

The Sword
The Crown
&
The Unspeakable Power



Todd N.
& Tom J.

**THE SWORD, THE CROWN, AND
THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER**

Based on the Powered by the Apocalypse engine by
D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker

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May your reigns be long and prosperous.

We are likely forgetting people cause there are just so many of you who made this possible.

Our apologies.



Table of Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>vi</u>
<u>THE BASICS OF SCUP</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>BASIC, PERIPHERAL, AND HONOR MOVES</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>CHARACTER CLASSES</u>	<u>48</u>
<u>MYTHOLOGY CREATION</u>	<u>137</u>
<u>PATRONS, FACTIONS, AND HONOR</u>	<u>146</u>
<u>WEAPONS, ARMOR, GEAR, AND TAGS</u>	<u>168</u>
<u>ADVANCEMENT</u>	<u>175</u>
<u>THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES</u>	<u>185</u>
<u>THREATS</u>	<u>222</u>
<u>ODDS AND ENDS</u>	<u>235</u>
<u>PLAY RESOURCES</u>	<u>272</u>
<u>INDEX</u>	<u>294</u>



A Few Introductory Words About This Mean Little Game...

The Sword, The Crown, and The Unspeakable Power is a role-playing game. Players have a conversation at the table — guided by the rules in this book — and create a story together. *The Sword, The Crown, and The Unspeakable Power* is a hack of Vincent and Meguey Baker's groundbreaking game, *Apocalypse World* — if you haven't tried it out, you should. We'll wait, we're patient.

There are many fantasy games designed around going on a quest, but fewer games about the *politics* of that place. We liked the knife's edge balance of violence, intrigue, and power in *Apocalypse World*, but it was obviously the wrong setting — so we bent it and broke it and carved it up until it we found a gleaming black heart. That was the beginning of *The Sword, The Crown, and The Unspeakable Power*. We had so much fun playing villainous, greedy, desperate people, we decided to dedicate some more time to turning it into something other people could try, and the result is what you are now reading.

We were inspired by several other *Apocalypse World* hacks, notably *Monsterhearts*, *Monster of the Week*, *Urban Shadows*, *Masks* and *Dungeon World*, in our efforts. We should also add that other excellent games, including *Misspent Youth*, *On Mighty Thews*, *Kagematsu*, *In a Wicked Age*, *1,001 Nights*, *The Mountain Witch*, *Swords Without Master*, and *Sorcerer* directly and indirectly influenced themes, ideas, and language contained within. So now that you know the story, please enjoy the game. We've had fun both making it and playing it, and we hope you will, as well.

With cold hearts full of malice and treachery,

-T&T



The Basics



The Sword, The Crown, and The Unspeakable Power (SCUP) is a role-playing game for 3-6 people that deals with social hierarchy, political intrigue, and violent retribution in a fantasy setting. The players have a conversation that tells a story about what various

characters are doing in a fictional world. One player takes the role of the **Master of Ceremonies** (MC) — the person who portrays the world and most of its inhabitants, called the **non-player characters** (NPCs). The other players take the roles of single characters called the **player characters** (PCs). The PCs have a **character class**, or template for their character that lets them know who they are and what they can do. Through talking with each other, rolling dice, and using the game's moves, the players create a story that centers on these characters.



The Setting

The game takes place wherever power is held in grasping fingers and fought for with blades and bribes. Perhaps your game takes place in a port town with rich merchants, or within a series of great ziggurats dotting a desert wasteland. Maybe you survey peasants and farmland from your towering stone castle, or pray to your god in a cliffside monastery.

While SCUP is a fantasy game, it isn't about slaying dragons — it's about scheming, dealing, threatening, and worse to get what you want, no matter the cost.

Every group may create a different setting, but the one common thread between every game is *The Unspeakable Power*. In your game, it may be the azure demon that whispers in your ear, the tongues of hell-fire beneath the mountain that only the gods can lay eyes upon without going mad, or the blackness between the stars that calls you to it like a lover. It is always there, be it magic or corruption or well-spring of power — some can hear it, some can see it, and some can even try to control it.

What You'll Need to Play

To play, you'll need at least 3 players, one of whom is the MC, who should be familiar with the rules. Players will roll two six-sided dice — it's best if each has their own. You'll likely want printed copies of the character classes and move reference sheets. Sharp writing implements are both useful and thematically appropriate. A black heart brimming with ill intent and some snacks are also nice to have.

You can download play materials, including character sheets, at wheeltreepress.wordpress.com/scup.



During a session you'll have a conversation where you'll use the rules to create a narrative. A good length for a session is about 2-4hrs. You might play multiple sessions as a campaign, and you'll find rules for campaign play later (184).

The Core Rules

SCUP operates through **moves** and **stats**. **Moves** are effects that are triggered when a player describes something that their character says or does in the fiction that is related to the move. For example, a player might say "I attack him!" which could trigger the move **Engage in Combat**. Every PC has access to the **Basic Moves**, **Honor Moves** and **Peripheral Moves**, as well as moves specific to their character class. Each move details when it is triggered by the fiction and what its mechanical effects are.

Stats are the numbers that describe your character. When a PC triggers a move, they will often roll two six-sided dice (2d6) and add a relevant stat to learn the effect of that move. The stats are: Fierce, Wily, Steady, Sly and Arcane. We'll explain the stats more later.

When you roll 2d6 and add your stat, you'll get one of three results — a **full hit** is 10+, a **partial hit** is between 7-9, and a **miss** is 6 or below. A full hit usually means you achieve your goal, a partial hit means you get part of what you wanted, and a miss typically means something bad happens — though it doesn't always mean you've failed.

You may receive a modifier from a move, such as **+1 forward** or **+1 ongoing**. If you have +1 forward, that means you gain +1 on your *next roll*. If you have +1 ongoing, that means you add 1 to *each roll you make*. These bonuses are often conditional (for example, "gain +1 ongoing during the current combat") and unless the condition is met, you do not receive the bonus.



To summarize, the central dice mechanic typically goes like this:

1. Players describe their characters saying and doing things.
2. If their actions indicate that a move is triggered, refer to the move text to see what to do.
3. If the move calls for a die roll, the player rolls 2d6 and adds the stat indicated plus any modifier bonus they have received.
4. The result of the roll determines whether the move has been a full hit, a partial hit, or a miss.
5. The effects of the move are resolved based on the instructions in the move's text.

The MC does *not* roll dice in SCUP. Rather, the MC triggers their moves entirely through having things happen in the fiction. If you are the MC, you make moves at the following times:

- † When a player misses a roll.
- † When they've given you a perfect opening to mess with them in the fiction.
- † When it would be too good to pass up.
- † When there is a lull in the game and there is an appropriate move to fill it.

Those four situations are arranged from hardest to softest in terms of how rough the move you should make against them is. Don't make too hard of a move against players just because there's a lull. Do something a little softer or subtler. Hint at the bad things to come if they don't act. When a player misses a roll, however, feel free to make a nice, hard move. See the MC's chapter (185) for more information.



Who and What is This Game About?

This game is about three things:

THE SWORD: Sometimes power comes in the form of a big, gleaming blade that you can put through someone's gut. Or maybe you prefer to just draw your weapon and smile, showing them what you're capable of? Some character classes in SCUP have immense physical power. **The Gauntlet** can stand up to anyone, and **The Spur** commands a Militia of rough and ready fighters. **The Black Hood** may poison you, or **The Screw** may torture you. Politics isn't always done in back rooms with smiles and handshakes. Sometimes, politics is done at the pointy end of a spear. People tend to be quite willing to negotiate when they find they have a blade at their throat.

THE CROWN: Politics at the end of a spear? Please. A wise person once said that a sword can cut through anything, except gold. Everyone has their price in this world. Some people want money, others want status, and still others just want to watch the world crumble from the security of their safe little tower. In SCUP, **The Crown** rules over a Stead, and **The Voice** sits at their side, whispering ideas into their ear. **The Bloodletter** and **The Lyre**, on the other hand, are needed, or even loved, for their talents. When you have something people want, what will you make them do to get it from you?

THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER: The Unspeakable Power is the horrible, dark source of all magic. It is personal — it has a consciousness, personality, wants, and needs. The Unspeakable Power is whatever you decide it is in the mythology of your world. While all PCs in the game can seek wisdom, secrets or knowledge using the basic move **Whisper to The Unspeakable Power**, it only speaks back to a select few. **The Beloved** may be a shining light in this grim world, while **The Hex** might live in the darkness, ready to curse her enemies. **The Adept** wields their power like a weapon, and is used as a



weapon of The Unspeakable Power, in turn. These three character classes can use the move **Harness The Unspeakable Power** which lets them make small changes to the world. Find more about the difference between the two Unspeakable Power moves in the Basic Moves chapter (23).

The Agendas

THE MC'S AGENDA IS TO:

- † Make the world feel epic and extraordinary.
- † Fill the PCs' lives with intrigue and drama.
- † Play to find out what happens.

To make the world feel epic and extraordinary, and to fill the PCs' lives with intrigue and drama, you want to dangle big, important things in front of your players. As the MC, you should make the PCs the center of the world, even if they're lowly and common. Go out of your way to put them in interesting situations with real consequences for their lives and your fictional world.

Additionally, the MC may not write a story prior to sitting down at the table. This is not a suggestion — it is a rule. If you sit down with a plot for the players to work through, you're not playing to find out what happens. In a later chapter (193), we'll go into detail about how to accomplish the MC's agendas.

THE PCS' AGENDA IS TO:

- † Play your character to the bloody hilt.
- † Treat your character's needs and desires as real and powerful.
- † Get your hands nice and dirty.

The first two mean that you want to get into your character's skin to create a flesh and blood person. Your character wants things — things that may be difficult to get. Those things may be noble or base, and



they may change over the course of the game, but those needs and desires drive them. Additionally, think about the thematic elements of playing your character's class. What makes them powerful? What are their challenges? You want to lean into what makes your character's class thematically unique to get the most out of the game.

As for “get your hands nice and dirty,” it means that your character should be doing the most exciting, dramatic, or interesting thing they can at any given moment. Get entangled with other characters, make moves, set goals, freak out when you don't achieve them, crush your enemies, scheme, love, etc. Don't just stand there, *get your hands nice and dirty!*

Game Set Up

When you first sit down to play SCUP, you'll want to do the following in this order:

1. Mythology creation.
2. Character creation, including selecting character classes, picking stats and moves, and creating Factions.
3. Doing beginning of session stuff, including highlighting stats, selecting Entanglements, and rolling any start of session moves.
4. Playing your first session.
5. Doing any end of session stuff you have to do, including figuring out how much Honor you start the next session with.

This will all be explained in greater detail in later chapters, but here we'll touch on each component of the game set up.

Mythology Creation

The first thing you do when you play a campaign of SCUP, prior to creating characters, is collectively create a foundational mythology to give form to the world your game will take place in. The foundation-



al mythology may represent ancient history, fanciful stories about the gods, or actual events that happened just a few short years ago. Either way, this myth tells you why the world you live in is the way it is, and provides everyone some color and some shared knowledge. For more information, see the Mythology Creation chapter (137).

Character Creation

Once you have created your world and its mythology, each PC player will pick a character class, which represents the basic concept of their character. The Character Classes chapter (48) will guide you through creating whatever class you select. Two players may *not* pick the same class at the beginning of the game. The classes are:

- † *The Adept*, a magic user who draws on The Unspeakable Power to achieve their ends.
- † *The Beloved*, a prophet, cult leader, or mystic who has the favor of something beyond our comprehension.
- † *The Black Hood*, an assassin or thief who prowls the night, acting on behalf of a guild or clan.
- † *The Bloodletter*, a doctor, healer, and person of science. Maybe benevolent, maybe wrathful.
- † *The Crown*, a ruler or leader, sitting on their throne and making decisions about those beneath them.
- † *The Gauntlet*, a knight or warrior, serving their lord or acting as a mercenary.
- † *The Hex*, a witch or sorcerer who uses their magic powers to strike twisted bargains.
- † *The Lyre*, a performer or artist, filling the world with beauty while spreading rumors and secrets.
- † *The Screw*, a professional torturer who extracts information from both willing and unwilling.
- † *The Spur*, the leader of a militia filled with rough and tumble fighters, maybe working for someone, maybe independent.
- † *The Voice*, an advisor to power, standing behind the throne and whispering in the ears of those in charge.



If you are having trouble deciding, consider the following:

- † *Do you want physical violence?* The Spur, Gauntlet, Screw, and Black Hood act with weapons instead of words.
- † *Do you want political intrigue?* The Voice, Screw, Hex, Lyre, Crown, and Black Hood are at the center of the intrigue at the table.
- † *Do you want social capital?* The Adept, Beloved, Bloodletter, Crown, Hex, Lyre, Screw, and Voice can use powers to get information, provide services for people, or convince others to do what they want.
- † *Do you want to work for someone?* The Lyre, Black Hood, Gauntlet, Screw, Spur, and Voice have the option to start with a Patron.
- † *Do you want to direct a group of your own?* The Beloved, Crown, and Spur start the game with the ability to have a group of people they command.

The character classes are explained in detail in the Character Classes chapter of this book (48). For now, before discussing the first session further, we'll explain some of the other important rules you'll want to know before you create a PC.

Stats

A PC's stats describe important details about them. You select stats for your character when you create them. The five stats are *Fierce*, *Steady*, *Wily*, *Sly*, and *Arcane*.

Fierce describes how hearty, strong, tough, and merciless you are. Someone with a high *Fierce* is likely to be successful in combat or to get what they want by threatening and menacing others.

Steady describes how skilled, agile, unflinching, quick thinking, and calm under pressure you are. Someone with high *Steady* is likely to be able to sneak somewhere, lie to your face, or fire an arrow with a great degree of accuracy.



Wily describes how cunning, witty, charming, and seductive you are. Someone with a high *Wily* is likely to get people to do what they want or use their allure to get their way.

Sly describes how clever, learned, wise, and astute you are. Someone with a high *Sly* is likely to be able to piece things together or make useful observations.

Arcane describes either your innate or learned ability to tap into the magic forces in *The Unspeakable Power*. Someone with high *Arcane* is attuned to those forces and is more likely to successfully harness them.

Factions

When you create a PC, you will create a Faction for them. A Faction can be either a tightly bound group or a more amorphous collection of individuals. For example, a player could say “my character’s Faction is the noble family of Galt, who have ruled over these lands for centuries.” That’s a specific, tightly bound group. The family will all know each other, interact with each other, etc. Conversely, a player could say “my character’s Faction is the art community of the city. The various people who make music, sculptures, paintings, and put on plays.” That’s a much more amorphous group where everyone may or may not know each other or communicate regularly.

Your Faction represents the people who your interests align with. Your status, at least to a degree, rises and falls with theirs. As such, you will often act, either directly or indirectly, to advance the interests and standing of your Faction. Members of your Faction may sometimes assist you or make requests of you. Factions and Faction moves are further explained in the *Patrons, Factions, and Honor* chapter (146).



Patrons

Your character may have an employer. That's how social hierarchies work: everyone has someone that pushes them around and everyone has someone they get to push around. Your Patron pays you for your services, but you have to keep them happy by furthering their interests. If your character class says that you have a Patron, follow the rules in the Factions, Patrons, and Honor chapter (146) to create them.

Honor

Honor is a currency held by each PC that represents the worth of their name. Having a great deal of Honor does not necessarily mean that you are “honorable.” Rather, it means that *your name has value*. A thief may have lots of Honor if their name is known to the right people. Your Honor is your reputation.

All PCs start with a base of 1 Honor for the first session, except The Crown and The Voice, who automatically start out with 2. PCs may start with an additional point of Honor if they can reasonably make the case that their character is renowned, well-connected, rich, noble, or notorious. Your Honor is tied to your role in your Faction. You gain Honor through increasing your standing in your Faction by advancing its interests or doing things for people in it. Conversely, you lose Honor by rebuking or leaving your Faction.

You may spend Honor to trigger *Honor moves*. These are moves that play off your good name and reputation to get what you want. You may also spend Honor to refuse to do something that someone with leverage or authority over you has tasked you with doing. Over the course of the game, the value of your name will go up and down as you do things to spend and gain Honor. See the chapter on Patrons, Factions, and Honor (146) for more details.



Harm

Harm is a mechanical measure of how physically hurt a character is. When characters are stabbed, burnt, or otherwise beat up, they take **Harm**. Both PCs and NPCs take *Harm* when they are hurt. When a PC reaches 5 Harm, if they do not immediately take a Debility to save themselves (see below), they will soon die. If a character ever reaches 6 Harm or beyond, there is probably no hope for them, save some kind of miracle. Harm is incurred through suffering damage from being attacked, as well as other appropriate fictional causes. The amount of Harm weapons do is detailed in the Weapons, Armor, Gear, and Tags chapter (168). Specific character moves may also detail how much Harm they do. If you need to know how much Harm something does that is not clearly defined within a move or associated with a weapon, consult this reference list:

- † 0-1 Harm — Scratches and bruises. Falling off a chair, tripping, being pushed into a wall, or slapped.
- † 2-3 Harm — Serious pain you can push through. Falling down a flight of stairs, getting a flesh wound from a blade, or getting struck off a horse.
- † 4 Harm — Immense pain, broken bones or internal bleeding. Falling a great distance, getting stabbed with something square in the gut, or having your skin scalded by boiling oil.
- † 5-6 Harm — Deadly. Being engulfed in flame, cut nearly in half, or having a building cave in on you.

Armor can reduce the amount of Harm taken, typically by 1 or 2 points. If you are wearing armor, any Harm that would hit your armor is reduced by the points your armor is worth. For example, armor that is worth 1 Armor absorbs 1 point of Harm. If you are stabbed by a blade that does 2 Harm while wearing something worth 1 Armor, you only take 1 Harm. If an attack would bypass your armor (if someone put a dagger in your eye) or if the attack has the tag “armor piercing” (ap) the armor is ignored.



Armor worth 1 can be concealed by clothing, but armor worth 2 is too bulky and cannot be hidden.

When you are about to take Harm, you may take a *Debility* to avoid taking that specific harm. Debilities permanently reduce a stat by 1. For example, if someone stabs your character with a sword that will do 3 Harm, you may choose to ignore that entire attack and take a Debility instead. Each Debility may only be taken once per character. The Debilities are:

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)

When you take a Debility, mark it off in the Harm section on your character sheet, change your stat as appropriate, and then incorporate that new Debility into your character.

When you are Harmed, the MC may ask you to roll the **When You Take Harm** move. The rules for this move are detailed in the Peripheral Moves. You may see something that does “s Harm.” This means that it stuns the person who takes it. If someone takes “s Harm” then they cannot act for a brief period of time.

HEALING:

- † 1-3 Harm will get better over time, on its own. After a few days or weeks pass in game time, the MC may tell you to erase harm.
- † 4 Harm will stay where it is until you do something about it. Maybe you go to a Bloodletter for some healing, or an NPC who has the necessary skills. Once you’ve received medical attention, treat the Harm as above, healing over time.
- † 5 Harm means you are dying. The MC may call for a **Face Duress** roll to act. If you do not receive care soon, you will expire.
- † 6 Harm or higher means you are likely dead. Only a miracle or The Unspeakable Power can save you now.



NPCs can take Harm as follows before they die or become otherwise incapacitated:

- † Random character on the street or weak/ill named character: 1-2 Harm
- † Named character: 2-3 Harm
- † Important, powerful character: 3-4 Harm
- † Mythical creature, legendary figure: 5-6 Harm

We suggest that you use the final, legendary tier of Harm very sparingly. Most NPCs should take between 2-4 Harm to incapacitate or kill. If you put your sword through their gut, they probably die. That's just how diplomacy works sometimes.

Barter

Barter is a generic measure of currency — it can represent whatever you want it to in your setting. Perhaps it's gold or silver coins, paper money, precious gems, or rare spices. Whatever it is, it is an *abstract* concept. Many things a PC wants should cost no Barter, such as buying drinks at a pub. Barter is used when buying substantial, important things, where the outcome of the transaction has consequences. Room and board for some period of time, a fine new weapon, a sturdy suit of armor, a healthy horse, someone's total silence, all of these things should cost Barter.

Average things should cost 1 Barter. Quality things should cost 2. Permanently buying a home, acquiring a valuable antique, or paying for a horrible, dangerous deed could cost 3, 4 or more Barter. It is not an exact measurement of value, but rather a mechanical tool. An NPC may say "I'll do this deed for you, but it will cost you a hefty weight of coin." Then the MC can say, out of character, it'll cost you 2 Barter.



Characters start out with some amount of Barter, and those with Patrons will be paid for their work. PCs may always sell their services or make trades with others to earn Barter. In fact, they should feel encouraged to do so. Grasping for power is costly. The Bloodletter and Screw must spend 1 Barter every few times they use their tools to keep themselves stocked, so generating Barter should be a priority for them. Additionally, players may always gain Barter through the fiction. If a PC sells or obtains something valuable, if someone gives them something of importance, they may gain 1 or 2 Barter.

Should players be spending Barter to live? It's up to the MC to make them pay for food, shelter, clothes, etc. If the players never spend Barter to live, it is possible they can start to stockpile and wind up ridiculously wealthy over time, particularly if they have a Patron. On the other hand, if they always pay for things like food and shelter, it can become distracting, forcing them to constantly be worrying about how they're going to make ends meet instead of playing towards interpersonal drama between characters. It's up to the MC to balance this — make them explain how they are getting by and find reasons for them to pay, but maybe let them go a session or two without having to account for their lifestyle. The idea is to bring Barter up enough to make the PCs have to think about how they get by without letting it become the only concern they have.



Steads, Militias, and Followers

Characters may also have *Steads*, *Militias*, and *Followers*. A Stead is a defensible place of some kind: a castle, a city, a fortress, etc. The Crown starts the game with a Stead. A Militia is a group of people trained for fighting. The Spur starts off as the leader of a Militia. The Beloved may choose to start off with Followers — a group of people who listen to them and respect their authority.

Other character classes can earn a Stead, Militia, or Followers by selecting the following moves from another class when they advance:

- † If you want a Stead, take **Heavy is the Head...** from The Crown.
- † If you want a Militia, take **Leader of the Pack** from The Spur.
- † If you want Followers, take **Together, As One** from The Beloved.

If there is no fictional logic through which you and the MC can agree that your character could earn a Stead, Militia, or Followers, the MC may request you take a different advancement, instead of one of the above moves.

STEADS: A Stead is a place where people live. It can be a village, castle, fort, a large farm, a series of tents, whatever makes sense in the fiction — so long as people live there and can act in its defense. The rules for creating a Stead are in The Crown's moves. If no one at the table is playing The Crown, and no one has taken the move **Heavy is the Head...** then there is no mechanical Stead in your game. Of course, the PCs will still live *somewhere*, but it will not have the same mechanical effects.

Steads come in three sizes: small, medium, and large. These sizes exist to give you a sense of how large your Stead is relative to other places people may congregate in your game. What these three sizes mean is dependent on the world you create. For example, if your



game is set in a thriving, medieval kingdom, a large Stead might be a city-state with as many as 50,000 inhabitants, while a small Stead might be a village of a few thousand. Conversely, if your game is about warring desert tribes, perhaps a large Stead is an oasis of 500 or 600 people, while a small stead is an outpost of 75. In other words, the scope and scale of your game will help you decide what “small,” “medium,” and “large” mean for Steads in your game.

Additionally, a Stead has an army that can act in its defense. A Stead’s army has a stat called “Military.” Based on what selections a player chooses when they take the move **Heavy is the Head**, their army will have a Military from -2 to 3. When your army acts in defense of your Stead, you will roll+Military. Additionally, if you take the move **Commander of the Guard**, you will also roll+Military to command your army on the battlefield.

MILITIAS: A Militia is a group of people used for combat. They can range from highly trained and heavily armed to inept and poorly outfitted, but they come together as a group to attack or defend. You can create a Militia using the move **Leader of the Pack** from The Spur’s moves. Militias come in three sizes. We suggest that small is approximately 20-25 people, medium is approximately 40-50 people and large is 75+ people. You may adjust these numbers based on the scale of your game.

A Militia *increases* the amount of Harm they do to their target by 1 for every size larger they are than the target and *decreases* the amount of Harm their target does to them by 1. For example, a small Militia fighting a single person does 1 extra Harm when attacking and ignores 1 extra Harm from their opponent’s attacks. This is in addition to any damage reduction from armor, as well as any damage bonuses their weapons give them. To give an example, a medium Militia armed with short swords (2 Harm) and leather armor (1



Armor) will do 2 Harm when attacking and ignore 1 Harm when being attacked if fighting another medium Militia. The Militias are the same size, and therefore do damage based on their weapons and armor without any modifiers for size. However, were the medium Militia to fight a small Militia, they would do 3 Harm and ignore 2 Harm. Their Harm and Armor each go up one because they are fighting a smaller group. This is the case whether the Militia is under the command of a PC or not.

Militias take damage just like other characters. A small Militia can take up to 4 Harm, a medium Militia can take up to 5 Harm, and a large Militia can take up to 6 Harm. Harm done represents members being killed or incapacitated. The more Harm they take, the more members are out of the fight. If a Militia reaches its Harm limit in a single battle, they are defeated. If a Militia takes significant Harm (3 or more) in a single battle but is not defeated, they are decreased in size by one rank. At that point, the Militia may grow back up to its original size through actions taken in the fiction — if a PC playing *The Spur* loses half of their Militia, moving from medium size to small size, they may actively try and recruit new members, eventually bringing their Militia back up to medium size.

FOLLOWERS: Followers are people who look up to you, who believe what you say, who think you are wise or beautiful. They may be your clique, school, cult, family, band or something else. They represent a resource for your character to use, though they are more hesitant to put themselves in harm's way than a Militia. Follow the rules for **Together, As One** in *The Beloved's* moves to create your Followers.



Advancement

Characters improve through gaining *advancements*. You gain an advancement by marking 5 *advancement points*. When you do any of the following things, mark one advancement point on your character sheet:

- † *Rolling a Highlighted Stat (once per stat, per scene)*: At the beginning of each session, PCs will have two of their stats *highlighted*. Each player asks the PC players seated to their left and right to pick one stat for them to highlight. The *first time* a player rolls one of their two highlighted stats in a scene, they mark one advancement point. If there are only two PC players, the MC can highlight one of these stats.
- † *Entanglements (once per session)*: Each class features three *Entanglements*. At the start of each session, the MC will highlight one of the three options. During the session, if your PC does what the highlighted option stipulates, the MC will give you an advancement point.
- † *Using an Honor Move (once per session)*: A PC earns an advancement point the *first* time during a session that they trigger any of the Honor moves, **Do You Know Who I Am**, **Call On Your Faction**, or **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt**. You do not get a point for *each* move. Rather, you get a *single point* only on the first time you use *one* of these moves in a session. See the section on Honor (159) for more details on how to use these moves.
- † *Specific Moves (conditional, no limit)*: Some moves give you or other players advancement points when you trigger them.

Every time you mark your fifth advancement point on your character sheet, choose an option from the two lists of advancements for your character class. You may only pick from the first list until you have achieved your sixth advancement. Once you choose your advancement, add its effects to your character sheet, mark it off, and then erase your advancement points and start over.



The First Session

In your first session, you'll figure out who the PCs are, which NPCs are in their lives, and what their relationships are. This means that the first session is steered more by the PCs than the MC when compared to later sessions.

You begin the first session the way you begin every session of SCUP: by highlighting stats and Entanglements, as detailed above, and rolling any moves that characters have for the start of the session, including Patron rolls.

When you actually get to playing the game, the first session should involve the MC asking PCs questions and prompting them for color about their characters. These questions should start out broad: “what would you be doing on a normal day?” “Describe your character’s home, or where they spend time.” “What sorts of things do you do when working for your Lord?” This will begin to provide the MC with fictional material to use as a springboard. Begin bringing in NPCs — questions like “who else spends time there with you?” or “who do you work with?” are good. After the setting starts to firm up, the MC should start to narrow her questions. “How do you feel about her?” “What do you think about having to do this job every day?” The MC can ask leading questions if it seems appropriate. “What happened here that you don’t like to talk about?” “It seems as if you don’t like him. Why is that?” The MC should move their focus around so that all the different PCs get a chance to introduce themselves, interact with some other characters, and answer some of these kinds of questions. If there’s an opportunity, both the MC and the PCs should feel free to start to stir up some drama, or at least hint at drama to come.



The *First Session Worksheet* (285) will help the MC keep tabs on two things:

1. What sorts of resources the PCs have at their disposal
2. What NPCs threaten those resources

If a PC seems like she has some political power, you may choose to write her name next to a resource such as Titles, Loyalty, Luxury, Goods, Fame, Land, etc. If a PC seems like they are rough and tumble, write their name next to Discipline, Weapons, Strength, or Skill. Either way, over the course of the first session, the MC should figure out what the PCs have going for them. As that happens, she should keep track of which NPCs might be a problem for the PCs. Is someone jealous of a PC's strength, title, riches, power, spouse, etc.? Is a PC in the way of an NPC's needs or ambitions? The MC should figure out *what* about the NPC is driving them to threaten the PC — hunger, ambition, ignorance, etc., and write their name next to the appropriate space on the worksheet.

After the first session, the First Session Worksheet will serve as a resource for the MC that lets her know what the PCs have and who might be ready, willing, and able to take it from them. This information will help her generate *Threats* (see the Threats chapter, 222) for future sessions, as well as give her the raw material to generate ideas for interacting with the PCs in the future.



End of Session

When the session is over, conclude by having each PC total up what their starting Honor for the next session will be. In the Honor section (159) we detail how to do this.

This first session serves as your template for how to play other sessions after it. Begin with your beginning of session duties and moves, then play the session, then conclude with any of end session moves and total up each PC's Honor for the next session. Over the rest of the book, we go into greater detail on how to do everything discussed above.

Safety

One final note: this is a vicious, violent game. It is very easy to go in dark, nasty directions at the table. If this is what you're looking for, we encourage you to explore this, but you should first take the safety of all the players at the table into consideration. As such, we strongly suggest you read the Appendix on Safety (269) before you play. We want everyone playing the game to feel safe and have fun, even as their character gets their hands bloody.



Moves



If you are in a rush to **Engage in Combat** or **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power**, reference sheets can be found at the end of the book. We'll crack each of the moves open and examine their guts here.

Some moves happen without rolling — the

text will tell you what to do in those cases. When moves call for rolling dice, you'll roll 2d6 and add or subtract the stat called for. Results are divided into three categories — a full hit (10+), a partial hit (7-9) or a miss (6-). A full hit means you succeed on your move or get what you were aiming for. A partial hit means you succeed with unintended consequences or your success is complicated. A miss means you don't achieve the effect you were aiming for, though this doesn't always mean you've "failed." Rather, the MC may make a move in the case of a miss. Find more details on MC Moves in the MC's chapter (201).



Basic Moves

FACE DURESS

When you do something difficult where your ability to do so is seriously in question, you roll to **Face Duress**. You say what you are trying to do and the MC will tell you what the duress is. The MC's response to what you want to do gives you an indication of what to expect if you fail.

EXAMPLE 1

Player: *"I want to get to the other side of the battlefield and help Fist fight all those soldiers off."*

MC: *"It's chaos out there right now — roll to Face Duress. The duress is the arrows which are raining down all around you".*

EXAMPLE 2

Player: *"I want to lie right to Priestess Zalika's face about where I've been. She'd be so mad if she knew I was with Obasi last night."*

MC: *"For sure. Why don't you roll Face Duress. The duress is the knowledge that she'll probably fire you, or worse, if she finds out who you've been spending time with."*

You may use this move to inflict Harm on another character if they are not ready or able to fight you back, but only if failure is an option (see "doing harm clarified," below).

EXAMPLE 3

Player: *"I want to sneak up behind Lord Pembroke, and put my dagger in his side."*



MC: *“He’s distracted by the tournament and has no idea you’re there, but he does have guards milling around. Why don’t you roll **Face Duress**. The duress is the chance you’ll be spotted.”*

Player: *“I rolled an 11.”*

MC: *“You get up right behind him. You can smell the herbs he rubs his hair with.”*

Player: *“I slide my dagger in his side and whisper ‘this is for what you did to Pax.’”*

MC: *“He takes 2 Harm and falls over clutching his side and screaming. Everyone in the stands turns to see the commotion. What do you do?”*

When you **Face Duress**, state what you want to do, the MC will tell you what the duress is, and **roll+Steady**. On a 10+, you have achieved what you set out to do. On a 7-9, you have flinched, stalled, or hesitated. The MC will pick 1 or 2 of the following and tell you what it will look like if you take it.

- † You can achieve your goal, but it’ll come at a price.
- † You can achieve your goal, but only partially.
- † You cannot achieve your goal, but can do something similar, instead.

Then, decide if you go through with what’s been offered, or back off.

In example 1 above, if the player rolled a 7-9, the MC could pick “you can achieve your goal, but it’ll come at a price” and say “you take a step forward but the rain of arrows is thicker than you initially thought. You can get to Fist, but you’re going to take 2 Harm.” Conversely, the MC could pick “you can achieve your goal, but only partially” and say “it’s too much of a nightmare out there, but you notice an overturned cart about halfway to Fist. You can get there and hide behind it, but crossing that last bit of distance might be



rough.” In example 2, the MC could pick “you cannot achieve your goal, but can do something similar, instead” and say “Zalika will see right through you if you lie to her, but you’ll probably convince most of her council, who are watching.”

Once the MC has made their selection and told the player what could happen, the player decides if they go through with it or not. In example 2, the player could respond “Zalika already doesn’t trust me, and I’m mostly interested in undermining her, so let’s do it. I lie to her and hopefully convince her council.” Conversely, she could back off, saying “when I get the impression that she’s not going to believe me, I stop myself from talking. I don’t need to make her any angrier at me than she already is.” As such, on a 7-9, the PC must decide if the cost that the MC has presented to them is worth getting what they set out to do.

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU MIGHT MAKE A FACE DURESS ROLL: you are sneaking into someone’s room to steal something and don’t want to wake them. You’re trying not to crack during a grueling interrogation. You shoot an arrow at someone who doesn’t know you’re there from a long distance. You’re attempting to pick a lock before some guards arrive.

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU WOULD NOT MAKE A FACE DURESS ROLL: you wish to do something difficult but have all the time in the world or there are no real consequences for failure. You are doing something that is second nature to you. No need for a roll in these circumstances.

Note that **Face Duress** should only be used for situations when *the outcome of an action would have real fictional consequences* depending on how well it is performed and there is a direct obstacle standing between the character and success. Don’t call for a **Face Duress** roll every time a character does something.



THREATEN WITH FORCE

When you intimidate a person with violence, roll to **Threaten With Force**. To use this move you must meet three conditions: (1) you can and will do violence against the target if they don't do what you want, (2) there must be something they could potentially do to change their behavior to avoid the violence, and (3) they aren't ready and waiting for you to attack them. If they have a sword drawn and you shout "get out of my way or I'll kill you," you should roll the **Engage in Combat** move rather than **Threaten with Force**.

When you **Threaten With Force**, state what you want the other character to do and what violence you will do to them if they don't and **roll+Fierce**. On a 10+, your target believes your threat. If they are an NPC, they will either do what you ask or, if they do not, you may choose to immediately commit the violence you promised them. If they are a PC, they may decide what they do, but if they refuse to do what you ask you may choose to immediately commit the violence you promised them. On a 7-9, you were unconvincing or they are not persuaded. Your target will choose one:

- † Freeze in fear, surprise, or confusion.
- † Try to strike a bargain with you or talk their way out of it.
- † Start looking for a way out and take it if they can.
- † Put something or someone between themselves and you.
- † Laugh at you, challenge you, or attack you, right then and there.

Also, on a 7-9, you do *not* get to automatically do the violence you threatened if they don't do what you want. This is a different situation than you anticipated and you will have to react accordingly.

EXAMPLE 1

Player: "I want to get into the throne room to talk to Anna. I tell Issma that if he doesn't get out of my way, I'm going to break his jaw."



MC: *“His eyes widen. Sounds like it’s a **Threaten With Force** roll.”*

Player: *“I rolled a 10.”*

MC: *“He looks terrified, but he’s too loyal to Anna to move. He takes a step towards you and holds up his hands. Do your thing.”*

Player: *“I sock him right in the face with my mailed fist.”*

MC: *“He crumples to the ground in a heap, moaning. This is not what he expected when he woke up this morning. You can step over him and into the throne room.”*

EXAMPLE 2

Player: *“I really need to know where Fallow is hiding. I hold up my dagger and inform the barkeep that if he doesn’t tell me which room they’re in, I’m going to cut off one of his fingers.”*

MC: *“That is very much a **Threaten With Force** roll.”*

Player: *“Sounds good. I rolled an 8.”*

MC: *“He rolls his eyes and says ‘Listen, I get this all the time. I can’t go around revealing information about my best customers, but what I can do is make it worth your while to walk away.’ He slides a small purse of coins across the counter to you.”*

Player: *“Hub. I’m supposed to find Fallow, but money is pretty tempting. Let me think about this...”*

In the first example, the MC chose to have Issma not listen to the PC, and the violence was immediately visited upon him. In the second example, the player rolled a partial hit and the MC picked “Try to strike a bargain with you or talk their way out of it” and changed the situation. The player then had to react accordingly.



EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU MIGHT MAKE A THREATEN WITH FORCE ROLL: someone has something you want, and you say you'll kill them if they don't give it to you. You sneak up behind someone with a successful **Face Duress** roll, and then whisper to them, "I'll slit your throat if you don't tell me what you know." You point your crossbow at someone you have caught off guard, and say, "drop your weapon or I'll shoot you right through the eye!"

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU WOULD NOT MAKE A THREATEN WITH FORCE ROLL: you are just trying to hurt someone with no possible way they can change their behavior to stop you. You are bluffing, and have no intention of following through with your threat.

ENGAGE IN COMBAT

When you attack someone with the intent to do Harm, you make an **Engage in Combat** roll. **Engaging in Combat** assumes your opponent is defending themselves and not cowering before you, caught unaware, fleeing, etc. If your opponent can't or won't fight back or could act to cause you to not Harm them, you are not **Engaging in Combat**, you are either **Facing Duress** or **Threatening With Force** (as appropriate, see above), or simply inflicting Harm with no move (see "doing Harm clarified" below).

When using this move, you are exposing yourself to Harm and retribution. The person you are fighting will be able to deal damage back to you. When a PC attacks someone with an **Engage in Combat** roll, that character returns the attack.

When you **Engage in Combat**, say what you are doing to attack your opponent or opponents and then **roll+Fierce**.



On a hit (10+ or 7-9), choose one of the following:

- † You attack with vigor (you inflict +1 Harm).
- † You parry their blows (you take -1 Harm).
- † You battle aggressively (you inflict +2 Harm but take an additional +1 Harm to yourself).
- † You fight defensively (you inflict -1 Harm, but take an additional -2 Harm to yourself).

Additionally, on a 10+, pick one of the following:

- † You stymie your opponent (they must change their behavior, somehow).
- † You are impressive or dominant (gain the attention or respect of those present).
- † You achieve a goal (you may change the situation. Grab something from your opponent, push them somewhere, block their entrance or exit, etc.).

After you have selected your choices, you and your opponent(s) trade Harm-for-Harm as established by your weapons, armor, and the choices you selected, and the combat may continue, with a new roll, if needed.

EXAMPLE 1

Player: *“It sounds like Asdel is itching for a fight, and I’m happy to oblige. I go ahead and swing my mace at him.”*

MC: *“You definitely need to make an Engage in Combat roll here.”*

Player: *“I roll a 9. I’ll pick ‘You battle aggressively.’ I just want this over with.”*

MC: *“Okay, Asdel has on some leather armor and he’s got his sword drawn. You crack him with your mace a few times and do 4 Harm, 1 of which is soaked by his armor. He’s pretty hurt, but he gets in a shot at you with his sword. It would normally be 2 Harm, but you left yourself open because you went at him*



so aggressively, so it'll be 3 Harm. Your armor blocks 1, so take 2 Harm."

EXAMPLE 2

Player: *"No one talks to me like that. I'm done with this guy. I draw my sword and advance on him."*

MC: *"Go ahead and roll to Engage in Combat."*

Player: *"I got a 12. I'm less interested in killing him and more interested in making an example of him. I'll select "you parry their blows" and "you are impressive or dominant."*

MC: *"You get him in the side with your sword as you attack him and he takes 1 Harm, after his armor soaks 1. He tries to strike you, but you block it and it winds up glancing off your armor and you take no Harm. But all eyes in the street turn towards you. You are commanding the scene."*

Player: *"Good, I loudly announce that no one insults the Steel of the Queen and gets away with it."*

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHEN YOU MIGHT MAKE AN ENGAGE IN COMBAT ROLL: guards surround you with their swords drawn and you pull out your mace and attack them. Someone has a letter in their hand that you want, and they refuse to give it to, so you try and take it by force. You just made a **Threaten With Force** roll and the target didn't do what you want so you stabbed them, but they are not incapacitated and are now drawing their dagger to fight back.

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHEN YOU WOULD NOT MAKE AN ENGAGE IN COMBAT ROLL: if the target doesn't know you are there, you would **Face Duress**, not **Engage in Combat**, or just deal harm without a move. If they could do something to get you not to harm them, you might **Threaten With Force**, not **Engage in Combat**.



PERSUADE WITH LEVERAGE

When you try to convince someone to do something for you by using something you have against them or offering to give them what they want, you are **Persuading With Leverage**. Leverage can be giving them something they want, stroking their ego, paying them, reminding them that you can help them out with something they want, etc., as long as you have *something* that gives you some kind of leverage over them. People who will do something for nothing don't need convincing.

When you **Persuade With Leverage**, tell your target what you want from them and what your leverage is and **roll+Wily**.

For NPC targets: on a 10+, they will accept your offer and do/say what you want. On a 7–9, the MC picks one:

- † They want even more than what you're offering or suggesting.
- † They want concrete proof or upfront payment of the leverage immediately, before they do anything.
- † They want something else than what you're offering or suggesting, instead.

For PC targets: on a 10+, you get both below. On a 7–9, you choose 1:

- † If the target does or says what you want, you may choose to give them 1 advancement point.
- † If the target refuses, they must make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll.

What your target does is then up to them, given those caveats.

EXAMPLE 1

Player: *"I really need Adorna to lie to the Queen about what she saw."*

MC: *"Oh, she's not going to do that. This is too juicy not to tell her royal Highness."*



Player: *“Yeah, but she’s always wanted to get in good with my family. We do well by the people who work for us.”*

MC: *“That’s true.”*

Player: *“I say ‘Listen, Adorna. I don’t know what you think you saw, but I’m sure we could both agree it would be better if Queen Rhala doesn’t find out about it. If you can keep quiet, I can put a good word in with my father for you.”*

MC: *“Make a **Persuade With Leverage** roll.”*

Player: *“I rolled an 8.”*

MC: *“She smiles. ‘I’m perfectly capable of keeping quiet, friend, but not for a good word. I want to be in your father’s employ, now. Then I can keep quiet.’”*

Player: *“I say ‘Of course, Adorna. I’ll go talk to him right now. I’m sure we can work something out.’”*

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU MIGHT MAKE A PERSUADE WITH LEVERAGE ROLL: You tell someone to spy on someone and promise them you’ll do a favor for them in return. You hint that you might sleep with someone who has been lusting after you if they start attending your cult’s religious rituals. You tell someone that you might not let their powerful Patron know all the awful things they’re up to if they give you the information you want.

EXAMPLE OF A SITUATION WHERE YOU WOULD NOT MAKE A PERSUADE WITH LEVERAGE ROLL: If direct violence is involved, you are not **Persuading With Leverage**, but **Threatening with Force**. If the person will do what you want, no strings attached, they don’t need convincing, and this does not trigger a move.



STUDY A SITUATION

When try to work out what is happening around you, you make a **Study a Situation** roll. When you **Study a Situation**, you are indicating to the MC that the situation is charged or tense. By asking a question below, you are putting that into the fiction. For example, if you ask “who or where is my enemy, really?” you have indicated to the MC that you have an enemy here. The MC will not answer “you don’t have an enemy.” If you asked, you do. This means that this is a great move to use to inject some extra drama and intrigue into the fiction.

When you **Study a Situation**, **roll+Sly**. On a hit, you can ask the MC questions from the list below, either immediately or over the course of the scene. On a 10+, ask 3 questions. On a 7–9, ask 2:

- † Where is my best escape route/way in/way past?
- † How is one of my adversaries vulnerable to me right now?
- † What am I missing?
- † Who or where is my enemy, really?
- † Who’s actually pulling the strings, here?
- † Who or what here could be a useful opportunity for me?

On a miss, ask one question, but the MC gets to make their hard move, as well (see the MC’s chapter, 201). The first time you act on one of the MC’s answers, take +1 forward on your roll.

EXAMPLE 1

Player: *“I’m sure there’s something going on with the Marquis that I’m not getting. I’m going to try to figure out what’s happening.”*

MC: *“Make a Study a Situation roll.”*

Player: *“I got a 5, a miss.”*



MC: *“Go ahead and ask your question.”*

Player: *“What am I missing?”*

MC: *“It suddenly dawns on you that Hae and Farro make eye contact every time the Marquis mentions anything about the festival. They’re planning something. You’re not sure what, but suddenly it’s clear as day.”*

Player: *“He’s not going to be happy about that.”*

MC: *“Before you can speak up, Hae notices you looking at her and rises to her feet. ‘Quinn, weren’t you supposed to dispose of that false prophet and her cult who preach in the town square? We can’t have them ruining the festival.’ She turns to the Marquis and says ‘sir, it seems Quinn has failed you.’”*

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU MIGHT MAKE A STUDY A SITUATION ROLL: When someone says something confrontational to The Crown and you start looking around for an escape route. When someone walks into a tavern and everyone stops to look at them, hands reaching for their swords, and you try to figure out what the problem is. When you realize that things in a tense negotiation are going south and you need to decide who to side with.

STUDY A PERSON

When you and someone else are interacting and you want to glean information from them about who they are, what they want, what they’re thinking, etc., you must make a **Study a Person** roll. As with **Study a Situation**, you are suggesting that the interaction is charged or tense. It may be charged with desire, hatred, fear, mistrust, lust, whatever, but you are telling the MC that this is a charged interaction.



When you **Study a Person** you are interacting with, **roll+Sly**. On a hit, you can ask your questions from the list below over the course of the interaction. Whether your character asks these questions out loud in the fiction is up to you — maybe you just put the puzzle pieces together as they were talking. Either way, your character gains the information in the answers to the questions. On a 10+, ask 3 questions. On a 7–9, ask 2.

- † What does your character really want?
- † What is your character's current plan?
- † What does your character wish I would do?
- † What are you leaving out?
- † How could I get your character to _____?
- † Can I actually trust your character to _____?

On a miss, ask one question, but the MC gets to make their move, as well. The first time you act on one of the MC's/player's answers, take +1 forward.

EXAMPLE 1

Player: *"I feel like Archer is giving me a weird vibe. I'm going to try figure him out in this conversation."*

MC: *"Make a Study a Person roll."*

Player: *"I got a 7."*

MC: *"Archer is picking at his food, distractedly. He says 'I suppose that Vyncent is going to want me to accompany him to the banquet tomorrow night, but he hasn't actually said anything about it.'"*

Player: *"I say 'That's unlike him. Very strange indeed.' What is Archer leaving out?"*

MC: *"Archer and Vyncent had a terrible falling out recently be-*



cause Vyncent found out Archer has become one of your followers. He doesn't approve of that."

Player: *"This might be my chance. Okay. I put my hand on Archer's and say 'My friend, you know that Vyncent doesn't see you like I do.'"*

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU MIGHT MAKE A STUDY A PERSON ROLL: another character is making romantic overtones to your character and you want to know what brought this about. Someone is subtly suggesting that you switch allegiances but seems unwilling to say it out loud. You decide that something odd is happening in an interaction you're in and want to get to the bottom of what it is.

WHISPERING INTO THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER

The Unspeakable Power is personal, everywhere, and has its own agenda. It sees you, it hears you, and if you're brave, you can try and get a glimpse into it. When you ask a question of or seek guidance from the supernatural, you are **Whispering Into The Unspeakable Power**. When you do this, you open yourself to the influence of those horrible things between the spaces of reality that want all manner of little favors from those of us with corporeal bodies. Pray you don't get burned.

When you **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power**, roll+Arcane. On a hit, the MC will pick one of the following:

- † You have a brief vision.
- † You hear a faint voice.
- † You have a curious sensation.

On a 10+, whatever happens, The Unspeakable Power will provide clear insight to you on the guidance you seek. Perhaps the MC will give you a glimpse of a possible future. Perhaps the Power will reveal



something crucial to you. Most importantly, you come out unscathed. On a 7-9, The Unspeakable Power fills you and gives you insight, but at a cost. The MC picks one:

- † Your insight is vague, frightening, or confusing.
- † The Unspeakable Power learns something you might not want it to know.
- † The Unspeakable Power whispers a threat back to you.

You are playing with forces beyond your ken...

EXAMPLE 1

Player: *"I need some guidance here. I kneel before the statue and ask if I will gain power if I betray my mother."*

MC: *"Are you Whispering Into The Unspeakable Power?"*

Player: *"It sure seems like it. I rolled a 9."*

MC: *"The statue's eyes light up a dull red, and you feel them reach into your soul. Your mind flashes briefly, with an image of you driving a sword into your mother's heart as people behind you cheer wildly."*

Player: *"Just what I wanted to know! She's in trouble."*

MC: *"As you stand to leave, though, you hear a faint voice behind you say 'You have a pure love for Laini, the priestess, do you not?'"*

Player: *"I freeze in my tracks and whirl around to see who said that."*

MC: *"No one. The chapel is empty. But it feels a few degrees colder than when you entered."*

Player: *"Creepy. I'm getting out of here."*



NOTE: Generally speaking, The Unspeakable Power has better things to do than come after every mortal who tries to tap into it. The MC should not immediately come after someone who misses a **Whispering Into The Unspeakable Power** roll with the full force of its wrath. Over time, though, if you keep meddling with it, it will get worse and worse for you.

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU MUST MAKE A WHISPER INTO THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER ROLL: someone twice your size pushes you into the mud and you think “I’d sell my soul if I could know how to humiliate him just once...” You are on a battlefield, comrades dying all around you, and you wonder if any force is powerful enough to protect you from death. You want to know how to ruin your enemy at any cost, and open the darkest part of your soul to find out how.

NOTE FOR MAGIC USERS: If you are a magic user, you also have a more powerful move called **Harness The Unspeakable Power** detailed on your character sheet, that you may use for a different effect. You may still choose to use **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power**, if you wish.



Peripheral Moves

The following moves that are available to all characters but should be used less frequently.

PATRON MOVE

If you have a Patron, **roll+the stat your class lists** at the start of the session.

- † On a 10+, your Patron is happy with you. You and the player of your Patron should work out why this is. You may remove 1 disobedience if you have any.
- † On a 7-9, your Patron is generally pleased, with some reservations. You and the player of your patron should work out why this is. They hold 1 for the session. They may spend it to call on you to do something and you must make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll if you refuse. If you refuse your Patron's request, it counts as 1 disobedience (max 3).
- † On a miss, your Patron is angry with you. You and the player of your Patron should work out why. You receive 1 automatic disobedience (max 3).

If you reach 3 disobedience, an NPC Patron will immediately sever their relationship with you. A PC Patron may choose to immediately sever their relationship with you, or choose instead to take 1 hold to call on you next session, regardless of what you roll. Please see the chapter on Factions, Patrons, and Honor (146) for more information on how to use this move.

HELP OR INTERFERE

When you are in a scene with another PC, and you **Help or Interfere** with their move, describe how you are doing it, and then **roll+whatever stat is appropriate** (i.e. if you interfere using your intelligence, **roll+Sly**, if you interfere using your strength, **roll+Fierce**).



On a hit, they take +1 (for helping) or -1 (for interfering). On a 10+, pick an additional effect.

- † They take an additional +1 (for helping) or -1 (for interfering).
- † You do not expose yourself to danger, cost, or retribution through your action.

A miss functions like a miss for the basic moves for the person trying to help or interfere.

EXAMPLE 1

Player 1: *“I’m getting tired of Lockheart’s deception. I tell him ‘Listen, you tell me the truth about what you’ve been up to or I’m going to put my sword right through your cowardly neck.’”*

MC: *“Okay, Dirge, that sounds like a **Threaten With Force** roll.”*

Player 1: *“Yep! I rolled an 8.”*

Player 2: *“This is bad. What Lockheart’s been up to is plotting against the Empress with me. I’m going to interfere.”*

MC: *“How are you doing that, Pax?”*

Player 2: *“I’m going to scowl at Dirge and say ‘Lockheart doesn’t have to tell you a thing. I’ll roll with Fierce. I got a 10. I take the additional -1 to get him down to a miss, so I’ll have to take the risk of exposure.’”*

MC: *“Dirge, you’ve now missed. Lockheart laughs and stands to leave. ‘I’ll give your regards to her highness,’ he says. ‘I’m going to see her now.’ As he leaves, though, Pax, you notice that someone was listening in on the interaction. You’ve never seen them before, but he gives you a death glare. Dirge, you notice this too. Might be someone you should talk to.”*



In this example, *Player 2* took the additional -1 to get *Dirge* to fail. However, because she didn't take the option to not expose her character to cost, the MC inserted someone else into the scene who seems to have been put off by the interaction.

TAKING HARM

When you suffer Harm, **roll+Harm suffered** (after armor). If you took a hit for 2 Harm, and have armor that absorbs 1 Harm, you would roll+1, because you are taking 1 Harm after armor.

On a 10+, the MC can choose 1:

- † You're out of action for the time being: unconscious, downed, writhing in pain, or panicked.
- † It's worse than it seemed. Take an additional 1 Harm.
- † Choose 2 from the 7–9 list below.

On a 7–9, the MC can choose 1:

- † You lose your footing.
- † You lose your grip on whatever you're holding.
- † You lose track of someone or something you're attending to.
- † You miss noticing something important.

On a miss, the MC can choose something from the 7–9 list above. If she does, it's in place of some of the Harm you're suffering, so you take -1 Harm (i.e. if you were taking 2 Harm and you roll a 4, and the MC picks from the 7-9 list above, you are now only taking 1 Harm).

This move is optional, and can be triggered on a case-by-case basis. Use it as much or as little as seems appropriate for your group.



MARKET MOVE

When you go into a market looking for a particular thing, **roll+Wily**. On a 10+, it's right there for you, at a reasonable price. On a 7–9, the MC chooses one of the following:

- † “That’s quite is a rare thing! It’s going to cost you a little extra...”
- † “Oh, I know where you can get one, but only if you meet with an associate of mine...”
- † “Damn it all, I had one, I just sold it to _____, maybe you can go get it off them?”
- † “Sorry, I don’t have that, but maybe this will do instead?”

Honor Moves

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

“Spend 1 Honor to have someone you meet have recently heard something impressive about you. Take +1 forward on your next **Threaten With Force** or **Persuade With Leverage** roll against them.

CALL ON YOUR FACTION

When you call on your Faction for help, support, or to advance your agenda, spend between 0-3 Honor and **roll+Honor spent**. On a 10+, activate one of your Faction’s benefits. On a 7-9, activate one of your Faction’s benefits, but the MC holds 1. They may spend it to have someone from your Faction call on you to do a favor, fulfill your duty, or perform an obligation. On a miss, your Faction cannot help you. The MC will detail why and will pick one from the list of consequences below.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| † Secrets are revealed. | † Channels are cut off. |
| † Loyalties are shifted. | † Suspicions are confirmed. |
| † Status is threatened. | † Allies are put in danger. |



REFUSE AN OBLIGATION, DUTY, OR DEBT

When you refuse to do something you are supposed to do because of your station or resist carrying out a command or request from someone with leverage or authority over you, spend between 0-3 Honor and **roll+Honor spent**. On a 10+, nothing. On a 7-9, pick 1. On a miss, take both.

- † You feel guilty or conflicted. Take -1 forward.
- † You seem ignoble. The MC holds 1. They spend it to have someone you interact with have heard whisperings that you can't be trusted.

Move Clarification

HARNESS THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER CLARIFIED

The Adept, The Beloved, and The Hex all start with a move called **Harness The Unspeakable Power** that marks them as a magic user. They have a greater connection to The Unspeakable Power and can use it to change the world in small ways (but cannot use it to directly attack or affect another player).

EXAMPLES OF THINGS YOU COULD DO WITH HARNESS THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER

- † Write a message in the dirt to someone not present with you.
- † Amplify your voice to yell to someone far away.
- † See over a greater distance than you normally could, as if looking through a telescope.
- † Fill a room with music.
- † Jump farther than you normally can, or cushion yourself as you fall from a moderate height.
- † Create a small flame.
- † Fill a pot with soup to feed a small group.



- † Break a window, as if you threw a small rock through it.
- † Raise or lower the temperature of a room enough to make it uncomfortable.

In these examples, you are altering the world or your abilities in some minor way. Imagine this move as giving you a slight boost over reality. Also, note than none of them are direct attacks. What you can do is *not limited to this list*, these are simply examples to give you an idea of what you can do with it.

EXAMPLES OF THINGS YOU *CANNOT* DO WITH HARNESS

THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER

- † Teleport over a great distance.
- † Fly.
- † Completely alter your physical appearance.
- † Shatter a stone wall.
- † Shoot a fireball from your fingertips.
- † Create an illusion that convinces a room full of people it is real.
- † Compel someone to do something.

Each of these examples is too big for this move. More importantly, many of them are *duplicates of other moves*. You can directly attack someone with The Adept's move **Arcane Malice**, for example, or alter your physical appearance with The Hex's move **Fairest of Them All**.

PLAYER VS. PLAYER CONFLICT CLARIFIED

There are several ways to deal with player vs. player conflict. Below, we offer some suggestions.

For physical conflict:

1. Determine who acts first. The fiction may suggest a definite first party (for example, someone has snuck up on the other, someone has their sword drawn first, someone clearly initiates the combat, etc.). In that case, the definite first party gets to make their roll first. If they make an **Engage in Combat** roll, they



will be the one to make their selection. The other PC may trade Harm-for-Harm as indicated by the selections the PC who rolled the move takes.

2. Conversely, if neither player has an obvious “first attacker” advantage, they may roll **Engage in Combat** simultaneously and use their selections to jointly determine what happens. Selections may mechanically cancel out other selections (i.e. if you take “parry their blows” and they take “attack with vigor” those selections cancel each other out).

For other forms of conflict:

1. Two people may simultaneously use **Study a Person** on each other. They may also simultaneously interfere with each other as they do this. This is two rolls for each person: one roll to study the other person and one roll to interfere.
2. Two people may simultaneously use **Persuade With Leverage** on each other, as well as simultaneously interfere. This, as above, is two rolls for each person. Resolve them as normal.

DOING HARM CLARIFIED

Harm can be inflicted on another character in a variety of ways. If someone can't or won't fight back, you do not need to roll. You just inflict Harm. The MC may, in fact, choose to allow you to inflict extra Harm or even just kill the person outright because you have them at your mercy. For example, if someone is tied to a chair in front of you, and you say “I'm going to punch them in the face.” You don't need to roll, and the MC may let you do additional Harm, if you want. If you then say “I'm going to kill them,” you don't need to roll. Your character can just kill them.

Please note that this final suggestion, that your character can just kill someone at their mercy, should be sparingly applied to PCs. If a PC is tied up and someone says “I'm going to kill them,” that seems like



a good opportunity to let the target PC try a **Persuade With Leverage**, **Face Duress**, or **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power** roll, rather than just letting them die.

For NPCs at your mercy, kill away.

If there is some doubt that a PC may succeed in inflicting Harm on another character because some kind of skill, precision, or force is required to do so, then you must make a roll. Below is a list of the ways these rolls can break down:

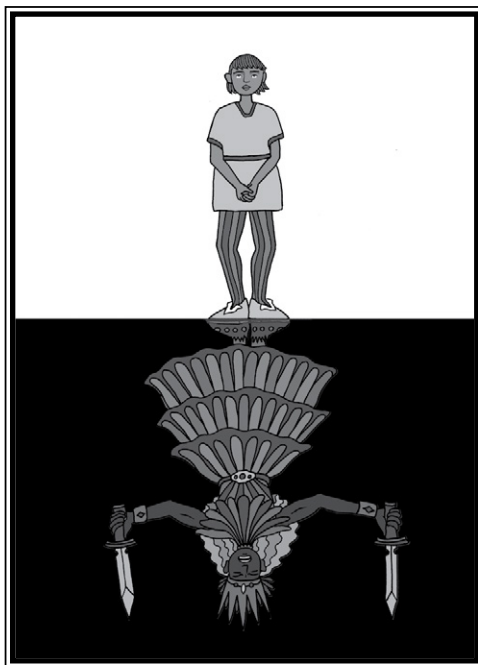
If you have snuck up on them, have the drop on them, and fully plan to inflict violence upon their person, you should roll **Face Duress** to do Harm. The duress is committing the violence before they or someone else becomes aware of you and prepares for the attack. If the target is simply in no position to fight back, then no roll is necessary.

If you have the drop on your target, you tell them what you're going to do before you do it, and your target could change their behavior to avoid the violence, you roll **Threaten With Force**. On a full hit with **Threaten With Force**, you may automatically do the promised violence to your target if they don't do what you want. You do not need to roll again.

If your target is ready for you and can and will fight back, you roll **Engage In Combat**. With each roll, you will trade Harm-for-Harm with your target as established by the choices you make. In other words, you will do Harm to them, based on your weapon and the options you selected from the move, then they will do Harm back to you, based on their weapon and the options you selected from the move.



Character Classes



PCs have a *character class* that indicates what their role is in the setting, what they can do, and what their stats are. At the start of a game, each player will pick a class for their character. In this chapter, we detail the information in each class.

Players should all choose different classes — it's easier to make sure everyone has a unique space in your fictional world if they each start with different archetypes.

If you are on the fence about which of the character classes you are interested in playing, see the questions asked in the Basic Rules chapter (1) to guide you.



The Adept



There are secrets out there, vast and powerful. Knowledge that few hold and fewer still can master. Your power can wield those secrets like a sword. You can create with that power, and destroy just as easily. People know that. They respect that. They fear that. You're either the story that parents use to scare their children when they put them to bed at night, or what they secretly hope those children will become when they grow up. You are one of The Adept.

CREATING AN ADEPT

To create your Adept, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAMES

Storm, Mattius, Way, Sevem, Oxus, Care, Crow, Theresa, Vlad, Stranger, Old One, Lock, Will, Shanasi

Something otherworldly. Something simple. Something unassuming.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+1 Fierce+1 Wily-2 Sly+1 Arcane+2
- † Steady+0 Fierce+0 Wily+1 Sly+0 Arcane+2
- † Steady+1 Fierce-2 Wily+0 Sly+2 Arcane+2
- † Steady+2 Fierce-1 Wily-1 Sly+1 Arcane+2

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Simple robes, Elaborate robes, Tight leather, Princely clothes, Plain clothes
- † Bleak face, Bony face, Serene face, Old face, Happy face, Non-descript face
- † Shining eyes, Kind eyes, Mischievous eyes, Tired eyes, Haunted eyes, Shimmering eyes
- † Slender body, Fat body, Broken body, Useless body, Old body, Average body

GEAR

You start with:

- † The clothes on your back.
- † Whatever item you need (if you need one) for **Arcane Malice**.
- † A small dagger or a staff, if you want.
- † A few books on The Unspeakable Power and other arcane sorts of things.
- † Oddments worth 1 Barter.
- † 1 magical object (see below).



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Adept has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † You think me wise and sagely.
- † You have seen me do great and terrible things with my power.
- † You want to be like me, maybe more than you realize.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Harness The Unspeakable Power**, and one additional Adept move.

HARNESS THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER

You are a magic user and have an ability to tap into The Unspeakable Power in a way that normal people cannot. When you try to harness The Unspeakable Power to achieve an aim, roll+Arcane. On a hit, you may change the world in some minor but tangible way. On a 7-9, the MC will also hold 1 and may spend it on one of the following.



- † The Power knows what you're doing and why you're doing it.
- † The Power asks for something minor in return.
- † The Power requests some small show of loyalty.

Use your talents wisely.

ARCANE MALICE

You can inflict Harm with your magic power. You roll +Arcane instead of +Fierce to **Engage in Combat** and **Threaten with Force** if you attack with magic. Detail how you use magic to deal Harm. Your attack has a base of 1 Harm. Pick 2 from the following list to describe exactly how your magic works:

- † Your attack is powerful. Add +1 Harm.
- † Your attack is inconspicuous. Add quiet tag.
- † Your attack has incredible range. Add far tag.
- † Your attack can Harm from within. Add armor piercing tag.
- † Your attack shakes the nerves and inflicts s Harm.

Also, pick 1 from the following list:

- † Your attack is violent. Add messy tag.
- † Your attack is short ranged. Add close tag.
- † Your attack is conspicuous. Add loud tag.
- † Your attack takes a lot out of you. You take s Harm or 1 Harm (your choice) each time you use it.

NOTE: you may not take conflicting tags (i.e. you may not take close and far or loud and quiet).

COURSING WITH MAGIC

Get +1 to Arcane (max 3).

DREAM QUEST

When you want something at any cost, roll +Arcane. On a hit, you fall unconscious and commune with The Unspeakable Power in



evocative dreams to get your desire. On a 10+, The Power will provide you with a clear path to your goal. Take +1 ongoing acting on this information until you achieve your desire. On 7-9, you have terrible nightmares about the obstacles that stand in your way. Take +1 forward on your next roll to get your desire. On a miss your dreams are unclear, but you wake to find that The Power has brought you what you wanted. However, the MC will pick one:

- † Someone had to be forever altered for the worse to get it to you. Maybe someone you needed or cared about.
- † What you want has been somehow twisted, perverted, or tainted.
- † Someone wants what you have received. Maybe more than you do.

JUST A SIMPLE OLD FOOL...

Use +Arcane instead of +Wily to **Persuade With Leverage**.

POWER, HORRIBLE POWER

You have achieved arcane mastery over something. Pick one of the following: stone; plants; air; fire; water; metal; illusion; beasts; or the dead. When you command what you have mastered, roll+Arcane. On a hit, hold 1. Spend your hold to bend what you master to your will (examples: shatter stone, create a powerful wind, feed a fire, raise a skeleton, calm a beast). On a 7-9, the MC will also pick a consequence from the following list:

- † Your control is weak. The effect is less than or not exactly what you desire.
- † Your control is erratic. There may be unexpected consequences.
- † Your control is exhausting. You take s Harm.

On a miss, you lose control of what you command. What that looks like is up to the MC.



ARCANE ADVISOR

When you counsel someone, describe the rituals you perform to gain insight and roll+Arcane. On a 10+, any who follow your advice will have good fortune. If a PC, they will take +1 forward on any roll directly following your suggestions. If an NPC, they will be fortuitous in their endeavors and credit you. On a 7-9, the same as above, but the MC holds 1. They may spend it to have a minor complication or malady related to your advice befall your target later. Whether or not they blame you is up to them. On a miss, The Unspeakable Power is not happy that you have tried to use it for your tiny, human concerns. They may find a way to let you know this. They may find a way to let those you advise know this, instead.

TEAR REALITY

When you create and maintain a magical portal to move a person or object through, roll+Steady.

If moving a person (including yourself): on a 10+, you get all 3 below. On a 7-9, you get to pick 2 below and the MC may decide about the 3rd. On a miss, the MC chooses: either the portal doesn't open or it does, but one of the things below definitely doesn't happen if someone goes through it.

- † Your target arrives exactly where you want instead of somewhere slightly off.
- † Your target arrives instantly, instead of a short amount of time later.
- † Your target doesn't take s Harm from the experience.

If moving an objet: on a 10+, you get both below, on a 7-9, pick 1.

- † It is exactly where you want, instead of somewhere slightly off. You may have to **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power** to ask where it is if you don't take this option.
- † No one, or no *thing*, you might not want to sees where you put it or ascertains where it is.



On a miss, someone or some thing may have found the object and might want to make a deal with you for you to get it back.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE ADEPT

When you and another character have sex, you both may **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power** as if you rolled a 10+.

ENTANGLEMENTS

The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

- † Sell your arcane power for a price to someone rich or important.
- † Threaten or coerce someone powerful with your magic.
- † Reveal the extent of your power to someone who may covet or hate your abilities.
- † _____

YOUR MAGICAL OBJECT

You have a bizarre magical object. Choose 2 from this list to describe it:

- † It lets you view things remotely (once per session, you may **Study a Situation** on a scene you are not currently in).
- † It lets you see into people's hearts (once per session, you may **Study a Person** on someone you know but are not in sight of).
- † It masks reality (once per session, when someone makes a **Study a Person** roll against you, after you answer their questions you may also tell them one plausible lie they now believe).
- † It makes promises binding (when an NPC promises something upon the object, they are compelled to follow through. If a PC,



they must make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll to resist refusing to fulfill the promise until it is completed or you choose to release them).

- † It stands between you and chaos (once per session when **Whispering Into** or **Harnessing The Unspeakable Power**, it will absorb or shield you from the consequences of a failed roll).

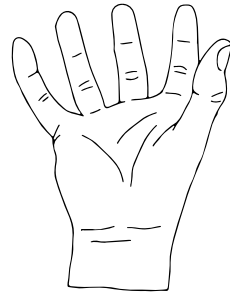
Now pick 1 from this list:

- † It exacts a cost (requires 1 Harm worth of blood from someone per use).
- † It hates you (you must make a **Persuade With Leverage** roll against the object to make it comply, treating it like a named NPC that talks only to you).
- † Its use requires time consuming preparation.
- † Its use requires the destruction of valuable objects: ground diamond, shattered valuables, things you love, usually about 1 Barter worth, or something personally significant to you.
- † It attracts the attention of something horrible (roll +Steady to not be noticed when you use it).

HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

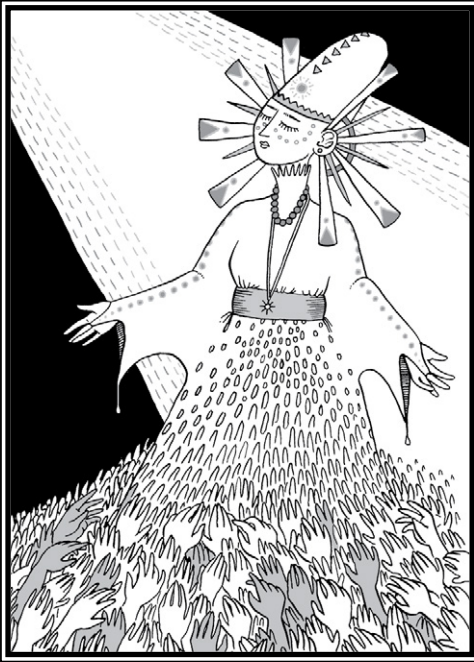
- † Get +1 Steady (max +3).
- † Get +1 Wily (max +2).
- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get a new Adept Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Get a Patron (roll+Arcane at beginning of session).
- † Get a 2nd attack option from the first list for **Arcane Malice**, if you have it. You may take an option you already have for double the effect.
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.
- † Get a 3rd attack option from the first list for **Arcane Malice**, if you have it. You may take an option you already have for double the effect (but not a third time).



The Beloved



The gods smile upon you, or at least *something* does. While others try to tame The Unspeakable, you feel it flow inside of you. While others try to understand *It*, you know *It*, and *It* knows *you*. You commune differently with *It*; *It's* like a lover, a friend, a competitor, an enemy, and your beating, bloody heart before you. Some worship The Power, others fear The Power, but you... you are *be-loved* by The Power. Now

how shall you make *Its* voice, that beautiful voice that sounds like so much thunder and honey in your brain, echo throughout this world?

CREATING A BELOVED

To create your Beloved, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME SUGGESTIONS

Lady, Petra, Say, Ransom, We, Sunfall, Slate, Scar, Andoly, Pembrook, Hash, Silence, Dusk, Serene

Something humble. Something beautiful. Something alluring.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+0 Fierce-1 Wily+2 Sly+0 Arcane+2
- † Steady+1 Fierce-2 Wily+0 Sly+2 Arcane+2
- † Steady+0 Fierce+0 Wily+1 Sly+0 Arcane+2
- † Steady+1 Fierce-2 Wily+1 Sly+1 Arcane+2

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Grey robes, White robes, Plain clothes, Comfortable clothes, Loincloth, Tribal wear
- † Calm face, Scarred Face, Stern face, Long face, Bony face
- † Piercing eyes, Distant eyes, Knowing eyes, Evil eyes
- † Thin body, Old body, Bent body, Decrepit body, Weird body, Athletic body
- † Shaved head, Matted hair, Pointed beard, Polite smile, Toothy grin

GEAR

You begin with:

- † A staff (1 Harm, close).
- † Oddments worth 1 Barter.
- † The clothes on your back.
- † Some small item which is sacred or important to you.

And that's it. You're not one for worldly possessions.



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Beloved has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † You have heard me speak my love for *It* and were moved.
- † I listened to you when no one else would.
- † You have encountered me and fear me. And fear *It*.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Harness The Unspeakable Power**, and one additional Beloved move:

HARNESS THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER

You are a magic user and have an ability to tap into The Unspeakable Power in a way that normal people cannot. When you try to harness The Unspeakable Power to achieve an aim, roll+Arcane. On a hit, you may change the world in some minor but tangible way. On a 7-9, the MC will also hold 1 and may spend it on one of the following.



- † The Power knows what you're doing and why you're doing it.
- † The Power asks for something minor in return.
- † The Power requests some small show of loyalty.

Use your talents wisely.

I DO NOT SHAKE BEFORE *IT*...

Roll+Arcane instead of +Steady when you **Face Duress**.

***IT* PROTECTS ME...**

When The Beloved wears no armor but, rather, wears sacred vestments or carries an important sacred symbol, relic, or object of her faith, she has +1 Armor. When she additionally performs the rites of her faith (chanting, preaching, rituals, prayers, etc.) she has +2 Armor.

***IT* KNOWS YOU...**

When you confront an NPC's inner demons, roll+Arcane. On a hit, you see and can interact with manifestations of their worst actions, fears, thoughts, etc. and engage them alone in interaction. If you best your target's demons in some way through persuasion, combat, trickery, etc., pick one of the following to happen to the target character:

- † They are freed of doubt, fear, or sadness.
- † They forget something awful they have done.
- † They are moved to forgive a wrong that someone did to them.
- † They are filled with mercy or concern for someone.

On a 10+, the change is permanent. On a 7-9, the change will fade. On a miss, the target's inner demons are let loose. What sorts of things will they whisper to you? What sorts of things will they whisper to your target?



IT IS EVERYWHERE...

When you call upon *Its* help during a battle, roll+Arcane. On a 10+, hold 2. On a 7–9, hold 1. During the battle you can spend your hold 1 for 1 to:

- † Name an NPC in the battle. *It* takes them out of the fight (detail how with the MC).
- † Name a character in the battle. *It* protects them from an attack.
- † *It* shields you. Ignore all Harm to yourself from an attack.
- † *It* inspires those around you. Compel an observer to join the battle on your side or escape the melee.

On a miss, *It* rebukes your pleas. Take -1 forward for the combat.

IT DEMANDS BLOOD

Once per session, when you speak a request or prayer to *It* and ritually sacrifice a living thing, roll. If the thing was an animal, add +1 to your roll. If the thing was human, add +2 to your roll. If the thing was a human that you truly love, add +3 to your roll. On a 10+, you have pleased *It* greatly, and *Its* divine hands will guide your actions. Hold 3 and spend them to accomplish anything below. On a 7–9, *It* smiles upon you. Hold 2 and spend them to accomplish anything below.

- † *Its* hand assists you: take +1 on a roll relating to your prayer or request.
- † *Its* voice guides you: **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power** as if you rolled a 10+ on something related to your prayer or request.
- † *Its* love protects you: ignore the consequences of a failed roll related to your prayer or request.

On a miss, *It* is displeased with your sacrifice. Take -1 forward to your next roll relating to your prayer or request. Regardless of your success or failure, the dead may remember what you did.



IT LIVES WITHIN ME

When you force your body to birth something unspeakable and unnatural into the world, mark 4 notches of Harm and describe the thing you have given bloody, writhing form to. You have created a new, horrifying NPC and you are a mess. The thing you have created is savage and hideous (2 Harm, 1 Armor, messy, close). Name it, then pick 2 from this list to describe it:

- † *It* is under your control (add tag: discipline).
- † *It* inflicts truly terrible Harm (add +1 Harm).
- † *Its* body has natural defenses (+1 Armor).
- † *It* is capable of clear communication and interpretation.

Then pick 1 from this list:

- † *It* is ravenously hungry (add tag: hunger).
- † You are not its only master.
- † *It* curses its birth and blames you for its miserable existence.

May the gods have mercy on you.

PREACHER

Once per session, when you speak of your beliefs about *It* to a crowd of people, roll+Wily. On a hit, they listen to your words. Pick 1.

- † They offer their precious things up to you. Gain +1 Barter.
- † They are moved to rage by your words. They will act as a small Militia at your command for a brief period.
- † They will confess their sins and secrets to you. Gain interesting rumors and information you seek from them.

On a 7-9, the MC picks 1, in addition:

- † The crowd becomes riled and unruly — rioting, fornicating, dancing, screaming, etc.
- † Your preaching attracts the attention of someone who might not like it.
- † Some in the crowd challenge your beliefs loudly and publicly.



TOGETHER, AS ONE

You have a small group of around 10-15 Followers. They are loyal to you, but may also have their own lives apart from you. Characterize them: your cult, your family, your students, your attendants, etc. By default, your followers start with: surplus: 1 Barter, want: desertion. See section on *tags* (171) for more information.

Choose 2 from this list:

- † Your Followers are exceptionally dedicated to you. Surplus: +1 Barter, and replace want: desertion with want: hunger.
- † Your Followers constitute a powerful arcane force. Surplus: +ritual.
- † Your Followers are joyous and celebratory. Surplus: +party.
- † Your Followers are educated and wise. Surplus: +insight.
- † Your Followers are hard-working and no-nonsense. Surplus: +1 Barter.
- † Your Followers are enthusiastic and proselytize on your behalf. Surplus: +growth.
- † Your Followers are rough and combative. They may fight as a Militia (2 Harm, small).

Additionally, choose 2 from this list:

- † You have few Followers, only 5-8. Surplus: -1 Barter.
- † Your Followers aren't really yours, you're theirs. Want: +judgment.
- † Your Followers rely on you for their needs. Want: +desperation.
- † Your Followers are typically intoxicated. Surplus: +stupor.
- † Your Followers disdain luxury and convention. Want: +disease.
- † Your Followers disdain law and reason. Surplus: +violence.
- † Your Followers are decadent and perverse. Want: +savagery.

At the beginning of each session, roll+Wily. On a 10+, your Followers are content and you gain whatever you have listed under “surplus” for the session. On a 7-9, things are mixed: you have your



surplus, but the MC will choose one tag from your want list to activate. On a miss, your Followers are in want. All want tags are active this session. If you have this move, you may twice choose to spend an advancement to add a surplus option to or remove a want option from your Followers instead of taking a normal advancement.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE BELOVED

If you and another character have sex, you share *It* with them. Hold 1. You may spend it at any time to have them spread knowledge, fear, or worship (their choice) of *It*.

ENTANGLEMENTS

The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

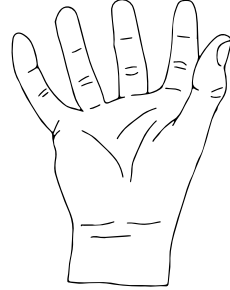
- † Willingly take Harm on behalf of your beliefs.
- † Publicly mock and denigrate the authorities of this world where all can hear you.
- † Openly denounce someone powerful as an enemy of *It* to their face, or in a way that they will hear about.
- † _____



HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

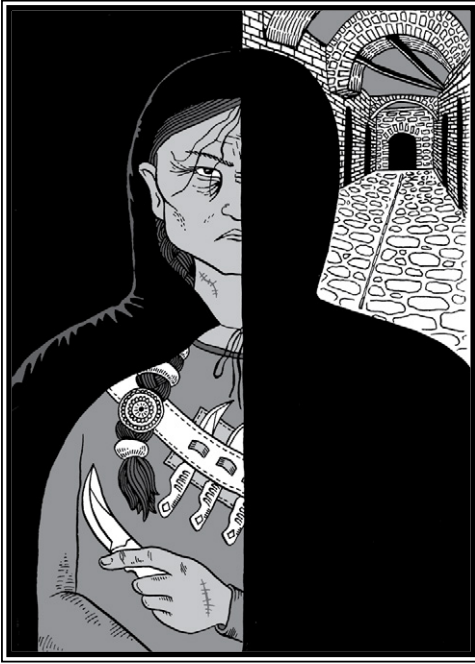
- † Get +1 Wily (max +3).
- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get +1 Arcane (max +3).
- † Get a new Beloved Move (x2).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Get a Patron (roll+Arcane at beginning of session).
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



The Black Hood



While some storm arrogantly at walls or dawdle with the dark mysteries of the universe to eliminate their enemies, others stay in the shadows and take a more elegant approach. After all, if disreputable folks are willing to part with good coin for a clean death here and there, you might as well be the one to fill your purse, right? So if you're one of those unlucky people, the ones with something that someone

wants or the ones whose mouth someone needs shut, well then, I'm sorry to say that it's probably too late. The Black Hood is already right behind you....

CREATING A BLACK HOOD

To create your Black Hood, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Grendel, Horus, Frenza, Lucy, Metal, Ulster, Y, Pen, Wraith, Umbra, Rain, Shadow, Legion, Feather

Something mysterious. Something subtle. Something somber.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+2 Fierce+1 Wily+0 Sly+1 Arcane-1
- † Steady+2 Fierce+0 Wily-1 Sly+2 Arcane+0
- † Steady+2 Fierce+1 Wily-1 Sly+0 Arcane+1
- † Steady+2 Fierce+1 Wily+1 Sly+1 Arcane-2

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Black clothes, Fancy clothes, Nondescript clothes, Flowing cloak, Comfortable clothes
- † Peaceful face, Scarred face, Sinister face, Innocent face, Pointy face
- † Gangly body, Strong body, Twisted body, Corpulent body, Small body, Thin body
- † Empty eyes, Knowing eyes, Bright eyes, Cruel smile, Toothless smile, Meticulous hair, Thin hair, Fierce frown

GEAR

You begin with:

- † A black, hooded cloak, of course. Very dashing.
- † Leathers worth 1 Armor.
- † 1 small, short-range weapon (a dagger or short sword, for example).
- † 1 long-range weapon (throwing knives or a small crossbow).
- † The tools of your trade (lockpicks, caltrops, a garrote, etc.).
- † Some clothes, personal items, and oddments worth 1 Barter.



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

PATRON

You almost certainly have a Patron, who is most likely a guild or secret society. Describe them. The Black Hood may be called on to act on behalf of the group they work for. The Black Hood must roll+Steady at the beginning of each session to see how their relationship with their Patron is doing. See the Patron rules to check the outcome of the roll.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Black Hood has relationships with.

To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † I have done something awful for you.
- † I have you wrapped around my finger.
- † I scare you, just a little bit.



MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus two additional Black Hood moves.

LIKE A SHADOW IN THE DARKNESS

When you are being chased, searched for, or otherwise trying to make yourself scarce or unseen, roll+Steady. On a hit, you are out of sight and may choose from the list below. On a 10+, choose 2 of the following, on a 7-9, choose 1.

- † Those looking for you position themselves within striking distance.
- † Those looking for you mistake someone else for you.
- † Those looking for you are distracted by something else that's equally pressing.
- † You stumble across something interesting or important as you hide or escape.

On a miss, The Black Hood draws unwanted attention. It's an occupational hazard.

HAWKEYE

Get +1 Steady (max +3).

JUST A SPOT OF INDIGESTION....

When you poison a victim, roll+Sly. On a 10+, you get all 3 below for the qualities of the poison, on a 7-9, choose 2.

- † It deals Harm within the exact time frame you want, up to 1 day.
- † It looks like something else happened to the victim.
- † It does the exact amount of Harm you intend (from 1-4 Harm ap).

Regardless of what you select, the victim will feel sick for at least a



day or two (if they're not dead). On a miss, pick 1 of the above qualities, but the MC also chooses 1 or 2 below:

- † Someone sees you do it.
- † Someone else unintended ingests it.
- † It does something you never would have guessed.
- † You lose track of where you slipped it. Pray no one buys you a drink....

Whether the move succeeds or fails, you must spend 1 Barter.

ESCAPE ARTIST

When you attempt to escape from bonds, a cell, or some other kind of restraint, roll+Steady. On a hit, you're gone. On a 7-9, pick 1:

- † You left something important behind.
- † Someone notices you're gone immediately.
- † Someone can track where you went.
- † You run into someone inconvenient.

On a miss, you pick: you don't escape, or you do but the MC will select 2 from above.

WHAT'S MINE IS MINE AND WHAT'S YOURS IS MINE

When you try to take a possession owned by another character, roll+Steady. When the target is an NPC: on a 10+, "what, you mean this thing of theirs I've got right here in my pocket? Silly me! How did that get there?" On a 7-9, you pick: either you get the thing but select one trouble from below, or you don't get the thing but there's no trouble. On a miss, you don't get the thing and the MC will pick one trouble:

- † Someone saw you.
- † You left something behind.
- † The thing isn't exactly right or it's damaged (unavailable on a miss).



When the target is a PC: On a 10+ your target picks two of the following. On a 7-9 they get all three.

- † They notice it's gone right away.
- † They notice a clue that points them towards you.
- † They know someone who knows where it might be now.

On a miss, you didn't get it and they definitely saw you trying to get it.

WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE

Once per session, take +1 on any roll where you're lying to, deceiving, or cheating someone. Lies are easy. Truth? *That* you're not so good with.

THEIR EYES NEVER OPEN

Once per session, when you attempt to silently abduct or kill an NPC who is reasonably within your ability to reach, roll+Steady. On a 10+, choose 2, on a 7-9 choose 1:

- † It is clean and quiet, no one sees or hears a thing.
- † It goes exactly as planned, your target is killed/abducted exactly as you want.
- † You didn't leave anything behind or you leave behind a calling card.

On a miss, you don't achieve your goal and are seen or heard. Prepare for a world of trouble.



ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE BLACK HOOD

When you and another character have sex:

- † For PCs: you may choose to act as though you have rolled a 10+ on **What's Mine is Mine and What's Yours is Mine** with the character you had sex with as your target, even if you don't have the move.
- † For NPCs: you may choose to act as though you have rolled a 10+ on **What's Mine is Mine and What's Yours is Mine** or **Their Eyes Never Open** with the character you had sex with as your target, even if you don't have those moves.

ENTANGLEMENTS

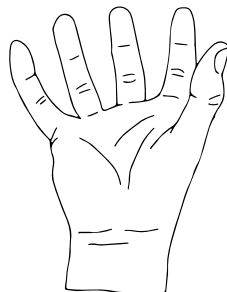
The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

- † Steal something valuable or important from someone powerful.
- † Spread rumors about the actions you take as the Black Hood to grow your legend.
- † Murder an enemy to better your own situation.
- † _____

HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get +1 Fierce (max +2).
- † Get +1 Wily (max +3).
- † Get a new Black Hood Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



The Bloodletter



When you were a child, you were different, weren't you? Wanted to take things apart and see what made them tick. Rats, dogs, rabbits, whatever you could get your little mitts on. A person can learn a lot about how a body works by doing that. A lot about how to fix that which is broken. A lot about what it feels like to hold a life in your hands. And most of all, a lot about all that wonderful, wonderful blood.

CREATING A BLOODLETTER

To create your Bloodletter, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Alain, Saint, Doc, Love, Grall, Rail, Alanna, Pill, Down, Pound, Lamb, Rope, Sasha, Niall

Something noble. Something kind. Something haughty.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+2 Fierce+0 Wily-1 Sly+1 Arcane+1
- † Steady+2 Fierce+0 Wily-2 Sly+2 Arcane+1
- † Steady+2 Fierce-1 Wily+0 Sly+1 Arcane+1
- † Steady+2 Fierce+1 Wily+1 Sly+0 Arcane-1

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third Gender, Transgressing
- † Dirty robes, Black robes, Simple clothes, Fancy clothes, Bloody apron, Plague mask
- † Kind face, Cruel eyes, Fierce face, Haunted eyes, Knowing eyes, Charming smile, Cherubic face, Serious eyes, Terse frown
- † Lanky body, Plump body, Fierce body, Decrepit body, Stout body, Small body

GEAR

You begin with:

- † A healer's bag with a handful of tools and medicines to heal people (see below).
- † Your infirmary (see below).
- † A small blade you may defend yourself with (1 Harm, hand).
- † Oddments and currency worth 1 Barter.
- † Some kind of armor (detail) worth 1 Armor. Perhaps a thick, leather apron?



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

PATRON

You may have a Patron. If you do, describe them. Your Patron may be another PC. The Bloodletter may be a royal physician, for example, or be on staff at a military hospital, but may also be independent. If you have a Patron, the Bloodletter must roll+Steady at the beginning of each session to see how their relationship with their Patron is doing. See the Patron rules to check the outcome of the roll.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Bloodletter has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † We were friends when we were young.
- † I helped you when no one else would.
- † You need me to keep someone you care about alive.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Healer** and one additional Bloodletter move.



HEALER

When you have your healer's bag or are in your infirmary and attempt to perform surgery, roll+Steady. On a 10+, the person heals 2 notches. On a 7-9, the person heals 1 notch, but the wound becomes infected.

IF THEY ARE A PC: the MC holds 1. If they spend it, the target must roll+Steady. On a 10+, the infection is gone and they heal 1 more notch. On a 7-9, the infection is gone but they heal no more. On a miss, the infection spreads and they take s Harm, and feel ill for a short period of time.

IF THEY ARE AN NPC: the MC holds 1. They may spend it, if they choose, to have the NPC fall ill from their infection. They will not die, but may be weak, tired, or out of commission for a short time.

The MC must spend their hold before significant in-game time has passed.

Regardless of the outcome of the roll, you may ask one **Study a Person** question of your target.

DIAGNOSIS

When you physically examine another character, roll+Sly. On a hit, you know exactly what's wrong with them and how to fix it. Additionally, on a 10+, you have the exact right tool, instrument, or salve already in your possession. You take +1 ongoing when acting on your diagnosis.

GOD COMPLEX

You know how bodies work. You can fix them. Perhaps you could even make them better? When you set out to do something terrible and miraculous (improving upon life, reanimating the dead, implanting something on someone) describe how you are doing it, and



the MC will pick 1 or 2 conditions you must fulfill, first.

- † You need to get a special object. An esoteric tome on arcane surgery, a special tool, some rare ingredient for a medicine, etc.
- † You're going to need help beyond what you've got, maybe someone with a specific skill.
- † It's going to cost you X Barter. Brilliance isn't cheap.
- † It's going to take a practice run first, on someone/something that isn't your target.

When you fulfill the condition(s) and are ready to begin, go to your infirmary and roll+Steady. On a hit, you do it. You have changed your target permanently. If your target is a PC, they may remove a Debility, mark an advancement point, or heal three notches (their choice). If your target is an NPC, they will be altered: healthier, more able, invigorated, alive, etc., and will credit you.

Additionally, on a 10+, pick one:

- † Word of your genius spreads. Pick someone to hear about what you've done.
- † You took extensive notes and could do this again, you're fairly sure.
- † It's completely need-to-know. News of what you've done does not reach anyone you wouldn't want it to.

On a miss, you have made a mess of it. It's not going to be pretty. The MC has the final say on what that means.

INTENSE FOCUS

You get +1 Steady (max +3).

BLOOD FOR BLOOD

When you have your healer's bag or are in your infirmary and sacrifice an NPC to save a mangled, ill, or dying person using methods beyond what mortals comprehend, detail how you are doing this



(ritualistic mystical healing, ancient surgeries, etc.) and roll+Arcane. On a 10+, the NPC is dead and your target goes to full health. On a 7-9, the NPC is dead (you think?) after some effort, and your target heals 3 notches. On a miss, your target heals 1 notch of Harm, but the NPC has become some strange thing between life and death. You might not know what. They might not know either....

COLLECTOR OF SOULS

Whenever someone in your care dies, you gain +1 Arcane (max +3). Anyone you kill while using **Blood for Blood** counts.

HEALING TOUCH

Once per session, when you tap into The Unspeakable Power to try and heal someone, roll+Arcane. On a 10+, you heal them one notch. On a 7-9, you heal them one notch, but you also **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power** as if you rolled a miss, as well. On a miss, you *both* **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power** and miss, and they heal no Harm.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE BLOODLETTER

If you and another character have sex, hold 1. Spend your hold to gain +1 on a roll of **Healer**, **Diagnosis**, or **Healing Touch** with them as your target.

HEALER'S BAG

Your healer's bag has the tools of your trade: scalpels, clamps, medicine, herbs, bandages, a saw, a jar of leeches, and a leather strap for your patient to bite on. When you use a Bloodletter move that requires you to have your healer's bag or be in your infirmary (see below), you use up some of your supplies. Every 2 times you do this,



you must spend 1 Barter to restock or you are too low on supplies to use it. Perhaps you might wish to charge for your services?

INFIRMARY

You have a small room you practice medicine out of. It is stocked with what you need to perform surgeries. You have two assistants — Block and Salane, perhaps? When in your infirmary, with no immediate threat distracting you, you gain +1 (max +3) on any Bloodletter move. As detailed above, you must spend 1 Barter every 2 times you use a move that requires you to have your bag or be in your infirmary to restock.

ENTANGLEMENTS

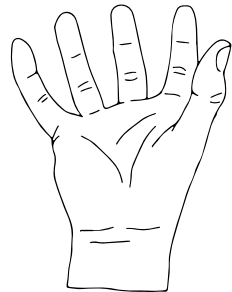
The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

- † Heal someone powerful or important for a price.
- † Refuse to help someone to advance your own interests.
- † Help someone, even to your detriment.
- † _____

HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

- † Get +1 Fierce (max +2).
- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get +1 Arcane (max +3).
- † Get a new Bloodletter Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



The Crown



The land is covered in horrible, horrible things. Wretched forests with vines that will kill you and forest-dwellers that will do much, much worse. Heathens in the mountains who will gnaw on your bones for their supper. Foul creatures that can crush a kingdom beneath their feet as easy as most folks piss in a pot. And that's just what's *outside* the walls of the city. It's not much better here in what

we call civilization. *Someone* has to keep all this mess in order. Not necessarily a *friendly* order, but order nonetheless. Someone has to wear the crown. It might as well be you.

CREATING A CROWN

To create your Crown, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Halbrook, Generous, Anna, Keeper, Rex, Han, Verona, Mother, Felicitous, Thorstein, Veyal, Father, Hilt, Amana

Something powerful. Something regal. Something gorgeous.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady-1 Fierce+2 Wily+1 Sly+1 Arcane+0
- † Steady+1 Fierce+2 Wily+1 Sly+1 Arcane-2
- † Steady-1 Fierce+2 Wily+0 Sly+2 Arcane+0
- † Steady+0 Fierce+2 Wily+1 Sly-1 Arcane+1

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Regal robes, Plain robes, Fancy clothes, Ceremonial garb, Military uniform, Terrifying cape
- † Loving face, Horrible face, Jovial face, Fleshy face, Glorious face
- † Sad eyes, Wise eyes, Calculating eyes, Fierce eyes, Inviting eyes
- † Long beard, Pointy beard, Strong jaw, Pursed mouth, Full lips, Flowing hair, Curly hair, Thin hair
- † Sturdy body, Gluttonous body, Aged body, Powerful body, Sickly body, Gorgeous body

GEAR

You start out with pretty much whatever you want, within reason, and 2 Barter immediately on hand. You're The Crown. Who's going to say no?

FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.



HONOR

You're The Crown. You start with 2 Honor. Everyone knows your name.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Crown has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † You think me a great and wise ruler.
- † You see me as an opportunity for a better life.
- † You fear I know the sorts of things you get up to.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Heavy Is the Head**, and one additional Crown move.

HEAVY IS THE HEAD...

You rule over a group of people in some sort of a Stead. Choose 1 of the following as your symbol of authority and describe it: a crown; a vestment; a scepter; scarification or tattooing; a unique eye color; a birthmark; a haircut or beard; something else. By default, your Stead is medium, with a number of inhabitants appropriate for the scale of your game. You subsist on a mix of hunting and agriculture (surplus: +1 Barter, industrious. Want: hungry). You have a small armory of average quality weapons and armor and an army you can call upon to defend the Stead (by default: +0 Military, tags: medium, untrained).

Choose 3 (you cannot take conflicting choices, i.e. large and small):

- † Your population is large. Surplus: active. Want: crowded.
- † Your population is small. Remove want: hungry.
- † For work, add raiding. Surplus: +1 Barter. Want: reprisals.



- † For work, add protection tribute. Surplus: +1 Barter. Want: obligation.
- † For work, add a bustling market. Surplus: +1 Barter, lively. Want: idle.
- † Your army is large instead of medium. Change medium tag to large for army. +1 Military.
- † Your army is well trained. Change untrained tag to disciplined for army. +1 Military.
- † Your armory is sophisticated and extensive. Add tag well armed to army. +1 Military.

And choose 2 (once again, no conflicting choices — i.e. armory can't be sophisticated from above list and poor from this list):

- † Your population is filthy and unwell. Want: disease.
- † Your population is lazy and drunken. Want: stupor.
- † Your population is decadent and perverse. Want: deviance.
- † Your Stead is remote. Want: isolation.
- † Your Stead owes protection tribute. Who is it to? Surplus: -1 Barter.
- † Your army is a pack of rabid dogs. Add tag savage to army.
- † Your army is small. Change medium tag to small for army. -1 Military.
- † Your armory is poor. Add tag poorly armed to army. -1 Military.

At the beginning of each session, while your rule is secure, roll +Fierce. On a 10+, you gain all surplus bonuses selected above for the session. On a 7–9, you have the surplus bonuses, but the MC will choose 1 want to activate. On a miss, or if your Stead is compromised or your rule contested, your Stead is in want. You have no surplus bonuses and the MC will activate 1 or 2 wants. When you have this move, you may twice choose to spend an advancement to remove or add an option to or from your Stead instead of taking a normal advancement.



When your army stands in defense of your Stead, roll+Military. On a 10+, you get all 3. On a 7-9, pick 2:

- † Your army suffers few casualties (they don't move down a size).
- † You won't need to spend X Barter (MC's call) repairing the damage to the Stead.
- † No one important to you was harmed.

IRON FIST

Get +1 Fierce (max +3).

...OF OMELETS AND EGGS

Once per session, when you miss a roll, before taking any negative consequences, roll+Fierce. On a hit, you sacrifice an NPC that is present and one of your subjects to negate the effects of your miss by having them take the brunt of your failure. The sacrifice of the NPC may be physical, social, mental, etc. Whatever makes sense in the fiction.

On a 10+, name a subject. They will volunteer themselves to suffer the consequences you face. They will take credit for your faults, shield you from violence, direct The Unspeakable Power away from you, etc. The MC describes how the NPC is permanently and horribly destroyed in some way to help you.

On a 7-9, name a subject. You command them to suffer the consequences that would befall you. The MC describes how the NPC is permanently and horribly destroyed in some way to help you, and the MC chooses one side effect below.

On a miss, no one helps you, even if you command them. The original failed roll stands, and the MC chooses one side effect below.



SIDE EFFECTS:

- † A member of your circle leaves because of your actions.
- † You have to make an example of a subject later to quell discontent.
- † Someone in your circle changes their allegiance from you to one of your rivals.
- † You are advised to put on a public display of your power to reassert your authority.

COMMANDER OF THE GUARD

When you personally command your army in combat from the battlefield, roll+Military. On a 10+, pick 3. On a 7–9, pick 2.

- † Your army stands victorious (you win the battle).
- † Your army suffers few casualties (they do not move down a step in size).
- † Your army shows mercy to their defeated enemies (you will gain prisoners from the opposing force).
- † Your army rallies around someone in defense (you or someone you name emerges from the battle completely unscathed).

On a miss, pick 1, and expect trouble.

NOTE: If you do not have this move, your command of your Stead's army is tenuous. They are led on the battlefield by someone else, and will fight for you if it is in their interests, but you cannot “command” them like can with this move.



BOUNTY

When you put out the word that you want something or someone (an NPC), roll+Fierce.

On a 10+, it shows up in front of you, like magic, no questions asked.

On a 7-9, choose one:

- † Something or someone close shows up, no strings attached.
- † The correct person or thing shows up, with some strings attached.

On a miss, someone can tell you exactly where it is, but you're going to have to work to get it, and the fact that you're looking for it might not have gone unnoticed....

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE CROWN

If you and another character have sex they gain 1 Barter in gifts at no cost to you if a PC. If an NPC, you may request something or convince them of something as if you have made a **Persuade With Leverage** roll at a 10+.

ENTANGLEMENTS

The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

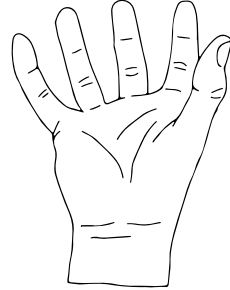
- † Make an example of a jealous rival or insubordinate lackey to humiliate them.
- † Seize greater power, no matter how petty, though it may put someone off.
- † Let someone you care about in on secrets you are privy to that they probably should not know.
- † _____



HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game):

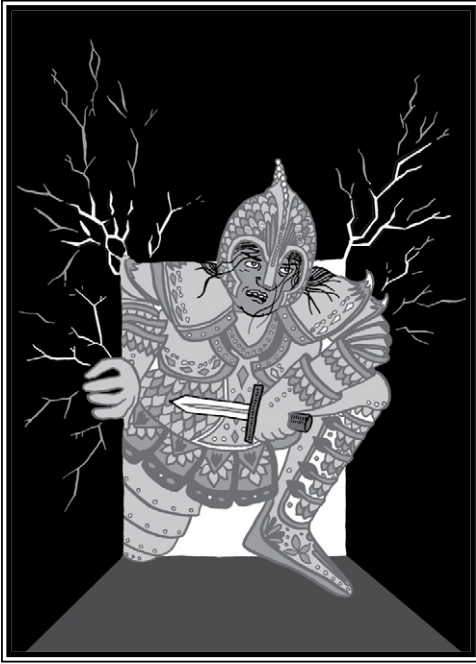
- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get +1 Wily (max +3).
- † Get +1 Steady (max +2).
- † Get a new Crown Move (x2).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



The Gauntlet



We all need to work for our supper. Some bake bread. Some sing songs. Some run cities from their comfy little chairs. You? You put swords through people, as long as the gold keeps glittering. Perhaps you're loyal to your boss, hell maybe she's your dear ol' sister. Or perhaps your loyalty is only to the coin. You've maimed, robbed, and killed, and probably done some good on the way a few times as well.

Maybe those few times have gotten to you and you're starting to grow a conscience. Maybe. Or maybe the money is just too damn good to worry about that sort of thing, especially when everyone from here to the ocean either wants to hire you or hang you, and a few of them for pretty good reasons.

CREATING A GAUNTLET

To create your Gauntlet, start by giving them a name, then complete each section after.



NAME

Bastard, Fist, Church, M, Guess, Quinn, Ossa, Pandy, Sena, Sarn, Bear, Illa, Crow's Eye, Entana, Nobody, Blade

Something blunt. Something strong. Something sensitive.

STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+1 Fierce+2 Wily+0 Sly+0 Arcane+0
- † Steady+1 Fierce+2 Wily-2 Sly+1 Arcane+1
- † Steady+1 Fierce+2 Wily+0 Sly+1 Arcane-1
- † Steady+2 Fierce+2 Wily-1 Sly+0 Arcane+0

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Worn armor, Elaborate armor, Blood-spattered leather, Well fitting robes, Tribal clothing
- † Scarred face, Handsome face, Missing teeth, Poorly groomed, Bushy beard, Wild hair, Strong jaw
- † Lost eyes, Sad eyes, Smiling eyes, Hard eyes, Missing eye
- † Strong body, Gargantuan body, Body like a whip, Curvy body, Aging body

GEAR

You begin with:

- † Your signature weapon (see below).
- † 1 or 2 additional normal weapon(s) of your choice.
- † Armor worth either 1 or 2 Armor, as appropriate.
- † Your Calling Card (see below).
- † Oddments worth 1 Barter.



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

PATRON

You have a Patron, who is your Lord. Describe them. Your Patron may be another PC. The Gauntlet is a weapon — a weapon that belongs to someone else. The Gauntlet must roll+Fierce at the beginning of each session to see how their relationship with their Patron is doing. See the Patron rules to check the outcome of the roll.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Gauntlet has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † I did right by you when I didn't have to.
- † You have seen me follow through on a well-deserved threat.
- † You once betrayed me and suffered my wrath.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus two Gauntlet moves.

FEARSOME

+1 to Fierce (max 3).



SEND AN ARMY, FOR I WILL NOT RELENT

In combat, you count as a small Militia. You take no penalties for fighting a small Militia by yourself, and medium and large Militias count as one size smaller against you.

LIKE A RABID DOG LET OUT OF ITS CAGE

When you set out to undertake an act of violence that someone has tasked you with, roll+Fierce. On a 10+, pick 2. On a 7-9, 1:

- † You may use Fierce instead of Sly to **Study a Person** and **Study a Situation** until your order is completed.
- † You get +2 to act on information from **Study a Person** and **Study a Situation** rolls instead of +1 until the order is completed.
- † You may inflict +1 Harm when inflicting Harm related to your order.

On a miss, you're distracted or conflicted. Detail why and take -1 forward.

TOO LONG IN THE KILLING FIELDS

When you **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power**, roll+Fierce instead of +Arcane.

MY DEBTS SHALL BE PAID...

When you are owed money or a favor of any kind by another character, take +1 ongoing on all rolls against that character until the debt is repaid or forgiven.

THE SMELL OF BLOOD AND STEEL

At the beginning of the session, roll+Fierce. On a hit, hold 1. Spend your hold to arrive at the scene of a battle (a real fight, not private violence between a small group of people). On a 10+, also take +1 forward in your first move upon arriving at the battle. On a miss,



the MC holds 1, and can spend it to have you pinned down somewhere, unable to escape without a fight.

I DON'T MIND THE PAIN

When you are severely wounded in the heat of combat (2 Harm or more, after armor), you gain +1 ongoing for the remainder of the combat.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE GAUNTLET

When you and another character have sex, hold 1. Spend your hold anytime to appear, ready for combat, when the person you had sex with is in danger.

LAST STAND

When you reach 5 notches of harm in a battle, you may declare that you are taking your last stand. While taking your last stand, you inflict +1 Harm and may fight until either you take another five notches of harm (to a total of 10) or the combat is over, whichever comes first. At that point, you expire in spectacular fashion. Give them something to remember. Become a legend.

SIGNATURE WEAPON

You have a signature weapon. It is, by default, 2 Harm. Choose from the following lists to complete it.

KIND (CHOOSE 1): Staff, Axe, Sword, Polearm, Mace, Knife, Exotic.

LOOK (CHOOSE 1): Ancient, Unblemished, Foreign, Mystical, Blood-stained, Ornate, Ceremonial, Tribal.



OPTIONS (CHOOSE 2):

- † Antique (+valuable).
- † Dangerous (+1 Harm, detail why).
- † Heavy (+2 Harm, add messy, counts as two options).
- † Hidden (+surprise).
- † One of many (+infinite).
- † Unbreakable (+ap).

Whether your weapon has the tag “hand” or “close” is dependent on the type. See the weapons section for more details (169).

Finally, give your weapon a name. She is your closest friend, after all.

CALLING CARD

Choose 1 calling card that others recognize you by. A calling card is a distinctive feature of your outfit or weapon. It could be a fancy hat, dusty boots, a horned helmet, a jewel encrusted scabbard, a fearsome mask, a dashing cape, anything that makes you stand out. When people see you coming, they know you because of your calling card.

ENTANGLEMENTS

The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

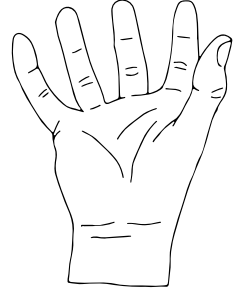
- † Publicly challenge someone tough to combat over a matter of honor.
- † Sell your steel to someone important besides your Patron.
- † Intimidate common folk on behalf of someone powerful.
- † _____



HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)

**ADVANCEMENT**

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

- † Get +1 Sly (max +2).
- † Get +1 Steady (max +3).
- † Get +1 Wily (max +2).
- † Get a new Gauntlet Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



The Hex



Out in the bog, or maybe beneath a castle. Perhaps someone's best friend, an advisor to the crown, or even a foreign dignitary. Whoever she is, The Hex straddles the chaos and power of The Unspeakable, turning it to her own ends and devices. Just don't fail to uphold a deal with her, or you might find that there are fates worse than death.

CREATING A HEX

To create your Hex, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Gerdy, Velma, Haze, Pattern, Aunty, Bog, Elder, Wevery, Chander, Gox, Tal, Rev, Longtooth

Something wizened. Something visceral. Something alluring.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+1 Fierce-1 Wily+0 Sly+1 Arcane+2
- † Steady+1 Fierce+0 Wily-1 Sly+1 Arcane+2
- † Steady-1 Fierce+1 Wily-1 Sly+2 Arcane+2
- † Steady+2 Fierce+0 Wily-2 Sly+1 Arcane+2

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Black robes, Tattered robes, Arcane Clothes, Simple garb, Revealing clothes, Dirty clothes
- † Hideous face, Loving face, Plain face, Flawless face, Angular face
- † Promising eyes, Milky eyes, Off-putting eyes, Tired eyes, Piercing eyes
- † Stringy hair, Wild hair, Crooked smile, Tantalizing smile, Wispy beard
- † Twisted body, Stunning body, Compact body, Simple body, Sickly body, Enormous body

GEAR

You start with:

- † The clothes on your back.
- † A staff or small dagger, if you want.
- † A few potions.
- † A small collection of other people's things.
- † A few books on The Unspeakable Power and other small, arcane sorts of things.
- † A pack full of oddments worth 1 Barter.



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

HEX'S MARK

Pick a Hex's mark (a wart, mole, strangely shaped scar, streak in your hair, etc.). Detail. Someone in the know will be able to identify the sorts of things you get up to by your mark.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Hex has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † You think me useful and powerful.
- † I have something you own.
- † You want something from me.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Harness The Unspeakable Power**, and one additional Hex move.

HARNESS THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER

You are a magic user and have an ability to tap into The Unspeakable Power in a way that normal people cannot. When you try to harness The Unspeakable Power to achieve an aim, roll+Arcane. On a hit, you



may change the world in some minor but tangible way. On a 7-9, the MC will also hold 1 and may spend it on one of the following.

- † The Power knows what you're doing and why you're doing it.
- † The Power asks for something minor in return.
- † The Power requests some small show of loyalty.

Use your talents wisely.

MOLOCH

When you curse another character, hold something of theirs and roll+Arcane. On a 10+, the target takes the tag “cursed” and puts 2 notches next to it. On a 7-9, the target takes the tag “cursed” and puts 1 notch next to it. For each scene the cursed character is in, they add 1 notch next to the cursed tag.

FOR PCS: When they reach three notches, hold 1. Spend your hold to interfere with a roll your target makes as if you rolled a 10+.

FOR NPCs: When they reach three notches, hold 1. Spend your hold to have a minor malady befall the character, stymying or humiliating them.

You do not have to be present to spend your hold. When you have spent your hold, your target erases the notches and starts over.

There are four ways to remove the tag “cursed.”

- † You die.
- † You choose to remove it.
- † You lose possession of the target's object.
- † When the curse was cast, you set a requirement that the cursed character must meet. When the requirement is met, the curse is removed.

FAIREST OF THEM ALL

When you hold a piece of someone's physical person (hair, skin, a tooth, a nail, a finger, etc.) and try to magically imitate their appear-



ance, roll+Arcane. On a 10+, you look, talk, and even smell like the other character for a brief period of time. On a 7-9, you still change, but the MC chooses (without telling you) one of the following:

- † The voice isn't right.
- † The smell isn't right.
- † The walk isn't right.
- † Your perspective is off (you move as if you're still in your normal body instead of the one you're imitating).

If you lose possession of the piece of the target, the illusion is shattered instantly.

BLACK ICHOR

When wounded by a weapon with the tag messy or harmed in a typically messy way, PCs near you must **Face Duress** to avoid being sprayed by the black sludge that flows in your veins. NPCs probably aren't so lucky. Your devil blood is 2 Harm, ap, corrosive.

WISE IN THE WAYS

Gain +1 to arcane (max +3).

DEVIL'S ANTE

When you strike a bargain with another character, they may give you a piece of them — a year of their life, their memories of their mother, their beautiful voice, etc. Something meaningful to them. If they are a PC, they mark an advancement point, but they must either take a Debility or cross out a future advancement. If they are an NPC, they are permanently changed somehow. Either way, you trap what they give you in a small object (a gem, a bottle, whatever). When someone destroys the object, they automatically succeed at any one move they are attempting as if they rolled a 10+. If either you or the other party fail or refuse to complete the bargain, the



wronged character gets +1 ongoing to act against the character who backed out until the situation is rectified.

BEND THE BONE

Once per session, when you use your magic to transform a target NPC in your presence into an animal or creature, roll+Arcane. On a hit, your target is physically (not mentally) transformed into the animal or creature. The effects are generally short, lasting a scene or so. On a 7-9, the MC chooses 1 of the following:

- † The transformation is partial. Use your imagination.
- † The transformation lasts shorter than usual. Just a minute or two.
- † The intended form doesn't come out quite right. They may be a different creature than you intended, for example.

On a miss, the magic backfires. You take s Harm or are transformed into the creature you intended your target to turn into for a brief time (MC's choice). If you die or choose to remove the spell, the move is undone completely and immediately.

BREAK THE BACK

When you take Harm directly from another character, roll+Arcane. On a 10+, hold 1. Spend your hold to inflict the same amount of Harm done to you back to the character who inflicted it, whenever you want, after the character has left your presence. You do not have to be near them. On a 7-9, hold 1. Spend it the same as above except inflict 1 less Harm than was done to you (if this reduces Harm to zero, the target will take s Harm). On a miss, the target character gets 1 hold over you. The character may spend the hold at any point to prevent you from acting against them as if you are blocked by an unseen force. You may only roll this move once per scene with a character.



DARK HARVEST

When you literally devour the heart of your enemy, hold 1. You may spend that hold to automatically receive a full hit on any basic move that was something your enemy was good at. For example, if you devour the heart of a charming person, you can succeed at a **Persuade With Leverage** move, the heart of a warrior for an **Engage in Combat** move, etc.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE HEX

When you and another character have sex, hold 1. Spend your hold to use **Fairest of Them All** to imitate that character as if you rolled a 10+, even if you don't have that move.

FAMILIAR

You have a familiar. What kind of animal is it? Bird, cat, dog, snake, rodent, bat, something else? Your familiar is completely loyal to you, and you see what it sees and hear what it hears. If it dies, you take 2 Harm (ap). You may then perform a ritual to select a new familiar.

ENTANGLEMENTS

The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

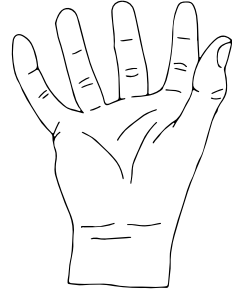
- † Double cross someone powerful or important who trusts you.
- † Take out someone who has become inconvenient to you using your magic.
- † Grow your infamy through a public display of your frightening power.
- † _____



HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)

**ADVANCEMENT**

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get +1 Steady (max +3).
- † Get +1 Wily (max +2)
- † Get a new Hex Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Get a Patron (roll+Arcane at beginning of session).
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.
- † Get a second familiar.



The Lyre



Never able to put down roots, were you? You just started walking the land, singing your songs, telling your stories, and cracking your jokes. Some might say you're lucky. After all, you got no responsibilities, a life of travel and adventure, and the privilege to speak truth to power. But will anyone stand up for you when that power gets tired of hearing your truth? Just how beautiful will that voice of yours be when it's being choked out of your pretty neck, I wonder...?

CREATING A LYRE

To create your Lyre, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Songbird, Horatio, Meadow, Pine, Ce'ana, Tongue, Blue Eyes, Jawbone, Wheel, Mug, Zolar, Starfall

Something pretty. Something sensual. Something exotic.



STATS

Choose one set and write it below:

- † Steady+1 Fierce-1 Wily+2 Sly+0 Arcane+1
- † Steady-1 Fierce+0 Wily+2 Sly+2 Arcane+0
- † Steady+1 Fierce-2 Wily+2 Sly+1 Arcane+1
- † Steady+0 Fierce+1 Wily+2 Sly+0 Arcane+0

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third Gender, Transgressing
- † Red cape, Feathered cap, Fancy clothes, Seductive outfit, Leather boots, Gold medallion
- † Brilliant eyes, Disarming eyes, Shifty eyes, Charming Smile, Sly smile
- † Glorious face, Soft face, Fleshy face, Sad face, Rosy cheeks, Dashing mustache, Flowing hair, Braided hair
- † Thin body, Tall body, Athletic body, Corpulent body, Compact body, Beautiful body

GEAR

You begin with:

- † The tools of your trade (an instrument, cards, make-up, puppets, etc.).
- † Oddments worth 1 Barter.
- † The clothes on your back.
- † A trusty weapon that does no more than 2 Harm.

FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.



HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

PATRON

You very well might have a Patron. If you do, describe them. Your Patron may be a PC. For a Lyre, the Patron most likely finances their art while requiring them to provide services, objects of beauty, or performances for them. The Lyre must roll+Wily at the beginning of each session to see how their relationship with their Patron is doing. See the Patron rules to check the outcome of the roll.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Lyre has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † I tend to come and go a lot. You miss me when I'm gone.
- † You and I? We just get each other.
- † You would do anything to be with me.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus two additional Lyre moves:

VOX POPULI

When you rile a crowd (a group of NPCs that are not comprised entirely of a PC's Militia or Followers), roll+Wily. On a 10+ you get 3 from below. On a 7-9, you get 2. On a miss, the crowd turns on you.



- † You rally the crowd to your point of view. What do they now believe?
- † The crowd will act to defend you as a small Militia.
- † You stir a righteous anger in the crowd. Pick a target for their rage.
- † You cannot be identified as the source of the commotion.

SOOTHSAYER

When you attempt to see an NPC's future, roll+Arcane. On a 10+ you have actually gazed into The Unspeakable Power and seen a brief, ambiguous glimpse of what's to come. The MC will detail a hazy, future event you see that will happen to this character unless there is intervention. You are under no obligation to be truthful about what you have seen, and whatever you say to your target will sound convincing. On a 7-9, you don't *actually* see their future, but you may spin a golden web of lies to convince them that you do. On a miss, you are unconvincing. You hesitate or get details wrong. Your target may turn on you, demand their money back, etc.

I'M THE BEST AT WHAT I DO

Get +1 Wily (max 3).

A SONG IN YOUR HEART

When you perform your talents before an audience, roll+Wily. On a 10+, hold 2. On a 7-9, hold 1. Spend your hold to name a member of the audience and declare...

- † This person must meet me.
- † This person has a job for me.
- † This person loves me.
- † This person will offer useful information to me.
- † This person admires my Patron.
- † This person will try to buy my services.



On a miss, you perform adequately but something amiss in the audience distracts you. The MC will detail what it is.

ROGUISH

When doing something in which your talents could somehow serve as a benefit (pickpocketing, athletics, cheating, lying, disguise, etc.), roll+Wily instead of +Steady to **Face Duress**.

CHARMED, I'M SURE

When you spend time alone with someone and work your charm on them, roll+Wily. On a 10+, they hold 3. On a 7–9, they hold 2. They spend their hold, 1 for 1, when they:

- † Give you something you want.
- † Act as your eyes and ears.
- † Fight to protect you.
- † Do something you would want them to do.

While your target has this hold, they cannot act against you except to defend against Harm. On a miss, they hold 1, but you find yourself fixated on your target, as well. You hold 1 and can spend it on one of the above actions. All hold from a role of this move must be exhausted before the move can be performed again on the same target.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE LYRE

If you and another character have sex, choose one:

- † It meant little to you, and a lot to them. They take +1 forward (PCs only).
- † You are inspired. Take +1 forward on your next Lyre move.
- † Things get complicated. Make a **Charmed, I'm Sure** roll, even if you don't have it.



ENTANGLEMENTS

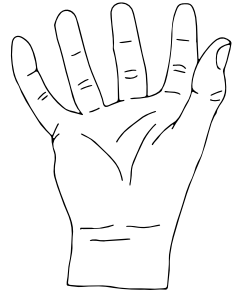
The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

- † Privately perform your talents for someone powerful or important.
- † Charm someone powerful to gain useful information.
- † Publicly mock the high and mighty where all can hear you.
- † _____

HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

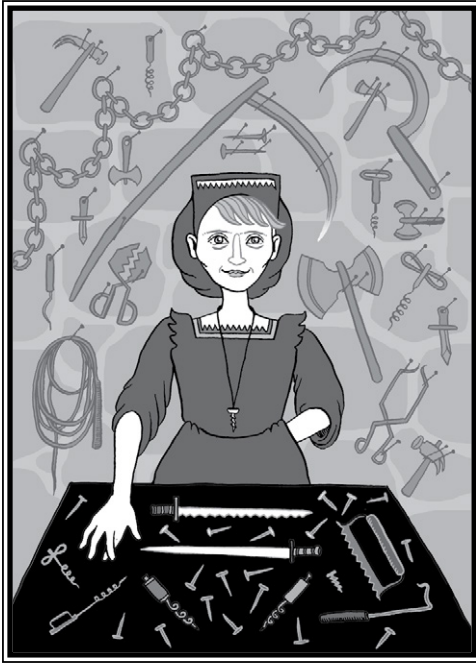
- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get +1 Arcane (max +2).
- † Get +1 Steady (max+2).
- † Get a new Lyre Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Get a second Patron.
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



The Screw



Information is valuable in a dangerous world and you know how to get it, even if folks aren't always terribly willing to part with it. People often wonder aloud how you do it. Perhaps you talk to them in an extra special way, or maybe you tickle their toes until they just can't take it anymore? Who are we kidding, we all know what you do: you keep turning the screws until they would stab their own mothers to get you to stop. It's all in a day's work, provided you get what you need.

CREATING A SCREW

To create your Screw, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Throttle, Pick, Twill, Fallow, Sebastian, Helena, Want, Pretty, Luck, Eyeball, White, Me, Night, Gregor

Something small. Something dark. Something pointed.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+1 Fierce+0 Wily+1 Sly+2 Arcane-1
- † Steady+1 Fierce+0 Wily-1 Sly+2 Arcane+1
- † Steady+0 Fierce+0 Wily+0 Sly+2 Arcane+1
- † Steady+1 Fierce-1 Wily+1 Sly+2 Arcane+0

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Black robes, Fancy clothes, Nondescript clothes, Bloody apron, Comfortable clothes
- † Peaceful face, Scarred Face, Sinister face, Innocent face, Pointy face
- † Knowing eyes, Empty eyes, Bright eyes, Cruel smile, Toothless smile, Thin hair, Meticulous hair, Fierce frown
- † Gangly body, Solid body, Twisted body, Plump body, Small body, Useless body

GEAR

You begin with:

- † Oddments worth 1 Barter.
- † The clothes on your back.
- † Your bag of tricks (see “Causing Pain” below), containing all manner of tools for making folks uncomfortable.
- † A small defensive weapon that fits in your bag of tricks (maybe a knife, spiked knuckles, or something similar).



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

PATRON

You may have a Patron. If you do, describe them. Your Patron may be another PC. For a Screw, the Patron pays them to get useful information for them. The Screw must roll+Sly at the beginning of each session to see how their relationship with their Patron is doing. See the Patron rules to check the outcome of the roll. Without a Patron, The Screw is an independent agent, selling information to the highest bidder.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Screw has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † I have caused you pain, and you never want to feel that again.
- † I know a secret about you that you'd never want to get out.
- † You think I could never hurt a fly.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Pretty Please** and one additional Screw move.



PRETTY PLEASE?

When you have another character at your mercy and cause pain to get them to confess something, roll+Sly. On a 10+ ask them 3, on a 7-9, ask them 2.

- † How are they/someone they're close to most vulnerable?
- † Who have they betrayed or who would they betray?
- † What are they/someone they're close to most afraid of?
- † Who do they trust/love the most or the least?
- † What useful secret do they have about another person?
- † What have they/someone they're close to done that could get them in terrible trouble if someone found out?

If The Screw acts on this information, or passes it on to another player character to act on, the character acting on the information gains +1 forward (you may apply this to **And What if I Say the Sky is Red?**). On a miss, The Screw still gets to ask 1 question, but if they ask it, the other character may ask the same question of The Screw. Pain is such a personal thing, after all.

A WONDERFUL MACHINE, THE BODY

You may roll+Sly instead of +Fierce when you **Threaten With Force** or **Engage in Combat**. You know how all the pieces fit together.

AND WHAT IF I SAY THE SKY IS RED?

When you cause an NPC pain to persuade them to do or say what you want, roll+Sly. On a 10+ choose 2. On a 7-9 choose 1:

- † They will agree to say out loud (or in writing) exactly what The Screw wants them to say.
- † They will agree to perform one action of The Screw's request.
- † They don't have any permanent, visible scars or marks after you're done with them.
- † They won't tell anyone what you did to them.



BRINGER OF DEATH

When you lay your hands on someone, skin-to-skin, to deal them supernatural Harm, roll+Arcane. On a hit, you tap into The Unspeakable Power and channel it into your target. On a 10+, you cause them 2 Harm (ap) and take +1 forward against them (non-cumulative). On a 7-9, you cause 1 Harm (ap). On a miss, you have lost control of The Unspeakable Power and it turns on you. The person you are touching takes 1 Harm (ap) but you also take 1 Harm (ap) and are physically knocked away from your target.

I KNOW YOU BETTER THAN YOU KNOW YOURSELF

Gain +1 forward to your next **Persuade With Leverage** or **Study a Person** roll on a character after you have inflicted any Harm on them (non-cumulative).

IS THAT YOUR BEST?

Once per session, when The Screw takes Harm directly from another character, roll+Steady. On a 10+, pick 2. On a 7-9, pick 1.

- † You feel so, so alive. Take +1 forward.
- † You see the one who hurt you for who they are. Ask 1 **Pretty Please** question of them.
- † It all becomes clear. **Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power** as if you rolled a 10+.

On a miss, you get an unpleasant taste of what it's actually like. Take -1 ongoing until you scare, intimidate, hurt, or spy on someone to right the scales.

A POUND OF FLESH

When you inflict Harm on a character, hold 1 (non-cumulative). If the character is a PC, spend your hold at any later time, whether The Screw is present or not, to automatically interfere with a roll



they are making as if you rolled a 10+. If the character is an NPC, spend your hold to deal immensely painful s Harm to them. How nice of you to leave them a little surprise....

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE SCREW

When you and another character have sex, you may ask one of the **Pretty Please** questions of them.

CAUSING PAIN

As a Screw, your job is to cause pain. When you use a Screw move that requires you to cause pain to a character, you inflict 1-2 Harm (ap) on them (your choice) per sitting. Spend 1 Barter every *two* times you ply your trade. Bone will do terrible things to metal, you see. You also start the game with your choice of 2 of the 3 following things helping you to do your job:

- † Two assistants (maybe named Snake and Nalla) who are loyal to you and will follow your orders. When you devise a plan to grab an NPC who it would be reasonable for them to be able to nab given the circumstances (MC's call), and give them the order to do so, roll+Sly. On a 10+ they get them, no problem. On a 7-9, either they get them but not quietly or they don't get them but no one knows, MC's choice. On a miss, neither. Without this option, getting people to do your thing to may be difficult.
- † A room with no view. Nice, dark, somewhere that only people who need to know about know about. Without this option, getting characters at your mercy for Screw moves should prove to be a challenge.
- † An endless supply of tools and devices for causing pain and discomfort. If you select this, you never have to spend Barter to restock your bag of tricks. Without this option, your profession may start to get costly.



ENTANGLEMENTS

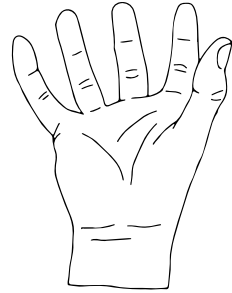
The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

- † Sell information for a price to someone dangerous or nefarious.
- † Harm someone on behalf of an important person.
- † Indulge in a secret pleasure with another.
- † _____

HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

- † Get +1 Sly (max +3).
- † Get +1 Wily (max +2).
- † Get +1 Steady (max +3).
- † Get a new Screw Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Get a second Patron.
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.
- † Get the third Causing Pain option.



The Spur



You've got a mess of greedy, hungry bastards on horses at your back, and a small, defenseless farmstead on the horizon. Your crew are waiting for you to tell them what to do. "Right" and "wrong" are the emptiest of words when you're the one in charge of all that muscle and steel. Go ahead. Give the order...

CREATING A SPUR

To create your Spur, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Dirge, Drum, Flail, Star, House, T, Yessta, Falcon, Thunder, Remy, Boss, Mace, Rook, She

Something blunt. Something stern. Something predatory.



STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+1 Fierce+2 Wily-1 Sly+1 Arcane+0
- † Steady+1 Fierce+2 Wily+1 Sly+0 Arcane-1
- † Steady+0 Fierce+2 Wily+1 Sly+1 Arcane-1
- † Steady+2 Fierce+2 Wily+0 Sly-1 Arcane+0

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third Gender, Transgressing
- † Leather hides, Flashy cloak, Mismatched armor, Worn armor, Military garb
- † Old face, Broken face, Bony face, Open face, Careless face, Stern face
- † Blank eyes, Angry eyes, Kind eyes, Tired eyes, Narrow eyes, Missing eye
- † Thick body, Wiry body, Striking body, Utilitarian body, Old body, Brutal body

GEAR

You begin with:

- † Your horse (see below).
- † Armor worth 1 Armor or 2 Armor (your choice, as appropriate).
- † Two weapons (one for close combat, one ranged).
- † Some clothes and gear for riding and camping.
- † Oddments worth 1 Barter that you can fit into a pack.



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

Your starting Honor is 1.

Add 1 if you are some combination of rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected.

PATRON

You may have a Patron, who is your Lord. If you do, describe them. Your Patron may be another PC. The Spur may be the captain of someone's guard, or the leader of a Militia that works for someone. The Spur must roll+Fierce at the beginning of each session to see how their relationship with their Patron is doing. See the Patron rules to check the outcome of the roll. Without a Patron, The Spur and their Militia are independent — mercenaries, bandits, etc.

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first session by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Spur has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † You have seen me show mercy when it was deserved.
- † You have dreamt of riding with my Militia and I.
- † You have seen me bully someone weaker than me.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Leader of the Pack** and one additional Spur move.



LEADER OF THE PACK

You're in charge of a Militia of about 20 hard, violent, and armed bastards. By default they are 2 Harm, 1 Armor, small, want: unruly.

Choose 2 from this list:

- † Your Militia is 40 instead of 20. Replace small with medium.
- † Your Militia is well-armed. +1 Harm.
- † Your Militia is well armored. +1 Armor.
- † Your Militia is trained and disciplined. Drop unruly.
- † Your Militia is well-paid or otherwise in your debt. Surplus: +loyal.
- † Your Militia has well-bred horses and knows how to tend to them. Surplus: +mobile.
- † Your Militia is self-sufficient, able to provide for itself by raiding, scavenging, guard duty, etc. Surplus: +1 Barter.

And choose 1 from this list (may not take options that conflict with choices above):

- † Your Militia's horses are in bad shape and not fit to ride very far. Want: immobile.
- † Your Militia is loose-knit, with members coming and going. Want: desertion.
- † Your Militia is in significant debt to someone else. Want: obligation.
- † Your Militia is filthy and unwell. Want: disease.
- † You Militia are bullies who throw their weight around. Want: savage.

At the beginning of each session, roll+Fierce. On a 10+, you gain all surplus bonuses during the session. On a 7–9, you have the surplus bonuses, but the MC will activate 1 want. On a miss, or if your leadership is contested, your Militia is in want. You have no surplus bonuses and the MC will active 1 or 2 wants. When you have this



move, you may twice choose to spend an advancement to remove or add an option to or from your Militia instead of taking a normal advancement.

ALSO: when you order your Militia to do something they are not immediately inclined to do, roll+Fierce. On a 10+, you get all 3 below. On a 7–9, choose 2 below and you definitely do *not* get the other:

- † They do what you want.
- † They don't fight back over it.
- † You don't have to make an example of one of them later.

On a miss, your leadership of the Militia will be contested by one or several of them.

FORGED OF STEEL

Get +1 Fierce (max +3).

DAREDEVIL

If you charge straight into danger without thinking, hesitating, or hedging your bets, you get +1 Armor. If you are leading your Militia, they get +1 Armor as well.

MORE MOUNTAIN THAN MORTAL

Take -2 on all **When You Take Harm** rolls. You're not one to be knocked over.

TACTICIAN

You may roll+Fierce instead of +Sly to **Study a Situation**.



DID I STUTTER?

When you give an NPC that is smaller, weaker, or lower in status than you a direct order, roll+Fierce. On a hit, they'll do what they're told, quickly, no questions asked. On a 10+ pick 1 below, as well:

- † You get +1 forward against them.
- † They will do an extra favor or task for you in the future without you asking.

On a miss, they may willing to do what you want, but the MC picks 1 or 2 below:

- † They'll make a horrible fuss about it, complaining to everyone who will listen.
- † They'll only do it if you push them, hard.
- † They'll only do it if you make an example of someone else, first.

YOU'RE EITHER WITH US OR YOU'RE AGAINST US

When you revel or commune with your Militia in preparation for combat, roll+Fierce. On a 10+ your Militia fights a step up in size (i.e. a small Militia fights as medium, etc.). On a 7-9, your Militia fights a step up in size, but the MC may also activate one of your Militia's wants after the fight. On a failure, your Militia is divided. Take -1 forward for the combat and the MC may immediately activate one of your Militia's wants.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE SPUR

When you and another character have sex, hold 1. Spend it to compel them to provide support, cover, or resources for your Militia. A PC can resist with a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll. An NPC will just do it.



HORSE

You have a horse. First, select a name for your horse from the list below, then pick their looks, strength tag, and weakness tag.

NAMES: Swift, Last, Dreadnought, Wind, Vandal, Pride, Friend, Beauty, Horse, You, Blood, Death

LOOKS (CHOOSE 1): Sleek, Great Breed, Massive, Fat, Muscular, Ghostly.

STRENGTH (CHOOSE 1):

- † Fast (you are nigh impossible to catch you on your horse)
- † Rugged (your horse can traverse nearly any terrain)
- † Aggressive (your horse never hesitates or fears combat)
- † Tough (your horse can withstand just about anything)

WEAKNESS (CHOOSE 1):

- † Slow (your horse cannot catch or outrun anything fast)
- † Bucking (your horse is easily startled and as been known to throw you)
- † Unreliable (your horse may take some coaxing to do things)
- † Weak (your horse is not in top shape and can be hurt easily)

ENTANGLEMENTS

The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

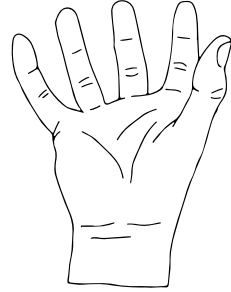
- † Sell your Militia's power for a price.
- † Threaten someone powerful with a fight without considering the consequences.
- † Offer mercy to someone, though it makes you look weak.
- † _____



HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

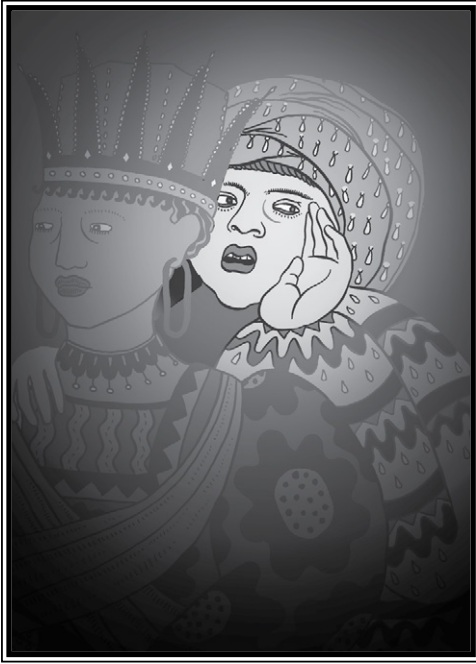
- † Get +1 Sly (max +2).
- † Get +1 Wily (max +2).
- † Get +1 Steady (max +3).
- † Get a new Spur Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



The Voice



You always manage to find yourself on the edge of important things: sitting there next to the throne, watching the battle unfold comfortably from a tent, or maybe whispering to fearful servants in some obscure hallway somewhere. Do you like the influence that comes with having the attention of folks with power and authority, or do you just enjoy watching it all burn from the comfort of a distant

tower? Maybe someday you want to be right in the center of it all yourself, sitting on that throne or on the front lines of that war. But more than likely you just like to pit the little people against each other and watch them tear the world apart. Either way, all you ever need is an ear or two, ready to listen...

CREATING A VOICE

To create your Voice, start by giving them a name, then complete each section that follows.

NAME

Pax, Issma, Snake, Friend, Uncle, Aunt, Savina, Candle, Bird,



Fellow, Holler, Frost, Doll, Wort

Something meek. Something lowly. Something inviting.

STATS

Choose one set:

- † Steady+1 Fierce+0 Wily+2 Sly+1 Arcane-1
- † Steady+0 Fierce+0 Wily+2 Sly+0 Arcane+1
- † Steady+0 Fierce-1 Wily+2 Sly+1 Arcane+1
- † Steady+1 Fierce-2 Wily+2 Sly+2 Arcane+0

LOOK

Choose a look by picking a handful of traits with the following as guidance:

- † Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed, Genderless, Third gender, Transgressing
- † Dirty robes, Shimmering clothes, Unassuming clothes, Official garb
- † Twisted face, Strange face, Seductive eyes, Pudgy face, Thin face, Sad face
- † Crooked teeth, Greedy smile, Curly hair, Stringy hair, Endless hair, Pug nose, Pallid skin, Pointed beard
- † Thin body, Bent body, Voluptuous body, Horrible body, Tiny body, Lovely body

GEAR

You start with:

- † Some clothes.
- † Oddments worth 1 Barter.
- † A letter from an important person (detail).
- † A dagger or other small weapon.

And that's it. One never knows when one might have to leave quickly.



FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the questions from the Faction section and write the answers on your character sheet.

HONOR

You know everyone who's anyone. You start with 2 Honor.

DESIRE

Choose one of the following as your obsessive desire, something that you want with all your heart, mind, and soul:

- † That special, unlucky someone, aren't they just so perfect and awful and beautiful and horrible and perfect and...?
- † Revenge. Sweet, dirty, lovely, bloody, sexy, delightful revenge.
- † The crown. Not just any crown. *The* crown.
- † To truly please or impress someone specific, whose praise is sweeter than the wine of the gods.
- † Untold riches. Enough to bathe in. Enough to drown someone in.

If you ever achieve your desire, you'll be overjoyed for the five most fabulous minutes of your life. Then pick a new desire. Now you want *THAT* with all your heart, mind, and soul. You're just like that.

PATRON

You *absolutely* have a Patron. A Voice is nothing without someone to hear their magnificent, beautiful words. Describe them. Your Patron may be another PC. For a Voice, the Patron is the powerful figure who takes your brilliant advice in exchange for keeping you fed, clothed, and sheltered, probably comfortably. The Voice must roll + Wily at the beginning of each session to see how their relationship with their Patron is doing. See the Patron rules to check the outcome of the roll.



RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone introduces their character at the beginning of the first section by name, class, and look. Then, on your turn, you will pick two other players that The Voice has relationships with. To do this, pick two options from the list below to tell two other characters.

- † You have followed my advice to your benefit.
- † You and I have a little partnership going.
- † I've heard rumors about you that you wouldn't want out.

MOVES

You get all the basic, peripheral, and Honor moves, plus **Whisper Darkness** and one additional Voice move.

WHISPER DARKNESS

When you whisper counsel into someone's ear (literally or figuratively), roll+Wily.

FOR NPCs: On a 10+, choose 2 of the following.

- † You convince them someone is for/against them.
- † You help them see a solution to a problem.
- † You shift their attention to something else you present to them.
- † You make them forget something important.
- † You convince them to give up on their current goal.

On a 7-9, choose 1 above, but the MC also chooses 1 consequence from below. On a miss, the MC just chooses 1 consequence.

- † They question your motives, now or later.
- † They decide to seek a second opinion from someone else.
- † They give you a task to complete.
- † They regain focus, hope, or concern on something you'd rather they not.
- † They misinterpret your words.



FOR PCS: On a 10+, hold 2. On a 7-9, hold 1. Spend 1 hold to give your target an advancement point when they do or say something you approve of, whether you're present or not. On a miss, they hold 1 on you with the same conditions. Regardless, all hold must be spent before this move can be used again.

If you miss, you cannot use this move on your target again unless you do something to get back into their good graces.

WORDS LIKE SILK

Get +1 Wily (max +3).

PULSE OF THE CROWD

When you examine the state of a group or crowd, roll+Sly. On a 10+, ask 3 questions. On a 7-9, ask 2 questions.

- † What type of person is dominant or high status in this group?
- † What is their mood?
- † Who are their leaders/outcasts?
- † What could I give to them or take from them that would appease/enrage them?
- † What words would sway them?
- † Where do their loyalties lie?

You gain +1 forward on any roll to use this information to your own ends.

LIKE PIECES ON A CHESSBOARD

When you spread rumors through your networks, roll+Wily. On a 10+, pick 2. On a 7-9, pick 1.

- † Name someone. They hear exactly what you want them to.
- † Name someone. They don't hear a thing.
- † It is impossible to trace the start of the rumor back to you.



On a miss, the rumor still spreads but you lose control over what, exactly, is being said, and anyone who tries would be able to trace it back to you.

I'VE SUDDENLY JUST REMEMBERED THAT I HAVE SOMEWHERE TO BE....

When you try to leave in a hurry, roll+Steady. On a hit, you're gone and no one sees you go. On a 10+, choose 3 from the following list, as well. On a 7-9, choose 1:

- † No one notices you're not there for a while after you've gone.
- † No one knows where you've gone.
- † In your haste to get away you don't bump into someone you might not want to.
- † You don't miss anything important.

On a miss, it's very obvious you're trying to slip away. You have a good explanation, right?

AN EAR AT EACH DOOR AND AN EYE AT EACH HALLWAY

You can get information about people. Maybe you warm someone's bed, slip someone coin, or have spies all around. When you want to know how someone is doing, roll+Wily. They do not have to be present. On a 10+, ask 3. On a 7-9, ask 1:

- † What is currently holding their interest?
- † Who are they spending time with, lately?
- † Who do they love or trust?
- † When next should I expect to see them?
- † What sorts of goals do they have?
- † How could I make them happy/mad/sad?

Take +1 forward when you use this information to undermine your target in some way. On a miss, your interest in the affairs of others might not go unnoticed....



ADDITIONAL DETAILS

SEX WITH THE VOICE

When you and another character have sex, hold 1. You may spend your hold to act as though you have rolled a 10+ on **Whisper Darkness** or **An Ear at Each Door and an Eye at Each Hallway** with the character you had sex with as the target. You do not need to have the move you pick.

ENTANGLEMENTS

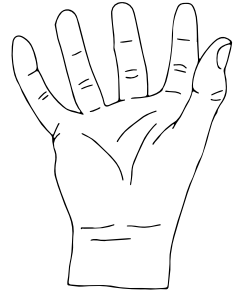
The MC highlights one of the options below at the start of the session. Once per session, when you perform an action that satisfies your highlighted option, mark an advancement point.

- † Pass along someone else's secrets to help yourself.
- † Double cross someone who trusts you.
- † Lie, nakedly, to someone powerful, even if being found out would put you in peril.
- † _____

HARM

You may take up to 5 Harm. When you take Harm, put a slash through a finger. If you take Harm and there are no more fingers to slash, you're dead. Take a Debility below to ignore all Harm from one incident. You may only take each Debility once.

- † Shaken (-1 Steady)
- † Weakened (-1 Fierce)
- † Tentative (-1 Wily)
- † Clouded (-1 Sly)



ADVANCEMENT

Make a mark every time you earn an advancement point. When you reach five, take an advancement below, erase them, then start again.

Tier One (Available from the start of the game)

- † Get +1 Sly (max+3).
- † Get +1 Steady (max +3).
- † Get +1 Arcane (max +2).
- † Get a new Voice Move (x3).
- † Get a move from another class (x2).
- † Get a new or second Patron.
- † Create, with the MC's approval, a fourth Entanglement for yourself.

Tier Two (Available starting at the sixth advancement)

- † Advance three basic moves.
- † Advance the other four basic moves.
- † Create an additional PC.
- † Take an End of Season Move.
- † Change character to a new class.



M

ythology Creation



In your first session of SCUP, you start by creating a foundational mythology that informs the fictional world of your game. This represents knowledge that most people in your world would *actually have*. Every child would be taught this

myth, and every priest and ruler would reference it at some point when they spoke to their followers. Mythology creation is done as a group *prior to making characters*, when you first sit down to play. This way character concepts may rest on ideas you develop during your mythology creation.

This exercise gives color and form to your world. Your myth creates shared reference points for the players, sets up the religion of your people or the values your world holds, and gives your world a feel and aesthetic. You can use this



myth to determine what The Unspeakable Power in your world is, and what people's relationship with it is like. Is it the slumbering Old Ones beneath the earth, and must we fear all who would commune with them? Or is it the light that emanates from the sun and the moon, and those who can control it are considered blessed by the gods? Your myth should answer these sorts of questions. Additionally, you can decide as a group if the myth is “real” or not, or if that even matters. Is this something that *actually* happened in the past, or is this a story the people of your world tell to explain how their world came to be what it is? Does anyone know for sure?

The myths and narratives of groups exist to delineate things about who they are and what they value. The foundational stories of a nation might highlight the heroism of its founders, or their wisdom in creating an enduring system. The origin stories of a religion may stress the divinity of the central figures, or the self-sacrifice they demonstrated when starting the faith. Whatever the narrative of a group is, *it tells you important things about that group*. In your game, you're using the mythology you generate with this exercise to tell a story about who the people of your world are, where they live, and what sort of things they value.

This isn't meant to be an all-encompassing short-story creation, just a brief exercise to give shape, form, and color to your world. You can get through all of this in 10 to 15 minutes if you want to get to play quickly, or you can take a little longer to really fill out the mythology. Don't feel obligated to spend hours on this — work on it just long enough to give everyone shared reference points and details for the world you create.



The mythology creation exercise below has broken foundational myths into a general structure in which you will complete six statements.

- † In the beginning...
- † Then...
- † This resulted in...
- † And because of this...
- † Until...
- † And now...

You begin the mythology creation by completing each of these sentences using the lists under the heading “*Mythology Creation Exercise*” below. Each statement fills in some of the framework of your mythology. They are also suggestive of important aspects of it. For example, if you pick “dangerous things were sealed away” as the completion to “In the beginning...” it begs the question: who or what were the dangerous things? Old gods? Foul demons? Powerful weapons? Who sealed them away? Great rulers? Wise scholars?

AN EXAMPLE:

In the beginning, there was peace between all. Then, a new power emerged in the land. This resulted in our glorious civilization quickly falling to ruin. Because of this, there was hatred, people filled with enmity and rage, until sorcerers tamed the unknown. And now, we have ensured such things will never happen again.

This provides you with the *skeleton* of your myth, but not the *details*. We have provided a list of questions and suggestions to guide you in filling in the details of your myth once you’ve completed the exercise. For example, if you began with the above example, you may want to ask what the peace that existed in the earlier time looked



like, what the new power that emerged in the land was, and what groups of people hated each other. After asking these questions, you could start fleshing out the framework with details as follows:

The peace was a harmony between two different city-states on opposite sides of a great river that were long-time economic partners. Their ruling families had long intermarried, creating a dense web of connections. Then, the priests of one of the city-states overthrew the rulers of the city using their magical power, something the priests of the other city did not possess. As such, the city-states developed a great hatred, centered on the use of magic. One city's rulers enforced their rule through magic, the other did not, and resented the magic-users for it.

As you fill in the details, you give your myth a plot, an aesthetic, characters, stakes, consequences, etc. We have provided you with extra tools at the end of the mythology creation. These include:

- † A list of names you can use for characters for the mythology.
- † A list of dramatic situations you can use to flesh out your story.
- † A list of evocative images for inspiration.

Mythology Creation Exercise

Complete each statement below to create the framework of your myth by selecting one of the six options offered. If you are having trouble choosing, you can roll 1d6 to make a selection for you.

IN THE BEGINNING...

1. The world was pristine and unsullied.
2. There was peace between all.
3. We lived in harmony with nature.
4. It was a golden age of prosperity and knowledge.
5. Dangerous things were sealed away.
6. Times were hard, but we got by with what we had.



THEN...

1. A never before seen threat arose.
2. A new power emerged in the land.
3. We meddled in what we should not.
4. Rightful rule was challenged.
5. Our ancient ways were cast aside or forgotten.
6. Supernatural powers unleashed their wrath.

THIS RESULTED IN...

1. Divisions between people who had long been at peace.
2. Our glorious civilization quickly falling to ruin.
3. The rightful order of things being overturned.
4. Poverty, famine, and plague overtaking us.
5. Wanton death stalking the land.
6. The world crumbled, as if nature turned against us.

AND BECAUSE OF THIS...

1. There was war which none could avoid.
2. There was chaos, confusion, and disorder.
3. There was destruction, our greatness laid to waste.
4. There was fear, dread, and panic.
5. There was hatred, people filled with enmity and rage.
6. There was decay and desolation, the once beautiful landscape blighted.

UNTIL...

1. Heroes stood mightily.
2. Scholars gained wisdom.
3. People joined together.
4. Sorcerers tamed the unknown.
5. The gods themselves intervened.
6. The threat vanished mysteriously.



AND NOW...

1. Things are back as they were, but we never forget...
2. There is an uneasy truce...
3. We have ensured such things will never happen again...
4. We can never return to those innocent days...
5. We must live our lives with constant vigilance...
6. Ruin is all around, a constant reminder of the past...

Once you have created your framework, write it down and flesh it out by asking questions. Take a moment to discuss what each part might look like. Talk about who is involved, where they are, what happened, etc. Use the following questions to guide you in adding detail.

- † Who are the main characters in this story?
- † How long ago was this?
- † What is the aesthetic or feel of our world?
- † What places exist in our world?
- † What social, political, and supernatural powers exist in our world?
- † What is magic like in our world?
- † What is religion like in our world?
- † What values are held in our world?
- † What remnants of this time are still felt today?



Resources For Myths

Below are 3 resources you can draw on if you are having trouble coming up with your myth. You do not have to use these — they exist to give you some inspiration if you are struggling, or if you want to draw on something to get going quickly.

Names for Characters

Santar, Zeina, Phillo, Barronne, Honold, Layla, Raleina, Viv, Orchid, Hilbradnt, Calla, Qing, Ravencall, Treeroot, Hamza, Phillip, Rohanna, Zhi, Ju'dann, Neta, Halima, Solani, Lizabeth, Decha, Taya, Halldon, Palo, Dragonwing, Li, Zalika, Benn, Abbas, Basya, Talib, Michele, Abani, Mirra, Georg, Fariel, Sael, Rosetta, Babatunde, Mariahsa, Anagha, Bilal, Ilanit, Jemen

Plot Hooks

- † Remorse arises in a villain after committing a grievous sin.
- † A seeker must go on a journey to find one who has been lost for a long time.
- † When an innocent is murdered, someone seeks vengeance.
- † A fugitive flees to avoid an unjust or misdirected punishment.
- † Someone must sacrifice what they most treasure.
- † A revolution is planned against a cruel and tyrannical power.
- † Balance is restored when a brave leader vanquishes an enemy.
- † Despite being guarded, something or someone is stolen away by an abductor.
- † A problem is presented to a seeker, the answer to which makes the truth clear.
- † An arbitrator settles a dispute between two opposed parties.
- † Two kinsfolk come together to conspire against a third party.
- † A hero sacrifices herself for a grand ideal.



- † Two lovers make plans to murder a betrayed spouse.
- † Mortal and immortal enter into conflict with each other.
- † Someone harms another through his or her own neglect or foolishness.
- † Two lovers cannot be together without first confronting an obstacle.
- † A questionable decision by a figure in power, urged on by an advisor.
- † Someone kills their unrecognized kin, only to learn later of what they've done.
- † A deal is struck with a dark power, consequences be damned.
- † A friend or lover is betrayed by someone they trust.
- † A strict parent drives their child to zealotry.

Evocative Images

- † Single combat on a rickety bridge across a narrow gorge, the bottom of which, legend says, is hell itself.
- † A sturdy old boat, with a rugged and stalwart crew, tossed and turned on a hostile sea, in pursuit of their reckless goal.
- † Lightning strikes, illuminating the hideous, smiling visage of true evil.
- † A placid lake, next to which companions bid each other a tearful farewell.
- † A cracked and charred battlefield, where tattered flags fly over a sea of corpses.
- † A night of reckless passion, of which the lovers may never speak again.
- † A king, brought to tears and wailing in the face of a decision only the gods should be allowed to make.
- † A woman, clad in the stars themselves, riding a great winged beast, her eyes fierce as fire and her hair dark as onyx.
- † A precocious child humiliating the local Templars with her ability to read the bones as easy as you or I read a parchment.
- † Ten thousand archers firing ten thousand arrows in a fruitless



- show of force against a nearly invincible opponent.
- † Two wizards in battle, one good and one evil, torn asunder by their heedless use of The Unspeakable Power.
 - † A woman dies in childbirth, bearing twins on the eve of a great civil war.
 - † The mighty tribes of the desert unite under one blood red banner, called to each other by the nightmarish union of two fearsome rulers.
 - † Stories are traded and drinks shared by firelight among those who know that tomorrow they will die, while rain gently falls outside.
 - † A hopeful song, beginning with one voice, soon joined by dozens and then thousands, until the chorus shakes the very walls of the city gates.
 - † A coronation ceremony, where a great lineage is founded as another is stripped of its royal claim and cast out into the wasteland.
 - † The mountain people and the tree people come together for the first time and the last time to celebrate their shared victory and bury their dead.
 - † A treaty is signed and a marriage arranged, one that neither of the betrothed wishes to go through with.
 - † A thief, standing upon the gallows, is revealed to be the long-lost, beloved princess, thought dead by her usurper uncle.
 - † A tower turning red with flame reveals a woman in white, her eyes harrowed, and her dress splattered with red, slowly approaching.

Once you have created your mythology using the framework above, read what you have written out-loud, and then begin character creation.



Patrons, Factions and Honor



Characters are connected through webs of power, status, and obligation. In this chapter, we explore the three primary ways that SCUP focuses on the hierarchies and systems of power that characters are positioned in: Patrons, Factions, and Honor.

A few words about the nature of power and authority — feel free to skip this theoretical introduction if you want to get right to the mechanics.

The legal theorist/sociologist Max Weber theorized that authority came from three main sources. The first is *tradition* — some handed down custom or convention. This is the authority of monarchs. Often, traditions state that the royal family rules through divine right, because of some great deed, or as a result of some grand historical moment. To challenge tradition is, therefore, to challenge history,

Chapter Five



myth, and even the divine order of things itself. As such, monarchs often seek to remind people of the traditions that put them in power through rituals, holidays, and belief systems.

In what Weber calls *legal-rational* authority, the rules of a society or institution give people power. A modern politician has power, for example, because they occupy a particular office (president, mayor, governor), and their power is considered legitimate when it is appropriate to their office. Once again, a whole system of ideas and justifications exist to support this kind of authority. The laws of a society, the rules of institutions, etc., delineate who has legal-rational power and what they can and cannot do with it.

Finally, the third source is the *charisma* of extraordinary individuals. Some folks just have an intangible quality that makes people listen to them, regardless of any kind of official position or title they may or may not hold. Someone with charismatic authority has remarkable personal qualities that make people want to do what they say, show them respect, be around them, etc. This is the authority that might be held by a prophet or social movement leader who inspires people to follow them with their words and deeds.

When you create characters, whether you're the MC or a player, think about what gives them power. Are they part of a noble family that has ruled for generations? What sorts of myths, traditions, and rituals uphold the dynasty? Do people resent being ruled by this family, or do they buy into the ideology that justifies the rule? Conversely, do you have authority because of a title or office you hold? What rules and relationships give that position of power? What are the duties of someone with your role? Finally, do you have remarkable qualities that draw people to you? Magic powers, useful skills, charm, beauty? Thinking through these things will help give you a sense for how and why a character is powerful.



Patrons

Several character classes start the game with a Patron, or the option to have one. If your class doesn't start with a Patron but the fiction puts you in the direct employ of another character, feel free to use these rules to decide how your relationship with your Patron works.

Patrons may be any number of things, depending on the setting: for *The Gauntlet* and *The Spur*, it is typically a Lord; for *The Black Hood*, it is likely a shadowy group; for *The Lyre*, it's probably someone who keeps them in room and board in exchange for their beauty, grace, and talent. The first step when creating your Patron is figure out *who or what your Patron is*. Your Patron does not have to be, but can be, another PC. Your Patron may also be a group. *The Black Hood*, for example, typically works for a guild or secret society. A *Gauntlet*, *Spur*, *Bloodletter*, or *Lyre* could be in the employ of a noble family.

After you decide who your Patron is, determine the nature of your relationship. If your Patron is another PC, you should work together with their player to determine your relationship from the following list. If your Patron is an NPC, you choose the relationship.

- † You are an employee. They pay you, and that's as deep as it gets.
- † You are kin. Your Patron is blood to you — literally or figuratively.
- † You have an oath. Your Patron is your lord, master, guardian, or dearest companion, who you are bound to by a tradition, ceremony, or honorific.
- † You are in debt. You are slowly working off a balance to your Patron.

When you have a Patron, you gain +1 Barter at the start of each session. This may be actual money, goods, room and board, etc., but you should detail the nature of your salary. Bear it mind: it is possible to lose your Patron, willingly or through rolling dice.



When you have a Patron, you may namedrop them to use as your leverage in a **Persuading With Leverage** roll. In this example, Todd is the MC, playing a character named Amon, interacting with Tom's character M, who works for the wealthy Lord Asdel.

Todd: *"Amon seems generally unimpressed with you as the two of you talk. He's constantly looking away, as if trying to find someone more important to talk to."*

Tom: *"I need him to spy on his sister for me. I tell him that if he's interested, I know powerful people and I can put in a good word for him if he tells me what his sister has been up to."*

Todd: *"It sounds like you're **Persuading With Leverage**. Could you be more specific?"*

Tom: *"I add 'I work directly for Lord Asdel, my friend. I could even get you a private audience...'"*

Todd: *"That got his attention. He turns to listen to you. Make your roll."*

If you are another PC's Patron, you may always take +1 in **Persuade With Leverage** rolls against them if you remind them of their station below you. In this example, Todd and Tom are both PCs. Todd is playing Lord Asdel, the Patron of Tom's character M.

Todd: *"Lord Asdel is yelling at the top of his lungs. 'How could he betray me like this? My own lover, turning against me!'"*

Tom: *"M just tries to keep him calm, telling him everything will be alright."*

Todd: *"Asdel turns towards M and says 'I'd gladly give you that title your family has always wanted if you put that sword through him!'"*

Tom: *"That seems like a lot of work. I think M would need to be convinced."*



Todd: “I’ll roll **Persuading With Leverage**. *Asdel adds ‘You best not disobey me. I can put you back out on the street where I found you!’ That will give me +1.*”

At the start of each session, if you have a Patron, you make a **beginning of session Patron move**. Your class will tell you what stat to roll.

- † On a 10+, your Patron is happy with you. You and the MC/player of your Patron will work out why this is. You may remove 1 disobedience if you have any.
- † On a 7-9, your Patron is generally pleased, but with some reservations. You and the MC/player of your patron will work out why this is. The MC/player of your Patron holds 1 for the session. They may spend it to have your Patron call on you to do something and you must make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll to refuse them. If you refuse your Patron’s request, it counts as 1 disobedience.
- † On a miss, your Patron is angry with you. You and the MC/player of your Patron will work out why. You receive 1 automatic disobedience.

If your Patron is an NPC, they sever their relationship with you when you reach 3 disobedience at the start of the next session — unless you roll a 10+ at that time and remove one disobedience. If your Patron is a PC, they may *choose* to sever their relationship with you at the start of the next session if you gain 3 disobedience. They may choose, instead, to maintain the relationship but skip your roll and just hold 1 for the session with the same conditions for a partial hit above, automatically. They may do this each session going forward as long as you are still in their employ and have 3 disobedience. The only way to remove disobedience in this circumstance is within the fiction (see below). If you remove a disobedience by getting back into their good graces, you roll your Patron move at the start of the next session.



A FEW CLARIFYING NOTES ON PATRONS: First, you may choose to sever the relationship with your Patron at any time. If your Patron is a PC, they may choose to sever their relationship with you at any time. An NPC Patron should only sever the relationship if the PC gains 3 disobedience or if there are extenuating circumstances in the fiction. For example, if Dirge, The Spur, murders their Patron Anna's sister right in front of her, Anna would be well within her right to immediately dismiss Dirge.

The fiction may create disobedience. If a PC acts against their Patron or refuses to do something requested of them, the person playing the Patron (whether a PC or the MC) may choose to give their employee 1 disobedience. Likewise, the fiction may create a situation where a Patron chooses to erase disobedience. If a PC is particularly useful or helpful to their Patron, their player may choose to tell the PC who works for them to remove 1 disobedience. Returning to the example above, let's say that instead of *killing* Anna's sister, Dirge just threatens her. Anna could say that Dirge now has 1 disobedience. If, later, Dirge does something particularly useful for Anna, such as dispatch some enemy of hers, she may tell Dirge to remove 1 disobedience.

A Patron who is a PC does *not* have to worry about the Barter they pay another PC who works for them. If you are playing The Crown, and you have a Gauntlet that you are the Patron of, when The Gauntlet gains +1 Barter at the start of the session, you do not lose 1 Barter. To simplify the logic of Patrons and their workers, a character who is powerful enough to have someone working for them is assumed to be able to afford their servant without having to worry about where the Barter comes from and how it changes hands.



Factions

A Faction can be a nebulous collection of people — a clique of friends, an art community, or the proletarian workers of the town. It could be a very tightly bound and ordered group such as a noble house, a school of magic, or a secret criminal society. Your Faction represents the people you have some loyalty to or affinity with. Your interests or agenda overlap, at least partially, with their interests and agenda. Your status rises and falls with their status. Even if you don't *like* them, you are at home with them, and feel that your fate is tied to theirs.

Power is about social relationships between people and groups. A boss needs employees, a queen needs subjects, and a pastor needs a congregation. Our status emerges from the positions we occupy in social groups. In high school, your clique defines how people see you and affords you some social protection. In politics, your party provides you with an ideology, identity, and assets that you can draw on. To be positioned in a social group is to have people to defend you and resources to help you achieve your goals. Being embedded in a social group also comes with responsibilities. To stay in a group, you must maintain positive relationships with other members. The power of being a group member comes with the price that all social relationships come with: responsibilities to those you are connected to.

In SCUP, your status emerges from your social embeddedness. Do you have a noble family whose name gives you power, but who require great loyalty from you? Are you a part of a secret society that protects you in exchange for calling on you to do awful things for them? Just as a politician's career is connected to the fortunes of their party or a businessperson's livelihood to the success of their company, you rise and fall as your Faction faces opposition or receives privileges.



CREATING A FACTION

To create your Faction, complete the exercise below when instructed to by your class during character creation and write the answers on your character sheet.

PICK A KIND OF GROUP:

- † House (a royal family or assembly and their employees and advisors).
- † Clan (an ethnic group or some other kind of demographic grouping).
- † Guild (a professional group).
- † Clique (a social group).
- † Ring (a criminal organization or society of some kind).
- † Order (a religious or educational community).

PICK A SOCIAL STATUS:

- † Noble (part of the ruling class).
- † Honored (a group held in esteem, despite not being noble).
- † Common (a group of regular people).
- † Proletarian (a lower status group).
- † Outcast (a reviled or marginalized group).
- † Outlaw (a secret or criminal group).

Then, select two Faction benefits based on your social status.

FOR NOBLE OR HONORED FACTIONS:

- † Wealth.
- † Power.
- † Status.
- † Magic.
- † Knowledge.
- † Rumors.



FOR COMMON OR PROLETARIAN FACTIONS:

- † Skill.
- † Gossip.
- † Networks.
- † Numbers.
- † Strength.
- † Inconspicuousness.

FOR OUTCAST OR OUTLAW FACTIONS:

- † Secrecy.
- † Blackmail.
- † Vice.
- † Dirty Work.
- † Contraband.
- † Magic.

Finally, for each other PC, discuss between yourselves which of the following describes the relationship between your respective Factions.

- † We have a rivalry with this Faction.
- † We have an alliance with this Faction.
- † We have open conflict with this Faction.
- † We are indifferent to or unaware of this Faction.

Using Factions

Factions are tied to Honor, the measure of your social capital and the value of your name. Some of your Honor represents who you associate with and how far those social networks can carry you. At the end of a session, you may gain Honor for having tangibly advanced the interests, agenda, or standing of your Faction. Additionally, you *lose* Honor if you acted against your Faction in any way. See the section on Honor later in this chapter for more on how to gain, lose, and use Honor.



To activate the move **Call On Your Faction**, you must spend your accumulated Honor points. You are burning your social capital to ask for a favor from people within your social networks. This move can allow you to take advantage of the benefits of your Faction.

When you call on your Faction for help, support, or to advance your agenda, spend between 0-3 Honor and **roll+Honor spent**. On a 10+, activate one of your Faction's benefits. On a 7-9, activate one of your Faction's benefits, but the MC holds 1. They may spend it to have someone from your Faction call on you to do a favor, fulfill your duty, or perform an obligation. If you refuse this request, you must make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll. On a miss, your Faction cannot help you. The MC will detail why and will pick one from the list of consequences below.

- † Secrets are revealed.
- † Loyalties are shifted.
- † Status is threatened.
- † Channels are cut off.
- † Suspicions are confirmed.
- † Allies are put in danger.

Faction benefits work in a similar way to tags (171). They are descriptors that allow you to put things in the fiction.

In the following examples, Megan is the MC, Jenn is playing a Screw named Pick, and Joe is playing a Lyre named Starfall.

EXAMPLE 1:

Jenn: *"I've gotten some good information on Lockheart, but he doesn't seem to care. I want to scare him a bit."*

Megan: *"Maybe your Faction can help. They are a secret society, after all."*



Jenn: *“Actually, they would be really useful here. I’m going to write down what I know about Lockheart and leave it for my contact, telling them to spread that information. We’re good at blackmail.”*

Megan: *“Sounds like you’re **Calling On Your Faction**. How much Honor are you going to spend?”*

Jenn: *“I think 2 seems safe. I rolled an 11. I’m heading back to the castle after I leave the note. I want to see the look on Lockheart’s face!”*

Megan: *“Okay, you leave the note, and by the time you get back to the castle, you’ve already heard whispers in the street about what Lockheart did. As soon as you enter the throne room he looks up at you with an ashen glare and says ‘I know this was you, Pick. What do you want from me?’”*

Jenn: *“I say ‘I couldn’t possibly know what you’re talking about, honorable one. But since you’re insistent on providing me with a gift, what do you have in mind?’”*

EXAMPLE 2:

Joe: *“I need to get into this party. Lockheart is in there and I need to seduce him if I’m going to get the information I need.”*

Megan: *“You could try to sneak in, but the doors are locked tight. It’s invitation only.”*

Joe: *“I must know someone in there. My Faction is the artists who entertain the nobles. I’m going to ask one of my contacts if they can get me in somehow. We’ve got status.”*

Megan: *“You’re **Calling On Your Faction**. Spend some Honor and make the roll.”*

Joe: *“Okay, I’ll spend 1 Honor. I rolled a 7. Not bad.”*



Megan: *“You find Dabia hanging out in the courtyard. When you explain what you need to her, she leads you through the halls of the castle to a maid she knows who happened to swipe an extra invitation off someone’s nightstand and gives it to you. You can flash that and get inside.”*

Joe: *“Excellent. I’ll go do that now.”*

Megan: *“As you leave, though, Dabia tells you that she’s going to want you to pass on some information to Hae while you’re at the party. Information Hae might not want to hear. Are you willing to do that?”*

Joe: *“Well, it eats up my time with Lockheart, but... sure.”*

In these examples, Jenn gets a full hit on her roll and activates the “blackmail” benefit of her ring. The blackmail happens, just as she wants it to. In the second example, Joe gets a partial hit on his roll and activates the “status” benefit of his honored group. This gets him into the party, but since it was a partial hit, Megan holds 1 and spends it to have Dabia give Starfall a task to do. She could have saved that hold to have it happen later, if she chose. Joe chooses to go through with it rather than make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll.

Here’s an example of a miss a **Call On Your Faction** roll. In this example, Nathan is the MC and Sarah is playing Savina, The Voice.

Sarah: *“What would be helpful is if I had some money to buy some clothes I could wear to the wedding. I have to put on a show for Kalessin, after all.”*

Nathan: *“You’ve blown through most of your money, though.”*

Sarah: *“I have. But I hang out with the Andar clan. They’re rich. Maybe one of them could loan me some money. I’ll hit up Sasha and see what she says about it.”*



Nathan: “*Make a Call On Your Faction roll.*”

Sarah: “*I’ll spend 1 Honor. I got a 5.*”

Nathan: “*You go to Sasha and ask her for the money, but she just turns on you. She shouts ‘what, you think that because you advise my father you are one of us? Don’t forget where we found you, Savina. We can put you back there.’*”

In this example, Sarah *missed* her roll and Nathan selects “Status is Threatened” as the consequence. Nathan didn’t have to use this immediately. He could have waited until a more appropriate point in the fiction to threaten Savina’s status. Either way, this gives an example of how to deal with a missed **Call On Your Faction** roll: use the consequences to complicate their relationship with their Faction, giving you juicy problems to springboard off of for new conflicts or confrontations.

A character that does something to completely rebuke their Faction may be rejected or exiled from the group. If a character decides to abandon their place within their Faction, they may choose to become Factionless. A character who becomes Factionless immediately goes to 0 Honor. They may not use the move **Call On Your Faction** and they do not gain or lose Honor at the end of the session for anything related to Factions. The character should be perceived as shunned by their former group. They may try to ally themselves with a new Faction, or fix their relationship with their Former faction and regain access to the Faction moves at a later time.

Players *must* create a Faction during character generation and may not begin play Factionless.

ONE FINAL NOTE: If you are a character who leads a group (The Crown, The Spur, The Beloved) your Faction may or may not overlap with your group. It is best if your Faction does not *entirely* over-



lap with your group. It makes things both mechanically easier and narratively more interesting. For example, if you are a Beloved, you may say that your Followers are predominantly creative folk who do things like sing, dance, and compose poetry. As such, your Faction can be the artists of the city. The Spur may say that their Faction is the rough-and-tumble criminal element that lives in the series of caves outside of town. Their Militia is drawn from this group. A Crown should certainly make their Faction narrower than their Stead, perhaps deciding that their Faction is their particular noble family, or their inner circle they meet with.

Honor

Characters in SCUP have a currency called *Honor* that measures their social power and prestige. Honor is not inherently a measure of how “honorable,” as in virtuous or righteous, you are. Honor is broader than that, representing the *value of your name*. Are there people who could drop your name to others who would care? You might have more Honor points. Conversely, are you reviled, mocked, or shunned? Then you may have fewer Honor points. As a currency, your Honor will go up and down over the course of a campaign. If you do things that mark you as a useful ally or worthy of consideration, your Honor will go up. If you are humiliated or repudiated, your Honor will go down. Reputation is a fickle thing.

The concept of Honor draws on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Just as one may have economic capital they spend in an effort to get a return on their investment, people have, according to Bourdieu, *social* and *cultural capital*. Social capital represents the people you know. When you want a job, you may call on a well-placed friend to help you find one. This represents spending your social capital to get something in return. In time, they may ask you



to repay the favor. Additionally, social capital is unequally distributed. Some people have dense networks of powerful people, others know few who can help them out in most situations. Cultural capital, on the other hand, is useful knowledge that you can deploy in social situations. If you are part of high society, for example, your cultural capital may be the extensive knowledge you have about fine wine and fashion that you can draw on to demonstrate that you belong at the fancy parties you attend. Cultural capital, like social capital, represents a kind of social inequality. Some people possess a great deal of socially useful knowledge, while others have very little.

If you think of the concepts of social and cultural capital together, it will help you understand the currency of Honor. Who do you know, and what do they think of you? Do you have networks of useful, powerful people at your disposal? Does your name carry far with them? Do you know how to impress people, or draw their attention to you? Your Honor is a measure of all of this.

In the same way that Honor isn't exclusively about how honorable you are, it's also not exclusively about high society. Both a king and a thief may have a high score in Honor if they have useful networks where their name matters. They are likely *different* networks and the reason their names carry may be quite dissimilar, but both characters have the ability to trade on their reputation for social benefits.

Gaining Honor

Almost all characters start with 1 Honor, representing their connection to their Faction. The Crown and The Voice, however, automatically start with 2 Honor. By virtue of being a ruler, The Crown is more widely known and considered valuable as an ally. The Voice, on the other hand, is someone who knows people and has access to



power. Other characters can make a case for starting with 2 Honor, as well. If you think there's a valid reason that you might be rich, noble, famous, notorious, or well-connected, then you can start with 2 Honor. Let's look at some examples.

Sarn, The Gauntlet, answers directly to the Empress, and is known for her great skill and strength in battle. This connection to power and usefulness in violence means she starts with 2 Honor.

Lamb, The Bloodletter, is well respected in town, having saved the life of someone close to almost everyone in their neighborhood. This earns them a great deal of respect. Lamb starts with 2 Honor.

Jawbone, The Lyre, is at every party. His dancing is renowned across the kingdom as he has wandered near and far, performing for anyone who will watch. Jawbone starts with 2 Honor.

Many different PCs could make a solid argument for starting with 2 Honor. We want most characters to come up with a good reason they start with 2 Honor to give them and the MC fictional tidbits to use immediately. If you are the MC, and Jawbone's character tells you they are famous for their dancing and beauty, that gives you a sense for how to have people interact with Jawbone. If Lamb's character tells you that people in their neighborhood adore them because they've done so much to help the locals, perhaps one of the first things that happens to them is a nearby acquaintance brings Lamb their sick child to heal. Honor is not intangible: it represents a measure of the real relationships you have with people in your social network and what they think of you.

Events and actions will both grow and diminish a PC's reputation during a session. At the end of the session, you and the MC should



talk about what happened to you in the session and decide if it has grown your reputation. Specifically, if you did any of the following:

- † Tangibly advanced the interests, agenda, or standing of your Faction.
- † Made a new connection with someone who may find you useful or desirable.
- † Demonstrated your power, talent, wisdom, or skill to others.
- † Spread rumors, secrets, or information to those who need or want it.

For each of these actions you gain 1 Honor, added to your current total. In other words, if you currently have 0 Honor, and you did two of the above things, you will begin your next session with 2 Honor. There is no maximum Honor that you can have. Here's an example.

Sarn, The Gauntlet, ends the session with 1 Honor. She is the enforcer of the Noble Cairn family — her Faction. They asked Sarn to intimidate one of their enemies, and Sarn did so. This pleased her Faction and helped them secure a deal with her target's family. Sarn earns 1 Honor because her Faction finds her useful. Additionally, she publicly battled someone who threatened a friend of hers, making short work of them. This demonstrated her power and skill to others, so she gains an additional 1 Honor.

You can also do things over a session to shrink or hurt your reputation. You *lose* a point of Honor for the next session if during the session you:

- † Were publicly humiliated, repudiated, or shown to be a weak.
- † Went back on your word, or betrayed someone.
- † Acted against your Faction.

Your Honor cannot drop below 0.



Let's return to our example above to illustrate.

However, Sarn was also given a verbal tongue lashing in front of the Empress by Asdel, the Empress' brother. Sarn was publicly repudiated, so she loses 1 of the points of Honor she earned. Since she had 1 at the end of the session, earned 2 for her behavior, and lost 1 for being humiliated in front of The Empress, she will begin the next session with 2 Honor.

If a PC ever becomes Factionless, they go immediately to 0 Honor. This represents being shunned and exiled from their social group. This is the kind of thing that would cut off their networks and mean rumors swirl about them. As such, their reputation will be greatly damaged.

We intend Honor to be relatively easy to gain. As such, if you are the MC, be fairly generous with letting characters claim Honor at the end of a session. If they can make a reasonable case for having done something to grow their reputation, let them claim a point of Honor. After all, Honor is a currency, and we want characters to earn it through their deeds, then spend it to make things happen in the fiction.



Spending Honor

Honor can get you a return on your investment. Building your good name and growing your reputation means you can ask for favors and trade on your status to jockey for position. There are three moves, available to all characters that draw on your Honor.

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

Spend 1 Honor to have someone you meet have recently heard something impressive about you. Take +1 forward on your next **Threaten With Force** or **Persuade With Leverage** roll against them. Note: you cannot use this move if your Honor is 0. You are *spending* a point of Honor to trigger this move, and you cannot spend Honor you do not have.

CALL ON YOUR FACTION

When you call on your Faction for help, support, or to advance your agenda, spend between 0-3 Honor and **roll+Honor spent**. On a 10+, activate one of your Faction's benefits. On a 7-9, activate one of your Faction's benefits, but the MC holds 1. They may spend it to have someone from your Faction call on you to do a favor, fulfill your duty, or perform an obligation. On a miss, your Faction cannot help you. The MC will detail why and will pick one from the list of consequences below.

- † Secrets are revealed.
- † Loyalties are shifted.
- † Status is threatened.
- † Channels are cut off.
- † Suspicions are confirmed.
- † Allies are put in danger.

NOTE: you cannot use this move if you are Factionless.



REFUSE AN OBLIGATION, DUTY, OR DEBT

When you refuse to do something you are supposed to do because of your station or resist carrying out a command or request from someone with leverage or authority over you, spend between 0-3 Honor and **roll+Honor spent**. On a 10+, nothing. On a 7-9, pick 1. On a miss, take both.

- † You feel guilty or conflicted. Take -1 forward.
- † You seem ignoble. The MC holds 1. They spend it to have someone you interact with have heard whisperings that you can't be trusted.

In this example of the move **Do You Know Who I Am?**, Todd is the MC and Megan is playing Lamb, The Bloodletter.

Megan: *"I'm irritated with the way The Empress' attendant is treating me. I'm not sure why he feels the need to be so hostile. I've done plenty for his employer."*

Todd: *"Maybe you should remind him of that?"*

Megan: *"Maybe I should! I'm going to spend 1 Honor to use Do You Know Who I Am?"*

Todd: *"How are you doing that?"*

Megan: *"I'll look him right in the eye and say 'Perhaps next time I visit The Empress I'll tell her about this little chat we're having.'"*

Todd: *"A look of recognition moves across his face. He says 'oh, you're... the healer? The one who...' He gulps, clearly nervous, and then goes on. 'You've done so much to help her highness' father, I mean...' He trails off. 'If you ever need anything from me, just let me know!'" You'll get a +1 next time to **Persuade** or **Threaten** him.*

Megan: *"That's actually useful. I might have something I need this guy to do later."*



In this example of the move **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt**, Jenn is the MC and Tom is playing Crow's Eye, The Gauntlet.

Jenn: *"Ferndale and you have been having a good time, downing drinks and telling stories. Then, he leans in and says 'I know you work for Lord Mori, but us kids from the outlands have to stick together, right?'"*

Tom: *"I see exactly where this is going. I nod. 'Yeah, Ferndale, we do. Why?'"*

Jenn: *"He looks around conspiratorially and whispers 'We're planning on stealing some horses from Lady Hae's stables, just like old times. She won't even notice they're gone.' I'm spending the hold he has on you — this is someone from your Faction calling on you to fulfill an obligation."*

Tom: *"I really don't want to do this. Hae is Mori's sister and he'll be furious if I get caught. I'm going to **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt**. I say 'sorry, Fern. I can't risk it. You know I work for Mori, now.'"*

Jenn: *"Sounds good. Make your roll."*

Tom: *"I'm spending 1 Honor, and roll 5."*

Jenn: *"So you get both things off the list. Ferndale's eyes narrow and he says 'You've changed, Crow. I barely feel like you're one of us anymore. You used to be the kind of person who would help a friend. I guess not, anymore. Folks in the old neighborhood will be interested to know what you're like, now.' I'll hold 1. Someone's going to hear about this."*

Tom: *"Ouch, that one hurt."*

Jenn: *"Yep, you also get -1 forward."*

Tom: *"I feel awful about that. Fern was my best friend."*



In this example, Tom misses his **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll and, as such, takes -1 forward for feeling conflicted. Additionally, Jenn holds 1 and can spend it to have someone hear about Crow's Eye's behavior. In both examples, Jenn and Tom motivated the losses in the fiction. Ferndale told Crow's Eye he would tell everyone about Crow's Eye's refusal to motivate the hold, and Tom indicated that Crow's Eye felt hurt by what Ferndale said.

ONE FINAL THING TO NOTE ABOUT HONOR: the first time a PC uses any of the Honor moves in a session, they earn an advancement point. This is *one* point per session, not per move. If you are the MC, you may consider reminding your players of this. We want folks to be spending their Honor to get engaged with their Faction, so we're giving them incentive to do so.



Weapons, Armor, Gear, and Tags



Weapons and armor each have two main descriptors. For weapons, the descriptors are the amount of Harm the weapon does (1 Harm, 2 Harm, etc.) and the weapon's *tags*. Armor has the amount of Harm the armor blocks (1 Armor or 2

Armor, corresponding to the amount of Harm the armor reduces any hit by) and its tags. If a weapon stuns someone when used, it will be listed as doing *s Harm*.

Tags are descriptors that give the MC and players the ability to put things into the fiction. If a weapon has the tag *messy* then its use will render nearby people bloody. If a group has the tag *savage* then you can assume that they will do things like pick fights, get rowdy, cause destruction, etc. Below, we provide a list of some tags and their meanings, as well as give examples of how to use them. You can also come up with your own tags to describe things.

Chapter Six



Kinds of Weapons

SMALL WEAPONS: Small weapons include daggers, short swords, claws, knuckles, and things like needles, bladed fans, etc. They tend to do 1 Harm, but can do 2 Harm, if appropriate, and have the tags **hand** and **small**. They may also have the tags **intimate**, **infinite** and **messy**, or other tags as appropriate.

LARGE WEAPONS: Large weapons include battleaxes, polearms, spears, broadswords, maces, etc. They tend to do 2 Harm, but could do 1 Harm or 3 Harm, if appropriate. For example, a long wooden staff probably does 1 Harm, a battleaxe, mace, or longsword is probably 2 Harm, and a two-handed broadsword or halberd is probably 3 Harm. They generally have the tags **close** and **large** and may also have **messy** and **area** if those make narrative sense for the weapon in question.

RANGED WEAPONS: Ranged weapons include throwing knives, bows, crossbows, etc. They tend to do 1 or 2 Harm, as appropriate, and have the tags **far** and perhaps **reload**. They may also have **infinite** or **silent**, if appropriate.

ARCANE WEAPONS are like any other weapon in the game except they function using the **Arcane Malice** move found in the Adept's class. When you attack with an arcane weapon, you will use the move **Arcane Malice** instead of **Engage in Combat**, **Threaten With Force**, or **Face Duress**. An arcane weapon can be a staff, a wand, or a small object such as a pendant or ring. A wand or wooden staff may be 2 Harm and have the tag **far** if it shoots lightning, fire, or energy and also have the tags appropriate to the magic that someone decides to use (blowing things up is **messy**, for example). A small object can be as small or quiet as the caster wants it to be, but perhaps only be useful at very close ranges and should do 1 Harm.



If the caster doesn't want to use magic and instead just wants to hit people with their weapon, they can roll just using the object's natural attributes. A staff probably does 1 Harm if you're just hitting someone with it and not using its magic powers. Ultimately, what the arcane weapon does is up to the player who has it and the MC working something out together prior to play.

We don't suggest creating weapons that do more than 3 Harm, and we also suggest a balance of positive and negative tags. You may consider using a similar process to creating an Adept's magic attack as detailed in the **Arcane Malice** move when creating a weapon to see what tags it has.

If there is a weapon not listed above that is appropriate in your setting, create it using the above guide as a reference point for roughly how weapons work.

Armor

Armor comes in two varieties. **LIGHT ARMOR** is anything that can be worn out in public without attracting attention — leather, padding, etc. It provides 1 Armor and can be concealed under clothing. There are no inherent tags, but you may consider positive tags such as **light** and **quiet** or negative tags such as **incomplete** or **worn**.

HEAVY ARMOR is a thick suit of armor. It looks like armor and you look like someone walking around ready for a fight if you are wearing it. It provides 2 Armor, but should have tags such as **heavy** and **conspicuous**.



Tags

Tags are words that describe the qualities of things. They give you permission to add things into the fiction. You do not *always* have to use tags, but you can use tags when appropriate. Here's an example, where Tom is playing a Gauntlet named M and Todd is the MC.

Todd: *"M, there is a brigand pointing a crossbow at you. What do you do?"*

Tom: *"M runs him through with his sword!"*

Todd: *"I don't know, M, he's a few paces away."*

Tom: *"My longsword has the tag close. How far away is he?"*

Todd: *"I forgot about how big that longsword you have is. Roll to Engage in Combat."*

Tom: *"I got a 10. I'm going to take 'fight with vigor.'"*

Todd: *"He gets in a few good hits, but your armor blocks them. M cuts the brigand nearly in two. Your weapon also has the messy tag. So he's a bloody heap, gurgling in front of you, and you are now covered in blood. Lord Issa is still expecting you in his audience room any minute. Are you just going to show up covered in gore? He won't be happy about that."*

In this example, the tags gave both Tom and Todd permission to do fictional things with the weapon. It gave Tom permission to hit someone who was a bit of distance from him. It gave Todd permission to say that M was covered in blood.

There is no definitive list of tags. You can come up with your own tags for the items you create. Below are some of the ones for gear that we think are important.



- † **Ap:** Armor piercing. This attack ignores Armor.
- † **Area:** this attack affects an area. If you are surrounded by three opponents, with a weapon tagged “area” you can say “I hit them all.” It’s useful for weapons you can swing in a circle, or weapons that create fire or explosions.
- † **Close:** someone can be out of your physical reach, but still must be within a couple paces to use this on them.
- † **Conspicuous:** you can’t hide this. Anyone who sees you knows you have it.
- † **Far:** someone can be many yards away from you, across a room, or even further, perhaps, and you can use this on them.
- † **Hand:** you can’t use this on someone unless you can reach out and touch them with your hand.
- † **Heavy:** this weighs you down. You’re probably making noise as you walk around with it and aren’t going to be doing any running or acrobatics.
- † **Incomplete:** there are holes in this, or pieces missing.
- † **Infinite:** you always have this on hand. You never need to find more or reload, and you never run out.
- † **Intimate:** you must be very, very close to the person you’re using this on.
- † **Light:** this doesn’t encumber you in any notable way.
- † **Loud:** you’re going to wake up the neighbors and draw attention when you use this.
- † **Messy:** there will be blood. Oh yes. There will be blood.
- † **Reload or refill:** after you’ve used this a handful of times, the MC can say that you need to reload before using it again.
- † **S Harm:** this will stun your opponent when you use it on them. They will be unable to act or severely limited in their actions for a short period of in-game time.
- † **Silent:** this can be used without a sound.
- † **Valuable:** this is worth a great deal were you to sell or trade it, and will impress people who see it.
- † **Worn:** this is used, old, and beat up.



Additionally, things *besides* gear can have tags, including Followers, Militias, and Steads. Here are some examples of what some of the tags for such groups may mean.

- † **Active:** There's always something interesting going on somewhere that has this tag.
- † **Crowded:** People are packed in. Things may get tense.
- † **Desperation:** The group may turn to extreme measures to meet their needs.
- † **Disease:** The group will have members who are sick and need medical attention or rest.
- † **Desertion:** The group may have members leave or abandon their station.
- † **Deviance:** The group in question gets up to all manner of unscrupulous things.
- † **Hungry:** People in the group are starving, and must dedicate time/energy to getting food.
- † **Idle:** The group faces boredom and may seek out less than savory ways to alleviate that.
- † **Industrious:** People are working, producing, building things, etc.
- † **Insight:** Members of the group may be called upon to provide guidance.
- † **Isolation:** The group is cut off, alone, lacking in avenues for social or economic connection.
- † **Judgment:** The group may be seeking to pin blame on someone for their problems or looking to punish someone who doesn't live up to their standards.
- † **Lively:** People are out and about, and things are fun, upbeat, and jovial.
- † **Loyal:** Members of the group feel a strong bond to someone.
- † **Obligation:** The group has a job they have to attend to.
- † **Growth:** The group may take actions to swell its ranks.
- † **Party:** This group knows how to have fun. They will draw people interested in getting drunk or rowdy to them.



- † **Reprisals:** There may be people who are angry at the group and seeking vengeance.
- † **Ritual:** The group conducts powerful and inspirational rituals of some kind.
- † **Savagery:** This group will be rowdy, pick fights, make noise, etc.
- † **Stupor:** The group is drunk, drugged, etc.
- † **Unruly:** This group doesn't like to follow orders, listen to authority, etc.
- † **Untrained:** This group may be willing to fight, but they aren't great at it and may be out maneuvered by trained warriors.
- † **Violence:** This group will seek to actively harm others.

Feel free to invent your own tags for things. They are merely descriptors that allow you to make things happen in the fiction, so whatever seems important for a particular thing might make an appropriate tag.

Other Gear

Tags are a useful tool for creating other kinds of gear. For example, if the Lyre has a lute as their instrument, perhaps it has **valuable** as one of its tags. If the Gauntlet's calling card is a long, red cape, perhaps they could give it the tags **intimidating** or **regal**. Don't feel that you have to assign *everything* tags — they are merely useful guidelines for how something might be used. If the Lyre's lute is **valuable**, it gives the MC permission to have people admire it wherever the Lyre goes. If the Spur has some rope and they say they want to climb a tower with it, the MC might say the rope has the tag **sturdy**. Through using tags, you can tease out what various things can and cannot be called upon to do or, how they can or cannot cause problems for people.



Advancement



Characters improve by earning *advancement points*. For every 5 advancement points a PC earns, they may take 1 *advancement* as detailed by their character class. When they choose one, they mark the advancement off, erase their advancement points,

and start the process over. If an advancement can be taken multiple times, there will be extra checkboxes next to it, indicating how many times it can be selected.



PCs earn advancement points in several ways:

- † *Rolling a Highlighted Stat (1 per scene per stat)*: At the beginning of each session, PCs will have two of their stats *highlighted*. The player asks the two players to their left and right to pick one stat for them to highlight. The *first time* a player rolls a highlighted stat in a scene, they mark one advancement point. If there aren't two other players, the MC can highlight a stat.
- † *Entanglements (1 per session)*: Each class features three *Entanglements*. At the start of each session, the MC will choose one of the three options. During the session, if your PC does what the highlighted option stipulates, the MC will give you an advancement point.
- † *Using an Honor Move (1 per session)*: A PC earns an advancement point the *first* time during a session that they trigger any of the Honor moves, **Do You Know Who I Am**, **Call On Your Faction**, or **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt**.
- † *Specific Moves (varies)*: Some moves give you advancement points when you trigger them.

There is a first tier of advancements available at the start of the game. You may increase one of your stats, take a new move for your character, gain a new Patron, etc.

Once you have reached your *sixth* advancement, you may start taking advancements from the second tier — some of which are more complicated.

When you select *create an additional PC*, you generate a new character that you will play *in addition* to your first character, meaning you will play two characters. People playing two PCs may not use the help or interfere move between their two characters. Additionally, we recommend creating a second PC that is not directly tied to your first character to keep things less complicated.

Another option is to *change your character to a different class*. This is a nice option if you think your character has evolved outside of their class. When you change your class, you lose anything about



your character directly related to your old class, such as any gear that no longer makes sense in your new path and any moves that would mark you as a specific type of character. You keep anything else, including your stats. This can be worked out on a case-by-case basis between you and the MC. Here are some guidelines:

- † You keep your name, your stats, gear, and any moves you have that represent knowledge that couldn't be taken away from you.
- † You *give up* any trappings or privileges of your class, including any kind of followers, special equipment, moves or gear that do not make sense with your new class, Patrons, etc.
- † You may change your Faction, if appropriate.

The Advanced Moves

Another advancement option is for PCs to “advance” the basic moves. This means that you gain access to *more powerful versions of the basic moves*. When taking these advancements, first select “advance three of the basic moves” from the tier two list. After that, you can take “advance the other four basic moves” for a subsequent advancement. When you select the first of those two options, note on your character sheet which of the seven basic moves you have advanced. When you advance a basic move, it unlocks a third kind of hit above a partial and full hit: an *advanced hit*. When you roll a 12 or higher on a move you have advanced, you get a greater affect. Advanced hits for each of the moves are below.

FACE DURESS: on a 12+, you have a moment of greatness. You fully achieve what you set out to do, and you and the MC may agree on a bonus effect, typically a bit of good fortune or additional appropriate flavor that can happen.



EXAMPLE:

*Y The Black Hood is trying to sneak up on a banker who is sleeping and steal his family's ornamental dagger. Y's player makes a **Face Duress** roll and gets a 13. Y's player says "how about I also notice a document sticking out from his drawer that lists his accomplices?" The MC agrees.*

THREATEN WITH FORCE: on a 12+, if your target is an NPC, they *have* to do what you want, and you may make an additional threat against them, if you want, as if you rolled a 10+. If your target is a PC, they still choose how they react to your threat but, if they are still there after you resolve it, you may make an additional threat against them as if you made a 10+.

EXAMPLE:

*Bastard The Gauntlet threatens an innkeeper, saying, "I'll put my sword through you if you don't tell me where Ulster is!" Bastard's player makes a **Threaten With Force** roll and gets a 12. The innkeeper immediately caves, saying "he's upstairs, second room on the left, with two guards!" Bastard then looks around the inn and says "If you know what's good for you, you'll head up there and tell him there's a message down here for him, then lead him out into the open." At this point, the MC can decide if the innkeeper does what Bastard says or not (because the second hit counts as a 10+).*

ENGAGE IN COMBAT: on a 12+, you pick selections as normal from the **Engage in Combat** list, plus pick one of the following:

- † The fight is over, on your terms. Detail.
- † Hold 1. Spend it at any time to have a person you encounter have heard stories of your prowess in combat.



EXAMPLE 1:

Dirge The Spur is fighting with two thieves she caught sneaking into her Militia's hideout. She rolls a 14 on Engage in Combat. Dirge picks her selections off the main list, and decides she wants the battle over. She says "How about one of them takes off running and the other is down for the count, bleeding and clutching their wound?" The MC agrees, and it happens.

EXAMPLE 2:

Dirge The Spur is fighting with two thieves she caught sneaking into her Militia's hideout. She rolls a 14 on Engage in Combat. Dirge picks her selections off the main list, and decides she wants to hold 1. Next session, when a rowdy NPC is threatening Dirge, she spends her hold. The MC says "Suddenly, he blanches, realizing who you are. 'Wait,' he says, 'you're that horse-rider who has been storming up and down the whole countryside!'" The MC may then choose to have the NPC back down, offer to hire Dirge based on what he's heard, beg to join her Militia, or whatever seems appropriate.

PERSUADE WITH LEVERAGE: on a 12+, you wrap your target around your finger. They are now your ally and you no longer have to make rolls against them to get them to do what you want, within reason. This can be undone if you are revealed to be obviously acting against them. It can be *redone* after that by another advanced hit on the same target.

Note that this only works on NPCs. If you make an advanced **Persuade With Leverage** hit on a PC, it works differently: the target *must* make an **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll with a -1 penalty if they want to avoid doing what you ask and there is no option to give the target an advancement point on an advanced hit.



EXAMPLE:

*Songbird The Lyre is trying to convince Flavia to tell her everything she knows from sitting on The Crown's council. Songbird says that she will write a song praising Flavia's beauty and perform it for the whole court if Flavia does it, and rolls a 12 on **Persuade With Leverage**. Flavia suddenly sees Songbird like she never has before. Songbird is so pure and beautiful, everything good and noble in the world. She spills everything she knows to Songbird, and adds "anything you need, anything at all, just let me know. Folks like us have to stick together..."*

STUDY A PERSON: on a 12+, after you ask your three questions, you may pick one of the following:

- † You may ask a **Study a Person** question of one of your target's allies who is present.
- † You may ask an additional question of your target, not limited to the **Study a Person** list.

EXAMPLE:

*Mattius The Adept is having a heated conversation with Zara, the head of his school. He is worried Zara is holding something from him, so Mattius makes a **Study a Person** roll and hits with a 12. After Mattius uses all three of his questions, becoming quite sure that Zara is conspiring against him, his player picks the first option above and says "Zara's crony, Star, standing behind her... What does she really want?"*

STUDY A SITUATION: on a 12+, you may ask any three questions you want about the situation, not limited to the list.



EXAMPLE:

*Grall The Bloodletter is trying to perform surgery on M, when three masked men enter their infirmary and demand that they stop and hand M over to them. It seems like things are going south, so Grall makes an advanced **Study a Situation** roll as they try to figure out what's going on, hitting with a 13. Grall looks at the **Study a Situation** questions, but decides they have different questions they want to ask. Grall asks, "Are those masks the same masks worn by the death cult at their ritual sacrifices?"*

WHISPERING INTO THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER: on a 12+, you whisper into the The Power, and The Power whispers into you. You see it all. Everything. *Every. Thing.*

End of Season Moves

The End of Season moves are designed to be bold, brutal, and dramatic. That being said, if your table doesn't want to use them, *you do not have to take them.*

When you pick "take an End of Season move" from the second tier of advancement, select *one* of the following four moves. We suggest you take one that highlights elements of your character that are likely to come into play. After that, follow the rules for whichever move you selected, allowing the fiction to dictate what is most compelling, appropriate, ironic, or glorious for your situation. The MC and you will work out the details of the move when you trigger it in the fiction.

May you earn what you deserve.



THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

Whenever your character experiences even a single moment of joy, tranquility, security, pride, or peace, make a notch. When you reach 3 notches, you die horribly as everything you hold dear comes crashing down around you. You are enveloped in a void so dark it's as if the night sky itself fell to the earth and covered up all you have ever known in a shroud of burning ashes. You and the MC will work out how. If the game continues, create a new character and start them with one free advancement.

SOW DISCORD, HARVEST BLOOD

Every time you hurt someone, physically, socially, or emotionally, make a notch. When you reach 3 notches, you face the reckoning. Those you love will suffer and die, undeservedly. Those you trust will betray you, laughing at your misery. As you have sowed discord, now you shall harvest blood. After it all goes down, if you live and the game continues, you may choose to retire your character to ceaseless misery and create a new character with one free advancement. Or you may press on, erase the notches, and start over. Will you ever reconsider your ways?

WORLD WEARY

Every time you are put into a situation where you must compromise your beliefs or your integrity for any reason, make a notch. When you hit three notches, set a tangible, significant goal for your character. You get +1 ongoing when you act towards that goal. When you achieve your goal, this life you lead no longer holds anything for you. Retire your character to safety. If the game continues, create a new character with one free advancement.



LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

Every time you perform some more than trivial act using The Un-speakable Power, especially something epic and/or bloody, make a notch. When you hit three notches, you and the MC together will choose one of the following:

- † The doors of reality crack and something horrible comes into your world, devouring you in the process. If the game continues, the MC will make a new Threat based on what slipped through, and you may create a new character with one free advancement.
- † Something enters you and burns your soul away. You're gone, but there is a new tenant in the building. Your character is now an NPC that *looks* like you but decidedly is *not* you. If the game continues, the MC will make a new Threat based on whatever is now wearing your face and flesh, and you may create a new character with one free advancement.
- † Something esoteric and beautiful entices you into a world far away. Describe it, in all its indescribable grandeur. Retire your character to safety. If the game continues, create a new character with one free advancement.

Like we said, we strongly suggest you take the End of Season for a spin at some point. Time is an ever-turning spiral — as some stories end, others begin.



Campaign Play

Once characters begin making advanced hits and using End of Season moves, it may be time to consider wrapping up your season. If you decide to come back and play a second season of your campaign, every player *may* choose to pick one of the following for their character:

- † Change their character's class (following the typical rules for doing so above).
- † Retire their character to safety/misery (whichever seems appropriate, you detail) and create a new one to play.
- † Let their character become an NPC and create a new character to play.



The Master of Ceremonies



The Master of Ceremonies, or MC, is the person who “plays the world,” effectively. These last two chapters are for the MC to read to know how to best run a game of SCUP.

The MC gets primary say over the events of the world (with input

from the other players), as well as controls the NPCs. Some of these NPCs will be *Threats*. For information on Threats, see the Threats chapter (222). This section details what the MC needs to know to play the game. If you are going to run a game full of danger, intrigue, and drama, you should follow the suggestions detailed in this section and understand all of the tools at your disposal.



The Responsibilities of the MC

Our view is that the MC is a player like any other in that they are playing the game to get something out of it. Having said that, the MC does have several responsibilities they take on which are different than the responsibilities of the PCs. Three unique responsibilities of the MC are: (1) *playing the world*, (2) *framing scenes*, and (3) *thinking about how it all connects*.

Playing the World

To be the MC is to have the greatest and final say in what happens in the fictional world of the game. This is not to say that the MC is the *only* player that gets a say, merely that they bear primary responsibility for this task. The MC gets to make decisions about things in the world the PCs inhabit including what the NPCs do and think, what people and places look like, what is going on when the PCs aren't around, what the weather is, what they layout of specific environments are like, etc. The MC doesn't have to make these decisions constantly, of course. Sometimes, the weather or the layout of a room might not be important, and can be left to the players' imaginations. Sometimes, the MC can invite the PCs into helping them decide what's going on in the world. But, ultimately, it is up to the MC to have the greatest authority in playing the world.

In this example of the MC playing the world — as well as ceding some authority to her players — Megan is the MC, Jenn is playing Amana, The Crown, and Todd and Tom are other PC players at the table.



Jenn: *“Now that I know that Hammond and Lynne are conspiring against me, I’m going to have a word with them — no one conspires against Amana and lives.”*

Megan: *“Where would you go to find them?”*

Jenn: *“I’m going to go to Hammond’s quarters. That’s where I suspect they are.”*

Megan: *“So when you arrive, the door is unlocked. What do you do?”*

Jenn: *“I storm right in.”*

Megan: *“You enter Hammond’s quarters. He likes to show off his family’s wealth, so the room is garishly opulent. Crimson tapstries hang from the walls, gilt decorations encircle the room, and an ornate carpet leads to a giant bed, which Lynne is lounging on. Hammond is sitting in a great chair, staring out the window...”*

Jenn: *“Can it be raining? I want it to be raining.”*

Megan: *“I like that. It’s cloudy and there’s a light drizzle. The light from the overcast sky plays on Hammond’s face. You clearly interrupted a conversation they were having. They both turn to look at you, surprised.”*

Todd: *“Is Lynne wearing Amana’s amulet that I stole for her?”*

Megan: *“Actually, no. You don’t see that. I mean, you know Lynne has that amulet, Amana, but she’s not wearing it.”*

Tom: *“Because I coaxed that information out of her.”*

Megan: *“Yes — she wasn’t happy about being threatened like that, last you heard. So you could hear them through the door before you entered, but as you walk in, they fall silent. Hammond stammers ‘what... what are you doing here, my Queen?’”*



Here, Megan assumes the responsibility of making decisions about where NPCs are, what they are doing, and what the setting looks like. She is open to taking advice from others: Jenn suggests it should be raining and Megan likes that detail, so she incorporates it. Todd asks if Lynne has the amulet he stole for her and Megan declines, perhaps because she is envisioning Lynne playing coy. Tom also interjects a bit of color about his character, which Megan briefly comments on before returning to the scene at hand. You see here how the MC *plays the world*. She has authority in thinking about and saying what the NPCs do and say, even when they are not on camera, and of describing situations and locations.

Framing Scenes

The MC has primary authority in scene framing — the MC gets to say where a scene is taking place, who is there, what NPCs are doing, what time it is, when the scene is over, etc. Just as with playing the world, other players should contribute, but the MC makes the final call. The MC can turn this authority over to the players as she sees fit — if the MC doesn't have any ideas for how a particular scene should begin, she could say “does anyone have a scene they'd like to have?” Conversely, the MC can use her authority in scene framing to say “Falcon, you're at the pub, and there's a rowdy party going on. You see some shady figures come in and start eyeing you nervously. What do you do?” We tend to encourage a collaborative mixture of the above approaches to scene framing. In this example, Megan is the MC and Tom is playing Falcon, The Spur.

Megan: *“Falcon, where would you be on a cold and rainy day?”*

Tom: *“Well, most likely I'd try to find Amana to cozy up to her, but last time I talked to her, she said she was going to go confront Hammond and Lynne. Oh, I know. I'd be at the Muddy*



Boot Inn. Falcon is worried about Amana, so he's going to go get drunk to take his mind off of it."

Megan: *"Sure! You walk in and the place is busy, but subdued. It seems a lot of folks might have just ducked in to get out of the rain. Baker looks up at you as you enter and she immediately starts pouring your usual drink with a half smile on her face. Before you have time to find a seat, though, you see that Lockheart is there. He notices you and begins drunkenly staggering your way, slurring 'oh, look who showed up, the captain of the guard. Not so tough without your thugs standing behind you, I bet?' He's clearly itching for a fight."*

Tom: *"Of course he is. This is going to get me in trouble, but it has been a long time. I'm going to oblige him. I draw my sword."*

Megan uses a collaborative approach that both takes and disclaims responsibility for scene framing. She begins by sharing responsibility for scene framing by asking Tom where Falcon would be. Then, Megan takes authority in framing the scene by describing what is going on at the pub where Falcon is and who is there. In this case, Megan decides that Lockheart is there and ready to start trouble.

Part of what it means to have authority in scene framing is that it falls on you to think about *why the scene is happening*. When you watch a compelling movie, there is often tight narrative efficiency — scenes have a purpose. They move the story forward in some way, or deepen your knowledge of what is happening. When you frame scenes, think about how the scene moves the fiction forward, what it reveals, or how it enriches the narrative.

The purpose of a scene doesn't always have to be big and dramatic. You can frame a scene to flesh out the relationship between two characters, to reveal an important piece of information, or to dangle something tempting in front of a PC. Each of these gives the scene direction and provides a reason that it is happening in the fiction.



Note, you are *not* writing a story as the MC — all players are playing to find out what happens. Drawing on the example above, the purpose shouldn't be “the scene where Falcon and Lockheart will get into a fight” because, *Falcon may decide he doesn't want the fight*. It's useful to frame scenes in an open-ended way, with what we might call a *decision point* in mind. Megan might wonder about the rising tension between Falcon and Lockheart and chose to frame a scene where Lockheart confronts Falcon and tries to force his hand. This sets up a decision point for Falcon: does he take the bait that Lockheart dangles in front of him and pick a fight, or resist it, trying to keep the peace?

Framing a scene with purpose helps to keep it from wandering. Without any direction to the interactions or decisions to be made by the PCs, scenes can get boring and the narrative thread of your game begins to go slack. You can avoid that by giving scenes a tight framing where you put your PCs in scenes with specific purposes or decision points that deepen or advance the narrative.

Thinking About How It All Connects

The PCs have a limited amount to focus on. They are predominantly concerned with their character and the elements of the fiction that are immediately related to them. The MC, though, has the responsibility of thinking about how everything connects. Where is your game going? What are the themes, narrative arcs, and climaxes of your story? As you game progresses, part of your job as the MC is to make these big picture connections that will give the story cohesion.

When possible, use elements of your story that already exist when you introduce new things into the fiction, as opposed to having things be too disparate. The danger in having too many disconnected elements in your story is that your game can start to feel like



a series of islands that the characters are occupying, with nothing relating them to each other. This makes it difficult to forge associations between the PCs that allow your players to interact with each other. While you want to make sure each PC has their own corner of the world to deal with that they have ownership over, having connections between them means that when something big happens in the fiction, it will affect everyone.

If one of your players is The Gauntlet, and they decide they work for the local noble family, and one of your players is The Lyre, and they make their living performing for the town's elite, giving The Lyre connections into the family The Gauntlet works for means that when something happens with one character, it can directly affect the other. This allows you to try and play the PCs off of each other or gives them reasons to ally with each other to achieve their goals.

Another big picture thing to think about is where things are going. In the Threats chapter (222) we talk about using *countdowns*. A countdown is a way to ramp up the danger of a situation as it progresses towards a problematic outcome for your PCs. They can always take action to *prevent* the outcome from happening, but you have a sense for how to push the fiction if you know the direction the Threat is moving in if the PCs don't intervene.

Megan is the MC for a game with Todd playing Rain, The Black Hood, Tom playing Falcon The Spur, and Jenn playing Amana, The Crown. NPCs Hammond and Lynne, two minor nobles, have been conspiring to overthrow Amana, and Megan has them hire Rain to help. Meanwhile, Falcon and Amana have started a relationship with each other, despite the fact that Amana's family would disapprove of her relationship with a commoner. To tie this all together, Megan may have Hammond and Lynne enlist Rain to spy on Falcon. If Rain finds out about the relationship,



Megan creates a countdown. If no one intervenes, she decides, Hammond and Lynne will go to Amana's family with their dirt on her and Falcon's relationship.

In this example, Megan finds ways to tie the characters together so that things that affect one of them can affect all of them, keeping a tight focus in their story. She is also thinking ahead, about where the game could go if no one intervenes. As Rain, Falcon, and Amana deal with the problems in front of them, Megan has given some directionality to their situation that will ramp up towards a climax unless someone steps in to stop it.

A FINAL NOTE: making sure you are focused on how everything connects doesn't mean you can't make the world *expansive*. In fact, you should make the world you're playing feel great and vast, if that's appropriate for your setting. We'll talk about how to make the world you're playing feel epic while still thinking about the overall big picture of your game later in this chapter.

To sum up, much of being the MC is fulfilling these three key responsibilities: playing the world, framing scenes, and thinking about the connections. To play the world with integrity, you have to be thinking about the connections. Thinking about the connections will help you in framing scenes that give direction to your narrative. As we mentioned, these responsibilities don't mean that the MC is the person solely in charge of the fiction of your game. You share telling the story with the PC players and you should make sure you give all the characters a chance to shine and to contribute to the story. You should not think these responsibilities mean that you are the PCs' enemy or antagonist. Rather, you are someone with a different set of expectations and tools than the other players who is working collaboratively with them to create something meaningful to all of you.



The MC's Agenda

Your responsibilities as the MC are complemented by your *agenda*, or your ultimate goals when you sit down to play a game. The MC's agenda is to:

- † Make the world feel epic and extraordinary.
- † Fill the player characters' lives with intrigue and drama.
- † And, most importantly, play to find out what happens.

What does it mean to *play to find out what happens*? It means that if you are the MC, you do not map out a dungeon and populate it with traps and monsters before sitting down to play and you do not make choices about what the PCs should do in advance. In this game, the fiction should be *emergent* — it should arise out of what happens when you are all assembled together, in play.

This doesn't mean that you cannot do any prep between games. You can think about the campaign and interesting people who might live in the world. You can ponder your Threats and ask yourself if they need to be modified in any way before the next session. Contemplate the motives of your NPCs. Brainstorm ideas for scenes that might kick off a session. We often arrive at the table to MC a game with some initial ideas in mind. You might sit down and say “hey Quinn, remember how you owed a favor to Reynaldo? Well he just stormed up to you in the street and he's looking to collect. What do you do?” Or, “Pax, you notice that two men have been following you. You keep catching them out of the corner of your eye. You think they saw you notice them, and now they're trying to disappear into a crowd. What do you do?”

Notice that neither of these examples are “plots.” They are *decision points*. You should not have presented either of these decision points with an idea mapped out of what happens *after* the player makes



their choice. You are presenting the character or characters with something they must react to.

Feel free to present decision points like this without knowing all the details behind them. Maybe you have *no idea* who the people following Pax are, you just decide that mysterious figures following Pax around would make sense given the things that she's been up to. As long as what you present to your characters is motivated by events within the fiction, it's fine to not have every detail worked out immediately. This way, the PCs can make real choices about how to interact with the world and be presented with the emergent consequences of their actions.

Playing to find out what happens is important because SCUP is a *high information* game. The PCs can **Study a Person** to learn that the Queen isn't who she says she is, or **Study a Situation** to figure out that there is a secret society pulling the strings behind the scenes. Then, they can **Face Duress** or **Engage in Combat** and kill the people who are making life difficult for them. If you have a big plot you've already written, you rob your characters of the ability to use the powerful, narrative-shaping tools at their disposal to gather information and use it to affect your fictional world. What's more, you rob *yourself* of the joy that comes from being surprised by what your PCs do and having to react to it in the moment.

The MC's agenda is also to *make the world feel epic and extraordinary and fill the player characters' lives with intrigue and drama*. It's your job to make the setting feel massive, dangerous, and dramatic. While your primary focus should *always* be the PCs, there should be things happening in the world that will affect them. One way to make them feel important is to have big things happen to them: rulers target them, shadowy organizations ensnare them, supernatural creatures entice them. As the MC, you should always be looking around



the table and asking yourself “how are these people at the center of the world in our epic story?”

You should make epic things happen whether your PCs are high and mighty or lowly and common. The PCs are the focus of your story regardless of who they are, and you should be thinking about how things affect them, how they see the world, and what their needs and desires are. If the local NPC lord makes an important decree, it should affect the PCs in some way, forcing them to make decisions. If there’s a war going on somewhere on the other side of the realm, then ask how that creates situations for the PCs to deal with where they are.

NPCs

Here’s the quick and dirty steps to create an NPC — read on for more detail.

- † If you don’t have many, create one — otherwise try to use one you’ve already established.
- † Give them a name and something that sticks out to the PCs when they meet them.
- † Think about how they might fit into the fiction, what their motivations and goals might be.

NPCs are your primary mechanism to interact with the PCs and you should create them as the fiction requires. Think of what is going on in the scene and why you might need a character, either an existing one or a new one. Give every notable NPC a name, and think of something interesting the characters might notice about them when they are around. Do they have a quirk? Do they know someone important? Where do they exist in this strange world you’ve created? Give them a personality, motivations, desires, goals, a purpose for being there, etc. Make them daring, charming, seduc-



tive, mean, jovial, whatever. Base them on someone you know or a favorite character from a book or movie if you need a quick bit of inspiration. Most importantly, *pay attention to how the PCs interact with them*. Compelling NPCs often have inauspicious beginnings, but spring to life when a PC suddenly takes an interest in them. Don't squander that. You now have a golden opportunity to get that player's attention.

One key way of reincorporating NPCs is to set up triangles between two PCs and an NPC, as detailed in *Apocalypse World*. Look for connections between characters — when you see an opportunity to put an NPC between two PCs in some way, take it. When you see two NPCs that can make competing demands on a PC, do it. In the scenario below, Todd is the MC, Tom is playing Fist, The Gauntlet, and Megan is playing Lamb, The Beloved. Watch how Todd uses NPCs to create intrigue and drama for the players.

Todd: *“Fist, you’re standing there, covered in blood. The whole market is staring at you. You just killed two people in the middle of the street. Folks around here aren’t used to the King’s muscle coming to the East District.”*

Tom: *“I turn, sweeping my eyes over the crowd, and loudly announce ‘do you all see what happens if you defy our Liege? You taste my steel!’”*

Todd: *“People are cowering from you. All except one — there’s a woman there, she sells dates and figs from a stand. She’s got a slight smile on her face and is leaning forward to get a better look.”*

Tom: *“Do I know her?”*

Todd: *“Her name is Zadkat. She’s kind of a minor local celebrity. Sells her wares in the market, sings at night down at the tavern. Real nice voice. Everyone knows her.”*



Tom: *“Fist actually recoils a little bit when he sees her.”*

Todd: *“That’s interesting. Why’s that?”*

Tom: *“Fist kind of has a thing for her. He’s seen her sing. Suddenly he’s a bit ashamed of what he’s done, all the blood he just spilled in front her. He sort of nods sheepishly to her, then gathers himself up and leaves.”*

Todd: *“You feel her watch you as you stride out of the market, the crowd parting around you.”*

(Some time passes in game.)

Todd: *“So Lamb, you’re in your infirmary.”*

Megan: *“It’s where I go to be alone. Lamb likes to be alone.”*

Todd: *“Who knows about this place? Anyone? Maybe one person?”*

Megan: *“Yes, she needs a partner for all her experiments.”*

Todd: *(Looking at his list of NPCs.) “I think Zadkat helps you find the folks who do experiments on. After all, she knows people, and she’s not afraid of blood.”*

Megan: *“Also, she and I are lovers.”*

Todd: *“How long has that been going on?”*

Megan: *“Forever. We’re both from the East District. We both grew up rough and we were friends when we were young and then became lovers when we were teenagers. We keep it secret, though. We have ambitions together, and don’t like folks in our business.”*

Todd: *“So Zadkat is interested in you because you’ve got connections to the royal family, then?”*

Megan: *“Definitely. She sees me as her meal ticket, and I know*



it. I'm her connection to the nobility, and she is discrete with my experiments."

Todd: *"So tell me a little bit about how Zadkat procures subjects for you?"*

In this example, Todd created an NPC on the fly, Zadkat, to give a little bit of spark to the scene. Tom said that Fist had feelings for her, and Todd played along. Todd then reincorporated her later with Megan, giving Zadkat and Lamb a connection. Megan built on that connection to suggest the two are lovers, leading Todd to ask a further question. This sets up the opportunity to pit Lamb and Fist against each other, or entangle them somehow. Perhaps Zadkat plays them both? Perhaps Zadkat manipulates Fist to help her procure subjects for Lamb's experiments. Maybe Lamb and Zadkat see Fist as yet another inroad into getting closer to the King. However it plays out, it represents an NPC being reincorporated to connect two PCs together. Look for situations where you can create webs like this between the players that will help create big, dramatic moments and decisions down the line.

Let's look at some final examples to flesh out the MC's agenda and use of NPCs in action. In this scenario, Joe is the MC, Jenn is playing Anna, The Crown, and Scott is playing Jawbone, The Lyre.

Joe: *"Anna, you're sitting at the head of the long table, presiding over your council. On either side of the table, the various members of the council look at you with the usual mixture of admiration and fear that people regard you with. Things are going normally, when your advisor Ogen slams his fist on the table and says 'Anna, my Queen, I apologize for speaking out of turn, but I must know — the Sorcerer's Campaign draws closer to our borders. Even now they push on the capital. And yet we have not*



spoken of these matters at all!’ The whole council turns towards you. What do you do?”

Jenn: *“I shoot him a cool glance. ‘Ogen, our city has always had an alliance with the wizards of the Tower, even as their relationship has deteriorated with the capital. I see no reason to...”*

Joe: *“He interrupts you. ‘My Queen, you really believe that those fanatics will...”*

Jenn: *“Wow, interrupting me is not okay. I stand and raise my voice. ‘Ogen, if you think it is appropriate to question my wisdom and judgment, perhaps you need to be reminded what your station is.’ My hand drops to my sword as I say it.”*

Joe: *“Are you Threatening With Force?”*

Jenn: *“Definitely. I will draw my royal sword and take off his arm if he doesn’t apologize and back down.”*

Joe: *“Okay, roll it!”*

(Time passes in game.)

Joe: *“Jawbone, you’re playing at the Muddy Boot Inn, your usual haunt. It’s a particularly crowded night. The patrons seem uneasy, too.”*

Scott: *“I’m going to Study a Situation. I got an 8 — What am I missing?”*

Joe: *“You notice a lot of the folks are wearing clothing from the west. They’re refugees fleeing the Sorcerer’s Campaign.”*

Scott: *“That’s going to cause some tension.”*

Joe: *“Just as you think that, a fight breaks out between a local and a refugee. Two of the Queensguard who are drinking here break it up quickly, but one of them turns to you and, with a*



smirk, shouts ‘singer, perhaps you should play a patriotic song? The kind that reminds people where they are!’ You’re not stupid. You know if you sing some local hero’s ballad, there’s going to be a riot as folks turn against the refugees. What do you do?”

Scott: *“I don’t want to be responsible for a riot, especially when Jawbone is from the west himself. I want everyone to turn against the Queen, instead. I’m going to try to rally folks together, maybe sing a song about the people rising against the powers that be. I’m going to roll **Vox Populi**. Can I take a +1 from my **Study a Situation** roll?”*

Joe: *“Absolutely, roll it.”*

In this example, there is a big event going on the realm: a war between the capital and a cadre of magic users. The war on the other side of the kingdom *directly affects both player characters*, despite one of them being high status and one of them being common. For Anna, The Crown, the war forced her to face challenges to her rule. For Jawbone, The Lyre, the war forced him to make decisions about how to deal with a rowdy and divided crowd. This brings both characters into the mythos of the world. Joe framed these scenes to provide the players with decision points about where they stand in relation to the war. Additionally, both situations allowed the characters to play to their strengths as a class. The Crown got to be commanding and authoritative, while The Lyre got to rally people using his music. Play towards your agenda by looking for opportunities to create these kinds of situations using the NPCs at your disposal.



MC Moves

Another way to play towards your agenda are MC *moves*. Instead of rolling dice, you *make moves* using NPCs to affect the players. You should use an MC move:

- † When a player misses a roll.
- † When they give you an opening to mess with them.
- † When it would be too good to pass up.
- † When there is a lull in the game and there is an appropriate move to fill it.

Those four situations are arranged from hardest to softest in terms of how rough the move you make against them is. A *hard move* is something that hurts the players physically, mentally, or emotionally. It is something that can't be undone. Stabbing someone, taking something from them, hurting someone they care about, forcing them to make a hard choice, or having someone betray them are all examples of hard moves.

A *soft move*, on the other hand, hints at a harder move in the future. The player might still change course and avoid future problems. Soft moves might include giving them word of a rumor about them, having someone make a threat to them, separating them from a friend they were with, or presenting them with a costly proposition. Maybe a PC gives you a perfect opening to mess with them, so you decide to make a soft move. An NPC they are arguing with backs them into a corner as your soft move. After that, the PC fails an **Engage in Combat** roll to try to fight their way out. *Then* you deal damage to them as your hard move.



HERE ARE THE BASIC MOVES THAT THE MC CAN GENERALLY MAKE AGAINST PCS:

- † Threaten them directly.
- † Give them word of whisperings behind their back.
- † Deal Harm to them.
- † Force them to pay.
- † Offer them an opportunity; perhaps show them the cost if they refuse.
- † Back them into a corner, literally or figuratively.
- † Inflict consequences on another because of their deeds.
- † Show them the downsides of their character class.
- † Align a Faction's agenda against them.
- † Separate them from their allies.
- † Surround them with their enemies.
- † Hint at an unwelcome future.
- † Disgrace them, privately or publicly.

In the example below, Tom is the MC, Marnie is playing a Black Hood named Ulster, and Longtooth is an NPC.

Tom: *"So you want to sneak into Queen Verona's chambers?"*

Marnie: *"Yep! I'm going to try and swipe her scepter. That'll show her."*

Tom: *"That's definitely possible, but not if you bring Longtooth."*

Marnie: *"I figured — she's a bit conspicuous. I'll turn to her and tell her to wait in the courtyard, hiding in the bushes. I'll come back and find her later."*

(Tom decides this is a good opening for a softer move, so picks "separate them from their allies.")

Tom: *"As soon as you leave Longtooth, some folks you recognize from Verona's court come strolling through the garden. Now*



they're standing directly between you and Longtooth, and you can't even see her anymore. What do you do?"

Marnie: *"I was going to leave Longtooth anyway, so hopefully they're gone when I get back. I'll stick with the plan. I'm going to sneak through a window and then into the Queen's chambers."*

Tom: *"There are lots of guards around. Why don't you make a Face Duress roll to get past them."*

Marnie: *"Oh no! I rolled a 5."*

(Tom can now make a hard move in reaction to a missed roll. He notices "inflict consequences on another because of their deeds," which was set up nicely by the soft move of separating Ulster and Longtooth.)

Tom: *"You're making your way towards the Queen's room when a ruckus emerges from outside. You peer out the window and see that some guards have caught Longtooth. One of them says 'I know you're here with that thief friend of yours. Where is she, witch?' He puts a sword right to her throat. Longtooth looks terrified. You can see other guards scattering to find you. What do you do?"*

Marnie: *"I want to vanish into the bushes. Hopefully I can get to Longtooth before anyone sees me. I'm going to roll Like a Shadow in the Darkness. And... a 6. I cannot catch a break."*

(Tom looks down at his moves list again. It's time to deal Ulster harm directly.)

Tom: *"You dive into the bushes and begin sneaking towards Longtooth but one of the guards sees you and plunges his spear into the bush where you're skulking. It catches you in the leg. Your leather armor blocks 1, so take 1 Harm, and make a When You Take Harm roll."*



Tom first made a relatively soft move when Ulster gave him the chance, which was to separate Ulster and Longtooth. On the missed roll, he made a hard move, having Longtooth get captured. This move was hinted at by the first move he made, which then snowballed into the harder move. Finally, when Marnie missed a second roll, Tom made another hard move against Ulster, this time having her get caught and damaged by a guard's attack. Tom doesn't always directly attack the PC. He first set up future problems for Ulster when the chance was available, then made a move against her companion, then finally took action directly against her.

Additionally, when you are the MC, describe what happens when you execute your move — don't say the name of your move. When a player misses a roll, don't say "I am going to surround you with enemies." Pick that move and then say "you swing your sword mightily, but connect with nothing, and the commotion attracts more of the city guard. You realize that ten of them are now forming a circle around you. What do you do?" Finally, think about switching up the moves you use. In the above example, Tom uses different kinds of moves to affect Ulster, not just moves that directly attack her. Make an unexpected move sometimes — using a surprising move can really shake up a situation and keep your PCs on their toes.

Unspeakable Power MC Moves

In addition to the basic MC moves, there are MC moves for using *The Unspeakable Power*. While you decide what The Unspeakable Power is in your story (i.e. the ability to harness the power of dreams, a blessing from the gods, the green light that glows in the recesses of the cave near the city, etc.), there are certain rules to *how* The Unspeakable Power works. In every setting, it is *conscious and it has an agenda*.



These moves highlight that The Unspeakable Power is *dangerous*. Using The Unspeakable Power shouldn't be as simple as snapping your fingers and having something happen. It exacts a cost on its user, even as it gives them fantastic abilities. As such, people who consistently call on it should begin to face costs for meddling in what is beyond the ken of mere mortals. *That's* when you use The Unspeakable Power MC moves.

These moves should be deployed predominantly against magic users who draw on The Unspeakable Power as part of their character class, but can also occasionally be wielded against non-magic using characters who try **Whispering Into The Unspeakable Power** one too many times. These should be used more sparingly than the basic MC moves, but can provide some extra color for a campaign as well as give your world a supernatural flavor. Because The Unspeakable Power is *conscious* and *personal*, with desires and wants, it probably has some way of communicating its agenda. You can use these moves to put that into the fiction, fleshing out The Unspeakable Power out and making it a character in your game.

THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER MC MOVES ARE:

- † Offer them power at a terrible cost.
- † Give them what they *think* they want.
- † Make a demand of them, set a price on failure.
- † Reveal to them the depths of their ignorance.
- † Seduce them with promises of hedonistic pleasure.



Here's an example of how to use one of these moves. In this example, Timo is the MC and Rob is playing Theresa the Adept.

Timo: *"Theresa, you said that you wanted to impress Ayabeth, so you could get in good with her Lord?"*

Rob: *"Yeah, as Ayabeth is making preparations for the feast tonight, I'm going to use my magic to decorate the room, making it look incredibly opulent. I want her to see it."*

Timo: *"She's easy to find right now. She's overseeing the preparations for the feast, running around the room making sure everything is in order."*

Rob: *"I confidently stride up to her and say 'you look like you could use a hand, friend,' then I rub my hands together to start the spell. I'm going to deck out the room in all kinds of finery."*

Timo: *"She seems a bit irritated when you approach her, but takes an interest when it's clear you're going to use your magic. Roll Harness The Unspeakable Power."*

Rob: *"I rolled a 6. A miss."*

(Timo glances at the MC moves for using The Unspeakable Power and settles on "make a demand of them, set a price on failure.")

Timo: *"Theresa, you hear the voice of the dark god Vincus, as if he is whispering in your ear. He hisses 'I do not like being disturbed for the frivolity of mortals, pet...'"*

Rob: *"I think 'My king, I do this all for you. I am trying to impress her royal highness so that I may exalt your glory to her.'"*

Timo: *"There's a long pause, and you get the uneasy feeling in your stomach that happens when Vincus ponders something. 'I grant you the power you seek, pet. But pray that your groveling works, for before the next rainfall you will convince her"*



highness that war with the Eastern Province is in her best interest.’”

Rob: *“I guess I have no choice. I think ‘Yes, King Vincus. It will be done.’”*

Timo: *“You can feel Vincus withdrawing from you. As he does so, he whispers ‘Fail, pet, and I will take Adorna from you, as I have promised I would.’ With that, he’s gone, and the room erupts in golden splendor. Ayabeth’s jaw drops and she looks at you and shouts ‘this is amazing, Theresa! I will inform her highness at once about what you’ve done!’”*

Rob: *“I nod, weakly. I hope I can pull this off...”*

In this example, Rob’s missed roll results in the personification of magic, the dark god Vincus, arriving to give Theresa an ultimatum. As a different example, Timo could have picked “reveal to them the depths of their ignorance” and had the spell go wildly wrong, destroying the room or hurting someone because Theresa was drawing on too great a power, or picked “give them what they *think* they want” and had the effect of the spell create unintended consequences for Theresa. Whatever you pick, you are revealing the influence that magic has in your world, the cost for using it, and how the personification of magic reveals itself to those who meddle with it.

Status Based MC Moves

Finally, there are MC moves that relate to different character statuses: *elite* and *common*. Some characters in your game are *elite* — noble, powerful, or privileged in some way. Other characters are *common* — lacking in prestige, status, or titles. The Crown is always going to be an elite character. Anyone who works directly for The Crown probably will be, as well. Characters without access to institutional or official power should be considered common.



Let's say you had a game with three PCs: a Gauntlet, who works for the local baron, a Beloved, who is seen by the townsfolk as a prophet, and a Lyre, who performs at the town's dive tavern. In this setting, the Gauntlet is elite because they work for the baron. The Lyre is common, because they hang around with ordinary folk and have no access to institutional power. The Beloved could go either way, depending on the circumstances. Is the church highly respected in this town? Do prophets occupy a privileged position? Then count the Beloved as elite. Conversely, is The Beloved on the outside of the temple walls, speaking truth to power? Then perhaps count The Beloved as common.

The reason this distinction is important is because power shapes your characters' lives. Being *elite* or *common* comes with very different experiences, benefits, and challenges, and the players in your game need to reconcile these differences.

MC MOVES FOR ELITE CHARACTERS:

- † Force them to wield their power or fulfill their duties.
- † Remind them how far they have to fall.
- † Hint at vast conspiracies against them.
- † Challenge them with uprisings and revolts from those beneath them.
- † Repudiate their position with ignominy and insubordination.

MC MOVES FOR COMMON CHARACTERS:

- † Subtly remind them of their station or lot in life.
- † Demonstrate to them how much they stand to gain.
- † Ensnare them, unwittingly, in the machinations of power.
- † Crush them with debt or obligations to those who have everything.
- † Put them in their place with degradation or humiliation.



The above moves are how you make power feel real and vital in your game. It may be worth looking to some of these moves *first*, before your regular set of MC moves. The cost of privilege is having to constantly fight to maintain your status. The Crown only keeps their place on the throne by wielding their power, keeping people afraid or awed. This can take a toll on them — they may become paranoid or fearful of what would happen to them if they lost it all. Maybe they begin to jump at shadows and even the most minor slight may feel like a great affront. Then heads start to roll. Use the MC moves for elite characters to push towards those situations. Make them claw and roar and wrestle to stay on top of the pile. Make them stomp on the hands of every single soul who tries to climb up to where they are. Make them shoulder the burdens of power until their gilded crown weighs on their skull like a stone and their royal chamber feels like a prison cell.

For commoners, use your MC moves to show them how it feels to see that glorious marble tower, glistening against the red sky, with all those guards and their shiny, shiny spears in front of it. What must go on in there? Feasts and orgies, the likes of which folks like them will never know. When they dare to take just the smallest peek at the good life to see what it's like, those well-fed fools laugh and slam the door in their face. It's enough to make someone want to grab a torch and burn that tower to the ground, isn't it? *That's exactly the idea.* Use the MC moves to make commoners feel the great indignities of an unfair system that they find themselves at the bottom of. If they try to climb the ladder, make them fight for every inch, always aware that someone above them can just push the ladder over from on high and send them tumbling back down into the mire below. Crush them under the weight of systemic inequality so they have every reason be driven by a righteous indignation at the evils of the world.



Here are two examples that show the status based MC moves in action. In the first example, Todd is the MC and Jenn is playing Pax, The Voice.

Todd: *“Something is off with the Queen’s council, today, Pax. Everyone is less chatty than usual, and they’re all avoiding eye contact with you.”*

Jenn: *“That seems ominous. I’ll go ahead and **Study a Situation**. I got a 5.”*

(Todd scans his MC moves and his eyes fall on “force them to wield their power or fulfill their duties” from the elite list.)

Todd: *“Pax, the Queen turns to you and says ‘finally, there is the matter of your friendship with Haze, the witch.’”*

Jenn: *“I say ‘your highness, what of it? I haven’t seen her in so long...’”*

Todd: *“She leans towards you imperiously and states ‘yes, and that is why I’m sure it won’t cause you any discomfort to arrange for her to be killed. She has become quite the thorn in my side.’”*

Jenn: *“I... did not expect that. I nod my head.”*

Todd: *“She stands up and walks around the table so she is hovering over you, blocking out the light from the window. You are consumed by her shadow. ‘You would not let any feelings for the witch get in the way of your loyalty to me, would you, Pax?’ All the eyes of the council turn towards you.”*

Jenn: *“I couldn’t bring myself to hurt Haze, but I definitely can’t say that. I stammer ‘of course, my queen. It will be done.’ I’ll need to figure out how to get out of this.”*

In this example, Jenn fails a roll so Todd has the Queen call on Pax to fulfill her duty as a member of her inner circle. Elite moves



should be used in this way: to make the pain of obligation and propriety cut deeply, while also showing them what they stand to lose if they fail.

In this example, Eric is the MC and Megan is playing Meadow, The Lyre.

Eric: *“How do you feel about being a servant at a fancy party like this?”*

Megan: *“I hate these people, I’d rather be signing in the bar, but it pays the bills. It might be worth it to listen in on some sweet gossip. I want to try and hear something interesting as I wander around.”*

(Eric decides this is a good opening to mess with Meadow with a soft move. He scans the common list and notices “put them in their place with degradation or humiliation.”)

Eric: *“As you lean in on a conversation someone says, just loud enough so you can hear, ‘that low-class bar wench’s singing is the only thing worse than her service....’ They shoot sideways, taunting glances at you as they do it.”*

Megan: *“Well, someone’s getting stabbed tonight. I don’t care if Asdel got me this job. The noble who said that is going to get it.”*

Eric sets up a troubling situation for Meadow by reminding her what the people in the nobility think of folks like her. Use these MC moves to highlight the inequity between common characters and privileged ones. Eric gives Meadow a nudge with a soft move to set things up — does she suffer the indignity, or do something about what’s being said about her?



The Principles

MC *principles* are the things that you should keep in mind as you play the game. When you're stuck on what to do, refer to these principles for guidance and inspiration.

- † Address the characters, not the players.
- † Make your move, but never speak its name.
- † Alliances shift like sands. See treachery all around.
- † Remember that power corrupts, duty calls, and subordination crushes.
- † Give every NPC a desire and aim those desires at the PCs.
- † Don't give anything away for free.
- † Ask big questions of the players and use them to spin webs.
- † Think broadly — what else is happening that may affect the players?
- † Give the PCs reasons to both love and hate the NPCs.
- † Sometimes, disclaim decision-making.
- † Be a fan of the PCs.
- † Even as you are cruel and calculating, remember that it's a game, with real people at the table.

ADDRESS YOURSELF TO THE CHARACTERS, NOT THE PLAYERS.

If Tom is playing a character named Fist, and you're the MC of the game, never say "Tom, what do you do?" Instead, say "Fist, what do you do?" You want the players to be in their character's skin. You help them to do this when you call them by name.

MAKE YOUR MOVE, BUT NEVER SPEAK ITS NAME.

You pick moves from a list as an MC, but — to give the fiction some integrity — don't say what you're doing. Just do it. Pick your move, then put it in the fiction without highlighting the behind the scenes mechanics.



**ALLIANCES SHIFT LIKE SANDS.
SEE TREACHERY EVERYWHERE.**

Part of your job as the MC is to see the webs of connection between the characters. When ambitious folks want power, or money, or security, they will use anyone around to get it. When those people become useless, they discard them. Have your NPCs constantly sizing up the PCs for what they can get from them, then looking for ways to double-cross them when the opportunity arises.

GIVE EVERY NPC A DESIRE, AIM THEM AT THE PCS.

Give everyone something that drives them. Switch them up, as well. Everyone doesn't have to want money or dominance. Some want to be loved. Some want to be protected. Some want adventure. In a game about intrigue and power, people have to want things — and it helps if they see the PCs as people who can help them or, conversely, as people who are standing in their way.

DON'T GIVE AWAY ANYTHING FOR FREE.

Everything comes with a price. When an NPC looks at a PC, imagine the mental calculations they're doing in their head. If you really think that's not how this NPC would think, remember that the cost doesn't have to come from *them*. If Sasha loves Twill, maybe she truly *doesn't* want anything from Twill. But maybe Asdel loves Sasha, and Sasha's love for Twill means that Asdel will do anything they can to take Twill out of the picture. So Sasha's love actually *does* have a cost. Everything has a price — if not today, then tomorrow.

**ASK BIG QUESTIONS OF THE PLAYERS
AND USE THEM TO SPIN WEBS.**

Ask questions, *always*. It gives you material to use and gives your players reasons to get involved in their characters as they think about



who they are and what they want. Use their answers to your questions to spin webs: connect them to other characters, entrap them in their own dealings, etc.

THINK BROADLY — WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING THAT MAY AFFECT THE PLAYERS?

Where else are there things in this world that you can bring into the game? What from the mythology you created (137) may apply? While you should remain focused on the characters and their immediate circumstances, don't let that focus *limit* you to thinking small. Think across space and time, even as you focus on the local. What else, from other places in the world, comes to bear on the immediate situation?

BE A FAN OF THE PCS.

Being a fan of the PCs is essential. It doesn't mean you are *easy* on them, it means you give them opportunities to do what they are good at. When a player designs a character with specific abilities, they *want* to be put in situations where they can use those abilities. Give them opportunities to do so. Think of yourself as putting them in difficult situations because watching them work their way through them is what makes you want to come back to these characters over and over, just like how you watch your favorite TV show over and over again so you can see the characters do the cool stuff they do.

GIVE THE PCS REASONS TO BOTH LOVE AND HATE NPCs.

This game needs its players to be emotionally invested in their characters. That means they need NPCs to love and hate. Give them someone to fall in love with, then put someone between them. Give



them noble leaders who inspire them and villains who make them want to scream. As often as you can, give them NPCs who fulfill both roles simultaneously. People they hate to love or love to hate. This means making the NPCs feel like real people by naming them, giving them desires, and aiming them at the characters.

SOMETIMES DISCLAIM DECISION-MAKING.

Every so often, ask your players, “so then what happens?” It’s their game, too.

EVEN AS YOU ARE CRUEL AND CALCULATING, REMEMBER THAT IT’S A GAME, WITH REAL PEOPLE AT THE TABLE.

In a game like this, it can be easy to go full on sadist. Remember that you are playing a game with real people who have real feelings and experiences. This may mean thinking about what the “rating” of your game is beforehand, such as how much sex and violence will be “on camera.” It may mean having a discussion about tools to use for player safety, such as lines and veils or the X card (see the Appendix on Safety, 269). It may mean avoiding things that would make players uncomfortable or treating them with the weight and seriousness your player wants you to treat them with.

We designed this game to be rough. We hope you play a nasty, brutish, blood opera. We also hope that you do it in such a way that your players leave happy, not feeling exploited or violated. That means knowing people’s limits, concerns, and needs and respecting them to the best of your ability. Even if you are playing this game with people you know well, it is worth checking in on these issues before you start to play. You won’t do it perfectly all the time, and that’s okay. You should still try. Once again, see the Appendix on Safety at the end of the book for more discussion of this.



Tips for MCing Classes

Each character class a PC plays comes with different challenges for the MC. This section will help you run the game for the different classes. The key thing to remember is that all the character classes are *powerful* in some way — physically, socially, supernaturally — and their power should always come with *costs and consequences*. They should reap what they sow.

THE ADEPT

Ask yourself “what does it mean to be a magic user in our world?” Is magic use forbidden or common? Is it celebrated or feared? Controlled by elites, or practiced only by outcasts? This will shape how you approach The Adept. In a world where magic users are celebrated or connected to power, The Adept may hold a coveted position. People may seek them out for advice, assistance, and blessings. What is an elite Adept called upon to do? Are there those who covet their power? Who want to use the Adept’s power for their own ends? Conversely, if magic is frowned upon or forbidden, think about how this would shape The Adept’s life. Do they have to hide their power? Do people try to find magic users to persecute them? Who knows about their magic use? Additionally, think about what The Unspeakable Power demands of magic users in your world. How costly is the power and how does it extract that cost?

THE BELOVED

The Beloved has a special relationship to The Unspeakable Power. Invite your player to flesh that out with you. Was The Beloved chosen by *It* to be their emissary in the world? What does *It* want from them? How do they assist with *Its* agenda? The Beloved gives you a great deal of leeway to have The Unspeakable Power in your



world have a personality so think about the cost of the supernatural in your world. Have *It* talk to The Beloved and make requests of them. Show their relationship in action. Additionally, think about how religion operates in your world, and where The Beloved fits in. Are they a priest in an established church, leading people in mainstream worship, or are they a sectarian prophet, challenging the prevailing beliefs in your society? Asking questions like these will help you to think about how The Beloved sits at the intersection of religion and magic.

THE BLACK HOOD

Make sure you have an idea of what direction your player is interested in going in with their character — maybe a selfish thief, a swashbuckling rogue, or a shadowy assassin. This will tell you what kind of challenges to throw at them. It will also give form to the society or guild they are a part of. A thief may work for a guild, while a more dashing character may be part of a movement that seeks to overthrow the rich. An assassin provides you with an opportunity to introduce a secret society with an agenda that involves dirty deeds. Having The Black Hood at your table invites you to think about the underworld of your setting. What is the criminal element like? Who lives beneath the streets, preying on those above, and why? Players may want a secret identity — operating in the shadows at night, while living a normal life during the day — this gives you an opening to have their normal life collide with their nocturnal doings.

THE BLOODLETTER

If your Bloodletter is a noble healer, plying their trade in a genuine desire to help others, you could give them someone powerful to take care of. Does the king need them to keep his dear mother alive? Does another PC have someone who could use The Bloodletter's



services? If this is the case, consider looking for ways to complicate the situation. If the king's mother takes a turn for the worse, what might he demand The Bloodletter do? If your Bloodletter is less savory, perhaps a scheming scientist meddling in arcane surgeries or trying to create life from terrible experiments, consider having them be hunted, perhaps by another PC. Is there a Gauntlet at your table? Task them with tracking down this deviant doctor whom rumors swirl around. This gives you the chance to constantly tighten the screws on The Bloodletter, always forcing them to stay on their toes.

THE CROWN

The Crown lives a life of luxury, but that luxury comes at the cost of obligation and exposure. Everyone knows them and everyone covets what they have. Make them fight to keep it. The Crown should always be in someone's crosshairs. Characters should constantly be coming to them to demand things, as well as trying to undermine them. The Crown is also a good character for connecting other PCs. Someone at the table can easily have The Crown as their Patron, and almost any PC would have a reason to get mixed up with The Crown, so they tend to be a nice character to use to build bridges between different parts of your game. Finally, does your Crown have the move **Commander of the Guard**? If so, they are the one who leads their army in battle. Give them an outside threat to deal with so they are forced to shoulder that burden. Conversely, if they *don't* have **Commander of the Guard**, who runs their military and how loyal is that person to them? Without that move you, as the MC, have the leeway to decide what happens with their military.

THE GAUNTLET

The Gauntlet's stock and trade is violence, and you should give them ample opportunity to show off how powerful they are. More



importantly, The Gauntlet *works for someone* who should be tasking them with committing such acts. This gives you the occasion to make the violence costly to The Gauntlet. Order them to commit acts of viciousness that may target people they know, need, or care about. Always consider what the ripple effects of violence are for The Gauntlet. Confront them with the blowback from their deeds. To be one who deals in violence is to be at the center of a messy, heart-breaking world.

THE HEX

The Hex's power revolves around deal making and cost, so always consider the price of her power, both to her and to others. People want to call on The Hex to help them, but may also fear or even hate her. The Hex is often played as an outsider, on the margins of society, disrespected or loathed by civilized folk, but also needed, desired, and coveted. You may consider having NPCs that play on this duality. People who are drawn to her, need her, want her, even as they treat her disdainfully and hate themselves for getting mixed up with such power. If you really want to get nefarious, consider double-crossing The Hex — her moves are particularly well suited for vengeance.

THE LYRE

The Lyre often has their fingers in many different pies. Their talent or beauty means they can travel among the elite, but they might be just as home among the common folk. What access does their talent grant them? Do they perform at noble parties? Have private audiences with rulers? Are they beloved by the regulars at a particular inn or marketplace? Having access to so many different groups means that The Lyre is often well suited to be an information conduit. They can gather a great deal of knowledge through their connections.



Consider trying to play them off different groups. Does a friend of theirs want them to spy on the nobles? Perhaps someone from a royal family sees them as a ticket out of their stifling existence? The Lyre also works well as the public face of opposition to the ruling elite.

THE SCREW

Have a serious talk with the group if someone is playing The Screw about how you are going to approach their chosen profession. Make sure to review the Appendix on Safety (269) and give your players tools to protect themselves, such as lines and veils or the X card. The important thing about The Screw is *why* they do what they do and how they feel about it. Are they a sadist who enjoys their job? Or is this something they do because they have no choice? Additionally, The Screw's currency is information. People probably need them, but may also disrespect them. A good foil for a Screw is someone who employs them, jealously paying them for information, while also feeling ambivalent about the fact that they need someone so unsavory in their employ. How does such treatment make The Screw feel? When you MC for a Screw, you want to spend some time thinking about the value of information in your world. What will people do to get it, how much is it worth, and how does The Screw sit at the center of it?

THE SPUR

If The Spur has an employer, give them violence to commit and then let them feel the consequences of their deeds. Whether they have a Patron or not, though, there's a similar dynamic at work between The Spur and their Militia. It's helpful to have some faces in the Militia that can fulfill different roles, allowing you to interact with The Spur in a variety of capacities. Consider having a sidekick — trust-



worthy, smart, useful — and then play them off folks in the Militia who doubt The Spur's leadership, or whose rash actions tend to get The Spur in trouble. The Militia gives you the opportunity to have The Spur's reach extend far and ripple out in unexpected ways. When in doubt, someone in the Militia did something that The Spur now has to deal with. All eyes are on them.

THE VOICE

The Voice is just *begging* you to surround them with all kinds of treacherous people. Give them foolish and gullible nobles who believe whatever they say, cunning social climbers who need them to gather intelligence or spread rumors, and backstabbing traitors who want to beat them at their own game. The Voice invites intrigue to the table more than any other class. However, don't forget The Voice's desire: something is driving them. It's often useful to try to humanize The Voice — give them someone to love, or protect, or someone they can trust. Giving them someone to care about also means that their underhanded conniving can have real consequences. A Voice who cares about nothing never has to worry about the blowback from their actions. A Voice who *does* care about something? Well, as they say — what goes around comes around.



Threats



Threats are what the MC uses to challenge and confront the PCs, making their lives tricky and messy. If you are the MC, you should read this chapter before running the game.

A Threat is a person, place, or thing that antagonizes the player characters.

Think of your Threats as a tool for creating obstacles for the PCs. You create and modify them after the first session, and they serve as your primary way to confront the characters with adversity as you play.



To create a Threat, follow these steps:

- † Name it and describe it.
- † Decide what resource(s) it threatens.
- † Decide what kind of Threat it is, and define its traits.
- † Figure out what it connects to.
- † Write one or two stakes questions.
- † Create a countdown and/or custom move (optional).
- † Play it to the hilt.

Let's explore each of these steps:

STEP ONE: NAME IT AND DESCRIBE IT

A Threat can be a person, group, or thing. If it's a person, give them a name, then their description can be as simple as "The King of the Realm" or "The Blacksmith's Daughter." A thing is a little more complicated. See *Maladies*, *Powers*, and *Realms* below for some examples of what a thing might be described as. Perhaps you could name it "The Dark Forest" and describe it as "The Dense Woods that Surround the Manor." Finally, a Threat can be a group. Let's call an example group "The Forest Dwellers" because we imagine it consisting of a shadowy bunch of brigands outside the walls of the town the PCs live in. For the description of a group, say who they are and name one or two important people in the group. These are the members of the Threat the PCs are most likely to encounter when they encounter this Threat. Here are two examples:

Raela, the blacksmith's daughter: *She is the young daughter of Benedict, the royal blacksmith. She is stout and strong, like her father, with black hair rolling down her back in a thick braid. She is often seen wandering about the castle, making small talk with people.*



The Forest Dwellers: *A mysterious group of bandits who live in the forest around the town led by a woman called Lady Red. They make travel to and from the town risky, and occasionally raid into the outskirts of town at night to rob people. They are identifiable by the red masks their members wear.*

STEP TWO: DECIDE WHAT RESOURCE(S) IT THREATENS

After the first session, you filled out a worksheet that lists what resources the PCs have at their disposal. A Threat threatens one or two of these resources. This tells you which PCs should be most concerned with the Threat. Let's give two examples:

You look at your first session worksheet and see that Pax, The Voice, has "information" as one of her resources. You write down "information" next to Raela, the blacksmith's daughter. She, too, is someone who gathers and spreads information, and she's interested in using that knowledge to undermine others.

This tells you who your threat might antagonize and gives you an idea of how they might do it. In the example above of Raela, you might try to have her usurp Pax's position as the chief information gatherer for the king, or perhaps spread nasty secrets about Pax that she wouldn't want known.

Your first session worksheet says that Dirge, The Spur, who is the captain of the royal guard, has "security" as one of his resources. The Forest Dwellers threaten the security of the town, so you write that next to them.

Perhaps the Forest Dwellers directly attack Dirge's militia, or maybe Dirge's Lord tells him that if he doesn't clear the Ghosts out of the forest, he'll relieve Dirge of his station.



STEP THREE: DECIDE WHAT TYPE OF THREAT IT IS

PICK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES:

- † Adversaries
- † Cabals
- † Maladies
- † Realms
- † Powers

You will also pick a trait or two (depending on the type of Threat) that gives you clues as to how to play it and use it to confront the players.

ADVERSARIES: An Adversary is a single person/creature that antagonizes the PCs. They may be selfish, resentful, cruel, or ignorant, but whatever their reason, they act as obstacles for the characters. They can be a literal monster or a sweet, innocent-looking 13-year-old child. The character is an Adversary because of what they *do*, not what they *are*. Sometimes, the best Adversaries are *surprising*. Pick one or two of the following drives for this threat:

- † Domination.
- † Wealth.
- † Chaos.
- † Power.
- † Lust.
- † Sport.
- † Fear.
- † Hunger.

An Adversary's drives will give you a sense of what to do with them. For example, say you create the Lord of the Manor where the PCs live — Lord Issma. His drives are domination and fear. When you bring Lord Issma into the fiction, think of these drives: how do his



fear and desire for domination make him act? This also helps you decide what MC moves to use with Lord Issma. Perhaps he is likely to inflict Harm on characters or humiliate them in order to dominate them? If someone rolls a partial hit on him when **Threatening With Force** we might see his fear take over and make him run away. An Adversary's drives are what you should go to when playing them, particularly when engaging the mechanics in any way, or presenting the PCs with decision points.

CABALS: A Cabal is a group of people with an agenda, often nefarious. They can be a cult, a school, a guild, a shadowy secret society, a gang of heavies, a clique of socialites, etc. Think up juicy details to make them seem threatening, powerful, or extensive when you write their description. This can be secret codes, tattoos or scarification, oaths, vast resources, and so on. A character's Faction may serve as a Cabal Threat. Pick a goal (or maybe two) when you make a Cabal:

- † To enrich their members.
- † To spread their dogma.
- † To swell their ranks.
- † To protect their own.
- † To sow discord.
- † To maintain order.
- † To consolidate their power.
- † To punish those who are different.

For example, you create a school of wizardry. The school's main goal is to "consolidate their power." When your PCs encounter members of the school, those members should be sizing the PCs up for whether they could be useful in this goal, get in their way of this goal, or could be stepped on in the school's ascent to power. Cabals and their members push towards their goal with fervor, and you should find ways to aim that fervor at the PCs.



MALADIES: Maladies are terrible conditions that spread through a populace. They can be a disease, a panic, etc. Maladies are not personal, in that they do not have a consciousness of any kind, but people may act on behalf of them. Having said that, it can be evocative to act *as if* a Malady has personhood. A disease that is spreading through the town with an almost tangible viciousness, or an ideology that seems to possess people like a nefarious spirit. When you create a Malady, pick one of the following types:

- † A fast spreading disease.
- † A wave of panic and hysteria.
- † A curse.
- † A dangerous ideology.
- † An irrational superstition.
- † An economic catastrophe.
- † A famine or other shortage.

As an example, you decide that the people of the town have adopted an irrational superstition. They have taken up human sacrifice to appease a god they believe is angry. This should directly affect the lives of the PCs. Is one of them somehow responsible for this superstition taking hold? Is someone a PC cares about taken in with the belief? Is a loved one being picked for sacrifice? A Malady should be used to ratchet up the tension between characters in your game. It should raise the stakes.



REALMS: Realms are places that may threaten the PCs. A living forest of phosphorescent flora encroaching on their town, a vast desert with twin suns that surrounds their fortress, a red sky that pours burning rain on them for days at a time. Those are Realms. When you create a Realm pick one of the following:

- † It consumes what is around it.
- † It is barren and dead.
- † It is nearly impenetrable.
- † It is poisonous or otherwise harmful.
- † It hides dangerous secrets.
- † It is a breeding ground for vile things.
- † It entices with lies.

Perhaps your PCs live in a mountain fortress. You could create two Realms that represent the world around them. One may be the mountain range. You pick “it is nearly impenetrable,” because it’s almost impossible to leave the fortress and merchants and travelers rarely come, meaning supplies are limited. You then decide there is a cave near the PCs’ home and pick “it is a breeding ground for vile things.” What awfulness emerges out of that cave?

Note that SCUP is about the local politics and drama of a particular place, not about a group of adventurers going on a quest. The Realm Threats you create should be things that are *already threatening the players because of where they are*. In our example above, it’s a mountain and cave where the PCs live, not in some distant land they have to travel to.



POWERS: Powers are Threats beyond mortal comprehension. They are supernatural, mystical, and horrific. They make promises of dominance, pleasure, and knowledge, but those promises may crumble as their real agenda become clear. When you create a Power, pick a fundamental danger or two that represent what makes it something costly to meddle with:

- † It will twist words.
- † It will give with one hand and take with the other.
- † It will corrupt from the inside out.
- † It will create madness and terror.
- † It will break loose and create wanton destruction.
- † It will become addicted to pain and suffering.
- † It will delight in collecting souls.

A magic using PC may be an invitation to create a Power — maybe a demon that strikes a Faustian bargain? In that case, you could pick “it will give with one hand and take with the other,” offering the PC knowledge, even as it makes increasingly horrific demands of them. Powers are like a drug: they start out appealing, then they take over.

STEP FOUR: FIGURE OUT WHAT IT CONNECTS TO

Threats should directly connect to other fiction in your game — especially PCs. When you create a Threat, look at what resources it threatens, what kind of threat it is, and how it fits into the fiction of your game. Use this information to decide what it connects to. Consider writing the name of the Threat in a circle and then drawing a map of connections with lines coming from it to other fictional elements it’s connected to.

Let’s use the example of Lord Issma, the Adversary Threat described above. In our game, it’s possible that Pax, The Voice, works for Lord



Issma. Connect Lord Issma to Pax. If Dirge, The Spur, captain of the guard also works for Issma, connect them to him as well. If Lord Issma is married to a prominent NPC named Sasha, connect the two of them as well. Finally, perhaps Raela, the blacksmith's daughter, another of our Adversary Threats, is conspiring with Lord Issma. That's another Threat that he connects to. To flesh out your map, consider describing the connections as you draw them. You could write "secret partners" on the line connecting Issma to Raela, for example, and "married" on the line connecting Issma to Sasha. When you make your connection map for your Threats, you should start simple and then expand your map as you go on.

Maps are a useful aid to decide what a Threat should do next. Glance down at your connection map and look at the various lines. Let's use the above example, again. Issma is connected to two PCs: Pax, The Voice, and Dirge, The Spur. When you're looking for something for Issma to do and you see that, you could think about how to put them at odds with one another. Does Issma ask Pax to gather information on Dirge because he doesn't trust her? Does he ask Dirge to intimidate someone Pax cares about? Your connection map will help you generate ideas for how to use the Threats to cause problems for your PCs.

WRITE ONE OR TWO STAKES QUESTIONS

What will happen if the various Threats aren't dealt with? Those are your stakes questions. Make them tangible and hard, and make them about specific PC's interests. Returning to the Forest Dwellers, we may ask things like "How hard would Dirge have to come down on The Forest Dwellers before they organized and raided the town?" or "Will Pembroke side with The Forest Dwellers when he finds out their leader, Red, is carrying his child?" Make them juicy, interesting, and big. As play progresses, you can swap them out for new



stakes questions if situations change and they are no longer applicable. These questions represent legitimate curiosities you have about things that are in motion with a Threat, not future things that will happen. They are open questions that will be answered in play, not plots you will write prior to play. A stakes question does not begin with “Pembrook will side with The Forest Dwellers if...” Rather, it begins with “*will* Pembrook side with The Forest Dwellers if...” The difference is important, because the questions allow you to leave your options open and be surprised about the answers that emerge in play.

Stakes questions are important because you want to think about *why your threat matters*. If a Threat doesn't have stakes, why have it at all? The stakes questions are your way of making sure the Threat is there for a reason. When you read a good novel, you can't wait to find out what's going to happen to the characters because you're invested in them and you have legitimate questions about what will happen. The book has given you stakes questions. Good stakes questions give you a reason to care about what happens, and playing towards them will help keep your PCs invested in the story you're creating together.

CREATE A COUNTDOWN OR CUSTOM MOVE (OPTIONAL)

You can give your Threat mechanical teeth by giving them a custom move or countdown.

You could write a *custom move* that triggers when a PC directly confronts an Adversary, traverses a Realm, or calls upon a Power for assistance, for example. Here is what a custom move for Raela, the blacksmith's daughter, might look like:

When you challenge Raela's status in a way that she finds out about, **roll+Wily**. On a 10+, pick 2, on a 7-9, pick 1.



- † A friend or ally immediately lets you know what information about you she is sharing.
- † Name a person. That person doesn't hear the information that Raela has shared about you.
- † Hold 1. Spend it to have someone tell you useful information about Raela in retaliation for what she's said about them.

A good custom move tends to play on the traits of the Threat, and/or aim at what resources it Threatens. Raela is an Adversary Threat driven by Power and Chaos. She seeks to create disorder and improve her own status. Additionally, she threatens the resource of information. This move plays on those themes, showing how she threatens the PC's ability to control information about themselves, and attempts to jockey for social position by stirring animosity within her circle.

If you want to be tricky, you can create custom moves that happen at the intersection of two or more Threats. Returning to our Forest Dwellers example, let's say they are a Cabal Threat with the goal of "enriching their members." The forest they live in is a Realm Threat with the effect of "it is poisonous or otherwise harmful." You can create a custom move that incorporates both Threats:

When you venture into the nearby forest to scavenge or hunt, **roll+Fierce**. On a 10+, you get both. On a 7-9, pick one:

- † You do not take 1 Harm (ap) from breathing in the spores.
- † You do not run across a band of the Forest Dwellers looking to rob you.

Most Threats do not immediately need you to write a custom move for them. Play them for a while to see how they feel — if you want them to bite harder, give them a custom move.

A *countdown* is a symbolic timer that will happen if there is no intervention. As you play to a Threat, you may realize what the ultimate



outcome of the Threat is, given their current actions. If your Threat is moving towards something awful and no one steps in and stops it, that's a good time to create a countdown. Let's return to Lord Issma, our Adversary Threat. Issma is driven by domination and is paranoid, on the verge of losing it. You create a countdown for him. Don't tell your players you're doing this, just do it. Here's what it could look like:

Every time anyone rebukes Lord Issma in any way, make a mark. When you get to five marks, Issma will demand tangible demonstrations of loyalty from all members his inner circle, and order anyone who refuses to be executed.

Countdowns are a way to give some direction to your Threats, as well as to give you things to do with them. Hint at the horrible, encroaching event that is coming, and give them costly opportunities to stop it. It also gives you a tangible measure for how to play the Threat. The further along the countdown goes, the more you can foreshadow what's to come. In the example above, as Lord Issma gets closer to the fifth notch, you could make him ever more jittery, and even drop hints as you get to the third or fourth notch about what is in store. If it hits the fifth notch, all hell breaks loose.

PLEASE NOTE: countdowns are not *automatic*. The fiction comes first, and countdowns should be changed if the fiction demands it. Lord Issma could have his countdown changed if a PC convinces him not to be so paranoid. In that case, erase some or all of the marks — depending on how long lasting the PC's advice was — or change it altogether.



When to Make a Threat

While playing, let NPCs, groups, places, and magic emerge in play, but don't start deciding everything is a Threat immediately. After the session is over, look at the notes you took during the game and consider converting some into Threats. You can be a bit overzealous with your Threat creation, particularly at first, turning many people and things into Threats. It's better to have too many than too few, at least early on. If one winds up not being interesting, not capturing the PCs' attention, or just isn't getting on camera that much, you can always phase it out, eventually settling on a small cast of main Threats. A good rule of thumb is to have at least one Threat per PC, because you want to make sure that every PC has at least something that challenges them specifically. More than double the number of PCs is probably too many. You just don't have time to give all those Threats that much screen time.

Your Threats are there to guide you in putting roadblocks in front of the characters, but don't feel bound by them. They are tools in your toolbox, and you should feel empowered, not constrained, by them. If a particular Threat isn't interesting, phase it out. If a Threat needs to be reworked, perhaps with a new type or stakes question, go ahead. If a new Threat is emerging through play, create it. Finally, if a threat is neutralized in some way, get rid of it. If an Adversary is killed, then there's no more Threat. If a Realm is tamed, then it's just there. It's no longer a Threat. Don't worry. You can always create more.



Odds and Ends



In this section are several appendices that provide guidance for playing SCUP. First, Tasha R. Robinson contributes an essay on the genre of dark fantasy to help you think through themes and tropes that might be appropriate in your game. After that, Willow Palecek provides her tips for how to get the most of your SCUP campaign by playing hard. Then, James Mendez Hodes explores how SCUP might be decolonized for play in non-European fantasy settings. Next, following this, Eric Simon gives an example of how SCUP might be played in a specific historical setting. Finally, we at Wheel Tree Press suggest some ways that you can play SCUP safely, respecting the boundaries and identities of all the folks at the table.

Appendices



The Nature of Dark Fantasy

BY TASHA R. ROBINSON

*“Bayaz nodded towards the city. ‘They are jealous of one another, all those people. It may be a union in name, but they fight each other tooth and nail. The lowly squabble over trifles. The great wage secret wars for power and wealth, and they call it government. Wars of words and tricks, and guile, but no less bloody for that. The casualties are many.’ The Magus sighed. ‘Behind those walls they shout and argue and endlessly bite one another’s backs. Old squabbles are never settled, but thrive, and put down roots, and the roots grow deeper with the passing years. It has always been so.” — Joe Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself**

Fantasy writers love their shadowy realms, like J.R.R. Tolkien’s Mordor, where clouds of dust and volcanic ash blot out the sun. Or the bleak underworld of C.J. Cherryh’s towering Merovingen, where only the richest citizens, living at the city’s highest levels, get to see daylight. Symbolism matters in fantasy, and often a city of eternal night — or at least, one with plenty of murky blind alleys and dank, gloomy bars — is the perfect place to perform dangerous or treacherous acts without being seen.

Dark fantasy doesn’t have to take place in dark settings, though. It can just as easily exist in the sun-bleached deserts of Tanith Lee’s Cyrion stories, or in the long, bright southern summer of George R.R. Martin’s early *Song of Ice and Fire* books. The darkness in the genre isn’t a result of ambient light levels. The mood of these worlds, and the experience of living in them, makes them dark fantasy. It’s in the characters, not the environments they share. It’s built into the tone, theme, and action of a story.

The exact borders of dark fantasy are hazy. A work might cross over into other genres, and fans can spend days arguing exactly which category a given book, film, comic, or game falls into. Getting im-



mensely pedantic about genre isn't much fun, though, especially when you could be reading books or playing games instead. Though no rule is absolute, and no genre definition is perfectly capable of nailing down every aspect of a creative work, we can still point to some generalities about the genre.

THE TONE IS OMINOUS.

Dark fantasy isn't about casual choices or easily escaped destinies. There's a threat hanging over the characters. It can be an earth-shaking one or a small, intense personal one. The fractious soldiers in Glen Cook's *The Black Company* face a wide variety of threats, from a centuries-old sorceress conquering the world to the petty cruelty of their fellow men at arms. In George R.R. Martin's Westeros novels, there are threats everywhere — not just the undead army in the North and the cruel, despotic Lannisters in the South, but also a series of petty sadists and opportunists everywhere else. There's a sense in dark fantasy that any safety and stability is slowly crumbling, which means the characters can't be complacent. They are forced to act.

THE ACTION IS IN THE CHARACTERS' HANDS.

Part of any compelling fantasy novel is a sense that the protagonists can make a difference, and that no one else is available to do the jobs they need to do. Maybe they're uniquely motivated, like Anafiel Delaunay in *Kushiel's Dart*, playing out an old grudge through court intrigue. Maybe they're uniquely gifted, like Delaunay's bond-servant Phèdre, whose angelic heritage gives her opportunities to spy for him. Maybe they're just in the right place at the right time, and their positioning lets them learn things no one else knows. But in dark fantasy more than in other fantasy genres, protagonists are likely to face complicated choices about what kinds of steps to take, and their own moral codes may be flexible enough to give them a wide variety of options. The main characters in dark fantasy stories gen-



erally aren't altruistic heroes with pure motivations and a knee-jerk willingness to die to save innocent lives. They're much more likely to consider their own motivations first.

That doesn't necessarily stop them from being heroes, or make them into anti-heroes. Anti-heroes in dark fantasy are certainly common, but consider Roland Deschain in Stephen King's *Dark Tower* books. He's unquestionably a hero, with uncommon skills and relatively pure intentions, as he tries to stop a dark, menacing sorcerer who threatens all of existence. But Roland also has revenge in mind, and an obsession with reaching the nexus of reality, the Dark Tower. And again and again, he proves that his quest is more important to him than friendship, protecting the innocent, or helping other people. He faces many choices, and from a purely heroic, black-and-white morality standpoint, he often makes the wrong ones.

Note that characters in dark fantasy don't always get to choose *whether* to act. They may be forced into service by the situation, by their faction or patron or master, or just by someone stronger than them. But they still get to choose how to address a situation — whether honestly and fairly, or with skullduggery and intrigue, or with backstabbing and murder. And the decisions they make always make a difference, not just in how the world moves forward, but in how it looks afterward.

THE THEME IS LONELINESS.

One of the unique things about dark fantasy is that characters tend to be fundamentally *alone*. They may serve the same lord or the same cause, and they may work together against a common threat. They may travel together and form friendships or enter relationships. They can even find comfort and respite in those relationships. But that doesn't mean they fully understand or trust each other. Joe Abercrombie's *First Law* novels feature multiple factions of people who



work together and quest together, but the characters tend to be alone in their own heads. They come from widely separated cultures, and have disparate personalities and goals. Even characters who become lovers still frequently miscommunicate and wind up desperately angry at each other. Even the band of Northerners who've traveled together for years and share a history, a culture, and a common understanding of the world don't spend much time talking to each other.

That's in part because dark fantasy characters tend to be paragons in their field. The primary protagonists in the First Law books are hard, practiced people with consummate skills, usually tied to some form of violence. Michael Moorcock's *Eternal Champion* novels are fundamentally about people so melancholy and distant from humanity that they can barely relate to their own sworn companions. The main characters in Tanith Lee's *Flat Earth* series are practically gods, and they consider the world their plaything. There are nearly insurmountable barriers between all these characters and the worlds around them, whether it comes from birth and nature; long, isolating practice at magic or swordsmanship or intrigue; or just a painful history that makes it hard for them to form bonds with other people.

That separation between characters is where dark fantasy most comes into its own. Epic fantasy stories like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* are fundamentally about noble heroes forming an unlikely but mutually supportive bond against the darkness. Urban fantasy novels, like Seanan McGuire's *October Daye* series, Emma Bull's *War For The Oaks*, or Charles De Lint's *Newford* tales, are more likely to be about a large community, and how all the characters fit into it, whether they want to or not. Coming-of-age fantasy stories like the *Harry Potter* books may make it hard for their Chosen Ones to relate to their peers, but they're still likely to have a cadre of friends and followers, and these kinds of stories are often about individuals learning to find their place in a larger world.



But dark fantasy loves its isolation, and the freedom of motion and action it gives the characters — especially to betray, flee, or fight other protagonists, or to create satisfying drama out of reluctant, distrustful cooperation. All of which makes dark fantasy harder than most genres to capture in a role-play setting. Long-time roleplayers have likely faced at least one weary GM who says, during character creation, “Make any character you want, as long as it isn’t a sullen lone wolf who doesn’t get along with anyone else.” Everyone who’s been in the hobby for a while has likely shared a table with someone who *does* want to play that sullen lone wolf, the arrogant Elric of Melnibone type with vast powers, tragic responsibility, and a personality that doesn’t mesh with anyone else in the party. For a certain kind of gamer, there’s a serious lure to this kind of dark, romantic figure: the loner whose fate is too heavy for anyone else to bear.

The Sword, The Crown, and The Unspeakable Power will let you play that character to your heart’s content without ruining the game for everybody else. It was designed around dark fantasy tropes, and the idea that players don’t have to be part of the same faction, or the same party. They’re dealing with the same setting, but they may be facing very different threats and choices. They can end up on different sides of the same conflict, with one player out to assassinate the same corrupt ruler that another player is trying to manipulate, and a third is trying to protect. Characters may not understand or even like each other. Because you’re embodying completely different archetypes, it’s perfectly all right for everyone to have their own corner of the world, where they’re the best at what they do.

That doesn’t absolve the players of responsibility to each other. Just as fantasy authors can set their characters against each other in the most bitter and savage ways, while still remaining responsible to the narrative, the players are still responsible for shaping their game into



a satisfying story. Sometimes that can mean giving way to someone else's character or plot just because it produces the most interesting results. You aren't violating the genre, you're remaining conscious of it, and faithful to it. It's everyone's responsibility to safeguard the narrative, and keep things consistent, involving, and worthwhile for everyone at the table.

In the process, you can bring in any other familiar dark fantasy aspects that suit your story. In dark fantasy works, there's often a mystery, a series of secrets to be unlocked before the full plot is revealed. There's a lack of competent central authority in the form of just rulers or sympathetic gods — any sort of organizing force that might rescue the characters out of benevolence or wisdom. Cynicism and the threat of despair may hang over the story, or a sense of reckless opportunism for those willing to grasp at it. There's often intrigue, with characters working against each other, and hiding their true motivations unless they're in confident positions of power. There's usually a price to be paid for that power, in the form of cost or compromise. Nothing comes easily or cheaply — and if it seems to, it's probably just because the full price has yet to be revealed.

With all this darkness hanging over the characters' heads, shaping their decisions and offering them opportunities, who needs seething cloud cover, occluded suns, or moonless nights? There can be enough darkness in the worldbuilding that scenes can seem fraught and unstable even if they take place in broad daylight, in the middle of a crowded marketplace, in on the busiest festival day of the year. If the themes and the tone are clear, the story will be too. The characters, and the world you create around them, carry the darkness inside them.

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Playing Hard: How to Have More Fun in Your Game

BY WILLOW PALECEK

WHAT IS PLAYING HARD, AND WHY SHOULD I DO IT?

Playing Hard is giving the game all you've got, to get the most enjoyment out of it as possible. It means pushing yourself, and those around you, to steer the game towards climactic moments, the kind that cause your adrenaline to surge and leave you with stories you'll tell for years to come. It means embracing change and conflict and taking risks, knowing that those are the things that drive dynamic play. It also means being a good sport, and learning to make the most of failure. Some of these techniques require you to be assertive, aggressive even. You may want to discuss them with the other players at the table before using them. It's never a bad idea to align expectations at the start of the game.

HOW TO PLAY HARD WHEN YOU'RE A PLAYER

Playing Hard as a player means being conscious of the situations around your character, and not just "doing what my character would do," but rather acting in a way to drive the narrative forward, consistent with the goals of the game. It means getting into conflicts and uncertain situations, and then playing to find out what happens next. It means pushing play, advocating for your character, and getting your hands dirty.

Want things, then go after them

The best thing you can do is establish some goals for your character. The book says "Treat your character's needs and desires as real and powerful." So pick some needs and desires, preferably ones that will take hard work to achieve. If all your character wants is to maintain



the status quo, they'll only be reacting, not acting. Figure out their hopes and dreams. What do they aspire to? What status do they want? Whom do they want put in their place? None of these will happen on their own.

Of course, to go after things, you have to want things. Suppose you're playing *The Crown*. You could just sit back and enjoy the fruits of your position, and defend it against all comers, but shouldn't you be thinking bigger than that? Look for a troublesome Faction you can frame for crimes so you can destroy them, a neighboring territory you can send spies into so you can dominate or annex it, or other ways to grow your power at the expense of someone else. If you have trouble thinking of a goal, look at *The Voice* playbook; it includes a number of desires that you might use as inspiration for your own character's goals. And when you're thinking of what you want, remember...

Don't be afraid of PVP

PvP, or player-versus-player, gets a bad reputation. We often think of the antisocial jerk who takes glee in murdering other people's characters as a way of showing real-life social dominance. Don't be that guy. Instead, look at PvP as another arena for conflict. The player characters don't have to be — and probably *shouldn't* be — best friends with each other. Real people get into conflicts with each other, and so should your characters.

PvP doesn't have to be all or nothing, victory or death. Moves like **Study a Person** and **Persuade With Leverage** allow you to have social PvP, where you can work against the other players, and everyone lives to scheme another day. Even if you **Threaten With Force**, the choice of how to proceed is on the threatened party. Give yourself permission to dive into conflict, rather than shying away from it. Don't forget — the other PCs have the same tools you do. NPCs are



fragile things in SCUP. If you want a real challenge, the other players are often the ones who can provide it, not the MC.

What are you afraid of? Take risks!

Finally, take big risks. Make plans and act on them. Sometimes you'll succeed, and you'll get what you want. Sometimes you'll fail, and bad things will happen. But failure can be fun. Maybe you're afraid that you'll suffer a major setback, or even that your character will die. These things can and do happen! But if you don't take risks, more likely than not, nothing will happen, which is boring.

Even if you end up in the oubliette eating rats, that's good pathos, and when someone breaks you out (or you manage to escape), you'll have revenge burning in your heart. Even if you lose your crown and are exiled, that's just a new challenge, and when your armies march back into the city and you destroy those who betrayed you, success will be all the sweeter. Playing Hard means sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose, but you, the player, make the best of it no matter what. It means experiencing the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, staring death in the eyes, and picking up the dice, knowing that no matter what you roll, the outcome will be exciting.

HOW TO PLAY HARD WHEN YOU'RE THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES

For the MC, Playing Hard is a little different. As a player, Playing Hard is all about pushing yourself. As the MC, Playing Hard is about pushing the players — giving them tense situations to deal with, making their lives hard, and demanding action from them. None of this should contradict your Agenda and Principles — in fact, it's more like turning them up to eleven. By making things tough for them, you're filling their lives with intrigue and drama. By giving them uncertain opportunities, you're playing to find out



what happens. The Powered by the Apocalypse system does a pretty good job as is of encouraging you to play hard. All you need to do is follow the rules as hard as you can. Starting with...

Your NPCs need to want specific things

It's not enough to have NPCs with nefarious demeanor and devious motives, but no specific goals. If the evil vizier never does anything other than twirl his mustache in the shadow and make cryptic remarks, he might as well not even be in the game. Remember, every NPC you make should have some desire: to better their station, to amass wealth, to get revenge. And the best desires are ones that will drive those NPCs into conflict with the PCs. Power is largely a zero-sum game here, and you can't get power without someone else losing it. If the warlord wants to invade the next kingdom over, there's little reason for anyone at the table to care. If she wants to invade the city that all the PCs live in and put its inhabitants to the sword, that's a different matter.

But more than that, think of the *actionable steps* the NPCs are going to take to get there. Let's look at two examples: the scheming vizier and the invading warlord. The scheming vizier wants to seize power for himself. How does he plan to do that? Perhaps he intends to acquire illusion magic that will allow him to disguise himself as the rightful ruler, then kidnap the ruler and replace them. Let's divide that plan up into individual steps:

Get Illusion Magic ⇨ Kidnap Ruler ⇨ Take Control of City

Think of how these individual steps might interact with the PCs. If you have a PC that uses The Unspeakable Power, will the vizier have to steal it from them or enlist their help? Might they learn of the source of the magic and have an opportunity to gain it for themselves? Is the ruler a Crown, or perhaps the Patron of one of the PCs? Will this action put them in The Black Hood or The Screw's



sphere of influence? And once they are in control, what will that mean for the characters?

Here's a more complicated example, that of an enemy warlord who wants to invade where the PCs live. She sends in her advance forces to infiltrate the city. As her armies approach, they ravage the land. At the appointed hour, the advance forces slay the gate defenders and open the gates. Then the armies battle for control of the city, and finally the leaders of the city are rounded up and executed. Plotted out, that looks like this:

Plant Spies in City → Armies Approach City → Armies Ravage Countryside → Spies Attack Gatehouse → Spies Let Army into City → Army Sacks City → City Leaders Captured → City Leaders Executed.

That's a lot of steps! And at each step, there's probably someone who will want them not to do the things they are doing, especially if you've got a Spur who leads the defenses of the City, or any number of characters who might be considered 'city leaders.'

This structure might look familiar — it's essentially a threat countdown. Whenever you like — either at the start of the session, or when time passes, or when someone fails a roll, you can move along to the next point on the chain. The vizier has gained his magic, or the spies have seized the gatehouse. Of course, if the PCs derail the plan, perhaps by stealing the magic for themselves, or killing the spies, that's when you have to figure out what happens next.

You don't have to go into this much detail for every NPC in your game, but it's probably a good idea to have two or three major threats, with countdowns or event chains thought out, and maybe with custom moves, such as:



WHEN YOU FIGHT IN THE BATTLE FOR THE CITY: roll+Fierce.

By default, you take 3 Harm.

On a 7-9, pick 2, on a 10+, pick 3.

- † You take 1 less Harm.
- † You corner an NPC of your choice in the fighting and deal Harm to them.
- † You protect an NPC of your choice from Harm.
- † In the chaos, you find an opportunity to sneak somewhere (your call) without anyone noticing.
- † You loot valuables worth 2 Barter.

On a miss, you're stuck in the thick of the fighting. Take 4 Harm instead of 3.

And when you're thinking about how hard to advance your threats remember to...

Consider where the PCs are pointed

'Pointing' refers to who is a danger to whom. Think of an arrow — whoever it's pointed at is likely to get hit. If The Lyre wants to seduce The Bloodletter to gain their confidence, then that's where the Lyre is pointed. The Bloodletter might be pointed back at the Lyre (because they want to use their oh-so-beautiful face for the flesh abomination they're building in the back room), or they might be pointed somewhere else, like at the Plague Cult that's making everyone in the city suffer from the Black Pox. Characters can point in multiple directions at once, of course. The Adept might want to oust their rival The Hex at the same time they want to mystically enthrall the Djinn of the Ninth Hell, and The Voice probably has some scheme in mind for everyone they meet.

Generally, if the PCs are pointed at each other, you have an 'inward-pointing' game. If the PCs are mostly pointed at NPCs and external threats, you have an 'outward-pointing' game. If the play-



ers are mostly pointed at each other, you're probably already doing your job right, but if you like, you can introduce a powerful external threat (like the invading warlord or a powerful magical entity) that demands attention right now. This means rivals may have to bury the hatchet (for now, at least), to deal with whatever threatens them, but at the same time, opportunities for betrayal abound.

On the other hand, if the players are too united against outside threats, use the tools at your disposal to drive wedges between them. Your most powerful tool is the PC-PC-NPC triangle: arrange it so an NPC is an ally to one PC and an enemy to another. Perhaps they are a member of one PC's Faction, or a Patron, friend, or relative, so that PC will be sympathetic to them, and then give them a motive that will put that NPC in conflict with another PC. With experimentation, you'll find the ideal balance of internal and external pressure for you and your table. Once you've got it, you can use your moves and techniques like safety valves, adjusting the tension here or there. And speaking of tension...

Attack them where they're weak

PCs are really competent at what they do, but everyone has a weakness. The Gauntlet or The Spur might be the greatest warrior in the kingdom, but put them at a masquerade ball and see how they fare. Your players are going to look for ways to use what they're good at to solve problems. The Gauntlet will use violence, The Screw will use information, The Adept will use blackest magic, and The Voice will use words.

To put them off their balance, bring them into situations where their area of expertise isn't the best tool. Think in terms of Swords, Crowns, and Unspeakable Powers. If someone is the best duelist in the realm, give them a social or magical problem to solve. Give a Voice or Crown an enemy that needs killing. Give the Beloved



or Adept treacherous political circles to navigate. Maybe they'll push through and use their expertise anyway — when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail, and characters in this game have some awfully big hammers. Maybe they'll turn to another PC for assistance, forging a tighter relationship. Maybe they'll do the best they can with what they've got. Maybe they'll even succeed.

This isn't about humiliating or playing 'gotcha' with your players. By all means, give The Black Hood people to assassinate, The Gauntlet and Spur people to fight, The Bloodletter and Screw people to cut open, and The Hex people to curse. Just remember to also push them into new directions, out of their comfort zones. Because you want to...

Put the screws to the players

Whenever possible, put your players in a situation where they have to make hard choices. The easiest way is to do it as a straight up 'would you rather' style choice, giving them a selection between two bad options. You can often do this on a 7-9 result or on a miss for any move. Here's some examples:

“As the Red Knight lunges at you, you realize he is much more powerful than you. You can stand fast and trade Harm, or you can bring your shield up, but it will probably break under the blow. What do you do?”

“You've evaded the guard patrols, but you see another patrol coming, and this one consists of three men and two dogs. You can get up to the Prince's tower unnoticed, but the dogs will probably pick up your trail soon. What do you do?”

“You can tell that the population are going to want someone to blame for the Black Pox. Unless you can offer up a scapegoat, that person is probably going to be you. What do you do?”



Some of these offer a simple binary choice, and others are clearly more open ended, but the imagination of players is such that few choices are ever simply between A or B. Even in the first example, the character might choose to try to turn and run, or throw down their weapons and beg for mercy, or attempt to use The Unspeakable Power to influence the situation. But what all of these moves have in common is that bad things are happening, and the player must choose how to proceed. By putting these choices in your players' hands, you can build on their decisions. What's more, because you give the players agency in helping to decide what bad things happen to them, they are invested in that outcome. They are the author of their own destruction. And then, when it does finally all come crumbling down...

Make your hard moves harder

Powered by the Apocalypse games can be pretty brutal, especially SCUP. It's an unforgiving world, full of people who want to see you fail. And sooner or later, everyone will roll a failure.

I recommend you make your moves harder than your first instinct.

The players are our friends, and we often want them to succeed and have fun. But PCs need adversity to shine, and part of your job is providing it. So make the moves a little bit harder. Push them, and give them an opportunity to push themselves. A good move to start with is to **Hint at an Unwelcome Future**. This is my favorite move. You show them that something bad is going to happen, and give them an opportunity to deal with it. If they don't deal with it? The horrible thing happens. But you told them it was coming, so it's not like they can blame you. Fair is fair. The more Unwelcome the Future, the better this move is.



The hardest moves of course, are the ones that do something immediately and force them to deal with the fallout. The temple collapses, the loved one is killed, the Faction turns against you, the demon breaks free of your control. The move has happened. The only question now is “what do you do?” My favorite hard moves are ones that change everything, and make everyone at the table reassess their situation. Kill off important NPCs. Have major alliances shift. Bring in a dynamic new threat. Have an existing threat achieve a goal. The person who failed their roll should suffer most, but if everyone suffers, more the better.

The most boring move you can do is to **inflict Harm**. If the character is fresh, Harm is usually just an inconvenience. If they are already wounded, it can take them out of play. Look for moves other than Harm when you can: take something they care about away, capture them, give them an escape route but reveal its cost. Sometimes though, the situation is the situation and Harm is Harm. If you try to wrestle the fire elemental, you’re going to get burned. To make Harm more interesting, pair it with another move, or give them a choice to take the Harm or have something else happen.

And finally, don’t forget that you can make a move (hard or otherwise) just because it’s too good to pass up. Use this power wisely, and keep in mind your principles.

Play Hard.

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Decolonize SCUP

BY JAMES MENDEZ HODES

Let's diversify the cultural and religious influences on your game, shall we? While the game translates well enough as-is to non-European settings, you can really make them sing if you pivot and complicate a few of the game's core assumptions.

PLURALIZE MYTHOLOGY CREATION

The Mythology Creation chapter presumes that everyone in your setting shares mythological reference points as to how the world was created and what The Unspeakable Power is. That's a great approach for settings where everyone believes basically the same thing. But SCUP's factional politics lend themselves to settings where multiple cultures and systems of thought have to figure out how to live with each other. Not everyone will believe the same mythology; and different mythologies will disagree with one another, borrow from one another, etc. Giving different belief systems different answers to the questions below fuels interesting alliances and conflicts.

- † Do humans have souls? Do those souls have different parts which have different fates upon an individual's death?
- † Is there one god? Many gods? Which of those gods are good or evil? Which are more powerful or weaker? Or are gods extant, but irrelevant to human conduct?
- † Where do gods or spirits live? Do they inhabit a separate realm, or do they share this world with us?
- † Must one have faith in God? Alternatively, do gods manifest in the real world, through physical forms or possession, obviating faith?
- † What holidays does the religion celebrate? Are there sacrifices? Dances? Prayers? Is there a formal priesthood? Are there shamans? Monastic orders? Prophets?



REPRESENTING DIFFERENT GROUPS

If different ethnic groups with completely different origins inhabit your setting, split the table into as many separate groups as there are ethnicities. Have each group come up with a myth without discussing with others. Then, reconvene and share your myths. Finally, each group should borrow one detail from each other group and change their myth accordingly.

REPRESENTING DIVERGENCES WITHIN A GROUP

Alternatively, your setting might feature a larger group subdivided into smaller but related denominations, such as you might find among different West African or South Asian ethnicities. In this case, start by making one myth; that's the most powerful group's myth. Then, in descending order of power, make a variation of that myth for each subgroup. Each variation changes one step of the myth, and then everything before or after that changed step (but not both). That's the subgroup's version of the myth.

THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER?

The concept of a mysterious, vaguely malicious entity which offers individuals great power at great cost to their integrity, safety, or community is a staple of not only European, but also Middle Eastern religion and fantasy. This trope originated with Central Asian religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manichæism, which posit a cosmos with a sharp, clear divide between pure good and pure evil. In the Abrahamic tradition, Satan and similar fallen angels lurk around every corner, ready to make a deal with you. If you're playing in the Levant, Ahriman might be your Unspeakable Power, or you could invent a new spirit or genie to fill that role. But The Unspeakable Power doesn't always translate well to other regions.



UNSPEAKABLE POWERS ACROSS THE WORLD

IN INDIA, great heroes and villains frequently vie for powerful entities' favor and blessings, but those entities are almost always good guys. For example, Rāvaṇa, the Demon King of Lankā and the Rāmāyaṇa's arch-villain, demonstrated his devotion to the god Śiva the Destroyer in order to win the power of invulnerability. Of course, he used Śiva's boon for evil; but the power he made a deal with is explicitly good.

IN WEST AFRICA, evil or monstrous supernatural figures are less abundant and threatening than human villains, especially wicked wizards and witches like the Sundiata's tyrannical nemesis Soumaouro Kanté. Their foul magic's supernatural source isn't as important as their own immoral character and selfishness. However, they sometimes enslave supernatural creatures, such as minor spirits, and force them to do their bidding. Several gods and spirits can offer great power, but the most volatile and dangerous ones used to be human — then became benevolent upon deification. For example, King Şàngó of Ọyó was as renowned for his good looks and martial skill as he was for his temper, suspicion, and sorcerous might. As a human he ruled cruelly and selfishly; but when he died and became an òrìṣà, he cleaned up his act. So, in a West African context, the responsibility and blame for even supernatural weirdness falls squarely on human shoulders.

EAST ASIAN fiction has even fewer supernatural evils to make deals with. Even the devils staffing Hell, who look scary and torment wrongdoers, are really just public servants doing their jobs. In Buddhist and Hindu thought, human selfishness generates badness. Supernatural villains manipulate the universe's own natural forces to sinister ends. For example, the White Eyebrow, master of kung fu treachery, was a Daoist sage who manipulated the forces of yīn,



yáng, and the five elements to grant himself great and selfish power. But the power isn't inherently evil, and it certainly came from no entity: it's his own fault. The idea of something being supernaturally, inherently evil isn't that important in this kind of fiction. Instead, the negative effects on people and society matter. Even troublesome creatures like fox spirits aren't inherently bad; the harm they do is measured in explicitly social terms. This whole situation is a great example of how social action, rather than metaphysical weirdness, is the focus of East Asian narrative.

The takeaway here: when you look outside an Abrahamic or European mythical context — and even when you look at European indigenous traditions sometimes — a malevolent, abstract force offering super powers often doesn't fit. A powerful human sorcerer might work better.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

As you survey unfamiliar legendry, you might run into figures who seem outwardly evil, but who turn out to be far more morally nuanced. The Hindu goddess Kālī, standing on a supine Śiva with her bloody fangs and swords and a severed head in her hand, comes to mind. She's definitely aggressive, but she keeps Śiva in line, beats up demons, and protects good people. If we look further West, we run into similar difficulty with the Yorùbá smallpox god, Sònpònná. He's socially awkward, bitter, and vengeful, a pariah who wanders the forest and curses the unlucky with disease. But he heals, as well. If you widen your perspective a little, it turns out this guy is one of the most popular òriṣà in the African diaspora. Desi Arnaz wrote a whole song about him!

Sometimes, like in Persian epics, unspeakable evil powers from beyond this world are easy to find and clearly despicable. More often, though, “dark” and “evil” figures are complex. If you go



around calling Kālī or Sònpònná “evil,” you might upset real people, and/or real gods (not to mention fail to get everything interesting out of that mythic figure). But one also can’t expect to determine from a casual read-through whether a religious figure is evil or not. How would you know without context?

So, here’s another take on The Unspeakable Power. What if you set aside evil and ramp up how *demanding* it is? A virtuous Unspeakable Power can cause just as much trouble as a wicked one. What if it insists you adhere to strict moral or ethical standards when all you’re trying to do is murder enough family members to get in power? What if you become responsible for a *benevolent* deity’s expectant flock?

HISTORICAL INSPIRATIONS

Traditional medieval fantasy draws heavily on tropes and concepts from historical Europe. Even fantastical settings still borrow customs of dress, manners, architecture, and appearance from somewhere in the real world. Historical signifiers are inescapable — so why not get excited about choosing them? Here are a few historical settings from which you could draw inspiration for your SCUP game, plus some fun and evocative fiction to get you started.

SOUTH ASIA: WHAT MATTERS MORE TO YOU, FOLLOWING THE RULES, OR DOING THE RIGHT THING?

Indian mythology has placed power politics in sharp focus for thousands of years. The great epic *Mahābhārata* (260) details a struggle for power and vengeance between two related families, the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas. A complex interplay between selfishness, social norms, and backstabbing snowballs until it leads relatives into tragic, open war against each other. Moreover, Indian epics jack the supernatural power level way, way up. Everyone and their horse is loaded



down with divine superweapons potent enough to flatten a city with a single arrow. Heroes command armies whose rank and file are each the match of five hundred ordinary soldiers. They go into battle arranged in formations that render them impervious to ordinary armies.

Later in history, the Mughals, an invading force of Turco-Mongol origin, controlled India for over three hundred years. They expanded their power through military conquest and state repression, clashing with local Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu leaders. Like in the Ottoman Empire, the decline or death of a Mughal emperor precipitated an internecine contest for the throne between his offspring via treachery, cruelty, and force. The Mughals were very clearly playing SCUP.

JAPAN: DO YOU WORK FOR YOUR FACTION, OR DOES YOUR FACTION WORK FOR YOU?

Japanese historical fiction chronicles chivalry's slow decline into a morass of conflicting political ambitions and betrayal. The height of Japanese chivalric culture occurred during the late Heian period. Works like *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu and *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon depict the cultured and refined Imperial court, where a veneer of peace, art, and propriety conceals subtle political maneuvering and base exploitation. *The Tale of the Heike* details the rise of knightly culture through the war between the Minamoto and Taira clans. If you like your political ambition cloaked in tragic gallantry, with noble cavaliers falling victim to their scheming family members' appetites, this time period has you covered.

Later in history, the Warring States period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw feudal warlords lead ruthless armies against one another, stooping to every form of villainy to get more guns, more glory, and more ground from their foes. But while his rivals tried harder and harder to perfect warfare, in the end it was a master pol-



itician — Tokugawa Ieyasu — who became Shōgun and brought peace (by any means necessary) to Japan for over two centuries.

MEDIEVAL WEST AFRICAN KINGDOMS: DO YOUR CHOICES AND CHARACTER BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER, OR SPLIT THEM APART?

West Africa is optimal for SCUP because several well-organized and -established kingdoms have enough cultural and geographic proximity to interact freely, but also many reasons to jockey for influence and territory. The Yorùbá kingdoms include Ilé-Ifè, where the òrìṣà (a pantheon of powerful, godlike spirits) first created the world and humanity; and Òyọ and Benin, geographically small but militarily and politically mighty empires which dominated Yorùbá politics for hundreds of years. Northern neighbors included Mali's Mande Empire and the Fon kingdom of Dahomey.

These kingdoms are a great choice if you want to work with centralized power structures and give players a lot of authority. West African states used efficient, paternalistic bureaucracies to point authority towards hereditary god-kings. What if each player had their own small, but well-organized country? What if each player had the power of a god? Many famous kings of West African history — Ọbàtálá, Odùduwà, Šàngó, Ọrànmiyàn — were deified upon their death and became òrìṣà who are venerated to this day. You can read stories of their great triumphs and catastrophic failures in Yorùbá folklore from West Africa and its diaspora in the Americas.

WHY?

Fantasy role-play has traditionally gravitated towards a late medieval European default: feudal aristocracies, knights, leather and steel, Gothic castles, large well-organized religions on Greek or Roman models, and individual heroes who accumulate power for them-



selves. Fantasy role-play got this way because the hobby as we've known it grew out of classic European tabletop wargames. White European-American men developed tabletop gaming by combining these wargames with high fantasy in the vein of another white European man writing about white European concepts: JRR Tolkien. Other white male authors such as Robert E Howard, Fritz Leiber, and Michael Moorcock influenced early gaming, as well.

Over time, white European fantasy fiction, which continued to dominate pop culture, has reinforced these tropes. While there has been an American interest in other fantasy traditions which were easy for Westerners to digest and readily available in inexpensive media, such as those of Japan and China, these were the exceptions. The result of four or so decades of the white male default is that European fantasy tropes are more common in the pop culture zeitgeist than any others. Everyone is broadly familiar with them, so we feel more confident innovating on them. We're also less likely to offend someone by misrepresenting them. One misrepresented Asian might be the only Asian character encountered in a given work; but one misrepresented European is typically one of dozens.

Playing in European surroundings with European trappings is "safe." It's the default. Be brave and challenge it. Working with the influences described above is harder than cleaving to what everyone knows; you might get things wrong, might have to apologize and do better, might have to learn. But your game will be better for it. By venturing outside your comfort zone, you make your table a safer place for people outside the mainstream.

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SCUP and the Mahābhārata

BY ERIC SIMON

“The lord of treasures said, ‘O Yudhishthira, patience, ability, appropriate time and place and prowess — these five lead to success in human affairs. O Bharata, in the Krita Yuga, men were patient and able in their respective occupations and they knew how to display prowess. And, O foremost of the Kshatriyas, a Kshatriya that is endued with patience and understandeth the propriety regarding place and time and is versed in all mortal regulations, can alone govern the world for a long time — nay, in all transactions. He that behaveth thus, acquireth, O hero, fame in this world and excellent state in the next.’”
— *The Mahābhārata (Book 3, Section 161), translated by K. M. Ganguli*

It is the end of the Dvapara Yuga, and the world tips further into the corruption that will soon become the Kali Yuga. The Pāṇḍavas battle with the Kauravas in a war spawned out of jealousy and careless gambling with lives and kingdoms. The gods join in the fight, but they will soon depart, abandoning the world to its violent ways.

This is the world of the *Mahābhārata*, the great epic poem that includes the Bhagavad-Gita, one of the most important religious texts for Hinduism, Jainism, and more. Though similar in topic and theme to its contemporary counterpart, the *Iliad*, the *Mahābhārata* spends more time with spiritual observations, especially those related to Dharma. A series of events that are each made worse by pride, jealousy, and haste leads to a terrible war, and at every turn we see the evils of those who act against their proper nature. Those who follow the appropriate path do not automatically win victory, as the world’s corruption is too pervasive. But they follow it regardless, and



they are remembered as heroes. Will you follow Dharma and establish your place in history as a tragic hero? Or will you reject the path set before you in favor of temporary, worldly gains?

EXPLORING THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*

Before I go any further, I want to say that I am not a scholar or expert on the *Mahābhārata*. I was not raised on it, so it is not ingrained in my personal experience the way it is for some. If you are like me — arriving at the *Mahābhārata* later in life — I have several suggestions for approaching this world and this text.

First and most importantly, be aware of how new you are and how old it is. As with any other sacred text or rich mythological tradition, don't assume that a single reading is going to provide everything you need to know. However, there is an excellent resource for a beginner's introduction to the *Mahābhārata*. Amar Chitra Katha is a publishing company that has produced fantastic comics portraying the historical and religious stories of India for over 50 years. You can purchase individual books electronically through their app for very low prices, and these are a wonderful way to begin your exploration.

This initial taste, along with the advice below, may be enough to get started with playing in a way that presents the themes and imagery of the *Mahābhārata*. If you want to dig deeper, you should read at least parts of the full story. William Buck published a shortened retelling that is crafted for Western readers but does a good job of conveying the overall arc. The definitive English translation remains that of Kisari Mohan Ganguli, whose complete version is in the public domain and therefore available online. Keep in mind that this version is a lot to take in — the *Mahābhārata* is the longest epic poem ever written in any language.



PLAYING IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

The game is already well set up to represent the world of the *Mahābhārata* with just a few important changes.

A Land of Gods and Monsters

The Dvapara Yuga is the last era in which the gods continue to walk the earth. Krishna rides in battle with Arjuna, Nala is possessed by a demon and then transformed by a naga, and heroes plead to both divine and monstrous figures for direct intervention. This affects the nature of The Unspeakable Power — whenever you harness it, you are accessing some power or gift given to you by the gods themselves. Arjuna’s bow Gandiva allows him to harness The Unspeakable Power to do incredible things beyond the abilities of a normal warrior, but it is not “magic” in the Western way of thinking.

Because it is a gift of the gods, The Unspeakable Power is not automatically dark or dangerous. Instead, the consequences you may face for whispering to it or harnessing it depend greatly on your intentions. Whether you are doing this in acceptance or rejection of your Dharma determines how your successes or failures manifest.

Dharma Rating and Dharma Moves

In this variant, your Faction and Honor are no longer relevant. Instead, your character is defined by how closely you adhere to the proper path of your profession and station. Whether you are a ruler, a warrior, or a laborer, you are expected to behave appropriately. The mechanics for Dharma are similar but not identical to the mechanics for Honor in the regular game. Most characters begin at 1 Dharma. This represents an average state for most people — you are not favored by the gods, but you are also not fighting them...yet.



YOUR DHARMA RATING MAY CHANGE OVER TIME AND CAN BE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE.

The Honor moves **Do You Know Who I Am** and **Call On Your Faction** are no longer used. However, any time you take a significant action that violates your place in society, roll+Dharma with the same results as the **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** Honor move. This move is now simply called **Reject Dharma**. In addition, all interactions with The Unspeakable Power have a chance both to affect your Dharma and to be affected by it. Whenever you roll+Arcane for any move, apply the following options in addition to the normal results of the move:

If you are at 1 Dharma or higher:

- † On a 10+ you may take on a difficult task or burden (chosen by the MC) and immediately raise your Dharma by 1.
- † On a 7-9 nothing happens.
- † On a 6- you may lower your Dharma by 1 to change the move result to a 7-9.

If you are at 0 Dharma or lower:

- † On a 10+ you may raise your Dharma by 1, but you must change the move result to a 6-.
- † On a 7-9 nothing happens.
- † On a 6- you may take on an evil task (chosen by the MC) to change the move result to a 7-9 and immediately lower your Dharma by 1.

Any tasks that you take on should be substantive but short term. They should be goals you can attempt to accomplish within the next couple of sessions. Note that you do not need to succeed at the task to receive the benefits, but you must agree to try.



USING THE CLASSES

Most of the classes are usable as they are, but the flavor changes slightly. For many of them, there are also preferred move selections when playing in the world of the *Mahābhārata*. Below is a list of suggested moves and flavor updates for each. Note that the suggested moves and moves to avoid are not absolute restrictions. However, following these guidelines will help you build an experience closer to the source material.

SPECIAL NOTES: The Black Hood and The Hex both start at -1 Dharma. Play groups should consider carefully whether they want to include them as player options, since they are likely to have dramatic effects on the tone of the game. The Screw is not recommended at all. The Bloodletter, on the other hand, is a more positive character in this variant, since Ayurvedic healing does not carry the same brutal connotations as European bloodletting. The Voice starts at 1 Dharma like most other characters, but nearly everything they do is going to require a **Reject Dharma** roll, since both deception and praising oneself are violations of Dharma.

THE ADEPT

Description: You are a religious and mystical figure (rather than a magical one). You may be a Brahmin or simply a wise advisor, and people come to you for advice. If you adhere to your own Dharma, you are very effective in keeping others on the path. If you reject Dharma and seek power for yourself, you fall swiftly into corruption and are likely to hurt others on your way down.

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: Coursing with Magic, Dream Quest, Arcane Advisor

MOVES TO AVOID: Power Horrible Power, Tear Reality



THE BELOVED

Description: There is no question that the gods love you. You may be their chosen representative, a consort, or a child of one of the gods. Because of this, you have a strong connection to The Un-speakable Power. However, falling out of favor (through negative Dharma) is more disastrous for you than for other people. The god who is your Patron, your parent, or your lover may continue to stand by you, but the rest of them are not so forgiving.

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: I Do Not Shake Before It, It Protects Me, It Knows You, It is Everywhere

MOVES TO AVOID: It Demands Blood, It Lives Within Me, Preacher, Together as One

THE BLACK HOOD (SEE NOTES ABOVE)

Description: You are the very corruption that others seek to avoid. Yet the services you provide are often preferable to open warfare. You rarely work for your own advancement (except in terms of payment), but you know that the very act of hiring you puts others at risk of violating their own Dharma.

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: All

THE BLOODLETTER (SEE NOTES ABOVE)

Description: Life is precious, and you know this better than others. You have dedicated yourself to saving others physically, though you also know how important it is for them to adhere to their Dharma. You work hard to keep your patients on the right path, because the health of the soul directly affects the health of the body.

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: Diagnosis, Intense Focus, Healing Touch

MOVES TO AVOID: God Complex, Blood for Blood, Collector of Souls



THE CROWN

Description: The burden of rule is terrible. Your Dharma affects not only your fate but the fates of all your people. But sometimes you have to make difficult decisions, doing the wrong things for the right reasons...

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: Heavy is the Head, Iron Fist, Commander of the Guard

MOVES TO AVOID: ...Of Omelets and Eggs, Bounty

THE GAUNTLET

Description: The honor of fighting for your kingdom is worth more than money, but not much more. Your duty to The Crown has brought you to the battlefield, but you still expect to be rewarded. And if there are opportunities to take that reward directly from the people of the kingdom you are supposed to defend, that is only your due...

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: Fearsome, Send an Army for I Will Not Relent, My Debts Shall Be Paid, The Smell of Blood and Steel, I Don't Mind the Pain

MOVES TO AVOID: Like a Rabid Dog Let Out of its Cage, Too Long in the Killing Fields

THE HEX (SEE NOTES ABOVE)

Description: You are a monster. You may be the child of a Naga or Rakshasa, or you may be a weaker demon disguised as a human. You wish nothing less than the full destruction of those who follow order, but for true destruction you must corrupt them first...

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: Moloch, Fairest of Them All, Black Ichor, Wise in the Ways, Dark Harvest

MOVES TO AVOID: Devil's Ante, Bend the Bone, Break the Back



THE LYRE

Description: Storytellers are praised and welcomed in all the courts of the land, and you are no exception. Perhaps you are just getting started, or perhaps you are so established that your fame precedes you, but either way everyone is happy to see you and to hear you practice your art. Now if they would just listen and understand the important message within the story...

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: Vox Populi, Soothsayer, I'm the Best at What I Do, A Song in Your Heart

MOVES TO AVOID: Roguish, Charmed I'm Sure

THE SPUR

Description: The greatest warriors are not the ones who can fight but the ones who can lead. Your strength is in the army that follows you, and it is formidable. But your soldiers are always watching the example you set, so you must be careful to maintain your image. They can never see you falter.

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: All

SPECIAL NOTES: Instead of a horse, The Spur has a personal chariot. Use the same choices for Strengths and Weaknesses as you would for a horse.

THE VOICE (SEE NOTES ABOVE)

Description: While the kingdom's enemies seek to weaken it so that it can be destroyed or conquered, your plans are more subtle and precise. You just want to weaken certain people or certain relationships so that you can insert yourself into the pathways of power. You don't want the Crown to fall, but you do want to position yourself as the one responsible for its salvation.

SUGGESTED STARTING MOVES: All



MYTHOLOGY CREATION

The normal procedures that SCUP offers for creating the specifics of your game world work perfectly well in this variant. However, you may want to consider where your story sits in relation to the actual story of the *Mahābhārata*. Because the *Mahābhārata* takes place in a time of legend, there are plenty of opportunities for kingdoms and characters not listed in the poem. You should set your story some time before the Kurukshetra War, since that climactic event transforms the world in far-reaching ways. However, you can easily make references to some of the earlier events that lead up to the war if you like. You probably also want to set your story away from the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas themselves. Individual characters might make brief cameo appearances, but they should not be central to your game unless you are very careful. On the other hand, you should certainly include the gods and their avatars whenever appropriate. Their presence is an important part of the setting.

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Playing Responsibly: An Appendix on Safety

Here, we detail some thoughts on how to do your best to make sure everyone walks away from your game of SCUP feeling good about what happened. You may not think these ideas apply to you if you know your gaming group very well. That's fine! Maybe they don't! But, in our experience, even among people who know each other very well, it's still possible for tabletop games, particularly ones that focus on violence, power, and manipulation like this one, to go off the rails. As such, we suggest you read this section and give some consideration to what's here.

As mentioned in the MC's chapter (185), there are a number of tools you can use to promote safety in game. First off, you probably want to begin your game by discussing what the rating of your game is, what you want "on screen" and what you want "off screen," and what is and is not allowed in your game. If there are things that come up in this conversation that some of your players are less interested in having in their game, consider using one of the following tools to help delineate what that is:

First, "lines and veils," coined by Ron Edwards, are the things that you *absolutely* don't want in your game (lines) and the things you want hidden from view (veils). For example, you might say that harming children is a "line" for you, as in it is off limits in your game. It just doesn't happen, not at all, not even off camera, while torture is "veiled" meaning that it can happen in the game, but "off camera," after you cut the narration. This is typically decided on *prior* to the game, but can also come up during a game. For example, if someone does something and you realize that you're uncomfortable with it, you can say "can we veil that?"



Second, an “X card,” originally created by John Stavropoulos, is a card with a little X on it that sits at the center of the table that someone can point to if something in the game is making them uncomfortable. This doesn’t mean you cut immediately, but it does mean you back off and take a detour. The MC says “you’re covered with spiders” and someone points to the X card. The MC pauses, says “what about snakes?” The person says that’s fine. “Okay,” the MC says, “you’re covered in snakes.” Conversely, the person may shake their head and say it’s still not okay. In that case, perhaps it’s time to have a conversation and figure out how to respect the fictional integrity while not hurting the player who pointed to the X Card and then figuring out how to get there. While it’s certainly not a tool every group will appreciate, if it’s something your group might work well with, it can be a useful way to make people feel safe at the table. Knowing you have a tool that gives you the power to protect yourself is helpful for many gamers.

We *especially* encourage you to use these tools if someone at the table is playing The Screw. Let us state this unequivocally: *torture is evil and ugly and we do not expect everyone who plays this game to want to hear or think about it.* Many people are legitimately uninterested in hearing depictions of torture for personal or political reasons. As such, your group must be clear on two things: (a) is The Screw an option in your game at all, and (b) if so, to what degree is The Screw’s dirty work done off camera? With regard to (a), if someone at your table sees torture as a hard line for them, then we encourage you to take The Screw out of the list of possible character classes for people. If folks are interested in having The Screw as a possibility, then you should have a conversation with regard to (b). It is *absolutely* possible to have someone play The Screw at the table and respect people’s boundaries and concerns, but to do so requires conversation. Personally, we have never run a game of SCUP featuring



someone playing The Screw where torture happened on camera, in full gory detail. In our games, it has always been off-camera. If there is any doubt or confusion about any of this, make sure you have those conversations *before* bringing The Screw into your game.

Finally, none of these are *perfect* tools. They are no substitute for ongoing conversation. Additionally, it is true that sometimes people *want* their buttons to be pushed, but this is the kind of thing that you would want to be sure you're on the same page about with some discussion prior to playing. The important thing here is to use the tools at your disposal to make sure people are comfortable and getting what they want out of the game. In fact, for a game like this, where we *want* you to take things right to the edge, this is especially important. You have to know people's limits, concerns, and needs to be sure that you can do that safely, otherwise you'll be walking on eggshells and perhaps feel you have to hold back the whole game. *We want you to know how far you can push things at your table* so you feel comfortable going to that edge while people still have fun.



Play Resources

Moves Quick Reference

BASIC MOVES

FACE DURESS

When you do something difficult where your ability to do so is seriously in question, roll+Steady. On a 10+, you have achieved what you set out to do. On a 7-9, you have flinched, stalled, or hesitated. The MC will pick 1 or 2 of the following and tell you what it will look like if you take it.

- † You can achieve your goal, but it'll come at a price.
- † You can achieve your goal, but only partially.
- † You cannot achieve your goal, but can do something similar, instead.

Then, decide if you go through with what's been offered, or back off.

THREATEN WITH FORCE

When you intimidate a person with the threat of violence, roll+Fierce. On a 10+, your target believes your threat. If they are an NPC, they will either do what you ask or, if they do not, you may choose to immediately commit the violence you promised them. If they are a PC, they may decide what they do, but if they refuse to do what you ask you may choose to immediately commit the violence you promised them. On a 7-9, you were unconvincing or they are not persuaded. Your target will choose one:

- † Freeze in fear, surprise, or confusion.
- † Try to strike a bargain with you or talk their way out of it.
- † Start looking for a way out and take it if they can.
- † Put something or someone between themselves and you.
- † Laugh at you, challenge you, or attack you, right then and there.



ENGAGE IN COMBAT

When you attack someone with the intent to do Harm, roll+Fierce. On a hit (10+ or 7-9), choose one of the following:

- † You attack with vigor (you inflict +1 Harm).
- † You parry their blows (you take -1 Harm).
- † You battle aggressively (you inflict +2 Harm but take an additional +1 Harm to yourself).
- † You fight defensively (you inflict -1 Harm, but take an additional -2 Harm to yourself).

Additionally, on a 10+, pick one of the following:

- † You stymie your opponent (they must change their behavior, somehow).
- † You are impressive or dominant (gain the attention or respect of those present).
- † You achieve a goal (you may change the situation. Grab something from your opponent, push them somewhere, block their entrance or exit, etc.).

PERSUADE WITH LEVERAGE

When you try to convince someone to do or say something for you by using something you have against them or offering to give them what they want, roll+Wily. For NPC targets: on a 10+, they will accept your offer and do/say what you want. On a 7-9, the MC picks one:

- † They want even more than what you're offering or suggesting.
- † They want concrete proof or upfront payment of the leverage immediately, before they do anything.
- † They want something else than what you're offering or suggesting, instead.

For PC targets: on a 10+, you get both below. On a 7-9, you choose 1:

- † If the target does or says what you want, you may choose to give them 1 advancement point.
- † If the target refuses, they must make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll.

What your target does is then up to them, given those caveats.



STUDY A SITUATION

When things are getting charged or tense and you try to work out what is happening around you, roll+Sly. On a 10+, ask 3 questions. On a 7–9, ask 2:

- † Where is my best escape route/way in/way past?
- † How is one of my adversaries vulnerable to me right now?
- † What am I missing?
- † Who or where is my enemy, really?
- † Who's actually pulling the strings, here?
- † Who or what here could be a useful opportunity for me?

On a miss, ask one question, but the MC gets to make their hard move, as well. The first time you act on one of the MC's answers, take +1 forward on your roll.

STUDY A PERSON

When you and someone else are interacting and you try to glean information from them about who they are, what they want, what they're thinking, etc., roll+Sly. On a 10+, ask 3 questions. On a 7–9, ask 2.

- † What does your character really want?
- † What is your character's current plan?
- † What does your character wish I would do?
- † What are you leaving out?
- † How could I get your character to _____?
- † Can I actually trust your character to _____?

On a miss, ask one question, but the MC gets to make their move, as well. The first time you act on one of the MC's/player's answers, take +1 forward.



WHISPER INTO THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER

When you ask a question of or seek guidance from the supernatural, roll+Arcane. On a hit, the MC will pick one of the following:

- † You have a brief vision.
- † You hear a faint voice.
- † You have a curious sensation.

On a 10+, The Unspeakable Power will provide clear insight to you on the guidance you seek. On a 7-9, The MC picks one:

- † Your insight is vague, frightening, or confusing.
- † The Unspeakable Power learns something you might not want it to know.
- † The Unspeakable Power whispers a threat back to you.

PERIPHERAL MOVES

PATRON MOVE

If you have a Patron, roll+the stat your class lists at the start of the session.

- † On a 10+, your Patron is happy with you. You and the player of your Patron should work out why this is. You may remove 1 disobedience if you have any.
- † On a 7-9, your Patron is generally pleased, with some reservations. You and the player of your patron should work out why this is. They hold 1 for the session. They may spend it to call on you to do something and you must make a **Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt** roll if you refuse. If you refuse your Patron's request, it counts as 1 disobedience (max 3).
- † On a miss, your Patron is angry with you. You and the player of your Patron should work out why. You receive 1 automatic disobedience (max 3).

If you reach 3 disobedience, an NPC Patron will immediately sever their relationship with you. A PC Patron may choose to immediately sever their relationship with you, or choose instead to take 1 hold to call on you.



HELP OR INTERFERE WITH ANOTHER PC'S MOVE

When you are in a scene with another PC, and you **Help or Interfere** with their move, describe how you are doing it, and then roll+whatever stat is appropriate (i.e. if you interfere using your intelligence, roll+Sly, if you interfere using your strength, roll+Fierce). On a hit, they take +1 (for helping) or -1 (for interfering). On a 10+, pick an additional effect.

- † They take an additional +1 (for helping) or -1 (for interfering).
- † You do not expose yourself to danger, cost, or retribution through your action.

TAKING HARM

When you suffer Harm, roll+Harm suffered (after armor). If you took a hit for 2 Harm, and have armor that absorbs 1 Harm, you would roll+1, because you are taking 1 Harm after armor.

On a 10+, the MC can choose 1:

- † You're out of action for the time being: unconscious, downed, writhing in pain, or panicked.
- † It's worse than it seemed. Take an additional 1 Harm.
- † Choose 2 from the 7–9 list below.

On a 7–9, the MC can choose 1:

- † You lose your footing.
- † You lose your grip on whatever you're holding.
- † You lose track of someone or something you're attending to.
- † You miss noticing something important.

On a miss, the MC can choose something from the 7–9 list above. If she does, it's in place of some of the Harm you're suffering, so you take -1 Harm.



MARKET MOVE

When you go into a market looking for a particular thing, roll+Wisely. On a 10+, it's right there for you, at a reasonable price. On a 7–9, the MC chooses one of the following:

- † “That's quite is a rare thing! It's going to cost you a little extra...”
- † “Oh, I know where you can get one, but only if you meet with an associate of mine...”
- † “Damn it all, I had one, I just sold it to _____, maybe you can go get it off them?”
- † “Sorry, I don't have that, but maybe this will do instead?”

HONOR MOVES**DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?**

Spend 1 Honor to have someone you meet have recently heard something impressive about you. Take +1 forward on your next **Threaten With Force** or **Persuade With Leverage** roll against them.

CALL ON YOUR FACTION

When you call on your Faction for help, support, or to advance your agenda, spend between 0-3 Honor and roll+Honor spent. On a 10+, activate one of your Faction's benefits. On a 7-9, activate one of your Faction's benefits, but the MC holds 1. They may spend it to have someone from your Faction call on you to do a favor, fulfill your duty, or perform an obligation. On a miss, your Faction cannot help you. The MC will detail why and will pick one from the list of consequences below.

- † Secrets are revealed.
- † Loyalties are shifted.
- † Status is threatened.
- † Channels are cut off.
- † Suspicions are confirmed.
- † Allies are put in danger.



REFUSE AN OBLIGATION, DUTY, OR DEBT

When you refuse to do something you are supposed to do because of your station or resist carrying out a command or request from someone with leverage or authority over you, spend between 0-3 Honor and roll+Honor spent. On a 10+, nothing. On a 7-9, pick 1. On a miss, take both.

- † You feel guilty or conflicted. Take -1 forward.
- † You seem ignoble. The MC holds 1. They spend it to have someone you interact with have heard whisperings that you can't be trusted.

MC Quick Reference**THE MC'S AGENDA:**

- † Make the world feel epic and extraordinary.
- † Fill the player characters' lives with intrigue and drama.
- † And, most importantly, play to find out what happens.

THE MC'S PRINCIPLES:

- † Address the characters, not the players.
- † Make your move, but never speak its name.
- † Alliances shift like sands. See treachery all around.
- † Remember that power corrupts, duty calls, and subordination crushes.
- † Give every NPC a desire and aim those desires at the PCs.
- † Don't give anything away for free.
- † Ask big questions of the players and use them to spin webs.
- † Think broadly - what else is happening that may affect the players?
- † Give the PCs reasons to both love and hate the NPCs.
- † Sometimes, disclaim decision-making.
- † Be a fan of the PCs.
- † Even as you are cruel and calculating, remember that it's a game, with real people at the table.



BASIC MC MOVES:

- † Threaten them directly.
- † Give them word of whisperings behind their back.
- † Deal Harm to them.
- † Force them to pay.
- † Offer them an opportunity; perhaps show them the cost if they refuse.
- † Back them into a corner, literally or figuratively.
- † Inflict consequences on another because of their deeds.
- † Show them the downsides of their character class.
- † Align a Faction's agenda against them.
- † Separate them from their allies.
- † Surround them with their enemies.
- † Hint at an unwelcome future.
- † Disgrace them, privately or publicly.

MC MOVES FOR ELITE CHARACTERS:

- † Force them to wield their power or fulfill their duties.
- † Remind them how far they have to fall.
- † Hint at vast conspiracies against them.
- † Challenge them with uprisings and revolts from those beneath them.
- † Repudiate their position with ignominy and insubordination.

MC MOVES FOR COMMON CHARACTERS:

- † Subtly remind them of their station or lot in life.
- † Demonstrate to them how much they stand to gain.
- † Ensnare them, unwittingly, in the machinations of power.
- † Crush them with debt or obligations to those who have everything.
- † Put them in their place with degradation or humiliation.



MC MOVES USING THE UNSPEAKABLE POWER:

- † Offer them power at a terrible cost.
- † Give them what they *think* they want.
- † Make a demand of them, set a price on failure.
- † Reveal to them the depths of their ignorance.
- † Seduce them with promises of hedonistic pleasure.

WHEN TO MAKE A MOVE AGAINST A PLAYER:

- † When a player misses a roll (i.e. gets a 6 or below).
- † When they've given you an opening to mess with them.
- † When it would just be too good to pass up.
- † When there is a lull in the game and there is an appropriate move to fill it.

CREATE A THREAT:

- † Name it and describe it.
- † Decide what resource(s) it threatens.
- † Decide what kind of Threat it is, and define its traits.
- † Figure out what it connects to.
- † Write one or two stakes questions.
- † Create a countdown and/or custom move (optional).
- † Play it to the hilt.

NPC NAMES TO USE: Grishnag, Asdel, Zadkat, Adriel, Ayabeth, Kiriell, Saba, Andar, Zopha, Sophia, Tharorod, Lockheart, Laini, Hammond, Adorna, Shaibach, Blade, Faela, Lynne, Isamu, Fiamma, Ogen, Vyncent, Dabia, Jane, Edward, Mustafa, Amon, Archer, Old One, Barael, Lucky, Orchid, Rhala, Hae, Ferndale, Sister, Farro, Kalesin, Otho, Baker, Alain, Mori, Geddy, Reaper, Jayson, Cat



Factions Worksheet

At the start of your game, each player will create a Faction for their character. A Faction is a group of people to whom your character feels/owes some allegiance to. They may be a tightly bound group, such as a noble house or secret society. Conversely, they may be a more loosely bound category, such as an art community or the proletarian working class of a city. Either way, a Faction represents the people you have some loyalty to or affinity with. Your interests or agenda are, at least to a degree, their interests and agenda. Your status, at least to a degree, rises and falls with their status. When you create a Faction, complete the exercise below and write the answers on your character sheet. The Honor section (159) features more information about the Faction move.

PICK A KIND OF GROUP

- † House (a royal family or assembly and their employees and advisors)
- † Clan (an ethnic group or some other kind of demographic grouping)
- † Guild (a professional group)
- † Clique (a social group)
- † Ring (a criminal organization or society of some kind)
- † Order (a religious or educational community)

PICK A SOCIAL STATUS

- † Noble (part of the ruling class)
- † Honored (a group held in esteem, despite not being noble)
- † Common (a group of regular people)
- † Proletarian (a lower status group)
- † Outcast (a reviled or marginalized group)
- † Outlaw (a secret or criminal group)



FACTION BENEFITS

Now pick two Faction benefits based on your social status.

FOR NOBLE OR HONORED FACTIONS

- † Wealth
- † Power
- † Status
- † Magic
- † Knowledge
- † Rumors

FOR COMMON OR PROLETARIAN FACTIONS

- † Skill
- † Gossip
- † Networks
- † Numbers
- † Strength
- † Inconspicuousness

FOR OUTCAST OR OUTLAW FACTIONS

- † Secrecy
- † Blackmail
- † Vice
- † Dirty Work
- † Contraband
- † Magic

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FACTIONS

Take a minute before play to briefly discuss how your Faction is related to each other PC's Faction. Pick from the following.

- † We have a rivalry with this Faction.
- † We have an alliance with this Faction.
- † We have open conflict with this Faction.
- † We are indifferent to or unaware of this Faction.



Threat Creation Worksheet

STEP ONE

Name it and describe it.

STEP TWO

Decide what resource(s) it threatens. Aim this at the resources of at least one of the PCs.

STEP THREE

Decide what kind of Threat it is, and define its traits.

- † Adversary (an individual antagonist)
- † Cabal (a group of people)
- † Malady (some sort of condition)
- † Realm (a landscape or place)
- † Power (a supernatural concern)

For **Adversaries**, pick one or two drives:

- † Domination
- † Wealth
- † Chaos
- † Power
- † Lust
- † Sport
- † Fear
- † Hunger

For **Cabals**, pick one or two goals:

- † To enrich their members.
- † To spread their dogma.
- † To swell their ranks.
- † To protect their own.
- † To sow discord.
- † To maintain order.
- † To consolidate their power.
- † To punish those who are different.



For **Maladies**, pick one type:

- † A fast spreading disease.
- † A wave of panic and hysteria.
- † A curse.
- † A dangerous ideology.
- † An irrational superstition.
- † An economic catastrophe.
- † A famine or other shortage.

For **Realms**, pick one effect:

- † It consumes what is around it.
- † It is barren and dead.
- † It is nearly impenetrable.
- † It is poisonous or otherwise harmful.
- † It hides dangerous secrets.
- † It is a breeding ground for vile things.
- † It entices with lies.

For **Powers**, pick a fundamental danger or two:

- † It will twist words.
- † It will give with one hand and take with the other.
- † It will corrupt from the inside out.
- † It will create madness and terror.
- † It will break loose and create wanton destruction.
- † It will become addicted to pain and suffering.
- † It will delight in collecting souls.

STEP FOUR

Figure out what it connects to.

STEP FIVE

Write one or two stakes questions.

STEP SIX (OPTIONAL)

Write a custom move.



First Session Worksheet

In this worksheet, the MC will write down the names of the PCs and NPCs during the first session to create a matrix they can use to examine what the PCs have and how NPCs might take it away. Use this to create Threats for conflict in subsequent sessions.

PC RESOURCES: Write a PC's name next to any resource they possess, control, or command.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food | <input type="checkbox"/> Security | <input type="checkbox"/> Land |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty | <input type="checkbox"/> Fame/Infamy | <input type="checkbox"/> Strength |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water | <input type="checkbox"/> Currency | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Positioning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luxury | <input type="checkbox"/> Ideology | <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Livestock | <input type="checkbox"/> Labor | <input type="checkbox"/> Skill |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goods | <input type="checkbox"/> Titles | <input type="checkbox"/> Magic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter | <input type="checkbox"/> Tradition | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information | <input type="checkbox"/> Weapons | <input type="checkbox"/> Myth |

COMPETITORS: Write the name of any person or thing who threatens the PCs because of one of the following (i.e. if someone's Hunger threatens one or more of the PCs, write their name in the box next to Hunger).

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunger | <input type="checkbox"/> Cruelty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambition | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrogance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignorance | <input type="checkbox"/> Lust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Madness | <input type="checkbox"/> Despair |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Envy | <input type="checkbox"/> Hatred |



Pre-Generated Settings

THE KINGDOM OF TRYGVASON

BY JENN MARTIN, ADAM ROBICHAUD, RICH ROGERS,
LARRY SPIEL, AND TODD NICHOLAS

The Kingdom is ruled over by House Einarsson in the capital city of Draumur Minna, where magic is forbidden because of a great terror many years ago, and where people suffer from restless, dreamless sleep because of the intervention of the gods.

MYTHOLOGY

Many cycles ago, mortals slumbered in peaceful, restful sleep, under the watch of the gods, blissfully unaware that terrible things were locked away in realms beyond our knowing. The complacent mortals became arrogant and began to meddle in what they should not, spinning magics and mocking the very walls between worlds. Their tampering unleashed the Vanir, creatures that crawled into our dreams, and whispered terrible things as we slept. Mortals lived in fear of the Vanir coming to them in the night and planting horrible ideas in their brains. Priestesses would forego sleep for weeks on end to avoid the lure of the Vanir and perform rituals that kept them at bay. Eventually, a cult, called Those Who Slumber, were seduced by the Vanir and rose up against the learned priestesses, slaughtering them. King Thronall of House Einarsson, declared war on the cult and their followers, leading to a bloody civil war. After a decade of wanton destruction, the gods themselves sealed the Vanir away in the blackness between the stars and robbed mortals of their ability to dream. Though time has passed, we can never forget those days because we must live with dreamless, agitated sleep. Now, some worship the vanished gods who ended the war, some venerate the noble priestesses who kept the Vanir at bay, some lust for the power of the



Vanir, and many think it's all nonsense. Except, of course, for those terrifying few who are cursed with the ability to dream. They and only they know the truth....

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

- † The Unspeakable Power comes from the Vanir. Anyone can get a taste. Only those who can dream can truly wield it. To be a magic user in this world is to be one who can dream.
- † There are a number of potential groups to think about as Factions for PCs or Threats against PCs. The religion of the Priestesses, the reemerged cult of Those Who Slumber, and the noble descendants of King Thronall, as examples.
- † Are there rituals that people perform to commemorate the myth? Is there anything people do to keep themselves safe from the Vanir?
- † What happens to those who can dream? Are they oppressed? Jailed? Studied? Or are they venerated? By whom?
- † What is the relationship between the noble family and the various other groups? Are they connected to a religious hierarchy? A group of scholars? Or do they have no allies?
- † What are the lives of regular folk like? What goes on in the city of Draumur Minna? How does the restless, dreamless sleep shape the city? Are people surly? Empathetic? What are their sayings, assumptions, and superstitions?

POSSIBLE THREATS

- † Queen Hekla of House Einarsson (Adversary, drives: domination, power)
- † Those Who Slumber (Cabal, goals: to spread their dogma, to consolidate their power)
- † The Vanir (Power, dangers: it will corrupt from the inside out, it will break loose and create destruction)

Once you feel you have a good handle on what the city of Darumur Minna is like, who rules it, and who the important groups are, create your characters and begin play.



QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR PLAYER CHARACTERS

THE ADEPT

The Adept is one who can dream. Do they worship or fear the Vanir? How do others feel about their power? Do they hide it or flaunt it? Are they part of cult of Those Who Slumber, or do they throw their lot in with the priestesses?

THE BELOVED

Are you a cult leader, trying to get a taste of the power the Vanir can offer, or do you venerate the vanished gods who saved the world? Who follows you? The nobility? Commoners? Outcasts?

THE BLACK HOOD

Do you work on behalf of the cult, assassinating their enemies? Or are you part of a guild of rebel thieves that seeks to enrich themselves by robbing from the nobles who rule the city?

THE BLOODLETTER

Do you work for the noble family? Perhaps you keep someone powerful alive as a court physician. Conversely, do you work for the priestesses, a scholar in search of more effective medicines?

THE CROWN

Are you a descendent of the great Einarsson line? What do you think of all those stories of your ancestors? Do you feel pressure to live up to their example, or do you think it's merely stories to tell children. Are you aware of the reenergized cult vying for power from below?



THE GAUNTLET

There are no shortage of possible Patrons for you. Do you work for the noble family, the priestesses, or are you employed by someone powerful in the cult of Those Who Slumber? What sorts of violence does your Patron have you commit on their behalf? Why do they need your steel?

THE HEX

What are the dreams the Vanir plant in your brain like? What sorts of horrible things do you see, and how do they shape the sorts of mischief you get up to during the daylight?

THE LYRE

What does it mean to be an artist or performer in Darumur Minna? Do you tell tales of the time when people could dream? Do you sing songs about restful sleep? Do you play gentle songs for the rich as they sleep to try and calm them? Why do people desire your talents and company in such a place?

THE SPUR

Is being the captain of the guard becoming more difficult since you've been tasked with rooting out the re-emergent cult? What about that has made your job complicated? Are some of your riders sympathetic to their views?

THE VOICE

So many ears for you to whisper in! Are you in the employ of a noble of the House of Einarsson, or do you serve as an advisor to the high priestess? What agenda do you seek for yourself in this world?



THE GREAT CITY OF KAR'IN NAR'EL

BY MISHA BUSHYAGER, BRENDAN CONWAY, ADAM RO-
BICHAUD, JENN MARTIN, AND TODD NICHOLAS

Kar'in Nar'el, jewel of the desert and center of the known earth. A sprawling metropolis under the shadow of the Ziggurat of Temmah, ruled over by the all knowing magic users called The Conclave of Nebutites, its citizens cannot leave because the great desert of Nyiri blocks any path out of the city.

MYTH

In the beginning, the great city of Kar'in Nar'el was the seat of power and scholarship at the center of a great jungle. Because the people of the city were curious, they ventured further and further into the jungle, discovering its secrets and treasures. One day, a young scholar named Temmah ventured into a cave far from the city and found a golden chest full of stone tablets. On the tablets, mysterious words were written. Temmah took the tablets back to her learned colleagues in the city and they began to speak the words. As soon as they did, the jungle around the city turned to a sea of endless sand and the earth shook, revealing the great mountains that surround the desert. Cut off from the rest of the world, the city of Kar'in Nar'el suffered and withered in the heat of the desert sun until the scholars who had first destroyed the jungle and split the earth mastered the words. While the destruction they wrought could not be undone, they created The Conclave of Nebutites, those who ink their tongues, to jealously guard the power of the tablets. The Conclave erected the great Ziggurat of Temmah, guarded by the High Priestess of the Words, and locked the tablets inside to ensure that they and only they know the words. Once a year, the High Priestess unlocks the chest at the Festival of Temmah and threatens to speak the words unless someone agrees to sacrifice themselves by wandering alone into the desert.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- † The Conclave of Nebutites are the rulers of the city with their High Priestess as their leader. The Unspeakable Power in this society comes from knowledge of the words, and magic users are connected to The Conclave. Or... are they? Are there rogue magic users?
- † What divisions exist within The Conclave? Are there those who wish to stop the sacrifices? Are there some who wish to share the power of the words with all? How open are these conflicts?
- † The rulers of this society are magic using scholars. What do people think of them? Are they fearful of them? Respectful? Resentful? How does this shape the relationship The Conclave has with the citizens of the city?
- † How do common citizens attempt to recapture the glory days of the city? Through art? Through stories? Or do they look on those days with ambivalence?
- † Is the desert dangerous? Do foul creatures, griffins and serpents and sphinxes, run wild in the great sand sea? Or are those merely legends? Either way, are there guards who patrol the hot sands to protect the city?
- † Speaking of, does anyone live in the desert? Are there tribal people, cults, or outcasts who live in the fiery, hot sands?

POSSIBLE THREATS

- † The High Priestess (Adversary, drives: power and fear)
- † The Conclave (Cabal, goals: to consolidate their power, to maintain order)
- † The desert (Realm, effect: breeding ground for vile things)
- † The desert cult of Nyiri (Cabal, goals: to spread their dogma, to sow discord)

Once you feel you have a good handle on what the city of Kar'in Nar'el is like, who rules it, and who the important groups are, create your characters and begin play.



QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR PLAYER CHARACTERS

THE ADEPT

The Adept can speak the words. Are they a part of The Conclave or are they a rogue magic user? How does this shape their experiences as an Adept? And why, exactly, are The Conclave colloquially referred to as “those who ink their tongues?”

THE BELOVED

Are you a member of The Conclave yourself, perhaps an attendant to the high priestess? Or perhaps you are a rouge prophet from a desert cult, challenging the authority of the religious order in the city?

THE BLACK HOOD

Do you work for a cult or secret society that stands against The Conclave? Are you from a desert tribe, stealing the basics of life for the people of your community from those who live in the city?

THE BLOODLETTER

Do you work for The Conclave? Perhaps you keep someone powerful alive as a court physician. Or are you a work-a-day doctor, one of the common folk? Is there a certain kind of sickness or injury you see more than others? What does this tell you about what is going on in people’s lives?

THE CROWN

Are you the high priestess herself? How do you feel about the ritual that demands you threaten to speak the words unless someone is sacrificed? What secrets do you know about the words you wouldn’t want to get out?



THE GAUNTLET

Are you the muscle that The Conclave uses to silence dissent? Or, perhaps, you are a warrior of renown who has been tasked with patrolling the desert around the city, looking out for the desert creatures and tribal folk who the city sees as threats.

THE HEX

Is your dark magic begrudgingly accepted due to its practicality by The Conclave? Or are you a mysterious witch, surviving in the desert by making dark bargains with those desperate enough to venture out under the red sun?

THE LYRE

What does it mean to be an artist or performer in Kar'in Nar'el? Do you look to the great past of the city to perform your skills? Perhaps you provide comfort and beauty to those in The Conclave. Are you a commoner or a tribal member seeking to improve your station in life? Where do your loyalties truly lie?

THE SCREW

Do you work for The Conclave? Is your work done in secret, to keep the dirty deeds they get up to quiet, or do all fear crossing you? What kind of secrets exist in the city that only you know?

THE SPUR

Do you and your riders venture forth into the desert to fight tribes or monsters? Or are you the leader of a marauding band of desert nomads? What secrets do you know of the sand and mountains that only the brave, who venture so far out, are aware of?

THE VOICE

Are you sitting at the side of the high priestess, whispering counsel to her? Or do you have your cart hitched to one of her rivals who sees things a little differently than she does?



Index

A

Advanced Moves: 177
 Advancement: 19, 175
 Armor: 170

B

Barter: 14
 Basic Moves: 24, 272
 Act Under Duress: 24, 272
 Engage in Combat: 29, 273
 Persuade With Leverage: 32, 273
 Study a Person: 35, 274
 Study a Situation: 34, 274
 Threaten With Force: 27, 272
 Whisper Into The Unspeakable Power: 37, 275

C

Character Classes: 8, 48
 Adept, The: 49
 Beloved, The: 58
 Black Hood, The: 67
 Bloodletter, The: 75
 Crown, The: 83
 Gauntlet, The: 91
 Hex, The: 98
 Lyre, The: 106
 Screw, The: 113
 Spur, The: 121
 Voice, The: 129

E

End of Season Moves: 181
 End of Session: 22, 161-162
 Entanglements: 19, 176

F-G

Factions: 10, 152
 Followers: 18, 64
 Gear: 174

H

Harm: 12, 46
 Harness The Unspeakable Power: 44-45
 Honor Moves: 11, 43, 164, 277
 Call on Your Faction: 43, 164, 277
 Do You Know Who I Am: 43, 164, 277
 Refuse an Obligation, Duty, or Debt: 43, 165, 278
 Honor Points: 160-163
 Honor: 11, 43, 159

M-N

MC Moves, Basic: 201, 279
 MC Moves, Common: 208, 279
 MC Moves, Elite: 208, 279
 MC Moves, Unspeakable Power: 205, 280
 MC Principles: 212, 279
 MC's Agenda: 6, 193, 279
 Military: 17, 88
 Militias: 17, 124
 Mythology Creation: 137, 268
 NPCs: 195



P-S

Patrons: 11, 148
 PCs' Agenda: 6
 Peripheral Moves: 39, 275
 Help or Interfere: 40, 276
 Market Move: 42, 277
 Patron Move: 39, 275
 When You Take Harm: 42, 276
 Player vs. Player: 45
 Pre-Generated Settings: 286
 Stats: 3, 9
 Steads: 16, 85

T-W

Tags: 171
 The First Session: 20
 First Session Worksheet 285
 Threats: 222
 Adversaries: 225
 Cabals: 226
 Creating a Threat: 223
 Maladies: 227
 Powers: 229
 Realms: 228
 Threat Creation Worksheet 283
 Unspeakable Power, The: 5
 Weapons: 169



The Sword, The Crown, and The Unspeakable Power (SCUP) is a dark fantasy role-playing game from Wheel Tree Press. Reminiscent of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* or *First Law* books, SCUP focuses on power, politics, and intrigue in a setting you create using a unique world building exercise.

Built on the Powered by the Apocalypse system developed in Vincent and Meguey Baker's game *Apocalypse World*, SCUP is designed to let players get their hands dirty in scheming, conniving, and backstabbing.

Take control of powerful sorcerers, regal nobles, and hardened warriors as you plot your rise to glory. Will others step on you as they ascend the social hierarchy? Or will you hack and claw your way to be the one who wears the crown?



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