

Fate's Edge: Game Master's Guide

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Weight of Choice

Welcome, Game Master. You hold a unique role in **Fate's Edge**. You are not a storyteller in solitude, nor a neutral referee. You are the **weaver of consequences**, the **architect of a living world**, and the **guide on a path where every choice echoes**. Your task is to breathe life into a realm of ancient magic, fallen empires, and stubborn, vibrant cultures—and then to let that world truly respond to the players' ambitions.

This is a game where power demands a price, where the past never truly sleeps, and where a single decision can reshape a nation or end an age. From the marble forums of Ecktoria to the mist-drenched fens of the Mistlands, the world is alive with stories waiting to be told. Your job is to provide the stage, set the stakes, and embrace the beautiful, chaotic ripple effects of player agency.

A World Alive with Consequences

In **Fate's Edge**, the fiction is the final authority. The rules in this book are not chains to bind your imagination, but **tools to give weight to your stories**. They provide a consistent framework for adjudicating risk, tracking progress, and ensuring that success and failure both drive the narrative forward in compelling ways.

Think of yourself as a conductor. The players provide the melody with their characters' actions and ambitions. You provide the harmony and rhythm with the world's response. The rules are your sheet music—a guide to creating a cohesive, dramatic piece, but one that allows for improvisation and adaptation.

Your judgment is the cornerstone of the game. If a rule doesn't serve the moment, change it. If a player's creative idea deserves to succeed, find a way to make it work. The ultimate goal is a collaborative, engaging story that everyone at the table helps to create.

The Core Philosophy: Narrative First

At the heart of **Fate's Edge** is a simple, powerful idea: **mechanics serve the story**. A dice roll is never just a binary pass/fail check. It is an event that changes the fictional landscape.

- A **Clean Success** means the plan works as intended—the guard is bribed, the lock clicks open, the argument sways the crowd.
- A **Success with Cost** means you get what you want, but the world pushes back—the guard takes the bribe but becomes a future liability, the lock opens but the mechanism is damaged, the crowd is swayed but a rival noble takes note.

- A **Partial** means you're faced with a difficult choice—you can open the lock but it will take time and risk discovery, or you can sway part of the crowd but alienate another faction.
- A **Complication** means the situation changes dramatically—a new threat appears, a hidden factor is revealed, the stakes are raised.

This approach ensures that every roll matters. The story never stalls; it evolves.

Risk is the Engine of Drama

Fate's Edge is built on the principle that **meaningful risk creates compelling drama**. Safety is boring. It is when characters have something to lose—their reputation, their allies, their ideals, their lives—that their actions become truly heroic or tragically memorable.

Your primary tool for managing this risk is the **Story Beat (SB)** economy. When the dice show a 1, it's not merely a failure; it's the world reacting. The GM gains SB to introduce complications, escalate existing threats, or reveal hidden dangers. SB are not punishments; they are the fuel for an unpredictable, responsive narrative.

A successful sword swing might defeat an opponent, but a Story Beat spent could mean the blade is notched and less effective next time, or that the defeat draws the attention of a more powerful foe. The drama continues.

Characters Who Change the World

Character growth in **Fate's Edge** is not about accumulating abstract power. It is about **meaningful growth** rooted in the story. Players earn **Experience Points (XP)** by engaging with the world's challenges and complexities. They spend XP to improve their capabilities, acquire assets like a ship or a spy network, or unlock unique cultural talents.

This means character advancement is directly tied to the narrative. A character becomes a legendary commander by leading armies, not by killing monsters in a vacuum. They become a master wizard by uncovering forbidden lore and surviving the backlash, not by memorizing spells from a textbook. As the GM, you are the curator of this growth, presenting challenges that allow characters to evolve in ways that feel earned and impactful.

Your Toolkit

To help you guide the story, **Fate's Edge** provides a set of elegant, interconnected tools:

- **The Dice Pool:** The core mechanic. Players roll a number of d10s equal to an Attribute + a Skill. The highest single die determines the degree of success, while any 1s generated provide Story Beats (SB) to the GM.
- **Position Effect:** Before a roll, you set the character's **Position** (Controlled, Risky, or Desperate), which defines the stakes of failure, and their **Effect**, which describes what a clean success will achieve.
- **Clocks:** Visual trackers for ongoing challenges. A 4-segment clock might represent picking a complex lock, while an 8-segment **Campaign Clock** could track the rise of a villainous faction.

- **The Deck of Consequences:** A standard 52-card deck used to generate inspired, thematic complications when SB are spent. The suit determines the nature of the complication (Social, Physical, etc.), adding a layer of fortune and flavor.

These tools are designed to be learned quickly and used intuitively, getting out of the way so you and your players can focus on the story.

How to Use This Book

This book is your guide to running the game.

- **Chapters 1-3** cover the core principles and basic procedures.
- **Chapters 4-6** delve into advanced systems for conflict, travel, and long-term play.
- **Chapters 7-9** provide guidance for high-tier campaigns, world-building, and the specific setting of the Amaranthine Sea region.
- **Chapters 10-11** offer practical advice for running scenarios and a comprehensive appendix of tools and tables.

You don't need to memorize everything. Use this book as a reference. Return to it when you need clarification or inspiration. The most important chapters to internalize are those on the core philosophy (this chapter) and the basic action resolution (Chapter 2).

Flavor is Free

Players and GMs: Remember that in **Fate's Edge**, **flavor is free!**

This means you can add descriptive details, cultural elements, and atmospheric touches to your actions without spending resources or requiring a dice roll. Want your Vhasian duelist to parry with a flourish taught in the royal fencing schools? Go ahead! Want to describe the eerie silence of a Valewood ruin when searching for clues? Perfect!

Flavor enriches the narrative and makes the world feel real and lived-in. It doesn't change the mechanical outcome, but it defines the **how** and the **why**. The GM should encourage this and reciprocate by painting vivid pictures of the world.

Mechanics determine success or failure, but flavor determines the story we tell about it.

A Guide for Veterans: Fate's Edge in a Nutshell

If you're experienced with other RPGs, here's a quick translation guide for how **Fate's Edge** handles common concepts:

Traditional RPG Concept	Fate's Edge Approach
Ability Scores & Skills	Attributes (Body, Wits, etc.) + Skills (Melee, Lore, etc.) form a dice pool.
Skill Checks	Roll Attribute+Skill dice pool. Highest die vs. Difficulty Value (DV). Any 1s give the GM Story Beats (SB).
Hit Points / Health	Harm Track for injuries. Fatigue for exhaustion. Consequences are narrative and mechanical.
Combat Rounds	Fiction-first. Actions are resolved based on narrative timing, not rigid initiative.
Spell Slots / Mana	Magic uses the same core system. Powerful spells may require extra time, resources, or risk generating more SB.
Saving Throws	Roll an appropriate Attribute+Skill combo to resist a effect (e.g., Body+Resolve to resist poison).
Experience & Leveling Up	Gain XP through play. Spend XP to increase Attributes/Skills, acquire Talents, or buy Assets. Growth is player-directed.

The key difference is a consistent, unified mechanic applied across all types of challenges, focused on narrative outcomes.

Begin the Journey

Your role is a privilege and a creative challenge. You are a facilitator, a fan of the player characters, and the keeper of a world that will challenge and surprise them. Trust the rules to handle the tension, trust your players to drive the story, and trust yourself to weave it all together.

Now, take a deep breath. Shuffle the deck. Let the dice fall where they may.

It's time to guide the edge of fate.

Chapter 2

Running the Game: Core Procedures

In **Fate's Edge**, the game flows through a series of **actions, consequences, and escalating stakes**. As the GM, your role is to guide this flow—not by dictating outcomes, but by **framing scenes, interpreting rolls, and spending Story Beats** to keep tension alive. This chapter walks you through the core procedures that define play, from the moment a player declares an action to the fallout that follows.

2.1 Scene Framing: Start with Stakes

Every scene begins with a question: **What's at risk?** Not just for the characters, but for the world, the mission, or the fragile alliances they've built. As the GM, you frame the scene by establishing:

- **Position:** Is the action *Controlled*, *Risky*, or *Desperate*?
- **Effect:** What happens on a success? What changes?
- **Stakes:** What is gained—or lost—if things go wrong?

A scene in the **Mistlands** might begin with the PCs crossing a flooded causeway at dusk. The bell-line hums with tension. The GM sets the position as *Risky*—slippery stones, rising mist, and the distant echo of a wraith-call. A failure here could mean separation, exposure, or worse.

2.1.1 Position Descriptions

- **Controlled:** You act on your terms. Complications are minor, setbacks are rare.
- **Risky:** You act under pressure. Success is possible, but failure brings a cost.
- **Desperate:** The odds are stacked against you. Success is hard-won, and failure is dramatic.

Use position to guide the fiction. A controlled entry into a noble salon in **Vhasia** might allow the PCs to charm or intimidate without resistance. A desperate one—perhaps after triggering an alarm—means blades are drawn before words.

2.2 Adjudicating Rolls: The Core Resolution Cycle

When a player rolls, they are not simply trying to "beat" a number. They are engaging with the world. This section guides you through the complete resolution process.

2.2.1 Step-by-Step Roll Resolution

1. **Player declares action and approach** (Attribute + Skill).
2. **GM sets Difficulty Value (DV)** based on stakes and fiction.
3. **Player rolls pool of d10s.**
4. **Count successes (6+) and Story Beats (1s).**
5. **Compare successes to DV** and apply Outcome Matrix.
6. **GM spends SB** or draws from the Deck of Consequences.

[Difficulty Ladder (Set Before the Roll)] IX

DV When to Use

-
- 2 Routine: Clear intent, modest stakes, controlled environment
 - 3 Pressured: Time pressure, mild resistance, partial information
 - 4 Hard: Hostile conditions, active opposition, precise timing required
 - 5+ Extreme: Multiple constraints, high precision, dramatic failure possible

A DV should reflect not just mechanical difficulty, but narrative weight. Climbing a wall? That's routine. Climbing it while pursued by Aeler vault-wardens? That's pressured—or worse.

[Outcome Matrix] IX

Result GM Guidance

-
- $S \geq DV$ and $C = 0$ Clean Success: Deliver the intent crisply
 - $S \geq DV$ and $C > 0$ Success & Cost: Grant the intent; spend/bank SB for complications
 - $0 < S < DV$ Partial: Progress with a fork or complication. Award one boon to the player.
 - $S = 0$ Miss: No progress. Cash/bank SB, award two boons to player
-

2.3 Fail Forward: Every Roll Matters

When you **MISS** on a *significant action*, you gain **2 Boons** and one on a **PARTIAL** success. A meaningful action is one that:

1. follows the standard procedure (declared intent and approach, DV set, then roll),
2. has **stated stakes** before the roll (what changes on success; what bites on failure), and
3. lands a **real consequence** now (the GM spends or banks SB, applies a condition, or advances a thread).

2.3.1 Important Notes

- Rolling a **1** always creates **SB** for the GM. Re-rolling **1s** does not remove SB already generated.
- **No Boon** for rehearsal, null-risk probes, or repeated identical attempts without a new approach, position, or stakes.
- **Controlled** tests with trivial fallout do not award Boons; they're for information or positioning, not currency.

2.3.2 Anti-Fishing Measures

If Boons are spiking, use one or more:

- **Once/Scene Cap:** At most **2 Boons from failures** per character per scene (further misses still create SB).
- **Repetition Rule:** Same approach + same stakes in the same scene cannot award another Boon.

2.3.3 Example

Picking a lock under watch (*Risky*, DV 3). Stakes are set: success opens the door; a miss trips the alarm. The roll **MISS**es; the GM spends 2 SB to start the alarm and tick *Guards Incoming*. The player gains **2 Boons** from meaningful failure.

2.3.4 Boon Sharing

Players may gift **1 Boon per scene** to an ally with a brief narrative justification.

- **Bonded Allies:** If characters share a bond, they may gift **2 Boons per scene**.
- **Assistance:** Boons may be spent to enhance an ally's roll (counts as assistance).
- **Campaign Events:** Major victories or setbacks may generate shared Boons for the party.

Table Use: Require a short story beat for each gift. Normal Boon limits apply. Track shared Boons openly. **GM Notes:** Reward generosity with extra opportunities, introduce occasional complications from dependence, and balance group vs. individual needs.

2.4 Story Beats: The Engine of Drama

Every time a player rolls a **1**, a Story Beat is generated. These are not mere penalties—they are narrative levers. Spend them to:

- Escalate a threat (drawing more enemies, raising the stakes).
- Drain resources (time, gear, positioning).
- Reveal hidden dangers or betrayals.
- Cause collateral damage or unintended consequences.

Story Beats should **push the story forward**, not grind it to a halt. Use them to add pressure, not to punish.

[SB Spend Menu] IX

SB Cost	Example Complications
1 SB	Minor pressure: noise, trace, +1 Supply segment, brief distraction
2 SB	Moderate setback: alarm raised, lose position/cover, lesser foe appears
3 SB	Serious trouble: reinforcements arrive, key gear breaks, tactical disadvantage
4+ SB	Major turn: trap springs, authority intervenes, scene shifts dramatically

2.4.1 When to Draw from the Deck of Consequences

The Deck of Consequences is a powerful tool for **thematic consistency**. When a player generates SB, you may choose to:

- **Direct Spend:** Translate SB into consequences/rail ticks immediately.
- **Deck Draw:** Draw up to **min(SB, 3)** cards and **synthesize a single twist** guided by suit and highest rank.

Never do both for the same roll. If the drawn card contradicts established fiction, reinterpret or redraw to fit the suit and tone.

2.4.2 High-Tier SB Sinks

For 3–6+ SB spends that move the world (reputation cascades, faction instability, resonance, prophecy), see the stand-alone *High SB Sinks* handout. A good default: at end of leg, **3 SB** → **tick 1 Front**.

2.4.3 Banking & Cashing SB

- Banked SB should pay off within the same scene or arc.
- Avoid nickel-and-diming. Prefer one memorable complication over many petty penalties.

2.5 Scene Management Tools

2.5.1 Scene Starters and Hooks

To keep the game moving, always open a scene with a strong hook:

- "The alarm bells ring as you step into the courtyard."
- "A courier collapses at your feet, clutching a sealed scroll."
- "The tide is turning—the ghost-ferry won't wait."

Let the players react. Let the world respond. And always—**follow the consequences**.

2.5.2 Setting Stakes Fast (Cheat Prompts)

- If this goes right, what changes?
- If this goes wrong, what bites back?

2.6 Bond-Driven Resource Generation

Players may earn boons by taking significant actions to aid bonded allies while providing intricate descriptions of how their bonds motivate their actions.

2.6.1 Adjudication Guidelines

- **Mutual Bond:** Verify the player and ally share a defined bond
- **Intricate Description:** The description must meaningfully reference the bond's nature
- **Significant Aid:** The assistance must be substantial, not routine help
- **Fiction First:** The bond must genuinely explain the character's motivation

2.6.2 GM Discretion

- Deny the boon if the action is trivial or the bond reference is superficial
- Encourage creative bond references that deepen character relationships
- Consider allowing this even when the aiding action fails, if the bond motivation was genuine

This mechanic reinforces collaborative play and character relationship development while providing meaningful mechanical rewards for roleplaying.

2.7 Integrated Combat Procedures

Combat in **Fate's Edge** follows the same core procedures as all other actions, but with specific applications for violent conflict. Every combat action generates potential for both triumph and complication, with consequences that cascade through the same economy as all other challenges.

2.7.1 Combat Resolution Procedure

1. **Declare Action:** Player states intent and approach (Attribute + Skill)
2. **Set Position:** GM sets Controlled, Risky, or Desperate based on tactical situation
3. **Roll Dice:** Roll pool = Attribute + Skill (takes 1 Player Turn)
4. **Count Results:** 6+ = Success, 1 = Story Beat (SB)
5. **Apply Outcome:** Use standard Outcome Matrix
6. **Manage Consequences:** GM spends SB or draws from Consequences Deck

2.7.2 Combat-Specific Position Applications

- **Controlled:** Advantageous position, minor consequences (flanking, higher ground, surprised foe)
- **Risky:** Even odds, moderate consequences (evenly matched, contested terrain)
- **Desperate:** Disadvantaged, severe consequences (outnumbered, wounded, poor positioning)

[Combat Consequence Types by Suit] IX

Suit Complication Themes

Hearts Morale, fear, command breakdown, psychological pressure, loyalty tests
 Spades Physical harm, positioning changes, weapon status, tactical wounds, cover loss
 Clubs Resource depletion, gear damage, fatigue, ammunition issues, supply problems
 Diamonds Environmental hazards, reinforcements, terrain changes, unexpected events

[Harm Integration with SB Economy] IX

Harm Level Effects & SB Generation

Harm 1 -1 die to related actions; generate 1 SB on next 2 rolls
 Harm 2 -1 die to most actions; generate 1 SB on next roll until treated
 Harm 3 -2 dice to relevant actions; generate 2 SB on next roll; incapacitation risk

[Tactical Clocks] IX

Clock Type Purpose & Triggers

Mob Overwhelm [6] Enemy numbers become advantage; tick when outflanked or surrounded
 Fatigue Spiral [4] Exhaustion affects performance; tick after strenuous actions or wounds
 Morale Collapse [6] Fear undermines effectiveness; tick after leader falls or shocking events
 Environmental [8] Terrain/fire/building failure; tick after destructive actions or time pressure

2.7.3 Position Dynamics in Combat

Position can shift during combat based on SB spending and narrative triggers:

- **GM Spend (1 SB):** Shift position one step worse for current action
- **Player Spend (1 Boon):** Shift position one step better or cancel GM shift
- **Narrative Triggers:** Flanking, reinforcement arrival, environmental changes, superior leverage

2.7.4 Magic Combat Integration

Spellcasting in combat feeds the same consequence economy:

- Channel/Weave Backlash SB applies to tactical situation
- Spells can shift position, create tactical clocks, or generate combat consequences
- Magic consequences cascade through existing combat systems

2.7.5 Asset/Follower Combat Integration

- **Follower Risk:** 2+ SB spent in combat can endanger assisting followers
- **Asset Compromise:** Combat in certain locations can damage relevant assets
- **Offensive Activation:** 1 Boon activates asset for combat advantage
- **Initiative Actions:** Followers can take combat-relevant independent actions

2.7.6 Combat Outcome Matrix Application

Same as standard resolution, but consequences are combat-specific:

- **Clean Success:** Intent achieved with no tactical complications
- **Success & Cost:** Intent achieved, but GM spends SB for combat consequences
- **Partial:** Progress with tactical fork (accept cost OR concede ground). Award one Boon.
- **Miss:** No progress; GM spends SB for combat consequences. Award two Boons.

2.8 30-Second Adjudication Loop

Use this fast procedure to keep the game flowing:

1. **Clarify:** "What do you want, and how?"
2. **Set Stakes:** "If it works, what changes? If it fails, what bites?" Start Risky/Standard unless fiction says otherwise.
3. **Roll & Read:** Count successes (6+) and SB (1s). Compare to DV.
4. **Spend One Beat Well:** Cash SB on one memorable twist or tick a relevant Clock.
5. **Push Forward:** Describe how the fiction changes; ask "Who moves next?"

2.9 Position + Effect in Action

A player declares a **Risky** action to **pick a lock** while guards patrol above. They roll **Wits + Skullduggery**, get 3 successes and 1 Story Beat.

The GM consults the Outcome Matrix: **Success & Cost**. The lock clicks—but a guard's bootstep halts above. The GM spends 1 SB to add tension: the patrol changes direction, heading toward the PCs' position.

2.10 Common Pitfalls and Solutions

[Troubleshooting Common Issues] IX

Issue	Solution
Over-cranking SB	Halve SB spends temporarily or convert to visible Clocks
Clock Sprawl	Merge redundant Clocks; scenes need only 2-3 active Clocks
Tag Paralysis	Paraphrase: "Sounds like [TAG]. DV 3. Want to roll?"
Rules Drift	Pick ruling that keeps flow, note TODO for post-session reconciliation
Boon Inflation	Enforce 2 Boon/scene cap from failures; use Repetition Rule

Chapter 3

Managing Resources

In **Fate's Edge**, resources are not mere numbers etched on parchment—they are **living, breathing elements of the fiction** that pulse with the same vitality as the characters who wield them. From the last precious sip of water in the sun-scorched sands of Akilan to the fragile loyalty of a Ykrul war-band chanting beneath blood-red banners, every resource tells a story, and every story demands its price. As the GM, you are the keeper of these vital threads, the weaver of scarcity and abundance. This chapter illuminates how to manage and narrate the systems that fuel both mortal ambitions and epic campaigns.

Supply Clock: The Pulse of Survival

The **Supply Clock** beats as a shared heartbeat for the entire party, tracking their access to life's essentials—food that sustains, water that quenches, gear that endures, and the logistical support that separates civilization from chaos. This is no sterile inventory system; it is a **narrative lever** that tightens tension when the party finds themselves isolated in whispering forests, pressed by pursuing foes, or cut off from the comforting glow of hearth fires.

Supply Clock States

[Supply Clock Conditions] IX

Segments Filled	Narrative Effects
-----------------	-------------------

0 (Full)	The party moves with confidence, well-equipped and prepared for the journey ahead
1 (Low)	Minor complications emerge: bland rations, damaged arrows, thinning waterskins, fraying ropes
2 (Dangerous)	Each character gains Fatigue as exhaustion and scarcity take their toll
3 (Empty)	Severe penalties manifest—starvation, dehydration, equipment failure become imminent threats

Filling the Clock

The Supply Clock fills when the world turns against the party's preparations:

- Extended travel through hostile lands without proper provisioning
- The GM spends 2+ SB on logistics failures or environmental hardships

- The party chooses to travel light for speed or stealth advantage
- Failed Survival or Craft rolls related to hunting, foraging, or repair

Emptying the Clock

Hope returns when the party finds respite:

- Reaching civilization resets the clock to Full—the comfort of inns and markets
- Group Survival check (Wits + Survival, DV 2) under favorable conditions clears 1 segment
- Downtime spent in relative safety removes 1 segment through rest and recovery
- Successful provisioning actions—a good hunt, discovered cache—can reduce segments

Example: A week-long sea passage across the Dolmis Straits with uncertain winds that whisper of storms. A failed Navigation roll causes the GM to spend 2 SB—filling two segments as supplies spoil in the damp hold. The party is now at Low Supply, tasting the bitterness of hardtack and warm water. A second failed roll against contrary winds fills another segment—Dangerously Low. Fatigue sets in like a creeping frost. The sea, once a path to glory, now gnaws at their endurance with salt-crusted lips.

Fatigue: The Weight of the World

Fatigue represents the cumulative toll of journeying through a world that rarely offers comfort—the **exhaustion that seeps into bones, the hunger that hollows cheeks, the strain that clouds judgment**. Each level of Fatigue forces the character to **re-roll one success** on their next action, as weariness undermines their competence.

Fatigue Effects

[Fatigue Progression] IX

Fatigue Level		Physical and Narrative Manifestations
1 Fatigue	Re-roll one success:	Minor exhaustion, distractedness, slight impairment
2 Fatigue	Re-roll one success cumulative:	Noticeable weariness, slower reactions, aching muscles
3 Fatigue	Re-roll two successes:	Significant exhaustion, labored movement, mental fog settling in
4 Fatigue	Collapse, KO, or spiritual break:	Character falls unconscious or becomes incapacitated

Clearing Fatigue

Recovery requires genuine respite:

- A night's rest with adequate Supply removes 1 Fatigue—the healing power of true rest
- Fatigue cannot be removed while the party is Dangerously Low or Out of Supply—exhaustion compounds scarcity
- Medical attention (Presence + Heal, DV 2) during downtime can remove 1 Fatigue through proper care

Narrative Note: Fatigue is not just physical—it can reflect the mental strain of constant vigilance, the grief of lost companions, or the spiritual exhaustion from battling unnatural forces. A failed ritual might leave a caster **Fatigue 2** from the metaphysical backlash alone, their soul bruised by unseen energies.

Harm and Fatigue Conversion

Tracks & Caps

- **Fatigue Track:** boxes equal to Body.
- **Harm Levels:** Harm 1 (minor), Harm 2 (serious), Harm 3 (critical/incapacitated).

Fatigue → Harm Conversion Whenever you would mark Fatigue and your Fatigue Track fills (all boxes marked):

1. Increase your Harm by one level (e.g., 0→Harm 1, Harm 1→Harm 2, Harm 2→Harm 3).
2. Clear all Fatigue (erase the Fatigue Track back to 0).

This conversion can occur multiple times in a scene. Effects of Harm tier (disadvantage, action limits, incapacitation at Harm 3, etc.) follow your existing rules.

Followers and Assets: Power Beyond the Self

In Fate's Edge, players can invest XP into **Followers** and **Assets**—tools that extend their reach beyond personal skill. These are not mere stat blocks—they are **story agents** with their own motivations, risks, and narrative arcs that intertwine with the player's destiny.

Followers: On-Scene Allies

Followers are **on-screen allies** who stand beside you in danger—loyal swords, cunning scouts, faithful apprentices. They are bought with XP and tracked by a **Cap** (their maximum assist bonus), representing their competence and dedication.

Cost: A follower with Specialty Cap C costs C² XP. Downtime = 1–3 days to recruit, train, and build trust.

Assisting in Scenes

Followers assist by adding their expertise to your endeavors:

- Assist dice come from the helper's capabilities, not the leader's pool
- Total Assist on any roll (from any sources) remains hard-capped at +3, representing practical limits of coordination
- Exception: The "Exceptional Coordination" Talent allows one follower to provide +4 assist dice through preternatural synergy
- When applicable, the follower adds help dice equal to **min(C, the helper's relevant Skill)**, capped at +3 dice
- Slot Limit: Only one follower may assist a given action—too many cooks spoil the broth

Follower Initiative Actions

Once per scene (across the party), one on-screen follower may take a small independent action that demonstrates their initiative:

- **Scout & Signal** — Change an ally's next action position to Controlled through timely warning
- **Distract & Draw** — Reduce a kinetic rail (Hunt/Escape/Hazard) by -1 tick through clever diversion
- **Fetch & Carry** — Move a small object through danger when moments count

Cost: Mark Exposure +1 or Harm 1 on that follower—bravery risks consequences.

Follower Upkeep

Relationships require maintenance:

- Each Downtime, pay XP equal to Cap or spend a Scene tending the relationship—neglect erodes loyalty
- **Risk:** If the GM spends 2+ Story Beats on an action you take with assistance, they may mark Exposure or Harm on the follower instead of applying other consequences, if fictionally appropriate
- **Off-Screen Capability:** Once per downtime, a follower with Cap 3 or higher can solve one significant problem but generates 1 SB for party. The GM must describe how the follower's action creates story consequences for the SB generated

Follower Condition

Followers track their own trials through **Exposure** and **Harm**:

Exposure — Heat, attention, stress, or narrative pressure placed upon the follower—the cost of being noticed

Harm — Injury, trauma, fatigue, or direct damage to the follower—the price of involvement

States:

- **Maintained** — Reliable and ready, their loyalty reinforced by attention and care
- **Neglected** — Needs downtime or care. Impose a -1 die penalty to their assistance—distance grows
- **Compromised** — Captured, defected, lost, or incapacitated. Cannot assist until recovered—the bond frays or breaks

Assets: Off-Screen Influence

Assets are **off-screen resources**—titles that open doors, safehouses that offer sanctuary, spy rings that gather secrets, charters that grant authority. They do not act in scenes directly, but they change the fiction and provide leverage when you return to the table, like chess pieces moved between matches.

[Asset Tiers and Descriptions] IX

Asset Tier Narrative Examples and Scope

Minor (4 XP, 1 day) Safehouse in the docks, small shop in the market, petty title granting minor respect, local contact network with limited reach

Standard (8 XP, 1 week) Noble title with actual influence, guild section with specialized resources, spy ring covering a district, workshop producing quality goods

Major (12 XP, 1 month) City license for major operations, regional network spanning cities, fortress lease with strategic value, trading company with international reach

Using Assets

Assets provide subtle but powerful benefits:

- **Off-Screen Effect:** Use each Asset's listed Off-Screen effect once per session for free—the quiet work between adventures
- **On-Screen Activation:** To reshape the current scene dramatically, spend 1 Boon—calling in favors at crucial moments
- **Downtime Activation:** A player may activate an off-screen asset at the very start of a campaign or during Downtime. It costs 2 XP or 1 Boon to activate—investment paying dividends
- The Asset must have scope and reach for the intended effect—a local shop can't influence royal politics

Asset Upkeep

Assets require ongoing maintenance to remain effective:

- **Frequency:** Upkeep is paid once per Downtime period per asset
- **Cost Options:**
 - **Efficient** (Higher XP, Less Time): Cost = $\max(1, \text{XP Acquisition}/3)$. Time: Minimal effort (e.g., sending a retainer, a quick inspection)
 - **Intensive** (Lower XP, More Time): Cost = 1 XP. Time: A dedicated Downtime action of significant personal involvement (e.g., training a follower, repairing an asset)
- **Failure Consequences:** If upkeep is not paid, the resource degrades:
 - **Follower:** Becomes Wary (or Seized if already Wary)
 - **Asset:** Becomes Neglected (or Compromised if already Neglected)

Asset Condition

All Assets have a **Condition Track** reflecting their maintenance and standing:

Maintained — Full capability. Functions normally—the asset thrives under care

Neglected — Impaired. Impose a -1 die penalty when used; requires attention—dust gathers, contacts cool

Compromised — Unavailable. Cannot be used until repaired or recovered—sealed by authorities, burned by rivals, lost to misfortune

Boons: The Currency of Resilience

Boons are **narrative tokens** earned by embracing risk and moving the story forward against the tide of misfortune. They reward **failure with texture and opportunity**, not failure with emptiness—the silver lining in clouds of defeat.

Earning Boons

Boons flow to those who engage deeply with the world:

- On a missed or partially successful roll with meaningful complications (see Fail Forward, Chapter 2)
- Through clever or risky roleplay that drives the story into new territory
- Via bond-driven actions with intricate descriptions that deepen relationships
- Through GM discretion for exceptional collaborative play that enhances everyone's experience

Boon Economy

Boons follow natural rhythms:

- **Holding cap:** You can hold at most 5 Boons—fortune favors preparation but not hoarding
- **Carryover Limit:** At the end of each scene, reduce held Boons to a maximum of 2. Excess Boons are lost—opportunities fade if not seized
- **Conversion:** Once per session, in downtime, you may convert 2 Boons → 1 XP (max 2 XP via conversion per session)—lessons hard-earned become permanent growth

Using Boons

Boons empower moments of exceptional effort:

- **Re-roll one die** after seeing the pool—a second chance when it matters most
- **Activate an Asset** for on-screen effect—calling upon resources at critical junctures
- **Power a Rite** or magical ability—channeling energy into mystical workings
- **Improve Position** by one step (1 Boon)—turning desperation into opportunity

Anti-Fishing Measures

To maintain healthy game flow and prevent exploitation:

- **Once/Scene Cap:** At most **2 Boons from failures** per character per scene—diminishing returns on repeated failure
- **Repetition Rule:** Same approach + same stakes in the same scene cannot award another Boon—innovation required for continued reward
- **Position Gate:** Controlled tests with trivial fallout do not award Boons—no reward without risk

Design Note: Boons are not a "get out of jail free" card. They are earned by **leaning into the fiction with courage and creativity**, not by fishing for failure. Reward players who take narrative risks, not those who roll badly on purpose.

XP Awards: Growth Through Choice

XP in Fate's Edge is **meaningful currency** that represents genuine growth through experience. It is not handed out for mere attendance—it is earned through **active engagement, meaningful risk, and tangible narrative impact**.

Session Awards

[XP Award Guidelines] IX

Award Type Description and Examples

Table Attendance	+2 XP for participating in the shared story
Major Objective	+2–4 XP for achieving significant story goals
Discovery/Lore	+1–2 XP for uncovering important information or secrets
Hard Choice	+1–2 XP for making difficult decisions with consequences
Complication Spotlight	+1–3 XP for engaging meaningfully with complications
Bond/Flag Driven Play	+1–2 XP for roleplaying that emphasizes relationships
GM Curveball	+0–3 XP for adapting well to unexpected developments

Milestones

Major achievements bring significant growth:

- +8–12 XP to all players at the conclusion of a major story arc—the reward for epic endeavors
- +2 XP bonus to one player for a signature moment of the arc—recognition for exceptional contribution

Campaign Resources: Mandate and Crisis

At the campaign level, two great clocks track the party's rising influence and the world's gathering resistance—the tide of fortune that lifts or drowns ambitions.

Mandate Clock (0–6)

Tracks the party's public legitimacy and the world's willingness to support their cause:

- **High Mandate:** Allies seek them out, resources flow freely, doors open without force
- **Low Mandate:** Suspicion dogs their steps, bureaucratic obstacles multiply, support withers

Crisis Clock (0–6)

Tracks the opposition's growing strength and the world's mounting troubles:

- **Rising Crisis:** Complications escalate relentlessly, enemies grow bolder, disasters loom
- **Managed Crisis:** Breathing room emerges, opportunities to strike back appear, pressure relents

Combat Resource Management

In combat, resource management takes on desperate urgency. The same systems that govern exploration and downtime now operate under the sword's edge, with consequences that echo immediately through the clash of steel.

Supply in Combat

Extended combat encounters drain resources with alarming speed:

- **Intense Combat:** GM may spend 1 SB to fill 1 Supply segment as arrows break and waterskins puncture
- **Prolonged Engagement:** Each hour of sustained combat adds 1 Supply segment—the slow drain of endurance
- **Ammunition Depletion:** Ranged weapons may run low, requiring scavenging actions amidst danger

Fatigue in Combat

Combat fatigue compounds existing strain with brutal efficiency:

- **Each Round:** Characters with existing Fatigue re-roll additional successes equal to their Fatigue level—exhaustion undermines skill
- **Critical Exhaustion:** Reaching 4 Fatigue during combat causes immediate collapse—the body's final surrender
- **Recovery:** Cannot clear Fatigue during active combat—no rest while blades flash

Follower Combat Integration

Followers in combat face unique risks and opportunities that test their loyalty and competence:

- **Combat Assistance:** Followers can assist in combat rolls using their Cap—standing together against danger
- **Follower Risk:** 2+ SB spent in combat can endanger assisting followers (mark Exposure or Harm)—bravery has its price
- **Initiative Actions:** Followers can take combat-relevant independent actions (cost: Exposure +1 or Harm 1)—moments of individual valor
- **Combat Exposure:** Each time a follower acts on-screen in high-risk combat, mark Exposure +1 after the second such beat this scene—the attention they attract

Tactical Clocks as Resources

Tactical clocks represent persistent combat conditions that drain party resources like sieges drain garrisons:

[Tactical Clock Effects] IX

Clock Type Resource Drain and Narrative Impact

Mob Overwhelm [6] Enemy numbers become advantage—forces Supply depletion and accelerates Fatigue through relentless pressure

Fatigue Spiral [4] Exhaustion affects performance—accelerates existing Fatigue, making each action more difficult than the last

Morale Collapse [6] Fear undermines effectiveness—generates SB and reduces effectiveness as confidence shatters

Environmental Collapse [8] Terrain/fire/building failure—creates new Supply and safety concerns as the battlefield turns against you

Narrative First: The Fiction Is the Ledger

In Fate's Edge, arrows, rations, and waterskins are tracked only in the fiction that surrounds them. Mechanics engage only when those resources become scarce enough to matter. The focus remains always on **narrative tension**—the gnawing hunger, the fading light, the last arrow—not sterile bookkeeping.

Let the world breathe with its own needs and abundances. Let the fiction lead through scarcity and surplus. And when the dice say the world pushes back against mortal plans—**listen to what they tell you about the price of ambition.**

Chapter 4

Magic and Backlash

In **Fate's Edge**, magic is not a clean or safe art practiced in sterile towers. It is a **dangerous negotiation with forces beyond mortal comprehension**—a dance on the razor's edge between power and damnation. Every spell is a gamble where power weighs on one side of the scale and consequence balances on the other. As the GM, your role is to make magic **feel weighty, thematic, and alive with risk**—a force that reshapes reality at a terrible price.

The Metaphysical Foundation: Eight Elements

Magic in Fate's Edge flows from eight fundamental forces that shape existence itself. These elements are not just energy sources—they are **philosophical principles** that define how reality functions and how magic interacts with it. They represent the core tensions that drive the universe: permanence versus change, creation versus destruction, order versus chaos, life versus death.

[The Eight Elements of Magic] IX

Element Domain and Philosophical Nature

Earth	Stability, foundation, permanence, material reality, mountains, bones, cities
Fire	Transformation, passion, destruction, creation, will, forge, revolution
Air	Freedom, thought, communication, wind, breath, ideas, movement, change
Water	Flow, emotion, adaptation, tides, blood, intuition, reflection, cycles
Fate	Destiny, patterns, inevitability, threads, prophecy, order, consequence
Life	Growth, vitality, healing, nature, birth, connection, ecosystem, renewal
Luck	Chance, opportunity, randomness, fortune, accident, serendipity, risk
Death	Endings, transition, memory, ghosts, sacrifice, silence, completion

Each element has its opposite—Earth opposes Air's changeability, Fire counters Water's fluidity, Fate clashes with Luck's randomness, and Life battles Death's finality. This opposition shapes how backlash manifests when magic goes awry. When Earth magic fails, it might cause sudden shifts and instability (Air's domain); when Fire magic backfires, it might create unexpected flows or emotional turbulence (Water's domain).

Three Faces of Magic

Magic in Fate's Edge is expressed through three interconnected paths. You may specialize in one, or mix them at greater bookkeeping cost. All paths share the same dice engine and SB/Obligation

economies, but their flavor and risks differ.

Casting (Freeform)

Requires Talent: **Caster's Gift** (2 XP). Grants access to Weave Cast using the Eight Elements. Flexible, creative, and risky (Backlash on 1s).

Weave & Cast: Casters describe the effect in terms of the Eight Elements. The GM sets DV and Effect based on scope.

- **Weave:** Player builds dice pool and rolls. On success, they stabilize the spell's form.
- **Cast:** A second roll channels the effect into the world.
- **Backlash:** Any 1 rolled may cause narrative backlash related to the Element.

Limits: Casters can attempt any effect that can be described, but the larger the scope, the higher the DV. Improvisation is costly; reliable effects require repeated use and narrative justification.

Rites User (Runekeeper)

Requires Patron + Thiasos (Familiar) + Codex (4 XP). Grants access to a Patron's Rites. Structured, powerful, but debt-driven through Obligation.

Requirements: A Patron bond, a Thiasos (Familiar), and a Codex (4 XP) mark a character as a Runekeeper.

Invocation:

- **Action Cost:** Invoking a Rite requires 1 Action.
- **Obligation:** Each Rite used marks Obligation on its clock.
- **Push It:** Once per Rite, you may Push to increase its duration or potency by +1 step at the cost of +1 Obligation.

Obligation Clock: Tracks the Patron's claim. When full, the GM resolves the debt in-fiction. Obligation is reduced through service or downtime actions.

Invoker (Symbol Path)

Requires one or more Patron's Symbols (4 XP each). Grants access to that Patron's Rites via rituals. Safe but slow; can Crack the Seal to cast instantly at steep Obligation cost.

[Invoker Path Features] IX

Feature Description and Limitations

Patron's Symbol Minor Asset, 4 XP each. Each Symbol grants ritual access to one Patron's Rites.

Ritual Invocation Takes *DV* + 1 rounds. Always marks +1 Obligation.

Crack the Seal Instant cast by setting the Symbol to COMPROMISED and marking +2 Obligation (+3 if High-Power).

No Push Invoker Rites cannot use *Push It* benefits.

Symbol Display The Symbol must be visible throughout the invocation.

Example: Brother Theron carries the Symbol of the Stone-Warden. Faced with a collapsing tunnel, he performs a full ritual to reinforce the stone (*DV* + 1 rounds, +1 Obligation). When ambushed moments later, he **Cracks the Seal** for instant protection—the Symbol grows hot and fractures, marking +2 Obligation as stone shields erupt around him.

4.1 Obligation Capacity

A character's **Obligation Capacity** equals Spirit + Presence. Track total Obligation segments across all Patrons (or Symbols, for Invokers).

- **Exceeding Capacity:** For each segment above Capacity, mark 1 Fatigue. The character cannot Invoke Rites or perform rituals until Obligation is reduced below Capacity.
- **Overload (2x Capacity):** Clear all Fatigue, take +1 Harm, and suffer immediate Patron intrusion (Claim, demand, or narrative cost). Downtime cannot reduce Obligation until Harm is addressed.
- **Resolution:** Reduce Obligation through Downtime service, Patron tasks, ritual cleansing, or story resolution.

Example: Spirit 2 + Presence 3 = Capacity 5. 6 segments → Fatigue 1. 7 segments → Fatigue 2. 10 segments → Harm 1. 11 segments → Harm 2.

Summoning: Binding Outsider Forces

Summoning is a way to call and bind Outsiders for temporary aid. This path requires the **Pact-Whisperer** talent (2 XP).

[Summoning Core Mechanics] IX

Mechanic Description and Requirements

Call 1 Action to manifest spirit at Near range; choose Spirit Template
 Bind Spend 1 Boon or mark 1 Fatigue to establish initial control
 Leash Set Leash = Cap + 2 segments (Cap is the Outsider's tier)
 Tick Leash Whenever spirit takes harm, you command against its nature, you split focus, rival contests it, it moves Close to Far quickly, or it crosses a [WARD]
 Departure When the Leash fills, the spirit acts to its nature once, then departs

Summoning follows a specific procedure:

1. **Call** (1 action): A spirit manifests at Near range. Choose a Spirit Template.
2. **Bind:** Choose one: spend 1 Boon or mark 1 Fatigue.
3. **Leash:** Set Leash = Cap + 2 segments.
4. **Command:** Issue orders each round; inappropriate commands tick Leash.
5. **Maintain:** Keep focus on the spirit or risk Leash ticks.
6. **Departure:** When Leash fills, spirit acts to nature once then departs.

Limits: Only one active summoned spirit at a time (unless a Talent says otherwise). All summons depart at Downtime unless explicitly sustained.

Example: Kestra calls forth a Cap 3 fire elemental to aid in battle. She spends 1 Boon to Bind it. The elemental's Leash is 5 segments (3+2). When it takes Harm 1 from enemy attacks, the GM ticks the Leash. Later, when Kestra splits her focus to attack while the elemental acts, another tick is marked. With careful management, the elemental proves a powerful ally—but its volatile nature means one misstep could turn it against the party.

Magical Arts and Specialization

A character's Art represents their personal approach to magic—the techniques, tools, and philosophies that define their craft. When a character gains magical capability, they define their Art with specific parameters.

[Defining Your Magical Art] IX

Component Description and Examples

Gesture & Medium Ink sigils, sung names, lantern-light, bone charms, legal contracts, salt-threads

Elemental Alignment Choose 2 primary Elements the Art typically engages with (Fire+Earth, Air+Water, etc.)

Thematic Focus Destruction, protection, revelation, transformation, communication, healing

Cultural Roots High Elf crystal-song, Ykrul blood-runes, Aeler spirit-whispers, Human alchemy

Art in Play

The fictional positioning of a character's Art matters significantly:

- **Spotlight Bump (1/scene):** If the Art is clearly honored in fiction (right tools, time, setting), gain +1 die on the Cast roll
- **Off-Style Strain:** If forced to work against the Art's nature (no tools, hostile environment), suffer worse Position or accept extra Backlash
- **Art-Based Backlash:** Consequences should reflect the Art's themes and elements

Tags: The Language of Magical Effects

Tags provide a common language for describing magical effects and their limitations. They only function when printed on a Talent, Ability, or Spell result.

[Common Magical Tags and Effects] IX

Tag Effect and Usage Guidelines

DISPEL

End an ongoing magical effect/construct. DV by fiction.

COUNTER

Interrupt a cast/rite in progress. DV by fiction.

BARRIER

Create cover/obstruction. DV by fiction.

SEAL

/[UNSEAL] Lock or unlock a container/door/portal. DV by fiction.

VEIL

Obscure a person/thing/zone. DV by fiction.

REVEAL

Expose illusions, disguises, hidden clauses. DV by fiction.

MARK

Tag a target for tracking or leverage. DV by fiction.

CURSE

Inflict a sticky hindrance with a clear release. DV by fiction.

CLEANSE

Remove/suppress a condition. DV by fiction.

FORTIFY

Harden against a vector. DV by fiction.

COMMAND

Issue a clear order to a sapient target. DV by fiction.

OATH

Bind parties to terms; breaking has teeth. DV by fiction.

SANCTIFY

Consecrate a zone to a code/patron. DV by fiction.

PASSAGE

Declare a route as permitted/easy. DV by fiction.

TRANSPORT

Move a target across an obstacle. DV by fiction.

CONJURE

Create a useful object/cover/hazard. DV by fiction.

WARD

Challenge Outsiders crossing a warded edge/zone. DV = target Cap.

BANISH

Drive a visible Outsider toward departure. DV = target Cap.

UNWARD

Unmake/suppress a [WARD]. DV by fiction.

Tags work within consistent parameters:

- **DV by Fiction:** Potency, preparation, and opposition set difficulty
- **Duration:** Typically "Scene" unless specified otherwise
- **Stacking:** No same-source stacking; identical tags use strongest instance

Backlash: The Price of Power

Backlash represents magic escaping control—the inevitable consequence of wielding forces beyond mortal comprehension. It's never arbitrary; backlash always reflects the elements involved and their philosophical oppositions.

Backlash Triggers and Severity

Backlash occurs when magic goes awry:

- **Primary Trigger:** Partial or Miss on either the Weave or Cast roll
- **Secondary Trigger:** Hit showing two or more 1s (minor backlash rides success)
- **SB Integration:** Backlash does not generate extra SB—it's how GM spends SB from rolled 1s

Backlash colors the cost of magic and is always expressed through fiction first.

[Backlash Menu] IX

Backlash Type Effect

Position Shift Worsen Position by 1 step for current or next action
 Fleeting Harm/Condition Sear, vertigo, chill that matters for this scene
 Exposure/Noise Draws notice or complicates stealth
 Resource Drain Time, focus, or component damaged
 Collateral Spark Threatens ally or fragile thing nearby

Elemental Backlash Coloring

On Partial/Miss (or double-1s on a Hit), color consequences by Element:

[Elemental Backlash Coloring] IX

Element Pair Minor Backlash

Earth / Fate Slips, binds, encumbrance
 Fire / Life Smoke, sparks, heat
 Air / Luck Scatter, misheard words
 Water / Dreams Slippery tide, slow gear
 Fate / Earth Probability resists
 Life / Fire Growth surge, vines tether
 Luck / Air Odds flip
 Death / Water Whispers, chill

Backlash should always feel thematic to the magic employed:

- **Fire Magic:** Burns, flares, smoke, heat exhaustion, uncontrolled fires
- **Water Magic:** Flooding, slick surfaces, damp-related rot, emotional turbulence
- **Earth Magic:** Tremors, collapsing structures, immobilization, heavy burdens
- **Air Magic:** Unexpected winds, carried sounds, vertigo, scattered plans
- **Fate Magic:** Closed options, inevitable consequences, prophetic nightmares
- **Luck Magic:** Allied misfortunes, fragile successes, random complications
- **Life Magic:** Overgrowth, sympathetic pain, unnatural hunger, fertility curses
- **Death Magic:** Ghostly echoes, premature aging, silence, memory loss

Ritual Casting: Collective Magic

Some workings require multiple casters pooling their strength. Rituals allow for greater effects but multiply risks.

Ritual Procedure

1. **Declaration:** Primary caster states intent and gathers participants
2. **Channel Together:** All participants contribute (Scene-long action)
3. **Weave:** Primary caster shapes combined Potential (Scene-long action)
4. **Backlash:** Consequences affect all participants based on their contribution

Ritual Mechanics

- **Helper Cap:** Primary caster can draw on $\text{ceil}(\text{Arcana}/2)$ helpers (max 3)
- **Skill Flexibility:** Helpers may use different relevant skills if fictionally distinct
- **Risk Distribution:** SB from Channel affects individual rollers; SB from Weave affects primary caster

Magic in Combat

Spellcasting in combat follows the same principles but with heightened stakes and immediate consequences.

Combat Casting Considerations

[Magic in Combat: Position and Effect] IX

Position Effect on Magical Actions

Controlled	+1 die to Channel; reduced Backlash risk; can maintain subtle effects
Risky	Standard casting conditions; typical risk/reward balance
Desperate	-1 die to Channel; increased Backlash severity; may attract unwanted attention

Tactical Magic Applications

Magic can reshape combat dynamics:

- **Position Warfare:** Spells that create cover, elevate positions, or restrict movement
- **Morale Effects:** Magic that inspires allies or terrifies enemies
- **Environmental Control:** Creating hazards, altering terrain, manipulating weather
- **Resource Denial:** Destroying enemy equipment, exhausting their supplies

Prestige Magical Abilities

High-level magical talents represent profound mastery or unique cultural inheritances.

[Example Prestige Magical Abilities] IX

Ability Description and Requirements

Echo-Walker's Step Observe perfect echo of past event (1/arc); GM banks +2 SB; reveals hidden truths (Req: Wits 5, Arcana 4)

Warglord Unify scattered warbands into host for season; track Logistics and Grudge clocks (Req: Body 5, Command 3)

Spirit-Shield Erase up to 3 SB from ally's roll (1/session); caster takes Fatigue +1 and GM banks +1 SB (Req: Spirit 4, Insight 3)

Elemental Mastery Choose one Element; gain +2 dice when using it, but backlash from opposite element is doubled

Design Philosophy: Magic as Narrative Engine

Magic in Fate's Edge serves specific design goals:

- **Risk-Reward Balance:** Every magical act should feel consequential
- **Thematic Consistency:** Magic should reflect the world's metaphysics
- **Narrative Primacy:** Mechanics exist to serve interesting stories
- **Player Agency:** Magic should offer creative solutions, not bypass challenges
- **World Reactivity:** The setting should respond meaningfully to magical use

GM Guidance: Making Magic Feel Magical

- **Describe the Unseen:** When magic is cast, describe how the world reacts—air crackles, shadows deepen, spirits stir
- **Follow the Consequences:** Magical actions should have lasting effects on the narrative
- **Respect the Elements:** Backlash should feel philosophically appropriate
- **Highlight the Cost:** Make players feel the weight of their magical choices
- **Encourage Creativity:** Reward inventive uses of magic that enhance the story

Remember: In Fate's Edge, magic is never a shortcut. It's a pathway filled with wonders and dangers—a tool that changes both the world and the wielder. The dice are not your enemy; they're your collaborator in crafting a world where **true power always demands an equal price**.

Chapter 5

Campaigns, Clocks, and Consequences

In **Fate's Edge**, campaigns are not just a string of adventures—they are **living narratives** shaped by player choices, faction dynamics, and the slow accumulation of influence that echoes through the ages. As the GM, you are the architect of long-term tension, guiding the story from its first spark to its final reckoning. This chapter introduces the tools that help you build and sustain that tension: the **Campaign Clocks**, the **Crown Spread**, and the art of managing consequences that ripple across entire seasons.

Campaign Clocks: Tracking Influence and Pressure

The **Campaign Clocks** are two great dials that track the ebb and flow of player power and opposition over the course of a campaign. They are not mechanical scoreboards—they are **narrative thermometers**, showing how the world reacts to the PCs' actions and how the weight of their choices accumulates like stones in a riverbed.

Mandate (0–6)

Mandate represents the table's **public legitimacy and buy-in**—the measure of how much the world accepts the PCs' authority, influence, or sacred mission. It is the currency of reputation in a world that remembers both triumphs and failures.

[Mandate Conditions and Effects] IX

Mandate Level Narrative Manifestations

0-2 (Low)	Suspicion dogs every step, doors remain closed, allies hesitate, every favor comes with strings attached
3-4 (Medium)	Respect is earned but conditional, some doors open while others require persuasion, trust must be continually maintained
5-6 (High)	Recognition precedes arrival, gates swing open unbidden, allies rally without question, reputation becomes a tangible asset

Crisis (0–6)

Crisis tracks the **opposition engine**—the rising tide of rivals, mounting pressures, and accumulating attrition that defines a challenging campaign. It shows how much the world pushes back against ambition and change.

[Crisis Conditions and Effects] IX

Crisis Level Narrative Manifestations

0-2 (Low) Breathing room emerges, opportunities bloom like spring flowers, enemies regroup rather than attack

3-4 (Medium) Pressure builds like gathering storm clouds, rivals make cautious moves, consequences become more immediate

5-6 (High) Enemies strike with boldness born of desperation, clocks tick with alarming speed, the world tightens like a noose

Advancing the Clocks

At the end of each major scene, you may advance one or both clocks based on significant narrative developments:

- **Clean Loss:** A rival codifies their position or escapes with leverage that threatens the party's standing
- **Public Cost Paid:** Extravagant feasts, declared holidays, or public penance that shifts perception
- **Asset Neglect:** Major assets degrade from inattention, signaling unreliability to potential allies
- **Evidence Shifts:** Immaculate reputations become scorched by scandal or revelation

Calling or Forcing the Crown

The campaign reaches its crescendo when one of two thresholds is met—the moment when accumulated influence and mounting pressure collide in a final reckoning.

[Finale Triggers and Conditions] IX

Finale Type Conditions and Narrative Implications

Player-Called Mandate 6 and Crisis 3—the party has earned the right to choose their moment of triumph

Forced Finale Crisis 6 regardless of Mandate—the world forces a confrontation that can no longer be avoided

Balanced Finale Both dials at 4-5—a tense equilibrium where victory and defeat hang in perfect balance

The Crown Spread: Seeding the Campaign

At **Session 0**, draw the **Crown Spread**—a five-card ritual that seeds the campaign's deepest themes, most dangerous rivals, and the very conditions of its ultimate resolution. This is not random chance but **oracular guidance** for the story to come.

Drawing the Spread

Draw one card for each of the five fundamental aspects of your campaign:

- **Spade:** The Crown Site—where destiny will be decided
- **Heart:** The Crown Rival—who stands between the party and their goals
- **Club:** The Crown Pressure—the relentless force that prevents complacency
- **Diamond:** The Crown Leverage—the advantage that can turn the tide
- **Wild:** The Hidden Force—the unknown element that will emerge when least expected

Interpreting the Spread

[Crown Spread Interpretation Guide] IX

Card Position Interpretation Guidelines and Examples

Spade (Site) A fortress shrouded in mist? A shrine built on forgotten truths? A battlefield where history repeats?

Heart (Rival) A noble with hidden motives? A cult leader with apocalyptic visions? A spirit with ancient grievances?

Club (Pressure) An escalating curfew? A spreading plague? A resource shortage that turns allies into competitors?

Diamond (Leverage) Seasonal endorsement from powerful factions? A city license that grants unusual authority?

Wild (Hidden) Face card: hidden patron steps from shadows; Ace: the site itself becomes a 10-clock challenge

Example Spread: Spade = High-Mist Pass (Aeler territory); Heart = Margrave of Acasia (Face card—ambitious ruler); Club = Curfew (restricting movement); Diamond = Seasonal Endorsement (temporary authority); Wild = Hidden Patron (Face card—mysterious benefactor or foe).

The Finale Procedure

When the Crown is called, run the three-beat finale that brings the campaign to its narrative climax:

1. **Reckoning:** Defend or sanctify the record of accomplishments. Draw upon the Rival's established motives. Place the Pressure rail that will drive the scene forward.
2. **Crossing:** Stage the kinetic rail (Escape/Hunt/Hazard) that threatens to end the scene prematurely if not managed carefully.
3. **Coronation:** Use the Diamond Leverage to sign, seal, or swear the oath that cements the campaign's legacy.

Twist Collision (Finale Clause)

Exactly once, when the Rival's Spade Twist contradicts their Club Belief, the table chooses:

- GM gains +1 SB to complicate matters, or
- Players reduce two ticks total across the active rails, gaining breathing room.

Legacy Conversion: Epilogue

After the Finale, each PC draws 2 cards and answers epilogue prompts by suit. Then convert campaign elements into lasting legacy:

- **Major Asset** → **Institution** (12 XP): A safehouse becomes a school, a spy ring becomes an intelligence service
- **Seasonal Endorsement** → **Doctrine Rider** (4 XP): Temporary support becomes permanent policy
- **Follower (Cap 3+)** → **Stationed NPC** (0 XP): Loyal companions become custodians of the new order
- **Rival** → **Fixture**: Surviving adversaries become recurring elements of the setting's fabric

The Clockwork Engine: Tracking Tension

Clocks are the pulsating heart of tension in Fate's Edge. They represent ongoing conditions, threats, or progress toward objectives in a visible, tangible way that everyone can track and anticipate.

Types of Clocks

[Clock Types and Their Purposes] IX

Clock Type	Purpose and Typical Segment Count
Travel Clocks	Track progress through dangerous journey legs (4-10 segments)
Tactical Clocks	Represent ongoing combat conditions like morale or fatigue (4-8 segments)
Campaign Clocks	Track long-term pressure and influence (Mandate 0-6, Crisis 0-6)
Scene Clocks	Specific to immediate situations like chases or disasters (4-6 segments)
War Clocks	Large-scale conflict tracking like supply lines or morale (6-10 segments)

Clock Creation Guidelines

Creating effective clocks requires thoughtful design:

1. **Announce Clearly:** Always tell players what each clock represents and what fictional events cause it to advance.
2. **Logical Triggers:** Clock advancement should follow naturally from player actions and world events.
3. **Visible Progression:** Use physical tokens or visual aids so everyone can see tension building.
4. **Meaningful Consequences:** When clocks fill, the consequences should change the story in significant ways.

Clock Advancement Rules

Story Beats drive clock progression in measurable ways:

- **1 SB:** Minor advancement (1 segment)—a small but noticeable step forward
- **2-3 SB:** Moderate advancement (2 segments)—significant progress or escalation
- **4+ SB:** Major advancement (3+ segments) or filling smaller clocks entirely
- **Multiple Clocks:** Distribute SB across relevant clocks rather than overfilling one

Campaign Combat Integration

Extended conflicts and war-level events require special handling to maintain narrative tension while scaling the mechanical scope appropriately.

War Clocks

Large-scale conflicts are tracked through persistent war-level clocks that represent strategic realities:

[War Clock Examples] IX

War Clock Strategic Implications and Triggers

Supply Lines (8) Logistics and reinforcement flow; advances when routes are cut or resources dwindle

Morale (6) Troop effectiveness and desertion risk; advances after defeats or poor conditions

Political Support (6) Civilian and noble backing; advances when scandals emerge or costs mount

Strategic Position (8) Control of key locations and routes; advances when territory is lost or gained

Faction Combat

When player factions engage in large-scale conflict, the rules adapt to maintain both narrative coherence and mechanical consistency:

- **Follower Armies:** Cap 5 followers can represent military units with distinct capabilities
- **Asset Leverage:** Off-screen assets provide strategic advantages like intelligence or supply
- **Campaign Clock Impact:** Major battles significantly shift Mandate and Crisis dials

Between Sessions: The GM's Sacred Trust

Between game sessions, the Game Master undertakes crucial preparation that transforms good games into unforgettable campaigns. This quiet work is the foundation upon which epic stories are built.

Mandatory Preparation

[Between-Session Checklist] IX

Task Description and Guidelines

Campaign Clock Updates Advance Mandate/Crisis based on session outcomes. Track developments that affect long-term trajectory
 Complication Debt Calculate starting SB: banked SB (max 2) + character complications + asset complications
 Thread Management Review active complication threads. Ensure no more than (Tier + 1) active threads per scene
 Resource Tracking Update NPC statuses, faction relationships, and world conditions based on player actions

Session Planning

Prepare the following elements with an eye toward pacing and player engagement:

- **Scene Preparation:** Design scenes with appropriate SB spending budgets (standard: 12 SB max, climactic: 16 SB max, session: 20 SB total)
- **Complication Hooks:** Develop 3-5 potential complications connecting to player backgrounds and campaign themes
- **Tactical Considerations:** Prepare combat, social, and exploration challenges with appropriate difficulties
- **Deck Preparation:** Ensure Consequences Deck is ready with cards appropriate for expected complication types

XP Award Calculation

Between sessions, calculate XP awards that reflect both accomplishment and engagement:

[XP Award Guidelines] IX

Award Type Description and Typical Value

Table Attendance +2 XP for participating in the shared story experience
 Major Objectives +2-4 XP for achieving significant story goals that advance the campaign
 Discoveries +1-2 XP for uncovering important information or hidden truths
 Hard Choices +1-2 XP for making difficult decisions with meaningful consequences
 Complication Spotlight +1-3 XP for engaging meaningfully with complications and setbacks
 Bond/Flag Play +1-2 XP for roleplaying that emphasizes relationships and character depth
 GM Curveball +0-3 XP for adapting well to unexpected developments and surprises

Narrative First: The World Remembers

Campaign design in Fate's Edge is not about railroading players along predetermined paths—it's about **responding to player choices** with consequences that accumulate like stones in a river,

gradually shaping the flow of the narrative itself. Let the world shift in response to their actions. Let factions rise and fall based on their allegiances. Let the dice sing the song of a universe that reacts.

And when the Crown is finally crowned—when the last card is played and the final clock ticks to completion—let the echo of that moment be heard across the entire Amaranthine, a testament to stories well-lived and consequences fully earned.

Remember: Your preparation between sessions is the quiet magic that transforms random encounters into meaningful episodes and mechanical challenges into memorable stories. The investment in this sacred trust pays dividends in player engagement, narrative coherence, and the creation of campaigns that will be remembered long after the final dice have been rolled.

Chapter 6

Advanced GM Techniques

In **Fate's Edge**, as the campaign deepens and the stakes rise, the GM must evolve from storyteller to **architect of tension**. This chapter explores advanced techniques for managing complex scenes, faction interplay, and custom content creation. These tools will help you keep the world dynamic, the choices meaningful, and the consequences **echoing through the ages**.

Story Beat Management

The GM should manage Story Beat (SB) spending to maintain dramatic tension while preserving player agency and game flow. SB spending scales with character tier but is subject to hard limits to ensure playability and prevent narrative overload.

Core Principles

- **Narrative Coherence:** All SB spends within a scene should connect thematically, creating a cohesive story rather than random setbacks
- **Player Agency:** Complications create interesting choices, not insurmountable obstacles—always provide resolution paths
- **Progressive Escalation:** Higher tier characters naturally attract greater consequences that match their growing influence
- **Resolution Paths:** Every complication thread should have potential resolution through player action and creativity

Spending Formula

Base SB = 4 + Character Tier

- **Tier I (Rookie 0-40 XP):** 5 SB base—local consequences, manageable threats
- **Tier II (Seasoned 41-90 XP):** 6 SB base—regional impact, organized opposition
- **Tier III (Veteran 91-150 XP):** 7 SB base—national consequences, strategic rivals
- **Tier IV (Paragon 151-220 XP):** 8 SB base—continental scale, legendary challenges
- **Tier V (Mythic 221+ XP):** 9 SB base—world-shaping events, mythic adversaries

Hard Limits

- **Standard Scenes:** Maximum 12 SB spending—maintains pace without overwhelming
- **Climactic Scenes:** Maximum 16 SB spending—allows for dramatic tension peaks
- **Active Threads:** Maximum (Tier + 1) concurrent threads—prevents narrative sprawl
- **Session Budget:** Maximum 20 SB total per session—ensures sustainable challenge

Banked SB Integration

Banked SB from character complications count toward scene spending limits rather than adding to available SB. This prevents exponential complication stacking while honoring narrative debt from previous choices and established character backgrounds.

Thread Management

Complication threads follow a natural escalation pattern that creates satisfying narrative arcs:

[Complication Thread Escalation Pattern] IX

Thread Level SB Escalation and Narrative Impact

First Exposure 1-2 SB (Minor inconvenience that introduces the complication)
 Second Occurrence 2-4 SB (Moderate setback that develops the thread)
 Third Strike 3-6 SB (Major consequence that brings the thread to climax)
 Resolution Thread concludes with narrative payoff and character growth

[Story Beat Management by Tier] IXXXXX

Tier Base SB Max Threads Scene Cap Climax Cap Session Budget

I (0-40 XP) 5 SB 2 threads 12 SB 16 SB 20 SB
 II (41-90 XP) 6 SB 3 threads 12 SB 16 SB 20 SB
 III (91-150 XP) 7 SB 4 threads 12 SB 16 SB 20 SB
 IV (151-220 XP) 8 SB 5 threads 12 SB 16 SB 20 SB
 V (221+ XP) 9 SB 6 threads 12 SB 16 SB 20 SB

[Complication Spending Safety Guidelines] IX

Scenario Guidance and Best Practices

Standard Scenes Spend 50-75% of available SB budget; preserve some for escalation and player adaptation
 Climactic Scenes May use full SB allocation; ensure resolution opportunities and meaningful choices remain
 Teaching Moments Explicit player consent required; time-limited complications; thorough debrief afterward
 New Players Reduce SB spending by 25-50%; focus on clear, actionable complications with obvious solutions
 Grimdark Mode Reserved for veteran groups; requires explicit session zero discussion; safety tools always active

Mastering the Deck of Consequences

The **Deck of Consequences** is more than a randomizer—it is a **thematic engine** that externalizes risk and ensures that setbacks feel consistent, fair, and deeply integrated with your campaign’s unique atmosphere.

Two Deck Systems (Compatibility)

Fate’s Edge uses two distinct card tools that serve different narrative purposes:

[Deck System Comparison] IX

Deck Type Purpose and Suit Meanings

Travel Decks (regional, 52-card) Spade=Place, Heart=Actor, Club=Pressure, Diamond=Leverage.
Powers journeys and geographic challenges
Deck of Consequences (scene drama) Hearts=social fallout, Spades=harm/escalation, Clubs=material cost, Diamonds=magical/spiritual disturbance

Critical Guidance: Never mix suit meanings across decks. When a rule references “Spade/Club/Diamond,” it means *Travel Deck*. When it says “Hearts/Spades/Clubs/Diamonds,” it means *Consequences Deck*.

When to Draw

After a roll generates Story Beats, the GM faces a strategic choice:

- **Direct Spend:** Translate SB into immediate consequences/rail ticks—fast, reliable, maintains pacing
- **Deck Draw:** Draw up to **min(SB, 3)** cards and **synthesize a single twist** guided by suit and highest rank—rich, thematic, introduces novelty

Never do both for the same roll. If a drawn card contradicts established fiction, reinterpret creatively or redraw to maintain thematic consistency.

Structure of the Deck

[Deck of Consequences Structure Guide] IX

Component Description and Application

Hearts Suit Emotional, social, or relational fallout—betrayals, misunderstandings, emotional wounds

Spades Suit Harm, danger, or escalation of conflict—injuries, reinforcements, tactical disadvantages

Clubs Suit Resource strain, economic or material cost—broken gear, lost supplies, financial setbacks

Diamonds Suit Magical, spiritual, or cosmic disturbances—backlash, omens, supernatural complications

Ace-3 (Minor) Inconvenience or flavor complication that adds texture without major impact

4-6 (Moderate) Setback with narrative teeth that requires player attention and response

7-9 (Significant) Consequence altering the course of action with lasting implications

10-King (Major) Major fallout introducing new problems or lasting scars that change the story

[Complication Application Methods: GM Decision Guide] IXXX			
Method	When to Use	Benefits	Typical Session Use
Direct Spend (70%)	Routine actions, combat, quick resolution	Fast resolution, consistent pacing, reliable complications	Investigation, travel, standard challenges
Deck Draw (30%)	Major revelations, character moments, climaxes	Thematic richness, unique complications, player surprise	Plot twists, discoveries, emotional scenes

[Session Phase Application Guidelines] IXXX			
Campaign Phase	Recommended Ratio	Resolution Time	Rationale
Early Game (Exploration)	80/20	3 seconds	Quick resolution maintains investigation flow and momentum
Mid Game (Development)	70/30	5 seconds	Balanced approach supports rising tension with meaningful pivots
Late Game (Climax)	50/50 to 40/60	8 seconds	Maximum impact complications for story resolution

Advanced Travel and Exploration

Travel in Fate's Edge is not a downtime skip—it is a **narrative layer** filled with tension, discovery, and risk that reveals the world's character through every mile crossed.

Core Travel Procedure

For each leg of a journey, draw 3–4 cards using the decks for your destination and controlling authority:

- **Spade** from the destination deck: sets the scene (place)—the physical and cultural landscape
- **Heart** from the destination deck: introduces the local actor or faction—who they meet and why it matters
- **Club** from the Wilds or destination: brings pressure—what challenges the journey itself
- **Diamond** from the authority that gates the route: papers, escorts, rights, or exceptions—the bureaucratic landscape

Set a travel clock by the highest rank:

- **2–5** → 4 segments (brief, intense journeys)
- **6–10** → 6 segments (standard expedition length)
- **J/Q/K** → 8 segments (extended, epic travels)
- **Ace** → 10 segments (campaign-defining voyages)

Example: Traveling the **Aelerian Passes** in deep winter, the PCs draw: Spade (Avalanche gallery—treacherous narrow path), Heart (Geometer—mapmaker with secret knowledge), Club (Engineer requisition—military demands), Diamond (Underway Pass—ancient right of passage). Clock: 8 segments. On a failed navigation roll, the GM spends SB to trigger a rockslide—Hazard +2 that threatens to bury the path entirely.

Faction Dynamics and Grand Strategy

Factions are **living entities** with goals, rivals, and shifting loyalties. They are not static backdrops—they are **active players in the story** whose movements shape the campaign’s grand narrative.

Creating Memorable Factions

Each faction should have distinct personality and concrete capabilities:

[Faction Creation Template] IX

Element Development Guidelines

Core Motive	What they fundamentally want—territory, ideology, survival, power, knowledge
Key Figures	Who leads or represents them—names, personalities, ambitions, vulnerabilities
Resources	What they can bring to bear—military, economic, social, magical assets
Weaknesses	What makes them vulnerable—internal divisions, external pressures, resource limitations
Relationship Map	How they connect to other factions—allies, rivals, neutrals, complicated histories

Faction Clocks and Grand Strategy

Track factional pressure with clocks that represent their changing fortunes:

- **Rising Influence** (6): Gaining power, allies, or territory—momentum is building
- **Internal Strife** (6): Leadership challenged, morale low—fractures appear
- **Public Scandal** (4): Reputation damaged, support wanes—trust evaporates
- **Strategic Initiative** (8): Controlling the narrative and setting terms of engagement

Example: The **Viterrra Dawn Knights** gain Rising Influence as they rally to the new Queen’s banner—but suffer Internal Strife as old commanders resist her modernizing reforms, creating tension between tradition and progress.

Creating Custom Content and House Rules

Fate’s Edge thrives on **player agency** and **world customization**. When designing new Talents, Assets, or Prestige Abilities, follow these principles to maintain balance while encouraging creativity.

Designing Balanced Talents

[Talent Design Guidelines by Tier] IX

Tier Design Principles and XP Cost Guidelines

General Talents (2-4 XP)	Simple benefits that enhance core capabilities without complexity
Cultural Talents (4-6 XP)	Thematic abilities tied to specific backgrounds or training
Prestige Abilities (6+ XP)	Campaign-defining powers requiring significant investment and narrative milestones

Example Talent Designs

- **Battle Instincts** (6 XP): Once per scene, re-roll a failed defense roll—honed reflexes saving from certain disaster
- **Silver Tongue** (4 XP): Gain +1 die when persuading or deceiving through speech—words that charm and manipulate
- **Stone-Sense** (Dwarves, 5 XP): Detect flaws in stone or earth; gain +1 die on Engineering or Craft rolls underground—ancestral connection to the deep places
- **Blood Memory** (Ykrul, 5 XP): After a battle, meditate to gain one temporary Skill die reflecting a foe’s tactics—learning through spilled blood

Designing Meaningful Assets

[Asset Design Framework] IX

Asset Tier Scope and Narrative Impact

Minor (4 XP) Local influence—safehouse, petty title, small shop with limited reach
 Standard (8 XP) Regional impact—spy ring, charter, workshop with measurable influence
 Major (12 XP) National scale—fortress lease, mercantile network, institution with lasting presence

Each Asset should include:

- **Activation Cost:** Typically 1 Boon for on-screen effect
- **Scope:** Clear boundaries on what it can plausibly accomplish
- **Fictional Hook:** Why it exists in the world and how it was obtained
- **Condition Track:** How it degrades or improves with use and attention

Running Complex Scenarios with Confidence

Heists and Infiltration

[Heist Scenario Framework] IX

Element Implementation Guidelines

Positioning Controlled entries through planning, distractions creating opportunities, asset use for specialized access
 Social Rails Curfew (time pressure), Crowd (witness management), Sanctity (cultural restrictions)
 Physical Rails Hazard (environmental dangers), Hunt (pursuit escalation), Escape (exit strategy)
 GM Philosophy Let players plan thoroughly but make the world react realistically—guards change, nobles arrive early, systems update

Mass Combat and Warfare

[Mass Combat Management System] IX

Component Handling Method

Follower Units Cap 5 followers represent military forces with distinct capabilities and morale
 War Clocks Supply Lines (8), Morale (6), Strategic Position (8)—track strategic realities
 Command Actions Leaders coordinate multiple units through decisive action and tactical insight
 Environmental Factors Weather, terrain, and time of day significantly impact large-scale engagements

Political Intrigue and Social Conflict

- **Leverage:** Diamonds and social rails determine influence in courtly settings
- **Allies and Rivals:** Represented by Assets and Followers with their own agendas
- **Public Image:** Tied directly to Mandate and Crisis clocks—reputation is currency
- **Information Economy:** Secrets become tangible assets with measurable value

Advanced Magic and Supernatural Challenges

Magic Duels and Arcane Confrontations

High-stakes magical combat requires special considerations that honor both the power and the peril of arcane arts:

[Magic Duel Framework] IX

Element Special Considerations

Counterspelling Interrupting opponent's Casting Loop requires precise timing and significant risk

Backlash Cascade Multiple casters generate SB that can create compound complications

Environmental Magic Terrain-altering spells change the battlefield with lasting consequences

Elemental Opposition Fire vs Water, Earth vs Air, Fate vs Luck—opposites create dramatic tension

Supernatural Investigations

When the party confronts mysteries beyond mortal understanding:

- **Clue-Based Progression:** Information becomes the primary resource
- **Sanity and Corruption:** Exposure to the unnatural has measurable effects
- **Ritual Timelines:** Some threats operate on schedules beyond human comprehension
- **Reality Bleed:** The supernatural leaks into the mundane world with subtle signs

6.0.1 Disabling Magical Traps (Wards)

Wards are traps encoded in magic: a binding, sensor, or anchored effect. Treat them like any obstacle: **state the fiction**, **set Position**, and **resolve against DV**. This subsection expands the SRD example with GM-facing tools: how to set DV from fiction, what good/bad results look like, and how to keep the scene moving.

Structure (at the table).

Step 1: Name the Ward. What does it sense (heat, oath-breaking, Patron presence)? What does it do (alarm, bind, blast, invert gravity)? Where is the *anchor* (sigil, keystone, idol, threshold)?

Step 2: Reveal Handles. Offer at least two fictional levers: the arcane pattern (*Arcana*), the mechanism/anchor (*Tinker*), and the approach route (*Agility/Move*). Tools, components, or Patron symbols count as handles.

Step 3: Set Position → DV. Use the ladder as defaults; shift for scale/urgency.

- **Controlled** (time, tools, clear access): **DV2**.
- **Risky** (pressure, partial access): **DV3**.
- **Desperate** (activating, hostile field): **DV 4–5+**.

Step 4: Declare Stakes. What happens on Partial/Miss? Name the *Ward Clock* and the *Alert Clock* up front if relevant.

Common Ward Types Anchors. >1 >X >X

Type	Trigger	Anchor	Examples
Sentry	Crossing a threshold, line of sight, sound cadence	Lintel sigil, eye-gem, bell filament	
Binding	Handling an item, touching a seal, oath breach	Wax seal, chain knot, iron brand	Punitive
Trespass	+ time window, named rival, taboo action	Idol tooth, ash sigil under rug, curse knot	
Displacement	Path inversion, gravity twist, dream-step	Floor mandala, mirrored post, sleep pin	
Anti-Magic	Casting in zone, symbol presence, boon use	Null plate, cold-iron frame, void ampoule	

Approaches Aids (examples).

- **Wits + Arcana:** analyze glyph grammar; ground the loop with salt/ink; counter-frequency hum.
- **Wits + Tinker:** wedge the keystone; snip hair-thin filament; re-route power to a safe sink.
- **Body + Agility:** thread the safe arc; pin the pressure plate; time the chime cadence.
- **Teamwork:** one character steadies Position with tools while another rolls; assistants may accept **1 SB** to grant +1d once.
- **Talents/Tools:** lockpicks, ward-ink, tuning forks, mirror-shards; Patron symbols might improve Position if thematically aligned.

Clocks that Matter.

Ward Integrity (4): how close the binding is to disarming *or* rupturing. On Partial, tick 1; on Misses, tick 2.

Alerted Attention (4): nearby guardians, spirits, or owners notice tampering.

Escalation (4/6): punitive effects ramp (more Harm, broader area, additional tags).

Outcomes Palette (use or adapt).

- **Strong Hit:** Ward disabled/redirected cleanly; optionally *bank a tell* (learn its signature for later).
- **Mixed:** Suppressed but *unstable*; pick one: tick ALERTED ATTENTION +1, apply minor Backlash by element/Patron, or leave a trace (future complication).
- **Miss:** Ward holds or triggers; GM may (a) advance WARD INTEGRITY toward rupture, (b) trigger a reduced effect now, (c) spend SB to introduce a hard complication.

Counter-Ward (Arcana Focus; optional). On a Success, choose one: (1) **Suppress** for a scene; (2) **Disarm** permanently (mark +1 Obligation or expend rare material); (3) **Invert** (redirect first trigger to a designated sink; start UNINTENDED ECHO 1/4).

Difficulty Dials.

- **Scale:** Large areas or ancient wards add +1 DV or an extra clock.
- **Haste:** Rushed attempts worsen Position one step.
- **Right of Names:** Knowing the warder's true name improves Position one step or grants +1d.
- **Wrong Patron:** Symbols from an opposed Patron impose -1d or +1 DV (GM call).

Fiction First Hooks.

- Show sensory tells (ozone, cold breath, hair standing) before rolls.
- On Partial, change the room: new cover lines, heat shimmer, dead zones for boons.
- On Miss, give a choice: suffer a lesser effect now to avoid full trigger later, or press on and risk rupture.

Worked Mini-Example. *Vault Sentry (DV 3, Risky).* Anchor: eye-gem in an idol. The crew uses Wits+Tinker with ward-ink and a mirror shard. Mixed result: WARD INTEGRITY+1, ALERTED ATTENTION+1, but the beam is shunted for this scene. Later a rival recognizes the mirror signature—payoff for the trace left behind.

6.1 Optional Player-Character Death

By default, Fate’s Edge treats death as rare and dramatic. Use any of the following modules (singly or in combination) to tune how lethal your table feels. All options respect **Story Beats (SB)** and **Obligation** as core currencies.

Baseline (Default)

PCs do not die on ordinary failures. Instead, they suffer **Harm**, Conditions, lost opportunities, or narrative costs. Death only occurs when a rule below is in play or the table agrees a scene warrants it.

Option A — Severe Harm Death

Trigger. When a PC would take a **third** instance of Severe Harm (or escalate past the top of your harm track), they instead face death.

Stave It Off. The player may avoid death by choosing one: (1) mark **2 SB** and take a MAIMED permanent Condition, (2) accept a **Patron’s Claim** (see OptionD), or (3) convert the blow into a **Last Stand** (OptionC).

Option B — Death Clock

Trigger. Catastrophic consequences (falls, crushes, mortal wounds) fill a named **Death Clock** (4 or 6 ticks).

While Ticking. Actions that stabilize reduce the clock; taking further punishment advances it.

When Full. The character dies unless one of the following occurs immediately: spend **2 SB** to hold at full (buy a single action), accept a **Patron’s Claim**, or another PC succeeds at *Pull From the Brink* (risky, effect = clock –2 on success).

Option C — Last Stand

Trigger. On lethal harm or a full Death Clock, the player may declare a **Last Stand**.

Effect. For the remainder of the scene, the PC acts with **+1 effect** and ignores new Harm. Each action automatically creates **1 SB**. When the scene ends, the character **dies** unless a **miracle** is secured (Patron rite, relic, or equivalent).

Option D — Patron’s Claim

Trigger. On death, the PC’s Patron (or a circling power) intervenes.

Bargain. The GM offers 1–3 -negotiable terms (e.g., *Obligation +2, forfeit a Gift, become a vessel for a season*). If accepted, the PC lives; mark the costs immediately and record the **Claim** as an ongoing front. Refusal means the death proceeds.

Note. Claims should change the campaign; use sparingly.

Option E — Dramatic Exit Inheritance

Dramatic Exit. The player may choose a meaningful death that resolves a question or saves others.

Inheritance. The next PC created by that player inherits one of: (a) a **Relationship** (bond, contact, or rival), (b) a **Tool** (asset degraded one step), or (c) a **Lesson** (start with +1 XP toward a Talent used in the exit). Record how the world remembers them.

Option F — Return From Beyond

Trigger. A body, a name, and a path (rite, gate, bargain).

Cost. Treat as a High Rite with Obligation appropriate to the transgression. Set DV using §??. On success, the PC returns **changed**: apply a SCAR (permanent Condition) and 1 **SB** to the rescuer. On failure, choose: lose the body, or return with a Patron's Claim.

Table Safety

Always confirm that **PC death is on the table** before a session begins. Use lines/veils or your safety tools; offer **Dramatic Exit** in place of surprise death if needed.

GM Guidance

- **Name the Stakes.** Before lethal rolls, state clearly which option(s) are available.
- **Tie to Themes.** Death, Claims, and Returns should echo the Patron's domain (e.g., Ikasha's shadow vigil, Mykkiel's writ of reprieve).
- **One Big Choice.** Offer a single fork at the brink (Last Stand, Claim, or Exit) rather than all at once to preserve drama.
- **Make It Matter.** Death or survival should change clocks, factions, and future scenes.

Quick Picks

Low lethality: Baseline + Death Clock only. **Heroic tragedy:** Severe Harm Death + Last Stand + Inheritance. **Dark bargains:** Any combo with Patron's Claim.

Narrative First: The World Remembers

In Fate's Edge, the world is not a puzzle to be solved—it is a **living system** that responds to player choices with consequences that ripple across time and space. Let factions shift their allegiances based on player actions. Let consequences accumulate like stones in a riverbed, gradually shaping the flow of history itself. And above all—let the story unfold organically from the collision of player ambition and world reaction.

Because in the end, it is not the GM who writes the legend that will echo through the ages.

It is the players, through their choices, sacrifices, and triumphs.

You simply hold the quill that records their epic.

And what an honor that is.

6.2 TPK Resolution (GM One-Pager)

A Total Party Kill doesn't have to end the campaign. Use this page to convert a wipe into forward motion without hand-waving or dream resets.

Framing

- **Name the fork.** Before the lethal roll, say which option will resolve a wipe.
- **Pick one lane.** Don't stack options; choose the one that best fits stakes and tone.
- **Change the world.** Advance clocks, shift factions, mark maps. Make it matter.

Menu (with GM Dials)

Capture Consequences. Overwhelmed rather than dead.

- *Base:* Strip 1–2 assets; apply 1 permanent Condition to 1–2 PCs; advance 1–2 relevant clocks +2.
- *Dials:* Add a CAPTIVITY 4/6 clock (escape or indoctrination). Offer a single bargain to drop a clock by 1.

Patron's Claim. A Patron intervenes with non-negotiable terms.

- *Base:* Each PC accepts 1 term (Obligation +2, lose a Gift, sworn service).
- *Dials:* Escalate to 2 terms for a full rewrite of the front; or concentrate the price on one PC (crown of thorns).

Last Stand → Legacy. Convert the wipe scene into heroic play, then pass the torch.

- *Base:* For remainder of scene: +1 Effect, ignore new Harm; each action generates 1 SB. After scene: PCs die.
- *Legacy:* Next party inherits 1 Relationship/Tool/Lesson per fallen PC.
- *Dials:* Let players bank 1 *Deed* each (a concrete change to a location/faction) in addition to inheritance.

Dramatic Exit Inheritance. Players choose meaningful deaths that alter the situation now.

- *Base:* Resolve a threat, save innocents, or seal a breach. Inheritance as above.
- *Dials:* Allow a single surviving witness or squire to carry the story fragment into the next chapter.

Reprieve at a Price. Buy back from death; the bill comes due.

- *Base:* Each PC marks Obligation +2 (or one steep Claim shared by all). Advance all scene clocks +1; introduce a new front tied to the price.
- *Dials:* Instead of Obligation, impose 1 permanent Condition on each PC *or* a faction Debt clock at 2/6.

New Torchbearers. End the chapter cleanly; begin with a connected cast.

- *Base*: New PCs tied to the fallen (apprentices, kin, witnesses). Bring 1 open clock and 1 enemy forward unchanged.
- *Dials*: Hand each new PC one *Echo*: a rumor, token, or map fragment linked to the last scene.

Sample Patron Claims (Pick 1 per PC)

>1 X

Patron	Example Claim Term
Aliyah (Curses)	Obligation +2 and bear a visible mark; once/scene your blessing bites an ally (GM may spend 1 SB to trigger).
Carrion-King (Endings→Beginnings)	Offer something broken each session; skip it once and he reclaims a boon until appeased.
Clockwork Monad (Optimization)	Adhere to a process vow; break it and gain COMPROMISED on your best asset.
Gallow's Bell (Reckoning)	Deliver one named debtor within three sessions or suffer OMEN.
Grimmir (The Wild)	Take the FERAL TELL Condition until a hunt is completed in his name.
Ikasha (Shadow)	Speak no true names for a week; reveal one and your shadow acts on its own (GM intrusion).
Inaea (Webs Fate)	Bind two rivals by promise; until then, you cannot refuse entangling bargains.
Isoka (Change)	Shed a relationship or identity; attempts to cling attract misfortune (GM may flip 1 die to 1 once/session).
Khemesh (Abyss)	Spend one night alone beneath open water/stone before next Downtime or suffer SHAKEN.
Livaea (Desire)	Surrender a private truth to a rival; gain leverage, lose safety.
Mab (Courts)	Host a salon and grant hospitality to an enemy; violate it and owe DEBT 2/6.
Maelstraeus (The Merchant)	Balance a ledger: repay a favor with interest within two sessions or forfeit a Gift.
Mykkiel (Writ)	Swear a public vow; break it and suffer SEIZED from your order.
Nidhoggr (Antiquity)	Restore a lost road/name; until then, suffer -1d on navigation/history.
Oath of Flame Light	Accept a watchdog role for a season; absent yourself and gain MARKED.
Raéyn (Sea)	Carry tidings between two ports before next moon; storms hunt you until done.
Sacred Geometry (Order)	Enforce a measure: refuse a “crooked” shortcut in play or take +1 Obligation.
Se	

6.3 Poison as Story Beats (Narrative ↔ Mechanics)

Poison is best when it *pushes scenes forward* rather than only dealing damage. This module frames poison as **Fatigue-forward**, with **Story Beats (SB)** powering escalation.

Core Model

- **Primary Effect**: Poison applies **Fatigue** (not Harm) unless it explicitly says otherwise.
- **Escalation**: The GM may **spend 1 SB** created in the scene to upgrade a poison instance: *Fatigue* (→) *Condition* (→) *Harm*. *Not the fiction of the escalation (spasms, fever spike, airway closing)*.
- **Clocks**: Use a named clock per poison (e.g., NEUROTOXIN LOAD 1/4). Ticks convert into Fatigue/Conditions at thresholds.
- **Resist**: Players may Resist poison normally; strong fiction (antidote, mask, purge rite) can reduce Position or cancel a tick.

Delivery & Position

≥11 X

Route	Base DV	Position	Cues
Contact	2	Sweat, numbness, rashes; Controlled with gloves/time.	Ingested 3 Bitter note, wine film; Risky at table, Controlled in lab.
Inhaled	3–4	Perfume cloud, dust motes; Desperate in confined spaces.	Injury/Venom 3–4 Fanged strike, tainted blade; Risky unless braced/prepared.

Outcomes Palette

Strong Hit. Avoid or purge: clear POISON CLOCK by 1 and ignore the current instance.

Mixed. Mark **Fatigue +1** *or* take a minor **Condition** (DIZZY, SHAKING). GM may tick the POISON CLOCK +1.

Miss. Mark **Fatigue +1** and tick POISON CLOCK +1–2. The GM may spend SB to apply a stronger Condition *or* escalate to **Harm 1**.

Conversion & Interactions

- **Fatigue** → **Harm**. Normal Fatigue overflow still converts per your health rules (see §??).
- **Armor**. Armor rarely helps vs. contact/ingested poisons; vs. *injury* delivery, apply armor before poison unless the blade is **Barbed/Venomous** (tag), which bypasses one step of conversion.
- **Rites**. *Purge* (§??) clears 1–2 ticks or downgrades Condition → Fatigue (GM sets Obligation).
- **Patrons**. Poison from a Patron-aligned source may trigger thematic backlash or Claims when resisted.

SB Dials for GMs

- **Pressure Valve (soft)**. Spend SB to *delay* catastrophic onset: tick clock instead of immediate Harm, but widen the threat.
- **Spike (hard)**. Spend SB to *frontload* impact: apply a named Condition now (BLIND, CRAMPING) or force a risky reposition.
- **Echo**. Bank 1 SB to trigger a delayed complication (e.g., relapse during negotiations).

Sample Poisons

≥1 X X

Name	Primary Effect (on hit)	SB-Driven Escalation
Bitterglass	Fatigue +1; breath tastes like copper.	1 SB: DIZZY. 2 SB: Harm 1 (air hunger).
Widowroot	Fatigue +1; numb grip.	1 SB: drop held item. 2 SB: SHAKING.
Dream-Marrow	Fatigue +1; slow recall.	1 SB: FOGGED (–1 to memory). 2 SB: ASLEEP unless shaken.
Serpent's Borrow	Fatigue +1; swelling puncture.	1 SB: CRAMPING. 2 SB: Harm 1 unless pressure banded.
Courtier's Kiss	Fatigue +1; sweet aftertaste.	1 SB: SWAYED (–1 vs. social manipulation). 2 SB: BLURRED VISION.

Worked Micro-Example

Gala Balcony. Inhaled perfume trap (DV 3, Risky). Mixed: PC marks Fatigue +1; GM ticks POISON CLOCK+1. Later, during the toast, the GM spends 1 SB to apply DIZZY; the PC chooses to lean on a friend (creating a bond) rather than push through and risk Harm.

Summary

Poison leans on **Fatigue** first. **SB** lets the GM pace escalation as the scene demands. Name the clock, show the tells, and let fiction lead the effect.

Chapter 7

Enhanced GM Play

Having mastered the advanced techniques of complication management, faction dynamics, and custom content creation, you now stand at the threshold of truly collaborative storytelling. The Crown system becomes genuinely transformative when the GM manages resources just like players, creating shared stakes and mutual investment in the narrative outcome. These enhanced mechanics elevate you from storyteller to co-creator, with your own resources, relationships, and narrative economy that mirror and complement the players' journey.

Resource Management for the Collaborative GM

Track these key resources to enhance your GM experience and create more balanced, deeply engaging gameplay where everyone has skin in the game.

GM Relationship Management

Just as players track relationship dice with NPCs, you should track relationship dice with major factions and key NPCs. This creates bidirectional engagement where both sides have tangible stakes in interactions, making the world feel genuinely reactive.

Starting GM Relationships

Begin each campaign with 1-2 relationship dice per major faction, representing your narrative investment in these groups:

[Starting GM Relationship Framework] IX

Faction Type Relationship Dice Allocation Guidelines

Political Factions	Nobility, merchants, clergy—allocate dice based on campaign focus
Criminal Organizations	Guilds, syndicates, pirates—dice represent underworld connections
Military/Civic Authorities	Guard, military, bureaucracy—authority relationships matter
Supernatural Entities	Fae, undead, spirits—mystical connections with narrative weight
Economic Powers	Merchant houses, guilds, trade consortiums—economic influence dice

Relationship Shifts

GM relationship dice change dynamically based on player actions and world events:

- **Successful player interaction with faction:** GM may gain/lose relationship dice based on outcome
- **Player betrayal of faction:** GM gains relationship dice with antagonistic factions
- **Player aid to faction:** GM may lose relationship dice with enemy factions as balance shifts
- **Faction initiatives:** World events can shift relationships independently of player actions

Bidirectional Rolls

When players interact with NPCs, both sides roll, creating a richer interaction dynamic:

- Player rolls their relationship dice with the NPC
- GM rolls their relationship dice with that faction
- Results determine the **quality** of interaction, not just binary success/failure
- High relationship dice can lead to unexpected aid or complications that feel earned

Shared Leverage Pool

Create a collaborative economy where helping each other becomes strategic and rewarding for everyone at the table.

Pool Management

[Shared Leverage Pool Mechanics] IX

Pool Element Management Guidelines

Initial Contribution Players contribute 1 leverage each to shared pool at session start
 GM Spending GM can spend from pool to enhance player successes or create interesting complications
 Player Spending Players can spend to bypass GM complications or enhance their own actions
 Refresh Cycle Pool refreshes each session, encouraging regular use and collaboration

Spending Options

[Leverage Spending Options] IX

Cost Effects and Narrative Impact

1 Leverage (GM) Add interesting detail to player success—colorful descriptions, minor benefits
 2 Leverage (GM) Create beneficial coincidence—timely arrival, fortunate discovery
 3+ Leverage (GM) Introduce major plot hook—significant narrative development
 1 Leverage (Player) Avoid minor complication—graceful recovery from small setbacks
 2 Leverage (Player) Gain advantage on next roll—momentum boost when it matters
 3+ Leverage (Player) Rewrite recent unfavorable outcome—meaningful narrative influence

Campaign Tracking Systems

Simple yet powerful tracking mechanisms that enhance long-term play without burying you in complex bookkeeping.

Faction Loyalty Tracker

Track persistent world state through faction relationships that evolve organically with player choices.

Loyalty Scale

Use a simple -3 to +3 scale for each major faction that everyone can understand at a glance:

[Faction Loyalty Scale] IX

Loyalty Level Narrative Manifestations and Behavior

- 3 (Enemy) Actively working against player interests, seeking to undermine at every opportunity
 - 2 (Hostile) Will cause trouble when possible, though not dedicating full resources to opposition
 - 1 (Unfriendly) Suspicious and unhelpful, requiring significant effort to gain cooperation
 - 0 (Neutral) Indifferent to player actions, responding only to direct incentives or threats
 - +1 (Friendly) Helpful when convenient, offering assistance that doesn't require significant sacrifice
 - +2 (Supportive) Actively assist player goals, allocating resources to help achieve objectives
 - +3 (Ally) Will sacrifice for player interests, treating player success as faction success
-

Loyalty Shifts

Player actions shift faction loyalty in measurable, predictable ways:

- **Major help:** +1 to +2 loyalty (saving faction from existential threat)
- **Minor help:** +1 loyalty (completing favors, providing useful assistance)
- **Neutral actions:** No change (transactions without significant impact)
- **Minor harm:** -1 loyalty (inconveniences, minor thefts, small betrayals)
- **Major harm:** -1 to -2 loyalty (significant damage to faction interests)
- **Betrayal:** -2 to -3 loyalty (breaking major agreements, causing grave harm)

Revelation Economy

Control information flow through mechanical budgeting that makes discovery feel earned and strategic.

Budget Management

[Revelation Economy Framework] IX

Economy Element Management Rules

- Point Generation Each clock segment resolved = 1 revelation point earned
- Discovery Costs Major discoveries cost 1-3 revelation points based on significance

Player Banking Players can "bank" unused revelation for future sessions

GM Strategic Saving GM can "save" revelation for climax moments and big reveals

Revelation Costs

1 Point: Basic facts, surface details—what anyone could learn with minimal effort

2 Points: Strategic insights, tactical advantages—information that changes approaches

3 Points: Major revelations, plot-critical information—game-changing discoveries

Escalation Economy

Make tension management a player choice rather than imposed obstacle, giving them agency over challenge levels.

Point System

[Escalation Economy Mechanics] IX

Mechanic Implementation Guidelines

Starting Pool Begin with 3 escalation points per major conflict or challenge

Escalation Costs Each escalation costs 1 point: +1 dice to opposition, new threat, complication

Player Control Players can spend 1 leverage to de-escalate or redirect challenges

Refresh Cycle Points refresh per new conflict, preventing infinite escalation

Collaborative Mechanics

These mechanics transform players from participants to active co-creators in the narrative process.

Complication Trading

Allow players to request specific challenge types, making them active participants in narrative creation rather than passive recipients of adversity.

Player Challenge Requests

Players can request specific complication types that match their character strengths and player interests:

- **Social complications:** Feuds, negotiations, diplomacy—exploring relationship dynamics
- **Physical challenges:** Combat, exploration, survival—testing capabilities and endurance
- **Mystery elements:** Investigation, puzzles, hidden information—engaging intellect and perception
- **Moral dilemmas:** Ethical conflicts, difficult choices—exploring character values and growth

Bargaining Process

1. Player declares desired complication type and spends leverage (1-2 points)
2. GM draws from appropriate deck but allows player modification of specific elements
3. GM can spend relationship dice to enhance complications with faction connections
4. Both sides benefit from engaging, invested complications that everyone wants to explore

Cross-Cultural Synergy

Encourage creative cross-cultural storytelling through mechanical rewards that recognize meaningful connections.

Synergy Recognition

Look for natural connections between different cultural elements in your campaign:

[Cross-Cultural Synergy Examples] IX

Cultural Combination Potential Synergy and Narrative Opportunities

Maritime + Criminal Zakov seafaring traditions + Kahfagia underworld connections = smuggling networks

Rural + Supernatural Aelaerem agricultural wisdom + Aelinnel mystical knowledge = nature spirits

Urban + Bureaucratic Ecktoria city life + Aeler administrative systems = political intrigue

Military + Political Black Banners discipline + Acasia diplomacy = strategic alliances

Synergy Bonuses

- Recognize cross-deck connections = +1 to relevant rolls (acknowledging creative thinking)
- Create perfect matches = Bonus leverage or relationship die (rewarding deep engagement)
- Suggest cross-cultural solutions = GM investment bonus (encouraging innovative play)

Momentum Banking

Reward efficient play and strategic pacing through saved resources that acknowledge player skill and preparation.

Banking Rules

[Momentum Banking System] IX

Momentum Source Acquisition Guidelines

Efficient Resolution Resolve conflicts under standard time = Bank 1 momentum per segment under

Creative Problem-Solving Innovative solutions = Bonus momentum opportunities

Cooperative Play Helping allies = Shared momentum benefits for entire group

Strategic Retreat Knowing when to withdraw = Preserved momentum for future use

Spending Momentum

- +1 to any relationship roll (social advantage)
- 1 free leverage (resource flexibility)
- Reroll one diamond draw (fortune's favor)
- Minor narrative influence (story shaping)

Session Management for Enhanced Play

Structured procedures for managing these enhanced gameplay elements during actual play sessions.

Pre-Session Setup

[Pre-Session Preparation Checklist] IX

Preparation Task Specific Actions and Considerations

Deck Review Check active decks for session themes and anticipated challenges
 Relationship Audit Review relationship dice for factions likely to appear
 Leverage Pool Setup Initialize Shared Leverage Pool with player contributions
 Momentum Carryover Note any momentum saved from previous sessions
 Loyalty Updates Prepare faction loyalty tracker adjustments based on past actions

During Session Management

- Track relationship shifts through player actions in real-time
- Monitor Shared Leverage Pool spending and opportunities
- Facilitate Complication Trading when players seek specific challenges
- Track faction loyalty changes as alliances shift
- Monitor Revelation Economy spending for information pacing
- Note Momentum Banking opportunities as they arise naturally

Post-Session Wrap-up

1. Adjust momentum based on clock resolution and efficiency
2. Update relationship dice for factions that saw significant interaction
3. Note relationship changes that will affect next session planning
4. Bank unused revelation points for future discovery moments
5. Track session investment ratings to gauge engagement levels
6. Plan any carryover elements that bridge between sessions

Gradual Implementation Timeline

Introduce these enhanced mechanics gradually to avoid overwhelming players or yourself with too many new systems at once.

Quick Start (Sessions 1-3)

[Initial Implementation Phase] IX

System Introduction Method and Simplicity Level

Shared Leverage Pool Start with 1 leverage each; simple spending options only
 Faction Loyalty Tracker Use basic -3 to +3 scale; track only 2-3 major factions
 Complication Trading Simple offers: "Want to make this more interesting?" with limited options
 Basic Relationship Shifts Track obvious changes only; don't overcomplicate early sessions

Building Skills (Sessions 4-6)

- Add Momentum Banking with clear segment tracking
- Implement Revelation Economy using clock segments as discovery budget
- Introduce Cross-Cultural Synergy recognition with bonus examples
- Begin Escalation Economy for major conflicts only

Master Level (Sessions 7+)

- Full bidirectional relationship system with nuanced interactions
- Complete Session Investment tracking with detailed metrics
- Advanced Revelation Economy with banking and strategic saving
- Player-GM Relationship Mirror for deep character integration
- Strategic Cross-Deck Synergy creation for complex narrative weaving

Narrative First: Enhanced Tools Serve Story

These enhanced mechanics are tools to deepen collaborative storytelling, not replace it. Use them when they enhance the fiction and discard them when they hinder the narrative flow:

- Let relationships shift naturally through roleplay and character development, not just dice mechanics
- Allow momentum to build through creative problem-solving and smart play, not mechanical optimization
- Let cross-cultural connections emerge from player choices and world exploration, not forced combinations

- Use the Shared Leverage Pool to reward collaborative play and interesting choices, not just mechanical efficiency

Remember: You are still the **weaver of consequences** in a world that responds to every action. These tools simply give you and your players more ways to create meaningful, interconnected stories together—stories where everyone has investment, agency, and stake in the outcome.

The world of Fate’s Edge responds to every action—and now, with these enhanced techniques, it responds to every **collaborative choice** made around the table.

Make it legendary, together.

Chapter 8

Tier IV and V Play

As characters reach Tier IV and V levels, the scope of play expands dramatically. What once were local concerns become matters of regional, national, or even world-shaking importance. This chapter provides guidance for managing the unique challenges and opportunities that come with high-tier play.

8.1 The Nature of High-Tier Play

At Tier IV and V, characters are no longer operating on the margins—they are movers and shakers. Their actions have visible, lasting impacts on the world. This shift requires the Game Master to think bigger, plan longer, and embrace the cascading consequences of player choices.

Key Characteristics

- **Wider Scope:** Actions affect cities, regions, or nations
- **Longer Timelines:** Consequences unfold over weeks, months, or years
- **Greater Stakes:** Failure means more than personal loss
- **Complex Alliances:** Multiple factions with competing interests
- **Legacy Impact:** Choices create lasting changes to the world

8.2 Deck-Based Campaign Management

High-tier play benefits from structured campaign management using the Game Deck and other tools to track large-scale developments.

Campaign Clock Expansion

Expand beyond core campaign clocks to include:

- **Faction Influence** (6): Track major faction relationships
- **Public Opinion** (8): Regional perception of the group
- **Resource Network** (6): Economic and logistical reach
- **Legacy Projects** (10): Long-term initiatives with lasting impact

Using Cards for World Events

Draw cards periodically to introduce world events:

- **Suit 1 (Swords):** Geographic/political changes
- **Suit 2 (Crowns):** Social/cultural shifts
- **Suit 3 (Anchors):** Economic/resource developments
- **Suit 4 (Glyphs):** Opportunities/leverage points

8.3 Managing Multiple Holdings and Allies

Tier IV+ characters often command extensive networks. Use these techniques to keep management manageable:

Holding Clustering

Group related holdings into portfolios:

- **Economic:** Trade routes, businesses, investments
- **Political:** Titles, contacts, influence networks
- **Military:** Retainers, fortifications, strategic positions
- **Intelligence:** Informants, research facilities

Ally Hierarchies

Create chains of command:

- **Lieutenants** (Expertise 4-5): Direct reports who manage others
- **Commanders** (Expertise 3): Mid-level managers of specific portfolios
- **Agents** (Expertise 2): Field operatives and specialists

8.4 High-Stakes Consequences

Setback Points at high tiers should reflect the expanded scope of play:

High-Tier Setback Sinks

- **3-4 SP:** Regional setback, major holding compromised
- **5-6 SP:** Faction relationship damaged, public scandal
- **7-8 SP:** Strategic position lost, major ally turned
- **9+ SP:** Paradigm shift, fundamental world change

Deck-Driven Consequences

Use the Game Deck for major setbacks:

- **Court Cards:** Major faction leaders or institutions affected
- **Aces:** Foundational assumptions challenged
- **Multiple Cards:** Cascade effects across multiple domains

8.5 Running Epic Campaigns

High-tier play often involves extended campaigns with multiple acts and lasting consequences.

Act Structure

- **Act I - Establishment** (Sessions 1-3): Set the stage, establish stakes
- **Act II - Escalation** (Sessions 4-8): Complications multiply, alliances shift
- **Act III - Resolution** (Sessions 9-12): Climactic confrontations, lasting changes
- **Epilogue** (Session 13+): Legacy assessment, new beginnings

Campaign Seeds

Use the full 4-card draw for major campaign hooks:

- **Suit 1 (Swords):** Primary location/region of conflict
- **Suit 2 (Crowns):** Key faction/leader driving events
- **Suit 3 (Anchors):** Major complication/threat
- **Suit 4 (Glyphs):** Opportunity/resource to exploit

8.6 Mass Combat and Warfare

Tier IV+ characters often find themselves commanding armies or influencing wars.

Army Scale Combat

Simplify large-scale battles:

- Treat armies as powerful allies with specialized skills
- Use clocks to track morale, supply, and strategic position
- Focus rolls on leadership and tactical decisions, not individual combat

Advanced Subsystem: Mass Combat

For a more detailed warfare system, use the following framework:

Army as an Entity Create a character sheet for the army with Approaches (e.g., Aggressive, Disciplined, Cunning) and a "Morale & Supply" clock.

The Battle Clock Each significant battle is a 4-6 segment clock. Characters can contribute by using their skills to create advantages or by leading from the front.

Strategic Rolls Commanders make skill checks against a target number. Success fills segments on the Battle Clock; failure fills segments on the army's "Morale & Supply" clock or introduces a complication via the Game Deck.

War Campaigns

Structure extended conflicts:

- **Strategic Phase:** Resource management, alliance building
- **Tactical Phase:** Key battles, covert operations
- **Political Phase:** Negotiations, aftermath management

8.7 Mythic Challenges

At Tier V, characters approach legendary status. Create challenges that match their stature:

Existential Threats

- Cosmic entities beyond normal understanding
- Reality-altering phenomena
- Threats to entire civilizations or ways of life

Legacy Missions

Missions that will be remembered for generations:

- Founding or destroying nations
- Ending or beginning ages
- Reshaping fundamental aspects of the world

Advanced Subsystem: Legacy Projects

A Legacy Project is a long-term goal that extends beyond a single adventure. To run one:

Define the Project The players state their goal (e.g., "Build a Mage University," "Forge an Alliance of Kingdoms").

Create the Project Clock This is a large clock, typically 8-12 segments.

Determine Prerequisites The project may require specific resources, allies, or completed quests to even begin.

Milestone Advances Instead of filling the clock with single rolls, each major story arc or significant achievement fills 2-3 segments. Setbacks from the Game Deck can remove segments.

8.8 Managing Player Agency

With great power comes the need for great Game Master flexibility:

Player-Driven Narratives

- Let player choices genuinely reshape the world
- Honor long-term commitments and consequences
- Provide meaningful opposition that matches their scale

World Reactivity

- Factions respond realistically to player actions
- Economic and political systems show cause-and-effect
- Non-player characters remember and react to past interactions

8.9 Rivals and Counterpoints

High-tier characters attract attention—both positive and negative:

Creating Worthy Opponents

- Mirror player capabilities and resources
- Give them their own networks and influence
- Create personal connections and history with the group

Dynamic Rivalry

- Rivals evolve based on player actions
- Competition across multiple domains (political, economic, social)
- Occasional cooperation against greater threats

8.10 Campaign Legacy

Help players see the lasting impact of their choices:

Legacy Tracking

- Document major world changes initiated by the group
- Track faction relationships and their evolution
- Record personal legacies and how they're remembered

Epilogue Framework

Use cards to determine long-term outcomes:

- Draw 2-3 cards from each suit
- Interpret results as 5-10 year outcomes
- Let players narrate their characters' final fates

8.11 Game Master Preparation Tips

Think in Campaign Arcs

- Plan 3-5 major story arcs per tier
- Each arc should have lasting world impact
- Connect arcs through recurring themes or non-player characters

Prepare Flexible Frameworks

- Create faction relationship matrices
- Develop economic and political systems that respond to actions
- Build modular locations that can evolve

Embrace Player Creativity

- Let player holdings genuinely solve problems
- Reward creative use of influence and resources
- Say "yes" to ambitious player plans, then make them interesting

8.12 Sample High-Tier Scenario

The Shattered Crown Crisis

A Tier IV campaign seed:

- **Suit 1 (The Royal Crypts):** Ancient tombs beneath the capital
- **Suit 2 (The Usurper):** A noble house claiming the vacant throne
- **Suit 3 (Fractured Loyalties):** Regional lords choosing sides
- **Suit 4 (The Crown's Secret):** Hidden royal treasures and alliances

Clocks: Succession Crisis (8), Noble Conspiracy (6), Public Unrest (6)

This scenario can evolve based on player choices—supporting the usurper, finding a true heir, or establishing a new form of government.

8.13 Tools of the Game Master

This section summarizes the key procedures for running epic-tier play.

Core Procedures

Starting an Epic Arc Draw 4 cards (one per suit) to generate the core elements of a major story: Location, Faction, Threat, and Opportunity.

Managing the World At the start of each session or after a major event, draw a card from the Game Deck to see how the world changes. Use the suit to determine the domain (Political, Social, Economic, Opportunistic).

Handling Major Setbacks When players accumulate 3+ Setback Points, consider spending them for a high-tier consequence. Use the Game Deck to determine the nature of the setback, with Court Cards and Aces indicating severe, world-altering events.

Tracking Progress Maintain the expanded set of Campaign Clocks (Faction Influence, Public Opinion, etc.) to mechanically represent the group's impact on the world.

Running Key Scenes

Mass Combat Use the Battle Clock subsystem. Focus on the characters' leadership actions and their consequences for the army's morale.

Legacy Projects Use the Legacy Project Clock. Advance it through milestone achievements, not individual rolls.

Epilogue After the final session, use a multi-card draw from the Game Deck to inspire the narration of the world's and characters' long-term futures.

8.14 Conclusion

Tier IV and V play represents the pinnacle of storytelling in this system. Embrace the epic scope, honor player agency, and let the world truly respond to their legendary actions. Remember: these characters don't just participate in history—they make it.

The dice still matter, consequences still flow, and every choice still carries weight. But now, those choices echo across nations and generations.

Make it legendary.

Chapter 9

World Regions and Cultures

The world of *Fate's Edge* is a tapestry of ancient empires, emerging kingdoms, and untamed wilderness. This chapter surveys major regions and cultures that shape the setting—from the marble cities of Ecktoria to the mist-shrouded fields of Aelinnel. These frameworks are yours to adapt, blend, or reimagine.

9.1 The Amaranthine Inland Sea

At the heart of the known world lies the **Amaranthine Inland Sea**, a wind-gnarled waterway ringed by marble quays, vineyard hills, and smoke-blue mountains. For millennia it has served as the circulatory system of trade, faith, and conquest. Tides are subtle, but seasonal winds and river-feeds set the rhythm of commerce, pilgrimage, and war.

9.2 Northern Shore of the Amaranthine Sea

Ecktoria — The Uтарan Imperium Successor

Once the furnace of empire (*Marble & Fire*), Ecktoria remains a palimpsest of power: old stones bearing new banners, old laws written under fresh seals. Though imperial reach waned, its civic habits endure.

Marble Cities Forums, amphitheaters, and aqueducts yet flow. District fountains double as public oaths guaranteed by guild charters.

Imperial Roads Mile-markers of white granite, way-shrines and customary tolls noted for couriers of the *Ashen Staves*.

Legal Legacy The **Uтарan Civic Codes** govern contracts, inheritance, and war-rights; local custom bends them under licensed *variance*.

Architectural Wonders Sun-bridges spanning deltas, the **Vault of a Thousand Maps**, and the **Amber Arch** petrified by alchemical storm.

Acasia — "The Broken Province"

Frontiers braided from roads, rivers, and resentments. Here the outer seams of empire frayed first. Fortresses turned manors, manors turned townholds, and banners multiplied like thistles after rain.

Petty Kingdoms Dozens of river-vales ruled by river-kings and banner-queens. Alliances shift with marriages, harvests, and omens.

Fortified Towns Walls for defense, not display. Gate-streets kink for ambush; towers carry horn-codes every child knows.

Mercenary Culture Free companies keep a *Black Ledger*: contracts fulfilled, oaths kept, debts paid.

Cultural Mix Imperial rites meet clan feasts; old gods share niches with civic saints. Exiles and second chances (*see* Silkstrand tales) are common.

Vhasia — "Old Vhasia & The Bloodlands"

Politically fractured land of courtly intrigue and martial tradition, where ancient bloodlines vie for supremacy amid shifting alliances and ceremonial warfare.

Fortress Castles Stone keeps crowned with gilded spires; courtiers plot in tapestried halls while knights train in courtyards.

Political Intrigue Complex web of alliances, vendettas, and ceremonial duels that settle matters of honor and succession.

Court Culture Elaborate ceremonies, patronage of arts, and rigid social hierarchies maintained through ritual and reputation.

Heraldic Traditions Complex system of banners, titles, and precedence that govern social interactions and military commands.

Thepyrgos

Province and capital city renowned as a center of learning, magic, and scholarly pursuit, where ancient towers house both wisdom and dangerous secrets.

Scholarly Traditions Tower-cities where mages, philosophers, and researchers pursue knowledge in specialized colleges and scriptoriums.

Arcane Heritage Deep traditions of magical study, with libraries containing texts predating the fall of ancient empires.

Academic Rivalries Intense competition between schools of thought, often manifesting in formal debates, magical duels, or scholarly contests.

Mystical Dangers Forbidden knowledge and experimental magic that sometimes escape control, creating ongoing threats.

Viterra — "The Last Kingdom"

Tudor-inspired realm that straddles the Dolmis and Amaranthine seas, known for its legalistic approach to governance and strategic river crossings.

Hedge-Law Culture Complex system of legal precedents, tolls, and river rights that govern everything from trade to personal conduct.

Duchy System Semi-autonomous regions governed by dukes who maintain their own courts and armies while owing fealty to the crown.

River Commerce Economy built around controlling strategic crossings, ferry rights, and maritime trade routes.

Legalistic Politics Intrigue centered on court cases, charter disputes, and the interpretation of ancient laws rather than open warfare.

Ubral — "The Stone Between Spears"

Highland realm of rugged clans and fortified holds, where honor culture and martial traditions dominate social interactions.

Clan Strongholds Fortified positions in mountain passes and high valleys, each clan maintaining its own laws and customs.

Honor Culture Society built around concepts of personal honor, family reputation, and the resolution of disputes through formal challenges.

Highland Warfare Military traditions emphasizing heavy infantry, defensive positions, and knowledge of mountain terrain.

Clan Loyalties Complex web of alliances, blood-feuds, and marriage pacts that shift with each generation.

Kahfagia — "The Empire of Wakes and Storm-Flags"

Maritime empire built on naval supremacy and exploration, where ship captains and merchant-adventurers shape both policy and culture.

Naval Supremacy Military and economic power based on controlling sea lanes, harbors, and maritime trade routes.

Explorer Culture Tradition of venturing into unknown waters, mapping new territories, and establishing trading posts.

Storm-Flag Protocol Complex system of maritime signals, weather prediction, and naval customs that govern seaborne activities.

Mixed Heritage Cosmopolitan society influenced by contacts with distant lands and diverse cultures encountered through exploration.

9.3 Southern Reaches

Theona — "The Marsh Crown"

Three island realms connected by causeways and maritime traditions, where wetland resources and naval culture define daily life.

Marsh Agriculture Sophisticated systems of dikes, canals, and floating gardens that support dense populations in wetland environments.

Island Culture Distinct traditions for each island, unified by shared maritime customs and inter-island trade.

Waterborne Commerce Economy based on fishing, water transport, and control of strategic waterways between islands.

Folk Horror Traditions Deep connection to marsh spirits, water deities, and ancient practices that blur the line between protection and appeasement.

The Mistlands — "Fields Under a Moving Sky"

Isolated region shrouded in perpetual mists, where ancient Aelerian protectorate status creates tension between autonomy and oversight.

Mistbound Geography Landscape of bogs, waterways, and hidden settlements connected by causeways and boat paths.

Bell Culture Complex system of bells and wards must be maintained to keep the Direwood horrors at bay.

Isolation Tensions Cultural friction between desire for independence and practical need for trade and protection.

Ancient Secrets Ruins and artifacts predating the Aelerian protectorate, hinting at older civilizations and forgotten magics.

9.4 Peoples and Cultures

Wood Elves (Lethai-al "People of the Body")

Inhabitants of the Valewood, deeply connected to the natural world and the cycles of growth and decay.

Forest Harmony Lifestyle integrated with woodland ecosystems, practicing sustainable hunting, gathering, and cultivation.

Body-Centric Philosophy Belief system emphasizing physical experience, instinct, and the wisdom of the body over abstract thought.

Living Magic Spellcasting traditions that work with natural forces rather than commanding them, often involving plant growth and animal communication.

Seasonal Rituals Calendar of ceremonies marking natural cycles, from planting rites to autumn harvests to winter hibernation periods.

High Elves (Lethai-thora "People of the Mind")

Primarily found in Thepyrgos as established immigrants, known for their scholarly pursuits and intellectual traditions.

Scholarly Excellence Deep traditions of academic study, magical research, and philosophical debate.

Mind-Centric Philosophy Cultural emphasis on reason, logic, and the pursuit of abstract knowledge over physical concerns.

Arcane Mastery Advanced magical techniques and theoretical understanding that often surpass other traditions.

Long Perspective Tendency to view problems and conflicts through the lens of centuries or millennia rather than immediate concerns.

"Dark Elves" (Lethai-ar)

Rare practitioners pledged to Isoka and Inaea, embracing serpent and spider themes without inherent evil, representing different philosophical approaches.

Serpent Wisdom Followers of Isoka, emphasizing transformation, renewal, and the shedding of old identities for new growth.

Spider Webs Devotees of Inaea, focusing on connections, patterns, and the weaving of fate through careful manipulation.

Philosophical Balance Neither inherently good nor evil, but representing alternative approaches to power and influence.

Cultural Rarity Uncommon in most settings, often viewed with suspicion or fascination by other cultures.

Gnomes (Aelinnel — "People of Sums")

Inhabitants of the Mistlands, inspired by dark fairy tales and Wonderland lore, known for their mathematical precision and otherworldly logic.

Mathematical Culture Society built around complex calculations, probability, and the belief that all phenomena can be understood through numerical relationships.

Fey Logic Non-linear thinking patterns that seem illogical to outsiders but follow their own internal consistency.

Mist Adaptation Unique abilities to navigate and manipulate the perpetual mists of their homeland.

Contract Culture Deep tradition of precise agreements, wordplay, and the careful crafting of obligations that can be both helpful and dangerous.

Halflings (Aelaerem — "People of the Hearth")

Peaceful agricultural communities with folk horror elements, emphasizing home, family, and the dark side of domestic tranquility.

Hearth Culture Deep connection to home, family, and the maintenance of traditional ways of life.

Agricultural Expertise Sophisticated farming techniques and seasonal celebrations that mark the rhythm of rural life.

Folk Horror Elements Dark undercurrents in seemingly peaceful communities, where hospitality can become trapping and tradition carries hidden costs.

Community Defense Strong traditions of mutual aid and collective action when the community is threatened.

Dwarves (Aeler — "People of Stone")

Mountain-dwelling peoples of the Aelerian ranges, known for their craftsmanship, clan traditions, and complex relationship with stone and metal.

Stone-Sense Innate ability to understand and work with geological formations, making them master miners and architects.

Clan System Complex social structure based on family lines, with intricate systems of honor, debt, and mutual obligation.

Craft Traditions Legendary skills in metalworking, stonework, and engineering that have been refined over generations.

Underground Cities Vast complexes carved from mountain hearts, connected by tunnels and halls that serve both practical and ceremonial purposes.

Other Races — "Peoples Beyond the Old Roads"

Various other cultures and peoples exist in the margins of the known world, each with their own traditions and ways of life.

Nomadic Tribes Various peoples who follow seasonal patterns across steppes, deserts, and other marginal lands.

Coastal Peoples Maritime cultures that live in harmony with ocean environments and maintain their own naval traditions.

Border Cultures Mixed communities that arise where different major cultures meet, creating unique hybrid traditions.

Ancient Survivors Remnants of older civilizations that persist in isolated regions, maintaining forgotten knowledge and customs.

9.5 Regional Specialties and Resources

Economic Strengths

Agrarian Belts Grain, olives, wine, riverfish.

Mineral Ranges Iron, copper, silver, salt, cut-stone.

Trade Hubs Banking, oath-bonds (insurance), information markets.

Coasts Ship-timber, sailcloth, tar, dried fish.

Forest Marches Timber, resin, furs, healing herbs.

Unique Products

- **Mistlands:** Fog-pollen ink, peat-bricks, bog iron, *mistglass* that hums in storms.
- **Aeler:** Tempered steel, memory-stones etched with oath-runes, counterweight bridges.
- **Theona:** Citrus oils, amphora ceramics, star-compasses.
- **Kahfagia:** Goods and spices from across the world, including the mysterious "west lands;" potatoes, tomatoes, maize.
- **Acasia:** Veteran mercenaries, mixed-style armor, border-wares bearing two stamps.

9.6 Travel and Trade

Major Routes (Reference)

Amaranthine Coastway Sea-corridor linking Theona, Linn, Zakov, and Kahfagia.

Astroegro Straits Pilot-ruled narrows; tolls and weather courts.

River Roads Grain and scrip from interior markets to sea.

Aelerian Passes Underways Vault-routes beneath the peaks; sealed in winter.

Kahfagian Sea Lanes Goods from across the sea; dangerous journeys.

The Way Of Silk Overland routes from the far-east ending in Silkstrand.

Shadow Corridors Liminal shortcuts near the Ways Between; risky, fast, never the same twice.

Travel Considerations

- **Road Quality:** From imperial highways to cart-ruts; in the marsh, dust becomes murder-mud overnight.
- **Bridges & Ferries:** Strategic choke points; expect tolls, ledgers, and oaths on both banks.
- **Seasonality:** Passes close, steppe-sand shifts, sea-winds reverse; plan by *Wind Tables*.
- **Safe Havens:** Caravanserais, monasteries, lighthouse-cloisters owing aid by charter.

9.7 Regional Clocks and World Response

Tie adventures to **clocks** that change the map:

- **Grain Shortage (4):** If filled, food riots reshape a Theonacity's politics.
- **Banner-Muster (6):** Steppe tribes unify; caravans demand new terms.
- **Harbor Scrip Crash (4):** Trade letters lose value; smugglers thrive.
- **Fog-Roused (6):** Mistland spirits awaken; bells fail at night.

GM Story Beats may *tick* these when the party's choices strike regional nerves: missed payments, broken oaths, loud magic, conspicuous success.

9.8 Cultural Practices and Customs

Languages and Cant

- **Utaran High** (court, law, scholarship); **River Cant** (trade pidgin with gesture-signs).
- **Steppe Tongues** (whistled across distance); **Sea-Patter** (mariners' clipped code).

Religious Patterns

- **Temple & School** (Theona): Ethical schools blend with temple tithes; festivals mark navigation seasons.
- **Ancestor Poles** (Vilikari): Kin-spirits seated at feasts; oaths taken under the watch of names.
- **Sky & Earth** (Steppe): Wind-knots bound, libations poured into the first hoofprint.
- **Sea-Rites** (Linn/Zakov): Weather judgments witnessed by storm-priests.

Law and Custom

- **Utaran Codes**: Contracts, inheritance, civic duties; licensed *variance* lets local custom lean the written law.
- **Clan Law** (Acasia/Vilikari): Oath-payment by cattle, steel, or service-days.
- **Merchant Law**: Arbitration by bonded factors; ledgers sealed in wax and salt.

9.9 Magic and Attitude by Region

- **Ecktoria**: Licensed thaumaturges file *Casting Notices* for urban work; unfiled magic draws fines—and attention.
- **Acasia**: Folk-wards respected; visible sorcery can start a levy.
- **Aeler**: Rituals fold into craft; backlash treated like a cracked beam—fix it, document it.
- **Mistlands**: Bells and fog-names soothe fears; spiritualists mediate with the grey things.
- **Linn/Zakov**: Weather rites must be witnessed by three wind-bearers; false rites are crimes.

9.10 Creating Regional Adventures

Using Regional Characteristics

Consider how geography shapes travel and pursuit; which customs open doors (or close them); which tensions tick **clocks**; and which resources (salt, steel, scrip, secrets) define stakes.

Mixing Regional Elements

- **Tin vs. Tide:** Aeler miners accuse a port-city of short-weighted scales.
- **Festival of Threads:** Islanders, Steppe riders, and Heartlanders trade rites and insults under watchful magistrates.
- **Fog and Fire:** A Mistlands relic surfaces in a Theonaauction; three factions bid with more than coin.
- **The Unquiet Map:** An Aeler survey contradicts an old border—whose truth stands?

Regional Adventure Seeds

Mistlands Mystery (Clock 4: Bells Go Silent)

- Dusk bells falter. Tracks end at a mirror-pool that shows tomorrow's sky.
- *Complications (SP):* Fog names stolen; a bell-tree cracks; a reed altar burns cold.

Broken Marches Conflict (Clock 6: Valley Claim)

- Two lords court your company. One keeps books; one keeps graves tidy.
- *Complications (SP):* Ambush at witness trees; the Black Ledger demands a tithe.

Stone Kingdom Discovery (Clock 6: Archive Wakes)

- An echo-vault opens to song. Memory-stones argue *with each other*.
- *Complications (SP):* Rival charter; a cracked beam of magic; miners strike for better rites.

Theona Trade War (Clock 4: Harbor Scrip Collapse)

- Watermarks sing wrong. A counterfeit choir spreads.
- *Complications (SP):* Dock riot; lighthouse shutters locked; a patron's legal *variance* revoked.

9.11 Adapting Regions to Your Campaign

These regions are *frameworks*. Rename, splice, or tilt them toward your tale:

- Merge Mistland bells with island wind-courts to create *storm-bell law*.
- Let the Merchant Concord adopt steppe arbitration; settle contracts at a gallop.
- Tie your party to a **regional clock**: when it fills, the map—and your story—changes.

Remember: the world should *answer* the players. Roads reroute around their deeds; bells ring differently after they pass; ledgers carry their names in salt.

Chapter 10

Running the Game: A Practical Guide

Reading the rules is one thing; feeling the flow of the game is another. This chapter provides a practical, illustrative walkthrough of how **Fate's Edge** operates at the table. We will follow a hypothetical group through several common scenarios, showing how the core procedures—Position, Rails, Clocks, and the Deck of Consequences—create a dynamic, responsive narrative. The goal is to see the rules not as restrictions, but as natural tools for collaborative storytelling.

The Setup: Our Intrepid Band¹⁰

To illustrate, we'll follow a specific group:

- **Valerius:** An Ecktorian ex-legionary (Body/Resolve), the group's protector.
- **Elara:** A Vhasian spy and infiltrator (Wits/Skulduggery), the group's face and trickster.
- **Kael:** A dwarven stonemason and lore-keeper (Lore/Geomancy), the group's scholar and planner.

They are in the city of **Silkstrand¹⁰**, Acasia, and have learned that a rival merchant, **Lord Silas**, possesses a sealed charter that proves their patron's rightful claim to a lucrative trade route. Their goal: acquire the charter from Silas's heavily guarded manor.

Scenario 1: The Heist - Infiltrating Silas's Manor

A heist is a classic test of planning, improvisation, and dealing with cascading complications. Let's see how it unfolds.

Phase 1: The Approach - Gathering Information

The players decide to case the manor before attempting entry. Elara suggests scouting the perimeter and socializing with the household staff at a nearby tavern.

The Action: Elara will use **Wits + Skulduggery** to identify patrol patterns and a weak point in the security.

- **Position: Risky.** The streets are watched, but the evening crowd provides some cover.
- **Rails:** The GM sets a **Hunt Rail** (4 segments) representing the alertness of Silas's guards. A complication might fill this clock.

Elara rolls: **2d10** (Wits 2 + Skulduggery 0). She gets a **5** and a **3** → a **Partial Success**.

The Outcome: She successfully identifies a side gate used by kitchen staff that is less frequently watched. **However**, the GM spends 1 Story Beat. A patrolling guard spots her loitering and becomes suspicious, advancing the **Hunt Rail** by 1 segment. The guard doesn't raise an alarm yet but will remember her face.

Phase 2: The Infiltration - A Desperate Climb

With the side gate identified but now under increased scrutiny, Valerius proposes a different approach: scaling the outer wall in a blind spot under cover of darkness.

The Action: Valerius will use **Body + Athletics** to scale the wall.

- **Position: Desperate.** The wall is high and slick with dew. A fall would be serious, and he's exposed.
- **Rails:** The **Hunt Rail** is now at 1/4. A complication here could be dire.

Valerius rolls: **3d10** (Body 3 + Athletics 0). He gets a **6**, a **2**, and a **1** → a **Full Success!** He scrambles silently over the wall and drops into a deserted herb garden.

The Outcome: No complication. He's inside. He secures a rope for the others. The GM notes that the **Desperate** position was overcome by a great roll, avoiding what could have been a nasty fall or immediate discovery.

Phase 3: The Complication - An Unlocked Door

Inside, Kael uses his **Stone-Sense** to try and feel the layout of the manor's lower levels, hoping to locate the vault.

The Action: Kael uses **Lore + Geomancy** to attune to the stonework.

- **Position: Controlled10.** He's in a quiet, stable area and can focus.

Kael rolls: **2d10** (Lore 2 + Geomancy 0). He gets a **1** and a **3** → a **Complication**.

The Outcome: He gets a vague sense of a reinforced room to the east, but the GM now has 2 SB to spend. The GM decides to introduce a new element: the door to the kitchen swing opens, and a young, nervous apprentice carrying a tray of wine steps out, freezing when he sees the intruders. The scene immediately shifts to a social encounter.

Phase 4: Improvisation - Swaying the Apprentice

Elara quickly steps forward, putting herself between the apprentice and the armed Valerius.

The Action: Elara will use **Presence + Sway** to convince the apprentice he saw nothing, perhaps with a bribe.

- **Position: Risky.** He's scared and could easily scream.
- **Rails:** The GM invokes a **Curfew Rail** (6 segments)—how long until the master of the kitchen comes looking for the late wine?

Elara rolls: **3d10** (Presence 2 + Sway 1). She gets a **4**, a **5**, and a **2** → a **Partial Success**.

The Outcome: The apprentice is swayed by the coin and doesn't scream, but he whispers, "The master's steward makes his rounds in five minutes! You must be gone!" The GM advances the **Curfew Rail** by 2 segments, creating immediate time pressure. The heist continues, but the clock is ticking loudly.

Heist Flow Summary

This sequence shows the core loop:

1. **Player declares goal and approach.**
2. **GM sets Position and relevant Rails/Clocks.**
3. **Roll determines outcome:** Success moves the plan forward; Partial Success does so with a cost (SB or Clock advance); Complication introduces a new problem (spending SB).
4. **The fiction changes**, and the loop repeats. The game naturally oscillates between controlled planning and chaotic improvisation.

Scenario 2: The Aftermath - Social Fallout

The group successfully retrieves the charter (though not without further close calls). However, Lord Silas knows he was robbed and suspects their patron. A few days later, Elara is invited to a high-society party at Silas's manor—a clear trap, but one she cannot refuse without admitting guilt.

The Scene: A Gilded Trap

The party is in full swing. Silas corners Elara, his tone friendly but his eyes cold.

The Action: Elara needs to navigate this conversation without giving anything away, using **Wits + Sway** to maintain her cover story.

- **Position: Desperate.** She's on his turf, surrounded by his allies.
- **Rails:** The GM sets a **Crowd Rail** (8 segments) representing the social pressure and potential for a public scandal that could ruin her patron.

Elara rolls: **3d10** (Wits 2 + Sway 1). She gets a **1**, a **1**, and a **4** → a **Complication**.

The Outcome: Disaster. Her story has holes. Silas smiles thinly and says, loud enough for others to hear, "A curious tale. It seems the rats in this city are growing bold." The GM spends the SB for a major social setback: the **Crowd Rail** is filled instantly. Whispers spread, and her patron's reputation takes a significant hit. The GM also draws from the Deck of Consequences for a long-term effect: the **Queen of Spades**—a major political figure (perhaps the Matron of Silkstrand herself) takes note of the scandal, creating a new, powerful rival.

Scenario 3: The Journey - A Chase through the Mistlands

With heat increasing in Silkstrand, the group decides to flee north into the Mistlands to deliver the charter to a safe ally. Lord Silas has hired a band of mercenaries to pursue them.

This is a perfect opportunity to use the **Travel Deck** and abstract a chase sequence.

The Chase as a Series of Clocks

The GM sets up two opposing clocks:

- **PCs' Escape Clock** (6 segments): They need to lose their pursuers or reach the safety of the dwarven holds.
- **Pursuers' Hunt Clock** (6 segments): The mercenaries are closing in.

Each leg of the journey is resolved with a skill check, with the outcome affecting both clocks.

Leg 1: Navigating the Fog. Kael uses **Lore + Survival** to guide them.

- **Position: Risky.** The mist is thick and disorienting.

Kael rolls a **Partial Success**. The GM rules: The PCs advance their **Escape Clock** by 1 segment, but the pursuers also advance their **Hunt Clock** by 1 segment—the mercenaries are doggedly following their trail.

Leg 2: Crossing the Charnel Bog. Valerius uses **Body + Athletics** to find a safe path.

- **Position: Desperate.** The bog is treacherous and slow-going.

Valerius rolls a **Full Success!** The PCs find a swift, hidden path, advancing their **Escape Clock** by 2 segments. The pursuers are stymied, and their **Hunt Clock** does not advance.

Leg 3: The Ambush. The Hunt Clock is at 4/6. The mercenaries catch up! This triggers a **Skirmish** as a discrete scene (see below), which will decisively impact the chase clocks.

Scenario 4: The Skirmish - A Fight in the Fog

The mercenaries emerge from the mist, blades drawn. The GM frames the conflict not as a round-by-round tactical simulation, but as a high-stakes action scene with a clear objective: **break through the ambush and escape**.

Setting the Stakes

- **Objective:** The PCs need to create an opening to flee.
- **Position: Desperate.** They are ambushed and outnumbered.
- **Clocks:** The GM creates a **Mob Overwhelm Clock** (4 segments). If it fills, the PCs are surrounded and captured.

Valerius's Action: He decides to charge the leader, hoping to break the mercenaries' morale with a show of force. He uses **Body + Warfare**.

He rolls a **Partial Success**. He clashes with the leader, holding him off, but the GM spends a SB: a lesser mercenary gets a lucky strike. Valerius takes **Harm 1** (a gash on his arm). The **Mob Overwhelm Clock** advances by 1 segment.

Elara's Action: Seeing Valerius in trouble, she throws a smoke pellet (a temporary asset) and uses **Wits + Skulduggery** to create a diversion.

She rolls a **Full Success!** The smoke and her shouts confuse the mercenaries, creating the needed opening. The **Mob Overwhelm Clock** is reduced by 2 segments as the enemy formation breaks.

The Outcome: With the opening created, Kael shouts for a retreat. The group disengages. The skirmish is over. They have survived but are wounded. The **Hunt Clock** is reset—the mercenaries are temporarily scattered. The PCs can now continue their journey, with the consequences of Valerius's harm applying to his future actions.

Conclusion: The Rhythm of Play

As these examples show, **Fate's Edge** is not about rigidly following a script. It's about a conversation—a rhythm between the players' ambitions and the world's reactions.

The GM's Mantra

- **Fiction First:** Always start with the fictional situation. What is happening? What makes sense?
- **Set Position and Rails:** Use these tools to define the stakes and pressure of a scene.
- **Let the Dice Decide:** Embrace the results. A complication is not a failure; it's a twist.
- **Spend Story Beats:** Make the world feel alive and reactive. Consequences should flow naturally from the fiction.
- **Think in Arcs:** Connect scenes. The social fallout from the party leads to the chase, which leads to new opportunities or threats in the Mistlands.

Your role as the GM is to be a fan of the characters, a fair judge of the rules, and an enthusiastic architect of a world that responds. Let the players drive the story, and use the mechanics to make their choices feel meaningful and consequential. The dice will guide you to a story that neither you nor your players could have predicted, and that is the greatest strength of this game.

Chapter 11

Appendix: Tools, Tables, and Optional Rules

This appendix provides quick-reference tools, sample content, and optional rules to support your game. Whether you're running a quick session or a long campaign, these tables and tips will help you keep the world alive and the tension high.

Quick Reference Sheets

Outcome Matrix

Case	Name	Guidance
$S \geq DV$ and $C = 0$	Clean Success	Deliver the intent crisply.
$S \geq DV$ and $C > 0$	Success & Cost	Grant the intent; spend/bank SB for complications.
$0 < S < DV$	Partial	Progress with a fork. Award a boon.
$S = 0$	Miss	No progress. Cash/bank SB. Award two boons.

Story Beat (SB) Spend Menu

- **1 SB:** Minor pressure: noise, trace, +1 Supply segment.
- **2 SB:** Moderate setback: alarm raised, lose position/cover, lesser foe or lock.
- **3 SB:** Serious trouble: reinforcements, key gear breaks, rail tick.
- **4+ SB:** Major turn: trap springs, authority arrives, scene shifts.

Position Descriptions

- **Controlled:** You act on your terms. Consequences of failure are manageable.
- **Risky:** You act under pressure. Failure carries a real cost.
- **Desperate:** The odds are stacked against you. Failure could be catastrophic.

Difficulty Ladder (Set Before the Roll)

DV	Name	When to Use
2	Routine	Clear intent, modest stakes, controlled environment.
3	Pressured	Time pressure, mild resistance, partial info.
4	Hard	Hostile conditions, active opposition, precise timing.
5+	Extreme	Multiple constraints, high precision, dramatic failure.

Optional Rule: Grid-Based Combat

While **Fate's Edge** is designed for theater-of-the-mind play, some groups prefer the tactical clarity of a grid. This optional rule provides a framework for using miniatures or tokens without adding excessive complexity.

Core Concepts

- **Zones of Control (ZoC):** Each character exerts control over the squares immediately adjacent to them (typically the 8 surrounding squares). An enemy cannot move *through* a square in another creature's ZoC without first engaging that creature or using a special ability. They can move *around* it.
- **Ranges:** The GM sets ranges based on the narrative and the battlemat size.
 - **Engaged:** In the same square or an adjacent square. For melee combat.
 - **Near:** Within a short move (e.g., 5-6 squares). For thrown weapons, short charges.
 - **Far:** Requires a full action to move into **Near** range. For bows, crossbows.
 - **Distant:** Beyond **Far** range, requiring multiple moves or special effort to engage.
- **Movement:** On their turn, a character can typically move a number of squares equal to 5 + their Body rating. Moving through difficult terrain (rubble, thick mud) may halve this distance or require an Athletics roll.

Actions on the Grid

The core action resolution remains the same. The grid simply provides spatial context.

- **Engage:** Move into an enemy's ZoC to enter melee.
- **Attack:** Make a combat roll as normal. Position is determined by the tactical situation (e.g., flanking an enemy might be **Risky** for you but **Desperate** for them).
- **Take Cover:** Move behind a terrain feature to improve position (e.g., from **Desperate** to **Risky**) against ranged attacks.
- **Flank:** By positioning on opposite sides of an enemy, allies may grant each other assistance dice on attacks.

Example Grid Combat

Valerius is battling two bandits in a ruined temple. The GM sets up a map.

- Valerius is **Engaged** with Bandit A. Bandit B is **Near** (4 squares away), behind a broken pillar.
- Valerius wants to charge Bandit B. He must first disengage from Bandit A's ZoC. The GM rules this is a **Risky Body + Athletics** roll. He succeeds, avoids an attack of opportunity, and moves into Bandit B's ZoC.
- Now engaged with Bandit B, Valerius attacks. The GM rules his position is **Risky** as Bandit A is now moving up behind him.

Optional Rule: Detailed Warfare

For campaigns where large-scale battles are a focus, this subsystem provides more granularity for mass combat.

The Army as a Character

Treat an army as a powerful Follower with its own attributes and clocks.

- **Scale:** The army's size and reach. Adds dice to strategic rolls (e.g., logistics, intimidation).
- **Discipline:** The army's training and morale. Used to resist routing and maintain formation.
- **Supply Clock** (6-8 segments): Tracks food, ammunition, and medical supplies. If filled, the army suffers penalties (e.g., -1 die to all rolls) and risks disintegration.
- **Morale Clock** (6-8 segments): Tracks the army's will to fight. Major defeats, poor conditions, or enemy terror tactics fill this clock. If filled, the army routs.

Battlefield Actions

Instead of individual attacks, characters leading armies make command rolls to achieve objectives. Each objective is represented by a clock.

- **Break Their Line** (6-segment clock): Use **Spirit + Command**. Success fills segments. Complications might fill the army's Morale Clock or allow an enemy counter-attack.
- **Flank the Enemy** (4-segment clock): Use **Wits + Skulduggery**. Requires a successful maneuver roll first.
- **Hold the Line** (Ongoing): Use **Body + Resolve** to withstand an enemy assault. Failure advances the enemy's objective clocks.

The Battle's Edge

Warfare uses a modified Story Beat system called **The Battle's Edge**. SB generated from command rolls can be spent by the GM to represent the fog of war and battlefield chaos:

- **1-2 SB:** A unit is out of position. A key piece of intelligence is wrong.
- **3-4 SB:** A trusted officer falls. A supply wagon is lost.
- **5+ SB:** The enemy unveils a secret weapon. The terrain turns against you (e.g., a dam breaks).

Sample NPCs

Encounters

- **Bandit Skirmisher:** Body 2, Wits 2. Melee 2, Stealth 1. Light armor, opportunistic.
- **Ykrul Rider:** Body 4, Wits 3. Riding 3, Melee 3. Mobile, brutal.
- **Street Bravo:** Presence 3, Body 2. Dueling 3. Quick to anger.

Foils & Rivals

- **Ambitious Scribe:** Wits 3, Presence 3. Intrigue 3, Lore 2. Always knows a rumor.
- **Mercenary Captain:** Body 4, Spirit 3. Command 3, Melee 4. Pragmatic, dangerous ally.
- **Flame Preacher:** Presence 4, Spirit 3. Oratory 4, Faith 3. Incites mobs.

Prestige NPCs

- **High Elf Loremaster:** Wits 5, Spirit 4. Lore 5, Arcana 4. Knows secrets older than nations.
- **Dwarven Forge-Patriarch:** Body 5, Spirit 4. Craft 5, Command 4. Commands stone and steel.
- **Ykrul Warglord:** Body 5, Presence 4. Command 4, Melee 5. Unites clans with blood and will.

Deck of Consequences Interpretation Guide

Two Deck Systems

Deck of Consequences (scene drama). *Hearts*=social fallout, *Spades*=harm/escalation, *Clubs*=material cost, *Diamonds*=magical/spiritual disturbance.

Travel Decks (regional, 52-card). *Spade*=Place, *Heart*=Actor, *Club*=Pressure, *Diamond*=Leverage.

Hearts (Emotional/Social)

- **Ace–3:** Minor offense, awkward moment.
- **4–6:** Relationship strain, public embarrassment.
- **7–9:** Betrayal, scandal, loss of trust.
- **10–King:** Heartbreak, exile, shattered alliance.

Spades (Harm/Escalation)

- **Ace–3:** Bruise, scrape, fatigue.
- **4–6:** Wound, gear damaged, position lost.
- **7–9:** Severe injury, ally down, structural collapse.
- **10–King:** Death, dismemberment, permanent loss.

Clubs (Material/Cost)

- **Ace–3:** Minor loss, delayed payment.
- **4–6:** Gear failure, debt incurred.
- **7–9:** Major asset lost, bankruptcy.
- **10–King:** Total ruin, legacy debt.

Diamonds (Magical/Spiritual)

- **Ace–3:** Omen, whisper, strange coincidence.
- **4–6:** Curse triggered, spirit appears, past returns.
- **7–9:** Arcane backlash, forbidden knowledge revealed.
- **10–King:** Reality bends, godlike force intervenes.

Campaign Clock Examples

Mandate Advancement Triggers

- Public victory in battle or debate.
- Successful resolution of a major crisis.
- Recognition by a powerful faction or ruler.

Crisis Advancement Triggers

- Rival faction gains influence or territory.
- Asset neglect or betrayal.
- Scandal or public loss of trust.

Travel Clock Sizes

- **2–5:** 4 segments (short leg, low risk).
- **6–10:** 6 segments (standard journey).
- **J/Q/K:** 8 segments (long or dangerous route).
- **Ace:** 10 segments (epic or supernatural travel).

Follower and Asset Condition States

- **Maintained:** Full capability.
- **Neglected:** -1 die penalty; narrative wear.
- **Compromised:** Unavailable until repaired or recovered.

Boon Economy Quick Guide

- **Holding cap:** You can hold at most 5 Boons.
- **Conversion:** Once per session, in downtime, you may convert 2 Boons → 1 XP (max 2 XP via conversion per session).
- **Using Boons:** Re-roll one die after seeing the pool; Activate an Off-Screen Asset.

Mechanical Constraints

- **ASSIST MAX:** +3 dice total per roll, regardless of helpers. Exception: The "Exceptional Coordination" Talent allows one follower to provide +4 assist dice.
- **BOON MAX:** 5 total, 2→1 XP conversion once/session (max 2 XP via conversion per session).
- **INITIATIVE:** 1 Follower Action per scene party-wide.
- **OVER-STACK:** 2+ structural advantages = start rails +1 OR GM banks +1 SB.
- **POSITION:** Controlled | Risky | Desperate (affects success/failure texture).

Optional Rule: Hex-Based Exploration

For a more structured exploration phase, the GM can map a region using a hex grid.

- **Hex Size:** Typically 6 miles (a half-day's travel in clear terrain).
- **Travel:** Moving into a new hex requires a **Wits + Survival** roll. The DV is set by the terrain (DV 2 for plains, DV 4 for dense forest or mountains).

- **Discovery:** On a Clean Success, the group discovers any points of interest in the hex automatically. On a Success with Cost or Partial, they might stumble upon a danger first or only get a hint of the interest. On a Miss, they become lost, wasting time and resources.
- **Points of Interest:** Each hex can have a pre-planned location or one generated on the fly using the Travel Deck (Spade=Location, Heart=Encounter, etc.).

Let the Tools Serve You

These tools and optional rules are not meant to constrain your game—they are meant to **support your vision**. Use them to keep tension high, consequences real, and the story moving forward. Choose the rules that fit your table's style, and don't be afraid to adapt them on the fly.

The ultimate goal is a collaborative, exciting story. These are just the brushes and paints.

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