



SEASON I

Guild Ball

GB DEVELOPMENT TEAM

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steamforged.com

For more information, please email:
support@steamforged.com

Guild Ball designed & created by
Mat Hart & Rich Loxam

Additional Design / Playtesting
Alex 'Ratty' Cairns, Dave Harbord,
Geoff Porritt, Jamie Perkins, John Snape,
Kevin Horseman

Illustrations
Doug Telford, Marc Molnar

Lead Writer
Sherwin Matthews

Graphic Design & Layout
Tom Hutchings, Thorn Graphic Design

Sculpting
Russ Charles, Clockwork Goblin

Studio Painter
Sébastien Lavigne, Dark Iron Studio

Element Games (UK) team
Byron Orde, Greg Plail, Ian Petrie,
Matt Betts, Elena Orde

Vassal Development
Alex Cairns, Gary & Veronica Amoe

Special thanks...
Andrea, Tom, Katherine and Jake
Claire, Steve, Lorraine and Blue



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KICKSTARTER / COMMUNITY

Guild Master - David Kaufman, Titan Games and Hobbies, Engineer's Guild

Character Backers - Andy Scott - Jac; Bertrand Trudel - TBA;
Matthew Parkins - Stoker; Michael Rivero - Midas; Steven Tower - Tower

Guild Insiders - Alexis Andre, Brad Crawford, Bruce Laing, Chris Bannister,
Chris Poynter, Christian Nord, Christian Torrent, Daniel Hartwell, James Kroesch,
John Nemeth, Justin Wrenn, Kurtess Mortensen, Lin Prisbrey, Mark Rodgers,
Michael McClellan, Rogerio Nunes, Simon Kearney, Scott Borror, Stefan Frey,
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TwoBands, Guild Ball Tonight podcast crew (Bill & Phil)

**Lastly, the late-night-keep-us-sane gang helping us to decompress with ideas,
chatting about stuff and games of LoL...**
Aaron Boyhan, Ben Palmer, Dale Watts, Dave Payton, Rich Jennings

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There was a burning bright sun overhead the pitch; the sparse buildings and spectator stands cast barely any shadow and beneath the players stretched deep, dark recesses. To the morbid eye, there looked to be a deep void beneath each one, threatening to swallow them should they falter.

Ox looked to either side, quick but measured glances, taking in the state of play around him. The Butcher's Guild trailed by two but had possession, the ball rolling out in front of Brisket as she sprinted several paces safely behind him. To his left, Boar lumbered along, barely breathing heavily despite his exertions so far. To the right Boiler and Shank ran alongside, knives glinting in the bright light. Out in front, Ox could see the huge form of Kraken towering over the other Fishermen as they stood in a semi-circular defensive formation. He risked a sidelong glance at Boar, subtly gesturing at the Fisherman blocker. The beast grinned a feral smile beneath his thick moustache, the sight unsettling in spite of being partially hidden from view.

Ahead, five paces now, Ox could feel the tension rise and increased his speed, the team pushing harder to keep with him. His ears detected Shank whispering threats under his breath, short sharp breathing from the others. Four steps, three steps, Ox saw Siren's hooded form dart out to his flank, sidestepping with an easy jog. Too late now to change the plan. The rest stood firm and Ox could only hope that either Boiler or Shank would show the initiative to mark her.

Two steps, Ox heard the percussive slashes of the Fishermen's spearguns firing. He threw heavy feet to the right, feeling one dart pierce his cheek with a sting of pain, the sharp flue tearing his skin open and leaving a bright red streak. Somewhere behind him came an anguished grunt as at least one missile hit its target. Ox let out a blood curdling roar, the sound tearing from his core, shattering the determined silence from both sides as they prepared for the inevitable collision.

'Get 'em boys!'

Half of the crowd screamed its raucous approval, the other let loose their own volley of curses and cries in answer as the Butchers slammed into the Fishermen. Ox ducked low and further again to the right as he closed, slipping beneath a swing from Corsair's spear. Droplets of blood from the scratch on his face splattered onto the Fisherman's clothes, painting a macabre pattern onto the pale cloth. As he moved, his cleaver arced up in a fluid motion and into his opponent's unguarded stomach. Corsair snarled as the blunted edge struck his plated armour, slid several inches to the side and leapt into the air, the impact driving him backwards two steps. He reacted with a swift downwards knife strike towards Ox which the Butcher desperately turned aside with a hard shove; blocking the shoulder of the arm holding the knife. Corsair once again stumbled back several paces and Ox pressed his advantage by stepping into the space. The Butchers all knew that close quarters where their adversaries would be unable to reload their spearguns would offer the more powerful, brutal team a significant advantage.

Ox could see that his first strike had hurt his opponent more severely than it had seemed. Corsair's eye twitched, the tell-tale narrowing suggesting the pain he felt, a thin trickle of red slid down from the side of his mouth. Ox stepped out left and Corsair circled right; his stance low like a knife fighter, warily watching the Master Butcher. The world had shrunk to the two of them, the players, images, and sounds around them losing all significance in the moment. Ox feinted to step left again but instead dove forward, trying to take Corsair by surprise, only to curse as the light footed Fisherman captain neatly dodged away. He made a careful side step right to maintain their distance. Ox glared, but knew that the longer that this held, the more chance that one of his crew around him would waste their mark and be able to force a mistake from Corsair. Then he could finish this.



Although Boar started any drive slowly, he housed so much physical momentum that by the time he picked up speed he became an overwhelming force. At the time of Ox's battle cry and the point of impact, Boar had already become an unstoppable juggernaut. The bulky Butcher crashed into Kraken, heavy pummelling forearms smashing into the huge Fisherman's thick set frame, who lost ground trying to hold the attack at bay. Boar's charge and Kraken's resistance pitched the Butcher forward and off balance but he was able to turn the movement into a head-but. With no free hands, Kraken did all he could to absorb the damage, tilting his head forward into the blow to take the impact on his forehead, with a sickening crunch, both players recoiled.

Boar was the first to recover and with a bestial roar lunged forward again, a huge hand reaching out to slap his opponents guard away whilst his foot simultaneously rose up and kicked out at Kraken's knee. As the blow made contact there was a loud crack and the Fisherman staggered. Furious, murderous intent giving rise to a madman's cackle, the red mist descended over Boar's eyes as he leapt upon Kraken, striking over and over at the giant's smashed knee and throwing heavy, punishing fists into his ribs.

Boar could tell that Kraken had managed to hit back several times in retaliation whilst he had tried to hold off the enraged Butcher, but he was so numbed by bloodlust that he ignored any sensation other than the coppery taste that filled his mouth. As the two players collapsed in a heap of struggling, writhing limbs, Boar briefly entertained the thought that he might have bitten his own tongue. He didn't care.

Fingers, pink at the tips from pressure, wrapped around Kraken's throat and he grinned at the Fisherman. His muscles strained against Kraken's white knuckled attempts to prise his hands away, viciously exerting his strength to smash the back of his opponents head into the ground, once, twice. The Butcher knew he was the stronger man and let loose a victorious shout. Again, he smashed Kraken's head backwards, feeling the hands around his own lessen their grip and then fall away as Kraken lost consciousness. Boar spat in the man's face. Satisfied, he took deep, hard breaths into burning lungs, and climbed to his feet, looking around for another mark to waste.



Ball carefully controlled before her, Brisket slowed her pace, looking for a break to run past the rival guild's lines. She could see Boar and Kraken tangled together, Ox and Corsair squaring off and Shank facing down Shark. Boiler lay in a crumpled heap a few feet away, impaled by a heavy harpoon flue and groaning pitifully as he tried to pull it out of his side. A growing puddle of blood soaked into the ground beneath him. Brisket wouldn't normally feel much remorse for a player on either team that was downed and she already could tell the rook had lost enough blood to have taken him out of this game. Hearing her footfalls, he looked up, face contorted with pain.

'Help me! Help me pull it out!' Watching as Boar unsteadily clambered up, she ignored Boiler and ran past without a word heading towards the Beast, Boiler's screams fading behind her. She suspected that ripping out the twin flue barb would actually do him more damage anyway, causing fresh cuts that would leave him bleeding far more than he was already.

Where were the other Fishermen? A change in movement and she could see Greyscales now laying on his front, near to Shank. She could guess what had happened there. No sign of Siren that she could see. Brisket dashed past Boar, kicking the ball out further in front of her. Boar got out of her way, watched her pass, then ran in the opposite direction, his eyes focused on Shark's back. Brisket increased her pace to sprinting, easily keeping control of the ball, kicking it out further and further as the distance between her and the open Fisherman goal shortened. Time to start a comeback.

She got a handful of steps closer before Siren came skidding out of nowhere between her and the ball, the bitch looking to steal it. Brisket tried a headlong tackle rather than arresting her motion, not expected by the other woman, who deftly dodged out of the way of the more physical player but had to concede control of the ball. It bounced crazily to the side, away from both of them. Why could Boar not just learn to play the game and give her a little back up just once?

Ox was careful to keep Corsair away from his speargun as they circled each other. No use at short range and needing to be reloaded before it could be used again, it couldn't be used as a ranged weapon but its heavy stock might be a valuable melee tool. Ox risked a kick at it, sending it skidding off backwards. He timed it well but didn't anticipate the rope still attached to it tripping him. He managed to keep his balance but the lapse in his attention gave Corsair an opening; he attacked as Ox's defence faltered for a moment.

Ox didn't block the strike and hit back with his cleaver, hoping that his armour and tough hide would mitigate much of the trauma. There was a dull thud and a sharp pain forced Ox to grit his teeth. He had forgotten how precise the vicious cutthroat could be, but his own attack had struck the Fisherman hard in the side of his head. Sprawled on the floor, split open from a savage cut that ran from his temple down and underneath his jaw, Corsair's eyes rolled backwards, the man knocked out.

The Master Butcher allowed himself to grimace, slump and hold a hand to his side. Most injured Guild Ball players were simply bludgeoned in their armour, over and over until huge welts covered them, they collapsed during the game due to exhaustion and the bleeding. He wasn't done, but he could tell that the attack had hurt him badly. He limped on unsteady legs, almost doubled over, surveying the pitch around him. Shank and Boar had Shark pinned. He wasn't worried about that, no matter how slimy the agile bastard was. He couldn't see either of the mascots, screw them both. The apothecaries were dragging Boiler off towards the sidelines, he'd got wasted. Brisket and Siren were at each other, some distance away, the ball forgotten temporarily. He felt wet on his hand. Blood. His blood, soaking through onto his fingers. Shitty knife must have gone through the armour. Not good.

Ox knew what his guild wanted. Still holding his hand to his side to keep some semblance of pressure on the wound, he started towards Corsair. Sometimes, winning wasn't everything. All the best, most longstanding players and teams knew that. Ox had got where he was by knowing his role, and who paid him. Put the guild before the game.

Gods, breathing was difficult. Scragging Fisherman scum had hit him far harder than he'd hoped when he had got the opening. Drawing deep breaths, as much air as he could, he stumbled into the prone player and rather than kneeling as intended, fell to his knees.

Carefully, he positioned his cleaver blade over the bastard's ankle. His wound burned and a thin line of pink drool fell unbidden from his lips. Raising the weapon high over his head, he swung it down. The blade bit, skidded past the ankle and tore out a huge chunk of the Fisherman's boot, skin and the meat beneath. Blood shot everywhere. His shaking hands slippery now, Ox grasped the cleaver firmly, positioned it in the same place and repeated the terrible action, again and again, driving the blade into the gristle of the joint.

Bright red blood covered everything. He could see the bone; even that was stained red. Red, gory violent red, the world became one hue. Ox's own spit, much darker now and closer to crimson, ran down his shirt. Corsair stirred. Urgently, as fast as his wounded body allowed, Ox moved over and struck a boot into his face. With the last vestiges of his strength he raised his cleaver two-handed above his head and drove it down, once, twice. The Fisherman's Guild Captain might have screamed, he didn't know any more. Ox's world had shrunk to numb already, his senses shutting down. His last thought as he passed out himself was that it didn't matter whether they won the damned game or not now. The guild had won regardless.

He collapsed sideways, next to the maimed player. Burning bright sun overhead. To the morbid eye the darkness of the deep, dark void seemed to have claimed them after all.





THE GAME

Mob football was a game generally played between neighbouring towns and villages on feast days. Players on opposing teams clashed and struggled to control a leather-wrapped inflated pig's bladder and attempt to kick it into the opponent's goal. Over the years, rudimentary leagues and tournaments sprang up throughout the Empire of Free Cities; there were even some national level games between the city states.

The powerful mercantile Guilds have taken advantage of the huge popularity of the sport, investing vast sums of money and creating professional teams who compete in structured leagues. With the game elevated to new heights of spectacle, Guild Ball is wildly popular with the masses.

Games are now played out in front of vast crowds of fans, whilst behind the scenes, hidden in the corridors of power, the results can mean fortunes are won or lost on the kick of a ball.

In a typical Guild Ball match, teams compete to outscore their opponents. Games may be won through scoring more goals, or simply battering the other team into the ground.

With no set length, Guild Ball matches accelerate towards the end of the game, with everything coming down to the last throw of the dice.



THE HISTORY OF GUILD BALL AND THE EMPIRE OF THE FREE CITIES



Guild Ball. It is a game like none other. The beautiful game you say? Maybe. I've not heard that one before. You wanted to know about it? Oh, I can tell you all about Guild Ball lad. Very few better placed than ol' Greyscales to point you in the right direction on that one. I've been a part of the game for more years than I care to remember.

It has risen to be ingrained in all of our lives, the ship further out to sea than they ever thought it might get. What was once an idea and then a solution now has a life of its own. It crosses the mountains, deserts, plains and the darkest, most primordial forests of our kingdoms, where no man in his right mind would choose to tread. It transcends the differences between the peoples of the Sovereign States and their nobles, politicians, kings, queens and princes and speaks in a common language where none exists. It binds our people together with ties stronger than any alliance that has come before or likely ever will. Even the gods of the greatest religions and pantheons look upon Guild Ball and are humbled, so fervent are the people in its worship, so widespread are they, from the poorest peasant wallowing in serfdom to the lord that he serves.

Whatever they might tell you, Guild Ball is now indispensable to the Empire of the Free Cities. Ruthless, bloodthirsty and vicious are all good words for it, but the clever mind that looks upon man knows that this has always been human nature, no matter how much he's learned or what gods he might have found. That's a dark truth boy, one that you might want to think on in years to come. Without the release, the raw euphoria, the cheering of the bloody violence, the wisest amongst us know that rivalries once forgotten would emerge from the darkest recesses of humanity as conflict, as war. We have seen it before, terrible atrocities, a darkness that threatened to overwhelm us. Instead, the players in the game are revered, heroes of a proud tradition rather than violent thugs. No matter who they are or what they might do, no matter that they represent corrupt organisations, only interested in furthering their own profit and power.

All that and more, these are the things that make the game known as Guild Ball. P'haps I like the name you called it – the beautiful game, was it? There's a certain irony there that rings true to this old seadog. But you want the real story of how it came to be this way, don't you? I thought that you might. To explain that, I'll have to take a little more time to tell you about the origins of the Empire of the Free Cities; the guilds that built the game to what she is now and how by doing it, they saved all of our lives.

You'd have to ask the bookworms over at the Scholar's Guild about when the Sovereign States first came into being as they are now, because the hell I know. If there ever was a name for this world before the Empire of the Free Cities or the Sovereign States, then it's long been forgotten and passed into the mists of time.

Long before there was anything like you see now, the tribes of men spread across the land and formed communities, villages and homesteads. After a time, they grew into towns, larger, with more people, banded together to look out for one another. Safety in numbers against a hard world outside of the walls. Probably didn't take long before most of them started feeling proud of where they called home and it started being part of who they were. Before too much water passed under the bridge, they fought against other people, other townships. Don't rightly know how they sold that one, what imagined reasons might have been come up with. Doesn't ever take man much excuse to spill blood in my experience. Whatever they might have said, the real motives were land and power. Carved out their own little dominions. I guess that was the start of it. Soon, there were kingdoms, with borders and armies, kings and nobles, and all of the things that come with them.

The guilds have always existed within our civilisation, for as long as any history you might read can recall. It's all the same story. In the early days of the first cities, groups of merchants got together and formed houses named after their trade to govern their business, which they called guilds. History books always leave out the part unsaid, about how much easier it was to better exploit their customers and inflate their prices that way. Couldn't think why, eh? No one knows which one was first and anyone that tells you different is talking out of his arse, but it hasn't stopped most of them claiming it over the years. It doesn't really matter in any case. In no time, all sorts of walks of life were setting themselves up that way. The guilds have never had any issue with numbers or supporters. Back then as much as now, probably even more so, upwards mobility was limited by station of birth and the guilds offered a nice way to get respect and earn a pretty penny on the side to its members. Don't know many that would turn that down.

As the isolated cities began to trade and establish ties to each other, so did the guilds do the same. Soon, all trades would be represented by one guild or another, in every city across the land. Once they were, the game changed. They never stopped competing with each other, but there was something new that the old guard who started the guilds out never dreamed of; internal conflict to gain power for one house or another, the rise of corruption and political infighting. That's a grand tradition now and no one alive has ever dreamed of it being any different. Once you sail out on that ship, there never is any looking back.

When the Sovereign States were born into the world, politically uniting cities and lands under one ruler, national guilds became a reality, neatly fitting in alongside. That was the real shift in their fortunes; when guilds not only controlled all practice of their particular craft, but started rubbing shoulders with the men and women that held the power that they didn't have. Every one of them greedily fished for a catch that was right in front of them but yet just out of reach at that point. It all became a quest for political influence with the state; pursuing their own agendas over that of their rivals, making coalitions where they needed them and casting them aside like a rough haul once they had outlived their usefulness. Always been the truth that the houses of the guilds can be fractious and prone to infighting, but just as true is that they are unified by how much they don't get along with any of the other guilds. One big battle for respect and pride, kept grounded as long as the rulers didn't pay them too much mind.

The Sovereign States that would eventually be united into the Empire of the Free Cities existed this way for generations, the people living out their lives, paying fealty to the nobility and their gods and toiling under the watchful eye of the guilds. In the cities and towns traditions and culture started to develop; religions took root and each drifted further apart from those that sailed different seas. In all things they became less alike and stared at their neighbours; increasingly wary and untrusting, always vigilant for hostility. Then came the Century Wars.

No-one can remember the cause for the Century Wars or who fired the first shot across the bows; for all that they devastated the land, murdered our peoples and brought civilization to its knees. I won't even try to explain it, but I've seen war in my lifetime and I can tell you, when people have been fighting for a long enough stretch of years, the meaning gets forgotten and the violence itself becomes the cause. The horrible memories end up shared communally in a place, even if no one was there to see them. One group hates another because that group hates them, that's about all that might ever be needed. No one thinks beyond that.

What is known that rather than try to end the conflict, the nobles and the rulers of the Sovereign States seemed happy to bleed their cities' coffers and populations dry in self destructive battles and engagements that seemed like they would never end. Didn't take long before it was always a wash. As many dead or dying on the winning side as the losing one, if there even was a clear winner. One day you'd take some land, a couple of miles worth shit to anyone, set up your flag and tents and then the next day you lose it again. The only thing that changed was that both armies were a couple hundred men lighter afterwards. Even worse for those of us out at sea, we didn't have anything to show, just marks on a map that got scratched out. Sometimes not even that.

With no decisive end in the spyglass that anyone believed might happen and every State using ever more destructive and inventive weaponry each day to make up for the lack of men in their quest for victory, it was to guilds that unexpectedly fell the mantle of mediators of peace.

As I said before, the guilds had long since held ambitions which reached far beyond the limits placed on them and their business interests by fickle and self serving politicians or the nobility. By the time of the outbreak of the Century Wars, the oldest and most powerful guilds had begun to at last exert some influence over the ruling class, but it had been to their considerable chagrin that they had still been unable to have any lasting hold on any real power.

War, and the inevitable upheaval that it brought to the world, gave them much greater freedom to pursue their dealings with a variety of more direct threats and without being undermined by the state. At first some of them, always the foolish ones, celebrated as the older, wiser birds sat on the rocks and watched on. But when the years rolled by and the conflict had devastated their industries and trading, it started hitting the guilds hard, reducing their wealthy coffers and what influence they had amassed. I can tell you that a whole bunch of them in the Fisherman's Guild at least got to thinking that the Century Wars would likely destroy the guilds and all that they had worked for. I reckon me that near all of them must have thought it, obvious really. How are you going to do any business with all the people poor, homeless, dead? It took nearly the death of the world as we know it, but in this one instance, nearly all of the guilds could all agree. The Century Wars had to end.

Fortunately for all of us, with independent ties between their houses within the Sovereign States, the guilds found themselves almost ideally placed to act and put an end to the hostilities. I don't rightly know how they all got together or decided who would approach the nobles, monarchies, dictators and the holy men, or how they managed to bring them all over to the new way of thinking. P'haps some of them saw the light and a way out, although I'd wager a month's purse that at least a handful of them needed some sort of special handling, if you get my drift. I can think of one particular King that was found floating face down in the Monde, can't say whether there were more I didn't hear of.

Finally, after considerable negotiation, the Century Wars were over. They'd agreed that the land and all of the Sovereign States were to be unified as the Empire of the Free Cities. You might think that people were dancing in the street to hear it, that there were parades or cheering crowds, armies returning home to greet their loved ones. There was none of that. Every man, woman and child were just exhausted. I remember when we found out most of us just collapsed to the ground. Didn't seem real. You'd probably think that strange young blood, can't imagine it, eh? Well, that's what it was.

Officially, everyone remembers it in the history books as the crowning achievement of a grand alliance lead by the Skaldic King, Gustav VI of the Holstmann dynasty. I think that as time passes, they probably will forget the truth. The guilds designed it that way. The Old Skaldic Empire became Skald, the first principle domain of the Empire of the Free Cities and the monarchy revelled in the platitudes heaped upon them. But you remember a moment ago when I said that everyone just sighed, exhausted at the end? There was one group that gleefully rubbed their hands together and smiled, hidden in the shadows out of sight. Quietly, the guilds looked on satisfied, for at last, they had achieved the position of power that had eluded them for so long.

But within the new unified land, a sudden vacuum existed, a tenuous peace after years of conflict between a disparate and varied populace with few common ties. Whilst the Sovereign States started the long road to rebuilding their shattered lands and people, it became obvious that something would need to be done, some institution would need to be established to bind us all together, or see everything break down all over again. That lad, was when the idea of nationalising the mob football games from the early days was reborn, as Guild Ball.

It wasn't anything new really. Way back when, it had been a ritual, a ceremonial thing that happened in settlements to celebrate the last autumnal harvests. Sounds like an idea from a madman now, but originally they played in the middle of towns and villages. Didn't have the stands, or the carefully set out pitches and dugouts for the teams. Just six or seven holy men on either side, a ball, made out of an inflated pig's bladder wrapped in leather and the local people watching, all standing around. Object was to take the ball and kick it into the other teams post, set in the ground out on the other side of wherever it was they were playing their game.

Now, I couldn't rightly say why anything in this world happens the way it does, but it seems obvious to me that it would grow into something bigger than an event that happened once a year at a harvest ritual. And it did, became a sport, the origins long since forgotten. You ever hear of a holy day of worship on the last day of the harvest lad? Thought not.

Of course, as the years had passed and the game grew in popularity, they had to move it out to the countryside. It's a world of difference having a bunch of doddering old goats walking around a place, speaking in sermons and praying to their gods for a some deliverance or another than it is to have young men and women trying to win a game there, all aggression. You get a lot of collateral damage, if you get my drift. That's when the game started being played on the specially made pitches, in fields set aside for the purpose. Now, the old boys weren't too happy to have their ceremony stolen from them, as you'd expect. That's where the name mob football came from. It was meant as a slight, to describe the cattle mentality of the people that went to go see the games. Spiteful name, but I can't say that anyone took offence.

It spread everywhere quickly and soon everyone was playing it. Nothing too serious as we know it now, just locals kicking the ball around one afternoon a week, but in every place you can name and more. It all stopped when the Century Wars came. The young men and women that played the games got dragged off to fight and the pitches were neglected, either overgrown or dried out, markings all faded. I hear that the Bookworms send out Magisters to find these old forgotten playing grounds, so they can mark them out as cultural heritage sites or some crap like that. Waste of time if you ask me. But that was how the game was then, abandoned. Until the guilds got a hold on it.

When the guilds saw mob football, they saw the opportunity to do something grand with the idea. It was unique in that it was popular in every village, town and city throughout the Empire, the only knot that tied all of the ropes together. With the backing of the guilds to formerly establish



teams, leagues and tournaments, and the vast sums of money invested to achieve this, Guild Ball became the new national sport of the Empire of the Free Cities overnight.

Originally they had in mind that it would give the people something to unite them and stop another war. Some other visionary with too much time on his hands came up with the idea that Guild Ball would let them settle disputes between guilds, offer a decision making process outside of the official channels or politics. But really, if it was either of those things, then they were overshadowed quickly by the struggle amongst the guilds. Having brokered the peace and shown the ruling classes that they were to be feared for what they represented, the guilds were now swollen with power. Guild Ball couldn't shake off the fact that ultimately, the guilds ran it. And as they stepped into their new boots after the Century Wars were over, it became just another tool in their arsenal of intimidation against each other.

For the guilds, the game means something very different to the rest of us, a way that they maintain their grasp over the Sovereign States by reminding their rulers of the threat that the guilds represent, all the time dancing to the tune of a much more deadly game against each other. But without the spectacle of Guild Ball and the guilds themselves binding everyone together, I fear that the Empire of the Free Cities would have long since fallen apart.

In a new era of peace and a period of endless possibility, the guilds now see a whole new business and revenue stream, and with it huge opportunities for amassing further wealth and power. With the potential being so vast and with their fierce rivals involved in the conflict of Guild Ball, the guilds now each have a vested interest in providing their chosen teams with training, equipment and facilities to try and tip the edge in their favour. Each match ups the stakes and makes the game bigger than ever before.

All of that makes for better watching for you or I, or even better still, a very good way of life if you can make it in the game.

And that lad is Guild Ball, our national sport. Wildly popular, played in front of thousands of roaring spectators hungry for blood, victory and glory, whilst behind the scenes the results can mean fortunes are won or lost on the kick of a ball.

Oh, so you want to be a player in the game eh? You should have said so sooner. Come with me and I'll show you the ropes...

- Greyscale, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain

SOVEREIGN STATES OF THE EMPIRE OF THE FREE CITIES

SKALD

Skald is one of the most populous Sovereign States within the Empire of the Free Cities. It is located in a relatively central position on the northern part of the continent and is bisected by the major land trade routes to the eastern and southern states from the north-west.

Such a position historically proved to be both extremely lucrative for the old Skaldic Empire and tragic in equal measure. For all that in times of peace, Skald was able to levy tithes upon any commerce that travelled through its borders, during the Century Wars those same passageways became the roads which armies marched upon. Devastated by the conflict, it is a testament to the resolve of the Skaldic peoples and their sense of purpose that Skald has rebuilt with remarkable alacrity and once again risen to great prominence.

The Sovereign State of the Old Skaldic Empire was long regarded by its people as the seat of civilization on the continent and there remains the same long-standing attitude of superiority towards their peers. Cities within this state easily represent the heaviest civic sector funding on the continent. Skald boasts the most governmental buildings within the entirety of the Empire of the Free Cities and the largest bureaucratic body.

Skaldic people have their own style in all things; from fashion to eating habits, they are extremely resistant to outside influences from the other Sovereign States. The only element that appears to have been able to permeate this cultural ideal is religion. Skald is almost exclusively given to the worship of the Solthecian faith, robust churches standing proud in most villages and towns. In the cities, the walls and roads are lined with spectacular stonework and artistry of saints and blessed angels, spectacular cathedrals dominate the skyline.

Skald is a monarchy with a royal family which has held their seat since the first formation of the Old Empire. The King is the head of state, but Skald is ruled by a Parliament. The government conducts the affairs of state, from domestic affairs to foreign policy, as well as regulating taxes and controlling the centralised mint. Ultimately, the monarch is able to dissolve or form government as is his wish, although in reality, the royal family are puppets to the politicians and have very little free rein with which to conduct their own affairs.

The capital city of Skald is Aldebrecht, a huge, swarming city, filled with people of all persuasions and of varied descent. There are several districts throughout, the buildings of each grandiose and extravagantly decorated. Nowhere is this more evident than in the real centre of power of the city, the guild district. Following the rebuilding of the city after the wars, each strived to outdo their rivals in construction, the result being sweeping buildings of dynamic design and with a wildly prominent sense of grand affluence. It is a common sight to see hurried messengers and tradesmen bustling past awestruck visitors in the streets surrounding them.

VALENTIA

Valentia is located along the westernmost coast of the Empire of the Free Cities. It is warm with a pleasant climate, its towns and villages famous for their finely regarded vineyards, picturesque cobbled streets and romantic old world villas. Summers are long, the forests abundant with wildlife, the coasts lavish and calm.

There is a rich Valentian tradition of the Sovereign State being the home of arts and culture throughout the Empire of the Free Cities, from long before the Century Wars. A home to sculptors, artists, actors and musicians, Valentia is a noble ideal to those outside of its borders.

For those that live within the cities of Valentia, nothing could be further removed from the truth. Despite her reputation, the state was never an affluent one and with many of her cities and grand works destroyed during the Century Wars, she is unable to pay the cost of rebuilding. Those same artisans now sleep in doorways or ruined buildings at night. During the day they either beg for the scraps of a passerby or perform in the marketplaces for coppers of an uncaring crowd, all of whom have seen each tired performance one time too many.

Minor crime such as petty theft is rife. The poor rural areas outside of the cities are safer but lack civic investment, contributing to a much lower standard of life than is evident amongst their counterparts from other states. Some amount of private investment from wealthy individuals has enabled a select few of the towns to avoid the same fate and has contributed to creating a unique middle class amongst the Empire of the Free Cities; primarily consisting of guild officials with an eye to become landowners.

For the nobility of Valentia life remains as was, albeit with barely any semblance of any real power. Their grand estates are remote from the cities and the hard life of the peasantry, although the wiser amongst them secretly wonder how long before the lower class revolts at the terrible conditions that they are forced to endure. The gap between the rich and the poor in Valentia is extremely pronounced, with literally no chance of upwards mobility. Even the most humanitarian nobles are forced to look the other way when food riots and murders of government officials occur for risk of being dragged into events far beyond their ability to control. Each of the nobility know that as soon as the first of their guardsman is seen to intervene, it will set a dangerous precedent and establish a commitment none of them are willing to place upon their fragile comfort.

The unspoken consensus amongst the landed gentry is that they are likely the last generation of traditional Valentian nobility. That once they have passed on or their coffers run dry, the guilds will claim their lands and titles for themselves. Each day, they watch the end of old Valentia grow closer.

ETHRAYNNE

Ethraynne is a relatively new Sovereign State that began life as part of Valentia. Prior to the Century Wars, a short and bloody civil uprising in the region resulted in a declaration of independence and the creation of Ethraynne as a Sovereign State in its own right.

Although the State consists of some twenty individual isles, with ships regularly travelling between them, the three largest play home to the most highly populated concentrations of urban settlements and house all of the government buildings. Sharing the same climate, language and cultural history as Valentia, traditionally the islands have been regarded as a considerably poorer and less artistically accomplished orphan to their neighbours on the mainland.

This certainly would have been a fair assessment before the Century Wars. Luckily for Ethraynne their perceived lack of military importance and the Valentian navy's preoccupation with the Raed meant that by boon of natural geographic safety, they escaped the ravages of the Century Wars as an impartial observer.

In the years during and following the Century Wars, the Ethraynnian people were able to nurture a rapidly expanding infrastructure and series of public improvements. The towns and villages of Ethraynne are some of the

most beautiful and scenic amongst all of the Empire of the Free Cities, her citizens friendly and courteous. In the western regions of the Empire of the Free Cities, there has developed a significant shift of political and economic power towards Ethraynne, much to the dismay of the Valentian nobility.

Although initially opposed to unification, the Ethraynnian people have since grown to accept the adoption of a national identity with the mainland. This is undoubtedly due to the extremely lucrative trading that occurs between the guilds on the islands and their counterparts in other Sovereign States. The ports of Ethraynnian cities bustle with activity and industry, as the trade ships and fishing trawlers of several surrounding states arrive and depart at all hours of the day.

Ethraynne is known for her great inventions and scientific innovations, the founder houses of many of the contemporary guilds are located upon her shores. The Astronomer's Guild, the Alchemist's Guild and the Engineer's Guild all maintain large and influential guild houses in Ethraynne, with only the latter having its ruling house elsewhere. There is a new scientific movement which is beginning to gather momentum and importance in the Empire of the Free Cities, its roots firmly located in this Sovereign State.

RAEDLAND

In the times before the Century Wars, Raedland was a powerful state with several interests across what would now be further flung parts of the Empire of Free Cities, all administered by a centralised government on the Raed mainland. In those days, Raedland maintained a mighty fleet that ruled the surrounding oceans and provided her with much revenue. They taxed the great fishing trawlers of Eisnor and Erskirad, as well as being able to exert considerable militaristic pressure and assistance in establishing outposts and colonies.

During the war, Raedland had to sacrifice each of her assets one after another. Her navy was stretched beyond its ability to sustain supply lines and forced fight a war on multiple fronts. As continued news of successive defeats and the fall of once impregnable fortresses overseas mounted, it became apparent that the war effort was not going well. The remnants of a now devastated military would be needed in its entirety to protect the mainland from invasion.

During a time when both Valentian and Erskirii armies threatened to begin landing on the shores of Raedland, and with the Queen and her sycophantic supporters indecisive at the height of the crisis, the Raed military were

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KEY	
★	Capital City
●	City/Notable Town
/	Country Border
↙	Notable River
~~	Mountains



forced into a coup d'état to wrest power for themselves and the good of the nation. With power over the army and navy consolidated, the difficult decision to abandon the remaining colonial cities was made.

Life for the Raed became a hard existence; the citizenry that had not already been conscripted were forced to take up arms to support the depleted military in repelling the invading forces. After long months of bloody urban warfare in the streets of coastal towns and cities, and of bitter naval engagements, Raedland could call her shores her own again.

Raedland now continues to exist as a military state, unable to support herself without the army to feed the populace, keep the peace and provide a continued sense of stability. Despite the efforts of reformers within the State, the people of Raedland have long memories of the ills of the royal family and the nobility. They have welcomed the application of martial law to put down the protests of the royalists that the monarchy be reinstated.

Raedland is a rustic and scenic isle, filled with large, roaming deciduous forests and long tracts of open grassland. The cities of this Sovereign State are considerably smaller than those of her peers and her citizenry for the most part is widely spread throughout small villages that continue a feudal existence, the peasantry still primarily farmers.

To the north is Maldriven, a wild and mountainous region, with its own strong cultural and national heritage. Here, the people are fierce and proud, and the Guild Houses and the production centres of the Brewer's Guild dwarf their counterparts in the other cities of the Raed.

PIERVO

Piervo is the smallest Sovereign State of the Empire of the Free Cities, only consisting of one city and its surrounding areas of countryside, pastures and farmland. During the Century Wars, Piervo's army was unable to do anything beyond withdraw to the safety of the city walls and prepare the populace for siege warfare.

Any other Sovereign State would have been long since annexed by a marauding army and her citizens put to death, as was the end of several Sovereign States in the Far East. But for Piervo this would not be her fate, for she is the holy city of Solthecian Order, the most widespread religion throughout the Empire of the Free Cities.

The head of state of both Piervo and the Solthecian spiritual faith is known as the Bacchus and is elected by mandate of the god Solthecius; his divine will manifested by the archbishops and cardinals. The role is unlike any other clerical or royal position throughout the Empire of the Free Cities; the Bacchus is able to influence several Sovereign States where the faith has any sort of foothold and even more so where it is the predominant religion.

During the Century Wars, Bacchus Alexandria IV and his successor, Bacchus Galbratii, were able to successfully negotiate with any Sovereign State that turned her sights to Piervo. They spared its people from the horror of the conflict beyond the walls and saved the city and its ancient religious landmarks from ruin time and time again.

Although to believers this leader is the chosen of Solthecius, in reality, any election of a Bacchus is a process of shrewd manoeuvring, underlying threats, and careful alliance. Thus, the head of state is often possessed of a considered political mind. Many followers would likely be surprised to learn how deep corruption runs within Solthecian faith and how self interested its leaders tend to be.

The Holy City is home to spectacular architecture and beautiful gardens; high domed cathedrals compete against monasteries with spires that point into the skies like crooked fingers. Statues old and new line every boulevard and street. Every hour, bells ring out and the scent of incense is thick in the air. Wherever an individual might stand in Piervo, there is at very least a low hum of penitent followers deep in prayer and every day the city is flooded with pilgrims come to demonstrate their faith.

This is not to say that industry does not exist within the walls, far from it. The Butcher's Guild's ruling house is in Piervo and has existed as the sole purveyor of sacred meat to the Bacchus for generations; something which its many Magisters and Chamberlains are keen to remind both visiting officials and those of other guilds. The Mortician's Guild also holds significant influence amongst the clergy in Piervo; the two bodies frequently working hand in hand in the day to day lives of the population. In many senses, Piervo is a city much like any other.

EISNOR

Eisnor is the name given to a loose collection of townships occupying the furthest northern point of the Empire of the Free Cities. Unified more by their differences to the other Sovereign States than to each other, they share only a handful of common traditions and customs at most. There are few

cities this far to the north, the most populous being Luemmyr and Kjet. The populace lives sparsely at the edge of the known world, each a small community in which every member has a role to play to ensure survival of their village or clan. There are no ruling families or nobility in Eisnor, nor a royal family. Instead, there is a council of each settlement, which governs each region individually. Although in the smaller villages these almost always are elected by tradition and age, the elders hold no sway in the few cities and larger townships where corruption and bribery has meant that powerful guild officials vie against each other for the seats.

The people of Eisnor are a hardy and rugged seafaring race, their main industries being hunting and fishing. In these remote climes, the bounty is not the same tame wildlife of the other Sovereign States, but much more primal and savage creatures. Those same creatures provide considerable wealth for the Eisnoran people; their pelts, ivory and meat highly valued by foreign traders. Even greater financial reward can be garnered if the exotic creatures are able to be taken alive to be sold to collectors from far flung states. For Eisnorans, the practice of keeping such creatures is entirely alien, but one that they are happy to profit from. Such is the benefit of inclusion to the Empire of the Free Cities.

Of all the Sovereign States, organised religion is least influential in Eisnor; her people still worshipping the pantheon of pagan deities that they have paid tribute to since settling these lands. In each town, city or settlement are multitudes of simple and ancient shrines to the Gods of the Hunt, Lords of the Deep, and the Goddess of the Harvest, to name but the most popular. Because more widespread education and literacy has not spread at the same pace amongst the Eisnoran people, many of these holy traditions and the identities of the Gods that they worship are passed down from father to son. In more progressive quarters the rites of some have now all but been forgotten; civilizing influence has begun to creep into the cities and the old statues crumble in the wilderness, abandoned to the elements.

CASTELLYA

Castellya is a land ruled by dynastic families of nobles; lords descended from old knightly orders, appointed by a royal family that died without heirs and left no legitimate claimants to their throne. The old royal palaces have long stood empty, their histories only known to those scholars that would seek to study them. In Castellya, very little emphasis is put upon the social status of such a profession, along with other academic pursuits.

During the Century Wars the armies of Castellya were some of the most active and best equipped forces throughout the realm. Above all others, it was the Castellyan armies that could most legitimately claim martial victory; for all that her military ambitions were eventually greatly curtailed by dwindling strategic resources.

The nobility still encourage aggressive overtures towards their neighbouring states when they are not at arms against each other. Castellya maintains large garrisons of soldiery and standing state armies, as well as each noble house being able to field their own considerable retinue. Social progression via the military is a viable choice, indeed it is how many of the lesser nobles with smaller estates have achieved their position of standing within Castellyan society.

It is unusual for the nobility themselves to spend much time in their grand residences however, more likely they will be found at the court of the ruling dynasty. Grave insult is inferred by absence at such proceedings without suitable justification and is likely followed by expulsion from court for a period of time. Falling from favour so severely is likely to seriously damage a noble families' standing for years.

Guild houses within this region are equally as grandiose as the buildings of the nobility and whilst not as overtly powerful, they are quite capable of directing the internal and foreign policy of the governing dynasties as is required. The same impassioned and fiery Castellyan temperament that rules the nobles is also rife within the guilds and is frequently noted by emissaries from other Sovereign States to be the reason that the guild masters have never truly taken control of Castellya. For all that the government is limited by infighting and the ancestral grudges of the noble families, so the guilds fight amongst themselves in the same sense.

FIGO

Separated from Castellya by the old pilgrim trail towards the Holy City of Piervo, Figo shares much with her sister state. Beyond subtle regional variations, citizens of both states share the same language and customs, the same hot-headed temperament in their peoples and a common ancestry which can be traced back to far before the Century Wars.

Despite this, even in times of peace and prosperity the nations have been the nemesis of each other in all things. In spite of the armistice that exists within the Empire of Free Cities following the end of the Century Wars, Figo and Castellya continue to regularly engage in border skirmishes; usually at the behest of warring noble families that have grudges stretching back for generations.

Unlike landlocked Castellya, Figo has a long stretch of coastline leading out to the expansive southern ocean. The Figeon naval tradition is as strong as that of her armies and even in these times of peace, her proud galleons and frigates are a familiar reminder that Figeon ships rule the seas.

This continues into her cities, where the presence of the polytheistic ocean gods is felt as strongly as that of the Solthecian faith. Rather than in Castellya, where the spires of the many grand cathedrals of the Solthecian Order reach into the skies, in Figo the faith is instead represented by much more sober monasteries and humble churches. These exist alongside the shrines and temples of the many oceanic deities that are worshipped here by the Figeon sailors and merchantmen. It is even known for men from far off Eisnor to frequent these holy sites when they are docked in port.

Understandably, the Fisherman's Guild has considerable influence in the south of the State and has some ties with trade further inland, but this is by no means a monopoly. The Brewer's Guild have their own district in the capital Gacildra, a beautiful and mysterious city built over a series of canals and elegant waterways. The Butcher's Guild also take advantage of this bustling trade hub and stock their ships here for travel to the southern Sovereign States of the Empire of the Free Cities.

As the crow flies north from Gacildra and the cities begin to resemble those of Castellya, the other guild houses become apparent. Following an epidemic of Lung Rot, an illness which once destroyed nearly two thirds of the Figeon populace before it was cured, the Mortician's Guild gained a position of power that has continued to exist into the present day. The current ruling house of the Mortician's Guild is based in Fiscerano, a centrally placed city dominated by great graveyards, tombs and memorial sites to those unfortunates.

ERSKIRAD

Located in the frozen north-east, Erskirad is a harsh land of broken plains of tundra, ravines, and mountains. The people from this desolate region are a pragmatic and hard race who do not suffer fools gladly. Their ancestors were able to first establish their homes in a seemingly inhospitable climate in spite of the elements and that same determination has continued to influence the mindset of their descendants.

When travelling outside of the Sovereign State, Erskirii people are regarded as miserable individuals with no sense of humour and a vile temper. For their part, an Erskirii considers those of the southern Sovereign States decadent

and flippant, far too easy with their praise. It is rare that individuals other than guild officials have travelled outside of the boundaries of Erskirad since the end of the Century Wars and perhaps this is for the best.

Religion is very important in Erskirad and all of its citizens are extremely pious. The capital city, Yureslan, is the birthplace of the kathenotheist order of the Svantelit and is the only religious order that is allowed buildings or sacred sites throughout the state. Any found to be outspoken against the Svantelit, or to extol the virtues of alternative faiths are imprisoned and subject to the whim of the Svantelii inquisitorial order. Those who do not repent and convert are burned to death in one of the many public squares across the land. Perhaps unsurprisingly for such an uncompromising and intractable faith, the order of Svantelit is yet to spread further afield from Erskirad.

Erskirad is a place of extremes. It has long-standing institutions which dominate society; the military and its mighty history of expansion, the Royalty that wars bitterly at court and of course, the guilds. As with Valentia, the difference between the affluent ruling classes and poor citizenry is extremely pronounced. Whilst the politicking in higher society leads to uneasy alliance or disenfranchisement, the rich negotiate lucrative trade agreements and the poor lead simple and bleak lives.

Almost all of the population are centred in huge, sprawling cities. Each of these has carefully demarcated areas for the common and privileged, areas set aside for industry, residence, and commerce. For a citizen, there are only two methods to improve his or her life, which many are loathe to embrace. The first is advancement within the military, which can lead to a respectable standing, if limited by a glass ceiling of patronage and nepotism. The Erskirii Military does not offer an easy existence however, and many will spend long years away from their families at a cold and lonely outpost, left to fend for themselves.

The second is considerably both less reputable and more dangerous, and is to become a member of one of the many undercity gangs. In each of the colossal cities exists a vast hive network of sewers and slums, where self appointed gang leaders extract protection money, fight turf wars and trade in illegal goods. These gangs are always welcoming of fresh members as fighting between them occurs on an almost daily basis in some form or another. It is hope of each ganger that they might attract the attention of one of the guilds within the city, who may employ them as a henchman, pulling them up out of the grime, to a new life.

Early afternoon sun bathed the courtyard outside of the Butcher's Guild in Aldebrecht, where the group of hopeful apprentices had been running exercises under the watchful gaze of the Master Butcher all morning. The guild house was a large, expansive building festooned with intricately detailed banners and imposing statues; it resembled a fortification from the Century Wars more than anything else. Standing out even amongst the extravagant residences in the cosmopolitan Skaldic capital and the many other guild houses in the District, it was as if the Butcher's Guild had sought to dominate their surroundings with its construction, form over function.

However, even looming over the courtyard as it did, the building somehow provided only the barest hint of shade for the aspirants below. For several hours now their stamina had run dry, drained out by rigorous activity. Some twenty or so in number, they had begun the day with nearly double that. Each of the apprentices had felt an unusual combination of pity and elation as the first boy broke down and collapsed early on. He had been a cheerful and popular member of their group, well liked. But as a guild official dragged him out of the yard and into the street beyond, all of them recalculated their improved odds of success. And so did they lose compassion for their fellows, giving way to an increased determination as the day passed. A vicious cycle, designed to harden them mentally.

Some of them were new to this. Others, like Boiler, had already been at the guild for some months now, the relentless drills and exercises had become slightly more tolerable as their muscles had tightened and become stronger, their minds focused, hungry, ruthless. For the new arrivals it was like being a piece of meat being thrown to the hounds. Adapt and survive, or be heartlessly discarded. Ox did not permit second chances.

'Again!' The order was gruff, hard, echoing off of the stone walls that surrounded them. None of the boys, men or women dared to voice dissent or doubts, wearily dropping back into position.

Ox strolled between the lines of apprentices facing off against each other, watching them all as they sparred. He raised an eyebrow here and there, nodded to one or two of them, but shook his head at most of the others. As the sound of the last metallic clink from the final duel had finished echoing in Boiler's ears, the Master Butcher called a stop once again. Standing with his back to a huge red and black banner thrown over one wall, he looked at the group with barely concealed loathing, nearly all of them gasping for breath and wilting under his gaze.

One rook not much older than Boiler was sitting in the dirt of the courtyard, utterly exhausted. His legs were straight out in front of him, his arms rigid behind his back, holding him up. His head rolled back, drawing in deep breaths, each desperate gulp of air as if he were a drowning man suddenly given life again. Boiler couldn't remember the boy's name, his own mind blank from exertion.

One of the girls tugged at the boy's sleeve urgently, trying to rouse him to his feet. With a shaky hand and a breathless, weak voice, the boy stuttered something about needing to stop for a moment, and that he could continue. Still she was insistent, her own voice shrill and pleading as she cast nervous eyes around her. Boiler knew this to be a mistake for both of them. Some rows back, they hadn't been noticed. Yet, Boiler had doubts it would stay that way.

Early on in his apprenticeship, he had been taken to one side by an older boy that had taken pity on him and taught the trick to keeping the Master Butcher from noticing of you. Even when you were so tired that you wanted to double over with your hands on your knees and puke, you fought to stand straight and put your hands on your waist instead. Initially, Boiler had struggled, especially with trying to keep a nonchalant face as he pushed the bile back down. But it had worked. Not once had Ox or one of the other instructors laid into him like the others. The boy had made the team a short while after and Boiler intended to follow his example.

'Shit. Pathetic.' The Master Butcher spoke, angry eyes staring down the assorted apprentices before him as he resumed walking around the yard. Most couldn't meet his gaze. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity to Boiler, Ox saw the rook sprawled out behind the rest of them. Snarling, he strode purposefully over to him.

'You - new here are you?' He spat the question out violently. Boiler realised with a growing fear in his gut that the boy didn't even realise that Ox was talking to him. The girl that had been trying to pull him back to his feet was long gone, had left him to his fate. Boiler saw her standing motionless a few feet away, chin up and purposefully not looking at the boy any more. Good for her, although Boiler fancied he might have seen a tear at the corner of her eye. She was cute in a tousled way, hair short, spiky and golden. He hoped that she might be around for a bit longer at least.

'Answer me!' Ox's statement came with a hard kick, and spittle that showered down onto the figure before him. The apprentice cried out in pain and tried to hide, with his arms over his head. Boiler winced at the impact, the same way he did every time he saw this happen. He chanced another look over at the girl. She was definitely crying now, head still held immobile. Boiler mentally made a point to try and console her afterwards, assuming that either of them would still be here by the time the evening forced a break.

'Don't bother making any friends, you won't be staying here long.' Not waiting for an answer, Ox gave the rook another kick, even harder this time than the last, and stalked off angrily, shaking his head. Behind him, it was as if the life had fled the boy's body all at once. He collapsed completely, not trying to fight anything anymore, able to give in at last.

'Any of the rest of you that can't take this should join him. I work my boys hard. Sweat more now...' lips contorted into a familiar sneer, the Master Butcher somehow managing to leave each one of them with the impression that he was talking to them personally. '...and bleed less on the pitch. Or end up like that piece of shit.' He pointed at the unfortunate rookie he had just dismissed, crawling towards the edge of the training ground in shame. 'I don't care either way.'

Avarisse kicked a heavy foot into the door, in the same place as the last three kicks had been. The first time it had shook violently, the dull thud lost even in the quiet alleyway, but that had been all. The second and third time, the door had groaned under the assault, each successive kick shaking it more than the previous time. Finally with the fourth kick, the door unexpectedly gave in, shattering splinters of old discoloured wood all over Avarisse, the alley floor and the passageway beyond.

One piece had managed to land embedded in Greede's left shoe. Grimacing at the damage done to the fine leather, he reached down and plucked it out, before tossing it aside. He strolled past Avarisse, the larger man comically hopping up and down on one foot and flailing his arms wildly, trying to keep his balance with one steel toed boot stuck in the door. Greede ignored Avarisse's plight, examining the door and its frame, running one finger thoughtfully along the broken lock.

'They simply do not construct doors this way anymore Mssr Avarisse. That we have been forced to reduce the number of such fine examples left to the world by one truly must be considered a disaster.' As ever, his cultured accent and expansive vocabulary was in stark contrast to his appearance, which any person that had encountered him could only have called troglodyte at their most generous.

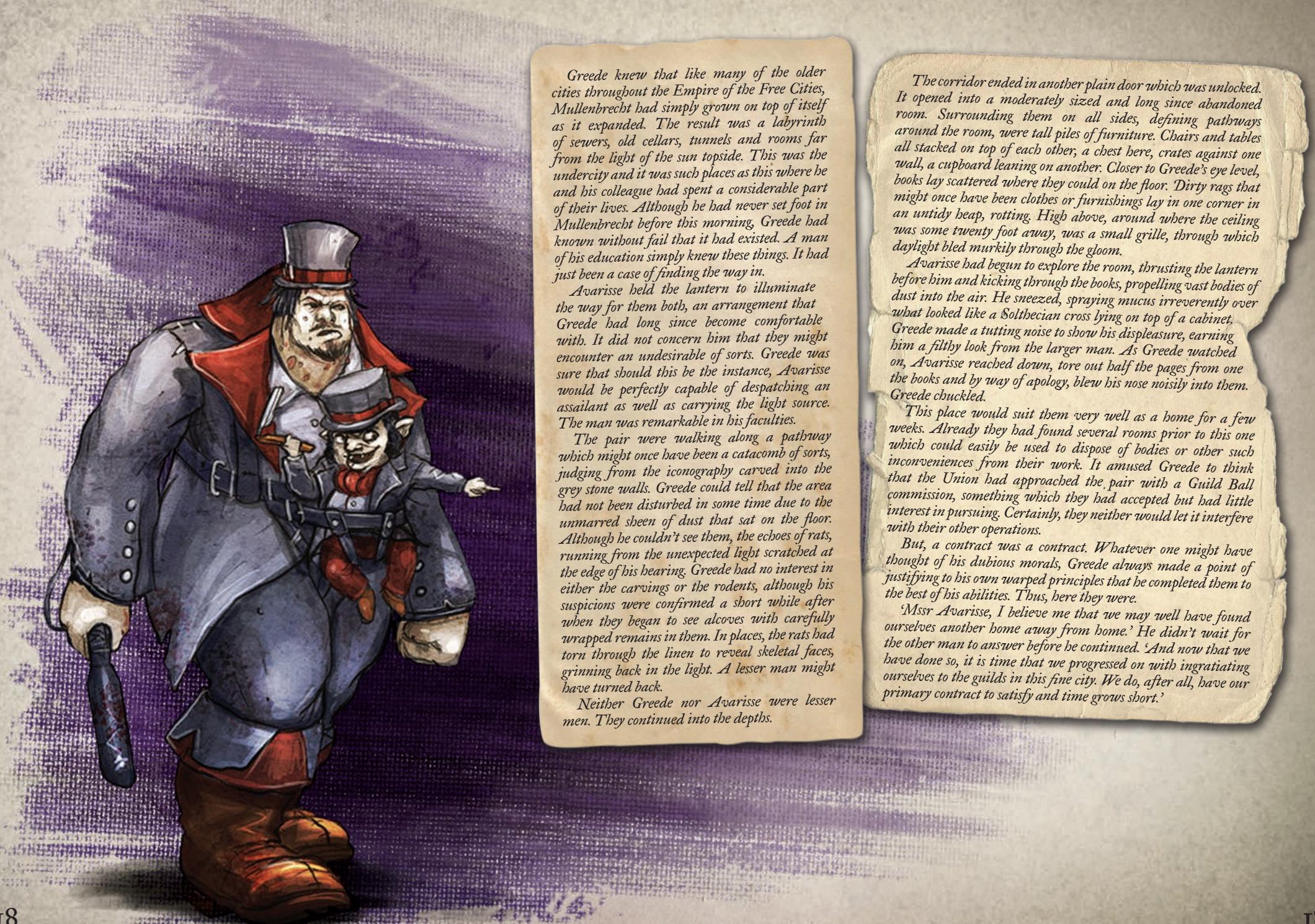
He looked beyond the door, where the sunlight struck a flagstone floor that had not seen daylight for many years. A thick layer of dust, now disturbed, floated in the air. It was as if they had opened a square of darkness in the side of the universe and the world now rushed to reclaim it.

Greede looked up at his accomplice, still trapped.

'Oh, do come now Mssr Avarisse. There will be time enough another day to play silly games.' Greede walked through the doorway, taking a handkerchief and pressing it to his nose and mouth to keep out the dust as he did.

Grunting, Avarisse bent his knee and hopped closer to the door, almost losing the battle for balance completely as he did so, until he was able to push both hands against the door frame. Leaning into his arms for support, he wrenched the trapped foot clear in another shower of tiny shards of wood. Before he followed Greede, he took a moment to compose himself in the alley, straightening his hat across his brow, and smoothing down the creases in his trouser leg, thick fingers brushing splinters to the floor. Satisfied, he stepped out of the light, ducking his head slightly to fit.

'Bastard thing.' He did not share Greede's generous appraisal of the door.



Greede knew that like many of the older cities throughout the Empire of the Free Cities, Mullenbrecht had simply grown on top of itself as it expanded. The result was a labyrinth of sewers, old cellars, tunnels and rooms far from the light of the sun topside. This was the undercity and it was such places as this where he and his colleague had spent a considerable part of their lives. Although he had never set foot in Mullenbrecht before this morning, Greede had known without fail that it had existed. A man of his education simply knew these things. It had just been a case of finding the way in.

Avarisse held the lantern to illuminate the way for them both, an arrangement that Greede had long since become comfortable with. It did not concern him that they might encounter an undesirable of sorts. Greede was sure that should this be the instance, Avarisse would be perfectly capable of despatching an assailant as well as carrying the light source. The man was remarkable in his faculties.

The pair were walking along a pathway which might once have been a catacomb of sorts, judging from the iconography carved into the grey stone walls. Greede could tell that the area had not been disturbed in some time due to the unmarred sheen of dust that sat on the floor. Although he couldn't see them, the echoes of rats, running from the unexpected light scratched at the edge of his hearing. Greede had no interest in either the carvings or the rodents, although his suspicions were confirmed a short while after when they began to see alcoves with carefully wrapped remains in them. In places, the rats had torn through the linen to reveal skeletal faces, grinning back in the light. A lesser man might have turned back.

Neither Greede nor Avarisse were lesser men. They continued into the depths.

The corridor ended in another plain door which was unlocked. It opened into a moderately sized and long since abandoned room. Surrounding them on all sides, defining pathways around the room, were tall piles of furniture. Chairs and tables all stacked on top of each other, a chest here, crates against one wall, a cupboard leaning on another. Closer to Greede's eye level, books lay scattered where they could on the floor. Dirty rags that might once have been clothes or furnishings lay in one corner in an untidy heap, rotting. High above, around where the ceiling was some twenty foot away, was a small grille, through which daylight bled murkily through the gloom.

Avarisse had begun to explore the room, thrusting the lantern before him and kicking through the books, propelling vast bodies of dust into the air. He sneezed, spraying mucus irreverently over what looked like a Solthecian cross lying on top of a cabinet. Greede made a tutting noise to show his displeasure, earning him a filthy look from the larger man. As Greede watched on, Avarisse reached down, tore out half the pages from one of the books and by way of apology, blew his nose noisily into them. Greede chuckled.

This place would suit them very well as a home for a few weeks. Already they had found several rooms prior to this one which could easily be used to dispose of bodies or other such inconveniences from their work. It amused Greede to think that the Union had approached the pair with a Guild Ball commission, something which they had accepted but had little interest in pursuing. Certainly, they neither would let it interfere with their other operations.

But, a contract was a contract. Whatever one might have thought of his dubious morals, Greede always made a point of justifying to his own warped principles that he completed them to the best of his abilities. Thus, here they were.

'Mssr Avarisse, I believe me that we may well have found ourselves another home away from home.' He didn't wait for the other man to answer before he continued. 'And now that we have done so, it is time that we progressed on with ingratiating ourselves to the guilds in this fine city. We do, after all, have our primary contract to satisfy and time grows short.'

MODELS

All models in Guild Ball have a profile card. An example of a model profile card is shown below; along with an explanation of the skills and attributes that appear on it.

MOVEMENT [MOV]

Shown as two numbers, e.g. [6"/8"] MOV

The first number is the **base-move**; the second number is **max-move**.

TACTICAL ABILITY [TAC]

Shown as a single number e.g. [4] TAC

This is the number of dice this model generates and adds to the dice-pool when performing an Attack action.

BALL SKILLS AND KICKING ABILITY [KICK]

Shown as two numbers e.g. [3/8"] KICK

The first number is the **base-kick** attribute and is the number of dice this model generates and adds to the dice-pool when performing a Kick action, or determining possession of the ball.

The second number is the **kick-distance** that this model may kick the ball.

DEFENSIVE ABILITY [DEF]

Shown as a single number e.g. [4+] DEF

This is the Target Number that an attacking model rolls against when targeting this model.

ARMOUR VALUE [ARM]

Shown as a single number e.g. [1] ARM

This is the number of Hits deducted from a successful Attack action made against this model.

INFLUENCE [INF]

Shown as two numbers e.g. [2 / 4] INF

The first number is **base-INF** and is the amount of Influence this model generates each turn during the Maintenance Phase.

The second number is the **max-INF** attribute and is the maximum amount of Influence this model may be allocated during the Maintenance Phase.

Influence is spent by an active-model to perform movement and actions.

CHARACTER TRAITS

Models have a number of special abilities they may use during the game; collectively called **Character Traits**. Traits generally do not cost anything to use; they are usually always active if the requirements are satisfied.

HEALTH POINTS [HP]

Shown on the model's card as a number of cells representing the total and current health of a model. Damage is referred to in the rules as a number e.g. [2] DMG. Remaining health is read from left to right. Mark damage from right to left. Once a model's health reaches [0] HP, the model suffers the taken-out condition.

The health bar may also show a number of Recovery Levels, marked with an Icy Sponge icon.

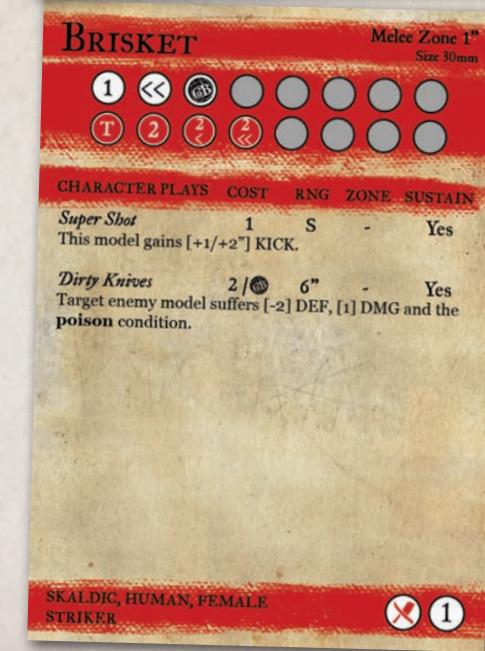
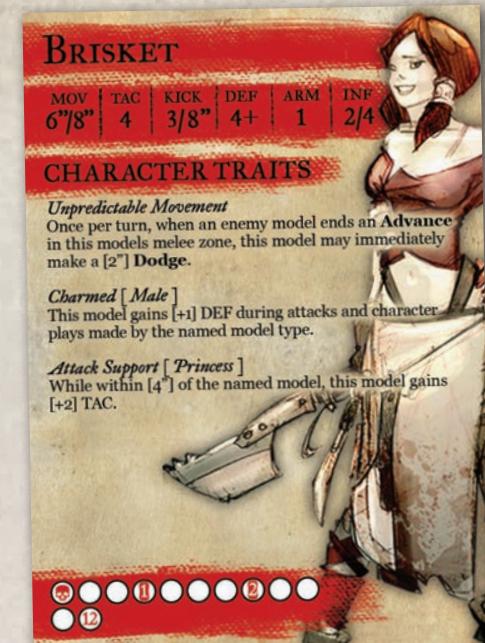
PLAYS

Models have a number of special skills they may use during the game; collectively called **Plays**.

There are three types of Play a model may have access to; Character Plays, Heroic Plays and Legendary Plays.

BASE SIZE

There are three base sizes; small (30mm), medium (40mm) and large (50mm).



SETTING UP

How to Win...

In a typical game of Guild Ball, the first player to reach 12 Victory Points (VP) immediately wins the game. A game takes around 2 hours to play on average; you may, of course, adjust the target VP win condition to play a longer or shorter game if you wish.

Goals! – A team gains [4] VP when they score a goal.

Bodycount! – A team gains [2] VP each time an enemy model suffers the taken-out condition.

GAME SIZE

A typical game of Guild Ball takes around 90-120 minutes to play. It is entirely possible to adjust the parameters to create a shorter game as follows:

Game Size	Duration	Pitch Size	Team Size	VP Total
Introductory Game (refer to the GB Quick Start rules)	30 mins	2'x2'	[1] Captain [2] Team	[6] VP
Quick Game	60 mins	3'x3'	[1] Captain [4] Team [1] Mascot	[8] VP
Typical Game	90-120 mins	3'x3'	[1] Captain [4] Team [1] Mascot	[12] VP

PRE-MATCH

Guild Ball is a game played between two teams of equal size. Players agree to a game size before picking a Guild to represent. They then select models from an extensive roster to make up their team for the match.

PICKING A TEAM

In a typical game of Guild Ball there are five Guild models per team plus a single mascot. The most important member of a team is the Captain who determines the Guild for which the team plays. A team may only have one model with the [Captain] type. All other models selected must be able to play for the same Guild as the Captain model. Each model is a uniquely named character and can only be taken once per team.

To pick a team:

1. Pick a model with the [Captain] type.
2. Pick a model with the [Mascot] type that may play for the same Guild as the [Captain] model. Skip this step if playing an Introductory Game.
3. Fill out the team roster with models that may play for the same Guild as the [Captain] model.

SETTING UP

In a typical Guild Ball match, players play across a 3'x3' playing surface, hereafter referred to as the Pitch.

There may be any number of pieces of terrain; both players are to agree on the position and type before starting the game. For the first few games we would recommend that you don't use any terrain in order to get used to the basic rules. Don't worry, the game plays wonderfully on a flat pitch too!

Prior to setting up teams, each player is dealt five Guild Plots from a shared deck. These cards may be kept secret. After review, each player must discard two cards, leaving them with three Guild Plots in hand. Discarded plot cards remain secret and are therefore not revealed.

Players each make a starting-roll of 1D6. The player with the highest net result chooses which player will be the **kicking player**. Re-roll any tied results. The other player is the **receiving player**.

The kicking player decides which table edge they will use for deployment and places their goal-token.

Goals are represented by a goal-token. Goal-tokens are always placed in the centre of the deployment zone, with the front edge on the goal-line.

The kicking player deploys their entire team completely within 10" of their chosen table edge and declares one model as the **kicker**. The kicker is given possession of the ball.

The receiving player uses the opposite table edge and places their goal-token in the same way and deploys their entire team.



KICK-OFF

After both players have deployed their teams, the kicking player activates the kicker. The kicker may move up to their base-move followed by a **kick-off** action.

The kick-off action does not require Influence but otherwise uses the normal rules for kicking the ball.

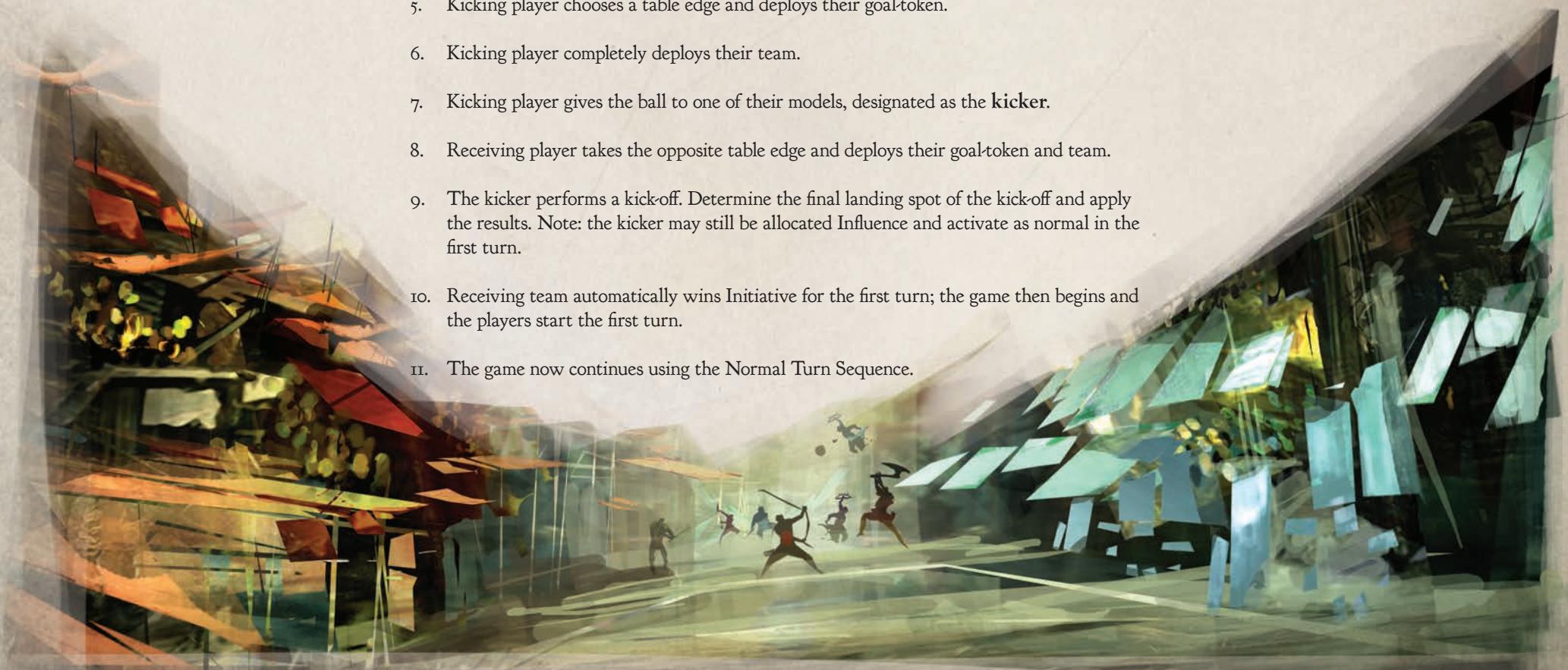
After resolving the kick-off, if the ball-token went out of play, or finished within the kicking player's half of the pitch, then the receiving player may give possession of the ball-token to any model of his choosing on his team.

After the kick-off has been resolved, the receiving player automatically wins the initiative roll for the first turn.

PRE-GAME SEQUENCE

The specific sequence for a new game is:

1. Define and agree terrain.
2. Deal five Guild Plot cards to each player, face down.
3. Each player discards two Guild Plot cards face down and retains three cards which are kept secret but may be revealed if desired.
4. Each player makes a starting-roll [1D6]. The player with the highest roll may choose to kick or receive.
5. Kicking player chooses a table edge and deploys their goal-token.
6. Kicking player completely deploys their team.
7. Kicking player gives the ball to one of their models, designated as the **kicker**.
8. Receiving player takes the opposite table edge and deploys their goal-token and team.
9. The kicker performs a kick-off. Determine the final landing spot of the kick-off and apply the results. Note: the kicker may still be allocated Influence and activate as normal in the first turn.
10. Receiving team automatically wins Initiative for the first turn; the game then begins and the players start the first turn.
11. The game now continues using the Normal Turn Sequence.



Magister Lundt of the Butcher's Guild looked disdainfully out of the carriage window as it was slowly pulled along the road. Out at the edge of the city the poverty was jarringly evident. Half rotten timbers shot with woodworm supported ugly one and two story buildings, packed closely together in irregular fashion; starkly different to the carefully spaced inner city residences that he was used to. Clearly it had been the their constructors' aim not to waste any available land that could be turned into dwellings for the spread of the low born, barely human residents. Dirty alleys ran between each of the buildings, the filthy walls receding into darkness, thickset thugs leaning against them and staring aggressively at every passer-by. It amused Lundt to think that the whole shanty town would probably go up in seconds with the slightest spark.

Overhead the houses bulged outwards, each one looking more structurally unsound than the last. There was no pleasing aesthetic here; no thought or care in what could be laughingly termed as their craftsmanship. Mankind in this district had no shame, no respect. As if to prove his point, a window slid open on one of the buildings and a filthy woman leant out with a bucket of waste, emptying it over the street below. Pedestrians leapt out of the way of the disgusting shower of excrement, but none looked up, likely used to this horrid spectacle. Lundt could smell the stench inside the carriage. Shaking his head, he leant back inside and quickly pinched a clump of snuff betwixt thumb and forefinger; held it to his nostrils and inhaled deeply.

After a time the carriage thankfully left the buildings behind, fading from the view of the rear window. The remaining vestiges of the smell at last abated. The road became narrower and the cobblestones of the city gave way to a ground stone track; then dissipated altogether into a muddy path. Bare trees lined the road underneath the afternoon's grey skies and between them Lundt could see the outlines of tombstones in the graveyards. The land where the Mortician's Guild had made its home was desolate and miserable in comparison to the vibrant Guild District that the Butcher spent most of his time in.

The man was modestly dressed with little regard for current fashions. In every respect he looked smart, his clothing functional. Smoking from an ornate pipe with a gold coloured mouthpiece, he lounged back in the Lord Chamberlain's chair; his boots propped arrogantly on the offices expensive antique desk. Thick smoke clouded the room, betraying that the man had been here for some time. As always, Lord Chamberlain Vincent de Laurentis wondered how his strange guest managed to enter the Fisherman's Guild and his office unseen by everyone; and how he knew when Laurentis would be out on business and when he would return. This was not common knowledge to any but a few trusted servants and his junior staff. For the Lord Chamberlain, a person whom prided himself on knowing everyone and their business, it was entirely too infuriating to not know not even a name for this man, let alone anything else, whilst at the same time being so apparently predictable himself.

'Assume that you find my office and chair to your satisfaction?' Laurentis asked bitterly.

'Quite.' The man smiled revealing yellow, tar stained teeth. His left foot shifted a fraction and ruffled some papers that had been conscientiously stacked on Laurentis' desk. The Lord Chamberlain bristled.

'And to what or to whom do I owe the dubious pleasure of your company this time?'

'Unsurprisingly enough, something extraneous to your own activities, outside of your considerable sphere of influence. But then you never invite me here at the best of times.' The man opened his arms wide as he elaborated on the subject; as if to emphasise the point. He ended the movement with folded hands behind his head, resting even more insolently, if such a thing was possible. Laurentis rolled his eyes at the pointless pantomime of the act.

'Now that the Butcher's Guild have removed Corsair from the active Fisherman's Guild Roster, my colleagues and I do not wish to see him return. Ensure that he is replaced, effective immediately.'

Laurentis offered the smiling man a hard, cold stare. Corsair represented a significant guild commodity in terms of the amount of training and upkeep that had been afforded him over his career. Whilst Corsair was by no means indispensable, the gall of the stranger in asking so casually for the Fisherman's Guild to throw away their team captain offered one of the most discourteous and ridiculous insults he could imagine. Inwardly, he was simultaneously seething and guessing at this hated man's intentions.

'Are you quite aware of what you are asking?' Laurentis finally managed.

'Of course. Obviously we appreciate that our request has certain implications.' Serious now, the man removed his feet from the desk, unfolded his hands from behind his head and leant forward. 'But nonetheless, for a capable individual such as yourself, not impossible. We are happy to leave the exact method of achieving this to you Laurentis. Your faculties are more than sufficient for the task.'

'Flattering and generous. And if I refuse?'

'You should try not to entertain such ideas. For all that your guild is currently part of an appreciable political alliance offering you significant degrees of both power and protection from the state, it is not insurmountable. We are not the state and we are not limited by its laws. You would do well to remember this.' The man had ceased smiling, all hint of any mischief earlier gone – but then, his eyes never had been throughout their conversation. They remained fixed on the Lord Chamberlain as he rose from the chair.

'Are we understood?'

Laurentis kept an even return stare, not wanting to back down, to resist this tyranny. His mind raced through possibilities. He could call the guards now and have this man taken into custody. He would show him how having little power or protection felt in the guild's dungeon. Yes, he could think of more than a few methods of extracting information from him before leaving the man a broken husk in the darkness. But then he was also unlikely to be working alone, as he had alluded to on several occasions. Laurentis might simply be removing a one of many, potentially incurring the wrath of another more powerful entity in the process. He could refuse to throw away the asset as he had been asked and both he and the Fisherman's Guild would incur that same ire. He had little doubt that the man's threats were sincere.

His only consolation was that he didn't believe that the Fisherman's Guild were alone in this. Although none of the other guilds would admit weakness in their dealings and little avenue for meaningful discourse existed between them; Laurentis was of the firm conviction that the man paid visits to each of them, exploiting them all in the same fashion. It made no sense to exploit any one alone, when you could easily do the same to all.

Far better then to play the long game. Laurentis was a politician and understood all too well how to build a long term strategy. At the present, he simply did not have enough information on the individual before him nor his mysterious organisation to act. More than anything, he wanted to know the man's agenda. He could only make wild speculation at present and Laurentis did not entertain such concepts. Anything that hurt his rivals could easily be turned into something that benefited him; even considering the web of half truths and lies that the man spun.

The silence stretched out between the two. The ticking of an old timepiece in the darkness at the rear of the office was the only sound. Finally, Laurentis spoke, a terse, stubborn answer, purposefully short.

'Yes.'

'Wait here, I will fetch the master.' The tired face bobbed once in reverent submission and then the old man scuttled off into the darkness of the guild's open doorway. Lundt shivered. The cold late winter air cut through his thick coat and the layers beneath. He stepped closer to the gothic building to get out of the wind and huddled his arms further around his body.

The houses of the Mortician's Guild were unlike any other. Tall, imposing stone arches covered in leering gargoyles and cryptic script rose up around the entrances to the building. Murky stained glass windows lined the walls; their colours muted with age and giving the appearance that they would barely let any light in at all. In the courtyard, several statues depicted devils and angels locked in mortal embrace. Others represented divine gods watching the conflict; eternally judging the combatants. Lundt did not feel comfortable here. The statues all seemed to be staring at him no matter where he stood, the interloper in their midst, promising damnation to that which did not belong. Scolding himself for thinking something so irrational, Lundt forced his gaze to the area around the building, away from the statues' condemnation.

He could see in the dying afternoon light that surrounding the guild were hundreds of gravestones in neat, organised rows; their order cold, precise, efficient. Larger mausoleums were dotted about, their shadows long and deep on the ground. Lundt's mind, already nervous, spent a moment too long wondering how many crypts surrounded him. He shuddered, this time not from the cold. The uneasy nervousness he had tried to cast aside returned.

'Magister Lundt.' The low, deep voice dragged him from his reverie. Lundt knew the voice belonged to Magister Abendroth, one of the higher ranking Morticians within this house. He turned in towards the building again and customarily held out a hand to the man. He intended to keep this as artificially cordial as was possible, hoping that the visit would be a brief one.

Abendroth looked at the Butcher's hand, making no effort to offer his own, before his gaze returned to Lundt. Apparently Lundt had misjudged the moment. Inwardly cursing the smile he could have sworn he saw at the edges of Abendroth's mouth, he withdrew the offered appendage. He should have known better than to expect one of the damned Spooks to be anything other than a lifeless, humourless ghoul. He fought to keep his shivering form steady lest he show another sign of weakness to the man and forged on, eager to escape to the relative comfort and familiar surroundings of his carriage.

'Very well. The Butcher's Guild have paid our debt to you as requested. The Fisherman's Guild team captain has been removed ahead of your own game with them. We trust that you now accept that the bond is spent.' It was not a question. Here, Lundt found his confidence after his initial misstep. He was a negotiator, a man of words, comfortable within the confines of language and the careful sculpting of it to his own ends.

'We are agreed. The Butcher's Guild has repaid its covenant with us.' The frankness of the reply surprised Lundt. He had expected some negotiation here, a power struggle to retain some bondage over the Butcher's Guild. He had been prepared for that, not to have the bond so carefully dismissed. Unsure of the moment, his next words faltered, caught in his throat, unnecessary.

'You may leave, Magister Lundt. I have tasks remaining of me, and little time to waste with you.'

Lundt saw it now. The bastard had calculated the whole exercise as its own exertion of power. Demanding that that a representative attend the Mortician's Guild to confirm the obvious, leaving Lundt waiting outside and then not lowering himself to debate but simply of dismissing the debt and the representative. It actually had turned the completion of the bond into a sign of submission from the Butcher's Guild and not the restoration of their strength. Lundt would remember this, not appreciating being used this way at all. With nothing else to be said he turned on his heel and strode off, keeping his head held as high as possible. Screw the Spook and his piss-poor guild in the middle of nowhere.

Abendroth watched the Butcher leave. He detested the younger Magister, like all of his kind now. So openly brazen in their dealings, supremely confident in their own abilities, honed by exploiting each other like children. No understanding of the subtlety of discourse, of how to properly reach accord. A more worthy man would have demanded that the Mortician had met him on neutral ground, would have insisted that the gatekeeper permit him entrance. Abendroth could remember the Butcher's predecessor. Yes, he had much more respect for the old ways than these young ones. The Morticians always remembered. Theirs was a guild of tradition. The young men and women like Lundt, puffed up with false bravado, were a stain on a rich history of negotiation. Perhaps Lundt would mature with age or gain some insight over time; although Abendroth seriously doubted it. The stench of failure would haunt his future dealings whether he realised it or not. It was of no concern to Abendroth in any instance.

'We too have reached accord, Longshanks.' He spoke to the figure hiding in the darkness against the wall, watching the entire proceeding unfold. Lundt might not have noticed but Abendroth let very little escape his perception.

'For now,' the man paused to retrieve an ornate pipe from his coat pocket. 'Although my colleagues and I already have in mind a greater task for your Guild.' He lit the pipe, puffing into the silver mouthpiece, briefly illuminating his face with an orange glow.

'You ask too much. Already my mistress chafes at discarding the claim we held over the Butcher's Guild for your advance and not our own.' This much was true. The Guild Master of the Mortician's had raged for days after Longshanks had demanded such a cherished covenant be wasted on injuring what seemed an inconsequential player from the Fisherman's Guild. 'Tread carefully now, lest we tire too much of your incessant annoyances.' The threat hung in the air.

'You misunderstand. This time the Mortician's Guild stands to profit from my intervention. Although, of course, I can easily withdraw my offer and instead make it to one of your rivals. Perhaps they will find the venture more to their liking.' The man paused, watching for any sign of reaction from Abendroth. After a moment, Abendroth offered him a barely perceptible nod. Longshanks continued. 'Then let us discuss this further within the confines of one of your crypts, away from the ears of others.'

Laurentis stood in front of his desk and appraised the large man in front of him. He knew much about the one that had been named Shark, although he had never spoken to him. He did not often have any contact with the Guild Ball players, preferring to leave that in the hands of menial staff who would then report to him. Far better not to muddy any waters with the commodity by allowing them to think that he offered them any patronage at all.

Despite this, Shark was one of the most imposing men that Laurentis had ever met, an unusual quality in a Fisherman's Guild player. Whilst not as physically large or brutish as many of the other Guild Ball players, instead he had a gritty solidity to him. All hard, lean working muscle from long years of labour in his younger days, every action seemed measured, with total economy of movement. Any moment, Shark looked like he could burst into violent action if required. Until then, he stalked. Yes, Laurentis thought, the name Shark suits this predator very well.

'Shark, I am making you permanent team captain of the Fisherman's Guild.'

Silence. Laurentis knew that as a native of Luemmyr, a Sovereign State in the northernmost part of the Empire of the Free Cities, the man did not speak Skaldic as his first language. Perhaps Shark simply did not understand Laurentis' words. For a moment, he entertained the idea that reports on Shark had missed something and that he would need to rethink the candidate to take over the captaincy.

'What of Corsair?' Even though familiar, when spoken with Sharks careful deliberation and thick accent the words sounded alien.

'Corsair will not be returning,' Laurentis hesitated, unsure of how to best phrase the next part to Shark to ensure total understanding. He decided on a direct approach. 'Corsair is no longer a concern of you, or this guild.' The words were very final and Laurentis suspected that he had not quite kept the frustration at the situation from his tone. Shark nodded.

'Will you need me for anything else Lord Chamberlain?' Shark's voice betrayed none of any emotion he might be feeling at his sudden promotion.

Laurentis came to the conclusion that he had chosen well after all. The man might lack charisma, but he certainly possessed an appreciable pragmatism and obedience that was extremely suitable to the role at hand. Corsair, an obstinate and stubborn pirate by nature, had threatened insubordinate behaviour on more than one occasion. It had been his natural talent and ability which had kept his place on the team rather than any sentimentality on the guilds behalf. In actuality, the removal of Corsair's captaincy would potentially make the rest of the team increasingly compliant.

Laurentis knew that he had come to accept this bitter hope in the way that a man with few options is forced to and was deliberately searching for an upside to the situation.. The lie was vaguely reassuring at least.

'No Shark, you may leave now.' Laurentis dismissed him with a casual wave of his hand.

The player left with little ceremony, slipping out of the room quietly; the only sounds were his boots on the lavish carpet and the creak of the door that open and shut a few seconds later.

'An excellent decision,' the man had said when Laurentis had offered him the name Shark.

'I do not have much choice from the existing squad.'

'Perhaps. However, you should be content that our agents would have recommended him if you had chosen otherwise.' The notion gave Laurentis little peace of mind.

'One day, you will lose the ability to exploit us as you do. It is only our inherent distrust of each other that maintains your control.'

'Yes, it is. But I personally have so little belief that such an accord would ever be possible between you now. Ever since the Empire of the Free Cities was founded, your kind have escalated your feuds and silly politicking like never before. Even prior to the Century Wars you were unable to ever exist without conflict. Now that you have your own contained and carefully orchestrated gang wars, what do you honestly think could ever bring you back together again?' The man had paused to offer Laurentis chance to disagree. When none came he continued. 'The simple answer is that there is nothing. Now that your petty rivalry has become institutionalised on a national scale and your objectified thugs perform for the baying crowds each week it has become impossible to contain; or for any of you to even contrive to do so.'

'My colleagues and I are merely here to maintain balance. To curb your excesses and to act in the best interests of the Empire and her peoples. That is all.'

'You lie.' Laurentis had been entirely unconvinced. 'I do not know what your motives might be, but they are far from altruistic. You have your own secretive agenda. I do not now know what it is, but I will. And I promise you, I will crush you for this. You and your so called colleagues.'

The man chortled. 'Grand claims indeed. Who are you to think that I have not heard such threats before? Still, I wish you the best of luck. It will get you nothing more than my name, which I shall offer to you freely.'

Laurentis bit his tongue. He would not let this man lower him to begging for scraps.

'Very well. If you will not ask, this once I will allow you to maintain your foolish pride. Do not misunderstand my kindness for weakness.' The voice had sounded sinister. The man had reached the door now and at the threshold broke stride for a moment.

'You may call me Longbanks.' And then he was gone.





PLAYING THE GAME

GAME TERMINOLOGY

Guild Ball uses a number of key phrases and terminology to define aspects of the game.

DEFINITIONS

A model is **within** a given distance when any part of its base is within that given distance, including touching.

A model is **completely within** a given distance when its entire base is within that given distance, including touching.

Towards means a model can only move in such a way that the distance between the model and the target is *always* decreasing.

Directly towards means a model must move along the line between the centre points of the model and the target.

Away means a model can move in any direction but only in such a way that the distance between the point of origin and the model is *always* increasing.

Directly away means a model must move along a continuation of the line between the centre points of the origin and the model.

If a model is required to either move Towards, Directly Towards, Away or Directly Away to or from a target/origin and becomes unable to do so (due to blocking models/terrain for example) it immediately stops movement.

An **aura** is effect that is constantly active throughout its duration. Models within an aura are immediately affected by it. Models are affected by their own aura.

A **pulse** is an effect that only affects models within its range at the point of activation. A pulse has no duration. Models are affected by their own pulse.



Active model refers to the model currently being activated.

During a model's activation; if any other model performs an action it temporarily becomes the active model for the duration of that action.

Origin model is the model initiating an effect or action.

Target model is the model targeted by an effect or action.

Friendly model is a model that is on the same team as the active model. **Enemy model** refers to a model that is on the opposing team to the active model.

Guild model refers to a friendly model whose primary Guild is the same as the active model.

A dice-pool is a number of standard 6-sided dice (D6), determined by the relevant model's attribute, collected together and used to determine success of an action. A dice-pool may never be reduced to zero.

The **ball-path** is a 30mm wide line that the ball travels along.

The effects of a **sustain** Play continue to apply until the End Phase of the current turn.

An **ongoing-effect** describes a residual effect created and left in play until the End Phase of the current turn.

Actions describe specific atomic ways in which a model may act during their activation.

A **target-spot** may be either a model or any point on the pitch the ball-token may be placed.

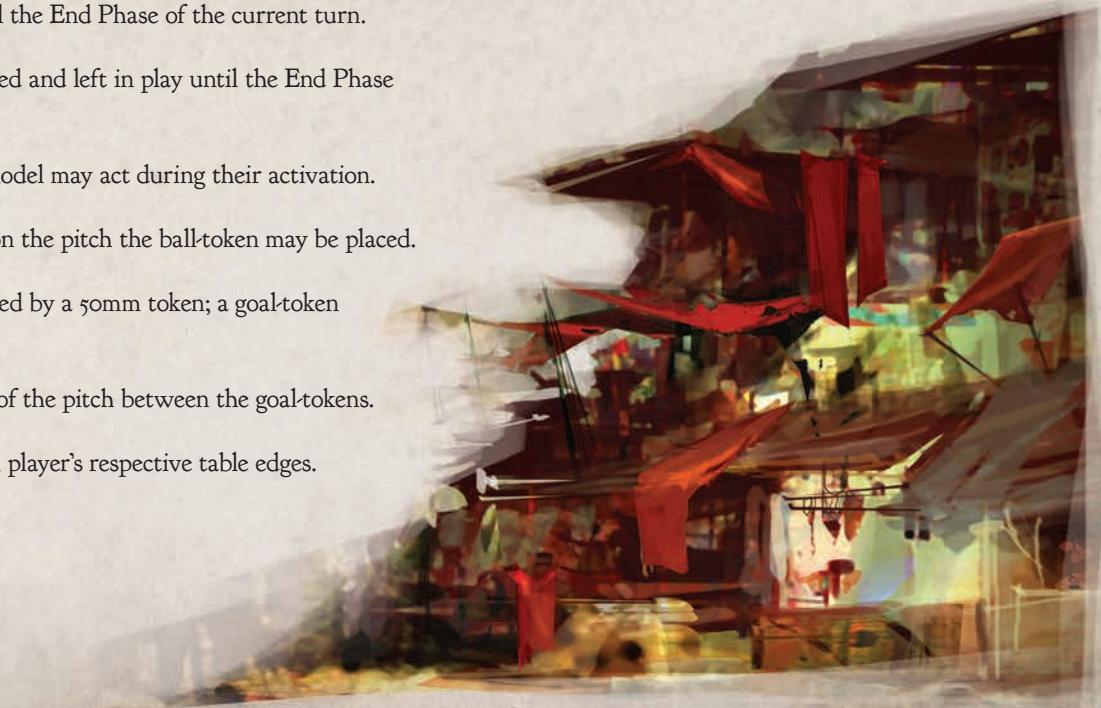
A **goal-token** is a specific piece of terrain represented by a 50mm token; a goal-token is a barrier that blocks LOS.

Half-way line describes the line across the middle of the pitch between the goal-tokens.

Goal-line describes the line 6" onto the board from player's respective table edges.



During a game Siren activates and targets Ox with a Play called "Lure". Siren is the active model and Ox is therefore the target model. When the Lure hits, Ox temporarily becomes the active model as he involuntarily moves toward Siren. Siren remains the origin model throughout.



DISTANCE MEASURING

All distances are expressed in inches.

Distance measuring is always between the closest points of a model's base and the target/origin.

Players *may* measure any ranges or distances at any time.

Distances are always measured on a horizontal plane.

LINE OF SIGHT

Models have 360-degree Line of Sight (LOS).

A model has LOS to another model or object as long as an unobstructed line can be drawn from any one point of the model's base to anywhere in the target's base.

A line is considered obstructed if it passes through terrain that blocks LOS; or if it passes over the base of an intervening model; or if it passes over an active effect that affects LOS.



Boar obstructs any line that Siren may draw to Ox and therefore Siren only has LOS to Boar but not to Ox. Note that the building also blocks LOS too.

CONVENTIONS

Players are obliged to allow full access to all game information to their opponent at any time (e.g. specific model details, statistics or current status).

Status effects should always be marked with a suitable token next to the relevant model.

Bonuses and penalties from different named sources are cumulative. Bonuses and penalties from the same named sources are not cumulative.

Players are to assume that rules as written in the main rulebook are the default. Rules written on a model's card always supersede rules written in the main rulebook. Rules conflicts and timings are always prioritised in favour of the active-model.

Rule priority is as follows: active model, origin model, target model, and then all other models.

The rule of least disturbance applies whenever attempting to place models or ball-tokens. This means attempt to place the model or token as close the correct location as is possible without moving or disturbing any other models or terrain on the pitch.

When a re-roll is required, all bonuses and penalties which applied to the original roll also apply to the re-roll.



CONDITIONS

During a game of Guild Ball, models may suffer **conditions**. Conditions remain on the model and continue to apply their effect until removed.

BLEED

A model with the bleed condition suffers [3] DMG during the next Maintenance Phase and then the condition is removed.

KNOCKED DOWN

Knocked-down models do not block LOS.

Knocked-down models cannot engage an enemy model.

Knocked-down models cannot have possession of the ball.

Knocked-down models cannot use any Character Plays.

Knocked-down models may forfeit their Advance action in order to remove this condition (i.e. stand up).

Knocked-down models may suffer a Push or make a Dodge but may not Advance, or be moved, by any other means.

A knocked-down model suffers [-1] DEF.

If a model in possession of the ball suffers the knocked-down condition, they immediately lose possession. Centre the ball token on the knocked-down model and immediately perform a standard-scatter.

POISON

Models with the poison condition suffer [2] DMG during the Maintenance Phase.

BURNING

While a model has the burning condition it suffers [-2"/-2"] MOV. Additionally, models with the burning condition suffer [1] DMG during the Maintenance phase.

TAKEN OUT

When a model is reduced to [0] HP it suffers the taken-out condition and is immediately removed from the Pitch. Remove all other conditions from the model.

Models that are taken-out do not generate, and cannot be allocated, any Influence and are not permitted to activate.





INFLUENCE

Every model on the pitch provides a measure of influence over the game. This is represented by the model's INF attribute.

Influence is a resource that models use in order to perform actions during their activations. Learning to use Influence wisely is crucial to winning games.

GENERATING INFLUENCE

During the Maintenance Phase, an influence-pool is generated for each team using the combined total of base-INF from each of the team's models on the pitch. Models suffering from the taken-out condition do not contribute Influence to the influence-pool.

In addition, each team may add [I] Influence to the influence-pool for each goal they have scored.

ALLOCATING INFLUENCE

When it is a team's turn to allocate Influence during the Maintenance Phase, it allocates its influence-pool to friendly models on the pitch. Each model may only be allocated Influence up to their max-INF.

Models may receive additional Influence during the course of a turn that may take them above their max-INF.

USING INFLUENCE

During their activation, models may use Influence to perform a variety of actions. Models may continue to perform actions as long as they have enough Influence to fund them.

Actions may be performed in any order and unless stated otherwise, actions may be repeated.

Common uses of Influence include movement, attacking, kicking and making Plays.



NORMAL TURN SEQUENCE

1. INITIATIVE PHASE

Teams each roll a single dice [1D6] to make an **initiative-roll**.

Teams additionally add [+1] to their initiative-roll for each unspent Momentum Point (MP) generated in the previous turn.

The team with the highest net initiative-roll decides which team has the **Initiative**. Re-roll tied results with all prior bonuses still applying at this point.

Unspent MP is then reset to zero.

2. MAINTENANCE PHASE

The team with the Initiative completes all Maintenance Phase steps first. The other team then completes all Maintenance Phase steps.

- A. Resolve all current Conditions on friendly models.
- B. Place an Icy Sponge token on each friendly model that has the taken-out condition.
- C. The team may return to play any valid friendly models using the Icy Sponge rule.
- D. Generate the team's influence-pool.
- E. The team allocates their influence-pool amongst friendly models. Each model may only be allocated Influence up to their maxINF.



3. ACTIVATION PHASE

Starting with the team that has the Initiative, alternate activating a single friendly model currently on the pitch.

Each model must be activated once per turn.

Models may continue to perform actions as long as they have enough Influence to fund them.

The active model may choose to end its activation at any time. A model is not required to use all Influence allocated.

4. END PHASE

Once all models on both teams have been activated then the current turn ends. Players then remove all current ongoing-effects (but not conditions).

Discard all Influence on models.





ON LIFE AND DEATH IN GUILD BALL

Many would think that in a ruthless sport such as Guild Ball, where players accept the risk of crippling injury every time they run out onto the pitch, death would be commonplace. In reality nothing could be further from the truth. Guild Ball's rules expressly forbid any one player from taking the life of another, something established early after peasant football's evolution into Guild Ball.

In the cut-throat Empire of the Free Cities a person could be forgiven for being surprised at this policy; seemingly at odds with the guild's typically callous disregard for the concerns or lives of the population. However, to those more educated observers, the reasoning behind it is simple. The guilds consider their players commodities; pieces in their political machinations. Each one represents considerable investment and financial expenditure. The rule is fundamental therefore in protecting the guild's interests above all else; the beneficial side effect for the players being a degree of safety from an untimely end.

Any player or team found to be deliberately violating this rule is treated with extremely strict and brutal reprisal – although of course, accidents have been known to happen. Guild Ball has a high council made up of representatives from all of the guilds which oversees such incidents and passes final judgement in such matters. Over the years, these select officials have become almost an autonomous body of their own, aloof and apart from their peers. Even amongst the guilds themselves it is of constant frustration that they are as such unable to exert any of their considerable power in influencing any decision that the council might be called upon to make.

A much more regular occurrence however is injury. These range from simple sprains or concussion; all the way through to more career threatening injuries such as severe blood loss, smashed joints and broken or even severed limbs. The rules of Guild Ball do little to protect a player from this and the game is rife with hidden agendas – those of teams with long standing rivalries, players with personal vendettas and the guilds' own intrigues and conspiracies. These often manifest themselves on the pitch as symbolic displays of barbarity.

Fortunately for the unlucky players on the receiving end of these injuries there is one guild which remains neutral in both the Empire of the Free Cities and in Guild Ball. For a modest stipend that is annually charged to all of the guilds, the Physicians Guild maintains the apothecaries that brave the open war of the pitch during games; dragging badly injured players to safety and treating their injuries at the side of the pitch. Those that have trauma too severe to be so easily helped, the Physician's Guild will send to one of their local guild houses to treat, where they are able to induce their mysterious and secretive accelerated healing. By these means players are never out of action for a prolonged period, often only missing a match at most.

Of course most of the guilds, particularly the older and more established, have attempted to coerce individuals from the Physician's Guild to become private apothecaries for their respective teams. As yet, not one has betrayed their oath of membership to the Physician's Guild. Little wonder when you consider that despite their role as healers within the Sovereign States of the Empire of the Free Cities, the Physician's Guild are still just as likely to resolve betrayal with swift violence...



Brisket has Recovery Levels at [4] and [8] HP.

Brisket has been beaten up by Shark and suffers the taken-out condition.

During the next Maintenance Phase, Brisket receives [1] Icy Sponge token as the Physician's Guild work on her tenderised body. Brisket may then choose to return to play by using the [1] Icy Sponge token to recover HP up to the first Recovery Level of just [4] HP.

Instead she wisely decides to receive further treatment; during the next Maintenance Phase she receives another Icy Sponge token. Brisket decides her team really needs her back on the pitch and returns to play by using her [2] Icy Sponge tokens to recover HP up to her second Recovery Level of [8] HP.

Flint caught the pass on his chest, bouncing it a couple of inches up into the air before hopping backwards a step and catching the ball with a thunderous strike; he twisted his hips into the shot and powered his right leg straight out in front of him. No one present was under any illusion that he would miss the shot. He never did.

Seconds later the Brewer's Guild goal post was rattling violently from side to side and Flint was sprinting back up the pitch, grinning like a madman with hand raised high in familiar salute. The Mason's crowd stamped their feet and cheered their hero. A group of female supporters who had collectively adopted the sobriquet of 'Flint's Bedrockers' sighed his name as if he were the second coming of Solthecius; several of them throwing lovingly woven strips of delicate material on to the pitch. As the flowery embroidery fluttered through the wind around him, Flint offered the ladies a wide smile, not committing himself to even one token.

ICY SPONGE

During the Maintenance Phase, each model suffering the taken-out condition gains [1] Icy Sponge token. Models suffering the taken-out condition may then be returned to play.

Returned models are placed in base-contact with a table edge within the friendly deployment zone and may immediately move up to their base-move.

Models return to play with their current HP and then use Icy Sponge tokens to recover additional HP.

Each model has a number of Recovery Levels marked on their health bar.

Each Icy Sponge token on the returning model allows recovery of HP up to the next Recovery Level.

Models that return to play remove the taken-out condition and all Icy Sponge tokens. Once returned to play, models generate Influence as normal and have full capabilities.

Limited use abilities do not recharge if they were previously used prior to the model being taken-out.

The Brewer's Guild supporters were legendary in the sport. By nature of their team's shadowy gang affiliations, many were dangerous and ruthless criminals, the remainder often easily led to violence by the outlaws in their number. The Brewer's Guild turned a blind eye to the behaviour, not even bothering to acknowledge it officially. Intimidation was just another part of the power struggle; whether it was towards a guild directly or just their people. With the Brewer terraces always volatile, the opposition knew not to flaunt their victories over them lest they suffer brutal retaliation from an unforgiving mob.

The crowd that Ox stood amongst now definitely qualified as that. They were a tough, seasoned group, each one proudly wearing scars from previous fights and segregated by their underworld clique or connections. Each looked around warily; the slightest jostle or push could spark off confrontation with their neighbours. Today however they were unified, united in the single purpose of supporting their team.

*And their team was losing.
Badly.*

Barely suppressed aggression pressed in. Ox could feel the tension in the people and the air around him. It was like being thrown into an arena with a caged animal, waiting for it to be released.

On the pitch in front of them, Hooper charged shoulder down into Mallet, connected with a vicious looking hook to the veteran Mason's head and then floored him with a leg sweep. He stood motionless, a granite hard bastard too miserable to wear a smile. Unlike any other spectators, the majority of the Brewer supporters erupted in jeers at the fallen player rather than celebration of their own. Spit and ale began to rain down onto Mallet from the stands.

'Rough crowd today, eh?'

Ox turned his attention to the small man who had spoken to him, but made no effort to reply.

'Never been to a game before? I can tell. You don't look the type. Not into this at all, are you?' His eyes were nervous, looking around him instead of at Ox directly.

'Not the type.' Ox affirmed. 'And not into what you're doing, trying to get at my pockets.' Ox's hand closed on the stranger's forearm, crushing it in his grip and causing the thief's fingers to spasm outwards. The eyes looked straight at him, wide eyed and afraid. Ox chopped the pickpocket in the throat without another word and released the arm as the man slumped to the floor, making a strangled choking sound. No one around them seemed to much care.

Over in the Brewer's Guild stands, his identity hidden by a thick shawl, Ox watched the match with disinterest. In contrast to the rabble pressed around him who continued to hurl abuse at the Mason's Guild players for daring to score yet again, the result didn't concern him in the slightest. As Flint jogged by them, the invective was accompanied by projectiles. A shower of stones, bottles and pieces of rotting vegetables ricocheted around the Mason as he passed. The Master Butcher raised an eyebrow as even a knife flashed past Flint's face, only narrowly missing him. The people in the stands booed loudly.

'Screw you and your fagbags, you lady-boy bastard!' One old man's voice seemed to succinctly sum up their feelings. Ox chuckled in genuine mirth at the insult.

Brick wiped the sweat from his brow and spat at his feet. The Mason's Guild were having a good game, despite the opposition supporters. Brick faced off against Hooper, grinning from ear to ear, two warriors testing their strength against each other. They traded insults, easily lost to Ox in the noise of the crowd around him.

The whole stand had become increasingly rowdy as the game had worn on; the alcohol adding to the sour mood of being first one, then two goals down, with two players out early. By the time Hooper had evened the numbers by wounding Mallet and then Harmony it had made little difference. The thugs surrounding Ox were disgruntled, angry and drunk. Their team was still trailing by two and the Master Butcher doubted that even goals could assuage the rising frustration. Around him whispered promises of violence coalesced into choral agreement.

Friday sprinted past Hooper and Brick as they struggled against each other. Spigot was waving his arms in the air far over on the far side of the pitch, looking for the pass and nothing else. Fool. Ox saw the tackle before it happened; Tower swinging his hammer through the air and into the Brewer. Spigot took the blow full in the chest, driven up into the air and off his feet, before crashing face down, to the pitch. He looked unconscious.

The Mason watched him warily, gingerly kicking his opponent as the apothecaries ran towards the pair. Typical Spigot as far as Ox was concerned, the man being a liability at his best. Drunks should have dropped him years back. Back with the ball and Friday remained unmarked. A professional's eye told Ox that Honour or Flint would be somewhere to block the shot. Both couldn't be tied up with Stave, surely.

He was distracted from his search for them by sunlight reflecting off a metal blade a couple of feet away. Turning his head slightly so it wasn't obvious that he no longer watched the game, Ox saw a suspicious looking woman in a muddy brown cloak giving out wicked looking shivs; sharpened lumps of metal or spikes with dirty cloth strips wrapped around them as makeshift handles. The weapons quickly spread throughout the crowd, passed hand to hand. Very few people looked uncomfortable at handling the weaponry. Barely any.

Now that he knew to look, Ox saw another woman passing out the blades over by the front near the pitch, and then a man two rows down. Someone next to Ox tried to pass one to him, their grubby fingers pressing the cold metal into his hand. He tapped the shoulder of the man in front of him and thrust it towards him, before fading back so he wouldn't need to do it again.

Over at the entrance, three men were worrying at the locks of the gate.

On the pitch, Friday scored after all. It was too late though. Nobody cheered in their stand. The air was different now.

The raw, seething fury had been replaced with quiet, deadly anticipation.

The doors to their stand thrown open, the Brewer crowd surged out and headed towards the opposition. Several of them brandished their weapons in plain view of match officials, who turned tail and fled rather than risk their own necks. One brave soul didn't, trying to hold his ground and stop the bloodshed that was about to happen. The first man to reach him delivered a head butt which floored the official, who was then trampled by the tide of skin headed thugs. He managed to struggle his way up briefly, bobbing into sight, before being pulled back down again and lost forever.

Some hero. Ox wasn't impressed.

They were at the Mason stand now, angrily hammering away at the gate with their fists and heavy kicks. The opposition supporters inside looked terrified, some frozen where they were with mouths open, others trying to pull up bits of wood and metal from anywhere they could to have something to fight back with. As Ox watched, one huge Brewer supporter, all scars and green-blue tattoos on a bare chest, pushed his way through the throng of bodies to the front of the mob. That was when the wooden gates really started to take a pounding; the man was armed with a massive club, thick arms bulging as he struck. Others started to climb the walls, trying to get in that way. The Mason's supporters inside were throwing missiles at them as they did, each one raining down onto the crowd outside. Both sides yelled obscenities at each other at the top of their voices.

Ox couldn't be sure, but he thought that he saw even more gangsters rushing in from outside the courtyard, underneath the large metal crescent that marked the entrance to the stadium. If that was the case, this boded very badly for the Mason's supporters. They had looked outnumbered already and had nowhere near the wild fury of the Brewer side. Certainly the main entranceway was blocked if nothing else. The officials that had tried to flee were surrounded nearby, being bludgeoned into the dirt by a circle of thugs wielding clubs and metal bars.

It was pandemonium, pitchside warfare, a siege. It reminded Ox of his days as a mercenary. He was surprised to realise that he was enjoying the spectacle, having long since given up on watching the game for any sort of entertainment.

There was a bright flash and several screams. As he looked on, Ox realised that an inventive individual trapped in the Mason stand had taken inspiration from the Brewer player Stoker. He had gathered up a collection of bottles into which several people were stuffing rags, setting the ends on fire and then throwing them over the fence to douse their assailants in flames. Ox was impressed by the entrepreneurial spirit almost as much as he was by the mob, which redoubled their efforts and refused to give in quite so easily.

Not all of the missiles hit their mark. Ox saw one crash into the fence and shower burning liquid over the group of defenders who were trying to push the doors back against the tide. They didn't share the same berserk dedication of the Brewer supporters it seemed; every one of them leaping back trying to put down the flames. The gate caught light, but it didn't matter. With a bestial roar, the frenzied mob finally broke it down; taking some of the wall with it and collapsing brick and mortar onto several people inside who stood waiting to fight.

The horde flew over the debris and into the fray, a tide of thrashing limbs and steel. Bright red and yellow flames shot upwards where the stands themselves now began to burn. Ox knew that the next colour he would see would be a fine red mist of blood.

The first indication to the players that something was wrong was the absence of sound from the stands. Ordinarily it would have taken a simple glance towards the supporters to see that the Brewer stand was rapidly emptying, or that the Mason supporters were no longer paying any attention to the game. But with both teams missing several players and the result of the game hanging in the balance, none could afford the time to look around them.

The Brewer's Guild were just beginning their comeback as the Mason's Guild tried to break their drive and turn it around. The game descended into a brutal ballet of feet hacking at the ball, the players brawling with each other in a tight circle. The other indications all came at once and gave them no notice.

Tapper tried to get the ball and his players loose; crossing to Friday who was fighting her way out wide. It was intercepted by Honour who managed to get an outstretched foot to it. Even so, the ball bounced wildly out of her control and into the path of Marbles, knuckling alongside her. Teeth bared in a feral snarl and looking to protect its mistress from Tapper, Marbles leapt over the ball, completely uninterested.

It rolled past the Mason players and back to Stave; the huge Brewer trying to control it but unable to do so whilst simultaneously defending against a tackle from Brick. Heavily listing from his injuries sustained brawling with Hooper and trying to continue fighting; the Mason didn't pay attention to the ball either, though his left foot did by chance accidentally punt it away back towards his team mate Flint. It rolled through the grass and over the bare mud, slowing its momentum drastically, but still managing to stop within reach.

The Mason Vice-Captain kept his cool at least. He ducked under a wild haymaker punch thrown by Hooper and pushed the Brewer backwards with every ounce of strength he could muster. It didn't make much space, the burly Brewer barely losing any ground, but an out of breath Tower dived between the two to block any further attempt by Hooper to attack directly. Both he and Flint knew that the Brewer would likely floor the exhausted rookie player in moments and Flint desperately looked for an opening before he was forced to try and fight off Hooper again.

He carefully dodged between the fighting, trying to make his own space to escape. Finally, as Brick managed to best Stave for a moment and drive his opponent down to one knee, Flint saw his chance and quickly exploited the gap. Yellowy eyes wild with primitive exuberance, Marbles followed at his heels. That was just fine with Flint as long as the unusual creature didn't get in his way. It did probably mean that Honour was down somewhere, but he didn't have time for that.

Suddenly, Flint was away with the ball and running out of the scrum, down the pitch towards the Brewer goalpost, unmarked. He didn't know why guild officials from both sides were suddenly running onto the pitch waving their arms, but Flint had no intentions of stopping. He couldn't make out whatever it was that they were shouting at him over the sound of his own heavy breathing and the screaming crowd. Or what that unfamiliar roaring sound was; like a heart, but much, much louder. He slowed his pace and let the ball roll out in front of him ready for the strike, looking up in the same movement for his target.

And stopped, ball forgotten. Behind him, the players all had too, even Hooper. Friday pointed, mouth wide open.

The Mason stands were burning brightly, great black clouds hanging in the air above them.

Perhaps they had finally found the heart to fight back, or perhaps it had been the fires licking ever higher, but the Mason supporters had managed to, at last, break out before the end. Several groups still fought running battles with the Brewer gangsters, trying to escape into the city. Injured men and women from both sides lay everywhere; as did pieces of wood, metal, rock and the odd weapon. Most were very bloody, the weapons stained dark crimson. The Mason's stand had collapsed in on itself long since, gutted by the fire and scorched black.

Ox, alone in the Brewer stands but for the corpse of the pickpocket from earlier, decided it was time to leave. He judged that the city guard would be along in short measure now that the real violence was over and the risk to life and limb was minimal. He couldn't be bothered with either talking or fighting his way past them in the event that they found him in the mess outside. He rose from the perch he had occupied, pulled his shawl tighter around him and made for the wide open gate at a brisk pace.

At ground level, the smoky air was thick with the scent of charcoal, tiny embers fluttering around like glowflies. Coughing but still moving, Ox slipped out of the stands and into the connecting courtyard. Visibility was far reduced from the view he had high up in the stands, but it was not so poor that he couldn't tell which way he needed to go. Walking quickly, he ignored the bodies lying around him and the shadows prowling through the gloom.

As he ducked out of the stadium's entrance and moved further away from the raging fire the air began to clear a little, revealing more of his surroundings as the wind blew great billows of smoke aside. Soon, he reached an entrance to one of the underground passageways that he preferred to use instead of the crowded avenues and roads. He debated whether they would be more dangerous with rioters still on the loose. Probably no more so than usual. These places were the hangouts of thieves and vagabonds, and Ox had dealt with them enough that all but the most desperate gave him a wide berth now. He started down the stone steps, silent footsteps taking him out of sight.

At the bottom of the stairs, four thugs stood around a figure curled up tight into a ball, his hands clasped over his head. As Ox continued downwards towards them he heard their voices echo, loud, boisterous insults accompanied kicks and laughter and a pathetic whimpering. They had their backs to Ox for the moment, but he would need to walk past them in the tight confines of the passage. It didn't occur to him to worry about not being able to proceed.

Just as he approached to within arms' reach from the closest of them, one looked up and saw him, alerting the others. Even in the darkness he could see the telltale glint of sharp metallic weapons, likely knives or improvised shivs. The group stared in silence, hungry wolf-like eyes on him. Ox glared right back, an alpha male amongst their pack, daring any of them to challenge him. His thumb, unseen by any of them, rested on his concealed cleaver, rubbing back and forth over the pommel.

The moment was broken by the young man at their feet. Realising that the assault had halted, he looked up, crying eyes afraid, settling on Ox. He reached out a trembling hand.

'Please! Please, don't leave me to them! I just wanted to watch the game with my father, I didn't want to fight with anyone!' He was very young, Ox realised. Maybe fourteen or fifteen. No age to be able to fight off four fully grown gangsters.

He couldn't be sure but the boy's voice seemed familiar, the features were recognisable in the half light too. Startled, Ox realised that he was thinking of his brother, missing all these years.

'Listen, you have to help me!' Tears streaming down his face, the boy still babbled, but Ox barely heard him. Now that he stooped to look closer, ignoring the strange glances from the pack around him, Ox saw a great deal of resemblance. The same messy crop of sandy blonde untidy hair, a gangly build with broad shoulders that promised he would mature into a strong, thickset man. The bright blue eyes, always staring outwards. All just like Jacques. It was uncanny.

'Look here lads; I think this one wants the boy for himself?' One of the gangers smiled a predatory grin towards Ox. The rest joined in on the laughter like chattering jackals, the sound echoing through the tunnel and making it seem as if there were an army of them.

'Better look elsewhere for your sport if you know what's good for you. This one is ours.' The second speaker was no less threatening. Ox tore his eyes from the boy to the thugs, stepping his back to the stairwell.

The laughter stopped. A nervous silence descended once again. Ox's thumb continued to graze along the handle of the cleaver inside his cloak. One of the men openly began to pull his knife free, until Ox caught his eye.

Hesitation. Uncertainty.

Then a click as the knife was pushed back into its scabbard.

The boy started snivelling again. Ox looked at him, a long, hard stare.

'You're not him, boy. He's dead. And I don't care about those not strong enough to stand on their own two feet.' The gangsters were completely confused by the unexpected statement and behaviour, the boy even more lost. 'You scum can have him. Now get out of my way.' Ox shouldered roughly past the group, long strides leaving the scene behind him.

He heard the boy crying for him, pleading, the impact of several blows, laughter. And then he heard a familiar swishing sound, like the air was being cleaved open, and a wet gurgling noise. Abruptly, all other sound died.

Ox didn't look back. Jacques was long gone, and so was the Master Butcher's honour.

MODEL ACTIVATION

Models are activated once per turn. Whilst active, they may perform any number of actions as long as they have Influence to do so.

MOVEMENT



Brisket has a base-move of [6"]. She moves forward 4" before changing direction and using her remaining [2"] of movement.

When a model moves, it does so in a straight line. It may stop to change the direction of movement at any point with no penalty.

Make all measurements from the front of the moving model's base.

Models themselves block movement. A moving model's base cannot pass over another model's base during movement.

If moving over a free-ball, models must have enough movement to completely clear the base or must stop upon contact.

A model may move, with or without the ball; possession of the ball has no impact on the distance travelled.

Models immediately leave the Pitch if any part of their base exits the playing surface. Models may not voluntarily leave the pitch. Models that leave the Pitch are mobbed by enthusiastic fans and so immediately suffer the taken-out condition. Models removed in this way retain their current HP.

Models may gain or suffer modifiers to their movement; these modifiers are applied immediately and affect all remaining movement.

ADVANCING

During their activation, a model may only make a single Advance action. While making an Advance, a model that spends Influence or Momentum or makes an Attack or Kick action, immediately ends its Advance action.

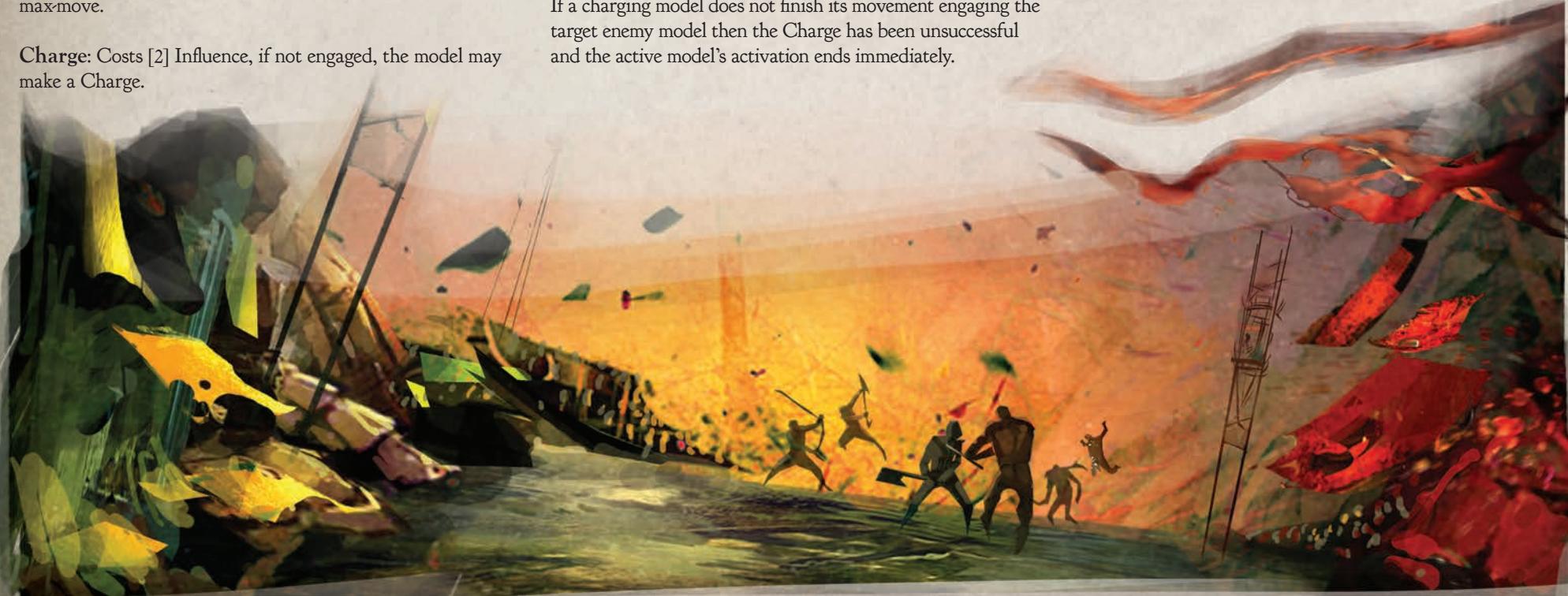
A model may choose to forfeit their Advance action. When a model forfeits their Advance action they do not count as moving. A model may only forfeit its Advance once per activation.

Types of Advance:

Jog: Costs [0] Influence, the model may move up to its base-move.

Sprint: Costs [1] Influence, the model may move up to its max-move.

Charge: Costs [2] Influence, if not engaged, the model may make a Charge.



CHARGING

When a model performs a **Charge**, it rushes towards an enemy and delivers a powerful attack.

A model may not Charge if it is currently engaged by an enemy model. A model may not make a Charge action against a model that it is currently engaging.

To perform a Charge, the active model targets an enemy model that is in its LOS and pays any applicable costs.

Charging models may move up to their max-move and, if able, must finish the movement engaging the target enemy model. The active model then makes a single Attack action (without spending any further Influence) against the target of the Charge; this Attack gains [+4] TAC.

If a charging model does not finish its movement engaging the target enemy model then the Charge has been unsuccessful and the active model's activation ends immediately.

REPOSITIONING

Repositioning refers to any movement that is not an Advance. Repositioning may be caused by either friendly or enemy actions.

A **Push** is a specific type of Repositioning movement. Push is shown as a distance e.g. [2"] Push. Models may be moved up to the distance shown. Models may not change direction during a Push. Pushed models immediately stop if they contact another model.

A **Dodge** is a specific type of Repositioning movement. Dodge is shown as a distance e.g. [2"] Dodge. Models may move up to the distance shown.

Push and Dodge movement suffers no penalty from terrain unless otherwise noted.



Ox attacks Shark. Ox has [7] TAC, which gives him a dice-pool of 7 six-sided dice ($7D6$).

Shark has [4+] DEF so any attacks made against him require a [4+] TN test.

Ox rolls his dice-pool of $7D6$ against the [4] TN and gets 2, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6, 6 which generates [5] hits and [2] misses.

Ox's attack is a success; he may now use the hits to generate results using his Playbook.

ACTIONS

Many actions a model may make are resolved using a TN (target number) test.

TARGET NUMBER TESTS

Models use their attributes and apply all relevant modifiers to gather a number of six-sided dice (D6), in order to generate a dice-pool.

Each action confers a base number of dice to the dice-pool. Action specific modifiers are then applied. All other applicable modifiers are then applied from Character Traits, Plays and other in-game effects. This will provide a total dice-pool for the action.

The difficulty of the action determines the target number needed. This is shown as a number in brackets.

When making a TN test, each individual dice rolled (as part of a dice-pool) that equals or exceeds the target number generates a hit. The number of hits rolled is the total-hits.

Any dice that roll less than the target number are considered a miss.

Some actions will have modifiers that affect the number of hits after the dice-pool has been rolled.

A TN test is successful if it generates at least [1] net-hit. In many TN tests, additional hits may improve the overall result.

MODIFIERS

During the game, when making a TN test, various factors may affect the target number or the dice-pool. These will be explained by the relevant rules for that action.

Modifiers cannot reduce the target number to less than [2+] TN or increase the target number to greater than [6+] TN.

- Instead, for each point a modifier would take the target number to below [2+] TN, the dice-pool gains an additional [1] dice.
- For each point a modifier would take the target number to above [6+] TN, the dice-pool loses [1] dice.

Modifiers cannot reduce the total dice-pool to less than one [D6].

THE BALL

The ball is not a model, it is a 30mm ball-token and so may not be targeted.

If there are no models in possession of the ball, the ball is deemed a free-ball.

Models may move over a free-ball without impediment; however a moving model cannot end its movement overlapping the ball-token's base.

BALL HANDLING

When a model is in possession of the ball place the ball-token in base-contact with that model. The exact physical position of the ball-token while in possession is irrelevant; it may be freely repositioned as required. The ball-token ensures the model in possession is clearly identified.

When a model in possession is moved, the ball-token is deemed to stay attached.

An active model in possession and not engaged may give up possession at any point during its activation. Giving up possession is not an action. To give up possession, the active model places the ball-token within [1"]; the ball then becomes a free-ball. The active model may not regain possession during the same activation.

If a model in possession of the ball suffers the knocked-down condition, scatter the ball-token using the standard-scatter rules with the template centred on the knocked-down model.

SNAP To

A model that starts its activation or moves within [1"] of a free-ball may choose to take possession of the ball-token; the ball-token will immediately snap to that model's base.

If the ball-token lands or is placed within [1"] of a model, that model may choose to take possession of the ball-token; the ball-token will immediately snap to that model's base. If each team has a model within [1"] of the ball-token, then each model may roll [1D6] and add their base-kick to attempt to gain possession. The model with the highest result gains possession. Where two or more models have the highest result, re-roll for those models until one model gains possession.



Shark has a base-move of [7"], and is in possession of the ball. He moves [4"], before giving up possession of the ball, and then completes his remaining [3"] of movement.

The ball scatters and comes to rest within 1" of both Ox and Shark.

Ox rolls 1D6 and adds his base-kick [5] while Shark also rolls 1D6 and adds his base-kick [4].

Luckily, Ox rolls high with a 5 giving him a result of [8]. Shark sadly rolls just 2 giving him a result of [6]. The ball snaps to Ox who glares triumphantly at Shark.



Angel has just scored a goal. The enthusiastic Butcher fans grab the ball and try to boot it out to their team's advantage.

The ball-token is placed on a target-spot within 10" of the goal-token, before a kick-scatter determines the direction and distance.

This time the crowd aren't too off target and roll [3] for direction and 1D6" [2"] for distance. Not too bad for Boiler to quickly mount a counter-attack.

KICKING

During its activation, an active model in possession of the ball may make a **Kick** action at a cost of [1] Influence.

PASSING THE BALL

To spread the play across the pitch, models usually pass the ball around using the Kick action. Models may Kick the ball-token to another friendly model or into open space.

SCORING A GOAL!

To score a goal, models must kick the ball-token into the enemy team's goal-token using a special Kick action called a **Shot**.

A goal can only be scored from a successful Shot attempt, a ball that scatters into the goal-token will not count. A model that scores a goal immediately ends its activation.

GOAL KICKS

After a goal is scored the ball is returned to play immediately. Typically it's the friendly crowd behind the goal that kick the ball back into play for their team via a **Goal Kick**.

Guild Ball is therefore played continuously with no positional reset after a goal is scored.

A Goal Kick happens immediately after a goal is scored. The Goal Kick is resolved by the player who just conceded the goal.

During a Goal Kick; the ball-token may be placed within [10"] of the friendly goal-token. Determine where the ball-token lands using the kick-scatter rules. Goal Kicks are not hugely accurate and so always scatter a distance of [1D6"].

Goal Kicks are fired high into the air; the ball may never be intercepted or affected by terrain while travelling to the final landing-spot.

KICKING SEQUENCE

1. After paying applicable costs, the active model declares a target-spot within range of their kick-distance.
2. Generate a dice-pool using the kicking model's base-kick.
 - Enemy models engaging the kicking model negatively affect the Kick attempt; suffer [-1] dice-pool per enemy model.
 - Enemy models, not engaging the kicking model, with any part of their base on the ball-path between the kicking model and the target-spot, count as intervening models and negatively affect the Kick attempt; suffer [-1] dice-pool per intervening enemy model.
3. A Kick attempt is resolved as a [4+] TN test.
 - If the target-spot is not in LOS of the kicking model then the Kick attempt suffers a [+1] TN modifier.
 - Enemy models engaging the target model (if applicable) negatively affect the Kick attempt; suffer [+1] TN per enemy model.
4. Upon a successful Kick:
 - If the target-spot is a model, the model immediately gains possession.
 - Otherwise, immediately scatter from the target-spot using the kick-scatter rules. You may choose to re-roll the entire kick-scatter once but must accept the re-rolled result.
5. Upon an unsuccessful Kick:
 - Immediately scatter from the target-spot using the kick-scatter rules.



Shark is under some pressure from Ox and so wants to pass the ball to Angel before he gets tackled. The trouble is she also has a number of Butcher players marking her. This isn't going to be easy.

Shark declares the target-spot to be Angel and notes his base-kick of [4]. Shark generates his dice-pool. He starts with 2D6 from his base-kick but suffers [-1] because he is engaged by Ox. Boiler is intervening along the ball path and so imposes a further [-1] and so Shark ends up with 2D6 in his dice-pool.

A kick action is made against a base [4+] TN, however, Angel is engaged by Shank which imposes [+1] TN penalty taking it to [5+] TN.

So Shark rolls his 2D6 dice-pool looking for a 5 or more...



Brisket slams into Shark and knocks him down. Shark loses possession of the ball and it scatters using the Standard-Scatter rules.

Hold the standard-scatter template centered over Shark's model, the #1 pointing towards the active player's goal, in this case Brisket's goal.

Rolling [1d6] to determine the scatter-direction results in a [2]. Rolling [1d6] to determine the scatter-distance results in a [5"].

Place the ball-token, centered on the landing-spot.

SCATTER ROLLS

Occasionally in Guild Ball, models will lose control of the ball, or miss that crucial shot or pass. Regardless of how it happens, the rules will call for a scatter roll to determine where the ball ends up.

Scatter rolls require a template to resolve. There are two types of scatter template used in Guild Ball; a standard-scatter and a kick-scatter.

STANDARD SCATTER

A standard-scatter occurs whenever the ball bounces freely; such as when a model is knocked-down, or the ball is thrown in by the crowd.

Standard-scatter is resolved from the current position of the ball-token; the origin.

To determine the ball-token's final landing-spot; hold the standard-scatter template over the origin with the #1 direction pointing towards the active player's goal-token.

To determine the scatter-direction, roll 1D6 to determine the direction that the ball-token bounces.

To determine the scatter-distance roll 1D6".

The ball-token's final landing-spot is determined by measuring scatter-distance in the scatter-direction from the origin. Place the ball-token centred on the landing-spot.

If there is terrain along the line of scatter then the ball reacts as defined in the Terrain rules.

KICK SCATTER

When the ball is kicked, a kick-scatter may be used to determine the final landing-spot.

Hold the kick-scatter template over the target-spot with the 90-degree line pointing in the direction the ball was originally travelling.

Roll [1D6] to determine direction, the ball's final landing-spot is [1D6"] along this vector.

Once you have determined the final landing-spot, the ball travels along the path between the original kicking model and the final landing-spot; this distance defines the actual kick-distance.

If there is terrain along the line of scatter then the ball reacts as shown in the Terrain rules.

Each intervening model on the ball-path between the kicking model and the final landing-spot, beginning closest to the kicking model, may choose to intercept the ball and take possession.



Ox has tried to pass the ball to a team mate but has missed. The ball scatters from the target-spot using the kick-scatter template.

To determine the final landing-spot, Ox places the kick-scatter template on the target-spot pointing in the direction of the original Kick. Ox then rolls a [6] on the [1D6] for direction and [5"] on the [1D6] for distance.



Ox determines the ball-path to the final landing spot and groans as he notes that Greyscale is cunningly in the right place to intercept the miskick.

THROW-INS

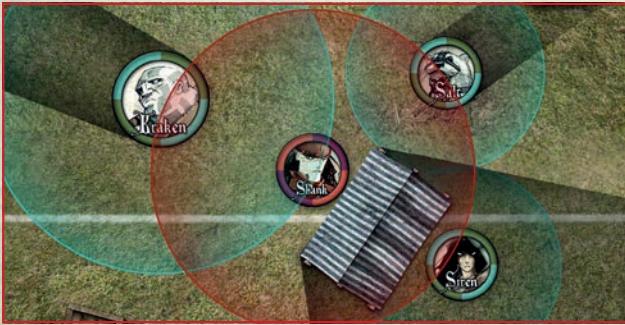
If the ball-token leaves the pitch during a game for any reason, the match still continues as the enthusiastic crowd quickly throw or boot a spare ball back into play.

If the ball-token leaves play immediately place a ball-token on the centre spot of the board.

Use a standard-scatter to determine where the ball lands; throw-ins scatter a distance of [1D6"]. Centre the ball-token on the final landing-spot.

The ball may not be intercepted from a throw-in.





Shank is engaging Salt and Kraken with his [2"] melee zone but is not engaging Siren because he doesn't have LOS to her.

Shank is not engaged by Salt's [1"] melee zone but is engaged by Kraken's [2"] melee zone.

Brisket declares an attack against Shark. Shark is within her melee zone of [1"] and LOS.

Brisket uses her [4] TAC, to generate a [4D6] dice-pool.

Shark has [4+] DEF so any attacks made against him require a [4+] TN test.

Brisket rolls her dice-pool of [4D6] against the [4+] TN and gets 2, 4, 4, 6 which generates [3] total-hits.

Shark has [1] ARM which reduces the total-hit by [1].

Brisket's attack has generated [2] net-hits and so is a success; she may now use the [2] net-hits to generate a result using her Playbook.

ATTACKING

During its activation, an active model may make an **Attack** action against enemy models at a cost of [1] Influence.

An Attack action is resolved as a TN test against the target's DEF attribute. The net-hits (after ARM is deducted) determine the results of the attack.

Models can only make Attack actions against enemy models that they are engaging.

ENGAGING

When a model has an enemy model within its melee zone and LOS, it is **engaging** that model.

When a model is within an enemy's melee zone and LOS it is **engaged** by that model.

Models can engage or be engaged by any number of models.

ATTACK SEQUENCE

1. After paying applicable costs, the active model declares an Attack against a valid target model.
2. Generate a dice-pool using the attacking model's current TAC; apply any applicable bonuses or penalties.
3. An Attack action is resolved as a [target model's current DEF] TN test.
4. The number of hits generated is the **total-hits** for the Attack.
5. Determine the **net-hits** for the Attack by deducting the target model's current ARM from the total-hits.
6. The active model applies the net-hits to their Playbook to determine the result(s) of the Attack action.

COMMON BONUSES AND PENALTIES

Charging

When making a Charge action; the active model gains a [+4] dice-pool for the Attack action made as part of the Charge.

Knocked Down

A knocked-down model suffers [-1] DEF.

Ganging Up

When making an Attack action, an active model gains [+1] dice-pool for each additional friendly model engaging the target enemy model.

Crowding Out

When making an Attack action, the active model suffers [-1] dice-pool for each enemy model, other than the target model, engaging them.



Ox is beating on Angel but she has back-up. Luckily, Ox has a team mate to give him a hand.

Ox gains [+1] Ganging Up bonus to his dice-pool because Shank is also engaging Angel; but suffers [-1] dice-pool Crowding Out penalty because Grayscales and Salt are both engaging Ox.





Brisket's Playbook.



Brisket has rolled [5] net-hits on her attack action against Shark. Her Playbook has 4 active-columns which means Brisket uses [4] net-hits to select any single result from the Playbook from the first 4 columns.

Brisket decides to deal [2] DMG as this result is a momentous-result and gains her team [+1] MP on top of inflicting some pain on Shark.

With the remaining [1] net-hit, Brisket also wants the ball so she selects the Tackle result from the first column.

This result is also a momentous-result and so as well as getting possession of the ball, Brisket gains her team another [+1] MP.

PLAYBOOK

Active models making a successful Attack apply the net-hits to their unique Playbook to determine the **result** of the action. Brisket's Playbook is shown to the left.

A Playbook is always read from left to right. The potential results are arranged in columns. Columns that contain marked cells are **active-columns**. Columns that contain no marked cells are **inactive-columns**. Inactive-columns are never counted when determining results.

RESULTS

Each net-hit from an Attack allows the active model access to an additional active-column counting from the left. The active model selects a single result from any of the results in the available active-columns; apply all of the effects of the selected result if able.

Momentous results are highlighted with a colour-fill on the Playbook. Momentous results generate [1] MP for the active model's team in addition to the effects of the selected result. If an ability allows a model to ignore the selected result then no MP is generated.

Some individual Playbook results deliver more than one effect. These may be applied in any order that the active model chooses.

WRAPPING

Occasionally an attack is wildly successful and can generate multiple results.

If an Attack generates more net-hits than active-columns, this means the active model may select more than a single result.

In this instance, the active model counts columns up to the last active-column and selects single result. The active model may then wrap round the Playbook and continue counting active-columns again from the left, selecting an additional result each time they either reach the last active-column or they run out of net-hits.

The active model must resolve all results generated but may do so in any order.

All results generated from a single attack are considered to be simultaneous events but are resolved as individual instances and so each result is subject to any applicable modifiers (such as Tough Hide).

An active model may always resolve all results generated by a single Attack action.

COMMON RESULTS AND EFFECTS

- ② **Damage (DMG)** – Reduce the current HP on the target enemy model by the number shown.
- ④ **Push** – The target model suffers a [1"] Push for each arrow shown on the Playbook result.
- ⑤ **Dodge** – The active model may make a [1"] Dodge for each arrow shown on the Playbook result.
- ⑥ **Knocked-down** – The target model suffers the knocked-down condition. This result may not be selected if the target model is already suffering the knocked-down condition.
- ⑦ **Tackle** – If the target model currently has possession of the ball, the active model immediately gains possession of the ball. This result may not be selected if the target model is not in possession of the ball.
- ⑧ **Play** – Shown as a number of play-icons. The active model may use play-icons to pay for a single Character Play from their Playbook (without spending Influence). The Playbook shows the cost in play-icons required for each Character Play.



PARTING BLOW

When performing an Advance action, if an active model leaves the melee zone of an enemy model it is engaged by, that enemy model may immediately make a **Parting Blow** against the active model. A model may suffer multiple Parting Blows if leaving multiple melee zones.

A Parting Blow is a free limited Attack action triggered and resolved immediately at the point the active model leaves the melee zone of the enemy model. A model may only make a single Parting Blow against the same active model.

Models making a Parting Blow gain [+2] TAC for the Attack action.

Models making Parting Blows do not receive the Ganging Up or Crowding Out modifiers.

Parting Blows do not generate MP, regardless of the Playbook result. Parting Blows may not generate a Push or a Dodge result, or trigger a Character Play.

After a Parting Blow is resolved, provided that the moving model remains able to do so, they may continue their original Advance action with any remaining movement.

Shark is engaged by both Ox and Boar; if he doesn't get out of there fast then he is going to be in a lot of trouble. Ox and Boar will benefit from Crowding Out bonuses if they get to activate before him. He moves away knowing he will suffer a Parting Blow from each of them.

Shark leaves Ox's melee-zone first, Ox gathers his attack dice-pool based on his base TAC plus a bonus [+2] TAC for the Parting Blow. Ox doesn't gain any Crowding Out bonus due to Boar because this is a Parting Blow. Ox won't generate any Momentum from the Parting Blow, he decides to go for raw damage with his result.

Shark has taken one hit, he continues moving and triggers a Parting Blow from Boar. This is going to hurt...

The afternoon heat was sweltering, anything at distance seeming hidden behind a hazy optic. Every player felt it; their clothes sticky, tiny beads of sweat leaving trails across their skin as they stared each other down across the halfway line, waiting for the horn to sound that would begin the match. The restless crowd murmured amongst itself, a frustrated, petulant beast tormented in the harsh unrelenting sun. A strange noiseless calm permeated the game, each side daring the other to be the first to break the silence.

Finally, the sound came.

At once, from both sides of the pitch, the stands roared their deafening approval, as if in some unspoken agreement each side tried to best the other. The players broke from their reverie as one; some wearing faces that betrayed excitement, whooping with joy; others set serious; even one or two finding the occasion to look nervous, frightened.

In any game of Guild Ball, the pride of both guilds would be at stake, pressure from within creating a constant tension in each player to perform their role. On the opening day of the playoffs and with each game of the Championship this urgency increased tenfold, the stakes much higher. Even the spectators felt it, a tacit understanding that the team would perform harder.

Overhead, the ball soared into the sky, all eyes fixated on its arching path as it sped towards the Alchemist's Guild players. One or two ran underneath, taking up position on point as Midas nodded to Calculus to intercept it. Across from them, the Fisherman side waited, ready.

Emitting a bestial roar to rival that of the huge crowd, Katalyst slammed into Kraken in the middle of the pitch. Dirt flew up underfoot as Kraken absorbed the brunt of the charge on his broad shoulders, his boots scrabbling for purchase in the mud. The two men wrestled with each other for long moments, each second a drawn out struggle of a forearm turned into a lock, broken and then reversed into something else. Chest heaving with exertion, Kraken's stoic silence was a stark parallel to the maniacal screaming from Katalyst, the filters on the Alchemist's mask streaming dirty foam and drool over both of them.

Kraken reared back a meaty left arm and then swung it forward in a heavy jab. Katalyst absorbed it by twisting his shoulder blade into the blow at the last moment, a raw thudding sound echoing out. Unconcerned for his own safety, the Alchemist let loose a muted bellow from behind his mask and head butted Kraken squarely on the bridge of his nose. With a line of thick red crimson running all over his shirt this forced the Fisherman back two steps, before he barrelled forward to intercept Katalyst once again. The crowd cheered on their heroes, locked in mortal embrace.

Calculus sighed inwardly at the smashed form of Flask at her feet. Brutes! How could they do such a thing to a harmless creature like the automaton? It served no greater purpose than bringing her fresh flasks. At least the apothecaries had ignored it. The Alchemist's Guild's own engineers would have to look at this.

At present, though, she gauged that she had wasted far too much time here already and that was not part of the greater concoction. Already, she was shamed that the Fisherman's Guild had blunted their offence, gained possession and launched a successful counter attack to take the lead. This would not do in the slightest. It was time to introduce the unstable elements at her disposal into the equation and demonstrate the superiority of the Alchemists over these stunted imbeciles and their backwater followers.

Calculus stood in a small inclined area of the pitch, next to a large tree and a shallow ditch. It offered some mild shelter from the hard glare of the sun in its shadows. There was no breeze at all and the world was still. She rose from her knees, brushing the dead leaves and twigs from her leggings. She never saw Shark behind her until it was too late.

He was as gentle as he could be, given the circumstances, using the flat of his blade to send her spinning down into the ditch. She did not rise and he saluted with a casual hand to the apothecaries who ran on to administer first aid.

'I think I saw the Lab Rat mascot there too.'

Angel saved herself by diving to one side as whatever the vial held exploded outwards. It sent fragments of glass shredding through the air all around and hissing acid splashed towards her. Even so, the armoured glove that covered her left arm was covered by the foul substance, corroding its way through the polished metal. She could already feel it burning the skin of her arm, where it had gone straight through the protection in places. Gritting her teeth, she frantically tried to unstrap it one handed, whilst warily backing away from the Alchemist that had thrown the bottle.

She came at Angel, long strides much faster than the rookie Fisherman's scrabbled escape to safety. Deftly vaulting over the lethal pool of acid, Vitriol descended like one of the Soltheician Angels of Conflagration, hair splayed out behind her like wildfire. Angel peddled back as quickly as her feet would take her, still vainly trying to tear the melted sleeve from her arm. She managed to avoid the initial blow, as Vitriol landed in the spot where she had been standing a moment before, the vicious downward strike of the staff swiping air only. The Alchemist sprang up again, aiming another wild swing at Angel, who finally managed to shed the remains of her armour but had no time to block the inevitable follow up.

With a loud metallic clink almost drowned out by the eruption from the crowd, the staff head impacted into the edge of a spear blade, thrust from the side. The kinetic energy was blocked and rebounded and Vitriol's momentum drove her into her own weapon, causing the woman to crumple in an inelegant heap before Angel. Gasping and groaning for air, Vitriol tried to regain her feet as Angel looked around at her unexpected saviour.

Shark offered her only a flat stare as he slashed his spear around through the air back to his side: 'I'll take care of her, get going'

Angel nodded and sprinted off up the pitch back into formation, the acid burns on her arm forgotten for the moment. By the time that she had caught up, she could see Greyscale had possession, Siren was on his left, drifting in and out of the traditional centre forward position. The cheers from the Fisherman's Guild stands grew louder with every step closer to the Alchemist goal post. As she stepped in, Greyscale offered her a nod.

'Remember the play.' The grizzled old veteran stuck up middle and forefinger to his cheekbone, a cocked eyebrow the question to go with his statement. Angel had time to nod subtly, hoping that she wouldn't let him down.

Only two remained before them now: Midas, and Mercury. Midas looked as unassumingly pedestrian to her eye as he ever did, except for that bright shining hand holding his accursed blue gem. Angel had underestimated him once before and spent a week at the pleasure of the Physician's Guild. She did not intend to make that mistake again. Mercury could have been one of the towering effigies that the farmers of her village set ablaze each spring, meant to represent the ancient gods that would bring favourable harvests. The flames normally swirling around his fists flared out, lending the appearance of a mighty creature of legend, wreathed in fire. He too would be a formidable opponent.

Angel didn't waste time wondering where the rest of the Alchemists were. Too late for that. Two early goals and the lead had set the pace, but that had been broken by the Alchemists scoring one of their own and then equalising. Time for the Fisherman's Guild to sprint to the finish. Anything else was another world away right now.

Greyscale dummied a safe pass to Angel as Mercury approached, fists blazing brightly. He somehow made the shimmering afternoon heat even more unbearable despite still being yards away from her. Gods knew how Greyscale could endure it so close. As the Alchemist reached him, Greyscale seemed to duck under the swing of an arm, lost for a moment in the haze, before reappearing several feet away and stroking the ball out wide to Siren. Angel meanwhile had run towards the centre and the waiting form of Midas.

The Alchemist Captain smiled as she approached, the self-satisfied grin of one lost in his own importance. It seemed odd to Angel that he didn't follow the ball as she had expected, instead preferring to face her down. Cautiously, her steps slowed, an eye kept on Siren moving into position to fire off a shot at the goal. If she could keep him engaged then he couldn't defend. Midas smiled on, eyes laden with murderous intent. Siren, ball rolling out in front of her, passed out of sight behind Midas for a moment. The crowd stamped their feet rhythmically, although Angel couldn't tell which side. She guessed it was her own.

Somewhere behind her over the sound of the crowd, she heard another sort of roar; a rolling, thunderous whoosh, followed by terrified screams torn from a strangled throat. Angel dared a glance behind her just in time to see Greyscale drop to the ground and roll away from Mercury, desperately trying to extinguish the fire that engulfed him. Her heart stung as she realised that she couldn't do anything to save him and that he wouldn't want her to anyhow. If he was lucky, then he would be able to carry on during the game. If not, maybe the apothecaries could get to him in time to prevent too much scarring.

Heavy feet drummed into the floorboards of the stand, picking up pace. Siren took the shot at the Alchemist goal.

There was a flurry of movement around her, of a dark cloak whipping in spirals like a vortex. The man that it belonged to? Mist? It was one of the Union players, the one seldom seen. Angel thought she had the name right. As with Greyscale, there was nothing Angel could do. She had Midas to contend with. Somewhere, she registered the shot missed, sailing past the goal post and into open field.

She and Midas faced each other down. Without taking his eyes from hers, the Alchemist palmed the Crucible and smooth skin began morphing into sharp, jagged metallic shards. Angel didn't wait, dashing to her flank to chase the ball, hoping to use her greater speed to gain the advantage. Midas followed. She knew that any attempt to fight him off would have been pitifully one-sided.

The ball had come to a rest, bouncing near to the boundary, almost over the line. Unprompted, an overzealous Alchemist Guild official booted it back up the pitch before Angel could get to it. The Fisherman supporters in the stands let loose a torrent of abuse at him, matching the cheering of their rivals opposite. Angel watched the ball pass over her head, disheartened.

It was intercepted by Shark four paces forward from the halfway line, the roar of the crowd louder than ever. The Fisherman skipped around the recently returned Calculus and her battered pet metal man, the ball skilfully rolled between her legs.

'Siren, head in the game!'

His shout seemed to reach the hooded woman even above the ambient noise of the crowd, their complaints about the weather long since forgotten. She snarled at Mist, the wrath of a thousand years enmity passing between the two, before dropping alongside her Captain as Mist faded backwards. Shark still in possession, they pounded down the pitch together, towards the goal.

Angel was happy enough just to try to survive against Midas. Desperately, she ducked, parried and sidestepped as his assault forced a retreat away from the Alchemist lines. The burns on her arm throbbed painfully as she moved, even as air passed over them. She dared not try to deflect any blow with the limb. She was exhausted and couldn't last much longer; exertion, the heat, the natural dynamic of the game had all taken their toll. Still, some force of will inside forced her to fight on.

Shark judged that he could reliably hit the goal in another five strides. He might have tried earlier, but at distance he would have been at the mercy of the Gods and Shark did not gamble. His pace slowed slightly as he broke his sprint to kick the ball a little further out and set his legs to make the shot, eyes on the target. His right boot struck the muddy turf, left swung back for the next...

He barely had a chance to pull up and hurriedly parry the left handed blow from Katalyst, the warning from the shadow cast by the huge Alchemist hidden by the overhead sun until he was right on top of the Fisherman. Off balance, Shark missed blocking the second strike, a powerful overhand haymaker. The blow dropped Shark onto his arse like a haul spilled on to the decking. Head spinning, his vision seen from the bottom of a bottle, he tried to push himself back to his feet and fight off the follow up tackle.

His head cleared a little and in the fleeting moments when his eyes focused properly he could tell that Katalyst was in a bad way, probably why the strike hadn't knocked him clean out. Several of the thick tubes that ran around the Alchemist, usually plugged into barbaric looking sockets on his arms, had been torn out and leaked yellowy syrup that stank like sour lemon. Those same sockets, now open to the air were swollen red and bleeding. Still, the giant screamed incomprehensibly behind his mask, hammering mighty fists all around him, even as his feet stumbled uncertainly. Shark had time to wonder at the peculiar sort of pantomime they must look before Katalyst's knuckles connected with his temple and knocked him clean out; the Alchemist losing his balance and tripping over Shark even as the Fisherman fell.

The unreal world around them shimmered, the colours all too bright, edges indistinct, blurry. Mist was there, always gloating, smirking too far away to reach by a hair's breadth any time she tried to get him. Again and again she tried to trick him with sudden turns, lunges or grabs at his cloak. Each time, the same frustrating failure.

The misdirection was absolute. Siren could not tell where she was on the pitch any more than she could have known what happened to the sound. It was deathly silent. The crowd, now muted, seemed to her to be moving at unusual, fractured angles, pointing their fingers as though to do so was to conduct some onerous duty, their arms moving in what should have been agonising directions. They might have screamed or sighed, mouths opening and shutting in either slow motion or at increased speed, totally at odds with reality.

Past a grinning face many times the size it should have been, Siren saw what they might have pointed at; the ball sitting at rest in a patch of green grass turning brown amongst great oceans of mud, bright orange in this odd world. She punched through the apparition in front of her, making long strides towards the ball. Mist seemed to sense the change as it happened and she was suddenly assailed with doubts, wild accusations of inadequacy and insults; all delivered in a mocking, singsong voice from leering masks surrounding her.

'Get out of my head!' Her scream sounded shrill, not her voice at all. The reply was thunderous, a chorus of the childlike voices all at once, repeating her eventual demise, that she belonged lost, forgotten to all.

'No!' The going was harder now, like wading through water, each foot weighing progressively more as she took every step. Not far left at all. Her back was slick with sweat, soaking through her robes. Just one more. She told herself that every time. The voices continued, unending, louder as if she was surrounded by spirits.

Finally, she was upon it, reaching out a hand before her for some reason, grasping at air, legs betraying her. The voices stopped for a moment and the air before her seemed to coalesce into the image of a small child; an infant, painfully familiar.

'Why do you try so? Why, for these people, that abandoned you?' The creature spoke in Siren's own voice.

'Begone. You cannot exist.' Though Siren tried to shout, her voice was robbed of all volume.

'Yet I do, and you have not answered my question.'
'I do not answer to devils of air!'

The thing that wore her face considered her, its expression a cruel parody of her own smile.

'Devil am I now? You never find occasion to smile any more, do you? You haven't, since... but then, you are too afraid to talk of that, are you not? I smile. Perhaps it is you who are the devil, a devil of the seas and I am the true individual.'

Siren paused, mind churning through the impossible, somehow plausible. The thing that was now Siren carried on talking to her.

'You understand me now I see. So concerned with forging your path forward that you never stopped to look inwards. Never once wondered what crawled out of that broken husk that day.'

Siren stared at her younger self with blank eyes; except that she was no longer Siren after all. She was something unknown.

'You must be exhausted, you have travelled so far, with a wound in your heart so large an ocean could flow into it.' Siren's voice continued, soothing, calming, erasing all frustration. The figure that had thought it was Siren was forced to admit that it was tired, desperately so. Like a puppet released from its strings, it fell to its knees, in front of the real Siren. A hand like a soft wind gently ran through the hair on the figure's head, pushing the hood back, exposing the neck. It offered reassuring noises and familiarity.

'Never!' A banshee's shriek tore through her throat, ripped raw from her very core. Siren surged upwards, smashing through the visage of the imposter and tore her way out of the hallucination. She raised her head from the dirt. The colours reverted to normalcy, the sound returned back to the universe. She tasted dirt and grass in her mouth. Spitting, Siren rolled over onto her back, and stood warily.

Mist was gone, nowhere to be seen. Over to her right, Shark and Katalyst lay in a tangled heap of limbs. Midas looked to have the upper hand against Angel; the young girl nearly cowering away from him. His face betrayed his frustration that the rookie had held his play so long, the usual composure completely gone, replaced by a something else.

The ball sat at Siren's feet.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.
Snapped them open, and made the shot.

CHARACTER PLAYS	COST	RNG	ZONE	SUSTAIN
<i>Super Shot</i>	1	S	-	Yes
This model gains [+1/+2"] KICK.				

CHARACTER PLAYS	COST	RNG	ZONE	SUSTAIN
<i>Dirty Knives</i>	2 /	6"	-	Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-2] DEF, [1] DMG and the poison condition.				

Brisket's Character Plays.



PLAY BONUSES AND PENALTIES

Knocked Down

A knocked-down model suffers [-1] DEF.

Crowding Out

When making a Play action, the active model suffers [-1] dice-pool for each enemy model it is engaged by.

PLAYS

Models have a number of special abilities and skills they may use during the game; collectively called Plays.

There are three types of Play a model may have access to; Character Plays, Heroic Plays and Legendary Plays.

CHARACTER PLAYS

[Name] Each Play has a name by which it is referred to.

Character Plays are the most common, with most models being able to access these abilities.

Character Plays are used by spending Influence or play-icons generated from an Attack.

[Description] This describes the Play and its effect. Plays will specify if they have a Pulse or an Aura effect.

[COST] Shown as either the amount of Influence it costs to activate the Play and/or the cost in play-icons required to trigger this Play as a result of an Attack action.

[RNG] Shown as one of three values;

[n"] This is the maximum range of the Play.

[S] Denotes that the range is Self and may only be used on the model that activates the Play.

[P] Denotes the Play can be activated by a result generated from the Playbook during an Attack action. This Play may only target the original Attack action target.

[ZONE] This shows if the Play affects an area of the pitch and what the size/type of the effect is.

[Sustain] This shows if the Play has effects that last until the end of the current turn.

CHARACTER PLAYS USING INFLUENCE

During its activation a model may spend Influence to trigger a Character Play as an action; the cost of each Play is shown on the model's profile.

Models triggering the Play may target any valid model within range and LOS.

A Play action that targets an enemy model is resolved as a [target model's current DEF] TN test. Use the Play's cost in Influence to generate the dice-pool.

Plays targeting friendly models automatically succeed with no TN test required.

CHARACTER PLAYS FROM ATTACKS

Alternatively, it is possible for Character Plays to be triggered as a result of a Playbook result.

When the active model triggers a Character Play from an Attack, they may use play-icons to pay for a single Play from their Playbook instead of spending Influence. The Playbook shows the cost in play-icons required for each Play.

The active model triggering the Play may target any valid model within range and LOS.

The Play is automatically successful; apply the effects immediately.

SEQUENCE OF A CHARACTER PLAY

1. The active model declares a Character Play against a valid target in LOS and pays the applicable cost.
2. If required, determine the success of the Play with a TN test.
 - a) Generate a dice-pool using the cost of the Play; apply any applicable bonuses or penalties.
 - b) A Play's success is resolved as a [target model's current DEF] TN test.
 - c) If the TN test is successful, apply the effects of the Play immediately.
3. If a TN test is not required then the Play is successful, apply the effects of the Play immediately.



Brisket has just attacked Siren. She generated [3] net-hits on her attack which gives her access to her 3rd Playbook column. She decides to use the play-icon on her 3rd column to use her Dirty Knives play on Angel who is nearby. Brisket checks that Angel is within the [6"] range of her Play and confirms LOS.

Angel is a valid target and so immediately suffers the effect of the Play as Brisket launches a wicked looking knife through the air at her.

Ox knows he needs to do something about Kraken's heavy armour if his team are to take him out. He spends [2] Influence to use "He Ain't Tough!".

Ox confirms Kraken is within range and LOS before generating his dice-pool. The cost of the Play is [2] Influence, with no other bonuses, Ox has a [2] dice-pool.

Kraken has a [2+] DEF; Ox rolls 2D6 and gets a 1 and a 4.

Kraken doesn't get to apply his ARM to the roll which means Ox has generated a single net-hit, enough for success. Kraken immediately suffers the effects of the Play.



Mercury smiles as he declares a "Fire Blast"; he pays the [2] Influence cost of the Play.

Looking around, he sees that Ox, Boar and Brisket are clumped together perfectly and chooses and centres a [5"] template on a target-spot within the [8"] range of the Play.

If he was triggering this Play from a Playbook result (following an Attack) then all three of the Butchers would be automatically hit and suffer the effects of the Play!

However, Mercury has paid Influence to use this Play and so must test to see who is affected and who isn't.

For each model within the template, Mercury gathers a dice-pool based on the Influence cost of the Play, in this instance [2]. He may choose to spend MP and use Bonus Time! to add a further dice to the pool, but must do so for each target model.

After resolving the Play against all three Butchers, Mercury leaves the [5"] template in place as "Fire Blast" has an ongoing-effect until the end of the turn...

AREA OF EFFECT

Some Plays affect a zone on the pitch (as opposed to a single target); these are called Area of Effects (AOE).

By default, AOE Plays deliver an instant-effect to an area; all models (friendly and enemy) within the AOE template may be affected.

Some AOE Plays also deliver an ongoing-effect to an area.

SEQUENCE OF AN AOE PLAY

1. The active model declares an AOE Play and pays the applicable cost.
2. Place a circular template (with a diameter equal to the size of the AOE) with the centre of the template anywhere within the range of the Play.
3. If the Play has been triggered by a Playbook result, all models within the template suffer the effects of the Play.
4. Otherwise, for each model within the AOE template, in an order determined by the active model:
 - a) Generate a dice-pool using the cost of the Play in Influence.
 - b) A Play's success is resolved as a [target model's current DEF] TN test. The active model may choose to automatically succeed against friendly models.
 - c) If the TN test is successful, apply the instant-effect of the Play immediately.
 - d) If the TN test is unsuccessful then that model has managed to duck out of the way of the worst of the blast and is unaffected by the instant-effect.
5. If the Play has a ongoing-effect, mark the AOE zone with a template.

ONGOING EFFECTS

Some AOE's leave a residual ongoing-effect on the pitch (like a patch of Rough Ground for example). Mark the zone of any ongoing-effect on the pitch with a suitable template.



Mercury's Fire Blast leaves a [5"] zone on the pitch until the End Phase of the current turn. Models entering or ending their activation within the zone suffer the ongoing-effect of the Play; in this case the Burning condition.

Both Ox and Boar move out of the [5"] ongoing-effect and so do not suffer the burning condition. Catalyst charges Brisket, as he enters the zone he suffers the burning condition. Catalyst knocks Brisket down which means she is unable to leave the zone in her activation and so she suffers the burning condition at the end of her activation.

HEROIC AND LEGENDARY PLAYS

Heroic and Legendary Plays are something special that only the really talented players have the ability to perform.

They follow the rules for Plays outlined above, but with the following exceptions and extra rules.

HEROIC PLAYS

Heroic Plays cost [1] MP to activate instead of Influence. Heroic Plays may only be used once per turn.

All effects caused by a Heroic Play last until the end of the turn unless noted otherwise.

LEGENDARY PLAYS

Legendary Plays have no Influence or MP cost.

All effects caused by a Legendary Play last until the end of the turn unless noted otherwise.

Legendary Plays are limited use abilities and so may only be used once per game. (Reminder: Legendary Plays are not refreshed when models are returned to play using the Icy Sponge).

Shank had warned Boiler that the changing rooms for the pitches in Erskirad were all shitholes and he remarked now as he looked around him that the one in Trabesilev was no different. Never yet having travelled very far afield to see the alternatives and admittedly lacking the experience of the older player, Boiler still had to agree. This place was a shithole.

The worst problem was the lack of separating rooms. It was literally one big, empty space, with just a hole in one corner to function as a toilet and no door to keep out the cold wind. The roof was thatched, but in places had rotted through completely, further exposing them all to the elements. Moss and lichen grew up the grimy brownstone walls, adding to the sense that someone had started building the room and then given up and abandoned it. It smelt of mould. Princess decided to add her own flavour to the earthy aroma, cocking a leg and pissing against the bench closest to Boiler.

The worst part for Boiler had been actually using the room for what it was intended for. Shamefaced and convinced that all eyes were upon him, he had slunk into a corner, turned his back on the others and tried to conceal himself as much as possible as he quickly stripped off his normal robes and pulled on his match clothes. Once his breeches were on he felt much better, and a lot less conspicuous. Turning to face the room again he saw Shank grinning at him.

'Ain't got nothing that the rest o' us haven't seen there, boy,' Shank leaned in conspiratorially, his voice lowering as he gestured with his thumb behind him. 'But just you wait for the real show to begin in a second. A young 'un like you might learn something if you keep your eyes peeled and your mouth shut.'

He was, of course, referring to Brisket, who like Boiler had no privacy for stripping off. Unlike the young apprentice, she simply looked around for a suitable bench to put her clothes on and then brazenly began to unlace her bodice. With each rustle of string, the material slackened off causing more of Brisket's skin to become exposed. Boiler was caught with his mouth open, halfway between wanting desperately to look in any direction but hers and a stirring below telling him to do the exact opposite. Next to him, Shank leered openly at the woman, earning him a cuff around the back of the head from Meatbook.

*'Draw a picture, it'll last for longer.'
'What's your problem? Upset I'm not paying you enough attention as well?'*

'You wish, gutter rat.'

'If you had more to look at, I might be more interested.' This earned him a slap across the face from Meatbook.

Boiler stood watching the exchange, still with his open mouth catching flies and a fiery red complexion. To his eyes, Meatbook had plenty to look at; for all that she would be extremely unlikely to appreciate the compliment.

'Leave him alone 'Hook. Most likely more action from a woman than he's had in months.' Brisket joined in the conversation, her thick Skaldic accent heavy with a dismissive tone.

Boiler turned to look at her and immediately wished he hadn't. His face now an even darker beetroot, burning red at the sight of the topless woman before him; he fled, her laughter ringing in his ears.

If Boiler had thought that inside the changing room was cold, outside was proof that it could be even worse. Now wearing his match clothes instead of the thick robes he had been attired in when he arrived earlier, the piercing frost took the breath out of him at once. He would not have to worry about a red face for long out here. Somehow, even in the dugout, the wind found its way to sweep down and set a chill into his bones. Out across the empty pitch it looked desolate, grey.

Ox and Boar were already out here, talking to another figure that Boiler did not recognise. The man was tall, almost eye to eye with Boar, but nowhere near as broad shouldered, being instead seemingly slender under a long coat that hid most of his features. He wore the same curious furry cap with no peak that the more affluent Erskiri people seemed to; although his bore no decoration on it, unlike the majority of others that Boiler had seen. With the high collar pulled up against the cold and the hat covering most of his head, Boiler could barely see his face, and what he could see was covered by a thick white beard. Protruding somewhere from that thatch of hair was an ornate brass pipe that the man was smoking; Boiler's eyes catching its delicate styling in the light.

The three looked over at him briefly and then continued speaking as if he wasn't there.

'Finally, my associate in Valentia warns me that the Fisherman's Guild currently pursue an agenda that might have some unhealthy repercussions in this match.'

Ox nodded. 'No surprise there. Last time around we wasted Corsair hard.'

'Indeed. Having heard this news, I nonetheless thought it best to bring it to your attention. I am sure that you are able to make arrangements for your own protection.'

'Don't worry about us, Longbanks. You just watch after your own worthless hide like usual and we'll watch out for ours. I'll do what you have asked like always; you can forget trying to get on my good side with your empty warnings.'

Whoever this was, Ox afforded him little extra respect; for all that he appeared to be a superior of some sort. The man chuckled in response, mirth entirely the wrong response to Ox's threat.

'Asak'ya, Master Butcher.'

'Asak'ya.' Ox spoke the strange Erskiri word surprisingly fluently.

Pulling his coat tighter to him, the man left, ducking his head under a beam across the dugout's entrance. The sickly sweet smell of his tobacco remained.

Meatbook ducked the blow and swept her right hand upwards, delivering a savage uppercut to Jac. Her vicious hooked blade caught his temple and a spray of rich red blood flew up into the air, moving in the opposite direction to his heavy steps. Staggering and unable to right himself, the Fisherman's knees buckled and he hit the ground hard, the frozen soil having seemingly little give to it. Meatbook twirled her blades for the crowd who roared their approval. The whole movement had seemed to Boiler like an abstract dance with explosions of coloured ribbons, like those he saw in the Valentian marketplaces.

Not bothering to see whether the prone Fisherman would rise, Boiler and Meatbook ran in the direction of the opposition goal, the ball running out before them. Princess loped alongside out of nowhere, her jowls spilling drool all over the snow underfoot.

Seeing Kraken closing in on them, Boiler quickly passed out to Meatbook and sprinted out wide, the other Butcher mirroring his movement. Princess kept to his heels. Predictably, the larger man opted to follow the ball. A moment away from contact, Meatbook neatly controlled the ball behind her, changed direction and punted the ball out sideways back to the Boiler. She was rewarded with a big meaty fist in her side, just into her lower ribs; she crumpled to the floor. Boiler didn't hang around to see what happened next, pushing the ball out before him, taking aim and kicking it as hard as he could. He hit the goal squarely. He heard the crowd scream, one or two even cheering his name. That had to be a first.

As an official from the Fisherman's Guild scampered out to kick a new ball into play and retrieve the old one, Boiler jogged back to where Kraken had left Meatbook laying on the ground. Boiler offered her a gloved hand to help herself up.

'Was it worth the broken rib?' She jested, as she pulled at his proffered limb and rose to unsteady feet.

'Yes, it's 2-1, we have the lead!' Boiler smiled crookedly back. Meatbook nodded, turned to make her way back downfield, and winced at a sharp shooting pain. She swore two unfamiliar words of her native tongue.

'Thought the bastard pulled his punches against women. Holy Pantheon, I wouldn't want to see how hard he hits other men.'

Snakeskin faced off against Brisket. The tough Butcher couldn't have known it was her though. She had carefully disguised herself as one of the rookie Fishermen, a semblance so carefully orchestrated that the trick had even fooled that old trout Greyscales. Snakeskin had been forced to listen to the old goat wheeze on for hours of pointless trivia and meaningless advice before the game, just nodding and forcing herself to smile politely. Loved the sound of his own voice so much that he let his eyes lie to him, which was fine as far as Snakeskin had been concerned.

The Butcher girl eyed Snakeskin warily, the ball at Brisket's feet. The crowd simmered, watching the confrontation. With the Butcher side on two goals, another would secure their advancement to the semi finals of the Championship and send the Fisherman's Guild crashing out. Understandably, the next goal was probably worth its weight in gold to the player that scored it. Brisket would do her utmost to keep possession.

That would be her downfall. The Union player didn't care about the result of this game, or who scored the next goal. Even if she did, the gold would be earned by the face of the rook that she had bled out and thrown into a ditch yesterday. No, Snakeskin was here with an entirely different agenda.

Brisket chanced a quick look left and right, clearly hoping for one of her team-mates to be lurking nearby and be able to help, but Snakeskin knew that they were otherwise engaged fighting off the Fisherman side. Shank had been taken out early by Kraken and thanks to Shark, Boar was sleeping off a concussion in the dugout; one of the extremely rare instances that someone had been able to knock the big bastard out of a game. That left the Butcher side with a numerical disadvantage, which Ox naturally countered by pushing his team hard to waste the opposition and pick up bodies again. A more astute captain might have tried for the remaining goal to finish early, but it seemed that Brisket was the only Butcher with a sensible head on her shoulders.

A pretty head on pretty shoulders at that. A shame that she should be the one. Always the pretty girls.

But she was. So Snakeskin couldn't care less for either of those things, instead focusing on her delicate and fragile neck that connected the two. Enough time wasting. Let's do this.

Snakeskin feinted directly forward towards the Butcher, hoping her disguise as a rook would fool Brisket into a predictable dodge in turn. She surprised Snakeskin by instead sidestepping and pushing the ball out seemingly unmarked. Not what she had expected at all, but then she kept the advantage; as long as Brisket thought that her opponent was wet behind the ears, she'd assume that Snakeskin would chase the ball as most rooks and defenders did. The mercenary silently saluted Brisket's aggressive posture, assuming that she planned to attack first and escape with the ball second.

The ball was within reach but instead of lunging forward, Snakeskin turned suddenly and tackled Brisket, her feet aimed at her opponent's shins. She caught Brisket as she was about to step behind her and try for a choke, barrelling into her, the pair collapsing in a heap. Brisket broke the Union player's fall, all of Snakeskin's weight landing on top of her. She rolled out to recover quickly, regaining her feet, not winded as intended at all. The sound of the crowd grew louder, all eyes on the pair.

Fast, aren't you?

Brisket eyed Snakeskin more carefully now. She had lost some of her advantage in the exchange. A line of red across Brisket's bared stomach said otherwise though. Her left hand was pressed to the wound, thin lines of blood trailing downwards between her fingers.

Not fast enough.

Snakeskin doubted that the Butcher had seen the concealed knife on the approach, even less so as it flashed out between them as they fell. Snakeskin still had plenty of surprises for her opponent. The ball temporarily forgotten, they played out the duellist's jig once again for the onlookers. It never failed to amuse Snakeskin how the players all forgot the game once they realised that their life was imperilled, every one of them.

Once again she tried a feint, but this time Brisket was ready, circling back. She followed her, not letting up on the pressure and forcing Brisket further away from the ball. Snakeskin had no doubt that even this Butcher might have long since tried to run if it were not for that anchor, something Snakeskin had carefully waited for during the match.

Brisket looked nervous now, her hand stained with her own blood, running along her forearm to the elbow. By forcing her to keep moving, Snakeskin was causing the wound to keep bleeding heavily and open further. The pain must have been considerable. Brisket had been lucky that the confined space between them had meant she couldn't have been gutted properly, although in a sense, it had only delayed the inevitable.

The opening came when Brisket lost her footing on the snow. It was only momentary, she recovered well, but the moment was all Snakeskin needed to be on top of her opponent, foot tripping Brisket again and pressing down her forearm to the Butcher's pale throat. Brisket tried to fight back, her bloody hand reaching for Snakeskin's face, inches from pushing in at her eye sockets, whilst a knee sought to strike between the legs. Her right hand had caught Snakeskin's, keeping the Union assassin from using it to stab her with the knife again.

Clever girl. But I am left handed.

The stiletto flashed in the sunlight as Snakeskin stabbed into her adversary, the lower back, just below the ribcage, aimed upwards. She twisted it as she pulled it back out, feeling the grip lessen on her wrist. The second strike hit the same spot, the blade this time a muted red from the gore. Brisket gasped as it slid into her, breaking the soft skin a second time and her struggles grew weak. Snakeskin chanced relaxing her right arm to allow greater movement and the third thrust cut deeply into Brisket's stomach. She started upright at that one, spraying a fine mist of red over the surrounding dirt and shredded blades of grass from their struggle.

The crowd had worked out that something was amiss by now, several jeering or shouting to get the attention of the other Butchers. This would have to be finished quickly. The last two cuts were hurried, one driven into the right flank to match the first two, pulled out to tear her insides as much as possible, the second across the side of her throat, Brisket's convulsions and the glistening layer of wet blood making it too hard to aim precisely.

Snakeskin could not afford to wait any longer. To the crowd, they must have looked like a bloody parody of the painted girls from the Seamstresses Guild. Snakeskin chuckled as she dashed in the direction of the stands, shedding her disguise as she went. Reaching them, she leapt over the barrier in one bound and quickly became entirely inconspicuous amongst the disgruntled supporters.

'This looks bad. Real bad.' Boiler couldn't be sure whether he was speaking to himself or for the benefit of anyone else. Either way, it did look bad. He didn't know the human body had so much blood in it, as it lay in crimson puddles before him, staining the snow pinky red.

Brisket wasn't moving. Even the nearby crowd, usually bloodthirsty, were quiet. A sense of dread hung heavy in the air. Meatbook was trying to roll Brisket over onto her side, her own injury sapping her strength. Boiler snapped out of his reverie and hastened to help her.

'Got to stop her choking on her own tongue or drowning on the blood in her mouth.' Meatbook grunted.

Whilst he was sure that might be true, Boiler wasn't sure that there was much point. No one could lose this much blood and survive, surely. Brisket's dead weight seemed to be impossibly heavy for some reason, but they both pushed the slight woman over. Brisket made no reaction. Boiler put his head down to her face, trying to ignore the vacant stare of her eyes, to check to see whether she was breathing still.

There it was. Impossibly shallow, but it was there. Barely.

He looked up to ask Meatbook what to do next, only to realise that she too had passed out. Princess nuzzled her maw at Brisket, making an unusual whimpering sound Boiler had never heard from the savage animal before. Boiler felt totally helpless. In an absurdly dark comic moment, he giggled as he lamented that butchers knew all about cutting people up, but nothing about how to put them back together again. That was part of a rhyme, wasn't it?

Ox arrived on the scene, his face set in a dangerous scowl.

'Away boy. The Sawbones are coming, there is nothing for you to do now.' Boiler could indeed see that the Physician's Guild Apothecaries were sprinting towards them, as fast as their bulky instruments and bags would allow. He suddenly was swept up, off of his feet, as the Master Butcher grabbed his shirt and dragged him up face to face.

'Did you see who did this? The eyes that stared back at Boiler were that of a madman. They promised nothing but violent retribution, brutal revenge. There was no mistaking that. The hard lines set into Ox's face had frozen at the corners of his narrowed eyes as he asked the question again, shouted this time, drops of spit landing on Boilers collar.'

'Did you see which bastard did this?'

Boiler shook his head in a frantic no.

'I swear that I will find them. I will find them and then I will end them.' The eyes stared still, but Ox wasn't talking to Boiler now, any more than he was to the panting Apothecary trying to tend to Brisket. Already, the cold white smock of the Physician's Guild and the metallic tools were stained sticky red with her blood. Princess was snarling at him, obviously confused as to what the man was doing.

Ox dropped Boiler and directed a heavy boot towards Princess, who yelled and ran off.

'See to it that she lives. Both of them do.' Ox appeared to notice Meatbook for the first time. 'If they don't, then I will find you too.' His tone, lower than usual seemed to carry menace that could destroy buildings. The Apothecaries seemed to agree, their hands moving faster as they tried to tend to Brisket's injuries.

Boiler remembered suddenly with a start that they were in the midst of a game. Ox read his mind.

'We've lost this one boy. It doesn't matter now.' He didn't sound too sad about it.

'But boss, this was the Championship, the playoffs, for the Final.'

'Some things are more important than gold. Your own blood is worth more than victories.' A pause, as the Butcher looked at the opposition, celebrating their victory in the distance. 'And this is not just about the game, not anymore.'



MOMENTUM

In a game of Guild Ball, a team's actions and play can generate impetus and drive. The building excitement, the roar of the crowd, the quickening of pace, this is all called **Momentum**; a resource that allows players to capitalise on the building pressure in the game by giving access to special actions not usually available.

Momentum can also be used to affect the Initiative roll each turn.

Momentum swings backwards and forwards throughout a turn; Momentum may never be reduced to less than zero.

GAINING MOMENTUM

Guild Ball rewards positive proactive play by generating Momentum, for example when a team plays to its strengths, or scores a goal, or passes the ball, or even through taking out enemy players.

A team will not generate Momentum while a friendly model in possession of the ball-token is completely behind their own goalline. Additionally, a team will not generate Momentum while a free-ball is completely behind their own goalline and the ball-token was last touched by a friendly model.

SCORE A GOAL

An active model that **scores** a goal gains [1] MP for the active model's team.

When resolving a Shot, if two or more sixes are rolled in the dice-pool then the goal scored is a **Screamer!**; the active model's team gains [2] MP instead.

PASS THE BALL

An active model that makes a successful Kick action and passes possession to a friendly model gains [1] MP for their team.

TAKE DOWN

An active model that inflicts the taken-out condition on an enemy model will gain [1] MP for their team.

PLAYBOOK

An active model gains [1] MP for each momentous result selected during an Attack action. Models never gain MP when making a Parting Blow.

USING MOMENTUM

Building Momentum gives a team far greater tactical choice through access to **Momentous actions**.

A team may use any number of Momentous actions, at any time, as long as they have MP.

SHOOTING

During its activation, an active model that wants to attempt a Shot on goal must spend [1] MP.

As the Shot is a Kick action the active model must also still spend [1] Influence.

COUNTER-ATTACK

When an Attack or Charge is declared the target model can immediately choose to spend [1] MP to react. The target model may only use Counter-attack once against each enemy model per turn.

Immediately after the active model resolves their Attack action, if able, the target model may then make an Attack action against the origin model.

Counter-attacks do not generate MP.

DEFENSIVE STANCE

When a Charge is declared, but before the action is resolved, the target model can immediately choose to spend [1] MP to react. Only [1] MP may be spent on Defensive Stance per Charge action.

The target model immediately gains [+1] DEF against the Charge attack made by the active model.

TEAMWORK

After a successful Pass The Ball, the active player may select one of the following actions. Only one Teamwork action may be selected per successful Pass The Ball:

Give'n'Go

The active model may spend [1] MP to immediately make a [4"] Dodge.

Pass'n'Move

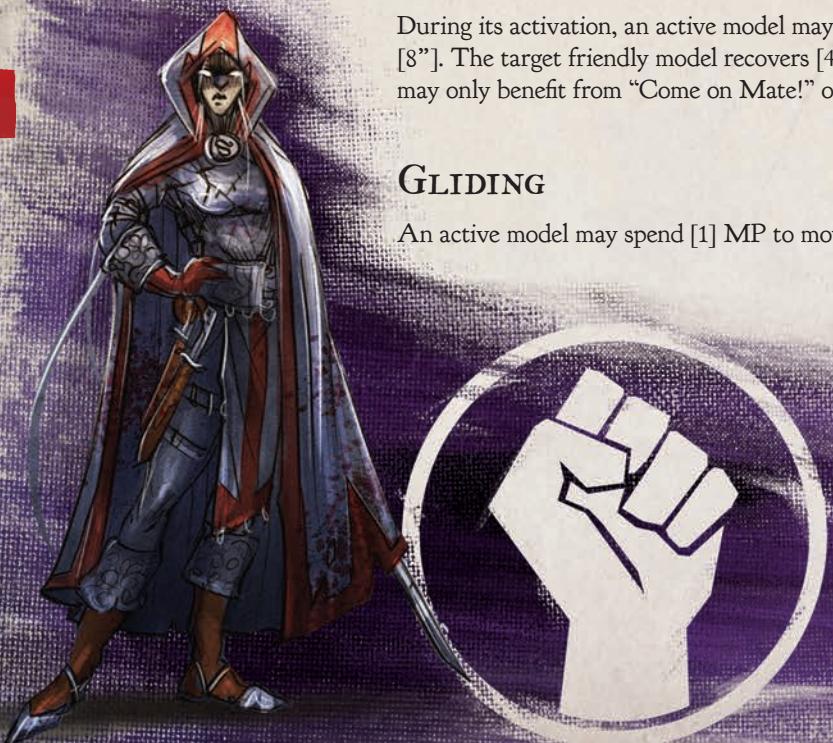
The receiving model may spend [1] MP to immediately make a [4"] Dodge.

Snap Shot!

The receiving model may spend [2] MP to immediately make an out-of-activation Shot attempt on goal without spending Influence.

The difficulty of the Shot is increased. A **Snap Shot!** Kick action requires [2] hits to successfully score a goal (rather than the usual [1] hit) and is subject to all Kick bonuses and penalties.

It is possible to score a **Screamer!** with a Snap Shot.



RUN THE LENGTH!

After scoring a goal, the active model may spend [1] MP to make a [4"] Dodge before their activation ends.

BONUS TIME!

When resolving a TN test, an active model may spend [1] MP to add a single dice to a dice-pool, before rolling. This may only be done once per TN test after all other modifiers to the dice-pool have been factored.

TAKE A BREATHER LAD!

During its activation, an active model may spend [1] MP to recover [4] HP or remove all status conditions. An active model may only "Take a Breather" once per turn.

COME ON MATE!

During its activation, an active model may spend [2] MP and target a friendly model within [8"]. The target friendly model recovers [4] HP or removes all status conditions. A model may only benefit from "Come on Mate!" once per turn.

GLIDING

An active model may spend [1] MP to move across rough-ground without penalty.

Lord Chamberlain Vincent de Laurentis stood suddenly from behind his desk, kicking his expensively upholstered chair backwards and causing it to topple over. Barely suppressing his anger, he leaned forward and pressed his palms down onto the wooden desktop. He glared at Longshanks who sat across from him; nonchalantly puffing grey-white clouds into the air from the end of his pipe. If the Union agent noticed the threatening look he did not acknowledge it, as had become the custom between the two of them. Their meetings had remained the same uneven power struggle over the last few months, with no signs that might ever change.

The once pleasant room was starting to reek of the pipe's thick smoke, so often had he been visited by Longshanks now. It was disgusting, staining the material of the expensive drapes and tapestries that the Lord Chamberlain had imported from Piervo; making the cream pattern on the lavish carpeting yellow and dry to the point of cracking as it was stepped upon. In every respect, Longshanks had begun to affect a sort of decay in the office, much as Laurentis would have sworn the man had to Guild Ball itself.

Thanks to the meddling efforts of the Union, their agents had managed to crop up in not only the Fisherman's Guild side, but in nearly every team this season, all of them pursuing their own agenda. There seemed now to be too many to count; the exiled Erskiri, the thug in the top hat, the monster that made Laurentis shudder just remembering him. The list went on. Worst had been the Chameleon. That one had made Laurentis feel profoundly uncomfortable just being in the same room as her, even if it were his own office. After much consideration during long, sleepless nights, Laurentis had decided that it had been the aura of promised violence that had been so unsettling about the woman more than anything.

Longshanks always seemed to have the upper hand, a cause of constant frustration that might have broken the Lord Chamberlain. Finally however a mistake had been made that Laurentis could exploit. During the last Fisherman's Guild game, Longshanks had for reasons unbeknownst to all, ordered one of his lackeys to eliminate a member of the Butcher's Guild. Word had it that as a result the Master Butcher was out for blood.

Laurentis intended to give the brute just that.

The Lord Chamberlain had known that Longshanks would be returning to the Fisherman's Guild to meet with him before long and so he had been patient, biding his time, preparing. And now, here the loathsome man was. The slime that would destroy Guild Ball if left unchecked.

Alone, and unguarded.

Today was going to be different, a day that Laurentis had awaited for some time.

'Where is he?' As if to punctuate the question, Avarisse slammed the woman's shoulders into the alley wall with each word. Each time, the back of her head struck the brickwork with a hard jolt.

'What's the matter, pig? Ran out of little boys to play with? Through dull eyes and near concussion she snarled her defiance at him, struggling in his grip even as the two of them knew the effort to be futile.

Avarisse grinned, an uncomfortable smile full of rotting brown teeth and shining gold crowns. It was not a pleasant smile. His left hand suddenly grabbed her by the throat and lifted her clear off her feet. Immediately her hands scrabbled against him, face beginning to turn pink. His other hand bunched up into a tight fist and reared back.

'Now bitch, I'll ask once more. But that will be the last time. After that, they find you in either the sewers or the river. I haven't decided which yet.' His voice betrayed no emotion, merely stating a matter of fact.

Eyes wide, face now red and fast turning purple, the woman tried to speak, only to find that the grip on her throat was too tight.

'Why Mssr Avarisse, I do believe that you have managed to coerce some degree of compliance out of her.' Greede's high pitched voice might have made an impartial observer laugh, if not for the deadly threat to the woman's life. 'Do be so good as to let her down for a moment.'

Avarisse relaxed his fingers and let the woman fall through them to the ground, landing badly on the grubby pavement. Greede approached her and carefully lifted his coat tail as best he could to avoid it lying too heavily in the dirt.

'Now, Neesa,' Greede pursed his lips. 'I imagine that you must prefer your actual name to the distasteful ones levied upon you by my colleague?' The woman nodded weakly. 'And so you should, of course. You shall have to try and forgive Mssr Averisse's lack of delicate vocabulary and forthright manner, I am afraid. Over the years one becomes quite used to it and forgets how unaccustomed a stranger might be to such behaviour.' He glanced at Avarisse, but if the larger man took any offence, he chose not to show it. More likely he was used to Greede's extravagances by now and thought little of them.

'But, I digress. Neesa, perhaps you would be so good as to share us with information pertaining to the whereabouts of our dear associate, Mssr Longshanks?'

The woman coughed, and started making a spluttering sound. Greede wondered whether the woman was choking at first, until he realised it was all that remained of her strangled voice.

'How should I know? Never even heard the name. Who is he, another piss poor excuse for a man like you two are? Go feck yourself, you weird little posh bastard and take your bully boy thug with you.'

Greede removed his hat and made a pantomime of shaking his head sadly, a sincere look on his face.

'That is a rather regrettable answer to my enquiry. In any case, thank you at least for your involvement in our enquiries this evening, Madame Neesa. It is always a pleasure to encounter new people.' He turned to Avarisse. 'Alas, we do not have time to waste here and must resume our perambulations as quickly as can be facilitated. Dispose of her as you wish. I have not a single preference.'

They did not allow him even the slightest hint of light and so he had scrabbled around in the darkness. He counted five paces in one direction and six in the other. But then, with no light it was impossible to tell whether he was just measuring the same pathway twice over, getting lost, turned around in his steps. He had spent what had seemed like hours trying to precisely measure the distance. He returned four and a half, five, six, seven and even eight paces. But more often than not, five and six were the most regular numbers. He took a median calculation from that, which satisfied him, until he realised that the room might not be square.

This was a setback.

After spending some time in the darkness inwardly cursing himself, he instead made a route of the circumference of the walls; crawling on his hands and knees his palms ran over the brickwork and the rough floor. This revealed nothing but standing alongside the wall with one hand resting upon it, he was at least able to confirm five paces by six paces. Satisfied, he groped around for the straw that served as his only bedding and tried to sleep. He had awoken after some indeterminate period of time and realised his new predicament.

He now had precisely nothing to do.

Initially, he had tried to relax and bring his thoughts to order. When that failed he tried to get his captors' attention, yelling, screaming at the top of his voice, alone in the pitch black. He found the heavy door and hammered his fists into it until he could feel that he had chafed and cut his knuckles. The pain at least had given him some new stimulus, but he had been otherwise completely ignored.

Subsequently, he raged. At his captors first; cursing, offering bitter and extravagant insults in every language he knew. This turned inwards at some point. He had been foolish, idiotic to not take precautions to prevent this, too caught up in his own sense of self importance. This had been brought on him by hubris alone. Finally he collapsed, exhausted. He had not been given food or water. His throat was hoarse, his skin itchy and clammy. It was likely that his cuts were infected from the way that they still stung as though the wounds were fresh. They might have been; he couldn't tell.

He lay in the darkness once again, drifting in and out of consciousness.

The building burned ahead of where the pair stood, dispassionately watching the flames quickly tearing through to engulf the entire structure. In the dark of night, they were a bright beacon rising high into the sky, fluttering madly in the wind.

'With inevitability, the autumnal evenings are beginning to draw in once again, Mssr Avarisse. Although somehow, I imagine that the people of this little community shall not thank you for the service you have provided in making them a communal fire, despite how it might serve to keep their chills at bay.' Greede's face glowed golden; the reflection of the firelight doing little to mask the sinister intent in his eyes, or colour any warmth to his voice. 'Did the gentleman know nothing by way of information that might have been helpful to us in our quest?

Avarisse grunted by way of answer and continued to pick at a piece meat that looked like it might once have belonged to a chicken.

'My word, masticating at a time such as now? My dear man, does the work that we are in the midst of undertaking not take some precedence over your need for consumption? Where did you even produce that from?'

There was a crashing noise as something collapsed within the inferno, a scream that died very suddenly and a fresh roar of flame. Neither made comment, seemingly not paying the event the slightest attention.

'In the larder. He wasn't going to need it any more. Shame to waste it.' Avarisse belched loudly and having finished eating, threw the remains of his meal into the conflagration before them. He turned to Greede, half of his face now hidden in shadow. Avarisse's eyes were hollow in comparison to Greede's, disinterested. 'Why did you start speaking like you do?'

'Pardon me?' Greede cocked his head and looked up at his partner in surprise, left eyebrow raised over a bulging eye and quite lost for further words.

'We both grew up spitting distance from each other. We had the same life down in the slums. Both learnt our lessons the hard way, were made into what we are together. But at some point, you started talking like you do. Different to everyone else.' Hard eyes continued to regard Greede coldly. 'You don't actually say anything different though. Not really. Just make it seem that way with unnecessary words that most people can't understand. Half the time I don't think that they even bother trying to. I can't remember when you started.' Avarisse snorted. 'Why did you?'

'Unnecessary? Why, I...' Greede tried to find words. 'That is to say, you accuse me of circumlocution? You find my attempt to provide an altogether more refined presentation to the world, my example to others, repugnant somehow?' Greede fought back an indignant tone to his voice, surprised to find himself remarkably put out by this unexpected turn in the conversation.

People were starting to gather now, an angry crowd. Most looked worried that the fire would spread to their homes. Several had fetched buckets of water, splashing it ineffectually over the flames.

'Nevermind. One day you might cut the shit and tell me.' Bored again, Avarisse strode off, leaving Greede to hurry along after him as quickly as his bowlegged limbs would allow.

The torturer, for there could be no other word for a man as mean spirited and vicious as this one, slapped him square in the face again. Longshanks' vision blurred even more and tears sprung unbidden to run down his cheekbones. He had long since stopped feeling the stinging sensation on the skin on his face at least. The pain he felt elsewhere was another matter of course. Through his impaired vision he dared not look at his feet. Once he had tried to do so and the messy blur of red gore with little white flecks showing through had made him retch. He couldn't feel anything anymore down there beyond a constant dull ache.

Until the torturer decided to work on them some more at least. Then he screamed, clenching his teeth, biting his tongue once and tasting blood as well as the bile.

His hands were next. One by one, his nails were ripped out, sharp spikes of savage pain that left him with a bizarre phantom sensation of the injury being inflicted over and over again. What followed was worse; when nails were driven into the soft, tender skin underneath, leaving him in agony. If he passed out, then he was awoken with a heavy handed slap.

When he thought he had already experienced the very extremes of pain that could possibly be wrung from the human body without death, one by one, a hammer was taken to his knuckles. Each of them was pulverised in turn until his fingers flapped uselessly from his hand; never again to be used for any task.

They never asked him questions. He pleaded with them to do so, at moments when the pain reached its peak, far beyond his threshold. At others, he maintained a broken silence, but for his sobbing. After the torturer had finished each infernal practice, he would throw Longshanks bodily back into the darkness. Bread and water awaited him each time. Longshanks debated starving himself to death, but human nature always took over and with broken hands he shovelled the food into his mouth and trembled as he gulped the water down. Once his hands were beyond function, he simply ate off of the dirty floor, tasting sand as well as the stale bread.

He did not dare even try to touch his fingers or toes. The horrors that had been inflicted upon him were too much to bear. Even in his dreams they swam up at him, waking him screaming.

The man that had once been Longshanks had lost all sense of the passage of time. He was a man lost to the world, removed from any consequence. That truth broke him a little more, nearly as much as the pain that had been inflicted upon him did. He lay in the foetal position weeping, cradling his stumps, too afraid to touch them, scared even of his dreams.

Finally, when he was brought to the room the next time, there was a new man waiting to talk to him. A familiar face.

They stood atop the landmark known as the Kingsbridge; a once magnificent structure of embossed brass, etched ironwork and lovingly carved wooden supports. A tribute to some forgotten monarch long since dead. During the Century Wars it had been stripped of all of its metals as the army had passed through; desperate for material to melt down and make into armour and weapons. Now it was a dark and imposing eyesore, a drab piece of wood and stone stained by the passage of time, its tempura murals long since faded beyond sight.

'Now you see Mssr Avarisse? Finally, we are getting somewhere. Indeed we are,' Greede was hidden in the shadows of one of the vast wooden beams. He preferred to do so if possible, deducing that people found him altogether more imposing that way. Not that there was any need for that kind of representation at present. The mark in question was already sufficiently terrified. Very much so.

Avarisse held their informant by his ankle at arm's length, over the edge of the bridge. Far below, the waters of the river Monde had dried up completely over the summer leaving a rocky riverbed, leaves and dust swirling violently between the columns and struts that supported the Kingsbridge. The wind whipped past Avarisse and Greede, their cloaks fanning out behind them like short capes. For the upside down man, it was as if the elements had decided to add to his despair; the gale plastering his shirt over his face suffocatingly and swinging him wildly around.

Muffled by his shirt and the buffering wind, he had been shouting something which the pair had ignored, preferring to draw the moment out before continuing their interrogation. If Avarisse felt any fatigue at his exertion, his face did not show it. In fact, he had the same stony expression that he nearly always wore. Greede chuckled, imagining that it was as if Avarisse had a single default that he constantly set himself to. At length, Avarisse relented and pulled his arm back closer to the edge.

'Speak! Either one of them would have had to shout to be heard over the weather, but Greede suspected that Avarisse would have shouted in their victims face anyhow.'

'Please!' The Fisherman's Guild official was terrified, that much was obvious. 'I'll tell you anything! Anything!'

'Good. Start with where Longshanks is. I tire of holding your weight up.'

'The smoking man? The Lord Chamberlain has him, in the dungeons below the guild.' He suddenly swung violently, although Greede couldn't tell whether that was due to the wind or just Avarisse entertaining himself at the man's expense.

'Which Lord Chamberlain? Which house?'" Back to bellowing again, Greede observed. Definitely for effect.

'Lord Laurentis! In Rue Lejourre, Valentia!'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes! Yes! He is there. I watched them carry him down into his cell myself.' A sudden realisation. 'Wait, I didn't touch him myself! It was not my idea, I only followed the Lord Chamberlain's orders!'

Greede grinned at Avarisse. They were done here. Avarisse's eyes narrowed. 'Too bad for you. If you'd at least hit the miserable bastard I might have liked you more.'

'What? Wait -'

Avarisse dropped the man into the inky darkness below.





Laurentis laughed to see his new, twisted form, mutilated and crippled. Longbanks might have felt shame once, but now, all he knew was utter despair. The Lord Chamberlain by comparison looked extremely healthy. Likely, without the meddling of the Union, the Fisherman had been able to resume sleeping properly at last. Through milky eyes that could not focus properly any more, Laurentis looked to be some sort of saint, compared to what Longbanks conceded his appearance had to have become.

'My eye, is it punctured?' His voice was slow, quiet, cracked.

It was strange that his first words to his tormentor were not of defiance. In the first period of his captivity, he had practised this meeting over and over in his head, each time more aggressive than the last. But now that had all been beaten out of him. The second surprise was the sad realisation that he had accepted his fate and had made peace with himself in preparation for it.

'Your eye?' Laurentis looked confused. He peered closer. 'Probably just dirt in it. Doesn't look like we've got as far as that with you yet. Don't worry, I intend to ensure that we will.' His tried to hide it behind a dignified and even tone, but his voice couldn't hide the sense of childlike glee inspired by Longbanks' suffering.

Longbanks nodded. Or at least, he tried to. His chin went down and then sagged into his chest, unable to rise again. How was he even standing? He didn't think that he would be able to any more. He was probably suspended on the wall he surmised, although turning his head to check seemed an exercise in wasting energy. Laurentis was talking to another figure, presumably the torturer.

'...ow much longe... hm... ,...you thi... a pity.' Longbanks could just about make out some of the words.

There was another slap, although this one was considerably weaker than the others had been. It had been Laurentis this time.

'It looks like you might not have as long a stay with us as I had anticipated after all. Those pathetic appendages of yours are most likely infected. Certainly your feet are. You can't even feel this, can you?'

Longbanks did look then, with growing horror, as Laurentis reached down to his foot and pulled off a chunk of his skin, the meat and gristle beneath peeling away with it. The Fisherman held it up to the light from a torch on the wall next to him. It was the end of one of his toes; Longbanks could still see the nail hanging off one side.

He hadn't felt it. That was a very bad sign.

'You stink. And this makes me disgusted. Even more than you used to when you smoked that disgusting pipe. Just completely steeped in filth.' For an all too brief moment Longbanks smiled; remembering the taste of the tobacco, rich and flavourful, imported from Sultar.

Another slap wiped that memory and the smile clean away. Laurentis was speaking again.

'But now? Now you will never be able to interfere with my guild, or Guild Ball again. I want you to realise in your last moments that I have won. I was going to throw you to the Butcher's Guild, but instead I think you can rot in the darkness, thinking about how the Union is broken once and for all.' Laurentis finished with a wide, self-satisfied grin.

Longbanks was stunned. Amazed.

And then he started laughing. First deep down, in his chest, but soon rising up, into his mouth, forcing itself out of him. A relentless, unstoppable mirth that spilled out into the cell. It hurt his sore throat, his aching lungs, prevented him from breathing at all except in desperate gasps. Once it had begun, he couldn't stop it, any more than he could have broken free of his chains.

Laurentis' smug grin slipped off of his face completely and his expression turned hard again. Through tears that now accompanied the laughter, Longbanks saw that the Lord Chamberlain's eyes flashed dangerous intent, but he didn't care. He had never feared this man, especially now.

'You think,' the laughter made speaking even harder. 'You think that I am the head of the... of the Union?' He broke into a hacking cough. 'I am not even a senior councillor. I am, I am one of many. I'm not.' More fits of laughter. 'I'm not even the only Longbanks!' That was all he could manage, before his merriment overtook him completely and he was incapable of any sort of words.

Ashen faced, Laurentis fled the room, Longbanks cackling ringing in his ears.

TERRAIN

Terrain plays a big role during the course of a game of Guild Ball, ranging from how the ball reacts to how models traverse the pitch.

How Much and Placement

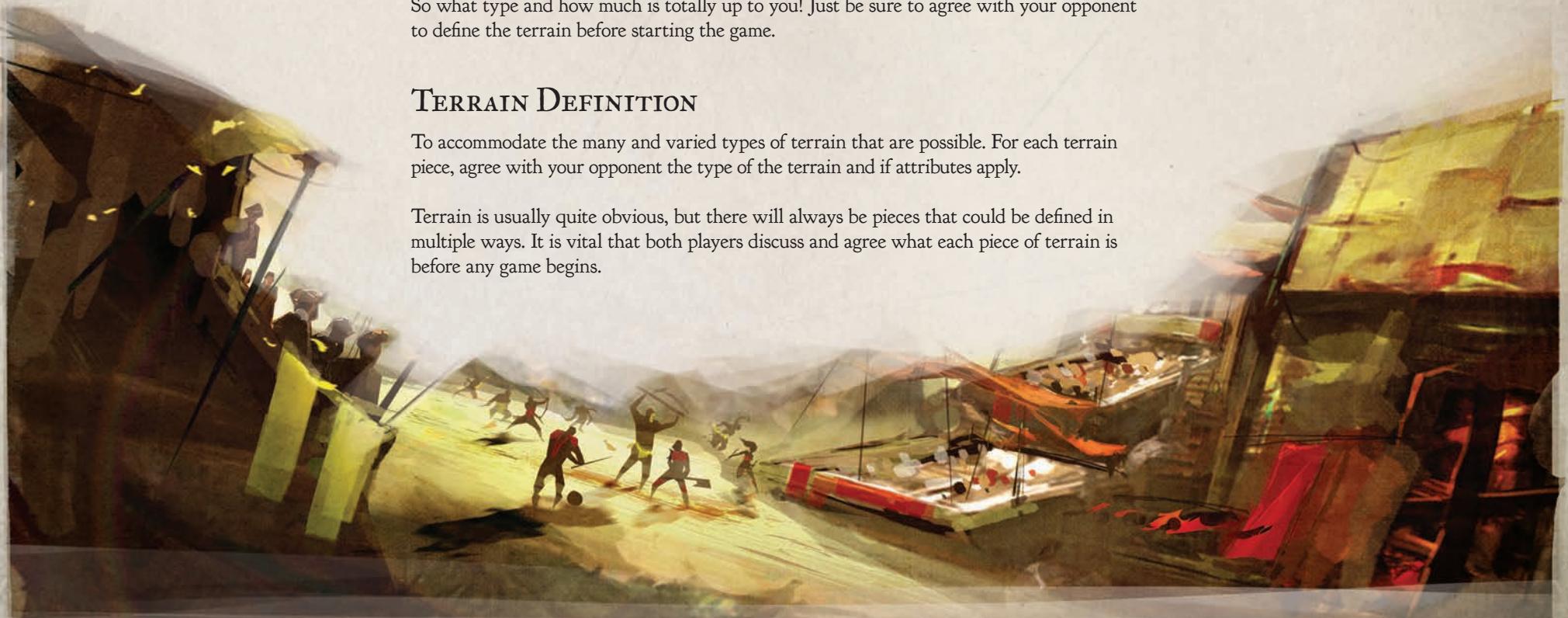
There are no set rules for how much terrain to use as Guild Ball can be played anywhere; from a purpose built pitch to a town square, on an old battleground or in some old ruins – even in a pig field!

So what type and how much is totally up to you! Just be sure to agree with your opponent to define the terrain before starting the game.

TERRAIN DEFINITION

To accommodate the many and varied types of terrain that are possible. For each terrain piece, agree with your opponent the type of the terrain and if attributes apply.

Terrain is usually quite obvious, but there will always be pieces that could be defined in multiple ways. It is vital that both players discuss and agree what each piece of terrain is before any game begins.



TYPES OF GROUND

OPEN GROUND

Describes mostly even, clear ground free of any hazards, such as grassy fields, streets, roads, tracks, desert tundra and so on.

Open-ground is considered the default terrain type for the pitch so you don't need to declare this!

There are no special rules for this type of terrain.

ROUGH GROUND

Rough-ground would be something like thick mud or bogs, puddles, streams, ploughed fields, ground with trip hazards such as broken masonry, and so on.

Rough-ground is difficult to move through. A model that moves within rough-ground at any point immediately reduces their movement-distance by [2"]. This penalty is only incurred once per instance of movement.

FAST GROUND

Fast-ground is areas of the pitch such as ice patches, slick mud, wet cobblestones, wet wooden decking.

Fast-ground can be traversed at a faster pace than open-ground. A model that moves within fast-ground at any point immediately increases their movement-distance by [2"]. This bonus may only be gained once per instance of movement.

TYPES OF TERRAIN

COVER

An active model targeting a model that is benefiting from Cover with an action, suffers [-1] TAC to that action.

OBSTRUCTION

An **obstruction** is a small/medium height terrain feature; things such as crates, statues, platforms, wagons, boulders, and bales of hay.

A model within [1"] of an obstruction is considered within that terrain piece and benefits from Cover.

Obstructions may be traversed but more slowly than normal movement. A model that enters an obstruction terrain piece immediately reduces their movement-distance by [2"]. This penalty is incurred each time an obstruction is traversed.

When forced by an enemy model to move into contact with an obstruction, models will immediately stop.

Models may never Sprint or Charge over an Obstruction.

Models may end their movement on top of an obstruction if there is sufficient room to place the model's base.

When a ball-token scatters and contacts an obstruction, use the rule of least disturbance to place the ball-token in base-contact with the terrain piece along the original line of travel.

BARRIER

A **barrier** is an impassable terrain feature, usually due to height; things such as single trees, cliffs and buildings.

A barrier blocks LOS and all movement including Pushes and Dodges. Models forced to move into a barrier immediately stop.

The ball-token may not be placed on a barrier; if the final landing-spot is within a barrier, or the ball-token contacts the terrain for any reason, use the rule of least disturbance to place the ball-token in base-contact with the terrain piece along the original line of travel.

FOREST

A **forest** is a unique zone of Rough Ground; models within a forest benefit from Cover. A forest is represented by a number of tree models on a base. The base defines the zone.

A model making a Kick action while within a forest suffers [-1] dice-pool.

A model making a Kick action to a target-spot that is within a forest, suffers [+1] TN.

Models may draw LOS into forest terrain but cannot draw LOS through forest terrain.

GUILD PLOTS

In Guild Ball, the guilds constantly wage a subtle political war in the shadows of commerce and trade. Vying for power and wealth, they seek to use any means to gain an advantage. Plots and Schemes represent their Machiavellian plans driving and influencing games of Guild Ball.

Each player has a number of Guild Plots that they may try to deliver on for an in-game benefit.

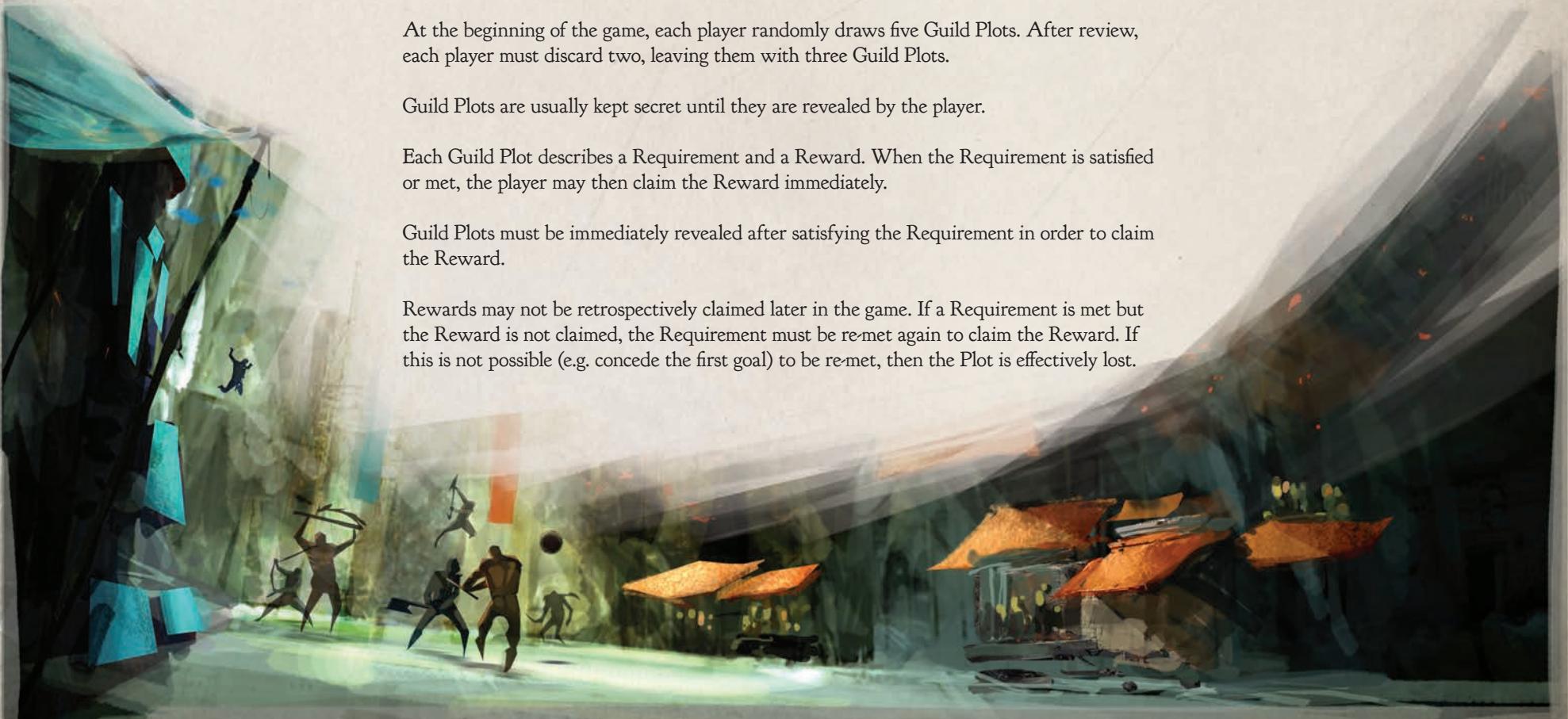
At the beginning of the game, each player randomly draws five Guild Plots. After review, each player must discard two, leaving them with three Guild Plots.

Guild Plots are usually kept secret until they are revealed by the player.

Each Guild Plot describes a Requirement and a Reward. When the Requirement is satisfied or met, the player may then claim the Reward immediately.

Guild Plots must be immediately revealed after satisfying the Requirement in order to claim the Reward.

Rewards may not be retrospectively claimed later in the game. If a Requirement is met but the Reward is not claimed, the Requirement must be re-met again to claim the Reward. If this is not possible (e.g. concede the first goal) to be re-met, then the Plot is effectively lost.



SEASON ONE GUILD PLOTS

VENGEANCE

Requirement: A friendly model suffers the **taken-out** condition as a result of an **Attack** or Play from an enemy model.

Reward: Mark the enemy model with a **vengeance-token**. Models attacking the marked model may remove the **vengeance-token** to add [+4] net-hits to any single Attack action.

MAN MARKING

Requirement: An enemy [Captain] model suffers the **taken-out** condition as a result of an **Attack** or Play from a friendly model.

Reward: During the next Maintenance Phase, add [+2] Influence to your team's Influence Pool.

MAKE A GAME OF IT!

Requirement: Concede the first goal.

Reward: During the next Maintenance Phase, add [+2] Influence to your team's Influence Pool.

KNEE SLIDER!

Requirement: A friendly model scores a goal.

Reward: Before the subsequent Goal Kick is resolved, the model that scored may immediately make a **Dodge** up to their max-move.

MIRACULOUS RECOVERY

Requirement: An enemy model inflicts the **taken-out** condition on a model which may be given Icy Sponge tokens.

Reward: The **taken-out** model immediately gains maximum icy-sponge tokens.

KEEP BALL

Requirement: Generate [1] MP from a Pass.

Reward: The model currently in possession of the **ball-token** gains Close Control until the end of the turn.

Close Control - Once per turn, this model may ignore the first Tackle result against it.

MAN DOWN

Requirement: A friendly model suffers the **taken-out** condition as a result of an **Attack** or Play from an enemy model, resulting in you having less friendly models on the pitch than enemy models.

Reward: All friendly models gain [+1] ARM until the end of the turn.

SIDELINE REPAIRS

Requirement: Remove the **taken-out** condition and return a model to play using the Icy Sponge rule.

Reward: The returned model may be placed anywhere in base contact with any table edge in your half of the pitch.

DON'T TOUCH THE HAIR!

Requirement: An enemy model engages a friendly model.

Reward: The engaged friendly model may immediately make a [2"] **Dodge**.

SECOND WIND

Requirement: Return one or more friendly models to play using the Icy Sponge rule.

Reward: All friendly models returning to play in the current Maintenance Phase may make an **Advance** up to their max-move (instead of base-move).

WHO ARE YA?

Requirement: An enemy model scores a goal.

Reward: Mark the enemy model with a **vengeance-token**. Models attacking the marked model may remove the **vengeance-token** to add [+4] net-hits to any single Attack action.

PROTECT YOUR BALLS

Requirement: A friendly model suffers a Tackle result and loses possession of the **ball-token**.

Reward: The friendly model may make an immediate Counter-attack without spending MP.

The Final. The most important game of the year. The game that all the others had been building towards. The game that made all the others seem paltry, petty and insignificant. The Final! The day that you looked forward to more than your name day, more than the days of your Gods. Today even the eternal deities in their remote Heavens looked upon the world in anticipation, just as their mortal worshippers did. Solticeius, Aburr, the Erskirii Pantheon, the Lords of the Deep, the ancient and primal Lords of Nature all; look upon our teams and bless them with your divine touch that they might end the day victorious. The Final! The name passed from mouth to mouth, across gender, age and social boundaries. It echoed down the corridors of power, off the walls in the streets as the people streamed down them, every avenue filled with cheering, screaming people.

For today it was that day and the fates would choose one team alone to stand above all others, triumphant.

Honour had stood here before. Once in 14c, when she had been fresh herself, her debut season. Then, she had listened and been inspired as the Old Man had given the speech. Punched the air with the rest, cheered and run out onto the field, to victory and the restitution of the Mason's Guild's power. That game had been simple. Just one of the crew, her eyes wide with the glory of it all. Stunned that this career might actually work and she wouldn't have to go back to the uncertainty of mercenary contracts. That night she had toasted with them all as the crowd's deafening chanting still rang in her ears.

The next time was two years later, having missed the previous year's victory from being injured in the semi-final. Again, she had watched them all as the Old Man spoke to his team. Bull, Chalky, Mallet, Castle and the rest. Each one proud, chests puffed out; the young ones starry eyed as she had been; the old veterans reserved, stoic. The Old Man had looked tired then, although she didn't say it. Worn down by too many years in the game. He bid it well and she had loved him so. Part of her had desperately wished that he could have found a way out, to sidestep and let one of the ascendant players take over. But he couldn't and they all knew that. The pressure to keep winning, to hold onto this fragile power, was too strong.

It broke him soon after. Honour remembered the bitter taste of defeat and then the acidic tears when the Old Man was forced out in ignominy days after. That double blow had been the end of the honeymoon with Guild Ball. Everything after that lost some of its shine, suddenly seemed hard edged, real rather than fairytale.

Again in 19c, after spending three years rebuilding the team. Her team now. Only Mallet left of the old guard that remembered those days. He had been sweet to her and told Honour (when the others were out of earshot) that she reminded him of the Old Man. Honour couldn't have afforded to have any delusions about it, but it didn't stop her smiling. It had been her turn to give the speech then, to inspire them. She had used every word she knew, every ounce of saved up spirit and zeal, stared each of them in the eye the same way she had the men of her mercenary company when they were about to charge up and out of the trenches. Defeating the Mortician's Guild that day had been her reward and finally, as she proudly lifted the cup aloft, she allowed herself to accept the Old Man's mantle.

Now she stood in the dugout with her team and found that she had used up all of her words already. Is this how he had felt in 16c? Exhausted eyes, run dry of emotion and a mind searching for words that didn't sound an old cliché? Honour looked at the team, each individual.

Flint, sitting hunched over on a bench, feet evenly spaced. His elbows rested on his knees, hands clasped, head low, eyes closed. If she hadn't known him she'd have been worried, but this was just his typical pre-match routine, his mental preparation. She envied him, the ease with which he found it. Mallet stared at her expectantly, the same resolute face that he had worn every time she had been here before, waiting. No help from him either. Harmony looked bored already. As she ever did when faced with her little sister, Honour felt that same nervous concern that the girl would be injured on the field. But, like every other time, she forced herself to forget it. She couldn't allow that to interfere with any decisions she might make.

Brick and Tower talked quietly in one corner, whispering urgently. The huge blocker expectantly punched his fist into an open hand while he talked; his deep rumbling voice as carefully measured as always. Tower by comparison spoke quickly, excitedly, eyes darting around. He wore a grin as huge as ever, completely oblivious to any pressure at all. It was his first season and it had been a very good one, his place in the team easily cemented. To find himself in the Final was likely beyond his wildest dreams of how this might have played out.

Honour remembered herself the first time that she had been here watching him. And then suddenly, she knew what to say.

The crowd, simmering for some time already in the early afternoon, were loud already. They had long since reached the level that would have been expected of a normal game, each stand trying to outdo the other before any players had arrived out of the dugout or the game had begun. Flags and banners waving frantically, they shouted their heroes' names at the top of their lungs; defiantly daring the opposition to answer with their own names, only to be drowned out. The struggle carried on for nearly an hour, circles of spiralling noise eddying in the air. Musicians within the stands blared out a cacophony of sound, overlapping each other; none complimentary in the slightest, but joining the struggle to be loudest. Then came the pointing from both sides, as the first of the guild officials strode out upon the hallowed turf.

Both sides began to stamp their feet in unison, almost a military tattoo, or the breathing of a mighty, feral animal in anticipation of seeing its prey at last. As all voices died out, the final officials took up their position standing at the side of the pitch. Most wore determined or worried smiles. For both guilds, today would have profound consequences, but only one would see the culmination of their efforts result in total domination. For the other, shame-faced obscurity amongst their peers awaited. Next came the officials from the Physician's guild; marching out all in their traditional white, ghostly apparitions almost lost entirely through their anonymity. The stamping feet continued relentlessly, increasing in tempo on both sides, catching members of both stands unawares. For a faltering moment the stamping lost its cohesion before returning stronger, faster, and louder.

And then the first of the players ran out of the dugouts, hand held high in salute, the sun shining off of their armoured forms, a vision of when titans strode the land. The stands exploded with a deafening roar so great that it seemed that those down on the pitch might well be buffeted to their knees by its power; but those noble warriors stood their ground, basking in the exhalation.

'You never get used to this, no matter how many times the tides wash you up here.' Greyscale was shouting in Angel's ear, trying to make himself heard as best he could over the noise. She nodded, trying to fight back tears, tears that she couldn't be sure were from fear, or happiness, or something else entirely.

'Don't bother, let them run. Blessings from the Lords o' the Deep girl.' Greyscale offered her a wry grin, having seen her watery eyes. Angel smiled back.

She had been the last out of the dugout, still tying her boots when Shark led the Fisherman's Guild onto the pitch. She hurried over to join the others in their half of the pitch, leaving Shark standing at the halfway line behind her with a Magister from the Fisherman's Guild, awaiting the approach of Honour and the Mason official for the coin toss.

None of them looked like they understood what she felt. Elation was probably the best word, but it didn't encompass the underlying concern she had if she couldn't pull her weight. The rest of the team seemed settled, accepting. She thought that she could see a nervousness in the way that Jac had reached down to pull at his left boot twice now, seemingly without realising he was doing it, but that was about it. Siren's icy stare from underneath her hood was unwavering and Kraken never seemed fazed by anything. Nearby Greyscale shared words with Jac, but he was an old hand at this. Angel doubted he ever felt nervous about a game. For the wily veteran it was probably all arrows and crosses marked on a chalk board somewhere.

'Time to get ready lass. They're starting.' Greyscale had finished with Jac and turned to face her. He nodded up the pitch at Shark, jogging back towards them.

Angel gave Shark one last look before running out wide where the Fishermen preferred her to play. From here, out on the flank, she could use her pace as an attacker, further forward than the rest. The Fisherman's Guild always favoured an aggressive stance and they planned on taking it to the Mason side today; to exploit their opponents' slower players and playbook. Jac, patrolling near their goal was the only line of defence initially. It would remain this way until the game started moving towards them when Kraken would also drop back to support. She knew where the rest of them would be by heart. Shark in the middle, marauding ahead of centre; Siren and Kraken to the left, almost mirroring her own position. Greyscale floated where he was needed but to start would be with her, until they knew where the Mason's Guild planned on playing Harmony. She was the wild card, the one to watch.

Everyone was at their marks for the kick off; Honour and Flint stood waiting by the ball. The former with her back to the Fishermen, the latter with his hands set to his hips making two small diamond shapes either side of him. Angel might have seen an unusual look in his eye, but she didn't know him well enough to be sure. The crowd still chanted their support, but quieter now, hushed, waiting. Almost time, any moment now. Sweat tickled its path down Angel's back beneath her heavy tunic. She heard Greyscale breathing next to her and readied her body to sprint.

A shrill whistle. Kick off. The stands roared their approval and the Fishermen started to run. Honour still had her back towards them but now hopped aside, turning and moving, leaving the ball alone. Angel heard Greyscale mutter something next to her but couldn't be sure what it might be.

And then was so surprised that she didn't think any more.

She saw Flint look toward their goal, one finger outstretched towards it, run forward and strike the ball with an almighty kick.

It flew through the air as though ancient spirits had taken hold of it, blurry and indistinct. Angel was struck by an absurd wonder as she followed its path with her head; who was it that painted the leather ball white for the finals and why? It never was for any other games. Did they wash it off after the Final was over, after the crowd's cheering had died out? The wonderment didn't last very long, replaced as it was by growing apprehension.

All eyes were on the sphere fizzing through the air towards the Fisherman goalpost, none of the players moving, the game at standstill. The drumming feet died out, the musicians stopped playing. Jac jumped in the air towards the ball, trident desperately raised to try and block its path; but to her horror Angel saw that he was tragically rooted, never even coming close. The ball soared past him and struck the Fisherman goal with a resounding whack that even Angel and Greyscale heard, furthest away. There was a stunned silence from every spectator, stretching the torment out.

'Never seen anything like that before.' Greyscale managed to find his voice first, sound suddenly alien to Angel's ears.

And then that same visceral, bludgeoning scream from the Mason stands. A worse start to a game even Greyscale couldn't think of.

One to nothing, Mason's Guild.



At last a bloodied Brick went down, but not without a fight. To Greyscale's eyes, it was a scene from the decks after a boarding action. Whatever it was, the Mason's Guild's pet ape mascot lay like a beached whale, unmoving. Damned thing had almost done for Greyscale. Kraken was probably out too, down to one knee and not looking too steady at that. Greyscale tried to help him up, Kraken's big mitt dwarfing his hand as he clasped it, but the other end was all dead weight. The big man's eyes couldn't focus properly, his movements slack. The old Fisherman let go and watched Kraken topple over sadly. No time to stop, had to get back in the game; this sort of trade wasn't the way to win.

They were still one goal down, but on the offence. Shark and Siren had paired together down the middle with Angel running ahead of them. Greyscale tracked Angel's movement. The remaining Masons marked up their men, Honour and the other girl shadowing Shark and Siren, Mallet moving in a hurry towards Angel. Somewhere out to one side Flint was trying to flank the centre, but Greyscale could see Jac drifting towards him.

See how he deals with that, the flash bastard. Greyscale couldn't reconcile it as anything other than a fluke goal, but it had put the pressure on the shoulders of the Fishermen to draw level in a hurry.

'Shark! To Angel!' Greyscale made his run across behind the two defending Masons, pointing to Angel. Shark looked up and found her, feinting one way and then turning his foot sideways to pass safely away from the legs of Harmony and towards Angel. Greyscale put on a burst of speed to beat Mallet to the action, as Angel collected the ball and brought it under control.

The rook, the one they called Tower, was moving off his mark now, slow to follow the unexpected change in direction. Greyscale had no intention of tackling a tough looking kid like that if he could avoid it, but might not have much choice. Then, short of breath, he found himself face to face with Mallet and couldn't look any more.

'So Greyscale, here we are again. Two old workhorses, should know better by now.'

'Maybe,' air, sweet air, trying to get it back into his body. 'Maybe not. You couldn't quit this any more than I could.'

'Aye, that's the kicker, isn't it?' The pair circled, Greyscale trying to keep between Angel and Mallet, pleased to hear the sound of her moving away, taking the ball with her. He hoped that his faith that she could shake off Tower was not misplaced, but he didn't intend to gamble on it.

Mallet had always been decent, one of the good'uns. But older, wiser sea birds knew other ways to fly and leave the landlubbers behind. Instead of answering, Greyscale sidestepped into a fighting crouch and made to jink his body left when Mallet came for him. The Mason, in all of his years had been nothing if not predictable. The attack came, barrelling forwards from the left as expected. Greyscale waited and at the right time slid down under, ducking the hammer swing, ready to slide away and join Angel.

The trip struck him right across his shins and sent him tumbling. He sprawled face down in the dirt, wind driven out him by the surprise as much as anything.

'What's the matter, forgotten your sea legs? Nothing personal, you old bastard.' Mallet was gentle as he could be with the blow to the side of Greyscale's head; just enough to knock him out before he could get back to his feet. A courtesy, from one professional to another.

Angel nervously approached Tower, taking in all of the details around her. The heft of his right hand, the angle at which he held the hammer. The strange icon embossed onto it. The shine of his armour in the sun. He looked jittery, like her. He might have been as nervous as she was. Both of them rookie players, new bloods, suddenly propelled into the Final for the biggest stakes possible in the game. Now they faced off, decisive pieces in a play the Fisherman's Guild desperately needed to succeed.

She cautiously made to kick the ball, drawing Tower away from his mark, only to move it back to her side, which he followed. She noticed his eyes flickering uncertainly between her feet and her body, unsure of whether to attack her, or try to block a shot on goal. She realised that she could exploit this. Another sidestep, another feint. More of that nervous look from under a furrowed brow, glistening with sweat already in the early game.

Like Shark, he was ruggedly attractive. Why were all of the best ones impossible to catch? Either not swimming in the right ocean or just too big for her net, it seemed. Even then, if they had been suitable for her, she might have had to do something like this to them. Life was unfair.

Angel took two steps forward giving Tower both an opening and a challenge. He took the bait, eyes straying to her arms as she wielded her trident in a swooping arc behind her, making to strike at him. As soon as he did, Angel turned the toes on her right foot up and punted the ball through his legs, far too fast for him to block it by closing them, into the goal behind. It struck the hard stone gently, albeit enough that Tower heard it, although the guffawing mixed in with the cheering from the stands probably gave that away in any case.

Angel offered him an apologetic smile as she turned away to run back up the pitch, before he could see her get upset at his anguish. The look on Tower's face was pure devastation, the worst thing that could have ever happened during any game, let alone the Final. But as much sympathy as she might have had, the poor guy was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mason's Guild one, Fisherman's Guild one.





Whilst the ball was out of play, Honour took advantage of the pause and restored order as best she could. Brick and Marbles were out, but so were Greyscales and Kraken, levelling the field. She bellowed commands at the players around her.

'Tower, I thought you were made of sterner stuff! Suck it up man and get back in the game!' The inconsolable rookie seemed to snap out of it a little, which was good. The Masons needed their defender on top of his game and Honour feared the silly mistake would cost them more than an easy goal against. 'Mallet, nice work. I want another out of you now. Drop into Brick's sweeper position.' The veteran stroked his beard approvingly and jogged into place.

The ball was just being kicked out to them now. Flint received it on his chest and dropped it down at his feet. Already the Fishermen were advancing down the pitch, hungry, looking to keep the momentum.

Harmony! About time you got your arse in gear and put in an appearance! Honour spared her sister none of her harsh words. Harmony shot her a foul look from across the pitch, but followed the play, keeping up with Flint. They passed the ball casually between them, kicking it along at an easy jog, looking for an opening.

Honour saw that Shark and Angel were working in tandem now, the pair blocking the forward path of Flint. Siren lurked on the right side, waiting for a mistake, looking to lure a player out onto the wing to have to deal with her. Either way, Honour reasoned that she would refuse that flank and join the others headlong down the middle. As long as Mallet remained their safety, Siren wouldn't be able to get under their feet and they could force a numerical advantage, especially with Jac keeping to the backfield.

The Fishermen were close now; Shark making a great show of swinging his spear around over his head in a great arc, then trailing it behind him as he ran towards the Mason players, head low. Angel was less aggressive but followed nonetheless, her Trident steady before her.

Flint stopped and moved the ball behind him with a deft touch where it trailed out to Honour. She held it, until she saw that Shark was following it and not committing to mark a player, before passing off to Harmony. The Fisherman captain surprised Honour by not chasing the ball or switching opponents. He left it for Angel to try and intercept and Honour barely managed to swing her hammer into the path of his spear's sharp blade as it snaked towards her.

Harmony kept the ball with her, dribbling it easily on her right foot and not wanting to give it up to Flint unless she had to. Angel approached, but seemed unsure of the best way to cover two players on her own. She kept back, wide steps retreating slowly but staying between them both. The Fisherman's eyes betrayed that she was looking out for Siren, searching for some sort of support. Holding up a hand to signal the play to Flint, Harmony dodged left, kicking the ball right towards her vice-captain and removing any option that Angel had. The rookie chased the ball as expected but Flint, the much more experienced player, shook her off easily and kicked the ball loose. He passed back to Harmony who was pelting forwards; the sound of the crowd louder in her ears as they stamped their feet and cheered the sudden change in pace.

If Flint could score his miracle shot, so could she. Playing to the stand's adoration, Harmony clipped the ball with her left foot to halt its momentum and tried a volley at the Fisherman goal, instead of the safer option of bringing it under control. Her first touch set her poorly for the strike and the reckless kick span comically wide of the goal and out of play behind Jac, the opportunity wasted. Flint slowed his pace and started returning back, head shaking in disbelief. If he had words of reproach then they would have to wait as he was forced to mark Angel, their roles reversed as the young rookie put on a burst of speed and tried to shake him.

Her face flushed and head down in shame, Harmony kept going, trying to put pressure on Jac as an official booted the ball over to him. Luck was on her side this time as the poor kick from the faceless assistant was a few feet short of Jac; the burly seaman had to lumber forward to close the gap as Harmony did likewise. He got there first and tried to clear it wildly away from goal, but Harmony leapt forwards and blocked the ball, stealing it. The crowd screamed her name and the young Mason basked in the glory as she put home an easy goal after all, Jac unable to prevent her. She offered the nearest stand a bow and a curtsey, hair dropping down over her face.

When she raised her eyes again she realised the crowd were gasping, some pointing behind her. Too slow, she couldn't escape as Jac's mailed fist kidney punched her and a heavy second blow sent her spinning through the air, down into darkness and out of the game.

Jac weathered the booing, jeering Fisherman stands. He smiled at them insolently, offering the finger. One more down, to make up for dropping behind on the scoreline.

Mason's Guild two, Fisherman's Guild one.

Brick's eyes flickered, once, twice. Then the eyelids slowly slid open and he was awake. Head groggy, he lay flat on his back atop a wooden table. There was a whipping noise of canvas surrounding him and then from somewhere beyond that, a crowd cheered. Above him, he could see only white, the colour following him as he moved his head from side to side. A tent, a white one. He was in a tent? Thoughts still slow, Brick couldn't think of why he would be here.

A new noise. And a sharp spike of pain. Suddenly, as if a curse had been cast over him, he sensed a lot of pain. Numb aches and sharp needles. His hand reached up to touch his forehead where it felt like a razor blade had been drawn across him, breaking the skin. His fingers returned back, slick red, stark against the clinical white background. Maybe one had.

The sound came again. It was from a figure all dressed in white, head to toe, with only a slit for their eyes to see out of. It held a strange metallic implement in its hands, delicate, elegant, but bloody and somehow barbaric at the same time. String seemed to run from the rear of it, off white to match the rest of colour of this bizarre scene.

'Where am I?' He wasn't aware that he had spoken until the figure looked up.

'Oh my. Really, you really are quite a remarkable specimen.' The voice betrayed the individual as a woman.

'Where am I? Who are you?' Brick ignored whatever her words might have meant. He started struggling up.

'No, you really must... that is, this is highly improper.' The woman was backing away now, unusual device forgotten and still sticking out of his leg. She held up her hands as if to placate him. 'You must wait for me to finish your treatment.'

Treatment? Brick didn't care to know. He had a pressing memory somewhere just beyond reach, an urgency that he couldn't quite place.

'Where am I?' He tried a third time, voice raised. He did not intend to ask again. 'What is this thing in my leg?'

'Listen to me.' Her voice was nervous. High pitched, like nails on a chalkboard to his ears. 'You were injured during the game, knocked out, amongst a multitude of lacerations, punctures and other-'

The match. The Final! Brick half pushed, half fell from his perch on the edge of the table to shaky feet and stumbled forwards.

'Stitch me up, Sawbones. I have to get back to the game!' It was a roar, not his normal voice. The woman shrieked, recoiling, hands held to where her mouth should be. She turned and ran from the tent, leaving through the previously unnoticed entrance, canvas fluttering in the breeze. Bright light shone through on the other side. Brick reached down and tore the curious device from his leg, causing a spurt of bright blood to arc up and over the pristine white wall. Still unsteady, he staggered to the exit and followed her out into the sunlight.

He emerged to a roar from the crowd, all for him. He could hear his name chanted, over and over again; a multitude of voices from men, women and children, hammering the sound into his head. One hand held up next to his bloody forehead to stave off the blinding light of the sun whilst his eyes adjusted; he could do nothing for the moment except feel uncomfortable both in their adulation and in the heat of the sun. Impatient moments passed and then finally, as his eyes adjusted, he could see shapes. Unmistakable players on the pitch, just feet away from him. Uncertain footsteps became a run, as he threw himself back into the game.

Flint ducked the first attack as the blade whistled through the air. He was not fast enough to avoid the backswing though; tired legs a fraction too slow, the flat of Shark's spear caught him under the jaw, taking him off of his feet. He fell backwards, landing awkwardly and hitting the back of his head on the hard ground. Flint tried to blink away the stars that cartwheeled across his vision.

Get up.

Get up. Now.

Everything was in slow motion. The faces staring at him from the crowd, blurry, mouths gaping open like ghouls. Around him, the movement of the boots stamping into the ground, each tiny piece of dirt jumping up high, little pebbles rolling. Particles of fine dust floating in the air and the giants above them swinging their fists, weapons, moving, always moving. A pair of dull brown eyes settled on him before being torn away to look at some threat.

Get up.

Flint agreed with the voice, but his body didn't seem to respond the way he wanted it to. Like moving your limbs but not feeling anything, feet unable to sit flat, fingers moving like they belonged to another person, detached from him. All the time, the dance of trampling feet around him. A ringing in his ears, like a blacksmith striking iron at his forge, the sound not fading.

Get up.

Enough!

He rolled over in the dirt, onto his front and pressed down with his hands. Someone else's hands? No, his, he could start to feel them again. Pushed down and then suddenly he was kneeling on clumsy stumps, back pedalling hands with tufts of green grass in them. It was all starting to speed up again, the world returning to normal, as though it had been shaken and the sediment was settling. Up to his feet with a lurch of his hips and a drunkard's uneven stagger.

Now, win!

Flint looked for the ball. The ringing was that of a bell now, throbbing, pulsing in his temple; no longer the only sound, competing against the noise of the game. He couldn't see anything past the melee ahead. Honour and Shark, trading blows. Jac about to jump Honour from behind; trident raised and ready to slash downwards. He raised his voice to shout warning, tried to get his feet moving towards her, tripping over themselves.

More blurring of shapes and colours and sound. A big one; accompanied by a cheer so loud it blocked out the bells. Now Brick; all red and blue and silver, slammed into Jac like the steam driven fist of an angry god.

Brick smashed a heavy fist into Jac's jaw, the brutish Fisherman's head wrenched to the side. Keeping his feet, Jac turned the recoil into a lunging tackle to Brick's waist, arms hugging around and taking both men off balance and to the ground. Brick tried to throw the Fisherman off, but Jac let go of an arm to block the outstretched hand. With the other hand he swung back and down, a fist aimed at Brick's face. Brick twisted his neck to one side and the punch impacted into the dirt beside him. His vision was red from the blood seeping out of the cut on his head, but he could ill afford the free hand to wipe his eyes.

'Don't give up, do you?' Jac's voice was strained as Brick's free hand grabbed his; they wrestled, each trying to overpower the other man.

'Never!' Takes more than you boys ever had to stop me.' Brick was beginning to win the struggle, his superior strength pushing the Fisherman's wrists away. Jac reacted by pushing his hips up and striking a knee downwards, aimed between Brick's legs. It impacted with the boxed armour there, but lights still burst across Bricks vision.

'I'll fight however I need to bring down a big bastard like you.'

Brick couldn't answer other than grunting, desperately trying to find the strength in his arms again. The hips moved again ready for another knee, but Brick twisted his own and managed to throw Jac onto his side where the Mason had been. Straddling the Fisherman, Brick let go with his right hand and savagely tried a punch of his own at Jac. It connected, although not before he could properly close his fist. The brunt of the impact crunched into his middle knuckles, breaking something with a snapping sound and a tearing pain, but the unexpected blow to his cheekbone had dazed the Fisherman. Jac's left hand slackened its grip slightly and Brick eagerly threw the freed arm back and then downwards. This time the contact was cleaner; hitting the Fisherman in the temple with a closed fist.

Jac's eyes went glassy, leaving Brick to cradle a broken hand.

'No! Go win the damned game!' Honour shouted at Flint as he approached her. Shark looked like he had other ideas, but Honour swung her hammer towards him, forcing his attention back to her with a hasty parry of his long polearm, the clash making both take step back.

Now win this thing.

The ball lay in the grass, to the side of the struggle, unattended. The Fisherman's Guild goal was clear, just the wind rattling a chain attached to it, long shadow stretching out behind it on the ground. No time to look and see whether any Fishermen were nearby, just time to take the shot. His shot. There was some shouting from behind him, but he didn't look. Concentrate on the ball, on the goal, on what had to happen now. Flint closed his eyes and breathed deeply through his nose. He had made this shot a thousand times, more, on the practice ground. Now was no different.

Time stood still.

And then it wrenched violently back into motion as he ran up, right foot, left foot and the right leg swinging downwards, ever faster, unstoppable, and struck the ball.

Clean. Like he had a thousand times before.

As good a touch as ever he could have asked for.

Majestically it rose into the air, blades of grass spraying up around it, over his boot. The ball soared forwards, reflecting the light from the overhead sun, all eyes upon it. In both stands, not one soul stood, hearts in their throats. If the Gods did indeed look upon this, then a priest might have likened the path to a spirit, flying free.

Out of the hands of mortals, left to the whims of fate.

Flint suddenly found that he could no longer look. He dropped to his knees, spent, face in his palms. An unbidden tear rolled from the corner of one eye. Whatever next, this would be etched into his mind for the rest of his days.

In later years, he would recall that he had seen enough to know and simply hadn't known what to do next.

Flint never missed. Not when it mattered.

A second later there was the loudest roar of all; as if mankind had torn open a rent in the universe and sound poured out into the world, uncontrollable, untamed and wild.

Three to One Mason's Guild.

Champions.



THE BUTCHER'S GUILD



Who are they lad? That team there? That's the Butchers and you don't want any part of them if you can avoid it. They're a real heavy set. Killers, every one of them, even the kid over there; he probably doesn't even know it yet. But if those swine are willing to take him on, you can bet that they've seen it in him, even if he hasn't.

Teah, these boys only play their Guild Ball one way. Pounding down the pitch in a headlong charge, a juggernaut driven into the opposition that leaves a mess behind 'em that makes most shipwrecks look more salvageable. Whole team knows its business far too well for my liking. You take the captain of the ship; the Ox they call him, ain't no one probably brave enough to ask him his real name. That's one mean bastard. He's been the head of the crew for a fair few seasons and before that he had as bad a reputation as it gets. If he makes you his mark, you can bet you're going to be lucky to walk away from that game. The others are just as bad.

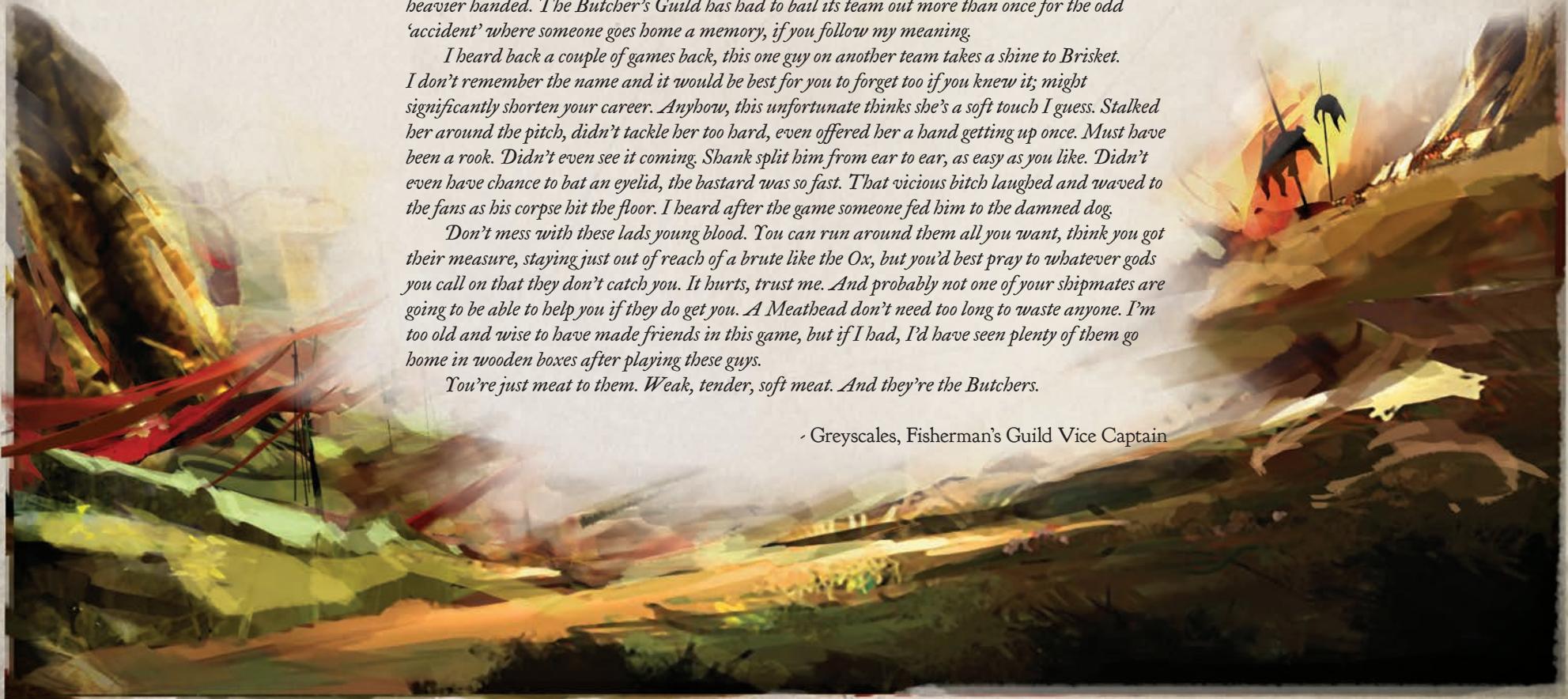
Thing that scares everyone though is that they've got themselves a heavy rep over the years for forgetting the rules on occasion. Against any team you can get wasted, but these boys are much heavier handed. The Butcher's Guild has had to bail its team out more than once for the odd 'accident' where someone goes home a memory, if you follow my meaning.

I heard back a couple of games back, this one guy on another team takes a shine to Brisket. I don't remember the name and it would be best for you to forget too if you knew it; might significantly shorten your career. Anyhow, this unfortunate thinks she's a soft touch I guess. Stalked her around the pitch, didn't tackle her too hard, even offered her a hand getting up once. Must have been a rook. Didn't even see it coming. Shank split him from ear to ear, as easy as you like. Didn't even have chance to bat an eyelid, the bastard was so fast. That vicious bitch laughed and waved to the fans as his corpse hit the floor. I heard after the game someone fed him to the damned dog.

Don't mess with these lads young blood. You can run around them all you want, think you got their measure, staying just out of reach of a brute like the Ox, but you'd best pray to whatever gods you call on that they don't catch you. It hurts, trust me. And probably not one of your shipmates are going to be able to help you if they do get you. A Meathead don't need too long to waste anyone. I'm too old and wise to have made friends in this game, but if I had, I'd have seen plenty of them go home in wooden boxes after playing these guys.

You're just meat to them. Weak, tender, soft meat. And they're the Butchers.

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain



BOAR

SHANK

OX

BOILER

BRISKET

MEAT HOOK

PRINCESS



TEAMS





Ox
Skaldic, Human, Male, Captain,
Attacking Midfielder

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5'8"	7	3/6"	3+	1	4/5

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

Tough Skin: COST 1 RNG 4" ZONE - SUSTAIN Yes

Target friendly model gains [+1] ARM. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

He Ain't Tough!: COST 2 / 6" RNG 6" ZONE - SUSTAIN Yes

Target enemy model suffers [-1] ARM.

Butchery: COST 2 / 6" RNG 6" ZONE - SUSTAIN Yes

Friendly models gain [+1] DMG to Playbook damage results against target enemy model.



Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

The Owner [4"] Aura
While within this aura, friendly models gain [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results.

Legendary Play

Get Em Lads! [6" Aura]

Within this aura friendly models gain [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results. Enemy models within this aura suffer [-1] ARM.

Ox, MASTER BUTCHER

BUTCHER'S GUILD TEAM CAPTAIN

The Ox is a pragmatist. You've got to be, Captain of a team where the only unifying factor is that in one way or another, the players are there because they like to hurt people. Such an individual needs to know how to get the most out of what they do best, because it's definitely not playing Guild Ball with a ball at their feet.

The Ox rules his team with an iron fist and has built them into a dependable, unified crew. No matter how much any of them might mouth off, not one ever has the stones to step over the line. The Master Butcher enforces obedience and his team know enough to show him respect. He wouldn't have it any other way. Ox is not above using intimidation or fear to control his own team, as well as a tool against their rivals.

But Ox is good at what he does too. Tough as nails, as capable of gutting a man as he is of talking to him. Tall, imposing, strong, a solid powerhouse that strikes terror into the hearts of the opposing team and their fans all the same. Originally a freelance mercenary, the Master Butcher has been a soldier for the Butcher's Guild for a long time. His career in Guild Ball is littered with mutilated victims and the bodies of opposition players and it is rumoured that before becoming a player, he held a contract with the Butcher's Guild for when more direct methods of persuasion were required.

Ox has never been one for asking questions, just getting the job done in as efficient an order as can be, his preferred method running to brutality foremost. If ever there has been a player more suited to the guild, chances are the Ox already got to them before they could make a name for themselves.

The Master Butcher knows that Guild Ball isn't all about the score-line, informed by years of experience. The Butcher's Guild has a reasonable performance record on the field, but in the game's shadowy underworld, a considerably greater reputation. The Butchers are one of the oldest and most prolific Guilds, with a lot of enemies and a considerable number of interests that must be protected. Many is the time that the Butchers have taken to the field and demolished the opposition without even touching the ball to fulfil some old vendetta, or wasted a key player at the behest of their guild. Other teams are always wary in playing Ox's team, for this brutality is where his ruthless hand is at its best.

Ultimately though, Ox knows that everyone is just an obstacle to his own, real goal, the guilds be damned. After years of bloody war and of barely controlled violence on the pitch, the Master Butcher is tired of all this shit and just wants to make his money and retire. And the only way he's going to survive to do that is to be the best he can be.

PRINCESS, ROAMING TERROR

BUTCHER'S GUILD TEAM MASCOT

No one quite knows where Princess is from. At some point, one of the past Butcher players brought her along to games; whoever it was is no longer with the Butchers Guild. Such is a life as is offered to a player as in a game as ruthless as Guild Ball In a guild like the Butcher's, even less effort is spent in remembering past players that didn't make the pack. Not one of them likely remembers the players name; just that he or she got wasted and was replaced. But Princess remained.

Princess
Raed, Animal, Mascot

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'8"	4	1/4"	4+	1	1/2

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

Blood: COST 0 RNG P ZONE - SUSTAIN P

Target enemy model suffers the bleed condition.

Rabid Animal: COST 0 RNG P ZONE - SUSTAIN P

Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV and the poison condition.

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Loved Creature
When this model suffers the taken-out condition as the result of an enemy Attack or play, the friendly team gains [2] MP and for the remainder of the turn friendly models gain [+2] TAC, [+2"/+2"] MOV.



Boar
Skaldic, Human, Male,
Attacking Midfielder
Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4"/6"	8	1/6"	2+	0	1/1

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Hamstring: P Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV.

Concussion: P
Target enemy model loses [1] Influence.

Character Traits

Berserk
During its activation, if this model damages an enemy model this turn, it may make an additional Attack without spending Influence. This ability cannot generate a further Attack from itself.

Furious
This model may Charge without spending Influence.

Regenerate
At the start of the Maintenance Phase, before conditions are resolved, this model may recover [2] HP.



BOAR THE BEAST

You can tell that the Boar is mad. It's in the deranged bastard's eyes and that grin. You hear everyone mouth off about how mean their big guy is, about how he's unstoppable and how he's going to waste anyone in front of him. The Butchers don't do that. They don't need to. Everyone is already scared of the monster that is Boar. I think half of the Butchers don't care to draw his attention to them much neither. When his blood is up, I don't think he much cares who you are, friend or foe.

I mean, how could you have such a player on the squad? Someone so self destructive? The Butchers don't seem to mind. It's because they know how to lead him into what he does best; just aim him at the opposition and watch him go. Who gives a shit about whether the man can string a sentence together without foaming at the mouth, when he's busy crippling some poor bastard too stupid to know to just run away when he saw him coming?

- Flint, Mason's Guild Vice Captain

Boar knows that they say these things. He knows that anyone he's ever shared the pitch with avoids him and after games, how only the Ox wants anything to do with him. He respects the man for that, knows that the Master Butcher is a hard man in his own right, worthy of Boar's loyalty; or as much as he has, anyway. But for the rest, Boar doesn't give two shits what they think.

Boar doesn't even really care about Guild Ball. If Boar didn't play Guild Ball, then he'd have been executed long since for murder, or killed fighting in some far off place, under a flag he couldn't care less about. The crowds might roar his name, cheer when he does it in front of them, but few dare to entertain the real truth for it is too dark to consider. Guild Ball gives Boar a legitimate reason to do what he does best, what he lives for. The thrill of spilling blood, of when you feel your fists smash into someone's face, the savage glee of wringing the life out of a man by his throat and the look on their face when they see their fate come upon them. Brutal and vicious violence drive the Boar and nothing else.

Yes, Boar knows that he is mad too. And he doesn't care, as long he can carry on living his life one bloody victim after another.

SHANK MASTER CUTTER

Shank edged around the building, his ears pricked, listening for any sound. Far off, he could hear the murmurs of the crowd, of the faint ring of steel on steel. Overhead, birds squawked nonsensically at each other. He drew his favourite stiletto knife, the one that had done the Spook from the Mortician's Guild last game.

Slowly, with each foot carefully balanced, each step calculated to make no sound, he crept to the corner, took a deep breath and then snuck a quick look. He flattened his body back almost immediately. His prey was mere inches away from him. Nostrils flaring, grinning, in one swift moment, he stepped out, arm reaching forward, past the man's gut and then the knife stabbing back in to his mark. His other hand reached around, snaking over the victim's mouth. A gasp and a shudder and Shank pulled the knife clear and stabbed again, and again, and again. Frenetic struggling now, blood gushed between his fingers, made the grip on the marks mouth slippery and the Cutter's hand slid away. A strangled sob escaped his target's lips and Shank swore as he pulled the body back into the shadows. Breathing quick, shallow breaths, he listened to see whether he had alerted anyone.

He looked around him, but couldn't hear anything. He darted back the way he had come, into a side street, heels skidding on the gravel and making a fine dirt mist. One down, five more to go.

Shank started out in life in an inner city slum with few more enticing prospects than joining one of the many dangerous gangs there and a violent death. He was a street rat with no education or money; his only possessions the pride that came from enforcing respect in his peers by violence and a dangerous talent with his knives.

Shank is a man with a dark past. You could call him a common thug, a thief, a murderer and more and still yet fall short. Shank has forgotten all of the names he's been called, the same way he couldn't tell you all of the names of his victims. The Master Cutter is gutter scum and he doesn't care. To Shank, a Guild Ball team is essentially a gang, on a much larger scale and that pays much better. What else is there?

Shank
Erskirri, Human,
Male, Winger
Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/8"	6	2/6"	4+	0	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Where'd They Go: 1 / S

This model may make a [4"] Dodge. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Thousands Cuts: 3 / 6" Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-2] DEF and [1] DMG.

Character Traits

Damaged Target
When this model performs a Charge against a damaged enemy model, it gains [+0"]/+2" MOV.



TEAMS





Brisket

Skaldic, Human, Female, Striker

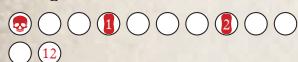
Melee Zone: 1'
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'8"	4	3'8"	4+	1	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Super Shot: 1 S Yes
This model gains [+1/+2"] KICK.

Dirty Knives: 2 / 6" Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-2] DEF, [1] DMG and the poison condition.

Character Traits

Unpredictable Movement

Once per turn, when an enemy model ends an Advance in this model's melee zone, this model may immediately make a [2"] Dodge.

Charmed [Male]

This model gains [+1] DEF against every Attack and Character Play made by the named model type.

Attack Support [Princess]

While within 4" of the named model, this model gains [+2] TAC.



BRISKET

LOVABLE MEAT

One of the game's few second generation stars, Brisket was always going to be a Butcher, right from birth. Her mother was a low ranking official at the guild, and her father a highly regarded Guild Ball player, a relationship not entirely approved by either the guild or the Guild Ball team itself. Whilst her parents might well have walked a fine line of condemnation and grudging acceptance, Brisket has always been a welcome member of both bodies. Even a man as bluntly unaffectionate as the Ox grudgingly regards her as a 'good girl' and one of his boys and she is a huge hit with the fans; most of whom would sell their own family for the chance to spend any time with her.

Touted as one of the most desirable players in Guild Ball history, for many, the juxtaposition of such a comely woman on such a savage team seems entirely at odds; until they spend any time with her. Stubborn, hard, cantankerous and spiteful, no one crosses Brisket and lives to tell the tale. Quite to the contrary of what one might expect, this low cunning and her vicious nature doesn't seem to play as detrimental with anyone.

Harsh though she may be and as unconcerned with the rules as any other Butcher's Guild player, Brisket has the unique place in the team that she represents the only individual that actually cares to play Guild Ball the traditional way, by scoring goals instead of simply brutally bludgeoning her path to victory. The guild's highest goal-scorer for decades now, she attracts more attention from the opposition with each match, the most foolish of whom likely see her as a soft touch compared to the other members of the squad.

This hasn't gone unnoticed by her team-mates, but if some of them consider her as the weakest link in their line up, it doesn't show in the way that they treat her, always one of the pack. Brisket is one of the gang, as much as the Boar or Shank. Fortunately for her, Brisket rarely lacks protection on or off the field; for a team with as indebted a fraternity to each other as the Butchers, to mess with one of them is to pick a fight with all of them.

And no one wants to bring that pain down on their heads.

MEATHOOK

WINTERS FURY

With that thick accent and tan, she's probably from out near Erskirie. Makes sense. Everyone from out that way are tough mothers, have to be with the long, cold winters and hard life. Look at everyone else with a sneer on their face, like they're all just soft southerners. It must be our fault that our fathers and their fathers before them saw that there was no sense in settling in a place as inhospitable as where the Erskirie call home I guess.

But she's got that vindictive streak in her all right. That, and a downright vicious one as well. When she sinks into you with those barbed hooks of hers, she fixes you with a look that would turn most men cold. I remember that there was a lad a few seasons back who tried to hold her up on a drive, she gut the poor bastard inside of two seconds and left him tryin' to push his tripe back in, stop 'em all spilling out all over the floor. He lived to tell the tale to his bunkmates of course. She knows her trade, was careful to not cut too much meat from the bone.

But the Winter's Fury is most dangerous because she's fast, like none of the other Meatheads. The rest of them you can try your best to avoid, dodge around and keep at arm's length. Not this one. You get close to their goal and she blows in like the north wind, a swirling dervish of wild, bloody mist and bad intentions. If you're not careful she'll either finish you off quickly and move on to your shipmates, or one of the others will catch up... and then, you're going to end up shipwrecked, mark my words.

I don't know why she plays in all honesty, or how she got into the game. Could be she just saw her chance to get out of that blasted tundra that she calls the motherland, could be that she's just good at what she does. I tell you for a fact lad that she enjoys it too much, like all of the Butchers. Yes, she's in the right guild that one.

But she'd better be careful. Delicate little thing really and for all that she's dangerous, I know that she's caught the eye of plenty of the big boys in this game who won't go down so easily as rooks and the other girls. You watch if one of those big ol' Spooks or the Monster manages to lay hands on her. She's not always going to be safe with back up from the others in her guild and one day they won't always be there for her when she picks at a bit of meat too big for her to handle on her own. Yes, she'll have to keep being very careful with her targets, or one day, she'll regret picking on the wrong prey.

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain

Meathook

Erskirie, Human, Female, Attacking Midfielder
Melee Zone: 1'
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'8"	6	3'6"	4+	0	1/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Scything Blow: @ P Yes
All models within this model's melee zone suffer [3] DMG.

Tooled Up: 1 4" Yes
Target friendly model gains [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Smell Blood

This model gains [+0"]/+2"] MOV when it performs a Charge against an enemy model suffering the bleed condition. When this model makes an Attack against an enemy model suffering the bleed condition, it gains [+1] DMG to Playbook damage results against that model.

Crucial Artery

Enemy models suffer the bleed condition when damaged by this model.

Heroic Play

Sanguine Pool [3" Pulse]

Enemy models that are suffering conditions and are within the pulse suffer [-4"]/-4"] MOV and [1] DMG.



Boiler

Ethrannian, Human,
Male, Winger

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'8"	5	2/6"	4+	1	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Swift Stance: 2 4" Yes
Target friendly model gains [+1] DEF.

Marked Target: 1 / 8" 8" Yes

Friendly models who declare a Charge against the affected enemy model gain [+0"] [+2"] MOV. This Character Play can only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Anatomical Precision
During an Attack from this model, enemy models suffer [-1] ARM.

Crucial Artery
When damaged by this model, enemy models suffer the bleed condition.

Assist [Princess]
When making an Attack against an enemy model engaged by the named model, this model gains [+1] TAC and [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results.



BOILER APPRENTICE

Boiler looked down at his hands, covered in blood. Someone else's blood. He couldn't for the life of him work out how he got this way. Last thing he knew, he was running for his mark like the Ox told him, breaking away from the pack. There had been a blurry flash, a horrific ripping noise and then that next sound; like a when you dropped a slab of meat onto a stone tile. A cold, dead, fleshy thud.

The Butcher suddenly realised he didn't have his knife to hand any more. Panicking, he scrambled up off his back and onto his knees, wild eyes staring around him. He was new and didn't know much about Guild Ball, but what he did know was that if he didn't have his weapon, he was as good as dead. He found his knife, the hilt protruding from the corpse's chest. That hadn't killed him though, as much as he had driven it into where the dead man's heart should be. What had killed the man was that Princess had torn out his throat. She'd run on now, looking for a fresh victim.

The apprentice quickly approached the body, still aware of his vulnerability to reprisal and braced his foot against it. With a sharp twist, he pulled the knife clear, an arterial spray arcing up with it and splattering across the grass next to him. It tumbled over onto its front and he heard the crowds roar. A huge shadow fell over him. He darted left, turning mid stride, knife poised to throw at this new target until he heard the deep, throaty laughter.

The Ox looked at him, his lips pursed in as much thought as the bigger man ever chose to entertain.

'You're dirty scum, Boiler. I saw the mutt bring him down and you had to finish the job yourself, didn't you? His thick drawl made him sound curiously affectionate, which you could never think if you caught the hard look in his eyes. Boiler started to speak, stammered, and then gave up the job.

'Actions speak louder than words eh? I can appreciate that about you kid. I'm glad you're on my side, you're cold as one of those Mortician Spooks. Now go find the animal and a new mark.'



THE FISHERMAN'S GUILD



The Fisherman's Guild is not a new guild and their team has been around for years in the lower divisions. They just never seemed to have a great game, you know? You ask anyone in the know about Guild Ball whether they ever heard of them back in the day and I can already tell you they're going to say no. Then one day, the Fisherman's Guild has a real revival in fortunes. Something to do with the nobles suddenly developing a taste for sea food and some shady deal with another guild. All I know is that suddenly they have guild houses springing up in every city that doesn't already have one and that everyone is going on about them.

And then the team got better. A lot better. Like crazy better. Beating the Butchers, the Morticians, the Alchemists and the Messengers; all of the big boys. Had to get better, once the guild got bigger, or it wouldn't sit right, you know? Whole bunch of new players, new sponsorship, new gear, new playbook. Suddenly, they're a name on the street, with a big following. People screaming at the top of their voices when they play, flocking to the grounds. Yeah, they became the team to beat overnight. Everyone knows who they are now. Pictures of them all over, they're a real big item.

But you know what the old timers all say about the poster boys and girls? That team could probably achieve even more greatness if they could just wise up. Pathetic how they all swoon over each other. One great big happy family. Only one of 'em got any idea how dangerous it is to make friends in this game, or that sometimes it ain't about winning, it's about doing what your guild wants. Instead, they all run around waving to the damned crowd, showboating with the ball, all touchy feely with each other whenever one of 'em gets knocked on their arse. Never known another team like it.

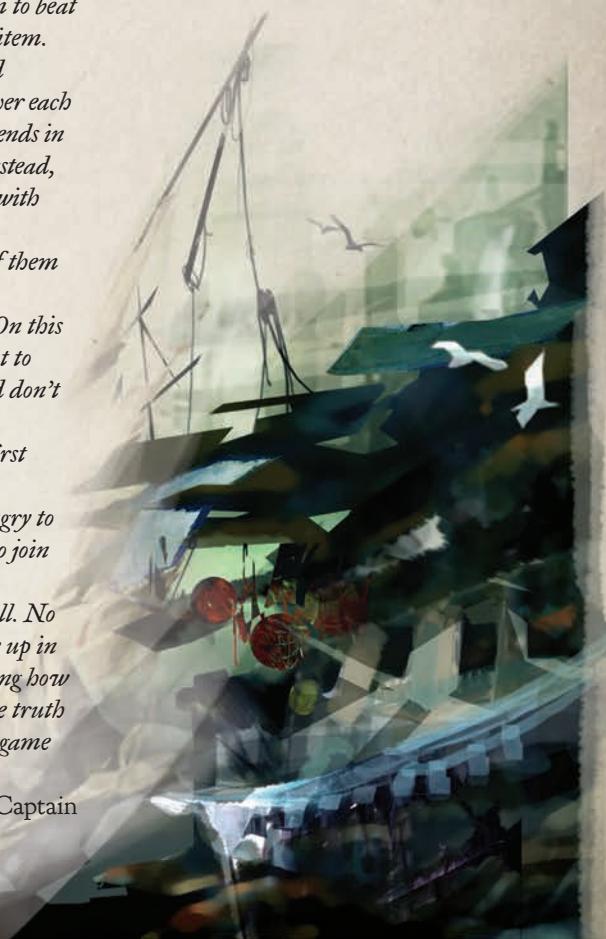
You wonder whether none of them ever seen someone they know get wasted in front of them like the rest of us.

Everyone else gets it. You think they would with the amount of rooks they go through. On this team, career life expectancy ain't high, you get me? Guess being the games top team does that to you though, gives you blinkers. I'll be fair to them, half the time the rooks that don't get dead don't make the clique. All teams are tight, but not like this one.

You don't have the right attitude, the right moves? Don't make a big impact in your first couple of games? You're out. When you're at the top, you've got the pick of the bunch, those desperate for it. The ones that want to stand out there, like gods to everyone else, plenty hungry to join up with them, even if most of 'em go home in wooden boxes. I suppose that the chance to join the damned team gives the rooks blinkers too.

But damn, they can play. If you're good enough to be on the team, then you're doing well. No dead weight there. They're the best right now for a reason. They've never had a better line up in their entire history than they have at the moment. Yeah, I know that they're new considering how long some of the other guilds teams have been in the limelight, but that don't stop it being the truth none, does it? Ain't no other team that can catch 'em and until someone seriously gets their game on, the Fisherman's Guild are going to keep winning.

- Flint, Mason's Guild Team Vice Captain



JAC

ANGEL

SHARK

THE SIREN

GREYSCALES

KRAKEN

SALT



TEAMS



Shark
Eisnoran, Human, Male,
Captain, Striker

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
7 ⁹ "	6	4 ⁸ "	4+	1	4/6

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

Quick Foot: COST 2 RNG 4" ZONE - Yes

Target friendly model gains [+2"]/+2"] MOV.

Gut & String: COST 3 / TAC 6" ZONE - Yes

Target enemy model suffers [-4"]/-4"] MOV and [-1] DEF.

Tidal Surge: COST 3 / TAC 6" ZONE -

Target model may make a [4"] Dodge. If target model is an enemy model, it counts as a friendly model during this action. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.



Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm
Character Traits

Light Footed
This model ignores the movement penalty while moving through rough-ground.

Legendary Play

Caught in a Net
[8" Pulse]
Enemy models within the pulse suffer [-4"]/-4"] MOV.

SHARK, FANG OF THE SEA

FISHERMAN'S GUILD TEAM CAPTAIN

Hailing from Eisnor, far to the northern fringes of the Empire of the Free Cities, the man that they call the Fang of the Sea is an atypical Fisherman's Guild player. A loner by nature, Shark is adept at patiently hunting his prey, a calm and deadly predator. In a team like the Fisherman side, with their emphasis on playmakers over the brutal stalkers found more commonly on the other more physical teams, he is the only one of his kind. This interests Shark little, in the same sense that he doesn't acknowledge that people whisper that he might be one of the hottest talents in the game right now. Shark is not in the game to feed his ego.

Unusual maybe, but not when considering his relatively new promotion to the captaincy; one that is a product of internal politicking within the Fisherman's Guild more than anything else.

Shark feels the heavy weight of responsibility of being captain upon him and is far more interested in the guild's success than his own personal glory. His background is of being part of a tight knit crew and long experience has taught him that the extent of what a dedicated and focused team can achieve is far beyond that of the individual.

It is ironic then that he is far more suited to playing alone and away from the others than with them in a directly supportive capacity. A blunt man feeling acutely isolated from his team-mates, undoubtedly the most significant barrier to his sense of inclusion is his ethnicity and the inevitable language barrier between him and the rest of the squad. Being unable to communicate with his peers as easily or fluently as his position demands, his orders are curt, clipped, practised and to the other players' ears, tired clichés which are occasionally entirely ignored.

It is fortuitous then that the presence of Greyscales goes some way to alleviating this situation, the Vice-Captain being able to offer his wealth of knowledge to the players when Shark's less than inspiring oratory falls flat. A less composed man in the position of captaincy might feel threatened by this, but for the Fang of the Sea, the synergy is foremost a cause for relief.

Greyscales effectively makes up for the gaps in Shark's own leadership and nods thoughtfully when Shark confides in the elder that the captains badge is one that he is unsure that he even wants at all. In spite of this, the wily veteran sincerely hopes to build Shark, the brutal player that is often more like a Butcher than a Fisherman, into the captain that he knows his team needs.

SALT, THE RASCAL

FISHERMAN'S GUILD TEAM MASCOT

The Fisherman's Guild doesn't have a strong history of bringing animals to their games, summed up once by Greyscales as the creatures 'having no sea legs'. But the current mascot proves the exception to that, treated with great affection by the rest of the team and fans alike. Although usually found skulking around Angel, Salt has been known as a familiar shadow to all of the Fisherman's Guild and is about the only player on the squad that Shark seems to tolerate for any duration. In private, some of the Fisherman's Guild suspect that this is presumably because he doesn't have to talk to it.

Unlike some of the other animals dragged into Guild Ball, Salt isn't a savage or bloodthirsty creature with a taste for carnage like Princess, nor a constant annoyance like the birds employed by the Mortician's Guild. Salt harasses the opposition as they approach and then bites at their heels once a player like Shark is on them, or skulks off once Angel has made her escape too.

Salt
Eisnoran, Animal, Mascot

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
7 ⁹ "	2	1/4"	5+	0	1/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

Where'd They Go?: COST 1 / TAC 8 ZONE - S

This model may make a [4"] Dodge. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Melee Zone - 1"
Size - 30mm

Character Traits

Loved Creature
When this model suffers the taken-out condition as the result of an enemy Attack or play, the friendly team gains [2] MP and for the remainder of the turn friendly models gain [+2] TAC, [+2"]/+2"] MOV.



Kraken

Unknown, Human, Male, Centre Back

Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4"/6"	5	1/6"	2+	1	1/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Harpoon: 2 / 6"

Target enemy model suffers a [6"] Push directly towards this model.

Release the...: 00 P

Target enemy model suffers a [6"] Push directly away from this model, the knocked-down condition and [3] DMG.

Character Traits

Tough Hide

Enemy Plays that cause damage or Playbook damage results targeting this model are reduced by [-1] DMG.



KRAKEN

DEEP POWER

Kraken jogged alongside Angel, his long loping strides that propelled him forward as fast as her legs carried her at full sprint. He barely ever spoke. Always instead with that kindly, gentle smile and look, completely at odds with his size, dwarfing everyone around him. Angel was always struck by a sense of gentleness about him for some reason she could never quite reconcile. That and how much physical power emanated from the man. It was almost impossible to see past that. When the other teams tried to bring him down, he always seemed an immovable object, like a cliff facing down the waves crashing against it. Then, like a mighty creature of myth, he would smite them aside with one giant swipe of a heavily tattooed arm.

Her breath was torn out of her as he barrelled into her sideways, sending her sprawling. Winded, gasping, she rolled over, trying to desperately draw air into burning lungs. Through blurry eyes she could see Kraken wrestling with another figure. Angel tried to stand, to get to her feet, but fell to one knee. She waited for the blade from a second assailant to end this as she helplessly tried to use her hands to push herself up.

It was a hand attached to strong forearm that grasped her wrist and pulled her to her unsteady feet.

She found herself looking into the eyes of Siren, impossibly blue, piercing her from underneath that hood, with no clue of anything that their owner might be feeling. Angel hacked up a cough and just about recovered in time to see Siren turn and nod to Kraken, standing stoically a few paces away, an unconscious assailant now at his feet.

A sensation, which Angel never could shake whilst around the pair, was that of being impossibly and uncomfortably awkward. Neither ever seemed to speak to the other, yet you quickly felt like you were out of place, an intruder to something primal, some ethereal connection. Whatever it was, the feeling was a complete mystery.

Now was not the time to waste on considering that though. They were already in front and there was a game to win. Quickly, Angel turned and ran up the pitch, looking for the pass to Greyscales.

JAC

THE BRAWLER

Jac? Good ol' boy that one, hardy and reliable, with a bit of a mean streak. Real sense of loyalty too, knows what it is to look out for his shipmates. I can't tell you how many times I've seen him pull some rook out of the deep end during a match.

Not afraid to dive right into the action neither and by the Lords of the Deep, I've seen him take a beating from most of the big lads in this game because of it. He doesn't let that slow him up none though. Real tough lad, no matter how hard he gets hit, just shrugs it off like water on a mermaid's back.

But don't let that make you think he's out there taking a beating each week and not much else. Trust me, this one is a real knockdown, drag out bruiser. No quarter given and none expected, he's not going to pull his punches for anyone. He'll fight you clean but he'll get his hands dirty if he has to, whatever it takes to get the job done. I've seen him throw down with three or four dock workers all at the same time in some run down drinking hole and barely break a sweat. How many of you pretty boys can say that, eh?

Stems from his upbringing. You wouldn't know it to look at him, but our boy Jac is from Butcher stock. Explains why he likes to talk with his fists, eh? Way he tells it wasn't too happy a childhood. Never fit in with the Meatheads none too well, even his own kin. Then days after he comes of age, an Impressionment Crew grabs him, drags him off to work below decks and dockyards in the Century Wars, solves the problem for him. Spent the next few years learning his trade under fire, in the Old Skaldic Navy. By the time the Wars ended, Jac was as much one of us as you or I young blood, probably more so.

When I met him, he'd got himself on The Achatina, a merchantman sailing from Mullenbrecht and running out to Figo somewhere. He caught my eye during a brawl in the Drowning Man over this lass, flared up between his first mate and some cutthroat. Typical fight you've seen the world over, until the freebooter pulled a knife. Didn't stop Jac though, threw himself in the middle of the two straight away, got himself fair cut up doing it too.

Right then, I knew that we needed someone with that kind o' fearlessness on our side. Even more when I found out later that he didn't actually like his first mate, just did it out of a sense of allegiance more than anything.

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain

Jac

Skaldic, Human, Male, Defensive Midfielder

Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/8"	5	3/6"	3+	1	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Ramming Speed: 1 S

During this model's Advance, any enemy model whose base is touched suffers a [2"] Push directly away. A model can only be affected by this Character Play once per turn.

Goad: 1 6" Yes

While this model is on the Pitch, the target enemy model can only move directly towards this model during its Advance. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Resolve

This model gains [+2] TAC when making a Counter-Attack.

Get Over Here! [Salt]

During this model's activation, if named model is within [10"] of this model, the named model may make a Dodge up to its base move directly towards this model.

Tough Hide

Enemy Plays that cause damage or Playbook damage results targeting this model are reduced by [-1] DMG.

Heroic Play

Trident Tested [3" Pulse]

Enemy models within the pulse suffer a [4"] Push directly away from this model.



Angel

Pigeon, Human,
Female, Striker

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6'8" 4 4/8" 4+ 0 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Super Shot: 1 S Yes
This model gains [+1/+2] KICK.

Nimble: 1 S Yes
This model gains [+1] DEF.

Character Traits

Light Footed
This model ignores the movement penalty while moving through rough-ground.

Tactical Advice [Shark]
During the Maintenance Phase, if the named model is within [4"], this model gains [+1/+1] INF.

Defence Support [Salz]
While within [4"] of the named model, this model gains [+1] DEF.



ANGEL

THE SEAS BEAUTY

She's a real sweet lass that one. Pretty little thing, all doe eyed and nervous grins. Hasn't been around very long and gets on with everyone already. I reckon half the team has a soft spot for her, as well as the people that come to see us every week. Tessir, she fits right in like a fish in the sea. You'd think a kid like that is too innocent for a violent, brutal and downright vicious game like this one eh? P'haps.

I've seen enough players to know when someone special comes along though, and Angel? You mark my words lad, she's going to be the biggest star in the history of the game one day. You can forget your Shanks and Boars, all those Meatheads that are only muscle; won't even remember the real creative ones like Honour or Spigot either. Hells, people will even think her name before they mention ol' Greyscales. Never going to be able to say Fisherman's Guild without her name in there somewhere.

Yeah, I know, big talk for a rook still wet behind the ears. But I gots me a feelin' about this one. A real good feelin'. Helps she's already this season's top scorer, don't it? You watch boy, that won't change for a long time; no matter how much Harmony pouts, or the Butchers beat up so many people, or ol' Brisket gets another hat trick. Yep, this girl comes in and in less than a season already puts her mark on the map. I hear from the ol' crow's nest that other guilds have put out a bounty on her head already. But don't you worry none boy, we ain't about to let her get wasted any time soon. If you're going to learn one thing about this guild, it's that we look after each other around here, not like those Spooks or Meatheads.

Oh, so you want to know more about her now eh? He, I can see that look in your eye young blood, I can tell what you want to know. Word to the wise there, she won't be interested in you. She's got her eye on a much bigger, more impressive catch, a predator himself. I don't think he cares for it, but if she does net him one day then that's a haul you won't want to throw down with.

So you'd be advised just leave her to get on with what she does best, and that's winning us games.

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain



THE BREWER'S GUILD



Real rough and tumble boys, these lads. You're never going to meet yourself anyone more likely to knock you down into the dirt, mark my words. Tough, thick skulled bastards that love to brawl. But you know? For all of that, they're all right by me. They're just playing the game and they don't take liberties with it none. I'll go ten matches with the Drunks over one with the Meatheads or the Spooks, bruises and all. Play against 'em one day, and you'll see what I mean. They're all aggressive and up in your face on the pitch and after will sit down to drink with you like you're old comrades.

Difficult to dislike someone like that. You see Brick and Mallet over there? They're both firm friends with most of 'em. I know most of the guilds don't get along, on or off the pitch, but neither of those two lads would hear a bad word said about any of the Drunks. Boss don't like it much, but even she can't complain; neither team gives anything away when we play each other. Some of the times I've seen Brick take the worst beatings have been at the hands of these boys. He just gets up afterwards, smiles and shakes their hand. Me? I could never understand two words that they say in a row, thanks to that thick accent they all have. Might be why I've never become friends with any of them.

But theirs is a weird guild, mark my words. No other like it for how much it changes so dramatically every so often. It's all to do with their history. All guilds have different houses and different families that fight each other for which gets to be the master architect and the Brewer's Guild is no exception. The part that makes them different to the rest is how each of the houses are so different to each other and what it is they push.

Take your Delenni Brewer's for example, all about their sugary spirits, big with the nobles. Think they get on with the boys down in Ghalsch, where they make that thick stout that would make a billygoat puke? And neither of 'em mucks in with the Brewer families from the north and that sharp, cold spirit the Erskirii drink. It's all a matter of perspective really. Makes sense when you think about it that much.

So rumour is that the Brewer's Guild fight amongst themselves all the time. Not like our boys, where it's all secrets and behind the scenes allegiances, I mean good old fashioned gang warfare. Each of the houses keeps the others in line by threat of violence and when they see that they can step in on another houses' turf, they'll do it. Then every so often, when the house in the lead gets toppled and a new one takes over? Everything changes, including the Guild Ball team. Different sponsorship of different players. Some of 'em stay around for a few seasons, but sooner or later they fade away, outsiders in their own team. No one asks what happens to them then. I doubt that they're given a drink and let retire though. Spigot's about the only one that seems to have been around for very long.

The current Drunks are nearly all from over Raedland way, around Maldriven and beyond. Considering how hard some of their predecessors have been, they're a fun bunch. Decent in their own way. You wouldn't remember, but before them was the lot from Erskirad. Far too serious for their own good, like their ale had grown stale long since. No one was sad to see the back of them. Let's just hope that the Maldriven Whiskey houses keep their hold over the Brewer's Guild for a long time to come, eh?

- Flint, Mason's Guild Team Vice Captain



STAVE

STOKER

HOOPER

TAPPER

SPIGGOT

FRIDAY

SCUM

TEAMS





Tapper
Mald, Human, Male,
Captain, Central Midfielder

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
4"/7" 6 3/6" 3+ 1 3/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Marked Target:

1 / 8" Yes

Friendly models who declare a Charge against the affected enemy model gain [+0"/+2"] MOV. This Character Play can only be used once per turn.

Commanding Aura:

2 / 8" S 4" Aura Yes

An Attack made against an enemy model within this aura gain [+1] TAC and [+1] DMG to their Playbook damage results.



Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

Character Traits

Tactical Advice
[Scum]
During the Maintenance Phase, if the named model is within [4"], this model gains [+1/+1] INF.

Tough Hide
Enemy Plays that cause damage or Playbook damage results targeting this model are reduced by [-1] DMG.

Legendary Play

Old Jakes's
This model may immediately allocate [2] Influence between friendly guild models within [4"].

TAPPER, GRAND BREWER

BREWER'S GUILD TEAM CAPTAIN

Tapper sat on his barstool in the Drunken Seamstress and carefully raised the glass in his left hand to the light. The liquid inside was a rich, warm, orange-flecked copper. It had no bubbles and sat still. Under the harsh appraisal of the light, he could see thick veins of sugary swirls in the murk of the substance, sitting uncomfortably with the other elements. He gave it a firm but gentle shake with a practised wrist, to see how the fluid reacted to being moved around the vessel. It moved languidly, slowly like a thick syrup. He moved it to his nose, tucking it just underneath his thick moustache and gave it a careful sniff. Dry, and extremely musky. He inhaled deeply and immediately wished he hadn't as the powerful aroma invaded his nostrils, through his sinuses and left his mouth via a spluttery, rasping cough.

He knew what it was. The others could tell by the telltale raised eyebrow, once he regained his composure.

'Soburian Brandy,' he intoned in an almost reverent tone. 'Not tasted this vintage in many a year.' He upended the glass, pouring the drink into his mouth in a single, sharp action, his head tilted back.

As the alcohol ran across his tongue and down his throat, it left a pleasant fruit after-taste, a warmth that spread lower as the liquid travelled through his system. He closed his eyes as he heard a groan from someone in the room and awaited the real taste.

There it was, starting from low down in his gut and quickly travelling up, back towards his throat; the scathingly harsh burn that made the drink famous. He rode it like he remembered he had in his youth when he drank it previously; savouring the unique flavour the second time, the vicious taste like raw seeds dipped in sugar cane. After it was past, he opened his eyes.

'Definitely Soburian Brandy. Good vintage too, at least 30 years aged, oak casket.'

Spigot groaned again, and pushed a small handful of copper and silver coins across the bar top towards Stave, wearing a huge grin so wide it was evident even under the big man's bushy facial hair. Stave's massive hand closed over the money and ferreted it away somewhere within the large leather belt around his kilt.

'Thought I had you there boss.' Spigot muttered nervously.

'I knew. Always have faith in t'boss. You never caught him out yet.' Stave was chuckling.

'That cost me a fair pretty penny, I could've sworn...' They were interrupted as the heavy door swung open on creaking hinges and slammed into a chair near to the wall. Scum screeched and leapt onto a perch somewhere behind the bar.

'Guv!' Friday was frantic. 'Guv, it's them over in t' Sapper's Arms, got rowdy it did, ugly. Hooper's there, slotted one mook, but there was ten o' em. Sent me t' bring you all back.'

Tapper didn't hesitate.

'Load up lads!' He roared, delivering a heavy toe punt to the door and stepped across the threshold.

SCUM, THE UNWANTED

BREWER'S GUILD TEAM MASCOT

I'm not sure why they let that cat on the pitch. I think it just turns up whether they want it to or not to be honest. Doesn't do much. No one ever pays it any attention. P'haps it's just someone's lucky cat or something. Could be a stray for all I care.

Sure has a strange name for a cat though. Drunk's sense of humour maybe. Whole outfit's damned crazy, what's one more weird thing going to matter?

- Flint, Mason's Guild Vice Captain

Scum

Mald, Animal, Mascot

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6"/8" 4 1/4" 5+ 0 1/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN
Hamstring: P
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV.

Melee Zone - 1"
Size - 30mm

Character Traits

Shadow Like
At the start of this model's activation, it may make a [2"] Dodge.

Unpredictable Movement

Once per turn, when an enemy model ends an Advance in this model's melee zone, this model may immediately make a [2"] Dodge.

COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

P

Stoker
Eisnoran, Human,
Male, Defensive Midfielder

Melee Zone: 1'
Size: 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
4"/6" 5 3/6" 3+ 2 1/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Molotov: 1 8"

Target enemy model suffers the burning condition.
This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Burn the Floor: 2 6" Yes

Choose a terrain piece. All models within the terrain piece automatically suffer the burning condition. All models entering or ending their activation within the terrain piece suffer the burning condition.

Flame Jet: 3 6"

Target enemy model suffers [3] DMG and the burning condition.

Character Traits

Tactical Advice [Stave]

During the Maintenance Phase, if the named model is within [4"], this model gains [+1/+1] INF.

Magical Brew

Once per turn during this model's activation, it can remove any conditions currently on it.

Burning Passion

This model gains [+1] DMG against an enemy model suffering the burning condition.

Heroic Play

Human Ball of Fire

Any model whose base is touched during this model's Advance suffer the burning condition. At the end of this model's activation it suffers [4] DMG.



STOKER

MASTER OF THE STILLS

The heat from the furnace in the room was oppressive. Hooper could feel the sweat trickling down his back just standing at the other end of the room from the huge stone structure. How this man could spend more than ten minutes in here without stripping down his clothes completely was a mystery to the tough ganger.

The Brewer in question stood in front of a large cylindrical still, the ruddy bronze reflecting the bright flames and casting curious shadows over his face. He was muttering a rhyme tunelessly under his breath in thickly accented Raed. Hooper wondered why anyone would choose to spend more time brewing alcohol than drinking it, even this crazy bastard.

He had never liked the madman's glint in the corner of Stokers eye. Hooper knew the stare, the same as a cornered mook in a fight, a dangerous and unbridged desperation. The stocky Eisnoran wasn't desperate when he threw down though. No one could say that of him as he laughed his head off and bellowed great explosions of fire.

Unbridged maybe.

Rumours were in abundance as to why Stoker came to the Brewer's Guild in Maldriven. Having known those piercing eyes, maniac grin and the crazed rolling berserker laughter, Hooper could quite easily believe the popular one; that he was fleeing after murdering some guild official back in Eisnor. It was, of course, hopelessly exaggerated. They said Stoker cut the man down in his furnace room and then dragged him into the heart of the flames of an enormous hearth, the like of which no man had ever seen. He was supposed to have spent a day and a night there, hiding as they searched for him, before emerging and making his escape.

The end was obviously bull. But the rest? Situated as he was in Stoker's lair right now, it seemed all too likely. A man like the Master Boiler had few friends and those that he did have could become enemies in a moment. A soldier like Hooper didn't back down from a fight, but he did pick the time and place. Better not to have this one at all, but certainly not here if he did.

'The Guv wants us. All of us. The rest are out back in the yard.' Hooper left, not waiting for a reply, or even to see whether Stoker had heard him.

FRIDAY

TRAGIC ORPHAN

Inventively spiteful, sharp tongued and mean spirited, Friday was born into the Brewer's Guild and has only ever known it. The product of an unwanted pregnancy, a frantic coupling between two gangers that never even came close to anything beyond a drunken moment in an alley; Friday was adopted as his own by an usually kindly Magister at the guild after her mother was murdered by a rival gang, her father long since forgotten.

As she grew older, Friday naturally gravitated towards the ganger lifestyle of her peers, despite the best efforts of her adoptive father to groom her into a ministerial role with the guild. Before too far into her teenage years, she had skipped her home and spent her nights either on the floors of pubs, gang safe houses, or in the beds of tough gangers.

Although Friday would not know it, having severed ties with him years ago, in one sense she has lived up to the hopes of the Magister that took her in; she has become a firm fixture of the Brewer's Guild Ball team. Friday took to Guild Ball as a dog to its vomit. Each match fills her stony heart with more enthusiasm and joy than she would dare admit and she eagerly awaits the day each week that she might run out in front of the crowds and shine brighter than any bastard child might dare to aspire to.

More insecure than anyone would know from her tough exterior, Friday greats the uncertainty of tomorrow with a sense of pragmatism not found in any other member of the Brewer's Guild and intends to survive at all costs. Friday's ambitions are to rise to Guild Ball captaincy one day far off and to somehow be safe from the turbulent and ever revolving line-up changes that the guild's power struggles subject the side to.

It is a cold logic which she does not entertain lightly, but Friday even acknowledges that this might even require a change of allegiance to another guild; if it does, Friday will have no qualm about doing so and will not waste time looking back at those that took her in and raised her with any wasted affection.

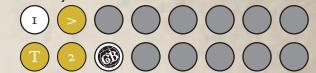
Until that time, Friday will use any guile or ability she has to strengthen her position, on or off the pitch.

Friday
Mald, Human,
Female, Striker

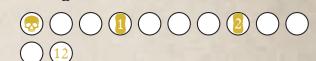
Melee Zone: 1'
Size: 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6"/8" 4 3/6" 4+ 1 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Dirty Knives: 2 / 6" Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-1] DEF, [1] DMG and the poison condition.

Character Traits

Shadow Like

At the start of this model's activation, it may make a [2"] Dodge.

Defence Support [Spigot]

While within [4"] of the named model, this model gains [-1] DEF.

Get Over Here!/Scum

During this model's activation, if named model is within [10"] of this model, the named model may make a Dodge up to its base-move directly towards this model.

Heroic Play

I Shoot Better after a Beer...
This model gains [+1/+2"] KICK. This model gains [+1] DEF against Parting Blow attacks.

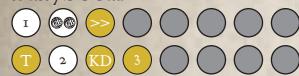


Spigot
Raed, Human, Male,
Defensive Midfielder

Melee Zone: 1
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/8"	5	3/6"	3+	1	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Tooled Up: 1 4" Yes

Target friendly model gains [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Ball's Gone!: 00 P

Tackle the target enemy model. The ball-token may then be placed in possession of a friendly model within [4"].

Character Traits

Football Legend
While within this aura, friendly models gain [+1/+1"] KICK.

Floored
This model gains [+2] TAC against models suffering the knocked-down condition.

Heroic Play

Times Called [4" Aura]
Friendly models starting their Advance within this aura gain [+2" /+2"] MOV.



SPIGOT

IGNOMINIOUS DRUNK

Used to be in the early days that Spigot was the best of the best. No one could touch him. Ask any of the old timers like Mallet and they'll tell you stories you won't believe about how good he was.

So what went wrong? Gods only know. Mallet tells it like the man fell hard for his brew. Like real hard, off the wagon, ran over by it and then rolled into the gutter. Ain't never crawled out since. Poor bastard. No idea why it happened. P'haps he just had too many good times, back when he was at his peak. Fame gets a man that way some times, grabs him by the scruff o' the neck, shows him the best nights of his life, wakes him up with a different girl in his bed every morning, has everyone wanting to be his friend.

Only so much you can live that though. Word is that they first used to turn a blind eye to him staggering around still rendered during practice, or when he used to turn up late for games. Product of his guild I s'pose, wouldn't fly with us, but then the Brewer's have never been known for much discipline, whichever backer they have at the time.

But even they had to sit up and take notice when he passed out in the dugout or started not showing up for games. Lots of things you can do in Guild Ball that will get you blacklisted, but no-showing is a big one.

Everyone stopped being his friend then. The good times were over, in a big way. But you have to give the Drunks their due, they've kept him around. You know, that man has survived so many different team changes in his guild; even Greyscales probably couldn't remember them all. And let me tell you, it's not because of his jokes. They're all terrible. Only one I feel sorrier for than his audience when he levels one of them is him. He always looks so desperate to fit in, be one of the crowd again, gets that twitchy eye goin', and the nervous smile. You watch, looks like he might break into tears at any moment. Still not all there, no way.

No, they keep him around, because every so often, you see a little of the old Spigot out there. A little bit of the magic. That's what wins them games when it looks bad. He's not reliable and it doesn't happen in every game. But when it does? Well, even the best won't be able to stop him.

- Brick, Mason's Guild



THE MASON'S GUILD

*The Mason's Guild? Rock solid. Safe as houses, if you'll forgive me the pun.
No? Rough crowd tonight.*

- Spigot, Brewers Guild

The Mason's Guild has always existed in a position of enviable prestige throughout the Empire of the Free Cities. Admired even before the Century Wars; they were propelled to the heights of power that all guilds inherited at the end of that bloody conflict. After all, what king can rule without a palace? What city is secure from invasion without walls to protect it? In the early days, many of the other guilds survived in the pockets of the Mason's Guild who constructed the most magnificent and architecturally astonishing of the greater guild houses.

Power came with a cost however and the Century Wars had a sting in the tail for the Masons. After an initial investiture of capital in battlements, forts and barracks across the Sovereign States, expenditure was diverted and spending prioritised on the upkeep and training of the immense armies that marched forth from each city. As the initial hope that the conflict would expire in timely fashion dwindled, so too did the fortunes of the guild.

During this time the Mason's Guild was forced to watch its once unassailable position diminish with each passing day, existing at the mercy of its rivals and forced to give up the bonds that it held over the other guilds. When the assembled guild representatives finally went forth to end the Wars, for the representative from the Mason's Guild, the negotiations were a last roll of the dice before the guild faced total financial bankruptcy and dissolution.

In the years after the Century Wars rebuilding began in earnest and the Banker's Guild began to fund each of the Sovereign State's governments. The Mason's Guild saw in this their salvation and began to slowly regain ground and esteem amongst their peers. More forward thinking Magisters within the guild were quick to place their agents in positions of power; influencing vital projects such as aqueducts, roadways, housing and civic improvements. They were also well placed to prevent other guilds from taking advantage of their reduced status.

The slow restoration of the guild would mean a timid start once Guild Ball was established and for many years, the Mason's Guild was a relative unknown on the field of play. It remained so until inter-guild politics conspired to create a new Master Artificer at the head of a new ruling house. Rankled by the lack of esteem and prominence amongst the guilds, new drive was put into creating a formidable Guild Ball team that would stand against their rivals and propel the Mason's Guild back to their rightful place as one of the most powerful throughout the Empire of the Free Cities. Significant investiture from the newly emboldened financiers and a fresh influx of talent followed and in 14c the Mason's Guild surprised the world, beating the Butcher's Guild with a one sided clean sheet in the season's grand final.



HARMONY

TOWER

HONOUR

FLINT

BRICK

MALLET

MARBLES



TEAMS

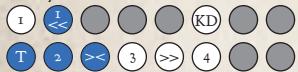




Honour
Castellian, Human, Female,
Captain, Central Midfielder

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'8"	6	4/6"	3+	2	3/6

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Quick Time: 2 4"
Target friendly model may make a [2"] Dodge.
This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Superior Strategy: 4 4" Yes
Target friendly guild model gains [1] Influence and an additional activation.



Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Linked [Harmony]
When this model's activation ends, if the friendly named model has not activated this turn it may take its activation next, if able to do so.

Responsive Play
Once per turn, when an enemy model ends its Advance in this model's melee zone, this model may immediately make an Attack against that model.

Assist [Marbles]
When making an Attack against an enemy model engaged by the named model, this model gains [+1] TAC and [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results.

Legendary Play

Topping Out!
[4"] Pulse
Choose either [+1] ARM or [1] Influence. Friendly guild models within the pulse gain the chosen benefit.

HONOUR, FIRST LADY OF GUILD BALL MASON'S GUILD TEAM CAPTAIN

Honour has seen more of the world than anyone her age has a right to. A mercenary from a young age, she fought far and wide in the later stages of the Century Wars. As the conflict lingered, standing armies became dangerously depleted and desperate Sovereign States began to dig deep into their coffers to hire free companies.

Disaster would strike just weeks before the armistice. During a military engagement to protect a vital holding in enemy territory, her outfit was decimated by the Skaldic State Guard who gained access through the efforts of a traitor within the mercenaries' own ranks. Overrun and with a handful of loyal men remaining after a bloody retreat, Honour found herself promoted to commander. Despite her own misgivings at her new role, she was pragmatic enough to know that she wanted above all to steer her own fate and accepted.

Honour immediately began rebuilding the group to allow only trusted soldiers; ever conscious of the betrayal that had come before. At the end of the war, her band found themselves in the unique position of being rested and at near full strength, able to accept contracts from the haughty nobility with whom unification did not rest well. These she duly exploited to even greater profitability than before and saw the troupe active in petty border disputes across the entirety of the fledgling nation.

It could not last. As the principalities and power hungry barons became increasingly pacified or were outright blackmailed into submission by the guilds that had orchestrated the peace, Honour saw the power shift. She was not long in making relations with the guilds, and offering her services to the highest bidder.

After a short career of clandestine activities for her new masters, the Mason's Guild became interested in her unique talents and decided that she would be much better employed in a permanent role within their ranks. When the new dynasty finally cast aside the guild's last vestiges of poverty and shame, Honour was the first offered an absurdly generous stipend to become a member of their team. Faced by the overwhelmingly profitable contract and the guarantee of work for as long as she could see into the future, Honour accepted.

Honour quickly rose to captaincy, her past life serving her well in a command role again. In the years since, Honour has existed as one of the best examples of Guild Ball's role models, something that is not lost on her hordes of devoted supporters. Every little girl in the stands dreams of living the life of the romantic mercenary turned Guild Ball star and every red-blooded male wants to be the one to thaw her icy heart.

MARBLES, EXOTIC PRIMATE MASON'S GUILD TEAM MASCOT

Presented to Honour for her services to the city of Dharli in the far-flung Sovereign State of Indossa, Marbles has been with the Mason's Guild ever since the team's current team captain took her place at the head of the crew.

Mischiefous by nature, an annoyance to both friend and foe alike, no other mascot in all of Guild Ball divides both players and fans so much as Marbles does.

Marbles

Indar, Animal, Mascot

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Loved Creature
When this model suffers the taken-out condition as the result of an enemy Attack or play, the friendly team gains [2] MP and for the remainder of the turn friendly models gain [+2] TAC, [+2"]/+2"] MOV.

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Tooled Up:
Target friendly model gains [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Goal:
While this model is on the Pitch, the target enemy model can only move directly towards this model during its Advance. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

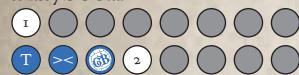


Flint
Raed, Human,
Male, Striker

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
5⁷/8" 4 3¹/8" 3+ 1 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Super Shot: 1 S Yes
This model gains [+1/+2"] KICK.

Where'd They Go: 1 @ S
This model may make a [4"] Dodge. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Close Control

Once per turn, this model may ignore the first Tackle Playbook result against it.

Charmed [Human]

This model gains [+1] DEF against every Attack and Character Play made by the named model type.



FLINT

VETERAN ROGUE

Flint sat cross-legged on the bench, head resting on the wall behind him, his eyes closed. The others limbered up, strapped on armour or offered prayers to their patron deity. Flint took steady, deep breaths and exhaled slowly. He could hear the early crowds chanting outside, a faint rumble as they stamped their feet on the stands.

This was his pre match ritual. Every game without fail. Leave it to the others to grow nervous, to appeal to dubious superstition or divine intervention. He might have done the same once before, until prison life had forced him to learn the hard way how to focus the mind.

Reflecting upon his life, prison internment had been a positive step in self-improvement. If he had not been incarcerated, then he would not have spent years playing Guild Ball against the other inmates out in the yard. Never honed the skills that earned him the recognition of the Mason's Guild once again, after shamefully being discharged years before.

Back then he had been looking for a life with excitement. His crime had brought disgrace to himself and his father... and had destroyed the old man he knew. Tough shit. You couldn't rely on anyone. He might have felt more sympathy if the old bastard had stuck up for him at his trial.

He vaguely remembered that he didn't care much for Guild Ball when he was a kid. In prison his interest had been born out of boredom. But the game grabbed you by the balls, he had to admit that. And with guild involvement, it had overnight become something much better. Who cared about a game over a roasting pig? No one. But a game played for serious money, and by the big boys? That was different.

The crowd were more in number and much louder now. The stamping was rhythmic, a heartbeat. One great orgiastic mass of raw, naked excitement. The game encompassed everything in these moments and Flint always knew to simply savour them. He could feel his pulse begin to speed up, that same fire start to work its way throughout his body. Guild Ball was his religion, his deity, a fickle mistress of fates and fortunes.

Flint wore an easy grin. It was time to go to work.

MALLET

THE OLD WORKHORSE

Mallet? He's a good old boy that one. Yeah, I know he's not on our side young blood, but don't yet that stop you having respect for the man. Known him for years I have, and he's only ever been a good man. Never once broken the rules, always followed his orders and never mouthed off at his teammates. Wish that could be said for those damned Meatheads or you young-uns. Tep, he's old school, just like me, no other school like it. Me and him, we've seen more years in this game than anyone else, and you know why? Call it a gentleman's agreement if you want, a code of honour between old warriors. Don't see that with anyone else these days. Whole game filled with opportunists, no love of the sport anymore.

You can call me an old romantic if you want, I know that's what you're thinking. Mayhaps I am. But I know that he'd agree with me. Oh, he's a sullen sort alright, never has a good word to say about anyone. Suits his team right down to the ground, beh. Sturdy, dependant, craggy, earthy. But you mark my words that the man is one of the best you'll ever face across the other side of the pitch. You don't need to worry about him hacking off a limb if he wastes you, or losing an eye to that knife on his belt. Won't see him gut a man that's down or take liberties, just does his work.

He's probably near retirement like me by now. It will be a shame when that ship sails. The game will be less without him. Either that, or he's like me and won't give it up because he loves Guild Ball so much. After spending so long on some ships, you become a fixture on them; just like the figurehead, you know? Well, you probably wouldn't young blood, but one day with a little bit of luck you might. Oh, and do yourself a favour, don't make the mistake of asking him about that. He's got none too pretty a way of speaking about anything. Don't take it personal like, it's just the way he is, gutter mouthed bastard, never has a good word to say about anyone, even if he likes them.

Now that I think about it my boy, I haven't shared a tankard with Mallet in a long time. Might have to rectify that next our ships are in the same port. You can join us if you'd like, listen to all the old tales from the good old days. Did I ever tell you about the time that ol' Greyscales and Mallet got into this fight at the Drunken Sailor over in Aldebrecht? No? Well, listen on...

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain

Mallet
Castellian, Human, Male, Melee Zone: 2"
Defensive Midfielder
Size: 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
4⁷/8" 5 2¹/8" 3+ 2 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Singled Out: @ P Yes
Friendly models gain [+2] TAC against target enemy model.

Smashed Shins: @ P Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4/-4"] KICK.

Character Traits

Football Legend [4" Aura]
While within this aura, friendly models gain [+1 / +1"] KICK.

Extended Reach
During its activation this model's melee zone is [3"].

Forceful Blow
During a Charge, in addition to any Playbook damage result, the targeted enemy model suffers a [2"] Push directly away and [2] DMG.



TEAMS



Brick
Castellian, Human,
Male, Centre Back

Melee Zone: 2"
Size: 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4 [/] 6"	5	1 [/] 6"	2+	2	2 [/] 3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Concussion: P

Target enemy model loses [1] Influence.

Character Traits

Knockback

In addition to any Character Play or Playbook result, the targeted enemy model suffers a [1"] Push directly away. This model may then make a [1"] Dodge directly towards the affected enemy model.

Counter Charge

Once per turn, when an enemy model ends its Advance within [6"] of this model, if this model is not engaged this model may immediately make a Charge targeting the enemy model.

BRICK

THE UNSTOPPABLE JUGGERNAUT

Through narrowed eyes, Brick glared across the pitch at Ghast, stood several feet away.

'Come on then Spook, face me!

Before he could take a step forward the impassive eyes behind the mask flickered right and Ghast sidestepped as a howling Cosset ran screaming between them, hooked claws raised. For an absurdly comic and horrific moment, her widened eyes stared frantically at each of them and her head ticked short, sharp movements left and right; it seemed as though both combatants waited to see which of them she would attack. Then, the moment was over as her head snaked its way towards Brick.

'At me then bitch! You can be next!' Brick smashed his heavy knuckledusters together.

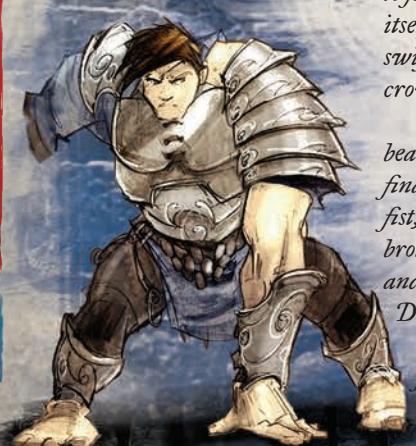
Cosset leapt at him, hair trailing behind her like a funereal veil, snapping her bladed claws. Brick stood his ground waiting. Waiting, as she flew closer. One mistake would likely cost him an eye.

With a horrible crunch, the bulking Mason's fist ploughed into her chest. Cosset's berserk eyes bulged impossibly, the spittle from her mouth splattered his gauntlet and then she was falling, thrown backwards. She landed in broken heap next to where Ghast had stood moments ago. Where had the Silent Terror gone? Brick looked warily left and right trying to locate the sinister giant.

On some unconscious whim he looked up to see a rustle of black feathers. Gods! Now the damned bird too? Aware he had to finish this quickly, he waited until the bird had committed itself to the attack, ready to peck at his exposed face. Then in a swift move that belayed his size, a huge hand grabbed at the crow and crushed it between his fingers.

Feeling the sharp pain of its talons sunk into his skin, its beak hammering into the soft flesh of his thumb, Brick's rage finally overcame him and he simply tightened his hand into a fist, smashing the delicate bird into a bloody pulp of feathers and broken limbs. It let lose a single strangled squawk as he dropped it and then drove a heavy stomp to its remains. The Mason snorted. Damn Spooks would have another one next week anyhow.

Leaving the bloody smear behind him, he looked around for another Spook twig to snap in half.



HARMONY

THE SCARLET STAR

The Scarlet Star ran out of the dugout and onto the fresh pitch. The roar from the crowd, cheering smattered with catcalls and whistles, deafened her. She lazily raised one hand in salute to them as she jogged over to the rest of her squad. Mallet offered her his best disapproving glare.

'Just keep smiling at my people old man. And try not to get in my way later, okay?' Mallet snorted.

Ignoring him, Harmony flicked back an errant bangle and flashed a radiant smile at the crowds. The furore grew even louder, even more ear-splittingly so. Over on the other side of the pitch, she could see an envious Brisket staring daggers at her. Let that bitch stew in her jealousy. These people were here for Harmony alone.

Beautiful, charming, talented, and flamboyant. Those would be the words Harmony would use to describe herself, a key playmaker for the Mason's Guild. Others would tell the rest of the tale. Vain, arrogant, conceited and filled with an overbearing sense of self-importance.

Unlike her sister Honour, Harmony is not in Guild Ball for the long term. She intends only to use the game to attract the eye of a wealthy noble or better yet, a prince. Then to marry her way into high society, leaving the brutal day-to-day life of a Guild Ball player far behind her. The guilds are a little else other than a necessary means to an end for a girl that grew up poor in a starving family. Leave the glory and the legacy for boring, stale Honour.

The woman known as the Scarlet Star is the beloved poster child of Guild Ball, she weaves her dance for the fans each week, amid thundering approval from the stands. Ever careful to hide her hidden agenda, Harmony is careful to keep up appearances. Remembering to smile or flirt with the right person at the right time will go a long way. Aware that her kinship with Honour will only allow her so much leeway, she is careful to not leave her elder sister wondering why she accepted her manipulative sibling into the squad.

And it works, or at least has so far. Much to their disgust, only veterans such as Mallet and the ever vigilant Greyscales seem to see truth behind the smile.

Harmony
Castellian, Human,
Female, Winger

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6 [/] 8"	3	2 [/] 6"	5+	0	2 [/] 4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Acrobatic: S Yes

This model gains [+1] DEF against Parting Blow attacks.

Scything Blow: P

All models within this model's melee zone suffer [3] DMG.

Character Traits

Family [Honour]

Once per turn, If this model starts its activation with [4"] of the named model, this model can replace its TAC and KICK with the named model's values.

Protected [Brick]

While within [4"] of the named model, this model gains [+1] ARM.



Tower

Raed, Human, Male,
Defensive Midfielder

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5'8"	5	3/6"	3+	2	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Shutdown: 1 8" Yes
If target enemy model has not activated this turn, it must be the last model the enemy team activates. This Character Play may only be used once per turn per team.

Defend the Grounds: 1 8" Yes
Choose a terrain piece. Friendly models within the selected terrain may use Defensive Stance without spending MP.

Character Traits

Knockback

In addition to any Character Play or Playbook result, the targeted enemy model suffers a [1"] Push directly away. This model may then make a [1"] Dodge directly towards the affected enemy model.

Floored

This model gains [+2] TAC against models suffering the knocked-down condition.

Heroic Play

Protect Those Close [2" Aura]

While within this aura, when a friendly model suffers damage, this model suffers the damage instead.



TOWER

THE REDOUTTABLE APPRENTICE

The familiar sound of cracking stone echoed through the workshop and a cloud of fine dust burst outwards as the hammer impacted on the head of the chisel, driving it into the large stone cylinder. Small fragments of the main body fell to the floor to join much larger pieces. With a critical eye, the young man looked over the work, rubbing a rough and calloused finger over the ridges carved into it, wiping away the detritus. Smiling, he adjusted the angle of the chisel and began tapping it softly with the hammer again.

The art was a sort of magic to him really. He gave the hammer one final strike and then satisfied, stepped back and admired his craft.

It was unlike any goalpost a Guild Ball pitch had ever seen and at last he considered it ready to be showcased in tomorrow's match. Pausing to give thanks to his father for passing down the plans for his great design, he threw a heavy woollen blanket over the pole, and began clearing away his tools.

In the waning light of the early evening, the two figures standing across the yard in the alley between two buildings were but mere shadows to the untrained eye. Tower, in his exhausted yet exuberant state, never noticed them. As he passed by them on his path back towards his dormitory, the taller man looked to the other.

'You see his skill, the dedication to our craft.' It was not a question.

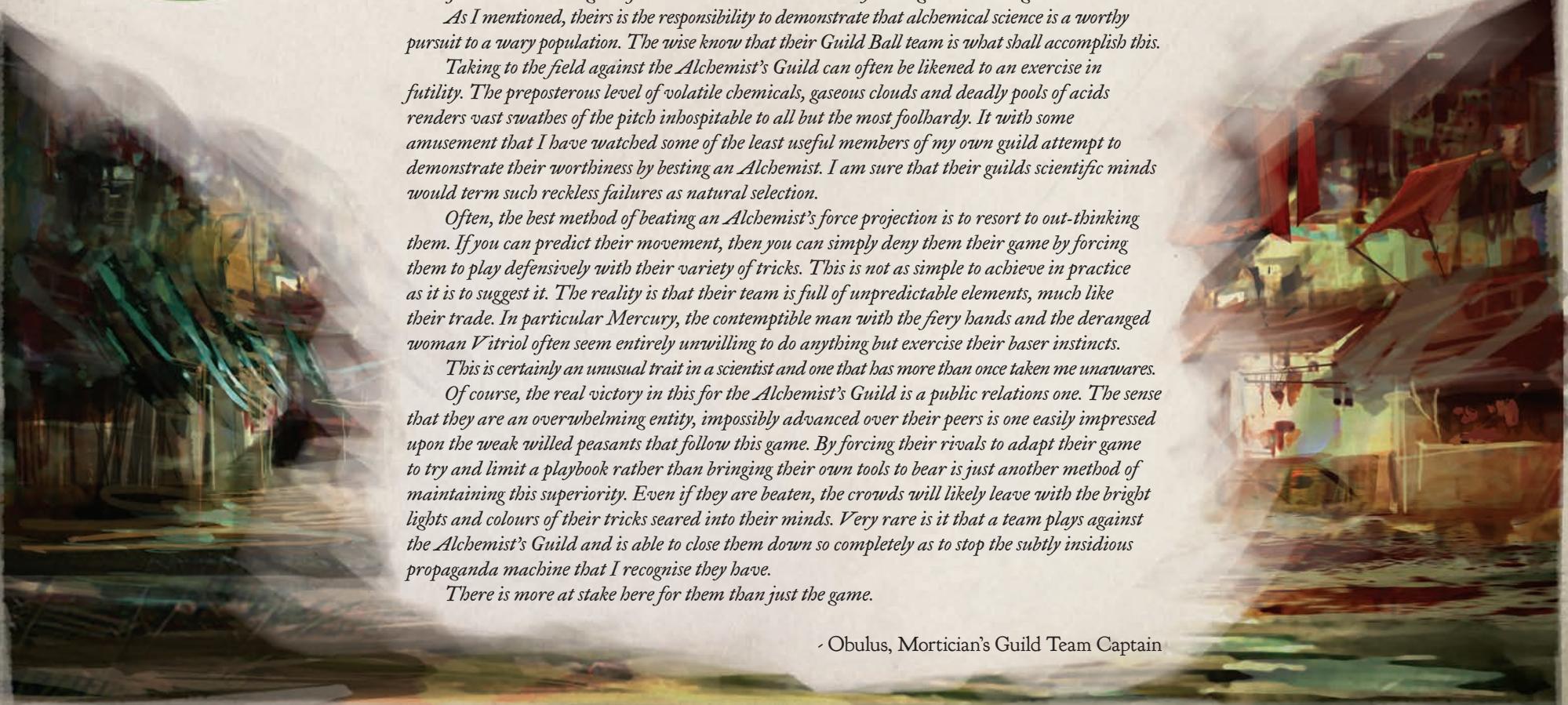
That much had never been in doubt. Had his father not died, we would have had a Tower in our ranks long ago. But tomorrow we shall see how he performs on the pitch.'

The second man grinned, and ran thumb and forefinger through a wiry beard. 'Shouldn't we ask him first?'

There was a brief pause as both men enjoyed a quiet chuckle, and then departed.



THE ALCHEMIST'S GUILD



It is a new Guild. Not so unlike the others in its activities, but very much so in its ideology. Being able to have observed hundreds of years of development before beginning your own venture has a tendency to allow you to avoid certain growing pains I suspect. But being so wildly divergent in your practice will just as likely spawn different ones; mistrust for one thing. Unlike any of its rivals, the Alchemist's Guild has yet to prove to the people that its industry is worthwhile. It has the burden of proof over simple necessity that we enjoy.

Death is inevitable, a cold and hard fact. Witchcraft is not.

I possess a tome stolen from one of their libraries, a curiosity that I could not resist availing myself of when the opportunity presented itself. It is interesting reading. The volume chronicles each of their guild members' notable experiments and their results in attributable collateral events; realistically a way to address all of the explosions that have levelled buildings, led to the mysterious disappearance of townsfolk and cast eerie green fires that have burned their way through entire villages

As I mentioned, theirs is the responsibility to demonstrate that alchemical science is a worthy pursuit to a wary population. The wise know that their Guild Ball team is what shall accomplish this.

Taking to the field against the Alchemist's Guild can often be likened to an exercise in futility. The preposterous level of volatile chemicals, gaseous clouds and deadly pools of acids renders vast swathes of the pitch inhospitable to all but the most foolhardy. It with some amusement that I have watched some of the least useful members of my own guild attempt to demonstrate their worthiness by besting an Alchemist. I am sure that their guild's scientific minds would term such reckless failures as natural selection.

Often, the best method of beating an Alchemist's force projection is to resort to out-thinking them. If you can predict their movement, then you can simply deny them their game by forcing them to play defensively with their variety of tricks. This is not as simple to achieve in practice as it is to suggest it. The reality is that their team is full of unpredictable elements, much like their trade. In particular Mercury, the contemptible man with the fiery hands and the deranged woman Vitriol often seem entirely unwilling to do anything but exercise their baser instincts.

This is certainly an unusual trait in a scientist and one that has more than once taken me unawares.

Of course, the real victory in this for the Alchemist's Guild is a public relations one. The sense that they are an overwhelming entity, impossibly advanced over their peers is one easily impressed upon the weak willed peasants that follow this game. By forcing their rivals to adapt their game to try and limit a playbook rather than bringing their own tools to bear is just another method of maintaining this superiority. Even if they are beaten, the crowds will likely leave with the bright lights and colours of their tricks seared into their minds. Very rare is it that a team plays against the Alchemist's Guild and is able to close them down so completely as to stop the subtly insidious propaganda machine that I recognise they have.

There is more at stake here for them than just the game.

- Obulus, Mortician's Guild Team Captain

VITRIOL

MERCURY

MIDAS

CALCULUS

FLASK

KATALYST



TEAMS





Midas
Valentian, Human, Male,
Captain, Central Midfielder

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/8"	6	3/8"	5+	0	4/7

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

True Replication: 5 8"
This model chooses an enemy [Human] non-[Captain] model's Character Play and replaces this Character Play with it for the rest of the game.

Heavy Burden: 1 / 6" Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV and [-2] to their dice pool on Character Plays. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Clone: 2 / 000 S Yes
This model may ignore the first Character Play or Playbook result against it, then may make a [2"] Dodge.



Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Light Foothed

This model ignores the movement penalty while moving through rough-ground.

Unpredictable Movement

Once per turn, when an enemy model ends an Advance in this model's melee zone, this model may immediately make a [2"] Dodge.

Legendary Play

Pseudographia
This model may spend up to [3] Influence. For each Influence spent this way gain [1] MP.

Heroic Play

Metallic Skin
Gain one of the following benefits:
[+1] DMG to Playbook damage results.
[+1] ARM
[+2"/+2"] MOV

MIDAS, THE CHOSEN ONE

ALCHEMIST'S GUILD TEAM CAPTAIN

Midas is amongst the most radical thinkers of his time. In an age when culture and society struggles to accept the innovations that have begun to emerge from properly considered scientific principles and for the first time embraces conventional wisdom over secular thought, the chosen one of the Alchemist's Guild has already long since surpassed even his peers. But then, that is no surprise. For Midas has already lived a life as malleable as the metals that he works with.

A son of one of the increasingly disenfranchised noble families of Valentia, Midas learned at an early age in order to achieve anything in the Empire of the Free Cities, one would have to make their own fortune. Disgusted with the languishing misery of noble life in his homeland and armed with both a keen intellect and an education to rival that of the most affluent crown prince, Midas chose to flee to Ethrayne on the advent of his sixteenth name day.

Landing ashore in the city of Cest'alle, Midas soon found the community of progressive thinkers and revolutionaries that he had searched in vain for throughout his life as a noble. Poor, living in squalor and sleeping in abandoned buildings, huddled together for warmth; nonetheless their scientific minds dreamt of demonstrating their knowledge of the world to better the lives of the people and to further humanity. But Midas would not content himself with this existence.

Pilfering from workshops across the city and travelling alone to remote parts of the countryside in search of precious minerals and resources, soon Midas was able to set up his own experiments. His findings were astounding. With the invention of his own scientific approach, he created what he termed 'the Crucible'; the ability to create precious metals from worthless minerals. He was not long in attracting the attention of the Magisters of the Alchemist's Guild to this.

Abandoning the dreamers of the slums to become a scholar in residence, Midas threw himself into further studies within the extensive libraries and laboratories of the guild, seeking to perfect his technique. When the moment came, Midas saw in Guild Ball another step up on the rungs of power.

It is not until an Alchemist's ascension in rank that the curtain is truly pulled back. For the High Council of Alchemists, the captain is an ambassador to the Empire of the Free Cities, a liaison between the guild and the common people. To Midas this is as great a charade as any other he has known, and it is one he reluctantly plays a part of. For all that the council hope that by his inclusion that they placate and rein him in, the reality is that all it has truly served to do is to fuel his ambition and encourage him to concoct other ways in which he could seize even more power.

FLASK, OBSCURE AUTOMATON

ALCHEMIST'S GUILD TEAM MASCOT

Flask was a gift in 17c from the Lord Chamberlain of the Engineer's Guild, presented to his counterpart in the Alchemist's Guild at a state banquet, as a token of the long standing alliance between the two institutions. It was an unusual and entirely unexpected gift of the moment, a remarkably generous yet carefully calculated curiosity. For through the acceptance of Flask were the Alchemist's Guild's High Council bound by protocol to honour a trade agreement which had become increasingly obsolete in previous years; one that they had already voted to absolve themselves of.

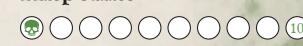
Flask
Indar, Mechanica, Mascot

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/7"	2	1/4"	3+	2	1/2

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Intensify: 2 / 000 S Pulse 3"
Enemy models that are suffering conditions and are within the pulse suffer [2] DMG.

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Light Foothed

This model ignores the movement penalty while moving through rough-ground.

Overheat [3" Pulse]

When this model suffers the taken-out condition during the Activation Phase, all other models within the pulse suffer [3] DMG and the burning condition.

Smoke Cloud

Once per turn, you may place a (3") AOE over the centre of this model. Models within this ongoing-effect AOE benefit from cover.



Calculus
Ethrannian, Human,
Female, Central Midfielder
Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/8"	4	3/6"	4+	1	2/4

Playbook

Hitpoints

Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Blind: 1 6" AOE_{3"} Yes
Enemy models hit suffer [-4] TAC and [-4"/-4"] MOV. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Noxious Blast: 2 8" AOE_{3"} Yes

All models hit suffer [2] DMG and the poison condition. Models entering or ending their activation in this ongoing-effect AOE suffer the poison condition. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Poisonous Fumes [1" Aura]
Enemy models entering or starting their activation in this aura suffer the poison condition.



CALCULUS

MAIDEN OF SCIENCE

Initially, it always irked Calculus to see Midas not wearing his apron in the laboratory, yet another way for their tiresome captain to lord his status over the rest of the team.

As time went on however, Calculus saw that this couldn't be further from the truth. Her current considered observation was that Midas was uninterested in what anyone in either his team or the guild at large thought of him. His lack of apron instead was likely the product of a reckless mind and only a casual relationship with proper safety protocol. That was all.

She was likely to have been appointed team captain until the arrival of Midas. But then, Calculus was a woman dedicated to demonstrating to the world the power and benefit of what alchemy might bring. A petty role within her guild such as Team Captain meant little to her in the grand scheme of the universe. She could serve the guild just as well in her role as Vice-Captain. Concepts such as pride or self interest were beneath the enlightened.

Mercury was leaning casually against the wall, looking over the multitude of vials, flasks, phials and the bubbling concoctions therein that made up her experiments. His raised eyebrow suggested amusement somehow. He flashed her a roguish grin, his lips curling underneath his moustache. It was an oddly charming yet predatory gesture. Dismissed as an attention seeking womaniser by most, for all there was clearly some truth to the rumours, Calculus was sure that there was far more to Mercury than hedonistic indulgence.

Her mind contemplated the others in their cabal. The headstrong Katalyst and poor bitter Vitriol, always so quick to fly at each other's throats. A difference in philosophy and nothing more, however tiresome. One progressive, the other regressive. Simple therefore that they could never see eye to eye. At least they kept it away from the pitch. Necessarily volatile base chemicals in the compound that was the Alchemist's Guild team. No one would honestly deny the logic of their inclusion. Both brought too potent an element to ignore.

Calculus liked to make measured observations. That was what science was. Measured, considered and reproducible results. The ascension of mankind's thinking beyond superstition by method of empirical data. To her, that was what a Guild Ball team could be understood by also. A game by extension was a further mixing of two solutions to create further amalgamation. And it was her task to ensure that the mixture produced the desired results.

MERCURY

THE FLARE OF PASSION

I don't think he cares much about guild business, perhaps not even the game. He's not like the others, trying to save us all with his witch magic, not even like that power hungry sop they call a captain. He's less a Lab Rat and more a flashy, showy Drunk. Yes, the Brewer's Guild might like him, throw the cat right amongst the pigeons.

I think he's just in this for the women. Typical Ethrannian. Got his trick with his gloves nailed down to show off like, made the squad and then started chasing tail like a sailor just got into dock. It works, I'll grant you. Never known any other player go down such a big hit in the stands. I hear that he even has a whole bevy of them follow him around like his own personal fan club. You can bet that hedonistic bastard has some stories that would turn a priest's ears red.

One day, he'll retire and write a book out of it, if no one wastes him too hard first. I'd pay good coin to be left alone with the smirking bastard myself; see if he's such a hit after I'd be done with him. Something about him just rubs me the wrong way.

Probably when I've seen him pass up the chance to score before, just so he can show off and get the stands to cheer him. That don't make him too popular with the old school none either, let me tell you. Between the boys in the packs that don't care for the Lab Rats, the old timers that run things that he don't follow the orders of and the hardliners like the boss, he don't have many friends.

He's got the goods though. You ever see what he did to that Mason? Smelt like bacon. Don't engage him directly. If you can, try for a backstab. Less dangerous that way. I don't care whether you get wasted or not mind, but more of us against less of them is good pickings. No sense in running by the skin of your teeth unless you have to. And if he starts throwing those fireballs around? My best advice is not to hang around where they're about to land. You could wind up smelling like bacon too.

You might just about get away with not making yourself a target though. If he don't think none of you, or that you're no threat, he might just go after someone more impressive looking for his fan club. He won't care about whether his guild wants you taken out or not, doesn't play that game.

At the end of the day, the guild is just a seal stamped on his cheques, a means to an end. That's all. Almost respectable really, it's about the only thing of him I can respect. That's probably why I haven't knifed him yet when our paths have crossed.

- Shank, Butcher's Guild Vice Captain

Mercury
Ethrannian, Human,
Male, Central Midfielder
Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/8"	4	4/6"	4+	1	1/4

Playbook

Hitpoints

Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Fire Blast: 2 8" AOE_{3"}
All models hit suffer [2] DMG and the burning condition. Models entering or ending their activation in this ongoing-effect AOE suffer the burning condition. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Flame Jet: 3 6"
Target enemy model suffers [3] DMG and the burning condition.

Character Traits

Burning Spirit [1" Aura]
Enemy models entering or starting their activation in this aura suffer the burning condition.

Tactical Advice [Flask]
During the Maintenance Phase, if the named model is within [4"], this model gains [+1/+1] INF.



Katalyst
Erskiri, Human, Male,
Attacking Midfielder
Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/8"	6	2/6"	2+	0	2/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Intensify: 2 / 6 S Pulse 3"
Enemy models that are suffering conditions and are within the pulse, suffer [2] DMG.

Rabid Animal: 0/0 P Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV and the poison condition.

Character Traits

Elemental Infusion
If this model makes an Attack against an enemy model that is suffering from one or more of the following conditions, the following cumulative benefits apply to the Attack against that model:
Poison: [+1] DMG to Playbook damage results.
Poison: [+2] TAC.
Bleed: Target suffers [-1] ARM.



KATALYST

FALLEN PROMETHEUS

Not all alchemy is concerned with conversion of inorganic materials. For some scientists, the pursuit of extending mankind's years and to emerging victorious against ravages of time is a much nobler study. One such alchemist is known to others as Katalyst.

On the pitches upon which Guild Ball is played, the hulking Katalyst stalks the opposition, limbs in a perpetual state of paroxysm, snorting great deep breaths through his restrictive mask. The cylindrical generator strapped to his back whines and churns as chemicals rush through the heavy piping connecting the apparatus to the barbaric looking sockets set into his skin. Needles on dials whirr manically from number to number, in and out of the painted red sections, muscles on the man twitching accordingly.

Behind the mask, Katalyst wears a rictus face, locked between a hideous maniacal grin and the grimace of a person in sheer agony. His teeth crack as he gnashes them together, spittle runs along the underside of his chin, collecting in rivulets that trail onto his immense chest. Sporadically and uncontrollably there is emitted a titanic bellow, half terrifying roar, half strangled sob. Katalyst is feral and powerful, like some primordial creature of legend come to life to dominate and maim, to break men across his knee.

But the same compound that has sustained his growth into the towering wall of muscle and that feeds his raw brutality is also killing Katalyst. Over time, he is aware that it will simply liquefy his organs. After each game he staggers from the field to collapse, crawl into the foetal position and await the inevitable shuddering torment of withdrawal from his elixir.

Ironically, Katalyst has seen a glimpse that he is desperately close to the secret of life eternal in his laboratory. A more collected individual might devote himself entirely to research, in the hope that the formula could be perfected in his lifetime.

But then Katalyst has never been known for his patience. He will achieve the greatness he yearns for however he can, destroying his body as his mind searches for his answer. Only time will tell whether he retires a legend; the man that discovered the secret of eternal life, or dies an undignified victim to his own reckless folly.

VITRIOL

THE FULMINATION OF PROGRESS

Jaded, spiteful and antagonistic, subject to the whims of a manic depressive personality, the woman known as Vitriol is ruled by the tacit understanding that she is a failure. But it was not always this way.

The young Meredith Tieger possessed a mind unlike any other in the small community that she grew up in. The child that would always stay at school to study and ask endless difficult questions that the priests would struggle to answer. As she grew older Meredith's studies progressively took over her life, until, hopelessly alienated from her community and family at last she fled; bound for the Alchemist's Guild, a place that offered sanctity and fellowship to a mind with vested scientific interest.

There, her superiors looked on with interest as she excelled, a young woman so dedicated to the furthering of scientific wisdom. Meredith promised much and refused to be cowed by the unknown, arguing the nature of the world with those educated scholars that contented themselves otherwise. Soon she fast outstripped her peers' understanding, frequently spending long nights in the laboratories in search of a greater comprehension of the universe.

It was on such a night that Vitriol would be born through tragedy. The details are not known of the terrible accident itself or of Meredith's intent, but as with so many alchemical studies, the volatile experiment resulted in a raging inferno which would engulf an entire wing of the guild house before the blaze could be brought under control. The woman that emerged from that conflagration would be forever changed by hideous disfigurement and the ruination of her career.

Although none that had known Meredith before the accident would have called her friendly or personable as she sought to master the universe and chart its elements, the changes now are very apparent. For the realisation that she so heinously misunderstood her study has dominated her personality, leaving a dangerously introverted and isolated woman.

Only confident in the basic compounds which she previously knew as absolutes, Vitriol is content to confine her experimentation to corrosive acids and sulphuric materials alone. This seems to be the only remaining drive left to the broken woman and for her guild, leaves them only one suitable home for her, where her destructive capabilities can be fully appreciated.

Vitriol
Skaldic, Human, Female, Striker
Melee Zone: 2"
Size: 30mm

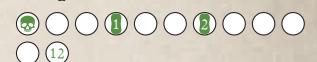
Melee Zone: 2"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6"/9"	5	4/8"	5+	0	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Smoke Bomb: 1 8" AOE 3"
Models within this ongoing-effect AOE benefit from cover. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Clone: 2 / 00 S Yes
This model may ignore the first Character Play or Playbook result against it, then make a [2"] Dodge.

Character Traits

Cover of Darkness
If this model takes an Advance while benefiting from cover, it gains [+2"+2"] MOV.

Skilled within Shadow
This model gains [+2] TAC while targeting an enemy model benefiting from cover.

Hidden Damage
When this model targets an enemy model that benefits from cover, gain [+1] DMG to all Playbook damage results against that model.



THE MORTICIAN'S GUILD

Real old guild, the Mortician's. Been around in pretty much most parts longer than anyone else. Guess if there's one certainty in this life, it's death, eh? Not that you're going to catch one of them with my body when my time is up, young blood. Nope, plain and simple burial at sea for old Greyscales, just like the gods always wanted. This business of interfering with the dead and not letting the elements take them how they choose is all wrong, if you ask me. The Lords of the Deep washed me ashore and can take me back again when I'm done.

Plenty that would disagree with me though. Solthecian cult for one thing has always had strong ties to the Spooks. Same with some of the other religions and the rich and powerful too, mostly the nobles. Yes, mighty old fashioned guild, the Mortician's. Enjoyed patronage from all aspects of society for a long time.

Let me tell you, I don't think that they suffered none in the Century Wars like everyone else did. When your business is death, a war is good news I s'pose. No new thinking, no influx of new people. Might be why they always seem so stale, like the bottom of a fishing trawler. Ha!

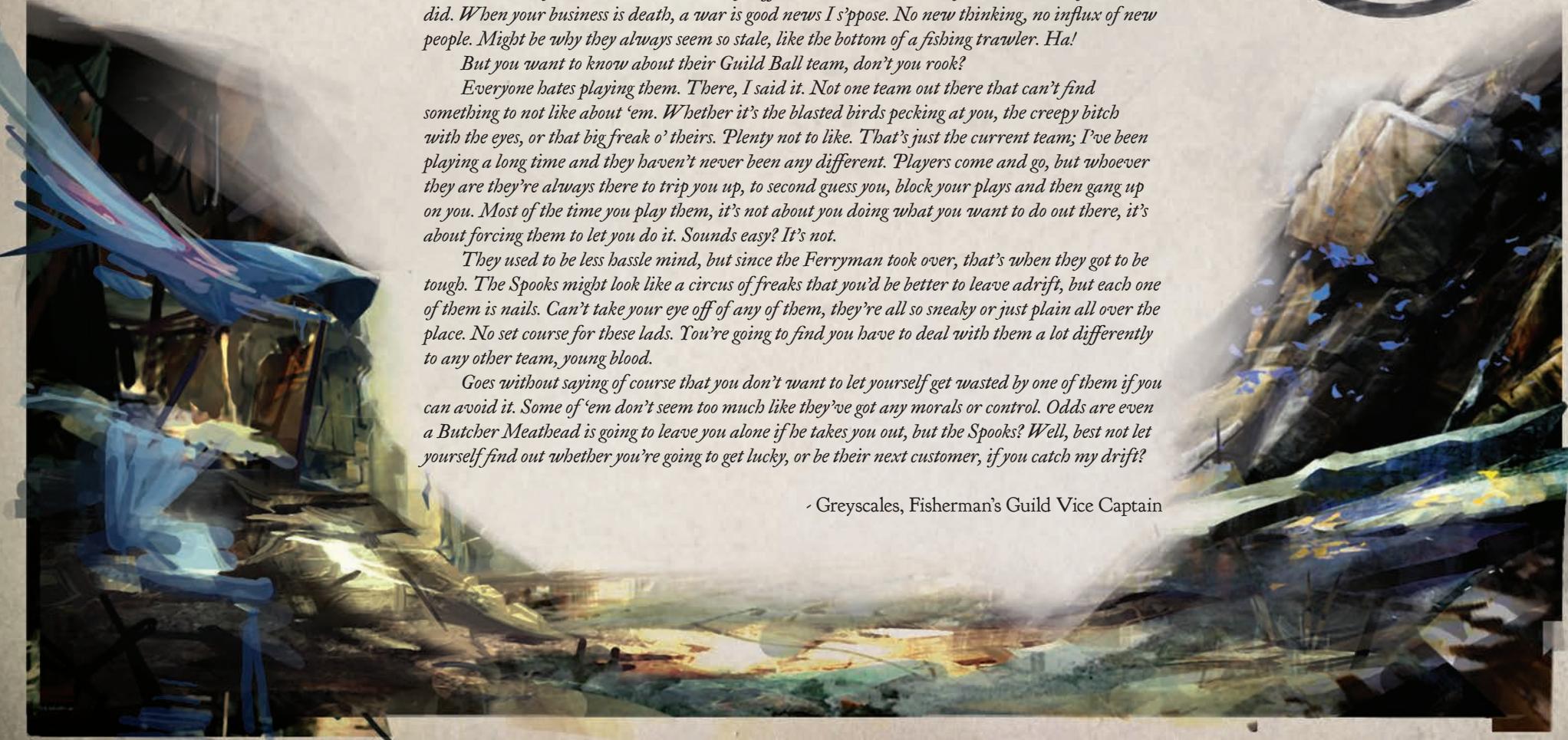
But you want to know about their Guild Ball team, don't you rook?

Everyone hates playing them. There, I said it. Not one team out there that can't find something to not like about 'em. Whether it's the blasted birds pecking at you, the creepy bitch with the eyes, or that big freak o' theirs. Plenty not to like. That's just the current team; I've been playing a long time and they haven't never been any different. Players come and go, but whoever they are they're always there to trip you up, to second guess you, block your plays and then gang up on you. Most of the time you play them, it's not about you doing what you want to do out there, it's about forcing them to let you do it. Sounds easy? It's not.

They used to be less hassle mind, but since the Ferryman took over, that's when they got to be tough. The Spooks might look like a circus of freaks that you'd be better to leave adrift, but each one of them is nails. Can't take your eye off of any of them, they're all so sneaky or just plain all over the place. No set course for these lads. You're going to find you have to deal with them a lot differently to any other team, young blood.

Goes without saying of course that you don't want to let yourself get wasted by one of them if you can avoid it. Some of 'em don't seem too much like they've got any morals or control. Odds are even a Butcher Meathead is going to leave you alone if he takes you out, but the Spooks? Well, best not let yourself find out whether you're going to get lucky, or be their next customer, if you catch my drift?

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain



SILENCE

GRAVES

OBULOUS

GHAST

COSSET

CASKET

DIRGE



TEAMS



DIRGE, CACOPHONOUS DISCORD

MORTICIAN'S GUILD TEAM MASCOT

Thrice damned bird. I've never known anything more annoying in the game. Any time you run against the Spook's, you can guarantee the bloody thing is going to be there, pecking at you whenever you want to do anything. Never actually hurts no one mind, but just makes everything go wrong.

- Corsair, Fisherman's Guild

Dirge
Valiant, Animal, Mascot

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
8" 10" 2 1/4" 5+ 0 1/2

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Singled Out: P Yes
Friendly models gain [+2] TAC against target enemy model.

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Dark Doubts
When this model suffers the taken-out condition as the result of an enemy Attack or Play, the enemy team immediately suffers [-4] MP.

Follow Up
After the enemy model performs an Advance that takes it out of this model's melee zone, this model may immediately move its base-move directly towards it.

Flying
When this model moves it ignores other model's bases and terrain. It cannot end its movement overlapping another base or barrier terrain.



OBULUS, THE FERRYMAN

MORTICIAN'S GUILD TEAM CAPTAIN

Long, slow strides carried Obulus upon his path along the long corridor of the Mortician's Guild. The faded stained glass windows cast a murky, jaded light upon his form; washed out colours growing less remarkable with each aperture he stepped past, the day's light gradually dying outside. At this hour, the menials would soon be found scurrying about lighting candles, the flickering lights of their lanterns casting unpredictable, strangely fluid shapes to break the blackness of the long corridors.

The Ferryman was, as always, in deep contemplation. Obulus was unique amongst the fraternity of Guild Ball players insomuch as he wielded a significant degree of power outside of the confines of the game itself. The role of a petty thug with little aspiration to call his own was not one that he entertained for himself. Since his acceptance into the inner circle of his guild, he had bent his considerable will to orchestrating a position of some influence.

At present, he was considering subject of delicate housekeeping required within his own guild. This was not a new development. Nothing in this rotting building ever moved quickly or suddenly. Obulus had learned this truth many years ago.

Obulus ruminated that to further the success of his machinations he would first have to find a way to circumnavigate the guilds authority; something that for all of his good standing, he was still subject to. He was convinced that the key was Magister Abendroth. The man's immutable nature had long since been a tiresome barrier to Obulus' own agenda. And so, each day, he bent his considerable will to brooding over how best to exploit the Magister and to press his advantage.

A figure approached, feet in slippers silently gliding along the stone tiles, the candelabra in his hand eerily lighting the underside of his face. It was Silence, the duplicitous apostate. Obulus knew that the man tried to create as ostentatious a display as possible when on guild business and the visage currently hurrying towards him was no exception to that rule. Obulus couldn't quite keep his usual scowl from deepening and the corners of his mouth turned downwards a fraction further.

The idea came to Obulus at once, as he watched Silence approach, his head tilted downwards in silent obeisance.

He knew how to manoeuvre Abendroth into his pocket and simultaneously advance his own continued rise with the Mortician's Guild. Loathe though he was to rely upon the actions of another, especially an entirely untrustworthy individual such as Silence, the man that almost stood before him would have a role to play here before being discarded as an expendable asset. Obulus could appreciate the efficiency of one scheme to remove two obstacles.

In an extremely rare occurrence, the Ferryman smiled.

Obulus
Ethrynnian, Human, Male,
Captain, Defensive Midfielder

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4" / 6"	6	2 / 6"	4+	1	5 / 8

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Confidence: 1 4" Yes
Target friendly model can reroll one or more dice during a single Attack or play during its activation.

Misdirection: 4 8"
Target enemy model loses [1] Influence. This model may immediately allocate [1] Influence to a friendly guild model within [4"].

Puppet Master: 4 8"
This model gains [1] Influence. Target model immediately makes a Jog, Pass or Attack without spending Influence. If target model is an enemy model, it counts as a friendly model during this action. This character play may only be used once per turn.

Melee Zone: 2"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Shadow Like
At the start of this model's activation, it may make a [2"] Dodge.

Unpredictable Movement
Once per turn, when an enemy model ends an Advance in this model's melee zone, this model may immediately make a [2"] Dodge.

Legendary Play

Rigor Mortis
The enemy team lose all current MP. The friendly team gains MP equal to the MP loss caused by this action. This legendary play does not last until the end of the turn.



TEAMS





Silence
Valentian, Human,
Male, Central Midfielder

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5'/6"	5	3'/6"	5+	0	3/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Tucked: 1 8" Yes
If target enemy model has not activated this turn, it must be the next model the enemy team activates. This Character Play may only be used once per turn per team.

Shutout: 1 8" Yes
If target enemy model has not activated this turn, it must be the last model the enemy team activates. This Character Play may only be used once per turn per team.

Embalming Fluid: 2 8" AOE₃"
All models hit suffer [1] DMG and the burning condition. Models entering or ending their activation in this ongoing effect AOE suffer the poison condition. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Creation [Dirge]
Once per turn, this model may spend [2] MP during its activation to remove the taken-out condition from the friendly named model and place it in base contact with full HP. The named model is not allocated Influence this turn but may activate as normal.
Models created by this ability do not generate VPs.

Kick Support [Dirge]
While within [4"] of the named model, this model gains [+1/+1"] KICK.



SILENCE THE THORN WITHIN

The man known as Silence. The sycophant. The calm, rational figure in the eye of the storm that is the unpredictable, deviant Mortician's Guild. The quiet enforcer of Obulus' will throughout the guild. Dependable, consistent, loyal. The trusted lieutenant.

The traitor.

Silence has aspirations and is not content to wait for his chance to become the team captain of the Mortician's Guild through fate alone. Ever vigilant for any sort of advantage that he might be able to exploit, the Vice-Captain bides his time and plays the devoted soldier for now. Inside, he seethes at the rest of the roster. All of them disgust him. What Obulus has let the Mortician's Guild team become is an embarrassing carnival of irrational, monstrous liabilities. When Silence's inevitable rise to power is at last realised, it is unlikely that he will welcome even one of them to return to the team.

But remove the monstrosities and Silence can see the potential for the Mortician's Guild, for he alone it seems understands the problem that holds them back; the rotting misery of stagnant tradition, the institutional inability to look forward. Silence knows that he will likely have to effect great changes, but that they are all achievable in what he understands as his manifest destiny, to make the Mortician's Guild the most powerful Guild Ball team in the Empire of the Free Cities.

Unbeknown to Silence, Obulus is not blind to this. It amuses the Ferryman to watch Silence's knee scraping efforts, to watch the man purposefully humiliate himself. Obulus is far wiser than Silence about the truth behind the guild and how Silence's childlike naivety shows his utter incomprehension of reality. In truth, Silence is a much more useful tool to Obulus at present as he is, which is why the Ferryman allows his Vice-Captain to keep his place. And if ever Silence's insubordination were to grow tiresome, or his hand were to be forced, then Obulus would have no reluctance in terminating the Thorn Within at once.

COSSET IMPURE INNOCENCE

Yeah, yeah, I know. I tell you to be careful of all of the women in this game. Pah, sexist, old fashioned, whatever you want to call me. But if you know what's good for you young blood, even if you don't listen to what I say about anyone else, you'll know enough to listen now. Avoid Cosset.

Oh yeah, you heard me right. She smiled at you once? Lucky you. Looks cute, sweet, innocent maybe? Forget looks. You're wondering how a seemingly fragile looking little lamb wound up hanging with the Spooks? Truth is, she's stone cold, bat shit crazy.

Downright vicious too. I've seen her claw a man's eyes out, shrieking like a banshee the entire time. Gives me shudders just remembering it. He's lay screaming, red gory empty sockets where his eyes used to be. Blood all over the place. She's just sitting, licking it off her fingers, next to him crying and sobbing. And then she smiled at the apothecaries when they ran on to try to try and take him off, blew the poor bastard a kiss.

You don't believe me? Well, ask yourself this young blood. Why else is she on the Mortician's roster, of all teams? The Spooks only take the morbid ones, those that don't fit in nowhere else, and believe me, she definitely won't fit in somewhere else. No-one else would want something like that on the squad. Even the Mortician's have been known to give her a wide berth. At least some mean bastard like Boar is predictable. He's going to smash you into pieces if you get too close, all belligerent muscle, but he's not going to strike out at one of his own unless they get in his way.

Now, Cosset? Once, I saw her just stand there and watch a rook like you run straight past her with the ball, no tackle, nothing; then she's gone after her own mascot and ripped the thing to pieces in front of everyone, cackling away at her own joke. Totally unpredictable, irrational. They might be the only ones that will take her, but why the Spooks keep her around is a mystery to everyone. Can't be easy to build any sort of game plan around something like that. Show her the playbook, and I'll give you good odds she'll either eat it or start drawing pictures in it as much as read it.

I don't even want to waste any more time on that one, thinking about her too long gives me chills. One wrong look and next thing you know, she's flipped and only the gods know what she's going to do next.

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain

Cosset
Valentian, Human,
Female, Winger

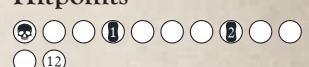
Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
7'/9"	4	2'/6"	4+	0	2/2

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Lure: 2 8"
Target enemy model immediately moves its base-move directly towards this model. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Screeching Banshee: @@ P Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV and [2] DMG.

Character Traits

Crazy
Once per activation, this model may suffer [3] DMG to gain [+3] TAC for the remainder of this activation.

Furious
This model may Charge without spending Influence.

Damage Support [Dirge]
While within [4"] of the named model, this model gains [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results.



Ghast
Valentian, Human,
Male, Centre Back
Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4 ⁷ / ₇	6	1 ⁶ /6"	3+	1	1/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

The Unmasking: **@@** S Pulse³
All other models within the pulse suffer a [4"] Push directly away from this model and [3] DMG.

Character Traits

Rising Anger
The first time this model is damaged by an enemy model each turn, the friendly team gains [2] MP.

Fear
The enemy team must spend an additional [1] Influence on the first Character Play or Attack targeting this model each turn.



GHAST

SILENT TERROR

Ghast has known no other home than the guild since childhood, when his family burnt to death in the terrible blazes that tore through Rue Lejourre during the food riots of 7c. The only survivor of the near death of a city, the boy would have had no better future than starving to death in one of the cities nameless alleyways, until uncharacteristically the Mortician's Guild intervened. A short time later the child that would become Ghast began his service to his new patrons.

Ghast soon came to be an extremely unsettling child, growing into a silent, brooding and melancholy man. With total obedience and dedication, Ghast worked his younger years tending the grounds of the Rue Lejourre guild house, the constant physical exertion building him into a towering and formidable figure that would cause most visitors to the guild to shudder when they crossed his path. When Ghast was trialled as part of the Mortician's Guild roster, it was of no surprise to many of those same people that had encountered him. Such a redoubtable player soon proved his worth. After only a short time on the roster, the guild marked him as indispensable, and significant sponsorship began.

Eerily calm and detached, following orders with no questions, most observers could never imagine any emotion staring out from the eyes behind the heavy mask that he wears.

Then there was Mullenbrecht.

During that game, a brutal tackle tore the mask from his face and all present witnessed the rage that Ghast hides, unleashed at last. After savagely rampaging across the pitch, the screaming apparition disappeared into the depths of the city. Three days later he would reappear in the grounds of Mortician's guild house, masked once again and seemingly at peace.

The stories of when the Terror stalked the alleys and shadows of Mullenbrecht would live on. They whispered of the mutilated bodies and bloody messages painted on the walls. Since then, isolated repetitions of that unleashed malice have surfaced whenever the mask has been removed, so horrific that for days after, entire communities hide themselves away lest they become victims to the Ghast and his wild, indiscriminate fury.

GRAVES

DOCTOR DEATH

The others might be crazies, freaks or just plain weird, but the evil one is that bastard Graves. He's as sane as you or I, but he won't see you as anything but an experiment, a rat in a maze. No sympathy, no decency, no humanity behind those glasses and that stare. He's not really here to play Guild Ball I don't think; he just likes to spear you in the gut and then watch you squirm, see how suffering looks. If you don't show him enough to his satisfaction, the sadistic swine will twist the blade a bit, make you bleed more until he gets his results. That's all he's interested in. Seeing how people hurt and what it does to them. I don't get a man like that.

I hear back in Raedland he was a Physician, got kicked out of one of the guild houses there. Don't reckon me that's too true though, you ever hear of a freelance Sawbones? Me neither. They're the worst of all the guilds for protecting their interests. More than likely he just kidnapped one and tortured him until he told Graves all he wanted to know. That I can believe. I bet he'd know just how to dispose of the body like, and work some other poor fool into taking the fall. Gods only know why he ended up in Guild Ball. You can tell that he don't feel no loyalty to his guild, they're just the one that took him in. Don't get me wrong, he's competent on the pitch, but one day I won't be surprised if he just ups and disappears.

Rumour is he's already in talks with some of our crew up top about something. That's some stones he's got if it's true. Pretty sure the Spooks wouldn't take too kindly if they knew. Can't work out what he'd have to offer us though. I don't like how little he cares about people, how he might get his hands dirty and not blink an eye, or how much he's more like one of us than most. If he's got a secret to share with the guild then that's none of my business until he makes it that way, and I think he's too smart to let that be his obituary.

If Graves comes anywhere near my boys, I'll kick the shit out of him and leave him bleeding in the gutter, you mark my words. We don't take no off-cuts, and I don't trust anyone who can change sides like that.

- Ox, Butcher's Guild Team Captain

Graves
Raed, Human,
Male, Winger
Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5 ⁷ / ₇	6	3 ⁶ /6"	4+	1	1/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Scything Blow: **@@** P
All models within this model's melee zone suffer [3] DMG.

Rabid Animal: **@@** P Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV and the poison condition.

Character Traits

Damaged Target
This model gains [+0"/+2"] MOV when it performs a Charge against a damaged enemy model.

Crucial Artery
When damaged by this model, enemy models suffer the bleed condition.



TEAMS





CASKET THE POSSESSED

Brisket recoiled at the sight of the huge, bedraggled man stomping towards them.

'What is it?'

'You want to wait around and ask it?' Shank punted the ball off to her and stood his ground. 'Get going!'

Brisket nodded in relief and aimed a long kick to the right, before sprinting off in the same direction, leaving Shank to face down the new threat.

Closer, Shank could see that the man's eyes were glazed over, like some poor sucker that had been possessed in an old faerie tale. Drugged most likely he concluded, off his head on something. Just like the Spooks to try a dirty trick of pumping a man so full of narcotics that he stopped feeling pain or fear and then bulldoze him into the opposition like a madman. And what was with lugger a damned coffin around, strapped to his back? Shank would have laughed if the situation didn't seem so terrifyingly threatening.

As the man staggered ever closer, the Master Cutter heard an eerie howling.

The wind.

Had to be.

The man's limbs didn't quite look right either. His left arm twitched spasmodically, his right almost dragging along the floor. The steps didn't seem all that certain. He smelt of sulphur, and incense.

And that howling. Louder, shrieking.

Whoever he was, he was mumbling near incoherently.

'The gate is the key. The key is the master. The gate must open. Open for the rest to follow. The gate is the key. The key is the master,' It didn't stop. A low, atonal murmur, all even, no variation in pitch or speed Shank realised. '...open. Open for the rest to follow.' Each word was measured, in the same tone and at the same pace as the one before it.

Shank bolted. Screw facing down whatever that was. It might have once been a man, but now it was something else entirely.

Casket
Pigeon, Human,
Male, Centre Back

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5"/7"	5	2/6"	3+	1	1/4

Playbook

●	●	KD	3	●	●	●	●
1	2	T	2	3	>>	●	●

Hitpoints

●	○	○	○	○	○	1	○	○	○	○
●	2	○	○	○	○	17	○	○	○	○

Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Ghostly Visage: 1 4" AOE 3"
Enemy models suffer [-0"/-4"] MOV and [-2] TAC when targeting friendly models within this ongoing-effect AOE with a Charge. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Heavy Burden: 1 / 6" Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV and [-2] to their dice pool on plays. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Tough Hide
Enemy Plays that cause damage or Playbook damage results targeting this model are reduced by [-1] DMG.

Foul Odor [3" Aura]
The open-ground within the aura is treated as rough-ground by models entering or starting their Advance within it.

Reanimate
Once per turn. When this model is reduced to [0] HP, before suffering the taken-out condition recover [3] HP and remove all conditions.

Legendary Play

Casket Time
When this model inflicts the taken-out condition on an enemy [Human] model, that model cannot gain icy-sponge tokens and counts as 4 VPs.



THE ENGINEER'S GUILD

We are strange bedfellows. Untrusting of each other, dismissive and always looking to gain political capital to use against our opposite numbers. Yet for all that, our alliance is a necessary one that I imagine neither party could really function without. Until the time when the farce of union is played out, we shall have to keep our secrets close, as they do jealously guard their own from us.

Although nowhere near as new as some of the fledgling guilds that have come into being since the end of the Century Wars, the Engineer's Guild is certainly not much older, barely more longstanding than our own enterprise. They were originally formed just prior to the beginnings of the conflict, as siege engines and fortifications began to be constructed by the armies of the Sovereign States. Their principle craft was the technical knowledge and regulation of such constructions and the understanding of the forces that drive them.

All rather pedestrian to an Alchemist of course. Who truly cares to know precisely how a rope or lever will react under strain, or how much exact force is required to be able to counterweight an arm on a catapult? Their science is a trite and laborious one, entirely too immutable for my tastes. Advancement is far too slow and their agent's attitudes often boorish and condescending, especially amongst the older Magisters and Artificers.

But to be fair and pay them their due, not all are that way.

In the years following the unification, they have concerned themselves with public developments, creating marvels of the new age in the cities across the Empire, uneasily nestled in with the cathedrals and castles. Whilst the elder members of their guild rest on their laurels at these magnificent accomplishments, the revolutionaries only see this as the beginning.

Further to this, the keenest amongst them have lent their hand to construction of clockwork instruments and devices of far more interest to our enlightened minds. I am especially fascinated with the automaton that they call Velocity. In that I see the path to immortality, carefully laid before us.

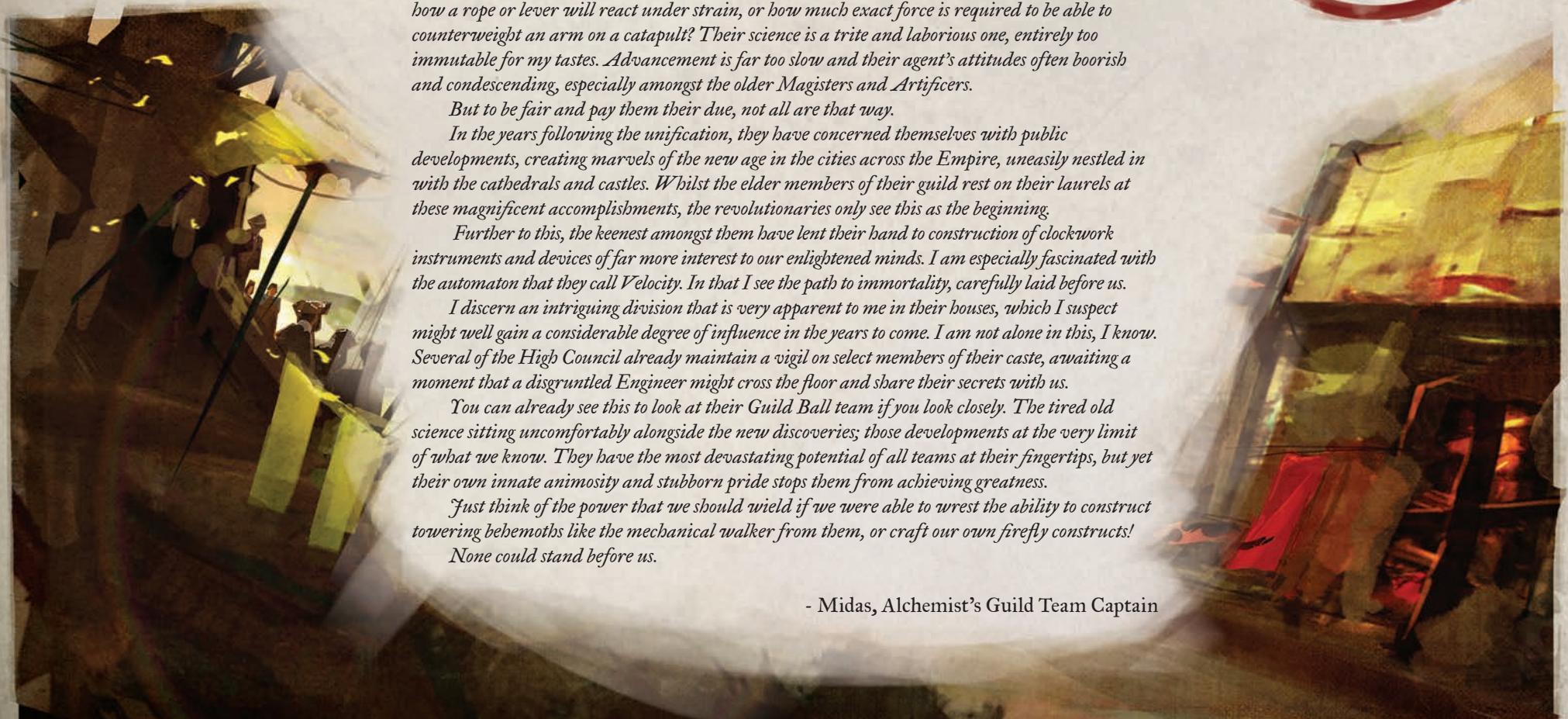
I discern an intriguing division that is very apparent to me in their houses, which I suspect might well gain a considerable degree of influence in the years to come. I am not alone in this, I know. Several of the High Council already maintain a vigil on select members of their caste, awaiting a moment that a disgruntled Engineer might cross the floor and share their secrets with us.

You can already see this to look at their Guild Ball team if you look closely. The tired old science sitting uncomfortably alongside the new discoveries; those developments at the very limit of what we know. They have the most devastating potential of all teams at their fingertips, but yet their own innate animosity and stubborn pride stops them from achieving greatness.

Just think of the power that we should wield if we were able to wrest the ability to construct towering behemoths like the mechanical walker from them, or craft our own firefly constructs!

None could stand before us.

- Midas, Alchemist's Guild Team Captain



MAINSPRING

COLOSSUS

BALLISTA

RATCHET

VELOCITY

SALVO

TEAMS



MAINSPRING, ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE ENGINEER'S GUILD TEAM MASCOT

They call them Mainsprings. The construction of them is one of the Cogs most closely guarded secrets, along with how they get them to move about under their own power and without needing too much guidance. I know a whole host of people that would love to get their filthy hands on the design of it and use them to their own ends.

Trouble is, same reason that the little bastards are good on the field stops them from falling into the wrong hands too. Anyone that has managed to pick one up and make off with it rarely lives to have regrets once they start dissecting the thing. I heard one Cog call them tamperproof. Reckon the stories I hear confirm that and then some. I wonder if even some of the Engineer's don't get nervous around them.

- Flint, Mason's Guild Vice Captain

Mainspring
Indar, Mechanica, Mascot

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6 ⁷ /8"	2	1/4"	4+	1	1/3

Melee Zone - 1"
Size - 30mm

Character Traits

Overheat [3"] Pulse
When this model suffers the taken-out condition during the Activation Phase, all other models within the pulse suffer [3] DMG and the burning condition.

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Super Shot: 1 S Yes
This model gains [+1]+2") KICK.



BALLISTA, LORD ARTIFICER ENGINEERS GUILD TEAM CAPTAIN

Ballista? Like most of the rest of them, he'd happily spend all of his days in the workshop if he could, just tinkering away with whatever latest mechanical marvel he's come up with. But he's got a strange sense of tradition for an Engineer. Everything has to be done to the right measurement, carefully adjusted and precise. I know that the rest of them can get a bit that way, but he's on another level.

It's probably because he's old school, used to giving the orders for long years past. He made his fortune for himself and the guild back during the Century Wars, creating weaponry and siege engines. Some of them were a marvel to behold if you weren't on the receiving side. Massive trebuchets, bigger than you've ever seen before, bolt throwers that fired four or five darts at once, immense towers with steel plating for armour so they couldn't be set alight.

But the worst were the fire breathers. Each one had great big tanks full of this thick, black oil, with a furnace under them to heat it up and a huge bellows at one end. The other was a long funnel with a blackened mouth. I shudder to remember when it fired, belching flames forward out of its maw and incinerating the soldiers unlucky enough to get in the way. One moment, a regiment standing proud; the next, all of them just ashes floating in the wind.

Thing is, he tried to bring something like that to Guild Ball once upon a time. It was much smaller, looked like a crossbow, but with a long barrel instead of arms. First couple of games it fair decimated everyone. He'd just sit in the back field with that girl apprentice of his as a reloader and pick his shots.

Then they played the Alchemist's Guild. Always been close those two, in on it together. They supplied Ballista the powder that the weapon needed. I don't know rightly how, but all I can tell you is that right there in front of the stands, first time he tried to fire it, the thing exploded. Threw him backwards, put him out of the game for a while from the burns. The apprentice wasn't so lucky, took a huge lump of shrapnel right through the eye and out the back of her skull. Killed her dead where she stood.

That was the last time anyone in the Empire of the Free Cities saw anything like it. Ever since then, Ballista took to the field with a huge crossbow instead. Less effective, but good, old fashioned and reliable.

The saddest part in all of it is that I know he's a sentimental soul really. He's not the vicious type you see in some teams. Has a strict code of honour and pride, a rigid idea of right and wrong. For all that over the years he's brought misery with his inventions, all he ever considers them is tools. It's the people around him that he cares about, trying to keep them all safe and remembering the past ones with due respect.

They might not win as much with him at the helm as they could, but he's a good captain, and the game could do with more like that by my estimation.

- Honour, Mason's Guild Team Captain

Ballista
Figeon, Human, Male,
Captain, Defensive Midfielder

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5'7"	6	4/6"	3+	1	4/6

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Second Wind: 2 4" Yes
Target friendly model may make a Jog at the end of its activation. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Deadbolt: 2 8"
Target enemy model suffers a [2"] Push directly away, the knock-down condition and [3] DMG. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Flurry: 2 8" Pulse 2"
Target enemy model suffers [2] DMG. All other models within the pulse suffer [2] DMG. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Melee Zone - 1"
Size - 30mm

Character Traits

Tough Hide
Enemy Plays that cause damage or Playbook damage results targeting this model are reduced by [-1] DMG.

Momentum Inspiration

[4"] Aura
While within this aura, friendly models that generate one or more successful hits when using a Character Play that causes damage, additionally generate [1] MP.

Legendary Play

Mine Field
[8"] Aura
While within the aura, enemy models suffer [1] DMG each time they make a Reposition movement. Enemy models entering or starting an Advance within the aura suffer [4] DMG.



TEAMS



Salvo
Ethrannian, Human,
Male, Winger

Melee Zone: 1'
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'8"	4	3/6"	4+	1	2/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Kick Bolt: 1 6"

Target enemy model suffers a [3"] Push directly away and [2] DMG.

Floored Bolt: 1 6"

Target enemy model suffers [1] DMG and the knocked-down condition.

Character Traits

Pumped!
Once per turn, this model may use Bonus Time! without spending MP.

Swift Strikes
This model may make a [1"] Dodge after causing damage to an enemy model.



SALVO THE MARKSMAN

For the young Salvatore, a street urchin from the streets of Annamura, nothing was of more interest than the great public works of the Engineer's Guild. Hand in hand with his older sister, he would rush around the city and visit each of the mechanical marvels in turn, the pair of them staring in rapt fascination. It was of no surprise to their parents when both apprenticed at the Engineer's Guild, first Quistis and then Salvatore a year later.

Quistis thrived and jealous of his sister's stories from the year he spent in sulky frustration, Salvatore threw himself into learning as much as he could, soon demonstrating an remarkable aptitude to his teachers and attracting the eye of the gruff Lord Artificer. Soon to considerable jealousy amongst his peers, he joined his sister as a second apprentice to Ballista, a much vaunted role within the guild and marked for greatness.

No man could have been more proud when Ballista first took on the mantle of Guild Ball captaincy than Salvatore and then again short time after, when his master adopted Quistis into the team. Watching each match from the sidelines, Salvatore at last found a rival for his attention to engineering in the game which fascinated him.

After his first game, he retired to the workshop and began to develop his own weaponry to take to the field himself, based upon the huge crossbow that Ballista favoured. Too heavy for the sleight young man to wield, instead he developed two much smaller handheld variants, miniaturised versions of a standard crossbow.

He would get his place in the side unexpectedly and in the worst way possible.

In the aftermath of Quistis' death, Ballista sat and quietly talked to Salvatore. His master had long since become more a father figure to him than his biological father and in the kindly, soft words there was the promise of vengeance that Salvatore wanted. He accepted, becoming both first apprentice and Guild Ball player in one.

Since then, Salvatore has taken to the pitch as Salvo the Marksman, each game viewed through bitter eyes that perceive the sport entirely differently to how he had previously. For Salvo, the machines of the Engineer's Guild only now have one goal.

Domination.

VELOCITY QUISTIS REBORN

Following the tragic death of the young apprentice Quistis, Ballista took to his workshop for several long weeks whilst he healed, even once his body had recovered from the accident. The guild's Magisters despaired that the Lord Artificer might never be drawn out from his lamentations.

Salvo, also keenly affected by his sister's death dwelt on his loss, but instead planned a tremendous memorial to her life, a celebration of all that she had promised. Whilst his master locked himself away from the world, so too did Salvo shut himself in the workshop. But whilst Ballista raged and spat bile, Salvo constructed his tribute, a mechanical figure in Quistis' image.

Even in his self imposed solitude, Ballista eventually noticed the absence of his apprentice. He found him as Salvo had at last exhausted his own ability to work with the metals and gears of his trade, the project limited from achieving his vision by his inexperience. Ballista might have chafed at his apprentice's forthright nature on occasion, but never had he been a man to mistake devotion or loyalty when he saw it. On that day, the pair vowed to see the completion of the manikin.

With Ballista's considerable skill and knowledge, suddenly Salvo found the project launch forward in leaps and bounds. Each day brought new understanding, as Ballista taught him the practices and science of the craft. The Lord Artificer's influence opened new avenues with previously aloof workshops across the land, which now sent materials and pieces to fit into the figure. As they progressed, both men knew that they were likely constructing the most vital invention of their lives, with the potential to change the world forever.

At last, the project was finished. Both men wept to see its completion, as the figure began to move. Slowly at first and unsteady, but quickly adopting a fluidity and grace which neither had dreamed possible from a mechanical automaton. Soon there was only a simple elegance as it darted around like the fastest flashing steel of a duellist.

In Velocity, Quistis lives on, as the fallen have achieved immortality.

Velocity
Ethrannian, Human,
Mechanica, Striker

Melee Zone: 1'
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'8"	4	4/8"	5+	0	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Nimble: 1 S Yes

This model gains [+1] DEF.

Character Traits

Close Control
Once per turn, this model may ignore the first Tackle Playbook result against it.

Reanimate
Once per turn, When this model is reduced to [0] HP, before suffering the taken-out condition recover [3] HP and remove all conditions.



Colossus
Raed, Human, Mechanica, Melee Zone: 2"
Central Midfielder Size: 50mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
6'7"	5	4/6"	2+	1	2/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Ramming Speed: 1 S -

During this model's Advance activation, any enemy model whose base is touched suffers a [2"] Push directly away. A model can only be affected by this Character Play once per turn.

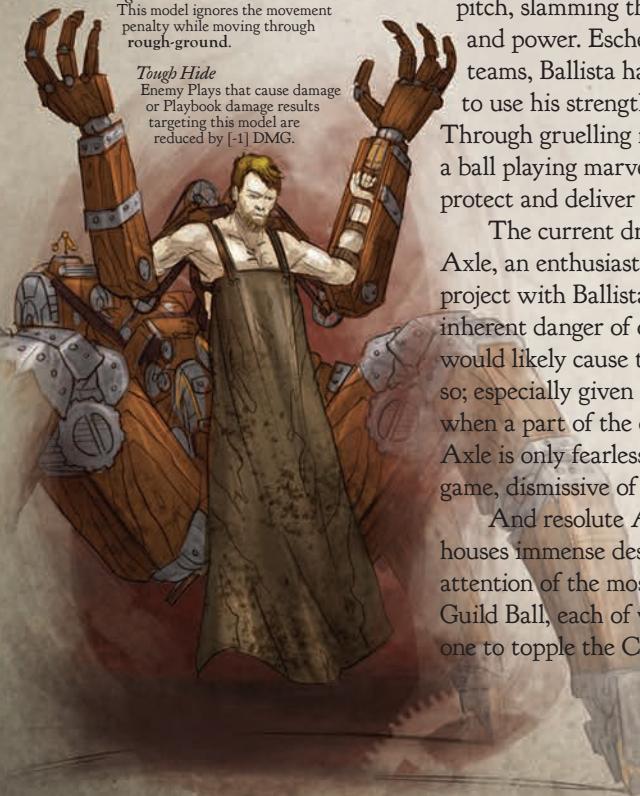
Smashed Shins: ④ P - Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4/-4"] KICK.

Character Traits

Close Control
Once per turn, this model may ignore the first Tackle Playbook result against it.

Light Footed
This model ignores the movement penalty while moving through rough-ground.

Tough Hide
Enemy Plays that cause damage or Playbook damage results targeting this model are reduced by [-1] DMG.



COLOSSUS

ENGINE OF DESTRUCTION

Not every Guild Ball team in the Empire of the Free Cities can boast that they possess a monster amongst their number such as Boar, Ghast or Katalyst. Such a disadvantage can often be the undoing of a lesser side, as they are simply muscled off of the pitch by a more aggressive play style. This was something which Ballista was acutely aware of when he adopted the mantle of captain and refused to let become a disadvantage for the Engineer's Guild.

After a short period of deliberation on the issue, Ballista decided that he would bend his considerable skill to crafting a new type of war machine to answer this deficiency. It was to be as devastating as the enormous siege engines that he had once delivered to the Sovereign States during the Century Wars; on a considerably smaller scale to allow for mobilisation during the game. The resulting triumph astounded supporters and critics alike, and forced the other guilds to take notice of the Engineer side at once.

The Colossus is an unstoppable juggernaut on the pitch, slamming the opposition aside with its sheer bulk and power. Eschewing the brute force approach of other teams, Ballista has insisted that his finest creation be able to use his strength for the benefit of the team as a whole. Through gruelling months of practice Colossus has become a ball playing marvel, utilising great reach and height to protect and deliver the ball wherever it is required.

The current driver of the Colossus is a man named Axle, an enthusiastic Raed Engineer that worked on the project with Ballista from its beginnings. For some, the inherent danger of operating a machine such the Colossus would likely cause them to reconsider volunteering to do so; especially given the fate of the first driver, torn to pieces when a part of the drive train detached during a match. But Axle is only fearless as he faces down the opposition each game, dismissive of the potential danger.

And resolute Axle must be, for all of which the device houses immense destructive power, it also attracts the attention of the most dangerous figures in the world of Guild Ball, each of which would sincerely like to be the one to topple the Colossus.

RATCHET

THE MAVERICK

Not for the first time that day, Ratchet cursed Ballista's lack of inventiveness. Everything was always so rigidly limited by old regulations and practices, most of which as far as Ratchet was concerned were long out of date or obsolete. It took an age to achieve anything under Ballista's leadership. The man was so ponderously slow in everything, his mind dull witted and unable to grasp even the basic principles of the new discoveries that were being made daily in the larger city guild houses.

This was not why he had left his homeland of Indossa, travelled halfway around the world and learnt a new language. He had come to escape the torment of being overshadowed by backwards thinking in a wretched and forgotten place, filled with minds concerned only with the words of their prophets and gods; only to find that here, despite being so very close to enlightenment, individuals like Ballista barred his way still.

At least he had managed to make some impression and advancement. His first creation, a tiny automaton in the shape of a man which moved on tracked wheels had been greeted with mixed reception and was quickly forgotten. But Ratchet had learned from that failure.

The Mainspring device was his finest creation yet and had met with much greater success. The simple introduction of outlawed explosives and a handful of design changes had created a powerful new weapon. He didn't care for the protests of the old guild members whom remembered the horrors of when such materials were implemented during the Century Wars. They were short sighted, stuck in the past. Ratchet grasped at the future.

With significant backing and new power, he had manoeuvred into a position on the Guild Ball team, better so that he would be able to administer the dangerously volatile creatures first hand, rather than risk passing his knowledge on to another. Ratchet jealously guarded his secrets and didn't trust anyone other than himself.

He would use the Mainspring to propel himself further up the ladder of advancement within the Engineer's Guild. There would come a day when the old devices and instruments would be seen for what they were, outdated relics of a time past, along with those that hid behind them. The time was to look forward, the path of mankind at last to be wrested from secular isolationism through violent invention.

Ratchet
Indar, Human, Male, Defensive Midfielder Melee Zone: 1" Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5'7"	4	4/6"	3+	1	2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Fixer: 1 4" -

Target friendly [Mechanica] model recovers [2] HP and removes all conditions. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Long Bomb: 1 12"

If this model is in possession of the ball-token, choose a target-spot and scatter the ball from that location using the standard-scatter.

Blast Earth: 2 10" AOE: 3"

All models hit suffer [2] DMG. This ongoing-effect AOE is rough-ground.

Character Traits

Creation [Mainspring]
Once per turn, this model may spend [2] MP during its activation to remove the taken-out condition from the friendly named model and place it in base contact with full HP. The named model is not allocated Influence this turn but may activate as normal. Models created by this ability do not generate VPs.

Heroic Play

Overclocked
Choose a target friendly [Mechanica] model within [4"] that hasn't activated, it may Sprint or Charge without spending Influence in its next activation. At the end of its activation it suffers the taken-out condition.



TEAMS





THE UNION

Who are the Union? A mismatched bunch o' mercenaries, scum and criminals for the most part. You wouldn't want to meet any of them in a dark alley late at night.

Nobody really knows when orders from above won't turn up and you'll have one of them playing for you. How it is that they manage to worm their way into everyone's teams is beyond my ken. Something to do with the lads high up in the guilds is all anyone can tell you, and even that's probably guesswork more than truth.

All I know is that you never trust them. Watch them carefully, even when they're on your side; they might not be next time around.

- Flint, Mason's Guild Vice Captain



RAGE

HEMLOCKE

FANGTOOTH

DECIMATE

MINX

AVARISSE
& GREED

BLACKHEART

GUTTER

SNAKESKIN

MIST

COIN



TEAMS





Blackheart
Unknown, Human, Male,
Captain, Central Midfielder

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
5⁷/7 6 3/6" 3+ 2 4/6

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

Misdirection: COST RING ZONE SUSTAIN

Target enemy model loses [1] Influence. This model may immediately allocate [1] Influence to a friendly guild model within [4"].

Commanding Aura: 2 / 80 S" 4" Aura Yes
An Attack made against an enemy model within this aura gains [+1] TAC and [+1] DMG to Playbook damage results.



Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Shadow Like
At the start of this model's activation, it may make a [2"] Dodge.

Legendary Play

Strike from the Shadows [8"] Pulse
Choose either [+1] DEF or immediately making a [2"] Dodge.

Friendly guild models within the pulse gain the chosen benefit.

BLACKHEART, THE PIRATE KING

UNION TEAM CAPTAIN

No one knows where he came from, grew up, or how it is that Blackheart became Pirate King of the seas. I think just about every Sovereign State has either disowned him or flat out denied having anything to do with him; he's probably robbed each of them blind too.

Sound dramatic young blood? Pray that you never cross him. The day that the man gave up the life of a pirate and became a renegade mercenary was the day that shipping became a safe profession at last. Even the Lords of the Deep would not defy that man. They say that when he put in for the last time, he stowed her in a safe place to return to someday and then murdered the entire crew so that none might learn of his ships whereabouts. Only spared the first mate and that cursed devil snake of his.

He roamed the land as a warlord then for months. Terrorised the villages, the towns, threatened entire Sovereign States. We all feared that he might even reignite the Century Wars during the dark days, when no one knew where or when he would strike and his army just kept growing. Then silence. Somehow, he made an entire army disappear. Probably killed them down to the last man same as his crew, kept all the booty for himself. Anyone else, you'd laugh that notion off. Not him.

Why did he take up the mantle of a Guild Ball Captain? Your guess is as good as mine. I can tell you that the day that he marched onto the pitch was the day that I almost reconsidered my retirement. I very much doubt that he holds any affection for this game. I don't even know how his team manages to play without the backing of a guild. If you could, then I imagine the clever man could rake in a pretty penny or two that way. I think that is what led him to us.

Wealth is the only thing that drives Blackheart and his name is apt indeed. If you are in his way, then he will end you in a heartbeat, or send one of his crew to do the dirty work for him. Terrible group they are. And they turn up everywhere. I've seen all of them play on different teams. Even us. I don't know how it happens, but their loyalties are as flexible and worthless as their words. Don't trust any of them young blood, even if they're on your side. Word is that they all operate for some grand spymaster, who can influence even the guilds.

I don't much like the sound of that at all. And I don't dare ask.

I'm sure that he'll move on sooner or later to somewhere he can make more money. Hopefully for all of our sakes, in my lifetime. Same as when he left the seas, Guild Ball will be a safer game without his threatening shadow looming over it.

But I wish the sadistic bastard had never come here in the first place.

- Greyscales, Fisherman's Guild Vice Captain

COIN, HORRIFIC SERPENT

UNION TEAM MASCOT

Coin is a huge snake that Blackheart feeds his fortune to, from an exotic isle far outside of the boundaries of any Sovereign State. A monstrous creature itself before the horror inflicted upon it by Blackheart; it easily exceeds the size of the closest serpent native to the Empire of the Free Cities. Wildly dangerous to any other creature that might make the mistake of crossing its path, even Blackheart is careful to treat the serpent with caution. There is no love for his unorthodox bank, which he daily subjects to the suffering of being forced to swallow indigestible gold. The alien eyes of the snake show no comprehension of Blackheart as anything other than the source of its torment, as he has been for so many years now.

Coin
Unknown, Animal, Mascot

Melee Zone: 2"
Size: 30mm

Character Traits

Bag of Coffers
Once per turn, target friendly non-[Captain] guild model within [4"] gains [1] Influence and can use Bonus Time! without spending MP.

Follow Up
After the enemy model performs an Advance that takes it out of this model's melee zone, this model may immediately move its base-move directly towards it.

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays

COST RING ZONE SUSTAIN
Hamstring: P Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV.



Gutter
Erskiri, Human,
Female, Central Midfielder
Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6'8" 5 3/6" 4+ 1 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Chain Grab: 1 / 6" Yes

Target enemy model suffers a [4"] Push directly towards this model and [1] DMG.

Scything Blow: P

All models within this model's melee zone suffer [3] DMG.

Character Traits

Selective [Brewers, Butchers, Engineers, Fishermen]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Lifedrinker

When this model damages one or more enemy models, it may recover [2] HP.

Anatomical Precision

During an Attack from this model, enemy models suffer [-1] ARM.



GUTTER THE BROKEN

I heard that she was a princess once, from one of the Sovereign States in the north, out Erskirad way. Then, as part of a raid, she gets captured by Blackheart, who intends to ransom her off; thing is, northern nobles are even more ruthless than he is and a female heir is worth nothing really. So Blackheart never got his coin for this one. So he keeps her locked aboard his ship's lower decks, barely feeds her, takes his fill of her every night for a month.

Then the damnedest thing happens. Crazy bitch decides she's fallen in love with him. Totally broken down. Must be something snapped inside her head for that to happen. Maybe she wasn't too sane to begin with.

Anyhow, old Blackheart is no fool. He knows how to exploit an opportunity when it comes his way. Makes her first mate. Who can you trust more than some batshit crazy bitch totally devoted to you? No one in a crew of cutthroat pirates certainly. He didn't look after her though. Oh no, she was thrown to the wolves. Rough ride for the poor little princess, I heard she was raped a dozen times, near got herself killed learning the ropes. But each one of those men that abused her started turning up dead, one after another. And each time, her smile got that little bit more deranged, a little more like she was enjoying seeing the fear in the eyes of the crew. Before too long, they're following her orders alright.

She's the only one he took with him when he gave up the pirate life and she's been with him ever since. I think she's given up pursuing him, but that hasn't stopped her butchering anyone that she thinks is a threat. She's worse than most of the crew on his ship ever were now. Swings that mean-looking hook around with far too much intent for my liking, and that knife always tickles your throat if she takes you down, like she wants you to know that she could end you right there if she wanted. Keep her away from Harmony and the boss, she might not stop for a woman.

She even plays the game. Now that's the real surprise. Gods only know what her warped mind understands about that. P'haps she's just trying to get his attention, turning up without him on teams. Maybe she's just following his orders. Could be something else, we're both far too sensible to even begin to understand the woman.

- Brick, Mason's Guild

MIST MYSTERIOUS SHADOW

First time I ever saw any sort of reaction from Siren over anything. You should have seen her, stopped dead in her tracks. I don't know who he is, but you can bet that there is some history there. The big lad knows him too. Different reaction though, just went thundering after him. Now that's another unusual sight. Kraken doesn't lose his calm like that.

Still, fair kept them both off of our backs for the rest of the game though. Whenever she got anywhere close enough for whatever it is that she does that makes a man lose his head and run out of position, he was there to spoil the moment. The last couple of times, I swear I heard her howl in frustration, but that must have just been the wind. Stuck up bitch never makes any sound. And there it was, every time he chased her off, Kraken shows up, following him, ignoring the rest of us. Never had a chance of catching him though; I would have laughed if not for the fact that if Kraken wanted to, he could probably smash out most of my teeth without even breaking a sweat.

That lad is fast; every movement is like watching water flowing, intangible and smooth. Never seems to make a mistake, get tired, just knows whenever anyone is trying to sneak up on him. Go to grab his cloak and he's not there anymore, he's behind you, and that stick smacks you across the temple. I saw Shark go for his legs, and he leapt over him, flipped in midair, to change direction and land perfectly. I don't think a normal man can do that. Trust me, I've travelled here and there, seen all sorts of sights and this is something I've never seen. I think if he wanted to, he could probably have played that game without us on his own and still won.

Just be glad he's on our side. For now.

- Flint, Mason's Guild Vice Captain

No hint of the mysterious Shadow's motive is discernible from watching him on the pitch of Guild Ball. Only one clue exists and that is the strange, almost otherworldly link between Mist and Siren. All that can be said is that whenever the two are on opposite sides of the pitch, that some fate or bond seems to bring them together. Whether the truth behind this link will be revealed or the secret will just deepen in the future, only time will tell.

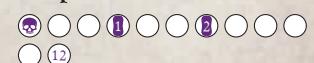
Mist
Unknown, Human,
Male, Striker
Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6'8" 4 3/8" 5+ 0 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Smoke Bomb: 1 8" AOE³

Models within this ongoing-effect AOE benefit from cover. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Where'd They Go?: 1 / S

This model may make a [4"] Dodge. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Selective [Alchemists, Masons, Morticians]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Cover of Darkness

If this model starts an Advance while benefiting from cover, it gains [+2"+2"] MOV.

Skilled within Shadow

This model gains [+2] TAC while targeting an enemy model benefitting from cover.



TEAMS



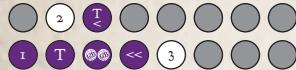


Snakeskin
Castellian, Human,
Female, Winger

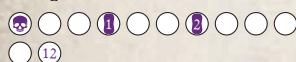
Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6'8" 5 3/6" 4+ 0 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Nimble: 1 S Yes
This model gains [+1] DEF.

Clone: 2/00 S Yes
This model may ignore the first Character Play or Playback result against it, then may make a [2"] Dodge.

Character Traits

Selective [Alchemists, Fishermen, Masons]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Venomous Strike
Enemy models suffer the poison condition when damaged by this model.

Charmed [Male]
This model gains [+1] DEF against every Attack and Character Play made by the named model type.

Shadow Like
At the start of this model's activation, it may make a [2"] Dodge.



SNAKESKIN THE CHAMELEON

'You ask the impossible!' Lord Chamberlain Vincent de Laurentis slammed his fist down onto the polished surface of his desk, causing the carefully arranged ornamentation to jump into the air, a couple of pieces clattering nosily onto the floor. 'I am at my wits end, trying to cater to your demands and now you bring me this... this...' he searched for the right word.

'Agent of the Union.' Longshanks quietly finished for him.

Laurentis offered the third figure standing quietly in the corner of the room a baleful glance. At first, she had seemed an old crone, hooded and cowed, but on closer inspection, was in fact a young, powerfully built woman, sinewy and fluid underneath her robes. Laurentis turned his eyes back to Longshanks for a moment and he could have sworn that the woman disappeared. He sharply looked back into the corner and sure enough, the figure was gone. By the time he returned to Longshanks, she stood next to her employer.

'Who are you?' Laurentis rasped through clenched teeth, unease beginning to replace the anger.

'They call me Snakeskin. Nice to meet you Chamberlain. Don't get up on my behalf.' Her voice was an adder's hiss.

This woman was the vilest sort of degenerate, Laurentis decided. Not for the first time, he wondered where Longshanks found these people. Whatever Snakeskin was, she wore an infuriatingly insolent grin. A grin only matched by that of Longshanks, standing next to her.

'And you want me to commission your agent to become a member of the Fisherman's Guild team?' Laurentis' voice was incredulous.

'Nothing nearly so exciting. All I am telling you is that for your next game, Snakeskin here will be a starting member on the roster. We do not expect that this will detract from your performance, in fact, far from it. You will find her quite capable.'

'And who do you suggest that I bench to make way for her?'

'That is entirely your choice. It is of little matter to either myself or my associates.'

'How magnanimous of you.'

Longshanks didn't bother with any acknowledgement beyond a curt nod of his head and a thick puff of smoke from the damnable pipe.

'We shall see you on match day Laurentis.' Longshanks quietly rose and left. Snakeskin seemed to fade backwards and then dissipate into the darkness. A pale-faced Laurentis held his face in sweaty palms and wept.

HEMLOCKE

PRIESTESS OF THE ANCIENT GODS

Hemlocke views the culture and politics of the Empire of the Free Cities and its Sovereign States with almost total indifference. She cares little whether the people are united under one nation, or exist as separate communities. She does not trouble herself with the new philosophy of secular thought or mankind's new empirical science. The only position that she has ever expressed any opinion on is her spiteful disrepect for the institution of the Solthecian faith.

Hemlocke pays fealty to ancient and primordial divinities, those that the increasingly cosmopolitan citizens of the Empire of the Free Cities have largely forgotten. Those with shrines overgrown by weeds, monoliths toppled and smashed from decades of neglect, their names long since passed from memory.

To most of those that have dealings with her, Hemlocke is an eccentric hermit, a deluded outcast that seems an odd fit for the shadowy and sinister Union. Gentle and affectionate when administering medicines or harvesting herbs in villages and towns as she travels across the land, Hemlocke is unusually popular for a Union player, with a dedicated and loyal following in the Guild Ball stands. It would likely horrify her admirers to know the number of significant guild figures that she has eliminated at the behest of the gods.

Hemlocke infiltrates the guilds, following the pretence of indulging in their paltry games against each other and observes them warily. She is under no illusion that she might ever hope to destroy the powerful institutions herself, but then, she has no such motive. Hemlocke follows the agenda of her primeval masters, shown to her in dreams, hallucinations and omens. The universe is natural, a living entity that man is not meant to understand, even a priestess touched by the hand of fate.

Hemlocke is not content to merely watch the pathetic scrabbling of man as he attempts to stamp a punitive and erroneous order upon his world, foretelling each step away from the ancient divinities and their natural order is one further along towards damnation. Fate itself answers only to the unpredictable whims of the old ones, those which mankind no longer serve.

The path of the future is set in the stars, which only Hemlocke can see.

Hemlocke

Eisnoran, Human,
Female, Defensive Midfielder

Melee Zone: 2"
Size: 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6'8" 3 3/6" 6+ 0 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Blind: 1 6" AOE³ Yes
Enemy models hit suffer [-4] TAC and [-4"/-4"] MOV. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Smelling Salts: 2 4" AOE³
Friendly models recover [2] HP and remove any conditions currently on them. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Noxious Blast: 2 8" AOE³
All models hit suffer [2] DMG and the poison condition. Models entering or starting their activation in this ongoing-effect AOE suffer the poison condition. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Character Traits

Selective [Alchemists, Brewers, Fishermen, Hunters]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Magical Brew

Once per turn during this model's activation, it can remove any conditions currently on it.



Rage
Castellian, Human,
Male, Attacking Midfielder

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
5'/7"	6	2/6"	4+	0	1/1

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Tooled Up: 1 4" Yes
Target friendly model gains [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results.
This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Concussion: P

Target enemy model loses [1] Influence.

Character Traits

Selective
[Brewers, Butchers, Engineers, Morticians]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Maverick
This model cannot be affected by other friendly Plays or Character Traits.

Berzerk
During its activation, if this model damages an enemy model this turn, it can then make an additional Attack without spending Influence. This ability cannot generate a further Attack from itself.

Furious
This model may Charge without spending Influence.

Crucial Artery
Enemy models suffer the bleed condition when damaged by this model.



RAGE THE OPPORTUNIST

Abendroth drew his cloak tighter to him and watched his breath as he exhaled. Down in the crypts, it was always so insufferably cold. He liked the quiet though. It made him smile to be so at peace among the dead.

'Don't do that too often. If the wind changes, you'll be stuck looking like one of the cadavers you Spooks stitch up.'

Abendroth scowled, his levity forgotten. 'Who are you, impudent scum?'

'Impudent I may be, but scum? I've been called worse.' The man chuckled, a dangerous rattle. 'But few have lived to do so again.'

The man's face was barely illuminated by the lantern that Abendroth held and not at all by the thick cigar which glowed warmly in the shadows. It stank. The Mortician made a note to have his servant throw out the clothes he was wearing after he retired this evening.

'Cease wasting my time and state your business.'

Abendroth had little patience for surprises.

'Longshanks warned me that you were the life and soul of the party. As per your agreement with the Union, you are to place me in your Guild Ball squad ahead of this week's game against the Mason's Guild.'

Abendroth had expected this. Union involvement in the game was becoming far too commonplace for anyone's liking. He had begun to wonder whether the enigmatic Longshanks was less wise than he had first attributed the man to be.

Abendroth nodded. It would not do at all to show any inclination of these suspicions.

'We are understood then. Will you require anything else?'

The Union agent scowled. 'Just leave me on the pitch with that bitch and her lackeys. We have unfinished business.' The venom in his voice betrayed his hatred.

Abendroth felt that the man's openness was a weakness. 'Do you have a name?'

'Call me whatever, I have several.' the man sounded disinterested, quietly seething following his earlier outburst.

Rage then, for a hotheaded fool.

'You may let yourself out in the same way that you let yourself in, whatever that might have been.' Abendroth was done here and left the man alone in the darkness.

FANGTOOTH THE MONSTER

The rook stared at the impossibly huge bulk moving along the other side of the cobblestone path with what looked like aimless, directionless steps. Each was ponderously slow, a dull thud that echoed off of the walls of the buildings. For the moment, it hadn't seen him. He intended to keep it that way.

Where did this beast even come from? It certainly wasn't a regular player on the Mortician's roster that he'd seen before. Even Greyscale had never seen anything like this in all of his years playing Guild Ball and that was saying something. Even Kraken would have thought twice before throwing down with whatever that thing was.

He cautiously slunk back into the shadows of the alley, afforded one quick glance around the corner and then hit the ground running. As he sprinted across the path, his eyes never left the creatures back.

Without looking where he was going, the Fisherman ran straight into something at full speed. Winded, he fell backwards, letting out an audible cry, his arms flailing. The creatures meandering pace stopped. Agonisingly slowly, its head turned. Upon seeing the fallen player, the unsteady gait became long, tireless and menacing strides towards where he lay; doubled over and desperately trying to get his breath back.

This close, he could smell the enemy for the first time and that almost stopped him in his tracks, retching. Hand over his mouth; he frantically tried to rise on unsteady feet.

Too late, he looked up at the shadow looming over him and the large expanse of pasty, blotchy pink flesh, as the creature battered him into the ground with one big meaty fist. The rookie looked up through lidded eyes as he spat blood through his teeth and felt burning, searing agony from somewhere in his gut.

The creature impassively raised one huge foot up and stamped down hard onto the Fisherman's head with a horribly wet crunch.

As the lifeblood drained from the boy into the dirt, the red mist that flooded the creature's vision rage dissipated, along with the murderous rage. It listened carefully and its head turned slowly, looking for other stimuli. When it found none, it began its slow, methodical walk along the path again, the encounter quite forgotten.

Fangtooth
Ethrannian, Human,
Male, Centre Back

Melee Zone: 1"
Size: 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4'/6"	5	1/6"	2+	1	1/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Bleed: P
Target enemy model suffers the bleed condition.

The Unmasking: S Pulse: 3
All other models within the pulse suffer a [4"] Push directly away from this model and [3] DMG.

Character Traits

Selective
[Brewers, Fishermen, Morticians]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Foul Odor [3" Aura]
The open-ground within the aura is treated as rough-ground.

Heroic Play

Fangtooth Unleashed [4" Pulse]
All friendly models within the pulse immediately suffer [5] DMG. This model gains [+1"/2"] MOV and [+1] DMG to Character Plays that cause damage and Playbook damage results.



Decimate
Erskiri, Human,
Female, Winger

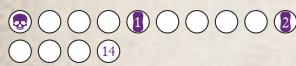
Melee Zone - 2"
Size - 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
6^{7/9} 6 3⁶ 4+ 1 2/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Second Wind: 2 4" Yes
Target friendly model may make a Jog at the end of its activation. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Thousand Cuts: 3 / 6" 6" Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-2] DEF and [1] DMG.

Character Traits

Selective
[Alchemists, Butchers, Engineers, Masons]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Anatomical Precision
During an Attack from this model, enemy models suffer [-1] ARM.



DECIMATE

EXILE

The woman now known as Decimate is properly known as Svetlana Leonid Volstov III, a princess of Erskiri nobility. Cursed by the misfortune of a late birth into a large family with little interest in a fourth successor, Volstov had the run of a disinterested court and the pampered if insignificant life of one quickly forgotten by her parents.

Such an existence is but a paltry thing to a young, well educated girl with near unlimited potential. By the time she reached her twelfth name day, Volstov had already begun to involve herself in a far more exciting life amongst the underclass of the cities. It was not long before she discovered fraternity amongst the well funded and organised Brewer's Guild gangs. Ever the opportunist, Volstov rapidly rose within their ranks, her education and breeding aiding her in gathering significant influence.

When in 11C the Brewer's Guild house of Strakislov went to war against the Kersch guild house and successfully wrested control of the guild for themselves, they were not slow in consolidating power. After the ruthless purging of the Guild Ball team and the introduction of their own trusted 'family', the adolescent Volstov found herself a Guild Ball player, a career in which she thrived. Over successive seasons, Volstov evolved into the figure known to the crowds as Decimate, the duellist. With each passing match, Decimate would bask in more adoration of a roaring crowd and become more distanced from her associates.

This all changed after the Maldriven guild houses took control of the Brewer's Guild in a short, violent coup in 19C. As before, the new masters were quick to purge all trace of the former houses' influence within the corridors of power. Awoken in the early hours of the morning by a botched assassination attempt on her person, Decimate fled into the night.

A year later, Decimate took to the pitch in her first game as a free agent of the Union, flashing blades a swirling dance of destruction and mastery as ever they had been in the past. What her link to her new masters might be can only be guessed at, but she is as ever the arrogant, spiteful and dismissive noble that she always has been.

MINX

FERAL HUNTER

The hated man came back from wherever he went when he left her alone in the darkness. The Hunter preferred the dark. It reminded her of the safe places that she laired in, deep beneath the ground. The only times that she felt safe enough to sleep, without keeping an eye open for danger. It was familiar to her, comforting.

The times when he led her out into the light places, with all of the pale skinned maggots staring at her behind their devil-kin faces, were agony. The brightness stabbed at her eyes, like knives driven into them. The feel of so much light from the golden devil in the skies, burning her skin. It was no way for anyone to live, in that torture. His children, the maggots, had been bleached white by it.

The hated man was the worst one, with his perfect white teeth and his unnatural smooth, pale skin. She would have given anything to bite into it, to rip it from his bones and wear what she didn't eat like a trophy. But that was only for worthy prey. And the man was no prey. Maggots were unworthy. So she just thought about how she would skin him while he was alive and make him watch her eat the scraps. The maggots had no taste for their own skin and blood. They were sickly, weak creatures that lacked the blessing of the Moon Goddess.

It angered her still that they had captured her. It angered her more that they kept her chained up, docile and toothless instead of killing her. But worse still was the time when the man did something in her mind and she couldn't resist him, even with all of her strength. The times when he told her to go and fight his enemies for him, like a contemptible coward. And she did, because the maggot had made her weak somehow, had wormed his way into her head. The best the Hunter could do was to give in and just live for the thrill of the moment, drawing out their blood and taking scalps.

Hollow. It was all hollow. None of it was what she wanted. When he would return her to the darkness, he would smile at her and pat her head like the Hunter was a dog. She would be forced to look at him all of the time, waiting until he left and released her, then the Hunter would shame herself by crying like a youngling.

But she would not break. He was a maggot, like all of the rest, and she would escape and kill them all.

Minx
Unknown, Human,
Female, Winger

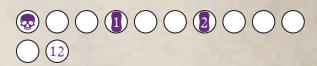
Melee Zone - 1"
Size - 30mm

MOV TAC KICK DEF ARM INF
7^{7/9} 5 2⁶ 4+ 1 2/2

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Marked Target: 1 / 8" Yes
Friendly models who declare a Charge against the affected enemy model gain [+0"/+2"] MOV. This Character Play can only be used once per turn.

Screeching Banshee: P Yes
Target enemy model suffers [-4"/-4"] MOV and [2] DMG.

Character Traits

Selective
[Butchers, Hunters, Masons, Morticians]
This model can also play for the named teams.

Furious
This model may Charge without spending INF.

Damaged Target
When this model performs a Charge against a damaged enemy model, it gains [+0"/+2"] MOV.

Follow Up
After the enemy model performs an Advance that takes it out of this model's melee zone, this model may immediately move its base-move directly towards it.



AVARISSE & GREEDE

PRIVATE ENTREPRENEURS FOR HIRE

Everyone in the underworld knows Avarisse and Greede. Innumerable are the crimes, sins and vices of this pair. They've probably been down in the slums of every city of every Sovereign State in service of their 'Principles'. I don't think that they have any scruples. They must have worked just about every shitty job going. I've seen them be bodyguards for a gang boss, henchmen for another. Heard about them involved in extortion, racketeering, human trafficking, narcotics, procuring and good old fashioned murder. Don't think that list is everything either. Bound to be more I've missed off. If you have the money and the contacts, then they'll work for you. Even in a den of vipers like the Union, those two stand out as having the most flexible loyalties.

They're a weird pair. No one has ever felt the need to ask them how they met or why they work together. It's not as simple as Greede being the brains like you might think. Oh, he's the clever one, you can see it in those beady yellow eyes of his. Always moving, scheming, evaluating and watching everyone. Talks like he's real educated too, most of the words out of his mouth you won't ever have heard before. But Avarisse is more than just muscle to go with that. Don't talk unless spoken to, but underestimate him and his ruthless cunning at your own peril. Got himself a real sadistic streak.

How it might be that they became involved in actually playing Guild Ball is probably the only mystery about them. They used to run a gambling den for the game I remember, down Skald way. That was years ago, when I was inside. But playing and pushing are two very different things. Bet they earn a pretty penny when they take to the pitch, only way I can see they'd bother. It's not love of the game for sure, I've never seen either one even look at the ball.

Word is that first time anyone saw them, crowd laughed at the contraption that Avarisse wears to carry Greede around in, and at the funny little man giving the big lad orders. They stopped that alright, about five minutes later when Avarisse stoved in some poor mook's skull; just killed him dead in front of the crowd. Now they don't laugh, cheer, or anything. Good thing that they don't show up much on the pitch at least, sours the game. Behind the scenes? Now that's another story.

- Flint, Mason's Guild Vice Captain

Greede

Raed, Animal,
Male, Striker

Melee Zone · 1"
Size · 30mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4'/5"	5	4/4"	5+	0	1/4

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Where'd They Go? 1 / 1 S

This model may make a [4"] Dodge. This Character Play may only be used once per turn.

Rabid Animal: 0/0 P Yes

Target enemy model suffers [-4"]-[-4"] MOV and the poison condition.

Character Traits

Selective [All Guilds]

This model can also play for the named teams.

Bonched

This model does not start on the Pitch and does not count towards your maximum team size allowance.

Attach [Avarisse]

During the Maintenance Phase before Influence is generated, if this model is in base contact with the named model, it may remove all damage and conditions and remove itself from the Pitch. If this model is in possession of the ball, move the ball-token to the named model.

Defence Support [Avarisse]

While within [4"] of the named model, this model gains [+1] DEF.

Crazy

Once per activation, this model may suffer [3] DMG to gain [+3] TAC for the remainder of this activation.

Avarisse

Raed, Human,
Male, Centre Back

Melee Zone · 1"
Size · 40mm

MOV	TAC	KICK	DEF	ARM	INF
4'/7"	6	1/6"	2+	0	1/3

Playbook



Hitpoints



Character Plays COST RNG ZONE SUSTAIN

Singled Out: 0/0 P Yes

Friendly models gain [+2] TAC against target enemy model.

Character Traits

Selective [All Guilds]

This model can also play for the named teams.

Tough Hide

Enemy Plays that cause damage or Playbook damage results targeting this model are reduced by [-1] DMG.

Detach [Greede]

During the Maintenance Phase before Influence is generated, the named model may be placed on the Pitch in base contact with this model. If this model is in possession of the ball, it may move the ball-token to the named model.



TEAMS





Ox and Boar hurried through the empty streets, followed closely by a pair of hard looking Butcher's Guild thugs. Overhead the sparsely situated street lights, lit at dusk by the lamplighters, still burned low, giving each of the figures long shadows as they passed under them. The link boys had all long since retired to their beds, their only other companion was a harsh early winter wind, biting at their skin hidden under heavy cloaks. The skies had looked overcast all day, blocking out the stars and most of the moonlight now, the Gods having seen fit to bestow a chilling herald to an oncoming storm.

Ox looked around him at the buildings they passed, carefully noting them against the map of the city he'd memorised earlier. Not much further now to the docks, then past the fish market, the entrance to Pawnbroker Alley and finally down into the undercity. He kept a brisk pace despite the unfamiliar surroundings.

Ox had never been to Rue Lejourre in all of his travels but he supposed that all Valorian cities looked much like each other; all broken down buildings and rotting slums. It was unlikely that he was missing anything and they could ill afford to delay meeting with their contact. As always now, there was the urgency, vengeance consuming all of his thoughts.

Vincent de Laurentis and the Fisherman's Guild both would pay this dark night. Blood money for what they had done to Brisket.

Staring daggers at Ox's back, Snakeskin sweated inside the thick shawl that the Butchers wore this eve and served as her disguise. Unlike them, she was used to the hard nights, having spent many amongst the Erskiri, under bridges or huddled in alleys. The weather didn't bother her in the slightest.

Of more concern to her was the heavy cleaver at her side. The unfamiliar weight slowed her down and she would have to be careful to wield the cumbersome weapon discretely, lest one of the other Butchers see how uncomfortable she was fighting with it. She wasn't worried about her safety in a fight of course. She had several wickedly sharp stiletto blades concealed about her person if it came to that; much preferring the subtle assassin's tools to something as painfully primitive as the weaponry employed by the Butcher's Guild.

Snakeskin was mildly amused by the Master Butcher's vendetta. It seemed so wasteful, so pointless. Killing a worm like Laurentis would achieve nothing and certainly not provide any restitution for the injury done to Brisket. Nothing about this evening would bring her back from the brink of death. Snakeskin had always heard that Ox was hardnosed, pragmatic in his dealings.

Apparently not.

But the irony that Snakeskin should accompany the Butcher to enact his revenge on an innocent was delicious. A happy coincidence then that, courtesy of the information from the otherwise contemptible Avarisse and Greede, she could accomplish the rescue of Longbanks from beneath the Fisherman's Guild at the same time.

She stalked on through the night amongst the Butchers.

Barely any of the light from the lamps in the street penetrated the shadows where they stood in an alley between two huge buildings. Ox could barely see the man in the darkness, only a vague silhouette outlined by what little illumination there was.

'You the one they call the Ox?' The stranger hissed at him in an urgent tone.

Ox nodded an affirmative. Behind him, he heard Boar grunt. Ox agreed with the big man. It had been a stupid question. Every bastard and his dog could recognise the Butcher's Guild Ball captain when he stood in front of them. But the Master Butcher knew well enough to let the stranger keep his pride for the moment, until he had done his part.

The man struck a flint and settled it into a lantern. He quickly dropped the shutters over the flame, leaving just the barest minimum of light to hasten their way. They set off, deeper into the alley, away from the outside world and into the undercity.

The alley seemed to curve to the left, then a definite sharp right at what might have been a crossroads of sorts. They continued. Another right, the ground feeling like it had taken a downwards slant, then straight. All the time it was deadly quiet, no noise other than that of their footsteps in the gravel. Although they were still in the open, no light came from overhead, leaving them in almost total blackness other than their guide's lantern. It was as if the world was swallowing them whole as they descended into its innards, only to be spat back out in a totally new place. The sense was so complete it was all Ox could do not to place a hand on one of the walls around him, expecting to feel a pulse throbbing in the brickwork.

Suddenly, the man stopped dead in his tracks. Ox was following far enough behind not to collide with him, but Boar blundered into the back of the Master Butcher, causing Ox to overbalance and reach out an arm to the adjacent wall to keep his feet. There was a loud metallic clatter, which seemed to last for an eternity in the soundless dark, rebounding from wall to wall.

The lantern swung their way, its sudden brilliance making Ox blink and shield his eyes. 'Are you oafs done waking everyone up?' came the hissed rebuke.

Ox heard a growl from Boar behind him and readied himself to restrain the Beast from an explosive outburst, but to his surprise and relief, no other retort came. After listening for a moment to see whether they had alerted anyone, the contact seemed satisfied and motioned for them to stand still and wait. He took a couple of steps forward, gingerly casting the lantern around him at the walls, obviously looking for markers of a sort. Catching a faint murmur of the man muttering under his breath, Ox thought he made him out, stooping over the ground, and then definitely saw him place the lantern on the ground and kneel.

The Master Butcher could hear him scrabbling around in the dirt for a moment, his form hunched over by where the lantern had been placed on row of stone cobbles that circled a round drain. Next, the flicking sound of a concealed blade, a gentle rattle of a thief's tool set and a grunt as the stranger braced himself and shifted the heavy grate up and over.

'In there we go.' The man panted from the effort, trying to catch his breath and pointing in the poor light.

Snakeskin followed last, looking left and right to see whether the blundering idiots had alerted anyone with their noise. That had been inexcusable, lucky not to draw attention to them. She was reminded why it was she always insisted to Longbanks that she carry out this sort of work alone.

Her night vision was exemplary, not needing the lantern to see the outlines of the walls, or the clouds above. Standing dead still, she listened, trying to tune out the noises of the Butchers' ungainly descent into the sewers and focusing her attention on the alley. It was silent. Not even the wind penetrated past the tall walls around her.

Satisfied that the group had escaped detection, she took her last deep breath of clean, fresh air and stepped into the dark hole, thick with the stench of rot and waste.

It stank inside. A wretched mix of damp, urine and shit. As bad as Ox would have expected of a sewer, as much as he had hoped to be wrong. Replacing the silence of the alley were the sounds of dripping water somewhere to their left and a steady trickle at their feet; like a man taking one long, never-ending piss. Finally, they were all inside and once the man had closed the heavy ironwork and opened the shutters on the lantern, Ox could inspect their guide properly.

He was a small man, with pinched features around the nose that reminded the Master Butcher of a rat, with its twitchy snout and small mouth. His eyes seemed huge on that face, bulging outwards as though he had just been kicked between the legs, and large ears that stuck out from a shaggy crop of dark brown hair. His skin was pale, hidden underneath a layer of dirt and grime. A ganger then maybe. Or just a gutter rat. The long, sharp knife at his belt suggested the former. Scum out to make a name for himself no doubt.

The little man gestured for them to follow.

'No need to be so quiet down here. No guards or hidden eyes. You follow me, but watch your step eh?' A pause. The man looked up at Boar, standing next to Ox, and smirked. 'There are sink holes which will swallow even a big man like you.' He turned and made to hurry away into the darkness, without bothering to look to see whether they would follow him.

Ox admired the stranger's stones at least, no matter how questionable his loyalties might be. He rounded on the Beast, hearing the inevitable retaliation before it even came, hurriedly pushing the big man backwards before he started throwing fists. He clamped a gauntleted hand over the Beast's mouth and whispered urgently to him.

'You just soldier and keep your mouth shut!' Boar growled his displeasure. Ox continued, his tone less urgent. 'There will be plenty of them to take it out on later. For the moment, we need him. Don't make me regret bringing you.'

Boar stared at Ox, his eyes thick with murderous intent, the diminishing light making the big Butcher's expression ever more sinister. Finally, he nodded. If their other two companions thought anything of the altercation between the two, they wisely kept their opinions to themselves. Pleased to have kept Boar in line, Ox turned to follow after their guide and the light.

As they travelled, the pathway through the sewers descended; the trickle of water running in the recess along the centre becoming ankle deep and then deeper still. Up to the waist it forced them to walk on the edge of what seemed like a still stream, a stagnant ditch of waste.

The ceiling was low in places, causing the Butchers to have to duck; several pieces of stone had come adrift from the walls along the path, forcing them to watch their footing constantly in the poor light. Once, they had to leap a large cesspit which bisected their path, while their guide tried to give them as much illumination as he could. They almost lost one of the henchmen there, only a quick hand from his companion pulling him back to safety.

The walkway was not intended for a man of Ox's size, let alone Boar's. The Master Butcher could hear the much larger man swearing behind him. They passed by several darkened junctions that all looked identical, the guide having some private knowledge as to which direction to take. Definitely a gutter rat, Ox decided. Whoever he was, it was obvious that they would be totally lost without him, even with the lantern to illuminate their way. There was no other source of light here.

By the Master Butcher's reckoning, they had been travelling for entirely too long through the shit and slime of the sewers before the path angled back upwards and they stopped once again. At this rate, he cynically wondered whether it would be daybreak when they emerged. The stranger seemed to read his mind.

'Not much further now at all, just around the corner.' He scuttled off at pace, the four Butchers following.

Waiting for them as promised was an old but solid looking iron ladder, its rungs set into the stone wall on one side of the corridor. The man directed his lantern upwards, revealing a small circular opening in the ceiling.

'Up there, about sixty steps, it will open into the courtyard next to the gardens. There is a heavy grille, which you should be able to push aside. There will not be any guards inside the walls this time of the night, don't worry about the noise. Across the yard and into the largest building should take you into the eastern passageway, which leads to his rooms.' The man leaned in closer, the lantern unintentionally casting a haunting glow on the underside of his face. 'They may be some guards there, but I'm sure you know how to take care of yourselves.'

'You stay here like a stinking coward?' Boar raised an eyebrow.

'Please,' the man looked nervous. 'If I was to be found or seen, my life would be forfeit. My family... the guild is ruthless.'

'Hub. No backbone, little man. Where is that big mouth of yours now eh? Lost your stones down here?' Boar fought back laughter at his own joke. 'Maybe they ran down your trouser leg and away in the little river of piss at our feet.'

Their guide's face was crimson, his mouth working open and closed silently, his large eyes yellowish in the light, staring. For one moment Ox thought the smaller man would make a move, but he looked away, causing a snort from Boar.

'Enough.' Ox couldn't afford to waste time with this. 'You will wait for us here?' There was a deliberate finality to the question that implied that the man had no choice. The man nodded, trembling. Whether from rage or fear, Ox didn't much care.

'Good.' Ox struck one foot at the base of the ladder and tested a rung with a sharp pull of his hand. It didn't move, but a thin layer of rust dusted his glove a bright orange. Best not to climb too slowly he decided, slipping the gloves off to get a better purchase and began his ascent.

It was pitch black inside the tight crawlspace. All that there was in this claustrophobic world was the next rung, the next step. Mechanical, unthinking movements, like the peculiar team mascot in the Alchemist's Guild team. One after another, heavy breathing from the three men below him.

Too late now to wonder whether they were too loud, or whether he should have brought someone else instead of Boar. He didn't like the big man's attitude and Gods knew he was uncontrollable once his blood was up, but he was reliable, blunt force muscle. Of all his boys, Shank would have been better for sneaking around in the night, for slitting Laurentis' throat. But Ox didn't trust that one. Not yet, anyhow. Had to prove himself off of the pitch. Far better to hedge your bets on the big lad you knew from experience had your back.

The air had steadily grown lighter and the pestilential smell of the hole beneath them became increasingly distant as they climbed. The muscles in Ox's arms burned. It would have been hard on a man in the light, but in the dark, hanging uncertainly by three limbs whilst poking around trying to find the next rung with the other hand made it hell. The Master Butcher hoped that the others were keeping up. The echoes from beneath him at least seemed encouraging.

At last there seemed to be a small change in the light coming from above him. It was still dark, but he could at least make out the vague outlines of the rungs now. He increased his pace and after a few more steps could see a small round patch, lighter than the surrounding walls, growing larger.

Finally, his hand punched into metal above him, grazing his knuckles. He stopped and hissed to the others beneath him to do likewise. Bracing his feet on the rungs, his back resting on the cold wall behind him, he reached up his hands and forced his calloused fingers into the holes in the grille. Then, teeth clenched together, he heaved upwards, his arms tightening underneath with the strain, closing his eyes in concentration. There was a grinding noise and dust showered down over his shoulders. He dared not stop or cough and pushed harder, a low grunt forcing itself out through exertion. This appeared not to have been moved for years, so heavily was it stuck in place. Ox began to wonder whether it was the wrong exit. Too late now though; he pushed harder, throwing as much weight into the lift as he could, given his precarious footing.

At last something broke or dislodged and his hands, still holding the grille, shot upwards in to open air. Breathing deeply into eager lungs, he carefully placed the grille down on the stone floor next to the opening before hauling his body up into the courtyard.

There was more light now than the Butcher had seen in hours, each wall with a sconce set onto it, burning low now in the early hours. As their guide had said, Ox couldn't see any guards. He looked around for the building that the man had mentioned, as the others pulled themselves up, and out of the tunnel.

Why did the Meatheads have to do things so slowly? That climb took far too long. Snakeskin's lip curled involuntarily in her distaste for the brutish, vulgar thugs. Once again she swore to herself that she continue to insist that Longshanks never played her in their guild. At least it was almost time to lose them and find her employer.

The sooner that this was over, the better.

The walls were a rough stone and chalky to the touch, not what the Master Butcher had expected at all. This house of the Fisherman's Guild evidently was much older than it looked from outside. At their feet mosaic tiling ran along the floor in both directions, carefully arranged to show interweaving patterns that meant nothing to him.

They followed the passage eastwards as instructed; Ox taking the lead with one of his banchmen at the rear, watching for guards. Thankfully even Boar managed to be quiet, the only sounds their soft footsteps on the stone tiles, drowned out by the heavy wind and rain outside. The storm that had threatened to break all day had finally done so just after the group had gained access from the courtyard into the guild house itself. Every so often there was a roll of thunder and a bright burst of lightning that illuminated the skies, causing them all to hide in the shadows. Mercifully at least, there seemed to be few windows in the corridor, aiding their cautious advance.

The corridor turned sharp left ahead and Ox could see that whatever room lay beyond was lit by a warm orange glow seeping outwards along the walls and floor. He signalled to the others to ready their weapons, hearing a faint series of clicks and a slithering noise of steel on leather as they complied. As they approached, Ox detected a faint and not altogether unpleasant scent, like incense.

He didn't care for this sort of work at the best of times, much preferring a direct approach. But vengeance was in the hearts of the Butcher's Guild this night and they would take their due however they had to. Ox edged ever closer, flat against the wall, and chanced a quick look around the corner at the room beyond.

Two guards were inside, one sitting in a small alcove set into the wall, the other leaning heavily on a halberd. So much for professionals. That halberd, designed for military use on the field of battle, would be next to no use in the tight confines of the room where it couldn't be swung properly. The most use that it might see would be as a spear, still not ideal. Ox couldn't see what the second man was armed with. If he too carried one of the long polearms, then it was well hidden, which made the Master Butcher doubt he did. Neither wore too much by way of armour, just breastplates that shone dully in the half light and some sort of iron vambraces, shirt sleeves tucked into them.

Otherwise, the room was adorned with comfortable looking chairs and antique decorations. A reception room. Grand doors in the back wall were embossed with gold and silver trout that leapt across their surface; these undoubtedly led to the Lord Chamberlain's living quarters. Ox knew that he would have to barrel past the guards and leave them to his boys, while he gained entry to Laurentis' rooms and murdered the bastard.

He leaned back and whispered what he had seen to the others. Boar grinned in the darkness. Ox didn't need to ask that the big man knew what to do.

They burst into the room from their hiding place, taking the two guards by surprise at the sudden activity. Looking up in shock, the one leaning on his halberd knocked it over with a sharp clatter. His companion fared slightly better, at least managing to make it to his feet and draw a wicked looking falchion before the Butchers got to him. Ox ignored them both as Boar smashed into the latter, axe upraised and swinging downwards as the other man was mobbed by the two banchmen. Ox planted a heavy kick into the doors, which swung open and he charged into the room beyond.

The Master Butcher found himself in the dark once again, the only light came from the room behind him and a low glow emanating from a doorway further inside the audience chamber. Even in the darkness, the outlines suggested to Ox that they were as opulently decorated as he had expected.

Reasoning that the glow came from the bedchambers, Ox stormed towards the opening and found himself face to face with the Lord Chamberlain, come to see what the commotion was. Mouth slack, eyes wide and momentarily stunned by the appearance of Ox, in trembling fingers Laurentis held a small knife. The Master Butcher quickly chopped it away from him with his left hand and then with his right grabbed Laurentis by the throat, squeezing his fingers together.

He stared at the Lord Chamberlain of the Fisherman's Guild, knowing that he would long remember this moment. Laurentis was likely one of the most powerful individuals in the Empire of the Free Cities. Real power, not like the puppet nobles or monarchs that Ox had fought for in the past.

His left hand slid the dirk out of its hidden scabbard on his leg. He had claimed it during the Century Wars; stolen from a Raed officer that he had killed on a forgotten battleground somewhere. A murderer's weapon, fit for this murder.

Nails raking like claws at the Master Butcher's gloves, Laurentis was trying to speak, lips blue, eyes bulging. Ox didn't care. This was how the Butchers set an example, looked out for their own.

The knife snarled through the air as he thrust it into the Lord Chamberlain's stomach, viciously twisting it upwards to carve out the maximum amount of damage inside. Eyes never leaving Laurentis', Ox tore it out and repeated the brutal action twice more as blood spurted out all over them both, staining their clothes. Laurentis stopped struggling and his eyes began to flicker, their reflection dim. The third slash accelerated the flow of blood from the Lord Chamberlain. It gushed all over Ox's legs, a slick crimson running down onto the floor and pooling at their feet. Keeping his tight grip around Laurentis' throat, Ox leaned forward. The man was close, very close, from blood loss and being strangled.

Ox spoke the last words that the Fisherman would ever hear.

'That was for Brisket.'



Snakeskin had slipped away from the rest during the fighting. She had no doubt that Laurentis was a dead man; Ox unwittingly serving the Union's justice for them. Time now to find Longshanks and beat a hasty retreat before the guards arrived.

The entrance to the Fisherman's Guild dungeon was an innocuous door at the end of an equally nondescript alley, adjacent to another building across the central compound. Snakeskin had carefully hidden herself, darting from shadow to shadow through the downpour as the guards rushed to investigate the noise made by the Butchers.

Snakeskin opened the door just enough and slipped out of sight.

The air was cooler in the passage than outside, the floor level descending immediately. The walls were old discoloured brick, lit by torches sparsely set some feet apart, the smell musty. She moved quickly, looking for cells of some kind. Initially there were no doors at all as the path spiralled down into the earth, until she reached what she supposed was below water level, where the musty scent was replaced by damp. Now, where the floor bottomed out, she found rooms and cells.

The first were empty, their iron bar doors wide open. They looked like they hadn't been used in years, the iron hinges stiff, rusted. Snakeskin didn't stop to check in the inky blackness for anybody. Next was a room with an open doorway, revealing rows and rows of shelves, all full with either wicked implements of torture, or jars and vials. Again, most looked disused, covered in a fine layer of dust. She kept moving.

Snakeskin was forced now to remove one of the torches from the wall, as the lighting abruptly stopped. Surrounding her were several barred wooden doors to newer cells, each with tiny iron bar slots in them. Carefully, so as to try and not to make any noise, Snakeskin began checking each one in turn. Each metallic squeal as she opened them was deafening to her ears in the otherwise quiet dungeon, but no guards came.

She began to despair that she would ever find Longshanks as she methodically searched the empty cells. Any of them could have been used recently, from their relative cleanliness, but none had any sign of occupancy. All were totally devoid of even a hint of human life.

The last door stood apart from the rest, wooden with no lock, just a metal ring for a handle. With a growing sense of unease, Snakeskin opened it. Beyond lay a torture chamber, with racks of bloodstained devices that looked much more recently used than those in the alcove earlier. At the far end, naked and with his chin resting on his chest, Longshanks was shackled to the wall.

Snakeskin approached him quickly through the filthy room, carefully avoiding the large rack in the centre and the other large instruments, sure feet enabling her to step over the sticky blood smears on the stone tiles. Longshanks looked to be in a terrible condition, hands and feet smashed to a pulpy dirty red. His chest had crusty red and brown gouges running vertically along it, the surrounding skin inflamed a raw pink. He stank of infection, sweat and bile, his chest unmoving.

Snakeskin was satisfied that Longshanks was dead, or close enough that he might as well be. There was no way she cared enough about the man to drag him back in this condition; there was little chance he would even survive the ordeal of being cut down.

Time to leave. The guards would already have alerted the whole house in the hunt for the Butchers by now, and she would have little darkness left with which to make her escape.

They ran, ruddy faced and out of breath, with no time to look around and see whether they were being followed. Stinking guards, who knew the Fisherman's Guild had so many? They couldn't get back to the sewers now, that much was certain. Too many lights in that direction, bobbing around in the darkness, moving towards the Lord Chamberlain's residence. Ox wore a cruel grin. Let them all see him, spit like a pig. The more that found him the better to bear witness to Butcher's Guild justice.

They were in a garden of some sort again, different from the last one, much more ornamental. Statues lined a central walkway, the outlines of flowerbeds and small hedges surrounding them, what little light there was from the shrouded moon reflecting off still ponds. No artificial light disturbed the scene. Ox skidded to a halt behind one of the statues, the other Butchers following suit. All was still and they were alone, desperately trying to regain their breath without making too much noise. He counted their number.

'What happened to Skinner?' His eyes went to the remaining henchman first.

'Haven't seen her since, uh, we gutted those guards.'

'Boar?'

Even as he asked, Ox could see the big man shrug. 'I saw her, then I didn't care anymore. I had meat to kill.' It was obvious that was as much as could be expected from Boar.

Ox cursed that they had to leave a man behind, but they didn't have the luxury of time to look out for her. They had to get out of the guild house, now. The Master Butcher looked around at the tall walls, keeping a wary eye on the little orange yellow dots that moved rapidly back and forth in the direction that they had just come from. Every so often, he glimpsed a weapon or armoured silhouette, a sinister reminder of the danger that they were in. Keeping his head down, he ran hunched over in the rain and the darkness to what he hoped was an outer wall. Long ivy grew upwards across its surface, hopefully to safety. The other two followed him.

Ox gave a sharp tug on a thick vine, making the plant rattle and spray droplets of water, the sound swallowed up by the storm. It seemed sturdy enough to support his weight, with a pinch of luck. But then, Ox didn't believe in luck. It was too late to start now either, best just to get it over with. He would either make the climb or fail in the attempt. One hand reaching up to snag a handful of the creeper, he began pulling himself up, tired muscles bunching together, one boot kicking to the wall for support, other arm ready to grasp the plant further along.

A dull wooden thud, where his steel toecap bit the wall. Ox gave up his climb and hurriedly started brushing the leaves away, trying to clear away the growth to see what was on the other side. He was making a lot more noise now, but if this was an old door, then it was their escape. Boar helped, giant hands clumsily ripping vines and branches to the ground.

The door was decayed, probably worn by the elements in the light, but it still felt solid. Its hinges were crusted with a thick layer of what had to be rust, peeling off in flakes. The bracing bar had either rotted right through or had just been lost at some time over the years, but the heavy lock still seemed formidable enough.

'Boss, they're coming this way!' The henchman's hiss sounded urgent. Ox could hear them too, the sound of angry voices; indistinct now, but getting closer. Two lights, flickering, wavering in the rain.

'Get out of my way. I'm not dying here to these pigs!' Boar's voice brooked no alternative.

Ox weighed up his choices in an instant. They were out of time and out of options. They could climb in the dark, backs to the guards, hoping not to be seen; or smash their way through this door and hope that they could get through before the whole guild came down on top of them. Neither choice came with a guarantee.

One look at Boar told him enough. Ox stepped aside and the Beast threw himself at the door, cleaver raised, swinging with desperate power, cutting deep into the wood with a loud crunching sound. Snarling, Boar planted one foot on the wall and tore the cleaver out again, stepped back one pace and then swung again with no less force. Again, the cleaver hammered into the ancient door with an explosion of splinters, metal joints rattling in violent protest.

All pretence of silence was gone now; Ox saw the two nearest lights rush towards them much faster and another seven or eight further back all following. There was a slashing sound from a crossbow bolt in the air; the bastards were firing blindly at the source of the noise. Sounded like two of them, from the rate of fire he could hear.

'Boy, are you ready?' Silence.

Now that he looked, he realised the remaining henchman wouldn't be coming with them. One of the missiles was embedded in his forehead, splitting his skull open like ripe fruit. A stupidly lucky shot. Glassy eyes stared at Ox, accusing him of causing their owner's death, mocking him that his would match soon enough.

'Screw you then. If you'd been better, it might have been worth remembering your name.' The corpse didn't reply.

Ox readied his own cleaver and dropping into a fighting stance. No sense in trying to duck the bolts if they were getting lucky like that. In the darkness against the backdrop of the wall, he was as hidden as he ever could be. Behind him, the door continued to protest under the assault, Boar unrelenting and roaring incomprehensibly now as he struck it.

'My own piss poor pride, that's how.' Ox rumbled the answer to his own question, as he wondered how he had found himself here, right now, facing down maybe a dozen men on his own. Never one accustomed to sentimentality, the admission surprised him. He hadn't thought he had anything close to that left in him, worn down by years of bloody work for nameless faces.

He might have been infuriated at himself for how futile this all was if you'd asked him before Brisket had been gutted, out there in plain sight. Would have told you how stupid it all was. Even after he'd abandoned that kid, the one that reminded him of Jacques so much. But something inside had been pushed too far now, broken. The Master Butcher was tired of feeling like he was running from himself. He didn't run from any other fights. He might even welcome one last chance to leave this stinking existence behind on a bloody eve of retribution.

Finally, Boar smashed his way through, just as the guards were almost upon them. They might have been too, if Ox didn't suspect that they had slowed down to better let their comrades catch up. Damned cheap mercenaries, that's what you got, more invested in their own skin than playing hero.

The moment passed.

'Cowards.' He spat the word more than he spoke it, as he ducked through the wreckage of the door after Boar.

Snakeskin ran back up through the dungeons, past the cells, not caring about the noise she would make in the empty area. Opening the door carefully at the top, she looked around and not seeing any movement in the alley, quickly ducked out, head down.

The rain was much heavier now, low clouds overhead still masking much of the moonlight. The thunderous storm and wind drowned out the sound around her. In the distance she could still see the Fisherman's Guild soldiery, rushing through the yard, their bright lanterns making them easily visible.

Snakeskin watched for a moment and then sprinted across the gardens, past the ornamental ponds and through the muddy flowerbeds, scattering broken vegetation in her wake. Finally, she reached the short wall separating the courtyard, crouching on the other side. This would be the difficult part. The courtyard was open with no cover to hide in. Even with the drain being only ten feet or so away, it might as well have been miles. Fortunately at least, the escape route had yet to be found. If it had been, then the only other possibilities would have been to hide out until daylight and hope to slip out unnoticed, or scale the walls in the slippery rain. Neither seemed appealing.

Her choice was made much easier by some sudden commotion behind her. At first, Snakeskin thought she had been seen, unsheathing one of her long knives and turning to strike suddenly, until she realised that whatever it was that had the guards' attention was somewhere back in the direction of Laurentis' residence. Snakeskin grinned, fortune on her side for once.

Pleased with herself, distracted by watching the guards, and with the storm muffling the sound around him, she didn't notice the man sneaking up on her position, sword in hand. Suddenly, Snakeskin was face to face with him. Instinctively, she struck out with her knife, managing to strike her assailant across his neck, under his mail. She was unable though to stop the sword slicing in at the same time. With a savage tearing motion, it cut deeply into her flank, the blade embedding itself just below Snakeskin's ribs.

Both of them went down hard. Snakeskin forced a fist into her mouth and screamed into her knuckles, other hand pressed to her wound, all bloody and warm against the rain. The guard's throat was torn open, lifeblood staining the flagstones. Snakeskin knew she had to get the blade out of her, that she had to get moving, couldn't stop no matter how badly the swine had shanked her. She took a deep, rasping breath.

With a sickening ripping noise and another sharp burst of raw, bright red pain across her eyes, Snakeskin tore the damned blade out of the soft meat of her body and tossed it away to clatter into the dark.

She lay motionless for a moment in the foetal position. The darkness was comforting and she couldn't hear anyone coming. Unconsciousness threatened, but the part of her that desperately wanted to survive forced her to crawl towards the tunnel and a hazardous descent.

The sound of the frantic guards above her in the courtyard drove her deeper, faster.

The blood had nearly made it impossible. Where Snakeskin's hand had touched became too slippery to hold and by the time she had estimated that she was at least halfway down, her legs had started shaking. Whether from exertion or blood loss she couldn't tell, but twice she had lost hold of the rungs completely, falling for a few, brief, horrifying seconds, until a desperately flailing hand or boot managed to catch the ladder again. The first might have saved her life but had probably broken the little finger on her right hand. The second had twisted her ankle for sure. She couldn't put any real weight on it after that.

But she had made it.

The second her damaged ankle touched the stone of the sewer, she slithered off of the ladder in an undignified heap, too exhausted even to collapse. Once again as with before her climb, she lay there, feeling the pain that emanated from her flank, her face tickled by dirty sewer water instead of rain. She didn't care. She had to be alive down here, in this maze, where any pursuer would never be able to find her in the dark.

Her eyes opened. She didn't know how long she had lain there, unconscious. It was still pitch black.

Snakeskin rolled over onto her back and carefully, so very carefully, so as to not aggravate her injuries further, rose to lean against the wall. With stumbling steps and hands groping in the darkness, she began to follow it around the corner.

Two thoughts came to Snakeskin at once, urgently, like the bells that rang out when fire took hold in the city.

Where was the guide? He should have been waiting by the ladder for the group. And where was the light ahead coming from? It had been pitch black down here before.

Her answers were not long in coming.

Avarisse leant insolently against the wall and watched her with disinterested eyes, suit straining to contain his bulk as it ever did. In his left hand he held a lantern; looped around the wrist of his right, his familiar cosh. He made no effort to help Snakeskin, watching his wounded comrade limp along.

'Why Madame Snakeskin, how fortuitous of us to find you down here.' As it echoed between the close walls, the curiously effeminate squeak of Greede sounded distorted, scaling up to many times the size of the diminutive figure.

Snakeskin looked around, but couldn't see the little shit. She immediately regretted the wasted effort as she lost her balance against the wall, slumping back down onto her arse. She was bleeding out everywhere now. Dimly, some part of her mind knew that was a bad thing. She tried to stand, but her legs didn't seem to want to work anymore.

'I was just discussing a wager with Mssr Avarisse here that you would be along with the utmost expediency to see us and that pursuit would not be required.' Snakeskin tried to answer, missed her cue and Greede continued his exasperating whining without waiting for a response. 'It seems that he misjudged you and that my faith was not misplaced after all.'

Greede came into view now, his stunted form walking awkwardly, hopelessly bow-legged. Snakeskin laughed as she always did to see it, the sound emerging from her throat as a dry rattle. She needed a drink and wondered whether the waterway would poison her. Anything at this point seemed appetising.

'But Madame Snakeskin, I must say, you are rather worse for wear. Even for one with such varied appearance as you. And I see that your perambulatory efficiency certainly seems to have suffered as a result. Perhaps this once, we could forgive your tardiness in this matter.'

Snakeskin spat a mouthful of blood onto her collar by way of reply.

'And look here, making a mess of yourself. Why, I would have thought that you of all people would know that blood is hell to shift.' While Greede had been speaking, he had been walking closer to Snakeskin. In the flickering lantern light, he cast an immense shadow along one wall. Avarisse finally rose from his slouch and joined them both.

Snakeskin looked up at Greede with lidded eyes. 'Enough. Ta-ta-take me away from... here.'

'Oh no Madame Snakeskin, that would not do at all. Not at all. No, I'm afraid that our new employers have very specific ideas on how we are to continue to further the Union cause. Indeed, with you in particular, very specific.'

New employer? Snakeskin couldn't think very clearly any more. 'Longbanks is dub, de-dead,' she offered helpfully. 'Saw him.'

'Indeed. We of course, would know. We carried out the deed at the behest of our employer earlier this evening.' Greede's voice sounded amused by the turn of events. He leaned forward, and just this once, his cultured voice disappeared and was replaced with something else, something entirely evil, rasping and spiteful. 'There is a power struggle now in the cities, a new player in their game. You would have done well to have paid more attention. Perhaps you might have found yourself able to alter your loyalties to compensate for this, as we have.'

'Ba-stard.' Snakeskin coughed pink foam halfway through saying it. She looked up at Avarisse looming above her. 'You... too.'

'How impolite of you.' The usual voice had returned now. 'Mssr Avarisse, if you please.'

Snakeskin watched the light from the lantern flickering crazily around the walls as Avarisse reached back with his mail and closed her eyes. She was almost thankful for the respite. The pain would stop very soon. She was tired, so tired.

She didn't hear or feel the wet thud as it hit her head, caving in her skull.

The rain had abated at last, but not before they were soaked through, their clothes doing nothing now to fight back the cold air. There was no more running in any case. By all rights, they should have, likely they were still pursued. But some unspoken agreement had passed between the two men, they were both too tired to run now. Instead they strode through the alleys in silence, daring fate to catch them. The entrance to the undercity was close now in any case, secreted in the shadows of the huge cathedral.

Up close, the walls rose ominously upwards, still shrouded in darkness, even as daybreak edged closer. Huge stone pillars flanked large stained glass windows that were a cold, dead black in the low early morning light. The doors were open and inside bright light came from what seemed to be hundreds of candles all aligned on the floor, the warm glow a stark contrast to the natural grey light of the world.

If Boar thought anything of the scene, he kept his tongue in check. Most likely, he just saw the same way through the city that Ox did, on the other side of the grounds, ignoring the building's unusual appearance. Maybe the man didn't see anyone to fight and that was all he ever looked for. Dead tired, the pair walked alongside the fence that surrounded the churchyard, too lost in their own thoughts to make an effort to converse; their boots making scuffing noises as they walked atop the cobblestones.

Ox couldn't even have said what faith the cathedral belonged to, having never paid any attention whatsoever to any of the myriad religions worshipped across the length and breadth of the Empire of the Free Cities. He supposed that this was Solthecian given its size and location. Whatever it was, the answer held very little interest for him. The expansive grounds were morbid behind the rails. Tall mausoleum spires surrounded by sepulchres pointed up to the heavens as testimony to the weakness of man and his servitude to the Gods. Weathered statues depicted saints smiting common man for his sins.

He remembered once when he had been a little boy that an elderly priest, all liver spots and wrinkled leather skin, had come to his village to preach to the children. He and Jacques had both been taken to the village hall by their father and told to listen. Even then, barely old enough to hold a skinning knife, the self righteous sermon had bored him. The tall tales of vainglorious sacrifice on the field of battle that so entertained the other boys held no appeal. Ever since then, Ox hadn't given two shits for holy men and their lies. If anything, living a life so frequently close to death had convinced him that if there were any Gods, they had little mercy, and worshipping them would in no way save a man from his fate when it came.

As they rounded the final corner of the grounds they saw the waiting man, standing unmoving between them and their destination. Attired in heavy clerical robes and ornate, lacquered armour, his hands were pressed together as if in supplication. He was unmasked and watched the Butcher's approach through icy blue eyes. He said nothing as they drew closer, just staring until they were ten paces away.

'The Master Butcher himself.' His voice was accented and he spoke in slow, over pronounced Skaldic, as if it was not familiar to him. From the lilt to his voice, he was likely a native Valentian.

If he was expecting a response, Ox did not give him one, beyond a hard stare. He was not some lesser man, likely to be cowed by weak intimidation and his distaste for this sort of theatrics soured his mood even more than it was already. There was a rumble of thunder from above, the storm reminding all below that it was not yet over.

'I must have you at a disadvantage, for you do not strike me as one of our brothers.' The holy man cocked his head to one side. 'No matter. I am Michele Cesare de Corella, Knight Paladin of Divine Solthecius, praise be to his name and noble legacy, First High Priest and august Lord of the Valentian Church of the Solthecian Cult.'

'And you are the Master Butcher. A worthless and spiteful batshet man, lord and master of nothing.'

Ox snorted, tilting his head deliberately slowly and spitting on a religious symbol carved into one of the nearby tombstones. He smiled crookedly. Better to get this bullshit done and then carve their way through anyone that tried to deny them exit.

'Are you finished with your pointless titles, holy man? A lot of names for a pathetic and spineless old corpse. I am lord and master of nothing? That may be. I have never claimed to have been either. But all I see here is the lord and master of a bunch of cowards hiding in the shadows and a miserable forest of stone.'

The pretence entirely spent, hidden figures around them stepped out. Some ten or so of them, armed with assorted weaponry, a light clinking noise betraying armour under their heavy robes. In truth, Ox hadn't been sure that they were there, but confirmation of so many and their armament was worse than he could have hoped.

'I see your impudence is as I feared after all. I had so hoped otherwise.'

'Enough talk. Gut the bastard boss, so we can throw down with the rest of them.' Boar was grinning ear to ear, his eyes bright and alive in the candlelight. He edged closer to the approaching men.

For once, Ox was inclined to agree with him.

'I pity you and your breed.' The Paladin's voice was disdainful. 'Such base creatures. No attempt to understand mankind's divine mission or purpose, happy as a pig in swill, indulging in the sins of the flesh.'

'Why am I here? I am tired of hearing your empty words.' Ox unsheathed his cleaver.

'Do you know what happens to a man's soul when he passes, Butcher? I am going to help you to understand, to illuminate you.'

Ox knew all too well what happened to man when he died. He had seen it firsthand altogether too many times not to. There was no saviour for the men that he had left with their lifeblood spilling out over cobblestones, into the dirt, those left screaming as they tried to push organs from a split belly back into their bodies. Most often when a man expired, he bled everywhere, spit himself or puked and screamed futile curses at his enemy. Never did he meet death with the serene grace that the priests told their followers about.

Illumination was a very poor term indeed.

'Piss on your illumination. I do not intend to die today.'

'Such a pity.' The Paladin's voice betrayed no compassion at all. 'But examples must be made. And you are the first.'

He turned his head to regard Boar. 'You are the one that they call Boar? You may pass if you wish. My agenda is with the Master Butcher alone for the present.'

There was a moment of surprise. Eventually, Boar spoke, his tone brash and unimpressed. 'What diablerie is this?' He stared down the impassive faces surrounding him as he spoke.

'Diablerie?' This seemed to amuse the Paladin, his lip curled upwards at the edges of his mouth. 'We are prelates of the Lord Solthecius. Our word is sacrosanct.' He gestured with a gauntleted hand and three of the hooded men blocking their path nearest to Boar stepped aside. Boar looked at the strangers, sizing them up. Only the Paladin met his gaze without flinching. He chuckled, a dangerous predatory rumble promising nothing but carnage. He turned to Ox and for a long moment the two men exchanged a frank, honest silence, the first that Ox had ever known the Beast to offer.

Vicious, crazed eyes, dark, bottomless, like death. Eyes that did not know mercy, compassion or friendship, only hatred and rage. He saw Boar for what he was at last, what he had always known what the Beast was, yet somehow forgotten.

A killer and not much else.

There seemed to be a moment when Ox might have hoped that the berserker fury might well take over as it had so many times, that baiting the Beast with bodies to fight would be enough. It stretched out for what felt like an age; the morning breaking somewhere but unable to pierce the foggy darkness they stood in. Everything was still and the world waited, its breath held.

But Ox was a pragmatist. He knew that this couldn't play out in his favour and how it would end.

Boar shrugged his shoulders.

'I think that about settles it then. You've got some stones Master Butcher, but this fight is not mine. Better live to kill another day than die fighting another man's battle.' He shouldered his way past the group. 'About time the Butcher's Guild was led by a new man. Only the strongest survive, only the strongest deserve to lead and I am stronger than all.'

Ox watched him pass, the figures that had let Boar past stepping back in line again, biding him from view. The Master Butcher knew it would be the last time that he would ever see Boar.

That he would have to face this alone, unaided.

'Time to pray and beg pardon for your sins.' The Paladin reached behind him and drew a long, heavily decorated claymore from its scabbard, cold eyes never once leaving Ox. He heard the men around them form a circle behind him, cutting off any possibility of escape. It was of no matter. The Master Butcher had given up that possibility long ago.

The world shrank to just the two of them in the circle. Nothing else mattered, not now. Only the strongest survive, Boar had said. Simple, irrefutable logic, especially when staring death in the face. Ox didn't feel very strong any more. It had all been drained from him. He was tired. Tired from questioning himself, the weight of how he had spent his years suddenly pressing him down.

Ox took a weary breath, trying to roll his shoulders and ease some movement back into them after the long night. He thought of his life until now, all of the faces of the men and women that he had killed. He thought of Jacques and the family he had lost long ago. Remembered how he felt looking down at Brisket, and the Butchers' vengeance. Wondered whether he had found some measure of salvation for himself, in the last.

Probably not.

Sometimes, there is nothing a man can do but play the hand he is dealt. The Master Butcher boldly walked forward, accepting, towards his fate. Another crack of thunder from the storm overhead and once again, the rain began to fall.



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Step onto the pitch and experience Guild Ball; a bloody mob football game of high action and higher stakes.

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