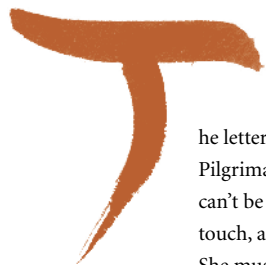


Letters to Heaven

CH
03



The letters are the beginning of each story in the Pilgrimage. Whenever there is a problem that can't be solved or a situation too tenuous to touch, a worldly person can call in the Pilgrims.

She must write a letter that explains the situation, like that her planet just got swallowed by an air whale or that she suspects she's been bitten by a werewolf. Then she must hide it somewhere special or dispose of the letter in some other ritual. A short while later, the letter disappears from its hiding spot and reappears fluttering above the Temple. Early Pilgrim flying lessons actually involve trying to catch the most letters from the sky and deliver them to the Temple elders.

Instead of giving you pages and pages of setting details for you to digest before playing, this game lets you can pick and choose which parts of the setting you find important. You do this by choosing the letters that your Pilgrims will answer throughout their Pilgrimage. The letters allow you to choose which parts of

the universe you want to include in your stories. You can ignore the letters you don't like, thereby ignoring that part of the universe. You can respond to the letters you do like, thereby making those aspects of the setting more important.

A letter is kind of like a level in video game. It's a self-contained set of problems and puzzles for your character to deal with, but just one in a series.



ABOUT THE LETTERS

Pilgrims Answer Letters and Help Worldly People

When a group of Pilgrims is ready for their journey, the elders give them a stack of letters. Worldly people always write letters to the temple asking for help. The letter-writers each have a problem that they just can't handle on their own. Pilgrims respond to these letters in-person as a representative of the Temple.

Though the people and their worlds may be strange, someone out there needs help only the Pilgrims of the Flying Temple can provide. Just as worlds come in many shapes and sizes, the worldly people do as well. Your Pilgrim's travels will bring her to high noble kingdoms and grungy pauper towns. She'll have divine audiences with deities and trade jokes with nature spirits. A Pilgrim may visit a forest moon full of friendly sprites, and then visit a tiny asteroid where a grumpy troll lives. Later, she dines with a colony of ghosts haunting an abandoned home, then a clockwork city of fidgety automatons. All these and stranger peoples may be met in the open skies.

The Temple elders do not hand these letters out randomly. They have known these pilgrims for a long time, and know the issues they need to outgrow. A pilgrim who gets into trouble by being too shy may face an antagonist who compels her to get out of her shell. A pilgrim who rashly rushes into a fight may face an antagonist unswayed by such acts of foolish bravado. Whatever their nature, they often reflect something about a Pilgrim's hang-ups and areas where she needs to grow.

Letter-writers are unreliable narrators.

Each letter reflects the particular, sometimes skewed worldview of the writer. Some letter-writers may come from worlds whose cultures don't even believe the Temple exists. That certainly makes it awkward when Pilgrims fly in from out of nowhere.. Other letter-writers are all too aware of the Temple, but overestimate how much a Pilgrim can accomplish, thinking them to be angelic beings of divine omnipotence. Imagine the disappointment when Pilgrims turn out to be just a bunch of teenagers with too much authority. Sometimes two letter-writers' description of the universe may even contradict each other.

Either way, the Pilgrims know what's really real... or at least they're sure enough. The elders teach Pilgrims to abide by the

local customs as far as they are comfortable. So, if the letter-writer believes the universe really is an inky black void and that the Pilgrims are aliens from another planet, a Pilgrim will act the part if it makes it easier for her to solve the letter-writer's problems. If she's on a world where no one even knows the Temple exists or that the universe is full of intelligent life, a Pilgrim won't mention it if it will cause more trouble than it will solve. That being said, there's a limit to every Pilgrim's pragmatism.

When faced with prejudice, injustice or something that just gets on the nerves, a Pilgrim or two has been known to break out of cultural norms. Then you get pilgrims trying to teach small town bigots a lesson through the judicious application of kung fu dinosaurs. Depending on the scope and mood of your stories, these might cause more trouble than they resolve. So, for the most part, do as the Romans do, even if it stinks.

Letters are story seeds.

This chapter presents many different letters written by all sorts of people from around the universe. (Actually, they're written by real people who were kind enough to contribute their creativity to this game.)

Each letter offers you a fruitful beginning for a fun adventure and plenty of opportunities for your Pilgrims to get into trouble. By picking a letter, you decide how a story will begin, but neither you nor the other players know how the story will end. You will have a letter written by someone on a distant world asking for help, but that only sets the stage for your adventures there.

From that starting point, you and your friends will create your own story together. You could even play the same letter with different groups of players and it would result in a different story.

THERE ARE EIGHT KINDS OF WORLDLY TROUBLE.

For your convenience, and because the Temple monks are huge nerds, there is a special system for seeing the kind of troubles your Pilgrims might experience if they answer a letter. When you browse through the letters, you will see symbols stamped on each. There are eight symbols total and each stands for a particular kind of trouble. Use these symbols as rating system, so you can tell whether this subject matter is appropriate or fun for the group.



Book represents affairs of tradition, law and custom. These are troubles involving tradition and laws. There may be times when your Pilgrim acts against accepted norms, either by defying a cultural taboo or outright criminal intent. Expect encounters with local authorities. Arrest is the most common and immediate trouble.

Example: Fed up with the local governors, Pilgrim Anointed Tree steals the fish-crown and declares himself new emperor of this world. Suddenly, royal guards whisk away Pilgrim Anointed Tree for defiling the crown.



Heart represents troubles in which your Pilgrim is in love or is involved in worldly love lives. Love is a delicious problem. Sometimes the “trouble” with love is that it is forbidden by some cultural taboo. More often, the trouble is the other emotions that might come with the romance, including jealousy, attachment, and vulnerability. Your Pilgrim may find herself falling in love with a worldly person, or vice versa, which is definitely a distraction from her duties.

Example: Struck by her thorough understanding of philosophical treatises, Pilgrim Sage Hook falls in love with Xieu. The only problem is that she’s already betrothed to the prince of this world.

Flag represents troubles involving relationships and politics between nations, towns or whole worlds and empires. Worldly diplomacy impacts large groups of people, usually ruled by some kind of noble. Pilgrims’ meddlesome irreverence makes them quite infamous among the ruling elite. Pilgrims are only tolerated if their unorthodox methods work in the nobles’ favor. Well-intentioned Pilgrims may accidentally instigate border disputes, break treaties, and spread rumors.

Example: In dark of night, Pilgrim Electric Glass flies to the demilitarized zone between Cobar Province and Five-Peak City to parley between the generals. Unfortunately, both sides mistake her flashing static charge as a signal-flare for surrender.

Knot represents troubles involving families and their peculiar manner of getting on each other’s nerves. Family connects people across the universe, like invisible strings waiting to ensnare an errant Pilgrim. Tread around family affairs lightly. A cunning word can’t erase years of bad blood between rival heirs. A swift kick can’t sweep away tension between a stepparent and her new child. Pilgrims sometimes get personally involved in family troubles when they are mistaken for long-lost sons, daughters and uncles.

Example: Pilgrim Witty Pen cheers up a sick child by writing a funny poem about being raised by wolves. Rumor spreads that she is one of the long-lost wolf-people who left this world long ago, promising to return with new medicines.





Pen represents academic and investigative troubles, which are fairly common along the Pilgrimage. These troubles are a challenge to the mind, testing a Pilgrim's ability to deduce the root of a worldly problem. Your Pilgrim may find herself wrapped up in a labyrinthine mystery, uncovering dangerous secrets. A Pilgrim might also be forced to hide from scrutiny, trying to keep a secret. Pen troubles may also be distracting tests of mental agility, like puzzle rooms and riddles.

Example: Pilgrim Diving Banister discovers a conspiracy is afoot when she notices a false bookcase along the wall. The bookcase falls forward and a rush of wind sucks her into a room full of mathematical puzzles.



Lotus represents troubles in which the Pilgrims interact with gods or their followers. The gods embody aspects of the human condition, yet are endowed with superhuman abilities. This is a volatile mixture of insecurity and power. Gods break promises, and then direct their flock's rage against another god's people. They can cause wars, famine and demand devotion. Their moods are fickle and can be enraged at impropriety. Unfortunate pilgrims have been cursed, turned into toads and otherwise just been messed up.

Example: The arrogant Pilgrim Glorious Rose comfortably assumes the title and duties as figurehead of the local religion. Angry at the pilgrim's insolence, Thaderelius, local god of vengeance and wine, floods the world in grape juice.



Sword represents troubles of warfare, violence and weaponry. Perhaps the most straightforward type of trouble, but carries the worst consequences. When punches are thrown, a Pilgrim failed to keep the peace. A Pilgrim should solve problems without violence, but all are trained to use their flying talents to defend themselves and escape danger if necessary.

Still, sky ships, nets, weights or other contraptions may overcome the best flyers. Even the threat of violence may be troublesome enough.

Example: Pilgrim Limber Brush deftly strides into battle, acrobatically dodging the hundreds of spears lobbed at her. That is, until she realizes those spears actually formed a cage, leaving her trapped and unable to fly away.

Tree represents troubles in which the environment is the challenge. A Pilgrim could be caught in a dangerous storm, hunted by wild animals or disoriented after being puffed by a strange mushroom. These troubles also manifest as spirits, embodying aspects of the natural world. Using nature spirits in your story lets you turn the environment into a worldly character with whom your pilgrim can interact.

Example: Pilgrim Bookish Scrolls has a dozen different nature spirit languages in his supply of scrolls, so begins the negotiation with the river spirit. Unfortunately, this is technically a spirit of tributaries and is offended by the association with those degenerate river spirits.

Now that you know what each symbol means, let's take a tour through the letters!



BOUND FOR DARKNESS

by Myles Corcoran

Oh holy ones,

I am charged by the people of Falling Mountain to write this letter. We suffer and are in chains of our own making. Please free us.

Falling Mountain is caught, bound by shackles of iron to a passing behemoth and dragged out into the deeps far from light and warmth. We cannot break free. Each day our world grows colder, the crops fail and our children grow hungry. Please free us.

I must explain. Our world was a pleasant sphere, dotted with farms, garlanded with blossoming trees, ringed by gurgling streams. We lived a simple life, traded what little surplus we made with neighboring worlds and counted ourselves content.

Misfortune cast its shadow on us the day the behemoth came. A great beast of heaven, larger than imagining, it swam through the clouds impervious to man and his concerns. Some of our folk heard tell of its coming from a travelling band of tellers and jugglers. The sweetest talking of the foreigners, one Song-Bao, confronted our elders, encouraging the young to abandon our old ways and take up the travelers' life, sharing the riches of the beast and leaving Falling Mountain forever. Our young men were swayed by tales of prowess and the glory of the hunt. The fools!

As it grew nearer, our youths set out in floats to snare it, carrying nets and harpoons, chains and billhooks. The foreigners egged them on. Poor Li Foon the Oldest tried in vain to stop them but was laughed down by the hot-blooded boys.

Like gnats they were, eager for blood from the giant, afraid to let it escape, taking its unimaginable wealth away from Falling Mountain. Unhappily, they succeeded. We are now chained to the beast. The first few harpoons provoked no reaction from it, but eventually it shrugged, doubtless irritated by the parasites who bit at its flesh. The chains held, and our world was dragged crazily out of its orbit. Those villagers who managed to stay conscious tell me that we spun three, possibly four times around the behemoth before slamming into it. Merciful gods, but we stuck to it, lodged in its skin and held fast.

Our world is trapped, the chains that bind us buried in the body of the beast. This letter holds the hope of our world. Each day that passes takes us further from the holy light of the Temple, deeper into the dark. Please free us.

We have tried everything we know to break the chains, but it is hopeless. The skin of the beast overgrows the chains and our world is slowly being absorbed into the living flesh of the creature. Our village has fallen apart. The young men side with the foreigners, the foul Song-Bao promises great things when the behemoth reaches its destination. The elders call his words lies, and tell us that we're headed into the dark, a dark without hope.

I send this letter with the last of our boats. Please return it if at all possible, as Zheng will never let me hear the end of it if it is lost. Please free us.

GOAL WORDS:

Zheng

"The young men"

"Li Foon the Oldest"

"Li Foon the Oldest"

"Falling Mountain"

"Falling Mountain"

"Falling Mountain"

Behemoth

Cold

Song-Bao

Village

"failing crops"

"glory of the hunt"

"great beast of heaven"

"holy light of the temple"

"hungry children"

"Shackles of Iron"

"the foreigners"

"the old ways"

