

Lethai Module for Fate's Edge

Core Concept

The Lethai are divided by an ancient curse that prevents them from fully accessing both physical and mental gifts. This division creates distinct elven cultures, each excelling in different aspects of existence while yearning for wholeness. They are masters of living law, environmental stewardship, and contextual knowledge.

Affinity (All Lethai)

Gift of the Body OR Gift of the Mind (Choose One):

- **Gift of the Body (Lethai-al/ar):** +1 die to physical actions (Body-based skills). Once per scene, can spend 1 Boon to enhance a physical ability beyond normal limits for one action.
- **Gift of the Mind (Lethai-thora):** +1 die to mental actions (Wits/Spirit-based skills). Once per scene, can spend 1 Boon to recall or deduce information that would normally be beyond immediate knowledge.

The Curse of Division: Lethai cannot take talents that enhance both physical and mental capabilities simultaneously. If a talent would grant bonuses to both, choose one benefit.

1 Lethai-al — Root, River, and the Roof-Tree

Woodwise lawkeepers, merchants of light and shade, and stewards of living borders

“Name yourself once, name the river twice, and never name the forest as if it were yours.”

1.1 I. Ground & Memory

The Lethai-al dwell where roof-trees braid the sky and rivers think aloud. Their memory is arboreal: rings and seasons, storms and healings, disputes recorded in coppice and replanting rather than tablets and seals. A Lethai-al oath is **root-law**: it binds living things—people, paths, waters—and is paid in years. To outsiders they appear quiet; to neighbors they are relentless auditors of footprint and flow.

1.2 II. Forest Commons (Places that Hold)

Valewood

Tall-canopy forest stitched with rain gardens and stone-steps. Trails shift by season; waystones carry moss-tallies (green for open, gray for mend, black for trespass). Songs mark crossings where words would bruise the undergrowth.

Roof-Tree Circles

Villages built around elders: one monumental tree per circle, scaffolded with walkways and rain-catchers. Roof-Tree sap is consecrated—used to seal pacts and to dismiss them when harms outweigh promises.

River Courts

Every significant stream keeps a court: a shingle bank, a willow-bench, a book of pebbles. Trade, ferry rights, and flood work are judged where the water can overhear.

Edge-Wards

Where wood meets field or steppe, boundary groves are tended as treaties: thorn, ash, and fruit interplanted. The sharp feeds the soft—hedge law that stops hooves and nourishes neighbors.

1.3 III. Courtesy & Everyday Law

Shade Etiquette is the grammar of Lethai-al life. Observing it grants hospitality and hearing; ignoring it turns the forest against your plans.

- **Iron Covered.** Bare iron offends ward-lines; wrap it in leather or cloth. (Mechanic: on first entry, covered iron grants *Position +1* in any parley or request to pass.)
- **Name Once.** Speak your name and intent at the edge; do not name the forest as property.
- **Step on Stone.** Where stones are laid, use them; every crushed sprout is a debt.
- **Water First.** Pour a first cup to the river or cistern before you drink.
- **Leave the Light.** Replace the shade you take: plant, mend, or pay. (Use *Light-Due Strings* below.)

Clocks for breaches: **Under-Root Grudge** [4], **Stream-Clouding** [4]. When a clock fills, expect formal censure, raised tariffs, or wardens on the path.

1.4 IV. Courts & Factions (Not One Voice)

- **Wardens of the Roof-Tree.** Rangers and surveyors who measure canopy health, poacher pressure, and firebreaks. They carry leaf-badges and thorn-writs.
- **Merchant Foresters (Syndics of Light).** Manage sustainable fellings, resin trade, boat-timber quotas, and lantern-wood auctions. They argue that trade funds stewardship.
- **Songkeepers.** Priests of repair rites and remembrance festivals. They arbitrate forgiveness by counting regrowth, not coin.

- **Ferrymen of the Rain.** River pilots and dam-tenders; their votes swing courts in flood years.

Tension lines: quota vs. canopy; export timbers vs. local craft; river straightening for mills vs. flood meadows for salmon.

1.5 V. Borders & Neighbors

Silence Furlong (with the Ykrul)

A speechless border strip: no grazing, no felling, no names. Cross in silence, then speak once. Honored, it keeps peace warm; broken, gray-fledged messengers appear at dusk. Joint patrols mend hedges and lift stones; concessions are marked as seasonal strings on both boards.

Ridge Courtesy (with the Aeler)

Root-law and stone-law trade proofs. Aeler build keystone stairs where Lethai-al choose the line; Lethai-al plant edge-wards that keep roads alive. Disputes end with bread in oven courts and sap at roof-trees.

Moots at the Mouth (with the Linns)

Ship-timber quotas bind with replanting moots and harbor dues. When storm seasons bite, both sides sing the river clear.

1.6 VI. Economy of Light (Strings & Ledgers)

Light and shade are currencies. Every fell, ferry, and fire has a **light-due**—a balance to be repaid in replanting, canal-clearing, or trade at kinder rates.

- **Strings (examples):** *light-due receipt; shade-credit; ferry right; resin share; canoe-lane priority; seed tithe.*
 - **Use:** Cash a light-due to gain $DV -1$ on any operation framed as repair, replanting, or flood work. Abuse it and start *Under-Root Grudge* [1].
 - **Quotas as Clocks:** *Boat-Timber Quota* [6], *Lanternwood Allotment* [4]. Fill the clock to unlock export; overfill and trigger *Canopy Censure*.
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1.7 VII. Threats & Remedies

- **Bark Blight.** A fungal rot spread by careless carts and damp blades. Remedy: ash-wash stations, tool quarantine, fire-lines by moon.
- **Poacher Pressure.** Syndicates take ripe resin and seedwood without dues. Remedy: under-cover ferries; tariff traps at market; public shaming rites.
- **River Clouding.** Silt from mills and bad embankments chokes fish beds. Remedy: settle-ponds, scheduled sluices, mill-weirs redesigned with Aeler math.
- **Old Fire.** Lightning scars that wake in drought years. Remedy: fuel mosaics, controlled burns, ember patrols.

Fronts (example): **Bark Blight** [6] → **Canopy Hunger** [4] → **Famine Tariff** [4].

1.8 VIII. Tools & Tokens (at the table)

- **Leaf-Badge (Warden).** Once/scene, upgrade Position by +1 when enforcing forest law or rescue.
 - **Seed-Tithe Seal.** Convert a sanction into a *Repair Project* [4] instead of a fine or exile.
 - **Ferry-Knot.** Skip the first *River Hazard* consequence on a leg or chase; on use, pay a *light-due*.
 - **Moss-Tally.** Reveal one hidden quota clock in a market or lumberyard scene.
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1.9 IX. Aesthetics & Speech

- **Materials:** bark-laminate armor, willow-bone frames, resin-glass panes, river-iron sheathed in leather.
 - **Colors:** rain green, bark gray, amber, sky-through-leaf.
 - **Proverbs:**
 - “Leave the forest no thinner than your shadow.”
 - “The river remembers who spoke over it and what they promised.”
 - “Cut where it wants to fall or do not cut at all.”
 - “If the hedge is hungry, the treaty is thin.”
 - **Names:** given + grove + season/deed: *Talan of Reedfall*, *Who Unknotted the Flood*.
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1.10 X. Integration Hooks

- **Political Intrigue:** Forest syndics lobby city councils for lanternwood allotments; bribes look like “donations” to flood work.
 - **Caravans:** Resin and seed routes require *shade-credit*; escorts must mind iron covers and Silence Furlongs.
 - **Wilderness:** Use *Hinterlands* procedures with *fuel mosaics* and *blight quarantine* as special orders.
 - **Violets & Stone:** Dock courts host River Days; Lethai-al ferries grant *canoe-lane priority* to crews who mend ladders and steps.
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1.11 XI. Adventure Seeds

1. **The Hedge That Ate a Road.** An edge-ward grew too well and swallowed a toll lane. Broker a cut and a replanting that keeps both law and trade.
2. **Blight Under Boots.** Bark Blight rides a caravan’s wheel hubs. Build ash-wash stations without sparking a tariff war.
3. **Silence Furlong, Twice Broken.** Two violations in one season risk a border feud. Walk the strip, plant the apology, and write a geometry both sides can live in.

4. **River Court at Flood.** Mills want straighter banks; fishers want flood meadows; Aeler offer weirs. Choose a design, then stand in the water and defend it.
 5. **Lanternwood Ledger.** A stenographer vanished with the quota book before an export moot. Find them, or reconstruct the truth from moss tallies and ferry knots.
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1.12 XII. Portraying the Lethai-al

Let *policy* speak before mystique: quotas, ferries, hedges, and the cost of light. Make courtesy concrete (stones, coverings, cups) and consequences seasonal, not theatrical. Honor the forest as a *party to the treaty*, not scenery. When in doubt, ask: *What did this footstep cost, and who will we pay?*

1.13 XIII. Language & Time (Context is King)

Lethai speech is **context-saturated**. Syntax legible to grandparents will baffle grandchildren unless framed by the right place, season, and kinship. Meaning travels with *context keys*—gesture, setting, shared story. A sentence lifted from its grove can die on the road.

- **Context Keys.** Place-name, season-mark, kinship-hand, and roof-tree sign. Absent any two, assume misreadings.
 - **Old Texts.** Manuscripts older than two generations require *gloss-trees* (marginal twig glyphs) or a *songkeeper* to render.
 - **In play.** When reading or pleading in older registers, increase DV by +1 unless the party holds a *Context String* (gloss-tree, witness, song). Cashing a Context String reduces DV by −1 and creates a *Shared Frame* for the scene (Position +1 on first exchange).
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1.14 XIV. Peoples & Lineages (Not One Grove)

Lethai-al — *The People of the Body* The woodwise many. Found in most great forests, they are the elves most humans meet and the most willing to integrate in mixed cities. **Embodied and present:** heightened senses, quick strength, an ease with weather and work. Most *half-elves* trace lineage here.

- **Everyday.** Ferry crews, hedge-wardens, resin syndics, ward dancers.
- **Gifts (examples).** *Canopy Spring* (Position +1 on leaps/climbs once/scene); *Scent of Rain* (clue on approaching weather/rot); *Root-Balance* (resist shove/knockdown).
- **Strings.** ferry knot; resin share; roof-tree blessing.

Lethai-ar — *The Oathbound (Dark Elves)* Wood elves who swear to **Inae** (the Weaver, Angel of Spiders) or **Isoka** (the Serpent Queen, Angel of Snakes). Rare in the upper Amaranthine, growing along shaded trade arteries and cavernous underways. Their vows shape craft and law: webs of obligation, clean strikes, poison as *medicine with teeth*.

- **Everyday.** Understory judges, silk engineers, antidote keepers, night pilots.

- **Gifts (examples).** *Weaver's Reading* (trace networks: DV −1 on uncovering plots/paths); *Stillness* (be unnoticed in dim light until you move to act); *Venin Lore* (convert Harm 1 from toxins to Fatigue once/scene).
- **Strings.** spider-vow token; serpent oath; silk-tithe.
- **Courtesy.** Oath-signs worn openly; breaking web-law costs *Mask Rights* for a season.

Lethai-thora — *The People of the Mind* Urban circles, chiefly in **Thepyrgos**. Scholars, civil engineers, translators of other peoples' law. **Long memories, sharp minds**; ironically, many are experts on human and Aeler culture. Their courts weigh arguments like bridges.

- **Everyday.** Archivists, canal designers, mint auditors, diplomatic tutors.
- **Gifts (examples).** *Memory Canticle* (recall a text with line-accurate detail); *Number Music* (DV −1 on design/repair/logistics projects framed aloud); *Cold Reading* (Position +1 on first parley when you had time to observe).
- **Strings.** gloss-tree charter; canal seal; ledger witness.

Sundered Elves (Itinerant Thora) Lethai-thora who reject the bench for the road. They carry portable gloss-trees and teach *context literacy* in market towns. Neither fully grove nor fully court, they translate between.

- **Gifts (examples).** *Bridge-Tongue* (treat cross-cultural etiquette DV as if in shared frame once/scene); *Pocket Gloss* (create a one-use Context String on the fly).

1.15 XV. The Two Gifts (Body & Mind) & Mixed Blood

Lethai tradition holds: **no one may bear both gifts** at once. A person chooses (or is chosen by) *Body* (Lethai-al, Lethai-ar) or *Mind* (Lethai-thora). Training and rites reinforce the choice; law and courtesy expect it.

- **Rule of the Two Gifts.** A Lethai PC selects either *Body* or *Mind* at character creation; pick Gifts only from that list. Swapping lists requires a season-long project and comes with social costs (lose one String tied to the former gift).
- **Half-Elf Exception.** A half-elf whose heritage is *quartered* (one quarter Lethai-al or -ar; one quarter Lethai-thora; remainder human or other) may take *one* Body Gift and *one* Mind Gift. This **Bridge-Born Clause** is rare and often controversial.
- **Most Half-Elves.** Most half-elves in mixed cities descend from Lethai-al lines; they default to Body Gifts unless the Bridge-Born Clause applies.

In play. The Two Gifts are *narrative permissions*: Body Gifts tend to grant Position shifts and physical resistances; Mind Gifts lean toward DV reduction in planning, repair, and rhetoric. Do not add new math—use core ladders.

1.16 XVI. Hooks & Complications

- **The Gloss That Wouldn't Read.** A treaty text from three generations back refuses to make sense. Find the missing context keys or watch a border go hot.
 - **Web-Law, River-Law.** Lethai-ar silk syndics claim a bridge-toll by Inae's charter; Lethai-thora auditors counter with canal clauses. Bowl, then Board, then *Shade Etiquette*.
 - **Bridge-Born in Question.** A half-elf prodigy manifests both gifts; a circle moves to forbid the rite. Protect or persuade before the masks come down.
 - **Mask Rights Forfeit.** A serpent oath-bearer allegedly broke web-law in human courts; can a seed-tithe seal commute sanction to a repair project?
 - **The Sundered's Lesson.** A Sundered gloss-carrier teaches a market to read Lethai context—someone powerful profits from the confusion and wants them gone.
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1.17 XVII. Rivals & Distance: Aeler and Ykrul

With the Aeler (Stone-Law, Root-Law)

The quarrel is old and mostly quiet: **stone-law** tallies weight and span; **root-law** tallies shade and years. Each doubts the other's ledgers. Aeler keystone stairs bite deep; Lethai-al prefer lines that bend with slope and sap. They trade proofs—bridges that do not drown salmon, hedges that do not choke roads—and keep their councils separate when tempers rise. The Aeler call elves the "Aelaef"

- **Treaties in Practice.** *Keystone-in-Bark* accords mark where a road enters a grove: the Aeler choose the tread, the Lethai choose the line. Breaking either creates fines paid as *repair years*.
- **Isolation Habits.** Pass-keeps that only ring bells to one side; roof-tree circles that refuse iron even when wrapped. Delegations meet at *split courts*—half oven, half river bank—and adjourn before dusk.
- **Strings.** keystone courtesy; shade-credit; river-weir writ; seed-tithe seal.
- **Clocks. Ridge–Root Stalemate** [4] (project stalls until a mixed design is signed); **Sluice vs. Salmon** [4] (silt, tariffs, tempers).
- **Levers at the Table.** If a scene honors both *iron-covered* and *step-on-stone*, begin in a *Shared Frame* (Position +1 on the first exchange). If either party arrives with bare iron or cuts outside plan, advance *Ridge–Root Stalemate* by +1.

With the Ykrul (Grass-Law, Shade-Law)

Respect edged into distance. The **Silence Furlong** keeps hooves from roots and axes from borders: cross wordless, name yourself once, and keep to the stones. When honored, councils run warm; when broken twice in a season, gray-fledged messengers appear at dusk and rings draw tight.

- **Customs.** *Bowl, Board, and Shade*—fairness, then geometry, then courtesy; a concession on the Ykrul board becomes a seasonal *light-due* at the forest edge.
- **Isolation Habits.** Markets on the margin (hedge fairs) rather than deep exchange; joint patrols that mend hedges together but camp apart; songs traded by echo, not chorus.

- **Strings.** light-due receipt; ferry knot; windbreak right; border-song.
- **Clocks. Furlong Breach** [4] (speech, grazing, or felling in the strip); **Banner at the Hedge** [3] (Meadow banners crowd the edge; tempers tighten).
- **Levers at the Table.** When both sides keep the Furlong and the *iron-covered* rule, reduce DV by −1 on any parley for passage or pasture. On a breach, increase DV by +1 and tick *Furlong Breach*.

Notes for Portrayal Keep rivalry *policy-first*: quotas, stairs, hedges, ferries, and the cost of light—rather than eternal enmity. Isolation is a choice with reasons: fewer misunderstandings, slower trade, less shared risk. Let dissenters exist on both sides (Aeler reform lodges; Lethai merchant foresters) who argue for *mixed councils* where ovens, weirs, and hedges share one ledger.

1.18 XVIII. War by Shade — Deterrence & Asymmetry

The Lethai-al and Lethai-ar do not meet banners in open fields. They make *routes expensive*, fragment columns, and end campaigns by ledger long before the first arrow. This doctrine—called **war by shade**—is why most peoples simply leave the forests alone.

Principles

- **Fight the route, not the regiment.** Break ferries, confuse lanes, erase way-marks, and make supply walk twice.
- **One strike, five repairs.** Every cut obligates replanting or flood-work; war ends when the ledger of repair is signed.
- **Night, rain, understory.** Engage when wind and water cover sound; withdraw where canopy eats pursuit.
- **Courtesy as weapon.** An iron uncovered or a crushed sprout is grounds to raise tariffs, close ferries, or call wardens without drawing a blade.

Plays of the Shade

- **Hedge War.** Edge-wards are cut and reknit to channel intruders into *dead ground* pockets watched by wardens. (Invader *Move/Scout* DV +1 while *Hedge Mosaic* stands.)
- **River Denial.** Ferries vanish upstream; weirs open at dusk; mills idle to clear silt where pursuers need footing. (Start *Supply Strangle* [4] on any hostile force dependent on crossings.)
- **Night Lanes.** Lethai-ar *web-law* lays silk trip-lines and warning strings; Inae's oath-bearers strike once and vanish; Isoka's keepers use venom as medicine with teeth. (First ambush in dim light begins at *Dominant* for defenders; on hit, intruders mark *Fatigue* instead of direct Harm unless they stand and escalate.)
- **Canopy Runners.** Lethai-al move above sight-lines; arrows fall where footfalls never were. (Once/scene, defenders convert a *pursuit* into a *parley or retreat* with *Position +1*.)

Deterrence, in Practice

- **Fearsome Reputation.** Before any faction chooses a forest campaign, start “**Leave Them Alone**” [2]. On fill, leaders choose tariff, treaty, or route-around over invasion.
- **Intruder Exhaustion** [6]. Ticks for lost hours, wet powder, spoiled grain, and wrong turns. On fill, morale folds without a decisive battle.
- **Arrow Ethics** [3]. Songkeepers oversee. If intruders withdraw and sign repairs, arrows go quiet. If they burn, the mask rights come down and ambushes escalate.

Terrain Tags (at the table)

- **Hedge Mosaic.** Invaders suffer DV +1 on Navigate/Scout; first defender action gains *Position +1*.
- **Resin Smoke.** On ignition, obscure vision and sting eyes; convert first Ranged Harm 1 against defenders to *Fatigue*.
- **Stone Steps.** If invaders *step on stone* and keep iron covered, begin in a *Shared Frame* (DV −1 to request safe passage). Breaches tick *Under-Root Grudge*.

Why Most Leave Them Alone

- Campaigns end in tariffs and repair years, not trophies—no glory to sell at court.
- Columns starve by inches while ledgers fatten with fines and ferry dues.
- Past nights have names (*Two Bridges Gone*, *The River That Walked*); generals remember.

Hooks

- **Five Cuts, One Bridge.** A hedge war strands a foreign regiment. Negotiate the repair ledger before someone lights the resin stores.
- **Web & Weir.** Lethai-ar silk lines are blamed for a drowned patrol; River Denial saved three villages. Untangle oath from accident before *Leave Them Alone* collapses to *Banner at the Hedge*.

Context-Saturated Speech: Lethai language evolves rapidly. Reading texts older than two generations requires successful Lore + Notice (DV 4-5) or a Context String. Speaking in older registers without proper context keys increases DV by +1.

1.19 XIX. Marks — Burden, Blessing, and Lost Context

Many Lethai artifacts carry **inherited knowing**. Leafblades etched with moss-tallies, resin-glass panels that hold songs, riverstones scored by ferrymen—these do not merely *remember*; they *oblige*. Among the Lethai—especially the woodwise Lethai-al—**past knowledge is a burden on the present**. What you inherit, you must carry carefully or set down with witness.

Passing-Knowledge Artifacts

- **Leafblade (moss-tallied).** A knife whose edge carries hedge-law. *Invoke:* gain a *Context String* for border disputes; *Cost:* tick **Burden Ledger** [1] (you owe repair work this season).
- **Resin-Glass Pane.** Sun-cured panels that hold a chorus. *Invoke:* reduce DV by -1 on rites requiring the old wording; *Cost:* *Under-Root Grudge* $+1$ if used to excuse harm without replanting.
- **Riverstone Book.** Pebbles in corded order record ferry rights. *Invoke:* create a temporary *Ferry Knot String*; *Cost:* pay *light-due* before you drink.

Marks of the Body (Animist Rites) Lethai **Marks** (ink, scar, resin-inlay) amplify embodied gifts by binding person to pattern. Every Mark has *Context Keys*—place, season, witness. **Out of context, a Mark drifts toward curse.**

- **Barkskin Mark.** Skin takes the grain of oak. *Gift:* once/scene, downgrade a Physical Harm by one step (*Position* $+1$ when braced). *Context Keys:* shaded work, sap rite, roof-tree witness. *Curse (lost context):* brittleness—cold converts first Fatigue to Harm.
- **River-Ears.** Cartilage braided with silver reed. *Gift:* sense current/voices across water (Clue $+1$ on rivers). *Keys:* pour water first, ferryman's knot. *Curse:* flood-whispers—compelled toward lowest ground (SB: *Downhill Pull*).
- **Spider's Patience** (Inae oath). *Gift:* hold still beyond breath; ambush begins at *Dominant* in dim light. *Keys:* web-tithe, oath-sign shown. *Curse:* fixation—DV $+1$ to abandon a plan once set.
- **Serpent's Breath** (Isoka oath). *Gift:* once/scene convert Toxin Harm 1 to Fatigue; read heat like color. *Keys:* antivenin rite, shed-skin offering. *Curse:* cold-blooded—action slows in chill (*Position* -1 unless warmed).
- **Storm-Shadow.** Ink of ash and rain. *Gift:* vanish in downpour; ranged attacks vs. you suffer -1 Effect in rain. *Keys:* storm cup, gutter song. *Curse:* thunder-call—loud noises pull attention (start *Noticed* [1] on loud scenes).
- **Lanternbone.** Resin set in a healed break. *Gift:* glow faintly to mark safe steps; once/scene grant ally *Position* $+1$ on footing checks. *Keys:* night watch, seed-tithe. *Curse:* beacon—predators test the light (GM may spend SB to start *Hungry Eyes* [2]).

Curses as Lost Context A Mark becomes a **Curse** when used without its Keys or against its ethic.

- **Context Drift** [4]. Ticks when a Mark is invoked off-season, off-place, or without witness. On fill, the Mark expresses its *Curse* until *Context is Restored*.
- **Context Restored (project** [4]). Recover Keys: return to place, invite songkeeper, repay light-due. Aelinnel *Sumwright gloss-trees* can substitute for witness once.
- **Burden Ledger** [6]. Tracks obligation from inherited knowledge. On fill, pay with repair years, seed-tithes, or forfeit a String tied to the artifact.

At the Table (simple levers)

- **Strings:** *mark-right*, *context key*, *songkeeper witness*, *gloss-tree charter*. Spend to reduce DV by -1 on rites/negotiations tied to that Mark or artifact.
- **Position/Effect:** Most Marks grant *Position +1* or *Effect +1* *once/scene* when used with Keys; without Keys, instead tick *Context Drift*.
- **Mitigation:** Aeler *null-bells* can mute a Mark's *Curse* for a scene at the cost of *lamp-time* or *Public Outrage [1]* if used in a Lethai court.

Custodians & Dissent

- **Songkeepers** steward Keys and judge when burdens may be set down.
- **Lethai-ar Oathbinders** police oath-Marks; mask rights fall for abusers.
- **Lethai-thora Archivists** map Marks to contexts in *gloss-trees*; Sundered Elves carry these into markets and mistakes.

Hooks

- **The Bark That Broke.** A famed Barkskin bearer shattered in frost—find the missing roof-tree witness before winter claims more.
- **River-Ears in a Dry City.** A collector misuses a Riverstone Book; canals riot. Restore Keys or rewrite dues with a bowl at the fountain.
- **Spider's Ledger.** Inae's Mark is called curse after a web-judge froze a harvest lane. Untangle oath from context drift before masks come down.

2 Valewood — Empire Under Leaves

Living courts, phasing ruins, and the law of guest and host

“Name yourself once, pour water first, and step on the stones. In the Valewood, truth grows wild and the paths remember your feet.”

2.1 I. What the Valewood Is

A vast, old-growth forest whose memory runs deeper than city annals. Phasing ruins (*star-roads*, *living stone*, *breathing streets*) surface and sink with moon and season; oaths are measured in years of repair. Power moves through **hospitality**, **knowledge of ways**, and **careful speech**. The Lethai-al keep edge-wards and ferry rights; the Lethai-ar hold *web-law* and shaded corridors; fae courts barter in *truth told right now*; beast-kin patrol cairns none can map twice the same way.

2.2 II. Courtesy & Entry (Shade Etiquette)

Observe these to avoid waking the wood's ledgers.

- **Iron Covered.** Wrap iron in leather or cloth. (*Position +1 on first parley at a hedge or ferry.*)
- **Name Once.** Speak your name and intent at the edge; do not name the forest as property.
- **Step on Stone.** Use set stones and boardwalks; crushed sprouts become *Light-Due*.
- **Water First.** Pour the first cup to the cistern or stream; then drink.
- **Leave the Light.** Replace what you take: plant, mend, or pay *seed-tithe*.

Clocks for breaches: **Under-Root Grudge** [4] (tariffs, closed ferries), **Stream-Clouding** [4] (mill shutdowns, fish wardens).

2.3 III. Routes & Taboos (Using the Travel Seed)

Shadow Corridor (Thin Shore). The misted coastal lane north–south toward Zakov. Draw *Spade* from Valewood, *Heart* from Mistlands (or Valewood), *Club* from Mistlands (wraiths, bell-line failures), *Diamond* from either Mistlands (*Ward-salt*, *Lantern Writ*) or Valewood (*Way-Cord*, *Truce-Bough*) depending on which law you invoke.

Rule of 9s (Valewood & Theona). Whenever a 9 appears in a travel seed touching Valewood or the isle moots, add an **omission**: a missing step, an unsaid name, an unseen guest. If the 9 is a *Diamond*, you may break the taboo once—someone will come to collect. Treat the omission as a one-scene *Shared Complication* the table must name.

2.4 IV. Places That Hold (Spade Prompts)

Use as scenes, sets, or advantages:

- **Star-Road Shard.** Pale flagstones hum when trod in order; a gate stirs if you match the cadence.
 - **Rooted Amphitheatre.** Moss seats remember speeches not yet given; debate here shapes routes.
 - **Glyphed Bridge.** Lies make glyphs glow; truth pays the toll.
 - **Calendar Grove.** Solstice-aligned trunks; one tree is stone—time tallies are read here.
 - **Unfound Arcade.** Arches appear at dusk, vanish at dawn; reality keeps hours.
 - **Breathing City.** Vine-choked streets shift on the hour; the ruin is alive and listening.
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2.5 V. Pressures of the Wood (Club Prompts)

- **Ward-Trap.** Ancient mechanisms treat you like yesterday's invader; tools and talk jam.
 - **Oath-Magnet.** Words stick; a careless promise rewrites your plan (*start a Task Clock you named aloud*).
 - **Geas Catch.** A phrase turns into a job that names itself; the wood expects it done.
 - **Name-Theft.** Edges of your true name are sampled; masks come down unless paid in courtesy.
 - **Muster of Boughs.** Green banners rise—travel becomes trespass until a *Truce-Bough* is raised.
 - **Mirror Rain.** Leaf-drips replay choices you didn't make; doubt taxes Position until resolved.
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2.6 VI. Charms, Rights, & Papers (Diamond Prompts)

Treat these as *Strings* that spend like documents or single-use boons:

- **Way-Cord.** Knot that points to the true next turn once. *Spend:* DV -1 on Navigate/Scout; negates one *Sweet Wind* lie.
 - **Dew-Mirror.** Shows a thing as it is, not as sung, for one scene. *Spend:* reveal a concealed intent or hazard; ignore one glamour.
 - **Hazel Token.** Lawful crossing of a warded hedge without snag. *Spend:* Position +1 to pass an edge-ward.
 - **Honey-Right.** Eat and speak under bee-stone protection. *Spend:* immunity to first social SB this parley.
 - **Name-Bead.** Kept promise warms, broken one chills and glows. *Spend:* convert one consequence into *Repair Work* [4].
 - **Truce-Bough.** Cut, hunt, or camp in a named copse without offense. *Spend:* suppress *Muster of Boughs* for a scene.
 - **City-Shard.** Wake one gate or stair in a phasing ruin. *Spend:* create an exit where none is seen.
 - **Oathsap.** Seal a pact that even echoes respect. *Spend:* turn a verbal concession into a season-long right.
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2.7 VII. People & Practice

- **Pathweavers.** Guides who knot safe routes into cord; their cords double as minutes of what was promised on the way.
- **Wardens of the Roof-Tree.** Canopy surveyors and hedge-keepers; they measure damage in *repair years*.
- **Silk Engineers (Lethai-ar).** Keep night lanes and warning webs; *mask rights* fall for oath abuse.
- **Songkeepers.** Render gloss and context for old speech; without them, even yesterday's syntax can betray.

- **Beast-Kin.** Border guardians tied to cairns and seasons; they bargain in food, paths, and respect.
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2.8 VIII. War by Shade (Deterrence in the Valewood)

The wood teaches *route warfare*: make supply walk twice; end campaigns by ledger. Ambushes begin at *Dominant* under rain or understory; invaders who *step on stone* and keep iron covered may parley for escorted withdrawal instead of bleed for it. Before anyone plans a forest campaign, start “**Leave Them Alone**” [2]; on fill, command chooses tariff, treaty, or route-around.

2.9 IX. Integration Hooks

- **Political Intrigue.** *Bowl, Board, and Shade*: fairness, then geometry, then courtesy. Convert a concession into a *season-long right* at a ford, gate, or pasture.
 - **Caravans.** Shadow Corridor runs require *Way-Cord* or *Lantern Writ*. Mistland law (ward-salt) vs. Valewood law (truce-bough) determines your final judgment.
 - **Wilderness.** Treat edge-wards and fuel mosaics as special orders during camp phases; blight quarantine uses *ash-wash stations*.
 - **Aeler Roads.** *Keystone-in-Bark* accords: Aeler choose tread, Lethai choose line. Breaking either creates fines paid as *repair years*.
 - **Ykrul Borders.** *Silence Furlong*: cross wordless, then speak once. Keep it and reduce DV −1 on pasture passage; break it and tick *Furlong Breach*.
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2.10 X. Omens & Seeds

- **Sweet Wind.** A breeze that lies kindly; *Wind-Veil* mutes it for a walk.
- **Missing Ninth.** Somewhere a ninth step or name is absent; pay in favors or get lost kindly.
- **Bell-Line Failure.** Mistland lantern law flickers; wraith indemnities come due.

Adventure Seeds

1. **The Bowl at the Bridge.** A *Glyphed Bridge* lights at every lie; arbitrate a toll war using *Bowl, Board, and Shade*.
 2. **Way-Cord for a Price.** A pathweaver demands a *Name-Bead* to knot your route; who pays when it chills?
 3. **Empire Wakes.** A *Breathing City* aligns at dusk; open a *City-Shard* gate or be counted as yesterday’s invader.
 4. **Silk and Sluice.** Lethai-ar web-law snared a patrol; river pilots claim the weir saved three villages. Balance oath and repair.
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2.11 XI. At the Table (Simple Levers)

Keep to core ladders—use these as narrative permissions:

- **Context Strings** (*gloss-tree, songkeeper witness*) reduce DV −1 when reading/pleading in older registers.
- **Light-Due & Seed-Tithe** convert fines into *Repair Projects* [4] instead of exile or coin.
- **Way-Cord / Truce-Bough / Dew-Mirror** spend for single-scene Position/DV shifts as listed; abusing them starts *Under-Root Grudge*.

Portrayal note: Let policy speak before mystique—ferries, hedges, quotas, and the cost of light—then add the wonder: paths that hum, rain that remembers, courts that sit where the river can overhear.

Starting Talents

Lethai-al/ar Path: Embodied Presence

Heightened Senses (3 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Wits 2+
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to Notice and Survival rolls
 - Can detect hidden creatures/objects with successful Wits + Notice (DV 3)
 - In natural environments, +1 Position on stealth and tracking rolls

Root-Balance (3 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Body 2+, Heightened Senses
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to Athletics and resist shove/knockdown attempts
 - Can move through natural terrain without penalty
 - Once per scene, can stabilize on precarious footing with a successful Body + Athletics roll (DV 3)

Lethai-thora Path: Mental Acuity

Long Memory (3 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Spirit 2+
- Benefits:
 - Perfect recall of events within the past week
 - +1 die to Lore and Insight rolls involving historical or cultural knowledge
 - Once per session, can recall a crucial detail from long-term memory (GM's discretion)

Cold Reading (3 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Wits 2+, Long Memory
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to Sway and Insight rolls involving observation and social analysis
 - Can make intuitive leaps about people's motivations with successful Wits + Insight (DV 3)
 - Once per scene, gain +1 Position on first parley when you had time to observe

Key Talents

Lethai-al Specific

Canopy Spring (4 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Heightened Senses, Body 2+
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to climbing, leaping, and arboreal movement
 - Can perform feats of agility that would normally be impossible with a successful Body + Athletics roll (DV 4)
 - Once per scene, gain +1 Position on movement actions in forested environments

Scent of Rain (4 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Heightened Senses, Survival 1+
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to weather prediction and detecting environmental hazards
 - Can sense approaching storms, fires, or diseases with successful Wits + Survival (DV 3)
 - In natural environments, can track by scent trails with +1 Effect

Lethai-thora Specific

Memory Canticle (4 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Long Memory, Lore 2+
- Benefits:
 - Can recall texts with line-accurate detail
 - +1 die to research and translation rolls
 - Once per scene, can provide crucial historical context that advances investigation

Number Music (4 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Long Memory, Wits 2+
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to design, repair, and logistics projects
 - Can perform complex calculations and engineering analysis with Wits + Craft (DV 3)
 - When framing projects aloud, reduce DV by -1 on related rolls

Lethai-ar Specific (Oathbound)

Weaver's Reading (4 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Heightened Senses, Bond to Inae
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to uncovering plots, paths, and hidden networks
 - Can sense web-based communication and surveillance systems
 - Once per scene, trace a network connection with successful Wits + Notice (DV 3)

Venin Lore (4 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Bond to Isoka, Survival 1+
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to identifying and treating poisons
 - Can convert Harm 1 from toxins to Fatigue once per scene
 - Can craft antidotes and venins with successful Lore + Survival (DV 4)

Stillness (5 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Weaver's Reading OR Venin Lore, Stealth 2+
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to stealth and hiding rolls in dim light
 - Can remain unnoticed until you move to act
 - Once per scene, become effectively invisible in appropriate cover for one exchange

Sundered Elves Specific

Bridge-Tongue (4 XP - Minor Talent):

- Requirements: Long Memory, Sway 2+
- Benefits:
 - +1 die to cross-cultural communication and translation
 - Can treat cross-cultural etiquette DV as if in shared frame once per scene
 - Once per session, create a one-use Context String on the fly

Half-Elf Exception

Bridge-Born Clause (6 XP - Major Talent):

- Requirements: Half-elf heritage, both Lethai-al and Lethai-thora lineage
- Benefits:
 - Can access both Gift of the Body and Gift of the Mind
 - +1 die to rolls combining physical and mental skills
 - Once per scene, can perform actions requiring both gifts simultaneously
 - Immune to The Curse of Division

Cultural Mechanics

Shade Etiquette

Lethai-al courtesy that grants hospitality and hearing:

- **Iron Covered:** Bare iron offends ward-lines; wrap it in leather or cloth. (On first entry, covered iron grants Position +1 in parley)
- **Name Once:** Speak your name and intent at the edge; do not name the forest as property
- **Step on Stone:** Where stones are laid, use them; every crushed sprout is a debt
- **Water First:** Pour a first cup to the river or cistern before you drink
- **Leave the Light:** Replace the shade you take: plant, mend, or pay

Light-Due System

Light and shade are currencies. Every fell, ferry, and fire has a light-due—balance to be repaid in replanting, canal-clearing, or trade at kinder rates.

- Cash a light-due to gain DV -1 on operations framed as repair, replanting, or flood work
- Abuse it and start Under-Root Grudge [1]

Context Keys

Lethai speech requires context keys:

- Place-name, season-mark, kinship-hand, and roof-tree sign
- Absent any two, assume misreadings
- When reading or pleading in older registers, increase DV by +1 unless holding a Context String
- Cashing a Context String reduces DV by -1 and creates a Shared Frame (Position +1 on first exchange)

Strings (Lethai Cultural Influence)

- **Light-Due Receipt:** Balance to be repaid in environmental work
- **Shade-Credit:** Favor with forest communities
- **Ferry Right:** Priority passage on waterways
- **Resin Share:** Access to valuable forest products
- **Canoe-Lane Priority:** Preferred river routes
- **Seed Tithe:** Right to harvest forest reproduction
- **Spider-Vow Token:** Oathbound commitment marker
- **Serpent Oath:** Isoka-bound promise
- **Silk-Tithe:** Payment for web-based services
- **Gloss-Tree Charter:** Authority to interpret ancient texts
- **Canal Seal:** Waterway management rights

- **Ledger Witness:** Authority in scholarly disputes
- **Keystone Courtesy:** Aeler-Lethai cooperation agreements
- **River-Weir Writ:** Dam and water control permissions
- **Windbreak Right:** Ykrul-Lethai border accommodations
- **Border-Song:** Cross-cultural musical agreements

Patron Relationships

- **Lethai-al:** Often bond with nature-related Patrons (Old Man of the Black Forest, Carrion King, Nidhoggr)
- **Lethai-thora:** Prefer knowledge-related Patrons (The Witness, Sacred Geometry, Clockwork Monad)
- **Lethai-ar:** Bond with Inae (spiders) or Isoka (serpents) - dark, transformative Patrons
- **Half-elves:** Can bond with any Patron but often struggle with divided loyalties

Complications

The Curse of Division:

- When attempting to use talents from both paths, suffer -1 die to all rolls until scene ends
- Can only advance in one path per tier without the Bridge of Gifts talent

Contextual Communication:

- Cannot effectively communicate with other Lethai without proper context keys
- Modern elven speech confuses outsiders (-1 die to social rolls with non-elves)
- Reading old texts requires special effort or assistance

Cultural Tension:

- Lethai-al and Lethai-thora communities often distrust each other
- Half-elves face prejudice from both communities
- Lethai-ar are feared and often ostracized

Environmental Responsibility:

- Every action in natural environments has consequences
- Breaking Shade Etiquette triggers social and environmental backlash
- Light-dues accumulate and must be repaid

Sample Characters

Talan of Reedfall, Who Unknotted the Flood

- Body 3, Wits 3, Spirit 2, Presence 2
- Skills: Athletics 2, Survival 2, Notice 1, Craft 1
- Talents: Heightened Senses, Root-Balance, Canopy Spring, Scent of Rain
- Affinity: Gift of the Body
- Strings: Ferry Right, Resin Share, Shade-Credit
- Complication: Environmental Responsibility

Mira of the High Archive

- Body 2, Wits 4, Spirit 3, Presence 2
- Skills: Lore 3, Insight 2, Sway 1, Craft 1
- Talents: Long Memory, Cold Reading, Memory Canticle, Number Music
- Affinity: Gift of the Mind
- Strings: Gloss-Tree Charter, Ledger Witness, Canal Seal
- Complication: Cultural Tension

Sariel Half-Elf of the Crossroads

- Body 3, Wits 3, Spirit 2, Presence 3
- Skills: Melee 2, Lore 2, Survival 1, Sway 1
- Talents: Heightened Senses, Long Memory, Bridge-Born Clause, Bridge-Tongue
- Affinity: Both Gifts (through Bridge-Born Clause)
- Strings: Shade-Credit, Ferry Right, Gloss-Tree Charter
- Complication: Cultural Tension

Adventure Hooks

1. **The Hedge That Ate a Road:** An edge-ward grew too well and swallowed a toll lane. Broker a cut and a replanting that keeps both law and trade.
2. **The Gloss That Wouldn't Read:** A treaty text from three generations back refuses to make sense. Find the missing context keys or watch a border go hot.
3. **Web-Law, River-Law:** Lethai-ar silk syndics claim a bridge-toll by Inae's charter; Lethai-thora auditors counter with canal clauses. Bowl, then Board, then Shade Etiquette.
4. **Bridge-Born in Question:** A half-elf prodigy manifests both gifts; a circle moves to forbid the rite. Protect or persuade before the masks come down.
5. **Blight Under Boots:** Bark Blight rides a caravan's wheel hubs. Build ash-wash stations without sparking a tariff war.

Integration with Core Rules

The Curse Mechanic

The Curse of Division works as a persistent condition:

- When a Lethai attempts to use talents from both paths in the same scene, mark 1 segment on a Curse Clock [4]
- When the clock fills, suffer -1 die to all rolls until the next dawn
- The Bridge-Born Clause talent negates this effect

War by Shade

Lethai defensive warfare principles:

- **Hedge War:** Edge-wards channel intruders into dead ground pockets (Invader Move/Scout DV +1)
- **River Denial:** Ferries vanish, weirs open, mills idle (Start Supply Strangle [4] on hostile forces)
- **Night Lanes:** Web-law trip lines, single strikes, venom as medicine (First ambush in dim light begins at Dominant)
- **Canopy Runners:** Movement above sight-lines, arrows from impossible angles (Once/scene, convert pursuit to parley/retreat with Position +1)

Terrain Tags

- **Hedge Mosaic:** Invaders suffer DV +1 on Navigate/Scout; first defender action gains Position +1
- **Resin Smoke:** On ignition, obscure vision and sting eyes; convert first Ranged Harm 1 against defenders to Fatigue
- **Stone Steps:** If invaders step on stone and keep iron covered, begin in Shared Frame (DV -1 to request safe passage)