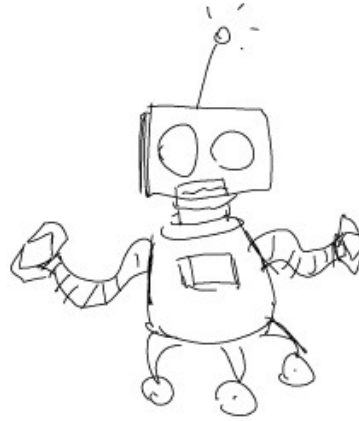


**Lord Ginger Bottom (Carlos's character)**



### **Robots**

These little guys were the first obstacle my players had to face. Cute, but a nuisance! Alyson cleverly used her Domain to infect all the robots with a computer bug, thus disabling them.



### **Rat Dog Things**

I'd actually not considered putting these guys in the game, but I was reviewing some game design notes and I'd doodled this picture, and I thought the creature too great to not include! They served the role of triggering Jake's handicap, creating another obstacle for my players, and when they were accidentally driven insane, it made a good excuse for me to introduce the boss.

### **Power of Rockets**

This guy was the Nobilis "boss" of the Zeppelin Prison, and my players had a fantastic time doing battle with him.



### **Zeppelin Prison**

(Or, as named by Brian Evans, the Hindenschlammer) I borrowed this illustration from a friend to use to represent the zeppelin.



### ***Pre-Game Bits***

Before the game took place, I took some “in character” steps to get my players into the mood of the game. I was hoping this would be a nice way to ease them into the world, especially for Alyson, who seemed quite nervous at being a beginner at Adventure Games in general.

**The story begins...**

*I sent this email to my players as a way to introduce them to the adventure they would be facing, and also as a way to introduce one another to each other's characters (based on the information they had sent me).*

A Noble's training is a long and arduous process, and the group of Nobles lead by the True God Emperor of Juggling is on the cusp of graduation. They have trained long and hard, and will soon be able to venture out into the world, set up a Chancel somewhere, and come into the full power of Nobilis, fighting Excrucians and strengthening their estates all day long.

The Nobles have been in the same Family for all their training, and know each other well...

Zenia, the Power of Bugs, has the most unusual appearance of the group, being a centaur with a unicorn/pegasus lower half. She's a subtle creature of decisive action and few words. Logical but with a heart of gold, she exudes confidence and comfort. She is a fairly balanced noble, comfortable in relying on both her physical power and the power she wields over her Domain of Bugs. Because of her mythological background, she is unable to use modern technology, but she can fly, and her unicorn genes have given her a venomous bite!

Charlie Miller, the Power of Dirt, is a teenager afflicted with typical teen angst. He is a kinda goth, kinda hipster kid whom no one understands, and of course the world is out to get him. He's looking forward to graduating from Nobilis training, since he can totally ditch high school after that. Charlie is strongly imbued with his power over Dirt, and can even transform into the elemental form of Dirt if the situation calls for it. In spite of his angsty attitude, animals inexplicably love Charlie, and will inevitably be drawn to him if there are any in the area.

Lord Ginger Bottom, the Power of Beards, is a man child, plain and simple. He retains the appearance of a small child, with the exception of sporting a massive beard that any lumberjack would envy. Ginger Bottom is gruff, proud, and impatient, and prone to getting what he wants. He is a man child, after all. Do not be fooled by his childlike stature, however, as he is physically capable of throwing a bus. His near god-like ability to perform impossible human feats makes up for his more limited control over his Domain. Lord Ginger Bottom is Glorious, and his physical presence stirs a strong, fan-boy like admiration in mortals. We think it's the beard. However, his proud nature does him the flaw of never being able to pass up a bet or a challenge, no matter how obstructive or ridiculous it may be.

Yes, this Family of Nobles has trained well, and is ready and anxious to graduate.



But, the True God Emperor of Juggling, like any good Professor, has one final assignment for his Family of Nobles before they can graduate...

On Wednesday morning, each Noble receives a message.

"I'm sending you on a field assignment tonight," says the True God Emperor of Juggling in their brains, "a mortal needs rescuing, and I'm sending you three to do it. Pick up your field guides in your ETC mailboxes tomorrow, and meet in the Bando-lounge at 7pm for more details. Oh yeah...bring snacks..."

## Field Guide

In my research on Nobilis one-shots, I found one person who made his players a [little pamphlet entitled "So you've just been EnNobled..."](#) with basic information about the world. I thought this was very clever, so I made a pamphlet for my players in a similar vein. It contained the most basic "rules" of the Nobilis world, a glossary of terms, and a reminder about how to use Miracle Points (which is really the most important thing to the game).

Here's the info I included in the tri-fold pamphlet. The original is littered with tacky clip-art, to make it look like...well...a tacky brochure that someone put together using Microsoft Word!

## NOBILIS FIELD GUIDE

*A Handy Practical Guide for the Noble-in-Training*



### Earth Guidelines

Congratulations! You are on the verge of becoming a full-fledged Noble. But before you set off for earth, be sure you review these rules and guidelines for interacting with mortals. Fail to

adhere, and you will suffer at the hands of the Locust Court. Have a nice day! :)

#### I. Thou Shalt Not Love Another.

Your job is to uphold the integrity of your estate, not to go around falling in love! Just between you and me, though, if it ever comes to court...just claim it was for the sex, and you're likely to get off clean.

#### II. Thou Shalt Harm None Who Has Done No Harm

This is taken incredibly seriously by the Locust Court, and applies to Nobles, Imperators, and mere mortals. **Driving human bystanders insane with miraculous magic counts as harming them, according to all court precedent.** Punishments can be severe, so take care you know what's up before attacking, be subtle with your magics on earth, at least if anyone is watching, and if things get out of hand, try to fix things.

#### III. Treat No Beast As Your Lord

Beast includes humans. Nobles are expected to mete out severe justice when they are insulted, ordered about, or dissed by "lesser beings." An insult to your dignity trumps Rule II.

#### IV. Protect No Power From the Justice of the Code

Basically, don't harbor any criminals. This one is taken fairly seriously, but if you can get away with at least convincingly claiming you didn't know you were harboring a criminal, you can generally get off without punishment.

Summary

Just because you now have craazy Nobilis powers doesn't mean you can go using them willy-nilly with no regard for other creatures. The Locust Court is merciless, so be careful!

### Managing your Miracles

Performing miracles is the best thing about being a Noble! Here is some helpful information about miracles:

- You can perform any miracle of the same level or lower than your Aspect or Domain score for free!
- To perform higher level miracles, you'll need to spend miracle points.
- If you can imagine doing something, even if it's outrageous, propose it! Your Storyteller will let you know how much it will cost you.
- The maximum amount of miracle points you can use to cast a high-level miracle is 4
- You can use any amount of miracle points you please to try and break through another Noble's Spirit defense.
- All Do
- main miracles cost an additional miracle point if cast at a great distance.

### Glossary

**Aspect:** The measurement of how much of a physical and mental badass you are. Higher Aspect means more godlike.

**Auctoritas:** Your Spirit Defense force field that protects you from magical miracles cast by other nobles

**Domain:** The aspect of reality that you as a Noble control. It's the "blank" in "Power of \_\_\_\_"

**Estate:** Another word for Domain

**Excrucian:** A being intent on erasing reality, by targeting one aspect at a time. These guys are our enemies!

**Imperator:** A being more powerful than the group of you combined. He's the one who leads your Family. Do what he says.

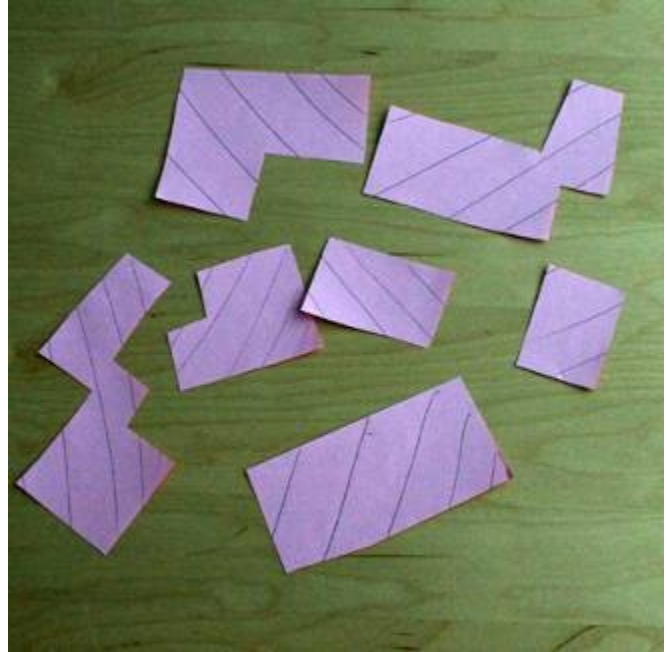
**Shard:** This is a being who works for the Excrucians, carrying a decent amount of magic themselves. A Shard is to an Excrucian is as a Noble is to an Imperator.

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## Puzzle Analysis

I chose to use 2 puzzles in my game, an overt one and an integrated one. The overt puzzle was pretty simple; it was a piece of paper with lines on it that I cut up into square-angled shapes. In the story, it was a panel to a large glowing force field that came apart, and I started a 5 minute timer for them to finish it in.

Even though this was a very simple puzzle, the players connected with it immediately and the time pressure made it rather intense. I didn't have to do much explaining, I just set the puzzle pieces on the table, explaining that the panel had fallen into pieces, and that a digital timer above the panel began counting down from 5 minutes. The players immediately jumped up and began frantically trying to assemble it, without exploring any alternatives. I added to the intensity by saying what was happening at certain minute marks (rocket portals began opening up all over the room). When the players solved the puzzle in time and the force field came down, revealing the mortal they were sent to capture, they were quite pleased. For everyone, this puzzle was a rise in action, if not a peak, on their individual interest curves.



I play-tested this puzzle several times with Andy before my adventure. This is how I decided to draw lines on the paper instead of leaving them blank shapes (blank shapes became impossible, because they could be turned over, and it made the puzzle way too hard). This is also how I figured out a good time limit to set.

The integrated puzzle was not so successful, but its failure was not detrimental to the game. It was the old "golden statue in the golden pedestal" trick, in that I had a large door with a sphere-shaped indentation, and my players eventually found a mechanical, sphere-shaped device that was about the same size as the indentation. No one figured it out that they were supposed to stick the sphere in the sphere-shaped indentation. Although this puzzle was not recognized, it was an amusing illustration of the warning that Ben gave to me.

Fortunately, I had taken Brendan's advice to always have more than one way to solve a puzzle, and we were able to bypass the situation by Jake turning into dirt and slipping under the door. I then improved up a keypad on the other side, and he used divination of dirt to figure out the key sequence by how dirty the keys were (which was, in my opinion, the cleverest use of a domain in the entire game, so it worked out for the better in the end).

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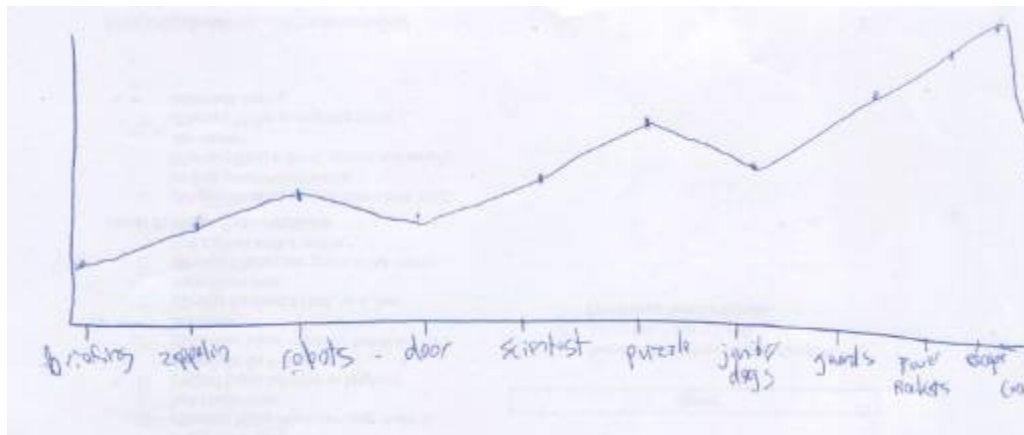
## Interest Curves

### Pre-game

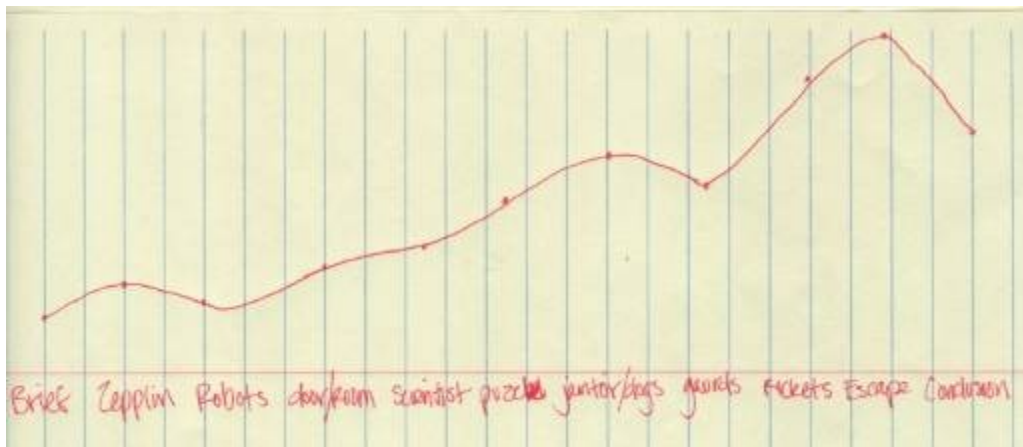
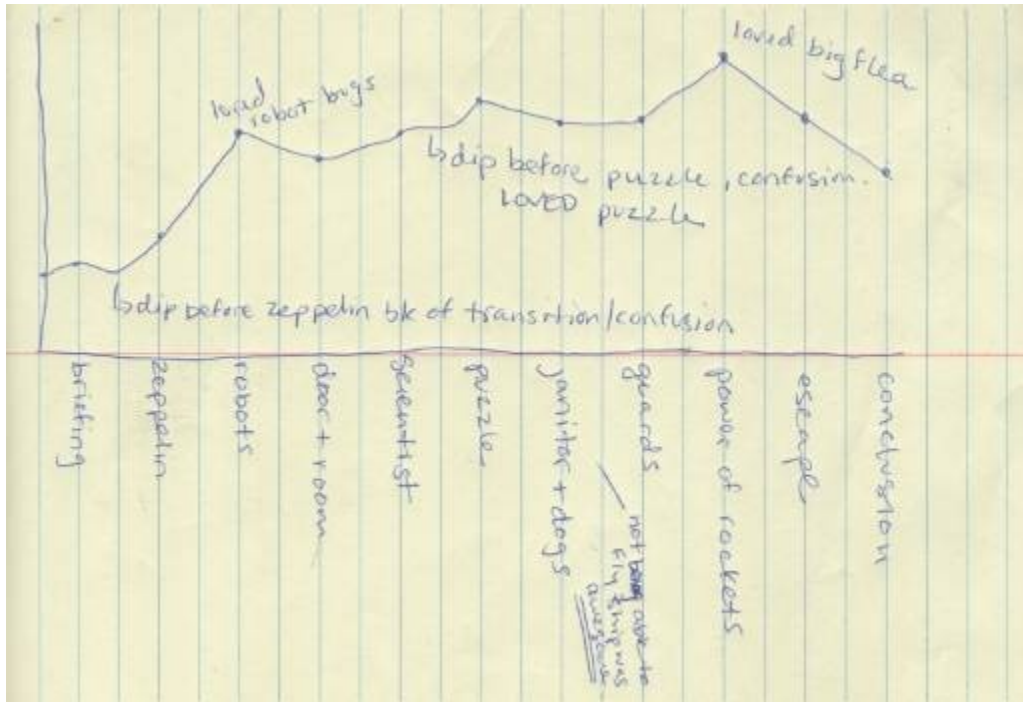
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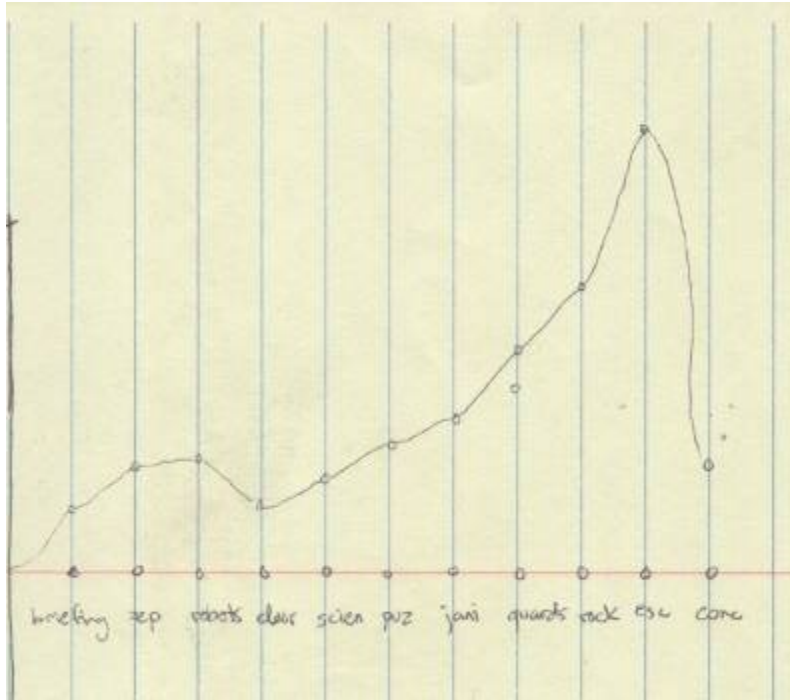


### Post-game



### Player Interest Curves





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## Post-mortem Analysis

### **Surprises**

- 1) I was surprised by how consistent the interest curve was among my players, I wasn't expecting it to pan out so well! Even though each player got a chance to "shine" at different points in the story, they all stuck together (and worked together as a team) throughout the whole adventure.
- 2) The cleverness of my players with their domains really surprised me. I was worried the Nobilis world and the idea of controlling an aspect of reality might be too weird for them, but they picked it up and responded to the idea very well. They actively sought ways to use their domains

and gifts, and were quite creative.

3) The fact that the "golden statue in the golden pedestal" syndrome showed up startled me. I wasn't expecting it to, but it worked nicely to prove a point that even with very intelligent, creative players, something "obvious" can just fly right over their heads.

4) I've been requested by my players to arrange another session for them to play. This was a huge surprise, but a flattering one. Fortunately, I arranged the story just so that introducing the full rule-set would make sense (since they are now graduates of Nobilis school, and full-fledged Nobles, I could start introducing parts of the original game that I'd left out).

### ***Interest Curve analysis***

1) My original and post-game interest curves differed in terms of the events that occurred, but this was not surprising to me. I'd intentionally made the original with sparse, "key" events, with room to expand if necessary. I ended up using 3 of my 4 planned "extra" scenes, plus an entirely improvised scene at the end before the boss (distracting a group of guards in the hangar). Even though the events differed, the shapes of my initial and post-game interest curves were quite similar.

2) My players' curves were very similar in shape, but had dips and peaks at different points (for example, Alyson's first peak was at the robots, because she got to do something clever, for Carlos, that was a dip).

3) In spite of small individual differences, the overall curve was similar among my players in a steady upward climb, and everyone had their climax at either the fight with Rockets or the daring escape.

4) People probably had their individual dips and peaks based on how their character played a role in each part. I tried to make sure each person would have an opportunity to use their unique talent without leaving anyone out.

### ***What went well***

1) People really latched onto the world, which resolved my biggest fear that Nobilis would



be too weird for them. They figured out what they could do well and played that up, finding clever ways to use their domains and gifts and really get into their characters.

2) Everyone had a lot of fun, and the timing and pacing turned out "just so." We finished the game in 2 hours, and it felt neither too long nor too short.

3) To represent each player's stock of Miracle Points, I used Alyson's set of poker chips. This was a great idea; people had a much easier time visualizing the points as resources to be spent, and it added a tactile quality to the game which was really nice.

### ***What could have been better***

1) If I were to do it again, I would reduce the overall number of Miracle Points people had. We had a bit of a surplus, so that it wasn't a very risky decision to spend them. Towards the end, during the climax, people caught onto this and started spending them in huge amounts, just to catch up. I also ended up at the last minute to combine all Miracle Points into a common pool, rather than separating them out (5 for Aspect, 5 for Domain, 5 for Spirit). I felt like this prevented some confusion, but it probably caused the surplus problem. I think I will reduce the total Miracle Points to 10 per person the next time I try to play with these one-shot rules.

2) My "hook" wasn't very...uh...hooky. It was a mild peak in everyone's curve, but more of a gentle slope than a peak, really. I think this was a result of confusion. I threw them into things very quickly, and since they were all new to Nobilis and mostly new to tabletop RPGs in general, this caused a bit of hesitation and confusion. A "tutorial" fight might have been a good idea.

### ***What I learned about interactive storytelling***

1) The reason, I think, that this is such a challenge in video games is that a computer doesn't come CLOSE to the variability in having a human run the game. Humans can make on the fly decisions that shape and cater the story to the players' whims. A Game Master with extremely good improv skills is much more valuable a storyteller than one who simply knows all the rules by heart, in regards for making a fun experience for the players.

2) In video games, even the ones with very good stories, there is still a sense of lack of control on part of the player. Part of this comes from the simple knowledge of the limitations of computers. They are simply not good at making decisions, as anyone who has to write a sorting algorithm will tell you, and can't pick up on things like a player's energy or mood at playtime. I suppose the thing that makes humans good at running interactive stories is how well we are adapted to analyzing feedback from our player.

3) Wouldn't it be cool to have a tool for game masters that essentially allowed them to run games in a virtual world, and shape the world at their whim based on the characters' responses? That would be awesome! It would essentially, in my dream world, be a system set up such that the player's end would be much like playing a common MMORPG, but they are running an adventure constructed by their GM. Perhaps they communicate via headset or some such.

The GM, through some means of technological magic, not only would be able to set up the world for the current adventure, but would have the ability to easily manipulate and change things on the fly in real time, as improvisation requires. It wouldn't be a massive game, or even a game at all, just a tool to create and manipulate virtual worlds in real time. I'm not sure if there would be much of a market for this potentially expensive (if even possible) toy, especially if it's just intended as an augmentation to traditionally run tabletop RPGs. But damn, it would be cool.....I'd use it.