

Black Banners — Condotta & Crowns

Wargame Expansion for Fate's Edge

I. Introduction: The Theater of Banners

A. Core Concept

War as Social Theater. In Fate's Edge, battles are brief flashes. The story lives in the hours before and after: payroll arguments, muddy roads, who eats, who prays, who runs. Camps, fords, and counting-tents are the true stages of war.

Mercenaries as Narrative Bridges. Bannered companies move between courts, ports, and steppes. They tie urban intrigue to caravan legs, wilderness marches, and political endgames. Hire them, join them, outmaneuver them—either way, banners connect arcs.

The Condotta System. Contracts (condotte) are adventures in legal clothing: clauses, riders, sureties, and scheduled betrayals. This module gives you fast procedures to play the deal, the march, and the clash with the same tools as core Fate's Edge (Position / DV / Effect, Strings, and clocks).

B. Design Philosophy

Camp Over Clash. Put logistics, medicine, and morale on the table. The camp is where choices compound; the clash is where they're cashed.

Contracts as Stories. A charter's margins foreshadow your next session. Every clause is a future scene; every omission, a future wound.

Dynamic Loyalties. Allegiances shift without spreadsheets. One die per scene nudges fortune, pay, politics, and position.

Cross-Arc Integration. Banners bring Diamonds (leverage), Clubs (pressure), Hearts (people), and Spades (places) to any arc: court, road, hedge, harbor.

C. Quickstart Summary

- Two-Minute Setup**
- Condotta Crossroads: Put two conflicting charters on the table. Ask who you disappoint first.
 - Company Sheet: Name, Colors, Captain, Cohorts. Add Payday [4], Supply [4], Cohesion [6].
 - Pressure Clocks: Pick two externals (e.g., Skirmish Spiral [6], Camp Despair [6]).
 - Allegiances in Flux: At each scene start, roll 1d6 and apply the twist.
 - Honor Pragmatism: Slide the dial to reflect recent choices; gain a boon, pay a cost.
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Lore: The Black Banners

“The contract is the road. The colors are the promise. The pay-chest is the prayer.”

The Black Banners are not one company but a league—a loose commonwealth of mercenary outfits that share camp law, pay customs, and a habit of turning up wherever the map is loud. Their colors are always some device on black: a lantern, a thorn, a bell, a fishbone, a broken scale. Black means coin before crown; witness before oath.

They are the thread that stitches frontiers to courts, caravan roads to siege lines. Ask five people who the Black Banners are and you’ll hear five truths: quartermasters who can feed a ghost army; paymasters who count twice; raiders with rules; peacekeepers who charge rent; undertakers who sing.

Origins & Reputation

- **Birth at the Crossroads.** The first “black” standards reportedly gathered during a famine campaign when city militias and steppe hosts both ran out of grain. A broker chalked clauses on wagon boards; those who signed swore to take coin, keep order, and leave exits. Black cloth was used because no city would lend its colors.
 - **Four Sacks of Ecktoria.** The empire counts four humiliations as “sacks.” The banners will say—privately—that the gates opened for Vilikari cohorts and Banners logistics, not for steppe charges. It was a war of ledgers, ferries, and night roads...and the empire paid late every time.
 - **Fierce, but priced.** Their reputation is a machine: frightening enough to deter trouble, disciplined enough to be rentable, and bound by camp law that courts grudgingly respect.
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Articles of the Camp (the Eight You Hear Aloud)

- A. Payday comes before parley. No pay, no move.
- B. Leech and bell are sacred. Healers and chaplains travel untouched.
- C. Colors at dawn, not at night. Sacks and changes of allegiance happen in light, with a witness.
- D. Prisoners eat. Ransom or release; no starving.
- E. The broker is a bridge. Don’t kill bridges.
- F. Take no road you won’t defend. (Some add: “Leave two exits; take one.”)
- G. No fire in the hospital quarter. Even if the enemy runs through it.
- H. Count twice. Coin, bodies, promises.

Breaking an Article earns a Black Mark—a stigma that travels faster than mail. Three Black Marks and no reputable broker will carry your charter without triple surety.

How They See War

- **Camp before clash.** A battle is the interest on debts a captain accrued in camp: food, route, weather, rumor. If those sums are wrong, steel won’t save you.

- **Contracts as maps.** A condotta (charter) isn't just payment—it's terrain in sentences: rights of passage, shares of salvage, witness duties, who feeds prisoners and at what rate. Good captains can march through a clause.
 - **Loyalties in motion.** They do change sides, but by rule: daylight, drum, witness, surety paid. The gutter word is "treachery." The banner word is "rider fulfilled."
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The Four Faces of a Banner (Hearts)

- **Captain.** Judge of risk and reputation. The best can smell a forged clause and a storm in the same breath.
- **Quartermaster.** The real warlord. Controls Supply, hates surprises, loves rain barrels.
- **Surgeon/Leech.** Holds morale together with needles, vinegar, and songs. Chooses who lives when coin runs out.
- **Scout/Sergeant.** Decides if today is a straight road or an honest ambush.

If Hearts are rotten, no Spade (place), Club (pressure), or Diamond (writ) will save you.

Colors, Devices, & Cant

Common devices: lantern, bell, thorn, chain, fishbone, ladder, broken bit, river-stone, empty ring.

Cant phrases:

- "Black's the bargain." (We do this for pay, not love.)
 - "Lantern high." (We act under witness.)
 - "Count on copper." (Do it the hard way; stop promising silver.)
 - "Two weights, one truth." (Say the public price and the real one.)
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Famous Companies & Rumors

- **The Iron Lanterns.** Siege specialists who promise no fire in hospitals and keep it. They claim to have taken five cities with fewer dead than one bad winter.
- **Thornwrights.** Sappers and road-cutters who price bridges by the breath—your breath at the gallop.
- **Bone & Bell.** Undertaker company; they bury both sides by the book and take payment in coin, land, or lineage favors.
- **The Fifth Pay-Chest.** An administrative company that "escorts" money and occasionally a colonel's conscience.
- **Sea Charters.** Colors on black sails; swear by Blue Moot tariffs; infamous for opening blockades with paperwork and weather.

Rumor: A captain called the Bannerless One walks with no colors and settles Payday by sheer presence. Those who accept their help wake with coin...and a debt that isn't money.

Brokers, Prefects, and Other Power

- **Condotta Brokers.** They draft the charters, carry news, hold surety. Killing a broker is like burning a bridge: possible, unforgettable, and expensive for a decade.
 - **River Prefects.** Stamps that open bridges—once. Prefects sell time more than passage; banners pay dearly.
 - **City Factors.** Neutral accountants; they read your ledger aloud and write you back into polite society—for a price and a favor. Many banners owe them Price of Neutrality.
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Faith & Rites

- **Bell-Tokens.** Camp chaplains carry small bells strung with bone or copper. Three bells rung at dawn means a general amnesty for the morning: bury dead, trade prisoners, fix wells, no ambush. Violating a Bell Dawn is how legends end badly.
 - **The Surgeon's Right.** A leech can claim any blade or cloth in arm's reach during a procedure. Interfere and the nearest captain is obligated to cut you down or lose face.
 - **Break-Reins Rite.** When leaving a bad charter, a captain hangs a bridle ring on the camp gate. It means: we break this without treachery; pay our arrears, we'll bury your dead. Aveh's riders sometimes attend.
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Money, Loot, & Shares

- **The Cut.** Standard shares: captain 3; officers 2; soldier 1; specialist $+ \frac{1}{2}$. Horses get fed first, surgeons second, then soldiers, then officers, then captains. (Good companies keep it that way.)
 - **Black Chest.** An emergency pay-chest sealed under four keys—captain, quartermaster, leech, and the senior sergeant. Opening it without witness earns a Black Mark.
 - **Repair Years.** When a sack goes lawful but ugly, some companies pay in repair years—labor, stone, seed—rather than coin. It buys reputations you can recruit with.
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Law & Punishment

- **Articles tribunals.** Verdicts delivered at noon, with the lantern high. Penalties range from dock of shares to branding (a small black banner on the forearm) to drumming out (colors stripped, tools kept).
 - **The Gentle Noose.** A derisive term for “polite” executions: a leather loop drawn until sleep—then a posting to the worst job for a year. Leechs hate it. Prefects love it.
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Relationships & Politics

- **With Ykrul.** Respect and rivalry. Banners can pay for route rights with repair or coin; Ykrul will grant them if you hold your exits honest. Many Ykrul learned to price routes from banner quartermasters—and many quartermasters learned geometry from Ykrul judges.
 - **With Vilikari.** Symbiosis. Vilikari run night ferries, speak to both ledgers, and make false orders less profitable than a right bribe. Every good banner captain owes a Vilikari countkeeper at least one feast.
 - **With Ecktoria.** The empire hires, audits, and denounces—often in that order. Ecktorian “corrections” improve Position but put Black Marks on captains who say no.
 - **With Aeler.** Hire for stone and siege; pay in repair contracts and courtesy. Break a keystone charter once and all mountain roads become expensive.
 - **With Lethai.** Tricky. Lethai-al will deal if you respect hedges, bell dawns, and seed dues. Lethai-ar offer night work at good rates and terrible luck.
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Seasons & Omens

- **Winter:** loyalty crystallizes or shatters. Good captains winter under charter; bad ones invent taxes.
 - **Storm Season:** the Blue Moot opens sea lanes or closes them. Sea Charters thrive; everyone else writes smaller letters.
 - **Omens:** a lantern that won’t light before parley; a bell that rings once with no wind; a pay-chest key that twists warm in a pocket.
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What Everyone Knows / What Captains Know / What Only Leeches Say

Everyone: They fight for pay but keep rules that make them safer than warlords.

Captains: The real battle is Payday and Supply; break neither and you can lose three skirmishes and still win the war.

Leeches: If the camp sings, you live. If they stop singing, even the best charter bleeds.

Adventure Sparks

- **Lantern High at Noon.** A broker calls a bell dawn to arbitrate a massacre blamed on your colors. Find the forger, save the Articles, or carry a Black Mark forever.
- **The Fifth Chest.** Someone stole the black chest and left everyone’s keys in their boots. Recover it before Cohesion unravels.
- **Price of Neutrality.** City factors demand a favor: escort a despised official through your own angry camp during Short Rations.
- **The Bannerless One.** A quiet person clears your Payday problems and asks only for a prisoner you’d rather keep. Choose mercy, honor, or coin—then count the cost.

- **Bridge by Bell.** Blue Moot offers one bell-token to reopen a war-closed bridge for a watch. Who crosses first writes a season's history.
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Using the Black Banners in Your Campaign

Drop a bannered company anywhere you need stakes with rules. They carry their own courts, hospitals, road crews, and songs. In intrigue arcs, they're leverage; in caravan legs, they're escorts or competitors; in wilderness play, they keep the wolves fed and the fires small; in political campaigns, they are the deniable arm of policy, standing under black to make the colors behind them look clean.

The secret of the Black Banners is simple: they turn war back into agreements. And agreements—like bridges—are only as strong as the people who keep them in the wind.

II. Core Mechanics Framework

A. The Four-Suit System

Hearts (People). Faces for your theater:

- Captain: command, parley, risk.
- Quartermaster: supply, pay, scavenge.
- Surgeon/Leech: harm control, disease, morale.
- Scout/Sergeant: terrain, ambush, tempo.

Use Hearts to bind scenes to stakes: who bleeds if this goes wrong?

Spades (Places). Position and Effect live in terrain: frozen fords, rain-cut roads, half-built siegeworks, forest lanes under truce. Spades name the rule of the ground and what it does to dice.

Clubs (Pressures). The SB menu of war: false orders, cut lines, camp-fever, gear breakage, rival aid that arrives late and loud, political “help.” Clubs are how the Keeper spends setbacks.

Diamonds (Leverage). Fictional assets that bypass a roll once when you pay the price: safe-conducts, bridge priority stamps, debt notes, dispensation writs, blood-truce witnesses. Put at least one Diamond in every scene.

Use in play: At the top of a leg, draft one of each suit. Highest rank sets a major clock (4/6/8/10). Any Ace = winter & loyalty motif: expect hunger, omen, promotion-by-attribution.

B. Company Sheet Structure

[COMPANY NAME] — [COLORS/BANNER]

Captain: [NAME]

Ledger: What we owe / Who owes us

Cohorts: Scouts • Sappers • Surgeons • Foragers • Skirmishers

TRACKS:

- Payday [4] — missed pay, bad terms, seized chests → desertion risk
- Supply [4] — weather, marches, sabotage → worse Position on maneuvers
- Cohesion [6] — losses, betrayals, humiliation → mutters → fractures

- Ledger Notes (Strings): broker's favor • bridge priority • chapel bell-token • banner voucher
- ford right (season). These are receipts you can spend.

C. Track Management

- **Payday.** Tick for missed coin, broken promises, stolen chest, or a “creative” delay. On fill: a squad peels off, a veteran sells secrets, or the next Allegiances roll is with disadvantage (take the worse of two).
 - **Supply.** Tick for hard weather, forced march, siege diet, or sabotage. While Supply 3, all risky maneuvers start one step worse Position unless you bring a Diamond to bear (scavenge, requisition, dispensation).
 - **Cohesion.** Tick for public humiliation, ugly losses, officer feuds, or moral injury. When Cohesion hits 0–1, the Keeper may convert the first 1 SB each scene into Desertion, Brawl, or Refusal until you repair.
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III. Loyalty and Allegiance Systems

A. Allegiances in Flux (1d6, scene start)

- Condotta Flip. Rival charter offers better terms. Take it: gain Black Mark [1] with the old patron. Refuse: tick Payday.
- Ykrul Counter-offer. Accept an exit-rich but costly route: start Obligation [2] you must pay in concessions later; refuse and tick Payday.
- Vilikari Shortcut. +1 Effect on this maneuver via night roads; Keeper gains 1 banked SB to spend as Hostile Terrain this scene.
- Ecktorian “Correction.” March under “imperial guidance”: +1 Position this scene or take a Black Mark [1] for defiance.
- False Orders. Clubs rain down. First command this scene risks misinterpretation unless countered with a Diamond (cipher, cantor, witness).
- Bannerless One. A myth-wrapped fixer clears Payday by 1—but starts Price of Mercy [2]. It will come due (prisoner release, repair years, or a refused sack).

Note: Allegiances events are biases, not dictates. They tilt Position/DV, start clocks, or offer bargains.

B. Honor vs. Pragmatism Dial

[HONOR] ←— 0 —→ [PRAGMATISM]

- Honor (left). +1 Position in parley/oaths; logistics burn faster (tick Supply on a partial where you’d normally be safe).
- Pragmatism (right). +1 Effect in ambush/sabotage; social starts one step worse Position when oaths/witnesses matter.

Centering Actions: pay arrears on-screen; return prisoners with witness; fulfill a broken writ at cost. Move the dial one step toward center.

C. Loyalty Management

- **Black Marks.** Track public betrayals and insulted patrons. At 3, your Diamonds cost more: each use adds Political Pressure [1].
 - **Favor Debts.** Who owes you? Who do you owe? Record as Strings. Each unpaid Favor at arc's end ticks Cohesion once (soldiers smell unpaid debts).
 - **Reputation Shifts.** Recruiting in civilized ports favors Honor; hiring in hard fronts favors Pragmatism. Slide the dial to attract what you want.
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IV. Camp Life Procedures

A. Weekly Entanglements (choose 2 per leg)

A. Condotta Brokers' Syndicate

- Register colors and surety to bank Broker's Favor (parley DV 1 in camp).
- Skip registration: gain Unauthorized Colors—the Keeper can spend the first SB at a checkpoint as False Orders.

B. Camp Quartermasters

- Accept audits: cancel the next Supply tick on this leg.
- Refuse: start Short Rations [4]; while active, marching starts one Position worse.

C. Field Chaplains & Leech-Circles

- Tithe time or coin: clear Camp-Fever [1] each day, and the Keeper cannot convert the first 1 SB into Disease/Death this leg.
- Neglect: on the first Clubs spend, camp-fever blooms.

D. Steppe Envoys

- Keep rites (salt/water/shade): bank Remount Rights (once: +1 Effect on retreat/rapid redeploy).
- Break rites: gain Soured Oath (parley DV +1 with steppe peoples) until you repair with a gift or witness.

E. Hill Truce-Holders

- Stones-circle witness: bank Blood-Truce (cancel one hill ambush or demand parley).
- Violate: begin Guest Right Forfeit [4]; when it fills, locals refuse aid or safe passage.

B. Soft-Power Integration

- **River Prefect Stamps.** Spend to claim Bridge Priority (crossing DV 1 once).
 - **Neutral City Factors.** Reroll a market roll in-camp; start Price of Neutrality [4] (the city expects something back).
 - **Border Monasteries.** Bell-tokens make the first Prisoners/Parley step safer (Position +1). Burn a bell-token for a clean retreat once/arc.
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V. Combat and Campaign Integration

A. SB Menu for War (Keeper)

When you roll 1s or on partials/misses, consider:

- False Orders (split unit, wrong target, delay).
- Ally Turns Sides (for a scene or for pay).
- Cut Supply Lines (tick Supply).
- Camp-Fever Outbreak (start or advance disease).
- Gear Failure (downgrade Effect; force scavenge).
- Reinforcements Arrive (tilt Position against you).
- Authority Intervention (political demand interrupts ops).
- Winter/Loyalty Omens (hard weather; Allegiances roll with disadvantage).

B. Position/DV Modifiers (fast dials)

- **Weather:** Snow (1 Position), Storm (DV 1 to cross water), Clear (+1 Effect to ranged).
- **Supply:** Short (1 Position on risky maneuvers), Adequate (normal), Surplus (+1 Effect on prepared actions).
- **Morale:** Low (DV 1 to resist fear), Normal, High (+1 Position to hold ground).
- **Terrain:** Familiar (+1 Position), Neutral (normal), Hostile (1 Effect unless you bring a local Diamond).

C. Campaign Clock Management

Primary:

- Payday [4] — financial pressure.
- Supply [4] — logistical pressure.
- Cohesion [6] — morale pressure.

Secondary:

- Skirmish Spiral [6] — tit-for-tat escalates into a war neither side budgeted.
- Camp Despair [6] — rumor, grief, and boredom eat discipline.
- Political Pressure [4] — courts, patrons, and prefects add new Prices to Diamonds.

VI. Scenario Seeds and Scores

A. Contract Negotiations — Broker's Table, Two Ledgers

Two charters: one legal and thin, one dirty and rich. Pick one; secret the other as leverage (String). Attempt a synthesis by proposing a repair project that satisfies both—on a miss, start Political Pressure [2] and tick Payday.

B. Crisis Management

Plague Ground Sanctification. Camp-Fever [3/4]; coordinate chaplains, leeches, and a bell-token circle to reset. Each delay ticks Cohesion; success restores one step toward Honor.

Banner Swap in the Wind. Colors change mid-skirmish; prove command while False Orders fly. Claim a Diamond (cipher, cantor, or witness) to hold line-of-command.

C. Leadership Challenges — Field Promotion

A shattered unit's warrant lands in your lap. You inherit their Payday [2/4], Supply [1/4], and Black Mark [1]. Keep them intact for a leg and you gain Veteran Network (a permanent contact).

VII. Cross-System Integration

A. Political Intrigue

Map condotta clauses to Influence ticks. Broker's Favor spends like a Boon. Black Marks behave like Exposure in social arcs.

B. Caravan Operations

Quartermaster audits cancel the next Supply tick on a leg. River stamps reduce crossing DV. Vilikari shortcuts give +1 Effect and bank a hostile-terrain SB for the Keeper.

C. Wilderness Survival

Hill stones-circles serve as safe trailheads (bank a Blood-Truce). Steppe rites (salt/water/shade) affect travel Position. Environmental hazards tick Supply instead of dealing Harm outright.

D. Urban Adventures

City factors reroll a market roll; guild dispensations act as Diamonds. Municipal politics can rewrite the fine print on your charter mid-arc.

VIII. Character Options and Roles

A. Company Roles

Captain (leadership).

- Command, parley, and dial control.
- Once/scene: convert a No into a Project [4] if you can offer a witness.

Quartermaster (logistics).

- Supply, audits, requisitions.
- Once/leg: cancel one Supply tick by cashing a String or finding salvage.

Scout/Sergeant (tactics).

- Recon, ambush, terrain leverage.
- Once/scene: treat hostile ground as neutral if you describe the route.

Surgeon/Leech (support).

- Harm, disease, morale rituals.
- Once/session: downgrade a fatal consequence to a clock the table can work.

B. Specialized Talents

- **Condotta Veteran (4 XP).** +1 die on contract scenes; spot a forged clause on sight.
 - **Banner Reader (3 XP).** Read enemy disposition from standards; predict one Allegiances result per leg.
 - **Supply Master (5 XP).** Reduce Supply by 2 segments when you secure forage or plunder; scavenge rolls gain Position +1 in hostile terrain.
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IX. Campaign Framework

A. Session Zero — Why This War?

“Ecktorian treasuries bankroll a perpetual border-war they claim to ‘contain,’ while companies sell steel to whomever keeps the books. Between rigid honor codes and steppe pragmatism, mercenaries survive by reading winds, not banners.”

B. Arc Progression

Act I: Form up, take the first cheap charter, meet the brokers.

Act II: Run lean, juggle loyalties, pay or bleed for Diamonds.

Act III: A crisis demands a side; move the dial hard and live with the ledger.

C. Legacy Options

- **Company Reputation** (affects future rates and riders).
 - **Veteran Network** (NPCs become contacts across arcs).
 - **War Stories** (Strings you can cash in other modules as legend).
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X. GM Toolkit and Procedures

A. Scene Start Procedure

- A. Roll Allegiances in Flux (1d6).
- B. Apply the twist (tilt Position/DV, start a clock, or offer a bargain).
- C. Check Payday/Supply/Cohesion; surface any on-3+ effects.
- D. Set baseline Position from terrain and the Honor/Pragmatism dial.
- E. Put one Diamond on the table (named, with a clear price).

B. Pressure Management

Low: One primary clock in view; Diamonds plentiful.

Medium: Two clocks pressure; Clubs spend once/scene.

High: Three clocks hot; Allegiances roll with disadvantage; require witness to make anything stick.

C. Keeper Cheatsheet

- Allegiances every scene.
- Payday/Supply visible at all times.
- Offer fiction-first Diamonds.
- Spend SB as: False Orders, Ally Turns, Supply Cut, Disease.

D. Pacing Guidelines

A good banner session breathes:

- 2–3 camp scenes (contracts, audits, rites).
- 1–2 travel scenes (marches, scouts, weather).
- 1 major encounter (battle, crisis, betrayal) with at least one Diamond on the table.