

BLADES IN THE DARK

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CHAPTER 1

THE BASICS

THE GAME

Blades in the Dark is a game about a group of daring scoundrels building a criminal enterprise on the haunted streets of an industrial-fantasy city. There are heists, chases, escapes, dangerous bargains, bloody skirmishes, deceptions, betrayals, victories, and deaths.

We play to find out if the fledgling crew can thrive amidst the teeming threats of rival gangs, powerful noble families, vengeful ghosts, the Bluecoats of the City Watch, and the siren song of the scoundrels' own vices.

THE SETTING

The game takes place in the cold, foggy city of **Doskvol** (aka Duskwall or “the Dusk”). It’s **industrial** in its development. Imagine a world like ours during the second industrial revolution of the 1870s—there are trains, steam-boats, printing presses, simple electrical technology, carriages, and the black smog of chimney smoke everywhere. Doskvol is something like a mashup of Venice, London, and Prague. It’s crowded with row-houses, twisting streets, and criss-crossed with hundreds of little waterways and bridges.

The city is also a **fantasy**. The world is in perpetual darkness and haunted by ghosts—a result of the cataclysm that shattered the sun and broke the Gates of Death a thousand years ago. The cities of the empire are each encircled by crackling lightning towers to keep out the vengeful spirits and twisted horrors of the deathlands. To power these massive barriers, the titanic metal ships of the Leviathan hunters are sent out from Doskvol to extract electroplasmic blood from massive demonic terrors upon the ink-dark Void Sea.

You’re in a haunted Victorian-era city trapped inside a wall of lightning powered by demon blood.

The point of all this is to create a pressure-cooker environment for our criminal escapades. Traveling outside the lightning barrier is a very bad idea, so it's impractical to "leave town and wait for the heat to die down" after you pull off a score. Everything the players choose to do has consequences for their characters and shifts the balance of power around in the city—driving the action for a sandbox style of roleplaying game. For a full guide to Doskvol, see page 237.

THE PLAYERS

Each player creates a character and works with the other players to create the crew to which their characters belong. Each player strives to bring their character to life as an interesting, daring scoundrel who reaches boldly beyond their current safety and means. **This is the players' core responsibility:** they engage with the premise of the game, seeking out interesting opportunities for crime in the haunted city—taking big risks against powerful foes and sending their characters into danger.

The players work together with the Game Master to establish the tone and style of the game by making judgment calls about the mechanics, dice, and consequences of actions. The players take responsibility as co-authors of the game with the GM. For more, see **Players Best Practices**, page 182.

THE CHARACTERS

The scoundrels attempt to develop their crew from a ragtag group of poor independents to a serious criminal organization with established turf. They do this by taking illegal jobs from clients, planning their own devious missions, making alliances, destroying their enemies, and trying to stay one step ahead of the law. There are several character types to choose from, each representing a different style of scoundrel:

- ◆ **CUTTERS** are intimidating fighters. ◆ **LURKS** are stealthy infiltrators.
- ◆ **HOUNDS** are deadly sharpshooters and trackers. ◆ **SLIDES** are manipulators and spies.
- ◆ **LEECHES** are tinkerers, alchemists, and saboteurs. ◆ **SPIDERS** are devious masterminds.
- ◆ **WHISPERS** are arcane adepts.

Character types aren't unique. You can mix and match, or play a crew that is all of one type. It's up to you. For more, see **Character Creation**, page 51.

THE CREW

In addition to creating scoundrel characters, you'll also create the crew by choosing which type of criminal enterprise you're interested in exploring. The crew gets its own "character sheet," just like a player character.

- ◆ **ASSASSINS** are killers for hire. ◆ **HAWKERS** sell illegal products.
- ◆ A **CULT** serves a forgotten god. ◆ **SMUGGLERS** transport contraband.
- ◆ **BRAVOS** are thugs and extortionists. ◆ **SHADOWS** are thieves and spies.

The crew type isn't restrictive (you can pursue a variety of activities); it's there to help focus the game play. For more on crews, see page 91.

THE GAME MASTER

The GM establishes the dynamic world around the characters, especially the corrupt and wicked rulers of the city and the violent and desperate criminal underworld. The GM plays all the non-player characters in the world by giving each one a concrete desire and preferred method of action.

The GM helps organize the conversation of the game so it's pointed toward the interesting elements of play. The GM isn't in charge of the story and doesn't have to plan events ahead of time. They present interesting opportunities to the players, then follow the chain of action and consequences wherever they lead.

For more, see **Running the Game**, page 187.

PLAYING A SESSION

So, what's it like to play? A session of *Blades in the Dark* is like an episode of a TV show. There are one or two main events, plus maybe some side-story elements, which all fit into an ongoing series. A session of play can last anywhere from two to six hours, depending on the preferences of the group.

During a session, the crew of scoundrels works together to choose a criminal score to accomplish (either by getting a job from an NPC or by creating their own operation), then they make a few dice rolls to jump into the action of the score in progress. The PCs take actions, suffer consequences, and finish the operation (succeed or fail). Then the crew has downtime, during which they recover, pursue side-projects, and indulge their vices. After downtime, the players once again look for a new opportunity or create their own goals and pursuits, and we play to find out what happens next.

A given game session is typically one score and the following downtime, plus exploration and discovery of a new opportunity. As your group gets more familiar with the game, you might be able to pack more into a session, even doing two scores in an evening of play.

After a dozen sessions or so, you might decide to have a break in the flow of the story and start up a “season two” series—possibly with a slightly different cast of characters and a new starting situation.

BEFORE YOU START

Read this book once through. You won't immediately understand everything until you see it play. You won't get all the rules right the first time. That's fine; the rules will make more sense when you read them again after you play. The system of *Blades in the Dark* is designed to be learned as an ongoing process—each time you play you'll get better until everything is second nature.

You might be the only person in the game group that's read the book—that's fine, too, but then it's on you to convey everything to the other players, so that's a job you're taking on. You can send everyone the link to the **Player Kit** PDF on bladesinthedark.com, if players want to look at it ahead of time.

What the other players will need to do, though, is buy into the *idea* of the game. Tell them it's a game about daring scoundrels in a haunted industrial-fantasy city. Mention a few **touchstones** that they're familiar with (see the list below). "It's kind of like *Peaky Blinders*, but there's also some weird magical stuff and ghosts." If their eyes haven't lit up yet, maybe this game isn't going to click with them. That's fine. You can always play a different game with that person some other time. You want to have full buy-in from your players.

Read through the **Starting Situation** again (page 204) and get a good handle on the important factions involved, what they want, who runs them. Or, feel free to make up your own starting situation—just enough to throw the group into an interesting circumstance right out of the gate. You don't want everyone sitting there, excited to play, and then say, "So... what do you want to do first?" The starting situation keeps the momentum high at the beginning.

For more, see **Starting the Game**, page 201.

TOUCHSTONES

When you're pitching the game to prospective players, here are some media touchstones you can use to relate the game to stuff with which they're already familiar.

TV: *Peaky Blinders*, by Steven Knight et al. *The Wire*, by David Simon et al. *Spartacus* (particularly season two) by Steven S. DeKnight et al. *Narcos*, by Chris Brancato, Carlo Bernard, and Doug Miro, et al.

BOOKS: The Vlad Taltos novels (*Jhereg*, etc.), by Steven Brust. The stories of *Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser*, by Fritz Leiber. *The Lies of Locke Lamora*, by Scott Lynch. *Best Served Cold*, by Joe Abercrombie.

VIDEO GAMES: *Thief: The Dark Project* and its sequels, by Looking Glass Studios. The *Dishonored* series, by Arkane Studios. *Bloodborne* by Hidetaka Miyazaki and From Software.

FILMS: *Crimson Peak*, by Guillermo del Toro. *Gangs of New York*, by Martin Scorsese. *Ronin*, by John Frankenheimer. *Heat* and *Thief*, by Michael Mann.

THEME SONG

"Furnace Room Lullaby" by Neko Case.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

- ◆ Players: two to four. Plus one Game Master.
- ◆ A handful of six-sided dice. At least six.
- ◆ Printed copies of the character playbooks, crew sheets, and reference sheets + maps (available at bladesinthedark.com).
- ◆ Keep this book handy for reference.
- ◆ Some blank paper and index cards for notes and sketches. Pencils and markers.
- ◆ Beverages and snacks are nice. It's a social event, after all.

MAKING THE GAME YOUR OWN

Roleplaying is, at its essence, an expressive act. Everything in this book exists to help you and your friends express yourselves by creating collaborative social fiction about a crew of daring scoundrels. You have interesting things to say, and it's my job to inspire you and maybe also point out a few interesting things I've come up with, too. But it's not my job to tell you exactly what to say about everything.

Some elements of the game setting are meant to emerge in play, as an act of discovery and creative interpretation. I don't come right out and tell you everything about the nature of ghosts, for example. There are several possible concepts, from which you are free to pick and choose as you go along—making the game your own as you do. Once this game is in play, it's yours and yours alone. You're not beholden to anyone.

This book is a distillation of best practices and useful elements. It's one leg of the tripod that forms the basis for successful play: The book, your group, and the online community. Roleplaying is a social and performative art form, and as such, it benefits greatly from recorded videos of play and active online communities of discussion. If something about the game feels elusive to you, jump on YouTube and watch another group do it and maybe that will make it click. We all learn in different ways. This text is most useful for people who learn by reading. The online communities are good for people who learn by discussion. And videos are good for more auditory or social learners.

Visit bladesinthedark.com for links to the online community and videos of actual play.

THE CORE SYSTEM

THE CONVERSATION

A roleplaying game is a conversation between the GM and the players, punctuated by dice rolls to inject uncertainty and surprising turns.

The GM presents the fictional situation in which the player characters find themselves. The players determine the actions of their characters in response to the situation. The GM and the players together judge how the game systems are engaged. The outcomes of the mechanics then change the situation, leading into a new phase of the conversation—new situations, new actions, new judgments, new rolls—creating an ongoing fiction and building “the story” of the game, organically, from a series of discrete moments.

No one is in charge of the story. The story is what happens as a result of the situation presented by the GM, the actions the characters take, the outcomes of the mechanics, and the consequences that result. The story emerges from the unpredictable collision of all of these elements. You **play to find out** what the story will be.

JUDGMENT CALLS

Since roleplaying is a collaborative, expressive act, not a purely strategic endeavor, you’ll need to make judgment calls. By making these choices, the game group together establishes a style, tone, and form of fiction unique to their instance of play. *Blades in the Dark* is designed to bring these judgment calls to the forefront and make them explicit tools of the game.

When you play, you’ll make several key judgment calls. Everyone contributes, but either the players or the GM gets final say for each:

- ◆ Which actions are reasonable as a solution to a problem? *Can this person be swayed? Must we get out the tools and tinker with this old rusty lock, or could it also be quietly finessed?* The players have final say.
- ◆ How dangerous and how effective is a given action in this circumstance? *How risky is this? Can this person be swayed very little or a whole lot?* The GM has final say.
- ◆ Which consequences are inflicted to manifest the dangers in a given circumstance? *Does this fall from the roof break your leg? Do the Bluecoats merely become suspicious or do they already have you trapped?* The GM has final say.
- ◆ Does this situation call for a dice roll, and which one? *Is your scoundrel in position to make an action roll or must they first make a resistance roll to gain initiative?* The GM has final say.
- ◆ Which events in the story match the experience triggers for character and crew advancement? *Did you express your character’s beliefs, drives, heritage, or background? You tell us.* The players have final say.

The particular choices you make will create your own unique form of *Blades in the Dark*. You’ll say something about the world and the characters, about crime fiction, and even about the human condition. What will you say? There’s only one way to find out.

ROLLING THE DICE

Blades in the Dark uses six-sided dice. You roll several at once and read the **single highest result**.

- ◆ If the highest die is a **6**, it's a **full success**—things go well. If you roll more than one **6**, it's a **CRITICAL success**—you gain some additional advantage.
- ◆ If the highest die is a **4 or 5**, that's a **partial success**—you do what you were trying to do, but there are consequences: trouble, harm, reduced effect, etc.
- ◆ If the highest die is **1-3**, it's a **bad outcome**. Things go poorly. You probably don't achieve your goal and you suffer complications, too.

If you ever need to roll but you have zero (or negative) dice, roll two dice and take the single lowest result. You can't roll a CRITICAL when you have zero dice.

All the dice systems in the game are expressions of this basic format. When you're first learning the game, you can always "collapse" back down to a simple roll to judge how things go. Look up the exact rule later when you have time.

The most common result is **4/5**: partial success. This means that your character will tend to succeed, but at a cost—you'll rarely get away clean. *Blades in the Dark* is a game about underdog characters who are in over their heads. The dice mechanic reinforces this by making partial success crop up again and again. This is a good thing! Trouble is where the fun of the game happens.

To create a dice pool for a roll, you'll use a **trait** (like your **FINESSE** or your **PROWESS** or your crew's Tier) and take dice equal to its **rating**. You'll usually end up with one to four dice. Even one die is pretty good in this game—a 50% chance of success. The most common traits you'll use are the **action ratings** of the player characters. A player might roll dice for their **SKIRMISH** action rating when they fight an enemy, for example.

There are four types of rolls that you'll use most often in the game:

- ◆ **ACTION ROLL.** When a PC attempts an action that's dangerous or troublesome, you make an action roll to find out how it goes. Action rolls and their effects and consequences drive most of the game. See page 18.
- ◆ **DOWNTIME ROLL.** When the PCs are at their leisure after a job, they can perform downtime activities in relative safety. You make downtime rolls to see how much they get done. See page 153.
- ◆ **FORTUNE ROLL.** The GM can make a fortune roll to disclaim decision making and leave something up to chance. *How loyal is an NPC? How much does the plague spread? How much evidence is burned before the Bluecoats kick in the door?* See page 34.
- ◆ **RESISTANCE ROLL.** A player can make a resistance roll when their character suffers a consequence they don't like. The roll tells us how much stress their character suffers to reduce the severity of a consequence. *When you resist that "Broken Leg" harm, you take some stress and now it's only a "Sprained Ankle" instead.* See page 32.

THE GAME STRUCTURE

Blades in the Dark has a structure to play, with four parts (see the diagram at right). By default, the game is in **free play**—characters talk to each other, they go places, they do things, they make rolls as needed.

When the group is ready, they choose a *target* for their next criminal operation, then choose a type of *plan* to employ. This triggers the *engagement roll* (which establishes the situation as the operation starts) and then the game shifts into the **score** phase. See page 125 for more details.

During the score, the PCs engage the target—they make rolls, overcome obstacles, call for flashbacks, and complete the operation (successfully or not). When the score is finished, the game shifts into the **downtime** phase.

During the downtime phase, the GM engages the systems for *payoff*, *heat*, and *entanglements*, to determine all the fallout from the score. Then the PCs each get their *downtime activities*, such as indulging their vice to remove stress or working on a long-term project. See page 145 for details on downtime. When all the downtime activities are complete, the game returns to **free play** and the cycle starts over again.

The phases are a conceptual model to help you organize the game. They’re not meant to be rigid structures that restrict your options (this is why they’re presented as amorphous blobs of ink without hard edges). Think of the phases as a menu of options to fit whatever it is you’re trying to accomplish in play. Each phase suits a different goal.

During free play, the game is very fluid—you can easily skim past several events in a quick montage; characters can disperse in time and space, doing various things as they please. When you shift into the score phase, everyone leans forward and knows that it’s time to focus and get the job done. The camera zooms down into the action, obstacle to obstacle, as each challenge is faced. The players use flashbacks to elide time and establish previously unseen preparations. Then when the score is over and you shift to downtime, the pressure’s off. The PCs are safe and can enjoy a brief respite from danger to recover and regroup before they jump back into the cycle of play again.

FREE PLAY

Character Scenes

Actions & Consequences

Gather Information

Choose a Target

Choose a Plan

DOWNTIME

Payoff, Heat, Entanglements

Downtime Activities

Return to Free Play

Engagement Roll

SCORE

Actions & Consequences

Flashbacks

ACTIONS & ATTRIBUTES

ACTION RATINGS

There are 12 **actions** in the game that the player characters use to overcome obstacles (see the list at right).

Each action has a rating (from zero to 4) that tells you how many dice to roll when you perform that action. Action ratings don't just represent skill or training—you're free to describe *how* your character performs that action based on the type of person they are. Maybe your character is good at **COMMAND** because they have a scary stillness to them, while another character barks orders and intimidates people with their military bearing.

You choose which action to perform to overcome an obstacle, by describing what your character does. Actions that are poorly suited to the situation may be less effective and may put the character in more danger, but they can still be attempted. Usually, when you perform an action, you'll make an **action roll** to see how it turns out.

| |
|----------|
| ATTUNE |
| COMMAND |
| CONSORT |
| FINESSE |
| HUNT |
| PROWL |
| SKIRMISH |
| STUDY |
| SURVEY |
| SWAY |
| TINKER |
| WRECK |

ACTION ROLL

You make an **action roll** when your character does something potentially dangerous or troublesome. The possible results of the action roll depend on your character's **position**. There are three positions: **controlled**, **risky**, and **desperate**. If you're in a **controlled** position, the possible consequences are less serious. If you're in a **desperate** position, the consequences can be severe. If you're somewhere in between, it's **risky**—usually considered the “default” position for most actions.

For details on **Action Rolls**, see page 18.

If there's no danger or trouble at hand, you don't make an action roll. You might make a **fortune** roll (page 34) or a **downtime** roll (page 153) or the GM will simply say yes—and you accomplish your goal.

ATTRIBUTE RATINGS

There are three **attributes** in the game system that the player characters use to resist bad consequences: **INSIGHT**, **PROWESSION**, and **RESOLVE**. Each attribute has a rating (from zero to 4) that tells you how many dice to roll when you use that attribute.

| |
|------------|
| INSIGHT |
| PROWESSION |
| RESOLVE |

The rating for each attribute is equal to the number of dots in the **first column** under that attribute (see the examples, at right). The more well-rounded your character is with a particular set of actions, the better their attribute rating.

RESISTANCE ROLL

Each attribute resists a different type of danger. If you get stabbed, for example, you resist physical harm with your **PROWESS** rating. Resistance rolls always succeed—you diminish or deflect the bad result—but the better your roll, the less **stress** it costs to reduce or avoid the danger.

When the enemy has a big advantage, you’ll need to make a resistance roll before you can take your own action. For example, when you duel the master sword-fighter, she disarms you before you can strike. You need to make a resistance roll to keep hold of your blade if you want to attack her. Or perhaps you face a powerful ghost and attempt to **ATTUNE** with it to control its actions. But before you can make your own roll, you must resist possession from the spirit.

The GM judges the threat level of the enemies and uses these “preemptive” resistance rolls as needed to reflect the capabilities of especially dangerous foes.

For details on **Resistance Rolls**, see page 32.

EXAMPLE ACTION & ATTRIBUTE RATINGS

INSIGHT

- ● ● ● HUNT
- ● ● ● STUDY
- ● ● ● SURVEY
- ● ● ● TINKER

*This character has a **HUNT** action rating of 1.*

*Their **INSIGHT** attribute rating is 1 (the first column of dots).*

PROWESS

- ● ● ● FINESSE
- ● ● ● PROWL
- ● ● ● SKIRMISH
- ● ● ● WRECK

*They also have **PROWL** 1 and **SKIRMISH** 2.*

*Their **PROWESS** attribute rating is 2.*

RESOLVE

- ● ● ● ATTUNE
- ● ● ● COMMAND
- ● ● ● CONSORT
- ● ● ● SWAY



STRESS & TRAUMA

STRESS

Player characters in *Blades in the Dark* have a special reserve of fortitude and luck called **stress**. When they suffer a consequence that they don't want to accept, they can take stress instead. The result of the **resistance roll** (see page 32) determines how much stress it costs to avoid a bad outcome.

During a knife fight, Daniel's character, Cross, gets stabbed in the chest. Daniel rolls his PROWESS rating to resist, and gets a 2. It costs 6 stress, minus 2 (the result of the resistance roll) to resist the consequences. Daniel marks off 4 stress and describes how Cross survives.

The GM rules that the harm is reduced by the resistance roll, but not avoided entirely. Cross suffers level 2 harm ("Chest Wound") instead of level 3 harm ("Punctured Lung").

PUSHING YOURSELF

You can use stress to push yourself for greater performance. For each bonus you choose below, take **2 stress** (each can be chosen once for a given action):

- ◆ Add **+1d** to your roll. (This may be used for an action roll or downtime roll or any other kind of roll where extra effort would help you)
- ◆ Add **+1 level** to your effect. (See **Effect**, page 24.)
- ◆ Take action when you're incapacitated. (See **Consequences**, page 30)

The ability to push yourself for +1d means you effectively have at least 1d in every action as long as you have stress to burn. Even 1d gives you a 50/50 chance of success. This is the core “scoundrel’s luck” in the game system. Even when you’re in a bad spot, trying to do something for which you have no experience or training, you can dig deep and give yourself a chance. (*A much better chance than rolling 2d and taking the lowest when you have zero dots.*)

It’s important to remember this! Some players tend to forget and dismiss actions for which they have zero dots. “Nah, I can’t do that. I don’t have Attune. I’d have to roll 2d and take the worst. Ugh.” As long as you have stress to burn, you can get 1d and give any action a decent shot.

TRAUMA

When a PC marks their last stress box, they suffer a level of **TRAUMA**. When you take **TRAUMA**, circle one of your **trauma conditions** like *Cold, Reckless, Unstable*, etc. They’re all described on the next page.

When you suffer **TRAUMA**, you’re taken out of action. You’re “left for dead” or otherwise dropped out of the current conflict, only to come back later, shaken and drained. When you return, **you have zero stress** and your vice has been satisfied for the next downtime (see **Vice** on page 156).

Trauma conditions are permanent. Your character acquires the new personality quirk indicated by the condition, and can earn xp by using it to cause trouble. When you mark your fourth trauma condition, your character cannot continue as a daring scoundrel. You must retire them to a different life or send them to prison to take the fall for the crew's **WANTED LEVEL**. (See **Retirement**, page 43 and **Incarceration**, page 148).

TRAUMA CONDITIONS

- ◆ **COLD:** You're not moved by emotional appeals or social bonds.
- ◆ **HAUNTED:** You're often lost in reverie, reliving past horrors, seeing things.
- ◆ **OBSSESSED:** You're enthralled by one thing: an activity, a person, an ideology.
- ◆ **PARANOID:** You imagine danger everywhere; you can't trust others.
- ◆ **RECKLESS:** You have little regard for your own safety or best interests.
- ◆ **SOFT:** You lose your edge; you become sentimental, passive, gentle.
- ◆ **UNSTABLE:** Your emotional state is volatile. You can instantly rage, or fall into despair, act impulsively, or freeze up.
- ◆ **VICIOUS:** You seek out opportunities to hurt people, even for no good reason.

You can play your trauma conditions as much or as little as you like. They can totally transform your character's persona or have only a small impact—it's up to you. If you do play them strongly, though, allowing a trauma condition to complicate your character's life, you earn xp for it. (See **Advancement**, page 48.)

STRESS & THE SUPERNATURAL

A close encounter with a spirit or demon is a harrowing experience. By default, the standard effect is to either paralyze a person with fear or panic them into fleeing from its presence. A PC can choose to freeze up or flee or make a resistance roll with **RESOLVE** to ignore the effect. Characters with lots of exposure to spirits, such as Whispers, Rail Jacks, and occultists become less susceptible and only face fear or panic from exceptionally powerful entities.

Being possessed by a spirit inflicts a level of **TRAUMA** at the end of every week. Once the possessed body suffers its fourth level of **TRAUMA**, it can no longer sustain its life. The possessing spirit must either bond with the corpse (becoming a vampire) or abandon it and seek out a new host.

Mind-bending horrors (such as the physical manifestation of a forgotten god) may have additional effects on sight (in addition to causing viewers to freeze up or flee). You may choose to resist them, too, as normal. *When you behold the glorious horror of the Cloud of Woe, you stand frozen in place as it envelops you, and you crave to drink deeply from its dark essence.*

PROGRESS CLOCKS

A **progress clock** is a circle divided into segments (see examples at right). Draw a progress clock when you need to track ongoing effort against an obstacle or the approach of impending trouble.

Sneaking into the Bluecoat Watch tower? Make a clock to track the alert level of the patrolling guards. When the PCs suffer consequences from partial successes or missed rolls, fill in segments on the clock until the alarm is raised.

Generally, the more complex the problem, the more segments in the progress clock.

A complex obstacle is a 4-segment clock. A more complicated obstacle is a 6-clock. A daunting obstacle is an 8-segment clock.

The **effect level** of an action or circumstance is used to tick segments on a clock (see **Effect Levels**, page 24). **It's the GM's job to tick a clock so it reflects the fictional situation.** If the PCs are making a lot of progress, the clock should be ticked a lot. This comes with practice, by properly judging effect levels. But you should always feel free to adjust a clock in play to better reflect the situation.

You can't usually fill a clock with the effect of a single action. This is by design. If a situation is simple enough for one action, don't make a clock, just judge the outcome based on the effect level of the action.

When you create a clock, make it about the **obstacle**, not the method. The clocks for an infiltration should be "Interior Patrols" and "The Tower," not "Sneak Past the Guards" or "Climb the Tower." The patrols and the tower are the obstacles—the PCs can attempt to overcome them in a variety of ways.

Complex enemy threats can be broken into several "layers," each with its own progress clock. For example, the Lampblacks' HQ might have a "Perimeter Security" clock, an "Interior Guards" clock, and a "Bazso's Office Security" clock. The crew would have to make their way through all three layers to reach Bazso's personal safe and the whiskey collection within.

Remember that a clock tracks progress. It reflects the fictional situation, so the group can gauge how they're doing. A clock is like a speedometer in a car. It *shows* the speed of the vehicle—it doesn't determine the speed.

SIMPLE OBSTACLES

Not every situation and obstacle requires a clock. Use clocks when a situation is complex or layered and you need to track something over time—otherwise, resolve the result of an action with a single roll.

Examples of progress clocks follow. This is not an exhaustive list. Use them as you see fit!



DANGER CLOCKS

The GM can use a clock to represent a progressive danger, like suspicion growing during a seduction, the proximity of pursuers in a chase, or the alert level of guards on patrol. In this case, when a complication occurs, the GM ticks one, two, or three segments on the clock, depending on the consequence level. When the clock is full, the danger comes to fruition—the guards hunt down the intruders, activate an alarm, release the hounds, etc. (See **Consequences**, page 30.)

RACING CLOCKS

Create two opposed clocks to represent a race. The PCs might have a progress clock called “Escape” while the Bluecoats have a clock called “Cornered.” If the PCs finish their clock before the Bluecoats fill theirs, they get away. Otherwise, they’re cornered and can’t flee. If both complete at the same time, the PCs escape to their lair, but the hunting Bluecoats are outside!

You can also use racing clocks for an environmental hazard. Maybe the PCs are trying to complete the “Search” clock to find the lockbox on the sinking ship before the GM fills the “Sunk” clock and the vessel goes down.

LINKED CLOCKS

You can make a clock that unlocks another clock once it’s filled. For example, the GM might make a linked clock called “Trapped” after an “Alert” clock fills up. When you fight a veteran warrior, she might have a clock for her “Defense” and then a linked clock for “Vulnerable.” Once you overcome the “Defense” clock, then you can attempt to overcome the “Vulnerable” clock and defeat her. You might affect the “Defense” clock with violence in a knife-fight, or you lower her defense with deception if you have the opportunity. As always, the method of action is up to the players and the details of the fiction at hand.

MISSION CLOCKS

The GM can make a clock for a time-sensitive mission, to represent the window of opportunity you have to complete it. If the countdown runs out, the mission is scrubbed or changes—the target escapes, the household wakes up for the day, etc.

TUG-OF-WAR CLOCKS

You can make a clock that can be filled *and* emptied by events, to represent a back-and-forth situation. You might make a “Revolution!” clock that indicates when the refugee Skovlanders start to riot over poor treatment in Doskvøl. Some events will tick the clock up and some will tick it down. Once it fills, the revolution begins. A tug-of-war clock is also perfect for an ongoing turf war between two crews or factions.

LONG-TERM PROJECT

Some projects will take a long time. A basic long-term project (like tinkering up a new feature for a device) is eight segments. Truly long-term projects (like creating a new designer drug) can be two, three, or even four clocks, representing all the phases of development, testing, and final completion. Add or subtract clocks depending on the details of the situation and complexity of the project.

A long-term project is a good catch-all for dealing with any unusual player goal, including things that circumvent or change elements of the mechanics or the setting. For example, by default in the game, **TRAUMA** is permanent. But maybe a player wants to work on a project where they create a device to draw traumatic spirit-energies into the ghost field, thus reducing a character's **TRAUMA** and unleashing a storm of enraged ghosts in the area. It will be a long and dangerous process to set up everything needed to begin and work on a project like this, but almost anything can be attempted as long as the group is interested and it seems feasible to everyone.

FACTION CLOCKS

Each faction has a long-term goal (see the faction write-ups, starting on page 283). When the PCs have **downtime** (page 145), the GM ticks forward the faction clocks that they're interested in. In this way, the world around the PCs is dynamic and things happen that they're not directly connected to, changing the overall situation in the city and creating new opportunities and challenges.

The PCs may also directly affect NPC faction clocks, based on the missions and scores they pull off. Discuss known faction projects that they might aid or interfere with, and also consider how a PC operation might affect the NPC clocks, whether the players intended it or not.

PROGRESS CLOCKS IN PLAY

Infiltrating Strangford House

The scoundrels are sneaking into Lord Strangford's house to steal his personal log book (in which he keeps the secret maps and hunting methods for his Leviathan hunter ship—worth a small fortune to the right buyer). The GM makes a progress clock for the alert level of Strangford's personal staff and bodyguards. She makes a 4-clock because it's a single house, not a sprawling estate—only a few suspicious events will rouse the whole place. During the operation, Silver rolls to PROWL through the first floor and rolls a 4/5. She gets past, but the complication is a tick on the "Alert" clock. The GM ticks it once to represent the threat level of the kitchen staff downstairs—they're not trained security, so limited effect is called for. Later, when Cross rolls a 1-3 on a desperate action to sneak into Strangford's private suite, the GM fills three segments—the Lord's bodyguards are Tier IV professionals and are experts at spotting trouble. This fills the clock! When Cross eases the door open, he's set upon by the first pair of bodyguards, while the other two attempt to hustle Strangford (and his precious book!) out the back way.



ALERT

Assaulting the Red Sashes

The scoundrels attack the lair of the Red Sashes, in a final showdown to see which group will survive to control the drug market in Crow's Foot. The GM makes a clock for the forces of each gang. As the PCs take actions and suffer consequences, the GM ticks the clocks to show the waning strength and morale of each side. When one side's clock is filled, they've reached a breaking point—will they flee, surrender, or fall into a suicidal rage?



RED
SASHES



PC
CREW

ACTION ROLL

When a player character does something challenging, we make an **action roll** to see how it turns out. An action is challenging if there's an obstacle to the PC's goal that's dangerous or troublesome in some way. We don't make an action roll unless the PC is put to the test. If their action is something that we'd expect them to simply accomplish, then we don't make an action roll.

Each game group will have their own ideas about what "challenging" means. This is good! It's something that establishes the tone and style of your Blades series.

To make an action roll, we go through six steps. In play, they flow together somewhat, but let's break each one down here for clarity.

1. The player states their **goal** for the action.
2. The player chooses the **action rating**.
3. The GM sets the **position** for the roll.
4. The GM sets the **effect level** for the action.
5. Add **bonus dice**.
6. The player rolls the dice and we judge the result.

1. THE PLAYER STATES THEIR GOAL

Your goal is the concrete outcome your character will achieve when they overcome the obstacle at hand. Maybe your goal is "I want to get into the manor house" or it might be "I want to see who comes and goes at the house." In both cases, the obstacle is "the house guard patrol." The guards are the challenging obstacle that may be dangerous or troublesome for the PC.

Usually the character's goal is pretty obvious in context, but it's the GM's job to ask and clarify the goal when necessary.

"You're punching him in the face, right? Okay... what do you want to get out of this? Do you want to take him out, or just rough him up so he'll do what you want?"

2. THE PLAYER CHOOSES THE ACTION RATING

The player chooses which **action rating** to roll, following from what their character is doing on-screen. If you want to roll your **SKIRMISH** action, then get in a fight. If you want to roll your **COMMAND** action, then order someone around. You can't roll a given action rating unless your character is presently performing that action in the fiction.

There's definitely some gray area here, where actions overlap and goals can be attempted with a variety of approaches. This is by design. If your goal is to hurt someone with violence, you might **SKIRMISH** or **HUNT** or **PROWL** or **WRECK**, depending on the situation at hand. If your goal is to dismay and frighten an enemy, you might **COMMAND** or **SWAY** or **WRECK**. It's the player's choice.

See page 166 for more about choosing an action rating.



3. THE GM SETS THE POSITION

Once the player chooses their action, the GM sets the **position** for the roll. The position represents how dangerous or troublesome the action might be. There are three positions: **controlled**, **risky**, and **desperate**. To choose a position, the GM looks at the profiles for the positions below and picks one that most closely matches the situation at hand.

POSITIONS

CONTROLLED

You have a golden opportunity. You're exploiting a dominant advantage. You're set up for success.

RISKY

You go head to head. You're acting under duress. You're taking a chance.

DESPERATE

You're in serious trouble. You're overreaching your capabilities. You're attempting a dangerous maneuver.

By default, an action roll is risky. You wouldn't be rolling if there was no risk involved. If the situation seems more dangerous, make it desperate. If it seems less dangerous, make it controlled.

Choosing the position is an important judgment call and stylistic choice for your game. More controlled action rolls mean generally safer and more dominant scoundrels. More desperate action rolls give the game a gritty, underdog kind of feel. There's no ironclad rule about how to choose positions. It's meant to be an expressive element of the game. Make the choice that feels right to you and the rest of the group. If you're ever unsure about which position to pick, ask the other players.

As a player, if you're angling for a particular position, ask the GM what you might do to get it, or ask them to clarify the situation to explain their choice.

"It's risky? I was thinking it'd be controlled. I know this barkeep is supposed to be a tough old buzzard, but he's not a real threat to me, is he?"

"No, I think the danger is in the situation instead. You're out in the common room in front of everyone, ordering the barkeep to hand over the protection money that he's supposed to pay the Grinders. Who knows if someone in the room might decide to step up and play hero, or to get on the Grinders' good side? It's an uncertain environment. Maybe if you confront the guy alone, that's more of a controlled position for you. Or maybe if you bring the gang with you and make a show of force in front of everyone."

As GM, you have final say over the position for the roll, but explain and clarify things as needed, especially when you're starting out. By discussing the position (and how it might be better or worse) you'll help everyone build a better view of the fictional situation in their minds' eye and get on the same page about the tone of the game.

You'll also set precedents that the players can build on to make better decisions in the future. *"Ah, so we got a controlled CONSORT roll when we wined and dined them and showed them how friendly we are. Noted."*

4. THE GM SETS THE EFFECT LEVEL

The GM assesses the likely **effect level** of this action, given the factors of the situation. Essentially, the effect level tells us "how much" this action can accomplish: will it have **limited**, **standard**, or **great** effect? Effect level is explained in detail in the next section, starting on page 24.

The GM's choices for effect level and position can be strongly influenced by the player's choice of action rating. If a player wants to try to make a new friend by WRECKING something—well... maybe that's possible, but the GM wouldn't be crazy to say it's a desperate roll and probably limited effect. Seems like CONSORTING would be a lot better for that. The players are always free to choose the action they perform, but that doesn't mean all actions should be equally risky or potent.

5. ADD BONUS DICE

You can normally get two bonus dice for your action roll (some special abilities might give you additional bonus dice).

For one bonus die, you can get **assistance** from a teammate. They take 1 stress, say how they help you, and give you +1d. See **Teamwork**, page 134.

For another bonus die, you can either **push yourself** (take 2 stress) or you can accept a **Devil's Bargain** (you can't get dice for both, it's one or the other).

THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN

PCs in *Blades* are reckless scoundrels addicted to destructive vices—they don't always act in their own best interests. To reflect this, the GM or any other player can offer you a bonus die if you accept a Devil's Bargain. Common Devil's Bargains include:

- ◆ Collateral damage, unintended harm.
- ◆ Sacrifice **COIN** or an item.
- ◆ Betray a friend or loved one.
- ◆ Offend or anger a faction.
- ◆ Start and/or tick a troublesome clock.
- ◆ Add **HEAT** to the crew from evidence or witnesses.
- ◆ Suffer harm.

The Devil's Bargain occurs regardless of the outcome of the roll. You make the deal, pay the price, and get the bonus die. There might not be an interesting Devil's Bargain in every situation. If one doesn't occur to anyone right away, that's fine.

"I know our gang is savage—if we leave them alone here with the hostages, who knows what they'll do. I'm gonna get all up in their faces and Command them to keep their slaggin' hands off."

"Oooh, I have a Devil's Bargain. You can take +1d but you go too far with your intimidation and threats this time. I'm gonna start a new 4-clock called... 'The Gang Fights Back' and tick it three times. Mess with them this hard again, and you're gonna have a gang of savages on your ass."

"Nice. I like it! Maybe I'll try to un-tick some of that clock in downtime..."

Some players like to get a little fancy or creative with Devil's Bargains, using them to re-write a bit of the situation, create something new in the flow of the narrative, or shine a spotlight on a character's weaknesses.

"Someone here is a member of your old platoon—the one you left for dead."

"One of the cultists becomes obsessed with you."

"Your character doesn't realize it, but one of the boats moored at the dock you're burning turns out to be your poor old uncle's eel-fishing boat."

"Spending this much time during a meeting at a drug den... seems like you would have to overindulge yourself here, yeah?"

Don't push these bargains too hard if the player doesn't like this kind of narrative sleight-of-hand. It's fun for some and annoying for others.

The Devil's Bargain is always a free choice. If you don't like one, just reject it (or suggest how to alter it so you might consider taking it). You can always just push yourself for that bonus die instead.

If it's ever needed, the GM has final say over which Devil's Bargains are valid.

6. ROLL THE DICE AND JUDGE THE RESULT

Once the goal, action rating, position, and effect have been established, add any bonus dice and roll the dice pool to determine the outcome. (See the sets of possible outcomes, by position, on the next page.)

The action roll does a lot of work for you. It tells you how well the character performs as well as how serious the consequences are for them. They might succeed at their action without any consequences (on a **6**), or they might succeed but suffer consequences (on a **4/5**), or it might just all go wrong (on a **1-3**).

On a **1-3**, it's up to the GM to decide if the PC's action has any effect or not, or if it even happens at all. Usually, the action just fails completely, but in some circumstances, it might make sense or be more interesting for the action to have some effect even on a **1-3** result.

*Oskarr ATTUNES to the demonic entity he found in the secret hold of the Leviathan hunter ship. The roll is a **1-3**. The GM could say that Oskarr fails to ATTUNE to the demonic power, and the backlash from the desperate failure manifests as psychic harm, level 3. But it would be much more interesting if the attunement happened, and Oskarr was confronted with this horrific entity, mind-to-mind, right? Oskarr touches the horrible will of that ancient creature, and the twisting madness within it overwhelms him. He suffers level 3 psychic harm, sure, but also gets a new 6-clock: "Get Rid of These Nightmare Demonic Visions."*

Each **4/5** and **1-3** outcome lists suggested **consequences** for the character. The worse your position, the worse the consequences are. The GM can inflict one or more of these consequences, depending on the circumstances of the action roll. Consequences are explained in detail on page 30. PCs have the ability to avoid or reduce the severity of consequences that they suffer by **resisting** them. See page 32 for details about resistance.

When you narrate the action after the roll, the GM and player collaborate together to say what happens on-screen. *Tell us how you vault across to the other rooftop. Tell us what you say to the Inspector to convince her. The GM will tell us how she reacts. When you face the Red Sash duelist, what's your fighting style like? Etc.*

ACTION ROLL SUMMARY

- ◆ A player or GM calls for a roll. Make an **action roll** when the character performs a dangerous or troublesome action.
- ◆ The player chooses the **action rating** to roll. Choose the action that matches what the character is doing in the fiction.
- ◆ The GM establishes the **position** and **effect level** of the action. The choice of position and effect is influenced strongly by the player's choice of action.
- ◆ Add up to two bonus dice. 1) **Assistance** from a teammate. 2) **Push yourself** (take 2 stress) or accept a **Devil's Bargain**.
- ◆ Roll the dice pool and judge the outcome. The players and GM narrate the action together. The GM has final say over what happens and inflicts consequences as called for by the position and the result of the roll.

ACTION ROLL

 **1d** for each ACTION rating dot.

 **+1d** if you have ASSISTANCE.

 **+1d** if you PUSH yourself -OR- you accept a DEVIL'S BARGAIN.

CONTROLLED

You act on your terms. You exploit a dominant advantage.

CRITICAL: You do it with increased effect.

6: You do it.

4/5: You hesitate. Withdraw and try a different approach, or else do it with a minor consequence: a minor complication occurs, you have reduced effect, you suffer lesser harm, you end up in a risky position.

1-3: You falter. Press on by seizing a risky opportunity, or withdraw and try a different approach.

RISKY

You go head to head. You act under fire. You take a chance.

CRITICAL: You do it with increased effect.

6: You do it.

4/5: You do it, but there's a consequence: you suffer harm, a complication occurs, you have reduced effect, you end up in a desperate position.

1-3: Things go badly. You suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position, you lose this opportunity.

DESPERATE

You overreach your capabilities. You're in serious trouble.

CRITICAL: You do it with increased effect.

6: You do it.

4/5: You do it, but there's a consequence: you suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you have reduced effect.

1-3: It's the worst outcome. You suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you lose this opportunity for action.

DOUBLE-DUTY ROLLS

Since NPCs don't roll for their actions, an action roll does double-duty: **it resolves the action of the PC as well as any NPCs that are involved.** The single roll tells us how those actions interact and which consequences result. On a **6**, the PC wins and has their effect. On a **4/5**, it's a mix—both the PC and the NPC have their effect. On a **1-3**, the NPC wins and has their effect as a consequence on the PC.

EFFECT

In *Blades in the Dark*, you achieve goals by taking actions and facing consequences. But how many actions does it take to achieve a particular goal? That depends on the **effect level** of your actions. The GM judges the effect level using the profiles below. Which one best matches the action at hand—**great**, **standard**, or **limited**? Each effect level indicates the questions that should be answered for that effect, as well as how many segments to tick if you’re using a **progress clock**.

| EFFECT LEVELS | TICKS |
|-----------------|---|
| GREAT | <i>You achieve more than usual. How does the extra effort manifest? What additional benefit do you enjoy?</i> 3 |
| STANDARD | <i>You achieve what we'd expect as “normal” with this action. Is that enough, or is there more left to do?</i> 2 |
| LIMITED | <i>You achieve a partial or weak effect. How is your impact diminished? What effort remains to achieve your goal?</i> 1 |

ASSESSING FACTORS

To assess effect level, first start with your gut feeling, given this situation. Then, if needed, assess three factors that may modify the effect level: **potency**, **scale**, and **quality**. If the PC has an advantage in a given factor, consider a higher effect level. If they have a disadvantage, consider a reduced effect level.

POTENCY

The potency factor considers particular weaknesses, taking extra time or a bigger risk, or the influence of arcane powers. The electrical discharge of a lightning hook is potent against a ghost. The supernatural powers of a ghost are potent against a human. An infiltrator is more potent if all the lights are extinguished and they move about in the dark.

QUALITY / TIER

Quality represents the effectiveness of tools, weapons, or other resources, usually summarized by Tier. **Fine items** count as +1 bonus in quality, stacking with Tier.

Arlyn is picking the lock to a safehouse run by the Circle of Flame. Her crew is Tier I and she has fine lockpicks—so she's effectively Tier II. The Circle are Tier III. Arlyn is outclassed in quality, so her effect will be limited on the lock.

SCALE

Scale represents the number of opponents, size of an area covered, scope of influence, etc. Larger scale can be an advantage or disadvantage depending on the situation. In battle, more people are better. When infiltrating, more people are a hindrance.

When considering factors, effect level might be reduced below limited, resulting in **zero effect**—or increased beyond great, resulting in an **extreme effect**.

If a PC special ability gives “+1 effect,” it comes into play *after* the GM has assessed the effect level. For example, if you ended up with zero effect, the +1 effect bonus from your Cutter’s **BODYGUARD** ability would bump them up to limited effect. Also, remember that a PC can **push themselves** (take 2 stress) to get +1 effect on their action. See page 13.

For a master table of factor examples, see **Magnitude** on page 220. Every factor won’t always apply to every situation. You don’t have to do an exact accounting every time, either. Use the factors to help you make a stronger judgment call—don’t feel beholden to them.

DOMINANT FACTORS

If one effect factor overshadows the others, the side with that advantage dominates the situation. It doesn’t matter if you have a fine sword and extra effect if you try to fight 20 people at once. Their **scale** dominates the battle and you’re left with very limited effect, or no effect at all. The same principle applies to “impossible” actions.

Una wants to tear down a stone guard tower that the Silver Nails are using as a lair. She says, “I take my sledgehammer over there and I Wreck the thing, smashing it down stone by stone. Ha! I rolled a crit! Great effect!” Obviously, this isn’t possible. A person can’t smash down a stone tower with a sledgehammer. We know it’s inherently silly, like jumping over the moon. But this is also codified in the effect factors. The tower is dominant in quality, scale, and potency. Unless those factors are countered somehow, Una’s effect level is zero before she starts. No matter what she rolls for her action, she’ll have no effect. This concept is useful when assessing other very tough (but achievable) situations.

*Let’s imagine instead that Una is facing a demon. She wants to **SKIRMISH** with it, by engaging it with her sword and dagger. This is similar to knocking down the tower with the sledgehammer. Even on a **CRITICAL**, the GM says, “You manage to land a solid blow against the creature’s skull, but there’s no wound and your hand throbs with the impact of steel against its scaly hide.” In other words, zero effect! (On a **1-3**, the GM might say, “The creature swats your sword aside, clutches you in its hideous grip, and breaks your spine in two.” Seriously. Don’t mess with demons.)*

But this situation isn’t entirely hopeless. There must be some way to battle a demon. This is where effect factors can help make sense of the situation. If the demon is dominant in quality, scale, and potency, then the PCs can try to understand the factors, and take actions to address them. What’s the demon vulnerable to? They can use that to remove its potency (and seize that advantage for themselves). What scale is it? They need to bring more troops. Etc.

Effect factors are a way to codify the situation into a few key factors so it’s easier to talk about what needs to change in order to have the desired effect.

TRADING POSITION FOR EFFECT

After factors are considered and the GM has announced the effect level, a player might want to trade position for effect, or vice versa. For instance, if they’re going to make a risky roll with standard effect (the most common scenario, generally), they might instead want to push their luck and make a desperate roll but with great effect.

This kind of trade-off isn’t included in the effect factors because it’s not an element the GM should assess when setting the effect level. Once the level is set, though, you can always offer the trade-off to the player if it makes sense in the situation.

“I Prowl across the courtyard and vault over the wall, hiding in the shadows by the canal dock and Lyssa’s gondola.”

“I don’t think you can make it across in one quick dash. The scale of the courtyard is a factor here, so your effect will be limited. Let’s say you can get halfway across with this action, then you’ll have to Prowl through the other half of the space (and the rest of the guards there) to reach the other side.”

“I didn’t realize it was that far. Hmmm. Okay, what if I just go as fast as I can. Can I get all the way across if I make a desperate roll?”

“Yep, sounds good to me!”

EFFECTS IN THE FICTION

Effects aren’t simply a matter of a level name or ticking clock segments. After the action roll, when you narrate the outcome, answer the effect questions by describing what happens “on screen.” The answers to the questions will tell the group what the new situation is like, creating a natural bridge to further actions.

For a simple action, the effect level determines the end result. Do you achieve your goal partially, fully, or with great effect? For a more complex obstacle, the GM creates a progress clock to track the effort made to overcome it. You tick a number of segments on the clock depending on the effect level of your action and the factors involved. When you fill the clock, the obstacle is overcome. See **Progress Clocks**, page 15.

For example, if the player says “I shoved him and run away,” that might be a simple action. It will have limited, standard, or great effect on the enemy, resulting in a new situation. The enemy might be slowed down (limited), knocked off their feet and delayed in the chase (standard), or even injured by a powerful throw (great)—depending on the assessment of the factors at hand.

If the player says, “I engage this guy in a knife fight to the death,” that might be a more complex obstacle. The GM creates a clock for the thug’s level of threat, then there are several action rolls to resolve the fight, each ticking the clock according to the effect level (and risking consequences from the outcome of each).

Go with your gut and use simple or complex obstacles as you like, moment to moment in play. There’s no hard and fast rule for what’s “simple” or “complex.”

WHY WE DO THIS

The reason we assess effect is to set expectations and make the fictional situation more clear, so everyone is on the same page.

You tangle with the Hive enforcer, blade to blade. Do you inflict a grievous mortal wound? Do you only give them a shallow cut? Why are you having the effect that you have? How could it be worse? How could it be better?

By assessing effect and describing it in the fiction, the players understand how much progress they're making and how much they're risking. By understanding effect, the group understands how many actions (and risk of consequences) will be needed to achieve their goals. Maybe a shallow cut is all you need to prove your point. Maybe nothing short of death will suffice. After each instance of action, effect, and consequences, the players know where they stand, and can make informed decisions about what to do next.

If you've played other roleplaying games or video games, you're probably familiar with the concept of "hit points" for a character or a progress bar during a boss fight. The effect system in *Blades* is this type of pacing mechanic, abstracted so it can apply to any type of situation, from fighting, to social manipulation, investigations, arcane powers, infiltration, whatever! Every action has an explicit effect that everyone playing the game can understand—either resolving the current situation so we can move on to the next one, or incrementing progress toward the current goal.

CONSEQUENCES

When a PC suffers an effect from an enemy or a dangerous situation, it's called a **consequence**. Consequences are the companion to effects. PCs have effect on the world around them and they suffer consequences in return from the risks they face. See page 30 for details on consequences and how they impact the player characters.



SETTING POSITION & EFFECT

The GM sets position and effect for an action roll at the same time, after the player says what they're doing and chooses their action. Usually, **Risky / Standard** is the default combination, modified by the action being used, the strength of the opposition, and the effect factors.

When you first start learning the game, you might step through the process with some deliberation, but after a bit of practice, you'll be able to set position and effect with a quick "gut feeling" that can then be tweaked if a PC has a particular ability or item or some other element to consider as a special case.

The ability to set position and effect as independent variables gives you nine combinations to choose from, to help you convey a wide array of fictional circumstances.

For example, if a scoundrel is facing off alone against a small enemy gang, the situation might be:

- ◆ *She fights the gang straight up, rushing into their midst, hacking away in a wild SKIRMISH. In this case, being threatened by the larger force lowers her position to indicate greater risk, and the scale of the gang reduces her effect (Desperate / Limited).*
- ◆ *She fights the gang from a choke-point, like a narrow alleyway where their numbers can't overwhelm her at once. She's not threatened by several at once, so her risk is similar to a one-on-one fight, but there's still a lot of enemies to deal with, so her effect is reduced (Risky / Limited).*
- ◆ *She doesn't fight the gang, instead trying to maneuver her way past them and escape. She's still under threat from many enemy attacks, so her position is worse, but if the ground is open and the gang can't easily corral her, then her effect for escaping isn't reduced (Desperate / Standard). If she had some immediate means of escape (like leaping onto a speeding carriage), then her effect might even be increased (Desperate / Great).*
- ◆ *The gang isn't aware of her yet—she's set up in a sniper position on a nearby roof. She takes a shot against one of them. Their greater numbers aren't a factor, so her effect isn't reduced, and she's not immediately in any danger (Controlled / Great). Maybe instead she wants to fire off a salvo of suppressing fire against the whole gang, in which case their scale applies (Controlled / Limited). If the gang is on guard for potential trouble, her position is more dangerous (Risky / Great). If the gang is alerted to a sniper, then the effect may be reduced further, as they scatter and take cover (Risky / Limited). If the gang is able to muster covering fire while they fall back to a safe position, then things are even worse for our scoundrel (Desperate / Limited).*

CONSEQUENCES & HARM

Enemy actions, bad circumstances, or the outcome of a roll can inflict **consequences** on a PC. There are five types (at right).

A given circumstance might result in one or more consequences, depending on the situation. The GM determines the consequences, following from the fiction and the style and tone established by the game group.

- REDUCED EFFECT**
- COMPLICATION**
- LOST OPPORTUNITY**
- WORSE POSITION**
- HARM**

REDUCED EFFECT

This consequence represents impaired performance. The PC's action isn't as effective as they'd anticipated. You hit him, but it's only a flesh wound. She accepts the forged invitation, but she'll keep her eye on you throughout the night. You're able to scale the wall, but it's slow going—you're only halfway up. This consequence essentially reduces the effect level of the PC's action by one after all other factors are accounted for.

COMPLICATION

This consequence represents trouble, mounting danger, or a new threat. The GM might introduce an immediate problem that results from the action right now: the room catches fire, you're disarmed, the crew takes +1 **HEAT** from evidence or witnesses, you lose status with a faction, the target evades you and now it's a chase, reinforcements arrive, etc.

Or the GM might tick a clock for the complication, instead. Maybe there's a clock for the alert level of the guards at the manor. Or maybe the GM creates a new clock for the suspicion of the noble guests at the masquerade party and ticks it. Fill one tick on a clock for a minor complication or two ticks for a standard complication.

A **serious complication** is more severe: reinforcements surround and trap you, the room catches fire and falling ceiling beams block the door, your weapon is broken, the crew suffers +2 **HEAT**, your target escapes out of sight, etc. Fill three ticks on a clock for a serious complication.

Don't inflict a complication that negates a successful roll. If a PC tries to corner an enemy and gets a **4/5**, don't say that the enemy escapes. The player's roll succeeded, so the enemy is cornered... maybe the PC has to wrestle them into position and during the scuffle the enemy grabs their gun.

LOST OPPORTUNITY

This consequence represents shifting circumstance. You had an opportunity to achieve your goal with this action, but it slips away. To try again, you need a new approach—usually a new form of action or a change in circumstances. Maybe you tried to **SKIRMISH** with the noble to trap her on the balcony, but she evades your maneuver and leaps out of reach. If you want to trap her now you'll have to try another way—maybe by **SWAYING** her with your roguish charm.

WORSE POSITION

This consequence represents losing control of the situation—the action carries you into a more dangerous position. Perhaps you make the leap across to the next rooftop, only to end up dangling by your fingertips. You haven't failed, but you haven't succeeded yet, either. You can try again, re-rolling at the new, worse position. This is a good consequence to choose to show escalating action. A situation might go from controlled, to risky, to desperate as the action plays out and the PC gets deeper and deeper in trouble.

HARM

This consequence represents a long-lasting debility (or death). When you suffer harm, record the specific injury on your character sheet equal to the level of harm you suffer. If you suffer **lesser harm**, record it in the bottom row. If you suffer **moderate harm**, write it in the middle row. If you suffer **severe harm**, record it in the top row. See examples of harm and the harm tracker, below.

Your character suffers the penalty indicated at the end of the row if any or all harm recorded in that row applies to the situation at hand. So, if you have "Drained" and "Battered" harm in the bottom row, you'll suffer reduced effect when you try to run away from the Bluecoats. When you're impaired by harm in the top row (severe harm, level 3), your character is incapacitated and can't do anything unless you have help from someone else or **push yourself** to perform the action.

If you need to mark a harm level, but the row is already filled, the harm moves up to the next row above. So, if you suffered standard harm (level 2) but had no empty spaces in the second row, you'd have to record severe harm (level 3), instead. If you run out of spaces on the top row and need to mark harm there, your character suffers a **catastrophic, permanent consequence** (loss of a limb, sudden death, etc., depending on the circumstances).

| HARM | | |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 3 | <i>Shattered Right Leg</i> | NEED HELP |
| 2 | | -1D |
| 1 | <i>Drained</i> | <i>Battered</i> REDUCED EFFECT |

This character has three harm: a "Shattered Right Leg" (level 3) plus "Drained" and "Battered" (level 1). If they suffer another level 1 harm, it will move up to level 2. If they suffer another level 3 harm, it will move up to level 4: Fatal.

HARM EXAMPLES

Fatal (4): Electrocuted, Drowned, Stabbed in the Heart.

Severe (3): Impaled, Broken Leg, Shot in Chest, Badly Burned, Terrified.

Moderate (2): Exhausted, Deep Cut to Arm, Concussion, Panicked, Seduced.

Lesser (1): Battered, Drained, Distracted, Scared, Confused.

Harm like "Drained" or "Exhausted" can be a good fallback consequence if there's nothing else threatening a PC (like when they spend all night **STUDYING** those old books, looking for any clues to Lord Scurlock's weaknesses before he strikes).

RESISTANCE & ARMOR

When your PC suffers a consequence that you don't like, you can choose to resist it. Just tell the GM, "No, I don't think so. I'm resisting that." Resistance is always automatically effective—the GM will tell you if the consequence is reduced in severity or if you avoid it entirely. Then, you'll make a **resistance roll** to see how much stress your character suffers as a result of their resistance.

You make the roll using one of your character's **attributes** (**INSIGHT**, **PROWESSION**, or **RESOLVE**). The GM chooses the attribute, based on the nature of consequences:

- ◆ **INSIGHT**: Consequences from deception or understanding.
- ◆ **PROWESSION**: Consequences from physical strain or injury.
- ◆ **RESOLVE**: Consequences from mental strain or willpower.

Your character suffers **6 stress** when they resist, **minus the highest die result from the resistance roll**. So, if you rolled a **4**, you'd suffer 2 stress. If you rolled a **6**, you'd suffer zero stress. If you get a **CRITICAL** result, you also **clear 1 stress**.

Ian's character, Silas, is in a desperate SKIRMISH with several Red Sash duelists and one of them lands a blow with their sword. Since the position was desperate, the GM inflicts severe harm (modified by any other factors). They tell Ian to record level 3 harm, "Gut Stabbed" on Silas's sheet. Ian decides to resist the harm, instead. The GM says he can reduce the harm by one level if he resists it. Ian rolls 3d for Silas's PROWESSION attribute and gets a 5. Silas takes 1 stress and the harm is reduced to level 2, "Cut to the Ribs."

Usually, a resistance roll **reduces the severity** of a consequence. If you're going to suffer fatal harm, for example, a resistance roll would reduce the harm to severe, instead. Or if you got a complication when you were sneaking into the manor house, and the GM was going to mark three ticks on the "Alert" clock, she'd only mark two (or maybe one) if you resisted the complication.

You may only roll against a given consequence once.

The GM also has the option to rule that your character **completely avoids** the consequence. For instance, maybe you're in a sword fight and the consequence is getting disarmed. When you resist, the GM says that you avoid that consequence completely: you keep hold of your weapon.

By adjusting which consequences are reduced vs. which are avoided, the GM establishes the overall tone of your game. For a more daring game, most consequences will be avoided. For a grittier game, most consequences will only be reduced with resistance.

The GM may also threaten several consequences at once, then the player may choose which ones to resist (and make rolls for each).

"She stabs you and then leaps off the balcony. Level 2 harm and you lose the opportunity to catch her with fighting."

"I'll resist losing the opportunity by grappling her as she attacks. She can stab me, but I don't want to let her escape."

RESISTANCE ROLL

 **1d** for each **ATTRIBUTE** rating.

You reduce or avoid the effects of the consequence (GM chooses).

Suffer 6 stress minus the highest die result.

CRITICAL: Clear 1 stress.

Once you decide to resist a consequence and roll, you suffer the stress indicated. You can't roll first and see how much stress you'll take, then decide whether or not to resist.

ARMOR

If you have a type of **armor** that applies to the situation, you can mark an armor box to reduce or avoid a consequence, instead of rolling to resist.

Silas is taking level 2 harm, “Cut to the Ribs,” and the fight isn’t even over yet, so Ian decides to use Silas’s armor to reduce the harm. He marks the armor box and the harm becomes level 1, “Bruised.” If Silas was wearing heavy armor, he could mark a second armor box and reduce the harm again, to zero.

When an armor box is marked, it can't be used again until it's restored. All of your armor is restored when you choose your **load** for the next score. See **Loadout**, page 57.

DEATH

There are a couple ways for a PC to die:

- ◆ If they suffer level 4 fatal harm and they don't resist it, they die. *Sometimes this is a choice a player wants to make, because they feel like it wouldn't make sense for the character to survive or it seems right for their character to die here.*
- ◆ If they need to record harm at level 3 and it's already filled, they suffer a catastrophic consequence, which might mean sudden death (depending on the circumstances).

When your character dies, you have options:

- ◆ You can create a new scoundrel to play. Maybe you “promote” one of the NPC gang members to a PC, or create a brand new character who joins the crew.
- ◆ You can transfer your character to the **Ghost** playbook and carry on as a spirit. A ghost character can later become a **Hull** or a **Vampire** through play. See page 213 for details about spirit characters.

FORTUNE ROLL

The fortune roll is a tool the GM can use to disclaim decision making. You use a fortune roll in two different ways:

When you need to make a determination about a situation the PCs aren't directly involved in and don't want to simply decide the outcome.

The Lampblacks attack the Red Sashes. How does that turn out? The GM makes a fortune roll for the Lampblacks and another for the Red Sashes. The Lampblacks get a good result but the Red Sashes get limited effect. The GM decides that the Red Sashes lose their drug den, but the Lampblacks suffer some injuries in the skirmish.

When an outcome is uncertain, but no other roll applies to the situation at hand.

While pilfering the workshop of an alchemist, Nock is possessed by a vengeful ghost. As control of his body slips away, Nock grabs a random potion bottle and drinks it down. Will the arcane concoction have an effect on the spirit? Will it poison Nock to death? Who knows? The GM makes a fortune roll to see how it turns out.

When you make a fortune roll you may assess **any trait rating** to determine the dice pool of the roll.

- ◆ When a faction takes an action with uncertain outcome, you might use their **Tier** rating to make a fortune roll.
- ◆ When a gang operates independently, use their **quality** rating for a fortune roll.
- ◆ When a supernatural power manifests with uncertain results, you might use its **magnitude** for a fortune roll.
- ◆ When a PC **gathers information**, you might make a fortune roll using their **action rating** to determine the amount of the info they get.

If no trait applies, roll 1d for sheer luck or create a dice pool (from one to four) based on the situation at hand. If two parties are directly opposed, make a fortune roll for each side to see how they do, then assess the outcome of the situation by comparing their performance levels.

The fortune roll is also a good tool to help the GM manage all the various moving parts of the living city of Doskvol. Sometimes a quick roll is enough to answer a question or inspire an idea for what might happen next.

Other examples of fortune rolls:

- ◆ The PCs instigate a war between two factions, then sit back and watch the fireworks. How does it turn out? Does either side dominate? Are they both made vulnerable by the conflict? Make a few fortune rolls to find out.
- ◆ A strange sickness, the Cold Slumber, is sweeping the city. How badly is Crow's Foot hit by the outbreak? The GM assigns a magnitude to the arcane plague, and makes a fortune roll to judge the extent of its contamination.

FORTUNE ROLL

- ◆ **1d** for each **TRAIT** rating.
- ◆ **+1d** for each **MAJOR ADVANTAGE**.
- ◆ **-1d** for each **MAJOR DISADVANTAGE**.

CRITICAL: Exceptional result / Great, extreme effect.

6: Good result / Standard, full effect.

4/5: Mixed result / Limited, partial effect.

1-3: Bad result / Poor, little effect.

- ◆ The Hound stakes out a good spot and makes a sniper shot against Bazso Baz when he enters his office. The controlled **HUNT** roll is a success, but is great effect enough to instantly kill the gang leader? Instead of making a progress clock for Bazso's mortality, the GM decides to use a simple fortune roll with his "toughness" as a trait to see if he can possibly survive the attack. The roll is a **4/5**: the bullet misses his heart, but hits him in the lung—it's a mortal wound. He's on death's door, with only hours to live, unless the Lamplbacks can get an expert physicker to him in time.
- ◆ Inspectors are putting a case together against the PC crew. How quickly will their evidence result in arrests? The crew's **WANTED LEVEL** counts as a major advantage for the inspectors.
- ◆ The PCs face off in a skirmish with a veteran leviathan hunter captain and her crew. The tide of battle goes in the PCs' favor, and many crew members are killed. One of the players asks if the captain will surrender to spare the rest of her crew's lives. The GM isn't sure. How cold-hearted is this veteran hunter? She's stared giant demons in the eye without flinching... is there anything human left inside her? The GM makes a 2d fortune roll for "human feelings" to see if a spark of compassion remains in heart. If so, maybe one of the PCs can roll to **CONSORT**, **SWAY**, or **COMMAND** her to stand down.



GATHERING INFORMATION

The flow of information from the GM to the players about the fictional world is very important in a roleplaying game. By default, the GM tells the players what their characters perceive, suspect, and intuit. But there's just too much going on to say *everything*—it would take forever and be boring, too. The players have a tool at their disposal to more fully investigate the fictional world.

When you want to know something specific about the fictional world, your character can **gather information**. The GM will ask you **how** your character gathers the info (or how they learned it in the past).

If it's common knowledge, the GM will simply answer your questions. If there's an obstacle to the discovery of the answer, an action roll is called for. If it's not common knowledge but there's no obstacle, a simple fortune roll determines the quality of the information you gather.

For instance, if you decide to grab Avrick the powder dealer and COMMAND him to talk, you could ask, "Where does he get his supply?" Avrick isn't tough enough to stand up to you, so it's a simple fortune roll to see how much he talks. On a 1-3, he admits that he gets his supply from the Red Sashes. On a 4/5, he also tells you that he works for the Sashes because they forced him to. On a 6, he also reveals the time and place that he picks up the stash each week. On a critical, he'll even tell you a secret that he discovered: the Sashes get the drugs from diplomatic couriers from Iruvia.

Each attempt to gather information takes time. If the situation allows, you can try again if you don't initially get all the info that you want. But often, the opportunity is fleeting, and you'll only get one chance to roll for that particular question.

Some example questions are on the bottom of the character sheet. The GM always answers honestly, but with a level of detail according to the level of effect.

The most common gather information actions are **SURVEYING** the situation to reveal or anticipate what's going on and **STUDYING** a person to understand what they intend to do or what they're really thinking.

Sometimes, you'll have to maneuver yourself into position before you can gather information. For example, you might have to **PROWL** to a good hiding place first and then **STUDY** the cultists when they perform their dark ritual.

INVESTIGATION

Some questions are too complex to answer immediately with a single gather information roll. For instance, you might want to discover the network of contraband smuggling routes that the Hive uses throughout Duskwall. In these cases, the GM will tell you to start a **long-term project** that you work on during **downtime** (see page 154).

You track the investigation project using a progress clock. Once the clock is filled, you have the evidence you need to ask several questions about the subject of your investigation as if you had great effect.

GATHER INFORMATION

Ask a question and make an action roll or a fortune roll. The GM answers you honestly, with a level of detail depending on the effect level.

GREAT: You get exceptional details. The information is complete and follow-up questions may expand into related areas or reveal more than you hoped for.

STANDARD: You get good details. Clarifying and follow-up questions are possible.

LIMITED: You get incomplete or partial information. More information gathering will be needed to get all the answers.

EXAMPLES & QUESTIONS

- ◆ You might **ATTUNE** to the ghost field to see echoes of recent spirit activity. *Have any new ghosts been here? How can I find the spirit well that's calling to them? What should I be worried about?*
- ◆ You might **COMMAND** a local barkeep to tell you what he knows about the secret meetings held in his back room. *What's really going on here? What's he really feeling about this? Is he part of this secret group?*
- ◆ You might **CONSORT** with a well-connected friend to learn secrets about an enemy, rival, or potential ally. *What do they intend to do? What might I suspect about their motives? How can I discover leverage to manipulate them?*
- ◆ You might **HUNT** a courier across the city, to discover who's receiving satchels of coin from Mylera Klev. *Where does the package end up? How can I find out who signed for the package at City Hall?*
- ◆ You might **STUDY** ancient and obscure books to discover an arcane secret. *How can I disable the runes of warding? Will anyone sense if they're disabled?*
- ◆ Or you might **STUDY** a person to read their intentions and feelings. *What are they really feeling? How could I get them to trust me?*
- ◆ You might **SURVEY** a manor house to case it for a heist. *What's a good point of infiltration? What's the danger here?*
- ◆ Or you might **SURVEY** a charged situation when you meet another gang. *What's really going on here? Are they about to attack us?*
- ◆ You might **SWAY** Lord Strangford at a party so he divulges his future plans. *What does he intend to do? How can I get him to think I might be a good partner in this venture?*
- ◆ Or you might **SWAY** Strangford's bodyguard to confide in you about recent events. *Where has he been lately? Who's he been meeting with?*



EXAMPLE OF PLAY

SHOWDOWN AT THE DOCKS

The Billhooks, an NPC street gang, have been encroaching on the drug-sales territory of the PC crew (“the Bloodletters”), down by the docks. The players left their crew at weak hold for a while, so the GM decided to show that weakness by describing Billhooks milling around in their turf, talking to customers, and generally ignoring the Bloodletters’ claim to the streets.

In this session, the GM casually mentions that a Billhook is selling “spark” in a nearby alleyway, and that tips the scale—Arcy, Canter, and Oskarr (the PCs) have had enough! They gather their gang and come out in force to run the Billhooks off. It’s a display of dominance to see who flinches first. A Bluecoat patrol notices the two armed gangs squaring off and decides to wait on the sidelines for the moment—let them sort it out a bit first.

Arcy makes the opening move, getting up in the face of the first Billhook. She stares him down, ice cold, and says, “You think this is gonna be your moment, but it’s not. Get gone before we put you down.” Sounds like a **COMMAND** roll, and that’s what Sean (Arcy’s player) chooses. The GM reveals that this is Coran, second-in-command and the son of the leader of the Billhooks, and there’s no way he can lose face by backing down right away. It’s a risky roll with limited effect.

Sean gets 3d for Arcy’s **COMMAND** rating, plus 1d for an assist from Oskarr (the weird Whisper of the crew). Oskarr’s player, Stras, describes how the demonic eyeball on Oskarr’s spirit mask rotates around and glares unblinking at Coran—enough to freak anyone out, but the Bloodletters also have a reputation as brutal killers who are involved in some kind of dark magic, so that’s a perfect assist in this battle of nerves. Sean rolls 4d and gets a **4/5**: partial success.

Arcy does what she’s trying to do, and intimidates the Billhooks. The GM describes Arcy’s limited effect: “When you stare Coran down, you see him freeze up. He really doesn’t want to mess with you but he’s terrified of looking weak in front of his gang. You notice a few members shuffle nervously and start to back away.”

It was a partial success, though, so Arcy suffers a consequence from it, too. Harm doesn’t seem to apply here (not yet). A complication makes sense, though. The GM says that Coran’s three bodyguards become enraged when Arcy speaks to the boss’s son like that. They draw their weapons and close in on Arcy. If she even twitches, they’ll be on her before she can draw her sword.

Sean decides to resist the consequence. Arcy’s gonna need her sword if this turns into a battle, especially if it starts with a three-on-one attack on her. Sean rolls 2d for Arcy’s **PROWESS** attribute and gets a 4. She takes 2 stress and avoids the complication. The Billhooks think they have her in a bad spot, but she’ll be a lot faster than they expect, and won’t be surrounded or unarmed when they attack.

The Bloodletters have a *savage* gang, and now that weapons are drawn, they will certainly go on the attack—unless someone does something to make the Billhooks back off right now, it's gonna be a fight.

Sean and Stras discuss some options for how they might further intimidate the Billhooks, maybe even by busting out some arcane power to get even greater effect on them, but Adam (Canter's player) steps in and takes the initiative. “Screw it,” he says, “Canter just walks up and shoots Coran in the kneecap. ‘That’s how it is, fool.’ Everyone shakes their heads and chuckles, of course he does! This is how Canter Haig solves problems.

So what action is this? Adam thinks and says, “Well, I mean, I’m still trying to force them to do something. I’m shooting a gun, but I’m not Skirmishing or Hunting here. I’m forcing him to give this nonsense up. So it’s Command... which I have zero dice in, ha. Here we go.” Sean immediately volunteers to take 1 stress to give Adam 1d for an assist—Arcy is already helping, being her scary badass self. Adam asks for a Devil’s Bargain, and the GM has one: regardless of how this turns out, Coran is going to mark Canter as someone too reckless and dangerous to leave alive. Canter is going to the top of the Billhooks’ hit-list. Adam agrees, and takes +1d.

The GM says it’s a desperate roll, because obviously it is. Adam rolls 2d and gets... two sixes—a **CRITICAL** success! He grins, “That’s how you do it, people.” Blam! Coran takes a bullet to the knee and Canter commands the Billhooks to back off. With a **CRITICAL** success, Canter’s effect is increased, from standard to great. Is that enough to make them back down?

The GM says, “I don’t know... I mean, great effect is impressive. You ‘achieve more than usual’ it says in the rules—you get an additional benefit. But you’re also *shooting the boss’s son!* Would they back down after that? Even with great effect? It’s hard to imagine it. Maybe, instead, all the Billhooks flee while your gang chases them off, but Coran’s three bodyguards attack. And you keep the initiative, Canter, because of your critical here. How’s that?”

“That makes sense, yeah, but hold on,” Adam says, “I can push myself for extra effect, right? If Canter takes 2 stress for +1 effect, to make it extreme effect, is that enough to just shut all this down and dominate them right now?”

“Oh, wow, yeah, that would do it. Nice! So, boom, that’s it. Arcy stares them all down, Oskarr creeps everyone out, Canter shoots Coran—and just like that, the Billhooks fold like a napkin and disappear from your turf. The Bluecoat sergeant that was watching tips his cap to you, like, ‘Alright then, no problems here,’ and that’s the end of it.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ◆ Could the GM have run this situation using progress clocks? Maybe make a “Morale” clock for each gang and tick them according to the effect and consequences from the rolls? How would that go? Does that seem like an easier or harder way for you to handle it as a GM?
- ◆ What about Canter’s final effect level? Do you think he needed extreme effect for that result, or was great enough already? How would you judge it?

PC VS. PC

Situations may arise in play in which two or more PCs come into conflict. How do you deal with this? In general, the rules for PC vs. PC action are the same as the rules for PC vs. NPC action. It's still action rolls, resistance rolls, fortune rolls; effects and consequences; and resolution into a new situation. But it's a good idea to follow some guidelines when it comes to PC vs. PC conflict.

- 1. Pause the game.** When a PC comes into conflict with another PC, pause the game. It's a time-out in the fictional space, while the players talk things through. Don't be in a big rush to roll dice. Slow everything way down. This isn't a "who talks first wins" situation (and especially not "who talks more or loudest").

"Who goes first?" is sometimes the question players fixate on, especially if things are about to get violent. Usually, the answer is clear from the situation: someone has the initiative and someone else is reacting. If it isn't clear, you can make fortune rolls—each player rolls an action rating and you compare the results.

- 2. Agree to the resolution methods.** Talk it through, figure out the rolls, and discuss the consequences at stake. Don't try to resolve the situation until everyone agrees to the methods you're about to use. If you have an objection or an alternate idea, speak up! If the players can't agree to a method, then you're deadlocked. You can't proceed without everyone's consent, so this conflict just isn't going to happen. Maybe the PCs get in each other's faces and act like they're going to tangle, but then, nope... it fizzles and they back off. This happens in fiction a lot, and it's okay if it happens in the game.

It's a good idea to ask each other questions to help establish the resolution, rather than trying to impose your will. You might ask, "Can Vale be Swayed here? What would it take?" or, "Is Jewel within reach if I draw my sword now and attack?" or, "How vicious is Cyr going to be? Do you really want to hurt me?"

- 3. Abide by the results.** Once you've agreed to the methods, then follow them through and abide by the outcomes. You can roll resistance to avoid bad results, as usual, so don't try to weasel out of it some other way if things don't turn out the way you hoped.

Note that this is not a "player vs. player" system. When characters come into conflict, the players must still collaborate and make judgment calls together, as usual. Conflicts between players are outside the scope of the game; they can't be resolved with the dice rolls and mechanics of *Blades in the Dark*. If the players—not their characters—are in conflict, you'll have to work it out using social methods, then return to the game when it's resolved. Don't try to use the game as a way to dodge or replace a normal social interaction to resolve person-to-person conflict.

COIN & STASH

COIN

COIN is an abstract measure of cash and liquid assets. The term is Akorosian slang from the days of the old Imperial treasury, which minted special bank coins of solid gold—each one valuable enough to cover a major transaction. “Flashing a coin” was considered an ostentatious display of wealth. These days, everyone uses small silver pieces for currency, commonly called “slugs” or “scales.”

The few silver pieces the PCs use in their daily lives are not tracked. If a scoundrel wants to toss a few silver around to achieve a small goal (bribe a doorman), use the PC’s **lifestyle** quality for a fortune roll (see **Stash**, at right).

MONETARY VALUES

- ◆ **1 COIN:** A full purse of silver pieces. A week’s wages.
- ◆ **2 COIN:** A fine weapon. A weekly income for a small business. A fine piece of art. A set of luxury clothes.
- ◆ **4 COIN:** A satchel full of silver. A month’s wages.
- ◆ **6 COIN:** An exquisite jewel. A heavy burden of silver pieces.
- ◆ **8 COIN:** A good monthly take for a small business. A small safe full of coins and valuables. A very rare luxury commodity.
- ◆ **10 COIN:** Liquidating a significant asset—a carriage and goats, a horse, a deed to a small property.

More than 4 **COIN** is an impractical amount to keep lying around. You must spend the excess or put it in your **stash** (see below). A crew can also store 4 **COIN** in their lair, by default. If they upgrade to a **vault**, they can expand their stores to 8 and then 16 **COIN**. Any **COIN** beyond their limit must be spent as soon as possible (typically before the next score) or distributed among the crew members.

One unit of **COIN** in silver pieces or other bulk currency takes up one item slot for your **load** when carried.

COIN USE

- ◆ Spend 1 **COIN** to get an additional **activity** during **downtime** (page 153).
- ◆ Spend 1 **COIN** to increase the result level of a **downtime activity** roll (page 153).
- ◆ Spend **COIN** to avoid certain crew **entanglements** (page 150).
- ◆ Put **COIN** in your character’s **stash** to improve their lifestyle and circumstances when they retire. See the next page.
- ◆ Spend **COIN** when you advance your crew’s **Tier** (see page 44).

STASH & RETIREMENT

When you mark your character's final **TRAUMA** and they retire, the amount of **COIN** they've managed to stash away determines their fate. Your stash tracker is on your character sheet.

- ◆ **Stash 0-10: Poor soul.** You end up in the gutter, awash in vice and misery.
- ◆ **Stash 11-20: Meager.** A tiny hovel that you can call your own.
- ◆ **Stash 21-39: Modest.** A simple home or apartment, with some small comforts. You might operate a tavern or small business.
- ◆ **Stash 40: Fine.** A well-appointed home or apartment, claiming a few luxuries. You might operate a medium business.

In addition, each full row of stash (10 **COINS**) indicates the **quality level of the scoundrel's lifestyle**, from zero (street life) to four (luxury).

Canter Haig is a scoundrel who cares a great deal about his sartorial swagger, and Adam, his player, often describes Canter as modeling the most stylish and outrageous fashion to impress his peers. But he's just some street scoundrel, right? How impressive is his six-collared coat, really? The GM can call for a fortune roll using Canter's lifestyle level as the dice pool to find out how much impact the attire has.

Cross wants some alone-time with a prospective new friend, but he can't take them back to the hidden lair where he lives, so what to do? Ryan, Cross's player, says he wants to rent a nice room for the evening, so the GM asks for a fortune roll using Cross's lifestyle rating to see what quality of room Cross can manage.

REMOVING COIN FROM YOUR STASH

If you want to pull **COIN** out of your stash, you may do so, at a cost. Your character sells off some of their assets and investments in order to get some quick cash. **For every 2 stash removed, you get 1 COIN in cash.**



THE FACTION GAME

Doskvol is a city of crime, top to bottom. Every faction preys on others to survive. Alliances are fleeting, vendettas are bloody. Into this chaos of corruption and violence your fledgling crew has set its course. Will you be crushed, or will you rise up?

TIER

Take a look at the **factions** on page 282. Each notable faction of the city is ranked by **Tier**—a measure of wealth, influence, and scale. At the highest level are the Tier V and VI factions, the true powers of the city. Your crew begins at Tier 0.

You'll use your Tier rating to roll dice when you acquire an asset, as well as for any fortune roll for which your crew's overall power level and influence is the primary trait. Most importantly, your Tier determines the **quality level** of your items as well as the quality and **scale** of the gangs your crew employs—and thereby what size of enemy you can expect to handle.

GANG SCALE BY TIER

- ◆ **TIER V.** Massive gangs. (80 people)
- ◆ **TIER IV.** Huge gangs. (40 people)
- ◆ **TIER III.** Large gangs. (20 people)
- ◆ **TIER II.** Medium gangs. (12 people)
- ◆ **TIER I.** Small gangs. (3-6 people)
- ◆ **TIER 0.** 1 or 2 people

HOLD

On the faction ladder next to the Tier numbers is a letter indicating the strength of each faction's **hold**. Hold represents how well a faction can maintain their current position on the ladder. W indicates **weak hold**. S indicates **strong hold**. Your crew begins with **strong hold** at Tier 0.

DEVELOPMENT

To move up the ladder and develop your crew, you need **REP**. **REP** is a measure of clout and renown. When you accrue enough **REP**, the other factions take you more seriously and you attract the support needed to develop and grow.

When you complete a score, your crew earns **2 REP**. If the target of the score is higher Tier than your crew, you get **+1 REP per Tier higher**. If the target of the score is lower Tier, you get **-1 REP per Tier lower** (minimum zero).

You need **12 REP** to fill the **REP** tracker on your crew sheet. When you fill the tracker, do one of the following:

- ◆ If your hold is weak, it becomes strong. **Reset your REP to zero.**
- ◆ If your hold is strong, you can pay to increase your crew Tier by one. This costs **COIN** equal to your **new Tier x 8**. As long as your **REP** tracker is full, you don't earn new **REP** (12 is the max). Once you pay and increase your Tier, **reset your REP to zero** and **reduce your hold to weak**.

TURF

Another way to contribute to the crew's development is by acquiring **turf**. When you seize and hold territory, you establish a more stable basis for your **REP**. Each piece of turf that you claim represents abstracted support for the crew (often a result of the fear you instill in the citizens on that turf).

Turf is marked on your **REP** tracker (see the example below). Each piece of turf you hold reduces the **REP** cost to develop by one. So, if you have 2 turf, you need 10 **REP** to develop. If you have 4 turf, you need 8 **REP** to develop. **You can hold a maximum of 6 turf.** When you develop and reset your **REP**, **you keep the marks from all the turf you hold.**

*If you hold 3 pieces of turf, you need only 9 **REP** to develop, instead of 12.*



*When you develop, you'll clear the 9 **REP** marks, but keep the 3 turf marks. Mark turf on the right side, to show the "cap" on how much **REP** is needed.*

Also, when you acquire turf, you expand the scope of your crew's **hunting grounds**. See page 93 for details.

REDUCING HOLD

You may perform an operation specifically to reduce the hold of another faction, if you know how they're vulnerable. If the operation succeeds, the target faction loses 1 level of hold. If their hold is weak and it drops, the faction loses 1 Tier and stays weak.

When a faction is at war (see page 46), it temporarily loses 1 hold.

Your crew can lose hold, too, following the same rules above. If your crew is Tier 0, with weak hold, and you lose hold for any reason, your lair comes under threat by your enemies or by a faction seeking to profit from your misfortune.

FACTION STATUS

Your crew's **status** with each faction indicates how well you are liked or hated. Status is rated from -3 to +3, with zero (neutral) being the default starting status. You track your status with each faction on the faction sheet.

When you create your crew, you assign some positive and negative status ratings to reflect recent history. The ratings will then change over time based on your actions in play.

FACTION STATUS CHANGES

When you execute an operation, you gain -1 or -2 status with factions that are hurt by your actions. You may also gain +1 status with a faction that your operation helps. (If you keep your operation completely quiet then your status doesn't change.) Your status may also change if you do a favor for a faction or if you refuse one of their demands.

FACTION STATUS LEVELS

- ◆ **+3: ALLIES.** This faction will help you even if it's not in their best interest to do so. They expect you to do the same for them.
- ◆ **+2: FRIENDLY.** This faction will help you if it doesn't create serious problems for them. They expect you to do the same.
- ◆ **+1: HELPFUL.** This faction will help you if it causes no problems or significant cost for them. They expect the same from you.
- ◆ **0: NEUTRAL**
- ◆ **-1: INTERFERING.** This faction will look for opportunities to cause trouble for you (or profit from your misfortune) as long as it causes no problems or significant cost for them. They expect the same from you.
- ◆ **-2: HOSTILE.** This faction will look for opportunities to hurt you as long as it doesn't create serious problems for them. They expect you to do the same, and take precautions against you.
- ◆ **-3: WAR.** This faction will go out of its way to hurt you even if it's not in their best interest to do so. They expect you to do the same, and take precautions against you. When you're at war with any number of factions, your crew suffers +1 HEAT from scores, temporarily loses 1 hold, and PCs get only one downtime action rather than two. You can end a war by eliminating your enemy or by negotiating a mutual agreement to establish a new status rating.

If your crew has weak hold when you go to war, the temporary loss of hold causes you to lose one Tier. When the war is over, restore your crew's Tier back to its pre-war level.

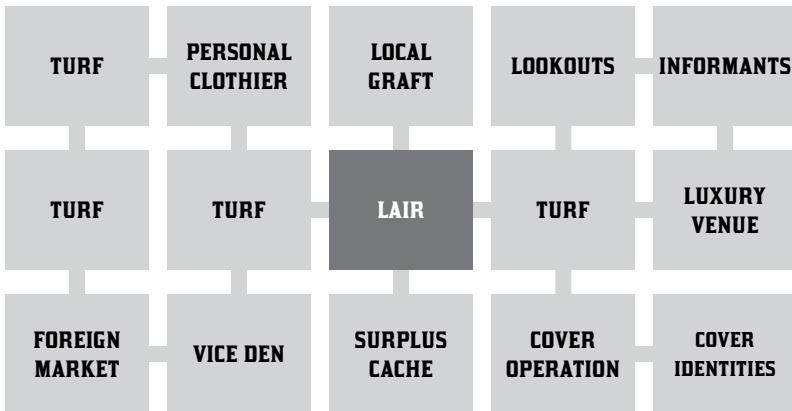
CLAIMS

Each crew sheet has a map of claims available to be seized (see the example for the **HAWKERS** crew on the next page). The claim map displays a default roadmap for your crew type. Claims should usually be seized in an orderly sequence, by following the paths from the central square, the crew's lair.

However, you may attempt to seize any claim on your map, ignoring the paths (or even seek out a special claim not on your map) but these operations will always be especially difficult and require exceptional efforts to discover and achieve. The claim roadmap shows typical paths for advancement, not an absolute restriction on your operations.

SEIZING A CLAIM

Every claim in Doskvol is already controlled by a faction. To acquire one for yourself, you have to take it from someone else. To seize a claim, tell the GM which claim on your map your crew intends to capture. The GM will detail the claim with a location and a description and will tell you which faction currently controls that claim. Or the GM might offer you a choice of a few options if they're available.



If you choose to ignore the roadmap paths when seizing a claim, the GM might tell you that you'll need to investigate and gather information in order to discover a claim of that type before you can attempt to seize it.

Execute the operation like any other **score**, and if you succeed, you seize the claim and the targeted faction loses the claim. (See **Chapter 4: The Score** on page 125 for details.)

Seizing a claim is a serious attack on a faction, usually resulting in -2 faction status with the target, and potentially +1 status with its enemies.

As soon as you seize a claim, you enjoy the listed benefit for as long as you hold the claim. Some claims count as **turf**. Others provide special benefits to the crew, such as bonus dice in certain circumstances, extra **COIN** generated for the crew's treasury, or new opportunities for action.

The Bloodletters (a crew of Hawkers who sell drugs) have grabbed a piece of Turf from the Red Sashes (to the left of their Lair on the claims map): it's an intersection of street corners near the docks, where their gang now holds sway. They want to claim a Vice Den next. The GM says that the tattoo parlor near their new turf is a front for a Red Sash drug den in the basement—they see users shuffling in and out all day. The Bloodletters gather their gang of Thugs and assault the place, driving out and killing the Red Sashes, and seizing it for their own. Taking these two claims drives their faction status with the Red Sashes all the way down, to -3. Now they're at war.

LOSING A CLAIM

An enemy faction may try to seize a claim that your crew holds. You can fight to defend it, or negotiate a deal with the faction, depending on the situation. If you lose a claim, you lose all the benefits of that claim. If your lair is lost, you lose the benefits of all of your claims until you can restore your lair or establish a new one. To restore or establish a new lair, accomplish a score to do so.

ADVANCEMENT

PC ADVANCEMENT

Each player keeps track of the experience points (**xp**) that their character earns.

During the game session, mark xp:

- ◆ When you make a **desperate action roll**. Mark 1 xp in the attribute for the action you rolled. For example, if you roll a desperate **SKIRMISH** action, you mark xp in **PROWESSION**. When you roll in a **group action** that's desperate, you also mark xp.

At the end of the session, review the **xp triggers** on your character sheet. For each one, mark 1 xp if it happened at all, or mark 2 xp if it happened a lot during the session. The xp triggers are:

- ◆ **Your playbook-specific xp trigger.** For example, the Cutter's is "Address a challenge with violence or coercion." To "address a challenge," your character should attempt to overcome a tough obstacle or threat. It doesn't matter if the action is successful or not. You get xp either way.
- ◆ **You expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background.** Your character's beliefs and drives are yours to define, session to session. Feel free to tell the group about them when you mark xp.
- ◆ **You struggled with issues from your vice or traumas.** Mark xp for this if your vice tempted you to some bad action or if a trauma condition caused you trouble. Simply indulging your vice doesn't count as struggling with it (unless you **overindulge**, see **Vice**, page 156).

You may mark end-of-session xp on any xp tracks you want (any attribute or your playbook xp track).

When you fill an xp track, clear all the marks and take an **advance**. When you take an advance from your playbook track, you may choose an additional **special ability**. When you take an advance from an attribute, you may add an **additional action dot** to one of the actions under that attribute.

Nadja is playing a Hound. At the end of the session, she reviews her xp triggers and tells the group how much xp she's getting. She rolled two desperate HUNT actions during the session, so she marked 2 xp on her INSIGHT xp track. She addressed several challenges with tracking or violence, so she marks 2 xp for that. She expressed her Iravian heritage many times when dealing with the Red Sashes, so she takes 2 xp for that. She also showcased her character's beliefs, but 2 xp is the maximum for that category, so she doesn't get any more. She didn't struggle with her vice or traumas, so no xp there. That's 4 xp at the end of the session. She decides to put it all in her INSIGHT xp track. This fills the track, so she adds a new action dot in HUNT.

You can also earn xp by **training** during downtime. When you train, mark xp in one of your attributes or in your playbook. A given xp track can be trained only once per downtime phase. See **Training**, page 155.

CREW ADVANCEMENT

At the end of the session, review the crew xp triggers and mark 1 crew xp for each item that occurred during the session. If an item occurred multiple times or in a major way, mark 2 crew xp for it. The crew xp triggers are:

- ◆ **Your crew-specific xp trigger.** For example, the Smugglers' is “*Execute a smuggling operation or acquire new clients or contraband sources.*” If the crew successfully completed an operation from this trigger, mark xp.
- ◆ **Contend with challenges above your current station.** If you tangled with higher Tiers or more dangerous opposition, mark xp for this.
- ◆ **Bolster your crew’s reputation or develop a new one.** Review your crew’s reputation. Did you do anything to promote it? Also mark xp if you developed a new reputation for the crew.
- ◆ **Express the goals, drives, inner conflict, or essential nature of the crew.** This one is very broad! Essentially, did anything happen that highlighted the specific elements that make your crew unique?

When you fill your crew advancement tracker, clear the marks and take a new special ability or mark two crew upgrade boxes.

*For example, when a crew of Assassins earns a crew advance, they could take a new special ability, like *Predators*. Or they could mark two upgrades, like *Ironhook Contacts* and *Resolve Training*.*

Say how you’ve obtained this new ability or upgrades for the crew. *Where did it come from? How does it become a new part of the crew?*

PROFITS

Every time the crew advances, **each PC gets stash** equal to the crew Tier+2, to represent profits generated by the crew as they’ve been operating.

CHANGING PLAYBOOKS OR CREW TYPE

A player might want to change their character to a different playbook (a Cutter becomes a Lurk), or the group may decide to shift their crew to a new type (Hawkers become Assassins). There are two ways to do this.

- ◆ The change represents a “rebuild” of the character or crew. For instance, if the PC was created as a Lurk, but after a couple sessions, the player realizes that the Hound playbook is a better fit for what they want to play. In this case, re-create the character or crew anew using the new sheet, keeping the same number of advances already earned.
- ◆ The change represents growth into something new, leaving the old life behind. In this case, transfer the action ratings of a PC or the upgrades of a crew to the new sheet (keeping the same total number of action dots or upgrades; you don’t get the “free” elements of the new playbook as extra advancement). You may keep some of the special abilities already earned as Veteran advances. A crew might also keep their claims—assess each one to see if it makes sense in the fiction to keep it with the new crew type.



CHAPTER 2

CHARACTERS

Doskvol needs the unwanted and the forgotten—to fill the workhouses, the Leviathan hunter ships, the chain gangs of the deathlands scavengers. The power structures of the world are designed to use you up and cast you aside, fattening the coffers of the rich and powerful, leaving you broken, with nothing. You are the dregs of the city. The disposable nobodies. But that will not be your fate. You will not be a victim. You will show them who you really are. They will know your name.

SCOUNDRELS

Every player character in *Blades in the Dark* is a daring criminal of the underworld of Doskvol, known in common parlance as a *scoundrel*. Scoundrels are familiar with all of the various feats of skulduggery represented by the **actions** of the game. They're all able to **SKIRMISH** in a knife-fight, **PROWL** in the shadows, **ATTUNE** to strange energy, **CONSORT** with contacts for information, and so on. Because of the way the dice system works, every scoundrel can roll at least 2d for any action in the game (+1d from pushing or a Devil's Bargain, and a +1d assist from a teammate). A roll of 2d is pretty good, statistically—a 75% chance of success. This means that all of the “zero rating” actions on your character sheet don't actually represent deficiencies or gaps of skill; they indicate the actions for which your character is likely to burn stress and rely on teamwork. As a scoundrel of the Dusk, with your crew at your back, you can attempt almost anything.

Of course, you'll also have your specializations and skills, the qualities that make your character uniquely effective in the criminal world. You might want the ability to compel obedience from ghosts and channel electroplasmic energy through your body, or maybe you want to manipulate the network of the underworld to your advantage and see danger before it strikes, or maybe you just want to be the deadliest fighter with a blade. In this chapter, you'll learn how to create your own unique scoundrel and choose the abilities that suit the style of play you prefer.

CHARACTER CREATION

CHOOSE A PLAYBOOK

A playbook is what we call the sheet with all the specific rules to play a certain character type in *Blades in the Dark*. Rather than a general “scoundrel” sheet, the game has seven customized playbooks. By choosing a playbook, you’re choosing which type of scoundrel your character is. The playbooks are:

CUTTER

Cutters are good at winning fights, with violence and with intimidation. Play a Cutter if you want to get your way.

HOUND

Hounds are good at tracking things down and also long-distance combat. Play a Hound if you want to choose your battles.

LEECH

Leeches are good at using alchemy and wrecking stuff with sabotage. Play a Leech if you want to be creative with weird tools.

LURK

Lurks are good at sneaking around and breaking into places. Play a Lurk if you want to slink around in the shadows.

SLIDE

Slides are good at social situations and subterfuge. Play a Slide if you want to manipulate and deceive people.

SPIDER

Spiders are good at masterminding maneuvers. Play a Spider if you want to assist teammates and deal with other factions.

WHISPER

Whispers are good at magical stuff and dealing with ghosts. Play a Whisper if you want to meddle with arcane powers.

When you choose a playbook, you’re choosing a set of **special abilities** (which give your character ways to break the rules in various ways) and a set of **xp triggers** (which determine how you earn experience for character advancement). But every playbook represents a scoundrel at heart. The Cutter has special abilities related to combat, but that doesn’t mean they’re “the fighter” of the game. Any character type can fight well. Think of your playbook as an area of focus and preference, but not a unique skill set.

This is why we call them “playbooks” rather than “character classes” or “archetypes.” You’re selecting the set of initial action ratings and special abilities that your character has access to—but you’re not defining their immutable essence or true nature. Your character will grow and change over time; who they become is part of the fun of playing the game.

Your playbook choice also represents how the other scoundrels of the underworld see you. The names of the playbooks are underworld slang in Duskwall. If someone solves their problems with weird occult stuff, people say they're a "Whisper." If they're a smooth talker and shrewd manipulator, people might call them a "Slide." Part of your character's reputation is reflected by their playbook choice.

Each playbook is detailed in this section, starting on page 61.

Once you've chosen your playbook, follow the steps below to complete your character.

CHOOSE A HERITAGE

Your character's **heritage** describes where their family line is from. You may be of any heritage of your choice, and then decide if you're a foreigner who has immigrated to Doskvol or if you're a local who grew up here. When you choose a heritage, circle it on the list on your playbook, then write a detail about your family life on the line above. For example, you might choose **SKOVLAN** heritage, and then write *Factory workers from Lockport, now refugees*. Or you might choose **IRUVIAN** heritage and write *Exiled nobility*. Each heritage is described in brief, below. For more details about these people and places, see page 308.

- ◆ **AKOROS** is the largest and most industrialized land in the Imperium, and is home to the capitol city as well as Duskwall itself. They're known as a diverse conglomeration of cultures that have grown together in close proximity for centuries, somewhat like Europe.
- ◆ If you want to be a rootless wanderer you could be from the **DAGGER ISLES**. People there often grow up on ships and travel a lot before settling down. They're known as corsairs and merchants who live without lightning barriers—dealing with spirits in other ways.
- ◆ If you want to be from a culture considered "foreign" by the locals, you could be from **IRUVIA**, a rich and powerful desert kingdom far to the south. It's another diverse land of varying cultures similar to old Persia, Egypt, and India.
- ◆ If you want to be from a place considered "wild" by the rest of the empire, you could be from **SEVEROS**. Outside the few Imperial settlements, most Severosi live in nomadic horse-tribes scattered across the blasted deathlands, surviving within the ruins of ancient arcane fortresses which still repel spirits.
- ◆ If you want to be from a marginalized people, you could be from **SKOVLAN**, the island kingdom just across the sea from Doskvol. Skovlan was last to be brought under Imperial rule, over the course of the 36-year Unity War (which ended only a few years ago). Many Skovlander refugees who lost their homes and jobs in the destruction of the war have come to Doskvol seeking new opportunities.
- ◆ If you want to be weird, you can be from **TYCHEROS**. It's a semi-mythical place, far away beyond the northern Void Sea. Everyone says that the people there are part-demon. If you choose Tycherosi heritage, also create a demonic *telltale* (like black shark eyes, feathers instead of hair, etc.) that marks your character.

CHOOSE A BACKGROUND

Your character's **background** describes what they did before they joined the crew. Choose one of the general background options from the list on your playbook, then write a detail about it that's specific to your character. For example, you could choose **LABOR**, and then write *Leviathan hunter sailor, mutineer*. Or you might choose **LAW** and write *Former Bluecoat*. See more examples below.

- ◆ **ACADEMIC:** A scholar, a professor or student from Doskvol Academy, a philosopher or journalist, etc.
- ◆ **LABOR:** A servant, a factory worker, a coach driver, a docker, a sailor, a Rail Jack, etc. *A stevedore for the North Hook Company*.
- ◆ **LAW:** An advocate or barrister, a Bluecoat or inspector (or even Spirit Warden), a prison guard from Ironhook, etc.
- ◆ **TRADE:** A shopkeeper, a merchant, a skilled crafts-person, a shipping agent, etc. *A liaison to the Ministry of Preservation*.
- ◆ **MILITARY:** An Imperial or Skovlander soldier, a mercenary, an intelligence operative, a strategist, a training instructor, etc.
- ◆ **NOBLE:** A dilettante, a courtier, the scion of a fallen house, etc.
- ◆ **UNDERWORLD:** A street urchin, gang member, young thug, or other outcast who grew up on the streets.

ASSIGN FOUR ACTION DOTS

Your playbook begins with three action dots already placed. You get to add four more dots (so you'll have seven total). At the start of the game, no action rating may have more than two dots (unless a special ability tells you otherwise). Brief descriptions of all the actions follow, on pages 58 and 59. Assign your four dots like this:

- ◆ Put one dot in any action that you feel reflects your character's **heritage**.
- ◆ Put one dot in any action that you feel reflects your character's **background**.
- ◆ Assign two more dots anywhere you please (max rating is 2, remember).

CHOOSE A SPECIAL ABILITY

Take a look at the special abilities for your playbook and choose one. If you can't decide which one to pick, go with the first one on the list—it's placed there as a good default choice.

SPECIAL ARMOR

Some special abilities refer to your **special armor**. Each character sheet has a set of three boxes to track usage of armor (standard, heavy, and special). If you have any abilities that use your special armor, tick its box when you activate one of them. If you don't have any special abilities that use special armor, then you can't use that armor box at all.

CHOOSE ONE CLOSE FRIEND AND ONE RIVAL

Each playbook has a list of NPCs that your character knows. Choose one from the list who is a close relationship (a good friend, a lover, a family relation, etc.). Mark the upward-pointing triangle next to their name. Then choose another NPC on the list who's your rival or enemy. Mark the downward-pointing triangle next to their name.

CHOOSE YOUR VICE

Every scoundrel is in thrall to some vice or another, which they indulge to deal with stress. Choose a vice from the list, and describe it on the line above with the specific details and the name and location of your **vice purveyor** in the city. For example, you might choose **GAMBLING**, then write *Spogg's dice game, Crow's Foot*. You can create a vice purveyor or ask the GM to tell you about a couple likely options for your vice. See a detailed list of vice purveyors on page 299.

- ◆ **FAITH:** You're dedicated to an unseen power, forgotten god, ancestor, etc.
- ◆ **GAMBLING:** You crave games of chance, betting on sporting events, etc.
- ◆ **LUXURY:** Expensive or ostentatious displays of opulence.
- ◆ **OBLIGATION:** You're devoted to a family, a cause, an organization, a charity, etc.
- ◆ **PLEASURE:** Gratification from lovers, food, drink, drugs, art, theater, etc.
- ◆ **STUPOR:** You seek oblivion in the abuse of drugs, drinking to excess, getting beaten to a pulp in the fighting pits, etc.
- ◆ **WEIRD:** You experiment with strange essences, consort with rogue spirits, observe bizarre rituals or taboos, etc.

RECORD YOUR NAME, ALIAS, & LOOK

Choose a name for your character from the sample list, or create your own. If your character uses an alias or nickname in the underworld, make a note of it. Record a few evocative words that describe your character's look (samples provided on the next page).

REVIEW YOUR DETAILS

Take a look at the details on your character sheet, especially the **experience triggers** for your playbook (like "Earn xp when you address a challenge with knowledge or arcane power," for example) and the **special items** available to a character of your type (like the Whisper's spirit mask, for example). You begin with access to all of the items on your sheet, so don't worry about picking specific things—you'll decide what your character is carrying later on, when you're on the job (see **Loadout**, page 57).

That's it! Your character is ready for play. When you start the first session, the GM will ask you some questions about who you are, your outlook, or some past events. If you don't know the answers, make some up. Or ask the other players for ideas.

NAMES

Adric, Aldo, Amosen, Andrel, Arden, Arlyn, Arquo, Arvus, Ashlyn, Branom, Brace, Brance, Brena, Bricks, Candra, Carissa, Carro, Casslyn, Cavelle, Clave, Corille, Cross, Crowl, Cyrene, Daphnia, Drav, Edlun, Emeline, Grine, Helles, Hix, Holtz, Kamelin, Kelyr, Kobb, Kristov, Laudius, Lauria, Lenia, Lizete, Lorette, Lucella, Lynthia, Mara, Milos, Morlan, Myre, Narcus, Naria, Noggs, Odrienne, Orlan, Phin, Polonia, Quess, Remira, Ring, Roethe, Sesereth, Sethla, Skannon, Stavrul, Stev, Syra, Talitha, Tesslyn, Thena, Timoth, Tocker, Una, Vaurin, Veleris, Veretta, Vestine, Vey, Volette, Vond, Weaver, Wester, Zamira.

FAMILY NAMES

Ankhayat, Arran, Athanoch, Basran, Boden, Booker, Bowman, Breakiron, Brogan, Clelland, Clermont, Coleburn, Comber, Daava, Dalmore, Danfield, Dunvil, Farros, Grine, Haig, Helker, Helles, Hellyers, Jayan, Jeduin, Kardera, Karstas, Keel, Kessarin, Kinclaith, Lomond, Maroden, Michter, Morriston, Penderyn, Prichard, Rowan, Sevoy, Skelkallan, Skora, Slane, Strangford, Strathmill, Templeton, Tyrconnell, Vale, Walund, Welker.

ALIASES

Bell, Birch, Bricks, Bug, Chime, Coil, Cricket, Cross, Crow, Echo, Flint, Frog, Frost, Grip, Gunner, Hammer, Hook, Junker, Mist, Moon, Nail, Needle, Ogre, Pool, Ring, Ruby, Silver, Skinner, Song, Spur, Tackle, Thistle, Thorn, Tick-Tock, Twelves, Vixen, Whip, Wicker.

LOOKS

Man, Woman, Ambiguous, Concealed.

Affable, Athletic, Bony, Bright, Brooding, Calm, Chiseled, Cold, Dark, Delicate, Fair, Fierce, Grimy, Handsome, Huge, Hunched, Languid, Lovely, Open, Plump, Rough, Sad, Scarred, Slim, Soft, Squat, Stern, Stout, Striking, Twitchy, Weathered, Wiry, Worn.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Collared Shirt</i> | <i>Hooded Cape</i> | <i>Rags & Tatters</i> | <i>Suspenders</i> |
| <i>Eel-skin Bodysuit</i> | <i>Hooded Coat</i> | <i>Rough Tunic</i> | <i>Tall Boots</i> |
| <i>Fitted Dress</i> | <i>Knit Cap</i> | <i>Scavenged Uniform</i> | <i>Thick Greatcoat</i> |
| <i>Fitted Leggings</i> | <i>Knit Sweater</i> | <i>Sharp Trousers</i> | <i>Tricorn Hat</i> |
| <i>Half-Cape</i> | <i>Leathers</i> | <i>Short Cloak</i> | <i>Vest or Waistcoat</i> |
| <i>Heavy Cloak</i> | <i>Long Coat</i> | <i>Skirt & Blouse</i> | <i>Waxed Coat</i> |
| <i>Heavy Jacket</i> | <i>Long Scarf</i> | <i>Slim Jacket</i> | <i>Wide Belt</i> |
| <i>Hide & Furs</i> | <i>Loose Silks</i> | <i>Soft Boots</i> | <i>Work Boots</i> |
| <i>Hood & Veil</i> | <i>Mask & Robes</i> | <i>Suit & Tie</i> | <i>Work Trousers</i> |

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

1 Choose a playbook. Your playbook represents your character's reputation in the underworld, their special abilities, and how they advance.

2 Choose a heritage. Detail your choice with a note about your family life. *For example, Skovlan: Ore miners, now war refugees in Duskwall.*

3 Choose a background. Detail your choice with your specific history. *For example, Labor: Leviathan hunter, mutineer.*

4 Assign four action dots. No action may begin with a rating higher than 2 during character creation. (*After creation, action ratings may advance up to 3. When you unlock the Mastery advance for your crew, you can advance actions up to rating 4.*)

5 Choose a special ability. They're in the gray column in the middle of the character sheet. If you can't decide, choose the first ability on the list. It's placed there as a good first option.

6 Choose a close friend and a rival. Mark the one who is a close friend, long-time ally, family relation, or lover (the upward-pointing triangle). Mark one who is a rival, enemy, scorned lover, betrayed partner, etc. (the downward-pointing triangle).

7 Choose your vice. Pick your preferred type of vice, detail it with a short description and indicate the name and location of your vice purveyor.

8 Record your name, alias, and look. Choose a name, an alias (if you use one), and jot down a few words to describe your look. Examples are provided on the preceding page.

LOADOUT

You have access to all of the items on your character sheet. For each operation, decide what your character's load will be. During the operation, you may say that your character has an item on hand by checking the box for the item you want to use—up to a number of items equal to your chosen load. Your load also determines your movement speed and conspicuously:

- ◆ **1-3 LOAD: Light.** You're faster, less conspicuous; you blend in with citizens.
- ◆ **4/5 LOAD: Normal.** You look like a scoundrel, ready for trouble.
- ◆ **6 LOAD: Heavy.** You're slower. You look like an operative on a mission.
- ◆ **7-9 LOAD: Encumbered.** You're overburdened and can't do anything except move very slowly.

Some special abilities (like the Cutter's **MULE** ability or a Demon's incredible strength) increase the load limits.

Some items count as two items for load (they have two connected boxes). *Items in italics don't count toward your load.*

You don't need to select specific items now. Review your personal items and the standard item descriptions on page 88.

ACTIONS

When you **ATTUNE**, you open your mind to the ghost field or other arcane power.

You might communicate with a ghost or understand aspects of spectrology. You could try to perceive beyond sight in order to better understand your situation (but Surveying might be better).

When you **COMMAND**, you compel swift obedience.

You might intimidate or threaten to get what you want. You might lead a gang in a group action. You could try to order people around to persuade them (but Consorting might be better).

When you **CONSORT**, you socialize with friends and contacts.

You might gain access to resources, information, people, or places. You might make a good impression or win someone over with your charm and style. You might make new friends or connect with your heritage or background. You could try to manipulate your friends with social pressure (but Sway might be better).

When you **FINESSE**, you employ dextrous manipulation or subtle misdirection.

You might pick someone's pocket. You might handle the controls of a vehicle or direct a mount. You might formally duel an opponent with graceful fighting arts. You could try to employ those arts in a chaotic melee (but Skirmishing might be better). You could try to pick a lock (but Tinkering might be better).

When you **HUNT**, you carefully track a target.

You might follow a target or discover their location. You might arrange an ambush. You might attack with precision shooting from a distance. You could try to bring your guns to bear in a melee (but Skirmishing might be better).

When you **PROWL**, you traverse skillfully and quietly.

You might sneak past a guard or hide in the shadows. You might run and leap across the rooftops. You might attack someone from hiding with a backstab or blackjack. You could try to waylay a victim in the midst of battle (but Skirmishing might be better).

When you **SKIRMISH**, you entangle a target in close combat so they can't easily escape.

You might brawl or wrestle with them. You might hack and slash. You might seize or hold a position in battle. You could try to fight in a formal duel (but Finessing might be better).

When you **STUDY**, you scrutinize details and interpret evidence.

You might gather information from documents, newspapers, and books. You might do research on an esoteric topic. You might closely analyze a person to detect lies or true feelings. You could try to examine events to understand a pressing situation (but Surveying might be better).

When you **SURVEY**, you observe the situation and anticipate outcomes.

You might spot telltale signs of trouble before it happens. You might uncover opportunities or weaknesses. You might detect a person's motivations or intentions. You could try to spot a good ambush point (but Hunting might be better).

When you **SWAY**, you influence with guile, charm, or argument.

You might lie convincingly. You might persuade someone to do what you want. You might argue a compelling case that leaves no clear rebuttal. You could try to trick people into affection or obedience (but Consorting or Commanding might be better).

When you **TINKER**, you fiddle with devices and mechanisms.

You might create a new gadget or alter an existing item. You might pick a lock or crack a safe. You might disable an alarm or trap. You might turn the clockwork and electroplasmic devices around the city to your advantage. You could try to use your technical expertise to control a vehicle (but Finessing might be better).

When you **WRECK**, you unleash savage force.

You might smash down a door or wall with a sledgehammer, or use an explosive to do the same. You might employ chaos or sabotage to create a distraction or overcome an obstacle. You could try to overwhelm an enemy with sheer force in battle (but Skirmishing might be better).

As you can see, many actions overlap with others. This is by design. As a player, you get to choose which action you roll, by saying what your character does. Can you try to **WRECK** someone during a fight? Sure! The GM tells you the position and effect level of your action in this circumstance. As it says, **SKIRMISH** might be better (less risky or more effective), depending on the situation at hand (sometimes it won't be better).

For a complete description of each action, with examples, see pages 170-181.





CUTTER

A dangerous and intimidating fighter

In the underworld of the Dusk, there are scoundrels who take what they want at the bloody edge of a blade or with a threatening presence that can stop a man cold. They are the enforcers, the debt collectors, the killers, the leg-breakers, and the thugs, commonly known as Cutters.

Where subtlety fails, swift brutality—and the threat of worse to come—can solve the problem. Or at least turn it into a different kind of problem.

When you play a Cutter, you earn xp when you address a challenge with violence or coercion. Go ahead and get up in everyone's smug faces and tell them who's boss, then let your blades do the talking if they don't get the message.

Do you have a personal code or a line you won't cross? Do you want to be the boss or do you want to be the enforcer for the boss? How did you acquire your taste for violence and coercion?

STARTING ACTIONS



SKIRMISH



COMMAND

STARTING BUILDS

If you want some guidance when you assign your four starting action dots and special ability, use one of these templates.

CAPTAIN. Command +1, Study +1, Survey +2. **Leader.**

THUG. Command +1, Consort +2, Sway +1. **Not to be Trifled With.**

TERROR. Prowl +2, Wreck +2. **Savage.**

DEVIL HUNTER. Attune +2, Hunt +1, Study +1. **Ghost Fighter.**

DANGEROUS FRIENDS, RIVALS

- ◆ **Marlane**, a pugilist. *Perhaps a pit fighter down at the docks, or a boxing coach who trained you?*
- ◆ **Chael**, a vicious thug. *Perhaps a member of a gang that you were in before the current crew, or an independent operator who's been in your way before?*
- ◆ **Mercy**, a cold killer. *Perhaps an assassin for hire, or a particularly deadly underworld scoundrel?*
- ◆ **Grace**, an extortionist. *Perhaps a former partner in thuggery, or a competitor on the scene?*
- ◆ **Sawtooth**, a physicker. *Perhaps a buddy from the war, or perhaps a butcher who botched your treatment?*

CUTTER SPECIAL ABILITIES

BATTLEBORN

You may expend your **special armor** to reduce harm from an attack in combat or to **push yourself** during a fight.

When you use this ability, tick the special armor box on your playbook sheet. If you “reduce harm” that means the level of harm you’re facing right now is reduced by one. If you use this ability to push yourself, you get one of the benefits (+1d, +1 effect, act despite severe harm) but you don’t take 2 stress. Your special armor is restored at the beginning of downtime.

BODYGUARD

When you **protect** a teammate, take **+1d** to your resistance roll. When you gather info to anticipate possible threats in the current situation, you get **+1 effect**.

The protect teamwork maneuver lets you face a consequence for a teammate. If you choose to resist that consequence, this ability gives you +1d to your resistance roll. Also, when you read a situation to gather information about hidden dangers or potential attackers, you get +1 effect—which means more detailed information.

GHOST FIGHTER

You may imbue your hands, melee weapons, or tools with spirit energy. You gain **potency** in combat vs. the supernatural. You may grapple with spirits to restrain and capture them.

When you imbue yourself with spirit energy, how do you do it? What does it look like when the energy manifests? When you’re imbued, you can strongly interact with ghosts and spirit-stuff, rather than weakly interact.

LEADER

When you **COMMAND** a **cohorts** in combat, they continue to fight when they would otherwise **break** (they’re not taken out when they suffer level 3 harm). They gain **+1 effect** and **1 armor**.

This ability makes your cohorts more effective in battle and also allows them to resist harm by using armor. While you lead your cohorts, they won’t stop fighting until they take fatal harm (level 4) or you order them to cease. What do you do to inspire such bravery in battle?

For details about cohorts, see page 96.

MULE

Your load limits are higher. Light: 5. Normal: 7. Heavy: 8.

This ability is great if you want to wear heavy armor and pack a heavy weapon without attracting lots of attention. Since your exact gear is determined on-the-fly during an operation, having more load also gives you more options to get creative with when dealing with problems during a score.

NOT TO BE TRIFLED WITH

You can **push yourself** to do one of the following: *perform a feat of physical force that verges on the superhuman—engage a small gang on equal footing in close combat.*

When you push yourself to activate this ability, you still get one of the normal benefits of pushing yourself (+1d, +1 effect, etc.) in addition to the special ability.

If you perform a feat that verges on the superhuman, you might break a metal weapon with your bare hands, tackle a galloping horse, lift a huge weight, etc. If you engage a small gang on equal footing, you don't suffer reduced effect due to scale against a small gang (up to six people).

SAVAGE

When you unleash physical violence, it's especially frightening. When you **COMMAND** a frightened target, take **+1d**.

You instill fear in those around you when you get violent. How they react depends on the person. Some people will flee from you, some will be impressed, some will get violent in return. The GM judges the response of a given NPC.

In addition, when you COMMAND someone who's affected by fear (from this ability or otherwise), take +1d to your roll.

VIGOROUS

You recover from harm faster. Permanently fill in one of your healing clock segments. Take **+1d** to healing treatment rolls.

Your healing clock becomes a 3-clock, and you get a bonus die when you recover.

CUTTER ITEMS

- ◆ **Fine hand weapon:** A finely crafted one-handed melee weapon of your choice. *Is this a well-crafted standard weapon, like a perfectly-balanced dagger, or something exotic, like an Iravian dueling saber or a metal-banded war-club?* [1 LOAD]
- ◆ **Fine heavy weapon:** A finely crafted two-handed melee weapon of your choice. *A warhammer, a greatsword, a military pike, a battleaxe, etc. A heavy weapon has more reach and hits harder than a standard weapon. This might give you potency when the power or reach of the weapon is a factor.* [2 LOAD]
- ◆ **Scary weapon or tool:** A scary-looking hand weapon or tool. This item grants increased effect when you intimidate, not increased harm in combat. [1 LOAD]
- ◆ **Manacles & chain:** A set of heavy manacles and chain, suitable for restraining a prisoner. *A souvenir from a stay with the Bluecoats, perhaps?* [0 LOAD]
- ◆ **Rage essence vial:** A single dose, which greatly enhances the user's strength, resistance to pain, and irrational aggression for the span of several minutes. *The GM will modify your position and effect accordingly when you fight on rage essence. Also, you suffer two consequences: "Can't Tell Friend From Foe" and "Can't Stop Until They're All Broken." You may resist these as usual.* [0 LOAD]



HOUND

A deadly sharpshooter and tracker

There's always a need for scoundrels who can find what others want to keep hidden. Whether that's a deadbeat gambler trying to skip out on their debts, a treacherous informant or witness who's going to squeal to the Bluecoats, or the trail to a treasure squirreled away in a secret vault—it's the Hounds that ferret them out.

Why have a fair fight, when you can stalk and ambush your prey on your terms? The underworld is your hunting ground.

When you play a Hound, you earn xp when you address a challenge with tracking or violence. Take the initiative to hunt down opportunities and targets for a score and be willing to hurt whoever stands in your way.

Do you see the whole world as potential prey, or do you still care about people? Which target in the past gave you the most trouble? Why?

STARTING ACTIONS



HUNT



SURVEY

STARTING BUILDS

If you want some guidance when you assign your four action dots and special ability, use one of these templates.

BOUNTY HUNTER. Consort +1, Prowl +1, Skirmish +2. **Scout.**

DEATHLANDS RANGER. Attune +2, Prowl +1, Survey +1. **Survivor.**

SNIPER. Prowl +2, Study +1, Survey +1. **Sharpshooter.**

VETERAN. Command +1, Skirmish +2, Wreck +1. **Tough As Nails.**

DEADLY FRIENDS, RIVALS

- ◆ **Steiner**, an assassin. *Perhaps one of your competitors, or a former partner from before you joined the crew?*
- ◆ **Celene**, a sentinel. *Celene is a guardian; a protector. Who does she watch over?*
- ◆ **Melvir**, a physicker. *Perhaps an old friend who's patched you up many times, or someone to whom you've sent too many victims?*
- ◆ **Veleris**, a spy. *Who does Veleris give their intelligence to?*
- ◆ **Casta**, a bounty hunter. *Perhaps a mentor who trained you in the deadly arts, or vice versa?*

HOUND SPECIAL ABILITIES

SHARPSHOOTER

You can **push yourself** to do one of the following: *make a ranged attack at extreme distance beyond what's normal for the weapon—unleash a barrage of rapid fire to suppress the enemy.*

When you push yourself to activate this ability, you still get one of the normal benefits of pushing yourself (+1d, +1 effect, etc.) in addition to the special ability.

The first use of this ability allows you to attempt long-range sniper shots that would otherwise be impossible with the rudimentary firearms of Duskwall. The second use allows you to keep up a steady rate of fire in a battle (enough to “suppress” a small gang up to six people), rather than stopping for a slow reload or discarding a gun after each shot. When an enemy is suppressed, they're reluctant to maneuver or attack (usually calling for a fortune roll to see if they can manage it).

FOCUSED

You may expend your **special armor** to resist a consequence of surprise or mental harm (fear, confusion, losing track of someone) or to **push yourself** for ranged combat or tracking.

When you use this ability, tick the special armor box on your playbook sheet. If you “resist a consequence” of the appropriate type, you avoid it completely. If you use this ability to push yourself, you get one of the benefits (+1d, +1 effect, act despite severe harm) but you don't take 2 stress. Your special armor is restored at the beginning of downtime.

GHOST HUNTER

Your hunting pet is imbued with spirit energy. It gains **potency** when tracking or fighting the supernatural, and gains an arcane ability: *ghost-form, mind-link, or arrow-swift*. Take this ability again to choose an additional arcane ability for your pet.

Your pet functions as a cohort (Expert: Hunter). This ability gives them potency against supernatural targets and an arcane ability of your choice. Ghost-form allows the pet to transform into electroplasmic vapor as if it were a spirit. Mind-link allows the pet and hunter to share their senses and thoughts telepathically. Arrow-swift allows the pet to move extremely quickly, out-pacing any other creature or vehicle. For more details about cohorts, see page 96.

SCOUT

When you gather information to discover the location of a target, you get **+1 effect**. When you hide in a prepared position or use camouflage you get **+1d** to rolls to avoid detection.

A “target” can be a person, a destination, a good ambush spot, an item, etc.

SURVIVOR

From hard-won experience or occult ritual, you are immune to the poisonous miasma of the deathlands and are able to subsist on the strange flora and fauna there. You get **+1 stress box**.

This ability gives you an additional stress box, so you have 10 instead of 9.

The maximum number of stress boxes a PC can have (from any number of additional special abilities or upgrades) is 12.

TOUGH AS NAILS

Penalties from harm are one level less severe (though level 4 harm is still fatal).

With this ability, level 3 harm doesn't incapacitate you; instead you take -1d to your rolls (as if it were level 2 harm). Level 2 harm affects you as if it were level 1 (less effect). Level 1 harm has no effect on you (but you still write it on your sheet, and must recover to heal it). Record the harm at its original level—for healing purposes, the original harm level applies.

VENGEFUL

You gain an additional **xp trigger**: *You got payback against someone who harmed you or someone you care about.* If your crew helped you get payback, also mark crew xp.

HOUND ITEMS

- ◆ **Fine pair of pistols:** A matched pair of handguns, made for greater accuracy, with double barrels that allow for two shots before reloading. *Were your pistols made by Kardera's Daughters, Templeton & Slane, the Imperial Forge, or some other gunsmith? How do they stand out from the average handgun?* [**1 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Fine long rifle:** A finely crafted hunting rifle, deadly at long range, unwieldy in close quarters. *Long rifles are usually illegal for private citizens in Doskvol, but you have (real or forged) military paperwork for this one.* [**2 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Electroplasmic ammunition:** A bandolier of electroplasmic ammo, especially potent against spirits, but less effective against physical targets. *The electrical charge is enough to stun a person, but does very little real harm. Several hits might incapacitate a human target. This ammunition is especially reactive in the ghost field—make a 4-clock called “Attention from the Spirit Wardens” and tick it for every operation in which this ammo was used.* [**1 LOAD**]
- ◆ **A trained hunting pet:** Your animal companion obeys your commands and anticipates your actions. *Cohort (Expert: Hunter).*
- ◆ **Spyglass:** A brass tube with lenses that allow long-distance vision. Collapsible. May attach to a rifle. [**1 LOAD**]



LEECH

A saboteur and technician

The world is built on industry, and the underworld is no different. Leeches are the scoundrels who distill the drugs, refine the arcane essences, build the bombs, bandage the wounds, and forge the tools of the criminal trades—and knowing how to make things also means knowing how to break them.

When you play a Leech, you earn xp when you address a challenge with technical skill or mayhem. Duskwall is a city full of industrial machinery, spark-crafts, plumbing, and electrical systems for you to bend to your purposes or sabotage. Get out your tools and get your hands dirty.

The extensive training that makes a Leech is rare and strange among the disenfranchised underworld class—how did you learn your arts? Which side of the coin do you prefer, the side of creation and restoration, or the side of mayhem and destruction?

STARTING ACTIONS

| | |
|---------|--------|
| ● ● ● ● | TINKER |
| ● ● ● ● | WRECK |

STARTING BUILDS

If you want some guidance when you assign your four action dots and special ability, use one of these templates.

DOCTOR. Consort +1, Finesse +1, Study +2. **Physicker.**

SAPPER. Study +1, Survey +2, Wreck +1. **Saboteur.**

VIPER. Prowl +2, Sway +2. **Venomous.**

WITCH. Attune +2, Study +2. **Alchemist.**

CLEVER FRIENDS, RIVALS

- ◆ **Stazia**, an apothecary. *Perhaps a former scoundrel turned to legitimate alchemical business, or perhaps the other way around?*
- ◆ **Veldren**, a psychonaut. *Perhaps an addict too poisoned to ever return to lucid thought, or perhaps an explorer of psychedelic realms beyond mere mortal experience?*
- ◆ **Eckerd**, a corpse thief. *Perhaps a good source of “raw materials”?*
- ◆ **Jul**, a blood dealer. *What other strange clients do they have?*
- ◆ **Malista**, a priestess. *To what forgotten god does Malista give her service?*

LEECH SPECIAL ABILITIES

ALCHEMIST

When you **invent** or **craft** a creation with *alchemical* features, you get **+1 result level** to your roll (a **1-3** becomes a **4/5**, etc.). You begin with one special formula already known.

*Follow the **Inventing** procedure with the GM (page 224) to define your first special alchemical formula.*

ANALYST

During downtime, you get **two ticks** to distribute among any long term project clocks that involve investigation or learning a new formula or design plan.

ARTIFICER

When you **invent** or **craft** a creation with *spark-craft* features, you get **+1 result level** to your roll (a **1-3** becomes a **4/5**, etc.). You begin with one special design already known.

*Follow the **Inventing** procedure with the GM (page 224) to define your first spark-craft design.*

FORTITUDE

You may expend your **special armor** to resist a consequence of fatigue, weakness, or chemical effects, or to **push yourself** when working with technical skill or handling alchemicals.

When you use this ability, tick the special armor box on your playbook sheet. If you “resist a consequence” of the appropriate type, you avoid it completely. If you use this ability to push yourself, you get one of the benefits (+1d, +1 effect, act despite severe harm) but you don’t take 2 stress. Your special armor is restored at the beginning of downtime.

GHOST WARD

When you **WRECK** an area with arcane substances, ruining it for any other use, it becomes anathema or enticing to spirits (your choice).

If you make an area anathema to spirits, they will do everything they can to avoid it, and will suffer torment if forced inside the area. If you make an area enticing to spirits, they will seek it out and linger in the area, and will suffer torment if forced to leave. This effect lasts for several days over an area the size of a small room. Particularly powerful or prepared spirits may roll their quality or arcane magnitude to see how well they’re able to resist the effect.

PHYSICKER

You can **TINKER** with bones, blood, and bodily humours to treat wounds or stabilize the dying. You may **STUDY** a malady or corpse. Everyone in your crew (including you) gets **+1d** to their **healing treatment** rolls.

*Knowledge of anatomy and healing is a rare and esoteric thing in Duskwall. Without this ability, any attempts at treatment are likely to fail or make things worse. You can use this ability to give first aid (rolling **TINKER**) to allow your patient to ignore a harm penalty for an hour or two.*

SABOTEUR

When you **WRECK**, your work is much quieter than it should be and the damage is very well-hidden from casual inspection.

You can drill holes in things, melt stuff with acid, even use a muffled explosive, and it will all be very quiet and extremely hard to notice.

VENOMOUS

Choose a drug or poison (from your bandolier stock) to which you have become immune. You can **push yourself** to secrete it through your skin or saliva or exhale it as a vapor.

When you push yourself to activate this ability, you still get one of the normal benefits of pushing yourself (+1d, +1 effect, etc.) if you're making a roll, in addition to the special ability.

You choose the type of drug or poison when you get this ability. You may change the drug or poison by completing a long-term project. Only a single drug or poison may be chosen—you can't become immune to any essences, oils, or other alchemical substances.

LEECH ITEMS

- ◆ **Fine tinkering tools:** A finely crafted set of tools for detailed mechanist work. A jeweler's loupe. Measuring devices. [**1 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Fine wrecking tools:** A specialized set of tools for sabotage and destruction. A small, powerful drill. A mallet and steel spikes. A prybar. An electroplasmic battery, clamps, wire. Vials of acid. A spark-torch cutter and fuel tank. [**2 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Blowgun & darts, syringes:** A small tube and darts that can be filled from alchemy flasks. Empty syringes. [**0 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Bandolier:** A strap worn across the body, fitted with specially-padded pouches to hold three alchemical agents or spark-craft bombs. When you employ an alchemical or bomb from a bandolier, choose one from the list at right (or one of your custom-made formulas). See page 226 for more on alchemicals and bombs. *During downtime, you automatically refill your bandoliers, so long as you have reasonable access to a supplier or workshop.* [**1 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Gadgets:** You may create gadgets during downtime by **TINKERING** with tools and materials. See **Gadgets**, page 227. *Track the load for each gadget you deploy during an operation.* [**1+ LOAD**]

ALCAHEST

BINDING OIL

DRIFT OIL

DROWN POWDER

EYEBLIND POISON

FIRE OIL

GRENADE

QUICKSILVER

SKULLFIRE POISON

SMOKE BOMB

SPARK (DRUG)

STANDSTILL POISON

TRANCE POWDER



LURK

A stealthy infiltrator and burglar

There is no longer any sunlight—the world is plunged into eternal night. There are scoundrels who live in the darkness, who prowl the underworld unseen, trespassing where they will. They are the burglars, the spies, the infiltrators, the cut-throats—commonly called Lurks.

When you play a Lurk, you earn xp when you address a challenge with stealth or evasion. Stay out of sight, sneak past your enemies, and strike from the shadows. If things go wrong, there's no shame in disappearing into the darkness... for now. Your greatest ally is the dark and twisting city, its ink-dark streets, its rooftop pathways.

How did you learn the stealthy arts of the Lurk? Which aspect are you drawn to most? The invisible watcher, spying on the unwary? The adroit acrobat, racing across rooftops? The deadly ambush predator, waiting for a victim in the darkness?

STARTING ACTIONS



FINESSE



PROWL

STARTING BUILDS

If you want some guidance when you assign your four action dots and special ability, use one of these templates.

ACROBAT. Consort +2, Finesse +1, Sway +1. **The Devil's Footsteps.**

ASSASSIN. Hunt +2, Skirmish +2. **Ambush.**

BURGLAR. Survey +2, Finesse +1, Tinker +1. **Infiltrator.**

DARING ROGUE. Skirmish +2, Consort +2. **Daredevil.**

SHADY FRIENDS, RIVALS

- ◆ **Telda**, a beggar. *Perhaps a mentor who taught you your skills, or perhaps a rival sneak-thief?*
- ◆ **Darmot**, a Bluecoat. *Perhaps a savvy officer that's busted you many times, or perhaps an old friend who turned to the law instead of crime?*
- ◆ **Frake**, a locksmith. *Perhaps an expert that you go to for consultations, or perhaps a master who creates locks to defeat you?*
- ◆ **Roslyn Kellis**, a noble. *Perhaps an old friend and confidant, or perhaps one of the victims of your espionage, bent on revenge?*
- ◆ **Petra**, a city clerk. *Perhaps a good source of information?*

LURK SPECIAL ABILITIES

INFILTRATOR

You are not affected by **quality** or **Tier** when you bypass security measures.

This ability lets you contend with higher-Tier enemies on equal footing. When you're cracking a safe, picking a lock, or sneaking past elite guards, your effect level is never reduced due to superior Tier or quality level of your opposition.

Are you a renowned safe cracker? Do people tell stories of how you slipped under the noses of two Chief Inspectors, or are your exceptional talents yet to be discovered?

AMBUSH

When you attack from hiding or spring a trap, you get **+1d** to your roll.

This ability benefits from preparation—so don't forget you can do that in a flashback.

DAREDEVIL

When you roll a **desperate** action, you get **+1d** to your roll if you also take **-1d** to any resistance rolls against consequences from your action.

This special ability is a bit of a gamble. The bonus die helps you, but if you suffer consequences, they'll probably be more costly to resist. But hey, you're a daredevil, so no big deal, right?

THE DEVIL'S FOOTSTEPS

You can **push yourself** to do one of the following: *perform a feat of athletics that verges on the superhuman—maneuver to confuse your enemies so they mistakenly attack each other.*

When you push yourself to activate this ability, you still get one of the normal benefits of pushing yourself (+1d, +1 effect, etc.) if you're making a roll, in addition to the special ability.

If you perform an athletic feat (running, tumbling, balance, climbing, etc.) that verges on the superhuman, you might climb a sheer surface that lacks good hand-holds, tumble safely out of a three-story fall, leap a shocking distance, etc.

If you maneuver to confuse your enemies, they attack each other for a moment before they realize their mistake. The GM might make a fortune roll to see how badly they harm or interfere with each other.

EXPERTISE

Choose one of your action ratings. When you lead a group action using that action, you can suffer only 1 stress at most, regardless of the number of failed rolls.

This special ability is good for covering for your team. If they're all terrible at your favored action, you don't have to worry about suffering a lot of stress when you lead their group action.

GHOST VEIL

You may shift partially into the ghost field, becoming shadowy and insubstantial for a few moments. Take 2 stress when you shift, plus 1 stress for each extra feature: *it lasts for a few minutes rather than moments—you are invisible rather than shadowy—you may float through the air like a ghost.*

This ability transforms you into an intangible shadow for a few moments. If you spend additional stress, you can extend the effect for additional benefits, which may improve your position or effect for action rolls, depending on the circumstances, as usual.

REFLEXES

When there's a question about who acts first, the answer is you.

This ability gives you the initiative in most situations. Some specially trained NPCs (and some demons and spirits) might also have reflexes, but otherwise, you're always the first to act, and can interrupt anyone else who tries to beat you to the punch. This ability usually doesn't negate the need to make an action roll that you would otherwise have to make, but it may improve your position or effect.

SHADOW

You may expend your **special armor** to resist a consequence from detection or security measures, or to **push yourself** for a feat of athletics or stealth.

When you use this ability, tick the special armor box on your playbook sheet. If you “resist a consequence” of the appropriate type, you avoid it completely. If you use this ability to push yourself, you get one of the benefits (+1d, +1 effect, act despite severe harm) but you don’t take 2 stress. Your special armor is restored at the beginning of downtime.

LURK ITEMS

- ◆ **Fine lockpicks:** A finely crafted set of tools to disable and circumvent locks. [**0 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Fine shadow cloak:** A hooded cloak made of rare Iruvian shadow-silk that blends into the darkness around it. *This item improves your effect level when you sneak around.* [**1 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Light climbing gear:** A well-crafted set of climbing gear that is less bulky and heavy than a standard set. [**1 LOAD**] *Standard climbing gear is 2 load.*
- ◆ **Silence potion vial:** A vial of golden liquid that negates all sound within 10 paces of the drinker for a span of several moments. [**0 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Dark-sight goggles:** An arcane device that allows the wearer to see in pitch darkness as if it were well-lit. [**1 LOAD**]



SLIDE

A subtle manipulator and spy

It's said that the primal substance of the world is not mere matter or strange plasms, it's lies. Everything we do, everything we care about, everything we value—all lies we tell each other and ourselves. The world is a fabrication, a convenient fiction, a story—and the storytellers are Slides.

When you play a Slide, you earn xp when you address a challenge with deception or influence. Talk your way into trouble, then talk your way out again. Pretend to be someone you're not. Bluff, lie, and manipulate to get your way. Every problem is ultimately a problem because of *people*—and people are the instrument upon which you play your music.

Is there anything true about you, at your core? Or are you whatever you need to be, day to day? Are all of your relationships merely gambits that you play for your advantage?

STARTING ACTIONS



CONSORT



SWAY

STARTING BUILDS

If you want some guidance when you assign your four action dots and special ability, use one of these templates.

THE SIREN. Attune +2, Consort +1, Prowl +1. **Trust in Me.**

THE PRESTIGE. Finesse +2, Prowl +2. **Mesmerism.**

THE GRIFTER. Consort +1, Finesse +2, Study +1. **A Little Something on the Side.**

THE SPY. Prowl +2, Finesse +1, Skirmish +1. **Cloak & Dagger.**

SLY FRIENDS, RIVALS

- ◆ Bryl, a drug dealer. *Perhaps a reliable underworld contact, or perhaps an old partner with a grudge?*
- ◆ Bazso Baz, a gang leader. *Perhaps a paramour pursuing your affections, or perhaps a former lover, now scorned?*
- ◆ Klyra, a tavern owner. *Perhaps a good source for gossip?*
- ◆ Nyryx, a prostitute. *Perhaps an informant to spark potential marks, or perhaps a rival manipulator?*
- ◆ Harker, a jail bird. *Perhaps a friend who you helped when you were in prison, or perhaps an enemy who hurt you when you served your time?*

SLIDE SPECIAL ABILITIES

ROOK'S GAMBIT

Take **2 stress** to roll your best action rating while performing a different action. Say how you adapt your skill to this use.

This is the “jack-of-all-trades” ability. If you want to attempt lots of different sorts of actions and still have a good dice pool to roll, this is the special ability for you.

CLOAK & DAGGER

When you use a disguise or other form of covert misdirection, you get **+1d** to rolls to confuse or deflect suspicion. When you throw off your disguise, the resulting surprise gives you the initiative in the situation.

*This ability gives you the chance to more easily get out of trouble if a covert operation goes haywire. Also, don’t forget your **fine disguise kit** item, which boosts the effect of your covert deception methods.*

GHOST VOICE

You know the secret method to interact with a ghost or demon as if it were a normal human, regardless of how wild or feral it appears. You gain **potency** when communicating with the supernatural.

The first part of this ability gives you permission to do something that is normally impossible: when you speak to a spirit, it always listens and understands you, even if it would otherwise be too bestial or insane to do so. The second part of the ability increases your effect when you use social actions with the supernatural.

LIKE LOOKING INTO A MIRROR

You can always tell when someone is lying to you.

This ability works in all situations without restriction. It is very powerful, but also a bit of a curse. You see through every lie, even the kind ones.

A LITTLE SOMETHING ON THE SIDE

At the end of each downtime phase, you earn **+2 stash**.

*Since this money comes at the end of downtime, after all downtime actions are resolved, you can’t remove it from your stash and spend it on extra activities until your **next** downtime phase.*

MESMERISM

When you **SWAY** someone, you may cause them to forget that it’s happened until they next interact with you.

The victim’s memory “glosses over” the missing time, so it’s not suspicious that they’ve forgotten something. When you next interact with the victim, they remember everything clearly, including the strange effect of this ability.

SUBTERFUGE

You may expend your **special armor** to resist a consequence from suspicion or persuasion, or to **push yourself** for subterfuge.

When you use this ability, tick the special armor box on your playbook sheet. If you “resist a consequence” of the appropriate type, you avoid it completely. If you use this ability to push yourself, you get one of the benefits (+1d, +1 effect, act despite severe harm) but you don’t take 2 stress. Your special armor is restored at the beginning of downtime.

TRUST IN ME

You get **+1d** vs. a target with whom you have an intimate relationship.

This ability isn’t just for social interactions. Any action can get the bonus. “Intimate” is for you and the group to define, it need not exclusively mean romantic intimacy.

SLIDE ITEMS

- ◆ **Fine clothes & jewelry:** An outfit that appears to be of such fine make as to pass you off as a wealthy noble. [0 LOAD] *If you’re carrying this item as a second outfit to change into, it counts as 2 LOAD.*
- ◆ **Fine disguise kit:** A theatrical make-up kit equipped with an impressive array of expert appliances to fool the eye. *The fine quality of this kit may increase the effect of your deceptive actions when you use it.* [1 LOAD]
- ◆ **Fine loaded dice, trick cards:** Gambling accoutrements subtly altered to favor particular outcomes. *The fine quality of this kit may increase the effect of your deceptive actions when you use it.* [0 LOAD]
- ◆ **Trance powder:** A dose of the popular drug, which induces an altered mental state. *The victim of this powder is not fully unconscious, but rather retreats into a calm, suggestible mental state, similar to hypnotism.* [0 LOAD]
- ◆ **A cane-sword:** A slim sword and its sheath, disguised as a noble’s cane. *The disguise will fool a cursory inspection.* [1 LOAD]



SPIDER

A devious mastermind

The underworld may appear on the surface to be a chaotic array of warring factions and bloody deeds, but it has a beautiful order to those who are able to see it. This pattern is the web of connections, favors, vendettas, and secrets that bind the criminal world together. The scoundrels who pluck the strands of this web are known as Spiders.

When you play a Spider, you earn xp when you address a challenge with calculation or conspiracy. Reach out to your contacts, friends, and associates to set your crew up for success. Use your downtime activities and flashbacks wisely to prepare for trouble and to calculate the angles of success. When things go wrong, don't panic, and remember: you planned for this.

Are you enmeshed in the network of favors and debts that you exploit as a Spider, or do you scrupulously hold yourself apart, as a cold predator upon the web?

STARTING ACTIONS



STUDY



CONSORT

STARTING BUILDS

If you want some guidance when you assign your four action dots and special ability, use one of these templates.

THE ARBITER. Attune +2, Study +1, Sway +1. **Ghost Contract.**

THE CONDUCTOR. Command +2, Survey +2. **Foresight.**

THE CONVICT. Command +1, Skirmish +2, Sway +1. **Jail Bird.**

THE OPERATOR. Prowl +2, Tinker +2. **Mastermind.**

SHREWD FRIENDS, RIVALS

- ◆ **Salia**, an information broker. *Perhaps a reliable contact for underworld jobs, or perhaps a former partner who sold you out?*
- ◆ **Augus**, a master architect. *Perhaps a good source for building schematics and historical details, or perhaps a rival who designs security measures?*
- ◆ **Jennah**, a servant. *Perhaps a good source for gossip among the upper class?*
- ◆ **Riven**, a chemist. *Perhaps a good source of medicines for recovery?*
- ◆ **Jeren**, a Bluecoat archivist. *Perhaps a double-agent within the City Watch, or perhaps an overly curious officer, interested in your crimes?*

SPIDER SPECIAL ABILITIES

FORESIGHT

Two times per score you can **assist** a teammate without paying stress. Describe how you prepared for this.

You can narrate an event in the past that helps your teammate now, or you might explain how you expected this situation and planned a helpful contingency that you reveal now.

CALCULATING

Due to your careful planning, during downtime, you may give yourself or another crew member **+1 downtime activity**.

If you forgot to use this ability during downtime, you can still activate it during the score and flashback to the previous downtime when the extra activity happened.

CONNECTED

During downtime, you get **+1 result level** when you **acquire an asset** or **reduce heat**.

Your array of underworld connections can be leveraged to loan assets, pressure a vendor to give you a better deal, intimidate witnesses, etc.

FUNCTIONING VICE

When you indulge your vice, you may adjust the dice outcome by 1 or 2 (up or down). An ally who joins you may do the same.

If you indulged your vice and rolled a 4, you could increase the result to 5 or 6, or you could reduce the result to 3 or 2 (perhaps to avoid overindulgence). Allies that join you don't need to have the same vice as you, just one that could be indulged alongside yours somehow.

GHOST CONTRACT

When you shake on a deal or draft one in writing, you and your partner—human or otherwise—both bear a mark of your oath. If either breaks the contract, they take **level 3 harm**, “Cursed.”

The mark of the oath is obvious to anyone who sees it (perhaps a magical rune appears on the skin). When you suffer “Cursed” harm, you’re incapacitated by withering: enfeebled muscles, hair falling out, bleeding from the eyes and ears, etc., until you either fulfill the deal or discover a way to heal the curse.

JAIL BIRD

When incarcerated, your **WANTED LEVEL** counts as 1 less, your Tier as 1 more, and you gain **+1 faction status** with a faction that you help while you're inside, in addition to whatever you get from the **incarceration roll**.

Zero is the minimum WANTED LEVEL; this ability can't make your WANTED LEVEL negative. See the Incarceration roll, page 148.

MASTERMIND

You may expend your **special armor** to **protect** a teammate, or to **push yourself** when you gather information or work on a long-term project.

When you use this ability, tick the special armor box on your playbook sheet. If you protect a teammate, this ability negates or reduces the severity of a consequence or harm that your teammate is facing. You don't have to be present to use this ability—say how you prepared for this situation in the past. If you use this ability to push yourself, you get one of the benefits (+1d, +1 effect, act despite severe harm) but you don't take 2 stress. Your special armor is restored at the beginning of downtime.

WEAVING THE WEB

You gain **+1d** to **CONSORT** when you gather information on a target for a score. You get **+1d** to the **engagement roll** for that operation.

Your network of underworld connections can always be leveraged to gain insight for a job—even when your contacts aren't aware that they're helping you.

SPIDER ITEMS

- ◆ **Fine cover identity:** Paperwork, planted stories and rumors, and false relationships sufficient to pass as a different person. [**0 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Fine bottle of whiskey:** A rare distillation from your personal collection, potent both in its alcohol and its ability to impress. [**1 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Blueprints:** A folio of useful architectural drawings and city plans. *Feel free to specify which plans you're carrying when you choose this item.* [**1 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Vial of slumber essence:** A dose of slumber essence sufficient to put someone to sleep for an hour. *The victim's sleep isn't supernatural, but it is deep—they can be roused with some effort.* [**0 LOAD**]
- ◆ **Concealed palm pistol:** A small firearm with a weak charge, easily concealed in a sleeve or waistcoat. *This pistol has extremely limited range; only a few feet. It's very difficult to detect on your person, even if you're searched.* [**0 LOAD**]



WHISPER

An arcane adept and channeler

Duskwall is a haunted place—plagued by rogue spirits consumed by vengeance, by cunning demons manipulating humans for their own inscrutable purposes, and by even stranger horrors lurking in the space just beyond sight and reason. To go into this shadowy world without knowledge of the arcane and the occult is to walk unarmed into the lair of the enemy. The Whispers are the sentinels who watch the greater darkness—staring into the void so others don't have to.

When you play a Whisper, you earn xp when you address a challenge with knowledge or arcane power. Seek out the strange and dark forces and bend them to your will. By being willing to face the trauma from the stress-intensive abilities of the arcane, you'll slowly remove parts of yourself, and replace them with power.

Why did you pursue the path of the Whisper? How did you develop your abilities? Are you a natural, did you study and practice on your own, or did you have a mentor?

STARTING ACTIONS



STUDY



ATTUNE

STARTING BUILDS

If you want some guidance when you assign your four action dots and special ability, use one of these templates.

THE SUMMONER. Command +1, Study +1, Survey +2. **Compel.**

THE CULTIST. Command +2, Consort +2. **Occultist.**

THE CHANNELER. Skirmish +2, Wreck +2. **Tempest.**

THE DARK SCHOLAR. Consort +1, Study +1, Tinker +2. **Ritual.**

STRANGE FRIENDS, RIVALS

- ◆ **Nyryx**, a possessor ghost. *Perhaps a good source for targets, or perhaps a spirit that escaped from your service?*
- ◆ **Scurlock**, a vampire. *Perhaps a mentor, or perhaps a deadly rival?*
- ◆ **Setarra**, a demon. *Perhaps your partner in a dark endeavor, or perhaps an entity you once controlled, seeking vengeance?*
- ◆ **Quellyn**, a witch. *Perhaps a knowledgeable healer and seer, or perhaps a student of yours who left over bad blood?*
- ◆ **Flint**, a spirit trafficker. *Perhaps a good source for unusual arcane supplies, or perhaps a rival in the occult world of Duskwall?*

WHISPER SPECIAL ABILITIES

COMPEL

You can **ATTUNE** to the ghost field to force a nearby ghost to appear before you and obey an order you give it. You are not supernaturally terrified by a ghost you summon or attempt to compel (though your allies may be).

*The GM will tell you if you sense any ghosts nearby. If you don't, you can gather information (maybe **ATTUNE**, **SURVEY**, or **STUDY**) to attempt to locate one. By default, a ghost wants to satisfy its need for life essence and to exact vengeance. When you compel it, you can give it a general or specific command, but the more general it is (like "Protect me") the more the ghost will interpret it according to its own desires. Your control over the ghost lasts until the command is fulfilled, or until a day has passed, whichever comes first.*

GHOST MIND

You're always aware of supernatural entities in your presence. Take +1d whenever you **gather information** about the supernatural by any means.

IRON WILL

You are immune to the terror that some supernatural entities inflict on sight. When you make a **resistance roll** with **RESOLVE**, take +1d.

With this ability, you do not freeze up or flee when confronted by any kind of supernatural entity or strange occult event.

OCCULTIST

You know the secret ways to **CONSORT** with ancient powers, forgotten gods, or demons. Once you've consortied with one, you get +1d to **COMMAND** cultists who worship it.

*CONSORTING with a given entity may require special preparations or travel to a specific place. The GM will tell you about any requirements. You get the bonus die to your **COMMAND** rolls because you can demonstrate a secret knowledge of or influence over the entity when you interact with cultists.*

RITUAL

You know the arcane methods to perform ritual sorcery. You can **STUDY** an occult ritual (or create a new one) to summon a supernatural effect or being. You begin with one ritual already learned.

Without this special ability, the study and practice of rituals leaves you utterly vulnerable to the powers you supplicate. Such endeavors are not recommended.

*For more details, see *Rituals*, page 222.*

STRANGE METHODS

When you **invent** or **craft** a creation with *arcane* features, get +1 **result level** to your roll (a **1-3** becomes a **4/5**, etc.). You begin with one arcane design already known.

*Follow the **Inventing** procedure with the GM (page 224) to define your first arcane design.*

TEMPEST

You can **push yourself** to do one of the following: *unleash a stroke of lightning as a weapon—summon a storm in your immediate vicinity (torrential rain, roaring winds, heavy fog, chilling frost and snow, etc.).*

When you push yourself to activate this ability, you still get one of the normal benefits of pushing yourself (+1d, +1 effect, etc.) if you’re making a roll, in addition to the special ability.

When you unleash lightning as a weapon, the GM will describe its effect level and significant collateral damage. If you unleash it in combat against an enemy who’s threatening you, you’ll still make an action roll in the fight (usually with ATTUNE).

*When you summon a storm, the GM will describe its effect level. If you’re using this power as cover or distraction, it’s probably a **setup** teamwork maneuver, using ATTUNE.*

WARDED

You may expend your **special armor** to resist a supernatural consequence, or to **push yourself** when you contend with or employ arcane forces.

When you use this ability, tick the special armor box on your playbook sheet. If you resist a consequence, this ability negates or reduces its severity. If you use this ability to push yourself, you get one of the benefits (+1d, +1 effect, act despite severe harm) but you don’t take 2 stress. Your special armor is restored at the beginning of downtime.

WHISPER ITEMS

- ◆ **Fine lightning hook:** A long, two-handed pole with a loop of heavy wire at the end, connected to an electroplasmic capacitor. Suitable for grappling a spirit and dragging it into a spirit bottle. *This custom-made hook collapses into a compact form, thus reducing its load to 1, even though it's two-handed.* [1 LOAD]
- ◆ **Fine spirit mask:** An arcane item that allows the trained user to see supernatural energies in great detail. Also affords some measure of protection against ghostly possession. *Each spirit mask is unique. What does yours look like? What makes it strange and disturbing to see?* [1 LOAD]
- ◆ **Spirit bottles (2):** An arcane device used to trap a spirit. A metal and crystalline cylinder, the size of a loaf of bread. [1 LOAD]
- ◆ **Ghost key:** An arcane device that can open ghost doors. *There's an echo of the entire city, across the ages, trapped in the ghost field. Sometimes a door to that place can be found.* [0 LOAD]
- ◆ **Demonbane charm:** An arcane trinket that demons prefer to avoid. [0 LOAD]

STANDARD ITEMS

A Blade or Two: Perhaps you carry a simple fighting knife. Or two curved swords. Or a rapier and stiletto. Or a heavy butcher's cleaver. [1 LOAD]

Your choice of blade might reflect your heritage:

In the North (Akoros and Skovlan) blades tend to be broad, heavy, and single-edged.

In Severos, the horse-lords favor spears in battle, but for personal combat they carry distinctive double-edged daggers with very wide blades, often intricately inscribed with family histories.

In the Dagger Isles, the corsairs often use narrow, light blades made for quick thrusts—such as the rapier and stiletto.

In Iruvia, curved blades are common; sharpened on the outer edge like a saber, or sharpened on the inner edge, like a sickle.

Throwing Knives: Six small, light blades. [1 LOAD]

A Pistol: A heavy, single-shot, breech-loading firearm. Devastating at 20 paces, slow to reload. [1 LOAD]

A Large Weapon: A weapon meant for two hands. A battle-axe, greatsword, warhammer, or pole-arm. A hunting rifle. A blunderbuss. A bow or crossbow. [2 LOAD]

An Unusual Weapon: A curiosity or tool turned into a weapon. A whip, a flail, a hatchet, a shovel, a length of chain, a razor-edged fan, steel-toed boots. [1 LOAD]

Armor: A thick leather tunic plus reinforced gloves and boots. [2 LOAD]

+Heavy: The addition of chain mail, metal plates, a metal helm. [3 LOAD]
The load for heavy armor is in addition to normal armor—5 load total.

Burglary Gear: A set of lockpicks. A small pry-bar. Vials of oil to silence squeaky hinges. A coil of wire and fishing hooks. A small pouch of fine sand. [1 LOAD]

Climbing Gear: A large coil of rope. A small coil of rope. Grappling hooks. A small pouch of chalk dust. A climbing harness with loops and metal rings. A set of iron pitons and a small mallet. [2 LOAD]

Documents: A collection of slim volumes on a variety of topics, including a registry of the nobility, City Watch commanders, and other notable citizens. Blank pages, a vial of ink, a pen. A number of interesting maps. [1 LOAD]

Arcane Implements: A vial of quicksilver. A pouch of black salt. A spirit anchor in the form of a small stone. A spirit bottle. A vial of electroplasm, designed to break and splatter on impact. [1 LOAD]

Subterfuge supplies: A theatrical make-up kit. A selection of blank documents, ready for the forger's hand. Costume jewelry. A reversible cloak and distinctive hat. A forged badge of office. [1 LOAD]

Demolition tools: A sledgehammer and iron spikes. Heavy drill. Crowbar. [2 LOAD]

Tinkering Tools: An assortment for detailed mechanist work: jeweler's loupe, tweezers, a small hammer, pliers, screwdriver, etc. [1 LOAD]

Lantern: A simple oil lantern, a fancy electroplasmic lamp, or other light source. [1 LOAD]

Spiritbane Charm: A small arcane trinket that ghosts prefer to avoid. [0 LOAD]

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS

If you want to include advantages from specific details of your items (reach, speed, etc.), consider a **Devil's Bargain** that relates to a detail.

"You can take +1d with your spear if you keep falling back to keep him at bay, but you'll have to move out to the street where people will see what's going on."

"You can take +1d with your dagger, in close, to shank him repeatedly, but you'll be absolutely covered in blood. No way to hide that from the other party guests."

Also, consider how this item affects your **position** and/or **effect**. If you're unarmed and you wrestle a thug who's wielding a blade, your position is probably *desperate*. If that thug tries to rush you when you have your pistol out, your position is probably *controlled*.

Assess the details that you're interested in when considering position and effect.





CHAPTER 3

THE CREW

STARTING A LEGACY

Regardless of how a crew comes to be formed, they all have one thing in common: they exist to create a legacy that will last beyond the founding members. When you start a crew with your partners, you intend to build something that (hopefully) will live on past the scope of your own criminal careers. This is why we have a separate character sheet for the crew—tracking its development, growth, and influence.

In a sense, the crew is the central figure in the stories we’re going to tell about the underworld of Doskvol. Scoundrels will come and go—burned out due to **TRAUMA**, or killed, or forever lost to their vices, or, if they’re very lucky, gone to some comfortable retirement—but the crew carries on. New blood comes in, new characters with new outlooks and drives, new stories to be told.

In this chapter, you’ll learn about all of the various crew types in the game, and how to create a crew to suit the type of criminal escapades that all of the players are most excited about.

Opposite: Many criminal groups make their lairs in the ancient underground canals beneath Doskvol.

CREW CREATION

CHOOSE A CREW TYPE

Your crew type determines the scores that you'll focus on, as well as a selection of special abilities that support that kind of action. The crew type isn't meant to be restrictive—a crew of Smugglers might sometimes engage in extortion (like Bravos) or sell contraband (like Hawkers)—but the core activity of the crew type is the most frequent way they earn **COIN** and xp for advancement.

There are six different types of crew to choose from.

ASSASSINS

Killers for hire. They execute “accidents,” disappearances, murders, and ransoms.

BRAVOS

Mercenaries and thugs. They execute battles, extortion, sabotage, and smash & grabs.

CULT

Acolytes of a forgotten god. They execute artifact acquisitions, auguries, consecration, and sacrifices.

HAWKERS

Vice dealers. They execute product procurement, covert sales, shows of force, and social events.

SHADOWS

Thieves and spies. They execute burglaries, espionage, robberies, and sabotage.

SMUGGLERS

Contraband transporters. They execute clandestine deliveries, territory control, and expeditions outside the city.

Like a character playbook, your crew type is also how you're known in the underworld of Doskvol. The criminal factions and the Bluecoats think of you as “assassins” or “a cult” etc., and will treat you accordingly.

Choosing a crew type is a very important decision! It's a way for the group to say, “These are the sorts of scores we want to do.” It organizes game play from “doing crimes” to “smuggling illegal spirit essences”—which helps the GM focus on the parts of the setting that matter most, rather than having to juggle every possibility at once. The group should choose a crew type that everyone is excited about. As a player, be vocal about your preferences. You're about to spend many hours doing this, so if you're feeling lukewarm about one of the options, speak up.

Once you've chosen, grab the crew sheet for that type and record the following choices in crew creation as you go.

Your crew begins with 2 **COIN** in its coffers (the remains of the PCs' savings). You are **Tier 0**, with **strong hold** and **0 REP**.

CHOOSE AN INITIAL REPUTATION & LAIR

Your crew has just formed and acquired a lair. Given this group of characters and their previous escapades, what initial **reputation** would you have among the factions of the underworld? Choose one from the list at right (or create your own).

You earn xp when you bolster your crew's reputation, so think of this as another cue to indicate what sorts of action you want in the game. Will you be recklessly ambitious, targeting higher-Tier targets? Will you take on daring scores that others deem too risky? Are you interested in the strange weirdness of the Dusk?

| |
|---------------------|
| AMBITIOUS |
| BRUTAL |
| DARING |
| HONORABLE |
| PROFESSIONAL |
| SAVVY |
| SUBTLE |
| STRANGE |

Also, talk about where the crew makes its **lair**. You begin at Tier 0, so it's probably a very modest or abandoned sort of place. Choose one (or create your own):

- ◆ A **half-sunken grotto** in the city's maze-like underground canals.
- ◆ An **abandoned watch tower** atop an ancient, crumbling wall.
- ◆ The **unassuming back rooms** of a merchant's shop.
- ◆ A **small, abandoned house** at the end of a dark lane.
- ◆ A **rickety, tin-roofed shack** perched on a rooftop.
- ◆ A **junked rail-car**, rusted in place on its old, overgrown tracks.

Look at the map of Duskwall (page 254) and choose the district in which your lair is found. Are you based in some derelict area of a wealthy district or is your lair one of many other poor hovels in a destitute area? A good district choice for scoundrel types is **Crow's Foot**—the district most known for street gangs and open criminal activity.

ESTABLISH YOUR HUNTING GROUNDS

Your crew is brand-new, but you have chosen some small part of a district as your **hunting grounds**. This is the area that you usually target for your scores, and you know it well. Your hunting grounds don't have to be in the same district as your lair. The area is small, only three or four city blocks—but it's still an intrusion on someone. The entire city is divided among larger, stronger factions. The GM will tell you which faction claims the area, then you decide how to deal with them:

- ◆ Pay them off. Give them 1 **COIN** in exchange for giving you room to work.
- ◆ Pay the faction 2 **COIN** as a show of respect and gain **+1 STATUS** with them.
- ◆ Keep your money and take **-1 STATUS** with that faction.

Your hunting grounds are useful for a particular type of criminal operation. Each crew type has a list of different operation types for their hunting grounds. For instance, Assassins have *Accident*, *Disappearance*, *Murder*, or *Ransom* as options. Choose one of these operation types as your preference.

When you prepare to execute an operation of your preferred type on your hunting grounds, you get **+1d** to any **gather information** rolls and a free additional **downtime activity** to contribute to that operation. This can help you discover an opportunity, acquire an asset you might need for the job, find an appropriate client, etc.

When you acquire **turf** (see page 45) you also expand the size and/or type of your hunting grounds. Detail the new area and/or methods with help from the GM.

CHOOSE A SPECIAL ABILITY

Take a look at the special abilities for your crew and choose one. If you can't decide which one to pick, go with the first one on the list—it's placed there as a good default choice. It's important to pick a special ability that everyone is excited about. You can get more special abilities in the future by earning xp.

Just like picking the crew type, reputation, lair, and hunting grounds, choosing a special ability is another chance to focus the game down to a more specific range of possibilities. Instead of playing a generic crew of scoundrels, you end up with *Assassins*, who are *daring*, with a lair in the *old watch tower*, hunting grounds in *Crow's Foot across the bridge from the docks*, a preference for *murder*, and the **DEADLY** special ability. That's a lot to work with, and it helps get the game going in a strong direction from the very beginning.

ASSIGN CREW UPGRADES

An upgrade is a valuable asset that helps the crew in some way, like a boat or a gang (see the complete descriptions on the following page). Each crew type has two pre-selected **upgrades** that suit that crew (like **Prowess Training** and a **gang** of Thugs for the Bravos crew).

You get to add **two additional upgrades** to your new crew (so you'll have a total of four upgrades when you start). You can choose from the specific upgrades available to your crew type or the general upgrades on the crew sheet. *For example, you might pick the Cult upgrade Ritual Sanctum as one of your choices and also the general upgrade Insight Training as your other choice.*

When you assign your two upgrades, the GM will tell you about two factions that are impacted by your choices:

- ◆ One faction helped you get an upgrade. They like you, and you get **+1 status** with them. At your option, spend 1 **COIN** to repay their kindness, and take **+2 status** with them instead.
- ◆ One faction was screwed over when you got an upgrade. They don't like you, and you get **-2 status** with them. At your option, spend 1 **COIN** to mollify them, and take **-1 status** with them instead.

You'll be able get more upgrades in the future by earning xp (see **Advancement**, page 48).

CHOOSE A FAVORITE CONTACT

Take a look at your list of potential contacts on the crew sheet. Choose one contact who is a close friend, long-time ally, or partner in crime. The GM will tell you about two factions that are impacted by your choice:

- ◆ One faction is also friendly with this contact, and you get **+1 status** with them.
- ◆ One faction is unfriendly with this contact, and you get **-1 status** with them.

At your option, these factions are even more concerned with this contact and so you take **+2** and **-2 status** instead.

CREW UPGRADES

- ◆ **BOAT HOUSE:** You have a boat, a dock on a waterway, and a small shack to store boating supplies. A second upgrade improves the boat with armor and more cargo capacity.
- ◆ **CARRIAGE HOUSE:** You have a carriage, two goats to pull it, and a stable. A second upgrade improves the carriage with armor and larger, swifter goats. *Horses are very rare in Doskvol—most carriages in the city use the large Akorosian goat as their draft animal.*
- ◆ **COHORT:** A cohort is a gang or a single expert NPC who works for your crew. For all the details on cohorts, see the following pages.
- ◆ **HIDDEN LAIR:** Your lair has a secret location and is disguised to hide it from view. If your lair is discovered, use two downtime activities and pay **COIN** equal to your Tier to relocate it and hide it once again.
- ◆ **MASTERY:** Your crew has access to master level training. You may advance your PCs' action ratings to 4 (until you unlock this upgrade, PC action ratings are capped at 3). This costs four upgrade boxes to unlock.
- ◆ **QUALITY:** Each upgrade improves the **quality rating** of all the PCs' items of that type, beyond the quality established by the crew's Tier and fine items. You can improve the quality of **Documents**, **Gear** (covers Burglary Gear and Climbing Gear), **Arcane Implements**, **Subterfuge Supplies**, **Tools** (covers Demolitions Tools and Tinkering Tools), and **Weapons**.
So, if you are Tier 0, with fine lockpicks (+1) and the Quality upgrade for gear (+1), you could contend equally with a Tier II quality lock.
- ◆ **QUARTERS:** Your lair includes living quarters for the crew. Without this upgrade, each PC sleeps elsewhere, and is vulnerable when they do so.
- ◆ **SECURE LAIR:** Your lair has locks, alarms, and traps to thwart intruders. A second upgrade improves the defenses to include arcane measures that work against spirits. *You might roll your crew's Tier if these measures are ever put to the test, to see how well they thwart an intruder.*
- ◆ **TRAINING:** If you have a Training upgrade, you earn 2 xp (instead of 1) when you train a given xp track during downtime (**INSIGHT**, **PROWESS**, **RESOLVE**, or Playbook xp). This upgrade essentially helps you advance more quickly. See **Advancement**, page 48.
*If you have **Insight Training**, when you train **INSIGHT** during downtime, you mark 2 xp on the **INSIGHT** track (instead of just 1). If you have **Playbook Training**, you mark 2 xp on your playbook xp track when you train.*
- ◆ **VAULT:** Your lair has a secure vault, increasing your storage capacity for **COIN** to 8. A second upgrade increases your capacity to 16. A separate part of your vault can be used as a holding cell.
- ◆ **WORKSHOP:** Your lair has a workshop appointed with tools for tinkering and alchemy, as well as a small library of books, documents, and maps. You may accomplish long-term projects with these assets without leaving your lair.

COHORTS

A **cohort** is a **gang** or an **expert** who works for your crew. To recruit a new cohort, spend **two upgrades** and create them using the process below.

CREATING A GANG

Choose a **gang type** from the list below:

- ◆ **ADEPTS:** Scholars, tinkerers, occultists, and chemists.
- ◆ **ROOKS:** Con artists, spies, and socialites.
- ◆ **ROVERS:** Sailors, carriage drivers, and deathlands scavengers.
- ◆ **SKULKS:** Scouts, infiltrators, and thieves.
- ◆ **THUGS:** Killers, brawlers, and roustabouts.

A gang has **scale** and **quality** equal to your current crew Tier. It increases in scale and quality when your crew moves up in Tier.

If your crew is Tier 0, your gang is quality 0 and scale 0 (1 or 2 people). When your crew is Tier II, your gang is quality 2 and scale 2 (12 people).

Some crew upgrades will add the “Elite” feature to a gang, which gives them +1d when they roll for a given Type. So, *if you’re Tier I and have a gang of Elite Thugs (+1d), they would roll 2d when they try to kill a target.*

CREATING AN EXPERT

Record the expert’s **type** (their specific area of expertise). They might be a *Doctor*, an *Investigator*, an *Occultist*, an *Assassin*, a *Spy*, etc.

An expert has **quality** equal to your current crew Tier +1. Their scale is always zero (1 person). Your experts increase in quality when your crew moves up in Tier.

EDGES & FLAWS

When you create a cohort, give them one or two **edges** and an equal number of **flaws**.

EDGES

- ◆ **Fearsome:** The cohort is terrifying in aspect and reputation.
- ◆ **Independent:** The cohort can be trusted to make good decisions and act on their own initiative in the absence of direct orders.
- ◆ **Loyal:** The cohort can’t be bribed or turned against you.
- ◆ **Tenacious:** The cohort won’t be deterred from a task.

FLAWS

- ◆ **Principled:** The cohort has an ethic or values that it won’t betray.
- ◆ **Savage:** The cohort is excessively violent and cruel.
- ◆ **Unreliable:** The cohort isn’t always available, due to other obligations, stupefaction from their vices, etc.
- ◆ **Wild:** The cohort is drunken, debauched, and loud-mouthed.

MODIFYING A COHORT

You can add an **additional type** to a gang or expert by spending two crew upgrades. When a cohort performs actions for which its types apply, it uses its full quality rating. Otherwise, its quality is zero. A given cohort can have up to two types.

USING A COHORT

When you send a cohort to achieve a goal, roll their **quality** to see how it goes. Or, a PC can oversee the maneuver by leading a **group action**. If you direct the cohort with orders, roll **COMMAND**. If you participate in the action alongside the cohort, roll the appropriate action. The quality of any opposition relative to the cohort's quality affects the position and effect of the action.

The Bloodletters want to run the Grinders out of the alley where they're selling spark. They send their gang of Thugs to go kick the Grinders out. The GM rolls 2d for the Thugs' quality, and gets a 3. An hour later, the Thugs come back, beaten and bloody. One of them looks sheepish, "Those guys are tough, boss." (The GM inflicts harm on the cohort, and they failed their goal.)

The next day, Arcy goes back and leads a group action, rolling her 3d in SKIRMISH alongside the Thugs' 2d. Arcy gets a 6 this time—they beat the tar out of the Grinders and send them packing (at least for now).

COHORT HARM & HEALING

Cohorts suffer harm similarly to PCs. A cohort can suffer four levels of harm:

1. **WEAKENED.** The cohort has reduced effect.
2. **IMPAIRED.** The cohort operates with reduced quality (-1d).
3. **BROKEN.** The cohort can't do anything until they recover.
4. **DEAD.** The cohort is destroyed.

All of your cohorts heal during downtime. If circumstances are amenable for recovery, each cohort removes one level of harm (or two levels of harm instead, if a PC spends a downtime activity helping them recuperate).

If a cohort is destroyed, it may be replaced. Spend **COIN** equal to your Tier +2 to restore it, plus two downtime activities to recruit new gang members, or hire a new expert.

The Bloodletters send their gang of Thugs to defend their lair against the Red Sashes, while the PCs deal with a rather urgent demon problem. Unfortunately, the already injured gang gets wiped out by the deadly (and numerous) Red Sash sword-fighters (The GM makes fortune rolls—the gang gets a 2 and the Sashes get a CRITICAL).

During the next downtime, Arcy restores the gang. She goes down to the docks and recruits a new batch of thugs fresh off a boat from Skovlan. The Bloodletters are Tier II so Arcy needs to spend 4 COIN to restore the cohort. This takes both of Arcy's free downtime activities.



CREW CREATION SUMMARY

1 Choose a crew type. The crew type determines the group's purpose, their special abilities, and how they advance.

You begin at **Tier 0**, with **strong hold** and 0 **REP**. You start with 2 **COIN**.

2 Choose an initial reputation and lair. Choose how other underworld factions see you: *Ambitious—Brutal—Daring—Honorable—Professional—Savvy—Subtle—Strange*. Look at the map and pick a district in which to place your lair. Describe the lair.

3 Establish your hunting grounds. Look at the map and pick a district in which to place your hunting grounds. Decide how to deal with the faction that claims that area.

- ◆ Pay them 1 **COIN**.
- ◆ Pay them 2 **COIN**. Get **+1 status**.
- ◆ Pay nothing. Get **-1 status**.

4 Choose a special ability. They're in the gray column in the middle of the crew sheet. If you can't decide, choose the first ability on the list. It's placed there as a good first option.

5 Assign crew upgrades. Your crew has two upgrades pre-selected. Choose two more. If your crew has a cohort, follow the procedure to create it. Record the faction status changes due to your upgrades:

- ◆ One faction helped you get an upgrade. Take **+1 status** with them. Or spend 1 **COIN** for **+2 status** instead.
- ◆ One faction was harmed when you got an upgrade. Take **-2 status** with them. Or spend 1 **COIN** for **-1 status** instead.

6 Choose a favorite contact. Mark the one who is a close friend, long-time ally, or partner in crime. Record the faction status changes related to your contact:

- ◆ One faction is friendly with your contact. Take **+1 status** with them.
- ◆ One faction is unfriendly with your contact. Take **-1 status** with them.

At your option, increase the intensity of the factions' relationship with your contact and take **+2** and **-2 status**, instead.

Opposite: A scoundrels' lair overlooking Catcrawl Alley, near the Docks.

ASSASSINS

Killers for hire

You're professional murderers—death is your business. In Duskwall, this means extra trouble from the spirit bells and vengeful ghosts. Be prepared!

When you play Assassins, you earn xp when you execute a successful accident, disappearance, murder, or ransom operation.

Do you have any scruples when it comes to who you kill? Is everyone fair game?

STARTING UPGRADES

- ◆ **Training: INSIGHT.**
- ◆ **Training: PROWESS.**

HUNTING GROUNDS

Choose a favored operation type:

- ◆ **Accident:** A killing with no telltale signs of murder.
- ◆ **Disappearance:** The victim vanishes without a trace.
- ◆ **Murder:** An obvious killing that sends a message.
- ◆ **Ransom:** A kidnapping and demand for payment for their return.

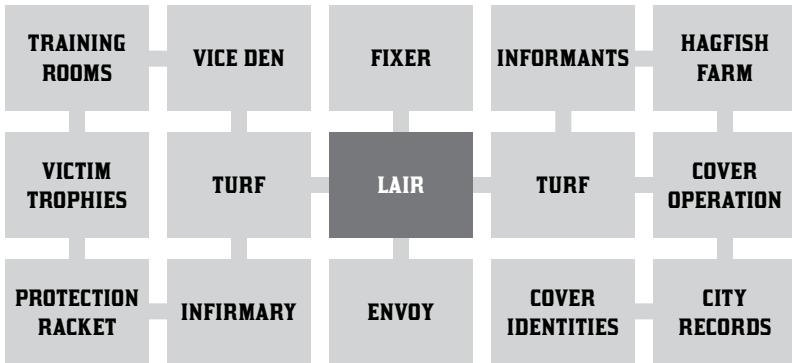
CONTACTS

- ◆ **Trev**, a gang boss. *Perhaps a gang that helped your crew get started?*
- ◆ **Lydra**, a deal broker. *Perhaps she acts as a liaison with your clients?*
- ◆ **Irimina**, a vicious noble. *Perhaps a potential patron for your crew?*
- ◆ **Karlos**, a bounty hunter. *Perhaps a source for off-book government “wet work?”*
- ◆ **Exeter**, a Spirit Warden. *Perhaps a double-agent informant for you?*
- ◆ **Sevoy**, a merchant lord. *Perhaps a connection to clients with deep pockets?*

ASSASSINS UPDATES

- ◆ **Assassin Rigging:** You get 2 free load worth of weapon or gear items. *For example, you could carry a pistol (a weapon) and burglary tools (gear) for zero load.*
- ◆ **Ironhook Contacts:** Your Tier is effectively +1 higher in prison. *This counts for any Tier-related element in prison, including the incarceration roll (see page 148).*
- ◆ **Elite Skulks:** All of your cohorts with the Skulks type get +1d to quality rolls for Skulk-related actions.
- ◆ **Elite Thugs:** All of your cohorts with the Thugs type get +1d to quality rolls for Thug-related actions.
- ◆ **Hardened:** Each PC gets +1 TRAUMA box. This costs three upgrades to unlock, not just one. *This may bring a PC with 4 TRAUMA back into play if you wish.*

ASSASSINS CLAIMS



CITY RECORDS: You get +1d to the engagement roll for stealth plans. You can use blueprints and other documents to determine a good approach for infiltrations.

COVER IDENTITIES: You get +1d to the engagement roll for deception and social plans. False identities help confuse the opposition.

COVER OPERATION: You get -2 HEAT per score. The cover of a legitimate operation helps deflect some of the heat from law enforcement.

ENVOY: You get +2 COIN in payoff for scores that involve high-class clients. This well-connected liaison will help arrange for a better payoff from rich clients.

FIXER: You get +2 COIN in payoff for scores that involve lower-class clients. This well-respected agent will help arrange for a better payoff from poorer clients.

HAGFISH FARM: When you use the reduce HEAT downtime activity after a score that involves killing, you get +1d to the roll and quiet, convenient disposal of any corpses you left on the job.

INFIRMARY: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. The infirmary also has beds for long-term convalescence.

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new targets.

PROTECTION RACKET: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT. Some of the locals are terrified of you and will gladly pay for “protection.”

TRAINING ROOMS: Your Skulks cohorts get +1 scale. Extra training enables them to fight like a larger gang.

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT.

VICTIM TROPHIES: You get +1 rep per score. Word of your grisly “collection” gets around, and your boldness boosts your rep in the underworld.

ASSASSINS SPECIAL ABILITIES

DEADLY

Each PC may add +1 action rating to **HUNT**, **PROWL**, or **SKIRMISH** (up to a max rating of 3).

Each player may choose the action they prefer (you don't all have to choose the same one). If you take this ability during initial character and crew creation, it supersedes the normal starting limit for action ratings.

CROW'S VEIL

Due to hard-won experience or occult ritual, your activities are hidden from the notice of the deathseeker crows. You don't take extra **HEAT** when killing is involved on a score.

The bells don't ring at the crematorium when a member of your crew kills someone. Do you have a "membership ritual" now that conveys this talent?

EMBERDEATH

Due to hard-won experience or occult ritual, you know the arcane method to destroy a living victim's spirit at the moment you kill them. Take **3 STRESS** to channel electroplasmonic energy from the ghost field to disintegrate the spirit and body in a shower of sparking embers.

This ability activates at the moment of the target's death (spend 3 stress then or lose the opportunity to use it). It can only be triggered by a killing blow. Some particularly powerful supernatural entities or specially protected targets may be resistant or immune to this ability.

NO TRACES

When you keep an operation quiet or make it look like an accident, you get half the **REP** value of the target (round up) instead of zero. When you end downtime with zero **HEAT**, take **+1 REP**.

There are many clients who value quiet operations. This ability rewards you for keeping a low-profile.

PATRON

When you advance your **Tier**, it costs **half the COIN** it normally would.

Who is your patron? Why do they help you?

PREDATORS

When you use a stealth or deception plan to commit murder, take **+1D** to the **engagement roll**.

This ability applies when the goal is murder. It doesn't apply to other stealth or deception operations you attempt that happen to involve killing.

VIPERS

When you acquire or craft poisons, you get **+1 result level** to your roll. When you employ a poison, you are specially prepared to be immune to its effects.

The poison immunity lasts for the entire score, until you next have downtime.

ASSASSINS OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 Two feuding noble houses put out the call for hired killers.
- 2 A fading noble house wants to exact revenge on their enemies list.
- 3 A grieving noble lord or lady wants revenge for a child killed in a legal duel.
- 4 A noble wants to eliminate their rival leviathan hunter captain before the next hunt.
- 5 A noble wants to clear the way for a lucrative marriage—kill the rival suitor.
- 6 A noble has been targeted by an underworld faction and will pay a hefty price to eliminate the gang leader—with little understanding of the consequences.
 - 1 A crime boss is facing serious charges and the inspector can't be bought—kill the witnesses.
 - 2 The new city official is extorting extreme bribes for looking the other way. It's just cheaper to kill them. You get several offers from different gangs.
- 3 Three warring street gangs put out the call for hired killers.
- 4 A powerful crime boss is enjoying safety in the prison ward they control. Their rival wants you to get in there and take them out.
- 5 The last survivor of a destroyed underworld faction wants revenge.
- 6 An underworld faction member has vanished with the treasury. Find them and kill them—and make it a good example for others.
 - 1 Two competing merchant houses put out a call for the assassination of their rival.
 - 2 An intelligence agent has identified a key Doskvol official whose death will serve a particular foreign interest.
- 3 A cult requires a series of specific and bizarre killings to serve their dark rituals.
- 4 A scorned lover wants their former partner (and their new paramour) dead.
- 5 Several poor families offer you their combined savings to kill a cruel workhouse boss.
- 6 A strangely lucid ghost will lead you to their killer for revenge—and then to a hidden treasure for your payment.

For any opportunity above, consider an Accident, Disappearance, Murder, or Ransom operation. To twist an opportunity or add additional elements, roll on the score generator tables on page 306-309.

BRAVOS

Mercenaries and thugs

Some crews plot and scheme, some crews sneak around, some crews get entangled with the occult—you fight. The fist and the blade are all you need.

When you play Bravos, you earn xp when you execute a successful battle, extortion, sabotage, or smash & grab operation.

Are you brutal thugs, savvy sell-swords, or ruthless gangsters?

STARTING UPGRADES

- ◆ **Training: PROWESSIONAL**
- ◆ **Cohort: Gang, type THUGS.**

HUNTING GROUNDS

Choose a favored operation type:

- ◆ **Battle:** Defeat an enemy with overwhelming force.
- ◆ **Extortion:** Threaten violence unless you're paid off.
- ◆ **Sabotage:** Hurt an opponent by destroying something.
- ◆ **Smash & Grab:** A fast and violent armed robbery.

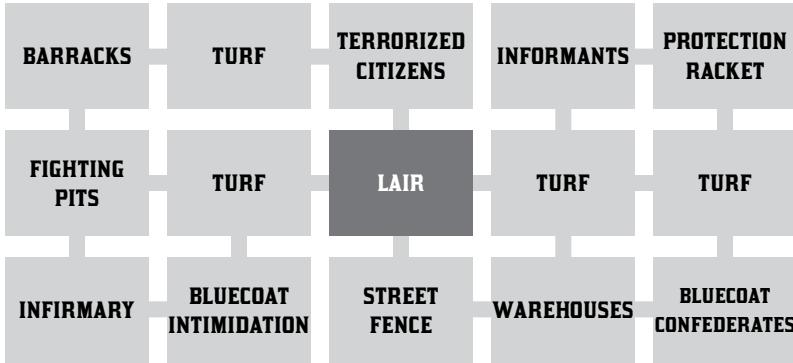
CONTACTS

- ◆ **Meg**, a pit-fighter. *Perhaps a trainer, or perhaps a fellow extortion artist?*
- ◆ **Conway**, a Bluecoat. *Perhaps an informant within the City Watch?*
- ◆ **Keller**, a blacksmith. *Perhaps a source for armaments?*
- ◆ **Tomas**, a physicker. *Perhaps a former thug turned doctor?*
- ◆ **Walker**, a ward boss. *Perhaps an employer who often needs violent work?*
- ◆ **Lutes**, a tavern owner. *Perhaps a good source of news and gossip?*

BRAVOS UPGRADES

- ◆ **Bravos Rigging:** You get 2 free load worth of weapon or armor items. *For example, you could carry a sword & pistol or wear normal armor for zero load.*
- ◆ **Ironhook Contacts:** Your Tier is effectively +1 higher in prison. *This counts for any Tier-related element in prison, including the incarceration roll (see page 148).*
- ◆ **Elite Rovers:** All of your cohorts with the Rovers type get **+1d** to quality rolls for Rover-related actions.
- ◆ **Elite Thugs:** All of your cohorts with the Thugs type get **+1d** to quality rolls for Thug-related actions.
- ◆ **Hardened:** Each PC gets **+1 TRAUMA box**. This costs three upgrades to unlock, not just one. *This may bring a PC with 4 TRAUMA back into play if you wish.*

BRAVOS CLAIMS



BARRACKS: Your **Thug** cohorts get +1 scale. *Extra room means more gang members.*

BLUECOAT CONFEDERATES: You get +1d to the **engagement roll** for assault plans. *The street patrol around here helps you out now.*

BLUECOAT INTIMIDATION: You get -2 **HEAT** per score. *The law doesn't want any trouble from you; they look the other way.*

FIGHTING PITS During downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *The locals love to gamble away their hard-won coin on the blood-sports you host.*

INFIRMARY: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. *The infirmary also has beds for long-term convalescence.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new targets.*

PROTECTION RACKET: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *Some of the locals are terrified of you and will gladly pay for "protection."*

STREET FENCE: You get +2 **COIN** in your payoff for scores that involve lower-class targets. *An expert can find the treasure amid the trash you loot from your poorer victims.*

TERRORIZED CITIZENS: You get +2 **COIN** in your payoff for scores that involve battle or extortion. *The frightened locals offer you tribute whenever you lash out. They don't want to be next.*

WAREHOUSES: You get +1d to acquire asset rolls. *You have space to hold all the various spoils you end up with after your battles. It can be useful on its own or for barter when you need it.*

BRAVOS SPECIAL ABILITIES

DANGEROUS

Each PC may add +1 action rating to **HUNT**, **SKIRMISH**, or **WRECK** (up to a max rating of 3).

Each player may choose the action they prefer (you don't all have to choose the same one). If you take this ability during initial character and crew creation, it supersedes the normal starting limit for action ratings.

BLOOD BROTHERS

When you fight alongside your **cohorts** in combat, they get **+1d** for **teamwork** rolls (setup and group actions). All of your cohorts get the *Thugs* type for free (if they're already Thugs, add another type).

If you have the Elite Thugs upgrade, it stacks with this ability. So, if you had an Adepts gang cohort, and the Elite Thugs upgrade, and then took Blood Brothers, your Adepts would add the Thugs type and also get +1d to rolls when they did Thug-type actions.

This ability may result in a gang with three types, surpassing the normal limit of two.

DOOR KICKERS

When you execute an assault plan, take **+1d** to the **engagement roll**.

This ability applies when the goal is to attack an enemy. It doesn't apply to other operations you attempt that happen to involve fighting.

FIENDS

Fear is as good as respect. You may count each **WANTED LEVEL** as if it were **turf**.

*The maximum WANTED LEVEL is 4. Regardless of how much turf you hold (from this ability or otherwise) the minimum **REP** cost to advance your Tier is always 6.*

FORGED IN THE FIRE

Each PC has been toughened by cruel experience. You get **+1d** to **resistance** rolls.

This ability applies to PCs in the crew. It doesn't confer any special toughness to your cohorts.

PATRON

When you advance your **Tier**, it costs **half the COIN** it normally would.

Who is your patron? Why do they help you?

WAR DOGS

When you're at war (-3 faction status), your crew does not suffer -1 hold and PCs still get two downtime activities, instead of just one.

BRAVOS OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 A jeweler has set up shop nearby. Lots of tempting pieces for the grabbing.
- 2 A local merchant is telling everyone that they “never capitulate to brutes” and urges others to follow suit. People are listening.
- 3 A channel fisherman wants his competitor’s boats destroyed.
- 4 A tavern owner is plagued by rowdy brawls every night. They want an end to it.
- 5 A distillery fires all their Skovlander workers and refuses to pay their wages for time already worked. The Skovs are camped outside, demanding justice.
- 6 A group of merchants are seeking mercenary muscle to defy the local gang payoffs.
 - 1 The Bluecoats have set up watchtowers and checkpoints to search people for weapons and pad their arrest quotas.
 - 2 The city council wants leg-breakers to put an end to unionizing among the dockers.
 - 3 A noble has hired a small private army to guard their estate for some reason. Must be something worth defending in there...
 - 4 The sparkwrights are building a loud, clanking machine in a tower across from an apartment building. The tenants are outraged by the noise and smoke.
 - 5 Ironhook is hiring toughs to provide security for a special expedition into the deathlands. The scavengers are all death-row convicts.
 - 6 Skovlander soldiers have stolen an armed naval ship, and are assaulting craft in the channel.
- 1 A rival gang keeps treasures from their crimes out in the open in their lair, expecting their fearsome reputation to dissuade any potential robbery.
- 2 A group of vigilantes has appeared, crippling anyone they deem to be “criminal scum.”
- 3 A vicious gang stalks the district, robbing with impunity and daring anyone to challenge them.
- 4 A horde of hollows is loose in the underground canals, dragging people to watery deaths and terrorizing the area, shutting down commerce and vice.
- 5 A gambling den operator needs a crew to make an example of a high-roller who skipped out on a huge debt.
- 6 A vampire-hunter has come to Doskvol and needs assistance.

For any opportunity above, consider a Battle, Extortion, Sabotage, or Smash & Grab operation. To twist an opportunity or add additional elements, roll on the score generator tables on pages 306-309.

CULT

Acolytes of a forgotten god

You heard the secret voice calling in the darkness. You obeyed. You are its instrument—and the world shall bow before its glory, or burn.

When you play a Cult, you earn xp when you advance the agenda of your deity or embody its precepts in action. Instead of hunting grounds, you have *sacred sites* that you use for your operations.

STARTING UPGRADES

- ◆ **Training: RESOLVE.**
- ◆ **Cohort:** Gang, type **ADEPTS**.

SACRED SITES

Choose a favored operation type:

- ◆ **Acquisition:** Procure an arcane artifact and attune it to your god.
- ◆ **Augury:** Do what you must to attract the god's attention and counsel.
- ◆ **Consecration:** Anoint a place for your deity.
- ◆ **Sacrifice:** Destroy what is valuable or good in honor of your god.

DEITY

Name your deity and describe it with two features from the list:

Alluring, Cruel, Ferocious, Monstrous, Radiant, Sinister, Serene, Transcendent

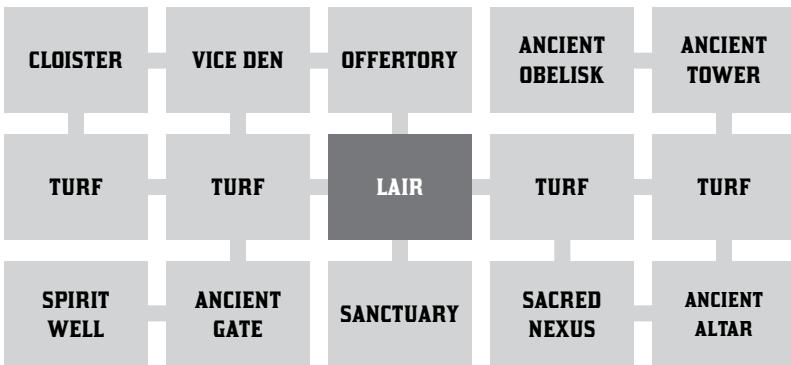
CONTACTS

- ◆ **Gagan**, an academic.
- ◆ **Adikin**, an occultist.
- ◆ **Hutchins**, an antiquarian.
- ◆ **Moriya**, a spirit trafficker.
- ◆ **Mateas Kline**, a noble.
- ◆ **Bennett**, an astronomer.

CULT UPGRADES

- ◆ **Cult Rigging:** You get 2 free load worth of document or implement items. *For example, you could carry a profane book of curses and a demon's hand for zero load.*
- ◆ **Ritual Sanctum in Lair:** This counts as a sacred and arcane **workshop** for occult practices and rituals.
- ◆ **Elite Adepts:** All of your cohorts with the Adepts type get +1d to quality rolls for Adept-related actions.
- ◆ **Elite Thugs:** All of your cohorts with the Thugs type get +1d to quality rolls for Thug-related actions.
- ◆ **Ordained:** Each PC gets +1 **TRAUMA** box. This costs three upgrades to unlock, not just one. *This may bring a PC with 4 **TRAUMA** back into play if you wish.*

CULT CLAIMS



ANCIENT ALTAR: You get +1d to the engagement roll for occult plans. *Its blessing is with you.*

ANCIENT GATE: Safe passage in the deathlands. *When you leave the city through this gate, the spirits of the deathlands will not molest you unless directly provoked.*

ANCIENT OBELISK: -1 stress cost for all arcane powers and rituals. *This effect applies to all cultists, everywhere—so long as the deity is well-pleased. You don't have to be on-site at the obelisk to benefit from its power.*

ANCIENT TOWER: You get +1d to CONSORT with arcane entities on-site. *This tower was prepared by sorcery from the pre-cataclysm and acts as an arcane lens to focus eldritch energy across the black mirror into the void.*

CLOISTER: Your Adept cohorts get +1 scale. *More room for hopeful novices desperate to pledge their service.*

OFFERTORY: You get +2 COIN in your payoff for scores that involve occult operations. *The frightened locals offer you tribute when you perform your dark practices. They don't want to be next.*

SANCTUARY: +1d to COMMAND and SWAY rolls on-site. *Your sanctuary maintains its effect as long as your deity is well-pleased with your service.*

SPIRIT WELL: You get +1d to ATTUNE rolls on-site. *A spirit well draws ghosts and other things to its power, which you harness to aid your arts.*

SACRED NEXUS: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. *Ancient arcane energy seeps into the wounded here, speeding their recovery, and marking them consecrated by its power.*

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT.

CULT SPECIAL ABILITIES

CHOSEN

Each PC may add +1 action rating to **ATTUNE**, **STUDY**, or **SWAY** (up to a max rating of 3).

Each player may choose the action they prefer (you don't all have to choose the same one). If you take this ability during initial character and crew creation, it supersedes the normal starting limit for action ratings.

ANOINTED

You gain **+1d** to **resistance** rolls against supernatural threats. You get **+1d** to healing rolls when you have supernatural harm.

BOUND IN DARKNESS

You may use **teamwork maneuvers** with any cult member, regardless of the distance separating you. By taking **1 stress**, your whispered message is heard by every cultist.

By what occult means does your teamwork manifest over distance? How is it strange or disturbing? By what ritualistic method are cult members initiated into this ability?

CONVICTION

Each PC gains an additional **vice: Worship**. When you indulge this vice and bring a pleasing sacrifice, you don't overindulge if you clear excess stress. In addition, your deity will **assist** any one action roll you make—from now until you indulge this vice again.

What sort of sacrifice does your deity find pleasing?

GLORY INCARNATE

Your deity sometimes manifests in the physical world. This can be a great boon, but the priorities and values of a god are not those of mortals. You have been warned.

SEALED IN BLOOD

Each human sacrifice yields **-3 stress** cost for any ritual you perform.

For details on Rituals, see page 222.

ZEALOTRY

Your **cohorts** have abandoned their reason to devote themselves to the cult. They will undertake any service, no matter how dangerous or strange. They gain **+1d** to rolls when they act against enemies of the faith.

CULT OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 A student at Doskvol Academy publishes a treatise claiming your god is a corrupted translation of an even more ancient god.
 - 2 It has become trendy for young people of high society to pretend to swoon and have visions, but not all of them are pretense.
 - 3 Construction work has accidentally unearthed an ancient spirit well, and awakened the entities trapped there since the cataclysm.
 - 4 A rival cult's secret regalia have some connection with the Immortal Emperor: are they his agents or is it mere coincidence?
 - 5 A noble performed a desperate ritual seeking assistance from your god. You have been chosen as the instrument of its aid.
 - 6 A prominent collector of artifacts chokes to death in the streets, vomiting blackened blood and gasping the name of your god.
-
- 1 A rival cult is destroying any and all artifacts and sites sacred to other gods. They seem to be have some arcane means of discovery. You may be next.
 - 2 The murder of a noble has signs and sigils of your god left at the crime scene.
 - 3 Local citizens in the area around your lair have started working together at odd times, in a trance, constructing something alien out of strange debris.
 - 4 A trio of formidable ghosts arrive at your lair and announce themselves as the true ancient masters of your cult.
-
- 5 The anointed champion of a rival cult challenges your chosen one to deadly combat.
 - 6 The Spirit Wardens intend to revive an ancient barbarism and burn a "witch" in the public square. Your god forbids this to occur, now or ever.
-
- 1 A moldy tome has been recovered from the bag of a Tycherosi vagrant: it contradicts some vital tenet of your cult's doctrine.
 - 2 A wealthy cult offers you riches (coin, claim, cohort, etc.) to abandon your faith and enter into their congregation.
-
- 3 A leviathan hunter ship returns to port, devoid of crew or any items save one thing: a huge pyramid of alien metal, thrumming with the secret name of your god.
 - 4 A gang of thugs is having serious mystical problems from a rival group. They hire you to put an end to it.
-
- 5 Blessed coins placed in the mouths of the faithful dead allow ghosts to return even after the Spirit Wardens have seen to them. Who is doing this? How?
 - 6 Your altars crumble, your artifacts crack. Demonstrate your true faith, or despair.

For any opportunity above, consider an Acquisition, Augury, Consecration, or Sacrifice operation. To twist an opportunity or add additional elements, roll on the score generator tables on pages 306-309.

HAWKERS

Vice dealers

All of Doskvol craves escape. They can't go outside... but they can turn to you.

When you play Hawkers, you earn xp when you acquire new product supply, execute clandestine or covert sales, or secure new sales territory. Instead of hunting grounds, you have a *sales territory* where you sell your product.

What's your product? Who's your supplier? Where and how do you sell it?

STARTING UPGRADES

- ◆ **Training: RESOLVE.**
- ◆ **Lair:** Secure.

SALES TERRITORY

Choose a favored operation type:

- ◆ **Sale:** A significant transaction with a special buyer of illicit product.
- ◆ **Supply:** A transaction to acquire new product or establish a new supplier.
- ◆ **Show of Force:** Make an example of an enemy to dominate territory.
- ◆ **Socialize:** Improve customer and/or supplier relations with a social event.

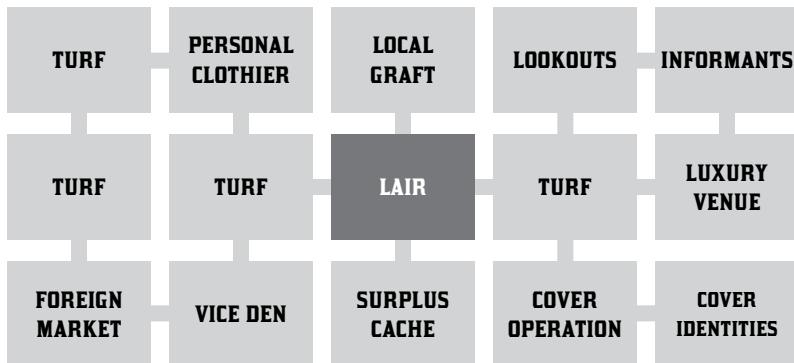
CONTACTS

- ◆ **Rolan Wott**, a magistrate. *Perhaps with a feckless son in Doskvol Academy, always in need of rescuing?*
- ◆ **Laroze**, a Bluecoat. *Perhaps an informant within the City Watch?*
- ◆ **Lydra**, a deal broker. *Perhaps known for her vicious retribution on those who don't hold up their end?*
- ◆ **Hoxley**, a smuggler. *Perhaps a friend of powerful ship captains?*
- ◆ **Anya**, a dilettante. *Perhaps a well-connected socialite?*
- ◆ **Marlo**, a gang boss. *Perhaps a good partner with a gang of tough thugs?*

HAWKERS UPGRADES

- ◆ **Hawker Rigging:** One carried item is concealed and has no load. *For example, you could carry a load of drugs or a weapon, perfectly concealed, for zero load.*
- ◆ **Ironhook Contacts:** Your Tier is effectively +1 higher in prison. *This counts for any Tier-related element in prison, including the incarceration roll (see page 148).*
- ◆ **Elite Rooks:** All of your cohorts with the Rooks type get +1d to quality rolls for Rook-related actions.
- ◆ **Elite Thugs:** All of your cohorts with the Thugs type get +1d to quality rolls for Thug-related actions.
- ◆ **Composed:** Each PC gets +1 stress box. This costs three upgrades to unlock, not just one.

HAWKERS CLAIMS



COVER IDENTITIES: You get +1d to the engagement roll for deception and social plans. *False identities help confuse the opposition.*

COVER OPERATION: You get -2 HEAT per score. *The cover of a legitimate operation helps deflect some of the heat from law enforcement.*

FOREIGN MARKET: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT. *Some of your product makes its way out of the city.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new clients.*

LOCAL GRAFT: You get +2 COIN in payoff for scores that involve a show of force or socializing. *A few city officials share bribe money with those who show that they're players on the scene.*

LOOKOUTS: You get +1d to HUNT or SURVEY on your turf.

LUXURY VENUE: +1d to CONSORT and SWAY rolls on-site. *Silks, paintings, and crystal impress the clientele.*

PERSONAL CLOTHIER: You get +1d to the engagement roll for social plans. *You always arrive on the scene in the most current and alluring fashion.*

SURPLUS CACHE: You get +2 COIN in payoff for scores that involve product sale or supply. *You have an abundance of product, which pads your pockets every now and then.*

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT. *Is this claim a den you've overtaken from another purveyor, or a new establishment replacing something else?*

HAWKER SPECIAL ABILITIES

SILVER TONGUES

Each PC may add +1 action rating to **COMMAND**, **CONSORT**, or **SWAY** (up to a max rating of 3).

Each player may choose the action they prefer (you don't all have to choose the same one). If you take this ability during initial character and crew creation, it supersedes the normal starting limit for action ratings.

ACCORD

Sometimes friends are as good as territory. You may treat up to three **+3 faction statuses** you hold as if they are **turf**.

*If your status changes, you lose the turf until it becomes +3 again. Regardless of how much turf you hold (from this ability or otherwise) the minimum **REP** cost to advance your Tier is always 6.*

GHOST MARKET

Through arcane ritual or hard-won experience, you have discovered how to prepare your product for sale to ghosts and/or demons. *They do not pay in coin. What do they pay with?*

The GM will certainly have an idea about how your strange new clients pay, but jump in with your own ideas, too! This ability is usually a big shift in the game, so talk it out and come up with something that everyone is excited about. If it's a bit mysterious and uncertain, that's good. You have more to explore that way.

THE GOOD STUFF

Your merchandise is exquisite. The product **quality** is equal to your **Tier +2**. When you deal with a crew or faction, the GM will tell you who among them is hooked on your product (one, a few, many, or all).

The quality of your product might be used for a fortune roll to find out how impressed a potential client is, to find out how enthralled or incapacitated a user is in their indulgence of it, to discover if a strange variation has side-effects, etc.

HIGH SOCIETY

It's all about who you know. Take **-1 HEAT** during downtime and **+1d** to **gather information** about the city's elite.

HOOKED

Your gang members use your product. Add the *savage*, *unreliable*, or *wild* flaw to your gangs to give them **+1 quality** (max rating of 4).

PATRON

When you advance your **Tier**, it costs **half the COIN** it normally would.

Who is your patron? Why do they help you?

HAWKER OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 A taste-making dilettante noble is slumming in your area with their coterie of sycophants, looking for “the next exciting thing.”
 - 2 A knock-off product shows up on the streets and undercuts your price. Is your supplier cutting you out?
 - 3 Your upscale clients are tired of coming to your territory for their fix. Set up a distribution front in a nicer part of town. (Or the same for low-class clients.)
 - 4 Students at Doskvol Academy have shown an interest in your supply, but they need it delivered to them, past the crisp Bluecoat security.
 - 5 A solo operator is providing a much more popular version of your product.
 - 6 A masked figure will pay you well for the opportunity to discreetly kill one of your regulars while they’re... distracted.
- 1 A city council member is considering a total ban on an illicit product—they might be persuaded to make it yours, driving demand sky-high.
 - 2 The gang who operated your territory years ago is back from the Dagger Isles and expects to get back to business as usual.
 - 3 A Bluecoat killed their last dealer for “pushing their relationship too far,” and comes to the crew for an alternate source.
 - 4 The smugglers in your supply chain want to cut out all intermediaries and deal with you directly.
 - 5 A legendary rip-off man and their crew are hitting stash houses. Now a bounty has been put on their head—can you claim it?
 - 6 A brutal gang of savage killers has wiped out a rival’s vice den. Now they want you to step in and run it for them.
- 1 The cult of a forgotten god approaches you with an offer of partnership: they can make your product much more appealing in exchange for... special considerations.
 - 2 A fiery street-crier rails against your product and drives down demand. But you think you recognize them as a customer...
 - 3 A new vice gang is making really smart, savvy moves. Rumor is, they’re guided by the ghost of a legendary street operator.
 - 4 Ghosts of former customers are suddenly drawn back to you, demanding their fix.
- 5 An arcane killer is targeting vice-users and dealers, leaving their hollowed shells wandering the streets.
 - 6 An infamous leviathan hunter has tastes that... you probably don’t usually provide for. But she’s willing to pay very well.

For any opportunity above, consider a Sale, Supply, Show of Force, or Socialize operation. To twist an opportunity or add additional elements, roll on the score generator tables on pages 306-309.

SHADOWS

Thieves and spies

Everyone wants something that they can't have. That's where you come in.

When you play Shadows, you earn xp when you execute a burglary, espionage, robbery, or sabotage operation.

Do you spy and steal primarily to serve your own interests, or do you sell your services to whoever will pay?

STARTING UPGRADES

- ◆ **Training: PROWESS.**
- ◆ **Lair:** Hidden.

HUNTING GROUNDS

Choose a favored operation type:

- ◆ **Burglary:** Theft by breaking and entering.
- ◆ **Espionage:** Obtain secret information by covert or clandestine means.
- ◆ **Robbery:** Theft by force or threats.
- ◆ **Sabotage:** Hurt an opponent by destroying something.

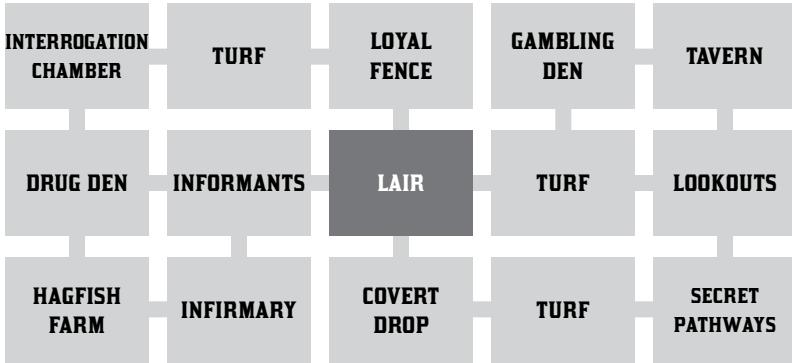
CONTACTS

- ◆ **Dowler**, an explorer. *Perhaps one of the rare deathlands scavengers that survived his sentence?*
- ◆ **Laroze**, a Bluecoat. *Perhaps an informant within the City Watch?*
- ◆ **Amancio**, a deal broker. *Perhaps a well-connected underworld figure, famous for their neutrality?*
- ◆ **Fitz**, a collector. *Perhaps an aficionado of strange artifacts?*
- ◆ **Adelaide Phroaig**, a noble. *Perhaps a source for scores among the elite?*
- ◆ **Rigney**, a tavern owner. *Perhaps a good source of news and gossip?*

SHADOWS UPGRADES

- ◆ **Thief Rigging:** You get 2 free load worth of tool or gear items. *For example, you could carry burglary gear and tinkering tools for zero load.*
- ◆ **Underground Maps and Passkeys:** You have easy passage through the underground canals, tunnels, and basements of the city.
- ◆ **Elite Rooks:** All of your cohorts with the Rooks type get +1d to quality rolls for Rook-related actions.
- ◆ **Elite Skulks:** All of your cohorts with the Skulks type get +1d to quality rolls for Skulk-related actions.
- ◆ **Steady:** Each PC gets +1 stress box. This costs three upgrades to unlock, not just one.

SHADOWS CLAIMS



COVERT DROP: You get +2 COIN in payoff for scores that involve espionage or sabotage. *The perfect hidden exchange point is worth the extra coin to discerning clientele.*

DRUG DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT. *What's the drug of choice?*

GAMBLING DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT. *Cards, dice, or something more unusual on offer?*

HAGFISH FARM: When you use the reduce HEAT downtime activity after a score that involves killing, you get +1d to the roll and quiet, convenient disposal of any corpses you left on the job.

INFIRMARY: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. *The infirmary also has beds for long-term convalescence.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new targets.*

INTERROGATION CHAMBER: You get +1d to COMMAND and SWAY on-site. *Grisly business, but effective.*

LOOKOUTS: You get +1d to HUNT or SURVEY on your turf.

LOYAL FENCE: You get +2 COIN in payoff for scores that involve burglary or robbery. *It requires a skilled eye and good contacts to move stolen goods.*

SECRET PATHWAYS: You get +1d to the engagement roll for stealth plans. *You might have access to long-forgotten underground canals, rooftop walkways, or some other route of your choosing.*

TAVERN: You get +1d to CONSORT and SWAY rolls on-site. *Some booze and friendly conversation can go a long way.*

SHADOWS SPECIAL ABILITIES

EVERYONE STEALS

Each PC may add +1 action rating to **PROWL**, **FINESSE**, or **TINKER** (up to a max rating of 3).

Each player may choose the action they prefer (you don't all have to choose the same one). If you take this ability during initial character and crew creation, it supersedes the normal starting limit for action ratings.

GHOST ECHOES

From weird experience or occult ritual, all crew members gain the ability to see and interact with the ghostly structures, streets, and objects within the echo of Doskvol that exists in the ghost field.

You might explore the echo of an ancient building, crumbled to dust in the real world, but still present in the ghost field; or discern the electroplasmic glow of treasures lost in the depths of the canals; or use a sorcerous ghost door from the pre-cataclysm to infiltrate an otherwise secure location; etc. The GM will tell you what echoes persist nearby when you gather information about them. You might also undertake investigations to discover particular echoes you hope to find.

PACK RATS

Your lair is a jumble of stolen items. When you roll to **acquire an asset**, take **+1d**.

This ability might mean that you actually have the item you need in your pile of stuff, or it could mean you have extra odds and ends to barter with.

PATRON

When you advance your **Tier**, it costs **half the COIN** it normally would.

Who is your patron? Why do they help you?

SECOND STORY

When you execute a clandestine infiltration, you get **+1d** to the **engagement roll**.

SLIPPERY

When you roll **entanglements**, roll twice and keep the one you want. When you **reduce HEAT** on the crew, take **+1d**.

The GM might sometimes want to choose an entanglement instead of rolling. In that case, they'll choose two and you can pick between them.

SYNCHRONIZED

When you perform a **group action**, you may count multiple 6s from different rolls as a **CRITICAL** success.

*For example, Lyric leads a group action to **ATTUNE** to the ghost field to overcome a magical ward on the Dimmer Sisters' door. Emily, Lyric's player, rolls and gets a **6**, and so does Matt! Because the crew has Synchronized, their two separate **6s** count as a **CRITICAL** success on the roll.*

SHADOWS OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 A local art dealer announces an exhibition of rare ancient Iruvian jewelry.
- 2 The Path of Echoes needs a specific body purloined from the crematorium before it's dissolved tonight.
- 3 A collector wants to steal an original work of art or industry and replace it with a forgery.
- 4 A client wants to extract a loved one from their servitude in an indentured work house.
- 5 A ghost wants you to secure the rest of their precious collection of worldly things.
- 6 A master assassin has come out of retirement for one more job. Many would pay well to know who their target is.
 - 1 The black sheep of a noble family wants their revenge, and the deed to the ancestral estate is the key.
 - 2 A drug gang wants to obtain the secret formula for their rival's popular new product.
 - 3 Strange artifacts were recovered from the Void Sea. They're held at Bellweather for analysis by the Spirit Wardens.
 - 4 Rumors of war, aren't there always? Plant a damning paper trail in the office of the ambassador.
 - 5 Anti-Imperial agents are passing information while on the trains. Intercept their communiqües.
 - 6 A professor in Sparkwright Tower wants their rival's research notes. Make it look like a common burglary.
- 1 A Bluecoat squad doesn't want to make a very dangerous arrest. Steal the evidence from the Inspector's safe.
- 2 A damning piece of evidence against a vulnerable crime lord is held in a bank vault until trial.
- 3 A client seeks the source of altered texts sold to academy students that are driving them to madness and murder.
- 4 A desperate Inspector needs you to plant evidence to bring down a demon-corrupted Spirit Warden.
- 5 A circus is in town, featuring strange creatures and mysterious animals. A client would pay well for a new pet.
- 6 Only one gang member survived their botched job. Can you clean the bloody scene before the authorities arrive?

For any opportunity above, consider a Burglary, Espionage, Robbery, or Sabotage operation. To twist an opportunity or add additional elements, roll on the score generator tables on pages 306-309.

SMUGGLERS

Contraband transporters

Illicit goods are the life-blood of Duskwall—both for those who consume them and those who profit from their taxation and criminalization. Smugglers keep the city alive.

When you play Smugglers, you earn xp when you execute a smuggling operation or acquire new clients or contraband sources. Instead of hunting grounds, you have *cargo types* that you use for your operations.

What kind of contraband do you transport? Do you have any rules about what you will or won't carry?

STARTING UPGRADES

- ◆ **Training: PROWESS.**
- ◆ **Vehicle:** A boat or carriage.

CARGO TYPES

Choose a favored cargo type:

- ◆ **Arcane/Weird:** Spirit essences, ghosts, cult materials.
- ◆ **Arms:** Restricted military weapons, heavy ordnance, explosives.
- ◆ **Contraband:** High-tax luxuries, drugs, banned art, etc.
- ◆ **Passengers:** People or livestock traveling in secret.

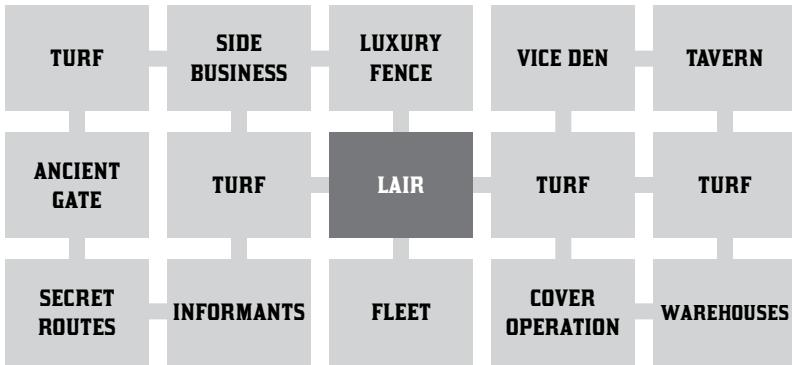
CONTACTS

- ◆ **Elynn**, a dock worker. *Perhaps a friend who can help with the infernal paperwork of the Empire?*
- ◆ **Rolan**, a drug dealer. *Perhaps a client with strong underworld ties?*
- ◆ **Sera**, an arms dealer. *Perhaps a supplier with military access?*
- ◆ **Nyelle**, a spirit trafficker. *Perhaps a supplier for the strangest of cargo?*
- ◆ **Decker**, an anarchist. *Perhaps a client in need of the illegal tools of revolution?*
- ◆ **Esme**, a tavern owner. *Perhaps a good source of news and gossip?*

SMUGGLERS UPDATES

- ◆ **Smuggler Rigging:** Two of your carried items are perfectly concealed. *You could carry 1 load of contraband and a pistol, perfectly concealed, even against a pat down.*
- ◆ **Camouflage:** Your vehicles are perfectly concealed when at rest. They blend in as part of the environment, or as an uninteresting civilian vehicle (your choice).
- ◆ **Elite Rovers:** All of your cohorts with the Rovers type get +1d to quality rolls for Rover-related actions.
- ◆ **Barge:** Add *mobility* to your lair. You can move it to a new location as a downtime activity.
- ◆ **Steady:** Each PC gets +1 stress box. This costs three upgrades to unlock, not just one.
- ◆ **Vehicle:** All smugglers start with a vehicle. When the vehicle is upgraded (two boxes), it also gets **armor**.

SMUGGLERS CLAIMS



ANCIENT GATE: Safe passage in the deathlands. *When you leave the city through this gate, spirits in the deathlands will not molest you unless directly provoked.*

COVER OPERATION: You get -2 HEAT per score. *What's your cover? Who did you seize it from?*

FLEET: Your cohorts have their own vehicles. *Each cohort has a common vehicle, with quality equal to your Tier.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new clients.*

LUXURY FENCE: You get +2 COIN in payoff for scores that involve high-class targets. *It requires a skilled eye and good contacts to move hot luxury goods.*

SECRET ROUTES: You get +1d to the engagement roll for transport plans. *You might have access to long-forgotten underground canals, dark streets normally hidden behind debris, or some other route of your choosing.*

SIDE BUSINESS: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT. *What kind of legitimate business is this? How do you get paid in secret?*

TAVERN: You get +1d to CONSORT and SWAY rolls on-site. *Some booze and friendly conversation can go a long way.*

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn COIN equal to the highest result, minus your HEAT. *Perhaps you sell some of the contraband you smuggle here? Or do you not mix your operations?*

WAREHOUSES: You get +1d to acquire asset rolls. *You have space to hold all the various items and supplies you end up with from your smuggling runs. They can be useful on their own or for barter when you need it.*

SMUGGLERS SPECIAL ABILITIES

LIKE PART OF THE FAMILY

Create one of your vehicles as a **cohort** (use the vehicle edges and flaws, below). Its quality is equal to your Tier +1. The vehicle can use **teamwork** actions (using **quality** for rolls). A vehicle can't lead a group action, but may participate.

VEHICLE EDGES

- ◆ **Nimble:** The vehicle handles easily. Consider this an **assist** for tricky maneuvers.
- ◆ **Simple:** The vehicle is easy to repair. Remove all of its harm during downtime.
- ◆ **Sturdy:** The vehicle keeps operating even when broken.

VEHICLE FLAWS

- ◆ **Costly:** The vehicle costs 1 **COIN** per downtime to keep in operation.
- ◆ **Distinct:** The vehicle has memorable features. Take +1 **HEAT** when you use it on a score.
- ◆ **Finicky:** The vehicle has quirks that only one person understands. When operated without them, it has -1 **quality**.

ALL HANDS

During **downtime**, one of your **cohorts** may perform a downtime activity for the crew to **acquire an asset**, **reduce HEAT**, or work on a **long-term project**.

GHOST PASSAGE

From harsh experience or occult ritual, all crew members are immune to possession by spirits, but may choose to “carry” a ghost as a passenger within their body.

What do you do to “carry” a spirit? Must the spirit consent, or can you use this ability to trap an unwilling spirit within?

JUST PASSING THROUGH

During **downtime**, take -1 **HEAT**. When your **HEAT** is 4 or less, you get +1d to deceive people when you pass yourselves off as ordinary citizens.

LEVERAGE

Your crew supplies illicit goods for other factions. Your success is good for them. Whenever you gain **REP**, gain +1 **REP**.

REAVERS

When you go into conflict aboard a vehicle, you gain +1 **effect** for vehicle damage and speed. Your vehicle gains **armor**.

If your vehicle already has armor, this ability gives an additional armor box.

RENEGADES

Each PC may add +1 action rating to **FINESSE**, **PROWL**, or **SKIRMISH** (up to a max rating of 3).

Each player may choose the action they prefer (you don't all have to choose the same one). If you take this ability during initial character and crew creation, it supersedes the normal starting limit for action ratings.

| SMUGGLERS OPPORTUNITIES | | CONTRABAND / CARGO |
|--|--|---|
| 1 Skovlander insurrectionists need supplies for their campaign of terror attacks against city institutions. | | 1 Escaped Prisoners, Spies (forbidden) |
| 2 Union organizers want to arm factory workers in advance of a strike. | | 2 Workers Fleeing Contracts (forbidden) |
| 3 A massive gang war creates high demand for restricted military weapons and heavy ordnance. | | 3 A Devil or Dangerous Artifact (forbidden) |
| 4 Exiled nobility slumming it in Doskvol has a sudden and urgent need to go home that they won't explain. | | 4 Insurrectionists or Anarchists (forbidden) |
| 5 Leviathan hunter made undocumented stops. Meet them outside the city and bring some things in uninspected. | | 5 Refugees or Immigrants (restricted access) |
| 6 Heiress needs to leave the city to meet her forbidden love. If you make it look like a kidnapping she'll split the ransom. | | 6 A Noble or Official Seeking Secret Travel |
| 1 The city council outlaws a formerly legal product. | | 1 Fine Tobacco, Whiskey, Wine, etc. (high tax) |
| 2 A jailbreak at Ironhook means many escaped prisoners seek flight from the city. | | 2 Luxuries—Perfumes, Silks, Spices (high tax) |
| 3 For a nominal fee, a Bluecoat will help you acquire a vehicle seized from another gang. | | 3 Livestock or Dangerous Animals (restricted ownership) |
| 4 A new spice has been “discovered” in Tycheros but it's officially banned. Naturally, everyone wants it. | | 4 Medicine, Alchemicals (restricted ownership) |
| 5 A route is closed to traffic (and Bluecoat inspection) due to: <i>imminent collapse—weird events—toxic gas—fires.</i> | | 5 Military Arms (restricted ownership) |
| 6 A criminal organization needs weapons smuggled into Ironhook to seize control of a cell-block. | | 6 Drugs (high tax) |
| 1 A cult wants to smuggle their demon-tainted “chosen one” past the Spirit Wardens and out into the deathlands. | | 1 Confidential Documents (restricted ownership) |
| 2 An ancient artifact has been spotted outside the barrier and academics need it in the city yesterday. For study, of course. | | 2 Banned Art, Seditious Materials (restricted ownership) |
| 3 A district is quarantined due to ghost infestation or plague. They need basic supplies, and spirit wards even more. | | 3 Arcane Implements or Documents (forbidden) |
| 4 A client wants you to move a strange package around the city for two days straight. Don't stop moving! That would be bad. | | 4 Electroplasmic Tech (restricted ownership) |
| 5 A derailed train in the deathlands has a lot of salvageable cargo. Possibly (wealthy and grateful) survivors, too. | | 5 Volatile Alchemicals or Explosives (forbidden) |
| 6 A noble's crimes leave their assets frozen. Their leviathan hunter, full from an expedition, is forbidden to dock. | | 6 Spirit Essences (restricted ownership) |

For any opportunity above, consider Arcane/Weird, Arms, Contraband, or Passengers as cargo. To twist an opportunity or add additional elements, roll on the score generator tables on pages 306-309.



CHAPTER 4

THE SCORE

Murder for hire, brutal extortion, dark rituals, illicit deals, smuggling runs, thievery in the shadows—these are the exploits of the scoundrels of Duskwall—the only chances left for those pushed to the margins and denied the privileges of the corrupt and predatory elite.

In *Blades in the Dark*, we play to find out if a fledgling crew of scoundrels can prosper in the underworld of a haunted city—and that prosperity depends upon their criminal endeavors, which we call **scores**.

A score is a single operation with a particular goal: *burglary Lord Strangford's manor, assassinate the Severosi diplomat, smuggle a strange artifact from the deathlands into the city*, etc. Usually, a score will fall into one of three categories:

- ◆ A **criminal activity**, determined by your crew type. An assassination, burglary, illicit vice deal, etc. (Crew types and their primary scores are detailed in **Chapter 3**, starting on page 91.)
- ◆ Seizing a **claim** that you choose from your crew's **claim map**. Claims help your crew grow and develop. See page 46 for more details.
- ◆ A **special mission** or goal determined by the players (like getting a rare artifact to empower one of the Whisper's rituals).

A score can be long and involved or short and sweet. There might be lots of rolls and trouble, or just a few actions to resolve it. *Play to find out what happens!* A score doesn't need to fill one session of play every time. Let it be however long it is.

The PCs can set up a new score by choosing a target (from their claims or the faction list, for example), by approaching a potential client and asking for work, or by being contacted by an NPC who needs to hire a crew for a job.

A score consists of a few key elements, detailed in this chapter: **planning & engagement**, **flashbacks**, and **teamwork**.



PLANNING & ENGAGEMENT

Your crew spends time planning each score. They huddle around a flickering lantern in their lair, looking at scrawled maps, whispering plots and schemes, bickering about the best approach, lamenting the dangers ahead, and lustng after stacks of coin.

But you, the players, don't have to do the nitty-gritty planning. The characters take care of that, off-screen. All you have to do is choose what **type of plan** the characters *have already made*. There's no need to sweat all the little details and try to cover every eventuality ahead of time, because the **engagement roll** (detailed on the next page) ultimately determines how much trouble you're in when the plan is put in motion. *No plan is ever perfect*. You can't account for everything. This system assumes that there's always some unknown factors and trouble—major or minor—in every operation; you just have to make the best of it.

There are six different plans, each with a missing **detail** you need to provide (see the list below). To “plan an operation,” simply choose the plan and supply the detail. Then the GM will **cut to the action** as the first moments of the operation unfold.

ASSAULT

Do violence to a target. *Detail: The point of attack.*

DECEPTION

Lure, trick, or manipulate. *Detail: The method of deception.*

STEALTH

Trespass unseen. *Detail: The point of infiltration.*

OCCULT

Engage a supernatural power. *Detail: The arcane method.*

SOCIAL

Negotiate, bargain, or persuade. *Detail: The social connection.*

TRANSPORT

Carry cargo or people through danger. *Detail: The route & means.*

THE DETAIL

When you choose a plan, you provide a missing **detail**, like the point of attack, social connection, etc. If you don't know the detail, you can **gather information** in some way to discover it. See page 36.

ITEM LOADOUTS

After the plan and detail are in place, each player chooses their character's **load**. This indicates how much stuff they're carrying on the operation. They don't have to select individual items—just the maximum amount they'll have access to during the action. For more details, see page 57.

ENGAGEMENT ROLL

Once the players choose a plan and provide its detail, the GM cuts to the action—describing the scene as the crew starts the operation and encounters their first obstacle. But how is this established? The way the GM describes the starting situation can have a huge impact on how simple or troublesome the operation turns out to be. Rather than expecting the GM to simply “get it right” each time, we use a dice roll instead. This is the **engagement roll**.

The engagement roll is a **fortune roll**, starting with **1d for sheer luck**. Modify the dice pool for any major advantages or disadvantages that apply.

MAJOR ADVANTAGES / DISADVANTAGES

- ◆ Is this operation particularly bold or daring? Take **+1d**. Is this operation overly complex or contingent on many factors? Take **-1d**.
- ◆ Does the **plan's detail** expose a vulnerability of the target or hit them where they're weakest? Take **+1d**. Is the target strongest against this approach, or do they have particular defenses or special preparations? Take **-1d**.
- ◆ Can any of your **friends or contacts** provide aid or insight for this operation? Take **+1d**. Are any **enemies or rivals** interfering in the operation? Take **-1d**.
- ◆ Are there any **other elements** that you want to consider? Maybe a lower-Tier target will give you **+1d**. Maybe a higher-Tier target will give you **-1d**. Maybe there's a situation in the district that makes the operation more or less tricky.

The engagement roll assumes that the PCs are approaching the target as intelligently as they can, given the plan and detail they provided, so we don't need to play out tentative probing maneuvers, special precautions, or other ponderous non-action. The engagement roll covers all of that. The PCs are already in action, facing the first obstacle—up on the rooftop, picking the lock on the Dimmer Sisters' window; kicking down the door of the Billhooks' lair; maneuvering to speak with Lord Strangford at the masquerade party; etc.

Don't make the engagement roll and then describe the PCs *approaching* the target. It's the approach that the engagement roll resolves. Cut to the action that results *because of* that initial approach—to the first serious obstacle in their path.

The first obstacles at the Dimmer Sisters' house are their cunning locks and magical traps. The engagement roll puts us on the roof outside a window, as the PCs attempt to silently and carefully break into the attic.

The PCs have kicked down the door and swarmed into the front room of the Billhooks' lair, weapons flashing, into the swirl of the melee with the first guards.

The PCs have socialized politely at the party, maneuvering into position to have a private word with Lord Strangford. As a group of young nobles leave his side, the PCs step up and engage him in conversation.

ENGAGEMENT ROLL

 **1d** for sheer luck.

 **+1d** for each **MAJOR ADVANTAGE**.

 **-1d** for each **MAJOR DISADVANTAGE**.

CRITICAL: Exceptional result. *You've already overcome the first obstacle and you're in a controlled position for what's next.*

6: Good result. *You're in a controlled position when the action starts.*

4/5: Mixed result. *You're in a risky position when the action starts.*

1-3: Bad result. *You're in a desperate position when the action starts.*

If the players want to include a special preparation or clever setup, they can do so with **flashbacks** during the score. This takes some getting used to. Players may balk at first, worried that you're skipping over important things that they want to do. But jumping straight into the action of the score is much more effective once you get used to it. When they see the situation they're in, their "planning" in flashbacks will be focused and useful, rather than merely speculations on circumstances and events that might not even happen.

OUTCOMES

The outcome of the engagement roll determines the **position** for the PCs' initial actions when we cut to the score in progress. A **1-3** means a desperate position. A **4/5** is a risky position. A **6** yields a controlled position. And a **CRITICAL** carries the action beyond the initial obstacle, deeper into the action of the score.

No matter how low-Tier or outmatched you are, a desperate position is the worst thing that can result from the plan + detail + engagement process. It's designed this way so the planning process matters, but it doesn't call for lots of optimization or nitpicking. Even if you're reckless and just dive in and take your chances, you can't get too badly burned. Plus, you might even want those desperate rolls to generate more xp for the PCs, which helps to bootstrap starting characters into advancement.

When you describe the situation after the roll, use the details of the target to paint a picture of the PCs' position. How might the strange, occult Dimmer Sisters present a desperate position for burglars? How might the violent and ruthless Billhooks present a risky threat to assaulting thugs? How might the vain and pompous Lord Strangford present a controlled opportunity for a manipulative scoundrel? Use this opportunity to show how the PCs' enemies are dangerous and capable—don't characterize a bad engagement roll as a failure by the PCs, or they won't trust the technique in the future. Sure, things are starting out desperate here against the creepy Dimmer Sisters, but you're just the type of scoundrels who are daring enough to take them on. Let's get to it.

HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

The engagement roll determines the starting position for the PCs' actions. How long does that hold? Does the situation stay desperate? No. Once the initial actions have been resolved, you follow the normal process for establishing position for the rest of the rolls during the score. The engagement roll is a quick short-hand to kick things off and get the action started—it doesn't have any impact after that.

ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLES

Infiltrating the Dimmer Sisters' House

The crew of Shadows has a plan and detail that doesn't give any modifiers in this case (the Sisters aren't particularly strong or weak against a stealth plan). The crew does have help from their contact Dowler, an explorer of Duskwall, who just happens to have scoped out the rooftop of the Sisters' house before. The crew gets +1d for his help. That gives them 2d total to roll and... it's a 2. Oh well! It's a desperate start for their infiltration.

The GM thinks about how the arcane Dimmer Sisters might pose a desperate threat to burglars, and seizes on the obvious: the seemingly ordinary window lock that's the first obstacle to their infiltration is protected by a magical ward. "So, who's Tinkering with the lock? This is desperate, so the consequence obviously will be setting off the alarm. Plus maybe something else from the magic. Maybe this should be a group action..."

Notice how the GM skipped past the approach to the rooftop and the attic window. She already knew that the PCs were sneaking in via the roof (that was their detail for the plan), so she cut to the first obstacle: a warded lock. This skips past a conversation about exactly where to enter, probing around for a perfect option, debating the merits of a window versus a chimney, etc. The engagement roll covers all that, and then deposits the PCs mid-action, carrying out their best shot at sneaking in. The players can't "back out" and try a different window—the engagement roll has placed them here. If they want to have prepared something for an arcane ward, it's just a flashback away...

Assaulting the Billhooks

The crew of Bravos is itching for a fight and it's time to go teach the Billhooks a lesson in blood and pain. Their plan is an assault, which they know is the strength of the Billhooks, but so what? They're Bravos; they live for this stuff. The Slide PC decides to hedge their bets a bit, though, and pulls off a CONSORT action to discover when the Billhooks will be most drunk during the evening. That will be the point of attack and a vulnerability of the enemy crew. The crew rolls 1d (1d base, -1d for the enemy's strength, +1d for the vulnerability) and gets a 5: a risky position to start things off.

What does that situation look like? The GM goes with the obvious thing: a risky position means a head-to-head contest, and what's more emblematic than a straight up toe-to-toe melee? The door crashes off its hinges, drunken and violent Billhooks (already armed and brawling each other) fall into the skirmish without hesitation.

The GM sets out clocks to track casualties on both sides, plus another one for the eventual Bluecoat response to the fight, and then it's risky SKIRMISH rolls around the table as the PCs crash headlong into the fray.

Negotiating with Lord Strangford

The crew of Hawkers is looking for a new supplier for their leviathan blood-based drug product. Thanks to an investigation project by their Spider, they have reason to believe that the leviathan hunter captain, Lord Strangford, has "flexible" ideas about demonic forces and is looking for a new partnership. They've decided to execute a social plan, by casually meeting the captain at a masquerade party held in honor of the Arkenvorn holiday.

They have 1d to start, for sheer luck. The detail of their plan is good, exposing a vulnerability in the target, for +1d. Also, the crew happens to be very friendly with the host of the party, Rolan Wott, a wealthy and corrupt magistrate—this gives them another +1d. They roll 3d and get a CRITICAL!

The GM thinks about how the PCs might slip past the first potential obstacle and end up in a controlled position against Captain Strangford. They go with the obvious choice: normally an important man like Strangford would be swarmed by a throng of young nobles seeking his favor, but the PCs are able to time their approach perfectly. Just as they draw near, Strangford disentangles himself from some boring dilettantes and makes a bee-line for the PCs, hoping these rougher-looking characters will provide him with more interesting conversation.

LINKED PLANS

Sometimes an operation seems to call for a couple of plans linked together. A common scenario is a team that wants a two-pronged approach. “You create a diversion at the tavern, and when they send thugs over there, we’ll break into their lair.” There are two ways to handle this.

1. The diversion is a **setup maneuver** that a team member performs as part of the plan. (See **Teamwork**, page 134, for details.) A successful setup maneuver can improve **position** for teammates (possibly offsetting a bad engagement roll) or give increased effect. An unsuccessful setup maneuver might cause trouble for the second part of the plan—an easy consequence is to give the engagement roll -1d. *If it makes sense, the team member who performed the setup can drift back into the main operation and join the team later so they don't have to sit out and wait.*
2. The diversion is its own plan, engagement, and operation, whose outcome creates the opportunity for a future plan. Use this option when the first part of the plan is required for the next part to happen at all. For example, you might execute a stealth plan to steal an artifact from the Museum of the Ancients, then later use that artifact in an occult plan to consecrate a temple for your forgotten god. In this case, you go into downtime (and payoff, **HEAT**, etc.) after the first part of the plan, as normal.

Either approach is fine. It’s usually a question of interest. Is the linked plan idea interesting enough on its own to play out moment by moment? Is it required for the second plan to make sense? If so, make it a separate operation. If not, just use a setup maneuver.

FLASHBACKS

The rules don't distinguish between actions performed in the present moment and those performed in the past. When an operation is underway, you can invoke a **flashback** to roll for an action in the past that impacts your current situation. Maybe you convinced the district Watch sergeant to cancel the Bluecoat patrol tonight, so you make a **SWAY** roll to see how that went.

The GM sets a **stress cost** when you activate a flashback action.

- ◆ **0 STRESS:** An ordinary action for which you had easy opportunity. *The Cutter CONSORTED with her friend Chael to agree to arrive at the dice game ahead of time, to suddenly spring out as a surprise ally.*
- ◆ **1 STRESS:** A complex action or unlikely opportunity. *The Hound FINESSED his pistols into a hiding spot near the card table so he could retrieve them after the pat-down at the front door.*
- ◆ **2 (OR MORE) STRESS:** An elaborate action that involved special opportunities or contingencies. *The Whisper has already STUDIED the history of the property and learned of a ghost that is known to haunt its ancient canal dock—a ghost that can be compelled to reveal the location of the hidden vault.*

After the stress cost is paid, a flashback action is handled just like any other action. Sometimes it will entail an action roll, because there's some danger or trouble involved. Sometimes a flashback will entail a fortune roll, because we just need to find out how well (or how much, or how long, etc.). Sometimes a flashback won't call for a roll at all because you can just pay the stress and it's accomplished.

If a flashback involves a **downtime** activity, pay 1 **COIN** or 1 **REP** for it, instead of stress. (See page 153 for details about downtime.)

One of the best uses for a flashback is when the **engagement roll** goes badly. After the GM describes the trouble you're in, you can call for a flashback to a special preparation you made, "just in case" something like this happened. This way, your "flashback planning" will be focused on the problems that *do* happen, not the problems that *might* happen. For more on this, see **Act Now, Plan Later** on page 185.

LIMITS OF FLASHBACKS

A flashback isn't time travel. It can't "undo" something that just occurred in the present moment. For instance, if Inspector Helker confronts you about recent thefts of occult artifacts when you're at Lady Bowmore's party, you can't call for a flashback to assassinate the Inspector the night before. She's here now, questioning you—that's established in the fiction. You *can* call for a flashback to show that you intentionally tipped off the inspector so she would confront you at the party—so you could use that opportunity to impress Lady Bowmore with your aplomb and daring.

FLASHBACK EXAMPLES

“I want to have a flashback to earlier that night, where I sneak into the stables and feed fireweed to all their goats so they’ll go berserk and create a distraction for our infiltration.”

“Ha! Nice. Okay, that’s seems a bit tricky, dealing with ornery goats and all... 1 stress.”

“Should I roll Prowl to sneak in and plant it?”

“Nah. Their goat stable security amounts to a stable boy who is usually asleep anyway. You can easily avoid their notice.”

“So it just works?”

“Eh... not so fast. When you want the distraction to hit, let’s make a fortune roll to see how crazy the Fireweed Goat Maneuver gets. Three dice.”

—

“The engagement roll is... a 2. Looks like a desperate situation for you! Hmm. Okay, so you’re inside the Grinders’ compound at the docks, slipping up through the shadows next to some huge metal storage tanks. But then all the electric lights come on. The big metal warehouse door rolls open, and you hear a heavy wagon coming in through the gate. Looks like they’re getting a delivery right now, and a bunch of Grinders are out to receive it. They’re about to be on top of you. What do you do?”

“Hang on, I want to have a flashback.”

“Okay, for what?”

“Uh. Something... helpful? Damn, I don’t know what that would be. Anyone have ideas?”

“Oh, what if you Consorted with your docker friends yesterday and they blabbed about this delivery, so we rigged it with a bomb.”

“Oh man, that’s hilarious. But kind of nuts. I guess 2 stress for that?”

“Sounds good. But let’s make that Consort roll and see if your docker friends made any demands or complicated anything for you. Then we need to find out how well this bomb works. Who was in charge of that?”

“I did it. I’ll roll Tinker to set the fuse just right. Hopefully.”

GIVING UP ON A SCORE

When you give up on a score, you go into **downtime**. Follow the phases for downtime presented in the next chapter. You’ll usually have zero **payoff**, since you didn’t accomplish anything. You’ll still face **HEAT** and **entanglements** as usual.

For more on this, see the **Downtime** chapter, starting on page 145.

TEAMWORK

TEAMWORK

When the team of PCs works together, the characters have access to four special **teamwork maneuvers**. They're listed at the bottom of the character playbook sheets to help remind the players of them. The four maneuvers are:

- ◆ **Assist** another PC who's rolling an action.
- ◆ Lead a **group action**.
- ◆ **Protect** a teammate.
- ◆ **Set up** a character who will follow through on your action.

ASSIST

When you assist another player who's rolling, describe what your character does to help. Take 1 stress and give them **+1d** to their roll. You might also suffer any consequences that occur because of the roll, depending on the circumstances. Only one character may assist a given roll. *If you really want to help and someone else is already assisting, consider performing a **setup** maneuver instead.*

A character may assist a group action, but only if they aren't taking part in it directly. You decide which character in the group action gets the bonus die.

LEAD A GROUP ACTION

When you lead a group action, you coordinate multiple members of the team to tackle a problem together. Describe how your character leads the team in a coordinated effort. Do you bark orders, give subtle hand signals, or provide charismatic inspiration?

Each PC who's involved makes an **action roll** (using the same action) and **the team counts the single best result** as the overall effort for everyone who rolled. However, the character leading the group action takes **1 stress** for each PC that rolled **1-3** as their best result.

*This is how you do the “we all sneak into the building” scene. Everyone who wants to sneak in rolls their **PROWL** action, and the best result counts for the whole team. The leader suffers stress for everyone who does poorly. It’s tough covering for the stragglers.*

The group action result covers everyone who rolled. If you don't roll, your character doesn't get the effects of the action.

Your character doesn't have to be especially skilled at the action at hand in order to lead a group action. This maneuver is about leadership, not necessarily about ability. You can also lead your crew's **cohorts** with a group action. Roll **COMMAND** if you direct their efforts, or roll the appropriate action rating if you participate alongside them. The cohort rolls its **quality** level.

PROTECT

You step in to face a consequence that one of your teammates would otherwise face. **You suffer it instead of them.** You may roll to resist it as normal. Describe how you intervene.

Bazso Baz decides to punch Canter's face in to make an example out of him in front of his gang. Arcy sees it coming, though, and moves in to take the blow from Baz's vicious right hook. Sean (Arcy's player) rolls Arcy's PROWESS attribute to resist, suffering 2 stress and reducing the harm to a level 2 "Swollen Eye." Sean then uses Arcy's BATTLEBORN special armor to reduce the harm even further, down to level 1. Arcy catches Bazso's fist in mid-swing, and the force spins her sideways and twists her wrist painfully, but Canter is unscathed.

SET UP

When you perform a setup action, you have an indirect effect on an obstacle. If your action has its intended result, any member of the team who follows through on your maneuver gets **+1 effect level** or **improved position** for their roll. You choose the benefit, based on the nature of your setup action.

This is how you do the "I'll create a distraction" scene. You roll SWAY to distract a Bluecoat with your charms, then any teammate who follows through with a PROWL action to sneak past him can get improved position. It's less risky since you're drawing the guard's attention.

This is a good way to contribute to an operation when you don't have a good rating in the action at hand. A clever setup action lets you help the team indirectly. Multiple follow-up actions may take advantage of your setup (including someone **leading** a group action) as long as it makes sense in the fiction.

Since a setup action can increase the effect of follow-up actions, it's also useful when the team is facing tough opposition that has advantages in quality, scale, and/or potency. Even if the PCs are reduced to zero effect due to disadvantages in a situation, the setup action provides a bonus that allows for limited effect.

The PCs are facing a heavily armored carriage that's immune to their weapons.

Aldo uses WRECK as a setup action to pry some of the armor loose with his crowbar, giving follow up actions +1 effect—going from zero to limited effect.

DO WE HAVE TO USE TEAMWORK?

Teamwork maneuvers are options, not requirements. Each character can still perform solo actions as normal during an operation. If your character can't communicate or somehow coordinate with the rest of the team, you can't use or benefit from any teamwork maneuvers.



EXAMPLE SCORE

Revka and her crew of scoundrels are on a score. They heard from their explorer contact, Dowler, that the **Dimmer Sisters** had recently acquired a valuable arcane relic from the time before the cataclysm, *The Eye of Kotar*.

Revka's crew has **-2 status** with the Dimmer Sisters, which means they're enemies. Stealing the *Eye* will hurt the Sisters, loosen their hold in the underworld, and put a treasure in the crew's vault, to boot. Everyone agrees that this is the score they want to pursue.

THE PLAN

Rachel, the GM, asks the question that kicks off every score in *Blades in the Dark*: “Okay, **what’s the plan?**”

The players look at the list of plans on their character sheets and quickly choose one. “I vote for **stealth**,” says Dylan.

“Yeah,” says Allison, “Let’s keep this nice and quiet. We already have enough heat as it is.” The other players agree.

The GM asks the group for the **detail** that completes the plan: “What’s your entry point?”

“Well,” says Allison. “Dowler has explored around the Dimmer Sisters’ house many times before. He probably knows all about the water-entrances. I think using the canal will be good. Plus, that’ll keep us out of sight from most witnesses on the street, so we might as well each take **normal load** if we want to.” Everyone agrees.

“Cool,” Rachel says. “That’s the plan your characters made, probably huddled around their sketch of the Sisters’ townhouse and the canal map.

Now you’re making your way along the canal that runs by the house, poling your gondola silently through the dark water.” “I have a lantern held out,” Allison says. “But it’s shuttered down to a faint glow. Are there any other lights?”

“This is a pretty decrepit part of Crow’s Foot,” Rachel says. “There’s barely any other light at all. The walls on either side of the narrow waterway are overgrown with dark moss. The water is black and oily. There’s a stench of waste and rot.” “Ugh,” says Allison.

ENGAGEMENT ROLL

“Time for the engagement roll!” Rachel says, a glint in her eye. “Let’s see what kind of situation you’re in when we start the action at the house.”

“I have that page open in the book,” Dylan says. “We start with 1d for sheer luck.”

“Well, that’s something,” says Ryan.

“We’re probably gonna need it,” Allison says.

“Yep, 1d to start,” Rachel says. “Then you might get advantage or disadvantage dice. What’s the first one?”

“Is this operation particularly bold or daring?” Dylan reads aloud. “Hmmm. I think so! The Dimmer Sister’s house is like a legendary place, right? People say that no one comes out once they go in. It’s pretty bold of us to break in.”

“Yeah,” Rachel says. “That’s what I was thinking. You should get +1d for that.”

“Excellent,” says Ryan.

“Okay, then ‘Does the plan’s detail expose a vulnerability of the target or hit them where they’re weakest?’ Dylan says.

"Oh, no, I know where this is going," Allison says.

"It's definitely not where they're weak," Rachel says. "In fact, their house is where they're strongest, and they have special preparations. So you get a disadvantage for that. -1d."

"Ah ha," says Dylan. "What about this, though? Can any of your friends or contacts provide aid or insight for this operation? We already know that one! Dowler scoped out this score in the first place."

"Oh that's true," Allison says. "Can we say that Dowler gave us some hot tips since he knows the place well? Maybe stuff like 'Don't go in through the roof' that helped our planning?"

"Yeah, totally," says Rachel. "Take +1d for Dowler's insight."

"Okay," says Dylan. "Are there any other elements we want to consider? We're the same Tier as them, so that's not a thing. Anything going on that would be an advantage or disadvantage?"

"Actually," Rachel says. "Yes. There's... well, there's something going on that makes things a bit tougher on the Sisters. Your characters don't know about this! But it definitely counts. Take another +1d."

"That's my kind of GM secret," Ryan says. "Heh. Alright, so we have 3d to roll then," Allison says. "I'll go ahead and do it." *Allison rolls and gets a 5.*

EVADING THE SENTRY

"A 5... okay, so that's a risky position for you to start. Well, that's pretty easy to describe. I know what's risky about breaking into the Sisters' house," Rachel says with a smirk. "So, you dock the gondola under a window in a bend in the

canal, then approach over a low rooftop until you're directly across from the second floor balcony of their townhouse, with the narrow waterway beneath you. Allison, I'm picturing Revka crouching on the rooftop there, peering at the dark windows of the house beyond."

"Yeah," says Allison. "I'm definitely on point here."

"Whispers first, that's what I always say," Dylan says.

"I assume you're being super sneaky and everything, yeah? You want to leap across the gap and silently break into the house," Rachel says.

"Yep," Ryan says. "But I have my pistols ready anyway. Just in case."

"Okay," Rachel says. "You're about to make your move across when suddenly your breath comes out like fog in the air, and the surface of the water below crackles with a spiderweb of frost."

"I knew it," Dylan says.

"A shimmering vapor coalesces above the water, striking sparks off a metal mooring post, forming the rough shape of what was once a person." Rachel says.

"Well, crap," says Ryan.

"Relax. It's just a ghost echo," Allison grins. "Some kind of spiritual guardian placed here with Dimmer Sisters magic, probably. We can get around it."

"I have electroplasmic ammo," Ryan says. "I can shoot it."

Dylan and Allison look at Ryan for a long moment.

"But guns are loud, so I won't do that." Ryan says.

"Do we have to confront this spirit?" Dylan asks. "Like, deal with its terrifying spookiness by resisting and all that?"

"Not yet," Rachel says. "It's just a vague shimmer of electroplasm right now, drifting in the ghost field around the house. It hasn't fully manifested and accosted you. If your engagement roll had been **1-3**, I probably would have put you in that spot. But that's definitely a risk here. What do you do?"

"I'm going to **lead a group action**," Allison says. "Let's **Prowl** across, and through the window, and leave this guardian spirit behind."

"Sounds good," says Dylan. "I have **2 Prowl**."

"I also have **2**," Allison says. "Sneakiest Whisper!"

"I have zero," says Ryan. "Oh well! Not my problem." He grins.

"Okay, it's a **risky Prowl roll**, group action," Rachel says. "I'm thinking **standard effect**. Aside from the danger of the ghost, the actual maneuver to leap across and get though the window is totally doable. Want a Devil's Bargain?"

"Nah, I think we're good. Let's roll 'em," Allison says. "I got a **4**."

"I got a **3**," Dylan says. They look at Ryan hopefully.

"I rolled a **6!**" Ryan says. "And a **2**. I have to take the lowest because I suck at Prowling. Bleeeah."

"And I take two stress from you jokers," Allison says. "Yeesh. Maybe I should have taken that Bargain after all."

"Well, you do it," Rachel says. "And the first complication will be a tick on the good ol' **'Alert' clock**. *She puts a 4-clock out on the table and ticks it once.* "The three of you leap over, ready to pick the lock on the balcony window... but it's unlocked. It swings opens at a touch and you're through the heavy curtains

and into the darkness beyond. You hear a faint moan from the spirit outside, as if it caught a glimpse of something, or perhaps a swirl in the plasmic ether."

"Wait, what did you mean by 'first complication'? There's another one, too?" Ryan says.

THE SPIRIT WITHIN

"Well, it *is* the Dimmer Sisters' legendary house," Rachel says. "As your eyes adjust to the darkness, you can see that you're in a music room, with shelves of sheet music along the walls, some chairs, a sofa, and the piano in the center. Then you hear the window close behind you on its own, and the lock clicks audibly in the latch. It's strangely cold in here."

"A haunted house. Of course it is!" Dylan says.

"The first few notes of an old lullaby come from the seemingly vacant piano as a softly glowing bluish vapor swirls into existence near it. Do you hear mournful singing? It seems so far away..."

"Okay, okay... holy crap you are freaking me out," Dylan says. "Let's get going and grab what we came for before more ghosts start popping out of the walls."

"Hmmm," says Allison. "We don't know exactly where the artifact is in the house... Dowler just said it was in here somewhere. Maybe I should **Compel** this ghost here to tell us where it is. Save us the trouble of searching every room. Turn their haunted security against them!"

"I like this plan," Ryan says.

"I like any plan that rolls sixes," Dylan says.

"Ha ha. I'm gonna **Attune** to the ghost and compel it to obey me," Allison says.

"Okay, that seems **desperate** to me," Rachel says.

"Desperate? It's just a normal ghost right?" Allison says.

"Yeah, but it's a ghost bound to the Dimmer Sisters, placed here under their compelling power. It's not a rogue spirit just wandering the city. I think it's **limited effect**, too," Rachel says.

"Wow, that's rough, but I get what you're saying. I guess I would want it to be hard for someone to take control of one of *my* servant ghosts—if I had any," Allison says. "Eh, I'm gonna do it anyway! I want that desperate roll xp."

"Okay then. Do you want a Devil's Bargain, or will you push yourself?" Rachel asks.

"Let's hear the Bargain," Allison says.

"Oh, I feel like there are so many options here," Rachel says, chuckling evilly. "I mean, the first thing that I think of is something kind of meta, like this is the ghost of your aunt Thea, that the Dimmers have captured for service."

"Oh, that's wild," Dylan says. "But I kind of like how it twists the story here. Makes it more personal."

"Yeah, that's interesting," Allison says. "I am from Duskwall, after all, and my family has pretty much all been Whispers, so they've been involved in stuff that the Sisters would have been involved in... maybe they were enemies in the past, and Thea was a casualty... this is neat!"

"Are we turning this into a rescue mission now?" Ryan asks. "Or I could just, you know, 'free her' real quick." *Ryan makes a "finger gun" motion.* "Electroplasmic ammo..."

"No shooting aunt Thea," Allison says. "I will totally take that Bargain and +1d. Can anyone assist me?"

"Actually, yeah," Ryan says. "And not by shooting! I'm a sharp-eyed Hound, yeah? Can I say that I spotted a cameo or piece of ribbon or some kind of memento that belonged to Thea—something that the Sisters use to bind her here? Maybe I grab it real quick and hand it to Revka."

"Yeah, that's good," Rachel says. "But if you're handling ghost-anchors, you're involved in this roll now. The consequences apply to you, too."

"Okay," Ryan says.

"Alright, so that gives me 4d for the **Attune roll. Desperate position, limited effect**. Here we go. I approach the piano, holding the cameo out in front of me. 'Aunt Thea?' I say. 'It's me, Revka. We need your help...'" Allison says. *She rolls the dice.*

Let's look at three possible outcomes of this roll: 1-3, 4/5, and a CRITICAL.

THE 1-3 RESULT

"Argh, I got a 3! On four dice. Such bad luck," Allison says.

"The ghost forms fully at the piano, banging crazily at the keys and wailing in a horrible crescendo," Rachel says. "It's aunt Thea all right, but she's lost in her ghostly madness and doesn't recognize you. She spins around, her ghostly dress billowing in the ether, eyes wild. Electroplasmic discharges spark in the air, through the cameo (which erupts with a blue fire), and into Revka and Cross. You both take **level 2 harm: 'Electrical Burns'**. I'm also gonna put **three ticks on the 'Alert' clock** as a 'serious complication.' That fills it up. So much for sneaking! From behind you, the window rattles and the ghost echo from the canal passes into the room, electrical sparks arcing from

it. You hear more wailing from out in the hallway. By the way, Dylan, now would be the time when you have to deal with terrifying ghost spookiness. What do you do?"

THE 4/5 RESULT

"Got a 5! So close yet again," Allison says.

"The ghost forms fully at the piano, finishing the lullaby with a flourish. She turns at your approach, her dress and hair drifting in the ether as if she's underwater. The soft glow of her ghostly eyes meets your gaze and a faint smile passes across her face. She seems to know what you want, but when she opens her mouth to speak, it's nothing but incomprehensible whispers."

"Ah, the summoning language of ghosts! We established this, like way back in the first session. Only the summoner can speak to them. I forgot all about that," Allison says.

"Yep! That's the limited effect here," Rachel says. "Thea can't tell you what you want to know, but she can take you to it if you follow her."

"Nice," Ryan says. "So we're good, then?"

"Hang on, skippy," Rachel says. "It was a partial success. I have a consequence to inflict here. And it was desperate, too... hmm, okay, let's get rough. I'm gonna put three ticks on the 'Alert' clock as a 'serious complication.' That fills it up. So much for sneaking! From behind you, the window rattles and the ghost echo from the canal passes into the room, electrical sparks arcing from it. You hear more wailing from out in the hallway. By the way, Dylan, now would be the time when you have to deal with terrifying ghost spookiness. What do you do?"

THE CRITICAL RESULT

"Two sixes! Suck it," Allison says.

"Wow, nice," Rachel says. "You do it and avoid consequences *and* get an additional benefit. Let's see... alright, first, the ghost forms fully at the piano, finishing the lullaby with a flourish. She turns at your approach, her dress and hair drifting in the ether as if she's underwater. The soft glow of her ghostly eyes meets your gaze and a faint smile passes across her face. It's definitely your long lost aunt Thea. I was going to say that normally you couldn't communicate very well because of the summoning language thing..."

"Oh yeah, right..." Allison says. "I'm gonna mark the load to have my **fine spirit mask** with me. Will that increase my effect here?"

"Yeah, definitely. Also, with the critical, let's say that your family connection boosts your effect, too. So you end up with **great effect!** She tells you that the Eye of Kotar is in one of the Sisters' bedrooms, just overhead on the next floor. She whispers, 'Beware the Eye! Seek not its power. Let it not taste your flesh. Doom... doom... doom...' before once again fading back to a faint glow in the air."

"I like her," Dylan says.

"Maybe we can come back for Thea some other time," Allison says. "Let's enjoy this success and get on up to the bedroom and grab that thing while we have the chance."

For the purpose of this example, let's imagine that the CRITICAL success result happened and carry on from there.

SNEAKING UPSTAIRS

"You're going to sneak upstairs now? More Prowling, I presume?" Rachel asks.

"Yep," Ryan says. "And another group action, I think, unless you want me to take my chances with zero dice on my own."

"Let's do it as a group. I'll lead this time, since I don't have any stress," Dylan says.

Everyone rolls a risky Prowl action, and the best result is a 4. Rachel advances the "Alert" clock by two ticks since they're deep inside the house and there are more guardian spirits to contend with. But Dylan wants to resist that consequence. He rolls Prowess and gets a 4. Frost takes 2 stress and the consequence is avoided.

"You slink upstairs in the darkness—the house has no lights on anywhere, that's a bit odd, yeah?—but anyway, you find the bedroom door and it's not locked. You hear a low humming sound coming from within, like a very low-pitched tuning fork. What do you do?"

SEIZING THE EYE

"We peek in," Dylan says.

"It's quite a scene in there," Rachel says. "It's a smallish bedroom with a four-poster bed, a desk, a wardrobe, a clothes trunk, a vanity, the usual stuff."

"The artifact is floating in the middle of the room: a bronze sculpture that looks like two up-swept wings holding a fist-sized, faceted stone between them. It's emitting a dull orange light, like a dying fire. Pulses come off the stone in waves, thrumming like the low tuning fork noise you heard. Arranged around the artifact are the Dimmer Sisters—or four of them anyway—their faces hidden behind veils, as always, dressed in long, black lace gowns. One of them is touching the artifact; she seems frozen in time, unblinking, her hand outstretched.

"The other three stand at the points of a triangle around the artifact. They're clearly working a spell, apparently attempting to extricate their sister from whatever the Eye is doing to her. They're concentrated fully on their task and don't react when you open the door."

"Well, that explains our mystery bonus die for the engagement roll. Looks like they're busy," Ryan says.

"Maybe we should come back when they're not indisposed," Dylan says. "Wouldn't want to be rude."

"I have an idea," Ryan says.

Allison and Dylan give him a look. "Do you want to shoot it?" Dylan asks.

"Yes," Ryan says. "But it's a good idea! Really. How about: I shoot the artifact out of the thrumming spell thing—using electroplasmic ammo, naturally—then Revka redirects the energy of... whatever this is... onto the Sisters so it whammies them."

"I actually like this idea," Allison says.

Dylan shakes his head. "Wow, okay, I can get on board with this madness. I guess it's up to me to grab the artifact, then. Without touching it, because obviously 'Let it not taste your flesh' is very solid advice. Ah, I got it: I'll say that Frost happens to have her **fine shadow cloak** with her. It's kinda-sorta magical... I can catch the artifact in that and wrap it up without touching it directly."

"Okay, yeah, let's do this. I actually have an escape idea, too," Ryan says. "But first, I'll take my shot as a **setup maneuver** for Revka. Boosted effect or better position?"

"Let me suggest boosted effect," Rachel says. "I think you'll have zero effect on this crazy artifact spell situation otherwise."

“Okay, boosted effect for Revka’s action,” Ryan says. “What’s my position for shooting the artifact out of the magical thingy?”

“Desperate as can be,” Rachel says. “Plus, I’m going to fill the ‘Alert’ clock since you’re making so much noise with the gun. This would be zero effect, normally, but your electroplasmic ammo will give you limited.”

“Electroplasmic ammo!!” Ryan crows. “Okay, I’m **Hunting** for the shot here, obviously... I have 2d.”

“I have a Devil’s Bargain for you,” Rachel says. “When you open your pouch to load the electroplasmic ammo, something strange is happening. All of the energy is leeching out of the shells, drawn into the house itself. There are only a few left with a charge—enough for this salvo of shots and then you’re totally out. You’ll have to acquire the asset again to have more.”

“Oh, that’s mean,” Ryan says. “I like it! It’s a deal. Now I have 3d.”

“I’m assisting you,” Allison says. “I start to Attune to the energy in the room and that weakens the magic a bit. I take another stress and you get +1d.”

“Okay, four dice it is.” *Ryan rolls and gets a 6!* “Boom! Nailed it.”

“Ha, it actually works,” Rachel says. “The artifact emits a shower of flaming sparks as the shot hits, and it goes spinning across the room—we watch in slow motion as Revka Attunes to the power and Frost runs to catch it.”

Allison rolls another desperate Attune action, pushing herself for 2 stress to get +1 effect, and she rolls a 5. Dylan rolls Prowl for Frost’s athletic run and leap to catch the artifact, and he gets a 6.

“Okay, Revka does it, hurling the residual magical energy at the Dimmer Sisters.

You would have had zero effect, but Ryan’s setup boosted you to limited, then you pushed yourself for standard effect. I’ll say that you blast them all around the room. They crash into the bed, knock over the vanity, smack into a wall, etc. You also suffer a consequence, though. It’s desperate, so let’s call it **level 3 harm: “Broken Ribs.”** You also get thrown across the room by the blast and you feel your ribs crack when you hit the desk.”

“Ow,” Allison says. “I’m already at 5 stress. I’m not resisting that.” *She writes the harm on her character sheet.*

“And Frost expertly catches the artifact in the shadow cloak, being very careful not to touch it directly. Oh, you’re soooo lucky that you got a 6,” Rachel says.

“I know!” Dylan says. “I was worried. Now what about this escape plan, Ryan?”

THE ESCAPE

“I want a flashback to the night before,” Ryan says. “Cross staked out the canals and Surveyed all of the times when regular boat trips happened. Like scheduled deliveries and stuff like that.”

“Okay,” Rachel says. “Call it a 2 stress flashback, to get the timings down exactly right. No need to roll for the Survey.”

“Okay, so, Cross knows precisely when a boat is going to pass below the windows of the Dimmer Sisters’ house, and he’s been listening out for the public clock chimes during this score, to time everything perfectly. As Frost catches the artifact, he rushes forward, grabs her and Revka by the arms and jumps them all out the window... onto the roof of a passing delivery boat. The End.”

“Wow,” Allison says. “I love it. I have to push myself to be able to move with my broken ribs, so that’s 2 more stress for me, but it’s worth it. What an exit.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ◆ How would a different engagement roll result change the score? On a **1-3**, Rachel mentioned that she would have confronted them with the guardian spirit right away. Does that seem right for an opening desperate position? What if they had gotten a **6** or a **CRITICAL**? How would you handle it?
- ◆ When Revka **ATTUNED** to compel aunt Thea's spirit, on the **1-3** and **4/5** results, how would things have gone if the PCs had resisted the consequences? Do you think the consequences were appropriate, given how powerful the Dimmer Sisters' house-magic is supposed to be? How would you increase or decrease the severity of consequences in a situation like this if the opponent was different?
- ◆ Allison used her fine spirit mask after the roll, to increase the effect of her result. Would you let a player do this, or do you think they should have to declare use of their items before they roll?
- ◆ The **CRITICAL** result on the **ATTUNE** roll really made things a lot simpler, didn't it? The crew could have been stuck battling angry ghosts in the first room of the house, but instead they just slipped on through to the location of the artifact, making the score a lot faster to complete. What do you think of short-and-sweet scores like this?
- ◆ What did you think of Ryan's "shoot things and jump out the window" maneuver at the end? Is that the kind of action-adventure tone that you want to promote when you play the game, or would you like something more gritty and closer to real-life? Do you think 2 stress is a fair cost for that flashback? Should he have rolled **SURVEY** to see how good his information was, or was it okay to gloss over that bit?

CHAPTER 5

DOWNTIME

After the crew finishes a score (succeed or fail), they take time to recover, regroup, and prepare for the next operation. This phase of the game is called **downtime**.

Downtime fulfills two purposes in the game:

- ◆ First, it's a break for the players. During the action of the score, the PCs are always under threat, charging from obstacle to obstacle in a high-energy sequence. Downtime gives them a reprieve so they can catch their breath and relax a bit—focus on lower-energy, quieter elements of the game, as well as explore personal aspects of their characters.
- ◆ Second, the shift into a new phase of the game signals a shift in which mechanics are needed. There are special rules that are only used during the downtime phase, so they're kept "out of the way" during the other parts of play. When we shift into downtime, we take out a different toolbox and resolve downtime on its own terms, then shift back into the more action-focused phases of the game afterwards.

Downtime is divided into four parts, which are resolved in order:

- 1. PAYOFF.** The crew receives their rewards from a successfully completed score.
- 2. HEAT.** The crew accumulates suspicion and attention from the law and the powers-that-be in the city as a result of their last score.
- 3. ENTANGLEMENTS.** The crew faces trouble from the rival factions, the law, and the haunted city itself.
- 4. DOWNTIME ACTIVITIES.** The PCs indulge their vices to remove stress, work on long-term projects, recover from injuries, etc.

After the downtime activities are resolved, the game returns to free play, and the group can move toward their next score.

PAYOUT

After a score, the PCs take stock of their income from the operation. A successful score generates both **REP** and **COIN**.

The crew earns 2 **REP** per score by default. If the target of the score is higher Tier than you, take **+1 REP per Tier higher**. If the target of the score is lower Tier, you get **-1 REP per Tier lower** (minimum zero).

If your crew is Tier I and you pull off a successful score against a Tier III target, you earn 4 REP (2 REP, +2 REP for a target two tiers above you). If your crew is Tier III and you complete a score against a Tier I target, you earn 0 REP (2 rep, -2 rep for the lower Tier target).

If you keep the operation completely quiet so no one knows about it, you earn zero **REP**. Mark the rep on the **REP** tracker on the crew sheet.

The crew earns **COIN** based on the nature of the operation and/or any loot they seized:

- ◆ **2 COIN:** A minor job; several full purses.
- ◆ **4 COIN:** A small job; a strongbox.
- ◆ **6 COIN:** A standard score; decent loot.
- ◆ **8 COIN:** A big score; serious loot.
- ◆ **10+ COIN:** A major score; impressive loot.

Record the **COIN** on the crew sheet, or divvy it up among the crew members as you see fit.

Most districts have crime bosses that expect smaller crews to pay a tithe from their scores. Ask the GM if there's a boss that you should be paying. **Subtract COIN equal to your crew Tier +1** when you pay a tithe to a boss or larger organization. *If you're supposed to be paying off a boss, but you don't, start a clock for that boss's patience running out. Tick it whenever you don't pay. Every time it fills up, lose 1 faction status with them.*

You can set the scene and play out a meeting with a client or patron who's paying the crew if there's something interesting to explore there. If not, just gloss over it and move on to the next part of downtime.

GM, definitely don't screw around with the players when it comes to the payoff. Don't say that the client lied and there's no reward. Or that the meeting for the payment is actually a trap, or whatever. These types of things are staples of crime fiction, but in *Blades*, the PCs have enough problems coming at them from every direction already. When it comes to getting paid, just give them what they earned.

HEAT

Doskvol is a city of prying eyes and informants (both living and ghostly). Anything you do might be witnessed, and there's always evidence left behind. To reflect this, your crew acquires **HEAT** as they commit crimes. After a score or conflict with an opponent, your crew takes **HEAT** according to the nature of the operation:

- ◆ **0 HEAT**: Smooth & quiet; low exposure.
- ◆ **2 HEAT**: Contained; standard exposure.
- ◆ **4 HEAT**: Loud & chaotic; high exposure.
- ◆ **6 HEAT**: Wild; devastating exposure.

Add +1 **HEAT** for a high-profile or well-connected target. Add +1 **HEAT** if the situation happened on hostile turf. Add +1 **HEAT** if you're at war with another faction. Add +2 **HEAT** if killing was involved (whether the crew did the killing or not—bodies draw attention).

You mark **HEAT** levels on the **HEAT** tracker on the crew sheet.



Marking 2 HEAT on the HEAT tracker. When the tracker is full, mark a WANTED LEVEL and clear all the HEAT.



When your **HEAT** level reaches 9, you gain a **WANTED LEVEL** and clear your **HEAT** (any excess **HEAT** “rolls over,” so if your **HEAT** was 7 and you took 4 **HEAT**, you’d reset with 2 **HEAT** marked).

The higher your **WANTED LEVEL**, the more serious the response when law enforcement takes action against you (they’ll send a force of higher **quality** and **scale**).

Also, your **WANTED LEVEL** contributes to the severity of the **entanglements** that your crew faces after a score. See page 150 for details.

INCARCERATION

The only way to reduce your crew’s **WANTED LEVEL** is through incarceration. When one of your crew members, friends, contacts—or a framed enemy—is convicted and incarcerated for crimes associated with your crew, your **WANTED LEVEL** is reduced by 1 and you clear your **HEAT**.

Incarceration may result from investigation and arrest by the Bluecoats, or because someone turns themselves in and takes the fall for the crew’s crimes.

The severity of the prison sentence depends on your **WANTED LEVEL**:

- ◆ **WANTED LEVEL 4:** Life or execution.
- ◆ **WANTED LEVEL 3:** A year or two.
- ◆ **WANTED LEVEL 2:** Several months.
- ◆ **WANTED LEVEL 1:** A month or two.
- ◆ **WANTED LEVEL 0:** A few weeks. Or, the Bluecoats give you a beating to teach you a lesson (suffer level 3 harm, no resistance roll allowed—they keep going until you’re injured).

Incarceration is dehumanizing and brutal. The renown of your crew is your only real defense inside. When you serve your time, make an **incarceration roll** using your crew’s Tier as the dice pool.

INCARCERATION ROLL



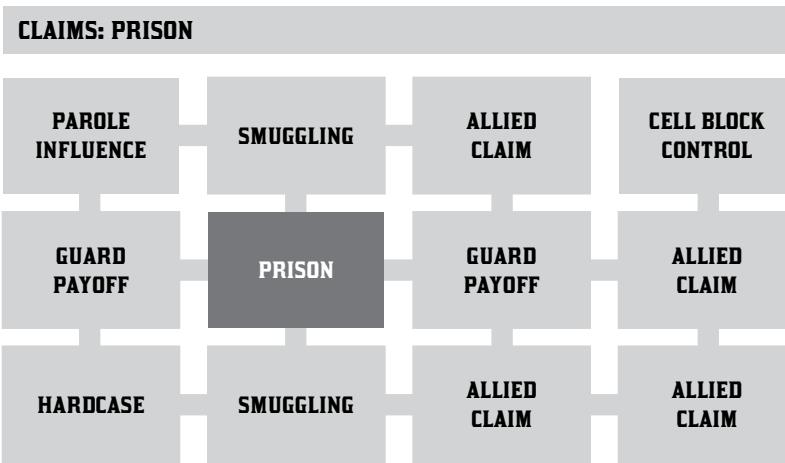
1d for each PC Tier level.

CRITICAL: You make a name for yourself inside. You gain +3 **REP** for your crew, **1 prison claim** and **+1 faction status** with a faction that you assisted while you served your time.

6: You do your time well. Your crew gains **1 prison claim** and **+1 faction status** with a faction that you assisted while you served your time.

4/5: You keep your head down and do your time without incident.

1-3: It’s horrific. You suffer a level of **TRAUMA** from the experience.



PRISON CLAIMS

ALLIED CLAIM

One of your allies on the inside arranges for their faction to grant you a boon. Take a claim for your crew from a different crew type. You can't take turf with this claim.

CELL BLOCK CONTROL

Your crew has a cell block under their total control—guards and all. You never take **TRAUMA** from incarceration.

GUARD PAYOFF

You claim several Ironhook prison guards on your payroll. Take +1d to your Tier roll when a member of your crew is incarcerated.

HARDCASE

Your reputation as a tough inmate bolsters your crew's image in Duskwall. When your crew advances Tier, it costs 2 fewer **COINS** than it normally would.

PAROLE INFLUENCE

Political pressures of various sorts can be applied to the magistrates and warden who oversee sentences for crimes. With this claim, you're always able to arrange for a shorter prison stay—as if your **WANTED LEVEL** was 1 lower. So, if your **WANTED LEVEL** was 3 when you went in, you'd spend only several months behind bars (equivalent to level 2) instead of a full year.

SMUGGLING

You arrange smuggling channels inside. You have **+2 load** while incarcerated, (starting from zero as a prisoner). If you take this claim twice, you'll have 4 load while you're serving time in Ironhook. Also, you may choose to carry **COIN** in place of load for purposes of bribes or acquiring assets while in prison. You may reset the items in your prison loadout whenever your crew has downtime.

ENTANGLEMENTS

Your scoundrels and crew didn't just spring into existence tonight. You have a complex history of favors, commitments, debts, and promises that got you where you are today. To reflect this, after each score, you roll dice to find out which **entanglement** comes calling. An entanglement might be a rival crew looking to throw their weight around (and demand some **COIN**), an Investigator of the City Watch making a case against your crew (but ready for a bribe), or even the attention of a vengeful ghost.

After payoff and **HEAT** are determined, the GM generates an entanglement for the crew using the lists below. Find the column that matches the crew's current **HEAT** level. Then roll a number of dice equal to their **WANTED LEVEL**, and use the result of the roll to select which sort of entanglement manifests. *If WANTED LEVEL is zero, roll two dice and keep the lowest result.*

| HEAT 0-3 | | HEAT 4/5 | | HEAT 6+ | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1-3 | Gang Trouble or The Usual Suspects | 1-3 | Gang Trouble or Questioning | 1-3 | Flipped or Interrogation |
| 4/5 | Rivals or Unquiet Dead | 4/5 | Reprisals or Unquiet Dead | 4/5 | Demonic Notice or Show of Force |
| 6 | Cooperation | 6 | Show of Force | 6 | Arrest |

Some groups like to roll entanglements “in the open” so everyone knows what’s about to hit them. Other groups prefer the roll to be secret, so the entanglement is a surprise when it happens. Either way is fine.

Bring the entanglement into play immediately, or hold off until an appropriate moment. For example, if you get the *Interrogation* entanglement, you might wait until a PC indulges their vice, then say the Bluecoats picked them up when they were distracted by its pleasures.

Entanglements manifest fully before the PCs have a chance to avoid them. When an entanglement comes into play, describe the situation after the entanglement has manifested. The PCs deal with it from that point—they can’t intercept it and defuse it before it happens. The purpose of the mechanic is to abstract a lot of the complex stuff happening in the backgrounds of the characters’ lives in order to generate trouble for them. Entanglements are the cost of doing business in the underworld—a good crew learns to roll with the punches and pick their battles.

The entanglements are detailed on the following pages. Each has a list of potential ways for the PCs to be rid of it. If you want the entanglements to be a momentary problem for the crew, stick to the suggested methods to resolve them, and move on to the next part of downtime. If you want to dive in and explore the entanglement in detail, set the scene and play out the event in full, following the actions and consequences where they lead.

ARREST

An Inspector presents a case file of evidence to a magistrate, to begin prosecution of your crew. The Bluecoats send a detail to arrest you (a gang at least equal in scale to your **WANTED LEVEL**). Pay them off with **COIN** equal to your **WANTED LEVEL** +3, hand someone over for arrest (this clears your **HEAT**), or try to evade capture.

A truncheon bangs on the shutters of the window. “Alright then! Come on out and let’s go quietly now!” It sounds like Sergeant Klellan. When you peek out, you see a detail of about twenty Bluecoats, all geared up for a fight. Klellan mumbles under his breath, so only you inside can hear: “Or perhaps I have the wrong address?” He clears his throat and waits for some coin to appear.

COOPERATION

A +3 status faction asks you for a favor. Agree to do it, or forfeit 1 **REP** per Tier of the friendly faction, or lose 1 **status** with them. If you don’t have a +3 faction status, you avoid entanglements right now.

DEMONIC NOTICE

A demon approaches the crew with a dark offer. Accept their bargain, hide until it loses interest (forfeit 3 **REP**), or deal with it another way.

FLIPPED

One of the PCs’ rivals arranges for one of your contacts, patrons, clients, or a group of your customers to switch allegiances due to the **HEAT** on you. They’re loyal to another faction now.

You hear word on the street that Laroze is working for the Billhooks now. He was seen talking to Flint the other day... that bastard is probably behind it. Remove Laroze as a contact until you can get that sorted out.

GANG TROUBLE

One of your gangs (or other cohorts) causes trouble due to their flaw(s). You can lose face (forfeit **REP** equal to your Tier +1), make an example of one of the gang members, or face reprisals from the wronged party.

After the PCs succeed at their assault and wipe out the Red Sashes, their savage gang takes things too far. They start attacking any Iruvians they see in Crow’s Foot, and during one brawl, they horribly maim a citizen. Everyone’s talking about it. Is this how the Bloodletters run their crew? Arcy decides to handle matters by making an example of one of the gang. She takes them back to the tavern where the incident happened, and smashes the offending thug’s face into the bar, giving her a horrific scar.

The GM thinks this treatment warrants a tick on a progress clock they created in an earlier session when Arcy treated the gang roughly. The clock is called “The Gang Fights Back.” It was already at three out of four segments, so now it’s full! Looks like Arcy’s rough treatment of the savage gang is gonna come back to bite her.

INTERROGATION

The Bluecoats round up one of the PCs to question them about the crew's crimes. *How did they manage to capture you?* Either pay them off with 3 **COIN**, or they beat you up (**level 2 harm**) and you tell them what they want to know (+3 **HEAT**). You can **resist** each of those consequences separately.

Some players really hate it when their character gets captured! Just tell them that this is completely normal for a scoundrel of the underworld. You spend time in and out of jail, getting questioned and harassed by the law. It's not the end of the world. But now that you're here in the interrogation room, what kind of person are you? Do you talk? Do you stand up to them? Do you make a deal?

QUESTIONING

The Bluecoats grab an NPC member of your crew or one of the crew's contacts, to question them about your crimes. *Who do the Bluecoats think is most vulnerable?* Make a **fortune roll** to see how much they talk (**1-3: +2 HEAT, 4/5: +1 HEAT**), or pay the Bluecoats off with 2 **COIN**.

Roll 2d for a normal person to see how well they keep quiet. If they're an experienced underworld type or some kind of tough, give them 3d or 4d instead. If they're soft or if they have some loyalty to the law, give them 1d or 0d.

REPRISALS

An enemy faction makes a move against you (or a friend, contact, or vice purveyor). Pay them (1 **REP** and 1 **COIN**) per Tier of the enemy as an apology, allow them to mess with you or yours, or fight back and show them who's boss.

RIVALS

A neutral faction throws their weight around. They threaten you, a friend, a contact, or one of your vice purveyors. Forfeit (1 **REP** or 1 **COIN**) per Tier of the rival, or stand up to them and lose 1 **status** with them.

SHOW OF FORCE

A faction with whom you have a negative status makes a play against your holdings. Give them 1 **claim** or go to war (drop to -3 status). If you have no claims, **lose 1 hold** instead.

UNQUIET DEAD

A rogue spirit is drawn to you—perhaps it's a past victim? Acquire the services of a Whisper or Rail Jack to attempt to destroy or banish it, or deal with it yourself.

*They can hire an NPC by using the **acquire asset** downtime activity (see page 153). Roll the NPC's quality level as a fortune roll to see how well they deal with the spirit.*

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

The Bluecoats grab someone in the periphery of your crew. One player volunteers a friend or vice purveyor as the person most likely to be taken. Make a **fortune roll** to find out if they resist questioning (**1-3: +2 HEAT, 4/5: level 2 harm**), or pay the Bluecoats off with 1 **COIN**.

DOWNTIME ACTIVITIES

Between scores, your crew spends time at their liberty, attending to personal needs and side projects. These are called **downtime activities** (see the list at right). During a downtime phase, each PC has time for **two downtime activities**. *When you're at war, each PC has time for only one.*

You may choose the same activity more than once. You can only attempt actions that you're in a position to accomplish. If an activity is contingent on another action, resolve that action first.

A PC can make time for more than two activities, at a cost. **Each additional activity from the list costs 1 COIN or 1 REP.** This reflects the time and resulting resource drain while you're “off the clock” and not earning from a score. When you complete a new score, you reset and get two “free” activities again.

Activities on the downtime list are limited; normal actions are not. During downtime, you can still go places, do things, make action rolls, gather information, talk with other characters, etc. In other words, only activities that are *on the list* are limited.

For any downtime activity, take **+1d** to the roll if a **friend** or **contact** helps you. After the roll, you may spend **COIN** after the roll to improve the result level. **Increase the result level by one for each COIN spent.** So, a **1-3** result becomes a **4** or a **5**, a **4/5** result becomes a **6**, and a **6** becomes a **CRITICAL**.

GM: If a player can't decide which downtime activity to pick, offer them a long-term project idea. You know what the player is interested in and what they like. Suggest a project that will head in a fun direction for them.

“Remember how you had that weird vision at the altar to the forgotten gods? Yeah, do you want to get to the bottom of that? Okay, start a long-term project—six segments—called... ‘Weird God Vibes.’ What do you do to work on that?”

ACQUIRE ASSET

Gain temporary use of an **asset**:

- ◆ One special **item** or set of common items (enough for a gang of your Tier scale).
- ◆ A **cohort** (an expert or gang).
- ◆ A **vehicle**.
- ◆ A **service**. Transport from a smuggler or driver, use of a warehouse for temporary storage, legal representation, etc.

“Temporary use” constitutes one significant period of usage that makes sense for the asset—typically the duration of one score. An asset may also be acquired for “standby” use in the future. You might hire a gang to guard your lair, for example, and they’ll stick around until after the first serious battle, or until a week goes by and they lose interest.

| |
|--------------------------|
| ACQUIRE ASSET |
| LONG-TERM PROJECT |
| RECOVER |
| REDUCE HEAT |
| TRAIN |
| INDULGE VICE |

To acquire the asset, roll the crew's Tier. The result indicates the **quality** of the asset you get, using the crew's Tier as the base. **1-3:** Tier -1, **4/5:** Tier, **6:** Tier +1, **CRITICAL:** Tier +2. You can spend **COIN** to raise the result of this roll beyond **CRITICAL** by spending **2 COIN** per additional Tier level added.

The GM may set a **minimum quality** level that must be achieved to acquire a particular asset. For example, if you want to get a set of Spirit Warden uniforms and masks, you'd need to acquire a Tier IV asset. A lower result won't do.

If you acquire the same asset again, you get **+1d** to your roll. If you continue to re-acquire an asset every time it's used, you can effectively rent it indefinitely.

Alchemicals, poisons, bombs, and dangerous gadgets are highly restricted in Doskvol. When you acquire one of these items (rather than crafting it yourself), you take **+2 HEAT**. (For more about **Crafting**, see page 224).

If you want to acquire an asset permanently, you can either gain it as a crew upgrade (using the rules for **advancement**, see page 48) or work on it as a **long-term project** to set up a permanent acquisition.

*Zamira the Whisper is a duelist in the Iruvian style, and would like a **fine sword** to add to her permanent items. Her player starts a long-term project: "Get My Family Sword Back from the Pawn Shop." The GM says this is an 8-clock (she can work on it by **CONSORTING** or **SWAYING** the pawn shop owner or maybe rolling her lifestyle level to represent small payments).*

LONG-TERM PROJECT

When you work on a long-term project (either a brand new one, or an already existing one), describe what your character does to advance the project clock, and roll one of your actions. Mark segments on the clock according to your result: **1-3:** one segment, **4/5:** two segments, **6:** three segments, **CRITICAL:** five segments.

A long-term project can cover a wide variety of activities, like doing research into an arcane ritual, investigating a mystery, establishing someone's trust, courting a new friend or contact, changing your character's vice, and so on.

Based on the goal of the project, the GM will tell you the clock(s) to create and suggest a method by which you might make progress.

*On the last score, Oskarr disintegrated Silver's body with electropasm and destroyed her spirit. But now her ghost is haunting him! How is this possible? This is beyond the scope of a simple gather information roll, so Oskarr starts a long-term project to investigate this mystery. The GM says it will be an 8-segment clock. Oskarr spends a downtime activity in the occult library at his lair, looking for any clues. The player rolls Oskarr's **STUDY** action and gets a 4: two segments of progress on the clock.*

In order to work on a project, you might first have to achieve the means to pursue it—which can be a project in itself. For example, you might want to make friends with a member of the City Council, but you have no connection to them. You could first work on a project to **CONSORT** in their circles so you have the opportunity to meet one of them. Once that's accomplished, you could start a new project to form a friendly relationship.

RECOVER

When you recover, you seek treatment and heal your harm. You might visit a physicker who can stitch your wounds and soothe your mind with anatomical science or a witch who specializes in healing charms and restorative alchemy. If you don't have a contact or fellow PC who can provide treatment, you can use the **acquire asset** activity to gain access to a healer, who can provide service for the whole crew.

Recovery is like a long-term project. Your healer rolls (**TINKER** for a PC with the **PHYSICKER** special ability or the **quality** level of an NPC) and then you mark a number of segments on your **healing clock**. **1-3**: one segment, **4/5**: two segments, **6**: three segments, **CRITICAL**: five segments.

When you fill your healing clock, reduce each instance of harm on your sheet by one level, then clear the clock. If you have more segments to mark, they "roll over"



Cross has two injuries: a level 3 "Shattered Right Leg" and level 1 "Battered." During downtime, he gets treatment from Quellyn, a witch friend of the crew's Whisper. Quellyn is a competent healer, so the GM says quality 2 makes sense. The player rolls 2d to recover and gets a 6: three segments on the healing clock. He decides to spend 1 COIN to improve the result to a CRITICAL to get five segments instead. Four segments fill the clock—all of Cross's harm is reduced by one level, then he clears the clock and marks one more segment. His level 3 harm "Shattered Right Leg" is reduced to level 2 harm. His level 1 harm "Battered" is reduced to zero and goes away. Cross is left with one injury on his sheet: level 2 "Broken Leg."

You may heal yourself if you have the **PHYSICKER** special ability, but you take 2 stress when you do so. You can also choose to simply tough it out and attempt to heal without any treatment—in this case, take 1 stress and roll 0d.

Note that it's the recovering character that takes the recovery action. Healing someone else does not cost a downtime activity for the healer.

Whenever you suffer new harm, clear any ticks on your healing clock.

REDUCE HEAT

Say what your character does to reduce the **HEAT** level of the crew and make an action roll. Maybe you **CONSORT** with your friend who's a Bluecoat and she arranges for a few incriminating Watch reports to disappear. Or maybe you **COMMAND** the fear of the local citizens so they're afraid to snitch.

Reduce **HEAT** according to the result: **1-3**: one, **4/5**: two, **6**: three, **CRITICAL**: five.

TRAIN

When you spend time in training, **mark 1 xp** on the xp track for an **attribute** or **playbook** advancement. If you have the appropriate crew Training upgrade unlocked, mark **+1 xp** (2 total). See **Crew Upgrades**, page 95. *You can train a given xp track only once per downtime.*

INDULGE VICE

Visit your **vice purveyor** to relieve **stress**. See the next section for details.

VICE

STRESS RELIEF

The scoundrels of Doskvol are a special lot. They defy the powers-that-be and dare to prey on those who are considered to be their betters. They push themselves further than ordinary people are willing to go. But this comes at a cost. A scoundrel's life is one of constant stress. Inevitably, each turns to the seduction of a **vice** in order to cope.

A scoundrel's vice is their obsession. But with this indulgence comes relief from stress and the ability to once again face the overwhelming challenge of their daring life.

INDULGING YOUR VICE

When you indulge your vice, you clear some stress from your character's stress track. Say how your character indulges their vice, including which **purveyor of vice** they use to satisfy their needs (see page 299). This indulgence takes time, so it can only be done when the crew has **downtime**. Alternately, you may choose to release your character to be "lost in their vice" during a game session, allowing them to indulge off-camera while you play a different PC. A gang member, friend, or contact of the crew might be created as an alternate character to play, thus fleshing out the landscape of PCs.

You roll to find out how much stress relief your character receives. A vice roll is like a resistance roll in reverse—rather than gaining stress levels, you clear stress levels. The effectiveness of your indulgence depends upon your character's worst attribute rating. It's their weakest quality (**INSIGHT**, **PROWESS**, or **RESOLVE**) that is most in thrall to vice.

Make an **attribute roll** using your character's lowest attribute rating (if there's a tie, that's fine—simply use that rating). **Clear stress equal to the highest die result.**

OVERINDULGENCE

If your vice roll clears more stress levels than you had marked, you **overindulge**. A vice is not a reliable, controllable habit. It's a risk—and one that can drive your character to act against their own best interests.

When you overindulge, you make a bad call because of your vice—in acquiring it or while under its influence. To bring the effect of this bad decision into the game, select an overindulgence from the list:

- ◆ **ATTRACT TROUBLE.** Select or roll an additional **entanglement**.
- ◆ **BRAG** about your exploits. +2 **HEAT**.
- ◆ **LOST.** Your character vanishes for a few weeks. Play a different character until this one returns from their bender. When your character returns, they've also healed any harm they had.
- ◆ **TAPPED.** Your current purveyor cuts you off. Find a new source for your vice.

VICE ROLL

- ➊ Roll dice equal to your **LOWEST ATTRIBUTE** rating.

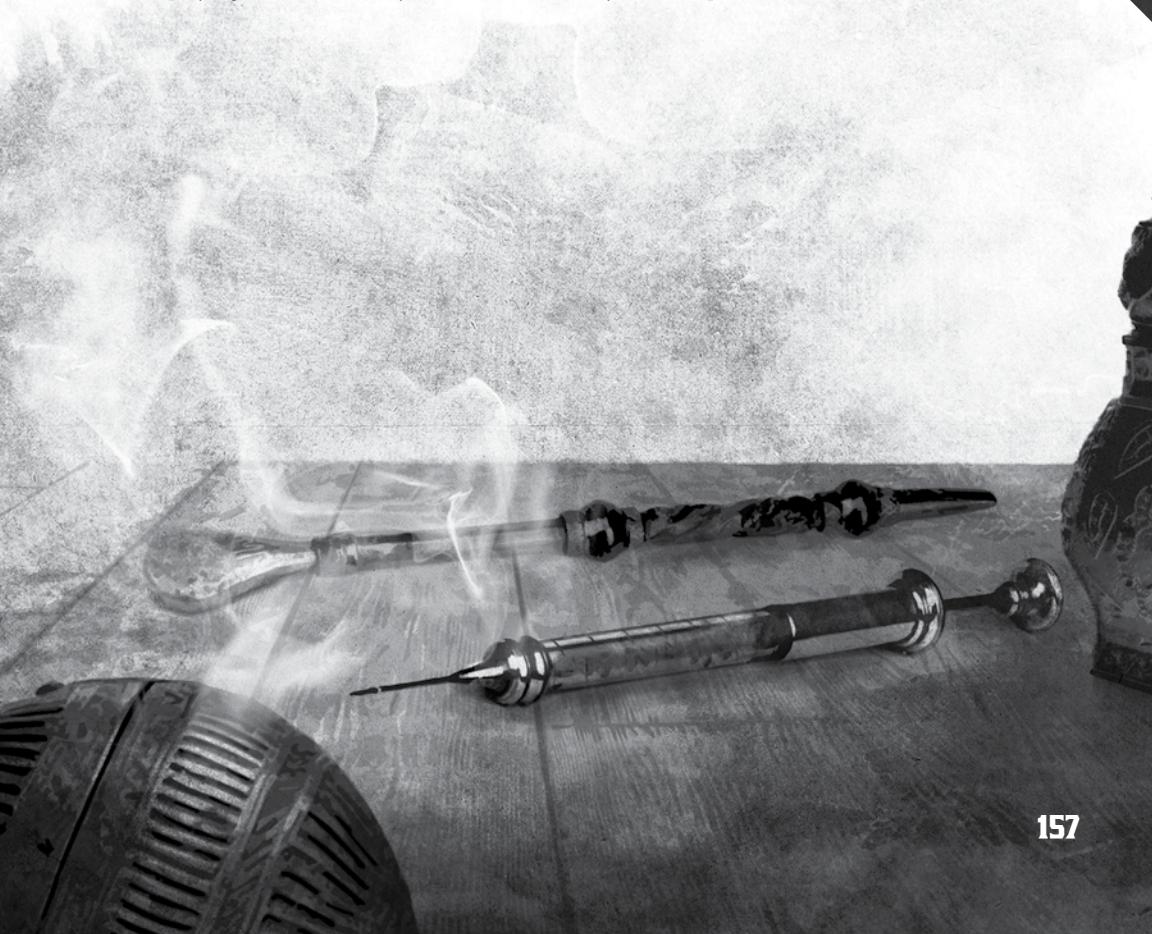
Clear stress equal to your highest die result. If you clear more stress levels than you had marked, you **overindulge**. If you do not or cannot indulge your vice during downtime, you take stress equal to your **TRAUMA**.

IGNORING YOUR VICE

If you do not or cannot indulge your vice during a downtime phase, you take stress equal to your **TRAUMA**. If you don't have any **TRAUMA**, you're free to ignore your vice. It doesn't have a hold over you (yet).

ROLEPLAYING & XP

Along with your character's heritage and background, their vice tells us what kind of person they are. This obsession impacts their motivations, goals, and behavior. When you ponder what your character might do or say next, you can always consider their vice to help you think of something. As an added benefit, by playing to the nature of your character's vice, you earn xp at the end of the session.



DOWNTIME ACTIVITIES IN PLAY

Oskarr wants to discover how Silver's ghost survived disintegration by electroplasma. He works on a long-term project called "Learn Ghost Secrets from Silver"—an 8-segment clock. The result of the ATTUNE roll is a 6! Oskarr ticks three segments on the clock.

Morlan wants to reduce HEAT on his crew. He grabs some thugs from the gang and makes the rounds, roughing up shopkeepers, smashing windows, and generally terrorizing everyone into submission. The result of the WRECK roll is a CRITICAL! The crew's HEAT drops by five levels as the local citizens decide to forget everything they've seen recently.

Canter needs some very special ammunition in order to hunt the demon Setarra. He acquires an asset from the Dimmer Sisters (who happen to be friendly with his crew right now): bullets made from quicksilver and deathlands ash, consecrated to the forgotten god of the Unbroken Sun, ancient enemy of all demons. The Tier roll is a 4: only standard quality, which isn't enough for this rare item. Adam (Canter's player) spends 2 COIN to bump up the result to a CRITICAL: exquisite quality. Canter gets his bullets—powerful enough to seriously harm the infernal creature.

NPC & FACTION DOWNTIME

NPCs and factions also do things when the PCs have downtime. The GM advances their project clocks and chooses a downtime maneuver or two for each faction that they're interested in at the moment. Choose any maneuver that makes sense for that faction to pursue. For example:

- ◆ Seize a claim or increase hold, make an enemy vulnerable, or reduce the hold of a vulnerable enemy.
- ◆ Gather information on the PCs (may be opposed by a PC roll) or another subject.
- ◆ Achieve a short-term goal they're in position to accomplish.
- ◆ Acquire a new asset.
- ◆ Call in a favor from another faction.
- ◆ Employ political pressure or threats to force someone's hand.

GM: Choose downtime maneuvers and advance clocks for the factions you're interested in right now. Don't worry about the rest. Later, when you turn your attention to a faction you've ignored for a while, go ahead and give them several downtime phases and project clock ticks to "catch up" to current events.

If you're not sure how far to progress a faction's clock, make a fortune roll using their Tier as the base trait, modified up or down depending on the opposition or circumstances. Tick 1 segment for a 1-3 result, 2 segments for a 4/5 result, 3 segments for a 6 result, or 5 segments for a CRITICAL result.

When factions do things that are known in the criminal underworld, tell the players about it through one of their friends or contacts or vice purveyors. These rumors and bits of gossip can lead to future scores and opportunities for the PCs.

DOWNTIME ACTIVITIES SUMMARY

Add +1d to your roll if a **friend** or **contact** helps with your downtime activity.

ACQUIRE ASSET

Roll the crew's **Tier**. The result indicates the **quality** of the asset:

- ◆ **Critical:** Tier +2.
- ◆ **6:** Tier +1.
- ◆ **4/5:** Tier.
- ◆ **1-3:** Tier -1.

Some items require a minimum quality result to acquire. To raise the result beyond critical, you may spend 2 COIN per +1 Tier bonus.

RECOVER

Get **treatment** to tick your **healing clock** (like a long-term project). *When you fill a clock, each harm is reduced by one level.*

REDUCE HEAT

Say how you reduce **HEAT** on the crew and roll your action. Reduce **HEAT** according to the result level:

- ◆ **Critical:** Clear five **HEAT**.
- ◆ **6:** Clear three **HEAT**.
- ◆ **4/5:** Clear two **HEAT**.
- ◆ **1-3:** Clear one **HEAT**.

LONG-TERM PROJECT

Work on a **long term project**, if you have the means.

Mark segments on the clock according to your result:

- ◆ **Critical:** Five ticks.
- ◆ **6:** Three ticks.
- ◆ **4/5:** Two ticks.
- ◆ **1-3:** One tick.

TRAIN

Mark 1 xp (in an attribute or your playbook). Add **+1 xp** if you have the appropriate crew upgrade. *You may train a given xp track once per downtime.*

VICE

Visit your **vice purveyor** to relieve stress. Roll dice equal to your **lowest attribute**. Clear stress equal to your highest die result. If you clear more stress levels than you had marked, you **overindulge** (see below). *If you do not or cannot indulge your vice during downtime, you take stress equal to your **TRAUMA**.*

OVERINDULGE: You made a bad call because of your vice—in acquiring it or while under its influence. What did you do?

- ◆ **ATTRACT TROUBLE:** *Maybe an enemy has tracked you to your vice purveyor and you let your guard down.* Select or roll an additional **entanglement**.
- ◆ **BRAG:** *Maybe you brag about your exploits.* The crew takes **+2 HEAT**.
- ◆ **LOST:** Play a different character until this one returns from their bender.
- ◆ **TAPPED:** Your current purveyor cuts you off. Find a new source for the indulgence of your vice.

You think I wander down here to watch the leviathan hunters come in, hey? To see them nose up to the docks, all thrumming with their catch, sending out the ripples, holding tight to that blood trying to force its way back into the sea? Hah. No. No, I'd sooner watch a seagull feed her young by yakking food into their outstretched beaks.

No, I come down here because I know summat that these crews don't know, that you don't know. Nobody knows it. Death is a song to the leviathans. They sing it, they listen for it. If you know what you're doing, you can invite them in close. Invite them up out of the water, even, if you have a pretty enough song.

That's how my people used to do it. Human sacrifice, that's right. By the dozen. Blood flowing in runnels to the ink-black water, plumes swelling into it like demon artwork, scenting the surf. You say the right words, sing the right songs, use the right knife. Get it right, and all that screaming and begging and weeping turns into seduction, into power. You snare the curiosity under those tons of water, and it glides in close. It wants that suffering and death, like you want that barmaid's hips. It wants to enter, it wants that warmth—it lusts for it.

So the greedy demon would haul itself up onto the land, panting through the surf, churning it to fog. Then my people would attack. We took cross-cut saws, hatchets, blades sharpened like you've never seen. We attacked those demons where they interrupted the skyline with their breathing evil and their wood-hard flesh, their shiny deep armor. We used drag harnesses to pull limbs away, and cut at their connections.

I remember it like it was yesterday. That living blood coats you like fury, squirming on the skin, invasive and cold and screaming. Your heart changes. Your lungs freeze. But you don't slow what you're doing, there's too much energy to hold still, and you're in the clouding fog of undeath and raging life.

You cut at the leviathan for tentacles, leg stumps, rudder fins all stubby and scarred. Whatever would stick out, different for each. Then you've got the leather, and the bone, and the meat, the rune-stitched sinew. Keep it all, use it to make your own music in the dark, to print the Back of the Mirror where the leviathan weakens its dividing surface.

See, I never saw a leviathan up close. I never had to. My great grandfather was a limmer, a sacrificing warlock harvester. What happened to him soaked into his bones and blood, into his past and future, and poisoned all of it. I can see the Back of the Mirror because of what he did, and what it did to him.

My mind's eye tells me the song this damned and forsaken city sings. I know there will come a time when one of those leviathans they hunt will follow them home. Then will be a beaching like this city has never known, those ships torn apart, that full load of blood crawling through everything.

That will be the end of my lineage, and my family has known it for four centuries. But today? These ships? No. Not today.

Maybe next time.

CHAPTER 6

HOW TO PLAY

FICTION-FIRST GAMING

Fiction-first is a bit of jargon to describe the process of playing a roleplaying game, as opposed to other sorts of games you might be used to.

In a standard board game, for example, when you take your turn, you choose a move from one of the mechanics of the game, and then use that game system to resolve what happens. You might say, “I’m going to pay two stone to build a second fort on my home tile.” We could call this process “mechanics-first.” What you do on your turn is pick a mechanic to engage, then resolve that mechanic. Your choices are constrained by the mechanics of the game. You might color it in with some fictional trappings, like, “The brave citizens of Baronia heed the call to war and build a stout fort!” but the fiction is secondary; it’s flavor added on. In other words, the fiction is brought in after the mechanics, to describe what happened.

In a roleplaying game, it’s different. When it’s your turn, you say what your character does within the ongoing fictional narrative. You don’t pick a mechanic first, you say something about the fiction first. Your choices in a roleplaying game aren’t immediately constrained by the mechanics, they’re constrained by the established fictional situation. In other words, the mechanics are brought in after the fictional action has determined *which* mechanics we need to use.

For example, in *Blades in the Dark*, there are several different mechanics that might be used if a character tries to pick the lock on a safe. It’s essentially meaningless to play mechanics-first. “I pick a lock” isn’t a mechanical choice in the game. To understand *which* mechanic to use, we have to first establish the fiction.

If your character is at their liberty back at the crew’s lair, with plenty of time to dedicate to opening the lock on the safe, then we could use one of the **downtime** mechanics—namely “Work on a long-term project.” You might do very well and open it quickly, or it might prove more challenging, requiring several attempts over a longer period of time.

If your character is in a burning building, trying desperately to open the safe while flaming roof-beams are raining down around them, then the **action** mechanic would come into play. You might do very well and avoid harm from the fire and debris while you work on the lock or you might have to abandon your work to keep from being crushed and burned.

If your character knows nothing about safe-cracking, you might pay someone to open it for you. In which case, we'd use the mechanic to **acquire an asset**—a master locksmith in this case. You might arrange a good deal and get a skilled worker, or you might have to pay more to get the quality you need.

And so on and so forth. There are an infinite number of approaches you might take, constrained by the fictional circumstances.

The important concept here is that you first choose what your character does in the fiction, then the group picks a mechanic that suits the situation to resolve what happens. Once you establish the fictional action, selecting a mechanic from the options at hand is pretty easy. If you try to do it the other way around—picking the mechanic and then trying to “color-in” the fiction after—you’ll find that the game can become confusing and muddled.

When something seems weird, or a situation resolves in a bizarre way, back out to the level of the fictional narrative. What’s going on? What are you trying to do? Which mechanic is suited for this? Don’t try to force a particular mechanic onto the fiction. Take the fiction first (ah, see that? “fiction-first”) and then use the mechanics to support it.

Think of the mechanics of the game as tools in a toolbox. There’s no point saying, “I hammer it” until you know what you’re building. Also, there’s no constraint that says you must always use a hammer and nail every time you need to attach two pieces of wood. You use the tools that suit what you’re trying to do. The same goes for mechanics in a roleplaying game. First establish the fiction, then select a mechanical tool from the toolbox that suits the situation you need to resolve. Which tools you pick will often be pragmatic, but can also be a stylistic choice. There’s no one right way to choose a tool, after all. The tools are there for you to use as you see fit; developing a style of use and set of precedents as you go along.

The text of the game gives you both the set of tools and a guide to their usage, which is essentially the best practices the playtesters and I developed. These best practices will start you on your way toward successful game play—but ultimately they are just a guide. It’s up to you and your group to put them into practice and learn the use and feel of the tools in play.

This is one of the most fun aspects of roleplaying games. Because there’s no single right way to use the tools, the act of play is constantly creative—at the level of the fictional narrative, of course, but also at the level of the application of the game systems. I’ll explain the tools and teach you some good ways to apply them, but when it’s all said and done, your experience with *Blades in the Dark* will be one that you and your group make for yourselves.

TRIGGERING THE ACTION ROLL

The game is a conversation between the people at the table. You’re talking, narrating actions, speaking in character, making jokes, sketching maps, speculating about what might happen, all that good stuff. But it’s *just talking*, right? There’s a thing that happens in a roleplaying game where the conversation shifts. Where you go from *just talking* to *using a mechanic*. What’s that like?

This shift in the conversation is the GM’s responsibility (they should always be on the lookout), but anyone can call for it. So, when do you call for it? You call for an action roll when any of these happen:

- ◆ **A player character attempts a challenging action** that might be dangerous or troublesome.
- ◆ **A player character leads or gives orders to an NPC or NPC group**, which faces something dangerous or troublesome.
- ◆ **Someone grabs the dice and gets all excited about making a roll.**

So, then, what do you actually say? I like to first ask the player how they’re accomplishing their action. Which of their **action ratings** will they use? Then, I suggest the **position** the character is in and the likely **effect level** they’ll have.

Player: “So he has the amulet? Okay, I’m forcing him to hand it over.”

GM: “Okay then. How are you gonna do that?”

Player: “I look him square in the eye and I Command him to hand it over.”

GM: “Cool. Sounds pretty risky to me. He’s no push-over and his goons are standing right there. Probably a limited effect since you’re outnumbered, unless you have a particularly potent threat to make here.”

And then the other players chime in and suggest an alternative position or effect level, or the player revises their statement to something more or less daring, or everyone just nods and we’ve shifted into using the mechanic.

The main thing to remember is that the group works together to set the goal, position and consequences of each roll. Don’t fall into the habit of simply “calling for a roll” to do stuff in general, without really engaging the group in the process of position and effect in a meaningful way. If a PC wants to suddenly kill an enemy, well, that’s quite the maneuver isn’t it? Are they in a controlled position to do that? Is it risky? Is it desperate? **What are they risking?** Take a moment to put everything in context in the fiction.

If the enemy is trying to kill them right back, then it’s probably desperate. They’re going toe to toe, to the death. On a **4/5**, they do it, yeah, with consequences. They inflict a mortal wound, and (in this example) they suffer one in return.

For some players, suffering a deadly wound won’t seem like a “success.” In *Blades*, though, an action roll resolves both the action of the PC as well as the action of the enemy. The enemy is trying to do stuff, too, and a “partial success” means they manage to do something. The action roll covers the whole exchange (or even a whole fight)—all the attacks and harm at once, for both sides.

In *Blades*, the PCs can't really do things safely. Everything is a risk of harm, consequences, **HEAT**, angry factions, etc. But they **can** do stuff! All those **4/5** results let them get stuff done, while they get smashed, bloodied, and harried by enemies. Doskvol chews you up and spits you out. The characters that start the game won't necessarily be the same ones that see the crew through to the end.

If you want less immediate consequences for those **4/5s**, you can always use a clock. Instead of instantly being noticed when they roll a **4/5** to sneak in, start an "Alert" clock for the guards and tick it up. This is still a tricky consequence, but it doesn't bring the whole situation to an end.

The theme for *Blades in the Dark* is one of struggle and consequences, so you almost never achieve anything without a cost—at least according to the dice results. This is why the PCs have additional resources to mitigate consequences: so the players have to make hard choices about what's worth resisting (spending their valuable stress) or when it's worth taking a hit for a teammate, or using your armor, or agreeing to a tough Devil's Bargain, etc.

Teamwork can also mitigate things a lot, turning a desperate roll into a risky one, increasing effect, and/or pumping up the dice pool. It takes a while for most groups to really use teamwork well, which is by design.

Distinguish the various action roll **positions** by what the PC is risking. Describe the enemy NPC in action, about to do something to the PC. That's what they're risking when they act, and that defines the position.

"You rush in to stab him in the neck, and he flashes his sword up in an expert parry, to turn your blade aside and run you through. Desperate position, great effect, yeah?"

All of the adjustable dials in the game—position, effects, consequences, supernatural powers—are for the group to experiment with. Try to avoid unilateral decisions as the GM. Ask the group what they think. Is this desperate? What's a good risk here? Do you think that's the full effect, or is there more left to do? Part of playing *Blades* is establishing things that work for your group.

WHY WE DO THIS

What's the point of this shift into a mechanic, anyway? Why not just talk it out? The main reason is this: when we just talk things out, we tend to build consensus. This is usually a good thing. It helps the group bond, get on the same page, set expectations, all that stuff. But when it comes to action-adventure stories like *Blades in the Dark*, we don't want consensus when the characters go into danger. We want to be surprised, or thwarted, or driven to bigger risks, or inspired to create a twist or complication. We want to raise our hands over our heads and ride the roller coaster over the drop.

When the mechanic is triggered, the group first dips into being authors for a moment as they suss out the position, the threats, and the details of the action. Then, author mode switches off and everyone becomes the audience. What will happen next? We hold our breath, lean forward in our seats, and let the dice fall.



HOW TO CHOOSE AN ACTION

When an action roll is called for, the character is usually already in motion, doing something in the fiction. This thing they're doing will almost always determine which action rating to roll. However, a player is free to revise their character's action in order to use a different rating, as long as the character performs the new action in the fiction.

For example, Nox wants to sneak into the secret meeting room of the Circle of Flame. The GM asks her how she does that and Nox's player says she'll climb the outside of the tower and slip in through a window. Climbing is a PROWL action, so that's what she'll roll.

Nox's player might change her mind and say, "Hmmm... I'm not very good at Prowling. I want to climb in using Finesse, instead. It's like I'm Finessing my way in, right?" No. Nox can certainly try to FINESSE her way in—through misdirection or subtle action—but Nox cannot "use FINESSE" to climb the tower. The action of climbing is... well, climbing. Athletic moves like that are the PROWL action. If Nox wants to FINESSE, instead, that's fine, but that means she is not climbing the tower.

Sometimes, several actions will reasonably apply to a situation. This is fine. The player may choose the action they want to perform, and the GM sets the position of the roll accordingly.

Arlyn is hanging from a rope in the darkness outside the quarters of Mylera Klev, leader of the Red Sashes. As Mylera enters the room, Arlyn's player says she wants to shoot Mylera in the back. Which action should she roll? PROWL covers an "ambush with close violence" and HUNT covers "shooting from a distance"—they both seem to apply here. The GM says that HUNTING will be a controlled roll (this is an ideal hunting shot, after all) and a PROWL attack will be risky: to "ambush with close violence," Arlyn will have to first swing through the window and then follow up with a backstab, exposing her to more danger.

THE PURPOSE OF DANGERS & STRESS

Some GMs get frustrated when they feel like the enemy NPCs or threats "aren't doing anything." They inflict harm on the PCs, but then the PCs resist and reduce or avoid the harm. This is by design! The PCs in the game start out as huge underdogs. The stress system gives them a special ability to survive when they otherwise wouldn't, so they have some hope of achieving their long-term goals.

The purpose of threatening harm is not always to *inflict* it, it's to *describe* it. The threats become manifest in the minds of everyone playing, even if they're avoided.

"The ghost is entangled with your soul."

"You hear the bone snap as you hit the cobblestones."

"You can tell that she'll never trust you again."

The bad outcomes are spoken aloud. They hang there in the room as horrible potential. They're scary. Then the player gets to roll their resistance, look you in the eye and say, "No. It's not that bad. I take the stress instead." It's **empowering**. They look danger in the face and laugh. That's the nature of a scoundrel.

Your job is describing the harmful outcomes with gusto, not inflicting them. The purpose of the consequence and stress mechanics is to add interesting fictional details to the game when it comes to harm and trouble. Instead of simply saying, “You take 3 damage,” you describe how the blade catches under their armor and digs a bloody furrow across their ribs. The harm becomes a vivid threat in our imaginations. Once we know what it is, the player cares about resisting it, “Yeesh! No, I’m gonna resist that.” But the only way they can know whether it’s worth it to risk the stress cost is if you describe the potential harm. Each cycle of threat and stress requires this input of new fiction. And that, after all, is what we’re here to do.

NPC THREAT LEVELS

The severity of the **consequences** that you describe (and the **position** for the action roll) determines the threat level of the opposition. If they’re facing an NPC that you’ve described as a standard thug, then the consequences will be things like wrestling the PC to the ground, or punching them in the face, or maybe cracking a rib with her blackjack if the thug has the upper hand.

If they’re facing an NPC that you’ve described as a master assassin, then the consequence might be a lightning-fast move that puts a dagger in the PC’s heart.

Since NPCs don’t have stats and action ratings, it’s by the **severity of their consequences** and the **position** and **effect** of the PC’s action roll that their capabilities are manifest in the game.

Also, a dangerous NPC can take the initiative. **If the NPC is skilled**, tell the players what the NPC is about to accomplish, then ask them what they do.

“She corners you at the top of the stairs and tries to wrestle you into the manacles. What do you do?”

The PC’s next move—and the action roll that results—will tell us how effective the NPC’s maneuver was. Remember, an action roll usually serves double duty, resolving both PC and NPC actions at the same time.

If the NPC is a master, tell the players what the NPC has already done, then ask if they want to **resist** it.

“She’s just way too fast for you to deal with. Before you realize what’s happening, the manacles are on your wrists. Yeah? Or do you want to resist that?”

This is something that will grow and evolve over time as you play the game. Talk to the group about it as you go. Do you want a more deadly, high-stakes, kind of game? Then PCs and NPCs should threaten lethal harm all the time, and resistance rolls should only reduce consequences. Do you want a more cinematic, adventurous kind of game? Then describe dangers with less dire consequences. People are “left for dead.” Explosions make you look cool when you dive out of the way.

You don’t have to decide on one approach and stick to it. Be flexible and let it change over time according to what the group is most excited about.

THERE'S ALWAYS A CONSEQUENCE

Every time you roll the dice in *Blades*, the situation changes. There's no such thing as a "nothing happens" result from a roll. How does this work?

The "failure" results for action rolls (**1-3**) are not simply "misses." The character's action has a tangible outcome. Something happens that changes the situation. On a **controlled** failure, the character spots a flaw in their approach, and can decide to withdraw or push their luck with a risky action. On a **risky** failure, the character suffers a consequence that presents some kind of trouble. Things get worse. On a **desperate** failure, the threat dominates and makes the situation much worse.

FAILING GRACEFULLY

The system of *Blades in the Dark* is designed to fail gracefully. If you just use the core rolls and forget extra details or special cases, it'll be okay. The game will sail along just fine. The game is better when you use all the details, but the whole thing doesn't come crashing down if you don't.

If you want to ease into the mechanics, **just start with risky action rolls and standard effect** (don't worry about factors).

When something bad happens to a PC and they want to resist it, explain resistance rolls. When the group starts asking about teamwork and helping each other, bring in the teamwork maneuvers. When they go up against high Tier or large-scale opponents who are meant to be very dangerous, bring in effect factors. Don't feel like you have to explain everything up front.

The same goes for the fiction. Don't feel like you have to get everything perfectly right every time. If you say something and then realize later that it was wrong, just revise it. No big deal.

"I told you that Trayga was seen at the docks, but that was all wrong. It was supposed to be Arlo."

"Oh! Well that changes things. Okay, got it."

If you're not sure what to do, keep it simple. Go with what's obvious to you. Add mechanics when you're comfortable. Forgive each other's mistakes. Fly casual.

SETTING PRECEDENTS

What's true for the PCs is true for the NPCs, and vice versa. If you establish that the Whisper PC is the only one who can talk to the ghost they summoned (due to a special "summoning language" that binds them together), then that fact becomes true for NPC-summoned ghosts, as well. If you establish that a skilled NPC can instantly kill an unsuspecting victim, then the PCs can try it, too.

Each time you make a judgment call or establish new details about the game world, they become available to everyone as a new tool in play. Precedents don't have to be permanent—feel free to revise them as you go along. But when you revise them, it still cuts both ways; for PCs and NPCs alike.

ABSTRACTION VS. DETAILS

Blades in the Dark usually depends on specific fictional details in order to work. For example, it might be important to understand exactly how a spirit bottle is constructed—because a character decides to suddenly smash one to surprise an enemy who has them at gunpoint. It's a small detail, but the description of the bottle contributes directly to understanding which **position** to roll for the action, the factors that go into **effects**, and the **consequences** at risk. Fleshying out the little details of the world makes the game system function better.

There are other times when abstraction is preferable, though. For example, the players wonder how the Circle of Flame has fared during the recent outbreak of the Cold Slumber plague. Are they weak and vulnerable now? The GM *could* create or try to remember all the details about the Circle of Flame that might affect their situation during the outbreak, or she could simply use the abstraction of the faction's **Tier** rating to make a quick fortune roll and see how it went for them. If no specific details have been established in play to indicate the Circle's resistance to an arcane sickness, then the abstraction of Tier covers it just fine.

A problem can arise when you try to use an abstraction when details are already present. For example, we may know for a fact that the Circle was one of the groups who created the plague, and they took special precautions against it (including moving important assets and leadership out of the area). In this case, it might be weird to simply use the abstract Tier rating of the faction for a fortune roll. We already know specific details, so the catch-all of "Tier rating" isn't very useful here. Perhaps it's obvious that the Circle has fared very well, so the GM says so. Or perhaps there's still some risk, so the GM rolls 6d for "plague preparedness" rather than their Tier.

The same goes for the quality of items, assets, and defensive measures. Since the Hive is Tier III, does that mean that every single lock on every single door in every part of Hive turf is a "Tier III lock"? No. The Hive's Tier rating is an abstract indication of the quality of stuff they're *likely* to have, *usually*. A lock on a minor storeroom door is probably just a cheap lock. The lock to their secret documents room is probably *fine* or even *exceptional* (making it even higher quality than Tier III). When we think about the overall quality of the Hive, it's "Tier III." That abstract Tier rating can be used for lots of things. But when there are specific details in play, those details establish what's actually true. They don't have to perfectly conform to the abstraction in every single case.

The abstracted parts of the game—Tier, **COIN**, stash, quality, engagement rolls—are abstract so that the game play can **focus on what's most important: the choices, actions, and consequences of the player characters**. Action rolls are where the meat of the game happens. Don't feel beholden to the abstractions when you have specific fictional details to work with.

ACTIONS IN PLAY

On the following pages, the 12 actions are detailed and fleshed out with examples of maneuvers and consequences.

ATTUNE

When you **ATTUNE**, you open your mind to the ghost field or channel nearby electroplasmic energy through your body. You might communicate with a ghost or understand aspects of spectrology. You could try to perceive beyond sight in order to better understand your situation (but Surveying might be better).

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ How do you open your mind to the ghost field? What does that look like?
- ◆ What energy are you attuning to? How are you channeling that energy? What do you hope the energy will do?

The “ghost field” is somewhat ambiguous, by design. It’s the energy contained within the lightning barrier of the city, the echoes of events in the recent past, and the medium in which spirits exist. It’s a dangerous and strange element that should never feel safe or tame. To Attune is to connect to a crackling source of power that can easily snap out of control. Bring your ideas of strange arcane energy into play and ask the other players what they think about it, too.

When you Attune to the ghost field you can see echoes of recent events or sense things beyond sight (the Whisper’s *fine spirit mask* allows them to see even more detail). Surveying is usually the action you’d use to get a sense of a location or to spot hidden things, but Attuning can work—often with a worse position since you’re risking danger from the ghost field.

Any PC can Attune. It’s not a supernatural gift. The ghost field is always there, just at the edge of the mind, ready for a connection. Whispers and other occultists can Attune as the basis for supernatural powers, such as **TEMPEST** or **Possess**. Without the ghost field and electroplasmic energy, these powers can’t manifest.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

I ATTUNE to the ghost field to see if there are any magical wards on the door.

4/5 Reduced Effect: You sense a buzzing ward in the ghost field, but you can’t quite tell how far it extends—to the windows and roof, too? Maybe so.

4/5 Lesser Harm: There’s a sharp electrical pop, and a spark burns across your cheek. Level 1 harm, “Scorched.”

RISKY

I reach into the ghost field for the death echoes of Trennet. He died on this very spot, so I’ll try to catch a vision of it.

4/5 Reduced Effect: You see the faint glimmer of Trennet’s ghost echo, thrashing on the floor with a large figure atop him, bearing down as if choking him. It sort of looks like Ulf Ironborn, but you can’t be sure.

4/5 Harm: Trennet’s death agony washes over you. You see Ulf Ironborn’s face and feel his vice-like grip on your throat, crushing the life out of you. Take level 2 harm, “Choked.”

DESPERATE

As the ghost tries to possess me, I smash my hand through the glass over the electric light. I’ll ATTUNE the electricity through myself to fry the ghost!

4/5 Serious Complication: The electrical surges overload the spirit. As it’s driven off, crackling bolts of energy lash out from your hands and eyes, setting the room ablaze.

1-3 Severe Harm: The ghost rides the energy directly into your mind. You suffer two types of harm: level 2 “Burned” from the energy, and also level 3 “Possessed.” Which would you like to resist first?

COMMAND

When you **COMMAND**, you compel swift obedience. You might intimidate or threaten to get what you want. You might lead a gang in a group action. You could try to order people around to persuade them (but *Consorting* might be better).

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ Who do you command? How do you do it—what's your leverage here?
- ◆ What do you hope they'll do?

When you Command someone, you don't care about what they want. You tell them what to do and expect them to do it—out of fear, respect, or some other motivating factor (this is your leverage over them). *Consorting* can be better if you're trying to get along with someone and work together. When you Command a friend or contact, they can feel disrespected, so your position will probably be worse.

Command is almost always the right action for leading a cohort or sending an NPC group to do something according to your instructions. Handle it as a “group action” teamwork maneuver with you rolling Command and the cohort rolling quality.

You might be able to Command another PC. Ask the player if their character has reason to follow your orders—fear, trust, respect, etc. If they do, then your action can force them to comply. If they don't, then your action can only disrupt them somehow. You might frighten them with intimidation (inflicting harm), cause them to hesitate at a crucial moment, make them look weak in front of others, etc. Command isn't mind-control but it is an intense interaction. The other player will judge if their character can be ordered around or not.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

“You’re on our turf, asshole. There are at least four guns on you right now. Give me the case and piss off.”

4/5 Reduced Effect: He sets the case down and takes a step back. “I’m supposed to get coin for this,” he says.

1-3 Risky Opportunity: He snaps a small lighter open and holds the flame near the documents jutting from the valise. “Not until I see some coin!” he says.

RISKY

“We’ve got each other by the collars, sort of half-wrestling against the wall. I snarl, ‘Just take your crew and walk away. One death is enough for tonight.’”

4/5 Harm: He twists an arm free and belts you across the jaw, ringing your ears. “Now it’s enough,” he says. “Let’s go, boys.” Take level 2 harm, “Concussed.”

DESPERATE

“No, I don’t think so, Bazso. You’ll pay six coin, up front, or we go to the Sashes for a better offer.”

4/5 Serious Complication: You do it! But Bazso looks you up and down with a steely eye. “You’ve got fire, girl,” he says, counting out six-coin worth of silver slugs into a purse and tossing it to you. Start a new clock—let’s call it “Bazso is Fed Up with Your Shit.” Four segments, and, how about you fill three of those in? You might become the next object lesson for young punks who challenge his dominance.

1-3 Serious Complication: You don’t do it. Bazso glares at you. “You’ll do it for three and say ‘Thank you Bazso Baz, sir.’” Start a new clock—let’s call it “Bazso Makes an Example of You.” Four segments, and fill three of those in.

CONSORT

When you **CONSORT**, you socialize with friends and contacts. You *might gain access to resources, information, people, or places. You might make a good impression or win someone over with your charm and style. You might make new friends or connect with your heritage or background. You could try to direct your friends with social pressure (but Commanding might be better).*

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ Who do you consort with? Where do you meet? What do you talk about?
- ◆ What do you hope to achieve?

When you Consort with someone, you care about what the other person thinks and feels and in turn they care about what you want (at least a tiny bit). You're being a charming, open, socially adroit person. You can Consort with people you already know, or try to "fit in" in a new situation so you make a good impression.

To Consort, you need an environment that isn't totally hostile. You might Consort with the chain gang when you're thrown into Ironhook (a desperate situation, to be sure) but it's usually hopeless to Consort with the assassin sent to murder you. When you Consort with people related to your background or heritage, you can expect a better position and/or increased effect.

You might be forced to Consort in an unfamiliar situation in order to create an opportunity for another action. For instance, if you want to talk to Lord Scurlock at a party, you'll have to at least try to Consort with the other guests to make your way to his table. *Commanding* or *Swaying* are options, sure, but expect a rather sudden escalation of trouble if things go badly.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

Nyrix has been working the Gondoliers for weeks now. I hope she has a good target she can share with me.

4/5 Reduced Effect: She has someone in mind, yeah. A real peach of a target. But she doesn't know where he lives. You'll have to follow him home after his shift.

4/5 Risky Position: She actually lured a target to the Red Lamp with her. She plops down next to you with this thick-necked Gondolier on her arm, already a bit drunk. She seems to sort of recognize you, or she's working it out. Nyrix gives you a look like, "Go ahead then!" and closes the curtain to the booth so you all have some privacy.

RISKY

I pull out my bottle of fine whiskey and give the room a broad smile. "Who wants the good stuff?" I hope I can keep them occupied while Breen works on the safe.

4/5 Harm: You pull it off, but you have to get wasted with them. Take level- 2 harm, "Trashed." Your head is killing you and the room is spinning.

DESPERATE

I know they're, like, a "secret" society, but can I sort of shmooze around the party and figure out who's a member of the Circle of Flame?

4/5 Serious Complication: You blend in long enough to spot some subtle hand gestures being used by a few guests. You recognize Arter Clavish, a wealthy nobleman, as one of them. Everything is going great until you realize that all the "normal" guests are gone, and the party has quietly become a Circle of Flame gathering. The time for introductions and bona fides is coming up any moment now. What do you do?

FINESSE

When you **FINESSE**, you employ dextrous manipulation or subtle misdirection. *You might pick someone's pocket. You might handle the controls of a vehicle or direct a mount. You might formally duel an opponent with graceful fighting arts. You could try to employ those arts in a chaotic melee (but Skirmishing might be better). You could try to pick a lock (but Tinkering might be better).*

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ What do you finesse? What's graceful or subtle about this?
- ◆ What do you hope to achieve?

When you employ Finesse, you're graceful, stylish, and subtle. You might think of it as the polar opposite of *Wreck*. To use Finesse, you'd prefer some time and space to do things "just so" rather than rushing into something and getting sloppy. If you have to hurry up, or act on someone else's terms, Finesse becomes challenging pretty quickly. It's all well and good to *want* to duel an opponent with your fancy sword arts, but if they insist on kicking the table over and throwing fire bombs at you, you'll have to get desperate. *Skirmishing* is the best option when the fight becomes a savage melee, but one-on-one, in a fight that you're ready for, Finesse can be just as good.

In a way, the reverse is true for sleight-of-hand and inconspicuous Finesse. Picking a pocket or slipping away unnoticed is less perilous when the situation is chaotic, crowded, or otherwise distracting for the target in question. (Contrast this with *Prowl*, which is best done in darkness, avoiding people.) When the Bluecoats wrestle you to the ground to manacle you, that's a great opportunity to lift the keys off one of them.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

I shut down the engine and guide the ship with residual momentum, slipping into the waterway beneath the Academy.

4/5 Reduced Effect: As your lamp casts its light ahead you see that the way is not as clear as you hoped it would be. Sections of the canal walls and ceiling have fallen in. You'll have to keep maneuvering carefully to get all the way to the landing further in. Start a clock: "Navigate the Canal," four segments, and tick one. Do you press on?

1-3 Risky Position: You approach the subterranean canal, and the water surges as the sinuous body of a great sea eel circles near the entrance, feeding on the scraps of refuse that collect around the entrance. You have a final moment to adjust course and turn away—or else go ahead with your maneuver from a risky position. What do you do?

RISKY

I embrace the magistrate warmly, "Lady Dunvil, how charming to see you!" while I slip the spirit lure into her pocket.

4/5 Complication: She doesn't notice you place the lure. During dinner, one of the other guests—a striking and gaunt woman in a crimson dress—stares intently at Lady Dunvil's side of the table. After dinner, she moves to investigate the strange disturbance she feels in the ghost field. What do you do?

DESPERATE

As the thug rushes in to tackle me, I deftly sidestep, draw my rapier, and cut their hamstring to send them tumbling down the staircase behind me.

4/5 Severe Harm: You do it, sidestepping and slashing, but the thug's momentum is too great, and the collision sends you both down the stairs. Suffer level 3 harm, "Broken Collar Bone."

HUNT

When you **HUNT**, you carefully track a target. You might follow a person or discover their location. You might arrange an ambush. You might attack with precision shooting from a distance. You could try to bring your guns to bear in a melee (but *Skirmishing* might be better).

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ How do you hunt them down? What methods do you use?
- ◆ What do you hope to achieve?

When you Hunt a target, it's all about precise and skillful execution—your talent brought to bear against the target, your victim. Like *Finesse*, Hunting is about performing on your own terms—you stalk the target to their lair, you select the ambush point, you line up the target in your sights and take the shot. Hunting is all about the maneuvers before the fight. When you try to Hunt after the chaos begins, you'll probably find yourself in a desperate spot. Time and distance are your allies. Contrast with *Skirmishing*, which is desperate and least effective when the enemy is far away and disengaged.

There's no "shooting" action in *Blades*, by design. The action roll system is designed for players to choose the action they perform in any given situation, which the GM then judges for position and effectiveness. When the fight is on, do you Hunt? (Or *Skirmish*, or *Finesse*, or something else?) It's up to the player to decide their approach. Hunting is usually the most effective action when taking an aimed shot at a distance. But if you're in the middle of a brawl and blast someone with your pistol, *Skirmish* works, too.

The Hunt action is broader in scope than mere marksmanship. It's the ideal action for tracking, stalking, and discovering the location of anything or anyone.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

I wait until Bazso passes in front of his office window, then I hold my breath, and squeeze the trigger.

4/5 Reduced Effect: The shot clips Bazso along the side of his head, ripping open his scalp. He crumples down out of sight, seriously wounded at least. What do you do?

4/5 Risky Position: You hit Bazso through the neck, spraying blood everywhere. (Let's make a fortune roll later to see if he's too tough to die or not, yeah?) Anyway, you hear shouts—"The roof, over there!" and bullets start cracking into the bricks all around you. What do you do?

RISKY

The Dimmer Sisters get their supply of electroplasma somehow. I'm going to locate the source and track how it's delivered.

4/5 Complication: You track down the source and delivery method (I'll explain in a minute), but as you're headed back to the lair, your breath comes out as fog and you hear the wail of a ghost echoing from the shadows: "Now now now, who's this this this, hunting hunting hunting..." Do you freeze up, try to escape, or resist and do something else?

DESPERATE

Before the Bluecoat can get around the corner, I want to set up an impromptu ambush!

4/5 Reduced Effect: You find a blind angle to attack from, but it's awkward and cramped in the alley. Your blade strikes sparks off a steam-pipe and then crashes off the Bluecoat's helmet. He grunts and staggers for a moment, swatting back with his truncheon and groping for his whistle. What do you do?

PROWL

When you **PROWL**, you traverse skillfully and quietly. *You might sneak past a guard or hide in the shadows. You might run and leap across the rooftops. You might attack someone from hiding with a back-stab or blackjack. You could try to waylay a victim in the midst of battle (but Skirmishing might be better).*

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ How do you prowl? How do you use the environment around you?
- ◆ What do you hope to achieve?

When you Prowl, you use the features of your environment to move around skillfully. The more conducive the environment, the better your position. Prowling is more than just “stealth”—it’s all of the related physical skills of movement as well as an instinctual awareness of where to go and the right timing to employ. You can think of Prowling as general athletic ability (running, climbing, jumping, swimming, etc.) tuned for quiet, efficient movement.

You might use this movement to hide out of sight and backstab an enemy. Waylaying someone this way is similar to *Hunting* a target from an ambush point—this is one area where the actions overlap. Prowl is often used as a setup action or to create an opportunity (or both at once). You might Prowl to a good hiding spot so you can take your time *Surveying* a location without being noticed.

When a Prowl roll goes badly, it doesn’t have to be “all or nothing.” A common mistake is to say that the character is discovered as a consequence. Instead, you can start a clock like “Discovered” and tick a segment or two. Think of the clock as “stealth harm levels.” The PC can take a few hits before they’re knocked out of the hide-and-seek fight.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

I slip up behind him and kosh him over the head with my blackjack.

4/5 Reduced Effect: His knees buckle for a moment, but he doesn’t go down. He curses and staggers sideways and reaches out to support himself against the wall. What do you do?

4/5 Risky Position: You knock him out and drag him out of sight under the stairs. Another guard bursts into the room holding a small keg under his arm. “I got some!” he says. He peers around. “Markus?” He’s blocking the only way out of here. What do you do?

RISKY

I dash across the courtyard, using the petrified trees for cover, and climb the drain pipe up to the second floor window.

4/5 Complication + Reduced Effect: You make it halfway across, behind the second tree here, when one of the guards says, “Hey, did you hear that?” and then heads over to check out the noise. Make a “Discovered” clock, four segments, and tick two—these guys are pretty sharp. What do you do?

DESPERATE

I back up to the balcony rail as they encircle me. “It’s been fun, fellas...” I jump off and throw my grappling hook, swinging to safety.

4/5 Severe Harm: You jump and swing but a few of them manage to rush forward and fire. A bullet smashes into your shoulder blade. Your hands go numb and you land hard on the cobblestones in the alleyway. Take level 3 harm, “Shot in the Back.” But hey... you escaped.

1-3 Severe Harm: Just not fast enough. You get one foot up on the railing, and they all open fire. Take level 4 harm as you’re shot to pieces.

SKIRMISH

When you **SKIRMISH**, you entangle a target in close combat so they can't easily escape. *You might brawl or wrestle with them. You might hack and slash. You might seize or hold a position in battle. You could try to fight in a formal duel (but Finesse might be better).*

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ How do you skirmish with them? What combat methods do you use?
- ◆ What do you hope to achieve?

When you Skirmish with someone, it's a fight. You're attacking and defending, back and forth. You can Skirmish to start a fight, to survive a fight, and to end a fight—but it's always a fight. If you step up behind someone and stab them in the spine, that's *Prowling*. If you tackle them to the ground, wrestle them into submission, and cut their throat, that's a Skirmish. If you address them with a formal challenge and step back into a dueling stance, maybe you'll get to try out your *Finesse*. (In a duel, Skirmishing is often desperate. In a brawl, *Finesse* is desperate.)

Generally, the consequences you suffer in a Skirmish come from the enemy. The more dangerous they are, the worse your position—and the more dire those consequences will be.

If you find yourself in a skirmish and you want to do something besides fighting, you might face a consequence first—which you can accept or resist (or maybe get a teammate to face for you). Just because you really want to *Sway* someone doesn't mean they stop punching you so you can talk to them. Another approach is to Skirmish (or *Prowl*) to win free of the melee (rather than inflict harm) then perform your other action after that.

If you fight alongside your cohorts in battle, you Skirmish. If you direct them but you're not engaged yourself, you *Command* them.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

Now that I have him pinned down on the ground, I grapple around to his back and choke him out. I want to get some answers from this asshole later.

1-3 Withdraw: GM: “As you wrestle with him, he suddenly gets his knife free and starts stabbing wildly. Want to keep going with a risky action?”

Player: “No, I'll withdraw and try a different way. I break free as he starts to stab, stand over him and blast him with my pistol. That's still controlled, yeah?”

GM: “Yeah, but it's a *different* way, right? You'll Hunt instead of Skirmish now.”

Player: “Ah, okay, gotcha. That's fine.”

RISKY

When he stabs at me, I parry his knife arm to the inside with my off hand, pass to his right side and attack him with an icepick stab to the neck.

4/5 Reduced Effect: He adjusts as you move in, grappling you close, but he loses his balance and you trip him backwards into a nasty throw, knocking the wind out of him as you pin him down. What do you do?

DESPERATE

He may have ambushed me, but I'm still gonna fight back! Also I'm gonna grab that icepick off the bar to use as an impromptu weapon. Screw this guy.

4/5 Suffer Harm: You avoid his sudden stab to your throat, but catch a nasty cut along your arm as you defend yourself. Take level 2 harm, “Knife Cut to Arm.” And you do manage to grab the icepick! What do you do?

STUDY

When you **STUDY**, you scrutinize details and interpret evidence. You might gather information from documents, newspapers, and books. You might do research on an esoteric topic. You might closely analyze a person to detect lies or true feelings. You could try to examine events to understand a pressing situation (but Surveying might be better).

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ What do you study? What details or evidence do you scrutinize?
- ◆ What do you hope to understand?

When you Study, you concentrate on small details—expressions, tone of voice, innuendo, tiny clues—to find what's hidden, determine facts, corroborate evidence, and guide your decisions.

Studying is often used to “read a person”—this is a **gather information** roll to judge whether or not they're lying, what they really want, what their intentions are, etc. (See the list of questions you might ask on the bottom of your character sheet.) When you Study someone in this way, you can ask the GM questions while you interact with them if you want, so you might wait until they say something fishy, and then ask the GM “Are they telling the truth?”

If you want to get a feel for the current situation or scout out a location, that's *Surveying*. A survey glosses over details in favor of big-picture stuff. Study does the opposite—it's about precise facts and details. Are they lying about that? Is the safe hidden behind a wall in this room?

Studying is also the action for research of all kinds (often a long-term project). Want to find out which noble has the best art collection with the worst security? Want to know how many rioting prisoners it would take to overwhelm the guards at Ironhook? Virtually any fact can be discovered through Study.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

I go over every inch of this place, looking for the secret entrance.

4/5 Reduced Effect: After a few moments, you find a hairline seam around what must be the door. You can't tell how to open it, though. Want to keep Studying and figure it out, or do something else?

4/5 Minor Complication: You hear the sound of heavy boots in the hallway as one of the house staff goes about their duties. Mark one tick on the “Discovered” clock. You find the door and mechanism, opening it with a deft flick of a hidden switch.

RISKY

While Arcy and Bazso talk, I Study Bazso for any signs of deception, especially when we talk about forming an alliance with the Lampblacks.

4/5 Complication: You can tell that he's telling the truth, but he notices your scrutiny and gives you a close look, as well. Start a new clock: “Bazso Figures Out Our Plans,” six segments, and tick two.

4/5 Desperate Position: You get a solid read on Bazso—he's telling the truth—but after the meeting, his second-in-command, Pickett, corners you and gets in your face. “What are you doin', giving everyone the stink eye, eh? Gettin' any funny ideas?” What do you do?

DESPERATE

As the demon lunges for Arlyn, I start grabbing books and journals off the shelves. There must be one that details the Count's investigations into this devil!

4/5 Severe Harm + Reduced Effect: You find the correct volume, but as you begin to open it, the demon suddenly roars, changes direction, and swats you across the room. The book lands a few feet away. The rune on its cover glows faintly. Your ribs are broken (level 3 harm). What do you do?

SURVEY

When you **SURVEY**, you observe the situation and anticipate outcomes. You might spot telltale signs of trouble before it happens. You might uncover opportunities or weaknesses. You might detect a person's motivations or intentions (but *Studying* might be better). You could try to spot a good ambush point (but *Hunting* might be better).

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ How do you survey the situation? Is there anything special you're looking out for?
- ◆ What do you hope to understand?

When you Survey, you get a better understanding of what's going on around you. You observe a location or circumstance and its features: entrances and exits, strong points and weak points, what's normal and what's unusual there, what's likely to happen next, etc. A good Survey will keep you from being surprised and helps you make better decisions about how to approach a problem.

Surveying is often used to "read a situation"—this is a **gather information** roll to judge opportunities and dangers (see a sample list of questions you might ask on the bottom of your character sheet). When you Survey the scene, you might ask the GM questions before anything happens, so you can spot opportunities for action. If you're suspicious of the meeting with the Lampblacks, for example, you might ask, "What's really going on here?" to get a clear read on the situation.

To Survey, you usually need access to good vantage points. If you want to Survey the Billhooks' HQ for a good assault point, for example, you'll need to walk around and give it a good look, maybe watch the gang members coming and going, notice their security measures, etc. You might use *Prowl* or *Consort* to set up a Survey action, so you can observe things with greater effect or from a safer position.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

I nestle into my hiding spot and watch the Hive HQ. I want to know who comes and goes, and how they get in and out.

4/5 Reduced Effect: You get a good feel for the various entrances and their security measures, but it looks like there's some kind of entrance challenge that people are subject to. Are they saying a code-phrase, or showing a pass or something? You can't quite tell.

RISKY

Okay, so, they're chasing me along the rooftops, right? There must be a good spot where I can dive into a canal and disappear. I want to do a setup roll for my Prowl action next.

4/5 Reduced Effect: "Hmm, reduced effect doesn't make sense for a setup roll, really. Let's pick a different consequence."

4/5 Desperate Position: "Yeah, this doesn't fit either. I'm setting myself up for a better position, so..."

4/5 Complication: "This is good. How about I take +2 **HEAT** during the chase? Everyone sees me leading the stupid Blues on a merry chase."

DESPERATE

They're attacking us? No no no... I want a flashback to a few seconds ago to get a bad feeling about this before it kicks off.

4/5 Reduced Effect: You sense the ambush, but it's down to seconds before everything happens. You can take one half-measure first. Do you drop to the ground for cover, push someone else down, something like that?

1-3 Severe Harm: You're fixated on one of the enemies, certain that they're gonna do something bad, and you get blindsided by someone else. Take level 3 harm, "Stabbed in the Back."

SWAY

When you **SWAY**, you influence someone with guile, charm, or argument. *You might lie convincingly. You might persuade someone to do what you want. You might argue a case that leaves no clear rebuttal. You could try to trick people into affection or obedience (but Consort or Commanding might be better).*

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ Who do you sway? What kind of leverage do you have here?
- ◆ What do you hope they'll do?

When you Sway someone, you don't care about what they think or feel. You're manipulating them—either with charm, lies, or well-reasoned arguments that they can't easily dismiss. You're trying to get them to do what *you* want, not what they want or need. You can Sway a friend or contact—they're probably vulnerable to you—but the risks are higher if they figure out what you're doing to them; it's probably a desperate thing to try.

Swaying someone isn't mind-control. You need some kind of leverage to make it work. It might be the leverage of being a very charming or desirable person that the target wants to please. It might be the leverage of having good reasons, evidence, and/or moving rhetoric that all seems so convincing they're inclined to agree with you. Leverage is situational: what works with one target may not work with another. If you have leverage, you can try to Sway them. Without it, you can fall back on fear or intimidation (*Commanding* them) or even simple physical force to get your way.

You might be able to Sway another PC. Ask the player if you have any leverage over their character. If you do, then your action can force them to see it your way. If you don't, then your action can only disrupt them somehow—an intense distraction, but not a convincing one.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

Maybe he doesn't want anything to do with the Grinders, but we both know that he owes me. I lay it out in black and white. It's time to make good.

4/5 Minor Complication: “Yeah, yeah, okay, you made your point. But look... you have to promise that no one will know I helped you, okay?”

1-3 Risky Position: He shakes his head the whole time you're talking, making a face. “You're right, I know! But I can't do anything! You have to tell Vale to let me back into her crew. Then I'll be safe, and I can do this for you.”

RISKY

Listen, Vale... I respect you. I'm not trying to run your crew. But you need a tinkerer, and Holtz wants back in. It's good for both of you.

4/5 Reduced Effect: “Fine, but he's on probation. If I catch him on the spark even once, he's out on his ass again.”

4/5 Complication: “You just want Holtz to help you with that Grinder thing, don't you? Okay, fine... but I get a piece of the action.”

1-3 Complication: “You come into my place and tell me my business? Over that slaggin' spark-head? Get out of here.” She's pretty pissed. Start a 4-clock, “Lose Status with Fog Hounds,” and tick it twice.

DESPERATE

I swear, I had nothing to do with it. I've never even been on a train! Been in the Dusk my whole life. Never left.

1-3 Serious Complication: “Yeah, yeah. Sure you haven't. We'll just let the magistrate decide, won't we? Take her away.”

TINKER

When you **TINKER**, you fiddle with devices and mechanisms. You might create a new gadget or alter an existing item. You might pick a lock or crack a safe. You might disable an alarm or trap. You might turn the spark-craft and electroplasmic devices around the city to your advantage. You could try to use your technical expertise to control a vehicle (but Finessing might be better).

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ What do you tinker with?
- ◆ What do you hope to accomplish?

When you Tinker, you take stuff apart, put things back together, bend, solder, twist, and modify. Tinkering covers a fairly broad range of activities, having to do with mechanisms and engineering as well as chemistry and biological sciences. The adept tinkerer knows how things work—all sorts of things.

Tinkering is most often used during a long-term project in downtime. It's one of the most versatile downtime actions, in fact (along with *Studying*). If you're willing to acquire the necessary components and take the time, wondrous things can be Tinkered into existence.

Tinkering can be useful in the moment, too. Duskwall is covered in strange technological components of all sorts, from spark-craft doors, locks, and elevators, to electroplasmic conduits, wires, and lights. You can Tinker with stuff on the fly to create a booby-trap or disable a security measure. Tinkering in this way can be a great setup action for *Wrecking* something later.

You can Tinker with a device in order to break it, which is similar to *Wrecking* it. Usually, breaking a device by Tinkering is slower, more precise, and less apparent than when you *Wreck* it. You might Tinker with a door mechanism so it jams after the third use. If you *Wreck* it, it just breaks into pieces and that's it.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

Okay, I just need to set up the receptor rods properly and we can pass safely through the lightning barrier without a scratch.

1-3 Withdraw or Risk: As you contact the barrier, the receptor rods spark like crazy and start to glow white hot at the tips. Maybe the alignment is wrong? Do you want to back off and try another way through, or try to tweak the alignment before they melt?

RISKY

Nothing to worry about! I'll just align the rods within the lightning field before they melt.

4/5 Complication + Desperate Position: One of the rods melts, bends, and disintegrates in a shower of electroplasm. The others survive long enough for you to get through the barrier, but they're going to melt away like the first one unless you do something about it. They're your only way back through...

DESPERATE

I can fix this! I grab a coil of cable from my tool bag and use it to ground the rods and bleed off the excess energy.

4/5 Severe Harm: You do it, but... a huge surge of electroplasmic energy arcs around the device, electrocuting you and tossing your body through the air. Take level 3 harm, "Electrocuted."

1-3 Serious Complication + Lost Opportunity: You try to connect the cables, but it's just too much energy too quickly. Things get out of hand—the rods, your cables, and the rest of your tool kit disintegrate in a flash of lightning and sparking vapor.

WRECK

When you **WRECK**, you unleash savage force. You might smash down a door or wall with a sledgehammer, or use an explosive to do the same. You might employ chaos or sabotage to create a distraction or overcome an obstacle. You could try to overwhelm an enemy with sheer force in battle (but Skirmishing might be better).

GM QUESTIONS

- ◆ What do you wreck? What force do you bring to bear?
- ◆ What do you hope to accomplish?

When you Wreck something, you ruin its functions so it can't be easily fixed and you create chaos in some way—loud noises, flying debris, fires, flooding, etc. Wrecking is as good for distractions and mayhem as it is for destroying things.

Scale is often a very important effect factor for Wrecking. If you want to destroy a steamboat, for example, you need tools or a team that are high enough scale to have an effect on the vessel. You might get a gang of workers to go aboard and knock holes in the lower hull, for instance. Or you might need to exploit a weakness to gain **potency** to offset the scale factor. A wooden ship is vulnerable to fire, for example, so a few fire-oil bombs will do the job that took 10 people with demolition tools.

There's some overlap between Wrecking something and *Tinkering* with it so it no longer functions. In general, Wrecking is faster and more thorough. You smash the thing, it's totally smashed. *Tinkering* is precise, allowing very specific results (like a clock that chimes at the wrong time) but it generally takes more time and is easier to fix. Also, Wrecking applies to pretty much anything: doors, walls, floors, whatever. *Tinkering* is limited to devices and chemicals and stuff like that.

EXAMPLES

CONTROLLED

I plant the bombs set the timers, move off to a safe distance, and... boom.

4/5 Risky Position: On your way out, two of the cult acolytes stop to converse near your planned exit door. The timers are ticking down. What do you do?

1-3 Withdraw or Risk: As you begin to plant the first charges, you can't quite discern how best to place them to level the building. You know that a cultist could come down here for supplies at any moment... do you want to take that risk and try to plant them properly, or withdraw and try a different way to destroy this place?

RISKY

I push past Fox and heft my crowbar. "Allow me to sweet-talk that lock, friend." I dig in and pry the thing off its hinges.

4/5 Complication: Well, sure... you can pry the door open—but it's not as quiet as picking the lock would have been! Somewhere upstairs, a chair scrapes back and you hear footsteps. Tick two more on the "Alert" clock for the guards. Oh did that fill the clock? Heh. You hear a shout and more footsteps running down the stairs toward the door.

DESPERATE

So, he comes at me with a sword? Pfff. I have a sledgehammer. I force him away with a backswing, then smash him through the window with a blow to the chest.

4/5 Severe Harm: He dodges around your backswing and his sword flashes out, piercing your upper thigh. Sledgehammers aren't great for defense, really. Take level 3 harm, "Vicious Leg Wound." But he's not ready for your sudden return swing and the hammer smashes him backwards and through the window.

PLAYERS' BEST PRACTICES

EMBRACE THE SCOUNDREL'S LIFE

The scoundrel's lot is a tough one, to be sure. The world in which they are trapped is deeply, cruelly unfair—created by the powerful to maintain their power and punish anyone who dares to resist. Some of the systems of the game are built to bring these injustices into play. No matter how cool or how capable the PCs are, the **HEAT** will pile on, entanglements will blindside them, the powers-that-be will try to kick them down with no regard.

Depending on who you are in real life, this predicament may come as a shock to you, requiring some new understanding on your part. Or it may be all too familiar. Either way, your character is not you. Their fate is their own. We're the advocates and fans of our characters, but they are not us. We don't safeguard them as we might safeguard ourselves or our loved ones. They must go off into their dark and brutal world and strive and suffer for what they achieve—we can't keep them safe here with us. They're brave to try. We're brave to follow their story and not flinch away. When they get knocked down, we look them in the eye and say, "You're not done yet. You can do this. Get back in there." And, unlike in our own world, our characters in *Blades in the Dark* cannot be defeated by mere power. They can be hurt—and they surely will be—but their resistance is always effective. The tools of oppression ultimately break against their defiance.

If we're willing to step back a bit, to not suffer their trials as personal failures, to imagine them as perseverant when we ourselves might quail, we might get to see them win past pain and despair into something else. It's a long shot, but they're up for it.

GO INTO DANGER, FALL IN LOVE WITH TROUBLE

You're a daring scoundrel on the mean streets of a haunted city. You're not a risk-averse, ordinary citizen. If you were, you'd indenture yourself to a workhouse and scrape out a meager living inside the status quo. You are daring, bold, ambitious, and ready to take big chances to live a bigger life.

Don't shoot down risky ideas. If something sounds fun and dangerous, well, that's great! The game system is designed to make risky actions very achievable for the PCs. Objections like "they might catch you," or "you could mess it up" are meaningless. There will always be risk in everything you do.

You're scoundrels at the bottom of the pile, daring to challenge the powers-that-be. Embrace this idea! Aim the action of the game toward what's cool and fun and don't feel like you have to manage every little risk. There will always be trouble and consequences of some kind. You'll drive yourself batty if you try to avoid it all.

Consequences aren't failures. Most actions will result in consequences—harm, stress, **HEAT**, new enemies, etc. But, in turn, most actions will succeed. Even with just two dice, you have a 75% chance of success. Success with complications, sure, but success nonetheless.

This means that you can take risks to achieve your character's goals—goals that a person with your character's lot in life would otherwise never achieve—you'll just have to suffer the consequences to get there. Is it painful for your character? Sure. Pursuing their goals will grind them down and hurt them in many different ways. But it doesn't have to be painful for you! Consequences drive the action of the game. **Consequences give you more chances to do cool scoundrel-y things**—which is the whole point of playing the game!

Don't let consequences frustrate you. Enjoy the rare **6** that lets you do it scot-free, but also learn to love those **4s** and **5s**. That's the core of the scoundrel life.

DON'T BE A WEASEL

As a player, you have the privilege of choosing which action to roll. But with this privilege comes a responsibility—**choose the action that matches what your character is doing**—not simply the dice pool you would like to roll.

For example, when you roll **TINKER**, it's because *you tinker with something*. When you roll **SWAY**, it's because *you sway someone's opinion*. If your crafty Leech shows off a cool gadget they made in order to sway a potential client, then the Leech is **SWAYING** them. They're **not** “using **TINKER**” to impress the person. That's not how actions work.

Of course, you can do a **setup** action with **TINKER** to build a gadget that might impress someone so they're more easily swayed (thereby increasing the effect or position of a follow-up action). But when you actually go to sway them, you roll your **SWAY** dice. That's why they're called actions, not skills. They're about what you're doing, not what you know.

If you're the type of player that really needs to use their best dice pool all the time, take the Slide's special ability **ROOK'S GAMBIT**. It will cost you stress—but at least you won't be a weasel.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

You are a co-author of the game. If you want shortcomings and flaws to be part of the ongoing story, show your own character's failure to make good decisions. If you want the world of Doskvol to be deadly, accept deadly harm when it's time for your character to die.

In *Blades*, every participant is responsible for the tone, style, and themes of the game—not just the GM. As a player, you have an *expressive* role to play at the table, not just a tactical one. Think about what you have to say as a co-author of the ongoing fiction and then use your character to say it.

USE YOUR STRESS

The ability to take stress is what separates your scoundrel from all the other people in the Dusk. Stress represents a pool of potential that can make you and your crew much more effective if you're willing to use it.

Take 2 stress to push yourself and get an assist from a teammate (they take 1 stress) and your odds of success greatly increase. The game is balanced so things are pretty tough for characters by default—that's the nature of Doskvol, after all. But by burning your stress, you can "break the rules" and perform beyond what you normally could achieve. If you hoard your stress, you might find that things are very tough for you.

DON'T TALK YOURSELF OUT OF FUN

When it's time to choose a type of plan, pick the one that sounds fun to you. Sure, your characters might try to play it smart and come up with a "good" idea and everything, but don't forget that you're playing this game so you can have exciting scenes of underworld action that appeal to *you*. Advocate for the plan type that will be most interesting and exciting—not always the one that seems like the clever thing to do. Your characters are daring, right? You can be, too. Go with what sounds like fun. The game will take care of the rest.

BUILD YOUR CHARACTER THROUGH PLAY

In *Blades*, your character begins as a simple sketch. You only have a few sparse details. You're a scoundrel! Maybe you used to be a noble or a laborer. You're from Irivia. You tend to **SKIRMISH** and **COMMAND** people to get what you want. That's about it. We don't know—and we don't yet need to know—who you "really" are.

In *Blades*, "character creation" lasts for the whole series of play. Your character's beliefs, drives, ambitions, and persona will emerge over time. We play to find out who you are at first, then who you become, and how you change (or don't), and it will come out of the process of play—the choices you make, the lines you cross, the things you're willing to sacrifice, when you give up, and when you don't.

If you've played other RPGs with persona or drama mechanics—you'll find them missing here. In this game, you don't first create your character as a fully realized fictional protagonist and then play that person. Instead, you start with a vague sketch and then create the character over time, on screen, as the game develops.

You're not beholden to initial choices for "who you really are" as a concept. You are what you become over the course of play.

ACT NOW, PLAN LATER

In roleplay gaming, spending a bunch of time planning can be really boring and pointless. You have a long talk about a dozen “what if” scenarios that never come to pass in play. All the points and counter-points about hypothetical situations turn out to be wasted time. Instead, move on to the action—and then “plan” using flashbacks or downtime actions instead.

Plan with a flashback when the **engagement roll** goes wrong. You’re about to break into the museum of antiquities but the engagement roll comes up 2—your crew is suddenly accosted by the patrol of moonlighting Bluecoats who are working as security. Oh no! We should have planned for this! Nah, just call for a flashback.

“Let’s have a flashback to the night before for a setup maneuver. We see Silver Consorting with our Bluecoat contact, Laroze. Maybe she was able to get some dirt on the local Bluecoat officers that she can use for leverage now—for better effect if we Sway him to look the other way...”

See how this is a much more badass form of planning? You could have discussed the merits of **CONSORTING** with Laroze ahead of time, just in case, in an endless debate of risk and reward. Or, **you can wait to see the trouble you’re in**, then flashback to a preparation that exactly applies to the situation at hand—making your character look terribly clever and cool. Much better, yeah? One of the reasons why the PCs have all those stress boxes is so you can do sly retro-planning maneuvers like this. Sure, this business with Laroze is a little far-fetched, but that’s okay. That’s what the stress cost is for. Pay the stress for the flashback and you have a perfect plan ready to go.

Your flashback doesn’t undo the result of the engagement roll—it isn’t time travel. Instead, you attempt to address the current bad outcome by making a roll as normal, except in this case the action takes place in the past. The bad engagement roll still matters—you’re in a bad spot—but by using a flashback for your action you can show how your earlier planning helps you deal with it now.

As long as you have stress to burn and a fun idea for a flashback, you can deflect or block some of the trouble from bad engagements after you see what they are, rather than trying to anticipate everything beforehand.

You can also **plan by working on a project in downtime**. The engagement roll partly depends on how vulnerable the target is. So, during downtime you can propose a long-term project like this: “I want to work on making the Red Sashes vulnerable to an assault.” The GM will ask you how you want to work on that, and you’ll make a roll, and when the clock is finished, whaddya know? The Red Sashes are now more vulnerable to an assault, and your engagement roll will have more dice. Since this preparation happens during downtime, you don’t need to debate its merits as a “plan” with the whole group. It’s simply something your character spends some of their time on, and it benefits everyone, so there’s no debate needed. And, if you can knock out the project in one downtime phase, even better! The Red Sashes will be vulnerable right away.

THE SCORE GAME AND THE CREW GAME

by Duann Figueroa

After playing *Blades in the Dark* for a while, I noticed that we were playing two interconnected but different games. Every score has its own set of priorities, challenges and rewards. Action rolls, consequences, teamwork rules, etc. This is the score game, an inside perspective of the adrenaline fueled lives of a scoundrel. Stuff blows up, blood is drawn, and characters try to dodge the bullets—come up victorious or empty handed.

But then there's the crew game. Payoff, heat, entanglements, downtime and, especially, the Tier and faction status rules. This is when you zoom out and get to play a bigger game. The beginning crew is a low-level character struggling to reach true “movers and shakers” status. The players speculate who they're going to help and who they're going to screw, deal with the fallout, get contacts, get intel, move the gears inside the Duskwall clock.

And here's where it gets interesting: both games form a virtuous circle.

Let's start from the beginning: we three scoundrels get together to survive in the streets of Duskwall through the shadowy arts of the underworld. We acquire contacts, get a lair, and are approached by another gang: they run the district, they are cool, they are powerful and above all, they are not starving. We want that, we will get there someday.

But there are bills to pay, so we plan a score. Things get rough, there are some entanglements as fallout, but we get some decent coin out of it. Not enough to rule, but enough to keep going.

Things move around us, maybe there's a war in the district, people start asking us for favors, we form more contacts and hell, maybe we could get somewhere with this. We can work with this other gang boss, he says we have a future. Or maybe we backstab him for a reward from his enemies.

So we play the score game, things happen, people are killed, favors are earned and paid, ghosts haunt us, coin is spent. But we're not isolated loners, we make enemies and allies, we have stuff to take care of, we have a goal. We're also playing the crew game.

The cycle is: we start a score, the score introduces new elements in the fiction, those elements affect other factions, those factions react, we try to make the most of those reactions and climb the Tier ladder. This affects other factions, we have to deal with it so we make another score... and on it goes.

Why is this awesome? Because the game ensures that player actions *matter*. They affect the game setting directly and deeply. By zooming in and out in scope we as a gaming group create a rolling snowball of adventures that changes us and changes the world.

CHAPTER 7

RUNNING THE GAME

If you've run other roleplaying games before, you might find that running this game is a bit different—mainly in the distribution of authority in the game, in the way players have a lot of say over how the rules are applied, especially.

This chapter breaks the GM job down into several key areas to help demystify it a bit. First, we'll cover **Goals**, then **Actions**, **Principles**, **Best Practices**, and **Bad Habits** to avoid.

GM GOALS

When you run the game, try to accomplish these goals:

- ◆ **Play to find out what happens.** Don't steer the game toward certain outcomes or events. Be curious!
- ◆ **Convey the fictional world honestly.** When it's time to say what happens, or what's in the world around the PCs, "look around" the vision of Duskwall in your head and say what you see. Don't play favorites. Make the world seem real, not contrived.
- ◆ **Bring Doskvol to life.** Give each location a specific aspect (crowded, cold, wet, dim, etc.). Give each important NPC a name, detail and a preferred method of problem solving (threats, bargaining, violence, charm, etc.). Give each action context—the knife fight is on rickety wooden stairs; the informant huddles among the wreckage of the statue of the Weeping Lady; the Lampblacks' lair stinks of coal dust.

To achieve your goals, use **GM Actions** guided by your **GM Principles** (detailed on the following pages).

GM ACTIONS

The player characters have sixteen actions they use to get things done in the game. You have actions, too. When it's your turn to contribute, and you're not sure what to do, look at your list of actions and pick one.

ASK QUESTIONS

First and foremost, **ask questions**. You can get along very well as a GM by simply asking questions, building on the answers, asking more questions, answering them with dice rolls, and so on. Asking questions is the heart and soul of running a roleplaying game.

- ◆ **Ask establishing questions** to set the stage for the action. *Who's leading the group? Is everyone rushing in to fight with Arcy, or is someone hanging back or doing something else? Do you want to focus on Bazso and win him over, or are you addressing the room at large to make your point?*
- ◆ **Ask provocative questions** to make the players think and express their characters. *What kind of person does he think you are now? Are you going to just let her get away with that? Can you bring yourself to hurt him?*
- ◆ **Ask leading questions** to show the players what you're thinking. *Do you think she's the type of person who will respond well to threats? Does anyone want to Survey the room or Study Lyssa? When you do that, the whole thing is gonna catch fire, though, right?*
- ◆ **Ask trivial questions** when the mood strikes you and you're curious. *Where do you usually go for dinner? Do you have any little curios or personal items here in the lair?*
- ◆ **Ask the players for help** when you're uncertain or stuck. You don't have to do it alone. *I don't know... should this be desperate or risky? What's a good Devil's Bargain here? Seems like fatal harm, I think, but maybe not? What do you think?*

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES, FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

GM, it's your job to **provide opportunities** but also to **follow the player's lead**.

Providing opportunities is easy: Duskwall is a setting specifically designed with the scoundrel in mind. As the GM, you'll step in and describe an opportunity when the PCs look for one, rolling or picking from the opportunity tables as you please, adding your unique ideas about the city and its factions, guided by your **goals** and **principles**.

Ask questions

Provide opportunities & follow the player's lead

Cut to the action

Telegraph trouble before it strikes

Follow through

Initiate action with an NPC

Tell them the consequences and ask

Tick a clock

Offer a Devil's Bargain

Think off-screen

Opportunities need not be balanced or consistent. Sometimes they'll be exquisite—a clear exploit, an ideal target, a fat payday. Sometimes they'll be poor—a perilous opening, a troublesome target, a thin margin for profit. But there's always something to be found. The setting of Doskvol is designed the way it is so that the next chance for a score easily flows from the fiction. Look around at the factions and NPCs that interest you. Who's vulnerable? Who needs something done? What part of the setting are you curious to see in play? It's sure to have opportunities for crime.

Between scores, the PCs are free to **gather information** to set up the next operation. If the players don't have their own idea for a job, this is the perfect chance to look for a new opportunity. Ask them if they'd like to perform a **group action** to discover something, and how their crew goes about that kind of thing. Do they **COMMAND** people to spill useful secrets? Do they **CONSORT** with their network of friends and contacts? Do they **STUDY** the newspapers and other documents, looking for weaknesses to exploit? Do they **HUNT** for victims across the district? A “legwork montage” may follow their rolls, allowing you as the GM to convey the details of the opportunity through brief moments of action and snippets of dialogue from NPCs.

When you present an opportunity, it should include the components necessary for the players to understand how they might mount a score. It may not be ideal, but it should actually be an opportunity; not a vague and indistinct notion. The PCs should understand that *“The Dimmer Sisters have lost their turf and now only their mysterious (and haunted) townhouse lair remains. Their enemies are closing in to finish them off.”* It's not sufficient to say, “You hear that there's something going on with the Dimmer Sisters.” Depending on the outcome of the investigation (or the strength of their informant's or contact's connection to the opportunity), you can provide even more details and hooks for the action to come. *“The Crows are closing in, poised to finish the Sisters off. You know how Lyssa is! The Sisters could use your help... or maybe betraying them to the Crows is the more profitable move.”*

An opportunity consists of:

- ◆ A **target**. *The Ministry of Preservation.*
- ◆ A **location**. *One of their contraband storage warehouses near Gaddoc Station.*
- ◆ A **situation**. *A spirit essence smuggling ring was busted by the Wardens at Gaddoc Station just yesterday.*
- ◆ One obvious vector for a **plan**. *Laroze can get hired to moonlight as security. He'll let you in the back door—for a cut of the profits.*

Better information from contacts or investigation (or other means) may include:

- ◆ **Connected factions** and what they need or want. *Those essences were paid for by the Hive. They want what's theirs.*
- ◆ A not-so-obvious vector for a **plan**. *Spirit essences can be compelled through the ghost field... in theory.*
- ◆ Interesting **secrets**, a link to an alternate opportunity. *The Wardens are likely to secure any captured essences with arcane protections. The Reconciled abhor the essence trade and may be a possible ally or enemy, depending on what you do.*

See the **Crew** chapter (page 91) for tables of opportunities arranged by crew type. These are bare-bones starters that you can flesh out with details from your specific iteration of Duskwall in play.

Basically, you're offering the players an opportunity for action. Sure, it follows from the ongoing fiction of Duskwall as established in your game, but the heart of these opportunities is a gameplay mechanic. The players have showed up to play *Blades in the Dark*, which means they want to do exciting and interesting crimes. It's like they're at the arcade and they've dropped in a quarter and it's your job as the GM to light up the screen with NEW STAGE and get the game going.

You're providing enough to keep the game from stalling; enough so that *Blades in the Dark* can happen at the game table tonight. If the PCs are flush with available **COIN** and **REP** to spend and downtime to burn, they can dig up lots more juicy information to position themselves strongly for this opportunity and go in with a better engagement roll (at least). If they don't have those resources to spend... well, things are tougher, but that's the nature of the scoundrel's life, and at least there's still something fun to do. We can shrug at the ill-fortune of our characters right now, slap them on the back and say good luck, have fun with that!

The other avenue for getting the game going is to **follow the player's lead**. This is just like providing an opportunity, but in this case you listen to the opportunity presented by the players rather than describing it yourself. Ask them clarifying questions to flesh out their idea so you end up with a target, a location, a situation, and a vector for a plan. Then ask if they want to investigate further (potentially inviting trouble) or go ahead to the engagement roll.

CUT TO THE ACTION

When they say, "We should break into Inspector Klave's house," that's your cue. Say "That sounds like a Stealth plan, yeah? What's your point of entry?" Then, when they give you the detail, you say, "All right, so you're on the rooftop of the fabric store across the alley from their house. It's quiet and dark in there. You throw your ropes and grapnels across. Let's make the engagement roll." Bam, just like that, you're on a score. That might seem way too fast and breezy if you're used to other roleplaying games. You don't always have to go that fast! But it's good to keep this method in mind and generally aim toward it. Anything prosecuted via conversation will take longer than you think it will—if you hold this "cut to the action" idea in the forefront of your mind, you can trim off some time that might just be fruitless planning or unnecessary hesitation.

Same goes for any kind of "scene change" that happens in play. Like, when a player decides to go **CONSORT** with their friend, you can cut to the action in progress. "You're at the usual place, under the Bell Street bridge. It's windy and raining; water pouring out of the gutters. Flint struggles to keep her pipe lit. 'Devil take this weather,' she says. 'What do you want?'" Rather than starting back at the lair and playing out "Where do you go? Where would Flint be? How can you arrange a meeting?" you just cut to the action of the meeting in progress and the game moves along fine, keeping momentum high.

TELEGRAPH TROUBLE BEFORE IT STRIKES

When the action is underway, show them a threat that's about to hit, then ask them what they do. Then it's easy to know what the consequences are.

She snaps her coat open, stepping away from you, drawing her pistol. She's cocking back the hammer now, in this slow-motion moment—the muzzle leveling at your face. What do you do?

The Inspector holds out his hand, impatient. Let's not take all day... He needs your approved cargo manifest and stamped Ministry of Preservation documents—which you totally have, right?

His eyes go wide when you walk in and he curses as he leaps out of his seat and runs full tilt for the back door. What do you do?

You skulk through the rooms of sleeping mercenaries, to the old stone stairs leading down into the cellar. There's no door, just a metal portcullis with a huge ancient lock, the sound and smell of water beyond in the dark. Boots clomp back down the hallway as one of the sentries resumes their patrol. What do you do?

Contrast those with these vague versions:

She starts a fight! Do you Skirmish with her?

You have to deal with an Inspector at the dock. How do you do that?

He's really scared of you. What do you do?

You want to sneak into their cellar? You can roll Prowl for that.

Without telegraphing the trouble and giving context to the action, the outcomes can seem murky. You might feel like you have to “invent” a consequence out of the blue when they roll a **1-3** or **4/5**. If you strongly imply the consequences before the action roll, though, then it's obvious what the consequences should be (she shoots you, your cover is blown, he escapes, you alert a sentry)—they follow directly from the fiction as established.

FOLLOW THROUGH

You've telegraphed the threat, so go ahead and follow through when it hits. Players have several tools at their disposal to deal with adversity. If they can react in time, they can make an action roll. If they're hit with trouble, they can resist it. You don't have to pull your punches!

She shoots you, the ball shatters your cheek and the room spins and goes dark and you go sprawling to the floor. Take level 3 harm.

The Inspector can't prove you're lying right now, but this all seems very strange. He's going to report it the Ministry later. Take +2 HEAT.

He makes it out the door and into the street and into the crowds of people there. You hear someone shout as they're shoved aside, but you can't see him anywhere.

You Tinker with the old lock and finally it gives way, suddenly creaking loudly as rusty bits crumble from the door. Back down the hall you hear a voice. “What was that?” I'm ticking the “Alert” clock.

This GM action applies to maneuvers by powerful enemy factions, too. If they're ready and able to do something without clear interference, then they can just do it. Go ahead and say, "The Unseen told you what would happen if you interfered. They firebomb your lair while you're sleeping. You wake up and it's just burning timbers and smoke everywhere. What do you do?" The players will interrupt, flashback, scramble, and deal with it. It'll be fun.

INITIATE ACTION WITH AN NPC

This is very similar to the previous GM action, but it's worth highlighting. You don't always have to wait for the PCs to do something. Your NPCs can initiate the action, too! The more dangerous an NPC is, the more they should seize the initiative.

"She's very smooth and sly. She tells you a lie about why she was late to the meeting, and it seems totally legit!"

"Oh, no way. I'm not gonna fall for that."

"Okay, resist with your Insight if you want to. Otherwise she's just too good."

This is a very effective technique, but it can be overused. Save it for an NPC who's a real master at something, or for particularly dire situations.

TELL THEM THE CONSEQUENCES AND ASK

"Yeah, you can run the whole way but you might be exhausted when you arrive. Want to roll for it and take the risk, or go slower?"

"The spirit strikes terror in your heart. You can flee or be paralyzed with fear. Which is it? Or do you want to resist?"

TICK A CLOCK

Keep a stack of index cards and a marker handy. Draw a clock whenever it feels right. Put them out where everyone can see, to help track progress in the fiction. Ticking a clock is a great way to follow through on a threat without bringing an end to the conflict yet.

OFFER A DEVIL'S BARGAIN

Think of a fun complication or reckless decision. Offer them the bonus die in exchange. If you don't have a good idea, ask the other players—or you can offer the devil's die in exchange for **HEAT**. There are always unseen witnesses lurking about in Duskwall.

THINK OFF-SCREEN

What's going on elsewhere, and will it have an impact on what's on-screen right now? Are there characters that might have reason to arrive here and get involved in what's going on? Where are the Bluecoat patrols in this district right now? Are there any ghosts that would be drawn to what's happening here?

GM PRINCIPLES

When you pursue your goals and choose actions, use your principles to guide your decision-making.

- ◆ **Be a fan of the PCs.** Present the world honestly—things really are stacked against them—but don’t make yourself the enemy of the PCs. They have enemies enough. Be interested in the characters and excited about their victories.
- ◆ **Let everything flow from the fiction.** The game’s starting situations and your opening scene will put things in motion. Ask how the characters react and see what happens next. NPCs react according to their goals and methods. Events snowball. You don’t need to “manage” the game. Action, reaction, and consequences will drive everything.
- ◆ **Paint the world with a haunted brush.** There are ghosts, weird echoes, arcane energies, and strange cults everywhere. How does the haunted city manifest?
- ◆ **Surround them with industrial sprawl.** Doskvol is crowded with factories and their choking soot clouds, buzzing electric lights, ironworks, hissing and clanking machines. How do the industrialized systems manifest here?
- ◆ **Address the characters.** “Silver, where do you go to look for the Red Sashes?” not “Sara, where does Silver go?” This puts Silver front and center—his preferences, desires, and style. Silver comes to life as a character.
- ◆ **Address the players.** “Sara, how do you want to handle this? Should we do a whole scene or just make a roll real quick?” This puts Sara front and center—her preferences, desires, and style. Sara can consider what she wants, rather than what the character wants.
- ◆ **Consider the risk.** Think about the dangers inherent in what the scoundrels do. A **risky** roll is the default. When they’re building on successes, they might make controlled rolls. When they have to improvise off the cuff or when they’re in over their heads, they’re probably making desperate rolls. Go with your gut. Call the positions as you see them, but be open to revision.
- ◆ **Hold on lightly.** Always feel free to rewind, revise, and reconsider events as needed. This is not a “no take backs” kind of game. You can always say, “Actually, no... let’s say it was only two guys, instead. I don’t know why they’d have any more than that here.” This can be a tricky principle to internalize. It can be so tempting to put your foot down (often for no good reason) or to treat elements of the game as too sacred. Resist that impulse!

GM BEST PRACTICES

Earn the trust of the group by being a supportive and fair advocate of the integrity of the fiction. It's your job to portray a fictional world with integrity, not one that's contrived and "set up" for particular outcomes. When you advocate for something, the players know that you do so on behalf of this integrity, not to get your way or to arrange situations to your liking.

Lead an interesting conversation. The game is a conversation between you and the players, the goal of which is to answer the question "*What happens now?*" in the most engaging way possible. The most interesting conversations are those that are **curious**—asking questions and prompting ideas—rather than dogmatic or one-sided. Be curious about what the other players have to say.

Create an atmosphere of inquiry at the table. This means you *play to find out what happens*, not to make sure something specific happens. Will they go to war with the Fog Hounds? Is Nyla badass enough to take out the thugs by herself? Can they avoid or predict Casta's betrayal? **Play to find out.** Don't decide outcomes ahead of time and manipulate play to bring them about.

Help the players use the game system to pursue the goals of the characters. Don't let them flounder. When they have a goal, ask them about any opportunities they have to pursue it. Present two possible approaches from that opportunity and ask if they want to choose one or invent a third way.

Don't block. It's not your job to say, "You can't do that." You're not the sole authority on what the characters can and cannot do. Instead, ask them, "*You need to create an opportunity to attempt that, right?*" Ask them *how* they might create an opportunity they need. Don't block. Show them that there's a path to their goal, even if it might be a long or dangerous one.

Keep the meta channel open. When you portray an NPC, tell the players things that are going unsaid. Invite them to ask their *gather information* questions to dig deeper. The characters have a broad spectrum of senses and intuitions to bring to bear in the fiction; the players have only the narrow channel of your few words. Help them out by sharing what they might suspect, intuit, feel, and predict.

Be a curious explorer of the game in play. Ask the players questions to feed your own interest in the ongoing fiction in which the PCs are the protagonists. Your game series is a cool TV show and you're its biggest fan. When you're curious about something that a PC says or does, ask them about it! "*I'm curious, though, when you tell him you'd do anything to help, do you really mean that? Anything? Are you that kind of person? Or are you just manipulating him?*" These questions will often lead to goals, approaches, and rolls.

Advocate for the interests and capabilities of the NPCs. Your job is to convey the fictional world accurately, remember? Believable NPCs with interests and capabilities make for a more compelling fictional world. Don't be a pushover. When the PCs take action against an NPC, remind the players of their interests and capabilities. *"But Quellyn won't just go along with all this, right? They're a witch, wanted by the Spirit Wardens. How are you going to contend with that?"* When the PCs act in alignment with the interests of NPCs, remind the players of their support and friendship.

Play Goal-Forward. Poll the group about what goal they're pursuing, either in the bigger picture of the game (best used at the beginning of a session) or in this microcosm of the present moment (best used when things are underway and the situation is snowballing). Once you know the goal, have a conversation about opportunities, actions, and effects. The pursuit of opportunities and positions to enable certain approaches, the acquisition of information and resources, and the nested conflicts that result will drive the action of the game. *"What are you trying to accomplish?" "Do you have an opportunity to do that?" "How do you want to go about it?"* Follow this chain of events as actions and consequences play out. Ask the players to lead where the game goes next.

Cut to the Action. Solicit a goal and plan, then cut to the action and use dice rolls to move the situation forward. Don't be afraid to resolve something! They want to eliminate Ulf Ironborn and then they go and do it, despite the odds and dangers? It's *done*. He's gone. Don't string things out artificially. The dice and mechanics will determine how simple or troublesome something turns out to be.

Be aware of potential fiction vs. established fiction. Potential fiction is everything in your head that you haven't put into play yet. It's a "cloud" of possible things, organized according to the current situation. When the PCs infiltrate the manor house, you might have potential fiction elements in your head like this:

- ◆ Courtyard (wide open? filled with statuary?)
- ◆ Rooftop (loose tiles?)
- ◆ Underground Canal
- ◆ Sentries (professionals?)
- ◆ Guard Dogs (or other animals?)
- ◆ Electric Lights
- ◆ Fancy Locks

And then, when they say that they're crossing the courtyard, you bring up a new cloud of potential in your head, by imagining that element in more detail, with its own features to establish, like deciding if the yard is open or filled with statuary.

As the players take action and face obstacles, you grab elements from the potential fiction cloud and establish them in the ongoing scene. Once established, they can be leveraged by the players. They're a part of the game. Before that, they're just notional—they don't have a concrete "place" in the game yet. They can be freely incorporated as needed to address the results of rolls and to paint the picture of the ongoing operation as it hurtles toward its resolution.

You're not taking the PCs on a tour of every room of your house. The PCs should be more like viewers watching an edited sequence of shots that carry them forward in the action of the game—into trouble or past it, as the rolls dictate. This is why *Blades* uses clocks to track progress rather than room-by-room maps. A map can be good as a reference to draw from as part of the “potential fiction cloud,” but in this game it’s a bad idea to treat a map as a checklist of areas that must be moved through in order to get somewhere.

Zoom the action in and out. We resolve uncertain and challenging situations with the roll of the dice. But what should the scope of these rolls be? Do we resolve the whole fight in one roll, or do we zoom in to each exchange of blows? By design, the game is fairly flexible on this point. Sometimes you’ll want to resolve a lot of action with one roll and sometimes you’ll want to get down to very small moments of action. Think of it like a dial that the group can turn during play to zoom the focus in and out from the broad to the specific.

To make this choice of scope explicit, the game uses effect levels and progress clocks. If a circumstance calls for several exchanges, multiple risk-taking actions, or a grind of effort against a tough obstacle, make a clock and tick it according to the effect system to progress through the situation. Each action roll is likely to produce consequences for the PCs, so the greater the effect they can muster, the more they’ll minimize trouble, and vice versa.

If you think the circumstance doesn’t call for it, though, feel free to zoom out and resolve a bigger chunk of action with one roll. “*You spent all day Hunting for the routes that Flint’s couriers are using, let’s see how it went.*”

Let the level of interest at the table be your guide for zooming in and out. If interest is high, zoom in. If interest is lower, zoom out and move on to something else.

Bring the elements of the game system to life on screen. When an NPC is influenced, what does that look like? When a PC is hunted by the guards, what fictional details convey that change in their situation? Ask the other players for ideas if you want to. “*Do they come rushing over with lantern lights trained on you?*” “*Oh, no, maybe they have electric lights here, and they suddenly switch on with a massive crackle of energy.*”

Put it on a card. Use index cards for NPCs, locations, job offers, leads, etc. It’s easy to lose track of things if you don’t have a record of it. By putting important things on index cards, everyone can see them spread out on the table and incorporate them into the game.

GM BAD HABITS

DON'T CALL FOR A SPECIFIC ACTION ROLL

This bad habit usually happens if you've GM'd other games where this is your job. You might say, "Give me a Finesse roll," or "That's a Consort check." Try to get out of this habit. Get used to saying this, instead: "How do you do that?" **Ask the player which action they use.** Then tell them the position and effect level that you see in this situation, using that action—as well as *why* you think that.

This lets you skip a tedious "convincing" phase where everyone has to debate about which action is the single right one to use. Don't have that debate. Just **ask the player** which action their character is performing, then set the position and effect.

"I want to get this guy to hand over the keys."

"How do you do that?"

"I... like, Finesse him?"

"Okay. What's your character doing? What do we see 'on screen'?"

"Oh, right... it's like, I sidle up to him, run my finger along his arm, down to his hand, look him in the eye... you know, kind of get all seductive about it."

"Ah, okay, I get it. I think that's risky, limited effect. If you actually Sway him, instead, I'd think that would be standard effect."

Maybe you would make a different judgment call in the case above (desperate position and zero effect, maybe, if you think **FINESSE** is all wrong for seductive persuasion). That's fine! Your game of *Blades* is your own. Plus, even when you say "desperate position, zero effect," you're not shutting the player down completely. They can push themselves for more effect, get a teammate to set them up for a better position, etc. It's not an argument between the GM and player that one person has to win. It's just the normal back-and-forth interaction of the game.

Instead of saying, "You have to roll Sway for this," you ask the player which action the character is performing—which gives the player the opportunity for a creative contribution to what's happening in the fiction. Then you put that action in context in the world as you see it, by establishing position and effect.

DON'T MAKE THE PCS LOOK INCOMPETENT

When a PC rolls a **1-3**, things go badly, but it's because the circumstances are dangerous or troublesome—not because the character is a buffoon. Even a PC with zero rating in an action isn't a bumbling fool. Here's a trick for this: start your description of the failure with a cool move by the PC, followed by "but," and then the element in the situation that made things so challenging. "*You aim a fierce right hook at his chin, but he's quicker than he looked! He ducks under the blow and wrestles you up against the wall.*"

On failure, talk about what went wrong. “Ah, maybe you missed something while you’re climbing through the jeweler’s broken window?” “Yeah, they probably have tripwires or something huh?” “Yep! You feel the wire snap against your arm.” You can also lean on features the player has already portrayed about the character. How are their vice or traumas a problem? What is it about their heritage or background that gives them trouble or gets in the way?

DON’T OVERCOMPLICATE THINGS

The consequence(s) you inflict on a **1-3** or **4/5** roll will usually be obvious, since the action has already been established. But sometimes you’ll draw a blank. It’s okay to keep it simple! A complication can just be some extra **HEAT**, or a tick on a clock that represents a related problem not present in the current scene. Or you can inflict simple harm like “Exhausted.” Every single consequence doesn’t have to be an interesting new problem or a brutal reversal of fortune. Go with what’s obvious to you. Ask the players for ideas if you feel stuck.

DON’T LET PLANNING GET OUT OF HAND

Some players will plan an operation forever if no one stops them—even if they hate doing it! They think it’s worth the trouble if they can cover every potential issue or avoid some bad outcome. This is not how *Blades in the Dark* works. Everything is resolved by engagement and action rolls, so get to them! If someone has a cool maneuver or idea, that’s great, but it’s probably still a controlled action roll. They can’t plan and discuss their way out of making the rolls. **An idea is not execution.**

DON’T HOLD BACK ON WHAT THEY EARN

If they get into position, make the roll, and have their effect, *they get what they earned*. Don’t weasel out of it! Things are hard enough on them already. Don’t be a skinflint about victories; defeats will come without your thumb on the scales. The scoundrels are at the bottom of the faction ladder, but that doesn’t mean they’re ineffective. It means they need lots and lots of victories to make it. They’re good at the game, they just started out with negative points on the board. The same goes for secrets. If they make the discovery, tell them all about it. Don’t hold on to your precious secrets. It’s more fun to find out what they do about it once they know.

DON’T SAY NO

There’s almost always a better answer than “no” or “you can’t do that.” Offer a **Devil’s Bargain!** “So... you want to seduce the most experienced madam in the city. Uh huh. Okay then. That’s desperate, with limited effect. But here’s a Devil’s Bargain: regardless of how this goes, you fall in love with her. She’s just that good.”

Or you might say the proposed action has **zero effect** as the baseline.

“I want to bash down the reinforced door with my bare hands. I’m Wrecking it.”

“Okay... it’s risky (you might break your hands) and you’ll have zero effect.”

“I’m gonna push myself to get limited effect, then.”

Same thing with super-fancy locks, or ultra elite soldiers, etc. You can set zero effect as the baseline for a given action—instead of saying no—and the players can then modify effect from there by pushing themselves, using teamwork, etc.

Or tell them to start the first phase of a **long-term project clock**. That's what they're there for. “*You want to trace every contraband route into Doskvol? Sounds like an investigation. Start a 6-clock for the first phase: ‘Assemble the List of All the Contraband Dealers.’*”

Note that you will have to say no, sometimes. A *Blades* character can't fly to the moon just because the player really wants to. It's your responsibility as the GM to convey the fictional world honestly. But in most situations, simply saying no is the boring option. Consider a Devil's Bargain, zero effect, or a long-term project, instead.

DON'T ROLL TWICE FOR THE SAME THING

When a PC faces danger, they make an action roll. Also, they can roll resistance to avoid a bad outcome. However, don't roll twice for the exact same thing.

For example, Arlyn is dueling a Red Sash on the roof. The Red Sash drives her back with a flurry of feints and slashes, and there's a danger that Arlyn will be forced over the edge during the skirmish. Arlyn's player makes an action roll to see how her counter-attack goes. She rolls badly! Arlyn is forced over the edge and falls off the roof.

But she can roll to resist, right? Yes. She can resist the *harm* that results from the fall. But she can't “undo” being forced over the edge. That's already been determined by her action roll. Her resistance reduces the impact of the fall. Instead of breaking her leg, she suffers lesser harm (maybe a sprained ankle) or maybe the GM rules that she's able to avoid the harm entirely by rolling into a rough crash-landing. Either way, she's still fallen off the roof.

In other words, the action roll determines whether a consequence manifests or not. Resistance changes **how much** of that danger manifests or how bad it is, but it doesn't negate the fictional outcome of the action roll.

DON'T GET CAUGHT UP IN MINUTIA

Whenever possible, elide time and edit the action to move ahead to the next engaging moment. When the players say, “Let's go talk to Lyssa about a new job,” you can say, “Okay, you head over to the Crows' tower, they pat you down and take your weapons, then you're brought in to see Lyssa in her office at the top.” That's potentially 30 minutes of tedium that you might have suffered if you'd played through every beat, like, “Okay, so where are you now? At Rigney's tavern? Let's look at the map. Okay, you're on this street here and the Crows' lair is over here. Which way do you go?” There's no need for that kind of moment-to-moment drudgery. Imagine the action like a TV show or film. The group announces an intention, there's an establishing shot of the new situation, then the action starts.

If the players get antsy, such as, “Whoa, hang on! I want to do something first,” or, “I don't want them to take my blade, I want to hide it so they don't find it with the pat-down,” then that's fine. Ask them what they do and resolve their action, then move on to the new situation.

ANCIENT MAGIC, MODERN SCIENCE: GOTHIC STORYTELLING IN DUSKWALL

By Andrew Shields

When improvising, it helps to have a few key themes to fall back on so you have a consistent flavor for your setting. For *Blades in the Dark*, one of those key themes is electroplasm. Duskwall runs on electroplasm. It is the distilled essence of the ghost field, rendered from demon blood. You can connect it to technological industry, with new lightning wall technology, electric lights, and gadgets. You can also connect it to the supernatural, with ghosts, other undead, leviathans, Whispers, and ancient runic magic. Electroplasm fuels the technology and energizes the supernatural.

If you are hard pressed and need to think up something valuable to reference, steal, or wreck, how does it relate to electroplasm? If you need to think of a cool site for something to go down, keep that electroplasmic lens in mind to give it unique touches. Maybe you need a quick obstacle; maybe it relates to electroplasm.

You don't want the scoundrels to run across electroplasm walls as an obstacle over and over. But there could be a restless spirit that manifests and is intensely territorial. Or maybe a team of Spirit Wardens picked tonight of all nights to do an alley sweep to wipe out the residuals. Or maybe there is a Whisper with an independent agenda in your way, communing with the spirits, and you're reluctant to interrupt. Maybe when you were casing the location an illegal leviathan blood vendor spotted you and thinks you're spying for the Bluecoats, and sends thugs after you.

Need a rich NPC? Maybe they own a leviathan hunter fleet of four ships. Maybe they made their fortune from Whispers prodding ghosts for blackmail material. Maybe they manufacture

the restricted electroplasmic barrier technology. Maybe they curate a museum of art made by ghosts.

Those improvisations were based on thinking of how it traces back to electroplasm, but also thinking of the breadth of how that could apply.

Finally, the power of Gothic storytelling (for me) comes in the uneasy clash of a rational, intellectual, scientific worldview, and a superstitious, emotional, magical worldview. Electroplasm has that built in, as people were coping with it before industrialization harnessed it properly as a mass-produced energy type. As they lost sight of its identity as anything but a resource, they lost the respect the superstitious showed. If you feel you are at risk of getting stale in improvisation, jump back and forth across the Gothic line.

They go to meet a contact, you want to make him interesting. Maybe he's proud of his electrified walking stick, and he lights his cigarettes with it. Or, to jump to the other side, maybe he's got runes on his hat-band so he can trap a ghost there if he gets in a pinch. Either way, your contact just got more interesting, and also is a flavor fit for Duskwall.

You need a heist location. On one side of the Gothic line, it's an abandoned distillery for leviathan oil. The Spirit Wardens were underpaid and sloppy in clearing it out, and all the dead in a half mile congregate here, corporeal or otherwise. But the office still has the safe...

On the other side of the Gothic line, three ragged basements connect to the cellars of a wealthy aristocrat. One of them houses a squatter who has covered all surfaces with chalk runes, trapped by a paranoia that there is a specific ghost out to get her. Maybe tonight there is...

STARTING THE GAME

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST SESSION

During the first session, the group will choose a crew type, create their scoundrel characters, and embark on their first score. You might be able to finish the first score in the first session, but you might not, depending on how quickly the crew and characters come together. Either way is fine.

To prepare, read through character and crew creation again. You'll take the lead on that process, walking everyone through the steps and answering their questions as you go. The creation phase is very important—it impacts all of the future sessions you're about to play—so take your time and create a cast of characters that everyone is curious about.

Skim through the **Factions** of Doskvol (starting on page 283) and pick three or four that you're especially interested in. During crew creation, the players will ask you about some factions connected to their crew, so it's good to have a few in mind already. If you're using the “War in Crow’s Foot” **starting situation** (see page 204), you'll probably want to use the Crows, the Lampblacks, and the Red Sashes as your connected factions to start.

You can also prepare with some of the game's **touchstones** (page 4). Watch an episode of a TV show or a movie, read a comic or a book, listen to music—whatever inspires you and puts you in the mood for *Blades in the Dark*. Fill your head with industrial-fantasy images and ideas and spend some idle time just imagining the dark city of Duskwall and what it's like there.

Finally, print out the game sheets (available at bladesinthedark.com). You'll want at least two of each playbook (in case two people pick the same one) and one of each crew type. Also print the rules reference sheets, the GM sheets, and the map of Doskvol.

AT THE FIRST SESSION: SETTING EXPECTATIONS

After everyone shows up and chit-chats and then finally settles down, ready to play, what do you say first? I like to start by giving a punchy synopsis of the game (even if everyone already knows it—it helps shift into “let's play” mode).

Okay, so you're all daring scoundrels on the haunted streets of Duskwall, seeking your fortunes in the criminal underworld. Let's make some characters and form a crew! Here are the playbooks. They're the different types of scoundrels you can play. I'll summarize them and then you can choose...

The key is not to over-explain or drown the players in loads of details or mechanics at this point. Give a little context so they understand what they need to do, but don't try to tell them everything in one big speech at the start. If they're curious and asking you questions, that's good! Don't explain all the rules up front. You can teach the rules as they come up during play. Don't give a lecture about Duskwall and its history. Keep everything as simple as possible.

While they're looking over the playbooks and crew sheets, talk about their role as players in the game and set expectations for what you're going to do together as a game group. I also like to say this:

This is a game, but it's also something else—something really cool and unique. We're gonna collaboratively create fiction together, by having a conversation about these characters and situations, without anyone having to plan it out or create a plot ahead of time. It's like our very own TV series that we produce but we also get to watch it as a viewer and be surprised by what happens. You'll say what your characters care about and what they do, and I'll say how the world responds and just like that, a story will happen. It's crazy. And fun. Oh, and here's the best gaming advice, from my friend Avery: play your character like you're driving a stolen car.

CREATING CHARACTERS AND THE CREW

Follow the procedures on page 57 and page 99. Ask the players some of these questions while they do it:

- ◆ *Why did you become a scoundrel?*
- ◆ *Have you ever been locked up? Why? Are any of your friends still behind bars?*
- ◆ *How did you join this crew? Did another member vouch for you? Were you a founding member?*
- ◆ *The two of you have the same heritage. Do you want to be blood relatives? Do you know each other's families?*
- ◆ *What's your vice? What is it, specifically? Why does that thing consume you?*
- ◆ *You both have the same background. Did you come up together? Were you partners before this crew was founded?*
- ◆ *When was the last time you used your blade? Why?*
- ◆ *Who do you trust the most on the crew? Who do you trust the least? What's that about? Or will we find out in play?*
- ◆ *Has [faction] ever tried to recruit you? What happened? You, uh, don't secretly work for them, do you?*

You don't have to know every little detail about the characters and their history before you start (it's better if you don't), but everyone should be excited about this group of scoundrels. If someone seems frustrated or disinterested, ask them about it and talk about how things might improve to get them more involved.

If a player gets stuck and can't make a decision, go into more detail on a rule or aspect of the setting. Some players really want to know all the possibilities before they can make a choice. You can reassure them by saying that their choices aren't set in stone. If they don't like something about the character or crew after the first couple sessions, they can just change it to something else. No big deal.

During crew creation, the players will ask you about a few factions—who gave them their hunting grounds, who helped with their upgrades, and who's connected to their contact. Use the factions from the **starting situation** (see the following page) to better tie the group into the action.

For a one-shot or faster start, you can forgo crew creation. The PCs are just a small street gang and have not yet acquired their lair and crew status. You can play to find out what kind of crew they are, then do crew creation then.

INTRODUCE CHARACTERS & CREW

Go around the table and ask each player to introduce their character to the group. They should say their name or alias, their playbook, look, heritage, background, and special ability. Ask them about their vice. Ask them who their best friend and rival are—maybe follow up with a question or two about those NPCs, like “Why is Flint your rival?” It’s okay if the answer is “Let’s find out in play.”

Do the same thing with the crew. Ask the players to remind you what they picked for their special ability and upgrades. The hardest part of crew creation is usually the name! Tell them that the crew will probably acquire a name based on what they do in play. They don’t need to have one figured out at the start.

THE STARTING SITUATION

After the characters and crew are introduced, throw the PCs into the starting situation and start the game in earnest. A starting situation consists of three factions that are currently entangled in a clear problem with no simple solution. You can create your own starting situation as follows:

- ◆ Set two factions directly at odds, with opposing goals. They’re already in conflict when the game begins. Both factions are eager to recruit help, and to hurt anyone who helps their foe.
- ◆ Set a third faction poised to profit from this conflict or to be ruined by its continuation. This faction is eager to recruit help.

The “War in Crow’s Foot” situation on the following pages follows this format as an example you can use. You can add a fourth faction into the mix if you want to, either as a third party in the main conflict, or as a second connected faction whose fate is tied to the struggle. Don’t go crazy adding factions, though. Keep it simple at first—things will snowball from here.

The purpose of the starting situation is to launch the first session with good momentum. The players don’t have to flounder around looking for something to do. You throw them into a situation already in motion so they can simply react at first, rather than doing even more creative work right after all the character and crew creation phases.

THE OPENING SCENE

Establish the location at one of the faction’s headquarters. *What’s it like? What’s the mood and disposition of the faction’s gang?* The PCs are there, in conversation with the faction leader or their second-in-command about the current trouble. They summarize the situation as they see it, then make a demand of the crew or offer them a job. *What could the PCs’ type of crew do for this faction to help them?*

If the players are reluctant to help this faction, ask them if they’re already working for one of the other factions in the situation. Or maybe there’s an opportunity here for them to exploit with a score of their own design.

Ask them what they do right now. How do they respond to the faction leader? Does anyone want to do a flashback to set something up? Whatever they decide, it leads them into their first score, and then you’re off and running.

STARTING SITUATION: WAR IN CROW'S FOOT

Your crew is caught up in a perilous (and possibly profitable) situation in the Crow's Foot district.

Roric, the ward boss who ran the criminal operations in Crow's Foot, has been killed. People say it was his second-in-command, **Lyssa**, who did it. She now controls Roric's impressive gang of cutthroats, who call themselves the Crows. *Can Lyssa establish dominance over the district the way Roric did?*

When Roric died, the peace he had brokered between two enemy gangs fell apart. **The Lampblacks** and **the Red Sashes** have once again exploded into open war on the streets. *Will their old feud finally be resolved with bloodshed?*

Your crew is poised to profit from all of this, or be swept up in the chaos and destroyed. Who will you side with? Do you have loyalties and friendships in the mix, or are you detached outsiders coldly exploiting the situation? We'll play to find out!

OPENING SCENE

After they make characters and the crew, tell them this:

You're in the cramped office of the Lampblack's leader, Bazso Baz, overlooking the coal warehouse floor below. Several of his thugs hang about, armed for war, sizing you up. Bazso wants your answer. Are you with them, or against them? What do you say? Will you side with the Lampblacks? Will you just pretend to? (Good luck, Bazso is very sharp.) Will you tell him to fuck off?

Are you actually here to kill him for the Red Sashes? (If so, do a flashback and pick a plan for the assassination.)

Play Bazso. He's charming, open, and ruthless. React to their answer the way he would. If they're with him, he has a job for them. Choose one of the options on the next page, or create your own assignment using the suggestions for the crew types.

If the PCs are against him, he says he's very sorry to hear that. They better get off his turf and stay out of the war, or they're all dead. He threatens them with an easy confidence—they'd never dare stand up to him, right?

OTHER SCENES

Play the NPCs. Mylera, Bazso, and Lyssa all have scoundrel-y things that need doing, so they'll offer the PCs jobs (until the PCs make an enemy of them, of course). Use the **scores tables** on page 306 for ideas. Also, each faction is vulnerable to criminal action in some way. How can the players use their crew's strengths to profit from this situation? Ask them how they want to gather information, which leads to a plan (or vice versa).

Don't waste time waffling around. Give them straightforward avenues to pursue at first. "Do you want to rob the Crow's card game on Cinder street? It's probably not defended much right now."

There are two sample starting scores, at right. Offer those, or one of the options below, and ask them which they want to pursue. Ask them to pick a plan and provide the detail, and get to it.

SCORE 1: THE WAR TREASURY

One of the faction leaders offers you a job: Steal the war treasury of their rival. It's about 12 **COIN**. You can keep 4 for your payment.

- ◆ *The treasury location is a secret, but the faction leader can tell you where to look if you agree to the job.*
- ◆ *What's the plan? Provide the detail.*
- ◆ *Engagement roll. Cut to the action.*

SCORE 2: THE ARTIFACT

One of the faction leaders offers you a job: Plant this strange artifact somewhere in their rival's lair, where they won't discover it.

- ◆ *It's covered in weird runes and makes your head throb when you hold it in your hand. Want to find out what it is?*
- ◆ *What's the plan? Provide the detail.*
- ◆ *Engagement roll. Cut to the action.*

OTHER OPTIONS

- ◆ If you're **Assassins**: *Maybe Bazso wants you to kill Mylera's contact at the Iruvian Consulate, who's been funneling money from the Iruvian government to the Red Sashes to keep them going.*
- ◆ If you're **Bravos**: *Maybe Bazso wants you to storm the drug dens of the Red Sashes down by the docks. Run off the clientele, smash up the places, grab any loose coin you find.*
- ◆ If you're a **Cult**: Use the artifact score, above.
- ◆ If you're **Hawkers**: *Maybe Bazso has a new drug that he wants to sell, but he can't while he's at war. He'll give you a supply to sell, if you give him a cut (it's worth about 10 **COIN** total).*
- ◆ If you're **Shadows**: Use the war treasury score, above.
- ◆ If you're **Smugglers**: *Maybe Bazso has a drug shipment at the docks, but the Red Sashes are watching for him to move it. He needs you to get it and smuggle it across town to his HQ.*

THE SERIES

Who ends up running the criminal activity in Crow's Foot? Do the PCs use the situation to rise up in the faction ranks? Do they manage to play for all three sides, or do they have to take a stand? Keep some index cards on the table with pressing questions written on them. Sandbox campaigns can get complicated—a few guiding questions can help keep the action focused.

- ◆ *Will Lyssa seize control of the criminal world of Crow's Foot?*
- ◆ *What ever became of Roric's ghost?*
- ◆ *How will the feud between the Lampblacks and the Red Sashes come to an end?*

It's natural for question cards to eventually collect a clock or two, tracking the status of some developing circumstances. This situation will transform over time into something new that no one could have predicted. You'll make it your own unique story, expanding into new problems and opportunities as the crew develops.

THE DARK FUTURE

After the launchpad of the starting situation, the game will run through its cycle to carry the action forward—score, downtime, entanglements and new opportunities, new scores, and so on. The initial conflict will spiral out of control, or have a clear victor, or fizzle out, or resolve some other way into a new situation. The crew will accumulate allies and enemies and develop new goals to pursue. You won’t have to do much preparation for future sessions, other than thinking about your NPCs and factions (what they want, what they do) and considering possible opportunities for the PCs to discover. The players will drive the game by deciding who to prey upon and which opportunities to embrace.

SERIES COUNTDOWNS

To track the consequences of events in the world, you can use **series countdowns**. These are progress clocks that give you a sense of how the bigger-picture stuff of the setting and situation is developing. For example, you might wonder how the Skovlander refugee situation will turn out—will the rising public bigotry get worse? Will people learn to accept them as equal citizens? Will the Skovlanders seize some power or wealth to improve their lot? You can make a clock for a possible outcome, like “Open Riots and Renewed Civil War in the Making.” Tick it when events of the game drive toward that outcome (whether they’re events “on screen” during game play or events “off screen” in the background, when you think about the larger setting).

The idea is to put something concrete down where you’ll see it, to remind you of this over-arching development, so it doesn’t get lost in the shuffle of the PCs’ story. Series countdowns make the world seem alive beyond the immediate actions of the group. Also, if the players see a countdown like this on the table, they might get curious about it and get involved, creating more opportunities for play.

SEASON TWO

After you’ve played *Blades* for some time, you might sense a natural resolution or watershed moment coming for the series. Maybe the crew has been seizing claims in Crow’s Foot, and they’re about to grab the one they’ve wanted since the beginning. Maybe the crew has been in a shadowy war against another cult and the big showdown is at hand. When a “finale” event happens, you can shine a spotlight on it and acknowledge the resolution by calling an end to this “season” of the game (like a season of a TV show). Celebrate the ending, acknowledging the events that got you here—maybe do a little retrospective where each player recalls their favorite moment. Then take a break and prepare for “season two.”

Move the timeline forward (a week, a month, a year) and come up with a **new starting situation**—either building on the fallout of season one, or creating something all new and surprising. Then start again with an opening scene, an opportunity or demand from a faction, and then the initial score to kick off the season.

This explicit “reset” can be very good for the game. It gives you a chance to refocus game play on something clear and actionable, rather than trying to continue spinning all the various plates from season one. Some old issues fade away (for now), new ones emerge, and the landscape of the series develops into something new.

The Bloodletters have fought a brutal war against the Red Sashes, culminating in an assault on the Sashes’ HQ in a showdown to the death, and wiped them out. This feels like the end of season one to everyone, answering the major questions asked from the outset. The Red Sashes are no more. The Lampblacks are solid allies. The Crows are satisfied with an end to the gang war. There are a few short scenes of fallout after the battle, and everyone tells the stories of their favorite moments from the beginning of the series until now.

For season two, the GM moves the timeline forward a month. The Bloodletters (with only weak hold) are trying desperately to hang on to the territory they’ve seized from the Sashes, but other gangs sense their weakness and are moving in: the Grinders and the Billhooks (absent in season one) are selling their own drugs on nearby corners, luring customers away. On top of that, the Bloodletters’ supplier, who went missing in season one, has not returned. They’re about to run out of product any day now.

Outside their tattoo-parlor drug den at the docks, the Grinders’ gang is clashing with the Bloodletters’ thugs. They’re squared off in the street, shouting challenges, ready to rumble. The Grinders’ lieutenant is there, demanding that the Bloodletters release his man, who’s held prisoner in the basement after he tangled with one of their customers. “Bring him out now, or we’re coming in to get him!” the Grinder shouts. What do you do?

CHANGING THE CAST OR CREW

A season break is a great opportunity to make big changes if the players want to. Maybe someone wants to retire their character and play someone new. Maybe they want to change their PC’s playbook to reflect a shift in who they are now. Maybe the group wants to change the crew type to try a different type of criminal action in Duskwall. Maybe you’ll even make a whole new crew and new PCs to explore something interesting that was developed during season one with a fresh perspective.

See page 49 for details about changing playbooks or crew type.



CHAPTER 8

STRANGE FORCES

In the fantasy world of *Blades in the Dark*, supernatural powers exist—but they are not innate to human beings. Humans are mortal, material, flesh-and-blood creatures, just as the rest of the natural world. To wield arcane abilities, humanity must harness strange forces in various ways:

- ◆ The control of spiritual energies and ghosts with pseudo-scientific techniques, known as *Spectrology*.
- ◆ Ancient occult compacts to entreat demonic or other-worldly assistance, known as *Rituals*.
- ◆ The distillation of weird chemical mixtures, known as *Alchemy*.
- ◆ The fusion of these disciplines with technological engineering, known as *Spark-craft*.

In addition, every living thing in the Shattered Isles has evolved a sensitivity to the invisible “other world” that presses always against the edges of perception—the strange dimension that erupted during the cataclysm, known as the *ghost field*. By focusing their mind in a certain way, a human can **attune** to the ghost field to perceive partially into it, to sense the echoes of real-world events captured in the field, or to make a connection to ghosts and spectral energy.

Some people see attunement as a normal part of life—a new human sense that is natural and advantageous. Others see attunement as a vile act, connecting with the dark forces that once destroyed the world, and who still lurk in the shadows, always ready to prey upon the unwary or power-hungry.

One thing is certain, the broken world will never be made whole again. The black void of the skies and seas, the psychic pressure of the ghost field, and the machinations of demons and cultists are now the way of things. Better to understand these strange forces than to be consumed by them.

THE UNQUIET DEAD

It's said that the cataclysm that shattered the earth, banished the sun, and turned the seas to black ink was caused by a sorcerer who consorted with demons and tore down the Gates of Death. But who believes such ancient tales? Whatever the truth of it, one thing is certain: when a body dies, its spirit does not disperse as they once did long ago. It becomes a ghost: a spectral entity composed of electroplasmic vapors.

It usually takes between one to three days for a ghost to become free of the corpse. It is then free to wander the world, consumed by darker and darker urges until it goes entirely mad and monstrous.

Ghosts have been a plague upon the world for nearly 1,000 years. Every community has developed methods for dealing with them, and Doskvol is no different.

BELLS, CROWS, & WARDENS

The arcane **spirit bells** at Bellweather Crematorium ring whenever someone dies in the city. They may only be heard by those near the site of the death, and by the **Spirit Wardens**, whose arcane masks are attuned to the bells. A **deathseeker crow** leaves the belfry and flies to the district where the dead may be found, circling ever closer to the corpse every minute. It's the responsibility of the Wardens to recover the body and remove it to the crematorium, where it is dissolved in electroplasm to destroy the spirit before it can become a ghost.

Wardens wear masks and have a secret membership, both to keep them uncorrupted by political influence, and as an homage to tradition—ancient ghost hunters wore masks and concealed their true names as defense against dark magic.

SPECTROLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY

- ◆ **ELECTROPLASM.** The energetic residue distilled from ghosts and leviathan blood.
- ◆ **GHOST.** A spirit without a body, craving life essence and vengeance on its earthly enemies. Composed of semi-solid electroplasmic vapor. Suffers limited harm from physical attacks, but is vulnerable to electricity and arcane powers.
- ◆ **HOLLOW.** A living body without a spirit. Usually dim-witted and easily controlled.
- ◆ **HULL.** A spark-craft body animated by a bound spirit.
- ◆ **POSSESSED.** A living body containing two (or more) spirits.
- ◆ **SOUL.** A living body with its own spirit. The normal state of affairs.
- ◆ **SPIRIT WELL.** A rift in the veil of reality where ghosts and other supernatural beings congregate. In ancient myth, a spawning ground for demons.
- ◆ **VAMPIRE.** A dead body animated and sustained by a spirit.
- ◆ **WHISPER.** A person who's able to summon and communicate with ghosts.

DEVILS

In Doskvol, common parlance calls anything supernatural or disturbing a “devil.” Ghosts, demons, witches, sorcerers, and the summoned horrors of ancient rituals are all devils. “Take the devil's bargain,” people say, when they know something is too good to be true. For tables to generate various sorts of devils, see page 304.

WHISPERS

A human who consorts with devils or investigates the arcane is known as a **Whisper**. Whispers are made, not born—anyone can develop arcane abilities with enough study and practice; it's not a matter of bloodline or being “chosen.”

Any PC can roll ATTUNE to attempt simple interactions with the ghost field or spirits. The special abilities of the Whisper are required for advanced arcane activities.

HULLS

A hull is a rare and advanced form of arcane technology that uses a captured spirit to animate a spark-craft frame. Some wealthy citizens employ hulls as bodyguards or servants. The Spirit Wardens have been known to use specialized hulls to assist in tracking and capturing rogue spirits or demons in the city.

Hulls come in three general frame sizes. Small frames are about the size of a house cat. Medium frames are the size of a human. Large frames are the size of a wagon.

As cutting-edge technology, hulls are often fitted with a variety of mechanical marvels dreamed up by visionary tinkerers, such as electroplasmic levitation, sound recording and playback via phonograph, and other wondrous things.

For more details, see the Hull playbook on page 216.

VAMPIRES

When a possessing spirit bonds with a living body, it becomes a vampire. This can happen if a ghost possesses a victim for too long, thereby destroying its original spirit, or when a hollow is specially prepared for the purpose by ancient ritual.

Scholars of the arcane say that vampirism breaks the chain of being. Over time, a vampire's spirit essence diffuses fully into the body, giving it physical immortality while at the same time destroying its echo in the spirit realm “beyond the black mirror.” Some have argued that this is the only way to escape the damnation of madness that otherwise inflicts all the ghosts denied passage through the gates of death. (A vampirism movement in the 6th century of the Imperium achieved significant popularity before it was eradicated by the Spirit Wardens.)

Vampires are exceedingly rare today. Most people consider them to be legendary or mythical. When the Spirit Wardens do discover one, they take great pains to destroy it in secret so as not to disturb the peace. In legend, vampires were destroyed by the rays of the sun. Since the sun was shattered by the cataclysm, this is no longer possible. Spirit Wardens must capture the vampire and disintegrate it in electroplasm according to a specific arcane method in order to destroy it.

A vampire sustains its energy by feeding on life essence from a living being. In fables, vampires drank blood to accomplish this, but this is not typical. Each vampire feeds on essence in its own way—leaving a distinct telltale sign on its victim afterwards. A vampire can easily detect these signs in order to locate their victims again for feeding, or to take care to avoid feeding on the chosen prey of another vampire.

For more details, see the Vampire playbook, page 218.

DEMONS

Some scholars believe that demons are the first beings, brought into existence at the origin of reality, as the primal forces of the universe coalesced into the elements of nature. Each demon strain is thus connected to an element. There are demons of the earth, demons of flame and smoke, demons of the sea, demons of the sky and stars, etc.

Before the events that caused the cataclysm, it's said that the Immortal Emperor bound most of the demons and imprisoned them in the dark, hidden places of the world. Only a few escaped this subjugation, and scholars believe that it was these few that broke the Gates of Death in their rebellion and freed the greatest of their kind—the leviathans—to shatter the world.

Unlike humans, demons are not echoed in the ghost field—their blood contains electroplasmic essence, which gives them eternal life. Demons are corporeal creatures, not spirits, though they are extremely difficult to kill. Most appear as monstrous humanoids with physical features related to their element. A sea demon is covered in dark scales and has black shark eyes, a fire demon has flesh of smoldering coal with fires burning within, and so on. Some demons can transmute into their corresponding element and a few can disguise themselves with a convincing human illusion.

The exceptions are the massive leviathans. No one knows the true shape of these horrors that dwarf the largest iron ships. Only a small portion may be glimpsed when they crest the surface of the ink-dark sea, drawn by electroplasmic lures.

Each demon is obsessed with its dark desire (mayhem, manipulation, corruption, etc.), which it attempts to satisfy in every way it can, usually by preying on humans. A demon is living embodiment of its dark desire, not a “person” in a normal sense. See page 304 for a list of possible demonic desires.

DEMONIC POWERS

Every demon has these supernatural abilities:

- ◆ **STRENGTH & SPEED:** Demons possess monstrous strength—they can dent steel with their bare hands, shatter stones, etc. They are also extremely quick, able to out-pace the swiftest steed.
- ◆ **ARCANE SPEECH:** Demons speak the ancient tongue of sorcery, which every human ear can discern. They may also speak arcane effects into existence according to the elemental affinity and power level of the demon (the Whisper's **TEMPEST** ability is thought to be a lesser form of this power).
- ◆ **STRANGE TRAVEL:** A demon may teleport from one site of their elemental affinity to another. For example, a sea demon could teleport from the water in a fountain to a canal under a manor house on the other side of town. The greater the distance, the more powerful the demon must be. A demon may bring others with them when they travel. A demon may also be summoned in this way, by forcing it to travel to the summoner's ritual presentation of their element.
- ◆ **REMOTE VIEWING:** A demon may use their elemental affinity to achieve clairvoyance. For example, a fire demon could gaze into a fireplace and see out of the cook-stove at the Bluecoat tower down the lane. The greater the distance, the more powerful the demon must be.

SUMMONED HORRORS

Some ancient rituals of the forgotten gods can rend the veil between worlds and usher in an alien creature that serves the deity. Horrors such as these rarely resemble any normal living thing—they may appear as a drifting toxic cloud, a twisting mass of pulsing viscera, floating crystalline shards, or other bizarre configurations.

Horrors are intensely powerful and highly resistant to harm. They may only persist in this world for a short time, however. Their alien forms cannot sustain life for long outside their native realm and they inevitably decay to dust or ooze in the span of a few hours or days.

Ghosts, demons, and summoned horrors can be terrifying to behold. They cause most people who see them to freeze up or flee. PCs may resist these effects. See page 14.

SPIRIT CHARACTERS

When your character dies, you may transfer to the **Ghost** playbook (page 214), if you wish. It's assumed that your body is not dissolved in electroplasm before your spirit is able to work free of the corpse. If the group thinks it would be fun, they can take on the protection of your corpse as a mission, keeping it away from the Spirit Wardens and the crematorium until your spirit emerges. Otherwise, you can skip over that period and simply become a Ghost.

Add all of your current action ratings to the ratings on the Ghost playbook. You may not have an action rating greater than 4.

You keep any **Ghost** special abilities from your human playbook. **GHOST MIND**, **GHOST VOICE**, etc. You lose all other special abilities. You start with the first trait on your Ghost playbook: **GHOST FORM**. You may also choose one more trait. (Ghosts **may not** choose **POSSESS** as a starting trait.) *Note: The traits on spirit playbooks are not special abilities, and cannot be taken by living characters by using a veteran advance.*

Your vice is replaced with a **need: life essence**. Ghosts must possess people in order to satisfy this need (which you can't do at first—you have to advance to earn that ability).

A Ghost character may transfer to a **Hull** or **Vampire** playbook, if they manage to complete the tasks necessary to become one of those entities. Building a hull is a complex spark-craft project (see page 227). Preparing a **hollow** body for a vampire involves finding, learning, and performing an ancient ritual (see page 222).

If you'd like to begin the game as a spirit character (even a hull or vampire), rather than first playing as a living human, talk to your game group about the idea and see what they think. If everyone is cool with it, go ahead! It makes the game much weirder at the beginning, though, so the game will naturally tend toward the arcane as a main fictional element. Be prepared for that.

GH~~O~~ST

A disembodied spirit, craving vengeance

A rogue spirit is a scourge upon Duskwall, hunted by Spirit Wardens and sought out as a servant by Whispers and cultists. But your righteous vengeance burns so bright and pure—you must not allow yourself to be thwarted by anyone.

When you play a Ghost, you earn xp when you exact vengeance upon those you deem deserving, when you express your outrage or anger, and when you settle scores from your heritage or background. Playing the Ghost means payback for anyone who wronged you in life. It's up to you to decide who has earned your ghostly ire, but don't let anyone off the hook!

Who shall be the first to suffer your wrath? Are there any living beings who deserve mercy, or shall they all eventually be found guilty in your eyes?

STARTING ACTIONS

- | | |
|---------|--------|
| ● ● ● ● | HUNT |
| ● ● ● ● | PROWL |
| ● ● ● ● | ATTUNE |

When you transfer your character to the Ghost playbook, add all of your current action ratings to the ratings on the Ghost playbook. You may not have an action rating greater than 4.

You keep any **ghost** special abilities from your human playbook. **GH~~O~~ST MIND**, **GH~~O~~ST VOICE**, etc. You lose all other special abilities. You start with the first trait on your Ghost playbook: **GH~~O~~ST FORM**. You may also choose one more Ghost trait. (You **may not** choose **POSSESS** as a starting trait.)

NEED

You no longer have a vice. Instead, you have an intense **NEED: life essence**. To satisfy this need, possess a living victim and consume their spirit energy (this may be a downtime activity). When you do so, clear half your drain (round down).

DRAIN

Instead of **stress**, you now take **drain**. You have 9 drain boxes. Whenever you would take stress, take drain instead.

GLOOM

Instead of **TRAUMA**, you now track **GLOOM**. You lose any **TRAUMA** levels you had in life. Whenever you would take **TRAUMA**, take **GLOOM** instead, and choose a gloom condition from the list.

GHOST TRAITS

GHOST FORM

When you become a ghost, you get this trait for free. You are now a concentration of electroplasmic vapor that resembles your living body and clothes. You may weakly interact with the physical world and vice versa. You're vulnerable to arcane powers and electroplasmic effects. You move about by floating and may fly swiftly without tiring. You may slowly flow through small openings as a vapor. You chill the area around you and are terrifying for the living to behold. You are affected by spiritbane charms and the **COMPEL** ability of a Whisper (you may make a resistance roll to overcome their effect). *Whenever you would take stress, take drain instead. When you would take TRAUMA, take GLOOM instead.*

DISSIPATE

You can disperse the electroplasmic vapor of your ghostly form in order to pass through solid objects for a moment. Take **1 drain** when you dissipate, plus 1 drain for each feature: *it lasts longer (a minute—an hour—a day)—you also become invisible—anything that passes through your form becomes dangerously electrified or frozen.*

MANIFEST

Take **1 drain** to flow through the electroplasmic pathways of the ghost field in order to instantly travel to any place you knew intimately in life, or to answer the summoning call of a **COMPEL**.

POLTERGEIST

Take **1 drain** to strongly interact with the physical world for a few moments (as if you had a normal body). Extend the reach and magnitude of your interaction to include telekinetic force and electroplasmic discharges by taking more drain (2-6).

POSSESS

You may **ATTUNE** to the ghost field in order to take control of a living body. When your control is challenged, you must re-attune (risking electroplasmic harm) or leave the body. Your control is challenged when: *you consume spirit energy from the host—arcane powers act against you—the host's will is driven to desperation.* You may easily and indefinitely possess a **hull** or **hollow** that has been ritually prepared for you (change your playbook to Hull or Vampire, respectively).

HULL

A spirit animating a spark-craft frame

You have become a pale echo of your living self, trapped in a metal body, forced into servitude. *Is this all that remains of you?*

When you play a Hull, you earn xp when you fulfill your functions despite difficulty or danger, and when you suppress or ignore your former human qualities.

STARTING ACTIONS



SKIRMISH



ATTUNE

When you transfer to the Hull playbook, add all of your current action ratings to the ratings on the Hull playbook. You may not have an action rating greater than 4.

You keep any **ghost** special abilities from your former playbook. **GHOST MIND**, **GHOST VOICE**, etc. You lose all other special abilities.

You start with the first trait on your Hull playbook: **AUTOMATON** (which also grants a **feature**, based on your frame size). You may also choose one more Hull trait.

HULL FEATURES

Interior Chamber: You have a compartment for a passenger or operator.

Life-Like Appearance: You are masterfully crafted to pass for a living being (unless it is closely scrutinized).

Levitation: You can fly slowly by floating inside a volatile electroplasmic bubble.

Phonograph: A wax-cylinder recording and playback device.

Plating: Thick metal armor plates.

Reflexes: You have lightning-fast reaction time (as the **Lurk** ability).

FUEL

Your spark-craft body runs on **electroplasmic power**. Recharge your capacitors by connecting to an industrial-grade generator (this takes one downtime activity). When you do this, clear 5 drain.

DRAIN

Instead of **stress**, you now take **drain**. You have 10 drain boxes. Whenever you would take stress, take drain instead.

WEAR

Instead of **TRAUMA**, you now track **WEAR**. You lose any **TRAUMA** levels you had in life, or any **GLOOM** levels you had as a ghost. Whenever you would take **TRAUMA**, take **WEAR** instead, and choose a wear condition from the list.

Sensors: Your sensorium includes sonar which can “see” through walls and hear heartbeats.

Smoke Projectors: Chemical system that can exude a dark, acrid cloud of smoke—enough to fill a large room.

Spider Climb: Miniature barbs built into your frame allow it to walk and climb effortlessly on walls and ceilings.

Spring-Leap Pistons: You can jump to extreme heights (several stories) and survive falls without damage.

HULL TRAITS

AUTOMATON

You are a spirit animating a spark-craft body. You have human-like strength and senses, by default. Your hull has natural **armor** (this doesn't count for your **load**). Your former human feelings, interests, and connections are only dim memories. You now exist to fulfill your functions. Choose three: TO GUARD—TO DESTROY—TO DISCOVER—TO ACQUIRE—TO LABOR AT ...that which my master commands.

Choose a **frame size**, look, and starting *feature* (see list at right).

You may be rebuilt if severely damaged or destroyed. If your soul vessel is shattered, you are freed from servitude and become a Ghost. *Whenever you would take stress, take drain instead. Whenever you would take trauma, take wear instead.*

SMALL (Cat size, -1 scale):
A metal orb, a mechanical doll, a clockwork spider.
Levitation—Reflexes

MEDIUM (Human size):
A metal mannequin, a clockwork animal. *Life-Like Appearance—Spider Climb*

HEAVY (Wagon size, +1 scale): A hulking metal giant, a self-driving vehicle.
Interior Chamber—Plating

Features for any frame:
Phonograph—Sensors—Smoke Projectors—Spring-Leap Pistons

COMPARTMENTS

Your **items** are built into your frame and may recess beneath panels out of sight. Your frame can now carry +2 **load**.

ELECTROPLASMIC PROJECTORS

You may release some of your plasmic energy as an electrical shock around you or as a directed beam. You may also use this ability to create a lightning barrier to repel or trap a spirit. Take 1 **drain** for each level of **magnitude**.

INTERFACE

You may **ATTUNE** to the local electroplasmic power field to control it or something connected to it (including another hull).

OVERCHARGE

Take 1 **drain** to perform a feat of extreme strength or speed (run faster than a horse, rend metal with bare hands, etc.). This factors into effect.

SECONDARY HULL

Choose an additional frame and its starting feature. You may transfer your consciousness between your frames at will.

FRAME UPGRADE

Choose an additional frame feature for one of your frames.

VAMPIRE

A spirit animating an undead body

The apex of human existence is the vampire—the sublime, immortal union of spirit and flesh. Mortals are merely flawed reflections of this perfection, suitable only for recruitment into the ranks of the eternal, or fed upon as chattel.

When you play a Vampire, you earn xp when you display your dominance or slay without mercy. You transcend the mortal world. Your concerns and needs eclipse all others.

To which worthy enterprise shall you commit your immortal effort?

FEEDING

You now have one vice: *life essence, consumed from a living human*. Use a downtime activity to **HUNT** prey and indulge your vice. Also, when you feed, mark four ticks on your healing clock. This is the only way you can heal. *How do you feed? What telltale sign do you leave on your victims?*

STARTING ACTIONS

| | |
|---------|----------|
| ● ● ● ● | HUNT |
| ● ● ● ● | PROWL |
| ● ● ● ● | SKIRMISH |
| ● ● ● ● | ATTUNE |
| ● ● ● ● | COMMAND |
| ● ● ● ● | SWAY |

When you transfer your character to the Vampire playbook, add all of your current action ratings to the ratings on the Vampire playbook. You may not have an action rating greater than 4.

You keep any **ghost** special abilities from your previous playbook. **HOST MIND**, **GHOST VOICE**, etc. You lose all other special abilities. You start with the first trait on your Vampire playbook: **UNDEAD**. You may also choose one more Vampire trait.

STRICTURES

Whenever you gain a new Vampire trait (not including your first one, **UNDEAD**), add a **stricture**:

SLUMBER: In downtime, you must spend one activity resting in a dark, silent place (or else suffer 3 stress).

FORBIDDEN: You cannot enter a private residence without permission from the owner.

REPelled: Spiritbane charms can hold you at bay. (Take 2 stress to resist the repulsion.)

BESTIAL: When you suffer physical harm or overindulge your vice, your body twists into a horrific bestial form until you next feed without overindulging.

BOund: Your spirit must remain in this body, or be destroyed.

VAMPIRE TRAITS

UNDEAD

You are a spirit that animates an undead body. Your **TRAUMA** is maxed out. Choose four trauma conditions that reflect your vampiric nature. Arcane attacks are *potent* against you. If you suffer fatal harm or **TRAUMA**, you don't die, but your undead spirit is overwhelmed. You take level 3 harm: "Incapacitated" until you feed enough to recover. If you suffer arcane harm while in this state, you are destroyed utterly. Your xp tracks are longer (you now advance more slowly). You have 12 stress boxes instead of 9.

When you suffer "fatal" harm and are incapacitated, you can push yourself in order to take action and feed. If you're also maxed out on stress, then you can take no actions, and must rely on an ally or servant to feed you.

ARCANE SIGHT

Take 1 **stress** to sense beyond human limits for several minutes. "Hear" a subject's true thoughts or feelings, see in pitch darkness, sense the presence of invisible things, intuit the location of a hidden object, etc.

DARK TALENT

Choose **INSIGHT**, **PROWESSION**, or **RESOLVE**. Your max rating for actions under that attribute becomes 5. You also get +1d to **resistance rolls** with this attribute.

SINISTER GUILE

During downtime, choose one: Get a free additional downtime activity, or take +1d to all downtime activity rolls.

TERRIBLE POWER

Take 1 **stress** to perform a feat of superhuman strength or speed (run faster than a carriage, break stone with bare hands, leap onto the roof of a building, etc.). This factors into effect.

A VOID IN THE ECHO

You are invisible to spirits and may not be harmed by them. Take 2 **stress** to cause living things to avert their gaze and fail to observe you for a few moments.

Spirits effectively have zero effect against you. Particularly powerful spirits or a spirit ritually prepared for the purpose may be able to counter this ability to some extent. When you cause living things to avert their gaze and fail to notice you, the power will cease if you take any sudden or violent action to draw their attention again.

MAGNITUDE

Supernatural entities and energies have a wide variety of effects and power levels. To help the GM judge these forces consistently, the **magnitude** scale is provided. See the master table of magnitude at right. Magnitude measures the quality level of a ghost or demon or different aspects of an arcane force: its area, scale, duration, range, and force. Whenever you need to assess an entity or power, use the magnitude scale as a guideline to judge how it compares relative to the examples given on the table.

You can use the magnitude of an entity or power as a dice pool for a **fortune roll** to see how much effect it has, if it's not obvious or certain.

A sea demon summons a crushing wave at the canal dock where the PCs are landing their boat. How badly does this damage the vessel and the crew? Obviously it's gonna be bad for them, but are they merely sinking or are they immediately wrecked and sunk? The GM makes a fortune roll using 6d (the magnitude of the demon). On a 1-3, the wave has only little effect (for a huge wave), causing the craft to take on water and begin sinking. On a 4-5, the wave has reduced effect, fully swamping the boat and throwing some of the characters and their cargo overboard. On a 6, the wave has full effect, immediately sinking the boat and dragging the crew and cargo under. On a CRITICAL, the boat is sunk, and also the crew and cargo are badly harmed by flying debris and the crushing force of the wave.

You can add levels of magnitude together to describe a combination of effects, or simply focus on one key feature for the magnitude assessment, ignoring other elements, even if they're on the magnitude scale. They're not always additive.

In the example above, the demon generated magnitude 6 force and the GM included its area of effect "for free" as part of the power. A huge wave at a dock should affect the boats and the crews there, in their judgment.

*In a different session, a Whisper wants to accomplish a ritual that will unleash a hurricane across the district. The GM says that this is a very significant effect, so they add two levels of magnitude together: **force 6 and range 5**. To create such a devastating power, the Whisper will suffer 11 stress! The GM offers a compromise: the ritual will take a few hours to complete, so the stress cost will be reduced to 8, but some people in the affected area may realize what's happening and flee before the full storm hits.*

The magnitude table is provided as a tool to help the GM make judgment calls. It's not meant to be a rigid restriction or mathematical formula to replace those judgment calls. Use the levels as a *guideline* for setting a magnitude number that seem appropriate to you.

This table can also be used as a guide to **quality level** when a PC **acquires an asset** or crafts an **alchemical** or **gadget**. See **Crafting**, page 224.

AREA / SCALE

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| A closet | A small room | A large room | Several rooms | A small building | A large building | A city block |
| 1 or 2 people | A small gang (3-6) | A medium gang (12) | A large gang (20) | A huge gang (40) | A massive gang (80) | A colossal gang (160) |

DURATION / RANGE

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| A few moments | A few minutes | An hour | A few hours | A day | Several days | A week |
| Within reach | A dozen paces | A stone's throw | Down the road | Several blocks away | Across the district | Across the city |

TIER & QUALITY / FORCE

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------|----------|--------|-----------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| Poor | Adequate | Good | Excellent | Superior | Impeccable | Legendary |
| Weak | Moderate | Strong | Serious | Powerful | Overwhelming | Devastating |

QUALITY EXAMPLES

| | |
|---|---|
| 6 | <i>A mansion, large ship, rare essences or arcane artifacts, powerful demon</i> |
| 5 | <i>A large townhouse, small ship, custom-tailored clothing, lightning barrier</i> |
| 4 | <i>A luxury vehicle, townhouse, typical demon or powerful ghost</i> |
| 3 | <i>A coach, boat, military rifle, fashionable clothing, small home</i> |
| 2 | <i>A pistol, respectable clothing, private rented room, typical ghost</i> |
| 1 | <i>A fighting blade, ordinary clothing, shared apartment, cheap food or drugs</i> |
| 0 | <i>A rusty knife, worn & tattered clothing, rickety shack on the street</i> |

FORCE EXAMPLES

| | |
|---|--|
| 6 | <i>Hurricane wind, molten lava, tidal wave, electrical maelstrom</i> |
| 5 | <i>A ship's cannon, raging thunder-storm, massive fire, lightning strike</i> |
| 4 | <i>A charging horse, burning forge, bomb, whirlwind, electrocution</i> |
| 3 | <i>A crushing blow, staggering wind, grenade, searing fire, electrical surge</i> |
| 2 | <i>A powerful blow, howling wind, burning brand</i> |
| 1 | <i>A solid punch, steady wind, torch flame, electrical shock</i> |
| 0 | <i>A firm shove, a candle flame, breeze, tiny spark</i> |

RITUALS

A ritual is a lost art of sorcery from before the cataclysm. Unlike modern arcane techniques that utilize the scientific application of electroplasmic energies, rituals depend on strange occult powers and entities to realize their effects. To enact a ritual is to come into contact with these abyssal forces and entreat them to do your will. It is a practice not without considerable risk.

FINDING A RITUAL SOURCE

A PC with the **RITUAL** special ability begins with one known ritual, already learned (answer the questions below to create it). To learn a new ritual, a PC must first find a **source**. A source may be secured as payoff from a score—perhaps you steal a ritual book when your crew robs the Museum of Antiquities. You might also secure a source as the goal of a long-term project—by consorting with cultist friends, studying ancient texts, or some other method you devise.

LEARNING A RITUAL

Once the source of a ritual is found, you may undertake a long-term project to learn the ritual. Most rituals will require an 8-segment progress clock to learn. The player and the GM answer questions about the ritual to define what it will do in play and what is required to perform it (see below). The player records these answers in their notes for future reference.

RITUAL QUESTIONS

1. GM asks: “What does the ritual do and how is it weird?” Player answers.
2. Player asks: “What must I do to perform the ritual, and what is its price?” GM answers. A ritual takes at least one downtime activity to perform and inflicts **stress** on the caster according to its **magnitude**. If performance of the ritual is dangerous or troublesome in some way, it requires an action roll (usually **ATTUNE**). A ritual may also have additional costs, such as a sacrifice, rare item, the start of a dire progress clock, etc.
3. GM asks: “What new belief or fear does knowledge of this ritual and its attendant occult forces instill in you?” Player answers.

EXAMPLE RITUAL ANSWERS

Player: “The ritual wards a person so that the ghosts of their victims cannot find them. It’s weird because... as long as the ward is in place, the person sometimes weeps tears of black blood.”

GM: “Spend a downtime action to prepare a mixture of tobacco, dream smoke, and crematory ash from a victim—which the target then smokes. You take at least 3 stress when you perform the ritual, which will be its quality for a fortune roll when it’s challenged by a spirit—so you might want to take more stress to make it more potent.”

Player: “Gotcha. My new fear is what will happen if the spirits figure out where the ward came from and turn their vengeance on me, instead.”

PERFORMING A RITUAL

To perform a ritual, you must have the **RITUAL** special ability, then follow the method outlined by the answers to the ritual questions. Most rituals will take **one downtime activity** to complete, though the GM may call for two (or more) downtime activities for very powerful or far-reaching rituals. Some rituals may be partially performed during downtime and then fully manifested at-will later by completing the last incantation or ritual action. In this case, simply make a note that the ritual has been “primed” and may be unleashed at a later time.

When you perform a ritual, you take an amount of **stress** as established by the ritual questions, according to the **magnitude** of the forces brought to bear. The GM uses magnitude as a *guideline* for setting the stress cost—it may be higher or lower at their discretion to better describe the nature of the ritual. Some claims and special abilities also reduce the stress cost for ritual casting (like the Cult’s **Ancient Obelisk** claim).

Rituals take time to cast. Use the duration examples on the magnitude table to reduce the stress cost based on the time needed, generally no less than an hour.

The GM may also **tick a progress clock** when you perform a ritual—to advance the agenda of an arcane power or entity, or to show the steady approach of a dark outcome that is a consequence of the ritual’s use.

If a ritual is dangerous or troublesome to perform, make an **action roll** (usually **ATTUNE**) to see if unpleasant consequences manifest. If a ritual has an uncertain effect then a **fortune roll** should be made to see how well it manifests. Because a ritual is a downtime activity, you may spend **COIN** 1-for-1 to increase the result level of your fortune roll (this represents the expenditure of expensive or rare ritual materials). If a ritual is both dangerous and uncertain, then both rolls may be called for.

Each performance of a ritual is a unique event, and may not always work the same way each time. The GM or players may call for a round of questions to establish a ritual anew. Rituals are a way to bring in a wide variety of arcane effects into the game. Use with caution! If you ever go overboard, address the questions again to establish new weirdness and costs if things have gotten out of hand. The abyssal forces are not playthings and cannot be considered a reliable or safe source of power.

SAMPLE RITUALS

GHOST MAP: This ritual enchants a specially prepared map so it reveals the position of all spirits across the district. An individual spirit may be **STUDIED** on the map to glean some details about it. The caster takes 4 stress when it’s performed (range: across the district, quality of information: good, minus extra time: a few hours). *As an example; another GM might judge the magnitude differently.*

PORTAL TO THE DEPTHS: This ancient song calls upon the power of the leviathans to open a small gateway to the great Void Sea (somewhere within a few blocks of the ritual site). Anything caught near the portal is swamped by cold, black water and drawn with hideous strength into the abyss. This ritual is very dangerous, involving arcane contact with a leviathan’s demonic power (*desperate* action roll). The caster takes 6 stress and ticks a 4-segment progress clock: “Seduced by the Leviathan’s Song.”

CRAFTING

During downtime, a PC can **TINKER** with special materials and tools to produce strange **alchemicals**, **build** (or **modify**) **items**, create **spark-craft** gadgets, or enchant **arcane** implements or weapons. The system for each method is similar, with different details depending on the nature of the project.

INVENTING

To invent a formula for a new alchemical concoction or the plan for a new item of your design, you need to **STUDY** it as a **long-term project**. Most new formulas or designs will require an 8-segment progress clock to invent and learn. The player and the GM answer questions about the invention to define what it will do in play and what is required to create it (see below). The player records these answers in their notes for future reference.

CREATION QUESTIONS

1. GM asks: “**What type of creation is it and what does it do?**” Player answers. A creation might be mundane, alchemical, arcane, or spark-craft. If a PC has an appropriate special ability (**ALCHEMIST**, **ARTIFICER**, **STRANGE METHODS**), they get bonuses when inventing and crafting certain creation types.
2. Player asks: “**What’s the minimum quality level of this item?**” GM answers, with the **magnitude** of the effects the item produces as a guideline.
3. GM asks: “**What rare, strange, or adverse aspect of this formula or design has kept it in obscurity, out of common usage?**” Player answers.
4. Player asks: “**What drawbacks does this item have, if any?**” GM answers by choosing one or more from the drawbacks list, or by saying there are none.

A PC with the **ALCHEMIST**, **ARTIFICER**, or **STRANGE METHODS** special abilities invents and learns one special formula when they take the ability (they don’t have to take time to learn it).

Once you’ve invented a formula or design, you can **craft** it by using a downtime activity (see **Crafting**, below). No one else can craft this invention unless they learn your design as a long-term project. If you acquire a formula or design invented by another tinkerer, you may learn to craft it by completing a long-term project.

Common alchemicals (see **Sample Creations** on page 226) and ordinary items don’t require special formulas or designs to learn. Anyone may attempt to craft them by using commonly available instructions.

CRAFTING

To craft something, spend one **downtime activity** to make a **TINKER** roll to determine the **quality level** of the item you produce. The base quality level is equal to your crew’s Tier, modified by the result of the roll (see the results on the next page).

The results are based on your crew’s Tier because it indicates the overall quality of the workspace and materials you have access to. *If you do the work with the Workshop upgrade for your crew, your effective Tier level is one higher for this roll.*

CRAFTING ROLL

- ◆ **1d** for each **TINKER** action dot.
-  +1 quality per **COIN** spent.
-  +1 quality for **Workshop** crew upgrade.

CRITICAL: Quality level is Tier +2.

6: Quality level is Tier +1.

4/5: Quality level is equal to Tier.

1-3: Quality level is Tier -1.

The GM sets a **minimum quality** level that must be achieved to craft the item, based on the **magnitude** of the effect(s) it produces. The GM uses magnitude as a *guideline* for setting the quality level—it may be higher or lower at their discretion to better describe the nature of the project. An item may be crafted at *higher* quality if the player wishes to attempt it.

You may spend **COIN** 1-for-1 to increase the final quality level result of your roll (this can raise quality level beyond Tier +2).

MODIFYING AN ITEM

Adding a feature or additional function to an item is simpler than creating something new. You don't need to invent a special formula or plan. Make a crafting roll to modify an item (the baseline quality of an item that you modify is equal to your crew's Tier, as usual).

- ◆ A simple, useful modification requires Tier +1 quality. *A rifle that breaks down into two sections to be more easily concealed.*
- ◆ A significant modification requires Tier +2 quality. *Strengthening the barrel and powder load of a gun to fire further.*
- ◆ An arcane, spark-craft, or alchemical modification requires Tier +3 quality. *A dagger that can harm a demon. An electrified hull on a boat to repel boarders or ghosts. An outfit coated with chemicals to mask you from deathlands predators.*

Modified items, like special creations, may have **drawbacks**.

DRAWBACKS

A creation or modification may have one or more drawbacks, chosen by the GM.

- ◆ **COMPLEX.** You'll have to create it in multiple stages; the GM will tell you how many. One downtime activity and crafting roll is needed per stage.
- ◆ **CONSPICUOUS.** This creation doesn't go unnoticed. Take +1 **HEAT** if it's used any number of times on an operation.
- ◆ **CONSUMABLE.** This creation has a limited number of uses (all alchemicals must have this drawback, usually one use).
- ◆ **RARE.** This creation requires a rare item or material when it is crafted.
- ◆ **UNRELIABLE.** When you use the item, make a fortune roll (using its **quality**) to see how well it performs.
- ◆ **VOLATILE.** The item produces a dangerous or troublesome side-effect for the user, specified by the GM (see examples on the sample creations, next page). A side-effect is a consequence, and may be **resisted**.

SAMPLE CREATIONS

Creations are listed with their **quality level** (by Tier: I-VI), followed by a **number of uses** if they're **Consumable** (1-3). These creations are well known by tinkerers in Duskwall, and don't need to be studied before producing them.

Revka spends a downtime activity to distill a batch of Drown Powder. She rolls TINKER and gets a 4, meaning quality level equal to her crew Tier, which is II. She spends 1 COIN to bump up her result to a 6 (Tier +1), which is high enough for Drown Powder (III). She makes two doses of the consumable poison.

BOMBS (SPARK-CRAFT)

Drawback (Conspicuous).

- ◆ **Grenade** (III/2): A small explosive charge with a short fuse that detonates into metal shrapnel.
- ◆ **Large Bomb** (v/1): A large explosive charge with a long fuse.
- ◆ **Smoke Bomb** (II/2): Creates a cloud of acrid smoke that's difficult to breathe and stings the eyes.

DRUGS (ALCHEMICAL)

Drawback (Volatile): "Woozy," lvl 1 harm.

- ◆ **Black Lotus** (1/1): A tar-like resin made from the leaves of the plant. Induces coma-like stupor and visions.
- ◆ **Bloodneedle** (1/3): Induces fever, euphoric mania, rampant energy.
- ◆ **Dream Smoke** (1/3): A milder formulation of black lotus. Induces a pleasant intoxication.
- ◆ **Quicksilver** (IV/1): A toxic metallic fluid. The user's mind opens further to the ghost field. Take +1d to ATTUNE roll upon use, suffer level 2 harm ("Zoned-out").
- ◆ **Spark** (1/3): A measure of raw electroplasm blended with seawater. The user feels empowered and emits mild electrical energy.
- ◆ **Trance Powder** (1/3): A glittering blue powder. Induces a pleasant hypnotic trance when inhaled.

OILS (ALCHEMICAL)

- ◆ **Alcahest** (III/1): A fluid that stops the effects of any other alchemical.
- ◆ **Binding Oil** (III/1): Permanently fuses two surfaces until dissolved by alcahest or electroplasma.
- ◆ **Fire Oil** (III/3): Erupts in searing flame upon contact with air.

POISONS (ALCHEMICAL)

Drawback (Volatile): "Sickened," lvl 1 harm.

- ◆ **Drown Powder** (III/2): A fine dust that incapacitates by giving the sensation of drowning.
- ◆ **Eyeblind** (III/3): A powder that causes blindness for a moment.
- ◆ **Skullfire** (III/1): Toxic fumes from overly heated Leviathan blood. Causes incapacitating migraines.
- ◆ **Standstill** (IV/1): A powder that causes temporary paralysis.

POTIONS (ARCANE)

Drawback: 4-clock, "Accosted by Spirit Wardens," 1 tick per use.

- ◆ **Silence Potion** (III/1): Creates an area of utter silence around the shattered vial.
- ◆ **Shadow Essence** (III/1): A distillation of the void. Creates a cloud of unnatural pitch darkness.
- ◆ **Viper Potion** (IV/1): The user's saliva and blood become highly toxic to others for a few minutes.

Note: Alchemicals, bombs, and dangerous gadgets are highly restricted in Doskvol. When you use the acquire asset downtime activity to get one of these (rather than crafting it yourself), you take +2 HEAT.

SAMPLE SPECIAL FORMULAS

- ◆ **Devilroot** (VI/1, ALCHEMICAL): *Sap of the devilroot plant. Can be instantly lethal when consumed.* **Unreliable.**
- ◆ **Dream Essence** (II/1, ARCANE): *A distillation of a vivid, lucid dream, perfectly recreated for the user.* **Rare.**
- ◆ **Drift Oil** (III/1, ARCANE): *Creates neutral buoyancy when poured on an object, causing it to float in the air for an hour.*
- ◆ **Ghost Oil** (IV/1, ARCANE): *A colorless fluid that causes affected material to slip into the ghost field. Very dangerous when applied to living beings.* **Volatile.**
- ◆ **Heartcalm** (IV/1, ALCHEMICAL): *Slows the heartbeat over several days, resulting in death.* **Unreliable.**
- ◆ **Life Essence** (VI/1, ARCANE): *The essential life force, in vaporous form. May delay death for a short time, or (rarely) revive the recently deceased.* **Unreliable. Volatile** (attracts the attention of the undead).
- ◆ **Sight Potion** (III/1, ARCANE): *Gives the user the ability to see the invisible and sense danger before it happens. Lasts several hours.*
- ◆ **Thought Essence** (VI/1, ARCANE): *A distillation of a spirit's memories, such that they become your own. Can have severe side effects.* **Rare. Volatile.**
- ◆ **Vitality Potion** (III/1, ALCHEMICAL): *Accelerates the healing process. +4 ticks on healing clock.* **Rare.**

SAMPLE GADGETS & SPECIAL PLANS

- ◆ **Black Salt Bomb** (IV/2, SPARK-CRAFT): *Covers a small room, keeping ghosts from exiting or entering.* **Volatile.**
- ◆ **Flash Bomb** (II/2, SPARK-CRAFT): *Orbs that detonate with a blinding flash when shattered.* **Unreliable.**
- ◆ **Ghost Scourge** (IV, ARCANE): *A plasmicly-charged chain connected to a spirit bottle, to entangle a spirit and draw it into the bottle.* **Conspicuous.**
- ◆ **Line Thrower** (II, SPARK-CRAFT): *A steam-powered pressurized launcher for a climbing line and grappling hook.* A Tier III version also includes a retracting line that can lift a person.
- ◆ **Spirit Lamp** (IV, ARCANE): *An electroplasmic lamp with a focused beam that can repel ghosts with serious force.*

- ◆ **Hull.** A spark-craft body animated by a spirit. Very **complex**, requiring six stages.
 - Stage 1: **Inner Chassis** (VI): *The articulated metal skeleton of the hull.*
 - Stage 2: **Clockwork actuators** (VI): *The inner gears and systems that allow the hull to move.*
 - Stage 3: **Sensorium** (VII, ARCANE): *A crystalline orb suspended in electroplasm within a metal frame, which allows the hull to see and hear.* Requires a **rare** item: a spirit-crystal orb.
 - Stage 4: **Soul Vessel** (VII, ARCANE): *An arcane device that houses the spirit.* Requires a **rare** material: a memento from the spirit's life.
 - Stage 5: **Outer shell** (V): *The metal exterior of the hull.*
 - Stage 6: **Feature** (VI): *A wondrous feature built-in to the hull.* See the Hull playbook for a list of possible features (page 216). May have drawbacks.

CRAFTING EXAMPLE

INVENTING A FLAMETHROWER

Noggs is fed up with losing fights to the Billhooks, so she decides to design a weapon that will tip the scales. Noggs's player, Jess, tells the GM that she wants to craft a flamethrower.

First, Noggs will need to invent the design. The GM and Jess go through the creation questions.

1. The GM asks, "What type of creation is it and what does it do?" Jess answers, "I want a portable flamethrower—like a WWII style thing with a fuel tank on my back and a sprayer-gun to direct the fire."
2. Jess asks, "What's the minimum quality level for this?" The GM answers, "If it puts out enough fire to fill a room... let's call that level 6 (two for the area, three for the force, and one for the range). This is somewhat advanced for Duskwall, but it's doable."
3. The GM asks, "What rare, strange, or adverse aspect of this formula or design has kept it in obscurity, out of common usage?" Jess answers, "Well, I think the obvious thing is the difficulty of managing the volatile fuel under pressure without turning the weapon into a bomb."
4. Jess asks, "What drawbacks does it have? As if I don't know..." The GM answers, "Heh, yeah, of course it has the *volatile* drawback. The dangerous consequence will usually be "Collateral Damage," though the possibility of exploding the tank might come up if it takes damage. Also, I think it has the *consumable* drawback, to reflect the need to refill it with fuel. Let's say it has enough in the tank to be used two times before refilling. You can refill fuel by acquiring an asset in downtime, probably quality level 2 for that."

Now that the design is settled, Noggs spends a few downtime activities on an 8-segment long-term project to **STUDY** the design and learn how to build it.

CRAFTING THE FLAMETHROWER

Once the design is learned, Noggs builds the flamethrower by spending a downtime activity. Jess rolls **TINKER** and gets a **6**, which is enough to build an item with quality equal to Noggs's Tier +1. Noggs is Tier 0, so that's quality level 1—not enough for the quality level 6 flamethrower.

To make up the difference, Noggs will have to spend 5 **COIN** on the construction of the flamethrower. A sizable sum, but Jess thinks it's worth it to terrorize the Billhooks. Noggs spends the money from the crew's vault (with the blessing of her crew mates) and the new weapon is ready to go.

CHAPTER 9

CHANGING THE GAME

After you play *Blades* for a good while (or maybe even right away if you’re one of those types), you’ll start to think about how you might add stuff to the game, or how elements of the game might be different, or how you might play a different sort of game using the *Blades* system as the foundation for something new. These impulses are called “game design” and you’re off onto a very rocky and rewarding road. This chapter is a crash course in some design concepts that might help get you started.

The first bit of advice I can give you is: **play and iterate**. It’s easy to fall into the trap of sitting at your computer, typing away, thinking up all kinds of game stuff, then despairing and tearing it all apart, or starting over, or throwing it away. Fight that tendency by focusing your design process on playing the game, then iterating a few things, then playing again, then iterating, and so on. Elements that seemed simple at the keyboard will reveal themselves as too complicated at the table, and vice versa. A small detail that you didn’t think important will be seized on by the players and expand into something amazing. A roleplaying game is dead on the page—you have to get it into play to really see what it’s like. Keep your design efforts focused on **play**, not a lonely writing exercise.

Also, **you don’t have to do it alone**. There’s your game group, of course—they’ll help you a lot. But there’s also a huge, vibrant community of tabletop gamers online that love to try new things, give feedback, and support design efforts—from minor hacks to full blown new creations.

Go to bladesinthedark.com to find a bunch of game-hacks that other people have already done (maybe they’ll inspire you!) and links that will take you to various community hubs online so you can talk to other gamers and designers.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE

You might want to create more special abilities, upgrades, or claims to expand the scope that the game covers. Here's a breakdown of the various benefits that are granted in the core game. You can re-purpose these for something new.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- ◆ Permission to do something that normal people can't do (like the Slide's ability **LIKE LOOKING INTO A MIRROR**: "You can always tell when someone is lying to you."). Or permission to apply an action in a way that you normally couldn't (like the Whisper's **OCCULTIST**).
- ◆ **+1d to a roll** in a specific circumstance.
- ◆ **+1 effect** in a specific circumstance.
- ◆ **Push yourself to activate** a special talent or minor supernatural effect.
- ◆ **Take variable stress to activate** a supernatural talent (use the **magnitude** scale). Take additional stress to activate optional features (like the Lurk's **GHOST VEIL**).
- ◆ Grant **special armor** in a specific circumstance.
- ◆ Suffer **reduced harm** or take a lesser penalty from harm.

CREW UPGRADES

- ◆ Permission to do something special (like the Smuggler's **CAMOUFLAGE**).
- ◆ Give **+1d to a cohort** of a certain type or in a specific circumstance.
- ◆ Give all crew members **+1 TRAUMA box** or **+1 stress box**.
- ◆ Free **load** for certain items.
- ◆ **+1 Tier** in specific circumstances.
- ◆ An addition to your **lair** (like the **Ritual Sanctum** of the Cult).

CLAIMS

- ◆ Permission to do something special (like the Cult's **Ancient Gate**).
- ◆ **+1d to engagement roll** for a plan type or in a specific circumstance.
- ◆ **+1d to a downtime activity roll**.
- ◆ **+1d to an action roll** in a specific location or circumstance.
- ◆ You take **less HEAT** after a score.
- ◆ Add **scale** or **potency** to a cohort.
- ◆ **Extra COIN** in payoff for certain types of scores or generated by an asset in downtime (like a **Vice Den**).
- ◆ **+1 REP** from scores.

For some examples of other ways to expand the scope for PCs, see **Advanced Abilities and Permissions**, page 234.

TWEAKING WHAT'S THERE

You might modify a mechanic that's already there, to tweak the game in one direction or another. For instance, maybe you want resistance rolls to be a bit weaker, so there's always a cost when you suffer consequences:

HARDCORE RESISTANCE

When you roll resistance, take stress equal to the lowest single die result.

With this tweak, the range of stress costs on a resistance roll is 1-6, rather than 0-5. This makes the “stress burn” in the game more steady. You can't luck out and suffer zero stress when you resist.

Or maybe you want resistance to be unreliable and even more costly:

UNCERTAIN RESISTANCE

When you resist a consequence, roll the appropriate attribute. On a **CRITICAL**, you avoid the consequence completely. On a **6**, you avoid the consequence if you take stress equal to its severity, or you may take 1 stress to reduce the consequence by one level. On a **4/5**, you may reduce the consequence by one level if you take stress equal to its severity. On a **1-3**, you don't resist the consequence. You suffer it fully.

Stress cost by severity: Limited/1-harm = 1 stress. Standard/2-harm = 2 stress. Severe/3-harm = 3 stress. Catastrophic/Fatal harm = 4 stress.

With this tweak, there's a chance that you won't resist the consequence; it's not a sure thing the way it is in the normal game. With *Uncertain Resistance*, the PCs become much more normal—they're not daring scoundrels who can slip out of trouble whenever they really need to.

Speaking of more normal PCs...

POOR BEGINNINGS

When you create your character, you have only one of your special playbook **items**, not all of them. Choose the one that you begin with. All of the other special playbook items must be unlocked by advancing your character's **lifestyle**. Each time you fill one of your **stash** rows and advance your lifestyle, choose two special items that you now have access to.

If you want lifestyle to play an even bigger role, you could tie it to the crew's advancement:

TIER TIED TO LIFESTYLE

To advance your crew to the next **Tier**, you must have a full **REP** track, and each PC must have a **lifestyle** level equal to or greater than the Tier that you're advancing to. (There's no cost to the crew in **COIN**.)

If you want to explore the story of a different type of crew in Duskwall, you might tweak the payoff systems of the game to reward different behavior. For instance, to design a crew of vigilantes, Sean Nittner changed the way the crew earns and spends **COIN** and **REP**. Sean explains it like this:

*When I started making a Vigilantes crew the first thing I knew was that their reward couldn't be **COIN**. **COIN** is a necessary evil in Doskvol, but if that was their primary objective, well, they wouldn't be vigilantes.*

*John and I went back and forth over other possible rewards but the change that was both the simplest and the most logical was that the primary reward for cleaning up the streets, protecting your family, or exposing corruption in the Blue was an existing currency (and in fact an existing reward): **REP**.*

*So what does that look like in play? I always envisioned the vigilantes as the anti-blade, so their **REP** is directly tied to their response to scores, and coin is tied to the faction they are going up against (even Vigilantes have to eat):*

VIGILANTES PAYOFF

A score yields 1 **COIN** per Tier of the target and a **REP** reward based on the nature of the operation.

2 REP: Retribution of a minor score.

4 REP: Stop a minor score. Someone protected.

6 REP: Retribution for a major score. Several avenged or someone saved.

8 REP: Interrupt a major score. Corrupt officials outed. Many saved.

10+ REP: Faction destroyed.

*What does this do in play? First it means that Vigilantes will fill up their **REP** clock very fast, and are likely to get strong hold very quickly. It also means that they will have a hard time going up in Tier because they don't have much coin, and that their downtime options are limited. I liked the first part of that, Vigilante groups tend to stay pretty small, so tempering their Tier growth fits well, but I still wanted them to have the option to "buy up" their success during downtime. This was solved by creating a new special ability for the crew:*

As Good As Your Word: You may spend **REP** as **COIN** for downtime activities. Additionally, each crew member must take *Obligation* as a second vice.

*This still leaves the Vigilantes with a potential abundance of **REP**, and I still wanted to give them a special way to take advantage of that good will, and to make spending their **REP** create further complications. So I added what is probably my favorite crew ability:*

Favors: Spend 1 **REP** and describe how one of your contacts is put out to help you. Everyone in your crew gets one dot in an action your contact is skilled in for this score.

It's very powerful, but it also comes at the cost of endangering an ally or at the very least straining that friendship, just like vigilantes do!

Go to bladesinthedark.com to download the Vigilantes crew PDF and check out all the tweaks Sean made to the mechanics.

MAKING SOMETHING NEW

You might create an original mechanic, to add a new feature to the game or highlight something that has become a regular feature of your crew's adventures.

TRUST ISSUES

To benefit from teamwork maneuvers, you must **TRUST** the teammate who's helping you (name the teammates you trust after you pick your load for the score). You can force any character who trusts you to perform the **protect** maneuver on your behalf (they suffer a consequence instead of you).

Or maybe you want to push the game out into new spaces: a different setting, a different premise, or a different focus for play. In *Scum & Villainy* (a game hack by Stras Acimovic and John Leboeuf-Little about heroic space adventure), risky actions are rewarded with the **gambit** mechanic:

GAMBITS

When you roll a **6** or **CRITICAL** on a risky action, add 1 gambit to the crew's gambit pool. You can spend 1 gambit on an action roll to get +1d.

Gambits reinforce the intrepid nature of protagonists in sci-fi adventure fiction, who can build on their successes to perform over-the-top feats of heroism. With gambits in play, the game is less gritty and the PCs seem larger-than-life.

For contrast, in *Blades Against Darkness* (a game hack by Dylan Green about adventurers who explore dungeons), the action is a lot grittier. Even a simple journey is fraught with peril in this monster-infested world:

THERE OR BACK AGAIN

Make a fortune roll to see how dangerous a journey is. Take **1d for each map zone** traveled through. Adjust the number of dice down for safer routes (quality guides, friendly factions in zones, etc.) or up for more dangerous routes (alpha predators, Witch-king cults, enemy factions, etc.).

CRITICAL: A hazard strikes without warning. *An ambush drops into the middle of the party, guns blazing. A Razormaw's tendrils entwine half the party and drag them away.*

6: A hazard strikes but there is time to react. *Suddenly a PC is caught in a web and covered in Shirkers. A bandit ambush is revealed by the crack of gunfire. A Grey Fox patrol demands "protection" tax.*

4/5: A hazard protects something of value. *A magi and their hirelings are under attack by a group of bandits. A group of white apes are spotted picking over an abandoned pilgrim camp.*

1-3: No dangers arise or some small advantage is gained. *A cache of supplies are found in a box at the waystation with a note reading "take only what you need." A merchant offers a safer route or just the right tool.*

The GM then decides in which zone the encounter happens. After things are resolved, if the players press on, cut to the destination.

ADVANCED ABILITIES & PERMISSIONS

Here's a sampling of advanced abilities and permissions for PCs to acquire through the events of play. You might create your own for your *Blades* series, focused on the elements that are important in your game. These advanced abilities don't explain *how* a PC achieves the requirements for them. That's something to discuss and discover in play.

IRUVIAN SWORD ARTS

When you achieve the rank of student in an Iruvian sword art, you receive permission to study the fundamentals of your chosen style.

When you have proven your command of the fundamentals of the style, you achieve the rank of adept. You receive permission to study the secret arts of the style. You gain the adept fighting maneuver of your style (this does not count as a special ability).

When you have proven your mastery over the secret arts of the style, you become a master. You may take the master special ability of your style as a **veteran** advance.

FALLING STAR STYLE

- ◆ [ADEPT] **SASH FIGHTING:** You may wield a special silken sash in combat to interfere with your opponent and open them up to sword attacks. The sash resembles a very long scarf and is weighted at the tips. You may attempt to disarm an opponent or grapple them (to immobilize a limb or choke them), while staying out of arm's reach. You may also use the sash as climbing gear and to negate harm from falls.
- ◆ [MASTER] **THE FALLING STAR:** Your sword attacks involve acrobatic leaps with powerful falling slashes. When you make an attack in this way, choose a beneficial extra effect (this effect occurs regardless of the outcome of your action): *The target's armor is ruined—the target's weapon is ruined—the target is knocked sprawling—the target is forced back out of sword-reach.*

RISING MOON STYLE

- ◆ [ADEPT] **MOON DAGGER:** You may wield a vicious curved dagger in the off-hand to counter your opponent's moves or launch a wild flurry of cuts with both your blades. During any exchange with an opponent, at your option, choose to fight viciously with dagger and sword—increasing the level of any harm inflicted by you and your opponent, or fight defensively—decreasing the level of any harm inflicted by you and your opponent.
- ◆ [MASTER] **THE RISING MOON:** Your sword attacks involve acrobatic leaps with powerful upward slashes. When you make an attack in this way, choose a beneficial extra effect (this effect occurs regardless of the outcome of your action): *The target's armor is ruined—the target's weapon is ruined—the target is knocked sprawling—the target is forced in close where a sword is useless.*

THE FORGOTTEN GODS

When you open your mind to the thought-tendrils of a forgotten god, you suffer **1 TRAUMA** and become an adept of its cult. You gain access to the following special abilities as **veteran** advances:

- ◆ **THE CLOSING OF THE EYE:** You no longer suffer terror from the supernatural, and can choose to take **only 1 stress** when you resist mental, electroplasmic, or spiritual harm, regardless of the result of your roll.

- ◆ **GLORIOUS VISAGE:** You may extend the thought-tendrils of the god from your own mind to those around you, granting them a vision of its formless form. This is a psychic attack that inflicts **3 stress** on you and has an effect determined by your **TRAUMA** level. **TRAUMA 1+:** all those who can see you must look away and leave your presence, or be paralyzed with dread. **TRAUMA 2+:** In addition, you inflict level 2 harm (formless dread) to all who can see you. **TRAUMA 3+:** Instead of level 2 harm, you inflict level 3 harm “Catatonic.” **TRAUMA 4+:** In addition, you may also focus on one person who can see you and inflict fatal psychic harm “Shattered Mind.”

When you suffer your fourth **TRAUMA**, your mind is prepared and you ascend to mastery in the cult of your forgotten god. You receive permission to call upon your god to briefly manifest in the physical world and enact its will, at the cost of 6 stress. You receive permission to continue to play your character rather than retiring, with the following restrictions:

- ◆ You may now heal stress only by serving the will of your forgotten god. Your vice becomes *Servitude*.
- ◆ When next you suffer **TRAUMA** (your fifth), you transform into an avatar of the god, losing your human mind and will as the thought-tendrils of the god fully manifest within you. Retire your character to their dark fate.

THE PATH OF ECHOES

When you achieve the rank of initiate, you receive permission to attend the secret rituals of the cult. When you make the appropriate sacrifices to the cult, master the ways of the secret rituals, and offer up your absolute loyalty to the Path, you become an adept. When you achieve the rank of adept, you receive permission to attend the forbidden spirit well rituals in the deathlands. You may also take the following special ability as a **veteran** advance:

- ◆ **SPRIT LINK:** The death or ghostly possession of your physical body instantly frees your spirit. You arise from any spirit well you have previously visited. Switch to the *Ghost* playbook and immediately take a playbook advancement.

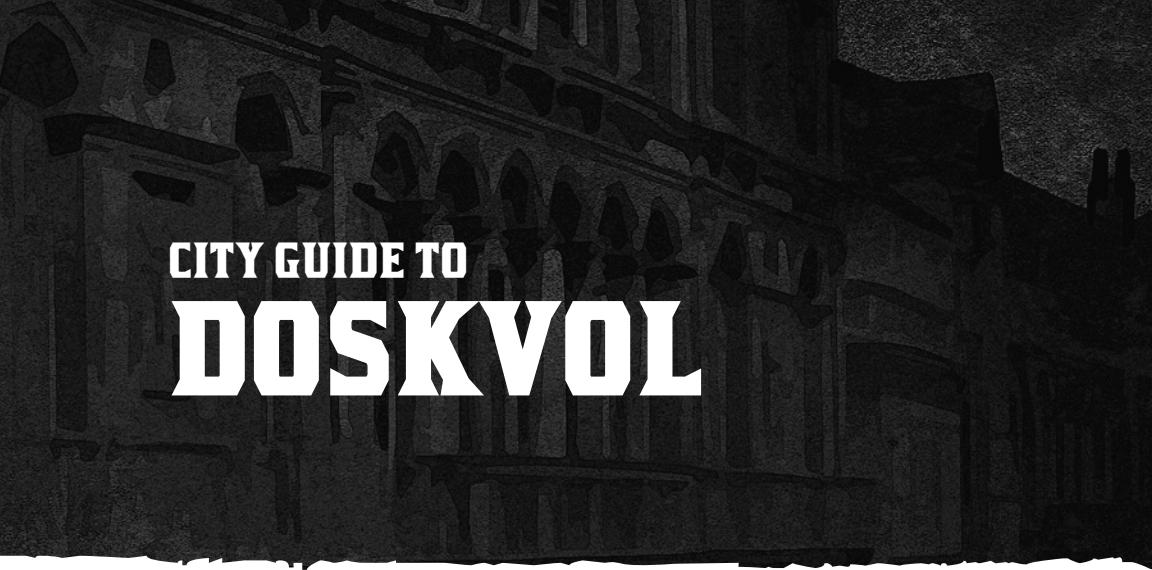
BOUND TO THE DEMON

When, having bound yourself by arcane ritual to a demon, you indulge its dark desire, you receive permission to command it and it may not refuse you. When the demon’s desire is not well-satisfied, it receives permission to work in secret toward your destruction to be free of its binding.

You may also take the following special abilities as **veteran** advances:

- ◆ **DEMONIC ATTENDANT:** A demon bound to you is compelled to stay always at hand, veiled and hidden within a nearby source of its elemental affinity, ready to appear at an instant to serve you. While its dark desire is well-satisfied, the demon will manifest to interpose itself for your protection or to offer its wisdom or aid without need for your specific command.
- ◆ **DEMONIC ARTIFACT:** You may force a demon bound to you to inhabit an artifact created by arcane methods. The demon’s abilities are then controlled by the wielder, so long as the demon’s dark desire is satisfied.





CITY GUIDE TO **DOSKVOL**

THE DARK JEWEL OF AKOROS

The city of Doskvol was established over 1000 years ago as a coal mining settlement on the cold north coast of Akoros. It has withstood the breaking of the world, an attack by a titanic leviathan, massive fires, a plague, a civil war, and legions of angry ghosts. It is a community of survivors.

The city is densely packed inside the ring of immense lightning towers that protect it from the murderous ghosts of the blighted deathlands beyond. Every square foot is covered in human construction of some kind—piled one atop another with looming towers, sprawling manors, and stacked row houses; dissected by canals and narrow twisting alleys; connected by a spiderweb of roads, bridges, and elevated walkways.

Doskvol is one of the most important cities in the Imperium, since it is from its port that the metal steamships of the leviathan hunters are launched. The hunters brave the far northern reaches of the Void Sea, far out of sight of land, to grapple with titanic demons of the depths and extract their precious immortal blood—the substance refined into *electroplasm*, the power source of civilization.

All powerful noble families operate hunter ships, each commanded by the scion of their line—and it is by their fortunes at sea and the bounties of blood they capture that the fortunes of the empire wax and wane. The savvy and the ruthless of Doskvol do well to position themselves to profit from this crucial enterprise upon which so many depend—either as an ally or servant of the aristocracy, or by preying upon the corrupted rich and privileged elite.

Opposite: The canals of Doskvol carry most of the goods and passengers across the city.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOSKVOL

PC: Pre-Cataclysm. IE: Imperial Era

~160 PC The old Skov kingdom establishes a coal mining settlement at the river delta. It grows into a small port town over several generations.

o During the cataclysm, the far northern reaches are spared the worst of the earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that shattered most of the continents to the south. The people of the mining settlement, like almost all of the survivors of the cataclysm, swear eternal fealty to the Immortal Emperor in exchange for his magical protection from the legions of vengeful spirits and other horrors unleashed upon the world. The safeguarded settlements salvage what they can from the ruins, and begin the long process of re-building.

~200 IE Some of the knowledge and technologies lost by the cataclysm are beginning to be restored at this point, thanks in large part to schools established by the Immortal Emperor and stocked with scholarly works rescued from obliteration. Doskvول becomes the primary training ground for all nautical endeavors.

223 IE The “great deluge” floods the mines of the rapidly growing city and kills hundreds. The mines are abandoned for several centuries, until advanced steam-powered machines can be employed to restore them.

551 IE The first hunters succeed at harvesting and refining leviathan blood, reaping a fuel source that will eventually power the Imperium.

556 IE The Immortal Emperor decrees that all cities of the Imperium are to begin construction of lightning barriers to replace waning protective sorceries. The first prototype barrier towers are built in Doskvول around the district that will become Charterhall.

809 IE Local citizens object when the Imperium moves the vast majority of its toxic leviathan blood processing to the factory town of Lockport in Skovlan. The Skovlanders insist that they are not subject to unilateral Imperial decree, claiming their figure-head king, Aldric, as their rightful ruler and demanding a withdrawal of the processing plants. The Emperor ignores them, sending workers to establish the new facilities under protection of the Imperial Military. King Aldric musters a militia force, and the Unity War begins.

Over the course of the conflict, over two thousand Skovlander refugees flee their war-torn homeland and make for the closest port, Doskvول.

845 IE The Unity War comes to end when Skovlan surrenders after Queen Alayne and her husband are killed by an assassin.

847 IE Present day.

CULTURES

Doskvol is a mix of many cultures and traditions, and, as in most cities, exhibits a paradoxical fusion of cosmopolitan rapport and tribalistic strife. To give you a convenient touchstone for cultures in this fantasy world, they're compared to various cultures from our world, below. This is not meant to be restrictive or definitive, just a short-hand to help you visualize and understand them. In play, it's your job to flesh out these sketches in the form of specific people, who each embody, reject, honor, or despise their cultures of origin depending on their own outlook and values.

The most common heritage in Duskwall is Akorosi, whose people and cultures resemble the diverse groups across Western and Eastern Europe. The Akorosi claim the same heritage as the Immortal Emperor himself, and base titles of nobility on this heritage.

Second most common are the Skovlanders, the original indigenous people of the north, whose people and cultures resemble those across Scandinavia and the northern British Isles. Many Skovlander refugees have come to the city throughout the Unity War, building up a very large population of laborers, skilled craftspeople, and other trades of the working-class. Some Akorosi look down on the Skovlanders as traitors to the Empire and treat them poorly.

Third are the Iruvians, a powerful and wealthy dominion in the south whose people and cultures resemble the diverse groups across Egypt, Persia, and India. Iruvians claim nobility via an ancient pact with the Emperor. They maintain an influential consulate in Duskwall and keep a close eye on their portion of the Leviathan hunter fleet.

For more on the lands of the Shattered Isles, see page 308.

LANGUAGES

There are three main languages spoken in the city. Most common is **AKOROSIAN**, or “Imperial,” which is considered the common tongue. It’s expressive, nuanced, and verbose—perfect for sprawling poetry or meticulous legal documents.

Second is **SKOVIC**, the mother tongue of Skovlan across the sea. Many Skovlanders live in Duskwall and their clipped, direct speech can be heard wherever they’re found. The ancient name of the city comes from an old Skovic word, *do'skov'ol*, literally meaning “the Skov’s coal mine.”

Third, and most rare, is **HADRATHI**, an ancient tongue found in musty old tomes but still spoken among some people, particularly Iruvians. Many people favor its elaborate, scathing expletives.

DOSKVOL OR DUSKWALL?

Like every old city, this one has collected many names, from the original form, *Doskvol*, to the Imperial nautical designation, *North Hook*, to the modern Akorosian slang, *Duskwall*. All the names are used interchangeably by citizens, depending on their background and preference. Scoundrels of the underworld sometimes refer to their shadowy corners of the city as “the Dusk.”

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

The sun was shattered in the cataclysm, plunging the world into darkness. Its remnant shards burn weakly in the sky at dawn and twilight, yielding only a dull glow, like the last embers in a dying fire.

Days are divided into two parts, marked by the weak lights at dawn and twilight. The 12 hours after dawn are numbered; the first hour, the second hour, the third hour, etc. The 12 hours after twilight are named, usually according to local custom, which varies from city to city. (The twilight hours of Duskwall are listed at right—the hour of wine, the hour of ash, etc.) Most cities ring public chimes to mark the hours.

If you want to keep things simple for the game group, you can refer to time in a standard 12-hour clock method, “3 a.m.” or “6 p.m.” Use the special hour names when you’re feeling fancy.

The moon looms huge and bright, swelling with each passing year, as if drawn ever closer by some terrible power. During certain phases of its transit, the moon appears to multiply across the sky, in pairs and trios of sibling lights, as if reflected on the facets of a vast crystalline dome. It is not known what causes these pale, dimmer sisters to appear, but occultists and natural philosophers have no shortage of arcane explanations and scientific hypotheses.

The ancient stars still hang in the black sky, though their arrangements sometimes swirl and change according to unknown principles of celestial motion. When the oceans turned to black ink during the cataclysm, a new realm of constellations appeared in the depths of the seas—millions of tiny pinpoints of light, somehow clearly visible far below the waves. To sail upon the waters of the Shattered Isles is to be flung into the void—the crushing dark of black sky upon black water, stars far above and stars far below. Not every sailor is able to keep their sanity.

Doskvول, like all the great cities of the Imperium, operates massive generators around the clock, to produce the power needed for lightning barriers as well as the thousands of electroplasmic lights that illuminate the public thoroughfares. Wealthy citizens operate their own generators and electric lights, but most people make do with simple candles and lanterns in their homes and shops. The smoke from generators, lanterns, torches, chimneys, and cook-fires chokes the air and covers the city in ash and soot.

Because of the perpetual darkness, a small hand lantern is practically a required tool for daily life in the city. Common people use simple oil lanterns, while the more well-to-do employ the most advanced miniature electroplasmic lamps, clipped to a belt to keep their hands free, mounted on the head of a walking stick, or carried by a servant lamp-bearer.

Areas of illicit dealings or ill-repute sometimes enforce a “no lamps” policy, so business may be conducted in the anonymous darkness.

| |
|---------------|
| HONOR |
| SONG |
| SILVER |
| THREAD |
| FLAME |
| PEARLS |
| SILK |
| WINE |
| ASH |
| COAL |
| CHAINS |
| SMOKE |

Opposite: Even at dawn, the city is shrouded in shadow.



ENERGY OF DUSKWALL

Excerpt from the lectures of Professor Schifrell Alcoria, "On Industrialization and Etherics."

THE MARVEL OF PLASM

The origin and background of modern fuel has long been a subject relegated to vague folklore and occult practice, ill understood by the masses. Hardly a surprising revelation, considering the rampant superstition and deplorable educational circumstance of the lower classes. To truly understand the topic, one must rely fully on the superior empirical methods of the modern natural philosopher.

We now know that the fuel properly known as Plasm is the liquid distillate of specific energetic reactions that occur throughout the Ether. The substance draws essence from a number of potential sources, each with its own properties cataloged by experiment. You may consider the diversity of these byproducts of life energy, from the glowing cerulean Electroplasm commonly seen coursing in an aetheric battery, to the opaque and viscous residue which accretes to the hulls of Leviathan Hunter ships.

Plasm is compressed life energy. Where there is energy, it may be put to work. The energy of Plasm is like any other—harnessed fully by the wit and Science of humankind with the proper application of aetheric frequency modulation techniques and trigonometric mathematics.

The quality of the various Plasms which result from the disparate processing techniques at large in the modern usage is often uneven, burning at different rates or with different amounts of “static” within (as Professor Gallo calls it) the “Ghost Field.” Static is, at best, distressing to the psyche of those in close proximity, and, at worst, a general safety hazard due to manifestations and emanations. Often they take the form of simple “spirit-echoes,” but some believe in entities of a darker nature which supposedly evidence an otherworldly intelligence and will. To call the manifestations “demonic” is to entertain the fantasies of ages past. As a woman of Science I reject such absurd notions.

Thankfully, the technicians of the Noble houses of Duskwall have perfected the distillation of raw Plasm from leviathan blood so that it burns bright, clear, and steady. Thus, as we all know, it is this exquisite Plasm which is most highly prized throughout the Imperium—to power the convenience of our electrick lights, the trains which connect our cities, and, of course, the great Lightning Towers that safeguard our lives. Doskvolian Plasm is the foundation for the glories of the Modern World.

CONDENSATION STAGE: FUEL FOR PLASM

The key insight to grasp in considering Plasm is this: it is distilled from materials that have already condensed life force into themselves. Whether using the leviathan blood—so full of life that even separated from its host it remains undying—or electroplasm, a force of life so enduring it survives death itself, the process requires saturated materials to distill. Some formulae can find saturated materials elsewhere, like in the moss and scum of a slaughterhouse or other such places, flourishing where death prevails.

Centuries of experimentation provided the foundational insights in alchemical form, or cloaked in the laughable superstitions of necromancy or astrology. Based on the principles that could be gleaned from those unfortunately-biased ancient works, modern Science has developed an industrial, mechanical, and chemical infusion process that can turn toxic materials into fuel.

Perhaps the most toxic material of all is the still-living leviathan blood. It is a thick, black, iridescent, oily substance harvested from the monsters of the deep. They drink the Ether and condense its energy to impossible levels of life force. Attempting to solve the mystery of vibrant blood laid the foundation for work with Plasm. The Leviathans consume and befoul the life energy of their world, condensing it in service of their baleful and abhorrent wills.

Electroplasmic energy forms at the edges where an individual life force experiences friction with the Ether. Wispy and vague, it glows, appearing much like mist, reacting to etheric currents and provoking fanciful speculation in the fevered minds of artists and the superstitious. In times past, this residue would evaporate into the background energy of the world upon the destruction of a life force. Now that the Ether is at high tide, as it were, that energy cannot disperse and sometimes condenses further to become almost palpable. This residual energy can sometimes ape the form and feeling of the deceased.

CONDENSATION STAGE: REFINING

Leviathan blood retains life impossibly well after separation from a leviathan, but remedying its liveliness is at the heart of the refining process. Special tanks can be prepared with careful application of, I'm sorry to say, rather secret trade techniques—then the living blood can be inserted and doused with various chemical formulations that eat away at the unnatural vitality therein. As the still-living blood defends itself, it draws in Etheric energies, concentrating them further as the tank siphons the intense byproducts to safe storage. Over time, the blood shrinks and loses all coherence, becoming leather and slag. These processing centers find that relocation is a necessary inconvenience, because of the horrible echoes in the Ether that result from this harvesting.

Electroplasm is vulnerable to forms of dimensional compression, so just as water vapor condenses to droplets of liquid, these ephemeral wisps of energy become glowing liquid Plasm.

In summary, Plasm is a refinement of condensed and distilled life (from any material saturated with life energy). Let us take a moment to relish the efficiency and orderly progression of the technology that allows life to continue to serve even when it shifts from a traditional form to a more pure energy. We look to a bright future, secure in the knowledge that we enter it with all the various devices and ingenuities needed to re-purpose life's wreckage to serve as industry's foundation.





WEATHER, CALENDAR, & SEASONS

Doskvol is cold, rainy, and windy on most days. Its citizens bundle up in heavy coats, scarves, gloves, and hats (convenient attire for a scoundrel who needs to conceal the tools of their trade). Just after dawn and again at twilight, the city is usually blanketed in a thick fog that obscures street lights and ruins visibility in the darkness. Many people habitually take a break during these times, staying indoors with a cup of tea to wait out the “blind hour.”

The official Imperial Calendar divides the year into six months of sixty days each (see the listing at right). It’s said they were named by the Immortal Emperor himself, to honor the lands and peoples lost during the cataclysm, but there are none now living who remember them.

A month is made up of 10 weeks of six days each. The days of the week are not named by official reckoning—they’re simply referred to by number (“We’ll meet again on the 17th.”), but regional custom sometimes names particular days of the calendar according to a regular event or practice. In Doskvol, the first day of each week is **Market Day**, when public traders put out a new selection of wares for the coming week. Some districts even have their own quaint weekday names particular to local events, such as **Home Day** in Crow’s Foot (prisoners are usually released on the second day of the week), **Commission Day** at the docks (new ships are launched on the third day of the week according to old superstitions), **Requiem** in Charterhall (wills and testaments are traditionally prosecuted on the fourth day of the week), **Dust Day** in Charhollow (the fifth day of the week, when the food stores of the poor run thin), and **Carillon** in Brightstone (operas and symphonies perform on the sixth day of the week).

The last day of each month is **Moontide**, an informal holiday based on a folk-practice honoring a forgotten sky deity; now merely an excuse to stop work and drink. Other holidays include **Arkenvorn** (honoring the institution of the Spirit Wardens), **Unison** (celebrating—or cursing—the end of the Unity War with Skovlan), **Doskvorn** (a birthday celebration for anyone born in Doskvol), and **Gratitude** (honoring the Immortal Emperor’s ascension to the throne and salvation of the Shattered Isles—as well as celebrating thankfulness for other things in life).

The north of Akoros, where Doskvol lies, experiences three seasons—a frigid winter (during Elisar and Mendar), a windy and rainy spring (Kalivet and Suran), and a stormy fall (Ulsivet and Volnivet). Also of note is “hunting season”—the most active time for leviathans in the northern sea, which usually lasts from late Suran through early Volnivet. The leviathan hunter ships procure 80% of their hauls during this time of the year.

| |
|----------|
| MENDAR |
| KALIVET |
| SURAN |
| ULSIVET |
| VOLNIVET |
| ELISAR |

Opposite: The vertical construction of Doskvol; every abode piled atop another.

WHAT IS THERE TO EAT IN DUSKWALL?

Excerpt from *Ports of the Ink Sea*, Evan Shandlay's travel guide.

Unsurprisingly, the bulk of cheap food in the port city of Duskwall is eel and mushroom pie. Eel are famously resistant to taking on some of the foul accretions of the canals and the sea, and they are easy to trap. Their consistency is not fabulous, and the incautious cook risks losing a finger to an ill-tempered bite, but the eels have a lot of meat on them and there are many ways to prepare it.

THE COMMON FOLK

Mushroom gardens are everywhere, from the poverty stricken apartment dweller's closet planter to the wealthy aristocrat's cultivated drawing room. "Leavings" to feed the mushrooms can be purchased on a third of the street corners of Duskwall, sold by enterprising urchins. Finer materials are sold in various specialty shops. Rich fertilizer seldom smells great, but that's why sealable "garden cans" are fashionable. Centipedes and other vermin are often attracted to these gardens. If caught, they provide much-needed variety to the diet.

The Ministry of Darkbloom is a charity that maintains mushroom gardens in unexpected places all around the city. Most bakeries or food stores have a counter where their inexpensive goods are sold. Usually their caps, stems, centipedes, grubs, worms, and rat-meat are sold raw, but sometimes they are finished into loaves, stews, or pies first. (Whatever is left tends to be baked into a "surprise loaf" or tossed in the stewpot, then taken to the alms house.)

Canal weed, watermoss, and algae are collected by city authorities. They are taken from the Ink Sea and certain canals to provide renewable roughage and fodder for animals. They also provide a basic ingredient for the more desperate of the city. Duskwall officials arrange for the Department of Waterways to collect it and turn it over to the Department of Drayage, who have special wagons dedicated to moving the material to various points in the city. Anyone can collect a share. Canal weed, watermoss, and algae can be used for various soups, or ground up into gamy flour.

Subsistence farming is common. Families or organizations take over a tunnel or basement, load it up with soil and fertilizer, and share the bounty among their number. Many wealthy citizens allow

sharecropping of their mushroom tunnels. A law passed almost twenty years ago forbids the creation of new mushroom tunnels, as they give fugitives too many places to hide, so the remaining tunnels are that much more valuable.

Soil treatment can be as basic as putting something that once lived in the dirt to feed the fungus, or as complex as crafting formulas of fertilizer ingredients to get specific effects from the mushrooms growing from the treated soil. From common sense to family secrets, these farming methods are widely varied and mostly legal.

Ingenuous *alchemical* fermentation techniques can take a variety of cheap materials and render them into alcoholic beverages. It may be low quality, but fungal brew will damage brain function enough to forget the day and have a good time. More or less.

THE WELL-OFF

If you aren't desperate, the options become more enticing. Modest fields within the lightning fence produce significant amounts of grain through half the year, so proper flour and alcohol can be made. The Sunken Garden is an area of dammed up canals where rice is grown. Prisoners working off public service tread out the dark waters managing the paddies under the watchful eyes of Bluecoats. Eels inevitably get in, and they are harvested for food as well (if they lose the fight).

Some decades ago the harrowmaze was invented, a labyrinth for mice and rats. They eat and breed and run in the sealed environment, with traps automatically catching a certain number at regular harvest times, providing a steady source of meat in a variably sized unit that can be housed in the home or a public area. Put mushroom pellets in, get rodent meat out.

Fishing ships ply the coastal waters daily, bringing back full nets of fish. Popular superstition figures the fish to be stray thoughts of the leviathans given

form, and many are ugly enough to justify that whimsy. However, once they've been sorted and the poisonous ones ground up for soil treatment or disposal, the rest grace the plates or bowls of those who can afford them.

Chickens do well in Duskwall, and breed quickly, providing a useful source of meat. Goats are also popular, as much for their milk and guard duty as for their meat. Becoming an expert in various pairings of goat cheese and mushrooms is a cultural hobby of the city's well-to-do.

Various sporings of "cap wine" are far superior to fungal brew. The wine-like substance is alcoholic, stored in glass bottles, and a symbol of the finer things.

THE WEALTHY

Duskwall is a garden of culinary delights for those who can afford them. Nets and specialized hunting techniques bring a bounty of dolphin, devilfish, squid, mussels, and all description of seafood into the city. Culture dictates that chefs prepare them to look as close as possible to how they appeared while alive, meanwhile stuffing them and their surroundings with accents and appetizers and succulent treats.

Nothing says "family celebration!" like a devilfish platter, treats among the carefully arranged arms, the head sac full of delicious stuffing, a side of crab cheese, creamy and smooth, in a dish between the eyes. Another popular tradition is eating rich caviar out of tiny wooden shoes with a silver spoon.

RADIANT ENERGY

What sets the wealthy diet apart from common food is the use of radiant energy. Centuries ago, brilliant alchemists and necromancers discovered ways to infuse electroplasmic energy into the living matrices of plants, creating beautiful living artwork that glowed with energy. The practices expanded to working with animals—first fish, then eels, devilfish, and other sea creatures. The practice is traditionally unsuccessful with mammals, and iffy at best with birds.

The glow of life energy emanating from radiant creatures is soaked up by surrounding plant life, which grows bigger and faster as a result. The wealthy tend to cultivate radiant gardens not just for the range of beautiful plants, but also because the light from those plants replaces sunlight and

allows other plants nearby to flower and bear fruit. The light is dimmer, but always glowing.

Critics of the process suggest the secrets to infusing radiant energy were learned from leviathans and are therefore not to be trusted. The practice is widespread regardless of its origin, and commonly accepted.

Many wealthy families have their own secrets for radiant integration, and so there is a wide variety of techniques and appearances among radiant plants and animals.

The Brochalla family have planted small radiant trees in rows with grapevines, creating an otherwise impossible vineyard. The Nyamaska family pioneered the technique of building an aquarium full of radiant fish that arched over a greenhouse. The living light allows growing gardens of fresh fruit and vegetables inside the mansion's security. The Durovlins have ponds full of radiant fish and plants. They harvest clams and mussels (and their weirdly shiny pearls) as well as other cultivated undersea delicacies from the glowing grottos.

Aristocrats and scholars can wax poetic about how the condensation of life energy in the electroplasm represents the doorway between life and death, condensation from the Ghost Field in a living thing. Food, too, is a doorway between life and death. One thing must consume another to live, and to interrupt that endless cycle brings death. From that death, fungal life may then spring up and begin the cycle anew.

Enjoy the radiant plants and animals, but do not eat them. Radiant poisoning is serious. The life energy that a person eats tends to root around in their echo and wake up a voice or personality of someone they killed, or a death they witnessed, or (for innocents) invites in the strongest nearby ghost voice. A psychic civil war ensues, and a Whisper must be hired to smooth out the unwanted voice and free the poisoned individual to be singular in the body once more. This usually works, but often has unpleasant side effects.

Radiant plants and animals must be disposed of by burning, as a human corpse would be, or their electroplasmic energy can cause problems in the Ghost Field. Since they almost never occur in the wild, this restriction on raising radiant plants and animals is generally not a problem.

Now you know what to eat next time you are in Akoros and find your way to the bustling port of Duskwall. Raise a glass to toast the Immortal Emperor, avoid eating anything with red spots, and you'll do just fine.

LAW & ORDER

Doskvol's law and order is presided over by six institutions:

- ◆ **THE LORD GOVERNOR** oversees Imperial interests in Doskvol, enforces edicts from the Immortal Emperor, commands the Imperial Military garrison and war ships in the city, and breaks ties when needed on City Council measures. The Lord Governor is appointed by the Emperor.
- ◆ **THE CITY COUNCIL** consists of six members of the nobility who draft and approve legislation, city ordinances, and public works; determine the disbursement of the city treasury; and issue taxation orders. Council seats are traditionally appointed by vote of the sitting council when a member dies or retires.
- ◆ **THE MINISTRY OF PRESERVATION** manages the provisions for the Imperium, ensuring that food and supplies are transported where they're needed across the electro-rail lines and within the cities. They also oversee the Sparkwrights who design and maintain the lightning barriers. They are appointed by the Emperor.
- ◆ **THE MAGISTRATES** issue warrants, prosecute trials, assess evidence, and pronounce judgments (there are no juries). Magistrates are appointed by the City Council.
- ◆ **THE CITY WATCH** (aka "Bluecoats") patrol the streets, "encourage compliance with the law," capture offenders, and operate Ironhook Prison. Watch-guards are hired by the Commander of the Watch, who is appointed by the City Council.
- ◆ **THE INSPECTORS** (aka "Constables") investigate crimes and present evidence for warrants and trials. Inspectors are appointed by the Lord Governor of the city. Inspectors are often foreigners, with no close ties within Duskwall.

*There is another related institution, the **Spirit Wardens**, but they serve the Emperor directly and are not officially part of Doskvol's law enforcement apparatus. See page 296 for details about the Spirit Wardens.*

Under this system, a citizen can expect to receive justice commensurate with their social status and wealth. The Inspectors are famously incorruptible and hold themselves apart from Doskvol's sprawling network of bribery, but the other institutions are bought and paid for by the powers-that-be and rarely (if ever) bite the hand that feeds them. If you're captured by the Bluecoats or brought before a magistrate, it's the depth of your pockets and the breadth of your political connections that will almost always decide the case, not the application of jurisprudence.

The Bluecoats are under general orders to enforce the law, but in practical terms, they serve the needs of the richest and most influential groups and harass the poorest and least powerful—essentially operating as another street gang extorting the underclasses.

It's often said that everyone is guilty in Duskwall, so make sure you get rich before you get caught.

Opposite: A Bluecoat at their post.



THE UNDERWORLD

The powerful elite of the city contrive to keep the lower classes in servitude and want, to profit from their labors and control them in their desperation.

But there are some who try to find a way out of the traps laid by the establishment; some who make their own fates with the only tools left to them: skulduggery, violence, and the dark arts. These daring few of the underworld are labeled criminals, villains, and scoundrels by high society; they're hunted down, locked away, and eradicated before they can upset the rigged games of the status quo.

The underworld factions that do survive often become what they battle against. Their power and influence corrupts them until they're just another agent of control and oppression—feeding on the weak and vulnerable, as they once were.

And so, a cycle perpetuates: violent resistance to authority, violent response, and violent ends—or else an ascension to power and privilege; out of the gutter and onto the overlord's perch.

The most notable of these ascended are:

- ◆ **THE UNSEEN.** An insidious criminal organization with secret membership, whose agents are said to be placed within every institution in Doskvول. They profit from vice and extortion at all levels of society.
- ◆ **THE HIVE.** An Imperially-recognized “merchant guild” with many legitimate businesses and contracts—cover for their much more profitable trade in contraband and human trafficking.

The rest of the underworld is in a constant war of attrition—vicious competition among desperate gangs, each scrabbling to crawl out of misery on the backs of their victims. The landscape of criminal power constantly shifts, street to street, block to block, district to district, as the struggle for dominance rages on. Right now in the city, several bloody conflicts consume the underworld:

- ◆ In **Crow's Foot**, a district ruled by violent gangs, the crime boss of the area has been murdered, and it's all-out war on the streets between the most likely successors: **the Crows**, **the Lampblacks**, and **the Red Sashes**. Each faction is recruiting every scoundrel they can to fill out their ranks and seize control. For more on this conflict, see page 204.
- ◆ In **Coalridge**, a district dominated by factories and workhouses, groups of laborers and indentured servants are rallying to form a union to demand their rights, while the overseers hire mercenaries to crush resistance with displays of violence, and predatory opportunists swoop in to profit from both sides.
- ◆ At **Charterhall University**, a group of nefarious students has established a successful criminal operation from within the school, drawing the attention of other gangs who now see the halls of academia as a ripe target.



ACADEMIA

Some of the best educators in the empire are found in Duskwall. From the high-walled towers of Doskvol Academy to the stuffy classrooms of Charterhall University, if there is a mystery to be solved, a philosophy to be explored, or a schematic to be designed, some student of Doskvol is probably toiling to gain course credit for it.

DOSKVOL ACADEMY

Principally renowned for its services to the Church of the Ecstasy of the Flesh, the Academy campus in Whitecrown is broken into three colleges, each a pillar of understanding, representing the body, mind, and soul.

College of Imperial Science

The school of magistrates and political scholars. Curricula include: Law, Economics, Iruvian studies, History of Unification, and Political Sciences.

College of Naval Command

The chief training grounds for officers of both leviathan hunters and Imperial war ships. Curricula include: Naval Law, Void Sea Navigation, Ship Design and Operation, Fencing, Athletics, Astronomy, Alchemy, and Applied Mathematics.

College of Immortal Studies

This college started as a theology department, but now classes include: History, Philosophy, Spectrology, Pre-Cataclysm Studies, Music, and Theater Studies.

CHARTERHALL UNIVERSITY

Charterhall University is a sprawling institution spread across Charterhall and throughout Doskvol. Students enroll (often by taking loans from sponsoring merchants) to learn a trade and gain guild membership and status.

Jayan Hall of Alchemy

A trade school for state and private alchemy including void water filtration, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and transmutation research. Admission and graduation are bought and sold by city institutions and merchant enterprises.

Houses of Jurisprudence

Called Barrister Alley, this collection of homes and taverns are each dedicated to a particular magistrate who teaches law to a small throng of students. The barristers are often in competition with each other over grant funds and wealthy patronage. This has engendered a bitter rivalry between the houses.

Sparkwright Tower

School of research and development sponsored by rival factions the Sparkwrights and the Foundation. An exceptionally dangerous place due to their constant work with electroplasmic energy and the massive turbines housed in the school.

Morlan Hall of Unnatural Philosophy

The nexus of secret societies spawning from the Path of Echoes, Forgotten Gods, and the Ecstasy of the Flesh—each of which vie for primacy within the halls of academia as well as carry on their own cult activities in secret. Classes include Spectral Philosophy, Introduction to Modern Metaphysics, and Ethics in Demonology.

THE HAUNTED CITY

The electroplasmic furnaces of Bellweather Crematorium burn night and day to properly dispose of all corpses recovered by the Spirit Wardens. The arcane dissolution destroys the spirit utterly, removing its echo from the ghost field and neutralizing the threat from a vengeful spirit.

Despite these efforts, however, there are still ghosts at large in Duskwall. Some bodies aren't found and destroyed soon enough, allowing the ghost to rise free of its shell. Some spirits are intentionally removed before the Wardens arrive, to be sold on the black market or distilled into spirit essence.

Rogue spirits crave what all dead things crave: the sweet essence of life. Some seek it by pursuing what was lost when they died, mindlessly repeating meaningless actions from life. Others lure the unwary into a cold, withering embrace. The most ancient spirits are said to have even more sinister ways of acquiring what they desire.

Every citizen of Duskwall has had at least one harrowing encounter with a rogue spirit, sometimes many more. Most spectral encounters in the city fall into one of five types:

- ◆ **ECHOES** are “loops” of behavior captured in the ghost field, repeating over and over. They have no will of their own, but are still dangerous because of the electrical discharge of their plasmic forms. They sometimes spontaneously manifest at the site of an extremely violent event, whether or not death was involved.
- ◆ **SPECTERS** are malevolent spirits seeking to possess a victim to drain its essence and to take vengeance upon those who they believe wronged them in life.
- ◆ **HORRORS** are non-human electroplasmic entities that live within the ghost field. They're very rare within the city, but are common in the deathlands beyond the lightning barriers.
- ◆ **RECONCILED** are ghosts that have stayed sane and do not crave life essence or vengeance as Specters do. Reconciled are extremely rare—some spectrologists don't believe they exist at all.
- ◆ **SPirit WELLS** are rifts in the veil of reality where ghosts and other supernatural beings congregate to draw energy. In ancient myth, a spawning ground for demons.

These entities, while terrifying and strange, are a fact of life in the dark world of the Empire. Citizens still go about their business amidst supernatural horrors everyday, clutching their spiritbane charms, mumbling a half-remembered invocation to a forgotten god, and never hesitating to call upon the services of a professional Whisper if the situation becomes dire.

Opposite: A close encounter with a vengeful spirit.



DOSKVOL



LANDMARKS

- 1 THE VOID SEA.** During the cataclysm, the oceans turned to black ink. Tiny points of light, arrayed like constellations of stars, can be seen far below the surface. Only the bravest or most desperate of captains dare to sail beyond sight of land, into a sea as black and dark as the sky above. The vengeful ghosts that plague the land tend to shun the open ocean, but there are more terrible things prowling the deeps.
- 2 THE LOST DISTRICT.** A once wealthy area, ravaged by plague then abandoned to the deathlands when the second lightning barrier was built. Contains many lost treasures for the foolhardy to seek out.
- 3 IRONHOOK PRISON.** A towering metal fortress, where the worst (or most unlucky) criminals are incarcerated. Many are forced into labor in the Southern fields and pit-mines of Dunsborough. The condemned are sent to scavenge in the deathlands.
- 4 GADDOC RAIL STATION.** Electro-rail trains from across the Imperium arrive here daily with goods and passengers.
- 5 EELERIES & FARMS.** About half of Doskvol's food needs are met by imports; the other half is gathered locally from eel farms, mushroom caverns, and crops nurtured by wondrous radiant energy lamps.
- 6 OLD NORTH PORT.** Before the deluge of the second century, the Dosk River delta was only a shallow bog surrounding a coal mining settlement. Ships used the Old North Port to dock and re-supply before crossing the open sea to Skovlan. The obsolete port was abandoned to the deathlands when the second lightning barrier was built.
- 7 THE DEATHLANDS.** Beyond the lightning barriers, the world is a wasteland of petrified trees, ash, and choking clouds of miasma. Restless ghosts ceaselessly search for the faintest spark of life essence upon which to prey.

WEALTH High Medium Low

DISTRICTS

BARROWCLEFT. Residences and markets for the farmers who work the fields and eeleries.

BRIGHTSTONE. The grand mansions and luxury shops of the wealthy elite.

CHARHOLLOW. A crowded district of tenements and stacked houses.

CHARTERHALL. The city's civic offices and the hub for shops, artisans, and commerce.

COALRIDGE. The remnants of Doskvol's original hilltop mining settlement, now home to laborers and industrial factories.

CROW'S FOOT. A cramped neighborhood of multi-level streets, ruled by gangs.

THE DOCKS. Rough taverns, tattoo parlors, fighting pits, and warehouses.

DUNSLOUGH. A labor camp served by convicts and a ghetto for the destitute poor.

NIGHTMARKET. The trade center for exotic goods imported by rail. Many vendors also trade in illicit goods.

SILKSHORE. The “red lamp district” and artist community.

SIX TOWERS. A formerly rich district, now worn down and dilapidated.

WHITECROWN. The sprawling estates of the Lord Governor, Hunter Commander, Master Warden, and Doskvol Academy.

Each district is detailed on the following pages.



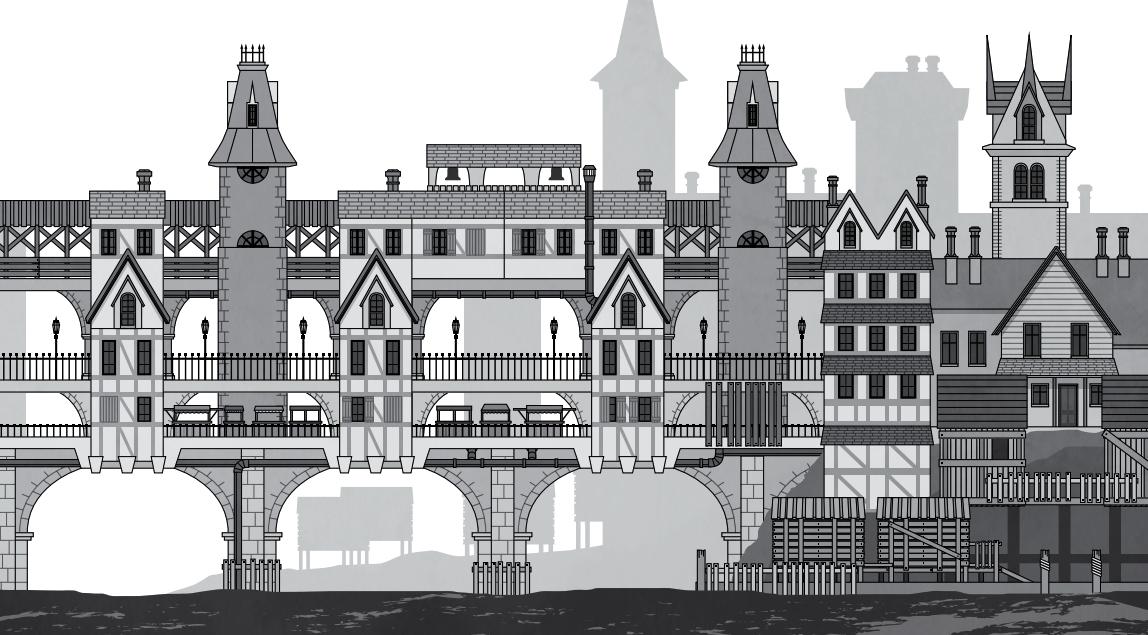


BARROWCLEFT

Barrowcleft is the home to the laborers and overseers of the Ministry of Preservation who attend the radiant energy farms of Doskvol. It is a dusty, rural district, with simple wooden buildings of only one or two stories and wide dirt roads to accommodate large cargo wagons. The farmers of Barrowcleft are organized into tight-knit family-based clans that are proud of their vital role in the city's welfare and hold themselves apart from the "city folk" across the river. Outsiders are welcome here for honest trade, but are met with a cold suspicion otherwise.

LANDMARKS

- 1 BARROW BRIDGE.** One of several residential bridges in the city. The bridge is lined with homes, shops, and merchant stalls. Families of river-fishers work from ramshackle wooden huts along the banks on either side. They hunt the large and dangerous wild river eels that gather to feed on refuse near the channel to the sea.
- 2 LIGHTNING TOWER.** The lightning towers of Doskvol are marvels of electroplasmic engineering, requiring constant attention from the powerful Sparkwrights guild. The largest towers are over 200 feet tall and include their own internal generators to provide power to the lightning barrier that keeps the ravenous spirits of the deathlands out of the city.
- 3 BARROWCLEFT MARKET.** This open-air marketplace provides a place for the radiant energy farms to sell fresh produce and goods made from their crops. Other related vendors have also sprung up here, including brewers and distillers, weavers, dyers, and goat breeders. The tough and close-knit people of Barrowcleft have managed to keep criminal influence out of their market and it's famous as a rare place for fair trade in the city.
- 4 RADIANT ENERGY FARM.** The wondrous power of radiant energy allows crops to grow in the darkness of Duskwall. Life in the city depends upon these farms, so their delicate radiant plants and irrigation systems are watched constantly by specially appointed deputies of the Watch.



DETAILS

SCENE: Farmers trudging to and from work. Tradespeople crafting simple goods. Merchants selling their wares. Heavy-laden cargo wagons transporting food into the city. Vigilant deputies surveying the fields from their watchtowers.

STREETS: Smooth dirt roads, drainage ditches. *Black Hill Road, Mill Street, Porter Street.*

BUILDINGS: Low, wide wooden structures. Barns. Animal pens. Stone mills. Hilltop manors for the Overseers. Crowded apartments, towers, and market stalls along Barrow Bridge.

TRAITS

Wealth



Security & Safety



Criminal Influence



Occult Influence



Barrowcleft market is one of the best marketplaces in the city, but criminal types draw lots of unwanted attention. You can take +1d to acquire an asset here, but also accrue +2 HEAT.

NOTABLES

CHIEF PRICHARD. The Head Overseer of Labor for the Ministry of Preservation in Duskwall. Manages the workers and food allotments for the city districts. (*Calculating, Confident, Calm*)

HESTER VALE. Matriarch of the oldest farm family. The living embodiment of “tough but fair.” (*Proud, Fierce, Suspicious*)

MARA KEEL. A former smuggler who’s gone into hiding among the farm laborers of Barrowcleft. (*Quiet, Secretive, Patient*)



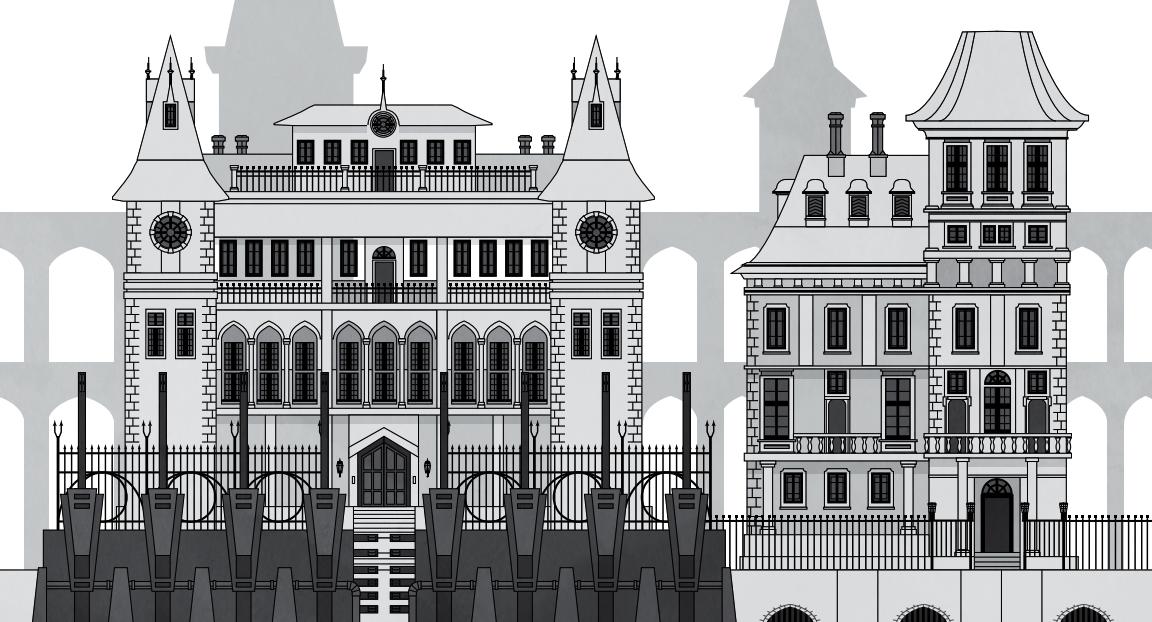


BRIGHTSTONE

Brightstone is home to many of the wealthiest and most influential citizens of Doskvol. Its streets are broad and paved, under bright electric lights; its canals are sparkling and clean, with perfumed water; its houses are all of fine, pale marble blocks, rich timbers, and intricate ironworks. There are cultivated parks fed by radiant energy; lavish restaurants and cafes; jewelers, tailors, and other luxury shops. Street-side vendors are forbidden here, resulting in a serene, spacious atmosphere, punctuated by the occasional carriage or marching Bluecoat patrol.

LANDMARKS

- 1 UNITY PARK.** A grand park, fountain, and roundabout featuring an enormous monument commemorating Imperial victory in the Unity War (or the War for Skovlan Independence, depending on who you talk to).
- 2 SILVER MARKET.** A curated open-air emporium overlooking the North Hook channel. Named for its original use as the primary marketplace for silver traders, it's now host to luxury goods vendors of all sorts, including rare Iruvian silks, spices from the Dagger Isles, horse-traders, carriage upholsterers, and rare alchemical distillations (including some illegal spirit essences—to which the City Watch turns a blind eye).
- 3 THE SANCTORIUM.** The chief cathedral dedicated to the Church of the Ecstasy of the Flesh. It's a towering edifice of buttresses and spires, originally commissioned by the Emperor during his last visit to Doskvol nearly 500 years ago. Devotees gather weekly to purify themselves in baptismal rites and through the ritual destruction of rogue spirits in electroplasm. The catacombs beneath contain the cremated ash of many famous and affluent citizens.
- 4 BOWMORE BRIDGE.** This massive structure of bright white stone and shimmering metal-work is said to be the largest bridge in the Imperium. Luxury apartments and shops perch all along its length from Brightstone to Whitecrown.



DETAILS

SCENE: Elite Bluecoat patrols, arrayed in fine armor and gleaming gun-pikes. Wealthy citizens strolling through manicured parks, attended by servants. Horse-drawn coaches and the occasional electroplasmic carriage rumbling along the avenues.

STREETS: Broad, clean, well-lit. *Silvermark Avenue, Goldcrest Avenue, Ruby Street, Sapphire Street.*

BUILDINGS: Pale stone mansions with lightning barriers, grand manor houses, lavish townhouses, opulent theaters and restaurants, luxury shops.

TRAITS

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| Wealth | ● ● ● ● |
| Security & Safety | ● ● ● ● |
| Criminal Influence | ● ● ● ● |
| Occult Influence | ● ● ● ● |

Most engagement rolls suffer -1d due to heavy Bluecoat patrols. Operations against the nobility in Brightstone are considered on “hostile turf” for the purpose of generating HEAT.

NOTABLES

LORD STRANGFORD. Operates one of the largest Leviathan hunter fleets, serves on the City Council and is a high-ranking member of the secret order within the Church of Ecstasy. (*Secretive, Calculating, Arrogant*)

COMMANDER BOWMORE. Chief Officer of the Watch in Brightstone. Bowmore’s family financed Bowmore Bridge centuries ago and now holds many positions of power. (*Proud, Principled, Connected*)

ROLAN WOTT. An influential magistrate who handles property, endowments, and financial cases. Famous for his extravagant parties. (*Stylish, Elitist, Shrewd*)





CHARHOLLOW

This crowded district is home to the bulk of the workforce of the city—servants, dockers, sailors, stockyard and eelery workers, cabbies, and so on. It's cheap, noisy, cramped, and sweltering from cookfires and hissing steam-pipes, but there's a familial camaraderie among its residents that you won't find anywhere else. The people of Charhollow are a true community, brought together by circumstance, but bound by ties of mutual support and care in stark contrast to the cutthroat ruthlessness that constitutes business as usual in the rest of the city.

LANDMARKS

- 1 THE SHEETS.** Washers, tailors, and seamstresses congregate in this neighborhood, filling the alleyways between the buildings with the billowing fabrics of their trade. A secret association of anarchists among the working class meets here to plot their schemes for revolution.
- 2 STRANGFORD HOUSE.** The grand, fenced estate of the powerful Strangford family perches on the hill of a private island overlooking Charhollow. Many who live in the district toil in Strangford's factories and workhouses, and few miss the chance to throw the evil eye in their direction when they catch glimpse of their house on the hill.
- 3 CHARHOLLOW MARKET.** A public market fills the open square here, offering fair prices and decent goods to the local community.
- 4 KELLEN'S.** One of the oldest pubs in the city, with a dizzying selection of Skovlander ales and whiskeys. Rich and poor alike rub elbows here to enjoy the traditional food and music with their drinks, though recently, the pub has become the target of masked anti-Skovlander bigots, who've vandalized the property and assaulted some patrons, shouting "No Skovs!" and "Skovs go home!"



DETAILS

SCENE: Laborers returning from work shout greetings to friends and families. Groups of people cook and eat together at communal cook-fires. Children run wild, playing at hunt-and-peek and catch-the-ghost.

STREETS: Steep inclines cut with crude stone stairs, twisting alleyways, dirt and cobblestones.
Bridge Road, Canal Street, Hill Street.

BUILDINGS: Stacked one- or two-room homes, cheap tenements, ramshackle apartments, well-worn taverns and public houses.

TRAITS

Wealth



Security & Safety



Criminal Influence



Occult Influence



Operations against the citizenry in Charhollow are considered on "hostile turf" for the purpose of generating HEAT.

NOTABLES

HUTTON. A Skovlander refugee and former soldier, now the leader of an anarchist revolutionary movement, bent on forcing the government to acknowledge Skovlander rights in the Empire. (*Brave, Compassionate, Wise*)

BRIGGS. The owner of a merchant stall at Charhollow market, cover for a network of gossips, spies, and code-smiths among the working class people of the district, selling their services to those who need them. (*Secretive, Sneaky, Cautious*)

CORBEN. An ex-military Skovlander on the lam for crimes against the empire. (*Tough, Reckless*)



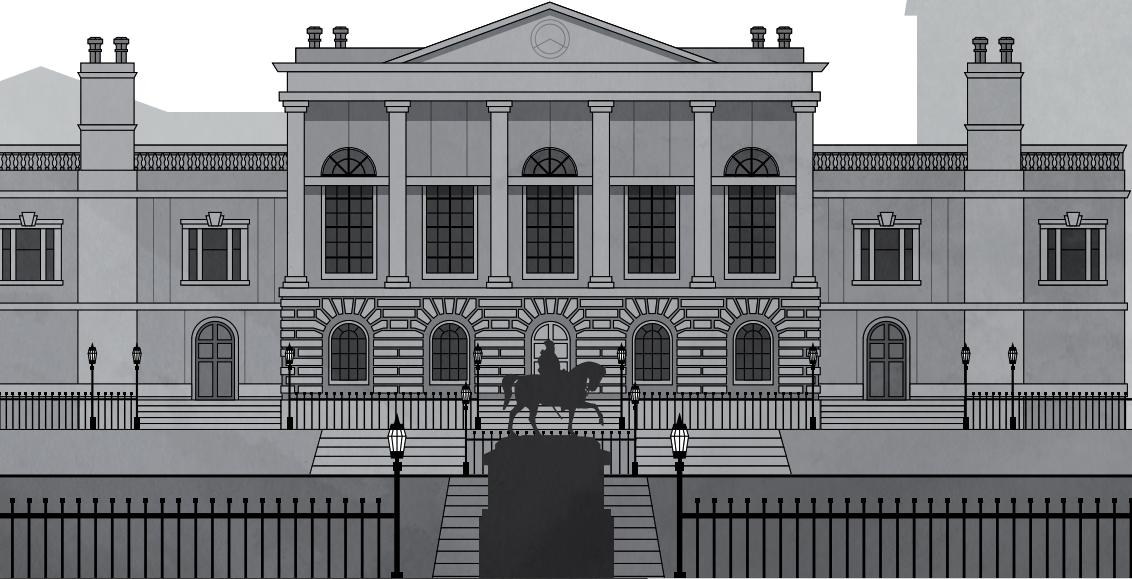


CHARTERHALL

Charterhall is the site of the first major construction in the city, in the days before the cataclysm. The old wall upon which was built the first lightning barrier in the Empire still stands in partial ruin around the district. The area is now home to the civic offices of the government including the courts, licensing and taxation offices, banks, and records archives. City officials and students at Charterhall University live here, along with the captains of Imperial industry who prefer to reside within sight of their fortunes.

LANDMARKS

- 1 CHARTER WALL.** Along the ruins of the old walls are a sprawl of artist colonies. Bohemian lovers of music and sculpture, these students are typically patronized by a single individual or family who expect their charges to master their craft and make art for their edification.
- 2 BELLWEATHER CREMATORIUM.** The site of the spirit bells and the rookery for the deathseeker crows. Bodies recovered by the Spirit Wardens are incinerated in electroplasm here to destroy their ghosts.
- 3 CLERK STREET.** The main avenue of the district is lined with imposing governmental structures of all sorts, tucked behind iron fences, patrolled by a mix of Bluecoats on the sidewalks and mounted Imperial cavalry on the grounds.
- 4 JAYAN PARK.** The great alchemist for whom this park is named contrived to formulate soil and seeds that could produce real, growing trees, without sunlight or radiant energy. They are horrifically toxic to all living things and must not be touched, but they still grow beautifully here, over 100 years later.
- 5 CHARTERHALL UNIVERSITY.** A dozen buildings have been converted into classrooms and dormitories for the students of this modest-seeming but nevertheless prestigious institution. The school's massive Sparkwright Tower, where experts of spark-craft are trained, looms huge over the district, often belching fire and smoke from the more vigorous lessons.



DETAILS

SCENE: Clerks and government workers rush to and fro, official papers bulging from their valises. Wealthy bankers trundle past in heavy carriages with private bodyguards arrayed in clanking armor. Students gather at street-corner cafes to discuss Iruvian politics, the tribal lineages of the Dagger Isles, and other esoteric matters.

STREETS: Broad, clean, well-lit. *Clerk Street, Jayan Way, Dalmore Avenue, Imperial Avenue.*

BUILDINGS: Imposing stone buildings with officious columns and classical sculptural motifs.

NOTABLES

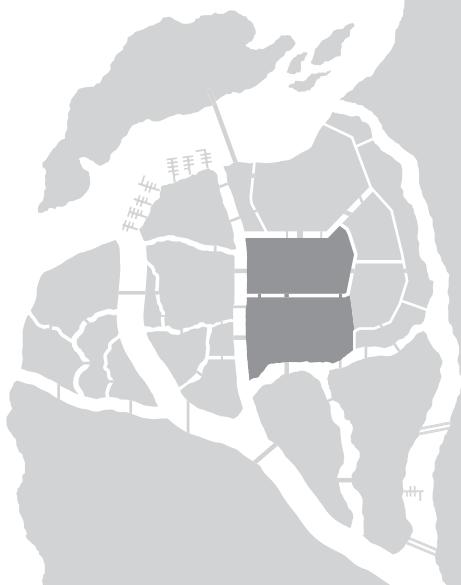
LADY DRAKE. A magistrate who is “reasonable” when it comes to street crime, so long as the offender’s purse is sufficient. (*Flexible, Shrewd*)

LORD PENDERYN. Chief Scholar of the Archive of Echoes, authorized by the Emperor to keep a collection of ancient ghosts trapped in spirit bottles, to be consulted in cases where knowledge from the distant past would benefit the operation of the Imperial government. Lord Penderyn also consults the spirits on his own volition, forming the rebellious Path of Echoes society for other elites and nobles who seek communion with the spectral realm. (*Reckless, Strange*)

TRAITS

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| Wealth | ● ● ● ● |
| Security & Safety | ● ● ● ● |
| Criminal Influence | ● ● ● ● |
| Occult Influence | ● ● ● ● |

The records in Charterhall can be of particular interest to criminal sorts. Take a Devil’s Bargain for +1d to gather info here in exchange for 1 HEAT (the Bluecoats are always watching for scoundrels like you).





COALRIDGE

Coalridge is home to most of the machinists, industrial laborers, and factories of the city. It's cramped, soot-choked, and loud—spewing dense clouds of black smoke, showers of sparks, and burning cinders. The old elevated train lines that once hauled coal now carry heavy equipment and raw materials to and from Gaddoc Station, though many of the ancient tracks and cars have been abandoned to squatters who've converted them into makeshift homes.

LANDMARKS

- 1 COALRIDGE MINE.** The site of the first permanent settlement at the river delta, the mine was originally built by the ancient Skov kingdom, who called it *Doskovol*—literally, “The Skov’s Coal.” The mine still operates over 1000 years later, though demand for coal has dropped sharply as the Imperium adopts electroplasmic power more and more widely.
- 2 THE OLD RAIL YARD.** Before Gaddoc Station was built, this industrial rail yard was a center for commerce in the city. The Old Yard now serves only a couple heavy cargo trains daily, with many of its old rail cars rusted in place where they were abandoned.
- 3 THE IRONWORKS.** The Ironworks is a sprawling collection of massive industrial workhouses. Cruel foremen drive indentured laborers around the clock to keep up with the massive production demands to replace and refit leviathan hunter ships as well as the need for goods transported out to the Imperium at large.
- 4 BRICKSTON.** The most densely packed residential area in Duskwall. Brickston is a cramped jumble of multi-story brick row houses, stacked one atop the other. Many of the toughest scoundrels of the underworld hail from here, learning the harsh lessons of survival and gang life within its dark maze.



DETAILS

SCENE: Soot-covered workers hacking up black bile as they trudge home from the factories. Heavy rail cargo being unloaded by crane. Street-tough waifs running wild. A factory boss lashing a worker for an infraction. Squatters cooking a meal in the coal engine of an abandoned train car.

STREETS: Multi-level, crowded with crates and discarded junk. Elevated rail lines. *Dunvil Way, Black Rock Road, Wright Street, Crane Street, Forge Street.*

BUILDINGS: Tall and narrow brick row houses with belching chimneys, metal-clad factories and warehouses, train cars converted into dwellings.

NOTABLES

MASTER SLANE. A notorious factory foreman known for excessive and cruel punishment. Many attempts have been made on his life, but all have failed. Some say he's a devil. (*Cold, Cruel, Sadistic*)

BELLE BROGAN. A Skovlander factory worker gaining popularity as a union organizer. It's only a matter of time before a factory boss tries to make an example of her. (*Charming, Confident, Bold*)

HOPPER. A drug addict, Whisper, and all-around weirdo who perches on rooftops in the district. Hopper claims to see "spirit train tracks" stretching beyond the horizon. (*Weird, Visionary*)

TRAITS

Wealth



Security & Safety



Criminal Influence



Occult Influence



Because the factories of Coalridge operate around the clock, there's no ideal time for clandestine crime here, but foremen are happy to be bribed to "take a break" or look the other way.





CROW'S FOOT

Crow's Foot is a crossroads, merging many qualities of its neighboring districts: the illicit vices of Silkshore, the labor and trade of the Docks, the poverty of Charhollow, and the classic architecture of Charterhall. The district is a patchwork, both held together and threatened to be torn apart by the menagerie of competing street gangs and Bluecoat squads that claim every avenue and corner as territory in an endless turf war.

LANDMARKS

- 1 CROW'S NEST.** An ancient tower from before the cataclysm that has been a ritual sanctum, an astronomer's laboratory, and a Bluecoat watch post—before its current role as the headquarters of the district's chief gang, the Crows.
- 2 TANGLETOWN.** Hundreds of years ago, one of the massive leviathan hunter ships was partially sunk in the river. Since then, it's collected an attendant flotilla of tiny watercraft, all lashed together into a floating neighborhood. Tangletown is considered neutral ground among the street gangs of Crow's Foot, and no violence is allowed there.
- 3 STRATHMILL HOUSE.** The lost children and unwanted orphans of Crow's Foot inevitably pass through the halls of Strathmill House. Some are cared for and trained for jobs at the docks or the workhouses of Coalridge. Others are quietly instructed in the arts of the lookouts and runners used by the gangs of the district—all for a small fee to Strathmill House, of course.
- 4 RED SASH SWORD ACADEMY.** This large mansion has been converted into a training school for the Falling Star style of Iruvian sword play. The Red Sashes, an Iruvian gang who run several luxury drug dens in the district, claim it as their HQ and cover operation for their illicit operations.



DETAILS

SCENE: Dockers filing to and from work. Minks plying their trade on the corners. A squad of Bluecoats shaking down a shopkeep for a bribe. Rival gangs calling challenges to each other across the rooftops. A fine coach carrying a noble seeking illicit wares.

STREETS: Multi-level, cramped, dark, foggy. *Ash Way, Cinder Street, Rye Street, Candle Street, Hulliver Lane.*

BUILDINGS: Flophouses, inns, old manors chopped into apartments, traditional stone houses. Smiths, taverns, brothels, and butchers.

NOTABLES

SERGEANT LOCHLAN. The senior Bluecoat squad leader in the district, reporting to Captain Dunvil. Lochlan is flexible and reasonable, taking bribes and payoffs when she can; enforcing the law and making examples when necessary. (*Shrewd, Tough, Commanding*)

LEWIT, JOL, MYRA, REYF. Bluecoat constables; run an extortion racket.

MARDIN GULL. Owner and operator of the Leaky Bucket public house. Mardin was the leader of the Crows many years ago (before Roric and Lyssa) and now enjoys a comfortable retirement out of the scoundrel life. (*Charming, Experienced, Respected*)

TRAITS

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| Wealth | ● ● ○ ○ |
| Security & Safety | ● ○ ○ ○ |
| Criminal Influence | ● ● ● ● |
| Occult Influence | ● ● ○ ○ |

Years of murder have made this the most haunted district. Angry ghosts crave bloodshed here. You may take a Devil's Bargain for +1d for violent action, but the ghost will lash out, too.





THE DOCKS

The docks of Doskvol are ancient, going back to the days before the cataclysm, when the area was a colony town of the old Skov kingdom. Today, some commerce has shifted to the new electro-rail lines of the Imperium, but the docks are still bustling with cargo haulers, fishing boats, and the prestigious leviathan hunter ships that provide the raw material that keeps the city running.

LANDMARKS

- 1 THE NORTH HOOK COMPANY.** This grand, old-fashioned estate house is headquarters for the oldest surviving shipping and naval exploration enterprise in the Imperium. The North Hook Company has a massive fleet of trade ships and is considered by many to be merely a private front for the Ministry of Preservation. No one knows for sure, since enemies and rivals of the company (not to mention overly curious journalists) tend to disappear.
- 2 INK LANE.** This twisting back-street is home to many of the city's tattooists as well as several newspapers—who all share the cost of their inks in bulk. A fine place for gossip and rumors of all kinds.
- 3 SALTFORD'S.** A squat stone building that houses one of the more notorious private banks in Duskwall. Being so close to the docks, Saltford's has faced many gangs of whiskey'd sailors that decided to turn to robbery as a new line of work, and defeated them all—sometimes even hanging the corpses from their lamp-posts as discouragement to the next pack of drunken fools.
- 4 THE MENAGERIE.** A fenced-off muddy field, dotted with rusting animal pens, water tanks, and gaudy signage. Sailors traditionally drop off any curious creatures they pick up in their travels, which Captain Rye, the strange proprietor, incorporates into his makeshift zoological displays.



DETAILS

SCENE: Small and medium steamships docked close, dwarfed by the titanic leviathan hunter ships further out. Throngs of sailors and dockers, doing their work, singing work-songs. Heavy cargo rumbling away on wagons. Shouts and breaking glass from a brawl spilling out of a tavern.

STREETS: Raised streets perched over the docks themselves, rigged with cranes and winches. *North Hook Way, Carter Street, Plume Street, Salford Street, Ink Lane.*

BUILDINGS: Massive cargo warehouses. Squat taverns, brothels, and tattoo parlors. Crowded overnight bunkhouses for sailors.

NOTABLES

CHIEF HELKER. One of the most influential senior Dockers. Helker has a lot of sway at the docks, and if you cross him, you might find your cargo tossed into the drink—and possibly you along with it. (*Cautious, Greedy*)

TRIS. A legendary tattooist who only inks those that have looked upon a leviathan and lived to tell the tale. Getting a tattoo from Tris is a rite of passage for everyone who hunts the demons of the Void Sea. (*Artistic, Popular, Insightful*)

TRAITS

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| Wealth | ● ● ○ ○ |
| Security & Safety | ● ● ○ ○ |
| Criminal Influence | ● ● ○ ○ |
| Occult Influence | ● ● ○ ○ |

Operations against ships at port are considered on “hostile turf” for the purpose of generating HEAT.



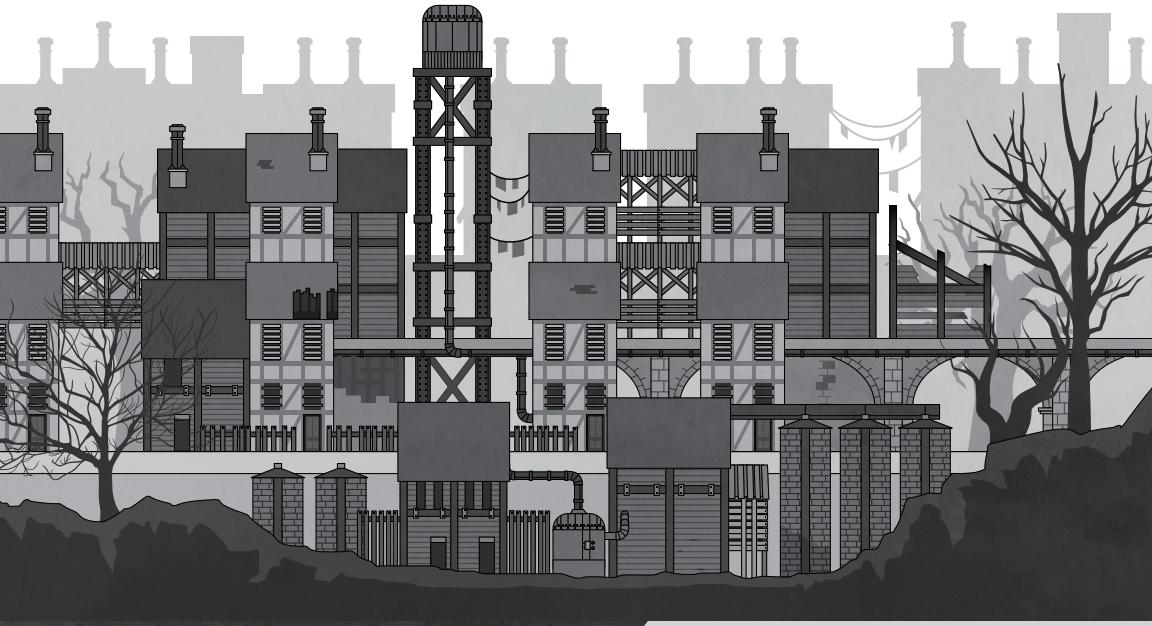


DUNSLOUGH

Dunsborough is a ghetto for the destitute poor of the city, as well as the site of Ironhook Prison and its labor camp. Originally, the ghetto was a neighborhood for families of prisoners, but over the years, extreme poverty and neglect have worn it down into a sodden ruin. A vicious cycle plays out here: crime driven by desperation, then arrest, incarceration, and release back to Dunsborough—giving Ironhook an endless supply of laborers to exploit.

LANDMARKS

- 1 IRONHOOK PRISON.** A towering metal fortress, where the worst (or most unlucky) criminals are incarcerated. The poorest are forced to work at Dunvil Labor Camp. The most well-connected prisoners manage a comfortable stay, and may even continue to run their criminal enterprises from behind bars.
- 2 DUNVIL LABOR CAMP.** Poor prisoners who can't afford to bribe the staff at Ironhook spend most of their days toiling at Dunvil Labor Camp, loading precious ores onto barges for the rail station and breaking the larger rocks hauled from the Mire.
- 3 DUNSLOUGH GHETTO.** The most destitute of the city end up in Dunsborough, working the Mire for a pittance just to buy their daily bread. The city counts the space as "runoff" for the prison grounds, and does nothing to maintain it.
- 4 THE MIRE.** A massive mud-quarry pit, the Mire is the site of the impact of an ancient celestial body, which left behind a variety of precious ores and jewels embedded in the earth.



DETAILS

SCENE: Mud-covered laborers returning from the Mire. Destitute families scrounging for scraps along the roadway to the Barrowcleft farms. Bored Ironhook guards, rifles slung on their backs, watching a taskmaster lash a labor camp prisoner.

STREETS: Cramped, multi-level—some of stone but many of dirt, sodden into thick black mud. No street names to be found.

BUILDINGS: Decrepit wooden row houses, many abandoned from fire damage or fallen-in from age. Stone silos, clanking steam machinery, and metal sheds for dredging equipment.

NOTABLES

MASTER KROCKET. An unsavory, greasy-haired, scarecrow of a man who runs the snarling pack of vicious dogs used by Ironhook to track down escapees and sniff out contraband and tunnels. His dog-handlers can be found around the labor camp and all about Dunsborough, using their status with the prison for favors and bribes. (*Cruel, Greedy, Ruthless*)

VANDRA. A deathlands scavenger that survived six runs and was pardoned. She knows the landscape beyond the barrier very well—but few can make sense of her haunted mumblings. (*Haunted, Wise*)

TRAITS

Wealth



Security & Safety



Criminal Influence



Occult Influence





NIGHTMARKET

Nightmarket is a district dominated by commerce. Situated near Gaddoc Rail Station, Nightmarket receives the bulk of salable goods from the cargo trains that travel across the Imperium, bringing the exotic and rare to Duskwall. The citizens that call Nightmarket home constitute a new class of “elites”—wealthy people who are not of noble descent but nevertheless claim land, status, and power without titles. The district has been taken over by new construction, introducing lavish private townhouses with all of the modern advances for the elites that can afford them.

LANDMARKS

- 1 THE VEIL.** A luxurious social club known for its confidentiality and permissive policies regarding guests of arcane or unusual origins. Rolan Volaris, the proprietor and host, is a Tycherosi with an extremely unusual manifestation of his demonic blood: rather than legs, he has the body of a serpent from the waist down... or so people say. Volaris is rarely seen in person.
- 2 DUNDRIDGE & SONS.** Considered by many to be the foremost tailor in Duskwall. The Dundridge family has provided the finest clothes and sartorial accoutrements to discerning citizens for over 300 years. Despite their legendary reputation, Dundridge’s prices are very reasonable.
- 3 VREEN’S HOUND RACES.** The racing of specially bred hounds is currently in vogue among Doskvol’s upper crust. A con man from the Dagger Isles calling himself “Master Vreen” swindled a small fortune from gullible investors to create “the premier hound racing track in the Imperium.” The investors have yet to see any returns, but Vreen assures them that a great windfall is due any day now.
- 4 THE DEVIL’S TOOTH.** A tavern known for its “secret” menu of alchemical concoctions. Adventurous psychonauts may experiment with all manner of mind-altering (or spirit-altering) substances in the relative safety of Mistress Kember’s comfortable establishment.



DETAILS

SCENE: Electric lights in a riot of colors advertise the market stalls of the vendors. Several devout acolytes bow in silent prayer at the statues of the Night Queen, the district's adopted forgotten god. The city's elite, hidden behind masks, slip into the underground to partake of strange pleasures in the private clubs.

STREETS: Multi-level wooden platforms and boardwalks. Landscaped parks of petrified trees from the deathlands. High-class subterranean avenues. *Song Street, String Street, Paper Street, Bell Street.*

BUILDINGS: Wooden market stalls. Underground stone shops and clubs. Newly constructed private townhouses for the Nightmarket elites.

NOTABLES

JIRA. A dealer of fine weapons from the Dagger Isles. Greatly respected by many street toughs in the Dusk—a “jira blade” is a status symbol that many aspire to. (*Bold, Tough*)

LECLURE. A purveyor of personal luxuries (soaps, hair oils, perfume, fine silks) who dabbles in fortune telling. Some say that her drowned lover is a ghost that whispers secrets in her ear. (*Shrewd, Tough, Commanding*)

MORDIS. A strange merchant that hides its true appearance beneath many layers of robes and hoods. Also fences occult and arcane stolen goods, no questions asked. (*Secretive, Insightful, Arcane*)

TRAITS

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| Wealth | ● ● ● ○ |
| Security & Safety | ● ● ● ○ |
| Criminal Influence | ● ● ○ ○ |
| Occult Influence | ● ○ ○ ○ |

Nightmarket is the best place to trade illicit and arcane goods in the city, but the darker corners are full of strange horrors. You can take +1d to acquire an asset here, at the cost of 2 stress.



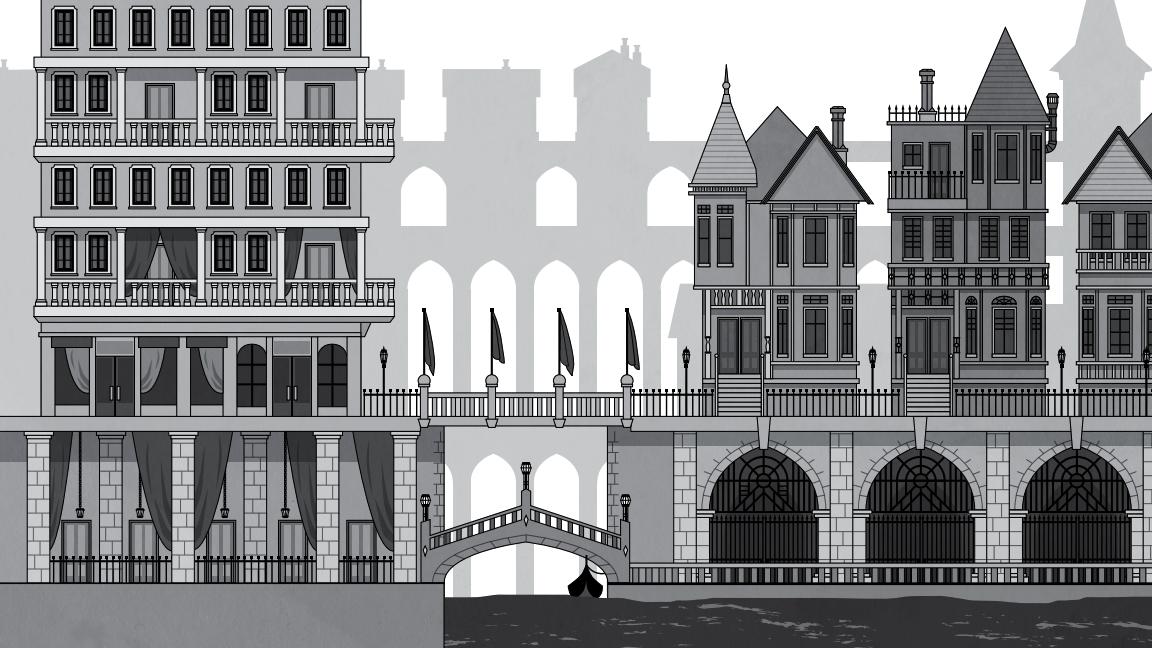


SILKSHORE

Criss-crossed by dozens of narrow canals, Silkshore is a district best navigated by gondola, as most visitors to this “red lamp district” do. The brothels, vice dens, food stalls, and exotic shops all perch at the waterside, ready to satisfy the appetites of their clientele, no questions asked. Silkshore is a place of public indulgence and private indelicacy, catering to every pleasure imaginable—as well as some that strain the bounds of fantasy.

LANDMARKS

- 1 THE SPARK GROUNDS.** Beneath the crackling flares of a lightning tower, this open field draws crowds to watch the death-defying stunts of acrobats and circus performers, including the notorious “spark flyers” who soar in manned kites adorned with bits of metal to attract arcs of electricity from the barrier in a pyrotechnic display.
- 2 THE EASE.** The northern part of the district is more easily navigated by gondola than by coach, and the dozens of entryways into the canals are flanked by shops and brothels advertising their wares with colored electric lights and flying banners.
- 3 FOGCREST.** A high, peaked hilltop crowded with rowhouses jammed within the maze of narrow stairways that constitute its “streets.” A bohemian community of artists, free-thinkers, psychedelic explorers, and philosophers.
- 4 ANKHAYAT PARK.** This extravagantly landscaped space is the largest open area in the city, hosting many public festivals and events throughout the year. The Iruvian noble for whom the park is named keeps a falcon aviary and stable of fine horses at the park and sometimes organizes gamehawking for the nobility.



DETAILS

SCENE: Hundreds of gondolas gliding to and fro in the spiderweb of canals, carrying eager patrons to the bounty of pleasure-houses and vice dens. Artists and philosophers arguing epistemology over Iruvian tea at the cafes on Fogcrest hill.

STREETS: The few remaining surface streets are interrupted at every turn by a bridge over a tiny canal. Colored lights and patterned silks hang roof to roof, signaling various indulgences in a complex code for the initiated. *Greenwater, Highwater, Chimewater, Ringwater, Sweetwater.*

BUILDINGS: Tall, narrow rowhouses of wood and stone. Low canal-side shacks and stalls. Cramped old stone houses and converted offices on Fogcrest hill.

NOTABLES

LEVYRA. A medium who invites clients to bring ghosts in bottles to possess her so they can share a few final words before the ghost is “freed” (Levyra hands it off to the waiting Spirit Wardens nearby).

HELENE. The elegant and mysterious proprietor of the Silver Stag Casino. People say she would have been a queen of Severos had she lived in the old days before the Empire.

MADAME TESSLYN. Operates the Red Lamp brothel, the oldest and most respected institution of its sort in the city.

TRAITS

Wealth



Security & Safety



Criminal Influence



Occult Influence



Should you overindulge your vice while in Silkshore, you'll get a taste for it. Take +1d to your roll the next time you indulge your vice here.





SIX TOWERS

This formerly prestigious district has faded over the centuries into a pale shadow of what it once was. The eponymous six towers were originally the grand residences of Doskvol's first noble families. All but two (Bowmore House and Rowan House) have been sold off and converted into cheap apartments or fallen into ruin and abandoned. The district has an empty, haunted feel, with many sprawling old buildings dark without power, broad stone streets cracked and buckled, and the fires of squatters crackling from overgrown lots.

LANDMARKS

- 1 ROWAN HOUSE.** One of the last of the original six towers, this antique building resembles an ancient castle from history books, complete with moat, draw-bridge, and arrow-slit windows. The powerful Rowan family rules their holdings from within the fortress, rarely venturing beyond the security of its thick stone walls.
- 2 MISTSHORE PARK.** This dark and overgrown space overlooks the eastern branch of the river Dosk and the deathlands beyond. In old folk ballads, young lovers who could not be together would commit suicide in this park. Whatever the truth of it, the park is certainly haunted now.
- 3 SCURLOCK MANOR.** The Scurlock family came to Duskwall centuries ago and was once a great force in the city, before some curse or calamity befell their line. This tumble-down manor house and tangle of vines is all that remains of their original fortune. It's said that a young nephew or cousin still resides there, but Lord Scurlock himself has moved on to finer abodes.
- 4 ARMS OF THE WEEPING LADY.** This grand building, formerly an opera house, is now a soup-kitchen and bunkhouse for the destitute, run by the charity of the Weeping Lady. Locals use this landmark as the demarcation between the districts of Charterhall and Six Towers.



DETAILS

SCENE: Bits of trash, blown by a cold wind, skitter across empty streets, illuminated only by a few still-working street lamps and the campfires of squatters. The shutters and doors of abandoned buildings moan, creak, and bang in a haunted chorus. Residents hustle by, heads down, clutching spiritbane charms close to their breasts.

STREETS: Broad stone avenues, cracked and broken, dark without power; overgrown and neglected. *Comber Way, Bowmore Way, Rowan Way, Coleburn Avenue.*

BUILDINGS: Palatial estates, tumbled into disrepair. Grand manors, remodeled into cramped and cheap apartments.

NOTABLES

MOTHER NARYA. Runs the Arms of the Weeping Lady charity house. (*Kind, Patient*)

CHEF ROSELLE. One of the best cooks in the city, still operating the legendary Golden Plum restaurant—worth the trip into the haunted streets of Six Towers. (*Creative, Insightful, Friendly*)

FLINT. A spirit trafficker who trades out of a condemned manor house. (*Weird, Calculating, Suspicious*)

TRAITS

Wealth



Security & Safety



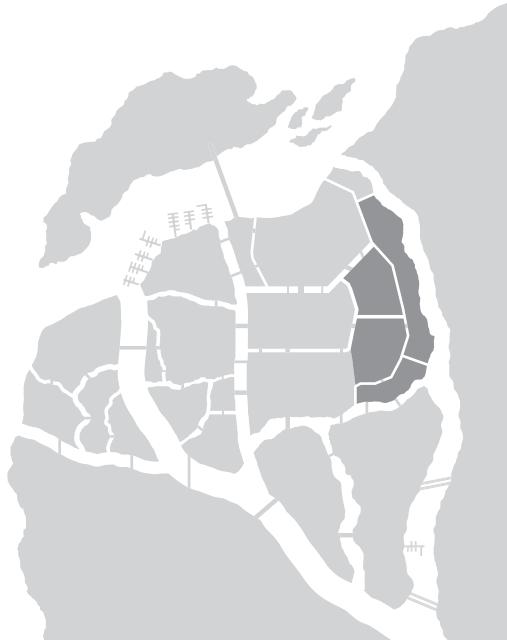
Criminal Influence



Occult Influence



The many empty buildings and abandoned properties make this district a perfect location for a hidden scoundrel's lair.





WHITECROWN

Whitecrown sits atop a grand peak on the island across North Hook channel from the city proper. From this lofty height, the Lord Governor's stronghold oversees all, flanked by the grand estates of the most powerful nobility and the extravagantly appointed campus of Doskvول Academy. Whitecrown is a rich and rarefied world unto itself—most citizens live out their entire lives in the city without ever once crossing the bridge to the glittering spires of wealth and power there.

LANDMARKS

1 LORD GOVERNOR'S STRONGHOLD.

The Emperor originally commissioned this stronghold as a garrison for the Imperial Military stationed at North Hook prior to the invasion of Skovlan. It now houses the Lord Governor, their family, and governmental aides as well.

2 DOSKVOL ACADEMY.

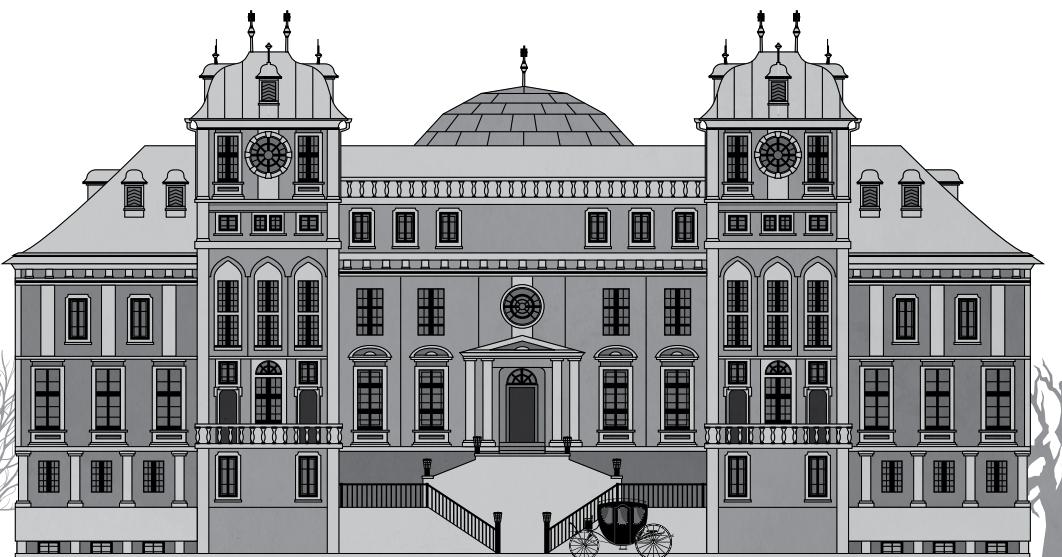
Hailed as one of the finer institutions of learning in the Empire, the school is most well-known as the instructional facility for the Leviathan hunter captains and their senior officers. Training cruises for new recruits are conducted year-round to replace the poor souls lost in the hunts.

3 MASTER WARDEN'S ESTATE.

This gigantic, fortified manor is home to the Commander of the Spirit Wardens and is their primary training facility. It's said that some spirits are not destroyed at Bellweather—but are brought here instead for some unknown purpose.

4 NORTH HOOK LIGHTHOUSE.

This ancient structure has been converted into an electro-plasmic apparatus capable of providing a navigation beacon for hundreds of miles into the darkness of the Void Sea around Duskwall.



DETAILS

SCENE: Imperial soldiers parade outside the stronghold, astride their armored steeds, gleaming lances held high. Trainee crews run drills on a Leviathan hunter ship docked for refitting. The lavish carriages and electroplasmic coaches of the fabulously wealthy glide by, carrying their privileged passengers to luxurious destinations.

STREETS: Broad, polished stone, brightly lit to near daylight by a riot of warm electric lights. *Whitecrown Boulevard, Swancrest Avenue.*

BUILDINGS: Grand, elegant facades; landscaped terraces, balconies, and elevated walkways connecting bright marble buildings with inlaid platinum and gold details.

NOTABLES

MAESTRO HELLEREN. Senior composer and conductor of the Spiregarden Theater, premiere performance venue for the elite of the city. (*Sincere, Dramatic*)

LADY FREYLA. Regarded by some as the finest sommelier in the Empire. She serves only the most deserving at the Emperor's Cask. (*Erudite, Cultured, Charming*)

TRAITS

Wealth



Security & Safety



Criminal Influence



Occult Influence



Most engagement rolls suffer -2d due to heavy Bluecoat patrols. Operations against the nobility in Whitecrown are considered on "hostile turf" for the purpose of generating HEAT.



OVERHEARD IN DUSKWALL

"Lyssa did it with her own hands, they say.
Eye to eye, cold as can be."
"If she stuck her own boss she's a dirty scuttler,"
(spits) "...but not one I'll cross any time soon."

"I heard that new Inspector used to be a captain in the Imperial Cavalry..."
"I guess snoopin' crooks in the Dusk beats riding down devils in the deathlands, eh?"

"Red milk, I call it. Y'take scarlet toad venom, distill it pure—a method whispered to me by a demon, hahaha!—cut it with a vesch of fractionated spirit essence, the best memories of former life—dam' hard to get—but if y'got some, even a dram..."
"Yes, yes... as I said, Lord Scurlock has..."
"Highest high silver can buy—lord, lad, or lady."

"Ya see, there are two types in this world. Me, an' doffing idiots."

"You punched a guy out of his pants!"
"They were kinda loose, I guess. Boots came off, too. Then his pregnant wife came at me. What are you supposed to do about that?"

"There goes another crow. How dreadful!"
"Whassat? Seven inna last half hour? Naw, mate, this is Crow's Foot. Like, where they perch, get it? Night's just getting started."

"...seen her in the mirror."
"Like, behind him?"
"No, just her reflection, in the mirror."
"Inky hell."

"Tally's missing from the orphanage. I asked the headmistress if he was taken already, but she shunned me out! I'm desperate, I can't leave my little brother like this!"

"Looks like a regular tattoo to me."
"Naaaaw, see how the crab's claw wriggles?
Ink's laced with demon blood."
"Sure, and I'm the Weepin' Lady."
"Oh, you'll see. Once it sets in..."

"He threatened you? What, with a blade?"
"Oh, no, Warden sir, nothin' plain like that, or I wouldn't have summoned yeh. He, well... it was awful strange. He spoke in my Rickard's voice, sir."
"He threatened you with a stage trick?"
"Not a trick sir! Rickard's own voice! Such awful things he said, too."
(sighs) "Hardly a crime, madame."
"But Rickard's dead these seven years, sir!
Never made it over from Skovlan. How could this Lampblack scuttler have his voice?"

"That wretch, Rowley. That... thing is twisted. I was walking late the other night and can swear I saw him surrounded by a damn horde of dregs like him. And they were pleading allegiance like he was the damned king of the alleys. It was the mockery of a court, with a throne and everything. He... it's gathering an army, I tell you."

"Do you know why they dispose of bodies in the canals after midnight? The spirits of the drowned live there. Well, 'live,' right? They claim everything that touches the water after the clock strikes twelve. Well, everything except those gondoliers."

"Yeah, and I suppose you have just the charm to sell me to keep me safe and sound..."
"What fortune! It just so happens I do..."

(sung as an out-of-tune sea shanty)
"...pawned my farm for a 'viathan hunter'
"lost me ship to the ink
"paddled back home on a dead god's shell..."
(louder, as if expecting others to join in)
"Id sell me soul for a drink!"

RUMORS ON THE STREET*Weekly, or whenever you need one*

| | | | |
|----------|---|----|--|
| 1 | Someone is trying to organize a union for Canal Dockers. | OR | The Ministry of Preservation is taking control of the Gondoliers. |
| 2 | The Path of Echoes will buy inhabited spirit bottles, no questions asked. | OR | A leviathan hunter ship returned to port, no crew living, carrying a demon. |
| 3 | There's a Bluecoat constable that takes bribes to frame targets for crimes. | OR | A corrupt magistrate is seeking secret passage out of the city ahead of charges. |
| 4 | The streetwalkers and pleasure houses are infiltrated by rogue spirits. | OR | The Church of the Ecstasy of the Flesh is seeking a new Apex. |
| 5 | The new drug, Lure, is made from leviathan blood and turns people into demons. | OR | The Spirit Wardens are stockpiling electroplasma, expecting a shortage soon. |
| 6 | All the well-to-dos are buying Turner's new locks—said to be impossible to crack. | OR | The vault at Charterhall Bank was ransacked, but they're covering it up. |

CITY EVENTS IN THE NEWSPAPERS*Weekly, or whenever you need one*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Plague | Festival | Raids | Revolution | Accident |
| 2 | Refugees | Strike | Prohibition | Construction | Siege |
| 3 | Demolition | Election | Scandal | Martial Law | Conscription |
| 4 | Shortage | Excess | Discovery | Paranoia | Assassination |
| 5 | Parade | Celebrity | Holiday | Riots | Gang War |
| 6 | Crime Spree | Political Upheaval | Prison Break | Diplomacy | Supernatural Weather |
| | | | | | Cult Gatherings |

REMARKABLE OCCURANCES*Weekly, or whenever you need one*

| | | | |
|----------|--|----|--|
| 1 | Strange plasmic fog fills the streets—deathseeker crows shun the district. | OR | Spirit Wardens set up a watch post and deathseeker crow roost in the old temple ruins. |
| 2 | Bluecoats suspend street patrols, citing budget cuts. It's free reign for crime! | OR | Bluecoats set up checkpoints for contraband or whatever they feel like confiscating. |
| 3 | Citizens rally against extortion, bringing in hired bravos from other districts. | OR | Local talent (band, chef, tumblers) becomes popular, swelling crowds at market and shops. |
| 4 | Canals become choked with debris, overflowing with foul effluvia. | OR | Canals throughout district are drained for maintenance (or some strange purpose). |
| 5 | The ramshackle shanties of the Drop in Crow's Foot are marked for demolition. | OR | A raging fire sweeps across Crow's Foot, threatening to destroy the district. |
| 6 | A group of scoundrels, recently escaped from Ironhook, go to ground nearby, attracting bounty hunters. | OR | An ancient crypt beneath the district, covered in strange markings, is exposed and attracts wailing hollows. |

FACTIONS OF DOSKVOL

| UNDERWORLD | | TIER HOLD | | INSTITUTIONS | | TIER HOLD | |
|-----------------------|--|-----------|---|--------------------------|--|-----------|---|
| The Hive | | IV | S | Imperial Military | | VI | S |
| The Unseen | | IV | S | City Council | | V | S |
| The Circle of Flame | | III | S | Leviathan Hunters | | V | S |
| Lord Scurlock | | III | S | Ministry of Preservation | | V | S |
| The Silver Nails | | III | S | Ironhook Prison | | IV | S |
| The Billhooks | | II | W | Sparkwrights | | IV | S |
| The Crows | | II | W | Spirit Wardens | | IV | S |
| The Dimmer Sisters | | II | S | Bluecoats | | III | S |
| The Gray Cloaks | | II | S | Inspectors | | III | S |
| The Grinders | | II | W | Iruvian Consulate | | III | S |
| The Lampblacks | | II | W | Skovlan Consulate | | III | W |
| The Red Sashes | | II | W | The Brigade | | II | S |
| The Wraiths | | II | W | Dagger Isles Consulate | | I | S |
| The Fog Hounds | | I | W | Severosi Consulate | | I | S |
| The Lost | | I | W | | | | |
| Ulf Ironborn | | I | S | | | | |
| THE FRINGE | | TIER HOLD | | LABOR & TRADE | | TIER HOLD | |
| The Church of Ecstasy | | IV | S | The Foundation | | IV | S |
| The Forgotten Gods | | III | W | Dockers | | III | S |
| The Horde | | III | S | Gondoliers | | III | S |
| The Path of Echoes | | III | S | Laborers | | III | W |
| The Reconciled | | III | S | Sailors | | III | W |
| Skovlander Refugees | | III | W | Cabbies | | II | W |
| Deathlands Scavengers | | II | W | Cyphers | | II | S |
| The Weeping Lady | | II | W | Ink Rakes | | II | W |
| | | | | Rail Jacks | | II | W |
| | | | | Servants | | II | W |

FACTIONS

Each faction of Duskwall is briefly described below, with detailed entries following for the criminal underworld and the other most significant factions of the city.

THE BILLHOOKS (II): A tough gang of thugs wielding hatchets and meat hooks.

THE BRIGADE (II): The fire-fighters of the city. Beloved for their life-saving heroism, or reviled for their looting and extortion rackets. Also known as “Sallies” (from “salamanders,” their ancient name).

BLUECOATS (III): The City Watch of Duskwall, tasked with upholding the law. Known as the meanest gang in the city. Corrupt, violent, and cruel.

CABBIES (II): The public coach operators. They also breed the large Akorosian goats used to pull the carriages. An impressive gossip network.

THE CHURCH OF THE ECSTASY OF THE FLESH (IV): The “state religion,” if there is such a thing. They honor the life of the body and abhor the corrupted spirit world. Essentially a secret society.

THE CIRCLE OF FLAME (III): A secret society of antiquarians and scholars; cover for extortion, graft, vice, and murder.

CITIZENRY: The ordinary citizens of a district can be represented by a faction, if you want to track status with them in the game. The GM will set their Tier according to the wealth and power of the citizens in that district (Whitecrown might be Tier V, The Docks Tier II, Charhollow Tier 0).

CITY COUNCIL (V): The elite noble rulers of the city government.

THE CROWS (II): An old gang with new leadership. Known for running illegal games of chance and extortion rackets.

CYPHERS (II): The messenger guild of the city. Cyphers swear sacred oaths of secrecy—never revealing the contents of

their messages or the identities of their clients—or so they claim.

DEATHLANDS SCAVENGERS (II): Convicts from Ironhook and desperate freelancers who roam the wasteland beyond the lightning barriers.

THE DIMMER SISTERS (II): House-bound recluses with an occult reputation.

DOCKERS (III): The hard-bitten laborers who work the docks.

THE FOG HOUNDS (I): A crew of rough smugglers looking for a patron.

THE FORGOTTEN GODS (III): Cults that attempt to follow the old ways from before the cataclysm, doing the bidding of demons and darker things. There are many cults, who rarely organize together. An individual cult is usually Tier I or Tier II.

THE FOUNDATION (IV): The powerful ancient order of architects and builders. Many of their enemies have disappeared behind the brick and mortar of Doskvol.

GONDOLIERS (III): The guild of canal boat operators. Venerated by ancient tradition. Said to know occult secrets (many things are submerged in the Dusk).

THE GRAY CLOAKS (II): Former Bluecoats who turned to crime.

THE GRINDERS (II): A vicious gang of former dockers and leviathan blood refinery workers from Skovlan.

THE HIVE (IV): A guild of merchants who secretly trade in contraband. Named for their symbol, a golden bee.

THE HORDE (III): A mass of hollows, all united in some fell purpose, controlled by an unknown power.

IMPERIAL MILITARY (VI): The armed forces of the Imperium stationed in Doskvol. Garrisons are posted at Gaddoc Rail Station, aboard the naval destroyer *Paragon*, and at the Lord Governor's stronghold (about 250 troops in total).

INK RAKES (II): The journalists, muckrakers, and newspaper publishers of Doskvol.

INSPECTORS (III): The criminal investigators of the City Watch. They have a reputation for ethics and integrity (no one likes them). They present evidence for prosecutions to the city magistrates.

IRONHOOK PRISON (IV): Where many scoundrels spend the bulk of their lives. Several criminal organizations are run by convicts inside its walls.

THE LAMPBLACKS (II): The former lamp-lighter guild, turned to crime when their services were replaced by electric lights.

LEVIATHAN HUNTERS (V): The daring captains and crews that grapple with titanic demons of the Void Sea to drain their blood for processing into electroplasm.

LORD SCURLOCK (III): An ancient noble, said to be immortal, like the Emperor. Possibly a vampire. Obsessed with arcane secrets.

THE LOST (I): A group of street-toughs and ex-soldiers dedicated to protecting the downtrodden and the hopeless.

MINISTRY OF PRESERVATION (V): The governmental body of the Imperium that oversees all transportation between cities and the disbursement of food and other vital resources.

THE PATH OF ECHOES (III): A mystery cult that borders on open rebellion against spirit laws. They revere the ancients, and seek to gain knowledge from the past—including consorting with ghosts.

RAIL JACKS (II): The men and women who protect the electro-trains of the Imperium from the savage spirits of the deathlands. Have recently been making noises about forming a union.

THE RECONCILED (III): An association of spirits who have not gone feral with the passage of time.

THE RED SASHES (II): Originally an Iravian school of swordsmanship, expanded into criminal endeavors.

SAILORS (III): The captains and crews for merchant and Imperial Navy ships.

THE SILVER NAILS (III): A company of Severosi mercenaries turned to crime when the war for Skovlan Unity ended. Renowned ghost killers.

SKOVLANDER REFUGEES (III): Desperate survivors of the Unity War, forced to criminal opportunities when denied all others.

SPARKWRIGHTS (IV): The engineers who maintain the lightning barriers. Also pioneers of new technology, often indulging in dangerous research.

SPIRIT WARDENS (IV): The bronze-masked hunters who destroy rogue spirits. Also run Bellweather Crematorium and research artifacts scavenged in the deathlands. Membership is secret.

ULF IRONBORN (I): A brutal Skovlander, newly arrived in Doskvol, fighting everyone for turf.

THE UNSEEN (IV): An insidious criminal enterprise with secret membership. Thought to pull the strings of the entire underworld.

THE WEEPING LADY (II): A charity and pseudo-religion, honoring the first Lord Governor of Doskvol, Lady Devera, said to be a champion of the poor.

THE WRAITHS (II): A mysterious crew of masked thieves and spies.

THE BILLHOOKS**TIER II****FACTION CLOCK**

A tough gang of thugs who prefer hatchets, meat hooks, and pole arms.

Terrorize magistrates to pardon members in prison

8

TURF: A butcher shop (HQ), stockyard, and slaughterhouse. Animal fighting pits and gambling dens. Several terrified merchants and businesses, which they extort.

NPCs: **Tarvul** (leader, serving life in prison, *savage, arrogant, family man*). **Erin** (captain, Tarvul's sister, *confident, deadly, ambitious*). **Coran** (thug, Tarvul's son, *fierce, loyal, quiet*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A large gang of bloodthirsty butchers. A pack of death-dogs.

QUIRKS: The Billhooks have a bloody reputation, often leaving the butchered corpses of their victims strewn about in a grisly display. Many wonder why the Bluecoats turn a blind eye to their savagery.

ALLIES: The Bluecoats, Ministry of Preservation.

ENEMIES: Ulf Ironborn, The Lost, Citizenry of Crow's Foot and the Docks.

SITUATION: Erin and Coran both want to take control of the Billhooks gang, either when Tarvul gets too old (which will be soon) or by taking the position by force. There is no love lost between Erin and Coran and they'll have no qualms about fighting a family member for leadership. Meanwhile, the rest of the gang wants to continue their reign of terror to pressure a magistrate to pardon Tarvul and other gang members and release them from Ironhook.

BLUECOATS**TIER III****FACTION CLOCK**

The City Watch of Duskwall. Known as the meanest gang in the city. Corrupt, violent, and cruel.

Procure bigger budget, military arms & equipment

8

TURF: The Bluecoats claim the whole city as their turf, but find their influence severely limited in Whitecrown, where the Imperial Military garrison holds sway under command of the Lord Governor.

NPCs: **Commander Clelland** (chief commissioner of the City Watch, *corrupt, cruel, arrogant*). **Captain Michter** (chief instructor, *ambitious, fierce, confident*). **Captain Vale** (quartermaster, *loyal, insightful, quiet*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: Many large gangs of vicious thugs in uniform. Armored coaches and canal patrol boats. Public punishment sites (pillories, stocks, hanging cages).

QUIRKS: The Bluecoats are divided into companies by district, and they have fierce rivalries, encouraged by their superiors—often good-natured, but sometimes violent.

ALLIES: The City Council, The Billhooks, The Crows, Ironhook Prison, Lord Scurlock, The Unseen.

ENEMIES: Imperial Military, many criminal organizations.

SITUATION: The Bluecoats have become jealous of the elite hardware and vehicles used by the Imperial Military. They want to refit their watch-guards in heavy armor and weapons, to better strike fear into those they prey upon.



| THE CHURCH OF ECSTASY | TIER IV | FACTION CLOCKS |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>The “state religion” honors the life of the body and abhors the corrupted spirit world. Essentially a secret society.</i> | Unlock the secret of <i>ascension</i> | 12 |
| | Eliminate the Reconciled | 12 |

TURF: The Sanctorium grand cathedral in Brightstone. Many other smaller temples across the city.

NPCs: **Elder Rowan** (leader, *devout, resolute, visionary*). **Preceptor Dunvil** (arcane researcher, *unorthodox, obsessive, enigmatic*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A large treasury of tithes from citizens. Extensive arcane and occult libraries, workspaces, and artifacts. Many cohorts of acolytes and hollows who enforce the will of the Church's leadership.

QUIRKS: Zealous believers volunteer to be hollowed to “become purified.” This was once common among the ancient cult of the Empty Vessel, which preceded the Church.

ALLIES: City Council, Leviathan Hunters, Spirit Wardens.

ENEMIES: The Path of Echoes, The Reconciled.

SITUATION: The purest beings (according to secret teachings of the Church), are those entirely without spirits: the demons. Demons are immortal, but never fade into madness or lustful hungers as rogue human spirits and vampires do. They are perfect; and the most devout of the Church seek to become as they are, to unlock the secret of *ascension*. Many dark experiments and rituals with hulls, hollows, vampires—and the rare demon—are conducted in the labyrinthine dungeons below the Church's chief cathedral in Brightstone.

| THE CIRCLE OF FLAME | TIER III | FACTION CLOCK |
|---|--|---------------|
| <i>A refined secret society of antiquarians and scholars; cover for extortion, graft, vice, and murder.</i> | Acquire all the ancient artifacts of Kotar | 8 |

TURF: The Centuralia club, Six Towers (HQ).

NPCs: **The Seven** (leadership): **Elster Avrathi** (Iruvian diplomat, *secretive, gracious*), **Lady Drake** (magistrate, *cunning, ruthless*), **Raffello** (painter, *visionary, obsessive*), **Lord Mora** (noble, *cold, suspicious*), **Lady Penderyn** (noble, *charming, patient*), **Madame Tesslyn** (vice purveyor, *sophisticated, subtle*), **Harvale Brogan** (vice purveyor, *shrewd, quiet*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: Vast treasury provided by wealthy membership. Impressive collection of ancient artifacts, maps, and ephemera. Highly trained and discreet private security force.

QUIRKS: One of The Seven is actually a demon in disguise.

ALLIES: The Forgotten Gods, The Path of Echoes, City Council, The Foundation.

ENEMIES: The Hive, The Silver Nails.

SITUATION: The Circle has an extensive library of scholarly works that catalog many of the arcane artifacts and valuable treasures that disappeared when the Lost District was abandoned outside the lightning barrier. Of special interest are the remains of Kotar, a legendary sorcerer, demon, or hero who was mummified before the cataclysm. The Eye, Hand, and Heart of Kotar are said to possess great power for those bold enough to risk their use.

| CITY COUNCIL | TIER V | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|------------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>The elite nobility who run the city government, its treasury, magistrates, and public works.</i> | Strangford is removed from council | 6 |
| | Strangford eliminates threats | 8 |

TURF: The city council chambers are in Charterhall, along with the attendant government offices and impregnable city treasury vaults. The council also holds ownership of all public spaces in the city, including streets, docks, and waterways.

NPCs: The scions of the six most powerful noble families in Doskvol, currently: **Bowmore, Clelland, Dunvil, Penderyn, Rowan, and Strangford.**

NOTABLE ASSETS: A massive treasury of coin and valuable goods. Many officials, barristers, clerks, and officials. The public coaches operated by the Cabbies.

QUIRKS: The members of the Council are all high-ranking adepts in the Church of the Ecstasy of the Flesh. Some of them are also secretly initiates in the Path of Echoes.

ALLIES: Bluecoats, The Church of Ecstasy, The Circle of Flame, Lord Scurlock, The Brigade, Cabbies, Sparkwrights, The Foundation.

ENEMIES: Imperial Military, Inspectors, Ministry of Preservation, The Reconciled.

SITUATION: Three of the councilors (Bowmore, Clelland, Rowan) have aligned against Strangford and are maneuvering to remove the house from the council. Dunvil and Penderyn have not taken sides so far. Can the conspirators arrange for the necessary scandal, framed crime, or assassinations to remove Strangford? Or can Strangford House stand against them and eliminate the threats?

| THE CROWS | TIER II | FACTION CLOCKS |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>An old gang with new leadership. Known for running illegal games of chance and extortion rackets.</i> | Reestablish control of Crow's Foot | 6 |
| | Rise in Tier | 6 |

TURF: Claims all of Crow's Foot as their turf. Everyone in the district pays up the chain to them. HQ in an abandoned City Watch tower. Operates gambling dens in Crow's Foot and extortion rackets at the Docks.

NPCs: **Lyssa** (leader, *brash, killer, noble family*). **Bell** (second-in-command, *loyal*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A veteran gang of thugs and killers. A number of small boats. A fortified HQ.

QUIRKS: Roric's body was lost during his murder (it fell into a canal). His vengeful ghost is now at large in the city.

ALLIES: The Bluecoats, Sailors, The Lost, Citizens of Crow's Foot.

ENEMIES: The Hive, Inspectors, Dockers.

SITUATION: Lyssa murdered the former boss of the Crows, Roric. She is a fearsome killer, and few want to cross her, but her position as leader of the Crows is uncertain. Some were very loyal to Roric. As the power-play continues, the Crows' hold on the district just might slip away.

| DEATHLANDS SCAVENGERS | TIER II | FACTION CLOCK |
|---|----------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Convicts from Ironhook and desperate freelancers who roam the wasteland beyond the lightning barriers.</i> | Obtain pardons (repeating) | 8 |

TURF: A few precious hold-fasts in the deathlands, secured by ancient rites against spirits. Hunting grounds to feed on the few strange animals that survived the cataclysm.

NPCs: **Lady Thorn** (leader, *haunted, brave, caring*). **Richter** (hunter, *patient, quiet, deadly*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: Generators, lightning hooks, gas-masks, air tanks, and other essentials of deathlands survival. A secret ancient book of ritual sorcery.

QUIRKS: Possession is a common hazard, and scavengers either learn to deal with it, or go mad and vanish into the darkness of the wastes. Those still in Lady Thorn's company have adapted well and suffer only minimal ill effects from possession.

ALLIES: Forgotten Gods, Gondoliers, Spirit Wardens.

ENEMIES: Ironhook Prison.

SITUATION: Condemned prisoners are sometimes given "mercy" and sent into the deathlands rather than being executed at Ironhook. A few survive, thanks to Lady Thorn and her deathlands scavengers, who take them in and train them in the ways of deathlands hunting and survival. The scavengers hunt for lost artifacts and treasures in the wastes, to sell or trade in the city, sometimes for enough to buy a pardon and return to life within the barriers once again.

| THE DIMMER SISTERS | TIER II | FACTION CLOCKS |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>House-bound recluses with an occult reputation.</i> | Dominate the spirit trade | 6 |
| | Obtain arcane secrets (repeating) | 4 |

TURF: Fine old manor house and grounds (HQ), as well as the ancient temple ruin and subterranean canal beneath. Apothecaries and witches in their service.

NPCs: There is no single leader of the Sisters; their true names are not known. **Roslyn** (servant, *patient, loyal, arcane*) deals with contacts outside the house. **Irelen** (spark-craft tinkerer, *loyal, enigmatic, obsessive*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A private electroplasmic generator, lightning barriers, and spirit containment vessels. Many spirits bound to service.

QUIRKS: The precise number of sisters is unknown. Some say they are an ancient family of possessing spirits. Others say they are vampires. Everyone knows that if you go into their house, you never come out again.

ALLIES: The Forgotten Gods, The Foundation.

ENEMIES: Spirit Wardens, The Reconciled.

SITUATION: The Sisters have been slowly and secretly consolidating the trade of captured spirits and spirit essences in Doskvول for several decades. Only a few remaining rivals stand between them and domination of the market. Do they have an ulterior motive for acquiring so many spirits and essences, or is this purely a matter of wealth and power?

| THE FOG HOUNDS | TIER I | FACTION CLOCKS |
|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| <i>A crew of rough smugglers looking for a patron.</i> | Eliminate rival smugglers | 8 |
| | Obtain a regular patron | 6 |

TURF: Underground canal dock (HQ). North and East city canal routes. Northern Void Sea routes. Old North Port supply caches.

NPCs: Margette Vale (leader, *quiet, cold, fearless*). Bear (second, *fierce, moody, brash*). Goldie (navigator, *calculating, patient, confident*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: Medium steamship, *Fog Hound*. A crew of hard-bitten, tough, expert sailors—all former Void Sea transport haulers (put out of work by the new cargo rail lines), well-worn from years of harrowing work. A wide array of Imperial transport and cargo documents, some forged, some legit.

QUIRKS: As veterans of many cruises on the Void Sea, Vale and her crew can be insular and clannish, and have a low initial opinion of anyone who hasn't proven themselves in a similar way. Once won, however, their loyalty is rock solid and fierce.

ALLIES: Dockers, The Lampblacks.

ENEMIES: Bluecoats (canal patrol), The Vultures (rival smuggling outfit, Tier I).

SITUATION: Vale and her crew have mastered the Northern smuggling routes in and out of Duskwall. They're currently attempting to absorb or eliminate the few remaining rivals on their territory and then establish reliable, regular work with a patron who needs a steady stream of contraband.

| GONDOLIERS | TIER III | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>The canal boat operators. Venerated by ancient tradition. Said to know occult secrets (many things are submerged in the Dusk).</i> | Investigate desecrated hollows | 8 |
| | Destroy spirit wells (repeating) | 4 |

TURF: The canals of Doskvol. Even the Bluecoats' canal patrol pays respect to them.

NPCs: Eisele (leader, *serene, knowledgeable, fearless*). Griggs (chief Whisper, *strange, ruthless, haunted*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: Fleet of gondolas and other water-craft. Map of known spirit wells and arcane sites across the city. A dedicated cohort of Adepts.

QUIRKS: Initiation into the Gondoliers grants the Whisper's **COMPEL** special ability.

ALLIES: The Lampblacks, Citizenry of all districts.

ENEMIES: The Red Sashes, Spirit Wardens.

SITUATION: Killers have disposed of bodies in the canals of Doskvol for centuries. The vengeful ghosts that rise from the corpses are a serious threat—a threat dealt with by the Gondoliers since ancient times. Before the Spirit Wardens were created by the Emperor, the Gondoliers protected citizens from rogue spirits and supernatural dangers of all kinds. The Gondoliers are beloved by most citizens, who prefer to go to them with “weird problems” rather than relying on the ruthless and indiscriminate judgment of the Spirit Wardens. A sudden influx of ritually disfigured hollows dumped in the canals has sparked investigation by the Gondoliers (the Spirit Wardens are pointedly ignoring the situation).

| THE GRAY CLOAKS | TIER II | FACTION CLOCKS |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>A crew of former Bluecoats turned to crime after being framed and expelled from the City Watch.</i> | Secure Six Towers as their turf | 8 |
| | Avenge their expulsion | 8 |

TURF: The basement of a burned-down City Watch station (HQ). Several apartments above a tobacconist in Six Towers. A pit-fighting arena and gambling den.

NPCs: Nessa (leader, *scrupulous, daring*). Hutch (second, *brash, fierce*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: The Gray Cloaks have attracted other former Bluecoats to their crew, amassing a sizeable gang of trained enforcers. They have their old uniforms and badges and often use them to pass as the City Watch.

ALLIES: The Inspectors.

ENEMIES: Bluecoats, Lord Strangford (Leviathan Hunters).

SITUATION: The Gray Cloaks are all former Bluecoats who were framed for a crime committed by their Watch station commander. Sure, they were skimming from the city coffers and taking bribes like everyone else, but they didn't burn down the Watch station and destroy the evidence in the case against Lord Strangford (of the Leviathan Hunters). Several inspectors who were working the case know the truth but can't prove anything—yet. Lord Strangford would pay well to have these loose ends removed permanently.

| THE GRINDERS | TIER II | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>A vicious gang of former dockers and leviathan blood refinery workers.</i> | Raise a crew, steal a war ship | 12 |
| | Fill war treasury | 12 |

TURF: Abandoned dock warehouse (HQ) and underground canal dock.

NPCs: Hutton (leader, *confident, volatile*). Sercy (second, *crippled, defiant*). Derret (toughest gang member, *huge, shrewd*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A few small canal boats. Wrecking tools and explosives.

QUIRKS: Many Grinders have been mutated by the toxic rain that plagues Lockport.

ALLIES: Ulf Ironborn, Dockers.

ENEMIES: Bluecoats, Imperial Military, Leviathan Hunters, Sailors, The Silver Nails.

SITUATION: The city of Lockport, to the North in Skovlan, processes 90% of the demon blood siphoned by the leviathan hunter ships of Doskvول (the hunters drop their raw cargo at Lockport before filling their holds with refined blood and returning to Doskvول for repairs and replacement crew for those lost to the Void Sea). The huge, churning refineries in Lockport have poisoned the city under a stinking cloud of toxic fumes and acid rain. A group of dockers and refinery workers from Lockport have come to Doskvول to raise an army and secure a warship with which to seize control of Lockport and destroy the Empire's refineries. They call themselves "the Grinders." To raise funds for their mission, the Grinders have turned to criminal endeavors, especially smash & grab looting and hijacking of cargo barges across the city.

| THE HIVE | TIER IV | FACTION CLOCKS |
|--|----------------------------|----------------|
| <i>A guild of legitimate merchants who secretly trade in contraband. Named for their symbol, a golden bee.</i> | Dominate contraband market | 8 |
| | Avenge Roric's murder | 6 |

TURF: Many shops, taverns, cafes, warehouses, and other mercantile establishments all across the city. No centralized HQ.

NPCs: **Djera Maha** (leader, *bold, strategic, confident*). **Karth Orris** (mercenary commander, *ruthless, insightful, jealous*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A massive treasury. Elite mercenaries on retainer. A fleet of transport ships, carriages, wagons, and private trains.

QUIRKS: The Hive is known to avoid doing business with any occult or arcane groups. The Church of Ecstasy is popular among Hive members, who reject the superstitions and weird practices of the past.

ALLIES: Ministry of Preservation, Dagger Isles Consulate.

ENEMIES: The Circle of Flame, The Unseen, The Crows, The Wraiths.

SITUATION: Djera Maha grew up as an urchin in the Dagger Isles. She learned all the secrets of vice and smuggling as she worked her way up the ranks of every gang along the trade routes to Doskvol. Having built up her acquisition and distribution network in the city (as well as within the Ministry of Preservation) she is poised to take over all of the contraband markets. Maha had a close relationship (some say romantic) with the leader of the Crows, Roric, who was recently murdered by his second-in-command.

| THE LAMPBLACKS | TIER II | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>The former lamp-lighter guild, turned to crime when their services were replaced by electric lights.</i> | Destroy the Red Sashes | 8 |
| | Become ward boss of Crow's Foot | 8 |

TURF: HQ in the office of a coal warehouse. Operates a handful of brothels and cheap drug dens across Crow's Foot.

NPCs: **Bazso Baz** (leader, *charming, open, ruthless, whiskey connoisseur*). **Pickett** (second, *shrewd, conniving, suspicious*). **Henner** (thug, *loyal, reckless*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A fearsome gang of leg-breakers and mayhem-makers. A number of smugglers on the payroll who run their drugs.

QUIRKS: Bazso Baz is a member of a secret society (forgotten gods cult, "The Empty Vessel") and sometimes puts the needs of that group ahead of the well-being of his gang.

ALLIES: The Fog Hounds, Gondoliers, Ironhook Prison.

ENEMIES: The Red Sashes, The Bluecoats, Cabbies.

SITUATION: The Lampblacks and the Red Sashes are at war over turf and vengeance for deaths on both sides. Bazso Baz is recruiting every free blade in the district for extra muscle and doesn't take no for an answer. You're either with them or against them. The Lampblacks are not particularly well-connected politically, but are akin to folk-heroes among the working class, who see them as "lovable rogues" standing up to the powers-that-be.

| LEVIATHAN HUNTERS | TIER V | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|--------|--|
| <i>The captains and crews that grapple with titanic demons of the Void Sea to drain their blood for processing into electroplasm.</i> | | Discover new hunting grounds 12 |
| | | Surplus runs dry 12 |

TURF: The massive metal docks for the huge hunter ships and the associated construction and repair facilities. Several small private leviathan blood processing facilities for the captains' personal shares.

NPCs: **Lord Strangford** (captain, *ruthless, arrogant, tainted*). **Lady Clave** (captain, *daring, cruel, accomplished*). **Lady Ankhayat** (Iruvian captain, *confident, charming, scoundrel*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: The leviathan hunter fleet (each vessel is owned by the noble house who built and commands it). Many cohorts of expert sailors, as well as spark-craft technicians, demonologist Whispers, and void-touched navigators. Companies of marines to protect the vessels and their valuable cargo at sea and in port.

ALLIES: City Council, The Church of Ecstasy, Sailors, Dockers, Sparkwrights.

ENEMIES: The Grinders, Ministry of Preservation, The Path of Echoes.

SITUATION: The captains have a horrible secret: the known hunting grounds for leviathans are coming up barren. The immortal creatures, once so reliable in their movements in the Void Sea, have begun to migrate elsewhere. New hunting grounds must be found before the surplus of leviathan blood disappears, and with it, the lightning barriers and the survival of the human race.

| THE LOST | TIER I | FACTION CLOCK |
|---|---|---------------|
| <i>A group of street-toughs and ex-soldiers dedicated to protecting the downtrodden and the hopeless.</i> | Destroy cruel workhouses (repeating) | 4 |

TURF: Converted rail car (HQ). The poverty-stricken streets of Coalridge and Dunsborough.

NPCs: **Cortland** (leader, *idealist, candid, cavalier*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A very experienced gang of formerly vicious thugs, killers, and Imperial soldiers.

QUIRKS: The Lost have all done horrible things in their former lives and they believe they must atone for these "sins." Each member keeps a pile of stones under their bed—one for each sin they balance with a just deed.

ALLIES: Workhouse Laborers, Citizens of Coalridge and Dunsborough, The Crows.

ENEMIES: Workhouse Foremen, Bluecoats, The Billhooks.

SITUATION: The Lost are currently focusing their efforts in Coalridge, running a campaign of sabotage, terror, and savage beatings against the most notoriously cruel workhouse foremen. The already-brewing union organizing efforts in that district are emboldened by the Lost's attacks, and the local Bluecoat patrols are starting to complain to their commanders for support of extra Watch guards from other districts. Meanwhile, the Coalridge foremen are making it known that they'll pay top dollar to anyone who will take the Lost out of the picture.

| MINISTRY OF PRESERVATION | TIER V | FACTION CLOCK |
|---|------------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Oversees transportation between cities and the disbursement of food and other vital resources.</i> | Seize control of Leviathan Hunters | 12 |

TURF: The electro-rail train lines of the Imperium. Radiant energy farms, eeleries, and other food-growing enterprises throughout the city.

NPCs: **Lord Dalmore** (executive officer in Doskvol, *commanding, intelligent*). **Lady Slane** (chief of operations, *insightful, subtle, effective*). **Captain Lannock** (mercenary commander, *shrewd, ruthless*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A fleet of cargo ships and their armed escorts. A significant treasury from taxation and transportation licensing. The Rail Jacks who work the train lines. A private mercenary company that answers only to the ministry itself.

ALLIES: The Billhooks, Imperial Military, Rail Jacks, Sparkwrights.

ENEMIES: Leviathan Hunters.

SITUATION: The Ministry leadership believes that the leviathan hunters are too vital to the public well-being to be controlled by the bickering noble houses, vulnerable to their petty rivalries and vendettas. Agents within the ministry have been tasked with a variety of espionage, sabotage, and political actions to ultimately seize control of the hunters and bring them into Ministry control.

| THE RECONCILED | TIER III | FACTION CLOCKS |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>An association of ancient spirits who have not gone feral with the passage of time.</i> | Infiltrate the City Council | 8 |
| | Infiltrate the Church of Ecstasy | 8 |

TURF: None.

NPCs: The Reconciled have possessed several important citizens in Doskvol. Their exact membership is not known.

NOTABLE ASSETS: Several secret and hidden spirit wells across the city and in the deathlands, which give the Reconciled the arcane energy they need to survive.

QUIRKS: The spirits of the Reconciled do not lose their minds or become obsessed with vengeance as other spirits do. They can possess a victim indefinitely without any adverse effects.

ALLIES: City Council, Gondoliers.

ENEMIES: The Church of Ecstasy, Spirit Wardens, Sparkwrights.

SITUATION: The Reconciled are very ancient and wise; they see themselves as the rightful and just rulers that Duskwall needs. A few of the City Council members have become initiates in the Path of Echoes and will soon be vulnerable to possession by the Reconciled. These councilors are also high-ranking members of the Church of the Ecstasy of the Flesh, which will give the Reconciled an opportunity for infiltration into that organization as well.

| THE RED SASHES | TIER II | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|---------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Originally a school of ancient Iruvian sword arts, since expanded into criminal endeavors.</i> | | Destroy the Lampblacks 8 |
| | | Become ward boss of Crow's Foot 8 |

TURF: HQ in their sword-fighting school/temple. Operates a handful of high-end drug dens across Crow's Foot and the Docks.

NPCs: Mylera Klev (leader, shrewd, ruthless, educated, art collector).

NOTABLE ASSETS: Small contingent of master sword-fighters. Master alchemist; many potent potions and essences.

QUIRKS: Several members of the Red Sashes are the sons and daughters of Iruvian nobility and diplomats in Doskvول. They train in swordplay at the school and sometimes participate in gang activities. Their families are powerful and will commit significant resources to punishing anyone who harms their children.

ALLIES: Iruvian Consulate, The Path of Echoes, Dockers, Cabbies, Inspectors.

ENEMIES: The Lampblacks, Bluecoats, Gondoliers.

SITUATION: The Red Sashes and the Lampblacks are at war over turf and vengeance for deaths on both sides. Mylera is recruiting every free blade in the district for extra muscle and doesn't take no for an answer. You're either with them or against them. The Red Sashes are very well-connected, with former sword students placed at the Iruvian Consulate, in the Path of Echoes, and among the Inspectors.

| LORD SCURLOCK | TIER III | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|----------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>An ancient noble, said to be immortal, like the Emperor. Possibly a vampire or sorcerer. Obsessed with the occult.</i> | | Fulfill debt to Setarra 12 |
| | | Obtain arcane secrets (repeating) 6 |

TURF: A secret lair outside the city. A dilapidated manor house in Six Towers and the catacombs beneath. An array of business holdings and cult shrines across the city, collected for some united purpose known only to Scurlock.

NPCs: Lord Scurlock (*enigmatic, cold, arcane, old-fashioned*) is an individual, but is so powerful that he's considered a faction. His personal scale is Tier III—in conflicts he counts as a large gang (20 people).

NOTABLE ASSETS: An impressive collection of occult and arcane curios, books, and ephemera. An ancient demonic temple.

QUIRKS: Scurlock is immune to spirits. Ghosts can't see, hear, or harm him. He makes no sound when he moves and is sometimes difficult to look at directly.

ALLIES: City Council, Bluecoats, Inspectors, The Forgotten Gods.

ENEMIES: Spirit Wardens, The Immortal Emperor.

SITUATION: Lord Scurlock is bound by ancient magic to the demon Setarra. Who is the master and who is the servant? Their roles have changed many times over the centuries. Now, Lord Scurlock must fulfill a debt. Setarra has found a nest of sea demons in the harbor, encased in stone, chained by magic from the cataclysm. She seeks to free them to see their wrath loosed on the world of men. Scurlock will aid her in this or suffer a dark doom.

THE SILVER NAILS**TIER III****FACTION CLOCKS**

A company of Severosi mercenaries who fought for the Empire in the Unity War. Renowned ghost killers.

Destroy spirits in the Lost District **8**Control the Lost District **8**

TURF: A large inn (The Mustang) and its fine stables (HQ).

NPCs: **Seresh** (leader, *bold, brash, defiant*). **Tuhan** (lead scout, *bold, cunning, charming*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A contingent of exquisite Severosian cavalry horses—fearless, swift, and trained to hunt and battle spirits. Arcane lances.

QUIRKS: Each member wears a ring fashioned from a silver nail, which protects against possession. They're trained in the **GHOST FIGHTER** special ability (Cutter).

ALLIES: Imperial Military, Sailors, Severosan Consulate.

ENEMIES: The Circle of Flame, The Grinders, Skovlan Consulate, Skovlander Refugees, Spirit Wardens.

SITUATION: Thanks to their expertise from riding in the deathlands of Severos, the Silver Nails are perfectly suited to explore the forbidden Lost District outside the lightning barrier of the city. Once the fiercest ghosts are driven out or destroyed, the Silver Nails can seize control and plunder the forgotten treasures and artifacts hidden within. (The Spirit Wardens currently control access to the Lost District and do everything in their power to keep the Silver Nails—and everyone else—out.)

SPARKWRIGHTS**TIER IV****FACTION CLOCK**

The engineers who maintain the lightning barriers. Also pioneers of spark-craft technology, indulging in dangerous research.

Develop alternative fuel **12**

TURF: Massive workshop, factory, and design facility in Coalridge.

NPCs: **Una Farros** (instructor at Charterhall University, *curious, vain, famous*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: The electroplasmic generators, city lights, lightning barriers and associated facilities and systems across the city.

ALLIES: City Council, Leviathan Hunters, Ministry of Preservation.

ENEMIES: The Path of Echoes, The Reconciled, The Foundation.

SITUATION: For centuries, the Sparkwrights have worked in secret to develop an alternative fuel that could replace the leviathan blood that powers the lightning barriers of the Imperium. A few researchers have gotten close, but “accidents” have inevitably killed them and destroyed their work (certainly arranged by the nobility who rule because of their stranglehold on leviathan hunting). But there is always a daring visionary willing to try to pick up the pieces and complete the work—even at the risk of their own life. Will one of them manage it this time, or will they, too, fall victim to the deadly agents of the elite?

| SPIRIT WARDENS | TIER IV | FACTION CLOCK |
|--|--------------------------|---------------|
| <i>The bronze-masked hunters who destroy rogue spirits. Also run Bellweather Crematorium to properly dispose of corpses.</i> | Uncover the infiltrators | 8 |

TURF: Bellweather Crematorium. The Master Warden's estate in Whitecrown.

NPCs: There are no known Spirit Wardens—they maintain an anonymous membership of people not native to Duskwall, using code-names. A Warden known as "Bakoros" (who may be several different individuals) sometimes lectures at the College of Immortal studies at Doskvol Academy.

NOTABLE ASSETS: The death bells that ring whenever someone dies in the city, and the deathseeker crows that fly to find the body (*ancient, arcane*). Many cohorts of expert Whispers. The most advanced spectrological and spark-craft equipment, including several spirit-hunter hulls.

QUIRKS: Membership in the Wardens is secret and utterly anonymous. They cut all ties and have no families or close relationships, save their fellow Wardens.

ALLIES: The Church of Ecstasy, Deathlands Scavengers.

ENEMIES: The Dimmer Sisters, Gondoliers, Lord Scurlock, The Silver Nails, The Unseen, Path of Echoes, The Reconciled.

SITUATION: The Spirit Wardens know that an enemy is attempting to infiltrate their ranks (they don't yet know that it's the Unseen). The Wardens are laying a trap for this enemy, to uncover their identity and eliminate them.

| ULF IRONBORN | TIER I | FACTION CLOCK |
|--|--------------------------|---------------|
| <i>A brutal Skovlander, newly arrived in the Dusk, fighting everyone for turf.</i> | Carve out gang territory | 6 |
| | Rise in Tier | 4 |

TURF: Rooms, workshop, and stable at The Old Forge tavern (HQ). A gambling den.

NPCs: **Ulf Ironborn** (leader, *ruthless, savage, bold*). **Havid** (second, *ruthless, volatile, shrewd*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A small but powerfully savage gang of thugs.

QUIRKS: As a refugee of the Unity War, Ulf does not trust the local Akorosi, or anyone who proclaims a strong allegiance to the Imperial government. Those of Skovlander blood find it easy to win his trust, however.

ALLIES: The Grinders.

ENEMIES: Citizens of Coalridge, The Billhooks.

SITUATION: Ulf is newly arrived in Doskvol, seeking his fortune on the streets. His gang has had recent success with savage smash & grab operations, leading into a potential "protection" racket. As more Skovlander war refugees swell the city population, the bigotry of some locals is starting to surface, with "NO SKOV'S" signs appearing at public houses and shops. Ulf's blind rage will be sparked off when he encounters this, surely leading his gang into war with any "true Duskers" brave enough to stand up to him.

| THE UNSEEN | TIER IV | FACTION CLOCK |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>An insidious criminal enterprise with secret membership. Thought to pull the strings of the entire underworld.</i> | Infiltrate the Spirit Wardens | 8 |
| | Expand into other cities | 8 |

TURF: A multitude of vice dens and extortion rackets across the city—virtually none realize that they pay up to the Unseen. Several opulent townhouses used as safe houses.

NPCs: **The Tower** (leader). **The Star** (captain). **Grull** (mid-level thug with big ambitions, undercover as a coach driver).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A legion of thugs, thieves, and killers on-call to their secret masters.

QUIRKS: The perfect secrecy of the Unseen is the result of arcane rituals. Core members can recognize each other with attuned second sight. Any non-member who learns the identity of a member falls victim to a ritual that removes that memory from their mind after a few moments.

ALLIES: The Bluecoats, Ironhook Prison, The Forgotten Gods, Cyphers.

ENEMIES: Ink Rakes, The Hive, Spirit Wardens.

SITUATION: The Unseen crave the power and authority of the Spirit Wardens, whose own secret membership has so far resisted infiltration. The Tower and The Star plot to place their own spies and operatives among the Wardens and seize it from within.

| THE WRAITHS | TIER II | FACTION CLOCKS |
|---|------------------------|----------------|
| <i>A mysterious crew of masked thieves and spies.</i> | Recruit expert thieves | 8 |
| | Secure an arcane ally | 6 |

TURF: Silkshore and Nightmarket are their primary hunting grounds. They specialize in the theft of luxury items and intelligence gathering for clients to use as blackmail.

NPCs: **Slate** (leader, *sophisticated, daring, secretive*). **Loop** (appraisal expert, *obsessive, moody, secretive*).

NOTABLE ASSETS: A scattered collection of secret rooftop shelters. A secret lair in a tower in Silkshore. All manner of thieves' gear for burglary.

QUIRKS: Each member wears a mask and conceals their true identity with an alias. They communicate with a private sign language.

ALLIES: Cabbies.

ENEMIES: Bluecoats, Inspectors, The Hive.

SITUATION: The Wraiths recently completed a heist at a luxury brothel in Nightmarket and happened to grab the private map book of a leviathan hunter in the process. The map book shows the secret hunting grounds of augured leviathan sites that will be used by the ship *Storm Palace* during the next season. Such a map is useless to the Wraiths, but is worth a small fortune to another leviathan hunter. The Wraiths are currently reaching out to contacts in the underworld to quietly arrange a sale.



DUSKWALL: VICE PURVEYORS

FAITH

- ◆ **Mother Narya**, House of the Weeping Lady, Six Towers.
- ◆ **Ilacille**, the ruins of the Temple to forgotten gods, Coalridge.
- ◆ **Nelisanne**, The Church of the Ecstasy of the Flesh, Brightstone.
- ◆ **Lord Penderyn**, the Archive of Echoes, Charterhall.

GAMBLING

- ◆ **Spogg's** dice game, Crow's Foot.
- ◆ **Grist**, boxing, the Docks.
- ◆ **Helene**, Silver Stag casino, Silkshore.
- ◆ **Master Vreen**, hound racing, Nightmarket.
- ◆ **Lady Dusk**, the Dusk Manor Club, Whitecrown.
- ◆ **Sergeant Velk**, the fighting pits, DunsloUGH.

LUXURY, PLEASURE

- ◆ **Singer**, bath house, Crow's Foot.
- ◆ **Harvale Brogan**, the Centurialia Club, Brightstone.
- ◆ **Traven's** smoke shop, Coalridge.
- ◆ **Dunridge & Sons** fine fabrics and tailoring, Nightmarket.
- ◆ **Chef Roselle**, the Golden Plum restaurant, Six Towers.
- ◆ **Maestro Helleren**, Spiregarden theater, Whitecrown.

OBLIGATION

- ◆ **Family members** (heritage) or **former co-workers** (background).
- ◆ **Hutton**, Skovlander Refugees/ Revolutionaries, Charhollow.
- ◆ **The Circle of Flame**, a secret society.

PLEASURE, STUPOR

- ◆ **Mardin Gull**, the Leaky Bucket, tavern, Crow's Foot.
- ◆ **Pux Bolin**, the Harping Monkey, tavern, Nightmarket.
- ◆ **Helene**, Silver Stag casino, Silkshore.
- ◆ **Lady Freyla**, the Emperor's Cask, bar, Whitecrown.
- ◆ **Avrick**, powder dealer, Barrowcleft.
- ◆ **Rolan Volaris**, the Veil, social club, Nightmarket.
- ◆ **Madame Tesslyn**, the Red Lamp, brothel, Silkshore.
- ◆ **Traven's smoke shop**, Coalridge.
- ◆ **Eldrin Prichard**, the Silver Swan pleasure barge, Brightstone canals.
- ◆ **Jewel, Bird**, and **Shine**, Catcrawl Alley, the Docks.

WEIRD

- ◆ **The hooded proprietor** of a half-flooded grotto tavern near the docks. Strange passageways lead to stranger chambers beyond.
- ◆ **Father Yoren**, House of the Weeping Lady, Six Towers.
- ◆ “**Salia**,” a spirit of the Reconciled, which moves from body to body at their whim.
- ◆ **Sister Thorn**, deathlands scavenger gang, Gaddoc Station.
- ◆ **Ojak**, Tycherosi rooftop market vendor, Silkshore.
- ◆ **Aranna the Blessed**, cultist of a forgotten god, barge moored in Nightmarket.

PROPS
 Nets, Ropes
 Crates, Boxes
 Cables, Chains
 Drain Pipes
 Water Pump
 Oil Drums

Brick Pile
 Iron Bars
 Wooden Boards
 Cut Stones
 Loose Rocks
 Cement Buckets
 Sewer Grate
 Rotting Refuse
 Mud Puddles
 Discarded Junk
 Carrion & Crows
 Sodden Trash

Carriages
 Push Carts
 Moored Boats
 Cargo Barge
 Gondolas
 Wagons
 Crane & Pulleys
 Cargo Bales
 Metal Ingots
 Industrial Forge
 Coal / Fuel
 Waste Bins

Street Lamps
 Electric Wires
 Junction Boxes
 Spotlight Tower
 Clock Tower
 Messenger Post

Withered Trees
 Monument
 Fountain
 Mossy Ruin
 Collapsed Bldg.
 Flimsy Hovel

Barricade
 Gate
 Checkpoint
 Piled Rubble
 Canal Lock
 Lightning Barrier
 Food Stall
 Vendor Stall
 Barrels, Casks
 Makeshift Shrine
 News Stand
 Stockade

DOSKVOL: STREETS

MOOD

- 1** Dark or Cold
- 2** Bright or Lively
- 3** Quiet or Refined
- 4** Abandoned or Decrepit
- 5** Cramped or Noisy
- 6** Cozy or Warm

IMPRESSIONS

| | SIGHTS | SOUNDS | SMELLS |
|----------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Rain Slick, Oil Slick | Machinery, Workers | Cook Fires, Furnaces |
| 2 | Dancing Shadows, Flickering Lights | Fluttering Cloth, Howling Wind | Damp Wood, Decay, Refuse |
| 3 | Mist, Fog, Frost | Laughter, Song, Music | Animals, Hides, Blood |
| 4 | Fleeting Shapes, Echoes in the Ghost Field | Whispers, Echoes, Strange Voices | Chemicals, Distillates, Fumes |
| 5 | Soot, Ash Clouds, Grime | Thunder, Driving Rain | Rain Water, Ocean |
| 6 | Crackling Electricity, Wires, Mechanisms | Bells, Clock Chimes, Harbor Horns | Ozone, Electroplasmic Discharges |

USE

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------|-----------------|---------------|---------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1-3 | Residential | Crafts | Labor | Shops | Trade | Hospitality |
| 4/5 | Law, Government | Public Space | Power | Manufacture | Transportation | Leisure |
| 6 | Vice | Entertainment | Storage | Cultivation | Academic | Artists |

TYPE

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1-3 | Narrow Lane | Tight Alley | Twisting Street | Rough Road | Bridge | Waterway |
| 4/5 | Closed Court | Open Plaza | Paved Avenue | Tunnel | Wide Boulevard | Roundabout |
| 6 | Elevated | Flooded | Suspended | Subterranean | Floating | Private, Gated |

DETAILS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Metal Supports | Ironwork Gates, Fences | Belching Chimneys | Metal Grates, Hatches, Doors | Clockwork Mechanisms | Rigging, Cables |
| 2 | Stairs, Ramps, Terraces | Wooden Scaffolds | Skyways | Rooftop Spaces | Rails, Train Cars | Hidden Passages |
| 3 | Banners, Pennants | Festival Decorations | Crowd, Parade, Riot | Street Performers | Makeshift Stalls, Shelters | Crisscrossing Routes |
| 4 | Gang Markings | Patrol Posts | Lookouts | Stocks, Public Punishment | Street Crier, Visionary | News Stand, Public Notices |
| 5 | Stray Animals | Landscaping | Muck, Mire | Construction, Demolition | Foul Runoff, Fumes, Smoke | Orphans, Beggars |
| 6 | Ancient Ruin | Leering Gargoyles | Spirit Chimes, Wards | Eerie Emptiness | Quarantine, Lockdown | Shrine Offerings |

DOSKVOL: BUILDINGS

EXTERIOR

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| MATERIAL | Gray Brick | Stone & Timbers | Cut Stone Blocks | Wooden Boards | Plaster Board & Timbers | Metal Sheeting |
| DETAILS | Tile Work | Iron Work | Glass Work | Stone Work | Wood Work | Landscaping |

USE: COMMON

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Bunk House | Inn | Tavern | Gambling Hall | Drug Den | Brothel |
| 2 | Market | Workshop | Bakery | Butchery | Forge | Tailory |
| 3 | Work House | Goat Stables | Brewery | Watch Post | Court, Jail | Dock |
| 4 | Ruin | Row Houses | Tenements | Apartment Building | Small House | Bath House |
| 5 | Shrine | Tattooist | Physicker | Fighting Pits | Square, Fountain | Grotto |
| 6 | Warehouse | Stockyard | Factory | Refinery | Eelery | Mushroom Garden |

USE: RARE

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|--------------|---------------|--------------------|------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Market House | Restaurant | Bar, Lounge | Academy | Salon | Cafe |
| 2 | Floristry | Tobacconist | Book Shop | Jeweler | Clothier | Gallery |
| 3 | Apothecary | Horse Stables | Distillery | Vintner | Master Artisan | Boat House |
| 4 | Theater | Opera House | Apartment Building | Townhouse | Manor House | Villa |
| 5 | Clinic | Temple | Cistern | Watch Post | Park | Monument |
| 6 | Archive | Spiritualist | Bank | Alchemist | Power Plant | Radiant Energy Garden |

DETAILS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Dripping Water | Creaking Floorboards | Roaring Fires | Smoky Lamps | Buzzing Electric Lights | Ticking Clockworks |
| 2 | Plants, Flowers | Wall Hangings, Artwork | Shuttered Windows | Heavy Curtains, Thick Carpet | Dust, Detritus | Wear, Damage |
| 3 | Threadbare, Tattered | Utilitarian Furnishings | Elegant Finery | Lush, Comfortable | Rough-Spun Simplicity | Spartan Austerity |
| 4 | Circular Stairs, Ladders | Secret Doors | Catwalks | Skylights | Balcony | Cellar |
| 5 | Drafty, Cold | Stout, Quiet | Cozy, Warm | Vaulted, Spacious | Low, Cramped | Rickety, Ramshackle |
| 6 | Strange Devices | Weird Artifacts | Spirit Wards, Old Runes | Piled Jumble of Curios | Antique Appointments | Shrine, Altar |

ITEMS

| |
|-----------------------------|
| Chalkboard, Desks, Papers |
| Maps, Charts, Diagrams |
| Books, Scrolls, Bookcases |
| Lamp, Inkwell, Writing Desk |
| Clock, Cabinet, Shelves |
| Table, Chairs, Notebooks |
| Bed, Bureau, Vanity |
| Bunks, Stools, Trunks |
| Basin, Pitcher, Mirror |
| Sofa, Divan, Music Box |
| Couches, Table, Lamps |
| Drapery, Pillows, Cushions |

| |
|--------------------------------|
| Counter, Sink, Cabinets |
| Cookfire, Pots, Pans, Utensils |
| Dining Table, Chairs, Cutlery |
| Game Board, Cards, Dice |
| Larder, Spices, Meat Hooks |
| Wine, Beer, Whiskey |

| |
|-----------------------------|
| Pedestal, Statue, Paintings |
| Bird Cage, Quill, Diary |
| Bell, Book, Candle |
| Fireplace, Rug, Armchair |
| Curtains, Vases, Flowers |
| Instruments, Music Sheets |

| |
|---------------------------|
| Exam Chair, Medical Tools |
| Burner, Vials, Beakers |
| Workbench, Tools, Rags |
| Weapons, Ammunition |

HERITAGE
1-3: Akorosi
4-6: Foreigner

FOREIGNERS
1/2: Skovlander
3: Iruvian
4: Dagger Islander
5: Severosi
6: Tycherosi

Remember, each Tycherosi has a demonic trait: cat's eyes, claws, feathers instead of hair, etc.

PEOPLE

To generate a number between 11 and 66 (for the table on the facing page), roll a six-sided die twice.

LOOKS

| 1/2: MAN | 3/4: WOMAN | 5: AMBIGUOUS, CONCEALED | | | 6: ROLL AGAIN | |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|---------------|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
| 1 Large | Lovely | Weathered | Chiseled | Handsome | Athletic | |
| 2 Slim | Dark | Fair | Stout | Delicate | Scarred | |
| 3 Bony | Worn | Rough | Plump | Wiry | Striking | |
| 4 Short | Tall | Sexy | Wild | Elegant | Stooped | |
| 5 Cute | Plain | Old | Young | Stylish | Strange | |
| 6 Disfigured, Maimed | Glasses, Monocle | Prosthetic, Crippled | Long Hair, Beard, Wig | Shorn, Bald | Tattooed | |

STYLE

Tricorn Hat
Long Coat
Hood & Veil
Short Cloak
Knit Cap
Slim Jacket
Hooded Coat
Tall Boots
Work Boots

Mask & Robes
Suit & Vest
Collared Shirt
Suspenders
Rough Tunic
Skirt & Blouse
Wide Belt
Fitted Dress
Heavy Cloak
Thick Greatcoat

Soft Boots
Loose Silks
Sharp Trousers
Waxed Coat
Long Scarf
Leathers
Eelskin Bodysuit
Hide & Furs
Uniform
Tatters

Fitted Leggings
Apron
Heavy Gloves
Face Mask
Tool Belt
Crutches
Cane
Wheelchair

GOALS

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|--------------|---------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1/2 Wealth | Power | Authority | Prestige, Fame | Control | Knowledge |
| 3/4 Pleasure | Revenge | Freedom | Achievement | Happiness | Infamy, Fear |
| 5/6 Respect | Love | Change | Chaos, Destruction | Justice | Cooperation |

PREFERRED METHODS

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------------|---------|-------------|-----------|---------------|----------|
| 1/2 Violence | Threats | Negotiation | Study | Manipulation | Strategy |
| 3/4 Theft | Arcane | Commerce | Hard Work | Law, Politics | Sabotage |
| 5/6 Subterfuge | Alchemy | Blackmail | Teamwork | Espionage | Chaos |

PROFESSIONS: COMMON

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-----------------|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 Baker | Barber | Blacksmith | Brewer | Butcher | Carpenter |
| 2 Cartwright | Chandler | Clerk | Cobbler | Cooper | Cultivator |
| 3 Driver | Dyer | Embroiderer | Fishmonger | Gondolier | Guard |
| 4 Leatherworker | Mason | Merchant | Roofer | Ropemaker | Rug Maker |
| 5 Servant | Shipwright | Criminal | Tailor | Tanner | Tinkerer |
| 6 Vendor | Weaver | Woodworker | Goat Herd | Messenger | Sailor |

PROFESSIONS: RARE

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------|---------------|------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| 1 Advocate | Architect | Artist | Author | Bailiff | Apiarist |
| 2 Banker | Bounty Hunter | Clockmaker | Courtesan | Furrier | Glass Blower |
| 3 Diplomat | Jailer | Jeweler | Leech | Locksmith | Magistrate |
| 4 Musician | Physicker | Plumber | Printer | Scholar | Scribe |
| 5 Sparkwright | Tax Collector | Treasurer | Whisper | Composer | Steward |
| 6 Captain | Spirit Warden | Journalist | Explorer | Rail Jack | Soldier |

| TRAITS | INTERESTS | QUIRKS |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 11 Charming | Fine whiskey, wine, beer | Superstitious. Believes in signs, magic numbers. |
| 12 Cold | Fine food, restaurants | Devoted to their family. |
| 13 Cavalier | Fine clothes, jewelry, furs | Married into important / powerful family. |
| 14 Brash | Fine arts, opera, theater | Holds their position to spy for another faction. |
| 15 Suspicious | Painting, drawing, sculpture | Reclusive. Prefers to interact via messengers. |
| 16 Obsessive | History, legends | Massive debts (to banks / criminals / family) |
| 21 Shrewd | Architecture, furnishings | Blind to flaws in friends, allies, family, etc. |
| 22 Quiet | Poetry, novels, writing | Once hollowed, then restored. Immune to spirits. |
| 23 Moody | Pit-fighting, duels | Has chronic illness that requires frequent care. |
| 24 Fierce | Forgotten gods | Secretly (openly?) controlled by possessing spirit. |
| 25 Careless | Church of Ecstasy | Serves a demon's agenda (knowingly or not). |
| 26 Secretive | Path of Echoes | Proud of heritage, traditions, native language. |
| 31 Ruthless | Weeping Lady, charity | Concerned with appearances, gossip, peers. |
| 32 Calculating | Antiques, artifacts, curios | Drug / alcohol abuser. Often impaired by their vice. |
| 33 Defiant | Horses, riding | Holds their position due to blackmail. |
| 34 Gracious | Gadgets, new technology | Relies on council to make decisions. |
| 35 Insightful | Weapons collector | Involved with war crimes from the Unity War. |
| 36 Dishonest | Music, instruments, dance | Leads a double life using cover identity. |
| 41 Patient | Hunting, shooting | Black sheep / outcast from family or organization. |
| 42 Vicious | Cooking, gardening | In prison or under noble's house arrest. |
| 43 Sophisticated | Gambling, cards, dice | Well-traveled. Connections outside Doskovl. |
| 44 Paranoid | Natural philosophy | Revolutionary. Plots against the Imperium. |
| 45 Enthusiastic | Drugs, essences, tobacco | Inherited their position. May not deserve / want it. |
| 46 Elitist | Lovers, romance, trysts | Celebrity. Popularized in print / song / theater. |
| 51 Savage | Parties, social events | Scandalous reputation (deserved or not). |
| 52 Cooperative | Exploration, adventure | Surrounded by sycophants, supplicants, toadies. |
| 53 Arrogant | Pets (birds, dogs, cats) | Spotless reputation. Highly regarded. |
| 54 Confident | Craft (leatherwork, etc.) | Bigoted against culture / belief / social class. |
| 55 Vain | Ships, boating | Visionary. Holds radical views for future. |
| 56 Daring | Politics, journalism | Cursed, haunted, harassed by spirits or demon. |
| 61 Volatile | Arcane books, rituals | Intense, unreasonable phobia or loathing. |
| 62 Candid | Spectrology, electroplasma | Extensive education on every scholarly subject. |
| 63 Subtle | Alchemy, medicine | Keeps detailed journals, notes, records, ledgers. |
| 64 Melancholy | Essences, alchemy | Is blindly faithful to an ideal, group, or tradition. |
| 65 Enigmatic | Demon lore, legends | Deeply traditional. Opposed to new ideas. |
| 66 Calm | Pre-cataclysm legends | A fraud. Some important aspect is fabricated. |

NAMES

Adric, Aldo, Amosen, Andrel, Arden, Arlyn, Arquo, Arvus, Ashlyn, Branon, Brace, Brance, Brena, Bricks, Candra, Carissa, Carro, Casslyn, Cavelle, Clave, Corille, Cross, Crowl, Cyrene, Daphnia, Drav, Edlun, Emeline, Grine, Helles, Hix, Holtz, Kamelin, Kelyr, Kobb, Kristov, Laudijs, Lauria, Lenia, Lizete, Lorette, Lucella, Lynthis, Mara, Milos, Morlan, Myre, Narcus, Naria, Nogg, Odrienne, Orlan, Phin, Polonia, Quess, Remira, Ring, Roethe, Sereseth, Sethla, Skannon, Stavrul, Stev, Syra, Talitha, Tesslyn, Thena, Timoth, Tocker, Una, Vaurin, Veleris, Veretta, Vestine, Vey, Violette, Vond, Weaver, Wester, Zamira.

FAMILY NAMES

Ankhayat, Arran, Athanoch, Basran, Boden, Booker, Bowman, Breakiron, Brogan, Clelland, Clermont, Coleburn, Comber, Daawa, Dalmore, Danfield, Dunvil, Farros, Grine, Haig, Helker, Helles, Hellyers, Jayan, Jeduin, Kardera, Karstas, Keel, Kessarin, Kinclaithe, Lomond, Maroden, Michter, Morriston, Penderyn, Pritchard, Rowan, Sevoy, Skelkallan, Skora, Slane, Strangford, Strathmill, Templeton, Tyrconnell, Vale, Walund, Welker.

ALIASES

Bell, Birch, Bricks, Bug, Chime, Coil, Cricket, Cross, Crow, Echo, Flint, Frog, Frost, Grip, Gunner, Hammer, Hook, Junker, Mist, Moon, Nail, Needle, Ogre, Pool, Ring, Ruby, Silver, Skinner, Song, Spur, Tackle, Thistle, Thorn, Tick-Tock, Twelves, Vixen, Whip, Wicker.

DEMON NAMES**DEVILS**

To generate a number between 11 and 66 (for the table on the facing page), roll a six-sided die twice.

GHOST TRAITS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1 | Jealous | Desperate | Violent | Hysterical | Skittish | Fleeting |
| 2 | Curious | Deceptive | Clever | Probing | Knowledgeable | Charming |
| 3 | Prophetic | Insightful | True | Revelatory | Guiding | Instructive |
| 4 | Reactive | Territorial | Dominant | Insistent | Bold | Demanding |
| 5 | Angry | Volatile | Aggressive | Wild | Savage | Vengeful |
| 6 | Mad | Chaotic | Bizarre | Destructive | Insane | Vile |

GHOSTLY SECONDARY EFFECTS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1-3 | Frost, Chill | Cold wind | Faint visions of the local past | Electrical discharge | Weird shadows | Faint echoes |
| 4/5 | Mist, Fog | Rushing wind | Intense visual echoes | Intense magnetism | Disturbing shadows | Thunderous sounds |
| 6 | Freezing fog | Storm winds | Pitch darkness | Lightning | Clutching shadows | Voices in your head |

DEMON FEATURES**DEMON FEATURES**

Black shark eyes
Scales (*onyx, iridescent, crystalline, metallic, etc.*)

Razor-sharp claws

Bony protrusions

Multiple eyes

Lashing tail

Leathery wings

Spines

Dripping ichor

Glowing eyes or markings

Hair or fur (*drifting as if underwater, burning with a cool fire, etc.*)

Feathers

Multiple arms

Tentacles

Hard shell, metallic plates

Lights dim or flare

Plants wither or grow wildly

Mechanisms grind to a halt

Liquid freezes, boils, turns to blood or ashes

DEMON TYPES

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-----------------|---|----------|--------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| ASPECT | Humanoid w/ Bestial or Elemental Features | | | Animal | Monstrous | Amorphous |
| AFFINITY | Sea, Water | Darkness | Earth, Metal | Fire, Smoke | Sky, Stars | Storm, Wind |

DEMON DESIRES

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------|-----------|----------|--------------|------------|----------|-------------|
| 1/2 | Mayhem | Murder | Justice | Corruption | Power | Control |
| 3/4 | Knowledge | Pleasure | Suffering | War | Revenge | Chaos |
| 5/6 | Freedom | Savagery | Manipulation | Deception | Fear | Achievement |

SUMMONED HORRORS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Reeking Tar | Writhing Mass | Radiant Being | Crystalline Shards | Creeping Growth | Animated Stone |
| 2 | Cloud of Burning Ash | Shadow Being | Swarm of Insects | Toxic Cloud | Fiery Being | Liquid Being |
| 3 | Flayed Being | Shambling Rags | Freezing Fire | Impossible Geometry | Monstrous Animal | Shimmering Spheres |
| 4 | Twisting Machinery | Psychic Mist | Throbbing Viscera | Metallic Being | Coil of Thorns | Hypnotic Lights |
| 5 | Oozing Slug | Tremulous Vibrations | Lashing Hooks | Skeleton of Black Glass | Flowing Quicksilver | Clutching Darkness |
| 6 | Floating Octopoid | Cloying Vapors | Swirling Mucus | Serpent Being | Insectoid Being | Consuming Orb |

FORGOTTEN GODS**CULT PRACTICES***Mix and match gods and practices as you see fit*

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 11 The One Within Many | Sacrifice: Fed to specially consecrated beasts / Savaged (eaten?) by frenzied cult mob. |
| 12 The Silver Fire | Sacrifice: Pitted against an anointed champion in death arena. |
| 13 The Rapturous Chord | Sacrifice: Ritually bled upon the sacred altar. |
| 14 The Fallen Star | Sacrifice: Progressively overdosed with mind-expanding drugs. |
| 15 The Lord of the Depths | Sacrifice: Ritually killed and claimed as anointed spirit-champion. |
| 16 The Silent Song | Sacrifice: Slain by arcane means (electrocuted, spirit shattered, death-cursed). |
| 21 The Lady of Thorns | Congregation: An orgy of pleasure (sex, food, dance, music) and/or pain. |
| 22 Our Blood Spilled in Glory | Congregation: Sacred hymns or prayers for days without ceasing. |
| 23 The Ram | Congregation: Occupying a sacred nexus point during an astrological confluence. |
| 24 The Empty Vessel | Congregation: A pilgrimage to a sacred place or being in the deathlands / at sea. |
| 25 The Closed Eye | Congregation: A group vision / dream-quest via essences, drugs, or meditation. |
| 26 The Hand of Sorrow | Congregation: A reenactment / dumb-show of a sacred event. |
| 31 That Which Hungers | Acquisition: A collection of eyes / hearts / blood from mystics or demons. |
| 32 The Thousand Faces | Acquisition: The shards of a shattered sacred object (jewel, sword, skull, stone). |
| 33 The Web of Pain | Acquisition: The original holy writings of the prophet / master / saint. |
| 34 The Pillars of Night | Acquisition: The severed body parts (heads, hands, tongues) of heretics or apostates. |
| 35 The Burned King | Acquisition: Properties aligned with sacred geometry or attuned by mystical events. |
| 36 The Father of the Abyss | Acquisition: The ghosts of prophets / mystics / founders / enemies of the order. |
| 41 The Forsaken Legion | Destruction: Ritual burning of sacred objects (rune-papers, effigies, flesh, hair). |
| 42 The Unbroken Sun | Destruction: Ritual eradication of a spirit or demon. |
| 43 The Revelation | Destruction: The breaking of the seals that keep the god from this world. |
| 44 The Radiant Word | Destruction: Shattering of ritual objects / altars / temples sacred to an enemy order. |
| 45 The Shrouded Queen | Destruction: Eradication of weapons / objects / sites / rituals that can harm the god. |
| 46 The Reconciler | Destruction: Eradication of social / legal / cultural elements that threaten the order. |
| 51 The Cloud of Woe | Consecration: Purification by bathing in sacred fluid (blood, wine, milk, oil, etc.). |
| 52 The Broken Circle | Consecration: Purification of the gates that give passage to the god into this world. |
| 53 The Conqueror | Consecration: Baptism / blessing of an acolyte or object by immersion in spirit well. |
| 54 She Who Slays in Darkness | Consecration: Purify / bless cult followers with tattoos / scarification / mutilation. |
| 55 The Dream Beyond Death | Consecration: Creation of blessed idols / artwork / ritual spaces / artifacts. |
| 56 The Blood Dimmed Tide | Consecration: Wards / runes / spirits bound to shun enemies of the order. |
| 61 The Guardian of the Gates | Desecration: Debasement or defilement of one sworn to an enemy order. |
| 62 The Maw of the Void | Desecration: Corruption of place / object / ritual / tradition to appropriate its power. |
| 63 The Keeper of the Flame | Desecration: Defilement of place / object / ritual to humiliate another order. |
| 64 The Throne of Judgment | Desecration: Manipulation of authorities / institutions to appropriate their power. |
| 65 The Lost Crown | Desecration: Corruption of acolytes to prepare them for transformation. |
| 66 The Golden Stag | Desecration: Mindless, pointless chaos; sewing the seeds of anarchy. |

DOSKVOL: SCORES

| CLIENT / TARGET | WORK |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| CIVILIAN | SKULLDUGGERY |
| 1 Academic or Scholar | 1 Stalking or Surveillance |
| 2 Laborer or Tradesman | 2 Sabotage or Arson |
| 3 Courier or Sailor | 3 Lift or Plant |
| 4 Merchant or Shopkeeper | 4 Poison or Arrange Accident |
| 5 Artist or Writer | 5 Burglary or Heist |
| 6 Doctor or Alchemist | 6 Impersonate or Misdirect |
| CRIMINAL | VIOLENCE |
| 1 Drug Dealer or Supplier | 1 Assassinate |
| 2 Mercenary or Thug | 2 Disappear or Ransom |
| 3 Fence or Gambler | 3 Terrorize or Extort |
| 4 Spy or Informant | 4 Destroy or Deface |
| 5 Smuggler or Thief | 5 Raid or Defend |
| 6 Crime Boss | 6 Rob or Strong-arm |
| POLITICAL | UNDERWORLD |
| 1 Noble or Official | 1 Escort or Security |
| 2 Banker or Captain | 2 Smuggle or Courier |
| 3 Revolutionary or Refugee | 3 Blackmail or Discredit |
| 4 Clergy or Cultist | 4 Con or Espionage |
| 5 Constable or Inspector | 5 Locate or Hide |
| 6 Magistrate or Ward Boss | 6 Negotiate or Threaten |
| STRANGE | UNNATURAL |
| 1 Ghost of (roll again) | 1 Curse or Sanctify |
| 2 Occult Collector | 2 Banish or Summon |
| 3 Vampire or Other Undead | 3 Extract Essence |
| 4 Demon (disguised) | 4 Place or Remove Runes |
| 5 Possessed or Hollow | 5 Perform / Stop Ritual |
| 6 Whisper or Cultist | 6 Hollow or Revivify |

Roll a handful of dice and use the results as you please to help guide your choices from the lists.

TWIST OR COMPLICATION

- 1** An element is a cover for heretic spirit cult practices
 - 2** An occultist has foreseen this job and warned the parties involved
 - 3** Rogue spirits possess some/most/all of the people involved
 - 4** Rogue spirits haunt the location
 - 5** The job furthers a demon's secret agenda
 - 6** The job furthers a vampire's secret agenda
-
- 1** An element is a front for a criminal enterprise
 - 2** A dangerous gang uses the location
 - 3** The job is a trap laid by your enemies
 - 4** The job is a test for another job
 - 5** The job furthers a merchant lord's secret agenda
 - 6** The job furthers a crime boss's secret agenda
-
- 1** The job requires travel by electro-rail
 - 2** Must visit the deathlands to do the job
 - 3** The job requires sea travel
 - 4** The location moves around (site changes, it's on a vehicle, etc.)
 - 5** The job furthers a revolutionary's secret agenda
 - 6** The job furthers a city official's secret agenda

CONNECTED TO A PERSON...

- 1** PC Friend
- 2** PC Rival
- 3** PC Vice purveyor
- 4** CREW Contact
- 5** CITY Doskvol notable
- 6** WEIRD Ghost, Demon, God

...AND Factions

| | |
|--|--|
| 11 The Unseen | 41 The Silver Nails |
| 12 Lord Scurlock | 42 The Hive |
| 13 The Circle of Flame | 43 The Crows |
| 14 The Lampblacks | 44 The Red Sashes |
| 15 The Dimmer Sisters | 45 The Grinders |
| 16 The Billhooks | 46 The Wraiths |
| 21 The Gray Cloaks | 51 Ulf Ironborn |
| 22 The Fog Hounds | 52 The Lost |
| 23 City Council or The Foundation | 53 Ironhook Prison |
| 24 Spirit Wardens | 54 Bluecoats or Inspectors |
| 25 Imperial Military | 55 Laborers or Servants |
| 26 Sparkwrights | 56 Cyphers or Ink Rakes |
| 31 A Consulate | 61 Ministry of Preservation |
| 32 Leviathan Hunters | 62 Sailors or Dockers |
| 33 Gondoliers or Cabbies | 63 Rail Jacks or The Brigade |
| 34 The Church of Ecstasy | 64 The Weeping Lady |
| 35 The Forgotten Gods | 65 Path of Echoes or Reconciled |
| 36 Skovlander Refugees | 66 Deathlands Scavengers |



THE SHATTERED ISLES

AKOROS

A land of dark, petrified forests and rocky hills. The rich coastal cities get their wealth from leviathan hunting and from mining colonies deep inland. The Akorosi are sometimes called “Imperials” since the Imperium began there. They are generally fair-skinned and dark-haired.

SEVEROS

A land of windswept plains, covered in dark scrub and thorny growths. Outside the Imperial cities on the coast, some native Serverosi still live in free tribes, scavenging the death-lands on their ghost-hunting horses. They are generally brown-skinned and dark-haired.

IRUVIA

A land of black deserts, obsidian mountains, and raging volcanoes. Some say that positions of power are openly held by demons in Iruvia. The people are generally amber-skinned and dark-haired.

THE DAGGER ISLES

A tropical archipelago covered in dense jungle growth; now turned dark and twisted from the strange magic of the cataclysm. Some say that the people there live without lightning barriers. How do they manage that? Native islanders are generally copper-skinned and dark-haired.

SKOVLAN

A ragged land of cold mountains and rough tundra. Skovlan was the last holdout against Imperial control. They are generally pale-skinned and fair-haired or red-haired.

TYCHEROS

A far off land, disconnected from the Empire. People say the Tycherosi (rudely called “Strangers”) have demon blood in their lineage.

A NOTE ABOUT THE WORLD

The Shattered Isles have wildly different climates due to magical forces left over from the cataclysm. The “water” of the Void Sea seems to be composed of opaque black ink, but it’s possible to see constellations of shimmering stars far below the surface. The sun is a dim ember, providing only meager twilight at dawn and dusk; leaving the world in darkness otherwise.

This was once a storybook fantasy world of magic and wonders, which was destroyed and an industrial civilization was built on top of the ruins.

Don’t expect scientific realism here.

TYCHEROS



KICKSTARTER BACKERS

Thank you so much for your incredible support to bring this project to life. We couldn't have done it without you!

1Soni, 9Littlebees, 9Thlevel, >Wbm, A Fool's Fool, A Spooky Ghost, A W, A. C., A. J. Wright, A.p. Klosky, Aarin, Aaron, Aaron, Aaron Abendroth, Aaron Alberg, Aaron Berger, Aaron Burkett, Aaron Clarke, Aaron Donogh, Aaron Dykstra, Aaron Friesen, Aaron Jones, Aaron Lavack, Aaron Moller, Aaron Nowack, Aaron Ross Powell, Aaron Roudabush, Aaron Sapp, Aaron Shaver, Aaron Sturgill, Aaron Turbo, Aarre Vuorio, Abhishek Ray, Abraham Simons, Aceobjection, Achim Oppelt, Ack, Acritarche, Ada Fairweather, Adam, Adam, Adam Anderson, Adam Blinkinsop, Adam Boisvert, Adam Brown, Adam Byström, Adam C, Adam Crossingham, Adam D. Howard, Adam Day, Adam Dray, Adam Drew, Adam Farnsworth, Adam Flynn, Adam Huffman, Adam Kennedy, Adam Koebel, Adam Lugibill, Adam M H, Adam M., Adam Makey, Adam Marler, Adam Mcconnaughey, Adam Meyers, Adam Milne, Adam Minnie, Adam Muszkiewicz, Adam Neisius, Adam Norwick, Adam Rajski, Adam Reif, Adam Saleh, Adam Schwaninger, Adam Stein, Adam Thornton, Adam Tolson, Adams Tower, Adel Zekri, Adilos, Adrian, Adrian, Adrian George, Adrian Klein, Adrian Long, Adrian Price, Adrian Smith, Adrian Sweatman, Adrian Thoen, Adrian Zollinger, Adriano Parisi, Adrienne, Adumbratus, Ahri, Aidan Carr, Aidan Turner, Ajarkeen, Ajit George, Akiv, Al Billings, Alan, Alan Barclay, Alan De Smet, Alan Edens, Alan Twigg, Alasdair Boyd, Alasdair Watson, Albert, Albert Jen, Alberto De Jesus, Alden Strock, Aleksandar Saranac, Aleksandr Ermakov, Alessandro Ricco' Alex, Alex, Alex, Alex Blue, Alex Broque, Alex Chvatal, Alex Defreese, Alex Dingle, Alex Ganong, Alex Goodman, Alex Greene, Alex Gwilt-Cox, Alex Kracht, Alex Manduley, Alex Norris, Alex Stone-Tharp, Alex Swanson, Alex Utter, Alex Wallace, Alex Whittaker, Alexander B Grover, Alexander Engel, Alexander George Prinz, Alexander Gräfe, Alexander Kimball, Alexander Kiok, Alexander Motola, Alexander R. Corbett, Alexander Tigwell, Alexander Zinzer, Alexandra Logan, Alexandra Mercer, Alexandre Charette Trépanier, Alexandre G, Alexandre Perras, Alexey Egorov, Alexh, Alexis Cole, Alexis Lamiable, Alfie Kirk, Alfred Rudzki Hitchcock, Alfredo Amatriain, Alfredo Tarancón, Algimantas Rauduve, Alicia Gugele, Alison Vitorio De Lima, Alistair Goodward, Allan, Allen Boudreault, Allen Varney, Alleyne Dickens, Alison Milwid, Alloyed, Alok Baikadi, Amber Haase, Amber Morefield, Amie Jackson, Amraphel, Amy Brighter, Analog Games, Anastiel, Anderland, Anders Granström, Anders Hällzon, Anders Håkon Gaut, Anders Smith, Anders Sørensen, Andi C., Andre Poenitz, Andrea, Andrea D. Barnes, Andrea Dixon, Andrea "Lord Lance" Parducci, Andreas Kjelgaard, Andreas Lieberoth, Andreas Rugård Klæsøe, Andreas Sewe, Andrej Voskresenskiy, Andres Ernesto Aguilar, Andrew, Andrew A. Ernst, Andrew Betts, Andrew Binsted, Andrew Butcher, Andrew C. Durston, Andrew Castner, Andrew Cherry, Andrew Cowie, Andrew E. C. Head, Andrew Eaton, Andrew Eddey, Andrew Esselaar, Andrew Feland, Andrew Findlay, Andrew G. Smith, Andrew Gatlin, Andrew Hackard, Andrew Jensen, Andrew Kenrick, Andrew Linstrom, Andrew M, Andrew Matchett, Andrew Mcmenemy, Andrew Medeiros, Andrew Moreton, Andrew Morton, Andrew Moss, Andrew Novak, Andrew Piseck, Andrew Ramseyer, Andrew Robinson, Andrew Rosenheim, Andrew Shields, Andrew Speigel, Andrew Stephens, Andrew Stoddard, Andrew W, Andrew Williams, Andrew Young, Andrew "Fish" Popowich, Andrew221, Andri Erlingsson, Andrzej Krakowian, Andrzej Stój, Andy Buell, Andy Evans, Andy Kitkowski, Anestis Kozakis, Angelic Despot, Angelo De Stephano, Angelo Hankes, Angelo Pileggi, Angstyface, Angus Abranson / Chronicle City, Angus Macdonald, Aniket Schneider, Anime Dave, Anita Murray, Anker Foss, Anna Ravenscroft, Anne Warren, Annie Bellet, Anonymous1453, Antero Garcia, Anthony, Anthony Howell, Anthony McCabe, Anthony Perkins, Anthony Yno Combrelxelle, Antifinity, Antirrhesis, Antoine Boegli, Antoine Fournier, Antoine Pempie, Anton Malmrot, Antonio Amato, Antonio Rodriguez, Antti Kirjavainen, Antti Luukkonen, Anyone Home, Aparna Rajpurkar, Apocryphal Lore, Aquarhead Lou, Aragaer, Aragorn Weinberger, Arakooser, Araselle Vivenza, Arboricopom, Arc Dream Publishing, Archeform, Ariakas, Arianna Gonzales, Aric Fehrenbacher, Ariel Jaffee, Arkanum, Armin Sykes, Aron Peterfy, Arseny, Artemis Hanzo, Arthur B, Arthur Breon, Arthur Le, Arthur McMahon, Arthur Perkins, Arthur Von Eschen, Artifice Knight, Asamuraiinthestorm, Asenrg, Ash Walter, Ashleigh, Ashmire13, Askel, Asmeil, Asmodeusdm, Astrid Whittaker-Dureau, Asurber, Atlichtoatl, Audio Mike Amman, August, Austin F, Austin Fristman, Austin McKee, Austin Walker, Austin Habershaw, Avi Public, Aviv M. Icel, Axel Gotteland, Axel H Davidsson, Azaquor, Aziraphale, Baji Naji, Barac Baker Wiley, Bardlebee, Barry Cook, Barry Stevens, Barry T Snyder, Bart Picca, Basement Jockeys, Basileus, Bastian Dornauf, Bastien

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