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played a game with points-based character creation or a system of advantages and disadvantages that is accessible at character creation. Traditionally, NPC contacts are sources of either information or administrative help such as a professor with an interest in the occult or a prominent lawyer. While these kinds of NPC contacts are entirely appropriate forms of diegetic advancement, they can also serve as points of access to skills that a character might want to learn. For example, the master of the fencing school I mentioned above could answer PC questions about unusual wounds on a body, but they could also teach a PC to fence and even turn up whenever a PC lets them know that they are in trouble. One of the great advantages of rules-light NSR games like Into the Odd and Liminal Horror is that they make it a lot easier to handle what might, in the context of the OSR, be referred to as hirelings. One of the reasons for successive D&D editions drifting away from the widespread use of hirelings is that they serve to complicate an already quite time-intensive system of accounting. Taking on a hireling means not only complicating the maths on treasure splits, it also means tracking their experience alongside that of your character. Games that are part of the lineage of Into the Odd simplify this process by having hirelings be rolled up in exactly the same way you'd roll up a new PC. Choosing a contact as a diegetic form of advancement means access to their expertise, being able to call on them if there's danger, and also having the option to play them should a character not survive an adventure. Artefacts Cairn, Into the Odd, and Liminal Horror all allow for the possibility that a character might start play with some form of magical artefact. In the case of Into the Odd, the artefact is always a whimsical piece of alien technology but both Cairn and Liminal Horror prefer the idea of spells that take up space on the characters person. The most obvious form of artefact-based diegetic advancement is to allow characters to acquire an additional spell, which they can then choose to take with them on adventures or leave back at home base. Diegetic advancement can also assume the form of having the character acquire the capacity to control an artefact. This is maybe a bit more controversial as I would argue that it is assumed that characters can automatically use any object they happen upon in the course of their adventures. Personally, as a GM, I would complicate this by introducing the concept of attunement: Anyone can use any artefact that they encounter in the course of an adventure but understanding the artefacts capabilities and being able to use them as efficiently as possible should require the character to experiment with or train on the artefact. Anyone can use any artefact, but only an attuned PC can use a particular artefact properly. As a further form of diegetic advancement, I would take inspiration from the way that Earthdawn handles magical objects and allow for the possibility of deepened attunement whereby a character who has spent a lot of time and energy training on an artefact has unlocked previously unknown powers that are inaccessible to anyone who tries to use it without the appropriate level of attunement. What power this deepened level of attunement unlocks would be determined by a discussion between me and the person playing the character. Status The above forms of diegetic advancement are all about the characters being able to do more stuff or being able to rely on the loyalty of NPCs who can do stuff for them. Status is less about competence and the direct projection of power, and more about being able to benefit from membership in the social hierarchies of a particular setting. The most obvious form of increased status is to be elevated to a higher socio-economic class. Maybe a players rogue archaeologist has done enough good work to secure a full professorship, or maybe a players skilled mechanic is asked to work on more prestigious projects with a staff of their own. From prole to bourgeois, and bourgeois to aristocrat: Maybe a players indefatigable man-at-arms has acquired such a reputation for gallantry that her former companions naturally start calling her captain and doing as she says. Maybe the skilled mercenary captain has fought long enough and hard enough for the same side that a local king decides to secure their eternal loyalty by knightng them on the spot. Maybe the local thieves guild has noticed a characters ability to earn and decided that they should be made. Many of the material benefits of increased social status should probably be secured separately: Being a captain doesnt mean having your own ship and being a knight doesnt mean that you automatically get your own castle. The world is full of temporarily inconvenienced members of high-status groups and the reason they stress their continued membership of these groups is that membership has its benefits in terms of access to people, places, and situations. It is one thing for a character to be self-made and self-reliant but being able to stand with the status quo behind you will certainly make life just that little bit easier. While this form of diegetic advancement is all about elevating the characters above the through, a trickier form of status acquisition would be the acquisition of basic rights. Maybe a run-away slave has done enough on their adventures to earn freedom, or maybe a member of a minority group has proved themselves enough to no longer be treated as a second class citizen. Obviously, role-playing these kinds of subjects requires some degree of delicacy but I think it is worth remembering that status goes from the basement to the ground floor as well as from ground to first. These four avenues of diegetic advancement are all (to my mind) fairly obvious, straight-forward and uncontroversial to implement. One difficulty is getting players used to thinking in terms of diegetic advancement so I would suggest taking a few moments at character creation to talk through all of these possibilities. This would give players the opportunity to not only choose their diegetic advancement, but also to role-play the process of acquisition. Having discussed the uncontroversial forms of diegetic advancement, Ill gingerly edge myself out onto a ledge Despite being a big fan of investigation-based horror games with a deep sense of place, I am not a fan of Free Leagues Vaesen. I wont relitigate the argument it isnt relevant but suffice it to say that I dont know how they started with that artwork and ended up with a game about murdering fairies in order to make the world safe for commercial logging. As much as I dislike Vaesen, I adore its advancement rules as in addition to traditional XP allowing players to increase their characters skills, they also allow players to invest in their home base. According to the fiction of Vaesen, the characters inherit a ruined castle that was once home to an order of psychical investigators. At the end of each session, the GM goes through a charmingly old-school questionnaire designed to encourage roleplaying and immersion: Did the characters go on a mission, did they confront the supernatural, did they solve a mystery. For each Yes, the players get a point they can invest in their castle. Maybe they uncover an old shooting range, maybe they restore the castles kennels, maybe they find the resources to hire some guards. Theres also a mechanic regarding the amount of points spent; the more points spent, the better the buff but the more likely it is that the characters activities will start attracting attention. There are dozens of potential upgrades, some of them chained together, some of can be purchased multiple times. Each room represents a boon that can be invoked once per session. It is a rich and compelling system of advancement that would have players drawing up maps and squabbling over whether they most pressinglly need a shooting gallery or an infirmary. Like the ships I Traveller, it can also become a source of adventures as the players work to defend the source of their boons. Obviously this type of system works best in a game with a traditional skill suite, but even skill-less games like Cairn or Liminal Horror could tie a gun-based advantage to a shooting range or a science-based advantage to possession of an in-house lab. You could even tie this kind of investment back into other forms of diegetic advancement: If the group invest in a shooting range or a salle darmes then it would be a lot easier for them to acquire the skills associated with using those weapons. Similarly, building a lab would be a great set-up for a scientific contact. Given that Vaesens property redevelopment rules are only loosely inter-connected with the skill system, it is tempting to port the sub-system across directly and localise the boons but I would like the system to be more rooted in the material reality of the game world. As a result, rather than handing out points for player-facing reasons, I will deal in abstracted character-facing resources like sources of funding and patronage, moneys secured in exchange for valuable objects, or just rewards for successful completion of missions. Im still thinking about this and may yet work up some upgrade paths for Cairn or Liminal Horror but I feel like this kind of system would work as part of a broader but systematic approach to diegetic advancement.

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