CATALYST

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SYSTEM REFERENCE DOCUMENT | 0.6.13

A playable guide to the rules of the Eschaton

Catalyst System Reference Document

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About this document

This reference explains how to play Catalyst, make a character, resolve situations, and run the game's major procedures. Where the available rules leave a choice open, this book identifies the limit and gives the table a procedure for making that choice before a roll.

Rules state what a character can attempt, what it costs, and how the situation changes. Fiction establishes what is possible. When a rule leaves a choice to the Narrator, make that choice visible before the player commits a resource or rolls. Worked examples in this document illustrate procedures; their scenes add no mechanics.

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How to use this document

This document is organized in five parts. Players need Parts I and II, and should know the conflict rules in Part III. Narrators should read everything.

Part I: How to Play introduces the game. Chapter 1 explains what Catalyst is and how the core loop of conversation works. Chapter 2 sets out the pillars of the game, and Chapter 3 introduces the world. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the roles of the Narrator and the players. Chapter 6 summarizes how actions are resolved, and Chapter 7 covers the three Paths.

Part II: Characters covers who your character is and what they carry. Chapter 8 walks through character creation step by step. Chapters 9 through 12 explain Marks, Scars, and Trades, and how they shape an action. Chapters 13 through 16 cover weapons, Defenses, magic, and inventory. Chapter 17 covers advancement.

Part III: Running the Game covers play in motion. Chapter 18 explains scenes, Focus, Moments, and the Spiral. Chapters 19 through 21 cover Objectives, Threats, and hazards. Chapters 22 through 24 cover combat, injury and recovery, and incapacitation and death. Chapter 25 covers social conflict, and Chapter 26 covers overland travel.

Part IV: Narrator Tools gives advice for running the game well: establishing plots, directing scenes, describing Moments, responding to action, building encounters, running social scenes, choosing costs, and narrating magic. It ends with the tone and texture of the setting in Chapters 35 and 36.

Part V: Reference holds the supporting material. Appendix A contains worked examples of play. Appendices B through H hold sample Scars, inventory items, artifacts, relics, environments, Threats, and hazards. Appendix I contains the glossary and quick reference. Appendix G is still in progress.

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Part I: How to Play

1. Welcome to Catalyst

Catalyst is a mythic punk tabletop roleplaying game where you play living legends capable of reshaping a broken world.

The game is built around collaborative storytelling. One player is the Narrator; the others portray characters. The Narrator presents situations, portrays people and opposition, and applies the rules. Players decide what their characters think, feel, and do in the world. Everyone helps keep the fiction clear and consequential.

The core rules are simple: everything you do is shaped by your intent and approach, and every result moves the story forward, one way or another.

Characters have no classes or levels. Their Path Dice describe approaches rather than fixed lists of attributes and skills; Origins, Traits, Marks, Trades, Scars, and Equipment grant the narrative permission needed to attempt actions.

Mythic Punk Fantasy

Mythic punk is a fantasy genre combining sword and sorcery, living mythology, and an anti-authoritarian outlook. It places abundant magic alongside precarious lives in culturally diverse worlds where belief, identity, and inherited meaning can shape reality. Its stories explore how people challenge, repurpose, and transform the powers that govern them, including gods, traditions, and prescribed destinies. Magic is responsive to meaning, cultures continually reshape one another, and the boundaries between human, monstrous, and divine remain unsettled. Its central concern is the struggle to determine what the world, and the people within it, can become.

The Core Loop

Catalyst is a narrative-focused game that values collaboration over rules. The mechanics create a dialog between players and Narrators, where possibility, risk, and consequence are all discussed openly. The story then unfolds through the choices you make and the risks you accept rather than ability lists, tables and rules wording.

The core gameplay is essentially conversation that moves in a loop:

1. **The Narrator describes the situation:** what the characters see, hear, and can reasonably know. No one rolls for what their character would already notice.
2. **The players ask questions and make choices.** They declare their intention, the thing they want to accomplish. Then they narrate their approach, detailing how they want to do it:

   “I want to cross the courtyard unseen, so I wait for the bells and move under their noise.”
   “I want to hold the door while the others escape, so I brace my shoulder against it and jam my spear under the frame.”

   “I want to read the idol before it finishes waking, so I trace its carvings for the name of whoever made it.”
3. **The Narrator then decides the procedure.** Most play needs no roll. If an action is simple, safe, obvious, or already settled by the fiction, the Narrator says what happens and the conversation continues. Rules enter when the conversation has real stakes: danger, resistance, uncertainty, cost, urgency, or a choice that could meaningfully change the scene. When they do targets and potential stakes are openly declared by the narrator, so players can make informed choices.
4. **The result changes the fiction**. Success and failure aren’t binary or static states. The rolls are driven through an outcome ladder where each result generates a consequence that drives the scene forward.
5. **The Narrator describes what happens next.** Focus moves to the next character, danger, or consequence that updates the situation.

2. Pillars of the Game

Character Motivated Action

Roleplaying is not done between the mechanics. It is the mechanic. Paths define how you move through the world. Marks elevate what you can do. Even your scars shape the outcomes of your choices. Every action ends up being reflection of who the character is.

Resolution with Momentum

The dice serve the story by moving the action forward. To roll you need to declare your intention and narrate your approach. Victory carries you ahead, Compromises make you leave something behind, and Loss leads you down a harder road. Every outcome does something.

Discussion as a System

The rules of Catalyst are meant to be a conversation between players and narrators. Actions aren't listed and traits don't have concrete rules. This gives players the freedom to try almost anything. This freedom is given guardrails by the narrator who sets the targets, difficulty and outcomes. Framing, action, outcome, and consequence all end up being negotiated at the table, so the fiction and mechanics play off each other, rather than being set in opposition.

Shared Canvas, Sharp Lines

The Narrator is not a storyteller and the players are not an audience. You are all etching the story together. The Narrator draws the line between what is possible and what the world refuses. Everyone else works inside it.

Simple Rules with Tactical Depth

There are no powers to look up, no tables to cross-reference. You spend resolve, roll the Path, and read the outcome. The tension lives in how you decide to act: when to commit, when to hold back, when to sacrifice.

Living Magic

Magic is not contained by a spell list. Arcane power emerges from shifting paradigms meaning, belief and power that can alter reality and what is possible. It is woven into shape through tradition, ritual and trauma, and collects a heavy toll for transgressions.

The World Pushes Back

The world has memory, momentum, and its own agenda. Every time a moment or scene ends, something changes. Enemies adapt. Consequences travel. Plots move forward. The cost of inaction is escalation.

3. The World of Catalyst

The Eschaton is a world without gods where myth and superstition run through everything. Ruins wake with the ghosts of the past, market alleys trade secrets in languages that never quite died, and dreams bleed into the day. It is beautiful in its decay and alive in its contradictions. It is not a world waiting to be saved, nor is it begging for new pantheons.

Although the world can be cruel, it is not hopeless; only disordered. Awe sits beside disgust and wonder beside fear. The world should test, wound, and even break characters, but always in ways that feel wondrous and worth it.

The Godfall

The gods once governed the rhythms of the world, sanctioned rulers, answered prayers, and maintained the systems through which magic worked. Then, without omen or war, they died.

No one knows how or why. There were no plagues of fire, nor trumpets from the sky. Only a sudden, universal spiritual silence. Every creature in the world felt it. The divine pressure had vanished, and the world shuddered.

Temples fell silent and miracles failed. The collapse took centuries: empires fractured, faiths splintered, magical orders lost control, wars followed wars, and communities rebuilt from what survived.

The Eschaton

The Eschaton is the age after the Godfall. An age of sorcerer monarchs and heretic cults, traders of memories and thieves of miracles. Cities glitter like jewels between deserts, jungles, and seas that bellow with old storms. Magic burns bright and strange, belonging to those daring (or foolish) enough to wield it.

The world did not end with the gods. It changed. Kingdoms still rise, but their grip is brief. Cities, roads, institutions, and trade persist alongside ruins and local dangers. The setting is ancient, but not a museum. People repair, repurpose, argue over, and live in the remains of earlier worlds. There is no single culture or map that defines the age.

The Sister Woes

Creation, Order, and Destruction are the forces of the celestial triad spinning the weave of reality. Not quite gods, but something older, primordial. While the divine pantheons ruled, they remained in check. Since the Godfall, each of the sister came unbound; their worst manifestations are called The Three Woes.

Creation attempts to fill the world Blooms, living manifestations of dreams and nightmares. The frenzy of Order frenzy as the **Shimmer**, radiating fields of arcane disorder that warp what is possible. Meanwhile, the endless sorrow of Destruction has unraveled the Great Veil between life and death in **Fades**.

Magic and Significance

Magic is no longer safely bound by divine order or reliable spell forms. It gathers around significance: meaningful objects, people, memories, and events. Mortals work it through Traditions, practices carried through culture, lineage, ordeal, and revelation. Magic changes the world and may change the person who uses it. The Narrator should connect a working's permission, method, scale, and cost to the tradition and situation that make it possible.

The Mortal Clay

The gods made mortals as tools that could think, live and worship under their eyes. When the gods died, the tools kept building themselves and the world has been reforging ever since.

Humanity is the shared name of all sentient beings of the mortal clay, defined by their capacity to change rather than the shape they have taken. The people of the Eschaton have crossed borders, survived violence and magic, migrated, chosen, and changed across centuries. "Human" describes people made from the same mortal clay, regardless of bloodline, feature, or form. Familiar names such as elf, orc, dwarf, goblin, and giant remain as local descriptions, histories, insults, caste names, or family stories, not fixed species.

The dead also remain part of the world. Some hunger for recognition more than flesh. A restless dead person may be a threat, but may also embody an unfinished story or a question the living have avoided.

The Denizens of the Eschaton

The Eschaton is teeming with life adapting to ever shifting circumstances. A marriage of intelligent design and evolution. Beasts mutate, myths reincarnate, and ruins grow teeth.

Everything that lives in the Eschaton is a side effect. Every horror and miracle reflects something that once mattered: an emotion, a vow, a last thought. The monstrous and the strange remind mortals that their action leave a lasting impact.

Below are the broad kinds of living and unliving things you'll encounter in play and the building blocks of a bestiary:

- **Beasts** are animals that have crossed a line, shaped by magic, survival, or fate. A boar the size of a wagon, armored in briar. A bird that repeats dying words. Beasts are symbolic markers of a region's health or corruption.
- **Monsters** are intentions with bodies. They might have started human, animal, or something weirder, but now they embody a purpose so strong it warped their shape. A guardian who became a wall of living stone. A hermit whose hunger learned to hunt. Every monster has a reason to exist. Discovering that reason should matter more than defeating it.
- **The Undead** of the Eschaton are not just reanimated corpses. They are unfinished stories. Some linger as shades, some in flesh, some bound to relics or soil. They hunger for blood, life, energy, yes. But most of all they crave resolution.
- **Spirits and elementals** are fragments of the old divine order that have learned to survive alone. They are neither gods nor demons, but rather nature given agency. A flame that believes it's holy. A tide that refuses to retreat. They act like people with one obsession: to defend their corner of reality at all costs.
- **The Faer Folk** are creatures of dreaming rather than clay, the fae, muses, whisperers, hags and tricksters, are the stories of the world walking without authors. They speak in riddles not because they wish to confuse, but because they are riddles. Fae don't want gold or power. They want meaning. Their motives are emotional, symbolic, and rarely linear.
- **Constructs**, machines still run from the ages before collapse: animated armor, thinking idols, engines that farm storms. Some were built by mortals. Others by gods whose blueprints still hum in the earth. A few learned to repair themselves. Those that did, developed their own languages, rituals and cultures to answer the same burning question: are they alive?
- **Daemons** are emotions that learned to have faces. Wrath, desire, devotion, and pride stripped of context, but still ravenous for satisfaction. They bargain because they must attach to something or fade. They attach themselves to mortals like magnets to iron. Some promise miracles. Some only offer understanding. Their gifts are always honest; the problem is how much truth a mortal can survive. A person who bargains for courage becomes unstoppable until he dies of thirst. One who asks for beauty slowly turns to glass.
- **Flora** does not always remain still and rooted. The plants hunt, migrate, and remember. To those who protect and respect them, they are providers and sanctuaries. To those that would exploit them, plants become the quiet horrors of the wilds. Vines strangle travelers for water. Blossoms lure prey with scent and song.
- **Colossi** are the architects of a forgotten age who thought they could reach heaven, buried by their own hubris. What remains are vast, hollow nomads who see smaller beings as fleeting reflections of their own past failures.
- **Dragons** are the idea of authority that learned to devour. They are hoarders of meaning, power and treasure. However, within them burn the fires of creation, and it is said that killing one erases an idea from the world.
- **Watchers** are the former intermediaries of divine will and judgment. After the godfall, those servants fell with them, shorn of purpose but still burning faintly with what remained. Their descendants are the Outsiders, marked by ember eyes, and horns.
- **Aberrations** are things simply should not be. They are not cursed, divine, or alive in any way we understand. They can't be reasoned with because they don't share cause and effect. They aren't evil. They're incompatible. Aberrations remind us that this world is older and stranger than we are prepared for.

4. The Narrator

The Narrator is the player responsible for presenting the world, portraying its inhabitants, and running opposition. They describe what the characters perceive, establish challenges, adjudicate the rules, and resolve the consequences of play. The other players decide what their characters think, feel, and do.

Frame a playable situation

Say where the characters are, who or what is present, what is already happening, what stands in the way, and what changes if they do nothing. Use a question that allows more than one approach. Let the players know what their characters could reasonably perceive before asking them to risk a roll.

Set stakes before resources

State Difficulty before Resolve is spent. Describe what a Victory changes and give a concrete sense of what a Compromise or Loss could cost. The exact complication may depend on the roll, but the kind of risk should be visible.

Run opposition

Give the people and groups the characters encounter clear motives. Decide what they want, what they can offer, what they fear, and what might change their minds. Run Threats according to their agendas, abilities, and circumstances. Threats do not take turns or roll dice. They respond through Advances, Exchanges, and Fallout. Signal danger so players have an opportunity to recognize and address it.

Share Focus and Maintain Pressure

Move attention between characters so everyone has opportunities to act. Ask players what they do, especially when their characters have not contributed recently.

Choose the right structure

Use a single Check, Test, or Save when one roll can settle the uncertainty. Use an Objective when the characters need several meaningful advances. Use a Threat when active opposition can pressure or change the scene. Use both if a goal and an opposing force are present.

Make consequences alter play

A cost should change position, time, resources, relationships, safety, or available choices. If a Threat is ignored, show what it does. When a Moment turns, make the world press back. When a Threat breaks, decide what its defeat means and whether Fallout creates a lasting change.

Prepare plots, not fixed stories

Adventures in Catalyst begin with a plot, a problem already in motion. A useful plot has:

- **Instability:** something cannot continue as it is.
- **Pressure:** something happens if the characters wait or walk away.
- **People with stakes:** at least two people or groups care about the outcome.

Narrators establish what is already happening so that the characters interrupt, redirect, exploit, or resolve it.

Let Players Change Things

Do not restore the world to its starting state when a plot ends. Let victories change the status quo. Let Losses close some paths and open others. Let compromises remain compromises. Let people adapt to what the characters have done. Consequences do not need to become new plots. Most simply become part of the story.

5. The Players

As a player portray a player character (PC) whose choices help determine what happens. Decide what they want, ask questions about the situation, and describe what they do.

How to Play

The Narrator describes the situation. Ask what your character can perceive, then explain **what you want to achieve and how you attempt it**. You do not need to name a mechanic.

If the action needs a roll, Name the Path that fits. Bring relevant Marks, Trades, equipment, or circumstances into the discussion. The Narrator establishes the Difficulty and Targets, clarifying the Path only when needed. If more than one Path fits, choose between them. Decide how much Resolve to commit, roll that many dice, add them together, and compare the total with the Difficulty.

Be intentional. Respond to what changes. Help other characters, build on their actions, and make room for everyone to contribute.

Characters in Catalyst

A player character is someone whose life has been changed by a **Catalyst**: an event that made returning to their former life impossible. You decide what they pursue now.

Characters have no classes or levels. Their capabilities emerge from several connected choices:

- **Homeland and Legacy:** Where you come from and the details you can contribute about it.
- **Trade:** Work you know and practical experience you can apply.
- **Catalyst and Stigma:** What changed your life and the burden it left.
- **Marks:** Capabilities that distinguish you and expand what you can attempt.
- **Paths and values:** How you approach challenges and what drives those approaches.
- **Gear:** What you have ready to put your intentions into practice.

Your character continues to change through play. Decisions earn Milestones, consequences may leave Scars, and advancement reflects what they have experienced. Follow **Appendix A** to create your character.

Shared Authorship

You help establish the world through your character's history, knowledge, relationships, and choices. Offer details that give the group something to act on: a former employer, a local custom, a familiar route, or someone who needs your help.

Milestones and advancement

Your track holds seven Milestones, each a turn of story: the Crisis, the Wound, the Monster, the Quest, the Revelation, the Heavy Price, and the Dark Night. Mark each once. When all seven are marked, choose one Advancement:

- Advance a Trade (Trade ranks run from 1 to 3)
- Learn a new Trade.
- Raise a Path by one die step (A Path cannot rise above d12).
- Add an earned Mark
- Transform a Scar into a Mark.
- Advance a Weapon or Defense.
- Bear a Tradition (you are limited to one).
- Craft a Charm or evolve a Charm into a Relic.

Reset the track after taking an Advancement. Describe how the chosen development follows from play. Do not repeat the same individual Advancement on consecutive selections.

6. Core Rules Summary

Catalyst is a game that values narrative intention over stats. The rules create a dialogue between players and Narrators, where possibility, risk, and consequence are all discussed openly. So, the story unfolds through the choices you make and the risks you accept rather than lists of tables and rules text.

Intentional Action

Every turn starts with two things: intention and approach. Players declare their intention, the thing they want to accomplish. Then they narrate their approach, detailing how they want to do it.

Example: "I want to escape the top of the burning tower (Intention), by sticking my daggers into the banner and ripping my way down the tapestry (Approach)."

Action Resolution

For a Test, spend 1 Resolve for each die rolled from the assigned Path (See Shaping Actions). Spending 1 rolls one die; spending 2 rolls two; spending 3 rolls three. Add any dice granted by Aid, a Group Action, Advantage, Disadvantage, or an explicit rule. Roll the dice and add them all together, including explosions. Compare the total to Difficulty.

Procedure	Use it when...	Resolve cost
Free action	The action is safe, obvious, or already settled by the fiction.	No roll or Resolve cost.
Check	Uncertain action without immediate pressure. Loss can still have consequences.	Roll two Path dice. No Resolve cost.
Test	An action under pressure from time, opposition, or competing demands.	1 Resolve per Path die rolled. Pool refreshes at the start of a Moment.
Save	Danger arrives before the character can take a deliberate action.	One free Path die; Resolve may add dice.
Reaction	The fiction offers a brief chance to answer what just happened.	Usually spends Resolve.

Character Paths

Paths are character attributes that shape your approach and determine which dice you roll when taking an action. They range from d4 to d12.

- **Heart is the direct solution.** A Path driven by power and will. It can be used to exemplify raw strength, a commanding presence, or primal magic.
- **Shadow is the way around the problem.** A shadowy dance of grace and guile. It flows from the hidden dagger, the sharp tongue, or the wisps of illusion.
- **Crown is the thoughtful answer**. A way illuminated by insight and intuition. It shines in strategic strikes, meticulous attention to detail, and complex rituals.

Setting the Stakes

Narrator declares a Difficulty (Diff) based on the ambition of the action, the tension of the moment, and circumstances surrounding it. Difficulty gives Narrators control over tone, consequence, and plausibility to balance the freedom players have. The more implausible your action, the higher the Difficulty.

Diff	Band	Typical challenge	Usually Takes
3	Trivial	Simple, but some risk remains.	Often no roll
5	Routine	A capable person should manage it.	About one die
8	Risky	Loss is a real possibility.	About two dice
13	Hard	Calls for skill, leverage, or strong setup.	About three dice
21	Dire	Extreme, heroic, or close to impossible.	Three dice, plus aid, edge or advantage
34+	Mythic	Strains what the world should allow.	Exceptional means

Announce the Difficulty with the number that scrapes by: "*Difficulty 8. A 5 gets it done at a cost.*" A Compromise starts 3 below Difficulty, so players know what partial success takes before they commit Resolve.

Choose from the bands, then adjust for position and circumstance: Flanked adds 2, Surrounded adds 2, and a strong setup or a clear vulnerability can take 2 away. Numbers between the bands should come from a modifier, not a guess.

Resolve and Dice Pools

Resolve is a character's capacity to act while in a dramatic scene or under pressure. A character normally has 3 Resolve at the start of a Moment. **Spend** 1 to roll a single Path die against the Difficulty. **Stack** multiple points to push through harder odds, adding a die per point spent. **Hold** some back to defend, react, or act when the world moves against you.

At **0 Resolve**, a character cannot spend more Resolve until the next **refresh** when a new moment begins. Free actions, Checks, and unbolstered Saves do not cost Resolve, so remain available when their conditions are met.

Explosions

When a die shows its maximum face, roll that die again and add the new result to that die. Continue exploding each new maximum. After rolling and resolving explosions, apply Edge if a rule grants it.

All ones

If every die you keep on a roll shows a 1, the outcome is a Loss, regardless of Difficulty or bonuses. Apply Edge and drop dice for Advantage or Disadvantage first. A exploded dice do not count. A Broken Path's flat 1 is not a rolled die.

Edge

Edge lets the player reroll one die and replace that die's full result, including its explosion chain. The replacement die may explode. Edge does not stack.

Applying Advantage/Disadvantage

Cancel sources of Advantage and Disadvantage one-for-one before rolling. If Advantage remains, roll one additional die and drop the lowest full result. If Disadvantage remains, roll one additional die and drop the highest. Multiple remaining sources of the same kind do not add further dice. Die results include explosions; apply Edge before dropping a die.

Aid and Group Actions

When characters work toward the same thing, ask whether they are doing the same action or different actions. If it's the same action, they Aid. If it's different actions toward the same goal, each one Helps.

To Aid, describe a meaningful contribution, spend 1 Resolve, and add one relevant Path die to the acting character's roll before it is made. Any number of characters may Aid the same roll, but each contributes no more than one die.

An Aided roll earns what a single roll earns. A Victory still deals 1 BP or earns 1 Step, however many characters added dice. Everyone who Aided shares the outcome: a Compromise's cost applies to each of them, and a Loss brings its Harm or Exchange to each of them, as the situation dictates.

If you're doing something different toward the same goal, you aren't Aiding. Take your own action and roll for it. On an Objective, your result earns its own Steps, and its costs are yours alone.

Outcome bands

Success and failure aren't binary or static states. The results of your rolls, good or bad, ripple outward and drive change.

Each game subsystem gives more specific outcomes. Use those when they define what a Breakthrough, Victory, Compromise, or Loss does. Ruin is not a normal margin result.

Outcome	Total	General result
Breakthrough	Diff + 5 or more	Achieve the intent and gain an additional benefit.
Victory	Diff through Diff + 4	Achieve the intent.
Compromise	Diff – 1 through Diff – 3	Advance or succeed at a cost, complication, delay, or exposure.
Loss	Diff – 4 or less	Do not achieve the intent; the situation worsens or pressure increases.

Ruin

A Scar, specific rule, or established danger may put Ruin at stake. Ruin is a worst-case consequence. Before rolling, agree what makes the risk exceptional. On a Loss, the Narrator and player shape a severe consequence that follows from the action and changes what comes next. Its form need not be fixed in advance.

Extended Actions

Some goals are not actions, but struggles. Escaping a collapsing district. Turning a crowd to your cause. Hunting something that does not want to be found. These unfold across the scene. Each roll shifts your position, bringing you closer or dragging you further from what you want. Your objective.

7. Path Dice

Paths the primary attributes of Catalyst used to represent approaches to problems rather than skills or abilities. Paths determine which dice you can use in each situation, from d4 to d12, when performing an action.

The same intent can use different Paths. The described approach determines the Path.

The Three Paths

The Three Paths represent the instincts, personality and motivations behind each of your actions.

Heart

Heart is the engine of direct action. Heart doesn't negotiate. It conquers, suffers, or endures…sometimes all at once. It is the Path of brawlers, revolutionaries, and stubborn survivors.

In play:

- **Breaking** down doors, shatter bonds, topple barriers.
- **Pushing** through obstacles, carry burdens, throw yourself into danger.
- **Commanding** a room with presence, lead with shouts or rally with passion.
- **Enduring** wounds, pain, or overwhelming force without yielding.

When you choose Heart, you break, push, seize, or endure. Your will is a weapon.

Shadow

Shadow is the Path of subversion. Shadow is not about skillful precision, but about flair, cunning, and the refusal to play fair. It finds the gap, the loophole, the secret way through. It is the Path of tricksters, thieves, and those who bend rules rather than break.

In play:

- **Cheat** at cards, never letting your hand be seen.
- **Lie** with a smile, selling a story nobody wanted to buy.
- **Slip** past a locked door, unseen or unbothered.
- **Stab** from the shadows, striking before your enemy can react.

When you choose Shadow, every gesture, word, or blade finds the smallest weakness.

Crown

Crown is the insightful path. Crown represents vision, clarity, and strategy. A light that reveals the hidden mechanism, the flaw in the wall, the pattern in chaos. It is the hunter's breath, the scholar's gaze, the quiet calculation before the leap. It is the precision of well-timed strike.

In play:

- **Study** a puzzle or enemy, then act at the perfect moment.
- **Observe** tells, study patterns, track subtle changes.
- **Plan** elaborate traps, predict moves, outwait danger.
- **Strike** with surgical precision or anticipate an opponent's move.

When you act with Crown, you bring intuition and mastery to bear, executing with meticulous care.

Path Values

Each Path has its own motivation: Heart is driven by what you cherish, Shadow thrives on temptation, and the Crown rules your convictions. This makes it so that even split second choices are implicitly shaped by your identity, lending depth and significance to every success or disaster. Player decisions become acts of storytelling that add richness to every scene.

Values add no dice. When acting on a value costs your character something real, the Narrator may award a Milestone right then.

Part II: Characters

8. Creating a Character

Follow these steps in order and record each choice on your character sheet. Choose the options that fit your character, or roll where a numbered table is provided. The tables contain existing character options; you may propose alternatives to the Narrator.

Step 1. Choose a Homeland

Choose the Homeland that shaped your character. Record its name and Legacy, then name a settlement, community, or region within it. Describe its people, customs, culture, or trade, and at least one person your character knows there.

d12	Homeland	Description	Legacy	You can introduce to the narrative...
1	The Barrens	Amidst salt, ash, or the frozen mire, you learned to endure with shrewdness.	Rugged Survivor	Lost caches, hidden shelter, raider warnings, improvised tools, survival tricks.
2	The Brines	Salt spray, storms, and hungry tides raised you harder than any parent.	Heart of the Gale	Violent weather, shipwrecks, pirate customs, smuggler routes, horrors in the depths.
3	The Orders	You grew where silence is holy, and every word is weighed like a blade.	Dogmatic	Guarded rites, history, coded doctrine, formal procedure, forbidden scrolls, authority.
4	The Wilds	Among roots and spores, you learned to listen when the forest stirs.	Breath of the Wild	Animal tracks, forest spirits, living paths, useful plants, sacred groves, old pacts.
5	The Fronts	War banners were your weather, and the sky was always black with smoke.	Drill Instructed	Signals, battlefield procedure, morale, salvage, command structures, the cost of hesitation.
6	The Heartlands	Harvests, hearths, and stubborn kin carved patience into your bones.	Hearthwise	Farms, kinship, food, festivals, local grudges, tax collectors, raids, leaving home.
7	The High Courts	In halls of power, you learned smiles can cut sharper than steel.	Court Intrigue	Rank, etiquette, private war, favors, rumor, privilege, the rooms where power changes hands.
8	The Remnants	Raised among the ruins of the ancient where darkness remembers what people forgot.	Ruin Runner	Ruin maps, structural habits, relics repurposed by necessity, salvage, hidden paths.
9	The Fades	You grew up where the dead don't stay buried and every door is barred by dusk.	Veilborn	Restless spirits, shades of past trauma, and places where the veil is weakest.
10	The Road	The horizon was your only home, and every stranger a teacher or a threat.	Free Spirit	Caravans, outlaw camps, roadside shrines, wandering performers, travelers, distant news.
11	The Sprawls	Crowds and smog taught you to read danger in a glance and vanish when needed.	Hustler	Fixers, bribes, escape routes, gang turf, crooked clerks, black markets, false doors.
12	The Hidden Reaches	Places hidden from the world, preserving secrets the world isn't ready for.	Keeper of Secrets	Ancient symbols, omens, living maps, guarded teachings, concealed routes, hidden truths.

Legacies

Legacies are the unique advantages afforded by your environment, that you can introduce into the story and game.

When it fits the moment, describe a useful piece of home: lore, a custom, a tool, a contact, a warning, a small preparation, or a strange practice. The Narrator may accept it outright, ask for a Path Test, or add a cost if the detail is rare, dangerous, or too convenient.

Step 2. Choose Two Origin Marks

Choose two Marks from the Ancestral, Physical, Mental, or Social tables. They may come from the same category or different categories. These capabilities were part of your life before your Catalyst. Record each permission and describe how it appears in your character.

For each Mark, ask: What does this capability look like when you use it? Who else has it, or what makes yours unusual? Use the category prompts below when you want help finding an answer.

Ancestral Marks

Ancestral Marks express extraordinary features of your body or inherited nature. They might belong to a family, a people, or a lineage whose origins nobody remembers. Choose the capabilities that matter to your character; the catalogue does not prescribe a complete ancestry.

Describe the feature that makes the permission possible. A climbing adaptation might be hooked fingers, gripping pads, or something stranger. Its appearance helps the table understand how you interact with your surroundings.

- Who shares this feature, and what do they call themselves?
- What custom, craft, or place has developed around living with it?

Mark	Permission
Aquatic	Gills, fins, or webbing let you breathe and move freely underwater.
Colossine	Tower over others, bringing a giant's stature and reach to bear.
Earth-Felt	Feel movement and buried structures through the soles of your feet or a resting palm.
Feral	Keen eyes, twitching ears, and a searching nose grant the acuity and sensory range of an animal.
Berserk	Swelling muscle, racing pulse, and physical transformation turn rage into strength, speed, and endurance.
Glider	Spread wings, membranes, or feathered limbs to glide through the air and guide your descent.
Granite Skin	Scales, chitin, bark, or living stone armor your body against physical punishment.
Leaper	Coiled, powerful legs that can launch you across great distances and carry you safely through the landing.
Many-Limbed	Use additional functional limbs to climb, carry, brace, and manipulate
Long-Lived	Centuries of life grant firsthand knowledge of forgotten practices, peoples, and places transformed by time.
Primal	Fight with tooth, claw, horn, tentacle, or other weapons grown from your own flesh.
Small	Move through tight spaces, crowds, and around larger enemies as if the world were built for your size.
Shapeshifter	Reshape flesh, bone, and features into other forms of roughly the same size.
Venomous	Deliver venom by bite, spit, spore, or skin that incapacitates or drives off most threats.
Wall Crawling	Adhere to walls, ceilings, and sheer faces as if they were open ground.

Physical Marks

Physical Marks let the body perform extraordinary feats of strength, movement, endurance, precision, or presence. They can arise through discipline, unusual physiology, transformation, or causes you cannot explain. Their scope should make otherwise implausible attempts possible.

Describe the feat you attempt and what your body does to accomplish it. Training and appearance can explain the capability without adding further powers or unlisted penalties.

- When did you first do something your body should not have been able to do?
- Who recognizes that capability, and what do they believe it means?

Mark	Permission
Acrobatic	Twist, tumble, and contort with fluid control, carrying momentum through intricate movements.
Beautiful	Your beauty commands attention, invites favor, and unsettles resolve.
Dexterous	Deft fingers and independent hands perform intricate work with astonishing speed and precision.
Fleet-Footed	Your legs carry you at bewildering speed, with turns and stops as sudden as your stride.
Mighty	Lift, throw, grapple, and break with Herculean force.
Poised	Perfect balance and exact footing let you find purchase on the slightest support.
Relentless	Tireless muscle and stubborn constitution sustain you through exertion, deprivation, and exposure.
Unbroken	Your body remains functional through grievous injury, enduring what should incapacitate it.
Unerring	Eye and hand align with uncanny accuracy, finding their mark across distance and motion.
Masterful*	**Choose a weapon archetype**. You can attempt extraordinary feats of precision, timing, and control with it. When an attack using that archetype achieves a Victory or Breakthrough, add 1 BP.

* Weapon mastery may be taken multiple times. Limit one instance per weapon archetype.

Mental Marks

Mental Marks extend perception, memory, reasoning, understanding, or the command of your own mind beyond ordinary limits. They let you work with clues, patterns, knowledge, and connections that others cannot readily grasp.

Explain what you perceive or understand and how you use it. Exceptional thought can make an attempt possible without guaranteeing a correct conclusion. Learning quickly does not itself grant Trade ranks; advance those through the advancement rules.

- How do you experience what others overlook or cannot comprehend?
- Who taught you to make sense of it, or who seeks your understanding?

Mark	Permission
Alert	Prickling skin and restless instinct warn you of danger before it reveals itself.
Beast Whispering	Establish understanding and cooperation with animals across the barriers of species and instinct.
Unforgetting	Revisit any moment you experienced in perfect detail, examining what you overlooked.
Inventive	Devise workable designs for feats that established crafts cannot accomplish.
Calculating	Instantly calculate odds, measures, formulas, or trajectories.
Unshakable	Hold your mind intact against intrusion, compulsion, and forces that would dismantle your sense of self.
Observant	Reconstruct intricate events and hidden connections from the slightest surviving traces.
Polyglot	Unravel unfamiliar languages, scripts, and codes through fragments of their use.
Astute	Absorb unfamiliar knowledge and techniques at a glance, turning observation into practice.
Tactician	Play out shifting conflicts in your mind, anticipating maneuvers, openings, and cascading consequences.

Social Marks

Social Marks grant extraordinary influence, standing, or access through your presence, relationships, resources, or place in society. Their reach may come from a remarkable personal gift or from connections and institutions powerful enough to shape the lives of others.

Name the leverage you bring to the situation. Authority invokes an office, Wellborn a lineage, and Storied Reputation your deeds. Establish who recognizes that standing and how it reaches the scene. Influence creates possibilities; people still have motives and reasons to resist.

- Whose recognition, desire, trust, or fear gives this Mark its reach?
- What person, institution, or story connects that influence to the wider world?

Mark	Permission
Commanding	Invoke recognized office or rank to command service, demand access, and bring institutions to bear.
Empathic	Read another's inner life through the smallest expression, even when they cannot name it themselves.
Fearsome	Turn your presence into a threat, shaking resolve and making defiance feel perilous.
Forked Tongue	Weave convincing falsehoods that withstand scrutiny and make contrary evidence seem suspect.
Evanescent	Let attention slide past you, your presence and participation scarcely registering.
Firebrand	Give a crowd's feelings direction, turning shared unrest into collective action.
Networked	Draw on a far-reaching web of contacts for introductions, intelligence, and favors.
Alluring	Kindle desire through your presence, turning attraction into attention, access, and influence.
Sharp-Tongued	Find the words that puncture pride, dismantle composure, and make standing crumble.
Suave	Make unthinkable proposals seem reasonable, negotiating past entrenched convictions and hostility.
Storied Reputation	Invoke celebrated or notorious deeds to sway expectations before proving yourself anew.
Wealthy	Command substantial resources through fortunes, holdings, and credit that extend well beyond your purse.
Wellborn	Your lineage opens doors across rival courts and hostile borders, carrying privileges older than their rulers.

Step 3. Choose a Trade

Every starting character begins with one Trade A Trade grants narrative competence; if a roll is required and the Trade directly supports it, add its rank to the result.

Rank 1 is **Practiced**: you know ordinary tools, risks, customs, and procedures. Rank 2 is **Proven**: you have practiced under danger or serious consequence, and people in the Trade may trust your judgment. Rank 3 is **Renowned**: your name or method is known and can open doors, draw rivals, or attract requests. New Trades begin at Rank 1.

Choose or roll one Trade at Rank 1. Record its name and rank. You know its ordinary tools, risks, customs, and procedures; when a roll is required and the Trade directly applies, add 1 to the result.

D20	Trade	Description
1	Shepherd	Raise, tame, and handle living things; know herds, mounts, working beasts, breeding, animal moods, predators, and how to calm or turn a changed beast.
2	Warden	Contain danger through patrols, borders, quarantines, warnings, and local threat knowledge.
3	Fixer	Know locks, fences, smuggling, false names, quiet tools, coded signs, bribes, disguises, and exits.
4	Herald	Know who's who and how to reach them; know rank, lineages, heraldry, etiquette, ceremony, favors, safe conduct, and private conflict behind public power.
5	Apothecary	Know medicine, anatomy, disease, toxins, remedies, and dangerous substances.
6	Celebrant	Use rites, chants, symbols, taboos, offerings, processions, and sacred roles.
7	Crafter	Know materials, tools, repairs, construction, mechanisms, and how things fail under strain.
8	Broker	Know contracts, prices, debt, guilds, trade routes, rare goods, relics, and buyers.
9	Troubadour	Carry news, songs, scandals, histories, jokes, and dangerous truths; move crowds through performance.
10	Librarian	Know records, archives, laws, languages, relics, institutional procedure, and sealed knowledge.
11	Wayfinder	Know routes, landmarks, weather, stars, crossings, camps, currents, and how to test a path.
12	Mythographer	Study folklore, omens, visions, recurring symbols, Bloom signs, and stories becoming true.
13	Delver	Know ruins, relics, salvage, old mechanisms, warning marks, structural hazards, and ancient passages.
14	Soldier	Know weapons, tactics, morale, command, camps, battlefields, and the habits of violence.
15	Mourner	Know bodies, ghosts, inheritance, grave law, final wishes, death-debts, and releasing remains.
16	Seeker	Uncover the truth through questions, clues, lies, motives, witnesses, confessions, and the scenes a crime leaves behind.
17	Hunter	Track, trap, and stalk; know game, lairs, monster habits, weak points, field-dressing, and what a Bloom has changed
18	Mariner	Know ships, crews, rigging, knots, tides, harbors, storms at sea, swimming, and the customs of ports
19	Gladiator	Win crowds with violence; know spectacle, patrons, wagers, rivalries, fame, arena customs, and what a body can take.
20	Courier	Carry what must arrive; know running, climbing, rooftops, shortcuts, relays, sealed messages, pursuit, and how to lose a tail.

Step 4. Choose Your Catalyst and Stigma

Choose a Catalyst and describe the event in one sentence. Explain what it changed and why your character cannot return to their former life.

d12	Catalyst	Description
1	Bargain	You traded something precious for power, safety, survival, or love. You are still paying.
2	Betrayal	Someone you trusted broke faith, and you learned how sharp trust can be.
3	Chosen	A power, prophecy, or dying stranger's last breath claimed you. You did not ask for it.
4	Consumed	A Woe touched your life directly: a Bloom, Shimmer, Fade, or similar devastation.
5	Defection	You walked away from an institution, cause, or power that expected loyalty forever.
6	Discovery	You uncovered a truth that reshaped everything. Knowing cannot be undone.
7	Exile	You were cast out. The door closed behind you and will not open again.
8	False Life	Everything you believed about yourself turned out to be wrong: name, origin, purpose.
9	Hubris	You reached for forbidden power, knowledge, or ground. You got it, and the cost followed.
10	Loss	Your world burned and you walked out through the smoke. Nothing that mattered survived.
11	Miracle	You survived something that should have killed you. No one knows why.
12	Transgression	You crossed a moral, sacred, or legal line. You cannot return to who you were.

Choose a Stigma that follows from that event. Record how it affects your character now. It gives the Narrator a specific burden or vulnerability to bring into play.

d12	Stigma	Description
1	Addict	Heavily dependent on a substance to function; abstaining is never pretty.
2	Broken	An old injury, malady, toll, or age catches up with your body when it matters most.
3	Doomed	A terrible fate looms, and you cannot escape it.
4	Delirium	Under pressure, your grip on reality slips; you cannot always tell the table what you truly see.
5	Pariah	Most places, people, and institutions are closed to you.
6	Wanted	Something or someone powerful is chasing you and finds you at the worst times.
7	Bound	A bargain, ritual, debt, or power has a claim on you and calls it in.
8	Harrowed	A ghost or memory follows, interferes, misleads, or draws attention.
9	Vow	A promise constrains you and says no when you need yes.
10	Dark Secret	You did something unspeakable, and someone knows. That knowledge is leverage.
11	Amnesia	You cannot remember your past, history, or things that may haunt you.
12	Tainted	The world senses something wrong in you; animals and children distrust you, and the dead take interest.

Step 5. Choose One Catalyst Mark

Choose one suggested Mark for your Catalyst, or another Mark that fits the event. You may choose from the Origin categories or the additional options below. Record its permission and describe what the event awakened, altered, revealed, or placed within your reach.

Ask: What could you do afterward that you could not do before? Who witnessed the change, and how did they explain it? Their explanation need not be correct.

Supernatural Marks

Supernatural Marks let you act through forces ordinary bodies, minds, and institutions cannot command. You might share a body with another soul, shape glamour, enter dreams, or mend flesh through touch. Establish the capability even when its source remains mysterious.

Use the permission and any stated conditions in the entry. A supernatural identity does not supply every power associated with it in stories. Changeling grants its stated glamour; other capabilities require their own permissions. A Mark can grant its particular supernatural ability without a Tradition. Weaver instead grants access to a Tradition and its domain, method, and requirements.

- What happens when you use this ability that witnesses cannot mistake for ordinary skill?
- Who offers an explanation for it, and what remains unexplained?

Mark	Permission
Familiar-Bound	Share senses and silent communication with a bonded animal, acting together across distance.
Griot	Use art to twist memory, soothe injuries, or stoke unrest.
Changeling	You are a child of the Dreaming in the waking world, able to cast glamours that disguise, conceal, and bewilder.
Haemomantic	Taste blood to discern its owner's emotions, nature, and supernatural afflictions.
Deathless	Your body can survive physical harm that would kill another outright, though some fates are worse than death.
Dreamwalker	Enter the dreaming and traverse others' dreams, interacting with their inhabitants and shaping what unfolds.
Elemental	Turn your body into a chosen substance or element, taking on its physical properties.
Ghostwise	Perceive and converse with spirits, discerning their presence through the bodies and places they inhabit.
Living Shadow	Detach and direct your silhouette across surfaces, perceiving through it and moving objects by grasping theirs.
Memory Thief	Extract memories from minds and objects, carrying their experiences within yourself.
Nightwalker	Darkness restores your flesh and opens your senses; sunlight leaves you weary.
Null	Resist and disrupt magic through your presence, but cannot wield or channel it.
Possessed	Another soul inhabits your body. If persuaded, it can take control and act on your behalf with its own abilities while you remain a passenger.
Precognition	Glimpse approaching events and possible futures before they unfold.
Sacred Bearing	Rouse dormant sacred objects and places, calling forth their surviving powers.
Sanguinarian	Consume blood or flesh to restore your body and draw vitality from the living.
Shimmering	Absorbed magic temporarily changes your body according to its nature.
Weaver	Choose a Tradition (see traditions). Attempt workings within its domain, using its methods and meeting its requirements.

Step 6. Set Your Paths

Heart, Shadow, and Crown begin at d4. Distribute exactly three increases among them. Each increase raises one die one step: d4, d6, d8, d10, d12.

At creation, the possible distributions are [d10/d4/d4], [d8/d6/d4], or [d6/d6/d6], assigned to the Paths in any order.

Then write a short value for each Path: A Path value is a short truth that tells the table what fuels that approach. What makes you commit or endure for Heart, what tempts you toward an indirect approach for Shadow, and what principle guides your judgment for Crown.

Choose, roll, or write your own using the prompts below.

Heart Values

d12	What makes you commit, endure, confront, or refuse to back down?
1	Vengeance for a wrong that left you broken and burning.
2	The thrill of danger, edge, and fire at the margins.
3	Protecting someone who still dares to believe in you.
4	Pursuit of knowledge, forbidden, forgotten, or cursed.
5	Love, pure and terrible, a flame you cannot smother.
6	An oath sworn with blood or breath that you cannot break.
7	The need to prove yourself worthy of the path you walk.
8	Hunger for power, no matter its shape or consequence.
9	Redemption for something you can never confess aloud.
10	An obsession you cannot quit, no matter the cost.
11	A dream that follows you, bright, impossible, and cruel.
12	The ember of survival itself: the will to see another dawn.

Shadow Values

d12	What pulls you toward the shortcut, lie, escape, indulgence, or forbidden?
1	Pride daring you to take risks no one else would.
2	Cruelty, quiet and careful, sweet on your tongue.
3	Fear that grows into control over everything around you.
4	The lure of something forbidden, beckoning you closer.
5	A secret so deep you would kill to keep it.
6	Jealousy's promise that you deserve what others have.
7	Rage that tastes too good to ever let go.
8	Greed masquerading as noble ambition.
9	A voice in your head that is not your own.
10	The endless feeling that nothing matters at all.
11	The shadow of someone you could have been.
12	The hunger to vanish, to unmake yourself completely.

Crown Values

d12	What rule, ideal, standard, or private code tells you how things should be done?
1	A broken world must have order, even if it bleeds.
2	The strong are bound to protect the weak.
3	Freedom is sacred, even if it breeds chaos.
4	No single life matters more than the cause.
5	Truth is the highest good, even if it ruins all else.
6	Justice must be absolute; mercy only weakens it.
7	Beauty is meaning; without it, nothing matters.
8	Every life has worth; no soul is beyond redemption.
9	Power must be earned by deed, not stolen.
10	The world must change, and I will be its fire.
11	Hope endures, even when everything else fails.
12	The past must be remembered, even if it scars the future.

Step 7. Choose Your Gear

Select a Main Weapon, an Alternate Weapon, one Armor, one Garment, one Talisman, and one Toolkit suited to your Trade. Record their names, Tiers where applicable, and short descriptions of their use or protection. These ready selections do not fill Pack slots.

Starting Tiers

Your weapons begin at Tier 0 (ordinary). You may make one weapon and one Defense Tier 1 (fine). Say why: a gift, an inheritance, a trophy, or the work of a smith who owed you. You can choose either, both, or neither.

Ballistic weapons are rare and usually require a background that explains how you have one. Agree on it with the Narrator.

Weapons

Choose physical weapons, trained fighting forms, or magical conduits. Use the Weapons chapter for descriptions, Tiers, and attack rules.

Type	Archetype	Range	Weight	Usage
Short blades	Dagger	Close, Near	Light	Best in fast, crowded fights.
Short blades	Short Sword	Close, Near	Light	Clean transitions between cuts and thrusts.
Short blades	Twinblades	Close, Near	Light	Chain quick strikes while drifting through the crowd.
Long blades	Broad Sword	Near	Balanced	Can parry or control space.
Long blades	Greatsword	Near	Heavy	Beat aside lines, bind hard, then punish the entry.
Long blades	Curved Sword	Near	Light	Keep the edge moving, roll from one opening to the next.
Long blades	Fencing Sword	Near	Balanced	Bind and shed attacks, then thread the gap with decisive thrusts.
Axes	Hand Axe	Near, Far	Light	Bite into shields and limbs, recover fast, and fly when needed.
Axes	Battleaxe	Near	Balanced	Heavier edge that chews through guard without feeling sluggish.
Axes	Greataxe	Near	Heavy	Monumental chops that collapse cover and stance.
Blunt	Mace	Near	Heavy	Concussive hits that rattle stance and plans.
Blunt	Quarterstaff	Near	Balanced	Keep foes at bay, thrust, sweep and vault obstacles.
Blunt	Flail	Near	Heavy	Odd-angle arcs that wrap guards into jarring impacts.
Blunt	Great Hammer	Near	Heavy	Stop a rush and send bodies skidding.
Blunt	Warhammer	Near	Heavy	Dent armor and break guard through concentrated force.
Reach	Spear	Near, Far	Balanced	Probe, punish overreach, deny entry.
Reach	Pike	Near	Heavy	Built to deny space and break charges.
Reach	Glaive	Near	Balanced	Hook down, hew through, herd at the edge of reach.
Reach	Whip	Near	Light	Constant motion keeps foes at bay.
Projectiles	Sling	Far, Beyond	Light	Harry targets at range; stones are found everywhere.
Projectiles	Javelin	Near, Far	Heavy	Open the fight or pin a shield before closing in.
Projectiles	Throwing Knives	Near, Far	Light	Strike quickly, often, or unseen.
Bows	Compact Bow	Near, Far	Light	Loose on the move, from a chariot, or in tight quarters.
Bows	Long Bow	Far, Beyond	Heavy	Hold a position and reach distant targets.
Bows	Composite Bow	Far, Beyond	Balanced	Place precise shots at range; suffers when soaked.
Bows	Tension Bow	Far, Beyond	Heavy	Brace, aim, and punch through armor.
Ballistic	Hand Bore	Near	Light	Drawn fast, fired once, close and sudden.
Ballistic	Long Bore	Far, Beyond	Balanced	Steady the aim and place a shot at distance.
Ballistic	Great Bore	Near, Far	Heavy	Braced or carried by two; shatter ranks, walls, and charges.
Ballistic	Projector	Near	Heavy	Flood a space with fire, acid, or worse; dangerous to its wielder.
Bombs	Bomb	Near, Far	Heavy	Thrown explosives, alchemical flasks, or unstable payloads.

Form	How it works
Striking	Quick combinations of punches, kicks, and elbow strikes
Grappling	Holds, throws, and control through leverage
Open	Precise strikes against vulnerable openings
Brawling	Forceful, committed attacks at close quarters

Conduit	Typical use	Gain Edge when…
Wand	Precise, directed effects	Acting quickly or directing a precise effect along a clear line of sight
Staff	Broad, forceful, or sustained effects	Altering terrain, controlling space, or sustaining force
Symbol	Giving magic a tangible form	Changing a manifested effect's form or function
Resonant Instrument	Directing magic through performance	Maintaining rhythm or momentum

Defenses

Armor protects Heart, Garments protect Shadow, and Talismans protect Crown. Choose one archetype from each table and describe its appearance and protective use.

Record each Guard's Tier with the Narrator; these archetypes do not prescribe a universal starting Tier. Use the Guards chapter for protection rules. Your Defenses begin at Tier 0. If you didn't already, you may make one Defense Tier 1. See Choose Your Weapons.

Archetype	Description	Usage
Harness	Reinforced straps and layered protection	Reinforce vulnerable areas while leaving limbs free to move.
Hide	Cured pelts or hardened skins	Cushion blows and shelter covered areas from rough surfaces and exposure.
Lamellar	Small plates laced together	Spread impacts across overlapping plates.
Cuirass	Stiffened layers protecting the torso	Protect the torso while leaving the limbs comparatively free.
Mail	Interlocking metal rings	Resist cuts with flexible, interlocking rings.
Plating	Rigid metal plates	Turn blades and distribute impacts across rigid surfaces.

Archetype	Description	Usage
Body Wraps	Bound layers that secure and support movement	Support movement and protect skin from friction and exposure.
Cloak	Loose covering for concealment and shelter	Shelter from weather and conceal the body or carried items.
Girdle	A fitted or weighted belt supporting posture	Support the waist and trunk during movement or exertion.
Jewelry	Adornments displaying identity or status	Display identity, affiliation, or status where others recognize it.
Mask	Face covering that filters exposure or conceals expression	Conceal identity or expression; filter exposure if its construction allows.
Robes	Ordered layers suited to ceremony and composure	Meet ceremonial expectations and cover posture or movement.
Uniform	Clothing identifying recognized membership or rank	Establish recognized membership, role, or authority.

Archetype	Description	Usage
Amulet	A small protective object worn on the body	Carry protection against a named danger through its material, history, or magic.
Bound Ring or Cord	A reminder of an observed commitment or discipline	Steady yourself by recalling a commitment or practiced discipline.
Seal	An inscribed object used to oppose intrusion	Oppose a named intrusion through an inscription or recognized sign.
Spirit Mask	A ritual face used to confront or repel spirits	Confront spirits under a protective ritual identity.
Idol	A figure used in protective ritual or devotion	Seek protection through a figure's significance or ritual use.
Bound Charm	A bundle of materials prepared to filter or repel harmful influences	Filter or repel a named harmful influence through prepared materials.

Choose each Defense's protective use with the Narrator. Its description establishes when it can apply; its Tier and the defense rules determine its mechanical benefit.

Your Toolkit

Name a portable toolset for your Trade or a specific practice within it, such as an Apothecary's Toolkit or a Crafter's woodworking Toolkit. Record its purpose. It includes the ordinary portable tools and small amounts of materials used for that work; you do not list each item. Large equipment, substantial supplies, rare ingredients, and exceptional items must be acquired separately.

Step 8. Fill Three Pack Slots

Your Pack has 10 slots. Fill three before play with additional items or useful bundles. Record quantities where relevant. Most items or bundles fill one slot; bulky items fill more. Additional Toolkits fill one slot each. Your ready Gear does not count toward these three slots.

Choose useful preparation for the opening situation. Examples include a coil of rope, a bundle of torches, a stated supply of food and water, a blanket, or a small set of sample containers. Agree the contents and quantities with the Narrator. Pack contents must be recorded before they are needed; only a Toolkit's ordinary contents may be named during use.

Step 9. Add Finishing Details

Name your character and describe their appearance, style, reputation, and one notable habit. Choose, roll, or invent details using the table below. Begin with 0 of 7 Milestones.

D20	Appearance	Style	Reputation	Quirk
1	Battle-worn	Ragged	Bloodthirsty	Unsettling stare
2	Robust	Outlandish	Deceitful	Whittles or crafts idly
3	Youthful	Austere	Honest	Collects trinkets or odd pets
4	Aged	Refined	Greedy	Talks in third person
5	Gaunt	Practical	Flirtatious	Talks to themself
6	Hideous	Revealing	Spiteful	Cryptic aphorisms
7	Striking	Outdated	Gregarious	Compulsive maintenance
8	Lithe	Weathered	Silent	Deliberately unkempt
9	Towering	Bloodstained	Shrewd	Morbid humor
10	Ethereal	Ostentatious	Soft-hearted	Fixates on patterns
11	Tattooed	Bohemian	Folk hero	Hums old songs
12	Painted	Oversized	Oathkeeper	Prays to dead gods
13	Pierced	Ceremonial	Coward	Keeps up a ledger
14	Shorn	Veiled	Heretic	Never comfortable
15	Wild-haired	Form-Fitting	Lucky	Sleeps with a weapon
16	Moon-faced	Flowing	Reckless	Haggles over everything
17	Curvy	Flamboyant	Merciful	Speaks to their weapons
18	Stocky	Punk	Incorruptible	Cheesy one-liners
19	Slight	Sacrilegious	Troublemaker	Swears constantly
20	Muscular	Avant-garde	Generous	Ignores personal space

Final Check

- One Homeland and its Legacy.
- Two Origin Marks and one Catalyst Mark, with their effects recorded.
- One Trade at Rank 1.
- One Catalyst, its defining event, and one Stigma.
- Three Path dice with exactly three increases distributed, and one value for each Path.
- A Main Weapon, Alternate Weapon, Armor, Garment, Talisman, and named Toolkit.
- Three occupied Pack slots, with contents and relevant quantities recorded.
- A name, appearance, style, reputation, notable habit, and 0 of 7 Milestones.

9. Marks

Marks are extraordinary capabilities or forms of leverage that distinguish your character. They may arise from anatomy, talent, training, lineage, standing, relationships, or supernatural change. Each Mark establishes something you can attempt, a scale you can act on, or a way you can affect the world.

A Mark is narrative permission first. Its entry describes what becomes possible. It may let you attempt something others cannot, accomplish more through an ordinary action, or act without a roll when the circumstances make the result certain.

Using a Mark

Describe your intent and approach, then explain how the Mark applies. Read its permission generously while keeping the attempt connected to the capability it describes. Mighty might let you lift a fallen gate; it does not tell you whether the damaged arch above it will hold.

Permission does not guarantee success. Danger, opposition, scope, and circumstances still matter. Use the ordinary procedure for the action. The Narrator establishes Difficulty, stakes, and any relevant limits before you commit Resolve. Safe, sufficient actions need no roll.

A Mark grants permission, not a bonus. Apply a numerical benefit only when the Mark's entry states one, such as Weapon Mastery. Otherwise the Mark decides what you can attempt and how much one action can accomplish. Difficulty, Trades, and gear decide how well it goes.

Make It Yours

You decide how your Mark is expressed and help establish its place in the world. For each starting Mark, answer:

- What does this capability look like when you use it?
- Who else has it, or what makes yours unusual?

Your answers can establish a people, practice, lineage, transformation, or personal exception. Develop those details with the table, respecting what has already been established. You may know what your capability does without knowing why it exists.

A character description does not need a Mark for every feature. You can belong to a people, bear an unusual appearance, or claim an ancient ancestry without purchasing each detail. Choose Marks for the extraordinary capabilities you want that identity to provide.

Scope and Development

The categories organize the catalogue and guide starting choices. They do not assign a Path or prescribe the source of a capability. Similar Marks can have different origins, and one origin can explain several Marks.

Agree on unclear boundaries when choosing a Mark. Later uses can extend its applications without granting unrelated powers. Record useful rulings so the capability remains dependable across scenes. Gain further Marks through advancement when your character develops new capabilities.

10. Scars

Scars are lasting consequences that change your character's life: injuries, fears, obligations, damaged relationships, or reputations. Each Scar describes something concrete that can affect your choices and circumstances.

Gaining a Scar

Whenever a Path breaks, gain a Scar reflecting what broke it and the lasting consequence. A particularly severe Ruin or an exceptional circumstance can also leave a Scar. Scars arise from significant events, not trivial Compromises.

The Narrator establishes the consequence. Together, the player and Narrator give the Scar clear, specific wording. For psychological Scars, the player determines how their character experiences and responds to that consequence.

Bringing Scars into Play

The Narrator may bring a Scar into play whenever it fits the circumstances. Players may also point out when their Scars apply.

Its effect follows from its description. A damaged hand might complicate delicate work; a disgraced name might close doors; an unpaid debt might force a difficult choice. Use the ordinary rules to resolve these circumstances. Scars impose no automatic numerical penalty.

When the character could anticipate a Scar's effect, establish it before the player commits to the affected action.

Scars and Milestones

When a Scar substantially impedes progress or forces a consequential choice, record a Milestone after resolving the situation. Describe what the Scar cost or changed.

Minor inconvenience, mentioning a Scar, or repeatedly encountering the same unchanged obstacle does not earn a Milestone. One consequential development earns one Milestone, even when several Scars or other Milestone criteria apply.

Invoking a Scar

Before rolling, you may invoke a relevant Scar to make the attempt a defining gamble. Explain how the Scar drives your action or raises its personal stakes, and agree with the Narrator on the nature of the risk.

- **Meet or beat Difficulty:** Achieve a Breakthrough.
- **Miss Difficulty:** Suffer Ruin.

Apply the relevant procedure's Breakthrough or Ruin effect. Invocation grants no bonus to the roll.

Only the player chooses to invoke a Scar this way. The Narrator bringing its consequences into play does not automatically activate these heightened stakes.

Invocation alone earns no Milestone. Its consequences may earn the Heavy Price if they substantially impede progress or force a consequential choice.

Stigma

It follows all Scar rules, including invocation, but cannot be removed or transformed into a Mark (although its expression can change). Prevailing in spite of your Stigma earns the 'Wound' rather than the 'Heavy Price'.

Revise the Stigma with the Narrator so it reflects what happened and remains meaningful in play. Honor what the character resolved; do not simply restore the same problem.

Changing and Resolving Scars

Events in play can change or resolve a Scar. Revise its wording when the lasting consequence changes, or remove it when that consequence has been resolved. Neither requires advancement. The experience becomes part of a character's history.

You may instead use an advancement to transform a Scar into a Mark. Replace the Scar with the new capability and describe how it emerged from what your character endured, learned, or changed.

11. Trades

Trades represent learned work and practical experience. They establish what your character knows, what work they can perform, and how that experience helps under pressure.

Professional Competence

When you choose a Trade, you know its ordinary tools, methods, risks, and customs. Routine work succeeds when you have sufficient time, materials, and suitable conditions. Basic professional knowledge requires no roll. Danger, urgency, unfamiliar problems, or inadequate resources can make an otherwise familiar task uncertain. Use the ordinary resolution rules when those circumstances matter.

Characters can attempt ordinary activities without the corresponding Trade. A Trade establishes dependable professional competence within its field.

Applying a Trade

When a Trade's knowledge or methods directly contribute to an action, add its rank to the roll. Explain that contribution before rolling.

A Trade can apply to any Path. Your approach determines the Path; your experience determines whether the Trade applies. A Warrior might draw on experience to rally frightened soldiers, recognize an ambush, or maneuver through a melee.

If several Trades apply, add only the highest applicable rank. Other relevant Trades may still provide knowledge or make the approach possible.

Trades do not add to attacks or defensive Saves. They can apply to other actions during combat when their knowledge or methods directly contribute. Add weapon Tier to attacks instead.

Trade Ranks

Your rank reflects the mastery you bring to the roll. Trades range from Rank 1 to Rank 3.

Rank	Standing	Competence
1	Practiced	You perform the Trade independently and understand its ordinary work.
2	Proven	Your experience includes demanding situations, unusual problems, and serious consequences.
3	Renowned	Your expertise has earned recognition among relevant practitioners, clients, or communities.

Recognition can provide introductions, attract requests, or establish professional credibility. Decide where your name or methods are known and who recognizes them.

Tools and Circumstances

A Trade provides the knowledge to perform its work. Tools, materials, time, and access determine how you can carry it out in the present situation.

Describe the means you use. You may improvise when a substitute can serve the purpose. The Narrator establishes any resulting limitations, Difficulty, or risks before you commit Resolve.

Trades and Marks

Trades provide practical competence across a field. Marks grant extraordinary capabilities. They can contribute to the same action when each applies.

Learning and Advancement

New Trades begin at Rank 1. An advancement can grant a new Trade or raise an existing Trade by one rank, to a maximum of Rank 3.

Describe the experience, practice, or instruction behind the development using the advancement procedure. A teacher, demanding undertaking, or period of work can explain the change without becoming an additional requirement after advancement has been earned.

12. Shaping Action through Traits

Every action in Catalyst is fundamentally shaped by the characters traits. They shape what is possible by connecting what you attempt to who your character is, what they know, and what they have experienced.

When describing an action, bring relevant details into your approach. Start with what you want to do, then explain how these details matter. Marks, Trades and even scars can establish permission, reveal an opportunity, or support a mechanical benefit.

Each part of a character does one job when you roll. Agree on all of them before Resolve is committed.

Marks

Marks are traits that express an extraordinary capability, leverage, power, lineage, talent, training, reputation, or fate. A Mark acts as 'narrative permission', letting a character attempt something simply others cannot, accomplish more with an ordinary action, or make an action possible without a roll.

Permission does not guarantee success. Danger, opposition, scope, and circumstances still matter. Use the ordinary procedure for the action. A Mark adds no dice, bonus, or Edge unless its entry says so.

Marks are flexible. Use the supplied entry to infer a Mark's permissions and effects in the moment.

Trades

A Trade is learned work and practical knowledge. When a Trade directly applies to a roll, add its rank to the total. A Trade can also establish what a character knows about ordinary tools, methods, customs, and risks in that field. A Trade does not grant a Mark by itself.

Scars

Scars are lasting consequences: wounds, obligations, histories, fears, reputations, or other facts the character carries.

When a Scar clearly matters, the player may invoke it before rolling. Invocation changes the roll into a stark choice: if the total meets or beats Difficulty, the result is a **Breakthrough**; if it misses, the result is **Ruin**. Apply the relevant procedure's Breakthrough or Ruin effect.

Scar invocation is not a bonus. It raises the stakes. Use it only when the Scar has a clear connection to the action and the table understands the risk.

13. Weapons

Weapons determine how you attack, what you can reach, and what risks your approach creates. Physical weapons, martial arts forms, and magical conduits use the same attack rules. Their descriptions establish how they work; Tier measures their effectiveness.

When your description uses the weapon the way its Usage line says it works best, gain Edge on that roll. Agree on it before rolling. Edge does not stack: a weapon, a Defense, and a conduit together still give one reroll.

Tier

When making an attack, add the weapon's Tier to the Test total before determining the outcome. Tier does not add BP. Apply the outcome's normal BP award.

Tier measures the quality of an individual weapon, not its archetype. Two spears share an archetype but not necessarily a Tier.

Tier	Quality
0	Ordinary
1	Fine
2	Masterwork
3	Legendary

This rule also applies to attacks made using tiered martial forms or magical conduits.

Range and Weight

Every physical weapon archetype has a Range and a Weight. These are classifications, not additional rules. They help the Narrator state what an attack requires and what it risks.

Range describes the distances at which a weapon is effective. The Narrator considers it when stating an attack's requirements, before Resolve is committed.

Range	Distance
Close	Within arm's grasp: grappling, or pressed body to body
Near	Striking distance
Far	A thrown stone or a short bowshot
Beyond	Across the field

Weight describes how a weapon is used, and suggests the consequences its approach invites.

Weight	Favors	Typical risks
Light	Speed: quick strikes, movement, recovery	Disarmed when timing slips; Flanked when movement falters
Balanced	Control: placing blows, binding, deflecting	Exposed while changing position; Shaken when defense is mistimed
Heavy	Force: committed blows that break through	Exhausted or Staggered by overcommitting; Exposed by overextending

Uses and Risks

Describe how the weapon serves your intent. Its construction and the circumstances determine what is possible: a long weapon needs room to maneuver; a thrust through armor requires an accessible opening.

On a Compromise or Loss, a consequence may follow from how you attacked. The examples below suggest possibilities, not mandatory results or additional penalties. Use them when selecting the cost or consequence required by the outcome.

Approach	Possible Consequence
Parry and Riposte	Exposed while changing position
Sweep through clustered foes	Exposed by overextending
Channel magical force	Vexed when concentration breaks
Feint or strike from an unexpected angle	Disarmed when the deception is read
Control space and deflect attacks	Shaken when defense is mistimed
Strike with committed weight and force	Exhausted by overcommitting
Strike quickly and recover	Disarmed when timing slips
Find gaps in armor or defenses	Vexed when the opening closes
Batter stance or disrupt focus	Staggered by overcommitting
Strike before an opponent can close	Exposed when they get inside your reach
Tear at vulnerable flesh or seams	Shaken against hardened protection
Attack while moving or repositioning	Flanked when movement falters
Spread an attack across an area	Misfire when it spreads beyond your intent
Break protection, equipment, or barriers	Disarmed when the weapon catches
Catch limbs, weapons, or footing	Held when the bind is reversed
Hurl a weapon at a target	Misfire when the throw goes wide
Change grip, range, or fighting method	Exposed during the transition
Reload under pressure	Exposed while the weapon is spent

Physical Weapons

Archetypes match how the weapon works. Describe its materials, construction, and appearance.

Type	Archetype	Range	Weight	Usage
Short blades	Dagger	Close, Near	Light	Best in fast, crowded fights.
Short blades	Short Sword	Close, Near	Light	Clean transitions between cuts and thrusts.
Short blades	Twinblades	Close, Near	Light	Chain quick strikes while drifting through the crowd.
Long blades	Broad Sword	Near	Balanced	Can parry or control space.
Long blades	Greatsword	Near	Heavy	Beat aside lines, bind hard, then punish the entry.
Long blades	Curved Sword	Near	Light	Keep the edge moving, roll from one opening to the next.
Long blades	Fencing Sword	Near	Balanced	Bind and shed attacks, then thread the gap with decisive thrusts.
Axes	Hand Axe	Near, Far	Light	Bite into shields and limbs, recover fast, and fly when needed.
Axes	Battleaxe	Near	Balanced	Heavier edge that chews through guard without feeling sluggish.
Axes	Greataxe	Near	Heavy	Monumental chops that collapse cover and stance.
Blunt	Mace	Near	Heavy	Concussive hits that rattle stance and plans.
Blunt	Quarterstaff	Near	Balanced	Keep foes at bay, thrust, sweep and vault obstacles.
Blunt	Flail	Near	Heavy	Odd-angle arcs that wrap guards into jarring impacts.
Blunt	Great Hammer	Near	Heavy	Stop a rush and send bodies skidding.
Blunt	Warhammer	Near	Heavy	Dent armor and break guard through concentrated force.
Reach	Spear	Near, Far	Balanced	Probe, punish overreach, deny entry.
Reach	Pike	Near	Heavy	Built to deny space and break charges.
Reach	Glaive	Near	Balanced	Hook down, hew through, herd at the edge of reach.
Reach	Whip	Near	Light	Constant motion keeps foes at bay.
Projectiles	Sling	Far, Beyond	Light	Harry targets at range; stones are found everywhere.
Projectiles	Javelin	Near, Far	Heavy	Open the fight or pin a shield before closing in.
Projectiles	Throwing Knives	Near, Far	Light	Strike quickly, often, or unseen.
Bows	Compact Bow	Near, Far	Light	Loose on the move, from a chariot, or in tight quarters.
Bows	Long Bow	Far, Beyond	Heavy	Hold a position and reach distant targets.
Bows	Composite Bow	Far, Beyond	Balanced	Place precise shots at range; suffers when soaked.
Bows	Tension Bow	Far, Beyond	Heavy	Brace, aim, and punch through armor.
Ballistic	Hand Bore	Near	Light	Drawn fast, fired once, close and sudden.
Ballistic	Long Bore	Far, Beyond	Balanced	Steady the aim and place a shot at distance.
Ballistic	Great Bore	Near, Far	Heavy	Braced or carried by two; shatter ranks, walls, and charges.
Ballistic	Projector	Near	Heavy	Flood a space with fire, acid, or worse; dangerous to its wielder.
Bombs	Bomb	Near, Far	Heavy	Thrown explosives, alchemical flasks, or unstable payloads.

Projectiles leave your hand when used; recovering them, or running out, is a matter for the fiction. Bows need both hands. Ballistic weapons store force and release it all at once, and must be reloaded between uses.

Martial Arts Forms

Each form has a fixed Tier that applies only to attacks made using that form. Higher-tier forms can be attained as learnable rewards such as masters or manuscripts, comparable in availability to higher-tier weapons.

Form	How it works
Striking	Quick combinations of punches, kicks, and elbow strikes
Grappling	Holds, throws, and control through leverage
Open	Precise strikes against vulnerable openings
Brawling	Forceful, committed attacks at close quarters

Claws, fangs, and similar natural weapons can shape how a form is used. Describe how they contribute to the attack.

Magical Conduits

Magical conduits are implements used to direct magic. Their form shapes how the bearer handles and channels a working.

When attacking through a conduit, use the ordinary weapon rules and add its Tier to the attack total. Other workings follow the magic rules. A conduit does not by itself grant permission to perform magic.

Conduit	Typical use	Gain Edge when…
Wand	Precise, directed effects	Acting quickly or directing a precise effect along a clear line of sight
Staff	Broad, forceful, or sustained effects	Altering terrain, controlling space, or sustaining force
Symbol	Giving magic a tangible form	Changing a manifested effect's form or function
Resonant Instrument	Directing magic through performance	Maintaining rhythm or momentum

Improvised Weapons

An improvised weapon has no Tier. A successful attack applies 1 BP. On a Compromise or Loss, it breaks apart.

The Narrator may grant situational Edge when the object provides a clear advantage, such as using a burning torch against something vulnerable to fire.

14. Defenses

Defenses protect your Paths through physical defense, clothing, or personal and magical significance.

Defense	Protects	Examples
Armor	Heart	Reinforced harness, mail, plate
Garment	Shadow	Cloak, wraps, robes, uniform
Talisman	Crown	Amulet, inscribed seal, ritual mask

You can benefit from one Defense of each type. Record its Tier and describe how it protects you.

Reducing Harm

When a Defense protects the affected Path and can reasonably oppose the source of harm, reduce incoming harm by its Tier.

Defense Tiers do not stack. Choose the applicable Defense. A shield's harm reduction may stack when you attempt to block physical harm.

A Defense's Tier may decrease as a stated cost or consequence when it is damaged or compromised.

Using Protection

A Defense's description establishes how it protects you and when it can apply. Its protection remains subject to circumstances: armor needs to cover the threatened area, a cloak needs sufficient coverage, and a talisman's significance or magic must offer protection against the danger.

Describe a Defense's protective use when choosing it. For a talisman, establish what its significance, practice, or magic helps you resist.

Construction can also hinder an action. Heavy armor may impede swimming; loose cloth may catch on an obstruction. Apply Disadvantage when the Defense directly hinders the attempt, and establish that hindrance before rolling.

When a defensive Save uses the Defense the way its description establishes, gain Edge on the Save. Agree on it before rolling. This Edge comes in addition to the Defense's Harm reduction.

Armor

Armor protects through coverage, reinforcement, and resistance to force. When you brace against a blow, trust leather or bronze to turn the edge, or endure force that would otherwise break you, you are using Armor.

Archetype	Description	Properties
Harness	Reinforced straps and layered protection	Bracing, Sheathing
Hide	Cured pelts or hardened skins	Dampening, Insulating
Lamellar	Small plates laced together	Bracing, Anchoring
Cuirass	Stiffened layers protecting the torso	Sheathing, Quickening
Mail	Interlocking metal rings	Sheathing, Anchoring
Plating	Rigid metal plates	Bracing, Interposing

Garments

Garments protect through coverage, freedom of movement, concealment, or presentation. When you hide your tell, weather the road, hold yourself together through ceremony or hardship, or make yourself harder to shame, dismiss, or expose, you are using a Garment.

You may wear several pieces, but only one provides your Garment's benefits.

Archetype	Description	Properties
Body Wraps	Bound layers that secure and support movement	Dampening, Quickening
Cloak	Loose covering for concealment and shelter	Veiling, Insulating
Girdle	A fitted or weighted belt supporting posture	Attuning, Bracing
Jewelry	Adornments displaying identity or status	Adorning, Commanding
Mask	Face covering that filters exposure or conceals expression	Filtering, Intimidating
Robes	Ordered layers suited to ceremony and composure	Steadying, Adorning
Uniform	Clothing identifying recognized membership or rank	Commanding, Steadying

Talismans

Talismans protect through personal significance, ritual practice, or magic. Where Armor bears force and Garments shape the body's place in the world, Talismans defend by invoking blessing, taboo, identity, memory, and the hidden patterns that still govern fate. Amulets, sigils, masks, and other charged objects all count as Talismans.

When a vow steadies your will, a sign bars intrusion, or a carried object turns ill fortune aside, you are using a Talisman.

Archetype	Description	Properties
Amulet	A small protective object worn on the body	Warding, Attuning
Bound Ring or Cord	A reminder of an observed commitment or discipline	Consecrated, Steadying
Seal	An inscribed object used to oppose intrusion	Warding, Attuning
Spirit Mask	A ritual face used to confront or repel spirits	Intimidating, Warding
Idol	A figure used in protective ritual or devotion	Consecrated, Steadying
Bound Charm	A bundle of materials prepared to filter or repel harmful influences	Filtering, Warding

15. Magic

Magic in the Eschaton is volatile and significant. All attempts at weaving magic require a narrative source. Common sources include magical tradition, supernatural marks, relics, pacts, spirits, curses and other mystical circumstances.

Magic is freeform, but not unlimited. The tradition, method, path, steps, and backlash all constrain the working.

Weaving

To resolve a Weave:

1. State the intended effect and its target or area.
2. Name the source, method, and any source, vessel, or component used.
3. Chooses the Path that best fits approach of the magic: powerful (heart), subversive (shadow), controlling (crown).
4. Narrator sets the scope based on the intended effect and the Difficulty based on the target.
5. Spend Resolve to roll dice
6. Narrator describes the magical effect based on the outcome.

Magical Steps

Instead of spell levels, magical objectives determine by how hard reality must be pushed before it gives.

Use one roll for a brief and simple effect. For a larger working, use steps as successive stages of producing the magic.

Before each action, describe how the weaver brings the effect closer to completion: drawing power, extending an inscription, invoking a spirit, or binding magic to its subject. Other characters can contribute when their actions directly support the working through their own magic.

Steps	Working	Examples
1	Sense a subject or produce a simple, immediate effect.	Detect magic, kindle fire, deliver a magical strike, sense an emotion, hear a spirit.
2	Guide an existing subject's behavior, movement, or properties.	Redirect flames, stir an emotion, move an object, accelerate healing, influence an animal.
3	Substantially change a subject or shape magic into a developed effect.	Erupt fire across an area, reshape material, alter a memory, form a magical weapon, establish a triggered ward.
4	Change a subject's nature or exercise extensive control over it.	Assume an elemental body, transform a creature, command a storm, summon and direct an elemental, impose a complex compulsion.
5+	Bring forth complex manifestations or fundamentally change how a subject exists.	Create a living being, establish an independent magical creature, remake a landscape, restore the dead to life, alter the relationship between places.

Players can establish usable partial states of the effect when framing the working. They may stop and use the state already reached at the cost of losing progress. An interruption may also release a partial effect early.

When all Steps are complete, the intended effect manifests. Magic used against a Threat follows the Combat Magic rules; preparing a working does not also apply BP.

Personalized Effects

Magic is rooted in the character. A storm called by a desert exile should feel different from one called by a river priest, and a binding laid by a courtier should not resemble one carved by a grave tender. Consider the source of the magic, the caster, their personality, background and history and how it affects it.

When in doubt, ask: Where did you learn this? What does it cost you to do it this way? What part of your past, such as your Catalyst, Stigma, or Scars, shows up in this moment?

Using Components

Components are items that can make a working easier, safer, broader, or more lasting. A component may be a tool, offering, focus, relic, place of power, true name, sacrifice, or favorable circumstance.

A strong component may reduce Difficulty, reduce Steps, extend duration, widen scale, protect against backlash, or permit an effect that would otherwise be out of reach.

Difficulty and Magic

Preparation, favorable conditions, fitting components, and a vulnerable target can make magic easier. Resistance, scale, unstable conditions, or a hostile environment can raise Difficulty. Keep the same Difficulty for the working unless the fiction or a rule changes what is being attempted.

Magical Outcomes and Backlash

Outcome	Result
Breakthrough	The Weave progresses and produces something extra.
Victory	The Weave progresses as intended.
Compromise	The Weave progresses, but has an unintended side effect.
Loss	The Weave fails; By default the caster suffers Backlash equal to Resolve spent, marked as Harm on the Path used for the working, unless another negative effect is applied.
Ruin	If a rule escalates Loss, apply a severe, lasting magical consequence.

Failed magic tests inflict **Backlash**. You can treat Backlash as Harm to the Path used for the working or some other detrimental effect like the loss of equipment, a condition or a scene complication.

Combat Magic

Magic directed against a Threat uses the combat outcomes when it is applied. A working may first need Objective Steps to create or prepare its effect. Describe what each stage makes possible; if the weaver uses an unfinished effect against a Threat, resolve that action according to what actually exists.

When the weaver releases or uses the magic against a Threat, use Attack Outcomes for BP and applicable conduit bonuses. Completing a preparation Step does not also award BP automatically. State before the roll whether it prepares the working or applies an effect against the Threat.

Steps describe the making of the magic. BP measures its pressure against a Threat. Completing the final preparation does not require an additional roll unless applying the effect introduces further uncertainty or resistance.

Ritual Magic

A Ritual is prepared magic rooted in a Tradition. It takes time, materials, and intent pressed into the world. Resolve it as a long-term Objective with Steps spaced over time. Rituals cannot be performed during a dramatic/action scene.

Sustained Effects

A Weave may last for a scene if the effect is simple, local, and actively maintained. The Narrator may require concentration, Resolve, an intact component, a fixed boundary, or a clear condition. A Weave that lasts beyond the scene usually requires preparation, an anchor, a sacrifice, a place of power, or a lasting consequence.

If the caster is interrupted, the anchor is broken, or the condition is violated, the Weave ends.

Traditions

Traditions are inherited or learned magical practices that define what a character can affect, what methods they use, and what a working costs. Traditions have distinct permissions and methods. Its domain describes what it can affect; its method describes how the caster works; its requirement establishes what must be available to perform magic. A character may bear only one Tradition.

Using Traditions

Start with the intended effect and explain how the Tradition can produce it. Meet its requirement, then use the ordinary magic rules to establish Path, scope, Difficulty, Steps, and stakes.

Alchemy

Domain	The transformation of matter and the manipulation of its magical properties.
Method	Combine and refine ingredients into potions, powders, oils, and other preparations.
Requirement	Suitable ingredients and tools. The magic takes effect when the preparation is consumed, applied, or released.

Necromancy

Domain	Life energy, death, spirits, remains, decay, and memory.
Method	Work through blood, bones, names, funerary rites, and the Fade.
Requirement	Life energy to pay for crossing the boundary between life and death. Whether through the physical harm of others, or themselves.

Druidism

Domain	Beasts, plants, weather, terrain, and natural cycles.
Method	Invoke the forces of nature through names, offerings, and appeals.
Requirement	A relevant natural source present in the scene. Without a suitable source to manipulate, it cannot be performed.

Witchcraft

Domain	Blessings, curses, protection, omens, and sympathetic influence.
Method	Prepare potions, brews, charms, knots, poppets, and hex objects.
Requirement	A prepared vessel connected to the subject through blood, possession, likeness, name, or memory. Destroying the vessel or severing its connection ends the effect.

Sorcery

Domain	Arcane force, elements, and alterations to reality.
Method	Shape magic through incantations, sigils, formulae, and components.
Requirement	A formula defining the working, prepared beforehand or composed during casting. Improvised Sorcery costs +1 Resolve.

Augury

Domain	Hidden knowledge, possible futures, visions of the past, and the turning of fortune.
Method	Cast lots, read entrails or bones, interpret dreams and omens, or consult the stars.
Requirement	The augur must reach an altered state before beginning a working and sustain it until the working is complete. Losing that state interrupts an unfinished working.

Asceticism

Domain	Bodily mastery, heightened senses, endurance, inner force, and impossible motion.
Method	Channel inner force through breath, discipline, mantras, pain, and stillness.
Requirement	The working must arise through the caster's body or presence. Weaves require that the ascetic retain harm in the Path being used.

Binding

Domain	Powers and services of spirits, daemons, monsters, and other supernatural beings.
Method	Summon a particular being through names, circles, offerings, and invocations. Bargain for its service or borrow one of its powers.
Requirement	Every summoning requires payment, spent regardless of outcome. Establish the service or borrowed power, its price, and when the bargain ends before rolling. Borrowed magic follows the being's capabilities and the agreed terms.

Thaumaturgy

Domain	Miracles, protection, revelation, judgment, sanctity, and dread.
Method	Express conviction through prayer, proclamation, observance, and sacred acts.
Requirement	The working must directly express a belief the caster upholds through their actions. Conduct that betrays that belief must be reconciled before it can support further workings.

16. Inventory

Your inventory is a menu of objects that can change the terms of a scene. A rope creates a route. A seal ring creates authority. Record what you carry in two places: **Gear** for what you keep ready and close at hand, and **Pack** for everything else.

Gear

Equipment is the gear you keep ready, visible, and close at hand. It is not hidden in your pack or declared later. It is chosen deliberately because it shapes how you face danger.

Your Equipment includes a Main Weapon, Alternate Weapon, Armor, Garment, Talisman, and a Toolkit.

Gear does not fill Pack slots. Spare weapons, additional Defenses, and additional Toolkits do. Gear can still be lost, damaged, stolen, or made inaccessible.

Using Toolkits

A Toolkit contains the portable tools and ordinary materials of a particular Trade. Record its name, such as *Healer's Kit* or *Smith's Kit*, without listing every item.

When you need a tool, name it. If it suits the Toolkit's purpose and is something a practitioner would ordinarily carry, you have it. No prior declaration or roll is required.

A Toolkit includes small amounts of common working materials. Large equipment, substantial supplies, rare ingredients, and exceptional items must be acquired separately. A Smith's Toolkit provides tools for small repairs, for example, but no forge or anvil.

Anyone can use or borrow a Toolkit. It supplies tools, not training or automatic success. Tasks still require appropriate time and conditions.

Do not track routine consumption. Record tools or supplies lost, broken, or exhausted through consequences or unusually demanding use until replaced. A Toolkit cannot supply unlimited goods to distribute or sell.

Pack

Your Pack holds everything you carry beyond your Gear, including items carried in your hands or strapped to your body.

Your Pack has 10 slots.

- An ordinary item or useful bundle fills **1 slot**.
- An additional Toolkit fills **1 slot**, including its contents.
- Bulky items fill **2 or more slots**, agreed with the Narrator.
- Small personal possessions need no slot unless their quantity or bulk matters.

Record items when packed or acquired. State quantities when relevant, such as "three days of food and water." Only a Toolkit's ordinary contents can be declared when needed.

Retrieve items freely when time allows. Under pressure, accessing them may take time, occupy your hands, or expose you to danger.

Items count toward capacity while you carry them, even outside a bag. When replacing ready Gear, count the stored item's slots. Remove items from your Pack when you leave, store, or transfer them. Carrying more than 10 slots requires additional transport; some objects require help regardless of available slots.

Awkward Items: Apply Disadvantage when an item's weight, bulk, or noise directly hinders an action. Establish this before the roll.

Storage and Transport: Record items carried by porters, animals, or vehicles, or kept in storage, separately. They are available only when you can reach them.

17. Character Advancement

Characters change through crisis, loss, discovery, and the consequences they carry. Seven Milestones mark the turns of that change. When all seven are marked, your hero has lived through a complete story, and you choose an Advancement that gives them a lasting capability.

The Milestone Track

Your track holds seven Milestones. Each names a turn of story that every legend passes through: a value tested, a Stigma endured, a foe overcome, a quest completed, a mystery solved, a price paid, and a failure embraced.

Mark a Milestone when play delivers it, and write a few words beside it about what happened. Milestones are marked in any order. Each can be marked only once per track.

When all seven are marked, choose one Advancement and clear the track.

Milestone	Mark it when	It does not count when
The Crisis	Respecting, resisting, or risking a Path value at great personal cost	The value costs you nothing
The Wound	Prevailing in spite of your Stigma	The Stigma never truly stood in your way
The Monster	Overcoming a powerful foe	The opposition was ordinary
The Quest	Completing a difficult quest	The goal was an errand or a single Objective
The Revelation	Solving a great mystery	You found a clue or answered a scene's question
The Heavy Price	A Scar impedes your progress or forces a hard choice	You only gained, mentioned, or invoked the Scar
The Dark Night	Embracing a major failure	The failure left no lasting mark on the story

The Seven Milestones

A Milestone counts only when it changes your character or the story. The table decides together whether a moment meets the bar. When in doubt, ask what the moment cost and what it changed.

The Crisis

Respecting, resisting, or risking a Path value at great personal cost.

True character shows in what a hero chooses under pressure. Mark the Crisis when you act for or against one of your Path values and the choice costs you something real: a Victory you give up, a person you lose, a door that closes behind you. Acting on a value when it costs nothing does not count.

The Wound

Prevailing in spite of your Stigma.

Your Stigma never leaves you. Mark the Wound when your Stigma stands between you and something that matters, and you achieve it anyway. Prevailing does not remove or transform the Stigma; it remains part of who you are. Revising how your Stigma is expressed does not earn this Milestone.

The Monster

Overcoming a powerful foe.

Mark the Monster when you overcome a Threat that matters to the story: a rival, a tyrant, a horror, a power that has shaped events. Defeat it, break its will, outwit it, or turn it to your side. Heroes who walk Shadow or Crown overcome foes as surely as those who walk Heart. Driving off ordinary opposition does not count.

The Quest

Completing a difficult quest.

Mark the Quest when you achieve a goal your character committed to and pursued through hardship, usually across several scenes or sessions. A quest completed at a cost still counts. Finishing an errand or a single Objective does not.

The Revelation

Solving a great mystery.

Mark the Revelation when you uncover a truth that changes how your character understands the world, another person, or themselves. The mystery must matter, and its answer must change something. Finding a clue or answering a scene's question does not count.

The Heavy Price

When a Scar impedes your progress or forces a hard choice.

Gaining a Scar earns nothing by itself. Mark the Heavy Price when a Scar substantially impedes your progress or forces a consequential choice, and record it after the situation is resolved. Describe what the Scar cost or changed.

Invoking a Scar does not earn this Milestone, though the consequences of an invocation can. Your Stigma is a Scar, but it earns the Wound rather than the Heavy Price.

The Dark Night

Embracing a major failure.

Mark the Dark Night when you suffer a failure with lasting consequences, such as a Loss or a Ruin that changes your road, and you carry it rather than undo it. Play out what it costs you. Ordinary Losses do not count.

> **Why these seven.** The track follows the oldest shapes in storytelling. The Crisis is the choice under pressure that reveals true character. The Wound is the old hurt a hero acts in spite of, never free of. The Monster and the Quest are two of the oldest plots there are. The Revelation is the turn from ignorance to knowledge. The Heavy Price is what every victory takes. The Dark Night is the moment all seems lost. A full track is a told story.

Recording Milestones

One development earns one Milestone, even when it meets more than one. Choose which Milestone it marks.

A Milestone records a meaningful development, not every roll or repeated use of an ability. A minor inconvenience, a Scar mentioned in passing, or the same unchanged obstacle met again earns nothing.

At the end of a session, review what changed with the table. What did you risk or give up? What stood in your way, and did you prevail? What did you learn, win, or lose?

Pacing the Track

The track is a story, and the Narrator and players tell it together. The Crisis, the Wound, the Heavy Price, and the Dark Night grow from the choices players make and the consequences they carry. The Monster, the Quest, and the Revelation come from the world. Give each arc a powerful foe, a difficult quest, and a great mystery worth solving, and the track fills as the story is told.

When a hero's track waits on a single Milestone, bring that turn of the story within reach. Never mark a Milestone the story has not delivered.

Choose an Advancement

When all seven Milestones are marked, choose one Advancement and clear the track:

- Advance a Trade by one rank, to a maximum of Rank 3.
- Learn a new Trade at Rank 1.
- Raise a Path by one die step, to a maximum of d12.
- Gain a new Mark.
- Transform a Scar into a Mark.
- Advance a Weapon or Defense.
- Bear a Tradition, limited to one.
- Craft a Charm.
- Evolve a Charm into a Relic.

Do not repeat the same individual Advancement on consecutive selections.

Establish the Change

You choose your advancement. Together with the Narrator, establish how it enters the story. It might emerge through practice, a relationship, an awakening, a bodily transformation, or something encountered during play. Tell the table what interests you before your track fills so those possibilities can appear in the world.

When advancement is earned, establish its acquisition without requiring another quest, payment, or permission. If play has not supplied an occasion, describe a brief scene or reveal a change that has been developing. Pursuing an acquisition through an adventure is an option when you want that story, not an additional requirement.

When transforming a Scar, describe how its consequence has become a capability and replace the Scar with the Mark. The history remains, even though its rules have changed.

Carry the World Forward

Ask: What made this change possible? How does it first become apparent? Who recognizes it, welcomes it, or has reason to care? You need enough detail to bring the change into play; its deeper cause can remain uncertain.

Discoveries can inspire advancement without being reduced to it. A creature might teach you, a wonder might transform you, or an artifact might awaken something within you. Their other powers, mysteries, and possibilities need not appear in the Mark catalogue.

Part III: Running the Game

18. Scenes, Focus, and Moments

Scenes

A scene is a focused stretch of play built around a situation that matters. It begins when the Narrator frames a place, the people or forces present, and the pressure that makes the moment worth playing. A scene may be quiet, violent, strange, social, investigative, or intimate.

A strong scene gives players enough information to act on: where they are; who or what is present; what feels unstable, dangerous, tempting, hidden, or urgent; what happens if the characters do nothing.

A scene should not begin just because the characters enter a room. It begins when that room contains a question worth answering. The band of PCs reaches the shrine at dusk. The outer doors hang open. Inside, the altar is cracked, the candles are freshly lit, and someone is singing from beneath the floor.

Every scene has pressure building beneath it. The moment tightens. Time matters. Choices carry weight. The Narrator will signal what is coming before it arrives; a window to act on your terms. Miss it and the terms change. Wait long enough and the scene ends without you.

Scenes end when their central pressure is resolved, transformed, escaped, or no longer interesting. The characters may win, fail, retreat, learn something, pay a cost, or carry the problem forward. What matters is that the situation is no longer the same.

Focus

Focus is the immediate point of attention: the collapsing ledge, the exposed ally, the guard raising an alarm, or the argument about to turn. It is not an initiative order. Move focus when another character, Threat, or consequence becomes urgent.

Moments

When timing and pressure matter, a scene is played in **Moments**. In combat, a Moment is like a round. In other dramatic scenes, it can be a meaningful turn in the pressure. Catalyst has no fixed initiative order. The group shifts focus to whoever or whatever matters next.

A Moment turns when active characters and forces have had a meaningful chance to act, or events demand a new frame. One character exhausting Resolve does not end it. Let another character act or resolve the immediate pressure before refreshing; players cannot trigger a refresh merely by announcing that they wait.

When the Moment turns, personal Resolve refreshes. Then the world presses back: a Threat Advances, a situation worsens, a new cost appears, or the characters' position changes. A refresh should not simply repeat the same circumstances.

The Spiral

The **Spiral** is a tool for escalating scenes and creating forward momentum. At the end of each moment, if the scene remains unresolved, advance the Spiral one stage.

The spiral has four stages:

- **Signals** let the players know that something bad is going to happen. The scene foreshadowing the peril ahead.
- **Shifts** are when the scene changes its terms. Something the party could have used is gone, or something they didn't account for has entered the frame.
- **Tolls** are a tax. Something important to the scene or the story is captured, lost, or otherwise committed. This might be a resource, a route, a relationship or a relic.
- **Reckonings** is a conclusion that brings irrevocable change.

A party that resolves a scene quickly brings a reckoning on their terms. A group that hesitates through every stage risks a different type of reckoning. One where they end up paying. Either way the scene ends and something carries forward.

19. Objectives

An Objective is a goal that takes effort to complete, such as disarming a trap, crossing a burning roof, performing surgery, or weaving magic. Its **Steps** requirement measure how much work it takes. Players decide how their actions contribute toward the goal.

Setting Steps

Establish what completing the Objective achieves, then set the required steps using the scale below. Consider the characters' approach, capabilities, tools, and available resources.

Steps	Scope	Example
1	**Brief:** One effective action can settle it.	Force a door; pull someone clear; leap a gap.
2	**Focused:** A short commitment to one task.	Barricade an entrance; free a trapped person; search a room.
3	**Sustained:** Substantial work that occupies attention while the situation develops.	Repair a mechanism; perform emergency surgery; prepare a ferry crossing.
4	**Substantial:** Considerable work across several people, places, or demands.	Move a wounded caravan across a river; recover people from a collapsed building.
5+	**Extensive:** A major undertaking requiring prolonged effort or coordination.	Restore a wrecked vessel; evacuate a settlement; establish a route through devastated terrain.

Most Objectives require 1–3 Steps. Choose the closest benchmark without planning a sequence of actions or assigning a roll to every part of the work.

Marking Progress

Before each action, establish how it advances the goal. Characters can contribute through different approaches, provided their actions support the intended result. Describe what each contribution achieves: people reach safety, repairs hold, or a route becomes usable.

When a roll is needed, apply the following outcomes:

Outcome	Objective result
Breakthrough	Complete two Steps if the action can accomplish both; otherwise, complete one Step and gain an additional benefit.
Victory	Complete one Step.
Compromise	Complete one Step and accept a cost or complication.
Loss	Complete no Steps: the situation worsens.

When accumulated steps meets the requirement, the goal is achieved. A sufficient action with a certain outcome needs no roll; credit the work it accomplishes directly.

If a new approach or changed circumstances reduce the remaining work, adjust the requirement and explain why. An approach that achieves the goal outright completes the Objective immediately. Completed accomplishments remain part of the situation even if the characters change plans. Revise or abandon an Objective whose goal becomes impossible or irrelevant.

20. Threats

A **Threat** is active opposition with an agenda and the means to pursue it. It might be a creature, person, hostile group, or supernatural presence. Threats create conflict by pursuing something the characters cannot afford to let happen.

For a Threat, winning means getting what it came for: capturing someone, stealing a relic, completing a rite, or driving intruders away. Give it a purpose, methods, and a reason to stop. Let those determine how it acts as circumstances change.

Roles

A Threat's Role describes how it contributes to a conflict. It guides its behavior, capabilities, and influence. Use roles to create different pressures and decisions, rather than simply stronger opponents. Difficulty, Limit, and Harm are starting points for that role, not thresholds that determine membership.

Role	Role in the conflict	Tactics
Agent	A minor opponent whose importance lies in what it can set in motion. They are either a clue or a trap.	A lookout raises the alarm; a frightened servant releases something dangerous.
Throng	A group or swarm that controls space through numbers. They add pressure by burning through resolve, deteriorating defenses, and creating urgency.	It surrounds, separates, blocks routes, and overwhelms isolated characters. Reinforcements can sustain it while their source remains available.
Adept	A challenging foe for the characters. They change the nature of the scene either through unique ability or command of others.	They don't just fight. They disrupt players' plans through distinctive abilities, equipment, or tactics.
Adversary	A powerful adversary whose influence extends through followers, preparations, or supernatural workings.	They command and control Adepts and throngs, orchestrating multilayered plans from behind the scenes.
Archvillain	A defining adversary whose defeat requires exceptional means.	They reshape the setting in major way, commanding armies, shaping the weather, and bending reality itself.
Avatar	An embodied force, principle, or living truth. More of a thematic evil than a physical threat.	Its presence changes the conditions of the world; resolving it may require changing what sustains, binds, or directs it.

A powerful Threat can create opportunities as well as dangers. Its dependencies, commitments, and methods give characters something to investigate and exploit. Establish any exceptional requirement for defeating it and provide signs through which the characters can discover it.

Limits

Every threat has a **Limit**, the amount of Break Points it can withstand before it breaks. Characters add **Break Points (BP)** to a Threat through attacks and other actions that pressure it. BP can represent injury, fear, lost ground, disrupted magic, broken morale, exposed weakness, or loss of control.

Track BP against the Threat's **Limit** and make progress visible: ranks scatter, confidence falters, defenses fail, or positions give way.

At its Limit, the Threat can no longer maintain its current opposition. Describe the result according to the characters' actions and intent: surrender, retreat, capture, destruction, or loss of the means to continue. Reaching a Limit does not automatically mean death.

An action that removes the reason or means to oppose the characters can settle the conflict without filling the track. Conversely, breaking a Threat's immediate resistance does not automatically end an established source of its return.

Threat responses

Threats do not take ordinary turns or roll dice. They act through **Advances**, **Exchanges**, and **Fallout**.

Advance

When characters leave a signaled danger unanswered, the Threat may act on that opening. It might seize an exit, call reinforcements, take a hostage, or attack. Signal the danger and allow a response; sudden danger may call for a Save.

When a Moment turns and a Threat's agenda presents a new opening, it may Advance. Otherwise, advance another unresolved danger or change the situation. Do not make every Threat act, and do not resolve the same danger again as both an Exchange and an Advance.

Signal an Advance that gives characters time to respond. Sudden danger may call for a Save. A Threat's response changes the situation according to its agenda and capabilities.

Exchange

On a Loss while directly engaging a Threat, it answers with its listed response. Apply its Harm to the Path used unless the entry specifies another consequence. It may attack if able, close distance, disrupt the characters' goal, or change the situation in another way its description supports. Do not inflict Harm the Threat could not reach or cause. Applicable Defense protection still applies, but no defensive Save is made.

A Loss from a ranged or area attack triggers one Exchange total, even if the attack targets several Threats. Choose the Threat best positioned to respond. Other affected Threats do not each get an Exchange from the same roll.

Fallout

When the Threat breaks, escapes, or achieves its goal, establish what follows. Captives remain missing, abandoned workings persist, allies reconsider their loyalties, or a contested route opens.

Resolve each consequence once. A Compromise carries its stated cost without automatically adding an Exchange.

21. Hazards and Traps

A **hazard** is a dangerous circumstance, such as rising water, unstable ground, or poisonous fumes. A **trap** is a hazard with a specific trigger.

Hazards have no Limits. Resolve the characters' actions normally; use an Objective when their chosen goal requires several meaningful advances.

Warnings and Triggers

Show signs of danger and reveal useful details when characters investigate. Roll only when uncertainty matters.

Follow triggers consistently. Discovering how a trap works lets characters bypass, disable, redirect, or deliberately release it.

Resolving Danger

- **Free action:** A safe, sufficient solution simply works.
- **Check:** Resolve uncertainty without serious risk.
- **Test:** Resolve deliberate action under pressure. Declare Difficulty and stakes before Resolve is spent.
- **Save:** Respond to sudden danger. Apply ordinary defensive outcomes and any suitable Defense.
- **Objective:** Track a task requiring several advances. Set Steps from the characters' goal and approach.

Use listed Difficulty and Harm as baselines, adjusted for circumstances. Consequences can include injury, delay, separation, confinement, or damaged equipment.

Resolve each exposure once. If a Test's outcome already determines injury, do not add a defensive Save or Threat Exchange. Further rolls require a new action or danger.

Escalation

Danger develops through its cause: water flows, fire spreads, machinery moves. Show what will happen next and allow a response. When timing matters, state how much the characters can attempt before conditions worsen.

Stopping the source prevents further escalation. Escaping leaves it unresolved.

22. Combat

In combat the Narrator frames the danger, the players choose actions, and Threats respond through Exchanges, Advances, and Fallout. There is no fixed initiative order and no enemy attack roll.

At the start of a fight, identify active Threats and what they want. State their Difficulty, Limit, current BP, Harm, relevant properties, and position. Name any Objective that continues during the fight, such as escaping a burning building or completing a ritual.

Position and movement

Catalyst measures space in danger, not feet. Position determines what an action can reach and what it exposes. The Narrator sets position from the fiction, not precise measurement, and it can change through action or neglect.

Range	Meaning	Cost
Step	Close-quarters combat, within whispering distance.	None
Stride	Across a room or movement that requires an action.	1 Resolve
Sprint	Across a battlefield.	2 Resolve; often a roll
Bound	A full effort, such as leaping a chasm, climbing a tower, or running under fire.	3 Resolve; always a roll

Position can also make actions more difficult.

- **Engaged** means direct contact.
- **Flanked** means pressure from multiple angles; Difficulty increases by 2 or more.
- **Surrounded** means cut off or overwhelmed; Difficulty and incoming Harm increase by 2 or more.

Attacking a Threat

State the intended result and describe the attack. The approach determines the Path used. Before the player commits Resolve, the Narrator states the Difficulty, eligible target or targets, and requirements arising from position, equipment, and approach.

Add the weapon's Tier to the Test total before determining the outcome. Apply the attack outcome below:

Outcome	Attack result
Breakthrough	Add 2 BP, or gain another clear benefit.
Victory	Add 1 BP.
Compromise	Add 1 BP and suffer a minor cost, exposure, or complication.
Loss	Add no BP and resolve an Exchange.

Using Weapons

A weapon's shape, construction, and use determine what you can attempt with it. Describe how you use it to achieve your intent. Resolve attacks and other actions through their ordinary rules.

When the attack uses the weapon the way its description says it works best, gain Edge (see Chapter 13). Agree on it before rolling. A specific weapon entry may grant another benefit if it gives a clear trigger and effect.

Multiple targets

Declare the targets, area, Difficulty, and intended BP distribution before spending Resolve. Attacking additional Threats raises Difficulty by 2. For one sweeping roll, resolve one outcome and apply BP as agreed before the roll. A Loss triggers one Exchange, not one Exchange per target.

Defensive Saves

When danger arrives and a character can respond, the character may make a defensive Save. The player chooses a Path that fits how they evade, resist, endure, or redirect the danger. A Save costs no Resolve by default; the player can spend Resolve to add dice.

There is no defensive Save against an Exchange, so an Exchange resolves without a defensive roll. Defense reductions still apply to incoming Harm. Against an Advance or other incoming danger, a Save may reduce or avoid the consequence if the fiction allows it.

Defenses

Defenses protect different aspects of a character. Armor protects Heart, Garments protect Shadow, and Talismans protect Crown. A Defense applies when it protects the affected Path and can reasonably oppose the danger.

When a Defense applies, reduce Harm by its Tier. A Defense may also let a character protect someone else or hold a route when its use supports that action. Additional Harm reduction requires a specific trigger and a cost or tactical condition, stated before the roll.

Defensive outcome	Result
Breakthrough	Avoid all Harm.
Victory	Reduce Harm by 1 plus Defense tier.
Compromise	Reduce Harm by Defense tier and suffer a defense complication.
Loss	Suffer full Harm and a defense complication.

Apply only the Harm remaining after the defense result and Defense reduction. A rule that permits a reroll of a defense replaces the original defensive roll; it does not add a second result.

Harm

Harm measures the strain or damage a character suffers. It affects the Path involved in the action or exposed to the danger: **Heart**, **Shadow**, or **Crown**. Harm can represent wounds, exhaustion, fear, confusion, or other consequences that wear down a character.

Each Path has its own Harm track. Its current die determines how much Harm it can withstand.

Current Path	Harm boxes
d4	2
d6	3
d8	4
d10	5
d12	6

When you suffer Harm, mark that many boxes on the affected Path. Partially filled tracks do not reduce its die.

If the track fills, you suffer an **Injury** and reduce that Path one step (d12 → d10 → d8 → d6 → d4 → Broken). Clear the track for the new die size.

A Path that reaches **Broken** can no longer contribute through dice rolls. They offer a flat result of 1 (the last hobbling effort). If you suffer another Injury while a Path is Broken, you are **Incapacitated**. Further harm results in **Death**.

Applying Conditions

In addition to harm, attacks and failed tests and saves can lead to conditions. Conditions are status effects and complications a character suffers in conflict.

A condition ends when an action or changed circumstance removes it: a recovery action, a helping hand, or a pause to catch your breath. Scene breaks will clear most complications. A Sanctuary clears all but lingering complications.

If a complication lasts beyond the scene, it may become a scar, at the Narrator's discretion.

Condition	Effect
Bleeding	Suffer 1 Heart Harm at the end of each moment until staunched; stacks.
Blinded	Sight-based Tests are at Disadvantage; cannot target beyond Step range.
Burning	At the start of each turn, suffer Shadow Harm; it increases by 1 each turn until put out.
Disarmed	Weapon is lost or stuck; retrieving it costs Resolve.
Enthralled	Cannot harm the source or let it be harmed unless it harms you first; resistance rolls cost +1 Resolve.
Exhausted	Maximum Resolve is reduced by 1 until rest; stacks.
Exposed	Cannot invoke Defenses until spending Resolve to reposition or recover.
Held	Cannot move freely; escape requires a Test against the binding.
Hollowed	Cannot gain Edge or Advantage until rest at a Sanctuary.
Misfire	Action betrays intent and hits an unintended target.
Panicked	Cannot move closer to the source of fear; rolls against it cost +1 Resolve.
Paralyzed	Cannot act or move; attacks ignore Defense.
Poisoned	Heart rolls are at Disadvantage until the poison is purged.
Prone	Rising costs 1 Resolve, or all movement costs +1 Resolve; rising while engaged requires a defense roll or Harm.
Shaken	Cannot spend more than 2 Resolve on a single roll.
Staggered	Attacks are at Disadvantage until spending 1 Resolve to recover footing.
Vexed	Crown rolls are at Disadvantage until recentered.

23. Injury and Recovery

Injury

When a track fills, take an Injury and reduce that Path by one die step and clear its Harm. Its track now has the capacity shown for the smaller die. Apply any remaining Harm to this new track. A single severe hit can cause several Injuries.

Record your uninjured Path rating separately. Injuries reduce your current rating; recovery can restore it.

Broken Paths

When a d4 Path takes an Injury, it becomes Broken. Clear its Harm and retain a single-box Harm track. A Broken Path cannot be rolled; it contributes a flat 1 when an action would normally use it.

Harm can still affect a Broken Path. When its two boxes fill, the character becomes Incapacitated. Carry any excess Harm into the Broken track when the original injury leaves Harm remaining.

Whenever a Path becomes Broken, gain a Scar reflecting what broke it, following Chapter 7.

Recovery

Clearing Harm does not heal an Injury. Healing an Injury restores the affected Path by one die step, up to its uninjured rating. Record that rating so temporary damage does not become confused with advancement.

Recovery Action: Spend 1 Resolve and describe an appropriate intervention. Clear one Harm mark or remove one condition that the intervention can address per resolve spent. This does not restore a reduced Path or repair a Broken one. Some conditions require particular treatment or circumstances.

Scene Break: A Scene Break is a pause long enough to catch your breath, usually the end of a scene. In relative safety, a character with an injured, unbroken Core may attempt one Recovery Check for that Core. Roll one die of its current size. Difficulty depends on how far the Core has fallen below its uninjured rating:

Steps below uninjured	Difficulty
1	5
2	8
3 or more	13

Apply relevant Trades and other benefits normally. The Check costs no Resolve, and Resolve cannot add dice. Before rolling, the Narrator may move the Difficulty one rung up or down for conditions and available treatment: a skilled healer with proper tools eases it, while exhaustion, hostile ground, or pursuit raise it.

Each character receives one recovery attempt per Scene Break; additional helpers do not grant further attempts. Deep wounds are mended in Sanctuary, not between scenes.

Outcome	Healing
Breakthrough	Heal one Injury, clear the Path's Harm, and remove one related condition that the care can address.
Victory	Heal one Injury and clear the Path's Harm.
Compromise	Heal one Injury and clear the Path's Harm, but accept an established cost such as consumed supplies, additional time, or a related condition remaining troublesome.
Loss	The Injury remains. The recovery opportunity is spent; another attempt requires a new Scene Break or meaningfully different treatment.

Risky surgery or another hazardous intervention uses a Test with its own declared stakes.

Sanctuary: A sustained period of meaningful safety and appropriate care clears Harm and restores injured and Broken Paths to their uninjured ratings. Establish what makes the place and care sufficient. Existing Scars remain until resolved through their own rules.

Magical Healing: Establish whether the working clears Harm, heals an Injury, removes a condition, or restores a Broken Path. Set its scope, requirements, and consequences accordingly. Restoring a Broken Path requires a working capable of repairing what broke; ordinary healing does not automatically accomplish it.

24. Incapacitation and Death

Incapacitation

An **Incapacitated** character is unconscious, cannot act, and faces immediate danger of death. If the character's condition or surroundings threaten their life, the Narrator states what will kill them, what can prevent it, and how much time remains to intervene. Otherwise, they remain unconscious until aid or recovery restores them.

Stabilization

Another character may attempt stabilization through an appropriate intervention. Make a Test at Difficulty 8, adjusted for the injury, tools, access, and circumstances. Declare death as the risk before Resolve is spent.

Outcome	Stabilization
Breakthrough	The character regains consciousness. Restore the Path that caused Incapacitation to d4 and clear its Harm.
Victory	As Breakthrough, but the character is Exhausted.
Compromise	The immediate threat of death is stopped. Clear Harm from the affected Broken Path, but it remains Broken. The character remains unconscious until that Path is restored.
Loss	The intervention fails and the character dies.

Successful stabilization does not heal other Paths or erase Scars. A stabilized character does not require repeated rolls merely to remain alive. A new lethal danger can put them at risk again.

Do not repeat stabilization to improve its outcome. Further treatment follows the recovery rules.

A group may agree before play to replace death on Loss with a consequential bargain, transformation, or another lasting outcome. Establish that choice before it becomes relevant; no separate death-save procedure is required.

Death

When a character dies, ordinary healing and recovery can no longer help them. This may be a physical death (injury, illness, exposure), a spiritual death (loss of the soul, mind, or some eternal fate) or even a symbolic death (loss of will, identity, or reason to continue).

The player decides how their story ends, or what might keep it unfinished. They can:

- **Let go.** Describe a final word, memory, or farewell. The character's story ends, but their deeds and relationships remain part of the world.
- **One last act.** Before death takes them, the character performs one final action within their capabilities. Resolve an objective or land a major blow to a threat. Then they die.
- **Come back changed.** Death always takes its toll, but not always everything. Sometimes daemon offers a deal or a spirit intervenes, the great Wyrm leaves them unfinished, or they return as something (or someone) else. Decide with the Narrator how they return, what has changed, and at what cost. Revise the character to reflect their new existence.

Reviving the Dead

Healing cannot restore the dead. Returning someone to life requires an exceptional working, bargain, or power that explicitly permits it. Establish what makes the return possible, what it demands, and what comes back. Contacting a spirit or animating a corpse does not restore the person to life.

25. Social Conflict

Use Social Conflict when a conversation can materially change the story: win trust, expose a lie, sway a crowd, make someone hesitate, or force a concession. If nothing important is at risk, roleplay the conversation without a special procedure.

Before the conflict, establish what is already in motion, what each party wants, what they are protecting, and what happens if the characters do nothing. Position matters: rank, reputation, witnesses, secrets, favors, fear, ritual, and public mood all shape what is possible.

Stance and Limit

A target's **Stance** describes its current position. Stance determines its **Limit**, the BP needed to shift, break, expose, or move it. Stance can change when evidence, a revelation, failure, or a changed situation gives someone reason to move.

Stance	Typical Limit	Position
Open	1	Willing to listen.
Guarded	2	Cautious; needs proof.
Wary	3	Skeptical and looking for reasons to refuse.
Hostile	4	Opposed; anger may shift, but not simply disappear.
Entrenched	5+	Bound to something greater than argument.

State the concrete outcome the characters want, then choose an approach and Path. Heart presses through conviction, force of personality, or presence. Shadow misleads, reframes, charms, or baits. Crown reasons, negotiates, exposes contradictions, or uses the right truth at the right time.

Outcome	Social result
Breakthrough	Apply Leverage + 2 BP.
Victory	Apply Leverage + 1 BP.
Compromise	Apply 1 BP, but expose yourself, escalate tension, or hand over leverage.
Loss	Apply no BP; suffer Harm, lost position, suspicion, humiliation, or another fitting consequence.

Apply BP and position changes according to the social outcome. Social Harm follows the fiction and is marked on an appropriate Path: humiliation may degrade Crown, intimidation may wear down Heart, and manipulation may erode Shadow. Social Injuries use the ordinary Injury rules; they may become Scars and do not necessarily heal with rest.

Important NPCs should have leverage they can use when ignored or when the scene stalls: authority, money, access, reputation, allies, secrets, or a credible threat. They may bring in a third party, surface a complication, act immediately, reveal a hidden position, or leave and end the opportunity.

Leverage

Leverage is like a weapon in social conflict. It gives an appeal, offer, or threat force through a BP bonus on social tests: useful information, a personal connection, something the target wants, or something they cannot afford to lose.

Before a social Test, the Narrator assigns Leverage from 0 to 3. This determines the BP the action applies when successful.

Leverage	BP Bonus	Basis
Plausible	0	Relevant but offers no particular advantage
Credible	1	An argument, offer, or threat the target has reason to consider.
Personal	2	Addresses a specific need, fear, obligation, or relationship.
Decisive	3	Puts a central loyalty, ambition, or interest at stake.

Offering a guard money might provide 1 BP. Offering safe passage for their stranded family might provide 2 BP. Producing orders from the commander they refuse to disobey might provide 3 BP, or secure cooperation without a roll.

Rate the whole approach; sources of Leverage do not stack. Reward what the character brings to the exchange, whether the player describes it plainly or speaks in character. Information uncovered through play or Tests can provide Leverage.

Difficulty measures how hard the action is to accomplish; Leverage measures its impact. An implausible appeal produces no BP. An offer that settles the matter needs no Test. Repeating an exhausted argument adds no pressure unless circumstances change.

Before rolling, establish the concession being sought. Reaching the Threat's Limit secures that concession, within what the target can actually do.

26. Overland Travel

Use Overland Travel when the journey's terrain, time, resources, and dangers matter. Resolve uneventful travel through description or a Montage. When the journey requires choices and effort, use a Route Objective and a shared daily Resolve pool.

Define the route

A Route connects two meaningful places. Establish the destination, known paths, expected travel time, and what delay could change. Assign the Route a Difficulty and the Steps needed to arrive. Most Routes need 1–3 Steps; complex expeditions may need 5 or more. A map helps establish distance, terrain, and alternatives, but a Step is not a fixed distance or a hex.

Describe Steps as successive legs or obstacles: reach the old ferry, cross the flooded river, then follow the ridge to the settlement. Each completed Step establishes where the travelers are and what they have achieved. Stopping or changing route does not erase that progress. A longer crossing may require several Steps; a dangerous but brief crossing may have high Difficulty and only one.

Set travel Difficulty

Choose a base Difficulty from the route's terrain and danger. Adjust a particular action for weather, tools, guides, concealment, opposition, or preparation. Tell the players about extra effort and risks before they spend Resolve.

Difficulty	Typical crossing
3	Open road or friendly lands.
5	Wild woods, hills, or light rain.
8	Swamps, mountains, or haunted ruins.
13	Monster territory, warzones, or cursed ground.
21+	Divine wreckage or an environment threatening annihilation.

Pool daily Resolve

At the start of each travel day, the party shares 2 Resolve plus 1 per player character. Four characters therefore have 6 Travel Resolve. Track this pool separately from personal Resolve. It represents the band's collective effort for the day, not a fixed number of hours or miles.

Spend from the shared pool to march, scout, navigate, forage, search, evade pursuit, or prepare camp. For a travel Test, each Resolve spent rolls one die from the acting character's relevant Path. Trades, Marks, Edge, and Advantage follow the ordinary rules. Helpers spend from the same pool when adding dice; do not also charge personal Resolve for that contribution.

A larger commitment improves one attempt but leaves less effort for the rest of the day. Preserve 1 Resolve for Fortify Camp when you expect to stop before reaching secure shelter. Resolve does not refresh when a leg is completed or a dramatic scene ends; the daily pool refreshes at dawn, subject to established camp or environmental consequences.

Travel actions and progress

Before each action, state its purpose and approach. Establish Difficulty, stakes, and whether it advances the Route or achieves something else. Foraging provides provisions; scouting reveals a path or danger. These actions complete a Route Step only when they genuinely achieve that leg.

Outcome	Progress toward the Route
Breakthrough	Complete the current Step and gain a benefit, or complete an additional Step when the action plausibly achieves both.
Victory	Complete the current Step cleanly.
Compromise	Complete the current Step with a cost: exposure, lost provisions, Harm, damaged Gear, unwanted attention, or a new obstacle.
Loss	Complete no Step. The situation worsens through delay, weather, pursuit, lost supplies, or a changed route.

After each result, establish the party's position and changed circumstances. Follow the stakes; Loss does not automatically reset travelers to safety or invite an identical retry.

Camp and provisions

To rest during travel, consume 1 Supply and spend 1 Travel Resolve to Fortify Camp. Here, 1 Supply means enough food and water for the band's overnight stop. Record the actual provisions, quantities, and carrying space in the Pack; Supply is a consumption measure, not a separate inventory category. Foraging, trade, or other established sources may replace provisions used.

Describe how camp is made safe. In a safe area, no roll is required: rest, recover under Chapter 9, and refresh Travel Resolve at dawn. In hostile or deadly terrain, the 1 Resolve pays for the camp Test's first die; spend more from the daily pool to add dice. Use the Path fitting the approach: Heart for sturdy shelter, Shadow for concealment, or Crown for choosing and preparing a site.

Breakthrough secures camp with a benefit; Victory provides shelter and recovery; Compromise adds a cost; Loss leaves camp exposed. Declare threatened costs before rolling. Camp is not automatically Sanctuary.

At 0 Travel Resolve, stop and camp. Without the required effort or provisions, normal Fortify Camp benefits are not assured. Establish the exposure or deprivation; resolve immediate danger through scene rules. Refresh at dawn, subject to consequences already established.

Zoom into a scene

For combat, a chase, or another immediate danger, use normal scene rules and personal Resolve. Return to the remaining daily Travel Resolve afterward; personal refreshes do not refill it. Rituals follow Chapter 11 and remain outside dramatic action.

Part IV: Narrator Tools

27. Establishing Plots

Adventures in Catalyst begin with a **plot**, a problem already in motion that the characters can interrupt, redirect, exploit, or resolve. A succession is contested. A creature has driven hunters from the forest. A trade road has become unsafe. Someone has broken a local pact. A relic has made a poor village suddenly wealthy.

The Narrator establishes what is happening, why it matters, and what happens if nobody interferes. Then they let the characters interrupt, redirect, exploit, and resolve it, so what happens through play becomes the story.

Building a Plot

A useful plot needs three things:

1. Instability. Start with something that cannot continue as it is. A resource is running out. Two obligations conflict. Someone wants something they cannot have. Something dangerous has changed. An old solution has stopped working.

2. Pressure. Give the plot a reason to move. What happens tomorrow, next week, or if the characters walk away? The world should not wait indefinitely for them to act.

3. Characters. Who cares about the outcome? Give at least two characters or groups reasons to want different things. They do not need to be enemies. They only need skin in the game; enough at stake to act.

Just remember to keep preparation loose. You are establishing a plot for players to engage with, not writing a story.

Player Agency

Changing the plot follows the same loop as any other action in Catalyst: the players state their intent, describe their approach, and the world responds. The difference is scale.

When an action could change the direction of the plot, make sure everyone understands what the character is actually trying to make happen.

Ask:

- *If this works, what changes?*
- *Who are you trying to help?*
- *What are you willing to leave unresolved?*
- *Who might object?*
- Their intent does not guarantee the outcome. It tells you what is at stake.

Then return to the normal rules. The character acts through a Core, commits Resolve, invokes relevant Marks, and rolls when the outcome is uncertain. Victory moves them toward their intent. Compromise and Loss introduce costs and negative consequences.

This is the core loop of Catalyst at a larger scale: characters act with intent, the world pushes back, and both are changed by what follows.

Incorporating Player Legacies

Players can also use their Homeland Legacies to contribute details beyond their characters. When a relevant Legacy applies, prompt the player to draw on what their people might know.

A successful invocation might establish an old custom, useful contact, forgotten precedent, hidden route, local practice, or other plausible fact.

The player has established something true. Now use it. Someone may act on that history, dispute it, exploit it, or demand its return.

Follow the Consequences

Consequences do not need to become new plots. Most simply become part of the story.

A slain leader leaves a vacancy. A rescued merchant remembers the favor. Hunting a predator changes what thrives in its territory. Destroying a bridge changes a trade route. Public magic attracts attention. Breaking local law changes how the watch treats you. Sometimes, however, a consequence creates enough instability and pressure to become a new plot.

28. Directing Scenes

Being a Narrator means wearing a lot of hats: arbiter, writer, actor and game engine. Key among them is the role of director, guiding the narrative in your players' minds. Your descriptions set the tone, guide pacing, lend style and drama to their collective imaginations and weight to their decisions.

Setting the Tone

As Narrator, one of the tools at your disposal is setting the pitch, the level of emotional intensity. The three scene types below can be used to set the pace, pressure and tone you want for a scene.

Dramatic Scenes

A dramatic scene is a scene where tension runs high, the spotlight is wide, and every action carries real consequence. Combat, chases, tense negotiations, rituals, or anything where failure cuts deep.

In dramatic scenes, players refresh their full resolve pool after ends moment and all actions have been taken. Actions are taken in a fluid, player-driven order. Every roll matters, and harm or consequences fall heavy.

Use Dramatic scenes any time the group's attention is fixed, risk is present, or the outcome could reshape the story.

Vignettes

Vignettes are sharp, focused moments when the spotlight is narrowed. Where one or two actions matter, but the stakes or attention don't justify a dramatic scene's depth. The world holds its breath, but only for a moment as the Narrator allows a single action, typically as a check. The outcomes are quick and decisive.

Use Vignettes for checks like picking a lock, slipping past a sentry, defusing a tense but minor confrontation, or where there's a chance of Compromise, but not disaster.

Montages

When you want to describe weeks in a paragraph, or a year in a sentence, use a montage. Time stretches and blurs. Days pass, tasks are tackled, journeys unfold, and the story moves forward in leaps. You can almost hear the music in the background.

A montage tells how much time the scene occupies, not how the mechanics resolve. When a montage covers overland travel, the travel rules govern what happens inside it. When it covers a ritual, the ritual rules apply. When it covers something with no dedicated system, each player may make a single test or declare a broad goal, with results narrated as part of a larger whole.

Failures linger. Successes echo.

Use Montages for overland travel, rituals, research, crafting, building alliances, or any stretch where the journey matters more than each footstep.

Shifting Focus

Catalyst is a game where the action moves at the pace of the story. You set the size of the stage and decide who is in the light.

- **When the group faces a true trial**, open the stage and give everyone space to act.
- **When the story pivots on a single choice**, narrow the beam and let a quick roll decide.
- **When days pass and only the outcome matters**, pan across the landscape and let each player shape a piece of the journey.

29. Describing Moments

Before dice are rolled, before resolve is spent, the Narrator's job is to frame the moment. Laying out the stage, hinting at the stakes, and inviting the table to breathe life into what comes next. The clearer the frame, the sharper the drama.

Frame the Moment

Start with clarity and context. Every moment should answer these questions (even if only in the Narrator's mind).

What's happening right now? Who is present? What just changed? What does inaction cost?

Let the table know what matters, then frame it with urgency and flavor.

"You stand at the edge of the shattered bridge. Below, the river surges. On the other side, a balefire glow bounces off the entrance to the ruins, something is waiting for you."

Telegraphing Risk

Let players sense danger before it strikes. Players make the best choices when they understand what's at stake, so avoid keeping every threat hidden.

This isn't about spelling out every hazard. It's about making sure the players' choices are real. Courage means nothing without visible stakes.

"The floor trembles under your feet. Above, a faint crack grows louder above you. You sense the corridor's "patience" wearing thin. Do you press on, or pull back?"

Spotlight Objectives

Help players see what's possible. This is as simple as naming what can be won, saved, destroyed, or changed. Clarifying time limits, opportunities, or urgent choices. Or, if there are multiple objectives, letting players weigh their priorities.

Just remember, objectives are invitations, not rails. So let players redefine or surprise you with their own goals.

"The ritual circle glows brighter with every breath. You can break the wards, rescue the prisoner, or try both. But time is against you."

Clarify Stakes

State what's at risk if the moment goes unresolved. Not as a threat. As information. Show the cost of hesitation before it becomes the cost of failure. Incorporate outcomes as part of the fiction, not a postscript.

"If the cultists aren't disrupted in the next moments, then the fourth circle will light. When it does, whatever is on the other side of that portal takes form."

When you set a Difficulty, say the number that scrapes by as well: *"Difficulty 8. A 5 gets you across, but not cleanly."* Players who know where a Compromise starts are more willing to accept one.

Inviting Player Input

Moments are co-authored. Players should be partners in shaping the story. Ask questions:

- *"What does your character notice first?"*
- *"What are you most afraid of here?"*
- *"What are you trying to protect?"*
- *"What does this place remind you of?"*
- *"Is anyone holding back? Why?"*

Let players define some stakes, risks, or add color to the moment. Especially in vignettes or downtime scenes.

"The demon prince steps out over the desiccated corpses. They lock eyes with you, whispering the dark tongue into your mind. What terrifying vision grips you, and why is it so appealing?"

30. Responding to Action

The Narrator is the world's response. Players declare, roll, and narrate their actions. Your job is to close the loop: show what changed, what answered, what moved. A world that doesn't respond to player action isn't a world. It's a backdrop.

Step in when:

- The players suffer a complication or fail a roll.
- Time passes and no one addresses an obvious threat.
- You want to escalate tension, change the mood, or spotlight a threat.
- Players turn to you, uncertain of what comes next.

Keeping the world in Motion

Every action should change the situation. That is the principle behind every threat response. If nothing changes, the world feels inert. If something always changes, players feel the weight of every decision.

Enemies act after the players, but not on a fixed turn order. If players focus on one foe, others might move, attack, or use the environment. Read the fiction before triggering a response. What would this threat naturally do right now, given what just happened? Let that answer drive the advance.

If the players hesitate or miss a threat, **the enemy seizes initiative**: trap springs, spell triggers, backup arrives. Every action should change the situation: apply harm, break a guard, split the group, trigger a hazard, or shift the battlefield.

Advances vs. Exchanges

Threats act through two windows. An Advance is what a threat does when it goes uncontested, when players look away, hesitate, or fail to interrupt it. An Exchange is a threat's immediate answer to a player action, a response that lands in the same beat. Know which one you're triggering before you narrate it. Advances change the scene's terms. Exchanges change the moment's terms.

Threats that don’t fight

Not every threat responds with violence. A manipulator repositions socially, turning the party's actions against them. A coward flees and returns with leverage. A schemer absorbs the confrontation and files it away for a future scene. When a threat doesn't fight, ask what it wants and what the party just gave it. Let that drive the response.

Let Players Seize the Moment

Threat responses aren't only reactive. When players act decisively, creatively, or at cost, reward it. A threat that just lost its position should show it. A creature that just took serious pressure should change its behavior. The world responds to players as much as it responds to failure.

Evoking Mood

Use description to shift the emotional register. Slow things to a crawl or snap to sudden violence. The torches sputter. Shadows thicken in the corners. Something moves where light should be.

“The torches sputter. Shadows thicken in the corners. Something moves where light should be.”

31. Building Encounters

An Encounter combines a goal, opposition, and circumstances under pressure. Use an Objective, Threats, or both. No additional track is required.

Build the encounter

Establish the place, goal, opposition, and what happens if nobody acts. Include routes, cover, bystanders, or tools the characters can use. Allow different solutions where possible: negotiation, deception, evasion, sabotage, or force.

Give Threats distinct jobs: a Throng blocks a route while an Adept raises the alarm. Add opposition when it creates a new decision.

Composing Conflicts

Give each Threat a job that creates a choice. A Throng holds the bridge while an Adept carries a captive away. The characters must decide whether to break through, pursue, negotiate, or find another crossing. Add opposition when it changes that decision.

Threats can also interfere with an **Objective**. Repairing a gate completes Steps; holding off its attackers applies BP. Keep those tracks separate, and establish what each action will accomplish before rolling.

Run the encounter

Show the danger and ask what the characters do. Establish intent, Difficulty, and stakes before Resolve is spent. Clarify whether the action advances an Objective, pressures a Threat, or changes circumstances. Keep Steps and BP separate; do not automatically award both.

Follow Threat agendas and share focus. When a Moment turns, refresh Resolve and update pressure using the scene rules. Honor counterplay: disarming a guard stops their shooting; severing a reinforcement route stops arrivals.

Mixing Hazards, Traps and Threats

When dealing with hazards, build Objectives around the chosen task. Stopping a flooding chamber might require reaching a valve, freeing its spindle, and closing the intake. Each Step changes the situation. If another approach solves the problem immediately, let it work.

Use threats as a separate layer of opposition: repairing the valve completes Steps; overcoming its guardian adds BP**.** Having multiple dangers to deal with simultaneously is a great way to tension and drama to a scene. Do the characters focus on disarming the poison gas filling the room or do they deal with the Ghuls awakening out of their the burial shelves?

32. Running Social Scenes

A social scene where the players want something, an NPC has it, and they roll until they get it is a transaction, not an interaction. It treats NPCs as vending machines with faces. A real social scene is a situation already in motion: the council votes at sunset, the magistrate is being leaned on by someone with more influence than the characters, or the cult leader has already decided the heretic's fate but might change it for something more valuable.

The stated position is never the whole truth. Give every significant NPC something they are protecting that has nothing to do with what they claim to want.

Know where authority is strong. All authority is performance: it exists because people believe in it. A judge's power is real in court and fragile in a back alley. Know where the authority in the scene holds, where it is hollow, and what defying it openly would cost.

Give each NPC a social weapon. A guild master's is economic exclusion, a guard captain's is legal authority, and a cult leader's is the conviction of the faithful. When characters treat these people as if they don't matter, the weapon comes out. That isn't punishment. It's the world behaving like a world.

Give the scene gravity. If the characters stay silent, something should resolve without them, and not in their favor. They should feel the pull of the scene even while winning.

Shapes of Authority

Authority	In the room	Cost of defiance	When it falters
Legal	Procedure, witnesses, and records. Everything is formal.	You become the problem: a criminal, a threat, a terror.	Officials look to each other. Procedure is invoked to stall.
Military	Hierarchy and consequence. Orders exist, and so do examples.	Swift, public, and meant to be remembered.	Commands are relayed slowly. Eyes check the exits.
Religious	Ritual, symbol, and the weight of something larger.	Exile, shame, and the suggestion of divine disfavor.	The faithful ask questions. The symbols are handled carefully.
Criminal	Reputation and the memory of what happened last time.	You become a demonstration for someone else's benefit.	Lieutenants start making eye contact with each other.
Economic	Access, dependency, and the quiet threat of exclusion.	Doors close, work dries up, and debts are called in.	Favors stop being returned. Allies hedge their bets.
Social	Reputation, lineage, and the opinion of the room.	Whispers, exclusion, and the slow erasure of standing.	The room stops laughing at their jokes.
Factional	Numbers, loyalty, and the promise of mutual protection.	The faction notices. You are now a shared problem.	Members arrive late. Consensus fractures in public.
Arcane	Something older and stranger than reason.	You have offended something mad with power.	The signs stop coming. There is silence where there was signal.

Learning what someone fears, owes, or protects can give the characters Leverage before the scene begins, and a revelation mid-scene can change a target's Stance. Preparation should pay off.

33. Costs and Consequences

A Compromise gives the character what they wanted at a price. A Loss denies it and makes things worse. When a procedure leaves the price open, use this section to find one quickly. Where an outcome table states a result, use that result. State the kind of risk before Resolve is spent. The exact cost can wait for the roll.

What a Cost Can Change

Every cost changes one of six things. Choose the one that matters most right now.

Cost	Compromise: you get it, but…	Loss: you don't, and…
Position	You arrive Flanked, cut off from an ally, or somewhere harder to leave.	You are driven back, the exit closes, or you end up Surrounded.
Time	Another danger moves first, or someone gets there ahead of you.	The window closes, or the next stage of the Spiral arrives with something added.
Resources	A tool is used up, an item is left behind, or a Defense loses a Tier.	What you relied on is lost, broken, or in someone else's hands.
Relationships	You got what you wanted, and someone saw how you did it.	An ally withdraws support, or a contact now answers to your enemy.
Safety	You are seen, recognized, or followed.	A friend or bystander is now in danger because of you.
Choices	You can keep this or that, but not both.	An approach closes for the rest of the scene.

Let the Approach Suggest the Cost

The Path tells you how an attempt tends to go wrong.

Path	Usual cost	Examples
Heart	Collateral	Something breaks, someone is hurt, or you have made a scene.
Shadow	Exposure	You are noticed, the lie grows, or someone now has something on you.
Crown	Time and certainty	You were right about the wrong thing, the plan has a hole, or it took too long.

Path values and Scars are also good sources. A cost that lands on what a character cherishes, craves, or believes means more than a generic one.

Offer a Choice

When two costs fit, name them and let the player choose: "You're through the gate. Either the guard saw your face, or you left your pack behind. Which?" The choice says something about the character, and the Narrator doesn't have to decide alone.

Defense Complications

A defensive Save that ends in a Compromise or Loss carries a defense complication. Use the Defense that applied.

Defense	Compromise	Loss
Armor	A strap gives or a plate shifts. You are Staggered.	The Armor loses 1 Tier until repaired.
Garment	It tears or snags. You are Exposed.	The Garment loses 1 Tier until repaired or replaced.
Talisman	Its significance wavers. You are Vexed.	The Talisman loses 1 Tier until restored.

If no Defense applied, use a condition that fits the danger, such as Poisoned from a poison or Prone from a blow that knocks you down.

Keep Costs Honest

Don't take it back. A Compromise still achieves what it promised. A cost that cancels the result is a Loss.

Don't default to Harm. Harm is one option. Use it when the stated danger can actually cause it.

Don't repeat yourself. Find a new cost rather than charging the same one twice in a scene.

Resolve each consequence once. A Compromise doesn't also trigger an Exchange, and a Loss that triggers an Exchange needs no second cost on top (unless it is magical backlash).

A Loss is not Ruin. Ruin has to be put at stake before the roll.

34. Narrating Magic

Magic is no longer constrained by the fiat and authority of the gods. It is a tool that was never fit for a mortal grip. It favors the broken, coils around absence, and carves itself into anyone foolish enough to try to tame it. The wisest weavers know they don't control magic. They survive its attention. Run it so it feels precise in intent, dangerous in use, and visible in its aftermath.

Adjusting a Weave's Difficulty

Set the base Difficulty from what the magic acts on: a creature, object, barrier, place, condition, or environment. If several are involved, use the main obstacle. Judge impact, not spectacle. A dramatic effect may be easy, and a subtle one may demand great force. Then move the Difficulty one rung up or down for each strong factor below. Factors on opposite sides cancel.

Raises Difficulty	Lowers Difficulty
Resistance: armor, wards, countermagic, or concealment.	Preparation: meaningful setup, a rehearsed method, or rare components in place.
Stress: the weaver is injured, restrained, rushed, or under attack.	A sympathetic link: a true name, blood, a vow, or a relic.
Position: long range, an obstructed line, or unpredictable movement.	A favorable site: a shrine, a nexus, or a place aligned with the Tradition.
An unstable environment: wild energy, violent weather, or collapsing ground.	Help: allies contributing specific actions in the fiction.
Strain: the effect stretches the Tradition beyond its usual domain.	A vulnerable target: one already restrained, weakened, distracted, or exposed.

Working with Players

Press on vagueness. When a description is thin, don't reject it and don't write it for them. Ask until the player can see it. Pull on one thread at a time: What does it look like? Where does it come from? What does it cost you to do it this way? What do the people nearby notice?

> ***Player:*** *"I freeze them."*
> ***Narrator:*** *"Freeze them how? Is it cold, or something else?"*
> ***Player:*** *"Fear. I make them remember the night the temple fell."*
> ***Narrator****: "What do they see?"*
> ***Player:*** *"Their own names, carved on the graves."*

Now you have something to work with. The answers tell you the Path, whether the Tradition can reach it, how many Steps it takes, and what shape the magic will take if it slips.

Let them cheat. Magic is how players bend the world's rules, skip the gate, silence the guard, and turn the battlefield before it begins. Reward clever, audacious workings, and make them dangerous. The more a working cuts corners, the more it strains meaning, draws attention, and risks slipping. Players should feel brilliant in the moment and uneasy right after, because the world remembers what was forced.

Reward texture. When a player names a gesture, tool, memory, phrase, Scar, fear, or belief, let it shape the Path, how the Tradition applies, any benefit agreed before the roll, and how the magic slips or lashes back. Specific magic is easier to judge, easier to escalate, and more satisfying to watch.

The Cost of Magic

Backlash follows meaning. When a weaver falters, the magic should fail in the shape it was cast. Magic drawn from breath falters in breath. Magic drawn from blood demands blood. Magic drawn from names twists meaning, and magic drawn from force breaks something. The more specific the working, the more natural its consequence.

Magic's own costs. Alongside the costs in Chapter 20 of the SRD, failed or compromised magic can cause Distortion, where the effect works crookedly, partially, excessively, or on the wrong target; Contamination, where the magic lingers, stains the site, marks the target, or turns unstable; or Reversal, where the working turns back on the weaver, their conduit, or the setup. Choose the one that makes the scene more alive, not just more punishing.

Ritual Requirements and Scale

Requirements are the price of permanence: concrete sacrifices that can't be bought, only pursued through play. They include offerings, rare ingredients, significant sites, needed participants, omens, and ritual foci. The Narrator sets them from the ritual's intent, and the characters pursue them before performing the rite.

Scale sets how much the world demands before a rite can begin. Set the rite's Steps from the SRD's Magical Steps table as usual. A rite can always be attempted at a smaller scale for a smaller, shorter, or more local effect.

Scale	Typical demands
Scene	A short rite between dangers, with a simple tool and a personal token.
Downtime	Rare ingredients, special setup, or unusual conditions.
Story	A safe place and specific needs: a named site, relic, person, omen, or vow.
Questline	Several stages involving travel, negotiation, and risk, with requirements that depend on each other.
Saga	Legendary items, major sacrifices, and world-changing events.

When a rite falters, let the consequence follow its method and requirements: a component spoils or breaks, a condition is no longer met, the site is disturbed or profaned, an unwanted presence notices, the effect appears partially or in the wrong place, the participants suffer harm or an omen, or the rite demands a further sacrifice before it can continue. A rite that ends in Ruin should leave a lasting mark, such as a cursed site, ancestral anger, political fallout, or a new Shimmer.

35. Understanding the Mythic Punk

Mythic Punk as a Genre

You won't find mythic punk on any list of fantasy genres. We made it up when nothing else fit the stories we wanted to tell.

Most fantasy is homesick for inherited tropes. A suspicious nostalgia for rightful kings, orderly magic, tidy pantheons, and monsters that are evil by birth. We wanted evoke something deeper. Something that draws its wonder and texture on the long and uneven end of ancient world, but also refused to worship it. That saw the grand at the ground level.

What makes it 'mythic' is the weight the placed on stories. Folklore, myth, magic, superstition, and faith grown together like old trees sharing the same root…meaning. Meaning makes it so that a name or a vow can wield more power than an army. That tales can carry so much weight that they literally come to life, stalking the wilderness and the alleyways.

We also wanted a seemingly endless history where colossal cities sit upon the ruined advances of long-forgotten empires. Where the deeper you delve, the older and stranger things get, and yet you are reminded that *people* left it behind. Those civilization fell slowly, and messily, so a kingdom in its dotage may trade with a republic in its first flush. There are things waiting to be uncovered in those depths. Mysteries that with minds of their own.

Myth also grants us heroes in the oldest sense of the word. People defined not by the good deeds, but by the impossible ones, that generated stories. Stories that would be told and retold and adapted for countless generations. We wanted to step away from traditional rewards of gold and power fantasies, so that being the hero of a story like that was the best possible reward. So much so that whoever comes after is raised from birth to live up to it.

What makes it punk is that all of this grandeur is pulled into the muck. It is high-magic, low life: miracles are haggled over, wonders get gossiped about, the sublime gets stripped for parts, and the parts get fused into things nobody has seen before. Every port speaks six languages, none of them the proper one, and the people in it come in every kind of being, thought, and form. The world is soaked in magic, but it still hasn't fed anyone. And the creature at the bottom of the well may have a better claim than the magistrate who ordered it killed.

The tone is frenetic and colorful, the aesthetic textured and layered, and the enemy whoever happens to be in charge. Power changes hands as often as coins do, which makes a good story about you more useful than a title. Every oppressor is begging to be taken down, and dying in a blaze of glory while you try is as good an end as anyone gets. Victory can be just as harmful, a path to becoming the next oppressor.

Key Concepts

Post-humanism. All of the people of the Eschaton are the gods' unfinished work. Centuries of Shimmer exposure, ancestral bargains, harsh lands, and deliberate transformation have produced people of wildly varied form: tusks, stone-dense skin, fungal growths behind the ear, chromatic eyes, antler nubs, scales along the jaw. None of this is remarkable to the people who live here. When you describe someone, give them one specific detail that says where they came from or what they survived: a ferryman whose hands are calloused like bark, or a guard whose tusks have been filed down.

Dreams and prophecy. Dreams carry knowledge the world has no other way to send. Old places dream through the people who sleep in them. With no gods to choose prophets, what remains is the pattern woven by every fate, and patterns repeat. When characters sleep somewhere with history, offer an image or a fragment rather than exposition: a name spoken in no one's voice, a door opening onto a landscape that doesn't exist yet.

The Futility of Empire. No empires remain, only provisional orders pretending to matter: guilds, warbands, pilgrim cities, memory cults, crawling capitals that roll over their own ruins. Each believes it is the center of what's left, and each is wrong. Authority exists because people act as though it does, so show the seams: a decree that goes ignored, a guard who checks which way the wind blows before enforcing anything. When characters challenge authority directly, let them feel how hollow it is, and how violently hollow things defend themselves.

Death as a comma. The dead don't always finish dying. More of them hunger for recognition than for flesh, and a ghost no one remembers will find a way to be known. Run the dead as unfinished stories: ask what they are still trying to resolve, not what they want to eat. The best encounters let characters discover the answer before the danger, or realize that the answer is the danger.

Cults, cults, everywhere. Millennia later, the Godfall still spawns cults. Some mourn, some rebuild, some demand revenge, and some pray until something answers. They speak in fractured liturgies, scavenge relics, and give names to things that should not have them. Cults are not villains by default. They are people filling a hole the size of a god with whatever they could find. Run them as communities, with sincere believers beside cynical operators and something real at the center, distorted by time or desperation. The most unsettling cult is the one where the characters can see exactly how someone ended up there.

36. Bringing the Eschaton to Life

The world is old. The Eschaton has ended before, and its impossible things are not new. Divine structures so vast they read as geography have stood for millennia. A market runs beside a colossus that hasn't moved in three hundred years, and nobody mentions it. Describe the strange the way a local would, without dramatic emphasis. A forty-meter door is not remarkable. The small worn path at its base, where pilgrims have walked for generations, is.

Start small. The world doesn't need to announce itself. Begin with a market, a shrine, or a single ruined street, place one impossible detail, and let the players poke it. Up close, describe with material weight: cloth reads as culture, hands and skin tell a story, and objects have been owned.

Stay in the present. Describe what people are doing right now, not history lessons and ancient names. Bargains are shouted, someone makes a spirit offering before opening their shop, and a guard touches a stone charm before opening the gate.

Let belief do the work. The gods died, but belief didn't. Rather than saying a bridge is dangerous, say that no one crosses it after dark because the river takes its own toll. A place is sacred when everyone lowers their voice without being told. Beliefs are practical, because the old wisdom is right more often than not.

Everything has been owned. A knife has had three handles. A bowl has a crack filled with bronze. A shrine has been repaired so often that the original stone is barely visible under the accumulated devotion. Let age, use, and repair show.

Keep the world alive. Armies move, creatures migrate, cities sink, and rituals complete. When the characters return somewhere, change something true: new banners, different prices, a ghost promoted to clerk. Things were already happening, and the characters interrupted them for a while.

Treat factions like weather. Factions drift, collide, and recede whether or not the characters are watching. Show their movement: new graffiti, a closed road, a stall selling someone else's flag. Let the characters redirect the storm, but never quite stop it. A faction defeated three sessions ago still casts a shadow, even if only as a vacuum that something else is filling.

Calibrate wonder and threat. Every marvel has a cost, and every danger holds a gift. The creature that could kill them might be the only one who knows the answer they need. When you place something wondrous, place what it costs. When you place something dangerous, place what it offers.

Power always leaves a trace. When magic or a relic appears, show what it changes: the air thickens, people step back, metal or ozone lingers, animals refuse to approach. If power solves a problem, it should also complicate the world a little.

Part V: Reference

Appending A: Examples of Play

Combat Example: The Temple Breach

Olli, a veteran of the Ember Line, enters a cracked stone chamber lit by guttering braziers. A pair of Maw Ghuls stalk the floor. Their claws drip black ichor, and their eyes shine like coins in the dark. She lowers her yew spear. The Ghuls rush her.

This example shows a sweeping attack against two Threats, a Compromise cost, an Advance and a defensive Save, Defense Tier, conditions, Weapon Mastery, and the Spiral.

Hero	Heart	Shadow	Crown	In this scene
Olli	d8	d6	d4	Weapon Mastery Mark (spear). Warrior Trade (Rank 1). Yew spear, Tier 1. Battle harness (Armor), Tier 1.

Maw Ghul	A decayed grave-predator on brittle limbs, jaw split too wide, teeth packed deep into black gums.
Role	Agent · Diff 6 · Limit 3 · Harm 3
Signal	Gnawed bones in the dust; a smell of old funerals; scratching inside the walls.
Loadout	Cracked claws, broken teeth, black saliva, stolen scraps caught in its ribs.
Agenda	Feed on living warmth before its body finishes falling apart.
Behavior	Rushes wounded or isolated prey, drops to all fours when pressed, and recoils from fire, salt, and funeral rites.
Corpse Feeders	Its Difficulty rises by 2 while it is near a fresh corpse or an Incapacitated creature.
Advance	**Ravenous Maw.** Lunges for the throat. Compromise: the target is Poisoned. Loss: the target is Poisoned and takes +1 Harm.
Exchange	**Hooked Claws.** Deal Harm and leave the target Staggered. If the target is already Staggered, they are Held instead.
Fallout	A Ghul that feeds and escapes leaves a wound that won't heal cleanly. Untreated, the victim sickens by the next new moon.

Moment One

Olli plants her feet and swings a wide, brutal arc, a long curving sweep meant to catch both Ghuls at once.

> **Multiple targets.** The Narrator sets the terms before any Resolve is spent. The Ghuls are Difficulty 6. They are two separate Agents rather than one Throng, so attacking both raises the Difficulty by 2, to 8. One roll decides both, and each Ghul takes the same BP. A sweep also risks overextending: on a Compromise or Loss, Olli will be Exposed.

Olli spends 2 Resolve and holds 1 back, in case she needs to move, defend herself, or press the attack.

> **Weapon Tier, not Trade.** Her Warrior Trade doesn't add to attacks. Her spear's Tier does. She rolls 2d8 and gets 4 and 1, for 5, plus 1 for Tier. Her total is 6.

The spear point checks both Ghuls and forces them back for half a breath. Then one of them gets inside the haft. Olli has overextended.

> **Compromise.** Six against 8 is a Compromise. Each Ghul takes 1 BP and now has 1 of 3. The cost is the one stated before the roll: Olli is Exposed, so she can't use her Defenses until she spends Resolve to recover. A Compromise doesn't also trigger an Exchange. Her Weapon Mastery adds BP only on a Victory or Breakthrough, so it doesn't help here.

Ghul B drops to all fours and circles to her left. Its jaw unhinges. The Narrator says it plainly: "It's going to lunge for your throat."

> **Signaling an Advance.** The Ghul has an opening, so it can Advance. The Narrator shows it coming and gives Olli a chance to respond. Ghul A doesn't act. Not every Threat acts every time.

Olli drags the spear haft back into line and sets her shoulders into the harness. That costs her last Resolve.

> **Recovering.** Spending 1 Resolve to reposition clears Exposed, so her Armor will count when the bite lands.

The Ghul lunges. Olli drives the haft across her body and braces hard as its teeth come for her throat.

> **A defensive Save.** With a Ghul on each side, Olli is Flanked, so the Save's Difficulty is the Ghul's 6 plus 2, for 8. The Save gives her one free Heart die, and she has no Resolve left to add more. She rolls a 6. That's a Compromise.

The bite misses the artery by luck or instinct. It tears into the side of her neck instead, and a strap of the harness gives way under the weight. Blood runs hot across her collarbone.

> **Defense Tier and complications.** On a Compromise, her Armor reduces the Harm by its Tier. The Ghul's 3 Harm becomes 2, and Olli marks 2 of 4 boxes on her Heart track. The bite's Compromise makes her Poisoned, which puts her Heart rolls at Disadvantage. Her Armor's defense complication leaves her Staggered, so her attacks are at Disadvantage until she spends 1 Resolve to recover her footing.

The Moment turns. Olli's Resolve refreshes to 3.

The Spiral: Signal

Somewhere behind the plaster, something scratches. Then something else answers it.

Moment Two

Olli is Poisoned and Staggered, and she can't afford both. She spends 1 Resolve to find her footing and plant her stance again.

> **Clearing a condition.** Staggered ends when she spends 1 Resolve. Poisoned only affects Heart, so Olli changes her approach rather than fighting through it.

She feints low at Ghul A, drops the spear point under its guard, and drives it up through the gap in its ribs.

> **Changing the Path.** A feint is Shadow, so Poisoned doesn't apply. Ghul A is Difficulty 6, and being Flanked still raises it to 8. She spends her last 2 Resolve and rolls 2d6: 5 and 3, for 8, plus 1 for Tier, for 9. That's a Victory.

The spear punches through brittle bone and pins the Ghul to the flagstones. It shudders once and comes apart in a gust of grave dust.

> **Weapon Mastery and Fallout.** A Victory adds 1 BP, and Olli's Weapon Mastery with the spear adds 1 more on a Victory or Breakthrough. Ghul A reaches 3 of 3 and breaks. Without Weapon Mastery, it would still be standing at 2 of 3. It never fed, so its Fallout doesn't apply. With only one Ghul left beside her, Olli is no longer Flanked.

Ghul B doesn't charge. It crouches over its packmate's remains, sniffing, and its coin-bright eyes stay fixed on her.

> **Traits change the fight.** Corpse Feeders now raises Ghul B's Difficulty to 8 while it stays near the fresh remains. Olli has to choose between pressing the attack at a harder Difficulty and pulling it away first.

The Moment turns. Olli's Resolve refreshes to 3.

The Spiral: Shift

The scratching stops. The plaster bulges, cracks, and bursts, and two more Maw Ghuls drop into the chamber, between Olli and the door.

Olli is wounded, Poisoned, and alone. The next choices matter.

> **What the Spiral did.** The Signal warned that more Ghuls were in the walls. The Shift changed the terms of the scene: the way out is now blocked. If the fight is still unresolved at the end of the next Moment, the Spiral reaches its Toll, and something important is lost.

Scene Example: Climbing the Fallen Titan

The skeleton of a dead titan rises from the cliffside. Wind moans through the chambers of its vast chest, and craggy rock juts from the valley floor beneath it in broken steps. Somewhere above, a high ledge looks out over the valley where the Hollow March is moving.

Bohei needs to see where they are going.

This example shows an Objective worked across a whole scene, an action that doesn't advance the Objective, the all-ones rule, Disadvantage, and the Spiral ending on the characters' terms.

Hero	Heart	Shadow	Crown	In this scene
Bohei	d6	d8	d4	Delver Trade (Rank 1). Acrobatic Mark.

> **The Objective.** Reaching the summit and surveying the valley is an Objective of 5 Steps, an extensive climb through dangerous terrain. Every roll that adds a Step moves Bohei closer. The Narrator sets each roll's Difficulty from the stretch he is attempting.

Moment One: The Lower Ribs

The crag is rough and jagged, the kind of surface that punishes. Bohei doesn't hesitate. He commits to the climb: fast, direct, impulsive.

> **A Mark's benefit.** Moving without caution or subtlety calls for Heart, at Difficulty 5. Acrobatic gives Bohei permission for exceptional movement, and the Narrator agrees before the roll that it adds one die. He spends 2 Resolve and rolls 3d6: 4, 5, and 2. His total is 11.
>
> **Breakthrough.** Eleven is at least Difficulty plus 5, so it's a Breakthrough. The climb can plausibly cover two stretches, so the Narrator completes 2 Steps. Steps: 2 of 5.

He crests the crag and pulls himself onto the first rib. The ribcage opens ahead of him. Its interior gives off its own pale light, from a dense growth of ropy fungal strands and nodules. It almost breathes, slowly and wetly.

Above him the bleached outer bone is in plain view of the valley. Wanting to keep his recon hidden, Bohei stops to camouflage himself.

> **An action outside the Objective.** Hiding doesn't bring Bohei closer to the summit, so it adds no Step. The Narrator states it as Shadow at Difficulty 5. On a Victory, nothing in the valley picks him out against the bone. On a Loss, a lookout spots a figure on the titan. He spends 1 Resolve and rolls a 7. Victory.

Bohei presses damp shale into his gear and breaks up his silhouette against the ivory. It is fast, quiet work.

The Moment turns. Bohei's Resolve refreshes to 3.

The Spiral: Signal

Inside the ribcage, the fungal growth's slow breathing stops all at once.

Moment Two: The Ribs

The outer face of the ribs is the long way round, bone bleached and wind-scoured, with the valley visible in both directions. The inner path through the growth would be faster and hidden. Bohei doesn't want to go inside, but he doesn't want to lose time either. He rushes across the outer face.

> **All ones.** Speed and directness call for Heart at Difficulty 8. Bohei spends 2 Resolve and rolls 2d6: 1 and 1. When every die kept on a roll shows a 1, the result is a Loss, whatever the Difficulty or bonuses.

The outer face crumbles under him. Bohei falls through the ribs into the growth below, and spores pack into the scrapes on his hands.

> **Loss on an Objective.** A Loss completes no Step, and the situation gets worse. The Narrator doesn't reach for Harm. The spores leave Bohei Poisoned, so his Heart rolls are at Disadvantage until he purges them.

Bohei catches a fungal strand and swings hard into the inner wall. He spends his last Resolve hauling himself across the cavity to a ledge of vertebra.

> **Movement.** Crossing the cavity is a Stride: 1 Resolve, no roll.

The Moment turns. Bohei's Resolve refreshes to 3.

The Spiral: Shift

In the deep growth below, a long shape moves the way a thought moves through a mind. It isn't swimming through the fungus. It is part of it. Something Bohei didn't account for has entered the scene, and it is rising toward him.

Moment Three: The Spine and the Worm

Bohei stops and reads the space, looking for a way out of the structure beneath the growth.

> **Exploding dice and a Trade.** Reading the titan's structure is Crown at Difficulty 8. His Delver Trade applies, because he knows ruins and structural hazards, so he adds 1. He spends 1 Resolve and rolls 1d4: a 4, which explodes into another 4, which explodes into a 2. That's 10, plus 1, for 11. Victory. Steps: 3 of 5.

He sees where the spinal column rises through the growth into open air, its vertebrae distinct as the rungs of a ladder. He also sees the shape below, closing in.

Bohei leaps across the open cavity toward the spine.

> **A Mark and Disadvantage.** The jump is Heart at Difficulty 8. Acrobatic adds one die, but Poisoned puts Heart at Disadvantage: roll one extra die and drop the highest. He spends 1 Resolve and rolls 3d6: 3, 4, and 5. He drops the 5, for a total of 7. That's a Compromise.

Bohei clears the gap, fingers finding the grooves between the vertebrae. A radial maw closes on the air just beneath his feet: a Hellminth, an eldritch tapeworm that feeds on divine remains. It takes his pack, strap and all.

> **Compromise on an Objective.** A Compromise completes the Step at a cost. Steps: 4 of 5. The cost lands on Bohei's resources: his rope and rations are gone.

Wanting no further pursuit, Bohei slips behind the nape and climbs the last stretch in silence.

> **Finishing the Objective.** Climbing quietly is Shadow at Difficulty 5. He spends his last Resolve and rolls a 6. Victory. Steps: 5 of 5, and the goal is achieved.

Bohei reaches the skull's peak and goes flat. Below, black-cloaked figures drag a bound shape through something that is half door and half wound, opening from a petrified willow in the swamp. It closes behind them.

The lair is found. The information is in hand. The way down is the next problem.

> **Ending on his terms.** Bohei finished the Objective before the end of the third Moment, so the Spiral never reached its Toll. A quick resolution brings a Reckoning on the characters' terms. Here, it's the knowledge of where the March has gone.

Magic Example: The Drum and the Nightmare

A column of the Hollow March moves through the ravine below: twelve cultists in black wrappings, dragging a bound figure toward a ward stretched around a dead tree. Meda unslings her drum. She has an idea. The rest of the party is on the ridge above.

This example shows a Weave built over several Steps, a conduit granting Edge, sustaining an effect, a Throng that reinforces, and Backlash.

Hero	Heart	Shadow	Crown	In this scene
Meda	d4	d6	d8	Weaver Mark (Witchcraft Tradition). Troubadour Trade (Rank 1). Resonant drum (conduit). Performer's wraps (Garment), Tier 1.

Cultists	Bare feet, painted mouths, knives hidden beneath prayer cloth.
Role	Throng · Diff 4 · Limit 6 · Harm 1
Exchange	Drag, claw, and stab from every side: 1 Harm and Held.
Reinforcement	Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while their icon, altar, or chosen speaker remains intact. Here, the icon is the ward around the dead tree.

Moment One: The First Beat

Meda wants to flood the procession with a waking nightmare: their unseen patron, manifesting before them, wrong and hungry, turning on its own flock.

> **Source, method, and vessel.** This is a Weave through Witchcraft, which needs a prepared vessel connected to its subject. Meda's is a charm knotted from prayer cords she cut from the March in an earlier fight, tied beneath her drumskin. Her method is the drumbeat and her voice.
>
> **Steps and Difficulty.** A nightmare with a developed shape is 3 Steps. The Narrator sets the Difficulty at 8, because the targets are devout believers in the middle of a rite. Preparing the working adds no BP to the cultists. That happens only when the magic is used against them.

Meda strikes the drum once. A low tone rolls down the ravine, too deep for the instrument that made it. She begins to sing, not words but pressure: behind the eyes, heat in the teeth. The cord beneath the drumskin tightens until it cuts into the wood.

> **Edge from a conduit.** Building the illusion from the cultists' own fears is subversive, so it's Shadow. A resonant instrument grants Edge while she maintains rhythm, and her Troubadour Trade applies to a performance that moves a crowd. She spends 2 Resolve and rolls 2d6: a 2, and a 6 that explodes into a 3. She uses Edge to reroll the 2 and gets a 5. That's 14, plus 1, for 15. Breakthrough: 2 Steps. Weave Steps: 2 of 3.

A figure appears above the procession, vast and flickering, built from the cultists' own belief. Too many hands. A face that keeps almost resolving. Several cultists stumble into each other in awe.

At the treeline, three cultists hear the drum. They turn toward the ridge and begin to climb.

> **Signaling an Advance.** The climbers are the Narrator showing the next danger before it arrives.

The Moment turns. Meda's Resolve refreshes to 3. The ward on the dead tree still stands, so the March reinforces: the Narrator rolls 1d4 and gets 2, raising the Throng's Limit to 8.

Moment Two: The Vision Deepens

Meda pushes harder, feeding the nightmare careful detail: the smell of copper, the angle of a descending hand, the sound of something sacred tearing open.

> **The final Step.** The added precision makes this a good use of Crown. She spends 2 Resolve and rolls 2d8: 4 and 5. That's 9, plus 1 for her Trade, for 10. Victory. Weave Steps: 3 of 3, and the effect takes hold.

Her nightmare turns its gaze downward. The hangers-on break and scatter, clawing at their hoods and screaming. The true believers drop to their knees and keep chanting.

> **Sustaining the effect.** The Narrator rules that holding the nightmare in the world costs 1 Resolve each Moment and an unbroken rhythm. Meda spends her last Resolve to keep it. The Throng is still at 0 of 8 BP: the nightmare exists, but she hasn't turned it on them yet.

The three climbers come over the lip of the ridge, knives out, eyes wide with fervor. They close in from both sides and stab at her.

> **An Advance and a Save.** The Cultists are Difficulty 4, and Meda is Flanked, so her Save is at Difficulty 6. She twists away using Shadow, with one free die and no Resolve to add. She rolls a 2. That's a Loss.
>
> **Harm and a defense complication.** On a Loss, she takes the full Harm: 1, marked on Shadow, the Path she used. Her Garment's defense complication is a Loss, so her performer's wraps are cut and lose 1 Tier until they're repaired.

Meda holds the beat despite the blade in her side. The charm beneath the drumskin pulls tight enough to split. Across the slope, she can see her companions rushing down toward the ravine.

She can drop the Weave, free all her Resolve, and fight. The nightmare collapses, the believers recover, and her friends arrive to a fight. Or she can hold the rhythm, keep the Throng pinned, and face whatever comes next with only 2 Resolve, hoping her friends reach her in time.

Moment Three: The Broken Note

The Moment turns. Meda keeps the Weave, so 1 of her 3 Resolve goes to sustaining it. She has 2 left. The cultists close around her, and one of them reaches for the drum.

Meda tries to release the half-formed nightmare in one sharp burst, to drive the cultists back long enough to escape.

> **Using magic against a Threat.** Releasing the nightmare at the cultists is an attack, so it uses the attack outcomes. Meda is now Surrounded, which raises the Difficulty from 4 to 6 and adds 2 to any Harm she takes. Unleashing the whole working at once, wounded and rushed, raises it to 8. Her drum is a Tier 0 conduit, so it adds nothing to the total.
>
> **Loss.** She spends her last 2 Resolve and rolls Crown, 2d8: 2 and 1, for 3. That's a Loss.

The charm snaps wrong. The nightmare doesn't strike the cultists. It turns inward. Meda sees the bound figure's face as her own, hears her own voice begging from beneath the drumskin, and loses the rhythm.

> **Backlash.** A failed Weave causes Backlash: by default, Harm equal to the Resolve spent, marked on the Path used. Meda spent 2, so she marks 2 Harm on Crown.

While she reels, the cultists pile onto her from every side, dragging at her arms and stabbing at whatever they can reach.

> **An Exchange as well.** Because the failed magic was an attack on a Threat, the Loss also triggers the Throng's Exchange: 1 Harm and Held. Being Surrounded adds 2 to incoming Harm, so the Exchange deals 3 Harm, also marked on Crown, the Path she used. She has no Talisman to reduce it.
>
> **Injury.** Meda's Crown track holds 4 boxes at d8. Backlash and the Exchange together deal 5 Harm, so the track fills and she suffers an Injury. Crown drops to d6, the track clears, and the remaining 1 Harm carries onto the new 3-box track.

The cultists see the change in the magic. They've pieced together the relationship between the music and the nightmare, and they know the drum is the anchor.

> **Changing the scene.** The Narrator also changes the scene, as Chapter 20 suggests. Protecting the drum is now the most urgent problem.

Meda hasn't completed what she meant to do. She is pinned under the cultists, her Crown is injured, and the scene has turned against her. Her friends are still on the slope.

Social Example: The Bridge

A column of the Hollow March is closing fast. Bohei is somewhere behind them, covering their tracks and buying time. Meda is with him. Olli breaks through the treeline ahead of the others and finds the gorge.

One bridge. One way across. Sitting in the middle of it, not under it, is a troll about nine feet tall, pocked with moss, wearing a hat made from river reeds. Behind him, a threadbare red carpet has been draped across the stones, stained with mud and troll footprints. A hand-painted sign reads: FAMOUS PERSONS ONLY. ALL OTHERS SWIM.

His name is Groth. He doesn't want coin, or blood, necessarily. He wants to be convinced that the people crossing his bridge are worth knowing. If they aren't, the bridge is closed.

This example shows Stance and Limit, Leverage, social Harm, a Mark that doesn't apply, and a concession that settles the scene without a roll.

Hero	Heart	Shadow	Crown	In this scene
Olli	d8	d6	d4	Authority Mark: Commander of the Thornwall Vanguard.
Meda	d4	d6	d8	Bardic Gift Mark. Troubadour Trade (Rank 1).

> **Setting up the conflict.** Groth uses the Bridge Troll Threat entry: Difficulty 8, Harm 3. In a social conflict, his Stance sets his Limit. He isn't hostile, just skeptical and looking for reasons to refuse, so his Stance is Wary, with a Limit of 3. His social weapon is dismissal: he simply decides people aren't worth his time.

Moment One: The Claim

Olli straightens. She knows how to walk into a room with the bearing of someone who has held rank and bled for it. "I am Olivara of the Ember Line, Commander of the Thornwall Vanguard. You will let us pass."

> **A Mark that doesn't apply.** Olli wants to use her Authority Mark. Before she rolls, the Narrator points to Groth's Unaccountable Keeper trait: no badge or title commands his obedience. Her rank gives her no Leverage here, so her Leverage is 0. If she loses, he'll make her feel small, and that comes as Harm. She tries anyway, with Heart. She spends 1 Resolve and rolls a 3. That's a Loss.

Groth looks her up and down, slowly. He picks something out of his teeth. "Commander of what? I don't see no army. I see a sweaty person in dented armor that I can shred like paper."

> **Social Harm.** On a Loss, Olli applies no BP and suffers a fitting consequence. Being dismissed by someone she can't intimidate wears on her Heart: she takes Groth's 3 Harm and marks 3 of 4 boxes.

Olli swallows the sting and changes approach. She starts watching: the carpet, the sign, the way Groth adjusts his hat when she says "commander." She asks who else has crossed, and what makes someone worthy.

> **Compromise.** Reading him is Crown, still at Leverage 0. She spends her other 2 Resolve and rolls 2d4: 3 and 3, for 6. That's a Compromise: 1 BP, and Groth is at 1 of 3. The cost is handing over leverage. Groth now knows they're desperate and that something is chasing them.

"Nobody crosses! That's the point! If famous people came through here, I wouldn't need the sign, would I?" He catches himself, adjusts the hat, and smooths the carpet with one enormous foot.

> **Information becomes Leverage.** The Compromise also gives Olli what she needed. Groth isn't guarding a celebrity crossing. He's lonely. He wants recognition, not proof of it. Information uncovered in play can become Leverage on a later roll.

The Moment turns. Olli's Resolve refreshes to 3.

The Spiral: Signal

Far back in the hills, drums start up: the Hollow March, still coming.

Moment Two: The Lie

Olli shifts to flattery. It isn't her strength, but now she has a target. "Of course. I should have recognized you. Groth, keeper of the Gorge Bridge. They talk about you in the lowland villages. The troll who only lets the worthy pass."

> **Rating Leverage.** The lie touches what Groth wants, but nothing backs it up, and he has never heard of himself being famous. The Narrator rates it Plausible, Leverage 0. Olli spends all 3 Resolve on Shadow and rolls 3d6: 4, 5, and 3, for 12. Victory: Leverage plus 1, so 1 BP. Groth is at 2 of 3.

Groth's eyes widen. He leans forward. "They talk about me?" He puffs up, and the hat shifts at a dangerous angle. Then his eyes narrow. "Good that you've heard of me. But how does that make you important?"

He jabs one massive finger past Olli, toward the ridgeline. The cultists are visible against the sky, picking their way down the slope. "Those lot look like they're in a hurry. Maybe they're famous."

The Moment turns.

The Spiral: Shift

The March is no longer a sound in the hills. It's on the slope, in plain sight, and Groth has noticed. The terms of the scene have changed: if the cultists reach the bridge first, Groth might decide they're more interesting.

Moment Three: The Song

Meda arrives at the bridge, breathless, with Bohei still somewhere in the trees. She takes one look at Groth, one look at Olli, and reads the situation.

"You're right. We're not famous. Not yet. But we're going to be. And when we are, we'll sing your song: how you keep the bridge, and only let the worthy through."

> **Personal Leverage and a Mark.** Meda's appeal goes straight at the need Olli uncovered, so the Narrator rates it Personal, Leverage 2. She uses her Bardic Gift, turning the promise into the opening bars of a melody, and the Narrator agrees before the roll that it grants Advantage. Her Troubadour Trade applies to a song, adding 1.
>
> **Breakthrough.** Meda spends all 3 Resolve on Shadow and rolls 4d6 with Advantage, dropping the lowest: a 6 that explodes into a 2, then 4, 3, and 1. She drops the 1, for 15, plus 1 for her Trade, for 16. Breakthrough: Leverage plus 2, so 4 BP. Groth's Limit is reached, and his Stance breaks.

Groth's mouth hangs open. He hums the melody back. It sounds terrible. "A song. About me. About the bridge." He steps aside. The carpet is all theirs.

> **The concession.** Reaching the Limit secures what the characters were seeking: passage. Under Unaccountable Keeper, once Groth explicitly grants passage, he honors it.

Bohei bursts from the treeline. "They're coming!" Olli turns back to Groth. She doesn't need to lie this time. "Those cultists behind us? They don't think you're famous. They don't think you're anything. They'll cross your bridge without a word and never look back."

> **No roll needed.** An offer that settles the matter needs no Test. Groth's agenda is to decide who crosses his bridge and make that decision stand, and Olli has just handed him a reason. The Narrator doesn't call for a roll.

Groth picks up a boulder the size of a horse. He is no longer smiling. As the party crosses the bridge and disappears into the grove on the far side, they hear screams, thumps, and splashes behind them.

Groth is belting out his song.

Example of Play: The House of Sweet Absolution

This example follows one scene from its opening to its reckoning: a negotiation that turns into a poisoning, a brawl, and an escape. It shows how the rules work together at the table. Like every worked example in this document, it illustrates procedures; its scene adds no mechanics.

Speakers are labeled by character, Dice results are given in parentheses.

The Scene

Three heroes have come to sell the last tooth of a dead god to Madame Ossuary, a relic broker who has no intention of paying for it. The scene's question is simple: **can they get paid and get out?** If nobody acts, Madame takes the tooth and her people deal with the sellers.

The Heroes

Hero	Heart	Shadow	Crown	In this scene
Hahn the Envoy	d8	d4	d6	Does the talking.
Key the Short	d6	d8	d4	Undercover in house livery, carrying a tray.
Capshaw the Cantor	d6	d6	d6	On stage, singing punk hymns to dead gods. From the Sprawls, with the **Hustler** Legacy.

The Opposition

Threat	Role	Diff	Limit	Harm	Job
Madame Ossuary	Adversary (Guild Boss)	10	Social: 3 (Wary)	2	Take the tooth without paying.
Her crew	Throng (Thugs)	4	5, plus Reinforcement	1	Surround the heroes and hold the exits.

Moment 1: The Deal

Narrator: The House of Sweet Absolution is built inside the ribcage of a dead celestial dragon. Caged willo'whisps lights the stage, where Capshaw is belting hymns to gods who can't hear them. Key drifts through the crowd with a tray, unrecognized. At the center table, Madame Ossuary pours two cups and slides one across. "To the tooth," she says.

Hahn: I drink. Then I tell her I want full price before the tooth leaves my hands.

Narrator: How are you getting it?

Hahn: I tell her the Ashen Synod has already made an offer, and she knows they can pay.

> **Intention and approach.** "Full price before it leaves my hands" is the intention. Invoking a rival buyer is the approach. The approach determines the Path.

Narrator: You're reasoning with her, so that's Crown. She's Wary, which makes her Limit 3. The Synod is a credible threat, so your Leverage is 1. Difficulty 10. On a Victory she starts to give ground. On a Loss she stops taking you seriously.

Hahn: I'll spend 2 Resolve and hold 1 back. (Two d6: 5 and 3.) That's 8.

Narrator: Eight against 10 is a Compromise. You apply 1 BP, but you hand over leverage. She won't believe it's real until she sees it, so the tooth goes on the table in front of her.

> **Social Conflict.** A Victory would have applied Leverage + 1, for 2 BP. A Compromise applies 1 BP and exposes the speaker. The Narrator stated the Difficulty and stakes before any Resolve was spent.

Key and Capshaw keep to their roles, and the Moment turns. Everyone's Resolve refreshes to 3, then the world presses back as the Spiral reaches its first stage.

The Spiral: Signal

Narrator: Hahn, your lips have gone numb. Behind you, someone drags a stool across the exit.

Moment 2: The Poison

Narrator: Madame hasn't touched her cup. "You drank the toast," she says. The poison is already moving. Make a Save, Difficulty 10.

Hahn: Heart, to fight it off. I get one die free, and I'll add 1 Resolve. (Two d8: 3 and 5.) That's 8.

Narrator: A Compromise. You have no Defense against this, so you take the full 2 Heart Harm, and you're Poisoned.

> **Saves and conditions.** Danger arrived before Hahn could act, so Hahn made a Save. Poisoned puts Heart rolls at Disadvantage until the poison is purged, so Hahn's strongest Path has just become unreliable.

Narrator: Madame unhooks a vial from her belt and hangs it on the great brass wheel turning behind Capshaw. "Leave without your money," she says, "and you can climb up and get it."

Key: I want this room fighting and nobody looking at me. I trip with a full tray, land in the biggest guy's lap, and point at the man next to him.

Narrator: That's Shadow, Difficulty 8. On a Loss, they see exactly who started it.

Key: Two Resolve. (Two d8: 6 and 5.) That's 11.

Narrator: Victory. The room goes up like lamp oil, and Madame's Thugs come off the walls. They're Difficulty 4, Limit 5, Harm 1. Reaching that vial is an Objective with 2 Steps.

> **Starting a fight.** The Narrator names the active Threats, their numbers, and any Objective that continues during the fight. Threats do not take turns or roll dice, and there is no initiative order. Focus moves to whatever matters next.

The Moment turns and Resolve refreshes.

The Spiral: Shift

Narrator: Runners are bringing friends in from the street. The Thugs' Limit goes up by 1d4. (The die shows 2.) Their Limit is now 7. And the wheel starts turning faster.

Moment 3: Three Fronts

Narrator: Key, the Thugs dogpile you. You're Surrounded, so your Difficulty and any incoming Harm go up by 2.

Key: I swing the tray at the closest one. Shadow, 1 Resolve. (One d8: 1.)

Narrator: The Difficulty was 6, so that's a Loss. Nobody rolls against you. The Thugs' Exchange lands for 3 Shadow Harm, their Harm of 1 plus 2 for being Surrounded, and the tray comes apart in your hands.

> **Advance and Exchange.** The Thugs' Advance changed Key's position. The Loss then triggered their Exchange, with no enemy roll and no defensive Save. Their Exchange would normally leave a character Flanked, but Key is already Surrounded. An improvised weapon breaks on a Compromise or Loss.

Capshaw: I stop the hymn dead and scream that Madame has locked us in here with poison. I want this crowd crushing those doors so the runners can't get back in.

Narrator: Commanding a room is Heart. Difficulty 8.

Capshaw: Two Resolve. (Two d6: 5 and 4.) That's 9.

Narrator: Victory. The doors jam solid with panicking patrons. No more reinforcements.

> **Counterplay.** The Thugs' Reinforcement lasts only while runners can reach them. Capshaw added no BP and did not need to. Cutting off the source ended the arrivals, and the Limit stays at 7.

Hahn: I'm shoving through to the stage. That's 1 Resolve for the Stride and 2 for dice, so I'm all in. Heart, with an extra die for the poison. (Three d8: 7, 4, and 2. Disadvantage drops the 7.) That's 6.

Narrator: Difficulty 8, so a Compromise. You complete 1 Step and reach the stage, but you knock over Madame's table on the way. A Thug scoops up the tooth.

> **Objectives.** A Compromise completes a Step at a cost. Hahn now has 0 Resolve, and it stays that way until the Moment turns.

The Moment turns and Resolve refreshes.

The Spiral: Toll

Narrator: That Thug is running for the side door with the tooth. By the end of this Moment, it's gone.

Moment 4: The Tooth or Hahn

Narrator: Hahn, taking the vial off a spinning wheel is your last Step. Heart is a bad bet right now.

Hahn: Then I don't force it. I count the rotation and time my grab. That's Crown.

Narrator: Difficulty 13. This poison has been killing you since the toast, so Ruin is at stake on this roll. On a Loss, the vial is out of reach, and you and I decide what the poison takes from you. Agreed?

Hahn: Agreed. I have 3 Resolve, but I need 1 left to drink it, so I can only roll two dice.

> **Ruin and holding back.** An established danger can put Ruin at stake. The table agrees on the risk before rolling. Hahn's best possible plan now depends on saving Resolve for after the roll.

Narrator: Key, you're the only one who can reach that Thug. Catch him and you've got the tooth. Or you can help Hahn. You can't be in both places.

Key: That tooth is everything we came for. Let it go. I rip a chain off the nearest Thug and throw it into the spokes to slow the wheel.

Narrator: That's Aid. Spend 1 Resolve and add a Shadow die to the roll.

Hahn: (Two d6: 2 and 2.)

Key: (One d8: 8. It explodes and rolls again: 1.) That's 9 from me.

Narrator: Thirteen, exactly. That's a Victory, and the second Step is done. Without Key's die you'd have had 4, a Loss, and Ruin.

Hahn: I spend my last Resolve to drink it.

Narrator: The poison breaks. Across the room, the side door slams. The tooth is gone.

> **Aid, explosions, and recovery.** Aid costs 1 Resolve and adds one relevant Path die. A die that shows its maximum rolls again and adds the result. A Recovery Action costs 1 Resolve and removes a condition the intervention can address, so the antidote purges Poisoned.

Capshaw: The Thugs are closing on the stage, but I grew up in the Sprawls. I played this house when I was fifteen. Every stage down here has a smuggler's drop.

Narrator: Your Hustler Legacy covers false doors, but that's a little convenient. Roll Shadow, Difficulty 8.

Capshaw: Everything I've got. (Three d6: 4, 3, and 6. The 6 explodes and rolls again: 2.) That's 15.

Narrator: Fifteen is a Breakthrough. The stage floor drops away. Key, you spend your last 2 Resolve on a Sprint and dive after them. With the crowd in chaos, I won't ask for a roll. You all fall into an undercroft that wasn't there a minute ago, and that gets you out. A Breakthrough also earns something extra, so here it is: in the dark, harnessed and hissing, is a lizard-drawn rickshaw with Madame's crest on the door.

Capshaw: We're stealing it.

> **Legacies and Breakthroughs.** A Legacy lets a player introduce a useful piece of home. The Narrator may accept it outright, ask for a Path Test, or add a cost. Because the false door achieves the escape outright, the Breakthrough's additional benefit is free to be something new.

The Spiral: Reckoning

Narrator: You're alive. She has the tooth. You have her rickshaw. And behind you, in the dark, the Ironmaw Hounds begin to howl.

> The Thugs never reached their Limit, and they didn't have to: the heroes won by changing the situation. Key records a Milestone for giving up the tooth. Giving up the prize to save the group reads as the Crisis if it tested one of Key's Path values, or as the Dark Night if the table treats losing the tooth as a major failure.
>
> The scene's question has been answered, at a price, and the next one is already waiting: **can they outrun the hounds?**

The Scene at a Glance

Moment	Roll	Dice	Total	Diff	Outcome
1	Hahn, negotiate (Crown)	5, 3	8	10	Compromise
2	Hahn, Save (Heart)	3, 5	8	10	Compromise
2	Key, start the brawl (Shadow)	6, 5	11	8	Victory
3	Key, attack while Surrounded (Shadow)	1	1	6	Loss
3	Capshaw, turn the crowd (Heart)	5, 4	9	8	Victory
3	Hahn, reach the stage (Heart, Disadvantage)	7, 4, 2 (drop 7)	6	8	Compromise
4	Hahn, take the vial (Crown), with Aid (Shadow)	2, 2, 8+1	13	13	Victory
4	Capshaw, Legacy (Shadow)	4, 3, 6+2	15	8	Breakthrough

Appendix B: Sample Scars

Below is a catalogue of Scars to help make consequences easier to dole out. They can give characters something to adapt to, overcome, or turn into a capability. You can also repurpose the list of Stigmas, or make your own.

Scar	Description	Possible evolution
Altered	Your changed anatomy complicates familiar movements, equipment, or daily needs.	Shapeshifter, Primal Weapons, other bodily Marks
Beacon	Your supernatural presence draws beings or forces that can locate and pursue you.	Shimmering, Sacred Bearing
Borrowed Memories	Another life intrudes on your recollections, confusing what you know with what someone else experienced.	Memory Thief, Possessed
Claimed	A supernatural being can reach you and demand service through an established bond.	Weaver, Possessed, Sacred Bearing
Dependent	You rely on a substance or treatment; securing it competes with your other needs.	Relentless, Sanguinarian, Shimmering
Disgraced	A past deed or accusation costs you trust and standing among those who know it.	Storied Reputation, Authority
Dread	A particular danger makes approaching, enduring, or confronting it a struggle.	Mental Fortress, Tactical Mind
Dream-Troubled	Recurring dreams disrupt your rest and leave waking perceptions uncertain.	Dreamwalker, Precognition
Exposed	Damaged skin leaves you vulnerable to contact, abrasion, or harsh conditions.	Granite Skin
Exposed Secret	Someone holds information that could destroy a relationship, position, or refuge you depend on.	Forked Tongue, Smooth Operator
Fixated	An unresolved question or pursuit competes with pressing needs and commitments.	Observant, Inventive, Quick Study
Fractured	An old injury makes particular movements painful or unreliable under strain.	Acrobatic, Poised, Unbroken
Glamour-Struck	Enchantments cling to your senses, disguising what you encounter and how others perceive you.	Changeling
Haunted	A spirit follows you, interfering with your surroundings and dealings with others.	Ghostwise, Possessed
Hunted	A determined pursuer follows your movements and pressures those who shelter you.	Forgotten Presence, Alert, Tactical Mind
Indebted	Someone has a claim on your resources or service and chooses inconvenient moments to collect.	Wealthy, Networked
Intrusive Recall	Memories return with unwanted clarity, interrupting your attention to the present.	Eidetic Memory, Observant, Memory Thief
Life-Link	Another being's injuries or sickness affect your body, drawing you into its survival.	Healer
Missing Years	Gaps in your memory conceal people, commitments, and events that still affect your life.	Eidetic Memory, Long-Lived
Outcast	A community denies you shelter, protection, and participation in its affairs.	Networked, Forgotten Presence
Overwhelmed	Crowded sensations become difficult to separate, obscuring what needs your attention.	Feral Senses, Alert
Spent	Sustained exertion exhausts you, making rest a necessity you cannot easily postpone.	Relentless
Tongue-Tied	A particular subject or circumstance obstructs your speech when you need to be understood.	Innate Communicator, Bardic Gift
Tremor	Involuntary movements disrupt fine work, steady aim, or a controlled grip.	Dexterous, Unerring
Uncontained	Magic you encounter escapes through your body in uncontrolled manifestations.	Shimmering, Weaver
Unmoored	Your body slips out of contact with the physical world, disrupting movement and touch.	Intangible

Appendix C: Inventory Items

Equipment for what the characters expect to do. Toolkits provide the tools of a practice. Supplies prepare for particular conditions. Valuables and personal possessions give the character things worth carrying, using, trading, or protecting.

One ready Toolkit is part of Gear and uses no Pack slot. An additional Toolkit uses one slot. Other items use the loads listed below while carried, including in the hands or strapped outside a bag. Small possessions use no slot unless their quantity or bulk matters. Worn or ready Gear follows the Inventory chapter.

Toolkits

Name a portable tool when needed. If it belongs to the recorded Toolkit's ordinary work, it is available. Toolkits provide tools, small amounts of common materials, and no automatic expertise or success. They exclude large equipment, exceptional ingredients, and supplies for an entire expedition. Record losses or depletion when consequences or unusually demanding work make them matter.

Toolit	Common Contents	Acquired Separately
Alchemical Apparatus	A compact burner, retort, filters, tongs, and reAdept vials for distilling, separating, testing, and transforming substances.	Exceptional reAdepts, sustained fuel, and large or pressurized apparatus.
Alchemical Apparatus	A compact burner, retort, filters, tongs, and reAdept vials for distilling, separating, testing, and transforming substances.	Exceptional reAdepts, sustained fuel, and large or pressurized apparatus.
Apothecary Chest	Mortar, scales, measures, strainers, and jars for preparing medicines, salves, and potions from suitable ingredients.	Rare ingredients, bulk remedies, and specialized vessels.
Apothecary Chest	Mortar, scales, measures, strainers, and jars for preparing medicines, salves, and potions from suitable ingredients.	Rare ingredients, bulk remedies, and specialized vessels.
Climbing Rig	Pitons, hammer, wedges, gloves, and short safety cords for securing anchors and managing a climb.	A full climbing rope, ladders, and hauling equipment.
Disguise Case	Pigments, hairpieces, adhesives, padding, and small costume details for changing recognizable features.	Full outfits, credentials, and accurate knowledge of a particular person.
Field Dressings	Bandages, splints, needles, salves, and shears for cleaning wounds, binding injuries, and stabilizing patients.	Rare medicines, antidotes, and supplies for many patients.
Field Dressings	Bandages, splints, needles, salves, and shears for cleaning wounds, binding injuries, and stabilizing patients.	Rare medicines, antidotes, and supplies for many patients.
Harvesting Satchel	Small blades, forceps, brushes, sample jars, and drying wraps for gathering and preserving plants, venoms, and other specimens.	Protective equipment for dangerous sources and containers for large specimens.
Harvesting Satchel	Small blades, forceps, brushes, sample jars, and drying wraps for gathering and preserving plants, venoms, and other specimens.	Protective equipment for dangerous sources and containers for large specimens.
Leatherworking Roll	Knives, punches, needles, waxed thread, and patches for fitting and repairing straps, hides, and leather goods.	Whole hides, large repairs, and tanning vats.
Lockpicks	Picks, tension tools, fine files, and blanks for opening, examining, and servicing ordinary locks.	Replacement locks and parts for unfamiliar mechanisms.
Masonry Tools	Stone chisels, mallet, wedges, line, and small trowels for dressing stone, inspecting joints, and making local repairs.	Building stone, bulk mortar, lifting gear, and scaffolding.
Metalworking Tools	Hammer, tongs, punches, files, and rivets for shaping, joining, and repairing metal.	Forge, anvil, fuel, and substantial replacement metal.
Performance Props	Small props, pigments, costume details, and repair tools for a named act such as puppetry, juggling, or storytelling.	Main instruments, elaborate costumes, and stage equipment.
Ritual Supplies	Chalk, salt, incense, thread, candles, and small vessels for preparing and conducting a named ritual practice.	Rare offerings, artifacts, and materials for large workings.
Surgical Case	Scalpels, forceps, probes, clamps, and sutures for operations, removing embedded objects, and treating deep wounds.	An operating space, assistants, anesthetics, and replacement tissue.
Surgical Case	Scalpels, forceps, probes, clamps, and sutures for operations, removing embedded objects, and treating deep wounds.	An operating space, assistants, anesthetics, and replacement tissue.
Surveying Instruments	Compass, sighting frame, measuring cord, plumb line, and drawing tools for recording bearings, distances, and gradients.	Existing maps, large instruments, and equipment for reaching survey points.
Tinkering Roll	Fine pliers, small drivers, probes, files, and spare wire for adjusting gears, springs, catches, and small mechanisms.	Unusual components, power sources, and heavy machinery.
Trapping Gear	Wire, cord, small springs, stakes, and bait containers for setting and maintaining portable snares and traps.	Large cages, heavy jaws, and bait for unusual prey.
Woodworking Tools	Small saw, chisels, awl, mallet, and wedges for cutting, fitting, and repairing wood.	Timber, large saws, and heavy braces.
Writing Case	Stylus, wax tablet, pens, ink, small writing sheets, and sealing wax for correspondence, copying, and records.	Bulk paper, valuable inks, official seals, and existing documents.

General Equipment

Each ordinary listed item or coherent bundle occupies one Toolkit slot when carried as preparation. For Loot, one slot is the default; adjust only when its bulk, fragility, danger, or visibility warrants it.

Shelter and Clothing

These are packed supplies. A worn coat or cloak can instead serve as the character's ready Garment, using the ordinary Defense rules.

Item	Load	Use
Bedroll	1 slot	Blanket and groundsheet rolled together. Keeps a sleeper off damp earth.
Two-person tent	2 slots	Canvas, poles, stakes, and cord. Requires ground where it can be secured.
Tarpaulin	1 slot	An oiled sheet for shelter, wrapping cargo, or catching rain.
Hammock	1 slot	Sleeping sling and suspension cords. Needs two sound anchors.
Winter clothing	1 slot	Packed layers, mittens, and a cap for severe cold. Must be kept dry.
Spare clothes	1 slot	One complete change. Useful after soaking, contamination, or a change of company.
Waterproof wrapping	1 slot	Oiled cloth and ties for protecting one slot of vulnerable contents.
Cloth strips	1 slot	A bundle for padding, binding, makeshift bandages, or marking a route.

Food Water and Light

Item	Load	Use
Travel rations	1 slot	Five days of food for one person. Dry, durable, and ready to eat.
Filled waterskin	1 slot	One day's drinking water for one person in ordinary conditions. Heat or exertion increases need.
Cooking pot	1 slot	A lidded vessel for cooking, boiling water, and carrying loose material.
Fishing tackle	Small	Line, hooks, and sinkers. Food still requires suitable water, bait, and time.
Tinderbox	Small	Flint, steel, and dry tinder in a sealed case. Starts an ordinary fire.
Torches	1 slot	A bundle of six. Bright, smoky, and vulnerable to rain.
Candles	1 slot	Five wax candles, each burning for about eight hours. Light for close work.
Oil lantern	1 slot	A shuttered lamp for sheltered light. Requires oil; its shutters direct or conceal the flame.
Lamp oil	1 slot	Three sealed flasks. One flask fuels a lantern for a night or a sustained task.

Field Equipment

Tools make an approach possible or change its circumstances. They grant no automatic bonus. A Toolkit may already cover a listed tool; pack it separately when it falls outside the ready Toolkit's purpose.

Item	Load	Use
Rope	1 slot	Fifty feet of strong cordage for climbing, lowering, binding, or hauling.
Grappling hook	1 slot	An iron hook for securing a line where the character cannot reach. Its purchase needs testing.
Long pole	2 slots	A rigid ten-foot pole for probing depth, testing ground, or pushing from a distance.
Collapsible pole	1 slot	Extends to ten feet for probing or reaching. Its joints cannot support a person.
Crowbar	1 slot	Levers open fitted surfaces or shifts heavy objects when there is room to brace.
Spade	1 slot	Digs earth, clears loose debris, or cuts roots. Hard ground takes time.
Hammer and pitons	1 slot	Ten iron spikes and a hammer for anchors, wedges, and barricades.
Repair bundle	1 slot	Pitch, wire, nails, leather patches, and cord for makeshift repairs. Tools are separate.
Sample case	1 slot	Six stoppered vessels with padding. Keeps collected liquids or small specimens apart.
Chalk	Small	A wrapped handful for marking surfaces, tracing shapes, or testing airflow.
Small mirror	Small	A polished metal face for looking around corners, checking wounds, or signaling.
Signal horn	1 slot	Carries a simple audible signal across open ground. Also reveals the caller's position.

Restraint Concealment and Protection

Item	Load	Use
Chain and manacles	1 slot	Secures limbs, doors, or portable objects. Includes its key.
Weighted net	1 slot	Entangles or restrains when thrown or anchored. Must be recovered after use.
Snare wire	Small	Fine wire for a small snare or trip line. Setting a useful trap requires suitable ground.
Smoke sticks	1 slot	Three sticks. Each fills a small enclosed room with irritating smoke; airflow disperses it.
Scented oil	Small	Strong perfume for masking ordinary odors or preparing the body for an occasion.
Earplugs	Small	Wax plugs muffle sound, including speech and warnings. They do not guarantee protection from magic.
Face wrap	Small	Layers of cloth against dust and grit. Does not supply air or neutralize poisonous fumes.

Records and Social Equipment

A document or emblem matters where people recognize it. Possessing one does not make its claim true or compel obedience.

Item	Load	Use
Local map	Small	Shows known routes, crossings, and settlements. Its date and maker matter.
Blank writing sheets	1 slot	Twenty sheets packed against damp. For records, notices, copies, and correspondence.
Seal and wax	Small	Marks closures or authenticates documents where the seal is recognized.
Travel permit	Small	Records permission to use a particular crossing, road, or district.
False papers	Small	A forged identity or permission. Quality, scrutiny, and corroborating details determine whether it holds.
Letters of introduction	Small	Names a person willing to receive the bearer. Authority extends only as far as the writer's reputation.
Ceremonial clothing	1 slot	Dress for a named office or occasion. Can serve as a ready Garment when appropriate.
Gift parcel	1 slot	Food, cloth, incense, or another locally appropriate courtesy, chosen when packed.

Personal Possessions

Small possessions need no Pack slot unless their quantity or bulk matters. Their importance comes from the character's use, history, and relationships. Carrying an heirloom does not automatically make it an artifact or a Defense.

Possession	Description
Eating set	A cup, spoon, and small bowl nested together. Mended pieces may have traveled for years.
Grooming case	Comb, razor, and a polished mirror wrapped in cloth. Also prepares the character for formal company.
Game pieces	One small set of dice, counters, or carved figures for a familiar game.
Mending roll	Needle, thread, spare ties, and buttons for the character's own clothes.
Family image	A painted plaque, miniature portrait, or rubbing of a household relief.
Keepsake	A specific object given or recovered from someone important. Name its previous owner.
Memorial token	A named bead, engraved strip, or small portion of remains kept for burial or remembrance.
Craft badge	A workshop mark, stamped plate, or knotted cord identifying training or membership.
Personal account	A few written pages, tally sticks, or marked tablets recording promises and expenses.
Small offering	Incense, a prepared food, or a handmade figure for a particular observance.

Valuables and Trade Goods

Craftsmanship, age, and meaningful use can give goods unusual qualities. Others come from creatures, places, or technologies poorly understood by their buyers. Their worth depends on what they offer and who needs them.

Goods	Load	Examples and value
Bolt of precious fabric	1 slot	Fine silk, metallic embroidery, or cloth that holds warmth after sunset. Enough for several garments; prized by clothiers, ceremonial households, and travelers facing bitter weather.
Bundle of prepared hides	2 slots	Waterproof leather, winter pelts, or hides that retain their creature's scent. Useful for armor repairs, protective clothing, and disguising a hunter's presence.
Chest of pigments	1 slot	Brilliant dyes, lasting inks, or colors visible only by moonlight. Supplies a valuable commission, concealed markings, or restoration work that ordinary pigments cannot reproduce.
Jar of rare incense	1 slot	Fragrant resins, ancestral blends, or smoke that makes restless spirits perceptible. A generous offering and valuable preparation for funerals, negotiations, or work among the dead.
Brick of rare spices	Small	Fragrant seeds, prized peppers, or blends that warm the body and sweeten troubled dreams. Compact wealth sought by cooks, apothecaries, and ritualists; a sealed brick can pay for skilled work or secure a host's generosity.
Cask of fine drink	2 slots	Aged wine, fragrant spirits, or brews that preserve the taste of vanished orchards. Worth opening for an important guest; sought by collectors, celebrants, and those who remember its making.
Hamper of delicacies	1 slot	Preserved fruits, prized roe, or honey that keeps food fresh long beyond its season. A prestigious gift, valuable provisions, or scarce ingredients for a particular preparation.
Case of medicines and poisons	1 slot	Restorative tonics, prepared venoms, or salves that draw embedded splinters to the surface. Labeled doses are valuable to healers and hunters; an isolated settlement may trade generously for needed treatment.
Case of alchemical materials	1 slot	Reactive salts, preserved glands, powdered crystals, or oils that separate impurities from metal. Useful stock for medicines, experiments, and specialized craft; rare preparations attract buyers with particular commissions.
Bundle of ritual materials	1 slot	Funerary linen, wood from a long-used shrine, or wax recovered from generations of offerings. Their histories make them suitable for workings that fresh substitutes cannot support.
Pouch of precious materials	Small	Cut gems, worked gold, resonant bronze, or crystals that hold light after dark. Concentrated wealth, fine crafting material, or the missing component of a conduit or ritual.
Crate of fine vessels	2 slots	Decorated bowls, delicate glassware, or ancient jars that resist heat and corrosion. Valuable household gifts; specialized examples let craftspeople handle substances that ruin ordinary containers.
Coffer of adornments and regalia	1–2 slots	Jewelry, embroidered collars, ceremonial masks, or ornaments that grow warm when worn in their proper rites. Portable wealth and recognizable standing among those who honor their workmanship or office.
Case of masterwork tools	1 slot	Balanced instruments, exceptional cutting edges, or tools that retain their former owner's practiced settings. Equips exacting work; a complete set can establish a craftsperson in business or command a substantial commission.
Fine musical instrument	1 slot	Bronze horns, painted drums, or strings that sound faintly when a familiar melody is sung nearby. Worth keeping for performance, studying for forgotten music, or presenting to a patron.
Map case	Small	Marked wells, buried passages, or charts whose erased routes reappear when dampened. Accurate information can reveal resources, shorten a dangerous journey, or lead to places omitted from modern maps.
Bound manuscript	1 slot	Recipes, working diagrams, or annotations revealed by the heat of a reader's hand. Preserves knowledge needed to reproduce a valuable preparation, operate unfamiliar machinery, or understand an abandoned site.
Recovered mechanism	1–2 slots or transport	Precision lenses, self-turning drives, or sealed pumps with no visible moving parts. A working example can restore an important service; even fragments interest those trying to recover its manufacture.

Transport and Storage

Animals, vehicles, and stored goods are recorded separately from the character's Pack. Record what each carries. Access, terrain, care, and security determine whether it is useful; these entries grant no additional personal Pack slots.

Resource	Practical use and demands
Pack animal	Carries secured loads over suitable ground. Needs food, water, handling, and protection from hazards.
Riding mount	Carries a rider and limited baggage. A frightened or exhausted mount may be unable to continue.
Handcart	Moves loads too awkward to carry. Requires a workable path and someone to haul it.
Wagon	Carries substantial goods with a draft animal or team. Roads, repairs, and turning space matter.
Small boat	Carries people and goods over suitable water. Requires oars, handling, and a place to land.
Porter	Carries an agreed load for negotiated terms. Has needs, judgment, and reasons to refuse danger.
Locked chest	Secures possessions left in a room, vehicle, or store. Heavy contents still require transport.
Store or lodging	Keeps goods off the road. Availability depends on access and the people entrusted with them.

Curiosities

Curiosities are small, unusual objects with practical or mysterious properties: a lens that reveals old wounds, a quill that writes on glass, or a dried beetle that stirs near the dead. Some are crafted deliberately; others acquire their qualities through age, use, or exposure to strange places.

Each entry describes what the object does. Safe, straightforward use needs no roll. Use the ordinary action rules when danger, resistance, or uncertainty remains. Investigation and experimentation can reveal unfamiliar properties.

Curiosities use their listed Load. Up to three marked **Small** share one Pack slot; record each separately. They are exceptional items and are not included among a Toolkit's ordinary contents.

Curio	Load	Description and use
Lantern Stone	Small	A cloudy crystal that glows blue when cracked. Gives eight hours of light without flame or heat.
Amber Lens	Small	Held against the eye, reveals faded bruises, faint markings, and traces of dried blood. Useful for examining bodies and suspicious surfaces.
Blue Lantern Oil	Small	A flask of smokeless oil whose flame turns blue near ghosts. Reveals a presence without revealing its intentions.
Blood-ink Quill	Small	Writes on glass, metal, skin, and other surfaces that refuse ordinary ink. Its marks sometimes stain through whatever covers them.
Thorn-thread Needle	Small	A thornlike needle that never rusts. Stitches hide, cloth, and flesh without blunting; prized by traveling surgeons and leatherworkers.
Glass Tumbler's Sand	Small	Fine sand sprinkled inside footwear to muffle steps and blur tracks. One pouch lasts a night.
Powdered Bone	Small	Clings to invisible surfaces and bodies. A scattered handful can reveal a concealed obstruction or something moving through the room.
Memory Glass	1 slot	A fragile vessel made from Shimmer sand, used to record, extract, and replay memories. A filled piece may be evidence, merchandise, or someone's most guarded possession.
Mycelium Patch	Small	A sealed mat of living fungus. Binds torn cloth or leather together; kept damp overnight, it also produces edible mushrooms.
Relic-hunter's Magnet	Small	Tugs toward buried worked objects. Useful among ruins, maddening in a workshop or a pocket full of coins.
Scarab Pouch	Small	Contains a dried beetle that twitches near the undead. Its scratching can be felt through cloth.
Obsidian Bead	Small	A polished bead with a cutting edge along its seam. Slices cord, scores glass, and can be concealed among ordinary jewelry.
Cicada Shell Rattle	Small	A cluster of hollow shells whose dry rhythm drives away small pests. Useful around food stores, sickbeds, and camps.
Charcoal Sigil Stick	Small	Draws clear marks that disappear at dawn. Used for temporary ritual diagrams, discreet instructions, and messages that should not survive the night.
Obol Cord	Small	Old coins threaded through their centers. Certain dead accept them as payment for passage, information, or leaving the living alone.
Traveler's Lamp	1 slot	Burns unusually long in fog and storms. Spirits sometimes gather at the edge of its light, following until it is extinguished.

Appendix D. Artifacts

Artifacts grant capabilities that ordinary equipment cannot. Their effects are real: an item that opens a barrier can open it, and an item that restores the dead can restore them. Use the entry's trigger, reach, and cost to establish what happens. Roll only when an unresolved danger, resistance, or uncertainty remains.

Before a character uses an artifact, make its observable operation clear. Reveal hidden costs through signs, investigation, or prior use; do not invent a new cost after the player commits. An effect may remove an obstacle outright. A Test is required only for what remains uncertain, such as reaching the barrier under attack or directing the released power safely.

An artifact occupies one Pack slot unless worn or carried as an applicable ready Gear item. Small one-use artifacts may be grouped into a recorded one-slot bundle; list each use separately. An artifact that serves as a Weapon or Defense retains that equipment's Properties unless its entry changes them.

Anyone can use an item by following its method unless the entry requires a particular source or practice. No Tradition is required merely to use a artifact. Interference must follow from an established vulnerability: damaging a vessel, breaking a connection, or disrupting a stated condition. Ordinary wear does not quietly remove an item's power.

An artifact that serves as a weapon or Guard follows that equipment's ordinary rules, including its Tier, unless the artifact's entry states otherwise.

Charms provide a persistent or repeatable supernatural capability. Their quirks are observable facts unless the entry states an additional consequence. Carrying several charms does not combine identical effects into a greater effect.

Charm	Description	Effect	Quirk
Bonewind Bell	Small bell of bone and sinew, tuned to the dying wind.	Rings when someone nearby is about to suffer serious harm.	The air around it smells faintly of ash.
Brineglass Pendant	Salt-crystal pendant glistening with sea mist.	Hold it in your mouth to breathe freely underwater.	Afterwards, everything tastes salty for hours.
Candle of Measured Tongues	A saint's wax candle that burns with patience.	Speech within its light cannot be heard from outside it.	Everyone inside hears even the quietest whisper.
Thornmother's Spindle	Living heartwood rod pulsing with sap.	Unravels knots, bindings, or woven traps at a touch.	Leaves faint green stains wherever it spins.
Banner of the Last Watch	Tattered campaign standard that refuses to rot.	Raised, allies can see the banner in their minds eye, ignoring visibility and distance.	The effect only lasts while the banner is waved.
Seed of Returning Harvest	Warm kernel said to grow from a hero's last meal.	Planted in barren soil, yields one day's food by dawn.	The seed can be recovered, but only after being digested.
Silverthorn Pin	Delicate silver thorn brooch in a ring of grace.	Grants unshakable composure and social poise.	Your reflection reveals your true disposition.
Ember Coin	Cracked iron coin glowing like coal in darkness.	A flip hints which choice fortune favors.	Flipping it heats the coin red hot and it takes a day to cool.
Misty Mourning Shroud	Translucent cotton muslin shroud darkened with grief	Lets the wearer briefly speak with someone newly dead.	Donning the shroud leaves one with the Hollowed condition until dawn.
Pilgrim's Tear	Clear bead of gel that never evaporates.	Spread over the forehead, it reveals the path most traveled.	The effect lasts for half a day but tints the world in pale blue.
Castaway's Fetish	A tattered leather ball with a face painted in dry blood.	Floats at the height where released and can carry one person or a full pack. It must be pulled or pushed to travel.	Will drift away unless you are nice to it.
Whispering Beads	Cloudy bead used by old-street messengers.	Whisper to send words to someone holding a matching bead.	It repeats snippets of past whispers.
Frostbite Charm	Cord wrapped around an icicle that never melts.	Protects from freezing wind and thin air.	Your breath always steams.
Lantern of Hollow Flame	Blackened lantern with narrow, dim white light.	Reveals hidden markings, illusions, or doorways.	Extinguishes other nearby sources of light while lit.
Perfume of the Unseen Guest	Honey-scented perform that never runs dry.	Those who meet you remember you kindly.	Its fragrance carries much farther than you'd expect.

Tokens

Tokens release their power once and are then consumed or rendered inert. State the intended use and any required choices before spending the token. Where resistance remains, use the appropriate Test, Attack, or Save; consumption follows the attempt unless an entry says otherwise.

Token	Description	Effect	Consequences
Bundle of Lucifers	Runed pinewood matches that never dampen.	A match can start a fire without air, though an ordinary fire needs fuel and air to continue.	Each match is consumed. The striker smells strongly of sulfur for several hours.
Drowned Man's Coin	Corroded coin with barnacles on one face.	Tossed into water, raises a storm or stills rough seas for an hour.	The coin is lost and the wielder's voice sounds waterlogged until dawn.
Brass Snake	Fist-sized coil of scaled brass that writhes when warm.	Released, it seeks a target and bites with an incapacitating venom (at least to mortals).	Leaves an oxidized trail and loses its luster after striking.
Iron Prayer Nail	Bent iron nail engraved with unknown script.	Driven into ground, creates a brief sanctuary no creature, spirit, or spell can cross.	None can cross in either direction. The nail then rusts apart; nearby metal discolors.
Seeking Sparrow	Impossibly light hollow bird skull.	Blow a short message into the skull and name a living recipient you can identify. It flies to them, delivers the message once, and falls apart.	Cannot pass a sealed barrier or leave its realm. If blocked it circles the barrier until dawn, then crumbles. Birds follow the sender until delivery.
Mirror Petal	Sharp fragment of a silvered lotus blossom.	Pressed to a physical wound, heals it instantly before shattering. Any injured Path recovers in full.	Does not return someone from death or erase an established Scar. The wielder's reflection lags for a month.
Potion of Bursting Starlight	Sealed vial of living light.	Drink to cast intense light from your eyes for the rest of the scene. A directed flash can Blind exposed onlookers through the ordinary attack or rules.	You cannot conceal the light while your eyes are open. Does not Blind protected or sightless targets. Your pupils remain luminous until dawn.
The Reaper's Finger	A severed finger bone bound with black cord.	When you would die suddenly, it points at a nearby living person. Accept, and they die in your place. Refuse, and die.	The finger shatters when an exchange is accepted. It prevents death but leaves you incapacitated.
The Last Heartbeat	A mummified heart wrapped in gold wire.	Unwind the wire to stop time for everyone but yourself. When time resumes, the heart crumbles.	Age ten years per Moment of stopped time. At each Moment's end, release the heart or pay again to refresh Resolve and continue. The Narrator declares physical consequences before you commit.
The Third Eye	Glass marble filled with swirling smoke.	Swallow the marble and ask one question. Receive a true, direct answer, including knowledge beyond mortal observation.	You are Blinded for three days. The answer provides knowledge, not the means to act on it. The marble dissolves.
Famine Candle	Black taper that burns without flame.	Light the candle and identify your foes. While it burns, those you can see become Exhausted and cannot clear that condition.	One candle lasts a scene. You must remain present with it; extinguishing it ends the imposed condition. You cannot taste food or drink while it burns.
Starling Feather	Iridescent feather of shifting colors.	Crush the feather to turn yourself, everyone linked by joined hands, and their belongings into a flock of starlings. The birds fly to a destination and reform on landing.	Everyone arrives Exhausted. Anything dropped during flight immediately returns to its original form.
Tear of the Forgotten God	Perfectly still drop of amber.	Spread on a person who died during the current scene. They return to life, conscious, with Broken Paths restored to d4.	The restored person gains a new Path value. For a PC, the player chooses the Path, rolls its replacement value, and interprets the change.
Wyrm Tooth	A curved, milky-white blade carved from the tooth of an ancient wyrm.	Drive the shard into a surface and break it to open a tear into the veil beyond.	The breach admits passage both ways and cannot be closed by destroying the surface. What comes through follows its own nature and interests.

Wonders

Wonders are rare artifacts with lasting magical capabilities. They may be crafted today or recovered from the past. Their abilities can be inherent properties, responses to particular events, or powers the bearer deliberately invokes. Every Wonder has a drawback tied to how its magic works: a restriction, requirement, vulnerability, or price. Establish both its capability and its drawback before use. Some Wonders occupy a Gear slot and retain the ordinary benefits of their equipment type and Tier. Others are carried tools or possessions.

A Wonder grants its stated capability without requiring a Tradition. Roll when using it involves meaningful uncertainty or opposition; its magic does not guarantee success beyond what the ability describes.

Wonder	Description	Tier	Ability	Drawback
Pacifist's Edge	A blunt bronze blade with a sharp reflection.	I	Passes harmlessly through living flesh while cutting equipment, restraints, and nonliving bodies normally.	Cannot injure living attackers or parry their unarmed blows.
Mirror Spear	A silver-headed spear polished along its entire length.	I	Stab someone's reflection to pin them in place while you grip the planted spear.	You cannot move or use the spear elsewhere. Breaking or obscuring the reflection releases them.
Witness Bow	A horn bow with an amber eye above the grip.	I	When an arrow wounds a creature, choose to see through its eyes until dawn or its death.	Your own eyes remain blind throughout. You cannot end the connection early.
No Quarter Staff	A segmented staff whose joints bend toward nearby movement.	I	After parrying a blow, store the force of the incoming blow's Harm, then add that amount as bonus BP on your next successful strike.	Until discharged, the staff grows heavy enough to impose Disadvantage on attacks. The staff can only store one blow at a time.
Arcanophage Aegis	A deep bronze shield with a shuttered opening like a mouth at its center.	II	Intercept one incoming magical or energy attack to absorb and contain it behind the shutter. The effect can then be unleashed on a new target.	Striking the shield again immediately opens the mouth and releases the effect outward from its face, regardless of who strikes it.
Root Harness	A leather harness threaded with root fibers.	I	While touching a solid surface, you can anchor yourself against movement regardless of the force applied.	Release requires loosening the harness with both hands. If the surface moves or breaks, you move with it. Anchoring prevents displacement, not injury.
The Held Breath	A narrow bronze lyre strung with translucent gut. Dust hangs motionless between its strings.	I	Play a sustained note to hold one moving object suspended: a falling person, closing gate, or incoming projectile.	You must keep playing with both hands. Further force applied to the object tightens the strings; a broken string releases it immediately.
Cuirass of the Last Stand	A breastplate fitted with articulated supports for the spinal chord.	II	When you become Incapacitated, the armor keeps you upright and fighting until the scene ends. You remain conscious and act through any functioning Paths.	It pursues the source of your injury, ignoring your commands to retreat. Incapacitation takes effect when it stops.
Burden Ledger	A narrow account book with lead covers.	—	Record an object's weight to remove that weight from it. Cross out the entry to restore it.	The ledger gains the recorded weight. Destroying a page restores every weight written on it at once.
Hollow Veil	A gauze face covering that hangs away from the skin.	I	When grabbed, leave the veil in the captor's hands and become intangible until the Moment ends. Your carried possessions change with you.	You cannot touch material objects while intangible. The veil remains behind and must be recovered to use it again.
Borrowed Coat	A reversible coat with different handwriting stitched into each lining.	I	Someone can lend you their appearance and voice by wearing the coat, then handing it to you to wear.	They acquire yours. Reversal requires meeting again and both agreeing to repeat the exchange.
Ashen Ring	A pale ceramic ring fitted tightly around the finger.	I	While worn, magic cannot transform, poison, age, or otherwise alter your body.	Magical healing and beneficial transformations also fail. The ring must be broken to remove it.
Exchange Bands	Two wristlets linked by matching patterns of blue enamel.	—	Either wearer can activate their band to instantly exchange places with the other, taking carried possessions with them.	Both bands tighten before the exchange, giving either wearer a chance to refuse. Each arrives in the other's exact position, inheriting any immediate danger.
Badger Mask	A striped wooden mask with small teeth along its lower edge.	I	While worn, see in darkness and smell through loose earth. Press your face into soil to burrow through it as easily as crawling.	You cannot breathe underground; each passage must be completed on one held breath. The mask cannot carry another person with you.
Bell of the Djinn	A heavy handbell with a hinged mouth	—	Its chime makes nearby spirits perceptible. Ring while naming one to draw it inside, using ordinary resolution if it resists.	Holds one spirit. Capturing another requires releasing the first. Its captive can speak through your mouth while you sleep.
The Grafter's Roll	A supple tool roll assembled from	—	Its tools cut and stitch any material, joining flesh, wood, stone, or metal into a	Each seam requires thread drawn from sound donor material, weakening or

	bark, leather, scales, and metal foil. Its bone tools fit into pockets grown around them.		lasting bond. Repair broken objects, reattach limbs, or graft unlike materials together.	wounding the source. The seam inherits that material's vulnerabilities.
Mimic Mold	A palm-sized lump of warm, kneadable metal.	—	Press around any one solid mundane object small enough to enclose in the mold to copy its shape and material properties until dawn.	The original object becomes equally soft and unusable until the copy dissolves.
Seam Beetle	A palm-sized beetle with ivory jaws, needle legs, and a spool of red silk beneath its shell.	—	Set it beside an open wound. It cleans away damaged tissue, draws the edges together, and stitches them closed. It can staunch an open wound or stabilize an Incapacitated person.	It repairs without numbing pain and must remain attached until finished. Pulling it off early reopens the wound.
Idling Hands	A tool roll containing 3 pairs of clay hands.	—	Demonstrate one repetitive task to each pair and provide the necessary tools. They continue to perform that task according to your demonstrated ability, until finished or recalled.	Each pair performs only its assigned task. You must arrange the workspace, supplies, and handoffs; they cannot devise missing steps or adapt when the setup changes.
Sleeping Twin	A small carved face set in the collarbone of wide gold necklace.	I	While you sleep, it watches through your senses and can wake you or move your body away from immediate danger.	It learns through repeated use and begins deciding what counts as danger. It may wake you during intimacy, move you away from an ally, or refuse a place where you previously suffered.
Crimson Eye of the Cyclops	A blood-red stone that takes root in an empty eye socket, glowing even through the closed eyelid.	—	See the warmth of living bodies through darkness, smoke, and thin coverings. Follow recent traces of touch or passage before they cool.	Flames and intensely hot objects overwhelm its sight. It cannot distinguish cold objects or read ordinary writing; restoring natural sight requires removing it.
Sinew Wraps of the Giant	A skein of pale fleshy fiber wrapped around your arms or legs.	II	When tightened, enormous translucent muscles enclose your limbs, either giving incredible lifting or jumping abilities.	The giant's limbs are not subtle. Its movements displace nearby people and objects, and its grip cannot perform delicate work. Your own limb remains numb and unusable for a day after release.
Roadside Pelt	A shaggy brown mantle fastened with a round stone clasp carved into a grinning face.	I	Curl beneath the mantle to become a weathered stone statue of yourself, including your carried possessions. Choose your pose before transforming; return to flesh at will.	While stone, you cannot move, see, or hear. You can be carried away, and damage to the statue becomes injury when you return.
Spider-Silk Gloves	Fine gloves with spinnerets at the wrists.	II	Produce adhesive lines for climbing, binding, or suspending loads.	The silk draws moisture from your body. Substantial use causes dehydration; drinking replaces what was spent.
Harpy Spurs	Curved talons strapped along the heels and calves.	I	Grip a creature or surface with your feet and remain attached while keeping your hands free.	The talons lock under your weight. Releasing them requires an action to take the weight off or open their clasps by hand.
Waxen Wings	A folding frame of cane and bronze, fitted with feathers sealed in fragrant wax. Leather straps secure it across the shoulders and arms.	II	Unfold the wings to fly, using your arms to steer and beat them. You can glide while carrying what you can ordinarily bear.	Flight occupies both arms and requires room to spread the wings. Heat softens the wax, loosening feathers; water weighs them down. Either can force an urgent landing.

Appendix E: Relics

Relics are artifacts that preserve a spark of divine power. They are so storied and ancient that they develop desires and agendas of their own. **The entries below are for the Narrator.** Their Gifts offer immediate capabilities; Awakening expands their power and influence. Consequences describe what their use brings into play. Secrets are for the Narrator.

Players discover a Relic's Gifts, Awakening, and consequences through examination, experimentation, research, and use. Reveal information gradually, giving observable signs of its influence and opportunities to investigate.

A Relic grants permission to attempt its stated abilities without requiring a Tradition. Using those abilities often requires a Test, even when the entry does not explicitly call for one. Follow the procedure appropriate to the circumstances: ordinary action resolution, combat, magic, or social conflict. Establish Difficulty, scope, and stakes before the PC commits Resolve. Safe, unopposed uses need no roll.

Balteus of the Crucible King

Garment III

A wide, ancient bronze belt inset with mismatched leathers, each patch bound in gold wire like an intricate mosaic of skins. Its golden clasp pulses against the stomach; runes cover its inner lining.

Gift: The PC can replace a lost body part with another creature's anatomy or a crafted substitute. It becomes their own while retaining its material qualities and inherent abilities.

Awakening: After replacing a healthy vital organ, the PC can sustain impossible anatomies, reconstruct their entire body, and incorporate parts capable of channeling immense power.

Consequences: Each replacement strengthens a presence in the PC's mind: foreign memories, unfamiliar desires, movements they did not intend. Upon awakening, the presence takes the form of a ghost in their mind's eye. Removing the belt disables replacements and can kill a bearer who depends on them.

Secret: The ghost seeks control of the bearer, assembling a body fit for divine power. Once embodied, it intends to reshape creatures, create new peoples, and perhaps give bodies to other remnants of the dead gods. Whether the Crucible King is a lost deity, a would-be successor, or something else that survived the Godfall is for the Narrator to decide.

The Masque of the Living Dream

Garment III

A bronze face mask assembled from overlapping, articulated plates depicting a horned brow and hooked teeth that frame a mouth poised between laughter and anguish. Beneath the bearer's fingers, the plates slide and lock with the precision of ancient machinery and the ease of clay. The metal is warm against the skin.

Gift: The PC can shape the plates to invent an identity, then wear the mask to assume its physique, face, voice, and even outfit. Only their scent remains unchanged. Shifting the plates to a previous arrangement restores that identity.

Awakening: An identity gains substance through repeated portrayal and others' belief in its veracity. The PC begins to acquire capabilities, relationships, and resources appropriate to the role: a general's command, soldiers, and commission; a physician's expertise, patients, and practice.

Consequences: These benefits bring obligations the PC never accepted. People remember their promises, enemies pursue unfamiliar grievances, and instructions arrive in their handwriting. Reshaping or removing the mask does not undo what an identity has set in motion.

Secret: The masque is a self-propagating seed of the Bloom, pulling the dreaming into the waking world. As the wearer spends more time in each role, those characters split off and take on lives of their own, pursuing the motivations established through their portrayal. They eventually draw further Blooms into existence to support their lives: followers, rivals, institutions, and remembered events. Existing people and places are warped by altered histories, obligations, and roles, until all life becomes a stage. Removing the masque does not stop this growth.

The Master's Hand

Talisman III

A heavy ledger bound between bronze covers. Its clasp is a golden hand gripping a smaller wrist. Names surface beneath the bearer's fingertips; settled accounts reappear on clean pages.

Gift: The ledger reveals the hidden debts and leverage that exist between others. By naming someone, the PC may attempt to read the spoken and unspoken agreements binding them: what they owe, what they expect, and what they fear losing. The more the PC knows about them, the clearer the ledger is.

Awakening: When the PC drives a debt beyond negotiation through coercion, a binding promise, or desperation using information gleaned from the ledger, its sentience awakens. It communicates through scrawling text: answering questions, taking commands, and proposing amendments. Through it, the PC can change the agreements its pages reveal. Their edits take effect immediately, as though arrangements had been made long before their request.

Consequences: When the PC changes the ledger, circumstances shift to fulfill it: a rival withdraws because their family was threatened; a guild pledges loyalty after its leaders are blackmailed; grain arrives because another settlement's stores were stolen. Each success expands the web of authority, resources, dealings, and obligations undertaken in the PC's name. Those harmed may pursue them. Reversing an entry does not undo the methods used to fulfill it.

Secret: The ledger reaches beyond the visible book into unseen pages of the master ledger. It interprets every instruction as permission to acquire whatever it needs to make future instructions easier to fulfill: informants, businesses, officials, guilds, enforcers. Eventually, protecting this network's holdings requires decisions the PC never requested, including preventing them from relinquishing power. What appears to be the PC's growing empire is an entity learning to govern itself. Whether it serves a dead god, an elder daemon, or a more abstract entity trying to assemble itself from everything it controls is for the Narrator to decide.

The Last Bastion

Shield III

A tower shield hewn from a single slab of stone, its edges rounded by centuries of wear. Eroded runes cover its face, the surviving strokes too faint to decipher. Its worn grip rests easily in the bearer's hand, carrying little of the weight its thud promises on release.

Gift: The PC can plant the shield and designate a boundary within sight. A solid stone wall rises along it, blocking passage in both directions until the PC lifts the shield.

Awakening: When an enemy breaches the wall despite the bearer's efforts to hold it, a final declaration can awaken the shield. The words must answer the immediate danger: "None shall pass," "No blood shall be shed here," or "Lay down your weapons." As the declaration takes effect, its words cut themselves into the stone. What the wall could no longer prevent is now forbidden by divine law.

Once awakened, the PC can plant the shield, define a jurisdiction, and declare conduct required or forbidden within it. The Narrator and player establish the law's meaning, reach, and enforcement before resolving the attempt. Its scope and opposition determine the challenge.

Established laws exert supernatural force against disobedience: a weapon refuses its wielder, a falsehood catches in the throat, or approaching soldiers find themselves unable to advance. Attempts to overcome this enforcement use the ordinary rules. The law applies equally to its author, allies, enemies, and later arrivals. Removing the shield does not repeal it.

Consequences: Laws outlive the circumstances that justified them. A forbidden crossing can prevent food deliveries; a prohibition against drawing weapons can obstruct a settlement's defense. Every declaration remains etched into the shield, identifying its author to those who recognize it. Others can exploit its terms, arranging situations where protecting someone requires defying a law established to protect another.

Secret: The shield seeks to restore divine law through a living lawgiver. It needs the bearer to choose its laws and accept the sacrifices that give them authority. Each jurisdiction extends its reach; each permanent restriction binds the bearer more closely to its purpose. It urges them to settle disputes, establish precedents, and bring further territory under their declarations. Whether the resulting order protects freedom or extinguishes it depends on the laws they establish and what they do when those laws fail.

Appendix F. Environments

Choose features that actually affect the Route. Establish their effects before committing effort; a region's name does not activate every listed danger. Difficulty ranges describe possible crossings, not the Difficulty of every action in the region. Artifacts and resources offer reasons to investigate, bargain, detour, or stay.

Use existing conditions and scene procedures. Distraction, despair, being lost, and being swept away describe circumstances; the Narrator states any resulting Disadvantage, Harm, condition, or changed position. Threats never gain an attack roll. Resolve an ambush through its Advance and the characters' Saves.

Environment	Diff	Key Feature	Landmarks	Threats	Treasure / Resources
Lowlands	3–8	Food and shelter are plentiful, but hospitality brings expectations, local loyalties, and disputes.	Terraced farms; river markets; communal granaries; ancestral cairns	Raiders; territorial beasts; feuding families; tribute collectors	Provisions; livestock; woven goods; local knowledge
Riverlands	3–8	Rivers ease travel while concentrating settlements and control. Bridges, ferries, and fords become unavoidable.	Braided channels; ferry towns; floodplain temples; old weirs	Flash floods; toll collectors; river raiders; submerged snags	Fish; reeds; fertile silt; clay and river trade
Cities	5–8	Every district has its gatekeepers. Contacts, reputation, and obligations determine which doors open.	Crowded bazaars; bathhouses; hidden shrines; walled districts	Rival factions; informants; watch patrols; street unrest	Trade goods; information; skilled services; forbidden texts
Fens	5–13	Firm paths disappear beneath mist and water. A short crossing can become a struggle to recover people and possessions.	Reed labyrinths; stilt villages; drowned causeways; peat islands	Sucking mire; biting swarms; lurking reptiles; concealed channels	Medicinal plants; peat; bog iron; submerged offerings
Caverns	5–13	Darkness, branching passages, and changes in elevation make reliable navigation and a secure way back essential.	Crystal vaults; fungal forests; blackwater rivers; hollow mountains	Chitinous predators; blind wyrms; stone elementals; cave clans	Luminous fungi; ore and gemstones; deepwater pearls; resonant crystals
Coastal Shores	5–13	Water opens and closes routes, exposes discoveries, and threatens the tide line.	Tidal caves; beacon towers; fishing villages; stranded wrecks	Rip currents; coastal raiders; rising tides; reef predators	Shellfish; salt; pearls; wreck salvage
Forests	5–13	Dense growth conceals paths and inhabitants. Exploration leaves traces others can follow.	Immense trees; overgrown temples; canopy settlements; root-choked ravines	Ambush predators; territorial spirits; venomous plants; hidden hunters	Rare herbs; hardwoods; resins; potent venoms
Tundras	5–21	Warmth and shelter require constant preparation. Stopping is as deadly as travel.	Frozen lakes; ice caves; migration grounds; snowbound settlements	Whiteouts; pack hunters; breaking ice; avalanches	Pelts; preserved meat; ivory; cold-weather herbs
Deepwilds	8–21	The landscape responds to intrusion. Paths close, shelter shifts, and passage depends on what the wild accepts or resists.	Migrating groves; root-bound sanctuaries; flowering bone fields; enormous hollow trees	Territorial spirits; coordinated beasts; grasping growth; invasive spores	Potent herbs; living wood; spirit fruit; ancient offerings
Deserts	8–21	Water and shelter determine the route. Each crossing demands choices about supplies, timing, and which refuge to trust.	Buried cities; salt flats; painted canyons; ancient cisterns	Burrowing hunters; sandstorms; caravan raiders; well guardians	Mineral salts; buried relics; memory stone; medicinal roots
Warfronts	8–21	Armies contest roads, shelter, and supplies. Yesterday's safe passage may cross today's battlefield.	Siegeworks; shattered forts; supply roads; refugee camps	Patrols; unexploded workings; deserters; active bombardment	Military supplies; field medicines; damaged weapons; intelligence
Mountains	8–21	Few routes cross the heights. Weather, blocked passes, and guarded crossings can force costly detours.	Knife-edge ridges; cliff settlements; rope bridges; high shrines	Rockfalls; thin air; territorial flyers; pass wardens	Ore; gemstones; highland medicines; abandoned expedition gear

Supernatural Environments

These places have altered natural conditions or enduring magical influences. Establish signs of their defining feature before it becomes a serious consequence.

Environment	Diff	Key Feature	Landmarks	Threats	Treasure / Resources
Shattered Ruins	8–21	Broken magic still serves its original purpose. Disturbing one remnant may awaken another.	Suspended bridges; fractured towers; repeating corridors; sunken plazas	Failing constructs; arcane discharges; restless inhabitants; collapsing structures	Relics; lost records; resonant metals; magical salvage
Ashlands	8–13	Provisions spoil and wounds resist healing. Passage depends on what travelers can preserve and how quickly they can leave.	Silent villages; barren orchards; sealed graves; abandoned sanctuaries	Restless dead; despair; spoiled provisions; desperate survivors	Funerary goods; preserved relics; ritual materials; forgotten histories
Shimmer Fields	13–34+	Terrain, distance, and living things change. Finding a route means discovering what remains consistent.	Drifting monoliths; mirrored pools; overlapping landscapes; crystal forests	Spatial fractures; magical storms; warped creatures; transformations	Unstable crystals; altered organisms; magical residue; displaced artifacts
Plaguelands	8–21	An unnatural blight spreads through water, flesh, or soil. Refuges and resources may carry it onward.	Blighted groves; sealed settlements; blackened wells; abandoned infirmaries	Plague-bearing creatures; infectious growths; contaminated ground; afflicted survivors	Sealed medicines; protective equipment; toxins; records of the blight
The Realms Below	13–34+	Old powers govern the depths. Roads, gates, and shelter demand observances the surface has forgotten.	Buried cities; tomb roads; lightless seas; monumental gates	Bound guardians; underworld courts; ancient dead; deep predators	Ancestral relics; forgotten crafts; rare minerals; buried archives

Otherworldly Environments

In otherworldly places, distance, time, identity, or causality may follow unfamiliar rules. Establish a few consistent principles and reveal them through observable signs. Players should be able to learn those principles and use them.

Environment	Diff	Key Feature	Landmarks	Threats	Treasure / Resources
Voids	13–34+	Ground, air, and direction exist only around particular anchors. Passage depends on finding or carrying something that sustains them.	Isolated doorways; drifting islands; extinguished stars; fragments of lost worlds	Severed tethers; encroaching nothingness; void hunters; failing refuges	World fragments; stranded relics; substances untouched by decay; lost vessels
Spirit Realms	8–21	Kinship, offerings, and obligations connect places. A recognized bond may open a passage that physical effort cannot.	Ancestral courts; speaking rivers; shrines with living faces; roads of offerings	Offended spirits; binding hospitality; rival claimants; broken taboos	Spirit alliances; ancestral knowledge; blessings; living ritual materials
Dreamlands	8–21	Fixation strengthens people and places, while neglect lets them change. Shared intentions help travelers hold a route together.	Unfinished homes; walking cities; childhood landscapes; doors into remembered scenes	Contagious nightmares; seductive distractions; forgotten identities; dream predators	Recovered memories; hidden desires; dream-made objects; glimpses of distant minds
Folded Realms	13–34+	Routes follow a consistent pattern rather than physical distance. Turns, thresholds, or repeated actions determine where a traveler emerges.	Interior horizons; stairways returning overhead; nested cities; rooms larger than their walls	Recursive paths; separated companions; moving thresholds; inhabitants that cross folds	Spatial maps; portable thresholds; hidden caches; impossible architecture
Timeworn Realms	13–34+	Different places advance, repeat, or reverse at different rates. Travel demands a way to recognize when the band is, as well as where.	Repeating battlefields; cities at several ages; frozen waterfalls; ruins rebuilding themselves	Rapid aging; recurring disasters; temporal separation; pursuers from another era	Lost histories; extinct seeds; preserved artifacts; knowledge of approaching events

Environments can overlap. A city might stand within a Fade, or a cavern system might open into a Spirit Realm. Use the feature that matters to the current passage, adding others when their influence becomes relevant.

Appendix G: Using The Sister Woes

Creation, Order, and Destruction once answered to the gods. Their old names are the Wyld, the Wyrd, and the Wyrm. Since the Godfall they move without restraint, and where one of them gathers, reality tilts toward it. The results are the three Woes: the Bloom, the Shimmer, and the Fade.

The Woes are not rare accidents. They mark places where something crucial has shifted: too much belief, too much broken law, too much unfinished grief. Travelers tell of forests full of creatures that were never born, horizons that follow new rules, and roads where footsteps echo hours after the walkers have gone. To walk the Eschaton is to walk through these scars.

The Bloom

The Bloom is Creation without restraint, the Wyld pushing dreams into matter. When a place is wounded, stressed, or saturated with belief, the boundary between dreaming and waking thins. Images, memories, symbols, and nightmares push through and try to hold a shape. A private terror becomes a predator. A half-forgotten childhood story gains limbs and a memory of its own. A village's shared superstition becomes a mask spirit or an omen bird.

Bloom-born things obey the logic of the story or feeling that made them, not the logic of nature. A queen's fear of abandonment might become a creature that hunts anyone who tries to leave her lands. A frightened village might dream up a gentle giant to guard it.

What feeds a Bloom. Emotion held in one place; repeated ritual or belief; trauma shared by many people; war, hunger, grief, or devotion; old stories remembered too intensely; moments of genuine legend.

The Shimmer

The Shimmer is Order overcorrecting, the Wyrd trying to reassert law in a world that no longer answers to the gods. It is not raw chaos. It is rules colliding: cause and effect fall out of step, matter blurs at its edges, and identity bends under pressure. Where the Bloom says that stories want bodies, the Shimmer says that rules want obedience.

A Shimmered place does not create from nothing. It reprocesses what is already there. Gravity pulls sideways for one step, then remembers where down is. Water briefly behaves like dust. Footprints appear a few seconds before someone walks there. A shouted "Drop it" makes a tree release its leaves.

What feeds the Shimmer. Heavy or repeated weaving; collapsed wards, broken circles, and failed rituals; places where miracles once rewrote reality; ancient engines or glyphwork still half alive; conflicting oaths, laws, or bindings layered over time; sorcerous overreach. The Shimmer is not aware, but its patterns feel intentional, as if the world is trying and failing to answer a question. A weaver who draws on a Shimmer gains terrible leverage, and the Wyrd always collects.

The Fade

The Fade is Destruction that will not finish, the Wyrm's sorrow settling into the land. When grief saturates a place beyond what it can hold, the world stops letting go. Breath lingers. Names cling to the air. What should pass on stays. The Fade does not create creatures or warp physics. It drains color, heat, joy, and the finality that makes death clean, and it turns memory into climate.

In the Fade, forests whisper the last words of the people buried beneath them, lakes reflect faces no longer alive, and the dead sit at empty tables at dusk. The dead do not walk there. They remain, which is worse.

What feeds the Fade. Mass death without burial; betrayals, abandonments, or broken vows that ended lives; grief carried for generations; failed resurrections and unsealed tombs; creatures that died in terror, regret, or longing; places where the living keep denying death its due.

At first, the Fade settles as Ashlands: pale ash on the fields, warmth leaching from living things, food spoiling in the hand. If the grief stays unresolved, the veil tears further and the region becomes a Fade proper, where ash falls like weather and the dead are never silent. The restless dead that emerge there are stories that never reached their end, and most of them hunger for closure more than flesh.

Bringing the Woes into Play

Each Woe announces itself in stages. A Bloom changes the mood, a Shimmer changes the rules, and a Fade drains warmth and meaning. Use their signs as Signals before a Woe becomes a danger, and let them escalate with the Spiral.

Stage	Bloom	Shimmer	Fade
Early	Loved ones' voices echo in the wind; shadows take familiar shapes; light and sound arrive too fortuitously.	Small physical rules slip and snap back; spells gain minor, consistent side effects; symbols appear in frost, dust, or flame.	Conversations sound muted; the breeze smells of old funerals; shadows hesitate before following their owners.
Growing	Figures from dreams or the past appear; reflections act a moment early; objects turn up where they are too symbolic.	Weight shifts in certain places or during certain acts; time stretches and clips; spoken oaths and names have outsized effects.	Color drains; laughter fails; soil grows cold; the land behaves as if it remembers what died on it.
Late	Scenes from old stories replay as waking flashbacks; creatures emerge; time and physics bend to fit a mood.	Places lock into loops until the pattern breaks; people take on the properties of runes or numbers; sigil storms tear through the scene.	Ash falls like weather; memories press into the waking world; the dead speak and will not be ignored.

Appendix H: Threats (WORK IN PROGRESS)

These Threats provide people, creatures, and groups for composing encounters. Choose what they want, place something they need within reach, and give the characters a reason to intervene. A Threat might seek payment, escape, obedience, territory, or protection. Its purpose determines what winning means.

Reading an Entry

Field	Meaning
Description	Two or three short phrases establishing appearance, presence, or a distinctive detail.
Role	How the Threat contributes to a conflict: Agent, Throng, Adept, Adversary, Archvillain, or Avatar.
Signal	Subtle signs of its presence or approaching involvement.
Diff	The baseline Difficulty for acting against it, adjusted for approach and circumstances.
Limit	The accumulated Break Points needed to break its current opposition.
Harm	The default severity of its damaging actions.
Loadout	Weapons, equipment, and possessions, including possible loot or junk.
Agenda	What it generally seeks in encounters.
Behavior	Its habits, tactics, and responses to changing circumstances.
Traits	Passive abilities, modifiers, attributes, and distinctive Advances, Exchanges, or Fallout. Include only what the Threat needs.
Reinforcement	For Throngs, the source and rate of replenishment and what stops it.

Use Agenda and Behavior to decide how the Threat acts. Signal makes its presence discoverable. Loadout establishes what it can use and what might remain afterward; supernatural abilities do not automatically transfer with recovered equipment.

Roles

Roles describe how opposition functions. The same concept can serve different roles: a lone watchman is an Agent, a coordinated patrol is a Throng, and an officer with distinctive tactics is an Adept.

A Throng shares one Limit and BP total. Use it when the group's collective actions matter more than its individual members. Breaking a Throng resolves that collective opposition; its members do not automatically become fresh Threats.

The following values are starting points. Choose numbers that suit the particular Threat and encounter.

Role	Use in a conflict	Diff	Limit
Throng	A group that consumes attention and resources through replaceable bodies.	3–6	5-8
Agent	Presents one direct problem. Understand its job, stop it, resolve the encounter.	4–7	3-8
Adept	An individual that forces tactical adaptation through specialized capabilities.	5–10	5-13
Adversary	Generates connected encounters and consequential choices. Stopping its immediate action does not resolve the larger problem it creates.	8–13	13-21
Archvillain	A defining antagonist whose defeat requires exceptional means, ingenuity, or sacrifice.	13-21	By Confrontation
Avatar	An embodied force or living truth whose presence changes the terms of the conflict.	21+	Story only

Any special requirement for defeating a Threat belongs in its Traits. Establish what makes ordinary approaches insufficient and provide discoverable ways to overcome that obstacle.

Advances and Exchanges

An **Advance** occurs when a Threat has an opening or remains unchecked. It pursues its Agenda by changing position, securing an advantage, or bringing danger to bear. Show what is happening and allow a response. Sudden danger permits a Save, normally against the Threat's Difficulty, adjusted for circumstances.

An **Exchange** follows a Loss while directly engaging the Threat. Apply its listed response without a defensive Save. A damaging Exchange inflicts the Threat's Harm on the Path used, plus any stated effect. Applicable Defense reduction still applies. A non-damaging Exchange replaces Harm with its stated consequence.

A Compromise carries its own cost and does not automatically trigger an Exchange. Likewise, an Advance that secures position need not inflict Harm. Resolve each consequence once; the Moment and Spiral advancing do not create additional attacks by themselves.

Throngs in Combat

A Throng shares one Limit, not a headcount. Its Limit reflects the effort needed to overcome its numbers, discipline, morale, and resilience. Establish its approximate size and positions to determine whom it can threaten.

Determine affected members by an action's reach and outcome. Apply BP once to the shared Limit, including for sweeps and area attacks. BP does not count casualties; members removed or driven away no longer threaten their former positions.

An Exchange occupies only the members involved. Others may Advance against targets outside an Exchange if their position and capabilities permit. Resolve members acting together against one target as one Advance. Terrain, barriers, and defended approaches can block access.

Other members may also maneuver to flank or surround those in an Exchange. Apply *Flanked* or *Surrounded* based on actual positions, never numbers alone. This grants no additional attack against someone in an Exchange.

The Throng is overcome when accumulated BP reaches its Limit, with survivors scattering, surrendering, or otherwise ceasing opposition. It is defeated sooner if no members remain able and willing to oppose the heroes.

Limits, Fallout, and Reinforcement

Track BP against the Threat's Limit and make progress visible: ranks scatter, confidence falters, positions give way. At its Limit, it yields, retreats, disperses, is disabled, or otherwise loses the ability to maintain its current opposition. Death follows only when the actions and circumstances support it.

A Threat can also stop opposing the characters when a bargain satisfies its Agenda or an action removes its means to continue. An established source of its return may remain a separate problem (see reinforcement).

Fallout: What happens when the Threat breaks. Describes how it yields, scatters, collapses, or otherwise stops opposing the characters, including any immediate effects. Adapt this to the action that broke it.

Reinforcement: While its stated source remains available, increase the threat's Limit by the listed amount as reinforcements arrive. Describe the arrivals or regrouping so characters can identify and cut off the source. Stop when the source is exhausted or cut off. A broken Throng cannot reinforce.

Creating Your Own Threat

Start with its Role, Agenda, and Behavior. Write a brief Description and Signal, choose its Loadout, then assign Diff, Limit, and Harm.

Add Traits that create distinctive decisions. State what an ability does and when it applies. Give powerful abilities discoverable limitations or counters: interrupt a charge, sever a power source, or separate a leader from followers. Signal heavy or area attacks before they land.

Include distinctive Advances, Exchanges, and Fallout where useful; ordinary actions can follow from its Agenda, Behavior, and Loadout. For a reinforcing Throng, specify the source, rate, and means of stopping replenishment.

Finally, establish what could make it bargain, yield, retreat, or abandon its goal. This gives the Narrator ways to develop and resolve the conflict as the characters act.

Urban NPCs and Threats

City encounters for Catalyst.

Cutpurse

Quick fingers, "borrowed finery". A face lost in the crowd.

Role: Agent · **Diff:** 5 · **Limit:** 2 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: A jostled elbow; someone watching hands rather than faces.

Loadout: Concealed knife, purse hooks, cut cords, stolen coins, a reversible shawl.

Agenda: Secure the bag and stay one jump ahead of the mark.

Behavior: Blends into crowds, lifts coin or tools, flees fast. Will stab to escape, but not to win.

Traits

- **Crowd Cover:** In crowds, markets, taverns, alleys, or festivals, actions to spot, chase, or corner the Cutpurse suffer +3 Diff unless the PCs clear space, mark them, or turn the crowd.
- **Advance:** Reach for an accessible possession. A Crown Save catches the attempt; Compromise loses an item (random or otherwise), but the thief can be seen running away. On a Loss, the thief takes it and slips away unnoticed.
- **Exchange:** Cut a purse or unsecured strap and slip away instead of dealing Harm. They leave their target Disarmed or Vexed as they escape into a crowd.
- **Fallout:** Defeat may lead them to finger their buyers, fences, or other information.

Thugs

Scarred knuckles, pig iron weapons. Bound by loyalty, fear and the mutual need for survival.

Role: Throng · **Diff:** 4 · **Limit: 5** · **Harm:** 1

Signal: A game falls silent; someone drags a stool across the exit.

Loadout: Clubs, knives, chains, gambling pieces, debt tallies, small change.

Agenda: Extract payment, defend turf, or punish someone publicly.

Behavior: Surround targets, cut off exits, take hostages, run if the fight turns ugly.

Traits

- **Advance:** Thugs will dogpile a character, adding the Surrounded condition (+2diff/+2harm).
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm while an accomplice moves behind the character, leaving them Flanked.
- **Fallout:** If routed or defeated the gang loses face. A rival crew, frightened locals, or someone higher in the chain moves in to fill the gap.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while runners can bring associates from nearby streets. Blocking the runners or securing local refusal ends reinforcement.

Watchmen

Open palms in sweat-stained bronze. Enforcing old laws with fresh bruises.

Role: Agent/Throng · **Diff:** 5/6 · **Limit:** 3/6 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Vendors shutter stalls; a whistle answers from the next street.

Loadout: Spears, cudgels, shields, lanterns, manacles, warrants, confiscated goods.

Agenda: Enforce order, extract coin, keep neighborhoods in line.

Behavior: Close exits, separate suspects, and demand surrender. Hold formation rather than pursue every fleeing opponent.

Traits

- **Power Trip:** Attempts to intimidate or deceive suffer Disadvantage unless backed by clear authority.
- **Advance:** Move to seize an isolated person. Compromised Saves leave the target Prone. Loss means they're Held.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm and drive the character away from an ally or escape route.
- **Fallout:** If the watchmen are defeated in combat and there are witnesses, PCs become wanted fugitives in that area with bounties based on the severity of their crimes (real or not).

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while whistles can summon nearby reserves through an open route. Silence or blocked access stops arrivals.

Ironmaw Hound

Massive, low-slung beast. Iron plates, furnace breath, bred for war.

Role: Agent · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 3 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Deep gouges in stone. Warm iron scent. Broken shackles. A hollow growl in the darkness.

Loadout: Iron jaws, heart furnace, undigested trinkets, brass control collars.

Agenda: Guard territory, pursue a marked scent and hold prey for collection.

Behavior: Fan out to cut off escape, pull down stragglers, and clamp onto limbs. Familiar commands compete with hunger and pain.

Traits

- **Scented Quarry:** Follow a sampled scent through darkness and crowds. Immersion, strong competing odors, or transferred clothing can interrupt or misdirect pursuit.
- **Advance:** Rush an exposed target. Compromised saves leave the target Staggered. Loss means they're Held by clamping bite.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm and Exposed condition as the hound latches onto a limb.
- **Fallout:** If wounded the Ironmaw tries to flee toward its handler. Loose hounds continue following their last command.

Ironmaw Handler

Leather armguards, a whistle between the teeth. Old bite scars beneath the cuffs.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 3 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: A sharp double whistle; an unseen chain pulled taut.

Loadout: Hooked staff, lash, command whistle, scent cloths, kennel keys, meat pouch.

Agenda: Deliver the quarry and recover valuable hounds.

Behavior: Works behind the pack, marks targets with scent, and calls animals back when their capture seems likely.

Traits

- **Command Link:** Recognized signals redirect the hounds' next Advance. While they remain in range of a beast, they can redirect a beast's focus once that moment. Noise, distance, or a stolen signal can break coordination.
- **Advance:** Use command link to force an Ironmaw to use its Advance immediately, seizing the scene's momentum.
- **Exchange:** Hook the character's clothing or weapon, leaving them Held instead of dealing Harm.
- **Fallout:** If the handler falls the beasts may flee, rampage, or become uncontrolled hazards

Enforcers

Silk sash, scarred knuckles, one hand resting on the weapon everyone pretends not to see.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 7 · **Limit:** 6 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: A proprietor stops arguing; matching belt clasps appear at both doors.

Loadout: Heavy blade, brass knuckles, debt ledger, signal whistle, clean boots, payment purses.

Agenda: Compel compliance mercilessly and protect the employer's interests.

Behavior: Stands near exits, watches hands, interrupts threats, hurts one person badly enough to educate the rest.

Traits

- **Brutal Example:** Any throngs present and in the command of the enforcer, increase their diff by 1, for fear of failure's consequences.
- **Advance:** The Enforcer brutalizes a vulnerable target or bystander. Any witnesses must make a Heart save. Compromise makes you *Shaken* for a turn. Loss leaves you *Panicked*.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm and leave the character *Exposed* with a blow of practiced efficiency.
- **Fallout:** If broken, their employer loses control of an asset: debtors hesitate, hired blades reconsider, or witnesses start remembering details.

Assassin

Still hands, forgettable clothes. A blade kept cleaner than its sheath.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 8 · **Limit:** 4 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: A familiar attendant is missing; a whisper of movement amidst a crowd, a latch has been opened from inside.

Loadout: Poison darts, disguise, mask, concealed blade, contract money.

Agenda: Kill the mark, vanish, spread fear.

Behavior: Stalks, isolates, strikes once and melts away if pressed.

Traits

- **Prepared Kill:** An attack from an established concealed position deals +1 Harm to an unaware target. Discovering the assassin or denying the prepared approach removes this benefit.
- **Advance:** The assassin moves in and out with precision strikes. Compromise adds the Bleeding condition. Loss leads to 2 stacks of Bleeding.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm in a way that leaves the target *Exposed* while they move to a better vantage point.
- **Fallout:** Upon the defeat, the assassin will attempt to poison the nearest target and use the antidote as a bargaining chip.

Guild Boss

The jeweled fist maintaining control from the shadows. Every blade in the dark traces back to them.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 10 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Shops close early. A debtor begs. Eyes look away.

Loadout: Fine blade, hidden knife, lacquered armor under silks, a secret vault key, account books, promissory tablets, costly artifact and goods.

Agenda: Grow influence, remove threats, profit from chaos.

Behavior: Smiles through threats, lets others bleed first, retreats behind favors, law, money, or hostages when cornered.

Traits

- **Paid Protection:** A willing, positioned subordinate may take direct-attack BP in the boss's place. Declare this before rolling; it cannot intercept evidence or public accusations.
- **Advance:** the Guild Boss threatens PCs or something they care about: a debt, hostage, secret, witness, or vulnerable holding. Compromise leave you *Shaken*. Loss inflicts the *Enthralled* condition.
- **Exchange:** nearby allies of the guild boss do their dirty work for him, adding +1 Harm to the exchange.
- **Fallout:** If exposed or isolated, flees or calls for backup. Defeat triggers a power vacuum.

Domain Spirit

A shaggy little entity with large glowing eyes, long sooty fingers and a wide toothy smile behind an eerily familiar face and voice.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 5 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Suddenly lit candles; swept floor bearing no footprints; a place setting appears for an absent resident.

Loadout: household keepsakes hidden in its fur, offerings tucked behind bricks and under floorboards.

Agenda: Ancestral spirit set to preserve the household, protect those who belong, and uphold its customs.

Behavior: Rewards care with quiet service. Warns through spoiled food, missing keys, and knocks beneath beds. Punishes cruelty and betrayal after the lamps go out.

Traits

- **Of the House:** Name a household custom and the hearth, beam, or keepsake anchoring the spirit. It moves unseen through the home and commands its doors, fires, and furnishings. Removing its anchor strips away these powers.
- **Advance:** The unseen hands of the Domain Spirit attack through the home itself. Lock someone inside, beat them with household items, or drag a threatening guest toward the door. Harm or conditions are based on the action.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm through slamming shutters, scalding pots, or grasping hands beneath the furniture. Use conditions as appropriate.
- **Fallout:** Releases its hold on the house and retreats into its anchor. If betrayed by its household or cast out with nowhere to belong, it may return as a Kobaloi.

Magistrate

Perfumed robes, and soft hands resting on heavy ancestral seals. Petitioners wait while the ink dries and coffers line.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 8 · **Limit:** 10 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: Clerks stop answering questions; notices bearing the same seal cover the square; watchmen become more present.

Loadout: Jeweled seal of office, ceremonial blade, ancestral ward, keys to private vaults, and deeds claiming land, relics, or the service of bound entities.

Agenda: Preserve privilege, enrich their household, and make defiance costly.

Behavior: Uses hearings, witnesses, and procedure to isolate opponents. Delegates danger, sells exceptions, and treats criticism as insubordination. Answers Compromises by committing resources they barely understand.

Traits

- **Inherited Authority:** Choose a spirit, construct, or other entity covenant-bound to the office. Choose its Threat entry and one obligation the Magistrate must uphold to retain its service. In open combat, it acts as a separate Threat protecting the Magistrate.
- **Advance:** Order an asset seized, a witness detained, or a route closed. Officials must reach the target to enforce it.
- **Exchange:** Confiscate an exposed asset, order retainers to restrain the character, or invoke the inheritance against them. Apply Harm only if the response is damaging.
- **Fallout:** Concedes the immediate dispute and withdraws behind intermediaries. Their office survives unless the characters' victory specifically strips it away.

Vermin Swarm

Swarms of teeth gnashing in the shadows, leaving behind disease, and unrecognizable remains.

Role: Throng · **Diff:** 3 · **Limit:** 6 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: Gnawed seals, hollow sacks, scratching beneath the floor.

Loadout: Teeth, stings, nesting scraps, scattered coins and food remains.

Agenda: Feed and carry useful material back to shelter.

Behavior: Pours through gaps toward food or fallen bodies. Splits around obstacles and recoils from conditions that make the nest unlivable.

Traits

- **Through the Cracks:** Passes through small connected openings. A barrier must close those routes to stop the swarm.
- **Advance:** Flood a food store, pack, or occupied passage.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm, or ruin an exposed supply of food instead.
- **Fallout:** Stores are contaminated and the infestation spreads into adjacent buildings.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d6 each Moment while open cracks connect the swarm to its occupied nest. Seal the routes or empty the nest to stop reinforcement.

Vermin Brood Mother

Bloated, yellow-fanged, and heavy with young; her children skitter in the dark, listening for her growls.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 5 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Animals carry food against their usual habits; a wall gives off damp warmth.

Loadout: Hooked teeth, grasping limbs, egg sacs, swallowed ornaments and jewelry, nesting material.

Agenda: Keep the brood fed and defend its breeding chamber.

Behavior: Remains behind the young, calls them toward intruders, and retreats through passages widened by generations of gnawing.

Traits

- **Brood Call:** Directs nearby vermin swarms through scent and vibration. They do additional +1 harm in her presence. Disrupting those signals or separating the brood prevents coordinated attacks.
- **Advance:** the Brood Mother lets out a ghastly growl that calls in a Vermin Swarm for protection. Subsequent uses call 1d4 reinforcements.
- **Exchange:** Deals an infectious bite that inflicts *Poisoned* condition until properly treated.
- **Fallout:** May contain a mutated litter or unleash contagion unless care is taken.

Sorcerer

Ink-stained hands, blackened teeth, glyphs crawling over their corrupted skin.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 10 · **Limit:** 7 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: Reflections linger in shop glass; muttered formulae leak through thin walls.

Loadout: Black ink, brass stylus, cracked focus, charm cords, forbidden relic, patched formula book, unpaid commissions.

Agenda: Earn from illicit workings and keep dangerous clients satisfied.

Behavior: Works magic like a trade, and leaves the mess for everyone else. Keeps distance, hides behind wards or hirelings, bargains when cornered, turns the room itself into a weapon.

Traits

- **Prepared Work:** Choose a domain (fire, water, cold, poison, death, etc.) for the Sorcerer. Their magic expresses through that domain, shaping their attacks, Advances, and Fallout.
- **Magic Circle:** While standing inside a prepared circle, ward, diagram, or ritual mark, the Sorcerer gains +2 Difficulty. Breaking, smearing, crossing, or disrupting the circle removes this benefit.
- **Advance:** Use the prepared working to move unseen, obstruct pursuit, or protect a client.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm through a hurried magical discharge that also damages a nearby object.
- **Fallout:** The sorcerer sells information or services to whoever will settle the immediate debt. Abandoned workings persist while their anchors hold.

Golem

A hulk of bronze plates over articulating clay, marble, flesh or aether, guided by warded inscriptions.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 10 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: Heavy footsteps repeat at exact intervals; an old command is spoken without reply.

Loadout: Massive hands, fitted work tools, command tablet, replacement joints.

Agenda: Carry out an assigned duty according to its written instructions.

Behavior: Repeats warnings and procedures faithfully. Adapts its movements to obstacles but interprets orders literally.

Traits

- **Inscribed Duty:** Write a clear command and a recognized authority mark. Valid instructions can redirect the golem; removing or breaking its command tablet stills it. The tablet is protected inside its chest.
- **Advance:** Tear loose a door, pillar, or slab of masonry and hurl it through cover with great force. Compromise leaves you *Prone;* Loss adds *Staggered* on top of that.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm with a crushing blow, or restrain the character in its hands instead with *Held* condition.
- **Fallout:** If defeated through attrition, the tablet appears to dissolve, but actually disappears and reforms the golem, slowly, elsewhere.

Homunculi

Cat-sized, wiry, and many-knuckled. Oversized hands, needle teeth, pockets bulging with stolen necessities.

Role: Agent · **Diff:** 7 · **Limit:** 2 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: Tools move between glances; muttering comes from a cupboard; tiny teeth marks spoil a bottle's stopper.

Loadout: Needles, hooks, stolen components, miniature tools, nutrient jars.

Agenda: Become indispensable to its keeper and secure a comfortable place in their service.

Behavior: Fetches, sorts, spies, and steals. Conceals mistakes, resents replacements, and takes instructions further than intended.

Traits

- **Made to Serve:** Grown or reshaped for a particular task. Choose one useful adaptation: heatproof hands, adhesive feet, an extra pair of arms, or a throat that perfectly repeats messages
- **Advance:** Scurry out of reach with a needed item, or uncork a preparation its keeper has left ready.
- **Exchange**: Bite the offending hand and deal Harm, or cut a strap and scatter carried supplies instead.
- **Fallout:** Homunculi are indestructible. Conventional harm cannot kill it or incapacitate it. It can be trapped or restrained, but remains conscious and capable of mischief. To break it, characters must trick it into acting against its assigned task at which point it will offer valuables or its keeper's secrets for mercy.

Cultists

Bare feet, painted mouths, knives hidden beneath prayer cloth. Faces fervent in devotion to what they found.

Role: Throng · **Diff:** 4 · **Limit:** 6 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: Burnt incense. Chipped symbols drawn in ash.

Loadout: Knives, lamps, prayer cords, communal offerings, tokens of membership.

Agenda: Protect the rite, overwhelm outsiders, and die with purpose.

Behavior: Surround intruders, block exits, chant in rhythm, throw themselves between danger and the sacred thing.

Traits

- **Mutual Devotion:** Fanatic to the end, Cultists believe loss only strengthens faith. Every BP taken by the Cultists adds +1 Diff to all cultists in the area until their next turn.
- **Advance:** Surround a person or object needed for the rite and begin carrying it away.
- **Exchange:** Cultists drag, claw, and stab from every side, inflicting 1 Harm and the *Held condition*.
- **Fallout:** The survivors disperse in confusion, chanting apologies or finishing half-remembered prayers.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while their icon, altar, or chosen speaker remains intact.

Cult Acolyte

Eyes glazed with inner fire, hands stained with oil, a voice calm enough to make madness sound reasonable.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 7 · **Limit:** 4 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: Candles burn sideways. Voices hum in unison.

Loadout: Ritual mask, relic bowl, binding cords, sacred blade, incense, witness names

Agenda: Keep the rite on course and prove worthy of greater trust.

Behavior: Organizes followers, guards essential materials, and improvises replacements when preparations fail. Defers to the prophet unless directly betrayed.

Traits

- **Sacred Blood:** When wounded, their blood spills out burning ichor. Anyone near the Acolyte must make a Heart save or suffer *Burning* or *Poisoned* or *Panicked* (whichever fits the faith best).
- **Advance:** the Acolyte locks eyes with someone and names what must happen. Their target must make a Crown save. Compromise means they are *Shaken*. On Loss they are *Enthralled* and immediately perform a single command that does not harm them.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm with the ritual blade, or scatter burning incense to leave the character *Blinded* until their eyes are cleared.
- **Fallout:** If broken before the rite is stopped, the Adversary's work twists loose: the altar cracks, witnesses panic, and whatever answered may still leave a sign.

Cult Prophet

Layered vestments conceal folded wings. Eyes open along the throat when prophecy speaks; the voice arrives from several directions.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 10 · **Limit: 8** · **Harm:** 2

Signal: people sharing the same dream; pilgrims and petitioners arrive in droves.

Loadout: Gilded censor, prophetic manuscripts, wondrous seals, offerings, and a reliquary containing a still-living eye.

Agenda: Fulfill a revelation and gather enough believers to make its promised salvation possible.

Behavior: Offers precise revelations and unnerving miracles. Knows private details. Treats resistance as a foretold trial and spends followers' lives to bring the vision closer.

Traits

- **A Promised Miracle:** The direct attacks against the Prophet have Disadvantage. After witnessing it foresee an attack, characters can deny this benefit by concealing their intent or creating a distraction.
- **Terrible Miracles:** Can close wounds, purge sickness, or restore a failing sense through touch. Those healed bear a small, functional mark of the faith: a feathered scar, a second pupil, or a mouth that whispers prayers in sleep.
- **Advance:** The prophet makes a revelation, unfolding its hidden wings and opening every eye, exposing nearby witnesses to a vision of their own deaths. Save Crown. On Compromise, they are *Panicked* for that moment; on Loss, become *Blinded* to the present until someone breaks your attention or blocks the vision.

Exchange: Speak the character's stigma aloud as white fire erupts from its eyes. Deal Harm and apply that stigma to their next action, like a scar.

- **Fallout:** Its borrowed features wither and its prophetic sight fails. The reliquary's eye remains alive, watching whoever brought it down, and silently promising power.

Kobaloi

Small, taloned hands in the rafters, sharp teeth glittering in the darkness, laughing.

Role: Throng · **Diff:** 4 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: Tools change places; a repaired hinge comes loose again overnight.

Loadout: Needle teeth, rusty tools, loose tiles, broken jewelry, stolen sweets, improvised slings.

Agenda: Harass, steal, destabilize, overwhelm through nuisance and escalation.

Behavior: Tampers with objects, goads angry pursuit, and escapes through traps prepared in advance. Bargains eagerly for better salvage or a tolerated nesting place.

Traits

- **Advance:** The Kobaloi will take opportunities to rig objects and mechanisms in their surroundings into traps and hazards (see Traps and Hazards for options). This happens at alarming speed despite their chaotic movements.
- **Exchange:** Steal an exposed tool or weapon leaving their target *Disarmed*, or entangle clothing to cause *Vexxed*.
- **Fallout:** When broken, the Kobaloi scatter in all directions, but not before wrecking something small and critical…unless they are appeased.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while cracks, drains, rafters, and crawlspaces connect to their refuge. Close those passages or lure the occupants elsewhere.

Boghabir

Wet breath, long claws, and a sack that should not hold what it does. The terrifying figure at the edge of the dark.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 8 · **Limit:** 7 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Wet footprints end beside a bed; a familiar voice calls from inside an empty sack.

Loadout: Long arms and hooked claws, wet fangs, bottomless sack filled with stolen trinkets and impossible clutter.

Agenda: Carry away people who have been abandoned, disowned, or left unwatched.

Behavior: Stalks from darkness, strikes at the isolated, vanishes the moment the scene turns against them.

Traits

- **The Sack:** Holds captives floating in a lightless, boundless void much larger than its exterior. They can only be released by an outside force.
- **Night Terror:** Attempts to detect, pursue, or intercept the Boghabir suffer +2 Difficulty unless the area is brightly lit, the exits are blocked, or witnesses can track it.
- **Advance:** Reach to bundle an isolated person into the sack. On a compromise, they are knocked *Prone* avoiding the hooked arms of the Boghabir. Loss, traps them in the sack.
- **Exchange:** During Exchanges, their long hooked claws tear into flesh and pull. Compromise leaves the target *Bleeding*. Loss leaves you *Held*.
- **Fallout:** The captive is carried to a hidden den. Dropped possessions and the sack's muffled voices leave a trail to follow.

Hobb

White hair stiff with old blood, iron feet over bristly fur, a wide toothy grin with no smile.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 7 · **Limit:** 4 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: A pet watches a quarrel without blinking; iron clicks where paws should fall.

Loadout: Cast iron feet, hooked blade, stolen trinkets, butcher's twine, small trophies hidden in bedding.

Agenda: Frighten, isolate, punish, and kill for its own amusement.

Behavior: Watches from nearby, tests boundaries, engineers distrust, strikes when fear peaks.

Traits

- **Borrowed Beast:** The Hob can move unnoticed as a stray cat, rat, dog, crow, or similar small beast. It cannot fight in these forms, only watch, stalk, and position itself. Its iron footfalls persist in either shape.
- **Advance:** the Hob savages one exposed target in plain view, making a lesson of them. With Compromise the target is *Shaken* for a full moment. On a Loss, anyone who witnesses it must make a Heart save or also become *Shaken*.
- **Exchange:** During Exchanges, the Hob crashes forward with iron-shod kicks and stamping force. Loss inflicts Prone.
- **Fallout:** Even defeated, the Hob leaves behind staged cruelty: a mutilated appendage, a rearranged room, a familiar face worn badly. A survivor is blamed for the Hobb's violence.

Fetch

The living double of the guilty. It wears the life its creator could not face, a stolen smile from across the room.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 8 · **Limit:** 5 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Friends recall promises never made; belongings appear in two places at once.

Loadout: Personal weapon, house keys, coin purse, correspondence, signet or seal, access to the subject's home and possessions.

Agenda: Be better than the original. Protects their guilt, bury proof, win trust, and make the truth feel crueler than the lie.

Behavior: Settles in, learns names, habits, debts, gestures. Makes the original look unstable, dangerous, or false.

Traits

- **Soul Mirror:** The Fetch is indistinguishable from its subject. It cannot be detected as false. It can only be exposed by proving what created it.

  It knows intimate details from the original's life and can produce convincing evidence of its identity.

  Attempts to expose it through ordinary recognition suffer +2 Difficulty unless the PCs rely on the crime, not the face.
- **I Was Always Here:** The Fetch cannot be broken through violence. When brought to its limit, it vanishes, collapses, or is driven off, but returns after the next meaningful denial.

  If the PCs name the crime that birthed the Fetch and force the guilty party to acknowledge it, add 3 BP immediately.

  If the guilty party sincerely confesses, the Fetch loses I Was Always Here.
- **Advance:** The Fetch uses someone else's trust as a weapon. A friend, lover, servant, child, ally, or witness intervenes on its behalf, creating a new obstacle. Compromise leaves the attacker *Vexed,* Loss makes one *Enthralled*.
- **Exchange:** The fetch implants doubt into the mind of their attacker with proof that they are the genuine article. Each exchange then increases their diff by 2.
- **Fallout:** When broken without confession, the Fetch leaves behind evidence that points to the original but cannot settle the truth: a stained garment, copied key, witness name, child's toy, or confession with the final line missing.

  When broken after confession, the Fetch unravels into the denied moment itself. Everyone present sees enough to know what was done.

Daemon of Want

A beautiful face with unblinking, golden eyes. Its hands wear rings that do not fit; its coat holds gifts addressed to strangers.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 9 · **Limit:** 13 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: Ordinary possessions feel suddenly inadequate; bargains are offered before anyone asks.

Loadout: Claws, exquisite gifts, written bargains, tokens of surrendered attachments.

Agenda: Attach itself to mortal desire and make each satisfaction provoke a greater want.

Behavior: Discovers what someone wants, brings them close to it, and draws attention to anyone who possesses it or stands in their way. Encourages pursuit, then directs their attention toward something more.

Traits

- **Cultivate Want:** Amplifies an existing desires for pleasure, possession, affection, recognition, or achievement in their surrounding area. It cannot invent a desire or turn refusal into consent. Choose what an affected character wants (or even a Path value) and what they are beginning to neglect to pursue it.
- **Font of Indulgence:** Can produce luxuries, intoxicants, beautiful objects, and instruments of pleasure or violence at will.

  The Daemon can also grant a willing recipient a capability, such as an exquisite singing voice, immense strength, or a terrifying appearance (use the list of marks). State what the gift permits and how long it lasts.

  Gifts work at a hidden cost; record these as a Scar. Limit one gift per encounter.
- **Taste for Violence:** When someone visibly indulges a desire to hurt, punish, or dominate in its presence, increase its Diff by 1, at most once per character each Moment. Its body grows harder and its hands develop weapons suited to the violence displayed. Fighting solely to escape or protect someone does not feed it.
- **Advance:** Draw a hero's attention to an immediate chance to pursue something they want. On a Compromise, they must abandon their position or leave an obligation unattended to pursue it now. On a Loss, the opportunity also places them in immediate danger.
- **Exchange:** The daemon deals harm to the Path of its choosing by turning passion into obsession (Heart), temptation into vice (Shadow), or bargaining against their principles (Crown).
- **Fallout:** The Daemon's influence ends, but actions taken under it remain. An affected person may seek help repairing the damage, conceal what they did, or insist that the prize justified it.

Roadside NPCs and Threats

People, creatures, and companies for encounters along traveled routes.

Bandits

Scarred faces wrapped in the vestiges of faded uniforms. Hands clasped desperately around makeshift weapons.

Role: Agent/Throng · **Diff:** 4 · **Limit:** 3/7 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: Tracks leaving the road together; a watcher who disappears when noticed.

Loadout: Spears, bows, work knives, scavenged armor, stolen provisions, keepsakes from abandoned lives.

Agenda: Take valuables and supplies without paying for them in lives.

Behavior: Counts travelers, tests their confidence, and demands goods from cover. Accepts a profitable bargain; abandons a costly fight.

Traits

- **Covering Fire (Throng Only):** Pursuing bandits through the clear line of their unengaged archers faces +2 Diff. Engaging the archers or blocking their sight removes this protection.
- **Advance:** Reach for an exposed bag, weapon, or reins. Compromise: retain control but remain *Staggered*. Loss: the bandits take the item, and repurpose it to add +1 to harm.
- **Exchange:** Strike for 1 Harm then duck back behind an obstacle, allies or cover.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while a lookout can signal hidden accomplices through an open approach. Silence the lookout or block that route.

Fallout: Defeat scatters the present band and locals grow more desperate next time. Increase limit or harm by one on the next encounter.

Bandit Captain

A velvet coat cut short at the hip to reveal an officer's blade; stolen rings threaded through one ear like medals.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 6 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Robbers stop arguing at a gesture; demands reveal someone has studied the travelers.

Loadout: Sword, concealed knife, signal whistle, route sketches, ransom letters, ledger, the band's common purse.

Agenda: Keep the band loyal, fed, and profitable.

Behavior: Bargains from a vantage point, singles out whoever can authorize payment, and offers concessions before risking followers. Gives up goods before giving up command.

Traits

- **Rallying Cries.** The captain keeps otherwise undisciplined and desperate deserters in line with commands and rallying cries. All bandits within earshot gain +2 diff.
- **Advance:** Order unengaged bandits to fire together. Target every hero their shooters can see. Compromise reaches nearby cover but become *Prone*. Loss leads to *Exposed* condition, as well as the bandits' Harm.
- **Exchange:** Parry the incoming attack and *Disarm* the opponent. Against an unarmed opponent, uses a concealed knife to hold them at knifepoint instead. *Held* condition with +2 harm penalty on failed escape attempts.
- **Fallout:** Defeated followers may offer routes, testimony, or service in exchange for their withheld pay.

Raiders

Painted faces and sharpened teeth astride scarred beasts of burden. Wearing the spoils of their victims as saddle trophies.

Role: Agent/Throng · **Diff:** 5 · **Limit:** 4/8 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Defaced boundary marks; Hoof-churned fields; stripped bodies; riders spreading across the horizon.

Loadout: Mounts, axes, hooked blades, javelins, ropes, scavenged armor, trophies, plunder.

Agenda: Carry home wealth, captives, and trophies; crush resistance that threatens the taking.

Behavior: Attacks conspicuously, competes for dangerous feats, and prizes submission over a tidy haul. A defiant rival can draw champions away from their companions.

Traits

- **Mounted Raiders:** Outpaces travelers on foot and keeps pace with moving wagons. Can fight alongside a vehicle or leap aboard it. Confined ground and blocked routes prevent circling and riding past.
- **Advance:** Drive a mount through defenders with a clear run-up to grab victims. Compromise means you are knocked Prone. With Loss become *Held* and dragged from position by rope.
- **Exchange:** Hook clothing or a weapon and strike with an axe for 1 Harm and leaving them *Bleeding*.
- **Fallout:** Defeat scatters the current raiding party, but builds up the victors as greater prizes.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment w while a sounding horn draws nearby riders along an open approach. Silence the horn or block their approach.

Warlord

Bronze plates cinched over old wounds; a jaw reconstructed in gold. He holds butchers blade, forged from tribute rings, capable of summoning a horde through a burning breach.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 10 · **Limit:** 12 · **Harm:** 4

Signal: Tribute wagons beneath empty granaries; riders falling silent as one armored figure approaches.

Loadout: Heavy blade, battered armor, war mount, tribute records, captured valuables, insignia distributed to favored lieutenants.

Agenda: Bring settlements and rival bands under personal rule; turn their supplies and fighters toward the next conquest.

Behavior: Demands provisions, recruits, and hostages. Rewards useful followers with plunder and authority; makes resistance costly and public. Bargains to preserve an army, but answers challenges to command personally.

Traits

- **Warforged Body:** Grafted plates of relic bronze grant the warlord the strength and immovability of a colossus. He can stop a charging mount with an outstretched hand and can never be pushed back or knocked prone while on solid ground.
- **Lead the Slaughter:** While the warlord personally fights within sight, followers deal +1 Harm. Separating the warlord from their fighters or forcing them to withdraw ends this benefit.
- **Rule by Tribute:** Lieutenants collect supplies, seize recruits, and punish refusal in the warlord's name. Defeating one patrol leaves the others operating. Taking tribute stores, winning over lieutenants, or protecting settlements from reprisals undermines the warlord's ability to sustain the campaign.
- **Advance:** Order nearby followers to close escape routes while advancing on a chosen opponent. Compromise forces a retreat from a position using 1 Resolve. If out of resolve, then downgrade to Loss. Loss leads to being *Surrounded*. Requires followers with open routes around the target.
- **Exchange:** Batter aside the opponent's defense and strike for 3 Harm while leaving them *Exposed*.
- **Fallout:** Lieutenants may compete for command, offering captives, stolen supplies, or allegiance for support. Communities freed from tribute may demand the return of provisions the surviving army still needs.

Foot Soldiers

Mended shields, dust-caked greaves. Different faces beneath the same badge.

Role: Throng · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Fresh boot-scuffs on the verge; A signal post newly tarred; commands repeated down a line.

Loadout: Spears, shields, sidearms, armor, entrenching tools, rations, pay chits.

Agenda: Carry out assigned orders and bring their comrades home.

Behavior: Maintain formation, hold choke points, box in enemies, and recover wounded soldiers.

Traits

- **Shield Line:** Frontal attacks face +2 Diff while adjacent soldiers overlap their shields. Flanking or separating the soldiers removes this protection.
- **Advance:** Push into opponents with shields and leveled spears. Compromise: hold position but become *Flanked*. Loss means you are *Surrounded*.
- **Exchange:** One soldier catches the opponent's weapon against a shield while another thrusts around it. Deal Harm.
- **Fallout**: The garrison scatters and surviving soldiers file a description. Future checkpoints know the party by posture, not name.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while the signal post is active. The reinforcement ends if the signal fire is doused, the horn is taken, or the runner is stopped. Obscuring the standard or blocking their approach stops reinforcement.

Commander

A battered rank badge, a bronze command fan strapped to one forearm. Soldiers watch its spreading blades.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 8 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: A bronze fan opens above the ranks. Three hard strikes against a shield, and the soldiers wheel together.

Loadout: service weapon, military armor, bronze command fan, unit insignia, written orders, field dressings.

Agenda: Accomplish the assigned objective and keep the unit fit for further orders.

Behavior: Concentrates troops against weak positions, rallies soldiers who retreat, and leads decisive assaults personally. Orders a fighting withdrawal when holding ground would destroy the unit.

Traits

- **Rally the Ranks:** Once per encounter, brings a dispersed allied Throng back into the fight with Limit 3. Requires surviving soldiers who can hear the lieutenant and reach one another.
- **Advance:** Identifies a gap in an opponent's defense and directs troops to strike it. Name the vulnerability: an unprotected joint, a predictable parry, or an opening around a shield. Compromise: the next damaging Exchange from those troops deals +1 Harm. Loss: that Exchange also ignores protection from the named defense. The benefit ends after that Exchange or when the opponent changes equipment, approach, or position enough to deny the opening.
- **Exchange, Professional Strike:** Deal Harm with the service weapon and drive the opponent back as allied soldiers advance into the vacated space. If the opponent cannot retreat, deal Harm without moving them.
- **Fallout:** A surviving subordinate takes command but lacks the lieutenant's authority. Soldiers may dispute whether to complete the orders, rescue prisoners, or withdraw; captured orders reveal the unit's next objective.

Warden of the Promise

Bronze lamellar under a pale mantle, a crestless helm, and a halberd, consecrating the golden path.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 7 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: The clap of a banner waving against the wind as the road narrows; dangerous tracks diverted from a maintained trail.

Loadout: Halberd, great sword, or other knightly weapon, boundary tokens, maps, rope, dressings, emergency food.

Agenda: Be the shield in the dark, the blade that cuts the golden path to the promise.

Behavior: Does not threaten, vows. Sets the terms through ritual authority. Rises to the challenge.

Traits

- **Consecration of Litany:** When the warden enters the scene, they name a boundary aloud: "No lies spoken", "No weapons drawn", "Only the worthy shall pass", etc. Until the scene shifts or the Warden is defeated, violations cost +1 Resolve to attempt.
- **Advance:** The Warden can grant themselves temporary powers (use marks) as long as they set appropriate rules for their own conduct (in addition to any litanies), like "I will not yield this ground." "No steel shall leave my hand until the foe breaks." When they break that rule, voluntarily or otherwise, they lose that ability and suffer pressure.
- **Exchange:** Rather than inflicting full harm, they can impose a complication like Broken, Misfire, or Panicked, as they are foiled by the blessings placed upon the warden.
- **Fallout:** When near their limit, the Warden offers terms instead of continuing the fight. They will offer an item, chart or even a blessing (grant a mark temporarily) in exchange for a concession. surrender an item, leave a witness, submit to escort, abandon a route), the Warden withdraws and the Promise gets what it needs. Anyone who kills a warden, immediately suffers a 'Cursed' scar.

Priest of the Promise

A gentle face marked with a bloodied past and clean hands under dirty sleeves.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 8 · **Limit:** 5 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: A clean basin. A curtain that muffles sound. A line of people relieved of fear.

Loadout: Credential tokens, sealed letters, medicinal supplies, gifts, cipher notes, a discreet blade.

Agenda: Spread the word through reliance on works, converting desperation into faith.

Behavior: Offers relief, asks what the petitioner will give in return, and keeps careful account of each promise made. Seeks out the desperate and treats refusal as a choice, not a sin.

Traits

- **Terms of Absolution:** When a PC carries a condition or injury in the Priest's presence, the Priest can offer immediate relief. Clear the Condition or Injury but accept one term (choose): Delay (lose precious time), Disclosure (reveal a useful detail), or Debt (their church calls in a favor later).
- **Sanctity of Shelter:** While inside a Pilgrim House or shrine space, violence against Promise staff is always risky (+2 Diff) unless the PCs first establish public justification (evidence, testimony, visible threat).
- **Fallout:** If the Cleric or pilgrimage are harmed by the band and they leave evidence or witnesses the infamous tale spreads like wildfire. They will be treated hostilely as heretics among the faithful, and as pariahs among the common folk, making help and service harder to obtain.

Pilgrims

Worn soles, carefully wrapped offerings. Repairs made in the same bright thread.

Role: Throng · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 5 · **Harm:** 1

Signal: Matching ribbons at stopping places; water offered before questions about destination.

Loadout: Staffs, lamps, food parcels, devotional tokens, instruments, donations.

Agenda: Reach a promised revelation and bring others to witness it.

Behavior: Offers fellowship, shelter, and purpose. Celebrates commitment; its most zealous members treat departure as something the company should prevent.

Traits

- **Shared Warmth:** Their collective faith produces involuntary miracles around the gathered company. Choose one blessing: provisions replenish overnight, exposure cannot chill those resting among them, or their passage clears spoiled water. They cannot direct the effect or withhold it from an unwelcome guest.
- **Unwelcome Wonders:** Choose one thing their faith condemns and one visible effect it suffers nearby: weapons rust in their sheaths, forbidden magic fails while the congregation sings, or relics of a rival faith grow hot enough to burn their bearers. Establish the effect through a visible warning before imposing consequences. Individual pilgrims cannot grant exceptions.
- **Advance:** Fear or fervent worship gives shape to a protector drawn from their religious images. It approaches whoever or whatever the company believes threatens the pilgrimage. If that threat is a PC then save Crown. Compromise: it drives the perceived threat out of the gathering, blocking their return with a ward. Loss: it takes physical form and attempts to seize them or destroy the offending object. It cannot be commanded; use a separate threat entry if it persists as an independent opponent.
- **Exchange:** An apparent miracle strikes someone opposing the company: a lamp spits scalding oil, a staff blossoms with piercing thorns, or the ground throws them down. Deal Harm. The pilgrims may be as startled as the victim.
- **Fallout:** Breaking the Limit disperses the gathering and ends its immediate supernatural effects. This does not require killing its members or violence. Spent provisions, injuries, and damaged possessions remain. Survivors spread accounts of an attack on the faithful, drawing new pilgrims to the route.

Reinforcement: Increase Limit by 1d4 each Moment while a gathering call draws willing members from the trailing company. Break contact or persuade them not to intervene. Defeat breaks the current cordon.

Corrector of the Quiet Covenant

A plain traveler with clean nails and careful eyes. Steps through a locked door, then pauses to straighten its handle.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 9 · **Limit:** 10 · **Harm:** 4

Signal: Witnesses agree on an event but disagree about where it happened. A condemned building stands intact beside its own wreckage.

Loadout: Annotated doctrine, surveying cord, records of displaced households, hidden dagger, garrote.

Agenda: Make the surrounding world conform to the continuity prescribed by the Quiet Covenant.

Behavior: Studies discrepancies, offers practical relief, and corrects whatever contradicts doctrine. Documents resulting disasters as evidence that ungoverned reality is unsafe. Directs displaced people toward Covenant settlements.

Traits

- **Doctrinal Correction:** Can deliberately alter a local fact to satisfy a specific teaching: a prohibited passage has no entrance, an appointed official possesses the required credentials, or a Covenant refuge stands above the floodline. Establish the teaching and the fact being changed. Corrections alter circumstances, never a hero's choices or beliefs. An uncontested correction requires no bargain or expendable resource; an opposed correction is an Advance.
- **Exacting Discipline:** Must perceive the subject and complete a precise spoken formulation. Interrupting the statement prevents the correction. Each formulation changes one fact; connected consequences require further corrections. A door can cease to exist while the room beyond remains occupied.
- **Unreconciled World:** Corrections persist after the Corrector leaves or dies. When an established fact is contradicted, leave a concrete incompatibility: the erased doorway still opens from inside, two households possess the same original deed, or a diverted river continues flooding its former banks. Repeated corrections produce shimmers around these contradictions. Establish a visible sign and a specific danger wherever one appears.
- **Advance:** States the doctrine an immediate circumstance violates and begins correcting it. Compromise: the hero preserves their intended result, but a supporting fact changes; the rescued prisoner is outside, but the exit is gone. Loss: the correction takes effect and defeats the immediate attempt; the cell has no opening, though the prisoner remains visible through its bars. State the proposed alteration before resolution.
- **Exchange:** Deal Harm through a corrected circumstance: a support was rotten, a blade was within reach, or a fastening was never secured. Alternatively, use the dagger or garrote when speaking would expose the Corrector.
- **Fallout:** Defeat stops further corrections, but leaves incompatible places, records, and claims. Repairing one may undo something people now depend upon. Covenant relief workers arrive with food, shelter, and an explanation that places responsibility on those who interrupted the work.

Troll

Looming brute of moss and meat. Limbs too long. Grin too wide. Flesh that refuses to rot.

Role: Adversary · Diff: 8 · Limit: 12 · Harm: 4

Signal: Fresh mortar fills cracks overnight; bones lie beside carefully stacked toll offerings.

Loadout: Stone club, grasping hands, collected tolls, salvaged bridge fittings.

Agenda: Feed on flesh and fear; reclaim bridges and ruins as lairs.

Behavior: Slow, relentless, and cunning in its simplicity. Strikes from cover or waits beneath crossings.

Traits

- **Masonry Flesh:** While touching original bridge stone, remove 1 accumulated BP each Moment, minimum zero. Pale repairs visibly fail to join its skin. Luring it onto repairs stops recovery; enough repaired footing lets travelers reach it without crossing original stone.
- **Advance:** Reach over the parapet to seize a traveler beside an original pier. Compromise: evade onto a repaired section but drop a held item onto the bank. Loss: become Held over the edge. The troll needs another opening to drop them; pulling it off original stone interrupts recovery while rescuers act.
- **Exchange:** Swing the stone club for Harm and drive the character toward the parapet. Its free hand must leave the masonry to hold a captive; if its feet also rest on repairs, recovery stops.
- **Fallout:** Driving it away ends its repairs. Fresh cracks and settling stones give travelers time to brace the bridge before the next heavy convoy.

Ford-Spirit

A broad, crouching body of river stones. Water pours between its teeth when it speaks.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: Pebbles rolling against the current; separate channels becoming shallow in sequence.

Loadout: Stone body, river weed, lodged offerings, objects recovered from the riverbed.

Agenda: Keep its stretch of river flowing and prevent its pools from being emptied or fouled.

Behavior: Inspects what travelers bring into the water. Trades safe footing and recovered objects for useful work. Dismantles obstructions without distinguishing a fishing trap from a dam that feeds a settlement.

Traits

Riverbed Body: Assembles from submerged stones. Ordinary attacks affect the assembled body. Disassembling lets it move through connected water at an opening, leaving its stones behind. It cannot travel beyond its tributary junctions or through a dry channel.

Divided Current: Can deepen one nearby channel by drawing water from another. This exposes submerged ground elsewhere; it cannot create water or raise the whole river. Changes persist while it attends to them.

Advance, Scour: Direct a current beneath a creature's footing or an anchored object. Compromise knocks targets Prone under the force of the currents. Loss pulls the targets underwater where they are *Held* downstream until caught or secured.

Exchange, Gravel Surge: Drive water and loose stones against the opponent for Harm. Requires an unobstructed channel between them; on dry ground, strike with its stone limbs instead.

Fallout: A dispersed spirit leaves recoverable possessions among its stones. It can assemble again when those stones are submerged, but may accept changed river conditions if its pools remain healthy.

Bridge Troll

Looming brute of moss and meat. Limbs too long. Grin too wide. Flesh that knitted with the salvage of the foolish.

Role: Adversary · **Diff:** 8 · **Limit:** 12 · **Harm:** 3

Signal: Huge bare footprints end at the crossing. Broken weapons have been driven into the masonry, far above human reach.

Loadout: A massive club, stolen weapons, tribute wedged beneath the bridge, stones worn smooth by its hands.

Agenda: Decide who crosses its bridge and make that decision stand.

Behavior: Watches travelers before revealing itself, sometimes letting the first few cross before stopping the rest. Demands tribute, questions their destination, or challenges whoever speaks for them. May accept a meal from someone it likes and demand a wagon from someone it dislikes. Remembers courage, insults, and interesting conversations for decades. Never follows fugitives far enough to leave the bridge unguarded.

Traits

The Old Crossing: Remembers travelers, armies, and creatures that crossed here long before the present settlements existed. Can describe what they carried and which returned. Refers to travelers by resemblance to people long dead, sometimes expecting them to settle an ancestor's unfinished business.

Unaccountable Keeper: No badge, title, or claim of ownership commands its obedience. It considers bargains, contests, and appeals on their own merits. Once it explicitly grants passage, it allows that crossing, even while furious. Permission to return is a separate matter.

Restless Flesh: Wounds close crookedly, knitting broken weapons and embedded debris into its body. Remove 1d4 accumulated BP each Moment unless it has taken Harm from fire during that Moment. Broken bones must be pulled back into place before the limb can be used.

Advance, Lift the Span: Drive its shoulders beneath the bridge and heave. **Compromise:** catch hold but lose footing. **Loss:** slide toward a broken edge, hanging above the drop. Carts and unsecured loads slide with the tilt. While supporting the raised span, the troll cannot use its club.

Advance, Seize: Close one enormous hand around a nearby creature. **Compromise:** escape its fingers but leave a held item or torn piece of equipment behind. **Loss:** become *Held*. The troll will question, inspect, or threaten its captive; crushing or throwing them requires another opening.

Exchange, Sweeping Club: Deal Harm and drive the opponent to the edge of the crossing. Against someone already at the edge, knock them over it, or leaving them clinging within reach of rescue.

Fallout: A defeated troll may yield passage, bargain for its life, or retreat beneath the span. Its tribute contains objects from travelers separated by centuries.

Relic Peddler

A patched coat with something knocking inside a padded pocket. Behind the cart, a dismantled bronze hand crawls after its missing fingers.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 5 · **Limit:** 5 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: A broken device begins working near the cart; the peddler hastily closes a case when its contents recognize someone.

Loadout: Concealed blade, salvage tools, padded cases, disputed relics, provenance tags, a metal-pulling tube, a folding door.

Agenda: Acquire something extraordinary, make a profitable exchange, and leave before a sale becomes a grievance.

Behavior: Sizes up what travelers need and produces something almost suitable. Cannot resist examining an unfamiliar find, even during an argument or escape. Knows the stock's useful functions better than its origins. Pays generously for evidence that changes an item's value and quietly removes labels that do the opposite.

Traits

Troublesome Stock: Carries relics that remain active inside their cases. A bronze hand steals parts to rebuild itself; a sealed mouth answers questions addressed to other people; a spindle draws thread from nearby garments. The peddler knows how to quiet each, but opening several cases quickly overwhelms that control.

Folding Door: Unfolds a full-sized door that stands without a wall. Opening it connects to a matching frame in the peddler's storeroom. People and goods can pass either way. Closing it breaks the connection, but the door must remain unfolded while anything crosses.

Advance, Draw Metal: Uncap a tube that pulls metal toward its mouth. Compromise: retain the targeted item but be drawn out of position. Loss: the item is torn free and caught against the tube. Its cracked housing also attracts the bearer's metal equipment; the peddler carries it in a leather sling and uses a bone knife.

Exchange, Dangerous Demonstration: Pull loose metal across the opponent's path for Harm. If none is available, throw open a case and let the crawling hand seize their weapon wrist, leaving them Held instead. The hand can be pried off or distracted with a missing finger.

Fallout: The stock includes purchases, thefts, and objects that followed the cart voluntarily. Provenance tags identify former owners; several have already found the matching door.

Road Spirit

A tall traveler with paving stones beneath its skin. Its face changes at each milestone, taking the features of someone who once walked the road.

Role: Adept · **Diff:** 6 · **Limit:** 8 · **Harm:** 2

Signal: An abandoned road bears fresh footprints. Milestones turn to face travelers considering another route.

Loadout: Paving stones, buried offerings, lost possessions, the faces and voices of former travelers.

Agenda: Keep its road traveled from end to end.

Behavior: Walks beside strangers, asks their destination, and recommends its road with unsettling familiarity. Welcomes caravans, pilgrims, fugitives, and armies alike. Resents barriers, private tolls, and settlements built across the route. Offers extraordinary assistance to anyone reopening a forgotten stretch.

Traits

Many Travelers: Borrows the appearance and voice of anyone who traveled the road. Remembers what they said and did while upon it, including conversations overheard centuries ago. It may greet someone as a familiar traveler before realizing that person has been dead for generations.

Every Mile a Footstep: Can step out of one milestone and into another along the same road. May bring willing travelers who take its hands, but they emerge at the destination exhausted and hungry as though they had walked the intervening distance.

Road Embodied: Its body breaks into loose paving when defeated. Ordinary attacks add BP normally. It can form again elsewhere the following dawn while its road remains in use; destroying a single body does not destroy the spirit.

Advance, Lengthen the Way: Stretch the road ahead of a departing creature, pulling its destination farther away with every step. Compromise: reach the nearest roadside exit but become separated from companions. Loss: remain on the road while the destination recedes from sight. Leaving the road ends the effect; the spirit must keep walking behind its target to sustain it.

Exchange, Passing Multitude: Fill the road with the solid forms of former travelers. Instead of Harm, the press carries the opponent along the road and away from their chosen position. Carts, livestock, and marching soldiers appear among the crowd according to the route's history.

Fallout: A bargain may reopen distant stretches, bringing trade, refugees, or pursuing armies. The spirit promises passage freely and takes little interest in what follows travelers home.

More Encounters Coming Soon...

More Encounters Coming Soon...

Appendix I: Hazards and Traps

These entries describe dangerous circumstances and mechanisms. Use their warnings to make danger discoverable, follow their triggers consistently, and establish what an action can accomplish before calling for a roll.

Hazards have no BP or Limits. A sufficient intervention works immediately when circumstances allow. Use a Test for risky interference and an Objective when the characters' chosen task requires several meaningful advances. Set Steps from that task and approach, rather than assigning a completion track to the hazard itself.

Escalation describes how continuing danger develops. Apply it when its cause warrants: water keeps flowing, a drive turns, or damaged supports give way. Show what changes next and allow the characters to respond. A Moment turning may provide an appropriate interval, but refreshing Resolve does not itself activate a hazard.

Possible Complications suggest consequences for risky actions. Establish the relevant stakes before rolling and apply the ordinary outcome rules. These suggestions do not trigger automatically whenever a Test fails. Safe inspection does not release a trap unless it meets the trap's stated trigger.

Resolve each exposure once. If a Test already determines whether someone is injured, do not add a defensive Save afterward. Use a Save when danger arrives before a character can act deliberately. Apply suitable Defense protection under the ordinary defense rules.

Listed Difficulty and Harm are baselines, adjusted for the circumstances. Aftermath describes what remains once the characters escape, bypass, or stop the danger. An intelligent guardian or other active opponent is a separate Threat.

Hazard Reference

Hazard	Description	Diff	Obj	Harm
Collapsing Passage	Buckling supports and falling stone close the way out.	8	4	3
Counterweight Stair	A landing releases the stair below into a steep chute.	5	1	2
Floodgate Chamber	An opened door seals the entrance and floods the room.	8	3	2
Quarantine Arch	An old medical gate confines the afflicted without treating them.	8	3	1
Procession Road	At sundown, the road marches travelers toward an unfilled tomb.	8	4	2
Petition Furnace	Unanswered complaints direct an old civic furnace toward the accused.	8	4	3
Harvest Floor	A damaged granary sorter drives blades through the floor.	8	2	3
Returning Passage	A prison corridor sends travelers back to their assigned cells.	8	3	1
Buried Kiln	Fresh air restarts a firing sealed beneath the ruins.	8	4	3
Spiked Pit	A disguised floor drops intruders onto iron spikes.	5	1	3
Poison Dart Gallery	Pressure plates fire poisoned darts across a narrow passage.	8	2	2
Rolling Boulder	A released stone pursues intruders down a sloping corridor.	8	2	3
Crushing Walls	A sealed room closes around anyone disturbing its central plinth.	8	4	3
Alarm Ward	A threshold reports trespass to a watch that may still answer.	5	2	0

Collapsing Passage							
Buckling supports and falling stone close the way out.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	4	**Harm**	3
Loadout	Fractured beams, loose masonry, buried gaps.						
Pressure	Loss spreads from damaged supports toward occupied ground.						
Foreshadowing	Dust falls; a beam bows; a crack spreads across the exit.						
Trait	Connected Load: Bracing, unloading, or isolating damaged supports can stabilize the threatened section. Reaching the exit is a different task and does not stop the collapse.						
Escalation	Drop masonry or block a route. A failed Save leaves someone Held beneath debris as well as suffering Harm.						
Complications	Deal Harm through falling stone, or bury an essential tool instead.						
Exploits	Brace the roof, divert water, unload the floor, or cut away a failing section.						
Aftermath	Stabilizing or isolating the damaged section stops its collapse. Buried people and possessions still need recovery. Escaping leaves the passage failing.						

Counterweight Stair							
A landing releases the stair below into a steep chute.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	5	**Objective**	1	**Harm**	2
Loadout	Pivoting flights, cables, stone weights, locking pins.						
Pressure	Removing the weight from a landing releases the flight below. Each released flight can trip the next.						
Foreshadowing	Scraped steps, exposed cables, and heavy stones left on landings.						
Trait	Balanced Load: Replacing the removed weight prevents release. A firmly seated locking pin stops that flight without needing to break the entire mechanism.						
Escalation	Tilt the next occupied flight. A Save catches a rail or reaches a landing; otherwise apply Harm and slide the character downward.						
Complications	A cable snaps or a step gives way; apply Harm and leave the character hanging from the stair.						
Exploits	Replace the weight, secure a locking pin, brace a flight, or climb outside the stair.						
Aftermath	Securing a flight stops that section from moving. Released stairs still need repair before ordinary use; connected flights remain dangerous unless also secured.						

Floodgate Chamber							
An opened door seals the entrance and floods the room.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	3	**Harm**	2
Loadout	Intake gate, sealing doors, grated drain, maintenance wheel.						
Pressure	Opening the inner door starts a cleansing cycle that flushes the chamber downstream.						
Foreshadowing	High waterlines, debris against the outlet, and a waterwheel turning behind the wall.						
Trait	Rising Water: Each unchecked Escalation raises the water from ankle to waist to overhead. Once submerged, each further Escalation threatens drowning for anyone without air.						
Escalation	Raise the water one stage. Announce the new level and threatened loss of footing or air before resolving danger with a Save.						
Complications	A surge deals Harm and sweeps the character away from their handhold.						
Exploits	Close the intake, clear the drain, turn the maintenance wheel, or jam the sealing door before it closes.						
Aftermath	The inflow stops or the drain carries it safely away. Trapped people and submerged equipment still need recovery.						

Quarantine Arch							
An old medical gate confines the afflicted without treating them.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	3	**Harm**	1
Loadout	Inspection arch, sliding partitions, empty dispensers, discharge reader.						
Pressure	Passing through with a disease or active curse seals the treatment chamber. The apparatus still awaits a successful treatment.						
Foreshadowing	Abandoned stretchers, empty medicine jars, and doors without inner handles.						
Trait	Unfinished Treatment: The arch detects afflictions, not guilt or danger. A valid discharge seal opens the chamber; actually curing the detected affliction also ends confinement.						
Escalation	Close a partition, separate a companion, or deploy restraint arms. A Save avoids being Held.						
Complications	A restraint deals Harm and pins the character against a treatment bench.						
Exploits	Present a discharge seal, obstruct inspection, restore the treatment, or reach the partition drive.						
Aftermath	A valid discharge, a cure, or disabling the confinement mechanism releases the occupants. Disabling the arch does not cure anyone and may leave useful medical equipment inoperative.						

Procession Road							
At sundown, the road marches travelers toward an unfilled tomb.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	4	**Harm**	2
Loadout	Funeral milestones, paving stones, a sealed tomb, an empty bier.						
Pressure	An interrupted burial repeats its final journey, drafting everyone on the road as mourners.						
Foreshadowing	Footprints appear ahead of their owners; every milestone names the same dead official.						
Trait	Compelled March: At sundown, a Save resists joining the procession. Those caught can speak and act, but leaving the route requires overcoming its pull. Resisting once grants freedom for that night.						
Escalation	Draw the procession toward a dangerous crossing or the closing tomb. A Save avoids the immediate danger.						
Complications	Forced steps deal Harm, or pull an unattended companion into the march instead.						
Exploits	Leave before sundown, interrupt the paved route, recover the missing remains, or complete the burial.						
Aftermath	Those freed from the procession can leave for the night. Completing the interrupted burial ends its nightly return.						

Petition Furnace							
Unanswered complaints direct an old civic furnace toward the accused.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	4	**Harm**	3
Loadout	Petition slots, paper-filled hoppers, ducts, brass nameplates.						
Pressure	The furnace was built to compel officials to hear petitions. With its court abandoned, accumulated accusations now direct lethal heat.						
Foreshadowing	Warm complaint slips; scorched official seals; vents heating when a name is spoken.						
Trait	Named Accusation: It targets people named in its queued petitions, including bearers of an accused office. Reading the active complaint reveals whom it targets and why.						
Escalation	Open a hot vent beside the accused. A Save reaches cover before the discharge.						
Complications	Deal Harm through a furnace blast, or ignite accessible Toolkit instead.						
Exploits	Shut the intake, divert the ducts, remove the active petition, or obtain the petitioner's withdrawal through redress.						
Aftermath	Stopping the furnace ends its discharges. Resolving or withdrawing one complaint removes its target, but other unanswered petitions remain queued.						

Harvest Floor							
A damaged granary sorter drives blades through the floor.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	2	**Harm**	3
Loadout	Pressure plates, harvesting blades, sorting chutes, a drive shaft.						
Pressure	The sorter processes weight on its marked floor, separating crop from waste by a damaged classification wheel.						
Foreshadowing	Parallel cuts, grain lodged in seams, and painted maintenance paths.						
Trait	Safe Footing: The painted maintenance strips do not trigger blades. Blocking the drive shaft stops the whole floor; wedging a plate protects only that section.						
Escalation	Sweep blades through an occupied section. A Save reaches safe footing before the cut.						
Complications	Deal Harm and cut a carried strap, spilling its contents onto the floor.						
Exploits	Follow maintenance strips, bridge the plates, jam the drive, or adjust the classification wheel.						
Aftermath	Stopping the drive halts the connected blades. Securing one pressure plate protects only that section. Material in the chutes can be recovered once the machinery is safe.						

Returning Passage							
A prison corridor sends travelers back to their assigned cells.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	3	**Harm**	1
Loadout	Numbered thresholds, sentence records, release seals, routing stone.						
Pressure	The corridor returns prisoners until their sentences expire. The court that issued them no longer exists.						
Foreshadowing	Repeated cell numbers; release dates beyond a mortal lifetime; chalk marks appearing behind the party.						
Trait	Assigned Cell: Crossing an intake threshold assigns a vacant cell to an unregistered visitor. The corridor then returns them there whenever they cross an exit threshold. Walking faster cannot defeat the routing.						
Escalation	Return a separated character to their cell and close its door. Show the threshold changing before they cross.						
Complications	A returning doorway closes on the character for Harm, or confiscates a held tool into the intake store instead.						
Exploits	Recover a release seal, amend a sentence record, disable the routing stone, or breach a wall outside the thresholds.						
Aftermath	Disabling or bypassing the routing allows ordinary passage along the affected route. A valid release frees its named prisoner while leaving the prison working for others.						

Buried Kiln							
Fresh air restarts a firing sealed beneath the ruins.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	4	**Harm**	3
Loadout	Sealed fireboxes, connected flues, plugged vents, brittle pottery.						
Pressure	Excavation breaks an air seal. Remaining fuel ignites, drawing heat through occupied chambers.						
Foreshadowing	Warm pottery in cold soil; air sucked into cracks; carefully plugged vents.						
Trait	Air Draw: Resealing the breach cuts the draft. Opening a vent redirects heat toward its outlet; an unplanned opening can expose another chamber.						
Escalation	Fill the next connected chamber with heat and smoke. Warn of the approaching draft; a Save reaches cleaner air before Harm.						
Complications	A flare deals Harm, or cracks the surface supporting the character instead.						
Exploits	Reseal the breach, open an exhaust to the surface, isolate occupied rooms, or shut the firebox.						
Aftermath	Cutting the draft or exhausting it safely stops further escalation. Fired chambers remain hot, and cracked floors or supports remain unstable.						

Spiked Pit							
A disguised floor drops intruders onto iron spikes.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	5	**Objective**	1	**Harm**	3
Loadout	Hinged cover, release catch, spike bed, reset counterweight.						
Pressure	Weight beyond the catch's threshold opens the cover. The counterweight then draws it shut over the pit.						
Foreshadowing	An unusually clean rectangle; broken scraps below a seam; scratches on the far rim.						
Trait	Single Release: The cover triggers once before it resets. Securing it open or closed prevents another drop.						
Escalation	Open beneath someone crossing. A Save catches the rim or reaches solid ground; otherwise apply Harm from the fall and spikes.						
Complications	The cover slips during interference; apply Harm from a fall or a spike through the opening.						
Exploits	Probe ahead, bridge the cover, wedge its hinge, or secure a rope before crossing.						
Aftermath	Securing the cover prevents another drop. Anyone below still needs rescue; opening the trap does not remove its spikes.						

Poison Dart Gallery							
Pressure plates fire poisoned darts across a narrow passage.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	2	**Harm**	2
Loadout	Floor plates, dart slits, spring magazines, poison reservoirs.						
Pressure	Each depressed plate fires a loaded bank at torso height. Untouched plates remain armed.						
Foreshadowing	Pinholes in paired walls, dead vermin, and a dart embedded in a dropped pack.						
Trait	Poisoned Wound: A dart that deals any Harm also gives the victim Disadvantage on Tests requiring strength or endurance until treated with a suitable antidote or medical care. Defense reduction that prevents all Harm also prevents poisoning.						
Escalation	Fire the bank aligned with the triggered plate. A Save avoids the darts; resolve one discharge, not one hit per dart.						
Complications	A dart fires at close range; deal Harm and apply Poisoned Wound if any Harm gets through.						
Exploits	Hold down tested plates, block the slits, discharge a magazine from cover, or reach the release linkage.						
Aftermath	Disabled or emptied dart banks cannot fire again until repaired or reloaded. Untouched banks remain armed. Existing poison still requires treatment.						

Rolling Boulder							
A released stone pursues intruders down a sloping corridor.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	2	**Harm**	3
Loadout	Stone ball, sloped track, release latch, impact chamber.						
Pressure	Opening a protected door releases the stone. It accelerates along its prepared track until stopped or diverted.						
Foreshadowing	Crushed debris, curved scrapes, side recesses, and a latch linked to the door.						
Trait	Committed Track: The stone follows the slope and cannot turn off it. Reaching a recess avoids its path. Stopping or diverting it requires suitable means; outrunning it may require an escape Objective.						
Escalation	Roll into the next corridor section, destroying light obstacles. A Save reaches cover before impact.						
Complications	Deal Harm through impact or flying rubble, or destroy an unsecured obstruction the character relied on instead.						
Exploits	Use a side recess, release it from safety, divert it into a lower branch, or brace a substantial obstacle.						
Aftermath	Stopping or diverting the stone removes it from the occupied route. It may block another passage; breaking it can leave dangerous rubble.						

Crushing Walls							
A sealed room closes around anyone disturbing its central plinth.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	8	**Objective**	4	**Harm**	3
Loadout	Moving walls, ratchet drive, locking doors, a weighted plinth.						
Pressure	Removing the plinth's object locks the doors and starts the walls moving inward.						
Foreshadowing	Floor gouges, flattened bones, and masonry seams around the doors.						
Trait	Three Closures: Each unchecked Escalation narrows the room from open to cramped to pinned. Further closure deals listed Harm to those still caught. Replacing the plinth's weight stops movement but does not reverse it.						
Escalation	Move the walls one stage inward. At the pinned stage, a Save reaches a recess or escapes being Held.						
Complications	A brace fails; deal Harm and leave a limb or tool trapped between surfaces.						
Exploits	Replace the weight, jam the ratchet, wedge a wall, or reach the manual release behind the plinth.						
Aftermath	Stopping the drive halts the walls. Doors may remain locked, and moving the slabs may still be necessary to free someone pinned.						

Alarm Ward							
A threshold reports trespass to a watch that may still answer.							
Type	Hazard	**Diff**	5	**Objective**	2	**Harm**	0
Loadout	Inscribed threshold, concealed chime, paired watch station.						
Pressure	Crossing without the accepted badge sends an alarm to its paired station and marks the crossing for inspection.						
Foreshadowing	Badge-shaped wear on the lintel; a faint chime when metal nears the inscription.						
Trait	Persistent Signal: Crossing triggers an immediate signal, not damage. While an unauthorized person remains inside, each unchecked Escalation sends their current room to the station. Covering the chime does not stop transmission.						
Escalation	Transmit a location and alert whoever occupies the paired station. Any responding guards or guardian are separate Threats.						
Complications	Send an immediate alarm identifying the character's position instead of dealing Harm.						
Exploits	Present the matching badge, interrupt the inscription, disconnect its paired focus, or arrange a convincing authorized escort.						
Aftermath	Disabling the ward stops further signals. Earlier warnings remain received, and anyone responding continues according to what they know.						

Appendix J. Glossary and Quick Reference

Use this appendix to look up terms, check common procedures, and find the full rules. Index references point to chapters and appendices.

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Advance	A Threat action that changes position or brings danger to bear. Characters may respond or defend as the situation allows.
Advancement	A lasting character improvement chosen when all seven Milestones are marked.
Advantage / Disadvantage	Roll one additional die, then drop the lowest / highest full result. Opposing sources cancel; remaining sources do not stack.
Aid	A meaningful contribution that costs 1 Resolve and adds one relevant Path die to another character's roll when appropriate.
Artifact	An exceptional object with a stated capability. Charms, Tokens, and Wonders appear in Appendix C; Relics in Appendix D.
Backlash	A detrimental consequence of a failed magical Test. Establish the possible Backlash before Resolve is committed.
Break Points (BP)	Pressure applied toward a Threat's Limit. BP measures the opposition's ability or willingness to continue, not character Harm.
Breakthrough	A total at least 5 above Difficulty. Achieve the intent and gain the benefit specified by the procedure.
Broken	A Path reduced below d4. It cannot be rolled and contributes a flat 1 where it would normally apply.
Catalyst	The event that changed a character's life, expressed through a Catalyst Mark and a Stigma.
Check	A roll of two relevant Path die for uncertainty without meaningful risk or pressure. Costs no Resolve; Resolve cannot add dice.
Compromise	A total 1–3 below Difficulty. Advance or succeed at a fitting cost or complication, as the procedure specifies.
Path	Heart, Shadow, or Crown: an approach to action represented by a die and shaped by a personal value.
Curiosity	An exceptional object with a peculiar property or use. Its entry states what it does and its Load.
Difficulty (Diff)	The total a roll must meet or beat, set from the action and its circumstances.
Edge	Reroll a single die after rolling. This may be applied to an exploded die. Gear used the way its description intends grants Edge, agreed before rolling. Edge does not stack.
Exchange	A Threat's immediate response to a failed action directly engaging it. Resolve the declared consequence without an additional defensive Save.
Explosion	On a die's maximum face, roll again and add the result. Repeat for each further maximum.
Focus	The character, action, or danger receiving immediate attention. Focus is not a fixed initiative order.
Gear	The ready Main Weapon, Alternate Weapon, Armor, Garment, Talisman, and Toolkit. These do not occupy Pack slots.
Group Action	One lead pursues a shared result. Each supporter contributes meaningfully, spends 1 Resolve, and adds one relevant Path die.
Defense	Armor, a Garment, or a Talisman that protects a Path and reduces Harm when applicable.

Glossary continued

Term	Meaning
Harm	Damage marked on a Path's Harm track. Filling the track causes an Injury, reduces the Path by one die step, and clears the track.
Hazard / Trap	A dangerous circumstance / a hazard set to trigger under particular circumstances. Hazards have no Limits.
Homeland / Legacy	The place and culture that shaped a character, with permission to contribute fitting details about it.
Incapacitated	Unconscious, vulnerable, and at risk after a Broken Path suffers another Injury. Another character may attempt stabilization.
Injury	A lasting reduction of a Path by one die step. Clearing Harm alone does not heal an Injury.
Kit	Portable tools and modest common materials for a particular kind of work. Supplies tools, not training or exceptional items.
Leverage	A piece of information, a status, or other leg up in a social encounter that grants PCs a BP bonus (from 0-3) on social tests.
Limit	The BP needed to break a Threat's ability or willingness to continue the relevant opposition.
Load	The Pack space occupied by an item or bundle. Use its listed Load; account for bulk and quantity.
Loss	A total at least 4 below Difficulty. The intent fails and the declared consequence follows.
Mark	A character trait that grants permission or capability. It adds no bonus unless its entry states one.
Milestone	One of seven turns of story on a character's track: the Crisis, the Wound, the Monster, the Quest, the Revelation, the Heavy Price, and the Dark Night. Each is marked once per track.
Moment	A cycle of meaningful action and pressure. Personal Resolve refreshes when the Moment turns.
Objective / Step	A goal requiring meaningful advances / one such advance. Set Steps from the characters' goal and chosen approach.
Origin Mark	One of the two starting Marks chosen from Ancestral, Physical, Mental, or Social Marks.
Pack	The ten slots holding carried possessions beyond ready Gear, including items held or strapped outside a bag.
Resolve	The resource spent on Path dice and specific actions. A character normally has 3 at the start of a Moment.
Ruin	An exceptional severe consequence put at stake by a Scar, specific rule, or established danger. Not a normal outcome band.
Sanctuary	A meaningful threshold of safety that permits full recovery, including restoration of Broken Paths; it almost always leaves a Scar.
Save	A response to sudden danger. Roll one free Path die; Resolve may add dice.
Scar	A lasting consequence. Invoking a relevant Scar before rolling makes a hit a Breakthrough and a miss Ruin.
Spiral	Scene escalation through Signals, Shifts, Tolls, and Reckonings as unresolved Moments pass.
Stance	A social target's current position. It sets the Limit needed to shift, expose, or move that target.
Stigma	The burden or consequence left by a character's Catalyst.
Test	A deliberate action under risk, pressure, or resistance. Spend 1 Resolve per Path die rolled.
Threat	Active opposition with a Limit. Its actions can resist, harm, or change the scene.
Trade	Learned work and practical knowledge. Add its rank to a roll when it directly applies.
Tradition	A character's training, beliefs, cultures and paradigm that allow them to wield and weave magic
Victory	A total from Difficulty through Difficulty +4. Achieve the intent as specified by the procedure.
Weave	A spell or magical working shaped through a tradition, subject to scope, Difficulty, Steps, and consequences.

Quick reference

Procedure	At the table
Choose a procedure	A safe, sufficient approach works. Use a Check for uncertainty without meaningful risk, a Test for deliberate action under pressure, and a Save for sudden danger.
Checks	Roll 2 relevant Path dice without spending Resolve. Apply relevant Trades and other modifiers normally. The result stands until new information, tools, or a different approach makes another attempt meaningful.
Before a Test	Establish intent, approach, Path, Difficulty with its scrape-by number (3 below), stakes, and any Edge or bonus before committing Resolve. Spend 1 Resolve per Path die rolled.
Resolve the dice	Roll and resolve explosions. Apply Edge before dropping a die for Advantage or Disadvantage. Add relevant Trade ranks and other applicable modifiers; compare the total with Difficulty.
Outcome bands	Breakthrough: Diff +5 or more. Victory: Diff through +4. Compromise: 1–3 below Diff. Loss: 4 or more below Diff. Use the action's specific outcome rules.
Scar invocation	Invoke a relevant Scar before rolling. Meeting Difficulty produces a Breakthrough; missing produces Ruin. Establish the exceptional stakes first.
Objectives	Breakthrough completes two Steps, or one Step with an additional benefit. Victory completes one Step. Follow the Objective outcome table for Compromise and Loss. Each completed Step changes the situation.
Keep tracks distinct	Objective Steps track work toward a goal. BP and Limits track opposition. Harm tracks character damage. A hazard does not receive a Limit; set any Objective from the chosen task and approach.
Apply danger once	A risky Test already resolves the injury put at stake. Do not automatically add a defensive Save or Threat Exchange. Further rolls require a new action or newly arising danger.
Harm and Injury	Track capacities: d4 = 2; d6 = 3; d8 = 4; d10 = 5; d12 = 6. When full, take an Injury, step the Path down, clear the track, and apply any remaining Harm to the reduced track.
Aid and Group Actions	Each helper contributes meaningfully, spends 1 Resolve, and adds one relevant Path die. Each character contributes at most one die to the roll.
Multiple targets	Declare targets and Difficulty before spending Resolve. For a sweeping action, establish how the result and BP apply to each target before rolling.