

Advanced Character Creation

Step 1: Ties to the native or adoptive land

Through this initial step, the Player defines their Character's native or adoptive land. One of the mechanics of the Shadows of Esteren campaign rests on the ties a Character can have to a place—generally their native land—and their will to defend it, come hell or high water.

When this has been determined, the Players can fill the “Ties to the native or adoptive land” section of their Character Sheet with a short description of the nature of their ties to the land in question.

Step 2: Narrative arc

This second step is the main element of Advanced Character Creation, which will directly involve each PC in the campaign. A narrative arc indicates a story focusing on a particular Character while being connected to the global plot.

The choice of a narrative arc goes beyond the initial creation of a PC and commits the Player for an entire campaign.

⊕ **Distributing the narrative arcs.** This choice can be made by agreement between the Players, or randomly. The first solution is preferable, so that each Player can pick the arc that inspires them the most. However, some groups may enjoy the challenge of having to roll with a story they have not selected, similar to using premade Characters. In this case, randomization can be a good idea.

⊕ **Choosing multiple narrative arcs.** In addition to a main one, a Player may also pick a second narrative arc from among the secondary ones.

⊕ **Narrative arc and faction.** By default, each narrative arc is connected to a particular profile defined by the Leader in relation to the campaign's premise. This profile is usually related to a major faction. For example, the narrative arc of Adoption, in addition to exploring the question of filiation, is tied to the profile of the premade character Joris, and has to do with the Temple faction. It is not incompatible to choose this arc while having a Character belonging to another faction, but this may have unexpected results. It is recommended that the PC choose a career related to the faction involved in their arc or that they have a connection with it.

⊕ **Once they have chosen their respective arcs, each Player can fill in the “Narrative Arc” section of their Character Sheet with the information related to the chosen arc. Concerning the theme, the Player will fill in the dedicated section once they have played the Focus relating to their Character's past.**

Step 3: Developing the bonds with the other Characters

This third Step follows and develops the one described on p. 201 of Book 1 – Universe, “Common motivations.” This is an important step, as it will determine the relationships between the PCs at the start of the campaign. To do so, the Players will discuss and define together the bonds their PCs share. The stronger they are, the greater the cohesion of the group will be.

Here are a few typical bonds that the PCs could share. The premade Characters from Books 0 and 1 are good examples, since they include such bonds, and the Players can draw inspiration from them.

⊕ **Feelings.** The PCs may have developed feelings of friendship, or even love. They will determine the context in which such feelings were fostered. Examples are the

friendship between Eoghan and Sid, or the relationship between Masha and Joris.

⊕ **Lineage.** The PCs can be from the same family. For example, Mirna and Masha are twins. It is up to the Players to determine the nature of their familial tie.

⊕ **Childhood.** The PCs have spent all or part of their childhood together. They may have been raised by the same Dàmàthair, or they may have met during their military service. This is the case for Arven and Yldiane.

⊕ **Mentor.** The PCs had the same mentor. There as well, the PCs will have to define the nature of the feelings their Characters have for each other. The story of Adeliene and Finn includes such a relationship.



Each Player writes down the name of each PC of the group on the fourth page of the Character Sheet. The following information should be added: when they met, the bonds and feelings they share (family, friendship, love, etc.), as well as any other relevant pieces of information (like having a common mentor, for example).

Ally and Enemy

Each narrative arc comes with a new Ally and a new Enemy for each PC, with the same effects as the Advantage and Dis-

sadvantage of the same names described in Book 1 – Universe. These new Allies and Enemies come in addition to those that the Players possibly took earlier during the Character Creation process. Note that they neither give nor cost any Experience points.

These Allies and Enemies can be defined now or after the scenarios related to the narrative arcs have been played (see the “Focuses” chapter, p. 80). These scenarios will be the perfect opportunity to discover and portray these NPCs who will play an important part in the story of the PC.

Step 4: Drive and Determination



This Step introduces a new trait: Drive. It is a given that the PC is very invested in their personal quest (represented by their narrative arc chosen during Step 2), but Drive shows how much of themselves they put into that purpose.

Drive is the fourth Aspect of the Character, in addition to Consciousness, Instinct, and Trauma. As defined in Book 1 – Universe (p. 211), these Aspects represent the various facets of the PC’s personality. Once determined, the score is written down in the dedicated space on the Character Sheet.

The higher the PC’s Drive is, the harder it will be for them to step away from what matters to them, particularly when they feel that they may make an important difference. In that regard, it is related to Instinct and depends on the Character’s Combaticiveness.

A PC with a high Drive will find it very hard to keep a cool head in the face of something that has to do with their driving passion. However, having a low Drive does not mean that it is less important than for a PC with a high Drive, simply that they will be more easily able to hold themselves back and act cautiously. In any case, the personal quest defined by the narrative arc will remain a major preoccupation of the PC.



Drive: Passion + Determination

⊕ Passion is the Fault related to the Way of Combaticiveness. It is determined at Character Creation and is equal to the Combaticiveness rating. The Faults are detailed on p. 234 of Book 1 – Universe.

⊕ Each PC can be given between 0 and 5 Determination points. The concerned Player and the Leader can agree on how many Determination points the PC should have, or they can be distributed after the Focus relating to the key moments of their past has been played.

For each Determination point earned, the PC will also earn Experience points or even special Advantages, which will represent their energy and passion for their personal quest (see “Advantages and Determination points” on p. 81). However, the more Determination points the PC has, the more dedicated to their quest they will be and the harder it will be for them to keep themselves in check.

Drive ranges from 1 to 10, and follows the rules of Test rolls as described on p. 234 of Book 1 – Universe. As long as the actions of the PC go toward the accomplishment of their personal quest, no roll is necessary. However, if they try to ignore it, they will have to fight their own obsession, the same way they would struggle against their Faults (related to their Ways). On such occasions, the PC will have to overcome their Drive, lest they pursue their quest without paying heed to the consequences.

Advantages and Determination points

Each Determination point earned brings a particular bonus. The bonuses stack.

- 1st Determination point = 10 Experience points;
- 2nd Determination point = 10 Experience points;
- 3rd Determination point = 10 Experience points;
- 4th Determination point = pick an Advantage among those below;
- 5th Determination point = pick a second Advantage.

The Advantages

If the PC has earned enough Determination points, they can choose one or two Advantages from the following. They can also pick a single Advantage twice, to double the obtained bonus. This information must be written down on the Character Sheet, in the “Personal quest” section.

⊕ **Tenacious.** The intensity of the PC’s personal quest grants them one additional Survival point. If this Advantage is picked twice, the PC becomes Dogged, and gets a second Survival point. These Advantages can stack with Survival Instinct and Survivor (see Book 1 – Universe, p. 214), which means a PC can have up to 7 Survival points. This is a truly exceptional case, and this should be reflected in how the PC is portrayed.

⊕ **Talented.** The PC’s emotional investment in a particular field grants them a +1 bonus in a given Domain (for example, Finn could have a +1 in Magience). If this Advantage is doubled, the PC becomes Excellent and gets a +2 bonus in the same Domain.

⊕ **Steadfast.** The personal quest of the PC strengthens their mind, increasing their Mental Resistance by 1. Doubling this Advantage means the Character becomes Iron-Willed, resulting in a second increase of 1 in Mental Resistance.

⊕ **Exalted.** The personal quest of the PC improves their Exaltation score by 5 points. Choosing this advantage twice means the PC is Mystical and improves their Exaltation score by 5 more points. This also means that the narrative arc of the PC will be strongly tinged with faith or some other kind of belief.

⊕ **Energetic.** The personal quest of the PC strengthens their primordial energy, resulting in a +5 increase to their Rindath score. If this Advantage is taken a second time, they become Fiery, for an extra +5 increase.

⊕ **Toughened.** The ordeals borne by the PC through their personal quest have hardened them physically. This hardship-fostered resilience results in the addition of one point to the “Bad” category of their Health Condition chart. If this Advantage is doubled, the PC becomes Hard as Nails, and gets a second bonus point, this time in the “Critical” category.

Focuses

Dearg introduces a new type of scenario: Focuses. Although the PCs are all involved in the same quest, each member of the party has their own history and motivations. The Focuses explore each PC's personal story. These particular scenarios follow a pattern different from a regular session: only one Player plays their Character, while the other Players play as important people in the PC's life, helping the Game Leader steer the story.

Lead, Supports, and Extras

During a regular Shadows of Esteren game, each Player controls their own Character, whom they have previously created. During the Focus scenes, only one of the Players will be their usual alter ego (the Lead), while the other Players will take the roles of secondary characters (Supports and Extras).

⌘ Lead

The Lead is the PC whose story or narrative arc will be explored during the Focus. The Player controlling the lead will thus play their Character as usual.

⌘ Supports

Supports are NPCs who have some importance in the story of the PC, or who will be involved later in the campaign. These NPCs are described in the introduction of each official Focus.

⌘ Extras

In addition to the Supports, there are also the roles of Extras to be distributed among the Players. For example, in one of the Focuses, one of the Supports can be Lord Wylard. One of the Players will be him, while the other Players (and maybe even the Leader) can be Extras, improvised on the spot, who will support his presence: a man at arms, a servant, his minstrel, etc.

Basics and rules of the Focuses

Now that the characteristics of the Focuses have been detailed, this section will define the various rules and principles that the Leader must review with their Players before starting the game.

❖ 1. Isolating the Lead

Before the game starts, the Player who will embody their own PC must wait outside the room, giving time for the Leader and the other Players to confer.

❖ 2. Describing and distributing the Supports

Once the Player who will be the Lead is out of earshot, the Leader can start describing to the Players the roles they will assume during the game. If necessary, feel free to remind everyone of the various possible categories of secondary characters (Supports, follower Extras, premade Characters, etc.) and their characteristics. Each Player will pick one or several Supports that they will play throughout the game. The Leader does not have to distribute all the Supports among the Players and may decide to keep some for themselves.

❖ 3. Key scenes and interpretation of the Supports

Now that the Supports have been distributed, the Leader provides details to each of the Players about the Character they have chosen. This information is gathered on the Support Sheets that the Leader can now hand out to the Players. They include a rundown of the Support's personality, their story, and most importantly, the Key scenes they will be part of. Several things must be taken into account:

- ⊕ The Player taking on the role of the Support will have to adapt to a Character that is not theirs, and portray them as faithfully as possible. More to the point, they must try to play the Key Scenes in accordance with what is planned, like an actor might. In the middle of the game, the Leader should feel free to steer the Player by playing the part of a voice-over, providing cues about what the Character should be thinking or doing.
- ⊕ The Players must remember that they will not embody their Support throughout the entire game, but only when they are involved. The same goes for the Extras.

❖ 4. The Extras

During this fourth phase, the Leader will quickly go through the scenario's Extras with the Players and remind them how these roles work: the Players will improvise these Characters on the spot and their objective will be to enhance the presence of the involved Support. They may also be given more specific instructions. The purpose of an Extra is to help the Leader and the Support drive the point of a Scene home without being of any particular individual importance. Most of the time, the Players will come up with such Characters on the fly.

❖ 5. Collaboration in the service of the Lead

Before the game starts, one important point of these particular scenarios should be emphasized:

Throughout each Focus, the Players will be the Leader's accomplices. The goal is to offer the Player who will be the center of attention the most memorable session possible. During the Focus, the Lead will be in the spotlight, and all the other participants, both Players and Leader, will work together setting up the best atmosphere possible to serve the story and the narrative arc of the PC involved.

