

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** (Dominant, Controlled, 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

The Core Loop: Your First 10 Games

Start here for your first session! Ignore advanced systems until comfortable.

1. Player states Goal & Action (Attribute + Skill)
2. GM sets simple DV (2-5)
3. Player rolls. Count Successes (6+)
4. GM consults Outcome Matrix. **Ignore Boons for now. Use simple complications on Partial/Miss.**

Once comfortable, add: Boons | Story Beats | Clocks

First Game Scenario: The Sunstone Tower

Premise: The party is hired to infiltrate the ruined Sunstone Tower and retrieve a magical sunstone before rival treasure hunters do. This scenario uses a limited rules subset perfect for beginners.

- **Ignore for this scenario:** Boons, Corruption, intricate magic subsystems, detailed Follower/Asset upkeep.
- **Focus on:** Core dice pool, Success/Partial/Miss outcomes, Position, Clocks.
- **Character Setup:** Use pregenerated characters or create simple ones with 20 XP and 2–3 clear hooks.

GM Prep in 10 Minutes

[Sunstone Tower Prep Checklist]

- Name 3 NPCs: hirer, rival delver, tower spirit (or echo).
- Write 1 sentence for each scene: Approach, Interior, Sunstone Chamber.
- Create 2 clocks: **Guardian Alert** [4] and **Tower Collapse** [6].
- Decide 1 twist: rival arrives early, tower shifts, or sunstone is not what it seems.

Scene 1: The Approach

Lane Marker: Skill Challenge with a Clock

GM Focus: Practice calls for DV and Partial outcomes. For this intro, tick the **Guardian Alert** [4] clock on a Partial or Miss.

The tower stands on a cliffside. Players must navigate three challenges:

- Cross the crumbling bridge (Athletics) – DV 3
- Scale the cliff face (Athletics/Strength) – DV 4
- Sneak past the stone guardians (Stealth) – DV 3

Guardian Alert Clock [4]: Each Partial or Miss advances the clock by 1. If filled, guardians activate and pursue; treat them as a single *Tower Guardian* threat with a simple [4] Harm track.

Scene 2: The Tower Interior

This scene teaches **Position** and **environmental stakes**.

- **Dominant:** “You have the high ground on the crumbling staircase, looking down on the patrol.”
- **Controlled:** “The hallway is dark but quiet. You can take your time, but there might be traps.”
- **Desperate:** “The floor gives way beneath you as you lunge for the door!”

[How to Call Position in Play]

- **Ask:** “How are you doing this? Cautious? Bold? Rushed?”
- **Map to Position:** Cautious → Controlled; clever leverage or clear edge → Dominant; rushed, cornered, or outnumbered → Desperate.
- **State It Out Loud:** “This is Desperate. Big reward, but real danger if it goes wrong.”

Scene 3: The Sunstone Chamber

The chamber is collapsing as rival delvers close in. Use a simple [6] clock for the collapse. Each round, the clock ticks up by 1. On each Miss, advance it by an extra 1 segment.

- **Goal:** Retrieve the sunstone and escape before the clock fills.
- **On Fill:** The chamber seals. Escape requires a final, Desperate group action.

Lane Marker: One New Idea at a Time

Scene 1: Clocks *only*.

Scene 2: Add *Position*.

Scene 3: Combine *Clocks + Position*. Reserve Boons, Corruption, and advanced magic for later sessions.

2.1 Learning Through Examples

This section walks the same situation through multiple passes, adding one rule at a time. Use it as a mental template when you improvise.

Example 1: Core Loop Only

Example 1 – No SB, No Boons

Lyra tries to sneak past the guardian in a narrow hallway. (Agility + Stealth = 5d10).

The GM says it's a normal risk, DV 3, Controlled Position.

She rolls and gets: 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 \Rightarrow 3 successes (6, 7, 9).

DV 3 with 3 successes is a **Success**.

GM: "You slip past the guardian quietly. You're in position behind it if you want to act."

Example 2: Add Story Beats Only

Example 2 – Adding Story Beats

Same situation. Lyra rolls 5d10 and gets: 1, 4, 6, 6, 8.

Successes: 3 (6, 6, 8). She also rolled a 1, which makes 1 Story Beat (SB) for the GM.

DV 3 with 3 successes is still a **Success**, but the GM now has 1 SB.

GM Spend (1 SB = Minor Complication):

"You get past the guardian, but your cloak snags and tears. The sound echoes – the next room has a -1 Position penalty for stealth checks."

Example 3: Add Boons Only

Example 3 – Adding Boons

Later, Lyra attempts to scale a loose stone wall (Athletics + Agility = 4d10). DV 3.

She rolls: 2, 3, 4, 5. Zero successes = **Miss**.

Instead of only consequence, the GM awards **2 Boons**.

GM: "You slip and land hard, taking 1 Harm. Mark 2 Boons – you can use them later to turn the tide."

On her next attempt, Lyra spends 1 Boon to re-roll a die, turning a failure into a success. The player feels the sting of failure *and* the promise of payoff.

Example 4: Putting It Together**Example 4 – SB + Boons + Position**

The party is fleeing as the tower begins to collapse. A crumbling staircase stands between them and the exit.

GM: “This is Desperate. DV 4 to get everyone across safely.”

Lyra leads, rolling 6d10 (Agility + Athletics + help). She gets: 1, 2, 6, 7, 7, 9.

Readout:

- 4 successes (6, 7, 7, 9) vs DV 4 = Success.
- 1 rolled **1** = 1 SB to the GM.
- Desperate Position means high risk if there had been fewer successes.

GM: “You all make it across, but the last step collapses behind you. I spend 1 SB: your exit path is gone. You’ll need a new way out.”

Lesson: Even on a success, SB let you bend the fiction toward drama without erasing the player’s win.

2.2 The Core Resolution Cycle

When a player rolls, they engage the world through risk, consequence, and discovery. Follow these steps:

1. **Declare Action & Approach:** Player states intent, Attribute + Skill.
2. **Set Difficulty Value (DV):** Based on narrative stakes.
3. **Establish Position:** Dominant, Controlled, or Desperate.
4. **Roll Pool of d10s.**
5. **Count Successes (6+) and Story Beats (1s).**
6. **Check Against DV** using Outcome Matrix.
7. **Apply Outcome:** Success, Partial, or Miss.
8. **Spend SB** for complications and twists.

[Position Effects] IX

Position Mechanical Effect

Dominant May re-roll one failure (die < 6).

Controlled Default state; no re-rolls.

Desperate Must re-roll one success (die 6+), keeping the second result.

[Difficulty Ladder – Beginner Focus] IX

DV When to Use

-
- 2 Routine: Clear path, no pressure, almost guaranteed.
 - 3 Default: Mild challenge, some risk, use this most often.
 - 4 Hard: Serious opposition, bad angle, or strong resistance.
 - 5+ Extreme: Save for major boss encounters or dramatic gambles.
-

2.3 Story Beats: The Engine of Drama

Every time a player rolls a 1, you gain Story Beats (SB). These are narrative tools, not punishments.
[SB Spend Menu (Beginner Version)] IX

SB Cost Simple Complications

- 1 SB Minor: Noise, distraction, small setback, lost gear.
 - 2 SB Moderate: Alarm raised, new threat enters, lose advantage.
 - 3+ SB Major: Reinforcements, scene shifts, stakes escalate.
-

Failing Forward with SB

- **On Success:** Use SB to add texture. The hero wins, but something changes.
- **On Partial:** The hero gets what they wanted *and* you spend SB to add cost or threat.
- **On Miss:** You can spend SB to make the setback sharper, broader, or longer-lasting.

Lane Marker: One Complication per Roll

When in doubt, spend SB on *one* clear complication instead of many small ones. Name it: “Guard Alerted”, “Floor Cracked”, “Oath Owed” and move on.

2.4 Combat Made Simple

Combat uses the same core loop. The only difference is that the stakes are higher and usually more immediate.

[Combat Quick Reference]

- **Initiative:** No fixed order. Ask: “Who acts next?” Follow the fiction.
- **Actions:** Each turn, a character can move and take one meaningful action.
- **Position Matters:** Flanking or ambush → Dominant; surrounded or exposed → Desperate.
- **Use Clocks:** Track enemy morale [6], environmental dangers [4], and boss thresholds.

Three-Beat Combat Structure

When you feel lost in a fight, fall back on three beats:

1. **Opening Exchange:** Establish where everyone is and what they want.

2. **Turning Point:** Spend SB or tick clocks to change the situation (reinforcements, terrain shifts).
3. **Final Gamble:** Make the last few rolls matter – higher DV, Desperate Position, or big rewards.

Example: SB in Combat

The party fights bandits on a collapsing bridge.

On a Partial, the GM spends 2 SB: “You push them back, but the bridge loses another support. The *Bridge Collapse* [4] clock advances.”

Now every action is also about whether they escape in time.

2.5 Clocks & Fronts

Clocks are visual trackers for threats, progress, and looming changes. They keep pressure visible and shared.

Basic Clock Usage

- **Size:** Use [4] for small scenes, [6] for bigger problems, [8] for arcs.
- **Advance On:** Misses, certain Partials, or SB spends.
- **Name It:** “Alarm Raised [4]” or “Floodwaters Rise [6]” is better than a blank circle.

[Beginner Clock Limits]

- No more than 3 active clocks per scene.
- Only 1–2 clocks should matter to the current roll.
- Say out loud when you tick a clock and why.

Mini-Fronts for Short Arcs

A *Front* is a cluster of related clocks and threats.

- **Example Front:** “Rival Delvers of the Sunstone Tower”
- Clocks: “Rivals Close In [6]”, “Tower Integrity [6]”, “Rival Reputation [4]”.
- Each time you spend SB, consider ticking one of these clocks.

2.6 Ready for More? Add These Systems

Once you’re comfortable with the core loop, introduce these modules one at a time. Treat each as a new lane marker.

Boons

Boons reward players for pushing their luck.

- On **Miss**: Gain 2 Boons.
- On **Partial**: Gain 1 Boon.
- **Spend**: Re-roll a die, add +1 Effect, or seize a small advantage (GM-approved).

Start with *re-roll only*. Once players are comfortable, add the other options.

Advanced Magic

- **Basic**: Use simple Tag-based magic (single roll, single tag).
- **Intermediate**: Add Runekeepers after 2–3 sessions, when everyone understands SB and Clocks.
- **Advanced**: Introduce Invokers and ritual magic for groups that enjoy planning and complex payoffs.

Followers, Assets, and Domains

Add persistent resources when the group cares about territory, organizations, or long-term projects.

- Start with 1 simple Follower or Asset each.
- Tie them to clocks: “Caravan Reputation [6]”, “Temple Influence [4]”.
- Spend SB to threaten or complicate these resources.

2.7 Session Flow: A GM Cognitive Checklist

Use this as a quiet mental script. You do not need to say any of it out loud.

Opening 10 Minutes

- Ask: “What does everyone want out of tonight?” (goal, vibe, focus).
- Recap 2–3 key facts and 1 unresolved clock.
- Ask each player: “What is your character worried about right now?”

During Play

- Before a roll: Name DV, Position, and stakes.
- After a roll: Say the outcome type (Success/Partial/Miss) first, then the fiction.
- Between scenes: Look at clocks. Ask, “Which one should move? What changes in the world?”

Closing 10 Minutes

- Ask: “What was your favorite moment?” (signals what to do more of).
- Note any clocks that reached halfway or full.
- Jot 2 bullet points: “Next time on Fate’s Edge...” as hooks.

Quick GM Cheat Sheet

- **DV Default:** 3 (adjust ± 1 for ease/difficulty).
- **Position:** Controlled (normal), Dominant (advantage), Desperate (risk).
- **SB Spend:** 1=minor, 2=moderate, 3+=major complication.
- **Max Clocks:** 3 per scene to avoid overwhelm.
- **Golden Rule:** When in doubt, make a ruling that keeps the story moving.

Remember: The goal is to tell an exciting story together. These rules are tools, not tests. Start simple, add complexity when you’re ready, and keep your lane markers clear: one new idea at a time, one clear consequence per roll, and one or two clocks that really matter.

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-crusts 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 Dominant 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:** Dominant 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 (Ritualist's Path)

Requires the **Invoker's Grimoire** talent (6 XP) and study of specific rites. Grants deep knowledge of ritual magic and the ability to perform Rites from multiple Patrons. Symbols are potent tools that enhance this knowledge.

[Invoker Path Features] IX

Feature Description and Limitations

Invoker's Grimoire Major Talent, 6 XP. Grants knowledge of Ritual Magic theory and access to perform a limited number of Rites.

Ritual Repertoire Start with knowledge of **2** Low or Standard Rites from any Patrons you research. Learn new Rites through Downtime study (see below).

Ritual Invocation Takes *DV* rounds (default 2–3 rounds). Requires specific components/materials.

Base Cost Mark **+1 Obligation** when you successfully resolve any known Rite (Low or Standard). (*High-Power/High Rites are normally unavailable; if the Keeper permits, treat their base Obligation as +2.*)

Symbol Enhancement Possessing the correct Patron's Symbol for a Rite you are casting reduces its **DV by 1** and its **Obligation cost by 1** (minimum 0). Only one Symbol may apply to a given Rite.

No Symbol (Explicit Penalties) You may attempt the Rite without the Patron's Symbol, but suffer: **+1 DV**, **+1 Obligation** (in addition to Base), and **+1 round** casting time. On *Partial/Failure*, generate **+1 extra SB**.

Symbol Display The Symbol must be visible/active throughout the ritual. If it is concealed, disrupted, or removed mid-cast: immediately **+1 DV**; on Failure, apply *Backlash* (see below).

Crack the Seal Desperate technique. Instantly cast any known Rite by setting the relevant Symbol to COMPROMISED. Mark **+2 Obligation** (+3 for High-Power Rites). Does not reduce Base Obligation below 0.

Optional Push Invokers may *Push* a Rite: choose one (+2 dice *or* +1 Effect *or* resolve one round faster). Always mark **+1 Obligation** and generate **1 SB**, in addition to other costs.

Cross-Resonance If you cast Rites from *different Patrons* in the same scene, each Patron after the first adds **+1 DV** to that Rite.

Symbol States & Repair

- **COMPROMISED:** A Symbol set to COMPROMISED (e.g., via *Crack the Seal*) provides *no* DV/Obligation reduction until repaired. Casting with a COMPROMISED Symbol imposes **−1** die on the Casting Test.
- **SHATTERED:** If you *Crack the Seal* again while the Symbol is COMPROMISED, it becomes SHATTERED and cannot be used until replaced (Asset lost).
- **Repair (Downtime):** 1 day of focused work and a *Craft or Lore + Tinker* test vs. DV 3. Success: clear COMPROMISED. Failure: no progress. Alternatively, spend **1 XP** to auto-repair.

Backlash & Failure (Explicit)

- **Success:** Rite resolves; apply Base/added Obligation and any SB from Push or No-Symbol clauses.
- **Partial:** Effect **−1** step *or* shortened duration; mark **Fatigue 1**. If cast *without* a Symbol, Keeper gains **+1 SB** (in addition to normal SB generation).
- **Failure:** No effect; mark **Fatigue 1**; Keeper gains **+1 SB**. Then test *Spirit + Resolve* vs. DV 3:
 - On Fail: suffer **Harm 1 (Shock)** or start **Backlash Static [4]** (Keeper's choice).
 - If the Symbol was disrupted/hidden mid-cast *or* you *Cracked the Seal*: upgrade to **Harm 2 (Shock)**.
- **Interrupted:** Harm, Silence, or disruption before resolution counts as *Failure*.

Example: Magus Vex, bearing the **Invoker's Grimoire**, has studied the rites of Raéyn and the Sealed Gate. He knows Raéyn's *Whispering Currents* (Low) and the Sealed Gate's *Circle of Denial* (Standard). Faced with a collapsing tunnel, he attempts the Sealed Gate's ritual. It's a Standard Rite, so **DV 3**, taking **3 rounds**, and costs **+1 Obligation**. He has the Sealed Gate's Symbol, reducing the DV to **2** and the Obligation cost to **0**. When ambushed, he needs quick

protection. He **Cracks the Seal** on the *Circle of Denial*. The Symbol becomes COMPROMISED, the Rite is instant, and he marks **+2 Obligation**. Later, needing to bind a particularly strong foe, he **Pushes** the Rite, marking an additional **+1 Obligation** and generating **1 SB**; the barrier strengthens. If he tried a Raéyn Rite afterwards in the same scene, *Cross-Resonance* would add **+1 DV** to that casting.

Learning New Rites

An Invoker can expand their **Ritual Repertoire** through dedicated study during **Downtime**.

- **Cost:** 1 week of Downtime + 2 XP.
- **Requirement:** Access to texts, a teacher, or direct observation of the Rite being performed by another adept.
- **Test:** *Lore + Investigation* (or a relevant skill) vs. DV 3–5 (based on Rite rarity/complexity).
- **Success:** Add the Rite to your Ritual Repertoire.
- **Failure:** Cannot learn this specific Rite for a significant time (GM discretion). The Keeper may set a relevant Complication (e.g., *Forbidden Knowledge Pursued*).

Symbols as Assets

- A Patron's Symbol is a **Minor Asset (4 XP)** whose primary value is as a **ritual focus/component**.
- You *can* attempt any ritual **without** the Symbol, but you incur these **No Symbol** penalties: **+1 DV** (*and therefore +1 round to cast, since casting time = DV rounds*), **+1 Obligation** (*in addition to Base*), and on *Partial/Failure* the Keeper gains **+1 extra SB**.
- Symbols can be **maintained/upgraded** like other Assets. Example upgrades: *Hardened* (ignore the first application of COMPROMISED per session), *Bright* (treat as *visible* for Symbol Display while concealed on your person).

Borrowed Grace

Type: Invoker Talent — *Lesser Imbuement*

Use

- **Cost:** 1 Boon, 1 action.
- **Effect (pick one on use):** **+1 Melee** *or* **+1 Thematic** (your table's signature/thematic Skill).
- **Duration:** *Single action/attack* (instantaneous boost only).
- **Requirement:** Wield/display the relevant Patron's **Symbol**.
- **Obligation:** Immediately mark **+1 Obligation** to that Patron (see §??).
- **Limits:** Cannot be extended, stacked, or *Pushed* for duration. Using *Borrowed Grace* while the Symbol is COMPROMISED lowers your **Position** by one step (*or imposes –1 die if already Desperate*).

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.

Table 4.1: Universal Push It Costs

Cost Component	Effect
+1 SB	Escalate effect immediately
+1 Fatigue	Immediate physical/mental strain
+1 Corruption Clock Segment	Long-term Patron influence (unless otherwise specified)
GM spends 1 SB	Thematic complication (unless otherwise specified)

Note: Some talents, Rites, or magical paths may specify alternative corruption costs or additional consequences for Push It actions. When explicitly stated, those specific rules override the universal costs.

Clearing Corruption Corruption may be reduced through *purging rituals*, such as exorcisms, sacred songs, or rites of contrition. These require a test (typically **Lore + Spirit**) against a DV equal to the character's current corruption level. On success, reduce corruption by 1. On failure, the corruption manifests violently, imposing a temporary Condition or advancing its narrative expression.

Optional: A **Story Beat** may also be spent to attempt such a ritual, representing the personal cost of atonement. Patrons may demand specific acts of service, sacrifice, or obligation as part of the purging process.

Summoning: Binding Outsider Forces

4.2 Summoning (Pact-Whisperer) — GM Mechanics

[Core] IX

Step Rule (GM-Facing)

Access Requires **Pact-Whisperer** (2 XP). Talents gate capacity: **Lesser Pactwright** (Cap 1), **Greater Pactwright** (Cap 3). With both, one of each may be maintained.

Call 1 Action. Manifest at *Near*. Choose a fitting Spirit Template (scene/Patron aligned).

Bind Pay 1 Boon *or* mark 1 Fatigue.

Leash Capacity Set **Leash** = *Cap* + *Spirit segments*. (Cap 1 = Lesser, Cap 3 = Greater.)

Tick Triggers Tick on: spirit takes Harm; command vs. nature; summoner splits focus; rival contests; rapid *Close*→*Far* reposition; crossing a [WARD] (test DV = Cap).

Act/Order A meaningful new order uses the summoner's Action; *Quick Commands* (attack nearest, hold doorway, relocate within *Near*, fetch and return) do not.

Departure When Leash fills, spirit acts to its nature once, then departs (or turns hostile at GM discretion).

Spirit Bond (Light Progress). Track a **Spirit Bond Clock** [4] per recurring spirit type. Mark on shared victories, good handling, or mutual aid. At 2: +1 die to communicate. At 4: on natural departure, +1 Boon and spirit becomes **Favored** (its Leash −1). *Near-Miss*: once/session per type, mark +1 on a meaningful failed Call/Bind.

Specializations (Pick When Relevant). Combat Specialist (+1 Harm melee; ignore first Harm on attacks) Scout Form (stealth/range; carry up to Cap 1: 2 kg, Cap 3: 10 kg; dragging ≤ 3×; overburden = tick) Utility Spirit (simple tasks) Shield Guardian (interpose; convert Harm→Fatigue).

Economy & Limits.

- **Boon Finesse:** Once/round, spend 1 Boon to clear 1 tick (before fill).
- **Order of Action:** Spirit acts immediately after summoner.
- **Concurrency:** One active spirit unless a Talent states otherwise; excess costs 1 Fatigue per extra Cap point.
- **End-State:** All summons end at Downtime unless sustained by Rite/Asset.

GM Reminders (No New Clocks). Use only the **Leash** and optional **Spirit Bond** clocks. *Quick Commands* should be crisp rulings; tick when the player overreaches the spirit's nature or fiction.

4.3 Cantor's Path (Songs) — GM Mechanics

[Core] IX

Element Rule (GM-Facing)

Access Talent: **Cantor's Path** (8 XP). Prereqs: Lore 1+, Performance 2+, Presence 2+.

Scope Low Rites as Songs only (counts as knowing for performance use).

Cast Test *Lore + Performance vs. DV* (typical DV 2–3).

Timing Start with 1 Action; resolves at *start of next turn* unless *Pushed*.

Cost Pay listed materials. *No Obligation* on success.

Visibility Songs are noticeable; on Failure or Push, assume observers clock it.

Corruption (Light). Track a **Corruption Clock** with *segments* = **Body**. Mark when: *Push*, perform a *Resonant Rite*, or the Keeper spends an SB tied to psionic/occult activity. On fill: apply the last-Patron **benefit & drawback** (and echo to followers/retainers); then reset.

Resonant Rites. Designated Low Rites may *optionally* mark +1 Corruption on success for added weight. Player chooses to resonate or not.

Results. Success: Rite as written. **Partial:** −1 step or shorter duration; mark Fatigue 1. **Failure/Interrupted:** No effect; mark Fatigue 1; GM gains +1 SB (Hearts).

Push. Resolve now; mark Fatigue 1; mark +1 Corruption; trigger a GM **Story Beat** (Patron/Road/social fallout).

Song Synergy (Tight Rulings).

- **Compatible Songs** = same Patron *or* clearly similar thematic purpose.
- **Harmony:** Two compatible Songs: +1 Effect to both.
- **Counterpoint:** Opposed Songs may cancel a drawback (GM adjudicates).
- **Chorus:** Multiple singers amplify (+1 Effect per participant), but cap coordinated *Song Weaver* style combos at **3 participants**.

Repertoire (Optional, Light). Single **Repertoire Clock** [6] for breadth: 2 seg = base DV −1 (min 2); 4 seg = +1 die to Song rolls; 6 seg = one *temporary* Standard Rite as Song (practice-dependent).

High Cantor (Prestige, Fast Ruling). Standard Rites as **High Cant:** instant; +1 die to primary effect; mark +1 Corruption. Recognizably flashy; repeated uses in a scene add +1 DV to subsequent *Resolve* saves (fear/charm/social pressure).

Bookkeeping Cap. At the table, track *only*: **Corruption Clock** and (optionally) the single **Repertoire Clock**. Do not add per-Song timers; use outcomes and Push to pace.

Inspire Chorus

While *actively singing a Song* (from the action to begin until it resolves, or while a *Lingering Verse* persists), the Cantor may **invoke Inspire Chorus**:

- **Effect:** All **allies within Near** (including the Cantor) **shift Position +1** for **one exchange** (e.g., Desperate→Risky, Risky→Controlled). Position cannot exceed **Controlled**. This does not stack with other Position-shift auras; use the best single shift.
- **Use: Once per scene** at no cost. **Additional uses in the same scene** are allowed, but each **immediately marks +1 segment on the Cantor's Corruption Clock**.
- **Requirements:** The performance must be perceptible to recipients (line of hearing; *Silence* or similar effects suppress it).

- **Timing:** Declare on starting the Song or at any time before it resolves; the shift lasts until the start of the Cantor’s next turn.
- **Notes:** Using *Inspire Chorus* does not change Song DV, Action cost, or outcomes. It respects *Bookkeeping Light*: no new clocks are created.

GM Guidance: Cantor-Led Cults

Cantor cults (*Choruses*) are an engine for drama, favors, and fallout. Treat the Chorus as a living faction tied to the Cantor’s **Corruption** and the community’s **Obligation**. Keep the bookkeeping light: 1–2 clocks, clear triggers, visible rewards—and swift consequences.

[Chorus as a Front — GM Tools] IX

Track Rule of Thumb

Scale *Choir* (dozens), *Flock* (scores–hundreds), *Sect* (hundreds+). Scale \approx Cantor’s **Presence** and recent wins.

Core Clock Devotion Sours [6]. Tick when: promises slip, doctrine wavers, rivals tempt, or the Cantor leverages the Chorus for risky schemes. On fill: fracture, scandal, or rival claimant. Reset by public service (*Vigil*) or costly restitution.

Leverage Once/scene if present (or reachable), the Chorus grants one: *+1 die* (Performance/Sway), rumor placement, safehouse for a night, or small crowd-work (block, disperse, carry). Each use: mark **+1 Obligation** (Patron or community).

Heat After any public *Inspire Chorus* or Resonant performance that shifts a scene’s balance, start **Unwanted Attention** [4] (magistrates, rivals, Patrons). On fill: raid, edict, or counter-cult.

Dials Softer Chorus: benefits cost no Obligation but tick **Devotion Sours**. Harsher Chorus: double Heat in law-heavy districts; failures auto-tick **Devotion Sours**.

GM Moves (Pick 1–2 on tension spikes).

- Offer an easy vow now that becomes hard later (advance *Devotion Sours* on refusal).
- Split the Chorus: elders vs. youths; orthodoxy vs. spectacle.
- Present a desperate petitioner whose need conflicts with Patron doctrine.
- Elevate a lieutenant; give them agency, appetite, and a private debt.
- Invoke the Patron’s agenda through a zealot who “hears the harmony” too loudly.
- Make the price visible: tithes, time, safety—someone meaningful pays.

Sample Complication Clocks.

- **Splinter Doctrine** [4]: A charismatic follower rewrites the Song; on fill, they peel away half the Chorus (new faction).
- **Patron Interference** [6]: Miracles with strings; on fill, mandatory rite or geas targets the Cantor.

- **Civic Heat [4]:** Edicts, informants, fines; on fill, venue shuttered or permit revoked mid-performance.
- **Devotee in Peril [4]:** A named follower's crisis escalates until addressed; on fill, tragedy stains the Chorus.

Scene Prompts.

- A rival cantor countersongs at the market; the crowd tilts between them.
- A funeral turns into a recruitment surge—along with contested obligations.
- A magistrate demands the Chorus disperse or tithe; the Patron wants defiance.
- A Chorus rumor you seeded comes home crooked; fix it or wear it.

Safety & Tone. Cults touch loyalty, coercion, and faith. Use lines/veils and check-ins. Keep consequences fictional and reversible through play (service, restitution, confession), not punitive bookkeeping.

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

Dominant	+1 die to Channel; reduced Backlash risk; can maintain subtle effects
Controlled	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

Ways-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

Free Casting (TAGS System)

Some casters do not prepare rote rites. They shape raw forces through shared arcane grammar known as **TAGS**. A spell is constructed at the table using a short phrase of TAGS. You only need the fiction, the TAG selection, and a casting roll.

Spell Structure

Intent + **Target** + **Tags** = effect.

Example formula:

“I unleash Burning • Area • Force against the marauders.”

The GM sets a Difficulty Value (DV) based on TAG complexity and danger.

Base Difficulty Value (DV)

Start at DV 1 and add +1 for each TAG used.

$$DV = 1 + \text{number of TAGS}$$

Adding powerful or perilous TAGS (Teleportation, Transformation, Dominate) adds +2 instead. Mastery, focus, or appropriate tools may lower DV by 1.

Casting Roll

Roll **Wits** + **Arcana** (or Ritual, Channeling, etc.). Success = spell goes off. Failure or 1 = Backlash (see below).

Backlash

Whenever a Free Caster fails—or pushes power beyond safety—the magic pushes back. Choose one:

- Harm 2 (Arcane)

- +2 Fatigue
- Corruption +1
- Catastrophic side effect (GM describes)

If the spell included a “Dangerous” TAG, Backlash triggers on *mixed* results as well.

TAG Library

Pick 1–3 for minor spells. Pick 4–6 for heavy magic (very dangerous). More than 6 is suicidal.

Elemental TAGS

- **Burning:** flame, heat, combustion.
- **Freezing:** ice, slowing, brittle shatter.
- **Storm:** lightning, crackling arcs, thunder shock.
- **Stone:** walls, spikes, tremors, armor.
- **Wave:** crushing water, currents, pressure.
- **Wind:** levitate, gusts, deflection.

Force TAGS

- **Force:** pure kinetic power, shields, blasts.
- **Area:** cone, circle, corridor, zone.
- **Strike:** single target precision.
- **Wall:** barrier or blockade.
- **Bind:** restrain, hold, suspend.
- **Dispel:** suppress magic, unravel effects.

Mind & Veil TAGS

- **Veil:** conceal, blur, illusion, silence.
- **Scry:** reveal hidden, see distance, read traces.
- **Memory:** erase, alter, restore.
- **Command:** compel short action.
- **Fear:** panic, flee, break morale.

Life & Body TAGS

- **Mend:** close wounds, restore flesh, reduce Harm 1.
- **Purify:** remove poison, corruption, disease.
- **Strengthen:** enhance body, armor, senses.
- **Waken:** counter sleep, paralysis, stun.
- **Beast:** speak with or influence animals.

Space & Motion TAGS (Always +2 DV Each)

- **Leap:** jump far, blink across short space.
- **Fold:** short-range teleport, vanish–reappear.
- **Gate:** long distance passage, open/close path.
- **Gravity:** crush, lift, suspend, walk skyward.

Creation & Transformation TAGS (Always +2 DV Each)

- **Create:** manifest matter briefly.
- **Summon:** call a being or construct.
- **Transmute:** turn one thing into another.
- **Animate:** make objects act with intent.

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 Dominant 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.

- **Dominant** (time, tools, clear access): **DV2**.
- **Controlled** (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, Controlled).* 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*. *Namethefictionoftheescalation(spasms, feverspike, airwayclosing)*.
- **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

≥11X

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

≥1XX

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, Controlled). 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.

6.4 Optional Rule: Multi-Character Followers

Overview

A player may control multiple characters by linking them as mutual Followers. This option also covers absent players' characters when consent is given.

Core Mechanics

- **Cap Tier +1:** A Follower may advance up to one Tier higher than their leader's current Tier.
- **Multi-Character Play:** A player may designate two PCs as Followers of each other. Only one is the *active* PC at a time; the other functions as a Follower.
- **Absent PCs:** With consent, an absent player's PC may be run as a temporary Follower at Cap Tier +1.

Switching Active Characters

- **Switch Cost:** When switching, the previously active PC immediately becomes a Follower of the new active PC at Cap Tier +1.
- **Condition Gate:** A PC cannot be switched *to* if Compromised, Seized, or otherwise narratively unfit for active duty.
- **Narrative Justification:** The fiction must support the switch (returning from a journey, recovering from harm, taking point for a specific task).
- **Strategic Choice:** Switching trades autonomy for support—gaining a powerful Follower but losing a full PC.

Balance Notes

- Prevents abuse by making switching itself the cost.
- Maintains narrative logic—leadership shifts naturally reshape party structure.
- Creates strategic depth—switching is a meaningful tactical decision.
- Keeps all characters relevant, encouraging upkeep even when not active.

6.4.1 Multi-Summoner Scenarios

When multiple Pact-Whisperers operate within the same party, the GM must balance narrative pacing, resource tension, and spotlight time. A three-summoner group creates a dynamic ecosystem of spirits, commands, and coordination that highlights Fate’s Edge’s distributed cognition design.

Core Principles.

- **Distributed Cognition:** Treat each summoner as a node of expertise. They manage their own spirit’s leash, but the group collectively drives story momentum through overlapping actions.
- **Tension by Degrees:** Maintain visible Leash clocks. Half-filled clocks are narrative warnings (heat shimmer, voice echo, wind strain). Filled clocks should escalate story stakes, not merely end control.
- **Position Flow:** Use Position as the balancing lever. Cooperative positioning between spirits and mortals determines tempo, not raw power.

GM Tools for Multi-Spirit Play.

1. **Visible Leash Tracking:** Display Leash clocks for each active spirit. This keeps the tension transparent and helps players self-regulate.
2. **Free Sustain Action:** Each summoner gains one free “Sustain” command per round to maintain prior orders without ticking the Leash. Active commands or redirections still require an Action.
3. **Boon Economy Hooks:** Encourage cross-summoner Boon trades as in-fiction gestures of focus-sharing, divine resonance, or ritual synchrony. It reinforces teamwork.
4. **Narrative Strain:** Whenever multiple Leashes fill within the same scene, create environmental consequences: resonance quakes, time distortions, fog bursts, or Patron echoes.

Encounter Design. Design encounters around **shared objectives** rather than discrete fights. Each summoner can anchor a dimension of the scene:

- **Social Summoner:** Improves Position and negotiation leverage through bound entities.
- **Combat Summoner:** Anchors tactical threat control and battlefield tempo.
- **Utility Summoner:** Expands environmental influence, stabilizing hazards or solving magical puzzles.

Example: The Merchant’s Dilemma. In a multi-summoner playtest, three summoners coordinated to solve a single crisis:

- **Session 1:** Social summoner negotiated trade peace via a Cap 1 *Sylph*.
- **Session 2:** Combat summoner’s Cap 3 *Berserker* held off cursed creatures.
- **Session 3:** Utility summoner’s *Construct* and *Earth Elemental* stabilized a collapsing shrine.

Each maintained different Leashes (*Cap + Command*)—6–8 segments—sustaining spirits for 6–10 rounds before departure. The result was natural pacing and tangible escalation without bookkeeping.

Narrative Balance.

- **Spotlight Rotation:** Shift scene framing—one summoner leads each major beat.
- **Cascade Effects:** If multiple Leashes break simultaneously, narrate a combined phenomenon (overlapping etheric resonance or backlash storm).
- **Scaling Complexity:** Introduce coordinated Leash management as optional at Tier III+.

GM Guidance Summary.

- Keep spirit autonomy visible and narratively meaningful.
- Tie consequences to the environment, not just the summoner.
- Let cooperation reshape the battlefield instead of multiplying turns.
- Use Story Beats from spirit actions to fuel ongoing complications.

Design Intent. A multi-summoner scenario tests the game’s collaborative depth. The goal is not to balance power, but to balance story agency—each summoner’s authority reshapes reality in their own way, and the GM’s role is to let those harmonics build rather than cancel.

Terrestrial Patrons

Not all patrons are gods, demons, or cosmic forces. Mortals create power too: nobles, guilds, conspiracies, temples, syndicates, and commanders. A Terrestrial Patron represents an ongoing relationship with a powerful mortal faction.

Why They Matter A terrestrial patron doesn’t grant magic. They grant *leverage*: protection, resources, sanctuary, information, and political shifts. Their rewards arrive through fiction and consequence.

Obligation (Terrestrial) Use the same Obligation track, but the consequences are social, legal, or economic instead of supernatural.

When you call on a Patron’s influence, add +1 Obligation.

Getting a Patron To gain a Terrestrial Patron, complete one of the following:

- a major job for them,
- a sworn Oath,
- legal or financial binding,
- blackmail or shared crime.

Mark them on your sheet and write one sentence: “*They want me because _____*”

Perks Each Patron offers 2–3 repeatable benefits, such as:

- sanctuary,
- legal relief,
- black market goods,
- elite followers,

- forged documents,
- military backing,
- rumors and spywork.

Using a Perk never requires a roll. Fate has already been paid—it simply comes with Obligation.

Demands Terrestrial Patrons always want something back:

- silence,
- loyalty,
- a job,
- a name,
- a secret.

Refusing raises Obligation by 1. Betrayal may have immediate consequences.

When Obligation Fills

At 6 Obligation, the Patron acts. This is **not** optional.

Choose one:

- You do a job you cannot refuse.
- You pay a severe price (legal, social, material).
- They strike first—reputation, warrants, bounty, blackmail.

Reduce Obligation to 3 after the consequence lands.

Cutting Ties

You may sever a terrestrial tie, but doing so has fallout:

- lose all current perks,
- gain a new Rival faction,
- take a Curse, Bounty, or Scandal that follows you.

Some patrons never forgive. Others can be bought off.

Redemption or Favor

If you do something monumental for them—beyond what was asked—reduce Obligation by 2 and gain a permanent Favor:

- title,
- land,
- permanent access,
- unique asset.

Quick Example

The Black Ledger smuggling syndicate gives sanctuary and illegal gear. Rellan calls on the Ledger for a smuggled border crossing. The GM rules it succeeds automatically, but adds +1 Obligation. Rellan now owes the Ledger. Later, the Ledger demands he silence a witness. If he refuses, Obligation rises again. If Obligation ever reaches 6, the Ledger collects: accounts frozen, bounty posted, or a rival informant sent after him.

6.5 Campaign Framing Tools

Before your first session, use these tools to establish the foundation of your campaign and create a framework for long-term storytelling that will engage your players and provide meaningful direction.

6.5.1 The Crown Spread

The Crown Spread is a powerful campaign-framing technique that uses playing cards to seed the major themes, conflicts, and story elements of your campaign.

Setup Procedure

1. In Session 0, shuffle a standard deck of cards and lay out 5–7 cards in a semicircle (the "Crown")
2. Each card represents a major campaign element:
 - Position 1 (Root): Underlying tension or theme
 - Position 2 (Crest): Key faction or influence that will rise
 - Position 3 (Crown): Climax image or major confrontation
 - Position 4 (Left Hand): Bond, ally, or relationship anchor
 - Position 5 (Right Hand): Rival, betrayer, or challenger
 - Positions 6–7 (Optional): Setting-wide twists or complications
3. Record the spread openly on a campaign sheet visible to all players

Interpreting the Spread

Suits:

- **Hearts:** Social/emotional elements, relationships, romance, family
- **Diamonds:** Resources, wealth, trade, material concerns
- **Clubs:** Physical conflict, violence, obstacles, challenges
- **Spades:** Mystical, supernatural, secrets, hidden knowledge

Ranks:

- **Ace–4:** Subtle influences or early-stage elements
- **5–10:** Moderate forces that will become important
- **Jack–King:** Major players or climactic elements
- **Face Cards:** Named NPCs or significant organizations

6.5.2 Foreshadow Clocks

Transform each Crown card into a Foreshadow Clock [4] that tracks when that element manifests concretely in play:

- When events lean toward that omen, advance the clock
- When a Foreshadow Clock fills, the motif manifests in play
- Tie Crown elements to your main Campaign Clock for pacing

6.5.3 Campaign Clock

Establish a master Campaign Clock [8] to track rising stakes across your arc:

Advance the Campaign Clock when:

- Multiple Story Beats overflow in a session
- Travel legs resolve with major complications
- Spread omens manifest concretely
- Player actions significantly impact the world

When the Campaign Clock fills: The Crown confrontation arrives and becomes the campaign climax.

6.5.4 Character Integration with the Crown

Help players connect their characters to the Crown elements:

- **Root Connection:** How does the underlying theme affect your character?
- **Crest Relationship:** Do you support or oppose the rising faction?
- **Crown Stakes:** What do you gain or lose in the final confrontation?
- **Hand Ties:** How do allies/rivals from the spread connect to you?

6.5.5 Session Zero Campaign Setup

Preparation Agenda (60–90 minutes)

1. **Draw the Crown Spread** (15 minutes)
2. **Interpret Major Elements** (20 minutes)
3. **Establish Player Connections** (20 minutes)
4. **Set Initial Clocks** (10 minutes)
5. **Review Character Bonds** (5 minutes)

Crown Spread Interpretation Examples

Example Spread:

- **Root (5 of Hearts):** Family secrets and inherited debts
- **Crest (King of Spades):** A powerful necromancer cult rising to power
- **Crown (Ace of Clubs):** A single decisive battle that will determine regional control
- **Left Hand (Queen of Diamonds):** A wealthy merchant patron who funds the party
- **Right Hand (Jack of Clubs):** A rival adventurer company that opposes the party

Foreshadow Clocks Created:

- Family Secrets [4]: Ties to noble houses and old scandals
- Cult Rising [4]: Necromancer influence spreading through the city
- Battle Approaches [4]: Military tensions building between factions
- Merchant's Favor [4]: Patron's demands becoming more significant
- Rival Company [4]: Competitors interfering with party's goals

6.5.6 Long-Term Campaign Pacing

Use the Crown Spread elements to pace your campaign across multiple arcs:

Early Game (Sessions 1–3):

- Introduce Root themes and Left Hand connections
- Begin advancing Foreshadow Clocks through player actions
- Establish the basic Campaign Clock at 1–2 segments

Mid Game (Sessions 4–8):

- Crest elements begin to rise and create pressure
- Right Hand rivals become more active and threatening
- Campaign Clock advances to 3–5 segments
- 2–3 Foreshadow Clocks fill, bringing elements into play

Late Game (Sessions 9–12):

- Crown confrontation becomes imminent
- All major elements converge toward climax
- Campaign Clock fills, triggering final confrontation
- Remaining Foreshadow Clocks resolve in climactic scenes

6.5.7 Campaign Ending and Legacy

The Climax

When the Campaign Clock fills, bring all Crown elements together for the final confrontation:

- The Root theme comes to a head
- The Crest faction reaches its moment of power or crisis
- Left Hand allies and Right Hand rivals take sides
- The Crown confrontation determines the outcome

Legacy Session

After the main campaign concludes, hold a legacy session:

1. Resolve any remaining Foreshadow Clocks as epilogue vignettes
2. Players mark Legacy Bonds—new relationships for future campaigns
3. Document major world changes and how player actions shaped them
4. Award Legacy XP for campaign completion and character growth

6.5.8 Adapting the Crown Spread

For Shorter Campaigns (3–6 sessions):

- Use only 3–4 Crown cards
- Reduce Foreshadow Clocks to [2–3] segments
- Set Campaign Clock to [6] segments
- Compress the pacing structure

For Longer Campaigns (12+ sessions):

- Use 7–9 Crown cards for more complexity
- Create secondary Crown Spreads for major story arcs
- Expand Foreshadow Clocks to [6] segments
- Plan multiple Campaign Clock cycles

For Specific Genres:

- **Political Intrigue:** Emphasize Hearts and Diamonds suits
- **Epic Fantasy:** Emphasize Spades and Clubs suits
- **Mystery/Crime:** Focus on hidden connections between cards
- **War/Battle:** Use multiple Clubs cards for conflict elements

6.5.9 GM Tips for Campaign Framing

- **The Spread is Not a Railroad:** Foreshadow, don't dictate
- **Reinterpret Cards Liberally:** Symbols matter more than literal events
- **Remind Players of Omens:** Reference Crown elements between sessions
- **Let Players Influence Interpretation:** Ask how they see the cards' meaning
- **Adjust for Player Actions:** Modify Crown elements based on character choices
- **Keep Clocks Visible:** Track Foreshadow and Campaign Clocks openly

Remember: The Crown Spread is your campaign's DNA—it provides structure while allowing for organic growth through player agency. Let it guide your storytelling without constraining creativity.

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

Tier VI — Mythic Play Guidelines

Scope. At Tier VI, actions reshape continents and concepts. Characters gain auto-successes equal to Tier (6) but remain bound by *Obligation, Corruption, and Harm*—now existential.

DV Scaling: $DV = 8 + n_{activeclocks} + Oppositionmod$ **Clocks:** 8–10 segments model nations, gods, or cosmic forces. **Resource Cap:** Obligation 12, Harm 3 (severe), Boons replaced by Mythic Tags. **Mythic Tags:** [OMEN], [REALITY], [SOVEREIGN], each grants +1 Effect and adds +1 Obligation when invoked.

Endgame Principle: Power demands metamorphosis—advancement changes what a character *is*, not what they *can do*.

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 Boss Generator

8.14.1 Core Concept

A deck-based tool to quickly create compelling, thematically rich boss encounters with built-in mechanical scaling and narrative hooks. The GM uses the draws as a foundation and then applies their knowledge of the setting, party, and desired challenge level to finalize the boss.

8.14.2 Deck Structure

Standard Deck (52 Cards)

Suits Define Core Aspects:

- **(Spades - Structure):** The boss's physical form, defenses, and core mechanics.
- **(Hearts - Drive):** The boss's motivations, goals, and psychological core.
- **(Clubs - Complication):** The boss's signature hazards, environmental effects, and unique challenges it introduces.
- **(Diamonds - Reward):** The boss's unique loot, knowledge, or narrative currency the players gain by defeating it (can also be a "Twist" reward that changes the story).

Ranks Define Scale/Intensity (Modified for Bosses):

- **2-5 (Minor):** A challenging elite enemy or minor boss. 4-segment "Phase" clock.
- **6-10 (Standard):** A significant boss encounter. 6-segment "Phase" clock.
- **J, Q, K (Major):** A major set-piece boss. 8-segment "Phase" clock.
- **A (Pivotal):** An epic, campaign-defining boss. 10-segment "Phase" clock.

Color Influence:

- **Black Suits (,): Physical, tangible threats and defenses.**
- **Red Suits (,): Psychological, social, or intangible aspects.**

8.14.3 Deck Categories & Examples

Spades - Structure (Form, Defenses, Core Mechanics)

- **2-5:** Augmented Body (Cybernetics, armor plating), Swarm Core (Controls lesser units), Fragile Shell (Weak physical form, relies on other defenses).
- **6-10:** Massive Construct (High Body, area attacks), Adaptive Core (Changes tactics/defenses), Phased Form (Intangible/invulnerable at certain times).
- **J/Q/K:** Living Weapon (Its body IS its weapon), Reality Anchor (Negates certain magic/effects in its zone), Hive Mind (Shares health/pool with minions).
- **A:** Titan (Massive scale, environmental effects just by existing), Conceptual Entity (Exists partially outside normal reality), World-Soul (Bound to the location itself).

Hearts - Drive (Motivation, Goals, Psychology)

- **2-5:** Greed (Wants treasure/resources), Survival (Will do anything to stay alive), Guarding (Protecting something/someone).
- **6-10:** Domination (Seeks control/power over others), Corruption (Spreads decay/evil), Restoration (Trying to fix/revive something, even destructively).
- **J/Q/K:** Vengeance (Driven by a specific past wrong), Ascension (Seeks to transcend current form/state), Preservation (Wants to prevent change or end the world).
- **A:** Cosmic Hunger (Consumes to fuel its existence), Paradox Incarnate (Embodies a fundamental contradiction), The Inevitable (Its goal is preordained, unstoppable).

Clubs - Complication (Hazards, Environment, Unique Challenges)

- **2-5:** Overheating Systems (Condition clock that worsens attacks if filled), Unstable Terrain (Difficult/unsafe ground), Reactive Defenses (Traps triggered by player actions).
- **6-10:** Environmental Collapse (Clock ticking towards a disaster), Phased Attacks (Must be attacked in a specific sequence), Debilitating Field (Ongoing condition for players).
- **J/Q/K:** Minion Control (Commands powerful followers), Reality Distortion (Rules of physics/magic are bent), Soul Drain (Attacks also sap resolve/resources).
- **A:** Apotheosis Trigger (Defeating it the “wrong” way makes it stronger), Causality Loop (Actions have delayed, paradoxical effects), Domain Authority (The battlefield itself is hostile).

Diamonds - Reward/Twist (Loot, Knowledge, Narrative Shift)

- **2-5:** Valuables (Riches, rare materials), Useful Tool (Minor artifact, key, helpful item), Tactical Knowledge (Insight into a related threat).
- **6-10:** Powerful Artifact (Significant magic item), Forbidden Lore (Dangerous but valuable information), Faction Favor (Gain status with a group).
- **J/Q/K:** Soul Bargain (Power at a cost), Command Obedience (Gain control over something related), Rewriting Fate (Undo a past failure or gain a major advantage).
- **A:** Worldly Truth (Reveals a major plot point), Shifting Balance (Fundamentally alters the power structure), Divine Spark (A step towards mythic status for a PC).

8.14.4 GM Usage Procedure

1. **Define Scope:** Decide the general tier/impact of the boss (Minor encounter to Pivotal climax).
2. **Draw Cards:** Draw one card from each suit. The highest rank determines the base **Phase Clock Size** (4/6/8/10 segments).
3. **Interpret Core:** Read the four cards as a cohesive whole. What kind of boss does this combination suggest?

- *Example: 6 Massive Construct, J Vengeance, Q Reality Distortion, A Worldly Truth.*

- *Interpretation: A vengeful, colossal war construct whose very presence warps reality. Defeating it reveals a crucial truth.*
4. **Theme & Flavour:** Use the core concept to tie the boss to the setting, the party's story, or the current location. What *is* this Massive Construct? Who is it seeking Vengeance against?
 5. **Set Base Stats:** Use the party's Tier and the boss's scale (rank) to determine a base dice pool.
 - *Guideline:* Tier I (Rookie/Seasoned): Boss Base 6-7 dice. Tier II (Veteran): 7-8 dice. Tier III (Paragon): 8-9 dice. Tier IV/V (Mythic): 9+ dice.
 6. **Mechanize the Cards:**
 - **Structure:** Defines base form, resistances, and primary attack modes. *Massive Construct* = High Body, area attacks, maybe [COMPROMISED] resistance.
 - **Drive:** Influences behavior and special actions. *Vengeance* = Targeted attacks on specific PC/ally, bonus against those who "wronged" it.
 - **Complication:** Create a named clock or ongoing effect. *Reality Distortion* = "Warp Field" clock [6]. When filled, the laws of physics in the zone shift dramatically for a round.
 - **Reward/Twist:** Plan the narrative outcome. *Worldly Truth* = Defeating it reveals the location of a hidden vault or the true identity of a patron.
 7. **Define Phases:** Based on the clock size, break the fight into 2-3 phases. As the main "Phase Clock" fills, the boss gains +1 die per phase (or other escalating effects) and may trigger its Complication clock or introduce new elements.
 8. **Tie to Story Beats:** Remember, the boss generates Story Beats (SB) on 1s. Use the Drive and Complication to guide how SB are spent. *Vengeance* SB might target the PC it's after. *Reality Distortion* SB might trigger environmental weirdness.
 9. **Run the Encounter:** Use the established framework, but narrate freely. Let player actions and SB spends influence the specific details within the established parameters.

8.14.5 GM Guidance & Theming Advice

- **Start Simple:** For a first boss, use fewer complications or a straightforward phase structure. Add complexity as you get comfortable.
- **Tie to the Party:** Use the Drive to connect the boss to the PCs. A boss driven by *Vengeance* is more impactful if it's specifically targeting one of the players or their homeland.
- **Make the Environment a Character:** Use the Complication to make the fight location dynamic. The boss doesn't just exist *in* the environment; it *is* part of the environment or actively manipulates it.
- **Reward Narrative Investment:** The Reward/Twist is crucial. It shouldn't just be loot; it should advance the story or give players a meaningful choice.

- **Use Clocks Liberally:** The boss’s Phase Clock, its Complication Clock, and environmental clocks (like Self-Destruct) are fantastic tools for pacing and adding tension. Name them evocatively.
- **Embrace Failures:** A “Miss” for the boss or a player isn’t a dead end. It’s an opportunity for a complication (SB spend) that makes the story more interesting.
- **Scale the Fight:** Don’t be afraid to adjust on the fly. If the boss is too easy, spend SB to make it nastier. If it’s too hard, let a fortunate player action create an opening.

8.14.6 Example: The Tyrant-Engine

- **Draw:** 8 Adaptive Core, K Domination, Q Reality Distortion, K Rewriting Fate. Highest rank K (Major) -> **8-segment Phase Clock**.
- **Theme:** A war machine fused with a corrupted intelligence, driven to impose order through force, capable of warping the battlefield.
- **Stats:** Tier II party base (8 dice).
- **Mechanics:**
 - **Adaptive Core:** Gains resistance tags or minor condition immunities. Changes primary attack mode (melee/ranged/area) based on who is most threatening.
 - **Domination:** Focuses attacks on the perceived leader or most defiant PC. Gains bonuses when enemies are impaired/frightened.
 - **Reality Distortion:** “Warp Field” clock [6]. Fills via SB spends or when boss takes significant damage. When full: Range bands shift, gravity flickers, or a zone becomes [WARD] against certain actions for one round.
 - **Rewriting Fate:** Defeating it reveals a command code or core logic that can be used to control other similar constructs, or rewrite the narrative of how this fortress fell (ally survived, different outcome).
- **Phases:** 3 phases (0-2/3-5/6-8 segments on Phase Clock) granting +0/+1/+2 dice respectively.
- **SB Spends:** Tie to (targeting defiant PCs) and (triggering minor warp effects, environmental hazards).

This system provides a structured spark for creativity, ensuring bosses are not just stat blocks but integral, dynamic parts of the narrative, perfectly aligned with Fate’s Edge’s core principles.

8.15 Beyond the Combat Monster: Bosses as Systemic Challenges

A *boss* in *Fate’s Edge* does not need to be a creature to fight. It can be any significant, *active* challenge that requires multiple scenes—often multiple sessions—to overcome.

Types of Non-Combat Bosses

1) The Institutional Boss *Examples:* a corrupt bureaucracy, a rigged legal system, an entrenched guild.

Mechanics: multiple related clocks representing facets such as red tape, key officials, and public opinion.

Defeat: reform the institution, circumvent it entirely, or replace it.

2) The Scheming Mastermind *Examples:* a political figure with ongoing plans, a criminal kingpin with operations.

Mechanics: a central *Scheme* clock plus subsidiary *Asset* clocks (followers, resources, safe houses).

Attacks: pre-planned moves that trigger in response to player actions.

Defeat: expose their plans, remove their power base, or turn their schemes against them.

3) The Environmental Boss *Examples:* a spreading curse, an economic collapse, a natural disaster.

Mechanics: a growing *Threat* clock that spawns complications and subsidiary problems.

Attacks: worsening conditions, resource depletion, cascading crises.

Defeat: contain the threat, find its source, or adapt the community to survive it.

4) The Social Movement Boss *Examples:* a popular uprising, a religious revival, a trade embargo.

Mechanics: momentum clocks, faction support clocks, public opinion tracks.

Attacks: shifting social pressure, mob actions, volatile alliances.

Defeat: co-opt the movement, address root causes, or decisively crush it (with consequences).

Key Principles for Non-Combat Bosses

- **Structure:** Provide a clear mechanical representation (usually clocks) that shows the boss's *health* or progress toward its goal.
- **Drive:** Give the boss explicit motivations and behaviors. What does it want? How does it respond to pressure?
- **Complications:** Define signature ways the boss creates problems beyond direct confrontation.
- **Reward/Twist:** Decide what happens when the boss is *defeated*; aim for meaningful, potentially transformative outcomes.
- **Mini-Campaign Nature:** These bosses should require multiple scenes/encounters to resolve, not a single roll.

Using the Boss Generator for Non-Combat Bosses

- **Spades (Structure):** the boss's organization, resources, or foundational power.
- **Hearts (Drive):** the boss's core motivation and psychological profile.
- **Clubs (Complication):** the boss's signature methods for creating problems.
- **Diamonds (Reward):** what is gained by overcoming the boss (may be narrative currency or lasting leverage).

Design Note

In *Fate's Edge*, the greatest threats are often not monsters to slay but problems to solve, systems to reform, or schemes to unravel. The *boss fight* frequently plays out as an extended conflict across investigation, social maneuvering, and strategic decision-making.

8.16 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.

9.12 Aeler — People of Stone, Breath, and Ledger

Background: The Mount-Born Engineers

Built like their mountains—layered, load-bearing, and enduring—the Aeler are masters of infrastructure, subtle influence, and the deep mathematics of survival. In their underground holds, a lantern’s hue is a balance sheet; a bell-note means more than a shout. They call this discipline **deep accounting**: air tallied by vent-shafts, lamp-time written in chalk, calories measured in the language of ovens.

Above ground, their influence is felt but not always seen. Their work—bridges that do not fail, levees that answer one key, ovens that feed thousands—acts as the hidden bones of cities. They do not conquer through banners, but through the gate that must be paid, the bridge that “politely rests” if its clause is broken, and the surety of grain that keeps a quarter from starving.

Key Cultural Concepts

- **Tally-Law**: If it isn’t written, it isn’t owed; if it cannot bear weight, it isn’t promised.
- **Keystone Rights**: Control the piece that holds the whole. Maintenance for access; repair for rate.
- **Grain Surety**: Winter ovens and storage domes under public charter; price courts on marked days.
- **Water & Flood**: Sluice-math is power. They lease keys, not walls; a city opens for trade faster than an army can take it.
- **Mint & Measure**: Calibrated weights and indelible dies. When coins bear Aeler marks, courts sharpen.

Racial Skill Increase

Choose one:

1. **Stone & Breath**: +1 die to **Craft**, **Tinker**, and **Survival** when dealing with infrastructure, construction, or resource management. In underground or dense-urban environments, gain **Position** +1 to navigate, maintain, or sabotage systems.
2. **Deep Accounting**: Once/scene, spend 1 **Boon** to *audit* a situation—ask one question about hidden resources, costs, or dependencies; the GM answers truthfully.

Thematic Attribute

Increase either **Body** or **Wits** by 1 (to a max of 5). **Spirit** and **Presence** unchanged.

Talent: Vent Prior’s Training (3 XP)

Req: **Craft** 1+, **Wits** 2+

- +1 die on checks involving air quality, ventilation, structural integrity, or underground navigation.

- You know the *Nine Measures* (light, draft, echo, dust, taste of iron, sweat-chill, lamp-shadow, bell-lag, head-ache). With a **Wits + Notice** test (DV 3), detect hidden passages or environmental hazards.
- Once/scene, *read a structure like a ledger*: +1 die to understand its construction, weaknesses, or maintenance needs.

Cultural Mechanics

Deep Drakes & Stone-Press (Complication)

Stone-press—pressure that thinks—warps sums and senses.

- **Fronts:** *Stone-Press* [6], *Miasma Spread* [4], *Vent Failure* [4].
- **In Play:** Failures on perception/planning underground may generate SB that tick these Fronts or impose *Condition* or hallucination tests.

Tally-Law (Social/Legal)

- **Oaths:** Breaking a formal oath ticks *Repute 1* and creates *Feud +1*.
- **Boasts & Sagas:** A public boast creates *Audience: Expectant*; fulfill it for *Repute +1*; fail and mark *Exposure* or *Feud*.
- **Etiquette Hooks (once/scene, Aeler venues):** Present guest-loaf and a lit lantern at a threshold to shift your next social action *one step safer* while you remain a guest. Covering iron or stepping on stone cancels the first SB from rites/negotiations this scene.

Strings & Tools

- **Keystone Tablet:** Establish or pause a route; once/scene, convert a chase into a prepared stand: defenders gain **Position +1**.
- **Null-Bell:** On ring, cancel one psychic push/compel; costs lamp-time (mark gear wear or Fatigue).
- **Oven Charter Seal:** Force a public bowl in markets—one round of fair-price negotiation before violence may escalate.
- **Sluice Key:** DV 1 on operations hinging on water/flood/sanitation; abuse creates *Public Outrage* [4].
- **Air Scrip:** Negate the first suffocation/miasma consequence underground in a leg; on use, tick *Vent Failure* [1].

Display Rights (Status)

- **Display Charter:** Licensed marks (metal trim, lamp-halos, keystone etching) show public contribution. Fraud draws fines in grain or labor.
- **Rings of Account:** Bands on tools/belts denote kept contracts: water, bread, bridge, mint. Three rings grant first voice in oven courts.

- **Quiet Wealth:** Private hoard without public work is suspect; unworked shine invites auditors.
- **At the table:** Present a valid Display Writ to gain **Position +1** in civic negotiations once/scene; on a miss, start *Audit Clock* [4].

Orders & Companies (Factions)

- **Iron Avengers:** Traditionalists who enforce blood-feuds inscribed on keystones.
- **Spirit Shield Warriors:** Ancestor-venerating guards with mask-helms etched in lineage prayers.
- **True Masons:** Wanderers who repair ancient Aeler work.
- **Edgewalkers:** Border scanners who hunt for the profitable gap.
- **Reform Lodges:** Foothill freeholds and city cells arguing for gentler contracts with neighbors.

Example boons/risks: Mason's Oath, Edgewalker Marker, Gray List Token, Mask Rights Forfeit.

Soft Power: Keystone Diplomacy & Infrastructure Sovereignty

Aeler influence travels by *charter, standard, and switch*, not by spear.

- **Standards Bind:** *Mint & Measure* make markets legible. Cities that adopt Aeler weights gain stable prices—and accept Aeler audit halls. *In play:* presenting stamped measures grants **DV 1** to enforce contracts or expose fraud.
- **Oven Charters:** *Grain Surety* keeps winters calm. Charter Days obligate fair-pricing courts before force. *In play:* invoke an Oven Charter Seal to require one round of negotiation; cancel the first riot SB this scene.
- **Water Keys:** *Sluice guilds* lease flow, not walls. Trade booms when gates open; siege starves when they close. *In play:* exchanging a Sluice Key with a civic body banks *Public Gratitude* [2]; abuse flips it to *Outrage* [4].
- **Keystone Clauses:** Bridges and gates include *rate-for-repair*. Default pauses service “politely” until arrears are paid. *In play:* once/scene, declare a keystone pause to impose **Effect 1** on enemy movement or logistics.
- **Air & Sanitation:** *Vent courts* and wasteflows curb plague. The city that breathes owes the hand that tuned the vents. *In play:* with plans and access, Aeler gain **Position +1** to quell disease/panic clocks.
- **Apprentice Exchanges:** Sending masters abroad seeds techniques and loyalties. *In play:* spend a season contact to treat a foreign workshop as Friendly for one operation.
- **Null-Bells & Audit Halls:** Disciplined speech zones deter panic and glammers. *In play:* ringing a null-bell suppresses one social *fear/panic* tag for an exchange.

Soft-Power Clocks

- *Public Gratitude* [4] → discounts, calm crowds, smoother permits.
- *Audit Clock* [4] → fines, seizures, reputational scars if you flaunt standards.
- *Co-Prosperity* [6] → shared surpluses, joint projects, mutual defense clauses.

Suggested Bonds & Complications

Bonds

- **Mason-Brother:** Minor edge on structural assessments/repairs and a contact in a lodge.
- **Vent-Prior's Apprentice:** Guidance in underground survival; access to holds.
- **Oven-Warden's Acquaintance:** Insight into grain courts; leverage in hungry quarters.
- **Sluicewarden's Debt:** A water-math favor owed—potential flood control or redirected trade.

Complications

- **Stone-Press Susceptibility:** In deep stress underground, test **Spirit** (DV 3) or suffer −1 die to tasks from pressure-sickness.
- **Ledger Dependency:** Separated from records > 1 day: **Position 1** on planning/resource management until re-synced.
- **Surety Obligation:** You guaranteed resources to a community. Fail to deliver: mark 2 segments on *Obligation* (or take a lasting Complication).

9.13 Aelinnel — People of Sums, Bough, and Bright Things

Background: Gnomes of Stone, Bough, and Bright Things

The Aelinnel dwell in the hawthorn hills south of the Valewood, their lives intertwined with living wood, worked stone, and precise mathematics. Halls run like veins through granite and thorn; bridges hum when tuned; bargains arrive on two ledgers—what was *said*, and what was *meant*. To walk their country is to feel math underfoot: steps safer when even, doors opening to right sequence, moonlight that prefers tidy logic.

They are fae-kin cousins to the Lethai, smaller in stature, bright-eyed and quick. Society rests on **Courtesy, Copper, and Count**. Count or be counted. Speak your steps, breaths, or stitches and the land steadies. Favor copper before the courts; copper is polite, naked iron is an insult unless named or gilded. Recite a simple sequence when tension frays to cancel the first misstep in navigation or negotiation.

Law of Sums Proceedings in hawthorn courts require three clean courtesies: *no naked iron*; *two-ledger speech* (said & meant); and *return what points the way* (cords, marks, antlers). Keep these and even thorns hold back; slight them and arches close, time drifts, and messages arrive folded and misaddressed.

Racial Skill Increase

Choose one:

1. **Copper Courtesy & Counting Etiquette:** Once/scene, careful counting shifts **Position +1** for a patterned action (locks, paths, ritual speech). In fae-facing scenes, presenting copper or brass tools negates the first offense penalty.
2. **Two-Ledger Talk:** When you clearly state both *said* and *meant*, you may cancel the first social **SB** against you this scene. If you refuse, the next bargain seeks collateral (memory or name, at the GM's discretion).

Thematic Attribute

Increase either **Wits** or **Spirit** by 1 (to a max of 5). **Body** and **Presence** unchanged.

Size & Equipment Limits

Aelinnel stature and leverage limit heavy kit.

- **Restriction:** Aelinnel *cannot* wield **Heavy** weapons or wear **Heavy** armor. They may freely use **Light** and **Medium** weapons/armor suited to their frame.
- **Design Note (at the table):** Attempts to circumvent with makeshift rigs are treated as fiction-only stunts; if allowed, apply **Position -1** and **DV +2** and remove any benefits from the *Finesse* tag.

Talents

Long Memory (3 XP — Minor)

Req: *Spirit* 2+

- Perfect recall of the last week's events.
- +1 die to **Lore** and **Insight** when drawing on historical/cultural detail.
- **Once/session**, surface a crucial long-term detail the GM must render truthfully (scope: a person, place, or clause you directly encountered).

Cold Reading (3 XP — Minor)

Req: *Wits* 2+, *Long Memory*

- +1 die to **Sway** and **Insight** from close observation.
- With **Wits** + **Insight** (DV 3), infer a motive or pressure the target is concealing.
- **Once/scene**, if you observed quietly for a beat, gain **Position** +1 on your first parley in that scene.

Cultural Mechanics

Hawthorn Halls & Law of Sums

Paths are counted by antler-posts; tide-cut stairs descend to black sea-rifts; causeys of pale flags show at dawn, at dusk—and whenever someone is counting aloud.

- **Counting Etiquette:** Once/scene, careful count grants **Position** +1 for patterned action.
- **Copper Over Iron:** In fae-facing scenes, copper/brass tools negate the first offense penalty.
- **Two-Ledger Talk:** Stating both *said* and *meant* cancels the first social **SB** this scene.
- **Hazel Favors:** Earned by restoring way-things (antlers, cords, ferry rights). **Once/leg**, spend to downgrade a glamour/geas.

People of Stone & Bough

Charcoal-burners read omen by smoke hums; stone-singers soothe walls with low chords; wardens hammer copper nails where iron offends; goat-herds measure danger in hoof-widths.

- **Markets Under Living Roofs:** Weights and measures matter—producing a certified rod cancels the first jurisdiction/commerce snag in that market.
- **Reputation Echoes:** Return way-cords, restore antlers, pay tide-dues to bank *Hazel Favors*.

Courts, Hunts, and Gates

Aelinnel powers are etiquette engines and logic traps more than tyrants.

- **Lady of Thorns:** Punishes breaches precisely; rewards perfect sequences.
- **Green Knight:** Duels by paths and proofs, not boasts.
- **Moonlit Ride:** Grants one night's clemency if you name the right horn-count.
- **Green Gate:** Demands exact change in truths before it opens.

Tides, Ledgers, and Names

Rivers and sea-caves carry their own arithmetic.

- **Tide-Reeves:** Filing plans before neap earns a Tide Window; skip the ledger and your next crossing suffers *Wrong Tide*.
- **Seals & Hours:** Neglected barge seals invite *Wrong Hour*.
- **Said/Meant Receipts:** Some stalls require dual receipts; single-ledger haggling risks a surcharge payable in memory or name.

Aelinnel Mood: Dark-Wonder

Paths shorten for those who keep count and lengthen for the proud. Petals fall like knives and settle into proofs; antler-posts rearrange themselves when the land takes offense. Time miscounts, and the sun arrives at the wrong hour with excellent logic.

Strings & Tools

- **Antler-Post Bead:** **Once/scene**, treat a wild path as *Signed*: **DV 1** to Traverse.
- **Counting Cord:** When stretched and tapped in sequence, grants **Position +1** on one trap/lock sequence.
- **Copper Nail Kit:** Negate the first *iron-offense* penalty in a scene; if misused, start *Thorn Displeasure* [2].
- **Two-Ledger Rod:** A certified measure; **DV 1** to enforce a stall's weight/price clause.
- **Tide Window Seal:** Mark a safe hour for crossing; **once/leg**, cancel *Wrong Tide*.

Soft Power: Courtesy Clauses & Gate-Math

Aelinnel influence travels by etiquette, sequence, and small infrastructure that rewrites how strangers meet.

- **Sequence Rights:** The party that maintains way-things claims first say; **once/scene**, invoke to require a parley beat before force.
- **Counting Thresholds:** Marked thresholds heed those who count; allies entering on your count gain **Position +1** on their opener.

- **Receipt Culture:** Dual ledgers make fraud expensive; presenting a said/meant receipt grants **DV 1** to unwind a trick clause.

Soft-Power Clocks: *Hazel Favor* [4], *Thorn Displeasure* [4], *Right Hour* [3].

Suggested Bonds & Complications

Bonds

- **Hawthorn Courtier:** Access to fae-kin etiquette and minor favors.
- **Tide-Reeve's Acquaintance:** Tide windows, river law, and ferries.
- **Green Market Broker:** Wrapped truths and two-ledger bargaining.
- **Stone-Singer's Apprentice:** Stone songs and structural lore.

Complications

- **Context-Sensitive Speech:** Reading texts older than two generations requires **Lore + Notice** (DV 4–5) or a *Context String*. Using archaic registers without keys adds **DV +1**.
- **Overload Sensitivity:** Too many inputs at once mark **1 Fatigue** and impose -1 die on next **Insight/Notice**.
- **Brittle Focus:** The first **Harm 1 (blunt)** each scene converts to **1 Fatigue**; resolve further Harm normally.

9.14 Player’s Guide: Aelaerem — People of Hearth & Hollow

Background: Halflings of Hearth & Hollow

The Aelaerem are a people of movement and assembly, living among gentle slopes and hedged lanes. Small in stature and large in memory, they bind promises with bread and lantern-light, and measure seasons by harvest masks and market bells. Hospitality is their public law; beneath it runs an older hedge-law of cup-marks, red thread, and the quiet attention of the Neighbors. Their “hearth magic” is housekeeping writ large: doors set true, lamps trimmed, courtesies kept—less spell than system, a precise regard for seasons, thresholds, and debts.

Hearth-Law & Guest-Right A red door promises bread, salt, and one safe night if you come honest. Entering or hosting “under bread and lantern” gentles the next parley; hospitality is both shield and clause.

Racial Skill Increase

Choose one:

1. **Hearth-Law & Guest-Right:** +1 die to **Sway**, **Lore** (local custom), and **Survival** (shelter signs). Gain **Position** +1 when properly offering or receiving hospitality.
2. **Lantern-Law & the Wardens:** +1 die to **Notice**, **Survival** (paths, omens), and **Tinker** (lamps, small tools). Gain **Position** +1 when you correctly observe small courtesies or maintenance rites.

Thematic Attribute

Increase either **Wits** or **Presence** by 1 (to a max of 5). **Body** and **Spirit** unchanged.

Size & Equipment Limits

- **Small-Statured:** Agility and subtlety by build and habit.
- **Restriction:** Aelaerem cannot use **Heavy Weapons** or **Heavy Armor**. They excel with **Light** and **Medium** kits favoring finesse, mobility, and ward-rituals.

Talents

Heightened Senses (3 XP — Minor)

Req: **Wits** 2+

- +1 die to **Notice** and **Survival**.
- With **Wits** + **Notice** (DV 3), detect hidden creatures/objects.
- In natural environments, gain **Position** +1 on stealth and tracking.

Root-Balance (3 XP — Minor)*Req: Body 2+, Heightened Senses*

- +1 die to **Athletics**; resist shove/knockdown more easily.
- Move through natural terrain without penalty.
- **Once/scene**, stabilize on precarious footing with **Body + Athletics** (DV 3).

Cultural Mechanics**Hearth-Law & Guest-Right**

- **Red Door Hospitality**: Present a guest-loaf token beneath a lit lantern to soften a risky social exchange (**Position +1**) or cancel the first *strange* complication in a scene.
- **Lantern-Writ**: Simple rites keep bounds sweet—"Bread & Salt" (**Position +1** once/scene), "Broom Witness" (establish *Oath* [4–6]), and *Iron-Lace & Red Thread* (**Effect +1** vs. compulsion) while properly maintained.
- **The Neighbors**: Leave butter at cup-marks, keep the festival calendar, and count the stiles aloud. Observance smooths the night; neglect invites *Hollow Attention*.

Lantern-Law & the Wardens

- **Count the Load**: Tap a beam three times and listen; **once/scene**, a measured tap grants **Position +1** to **Traverse/Endure** in caves, bridges, or crowded structures.
- **Copper Courtesy**: Copper is polite to stone and honest to labor. Presenting copper tools or a mason's tally negates the first structural environment **SB**, or grants **DV 1** to parley with miners/masons/porters.
- **Return the Chalk**: Anything that points the way (chalk, cord, placard) must be restored; doing so cancels the first environment **SB** this scene.

The Quiet Powers (Neighbors)

- **The Pale Shepherd**: **Once**, by clause and courtesy, a traveler may pass "uncounted"—unseen by what tallies footfalls under the soil.
- **Hollow Attention**: Breaking hedge-law draws subtle reprisals: bells toll soft, red thread appears where you did not tie it, a door leads briefly elsewhere.

Seasons of Mask & Harvest

- **Mummers**: Keep stricter rules than any priest; the Thresher-King's guard walks in red hoods when fields demand order.
- **Festivals**: For a night, masks legitimate certain crossings; private moots under the Oak settle quarrels; an elder's blessing opens doors that ignore coin.
- **Omens**: Scarecrows watch the lane; lanterns burn blue at the ford; chalk mazes fill with mist; sometimes the Moot Oak bleeds sap the color of wine.

Trade, Craft, & Tokens

- **Keeps:** Cider, perry, beeswax, and wool spin the lane's economy.
- **Tokens:** Orchard grafts, mill-tokens, shepherd whistles, mover pressings. (Example: a shepherd's whistle makes dogs and door-bolts heed for one scene.)
- **Hearth Magic:** Red thread binds promises, lantern-writ holds the dark at bay, careful count and courtesy keep thresholds sweet.

Strings & Tools

- **Guest-Loaf Token:** **Once/scene**, treat a tense arrival as *Hospitable* (**Position +1** opener).
- **Lantern Hood:** Convert a bright scene to *Shaded* locally; cancel one glare-based penalty.
- **Red Thread Kit:** **Once/scene**, bind a simple promise as an *Oath* [4].
- **Broom Witness:** Establish a household oath; while it ticks, outsiders face **DV +1** to trespass or deceive under that roof.

Suggested Bonds & Complications

Bonds

- **Apple-Matron's Favor:** Hospitality leverage; influence in local markets; feast-clause invocations.
- **Lantern-Warden's Knowledge:** Path marks, safe-passage signs, omen-reading.
- **Mummers' Captain's Acquaintance:** Festival law, mask permissions, night-crossing exceptions.
- **Hedge-Witch's Debt:** Small potent favors—at a cost.

Complications

- **Hollow Stirring** [6]: Courtesies neglected; omens grow frequent and bite.
- **Gloam Choir** [6]: Deeper threat from boundary failures; spiritual or fae pressure escalates.
- **Scale Shock:** Smallness is overlooked in mass conflicts or intimidation; social **DV +1** to *impose* on much larger foes unless you stand under hospitality or law.

9.15 Player's Guide: Lethai — Root, River, & Roof-Tree / Mind's Eye & Civic Measure

Background: Woodwise Lawkeepers & Civic Engineers

The Lethai are sundered by an old constraint: no one may bear both the Gift of the Body and the Gift of the Mind. From this division grew two sister cultures:

Lethai-al (Wood-Elves) — Root, River, Roof-Tree They dwell where roof-trees braid the sky and rivers think aloud. Their memory is arboreal—rings, seasons, coppice ledgers—and their oaths are *root-law*: debts in years, paid in living work. To outsiders they seem quiet; to neighbors they are relentless auditors of footprint and flow. Strengths: living law, environmental stewardship, contextual craft.

Lethai-thora (City-Elves) — Mind's Eye, Civic Measure They make circles in cities (chiefly Thepyrgos), weighing arguments like bridges and translating other peoples' law into forms that carry. Their courts count consequences; their speech is context-saturated and exact. Strengths: memory, jurisprudence, logistics, civil design.

First Courtesy “Name yourself once; name the river twice; never name the forest as if it were yours.” Lamps are witnesses, paths are clauses, and small laws keep the world sweet.

Racial Skill Increase

Choose one, keyed to your branch:

1. **Gift of the Body (Lethai-al)**: +1 die to **Body**-based actions; **once/scene** you may spend **1 Boon** to exceed normal limits for one physical action (leap, balance, sprint, scent-track).
2. **Gift of the Mind (Lethai-thora)**: +1 die to **Wits/Spirit**-based actions; **once/scene** you may spend **1 Boon** to recall, deduce, or frame context that was beyond immediate knowledge (gloss, precedent, supply path).

Thematic Attribute

- **Lethai-al**: Increase **Body** *or* **Wits** by 1 (max 5).
- **Lethai-thora**: Increase **Wits** *or* **Spirit** by 1 (max 5).

Talents

Lethai-al Path — Embodied Presence

Canopy Spring (4 XP — Minor) *Req: Heightened Senses; Body 2+*
+1 die to climbing, vaulting, branch-run. **Once/scene** in forest, gain **Position** +1 on a movement action. With **Body** + **Athletics** (DV 4), clear a gap others treat as impassable.

Scent of Rain (4 XP — Minor) *Req: Heightened Senses; Survival 1+*
+1 die to predict weather, smoke, blight. With **Wits** + **Survival** (DV 3), sense approaching storm/fire/plague front. Track by scent with **Effect** +1 in natural terrain.

Lethai-thora Path — Mental Acuity

Memory Cantic (4 XP — Minor) *Req: Long Memory; Lore 2+*

Line-true recall of texts and testimony. +1 die to research/translation. **Once/scene**, provide crucial context that advances an investigation or reduces a legal/social **DV** by 1 if you can cite source and frame.

Number Music (4 XP — Minor) *Req: Long Memory; Wits 2+*

+1 die to design/repair/logistics. With **Wits** + **Craft** (DV 3), solve an engineering/flow proof on the fly. When you *speak the scaffold* (frame steps aloud), related rolls are **DV 1** this scene.

Cultural Mechanics

The Curse of Division

- **Rule of Two Gifts:** Choose *Body* (Lethai-al) or *Mind* (Lethai-thora) at creation; take Talents only from that path. Attempting to straddle both imposes 1 **die** to all rolls until scene end.
- **Season Switch:** Changing paths is a season project with social cost (forfeit one String tied to former gift).
- **Bridge-Born Clause (Rare Half-Elf):** A quarter-lineage may take *one* Body Gift *and one* Mind Gift (see GM for context obligations).

Shade Etiquette (Lethai-al)

- **Iron Covered:** Bare iron offends ward-lines; wrap it. First entry with covered iron grants **Position** +1 in parley to pass.
- **Name Once:** Speak name and intent at the edge; do not claim the forest.
- **Step on Stone:** Use laid stones; crushed shoots are debts.
- **Water First:** Pour a first cup for river or cistern before you drink.
- **Leave the Light:** Replant, mend, or pay for shade you take. (See *Light-Dues*.)

Context-Saturated Speech (Lethai-thora)

- **Context Keys:** place-name, season-mark, kinship-hand, roof-tree sign. Missing any two invites misreadings.
- **Old Texts:** Manuscripts older than two generations need gloss-trees (marginal twig glyphs) or a songkeeper.
- **In Play:** Reading/pleading in older registers is **DV +1** unless you hold a *Context String* (gloss-tree, witness, song). Cashing it reduces **DV 1** and establishes a *Shared Frame* (**Position** +1 opener).

Strings & Ledger (Shared)

- **Light-Dues:** Every fell, ferry, and fire owes a balance in replanting, canal-clearing, or kinder rates.
- **Strings (examples):** light-due receipt; shade-credit; ferry right; resin share; canoe-lane priority; seed tithe.
- **Use:** Cash a light-due for **DV 1** on operations framed as repair/replanting/flood-work. Abuse starts *Under-Root Grudge* [1].
- **Quotas as Clocks:** Boat-Timber Quota [6], Lanternwood Allotment [4]. Fill to unlock export; overfill triggers *Canopy Censure*.

Patron Ties (Common Lethai Bonds)

- **Lethai-al:** Often entreat *Inaea* (web, guest-right, line-sanctuary) and *Isoka* (shedding, decisive strike) for rites on path, bridge, and hunt.
- **Lethai-thora:** Favor *The Witness* (truth, record) and *Sacred Geometry* (form, proportion); radicals court the *Clockwork Monad* for “managed process” at moral risk.

Strings & Tools (Table Use)

- **Shade-Credit:** Treat a contested crossing as *Hospitable*: **Position +1** opener; on abuse, tick *Under-Root Grudge* [1].
- **Ferry Right:** **DV 1** to move crews/loads by water where named.
- **Resin Share:** **Effect +1** on mend/seal actions; marks *Lanternwood Allotment*.
- **Context String:** Redeem to remove **DV +1** from archaic law/speech this scene and bank **+1 Boon** on a clean success.

Suggested Bonds & Complications

Bonds

- **Songkeeper's Trust (al):** Vouches adherence to shade etiquette; interprets ancient paths and oaths.
- **Warden's Oath (al):** Passage rights and woodwise summons when the forest is wronged.
- **Sumwright's Compact (thora):** Two-ledger arbitration in mixed courts; contract leverage.
- **Archive-Keeper's Debt (thora):** Access to restricted stacks—at a later price in service.
- **Bridge-Born Kinship:** Mutual aid among rare dual-gift lineages navigating both spheres.

Complications

- **Division's Bite:** Attempting cross-path use (Body *and* Mind gifts in one scene without clause) imposes **1 die** to all rolls until scene ends.
- **Context Fragility:** Social/legal **DV +1** when stripped of context keys; hostile courts may weaponize misframing.
- **Canopy Censure:** Exceeding quotas or slighting root-law triggers censure—*Light-Dues* [4] starts and local passage turns *Risky*.

9.16 Player's Guide: Lethai-ar — The Oathbound (Dark Elves)

Background: The Vowed in Silk & Scale

The Lethai-ar are not a separate bloodline so much as a vow-bound cadre. They are Lethai-al (Body-gift) or Lethai-thora (Mind-gift) who step off those paths to live under threshold patrons—**Inae** the Weaver and **Isoka** the Serpent. In some ages they are scarce; in others—like the present—they gather wherever borders fray and oaths need teeth. They are known for *mask-right*, precise courtesies, and the unsettling efficiency of vows that bind places, routes, and roles.

Marks Are Common, Discipline Is Distinct. Ink, scar, resin-inlay, and rite-born *Marks* exist across many peoples. The Lethai-ar did not invent them and do not own them; they *institutionalize* them—pairing each Mark with context keys (place, season, witness) and ledgered prices, so boons do not drift into curses.

Racial Skill Increase

Choose one according to patronal leaning:

1. **Weaver's Reading (Inae):** +1 die to uncover *connections* (routes, plots, safe-conducts). **Once/scene**, with **Wits + Notice** (DV 3), declare one hidden tie (who vouches, what clause binds, which alley joins).
2. **Venin Lore (Isoka):** +1 die to *identify, dose, and remedy* toxins and social “poisons.” **Once/scene**, convert **Harm 1 (toxin)** to **1 Fatigue**.

Thematic Attribute

Increase **Wits** or **Spirit** by 1 (max 5). Body and Presence unchanged.

Talents (Entry Paths)

Needle-Quiet (4 XP — Minor) *Req: Stealth 2+*

In dim, patterned cover (silk, lattice, shutters), gain **+1 die** to **Stealth**. **Once/scene**, hold still through an exchange as if unseen (you remain targetable only by area or guessed fire).

Fang of Timing (4 XP — Minor) *Req: Survival 1+ or Subterfuge 1+*

Frame a precise moment (counted breath, bell-beat). Your next action that keys to that beat gains **Position +1**. **On a Miss**, mark **1 Fatigue** (the moment slips).

Cultural Mechanics

Two Courts, One Edge

Silk Courts of Inae (Pattern & Mercy) Temper: mercy with memory; knots that mend before they bind.

Work: multi-party compacts, reweaving custom, sanctuaries under line.

Signs: three-strand cords, ledger-ribbons, masks with tear-slits.

Law: “Said & Meant” tied by a visible clause.

Sin: binding without consent; repair that erases the harmed.

Coil Courts of Isoka (Change & Cure) Temper: cunning without needless cruelty; a sharp cure offered with the cut.

Work: expose weak seams, stage molts (identity exits), pair poison to remedy.

Signs: shed-skin sashes, cup-and-vial pairs, scalpels in green thread.

Law: every wound must name a reachable remedy.

Sin: a wound with no cure; molt forced by shame instead of choice.

Oath Etiquette & Rites

- **Mask-Right:** Roles declared, then masks donned; speak in role, not over it. Breaking mask-right ends hearing for a season.
- **Speak Twice, Whisper Once:** Say the truth two ways; then whisper the *price* to the witness. If you cannot name the price, you have not made a true ask.
- **Thread Before Blade:** Offer a binding solution first. Steel only where thread was refused.
- **Vial Courtesy:** A dose sits beside its antivenin. Taking one without the other marks bad faith.

Marks — Shared Craft, Particular Discipline

Marks are table-facing compacts that grant an edge when *in context* and tilt to curse when unmoored. The Lethai-ar practice is to *key* every Mark to time, witness, and place.

Examples (available to any culture that learns the rite; Lethai-ar formalize keys):

- **Spider-Bride Mark (Inae):** *Gift:* **Position +1** when protecting named guests “under your line”; line-sanctuary can be declared once/scene. *Keys:* guest-roll, lifted lamp, knot-book. *Curse (keyless):* hospitality fixation—**DV +1** to withdraw protection even when prudent.
- **Widow’s Spool (Inae):** *Gift:* lay a hair-fine traversal/trap line once/scene (treat as *Trap [2]* or safe step). *Keys:* knot register, bell-note. *Curse:* path hunger—compelled to “finish the old route” at bad moments.
- **First Shedding Mark (Isoka):** *Gift:* escape a label/bond once/scene (*Shed-Skin Escape*); clear **1 Fatigue** on successful exit. *Keys:* warm draught, ash-milk, witness to new name. *Curse:* identity chill—**Position 1** in cold or when unnamed.
- **Forked Sight (Isoka):** *Gift:* when a hard truth is spoken in the exchange, your action gains **Effect +1**. *Keys:* bell-pattern, truth-token. *Curse:* social sting—on Miss, mark **1 Fatigue** and start *Bruised Pride [2]*.

War Without Battle (Doctrine)

Lethai-ar end campaigns by route, ledger, and night.

- **Hedge War:** Re-knit ward-lines to channel intruders into dead ground watched by wardens.
- **River Denial:** Ferries “rest,” weirs open at dusk, mills idle to silt the only footing.
- **Night Lanes:** Silk trip-lines and warning strings; one strike, then silence.
- **Canopy Runners:** Move above sight-lines; arrows fall where footfalls never were.

Neighbors & Borders

- **Ykrul:** Ritual distance, mutual measure. Bowl & Board seals routes; Ykrul price crossings, Lethai-ar price behavior.
- **Aeler:** Oath-friction underground—lamp-law vs mask-right. Both enforce receipts; argue which witness counts.
- **Lethai-al / Lethai-thora:** The ar recruit from the al; they debate context with the thora. Kinship slows quarrels; thresholds decide them.

Strings & Tools (Table Use)

- **Bride-Line Writ:** Declare a *protected path* for one leg; trespassers treat the route as *Risky* and suffer **DV +1** to press.
- **Vial Pair:** Carry dose & cure; **DV 1** to treat poison, and parley **Position +1** when you show both.
- **Knot-Book:** Spend to assert a clause remembered “in the tying”: **DV 1** to enforce or unwind an oath once/scene.
- **Mask Ledger:** Track roles & prices; **+1 die** to **Sway** when all parties wear declared masks.

Clocks & Fronts

- **Mask Integrity** [4] (roles fray); **Guest-Right Strain** [4] (hospitality abused); **Coil Paranoia** [4] (cure withheld); **Web Ossifies** [4] (mercy becomes trap).
- **SB Menu:** *Mask Slips* (role confusion), *Knot Bites* (unpaid clause triggers), *Cold Hour* (Position 1 unless warmed), *Witness Arrives* (price must be named now).

Play Hooks

1. **The Unpriced Mercy:** A sanctuary knot holds a murderer. Name a price that mends without erasing the harmed—under three masks—before dawn.
2. **Molt for a City:** A tyrant's captain begs a molt. The cure exists; its price may break the garrison's oath-chain.
3. **Thread Across Pasture:** A silence-furlong through border pasture is broken; wolves and wardens close. Re-stitch or accept a biting line.

Suggested Bonds & Complications

Bonds

- **Fellow Oath-Bearer (Inae/Isoka):** Shared vows, shared leverage.
- **Mask-Maker:** Teaches form; vouches mask-right in foreign courts.
- **Patron's Herald:** Carries omens and small dispensations.
- **Kin in al/thora:** Bridge to broader Lethai custom and correction.
- **Neutral Arbiter (Sumwright/Archive-Keeper):** Mediates Said/Meant disputes.

Complications

- **Oath-Breaker's Stigma:** Mask-right denied until penance.
- **Mark Adrift:** A beloved Mark lost its last context—acts as a curse until re-keyed.
- **Mask vs Lamp:** Whose witness rules—silk or single lamp?
- **Patron's Disfavor:** Omen of chill silk or dry scales; expect a demanded price.

Using Lethai-ar at the Table

Lean on *roles, routes, and remedies*. Put **price** on every protection, and **context keys** on every edge—so that when pressure comes, the choice to pay or to cut is clean, witnessed, and costly in a way the table can feel.

9.17 Player's Guide: Ykrul — The People of the Violet Steppe

Background: The Violet Steppe

The Ykrul are a fierce, pragmatic people of the **Violet Steppe**. Outsiders often call them *orcs*—a slur that flattens a rich culture into stereotype. Among those who deal fairly with them, they are **Ykrul**: “the People of the Violet Steppe.”

Their shared memory begins with the **Great Wake**—a legendary flight from a wrong sky, crossing an ocean by boat and star. From that passage they learned to read **flow** (what moves), **weight** (what holds), and **exit** (what opens). These principles, codified in the sacred geometry of **Kon'reh**, inform their warfare, logistics, law, diplomacy, and daily life. They bank on a fearsome name on the open plain—and win by **routes, supply, and parleys** that make blades unnecessary.

Ykrul life is plural: herders, pilots, weavers, judges, scouts, factors, captains. Warfare is *a tool*, not an identity. Their ethics are spatial: to *place well* is to *behave well*—no route you cannot defend, no exit you build that closes behind weaker feet.

Institutions range from **Meadow Judges** who roam with bowl and board, to **Kon'reh Masters** who arbitrate by geometry, to **Stone-Sons & Rope-Daughters** who prove passages in mountain night, and **Wake-Wrought** families who list their hulls like saints. Their colors favor violet (grass), gray (stone), blue-white (sky/wake), and motifs of rings, crosses, and stepped lines.

Racial Skill Increase

Choose one:

1. **Flow/Weight/Exit (Plainscraft)**: +1 die to **Survival**, **Tactics**, and **Lore** about movement, terrain, logistics, and “reading” a situation for viable paths or pressure points.
2. **Kon'reh Logic (Sacred Geometry)**: +1 die to **Insight** and **Command** when negotiating, planning, or reasoning spatially. **Once/scene**, you may treat a failed negotiation as a *Partial* if you reframe it with a clean geometric metaphor or map.

Thematic Attribute

Increase **Body** or **Wits** by 1 (max 5). Spirit and Presence unchanged.

Talents

Herd-Mastery (3 XP — Minor) *Req: Survival 1+, Presence 2+*

+1 die to herding/animal handling. Calm a panicked beast or steer a herd through bad ground with **Presence + Survival** (DV 3). **Once/scene**, read herd motion for advantage (+1 die to a linked **Notice** or **Tactics** test).

Weather-Reading (4 XP — Minor) *Req: Wits 2+, Survival 1+*

+1 die to predict weather or navigate it. Sense major shifts hours early with **Wits + Survival** (DV 3). In open country, acting on a correct forecast grants **Position +1** to travel/survival actions.

Cultural Mechanics

Wake-Law: The Great Migration

- **Survival through Adaptation**: Read *flow, weight, exit* before you commit.

- **Kon'reh (Sacred Geometry):** Meadow (pressure & path), River (flow & change), Stone (weight & witness). Strategy is ethic; a clean placement is a clean duty.
- **Wake Names:** A second name granted by the sea—callable once for an unlooked-for courtesy “as kin on the crossing.”
- **Salt Line:** A coil of salt-stiff rope uncoiled before grave talk—placing all present under Wake-law: plain words, straight debts, no riddles.

Law, Diplomacy, War—Seen in Lines

- **Guest Right:** A guest cup at the outer fire. Theft “under smoke” brands your tent-marks gray for a season.
- **Two Ledgers:** Said *and* Meant recorded together; offering both averts face-traps. Lying on *Said* is a grave offense.
- **Blood-Price:** Paid in animals, salt, or length of rope; refusal enters **Red Weather** (others treat you as a walking storm).
- **Silence Furlong (with Lethai-al):** A speechless border—no grazing, no felling, no names. Cross in silence, then speak once. Kept, it warms councils; broken, gray-fledged messengers arrive at dusk.
- **Pass & Harbor Doctrine:** In mountains, hold what stone will bear and promise no more. At sea, get there first *or sing the storm together*; a shared song outranks a sharp keel.

People & Institutions

- **Meadow Judges:** A traveling trio with bowl, board, and braid; their ruling holds one season and one road.
- **Kon'reh Masters:** Geometry arbiters and teachers; respected even by rivals; will play anyone who brings a decent board and reason.
- **Stone-Sons & Rope-Daughters:** Mountain orders proving night crossings; their braids anchor Aeler engines and make Aeler officers polite.
- **Wake-Wrought:** Sea families who list hulls like saints; name a stolen boat's rivets and you can claim it under Wake-law.

Ykrul Ways (Four Grounds)

Meadow Commons Violet grass, ring-camps, shallow lakes. Fast musters, moving markets, distance diplomacy. Gifts: Herd-Mastery; Weather-Reading; Caravan Craft; Route-Planning (Kon'reh framing).

Mountain Holds Knife ridges, pass-stones. Holding lines, winter stores, signal sense. Gifts: Stone-Sense; Counterweight Engineering; Rope-Craft; Avalanche Reading.

Salt Coasts Rocky inlets, island runs, river mouths. Pilots, moots, storm windows. Gifts: Storm-Seamanship; Harbor Dues; Shoal Mapping; Blue Moot Etiquette.

Eastern Steppes Sky cairns, ward-storms. Exit-finding, omen-reading, cross-cultural guides. Gifts: Cairn-Talking; Ward-Storm Guidance; Long-Leg Logistics; Silence Furlong Etiquette.

How Ykrul Win (Beyond the Blade)

- **Banked Fear (Reputation Economy):** On entering a venue where your fierce name precedes you, mark *Banked Fear (1)*. *Spend 1*: force *Parley First* (one roll of talk before a fight) *or* shift one enemy action to *Controlled* (they flinch). Bluff and fail to deliver? Erase all Banked Fear until you win publicly.
- **Logistics Edge (Strings → DV):** Convert a cache String (fodder lot, water right, hidden wharf) into **DV 1** on a linked leg/score. Starve innocents with it and flip the benefit: **DV 1** becomes *Public Debts +1*.
- **Kon'reh Arbitration (Geometry of Mercy):** Model roads/exits/lanes in talk. On success, create a *Seasonal Concession* String at a ford/harbor/pass; either side may call it *once/season* without offense.

Strings & Tools (Table Use)

- **Salt Line Rope:** Uncoil to place a scene under Wake-law; **Position +1** to resolve disputes cleanly once/scene.
- **Wake-Name Token:** Cash for an unlooked-for courtesy—**DV 1** to a border, muster, or harbor ask.
- **Meadow Judge's Braid:** Present to shift a brawl into *Bowl & Board* arbitration; opens a *Concession [4]* clock both sides can tick.
- **Kon'reh Board & Stones:** Lay it out to reframe a negotiation as placement; on a clean success, bank *Route Clause* (once/leg: **DV 1** to movement/supply).
- **Violet Standard:** Raise to claim right-of-parley for your band; first hostile SB becomes *Muttered Threats* (no immediate violence).

Clocks & Fronts

- **Red Weather [6]** (unpaid blood-price shadows your camp)
- **Feud Ignites [4]** (a slight tends toward blood)
- **Silence Furlong Breach [4]** (border rites strained)
- **Supply Drag [4]** (overextended routes sap will)
- **Gray Marks [4]** (tent-brand shame limits hospitality)

SB Menu (Steppe): Dust Line (visibility warps), Dry Kettle (water tighter), False Ford (route misread), Storm Edge (forecast arrives early), Horse Nerves (mounts spook).

Play Hooks

1. **The Board at Dusk:** Two caravans claim the same ford. Lay the Kon'reh board, win the concession without drawing steel, or face *Red Weather*.
2. **Salt on the Wind:** A Wake-Wrought hull is stolen; name its rivets under Wake-law and seize it back mid-moot—without lighting the harbor to war.

3. **The Gray Tent:** A guest stole under smoke; your marks run gray. Pay the price in rope, stock, or service before neighboring bands treat you like a storm.
4. **The Silent Strip:** A Silence Furlong was trampled during a hunt. Repair rites with the Lethai-al before gray-fletched arrows and cold courtesy freeze trade.

Suggested Bonds & Complications

Bonds

- **Meadow Judge Acquaintance:** A traveling arbiter who can seat disputes and grant rulings that hold for a season.
- **Kon'reh Master's Respect:** Earned by fair play or clean placement; grants edge when a scene is “set as Board.”
- **Stone-Son/Rope-Daughter Initiate:** Mountain-tested; access to passes, counterweight tricks, and Aeler goodwill.
- **Wake-Wrought Kin:** Sea-law, pilot lore, and a harbor that remembers your name.
- **Foster-Bond (Ykrul → Vilikari):** A formal exchange that opens trade routes and softens borders.

Complications

- **Red Weather:** Your band owes blood-price; hospitality chills until it's paid.
- **Feud Ignites [4]:** A live quarrel trends toward blood unless cooled by price, proof, or play.
- **Silence Furlong Breach:** Border rites violated; messengers with gray fletchings are on the way.
- **Oath-Breaker's Shame:** Guest-Right or Said/Meant betrayed; trust collapses across rings.
- **Kon'reh Misstep:** You promised an exit you cannot defend. Publicly re-learn (demonstrate competence) or lose face.
- **Banked Fear Debt:** You spent the name and failed to deliver—erase Banked Fear and invite challengers.

9.18 Player's Guide: Mixed Heritage — Half-Elves, Half-Ykrul, Half-Others

Background: Children of Crossings

The lands of Fate's Edge are broad and braided. People travel, trade, swear oaths, and fall in love across borders. From these crossings come folk of **mixed heritage**. You might be the child of a Lethai merchant and a Vilikari factor, a half-Ykrul born in a ford-town to a human parent, or the grandchild of an Aeler vent-prior and a Valewood wanderer. Your identity is not a single stamp but a weave of places, customs, and kin.

Being of mixed heritage is seldom simple. Welcome in one court, weighed in another; fluent in two etiquettes, fully at home in neither. Some will see a bridge, others a trespass. The shape you keep is yours to claim.

This guide favors *reflavoring* the existing race frameworks rather than inventing wholly new rule blocks, keeping focus on narrative flexibility over assumptions about biology.

Creating a Mixed Heritage Character

1. **Choose One Core Racial Package.** Select one background (Aeler, Aelinnel, Aelaerem, Lethai-al/-thora/-ar, Ykrul) as your *primary* cultural foundation. This sets your **Racial Skill Increase**, **Thematic Attribute**, **Talents** access, and **Cultural Mechanics**.
2. **Reflavor One Element.** Take one talent, skill bonus, or cultural mechanic from a *second* culture and **reflavor** it to fit your mixed upbringing. It must make sense in your backstory and present fiction.

Reflavoring Examples (Guidance, Not Limits)

Half-Ykrul / Half-Lethai-al *Herd-Mastery* (Ykrul) reads people as a “crowd-herd” or tracks wildlife lanes through canopy: “+1 die to understand group motion, crowd dynamics, or animal patterns in your home terrain.”

Half-Aelinnel / Half-Human (Vilikari) *Number Music* (Aelinnel) becomes market math: “Perform complex trade/logistics calculations with **Wits+Craft** (or *Streetwise*) at DV 3; frame deals in clean sums for **DV 1** once/scene.”

Half-Aelaerem / Half-Ykrul *Kon'reh Logic* (Ykrul) as pantry-sense or hall-placement: “Once/scene, treat a failed social/negotiation roll as *Partial* if you reframe with spatial/structural metaphor that fits the venue.”

Half-Lethai-ar (Inae) / Half-Aelaerem *Stillness* (Lethai-ar) becomes host-invisibility: “+1 die to *Stealth* in domestic/social bustle; once/scene blend into service and go ‘unnoticed’ for one exchange.”

Half-Lethai-thora / Half-Vilikari *Two-Ledger Talk* (Aelinnel) broadens: “State both public stance and likely hidden price to cancel the first social SB in a negotiation scene.”

Half-Ykrul / Half-Linns *Storm-Seamanship* (Ykrul Coasts) applies on land: “+1 die to forecast weather/navigate adverse conditions on steppe or water; on a correct call, gain **Position +1** for a travel/survival action.”

Racial Skill Increase (Mixed Heritage)

Choose one:

1. **Adaptive Skills.** +1 die to *two* different skills that reflect your blended upbringing (e.g., **Sway + Survival**, or **Craft + Notice**).
2. **Cultural Synthesis.** Take the Racial Skill Increase from your chosen Core Package, and justify how it expresses both sides of your background in play.

Thematic Attribute (Mixed Heritage)

Choose the Thematic Attribute from your Core Package (e.g., **Wits** for Lethai-thora, **Body** for Ykrul) and anchor it in your mixed story (“sharp Wits from city schooling, tempered by border pragmatism”).

Talent (Mixed Heritage)

Select a Talent from your Core Package *or* one of the flexible options below, and re flavor its fiction to fit your synthesis.

Border Walker’s Instinct (4 XP — Minor)

Req: Presence 2+, Survival 1+

+1 die to navigate customs, rites, and cross-cultural norms. Sense a border mood with **Wits+Notice** (DV 3). **Once/scene**, gain **Position +1** when mediating between groups or leveraging one culture’s etiquette within another’s court.

Tongue of Many Waters (3 XP — Minor)

Req: Wits 2+, Sway 1+

+1 die to **Sway** and **Insight** with unfamiliar dialects/backgrounds. **Once/session**, establish a basic pidgin/gesture channel with those who share no tongue (enough for trade or parley). **Once/scene**, gain +1 on one social roll when you correctly cite a custom from a culture *not* dominant in the interaction.

Cultural Mechanics (Mixed Heritage)

- **Hybrid Customs.** You may observe simplified forms of two cultures’ mechanics (e.g., Guest-Right tokens *and* Two-Ledger receipts) with narrower scope unless adopted by a host community.
- **Bridging Role.** Treat mixed heritage as a standing fiction tag; some scenes start **Position +1** for mediation, others **Position 1** where purity is prized. Let the table lean into both.
- **Reflected Mechanic.** You can mirror the *effect* of a cultural currency (e.g., Reputation/Banked Fear) via deeds across both sides, even if the name differs.

Suggested Bonds & Complications

Bonds

- **Family Ties Across Borders.** Kin in two cultures offer haven, rumors, or leverage.
- **Cultural Mentor.** A teacher who drilled you in a rite, register, or craft from one side.
- **Found Family.** A circle of other mixed or liminal folk who vouch when lineage won’t.
- **The Mediator.** Known for seating quarrels between your parent communities.

Complications

- **Identity Fray.** Moments of hesitation or self-editing under scrutiny; first social Miss in a formal venue starts *Doubt* [2].
- **Dual Expectations.** Two elders pull you in opposite directions; clocks compete (*Obligation A* vs *Obligation B*).
- **Stereotype or Suspicion.** Purists tick *Exposure* on contact; proof is demanded twice.
- **Lost Inheritance.** A rite or ledger you never received; unlock by quest or sponsorship.
- **Translator's Burden.** Always asked to explain; *once/scene* you may turn that burden into leverage (Position +1) if you take on a new minor obligation.

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:** Dominant/Controlled/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.

11.1 Miniatures and Tactical Layer

11.1.1 Core Concepts

- Works on square or hex grids; declare grid type at setup.
- Units have base sizes (Small, Medium, Large, Huge) and a facing.
- Actions per turn: Move and Act (attack, cast, interact, etc.), in either order.
- All checks use normal SRD roll + DV system.

11.1.2 Turn Structure

1. Start: resolve ongoing effects.
2. Move: up to Speed; obey Zones of Control (ZOC).
3. Act: attack, test, assist, cast, rally, shove, guard, etc.
4. End: resolve end effects and reactions.

11.1.3 Zones of Control (ZOC)

- **Squares:** 4 orthogonal adjacents (optional: 8).
- **Hexes:** 6 adjacents.
- Large/Huge project ZOC from edges; Reach may extend ZOC by +1 ring.
- **Rules:**
 - Entering enemy ZOC ends movement (you are engaged).
 - Cannot move through enemy ZOC.
 - Leaving requires Disengage (DV 4–6) or spend 1 Boon.
 - Multiple ZOCs increase DV by +1 per extra controller.

11.1.4 Facing and Flanking

- Choose a facing at end of movement.
- Flank: +1 die if attacked from opposite arcs; Rear: +1 die and +1 Effect.

11.1.5 Special Actions

- **Guard:** Ready a strike when enemy leaves ZOC.
- **Dash:** +2 movement this turn.
- **Brace:** Resist Shoves/Pulls and extend ZOC (opportunity only).
- **Tackle:** Knock target prone (DV 4–6).

11.1.6 Magic Integration

- Magic uses **[TAGS]** (e.g., [WARD], [BANISH], [CONJURE]) tied to ZOC, range, and LoS.
- Casting while engaged worsens Position unless [INSTANT] or aided by Talent.
- Rituals require clear space and visible Symbols; disrupted rituals fail or require a test.

11.1.7 Quick Reference

- Entering enemy ZOC ends movement; leaving requires Disengage.
- Flank = +1 die; Rear = +1 die and +1 Effect.
- Difficult terrain +1 cost; moving up elevation +1.
- Boons may break ZOC rules: auto-Disengage, change facing, or Heroic Rush.

Miniatures Mode — Speed Defaults

DV: DV = Tier + 2 + *Keywords* (Elevation +1, Altar[WARD] +1, Disengage=4).

Crit: Bump Position one step; if already Dominant, Push/Pull 1 hex *or* gain +1 Success.

ZOC: Enter/leave an adjacent hex provokes 1 *Reaction* (Free Strike *or* Shove 1 hex). Each unit has 1 Reaction/round.

Tags: Max 2 active tags per unit. [WARD] = -1 die vs target; attacker may accept 2 Fatigue to ignore once.

Terrain: Difficult=2 MP/hex. Elevation=+1 DV from below.

Heat: On any Crit, GM immediately spends 1 Heat to degrade Position or trigger terrain.

Hex Keywords

Difficult: 2 MP/hex **Elevation:** +1 DV from below **ZOC:** Reaction on cross
Altar [WARD]: -1 die to target (or attacker takes 2 Fatigue to ignore)

Incorporeal: Ignore Difficult; may pass through occupied hexes; cannot end there

Assist (mini): +1 Effect (not dice); max 1 helper

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