

# Gestalt Role Playing Game

## A Semi-Generic Fractal RPG

By Mendel Schmiedekamp

### Introduction

Gestalt is a fractal roleplaying game, a game where you decompose the characters and situations to treat them with as little or as much detail as you like. Everything is based around five points:

- Spirit – internal, emotional, force of will, and morale.
- Force – direct, focused, and overwhelming.
- Finesse – indirect, circular, subtle, and inexorable.
- Contact – social, influential, and drawing upon others.
- Thought – knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and perspective.

These are linked to Gestalt, the sum that is more than the parts. When we want more detail and texture we break things down into these five points (perhaps multiple times), when we want less we pull those points together into Gestalts until we have our desired level.

Gestalt can be played in many settings, with exceptions allowing identities to obtain extraordinary abilities, whether by being a wizard, a shapeshifter, a cybernetic warrior, or just the CEO of an international company.

### How To

As you play Gestalt you will build the identities of the people you play, the endeavors they set out upon, and the troubles they encounter on the way. The fractal nature of Gestalt means that you will be assembling and extending these at various times, literally cutting out pieces and taping or gluing them together in order to build your people and situations. You will also be drawing on maps and describing the backdrops of people, places, and events within which the identities will struggle and achieve. To that end you will want the following on hand:

- 2 or more people (including yourself)
- Blank paper and printouts (pages 4-11)
- Pencils or other erasable writing utensils
- Colored pencils or markers for the maps
- 2 ten-sided dice (each person can have their own)
- Scissors
- Tape or Glue

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## Game Procedures: Setup and Building in Gestalt

### Starting a Game:

- 1) As a group discuss and agree on an overall concept for the game and its Identities.
- 2) As a group choose one person to be the moderator (this can change over time), the rest are the players.
- 3) Based on this concept choose a starting Identity value (see the Identity table).
- 4) Based on this concept choose the starting time and place and make it as a Backdrop.
- 5) Then each player makes an Identity.
- 6) Then the players make one or more Endeavors.

### Making a Backdrop:

A backdrop is made up of people, places (on a map), and events. Go around in a circle four times, each member of the group does one of:

- 1) Describe and draw a place on the map.
- 2) Name and describe a person.
- 3) Describes and record an event.

Make a new backdrop each time the players decided to take their Identities elsewhere.

### Making an Identity:

- 1) Decide who you want your Identity to be, based on the overall game concept.
  - 2) Your Identity Gestalt is the value chosen when starting the game. If you create a secondary Identity, its Gestalt is 2 lower than the lowest among your Identities.
  - 3) You gain a number of free branches equal to your Identity's Gestalt. You may also spend 1 free branch for an exception\*, or 2 for a resolve or tricks branch.
  - 4) Finally you start with Growth equal to your Identity's Gestalt value.
- \* Exception: ability to do something extraordinary. Describe its source and a related limit, restricting your Identity.

### Making an Endeavor:

Endeavors are made up of spaces for impacts.

- 1) A person describes a goal for the identities.
- 2) The moderator decides its base difficulty will be. This will create troubles.
- 3) The moderator decides the min branches. 3 branches gives about 2 hours of focused play.

### Finishing an Endeavor:

1) When all of a Endeavor's impacts have been filled and it has at least its minimum number of branches, then it is finished. If the Endeavor Gestalt is non-negative it is accomplished as though it an impact with all the pieces falling into place, otherwise the Endeavor fails (see right). Then each Identity refreshes 2 spent Gestalt for each branch in the Endeavor.

### Identity and Stat Values:

Value	Identity	Stats
< 0	--	Actively troublesome
0	Particularly boring person	Meager ability
1-3	Typical person	Some talent or skill
4-6	Exceptional person	Competency
7-10	World-class	Expertise
11-15	Larger than life	Mastery
16-20	Mythic	Super-Human
21-30	--	Legendary
>30	--	Unlimited

### Making Troubles:

Trouble is made up of difficulties.

- 1) Each Endeavor can activate many trouble. The biggest starts at the endeavor's difficulty. The next is 5 or more below that, and so on, stopping when the next difficulty is less than 5. You can reuse trouble from past endeavors.
- 2) Each trouble may branch (basic only) up to once per full five points of difficulty.

### Abandoning or Failing an Endeavor:

When the players fail an Endeavor or decide to stop pursuing it, the moderator counts the number of branches which have impacts in them. Then the moderator divides that number up into a series of permanent limits for the player's Identities, describing the doors now closed to them.

### Difficulty and Trouble Values:

Value	Difficulty	Trouble
< 5	Trivial	--
5-9	Easy	Comic Relief
10	Default	Routine
11-15	Novice	Effective
16-20	Expert	Dangerous
21-25	Master	Wide Reaching
26-30	Grand Master	Mythic
31-40	Supreme	Vast & Potent
41-50	Mythic	--
>50	Almost Impossible	--

### Playing your Identity:

- Describe what you they are doing and ask for feedback and responses from the moderator and the other players.
- If you delve into more detail about how you are dealing with an endeavor you may **branch that endeavor**. Connect a blank branch to an open point of that endeavor.
- If you make an **impact on the situation**, and no one thinks it's risky or implausible, apply half an applicable Gestalt value (round down) as the impact.
- If during these actions, you use one of your **tricks**, spend Gestalt for it.
- If you would make an impact, but it is risky (and at least a little plausible), **roll the dice**.
- After you've tried to make an impact or you've gone on for a while, offer the floor to the rest of the group. Then refresh up to 2 spent Gestalt from your Identity or branches.

### Determining Gestalt:

- The Gestalt value is the highest point + the second lowest, divided by 2, rounded down.

### Branching Identities and Trouble:

- 1) Name and describe this branch and draw a line connecting it with with one of the five points of another node. This will always be the Gestalt value of the new branch.
- 2) Choose a size of the gap, from 1 to 6.
- 3) Order the points from highest to lowest.
- 4) The highest is the Gestalt + the gap.
- 5) The second lowest is the Gestalt – the gap.
- 6) The second and third highest start equal to the second lowest.
- 7) The lowest starts equal to the second lowest – the gap.
- 8) Now increase the second and third highest and the lowest by up to up to twice the gap total, keeping their values in the same order.

## Game Procedures: Playing Gestalt

### Rolling Dice:

- 1) Optionally describe how your Identity is working around or dealing with a limit – if you do get 1 Growth.
- 2) Describe how your Identity is acting, if impressive or interesting to the group, you get a reroll. If you have a clear advantage get a second reroll.
- 3) Other Identities may try to oppose you, if so get a chance to impact your roll first.
- 4) Roll 2 ten-sided dice, each reroll lets you choose to roll the lower die again, unless the dice match. If the dice match, gain 1 Growth.
- 5) Add the dice and add them to your stat.
- 6) Add the highest helpful impact you can apply to this roll, including from pushing.
- 7) Subtract the highest impact another Identity has applied to stop this action.
- 8) Subtract the highest applicable difficulty (of any Troubles). This is your impact.
- 9) If the impact is negative, you take a limit – for a time there something you cannot do.

### Impact and Limit Values:

Value	Impact	Limit
< 0	Flip into a limit	na
0	Lacks Substance	na
1 - 3	Serviceable	Inconvenient
4 - 6	Highly Effective	Difficult
7-9	Impressive and Powerful	Dangerous
10	Perfected and True	Life-threatening
Each +5	Increase in Scope	Increase In Scope

### Spending Gestalt from Identity and Reserve Branches:

- Spend in situations related to this branch:
- Focus – spend 1 to reroll your lowest die.
  - Resist – spend to reduce how much you missed to mitigate or avoid taking a limit, one for one.
  - Push – spend 1 to retry an endeavor impact with the previous impact as a modifier.

### Spending Gestalt from Trick Branches:

- You get a number of effects related to this branch, with their costs set by their impact, up to the Gestalt value.
- You can rework these effects each time Gestalt changes.
- To use one of these effects, spend its cost from the Gestalt value.

### Impacting Endeavors:

- 1) When you want to impact an Endeavor, pick an open point.
- 2) Write your impact (positive or negative) in that point when you determine it.
- 3) Then (re)determine any related Gestalts.
- 4) Check if you have finished the Endeavor.

### Spending Growth on Identities:

- 1) Spend 4 minus each step back to the Identity (min 1) to increase a open point by 1. Redetermine any Gestalt values affected.
- 2) Spend 10 on a new basic branch or exception, 20 on a reserve or tricks branch.
- 3) Spend 20 to create a secondary Identity

### Scopes:

- 1) Immediate - for the moment
- 2) Local – lasts until a change of situation
- 3) Persistent – lasts until actively negated
- 4) Permanent / Global – lasts forever, or at least until an endeavor is taken to reverse it.

---

**People**

**Map**

**Backdrop  
Sheet**

**Backdrop  
Sheet**

**Map**

**Events**

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# Identity Sheet

A pentagonal form for an Identity Sheet. At the top vertex is a small square box. Below it is the text "Spirit" and "Identity" in bold. The middle horizontal edge contains a large rectangular box, flanked by two smaller square boxes. Below these are the labels "Finesse", "Gestalt", and "Force". The bottom edge features an oval containing a slash "/". Below the oval is the text "Spend to:" followed by "Contact • Focus Thought" and "• Resist • Push". At the bottom vertex are two small square boxes.

Spirit  
**Identity**

Finesse Gestalt Force

/

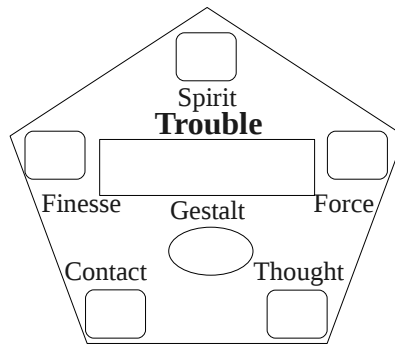
Spend to:  
Contact • Focus Thought  
• Resist • Push

# Endeavor Sheet

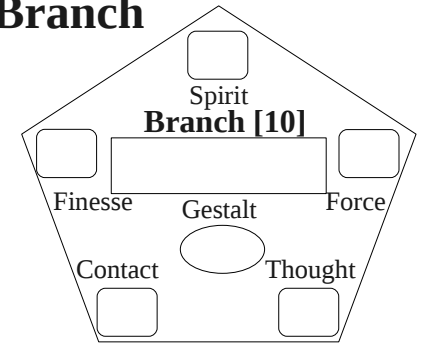
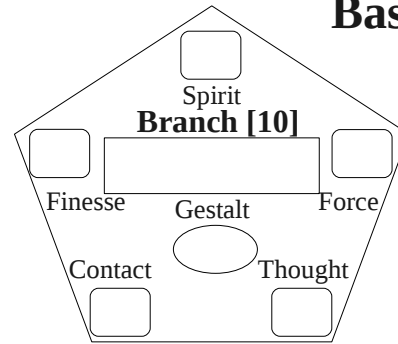
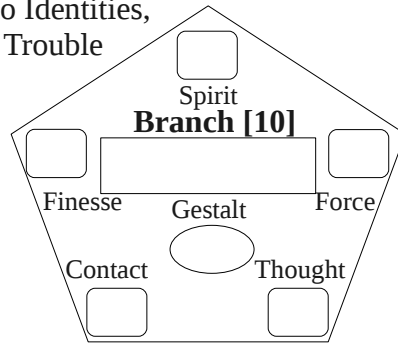
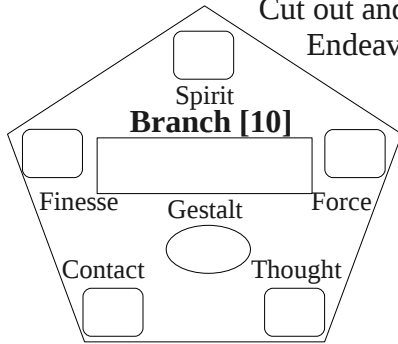
Spirit  
**Endeavor**

Finesse Gestalt Force  
Difficulty  Branches  
Contact  Thought

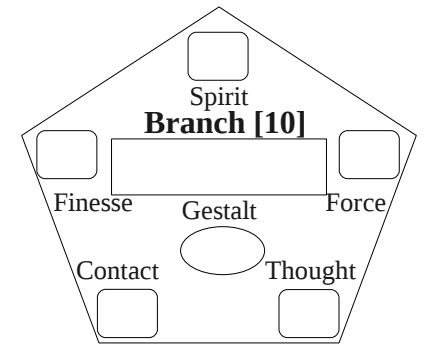
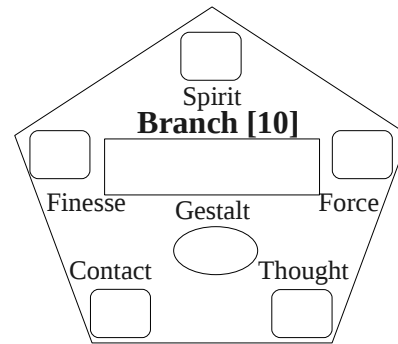
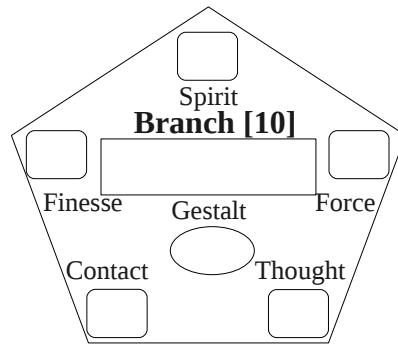
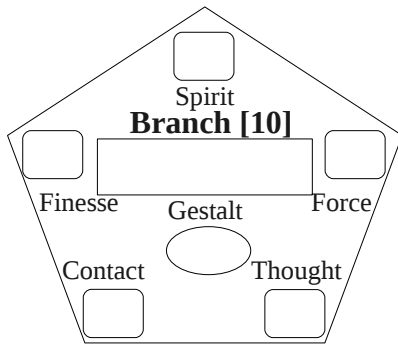
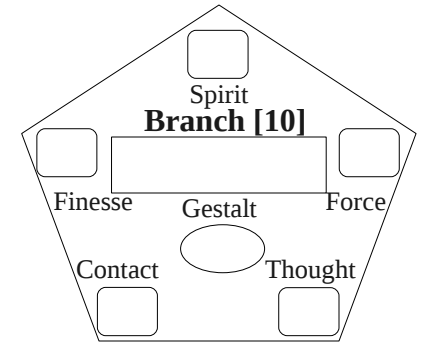
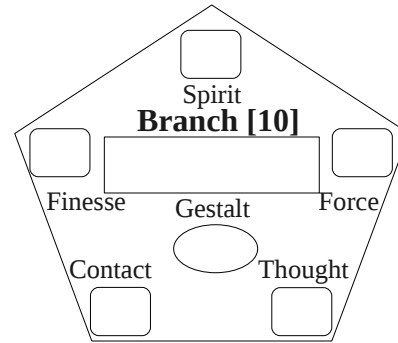
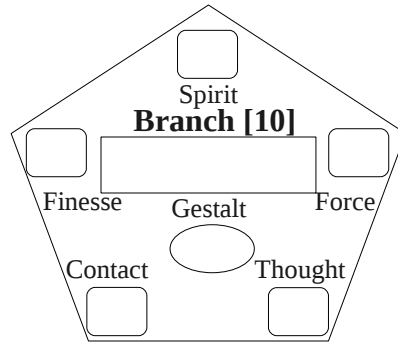
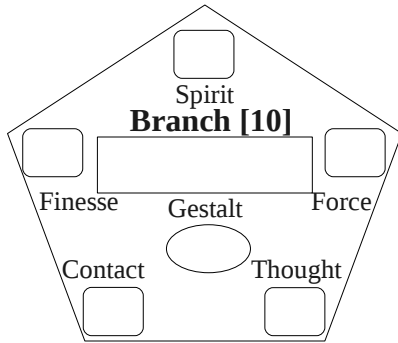
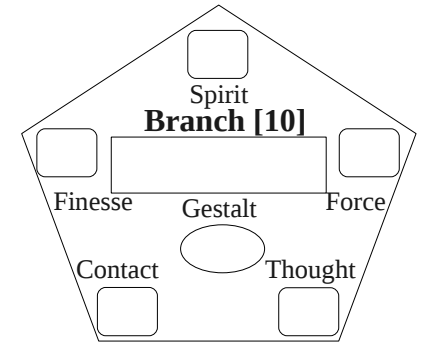
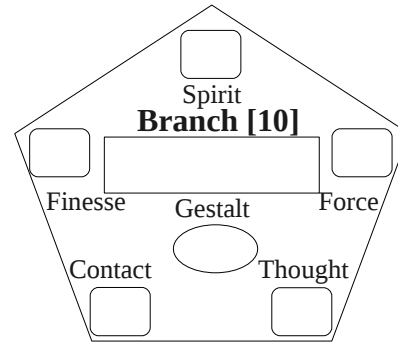
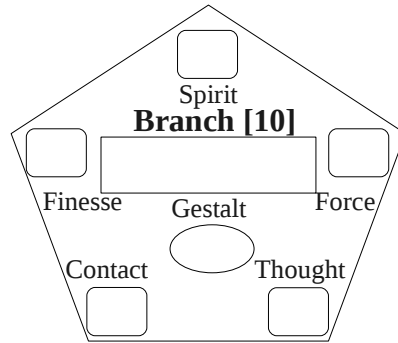
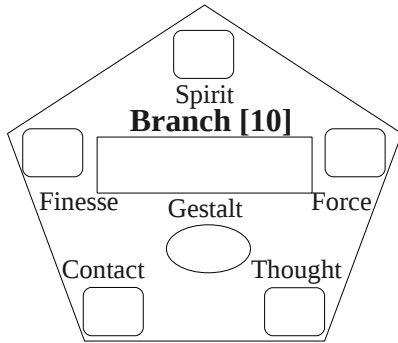
# Trouble Sheet



Cut out and tape to Identities,  
Endeavors, & Trouble



## Basic Branch





Cut out and tape to Identities.

## Reserve Branch

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Spirit

**Branch(Reserve) [20]**

Finesse  Gestalt  Force

/

Spend to:

Contact • Focus Thought

• Resist

• Push

Cut out and tape to Identities.

# Bag of Tricks Branch

Spirit

**Branch(Tricks) [20]**

Gestalt

/

Spend to:

Finesse Cost Effect Force

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Allocate cost of all Thought  
up to Gestalt value, Cost = req. impact

Spirit

**Branch(Tricks) [20]**

Gestalt

/

Spend to:

Finesse Cost Effect Force

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Allocate cost of all Thought  
up to Gestalt value, Cost = req. impact

Spirit

**Branch(Tricks) [20]**

Gestalt

/

Spend to:

Finesse Cost Effect Force

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Allocate cost of all Thought  
up to Gestalt value, Cost = req. impact

Spirit

**Branch(Tricks) [20]**

Gestalt

/

Spend to:

Finesse Cost Effect Force

— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

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Contact Allocate cost of all Thought  
up to Gestalt value, Cost = req. impact

Spirit

**Branch(Tricks) [20]**

Gestalt

/

Spend to:

Finesse Cost Effect Force

— \_\_\_\_\_

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Contact Allocate cost of all Thought  
up to Gestalt value, Cost = req. impact

Spirit

**Branch(Tricks) [20]**

Gestalt

/

Spend to:

Finesse Cost Effect Force

— \_\_\_\_\_

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— \_\_\_\_\_

— \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Allocate cost of all Thought  
up to Gestalt value, Cost = req. impact

# Exceptions and Limits

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

**Exception [+10]**

Source

Limit

Cut out and tape to Identities.

**Limit**

Scale

Immediate

Local

Persistent

Permanent

**Impact**

**Limit**

Scale

Immediate

Local

Persistent

Permanent

**Impact**

**Limit**

Scale

Immediate

Local

Persistent

Permanent

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Persistent

Permanent

**Impact**

# Example Identity: Orishan – Shadow Wizard

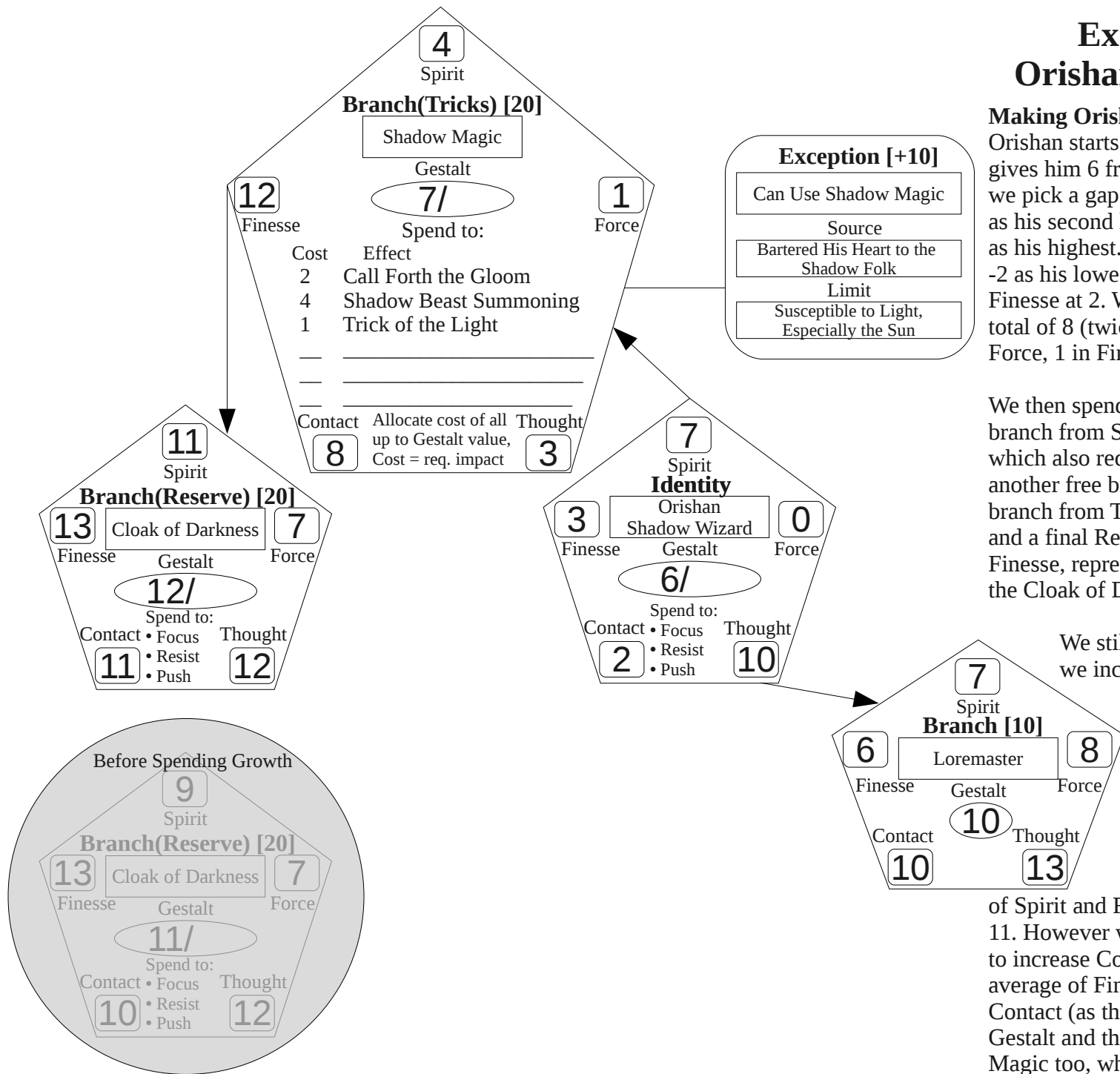
## Making Orishan:

Orishan starts with an Identity of 6, which gives him 6 free branches. For his Identity we pick a gap of 4, setting his Contact to 2 as his second lowest and his Thought to 10 as his highest. At first this leaves his Force at -2 as his lowest, and both his Spirit and his Finesse at 2. We then increase them by a total of 8 (twice the gap). We put 2 points in Force, 1 in Finesse, and 5 in Spirit.

We then spend 2 free branches on a Trick branch from Spirit, representing his magic, which also requires an Exception, costing another free branch. We then buy a basic branch from Thought representing his lore, and a final Reserve branch from his magic's Finesse, representing a supernatural ability, the Cloak of Darkness.

We still have 6 Growth to spend, so we increase the Spirit of the Cloak of darkness to 11, each step costing 2 Growth because this branch is two steps from the Identity. At first glance this might appear to change the Gestalt value, but the second lowest is now Contact instead of Spirit, and so the average of Spirit and Finesse rounded down is still 11.

However we can spend our last 2 Growth to increase Contact, which makes the average of Finesse and either Spirit or Contact (as they are tied) into 12, raising the Gestalt and the Finesse value of Shadow Magic too, which is the only way we can increase the Shadow Magic Finesse.



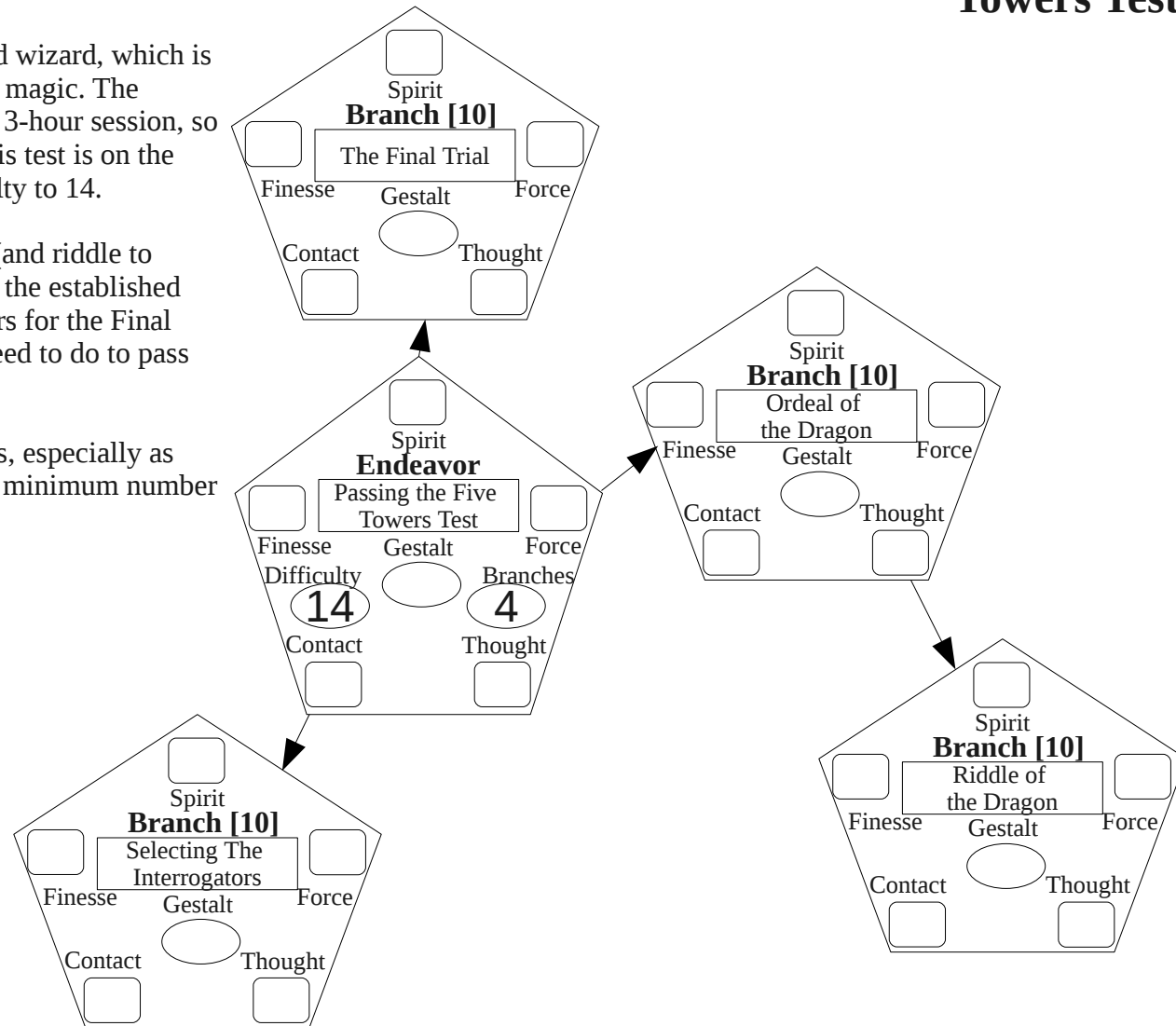
## Example Endeavor: Passing the Five Towers Test

### Making the Five Towers Test:

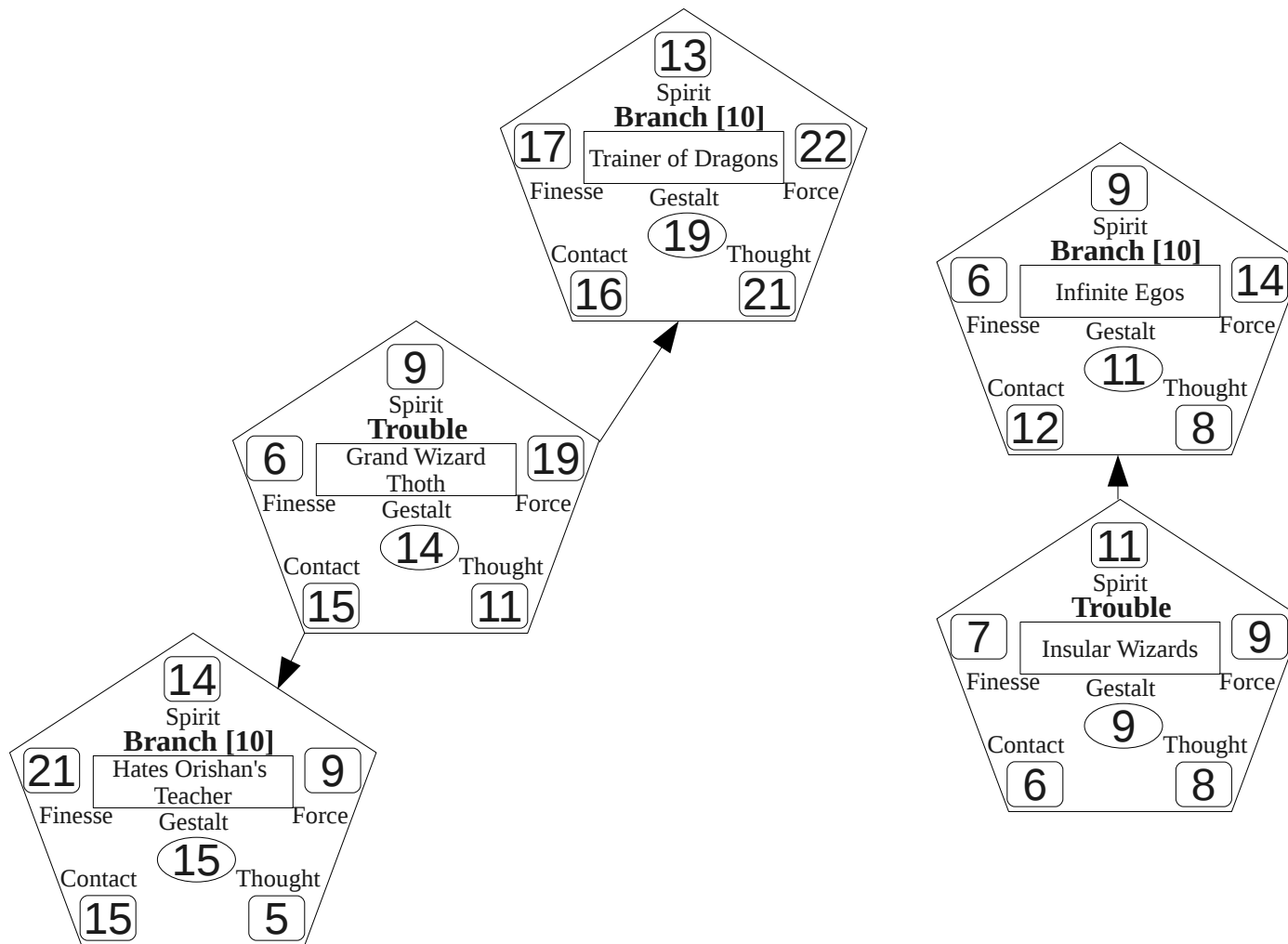
Orishan wants to become an accredited wizard, which is at the whim of the five great towers of magic. The Moderator expects this to take about a 3-hour session, so picks 4 minimum branches and that this test is on the high end of Novice, setting the difficulty to 14.

We then add an Ordeal with a dragon (and riddle to solve during that ordeal) and selecting the established wizards who will form the Interrogators for the Final Trial, to flesh out what Orishan will need to do to pass this test.

It is still possible to add more branches, especially as interesting situations come up, but the minimum number of branches has now been met.



## Example Troubles: Cascade of Five Towers Troubles



### Making the Five Towers Troubles:

The moderators job is to take the difficulty of the Endeavor and transform it into a cascade of Troubles, which will provide most of the difficulties for specific attempts on the Endeavor. The first trouble starts at the difficulty for the Endeavor, and any subsequent troubles are at least 5 less difficulty (to a minimum of 5).

This lends two Troubles, first a master wizard who has a grudge against Orishan's teacher. And second, the insular egotistical wizards of the Five Towers as a group.

Whenever neither of these troubles apply we will use the default difficulty for the Endeavor.