

The ABYSS



Sweaver



The Abyss

HEAVEN

by Bas Suverkropp

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Reccommended for Mature audiences.

www.kult-rpg.org

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Made for the Kult Roleplaying Game

For Mature Readers

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~ www.kult-rpg.org ~

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Some ideas for Heaven in KULT

This description of Heaven is based on the ideas of the original KULT rules and the Legions of Darkness sourcebook. The cosmology described in the Metropolis sourcebook doesn't appeal to me. I think that almost everything in Kult shows that the Demiurge never was particularly benevolent to mankind. Just look at the servants he created. Based on this, I have made a Heaven which was once very pleasant but still made for some dark purpose. Now the Demiurge has disappeared, and his Heaven is coming apart at the seams.

What is Heaven?

I do not agree with the idea put forward in the newer KULT books that our earth, Elysium, was once Heaven. Our reality is a cage, and it was never meant to be a pleasant one. Also, it is said that Malkuth fashioned our prison from her own body. What, then, is Heaven? I think Heaven is the citadel of the Demiurge, which has of course disappeared from Metropolis, but it does still exist (a temporal paradox too complicated for us poor unawakened). This was the place where the Demiurge gathered his direct servants and those of humanity willing to serve him. Before our imprisonment, people came to Heaven voluntarily, and could leave there too. When the Illusion was created, Heaven was also changed so those humans coming there would not awaken. Why a large number of people was kept in Heaven is unclear. Maybe the Demiurge saw them as a kind of reserve force, untainted by the machinations of Astaroth's minions and his own prison wardens, who could be used if Astaroth made a bid for ultimate power. Maybe the Demiurge had pity on part of humanity and offered them a respite from the Illusion, although he would not release them. Or the humans in Heaven are simply a cruel joke: they think they are chosen, but in fact the Demiurge can enjoy the submissiveness of those who once threatened his own power. Or it might just be a place, as has been suggested elsewhere, where peoples memories are erased by endless eventlessness before they are reborn.

How does one reach Heaven?

How would a character reach Heaven? Once, the gates of the Demiurges' citadel stood open for all those who would enter, so reaching Metropolis was the first step in reaching Heaven. Now only the Abyss is left. However, several ways to enter Heaven still exist:

Becoming a mystic. Mystics may partially live in Heaven, and eventually stay there. Becoming a mystic is basically increasing your mental balance until you reach really high levels (150+). By studying religious doctrine and having ecstatic experiences, the mind may be moved to Heaven, and eventually the body too. Christian mysticism will work, but mystic traditions from other religions also work, as long as these religions assume the existence of a Heaven. Taoist practices seem to be especially suitable. The first glimpses of Heaven will not reveal that there is anything wrong, so the Mystic will usually be encouraged to continue. Very critical mystics may spot the increasing decay of Heaven, a very shocking experience which will usually make them depressed and lose a lot of MB. Reaching Heaven by becoming a mystic takes a lot of time, and is not much of a game option.

A few artifacts can be used to enter Heaven. The Holy Grail is one example. These artifacts are either very, very obscure or very well guarded. The obscure artifacts were made or found by someone who did not tell anybody about them but quietly slipped into Heaven, leaving the artifact behind for someone else to use, with no clues about its powers. Some artifacts from legend have the power to open a gate to Heaven, too. Many powerful cults and beings try to get possession of these, so they are always well hidden and guarded. If you would be able to steal one of these, the original owners will do everything to get it back, and many other interested parties will also appear and try to take it from you. It is said that some Russian icons have this power, but with the large number of them in existence, trying this theory would take a lot of work.

If you can follow the path of a saint or martyr, you may be able to enter Heaven without dying. You will need as many possessions and relics of the person you will imitate. Then, you will spend every waking moment meditating upon the martyr or saints thoughts and teachings. When your own ego starts to fade, and you start to identify more and more with your object of worship, you will then imitate the most famous deeds of the saint (preferably physically strenuous ones) or the martyrs torture. Hallucinations will start to occur, showing you glimpses of Heaven, and if they are strong enough, the Illusion will crack and you will have arrived in Heaven. Reaching Heaven this way will take months in the least and success will not be guaranteed. Focussing on a saint is easier for people with positive MB and focussing on a martyr is easier for people with negative MB. Even if unsuccessful, your actions may have a strong effect on your MB. Some of the people who re-enact the Crucifixion of Christ in Jerusalem ended up in Heaven this way.

Some of the Angels that roam the Illusion still know how to find Heaven. Generally, it is painful for them to return, because Heaven reminds them sharply of the fact that the Demiurge has abandoned them. As a result, it is very rare for an Angel to return. If it does, it could be followed. Angels will never guide anyone to Heaven by their own initiative, you will have to ask them. You must either convince the Angel that you have a very compelling reason to go to Heaven (almost impossible) or force the Angel to guide you. Physical torture will not work on Angels, but magic or blackmail (threatening to kill or injure others) might. Note that doing this will certainly lower your MB. Once you've reached Heaven, there is no way you can compel the Angel. Sometimes, no matter what you try to coerce the Angel, you will fail, because many of the Angels in the Illusion have forgotten how to reach Heaven. Using a 'portal to the passions' spell on them might work, though. Some religions and magical traditions describe methods to summon Angels or celestial beings, to serve as a source of insight or divine knowledge. Most don't work at all, but those that do were designed in a time when the Demiurge was still present. If attempted now, most likely the Angel summoned will be deranged and will have little to give but despair. If you die, believe in Heaven, and have a positive MB, you are likely to end up in Heaven. Suicide usually doesn't work, however, since most religions frown upon this. If you arrive in Heaven because you have died, you will not be able to leave.

The Landscape of Heaven

Heaven is a open, green landscape of shrubs, small groups of trees and clumps of flowers, but somewhat dry, not unlike Southern Italy. Here and there you will see magnificent white marble buildings, in a style between classical Roman and modern architecture, with beautiful white statues. The first thing which goes through your mind when you see this is "Wow!" The setting looks very inviting. But soon the Arcadian landscape starts getting to you. The sky is somewhat overcast, dark clouds gathering in the distance like there will be a thunderstorm. The sun looks somehow weak, like it is faltering and dying. You feel vaguely threatened, though you don't know by what. The solitude of the landscape soon becomes oppressive. Anybody with knowledge of biology or gardening will see that the plants do not belong to any known species. The flowers lack reproductive organs. There are no animals, not even insects. If you reach one of the buildings, you will find that they are in a state of disrepair, and mostly empty. A few pieces of furniture, scattered in large halls, or a single curtain, flapping in a window, only emphasize this feeling of loneliness and emptiness. The buildings seem to have no function, they consist of halls, rooms and stairways, but no functional places like kitchens or bathrooms will be found. Small plants have started to creep up on the buildings, making cracks in the marble. If you stand on one of the terraces or balconies of the building, you have a grand view over the landscape, which stretches to the horizon in gentle, rolling hills, all green, with some dramatic mountains far of in the distance. It is quite monotonous, and although you can see more buildings, some in ruins, and maybe a seashore, you start to feel that it will bring you nothing if you reach them, just more emptiness. Sometimes, you can see buildings burn, far away, but if you reach them, there are only ruins left. It never gets dark, but the dark clouds never completely lift either. (Actually, the landscape paintings of Dutch magic-realist painter Karel Willink perfectly convey the atmosphere described here. He said of one of his own paintings: "A sunny landscape, once the symbol of pastoral peacefulness, can be an unbearable menace." Examples are his paintings The Terrace of Hercules, Job, and The Stylite). There are only dust roads, and some stone roads of the Roman type. All roads start at buildings but lead nowhere.

Effect of Heaven on characters

Roaming about in this abandoned place is dangerous. Some people will get very paranoid, and start to hallucinate. They will suspect that they are being spied upon constantly. They will not attack others physically, but will become very distrustful of former friends. They will question everything others do towards them. This behavior is typical for people with negative MB. Others get very depressive, sinking into black despair where nothing seems to matter anymore. They will sink in black moods where they see everything in the darkest light, and will say things to their companions that they might regret later. This mostly happens to people with positive MB. Still others become completely lethargic, they will refuse to do anything, even speak. This will happen to people with an MB close to zero. In all cases, many emotions are suppressed, such as jealousy and lust, love and joy. Anger and sorrow do still exist. People will become very irritable and defensive about any disadvantages they have. However, violence will rarely occur, and even the most violent person will think twice about it. It is not very effective, either. People seem harder to hurt and to wound by physical means. Inhabitants of Heaven will flee from violence, although the larger Angels will just endure it. No mechanical weapon or destructive device will work in Heaven, and arson is also impossible. Buildings or statues can be destroyed by slowly chipping away with a hammer and chisel, if desired. There is sleep in heaven, but no death for the characters. Characters will not get hungry or thirsty, but they will get tired and fall asleep. The body will not emit wastes or sweat, but crying is still possible. Some will be depressive enough to commit suicide, this does not work, they will sleep (sometimes for a long time) and their wounds will slowly heal. Being seriously or deadly wounded in Heaven will also lead to a loss of MB. But even though the body will not perish in Heaven, the mind might. It is possible to go mad, or to lose your memories.



~::~The Court of the Sublime by Jason Just::~~

Encounters in Heaven

There will be some encounters, but they should be rare. There is no time in Heaven, but it should seem like there are weeks or even months between each encounter. (Tough to role-play!) People can sometimes be seen walking along one of the roads in the distance or looking out from terraces or balconies of far-off buildings, but they have always disappeared when the characters get close.

The statues

The white statues that adorn the buildings or that are sometimes standing on small pedestals in gardens or along the roads are extremely lifelike. They depict men, women and children of all human races. Some look very old and a bit weathered, others are quite new and shiny. If the players pay attention, sooner or later they will see statues of people they know, who have died.

Although all of the statues look quite serene, a closer look at the faces will show that many of the people were not very happy when they were portrayed. Some look extremely weary, others a bit afraid. This is hard to see though, unless you know the person represented. If a character recognizes a close friend or relation of whom he didn't know he or she died, make an ego throw or the character loses 5 MB.

The amphitheater

The wind carries a soft sound of singing to the characters. If they walk in the direction of the sound, they will eventually reach a more or less round valley which has been made into an amphitheater. White marble seating lines the gently sloping hillsides, creating space to seat at least a million people, but probably many more. In the center, there is a large, empty stage. The theatre is mostly deserted. Small groups of people are scattered over the marble benches, sitting far away from each other. They are almost lost in the immensity of the structure. If one of the groups is approached, you will find that it consists of people of all ages and races, clad in simple white clothes in all kinds of designs (like toga's, tunics, long dresses, sari's). Most are sitting but some are standing. They move very slow, if at all. Some of them are singing, a vague, wordless hymn. Nobody will react when spoken to. If somebody tries to touch one of the people in the amphitheater, they will find that moving, pulling or shaking them is hard. It is as if every movement is through a thick syrup. Although it is possible to find people here that the characters might recognize, the chances are very small. Note however that there might be people in the amphitheater are not dead yet in the Illusion. Persons with negative MB have little to fear here, but everybody with a positive MB must make an EGO roll. If they fail, they will not want to leave the amphitheater. No amount of talking can convince them to leave, but they can be carried off. However, the strange resistance against movement of the place will already influence such people, so it is no easy task (make Strength and willpower rolls). Only when the singing can no more be heard will the person who was affected show some activity again. After having visited the theatre, the characters will sometimes hear the singing in the distance, but finding the amphitheater again is almost impossible, if they should want to.

Ossifying angel

The characters will notice an impressive statue of a winged angel, about three times as large as a human, standing on the grass in front of one of the marble buildings. When they come close, they realize that the head and part of the angel's wing are not stone, but flesh and feathers. The Angel will not talk, but it may answer when spoken to. Its answers will not be very straightforward, and will always be very negative and depressive. It will tell you that whatever you will try to do is hopeless, that whoever you are trying to save is already damned, that you will not be able to escape from the results of your sins, that the only One who could save you or humanity has left. Talking for a while with this Angel will cause you to get the disadvantage Depression. People who are already depressive cannot stand the talk for long and may go catatonic.

Angel of despair

When entering one of the buildings, the characters come into a large hall, with faded frescos on the walls. A single, broken chair lies in one of the corners, and somebody is sitting against the wall, his head in his hands, and covered with a large cloak. If the characters come closer, they realize that the cloak are actually the wings of the Angel. It will look up at the characters. The Angel is man-sized, and clad in simple, white clothes. It will not initiate conversation, but it will talk with the characters. The Angel is very depressed, and has not much to tell, apart from the fact that it is an Angel and that the characters hurt it by their presence. The Angel will know all the dark secrets of the characters and may tell them to all present if provoked. Its answers will usually be short and cynical. It will tell that salvation is impossible now, but it will not mention the Demiurge. It may pace around the hall, but will not leave it or join the characters.

Angel in distress

The characters hear some whimpering and moaning sounds coming from the direction of a small, overgrown marble monument, surrounded by a circle of cypresses. If they go investigate, they will see that a human-sized Angel is stuck to the column by the strong, thorny strands of a plant. The Angel is obviously hurting, and desperately trying to say something. The characters can try to free the Angels, which is very hard because the thorny strands are very strong and will cut everybody who tries to pull or break them. Trying to remove the strands will hurt the Angel even more, and it will start bleeding, thick, bright red blood, thicker than human blood. The drops of blood will sparkle like small jewels on the ground. The Angel will start to cry. If the characters succeed in freeing the Angel, it will fall to the ground, and collapse. It will not regain consciousness, but the pool of blood will slowly grow. If the characters leave the Angel bound to the column, it will scream and shout something, over and over again. The characters will hear this for a long time while they are walking away. (A side note: Angels blood may have some very strong magical effects, and is of course hard to find normally. The blood will stay fluid indefinitely.)

Deranged Angel

An Angel flies by in the sky, flapping its large wings. If the characters hail it, it will turn and land in front of them. It is man-sized, dressed in white rags, and heartbreakingly beautiful. It will look at the characters, and give a loud, desperate wail. Then it will fall to the ground, sobbing. If the characters help it up, they will see that its eyes are empty, and whatever they say or do, it will just wail or sob until they leave it behind.

Battle angel

The characters find this angel if they enter one of the large domed buildings (like an extra-large version of the Pantheon in Rome). This is a war Angel, a large winged humanoid being the size of a B52 bomber. It is smooth, with a gleaming, metallic skin, somewhat like a gigantic car hood ornament. It has no face, the front of its head is smooth silver. It is motionless, sitting on its haunches with its huge wings behind, and will not react to the characters entering the dome. However, if the characters use one of the names of God (Jaweh, Allah etc.) or the word Demiurge it will slowly turn its faceless head to look at the characters. It will not speak (it probably can't). If the characters swear, blaspheme or talk about the disappearance or non-existence of God, the Angel will emit a wordless scream of rage, stretch to full length and spread its wings. The dome will shatter if it does this (check for damage to the characters from falling stones). The Angel will then fly away and crash in the distance. The fire and smoke can be seen for days. If (and only if) a character uses the name of Astaroth, the Angel will attack him. It will fly up and dive down on the character, crashing and completely shattering both the body of its target and itself. The character is gone. (He or she will reappear somewhere in Heaven, but will not rejoin the other characters for a long time).

The Lion

Coming round the corner of some crumbling triumphal arch, the characters see a huge lion, easily twice as large as any normal one. It is also lighter in color, and has two wings. It is quite close to the characters, and slowly walks in their direction. Remember that they have not seen animals for a long time. In its eyes there is a wise and sad expression. If the characters flee or act aggressively towards the lion, it will utter a deep sigh, spread its wings, and fly away. If the characters act friendly, or simply stand and watch, the lion will come very close, and act friendly, but dignified. It will follow the

group. If the whole group goes to sleep, they will find that the lion has died when they wake up.

The inhabitants

Some of the magnificent but crumbling buildings are still inhabited by a few people. They are usually dressed in old-fashioned clothes, often white or with very faded colors. The people will either spend their time looking out from windows or balconies at the landscape, or go about some mysterious business inside the buildings. They will mostly ignore the characters. When spoken to, they can be engaged in some desultory conversation, but most have little or nothing to tell. Only rarely can they remember their own names, and of their previous lives they retain just some fragmented memories. Some have retained some possessions from the Illusion. They are not willing to give them up, but will only react with pleas, wailing or endless following of the characters if they are taken from them. They can tell nothing about the Demiurge or about the Angels, but might remember that things were different a long time ago.

The Pilgrims

A small group of people, usually of the same race, but mixed in age, shuffles slowly forward on one of the dusty roads. They are all clad in white clothes, which are also dusty and in bad repair. Some of them are carrying staves or walking sticks, of small children. If confronted, they will stop for a moment to look at the characters with dulled eyes, then continue on their way. They will not speak under any circumstances. Following them will lead to the Amphitheater or to the Throne on the Demiurge.

The throne of the Demiurge

Finally, after a long time wandering through Heaven, the characters might come to a massive structure, easily several miles high, made of white marble. It has roughly the shape of a seat, and a vision of a white robed patriarchal figure passes through the minds of most humans who see it for the first time. This is the throne of the Demiurge. Any person who is serious about his or her religion will realize now at the latest that God has gone (with consequences for their mental balance and sanity). The throne is empty, and crumbling. Enormous rifts, some of them 10 meters or more wide, crisscross the throne. There are four Angels who guard the throne, standing in the four cardinal directions with their faces turned outward, each leaning on a sword. They look small compared to the throne, but are still huge, skyscraper-sized beings. They have a grim expression and although they are clearly alive, they will not react to the characters. Anybody with a positive MB will feel a terrible sense of loss, like a small child that is abandoned by its parents, or a soldier coming home from the war finding his home village a ruin and his friends and sweetheart dead. Anybody with a negative MB will feel crushing guilt and fear that He might return to punish. Their impulse will be to flee and leave Heaven as soon as possible. Going down through the rifts in the throne, one can leave Heaven, usually ending up at the edge of the Abyss in Metropolis, although an Angel may show you to other places where Metropolis touches the Illusion.

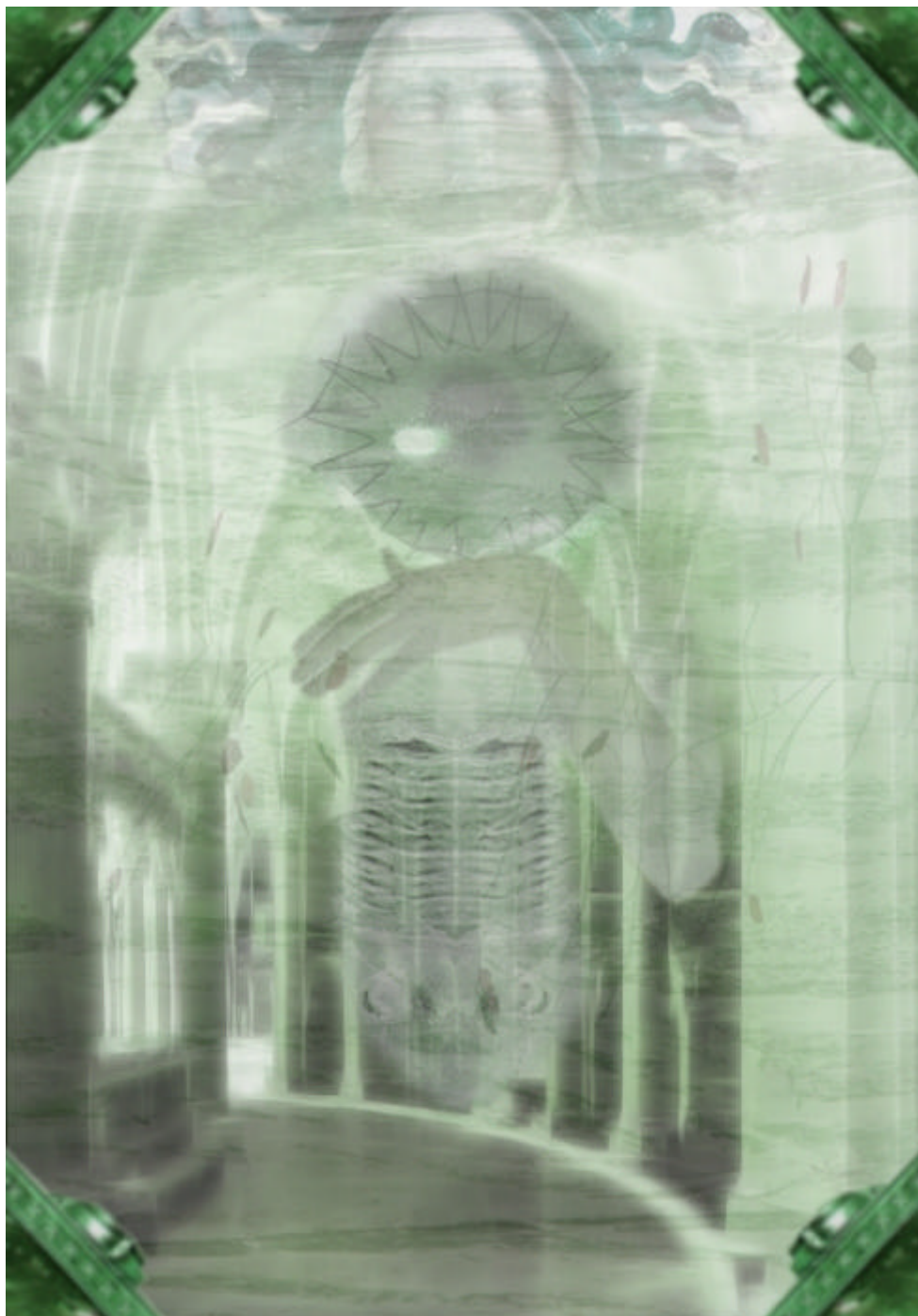
The role of Heaven in a campaign

Heaven should be kept a very exclusive place in any campaign, even more than Metropolis. Getting there should be hard, and players should not land in Heaven by accident. It will probably work best if it is the goal for a long quest. Imagine the players finally reaching Heaven and then finding out all is not well. This is about the biggest hint players can get about the KULT cosmology. On the one hand, Heaven will prove to them that religion is real (after all, there is a Heaven, and some definite signs of the existence of God), but the death or disappearance of God shows them too that a lot of things that religion tell you are not true.

(I posted the following on 26-11-96 on the Kult mailing list:

"I think the idea mentioned in the original rulebook (an abandoned Heaven where only a few crazed angels still roam) fits nicely in the atmosphere of the game. Imagine, you find a way to go to Heaven, and when you get there, there's nobody home. Everything still speaks of breathtaking beauty, but it is all in ruins. The dangers in the abandoned heaven are not

so much physical violence (IMHO this is much overused in the METROPOLIS sourcebook), but psychological dangers. The whole landscape will depress you. If even Heaven has fallen to ruins, what is there to strive for (Any player-character who is a practicing Christian, Jew or Muslim would have to roll against shock, with a hefty penalty). You will meet angels and other denizens of Heaven who radiate despair, melancholy, anger and depression. Ignoring them will give you a bad conscience (leaving an ANGEL in distress!), talking to them may leave you in deepest despair or bring all your negative feelings to the surface, or the angel may tell your dark secret to all present. The larger angels (not the ones described in LoD, but the real BIG ones) are probably dangerous in the way a nuclear launch silo is dangerous."



~::~Corridors of the Anonymous Receptacles by Jason Just::~~