7TH SEA



Begin your journey through the amazing world of Théah in the roleplaying game of swashbuckling and intrigue



7TH SEA

7th Sea is a tabletop roleplaying game of swashbuckling and intrigue, exploration and adventure, taking place on the continent of Théah, a land of magic and mystery inspired by our own Europe. Players take the roles of heroes thrown into global conspiracies and sinister plots, exploring ancient ruins of a race long vanished and protecting the rightful kings and queens of Théah from murderous villains.

Save the Queen of Avalon from treacherous blackmail!

Thwart a dastardly assassination attempt on the Cardinal of Castille!

Raid the villainous fleets of Vodacce Merchant Princes!

Free the Prince of the Sarmatian Commonwealth from a mysterious curse!

Make decisions that alter the very course of Théan history!

In ***7th Sea***, you are a Hero, an icon of Théah ready to live and die for causes that matter. You bravely take on a dozen thugs with swords, knives and guns all on your own. You are the trusted knight, a loyal bodyguard or even an adventuring queen herself.

In other words—you are d'Artagnan, Milady de Winter, the Dread Pirate Roberts, Jack Sparrow, Julie d'Aubigney, and the Scarlet Pimpernel all rolled up in one!

This is a game of high adventure, mystery and action.

This is a game of intrigue and romance.

This is ***7th Sea***.



John Wick PRESENTS



JOHN WICK PRESENTS A ROLEPLAYING GAME "7TH SEA"

LEAD DESIGNER AND WRITER JOHN WICK
PROJECT MANAGER MARK DIAZ TRUMAN
SYSTEM DESIGN MICHAEL CURRY AND ROB JUSTICE
ART DIRECTION BY MARISSA KELLY
ADDITIONAL WRITING BY MICHAEL CURRY JESSE HEINIG ROB JUSTICE MARK DIAZ TRUMAN
ART BY GIORGIO BARONI MANUEL CASTAÑÓN GUERRERO EL TÍO DRAKE SHEN FEI YOUNG YI LEE DIEGO RODRIGUEZ BETH SOBEL MEAGAN TROTT
COAT OF ARMS FLOURISHES INSPIRED BY THE ART OF SYRYA'
GEOGRAPHY DESIGN AND MAP BY MARK RICHARDSON
GRAPHIC DESIGN AND LAYOUT BY THOMAS DEENY
EDITED BY BRENDAN CONWAY SALLY RICHARDSON AMANDA VALENTINE
PROOFING BY SHELLEY HARLAN J. DERRICK KAPCHINSKY CARRIE ULRICH AMANDA VALENTINE
ADDITIONAL MAP BY STENTOR DANIELSON
ADDITIONAL LAYOUT BY HAL MANGOLD
STAFF SUPPORT BY TARA ZUBER ANDRÉ LA ROCHE J. DERRICK KAPCHINSKY
BASED ON "7TH SEA, FIRST EDITION" CREATED BY JENNIFER MAHR AND JOHN WICK

1ST EDITION CONTRIBUTORS

This book uses some modified text from the 1st Edition.
Marcelo Figueroa, Patrick Kapera, Jennifer Mahr, Jim Pinto, Ree Soesbee, Rob Vaux, Dave Williams, Kevin Wilson

PLAYTESTERS

The Crew of *Serendipity*
Brandon Stapleton, Rob Helton, Justin Kreft, Logan Burke

The Knights of Music
Andrew Peregrine, James Holman, Mark Welham, Kat Welham, Simon Hornby

Aetheric Knights of Challis
Declan Feeney, Matthew Grant, Remi Fayomi, Richard Lowe

The Heroes of "Live By the Sword"
Artemis Knight, Jeremy Elder, Bryan Bowman, Eric Husemann

The Crew of *The Illuminator*
Steven Skidmore, Mike McMullan, Chris Colbath

The Heroes of Legend
Brett Zeiler, Elisha Zeiler, Darryl Loyd, Robin Arnall, Zachary Gourley

Den of Eccentric Roving Pirate Scallywags
Nick Burtner, Casey DiFabbio, Holly Butterfield, Dylan Smith, Brandon Coleman, Kimberly Coleman

Castaways
Anne Gegg, Joshua Gegg, Kathryn Sian DeWitt, Dominque Corneau, Curt Moore

The Cat's Deceit
Fabien Badilla, Jessica Kauspedas, Ryan Moore, JB Todd, Dan Waszkiewicz, Ben Woerner

La Esperanza *Azul*
J. Derrick Kapchinsky, Marissa Kelly, Justin Rogers, Katherine Fackrell

The Adventurers of *Cascadia*
Jess L. Allen, Jordan Bouray, Danielle M. Harada, Katie Kemker, Kevin C. Krupp, A/C Witheren

SPECIAL THANKS

Rob Justice would like to thank Nicole, his wife, for encouraging and supporting his dream of writing games. Sophia, his oldest daughter, for being his biggest fan and most vocal proponent. Eleanor, his youngest daughter for being a constant source of joy in his life. Mike, his friend, for agreeing to start a podcast in 2008 that would lead both of them to this book. Tony Todd, the actor who portrayed the villain in the Candyman franchise. Why? Ask Mike sometime. He knows why. Finally, the crew of *7th Sea: Second Edition* for bringing me aboard on this historic voyage.

Mike Curry would like to thank his mother, Robin, for always encouraging his interests in writing. His friend Rob J, for helping to expand his horizons in the world of RPGs and how they can work. John, for giving him the opportunity to pursue a career that many of his friends talk about as "living the dream." His oldest friends: Rob H, Justin, and Brandon, for years of emotional and dramatic torment while sitting around a gaming table. Last but not least, the fans of *7th Sea*, for displaying enough passion in a project to make all of this possible.

John Wick thanks MDT for trusting me. Mike and Rob who made the insanity in my head work on the page. Jess Heinig is responsible for Hexenwerk and Sanderis; you can thank him when you see him. Marissa and the artists for bringing Théah back to life. And for Jessica: Rah. I love all of you.

Finally, a huge **THANK YOU** to the 11,483 Kickstarter backers who made all this possible.

COPYRIGHT

7th Sea and all related marks are © and ™ 2016 John Wick Presents. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be duplicated without express permission from the Author. This is a work of fiction. All characters and places are creations of imagination.

Table of Contents

A Day's Work 4

Chapter 1: Welcome to 7th Sea 12

Chapter 2: Théah 18
Avalon . . . 22
Castille . . . 27
Eisen . . . 33
The Highland Marches . . . 42
Inismore . . . 47
Montaigne . . . 53
The Sarmatian Commonwealth . . . 63
Ussura . . . 71
Vestenmennavenjar . . . 79
Vodacce . . . 86
The Seven Seas . . . 95
Théah's Courts . . . 96
The Duelist's Guild . . . 97
The Vaticine Church of the Prophets . . . 99
Knowledge . . . 106
Pirates and Privateers . . . 108
Secret Societies . . . 111
Syrneth Ruins in Théah . . . 112
Théah's Monsters . . . 114

Chapter 3: Making a Hero 116
Théan Heroes . . . 118
- Avalon . . . 119
- Inismore . . . 120
- The Highland Marches . . . 121
- Castille . . . 122
- Eisen . . . 124
- Montaigne . . . 125
- The Sarmatian Commonwealth . . . 127
- Ussura . . . 129
- Vestenmennavenjar . . . 130
- Vodacce . . . 132

Hero Creation . . . 133
- Step 0: Concept . . . 134
- Step 1: Traits . . . 137
- Step 2: Nation Bonus . . . 137
- Step 3: Backgrounds . . . 137
- Step 4: Skills . . . 146
- Step 5: Advantages . . . 148
- Step 6: Arcana . . . 156
- Step 7: Stories . . . 159
- Step 8: Details . . . 163

Chapter 4: Action & Drama 166
Traits . . . 169
Skills . . . 169
Risks . . . 171
Consequences . . . 174
Opportunities . . . 175
Flair . . . 176
Pressure . . . 176
Hero Points . . . 177
The Danger Pool . . . 177
Action Sequence . . . 178
- Helpless . . . 181
- "I Fail" . . . 181
- "I Dodge" . . . 182
- Action Sequence Example . . . 183

Dramatic Sequences . . . 186
- Dramatic Sequence Example . . . 188

Game Master Rules . . . 191
- Brute Squads . . . 191
- Villains . . . 193
- Monsters . . . 196
- Game Master Stories . . . 199
- Corruption . . . 203

Chapter 5: Sorcery 204
Hexenwerk . . . 206
Knights of Avalon . . . 210
Mother's Touch (Dar Matushki) . . . 217
Porté . . . 219
Sanderis . . . 222
Sorte . . . 228

Chapter 6: Dueling 232
The Duelist's Guild . . . 234
Maneuvers . . . 235
Duelist Styles . . . 236

Chapter 7: Sailing 240
What Is a Sailor? . . . 242
Types of Sailors . . . 243
The Ship's Crew . . . 244
Superstitions . . . 246
Your Ship . . . 247
Ship History . . . 248
Details . . . 252
Ship Battles . . . 254
Sea Monsters . . . 255
On the Same Boat . . . 255

Chapter 8: Secret Societies 256
Joining a Secret Society . . . 258
Favor . . . 259
Secret Societies . . . 260
- The Brotherhood of the Coast . . . 260
- Die Kreuzritter . . . 261
- The Explorer's Society . . . 263
- The Invisible College . . . 264
- Knights of the Rose & Cross . . . 265
- Los Vagabundos . . . 266
- Močiutės Skara . . . 267
- Rilasciare . . . 268
- Sophia's Daughters . . . 270
- Novus Ordo Mundi . . . 271

Chapter 9: Game Master 272
The Author Hat . . . 276
The Referee Hat . . . 286
The Storyteller Hat . . . 292
After the Game . . . 295
Villains . . . 296



A Day's Work

BY JENNIFER MAHR

Oliver surveyed the dozen angry men approaching—swords drawn, faces full of grim anticipation in the dim light of the tavern. He spared a glance for his impromptu companion. The short woman was sturdily built, but looked like she'd be more comfortable with a mug in her hand than a weapon.

"I hope you can use a sword," Oliver said, eyeing the approaching mob.

His companion gave a snort. "I hope you can fight in a dress," she drawled, her Vestenmennavenjar accent rolling the words.

Oliver glanced down at the flimsy, rose-colored chemise fluttering around his calves, and swore an oath to the fey spirits whose pernicious sense of humor had doubtless led him to this place.

Then he jumped forward, off the table they were standing on, and brought his pommel down across one man's nose before spinning his blade to catch the strike of another.

He had little attention to spare for his companion, but he thought the loud and cheerful laugh that rang over the sound of clashing steel was hers.

This day was not going as planned.

• • •

Four hours ago, Oliver's day had looked promising. Surrounded by glowing marble and heavy silk draperies, he'd stood in the exceedingly opulent sitting room of the Montaigne noble who'd commissioned him. Lord Descoteaux sat on his padded settee like a king on his throne. Or rather, Oliver reminded himself, like an emperor. The Marquis' attention was on the glass of wine in his hand, pale gold that glowed in the mid-morning sunlight. He studied it with the intent interest with which Oliver had seen other men regard horses, or crops, giving the liquid a slow spin with a practiced flick of his wrist before touching his lips to the rim.

Oliver stood by silently, like the servant who had brought the wine, and now waited at attention with his silver tray, invisible until addressed. They were like furniture in the room, but rather less interesting, and considerably less expensive. It would have rankled if Oliver hadn't been warned what to expect by the swordsman who'd tipped him to the job to begin with.

Lord Descoteaux paused, the wine held in his mouth, hummed a moment, thoughtfully, before swallowing. Apparently satisfied, he waved absently at the servant with the silver tray, dismissing him before turning his attention to Oliver.

"I have only the one daughter," he began without preamble. "She's a lovely thing, but retiring. She's not made for a trip to the country, so I never take her." He paused again, bringing his wine to his impressively-sized nose this time, drawing in a deep breath. "Under normal circumstances I'd leave her here with a few of my own house guard, but that's not an option. Both my sons are away on business to Vesten and Vodacce, so my guard is already split. I find myself inclined to travel to an important gathering in the country with the remainder of them."

An important gathering that Oliver already knew meant a cadre of other nobles meeting at a hunting lodge well outside the city to drink themselves senseless and shoot whatever wandered in front of their muskets.

He nodded solemnly and held his tongue.

"Therefore I find myself in need of a reputable swordsman who can remain here and safeguard my flower. You were recommended."

Oliver took the silence that extended then as his cue to speak. He dipped his head. "You're very kind, my lord," he said, even though there'd been no real compliment given.

His response appeared to satisfy his patron who nodded absently. "I'll return within a few days. Your duties here will be to maintain the safety of my Aurélie. See to her security here at home, attend her should she go out, though I strongly doubt she will. It's a very simple task." The Marquis cast Oliver a disparaging look. "But should you fail at it, your reputation and your neck will both suffer."

Oliver thought of and discarded a dozen replies because personal pride was second today to professional pride and there was, as he reminded himself for perhaps the thirtieth time that hour, no shame in that.

"Very well." The Marquis rose from his sofa with the air of a man used to deciding when conversations were finished. "Aurélie's people will provide any additional instructions." The grand double doors opened from the outside, and two servants stood by as though they'd been waiting there for their cue – which doubtless they had. One held a richly thick fur traveling cloak, the other stood by with a tray to retrieve his lordship's glass. Both followed him out, leaving Oliver to stand and listen to the retreating sharp staccato of wooden heels.

In the tavern, Oliver spun one shoulder out of the way as a heavy mace crashed down where it had been. He dropped to a knee and let another opponent's own force carry him off balance and over-reached so that Oliver easily tipped him into two more men, causing all three to tumble.

Over the general roar came a crashing of glass and a woman's scream—indignation rather than fear. A second shattering sound, and Oliver felt shards pepper his back, small stings through the thin fabric across his shoulders and, swearing again, he spared a glance behind him to see his Vesten companion was comfortable indeed with a mug in her hand, and wine bottles too, as she was now cheerfully throwing both into the melee.

As Oliver watched, the woman hoisted a heavy looking bottle over her shoulder, leaning back before hurling it like a javelin into the crowd where it smashed into shards against another man's head. Strong head, Oliver thought, before the man fell and a fragrance like fermented elderberries filled the air. Seemed a terrible waste really.

The hallways of Lord Descoteaux's town house were high-ceilinged and made use of a trick of windows and mirrors to contrive to fill the whole place with more daylight than the sun alone could have managed at mid-summer.

Oliver followed a lady's maid past white wooden doors carved with flawless rosettes, and wondered if he'd wiped the mud from his boots sufficiently before he'd come in. At the end of one hall, they passed into a sitting room, much smaller than the last, and considerably more feminine. Oliver guessed there must be three rose gardens kept in bloom at all times, just to supply the one room. Every table was full of arrangements of the flowers—all in the same precise orange-pink blush. More of the flowers stood in vases built into the walls themselves. On a cream-colored divan in the center sat Aurélie Descoteaux, in a dress the same shades as her preferred flowers. The thick silks looked as though they'd have the same texture as the rose petals that filled the room. So did her skin, for that matter, at which point, Oliver bowed low, taking the opportunity to study his own mud-flecked boots and remember his place and position here.

"My lady," he addressed her, still with his eyes down, and waited for direction.

"Monsieur Oliver Kay." Her accent made his first name into something exotic, and seemed to trip to a halt on the brevity of his surname.

When she said nothing else, he glanced up, then straightened. "Is there something I can do for you?" he asked, uncomfortable in the expectant silence.

"Of course," she murmured with a delicate smile. "You may join me for tea." When he hesitated, she raised a delicate eyebrow and nodded almost imperceptibly at the chair across from her.

Uncomfortably, he sat down in the indicated chair, keeping to the edge so as to hold his sword from

damaging or getting caught in the brocade arms that wanted to wrap around him.

"You can take that off." Aurélie inclined her head toward his blade.

"I really can't," he responded, shifting so that his weight was on one hip, allowing him to comply with her request to sit, while still keeping his blade free. He shrugged apologetically, not sure what constituted rudeness in this rarified atmosphere. "Your father charged me with your protection. I'd be ill-able to render it if unarmed."

"Are we in danger of attack here?" she asked, the edges of her lips lifting in amusement.

"It's a matter of principle," he replied.

The door opened then, a servant entering with a tray of tea things, and Aurélie turned away, her attention wholly elsewhere. It seemed to Oliver that Montaigne nobility had extraordinarily short attention spans.

He took the time that his charge was occupied with clinking china and silver to examine the rest of the room. There were large windows that looked out over an open courtyard with no walls near enough to be easily scaled. There were two doors besides the one he'd come in through. One likely went to the lady's bedchamber, the other perhaps to a private toilette? He'd like to know, for the sake of security, and was trying to determine a delicate way to ask, when his attention was called back to the scene at hand.

"I understand that tea is a very precise matter in Avalon," Aurélie was saying. "I certainly hope we don't disappoint."

"I'm sure it's fine," he said quickly, as the servant girl offered him the cup and saucer. "I'm sure it's excellent."

His fingertips just brushed the bottom of the saucer when it all went suddenly wrong—the cup abruptly tilting, the saucer sliding the other way, hot liquid spilling down the front of his vest, across his lap—and how did such a small-seeming cup hold so much liquid anyhow?

"Oh! Pardon Monsieur!" The girl serving the tea swiped at him with a decorative kerchief, her expression aghast.

"No, really. It's perfectly all right," he tried to assure her, while trying to take the kerchief from her. Instead she pushed the saucer and now empty cup at him, leaving both his hands occupied and both of hers free to roam about his clothes as she tugged at his coat while still daubing uselessly at it. He tried to move away, but in the chair with its wrap-around arms, there was nowhere to go. When her hands strayed to the lower portions of his clothing, he bolted up, still juggling china, managing to wriggle sideways around her and find his feet.

"Really. It's entirely fine," he said firmly, setting the china down on its silver tray, now set aside on a low table. "No harm done," he assured, holding his hands out before the girl could follow him too closely.

"Now that's hardly true." Aurélie spoke evenly from her seat, where he'd almost forgotten her in the commotion. She sat calmly, unmoved by the fracas in front of her, sipping her own tea delicately.

"Your clothing is soaked." She inclined her head at him. "It can't possibly be comfortable, and if your things aren't washed promptly the stain will set." She reached out one elegant hand to ring a small silver bell beside her chair. Immediately two more women entered, clearly more servants even though their dresses would shame many a noblewoman in Avalon.

Aurélie tipped her head at Oliver again as they approached. "Monsieur Kay needs fresh clothes, and his own need tending."

Immediately, and as if there were nothing more unusual in the request than if their lady had asked for biscuits to go with her tea, one of the women disappeared back out the door to the hall, while the other removed herself through one of the inside doors, the one closest to the outside wall. After only a moment, Oliver could hear the sloshing of water—so he'd guessed right about the private toilette, now undoubtedly being set up for cleaning of one sort or another.

"A bit of tea isn't an impediment," Oliver tried again, speaking to his hostess directly, even while servants fluttered back into the room, two of them carrying clothes in their arms while a third took him by the elbow, steering him towards the open door. "I don't mind." Oliver had the impression of being carried along on the wings of a flock of determined geese.

"Don't be absurd," Aurélie told him with an absent wave of her hand. "You can wear something belonging to one of my brothers while your own clothes are laundered. It won't take long, and you'll be much more comfortable. Besides, if company arrives, I can't have you standing by as guard while covered in tea. It won't do."

Surrendering for the moment, he let himself be hustled into an opulent washroom, where an enormous and intricate marble basin stood full and at the ready. Ivory and gold seemed to be the theme for the entire townhouse, he surmised, before gasping as his flock of helpers set hands on the laces and fastenings of his coat and waistcoat, tugging at his sleeves and buttons. He yelped as a hand went lower.

"What are you doing?" He tried to keep the alarm from his voice.

"We need to wash your clothes," said the oldest of the three women bent on undressing him. She was perhaps barely above twenty, but there was a no-nonsense

look to her. "We can't very well wash them if you're in them."

"We could try," offered one of the younger girls with a sly smile, and Oliver twisted away, his coat coming off in the process as the sterner maid kept hold of the edge of his sleeve. "You can change into those," she pointed to the neatly laid out ensemble on a bench beside a dressing screen. The fabric looked too rich for him, likely richer than the village he'd been born in, but they were a simple blue, and they looked dry, and no women were trying to strip them off him.

"All right," he said, raising his voice a bit. "Just give me a moment then. And a...a bit of privacy if you please." He stepped around the dressing screen, working himself free of helpful hands, and began to work the rest of the fastenings of his own clothing, trying not to feel any more uncomfortable in the face of the occasional quiet giggle without.

When he was down to his skivvies, he passed his clothes around the edge of the screen and laid them on the edge of the bench there. The new clothes were a bit out of reach unless he wanted to come out wearing nothing but a pair of drawers. One of the women handed him a bowl of steaming water and a cloth. "Here," she said. "So you can clean yourself as well."

"Thank you," Oliver said, reaching around the screen to take the items while trying not to reveal too much else. He settled back behind the shelter of the silken panels and waited, listening while the ladies spoke amongst themselves in rapid-fire Montaigne. When they'd gone and the door closed behind them, Oliver heaved a sigh of relief and dipped the cloth in the bowl of pleasantly warm water and began to clean himself where the tea had soaked through his clothing.

Definitely this was not how he'd expected this day to go when his friend and fellow swordsman Robert had recommended him to the position, one Robert had formerly held himself. He wondered if this kind of chaos and loose propriety was the norm in most Montaigne noble houses, or if he'd stumbled into something unique.

Setting aside the wash basin, he patted himself dry with the cloth he'd been given and, taking one more moment to be sure the room was empty, he stepped out. He'd just paused to admire the detailed sculpture work on the room's main basin when the sound of horses and the creak of carriage wheels outside arrested his attention. There was a window facing out into the courtyard, the same visible from Aurélie's audience chamber, and he could see a grand coach waiting for the gates to the outside street to open. The horses at the head of it were a snowy white, of course. He wondered if they were bought that color or bleached, then he sucked in his breath as Aurélie herself came into view, walking quickly, skirts fluttering in her wake. Without pause she mounted the step to the carriage, and climbed inside. As soon as the door was closed, the gate opened and the carriage rumbled forward.

His charge was getting away.

Cursing, Oliver turned to the pile of clothes on the bench, only to find them gone as well. Swearing with more color now, he looked at the window to see the carriage joining traffic in the street. He cast his gaze around the room, spotted the only other garment there, a full-length chemise in a delicate shade of rose hung beside the tub, and yanked it over his head without giving himself time to second guess. He grabbed his sword and belt, jammed stocking-less feet into his boots. He looked at the door to the rest of the house, then the carriage moving steadily further out of sight in the bob and weave of other carts and coaches and the general populace.

Seeing no time to lose, he hoisted himself up to the window sill, spotted the drainpipe too far for a safe leap, and leapt anyhow. He was halfway to the ground, sliding and breathless, before he caught a firm handhold. Lowering himself quickly down, he set off on foot, trying to keep the Descoteaux crest in sight. But pulled by two well-kept steeds, it was moving faster than he could.

Just outside the gate he caught sight of a much smaller carriage, at the side of the road, one horse hitched to it and a second about to be. "Pardon," he muttered to the startled groom, as he took the reins from the young man's hand. "Bit of an emergency." He vaulted onto the horse's back, saddle-less since it was about to be placed in harness, but he'd grown up riding bareback in the forests of his home island. He wheeled the mount about and pointed it toward where he'd last seen Aurélie's carriage.

"Ah. Yes. That's my horse then," came a woman's voice in a Vestenmennavenjar accent from behind him.

"Apologies," he called over his shoulder. "I'll bring him back." Then he was off and running, cobbles ringing under the horse's hooves, making Oliver hang on for dear life. Oliver knew his horses and knew them well. This was a good one. But it wasn't meant to run at this speed on such uneven pavement. If they weren't both careful and lucky, it could be the death of them. Since he didn't have the luxury of being careful, he'd have to rely twice as hard on luck.

He spared half his attention for where he was going, and the rest for trying to catch sight of the carriage. Plunging forward, he sped between two regal coaches about to pass each other, the space narrow enough that he brushed the crest of each one with his knees. A coachman swore at him, but up ahead he could see Aurélie's conveyance just rounding a corner five blocks

in front of him. He reined his horse to the side in time to narrowly avoid a fruit merchant pushing his cart across the road. Rounding the corner where he'd last seen his charge he cringed as his steed's hooves struck a large puddle, spraying muck up the opposite side of the lane, and directly onto a surprised-looking clergyman. Several more turns and a couple of desperate guesses led him to a less affluent section of town—the smell of salt air telling him he'd found the docks before the rest of his senses caught up with him.

He'd lost the carriage again, but he knew it had to be close. The lanes were getting narrower. There was water ahead and nothing behind but the way they'd come from. He stilled his horse, listening for the sound of wheels on the rougher road here, but there was nothing to hear, and nothing to see except tall wooden buildings, cheaply built and more ugly and honest than anything else he'd seen today. Still, when he examined the other ways in and out of the square he'd stumbled into, there were none that would accommodate a carriage as large as Aurélie's. Which meant it had to have disappeared into one of the surrounding warehouses.

With care, he dismounted, tethering his horse to a nearby rail and hoping it would be there when he returned. He was in a small open space, surrounded by buildings, no one else in sight. The stillness after the bustle of activity just a few streets away made him wary, and he kept one hand on the hilt of his blade, quietly approaching the nearest wooden door large enough to fit a coach through.

Just over his right shoulder a half-familiar voice asked, "What are we looking for?"

His blade was half out and his heart was halfway up his throat as he spun, recognizing the Vestenmennavenjar merchant from outside the Descoteaux townhouse. The woman was a hand span shorter than Oliver, a half dozen years older, and much better dressed. Her hair was braided back and she wore a well-cut coat over breeches and boots. Her slender dress blade was at her hip, not in her hands, and Oliver let his own sword slide back into its scabbard.

"How did you get here?" he asked with a frown, glancing back around the silent square, still seeing no trace to tell him which of the half dozen warehouses Aurélie might have entered.

The woman gave a snort. "I had two horses," she answered as though the response should have been obvious. She inclined her head back the way they'd come, and Oliver could see the second horse tethered to a post a block away.

"Why did you follow me?" he asked, still trying to sort out the situation.

This time the stranger smiled without reservation. "I don't normally encounter such honest-faced horse thieves." She looked Oliver over toes to top. "Or such prettily dressed ones. My curiosity was piqued."

Oliver flushed. Adrenaline had briefly let him forget what he was wearing. On cue, a passing breeze stirred the skirt of the chemise he'd pulled on. "I'm very sorry," Oliver answered stiffly. "This is...something of a long story. And I really was going to make every effort to bring your horse back."

"I don't doubt it," the woman said, irritatingly at ease. "Why did you take him to begin with then? What brought you to be desperate and foolish enough to speed through town at a breakneck pace on a stolen horse?"

"There's a girl..." Oliver began, but the woman chortled before he could say any more.

"Ah well, of course there is. It makes sense now. You're chasing after your girl."

"She's not my girl," Oliver protested.

His companion frowned. "You're chasing someone else's girl?"

"No!" He stopped at the sound of a hinge creaking and turned in time to see a flash of pale peach silk disappear down one of the lanes up ahead while a warehouse door clicked shut behind. "Apologies. I have to go." He turned his back on the Vesten merchant and started after Aurélie, only to realize that the woman was following him. "What are you doing?"

"Coming with you," she answered, hands spread out to show how obvious this answer was.

"But why?" Oliver asked in confusion.

"I want to see where this goes. And you owe me a story—call it rental price for the horse." They were nearly at the turn where he'd last seen Aurélie, and Oliver decided it was easier to just go along than to argue with the woman at this point. He had business to attend and a charge to find and defend. Who knew at this point if she'd come here of her own volition, or if she'd been coerced somehow?

Down the alley she'd disappeared into there were only three doors. The first two were locked, and the third opened onto a stench of spilt beer and human sweat that bellowed *tavern* louder than a drunkard.

His last thoughts of Aurélie having been forced into all this disappeared as he saw her seated at the bar, plainly at ease and holding a pint in one hand. Silently he cursed Robert again, for pointing him toward this job. He could see now why his friend hadn't wanted the work any more, but he might at least have mentioned that the charge Oliver was protecting fancied herself a character from some adventure novel.

He started forward. Just because Aurélie didn't see the danger she was in in a place like this, didn't mean that Oliver wasn't well aware of it. But within a few steps he realized that he'd once again forgotten to take his current state of dress into account. And how did he keep managing to do that anyhow? One of the rougher-looking patrons at the bar had spotted him and gave a low whistle. A card game came to a halt as the players put down their cards in favor of shouting out catcalls.

Aurélie, turning and spotting him, looked not in the least surprised. She raised her pint in a silent salute, lips quirking in the same subtle humor as back in the townhouse sitting room. Oliver kept walking toward her. If he could reach Aurélie, and get the both of them out of here quickly, he might be able to get them headed back toward her home without having to draw his blade. He could explain on the coach ride back why this had been a very bad idea, and then...

A wall that looked suspiciously like a very hairy chest moved in front of him. "You're new here." If it had sounded like a human voice it would have been a growl. Instead it sounded like a bear, that had recently eaten another bear and gotten some stuck in its throat. Oliver looked a long ways up at the scarred face at least two heads higher than his own. The man was Ussuran. His thoughts about bears might not have been off target at all.

"I'm just meeting a friend," Oliver responded, keeping his tone as neutral as he could.

The man-bear-mountain shook his enormous head at Oliver sadly. "I don't think you have any friends here."

"Oh come on then," Oliver looked up at him, neck straining a bit to do so. "That's just mean."

The big man looked confused. Then angry. Both expressions looked at home on his broad features. Then he reached out to lay a ham that was pretending to be a hand on Oliver's shoulder, and Oliver—deciding that this was not going to be a quiet afternoon in any respect whatsoever—planted a foot against the giant's knee and pushed. Hard.

The effort was enough to put the bigger man just a little off balance, like kicking a tree, but that little bit made him compensate in the other direction, so when Oliver changed his weight and shoved again, this time with a shoulder and the weight of his body behind it, his opponent tipped backwards over a chair and a patron, and through a table that never stood a chance.

Drinks flew, wood splintered, and men cursed. Oliver turned to take advantage of the chaos and reach Aurélie only to see her already at the door. She blew him a kiss, then inclined her head toward something to his right. He turned to look, ducked below the chair that whistled past where his head had been, and when he looked back to the doorway it was empty.

The Ussuran's crash through the table, and the resulting debris had been enough to catapult the room into a proper brawl. Glasses and furniture smashed with abandon. From behind the bar, an angry woman who had to be the proprietress shouted and hurled a bucket of water over the bar and into a determined group of combatants to get their attention. The Ussuran himself was in the process of getting up, but between the spilled beer and water now sluicing across the floor, he lost his footing when another body hurtled into him, and went back down, his weight carrying him through two chairs this time.

Behind him, Oliver heard a sharp whistle and turned to see the Vestenmennavenjar merchant standing on a broad, long table behind him. "Better view from up here," she called cheerfully. "Drier too."

Oliver bounded up onto the table beside her. The view was better in the sense that it afforded a clearer perspective on the destruction and violence. It didn't improve the substance of what he was seeing however.

"That girl that's not yours is pretty," the Vesten shouted over the mayhem. "I can see why you follow her around."

"It's not like that," protested Oliver. "I was hired by her father to protect her."

"Oh, well you're doing an excellent job then." She stuck her hand out with a mirthful chuckle. "Anika Boeveld, by the way."

"Oliver Kay." He took the offered hand. "It's nice to meet...well it's something, isn't it?"

"It is that," Anika agreed. "Don't look now, but whatever it is, it's about to get a bit more interesting."

The Ussuran had finally begun to pick himself up in earnest, and was being hauled to his feet by another man not much smaller, and similar enough in appearance that they could be brothers. Of course. Perfect. Oliver spared a brief thought for what life must have been like for their poor mother. He pictured a bustling woman yelling things like, "Yuri, put down the cow and come wash for dinner." He gave himself a shake to get back to the present moment and his impending doom. The brothers had friends, and as the rest of the room was slowly quieting, it was only because all the attention was turning toward himself.

"I hope you can use a sword," he said to his companion.

"I hope you can fight in a dress," returned Anika, good humor not affected by their current predicament.

Oliver took a final look at the approaching mob, noting who was armed and with what. As a rule, he didn't like to bring edged steel into a matter until someone else had made it a necessity. With a last

thought to the words he was going to have with Robert for getting him into this predicament—assuming he lived through it—he leaped into the fray.

One man's nose went bloody with his first pommel strike, and the next lost the blade he shouldn't have been carrying to begin with when Oliver blocked it and spun it from his hand. Honestly, rank amateurs just made the field more dangerous for everyone. A third and fourth lost their appetite for the fray when they realized how badly outclassed they were, losing half a mustache and their belt (and subsequently their trousers) respectively.

From the table behind him, Anika had begun to let fly mugs, bottles and crockery with a keen sense of enthusiasm and admirable accuracy.

Oliver turned to find himself face-to-clavicle with one of the Ussuran brothers and was debating between a prayer for luck and saving his breath in order to have it crushed out of him momentarily when there was a resounding, hollow thud and the enormous man's eyes rolled back in his skull. He tottered, and for an instant Oliver thought he might be crushed after all. But putting the pommel of his sword to the giant's chest and nudging sent his opponent toppling backward. Which left him a view of Anika Boeveld hoisting a second earthenware mug.

The other brother stood looking between Oliver and Anika, clearly deciding with a ponderous lack of speed who he wanted to murder first. Unperturbed, Anika waved at him. "Everything's fine here. I've got this. Go get your girl."

"She's not my girl," protested Oliver automatically.

"Fine, fine. Go get your professional obligation then, before you misplace her entirely."

Oliver hesitated. He couldn't very well leave the woman in the midst of this mess. But Aurélie really did have a head start, and at this point he wouldn't put much past her. Blazes, they were on the docks. She could be booking passage to the Seventh Sea by now.

"Go," Anika waved him on, and it was the perfect lack of concern on the merchant's face that finally decided him. Taking her at her word that she could take care of herself, Oliver waved his hand in salute and bolted for the door.

No one else made any attempt to get in his way, and in another moment he was outside where everything was sunlight and silence. He squinted against the late afternoon glare, made worse from where it reflected off water in between the warehouses. There was no sign of Aurélie—nothing to see and nothing he could hear when he tried. After a moment he started back toward the warehouse where he'd last seen her carriage. It was the best guess he could make. He was one building away when a familiar scent stopped his steps.

Roses. The smell of a garden in spite of the prominent and more appropriate smell of fish—it wafted from the warehouse he was closest to, and he stepped quietly as he could to the door, easing it open slowly.

He slipped inside, shutting the door. If he hadn't already given himself away, he didn't want to announce his presence to anyone inside. But that meant his having to wait while his eyes adjusted to the darkness. The smell of flowers was stronger. Aurélie had been here, might be here still. He took a tentative step forward before he heard the whistle of steel, ducking aside even though he was still effectively blind. He felt the wind whip past his face in the trail of the blade.

Cursing, he brought up his own sword in time to stop the next swing, then followed the movement of the other sword down as it tried to cut low. He moved to turn the blade from the other fighter's hand, but they were already loose, moving backward from the shuffle of footsteps.

His eyes were good enough now to make out the shape of another swordsman, but not the details. The posture and hold on the blade all said training, not like the blockheads at the bar. He stilled his mind even while his breath quickened, anticipation and a little exhilaration settling over him like a favorite cloak.

He watched his opponent. The details were obscured, but he was looking for balance, movement, the next steps in a dance. When the other swordsman moved forward Oliver didn't move backward, just turned his blade and twisted his body to let the strike carry past him. The other man recovered quickly, not overbalancing or stepping too far into Oliver's reach.

Oliver's next attack carried him forward, into his opponent's space, making him defend, seeing what would come of it. Like a partner in a dance, the other man moved back, not too far, just enough to take Oliver's strike and move with him.

They broke apart then, blades springing up between them as they circled, point nearly to point, each taking the other's measure. Again they came together, blades singing off each other in a series of rapid strikes, Oliver's blood singing with them. His opponent was good. Not as good as he was. Not as practiced. Still, in another set of circumstances he'd have enjoyed taking the time to make the fight a proper conversation. But he was still dueling time as well, with no real idea how much distance Aurélie could be putting between them. He executed a quick series of sweeps, before breaking the rhythm to step in close, force the issue, and in a moment of pressure he twisted his opponent's blade from his hand, sending it clattering across the floor.

He pivoted his own sword around, only to have it caught against a new sword's edge in a parry as unexpected as it was familiar.

"Robert?" he addressed his new antagonist.

The distinctive chuckle clinched it, not that he could have failed to recognize his friend's style with a blade. "Hello Oliver. Honestly, it took you long enough to get here. I was beginning to worry we were going to be late."

Frustration met rising temper, and Oliver felt his blood heat. "Late? The only thing you're going to be late for is finding my sword up your..."

"Tsk. Enough of that. There's a lady present after all."

Oliver froze. His thoughts began to tumble into order just in time to realize, as his first opponent struck a flint and lit a nearby lantern, what he would see.

"Lady Aurélie," he addressed her without surprise.

She'd traded her layers and gown for a pair of breeches and a close cut vest, sleeves tied up to stay out of her way in a fight. With a curtsy, she smiled at him, as reservedly as ever, before going to retrieve the sword he'd relieved her of.

"She's good, isn't she?" It wasn't really a question, as Robert's eyes followed her, pride on his face and something else...

"Oh for the love of the whole bloody faerie court," Oliver muttered. "How long have you two...?"

Finally, Robert had the good grace to look sheepish. "I took the job at the Descoteaux house four months ago. I've been training her in the sword since about a week after that." At the look Oliver gave him, he threw out his arms. "She wanted to learn. She's very determined." He didn't even look apologetic as he said it. Passing behind him, Aurélie paused to lean up on tiptoe and press a light kiss fondly to his cheek.

Oliver regarded the two of them in the flickering light of the lantern, spotlighted like players on a stage, the rest of the warehouse a curtain of shadows. "Why involve me then?" he asked, deciding it would be best to stick to the really pertinent questions, so that he didn't give in to the urge to strangle his friend where he stood and ruin the ambience of the moment.

Robert shrugged. "Well. We'd reached a point where I couldn't continue at the job. Aurélie's father was beginning to grow suspicious. Plus, I had to make arrangements... But I needed to know that Aurélie would be protected in my absence." Aurélie gave a delicate snort at that, and Oliver was inclined to agree. She could likely protect herself. "It only made sense," Robert continued, "to get you to take the job as Aurélie's guard. That way I'd know she was safe, and we wouldn't have the added complication of getting rid of some overzealous busy body today. Besides, I needed you here or I'd be short a best man."

At that Oliver froze, cheerful thoughts of dropping Robert drunk into the net of a conscription gang skidding to a halt. "I'm sorry, what was that again?"

Robert beamed at Aurélie, who patted him on the cheek. "We're getting married," he announced cheerfully. "And you're my groomsman." He looked Oliver up and down. "Or maid of honor. Either way."

Right. The damned dress. Robert was definitely going to have a run-in with a conscription gang. He could consider it a wedding present, or maybe a belated stag party. Then Oliver looked at Aurélie, absurdly, transcendently beautiful even in miserable light in a dilapidated warehouse, sword at her side and a prodigy's skill if she was that good with four months of training.

Right. He couldn't even blame Robert really.

The small boat bobbed on the waves, the setting sun painting the ocean gold. Oliver stood witness while the captain of the little fishing vessel recited the matrimony ceremony, Robert and Aurélie exchanging rings, then crossing swords and swearing on those too. It was beautiful, no doubt. It would be slightly more touching if he didn't have a draft going up his skirt.

He glanced to his side where Anika Boeveld stood beaming with a handkerchief in one hand. *Just in case*, Anika had told him when she'd brought it out with a flourish before the ceremony started. Behind her was the Ussuran who'd initially tried to crush Oliver in the bar.

Anika and the Ussuran had caught up with the rest of them on the dock while they were boarding the fishing boat Robert had hired for the occasion. After drinks and some discussion in the partially ruined tavern, Anika had offered the Ussuran, whose name actually was Yuri as it turned out, a job as a guard—*to keep anyone else from stealing horses off my carriages*—she'd explained to Oliver.

Robert and Aurélie swore on their blades to defend each other from all foes forever, then kissed as the fisherman declared them man and wife. Yuri sniffled. Anika handed him the handkerchief.

The day hadn't gone as planned, but plans, like a good blade, required an element of flexibility.





Chapter 1
Welcome to 7th Sea



WELCOME TO 7th SEA

This is Théah in 1668 AV (Anno Veritas)! This book gives you all the information you need to tell stories of swashbuckling, sorcery, intrigue, romance and adventure! Get ready to enter a world of piracy, diplomacy, archæology and exploration. It's a world of musketeers, buccaneers and privateers, ancient sorcery and lost civilizations, secrets that hide in the shadows and monsters that hide in plain sight.

That's quite a mouthful, so let's take it one step at a time.

Swashbuckling and Sorcery

7th Sea is a world where an order of musketeers guards the lives of the nobility, but also the virtues of honor, integrity and fraternity. It is a world of sharp blades and sharp wits, where a cutting retort can be just as deadly as a sword's point.

It is also a world where the nobility control the most powerful force of all—sorcery. Powerful magic pulses in the hearts of the noble class, power that was given to them long ago. Some assume the forms of animals. Others rip through the fabric of reality or play with the forces of Fate itself.

The hard edge of steel coupled with the shadowy substance of sorcery: that is the world of 7th Sea.

Piracy and Adventure

The pirates of 7th Sea are united by a common cause: freedom. Freedom from the tyranny of sorcerers and kings. Freedom from the shackles of the Church of the Prophets. Freedom from greedy landowners and moneylenders. Pirates sail where they want, take what they please and live a life of freedom unknown by any other in the world of 7th Sea.

With the decline of the Church, things have become even better for pirates. Théah's nobility hire daredevils to explore the unknown and bring back the booty they discover. Of course, if those adventurers lower their guard for even a moment, they'll find themselves facing the threat of pirates, looking for easy prey.

Diplomacy and Intrigue

In the world of 7th Sea, kingdoms are on the verge of becoming countries. In the courts of kings and queens, diplomats dressed in powdered wigs, lace and silk try to resolve the disputes of Nations. A swelling tide of nationalism grows in the hearts of men and women, and a new kind of conflict—covert warfare—is finding its way into the world.

A new kind of espionage is making its way into the world, as well. Agents trained in the arts of deception live perilous lives of illusion as they pillage enemy secrets with only their beauty, cunning and wits...and a willingness to do anything for crown and country.

Archæology and Exploration

Beyond the kingdoms of Théah lie the ruins of an ancient civilization, lost centuries ago: the vast cities of Lost Syrneth. Who knows what ancient secrets and treasures remain, unseen by human eyes, untouched by human hands?

Men and women who call themselves "archæologists" unearth these treasures and bring them back to noble hands. Daring the perilous ancient ruins, these scholars are all the rage in the noble courts and the subjects of romantic novels all across the land. They hope to discover the secrets of the Syrne in hopes that they may uncover the key to humanity's own origins, and possibly the secrets of the universe itself.

Romance and Revenge

Poets say those who fall in love become lovesick. You can't eat, you can't think, you can't do anything. And the only cure for your illness is the cause of your illness: the one you love. Revenge causes the same kind of illness. You can't eat, you can't think, you can't do anything. The only cure for your illness is the cause of your illness: the one who must pay for your pain.

Romance can be the source of all kinds of stories, especially in a world where arranged marriages are commonplace. While Théans are a bit more enlightened than their 17th Century Earthly counterparts, they are still human and prejudices, jealousy and other ugly emotions still exist. Meanwhile, revenge is a dangerous path, leading some Heroes straight into the warm embrace of villainy. The greatest test a Hero can face is having a Villain at his mercy.

What Kind of Game Is This?

7th Sea is a cooperative storytelling game. A lot like playing cops and robbers, except with more sophisticated rules. When players get together to play 7th Sea, they tell tales about the adventures of a group of characters in Théah. Players use their collective talents to make the stories come alive for everyone involved.

While any number of players can participate, three to six is usually optimal, including one player—called a Game Master—who arbitrates uncertain moments in the narrative and helps guide the story along. Each session of the game is called an Episode, a portion of the story in which the Heroes have adventures and solve problems, like a weekly television series.

The Players

Each player sits down with a copy of this book and creates a Hero to portray. Many people who play roleplaying games enjoy creating Heroes with backgrounds, skills, attitudes and abilities totally unlike their own. Often, these characters will do things their players would never dream of doing.

When you play 7th Sea, you sometimes speak as your character, delivering dialogue as if you were in a movie. Other times, you talk about your character in the third person, describing what your Hero does in the face of danger and adventure.

Heroes have daring adventures: foiling villainous plots against monarchs, rescuing kidnapped nobility, discovering ancient and forbidden secrets and protecting the common folk from danger. It isn't an easy job, but that's why they're Heroes.

The Game Master

The Game Master (or "GM") is a very important part of the game. While each player creates a single Hero to portray, the GM creates all the people, places and things the characters meet. She creates plot seeds and situations for the characters and improvises plot twists, responding to the players' input.

The GM is, in essence, the players' five senses. She describes everything they experience, from the trembling lip of the spoiled princess complaining about her saddle sores, to the whining laugh of the scheming villain, to the sickening crunch of the hardtack as the characters learn that it's meant to be soaked in liquid before being eaten.

RULINGS VS. RULES

We created the rules in this book to help players and GMs tell stories. We want you to think about the rules in this book as elastic, flexible and adaptable rather than final. In other words, don't use this book as an authority, but as a guide. Every rule is an example of the way *we* would do things, but not necessarily as the way *you should* do things. We'll give the GM lots of examples of how to use the rules in her own chapter.

We've written an entire chapter for the GM, complete with hints, suggestions and tricks to make her job easier. If you are a player, you may want to avoid reading the GM chapter. Like finding out how a magic trick works, reading that chapter reveals a lot of secrets and you don't want to spoil the fun of finding all that out on your own, do you?

A GM is part author, part improvisational actor and part referee. Whenever a dispute arises about the rules, the GM must make the final decision. The GM is also responsible for tying together the threads of the story, uniting the players' contributions into one coherent narrative.

7th Sea uses 10-sided dice (which you can find in most hobby stores) to help arbitrate the success of most actions the characters take. Whenever there is an uncertain outcome for an action, the GM tells the players to roll a handful of dice, add up the numbers, and tell her the result. This total determines the degree of success or failure.

Who Wins?

The best part about role-playing games is that everyone can win. On the flipside, everyone can also lose. Role-playing is like storytelling. When all the players work in concert, they can create a beautiful, elaborate story filled with adventure, drama and excitement. Players have to be patient and work together, allowing each other to share the spotlight.

Likewise, GMs have to be fair to the players and allow everyone a chance to participate in the story. It only takes one selfish player to ruin everyone else's evening. And that's what "losing" looks like—when one or more players put their own enjoyment ahead of everyone else. That's how you lose a role-playing game.

Théah

Théah is the continent where all the action of 7th Sea takes place—a continent with many similarities to 17th Century Europe. She's ruled by a series of nation-states, which bear cultural and historical similarities to particular European nations on Earth. While she isn't Europe's twin sister, she is certainly a distant cousin, which should make Théah more familiar and learning about her culture and history easier. There are some important differences, however.

Sorcery

Sorcery is a very real power in Théah. It is potent and dangerous, each flavor of magic demanding unique sacrifices. It is a discipline that not all can—or should—attempt to master, but when such power is harnessed by those who best wield it, Sorcery can change the fate of Nations.

The Vaticine Church

Théah's principal religion—the Church of the Prophets, or Vaticine Church—has many elements similar to European Catholicism, but also some key philosophical differences. The Church embraces science, encouraging the proliferation of knowledge through schools and universities. Because of its efforts, Théans have made several scientific breakthroughs that would not occur on Earth until centuries later.

Unfortunately, the Church has a darker side, as well. Théah has only just emerged from the thirty year long "War of the Cross," a struggle between traditional Vaticines and a reform movement known as Objectionism. Worse, a sinister Inquisition has recently seized power within the Church, threatening to transform it into an instrument of terror.

Lost Syrneth

The ruins of a society far older than humanity's lie scattered across Théah. Some sit in ruined cities beneath the earth, while others lie on an extensive string of islands in the western seas. The race that built them—known as the Syrne—has remained unknown, but it is clear that they were not human. These ruins are a treasure haven for daring men and women. Strange artifacts have been pulled from their depths, resulting in a great amount of puzzlement... and an even greater amount of wealth.

Nations

The current Nations of Théah represent the whole of the civilized world—as far as the Théans are concerned. A more detailed description of each can be found in the Théah chapter.

- **Avalon:** Green and enchanted, this union of three kingdoms has recently risen to the forefront of Théan politics.
- **Castille:** Headquarters of the Vaticine church, this fertile Nation recently fought off an invasion—their western neighbor, Montaigne, wished to seize their rich farmlands and plentiful mines.
- **Eisen:** A proud land recovering from a thirty-year war. A Nation of veterans, Eisen is also a land of horrors let loose by three decades of mass murder.
- **Highland Marches:** To the north of Avalon are men and women made strong by a harsh land. The Highlanders' greatest desire is freedom at any cost.
- **Inismore:** The Emerald Isle is the rebellious, misbehaving little brother of Avalon, led by a king who may be immortal and is more than certainly mad.
- **Montaigne:** One of Théah's most powerful Nations, leading the world in art and culture even as its Emperor crushes the populace beneath his thumb.
- **Sarmatian Commonwealth:** Two Nations bound by a single crown, the Commonwealth is a democratic monarchy where all people are equal, even kings.
- **Ussura:** A Nation torn between two ambitious rulers who will do anything to drag their Nation into the future, no matter the cost.
- **Vestenmennavenjar:** A Nation of raiders and warlords who conquered the world's economy by hammering their swords and spears into coins.
- **Vodacce:** The former cradle of civilization, now split between seven Merchant Princes whose complex schemes reach every corner of the world.

Each of these Nations is developing a national identity: a sense of country beyond the preferences of the nobility or monarchs. Ordinary people now think of themselves as Eisen or Montaigne and will fight to maintain what they see as their cultural heritage and national security.

Secret Societies

The Nations are not the only powers influencing Théah. There are many more clandestine organizations—not beholden to nationality or religion—moving Théan politics, some unnoticed by even the most observant scholars and statesmen. More details on these groups can be found in the Théah chapter.

Outside Théah

There are worlds outside the continent of Théah. Places of wonder and mystery and magic. There is Ifri, the continent just to the south of Théah, also known as "The Lands of Gold and Fire." To the far West is the continent known as "The New World," a land where ancient gods walk the earth. Just north of The New World are the many colonies founded by settlers from Théah. And to the East…the Crescent Empire. Those continents are not detailed in this book, but will be covered in future sourcebooks.

Your Adventure Begins!

If you want to get started right away, you can turn to **Chapter 3: Making a Hero** and start reading.

If you want to know a little bit more about Théah before you start making your Hero, turn to **Chapter 2: Théah**. That will give you a ton of information on Théan history, culture, and a huge section on each of the Nations.




Chapter 2
Theah



THÉAH

This chapter gives you an overview of the continent of Théah, the first part of the larger world of 7th Sea. We'll talk about geography, culture, politics and just about everything else you need to know about 17th Century Théah and the Théans who live there.

Diversity in Théah

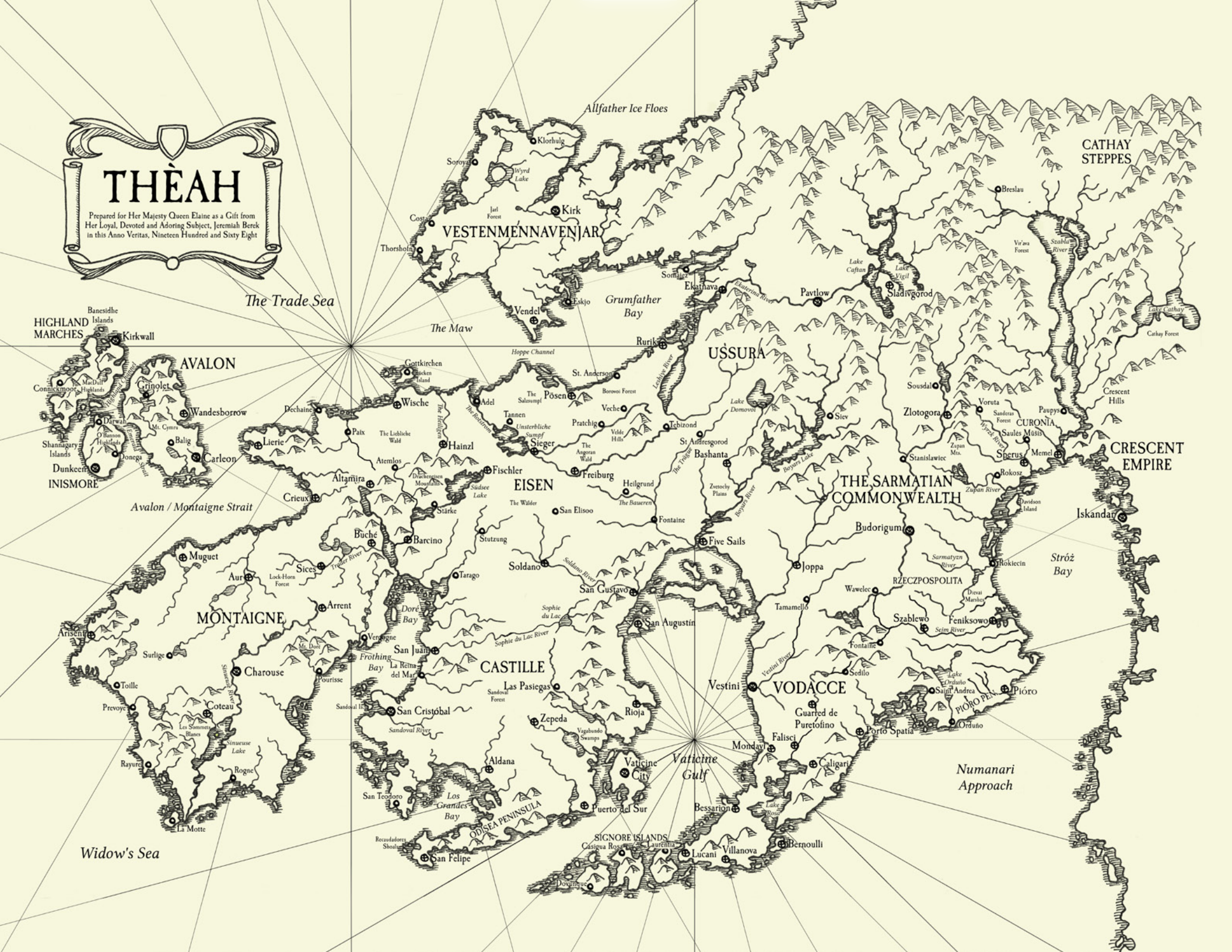
The biggest difference between the people of Théah and the people of Europe is diversity. The Vaticine Church teaches that all men and women are equal in the eyes of the Creator, regardless of where they were born and what they look like. Because of this difference, cultural migration has occurred with far greater regularity in Théah than Europe. That means a wider degree of people born in one country living in another.

Nations still have a general identity—people from Inismore tend to have pale skin, blue eyes and red hair—but exceptions are everywhere. Most importantly, the Théans do not see them as exceptions. Were you born and raised in Inismore? Then, you're Inish. Were you born and raised in Ussura? Then, you're Ussuran.

While Théah is far from a cultural melting pot, there are those who have lived in the Nations for generations who are descendant of people from faraway lands. You can find every skin tone in every Nation.

The Nations

Théah is made up of a number of Nations, each with its own character and personality. The concept of "nation" is new to Théah, only emerging in the last century or so. National identity has also begun to spread among the people, making culture more than just an expression of the monarch's tastes.


THÈAH
Prepared for Her Majesty Queen Elaine as a Gift from Her Loyal, Devoted and Adoring Subject, Jeremiah Berek in this Anno Veritas, Nineteen Hundred and Sixty Eight
Allfather Ice Floes
Klorhulg
Soroya
Wyrd Lake
Kirk
Jarl Forest
Costa
VESTENMENNAVENJAR
Thorshofn
Somjed
Ekathava
Eskjo
Grumfather Bay
Vendel
The Trade Sea
The Maw
Hoppe Channel
Rurik
USSURA
Lake Caftan
Lake Vigil
Ekaterina River
Pavtlow
Sladivgorod
Breslau
Vu'ava Forest
Szabla River
CATHAY STEPPES
Lake Cathay
Cathay Forest
Crescent Hills
Banesidhe Islands
HIGHLAND MARCHES
Kirkwall
AVALON
Connickmoor
McDuff Highlands
Grinolet
Wandesborrow
Darwah
Mt. Cymru
O'Bannon Highlands
Shannagary Islands
Balig
Carleon
Dunkeen
INISMORE
Avalon / Montaigne Strait
Gottkirchen
Glücken Island
Wische
Pechaine
Paix
The Liebliche Wald
Lierie
Hainzl
Atemlos
Altamira
Crieux
Starke
Buché
Barcino
Muguet
Aur
Lock-Horn Forest
Sices
Trader River
Arrent
Arisent
Surlige
Charouse
Toille
Prevoye
Coteau
Les Sommets Blanes
Sinueuse Lake
Rayure
Rogne
La Motte
Widow's Sea
Mt. Dore
Sinueuse River
Pourisse
Adel
The Salzsumpf
Pösen
St. Anderson
Borowoi Forest
Lezhitye River
Veche
Tannen
Unsterbliche Sumpf
Pratchlig
Velde Hills
Sieger
The Angoran Wald
Tebizond
St Andresgorod
Bashanta
The Trigate
Fischler
Freiburg
Heilgrund
The Baueren
EISEN
Südsee Lake
The Walder
San Elisoo
Fontaine
Five Sails
Soldano
Soldano River
Tarago
Stutzung
San Gustavo
Sophie du Lac
Sophie du Lac River
Doré Bay
Frothing Bay
San Juan
La Reina del Mar
San Augustin
CASTILLE
Las Pasiegas
Sandoval Forest
San Cristóbal
Sandoval River
Zepeda
Vagabundo Swamps
Rioja
Aldana
San Teodoro
Los Grandes Bay
ODISEA PENINSULA
Puerto del Sur
Recaudadores Shoals
San Felipe
Vaticine City
Vaticine Gulf
Vestini
Vestini River
VODACCE
Sedilo
Guarred de Puretolino
Falisci
Mondavi
Caligari
Porto Spatia
Lake Orduño
Saint Andrea
PIORO PEN
Pióro
Orduño
Numanari Approach
SIGNORE ISLANDS
Cassigua Rosa
Laurentia
Lucani
Villanova
Bernoulli
Dominique
Bessarion
Lake Rosa
Sousdal
Zlotogora
Siev
Voruta
Sanderas Forest
Paupys
CURONIA
Saules Müsis
Sherus
Memel
Stanislawiec
Zupan Mts.
Myrtek River
Rokosa
Zupan River
Davidson Island
CRESCENT EMPIRE
Iskandar
THE SARMATIAN COMMONWEALTH
Budorigum
Boyars Lake
Boyars River
Zvetochy Plains
Joppa
Sarmatyzn River
Rokiecin
Stróż Bay
RZECZPOSPOLITA
Wawelec
Tamamello
Dievai Marshes
Szablewo
Feniksowo
Selm River



Avalon

"In this land, immortality is a reality. Make yourself a story and you live forever."

— Jeremiah Berek

Far north and west of mainland Théah lie the Glamour Isles, the United Kingdoms of Avalon. Three crowns linked by a single destiny and duty, Avalon is a place of mystery and fantastic reality. Visitors to the isles always remember how the dew makes the grass shine like emeralds, how the cotton-white clouds stretch across the cobalt-blue sky and how the forests are tall, dark and menacing.

As its visitors suggest, Avalon could very well be a living færie tale. If you ask the Avalons, they smile, wink and remind you not to walk alone at night—not without an iron cross around your neck or a four-leaf clover in your pocket.

What Théans colloquially refer to as "Avalon" is actually three island kingdoms: Avalon, Inismore and the Highland Marches. Each island has its own peculiarities. Avalon itself is not particularly mountainous, but has its share of rolling hills, glens, moors and marshes. The islands see a good deal of precipitation and the intense rain and warm weather make for good crops. Morning and evening in Avalon are always covered with a thick fog that seems to linger all through the night, a fog that even the chilly ocean winds never blow away.

The main island and capital of the three Kingdoms is the island of Avalon, ruled by Queen Elaine, keeper of the Sacred Graal. Both Inismore and the Highland Marches have sworn fealty to her crown.

But humans aren't the only residents of Avalon. The Sidhe (SHEE), an ancient and powerful race, also reside there. Long ago, the Sidhe made a sacrifice granting the inhabitants of the isles the magic of Glamour: the ability to summon the power of legends. Both humans and Sidhe have this power, but only if they make a sacred vow to protect Avalon from enemies without and enemies within.

While the island kingdoms are technically united, political tensions still exist. For centuries, Avalon monarchs exploited both Inismore and the Marches, subjugating the people under an iron boot. But then, out of the chaos of civil war, Elaine arose, bearing the Graal. But how did she get it? Who gave it to her? And is she truly worthy of bearing it and the crown? Only time will tell.

Meanwhile, the King of Inismore, Jack O'Bannon, may be an immortal demi-god or may be insane. Or, he may be both. He has sworn fealty to Elaine so long as she stays true to Avalon. And in the north, the King of the Highland Marches, James MacDuff, has also sworn fealty to Elaine, but many wonder if his own desires eclipse his concern for his people.

Culture

In no other country is the nobility so close to the common folk than in Avalon. Elaine takes regular rides through the countryside, stopping at villages and hamlets, where it is said a single touch of her pure, white hand can heal any ailment. The people know, recognize and love their queen. Likewise, if a noble is good and pure, he can expect great devotion and loyalty from his subjects. On the other hand, if he is villainous and cruel, he can feel their hatred from leagues away.

While Avalon's social structure—peasant, clergy and noble—is almost identical to the rest of Théah, two new classes—the merchant and the sailor—have recently found their way into the mix.

In the last two centuries, the merchant guilds have gained a great deal of wealth in Avalon, but as any Théan scholar will tell you, money means nothing without land. Knowing this, the merchants turned to the land-rich but cash-poor nobility, and a deal was struck. The nobility sold title and land in exchange for cash, thus thrusting the merchant class into the middle regions of social structure.

Avalon's second new step on the social ladder found its place only recently. When Elaine took the throne, her need for a navy superseded protocol. She announced that anyone who sailed under the Avalon banner would be called "noble sailor," a title equivalent to an Avalon knight. In addition to this honor, all noble sailors own a percentage of any plunder taken while under the Avalon flag—no matter how that plunder was acquired. Needless to say, Avalon's navy soon outgrew even her lofty goals.

Names

During the Montaigne occupation, no one in Avalon was speaking her native tongue, Cymru (KIM-ree). Avalon words and names were replaced with their Montaigne equivalents. Names such as "Dyffd" were changed to "David," "Ieuan" to "Ian," and "Gwillim" to "William." Even the food changed nomenclature; a cow was called "boif," a sow was called "pork" and a deer was called "venison."

There is a great nostalgia in Avalon since Elaine's ascendance to the throne and the one place it shows most is in the changing language. Men and women are changing their modern names back to their more traditional versions and children are being named after the great heroes of Avalon's history.

Common Male Names: Aidan, Alan, Bran, Dwyer, Edward, Finn, Harold, Jerome, Keith, Liam, Luke, Malcolm, Michael, Morgan, Ossian, Quinn, Richard, Shawn, Thomas, Walter

Common Female Names: Aileen, Alison, Bridgit, Caroline, Denise, Elaine, Grace, Helen, Jane, Karen, Leila, Maeve, Mary, Pamela, Sabbina, Sybil, Teresa, Veronica



Clothing

One can expect to see a peasant dressed in simple trousers, a shirt and a belt and a hat. Tied to the belt is a purse and any tools the peasant or craftsman may want to carry with him, always including a cutting knife. Shoes are soft-soled and made of leather. Pants and shirts are wool, sometimes with a heavier smock or leather apron thrown over, or, if the peasant can afford it, a fine tunic. The hat is usually wide-brimmed and pinned on one side. Avalons tend to grow thin mustaches and beards, growing their hair long. There aren't many who wear make-up and wigs, and those who do are regarded as effete.

Avalon sailors have brought a new innovation to style: things called "pockets." The pouches are sewn into the inside of the trousers, freeing the sailor's belt from hanging tools that can get caught in the rigging. Sailors usually go barefoot and toss the tunic in favor of a smock. Both trousers and smock are almost always made of canvas.

Women generally wear two skirts (one hitched up under the belt), a wool blouse, tight bodice and a hat. A woman's hair is either kept up under the hat or braided, depending if she's married or a maiden, respectively.

Currency

Avalon's economy is based on the pound sterling ("£"). Each pound is divided into twenty shillings ("s"). All Avalon currency is in coin form, although banks are using paper notes for large exchanges. Elaine has accepted the Vesten Guilder into her economy—despite her advisors wishes—to maintain good relations with her eastern neighbor. Over the last few years, the Guilder has slowly gained ground, becoming almost as common as Avalon's native currency.

Customs

Avalons are known for their hospitality, but they are even better known for their superstitions. Far from the Castillian universities, it's easy for the Avalons to scoff at "scientific evidence" when they can hear the wail of the Banesidhe over the hills. Avalons cling tightly to their superstitions, knowing that a single slip could cost them dearly. Whenever someone spills salt, they throw a pinch over the shoulder. Parents hang a pair of iron scissors over a newborn baby's crib. Always shut your windows tightly before sunset, cover your mouth when you yawn, and make sure your left shoe has a copper penny in the heel.

All of these beliefs come from Avalon's very tangible relationship with the Goodly Folke, the Sidhe. The Sidhe are like a thunderstorm: beautiful, terrible, wrathful and blameless. With that kind of power wandering about Avalon demanding respect, it's easy to see why the Avalons are so polite to strangers; you just never know when you'll run into a Sidhe lord in disguise, ready to turn anyone who treats him with disrespect into a tree.

Art and Music

The Avalons love to sing and tell stories. For the last four hundred years, the Church repressed their native faith. However, instead of fading away, the beliefs and traditions transformed into ballads and folk tales. Ancient gods turned into kings, heroes into knights, villains into monsters and old planting and harvesting rites became dances. The old ways may have lost a little of their meaning, but they are there for those who are willing to look for them.

There are patterns in the stories the songs tell, and those who are familiar with the patterns can usually sing along with the chorus, even if they've never heard the song before. The melodies always seem familiar and set feet tapping. The songs are bawdy and boisterous, telling tales of maidens happily giving up their virtue as if it were a weight, and of young men who trust such ladies, much to their chagrin. The songs appear to be morality plays, but just under the surface the singer seems to be laughing at the morality he's preaching. It is a strange dichotomy, but one that makes Avalon folk music unique.

Religion

Elaine's policies have led to a resurgence of the Old Ways in Avalon's homes, a trend that the Queen seems happy to see. "We have ignored the Goodly Folke for far too long," she said. "Let us invite them back to our shores with open arms and open hearts." Despite Elaine's religious reform, there is still brooding among Avalon's faithful. The Traditionalists seek to complete Avalon's transformation, removing the influence of the Church entirely, while the Church seeks to do the same to their Traditionalist cousins.

While many loyal Vaticines have left Avalon, some faithful have remained. The Church universities have remained as well. Elaine offered the scholars the opportunity to stay, assuring them that she would not be looking over their shoulders as the Inquisition had been doing for years. The scholars agreed, and almost all of them are now devout followers of the Church of Avalon.

Government

The Avalon government begins with the Queen. Her rule is near absolute save for the Parliament, which may only gather with her permission. Members of Parliament represent the various regions of the island.

The Queen may not go to war without Parliament's permission. She also needs their permission to pass certain laws. When the Queen wishes, she summons the Parliament, makes her case, and asks them to vote.

Despite the fact Parliament may only meet when the Queen allows, members still gather informally, so long as they do not have enough members to cast a vote. Elaine allows this loophole, going so far as to turn the other way when necessary. She understands the nobility of Avalon have a great deal of power, and does not wish to anger them. Likewise, enough of the Parliament respect her authority—via ownership of the Graal—and maintain the rule.

Military

One of Elaine's first concerns when she came to the throne was rebuilding Avalon's military. Years of civil war exhausted her armies, leaving the island defenseless to invasion. Instead of conscripting Avalon's young men and women to shed blood for their nation, she turned to her court and demanded they build ships. "If we have the most powerful navy in the world," she said, "we shall have no fear of any army." Also, she promised that any noble who added a vessel to her navy would share in any profit that vessel brought back home. Needless to say, Avalon's beleaguered nobility jumped at the chance to bring new revenue to their coffers. They built Avalon's new navy in record time.

Once Avalon's shores were secure, Elaine turned her attentions to its interior. She sent messengers to Eisen, urging the landless warlords to come to Avalon and teach her people to fight. Many Eisen were too



proud (or superstitious) to go to the "Glamour Isle" to serve under a foreign crown, but some Objectionist Eisen had no problem leaving behind their war-torn land for a new start. She extended the invitation to the proud warriors of Numa, and in less than a year, strange faces graced Avalon's shores for the first time. With dark skin and foreign ways, they found their lives in Avalon difficult at first, but after a few years, they were accepted as any other.

Once the Eisen and Numa were on her shores, she ordered the dismantling of every standing army in Avalon, thus taking the opportunity for a military coup away from the nobility. The only standing army in Avalon would be hers, while the nobility were each afforded small garrisons—about ten to twenty soldiers—to protect their own homesteads. When the nobles complained, she reassured them that if their navy was strong, there was no need for an army. She also informed them that the crown coffers could afford an army or a navy, not both. Faced with the option of losing the profits the navy brought to Avalon's shores, the nobility soon lost its argumentative tongue.

Current Relations

If you want to understand what Avalonians think of their fellow Théans, it's wise to consult Queen Elaine directly. Here are a few choice quotes from Her Majesty on the subject of the other Théan Nations and their relationship to Avalon.

Castille

"Thank Theus the heart of the Vaticine Church is still recovering from the Montaigne invasion, otherwise they would be seeking our heart on a silver platter. We know they plot against us, but are unable to enact their machinations. Let them continue their plotting. The more they split their attentions, the less they focus on us."

Eisen

"The wasteland that was once the proud kingdom of Eisen has provided us with a militia to defend our borders. We agree with half of their philosophies, but disagree with none of them. Someone must help them regain their power, but, unfortunately, it cannot be us."

Montaigne

"For a period longer than we wish to discuss, the Montaignes ruled our land. Never again. We know them well, and their blood-magic tricks are of no use here any longer. But as long as they keep their attention turned south, we will maintain our cordial relationship with our flamboyant cousin."

Pirate Nations

"The Brotherhood of the Coast is just an excuse for criminals to run rampant on our seas. Yet, La Bucca has proven a promising place to recruit effective Sea Dogs."

Sarmatian Commonwealth

"They are too far from us to be considered enemies, but that distance also means they are too distant to be considered friends. Their monarchy is as ours: focused on the will and good of the people. If only they were closer, we might have a stronger kinship."

Ussura

"Distant and silent, Ussura is a mystery to us. We have heard and seen little of them, but understand there is deep magic in their blood, magic tied to their land. One of our explorers has told us that their magic is very much like Glamour, and the woman they worship has many characteristics similar to the Sidhe. Perhaps we are cousins after all?"

Vestenmennavenjar

"It may seem the people of the cold lands of the north have transformed, but they have not. They are still raiders…they have found a new method of robbing our coffers of coin. Instead of coming to our shores with fire and sword, they do so with a smile and contracts. But they are still what they have always been."

Vodacce

"Treachery is the word of the day as far as the Vodacce are concerned. Speaking with any Vodacce prince is like walking through a display of glass vases, all filled to the brim, sitting on thin pillars with a floor covered with eggs. They have been trained since birth to pierce any veil, and they wait with their sorcerous eyes to see any secrets, no matter how cleverly hidden. They are talented villains, but villains all the same."



Castille

"Castillians live their lives as they play their guitars: with unbridled passion and relentless precision."

— Lady Sophie de Lac

Founded by one of the oldest of the Old Empire's families, Castille has been shaped by many forces. It shared an alliance with the Crescent Empire, warred with Avalon and Montaigne, and currently houses the heart of the Vaticine Church. However, despite hundreds of years of invasions—military and otherwise—the heart of Castille has never changed. It was, is and always will be a nation devoted to its people.

The most important recent event in Castille's history is the surprise invasion from Montaigne in 1664. While Castille was able to throw off the Montaigne forces, their success was not without cost. Farms were destroyed, lives lost. Half a generation of young men was killed, maimed and crippled fighting off the ambitions of Montaigne's self-appointed "Emperor." Castille is teetering and ready to fall.

Geographically, Castille is situated on prime real estate. It has rich mines, fertile soil and well-stocked oceans; its people have never wanted for food or supplies. Until recently. Its winters are short and tepid and its summers are long and temperate. Castille's previous agricultural efforts hampered the productivity of its farmlands, but the Church's knowledge has changed all of that. In fact, the Church's organizational efforts turned Castille into an economic powerhouse. Until recently.

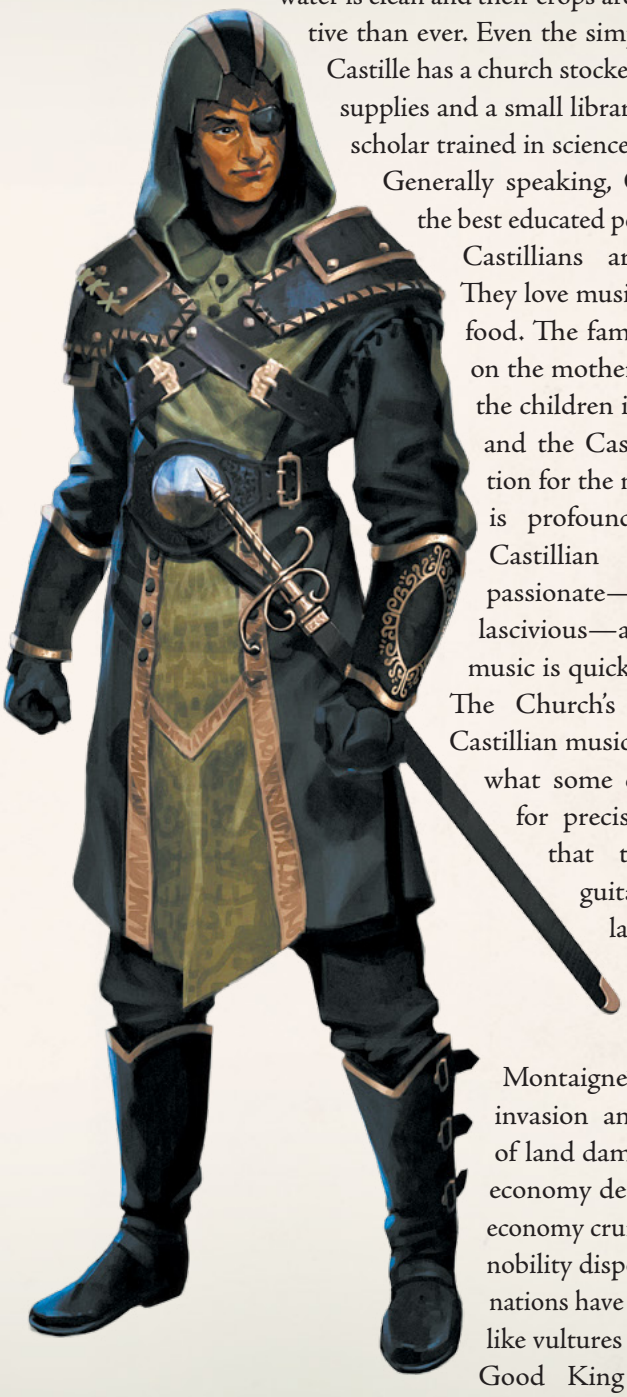
The Sandoval family sits on the throne of Castille, while its countrysides are divided into counties ruled by Castille's upper class called Grandes de Castille. A Grande governs a land grant or concesión for the King, collecting taxes and administering justice. Due to Church sanctioning, the concesiones are distributed equally, and the Grandes are each responsible for housing and maintaining an equal portion of the King's army. The King of Castille recently passed away, leaving his twelve-year-old son on the throne. Dubbed "Good King Sandoval" by one of the more famous court poets, the boy has held the country together for four years—far longer than his detractors predicted.

While the King of Castille is nominally the supreme ruler of his Kingdom, it is no secret that his council of Church advisors powerfully influences his decisions. Others have plotted treason against the Good King, but three assassination attempts have failed, due largely in part to the efforts of the mysterious figure known only as El Vagabundo. The masked vigilante has proven to be more than a match for those who plot against the crown of Castille, although his efforts may yet be in vain.

With the King surrounded by clerics and advisors—unable to speak to the Grandes—the hierarchy is breaking down. Corrupt officials graft more taxes for

themselves, putting less back into the upkeep of the Nation. Basic systems are falling apart. And Good King Sandoval is almost powerless to stop it.

Castillians are practical. They have seen the benefits of accepting the Church into their Nation's culture. Castille is the only Nation to have aqueducts in every major city. They have free public education. Their water is clean and their crops are more productive than ever. Even the simplest village in Castille has a church stocked with medical supplies and a small library, along with a scholar trained in science and medicine. Generally speaking, Castillians are the best educated people in Théah.



Castillians are passionate. They love music, dancing and food. The family is centered on the mother who brought the children into the world, and the Castillian veneration for the maternal figure is profound. Traditional Castillian dances are passionate—some say lascivious—and their music is quick and heartfelt. The Church's influence on Castillian music has produced what some call "a passion for precision," a sound that the Castillian guitar encapsulates perfectly.

The War of the Cross tore Castille apart. Montaigne's surprise invasion and destruction of land damaged Castille's economy deeply. With her economy crumbling and her nobility dispossessed, other nations have begun to hover like vultures at her borders. Good King Sandoval is trying to hold his kingdom together, but it's only a matter of time before the ambitious thrones of Théah rush in to share the kill.

On average, Castillians are tall and lithe, with predominantly straight and dark hair, and dark eyes. Their swarthy skin, high cheekbones and rounded noses are remnants of the Crescent influence in their past. They are well known for their nimble fingers and thin hands.

Social Strata

At the pinnacle of the Castillian social ladder are the King and Church, which are considered equal—although there is currently some debate about this among the nobility, as many refuse to acknowledge the rule of a boy over the Church. Next come Grandes who retain land—and therefore produce for the country's economy—and then those without land.

The Grandes are divided into three classes. The highest nobles are those with direct familial connections with the King. The second tier consists of nobles with land and title. Finally, the third tier, the *hidalgos*, includes those with title but no land. Castille has a great number of disenfranchised nobility since the War of the Cross ended twenty years ago. They have not recovered still.

Since the War of the Cross and the surprise invasion from Montaigne, much of Castille's nobility has lost its standing and its land. Most of it was snatched up by the Church. Because of these factors, Castillians do not consider social status—save that of such folk as the High King or Hierophant—to be of much concern. Seeing a noble selling his sword for coins, drunk in the local tavern, reduces the mystique of landed title.

For generations, the life of a commoner in Castille had been easier than in most Nations. Plenty of schools, hospitals and other services provided by the Church made the Castillian peasant class one of the most privileged in all of Théah. But that was before the War of the Cross. Before the seed of corruption grew into a weed that choked the land.

The most important aspect of Castille's social structure is the family. There is no such concept as "extended family" in Castille. Cousins are family. Uncles are family. Second cousins twice removed are family. The family traces its heritage back to a single founder—almost always a matriarch—and keeps a picture of her in the

house. Those with the means usually purchase smaller portraits to wear around their necks.

The Castillians know, deep in their hearts, that as long as a person has their blood in his veins, he is a member of the family. No matter what his sins, he will always have a place in the family. Only the most unforgivable sins—the murder of a family member or the like—will force a family to use its most dreaded punishment: ostracism.

Clothing

Black and fiery colors form the basic theme for all Castillian clothing. This results in a dark base color with trim, sigils and other adornments in passionate shades of yellow, orange and red. The Castillians consider dress a badge of honor and deportment, so style and pattern tend to change from one finca to another. Even the poor regularly acquire small amounts of dyed cloth to stitch into their outfits somewhere. In their case, this is not meant to imply royal status or flair, but simply that they are proud to be Castillian.

Traditional Castillian male garb includes the sombrero (a hat, usually wide-brimmed), short, close-fitting vests, snug pants and a cummerbund. Leggings are often worn on finca, where the legs must be better shielded. When traveling or at social gatherings, scarves, gloves, cuffs and collars are also worn. Embroidery, metal studs, buttons and buckles are the main decorative accents. Young, unmarried women tend to stand out in Castille—their clothing is mostly white or cream—but they often wear colorful kerchiefs. As women age, their fashion embraces a powerful mix of brilliant designs as they grow older and settle down.

Married women wear a great deal of color. Crimsons, bright blues, and dark greens are common, accented—by the nobles—with black. The skirts are full with strands of colored beads draping downward. They tie their hair in elaborate coifs with many small and medium-sized braids, hanging down over their necks in woven loops.

Customs

Until the Montaigne invasion, the two classes of people in Castille, peasants and nobility, carried themselves in very different ways. The peasants are typically very happy and outgoing, which can be seen in the zest of their daily festivities. Unless directed differently by their employers, they only work four or five hours at a time, taking a long break in between shifts for siesta, a time for rest and friendly sport. Though many in Théah point to this as a sign of sloth, few doubt the Castillians' fervor. Horse parades, street dancing, sermons, bands and contests of skill and daring dot the streets of Castille's cities and villages during siesta.

While the nobility have always remained above such activity, they have the same Castillian blood burning in their veins. They are known to be very regimented and proper, dedicated to appearances. They are well educated, and have always spent their time appreciating fine art and listening to fine music. Though they have consorted with the peasantry before, they have never joined in their celebrations.

Never before now.

The inordinate number of displaced Grandes within Castille, driven from their homes by the war, find it hard to adapt to their new circumstances, and many find the lifestyle of the lower classes appealing. Those in a position to entice their land-holding brothers and sisters arrange private gatherings of the nobility, but others have even been found enjoying the company of their lessers within their own homes.

The Church has so far remained quiet about this odd situation. This is mostly due to the fact that they are unsure how it affects the Castillian public as a whole. History has bred the instinct that mixing the classes is wrong, but the spirits of the people seem to be at an all-time high since the invasion, as if it were a blessing in disguise.

Religion

Since the seat of the Church of the Prophets was moved to Castille in 1257, the country has been the example for piety in modern Théah. It brings the Castillians a great amount of political influence, which garners Castille additional diplomatic posts in all the major cities of the world. Along with those benefits came a great responsibility—to uphold the blessed image of the Prophets, and act in accordance with the many edicts of their Church.

It has not been easy. Since the time of the Third Prophet, the Church's stance on forgiveness and mercy has shifted. As the years passed, that stance shifted even more. Finally, within the last ten years, the gathering threat of the Inquisition has turned into a storm. Castille is held firmly within its grasp, a fact that High Inquisitor Verdugo does not want to change any time soon.

Government

The present state of Castille's government is—at best—fractured. At worst, it is slipping into utter chaos. With the death of King Salvador Aldana in 1664, the sole heir to the throne—now a sixteen-year-old boy—is hardly prepared to handle the affairs of a world power.

For the first time since the whole of the royal family was stricken down by the plague in 1386, Castille's ruler has been denied his due title of Rex Castilium ("The King of Castilles") by El Concilio de la Razón—the council of Cardinals who act as the King's advisors. Sandoval's every decree is scrutinized and reworded by the Cardinals in an effort to maintain the illusion of strength at the head of Castille. They have instituted a conditional monarchy within the country, ignoring the absolute rule of their King in favor of their own judgment, and for all intents and purposes are currently running Castille.

This has not helped the already overburdened sovereign structure of the Nation, mired in a bureaucratic process left over from the time of the Old Republic, and made worse by the early influence of the Vaticine Church. Many battles against Montaigne forces were lost due to poor communication: the heads of the military clamored for orders that, in the past, had always come directly from the King. But in this case, there were too many commanders and not enough soldiers. Castille nearly lost its throne to Montaigne, winning out in the end because of sheer luck and the Emperor's short attention span.

There are simply too many voices 'leading' Castille, and El Concilio's choice of solutions reflects a deep corruption. Taxes are not building new hospitals, schools and churches, but instead are going directly into the pockets of the greedy. The Council has sequestered the King within Vaticine City and is conducting affairs in his name. With the Council firmly in charge and no one in a position to challenge it, the lamentable state of Castille's government does not look to improve in the near future.

Currency

The Castillian economy is supported mainly by its prolific farming, lumbering and mining efforts. Together they represent better than ninety percent of the export revenue for the country, and supply nearly all of the resources required by those within its borders. The excess is either tithed to the Church, stored within the King's coffers or devoted to projects of national interest.

This highly productive situation stems mostly from the Church of the Prophets and their methodical administration of Castille's natural resources. All lands are studied and all resources catalogued; they track flora, fauna and mineral deposits with painstaking precision.

Recaudadores, or "tax collectors," interact directly with the Grandes. Should any fail to provide their required minimum, the recaudadores must both report it to the King (or, because of recent circumstances, the Church) and find a way for the Grande to make amends. This can take the form of a percentage of the Grande's lands, or a gift of equal value to the Crown, such as the hand of a favored son or daughter or a service to either the King or the Church. It is rare that a Grande refuses to accept the terms of a failed contract with the recaudadores, but when it happens, "armed reconciliation"





may be used—soldiers arrive at the Grande's finca and demand compensation or the immediate surrender of his lands.

Lastly, over one-third of the country and its rich farmland was utterly destroyed by Montaigne's military in the last four years. The forethought of the Church has staved off a crisis, but they did not plan for the sudden explosion of disenfranchised Grandes whose lands and holdings are now worthless. Many in Castille hope to see those nobles compensated for for the damage wrought by the Emperor's forces, but there is little hope that the Sun King will suddenly regret his military adventures.

The national coin is the doubloon, which is highly regarded for exchange in all nearby countries. The Guilder is also becoming a standard within the country—much to the chagrin of neighboring Vodacce merchants.

Military

When Montaigne invaded four years ago, an unprecedented number of volunteers flocked to join Castille's army, but their numbers were sorely tested over four years of intense fighting. Now, Castille struggles to maintain a sufficient standing force, especially around key areas south of the Dracheneisen Mountains and east of the Frothing Bay. Castille's navy, devastated by the loss of the Castillian Armada, struggles to patrol and defend its waters. It is well known that Castillians fight with their hearts and souls as much as their bodies and minds, but many in the military are slowly losing hope that they can adequately defend their country if the Emperor decides to again attack.

In addition to their capable soldiers, Castillians rely heavily on military technology. The Castillian fortresses possess wheeled cannons and tracked cannon rings used to change the direction of the gun, technology that is much faster than lifting and carrying cannons into position. Advances in chemistry have developed a higher grade of gunpowder, allowing for a greater explosive charge using less powder. By far the greatest innovation of the military, however, was the recent use of prepacked powder charges for muskets. These charges allow Castillian musketeers to do away with their clumsy powder horns. They can now load and fire significantly faster than other Théan soldiers. Further experiments are being conducted to create measured powder charges for cannons.

Names

In addition to a given name, such as Rodrigo or Estrella, a Castillian also has one or more "bynames," any of which can be used or dropped.

The first kind of byname is the patronymic: a name derived from your father, mother or another relative. For example, if your name is Selena and your father's name is Gustavo, you could be known as Selena de Gustavo.

The second kind of byname is the locative: a name derived from where you were born. You could be Estrella del Rio, or "Estrella of the River." Or Rodrigo de Alamilla, or "Rodrigo from the town of Alamilla."

Castillian names can become quite long, adding bynames as you go. Traditional Castillian names can have as many as three or four bynames. For example, a Castillian may have the name, "Estrella Carmela de Fernández del Río."

Common Male Names: Alonso, Andrés, Baltasar, Benito, Carlos, Diego, Domingo, Esteban, Felipe, Gaspar, Héctor, Jaime, Juan, Lucas, Miguel, Rodrigo, Sancho, Sebastián, Tomás

Common Female Names: Andrea, Ángela, Beatriz, Catalina, Clara, Constantina, Cristina, Floriana, Francisca, Inés, Isabel, Juliana, Lucía, Luisa, María, Quiteria, Sancha, Susana, Úrsula, Yolanda

Current Relations

Avalon

Due to the "heathen" activities of the present Queen of Avalon, Elaine, there is a great deal of animosity between Castille and the island kingdom. But even the spiteful Concilio de la Razón is not willing to act against her at this time, content instead to support her enemies and wait for her to fall from grace.

Eisen

The armored lunatics of Eisen have proven themselves a threat in the past, but one look at their ruined lands and teetering rulership is enough to dispel the possibility for another invasion from the north.

Montaigne

The Montaigne currently bear the brunt of Castille's scorn for foreigners of all sorts. Prior to their invasion, no military troops except those directly controlled by the Castillians themselves had set foot upon Castillian soil for six hundred years—a very long time for hatreds to brew, as many Montaigne soldiers who served on the frontlines of the war would attest.

Pirate Nations

With the destruction of the Castillian Armada and little hope in sight for the Nation to put another fleet to sea, the Brotherhood of the Coast and the Buccaneers may provide some limited defense against the Sun King's ships.

Sarmatian Commonwealth

Many within Castille look at the recent development of Golden Liberty as a progressive step forward. Some have even mentioned Castille should follow in the Commonwealth's footsteps. But the prevailing powers in Castille rejected such a ridiculous idea. The Commonwealth is backwards—like most Eastern Théan Nations—and has no idea of progress. They are trying to recapture the great days of the Numanari Republic…days which are clearly nothing more than myth. And there is no point in chasing myth.

Ussura

Castillians travel far less than most, and those who do are rarely interested in the vast plains and deep forests of the Ussurans. Outside of standard diplomatic relations, religious pilgrimages and matters of continental war, the two countries have had very little to do with one another.

Vestenmennavenjar

"Of all the crooked con men of the world, we hate the Vesten the least." Beyond this statement—made by the late King of Castille—nothing can be gleaned of the relationship between these two distant nations.

Vodacce

Between the animosity of the Church divisions and the constant quarreling between the pompous nobles of both countries, Castillian relations with Vodacce are at an all-time low. The most recent demands by Vodacce merchants and inflammatory statements of their Cardinals have only served to worsen the tension along the Vaticine Gulf, and the Grandes have begun to call for additional patrols to ensure their safety.



Eisen

"The priests keep telling me that the Prophets will bring us all together in the next life. I find this hard to believe, since they've torn us apart in this one."

— Niklas Träge, Eisenfürst of Freiburg

Located in central Théah, Eisen has long been of critical importance in Théan wars and politics. Troops needed permission to move through her borders, and trade agreements often hinged on allowing merchants to pass through as well. After the War of the Cross, however, Eisen was devastated. Fields were reduced to mud, garrisons could no longer be paid and merchant ships could thumb their noses at any Eisen attempt to collect tolls.

The people of Eisen have always been proud. They are proud that their ancestors carved the Vaticine Church's empire for the Hierophant, and that their Empire lasted for hundreds of years. They are proud that their past is a series of one valorous deed after another. With the state their country is in today, they might be forgiven for trying to live in the past. They were proud of the fact that they have no magic except that which they make with their own sweat and blood…

…and then, the Horrors came.

They started appearing at the end of the War, but once it was over, they arrived in force. A terrible howl in the moonlit forest…the pale Countess living in darkness at the top of the hill…the mad inventor working with corpses in his ruined castle….

It wasn't enough that Eisen survived the War of the Cross. Now, the people of Eisen must survive what all that bloodshed and murder summoned.

Eisen's sun has risen and set once more. Now Eisen is a lonely land of mud and snow, and travelers are well advised to hire an armed guard.

But with all the talk of Eisen being a wasted nation, many have overlooked the fact that not all of her people look wasted. Some of them just look angry.

Eisen has a long history of coming back from disaster, and the worse the disaster, the bigger her comebacks tend to be. Right now, she's disjointed and disagreeable, haunted and preyed upon, but she will banish the Horrors. She will unite her people. And she will be a unified nation. The land isn't as pretty as Avalon, nor is its nobility as dignified as in Montaigne, but they are a proud people who won't let a little mud and blood stain their dignity.

The people who say there's no beauty in Eisen don't know where to look for it. Eisen holds stories of desperate daring, where you don't use words like "hero" and "courage" unless you mean them.

More than any other Nation, Eisen has learned the importance of national unity—chiefly because they've had it stripped from them in the name of religion.



The War of the Cross didn't start with Eisen fighting Montaignes or Castillians, it started with Eisen Vaticines fighting Eisen Objectionists. However, after all the blood was spilled and all the cities burned to ash, it became clear that it was just Eisen killing Eisen.

Because of this internal dissent, the Eisen are now viewed with faint scorn by the rest of Théah. However, their battlefield skills remain superior to any others in Théah; even the mighty Montaigne General Montegue has an Eisen sergeant as advisor.

Like every other Nation in Théah, Eisen stands at a crossroads. The most important people are her princes, who must be the unifying force that the Nation needs. Which prince wins the faith of the people will determine what role the Nation plays in the theater of world politics for the next two hundred years.

Théah is about to embark on the path that Eisen has been treading for three decades. She's on the edge of realizing that national pride can unify a people more than religion ever could. The Eisen are already there. And they're rebuilding.

But for now, Eisen is a bloody mess. The people know it and they don't like being reminded. It's kind of like walking into someone's house and saying, "What a pit." The Eisen may complain about their land, but they still love her. A Montaigne who wanders into a village and says something scornful about the land will find himself tarred and feathered by the end of the day.

The Land

Eisen is a mountainous region nestled in the middle of Théah that borders on almost every major continental country. The winters are long and there is a chill in the air even in the midst of summer. Eisen gets plenty of rain and snow, contributing to muddy roads all year round.

In the southern half of Eisen are the foreboding black forests, or the Schwarzen Wälder. People know not to walk the forest paths at night for fear of the Schattenmann, or "Shade Man." The stories describe him as a giant creature with thin, stick-like limbs, carrying an enormous pair of shears to dismember his victims, snipping them apart with precise strokes.

Northwest of the Wälder stands the Südsee, a huge lake that was once teeming with schools of freshwater fish. Due to heavy fishing, it is no longer as bountiful as it once was. Just to its northeast is the Unsterbliche Sumpf, or "The Undying Swamp," which is thought to be cursed.

Northern Eisen is heavily forested, with broad flood plains on either side of the Rotstrom, a wide river with pockets of clay that turn its waters red. Freiburg (FRY-boorg), the famed capital of trade, straddles the midpoint of the Rotstrom. There are two large forests in northern Eisen: the Angenehme Wald and the Liebliche Wald. Unlike the rest of Eisen's landscape, these forests are known to be safe, pleasant places to travel through. Of course, with all the desperate refugees found in Eisen, that may not be true for much longer. Eisenfürst Pösen posts regular patrols through the forests to flush out any would-be bandits. Still, she is reluctant to take these troops off the patrols in the Salzsumpf, the salt marshes near her castle, Insel; sirens have found their way into the swamp and waylay fishermen and other travelers. Pösen doesn't want them venturing into her territory.

In the mountains that border Eisen to the north and east, locals tell stories of the *drachen*, enormous creatures revered by the Eisen. In days past, nobles hunted the drachen as proof of valor. In fact, the image of the drachen has become synonymous with the concepts of strength and power. No noble has actually encountered one of the beasts in living memory, but tales survive of drachen rending entire cities to pieces with their enormous claws.

The iron mines of Eisen are also found in the mountains. Aside from mercenaries, iron is the country's primary export. Dracheneisen, the seemingly magical iron used to forge the legendary dragonscale armor (drachenschuppe) of Eisen, was once mined here. Unfortunately, the dracheneisen mines are a distant memory, like the drachen themselves, and the ancient mines are empty and haunted. What little dracheneisen remains is used to fight Eisen's Horrors. The Nation's most precious material, it can provide both a ward against the Horrors and weapons. Most of the Horrors cannot be harmed by traditional means, but dracheneisen, for some reason, can harm and even destroy them.

The People

Although Eisen lies in haunted ruin, her people are far from beaten. While some have succumbed to the horrors of war, those that remain are stronger for the cruelties they have endured. The Eisen have more collective combat experience than any other nation. The armies of most of Théah's nations rely on an Eisen advisor for tactics and strategy.

Since they have little else left to sell, the Eisen have begun to sell war. Their military academies are the best in Théah, and simply being born an Eisen is often a good enough reason to lead an army. Eisen mercenaries often find work as soldiers, bodyguards or marines defending ships against pirates. Many loyal sons and daughters have left their homeland to fight abroad, sending their wages home to their families.

One thing that echoes throughout the national character of Eisen is stubbornness. The Eisen never give up. They may lie low while they lick their wounds, but they always return in the end, ready to fight once again.

Thirty years ago, there were 24 million people living in Eisen. Today, there are 10 million. Nearly six million have fled to other countries. The rest are dead. Most died not in battle but through starvation, plagues bred by festering bodies and…Things.

This has transformed the Eisen into a grim, shattered people. Families have been torn apart by death, disease and raiders over the years, leaving many alone in the world. Some have retreated into catatonia rather than deal with the horror. Others have taken to the bottle to dull their pain. Even those Eisen who show no external sign of the War of the Cross are apt to explode in anger with no warning. It may take generations for these scars to heal.

The Eisen are tall and muscular, with a peculiar genetic quirk that sometimes combines brown or black hair with a red beard. Their eyes can be of any color, with a predisposition towards the lighter shades. The men keep their hair and beards short, in a military fashion, while the women grow their hair to shoulder length and sometimes tie it in braids. They have sharp aquiline noses and a light complexion.

Social Strata

There are four classes in Eisen. The first is the nobility, or Adel (AH-del). They live in grand castles left to them by their forefathers and continue to squabble among themselves, arguing over each acre of land as though it were an entire kingdom.

The second class is the mercenaries, or Söldner (ZOELD-ner). Next to the Adel, the Söldner are the wealthiest people in Eisen. They often form academies to train young Söldner when they grow too old to battle any longer.

The third class is the peasants, or Bauern (BOW-ern). They still cling to their lifestyle, eking out a living on Eisen's increasingly infertile land. They have weathered a great deal of hardship and pain, and there is an undercurrent of anger among them that steadily grows stronger.

The last class in Eisen was created during the War of the Cross. They are called the Waisen (VY-zen), or "the orphans." Their homes were destroyed and their families killed by the soldiers fighting in the War of the Cross. They wander the ruined fields of Eisen with walking sticks, searching for edible roots and other meager supplies. Most of them die of disease or starvation before long, and those who survive are often slain for trespassing on the lands they once called home. The Adel say, "You can identify them easily. They don't shield themselves when you beat them."

Etiquette

Eisen are straightforward. They understand the need for tact, and are careful what they say, but they tell those whom they don't like exactly how they feel. The Eisen have great respect for the truth and consider a secret or a lie to be a burden on their spirit. They'll bear this burden for a friend, or if it's necessary in order to keep their head in its proper place, but see no reason to spare the feelings of someone they don't like to begin with.

If an Eisen forms a strong friendship, he may refer to a friend as his Rücken (ROO-ken), or "Back." This means that the Eisen would trust him or her to defend his back in a battle. An Eisen never expects to be abandoned in battle by his Rücken unless he has asked him or her not to interfere, such as a duel of honor. When an Eisen is back to back with his Rücken, he will not look behind him. He trusts his Rücken to cover him.

The Eisen show a certain roughness in their customs that many foreigners are unused to. Friends hug each other roughly when meeting again after a long separation, and most Eisen have difficulty speaking with a soft voice in social situations, since their own gatherings tend to be loud and boisterous.

Clothing

Bauern and Waisen dress in whatever they can get, typically coarse linens. Often the Waisen allow their clothing to fall to rags on their backs. The richer Bauern men wear feathered caps, while the women wear aprons.



Söldner dress in fine leathers dyed in bright colors. Their shirts have distinctive sleeves with slits cut lengthwise in them. A wide-brimmed, feathered hat provides a bit of shade in the sun or protection from the rain.

The Adel men follow the fashions of nobility elsewhere with certain unique distinctions. They wear long leggings with thigh-length skirts tied with a single band and flat, wide-brimmed hats. The women also follow international fashions, but prefer small lace collars to the ruffled collars that are popular in so many places. They prefer bright colors on their clothing.

Food

The diet of the Waisen consists of anything peasants can find: old tubers, dead rats, gnawed cabbages and whatever they can steal—including the household pets of the Söldner and Adel.

The Bauer is somewhat better off, relatively speaking. He gets to keep a portion of whatever crop he grows in Eisen's "mud fields": typically grains and tubers. They drink water—beer has long since become too expensive for all but the richest Bauern. If they're lucky, the water is clean and doesn't carry any diseases. Butter remains the center point of any meal. It is typically served in a bowl into which bread can be dipped. Often the bread serves double duty as an eating utensil, herding peas onto forks and the like.

The Söldner and Adel have a more varied diet. They import vegetables and fruits for their tables, and maintain cattle and sheep on their share of the Bauern's grain, ensuring that they have a reasonably steady supply of meat. Much of this meat is dried or turned into sausage to prevent spoilage. A great deal of alcohol flows into the country to feed the soldiers' tireless thirst.

Customs

This is an unusual period in Eisen history, as long-standing traditions and customs are abandoned as impractical. Often, holidays go uncelebrated while the men toil on endless public works projects to rebuild the country. Gift giving has become an exchange of handmade crafts, since manufactured goods are entirely out of the Bauern's price range.

Due to the recent shortage of food, children always eat first in Eisen. Even honored guests wait politely until all the children have been served before eating themselves. A guest who does otherwise would be rebuked, and probably not invited back.

In addition, it has become a custom for guests to bring enough food to feed themselves and their hosts as a "gift." In reality, it's merely a way to make sure that your hosts aren't going hungry while they serve you the best food they have to offer.

The Bauern believe that it is bad luck to hurt or even touch a Waisen, as if somehow their misfortune were contagious. The only way to avoid this ill luck, or so it is believed, is to bathe thoroughly in order to wash it away.

Art and Music

Eisen art and music has less to do with the military than one might expect. Many of their most famous works depict scenes of idyllic beauty, and some of the most spectacular landscapes in all the world. Perhaps the Eisen see enough war in their day-to-day life.

Names

Most Eisen have three names: a first name, a surname and an *ehrenname*, or "name of honor." The surname passes down from the child's father, as most family names do. Lastly, the ehrenname is given to the child to honor a friend or relative of the parents. Typically, it is the honored person's first name. For an Eisen to name his first-born child after a friend is the greatest compliment he can give. In rare cases, men have received a woman's name as their ehrenname, and vice versa. While this can be somewhat amusing, laughing at an Eisen's ehrenname is a deadly insult.

When an Eisen introduces himself, he states his first name, his ehrenname, and then his surname. For instance, if a man introduces himself as "Gregor Friedrich Damaske," he is saying that his first name is Gregor, his surname is Damaske, and his ehrenname is Friedrich.

Common Male Names: Adrian, Bernhard, Dirk, Erich, Gustav, Hans, Josef, Kurt, Lorenz, Max, Oliver, Philip, Reinhard, Rolf, Stefan, Volker, Wenzel, Willi, Xaver

Common Female Names: Anna, Cordula, Cornelia, Dora, Eva, Gabriele, Ingrid, Janina, Kirstin, Lena, Margrit, Mona, Nina, Ruth, Sigrid, Silvia, Tina, Ursula

Religion

The Eisen are split between Vaticines and Objectionists. Their churches show an austerity typical to their culture. They don't believe in flashy, useless displays of wealth, but they are very religious nonetheless.

A Bauer often discusses religion with his neighbors while building roads in the winter with them, and the typical Adel can be expected to donate up to 50% of his yearly income to his church.

There is one practice unique to the Eisen branch of the Church of Prophets, and common to both Vaticines and Objectionists. The Söldner all wear iron

necklaces imprinted with the insignia of particularly pious Eisen who were once Söldner themselves. These necklaces are known as *Heiligen* (HIGH-lih-gehn). The Eisen believe that the spirit of the pious Söldner will intercede with the Creator on the wearer's behalf to keep him safe from harm.

Four men are most commonly honored on heiligen. The most popular bears the insignia of the late Imperator Weiss, a man with a crown of stars around his head. Weiss is remembered for his policies of religious freedom. The next most popular bears the insignia of Imperator Gottschalk I, the cross of the Church of the Prophets. Gottschalk created the Vodacce papacy and gave it to the Hierophant to rule. Objectionists often wear a heiligen with a wolf imprinted on it. Although this is Stefano Wulf's insignia, and he wasn't actually an Eisen, many Objectionists consider him the holiest man since Mattias Lieber. The last of the four primary heiligen bears the insignia of General Stauss, a hawk in flight. Stauss was the champion of the Vaticines in Eisen while he lived and is very fondly remembered by them.

Politics

Eisen has collapsed into seven *königreiche*, or "city-state kingdoms." Each is ruled by an *Eisenfürst*, or "Iron Prince." The title came from the noble families who once controlled the mines producing the valuable dracheneisen: a metal that is stronger than steel and half the weight. This metal was traditionally used to create superior armor and weaponry for the Eisen nobility, but after the War of the Cross, much of it was lost, stolen or destroyed.

Each Iron Prince rules his kingdom differently. Some, like Elsa Pösen, maintain strict control of all trade and troops. Others, like Roswitha von Wirsche, allow their subordinates to run the kingdom. The most extreme example of this hands-off attitude is Niklas Träge, who collects no taxes or tariffs, and only occasionally becomes involved in politics.

Government

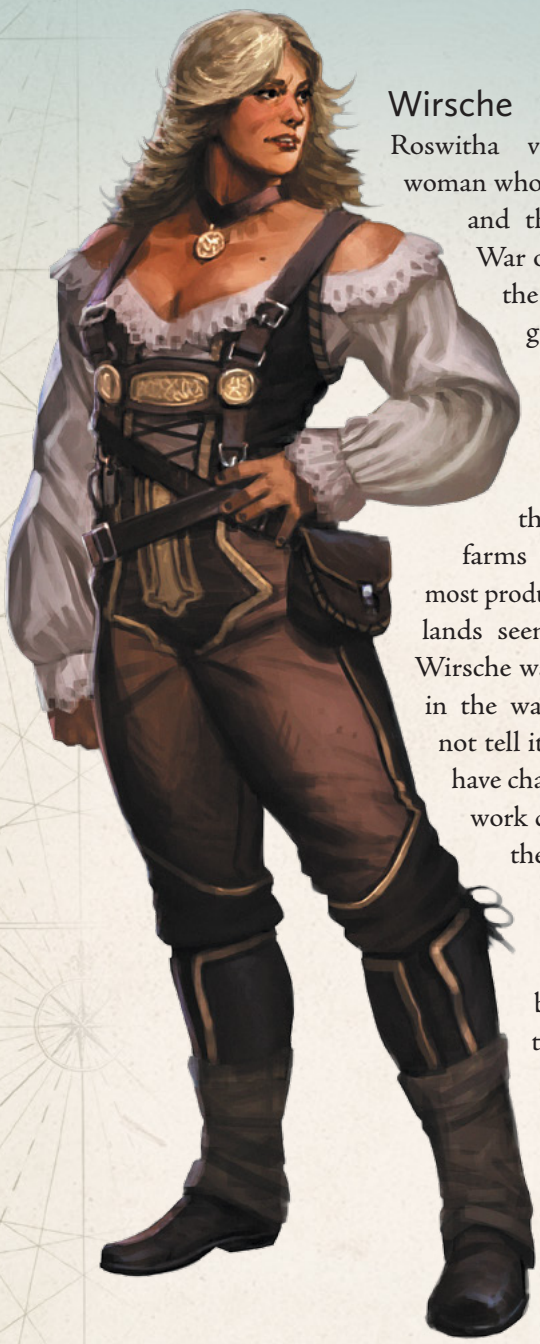
Boundaries between the *königreiche* are rough and often imprecise. It's not uncommon for two Iron Princes to lay claim to the same region of Eisen. Governmental practices vary from place to place.

Freiburg

The first königreich is the most unusual of them all. It is known as Freiburg, or "Free City," ruled by Niklas Träge, one of the first atheists to come to power in Théah. Träge was a respected general during the War of the Cross. Over the course of the War, his beliefs went from "The Creator will protect us" to "How can the Creator allow this?" to "There is no Creator." He believes that anyone will betray him if offered the right price, and he has been known to get drunk and verbally abuse passing clergy. "Don't trust anyone who believes in færie tales," is common advice from Träge's lips. Despite all this, Träge does his best for his people. He doesn't blame them for their moral weaknesses; he simply uses those weaknesses to manipulate them into doing the "right" thing.

A tall tower stands in the center of the town, known simply as the *Wachtturm*, "The Watchtower." Träge only claims the land that he can see from the top of this tower, having no desire to rule over a larger königreich.

Freiburg's economy is based on free trade. Träge levies no taxes and ensures that the source of certain questionable merchandise never reveals itself. In fact, Träge does his absolute best not to govern the city at all. He simply makes it worth peoples' while to govern themselves, provide for their own protection, etc. Nonetheless, he is convinced that Freiburg will not survive to see its fifth anniversary. There are too many land-hungry Eisenfürsten nearby, and if there's one thing that the Vaticine and Objectionist clergy can agree on, it's that an atheist ruler is a threat to the Church's power.



Wirsche

Roswitha von Wirsche, a woman who lost her husband and three sons in the War of the Cross, rules the second königreich. For a time, she gave up on life, allowing her lands to fall into ruin. But then, something changed. Her farms are some of the most productive in Eisen, her lands seemingly blooming. Wirsche was utterly ravaged in the war, but you could not tell it now. The people have changed as well: they work diligently but lock their doors at night. And if you visit the County of Wirsche don't bother with niceties: they will not speak to you. They dare not. The Countess may be listening.

Pösen

Elsa Pösen rules the third königreich. Elsa is a large woman, immensely strong and a skilled warrior. She is also arrogant and unbelievably stubborn. Her königreich occupies the northeastern corner of Eisen and is the most prosperous of the königreiche, except for perhaps Freiburg. Pösen survived the War of the Cross virtually unharmed. It possesses fertile land and seemingly bottomless iron mines.

Heilgrund

Stefan Heilgrund rules the fourth königreich, and works steadily towards the day that Eisen will be re-united under his rule. The other Eisenfürsten see him as a brash young fool and have no intention of ever submitting to his rule. Niklas Träge of Freiburg is the only one who will even talk to him, for he sees Heilgrund as a potentially useful tool. Rumors have spread that Stefan collects occult books and objects for some unknown purpose.

Fischler

The fifth königreich is ruled by Falk Fischler, a dark, brooding man. His königreich was formed from pieces of Sieger and Hainzl, a fact that Erich Sieger has never forgiven. Much of Falk's depression comes from the fact that his newfound wealth has failed to ease his loneliness. Before, he was surrounded by nobles who sneered at him and looked down on him because he was poor. Now he's surrounded by fawning nobles who hang on his every word for no other reason than that he has power and wealth. Fischler surrounds the Südsee, and much of its income comes from fishing. Unfortunately, fewer fish are caught each year, and Falk has pondered whether or not to prevent fishing for a few years to let the lake recover. Either way, it could mean economic ruin for his people.

Sieger

The sixth königreich belongs to Erich Sieger. It technically belonged to a Castillian noble at the end of the War of the Cross, but when soldiers arrived to take possession of it, they saw a madman locked within the fortress, willing to fight to the death over a patch of burned, salted mud. They decided that the land wasn't worth the lives it was going to cost them and went home. Since then, Sieger has had difficulties feeding his people and keeps losing them to nearby königreiches. He seems focused completely on retaining his holdings against all odds, and his sheer bloody-minded stubbornness might actually allow him to succeed.

Hainzl

The seventh and final königreich is ruled by Georg Hainzl, a pleasant, jovial man, virtually untouched by the savage War of the Cross. In fact, he is usually untouched by reality in general. He has made his land a place of beauty and art, and remains a generous patron to musicians. His castle contains rooms decorated in themes drawn from famous operas, and its exterior looks like it belongs in a fairy tale. Hainzl gets its income from its iron mines, the best in all of Eisen.

Economy

Eisen's primary exports are iron, lumber and coal, which demand high prices in foreign markets. This is fortunate, for Eisen must import 40% of its food due to the ravages of the War of the Cross. The Eisenfürsten control trade everywhere except in Freiburg.

Under the Imperators, Eisen's coinage was the *mark*, a small silver coin approximately the size of the Imperator's smallest fingernail. Eight marks equal one Guilder. However, only certain Eisenfürsten still accept marks as currency.

After the Treaty of Weissberg, Freiburg began using the Guilder as its standard currency, and also began minting *pfennigs* (FEN-igz), equal to one-tenth of a Guilder, with the Vendel League's permission. Since then, Pösen, Fischler and Hainzl have followed suit.

Heilgrund, Wirsche and Sieger all continue to use the mark, but for different reasons. Heilgrund hopes to use the currency as a rallying point for Eisen, reminding the people of more glorious days. Why Sieger continues to use the mark is unknown: probably just another symptom of the madness that made him defy Castille. He seems to defy people for no other reason than because he can. Perhaps Wirsche continues to use the mark out of tradition. Nobody really knows.

The Guild moneychangers in Freiburg continue to buy marks in exchange for Guilders, but no longer sell them. They are attempting to take the mark out of circulation, since it isn't backed by a stable government.

The Military

Mercenary Bands

Most of the military presence in Eisen consists of mercenary bands and the private guards of the Eisenfürsten. Since the private guards consist of no more than ten or twenty members, the mercenary bands will decide the military future of Eisen.

Most of the bands predate the War of the Cross. Many of them fought on both sides of the war at some time or another. Each can be recognized by its distinctive banner and war cry on the battlefield. Most companies also have a charter that sets down rules of conduct and divvies out shares of the pay.

One of the most famous Eisen warbands is the Blutgeister, or "Blood Spirits," whose battle-cry—"*Fliegt Geister!*" which translates into "Spirits, fly!"—strikes fear into the hearts of those they face.

As for the private guards of the Eisenfürsten, only two are of particular note. Elsa Pösen's guard is noteworthy because of its extreme loyalty and ability. The second, the guard of Erich Sieger, is the most brutal and callous group of Söldner in all of Eisen.

The Military Academies

The Eisen schools of tactics are acknowledged as the greatest of their kind in the world. Not only do the students learn how to fight at them, they learn how to show others how to fight. Four of these schools are acknowledged as the best of the best: Steil, Unabwendbar, Klippe and Gelingen.

Steil is located in Gottkirchen and was founded only seven years ago by a cousin of the late Imperator Riefenstahl. Since then it has seen phenomenal success, turning away more than half of the students who apply for admission. The curriculum emphasizes cavalry maneuvers and infantry drills.

Unabwendbar is in Starkbrunn, and serves primarily as a tactical school, with little emphasis on combat training. It teaches a philosophy known as *Unwiderstehlich*, or "Irresistible." Students learn to embrace the inevitable rather than struggle against it. Their focus shifts to the things that they can make a difference in, both on the battlefield and in life. They can sometimes seem a little cold-hearted, but if they ignore a collapsing cavalry charge, it's because there's nothing they can do to save them.



Klippe is based in the town of Tannen. The students take strict vows of secrecy the first day they arrive at the school, and indeed, attendance is by invitation only. Klippe is considered the best of all the Eisen military academies, and its students often receive the best positions once they graduate. Sadly, there is a high mortality rate among these graduates, leading some to believe that the school is cursed.

Gelingen is founded on the shore opposite Insel. The students learn in the field, often accompanying patrols into the Salzsumpf. These patrols ferret out poachers, watch for invading armies, and hunt down monsters that find their way into the swamp. The motto of the school is *Lernen durch taten*, or "Know by doing."

Current Relations

Avalon

"The only thing good about the Avalons is that we know they can't be trusted." As far as the Eisen are concerned, any Avalon has to be watched cautiously. Still, accusing someone of being a thief or a liar is a serious matter, so Eisen usually keep their opinions to themselves unless they have absolute proof of an Avalon's dishonesty.

Castille

The Castillians are somewhat odd, but mostly good, religious folk. If an Eisen is an Objectionist, he will definitely keep this a secret around the Castillians. They aren't known for their open-mindedness.

Montaigne

The Montaigne prefer style over substance, which greatly upsets Eisen sensibilities. Eisen see the Montaignes as wasteful, arrogant children. Still, they often have plenty of money to throw around, so it's worth being polite to them, just in case.

Pirate Nations

There's nothing wrong with men making a living through force of arms. The threat of pirates keeps many Eisen employed, and their trade often goes to Freiburg, where it helps the Eisen economy even more. The Eisen will not profit if something happens to the pirates.

Sarmatian Commonwealth

The Sarmatians are an odd bunch. Almost like two different families living under the same roof. On one hand, they've given rights to all their citizens, and on the other, they're making deals with demons. A strange Nation, to be sure. Not exactly sure how to even begin trusting them.

Ussura

The Ussurans are strong, quiet people, if a bit skittish. An Eisen could scarcely ask for a better traveling companion, since they keep to themselves unless there's a fight—in which case they're perfectly capable of holding their own.

Vestenmennavenjar

Although the Vestenmennavenjar are partially responsible for the War of the Cross, they are stout fighters and able craftsmen. Therefore, the Eisen respect them…but do not forget.

Vodacce

The Vodacce weave a web of lies around their victims and then descend to feast upon their helpless bodies. If there's a Vodacce around, always keep an eye on him, or he's bound to stick a dagger in your back.



The Highland Marches

For centuries, we've fought for freedom. Now, it is within our grasp. And the only thing we need do to reach it… is exercise our patience. Not our greatest virtue.

— James MacDuff

The seemingly insignificant Highland Marches have played a pivotal role on the world stage for centuries. While neither politically powerful nor overly rich in resources, their allegiance to Queen Elaine and potential to disrupt her rule make them key players in Avalon's bid to become a great power. Because of that, Avalon's enemies have turned to them when seeking a weak link in the United Kingdoms. The Highlanders—led by their king, James MacDuff II—have their own ideas, however, and have turned their status into a potent political weapon.

The Land

The Highland Marches are a wet, foggy land, dominated by rocky hills and constant rain. Travel in the Highlands is difficult at best. The rural roads are poorly maintained, and bandits and wild animals are fairly common. Most travelers prefer to travel overland by horseback, while the nobility will make use of carriages and other wheeled vehicles. There are few major rivers in the Highland Marches, so boat travel is limited to fishermen and others who make their living on the waterways.

The weather in the Highlands is far from pleasant. Rain and fog dominate the country for most of the year, with snow covering the land for most of the winter months. There are few extremes, however, and the Marches are rarely troubled by severe frosts or heat waves. As in Avalon, the Highland weather is stolid, gloomy and pretty much the same month in and month out.

Food

The food in the Highlands is like the weather—heavy, dull and unchanging. Sheep meat is a staple of the country, with national dishes consisting of mutton, haggis and lamb chops. Vegetable growth is root-based, so most meals include potatoes (brought from the New World), carrots and the like. Boiling is a favorite method of meal preparation, for it keeps the food longer and is easy to conduct in the wild countryside. Most Highlanders prefer stews and other mixed dishes, which are simple and add a little variety to the cuisine. They disdain the fanciful preparations of other countries as wasteful. "It's all the same when it's in your stomach" is a common saying among the Highlanders.

The People

Highlanders are generally taller than the average Théan. Like their Inish cousins, their redheads are more famous than their typical appearance: black hair and blue eyes. Highlanders spend almost all their time out of doors, but because the sky is usually overcast, their skin tones are not overly tanned or pale.

Clothing

The natives' clothing reflects the practical necessities of their land, designed for warmth and comfort rather than display. Men traditionally wear kilts, woven from sheep's wool and decorated in the tartan colors of their ancestral family or Clan. The kilts form a sash which is worn over the shoulder, and can be unpinned to cover the entire body in a sort of blanket. The nobility eschews rapiers and other weapons in favor of the great claymores of their past, an intimidating sight within the halls of Parliament. The remainder of their clothing is similar to the Avalon nobles', with buttoned waistcoats and buckled shoes.



Women favor dresses and pleated skirts, but Highland fashion is much less decorative than the mainland counterparts. Like the men, their clothes are woven of strong fabrics, able to withstand the cold of the Marches. They rarely wear hats, instead favoring ribbons or floral decorations in their hair—a remnant of the nation's pagan past.

Customs

Clan identity is very important to the Highlanders. While their sense of nationhood and allegiance with Avalon keeps the Clans from having much political effect beyond the Highland shores, they have come to dominate the cultural and social scene. Highlanders prefer wearing their ancestral Clan tartans in public, and dances and folk songs spring from the regional allegiances of time immemorial. While similar in nature—such that a foreigner traveling in the Marches would be hard-pressed to tell them apart—the natives can differentiate such songs easily. Many commoners separate counties and fiefdoms by the kind of shanties sung at bars, or the particular steps in a May Day dance.

One might ask how the Highlanders can flaunt such affiliations without falling back onto old rivalries and reigniting civil war. To the Highlanders, there is a difference between their cultural identity and their national pride. The effect is similar to college football fans in contemporary America. One can proudly wear a Clan's colors and sing a family anthem at the top of one's voice, but that affiliation doesn't override the sense of national unity or greater brotherhood among one's fellow islanders—beyond the occasional barroom brawl, that is. Six hundred years of common subjugation under Montaigne and Avalon has limited Clan rivalries to the verbal arena alone.

Highlander Women

On the surface, women are second-class citizens in the Highlands. They cannot own property, hold political office or otherwise carry themselves in public as equals. No women sit in the national Parliament and the idea of a female Clan head is unheard of.

From a practical standpoint, however, things are much different. Most Highland houses depend upon the wife or eldest woman to run them, and much of the country's day-to-day business would not be completed without them. Financial matters are also the domain of the fairer sex, and banks and other institutions usually address bills to "the lady of the household." Noblemen often defer to their wives' counsel over the advice of others, and while none hold elected office, many are respected as informal leaders in their local communities. The national army admits women as soldiers, although their numbers are tiny in comparison to men, and some of the country's most famous heroes have come from their ranks. One of Queen Elaine's most notorious privateers, "Bloody" Bonnie McGee, originally hails from the Highlands.

Noble Life

The Highland nobility has begun a slow process of integration with its counterpart in Avalon, as the two kingdoms come closer together. Most of the aristocrats from the Marches hail from large agrarian estates, dominated by civilized gardens and wild, untamed moors. Noble children are educated by tutors or governesses at home, although a few emigrate to Avalon for schooling in a proper institution. While they embrace the sophisticated trappings of culture and enjoy the refined subtleties of hunting, philosophical debate and so on, many Highland nobles eschew such passive practices for immersion in national politics. The wellbeing of the Nation is paramount in many of their minds and they usually work to better those under them or further their own ends rather than fritter away the time in mindless diversions. Their counterparts in other countries consider them quaint and a little backward, as is typical for such an isolated nation.



Peasant Life

Peasant life in the Highland Marches is hard, but the emergence of a middle class has alleviated things somewhat. The majority of the peasantry work on farms owned by the nobility or nouveau riche landlords. As education flourishes and the advances of science make their way inland, their lot has begun to improve. More and more of them have begun leaving the countryside to seek their fortune in urban centers, and a class of merchants and shopkeepers has slowly taken hold. For the most part, Highland peasants keep to themselves, respect their betters and try to make the most of the opportunities life gives them. For all of that, they can be very cheerful; they love their songs and their beer, and conduct social gatherings with a boisterous joie de vivre.

Etiquette

Honesty is very important among the Highlanders. Opposition to another is not a sin as long as it is openly stated, and the concept of "a good clean fight" dominates most political arguments. Promises are rarely given, but when they are, they are sacred; a Highlander considers his oath essential to his good name, and will never consciously break his word. This honesty, however, rarely spreads beyond the Avalon Kingdoms. Foreigners can be deceived with impunity, and often are, much to the chagrin of visiting dignitaries. More than a few foreign politicians have been lulled into believing a Highlander's solemn word...only to have that word broken at the worst possible moment.

Other points of etiquette are similar to Avalon's. One always tips one's hat to a lady and pays proper deference to those of a higher standing. While the national penchant for honesty has made manners coarser here than elsewhere, the Highlanders still expect a modicum of politeness from their fellows, and won't tolerate crude behavior without a good explanation. They are also quicker to come to blows than other countries; duels among the nobility are considered appropriate ways to end disputes.

Politics

Historically, the Highland political scene has been dominated by the Clans, who jockeyed for position and dominance even after the coming of the Montaignes. That is gradually changing as the country weds itself to Avalon, and Clan loyalties give their way over to broader political parties.

The Highland Parliament consists of all of the heads of the major Clans, who inherit their seats. Political boundaries are drawn by ancient rivalries, as the old school of bloodletting takes new shape in arguments and policy debates. They are overseen by the High King, the direct descendant of Robert I, who oversees all Parliamentary meetings and acts as an executor of their edicts. He serves as the shaper of national policy, and often controls the Parliament's agenda. As the leader of the Nation, the High King can technically act without Parliament's approval, but to do so he risks open censure and the inability to enforce his decrees. An unspoken agreement exists between king and Parliament whereby he respects their final decisions and in return receives their approval on issues he puts forth. As with most Théan Nations, this balance shifts as both sides gain and lose strength.

Currently, the Parliament is divided between the Unionists, who support the triple crown of Queen Elaine, and the Separatists, who want a fully independent Nation. The Unionists have a substantial majority, but the Separatists are slowly gaining ground and may prove dangerous in the near future. The powerful and charismatic James MacDuff, an ardent Unionist, has kept them in check since becoming High King. James believes that the Highlands can attain great strength—while still maintaining their autonomy—under the flag of the United Kingdoms. Independence would leave them weak and bereft of the protection of Avalon's privateers—opening the door for an invasion by Montaigne or Castille. He is loath to throw his country's newfound freedom away for the sake of some nebulous concept of independence.

Names

Highlanders have two names: their given name and patronymic or clan name. A clan name is usually derived from the founder of a clan—either male or female—and not a family member (which is why Highlander names are more consistent than Inish names, which are more personal). For men, the clan name has the prefix "Mac," while for women, the prefix is "Nic." For example, Angus MacBride and Beileag NicBride are from the same clan.

Common Male Names: Aonghas, Aodhagán, Beathan, Blair, Cailean, Cairbre, Carson, Colin, Dáibhidh, Donnchadh, Dugald, Ealair, Eoghan, Ewen, Fearchar, Fionnlagh, Fingall, Goraidh, Grier, Hamish, Kerr, Sachairi, Seósaidh, Seumas, Sláine, Tam

Common Female Names: Aileen, Ailsa, Beileag, Blair, Caoimhe, Deóiridh, Ealasaid, Eimhir, Eithne, Fionnuala, Gormlaith, Isla, Lachina, Lilias, Máiri, Oighrig, Seona, Sheona, Síleas, Teárlag, Úna

Towns and Villages

Kirkwall

Kirkwall is one of the oldest standing fortifications in the Marches. Built when the Vestenmennavenjar invaded many centuries ago, it has withstood siege after siege from both Highlanders and the foreign raiders. Now it serves as the keep of the High King and the Marches' official embassy. MacDuff's court can be found here and the Clans meet within his grand hall once a year. During that week, the population of Kirkwall triples, and a huge fair springs up around her walls.

Connickmoor

The home of the MacBride Clan, Connickmoor is also home of the Marches' Separatist Movement. MacBride's dreams of an independent nation have been stymied by the unyielding support for the Elaine/MacDuff alliance. So far, MacDuff's political maneuverings have brought fortune to the Marches, but MacBride is patient.

Current Relations

The rest of Théah considers the Highland Marches, much like Inismore, to be nothing more than an vassal state of Elaine's country. However, the Highlanders have maintained diplomatic connections with the Vestenmennavenjar, connections that allow wealth and prosperity to trickle into the Highlander borders from time to time.





Inismore

You can't just speak of Inish history. You have to sing it.
— Maggie O'Connor

Inismore sits just to the west of the isle of Avalon, and while its culture may have similarities, the differences stand out more. For centuries, the Inish were under Avalon rule by cruel and intolerant monarchs who outlawed the Inish language, hammered the people with heavy taxes and kept order under both fire and steel. Centuries of hate and distrust still exist among the Inish people for the monarchy of Avalon, regardless of the fact that Elaine holds the Graal.

But more than any other of the so-called "Avalon Isles" (don't let an Inish ever hear you say that phrase), the Inish know the importance and power of the Graal. Only a monarch who is worthy may hold it. Elaine holds it. That means she's worthy. And yes, the taxes have subsided. And yes, it is no longer illegal to speak their own language. And yes, the military rule is over. And yes, the island has its own King (as mad as he may be). But more importantly than all that, the Inish know the frailty of Glamour. One wrong decision and Elaine may lose the Graal and "the Glamour Isles" will fall into blood and chaos once again.

It isn't loyalty to Elaine that makes the Inish support the Queen. It's loyalty to Inismore. For as soon as Elaine fails, the terror will begin again. And the Inish will do anything to stop that from happening. Anything.

The People

The Inish are slightly smaller than the average Théan. While they are famous for their "fiery redheads," most Inish have black hair and dark eyes.

It is said that when the world was born, the greatest sorcerers in the world cast a Gesa (GAY-sah, compelling spell) upon Inismore. This spell created a code of conduct that has remained within Inish blood for almost two thousand years, a code that seems strange to those not native to the land. Once one sets foot on the Emerald Isle, it is easy to understand. It all boils down to reputation.

An Inish would rather cut his own throat than commit an act that would disgrace him in the public eye. Of course, what behavior constitutes "honorable" and "dishonorable" is very strictly defined by the Gesa set upon Inismore and her people. No one is above the Gesa, not even the King. In fact, the Inish see the King as "the best among equals," a very un-Théan attitude.

The sorcerer's Gesa created the Three Great Laws in Inismore: the Law of Hospitality, the Law of Bravery and the Law of Loyalty. There is a fourth Law, but it is only invoked when the first three are broken. We'll discuss that one at the end.

Hospitality

Much like her Avalon cousin, Inish hospitality to both friends and strangers is very important. So important, in fact, that all along the King's roads travelers can sleep and eat at the King's hostels for no charge. Because the hostels are owned by the King, the "King's Peace" is invoked. No weapons of any kind are permitted within the hostel, and any act of violence is a crime whose only punishment is death. A host who turns away guests or treats them poorly greatly endangers his reputation. Word spreads quickly among the Inish, especially if a bard is present. Likewise, those who abuse the hospitality of their hosts also put themselves in great danger.

Another aspect of hospitality is generosity. In many ways, a man is judged by the kindness of his heart and the generosity of his purse. Those with little need have a duty to aid those with great need, and woe to the man with full pockets who doesn't spare a coin for the man who has nothing. There are countless Inish folk tales that concern these issues and the fates that befall those who ignore the needy.

Bravery

It is better in Inish eyes to die a painful, horrible and courageous death than to live a long, blissful and cowardly life. How an Inish is remembered after his death is more important than anything else, for he is only immortal as long as he is remembered. Tales abound of heroes who give up their lives with a laugh and a smile because they know they will be remembered.

Inish are a proud people, too proud to show pain, doubt or fear. This aspect of their culture can be reflected in their casual attitude toward violence. A fistfight is always a respectful affair, sometimes even a friendly one. One man accidentally says the wrong thing (or perhaps the right thing), steps on someone else's foot, or just exchanges a look, and a fight breaks out. No weapons are ever involved, only two men and their fists. The pummeling continues until one man just can't get up; then his opponent lowers his hand, helps him to his feet and buys him a pint. The winner always buys his opponent a drink; it's a sign of respect. After all, he fought until he couldn't get up—but he never gave up. That's an important part of the fight, one that shows he is a man who is willing to fight until he just can't fight anymore. His body may have given up, but his will to fight never did.

Loyalty

Loyalty is important to the Inish; when a man makes a promise, he keeps it, no matter the cost. However, no man is ever expected to keep a promise that would compromise his honor—that is, make him break the Three Laws.

While a man owes loyalty to his lord, his primary loyalty is always to his own honor. This is seen as strange by many Théans—after all, the concept of vassalage has been in existence since the days of the Old Republic—but it is very important to the Inish. An Inish's first and most important concern is always keeping his honor intact. While this trait may be seen as troublesome by other cultures, it is only the Inish trying to preserve his honor and his family's status. In a world of serfs and servants, this stalwart cry of individualism is seen by many Théans as arrogant, but it is, in fact, the one trait that best defines Inish pride.

Justice

The fourth Law, the one that is only invoked when the other three are broken, is that of Justice. Inish law (as we will see below) is not designed to prohibit crime, but to punish it. The Gesa that was cast upon Inismore put into motion a force that brings the unjust to justice, no matter how fast or far they run. "What goes around, comes around," is not a phrase native to Inismore, but it may as well be. While justice may not be swift, it is inevitable. When foreigners to the isle see this power act, they call it "coincidence," but the Inish know better.

The Inish see justice as a responsibility. When they witness a transgression, it is their duty to set it right. After all, they say, there are already enough people who turn away and say, "It's not my problem."

The only way to rectify a wrong is atonement, a quest that clears the offender's name. Often, a quest includes three impossible tasks, all of which any good-hearted Inish is more than willing to try to accomplish, even if it means death. In fact, dying while trying to clear one's name is the best way to do so.

Clothing

Inish fashion has not changed much over the centuries. They still wear long leggings—a strange sight for the ancient invading Empire soldiers, all dressed in robes and tunics—long-sleeved shirts and heavy cloaks, all made of wool. Leather boots and belts are common, but buttons are not. However, jewelry is very popular among the Inish. Pins and broaches are seen everywhere, as are armbands, ankle-bands, rings and necklaces all adorned with the traditional intricate knotwork patterns that have become a hallmark of Inish fashion.

Food

Thanks to steady rainfall coupled with a long, warm summer, Inismore has one of the longest growing seasons in northern Théah. In fact, in southern Inismore, some farmlands can be maintained all year long. Farms cover two-thirds of Inismore. Her most important crops are barley, dairy products, hay, potatoes, poultry, sugar beets, wheat and some of Théah's finest livestock—cattle, horses and sheep. Fishing is also very important to Inismore's economy. Inish fishermen pull cod, herring, lobsters, mackerel, salmon and whiting fish out of Inismore's shallow waters.

Art and Music

"All Inish songs are about one of two things: whiskey and Nancy. The best are about both."

The Inish love to sing. A scholar could learn everything he ever needed to learn about Inish history, custom and tradition from their songs. The subjects vary from "rebel" songs (rebellion against tyranny, be it Avalon or Montaigne) to war songs to love songs to "whiskey" songs (singing of the complicated love-hate relationship the Inish have always had with drink).

The most important part of Inismore's musical tradition, however, is the bard. A bard is part of the Inish learned class (for more on bards, see the Druid section on page 50). Bards are so unique to Inismore that there really is no cultural comparison. They are found in the courts of nobility, telling stories of days gone by and writing songs that will be sung by a hundred generations to come. They are the living history of Inish culture, and how a man or woman treats them greatly influences how they will be remembered.

Religion

The native religion of the Inish has remained relatively untouched by the Church of the Prophets. They recognize the wisdom in the Prophets' words, but they never gave up their gods, chiefly because their gods never gave up them. Even in the darkest days of Montaigne occupation, the Inish knew that



one day the O'Bannon would return. Return he did, and he covered the Emerald Isle with crimson Montaigne blood.

The Inish gods live in worlds far beyond Théah. These Shadoworlds can be reached by magical means, although the gates have been closed for many centuries. The Inish aren't very concerned about their gods. They know to worship them during the right times, on certain nights when the seasons converge, but otherwise the Inish gods have very little to do with everyday life.

The most important thing to understand about Inish gods is that anyone can become one—if his glamour is strong enough. The Inish believe that reputation (glamour) has a direct link to the afterlife. The greater one's legend becomes, the more the land blesses him with glamour. Some of the Inish's most powerful deities were once ordinary people whose names were spoken long after they left the world of flesh, granting them access to the Shadowlands...and godhood. It is this belief that makes the Inish so devoted to the concept of reputation, and why it is always a mistake to call an Inish a coward; you've just told him he has to prove he isn't.



Druids

The keepers of the Inish ways are her holy men and women, or druids. The druids were silent over the last century, practicing their rites under the cover of darkness. But with the O'Bannon's return, their rituals and teachings have returned to the open, sun-covered fields.

Druids are not necessarily sorcerers, but teachers and wise folk who understand the world's most secret truths. Because of this understanding, they recognize world-patterns that occur over and over again, and are able to avoid pitfalls and capitalize on opportunities.

The best way to illustrate a druid's secret wisdom is by comparing him to a farmer. A man who grows up on a farm knows when a storm is on its way because of the smell of the rain and the stillness of the air. He knows that foxes raid the henhouse after the first frost because all the food is gone. He knows when to collect roots and herbs at their peak of potency because his father's father's father learned to do it a few hundred years ago and passed the knowledge down to his son. To an outside observer, such knowledge—without an accompanying reasonable explanation—may seem magical. In fact, it is only practiced intuition. As it is true of the farmer, so it is true of the druid.

Initiate druids are called bards. Bards spend their lives learning the secret knowledge their masters have already gained, and they learn it by wandering the countryside telling stories and picking up new ones. As they wander, they see the same patterns popping up in different counties, slowly contributing to the druid's understanding of the world. They also act as messengers between the distant Inish townships, walking with their "seven-league striders"—magical boots that can walk across the island in one day—over Inismore's fens and forests.

The Land

Inismore lies just south and west of Greater Avalon. It is divided into twenty-six counties, each with a representative in the country's parliament. The High King of Inismore—called the árd rí (ORD-ree)—rules from the capital of Donega. On a tall hill, just outside the town, sits the Fål Stone, a holy artifact that weeps and sings whenever the árd rí kisses it.

Lowlands cover a good deal of Inismore, dotted with dense woods and rolling farmland. Spotted across her lowlands are peat bogs—swamps covered in dying vegetation. Yet Inismore's mountainous regions are located throughout the core of the island, culminating in the O'Bannon Highlands. It's said that no place on the island is more than a hundred miles from water. Boats and docks matter greatly to the Inish; the three largest cities—Donega, Dunkeen and Darwah, respectively—are all port cities.

Inismore has a mild, wet climate and winters are warmer than one would suspect. However, that warmth also brings a great deal of rain. Average rainfall is between 60 and 100 inches per year, making flooding a serious problem throughout the island. Because of all the rivers and flooding, Inismore has a great deal of bridges and fords. No Inish army has ever dammed or blocked a river; to do so invites horrible consequences from the Sidhe who reside in the waters. In addition to many rivers and streams, Inismore also has a great many lakes, all of which are considered sacred. The most sacred lakes of all are those with an island in the middle, for every Inish knows those are gateways to the land of the Sidhe.

Strangely enough, the most prominent buildings in Inismore were built by invaders. The island's shoreline is peppered with foreign castles and fortresses, all of which now belong to the people they were designed to keep out.

Government

The O'Bannon may be the High King of Inismore, but he still has to deal with the Inish Parliament, a governing body put into place by the occupying Avalons hundreds of years ago. The O'Bannon has made it very clear that he doesn't have the time or patience to quibble with nobility. He is the O'Bannon, and his authority will not be questioned.



Economy

Inismore's economy has been linked to Avalon's economy for centuries. Pounds and shillings are everyday sights in Inish marketplaces and guild shops. The Vendel guilds do not have the same presence in Inismore as they do in Avalon, but you can find more guild houses in her cities every day.

Names

Inish names have two parts: your given name and your surname, known in Inismore as your "clan name." Due to occupation from Avalon and Montaigne, the highly complicated system of clan names has been abandoned and replaced with a simplified system. Most Inish clan names have the prefix "O'" or "Mac," such as O'Blaind or MacMárín. The "O" signifies "grandson/daughter of" while the "Mac" indicates "son/daughter of." Thus, a Hero could have the name Keelan O'Keelan, or "Keelan, the grandson of Keelan."

Common Male Names: Abbán, Ádhamh, Aidan, Barrfind, Barrie, Brady, Carey, Ceallach, Donagh, Dónal, Dubhán, Enda, Ennis, Fearghal, Finn, Keelan, Lochlainn, Mannix, Riordan, Séaghdha, Teige, Torin, Uilleag

Common Female Names: Aideen, Aignéis, Bébhinn, Blaind, Brígh, Catlín, Clodagh, Dáríne, Deirdre, Éabha, Eavan, Ena, Fionnuala, Gobnait, Íde, Keelan, Léan, Maeve, Máirín, Mór, Neassa, Nóra, Órlaith, Siobhán

Towns and Villages

When compared with the rest of Théah, Inismore's largest cities are nothing more than towns and villages. Her capital city, Donega, is little more than a township and one tenth the size of Avalon's Carleon or Montaigne's Charouse.

Donega

Donega is the largest of Inismore's cities, chiefly due to fishing and trade with Avalon. It is where the Fål Stone rests. The city fell under a curse in 600 AV, but when the O'Bannon returned years later, he broke the curse by spilling his own blood on the Fål Stone. The city has ramparts reaching over sixty feet high, surrounded by moats and other fortifications.

Dunkeen

Long the site of Avalon rule, Dunkeen is now a city of commerce. The city is the home of many ancient trade routes, including a few that begin and end in Montaigne and Vodacce. Donega may be the capital of Inismore, but no one can argue that Dunkeen is the face she shows the rest of the world.

Darwah

Darwah is Inismore's second largest city, trading almost exclusively with the Highland Marches. She falls under the purview of the O'Toole family, the dynasty the O'Bannon removed from the throne upon his return. It is no secret that the O'Tooles bear "mixed feelings" regarding the O'Bannon's return, but they have done nothing to sabotage his reign. So far.

Military

"Fear not an army of wolves led by a sheep, but the army of sheep led by a wolf."

— Inish proverb

Inismore's military is 90% untrained soldiers and 10% professionals. It's that last ten percent that concerns Inismore's enemies. The typical Inish army is a mass of wild-eyed madmen led by a few dedicated fanatics, using tactics that even the most unconventional generals would have difficulty anticipating. Any general facing an Inish army knows that he will undoubtedly outnumber his opponent, but he also knows that he will lose at least half his force to the unpredictable, bloodthirsty horde.

The Inish have no standing navy, but have sent hundreds of marines to serve in Elaine's Sea Dogs. Armed with generations of sailing knowledge and their savage reputation, Inish marines are the menace of the waves.

Current Relations

As far as the rest of Théah is concerned, Inismore is Avalon's foul-mouthed little sister. She is Avalon's appendix and nothing more. She has no navy, no army and no freestanding economy, so she is of little military or economic threat. There are no embassies for diplomats, but even if there were, her king is such a boor, who would want to visit anyway?



Montaigne

"Montaigne is like a grand old dame. If she decides, on a whim, to wear an antique hat to a party, she sets fashion back one hundred years."

— Val Mokk

One man's decadence is another's routine. Montaigne shines like a brilliant sapphire from her perch on the western coast of Théah. She is the center of culture and fashion and home to the most renowned artists and fantastic architecture known to mankind.

Until recently, Montaigne and Castille were locked in a bitter border war. The battles took a serious toll on Montaigne's peasant class, but the spoils of war added to the coffers of the rich.

The land itself is rich, flat farmland. Acres of green as far as the eye can see. Small farms are common; no land in Montaigne goes to waste. If it isn't a pleasure garden or a building site, it's being used for agriculture. Her many rivers provide natural irrigation.

Montaigne consists of vast cities, large towns and small farms. A man could walk for days and see nothing besides farmers' hovels. But when he does come upon a city, he finds a sprawling affair full of grand manors and dizzying wealth. These cities are metropolitan oases, almost entirely separate from the lands surrounding them.

Where the peasantry of Montaigne struggle daily to please their landlords and feed themselves, the upper classes in the cities have no word for "moderation."

All government and social politics revolve around Léon Alexandre, l'Empereur of Montaigne. The Sun King, as some Montaigne poets have called him, is the center of activity. Ranks of nobles orbit around him, most notably the dukes who control the various provinces of Montaigne. He parceled the country into smaller sections of land, each maintained by a single duke; this duke may have any number of marquis who attend to the actual day-to-day affairs of the lands. Each duke makes regular reports to Léon on the state of his lands. Invariably, these reports assure him that everything is perfectly fine. Should any wrinkles in the great plan occur, they are expected to be worked out long before they ever reach l'Empereur.

The peasants of Montaigne are simple people. They have a minimal education, produce large families, and live quietly respectable lives. Until very recently, young men of at least fifteen years were conscripted into the Montaigne military and sent to fight on the border against Castille. Many came back broken or not at all. With an entire generation lost to war, most farmlands must rely on daughters and wives, most of them widows.

Once, the custom in Montaigne was to hold all weddings in the springtime, but the war with Castille

gave rise to a new tradition. In the winter, when the fighting was at its slowest, many young men were granted leave, married quickly to their old sweethearts, and encouraged to procreate as rapidly as possible. After all, Montaigne always needs more soldiers and farmers.

By contrast, the practice among most nobles is to have no more than two or three children. Their reasons are as practical as those of their lower-born neighbors. In Montaigne, the eldest offspring inherits the land, property and wealth.

Although it is prudent to have more than one heir—it is, after all, impossible to predict the turns of fate—to have more than three is simply bad manners. This does not apply to l'Empereur and his nine daughters, of course.

Where Montaigne peasantry is hospitable and direct, her nobles have made an art out of inference. In the courts of Montaigne, no one ever says exactly what he means. Instead, they fall back on a wealth of metaphors and precedents, often using clever quotes rather than their own words. This kind of conversation can be dizzying to an outsider, and many diplomats from other nations serve their posts under protest, despite the fine food and accommodations of the Montaigne court. The pressure to be circuitously inoffensive is overwhelming.

The Montaigne prefer to make a verbal game out of the uncomfortable. The height of rudeness is to force someone into a direct response, especially when dealing with controversial subjects. Their banter frequently becomes playfully painful as they make light of a serious subject so that no one need address it directly. Individuals witty enough to excel at these delicate games are held in high esteem.

Another favorite game among the Montaigne is intrigue, along with its close cousin scandal. If nothing interesting has happened all season, someone will surely invent it. Guests from other nations have observed a playful viciousness in the mannerisms of the Montaigne.

Their quick conversation and practiced indirectness make them ideal spies. Even if someone suspects them of doublespeak, it's written off as Montaigne custom. What's more, since the Sun King's country sets the standard for clothing, custom and art, Montaigne courtiers are welcomed almost anywhere, allowing them easy access to other courts and sensitive information.

Since the Montaigne army pushed the Vaticine church out of their country, the Montaigne nobility has reveled in its newfound freedom. By contrast, the peasants live in apprehension regarding their new status living in a godless country.

The Montaigne nobility are decadent to the extreme. They've got so much money they don't know what to do with it; so, they build extravagant manor houses and pay starving artists to paint seventeen-foot-tall portraits, and sponsor archæologists to dig up Syrneth artifacts they can wear to next week's party.

The nobility have nothing better to do with their time than watch each other make mischief. The entire country has been excommunicated from the Church, and while that may not sound like a big deal to the nobility, it has shattered the starving Montaigne peasants. They may be willing to kill over it.

The Land

To outsiders, the nation of Montaigne is beautiful; some might say "perfect."

The Montaigne call her "the most glorious nation in Théah." Her terrain is bountiful, verdant and lush. Her soil is fertile, her mountains rich in ore and her farmlands extend for miles. Her cities mirror Paradise itself, stretching so far in all directions that they cannot be navigated by foot in a single day. Her ports bustle with activity and trade, and the opulence of her courts and palaces dwarf anything else Théah has to offer.

From the northern Avalon Strait to the city of Rogne in the south, from the Frothing Bay in the east to the populous trade city of Arisent in the west, Montaigne is a cultivated and civilized nation, a land of plenty. Every acre that can be farmed is harvested to the inch, every deposit of ore that can mined—no matter how rich—is dredged up and smelted into iron and steel, and any lumber deemed strong enough to build with is cut down, leaving room for more farms.

Unlike Castille, which benefits from the careful guidance of the Church, the people of Montaigne have not maintained their land while they draw from it. Visiting Church scholars have warned more than once

about the probable consequences if the Montaigne do not slow down production and begin rotating the use of their land. As yet, there is no evidence that the scholars are right, and the pressure to build caused by the war efforts conspired against such action.

Montaigne's geography is diverse: massive forests, mountain ranges and sweeping plains. Most of the land is level grasslands well suited for farming. The climate is moderate year-round, unbroken by temperature extremes, drought or violent weather. Winter temperatures rarely drop below freezing, and many regions of Montaigne vary little more than twenty degrees over the course of an entire year. Forests both great and small dot the landscape and a large collection of lowland rivers meander through her countryside. The combined effect is enchanting, further lending to the atmosphere that draws so many to her.



Montaigne's capital, Charouse, is the center of an immense basin, one of the lowest altitudes in all of Montaigne. To the southwest, a gradual incline creates a series of rolling hills cut into the graceful pasture, while a man can march a day or more to the east before seeing the horizon shift. This region contains some of the most highly prized farmland in the entire Nation, rich in the minerals and nutrients necessary for her most valued crops. It is also the most easily defended part of the country, making it the ideal location for her capital.

West of Charouse is Montaigne's most exceptional mountain range, Les Sommets Blancs ("The White Mountains"), whose snow-capped peaks reach ten thousand feet. The Sinueuse River runs through the capital, through the Sinueuse Lake and out into the Widow's Sea, providing a quick trading route to other Nations.

In the north, Muguet is the largest port city of Montaigne, and the province is possibly the most well known in Théah. It is not uncommon for the Duke of Muguet, Edouard Allais, to countermand the advice or even commands of all but the royal line, and this attitude has attracted many of the most free-willed Montaignes, and some from abroad.

The province of Doré has acquired a similar reputation by the actions of Pierre Flaubert de Doré, who recently spent a fortune converting the land immediately around Pourisse from marshlands into farmlands, becoming the largest cattle breeder in the Nation virtually overnight. The beef provides his province with a level of income unmatched in the Nation, and directly challenges Charouse for supremacy in livestock. Though courtiers and nobility across the Nation have expressed open hostility at this decision, the royal family has yet to respond, perhaps too occupied with fashion to comment on the state of beef.

To the east of Charouse, beyond the Montaigne flatlands, is the Eisen territory gained through the Treaty of Weissburg: Lock-Horn Forest, whose name originates from a time when Avalon occupied northern Montaigne. Wood lumbered from this forest has proven an invaluable resource, though it has come at a high price: nearly two dozen people—including two Porté sorcerers—who entered its shadowed canopy have vanished, never to return. All that remained in their stead were a series of bizarre blood trails leading up tree trunks and into the highest branches before disappearing.

The People

Called Montaignes, or "Sunflowers" behind their backs, the people of Montaigne are very fit and—by comparison—very clean, as well. The average male noblesse is well groomed, while noble women keep their hair and cosmetics in the proper style for the current season. Brown hair and eyes are standard, though a few with hazel eyes or blond hair appear, as well. Montaigne men often hide their soft features behind a short beard or trim mustache, while females accentuate their gentle cheekbones with long hair that borders their faces.



Peasants cut their hair once a year at the beginning of spring, so they have a full head of hair and a thick beard to keep them warm in winter. There is not a great deal of variation in the way they dress, though whether this enhances or stifles their diversity is a topic for debate. Some argue that the nobles, not their lesser countrymen, share a common face, as each strives continually to maintain whatever look is in fashion at any time.

Social Strata

Montaigne is the most broadly divided nation in Théah, economically and philosophically. Under a rigid caste system, the people of Montaigne easily separate into a series of identifiable classes. A broad description of each follows, descending from the royal line to the nearly invisible peasantry.

The uppermost crust of Montaigne's nobility (La Famille Royale) is few in number, but wield absolute power in her lands. Only l'Empereur (a title recently changed from "King") Léon Alexandre de Montaigne, his wife, the Impératrice, their immediate family and the parents of the former monarchy can accurately claim to be of this class. At present, l'Empereur has nine daughters but no sons, a sore point with the royal line. Morella Alouse Giacinni, a Vodacce Fate Witch and l'Empereur's third wife, has been unable to provide him a suitable heir. She gave birth to their daughter, Dominique, who shows no talent for sorcery at all. L'Empereur's previous wife, a Castillian and mother of three, died of "feminine ills" some time ago.

Below the royals are the noblesse (or nobility proper), the Dukes and Marquis of Montaigne. Highest among them are the Dukes, the landed nobles, who share the names of those who have ruled since Montaigne's foundation. But the Marquis, their siblings, command the bulk of the wealth and manage the majority of the resources of the nation. They may live within a remote part of the provinces they administer in return for their services, tending to the details of each.

Next are the petite noblesse, or, as they are more commonly known, the "gentry" of Montaigne. These people are nobles by virtue of affluence alone, being without land or the associate responsibilities it brings. They are a by-product of the staggering amount of wealth within the Nation. Some have inherited it, others have swindled it—in their class, all that matters is that they have it. They maintain an extravagant life and attend all of the functions of the nobility, while avoiding the politicking and infighting so common among the elite.

Also below the proper nobility—and ranking just beside the gentry—are the noblesse errante. These are nobility that have somehow become disenfranchised and have chosen to become courtiers, emissaries or

dignitaries to the throne. Paix and Buché are flooded with hundreds of bureaucrats, and each new generation adds more. The duty of many errante depends upon the level of noble to which they have linked themselves; one's patron also determines the level of respect one receives. The desire to acquire one with magic or ambition is high.

Courtiers—talented commoners—tend to have an easier time of things. They exist mainly to entertain the nobility, to impress them with their skill. Poets, jesters, jennys, actors, writers, artists and charlatans all belong to what has become a broad social stratum. Merchants or clergy with enough coin can earn the respect of courtiers as if they were nobility. However, without a proper understanding of the "rules," it is very easy for someone to insult the integrity of the court, and thus insult the power of the reigning noble.

The first of the classes outside the nobility are scholars, who have gained newfound popularity with the recent increase in exploration. Although scholars, especially philosophers, have traditionally been highly regarded in Montaigne, acceptance into the developing study of archæology is quickly becoming a badge of distinction. Many noblesse keep several scholars on retainer, including an archæologist, and most—realizing that their lack of outward interest has cost them dearly—struggle to build private libraries to entice scholars to them, as well.

Merchants and craftsmen have also received special consideration in Montaigne of late. By and large, these workers belong to the Vendel League, ensuring them a level of income above most "freelance" agents in their field. Those Montaigne with money can sway them to ply their trade within their country exclusively, creating the air of superiority they crave and drawing increased revenue to support them along the way. To the nobility, these people are an asset too valuable to neglect.

The last rung on the Montaigne social ladder is that of the peasantry. Though the immense walled cities and elaborate chateaux present the beauty and peace of the Nation, all have been built upon the backs of her peasants. The life of the commoner in Montaigne is hard, particularly when measured alongside the tales of luxury afforded the peasantry of other nations, such as the farmers of Vodacce, for one. A 60-hour workweek consumes their lives, as old men, daughters and widows tend to the millions of acres of land owned by the Montaigne nobility.

Etiquette

"Faites-vous tout petit."
("Make yourself inconspicuous.")
— Anonymous

The Montaigne nobility avoid confrontation. Rather than engage anyone directly, they speak through assistants, envoys, messengers and courtesans, and in court settings they use metaphor and witticisms to circumvent conversation. They often avoid your gaze if cornered. Subtlety has replaced the need to actually say anything, and is considered a far more noble skill than honesty.

The fine art of blending with consensus is pervasive in Montaigne; few nobles have the fortitude to start trends. So many fashions are popular in the Nation because so many are told how to act and what to wear. The organization of parties—though common—is a trying experience for them, and most Montaigne would rather fund someone else's function than host their own. For this reason, an entire year can pass with parties held nowhere but in Paix, Charouse and Crieux, where those bold enough to become pacesetters have migrated.

Citing precedent is also very common among the nobles. When dealing with foreigners, the Montaigne often say things that seem out of context, confusing or annoying their visitors. This has led to numerous disastrous situations for them; were it not for the Paix Embassy's lush surroundings and convenient location, many ambassadors—once offended in such a way—would not return.

The peasants of Montaigne do not wilt so easily. They are kind and inviting, despite their rough lifestyle. Through years of humility they have learned not to complain about their plight, and so even though they live in squalor, they remain clean and confident. People who have visited Montaigne often complain that the people were rude or vulgar, but those who avoid the cities have nothing but good things to say about their visit.

Clothing

While peasants are lucky to afford a second suit of clothes before they die, the nobility wear whatever is in style, and quickly double their wardrobe within a single season if others speak highly of a new designer. Excessive gowns, expensive jewelry and an entourage to carry their train are all integral parts of Montaigne fashion. Experienced Porté sorcerers can usually be identified by gloves and cosmetics, used to cover up the unsightly blemishes that eventually form upon their hands and arms.

Montaigne apparel comes from a variety of materials, including brocades, velvets, silks, laces, sheer linen and satin. Although royal blue and gold are the colors of the nobility, all things vibrant can be seen among the elite. Rococo floral patterns shine on coats and gowns, giving the Empire of the Sun the gleam and sparkle associated with its regal luster. Dark colors are considered hideous, and many patriotic Montaigne consider it an insult for visitors to wear such colors in their court.

Montaigne dictates style to most other nations of the world, and the focus of this thrust is the Mode du Lac (the Fashion Society), a high-society art house who set major fashion trends. In recent years they have grown close to the Vendel League, which has helped to spread their message in return for a choice of annual styles. Men generally follow the dictates of the Mode de Lac, but women's wardrobes diverge shortly into the season if the queens across Théah have followed another path.

Food

Nobles of Montaigne enjoy imported meats, fish, cheese, milk, butter, wine, grains, vegetables, spices and a host of exotic foods from all over Théah. Vodacce cuisine is particularly popular at the moment. Montaigne cooking is the most inventive method of food preparation in the world right now, and its cooking schools are renowned for their creativity and exotic measures. The nobility have recently discovered a love for grapefruit and cantaloupe, and have begun importing exotic fruits from Vodacce traders. Truffles are considered a delicacy in Montaigne, and the chefs have begun hiring people to train pigs to seek out the tidbits.

Merchants are not accustomed to the pampered diet of their noble superiors, but they enjoy their meals nonetheless. Fresh vegetables, wines, meats, cheeses and breads form their daily rations. Castillian crops are also becoming more affordable, as the economy of Montaigne's eastern neighbor rebounds in the aftermath of the war. The Emperor had hoped to acquire some of Castille's rich farmland for himself, but Montaigne's wealth still brings the fruits of Castille's labor to his doorstep.

The diet of the Montaigne peasantry is simple—old beans, moldy bread, rotted lettuce, turnips, cabbage, over-aged wine and dirty water. Every day, farmers harvest decent food that winds up filling the bellies of the nobility or being exported to the rest of the world, while the men, women and children who labored for it starve. As expected, peasants often keep some extra from what they reap each month, but they must be careful—too much and the tax collectors will notice.

Customs

The Montaigne revel in ridiculing others, as long as the games remain fun. Nearly all Montaigne embrace the importance of humor, even at their own expense, but there is a fine line that must not be crossed. When derision goes too far (and intuitive Montaigne know when this has happened), the blagueur ("offender") is quickly ousted from polite society. It is not uncommon to find someone gifted in ridicule to be very popular until an indiscretion; many courtiers specializing in social critiques find themselves without a patron mere moments after inflaming a delicate situation. Ironically enough, however, if a situation is so delicate as to be considered explosive, most everyone is expected to engage in "the game" in order to lessen the load on their neighbor, a nuance many outsiders never understand.

Touching is another ambiguous custom in Montaigne. Montaigne do not touch their spouses while in public (except, perhaps, when dancing), but it is not uncommon for them to embrace a courtier or friend in the company of others, whether married or not. Fanning one's face while laughing and touching a friend's hand or chest is also acceptable.

Art and Music

Just as they stand in the forefront of modern philosophy, the Montaigne also remain the most influential in the fields of art and music. Some believe that greatness is attracted to the Nation by its patron-worthy nobility. Regardless of the reason, Montaigne has become a breeding ground for all things creative, and churns out artists almost as quickly as society's collective eye can wander.

Montaigne music is played on strings and harps, with little percussion. It is very slow and stale, reminiscent of funeral music, though one person is trying to change that. His name is Wolffrond von Hazel (HOTS-el); he is seven years old and he is perhaps the greatest musical talent of the last one hundred years. Born in Eisen ("where all the best composers hail from"), von Hazel has come to Montaigne with his parents on an extended tour showcasing his talent, hoping to adopt a suitable (read: wealthy) patron for him. He has spent the last several months in Paix and garnered critical support among the Montaigne lords.

Names

Like the rest of Montaigne society, naming revolves around one's social status. For instance, the proper names of nobility are preceded by a title, then the first name and surname, followed by the word "de" and the province they govern. (Members of the royal line are the only ones permitted to use the province of "Montaigne" for this purpose.)

Gentry may keep whatever name they choose for themselves. Nor are the clergy bound to the naming process of the nobility; most, in fact, lose their birth name when they take their station, with Bishops and Cardinals taking on five or more names in some cases. For example, the Bishop Jules Corentin d'Auguereau Crepin d'Agneau served under High Cardinal Michel Jean-Claude Desaix de Mirielle Sarnin.

Members of the merchant class have a first and last name, while the peasants have very simple names. Peasant children, for instance, receive only a first name, as they rarely leave their villages. In cases like these, the name of the village, town or province they are from usually becomes a surname if necessary.



Common Male Names: Ambroise, Blaise, Cédric, Daniel, Denis, Eugène, Félix, Gérard, Guy, Henri, Jacques, Jules, Luc, Marc, Martin, Pierre, Rémy, Sébastien, Victor, Zacharie

Common Female Names: Allette, Andrée, Arielle, Blanche, Camille, Cosette, Dominique, Estelle, Francine, Georgette, Henriette, Irène, Julie, Lydie, Nicole, Philippine, Roseline, Sylvie, Vivianne

Religion

Up to the early 1600s, the Montaigne people were resolute in their spirituality, and many found solace in the words of the Church's representatives. With the abysmal lack of moral leadership during the reigns of King Léon XII and Léon XIII, the spiritual fiber of the nation began to decay. Since then, it has become evident that any influence the Church had upon the Montaigne nobility is fading fast.

Today the nobility of Montaigne openly opposes the Church, promoting banned books and secular movements. Financial support has completely halted and the Churches that remain are heavily taxed. A climate of sin prevails across the Nation. With fewer and fewer Montaignes following the Church, the number of clergy in the Nation has dwindled as well.

The peasants of Montaigne, with the exception of most servants, fear they are damned. They have noticed the shift in their nobility's religious views, even if those who are closest to the nobility remain ignorant (or complicit) in their excesses. The church has done all it can to keep the impoverished masses happy while petitioning the courts to alleviate the strain upon their lives, but many Church officials turn a blind eye to the conditions of the peasantry when l'Empereur's soldiers deliver coffers of gold as "gifts from the people."

There is presently no Cardinal in Montaigne, and all of the Bishops are missing or in seclusion, leaving the Monsignors and priests alone with the responsibility of leading their misguided flocks. Between the rampant fear among the peasants, and the hedonistic excess of the Montaigne nobility, the role of the remaining Vaticine clergy is a difficult one indeed.

Government

"L'Empereur is an angry drunk and he is never sober."

— Common saying among the Montaigne peasantry

Outsiders often find Montaigne politics confusing. Even ambassadors familiar with its structure sometimes lose track of who to talk to and who to elude. The dizzying number of political clichés to avoid and the immense network of connections, each with an associate—and often explosive—emotional attachment, can rattle the best-trained Fate Witch.

The result is a fully functional system in which—somehow—everything gets done. Eventually, when the knives are put away, the blood dries and everyone has set aside their death-writs, results can be achieved, though rarely unanimously. "Show me a law in Montaigne and I'll show you someone who disagrees with it," the proverb goes.

Since the War of the Cross began, Montaigne has doubled its size. The need for rulers has become increasingly more important, and the wealth of the nobility has expanded proportionately.



Economy

"When the gentry dresses as well as I, then our nation is full, lush, rich and strong. When one sees a merchant do it, it is time for higher taxes."
— Empereur Léon XIV

Montaigne enjoy the highest standard of living in Théah. The tariffs that the royalty imposes on merchants also ensures that the Montaigne treasury is always full. Montaigne consumes and imports more goods, food and raw iron than any other nation. The nobility purchase so much food, crafts, labor and stone that their rate of consumption far exceeds their production and export, thus leaving them in a precarious situation if economic peril should befall them—which has never happened.

Montaigne uses both the soleil (SOL-hey)—named after the imprint of the Montaigne sun—and the Guilder. On newer coins, the back has an impression of l'Empereur in silhouette, while older coins, which are becoming increasingly scarce, have the crossed sword crest of the Musketeers. Throughout Montaigne, merchants and craftsmen accept Guilders and soleils equally; most merchants accept the Guilder, but give out soleils whenever making change.

Military

Years ago, the military of Montaigne was revered as noble and austere, the fighting arm of a world power. In recent years, however, its size has nearly tripled due to conscription, subsequently weakening the families—mostly peasants and farmers—that support the Nation. At the same time its command structure dwindles, and more inexperienced military leaders—including many peasants with natural talent, but no practical knowledge—are being fielded. Few nobles bother to enlist.

The Sun King's losses in Castille proved a poor lesson...for everyone but the rich. Many were made even wealthier off the spoils of war, and few nobles saw their sons and daughters die on foreign soil. It is rumored that l'Empereur himself collected more than half of all the goods that Montaigne seized from Castillian ships captured on the Frothing Bay.

The High Admiral of the Navy is another issue altogether. His name is Alceste Valois de Praisse III, and he is without a doubt the most ostentatious military leader in recent years. Born into nobility, he continues to live a lifestyle of that station. Alceste spends more time in the courts and homes of the other nobles than doing his duty, while assuring l'Empereur that there are no pirate threats nearby. Recently, he has ordered the mighty Montaigne fleet out to patrol "safe" waters, leaving the bay west of Crieux unguarded against plunder or illegal traffic.

The Musketeers

The elite soldiers of Montaigne's military, the Musketeers, fulfill many important roles in the nation, from upholding the law of the king or escorting nobles through dangerous territory, to performing any of a number of tasks for royalty. They swear an oath to l'Empereur of Montaigne upon enlistment and receive a rapier, tabard (front-facing cloak) and musket that establish their authority. The rapier's hilt is specially forged and fitted by royal blacksmiths. The tabard has a royal crest on the front and back, and the musket is made of fine steel and inlaid with pure silver markings and the fleur de lis on the shoulder stock.

Musketeers are chosen by a council of twenty of their prospective peers. The number of Musketeers always remains one thousand. In order to stay fresh, well trained and efficient, old soldiers retire and new soldiers join at the beginning of each spring season.

Each Musketeer will fight to the death to defend the honor of another. Because the Musketeers are so tightly bound to one another, they must have a great deal of trust in the judgment and loyalty of those around them.

The Lightning Guard

L'Empereur's personal guard is known as the Lightning Guard, formed from the greatest of the Musketeers. The guard has lasted for over 600 years, serving l'Empereur exclusively. They are devoted and righteous, incredible duelists and staunch defenders of the royal sovereignty. When necessary, they can also act as couriers, escorts, bodyguards, investigators or regal ambassadors.

Current Relations

Avalon

Though the constant shuffling of government between Montaigne and Avalon has long since settled and commerce across the Montaigne Strait is at an all-time high, long-standing grudges continue between the two nations. Montaigne and Avalon have both moved on to new conflicts, however, and internal struggles within both nations serve to keep these hostilities buried for the moment.

Castille

The people of Montaigne have never respected the Castillians, resenting their booming agriculture and export business and holding the daily siesta in contempt. The Montaigne nobility considered the war to be a righteous cause—a blow against the domineering morality of the Vaticine Church—but even the lower classes felt that the Castillians were undeserving of their riches. Most commoners found the war to be a reasonable response to the insults and indignities the Castillians forced upon Montaigne over years of trade negotiations and border disputes.

Eisen

The Treaty of Weissburg ended open hostilities between Montaigne and Eisen, but the emotions beneath those angry blows remain. The Montaigne have made an enemy of the Eisen, though it may not appear that way to those outside the conflict. Both sides have made a very public display of trading resources with one another, including employing several Eisen generals at the Montaigne training grounds.

Pirate Nations

Montaigne's navy currently spends most of its time defending trade ships from pirates. The Vendel League recently offered to supply additional mercenary ships as escort vessels, but l'Empereur has not acknowledged their offer.

Sarmatian Commonwealth

Peasants voting? Surely, no. Enough with that. Bring the wine.

Ussura

There has been little contact between Montaigne and Ussura. They are distant from one another, for one thing, and it is simply easier to negotiate with other Nations that are closer to Montaigne. Yet...l'Empereur often asks questions of visiting nobles and dignitaries about the Ussuran land and people, hinting that he may pursue another military campaign when he grows tired of his latest artistic endeavors. Some of his generals have suggested he look west or north instead of so far east, but—so far—he has remained noncommittal about his plans.

Vestenmennavenjar

Montaigne maintains contact with Vesten primarily through the League and its economic charters, which regularly strain their resources. Were it not for a series of tariffs set in place by l'Empereur and his council, the constant machinations of the Vendel League might have caused tension between these Nations. Despite their differences, both Montaigne and Vesten agree on one thing: luxury goods are wasted on the rest of Théah when Montaigne is willing to pay so much for the best that the Vendel League has to offer.

Vodacce

Montaigne's trade relations with Vodacce are certainly more agreeable, and profitable, than those with any other nation in Théah, for many reasons. First and foremost, the Montaigne people love items produced by the Vodacce, whom they consider "larger than fashion." Rumors abound, however, that l'Empereur—who has made an enemy of, or alienated, everyone else—is laying the foundation for a future political alliance.



The Sarmatian Commonwealth

"All are equal. Even Kings."

— Lucjan Wyrzyk

To the far south and east lie two kingdoms united by a single crown: what most Théans refer to as "the Sarmatian Commonwealth." In the mid-1500s, the King of Rzeczpospolita (more commonly known as "Rzeplita") was also the Grand Duke of neighboring Curonia. He united the two kingdoms, which also united the aristocracy, leading to a series of compromises, limiting the King's power, and creating a parliament: the Sejm (pronounced like the English "same").

By 1667, the Royal Council of sixteen nobles and Vaticine bishops had become bogged down in corruption and petty politics. The aged and dying King had little power. The Commonwealth was dying. But the King's son found a way to cure the poison coursing through the two Kingdoms: by making all citizens noble. And thus, the Commonwealth has become the Land of Golden Liberty.

Golden Liberty has given every citizen of the Commonwealth the right to vote in the Sejm. This change has caused a dramatic shift in power within the Commonwealth, lifting common peasants to the same relevance as the nobility. Every person has the same voice, the same authority.

Meanwhile, in the darker parts of the Commonwealth, old voices whisper. The dievai—powerful entities lurking in the shadows of forests, crossroads and graveyards—make promises of power to those willing to make a deal.

The Land

Rzeczpospolita's (reh-ZEHKS-pos-poh-lee-tah) climate is usually temperate. The summers are warm and the winters are cold but there always seems to be a chilly wind coming in from the North. Rain is a constant companion during the summer and snow in the winter.

Due to its size, the Commonwealth has many distinct geographical features. Politically, the land is divided into two Nations: Rzeczpospolita in the southwest and Curonia in the northeast. Most of Rzeczpospolita is made up of plains and marshes with forests dotted across the countryside.

The largest river, the Sejm (renamed after the governing body in a unanimous vote fifty years ago), runs the entire length of the Nation. It begins near Sousdal in Ussura, runs down to Bodorigum, south to Wawelec and into Vodacce, providing a fast trade route to the southern waters. After that, the Sejm turns east toward the Bay. Ussura uses the river to transport goods across the Commonwealth, paying hefty fees at every stop. In the northeast, Curonia is almost all marshes, save for the Sandaras Forest, a haunted place that only the most brave ever dare enter.

Culture

The Commonwealth is ruled by a common crown and a kind of parliament called "the Sejm." Until recently, the Sejm was made up of sixteen powerful nobles and Vaticine clergy who gained their power through political maneuvering, commerce and threats of revolt against the King. Eventually, the King signed away many of his rights, granting them to the members of the Sejm. However, all of that has changed.

The most important event in the Commonwealth's history—and one of the most important in Théan history—occurred just eighteen months ago. The Republic stood on the edge of political collapse and for two reasons. First, the Sejm was paralyzed by a rule called *liberum veto*. This allowed any poseł ("envoy," "representative," plural: "posłowie") to kill any legislation, thus cancelling all discussion and the vote. Any poseł could simply announce "Nie pozwalam!" ("I do not allow this!") and all political discussion was over. The poseł introduced the rule to reflect that all within the Sejm were equals, each with an equal say in all matters. Unfortunately, cynicism and political posturing ceased all progress within the Sejm.

The sickly King of the Commonwealth—Stanisław I—lay in his deathbed. His son Stanisław II, the presumed heir, searched for a way to save the Kingdom. He locked himself in the Royal Library, looking for something—anything—that would break the paralysis of the Sejm. A little after midnight, he found it.

Any Royal Decree could be vetoed by the Sejm, save one. The various agreements and treaties took many of the King's liberties away, save one: the right to declare noble title. The Sejm had no right to veto that Decree. And so, the loyal son brought his dying father to the Sejm—carried in his bed by a half-dozen servants—for one last Decree before his death. His father spoke as the secretaries wrote down the King's final words.

His Decree? He announced that *all citizens* of the Commonwealth were now considered noble, granted the title of "Sir" or "Madame." That meant that *every citizen* of the Commonwealth had the right to vote in the Sejm.

With his final Decree, the King turned the Commonwealth into a true democracy. The Sejm had thirty days before the King's final Decree was legal. They could not stop it. And with the thought of *any citizen* having the power to veto *any legislation*, the Sejm quickly—and unanimously—voted to remove the *liberum veto*.

Hours later, King Stanisław survived an attempt on his life thanks to his son and his son's then-fiancée, a Fate Witch from Vodacce. The King still lives, but barely, as his son attempts to raise enough political capital to succeed him.

Now, any citizen of the Commonwealth may travel to the Sejm and vote as they see fit. Not all citizens do, but they all know they can. If the Sejm decides to go to war, the army can show up and vote against it. If the Sejm decides to raise taxes, all the Commonwealth's guildsmen can show up to vote against it. Not since the earliest days of the Empire has Théah seen a true democracy. And the people of the Commonwealth do not hide their pride.

Social Strata

While the Commonwealth still has nobility, the line between noble birth and common birth has been blurred. It isn't gone, you can still see it, but providing the peasant class with the power to vote has changed much in the Commonwealth. Nobility are still powerful, the peasant class is still poor, and the merchant class is still wealthy, but losing the exclusive right to make laws has chipped away at the noble class's standing.

Anyone can walk into the Sejm and call for a vote. *Anyone*. Granted, most of these "common votes" get struck down, but when an entire village shows up to cast their votes, real politics begins. Slowly, very slowly, all the privilege and power the nobility had is beginning to erode, month by month, week by week. Slowly.

The two nations of the Commonwealth have much in common, but are still two different cultures. However, as their union has aged, those two cultures have merged, forming a kind of singular voice.

The largest difference between the two countries is religion. While the Rzeczpospolitan are devoutly Vaticine—to an extreme, in some cases—the Curonian adhere to an older faith, revering ancient spirits and gods. Both the Rzeczpospolitan and Curonians see themselves as holy warriors and

divinely blessed, but the source of that divinity is not the same.

Some Rzeczpospolitan see the Curonians as heathens. Likewise, some Curonians see the Rzeczpospolitan as a people who have betrayed the old gods for a new faith. However, both nations tolerate their differences for the sake of the Commonwealth.

Both nations are highly influenced by their neighbor: the Crescent Empire. The fashions, styles, food and philosophies of this foreign land have had a profound impact on the Commonwealth. Adoption of Crescent trends such as long robes and coats, turbans and elaborate belts have found their way into both the nobility and the common folk. The szabla—the most popular sword of the region—bears a great resemblance to the Crescent scimitar.

Sarmatism

The most significant cultural influence in the Commonwealth is the rise of "Sarmatism," a kind of chivalry inspired by tales of noble and brave people who once ruled Rzeczpospolita. It was seen by many to be little more than a fad among the nobility, but the movement caught on, inspired by a sudden need by the nobility to distinguish themselves from the peasant class. Nobles began wearing clothing that was popular centuries before. Long, fur-trimmed coats called "żupan," high riding boots, a wide, cloth belt called a "pas kontuszowy," thick mustaches for men and long, braided hair for women, and the szabla: a long, curved saber. Top that off with a huge hat with a flamboyant plume and you have your ideal noble Sarmatian.

However, the fad turned out to be more than a fad. Soon, the trend extended to the merchants and peasant class alike. If you can afford only one piece, you'd wear the pas kontuszowy, the dashing cloth belt.

Nobles continued wearing Sarmatian garb for the same reason Numanari Senators wore white togas: to distinguish themselves as honorable and just. "I am not the selfish and corrupt land lord; I am a righteous noble."

And the rest of Rzeczpospolita did the same.

Sarmatian style has infected even the lowest and poorest in the Commonwealth; however, for those who cannot afford to wear such extravagance, the common cotton and wool tunic and trousers are most typical.

In Curonia, Sarmatism has crept its way in, but only so far as inspiring the nobility. The common folk are unimpressed with this custom and keep to their own traditions.

Names

The two Nations of the Commonwealth have their own languages, and thus, their own distinct names.

Female Rzeczpospolita Names: Adelajda, Agnieszka, Aleksandra, Barbara, Beata, Czesława, Dorota, Danuta, Eligia, Elżbieta, Gracja, Grażyna, Hanna, Helena, Ignacja, Janina, Józefa, Katarzyna, Karolina, Lidia, Łucja, Magdalena, Małgorzata, Marianna, Mirosława, Nadzieja, Natalia, Pelagia, Radomiła, Ruta, Sabina, Teodozja, Urszula, Władysława, Zofia, Zyta

Male Rzeczpospolita Names: Aleksander, Anastazy, Andrzej, Bartłomiej, Błażej, Bogumił, Cezary, Czesław, Dariusz, Dawid, Dobromir, Eligiusz, Franciszek, Gaweł, Gracjan, Grzegorz, Henryk, Herakliusz, Ignacy, Ireneusz, Iwo, Izydor, Janusz, Jan, Jarosław, Jerzy, Jeremi, Kajetan, Konrad, Lesław, Maciej, Marceli, Marek, Mirosław, Michał, Piotr, Przemysław, Roch, Seweryn, Teofil, Wacław, Walery, Wielisław, Wojciech, Ziemowit, Zygmunt

Female Curonian Names: Agnė, Aldona, Amalija, Audra, Daina, Daiva, Dalia, Danutė, Emilija, Estera, Gabija, Giedrė, Gintarė, Ieva, Ilona, Jadvyga, Janina, Jelena, Kamilė, Katrė, Laima, Lėja, Lilija, Lina, Liucija, Miglė, Milda, Rasa, Rožė, Rūta, Saulė, Solveiga, Svajonė, Ugnė, Urtė, Valerija, Viltautė



Male Curonian Names: Adomas, Albertas, Andrius, Antanas, Aras, Ąžuolas, Bronislovas, Bronius, Darijus, Daumantas, Erikas, Gabrielius, Giedrius, Gintaras, Gvidas, Herkus, Ignas, Juozapas, Juozas, Jurgis, Kasparas, Kęstutis, Leonas, Matas, Mindaugas, Modestas, Mykolas, Nojus, Petras, Pilypas, Pranciškus, Raimondas, Ramūnas, Valdas, Valdemaras, Viltautas, Visvaldas, Žydrūnas

Currency

In both Rzeczpospolita and Curonia, the common currency is the złoty. Minted at the capital, a złoty can be broken down into one hundred grosz. However, with the Golden Liberty, the Vesten Guilder has come into favor, slowly eclipsing the złoty and grosz.

Food

Meals served on Rzeczpospolita's tables—common and noble alike—are a strange mix of flavors and textures due to its embrace of different cultures. You have traditional dishes from both Nations, recipes from the Crescent Empire and Vodacce, plus tastes from Eisen.

Most traditional dishes use thick cream and eggs, plus an abundance of a special kind of sausage called kiełbasa. Bigos, a hunter's stew, includes meat (for the common folk, often tripe), sauerkraut and cabbage. A sour rye stew called żurek is also popular. In fact, soups are a huge part of the traditional Rzeczpospolita meal. And then, there are pierożki: a small, personalized fried bun filled with spiced meat. These have become particularly popular in both Castille and Montaigne.

Curonian cuisine has much in common with its neighbor, although it has tastes all its own. Potato and pork are the most common ingredients, as well as dumplings. Cepelianai is a favorite dumpling recipe, often stuffed with ground beef, cottage cheese and mushrooms.

Cranberries are a popular export and new to Théan palates. Lingonberry jam has proven so popular in Avalon courts and countrysides that Queen Elaine has sent ships to the Commonwealth for the sole purpose of bringing back as many bottles as possible.

Religion

The Vaticine Church has been a major power in Rzeczpospolita since the 14th Century; however, despite its best efforts, it has not been able to wipe away the "superstitious nonsense" of the land's ancient beliefs. But the Commonwealth has been stalwart holding on to those ancient traditions. While there are many churches, all trying to do good work and spread the word, the vast majority of people hold to their beliefs in ancient and powerful entities.

And so, the Commonwealth holds a kind of strange syncretism. On one hand, the people are devout Vaticines. But on the other, they still maintain their old faith. The reason? Their gods are still walking among them. Not in some abstract way, not in some symbolic way.

One of them could walk through your door this afternoon.

The Dievai

The Rzeczpospolita Vaticine priests and priestesses call them "czorts," a word that can be translated as "demons." However, most of the Commonwealth uses the Curonian word for them: "dievai." A word that could be translated as "gods."

(The singular form of the word is "dievas.")

The Church has attempted to convert these "gods" into saints or demons, depending on the overall disposition of the entity, and has been successful to a small extent. But outside the safe walls of the cathedral, everyone knows these things are neither saint nor demon.

Ambrose Davidson, an Avalonian scholar who visited the Commonwealth, was astounded by the resemblance between the dievai and the Sidhe. "This is more than mere coincidence," he wrote. "Avalon legends speak of a lost 'unseelie' (unholy) court of Sidhe. Perhaps here is where they got themselves lost."

When looked at closely, the entities do resemble Avalon's Sidhe, but nuance makes the difference. Most of the Sidhe are like thunderstorms—destructive, but impersonal. The dievai are anything but impersonal. They disguise themselves as mortals, become companions and lovers of heroes, only revealing themselves when discovered. They walk the roads, enter castles and homes, break bread, drink and consort with

mortals all the time. One can never tell if a stranger is human or something else. Best to be cautious and polite.

Curonian Paganism

The Curonians do not so much worship the dievai, but recognize them for what they are: powerful entities that can change your life on a whim. Curonian faith has no official hierarchy; there is no high priestess or hierophant. Each town or village has a priest or priestess: someone who knows the proper rituals and procedures for dealing with the spirit world. A priest or priestess holds their position because of the knowledge they possess, not any supernatural power.

However, because of that knowledge, the clergy are most likely to have supernatural gifts gained because of deals and bargains made with the dievai. And that is the most common interaction with the dievai: bargains. (The Curonian word is "sanderis.") "Deals with devils," the Vaticine Church often calls them. For some reason, perhaps if only for entertainment, the dievai are always seeking an opportunity to wager, bargain or trade extraordinary powers with humans… but always with a cost. A dievai deal can involve losing something as simple as your hair or as costly as your first-born child. Perhaps you must serve the dievai for a year and a day or be forced to carry a silver sword that seems to have a will—and agenda—of its own.

The Church regards dealing with these entities highly dangerous to both the body and soul; however, there is little it can do. The people have dealt with the dievai for hundreds of years before the Church showed up and declared them sinful. Villages have relationships and traditions with the dievai going back generations. Destroying such tradition takes time. More time than the Church is willing to give. And thus, priests and priestesses have reluctantly accepted the dievai as part of their own lives. The clergy may not like it, but there's little else they can do about it.

Government

The Sejm is a collection of nobles and clergy who have a powerful voice in the destiny of the Commonwealth. However, after Golden Liberty, *every citizen* has that same voice. This knocked the nobility on its heels, forcing them to consider every vote the people bring forward. In fact, there is a new position in the capital: the stróż ("watchman"). The stróż is a commoner sitting in the Sejm, watching all the action. If a vote comes up, he rushes out of the building and rings a bell, informing all within the city that voting has begun. The stróż is an unofficial position, but after two attempts to sneak votes in the middle of the night, the people of the capital felt it was a necessary position. Commoners work in shifts to make certain there is always a stróż in the capital. Just in case.





The King

The King of the Commonwealth is the least powerful monarch in Théah. He serves as the Nation's ambassador, establishing embassies in other Nations while his castle serves as the chief residence for the ambassadors from other countries. He may make laws, but the Sejm can veto them with a simple majority. Of course, a "simple majority" is a little more complicated than when the Sejm had just 16 members. (See *The Sejm* below for more details.) The King also has the power to grant noble title, but with every citizen currently having noble title, that power has become extraneous.

The King's power is limited by the Walezy Articles, signed by the King and the Sejm in the mid-1500s. They stated:

The King is chosen by the Sejm; his offspring does not inherit the throne.

The King may not make new laws or taxes without the Sejm's approval.

The King's marriages must be approved by the Sejm.

The King may not dissolve the Sejm.

The King must create a royal advisory board who shall be present to oversee his decisions.

The King may not declare war without approval of the Sejm.

The King must provide for a standing army.

The King must protect the religious freedom of all citizens.

The King may be removed from office with a majority vote of the Sejm.

The Old King is a good man and a fair ruler, but his time in this life is nearly over. The people adore his son, the Prince of the Commonwealth, and have already taken to calling him Stanisław II in anticipation of his selection by the Sejm. But so little is certain in these turbulent times, and the Prince has many enemies.

Stanisław II was recently married to a Vodacce woman named Domenica Vespucci. Domenica was part of the party responsible for saving the Old King's life after his Decree establishing Golden Liberty. She is a Fate Witch, and while some in the Commonwealth doubt her motives for marrying the Prince, both father and son trust her with their lives and the lives of their people

The Sejm

The Sejm is a two-house parliament divided into the upper house (the *Senat*, or "Senate") and the lower house (the *Izba Poselska*, or "House of Deputies"). The upper house is made up of the original Sejm before the pronouncement of Golden Liberty. These are the "old nobles" who controlled the Commonwealth, and to be frank, many of them view the lower house as "the lesser house"—and even refer to it as such.

The *Izba Poselska* is made up of the "new nobility," those granted title by Golden Liberty. It has no official number and must be called into order by the King. Also, the King acts as the moderator of the lower house, recognizing the right to speak. The Old King believed that he would pass quickly after his Decree, leaving the next King to preside over the lower house. While many are happy the King still lives, he is often unable to call the house to order.

Laws can originate in either house, but both houses must pass the law with a majority vote. This makes things complicated. The lower house generally doesn't like passing legislation from the upper house and vice versa. In order to get a new law passed, the opposing house usually rewrites a bill, attaching new legislation, ensuring both houses get what they want.

Slachta

After an attempt on the Old King's life, the *Senat* insisted both they and the King have bodyguards. At first, Stanisław refused. "We are no different than any other," he said. "And our position does not lift us above the rights of others." After lengthy debate, the King acquiesced to the idea, but only under certain conditions. And thus, the *Senat* and Stanisław resurrected the concept of the *slachta*.

In old Rzeczpospolita, the slachta were an order of knights devoted to honor and protecting the King and the Sejm. Those who carry this title in modern times swear to act in accordance to those ancient ideals, not only protecting the Crown and the Sejm, but *all* of Rzeczpospolita.

The ancient order of knights was reborn first in the Sejm itself, making the officers knights with sacred duties. From the Sejm's knights, the King chooses six to serve as his personal guard. Now, the Sejm use the slachta as goodwill ambassadors, promoting justice and Golden Liberty beyond Rzeczpospolita's borders.

Military

While both nations contribute to the Commonwealth's military, Curonia provides about a third of the army's total force. An atypical force, the army is made up of mostly volunteers, serving to protect the Commonwealth from its enemies. It is the largest standing army in Théah. Because of its many encounters with the Crescent Empire and Ussuran forces, it is also one of the most unconventional, relying on speed and movement rather than brute force.

The most famous regiment in the army is its cavalry: the winged hussars ("*husaria*"). The hussars are, without a doubt, the most dreaded cavalry in Théah. Armed with lances, sabers and their distinctive winged chest plates, they charge into battle with absolute fearlessness. With plumes and streamers and actual feathered wings, a line of hussars makes an intimidating sight. So intimidating, they have charged against armies five times their size, sending their enemies screaming from the battlefield.

The most common weapon used by officers is the *szabla*, otherwise known as the Rzeplitan saber. Inspired by the Crescent scimitar, it is a one-edged, curved, one-handed weapon designed for speed. The tip, called the *pióro* ("feather") is double-edged. The szabla is a symbol of honor and distinction in the Commonwealth; originally worn only by the nobility, it has become a symbol of its solidarity, carried by nobles and commoners alike. However, the people of the Commonwealth do not view wearing the szabla as a right. It is a distinction that must be earned. A distinction that must be maintained. Not just anyone may wear it. Only those who show true courage, fidelity and honor.

Current Relations

The Commonwealth's relations with its neighbors are delicate to say the least. Sudden and turbulent political reform can cause neighbors to worry.

Avalon

Because of geographical distance, the Commonwealth has little interaction with the Glamour Isles; however, this has emboldened the activities of Elaine's privateers, giving them the courage to raid the southern seas. The ageing King paid little attention to their

raids, but Stanisław II has hired mercenary ships to guard the Commonwealth's trade routes, ensuring the Sea Dogs meet with cannon fire when they try to capture merchant vessels.

Some suggested the Prince of the Commonwealth seek Elaine's hand in marriage. It would have been a great match: two great nations united. Stanisław II considered the option but carried out his father's wishes to marry a Vodacce woman. The Prince knows Elaine's situation is just as perilous as his and hopes he can convince her to at least make a political alliance now that marriage is out of the question. However, the Prince often suspected it might have never been a legitimate question in the first place.

Castille

Castille is closer to the Commonwealth than Avalon in many ways. Half the Commonwealth is devoutly Vaticine, perhaps more devout than any other nation in Théah. Trade between the two countries is strong, bolstered by access through the southern seas. King Stanisław has openly supported the Church on many occasions, although even he is reluctant to openly support the Inquisition. The Church's more recent activities have caused him to pause on many occasions.

Eisen

The Commonwealth refused to participate in the War of the Cross…until it came across the border. Then, both Curonian and Rzeplitan soldiers fought the invading armies, pushing them north and west, back into Eisen. More than a few disobeyed orders and continued fighting, looting and raiding the already ruined country. Needless to say, tensions still exist.

Montaigne

King Stanisław is not impressed with the Sun King. He hears about the oppression of the Montaigne people, the wanton poverty, the abuses…everything Golden Liberty stands against. His nation has diplomatic relations with Montaigne and both countries have embassies, but King Stanisław seldom sees Montaigne's envoy. She's too busy drinking, flirting and attending lavish parties held by the Commonwealth's wealthier aristocracy.

Pirate Nations

The Commonwealth has a mixed relationship with La Bucca. For years, the King used Buccaneers to protect his trade ships. "Pay them now or pay them later," was his attitude. Now with the King near death, the Sejm has taken a dimmer view: "Buccaneers and pirates are all the same! Negotiating with pirates is like negotiating with your own kidnapper."

Ussura

Because Ussura has no warm-water ports, they must rely on others for overseas trade. Among that list of "others" is the Commonwealth. Ussura is one of the Commonwealth's most important trade partners. Couple that with both nations' proximity to the Crescent Empire and Cathay, and you can quickly understand the tight political bond between Ussura and the Commonwealth.

Vestenmennavenjar

Stanisław I is forward-thinking enough to recognize that the Guilder is the path to the future. A single unit of commerce used all across the world, easing trade and thus making diplomacy easier? Yes, yes, a thousand times yes. Plus, the Vesten are far enough away to not be a military threat.

Vodacce

Złoczyńca na Zachodzie. "The Villain of the West." That is how the Commonwealth addresses their neighbor. Vodacce holds an iron grip over southern sea trade and it seems they will never give it up. So long as Vodacce maintains their tyrannical hold over the southern seas, they will always be at odds with the Commonwealth. However, using the famous Merchant Princes against each other has been a reliable strategy so far. The Old King knew how to do that, but as he has grown older, as his wits have dimmed, his successes have faded into failures. Stanisław II—should he win the throne—has this challenge before him. Establish new relationships with the Vodacce Princes, discover their petty jealousies, and turn those against them. It is a dangerous strategy, but the alternative is costly. Too costly.



Ussura

"You share the warmth or die from the cold."
— common Ussuran proverb

From its high and snowy peaks to the inland sea and the rolling lowland, the common folk of Théah look out across Ussura (oo-SOO-rah) with pity and contempt. Her religion is backwards, they say, and her people uneducated. They dance under a blazing moon beside wide rivers, and never give a thought to civilized codes of conduct. Furthermore, the nobles act as poorly as their peasants. It is certain: Ussura has no future.

But as they speak, their eyes hint of fear, and when they pass within sight of the snow-filled landscape, even the bravest merchant lowers his voice. For the forests of Ussura can hear every word.

Late at night when the wind wails down from the mountains and rushes through the thick trees, families gather around the fireplace and tell stories of "the Leshiye." Ancient spirits who grant both blessings and curses. The greatest of them all is Matushka, she who stalks the forest with a broom in her hand, and if she finds young children wandering out of their homes, she sweeps them back with a quick "Tsk, tsk." If they don't treat her with the proper respect, she pops them in her black pot and turns them into stew.

Ussura is not a kind land. It is not a gentle land. But its people have kind, gentle and humble hearts, made so by the harsh lessons they've learned from Ussura's winter.

The Land

Ussura is covered in snow and ice nearly year round. When it isn't covered in snow, it's covered in mud. One visiting scholar wrote, "The Ussurans do not live in the present, but five hundred years in the past." There are no working roads, dams or any other structure resembling modern architecture—or even antiquated architecture for that matter. Even their huts and hovels are primitive compared to the shacks of Théah's more fortunate peasantry.

But if you talk to the Ussurans, they don't feel like they're living in a frozen wilderness. In fact, they look well fed. If you look closely enough, Ussura isn't the wasteland it first appears to be. The people produce crops in land that should not support them, have surprising luck with their traps, and haul up catches big enough to make any Avalon fisher turn green with envy.

To those not native to Ussura, the land can seem actively malicious. Wild game is never found. Berries and mushrooms inevitably make the trespasser ill, and landmarks seem to change of their own accord. Meanwhile, Ussurans stroll through the chaos and wonder why people of other nationalities consider theirs a harsh, inhospitable land. After all, Matushka provides everything they need, and if she is sometimes hard, it is only because she wants her children to be strong.

The People

Ussurans are a short, broad people, and the commoners typically possess dark hair and eyes. Only the nobility—specifically those chosen by Grandmother Winter—bear the emerald green eyes of the Gift. Ussuran men usually grow long beards and wear their hair long; the women pull their hair back, and married women usually cover their hair with a cloth wrap known as a babushka. Across classes and genders, Ussuran complexion is pale, and they quickly redden after a few drinks. Others Théans sometimes mock their appearance as cartoonish: their noses are bulbous, and they have thick, stubby fingers that callus easily.

How do the Ussurans survive so well in a snow-covered land? "The question is a good one, but the answer is better," said a famous Ussuran traveler. "The land cares for us, and we care for the land."

The statement is truer than the rest of Théah may imagine. In Ussura, the land itself is alive, rippling through the seasons with joy and fertility and fighting alongside its people in time of war.

This is not to imply that trees bring fruit on command or that an Ussuran farmer's life is less difficult than farmers in any land. Rather, it shows that the land listens to her people—and rewards them for good deeds, as well as punishes them for bad. If an Ussuran farmer works hard throughout the year, and strives to place his duties before his own selfish desires, he will be rewarded. No matter how harsh the year, his crops will grow and his family will be fed.

No invasion of Ussura has ever marched beyond the first river. Barbarian hordes from Cathay died of plague and starvation. Enterprising warriors of Eisen often speak harshly of General Johann von der Velde, who led them in an attack on Ussura's southernmost province in the year 523. The army was found after the snows melted—buried by an ice storm that began in the middle of summer.

Practical, honest and forthright statements such as this are the bread and butter of Ussuran philosophy. "If it works, why meddle with it?" could be their national slogan.

Social Strata

The people in Ussura form two primary classes: the muzhik (moo-ZHIK) and the boyars (BOY-arz). The muzhik are the peasants, while the boyars are the landowners in Ussura: they collect a portion of the muhzik's crops in return for letting them use the land.

Among the muzhik, the largest and strongest typically receive the most respect. Contests of physical prowess often occur in rural villages: everything from arm wrestling to footraces to tug-of-war. Women are not excluded from these contests by any means, but they tend to prefer games where their superior stamina helps make up for their lack of brawn.

The status of a boyar has more to do with how much land he owns than how strong he is. Certainly, there is status to be won at the local fairs by winning a contest or two, but a boyar who owns only a small parcel of land will never be as powerful as one who owns hundreds of acres.

At the top is the royal family: the most powerful boyars in Ussura. The head of the royal household is called the Czar (taken from a title in the Old Republic) or Czarina. The title is inherited from one generation to the next and can change from family to family depending on political and military power.

Clothing

The Ussurans wear long, warm clothes called "caftan," tightly buckled around the waist and often layered to keep out the cold.

Those who can afford luxuries (i.e., the boyars) are inclined to dye their clothing in bright oranges and reds. Boyars who actively own and manage land always wear bright red boots to show their station.

Food

The typical muzhik diet includes foods such as cabbage soup, turnips, garlic, pickled cucumbers and jams. Bread is served at every meal. Much of an Ussuran's diet consists of unleavened bread; the most popular type is known as khleb.

Eggs and milk are far more plentiful than meat, which is typically eaten only when the muzhik has time to trap or hunt. Mushrooms are highly valued, and dried and preserved for use through the long winters.

Customs

The short summers and long, inhospitable winters dictate the Ussurans' lifestyle. They work feverishly in the summer, trying to bring in their harvest before the first frosts settle on the fields. In the winter, they spend most of their time inside their small houses, seated on or near the stoves that form the center of their households. They possess a great love of alcohol, and spend much of the winter in the drunken revelry that makes these long periods of isolation bearable.

Most "heavy" or important talking is done over spiced tea (called chay) at the kitchen table, the undisputed center of the Ussuran home. Most Ussurans have a central, wood-burning stove in the kitchen called a pechka, and a guest is often invited to sleep on its upper reaches to keep warm.

On the last day of the week, all the muzhik take two hours out of their daily schedule in the morning to worship Matushka (while giving thanks to the Prophet) at the village altar. Typically, the most learned man in the village leads the ceremony; most villages can't afford actual priests.

The most important day of the year for any Ussuran is Rebirth Day, the third day of Corantine. It celebrates the anniversary of their bargain with Matushka. On this day, every Ussuran, even the smallest child, has his or her left thumb pricked with a needle and spills a drop of blood on the ground to help nourish Matushka. The day is then usually spent in prayer and song.

During the winter, families stay indoors most of the time, relaxing, telling stories, visiting neighbors, drinking and playing games. Since Squares was introduced to Ussura, it has become very popular, allowing a bored family to while away several hours at a stretch.

Etiquette

Ussura is deadly cold, and villages are often separated by walks of two weeks or more. As a result, no Ussuran refuses hospitality to anyone who enters the village except under the most extreme circumstances. Refusing to give a traveler some food and let him warm himself up by the stove is tantamount to murdering him. This gives rise to the Ussuran reputation for generosity.

An Ussuran will not hesitate to share his food, camp, liquor or even tent with a fellow traveler in need. He will be gravely insulted if not shown similar courtesy, however; it would be like telling him that you don't care whether he lives or dies. Ussurans traveling in other countries have often been gravely insulted when asked to pay for a meal they assumed was hospitality. Such arguments often end in fistfights, giving the Ussurans a reputation of hot-headedness.



Table manners are casual, and the Ussurans have a relaxed attitude towards nudity. Their steam baths are communal. Bathers strip before entering, rush inside out of the cold, sweat in the heat as long as they can stand it, and then run outside again to rub themselves down with handfuls of snow or jump in an icy stream before drying off and redressing. People from other Nations who witness this ritual often stand open-mouthed in astonishment, not only at the casual attitude towards stripping in front of strangers, but also at their tremendous ability to withstand such brutal treatment.



Art and Music

Ussurans are famous for their wooden miniatures. They have been known to spend days crafting a single hand for a doll that stands no bigger than a man's thumb. Their work is minutely detailed, and often so precise that foreigners cannot see the seams where the tiny parts join together. Every year in the town of Siev an enormous contest is held and wood carvers from all over Ussura enter their finest pieces in the competition. The prizes are donated by the boyars attending the contest, and while they vary wildly from one year to the next, they are always worth the trip. Last year's grand prize was an exquisite sleigh with four fine dogs to pull it. The year before that, the winner received twenty acres of land and was made a minor boyar.

Ussuran music is loud and boisterous, and often a bit off-key: the communal experience is more important than the beauty of the song itself. Most of the songs are spirituals that praise the land. A few children's songs tell stories about the most common fairy tales, such as the tale of the head of the Riasanova family who acquired the ability to transform into the Firebird. The truth of the song remains to be seen.

Names

In Ussura, family names may be long, convoluted, and peculiar. When a common muzhik's child is born, he or she receives a first (or "Prophet's") name, such as Pavel.

Each child's last name is a modification of the father's name (in this case, Ivan). The ending -ova (or -ovna) on a surname denotes a daughter, such as Ivanova (daughter of Ivan). In a similar fashion, the name ending -ov denotes a first son: Ivanov. The ending -vich denotes a second, or lesser, son.

It is common practice to add the name of the town or village as a middle name for the child, so that his or her home becomes part of his or her identity.

Using the fictional Ivan of Ekatnava as an example, his children might be named:

First Son: Pavel ✦ Ekatnava ✦ Ivanov

Second Son: Nikolay ✦ Ekatnava ✦ Ivanovich

Any Further Sons: First Name ✦ Ekatnava ✦ Ivanovich

First Daughter: Makhaia ✦ Ekatnava ✦ Ivanova

Any Further Daughters: First Name ✦ Ekatnava ✦ Ivanova

When Pavel marries, his wife, Iviana Brislav Petrovna, adds his name to her own, using the additional surname ending -tova, and would become Iviana Brislav Petrovna Paveltova.

The firstborn son of Pavel, Aleksei, would use his own father's name as his surname, and thus would be Aleksei Ekatnava Pavelov.

Boyars use a simplified variant of the common naming practice. While they alter their surname to conform to their parent's name, they sometimes use their mother's first name as their surname instead. They almost always choose the parent with the higher social standing.

No matter who the parents are, each boyar's child uses their familial title at the end of the surname, noting that he or she descends from one of the five leaders of the original Knias. Appropriately, the surname created by the original Knias member (Novgorov, Vladimirovich, Pietrov, Riasanova and Pscov) has become the familial surname, prefixed by the modifier 'v' (of). Thus, a wealthy boyar's child of good lineage might have the name Mikhail Ekatnava Elizavetov v'Riasanova.

Common Male Names: Aleksei, Alexandr, Boris, Dimitri, Danil, Erema, Fyodor, Georgi, Ignati, Ilya, Kiril, Mikhail, Nikita, Pyotyr, Sergei, Taras, Timofey, Vasily, Vladimir, Yevgeni

Common Female Names: Agafya, Anna, Avdotia, Darya, Ekaterina, Elizaveta, Galina, Irina, Ksenya, Larisa, Ludmila, Lyuba, Marya, Nina, Natalya, Natasha, Nastasya, Olga, Sofia, Tamara, Yelena, Yevpraskia, Zhanna

Religion

The Ussuran Orthodox Church is the state religion, combining the First Prophet's words with the native Ussuran reverence of the Leshiye. Most of the attention goes to the chief matron of the pantheon, the entity known as "Matushka."

Matushka is said to appear as an ancient, matronly woman with iron teeth and nails. Children must be polite if they should encounter her, for she devours rude little boys and girls. She brooks no impertinence, but generously rewards those who treat her with respect. Ussurans feel that nature serves as a guide to proper behavior, and visitors who don't understand this aspect of their religion often find themselves utterly confused by some of the Ussuran customs.

The Orthodoxy ignores the Second and Third Prophets entirely, feeling that their messages went against the intent of the First Prophet. After all, things had been going so well; what reason was there for them to change? This decision put them at odds with the rest of the Vaticine Church, so there has been little contact between them since the coming of the Second Prophet.

The Leshiye

The Leshiye are the nature spirits of Ussuran folklore made manifest. Ancient and powerful, they roam Ussura's countryside, giving both blessings and curses to the worthy and unworthy. Encountering the Leshiye is always dangerous, even if the one in question is generally considered beneficent. They are known for rewarding the wise and punishing those who do not show proper respect. Once thought of as gods, the Ussuran people now recognize them as… something else.

The Orthodox Church incorporates their existence with faith in the Prophet, a kind of syncretism that other Nations see as bizarre. The Ussurans, however, cannot deny the existence of something that lives beside them every day. They are faithful followers of the Prophet, and at the same time, recognize the power of the Leshiye.

While there are countless Leshiye throughout Ussura, a few are more prominent than others.

Matushka, appearing as an ancient, withered crone with iron teeth who flies through the sky in a mortar, wielding a pestle, is the most revered. The Ussurans see her as "Grandmother Winter," both cruel and giving. Children are warned to call her "Little Grandmother" if they encounter *any* old woman on the road and to treat her with the utmost dignity and respect. Those who do are often rewarded. Those who do not end up in her pot.

Chernobog—otherwise known as "the Shadow on the Mountain"—seems to be Matushka's counterpart. Both wicked and cruel, he seems to only bestow curses on those who disturb him. The Ussurans believe he lives at the top of a mountain, casting lightning down on the unfortunate. Chernobog does not reward the



worthy, nor does he tolerate tricksters. His wrath is sudden and merciless and best to be avoided at all costs.

The Forest Walker Borovoi is a tall, thick entity with grass for a beard and teeth. It has been known to aid lost travelers or lead them deeper into the forest, depending on how they treat him.

Vir'ava is known as the Mother of the Wood and may be Matushka's younger sister or possibly her daughter—different stories give different relationships. Possibly, both are true. While she is never seen with Borovoi, the two may also be husband and wife. She is more charitable than Borovoi, although if offended, she has been known to lead strangers into caves with sleeping bears.

Government

The Czar

The Czar, Keeper of the Knias Council, rules Ussura and his word is law. Some say Matushka will not allow a Czar to remain in power unless she approves of his actions. When the Czar dies, the Council respects a brief period of mourning, but then there is a rush to fill the political vacuum. There is no guarantee the Czar's children will inherit his title: they must prove they can provide the same strength and leadership. Ussura is currently in the middle of such a struggle.

The old Czar was a widower who disowned his eldest son, Ilya Sladivgorod Nikolovich. The Czar remarried a young Eisen princess, Ketheryna Fischler Dimitritova, hoping she would provide a new heir. Unfortunately, the Czar died under mysterious circumstances, and now, both Ilya and Ketheryna are vying for the title.

The Knias Douma

The Knias Douma is technically a council of advisors to the Czar. Under normal circumstances, the Douma usually holds the real power in Ussura. However, with everything in flux, nobody holds the true power. With only a few exceptions, the boyar families have become quite adept at manipulating the Czar over the years. There are five positions on the Knias Douma, each permanently held by a powerful boyar family.

The first position goes to the Novgorov (NOHV-goh-rohv) family, leaders of the province of Rurik. They control much of the trade in the far north-western portion of Ussura, primarily conducted with the Vendel League. The sigil of their family is the Great Wolf, king of all wolves. This is the most prestigious position on the council, given to the descendant of ancient Arch-Duke Novgorov (the man who created the Knias Douma and unified the Ussuran city-states). As the premier family, the Novgorovs always have leave to cast their vote last when the Council makes a decision. Their province, Rurik, is the most populated region of the country and contains the Ussuran capital, Pavtlow.

The current leader of the Novgorov family is young prince Aleksi Pavtlow Markov v'Novgorov. Because of his lack of ambition and his unpredictable mood swings, he does not currently lead the Knias.

The second position goes to the Vladimirovich (vlahd-ee-MEER-oh-vich) family of Veche. The sigil of this family is the Grandfather Bear, the largest and fiercest bear alive. The principality of Veche is the second-largest region in Ussura, but one of the most sparsely populated. Its largest city, Siev, is a hub of political and mercantile activity. Both Veche and Somojez conduct limited trade with the Empire of the Crescent Moon; this rivalry has strained relations on the Knias Douma in the past.

The third seat on the council goes to the Pscov (PIS-kov) family of Somojez. They control a lengthy portion of Ussura just to the east of Eisen, although their influence extends deep into the heart of Ussura. They've absorbed a bit of the Eisen culture into their family, and hold an armored drachen as their family sigil. Their province contains some of the most beautiful monasteries and reliquaries in all of Ussura, although many lie within the mountain range Sorivdgrastov just to the north of the province, and are fiercely guarded by the Pscov.

Many of the Pscov nobility also descend from Grand Duke Vsevolod, sainted for his work with the Church in Ussura. The Pscov family prefers the title of "Tabularius," or "Guardian of the Faith." The Orthodoxy is very strong in this region of Ussura, with many churches, holy sites, and loud festivals celebrating the Ussuran religion.

The Riasanova (REE-ah-sah-noh-vah) family of Gallenia holds the fourth seat of the Knias Douma. They control the southeastern portion of Ussura, and trade occasionally with the few Cathayans that have made the journey west. The sigil of their family is the legendary Firebird, an enormous hawk whose feathers glow more brightly than any candle. Although the Riasanova are the smallest family in the Knias, their members are known for their ferocity and tenacity.

The Pietrov (pee-EH-trohv) family of Molhynia holds the last seat of the Knias Douma. They control all of northernmost Ussura, and conduct only a small amount of trade. The head of the family is a disturbing figure known as Koshchei; his flesh has a waxy pallor to it that reminds some of a corpse. Add to this the whispers that he has held the Molhynia family seat since the creation of the council centuries ago, and it's easy to see why so many wild rumors surround him. The sigil of the Pietrov family is modest: a large raven against a setting sun.

Economy

Most of Ussura's exports are furs. There is also a strong trade in honey and beeswax. As for imports, Ussurans mostly purchase spices, various types of alcohol and steel. The boyars oversee this trade and have an income comfortably greater than even the hardest-working muzhik.

Most of the commerce inside Ussura is conducted in barter, since no centralized coinage has yet been adopted. The Guilder has started to worm its way into the country, but unscrupulous traders often misrepresent its value, leaving the Ussurans a little distrustful. As they are wont to say, "My family cannot eat money."

Military

Invading armies who march on Ussura usually meet with disaster. Vast legions from the Crescent Empire died of plague and starvation; troops from Cathay still refuse to march west into Ussura after failed invasions in the late 800s. Eisen soldiers, in particular, still reminisce about General Idun von der Velde—grandson of General Johann von der Velde—who tried to overcome his grandfather's failure to take Ussura in 523. His army fared no better.

No Standing Army

Ussura hasn't needed a standing army for centuries. Most boyars still maintain small home guards, and the Czar has his stelets, but otherwise there is no Ussuran army. There isn't a navy, either, unless you count the fishing fleet that sails Grumfather Bay.

Superstitions

Despite their practical bent and solid intelligence, Ussurans are plagued by numerous superstitions, designed to remove bad "blessings" and other plagues. For years the Ussuran people have practiced simple, native cures to their ills, both mental and spiritual. This often leads to ridicule from other nations, but the people of Ussura hold their beliefs dear:

The birth of a child is celebrated by planting a tree. This tree grows as the child does, and if it flourishes, Ussurans believe the child will flourish as well. An old Ussuran legend tells of a mother whose son went to war, and on the day of his death, his child-tree instantly withered and died.

In Somojez, the children throw their baby teeth on the roof of their cottage and ask Grandmother Winter to give them an iron tooth in exchange.

Flowers in even numbers are reserved for funerals or tragedies. Odd numbers suffice at all other times. Hence, the Théan tradition of giving a young lady a dozen roses would scare an Ussuran greatly, and even be considered a threat against her life.

Every home in Ussura is believed to have a domovoi, or gentle spirit who guards it. Many times, this spirit is as much a prankster as a friend, and it lives in the pechka oven at the center of the home. The domovoi bothers the house's inhabitants, steals an occasional sock, and sometimes misplaces the knife, but it is generally a friendly spirit.

Current Relations

Avalon

The Ussurans think the Avalons are great fun to have around. Their tricks delight like few other things. Of course, an Avalon who uses his abilities to rob or cheat an Ussuran is liable to gain a more persistent enemy than he anticipated. Ussurans have long memories.

Castille

"Although you Castillians are somewhat pig-headed, you have your hearts in the right place," a minor boyar once said to a visiting Castillian Bishop. It sums up the Ussuran opinion of the Castillians quite nicely.

Eisen

"There is something wrong with the land," is the general consensus among Ussurans on Eisen. Since they tend to equate a people's land with the people themselves, the Ussurans keep a careful watch on any Eisen they meet, half-convinced that he could go mad.

Montaigne

Ussurans have nothing but contempt for the Montaigne nobles. The use of Porté near an Ussuran causes him physical pain, and the Montaignes' callous disregard for others disgusts him.

Pirate Nations

Ussurans are unbothered by pirates. The only fleet Ussura has is a fishing fleet that sails on the Bay.

Sarmatian Commonwealth

A dangerous, backward, progressive, superstitious, overly pious gathering of conflicting ideals. Best to avoid them. Anyone clever enough to trick a demon is clever enough to trick you.

Vestenmennavenjar

The Ussurans are very pleased with their relationship with the Vendel League. Through their interactions with the League, they have been able to acquire so many new things, such as steel and spices.

Vodacce

Vodacce is a confusing and dangerous place for an Ussuran to find himself, and the Fate Witches are not to be trifled with.



Vestenmennavenjar

"Two hundred years ago, they raided and pillaged without mercy. The only thing that's changed? They pounded their swords into coins."

— Fiona Costa

They were once the most feared pirates in the north seas. The Northmen, sailing from their frozen lands to the south with sword and fire, taking what they wanted, leaving what they didn't need. But then the people of Vestenmennavenjar (VES-ten-mahn-NAH-ven-yar) underwent a change. In fact, you might call it a transformation.

Over the centuries, the ruling noble class—the jarls—controlled Vestenmennavenjar, but during the 15th Century, the noble class found itself short of funds. Like mainland Théah, the nobility was land rich but cash poor. At the same time, the merchant class—the carls—needed protection against pirates and bandits. The carls banded together to create an informal confederation to protect their shipments and investments. The confederation put its headquarters in the city of Vendel, a well-known and well-used trade port.

The local jarl, Eindridi Utterstrom, saw potential in the idea. Utterstrom was one of the most powerful and famous Vesten nobles, but lost all three of his sons the previous winter in a battle against another jarl. He had fallen into a deep depression. When the merchants came to the jarl's castle asking for assistance (with compensation, of course), Utterstrom's advisor, Inger Holmstrom, spent three days convincing his lord to accept their offer. Trade without violence. Coins in the pocket without ever drawing a sword. Literally, money for nothing. Utterstrom had always been a supporter of the arts—the chief reason the confederation chose Vendel and Utterstrom in the first place—and after many, many hours, he agreed to provide the protection the merchants sought.

Two hundred years later, Utterstrom's investment paid off in ways he could have never anticipated.

The titles of "carl" and "jarl" still remain in Vestenmennavenjar, but they mean different things. No longer is the noble caste atop the merchant caste, looking down. Rather, they stand side by side. And Vestenmennavenjar has become an economic kingdom stretching across the world.

Now, Vestenmennavenjar is one of the greatest economic powers in Théah, if not the greatest. Sponsored by the jarls, organized by the carls and powered by an economic force called the "Guilder."

The most important development in Vesten's history has been the formation of the Vendel League. Formed in the city it was named after, the League is a conglomeration of merchants and craftsmen of not only Vendel, but of the entirety of Théah. Nearly



every Nation has adopted the League's currency, the Guilder, making Vesten a world power nearly overnight. They are still the northmen. They are still raiding the treasures of foreign lands. But now, they're doing it with a smile and a handshake.

There has been no real "high king" (Mjötuðr) of Vestenmennavenjar for at least two centuries. Warring nobles claimed the title, but none kept it for very long. Now, the Vendel League—the most powerful merchants in Vestenmennavenjar—controls the Nation's destiny. The jarls still exist and serve as Vestenmennavenjar's military force, also keeping the peace within the Nation's borders, almost like Avalon's sheriffs, but with much more distinction.

The culture's change has merged the warrior and the merchant into a single entity, both figuratively and literally. They are now seen as two sides of the same coin, so to speak. In fact, on one side of the Guilder coin is the sword and on the other is the wheel: the two symbols of Vestenmennavenjar power.

Culture

"You are as the Allfather saw you. Try running from your wyrd and you'll only run faster toward it."
— old Vesten proverb

An important element of Vesten culture—perhaps the most important element—is wyrd. The word means many things, but essentially translates as a person's destiny or fate. The Vesten King of the Gods, the Allfather, got a glimpse of the world's future and saw it was set and unchangeable. This concept, that one's life has been predetermined before birth, has a profound influence on Vesten culture.

Wyrd is the reason the Vestenmennavenjar still adhere to their caste system dividing the jarls and the carls. You are born into a role and you fulfill that role to the best of your abilities. If you try avoiding your wyrd, the world will punish you.

Merchants were born merchants. Nobles were born nobles. This is how the world was, is, and always will be. There is no dishonor in being a noble, nor is there dishonor in being a merchant. Dishonor does not come from your wyrd; it comes from disrespecting your wyrd.

Social Strata

The Vesten jarls are still the official rulers of the various parcels of land. They collect taxes; command armies and navies; appoint mayors, sheriffs and the like; and dispense justice when they see fit. Meanwhile, the carls run Vesten's trade. Both rule the Nation, but in different ways.

The jarls hold the traditional authority over the Nation, but the carls—represented by the Vendel League—also hold a great deal of power. The line between where a jarl's authority ends and where a carl's authority begins can blur from time to time. Much of this depends on the relationship between the local authorities. The League assigns a representative to each jarl. Her official role in his court is to advise him, but her unofficial role is to keep him in line with the Nation's needs. Much of the jarl's authority is traditional while the carl's authority is interpreted by need. The jarl has the right to tax the people, but the carls determine how it is spent.

A jarl's wyrd demands he protect the land and its people from physical dangers. A carl's wyrd demands she make lives worth living. Jarls are warriors, training with swords, spears and shields, putting their bodies between danger and those they have sworn to protect. A carl provides food, clothing and all the things that people want and need. Without the jarl, the world would murder the people. Without the carl, the people would starve, both physically and spiritually.

Both roles are vital. Essential. *Necessary*. Life lacks without one or the other. Both see their roles as duties they must perform. It is their wyrd, just as the Allfather saw, long ago.

Every region of Vestenmennavenjar is ruled by both a jarl and a carl. The jarl provides his traditional role: protection. He also serves as political liaison for the region. The carl, assigned by the Vendel League, now serves as an exchequer, providing finances for art, craft, education and leisure. The relationship between the jarl and the carl differs from region to region, and while the jarl holds ultimate authority, in these modern days, using that authority without the blessing of the carl is seen as challenging his wyrd and disrespecting the carl's wyrd.



Virtues

The Vestenmennavenjar value four virtues: courage, loyalty, honesty and luck. Courage, of course, is valor in the face of danger. However, the Vestenmennavenjar understand that blind courage is nothing more than dressed-up stupidity. Loyalty to the family comes first. In a land that remains in the dark and covered in snow for most of the year, a man must rely on his family or die alone. Honesty goes hand in hand with the previous virtues. A man must be honest with himself to be courageous and must be honest with his family to honor them. Finally, the Vestenmennavenjar believe that every man begins life with a measure of luck. Some men have a great deal of it, others none at all. Some men are born with the wrong kind of luck, even if it is just a little.

Another important aspect of Vestenmennavenjar culture is the almost mystical relationship between mead and a good story. Both can make a man feel light-headed. Both can make a man believe he can do things he didn't think possible that morning. And, in the end, both can get a man into a whole lot of trouble.

Clothing

Vesten clothing is warm. Long trousers, furs, heavy coats. Up near the polar circle, things get cold and the Vesten dress for it. Typical male dress includes a long shirt, knee-length long leather tunic and linen or wool pants tied off with a leather belt. Their hats are tall, pointed and made of leather. Boots are usually made from leather or fur and tied tightly with a long leather thong. Women replace the shirt with a floor-length, sleeveless chemise, but otherwise wear outfits similar to their male counterparts. Clothing may be modest or ostentatious depending on the individual.

A popular trend in Vesten fashion is adopting foreign styles and incorporating them into traditional Vesten wear. Whatever Montaigne wears this season, you can count on the Vesten adopting it, modifying it, and making it their own.

The recent and popular Vesten fashion statement is the top hat: a quite modern fashion innovation, based on Avalon flat caps. So far, the fashion has not spread to the other Nations, but time will tell.

Currency

The Vendel Guilder has single-handedly changed Théah's economy. Merchants only have to use one currency and never have to deal with exchange rates. When it was introduced, the Vendel Guilds announced that it would have a set value that would never change.

While many national leaders were slow to realize the effect this would have, merchants picked up on it quickly. Guild houses would accept Guilders or the Nation's coin, but the Guilder was so easy to use, merchants flocked to the exchange houses, eager to pay the five percent exchange rate. International trade exploded. Merchants began keeping track of prices from one nation to the next and captains soon found themselves paid to transport fresh fruit and vegetables, leather, furs and spices.

The Guilder is now the most popular currency in Théah. It has created a world market economy, and made Vesten the home of commerce and trade. When visitors arrive in Vesten, they are treated like nobility, no matter what their station. Vesten has become a full-service economy—the first in the world—and business is booming. Everyone takes a holiday in Vesten...if they can afford it.

Food

The Vestenmennavenjar rely chiefly on fish, although they also dine on game meats such as rabbit and venison. Because of its rich trade routes, the Vesten diet has expanded to foreign delicacies. In addition to food from native fisheries, the Vendel League imports Vodacce wine, Castillian fruits, Montaigne bread and Avalon veal.

Art and Music

The most important piece of Vestenmennavenjar literature is The Grumfather Cycle, a collection of epic poems that tell of the creation of the world, the rise and fall of its gods and heroes, and the destruction of the universe in one final, massive battle. The people who tell and remember the tales are called skalds. A skald keeps the tales in the memory of the Vestenmennavenjar, for they believe that a soul only lives on if the living remember his or her name. The music played by the Vestenmennavenjar is primitive

to the modern Théan ear, involving a great deal of drumming and crude lutes. They use the music not for amusement, but for ritual.

Meanwhile, in Vesten, the most beautiful sculptures, paintings and carvings in the world can be found in halls of the guildhouses. The most prestigious artists in Théah submit their work to the Vendel guilds to gain sanction, prestige and patrons. Only Montaigne can claim an equal collection.

Names

To the Vestenmennavenjar, a name is more than a term of identification. Names are *history*. You carry your ancestors' names with you and when you invoke those names, you invoke their legacy and power.

The Vestenmennavenjar have two names: their "trade" name and their "true" name.

A Vestenmennavenjar's true name is the one given to him at birth by his parents. Sons and daughters are commonly named after a beloved relative and not the father or mother. The child's surname is typically the father's name plus the patronymic or matronymic additions of –sen or –datter. For example:

Magnus, son of Ketil would be Magnus Ketilsen. Osk, daughter of Ketil would be Osk Ketildatter.

The Vesten trade name is for strangers, foreigners or those who have not yet earned their trust. A Vesten chooses his trade name when he comes of age (usually around 10 or 12). Vesten are known to change their trade names from time to time. Trade names are usually foreign and can even be different depending on the nationality the Vesten is dealing with. For example, a Vesten merchant may be William Carpenter in Avalon, Guillaume Charpentier in Montaigne, and Wilhelm Cieśla in the Commonwealth.

Common Male True Names: Alfgeir, Bragi, Brøn, Eldgrim, Gellir, Hägin, Hallbjørn, Hrafn, Jön, Ketil, Magnus, Olväld, Reinn, Serk, Sigurd, Solmünd, Thørfinn, Thrand, Ulf, Velëif

Common Female True Names: Asgerd, Asny, Bera, Dalla, Grøa, Gudrid, Hrafnhild, Ingibjørg, Jofrid, Kadlin, Ljüfa, Osk, Rannvëig, Sæun, Sigrid, Thørhild, Ulfeid, Vigdis, Yngvild, Yr

CURRENT LEAGUE CHAIRS

Merchant's Guild: Master Val Mokk (Sigvald Gunnisen) (Vesten)

Sailor's Guild: Master Allen Trel (Arvor Troelsen) (Vesten)

Carpenter's Guild: Master Joris Brak (Joris Braakenjorsen) (Vesten)

Blacksmith's Guild: Mistress Sela Cole (Selma Colbjorsdatter) (Vesten)

Jenny's Guild: Madame Lorraine Weller (Avalon)

Usury Guild: Mistress Red (Gytha Hallesdatter) (Vesten)

Brewer's Guild: Master George Skard (Jorgan Skaardalsen) (Vesten)

Miner's Guild: Master Eladio Ballesteros (Castille)

Joseph Volker: Butler and Representative of the Late Imperator Riefenstahl

The League

The largest building in the city of Vendel is the Guild House where the Vendel League meets. The bodies that fill those nine Chairs and 91 Seats control Théah's economy, and some say, her destiny.

The League accepts only Guilders at their auctions; no other currency has a voice in Vesten. The men and women who sit in the League's nine Chairs bought their positions at the birth of the League. A Chair cannot be purchased, only inherited. The men and women who gave birth to the Guilder almost four years ago currently hold all nine Chairs.

Religion

While the rest of Théah bickers over the message of the Prophets, religion is not a debatable subject for the Vestenmennavenjar. Their belief in their gods and ancestors is not a matter of faith, but of fact. Their priests can see their ancestors and summon the powers of Creation itself. The "rune magic" the Vestenmennavenjar use is not magic at all, but a

miraculous gift, given by the gods. They believe that a great hall awaits them in the afterlife, and only those who die in battle will pass on into that hall. There, their spirits await a great serpent that they must fight, lest it devour the world.

The Vestenmennavenjar religion is a living mythology, a spirit world that surrounds them in constant interaction with the living world. The spirits of their forefathers live on today, and by naming landmarks after people who have passed their "myth" lives on, as well. As long as their names are still invoked, they remain in the Afterlife.



Those that have mastered the art of runes are called *Ypperste Prest* (high priest). They can see the Living Mythology around them at all times. The Vesten, sympathetic to the immediacy of Objectionist doctrines, have accepted the Objectionists into their country and sponsor some of the most impressive churches and universities ever built. A three-decade-long plan has been put into motion to build the tallest, most incredible cathedral in Théah, a rival even to the great cathedrals in Montaigne.

Government

The Vestenmennavenjar legal code is simple, but it appears backward to other Théans. It has its history in a kind of impromptu court called a *thing* (pronounced "ting"). The thing heard arguments from both sides, and then decided what punishment should be dealt out, if any. Things only convene when families cannot resolve conflicts themselves and require a higher authority. When the thing reached its decision, it was up to the family to enforce it. This precedent left weaker families little chance of finding justice. When the carls rose in power, all of that changed.

Now, things are much more formal and the jarl's duty is to enforce the decision. He does so through punitive fines. Other than murder, the Vestenmennavenjar have no corporal punishment: everything is a fine. In the case of murder, the criminal is branded on the forehead and exiled from the Nation. If he returns, he is given the Death Brand and exiled again. No need to worry about him, then. Death will find him soon enough.

There is no High King of Vestenmennavenjar. Not for centuries. Funny thing: the Vesten discovered they didn't need one. The Nation has been running better than ever with no one sitting on the throne. Local jarls manage their own lands and the Vendel League keeps the money coming in. When land disputes arise, the jarls call a thing and let the other jarls stand in judgment. The Vendel League then enforces the decision.

Military

The Vestenmennavenjar's army is made up of both native soldiers and hired mercenaries. Their fleets are made up of local navies and foreign privateers. What they could not raise from their own countrymen, they hired out. Those two combined forces make Vesten's military force one of the strongest in Théah.

"The Vendel Irregulars" are chiefly Eisen, Avalons, Inish, and Highlanders, all paid top Guilder to protect the Nation from dangers. There has been a great deal of speculation regarding the Avalon Sea Dogs and their reluctance to attack Vestenmennavenjar pirates who terrorize the northern waters. Perhaps this might have something to do with the secret treaty signed between Queen Elaine and certain Vendel League Chairs.

Despite their sophisticated demeanor, the Vestenmennavenjar are still pirates at heart. Many rumors tell that each jarl has his own navy of privateers sailing the waves, although the Vendel League denies any knowledge of such activities.

Current Relations

Avalon

When Queen Elaine took the throne, she needed allies, and the Vendel League was in the right place at the right time. Both have put high stock in their privateers, but have kept to raiding the less scrupulous nobles and merchants—the Vodacce. A great deal of commerce, trade and communication go back and forth between Avalon and Vestenmennavenjar. The two are close allies…for now.

Castille

Suspicion has made Castille reluctant to adopt the Guilder into her economy despite Vesten assurances of neutrality, and the Vaticine Church has found many of its ships under fire from Vestenmennavenjar privateers lately. Needless to say, Castillians are highly suspicious of the pagan Northmen, but the Vendel League needs Castillian support if they wish to remove Vodacce from the international picture.

Eisen

Eisen is an opportunity that the Vendel League has not overlooked. The Eisen economy has collapsed and four of her Eisenfürsten have already accepted the Guilder in lieu of the near-worthless Eisen mark.

Montaigne

No two Nations could be more chummy than Montaigne and Vestenmennavenjar. The two have used each other to make themselves very, very wealthy. However, the carls are very aware of l'Empereur's treatment of his subjects and do not approve. Many have called to cut off relations with Montaigne, but the steady flow of income currently has the vote.

Pirate Nations

The Vestenmennavenjar see piracy as a useful tool, but one they should control. They never complain about the Vesten Raiders or Sea Dogs. And while they engage their own Buccaneer privateers, they despise free-booting pirates—Buccaneers and Brotherhood alike: "They are nothing more than lazy criminals preptuating their lives of luxury and vice through violence."

Sarmatian Commonwealth

Many of the Vestenmennavenjar are impressed with this "Golden Liberty" Sarmatia has put forward. And with their forward-thinking Prince poised to take the throne, perhaps that backward little country can finally make a profit.

Ussura

As far as the Vendel League is concerned, Ussura is a large kingdom with limited potential. Ussuran crops are always plentiful, but when the League tries to exchange currency for produce, the farmers reply, "You expect me to feed my family with paper?" The current dispute for Czar means conflict and conflict always leads to profit, but some within the League want to help settle the dispute without violence. "Bloodshed costs more than coins."

Vodacce

If the Vodacce see the Vestenmennavenjar as usurpers, the League looks upon the Vodacce as cranky old men who refuse to look progress in the eye—even if it's holding a gun to their heads. But the Vodacce are still dangerous. Very dangerous. So long as they keep pointing that danger at each other, the League will continue to flourish.



Vodacce

"If asked to describe Vodacce with a single word, I would respond: 'Treacherous.'"
— Admiral Enrique Orduño

Always look over both shoulders. Never meet a woman's eyes unless you know your blade is better than her husband's. And never, ever turn your back on a challenge. You won't get an opportunity to turn around again. Vodacce is a place where every careless word, every second glance, every misstep could be fatal. It is not a safe place for the reckless.

With the exception of some low, swampy land to the west—prime for rice and other specialized farming—most of mainland Vodacce is mountainous regions, difficult to farm, but perfect for mining. The west is low and near the water, the land crisscrossed with small streams and rivers. Meanwhile, the east is rocky, dotted with mining communities that eventually give way to marshes south of the Sarmatian Commonwealth on the Pióro Peninsula.

The land is divided into territories controlled by the seven Merchant Princes, each with his own resources and guards watching the borders. Treachery is commonplace in Vodacce. Trusting a cousin is the equivalent of giving him the knife that ends up in your back.

Vodacce was once the seat of the Old Empire's capital. Its streets bustled with senators, merchants and soldiers all going about their business. Its buildings echoed with their debates, and its libraries overflowed with the collected knowledge of a thriving Republic.

Now, several hundred years after the fall of that Empire, the capital city stands empty and silent. The land on which it stands belongs to the Princes who have turned their backs on debate in favor of subterfuge, and turned the great cities into their own miniature kingdoms scattered along the peninsula. Better in Vodacce to be king of your own hill than to share the rule of a mountain with other men. But better still to be king of that mountain.

Each of the seven Princes controls a different aspect of the country's economy and a different export. One makes the finest wine in Théah, another boasts the best craftsmen. Vincenzo Caligari holds the greatest collection of Syrneth artifacts on the continent, and Gespucci Bernoulli controls the most profitable trade routes to the Crescent Empire.

Fighting, like much else in Vodacce, is a man's sport. Although Vodacce men are known for their hot tempers and fast blades, their women are renowned for their cool calculations. In Vodacce, alone among Théan nobility, only women possess sorcery. Called "Fate Witches" in other parts of Théah, the Sorte Strega play a dangerous game of cat and mouse with destiny itself. They see and tug the strands of fate,

aiding their husbands in their business. Vodacce ships are seldom caught in bad storms, and ordinary pirates usually stay clear of them out of fear of running headlong into misfortune.

Romance is one of Vodacce's greatest pastimes…if you are a man. Wives maintain a respectable distance from such things. Marriage among nobles is entirely a matter of politics and economics. Couples seldom meet before the wedding day, although once the engagement has been decided, husbands are still required to woo, from a distance, with poetry and fine gifts. Most of a man's romantic endeavors are directed at professional courtesans. These women exist as a separate society from Vodacce's other women. Where "respectable" ladies do not read—the Vodacce fear that education would tip the tenuous balance of power between men and witches—courtesans are extremely well educated both in arts and the sciences.

"Watch your step" is a phrase that finds its origin in Vodacce. One look at the architecture is convincing enough, but a glance at its politics hammers the point home. The streets of Vodacce's cities are jovial and carefree, symbolized by their revered poets and playwrights and beautiful courtesans. The cities are filled with tall, slender buildings, utilizing every inch of usable land. A treacherous system of bridges runs between each building, connecting the whole city like a giant web. It doesn't take an architect to see that a single misplaced sneeze could send the whole system tumbling into the sea.

While Vodacce's architecture may appear unstable, it is a pleasant afternoon stroll compared to its political environment. The seven Merchant Princes ruling Vodacce are the most ruthless men in all of Théah. Stuck in the middle of a trade war with the Vendel League, the Princes have struck a reluctant alliance to combat the competition from the north. At the same time, however, each of the Vodacce Princes knows his cousin would take any opportunity to stab him in the back and steal his land and his business. There have not always been seven Princes; there have been as many as twelve and as few as three. Today there are seven, but who can say anything about tomorrow?

Culture

The Vodacce are a prideful people. Their tempers are as quick as their blades, and the last man standing is right. A man is judged not only by his wealth, but also by the way he spends it. A proper man has enough money not to have to worry about spending it, but only a fool lets himself be taken advantage of.

The women of Vodacce are a different matter. Although you seldom see them acting publicly, they support their husbands and fathers through craft and their arcane Fate Witchery.

The Vodacce have a slender build and are of about average height. Their hair is black and straight. Their eyes are dark and mysterious, ranging from black to gray. The Vodacce have straight, proud noses, and their complexion runs the gamut from pale to swarthy.



Social Strata

Only in Montaigne is the distinction between noble and peasant more distinct than in Vodacce. However, the life of a peasant is not as harsh in Vodacce as in other countries. In fact, a Vodacce peasant's life could be seen as luxurious when compared to an Eisen or Montaigne peasant.

Peasant Class

The day begins at sunrise and ends after sunset. The first duty for a Vodacce peasant is farming, which continues until around noon. Lunch is an elaborate affair that lasts for as long as an hour and a half, followed by a long, restful nap. The peasantry sleeps away the hot hours of the day, rises at four, and continues its work until long after sunset. Then, when the daily chores are done, dinner is served and the farmers set themselves to sleep.

There is little else in the peasant's daily routine. Seasonal festivals and feast days take place, of course, but other than the hard work of maintaining the noble class' appetite, there is little the Vodacce peasant does other than work and rest.

Middle Class

Vodacce's middle class consists primarily of artisans and merchants. Vodacce boasts some of the most talented craftsmen in Théah. Even the simplest items are often decorated to the point of being distracting. Much of the economy is based on the trade of these elaborate and decorative luxury items.

Bartering is as much a pastime and a source of pride in Vodacce as athletic events are in other kingdoms. Sessions can last for hours in the bustling streets. After all, a man who cannot make a good deal is hardly a man at all. A woman who cannot shop properly for her house should be scorned.

The social structure in Vodacce is clearly apparent in the architecture of its western cities. The lowest classes live nearest to the water, and, by default, the filth of the streets. The more money one has, the higher (literally) up the social structure one can go. The middle class can afford accommodations further up, often built directly on the roofs of their poorer neighbors. The nobility and the very wealthy live high in narrow buildings constructed with a combination of brilliant architecture, elaborate suspension, and a little magic. It is said that a party in the Prince's home may wake the rats that live under the floor of his poorest peasant. For similar reasons, it is also said that you can tell a lady because her feet have never touched the ground.

The Nobility

The noble class of Vodacce springs from its roots in the Old Republic to families that held seats in the Senate. The Merchant Princes, or "Signore," are not as extravagant as the nobility of Montaigne, nor are they as dignified as the nobility of Avalon. Vodacce poets write that the Vodacce have two hearts: one that beats for duty, and the other that beats for love.

The Seven Princes of Vodacce take their titles very seriously. Wealth and pride stand side by side as cornerstones in Vodacce culture; the former is a tool to satisfy the latter. The Princes seldom gather together except to determine matters of policy, or for very formal social occasions, such as weddings of state and funerals.

When they convene for policy, it is at a neutral estate. This avoids useless bickering about who should host the gathering. Also, it ensures that no one Prince has a tactical advantage. Since the fall of the Old Republic, when poison and treachery were considered reasonable and fair means to negotiate succession, the Princes have never trusted one another, and with good reason.

Because of these arrangements, the Princes have little opportunity to show off their wealth for each other. Therefore, a less conspicuous method has developed. The Vodacce Princes take turns hosting elaborate feasts for the lesser nobility. These minor nobles travel throughout the year, telling the tales of their most recent host's excesses, with the understanding that their present host will go out of his way to surpass his cousin's decadence.

It has been said that wine flows through Vodacce's noble houses like water through her many rivers; similarly, food, gold, jewels and women. It is also rumored by some skeptics that the Princes' habits may be a detriment to their power base, and that more wealth flows through the streets of Vodacce than through her trade routes.



Courtesans

Along with fine wine and exquisite cuisine, there is one more commodity enjoyed in the southern peninsula. Nobles from throughout Théah covet an invitation to the Vodacce feasts, not for their culinary offerings, but for their carnal ones.

In Vodacce, romance is a virtue. Men are expected to court women, even though their wives inevitably come to them through arranged marriages of state. By contrast, women of good breeding learn to be modest and shy. The profession of the courtesan specifically bridges this gap. A man can speak about things with a courtesan that he cannot with his wife. He can take her places where "proper" women are not allowed to go. He can praise her as a goddess of love, an ideal image. And when he is finished, he can go on about his business without giving the matter any further thought.

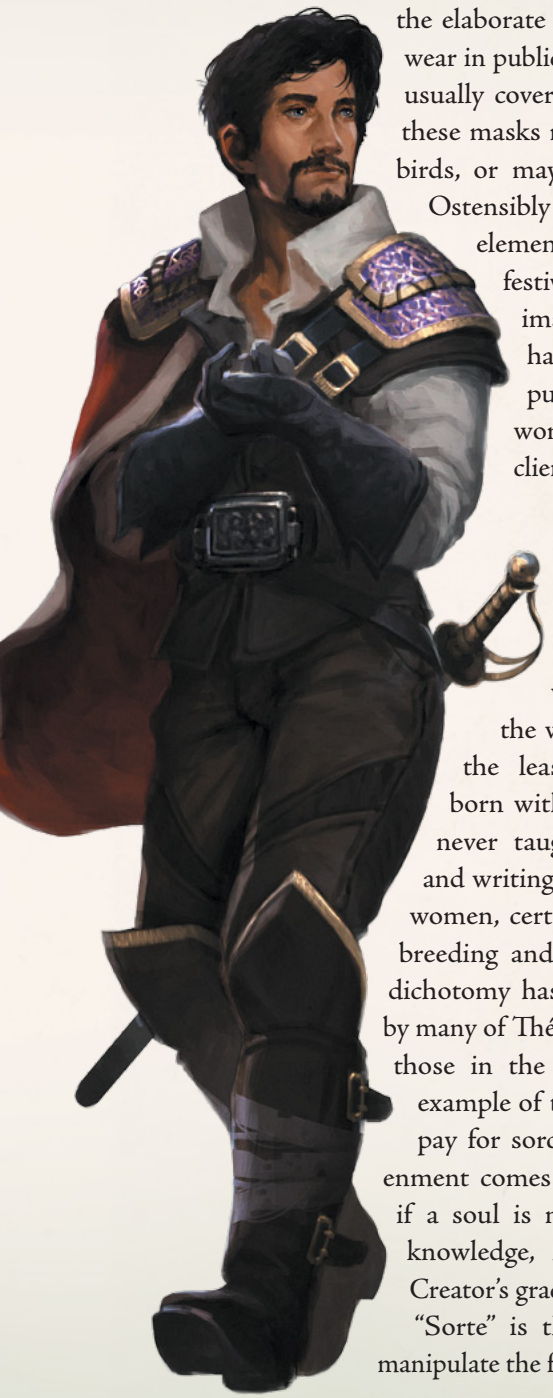
The courtesans of Vodacce are renowned throughout Théah. Although there are schools for basic etiquette, music and other various arts, the best courtesans train primarily with private tutors. Similar to blacksmithing, winemaking and other professions, this one is often handed down from mother to daughter. There are, in fact, a handful of "courtesan families" scattered across the Vodacce.

Courtesans are not bound by the rules that keep most Vodacce women illiterate and quiet behind their tapestried curtains. They have access to libraries, universities, public forums and anywhere else that their male clientele choose to pass their time. They train in the arts of acting, poetry, song and dance and, in some cases, politics.

Still, there are disadvantages to this way of life. Although Vodacce noblewomen are limited in what they may and may not do, they are unquestionably protected, their security assured. A courtesan must rely on her wits and skills to determine her fortune. A wise woman will take care to gain the favor of nobility who are in a position to defend her should she find herself in difficulty in the future. Society and politics in Vodacce are bedfellows.

Vodacce courtesans are easily recognizable. They walk the streets like brightly plumed exotic birds, decked in brilliant colors, glittering jewels and styles of dress that would disgrace "proper" women. There are few limitations as to what they may wear and to what they may do, although like everyone else in Vodacce, those inept at predicting whom they may anger don't last long.

The final detail to their costuming is the elaborate decorative masks they wear in public. Glittering affairs that usually cover only part of the face, these masks may mimic animals or birds, or may be entirely abstract. Ostensibly these masks add an element of excitement and festivity to the courtesan's image. In reality they have a more pragmatic purpose: to protect the woman's identity from her clients' wives.



Noblewomen

If the courtesans of Vodacce are some of the most educated women in Théah, then the wives of her nobles are the least educated. Women born with the gift of Sorte are never taught to read. Reading and writing are activities of vulgar women, certainly not for ladies of breeding and stature. This strange dichotomy has been commented on by many of Théah's scholars (primarily those in the Church) as an ideal example of the price mortals must pay for sorcery. After all, enlightenment comes from knowledge, and if a soul is not permitted to gain knowledge, how can it find the Creator's grace?

"Sorte" is the ability to see and manipulate the fate strands that bind all of humanity together. Only Vodacce's women possess it, much to the chagrin of Vodacce's men. So enraged were the original men who bargained for the power that they set traditions in motion that remain even to this day.

The measures they put in place ensured their women could not wrest control of Vodacce's destiny from male hands. When a child is found to have the gift, her father makes certain she never learns to read or write, nor may she gain access to any other forms of education. Her duty to her father (and later, to her husband) is to serve him, his family and Vodacce, not her own vanity. Vodacce wives wear modest black dresses and their faces are covered with thick, black veils—so a witch's eyes cannot meet the eyes of a man who is not her husband.

Noblemen

Vodacce men of all ranks are known for their pride. Most of the sons of better families have studied at some of the most renowned fencing schools of Théah, and they are always on the lookout for an opportunity to demonstrate their skill. The least offense can provoke a duel. What's more, Vodacce schools teach more than proper technique. Many of them have adapted the practical elements of streetfighting into their techniques, giving many an outsider a nasty surprise.

Etiquette

The ultimate breach of etiquette in Vodacce is to show yourself a coward. With the political climate as tense as it is, and pride such an important aspect of the national character, it is not uncommon to observe three or more duels in the course of an afternoon. Men call each other out for minor or imagined slights. Dishonor comes not from picking a fight, but from declining one. Of course, not all of these fights are fatal. Many are scarring matches (who can give his opponent the most scars), or even just shows of skill.

A promise in Vodacce is also a very important thing. A man who breaks his word shames himself and his family. If this occurs, the patriarch of his family must punish the offense. To openly doubt another man's word when he has social stature equal to or greater than your own is cause for a duel to the death.

Clothing

The shapes and cuts of Vodacce clothes are similar to those popular in Montaigne, but they have a unique flavor. Their outer garments, dresses, coats, etc. are made up of panels of fabric laced together. This is especially common in the coats and dresses.

Shirts and underdresses are usually a lightweight fabric. Brocade, velvet and tooled leather are favored for outer garments. Rich dark shades are popular among the nobility.

Vodacce noblewomen favor simple jewelry, usually pearls or polished stones. The noblemen, like their courtesans, prefer to wear their wealth on their person. Almost no one in Vodacce wears faceted stones, or mirrored items of any kind. It's unlucky to see your reflection in more than one place at a time.

A typical nobleman's outfit consists of trousers—not baggy but loose enough for easy motion—and linen shirts with loose sleeves and flaring cuffs, embroidered with shimmering threads. Often, tall, supple boots that come up to the knee are worn, although a man in his own house or visiting friends may wear shorter shoes. Vodacce men favor frock coats with a slight flare below the waist. Sleeves can be removed before a duel, giving more freedom of movement, while a vest remains, providing an ideal hiding place for extra weapons.

Noblewomen wear primarily black dresses, sometimes ornamented with small pearls sewn to the fabric. The waistlines of their dresses come to a low point from which their skirts fall in straight lines, as opposed to the full bustles of the Montaigne.

They wear their hair back from their faces, either straight in the back or else braided and bound up. They usually veil their faces when in public. This serves a dual purpose. It indicates an appropriate modesty, and also allows them to look where they please unobserved, preventing others from noticing the unfocused look in their eyes when they practice Sorte.

Food

Vodacce is mostly mountainous, limiting what can be grown there. Grapes grow in low rolling hills, but the main crop of the western fields of the country is rice. The diet of a Vodacce peasant consists largely of rice, pasta (which has made its way to Vodacce from Cathay), and seafood. A wide variety of fish make their homes in the waters surrounding Vodacce, as well as lobsters and crabs. Although some vegetables and citrus fruits grow in the mild, moist climate, most are imported from Castille.

The middle classes and nobles have more variety in their diets. Anyone who can afford it imports beef and venison as well as a host of other foods. Oysters are also a popular delicacy. They are plentiful in the sea surrounding Vodacce, but rare throughout the rest of Théah. Almost all of what the nobles don't eat is exported to other courts.

Customs

Family is very important to the Vodacce, high and lowborn alike. Professions often pass down from father to son. The father's reputation in his profession is often as important as the son's. A fisherman can be proud that his father was the best fisherman ever, and a merchant whose father has a reputation as an honest man will receive more trade than a merchant whose father is not as respected.

Another peculiarity is the way the Vodacce treat their dead. The dead deserve absolute respect from friends and enemies alike. No one in Vodacce speaks ill of the dead, no matter how hated they were while still among the living.

Art and Music

The Vodacce are especially fond of well-crafted items. Although a handful of celebrated painters live on the southern isles, their favored styles of art include fine weaving, intricate gold work, exquisitely prepared food and any other item that adds a little extra grace to their lifestyle. The Vodacce are hedonists to the core.

Although they appreciate grand productions, orchestras and operas, the Vodacce prefer more romantic and dramatic music. The songs of the troubadours are still popular. Part of being a proper man is the ability to sing and play an instrument. The most popular ballads are either romantic or witty. Women also sing love songs, but only in private, either for other women or for their husbands. They seldom sing in public, except the occasional historical or familial ballad.

Religion

"If a Vodacce is not a devout Vaticine, he's quiet about it."
—Benedict the Farmer, Vodacce Peasant

Religion in Vodacce is a strange subject. Every church fills with Fate Witches and with husbands devoted to women who are not their wives. The bishops in Vodacce do not turn a blind eye to vice; they have simply defined it in a manner that does not interfere with the Vodacce lifestyle. These rigorous definitions apply mainly to sin. The Vodacce Church has spent a great deal of time defining what is sin and what it is not. The most decadent men in Vodacce are said to belong to the clergy, but if such rumors are true, they have never been proven. Needless to say, the blood-red robes of the Inquisition are seldom welcome in Vodacce.

To the Vodacce, religion is first and foremost a political tool. The noble houses have always been closely tied to the Church, and this relationship has strengthened over time. Vodacce controls five of the ten Archdiocese seats of the Vaticine Church, a powerful position from which to forge Church policies. In fact, in order for any policy to be made official, the favor of "the Vodacce Five" must be won; if a Cardinal (or even a Hierophant) disregards their authority, none of his policies will come to fruition. The Princes have used this position on countless occasions, and their activities have not diminished since the Church moved to Castille.

The Vodacce church has gone to great lengths to create a compatible relationship between its religious tenets and its people's way of life. Although the seven sins of the Vaticine church are consistent between Castille and Vodacce on the surface, the definitions vary somewhat. The primary difference is that the Vodacce believe that sin is seldom the action, but the corresponding inaction.

Sloth—The most reviled sin in a culture where a man is judged on the fortune he makes.

Envy—To envy what another man possesses is folly. You seek only to be equal with your neighbor. Instead, go out and get something that will make him envy you.

Greed—Wanting what you have no right to. If you have it within your capacity to earn that which you desire, then you are a fool for not doing so.

Lust—To the Vodacce the sin of lust is not in the wanting, but failure to act upon it. If you have feelings for a woman, pursue her. The sin to you and her is if you allow your desire to fester into a spiritual impotence.

Vanity—The fault here lies not in pride in your own appearance, but in unjustified pride. Know yourself. Don't be fooled by your own ego.

Wrath—If you feel fury toward someone, you must challenge him and justify yourself. It is only a sin if you cower in your home and do not address the harm you believe he has inflicted upon you and yours.

Gluttony—Gluttony is the sin of consuming more than you should. However, to a hedonistic people, the definition of "what you should consume" may be different than it is elsewhere.

Names

Vodacce nobles still derive their names from two of the three Old Republic senators who founded their nation: Gallili, Lorenzo, and Delaga, who became Vodacce's first king. Nobles today trace their line back to one or more of these senators, and their names reflect this, ending in the same vowel as the original senator's name.

All of the princes share a lineage through Delaga, but only the closely related Villanovas use the "a" ending of their name. The rest have taken their name endings from Gallili. Most members of Vodacce society, at least those who are not noble, have no surname. One Roberto is differentiated from another by his profession. Roberto the fishmonger is obviously different from Roberto the wine merchant.

Common Male Names: Alberto, Antonio, Carlo, Ernesto, Felice, Fortunato, Gianni, Giuseppe, Leon, Marco, Modesto, Pietro, Rinaldo, Rolando, Savino, Siro, Timeo, Toni, Umberto, Vito

Common Female Names: Alesio, Angelina, Clarissa, Crescenza, Elena, Fiora, Iolanda, Lea, Luisa, Miranda, Natalia, Paolao, Penelope, Rachele, Rebecca, Regina, Sandra, Valeria, Veronica, Viola

Government

Each of the seven Princes ruling Vodacce control a different aspect of trade and commerce. Each dreams of the day when he can gain supremacy over his cousins, uniting Vodacce under his own rule. Of these seven, three—Bernoulli, Falisci and Villanova—have gained enough influence to try. The result is a political seesaw as each of the three attempts to manipulate his weaker cousins.

Bernoulli

The Bernoulli family has always staunchly supported the Church. As a reward, when general contact with the Empire of the Crescent Moon ended in the 1250s, the Church granted the Bernoulli family sole trading rights with the Empire. Since then, the Bernoullis have prospered greatly, and are, not surprisingly, the most generous contributors to the Church. Gespucci Bernoulli, the family patriarch, is personally devout. However, as he grows older (he's in his early sixties already), his sons have taken on more and more of the active duties of trade. They make frequent trips across the waters to the Empire of the Crescent Moon, and are more than willing to indulge in the pleasures and vices to be found there.

Falisci

Donello Falisci believes in doing one thing and doing it exquisitely. For him, and for his father and grandfather before him, that one thing is the making of great wine. Bottles of Falisci wine have been traded for small estates. The family possesses the most fertile part of the Vodacce, and has dedicated their crops to creating new and marvelous flavors.

Villanova

One of the oldest and most powerful families, the Villanova are known for their deadly deals and treacherous methods. Giovanni Villanova took control of the family when his father Allegro died. Allegro was only thirty-two when he suffered an unlucky fall from a tall flight of stairs. His brother Giam stepped in as advisor for the ten-year-old Giovanni, but his health began to deteriorate soon after. It continued to worsen over the course of the next two years, and shortly after Giovanni took over the family affairs, Giam expired.

Lucani

The Lucani family has only held its present land for about one hundred years. Prior to that, it was owned by the Villanova family. One century ago, as payment for loyalty, or perhaps for some service—the histories are vague about the specifics—the Villanova patriarch awarded this small holding to his lower-birthed cousin, Michele Lucani. Since that time, the Lucani have struggled to keep the land they were given.

Mondavi

With the exception of the Faliscis, Mondavi is the only Vodacce family making its living from agriculture. The family's holdings are marshy, but ideal for producing rice. Although this does not bring an extraordinary income, it is a stable one, and Mondavi seems to be content with maintaining the status quo.

Vestini

Although the Bernoulli family controls the trade of foreign luxuries, the Vestini dominate the manufacture of domestic ones. Vestini offered a substantial sum to fine craftsmen throughout Vodacce, provided they move to his domain and produce their crafts for him. At the time, the Vestini family had sufficient military and political power to keep most of the other Princes from challenging them. The one Prince who did found his youngest son dead in a canal. If it had been his eldest, there might have been war.

Caligari

Vincenzo Caligari was an old man ten years ago, but he shows no signs of relaxing his grip on power. Steeped in tradition, his home is modeled on the senate building of the Old Republic. He keeps a council of advisors who wear medallions similar to the senators' seals of that period. His private chamber is a small museum, filled wall to wall with tomes, scrolls, boxes and bags excavated from ruins across Théah. Vincenzo Caligari is obsessed with these bits of older lives. For most of his days, since the lingering death of his father, Vincenzo has been convinced that he was not destined for such a common demise. He believes that the right artifact, or combination of artifacts, will keep him safe from sickness and ageing.

Economy

Vodacce continues to use the currency of the Old Republic, a bronze coin called, appropriately enough, a "republic." They also use smaller copper coins called *sedilo*, or "seats." There are ten sedilo to a republic, since there were ten seats on the Senate of the Old Republic. Unlike most other currency, republics and sedilos are not exchangeable for Guilders.

Military

There is no standing army in Vodacce. Each Prince keeps a personal house guard, and young men who are able may serve at the garrisons that guard traffic to and from the Crescent Empire.

However, almost all noblemen learn to use a sword, a tradition stemming from the days following the fall of the Old Republic, when each house was responsible for furnishing a suitable number of young men to fight for the nation.

The Vodacce "Navy"

There is no official Vodacce navy. However, the merchant ships that travel back and forth from her are owned by loyal men and heavily armed, with a contingent of mercenary marines on board to repel pirates. In a pinch, these ships could serve as a very respectable navy.

Current Relations

Avalon

Officially, the Vodacce want nothing to do with the Avalons, and vice versa. However, there are rumors that the two countries are carrying on trade in secret using the Sea Dogs as an intermediary.

Castille

Vodacce's relation with Castille is strained at times, almost the way feelings between siblings sometimes run hot. The two nations are more similar to each other than to any other country, but they often butt heads, mostly regarding their shared religion.

Eisen

The Vodacce keep a careful eye on the Eisen. With the country in such dire shape, the Vodacce fear a desperate mob of Eisen may attempt an invasion to avenge themselves for the War of the Cross.

Montaigne

The Montaigne people are Vodacce's largest market for luxury goods, and the two peoples have a lot in common with one another. This makes for very good relations between the two countries.

Pirate Nations

Thanks to the predictions of the Vodacce Fate Witches, the merchants of Vodacce suffer from less piracy than might be thought. They still keep a close watch for pirates, and hang any they capture, but it isn't as much of a concern as it could be.

Sarmatian Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Prince, Stanisław II, has a Vodacce wife. That makes him a cousin of sorts. He has been crafty dealing with the Merchant Princes, playing one off the other. So far, they respect his skills, but only for so long. And as for this "Golden Liberty" idea? That sort of nonsense had best not come across the border to Vodacce.

Ussura

The Fate Witches are afraid of the Ussurans, warning of a dark shadow that looms over them protectively. This has made the rest of the Vodacce very cautious around them. They are very careful not to do anything that might insult or upset them, or their mysterious protector.

Vestenmennavenjar

The situation with Vesten is strained. The two nations are already engaged in a trade war that could quickly become a shooting war. In the last few years, there have been several instances of a Vodacce Prince sending a trade group too far north. More than one of these groups were politely returned home in chests. The main reason that no serious action has been taken by the Vodacce is that no single Prince has sufficient power alone to attack the Vesten. Besides, if he did, he'd have to explain his actions to his cousins, and admit to them that he'd attempted to trade outside his borders and behind their backs, as well.



Life in Théah

The Seven Seas

There are seven seas surrounding Théah. The first, the Trade Sea, is found around Avalon and Vesten. It is known for its shallow waters and the unnerving tendency of the tides to make reefs appear to move. Experienced captains in these waters have run aground on reefs that they swear were not there the day before. Aside from this phenomenon, the Trade Sea is relatively safe.

The second sea is found near Avalon and Montaigne, and is called the Widow's Sea for all the sailors lost during pirate attacks and the bloody War of the Cross. A healthy population of sharks and sirens make the Widow's Sea more treacherous than the Trade Sea, not to mention the sudden fog banks and inexplicable appearances of a phenomenon known as "sea mirages." Often, ships are sighted, only to disappear as the viewer draws nearer, like a mirage in a desert.

The third sea is just off the coast of Castille, and is often referred to as "the Vaticine Gulf" or La Boca del Cielo. Its deep, cold waters make an ideal breeding ground for the whales that swim there, protected by the fearsome subspecies known as leviathans. These beasts are up to three times as large as a normal whale, and possess a much more aggressive disposition. This sea is also thick with pirates, notably the Brotherhood of the Coast. Sailors who frequent La Boca del Cielo circulate rumors of Estallio, an enormous serpent that feeds on the leviathans. For a creature of such reputed size, it seems odd that no confirmed sightings exist.

The fourth sea is called the Numanari Approach, so named after the Numanari Islands to the south. It lies to the southeast of Vodacce, near the Crescent Empire. For centuries, Church-maintained garrisons on the Vodacce keys prevented access to this sea, but the newly independent Numa has declared the Approach to be open to all, reviving trade between Théah and the Empire…and attracting pirates aplenty.

The fifth sea sits between Vesten and Eisen, called "The Maw." It got its name from old Vestenmennavenjar traders who, when they saw the first accurate maps, believed their land looked like the head of a dragon. Hence, the name. It is one of the most highly guarded seas in Théah, thanks to the abundant coins of the Vendel League. The Vendel League hires mercenary ships to guard the waters—most of them ex-pirates paid off to hunt their former brethren.

The sixth sea is known as the Avalon Strait—or the Montaigne Straight, depending on which side you happen to be on. Traffic between Avalon and Montaigne is highly guarded by Elaine's Sea Dogs. The Avalon Strait is the fastest route from Southern Théah to its Northern waters, but it also requires "sailing taxes" enforced by Avalon ships. Sailing all the way around the Avalon Isles adds days to your trip… and frequently puts you in the direct line of "pirates" from both Avalon and Vestenmennavenjar. Best to just pay the tax and get on your way.

Lastly, many sailors speak of a place where the sun and moon shine in the same sky, where the stars go backward and the waters turn to silver. This "seventh sea" is the source of much discussion within Théah's scholarly community. Sailors tell stories of sailing the silvery waters for days with no sign of land in sight until finally, the sky and waters suddenly snap back and the ship is thousands of miles off course.

A recent archæological discovery may hold the key to the Seventh Sea. The Explorer's Guild is calling it an "alchemical compass," and they believe that the Syrne used it to sail the mysterious sea. If their claims are true, it could open the door to a new world.

Théah's Courts

Across Théah, while the peasants toil in the fields and the merchants trade at the stands, as duelists assume their stances and soldiers advance at one another across open fields, a different kind of war rages within the resplendent forums of Théah's nobles. It is a ceaseless game of polite intrigue, where a slip of the tongue can forfeit a province and the wrong gesture can end a career. It is the world of Théan politics, and it is not a pretty place.

Montaigne, Vesten and Avalon presently have the most trafficked courts. Their tremendous ballrooms and meeting halls, designed and built to impress, allow the nobles and their guests just enough privacy to feel comfortable, but never enough to be safe. The courts of the Castillians are much smaller, open-air events, which focus more on community than conspiracy. The courts of the Eisen and Ussurans, who are not as interested in international affairs, tend to be small. Vodacce courts are busy with intrigue and politics, as gaudy and extravagant as the Montaigne courts, but slightly more exclusive. Meanwhile, in Sarmatia, the courts usually regulate themselves to issues of state rather than celebration.

Court can be a draining experience. It takes the average noble courtier four to five hours to get dressed; they are literally sewn into their clothes. Every courtier employs five to six handservants who follow them about, tending to their every whim.

WHAT IS THE 7TH SEA?

Some scholars suggest the seventh sea is a doorway to other worlds. Others believe it may be the home of creatures such as the Sidhe and Matushka, that perhaps these creatures are exiles of the seventh sea and live here now.

The discovery of the alchemical compass opens unique opportunities for Théans brave enough to risk the waters of the seventh sea. Are there treasures to be found? Adventures to be had? Only time will tell.

Fashion and dialogue govern the daily ebb and flow of courtly life. Everyone knows who the best-dressed or most eloquent people at court each week are, sometimes before they arrive. Trends come and go with the seasons, and those who have not managed to arrive with the right clothing can be shunned, or even ridiculed, for their inattention.

An example of a trend that has remained fashionable for some time is being seen with a small reading book, even by those who cannot read—illiterate nobles have their books read to them, employing servants for that purpose. Some are bound like normal volumes, while others are sheaves of folded paper, called "quartos." They contain picture stories, hymns, excerpts of other texts and fairy tales.

Nations employ courtiers and ambassadors for many reasons, primarily to prevent wars. With all the constant—and often unintentional—slights committed between Nations at this point, it becomes almost essential for courtiers to actively pursue peace at court to prevent the outbreak of open hostilities. Of course, as can be seen by the recent Montaigne invasion of Castille, this practice is not always successful, but continues regardless.

The other primary reasons for courts in Théah are power brokering, arranging marriages and gaining favor with other nobles. After all, a good party always leaves visitors in happy spirits—and less likely to cause turmoil.

The Duelist's Guild

Over the last fifty years, dueling became a source of great controversy. Some Nations were beginning to take steps toward outlawing it altogether. But in the winter of 1644, three men—each the owner of a fencing academy—met in a dark room and signed a pact in their own blood. They approached the kings of their respective countries and shared their vision. The monarchs approved the agreement, and the Duelist's Guild was born.

The Duelist's Guild is just like any other of Théah's Guilds: you cannot become a blacksmith without joining the Blacksmith's Guild and you cannot be a duelist without joining the Duelist's Guild.

The laws regarding dueling in Théah are complicated, but can be summed up as below:

- Only a member of the Duelist's Guild can challenge someone to a duel.

In other words:

- If you want to challenge someone to a duel, you must either be a Duelist or hire a Duelist.
- If you challenge someone to a duel and you are not a Duelist, local authorities will try to arrest you.
- If someone challenges you to a duel and they are not a Duelist, you should report them to the authorities.

Members of the Duelist's Guild make themselves available, of course, to nobles and other wealthy patrons who wish to satisfy their honor or settle a dispute. In many Nations, it is considered vital to have a Duelist on staff, available to step forward in the event of a challenge.

Yet despite all these rules, many continue to duel illegally, meeting at dusk or dawn on the outskirts of a city to draw swords and reclaim their honor. The Duelist's Guild looks quite unfavorably on such events; after all, who will pay them to duel if any fool with a sword can claim the honor?

The Guild has representation all across Théah in the form of Guildhouses. Most duels occur within a Guildhouse—another way to evade the watchful eye of the law—in front of witnesses and seconds. Every Guildhouse would deny that they permit illegal duels, but for the right price arrangements can sometimes be made.

The Duel

There are two types of duels in Théah: those to first blood and those to the death. A duel to the first blood continues only until one of the Duelists has been hit and suffers a wound. Most duels are to first blood. Only a very serious offense justifies a duel to the death.

As noted already, only members of the Duelist's Guild are legally entitled to challenge others to a duel. Everyone else does so in violation of the law and can expect a visit from a representative of the Guild if word of the challenge gets out. However, most Duelists are more than happy to issue a challenge on behalf of a noble and then let the noble fight the duel personally. They collect the same fee with no personal risk, and the noble may fight his own duel.

Honor

Modern Théan concepts of honor descend from the classical ideals of chivalry immortalized in the old Avalon romances of knights and kings. These notions are dying; the sun is setting on chivalry for the last time. Those who still cling to these ideals are known as "gentles," or, more cynically, "romantics."

The fall of chivalry began with a Montaigne knight named Bastion. During the 1460s, he was considered the pinnacle of chivalry. He was honorable and noble, and the ladies swooned when he spoke to them. Then one day in battle, a peasant armed with an arquebus shot him in the back and he died, drowned in the blood that seeped into his punctured lung. The thought that spread, unspoken, across Théah was, "Bastion was a man of honor, and all it earned him was a painful death."

The average Théan looks out for himself first, his friends and family second, and everyone else not at all. This doesn't mean that Théah is constantly immersed in schemes and plots, only that most people have better things to worry about, such as getting enough food to eat and making sure their roof will keep out

the rain. Chivalry is a pastime for those rich enough to afford it. It is sneered at by many, and romantics are often branded as old-fashioned dreamers who cannot look reality in the eye.

But all hope is not yet lost. Romantics are the last people in Théah to conduct business with a handshake and a spoken promise before a contract—that alone should win them the admiration of even the strongest cynics. There are those who still see them as shining knights on white steeds, and prefer to take all their business to the few who remain.

A Gentle's Word

A gentle does not break his word. Ever. The first time he breaks a promise, it brings into question any promise he makes in the future. On the other hand, having a positive reputation means you are as good as your word: reliable, trustworthy and admired.

By the same token, he is very particular about when and to whom he gives his word. Only a lowborn dog would hold a gentle to any pledge made while he was in his cups, though a gentle would probably honor it regardless. A true gentle will die before breaking his word, for it is his bond and his soul; some, caught in pledges that would destroy their family, have committed suicide rather than dishonor themselves, but this is rare.

If a gentle breaks her word, the repercussions upon her business and lifestyle would be disastrous. Her friends would cease to associate with her, her business associates would abandon her or start demanding written contracts for everything (an intolerable insult to any gentle) and her income would dwindle to nothing as her reputation was dragged through the mud.

Often, a gentle swears promises on an item of particular personal importance, such as his grandfather's sword or his mother's pendant; the implication is that if the promise is broken, the ancestor associated with the item will know.

CALENDAR

The Théan calendar is similar to Europe's: twelve months, seven days in a week, twenty-four hour days and sixty-minute hours. That's where the similarities end.

The days of the week are Soldi, Veldi, Amordi, Terdi, Guerdi, Redi and Voltadi.

A Théan month is exactly thirty days. The fifteenth and thirtieth day are feasting days, celebrating the Creator's work, wisdom and mercy.

The original Théan calendar included ten months of 36 days apiece, but this was shortened to 30 days when two more months were added. These two new months were named after important figures in the history of the Old Republic, Imperator Corantine and Julius Caius, and inserted before the seventh month.

The twelve months are Primus, Secundus, Tertius, Quartus, Quintus, Sextus, Julius, Corantine, Septimus, Octavus, Nonus and Decimus.

The Théan year is broken down into four seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter), each three months long. At the end of the year, the Prophets' Mass—a five- to six-day long celebration—fills out the remaining days.

Reputation

A gentle's reputation is one of his most prized possessions. He will go to extreme lengths to prevent it from being sullied. Anyone who besmirches his good name can expect a challenge to the blood; anyone who publically disgraces him, a duel to the death. His word is tied to his reputation, and if one is harmed, the other suffers as well. Thus, accusing a gentle of lying is a slur upon his good name, while accusing him of lying in public is tantamount to publicly disgracing him.



The Vaticine Church of the Prophets

"The Creator is all around you; his face is hidden in his works."
— The Book of the Prophets, Volume I, Verse Seven

The Reformed Vaticine Church ("vaticine" meaning "prophet," therefore "the Prophets' Church") is one of the most powerful and influential organizations in Théah. Drawing power from the common people—and the nobles who support its beliefs—the Vaticine (VAH-tih-seen) Church and its flock are a force to be reckoned with. Beginning with the first Prophet who spoke to the Old Republic so long ago, it has amassed its own army, developed a system of education, and instigated most of the world's technological and philosophical advancements.

However, the Church has fallen under harsh criticism in recent times. Accusations of corruption and greed have caused many to doubt its authority, and even its veracity. The Objectionist Movement that began in Eisen over one hundred years ago has changed the Church forever; almost a third of its flock has turned to the Objectionists for guidance. It is a hard time for the Church, but many within its structure would argue that it has brought these troubles on itself, and that they could have even been avoided, if only the Cardinals had listened.

The Message and the Messenger

The message of the Vaticine Church is simple. The Creator made the world as a riddle for humanity to unravel. The closer to solving the riddle mankind comes, the closer he comes to understanding the mind of the Creator.

Credo ("What I believe")

Shortly after the death of the First Prophet, Emperor Corantine adopted belief in the Prophets as his Empire's official religion. He also demanded there be a "credo"—a unified expression of faith. In 325 AV, the Corantinian Convention put together this credo and presented it to the Emperor. He was satisfied.

The credo consists of six Articles of Faith, tenets that all believers hold to be true. The faithful memorize the Articles and recite them during Mass and all other Church activities. In order to understand the Church, one must understand its credo.

Article One: One True God

We believe in one true God, the Creator Almighty, Maker of Paradise and the World, and of all things visible and invisible.

The First Article declares that there is only one true Creator—Theus, the Maker of the Universe. Those who are members of the Faith cannot believe in any other gods or powers, nor make use of sorcery (which the Church has proclaimed comes from Legion, the Great Adversary). The use of sorcery is acceptance of powers other than the Creator, a heresy that can only end with death and the burning of the guilty person's corrupted body.

Article Two: One True Faith

We believe in one holy and prophetic Church.

If there is only one true God, there can be only one True Church, and that is the Vaticine Church. In other words, only the rituals prescribed by the Prophets are ordained by the Prophets, and therefore ordained by the Creator. Those who follow the rituals and beliefs of the Church shall stand as the armies of the Prophet at the end of the world. All other churches are false faiths, deceitful lies that will lead a soul not to Paradise, but to the Abyss.

Article Three: The First Prophet

And in its Prophet, who spoke the Creator's message for man and his salvation; who foretold the coming of three further Prophets; who delivered himself unto his enemies; and who was martyred for us in the days of Augustin Lauren.

The First Prophet is the key to the Church's credo. It was he whom the Creator made to bring his message to the world, he who spread the prophecy of three who would follow, and he who told of the wonders they would perform, "continuing his work in Theus' name." He gathered followers, the first saints, who had achieved a state of enlightenment through reason, and with them preached that only through acceptance of others (even those tainted by magic) can a person obtain salvation. Finally, it was he who—at the hands of vicious sorcerers and their corrupted rulers—was consumed by the raging flames of hatred and fear.

Article Four: The Second Prophet

And in the Second Prophet, who bore a staff; who spoke the Creator's message, and delivered men from evil; and who was betrayed by the unfaithful and was martyred for us.

The Second Prophet arrived from the now-infidel Empire of the Crescent Moon, claiming to be sent on a pilgrimage ordained by Theus. Though he was doubted, both for his claim and his skin, he struck dumb those who opposed his mission, and made powerless all sorcerers he encountered. And it was he who—claiming his flock were slaves of their homeland—led them back into the desert, only to be betrayed and murdered by the brothers of his birth.

Article Five: The Third Prophet

And in the Third Prophet, who bore a sword of pure flame; who spoke the Creator's message; divided the righteous from the unrighteous; and made the way clear for him who shall follow.

The Third Prophet was born into a time of unrest, when the world was braced for coming conflict. Unlike his predecessors, however, he was neither understanding nor tolerant of the world's convictions, rising from within the ranks of noble blood and casting the gauntlet back at them, becoming the spark that ignited a war of faith. He shifted the home of the Church from Vodacce to Castille and changed the manner of thought across the world in one, decisive act, rupturing the harmony of the Church.

Article Six: The Last Prophet

And in the Fourth Prophet, who shall bear a balanced hourglass; who shall be announced by trumpets; and the dead shall awaken and he shall reign in the visible and invisible world forevermore.

Inevitably, humanity will learn the awful tribute due at the end of time. The Fourth Prophet will bring Armageddon, casting the world into a cosmic battle for human souls. His kiss will be the breath of life across the globe, and his army will be the ranks of the fallen. He will lead them all through death and anger and conflict into a new age of brilliant truth and glory, where our fates are our own and the faithful shall live in the beauteous service of Theus forever.

Organization

Since the foundation of the Vaticine by the First Prophet, the administrative system has used the number ten to divide each tier of its hierarchy. Entire nations are divided up into religious districts, even if they do not necessarily conform to political districts, and governed by a Church-appointed official.

The Church

In any region of Théah that recognizes the Prophets, one can find a church. In fact, as of the Third Prophet's Declaration of Deference in 1267, "any fellowship without the blessing of a place of worship to the Creator shall be considered without the blessing of His Church," and so a church is often the first building erected in any new town.

The local church is the center of community: a court for magistrates, a hall for town meetings and the center of a wide variety of festivals and holiday celebrations. It is a place of refuge for the needy, a hospital for the sick and a sanctuary for those who claim to have seen the error of their ways.

The administration of a local church falls upon the most senior of its ordained priests. The High Priest, appointed within his own church by a vote of his peers and their congregation, represents the church in the Parish Council.

The Parish

The smallest district of Church administration is the Parish. A Parish consists of ten churches in close proximity. A Parish is governed by a Monsignor, who represents it in the local Diocese Council, and who is elected from among the High Priests of their Parish.

The Diocese

The next level in the Vaticine Church system is the Diocese. Each Diocese is made up of ten Parishes. A Diocese is governed by a Bishop who is also an elected position from within the Diocese.

The Archdiocese

The second highest, and most powerful, district within the Vaticine Church is the Archdiocese. Each of these extremely large districts is made up of ten Dioceses, and is governed by an Archbishop who represents his district in the Hieros Council. The council of Archbishops chooses ten of their members to serve as Cardinals, representing their own Archdiocese and also maintaining a Rectory in Vaticine City.

The Hieros

Aside from a Prophet, the most powerful leader in the Vaticine Church is the Hierophant, and the whole of the Prophets' Church is known as the Hieros. The Hierophant is selected by the Cardinals—from among the Archbishops who sit upon the Hieros Council—to serve the Church through a life-long position of pious leadership. The Vaticine Church's highest seat resides in Vaticine City, located just off the southeastern coast of Castille since the middle of the 13th Century.

The position of Hierophant is a stressful one. As such, the Hierophant has traditionally made use of the wise counsel of his Cardinals. It has also been a tradition for the Hierophant to make visits every other year to one of the courts of the Vaticine Monarchs (King Sandoval or one of the Vodacce Princes) during the summer months.

Until the time of the Third Prophet, the seat of the Vaticine Church resided in Vodacce, and a vast majority of the Hierophants hailed from there until it moved to Castille in the 13th Century. At present, there is no Hierophant. The last woman to hold that title was assassinated by an unknown assailant.

Church Positions

Hierarchical positions (Monsignor and higher) in the Vaticine Church are elected from a council of their peers within the same district. Each term of service is for life or until such time as the Church official decides that retirement is preferable to expiring in office. Retired Church officials return to their duties as priests in the local church where they began their religious careers. The Vaticine Church believes in and promotes equality between the sexes, and its titles are genderless. There are no "priestesses" and such—only female priests.

Rituals

There are an immense number of rituals performed regularly by the Priests of the Church of the Prophets. The following are among the most common.

Mass

This is the standard gathering of faithful within a church for the purposes of communal prayer. Most churches still hold Mass in Old Théan, though a few Nations (Eisen and Avalon, in particular) have translated the hymns and responses into their own native languages.

Baptism

Baptism within the Church of the Prophets occurs at the age of ten. The child in question receives an oral exam of his understanding of holy scripture. Failure results in a one-year grace period—called "deferment"—allowing the child to continue his studies until he succeeds.

Ordainment

Like Baptism, an oral exam is required for those who wish to join the Church as priests. As would be expected, the test is difficult, and failure results in a three-year deferment before another can be attempted. If the student fails again, he is not allowed a third attempt.

Marriage

Marriage is considered a social contract before Theus by the Vaticine Church. The wedded couple agrees both to uphold the tenets of the Creator's message and to provide a new generation of children to do the same. Priests may marry, though their prospective mates must be baptized members of the faith.

Tomes

There are two primary books used by the Church of the Prophets. The first is the Vaticine *Book of Common Prayer*, which details religious etiquette, procedures and hymns, and the rituals of the faith. The second is the *Book of the Prophets*, which consists of four Vigils, one for each of the Prophets who have already come, and another for the Last, which was delivered to the Third directly and allegedly documents the end of the world.

Church Philosophy

A gnostic church like the Vaticines is a little different from modern European faiths: unconcerned with faith, but—as their name suggests—fascinated by knowledge. As far as the Church is concerned, it is knowledge, not faith, that brings one closer to the Creator, for understanding His works gives you insight into the secrets of the Universe. Here are a few of the more contested philosophical questions of the modern Vaticine establishment:

Determinism vs. Free Will

The main conflict going on in Church universities right now is the debate between determinists and those who hold faith in a new concept called "free will." Determinism—at this time period—is the theory that all decisions that mankind makes are already predetermined by Theus.

On the other hand, many scholars have argued that mankind must have a choice. They do not argue the logic of determinism, but instead argue the importance of indeterminism. "If man cannot choose," argued one scholar, "then all of nature is an impersonal, uncaring force and not the patriarch we have painted him to be." It is a heated debate among scholars, and not likely to be resolved any time in the near future.

Romantic Love

The Church recognizes love as a concept, but not the love the poets write about. A man must love his neighbor, no matter who he is. A man must love his wife, no matter who she is. A wife must love her husband, no matter who he is. Love is for all of mankind, not just for one. The love the romantics write about is nothing more than lust, a base emotion.

Yet the romantics sing about a new kind of love, a love between two people that no other can experience, share or understand. It is a fire that flares up without reason and burns forever.

Is love as impersonal as the Church dictates, or is it as the poets claim, a mingling of two souls into one? Is there such a thing as True Love, and if so, have any truly fallen under its spell?



The Inquisition

The Inquisition is a secretive order within the Church, created by the Third Prophet following his rise to power, charged with seeking out and destroying sorcery. Inquisitors were answerable only to the Hierophant, and had vast authority over Church procedure. Vaticines were expected to assist them in any way they could. Thanks to their efforts, sorcery in civilized Théah remained underground for many centuries.

Luckily, they were always kept in check by the Hierophant. Each successive leader kept a close eye on the Inquisition, limiting its membership and ensuring that its power never grew beyond control. Overly ambitious Inquisitors would be quietly removed from their positions, which kept the order focused on its duties instead of seeking to control the Church.

Over the centuries, the Church has gradually grown more conservative, giving the Inquisition greater leeway in carrying out its duties. That rising tide crested when the current Hierophant was murdered. Now, the Inquisition is answerable to no one and cannot be stemmed until a new Hierophant is chosen.

Cardinal Esteban Verdugo has moved quickly to seize power, expanding the Inquisition's goals and filling its ranks with devout fanatics. They declared war on Théah's universities: burning books and hanging professors who oppose them. Their enemies are kidnapped and executed as heretics; many who might oppose them are too frightened to act. In the space of a decade, they have come to dominate the Church's affairs.

Organization and Methods

The Inquisition is organized around a small group of "High Inquisitors"—priests and Bishops charged with fulfilling the Third Prophet's edicts. They answer to Cardinal Verdugo, and employ a bewildering array of assistants, lackeys and contacts, which they control through loyalty, fear or blackmail. Those willingly involved in the Inquisition's affairs may hold the title of "Inquisitor" if they wish—a rank beneath the High Inquisitors who command them.

Because the order is ostensibly secret, Inquisitors and High Inquisitors all have normal positions within the Church, masquerading as ordinary priests or

mundane agents of Vaticine authority. Their targets are heretics—scholars, sorcerers, Objectionists and anyone who questions the Church's policies. When they have amassed enough evidence, they strike without warning, using surprise and terror to keep their target confused. They attack at night if they can and always make sure the local authorities cannot intervene. Victims are hanged on sight, or burned if the Inquisitors have time; experiments, books and research notes are burned, as well. The Inquisitors then vanish without a trace, leaving cryptic warnings to accompany the bodies.

The Inquisition holds the most power in Castille—the only Nation where they can move openly among the populace, without hiding their true purpose. Other Nations require more subtlety. Montaigne Inquisitors use the peasantry—who are still largely Vaticine—to mask their movements against the heretical nobility. The chaos of Eisen makes it easy for them to operate in that broken country, although they must avoid the forces of the Eisenfürsten who dislike religious fanatics. Vodacce, while dangerous, is tightly wound with political infighting, which the Inquisition can use to their advantage. There are few Inquisitors in Avalon, the Commonwealth, Ussura, or Vesten; all these Nations are hostile to Vaticine zealots.

Two forces currently stand against the Inquisition: the secret society known as the Invisible College and the mysterious vigilante called El Vagabundo. So far, they have been able to stem the worst of Verdugo's crimes, but unless a new Hierophant is chosen soon, their efforts can only slow him down.

The Objectionist Reform

In Octavus of 1517, a twenty-eight-year-old monk walked up to the door of his Bishop and nailed a piece of paper upon it. This was not a unique act; there were other pieces of paper nailed to the door, each a list of topics the monks of the mission wished to discuss at the end of the week. But this paper was different. The author was named Mattias Lieber, and within the span of five years, the whole world would know his name.

Lieber's paper contained a list of inflammatory questions, challenging every notion of Church authority and calling for widespread reform and a fundamental shift in Vaticine philosophy. Lieber denounced his fellows in the presence of the Hierophant, demanding an explanation for "the Church's inexcusable crimes and decadence." The Hierophant excommunicated Lieber on the spot, demanding his death, but he was smuggled out of Castille by King Franz II and returned to Eisen.

In the safety of his homeland, Lieber used a new invention, the printing press, to spread his news. He also translated the *Book of the Prophets* into Low Eisen, and distributed them throughout the country. Through his efforts, a new religious movement called Objectionism slowly spread, first to Eisen and then to the entire world. Within a few years, it had reached every corner of civilized Théah.

Objectionist Philosophy

Objectionism embraces the same basic ideals as the Vaticines, but with key differences. Under it, the Church no longer acts as an arbitrator between Theus and humanity: no one can interpose or "filter" the teachings of the Creator. Theus is everywhere and therefore needs no human institution to interpret His will. Priests cannot absolve sins; only Theus can. The Church cannot create miracles; only Theus can. Therefore, humanity should appeal directly to Theus for absolution and guidance, not depend upon the Church to do it for them.

They can do this by reading the *Book of the Prophets* and acting on what they read. They can express their faith through charity, hard work and helping others in need of aid. "Theus," Lieber wrote, "has granted every creature a measure of His grace, which we must use to further His good works." While the Church can act as a facilitator in this scenario, it cannot claim any absolute authority or interpose itself between Theus and the individual.

Organization and Structure

Objectionism is organized roughly along Vaticine lines, but with fewer ranks and less authority. Individual priests are called "chaplains," who each oversee a single church. "Deacons" are senior chaplains who each coordinate twenty churches. Above the deacons are "Apostles" who coordinate the church's efforts for an entire province or Nation. They are the

highest branch of the faith; there are twenty-five of them in all. No apostle has authority over any other, and each is considered equal in the eyes of the church. Apostles are elected by the deacons, who can also remove them from office by a vote of no confidence.

There are no dioceses, no bishops, and no Hierophant; chaplains cannot absolve sins or declare heresies. Fasts, pilgrimages and miracles are unnecessary. Baptisms take place at age seven, and the children are not required to take an exam. A chaplain's official duties are fairly limited—holding mass, overseeing marriages and conducting funeral rites—but he or she is expected to serve as an example to his or her congregation. When not spreading the word, Objectionist priests are expected to work in universities and hospitals, bettering the lives of others.

Needless to say, the Vaticine hasn't taken well to this new faith. For one hundred years after Lieber's teachings, tensions between the two sects rose until exploding into the War of the Cross. After thirty years of bloodshed, Théans have come to the inevitable conclusion that the continent will remain forever divided between Objectionist and Vaticine faiths.

The Nations and Their Faiths

Every Nation has a complicated relationship with faith and religion. Nothing is clear here. If you're looking for clear-cut answers, you won't find them. Religion and faith are built on exceptions, not rules.

Avalon

In 1554, the King "refused to allow the Church of Castille to rule Avalon," throwing off the Church's control and forming the Church of Avalon. Elaine has taken up that mantle as well, making her the final authority on all spiritual matters and the Hierophant's ecclesiastical equal. Inismore and the Highland Marches, on the other hand, are much more traditional, featuring a mix of Vaticine and Objectionist faiths.

Castille

No nation is as devoutly Vaticine as Castille, the home of the Church of the Prophets. Every Castillian attends Mass at least once a week and the few Objectionists in the country are very quiet about their affiliation.

Eisen

For almost a century, half of Eisen was Vaticine and the other half was Objectionist. The War of the Cross was born out of religious intolerance…all the conflict did was deepen the wound. Now, most Vaticine Eisen have left the Nation, leaving the Objectionists in charge of matters of faith.

Montaigne

Montaigne is currently divided between its peasantry, who are devoutly Vaticine, and its nobility, who have consistently rejected Church authority. The previous Hierophant excommunicated the entirety of Montaigne before her death, but many Churches still operate within the country, serving the peasants who seek solace in the Vaticine faith that has been so callously regarded by a man who thinks himself a god.

Sarmatian Commonwealth

The Commonwealth is a mish-mash of Vaticine teachings and old paganism. Many of the old gods are now considered saints or demons in the more civilized parts of the Commonwealth, but in the rural areas, those "demons and saints" show up from time to time, leaving little room for misinterpretation.

Ussura

The Ussuran Orthodox Church follows the teachings of the First Prophet only. The First Prophet got it right the first time, after all. Why do you need a second and a third? The Church, on the other hand, couldn't care less what a country of backward-born barbarians believes.

Vestenmennavenjar

While the Vestenmennavenjar cling to their ancient pagan religion, the Vaticine have made some small progress into the Nation. Not much, but maybe a fingerhold. The Vesten give money to Objectionist cathedrals and missions, but no one knows exactly how they expect those investments to mature.

Vodacce

Vodacce was, is and always will be Vaticine.



Knowledge

With the help of the Vaticine Church, Théans are a little ahead of where our own technological progress was in the mid-17th Century. The last ten years of Théan history have produced an impressive array of scientific advancements: the microscope, the reflecting telescope, knowledge of human anatomy and astounding discoveries in astronomy, physics and chemistry.

Unfortunately, with the Inquisition's rise to power, these advancements are in danger of being destroyed. The Inquisition claims that the time of knowledge is past, and that Théans should prepare for the end of the world rather than dabble in useless scientific curiosity. Advancement may be lost to the flames if the Inquisitors are not stopped.

Archæology

Currently, archæological technology is restricted to shovels, brushes, historical investigations and notepads. The Théans are perfectly capable of sketching the things they discover in the archæological digs across Théah, and they are slowly gaining understanding of these objects. But important artifacts often get destroyed accidentally, or stolen to hang on some private collector's wall. Archæologists hope to share these discoveries with all of Théah and improve their understanding of its pre-history.

Architecture and Construction

The Théans are capable of impressive architectural feats. While they couldn't construct a highway, a suspension bridge or a skyscraper, they've built beautiful cities and enormous cathedrals that stretch up to 400 feet in the air. They possess the secret of making concrete, but they lack the mass production facilities necessary to use it on a large scale. Their roads are cobbled, their roofs are often covered with sheets of tin, and their windows, at least in the bigger cities, are usually made of glass.

Astronomy

The Théans understand that their world, Terra, is a sphere that orbits their sun (which is called Solas), and their moon orbits their world. In addition, they've discovered five other planets that orbit their sun in the same way. There may be more, but their telescopes are too primitive to see them.

Théans know how big Terra is within a 1% degree of error, and they can predict eclipses of both the sun and the moon. Telescopes have been around in Théah for a century, but a few months ago (1668), a Castillian astronomer named Alvara Arciniega constructed the first reflecting telescope. It has allowed Théans to see further into the skies than ever before. With the help of the Invisible College, he has revealed his invention to the scientific community and hopes to further refine it in the future.

Chemistry

Chemistry has recently emerged from its mystical roots in alchemy (although in Théah there could be some truth to alchemy). An Avalon named Jeremy Cook wrote *The Rational Chemist* in 1661, which established a more rigorous discipline based on the scientific method. Now only a few practicing alchemists are left, most having turned to the new science of chemistry. In 1662, Cook created the first air pump, an act that should have proven the existence of air. Unfortunately, by that time, the Inquisition was coming to power, and Cook was shot for his heretical research. His work survived only because of the efforts of the Invisible College.

Mathematics

Théan mathematicians have worked out the mysteries of algebra, trigonometry, geometry and the zero. They do not yet possess calculus, but it won't be long in coming. Probability is not yet a rigorous discipline, and, as Verdugo himself said, "Only gamblers would be interested in its results."

Medicine

Théan doctors are significantly more advanced than our own doctors were in the 17th Century. The humor theory, which states that the body is governed by four humors (blood, phlegm, bile and black bile), was denounced by Vesten physician Franz Deleboe in 1661. The Inquisition carried him off in the night, but word of his revelation leaked, and other physicians have been able to capitalize on his work.

The Théans understand that careful hygiene during operations leads to a higher survival rate, but they aren't sure why. To treat a gunshot wound, they know to remove the bullet and stitch the wound closed afterwards. They also know to change the bandages on a wound every so often and to boil the bandages to make sure they're clean. They are aware that diseases are spread by sick people, so they keep them quarantined, but they have not discovered viruses or bacteria.

The microscope has been around in Théah since 1608. Its inventor, an unknown Vesten, used it to view blood corpuscles, as well as insects and small plants. In addition to its aid in medicine, it has greatly enhanced the fields of biology, botany and entomology.

Natural Philosophy (Physics)

The field of physics has witnessed some startling breakthroughs in the past few years, despite the efforts of the Inquisition. Static electricity was harnessed in 1662 with a small device using a rotating globe of sulphur. María Alvarado, a Castillian scholar, invented the device as part of her university studies; it was the first practical demonstration of static electricity on a large scale.

The Inquisition was not powerful enough at the time to stop Alvarado's experiment—she was prominent and well respected—but they came close to wiping out another physics breakthrough just four years later. The Castillian Alvara Arciniega discovered the light spectrum with a series of homemade prisms. The Inquisition, upon learning of this theory, attempted to hang him, but Arciniega was a skilled swordsman and killed three Inquisitors before escaping to the country. It was there that he first perfected the reflecting telescope, detailed in the Astronomy section.

Navigation

The Théans possess magnetic compasses and astrolabes, but do not yet possess a chronometer that is accurate enough and resistant enough to the moist sea air to allow them to measure longitude. The Montaigne have a method that works, but it requires a noble gifted with Porté magic to teleport home and look at a clock there, then return. Obviously, this method doesn't see much use, but it does give the Montaigne navy the best maps of Théah.

Weapons and Warfare

Currently, muskets are the weapon of choice in warfare, typically supported by a line of pikemen. The Théans do not yet have rifles, so the accuracy of these guns is less than it could be. They have developed cannons, as well, but do not yet possess the ballistic knowledge necessary to create mortars. The Montaigne have also developed primitive grenades, but the weapons have proven so unreliable that only peasant levies (grenadiers) carry them into battle. The average lifespan of a grenadier is three battles.

In duels of honor, rapiers or other fencing weapons are commonly used, with the saber reserved for the brave cavalrymen of the day.



Pirates and Privateers

"Hop to, lads, and raise every stitch of cloth we've got! If that man-of-war catches us, then the sirens will sing over our bones before the day is through!"

— Reputed last words of Captain Aaron Guy, Avalon pirate

While hundreds of pirate crews navigate the Seven Seas, five well-known bands of pirates hold the most notoriety.

The Brotherhood of the Coast

Originally a band of desperate pirates and smugglers, the Brotherhood of the Coast formed in response to the ruthless pirate hunters known as the Black Spot Fleet: ruthless pirates, thugs and brigands who were paid to hunt down their own kin by the Castillian nobility.

The first members of Brotherhood, all victims of the Black Spots' relentless crusade, joined forces and signed a charter of mutual protection. Under their First King—the legendary Captain Roberts—the Brotherhood defeated their enemies and reclaimed the seas from the schemes of Castillian nobles. Each Brotherhood ship is now a state unto itself: the crews elect Captains as representatives of a free Republic of Pirates.

Yet all know that their Republic would have scattered to the winds if not for the Gentleman Pirate, Captain Gosse. Famous for his civility, Gosse was elected King of the Pirates after the Devil Jonah himself slew Captain Roberts. Gosse worked tirelessly to build an enduring foundation for the Brotherhood, then retired, making way for Captain Bonaventura to win the necessary votes to become Queen.

Captain Bonaventura—Queen of the Brotherhood of the Coast—has declared war on the world since winning her crown. If the governments of Théah refuse to recognize the Brotherhood, then the Brotherhood will continue to take their boats, their cargo and their lives.

The Buccaneers of La Bucca

A former prison island far off the coast of Castille, La Bucca has become a beacon of liberty for all. The prisoners of La Bucca—now called Buccaneers—stole back their freedom from their jailers when they faked an outbreak of the plague, allowing them to capture the island in the ensuing panic.

Rumors of raiders from the island eventually caused the Castillians, the Vodacce and the Vesten to each send a warship, leading to a four-way stalemate. The three foreign captains discovered their fresh water supplies unexpectedly gone—some suggest it was sabotaged by sorcery or underhanded legerdemain—and when the leader of the Buccaneers offered the Vodacce, Castillians and Vesten the choice of a treaty or death from thirst, the foreign captains capitulated.

The Buccaneer leader is a man named Allende. Due to some rumored "unusual occurrences," most believe him to be a sorcerer. For example, one prison guard tells the story of placing a pistol against Allende's chest and pulling the trigger. He saw Allende fall backwards, then get back to his feet, completely unharmed.

Allende and his Buccaneers now welcome all fleets with either friendship or the sword. Any who sight the island are welcome to dock in her safe harbors. They find fresh water, salted pork, unfettered trade in goods and secrets and a host of Buccaneers ready to sign Letters of Marque for any who will hire them. Beyond the horizon of La Bucca, and all over Théah and the New World, those same Buccaneers roam the waves, knives sharp and cannon ready, looking for any ships whose names do not appear on their numerous Letters of Marque.

The Crimson Roger

This "group" of pirates consists of a single ship named the Crimson Roger. They are brutal, bloodthirsty criminals led by an equally fearsome captain. No quarter is ever offered to their victims, and no prisoners are ever taken. The pirates simply attack, murdering everyone they find. Ships carrying cargoes of Syrneth artifacts seem to be most at risk, as though the crew can somehow sense the presence of such devices.

The only eyewitness account of these pirates come from the captain of His Lordship's Mistress, a merchant brigantine that managed to escape the Crimson Roger after her sister ship, The Grey Dog, was plundered. The pirates used strange devices, possibly of Syrneth origin, in the fight. The captain was a tall man with curly black hair and a strange scythe that sliced through flesh and ship alike.

As His Mistress sailed away in a panic, the mysterious pirate Captain hollered out to them, "Run, you dogs, and tell the world what you've seen of the Crimson Roger and Captain Reis! Next time we meet, I'll split you all from top to bottom!" The captain of the brigantine was so distressed by this threat that he retired and refused to go to sea ever again. It seemed as though his instincts were correct: within a month his old ship vanished at sea. The captain himself was found in his study a week later, split in half by some fearsome weapon. Written in blood upon the wall was one word: "Reis."

Queen Elaine of Avalon has offered an 8,000 Guilder reward for proof of Reis' death, which would presumably include his unusual scythe.

The Sea Dogs

Operating along the northern and western coasts of Théah, the Sea Dogs focus their attacks on Montaigne and Castillian ships. These pirates sail in small, maneuverable sloops, and never harm Avalon ships. Some suggest there is some connection between these men and Queen Elaine, but she denies sponsorship of the Sea Dogs. The rulers of the other countries are not convinced of her sincerity.

There are several Sea Dogs seemingly acting independently of each other, but the most famous of them is Jeremiah Berek, captain of the Black Dawn. Captain Berek is a dashing, handsome man whose crew would follow him into the Abyss itself. Cynical comments made by other captains suggest that Berek uses Glamour to cultivate this loyalty among his men, but there is no hard evidence of this.

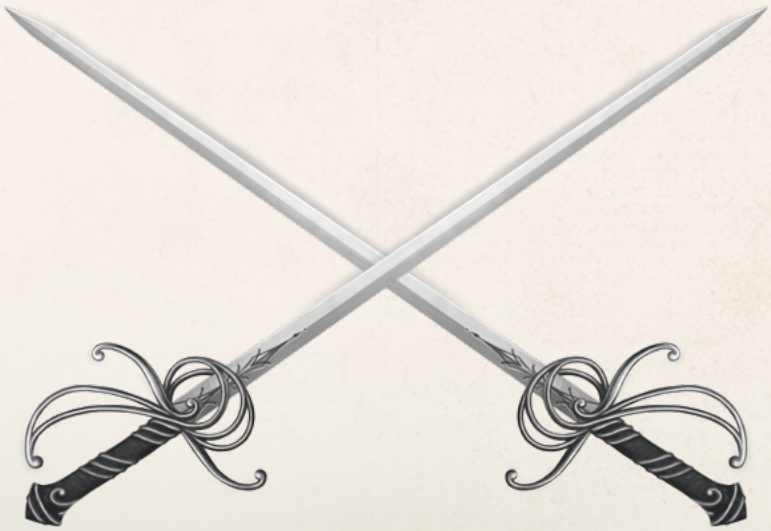
Captain Berek and the other Sea Dogs appeared at the battle with the Castillian Armada. Berek's ingenuity and leadership during the fight contributed immeasurably to the Avalon victory. This only strengthens the claims that he is working for Queen Elaine.

The Vesten Raiders

The Vesten Raiders haunt the waters of Théah, attacking any merchant ships that cross their paths. Often rowing their longships out of chilly fog banks to surprise unwary merchants, the Raiders have the powers of Vestenmennavenjar Skalds and stout Eisen mercenaries at their disposal. There is little merchants fear more than the steady thrumming of their heavy drums, beating time for the oars as the wind spills from the sails of their chosen victims.

When they first appear, the Vesten Raiders blow a ram's horn three times. Their victim then has a choice: lower sails and surrender…or fight to the last hand. The Vesten are not interested in taking prisoners, as their own crew work the oars more reliably than any chained slave. However, in spite of this "no prisoners" policy, the Vesten are careful to leave one person alive from each crew who fights them, to spread the word of their deeds far and wide.

Hysterical stories have begun to circulate about ships with rune-covered figureheads that can spit lightning and battle-maddened Raiders wearing horned helmets, shrugging off blows that should have killed them. Sensible merchants ignore these rum-induced tales, but there's no mistaking that the Vesten Raiders are a serious threat to all non-Vendel League merchant vessels.



Secret Societies

"They are nothing more than a very private organization with a very public agenda."
— Esteban Verdugo

Secret meetings in dark rooms are as important to Théah's history as the armies who march across her green fields. Her history is spotted with wars, but the most important conflicts are not fought with swords, guns or cannons, but in the shadows with knives and whispers. Those innocent of such activities are both blessed and cursed: blessed because they do not know how their lives are directed by these organizations, and cursed for the very same reason.

There have always been clandestine organizations operating behind the scenes. These groups have hidden agendas; while you may never know of their existence, it is guaranteed that they know of yours.

The Brotherhood of the Coast

Flying a flag of freedom across open waters, the pirates who call themselves the Brotherhood prey upon the corrupt and decadent who sail the waters around Théah. They will be free men, even unto their deaths.

Die Kreuzritter

In the 12th Century, a group of Eisen knights travelled East to the Crescent Empire to fight the "heathen hordes." What they discovered changed the order, transforming it completely. Now, die Kreuzritter travel across Théah doing battle with monsters using knowledge from both Théah and abroad.

The Explorer's Society

It started as a scholarly club in the Odiseo region of Castille. Over the years, it developed into a group of adventurer-scholars seeking out the secrets of the Syrneth ruins. Now, because of the Inquisition, the Society has gone underground, hiding their exploits and discoveries from the Inquisition.

The Invisible College

When the Inquisition fell upon the Church, research papers were destroyed, scholars imprisoned, and any further investigations cancelled. A small team of priests began smuggling papers back and forth, maintaining their research covertly, out of view from the Inquisition. This is the Invisible College: science at the risk of losing their lives.

Knightly Order of the Rose & Cross

The Rose & Cross is a "gentle's order" dedicated to the ancient codes of chivalry: protecting the helpless, bringing the unjust to justice and generally making the world a better place. Depending on where you are and who you ask, they are either the greatest heroes in Théah or a gaggle of miscreant noble children butting their noses where they don't belong.

Los Vagabundos

A small, elite group of heroes who began in Castille but now have a presence all across Théah. Their purpose? To uphold the reigns of kings and queens who serve their people justly and overthrow those who would oppress those they rule.

Močiutės Skara

"Grandmother's shawl." A group that began in the Commonwealth during the War of the Cross. Common citizens prepared to respond to disasters, providing aid, comfort and shelter to those in need.

The Rilasciare

The most disorganized, but potentially dangerous, organization in Théah has dedicated its powers to overthrowing what it calls "the Two Tyrannies." These are monarchy and the Vaticine Church. And they do so with an almost invisible power: the power of ideas.

Sophia's Daughters

In Vodacce, women are little more than glorified slaves. The covert organization known as Sophia's Daughters hopes to change all of that, one Merchant Prince at a time. But their focus is not only on Vodacce, spreading out across Théah to protect and advise women in power in every Nation.

Syrneth Ruins in Théah

Scattered throughout Théah lie the ruins of a society older than humanity, generally known as the Syrne. The ruined cities of this elder race are a treasure haven for men and women willing to risk their safety for the knowledge and riches of the unknown.

The Syrne apparently lived across most of Théah at one time, and partial artifacts appear everywhere from the most distant islands to recently plowed farmers' fields. Well preserved sites are more difficult to come by, but optimistic adventurers continue to search for them.

More than half a century ago, Leandra Souza founded the Explorer's Society in Odiseo. Since then, the group has grown in power and prestige, and boasts houses in several Nations. Members of the Explorer's Society dedicate themselves to learning as much as they can about humanity's predecessors. They constantly seek out new ruins and record whatever they learn. The artifacts they find are preserved and sent back to the Society Houses for study.

On the other side of the coin, groups of adventurers, either independent treasure seekers or parties funded by Théah's nobility, have also stepped up their search for Syrneth remnants. Less interested in the tedious pursuit of information, these groups care mainly for the money. In the last few years, Syrneth artifacts have become the fashionable hobby of the nobility. Private collections are a source of prestige, and the truly decadent show off their wealth by incorporating the artifacts into their daily dress and ornamentation. These nobles offer a high price for such trinkets, keeping fortune hunters of all stripes busy searching for more.

The Sites

The remains of the Syrne are obvious in some places. Buildings in Montaigne, inhabited for centuries by human beings, were clearly not built by them. They stand tall but impossibly slender, with no means of support. In other parts of Théah, more than a millennium of dust and weather has buried whole cities. Only through extensive excavation have explorers learned anything at all about them.

Along with the natural dangers of this kind of exploration—cave-ins, flooding, poisonous gas—elaborate traps lurk at some locations, ready to strike the unwary. Other areas are homes to unnatural animals not listed in any encyclopedia or travelogue, who attack any hapless adventurer unlucky enough to wander into their lairs.

The Montaigne Tunnels

Beneath Charouse, the capital city of Montaigne, runs an extensive set of tunnels. Although maps detail some of the major tunnels, no record exists of exactly how far they extend, and many of the narrower off-shoots are unrecorded. The major caverns are approximately 15 feet tall and 10 feet wide, although in some intersections they are much larger.

The tunnels have existed longer than the city and were obviously created by a deliberate hand. Spiral pillars support stone archways, and decorative carvings are etched into some of the blocks lining the walls. The stone is not identifiable as any normally found in the region.

Whatever purpose they may have served initially, the tunnels are presently used as the city's sewer system. The bulk of the city's refuse runs through the lengthy tunnels, but as of yet, no one is quite certain where that waste drains to. Portions of the tunnels also function as home to some of the city's less fortunate residents.

Several parties from the Explorer's Society have made forays into the tunnels beneath Montaigne's capital city. Although the most accessible passages are filled with grime, some parties have made interesting finds further in. They've discovered several pieces of metal, which appear to be body ornamentation that would fit a humanoid figure. Some have argued that the pieces aren't artifacts at all, but instead discarded pieces of Montaigne finery. However the style is unlike anything in the Théan courts, and the items were unearthed further down than any of the city's waste has traveled.

The most impressive discovery has been the "Star Map" located deep in the tunnels. It consists of a vast, spherical chamber, with a narrow bridge running through the center, suspended nearly 50 feet from the highest and lowest points of the sphere. Gemstones line the walls, floor and ceiling, creating what appears to be a fairly accurate map of Théah's heavens. However, along with the familiar points of

WHO ARE THE SYRNE?

The ruins of an ancient civilization can be found all across Terra. Dubbed "the Syrne" by one of the first scholars to study the ruins, the ancient people who built these structures seem to have been similar to humans, but with a different kind of technology. At least, a technology too advanced for 17th Century minds to grasp.

The Théans have no record of what the Syrne looked like, although some scholars suggest they were at least bipedal. Their tools seem designed for digits similar to fingers and thumbs and are roughly human-sized. Because they vanished so quickly and so completely, many scholars assume a great catastrophe destroyed them. Some suggest the ancient and powerful entities lingering in Ussura, the Commonwealth and Avalon may be the last surviving remnants, but those creatures aren't confirming any suspicions today.

light, a number of stones are set at points that appear in the sky to be only empty space. The explorers who found it estimate that the chamber lies almost directly beneath l'Empereur's palace.

L'Empereur of Montaigne is not friendly toward the Explorer's Society. Charouse's city guard and the local residents have gone out of their way to make the visitors feel unwelcome. Shortly after the discovery of the star map, the explorer party found their rooms ransacked and many of their research notes missing. This has led to some speculation as to how much the monarchy knows about the strange site beneath their city...and what they'd like to keep hidden.

The Signore Catacombs

There is a great deal of debate as to whether the labyrinths beneath the Signore Islands are a naturally occurring geographic feature or a deliberate accomplishment. Each of the islands is formed from hard, non-porous rock. Cities rise up from the surface of several of the larger islands, but beneath the entire chain runs an even more complete set of tunnels. They do not appear to follow any set pattern, and their surfaces are rough and unpolished. However, shelves in the stone appear at regular intervals along both sides of the passageway.

The tunnels span for uncharted miles, similar to those in Montaigne. These are smaller, some seven to eight feet high and five to seven feet wide. They also run in levels, stacked one on top of the next, some of which go all the way down below sea level. Salt water floods the lower levels, reaching higher when the tide rises.

The Merchant Princes of Vodacce have put the tunnels beneath the Signore Islands to good use. The niches in the cavern walls can accommodate a human body, so they've served as the tombs of several major families for several generations. This raises another exploration problem: it can be difficult to tell if anything found in the tunnels has remained there for hundreds of years or whether the sea has recently washed it in or down from the human remains above.

Other Sites

In addition to these well-known areas, smaller pockets of Syrneth civilization are scattered about Théah. The most notable are those on the far western isles, which were apparently a haven for the Syrneth civilization. The most famous of these are the Thalusian Islands, located to the west of Avalon, but countless others exist as well. Every island and archipelago, it seems, has some trinket waiting to be discovered. Explorers journey there on a regular basis, for they do not need any nation's permission to search the ruins. They must dodge pirates and treasure hunters, as well as the dangers of the ruins themselves, to find what they are after.

Other areas in Théah have produced more stories than artifacts. Groups returning from Ussura have reported aeries high in the mountains too large for any bird they've seen. Pirates tell tales of boiling lakes on islands far to the south, and the remains of giant insects that they've found there. Some tales are more outrageous than others, but anyone who enters Syrneth ruins without taking every precaution can only blame himself should the unexpected occur.

In other continents and other Nations, Syrneth ruins show up from time to time, but not every Nation is as concerned with protecting them as the Explorer's Society.

Théah's Monsters

Legends of foul and terrifying creatures abound on Théah, mostly in wild and uncivilized areas. They differ from mundane creatures by their ferocity and their threat to human beings. Most are unintelligent, though some have the capacity for reason. It is these intelligent monsters that explorers have learned to fear the most.

The Bestiary

Constanzo Rodriguez, a notable member of the Explorer's Society, has spent most of his life cataloguing Théah's more remarkable fauna. His *Complete Bestiary* is an ever-expanding work that has brought great prestige to the elderly Castillian. The largest entries—the ones listed below—are creatures most often seen by Théans, or at least, the creatures that cause mankind the most trouble.

Ghosts

Ghosts seem to be the lingering spirits of the departed. Often wandering the places they died, ghosts usually look exactly as they did at the instant of death. This means that they might be carrying their head around if they had it lopped off by an executioner, or their clothing might be forever stained with blood. Some ghosts are believed to interfere with certain types of sorcery in their vicinity. For instance, ghosts spotted in Montaigne will often prevent Porté from working near them. The Montaigne have also been able to catch ghosts in mirrors (a very specialized and rare talent), and many nobles use these captured souls for ghastly entertainment at their lavish parties.

Ghouls

Ghouls are strange, ape-like creatures that seem to sense wounded creatures from miles away. They prefer to feed on still-living flesh, but are usually too weak to capture it themselves, so they feast on animals that have injured themselves. These beasts make no distinction between wounded animals and wounded humans. Often, field hospitals must be guarded at night, for ghouls have been known to slip inside and attack the wounded men. Most soldiers are deathly afraid of being found in a weakened state by a ghoul, and ghouls following an army are seen as a very bad omen.

Kobolds

Often encountered in uninhabited forests, such as the Schwarzen Wälder in Eisen, kobolds are the models for the grotesque stone rainspouts often found atop cathedrals and other important buildings throughout Théah. They are bloodthirsty, territorial beasts who will not move into an area if they see another of their kind living there already. The statues are an attempt to fool them into thinking that the area is already inhabited. These beasts attack using their oversized fangs and claws, and are difficult to injure. Their bite is mildly poisonous.

Sirens

The sirens possess an upper torso similar to a woman's, and the lower body of a fish. They feed almost exclusively on meat, and have a preference for human flesh. They have been known to imitate drowning women near ships, in the hopes that a gallant sailor will attempt to rescue them. In other instances, they swim up next to ships anchored in shallow bays and motion for the sailors to join them for a swim. Should all these subterfuges fail, sirens will still follow a ship in hopes of a shipwreck. Once a sailor is in the water, the sirens quickly swim up to him, emitting a soothing warbling noise. They use their shark-like teeth and sharp nails to tear the sailor apart, gobbling down large chunks of meat, which their necks stretch to accommodate. The keening noise that they make while feeding seems to be a sound of satisfaction or happiness, and has come to be known as the "siren's song." There are few noises a sailor fears more.

Wights

Wights are corpses that have not ceased to move. They disdain the use of weapons, preferring their own filthy talons. In spite of this primitive attitude, they show a fair degree of cleverness, and perhaps even actual reasoning, although they never speak. It is believed among churchgoing Théans that wights are created when a man who is too proud of his own accomplishments dies of unnatural causes. Their obstinate pride prevents them from moving on into the afterlife.

Rodriguez's *Bestiary* has disputed this claim in its latest edition. He says that there is evidence that a wight's condition is similar to a disease, and that the condition is spread through contact with existing wights. Unfortunately, since wights are so difficult to destroy, the few cadavers he has obtained have been too mangled to perform a proper dissection on. Wights are encountered near the seas more often than anywhere else.

Other Monsters

Other monsters of note include the drachen, the griffons, and the night terrors. None of these beasts are encountered very often—no one has seen a drachen in living memory—and they are poorly understood. It is known that night terrors somehow invade a person's dreams to attack them, and that griffons attack in packs of fifteen to twenty members, but the details of their behavior are so sketchy as to be worthless to the average explorer.

Monsters as the Seven Sins

The Church has identified certain monsters with the seven deadly sins. The following litany is taught to young children to help them identify the sins within themselves. These monsters aren't necessarily the most common, simply those the Church feels best exemplifies the seven sins.

"The Pride of the Wights has brought them to doom,
The Ghosts, full of Envy, lurk near in the gloom.
The Greed of the Kobolds drives them to kill.
The Gluttonous Ghoul on men has his fill.
A Lust for the Sirens brings a man's death.
The Night Terrors steal a Slothful man's breath.
The Wrath of the Drachen roars from its den,
But a man without sin is a king among men."






Chapter 3
Making a Hero



MAKING A HERO

Before you sit down to play 7th Sea, you need a Hero. Not someone else's Hero…*your* Hero. This chapter shows you how to make your own. This is your opportunity to create a Hero just like your favorites in fiction and film. The numbers and words on the Hero sheet aren't enough; you've got to know more about him than Traits and Ranks. There are some important questions you'll have to answer first, questions that will turn your Hero from a two-dimensional caricature into a three-dimensional character. Start by getting a copy of the Hero sheet located in the back of the book. Then, read through the next section. Each Nation in Théah means something a little different when they say "hero." Where your Hero was born says a lot about what *he* thinks it means.

Théan Heroes

This section gives you the rundown on all the Nations. It also tells you what the Heroes from those Nations are like, so you can decide where you want your Hero to hail from. Every Nation has its own culture, its own flavor, its own themes. When you choose to be a Hero from a Nation, you adopt that culture, that flavor, and those themes. A Hero from Eisen might have much in common with a Castillian or Sarmatian, but he will always be from Eisen. Of Eisen. *Always*.

Every Nation in Théah has their own definition of a hero. What qualities does a hero have? What are the most important? What qualities disqualifies someone from being a hero? Each Nation has an answer to these questions. When you choose your Nation, you're choosing a culture's definition of "hero." You can play up to it, play against it, or take it your own way. Playing against type may win you favors when you travel abroad, but it will also make you an anti-hero in your own homeland.

Avalon



Also known as "the Glamour Isle," Avalon is one of the Three Kingdoms. Queen Elaine holds the Graal, an ancient and powerful item that makes her the undisputed monarch. So long as she holds the Graal, Avalon and its sister isles remain united. Heroes of Avalon are also united in their cause: protecting the Queen from danger. Since her ascent to the throne, many have tried to assassinate Elaine. Her trusted circle of Knights guards her from any further attempts.

Avalon is a land where legends are more than just stories: they are the very embodiment of magical power. The greater a Hero's story, the greater she becomes. This is the magic of Avalon, a magic called "Glamour" (see page 214).

The island also has another race living among the Avalonians: the mysterious Sidhe. Whether it be a beautiful Sidhe knight or a puckish trickster spirit, the Sidhe come in many forms and demand great respect from the Avalonians. Your relationship to the Sidhe is an important part of your character. Are you friendly? Distrustful? Antagonistic? The Sidhe gave Elaine the Graal, so your attitude toward them may influence your attitude toward the Queen as well.

Appearance

The typical Avalon has pale skin and light eyes. Hair varies between dark and light. The men and women are both stout. Men grow beards. Men and women grow their hair long with braids.

Clothing tends to be wool with many layers: Avalon can get cold. A recent trend among Avalon sailors is pockets: something that has begun to spread among other cultures as well. Wearing iron bracelets or necklaces is also popular, just in case you wander into an unfriendly Sidhe. Iron sometimes blocks Sidhe magic. Sometimes.

Typical Professions

Many Avalonians start as sailors and fishermen. When living on an island, the most abundant food source is the sea. Avalon also has its fair share of hunters and farmers, but more families make their living from the sea than any other profession.

Religion

As an Avalon Hero, you have a choice of four faiths: Druidic, Vaticine, Church of Avalon, or Objectionist. The oldest religion, the Druidic faith, is kept by various priests and priestesses. The Druidic faith is not well organized, nor does it want to be. If you believe in the Old Gods of Avalon, you gather on holy days in the forest, then dance and sing and frolic until dawn.

Three hundred years ago, the Vaticine Church reached Avalon's shores, constructing churches on Druidic holy sites. Blood was shed until the King declared protection for both faiths. The Vaticine Church brought science and reason to Avalon, including medicine and agricultural techniques. If you are Vaticine, you believe you can understand the mind of God by studying His Creation.

One hundred years ago, the King of Avalon separated his kingdom from the Vaticine Church—after a disagreement about divorce laws—establishing the Church of Avalon. After the King's death, the country broke into civil war over the two faiths until Elaine healed the land. If you are a follower of the Church of Avalon, you believe Elaine is the head of the Church, but otherwise follow the same tenets as the Vaticine faith.

More recently, Objectionists have come to Avalon. They believe that neither the Old Gods nor Elaine nor the Hierophant are truly divine. Instead, Theus must be known directly by those who believe in him. If you're an Objectionist, you find ways to connect with Theus without relying on a Church.

Attitudes

When playing an Avalon Hero, make sure everyone notices what you do. After all, Glamour demands it. Heroes remembered by Avalon bards live forever, and the only way to be remembered is by doing the impossible. Every day.

Hospitality is a huge part of Avalon culture. On the island, the people you meet might be ordinary travelers or powerful Sidhe: you never know when or how a kind gesture or a cruel rebuke will come back to you. So, treat strangers with respect. Guarded respect.

Sing songs and tell stories. The Avalonians are the greatest storytellers in the world. Just ask them.



Inismore

Another of the Glamour Isles, the people of Inismore—the Inish—do not like being called "Avalonian." Yes, their Nation is part of the Three Kingdoms and yes, they do acknowledge Elaine as the High Queen, but do not call them Avalon. Call an Inish sailor an Avalonian and you'll likely spend the rest of the night looking for your teeth.

The two Nations may be at peace now, but old wounds are slow to heal. The Inish generally don't trust Avalonian ambition and the Avalonians are suspicious of Inish revenge. Allies for now. Just now.

As for the rest of Théah, the Inish are happy to wander and add to their personal legends. The same magic that guides the hearts of the Avalonians—glamour—makes the Inish some of the most courageous adventurers in Théah. Some say because they are drunken and foolhardy. The Inish know better. It's the key to Inish magic: transforming a mortal into an immortal. Into a story. Into a legend.

The O'Bannon

The King of Inismore is "Mad" Jack O'Bannon, a walking-talking-laughing-drinking-singing-story-telling-fighting-seemingly immortal legend. Stories say the O'Bannon has always been the king of the island who occasionally steps away from his duties for reasons known only to himself. He sits on the throne for as long as he wants, then suddenly announces, "I'm going for a walk," and leaves. The last time this happened, the O'Bannon returned, killed the villain who claimed to be king and announced, "He was sitting in my chair."

To say the O'Bannon is loyal to Elaine is an understatement. In fact, anyone who speaks against her while in his presence usually suffers a bloody and painful fate. He has even enlisted a secret order of agents to protect her from dangers both foreign and domestic, their identities known only to him.

Appearance

The Inish tend to be a little shorter than the average Théan, but they also tend to be stronger and more robust. Inismore is an agrarian Nation with the vast majority of its people spending every day in manual labor. Even the noble class. Their hair is typically black or red with pale skin. Blue and green eyes are common, but most Inish have dark eyes.

Clothing is usually heavy to accommodate Inismore's wet and cold climate. The Inish are also fond of braided hair for both men and women (and that includes braided beards).

Typical Professions

There are more Inish sailors than Avalon sailors in Avalon's navy. And while Inismore has no formal army, most every farmer and fisher knows how to use a sword. Hunting is important on the island, as well. Because Inismore has little official contact with other Nations, they must rely on themselves. No trade with Montaigne means making your own liquor. No trade with Castille means making your own swords. Craftsmanship is not a matter of pride for the Inish—it's a matter of necessity.

Religion

Faith is a complicated matter for the Inish. They've adopted the Vaticine faith, but intermingled it with Inish paganism. Some say they adopted the Vaticine Church because the Avalon King rejected it, but for whatever reason, much of Inismore is Vaticine. At the same time, they also recognize the Old Faith of Inismore, recognizing its ancient gods and goddesses, using the stories of its heroes to inspire future generations.

Attitudes

When playing an Inish Hero, remember your Nation has remained true to the Old Faith. Avalon and the Marches lost that path, turning to the Vaticine Church. The only reason Glamour returned to Avalon is because Queen Elaine is worthy of holding the Graal. Her devotion and faith have united the Avalon Isles…for now.

In the meantime, you have magic to make. A particular kind of magic only your people can make: changing yourself into a story. A legend for future generations to look back upon and learn. You must make epic mistakes, fight with every ounce of strength in your body, and love with every ounce of passion in your heart. That's the only way to become immortal… become a *legend*.

The Highland Marches



For centuries, your people lived under the rule of tyrants—villainous Avalonian Kings and Queens who saw your people as little more than brute savages, subjugating them into near slavery. Then Queen Elaine took the Graal, and now there is peace. But for how long? And does this Avalon deserve to hold the Graal? Some say she must have tricked her way into guarding it. Others say she could not hold it if she did not deserve it. The current King of the Marches, James MacDuff II, stands by her side and calls her "Queen." But not all in the Marches are convinced.

Of all the Kingdoms of Avalon, the Marches has the least friendly attitudes toward the Sidhe. There is a reluctant respect for their power, but many consider them too frivolous and cruel. The Marches is a practical place. It's cold and mountainous and growing anything takes time, patience, and care. It is a rough place that produces a strong people, not reliant on the "gifts" of the Sidhe. One cannot ignore the power of Glamour, but Marchers use it differently than the others. Their heroes are not drunken fools and rakish louts, but honest and forthright men and women who question the authority of kings and queens. People were born free and were meant to live free. Royalty has a duty to those they rule, and those who abuse that duty deserve the least respect of all.

The Marches are at peace for now. But only for the moment. They know that peace is only the pause between wars. No matter how wise and kind this Queen Elaine may be, war is on its way. And only the Highland Marches will be ready for it.

Appearance

Marchers tend to be tall with long limbs. Even their nobility work long days, meaning they are typically strong and resilient. Both the nobility and commoners often dress the same. Men and women wear long white *leine* (len-ya), which is a long white shirt that reaches down to the knees. On top of the leine, men wear a brat: a kind of cloak/robe tied around the waist with rough trousers and high boots for leggings.

Married and young women typically wear a sark—otherwise known as a chemise—a petticoat, and long, pleated skirts, but many women-of-age are seen dressing in trousers with high boots, standing alongside the men with swords on their hips.

Typical Professions

The Highland Marches has no standing army, but every one of their sons and daughters are trained to be warriors from the day they can walk. They're taught to use everything as a weapon: even the land itself. "The best cure for a tyrant is a quick sword."

Farming is rough in the Highlands with most of the land covered in forests and hills. Farmlands are valuable and highly coveted by those with ambition. Most inland Highlanders feed their families through hunting and lake fishing. On the coasts, sailors bring in daily catches, selling them in morning markets and feeding their families with the rest.

Religion

The Marches is a hodgepodge of religious beliefs. Because of their untrusting relationship with the Sidhe, the Marches has embraced the Vaticine Church. Believers in the Old Faith still remain, although they are seen as outsiders. Outsiders, but not outcasts. This is an important distinction.

The Objectionist Movement reached the Marches nearly a decade ago and has brought even more religious confusion. Currently, nearly one third of the people in the Marches are Objectionist, and while there is tension, there is no violence. If the Highland Marches has embraced only one thing from Queen Elaine's rule, it is religious tolerance.

Attitudes

A king or queen must *earn* the trust of the people, and it is never earned easily. Authority breeds corruption in all—none are immune to this pure fact. A king must listen to his people, trust his people, and protect his people. Otherwise, he is lost in the sound of his own voice.

While this may make the Marchers sound like a dour people, they curb that suspicion with healthy revelry. Perhaps it is the overwhelming presence of doom in their culture that makes celebrations that much more joyous.

Castille



For a Castillian, three things head up your life: God, King and Family. In that order. Granted, sometimes circumstances may switch those three priorities, but they are always your top priorities.

Castillians are proud people, and they have a right to be. Castille is the most educated Nation in Théah. It is the home of the Vaticine Church and the central message of the Church is "To learn the mind of God, you must study His Creation." Castillians take this to heart. Knowledge and study are virtues hammered into every Castillian child's mind.

Castillians have very large families. To many Théans, a cousin is a close relative. Not to a Castillian. Everyone related to you, no matter how distant, is a cousin. And cousins are family. You protect your family. To do otherwise would compromise your honor. Oh, have we not mentioned honor yet? We will. We will.

Courage is another virtue young Castillians learn. The Church teaches that courage is the ability for the human mind to recognize some things are more important than our own mortality—some scholars whisper this may not be unique to humans, but generally keep such thoughts to themselves until the Inquisition is dealt with. Couple this notion with the concept of family and you get Castillians throwing their lives between danger and family members. That's because, as a Castillian, you believe your family is more important than you.

And this brings us to the concept of Castillian honor. A person's reputation depends entirely upon her honor. Does she maintain the dignity of her family? Does she serve the King? Does she pay proper reverence to God? These things determine a Castillian's honor. Besmirch it at your own risk.

Appearance

Castillians typically have darker hair and skin than other Théans as a result of the invasions of the Crescent Empire centuries ago. The Crescent held Castille for over two hundred years, bringing their culture along with them. Castillian clothing and architecture still echo from this time. Billowy sleeves, curly hair, and thick beards for men, while women have olive skin, long black hair, and golden eyes.

Castillians who can afford it like the look and feel of leather and wear it often. Both men and women wear swords: the symbol of Castillian honor. It is such a predominant symbol, some villages have community swords shared by all for the purposes of defending the village from bandits.

Typical Professions

Most Castillians were raised in a village with a church providing education and enlightenment. Most also know how to use a sword. Those hailing from more modest families are typically farmers and fishers. Some are educators, enlisted by the Church for the purpose of keeping Castille's reputation as the most enlightened Nation in Théah.

But the most common background for Castillians is soldier: Castille boasts one of Théah's largest and most powerful armies. The people see serving in the army as a duty: a way to serve the King, and thus serve God, and thus, protect their family.

Religion

Castille is the home of the Vaticine Church, one of the most powerful—if not the most powerful—organizations in Théah. As a Castillian, the Church is a dominant part of your life. It teaches values such as courage, devotion to family, loyalty and curiosity. Churches teach Castillians to read and count, to measure and study. The Vaticine Church is the center of learning in Théah. At least, it used to be. But in recent years, the Inquisition has taken hold of the Church, transforming it from the hub of education into a hub of fear and violence. The Church actively seeks out heretics to convert or kill, and these days, questioning the Inquisition makes you a heretic.

That isn't to say there are no good men and women in the Church. On the contrary, most of the faithful are good people, adhering to the virtues and values the Church once taught. It's the officials who have corrupted the Church's message. And as a good Castillian, one of your primary duties is restoring the Holy Mother Church back to her former glory.



Attitudes

Castillians are extremely proud, and, of course, feel they have a right to be. The most civilized and educated culture in Théah, they are the greatest fighters, the greatest poets, the greatest lovers…it isn't blind pride: a Castillian proves her worth every moment of every day. Honor demands it.

Castillians can also hold very long grudges. Their loss to the Avalon navy still stokes dark fires in the heart, but only because the Avalonians did not face their inevitable defeat with honor, and instead used underhanded tactics. An honest defeat is an opportunity to demonstrate honor. When bested by the sword, a Castillian does not give excuses, but admits his loss with dignity and grace. Likewise, after defeating an honorable opponent, mercy is the proper Castillian response.

But a villain without dignity or honor deserves nothing but contempt and a quick, cold death delivered by a skilled Castillian hand.

I want no more excuses! No more failures! This "El Vagabundo" must be caught and unmasked. Not tomorrow. Not next week. I want him now. And I want him alive!

You are the greatest Inquisitors in Castille. You will bring him here and I will unmask him with my own hand. And there is no reward. The one who brings me El Vagabundo will live and the rest of you will be hung. That is your reward. Now go. Go! And bring me this brigand! Or you will all hang!

— Cardinal Esteban Verdugo



Eisen

"Our land may be mud, but it's our mud." That's the attitude of Eisen Heroes. All around them is ruined, but for the Eisen, that just means an opportunity to rebuild. The Eisen spirit cannot be ground to dust. It can only be pounded down into mud. And from that, they can rebuild. Rebuild. And rebuild.

The Eisen don't know the meaning of the word "capitulate." They will fight until there is no more blood to spill, until there is no more breath to breathe, until there is nothing left to fight for. And mud is worth fighting for. It has their blood and their breath. And they will die fighting for it.

An entire nation of veterans. War-weary and ready to lay down arms. But the war isn't over yet. Sure, it's over for Montaigne and Castille, but it isn't over for Eisen. Montaigne and Castille may have gone, but they left the war behind them. Except now, it's a war against a different enemy. An enemy of shadow and no true form.

The War of the Cross was a three-decade-long mass murder. And all that blood was certain to open doors. The Eisen didn't open those doors, but they're damn sure going to close them. Once and for all.

Appearance

Eisen Heroes, both men and women, are typically larger than life—metaphorically and literally. They typically have blond hair and light eyes with pale skin. Muscular and thick frames are common.

Because the land is in such poverty, Eisen clothing is often very modest and practical. Most clothes are made to last: heavy leather, heavy cotton and thick buttons. Tall boots to navigate the treacherous terrain, and thick gloves for the cold winter nights. Heavy cloaks to keep the rain off your head. Also, an iron Prophet's Cross around the neck. That's essential in Eisen.

Typical Professions

Everyone in Eisen—soldier or otherwise—is a veteran of the War of the Cross. When an army marches across your cornfield, you learn how to defend yourself fast. Also, the transformation of the countryside into a living nightmare has encouraged the learning of Hexenwerk…for good and evil.

Religion

Eisen is decidedly Objectionist. The Movement began in Eisen after King Franz II protected its founder, and since then, the Nation has been glad to be free from the shackles of the Vaticine Church. Of course, some blame the recent horrors on that action, claiming Eisen's fate is a punishment from God. However, such claims are often spoken by foreigners and never too loudly.

Attitudes

Eisen are protective of their homeland. They see their heritage as a mark of pride. An Eisen never runs. Not even in the face of ultimate horror. Then again, an Eisen never starts a fight she doesn't think she can finish. That's because Eisen think and act in highly practical ways. Frivolity is waste. When your entire country is broken, you can't risk waste.

Hexenwerk is a problem. Some see it as a necessary evil while others see it as just plain evil, exacerbating the problem. Yes, there are good men and women using it, but how much longer can they do so without risking corruption? On the other hand, the use of Hexenwerk may be the most powerful tool the Eisen have for combating the horrors unleashed after the War of the Cross. There are no good answers.

With their land haunted by horrors, the Eisen people have new troubles to deal with. Some choose to ignore them, pretend they don't exist. Others choose to face them with fire and steel. Your choice, of course, is your own.

Montaigne

Liberté. Égalité. Fraternité. These three words are key to understanding the Montaigne character. Freedom, equality and fraternity. But there's another word equally important to understanding the Montaigne: panache. That ephemeral *je ne sais quoi* that sets the Montaigne apart from every other Nation, from every other people. It's a desire to stand out, to be unique, to have a voice in the world. Your voice. Distinction. A white plume in your hat. That is the chief quality of the Montaigne people that makes them who they are. And if you're born in Montaigne, you have a keen understanding that you must find your own white plume and wear it proudly. "This is who I am!" Shout it out. And if anyone tries to silence you, make sure they understand the profundity of their error.

Montaigne is a nation divided into two distinct peoples: the rich and the poor. Its King—who calls himself *"l'Empereur du Monde"*—sits in a palace of wealth and power, selfishly keeping it to himself while those around him suffer and starve. Most of the wealthy ignore the extreme poverty that surrounds the richest parts of Montaigne, but there are those in the noble class who seek to remediate the suffering of the poor, though the problem is an epidemic. Still, even in the poorest parts of Montaigne, the people still carry themselves with pride. With distinction. With panache.

Appearance

The Montaigne Hero does not have a "typical look." Montaigne is a diverse nation with different appearances based on regional stereotypes. Black hair, blonde hair, and brown hair are common depending on where you look. Most Montaigne have blue or green eyes. Because of the Ifri Migration in 1554, some have darker skin and thick, curly hair.

Nobles tend to wear wigs, face paint, and makeup, dress in extravagant clothing, and use a great deal of perfume—both men and women. The common folk dress far more modestly, but still try to maintain a prideful appearance. Clothes are more functional—made from thicker and sturdier materials—with a distinguished flair.



Typical Professions

In the advent of the War of the Cross, and because l'Empereur enjoys being surrounded by soldiers, many of Montaigne's young men and women have military training. Many of Montaigne's farmers and ranchers are retired military, informally training their sons and daughters in swordplay, hoping they may make a living in the big city as a member of l'Empereur's guards, the Musketeers.

L'Empereur does not have much of a navy—he sees little direct profit in it and much risk—although there are some Montaigne sailors who have convinced him to give them a letter of marque.

Because of l'Empereur's lack of concern with the safety of his people, the Montaigne countryside is riddled with bandits. The Musketeers have been charged with dispatching them, but the task is nearly impossible: too little funding and too few Musketeers.

Meanwhile, the courts are filled with men and women seeking fortune. *Le Grand Jeu*—"the Great Game," as l'Empereur calls it—consists of impressing him and his entourage, winning their favors. Entertain him, win a fortune. Bore him and spend your life in jail. Insult him and you'll meet Madame Guillotine.

Religion

On the surface, Montaigne is a Vaticine Nation. However, l'Empereur considers himself a philosopher and an atheist, a stance that allows him to "experiment with any morality I choose." He considers those who believe in "the Vaticine superstition" to be childish and churlish. And the greatest crime one can commit in front of l'Empereur is to bore him. Thus, most of the court professes themselves to be "philosophers" as well, even if they are secretly faithful.

For the common folk, however, faith is as personal as style. Most Montaigne are faithful but express their faith in her own way. They attend mass and worship together, but the Montaigne believe everyone must find God in their own way.

Attitudes

Some believe the Montaigne are a proud people. That simply misses the mark. The Montaigne strive to be the best at what they do. The best carpenter, the best vintner, the best duelist. It's not a matter of pride; it's a matter of dignity. If you don't try to be the best at what you do, you're not worthy of respect or honor. Remember: liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Montaigne adopted these as virtues because they make a great society. Unfortunately, the monarchy has fallen into decadence and frivolity, driving the rest of the country into mediocrity.

For a Musketeer, devoted to protecting the royalty of Montaigne, every day must be torturous. Previous Kings have made Montaigne the true center of the world. They sponsored those virtues, espoused education, and viewed charity as a duty. Not so much these days. And as a Musketeer looks upon those she is charged to protect, she must wonder where her true duty lies: to those who exploit the weak or to those who are too poor to protect themselves.

The people of Montaigne are not oblivious to this plight, but feel there is little they can do. Regicide? Out of the question. But if "l'Empereur" will not step aside for the good of his people, what kind of choice does that leave a Hero? There's a reason philosophers call them "moral dilemmas." It's because when facing one, there is never an easy answer.

My friends…our goal is simple. Removal of l'Empereur. But I must disagree with my esteemed colleague, Erwan. He told you we must accomplish this goal at any cost. And to this, I must ask, even at the cost of our own souls? Our own dignity? When we stand before Theus and he asks us what we sacrificed for freedom, what shall we say? Will we show him our bloody hands? Will we say "The ends justified the means?" Will we list the names of all those we killed for the cause of freedom?

No, my friends. We cannot. Or we shall become the very villains we have sworn ourselves against.

L'Empereur must be removed from power, we know this. But we cannot do it with murder. Not with guns or swords. We cannot use the tools of the enemy or we risk becoming the very thing we fight against.

Ours must be a subtle war. A war of the mind. A war of the will. We shall capture the minds of the people. We shall inspire their imaginations. We shall lift the gauze from their eyes and they shall see the truth. Only freedom can win freedom. Violence will only win us a new slavery.

—"Francine," Agent of the Rilasciare

The Sarmatian Commonwealth

In a world where kings and queens decide the fates of Nations, the Commonwealth is the exception. In the Commonwealth, every citizen has a voice. An equal voice. Anyone can walk into the Sejm (the Sarmatian Senate) and speak. Anyone can walk into the Sejm and vote. That fact alone makes the Commonwealth different. But there's so much more.

Sarmatism—the nostalgic wave of chivalry that's flooded over the Commonwealth—is an understanding that the nobility have a duty to protect the common folk. Not an obligation, but *a duty*. This wave started in the noble class, but has moved down to the commoners, as well. A sense that we truly are all in this together and we have a responsibility to each other. If you get knocked down, I'm there to help you get back up. Not because I'll be rewarded for it, but because *I can*. Defend the weak, bring the unjust to justice. The duties of a knight are what are expected from *every citizen* of the Commonwealth.

But on the fringes of civilization, the old ways still linger. Old voices making promises of power. Of course, the temptation to beat the devil always swims in your mind. The clever and brave can do it. You're clever and brave. Of course you can beat the devil at her own game. Can Sarmatism survive these ancient temptations? Your choices will answer that question.

Appearance

Your Sarmatian Hero is either from western Rzeczpospolita or eastern Curonia. The Rzeplitans and Curonians have similar physical features. They tend to be dark haired and pale, although there are many who have darker features because of their proximity to the Crescent Empire and Ifri. They have average height for Théans, although tend to be stockier: a little weight helps survive the bitter and long winters.

As for fashion, Rzeplitan Heroes are more likely to adopt the chivalric dress of the Sarmatian craze:



long coats (usually crimson), a distinguishing sash, and a saber. Curonians are not immune to the lure of nostalgia, but they are also keen to distinguish themselves from their western neighbors, and thus, choose to wear more traditional clothing. This usually involves practical trousers, thick boots, and a heavy shirt—for both working men and women. Curonians are also more likely to carry firearms, if for no other reason to distinguish themselves from the Sarmatians who tend to view pistols and muskets as "too modern."

Typical Professions

A resurgence in chivalry has led to a boom in the Sarmatian military—not to mention the fact the army can now show up at the Sejm and vote for or against military action. The elite force in the Sarmatian military is the winged hussars, a regiment of cavalry famous all across Théah. With literal wings strapped to the back of their armor, they are a terrifying sight and a terrifying force. They are the most highly trained soldiers in Théah—outside of Eisen, of course. But that's only if you ask an Eisen.

In the more rural parts of Rzeczpospolita and most of Curonia, the keepers of the old faith, the Žynys, are priests and tricksters. Those who have beaten the bargains offered by the dievai and gained power from it.

And, of course, there are the officers of the Sejm, the *posłowie*, professional Senators seeking to keep the Commonwealth on a clear and straight course. Not all of them have the Commonwealth's best interests above their own. And those are the ones a Hero has to keep his eye on.

Religion

The Vaticine Church has gained some sway in the west part of the Commonwealth, but none at all in the east. The Rzeczpospolitans have embraced the message of the Prophets, but still understand some powers are older than the Church. Meanwhile, in Curonia, the Vaticine priests can't get a single foothold. They have no official religion—only wise men and women who help guide villages through dark times and help celebrate the bright times.

Attitudes

There are really two Sarmatian Heroes: the Western Hero and the Eastern Hero. The Western Hero is wrapped up in the Golden Liberty and Sarmatian nostalgia. He believes his Nation is moving forward, and in some ways, is more progressive than any other. After all, in what other Nation can a farmer say "No" to a king? He believes in chivalry, justice, and mercy. Not only does he believe in those ideals, he does his best to live by them.

The Eastern Hero sees the virtues in Sarmatism—and may even practice them in her own way—but she also understands the world isn't as bright as her Western friend believes it to be. She is more practical, relies on deception when necessary—after all, you have to *trick* the devil to beat him—but still has her mind on helping others whenever she can. She's just willing to use skills her Western counterpart may see as…less honorable.

Soon, the old King will die. And when he does, our plan shall commence. The Prince knows nothing. He thinks himself a hero, but he is a boy. A student and a soldier. Nothing more. The people love him, but the people can be turned. A scandal. His witch wife is an easy target. We will throw shame and derision on his name until the people turn away from him and turn to us. And then, when they have forgotten why they loved him, they won't care when they find his body in a ditch.

Then, the Commonwealth will be ours.

— Marcen Sabat



Ussura

In Ussura, the people co-exist with the Leshiye, nature spirits who grant magical powers to those who serve Ussura's common folk. Those who have these gifts are known as *bogatyr*, riding through Ussura's vast landscape, serving as errant knights, righting wrongs, and dealing with brigands, bandits, and other threats.

However, Ussura's current troubles may be too great for even the bogatyr to face. The Nation is under the reign of two rulers: Ilya Sladivgorod Nikolovich and Ketheryna Fischler Dimitritova. Both claim to be the true rulers of Ussura, the rightful King and Queen, respectively. How such a problem began is…complicated. The previous ruler, Gaius Iriney, was a widower who disowned his son, Ilya, going so far as to banish him to the far east of Ussura. Iriney married an Eisen princess, Ketheryna, and planned on bearing a worthy heir. Unfortunately, Iriney died, leaving no such heir, and here we are.

The Nation stands on the brink of civil war, although that war hasn't happened quite yet. So far, Ussura's neighbors have visited both capitals, acknowledged both monarchs' claims, and are playing safe until one side forces the other to capitulate.

As an Ussuran Hero, you will have to choose which monarch you follow. Ilya wants to bring change to Ussura, but a gradual one. Ketheryna's progress has been much more successful, but also much more ruthless. Will you kneel before King Ilya or will you kneel before Queen Ketheryna?

Appearance

Ussura is a huge place, and other than the typical warm furs, the diversity of appearance can be startling. Ussuran nobility tends to look like the rest of eastern Théah: tall, blonde, pale-skinned with angular features. The rest of Ussura, on the other hand, does not. The people are dark-haired with tanned skin. The Khazari, a huge nomadic horse tribe inhabiting the northernmost parts of Ussura, show their non-Théan ancestry with almond-shaped eyes and straight, black hair. In short, other than the winter gear, there is no "standard Ussuran" appearance. The Nation is simply too diverse for such simple caricatures.

Typical Professions

Ussuran Heroes are more varied than any other Nation. There are more farmers in Ussura than anywhere else, more carpenters, more blacksmiths, and just about any profession you can imagine. Yet there are not many sailors. Ussura has no warm water ports and its only access to the sea—the North—is also frozen for most of the year.

Bogatyr are, essentially, wandering Heroes seeking to help the unfortunate: a professional Ussuran adventuring class. The Khazari in the north have been known to ride into the rest of Théah looking for adventures to add to their legacy.

Religion

Although the Vaticine influence crossed Ussura's borders, like the Sarmatian Commonwealth and Avalon, Ussura's Old Faith still lingers. In fact, it is still very strong. That's probably because the entities the Ussurans worshipped in the old days are still around, still giving blessings to the worthy.

The Ussurans never officially joined the Vaticine Church, but instead, developed a Church of the Prophets on their own, co-existing with the Vaticine. The Ussuran Orthodox Church combines teachings of the First Prophet with the native faith of Ussura.

Attitudes

Many Théans view Ussurans as less sophisticated throwbacks to an earlier century. For the most part, they're right. The typical Ussuran can't read, nor sees any use in learning how. Ussurans know what they need to know to survive, and that's all they need to know. The land is alive around them and if they want to survive, they best know how to speak to it.

But many within the Nation see the need to catch up with progress. Théah is changing, and changing fast, and if Ussura doesn't keep up, all that technology and knowledge will put Ussura in the Stone Age. These "progressives" want to bring the 17th Century to Ussura. Of course, traditionalists see no need for such "progress." No army has ever successfully invaded, nor will they. Ussura will protect her children so long as they are true to her. That is the way things have always been; that is the way things will always be.



Vestenmennavenjar

They were once the most feared pirates in the north seas: the Northmen, sailing south from their frozen lands, taking what they wanted, leaving what they didn't need, calling upon the arcane power of their ancient runes. But then, the people of Vestenmennavenjar (VES-ten-mahn-NAH-ven-yar) underwent a change. In fact, you might call it a transformation.

Over the centuries, the ruling noble class—the jarls—controlled Vestenmennavenjar, but during the 15th Century, the noble class found itself short of funds. At the same time, the merchant class—the carls—needed protection against pirates and bandits. The carls banded together to create an informal confederation to protect their shipments and investments. The confederation put its headquarters in the city of Vendel, a well-known and well-used trade port.

Now, the entire world is bound together by this confederation of crafters and merchants, bound by a common currency: the Guilder. Used by every Nation—save Vodacce—the Guilder represents Vesten power. Their men and women are still those same raiders they once were, but the old roles they played have changed forever. Vesten merchants still call upon the power of their ancestors and the runes, but now they may also call upon the power of a worldwide economy they hold in their hands.

Appearance

The Vesten are tall with wide shoulders, both men and women. Vesten women are taller than most Théan men. They have blonde or red hair and striking ice blue eyes. Their skin is pale, their features round. Men wear long, braided beards and women wear their hair in long braids. Their skin is often adorned with tattoos.

As for clothing, Vesten men and women are often seen in the best fashions. Silks from the Crescent Empire, leather corsets and jerkins, and tall boots. And a recent distinction, almost unique in Vesten: something called a "sugarloaf hat."

Typical Professions

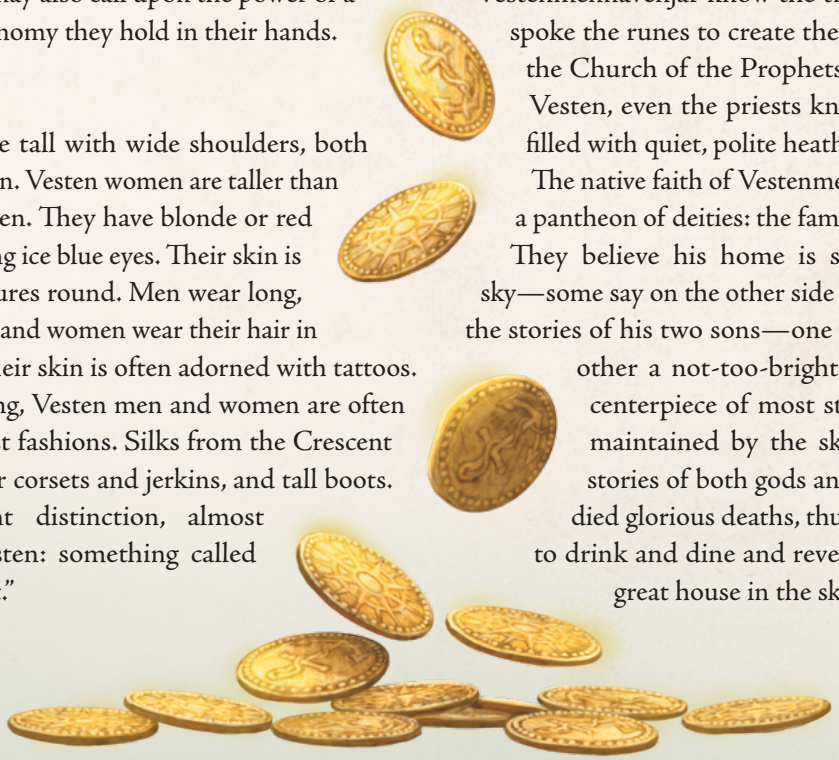
The Vestenmennavenjar are the most successful merchants in the world… unless you speak to someone from Vodacce. But before they were merchants, they were warriors: a part of their culture that has never faded into obscurity. Every Vesten merchant wears a sword and knows how to use it.

The Vesten still put a large emphasis on tradition and history, and the men and women who keep those things alive are the skalds. A skald is a living history book who knows the lives of every man and woman he ever met. His memory can make you a hero or a villain, depending on his disposition. The word "scalding" comes from a particularly nasty tale the storyteller recites, murdering a person's reputation.

Religion

The Vestenmennavenjar put a kind face toward the Vaticine Church, even going so far as to allow the building of cathedrals and schools. Education is important in Vesten, but the teaching of the faith of the Prophets generally falls on polite but deaf ears. The Vesten have seen the power of the runes—ancient symbols of the words of creation—and even concede that perhaps—*perhaps*—the God of the Prophets was responsible for their creation. But all Vestenmennavenjar know the truth: the Allfather spoke the runes to create the world. And while the Church of the Prophets has a presence in Vesten, even the priests know their pews are filled with quiet, polite heathens.

The native faith of Vestenmennavenjar involves a pantheon of deities: the family of the Allfather. They believe his home is somewhere in the sky—some say on the other side of the moon—and the stories of his two sons—one a trickster and the other a not-too-bright warrior—are the centerpiece of most stories. The faith is maintained by the skalds who tell the stories of both gods and heroes who have died glorious deaths, thus earning the right to drink and dine and revel in the Allfather's great house in the sky.





Long ago, the Vestenmennavenjar burned cattle as sacrifices on altars to the Allfather. The sacrifice was to acknowledge his wisdom and power, burning something of value to show humility and hope for his blessings. These days, the Vestenmennavenjar merchants burn something more valuable than cattle on their altars. They burn Guilders.

Attitudes

Part of Vestenmennavenjar sees the world as nothing more than victims—we call these people Villains. But others see the Vendel League as an opportunity to build something incredible. "A rising tide lifts all boats" may as well be a Vestenmennavenjar proverb; it was a sentiment before this transformation and it has only been encouraged by the success of the Vendel League.

They agree with the Church's sentiment of "education for all" and know the only way to accomplish that goal is with resources. Thus, the Vesten merchants put huge amounts of their influence and power behind public schools. If every boy and girl can become an educated, erudite citizen, the entire Nation can only benefit. They see investment in roads, clean water, and law enforcement as improvement for *all*, and since "I" am included in "all," I must benefit as well.

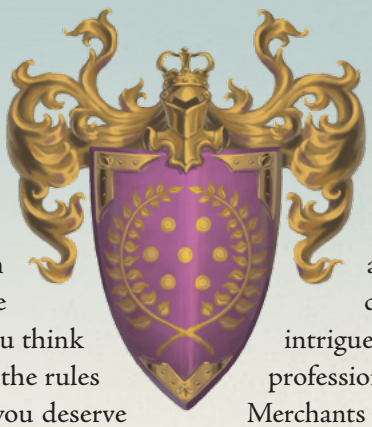
To be precise, the Vestenmennavenjar are using capitalism for the power of good.

Meanwhile, the Vesten look out at the rest of Théah and see not every Nation has the same goals for its people. Certainly not the Vodacce or the Montaigne. Queen Elaine seems to have a genuine concern for her people and has even gone so far as to recruit foreigners to assist rebuilding her kingdom.

We have an opportunity. An opportunity no other Nation in the history of Théah could ever see, let alone grasp. The coffers burst with wealth. More wealth than we could ever spend in our lifetimes. That wealth represents opportunity for those who would otherwise never have it. We can become a Nation of sovereign men and women. A Nation of Kings and Queens. This is our chance. Let us not waste it.

— Hafdan Sevenfingers

Vodacce



The Vodacce recognize one fundamental truth about the world: wealth is power and power is wealth. Ignore this fact at your own peril. And if you think a perfect stranger is going to play by the rules to make things easier for you, then you deserve everything you've got coming to you.

Greed is a virtue. Not selfishness, no. Greed. The accumulation of wealth. Because the only thing that changes the world is *coin*. Not sentiment, not good will. No. Coin. That's it. And if throats need to be cut to acquire it, then so be it. The end justifies the means. If you want to change the world, you have to be willing to sacrifice morality. And trust that once you do, you'll never miss it.

That is Vodacce. A convincing argument to be sure. A beguiling seduction. That is the way Vodacce works. And if you try to change it without understanding it, you'll wind up face first in the canals with a cut throat.

What does it mean to be a Vodacce Hero? It means that you must, to a certain extent, play by its rules. Can you change Vodacce? Perhaps. Its structure is much more fragile than anyone will admit. The scales are perfectly balanced. Tip them, even a little, and the whole thing may come toppling down.

Appearance

Due to their proximity to the Crescent Empire and the continent of Ifri, Vodacce appearance varies more than any other Théan Nation. Skin tone varies from pale to dark; hair can be straight blonde or curly black.

Fashion is always expensive, relying on exotic dyes to create purple, crimson, and black. The Vodacce look for clothing that emphasizes masculine and feminine characteristics. Swords and sword belts are common among men and women, but mostly men.

Married women—especially Fate Witches—are expected to dress modestly, however. Black dresses with veils to hide their eyes. Looking into a married woman's eyes is not only considered bad luck, but can be seen as an insult to her husband, and thus, result in a duel. Vodacce's courtesans, on the other hand, dress in elaborate costumes, wearing many colors and decorative masks. They are walking, talking celebrations, advertising with every step they take.

Typical Professions

The men of Vodacce have only one ambition: power. Acquired through deception, manipulation, diplomacy, intrigue, or the sword. Many men take the profession of merchant for that very reason. Merchants need bodyguards, and thus, the proliferation of swords on Vodacce's streets.

Women have little choice in their destiny, especially those who can manipulate fate. *Sorte Strega*—Fate Witches—often find themselves married to men they never met after spending their childhood learning how to alter his fortunes, although some find a way to escape. Women without sorcerous gifts can make their own fortunes as courtesans, selling the illusion of love to the wealthy and powerful, thus earning wealth and power for themselves.

Religion

On the surface, it appears Vodacce is strictly devoted to the Vaticine faith. In reality, the Princes pay lip service to the faith while observing their own morality. Many of the peasant class are still truly Vaticine—the Church began in Vodacce, after all.

Attitudes

The Vodacce have a practical view of the world. They know how it works, why it works, and how the rules can be exploited. Some exploit them for the benefit of others; some exploit them for the benefit of themselves. That separates the Heroes from the Villains.

While steeped in practicality, Vodacce blood is rich with romance. Perhaps it's the harsh reality of their highly political days that inspires such adventurous evenings. Go to a Vodacce party and you will see men and women drowning themselves in wine, performing poetic duels, singing songs, and otherwise trying to distract themselves from the *real politic*. After all, the harder one works, the harder one plays.

A Vodacce Hero knows how to think and act like a Villain. He knows the game is rigged, knows when to bend the rules, and knows when to break them. Almost every Vodacce Hero not living in Vodacce has either been exiled or got out when the fire got too hot. The fire of revenge—vendetta—burns in their blood and repressing those dark desires requires a nearly inhuman will.



Hero Creation

This short description gives you the outline for making a Hero. The steps will be fully detailed, below.

Step 0: Concept

First, think about what kind of Hero you want to play. We ask you twenty questions about your Hero. You don't have to answer all of them, but they'll give you a good idea who your Hero is and what she believes in.

Step 1: Traits

Traits are your Hero's core strengths. Decide how you want to spend points on your Traits. Every Hero begins with his Traits at 2. You have 2 points to spend to increase your Traits.

Step 2: Nation

You get a bonus based on your Hero's Nation.

Step 3: Background

A Background describes your Hero's past. Choose two Backgrounds for your Hero. Gain all the Advantages and Skills (Rank 1) from your Background.

Step 4: Skills

You get 10 Skill Points to increase your Background Skills and to add non-Background Skills. No Skill can be above Rank 3 when you make your Hero.

Step 5: Advantages

You have 5 points to acquire new Advantages. You may only buy Advantages for which you are qualified.

Step 6: Arcana

Every Hero has a destiny. Your Hero is no exception. Pick one Virtue and one Hubris: your upright card and your crossing card.

Step 7: Pick a Story

Stories are parts of your past that remain unresolved. Do you have an old enemy who continues to haunt you? Perhaps a rivalry that has never been put to rest?

Step 8: Finishing Touches

Once you've gone through all those steps, you're ready to do a few little things and then, you're ready to play.



Step 0: Concept

Before you start making a Hero, you should consider what kind of person you want to play. Is he a noble? Where does she get her money? How does he handle problems? If she were forced to choose between her loyalty to her friends or her crown, how would she choose? How exactly does your Hero's smile grow on his lips? Every question you answer brings you a little closer to a Hero who feels real. The questions below will give you all the information you'll need to fill in the blanks on the Hero sheet.

You don't have to have a strong idea of your Hero's identity before you start, just a vague concept. But when you answer the questions below, take a moment to think about each one.

The Game of Twenty Questions

We designed these twenty questions to help you better understand who your Hero is. You can answer them or not; it's entirely up to you. You can keep the answers to yourself or share them with other players. As you discover more about your Hero during play, you can change the answers if you like.

You are the author of your own character. Any time you want to change something, you can. It's okay. We give you permission.

1. What Nation is your Hero from?

This question gives you a foundation upon which to build. When you understand your Hero's culture, you will begin to understand your Hero. Imagine how her environment helped shape her personality. Your homeland stays with you no matter where you go.

2. How would you physically describe your Hero?

First off, is your Hero a man or a woman? Théah doesn't have as many prejudices as Europe did in the 17th Century. Women are pirates, duelists, courtiers and any other heroic role a European would consider strictly masculine.

Aside from gender, how does your Hero look? Start at the top of his head and work your way down to his feet. Focus on the things that reflect his personality and the way he is treated by others. Which is more interesting—the fact that your Hero is blond, or that he wears his hair in a single braid and scents it with contraband Crescent lotions?

Build and height are also important in determining how others see your Hero. The average height in modern Théah is about 5' 6", although certain nationalities are a bit taller or shorter.

3. Does your Hero have recurring mannerisms?

An accent, a nervous habit, or a peculiar expression of speech can serve as shortcuts to developing a personality.

Too many can turn a character into a clown, so pick one or two and run with them.

4. What is your Hero's main motivation?

What keeps your Hero going when his ship has been sunk and he's marooned on an island? Is it greed, love, or revenge? Perhaps the Hero dreams of freeing his homeland from foreign occupation or hopes to find a younger sibling who was carried off by pirates.

5. What is your Hero's greatest strength? Greatest weakness?

Is your Hero really good at one particular thing? Maybe she's a master navigator and can guide a ship through the blackest night with only her wits to work from. On the other hand, does your Hero have something she's terrible at? Maybe animals don't like her, or she's nervous around ladies and blurts out less-than-intelligent comments. A Hero with no strengths is difficult to keep alive; one with no weaknesses is difficult to sympathize with. A Hero with both strengths and weaknesses has a more balanced personality and will develop into a richer role-playing experience.

6. What are your Hero's most and least favorite things?

The secret of the soup is in the details. Does your Hero hate eggs? Perhaps the glistening sickly yellow of the yolk disgusts him. Maybe he has a favorite breakfast that he eats every morning, such as a cup of tea and a slice of toast spread with apple butter. Maybe it's not a food that your Hero loves or hates but a particular sight or smell? Some people find great solace in the sight of the stars above them, while others aren't happy unless they can smell the salt spray of the sea. This is a grand opportunity to add a touch of poetry to your Hero's soul.

7. What about your Hero's psychology?

Is it hard for her to restrain her anger or hatred? Does her passion always get the better of her? Maybe she thrives on the rush of adrenaline that battle brings with it and disturbs her comrades with laughter during a fight. Does a particular song bring her to her feet stomping and clapping? What song or play brings tears to her eyes?

8. What is your Hero's single greatest fear?

It is a rare person who fears nothing at all. Even the greatest warriors may have a fear of heights or dread growing old. If your Hero is terrified of dying of old age and hears a rumor about a fountain that brings eternal youth, might he not search the world for it, even if the rumor came from an unreliable source? Sometimes a man's fears propel him to his greatest achievements.

Of course, many people fear simpler, more physical things than old age. Some have a dread of snakes or spiders, others have a horror of worms and slimy things, and a number of people experience panic attacks in dark, narrow places.

9. What are your Hero's highest ambitions? Her greatest love?

When your Hero dies, what does she want people to say about her? Does she want to be remembered forever for her poetry? Maybe she hopes that tales of her battle exploits will outlive her. Maybe she just wants a small house and a loving wife, but ridiculous fortune keeps obligating her to go on one adventure after another. Perhaps she dreams of glory and a kingdom of her own, or a country reunited by her hands.

If she could live forever, what would she want to spend eternity doing? Sailing? Wooing beautiful women? Cataloguing the artifacts left behind by the Syrne? Whatever her greatest love is, your Hero will take every opportunity to indulge in it.

10. What is your Hero's opinion of his country?

Is your Hero a diehard patriot, blind to the flaws of his countrymen, or is he a man without a country, having grown tired of his homeland's foolishness long ago? Most people are somewhere in between, neither hating their country nor believing it can do no wrong.

11. Does your Hero have any prejudices?

Is there a group of people that your Hero immediately turns up her nose at? Perhaps she can't stand the smell of "those filthy peasants," or maybe a Vodacce Fate Witch killed her brother. There may be no reason for the Hero to hate this group, but she believes there's one. Traumatic childhood incidents can lead to a lifetime of hatred and prejudice that the Hero may never get over. For the sake of party unity, it's a good idea to hate a group that you know none of the other players want as characters.

12. Where do your Hero's loyalties lie?

Does your Hero loyally serve a certain noble? Maybe his loyalties lie with his family or his spouse. Perhaps his first concern is looking out for himself, or maybe he serves a greater cause.

13. Is your Hero in love? Is she married or betrothed?

Is there someone who makes your Hero's heart beat faster? Perhaps she is already married to the love of her life. If so, do they have any children? How old are the children? Maybe she's just betrothed to be married sometime soon, and the happy—or unhappy—event has yet to take place.

14. What about your Hero's family?

Decide on a family name. Then talk about your Hero's early childhood. List events that would have occurred before your Hero would even be able to remember them. Some of these events may be influencing your Hero's life without him knowing it.

Also, consider the family's social standing. A Hero from a rich family will certainly have a different outlook than a Hero from a poorer family.

15. How would your Hero's parents describe her?

This question reveals much about both your Hero and her relationship to her parents. Answer this one in the voice of your Hero's mother, then go back and answer it again for your Hero's father. You may come up with two very different answers.

16. Is your Hero a gentle?

Being a gentle means that your Hero attempts to follow the code of chivalry. Your Hero's word is his bond. Of course, there are those who see you as foolishly old-fashioned, but there's always the possibility of having a moon-eyed damsel or handsome young poet fall in love with you.

17. How religious is your Hero? What sect of the Church does she follow?

Religion is, for many people of Théah, their deepest passion. The Church of the Prophets has been the greatest power on the planet for over a thousand years, and for all the bureaucracy it has a number of redeeming qualities. It fosters learning and education, provides hospitals for the poor and needy, and is a great source of comfort for many people in their hour of need. True and honest people are often attracted to the Church for this reason, and they are more than willing to help it perform its good works.

Of course, there are many who see the Church's actions as evil. They look at the Inquisition and the Crusade as prime examples. They hate the things the Church stands for and would love to see it fall.

Then there are those people in the middle, who either don't worry about the Church since it doesn't affect their daily lives or believe in a religion that is a variant of what the Church preaches, such as Objectionism or the Ussuran Orthodox Church. These people try to live out their lives with as little official contact with the Church as possible, either out of fear or lack of interest.

18. Is your Hero a member of a guild, gentle's club, or secret society?

Contacts are important, and they can be made through these organizations. They are a source of adventures and information. From a role-playing perspective, many tangible benefits come from being a member of these organizations. Perhaps your gentle's club buys a communal copy of the latest archæology journals, or serves tea and biscuits every morning to members. The clubs your Hero joins also influence the type of people he meets. You find a very different crowd of people in the Rose & Cross than you do in Madame Josette's Gentle's Society.

19. What does your Hero think of Sorcery?

Not all people with Sorcery like it, and not all people without Sorcery hate it. It sometimes alienates people, and the Church preaches against it; some people will dislike you for no other reason if you possess it. On the other hand, some who lack Sorcery look at the power it brings its bearer and long desperately for magic of their own. They tend to purchase any runic items they can get their hands on, and sift through Syrneth ruins seeking mystic secrets lost to the world.

20. If you could, what advice would you give your Hero?

Take a good, long look at the other questions before you answer this one. Speak to your Hero as if he were sitting right in front of you, and remember to use the proper tone. You'll want to make certain your Hero actually listens to you when you give him this free advice.

Step 1: Traits

Every Hero has five Traits defining what that Hero's core strengths are. The Traits are:

Brawn is a Hero's strength and physical power.

Finesse measures a Hero's coordination and agility.

Resolve is a Hero's willpower and endurance.

Wits measures how quickly a Hero thinks on his feet.

Panache is a Hero's charm and personal magnetism.

Every Hero begins with all of her Traits at 2. You have 2 additional points you can spend to increase your Traits.

Step 2: Nation Bonus

During Step 0, you chose a Nation. (If you skipped Step 0, you should seriously consider going back and doing it.) Your decision of Nation affects your Traits, and also grants you access to Nation-specific Backgrounds and Advantages. Apply these bonuses *after* you have spent points on Traits.

NATION	BONUS
Avalon	+1 Panache or +1 Resolve
Inismore	+1 Panache or +1 Wits
The Highland Marches	+1 Brawn or +1 Finesse
Castille	+1 Finesse or +1 Wits
Eisen	+1 Brawn or +1 Resolve
Montaigne	+1 Finesse or +1 Panache
Sarmatia	+1 Brawn or +1 Panache
Ussura	+1 Resolve or +1 Wits
Vesten	+1 Brawn or +1 Wits
Vodacce	+1 Finesse or +1 Resolve



Step 3: Backgrounds

In the world of Théah, few ever pick their own life path. Often, a child's parents pick his career for him. Your Hero is probably no different. Your Backgrounds represent what your Hero did before the game begins. Were you trained to be an artist or a soldier? Did your parents send you to sea to learn the life of a sailor? Perhaps you were raised with a wandering troupe of actors, jugglers, and other performers. Or, maybe you were born into a life of luxury as one of Théah's many nobles. This isn't where your Hero ends up, but it is where he started.

Backgrounds represent your past. You *were* a sailor, you *were* a performer, you *were* an assassin. While these things had a strong influence on you, they are not necessarily whom you've become.

Backgrounds give you a few things that make your Hero distinct from others.

Restrictions: Some Backgrounds have restrictions. Make sure you follow these; they are a part of your Hero's story.

Quirk: Backgrounds come with a Quirk, a personality trait that is common among people of that background. If you act in accordance with a Quirk from your background, you gain a Hero Point. You may only gain a Hero Point from a particular Quirk once per session.

Advantages: Backgrounds give you Advantages. Advantages are abilities most Théans will never have. If your Background lists an Advantage, you may add that Advantage to your Hero Sheet at no cost.

Skills: Each Background also gives you a set of Skills, which begin with 1 Rank. Skills are specific bonuses for specific tasks. Like Traits, Skills have Ranks that tell you how many dice they give you. A Skill's Rank can only go as high as 5.

Two Backgrounds

Pick two different Backgrounds from the following list.

You get all of your Backgrounds' Advantages. If you have duplicate Advantages, take another Advantage of the same point cost, your choice.

You get 1 Rank in all your Backgrounds' Skills. If you have duplicate Skills, add 1 more point (for a total of 2 points) to the duplicate Skill.

Basic Backgrounds

ARCHÆOLOGIST

You study Syrneth ruins and explore the lost parts of Terra.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you turn an artifact of value over to a university, museum, or a publicly displayed site.

Advantages	Skills
Signature Item	Athletics
Eagle Eyes	Convince
	Notice
	Scholarship
	Theft

ARISTOCRAT

You were born into the nobility of your home country and regularly attend the courts.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you prove there is more to nobility than expensive clothes and attending court.

Advantages	Skills
Rich	Aim
Disarming Smile	Convince
	Empathy
	Ride
	Scholarship

ARMY OFFICER

You enlisted in the army and soon found yourself in a command position.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you seize command during a moment of intense violence or extreme danger.

Advantages	Skills
Academy	Aim
Direction Sense	Athletics
	Intimidate
	Ride
	Warfare

ARTIST

You work tirelessly to create objects of beauty.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you make a sacrifice in the hope of making Théah a more beautiful place.

Advantages	Skills
Patron	Convince
Fascinate	Empathy
	Perform
	Ride
	Tempt

ASSASSIN

You stalked the shadows as a specter of silent death in return for bloody coin, but no more.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you go out of your way to avoid the death of an adversary or outright refuse a course of action because it could result in another person's death.

Advantages	Skills
Fencer	Athletics
Psst, Over Here	Empathy
	Hide
	Intimidate
	Weaponry

CAVALRY

You are a mounted warrior and part of your Nation's esteemed cavalry.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you apply your skills in horse riding to an uncommon situation.

Advantages	Skills
Bruiser	Intimidate
Indomitable Will	Notice
	Ride
	Warfare
	Weaponry

COURTIER

You regularly attend the courts of your home Nation and act as a diplomat to foreign courts.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you turn the tide of violence with charm and flair.

Advantages	Skills
An Honest Misunderstanding	Empathy
Friend at Court	Perform
	Ride
	Tempt
	Weaponry

CRAFTER

You work tirelessly to create objects of function.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use everyday crafting skills to solve a problem deemed too complex for such a simple solution.

Advantages	Skills
Masterpiece Crafter	Athletics
Handy	Convince
	Notice
	Perform
	Scholarship

CRIMINAL

You break unjust laws to achieve what you believe is the greater good.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you break the law in the pursuit of a noble endeavor.

Advantages	Skills
Camaraderie	Athletics
Streetwise	Empathy
	Hide
	Intimidate
	Theft

DOCTOR

You work to heal the sick and tend to the wounded.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you tend to the injuries of a Villain or the innocents harmed by a Villain.

Advantages	Skills
Miracle Worker	Convince
Time Sense	Empathy
	Notice
	Ride
	Scholarship

DUELIST

You have devoted your life to mastering the blade.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you resort to the edge of your blade to defend a noble ideal.

Advantages	Skills
Duelist Academy	Athletics
	Empathy
	Intimidate
	Perform
	Weaponry

ENGINEER

You are concerned with applying scientific knowledge, mathematics, and ingenuity to develop solutions for technical, social and commercial problems

Quirk:

Earn a Hero Point when you use your technological savvy to solve a problem.

Advantages	Skills
Masterpiece Crafter	Aim
Direction Sense	Convince
Time Sense	Ride
	Scholarship
	Warfare

EXPLORER

You live to see the farthest reaches that Terra has to offer.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you set your eyes upon a sight few, if any, Théans have ever seen before.

Advantages	Skills
Quick Reflexes	Athletics
Second Story Work	Convince
	Empathy
	Ride
	Sailing

FARMKID

You were raised on a small farm, working to survive, and have never known the life of adventure.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you solve a complex problem in a simple, tried and true method from back on the farm.

Advantages	Skills
Legendary Trait	Athletics
Survivalist	Convince
	Empathy
	Perform
	Ride

HUNTER

You sleep under the stars and hunt your meals with your own two hands.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your hunter's acumen to save someone from danger.

Advantages	Skills
Sniper	Aim
Got It!	Hide
	Intimidate
	Notice
	Ride

JENNY

You seduce others for fun and profit.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you resolve a conflict with seduction or sexual wiles.

Advantages	Skills
Dynamic Approach	Aim
Come Hither	Athletics
	Empathy
	Perform
	Tempt

MERCENARY

You sell your skills in battle to the highest bidder.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you choose to ply your trade for a reason that's worth more to you than money.

Advantages	Skills
Hard to Kill	Athletics
Cast Iron Stomach	Brawl
	Intimidate
	Notice
	Weaponry

MERCHANT

You travel the countryside to sell your wares in market or port.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you sell an item for far less than it's worth to someone who desperately needs it.

Advantages	Skills
Lyceum	Convince
Time Sense	Empathy
	Intimidate
	Ride
	Tempt

NAVAL OFFICER

You enlisted in the navy and worked your way into the command crew of a ship.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you put the needs of the crew ahead of the needs of the mission.

Advantages	Skills
Perfect Balance	Intimidate
Barterer	Notice
Sea Legs	Sailing
	Warfare
	Weaponry

ORPHAN

You lost your parents at a young age and have been forced to look out for yourself.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you put yourself in danger to ensure someone else doesn't have to be alone.

Advantages	Skills
Brush Pass	Athletics
Reckless Takedown	Brawl
	Empathy
	Hide
	Intimidate

PERFORMER

You work tirelessly to create an experience of beauty.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your crowd-pleasing skills for something more than making a few coins.

Advantages	Skills
Virtuoso	Athletics
Inspire Generosity	Empathy
	Perform
	Tempt
	Theft

PIRATE

You sail the seas, taking what you need, and providing true freedom to all who accept the call.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you make a personal sacrifice to ensure the freedom of another.

Advantages	Skills
Deadeye	Aim
Indomitable Will	Intimidate
	Notice
	Sailing
	Theft

PRIEST

You serve a higher cause with every living breath you take.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you set aside the rhetoric and take action to practice the virtues you preach.

Advantages	Skills
Ordained	Empathy
Inspire Generosity	Perform
	Ride
	Scholarship
	Tempt

PROFESSOR

You teach others at a prestigious learning institution.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use knowledge from an obscure text to solve a complicated problem.

Advantages	Skills
Tenure	Convince
Team Player	Empathy
	Perform
	Scholarship
	Tempt

PUGILIST

You rely on your hands and feet to solve all the violent problems in your life.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you drop what you're holding to fight with fists regardless of your opponent's weapon.

Advantages	Skills
Boxer	Athletics
Staredown	Brawl
	Convince
	Empathy
	Perform

QUARTERMASTER

You serve aboard a ship taking care of all the things the other sailors ignore.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you solve a problem for your crew.

Advantages	Skills
Handy	Aim
Got It!	Brawl
Sea Legs	Hide
	Sailing
	Warfare

SAILOR

You serve no country or master, but the ship and your crew are all the family you need.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you put aside your personal desires to ensure the safety and comfort of your allies.

Advantages	Skills
Bar Fighter	Brawl
Eagle Eyes	Notice
	Sailing
	Tempt
	Weaponry

SCHOLAR

You dedicate yourself to learning and documenting all the wonders of Terra.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you put yourself in harm's way in pursuit of knowledge.

Advantages	Skills
University	Convince
Linguist	Empathy
	Notice
	Perform
	Scholarship

SERVANT

You work for another doing whatever your master's bidding may be.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you put yourself in danger to assist another character with a difficult task.

Advantages	Skills
Foul Weather Jack	Hide
Team Player	Notice
	Ride
	Tempt
	Theft

SHIP CAPTAIN

You command a crew and sail the seas for whatever banner you fly.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you're the last one in your crew to safety.

Advantages	Skills
Married to the Sea	Aim
Leadership	Convince
Sea Legs	Notice
	Sailing
	Warfare

SOLDIER

You know how to fight—and how to kill—and you have made a life doing so under banners and for lords.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you stick to the plan regardless of the danger to yourself.

Advantages	Skills
Riot Breaker	Aim
Able Drinker	Intimidate
	Notice
	Warfare
	Weaponry

SPY

You serve your Nation by infiltrating its enemies and securing their secrets.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you take a great risk to uncover a secret.

Advantages	Skills
Opportunist	Empathy
Poison Immunity	Hide
	Notice
	Tempt
	Theft

Glamour Isles Backgrounds

BARD

You tell the old tales, the stories of Legends, and ensure the soul of Avalon is never forgotten.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you solve a problem by following an example set by a Legend.

Advantages	Skills
Barterer	Aim
Virtuoso	Convince
Able Drinker	Empathy
	Perform
	Ride

KNIGHT ERRANT

You are imbued with the legendary magic of the Knights of King Elilodd.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you uphold an ideal of knightly virtue in a way that gets you into trouble.

Advantages	Skills
Sorcery	Brawl
Sorcery	Intimidate
Direction Sense	Ride
	Warfare
	Weaponry

PRIVATEER

You have been given a charter to sink any ships that are enemies to the Crown of Avalon.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you defeat the enemies of the Crown of Avalon.

Advantages	Skills
The Devil's Own Luck	Notice
Perfect Balance	Sailing
	Tempt
	Theft
	Weaponry

UNIFICATION AGENT

You have been tasked by the Crown of Avalon to keep the peace among the Isles.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you ensure the stability of the Glamour Isles Unification.

Advantages	Skills
University	Aim
Survivalist	Empathy
	Notice
	Scholarship
	Tempt

Avalon Backgrounds

PURITAN

You are a reformed Objectionist who seeks to "purify" the Church of Avalon from all Vaticine practices

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you expose corruption, hypocrisy, or ineffectiveness within the Vaticine Church.

Advantages	Skills
Dynamic Approach	Convince
Reputation	Empathy
	Intimidate
	Ride
	Scholarship

Inismore Backgrounds

SAOI (WISE ONE)

You hold the highest honor bestowed by Aosdána, a state-supported association of Inish creative artists.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you put yourself in harm's way to protect the artists of Théah.

Advantages	Skills
Team Player	Athletics
Disarming Smile	Convince
Able Drinker	Empathy
	Perform
	Weaponry

Highland Marches Background

SEANCHAIDH (WARRIOR-POET)

You are a storyteller and historian, versed in the laws of your people and their ancient ways.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you enforce the ancient laws of your people.

Advantages	Skills
Riot Breaker	Convince
Linguist	Notice
	Perform
	Ride
	Weaponry

Castille Backgrounds

ALQUIMISTA

You sought long and hard until you unlocked the mystery of alchemical creation.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you improve another Théan's life through Alchemy.

Advantages	Skills
Alchemist	Empathy
Cast Iron Stomach	Notice
	Scholarship
	Tempt
	Theft

ANTROPÓLOGO

You are a cousin to the Archæologist but focused on the people you find and not the ruins they left behind.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you solve a problem for a group of strangers.

Advantages	Skills
University	Athletics
Linguist	Convince
	Empathy
	Notice
	Scholarship

DIESTRO

You have dedicated your life to the understanding of the Sword, not just its function.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you best a trained duelist at her own game.

Advantages	Skills
Fencer	Athletics
Disarming Smile	Empathy
	Intimidate
	Scholarship
	Weaponry

MIRABILIS (PRIEST)

You are a master scholar of the Vaticine Church and member of the Ordo Doctorem Mirabilis.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you give of yourself to demonstrate the warmth and compassion of the Vaticine Church.

Advantages	Skills
Ordained	Convince
Spark of Genius	Empathy
	Perform
	Ride
	Scholarship

Eisen Backgrounds

HEXE

You are a master of Hexenwerk, the sorcery of the dead.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you go out of your way to ensure that the dead stay dead.

Advantages	Skills
Sorcery	Athletics
Sorcery	Intimidate
Cast Iron Stomach	Notice
	Tempt
	Weaponry

KRIEGER (WARRIOR)

You survived the War of the Cross and carry the scars of many battles on your flesh.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you choose to fight to defend the defenseless or prevent destruction.

Advantages	Skills
Staredown	Aim
Academy	Athletics
	Ride
	Warfare
	Weaponry

UNGETÜMJÄGER (MONSTER HUNTER)

You know that there are unnatural creatures stalking your homeland, and you've sworn to destroy them.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you choose to hunt down an inhuman creature so it will never hurt anyone ever again.

Advantages	Skills
I Won't Die Here	Aim
Indomitable Will	Athletics
	Brawl
	Notice
	Weaponry

VITALIENBRUDER (PIRATE)

You are one of the many brothers of Eisen dedicated to fair trade and equal shares.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you take from the rich to give to the poor.

Advantages	Skills
Leadership	Brawl
Streetwise	Hide
Sea Legs	Sailing
	Theft
	Warfare

Montaigne Backgrounds

L'AMI DU ROI (COURTIER)

You are, literally, a favorite courtier of the King of Montaigne.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you leverage the King's favor to solve a problem.

Advantages	Skills
Connection	Convince
Friend at Court	Perform
Linguist	Ride
	Tempt
	Weaponry

MOUSQUETAIRE

You are sworn to protect the King of Montaigne and your fellow musketeers until your death.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you take a serious injury to protect your comrades or King.

Advantages	Skills
Camaraderie	Aim
Quick Reflexes	Intimidate
	Notice
	Ride
	Weaponry

RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE

You have pledged yourself to seeing your country freed from the tyranny of the aristocracy.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you make a personal sacrifice for the sake of liberty.

Advantages	Skills
Joie de Vivre	Hide
Slip Free	Notice
	Ride
	Theft
	Weaponry

SORCIER PORTÉ

You have mastered the art of Porté, the magical opening of doorways.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you close a *Blessure* that a Villain ripped open.

Advantages	Skills
Sorcery	Empathy
Sorcery	Hide
Time Sense	Ride
	Scholarship
	Tempt

Sarmatian Backgrounds

POSEŁ (ENVOY)

You act as an advisor to the entire voting body of the Commonwealth.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you insist on democracy when it would be advantageous for you to not take a vote.

Advantages	Skills
Leadership	Convince
Lyceum	Empathy
	Intimidate
	Perform
	Tempt

TREMTIS (EXPATRIATE)

You fled to the Commonwealth seeking asylum after Golden Liberty was declared.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when something from your past comes back to haunt you.

Advantages	Skills
Foreign Born	Brawl
Streetwise	Empathy
Connection	Hide
	Notice
	Theft

WINGED HUSSAR

You serve in the proudest of cavalry regiments, an elite unit in the Sarmatian military.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you and your steed plunge head-first into a battle or conflict, heedless of the danger.

Advantages	Skills
Together We Are Strong	Convince
Team Player	Notice
	Ride
	Warfare
	Weaponry

ŽYNYS (SOOTHSAYER)

You met the Devil on the road, tricked him, and gained his powers at your command.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use something evil for good.

Advantages	Skills
Sorcery	Athletics
Sorcery	Convince
Linguist	Perform
	Scholarship
	Weaponry

Ussura Backgrounds

COSSACK

You live in the Eastern steppes of Ussura, a place with a proud heritage of horsemanship and warfare.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you leave behind something important so you can travel light.

Advantages	Skills
Strength of Ten	Brawl
Reckless Takedown	Intimidate
	Notice
	Ride
	Weaponry

PROGRESSIVIST

You travel Théah to bring innovations home to modernize the old country.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you risk life and limb to secure a piece of advanced technology.

Advantages	Skills
Extended Family	Athletics
Handy	Convince
Connection	Empathy
	Ride
	Tempt

TOUCHED BY MATUSHKA

You have been touched by Matushka and granted great power at a terrible price.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you teach someone a lesson in a way that would make Matushka proud.

Advantages	Skills
Sorcery	Athletics
Sorcery	Intimidate
Survivalist	Perform
	Tempt
	Theft

WHALER

You sail the frozen seas of Ussura with spears and boats tracking the most dangerous sea life.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you face a creature that could swallow a man whole.

Advantages	Skills
Able Drinker	Athletics
Sea Legs	Brawl
Patron	Notice
	Sailing
	Weaponry

Vestenmennavenjar Backgrounds

BEARSARK

You fight with a nearly uncontrollable, trance-like fury.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you let the Game Master choose your character's next action.

Advantages	Skills
Hard to Kill	Brawl
Able Drinker	Intimidate
	Sailing
	Warfare
	Weaponry

GUILDMÄSTAREN

You serve on the Vendel League and manage Guilds in some capacity.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use the vast resources of the Vendel League for something more noble than profit.

Advantages	Skills
Masterpiece Crafter	Convince
Rich	Empathy
	Ride
	Scholarship
	Tempt

SJØRØVER (PIRATE)

You give honor to the ancient Vestenmennavenjar heritage of naval combat, raiding, and pillaging.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when put yourself in danger in order to ensure your place of honor at the Allfather's table.

Advantages	Skills
I'm Taking You With Me	Brawl
Staredown	Intimidate
	Notice
	Sailing
	Weaponry

SKALD

You interpret the mysteries of the bonfire and the bones, sharing tales of glory and defeat.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use your knowledge as a Seidr to help another Hero to solve a problem or thwart a Villain.

Advantages	Skills
Seidr	Brawl
Sea Legs	Intimidate
	Perform
	Sailing
	Weaponry

Vodacce Backgrounds

BRAVO

You have sworn to protect someone else and will always be at his side.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you put yourself in danger to defend the life of the person you've sworn to protect.

Advantages	Skills
Poison Immunity	Athletics
Hard to Kill	Empathy
	Intimidate
	Notice
	Weaponry

CONSIGLIERE

You work as an "advisor" to a Merchant Prince.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you take a great risk to protect someone else's secret.

Advantages	Skills
We're Not So Different...	Convince
Streetwise	Empathy
	Notice
	Ride
	Tempt

ESPLORATORE

You travel the world on behalf of a Merchant Prince.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you use non-Théan items or knowledge to solve a problem.

Advantages	Skills
Lyceum	Convince
Linguist	Empathy
	Intimidate
	Sailing
	Tempt

SORTE STREGA

Note: Only women Heroes can choose this Background.

You can sense the strands of Fate, twisting and controlling them to your will... but not without a price.

Quirk

Earn a Hero Point when you commit to a dangerous course of action that you believe is destiny.

Advantages	Skills
Sorcery	Convince
Sorcery	Hide
Time Sense	Perform
	Ride
	Tempt

Step 4: Skills

Skills are an integral part of a Hero. Skills determine her training, talents, education, and similar abilities. Any time you make a Risk, the GM tells you which Skill and Trait to use, and roll that many dice. Some Advantages might give you Bonus Dice when you use certain Skills under certain circumstances, or modify your dice in some way.

You gain 10 points to add to existing Skills from your Backgrounds or to add new Skills to your sheet. Each point buys you one more rank of a Skill, whether you already have any ranks in it from your Background or not. You cannot raise a Skill above Rank 3 when making your Hero.

Achieving certain Ranks in Skills grants your Hero additional bonuses beyond dice.

- At **3 Ranks**, you gain the ability to reroll any single die when you take a Risk using that Skill.
- At **4 Ranks**, you gain the ability to earn 2 Raises per set by creating sets of 15, rather than only 1 Raise per set for creating a set of 10.
- At **5 Ranks**, all dice that roll a 10 explode, allowing you to roll an additional die and add it to your total.

Skills are meant to be somewhat open to interpretation. These are ways that your Hero chooses to solve a problem, rather than explicit requirements for success. The GM should not choose your Approach—"Roll Brawn+Athletics to punch these Brutes!"—he should be presenting you with a problem and asking you how you solve it. Based on what you choose to do, the GM would then tell you which Skill is applicable.

Below is the list of Skills for *7th Sea*, along with some brief examples of when you use them. These are not restrictive; they are intended to be starting points. When in doubt, consult your GM to see if a Skill could be interpreted or applied in a particular way.

AIM

Use Aim when you point a pistol at someone and pull the trigger. Use Aim when you throw a knife across a crowded room with pinpoint accuracy, whether your target is a person or an object.

ATHLETICS

Use Athletics to swing across a room on a chandelier, jump from rooftop-to-rooftop, or otherwise perform a dangerous physical stunt.

BRAWL

Use Brawl whenever you punch or kick someone in the face. Use Brawl when you grab someone and drag him down an alleyway.

CONVINCE

Use Convince when you appeal to another character's better nature. Use Convince when you assure someone you're being completely honest with her and she should trust you.

EMPATHY

Use Empathy when you want to tell if someone is being genuine. Use Empathy when you determine someone's general mental state—they're afraid, they're nervous, they're angry.

HIDE

Use Hide when you sneak through a dark room without the guard on watch seeing you. Use Hide when you keep a weapon or other item hidden, and avoid it being found if you are searched. Use Hide to attack an unsuspecting victim with a weapon or your fists. Use Hide to construct a disguise or camouflage a location.

INTIMIDATE

Use Intimidate when you make someone do what you want under threat of some action from you, physical or otherwise.

NOTICE

Use Notice when you investigate a crime scene or search a Villain's study for clues. Use Notice when you want to pick out fine details at a glance.

PERFORM

Use Perform when you try to captivate an audience with your showmanship. Use Perform to get across a particular message to your audience or to elicit a specific emotion from them through your performance—to make them laugh at your comedy, to make them weep at your tragedy, to rile them up with a motivational speech, etc.

RIDE

Use Ride when you engage in a high-speed carriage chase. Use Ride when you ride a horse through the forest at a gallop.

SAILING

Use Sailing whenever you navigate your way through a ship's rigging. Use Sailing when you attempt to steer a ship during a pitched battle at sea, or through a dangerously narrow channel.

SCHOLARSHIP

Use Scholarship when you wax ecstatic about a certain subject matter, either from personal experience or teachings. Use Scholarship when you consult your knowledge to fill in the details on a certain subject. Use Scholarship when you call upon your medical training to tend to an injury.

TEMPT

Use Tempt when you bribe someone to do something for you that she really shouldn't agree to do. Use Tempt when you convince someone to give you a little "alone time."

THEFT

Use Theft when you swipe something from someone's pocket without him noticing. Use Theft when you pick a lock, crack a safe, or something similar.

WARFARE

Use Warfare whenever you need tactical expertise, such as when you're breaching a castle's defense. Use Warfare when you lead an army in battle.

WEAPONRY

Use Weaponry when you attack something with a sword, axe, hammer, or knife in your hand.

Step 5: Advantages

Although you already have some Advantages from your Backgrounds, you may now buy new Advantages. These are distinctions that set you apart from everyone else.

You have 5 points to buy new Advantages.

Advantages cost between 1 and 5 points and may cost different amounts depending on your Hero's Nation of origin. Some Advantages have restrictions.

All Advantages may only be purchased once unless explicitly stated otherwise.

An Advantage with the Knack tag (Ⓚ)requires a Hero Point to activate, but no Raises—meaning that it doesn't take an Action, even though it is probably activated on your turn.

An Advantage with the Innate tag (🧍) can only be selected at Hero Creation.

1 Point Advantages

ABLE DRINKER

Alcohol never adversely affects you, no matter how much you drink.

CAST IRON STOMACH

Spoiled or raw food never negatively affects you, and you still gain required sustenance from it.

DIRECTION SENSE

As long as you have some point of reference, you are never lost. That isn't the same as knowing exactly where you are—if you're knocked unconscious and wake up in a dungeon, you don't necessarily have any idea what city you are in, but if you manage to escape your cell you will never get turned around in the winding tunnels that make up the dungeon.

FOREIGN BORN 🧍

Choose a Nation of Théah aside from your own. You were raised there, rather than your blood homeland. For example, if your parents are Castillian but you were raised in Vodacce, you would be Foreign Born [Vodacce]. Any Risk you take that would benefit from your dual heritage—using Convince to negotiate between two merchants who hail from your two cultures, or using Tempt to know just what to say to bribe a border patrol into letting you pass without inspection—gains 1 Bonus Die.

LARGE 🧍

You cannot purchase the "Small" Advantage

Gain 1 Bonus Die on any Risk that is easier due to your size—using Athletics to run at full speed even while carrying another Hero, or looming over someone in order to Intimidate them.

LINGUIST

You speak, read, and write all Théan languages. Even the dead ones.

SEA LEGS

While aboard a ship, treacherous footing never affects you. You gain 1 Bonus Die on any physical Risk while aboard a ship at sea—engaging in a sword fight on a pitching ship deck, or climbing through the rigging during a storm.

SMALL 🧍

You cannot purchase the "Large" Advantage

You are smaller than the average Théan. Much smaller. If your small size makes a Risk easier—using Hide to squeeze into a tiny space and escape a guard patrol, or using Athletics to slip between the bars of a jail cell—gain 1 Bonus Die.

SURVIVALIST

If you are in the wilderness, you can forage or hunt and find enough food for yourself and up to five other people. Under extreme circumstances—lost in the middle of a desert, or abandoned in the Ussuran tundra, for example—you find enough food for yourself and up to two other people.

TIME SENSE

You always know what time it is. You know how long until the next sunrise or sunset, with less than a one minute margin of error.

2 Point Advantages

BARTERER (1 IF GLAMOUR ISLANDER)

Spend a Hero Point to convince someone to cut you a deal, give you a reasonable discount, or assure someone who knows you that "you're good for it."

COME HITHER

Spend a Hero Point to lure another character into a private room and later leave said private room without him, removing him from the scene. He may be rescued after you're long gone.

CONNECTION

You have connections who can give you information or help you out when you need it. Choose a type of contact—"Freiburg underworld," "Five Sails city watch," or "Vodacce high society courtiers," for example. You can always make contact with someone of that type who will give you basic information or help you in some minor way, so long as it doesn't cost them anything or put them in danger. If you want more hard-to-find information or a dangerous favor, you must spend a Hero Point or agree to a cost that your connection stipulates, such as paying them money or agreeing to do a favor for them in return.

DISARMING SMILE

Spend a Hero Point to keep another character from drawing a weapon, starting a fight, or resorting to violence. She will still defend herself, but she will not start any violent conflicts.

EAGLE EYES

As long as you have a clear line of sight, you can see perfectly out to a distance of one mile. If you use a spyglass you can even pick out fine details, such as the inscription carved into a wedding band. If you make a Risk that relies heavily on your keen vision, you gain 1 Bonus Die.

EXTENDED FAMILY (1 IF USSURAN)

Spend a Hero Point to reveal you have a distant cousin who lives nearby and can help you with materials, information, or shelter.

FASCINATE

Spend a Hero Point to capture the attention of another character. That character pays attention only to you until the end of the Scene or until you cease speaking/paying attention, whichever comes first.

FRIEND AT COURT

When you are at a ball, feast, or similar high society function, spend a Hero Point to reveal you have a close friend also in attendance.

GOT IT!

Spend a Hero Point to immediately pick a lock, crack a safe, or disarm a trap.

HANDY

Spend a Hero Point to repair a broken item, rig a damaged gun, patch a leaky ship, or perform similar miracles, causing the object to function normally for the rest of the Scene. At the end of the Scene—or if the object suffers any additional damage—the object becomes unusable until you have time to perform serious repairs with the proper tools.

INDOMITABLE WILL

After another character attempts to intimidate, seduce, or otherwise goad you, spend a Hero Point to automatically resist.

INSPIRE GENEROSITY

Spend a Hero Point to convince another character to grant you an object you want at no cost. They might give you something they already have or go to some lengths—legal or illegal—to procure the item, whatever is the easiest way for them to get their hands on what you want.

LEADERSHIP (1 IF SARMATIAN)

Spend a Hero Point to inspire a group to action. The group must be able to hear you, but if they can and they are of neutral or better disposition, they will do whatever you command so long as it is reasonable—they are unlikely to all throw themselves off a bridge to certain death, for example.

SORCERY

You may have noticed that Sorcery is listed twice in several Backgrounds, such as Knight Errant or Hexe. This isn't a typo! Unlike most other Advantages, you may select Sorcery more than once, gaining additional or stronger abilities as a result of your continued study in the magical arts.

MARRIED TO THE SEA

You have access to a Ship. If you and your allies already have access to a Ship, your Ship gains an additional Background. See the ***Sailing*** chapter for more information.

PERFECT BALANCE (K)

Spend a Hero Point to move across a thin beam, jump from one place to another, or otherwise perform a feat of perfect agility and balance.

POISON IMMUNITY (1 IF VODACCE)

Poison never affects you, aside from some potential mild discomfort. If the poison would ordinarily kill you, it might cause you only to vomit instead, but there are no additional effects.

PSST, OVER HERE (K)

While undetected, you can spend a Hero Point to lure a single character out of position and knock him out. Any other characters in the area remain unaware of your presence.

RECKLESS TAKEDOWN (K)

Spend a Hero Point to immediately defeat a single Brute Squad, regardless of its Strength. You immediately take 1 Dramatic Wound.

REPUTATION

You determine what your Reputation is with a single adjective—"Honorable," "Vicious," etc.—When you use your reputation to your advantage in a social Risk, you gain 1 Bonus Die. A Hero can buy this Advantage multiple times. Each time she does, she can choose to gain either a new Reputation or to increase the number of Bonus Dice she gains when she invokes her existing Reputation.

SECOND STORY WORK (K)

You can spend a Hero Point to locate a way into a building or restricted area. You can bring up to one other character along with you, but everyone else has to find their own way in—or wait for you to open a path for them.

SLIP FREE (K)

Spend a Hero Point to slip your hands free from manacles, loosen the rope tying you to a chair, or similarly free yourself.

SORCERY

You gain the Sorcery from your National bloodline. If you purchase this Advantage after Hero Creation, you may only do so with a Hero Story. See the Sorcery chapter for more information.

STAREDOWN (K) (1 IF EISEN)

Spend a Hero Point to intimidate a character into backing down from a threat, letting you into somewhere he shouldn't, or otherwise getting out of your way.

STREETWISE (K)

You can spend a Hero Point to locate a fixer, an information broker, a black market, or a similar underworld figure.

TEAM PLAYER

When you spend a Raise to create an Opportunity, you can spend a second Raise. If you do, you activate the Opportunity on behalf of another willing Hero—she doesn't need to spend her own Raise.

VALIANT SPIRIT

You begin each game with 2 Hero Points instead of 1.

3 Point Advantages

AN HONEST MISUNDERSTANDING (K)

Spend a Hero Point to edit, redact, or otherwise alter something you or another Hero just said, "reinterpreting" the words into the kindest compliment.

BAR FIGHTER

You gain 1 Bonus Die when you make a Brawling Risk to fight using an upturned table, a barstool, a plank of wood or some other improvised weapon.

BOXER

You gain 1 Bonus Die when you make a Brawling Risk to punch, kick, headbutt or otherwise injure another character using nothing but your own body.

BRUISER

You gain 1 Bonus Die when you make a Weaponry Risk using a claymore, zweihander, battle axe, halberd or similar weapon in both hands.

BRUSH PASS (K)

Spend a Hero Point to pick a pocket, steal a ring from another character's finger, or plant a small hand-held item on another character without him noticing.

CAMARADERIE (2 IF MONTAIGNE)

Whenever you spend a Hero Point to aid an ally, they gain four dice instead of three.

DEADEYE

You gain 1 Bonus Die when you make an Aim Risk using a pistol, blunderbuss, or a thrown weapon such as a knife or axe.

DYNAMIC APPROACH (K)

Spend a Hero Point to change your Approach during an Action Sequence or Dramatic Sequence.

FENCER

You gain 1 Bonus Die when you make a Weaponry Risk using a rapier, dagger, cutlass or similar weapon in one hand.

LIMITS ON ADVANTAGES

Some Advantages allow you to affect or change the behaviors of other characters (such as Come Hither or Disarming Smile. We designed these Advantages to make your Heroes awesome, but it's worth noting that they have a few limits:

First, the GM has final say on what an Advantage can reasonably accomplish. If using the Advantage is just silly or unrealistic—like seducing Queen Elaine while she's in the middle of a public speech—then the GM may not allow you to use the Advantage.

Second, if you try using one of these Advantages on a Hero, offer the player of that Hero your Hero Point. They get the Hero Point for saying, "Yes, you can affect my Hero in this way." If the player rejects the Hero Point, they are saying, "No, that doesn't work on my Hero."

FOUL WEATHER JACK

Your Hero gains a second Story. You create this Story in the same manner as all other Hero Stories, and its progression and rewards are determined independently. When this Story is completed, you may write a new one.

MASTERPIECE CRAFTER (2 IF VESTEN)

Choose one type of item—weapons, armor, paintings, etc. When you create such an item, you may increase the time you work on it in order to create an item of greater quality. If you are using typical, mundane materials, this has no additional effect aside from cosmetic—the item is noticeably higher quality than similar items, and may even bear your mark, earn you notoriety for your fine work, draw a higher price if it is for sale, etc. If you use exotic materials—such as creating a sword using metal from a fallen star, for example—you can create a Signature Item for yourself or another Hero. The time required to create a Signature Item, and whether or not a material is "special" enough to qualify, is always a GM's discretion.

OPPORTUNIST (K)

When another Hero spends a Raise to create an Opportunity, you can spend a Hero Point to immediately activate the Opportunity for yourself.

ORDAINED (2 IF CASTILLIAN)

You can expect refuge, a place to stay, and hot meals in any church. You also have access to many—but not all—of the Church's libraries. Finally, you gain two dice for any social Risks against characters who are adherents to your faith.

PATRON

You have a patron, either an individual or an organization, who appreciates your work and supplies you with steady employment. You begin each session with 1 Wealth. You may spend a Hero Point to call in a favor from your Patron. This favor is typically political or mercantile in some way—your Patron might provide you a letter of introduction, or pull strings to get you into an exclusive party, etc. Your Patron may ask you for favors or have other expectations for you, such as expecting you to produce goods or art on her behalf if you are an artist or aiding the populace in her name if you are a knight.

QUICK REFLEXES

Choose one Skill. You always take actions as if you had an additional Raise to spend when you use that Skill. For example, if a Hero has Quick Reflexes with Weaponry and rolls 3 Raises with that Skill, she takes her first Action on 4 Raises. If she spends 1 Raise to take an action (and so has 2 Raises remaining) her next Action occurs on 3 Raises. A Hero can buy this Advantage multiple times. Each time they do, they choose a different Skill.

RICH

You begin each session with 3 Wealth.



SIGNATURE ITEM

Choose a specific item that is important to you. Describe it, decide why it is important, and maybe even give it a name. You can always spend a Hero Point to...

- have your Signature Item appear in the next scene if you lose it or it is stolen.
- gain 2 Bonus Dice on a Risk when using your Signature Item.
- attack a foe to deal Wounds equal to the Raises you spend plus your highest Trait when using the Signature Item.
- prevent a number of Wounds equal to the Raises you spend plus your highest Trait when using the Signature item.

You must always describe how your Signature Item helps you, and it must make sense for the item to gain you any bonuses in this way (GM discretion).

SNIPER

You gain 1 Bonus Die when you make an Aim Risk using a long-barrelled musket, longbow, or crossbow.

TENURE

You can expect refuge, a place to stay, and hot meals in any university. You also have access to many—but not all—of a university's libraries simply by requesting it. Finally, you gain 2 Bonus Dice for any social Risks against characters who are members of an institution of higher learning or who respect such an education.

VIRTUOSO

Choose a specific Performance type, such as singing, playing a specific musical instrument, or dancing. You gain 1 Bonus Die when you make a Perform Risk using that art.

4 Point Advantages

ACADEMY

You studied strategy, horsemanship, and soldiering at one of Théah's many military academies. When you make a Risk using Athletics, Warfare or Ride, all of your dice gain +1 to their value.

ALCHEMIST (CASTILLIAN ONLY)

Spend a Hero Point to produce an elixir or potion that provides an immediate benefit. Using the alchemical concoction requires a Raise during an Action Sequence or a Dramatic Sequence. These are some examples of uses for alchemical concoctions. There may be others. If you want to create one of your own, consult with your GM.

Explosion: The concoction causes an explosion of choking smoke and fire, creating an Opportunity you and others can use to escape the Scene.

Enhancement: You gain 1 Rank in 1 Trait for 1 Round.

Oil: Anything covered with the concoction is slick and nearly impossible to hold. If poured on the floor, anyone walking or running on the surface will slip and fall. If poured down a wall, anyone trying to climb the wall slips and falls as well.

HARD TO KILL

You no longer become Helpless when you have four Dramatic Wounds. Instead, when you have four Dramatic Wounds any Villain who takes a Risk against you gains 3 Bonus Dice (rather than 2). You gain an additional tier of Wounds. When you have taken your fifth Dramatic Wound, you become Helpless.

LEGENDARY TRAIT

Choose a Trait. Whenever you roll a Risk using that Trait, you remove one die from your pool before you roll. That die is always considered to roll a 10. If your 10s explode, your free Legendary Trait 10 explodes as well.

LYCEUM

You studied rhetoric and debate, and refined your social graces at one of Théah's many lyceums, finishing schools typically reserved for the social and noble elite. When you make a Risk using Convince, Intimidate, or Tempt, all of your dice gain +1 to their value.

MIRACLE WORKER

Perhaps it was study with the Church or a local shaman, but you know wounds and how to deal with them. Spend a Hero Point and 1 Raise on your Action to heal another Hero: they regain 1 Dramatic Wound. You must be able to touch the Hero you are healing.

RIOT BREAKER

You're used to your opponents coming in double digits. When you take Wounds from a Brute Squad, subtract your Resolve from the Wounds. The remainder is how many Wounds you take, to a minimum of 1 Wound.

SEIDR (VESTEN ONLY)

You have studied under a Vesten Skald. You learned how to see the Names of things, how to know the future based on how the flames of a bonfire dance, and how to guide the passions of people either to laud your heroes or deride your enemies.

Spend a Hero Point and make a speech about another character. He gains a 1 Rank Reputation (as the Advantage of the same name) of your choice, increases an existing Reputation by 1 Rank, or you change their Reputation to a different Reputation of your choice (but the Rank remains the same). If you change a character's existing Reputation, anyone who uses the new Reputation against him gains Bonus Dice equal to that Reputation's Rank.

Spend a Hero Point to cast runes, dice, or bones. When you do so, ask the GM a single yes or no question about the future. The GM must answer honestly, but only needs to respond yes or no. If the event in question can be changed by the actions of others, such as whether or not a person will die, then the answer given represents the outcome that is currently most likely, but otherwise this power is never wrong.

Spend a Hero Point when you look at another mortal human. You know that person's name. No disguise can hide the name from you, nor will you believe any lie designed to obscure the name. For the rest of the Scene, you always recognize it, no matter how it changes.

SPECIALIST

When you purchase this Advantage, choose a Skill that you have at least 3 Ranks in to become your Specialist Skill. When you make a Risk using any other Skill during an Action or Dramatic Sequence, you do not have to pay additional Raises to Improvise with your Specialist Skill. A Hero can only have a single Specialist Skill; purchasing this Advantage again lets you choose a new Specialist Skill, but you lose your old one.

TRUSTED COMPANION

You have a small group of individuals who are devoted to you, or a single trusted ally who would walk through fire for you (a bodyguard, a horse, etc.). If your allies directly aid you in a Risk, you gain a Bonus Die if you describe specifically how they aid you. If you send them out to accomplish something else and they need to make a Risk (GM discretion), they roll five dice. Your Trusted Companion can take 5 Wounds before he becomes Helpless, and will more than likely require you to rescue him.

UNIVERSITY

You attended one of Théah's formal universities and are familiar with many academic fields of study such as mathematics, architecture, and astronomy. When you make a Risk using Scholarship, Empathy, or Notice, all of your dice gain +1 to their value.

5 Point Advantages

DUELIST ACADEMY

You may choose a Dueling Style. If you purchase this Advantage again, you gain an additional Dueling Style. See the *Dueling* chapter for more information.

I WON'T DIE HERE (3 IF EISEN)

Spend a Hero Point to ignore all negative effects from Dramatic Wounds for the round—the Villain does not gain Bonus Dice if you have 2 Dramatic Wounds, and you do not become Helpless at 4 Dramatic Wounds.

I'M TAKING YOU WITH ME (3 IF VESTEN)

Spend a Hero Point to have all damage that you do this Round increased by the number of Dramatic Wounds you have.

JOIE DE VIVRE (3 IF MONTAIGNE)

Just before a confrontation with a Villain occurs, spend a Hero Point and make some sort of pithy or clever comment about how "When things look darkest, that's when souls shine brightest." Each Hero—that hears the speech—counts all dice that roll equal to or under his Skill on his next roll as 10s.

SPARK OF GENIUS (3 IF CASTILLIAN)

Choose a specific field of academic study (astronomy, mathematics, architecture, history, etc). When you make a Risk and call on your specialized field of study, spend a Hero Point to gain additional Raises equal to your Wits.



STRENGTH OF TEN (3 IF USSURAN)

When you perform a feat of raw strength (lifting a castle portcullis, holding a door closed against a battering ram on the other side, etc.), spend a Hero Point to increase all of your individual dice for that Risk by your Brawn or your Resolve, whichever is greater. For example, if you are trying to keep a crumbling wall from collapsing so that your friends can escape, spend a Hero Point to increase the number on each of your individual dice by your Brawn score.

THE DEVIL'S OWN LUCK (3 IF GLAMOUR ISLANDER)

Spend a Hero Point after you take a Risk to Re-Roll any number of dice you wish. You must keep the new roll, unless you have a different effect that allows you to Re-Roll dice. You can only use this Advantage once per Scene.

TOGETHER WE ARE STRONG (3 IF SARMATIAN)

Spend a Hero Point to give any number of your Raises to another Hero in the same scene, as long as they can see or hear you.

WE'RE NOT SO DIFFERENT... (3 IF VODACCE)

Spend a Hero Point to convince a Villain you are on her side. The Villain considers you a trusted ally. As soon as the Villain sees you perform a Heroic action or if you refuse to perform a Villainous action, the illusion is over. You can only use this Advantage on each Villain once. "Fool me once..."

Step 6: Arcana

Each Hero is touched by Fate: made greater for Her purposes. At least, that's what the *Sorte Strega* believe. They point at the aura each Hero has: a kind of energy that a Fate Witch can read. This is called a Hero's Arcana.

When a Fate Witch reads your Arcana, she reads two things: your Virtue and your Hubris. Your Virtue is the key element of your character that makes you a Hero. Your Hubris, on the other hand, is your greatest emotional challenge.

The Sorte deck is a pack of cards the *Sorte Strega* use to teach girls who are just discovering their gifts, and in that deck are 20 Arcana: special cards representing a heroic journey. Your Hero's Arcana represent her place on that journey.

For your Hero, you choose a Virtue and Hubris from the list below. They do not need to be from the same card. If you're interested in creating a character from a random draw, pick up a Sorte Deck from our website (JohnWickPresents.com/Sorte).

You may only activate your Virtue once per Session. Activating your Virtue has no cost, but it may require specific circumstances: meeting a character, another Hero taking Wounds, etc.

You may only activate your Hero's Hubris once per Session. Activating your Hubris gives you a Hero Point. The GM can offer a Hero Point to activate a Hero's Hubris, but the player may refuse. If he accepts, he gains the Hero Point and must act in accordance with his Hubris.

The Fool

Virtue: Wily

Activate your Virtue to escape danger from the current Scene. You cannot rescue anyone but yourself.

Hubris: Curious

You receive a Hero Point when you investigate something unusual, especially if it looks dangerous.

The Road

Virtue: Friendly

Activate your Virtue when you meet a character (even a Villain) for the first time. She treats you as friendly for one scene.

Hubris: Underconfident

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero decides he cannot take an action without help from another Hero—insisting another Hero spend a Hero Point to give you Bonus Dice, or asking her to use one of her Advantages to aid you, for example.

The Magician

Virtue: Willful

Activate your Virtue and target a Villain. Until the end of this Scene, you cannot spend Hero Points and the Villain cannot spend Danger Points.

Hubris: Ambitious

You receive a Hero Point when you chase after power and the deal you're after is dangerous or causes trouble.

The Lovers

Virtue: Passionate

Activate your Virtue when another Hero takes Wounds to prevent her from suffering those Wounds. You take one Dramatic Wound instead.

Hubris: Star-Crossed

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero becomes enamored with someone she really shouldn't.



The Wheel

Virtue: Fortunate

Activate your Virtue to delay an Opportunity or a Consequence by 1 Action.

Hubris: Unfortunate

You receive 2 Hero Points when you choose to fail an important Risk before rolling.

The Devil

Virtue: Astute

Activate your Virtue after a Villain spends Raises for an Action. That Action fails. The Villain still loses the Raises she spent.

Hubris: Trusting

You receive a Hero Point when you accept someone's lies or lopsided deal.

The Tower

Virtue: Humble

Activate your Virtue to gain 2 Hero points instead of 1 when you activate your Hubris or trigger a Quirk.

Hubris: Arrogant

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero shows disdain, contempt, or otherwise looks down on a Villain or someone who could cause harm to friends.

The Beggar

Virtue: Insightful

Activate your Virtue to discover a Brute Squad's type, or to know a Villain's Rank and Advantages.

Hubris: Envious

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero covets something, and does something unwise to get it.

The Witch

Virtue: Intuitive

Activate your Virtue to ask the GM one yes or no question about an NPC. The GM must answer honestly and should be generous—for example, if there is a qualifier, he should tell you and explain more fully.

Hubris: Manipulative

You receive a Hero Point when you try to get someone else to do your dirty work for you, and it backfires.

The War

Virtue: Victorious

Activate your Virtue the first time you Wound a Villain during a fight to make her take a Dramatic Wound in addition to the Wounds you normally deal.

Hubris: Loyal

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero goes back for a fallen comrade or refuses to leave a wounded ally.

The Hanged Man

Virtue: Altruistic

Activate your Virtue to suffer a Risk's Consequences in place of another Hero.

Hubris: Indecisive

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero takes an Action to pause in hesitation, doubt, or uncertainty before she makes a move.

Coins (for the Ferryman)

Virtue: Adaptable

Activate your Virtue to take your first Action before anyone else in a Round.

Hubris: Relentless

You receive a Hero Point when you refuse to leave well enough alone or quit while you're ahead, and it gets you into trouble.

The Thrones

Virtue: Comforting

Activate your Virtue to cancel the effects of Fear on you and your friends.

Hubris: Stubborn

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero is stubborn and refuses to change her mind in the face of evidence.

The Moonless Night

Virtue: Subtle

Activate your Virtue when you act behind the scenes, from the shadows, or through a proxy. For the next Risk, when you determine Raises, every die counts as a Raise.

Hubris: Confusion

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero fails to understand an important plot element and that misunderstanding leads to danger for herself or others.

The Sun

Virtue: Glorious

Activate your Virtue when you are the center of attention. For the next Risk, when you determine Raises, every die counts as a Raise.

Hubris: Proud

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero refuses an offer of aid—for example, if a Hero tries to spend a Hero Point to give you Bonus Dice and you turn them down.

The Prophet

Virtue: Illuminating

Activate your Virtue to know whenever any other character lies to you until the end of the Scene.

Hubris: Overzealous

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero strongly defends one of her opinions when the time or place is inappropriate.

Reunion

Virtue: Exemplary

Activate your Virtue and choose another Hero in the same scene to pool your Raises for the round, spending Raises to take Actions from your shared pool.

Hubris: Bitterness

You receive a Hero Point when you bring up old grudges or bad feelings when doing so will lead to trouble.

The Hero

Virtue: Courageous

Activate your Virtue to add Bonus Dice to your Risk equal to the Fear rating of your target.

Hubris: Foolhardy

You receive a Hero Point when your brash, cocky, or reckless actions cause trouble for you and another Hero.

The Glyph

Virtue: Temperate

Activate your Virtue to prevent any magical effect (Sorcery, Artifacts, Monsters, etc.) from affecting you.

Hubris: Superstitious

You receive a Hero Point when you refuse to solve a problem using Sorcery, an artifact, or some other mystical effect that you don't trust.

The Emperor

Virtue: Commanding

Activate your Virtue. The GM gives a Hero Point to all other Heroes in this Scene.

Hubris: Hot-Headed

You receive a Hero Point when your Hero flies off the handle and loses her temper, causing trouble.

Step 7: Stories

While Heroes work together to tell a larger story, every Hero has her own story to tell. Your Hero is no different. The promise you made to your father on his deathbed. The man whose wrongful testimony sent you to prison for all those years. The woman whose love you've sworn to recapture. Stories are more than the things you tell everyone you'll accomplish one day. Stories are also the road you'll walk to get there.

Choosing a Story

When you decide to start a new Story, think about what kinds of themes you want to explore with your character. Do you want her to be a brave warrior, fighting for the people she loves? Or would you rather see her have to solve difficult problems without resorting to "easy" solutions like violence?

You can change Stories later, but try to pick something you'll find fun and interesting. Talk to your GM as well; he might have some ideas for a Story that would be a perfect fit.

Starting a Story

Each Hero can have only one Hero Story at a time, beginning with the Story you create when making your Hero. Upon resolution or abandonment of a Story, Heroes are free to move on to their next tale. Players may feel free to keep notes about future Stories they may want to tackle, but their Heroes should each remain focused on the Story at hand.

To start writing a Story the player should create a short name that acts as a conceptual reminder of what your Hero wishes to accomplish. This is the mantra the Hero repeats to keep her mind on track:

- Absolution: My negligence led to the destruction of my home; I'll never let that happen again.
- Revenge: I'm gonna make 'em all pay for what they did to me.
- Cleanse: Monsters have plagued my life. I cannot rest until they are destroyed.

Once you've written the concept down you can move on to writing the ending, or Goal.

GAME MASTER STORIES

In addition to the Stories players create, the Game Master also has rules for creating Stories of his own that reward every Hero in the game instead of an individual (see page 199).

Reaching a Goal

There are two aspects to the Goal of a Story. First is the **ending**, a specific action that your Hero must take to finish the Story. You should know, without a doubt, when your Story has been completed.

Endings do not contain suspense for the players and while they should telegraph the player's desired outcome, the Hero might not know them. As such, it's often best to write the ending in third person:

- The plague that wiped out Samuel's people returns, but this time he takes action.
- Hector lies dead at Leannán's feet.
- Elias uncovers the connection between Ingrid and Helmuth.

Write an actionable sentence about what your Hero needs to do. You don't need to determine every tiny detail right now, just a broad scope of what your Hero wants to accomplish.

Endings should be flexible, capable of changing enough to ensure they never become unattainable. If a Hero discovers her ending is unattainable, she should be able to change it. A player should work with the Game Master to determine a related ending.

The second part of Goals is the **reward**. Hero Stories award new Advantages, increase a Trait or Skill, or change a Quirk. When you write your Goal, be sure to include what you want for your Hero from the Story and then make sure to work towards that Goal during the Story. A Story's reward can be a bonus point in a Skill, a Trait, or a new Advantage. Much like writing an ending, the reward should be explicit:

- This is a four Step Story that will earn Samuel the 4 point Miracle Worker Advantage.
- This is a three Step Story that will earn Leannán Rank 3 Aim.
- This is a three Step Story that will earn Elias a chance to drop his Farmkid Quirk.

CHANGING TRAITS

You can increase your Trait Ranks, but to a limit. You may only have up to 15 total Ranks of Traits. You can move Ranks around, but you can never have more than 15 total. Also, no Trait may be above Rank 5, or below Rank 2.

Taking the Next Step

Knowing the Goal helps you know the ending, but sometimes the road to getting there isn't as clear. That's where the Steps come in. This is the action that puts you on the road to your Goal. Like the Goal, every Step should be an achievable item. However, unlike Goals, they can be as detailed as you like.

During Hero Creation, and whenever you create a new Story, you only need to know the next immediate Step. This is the action that puts you on the road to your Goal. Don't worry about outlining the entire progression of your Story, as you'll often find what you need to do next is determined by what you just accomplished. Instead, just focus on what's directly ahead of your Hero.

When writing a Step, write a short sentence that declares what the next thing your Hero needs to accomplish in order to progress his Story:

- "Treat my first patient in the Áki Klinikka."
- "Question Degarmo."
- "Substantiate a rumor to Ingrid's whereabouts."

Once that Step is completed, the player may write her next Step at any time. She could do it immediately following the completion of a Step or she can wait a bit. Until she writes her next Step, she cannot advance towards her Goal. If her next Step becomes unattainable for some reason, then she can strike it from her list and write a new Step replacing the lost one.

If during the course of a Story a Hero realizes she must accomplish something before securing her next Step, that action cannot become a Step. A Hero needs to remain focused on her Story and avoid the temptation to meander.

Rewarding the Journey

Your Story gives you rewards when you reach your ending and accomplish your Goal. The number of Steps in a Story determines the kind of Advancement your Hero earns.

- **Skills** require a number of Steps equal to the new Skill Rank. A new Rank 1 Skill only requires a single Step while improving a Rank 4 Skill requires a five Step story.
- **Advantages** require a number of Steps equal to their cost. A 1 point Advantage only requires a single Step while a 5 point Advantage requires a five Step story.
- **Quirks** require three Steps to change, allowing a Hero to change any existing Quirk to a different, or wholly new, Quirk. You cannot have the same Quirk twice.
- **Arcana**, both Hubris and Virtue, require four Steps in order to change. Heroes may only have one Hubris and one Virtue each at any time.
- **Traits** require four Steps to shift a single Rank from one Trait to another Trait—so one Trait rises, and the other falls.
- **Traits** require five Steps to increase by 1 Rank, but this can only be done twice. See the sidebar for more details.
- **Corruption** requires five Steps to remove. Redemption is never easy or quick.

Story Starters

Here's a list of sample Stories for your convenience. Each Story includes a few possible endings and suggested first steps. These can, and should, be tailored to your individual Hero but can work as starting points:

- Amnesia
- Cursed
- Hunting
- Lost Love
- Obligation
- Rivalry
- Romance
- Vendetta

Amnesia

You aren't quite sure who you are or why you happen to be here, but you are pretty sure that somebody does. After all, they wouldn't be trying to kill you if they didn't, right? The Amnesia Story doesn't limit any of your Traits, Skills or Advantages, but it does prevent you from remembering anything from your past.

Endings

- My Hero finally remembers that he was the one who killed his wife.
- My Hero is able to reclaim his rightful nobility.
- My Hero is able to track down the men who tried to kill him and exact his revenge.

First Steps

- Find out what my real name is.
- Remember anything from my past.
- Run into someone who recognizes my face.

Cursed

A curse could be something as simple as the inability to sustain serious relationships or something as complex as being doomed to live forever, until you fall in love. The Vodacce Fate Witches are a common origin for curses in 7th Sea, but there are a slew of other options, from angry mistresses to vengeful lords, or even one-eyed vagrants. With every curse, three things need to be decided: what causes the effect (the trigger), what that effect is, and what can be done to end the curse—its penance.

Endings

- My Hero finally breaks the curse.
- My Hero kills the Witch that inflicted the curse on her.
- My Hero uncovers the origins of the curse.

First Steps

- Find someone with the knowledge required to break the curse.
- Figure out where the Witch is living.
- Become convinced that the Curse is real and not just bad luck.

Hunting

You've lost something. Something very important. Perhaps it's a Syrneth artifact, passed down through the generations, that you've let slip through your hands. Maybe it's a husband who skipped out on your wedding. Maybe it's a man running from justice whom you've sworn you will hunt to the ends of the world.

Endings

- My Hero brings his quarry to justice.
- My Hero secures his MacGuffin in his chosen location.
- My Hero finds the answers he needs and gives up the hunt.

First Steps

- Pick up my quarry's trail.
- Track down the last known Fence of my MacGuffin.
- Talk to my lover's family to see if they have a clue as to why my lover vanished.

Lost Love

She used to be the light of your life...and now she's with your family's nemesis, wearing his ring on her left hand. He used to be the one you'd walk through the Abyss for...and now he's with her, that plotting and scheming shrew who ruined your family's name and reputation. Lost Love is a dangerous Story, for it strikes at the heart of a Hero. You were once in love—perhaps you even thought it was true—and now it's gone.

Endings

- My Hero is reunited with her lost love.
- My Hero realizes that her lost love has moved on.
- My Hero finds the remains of her lost love.

First Steps

- Trace my lover's steps using her last letter.
- Return to the town in which my love once lived.
- Cross paths with my lost love's family.

Obligation

You owe someone something. Perhaps he saved your life or helped you out in the past. Now you must repay the favor. Or maybe, in a moment of drunken weakness, you blurted out your devotion to his cause. You believe in keeping your word, and you've made a promise to someone (perhaps even yourself) that you will not break...even if it costs you your life.

Endings

- My Hero is excused from his obligation.
- My Hero fulfills his promise.
- My Hero gives up and abandons his vow.

First Steps

- Have a serious talk to determine what I owe.
- Travel far away from my family and home in service of my promise.
- Convince someone else to take up the cause with me.

Rivalry

She isn't your enemy. In fact, she could be your best friend. Whoever she is, she's in direct competition for something that's very important to you. She could be a rival suitor for your true love's hand, she could be competing with you to get that position in the Lightning Guard, or she could just be a fellow duelist who's a touch better than you.

Endings

- My Hero moves beyond the petty rivalry.
- My Hero's rival earns the position my hero coveted.
- My Hero thwarts her rival completely.

First Steps

- Get shown up by my Rival.
- Secure a personal meeting with an exclusive organization.
- Learn something new about my Rival.

Romance

After many months of flirting, poetry and moonlit walks through the park, you've finally won the affections of a beautiful maiden or a handsome young man. Or so you think. It takes a great deal of effort to keep the fires of romance burning. If you neglect the hearth for even a short while, the fire can die. And neglecting your lover may cost you...

Endings

- My Hero is happily married and retires from his life of adventure.
- My Hero's lover is brutally murdered in front of him.
- My Hero's life is finally too much and his lover leaves him.

First Steps

- Save my love from the Villain.
- Find the perfect gift for my love.
- Make time to write a letter back assuring my love of my imminent return.

Vendetta

Don't call it revenge. Revenge is for suckers. Don't call it justice, because that's too forgiving. This is something altogether different. You owe somebody big time, and killing isn't enough. No, killing is merciful compared to what you have in mind. You have to hurt her, and hurt her, and hurt her. When you're done, Legion may be waiting for you, but you don't care. When they see what you've done to her, they'll welcome you with open arms.

Endings

- My Hero deals the fatal blow to her transgressor.
- My Hero finds peace, giving up her vendetta.
- My Hero dies at the hands of her enemy.

First Steps

- Completely recover from my injuries.
- Find others wronged by my enemy.
- Disrupt my enemy's supply lines.

Example Stories

Below are a few sample stories, fully fleshed out, that may help you see how to structure the overall Story. Remember, you don't write all of your Steps during Hero Creation. These examples are provided to show a finished Story.

TRUE ROYALTY

John Doe is really Arthur of Connaught, Prince Consort of Avalon.

Ending: John takes his place among Avalon's royal family.

Reward: Rich Advantage (Rank 3)

Steps:

1: Travel to Balig, where I was last seen, and ask about myself.
2: Meet with Princess Mary of Connaught to see if she remembers me.
3: Return to Carleon and plead my case before the Queen.

PRINCE'S CURSE

Rosario Giulietta Concetto Bicchieri once refused payment to a Prince, and she has been unable to find true love since.

Ending: Rosario is happily married for at least two years.

Reward: Convince (Rank 4)

Steps:

1: Have Peppi Calligaris, a wealthy shoemaker, fall in love with me.
2: Take Ermanno Sapienti's advice to find out if Prince Falisci had me cursed.
3: Convince the Fate Witch in Prince Falisci's employ to lift my curse.
4: Leave Peppi at the altar and run away with Ermanno Sapienti.

INDEBTED TO THE VENDEL

Kristoffer Albertsen took out a sizeable loan from the Vendel Banker Joe Carlsen and can't afford to pay it back.

Ending: Joe clears Kristoffer of his debts.

Reward: Deadeye Advantage (Rank 3)

Steps:

1: Convince Joe to let me work for him instead of making payments.
2: Travel to Vodacce to "see to the interests of the Vendel League."
3: Burn down the Primo Banca.

Step 8: Details

Finally, let's fill out the blank spots on your Hero Sheet: we're talking about Languages, Reputation, Secret Societies, Wealth and Wounds.

Reputation

Your Hero usually earns a Reputation over the course of play—unless you purchased an Advantage that lets you start with some Reputation. Reputation is always a single descriptive word that shows how people generally perceive your Hero. "Honorable" is a great Reputation. So are "Deadly," "Vengeful," "Well-Connected." Reputation adds dice to your roll when it's appropriate socially: someone who is "Deadly" is likely to intimidate her opposition.

Try to use adjectives and avoid nouns. For example, "Duelist" is a bad Reputation because it doesn't say anything about what people think of you. "Ruthless" is better because it says something about your Hero, but something like "Scoundrel" might work too. If your best friend described you using only a single word, this is the word he would choose.

Languages

Your character can speak a number of languages equal to his Wits. Since all Heroes start at Wits 2, every Hero can speak Old Théan and his native language. If your Hero's Wits is higher than 2, you may select additional languages you know at this time.

For the most part, most business in Théah is done in Old Théan. It's the language nearly every Théan knows.



Secret Society

You may, if you wish, join a Secret Society (page 258). Joining a Society costs nothing. You gain 2 Favor with your Society, but you may also find your brethren making demands of you.

Brotherhood of the Coast

Serving under the black flag, these pirates seek freedom and liberty...and a profit from those who would exploit the weak and vulnerable.

Die Kreuzritter

Clandestine warriors who battle Monsters and protect others from horrors unleashed by Villains.

The Explorer's Society

Scholars and adventurers seeking out the ancient truths in the world by investigating ruins from a race long gone from the face of the world.

The Invisible College

A band of clergy hoping to topple the Inquisition and restore the Church, operating right under the Inquisition's nose.

Knights of the Rose & Cross

Knights-errant wandering Théah, righting wrongs and meting justice through Heroic quests.

Los Vagabundos

A clandestine cabal set to protect the virtuous nobles of Théah and overthrow the unworthy.

Močiutės Skara

Rising from the ashes of the War of the Cross, the group known as "Grandmother's Shawl" seeks to end war and bring peace to Théah, once and for all.

The Rilasciare

Free thinkers who fight the two "great corruptions" of the world: monarchy and the Church.

Sophia's Daughters

A sect of the Rilasciare, these women seek to liberate Fate Witches and undermine the Merchant Princes of Vodacce.

Wealth Points

A Hero can always afford the basic necessities to live (if they are available). Ordinary food, basic shelter, and basic clothing are things that, given time, can be acquired without spending Wealth Points. Wealth allows you to buy the *extra things*.

A Hero's ability to spend money to acquire the things he wants is represented by his Wealth. Unless you have a way to start play with Wealth Points (such as the Patron Advantage), your Wealth begins at zero every session.

Earning Wealth

If you wish to generate Wealth, you can do so by taking up a Profession. You can use just about any Skill for a Profession: Perform to earn money as a singer, actor, or musician, Weaponry to act as a bodyguard, or Sailing to serve on a ship.

When you pursue a Profession, tell the GM which Skill your Hero uses to earn Wealth. Assuming you have an opportunity to do the work, you gain a number of Wealth Points equal to the relevant Skill. For example, if you use your 3 Perform Skill to gain Wealth, you gain three Wealth Points at the beginning of the session. Remember that you have to have the right opportunity; if your Hero is on a ship for the next few months, he can't earn Wealth using Perform or Warfare. He's Sailing!

In general, unspent Wealth is lost between game sessions, although if a player is specifically trying to save for something expensive (if she wants to own her own ship, for example) a GM might allow them to "bank" some of their Wealth points. A good general rule is that a Hero loses at least half of her total current Wealth at the end of each game session.

Spending Wealth

A Hero can spend Wealth Points for any of the following effects. These are only guidelines and examples—if you want to purchase something, ask your GM how much Wealth it will cost you.

- When in a social Risk that could be influenced by money, you can spend Wealth to make bribes and present gifts. Every Wealth Point spent allows you to reroll one d10.

- 1 Wealth Point buys high quality common items, like an excellent sword or a trustworthy horse.
- 3 Wealth Point hires a Strength 5 Brute Squad for a scene.
- 5 Wealth Points purchases something non-unique that isn't readily available or is illegal.
- 8-10 Wealth buys a business, a house, a ship, or a similar piece of property.

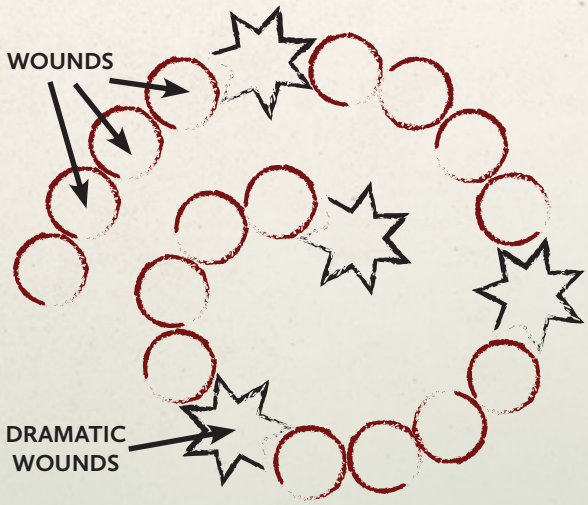
If an adventure ends with the Heroes being paid (if they accepted a job to rescue someone, for example, and are paid upon return) then the GM should grant the Heroes access to those Wealth Points at the start of the next session, rather than at the end of the current one.

Wounds

When your Hero takes Wounds, don't worry too much. After all, they're just Wounds! Your Hero can fight through a Brute Squad, crash through a skylight or stumble through a fire…and you'll live to fight another day. But eventually those Wounds can add up.

The Death Spiral

Just below is a graphic from your Hero Sheet called "the Death Spiral." (Always announce the Death Spiral with an overly melodramatic tone and music.) The Death Spiral keeps track of both your regular Wounds and your **Dramatic Wounds**. Wounds aren't a big deal, but Dramatic Wounds can injure, maim or even kill your Hero.



Dramatic Wounds

First, it's important to know that bubbles represent Wounds and stars represent Dramatic Wounds.

When your Hero takes Wounds, fill in a number of bubbles on the Death Spiral equal to the Wounds he took. If your Hero takes one Wound, you fill in one bubble; if your Hero takes two Wounds, you fill in two bubbles. Keep going, filling in a bubble for each Wound he takes.

If you ever fill in one of the stars (instead of a regular bubble), your Hero takes a Dramatic Wound. For example, if you take three Wounds and the second one is a star, you've taken a Dramatic Wound. Keep filling in bubbles and stars until you've taken the total number of Wounds.

Dramatic Wounds increase the tension of an Action Sequence. This isn't always bad for the heroes—Dramatic Wounds keep you focused, remind you of what's important, and push you to dig deep inside yourself for those inner reserves of strength.

Benefits and Penalties

Each Hero gets the same Death Spiral: four Wounds per Dramatic Wound and four Dramatic Wounds per Hero. Heroes with more physical Skills (like Athletics, Brawl, or Weaponry) will take Wounds less often, but all Heroes are pretty tough.

As your Hero takes Wounds (and your Death Spiral fills), you get benefits and penalties fitting your situation:

- A Hero with one or more Dramatic Wounds gains 1 Bonus Die on all Risks. (Yay!)
- A Hero with two or more Dramatic Wounds grants 2 Bonus Dice to any Villain who rolls a Risk against them. (Boo!)
- A Hero with three or more Dramatic Wounds has exploding 10's on all Risks they make. This means that if you roll a 10, you immediately add another d10 to your roll. (Yay!)
- A Hero with four Dramatic Wounds is Helpless (see page 181). (Boo!)





Chapter 4

Action & Drama



ACTION & DRAMA

This chapter discusses how to resolve Risks in 7th Sea. Risks are important actions that could impact the story. We talk about Traits (the first half of resolving Risks), Skills (the other half of resolving Risks), Hero Points (which help you resolve Risks), Raises (which make your Hero awesome), and we finish off with how your Hero handles the Consequences of failure and the Opportunities of success.

Risky Actions

Heroes in 7th Sea do all sorts of normal things—they eat meals, they do laundry, they might even have a quiet night at home with a book on occasion. But the stories you tell together aren't about those ordinary moments; your Heroes' adventures are about the extraordinary and exciting, the dangerous and the dynamic, the brave and the bold. The stories everyone remembers. The stories that matter.

When you're playing 7th Sea, you'll find that your Hero is put in all kinds of tough situations, moments in which real danger or disastrous consequences lay just around the corner. Your Hero takes actions in response to those threats and consequences—Risks—in the hopes of saving the day, warding off fate, or just plain staying alive!

Risks That Matter

When your Hero takes Risks, we're not going to pay too much attention to the sword she's using or the exact color of the cloak she's wearing. Those things can matter—it's hard to win a swordfight if you don't have a sword—but we care far more about the decisions your Hero makes than the small details of those choices.

When confronted by the man who killed your father, will you pick up a sword? Will you take up arms against him, even though he's the most powerful advisor to the Sun King of Montaigne? Or will you politely greet him with kind words that earn his trust, moving ever one step closer to your moment of revenge?

Either is a Risk.

OVERVIEW

The game element of **7th Sea** works like this.

First, the GM frames a situation or Scene.

Second, the players roll dice and use those dice to make Raises.

Third, the players use their Raises to take Actions that change elements of the situation or Scene.

That's the nuts and bolts of it. Whenever you get confused or feel lost, always go back to those key steps. GM lays out the scene, players make Raises, and then players use Raises to take Actions that change the elements of the Scene. If you keep to those three basics, you'll be doing fine.

Traits

Traits are the keystones to resolving dangerous and Risky actions. Whenever the outcomes of a character's action are uncertain, look to that character's Traits.

Traits describe how quick, nimble, strong, resilient and charming your Hero is. Each Trait has a Rank—from 2 to 5—indicating your Hero's competence. The higher the Rank, the stronger the Trait.

Brawn

Brawn represents your Hero's physical strength and power. If she wants to get across a burning room using Brawn, she picks up a table to protect herself from the flames. You can also use Brawn to jump from rooftop-to-rooftop, force a heavy door open, or otherwise use brute force to resolve an obstacle or problem.

Finesse

Finesse represents your Hero's quickness and nimbleness. If she wants to get across a burning room using Finesse, she would dodge the burning debris and flames, making sure she didn't get burned. You can also use Finesse for fencing, picking pockets, and other problems that can be solved with speed and dexterity.

Resolve

Resolve represents your Hero's conviction and endurance. If she wants to get across a burning room using Resolve, she just walks through the flames. You can also use Resolve for acts of physical intimidation, surviving a high fall, or otherwise being resilient.

Wits

Wits represent your Hero's intellectual abilities. If she wants to get across a burning room using Wits, she would look at the room and evaluate the safest way to get across. You can also use Wits to remember obscure facts that may be useful or out-think an opponent.

Panache

Panache represents your Hero's charisma and style. If she wants to get across a burning room using Panache, she would convince someone to carry her across the room. You can also use Panache to impress a foreign monarch or convince a pirate captain that you'd be safer in his chambers than in the brig.

Skills

Skills represent your Hero's training and education. The higher a Skill's Rank, the stronger that Skill is. Skills also help your Hero overcome difficulties and dangers and are often added to Traits.

Aim

Use Aim when you point a pistol at someone and pull the trigger. Use Aim when you throw a knife across a crowded room with pinpoint accuracy, whether your target is a person or an object.

Athletics

Use Athletics to swing across a room on a chandelier. Use Athletics to leap from one rooftop to another. Use Athletics to dodge falling debris or climb a ship's mast.

Brawl

Use Brawl whenever you punch or kick someone in the face. Use Brawl when you grab someone and drag him down an alleyway.

Convince

Use Convince when you appeal to another character's better nature. Use Convince when you assure someone you're being completely honest with her and she should trust you.

Empathy
Use Empathy when you want to tell if someone is being genuine. Use Empathy when you determine someone's general mental state (they're afraid, they're nervous, they're angry).

Hide
Use Hide when you sneak through a dark room without the guard on watch seeing you. Use Hide when you keep a weapon or other item hidden, and avoid it being found if you are searched. Use Hide to attack an unsuspecting victim with a weapon or your fists. Use Hide to construct a disguise or camouflage a location.

Intimidate
Use Intimidate when you make someone do what you want under threat of some action from you, physical or otherwise. Use Intimidate when you need to scare away your enemies before they have a chance to strike.

Notice
Use Notice when you investigate a crime scene or search a Villain's study for clues. Use Notice when you want to pick out fine details at a glance.

Perform
Use Perform when you try to captivate an audience with your showmanship. Use Perform to get across a particular message to your audience or to elicit a specific emotion from them through your performance—to make them laugh at your comedy, to make them weep at your tragedy, to rile them up with a motivational speech, etc.

Ride
Use Ride when you engage in a high-speed carriage chase. Use Ride when you ride a horse through the forest at a gallop.

Sailing
Use Sailing whenever you navigate your way through a ship's rigging. Use Sailing when you attempt to steer a ship during a pitched battle at sea, or through a dangerously narrow channel.

Scholarship
Use Scholarship when you wax ecstatic about a certain subject matter, either from personal experience or teachings. Use Scholarship when you consult your knowledge to fill in the details on a certain subject. Use Scholarship when you call upon your medical training to tend to an injury.

Tempt
Use Tempt when you bribe someone to do something for you that she really shouldn't agree to do. Use Tempt when you convince someone to give you a little "alone time."

Theft
Use Theft when you swipe something from someone's pocket without him noticing. Use Theft when you pick a lock, crack a safe, or something similar.

Warfare
Use Warfare whenever you need tactical expertise, such as when you're breaching a castle's defense. Use Warfare when you lead an army in battle.

Weaponry
Use Weaponry when you attack something with a sword, axe, hammer, or knife in your hand. Use Weaponry when you evaluate the quality of a particular blade or weapon.

Risks

When your Hero takes a dangerous or important action—called a Risk—he rolls dice. Normal actions—such as tying up bootlaces, walking down the street, opening a door, etc.—are not inherently Risky and don't require dice. Unless some element *makes* that action Risky, like if the room is on fire.

In 7th Sea, Risks have three important elements: Approach, Consequences, and Opportunities.

Approach

An Approach is the method your Hero has chosen to solve a problem. Your Approach is the Skill and Trait you roll for a Risk, but it also determines how you spend Raises during a Sequence. If an Action you wish to take isn't covered by your Approach, that Action costs you an additional Raise.

If you struggle to define your Approach, ask, "Why am I doing this? What do I want? How do I get it?"

Consequences

Risks also come with Consequences. Consequences represent everything that can hurt or hinder your Hero while attempting her Risk. Running across a burning room could mean your Hero catches on fire. That's a Consequence. She could get hit by a burning beam. That's another Consequence. Or her secret identity is revealed to nosy bystanders who will reveal her to her enemies.

Once you've said what you're doing, you can't take it back: those are the Consequences you must face. Most Risks have one or maybe two Consequences, but more dangerous Risks can have up to three or even four.

Opportunities

Other times, when a player announces her Approach, it opens up an Opportunity. This is a moment of good fortune the Hero can exploit…if she can seize it. Locking eyes with a pirate captain to initiate a duel. That's an Opportunity. Spotting an ally on the streets during a foot chase. That's another Opportunity. Or finding that pistol with a single shot right as you run out of ammo.

When you announce your Approach, the GM tells you about any Opportunities you have. Not all Risks have Opportunities, but some exceptionally dramatic Risks could have one or two Opportunities.



How Risks Work

When you announce an action for your Hero, the GM decides if that action is a Risk. If it is, use these steps:

Step 1: Setting the Stage

First, the GM describes the situation. She tells you important details that may work for or against your Hero, elements she can use and elements that might hinder him.

> The GM says, "You are in a castle and the room is on fire, everything is falling apart. You are three stories off the ground. There are tapestries on the walls, a chandelier tied to a rope and a suit of armor. What do you do?"

Step 2: Approach

You tell the GM your Approach. What are you hoping to accomplish and how? The GM then decides if this is a Risk or just a normal Action. If it isn't a Risk, your Hero accomplishes her Action. If it is a Risk, the GM moves to Step 3.

> The player says, "I want to cut down the chandelier and use the rope to climb down to safety."
> The GM says, "That's a Risk."

Step 3: Gather Dice

The GM tells you which combination of Trait and Skill to use. Add your Trait Rank plus your Skill Rank for your Risk Pool. This is the number of dice you roll to overcome the Risk.

You may also get dice from other sources, such as Advantages.

> The GM says, "That sounds like a Brawn+Athletics Risk. You're trying to cut down the rope and use it to climb down the wall while dodging fire.

Step 4: Consequences & Opportunities

The GM now tells you the following:

- Why the action is a Risk, e.g. you're running through a burning building.
- The Consequences of the Risk, e.g. you'll take 2 Wounds.
- The Opportunities your Risk may offer, e.g. you spot a secret document on the desk about to catch fire.

All Risks have at least one Consequence. Some Risks may not have an Opportunity. Some Risks may have a combination of Opportunities and Consequences. Your GM determines these elements before you roll dice.

> The GM says, "You need to use **1 Raise** to get to the other side of the room. But the **Consequence** of getting to the other side is getting burned. You need to spend **2 Raises** to avoid the flames. You see a pile of papers on the table dangerously close to the fire. The papers seem to be private letters written between a known Villain and a local sheriff. That's an **Opportunity**: you need to use **1 Raise** to get the letters on the way out.
>
> **1 Raise:** Get out of the room successfully.
>
> **Consequences:** Take 2 Wounds. You can spend 1 Raise per Wound to avoid getting burned.
>
> **Opportunity:** Secret blackmail papers. Spend 1 Raise to get them before you escape.

If you end up with unused dice, the GM can choose to buy them from you. For each die the GM chooses to purchase in this fashion, you gain 1 Hero Point... and he gains 1 Danger Point.

Step 5: Roll & Raises

After you roll, use your dice to create sets of 10. Each set of 10 you create is a Raise. Sometimes, you may use dice that add up to more than 10. That's okay; it's still a Raise. But if you don't have enough points to make a 10, you can't use those dice for a Raise.

> I roll 10, 7, 5, 5, 2 and 2. I can make these sets of 10:
> 10 (1 Raise),
> 5+5 = 10 (1 Raise),
> 7+2+2 = 11 (1 Raise)
> Another example: I roll 8, 4, 3, 3, 2, 1, 1.
> 8+1+1 = 10 (1 Raise),
> 4+3+3 = 10 (1 Raise)
> I have a 2 left over. I can't make a Raise out of that.
> Another Example: I roll 10, 9, 9, 7.
> 10 (1 Raise),
> 9+7 = 16 (1 Raise)
> I have a 9 left over. I can't make a Raise out of that.

Step 6: Using Raises

You use Raises to take Actions, overcome the Consequences, take advantage of Opportunities, create Opportunities for other Heroes, and inflict Wounds on other characters.

On any given Risk, you can spend your raises a number of ways. Here are the most important:

A single Raise spent to take an Action ensures that you do what you set out to do—your Hero succeeds.

Raises spent to Overcome the Consequences reduce the side effects, collateral damage, and harm to you caused by the Risk.

Raises spent to take advantage of an Opportunity mean your Hero gains the benefit of whatever benefit the Opportunity offered you.

Raises spent to create a new Opportunity means your Hero sets the stage for another Hero to benefit from her action later.

Raises spent to Inflict Wounds cause 1 Wound per Raise spent to a character within reach of your Hero.

The player rolls dice and gets 3 Raises. He decides to use them this way:

1 Raise: Gets him the Opportunity. He grabs the blackmail papers.

1 Raise: Gets him out the window and down the wall with the rope.

1 Raise: Avoids one of the Wounds (Consequences). So, he still takes 1 Wound while getting out of the room.

Improvising

Players don't have to spend their Raises only on their Approach. A Hero may **Improvise**.

If a Hero wants to take an Action outside the scope of the Skill or Trait that he rolled at the beginning of the Sequence, he must spend an additional Raise. Whether a Hero's Action falls within the scope of his Skill is the GM's discretion.

You chose to roll Convince+Panache at the beginning of the Sequence, setting your Approach. But later, you want to bash an unsuspecting guard over the head with an expensive vase and knock him unconscious. The GM says, "You must spend 2 Raises." That's 1 Raise for your Action and another Raise because you are taking an Action outside the scope of your initial roll: your Approach.

Unskilled

If a Hero takes an Action that would be tied to a Skill she doesn't have, she is Unskilled and must spend an additional Raise. The Skill associated with any given Action is the GM's discretion.

If a Hero takes an Action that would be tied to a Skill she has no Ranks in, and it is outside the scope of the Skill or Trait that she rolled at the beginning of the Sequence, she must pay both costs.

You've set your Approach with Convince+Panache at the beginning of the Sequence, ready to earn friends and influence people. You've found yourself in a tight situation: you need to sneak through the darkened study without a guard noticing, but you have no Ranks in Hide. The GM says, "You must spend 3 Raises." That's 1 Raise for your Action, a second Raise because this Action isn't related to your Approach, and a third Raise because you're Unskilled.

No Raises

If you cannot make 1 Raise on your roll, something interesting happens. Your Hero doesn't necessarily fail. This could be the arrival of a new Villain or a dramatic shift in the narrative. The GM narrates the outcome of the Risk, your Hero suffers any and all Consequences, and misses all the Opportunities.

Risk Example

Your Hero runs through a burning room—something that will come up shortly—and the GM says, "That's a Risk. The Consequence is taking 2 Wounds, but there is an Opportunity to grab a secret letter before it catches fire."

You roll your dice and come up with 2 Raises. You use the first Raise to take an Action—you get across the room, no matter what harm you may take in the process. You can either use your second Raise to negate the first Wound or grab the secret letter. Because you didn't have a third Raise, you have to make a choice and take at least 1 Wound from the Consequence.

Consequences

When thinking about Consequences, the GM thinks about the circumstances of the Risk and what makes it dangerous. Injury is a great go-to, but it isn't always the most appropriate Consequence. Don't create Consequences out of left field or arbitrarily; any Consequence you create should come from the Scene, arising from the immediate moment.

Here are some example Consequences for common risks.

Action: "I want to pick the lock."

Your Hero tries picking an old, rusted lock. The door leads to where the guards sleep. There are guards on the other side of the door—some asleep, some gambling—and you want to get by the lock. Here are some Consequences…

- Someone on the other side of the door hears you.
- Because this is the guards' quarters, they've installed a poison needle. Got to avoid that.
- The lock is very old and rusted and you may break your tools.

Action: "I want to leap to that rooftop."

Running away from guards across rooftops is pretty standard swashbuckling stuff. In this case, you may face any of the following Consequences…

- Breaking through the thin roof when you land on the other side.
- Dodging arrows or bullets being fired at you.
- Being noticed by guards in the nearby plaza.

Wounds as Consequences

One of the simplest Consequences you can apply to most Risks is the threat of injury in the form of Wounds. In most circumstances, Wounds are a shared Consequence that the players overcome as a group. A Risk with a Consequence of 10 Wounds, for example, can be overcome by any and all players.

If the Consequence is not fully overcome (by the players not collectively spending enough Raises to reduce the Wounds to zero), all Heroes are dealt the remaining Wounds.

A Hero who wishes to protect her friend can choose to take some or all of the Wounds that would be applied to her ally, so long as the Hero is in a position to help and spends one or more Raises.

> A Risk has a Consequence of 10 Wounds. Every Raise spent by any Hero can be used to reduce this Consequence. If the Heroes only spend a total of 8 Raises between all of them, a Consequence of 2 Wounds remains. Each Hero takes 2 Wounds.

The GM and Consequences

The GM has a huge responsibility. The players came to your table to have fun. Your job is to make sure that happens. You could use Consequences to make the Heroes' lives more interesting and dramatic, or you could use them to simply screw the Heroes over.

Don't choose the second option. Ever.

Your players want their Heroes to be just that: heroes. They are the protagonists of this story. They want to feel like swashbuckling legends and you should help them reach that goal. Yes, protagonists fail from time to time, but we're providing a mechanic for players to choose when their Heroes fail. Let them use it. Remind them to use it.

Use Consequences to make the story more dramatic. Do not use them to turn a success into a failure. Don't come up with clever ways to turn "Yes" into "No."

Opportunities

Opportunities are a little trickier (especially for experienced GMs) because you're trying to think of things that will *help* the Heroes rather than hinder their progress. When thinking about Opportunities, think about the circumstances of the Risk and what elements might be in the Heroes' favor. Usually, there is only one Opportunity per roll, but the GM might throw out one or two more if the circumstances permit it.

Here are a few sample Opportunities for some common Risks:

Action: "I want to pick the lock."

Your Hero is picking an old, rusted lock. The door leads to where the guards sleep. There are guards on the other side of the door—some asleep, some gambling—and you want to get by the lock. Here are some Opportunities…

- One of the guards in the room is an old, trusted friend.
- There are two mounted pistols on the wall that could easily be stolen.
- Because this is the guards' quarters, they've installed a poison needle, which could be repurposed.

Action: "I want to leap to that rooftop."

Running away from guards across rooftops is pretty standard swashbuckling stuff. In this case, the GM may offer any of the following Opportunities…

- A nearby window would hide you from a few of the guards.
- A guard's uniform hanging out to dry on a clothesline could make a good disguise.
- One of the guards drops his loaded pistol, which skitters across the roof.

Just like with Consequences, all Opportunities should emerge naturally from the Scene.

Creating Opportunities

You can use your own Raises to create Opportunities for other Heroes. Spend 1 Raise to create an Opportunity for another Hero to use in the Scene. Other Heroes must spend a Raise of their own to take advantage of the Opportunity you created.

Opportunities are narrative permission slips—they give you the chance to do something that you otherwise couldn't have done, typically because the situation just didn't allow it. You create a narrative opportunity that didn't exist before you spent the Raise.

For example, you are fighting a guard who is holding your friends captive in the local jail. You could spend a Raise to create an Opportunity for one of your Heroic companions, saying that you knock the gun out of his hand and the pistol skitters across the floor, sliding between the bars of the jail cell holding your friends prisoner. One of them can now spend a Raise to pick up the pistol, arming himself in a situation that otherwise wouldn't have permitted it.

All of the Opportunities you create should emerge naturally from the Scene. You can't spend a Raise to make a dinosaur appear and randomly rampage through the streets, because that's silly. The same goes for Opportunities that don't make any sense or otherwise aren't fun. Stick to the fiction of the game; maintain the tone around the table. Make it interesting, not ludicrous.



Flair

Whenever Heroes make a Risk, they are encouraged to vary their tactics and to give interesting, Heroic, cool descriptions of their Actions.

Every time you use a unique Skill (a Skill that you have not used before in this Scene), you gain 1 Bonus Die. So if the Scene just started and you attack with your sword, you gain 1 Bonus Die. If you then choose to defend yourself by jumping out a window (using your Athletics), you gain 1 Bonus Die. If you then punch someone in the face with Brawl, you gain 1 Bonus Die. If you then choose to defend yourself by using Athletics again, you do not gain a Bonus Die.

GM: How are you getting past the last guard?

Player: I guess I'll hit him. Wait. I already did that. How about trying to scare him off? I already knocked out all the other guards.

GM: Sounds great. He's probably already scared. Take a Bonus Die for using Intimidate for the first time this scene!

If players give a description of their action, make a clever quip before they roll, interact with the scenery around them, or otherwise add to the Scene in a fun way, they gain a Bonus Die. A description does not have to be something incredibly in-depth—anything more than "I'm going to use my Sword Skill" should be rewarded. "I go for my sword immediately and charge with a loud battle cry" earns a Bonus Die. "I scowl at the leader of the gang and tell him that if he wants my money, he can come and pry it from my hand himself" earns a Bonus Die. "I'll roll Intimidate" does not earn a Bonus Die.

GM: What do you say to the guard to scare him?

Player: Hmmm. I just look at him.

GM: How do you look at him?

Player: I actually look really friendly. I take my sword and level it at him...and smile.

GM: That's terrifying. Totally worth a Bonus Die.

A Hero can earn one die for using a unique Skill and another for giving an awesome description. These two behaviors are not mutually exclusive and should both be rewarded.

Pressure

Heroes or Villains use Skills to coerce, lure, seduce, or influence another character's actions. This is called **Pressure**. When a Hero (or Villain) applies Pressure, she forces her target to either act in a way that she chooses or to spend an additional Raise if he wants to take a different Action.

First, the character applying Pressure chooses a specific Action ("Attack me" or "Run away" are good examples). The next time the Hero's target chooses to do anything other than the directed Action, he must spend an additional Raise.

Pressure can be used in both Action and Dramatic Sequences (see page 178). The easiest way to create Pressure is with Convince, Intimidate, Tempt and other similar Skills, but creative players may find ways to use any Skill to apply Pressure.

Annette duBois spends a few moments speaking to the Villainous Count. Annette's player tells the GM: "I spend 1 Raise to seduce the Count—if he wants to pay close attention to anyone other than me, he has to pay 2 Raises instead of one."

So long as the Villainous Count spends Raises paying attention to Annette, he pays the regular cost (usually 1 Raise per Action). But if he wants to spend Raises on any Action other than paying attention to Annette, he must spend 2 Raises. Once he spends those 2 Raises, he has "broken the spell" and may spend Raises as normal.

If someone has Pressured a character, no one else can Pressure that same character until the initial situation has been resolved. If another Hero wants to try to seduce the Count, for example, he will have to wait until the Count has broken Annette's spell by spending 2 Raises to do something besides pay attention to Annette.

Villains can apply the same Pressure to all Heroes in a Scene with a single Raise and a Danger Point. A Villain could use Pressure to say, "All of you will run away," or "All of you will attack me," or "All of you will save that helpless victim." All she needs to do is spend a Raise and a Danger Point. Otherwise, Villains use Pressure normally.

Hero Points

All Heroes start each game with one Hero Point, a special resource they can use to do awesome things. Players can use Hero Points in various ways: activate special abilities, gain Bonus Dice, or save another character from an untimely demise.

Gaining Hero Points

A Hero gains a Hero Point when:

- Either he or the GM activates his Hero's Hubris.
- He chooses to say, "My Hero fails." The player does not roll dice and cannot spend Raises to overcome Consequences and produce other effects.
- His Hero acts in a way as described by his Quirks. A player can earn only 1 Hero Point per session per Quirk.
- The GM buys any unused dice that aren't part of a Raise. For each die the GM chooses to buy in this fashion, you gain 1 Hero Point...and he gains 1 Danger Point.

Using Hero Points

Players may use Hero Points for the following benefits:

- Add one bonus d10 to his roll before a Risk. A player may spend multiple Hero Points in this fashion on a single Risk.
- Add three bonus d10s to another Hero's roll before a Risk. This represents the first Hero helping the second in some way, even if it is only moral support; a Hero can only accept help from one other Hero at a time.
- Activate a special ability on his Hero Sheet. A player may spend multiple Hero Points on different special abilities on a single Risk.
- Take an Action while Helpless. A player may spend multiple Raises on this Action, just as if they were not Helpless. See page 181 for more on becoming Helpless.

The Danger Pool

The GM has a pool of points, as well: the Danger Pool. The GM starts each game with 1 Danger Point for each Hero. So if a campaign has 5 Heroes who are playing, the GM begins each session with 5 Danger Points.

Using Danger Points

The GM may use Danger Points from her pool to:

- Increase the total needed for a Raise by 5 for a Risk or Round. This affects all Heroes in the Scene.
- Add two dice to any Villain's die pool.
- Activate a Brute Squad's special ability.
- Activate a Villain's special ability.
- Murder. If a Hero becomes helpless, a Villain can spend a Danger Point to murder that character. See Helpless (see page 181).

The GM can spend additional Danger Points to add multiple dice to a Villain's die pool, but can't spend multiple Danger Points on any other option, e.g. increasing the total for Raises by 10 or murdering two Heroes at once.





Action Sequence

If only a single Hero is taking a Risk at a time, the GM only needs to handle that one Risk and move on to the next Risk. But when multiple Heroes are involved, or when a Hero faces a Villain, or when all their actions are important all at once and seconds count, it may be time for an Action Sequence.

A sword fight is an Action Sequence. Escaping a burning ship with a precious Syrneth artefact is an Action Sequence. A high-speed carriage race down a winding cliff-side road is an Action Sequence. Boarding an enemy ship on the open seas is an Action Sequence.

Action Sequences move fast, and sometimes, things can get confusing. In order to maintain the pace of an Action Sequence, the GM keeps things moving, but if anyone gets confused and doesn't understand something, be sure to ask questions. However, don't let too many questions slow down the scene or delay your Heroes' choices. After all, your character doesn't have five minutes to debate every move…

How a Round Works

We divide an Action Sequence into Rounds. A Round is as long as a GM needs it to be. During a Round, every character gets to take Actions. An Action is a single activity resulting in a single result.

Step 1: Approach

Everyone announces an Approach for the Round. The GM tells each player which Trait+Skill to use for her Risk. Just like a normal Risk, all players gather dice from their Traits, Skills and elsewhere.

Step 2: Consequences and Opportunities

After hearing Approaches, the GM tells everyone what the Consequences and Opportunities are, if any, and when those Consequences or Opportunities occur. Some Opportunities and Consequences have Time Limits. We'll talk about that more below.

Step 3: Roll & Raises

All players roll at the same time and count their Raises and tell the GM what they rolled.

Step 4: Actions

The player with the most Raises describes his Hero's Action and spends one or more Raises on that Action. In addition to normal Actions, he might also spend Raises to overcome a Consequence, take advantage of an Opportunity, create Opportunities for other Heroes or inflict Wounds on another character. The more Raises he spends on the Action, the bigger the effect.

After the first Action resolves, the character with the most Raises at this point takes the next Action. is could be the same character or it could be another character, but whoever it is, the character with the most Raises always takes the next Action. If two Heroes are tied, they decide which of them goes next.

Villains always go first when tied with Heroes. Villains are aggressive; they move quickly to get what they want.

Step 5: End of Round

When a player is out of Raises, his Hero can no longer take Actions during the Round. He must wait until all players spend all their Raises for Actions.

This rule also applies to Villains. If a Villain has no Raises, she can take no Action during the Round.

When all players are out of Raises, the GM determines if an Action Sequence is still necessary. Does everyone think an Action Sequence is still necessary? If so, the Action Sequence continues. Go back to **Step 1: Approach** and go through the steps again.

If the players have resolved the Scene, the Action Sequence is over.

Time Limits

Some Consequences and Opportunities have Time Limits: the players have a limited amount of time to overcome the Consequences or take advantage of the Opportunity. After that time passes, Heroes no longer have the option to jump on it.

For example, the GM could say, "You need to get off this burning ship before the powder room explodes. And the powder room will explode at 2 Raises and everyone takes 5 Wounds." That means, as soon as all of the Heroes have fewer than 2 Raises, the powder room explodes and everyone takes 5 Wounds.

Another example could be a priceless necklace slipping across an angled roof. If the Heroes don't grab it by Raise 3, it falls off into the night, down onto the city streets, into the fire, or into the ocean.

The GM can set more than one Time Limit: "The cannons below explode on Raise 3. Everyone will take 3 Wounds. And, on Raise 1, the ship goes down, dragging you all down into the deep!"

The GM sets these Time Limits when she presents Consequences and Opportunities.

Opportunities and Consequences must have Raises devoted to them before they occur in order for a Hero to take advantage of them or to overcome them. For example, if the room's ceiling will collapse on 2, a Hero who wishes to dive out of the way must spend Raises to do so before the ceiling collapses.

If a Hero acts on the same Action as an Opportunity or Consequence occurs, she can still overcome the Consequence or take advantage of the Opportunity. She might snatch the burning letter out of the fire at the last possible moment or dive out of the way as the ceiling collapses right on her heels. How dramatic!

Using Multiple Raises for a Single Action

When a player announces an Action for an Action Sequence, he spends 1 Raise to accomplish that Action. It could be to overcome the Risk, to negate a Consequence, to take advantage of an Opportunity, or perhaps to take care of some other danger that has come up during the Action Sequence.

Players may choose to spend more than 1 Raise on an Action. For example, if the GM tells you the Consequence for running across the room in front of the Villain's musketeers will cause you 3 Wounds, you can spend up to 3 Raises to negate those Wounds, but if you choose to spend less than 3 Raises, you cannot spend more Raises on later Actions to negate the remaining Wounds.

Sometimes two Heroes, or a Hero and a Villain, will want the same thing, or they will each have an Action that runs counter to the other. Whoever spends the most on their Action gets it, to the exclusion of all others. However, Raises spent to overcome the Risk must be spent in a single Action—you can't spend 1 Raise to make your Action, then decide to spend a second one to reinforce it later. It's all or nothing.

Wounds & Dramatic Wounds

Wounds represent physical injuries, albeit minor ones. Dramatic Wounds are much more serious and obvious. As your Hero takes Wounds and Dramatic Wounds, she gains bonuses. Yes, you read that right, *the more injured your Hero becomes, the more awesome she becomes*. We like to call it "the McClane Effect."

But how do you injure other characters? And what happens when your Hero becomes injured?

Causing Wounds

Causing another character Wounds is a Risk. You declare your Approach, gather dice, and make Raises.

Spend 1 Raise to cause your opponent 1 Wound. You may spend additional Raises to cause additional Wounds: 1 Wound per Raise.

Avoiding Wounds

When you face a Villain or Hero in combat, he may spend Raises to directly inflict Wounds on your Hero outside of a Consequence. You can avoid these Wounds by immediately spending Raises—one-for-one, outside of the normal Action order—and saying what your Hero does to avoid being hurt.

> Annette duBois is facing a minor Villain, one of Diego Marcera's henchmen. The Villain spends 3 Raises to inflict a Wound on Annette by slamming her into a wall, but she avoids the Wounds by spending 2 Raises of her own, even though another Hero has the next Action. She says, "I slip out of his grasp at the last second, and I only suffer 1 Wound from the force of the blow."

Firearms

A pistol or musket in the hands of a Hero or Villain represents serious danger. Firearms are relatively easy to use, and their effects are devastating. (Brute Squads, of course, only inflict their normal damage no matter what weapons they are using.)

Anyone shot by a firearm by a Hero or Villain takes 1 Dramatic Wound in addition to all other normal effects from the attack. If you shoot another character with a firearm using 2 Raises, that character takes 2 Wounds and 1 Dramatic Wound. The target cannot use Raises to negate the Dramatic Wound from a firearm; he might be able to minimize the damage, but he can't dodge a bullet.

The good news is that a gun takes 5 Raises to reload. That means any Villain (or Hero) who uses a firearm has to spend 5 Raises—either in the same Action or over the course of several Actions and Rounds—to reload a gun. The bad news is that guns in Théah become more advanced, more deadly, and easier to reload with every passing day..

Marking Wounds

When your Hero takes injuries, they are reflected on your Hero Sheet as **Wounds** and **Dramatic Wounds**. Bubbles represent Wounds while stars represent Dramatic Wounds.

When your Hero takes Wounds, fill in a number of bubbles on the Death Spiral equal to the Wounds he took. Thus, if your Hero takes 1 Wound, you fill in one bubble. If your Hero takes 2 Wounds, you fill in two bubbles. Keep going, filling in a bubble for each Wound your Hero takes.

Wounds aren't too serious, but when filling in bubbles, if you ever fill in one of the stars, your Hero takes a Dramatic Wound. For example, if you take 3 Wounds and the second one is a star, you've taken a Dramatic Wound. Keep filling in bubbles and stars until you've taken the total number of Wounds from the injury.

Dramatic Wounds

Dramatic Wounds increase the tension of an Action Sequence. This isn't always bad for the heroes—Dramatic Wounds keep you focused, remind you of what's important, and push you to dig deep inside yourself for those inner reserves of strength.

- A Hero with one or more Dramatic Wounds gains 1 Bonus Die on all Risks. (Yay!)
- A Hero with two or more Dramatic Wounds grants 2 Bonus Dice to any Villain who rolls a Risk against the Hero. (Boo!)
- A Hero with three or more Dramatic Wounds has exploding 10's on all Risks. This means that if you roll a 10, you immediately add another d10 to your roll. (Yay!)
- A Hero with four Dramatic Wounds is Helpless. (Boo!)

Taking Another Hero's Wounds

Before another character takes Wounds, you can use your own Raises to take the Wounds instead. This is "jumping in the way" of the injury. A player may offer to do this "out of order," in other words, when it isn't her turn to spend Raises.

Be sure to explain how you do this in dramatically appropriate fashion—leaping in front of your friend, taking the sword thrust at the last moment. Or dropping down from the balcony above and landing on the enemy to distract him but suffering an injury from the fall. Or calling on your last ounce of strength and rushing across a crowded ballroom, pushing people out of the way, to jump onto the podium and grab the chandelier chain before the chandelier hits your friend.

Actions like this add drama to the Scene and also explain how your character managed the feat, which is important because you may sometimes be in a Scene where no opportunity presents itself for you to make such a sacrifice.

Healing Wounds

At the end of a Scene, when the Heroes have a few minutes to catch their breath and regroup, all Wounds are healed. Dramatic Wounds remain until the end of the Episode, or until the Heroes manage to deal with them through the course of play. Mundane healing, such as visiting a doctor, isn't an instant cure-all and doesn't come cheap, costing 1 Wealth and several hours of uninterrupted treatment to heal 1 Dramatic Wound.

Magical healing, through Sorcery or artifacts, is rare and cannot be purchased. At least, not with coin...

> For example, John gets in a sword fight with his nemesis. He wins, but over the course of the fight he takes a total of 19 Wounds. This means that he's taken 3 Dramatic Wounds. At the end of the Scene, all of his Wounds go away, but he still has 3 Dramatic Wounds.
>
> If he gets into another sword fight, he starts at zero Wounds on the first tier of his Death Spiral, but all of his Dramatic Wounds are already filled in. His new opponent, if a Villain, gains 2 Bonus Dice (2 Dramatic Wounds), but John gains 1 Bonus Die and all of his 10's explode (1 and 3 Dramatic Wounds, respectively)

Helpless

Most Heroes can only take four Dramatic Wounds, although some Advantages or other abilities allow some Heroes to take more. Once your Hero takes the maximum number of Dramatic Wounds he can take, your Hero becomes Helpless.

A Helpless character is prone and cannot get to his feet. A Helpless character can still roll dice for Risks, but must spend a Hero Point to taken an Action. If the Hero wants to take more than one Action, he must spend multiple Hero Points.

A Villain may kill a Helpless Hero by spending a Danger Point and announcing murderous intent as his Action: "I am killing this character." The Villain spends all remaining Raises. Her Action resolves at the end of the Round, after all the other Actions.

In response to a Villain announcing murderous intent, any Hero can spend all of her Raises immediately (as well as a Hero Point) to save the Helpless Hero. She may take this Action even if it is not her turn. The player describes how she reaches the victim and stops the murder. The Helpless character is now safe for the rest of the Scene or until their savior becomes Helpless as well; no Villain can attempt another murder against that Hero.

If a Villain attempts a Murder outside an Action Sequence, a Hero can still spend a Hero Point to stop the murder, but it's the only Action she can take.

"I Fail"

We mentioned this under Hero Points, but it's worth bringing up again.

Before any roll, a player can announce, "I fail." This means the Hero fails to overcome the Risk, he suffers all the Consequences and misses all the Opportunities. He never rolls dice so he has no Raises to spend. The player gets 1 Hero Point and describes how his Hero fails.

For example, if a Hero gets assaulted by a Brute Squad, the player could say, "They capture me." The GM then gives the player 1 Hero Point, the Brute Squad captures the Hero and probably takes him off to someplace dark and dank to wait for the Villain.

Another example. A player wants to leap from rooftop-to-rooftop. The player points to her Hero Sheet and says, "She doesn't make the jump." The GM asks, "Okay, what happens?" The player describes her

Hero falling a little short, grabbing the edge of the building, losing her grip, falling on the balcony railing, bouncing off that, falling through a cloth awning and slamming hard on the ground. The GM gives the player 1 Hero Point.

Gaining 1 Hero Point for failing, then narrating the outcome, adds tension and drama to an Action Sequence. Try it out.

"I Dodge"

You may notice there is no "Dodge" skill. This is intentional. We don't want any player to ever say, "I dodge." Why? Because it's boring.

Instead of saying, "I don't want to get hit," explain how your character acts to avoid getting hit. Don't just "dodge." Instead, cut the rope holding the chandelier and swing up to the roof. Jump under your enemy's blade so you are standing behind him. Kick the candelabra's hot wax into your enemy's eyes as he thrusts his sword toward you.

You don't want to say, "I dodge" because that just maintains the status quo of the scene. A success in that case means that nothing changes. Instead, use your Action to change the circumstance of the Scene. Throw a table on them. Make the other people in the room laugh at them for trying to stab you. Demoralize them. Confuse your opponent into striking someone else.

Be creative. Don't be passive. Don't use your Risk to just say "No." Use your Risk to take action.

DODGING WITHOUT DODGING

Our friend Jess Heinig has a point when he writes:

"I can think of one case in which you would want to allow someone to just dodge: If the goal is to occupy the enemy and survive long enough for something else to happen. For instance, you are unarmed and trying to keep the Villain occupied while you wait for your friends to arrive, and they will not show up for several more turns. So you defend yourself as best you can in order to make the Villain waste his actions.

"Obviously, this is best if you can do so in a colorful, descriptive way. Remember, varying up your routine will give you Bonus Dice, so instead of just saying 'I try to dodge the enemy's attacks' each time your turn comes up, find a new, colorful way to evade the enemy. Grab a curtain and use it to entangle his sword. Oh no! The Villain has cut through the curtain and it is useless! Rush over to the frame used by the painters who have been painting a fresco on the ceiling, and climb up it. The Villain has kicked out the railing and it is falling over! Jump to the curtain pull and slide down, then pick up one of the pieces of wood and use it to defend yourself...

"You get the idea—even dodging and evading your enemy to buy time should be a series of gambits."



Action Sequence Example

A group of three Heroes from the Explorer's Society discovers a Villain and her three Brute Squads trying to steal an ancient Syrneth artifact from a ruin on a desert island. Our three Heroes are Fiona Donnegal, a swordswoman from Inismore; Heinrich Ausbund, a witch hunter from Eisen; and Brand Eeroson, a skald from Vestenmennavenjar.

They run into the Villain—Sandra Bustillo—and her Brutes just as they're about to remove the artifact—a curious gemstone—from the eye socket of an inhuman statue.

GM: Bustillo sees the three of you and shouts to her Brute Squads: "Stop those three while I get the Eye of Sysvalis!"

Donnegal: It's on, boys!

GM: This is going to be an Action Sequence. So, I want everyone to tell me their Approach.

Donnegal: I'll be cutting my way to the woman who gave me this scar on my cheek!

GM: That sounds like it will be Finesse+Weaponry. Do you have any Bonus Dice?

Donnegal: Yes! I've got a Signature Item, my shillelagh! It gives me 2 Bonus Dice if I spend a Hero Point. My Finesse is 4 and my Weaponry Skill is 4, so that's a total of ten dice!

GM: This is the first time you've used Weaponry this Scene—and that scar you're threatening sounds impressive—so you get 2 Bonus Dice for Flair. Remember to spend a Hero Point for your Signature Item, and tell me how you plan to use your shillelagh.

Donnegal: Alright! I'm going to wade into the room swinging my shillelagh at the nearest available skulls!

GM: Okay, Heinrich, what's your Approach?

Heinrich: I draw my broadsword and deal with the vermin who follow the filth known as "Sandra Bustillo!"

GM: That sounds like Brawn+Weaponry because your broadsword is a two-handed weapon, you use Brawn instead of Finesse.

Heinrich: Do I get Flair, too?

GM: Yes, you do. 2 Bonus Dice.

Heinrich: I have a 4 Brawn and 3 Weaponry Skill. Plus Flair, that means I roll nine dice.

GM: Sounds good. Brand, you're next.

Brand: I'm very concerned about the Villain. I want to make sure she can't harm us.

GM: How are you going to do that with your Approach?

Brand: I'm not sure. I want to distract Sandra and make sure she focuses on me rather than my two sword-capable friends.

GM: Hm. Sounds like you want to make a Panache Approach.

Brand: Yes. Can I use Panache+Perform? As in, I'm using my skald training to insult her and get her attention?

GM: Yes...yes, that sounds good. You get 2 Bonus Dice for Flair. How many dice will you be rolling for your approach?

Brand: Panache 4 + Perform 5. With Flair, that's eleven dice.

GM: All right. Now that everyone has their Approach, let's have everyone roll dice at the same time and see who has the most Raises.

(Everyone rolls.)

Donnegal: I have four.

Heinrich: I have four.

Brand: I rolled two tens that exploded. Um...I have six Raises.

GM: That's a lot. The Villain also rolls...and gets five Raises.

Players: Uh oh.

GM: Brand, you have the most Raises. You go first.

Brand: Okay. I say, "Bustillo! Is that Castillian for, 'Can't Get an Honest Job'?"

GM: How do you use your Raise to change the Scene?

Brand: I spend one Raise to say that she was interested in the other two, but now she's much more interested in me. I'll put Pressure on her to attack me, not my friends.

GM: All right. She's now focused on you. Congratulations. She gives you the evil eye and draws her pistol, calling on a few of her Brutes to help her out.

Brand: Hey everyone! The Villain's focused on me! (pause) Wait a second. I don't think that was such a good idea.

Donnegal: Ya think?

GM: Brand used his Raise. Who has the most Raises now?

Heinrich: The Villain does. Bustillo.

GM: Bustillo sneers at Brand. "I've come too far to be stopped by the likes of you! You'll have that gem over my dead body!" She'll spend her Raise and level her pistol at the mouthy Vesten.

Brand: Maybe I didn't think this through...

GM: She spends a Raise and pulls the trigger. Brand, you take 1 Wound, and 1 Dramatic Wound from being shot.

Brand: Oof, that hurts! Can I spend a Raise to reduce those Wounds?

GM: Yes, you can spend a Raise to avoid the Wound, but not the Dramatic Wound. Not even Heroes can dodge bullets. Who has the most Raises?

Donnegal: I have four.

Heinrich: I have four.

Brand: I have four.

GM: Bustillo also has four. She tosses the smoking pistol aside. "I have always beaten you! What makes you think today will be any different? You are beneath me!"

Heinrich: Grr, I hate her and her smug attitude so much!

GM: Bustillo spends her Raise to create Pressure, and a Danger Point to apply it to all of you instead of just one of you. If any of you don't directly face her or her men, you will have to spend an additional Raise. Alright, it looks like you all have four Raises. Who wants to go first?

Brand: Um...I'm gonna try to get the artifact!

GM: That's changing your Approach. You started this Round with Perform. Dodging through Brute Squads and around a Villain trying to murder you sounds more like Athletics. And remember, you're under Pressure, as well. If you don't face her or her men, it costs you another Raise. That'll be a total of three Raises.

Brand: I have Dynamic Approach. Can I spend a Hero Point and change my Approach to Athletics?

GM: Absolutely.

Brand: Great!

GM: You spend a Hero Point and change your Approach to Athletics, then two Raises to dodge everyone and get to the Eye of Sysvalis.

Brand: Two Raises, because I'm still under Pressure, right?

GM: That's right.

Brand: Okay, I do that.

GM: Tell me how you do that.

Brand: Um...I leap quickly, using some of the rubble as cover. And when the guards try to stab me or shoot at me, I duck behind a large stone, making my way toward the Eye.

GM: Bullets ricochet off the stones and swords clatter as you dodge your way to the magnificent ruby known as the Eye of Sysvalis! Okay, now, who has the most Raises?

Heinrich: Donnegal and I both have four.

GM: Okay, you two decide who goes first. You're Heroes, so it isn't a contest. You're supposed to be working together.

Donnegal: You go first, Heinrich. I'm going to deal with the Villain.

Heinrich: I use my broadsword and panzerhand to smash my way through the Brute Squads.

GM: You have a dueling style, right?

Heinrich: Yes! Eisenfaust! I use the Slash Maneuver, spending one Raise to cause...(checks character sheet) THREE WOUNDS!

GM: That's your Weaponry Skill, right?

Heinrich: That's right.

GM: One of the Brute Squads gets knocked down from Strength 5 to Strength 2. You smash your way through the first Brute Squad, bashing them with the pommel of your sword, hammering them into the ground until only two of them remain, trembling under your shadow.

Heinrich: RAAAAAUUUUGGGGHHHH!

GM: Okay, Donnegal, you have the most Raises now. Your go.

Donnegal: I'm headed straight for the Villain. Coming up behind Bustillo, I bash her over the head with my shillelagh!

GM: You also have a dueling style, if I remember right. Do you have any Maneuvers you want to use?

Donnegal: Slash is appropriate here, right? Even with a blunt weapon?

GM: That's right. You crack the shillelagh over Bustillo's head.

Donnegal: That's four Wounds!

GM: Bustillo stumbles forward, grasping her head...then turns around and sends you a glare that could melt glaciers. "You ignorant, drunken pirate!"

Donnegal: Compliments won't save you, Castillian!

GM: Okay...Bustillo has three Raises. Anybody else got more than that?

Heinrich: We all have three.

GM: Lucky for her, Villains go first on a tie! Bustillo backs up, holding her bruised head, into an alcove. She pulls out another pistol and...

Donnegal: Everybody duck!

GM: ...fires it at a spot in the ceiling of the cave! She spends a Raise to make the shot. And you hear a huge explosion!

Brand: What did she do?

GM: She set gunpowder bombs in the ceiling. One shot was all she needed to set them off! The ceiling starts to collapse!

Heinrich: No! It's almost twenty feet underground here!

GM: Okay, who is going to go next?

Brand: I want to grab the Eye!

GM: There's nothing inherently dangerous about grabbing the stone, so you can do that easily as part of another Action. What do you do once you have it?

Brand: Well this place is falling apart. I'm going to try to get back across the room and get ready to escape!

GM: Bustillo's men swing their swords at you as you pass, but you manage to avoid them and make it back across the room and to relative cover. Relative being the key word here—the ceiling looks like it could collapse at any moment.

Heinrich: While they're distracted trying to stop Brand, I'll come at them from behind. I'll perform the Bash Maneuver. That inflicts 1 Wound, and reduces the Wounds they'll deal. Hopefully it doesn't come to that, though.

GM: That Brute Squad is down to Strength 1 now. You step up behind the two guards and smash one of them across the back of the head with your Panzerhand. Looks like your turn, Donnegal.

Donnegal: I stay on Bustillo. She'll pay for what she did to me in Carleon! I perform Feint. Next Action, I'm going to mess her up!

GM: You take a big step toward Bustillo. She's backed herself into a corner and you Feint to one side. She takes one Wound from the Maneuver, and the next time you deal Wounds to her, it's going to really hurt.

Donnegal: Vengeance has found you at last!

GM: It looks like it's Bustillo's Action. Bustillo laughs. "You fools! That isn't the Eye! I already have it!" She pulls a ruby from her coat and gloats. "The one you have is counterfeit!" Her maniacal cackling fills the room as she backs further into the alcove.

Brand: We're in deep trouble.

Donnegal: If you mean, "Deep under ground," you're right.

GM: I spend a Raise and Bustillo shuts the concealed door in front of her, locking you all in this collapsing room!

Donnegal: Okay! Think, everyone! We still have a few Raises left!

GM: You can hear Bustillo's laughter, like a distant echo. At the end of this Round, when all your Raises are gone, the room will completely collapse, trapping you down here...forever!

Heinrich: Not if I have anything to say about it. I know it doesn't really work like this, but can I activate my Strength of Ten Advantage here?

GM: Hmm. Okay, here's the deal I'll make you. Spend a Hero Point and all of your Raises, and you can brute force the door open immediately.

Heinrich: Done!

GM: You put your shoulder against the door...

Donnegal: Hurry, Heinrich!

GM: You pull back and with a mighty roar, slam into the slab of stone with your shoulder. You bash down the concealed door! The three of you fall through to safety.

Brand: I go back for the Brute Squads.

Heinrich: WHAT?

Donnegal: What are you doing?

Brand: I can't leave them behind to die! Besides, I have The War Hubris. I can't leave anyone behind. Do I get a Hero Point for that?

GM: Indeed you do. Here, have a Hero Point.

Brand: I have two Raises left. I'd like to use them to get the Brute Squads out.

GM: There isn't a lot of room in here...

Donnegal: Brand is right. We can't just leave them to die.

Heinrich: Once again, the Vestenmennavenjar's courage surprises and impresses me.

GM: Okay, if you're all going to help, let's throw the rest of your Raises at the problem. If you spend all your Raises, you can save the men and women Bustillo left behind.

Brand: All of them?

GM: All of them.

Donnegal: Then we do!

GM: You get the last one out just before the roof collapses completely. You watch as rubble, dirt, and sand smash down on the cave floor. One of the Brutes says, "That could have been us. Thank you."

Heinrich: Thank the Vestenmennavenjar skald. I would have left you to die.

Brand: No, you wouldn't have. I wouldn't have let you.

Heinrich: (pause) Perhaps you are right. But I glare at the Brute anyway.

GM: All right, that's the end of the Action Scene. What do you do next?

Dramatic Sequences

If an Action Sequence is a rush of furious activity that lasts only a few seconds, a Dramatic Sequence is the exact opposite. When deciding which Scene type you are using, ask yourself if the Scene's importance comes from immediate physical danger (Action Scene) or building tension (Dramatic Scene).

An Action Sequence is a rough and tumble encounter with a bunch of brutes, but a Dramatic Sequence covers a few hours at l'Empereur's party. An Action Sequence is running across a burning rooftop, fighting assassins as you go, but a Dramatic Sequence is sneaking through the darkened corridors of a Villain's castle, looking for a particular locked treasure chest.

An interrogation by the city watch is a Dramatic Sequence. Gathering information at a high society gala is a Dramatic Scene. Infiltrating a secure building without being discovered is a Dramatic Scene.

Dramatic Sequences tend to move slower than Action Sequence. The Heroes usually have more time to make decisions, but those decisions are just as important as the ones made in an Action Sequence—and sometimes are even more important.

Action or Drama?

The biggest difference between Action Scenes and Dramatic Scenes is in their pacing. An Action Scene is dangerous because you could get shot, or stabbed, or burned alive. Your adrenaline is running high.

A Dramatic Scene is dangerous because you need to make decisions on what to say, who to trust, how to spend your resources, and what is important to you. Action Scenes are fast-paced and instinctive; Dramatic Scenes are tense and cerebral. The difference between the two is not just that one Scene is fast and the other is slow. The pacing also changes because the stakes are different. When you shift from a Scene sword fighting against a villain to a Scene wooing a potential consort, there's still tension and risk of failure, it just takes a different form.

It is possible for a Dramatic Scene to turn into an Action Scene, and vice versa. If you are sneaking into a restricted building, it's probably a Dramatic Scene. If you are then discovered by the guards, it becomes an Action Scene. If you are dueling a famous pirate

captain, it is an Action Scene. If both of you decide to negotiate (even if it's still at sword-point), it is a Dramatic Scene.

A Risk in a Dramatic Sequence is a long-form gambit with long-form consequences. You arrive at the gala wearing a mask and hide your identity. You refuse to answer the city watch's questions about exactly where you were last night when that warehouse went up in flames. You slink through an open window to infiltrate the Vodacce embassy in the dead of night. Each beat is a few minutes, long enough to accomplish a small goal (sneak into the Count's private study without anyone noticing you) or uncover a piece of information (ask around the ball to discover if the lord of the manor has a mistress).

Step 1: Approach

The GM tells each player what the circumstances of the Sequence are in general terms and what they can expect. This should include the scope of the Sequence, any dangers that the Heroes are aware of, and how long the Sequence, in general, will last. All of these facts aren't set in stone, and things can change as the Sequence progresses. More than anything else, this serves as a reminder as to what the Heroes are getting themselves into and lets them make a more informed decision about how to spend their resources.

Each player announces an Approach for the Sequence. Your Approach is a general strategy for dealing with the complicated implications of the Scene. Each Approach is a Trait+Skill combination (with appropriate Bonus Dice).

Some Examples

As an Approach, a player could announce:

"I'm going to be charming and attempt to disarm everyone at the party."

That sounds like a Panache+Convince Approach.

"I want to learn people's secrets through careful observation."

That sounds like a Wits+Notice Approach.

"I want to be overbearing and make everyone fear me."

That sounds like a Resolve+Intimidate Approach.

"I want to impress people with my physical abilities."

That sounds like a Brawn+Athletics Approach.

"I want to sneak into a corner and take out the guards in the courtyard, one by one."

That sounds like a Finesse+Hide Approach.

Step 2: Gather Dice

Just like a normal Risk, all players gather dice from their Traits, Skills, and elsewhere.

Step 3: Roll & Raises

All players roll at the same time and count their Raises.

All players tell the GM what they rolled.

Step 4: Actions

The GM narrates the Sequence, describing details, presenting challenges and circumstances. Heroes spend their Raises to overcome challenges, accomplish goals, or take action to change their circumstances. There is no strict sequence of events or actions in a Dramatic Sequence—things are much more fluid and malleable than procedural and direct Action Sequences. Players spend Raises to take Actions, take advantage of Opportunities, and avoid Consequences, just like an Action Scene.

Example: A powerful noble invites the Heroes to a party. This is a good thing because the Heroes are trying to figure out which of the city's nobles is hiring thugs to abscond with cargo off the docks. Seems like this party may be a great opportunity to find out who that noble is.

When the Heroes arrive at the party, the GM says, "This is a Dramatic Scene. Everyone announce your Approach and I'll tell you what Trait+Skill to use."

All the players make their decisions, but let's focus on Mary. Mary—playing a Montaigne courtier—decides she wants to gather information by flirting with the party attendees. The GM tells her, "That sounds like Panache+Tempt, plus any bonuses you may have." Mary rolls nine dice and gets 5 Raises. That's how many Raises she can use during the Dramatic Sequence.

Later, at the party, Mary's Hero meets with a powerful noble who also happens to control the guards down on the docks. She spends some time talking to him and at the end of the conversation,

MORE THAN A SERIES OF CHALLENGES

Dramatic Sequences are all about Heroes exploring environments, using Raises to get what they want from tense situations. The Heroes might be opposed by Villains (or other Heroes), but Dramatic Sequences are open sandboxes and not just a series of challenges set up by the GM. The GM isn't supposed to give the players a list of problems to overcome; that kind of thing happens in Action Sequences!

she spends a Raise to say, "He wants to show off and impress me with a secret." The GM accepts Mary's Raise and says, "Yes. He says that he's recently come into a great deal of money down on the docks."

The GM could have told Mary, "I'm sorry, but he doesn't have any secrets about the docks." If this was the case, Mary keeps her Raise.

Example: Jim's Hero, an Eisen spy, wanders away from the party, sneaking through the corridors, looking for a key to the safe on the fifth floor. Jim tells the GM, "I want to get to the upstairs bedroom without being seen." The GM nods and says, "Spend a Raise."

Jim's Hero gets to the bedroom only to find two others already inside…slightly disheveled and distracted. The player says, "I sneak across the room, using the furniture and dressing panels as cover, to get the key on the desk." The GM nods and says, "All right, spend a Raise." The player spends the Raise and gets to the desk and the key.

Out of Raises

If a player runs out of Raises, she does not roll again. She can continue to participate in the Dramatic Sequence, but she can no longer spend Raises to achieve effects or overcome challenges. After all, she doesn't have any more Raises to spend.

Example: Remember the Hero in the room after the key? He says, "I need to get out of here without being seen." The GM says, "Spend another Raise." But this time, the player is out of Raises. The GM says, "That's too bad. They're going to see you sneaking out."

Dramatic Sequence Example

Three Heroes are trying to foil a Villainous Vodacce Ambassador's scheme. They've discovered that the Ambassador has an alliance with the local Count, and are looking for evidence to prove it.

Miranda has decided that her Hero will sneak into the embassy late at night and rifle through the Ambassador's office.

Alice wants to get into a high-society dinner party and rub elbows with the city's elite to see what they know.

Adam is going to get his hands dirty by cornering and interrogating one of the Count's street gang informants.

Nick, the group's GM, tells them all that this will be handled in a Dramatic Sequence. Each player chooses an Approach.

Miranda chooses Wits+Hide. Alice opts for Panache+Convince. Adam cracks his knuckles and goes for Brawn+Intimidate. All of these are okay by Nick, and everyone rolls. Miranda gets 3 Raises, Alice gets 4 Raises, and Adam gets 3 Raises.

Nick: Miranda, you make it to the fence that surrounds the Embassy grounds. You can see a handful of guards standing watch, and there are a few windows that are lit up from the inside, but the building looks mostly dark. What do you do?

Miranda: I'm going to have a look at the guards first. I want to see if they are expecting trouble or if it's a typical night. Maybe I can also find out if there's an officer or someone in charge.

Nick: That sounds good. Spend a Raise. (Miranda does so.) You spend a few minutes sticking to the shadows on the outside of the fence, watching the guards and eavesdropping on them. They don't seem to be particularly on watch any more than any other night. One of them mentions something about "the Captain" being on edge lately, but it's the typical complaints people have about their boss acting like a pain. You learn that the Captain has been spending his nights at the Embassy lately, but he doesn't walk the grounds and is probably inside the building.

Miranda: Okay. Can I try to sneak inside?

Nick: In a minute. Adam, you know of a local information broker who sells to the highest bidder, and everybody knows that the highest bidder is always the Count. This broker isn't hard to find, but he is hard to get a meeting with if he doesn't know you. And obviously, he doesn't know you. What do you do?

Adam: I'll corner a thug who works for the guy and get him to bring me to his boss...or else!

Nick: Finding someone who works security for this broker isn't hard. You find him shaking down some random stranger in an alleyway, demanding his money.

Adam: I'll walk into the alleyway behind him and loudly clear my throat. I make sure that I'm standing between him and the exit, so if he wants to leave the alleyway, he has to go through me. Then I tell him to let that poor bastard go, we have to talk.

Nick: Spend a Raise. (Adam does so.) The thug sneers at you, but when you step forward and glare at him, he lets his victim go. Do you let the victim leave?

Adam: Yeah. Wait, did the thug already take his money? (Nick nods.) I'll spend a Raise and demand that the thug gives the money back, then I'll tell the guy to get out of here. The two of us have some...business...to discuss.

Nick: The victim thanks you and scampers out of the alleyway, and runs off down the street. The thug takes a step away from you, but realizes he doesn't have anywhere to go. He tries to look like he isn't afraid of you, he crosses his arms and spits off to one side, but you can tell he's rattled. "Whaddaya want?"

Adam: "I need to have a word with your boss. I've heard you can schedule a meeting for me. Sooner is better than later. I'm free right now, actually." I'll take a threatening step toward him, and make it very clear that this isn't a request.

Nick: Okay. Spend a Raise. (Adam does so.) The thug quickly recognizes that this doesn't have to be about him, and all he has to do to get out of this is put you in a face-to-face with his boss. He tells you that it might take him an hour or so to find out where he is, but he can make the meeting happen if you agree to leave him out of it once the meet is set.

Adam: I tell him that he can go home once I'm sitting across the table from the broker and not a second before. If he's got a problem with that...well, there's always the other way.

Nick: That sounds like a good deal to him; he's definitely not interested in making you mad. Or at least, not any more mad than you already are.

(The GM turns to Alice)

Nick: Okay, Alice, you know there's an upper-crust wine tasting event tonight at an elite social club. Unfortunately, you don't have an invitation, and you aren't a member of this club. What do you do?

Alice: If I can't make my way past a club doorman, I don't deserve to get in. I'll pretend like I'm searching my handbag for my invitation, and when another guest walks in I'll pick his pocket and steal his invitation.

Nick: Well, that sounds like Theft or maybe Hide to me, but you used Convince. So you can do that, but it will cost you 2 Raises instead of 1.

Alice: Oh, that's right. Okay, I'll try a different tactic. I'll admit that I don't have an invitation, but I really want to get inside and talk to some of the guests. I'll just level with him—I'm investigating the Vodacce Ambassador, and I think some of the guests here might be able to point me in the right direction.

Nick: Perfect. He seems hesitant, but—spend a Raise (Alice does so)—in the end, he agrees to let you inside as long as you keep his name out of it.

Alice: "Of course. I wouldn't dream of selling out a friend who did me a favor."

Nick: He appreciates that. Once you're inside you see some of the wealthiest and most connected people in the city all milling around, talking to one another, and drinking various wines that probably cost more than most people see in a year. There are high-ranking city officials, minor nobility, well-to-do merchants, and a handful of spoiled rich kids.

Alice: Oh, rich kids love to gossip and show off just how connected they are. I'll schmooze with

them, and once I think I've made a good impression I'll ask and see if they've heard any rumors about that new Ambassador from Vodacce.

Nick: It takes a lot to impress these kids, but you're right—they are definitely interested in bragging about who they know and how rich they are. Spend a Raise. (Alice does so.) You manage to get into a conversation with two young men who are competing to impress you. One is talking about his father's local connections, particularly with the Count and his retinue. The other is going on and on about his family's generations-old trade deals with Vodacce, and how that carries forward into the modern day with the new Ambassador. After a few minutes you notice a few shared stories between the two, and you're pretty sure you can put the Ambassador and the Count in the same room at least half a dozen times, and based on how these two are talking they share a lot of the same allies.

Alice: I'll ask them for more details about the most recent meeting. What was it about?

Nick: The young noble—the one with ties to the Count—keeps talking, but it becomes clear pretty quickly that he doesn't have any more details. He knows that the Count and the Ambassador were both there, and he's heard that they met privately to discuss some sort of deal. He won't admit it, but you don't think he knows anything more. The merchant's son—the one with ties to the Ambassador—gets pretty quiet. You think he might realize that he has said more than he should have already, and might know more but doesn't want to say anything further.

Alice: Oooh, very interesting. Maybe if I can get him alone, he'll be willing to tell me more. I'll try to seduce him, and convince him to head somewhere a little more private where we can talk.

Nick: That sounds like Tempt again. If you want to seduce him, it will cost you 2 Raises, since you rolled Convince.

Alice: Ah, that's right. I don't want to spend 2 Raises to do that. I won't have any left to question him.

Nick: Okay, you can't quite convince him to leave with you. "This wine is fantastic!"

Alice: Oh, can I use an Advantage instead? I have Come Hither: it lets me spend a Hero Point to lure another character into a private room and later leave without him.

Nick: Absolutely! Spend a Hero Point. (Alice does so.) You give the merchant's son the look—we all know the look—and he quickly changes his mind and decides that going somewhere more private sounds like a great idea.

Alice: Okay, now that I've got him alone, I'll tie him up and question him about the meeting. I'll abandon my Convince and spend 2 Raises—it's time to take a page out of Adam's book. I'll tell him that if he doesn't tell me everything he knows about what happened at that meeting, I'll make sure the Ambassador finds out exactly who is doing all the talking about his private meetings.

Nick: We'll get back to that in a minute. Back to you, Miranda—you're outside of the Embassy, you know that the Captain of the guard has been on edge lately and is inside, and the guards themselves aren't expecting trouble. What do you do?

Miranda: I want to get inside. I'll slip over the fence and scale the wall up to a second floor balcony, then pick the lock there to get inside. Instead of spending a Raise for that, can I spend a Hero Point to use my Second Story Work Advantage? It lets me infiltrate a secure area.

Nick: Yeah, that's no problem. You easily slip over the fence, duck behind a decorative hedge to avoid a patrolling guard, and then make it to the side of the building. Getting up to the balcony isn't too difficult, since the place was clearly designed for appearances and not security, but it's not a cakewalk. Once you're on the balcony, picking the lock is child's play, and you slip through the doorway and into a dark room on the inside of the Vodacce Embassy. Nobody has noticed your intrusion yet, but you do see a light shining from under a nearby doorway, and you can hear muffled voices behind it. What do you do?



Game Master Rules

The following section contains rules players rarely—if ever—interact with. These are rules for the Game Master only. They aren't secrets but they are magic tricks. If you have no intention of ever being a GM and want to maintain the delight of the illusion, you can stop reading now. But if you want to know how the tricks work, continue reading.

Brute Squads

When the Heroes come face to face with adversity that intends to do them harm, it isn't always a Villain. Villains have underlings, goons, faceless mercenaries, and other threats that they wield against the heroes. These threats are called Brute Squads.

A Brute Squad has only one statistic—Strength—determined by the number of individuals in the Squad. A Squad of five soldiers has a Strength 5. A Squad of eight guards has Strength 8. A Squad of ten assassins has Strength 10.

Engaging the Brute Squad

When your players engage a Brute Squad, use these Steps:

Step 1: Approach

Heroes announce their response to meeting the Brute Squad: run away, hide, attack, generally any other thing they want to do.

Step 2: Gather Dice

The GM tells each Hero the appropriate Trait and Skill combination for their Approach and the attached Consequences. For a Brute Squad, the Consequences are always, "Take a number of Wounds equal to the Strength of the Squad," although some Brute Squads may have additional Abilities (see page 192).

Step 3: Roll & Raises

Players use their Raises to take Actions against the Brute Squad, decreasing the Strength of the Brute Squad. Each Raise reduces the Squad's Strength by one.

Step 4: Brutes' Turn

If a Brute Squad has not been reduced to zero, they get to attack the Heroes. The Brute Squad delivers a number of Wounds equal to its current Strength. Thus, if a Strength 8 Brute Squad has been reduced to Strength 3, the Hero facing the Squad takes 3 Wounds. If multiple Heroes are facing multiple Squads, the GM decides which Squads attack which Heroes. A Squad must deal all of its damage to a single Hero.

Step 5: Continue?

If the Brute Squad still has Strength left, it may choose to continue its assault on the Heroes. It may also choose to surrender. Probably not, but hey, a guy can hope, right? Go back to **Step 1: Approach** and continue until either the Heroes are incapacitated or the Brute Squad is defeated.

Brute Squads may use this opportunity to reorganize themselves, as well. A 5 Strength Brute Squad and a 3 Strength Brute Squad could choose to combine their efforts to become a single 8 Strength Brute Squad, or a 10 Strength Brute Squad could choose to break into two 5 Strength Brute Squads.

Brutes During Action Sequences

When Brutes attack Heroes during Action Sequences, Heroes have to contend with both the Brutes and the Consequences of the environment. For example, on a ship during a storm, a group of pirates climb over the side and begin taking over the ship. The GM tells the players, "You have to deal with Consequences: you must spend a Raise to avoid being blown off the ship by the storm."

Number of Brute Squads

More than one Brute Squad can show up at a time. In fact, we suggest multiple Brute Squads if the Heroes are highly skilled. Duelists can dispatch Brute Squads quickly and clever players can find ways to deal with them in other ways.

So, Game Master, depending on the size and capability of your group, consider how many Brute Squads you want. After all, they come in packs. You can always order more.

NPC HEROES

We talk a lot about how your players make their Heroes—there's a whole chapter on it. Here we tell you how to make the Villains who oppose them.

But so far, we haven't told you how to make the Heroic allies (or opposition) that your players will encounter. After all, sometimes Heroes disagree.

The decision on how to make Heroic NPCs is up to you. You can make them like Villains (a simple Strength rating) or you can have full Hero Sheets, allowing them to roll dice in Action and Dramatic sequences along with the Heroes. In the end, it's your call how much detail and bookkeeping you want in your Heroic NPCs.

However you decide to approach this, however, it's important to remember one thing: your players are *the* Heroes. Any NPC Heroes you make should not overshadow them. The story is about the players, not your NPCs.

Special Brute Squads

Brute Squads come in different flavors. You can have Assassin Brute Squads, Guard Brute Squads, Pirate Brute Squads…you name it, you can have it. Not all Brute Squads have a type, but those that do have an **Ability**. The GM activates a Brute Squad's Ability for a Round by spending a Danger Point. A Brute Squad's Ability occurs in addition to the normal Wounds that a Brute Squad deals.

Guards: Spend a Danger Point and they force an attack just made against a Villain to target themselves instead, and reduce the Wounds dealt by 1.

Assassins: Spend a Danger Point and they go *before* the fastest Hero, causing Wounds immediately.

Duelists: Spend a Danger Point and they attack a second time, choosing either the same Hero or a different one.

Pirates: Spend a Danger Point and they abduct a non-Hero character from the Scene. This reduces the Brute Squad's Strength by 1 as a single member of the Squad escapes the Scene with the abducted character.

Thieves: Spend a Danger Point and they steal one item currently in a Hero's possession. This reduces the Brute Squad's Strength by 1 as a single member of the Squad escapes the Scene with the item.

Villains

Villains represent the true danger for Heroes. While most Heroes can take care of a Brute Squad with relative ease, a Villain can undo a Hero with equal ease… unless the Hero prepares first. Villains. Are. Deadly.

Think of your favorite protagonist's first encounter with a Villain. Typically, the Hero comes up short. He's defeated, needs to retreat or otherwise does not take down the Villain. It's only after a whole lot of work undermining the Villain's strengths that the Hero finally has a shot at taking down his nemesis. This system reflects that dramatic truth.

Villainy

Villains do not have full character sheets, although they share a few elements with Heroes. A Villain has Arcana (both a Virtue and Hubris), just as a Hero does. They also possess Advantages, same as a Hero.

They do not have Skills, however, and they have only two Traits: **Influence** and **Strength**. The combined total of these creates his **Villainy Rank**.

Strength & Influence

Strength is the Villain's personal ability, intellect, charm, skill with a sword, ability to use magic, etc. It is her individual capability. If you took away the money, the political power, the goons, and put her in a room with a sword, this is what the Villain is capable of. A Villain's Strength also determines how many Advantages she has.

Influence is the Villain's money, resources, minions, political power, allies, etc. It is her ability to change the world to achieve her goals.

Some Villains have more Strength than Influence and vice versa. For example, Cardinal Richelieu has high Influence but low Strength. He isn't any good in a fight, but he commands the most powerful nation in the world. On the other hand, his compatriot, Rochefort, has high Strength and low Influence.

The Princess Bride gives us another pair of examples: Prince Humperdink and Count Rugen. Humperdink has a lot of Influence (he is the Prince, after all), but has no fighting ability whatsoever. Meanwhile, Count Rugen is a master swordsman and a deadly enemy. He has a great deal of Strength but his Influence is much lower.

Villains can also have equal Influence and Strength. Nothing says a Villain has to have all of one and none of the other.

Ranks of Villains

When looking at Villains, their Villainy is a good indication of how powerful they are.

A **Weak Villain** (a middle-management gangster or a toady guard captain) is around Villainy 5.

A **Strong Villain** (a feared mercenary captain or a renowned assassin) is around Villainy 10.

An **Epic Villain** (the bloodthirsty general of an enemy army or the insane leader of a dark cult) is around Villainy 15.

A **Mythic Villain** (the greatest assassin the world has ever known or a demi-god champion attempting to take over the world) is around Villainy 20.

Using Strength & Influence

Whenever a Villain takes a Risk, he rolls up to a number of dice equal to his Villainy Rank. The Villain doesn't need to declare an Approach; he simply rolls his dice and spends his Raises to affect (or thwart!) the Heroes, inflicting Wounds and taking Actions like any Hero.

Note that we said "up to his Villainy Rank." A Villain never has to reveal his true power to Heroes... not until it's far too late. Also note that a Villain typically only takes a Risk when trying to affect the Heroes—for most other things, the Villain simply spends In Influence.

Yes, this means a Villain can roll as many as 10 to 20 dice for a single Risk and spend those Raises however he likes without penalties for Improvising. How do Heroes overcome such monumental foes?

The same way you eat a whale: one bite at a time.

Taking On a Villain

Heroes can take Actions to undermine the Villain's Influence and Strength. When they do, his Villainy Rank lowers. Here's how you do it.

Undermining Influence

When a Hero takes indirect action against a Villain (robbing a tax collector who works for him, successfully Dueling the minions he sent after the Hero,

convincing the Duke that he is up to no good) that Hero reduces the Villain's Influence. Note that if the Heroes seek to undertake this sort of action against a Villain, they should have an idea of what the general effect will be if they succeed.

Villainous Influence is malleable, constantly in flux. It grows as the Villains complete schemes, hire underlings, bribe others, kill rivals, and advance their personal agenda. It shrinks as the Heroes foil their plots, turn their allies against them, expose their corruption to the populace, and rob their vaults.

> The Heroes oppose the Count of Aldana, a man named Diego Macera. They discover a number of ways to erode his Influence: he has recently forged an alliance with a rival Baron, he has an arrangement with a gang boss to run a protection racket on local merchants, and his personal assassin is hunting an influential priest who has been speaking out against him.

As a Villain's Influence decreases, her dice pool for all Risks decreases as well. A Villain rolls only her current Villainy Rank when she makes a Risk.

Undermining Strength

A Villain's Strength is her personal capability with words, weapons, Sorcery, or anything else. While you can weaken a Villain by attacking her Influence, the only way to defeat her is by facing her directly.

Villainous Strength is permanent. It changes rarely (if ever) and acts as a measure of the Villain's threat as an individual.

Once a Villain has Wounds equal to her Strength, the next single Wound she takes becomes a Dramatic Wound. So a Strength 10 Villain can take 10 Wounds, but her 11th Wound is a Dramatic Wound.

When a Villain takes 4 Dramatic Wounds, she is defeated and (like a Hero) becomes Helpless. A Strength 10 Villain becomes Helpless upon taking the 44th Wound in a Scene

Schemes

While the Heroes are running around town trying to find a way to take him down, the Villain doesn't sit idly by. He's always plotting, coming up with new ways to increase his Influence. He does this by creating Schemes.

A Scheme is a specific plot, crime, heist, or similar activity designed to increase the Villain's personal power. To create a Scheme, a Villain invests Influence into them. Every Influence Rank invested in a Scheme is a gamble—the Villain effectively bets the Heroes won't be able to stop him this time. A Villain cannot use Influence against Heroes while it is invested in Schemes.

When making a Scheme, remember that it should culminate in Action. Most information-gathering Schemes are poor choices unless that information is gained via an Action Sequence (robbing a museum, kidnapping an informant, etc). While Villains are capable of being subtle, they are rarely timid. A Villain is unlikely to simply ask around and see what he can dig up—if he thinks you know something he's going to grab you, throw you in the dungeon, and put your feet to the coals until you spill the beans.

"Rob the city bank."

"Get myself betrothed to the Duchess."

"Rig the mayoral election in my favor."

"Assassinate the King."

"Steal an artifact."

A Scheme is an active plan, never a reactive one. "Don't get caught" is not a Scheme because the Villain should be trying to do that all the time. "Continue to gain power" is not a Scheme because it is not explicit. "Find out who is working against me" is not a Scheme because it doesn't result in Action, but "Assassinate the person who stopped my last heist" is a good alternative.

If the Scheme is Successful...

If the Heroes fail to stop the Scheme, the Villain gains double his investment. In other words, if the Villain invests 4 Influence in a successful Scheme, he gains 8 Influence back.

If the Scheme is Unsuccessful...

If the Heroes foil a Villain's Scheme, the Influence that were invested in the Scheme are simply lost. The Villain's gamble hasn't paid off; he spent Influence and gained nothing. Other effects within the Scheme may cause the Villain to lose additional Influence—if he dispatched another Villain—a minor Duelist, for example—to accomplish the Scheme and you defeat her in a duel, the main Villain loses the Influence he invested into his lackey.

What Does Influence Do?

Influence is a Villain's currency. It's how he gets things done, attracts minions and Brute Squads to his service, bribes nobles and local officials, and otherwise *influences* (see what I did there?) the world into doing what he wants it to do.

Recruiting Brutes and Villains

As a GM you may ask, "Aren't I introducing these all the time? Do I have to spend every time I do something?"

No.

Not all Brutes answer directly to a Villain. If the Heroes piss off the City Watch, for example, they aren't necessarily under the control of the Villain but they'll still come after the Heroes. But when the Villain hires the infamous Black Hand Assassin's Guild to go after the Heroes, or when he bribes a magistrate to have the Heroes branded as wanted criminals, he buys that privilege with Influence. This is when the Villain explicitly sends a Brute Squad after the Heroes.

"Recruiting another Villain" creates another Villain that answers to the main Villain. A "new Villain" that doesn't answer to them doesn't cost the GM anything. You can (and should!) introduce new Villains all the time. But if your main Villain wants minions and lackeys that are more powerful than a Brute Squad, she has to pay for them in Influence.

All this hired help allows Villains to build a Villainous empire, an organization that "invests" the Villain's influence into unsavory people who work on the Villain's behalf. And any Influence gained by these recruited Brutes or minor Villains goes to the Villain in charge, not necessarily to the Brutes or minor Villain who gained the Influence.

What Does Strength Do?

Strength is a Villain's personal capability. It is an abstraction of all of the Villain's Traits and Skills, simplified to make him simultaneously more dangerous and easier for the GM to manage. You don't need to remember how many Ranks a Villain has in each Skill; all you need to know is his Strength.

There are other factors that are influenced by Strength, however. Villains have Advantages just like Heroes. All Villains can have 5 points in Advantages, plus additional Advantage points equal to their Strength.

Any effects from Advantages, Sorcery, Dueling Styles, or anything similar that has a variable effect depending on Skill Ranks or Traits are influenced, instead, by the Villain's Strength. For such effects, Villains are considered to have Skill Ranks or Trait Ranks equal to half their Strength. For example, a Strength 7 Villain is considered to have Weaponry 4 for the purposes of Maneuvers (see page 235).

Villainous Pressure

As stated on page 176, Villains can spend a Raise and a Danger Point to apply the same Pressure to all Heroes in a Scene. Of course, Heroes can always overcome the Pressure by spending an additional Raise:

> Diego Marcera inflicts Pressure on Heinrich at the King's feast, intimidating the Hero into keeping quiet about his evil plots. Heinrich will need to spend 2 Raises to tell the King about Marcera's plans.

INFLUENCE COSTS

EFFECT	COST IN INFLUENCE
Hire or recruit another Villain	2 per 5 Strength of the Villain
Employ a Brute Squad	1 per 10 Brute Points
Convince a Hero's ally to betray him	Hero's Panache score
Bribe an official	1
Discover a rival NPC's identity	1
Discover a rival Hero's identity	Hero's Wits score
Find a secret location	1
Escape a scene	Highest Trait present



Monsters

Monsters are common features in Théan folklore and legend. The legendary Vesten heroine Gull faced a pack of wolves that prowled the snowy forests, led by a beast the size of a horse that spoke directly to the minds of men. In Sarmatia, they tell of a swordswoman named Dalia who defeated a creature that had fangs dripping with black venom and bled pure shadows. And of course, nearly every single story of the Eisen hero Hugo Ausbund details him hunting the walking dead, slaying a fiery demon or driving his famous dracheneisen blade *Lobrede* through the heart of a vampire.

But everyone knew those were just stories. Monsters weren't real, or at least not common. Certainly there might be strange creatures high in the mountains, or living in the heart of deep forests, or lurking in caves.

The people of Eisen have always known better. The Wälder is a place of nightmares, where an inhuman beast terrorizing the people is common. The knights of Die Kreuzritter were founded specifically to hunt and destroy such creatures, and in Eisen an *ungetüm-jäger* (monster hunter) is typically considered a Hero, even if they are a dark and somber lot.

In other bright places, however, such creatures remain firmly in the territory of fiction. "The true Monster is tyranny," the Rilasciare would tell you. "The true Monster is heresy," the Inquisition says. "The true Monster is ignorance," the Invisible College claim.

No. The true Monsters are **Monsters**. And once you know where to look, you will see them everywhere. Beneath every rock, behind every hedge, around every corner, there is some unfathomable creature who sees all of mankind as little more than food waiting to be eaten.

Making a Monster

A Monster is an inhuman creature that sees you and everyone you have ever known as prey. Monsters prowl the darkness; they lurk in the deepest and darkest waters; they hunt at night, swooping through the darkness on wings that block out the moon; they rise from their graves, hungering for the flesh of the living.

Creating a Monster is a simple and straightforward process.

If the Monster is impressive and dangerous alone—similar to a Villain—assign it a Strength value to determine its capabilities. Monstrous Villains usually don't have Influence and instead operate entirely on Strength. They also have Monstrous Qualities instead of Advantages, abilities that allow them to make use of their inhuman powers against Heroes.

A Monster that was once human (such as a vampire or werewolf) has all the Influence and Advantages of a human Villain—in addition to Monstrous Qualities—but an inhuman beast (a sea creature or a giant otherworldly snake, for example) has only Monstrous Qualities. There is no limit to the number of Monstrous Qualities that a Monster can have—if the vampire baron can teleport through a combination of dark magic and his vampiric gifts, give him the Teleporting Quality.

If the creature hunts in large groups (such as a pack of fiendish wolf-like creatures or a horde of shambling corpses), you treat it similar to a human Brute Squad. The Monstrous Quality for a Monster Squad replaces their Special Type (such as Assassin or Duelist), and typically a Monster Squad will have only one or two Qualities, but treat that as more of a guideline than a rule.

Monstrous Qualities

Below is a list of the Qualities that can be given to a Monster. A Quality modifies the way a Monster rolls dice, grants bonuses under certain circumstances, or allows the GM to spend Danger Points for specific effects.

Aquatic

Although not necessarily restricted to the water, this creature definitely feels at home there. Woe to any Hero who faces such a Monster beneath the waves. If this Monster is a Villain, it rolls 5 additional dice in any Risk it takes while in water. If this is a Monster Squad, it inflicts double Wounds while in water.

Chitinous

This Monster has a tough outer shell, such as scales or a hard insect-like exoskeleton. Spend a Danger Point to negate all Wounds dealt to this Monster by a single attack.

FEAR

Some Monsters are so incredibly terrifying that they strike terror into the hearts of mere mortals (Fearsome, below). All Risks against such a Monster lose 1 die for each Rank of Fear the Monster possesses. Some Virtues—Comforting and Courageous (see page 158)—and Sorceries—Hexenwerk (see page 206) or Glamour (see page 214)—can help Heroes overcome such foes

Elemental

This is a creature of raw elemental might, such as a demon whose blood literally boils in her veins or a hungry ghost of winter who can freeze a man solid with a touch. Choose an element, such as fire, ice, lightning, etc. If this Monster is a Villain, when the Monster is exposed to that element or uses that element to attack the Heroes, it rolls 5 additional dice in any Risk to do so. If this is a Monster Squad, it inflicts double Wounds when using its element. Any Wounds that would result from the Monster's element (such as if a Hero throws oil on a fire Monster and sets it aflame) are ignored.

Fearsome

This Monster is terrifying to behold, much less face. The Monster gains a Rank of Fear, plus an additional Rank of Fear per 5 Strength. Spend a Danger Point to double the Monster's Fear Rank for 1 Round.

Nocturnal

The night is dark and full of terrors. This is one of them. If this Monster is a Villain, it rolls 5 additional dice in any Risk it takes at night or in complete darkness (if you are trying to fight it inside a mine, for example). If this is a Monster Squad, it inflicts double Wounds at night or in complete darkness.

Powerful

Raw physical power at the command of something whose only desire is destruction. This Monster could easily pick up and carry a horse, and perhaps more. Spend a Danger Point to double the number of Wounds dealt by the Monster after a successful attack against a Hero.

Regenerating
The Monster heals quickly, and is even able to regenerate lost limbs. This Quality can only be applied to a Monster Villain. Spend a Danger Point to remove all Wounds in the current tier. Spend 2 Danger Points to remove 1 Dramatic Wound.

Relentless
Prey runs, and the predator gives chase. This Monster never gives up the hunt, and hiding from it is futile. It will find you. Any attempts to evade or escape from this Monster cost 2 Raises, instead of 1. Spend a Danger Point to have the Monster enter a Scene, so long as it is physically possible.

Shadowy
Whether a natural hunter and predator, or a creature with some sort of magical affinity for darkness, this Monster prowls the shadows with unrivaled grace and stealth, striking when its unfortunate prey least suspects. Any attempts to locate or track this Monster cost 2 Raises, instead of 1.

Shapeshifting
The best hunters never let their prey know they are being hunted until it is too late. This creature could be standing next to you, perhaps even speaking with you, and you might never know it. Spend a Danger Point to have this Monster assume a new form. The new form is completely indistinguishable from whatever it is mimicking, save for a specific thing that the GM determines. For example, a specific Monster may always have cat's eyes or have a snake's fangs.

Swift
Faster than a speeding bullet—literally. This creature can move with such speed that the human eye can't follow it, much less react in time. Spend a Danger Point to take an action immediately.

Teleporting
Either by ripping a hole in reality in a similar manner as the Porte mages of Montaigne or by simply vanishing from sight to appear somewhere else, this Monster can move through space with the same effort that a man takes a breath. Spend a Danger Point to have the Monster escape or enter a scene, even if it would be otherwise impossible (such as a room with all doors and windows closed, a sealed underground vault, etc.).

Tentacled
Perhaps a giant octopus or squid, or a more "ordinary" creature that has suffered at the hands of dark magic or forbidden scientific experimentation, this creature has powerful tentacles that make it a greater threat than it would otherwise be. For every 5 Strength, this creature has a Tentacle. Tentacles are always Strength 5 and can be destroyed by inflicting a single Dramatic Wound.

Unliving
Typically single-minded in the pursuit of slaughter and feeding their insatiable hunger, these walking corpses are unsettling to behold but not a significant threat alone. This Quality can only be applied to a Monster Squad. Spend 1 Danger Point at the end of a Round to return this Squad to full Strength.

Venomous
The Monster has potent venom and fangs that are good for applying it. Spend a Danger Point at the beginning of the Round. When the Monster deals damage, remove 1 Raise from the Monster's target.

Winged
This creature has a powerful set of wings that it uses to propel itself through the air, and typically prefers to strike at is prey from above. If this Monster is a Villain and has room to spread its wings and fly around, it rolls 5 additional dice on any Risk. After the Monster takes 2 Dramatic Wounds, it is too injured to fly and loses this bonus until it has time to recover. If this is a Monster Squad, any attempts to deal Wounds to them cost an additional Raise.



Game Master Stories

During Hero Creation you saw how the players write Stories for their Heroes, but those aren't the only stories we are here to tell. The same system that rewards the Heroes for their personal journeys can also be used to reward them for exploring the world, meeting NPCs, and solving problems. If the Hero's Story drive the individual Heroes forward, these Game Master Stories drive the whole game forward. We'll outline four types of Game Master Stories later, but don't treat that as an exhaustive list. Feel free to write Stories for just about every aspect of your games. First, here is a quick primer on the shared elements of Game Master Stories:

Shared Story Elements

Stories often share the same elements. Each has a Start, a Goal, and a series of Steps. In this way they are identical to the Heroes' Stories. To start writing any story you should give it a short name to act as a conceptual reminder of what you wish to see from the story. Once you have a clever name you define the Goal of the Story.

Goals

Again, like in a Hero's Story the Goal of a Story is also its ending. The Goal is a specific action that the Heroes must take to finish the Story. You should know, without a doubt, when your Story has been completed. You'll be able to divide your game's history into Before the Story and After the Story.

Write down, in a few words, what the Heroes need to do. You don't need to determine every tiny detail right now, just a broad scope of what the Heroes need to accomplish. It does, however, need to be an actionable item. After you know what it is you want the Heroes to accomplish, you need to figure out how to get there.

Goals should be flexible, capable of changing enough to ensure they never become unattainable. If you realize the Goal you originally set out has become unattainable you should simply shift the Goal to help keep the game moving. Unlike a Hero's Goal however, you should avoid dropping a Goal completely. Never penalize the Players for a lost Goal. Write the next Step and keep going, even if it seems like a non sequitur.

However, unlike a Hero's Story a Game Master Story's Goal does not have a reward attached to it. The reward for a Game Master Story is left up to the individual players to select, though the Game Master can suggest likely advancement for a completed Story.

Truth vs. Mystery

In general you should share the Goal with the players, but if you wish to inject some mystery into your story consider leaving out some details. You could even tell the players about a Red Herring Goal, but be careful with creating resentment for the misdirection. When you write a Goal, also consider what you're going to tell the players. Is knowing the ultimate ending going to be a disappointment when you get there? Or are

your players going to chomp at the bit to see it come to pass? There is no right answer for this. Gauge your players' styles and make the decision you think is best for your group.

Steps

Knowing the Goal helps you know the ending, but the road getting there is where the Heroes spend most of their time. That's where the Steps come in. When you create a new Story, you need to determine what the first Step is. This is the action that puts the Heroes on the road to the Goal. Like the Goal, each Step should be an achievable item. However, unlike Goals, they can be as detailed and specific as you like.

Again we'll deviate from Hero Stories here. The Stories a Game Master writes should have the next few Steps outlined. The trick is to start specific and grow vague, only to fill out the details of your Steps as they grow closer to completion. The next immediate Step should be very detailed and specific.

Write a short sentence that declares the next thing the Heroes need to accomplish in order to progress the Story. Again, this needs to be a definitive action. Then write the next Step, but try to be a little broader than the Step before. Leave yourself room to adjust the Steps before they become the current Step in the Story.

During the course of a Story, if your realize something the group must accomplish before securing their next Step, add a new Step into the Story. Don't pull the rug out from under the players and change the current Step they are working on, but add your next Step in as soon as you identify it.

If the current Step becomes unattainable for some reason strike it from the list and write a new Step replacing the lost one.

Finally, when you tell the players about the Steps, only tell them the very next Step in your Story. They don't need to see the vague plans two or three moves down the road. Keep them focused on the task at hand and as long as you know the direction of your narrative you should avoid problems.

Rewards

Game Master Stories offer the same rewards as Hero Stories. When the Game Master Story is complete, the players who completed the Steps of the Story get to select an advancement as if they completed a Hero Story with a similar number of Steps (see page 160).

Type of Stories

As mentioned earlier, there are four common types of Stories that the Game Master will be writing. The main two are broken up by time, the third is a new take on writing stories similar to the Hero Stories, and the fourth one is an entirely different beast.

Season Story

A Season Story is one that takes place over the course of several game sessions. If you like you can call them your Campaign Story, Book Story, Main Story, or whatever other clever name you choose. These are long-term Stories and are written on the player's Hero Sheet. While this means everyone is writing the same thing it helps the player keep track of the big picture.

Game Masters should strive to accomplish at least one Step in a Season Story every game session to keep things moving. This isn't a hard rule, though. Sometimes a good Episode Story (see below) grabs hold of the Heroes and setting the Season Story aside is the road to maximum fun. Other times you might decide to have a session dedicated to advancing the Season Story and plow through a few more Steps than usual.

Season Stories should, almost always, be five Step Stories. The occasional four Step Story may happen from time to time, but Season Stories should never be three or fewer Steps.

Episode Story

An Episode Story is one that takes place over the course of a single game session. If you like, you can call them your Session Story, Chapter Story, Side Story or whatever other clever name you choose. These are short-term Stories and can be tracked on a Story Card for all the players. Since these Stories are going to be wrapped up in a single session, the players shouldn't need a strong reminder.

Game Masters should strive to accomplish at least one Step in an Episode Story for every hour or two a game session is played. However, if the players are distracted with Hero, Character or Session Stories, don't force an Episode Story on them. As long the Heroes take Steps to resolve a Story, consider the session a success. Episode Stories work best when they fill in for the moments when the sessions start to lose direction.

If you don't finish an Episode Story in a single game session don't panic. That Story has just become a two (or more) parter. Add "Part 1" to the end of the Story's name and split the remaining steps into a Part 2.

Episode Stories should be two or three Steps long. Occasionally a one Step Story could occur but be careful because there are only a limited number of possible one Step rewards. Avoid making Episode Stories four or five Steps.

Character Story

A Character Story is one that helps the Heroes learn more about, or accomplish a Goal for, a non-Hero character. If you like you can call them NPC Stories, Villain Stories, Connection Stories, or whatever other clever name you choose. Character Stories can last from a single session to several sessions, possibly even spanning multiple seasons. How these are tracked is up to the group. If some players are more interested in a specific Character Story they may consider adding the Story to their Hero Sheet. For other Stories a single Story Card might be enough to remind the group about the lingering Story.

There is no good guide for how slowly or quickly the Game Master should work through a Character Story. These simply need to progress at the speed of character interest.

Character Stories can be anywhere from one to five Steps long. Character Stories are a great place for quick little one-Steps but they can also be used to tell more elaborate NPC backstories. Use the players' interest as a gauge for how long a Character Story should run.



Retroactive Story

A Retroactive Story is one that happens after the action. Sometimes the game will carry itself along and it's not until after everyone is done playing that the Game Master looks back to notice he completely dropped the ball on Stories. When this happens you write a Retroactive Story. If you like you can call them Makeup Stories, Reward Stories, Hindsight Stories or whatever other clever name you choose. Retroactive Stories are always written after a game session is over and typically rewarded at the start of the next session.

The biggest difference with a Retroactive Story is that you already know the Goal and Steps before you even start writing. Think back to what the Heroes accomplished in the game session and mark that as the goal. Then run through each Scene and make notes about what the Heroes accomplished there. This should give you a rough list of Steps.

Retroactive Stories should reward the players at the same rate as an Episode Story but should fall on the smaller side. Retroactive Stories could often be one or two Step Stories with the occasional three Step Story if things were really going well.

Example Stories

Below are a few sample Stories, fully fleshed out, that may help you see how to structure the overall Story. Remember, you don't write all of your Steps during Character Creation. These examples are provided to show a finished Story.

Season Stories

Iron Mayor

Goal: A mayor is selected for Segel.
Step 1: Convince all nine Iron Princes staking claims in Five Sails that a Mayor is what's best for Segel.
Step 2: Get the Nine to agree to the three most suitable candidates for Mayor.
Step 3: Hold an election for the people of Segel to elect their Mayor.
Step 4: Establish contracted agreements with the other Sails and the Governor for acceptance of the new mayor.
Step 5: Convince the current Segel Council to sign over their rights to the Mayor.

May His Reign Be Short

Goal: The Governor of Five Sails is overthrown and a proper election held.
Step 1: A potential new admiral for the Avalonian fleet is recruited to go to war against the Governor.
Step 2: The Avalonian fleet is seized from Baines's control and the new admiral is appointed.
Step 3: The Governor's island is reclaimed, Baines and all of his men are captured.
Step 4: Meredydd Baines stands trial and is found guilty of piracy.
Step 5: A new Governor is sworn into office.

Episode Stories

The Death of a Good Man, Episode 1

Goal: Uncover the truth behind the Governor's death.
Step 1: Meet with the grieving widow.
Step 2: Investigate the Governor's Manor for clues.

The Death of a Good Man, Episode 2

Goal: Uncover the truth behind the Governor's death.
Step 3: Locate the missing Watch Captain.

Character Stories

Sierra Adentro: Hunt the Inquisition

Goal: The Inquisitor who ordered the death of Sierra's mother lies dead at Sierra's feet.
Step 1: Convince Sierra you work with Los Vagabundos and can help protect her.
Step 2: Uncover the name of the Inquisitors who attacked Sierra's mother.
Step 3: Get the name of the Inquisitor from the lips of his underlings.
Step 4: Travel to Vaticine City and confront the Inquisitor responsible

Retroactive Stories

The Kidnappin' of Vanessa Oakes

Goal: Rescue Vanessa Oakes from the pirates who took her.
Step 1: Infiltrate the pirate's ship.
Step 2: Escape the ship with Vanessa.



Corruption

This is a game about Heroes. However, there are times when a Hero is tempted to take an action that is less than heroic. Villainous, in fact. When that happens, the Hero gains a **Corruption Point** (or just "Corruption").

A Hero earns Corruption when she performs an evil action. And by "evil" we mean a few things.

Causing Unnecessary Suffering

If a Hero intentionally causes another character unnecessary pain, it's an evil act. We're not talking about a surgeon who causes temporary pain for long-term health or a dentist who pulls a rotting tooth, we're talking about inflicting pain on a helpless victim.

Heroes don't torture. Heroes may intimidate and threaten, but never torture. That's worth a Corruption Point. One step toward becoming a Villain.

Inaction

If another character is in mortal danger and a Hero could save him without any risk to herself, and chooses not to, it's an evil act.

Heroes help those in need, especially when there's no risk—physically or financially—to themselves. Villains don't care about the helpless and needy.

Evil Acts

The first time a Hero commits an **Evil Act**, she earns a Corruption Point.

The second time a Hero commits an Evil Act, she gains 2 Corruption Points for a total of three (1 for the first plus 2 for the second).

The third time? 3 Corruption Points for a total of six (1 for the first plus 2 for the second plus 3 for the third).

The fourth time? 4 Corruption Points for a total of 10. (1 for the first plus 2 for the second plus 3 for the third plus 4 for the fourth).

The GM should *always-always-always* warn the player before giving her a Corruption Point. "Are you sure you want your Hero to do this?"

The GM is the final arbiter of who gets Corruption Points. No arguing. No complaining. If the GM gives a fair warning, players best consider their next action carefully.

Fall from Grace

Whenever a Hero gains Corruption, the GM rolls 1d10. If the result is equal to or less than a Hero's current Corruption Points, the Hero turns into a Villain. She becomes an NPC controlled by the GM.

> Jim says he wants his Hero to tie one of the Villain's agents to a chair and torture him for information. The GM says, "Torture is an Evil Act. Are you sure?" Jim says, "I need the information." The GM gives Jim his first Corruption Point. The GM rolls 1d10 and gets a 7. If he had rolled 1, Jim's Hero would have become a Villain.
>
> Jim's Hero decides to become a highwayman. He stops a carriage and says, "I kill everyone inside." The GM warns Jim, "This is an Evil Act." Jim says, "I can take it."
>
> This is Jim's second Evil Act. That means he gets 2 Corruption Points. That's a total of three (one from his first Evil Act and two from his second). The GM rolls 1d10. If the result is 3 or less, Jim's Hero becomes a Villain. In this case, Jim is lucky, the GM rolls a 5.
>
> Finally, Jim decides to push a child out the window of a tall tower. This is Jim's third Evil Act. The GM gives Jim 3 Corruption Points. That's a total of six (one from the first Evil Act + two from the second Evil Act + three from the third Evil Act = 6 Corruption). The GM rolls 1d10 and gets a 4. Jim's Hero turns into a Villain.

If Jim's Hero had somehow survived and committed a fourth Evil Act, the GM would roll 1d10 a fourth time. If it rolled 10 or less...Jim's Hero would have become a Villain. In other words, the fourth Evil Act is your last one as a Hero.

Redemption

A Hero may redeem himself, burning away the evil in his past. To do so, he must commit himself to a Redemption Story (see page 159). The Redemption Story must end with him performing a significant good deed. This may be a selfless act of heroism, a costly sacrifice or some other noble gesture.

The Story must have 5 Steps and the Hero may not complete any other Story while a Redemption Story is active. Upon completion the Hero may remove 1 Corruption Point.





Chapter 5

Sorcery



SORCERY

"Sorcery" is a catchphrase for the supernatural abilities many Théans possess, ranging from Porté in Montaigne, Matushka's Touch in Ussura, Avalon's Glamour or the Fate Magic wielded by Vodacce's *Sorte Strega*. Sorcery has no single source: each has a different origin and different rules.

Hexenwerk

Hexenwerk is a Sorcery practiced almost exclusively in Eisen. In many parts of the country, the Sorcery is illegal, punishable by death. In others, it is seen as a necessary tool to fight the horrors of the night. A *hexe* is one who practices this forbidden art. Some use it to fight the undead of Eisen and others use it for more nefarious ends.

What are the undead? Anything that was once dead, but isn't anymore. The manner of resurrection is unimportant: if its body grew cold, its skin pale, and its heart stopped beating…it should not be here.

When a Hero learns Hexenwerk, he gains the ability and knowledge to create an Unguent (a soft, greasy ointment) made from human corpses, herbs, poisons, pieces of monsters and other unsavory, rare or mystical materials. Unguents help Heroes battle the monsters that lurk in the dark, granting gifts and abilities that can control, push back, and destroy the undead.

The use of Hexenwerk can *easily* lead to Villainy. Heroes who practice this forbidden art must take care to ensure their efforts are put toward protecting others. Even then, the basics of this Sorcery ride the edge of morality. Take care of your soul lest you lose it.

Before you read any more, you should be warned. Many would consider much of what a *hexe* must do to be desecration of the dead, disrespectful and foul. We say the following not as a challenge, but as a heartfelt warning: *Hexenwerk is disgusting*. If you feel like Hexenwerk may upset you, *you're probably right and you should not read any further.*

How It Works

Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you learn the recipe for one Major Unguent and two Minor Unguents. There are *seven* known Major Unguents and *thirteen* known Minor Unguents. Neither number is a coincidence. Neither number is an accident.

Unguents have ingredients such as blood from a corpse, eyeballs plucked out of a dead body, or a severed tongue of the recently departed. Some also require rare herbs, venom from natural or unnatural creatures, or everyday objects—such as water or wine—that have been blessed by a priest.

Using a *hexe's* body parts as ingredients makes the mixture more potent: any Unguent made using *hexe* body parts gives twice as many doses. In addition, Unguents made using *hexe* body parts do not degrade at the end of an Episode. Many Villainous *hexe* hunt their own kind in order to harvest their valuable ingredients.

Some *hexe* will take on apprentices and teach others how to create their brews, but it is necessary for this to be a "hands on" process. The ingredients for an Unguent are volatile and unpredictable, and the best order of mixture often changes from brew to brew.

While *hexe* often keep notes on their mixtures, these are often more guidelines than rules—they are personal study notes, not a textbook.

Unguents

Creating an Unguent requires time (at least an hour) and a workspace (a kitchen or an alchemical lab). The *hexe* spends a Hero Point, combining the materials to create one Major Unguent for which she has the recipe. In addition, she also creates two Minor Unguents for each time she has purchased the Sorcery Advantage. These Minor Unguents can be multiple doses of the same Unguent or single doses of different ones.

> Charlotte has purchased Hexenwerk once. If Charlotte spends a Hero Point to create an Unguent, she brews one Major Unguent and any combination of two Minor Unguents for which she has the ingredients and the recipe. Charlotte chooses to make one dose each of Ghost Eyes, Scourgebane, and Tears of the Prophet. She could have chosen to instead make one dose of Spectral Prison and two doses of Reaper's Poison, if she had the ingredients.

POWER OVERWHELMING

Many aspects of Sorcery are intentionally powerful, to the point of being world-breaking. If you are reading this Chapter, see a Sorcery power, and think to yourself "Yes! That is so strong! I can destroy anyone! Nobody can stop me!" then we'd like to be the first to congratulate you on your new career as a Villain, and advise you to start the entire process of Hero Creation over again.

This power is great. Too great for any Hero to be trusted with it. *You have been trusted with it*. Do not disappoint us.

Once created, an Unguent can be used by anyone. Activating an Unguent costs a single Raise if during an Action Sequence, but requires nothing otherwise. Unguents are unstable; each Hero can only keep one unused Major Unguent or one unused Minor Unguent at the end of each Episode—all others spoil, melt through their containers, or become otherwise unusable.

Major Unguents

A Major Unguent's effects last until the end of the Scene, unless otherwise noted.

Dead Man's Blood

A mixture of blood from a fresh corpse and a number of herbs, poisons, roots, and other such things. If you introduce Dead Man's Blood into the body of an undead (via injection, getting them to eat it, etc) the afflicted Monster is Helpless for the rest of the Scene. Note that in order for Dead Man's Blood to be effective, a relatively large amount must be ingested. This makes it ineffective if simply applied to a weapon and then used to attack.

Ghost Eyes

Eyes carved from the recent dead, mixed with holy water and mandrake, and then smeared across the eyelids. Ghost Eyes allows you to see—for a single Scene—spirits, ghosts, and other such Monsters that would typically be invisible.

Corpse Tongue
The severed tongue of a corpse, soaked in nightshade and ground into a paste, rubbed on the *hexe's* tongue. Corpse Tongue allows you to speak with a dead body, receiving messages from it about anything it knew in life. You can ask two questions for each point of Resolve you have, and the corpse must answer you honestly. After you ask your last question, you vomit, and the corpse you have been questioning crumbles into dust—you cannot question it further, even if you have an additional dose of Corpse Tongue.

Master's Bread
A dead brain with a number of hallucinogenic herbs, mushrooms, and the like and mixed into a dough-like substance before being allowed to dry. After eating, you can give a single command an undead Monster Squad must immediately perform (such as to attack a particular target, break down a barricade, etc.). A Monster Squad cannot attack itself. Against an undead Villain, Master's Bread grants 1 Raise on any social Risk against the Villain.

Spectral Prison
Moss from a tombstone or mausoleum, boiled and dissolved, mixed with salt and bone meal into a thick, gooey paste. Draw a closed circle, square, pentagram, or similar shape with this Unguent. As long as the shape remains intact and closed, no undead Monster can cross the shape or affect any creature on the other side of the line. The Monster can take other actions as normal—such as making a social Risk if it is capable of speech or shooting a gun if it knows how to do so—but no supernatural effects can cross the line. The Monster itself cannot break the line (by throwing a normal item over it, by breaking the surface the line is drawn upon, etc.), but it may be able to convince someone else to break it.

Funeral Porridge
Kidney and liver from a corpse, mashed into a lumpy porridge along with powerful sedatives and poisons. When consumed by the living, Funeral Porridge causes 1 Dramatic Wound immediately. If a person dies on the same day he has consumed Funeral Porridge, he rises as an undead Monster under your command within three days of his death. You determine the type of undead when you make the porridge—a walking corpse, a spirit, etc—and the Monster treats all of your commands as if he was always under the effect of Master's Bread. Creating a dose of Funeral Porridge always results in Corruption. Feeding Funeral Porridge to a character also always results in Corruption. If you brew a dose of Funeral Porridge and then feed it to another character, you gain Corruption twice.

Wraith Walk
A human heart, ground up and mixed with herbs and sedatives. Consuming this Unguent causes you to immediately fall unconscious, and forces your spirit out of your body. As a spirit you can move freely, perfectly aware of the surroundings of your spirit—but not your body. You can fly, move through walls, and are invisible. While a spirit, you are subject to any effects that would affect undead and can be detected by any effect that would allow detection of invisible Monsters (such as Ghost Eyes). Your spirit is extremely fragile—you take Wounds as normal, and if you take a Dramatic Wound while you are a spirit you immediately return to your body and take an additional Dramatic Wound. If you do not return to your body before the next sunrise or the next sunset (whichever comes first), you die. If your spirit is destroyed but cannot return to your body (for example, if it is trapped in a Spectral Prison), you die.

Minor Unguents
A Minor Unguent's effects last until the end of the Round, unless otherwise noted.

Revenant Venom
Potent venom from natural creatures, such as spiders and snakes. Revenant Venom is applied to a weapon upon being mixed, and then the weapon is sheathed until ready. When that weapon is next drawn, for 1 Round all Wounds dealt to an undead Monster are doubled. Revenant Venom cannot be applied to a dracheneisen weapon—the two materials are anathema to one another. The dracheneisen causes the Venom to boil away.

Reaper's Poison
A caustic blend of natural poisons sprinkled with shavings of pure silver. When you attack the undead using a flask of Reaper's Poison, spend Raises as normal to inflict Wounds. If the Monster takes at least 1 Wound, it is inflicted with Reaper's Poison, causing 1 Wound every time it takes an action until the end of the Round. These Wounds cannot be cancelled.

Scourgebane
A mixture of numerous herbs, poisons, and a splash of communion wine. When you attack an undead Monster using a flask of Scourgebane, you spend Raises as normal to inflict Wounds. If it takes at least 1 Wound from the attack, the GM cannot spend Danger Points to activate any of its Monstrous Qualities for the rest of the Round.

Tears of the Prophet
A viscous substance made from anointing oil and rare spices. You can apply Tears of the Prophet to a dead body that has not been affected by Hexenwerk. This body cannot return to life.

Mother's Mercy
A thin soup with wild vegetables and holy water. Drinking Mother's Mercy removes all effects of any disease, curse, or debilitating effect resulting from the undead. If a character who has eaten Funeral Porridge drinks Mother's Mercy, he immediately dies but does not return as an undead Monster.

Father's Fury
A stake of holly wood, smeared with a mash made from herbs and natural poisons, and then blessed by a priest. You can take an action to use Father's Fury on a Helpless undead Monster. The Monster is utterly destroyed, and can never be brought to life again.

Black Broth
Moldy bread mixed in Monster's blood and fetid swamp water. Choose a single Monstrous Quality at the time of brewing. When Black Broth is consumed, it grants that Monstrous Quality to the person who eats it until the end of the Scene. Willingly and knowingly drinking Black Broth, or tricking another character into drinking it, results in Corruption.

Red Thirst
Rotten meat and berries, boiled together with pungent roots and herbs. Spend 1 Raise during an Action Sequence to smear Red Thirst on yourself. Any undead Monsters who attack this Round must target you with all their attacks.

Summer's Smile
A poultice brewed from water from a fast-flowing stream and sickeningly sweet herbs. When applied to a Dramatic Wound caused by an undead Monster, the Dramatic Wound is healed at the end of the Scene.

Winter's Scowl
Holy water, a thorny rose stem, and a few drops of *hexe* blood. The holy water hardens into an impossibly thin and sharp blade of ice. When you make an attack against an undead Monster using Winter's Scowl, you spend Raises as normal to inflict Wounds. If you inflict a Wound, the Monster is stunned for the rest of this Round, meaning it cannot take any actions (but may still spend Raises to defend itself, if it is a Villain). After a single use, Winter's Scowl shatters.

Autumn's Sigh
Seeds from a rotten pumpkin, common red table wine, and a teardrop. Characters who drink Autumn's Sigh will sleep soundly for the night, untroubled by nightmares (natural or supernatural). They will awaken as normal due to outside stimulus (such as being woken normally, loud noises, etc.), but they fall asleep easily, and their sleep is idyllic and restful.

Spring's Laugh
Fresh spring flowers, tree sap, and rain water mixed into a thick syrup. A character who consumes Spring's Laugh is immune to an undead Monster's Fear rating for one Scene.

Widow's Veil
A wilted chrysanthemum taken from a grave, washed with holy water, and then blessed by a priest. A character who pins a Widow's Veil to her clothing is immune to the first attack or supernatural effect that comes from an undead Monster. After the attack or effect is prevented, the Widow's Veil crumbles into dust and is useless.

Knights of Avalon

"For as long as you and your descendants sit on the throne of Avalon, so shall the blessing of the Sidhe be with you."

With these words the Sidhe turned the Graal over to King Elilodd. Magic rippled across Avalon. The Graal found those most loyal to the Isles and imbued them with great power. The tales of Elilodd's Knights, and those that succeeded them, have been part of Avalonian history ever since. Until the return of Queen Elaine in 1656 these stories were myths.

When Elaine took her seat in 1658 another pulse of magic spread out across the Avalon, imbuing a new generation with the power of legend. Those who answered the call found they had access to a breadth of abilities they never thought possible. However, they were still hindered, in some ways, by the will of the Isles. The Knights found themselves beholden to a code, restricted by the Gesa, an obligation that, if broken, rends the magic from the Knight.

While King Elilodd's Knights were loyal to him, not all of the new generation has bent their knee to the Queen. This fact has turned into quite the courtly scandal, and tension is quickly rising between the Avalonian Knights and Inish or Marcher Knights.

How It Works

You are not a reincarnation of these famous characters, but simply the next to hold their mantle. You are literally an **Embodiment** of that Knight's spirit.

When you acquire the Sorcery Advantage, select a Knight. You are the only living embodiment of that Knight and your embodiment connects you to two Traits—one Major and one Minor—that offer unique magical effects called **Glamours**.

The first time your Hero takes the Sorcery Advantage, you choose one Major Glamour and two Minor Glamours connected with the Traits your Knight embodies, all starting at Rank 1. Every additional time you take the Sorcery Advantage you may either select new Glamours or increase the Rank of one Major Glamour and two Minor Glamours.

There is also a list of Luck Glamours available to all Heroes with the Glamour Sorcery. Luck is not limited by Knight: you may buy effects from both Major and Minor categories.

Lucia has chosen to be the new Dunstan, the Outsider. She looks at his Glamours and sees his Major Trait is Brawn and his Minor Trait is Wits.

Lucia chooses her first three Glamours: *Petty Luck* (Minor Luck), *Arrow Catch* (Minor Wits), and *Strongest There Is* (Major Brawn)

The next time she takes the Sorcery Advantage, she can increase the ranks of the Glamours she already has or get two new Minor Glamours and one new Major Glamour.

The Knight's Gesa

There are seven tenets of the Knight's Gesa; while the Gesa is supernaturally enforced, its interpretation is often based on the Knight's beliefs. For example, one tenet is "Never raise your sword against a countryman," but the Gesa doesn't specify what that means. An Inish Knight, for example, may not consider Avalonians to be his countrymen.

While the Gesa can be open to interpretation, a Knight can't decide "on the fly" how it applies. If she doesn't consider serving Queen Elaine to be the same as serving the Graal, she needs to make her interpretation clear to the GM. Whether or not a Knight's actions break her Gesa is ultimately up to the GM.

The seven tenets are:

Never raise your sword against a countryman

Never abandon the fight before it is through

Never break your word or help someone else break theirs

Never be idle when there is work to be done

Never let your passions rule you

Never take something for yourself that belongs to another

Always serve the Graal

A Knight who breaks a tenet of the Knight's Gesa jeopardizes their mantle of Glamour. A mantle that is in jeopardy still functions as normal, but the Knight can feel his grasp on magic becoming tenuous. In order to reforge his bond to the magic of the Graal, he needs to atone. If a Knight's mantle is in jeopardy and they break a tenet of the Gesa, they lose all access to their Glamour until they atone.

Atonement

In order to atone, a Knight must seek out another person (**a confessor**) who has been bestowed with power from the Graal—either another Glamour Knight, or Queen Elaine. The one seeking atonement (**the supplicant**) must confess the actions that they took which resulted in the breaking of the Gesa, and why they believed they were justified in doing so.

The confessor communes with the Graal through the power of his own mantle via meditation or prayer (typically an hour or so of uninterrupted time). The Graal informs the confessor of the task that must be done in order for the supplicant to atone. Sometimes, if the confessor believes that the supplicant's actions were justified, they will aid the supplicant in the completion of this task.

A task of atonement is typically related in some way to the tenet that was broken. Some examples of atonement tasks are:

- Aid a fellow countryman in a specific task ("Go to Carleon, find a man at the customs office named Finnegan, and help him with his problem.")
- Help someone else learn the value of one of the tenets of the Gesa, even if they aren't a Knight ("In Kirkwall, there is a pickpocket named Angus MacFierson. Find him, and help him to learn to live an honest life.")
- Acquire something of value to another character and give it to them, no strings attached ("A woman in Donega named Fiona Brennan has lost her inheritance to a scheming foreign barrister. Help her get it back.")

A Knight whose mantle is in jeopardy cannot act as a confessor.

Elilodd's Knights

When the Sidhe gifted King Elilodd with the Graal, he was with his twenty most loyal soldiers. The magic spread out from the Graal to his people and the first generation of Glamour Knights were created. The Sidhe have always claimed that these twenty were not the first to be Glamoured, but these Knights are the most famous Avalonians to wield the Sidhe magic.

HEROES AS CONFESSORS

As Knights of Avalon, your Heroes may find themselves sought out by other Knights seeking atonement. As long as their mantles are not in jeopardy, they are fully capable of acting as confessors.

In order to determine the task that you give to the Knight, you and your GM should have a conversation about what this opportunity could mean for your Hero. Is your Hero dangerously close to breaking a tenet? Perhaps this is a good time to reinforce their adherence to the tenet, or an opportunity to ease her conscience as she sees that other Knights also struggle with the Gesa.

The GM is the final arbiter of the task that the Graal assigns for atonement. You are free to tell the supplicant whatever you wish—so long as you understand that lying about a task of atonement certainly breaks your Gesa.

Æsc, Of the Forests

Æsc rarely took residence inside the castle of King Elilodd, instead he prefered to live in the forests surrounding the estate. Æsc would often commune with the creatures, both mundane and otherworldly, to bring their troubles to the Court.

Major Trait: Resolve Minor Trait: Panache

Beorhtsige, Siegebreaker

When King Elilodd's castle was besieged by enemies, it was Beorhtsige that arrived and broke the lines. When Beorhtsige himself was under siege, he assaulted an army head on with only a handful of loyal soldiers. It seems that no matter what side Beorhtsige was on, no siege could withstand his will.

Major Trait: Panache Minor Trait: Brawn

Cenhelm, The Keen

Cenhelm earned his name for both his blade and his mind. The stories say there was no Knight quicker of wit or of blade than Cenhelm. Stories of Cenhelm often begin with his tongue getting him into a precarious situation and his blade carving the problem to pieces.

Major Trait: Finesse Minor Trait: Wits

Ceolmund, Knight Protector

While every Knight has tales of sacrifice, none are as famous as Ceolmund. His most famous tale is that of his death. As he stood his ground, taking every blow for his friends and yelling for them to stay back, he delivered a mortal blow to his foe…then collapsed dead on the spot.

Major Trait: Resolve Minor Trait: Finesse

Dudda, The Round

While Dudda was often the comic relief of the fables, he was no less of a Knight than his brothers. Described as a large, rotund man, Dudda enjoyed his life more than any of the Knights. Dudda was mostly found during celebration scenes or farewell feasts but rarely in combat.

Major Trait: Brawn Minor Trait: Resolve

Dunstan, Outsider

Dunstan is often mentioned by Inish or Marcher Knights seeking to prove that not all Knights need to be Avalonian. Hailing from "a land where the sun never sets and the ground is of fire," Dunstan had dark skin and hair that set him apart…yet none of the other Knights ever treated him as less than a brother.

Major Trait: Brawn Minor Trait: Wits

Eadburg, The Wealthy

They say that upon swearing fealty to King Elilodd, Eadburg gave up all his worldly goods. The once wealthy merchant took a vow of poverty and refused any payment beyond what he needed to survive. Still, his name was said to reflect not his worldly earnings, but his spiritual wealth.

Major Trait: Panache Minor Trait: Wits

Ealdræd, The Oldest Knight

King Elilodd wasn't born wielding a sword. His teacher was the formidable Ealdræd, first Knight to Elilodd's father. While not a common figure in the stories of King Elilodd, Ealdræd often showed up to remind King Elilodd of his roots or to encourage a younger Knight to seek wisdom in the past.

Major Trait: Wits Minor Trait: Finesse

Frideswide, The Knight of Peace

After many years serving by King Elilodd's side, Frideswide returned to the castle and threw her sword down at the King's feet, swearing to never let her steel draw blood again. King Elilodd responded by giving Frideswide a task never heard of before: only Frideswide could rally the Knights to war.

Major Trait: Wits Minor Trait: Resolve

Godric, The Pious

When Elilodd was given the Graal, only one voice spoke caution. Godric said the deal with the Sidhe was a blasphemy and should be renounced. Elilodd was about to cast Godric out when the Sidhe stopped him:"The first to ask why is the wisest of you. Let him protect you from darker dealings."

Major Trait: Panache Minor Trait: Resolve

Hereward, Knight Advisor, and Hildræd, Knight Commander

One cannot talk about Hereward without mentioning Hildræd. The two Knights served King Elilodd in similar fashions but couldn't be more different. When Hereward asked for patience, Hildræd demanded war. When Hildræd became cautious, Hereward saw need for swift action. As such, King Elilodd was always informed of the best options for either strategy.

Hereward and Hildræd were also related in some way. Some stories cast them as bickering brother and sister, others as husband and wife and some as star-crossed lovers.

Hereward	Hildræd
Major Trait: Wits	Major Trait: Finesse
Minor Trait: Panache	Minor Trait: Brawn

Leofric, The Beloved

While all the Knights were loved, it was Leofric alone that made the greatest sacrifice for the people of Avalon. When the Sidhe Courts were overrun by Unseelie, it was Leofric who stood vigil at the gates, protecting those inside from the rampaging Sidhe. His sacrifice turned the war and allowed the Seelie to regain their throne, and in turn saved Avalon from the destructive magic of the Unseelie.

Major Trait: Resolve Minor Trait: Wits

Mildgyd, The Gentle

Standing over eight feet tall, or ten, twelve, or twenty depending on the story, Mildgyd was a classic gentle giant. The stories claim he had some giant blood in his veins and almost all of his tales involve his interaction with a Sidhe's misunderstanding of his nature. Often with humorous outcomes.

Major Trait: Brawn Minor Trait: Panache

Osgar, The Spear Knight

While all the other Knights carried swords, Osgar carried a spear. The others teased Osgar, saying that a spear was no weapon for a Knight. Yet when they were set on by a massive boar, it was Osgar and his spear that slew the beast. After that, none mocked the Spear Knight again.

Major Trait: Finesse Minor Trait: Resolve

Pæga, Forgotten

There are no stories of Pæga. No mention of their heroics or their battles. Not even a mention of their gender. The only reason the people of Avalon know the name is because it was carved into a place at Elilodd's table. Some say that Pæga betrayed Elilodd and was cast out of the Circle. Others think that Pæga was Elilodd's most loyal spy and chose to be forgotten.

Major Trait: Finesse Minor Trait: Panache

Sæwine, The Sailor

Commander of Elilodd's Navy, Sæwine was rarely seen in court. Her tales take place in strange and foreign courts, dining with allies of King Elilodd and capturing ships of his enemies. She was said the be the match of any man on land or sea and was the first female Knight that King Elilodd took into his court.

Major Trait: Panache Minor Trait: Finesse

WHAT IS A KNIGHT?

The title Knight is a bit of a misnomer. The Knights of Avalon are not the traditional full-plate wearing, horse-riding, lance-wielding Knight that immediately come to mind. In fact, most modern Knights bear little resemblance to the Knights of King Elilodd. Modern Knights come from all walks of life; sailors, merchants, craftsmen, and even criminals have found themselves called to the Graal.

Sunngifu, The Generous

When an old man came into town raving mad one day, the guards turned him away from the Castle. Sunngifu, overhearing the commotion, went to the man's aid. When the man asked for her sword and shield to protect his farm, Sunngifu gladly gave them over. When the man begged for Sunngifu's armor to clad his only daughter for protection, Sunngifu stripped naked. When the guards mocked Sunngifu for her naiveté, the old man turned and smiled. The Wizard had come to see if the tales of Elilodd's court were true, and Sunngifu secured one of King Elilodd's most powerful allies that day.

Major Trait: Wits Minor Trait: Brawn

Wilfrith, The Knight of Will

Captured by enemies, Wilfrith was held in prison for fifteen years. No amount of torture or promise of wealth turned her loyalty. When her enemies grew weary of tormenting her, they tried to feed her to a monster undescribable. Somehow, Wilfrith returned to King Elilodd's castle. Half dead and raving mad, it took less than a moon for her to regain her senses and heal her wounds.

Major Trait: Resolve Minor Trait: Brawn

Wulfnoð, The Bold

The first into battle and the last to leave, Wulfnoð was so good at what he did the other Knights tolerated his rashness. Stories with Wulfnoð constantly feature him breaking formation and pursuing an enemy around the battlefield. His daring often caught his opponents off-guard, allowing him victory in dire circumstances.

Major Trait: Brawn Minor Trait: Finesse



Glamours

Glamours are Ranked between 1 and 5. Activating a Glamour costs a Hero Point. Major Glamours can only be activated once per Episode and Minor Glamours can only be activated once per Scene.

Luck Glamours

Luck Glamours may be selected for any Trait, but they always apply to the Knight's Minor Trait (for Minor Glamours) or Major Trait (for Major Glamours).

Petty Luck **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour. For the rest of the Scene, after you make a Risk using your Minor Trait, you can replace any one die with a die whose value is equal to 1 + the Ranks you have in this Glamour.

Greater Luck **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to add your Rank in this Glamour to the value of any die. For example, if you have 5 Ranks in this Glamour, you could add 5 points to any die you rolled. If the value of a die reaches 10 or higher, that die Explodes.

Heroic **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour after a Risk using your Minor Trait. You may re-roll a number of dice equal to your Rank in this Glamour. You must keep the new value on any dice that you re-roll, even if they are lower.

Mythic **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour after a Risk using your Major Trait. You may re-roll a number of dice equal to your Rank in this Glamour. You may choose which value to keep between the old roll and the new roll.

Mad Luck **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour to roll a number of dice equal to your Rank in this Glamour. You may pass these dice out to other Heroes who may keep that die for all rolls for the rest of the Scene. For example, if you choose to give an 8 to a duelist, for the rest of the Scene that Hero always adds that die to every Risk.

Legend **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour to add your Ranks in this Glamour to your Major Trait for the rest of the Scene.

Brawn Glamours

Reduce the Brute **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to eliminate any Brute Squads in a Scene with a Strength rating equal to or less than the Ranks you have in this Glamour.

Stronger Than You **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to add a number of dice to any Brawn Risk equal to your Ranks in this Glamour, plus one.

Reduce the Villain **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour to temporarily reduce a Villain's Strength by the number of Ranks you have in this Glamour. The Villain's Strength returns at the end of the Episode.

Strongest There Is **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour to add a number of Raises equal to your Ranks in this Glamour to any roll using Brawn.

Finesse Glamours

Flash **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to take actions as if you had additional Raises equal to your Ranks in Flash. These additional Raises are only to determine when you take Actions, and cannot be spent.

Vanish **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour and anyone looking for you is unable to locate you for one hour for every Rank you have in Vanish. Any attempts to track you, to locate you via supernatural means, or to learn your location from others, automatically fail. This doesn't make you invisible; if someone can physically see you, this Glamour has no effect.

First **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour to immediately gain a number of Raises equal to your Ranks in First. This Glamour is activated at the beginning of an Action Sequence, before anyone else rolls any dice. If more than one Knight wishes to use this Glamour, the one with the most Ranks in this Glamour goes first.

Sure Strike **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour after you determine Raises for a Weapon Risk. All of your attacks deal additional Wounds equal to your Ranks in this Glamour. This effect lasts for the Round.

Panache Glamours

Sense Sorcery **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to detect whenever someone (or something) that possesses Sorcery comes within a number of feet of you equal to ten times your Ranks in this Glamour. This effect persists for the rest of the Scene.

Mend Ship **MINOR**

Touch a ship and activate this Glamour to instantly repair the ship's Hits. You repair five Hits for every Rank you have in this Glamour. You cannot repair Critical Hits.

Resist Sorcery **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour when someone uses Sorcery to target you directly. The Sorcerer still pays the cost, but the magic fails to take hold of you. You can activate this Glamour once per game session for each Rank you have in Resist Sorcery.

Subsume Ship **MAJOR**

When aboard a ship, grab the wheel and activate this Glamour. The two of you are considered a single entity. When making a Risk of any sort while aboard, you add your Ranks in this Glamour as Bonus Dice. This Glamour ends as soon as you release the ship's wheel. When you suffer a Dramatic Wound, the ship suffers a Critical Hit, and vice versa.

Resolve Glamours

Pain Is Temporary **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to instantly heal yourself of five Wounds for every Rank you have in this Glamour. Dramatic Wounds are not healed.

No Fear **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to reduce the effects of a Fear effect equal to your Ranks in this Glamour until the end of the Scene. This only affects the Hero activating the Glamour.

Endless Vigil **MAJOR**

Choose a patch of ground no more than ten feet in diameter. Until a sunrise and a sunset for every Rank you have in this Glamour have passed, and as long as you do not leave your chosen ground, you cannot die, be crippled, or rendered Helpless.

You still can suffer Dramatic Wounds, but they do not affect you until the effect ends. Leaving the chosen area ends the effect immediately. When the Glamour expires, if you have taken more Dramatic Wounds than you would normally be allowed, you drop dead on the spot.

Reborn **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour when you are killed. At dawn the next morning, you return to life, all wounds healed and all harmful substances purged from your body.

Your Resolve drops by five minus Ranks in this Glamour from the stress of dying. If this would drop your Resolve below 0, this Glamour is permanently lost and the next time you die you are dead for good. Of course, even if the power works, you may have been buried in the meantime…

Wits Glamours

Arrow Catch **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to catch anything thrown or shot at you, except from firearms. This includes knives, axes, or even arrows. You must have one free hand to perform this maneuver, and you take one fewer Wound for every Rank you have in this Glamour.

Summon Sidhe **MINOR**

Activate this Glamour to call out to the nearest Sidhe for aid. The more Ranks you have in this Glamour, the more powerful the Sidhe can be. Unless the Game Master spends a Danger Point, a Seelie answers your call and aids you as best it can—for a price, naturally.

If the Game Master spends a Danger Point, then an Unseelie has answered your call. The price it demands for its assistance, assuming it doesn't try to kill you out of hand, will be much, much harsher. However, if you spend a second Hero Point, you may cancel the Game Master's Danger Point and force a Seelie to appear.

Bullet Catch **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour to catch anything, including a bullet, that was fired at you. You must have one free hand to perform this maneuver, and you do not take the automatic Dramatic Wound from being shot by a gun. For every Rank you have in this Glamour you may activate this Glamour an additional time per Episode.

Sidhe Circle **MAJOR**

Activate this Glamour to create a circle ten feet in diameter, centered on you, that Sidhe cannot enter. They are hurled away from you if they are inside the circle when you activate this power, and they may not use their magic on you while the effect lasts. You may maintain this effect for a number of sunsets equal to your Ranks in this Glamour. If you move from the spot the effect ends, and anyone else who leaves it is instantly vulnerable to the Sidhe.

Mother's Touch (Dar Matushki)

"There may come a time in life when you meet Matushka. Take care, sweet child, in how you treat her. For her blessings are wonderful but never come without a lesson."

Everyone in Ussura has heard a story or three about the little old woman who lives in the woods. Some seek her out and beg for her help. Others try to rob or trick her. All the stories end the same: Matushka reached out and touched their arm, imparting power beyond the ken of mortals at a price few are willing to pay.

These seeming færie tales of "Dar Matushki" ("Mother's Touch") have a truth behind them. A truth you know all too well. Matushka gives whatever is needed to survive a harsh and brutal life in Ussura. The question is, what price does she ask?

How It Works

You met Matushka because she sought you out, wanting you to learn a Lesson. Maybe it was how to be kind to a poor old women, or how to be humble. When you acquire the Sorcery Advantage, Matushka has given you a lesson to learn. That Lesson includes supernatural Gifts and Restrictions.

Each Lesson includes two parts.

Gift: Your Lesson includes a supernatural power. You can use your power by spending a Hero Point.

Restriction: This is a limit on your behavior. So long as you maintain your Restriction, you can use the Lesson's Gift. Your Restriction also includes the price you must pay if you break the Restriction.

When you build your Lesson, you gain two Gifts and one Restriction. Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you gain an additional two Gifts and one new Restriction.

Gifts

These are examples of Gifts granted by Matushka. You may pick one or create a new one (with the GM's assistance). All Gifts require a Hero Point to use.

Command

Select an animal from the Animal Forms sidebar. You may summon one of your selected animals and issue any instruction you like to the creature. If there are no creatures within travel distance to you or the summoned creature is unable to fulfill your command, the GM refunds your Hero Point. If the command you issue would require a Risk, the animal rolls 5 dice, but you decide how it spends Raises. It gains 2 Bonus Dice if the command is particularly suited to it—if you command a wolf to track a creature, for example.

Illuminate

The area around you becomes perfectly illuminated. Not too dark, not too bright. A magical and perfect ambient light fills the space. If you activate this power outdoors, the effect is centered on the user and spreads out dozens of feet. All Undead creatures in the area suffer 5 Wounds immediately, and they roll 2 fewer dice for any Risks they make while Illuminate is in effect.



Purify
You cleanse a room of toxins, poisons, diseases, and even dirt. The room is perfectly sterile after its use. Purify affects every surface, inside closed and locked drawers, and even affects food and drink. A potentially unfortunate side effect of this is that any alcohol in the room loses its potency.

See
Select an animal from the Animal Forms sidebar. You perceive the world through all the senses of the nearest animal matching your choice. Although you are using the animal's senses instead of your own, any Risks you make regarding perception are made using your Traits and Skills, not the animal's. If the animal's form would be particularly advantageous for such a Risk (such as a cat seeing something in the darkness of night) you gain 2 Bonus Dice.

Sew
Touch an item: it is perfectly restored to its original form. Cracked swords are mended, jammed guns are restored, and faded paintings regain their vibrancy. This Gift cannot make an item better than it originally was or fix any defects present at its creation.

Storm
You can intensify or lessen whatever weather you're currently experiencing. You can turn light rain into a thunderstorm or a ray of sunlight into a clear sky.

Regeneration
You recover from injury at an incredible rate. Any missing or crippled limbs are completely restored. Missing hands regrow, cataracted eyes are unclouded and broken kneecaps reform. You heal one Dramatic Wound.

Transformation
Select a form from the Animal Forms sidebar. You may take the form of that creature for the Scene. Your skills, knowledge, and abilities are all retained in your new form—although they may be limited, such as Weaponry being unusable if you cannot hold weapons. If the animal's form would be particularly advantageous (such as trying to avoid notice while you are in the form of a mouse), you gain 2 Bonus Dice.

ANIMAL FORMS

Limit: Matushka often gives powers related to common Ussuran animals. Below is a brief list of some of the more common animal associations.

Bear, Boar, Cat, Fish, Fox, Goat, Horse, Mouse, Owl, Rabbit, Raven, Reindeer, Snake, Turtle, Wolf

Restrictions
Part of your Lesson is a restriction put upon you by Matushka. See below for examples. Each Restriction has two parts: the Limit and the Penance.

So long as you maintain the restriction, you can use your Gifts. If you break your Restriction, you lose the ability to use your Gifts. In order to regain your Gifts, you must perform the Penance.

Efficacy
Limit: You must never change your course of action due to fear.
Penance: You must seek out whatever is the most terrifying for you and confront it.

Forgiveness
Limit: You must always show mercy to your enemies and may never hold a grudge against those that act against you.
Penance: You must seek out the one you wronged and do whatever it takes to make amends.

Honesty
Limit: You must never tell a lie, mistruth, or obscure the truth.
Penance: You may only recover it by spending a month without lying.

Kindness
Limit: You must always offer aid to those in need—friends, strangers—no matter how desperate the situation.
Penance: You must aid someone who wronged you.

Moderation
Limit: You must do all things in moderation and if you ever overindulge yourself, you lose your Gifts.
Penance: You must submit to an act of fasting, never indulging in your most favorite activity, for a month.



Porté

The most famous sorcery (perhaps because of its spectacular and violent effects) belongs to the nobility of Montaigne, the *sorcier de Porté*. Using this powerful magic, a *sorcier* can bend the rules of reality, traveling a great distance in a moment or pulling an object to him that he has previously marked as his own.

La Magie des Portails, also known as "Porté," or "doorway magic," involves the *sorcier* cutting holes in the fabric of the universe. The doorways bleed and scream in horrible, blood-curdling voices and fill the room with an ice-cold wind that could chill the marrow in your bones. Not only is the "bleeding" of the doorway itself a part of the sorcery, but bleeding of the *sorcier* is also necessary.

Occult scholars call the nether dimension linking the doorways "the walkway," a place as deadly and mysterious as the Seventh Sea itself. No one knows what beings reside there, but most *sorciers* know better than to linger in their realm for long. Those that tempt fate do not usually return to tell tales of what they have seen on their journeys.

How It Works

Porté magic is inherited through the blood. If an ancestor of yours had Porté, you may have Porté. The Montaigne keep a strict track on lineages, ensuring the gift does not travel too far from noble blood. There have been non-noble Porté mages, but those who have the gift either keep it secret or never cultivate it. Stories of black carriages showing up in the middle of the night—dragging young children away, never to be seen again—are more than just folklore.

A young Porté mage first learns the art of the Blood Mark: the ability to mark an object with your own blood. A mage can feel the object's presence when it is nearby or know where it might be at a distance.

After he's learned how to Mark an item, he learns how to **Pull** the item toward himself. He bloodies his hands, opens a portal, and reaches through the portal toward the Marked object. When he's grasped it, he can pull the item through the portal to where he currently stands. The *sorcier* may only bring objects that can easily fit in one hand. If he can't lift it, he can't pull it through the portal.

BLESSURES

A Heroic *sorcier* uses her magic in subtle ways, when she needs it. She opens *portails*, or doors. She realizes that what she does is painful to the world itself, and so she minimizes the pain that she causes. This is why she bleeds to do so—she harms herself to spare the world. She is surgical, cutting only when and where she needs to.

Villainous *sorciers* have no such scruples. He uses his magic like an axe, chopping away at their problems and letting the world itself bleed to pay the cost. He opens *blessures*, literally Wounds, upon the world. If a Heroic *sorcier* is a surgeon, a Villainous *sorcier* is a butcher.

These *blessures* are screaming, bleeding fissures in the fabric of the world. Some Heroic *sorciers* see it as a responsibility to mend these injuries, and to seek out those who cause them and put a stop to it. Such a task comes with great danger—a *blessure* can only be closed *from the inside*, from within the Place Between Worlds, and the *things* there do not take kindly to trespassers, no matter how noble their intentions.

Opening a *blessure* functions the same as opening a portal, but the *sorcier* doesn't take a Dramatic Wound—instead, the world pays the cost. Opening a *blessure* always results in Corruption. Let me be clear—**opening a blessure ALWAYS results in Corruption**. There are no exceptions. There is no end that justifies that means.

She drew a knife and sliced into the air. I heard a cry, like the world itself screaming, as she divided it with her hands, pushing it apart. She turned to me, a smile on her face. "Our escape route," she said. "Or, do you prefer rotting here in this prison?" She extended a hand to me, dripping with gore and blood. "I know you don't trust me, Stephan," she said. "I know you think me to be a villain… but you need me. Otherwise, all those innocent children will die."

I looked at her bloody hand and wondered what mark I would put on my soul for taking it.

After learning how to pull objects, the next skill a *sorcier* learns is how to **Walk**. This allows the *sorcier* to open a portal and walk to a location or object he has Marked. This is a dangerous practice because it exposes the *sorcier* to the otherworldly walkway in full. However, the *sorcier* can move from one continent to another in a matter of minutes. Far easier than chartering a ship or traveling overland, but while exposed to the walkway, the *sorcier* must keep his eyes shut tight and ignore the voices he hears urging him to open his eyes.

Pulling Through

Heroes with Porté can pull objects through the doorways toward them and pull themselves toward blooded objects. There is no other physical connection between the two doorways. In other words, if a Hero drops a blooded pin into the ocean and opens a doorway to that pin, water will not rush out through the doorway; however, the pin will be wet when the Hero pulls it through.

Likewise, if a Hero tries to pull himself through a doorway toward an object and the object is in a place the Hero cannot enter, he will find his passage blocked and he'll be forced to go to another blooded object in order to get out of the portal…not a very pleasant option. For example, if a Hero leaves a blooded pin in a lady's chamber and the lady places the pin in her jewelry box, the Hero will not be able to move through the portal into the jewelry box. However, he will be able to pull the pin toward him without compromising the integrity of the box.

Trapped on the Walkway

If a Hero steps through a doorway, walks to his item, finds that he cannot connect with it and has no other blooded objects to home in on, he's trapped in the walkway forever, or at least until *something* finds him. For this reason, many *sorciers* create and hide blooded objects that can act as emergency exits, safeguarding the knowledge of their existence from even their close friends and family.

Blood Marks

A Porté *sorcier's* power comes from her blood—literally. When a sorcier wishes to place her Mark upon someone or something, she pricks her finger, places a drop of her blood upon an object and concentrates, forging a bond between herself and the piece of her that she's used to anoint the object. Then she spends a Hero Point. That object is now Marked.

Minor Marks

Smaller objects (something that can be held in one hand such as a sword, locket, hat) are usually marked with a Minor Mark, allowing the *sorcier* to know where the object is and Pull the object to her using Porté.

Major Marks

Large objects (something too large to be held in one hand such as a boat, wagon, treasure chest), a place, or another person can only bear a Major Mark, allowing the *sorcier* to also Walk to the object, place, or person. Smaller objects can bear Major Marks as well, but it's more common for a *sorcier* to place a Major Mark on stable locations or buildings. A direct, one-step blood relative (such as a brother, a daughter, or a mother) is always considered to have a Major Mark placed upon them at no cost to the *sorcier*, so long as they are alive.

Maintaining Marks

A *sorcier* can only maintain her connection to a certain number of marks at a time. Once placed, a Mark remains until something explicit happens in order to remove it (such as the mark being discovered and purposefully washed away) or the object is destroyed. Incidental contact or washing is usually not enough to erase a Mark. If a *sorcier* were to mark the wall of a tavern with a Major Mark, for example, a routine cleaning by the tavern staff would not remove the mark. If the Mark is discovered, however, it can be quickly and easily removed.

For each time she has purchased the Sorcery Advantage, she can maintain a connection to 2 Minor Marks and 1 Major Mark. If the sorcier is already at her maximum number of Marks and wishes to place a new one, she must sever her connection to one that already exists. Severing a connection takes just a few moments of concentration. During an Action Scene, it requires one Raise.

Using a Mark

A *sorcier* can, with a moment's concentration, know the general direction and distance to any of her Marks. Using Porté during an Action Sequence requires a Raise. The *sorcier* chooses a Mark, and then the GM informs her the rough distance and general direction ("that Mark is around 250 miles away, roughly north"). If a *sorcier* comes within approximately 100 feet of any of her Marks, she immediately knows but cannot pinpoint its location any more closely.

In order to Pull or Walk to one of her Marks, a *sorcier* must spill her own blood. While creating a Mark requires only a drop (and thus doesn't cause significant harm), opening a portal is different. It is a bloody affair.

The *sorcier* practically opens a vein. This causes a Dramatic Wound. If this Dramatic Wound would cause the *sorcier* to become Helpless, she becomes Helpless as soon as she completes her Sorcery. If a *sorcier* wishes to open a portal during an Action Sequence, it costs a single Raise in addition to the Dramatic Wound.

A *sorcier* can Pull a Minor Mark to herself. This allows her to open a portal, reach through, and take hold of the Marked object.

A *sorcier* can Walk to a Major Mark. This allows her to open a portal and step through, appearing through a similar portal standing within 5 feet of her Major Mark. If there is not enough space for the *sorcier* to occupy on the other side, the Walk fails—she must immediately choose another Major Mark to walk to (but doesn't need to suffer an additional Dramatic Wound), or become lost in the Place Between Worlds.

> Earlier in the Episode, Roseline marked her nephew's sword with a Minor Mark. When she finds herself in trouble later, she can't Walk to the sword—she would need a Major Mark to Walk and neither the sword nor her nephew are strong enough connections—so she Pulls the sword to herself instead.
>
> Hopefully, he wasn't using it.

It is possible for a *sorcier* to bring other people with her when she Walks through a portal. The sorcier must spend 1 Hero Point for each character she wishes to bring along. Of course, the larger a group a sorcier tries to bring through the Place Between Worlds, the more attention the group will draw.



Sanderis

The art of Sanderis (literally bargain) is a powerful magical tradition in Sarmatia. A *Losejas* (plural: *losejai*), is one who practices Sanderis, having forged powerful and binding contracts with an otherworldly powerful creature known as a *dievas* (plural: *dievai*). The goal of the *losejas* is to learn his *dievas'* full true name so he can destroy it. The *dievas'* goal is to turn the *losejas* into a Villain. They are on a path of mutual destruction and only one of them can win.

Rivaled only by the Porté sorcier of Montaigne or the Sorte Strega of Vodacce, the sorcerers operate in a strict and rigid structure of partnerships and allies. They are governed by the *Ratas*, the Circle. All *losejai* are members of the Circle by default, whether they want to join or not, and thus are governed by their rules. Failure to do so will result in being hunted by Purifiers ("Valytuvas"), agents of the Circle specifically empowered to hunt down and eliminate rogue *losejai*.

How It Works

Each *losejas* has a personal demon, a *dievas*, who sees and hears everything the *losejas* does—and many times, even what the *losejas* does not. They have perfect awareness of their *losejas'* surroundings—although it's important to note that the *dievas* can't read the *losejas'* thoughts and doesn't experience her emotions.

Every *dievas* has the same goal: to see their contract voided, to earn their freedom, and thus be permitted to strike a new contract with someone who isn't so versed in the rules. Someone they can manipulate and use. Every Deal that a *dievas* makes is in pursuit of this goal, every price they exact from their *losejas* is to further this agenda.

A *losejas* regards their contract with their *dievas* as a burden. They are not partners; they are jailers. The relationship between *dievas* and *losejas* is one of mutual destruction, and both parties know it. But life doesn't take place in a vacuum, and both are trying to accomplish other goals. A Heroic *losejas* wants to keep his *dievas* in check, make sure it doesn't cause havoc or destruction or suffering. However, there is no denying the power of a *dievas*, and there are times when it becomes necessary to, literally, make a Deal with the Devil you know rather than the one you don't.

"Well, Technically...": Exact Truth

Losejai tend to speak directly and clearly. They usually try to avoid poetic or flowery language, because they believe those things muddy the discussion at hand. What matters is the word as written. They call this Tiksli Tiesa, or "Exact Truth."

Exact Truth is the letter of the law. The rules as written. The precise, direct, and clearly stated meaning. They do not infer; they dictate precisely what they mean, what they want, what they will trade, and what they expect.

And they learned this from the *dievai*.

A *dievas* is a clever creature, but an honest one in its own way. It abides by the terms of its agreements and its contracts. A *dievas* is also wicked and cruel. It has its own desires, goals, and agenda. The power it wields is considerable, but it is also its only currency. It guards it jealously.

A *dievas* always follows through on its promises, but only in the strictest and most literal sense, and often will twist a Favor into something that the *losejas* did not want.

What this means to you, whether you are a GM or a player, is this. Elsewhere in this book, we advise the GM to be generous in the information that they give. This is not the case here. Be clear and explicit about what you want, and about what you don't want. The GM is allowed—encouraged—to twist your words, so long as the agreement remains technically valid. They can't redefine words. You can't pull an Obi-Wan and tell Luke that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered his father, because that isn't technically true. But you could tell him that his father was a great Jedi knight, and that he fell during the war. "What I told you is technically true. He fell…to the Dark Side."

Deals

Each time a Hero purchases Sanderis Sorcery, her *dievas* gains one Deal. The *losejas* selects two Minor Favors for any Deal her *dievas* has, and can always invoke those Favors by spending a Hero Point. For a Minor Favor, the *losejas* only needs to ask for the effect. The bargain she made with the demon includes these minor Favors. If a *losejas* wishes to invoke a Favor during an Action Sequence, it costs one Raise as well as the normal Hero Point.

DESTROYING YOUR DEMON

Each Deal that a *losejas* makes with his *dievas* allows both parties to grow in power and influence. What those who are not a *losejas* themselves don't realize is the source of this power: a *dievas*' name.

Each Deal is a piece of the *dievas*' true name. Think of them like a letter or syllable that, when put together, make up the whole. When a *losejas* calls upon the power of Sanderis, he invokes the name of his *dievas* and channels the demon's power through the *losejas*.

No one knows for certain what happens when you make the Seventh Deal. Some *losejas* believe that both they and their *dievas* are destroyed, others believe that only one of the two meet their end. A small number of *losejas* believe that making the Seventh Deal causes the *losejas* and their *dievas* to become one (which the *Ratas* denies emphatically).

One legend states the *dievas* enters the world as a physical entity once the Seventh Deal is made. Both the *dievas* and the *losejas* know when the other is close. And, most importantly, while the *dievas* is in the world as a physical entity, it is free to act however it wishes...but it can also be destroyed just like any other physical entity.

The *dievas* cannot refuse a Minor Favor: these are part of the larger Deal the *losejas* made with the demon. These prices are minor, but galling.

The typical cost for a Minor Favor would be something like...

- "Raise a toast in my name!"
- "After I do this, you must say thank you. And you must mean it."
- "Give me a friendly handshake, smile and make eye contact."

If the *losejas* wants to make a Minor Favor that they have not purchased, they can spend a Hero Point (and a Raise, if during an Action Sequence), to ask their *dievas* for such a Favor. In most cases, the act the *dievas* demands is to repay a debt to another *dievas*.

They plot and scheme amongst themselves as much as with their mortal *losejas*, trading favors in a complicated web of intrigue and boons.

The typical cost for a Minor Favor that the *losejas* has not purchased would be something like...

- "The next time you are in Sperus, find a one-armed man named Markos. Buy him a comfortable pair of shoes."
- In Feniksowo, there is a beggar that the children call Sad Anthony. Make certain that he sleeps in luxury for at least one night."
- "In Five Sails, go to the bank in the Vodacce quarter. Gain access to safe deposit box 13. Take the letter that you find inside, and deliver it to a woman named Oksana."

A Major Favor is another matter altogether. A *losejas* does not select specific Major Favor when they purchase Sorcery. A *dievas* can always deliver a Major Favor, but it is costly. The *dievas* knows that to ask for such a thing, the *losejas* must be desperate, and desperate men will make poor decisions, agree to do things that they would never otherwise do.

The typical cost for a Major Favor would be something like...

- "Go to Carleon. Find Captain Horatio Oakes, of the Royal Avalonian Navy. Make certain that he loses his commission."
- "In Villanova, there is a priest named Father Vitale. He has a good reputation, and is beloved by the people. See to it that they run him out of town in shame. Or that they kill him. I do not care which."
- "In Eisen, there are two brothers named Dietrich and Alfons Weber. Convince one of them to betray the other in order to secure the whole of their father's inheritance for themselves. I do not care which."

A Major Favor always results in a single point of Corruption, even when it seems like it wouldn't. The consequences of such large-scale changes to the world reach farther than a mortal can understand, and wielding such power innately changes you. This is in addition to any Corruption that your Favor would cause (such as commanding your *dievas* to destroy a city), or that the acts demanded in return might cause (killing the firstborn child of a King because a *dievas* told you to do so definitely results in additional Corruption, for example).

If a *losejas* doesn't hold up their end of the bargain, they cannot invoke any Favors (Minor or Major) until they do so. If the cost their *dievas* demands becomes impossible to attain, the *dievas* can offer a new cost, but this will almost certainly be even more difficult and morally compromising than the first.

Each Deal has examples of Favors that a *dievas* with that Deal is capable of, but Major Favors are much less strictly defined. In general, a *dievas* is capable of accomplishing almost anything. Anything.

Darkness

A *dievas* with the Darkness Deal can manipulate shadows and darkness, stretching or shrinking them. They can see and hear through shadows, use them as doorways, and even give a shadow physical form in order to use it to cause harm to another creature.

Major Favors

- Cause an eclipse, plunging a large area (such as an entire city) into utter darkness.
- Summon a shadow beast, a terrifying monster made of pure darkness, to stalk and kill one creature of your choice.

Minor Favors

- Make a room dark as night.
- Observe an area or another character through shadows. You see and hear everything as if you were standing in the shadow, and all of your senses function normally.
- Open a shadowy portal to instantly travel a short distance to another shadow in sight.
- Cause a creature to be attacked by its own shadow, inflicting 1 Wound each time they take an Action this Round.
- Wrap shadows around yourself to become impossible to detect. Any attempts to locate you with mundane means automatically fail (requiring no Raises to avoid).

Fire

A *dievas* with the Fire Deal is a being of living flame, whose blood can melt stone and whose touch can set wood ablaze. They can create and manipulate fire, restore objects that have been damaged or destroyed by burning, or summon devastating swarms of fire to rain down from the sky.

Major Favors

- Create a massive firestorm, utterly destroying everything within 100 feet of the center point.
- Summon an unstoppable Monster of living flame, which will attack an enemy or enemies in accordance to a single command (although it ignores qualifiers, such as "without killing anyone" or "but don't set anything on fire").

Minor Favors

- Create a controlled and contained fire, the size of a bonfire or smaller.
- Snuff out all open flames in a room.
- Set another creature's clothes aflame, inflicting 2 Wounds each time they take an Action this Round. The creature can take an Action to put the flames out, ending the effect.
- Reconstruct a hand-held object that was destroyed by fire, returning it to the condition it was before being exposed to the fire.
- Wreath a weapon with supernatural flame, causing it to inflict 1 additional Wound each time it is used to attack; the weapon melts or is burned to ash at the end of the Scene.

Cold

Cold Deal *dievas* have visible mist rising from their frost-wreathed skin. They can freeze water with a touch—perhaps even with just a look. They can turn a man into a single frozen piece and then shatter it with a fingertip, or cut down scores of them with impossibly sharp claws made of ice.

Major Favors

- Plunge a region into sudden and violent winter, causing plant life to die from the extreme cold snap, lakes and streams to freeze over, and torrential snowfall in an area approximately half a mile in every direction of its center point.
- Cause an avalanche, and all of the destruction that would entail. Such an avalanche is large enough to completely destroy a moderately sized mountain village.

Minor Favors

- Cause a character or object the *losejas* touches to be frozen solid, encased in a thin layer of ice. While encased, the character or object cannot be harmed or destroyed directly.
- Reform or reshape existing ice into a shape of your choosing, with precise and exact detail. The object appears exactly as you require it—for example, you could form a key made out of ice to unlock a specific door, even if you've never seen the key that opens it.
- Cause still or slowly flowing water to freeze over solid enough to walk upon in an area of approximately 100 square feet.
- Create a hand-held object made of solid ice, such as a sword. The object functions as a normal item of its type for one Scene, then it melts harmlessly away.
- Cause a block of ice to shatter with a simple touch. If something is imprisoned within the ice you shatter, you can choose to free it harmlessly or have it shatter, as well.

Storm

A *dievas* with the Storm Deal can be as unpredictable as the wind itself. They drift effortlessly through the air with perfect control. They can create a tornado with their breath as easily as a mortal can draw breath or summon a bolt of lightning with a snap of their fingers.

Major Favors

- Gather a storm, such as a hurricane or tornado, from calm weather. Such a storm ravages an area approximately one mile in every direction of its center point.
- Call a lightning bolt down during a storm to strike a creature of your choice, killing them instantly.

Minor Favors

- Create a steady wind that blows in a direction of your choice for one Scene.
- Calm an existing storm, turning a torrential downpour into a gentle rain. Empower an existing storm, turning a gentle rain into a torrential downpour.
- Gain the ability to cause lightning or a crash of thunder for one Scene, to use as a distraction. You can cause a lightning strike or a roll of thunder by spending a Raise during any Risk.
- Summon a powerful updraft of wind, allowing you to leap a distance or height that would be otherwise impossible or to cushion a fall that would have been deadly.
- Throw a bolt of lightning to knock back a creature (or creatures, if they are a Brute or Monster Squad) up to ten feet directly away from you. If the creature strikes something solid (such as a wall), it takes 3 Wounds from the impact. Regardless, it falls to the ground afterward, stunned, and must spend its next Action regaining its feet.

Sea

While the form of a *dievas* with the Sea Deal might vary (sometimes a creature with black scales covered in barnacles and draped in seaweed, others a creature whose body is a rough facsimile of a man's but made entirely of water), their power is undeniable. They can drown a man as he sits atop a mountain, call a tidal wave to devastate an entire port city, or command monstrous creatures of the deep.

Major Favors

- Create a tidal wave of nearly apocalyptic proportions, capable of wiping out an entire coastal city.
- Summon a Monster from the deep to drag an entire ship below the waves. The creature doesn't follow instructions, but it will not directly attack the one who summoned it or a ship that they are aboard unless provoked.

Minor Favors

- Know the exact location of any ship within 10 nautical miles of your current location.
- Calm raging waters to make them navigable or swimmable, or cause calm waters to rage and froth.
- Gain the ability to survive in water as if it were air for one Scene. You still swim normally, but you gain the ability to breathe and see underwater just as well as you can on land.
- Cause the level of an existing body of water to rise or fall up to five feet. It takes one minute for each foot of change in water level.
- Remove any toxins, poisons, or harmful substances from a container of water up to five gallons. The water becomes perfectly pure, clean, and clear. This won't turn seawater into fresh water.

Knowledge

Dievai who favor the Knowledge Deal often appear similar to a typical Théan, perhaps huddling within a voluminous cloak to hide their faces or wearing masks. They can call upon the sum total of knowledge, of men or other creatures. They also govern the connection between the mind and the body, and can cause a clean break between the two, turning a Théan's mortal body into a prison from which their mind cannot escape.

Major Favors

- Sever a creature's mind from its body—the creature remains alive, but can no longer speak or move.
- Alter a specific memory in a large number of people. You could cause everyone who has caught sight of you within the last 24 hours to completely forget your presence. They remember everything else, but there is effectively a void where you would be.

Minor Favors

- Answer a single, factual question with a yes or no. The question must concern only events that have already transpired—no matter how much it might insist otherwise, a *dievas* cannot predict the future with any more accuracy than its *losejas*.
- Find the precise location of any object you wish, with exact accuracy both as to the object's location and the object itself.
- Uncover some scrap of knowledge, even if it is otherwise lost—anything from an ancient alchemical formula to a map that would guide you to a hidden nautical retreat.
- Wipe a specific memory from a single character's mind. You could cause a man to forget he ever spoke to you, or cause your enemy to forget your face. This often has grave aftereffects on the victim's psyche, especially if the forgotten memory comes under scrutiny.
- Restore an addled mind to full function. Sadly, this effect only persists for one Scene, and the character returns to her previous mental acuity afterward.

Love

Dievai with the Love Deal know the passions of the Théan heart. Their appearance is most likely to be dependent on the tastes of their *losejas*, seeking a form that will entice and tempt their subject while twisting that desire in some way (a beautiful woman, perfect in every way except for the blood-red tone of her skin or an Adonis-like man with hair made of angry, snapping vipers).

Major Favors

- Cause a person to fall madly in love with someone. The key word here is "madly"—the victim becomes obsessed with the object of their infatuation, and will do literally anything to be with him.
- Cause every creature within 500 feet of you to fly into a mad frenzy, attacking anyone and anything around them. Those affected are impossible to calm, and must be dealt with physically.

Minor Favors

- Know the answer to a single question regarding the emotional connection between any two people, simply by looking at them. The GM must answer this question honestly, but usually in five or fewer words.
- Manipulate the fires of passion in another creature, heightening its emotional state and putting it into a mode of "fight or flight," or forcing it to become calm, almost docile.
- Know a character's single greatest fear, or the one thing that she loves or desires more than anything else
- Discover whether another character is lying to you. This pertains only to what the character believes to be true, rather than the actual truth—if someone tells you that your father is dead, you only know whether or not he honestly believes it to be true.
- Push another character to give in to her baser instincts, even if she otherwise wouldn't.



Sorte

Sorte (soar-tay, also known as "fate magic") is one of the rarest sorceries in Théah. It is only found in Vodacce and runs only in the blood of its women. Those attuned to Sorte can see the great web of fate and how its strands connect to all things. With enough skill, the *Sorte Strega* ("Fate Witch") can manipulate the strands, changing the fates of those around her.

Vodacce men are famous for their outrageous fortune, good or bad. Vodacce women are even more famous for their blessings and curses. The Vodacce are so in tune with the elements of fate, they can actually force its hand. The cost is high, but many times, it is worth it. On their deathbeds, many Vodacce mothers call to their children for one final blessing before they pass into the next world. Likewise, new Vodacce mothers often bless their children moments after they are born.

Enemies of the Vodacce take care never to meet the eyes of a Vodacce woman, just in case. The wrath of an angry *Strega* should not be underestimated. In fact, most of Théah's greatest historical and literary tragedies begin with a Vodacce curse.

Vodacce women who wish to pass on a blessing or a curse do so at the risk of great harm to their own fate. The ritual is very simple. The *Strega* looks into the eyes of the recipient and speaks his name three times. Then, she kisses him. If someone interrupts the ritual, the curse or blessing fails.

How It Works

Sorte contains a number of effects, each called a Weave or Tessere (plural: Tesse) which has both Minor and Major effects. The first time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, your Hero gains the Read Weave, two additional Minor Weaves and one additional Major Weave. In order to learn a Major Weave, you must first learn the same Minor Weave.

Each time you purchase the Sorcery Advantage, you gain additional Weaves for a total of:

- 1st Time: Read, two Minor, one Major
- 2nd Time: Read, three Minor, two Major
- 3rd Time: Read, four Minor, three Major
- 4th Time: Read, four minor, four Major

Hero Points and Lashes

When a *Strega* uses a Tessere, she spends a Hero Point and takes at least 1 Lash (some Tessere give the option to take additional Lashes, but the minimum is always 1). The number of *Strega's* Lashes magnifies the effect of a Tessere, but they also make the eventual cost steeper to pay. Fate is displeased by the meddling of *Strega*, and it always makes sure to take its toll.

Having Fate Lashes is both beneficial and harmful. It is beneficial in that the more Lashes you have, the stronger your magic is, and harmful because getting rid of them becomes more painful.

Removing Fate Lashes

A *Strega* can choose to remove a Fate Lash in two ways:

- First, she can choose to pay in blood. To remove a single Lash, the *Strega* takes a number of Wounds equal to the number of Lashes she has. For example, a *Strega* with 4 Lashes can choose to remove 1 Lash, immediately taking 4 Wounds. Now, she has 3 Lashes.
- Second, she can choose to pay in misfortune. To remove a single Lash, the *Strega* chooses to add one Danger Point for each Lash the *Strega* has. For example, a *Strega* with 4 Lashes can add 4 Points (which are immediately added to the GM's pool of Danger Points). Now, she has 3 Lashes.

A *Strega* who does not take care to keep from gathering too many Lashes can find herself strained and exhausted, betrayed by Fate when she most needs her. After the *Strega* makes any Risk, the GM can spend a Danger Point. The *Strega* cannot use any dice that roll lower than the number of Lashes she has.

By paying an additional Danger Point, the GM can target a Hero other than the *Strega* with this effect—Fate will have its due, one way or the other. For example, a *Strega* with 4 Lashes would be unable to use any dice that roll a 3, 2 or 1 in order to make Raises.

Tesse

Using a Tessere during an Action Sequence must take place on your action, and costs 1 Raise in addition to any other costs (such as Hero Points or Lashes). A *Strega* can never target herself with any Tessere.

Read

Read is a special Tessere all *Streghe* learn. Using Read requires no Hero Points or Lashes and has only a single Effect (rather than a Minor and Major Effect).

In order to use any other Weave, a *Strega* must first use Read to see the Arcana surrounding her. If a *Strega* cannot see (if she is blindfolded, has salt in the eyes, or is permanently blinded), she cannot use Read.

Using Read costs a Raise during Action Sequences. Once she uses it, she can see all the strands and Arcana for the rest of the Scene.

Arcana

Strega can see the Arcana of others, knowing both their greatest strengths and weaknesses. To use this Weave, you must first Read your target to determine their Arcana.

Minor

Spend a Hero Point and take a Lash to activate your target's Virtue or Hubris. If you choose Virtue, your target immediately gains the benefit of his Virtue. If you choose Hubris, your target gains double the benefit if he activates his Hubris on his next Action. You can use this Tessere even if your target has already activated his Virtue or Hubris this session, and the character you target may still use his Virtue or Hubris again if he has not activated them this session. No character can be affected by this more than once per session.

Major

Spend a Hero Point and take a Lash. You choose a card from the Sorte deck and—for the rest of the scene—you replace another character's Virtue or Hubris with the Virtue or Hubris associated with the card you selected, drawing out a hidden aspect of the target's Arcana. All other rules for Virtue and Hubris still apply—if the character has already activated either, she cannot activate the new one again. A *Strega* can only use this power once per session.

THE SORTE DECK

When the *Strega* is young, she learns how to observe the strands using a Sorte deck. The Sorte deck is comprised of 76 cards, divided into two categories: Lesser and Greater.

The Lesser cards are further divided into four suits: coins, cups, staves, and swords. Each suit has cards numbered from one to ten along with four court cards: the dame, knight, queen and king.

The Greater Cards are different. They have no suit and the cards are not numbered, but have full illustrations and cryptic titles. The Greater Cards are sometimes referred to as "Arcana."

The *Strega* learns to read fate strands by learning the relationships between the Lesser Cards. She reads the complicated patterns the fate strands make while shuffling, dealing and reading card configurations. Each suit corresponds to a specific strand type and once she can identify the symbolic meaning of the different suits, she can also identify the meanings of the strands.

As for the Greater Cards, there are actually more than just twenty. In fact, there are *many* Arcana...but tradition holds a *Strega* can only put twenty in her deck. Thus, the reason every *Strega's* deck is different. She chooses twenty Arcana from the many, customizing her Greater cards. They reveal the strengths and weaknesses lurking in the hearts of others. The *Strega* can't affect the Arcana in any way, but she can use this knowledge to manipulate strengths and weaknesses she knows.

When viewed together, the Arcana make what the *Sorte Strega* call "The Great Tale." Because the cards are unnumbered, they can be put into any order to create a story. Every story is different, but they all contain the same iconic images. Those with a great destiny or powerful wills have strong auras corresponding to these cards. *Streghe* can see these auras and even invoke their power.

Arcana appear as ghostly halos, vibrating colors the *Strega* learns to interpret, looming over the head. These images can be virtuous (the Arcana's "proper aspect") or vicious (the "inverted aspect," or "hubris"). The proper form of an Arcana normally indicates a strength of some sort, while the inverted form of Arcana indicates a weakness.

Blessing

You may bestow a Blessing on another character. This requires a kiss (chaste or otherwise). Kissing someone during an Action Sequence costs a Raise.

Minor

Take one or more Lashes to give another Hero or Villain a Minor Blessing—Bonus Dice equal to the number of Lashes you have when you cast it. He may keep his Bonus Dice until used or until the end of the Scene (whichever comes first), but only for one Risk. If a character chooses to use his Blessing on a Risk, he must use all of the Bonus Dice granted.

Major

Spend a Hero Point and take one or more Lashes to give another Hero or Villain a Major Blessing. Unlike the Minor Blessing, a Hero or Villain may use the Bonus Dice for *any Risk* until the end of the Scene or until he runs out of Bonus Dice.

Curse

You can put a Curse on another character. This requires a kiss (chaste or otherwise). Kissing someone during an Action Sequence costs Raise. You can only activate a Curse if you can see the character. All Curses fade at the end of the current Scene.

Minor

Take one or more Lashes to give another Hero or Villain a Minor Curse with a Rank equal to the number of Lashes you have when you place it. The character remains Cursed until you choose to activate it (after she gathers dice to make a Risk, but *before* she rolls). When activated, your Curse removes 1 die from her Risk pool per Rank of the Curse.

Major

Spend a Hero Point and take one or more Lashes to give another Hero or Villain a Major Curse with a Rank equal to the number of Lashes you have when you place it. The character remains Cursed until you choose to activate it (*after* she rolls dice for a Risk). When activated, your Curse removes 1 Raise from her Risk per Rank of the Curse.



Pull

You can pull another character toward you by grabbing hold of the strands and physically tugging on them. You must be able to see your target to use this Weave. You cannot pull characters through walls or stationary objects, but non-stationary objects (tables, chairs, etc.) will move out of the way.

Minor

Take one Lash to pull your target toward you. The character loses one Raise as he stumbles headlong toward you and struggle to recover his balance and footing. Of course, characters on balconies and banisters may tumble to the ground if pulled toward you. If the character is on the other side of some movable obstruction, or one that is easily broken (such as a table or a window) he takes 1 Wound.

Major

Spend a Hero Point and take one or more Lashes to pull multiple targets toward you. The target of your Tessere always takes 1 Wound due to the sheer force of your pull, regardless of whether there are movable or easily destroyed obstructions separating you or not—those obstructions do *not* cause a second Wound.

When you use this Tessere, you can target a number of Brutes equal to the number of Lashes you have. If you can target at least half of the Brutes in a Squad this way (for example, if you have 5 Lashes and you use this Tessere against a Squad of 10 Strength), the Squad loses their ability to act at the end of the Round as they struggle back to their feet and stumble over their fallen comrades.

Otherwise, this Tessere functions similar to the Minor version, except you can target two Heroes or Villains with one use, pulling on one character's strands with each hand. You take at least one Lash for each Hero or Villain you target in this manner. If they are on the other side of some immovable obstruction that is difficult to break (a wooden door or the iron bars of a jail cell), they slam into the obstruction, taking 2 Wounds. On each of your Actions, you can spend a Raise and take an additional Lash to hold such a character pinned in place, but only so long as you can do so by pulling him directly toward you.





Chapter 6

Dueling



DUELING

Any ruffian off the street can hack away with a sword. Such an individual might be known as the best sword in the slums, the sharpest soldier in the regiment or the most dangerous in a crew of pirates. A Duelist would take her apart without breaking a sweat.

The Duelist's Guild

A Duelist is an individual who has attended a Duelist Academy, studying under a Swordmaster to learn the secrets of his Style. Upon graduation he is inducted into the Duelist's Guild and granted a small steel pin in the shape of a triskelion as a symbol of his membership.

Members of the Duelist's Guild have the exclusive right to initiate duels. The wording of the previous sentence is very important; a member of the Duelist's Guild has the right to initiate duels, but any man has the right to defend himself.

Duelists are expected to wear their pin somewhere on their person, but not always openly—a Duelist who wants to avoid attention may wear their pin on the underside of his lapel, where it can be shown to a would-be opponent with a simple motion.

Learning the Art of the Sword

When you purchase the Duelist Academy Advantage, you learn a Dueling Style. Learning a Style always requires a swordmaster, someone who has mastered the Style and agrees to pass its methods on to you. As such, in order to purchase the Advantage you must find someone who knows the Style you wish to learn and convince her to teach you—usually, but not always, directly as part of a Story.

If you wish to learn an additional Dueling Style, purchase the Duelist Academy Advantage again. You can learn as many Dueling Styles as you care to learn, but remember that mastery of even a single Style takes some Heroes years.

Maneuvers

Attending any Duelist Academy grants access to all **Maneuvers**, specific ways to wield a weapon that stay consistent across Styles. In addition to these Maneuvers, a Duelist also gains access to a Style Bonus, a unique advantage based on his training.

To perform a Maneuver, spend a Raise on your Action. A Duelist can perform one, and only one, Maneuver on each of his Actions, i.e., a Duelist cannot spend two Raises to declare that he is Slashing and Parrying as a single Action. A Duelist can still spend multiple Raises to perform multiple Maneuvers within an Action Sequence as separate Actions.

In addition, a Duelist can never perform the same Maneuver in consecutive Actions (you cannot perform Slash, then on your next Action perform Slash again). A Duelist may perform a Maneuver twice in the same Round of an Action Sequence, but there must be an additional Maneuver (or non-dueling Action) between the repeated Maneuvers.

Slash

A basic Maneuver used to attack, but one that even the most gifted street thug wishes she could master. When you perform Slash, deal a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry.

Parry

The art of putting your weapon between yourself and harm. Perform Parry to prevent a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry. You can only activate Parry on your Action, immediately following the Maneuver that caused your Wounds.

Feint

Posturing and positioning in such a way that your opponent drops his guard or tries to block an attack that never comes. When you perform Feint, you deal one Wound—if your target is injured again this Round, he suffers one additional Wound.

Lunge

A reckless and sometimes desperate Maneuver, but one capable of ending a conflict immediately. When you perform Lunge, spend all of your Raises. You deal a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry plus the Raises you spend. These Wounds cannot be avoided or prevented.

VILLAINOUS MANEUVERS

Villains can use Maneuvers, provided they've mastered a Dueling Style. When a Villain spends Raises to perform a Maneuver, she is considered to have Skill or Trait Ranks equal to half her Strength (see page 193).

Bash

Forcing your opponent off balance—with your pommel or a closed fist—to render her next strike less effective. When you perform Bash, deal one Wound; the next time your target deals Wounds this Round she deals one less Wound for each Rank you have in Weaponry.

Riposte

Failure to master Riposte has resulted in more students failing to graduate from their Academy than any other Maneuver. When you perform Riposte, you prevent a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry, and deal a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry.

You can only perform Riposte on your Action, and you must perform it on the Action immediately following the Maneuver that caused the Wounds you are preventing. A Duelist may only perform this Maneuver once per Round.

Fiona is dueling a Villain, Sandra Bustillo. The GM declares that this is an Action Sequence, as Bustillo rushes at Fiona, sword drawn. Fiona rolls her Approach (Finesse+Weaponry) and gets six Raises; Bustillo ends up with only four.

Fiona spends her first Raise to Slash, inflicting three Wounds on Bustillo. Since she has five Raises left, she gets to go again before Bustillo can react, but she can't use Slash a second time...yet. Fiona decides to Bash Bustillo, inflicting one more Wound and minimizing the damage Bustillo can inflict on her action.

Bustillo acts next: Villains win ties. The GM declares that Bustillo Slashes Fiona, inflicting five Wounds. Luckily, Fiona's Bash means that only two of those Wounds land.

Fiona could Slash again—she used Bash most recently, but she decides to Riposte instead, spending a Raise to reduce the Wounds she suffers from Bustillo's attack to zero and inflicting three more Wounds on the Villain!



Duelist Styles

Learning a Duelist Style lets a Duelist adopt a particular way of fighting, granting her special abilities or bonuses beyond normal Maneuvers. At the beginning of a Round during an Action Sequence (when gathering dice to make a Risk), a Duelist adopts one of the Styles she knows and gains the benefits of that Style for the Round, so long as she fulfills the Style's requirements (usually based on wielding particular weapons).

When a new Round begins, a Duelist can change to a different Style, so long as she knows it. No matter how many Styles a Duelist knows or how many requirements a Duelist fulfills, she can only use one Style at a time.

A student who knows a Style can always recognize her own way of fighting—this means that if a Duelist's opponent uses a Style that the Duelist knows, she can identify the Style as soon as her opponent takes an Action.

Aldana

Aldana is the fighting Style of choice for many Castillians, one of the few fighting Styles on Théah that forgoes the use of the off-hand. Instead, the off-hand is tucked behind the Duelist's back and he presents his side to his opponent, narrowing the choice of targets that can be struck at. Aldana is designed for use with fencing weapons.

Aldana combines fencing with dancing to produce an unpredictable series of movements. The Duelist silently counts time inside his head, mentally playing the song that he is "dancing" to. This allows him to make unpredictable moves along with the rhythm of the song, which is unknown to his opponent.

Style Bonus: Aldana Ruse

When you wield a fencing sword in one hand and nothing else, you can perform a special Maneuver called the Aldana Ruse, causing your target to take additional Wounds equal to your Ranks in Panache the next time he takes Wounds this Round. You can only perform Aldana Ruse once per Round.

Ambrogia

Ambrogia has caught on like wildfire in recent years. It is remarkable for two chief reasons. The first is that it teaches its students to fight with their sword in their left hand and their main gauche in their right. The second is that its creator, Veronica Ambrogia, also happens to be one of Vodacce's most famous courtesans.

While Ambrogia does focus on the left hand (a factor that many Duelists find difficult to deal with), it emphasizes practicality over style. The students learn to use whatever they find in their hands to win the duel. "After all," teaches Madame Ambrogia, "it's the winner who tells the tale."

Style Bonus: Veronica's Guile

When wielding a dagger in your right hand and a fencing sword (such as a rapier or cutlass) in your left, you gain an ability called Veronica's Guile. When you build a Risk Pool for Weaponry, you may use either your Finesse or Wits. If you spend a Hero Point, you may use both.

Boucher

The Boucher Style of fighting was originally forged in the streets of Montaigne, and isn't considered a "gentlemanly" school. However, some Duelists are more concerned with results than with the impression they make on their peers; this Style is designed with them in mind. Students of Boucher wield a long knife in each hand, and use the two together in a series of attacks designed to confuse and disorient the opponent.

Boucher is one of the fastest fighting Styles taught on Théah today. Once the superior reach of the opponent's weapon has been overcome, the knife fighter starts a flurry of attacks that is almost impossible to stop.

Style Bonus: Boucher Step

When wielding a dagger or knife in one hand with nothing in the other—or a dagger or knife in each hand— you gain an ability called Boucher Step. Boucher Step allows you to perform two Maneuvers back to back, spending Raises as normal for each of them before your opponent can react. All other rules for Maneuvers still apply—you cannot perform the same Maneuver twice in a row, for example. You can only use Boucher Step once per Round.

Donovan

Created by Donovan Durant—the most famous bodyguard in all of Théah—this Style of swordplay is unique in both application and in the occupation of its creator. Donovan was very particular in those he took on as clients, only choosing to defend those who he truly believed needed protection. Before his retirement, it was said that only one ward under his protection ever died—his first. He swore to never let it happen again. He kept that oath.

Upon his retirement, he founded the Donovan Academy in Carleon, a school with perhaps the most rigid requirements for entry of them all. Every single student is approved personally by Donovan after a rigorous interview process. Only those who Donovan Durant judges to share his commitment to protection are permitted to study in his Academy.

Style Bonus: Donovan's Bulwark

When you wield a heavy weapon (a longsword, mace, etc.) in one hand and nothing in the other, your Parry Maneuver is replaced by Donovan's Bulwark. Donovan's Bulwark prevents Wounds dealt to you or an ally within your reach equal to your Ranks in Weaponry. Additionally, when you perform the Donovan's Bulwark Maneuver, you can spend a Hero Point to lock weapons with your opponent. Both you and your opponent lose all of your remaining Raises and can take no more Actions this Round.

Drexel

This school was developed by a mercenary named Kristoff Drexel, the leader of the warband known as the Blood Spirits. He often found himself in unpredictable situations that called for flexibility in thought and fighting Style. Thus, he devised several different ways to make use of the versatile Eisen zweihander. The Drexel fighting Style is very popular among elite mercenaries because of its ability to deal with many different situations.

A Duelist making use of Drexel has more ways of attacking and defending himself than a Duelist using another Style. There are three Stances, or ways of holding the zweihander, that Drexel teaches. Each has certain advantages and disadvantages.

Style Bonus: Drexel Stances

When you wield a heavy weapon in two hands, you can choose a Stance:

- **Bittner** Stance (Forward): Maneuvers that prevent Wounds prevent additional Wounds equal to your Resolve, but you cannot perform the Slash Maneuver—although you can still spend Raises on your Action to deal Wounds as a non-Duelist would.
- **Metzger** Stance (Back): You take all Actions as if you had additional Raises equal to your Wits. These additional Raises are only for when you take your Actions, and cannot be spent. However, you cannot perform the Parry Maneuver—although you can still spend Raises on your Action to prevent Wounds as a non-Duelist would.
- **Gerbeck** Stance (High): Maneuvers that deal Wounds deal 1 additional Wound, but you take all Actions as if you had 1 fewer Raise (minimum 1).

You select your Stance at the beginning of each Round. If you wish to change your Stance during a Round, you must spend 1 Raise to do so.

Eisenfaust

Eisenfaust makes use of a broadsword with an off-hand panzerhand, or iron glove. The Duelist deflects or grabs incoming attacks with his glove and exploits the openings created with his broadsword. Eisenfaust is defensive, teaching its students to wait for their opponent to make a mistake before attacking.

Eisenfaust exploits mistakes made by an opponent. Gradually, the opponent grows impatient or angry. As soon as he slips up, the student of Eisenfaust is on top of him, raining down fearsome broadsword blows.

Style Bonus: Iron Reply

When you wield a heavy weapon in one hand and a panzerhand in the other, your Riposte Maneuver is replaced by the Iron Reply—preventing a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Resolve + your Ranks in Weaponry. You also deal a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Brawn + your Ranks in Weaponry. You can only perform Iron Reply once per Round.

Leegstra

Leegstra has been practiced by Vesten for centuries, well before it had a name or there was such a thing as the Duelist's Guild. This extremely aggressive Style teaches the use of a weapon in each hand, and encourages an almost reckless level of offense, seeking to suffocate opponents beneath a constant rain of blows.

Although the method of fighting itself is old, it was only formalized around two decades ago by Leegstra Eldsdóttir, a Vesten woman who boasted that she had never been beaten in single combat. With the rise of the Duelist's Guilds, she founded her own Academy in the city of Thorshofn.

Style Bonus: Leegstra's Crash

When you wield a heavy weapon in each hand (typically axes or hammers, although heavy-bladed broadswords are not uncommon), you may perform a special Maneuver called Leegstra's Crash. Leegstra's Crash deals a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry. A Duelist can only perform Leegstra's Crash once per Round.

Mantovani

Originally popularized amongst serial novels in Vodacce, the Mantovani style is born of practicality. Many would-be Duelists have attempted to perfect a Style that uses something less conspicuous than a sword; Vito Mantovani chose the whip.

The Mantovani Style favors misdirection and adaptability, using a whip to manipulate the environment: taking hold of small items to throw them at the opponent with the flick of a wrist or laying a small lash across the hand to make continuing to fight more pain than it is worth.

Style Bonus: Mantovani Flay

When you wield a whip, you gain a special Maneuver called Mantovani Flay. This Maneuver deals one Wound, and you choose a Maneuver that you know your opponent can perform (a basic Maneuver or a specific Style bonus that you know they possess). Your target cannot perform that Maneuver on their next Action because you bind their weapon, lay a particularly painful slash across the back of their hand, or otherwise control the way they can act. You can only perform Mantovani Flay once per Round.

Mireli

Katya Mireli was a dancer who traveled across Ussura with various circus troupes, never staying in one place or with one group for very long. Her most famous performance was a captivating dance with a curved sword in each hand. Her act became so famous that it attracted the attention of the nobility and wealthy merchants, who would come from a hundred miles or more to see the famous Mireli Sword Dance.

The Mireli Sword Academy is unique in that it has no set campus. Those who wish to learn it must find Mireli or one of her students as they travel from place to place, often amongst performers or circus troupes. This has been tradition for the Academy's nearly three decade long history.

Style Bonus: Mireli's Revision

When you wield a heavy weapon (such as a saber or cutlass, although some Mireli Duelists favor a hatchet) in one hand, or one in each hand, you may perform a special Maneuver called Mireli's Revision. Mireli's Revision functions identically to either the Bash or Parry Maneuver. The Duelist chooses the effect of Mireli's Revision when she performs it.

Sabat

Mirek Sabat spent most of his life fascinated by the game of chess. He believed that many forms of strategy in chess could be applied to other strategies in life, from politics to warfare to swordplay. By twenty, he was considered by most to be a grand master, although it wasn't unknown for him to lose a match to an inferior opponent as he experimented with some unorthodox strategy.

The Sabat school of fencing favors a defensive Style that allows opponents to attack relentlessly to exhaust themselves. Once the adversary is vulnerable, Sabat seeks to end the bout decisively and in one master stroke.

Style Bonus: Sabat Gambit

When you wield a heavy weapon (typically a heavy curved saber) in one hand, your Lunge is replaced by the Sabat Gambit. Sabat Gambit deals a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Weaponry + your Finesse + the number of Raises you spend.

Torres

Originally developed for bullfighting, the Torres style makes use of a rapier in one hand and a cloak in the other. The student uses subtle movements to draw his opponent's attention to the cloak, and then blindside him with the rapier.

The Torres school is an extremely effective defensive style, as the cloak and sword combine to form a wall of cloth and steel between the student and his opponent's blade. Masters of the school are some of the most quick-witted and agile men and women in the world.

Style Bonus: Matador's Flourish

When you wield a fencing sword (such as a rapier or cutlass) in one hand and nothing in the other, and are wearing a long cloak, you can perform a special Maneuver called the Matador's Flourish. Matador's Flourish prevents a number of Wounds equal to your Ranks in Athletics. A Duelist can perform Matador's Flourish once per Round.

Valroux

The Valroux Style of fighting is one of several that uses a fencing weapon in the primary hand and a main gauche in the off-hand. The fighting Style is technically defensive, with the main gauche used only to parry. Students of this Style call attention to openings they could have exploited, generally humiliate their opponents, and finish them off whenever the duel grows wearisome.

One of the main strengths of this Style is its demoralizing effect on opponents. Masters of Valroux move the duel around in a dizzying circle, keeping their opponent guessing as to the pace of combat, all the while hurling insults that infuriate their adversary. To win against a student of the Valroux Style requires an iron will and long patience.

Style Bonus: Valroux Press

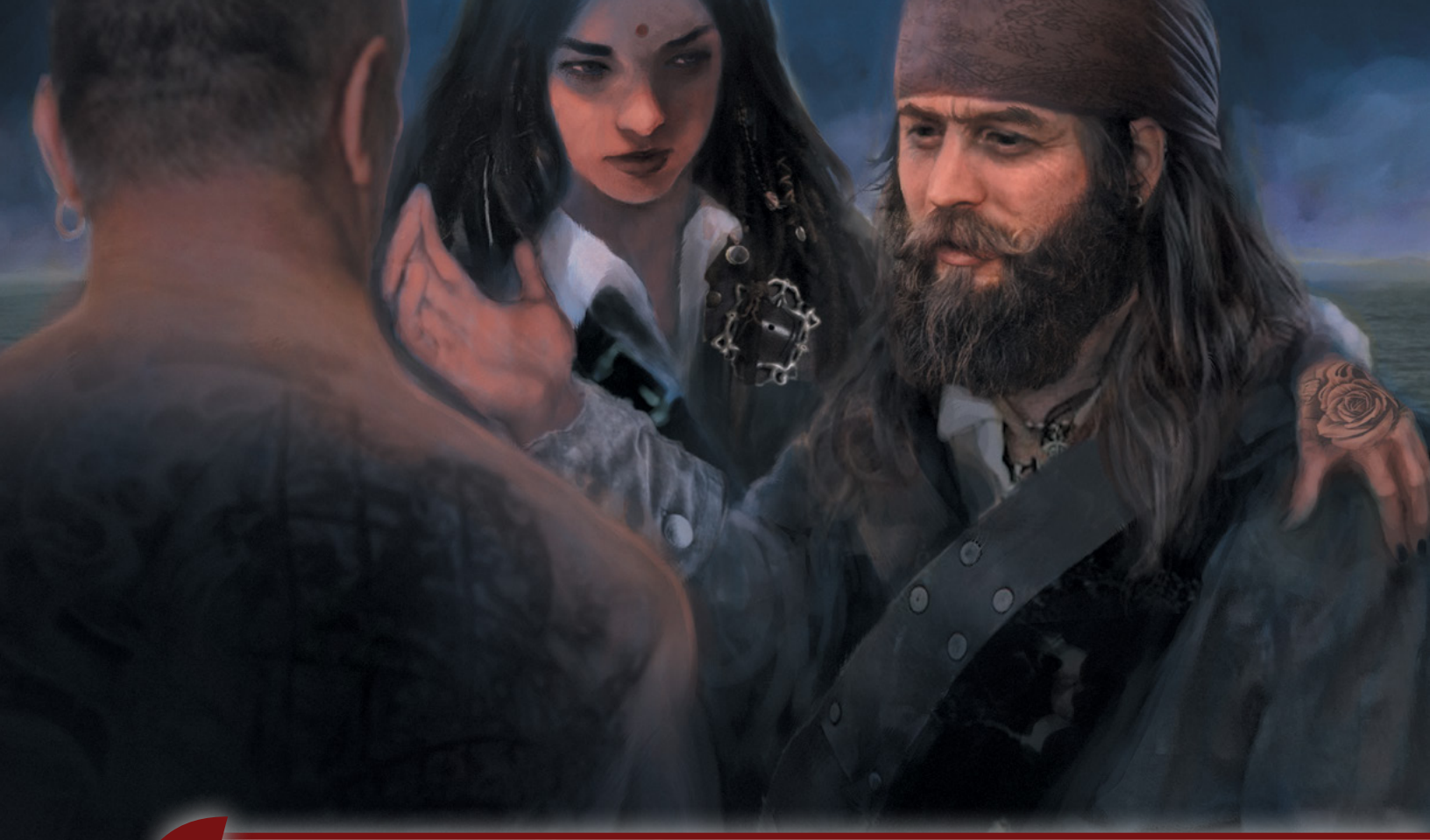
When you wield a fencing sword in your right hand and a dagger in the left, you can perform a special Maneuver called Valroux Cross. Valroux Cross prevents Wounds equal to your Weaponry, and you choose a Maneuver you know your opponent can perform on her next Action. Performing any other Maneuver costs your opponent an additional Raise. You can only perform Valroux Cross once per Round, immediately following the Maneuver that caused your Wounds.





Chapter 7

Sailing



SAILING

Ships are key to Théah's economy. Moving large amounts of cargo from one Nation to another, from one continent to another, requires the use of ships. So much wealth moving around, naturally, attracts the attention of the criminal element. On roads, these criminals are highwaymen. In cities, these criminals are robbers and burglars. On the sea, these criminals are pirates. And, with pirates, you get Nations finding new ways to protect their treasures. It is literally open warfare on the seas.

Life as a sailor has never been so dangerous…and so profitable.

What Is a Sailor?

A sailor's profession requires a vast array of skills. He must have sailor's hands (strong), be of stout heart (healthy) and have guts of iron (courage) or he's of no use at all. He must learn how to tie dozens of different knots, be able to work canvas so he can repair damaged sail, have incredible balance and fleet feet to move amid the ship's rigging, and be able to work while cannon shot fires over his head or while a storm tries to rip him from the decks.

Any skills a sailor does not have when he steps on board, he learns quickly. Many apprentice sailors begin a voyage knowing next to nothing, having spent their entire lives in one village. They join a ship, spend months at sea, then return completely changed. Sailors usually learn to read while at sea (there's little else to do when the wind won't kick up), see whales and dolphins (in addition to less amicable sea creatures), visit foreign ports, experience foreign cultures, learn new languages, learn mathematics, survive starvation and disease, build their strength and resolve, misplace their money in a jenny's warm bed and return to sea to earn back the money they lost.

Unfortunately, the romantic life of a sailor also has some very unromantic aspects. Any ship that sets sail

risks returning with only a portion of its Crew, the rest lost to disease, violence, storms, starvation, thirst, negligence or accident. A sailor divides his day into three eight-hour watches:

1st watch: the sailor is on full duty
2nd watch: light duty/personal time
3rd watch: sleeping

First watch is active duty, performing your job on the ship. The second watch is filled with eating your main meal after your shift, working on sewing (sails, clothing), carpentry (building and cutting stuff for the master carpenter like spare stays, blocks, etc.) or smithing (chipping cannonballs, replacing flintlocks, etc.). You can also help out with other Master's Mates, learning a new position on the ship (always a good idea to make yourself more valuable). You could make bandages for the Doctor, peel potatoes for the Cook, etc. Then, if there is time left over, you can read (or learn to read from a literate mate), study or whatnot depending on your station.

While on board, you must handle rigging fifty feet in the air with forty-mile-an-hour winds ripping at your balance, not to mention rain and sleet and renegade storm waves. The food you eat is usually rotten, the water putrid and the officers unforgiving of error. You must avoid conflict with your mates or risk a knife in the back, a slit throat while you sleep or a shove while you're up in the rigging.

If the ship enters combat, your chances of survival plummet, depending on the flag of the enemy ship. If the surgeon on board doesn't have the tools to deal with the wounds you'll earn, you'll probably bleed to death before anyone even knows that you've been hurt.

But at the end of the voyage, the paymaster will put more coins in your hands than you've seen in your entire life. In fact, with the money you earn from one voyage, you could retire quite comfortably if you so chose. Of course, you usually spend the whole lot on wine and jennys in a foreign port, meaning you'll have to take another voyage to earn back your newly lost fortune.

That's the romantic life of a sailor.

Types of Sailors

Sailors in Théah fall into four basic categories.

Merchants are those who use their ships for trading or other commercial activities. They include businessmen hauling cargo from one port to another, as well as fishermen, whalers and explorers of the western seas. They also include less savory professions such as smuggling and bootlegging. More sailors belong to this class than any other.

Naval Recruits belong to a nation's official navy, serving as officers or seamen aboard a military vessel. They patrol the waters around their country, protect important convoys, hunt pirates and do battle with other navies. Life on a naval vessel is notoriously bad, although there are exceptions—usually under competent Captains.

Privateers form a nebulous category of mercenaries and ne'er-do-wells. They're essentially "pirates for hire," granted official sanction from a government to patrol the seas. They prey on their employer's enemies, stealing booty from rival nations while keeping the more formal navies from dirtying their hands. Privateers also engage in escort duties and other specific missions. The Sea Dogs, under the sanction of Queen Elaine of Avalon, are the most notorious privateers on the seas today.

Pirates are the wolves of the sea—outlaws who ride the waves in search of cargo to plunder. They answer to no one save themselves and most feel obligated only to the profits they steal from their victims. The dangers of a pirate's lifestyle are beyond counting, but they have more freedom than any other class in Théah. Because they are usually after the goods in their targets' holds, they rarely attack to sink ships, preferring instead to close and board them. Their bloodthirsty reputation has earned them few friends: military vessels have orders to sink all pirate craft on sight, and captured pirates are usually hanged without trial. Despite that, not all of them are malevolent. The famous pirate Gosse, for example, was renowned for his gentlemanly behavior, and the Brotherhood of the Coast, while ruthless, has brought a rough sense of honor—and the first stirrings of democracy—to the Théan seas.

The Ship's Crew

Under each officer is a brief description of his duties and the men he commands.

Captain

A captain's role on the ship differs depending on the command. On naval vessels, he has ultimate authority. On many pirate ships, however, his authority is defined by the ship's charter. Some charters allow the captain to act only as a general, taking authority only when the vessel battles another ship, while others give him the same authority he holds on a navy ship. The captain isn't often the most experienced sailor on board (see ship's master), but he usually has the best command skills. He usually has a number of officers under his direct command:

Lieutenant(s): A ship's lieutenant or "first mate" serves as second-in-command. He assists the captain and carries out orders to the rest of the ship. A captain may have a number of lieutenants, depending on the size of the vessel.



Ship's Master

The ship's master answers to the captain and his lieutenants, but otherwise holds complete command of the ship. The captain gives the master orders, and the master makes sure those orders are carried out. The Master's chief duty, however, is to navigate the ship. The captain of the ship usually assigns this duty to the most experienced sailor on the ship, thus capturing the crew's respect. The ship's master has a number of officers under her direct command, each in charge of duties assigned to the master. They are listed below.

Master's Mate: The master's mate is a sailor training to hold the position of ship's master.

Quartermaster: The quartermaster is directly responsible for organizing the steering of the ship.

Helmsman: Helmsmen are the officers directly in charge of each of the ship's watches. There is at least one helmsman in charge of each watch, depending on the size of the ship.

Purser: The purser manages all the ship's finances, and is responsible for all its cargo and supplies. Anyone who handles the ship's supplies, even the ship's cook, reports to the purser.

Steward: The steward is the purser's assistant.

Cook: A cook prepares the ship's meals.

Boatswain

The boatswain (commonly spelled and pronounced "bosun") is like the ship's sergeant. Whenever the captain makes a decision, he tells it to one of his lieutenants. The lieutenant tells it to the ship's master, who then tells it to the boatswain. Finally, the boatswain then organizes a group of men (called a "mess") to fulfill the order. He is the highest-ranking man on the ship to work with non-officers. More importantly, the boatswain handles the ship's discipline. When men get out of line, the most common punishment is flogging, done with the boatswain's cat-of-nine-tails. A common phrase used by sailors when they get into trouble is to "let the cat out of the bag."

Boatswain's Mate: The boatswain has a number of assistants who call out orders and gain the crew's attention, usually using tin whistles to do so.

Sailmaker: The sailmaker repairs the sails on the ship and makes new sails from the canvas purchased by the purser.

Master of the Tops: The master of the tops is in charge of setting the sails and working the rigging. sailors who work above deck in the rigging are called "topsmen."

Master of the Forecastle: The master of the forecastle is in charge of the front of the ship. Her duties include mooring, sounding the depths and raising and dropping the anchor.

Master-at-Arms: The master-at-arms is in charge of all small weapons (muskets and pistols) aboard the ship and keeps the key to the arms locker.

Gunsmith: The gunsmith repairs the small arms on the ship.

Carpenter: The ship's carpenter is responsible for all repairs, maintenance and modifications made to the ship's wooden parts. The carpenter usually is assigned a carpenter's mate and a cooper (a crewmember who makes and repairs barrels).

Master Gunner

The master gunner (or simply "gunner") fires, maintains and repairs the cannons on the ship. There is only one key to the powder room on the ship, and she has it tied around her neck. The gunner must also be skilled in mathematics to correctly configure the aiming of the cannons. The gunner has only one person under her command: the gunner's mate.

Gunner's Mate: A gunner's mate answers to the master gunner. He is in training to be a master gunner, and while on the ship learns how to measure and mix gunpowder and figure the algebra used to aim the cannons.

Powder Monkeys: Untrained boys who are learning their positions. Powder monkeys are small, fast and good in the dark, ferrying powder from the armory to the various guns.

A PIRATE SHIP'S CREW

Pirate ships have a far less regular retinue of men to draw from than a navy ship. The example Crew detailed here is a ship at its full complement. Pirate ships seldom, if ever, have the hands necessary to fill out a full complement; they have to make do with whatever they can patch together. However, pirate ships almost always have many more master mariners than a standard navy ship, and their men are more willing, ready and able to draw blood.

Surgeon

The ship's surgeon is responsible for the general health and welfare of the crew. Using his knowledge of herbs and medicine, he does his best to keep away scurvy and sickness—not an easy task. He also tends to the crew's wounds. The surgeon has two sailors under his command.

Surgeon's Mate: The surgeon's mate learns the surgeon's duties and assists him in his many duties.

Loblolly Boy: A loblolly boy runs errands for the surgeon and serves as his nurse, keeping watch over wounded and ill sailors and informing the surgeon if their condition changes.

Midshipmen

A midshipman is a sailor training to be an officer. She usually spends her days learning different positions on the ship, testing her capabilities in each duty. She is almost always a veteran sailor with a couple of voyages under her belt.

Master Mariner

A master mariner is a sailor experienced in many positions, but he has not yet reached an officer's rank. Mariners are the most valuable non-specialized sailors on the ship, and usually provide insight and advice to the boatswain.

Able Seaman

An able seaman has one or two voyages under her belt and has gained recognition for her actions.

Ordinary Seaman

Sailors know how to tie knots and not fall overboard.

Superstitions

"Red sky in morning, sailor take warning."

Sailor life is filled with superstition, most of which has a bit of fact hidden within it somewhere. Listed below are just a handful of the thousands of superstitions that haunt a sailor's every waking moment.

Some of these are just legends—stories spun by old salty dogs to haze the new bloods. Some are simple sea lore, easy rhymes and tricks that are useful for a life on the waves. Others, however, are almost certainly true and terrifying.

"Ring around the Moon, rain or snow soon."

A halo around the sun or moon indicates high ice-crystals in the atmosphere. Usually, a lunar or solar halo indicates harsh weather within three days.

"Rainbow in the morning gives you fair warning."

Weather in the middle latitudes travels from west to east and rainbows appear if the viewer's back is to the sun while looking at a rainstorm. Thus, if the sun is in the east, the shower and the rainbow are in the west. Because weather travels from the west to the east in middle latitudes, a rainbow indicates a storm on the way.

"Clear Moon, frost soon."

If the sky is clear and the moon is easily visible, it means the atmosphere is clear and Terra is rapidly cooling. If there is no wind and the temperature has dropped low enough, frost will begin to form on the masts and yards.

"Red sky in morning, sailor take warning."

A red sun indicates the two elements that are essential for rain to occur: dust and moisture. A red sun is a fair warning of foul weather.

Dead Men

Ships almost never carry dead men across the water; it's just inviting bad luck. When a man dies at sea, he's washed, dressed in clean clothes, wrapped up in cloth with irons tied to his legs, and thrown overboard with a respectful prayer. Likewise, when a sailor is reported lost at sea, landlubbers never dig a grave or erect a headstone (or even speak of him as dead) until he's been lost for at least seven years. Digging a grave for a man before he dies is asking for trouble.

Sailors almost never speak of the departed, and when they do, they don't speak of James or Jack, they speak of "Poor James" and "Poor Jack." There is a profound respect for the dead on a ship, chiefly because the sailors know the tales of ghosts and ghost-ships all too well.

Mother Ocean

"What the sea wants, the sea shall have."

Sailors always refer to the water as "Mother Ocean," a sentiment quite similar to the Ussuran mother, "Matushka." The ocean is a jealous, protecting mother and does not like to see her children wasting their time with men and women of low virtue—precisely why taverns are never set on the shore, but away from sight of the sea.

Sailors also know never to tell their wives and loved ones how long they'll be gone, where they are going, or when they'll return. A sailor's life is at the whim of the sea, and once he sets sail all those questions are no longer his to answer. They belong to Mother Ocean.

Likewise, sailors know that men who fall over the side of the ship are being claimed by the ocean, and those who try to save them from Mother Ocean are likely to be claimed, as well. Therefore, many sailors view reaching over the side of the ship to save their brothers as *bad luck*. Of course, saying "many sailors" means there are others who do not share the same superstition and do everything they can to save a sailor thrown overboard. But the risk of saving one sailor is not worth saving two. That's the real lesson here.

Your Ship

The number of ships that sail the waters in and around Théah is impossible to fathom. Between national navies, private vessels, merchant fleets, and pirate ships, there are so many vessels on the water that it is nearly unbelievable.

Yes, many ships sail the seas. But this one is *yours*. If you take care of her, she'll take care of you too. If you treat her with respect, she'll do what she can to protect you as you venture across the hungry ocean. And if you mistreat her, or if you disrespect her, she'll let the sharks tear you limb from limb.

Class

These are the most common ships you find on Théan waters. Your Ship's class doesn't really affect how she works in the game, it just gives you a good idea how your Ship looks and feels.

Brig

A very popular class of ship on the Seven Seas, a brig is a two masted, square-rigged ship. It's smaller than most of the other ships (but larger than a schooner), which makes it faster. It can still carry a bit of a punch, however, carrying anywhere from 10 to 20 guns.

Brigantine

The brigantine is a favorite among pirates because of its speed and maneuverability. Most brigantines are fitted with oars for when the wind dies, making larger ships in the same condition vulnerable.

Carrack

A carrack is a large square-rigged ship originally built by the Vodacce for carrying cargo. It has four masts, a huge hull and is designed for long voyages. Although very large, it has little space for cannons, relying on smaller ships for protection.

Fluyt

A ship very similar to the carrack, the Vestenmennavenjar designed the fluyt for long voyages, completely eliminating cannons in lieu of more space and a smaller Crew. Fluyts are specifically designed with a very shallow pear-shaped draft so they can go up river and also actually dock at port instead of having to anchor in the bay and send in rowboats: an advantage that may seem trivial, but actually saves a great deal of time and energy.

Frigate

A frigate is a small, well-armed military ship designed to take on larger ships using its maneuverability and speed. It has little room for cargo or Crew, packing the men in hammocks on top of each other.

Galleon

The mainstay of the Castillian Armada, the Galleon is one of the largest ships on the waves. Square rigged with three decks and three masts, the Castillians use it primarily for long sea voyages, relying on smaller ships to protect it.

Man-of-War

A man-of-war is a heavily armed ship built for battle, not shipping cargo. Some heavy frigates are considered light man-of-war, but most man-of-war are much larger. Most ships are given feminine names, but the tradition among sailors is to give this class of vessel a masculine name.

Schooner

A schooner is a very small but very fast ship. Because of their size, they can sail in more shallow waters than other ships and can run from a fight when needed.

Ship History

A Ship has an Origin. This is the Nation, region or area of the world where your Ship hailed from during its maiden voyage. Different people have different ideas of the best way to construct a Ship.

Some Origins grant Bonus Dice under certain circumstances. These circumstances are left purposefully vague and up for debate—the GM makes the final call on whether or not a Ship's Origin or Background applies in a given case, but we urge her to be generous. When such a bonus does apply, however, it can only be used by a single Hero at a time.

Origins

Avalon

Ships made in Avalon tend to be smaller and built for speed. Gain two Bonus Dice for any Risks involving speed and maneuverability—such as trying to flat outrun another Ship. If your Ship is from Avalon, it is most likely a brig, brigantine, or schooner.

Castille

Most Castillian Ships are large and square rigged with three decks and three masts. Difficult to take down, but very slow, requiring tons of canvas to move. Your Ship can take an additional Hit before it takes each Critical Hit. Your Ship is probably a galleon or a man-of-war.

Eisen

While Eisen Ships are otherwise unnotable, they do have the most dangerous marines in all of Théah. Your Ship has 5 additional Crew, and your Crew can now divide into up to 3 Squads.

Montaigne

Montaigne Ships have one thing in common: they are all beautiful. They're also usually well armed to protect all that beauty. Your Ship is probably a frigate or a schooner. When making a social Risk (such as negotiating with other Ships), you gain two Bonus Dice.

The Sarmatian Commonwealth

Sarmatia has a very small fleet, and frankly, most of their Ships were "acquired" from other Nations. Gain a bonus Background.

Ussura

Ussura's Ships are designed to be sailed in northern, icy waters and as such they tend to be hardy and strong. In extremely choppy waters, during a storm, while sailing in dangerous waters (such as trying to navigate an icy ocean or through reef-infested waters), or when otherwise under threat by the environment, gain two Bonus Dice.

Vodacce

Vodacce Ships are built for the long haul: four masts, a huge hull. They are merchant vessels designed for sailing to distant lands. Vodacce Ships can carry 3 Cargo (rather than 2).

Vestenmennavenjar

Almost all Vesten Ships are fluyts, designed for long travel, but with more sophisticated sails, reducing the number of Crew needed. When a Vestenmennavenjar Ship raids another vessel for Wealth, it gains all of the other Ship's Wealth rather than half.

Exotic

Your Ship was designed and built outside of Théah, such as the Crescent Empire, Ifri or Cathay. An Exotic Ship always earns one more Wealth whenever it sells foreign goods in Théah, or whenever it sells Théan goods in a foreign port.

Ship Backgrounds

Backgrounds grant Advantages to your Ship, but, more importantly, they inform you about your Ship's epic and unique tale. These are the events in the Ship's past that build a reputation, that contribute to the Crew's pride, that turn your vessel from "just a boat" to "a Ship."

A Ship may only have a specific Background once. For example, you can have Captured by Pirates, Prominent Battle and Round the Horn. But you can't have Captured by Pirates twice. Each Hero who purchases the Married to the Sea Advantage (see page 150) contributes one Background to the Ship's History.

Beyond the Horizon

Your Ship has sailed to the far reaches of the world, and docked in the colorful and distant ports of the New World, Ifri or Cathay. You can spend a Raise or a Hero Point when speaking about the cultures, customs and people of far-away lands. Whoever you are speaking to, they believe you.

Broke the Mirror

Your Ship sailed the frozen waters of the Mirror, something that only the bravest and most heroic Vesten have managed before, and so has earned the honorable title of isabrot, "Icebreaker." You can spend a Raise or a Hero Point when encountering an NPC from Vesten. They respect you, your Ship and her Crew.

Captured by Pirates

Your Ship was captured by pirates and probably sold to another pirate at one of the Brotherhood's friendly ports. Your ship is equipped with smuggling compartments used to hide valuable Cargo (or Crew). When you hide something in your smuggling compartments during a Scene, it cannot be found during that Scene unless the person looking knows exactly where to look (such as if they are a former crewmember, for example—word of mouth is not enough). You can hide a single Cargo in this way. This doesn't give you the ability to transport additional Cargo, only to protect what you have.

Friend of Iskandar

Your Ship has visited the docks of Iskandar, and is a respected and trusted friend of the city, earning the title of "Sadiq Iskandar." You can spend a Raise or a Hero Point when encountering an NPC from the Crescent Empire. They are friendly, until you give them a reason not to be.

Heroic Captain

One of your Ship's Captains had a stellar reputation all across Théah. That reputation passes on to your Crew. You can spend a Raise or a Hero Point when you encounter an NPC sailor, old sea dog, retired naval Captain or similar individual. That NPC had a favorable run-in with your Ship's Captain, and they look favorably upon your Ship and her Crew.

Pirate Hunter

Your Ship was once used to hunt pirates. When your Crew rolls dice against pirates, their 10's Explode.

Prominent Battle

Your Ship survived a horrible battle and has gained a reputation for being able to survive. Your Ship can take 5 Critical Hits before becoming Crippled, instead of 4.

Round the Horn

Your Ship has a small and strange mascot from the Land of Ifri. It could be a small monkey, parrot, runic totem, a custom wheel carved from a special wood or another kind of lucky charm. The Ship has Good Fortune. Once per game, one Hero on the Ship can spend a Hero Point to use the Ship's Good Fortune to re-roll any number of dice in a Risk they just made, so long as they are aboard the Ship.

Swallowed by the Triangle

Your Ship has explored the far waters of the Triangle and shores of the strange land of Kammerra. For a time, your Ship may have been thought lost. You can spend a Raise when you encounter a strange magic, artifact or creature (such as a sea monster, a giant bird or a Kammerran shaman). You can ask the GM a yes or no question about the magic, artifact or creature, and he must answer you honestly.



Adventures

Adventures grant the Heroes bonuses and abilities the first time they do something specific with their Ship during play. An Adventure is not always a positive experience (getting robbed by pirates or running aground on a remote island is rarely pleasant), but the Ship and her Crew learn and grow from the experience.

The first time you, your Ship and her Crew accomplishes an Adventure during play (not in pre-game discussions, not in a talk about what the Heroes do between sessions or over downtime and not in your Ship's Background, but during actual play at the table), your Ship gains a new bonus or ability associated with that Adventure.

The bonus for completing an Adventure is only gained the first time you do something. So the first time you are raided by pirates, your Ship gains "Your Gold or Your Life!" If you are raided by pirates a second time, you don't gain it again.

Remember that the bonuses from Adventures are in addition to whatever the Heroes and the Ship would have gained or lost from the events that lead to the Adventure's occurrence. For example, when you complete "X Marks the Spot," you gain 10 Wealth *in addition to* what you would have gained for finding the buried treasure.

The Adventures listed here are not an exhaustive list, but should serve as a good baseline for how a GM can design their own Adventures and associated rewards. The general rule for what constitutes an Adventure should be that it is either difficult (such as earning 10 Wealth in a single Voyage for the "Gold Drives a Man to Dream" Adventure), interesting and unusual (such as transporting a Fate Witch for the "Tempting Fate" Adventure), or evocative and fun (such as singing a sea shanty for the "Shore Leave" Adventure).

A Jenny in Every Port

Make port in every Nation in Théah. When you make port in a Théan city, any Hero can spend a Raise or a Hero Point. Whatever authority exists in the port (a harbor master, a customs officer, an admiral) knows your Ship and her Crew, and treats you relatively well until you give them a reason not to. This doesn't mean they will let you break the law…but they might let you bend it a little.

A Short and Merry Life
Convince a hostile ship's Crew to join you, through negotiation, coercion or intimidation. Your Crew gains 5 Strength.

Adventurer
Accomplish 5 Adventures. Each Hero gains one of the following Advantages of their choice: Able Drinker, Cast-Iron Stomach or Sea Legs.

Drag Them to Their Doom!
Perform a successful boarding action. The first time each round any of your Crew Squads inflict Wounds on an enemy while at sea, that enemy takes one additional Wound.

Feed the Sea with Ghosts
Defeat 5 Ships in naval combat. The first time each round your Ship fires her cannons at an enemy, that enemy Ship takes an additional Hit.

Gold Drives a Man to Dream
Earn 10 Wealth from selling Cargo in one Voyage. You may carry one additional Cargo on your Ship.

Hot Pursuit
Escape a city with the authorities on your heels. Your Ship's Crew learns how to leave port in a hurry. Your Ship can return to full complement after only 12 hours in port, rather than 24.

"How Long Can You Hold Your Breath?"
Dive a shipwreck, a reef or an underwater cave and retrieve something valuable. Gain 1 Bonus Die for any Risks involving swimming, navigating underwater or holding your breath.

Off the Map
Make port in a city outside of Théah. Gain one Bonus Die in any social Risk against an NPC whose native language is one from outside of Théah.

Saved from the Deep
Rescue a marooned NPC (either lost at sea, on a deserted island, etc.). Add one Strength to your Ship's total Crew.

Shore Leave
Lead your Crew in the singing of a sea shanty during shore leave at a seedy port tavern. Any Hero can spend a Hero Point to return one of your Crew Squads back to full Strength. Only one Hero can activate this benefit per game session.

Tempting Fate
Transport an NPC Fate Witch from one port to another. At the beginning of each game session, each Hero rolls one die. Whichever Hero rolls the highest begins play with an additional Hero Point. Fate favors him. If the highest roll is a tie between two Heroes, no Hero gains an additional Hero Point. Fate can be cruel.

Thanks for the Backup
Save the crew of a sinking ship, when things look their bleakest (fierce storm, sea monster attack, etc). The Captain and Crew of that Ship are now allies and can be relied upon for friendly assistance when needed, earning all Heroes the Connection Advantage (see page 149) with that ship and her Crew.

The Only Good Pirate...
You rendered a Pirate ship Crippled. Pirates have learned to fear your Ship's Crew the hard way. The first time each round you spend a Raise to reduce the Strength of a Pirate Brute Squad, you reduce their Strength by 1 more than you would have normally.

Well Excuse Me, Princess
Transport a member of Théan royalty from one port to another. Due to your success, any NPC with noble blood treats you a little better. Gain one Bonus Die for any social Risks involving noble characters.

X Marks the Spot
Find a buried treasure. Add 10 additional Wealth to your Ship's Treasury.

Your Gold or Your Life!
Your ship was Crippled, you surrendered or you were successfully robbed by pirates. The first time any Hero rolls a Risk versus a Pirate in a game session, all Heroes gain a Hero Point.

Details

Finally, let's fill in the last details about your Ship. Let's talk about Hits, Crew and Cargo.

Hits

A Ship can take 5 Hits before it takes a Critical Hit. A Ship can take 4 Critical Hits before it becomes Crippled.

A Crippled Ship cannot fire her cannons or avoid enemy fire. She is a sitting duck in the water, unable to defend herself. A Crippled Ship is vulnerable to being plundered by an enemy, having her Cargo stolen and her Treasury looted. Her Crew is typically either forced to row or swim ashore and hope for the best, offered a place aboard the victorious Ship's Crew… or executed.

"Her Spirit Lives On…"

A Crippled Ship who takes a Hit has been sunk. The Crew's only recourse at this point is to abandon her and save themselves.

If your Ship is sunk, she can sail again someday even if it's with a new hull. As long as you can retrieve a meaningful memento from your ship and work it into the design of another (the distinct figurehead, the custom-made wheel, etc), you can bestow a new Ship with your old Ship's Backgrounds and Adventures. Only new Ships, who have no Adventures or Backgrounds of their own, can be used in this way.



Crew

A Ship has 10 Crew who can divide into up to 2 Squads. So you could have two Crew Squads at Strength 5 each, or one Squad of Strength 8 and one Squad of Strength 2 or one Squad of Strength 10.

Any Hero can direct the Crew to action, but unlike Heroes an individual Squad can only take a single action each Round, always spending all of its Raises on a single task. If the action the Crew takes is a Risk, they roll dice equal to the Strength of their Squad. For example, if you organize your Crew into a single Squad of 10 Strength, it can take a single action each round and roll 10 dice. If you divide them into 2 Squads, one with Strength 7 and one with Strength 3, each of those Squads can act independently and they roll 7 dice and 3 dice, respectively.

Ilyse von Isane is the First Sword of *The Illuminator*, meaning she leads the Ship's marines in battle. The marines are a Crew Squad of 10 Strength. Ilyse takes her Actions as normal, and at the end of the Round the marines act. Ilyse tells them "Fire the cannons!" Then, Ilyse's player rolls 10 dice (since the marines are Strength 10). The marines get 3 Raises. Because they are a single Squad, they can only take a single action—so they spend all 3 Raises to fire the cannons, inflicting 3 Hits on the enemy Ship.

In a later adventure, the marines of *The Illuminator* are now divided into two Squads of Strength 6 and Strength 4, respectively. Ilyse is busy dueling the Captain of the enemy Ship, so the marines are currently under the direct control of Dougall, Captain of *The Illuminator*. Dougall takes his Actions as normal, and at the end of the Round the marines act. Dougall tells the first Squad "Fight the enemy crew!" This Squad rolls 6 dice (since they are Strength 6) and earns two Raises. They spend both of those Raises to deal Wounds to the enemy Crew. Dougall tells the second Squad "Shoot your guns at the enemy Captain to help Ilyse!" The Squad rolls 4 dice (since they are also Strength 4) and earns one Raise. They spend their Raise to deal a Wound to the enemy Captain.

Each Wound that a Squad takes reduces its Strength by 1 as the members of your Crew are injured, killed, subdued, thrown overboard or otherwise rendered unable to act. Whenever you make port for at least 24 hours, you can replenish any lost Crew, return to full complement and reorganize your Crew Squads.

Cargo

A Ship can carry 2 Cargo. Transporting Cargo from one port to another earns the Ship 1 Wealth Point per Cargo successfully transported. If you transport Cargo a particularly long distance (say from Théah to the Crescent Empire), each Cargo earns an additional Wealth point. If your Cargo is particularly valuable to the people you are transporting to (if you are bringing rare Cathay spices back to sell to the nobles of Vodacce, for example), each Cargo earns an additional Wealth point. These additional points stack.

The Black Dawn carries 2 Cargo, leaving Avalon for Iskandar. The Cargo, in this case, is Inish whiskey and Castillian silk. The GM tells the Crew: "The whiskey is in demand because liquor is illegal in Iskandar."

When the Black Dawn arrives, it gains:

2 Wealth for its two Cargo

2 Wealth for a distant port

1 Wealth for "in demand" Cargo (whiskey)

That's a total of 5 Wealth for the trip.

By the way, the Crew had to hide the illegal whiskey in their smuggling compartments so the Iskandar officials couldn't find it. Something along the lines of...

GM: "Your Inish Whiskey is illegal, so to get it past customs you'll need to make a Risk."

Player: "Can I just put the Whiskey in our smuggling compartment?"

GM: "Yeah, that works. Alright, moving on..."

Whenever you make port for at least 24 hours, you can sell off or acquire new Cargo.

Dividing the Wealth

When the Crew earns Wealth, they bank it in the Ship's **Treasury**. The Captain (typically) decides how to divide it up. A wise Captain will make sure his Crew gets paid, or risk Mutiny. At the end of each game session, the Wealth contained in the Ship's Treasury is halved, round down. This represents the cost of upkeep and repairs, provisions, and payment of the (non-Hero) Crew.

If the Captain doesn't pay his Crew at the end of a game session (either because he chooses not to halve his Ship's Treasury, or the Treasury is empty), the Crew becomes **Mutinous**. A Ship whose Crew is Mutinous imposes a 2 dice penalty on all Risks taken aboard, loses any die bonuses from Origins or Backgrounds or Adventures (see above), and her available Crew is reduced by half its total due to desertion and general poor morale.

A Mutinous Crew who receives payment at the end of a game session returns to normal status at the beginning of the next game session. Failure to pay a Mutinous Crew results in—surprise!—Mutiny. The Ship's Crew abandons her (meaning she can't sail and has no Crew Squads), they steal any Cargo the Ship was carrying, and they may even abduct the Captain or officers, or take other drastic action. A Captain who doesn't pay his Crew demonstrates he doesn't respect his Crew, and such a Captain deserves no respect in turn.

Extreme circumstances may, in rare instances, delay or prevent a Crew from becoming Mutinous. Such circumstances are always at the GM's discretion, but a GM should never reward a Captain's greed or neglect.

Raiding

A Ship successfully raided by pirates (by taking enough Critical Hits to render her Crippled, having her Crew defeated, or surrendering) loses all its Cargo and half the Wealth in its Treasury. Sometimes a Captain will negotiate a surrender or offer tribute in return for going unmolested. Under these circumstances, the amount of Wealth and any Cargo that are lost are a matter of negotiation.



Ship Battles

A **Ship Battle** is just like any other Action Sequence. The Ship's watch spies an enemy in the glass, the officer of the watch calls for general quarters and the GM asks the players for their Heroes' Approach. The Sequence has Consequences for the Heroes to negate and Opportunities to jump on. When players use all their Raises, the GM determines whether or not to continue the Action Sequence.

Step 1: Approach

Just like a normal Action Sequence, players describe their Approach for the Round. For players who are not familiar with naval combat, here are some suggestions:

Fire the Cannons: Heroes can fire cannons at the enemy ship, hoping to damage it enough to sink her, force her surrender or cripple her enough for a boarding action. Firing the Ship's cannons can be a Brawn Risk (they're pretty damn heavy, even on wheels) or a Wits Risk (getting the angle right is a matter of mathematics and timing). Heroes could even use Panache to command the Crew or Resolve to keep cool under fire. Finesse could be used for reloading quickly.

Man the Sails: "Going aloft" gives the Heroes an opportunity to put the Ship out of range of the enemy's cannons and grappling hooks. Up in the lines, Finesse is probably the most important Trait, but keeping hold of the ship while sharpshooters from the enemy Ship take pot shots at you requires a bit of Resolve.

The Bilge Crew: The Bilge Crew remains below, doing repairs to the Ship during combat, patching holes, and making sure she doesn't sink. This requires activity such as pounding canvas over holes below the line (under the water), manning the pumps and re-aligning cannons knocked around during a heavy round of fire. Resolve is often key for the Bilge Crew, as their job requires them to plunge into areas of the Ship that less brave sailors would refuse.

Doctor's Crew: A Hero could assist the Ship's doctor (if it has one) dealing with the injured Crew. Here, Wits are key to saving limbs and lives.

Boarding Party: Ships have to get close enough for grapples, but once they do, sailors can go face-to-face. Heroes can use Brawn to pull the other Ship in or Finesse to leap from yard arm to yard arm. Or Panache to take command of a boarding Crew (Brute Squad).

Step 2: Consequences & Opportunities

Having determined your Actions, the GM now tells you the Consequences and Opportunities.

Most times, the Consequences of engaging an enemy Ship are Wounds from the cannons. But your own Ship can take Hits and Critical Hits—the equivalent of Hero Wounds and Dramatic Wounds. You can spend Raises to prevent those.

The Enemy Ship can also target key parts of your own Ship. She can fire at the rudder (meaning the Ship can't turn), aim at the main mast with chain shot (meaning she can't move at all) or even target the Crew with grape shot. If you don't prevent these Consequences, your Ship could lose maneuverability, speed or valuable crewmembers when the inevitable boarding action occurs.

Meanwhile, the Sequence may have Opportunities. You may have a shot at the Enemy Ship's main mast or rudder, get into position to "cross the T" or take potshots from the rigging. If you don't take advantage of these Opportunities, they're lost.

Step 3: Gather Dice

The GM tells you which combination of Trait and Skill to use. Add your Trait Rank plus your Skill Rank for your Risk Pool. This is the number of dice you roll to overcome the Risk.

Step 4: Roll & Raises

After you roll, use your dice to create Raises. Just like any other Action Sequence.

Step 5: Spend Raises

You spend Raises to take Actions, overcome the Consequences, take advantage of Opportunities, create Opportunities for other Heroes and Inflict Wounds.

Sea Monsters

Of course, other ships aren't the worst thing a crew can encounter while sailing. There are larger things. Meaner things. Monsters.

If your ship has the misfortune to encounter one of these beasts of the deep (perhaps equipped with tentacles and a beak that can cut a man in two with a single snap), your crew can attempt to put up a fight instead of resigning themselves to greeting the Devil Jonah at the bottom of the sea. A particularly industrious and foolhardy crew may even seek such creatures out to study their nature or hunt them for wealth and glory.

A battle with a sea monster—from the deck of your Ship—is like any other Action Sequence against a Monster. The creature may exhibit any number of Monstrous Qualities (see page 197) or Qualities of Ships (such as spawn that cling to their skin and act as a Crew Squad). Like Ships, sea monsters tend to ignore Wounds in favor of Hits and Critical Hits.

On the Same Boat

The life of a sailor isn't easy. Working all day, trying to sleep through storms, under fire from pirates, sickness, drowning, heat exhaustion, dehydration and freezing cold. The worst part of all of it: there's nowhere to go. You're on the ship. Along with other sailors.

You are, quite literally, all on the same boat.

Being on a ship builds camaraderie among sailors. Spend two years at sea with someone and you're kin. Sailors will do amazing things to protect shipmates. Make incredible sacrifices. Remember that. Because a ship isn't just a bunch of numbers and words. A ship isn't the wood or the sails or the cannons. A ship's heart and soul is its crew. And every single one of them has a name.





Chapter 8

Secret Societies



SECRET SOCIETIES

While Kings and Queens govern the lands under their jurisdiction, secret societies do not recognize borders, operating where they please, both in the public eye and away from it. These are some of the most powerful organizations in the world. Deal with them at your own risk.

Joining a Secret Society

Membership in a Secret Society comes with many benefits, but also burdens you with great responsibility. You are a steward for the people of Théah, and you strive to make it a better place. Societies differ on what they believe is the best way to do this, or which issues matter the most, but all of them seek to guide the Nations of Théah and her people to what they believe will be a better, brighter future.

In general, what the Societies want from their membership is always the same. They want their members to do what ordinary citizens can't. In return, they grant favors to their members in good standing and function as a network of like-minded individuals who are often willing, if not eager, to aid one another.

A Hero can join any Secret Society that they have made contact with, either during play or in their background. This costs nothing (no Skill points or Advantage points, no Story advancement) aside from loyalty—a Hero can only join a single Society. One cannot serve two masters, and all of the Societies of Théah highly value loyalty from their agents. If a Hero wishes to change their membership in a Secret Society—or switch to another—they lose all pull with the Society. A Hero who has left a Secret Society and encounters that Society's members is likely to be treated coldly—nobody likes a turncoat—but they are unlikely to react with violence so long as the Hero left the Society on decent terms (she wasn't declared a traitor, she continues to honor the Society's secrets, she didn't steal relics or abandon a fellow agent, etc.).

Favor

When you join a Secret Society, you gain Favor. Favor represents the faith the Society has in you and the resources you can draw from. Resources could include bodyguards, rare items, pulling political strings, or simply cash. Furthering a Society's agenda earns you Favor with them. In contrast, if you want a Society to help you, you spend Favor.

Earning Favor

All Societies have shared interests. A member of any Secret Society can perform any of the following actions to earn Favor with his Society.

Selling Information that is of interest to the Society is worth 2 Favor. Information of this type is not commonly known but not a closely guarded secret, such as a merchant's previous failed businesses or the name of a privateer's wife.

Aiding an Agent of the society, by saving him from danger or helping him accomplish a mission, is worth 4 Favor.

Selling a Secret that is of interest to the Society is worth 6 Favor. Information of this type is a closely guarded secret, such as the secret bastard son of the Count or the identity of an Inquisition assassin.

Spending Favor

Secret Societies have many resources at their disposal. They are all willing to aid friends and agents in their employ in the following ways.

Buying Information that the Society possesses costs 1 Favor. Information of this type is not commonly known but not a closely guarded secret, such as a merchant's previous failed businesses or the name of a privateer's wife.

Requesting an Agent of the Society to save you from danger or help you accomplish a mission costs 3 Favor. Agents of a Secret Society who are dispatched in this capacity are typically Strength 6, meaning they always roll 6 dice for Risks and can take 6 Wounds before they take a Dramatic Wound. A more skilled Agent is likely to cost more Favor (GM discretion).

Buying a Secret that the Society possesses costs 5 Favor. Information of this type is a closely guarded secret, such as the secret bastard son of the Count or the identity of an Inquisition assassin.

The Flow of Favor

You may notice that selling something to a Society gives you more than it will charge you for equivalent information or service. This is intentional—a Society's primary interest is in building up good relationships and a network of potential agents across Théah. The best way to do this is to make your allies feel like you are treating them well. You can't put a price on goodwill.

This also means that a Society will always look favorably upon an ally or agent who deals with it on equal terms, and that agent will always have a "net gain" of Favor. A Society is much more likely to respond to a call for aid from a long-time agent who has always treated it well, and it trusts that the reverse is true.

Societies also deal in good faith, and expect the same of their agents and allies. A Society should never try to "nickel and dime" an agent by piecing out information or aid into small, individually useless chunks. Likewise, an agent who shares tiny bits of information over and over to try and earn more and more Favor is likely to find that his Society will grow tired of being toyed with.

A member of a Society who betrays them or their allies to an enemy is branded a traitor. A traitor is never to be trusted again, and is treated with disregard or contempt at best, and violence most typically.

"But What if I Want to..."

The needs of Heroes and the needs of a Secret Society are always in flux, changing to suit their current agendas. Writing an exhaustive list of everything that a Hero may want out of her Society, or that a Society may want out of its membership, is nearly impossible. This list, and those that follow, are guidelines intended to inform the GM and give her a starting point.

Basically, just because it isn't on the list doesn't mean that your Society won't do it. But it'll probably cost you…

The Brotherhood of the Coast

The Brotherhood has many ships, each with its own captain. Queen Bonaventura's ship, La Dama Roja, is one among the fleet who prey on ships sailing to or from Montaigne, Castille, Vodacce and the New World.

When it comes to organization, the Brotherhood is a paradox. On one hand, their credo enshrines freedom, but on the other they are bound by a charter that none of them dares break.

Their charter—written by the First Captains and signed by every member of the Brotherhood—is a strict code of conduct followed by every soul aboard a Brotherhood ship. Sailors who meet a ship flying a Brotherhood flag know that if they give up without a fight, they will not be harmed; when they see the flag of the Brotherhood, they often surrender. Those who do not surrender face ships crewed by some of the most experienced sailors on the waves.

The Brotherhood's Charter

I. Every hand to have a vote in the affairs; equal title to the provisions and liquors, and may use them at pleasure, unless scarcity makes it necessary to vote to a rationing.

II. Every hand to be called fairly in turn, by list, on board for duty.

III. If any defraud the Brotherhood to the value of a Guilder in plunder, marooning shall be his punishment.

IV. No person to game at cards or dice for money.

V. All souls aboard a captured ship shall be set free and determine among themselves, by vote, the course they set once their hull is plundered.

VI. No member of a crew is to be harmed if she surrendered without violence.

VII. Every hand to keep his piece, pistols and cutlass clean and fit for service.

VIII. To desert the ship or their quarters in battle is punished with death or marooning.

IX. No striking one another on board, but every hand's quarrels to be ended ashore with sword and pistol.

X. If in service to the Brotherhood any hand should lose a limb, or become cripple, he should have 600 Guilders, or 500 Guilders for limb, or 100 Guilders for an eye or finger.

Favor with the Brotherhood

The Brotherhood primarily concerns itself with gold. Politics typically don't interest it, and the machinations of the nations of Théah are only important to it when they involve large amounts of Guilders that Brotherhood ships seek to plunder.

A Hero who belongs to the Brotherhood can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Selling information that leads to a ship the Brotherhood can plunder earns an additional Favor (3 Favor total). The Brotherhood will also pay 1 Wealth from the ship's spoils.
- Aiding an Agent of the Brotherhood of the Coast in capturing a prize (a ship of value, or one that carries significant plunder) earns two shares of the prize, in addition to the normal Favor gains. This typically results in at least 2 Wealth, and can pay out more.

A Hero who belongs to the Brotherhood can call upon it for aid in the following ways.

- Smuggle items into or out of a secured area, past an enemy blockade or similar secret action for 4 Favor. Smuggling something or someone only means that the Brotherhood will do what it can to get it to port—once it leaves the Brotherhood's ship, it's no longer its problem. If you want to smuggle something or someone out of a city, the Brotherhood will drop it off at a reasonable next safe port.
- Blockade a sea pass with Brotherhood ships for 7 Favor. Blockading doesn't absolutely guarantee that people and goods can't get through, but it definitely makes it significantly harder and more dangerous to do so. The Brotherhood will blockade an area for approximately a week for this favor, but may be willing to stay longer if the plunder turns out to be worth its while.

Die Kreuzritter

"We marched south, believing that all demons came from the Crescent Empire or Ifri. When we only found other men we returned, only to find demons living in our homes."

Over five hundred years ago a small band of brave Eisen men and women built a small fort at the edge of the Wälder. The forest was known to be the birthing ground for the most evil of creatures and the blackest of magics. Over time this small fort grew into a village and—with the aid of the Vaticine Church—the Knightly Order of the Rose & Cross established a small guild dedicated to the protection of Eisen from whatever crawled out of the forest.

This guild, not officially part of any order or fraternity, had no name in the early days. It would one day be known as Die Kreuzritter, The Crusaders, but before that it was only known by its symbol, a white star on a black background. A motif so powerful that it inspired the villagers to call their settlement the Stern, or the Star.

Over time this hodgepodge guild expanded and its connections to the Vaticine Church grew strained. Until finally, in 1128, the Imperator of the guild, a devoutly Vaticine man, convinced the guild to march south. The Church believed that the demons of the Wälder came from a land known as the Crescent Empire and if the people of Stern ever wanted peace they would need to root out the creatures lair.

Except when they arrived, there were no demons, only men and women. Their Imperator claimed that they had not traveled far enough. That demons must come from Ifri and they marched further south. This time when they found only men and women, the Imperator claimed that demons must come from the east, from Cathay. Except the guild didn't believe him. Turning on their Imperator, the men and women under his command marched home with their new allies: agents from far-away lands.

Except the home they returned to was not the one they left. In their absence, Stern was overrun by monsters and the Vaticine Inquisition stepped in. The crusaders had been branded traitors; the Inquisition claimed they marched on an unsanctioned Crusade, abandoning Eisen itself to the Horrors. Their Imperator had never intended for them to return from their quest. The guild was intentionally lead from its home so that the Inquisition could take its place.

Knowing they would never survive an open conflict with the Church, Die Kreuzritter vanished into the shadows, armed with immense experience and unique knowledge. They decided to live in the darkness and protect others from the monsters that lived there. They may have been branded traitors and heretics, their friends and family might revile them, but they knew the truth. That there were real monsters out there. Creatures beyond the ken of mere Théans. They vowed to never be used as a tool of politics or religion but to protect the innocent. To be a star shining true against the darkness.

Favor with Die Kreuzritter

Die Kreuzritter primarily concerns itself with inhuman monsters and dark magic. Information regarding a strange monster's weakness, proof that the Baron is secretly a necromancer, or the location of a sword that turns the walking dead into dust is likely to be of great interest to them.

A Hero who belongs to Die Kreuzritter can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Selling information about a monster, a dark sorcerer or a cursed or dark artifact earns 2 additional Favor (for a total of 4 Favor) after the creature is destroyed, the sorcerer is defeated, or the artifact is claimed or destroyed by Die Kreuzritter agents.
- Acquiring dracheneisen gains you 10 Favor. Dracheneisen is the most effective weapon against Monsters. The more the Order gains, the easier their job becomes.

A Hero who belongs to Die Kreuzritter can call upon them for aid in the following ways.

- Access to a reliquary costs 4 Favor. A Kreuzritter reliquary contains dangerous magical artifacts that either the order could not destroy or it chose to keep in case of a future need. Accessing a reliquary allows

access to a relic belonging to the order, typically a dracheneisen weapon, that they will loan to their trusted agent for one mission (usually a few Scenes, but no longer than an Episode). An agent is expected to return the relic to the order once her mission is complete, and refusal to do so can result in the agent being declared a traitor.

- A dracheneisen weapon's location costs 9 Favor. The Order does not simply hand their agent a blade—they are too valuable and rare for that. They will, however, share a blade's location and assist their agent in acquiring it. You gain a special Story—"Dracheneisen Seeker"—that rewards you with a dracheneisen blade upon completion. The "Dracheneisen Seeker" story must be at least 10 steps long and will involve a great deal of danger. Die Kreuzritter will gladly allow a trusted agent to carry and wield a dracheneisen weapon acquired in this way, so long as that agent remains a member of the Order.



DRACHENEISEN

Dracheneisen is not easy to acquire. Die Kreuzritter has the lion's share of it; the rest is held in private collections or was lost during the War of the Cross.

Under normal circumstances, no character may start the game with a dracheneisen item. There is no Background nor Advantage that has dracheneisen as a starting item. If a Hero acquires dracheneisen through the course of a story, he should know Die Kreuzritter will be on the lookout for him. The Order is very clear on this matter: nobody can be trusted with such a powerful artifact except their own knights.

Dracheneisen is perhaps the most rare material in the world. The means to create it has been lost and most dracheneisen items were stolen during the War of the Cross. Now, they sit in private collections, gathering dust. But the fact of the matter is, dracheneisen is the most effective weapon against Monsters—unholy and otherwise.

Dracheneisen weapons are usually melee weapons (typically swords, but other weapon types are not unknown), and are never firearms or ammunition. Jewelry, pendants, and rings are rare but they do exist. All dracheneisen items function normally for an item of their type, and also have the following qualities.

Short of dropping it into a volcano or a similar level of extreme destruction, all dracheneisen items are indestructible. A dracheneisen item could eventually cut through stone with the same time and effort a steel weapon could cut through wood.

Dracheneisen glows with a white aura when a monster approaches within 30'.

If a dracheneisen item is presented strongly in the presence of a Monster, to gain the benefit of one Danger Point, a Monster must spend two Danger Points. If the item somehow leaves the scene (thrown out a window or down a well), the benefit is lost.

Weapons made from dracheneisen are particularly dangerous to monsters and sorcerers. A dracheneisen weapon causes 1 additional Wound when it strikes a character with a Sorcery Advantage or a Monster Quality.

The Explorer's Society

Founded in 1598 by Leandra Souza, a Castillian scholar from the province of Odiseo, the Explorer's Society has been the at the forefront of archæological research and discovery for almost nine years. It has unearthed sites of Syrneth cities, catalogued nearly five hundred individual artifacts, and maintained the largest library of maps in Théah. Members openly display their affiliation with the Society, wearing silver pins and rings that display the magnetic compass with pride.

The Society has captured the imagination of the public, and its fame rivals even that of the Knights of the Rose & Cross; many plays and novelettes have been written with Society members as main characters.

Souza founded the Society to discourage "diggers"—men and women raiding Syrneth cities and stealing the artifacts to sell to nobles. The Society is much more concerned with categorizing and studying artifacts than selling them. The long, heavy leather coats worn by Society members are often called "digger coats," a title the Explorers could live without.

Strangely enough, the strongest opponents of the Explorer's Society are members of the Vaticine Church. The Third Prophet denounced exploring the Syrneth ruins, saying such activity led to corruption of the soul. While some Cardinals have come to the Society's defense, the Church's stance has remained unbending: "such activity is heretical and will be punished if need be with death." Since this proclamation, the Society has gone underground, keeping its activities secret.

The current headquarters of the Society is in the Odiseo city of Lisso. Regional headquarters can be found in Montaigne, Vendel, and the Eisen city of Freiburg. Members must give hospitality to any member who asks for it—including sanctuary from Church officials if it should become necessary. The Society has stations all over Théah and in other continents as well, including Ifri, the Crescent Empire and the distant continent Théans are calling "the New World."

Favor with the Explorer's Society

The Explorer's Society primarily concerns itself with the ancient ruins of Numa and Syrneth, as well as any texts, notes, or artifacts from such places. The Explorer's Society craves knowledge of the past so that it can be studied in order to better our future.

A Hero who belongs to the Explorer's Society can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Acquiring a relic or lost knowledge is worth 4 Favor, if that knowledge or relic is turned over or shared with the Explorer's Society for study. Such knowledge could be the forgotten formula for Numanari concrete or the research notes of a deceased archeologist.
- Finding a Syrneth or Numanari ruin and then informing the Explorer's Society is worth 5 Favor. The Explorer's Society values relics, but more importantly it values knowledge—and the true source of that knowledge are the ruins of Syrneth and ancient Numa.

A Hero who belongs to the Explorer's Society can call upon it for aid in the following ways.

- Access to a reliquary costs 3 Favor. An Explorer's Society reliquary contains rare magical artifacts that Explorer's Society agents have recovered from their expeditions across Théah. Such a relic functions similarly to a Signature Item, although the effects of a particular relic are at the GM's discretion. An agent is expected to return the relic to the reliquary once his mission is complete, and refusal to do so can result in the agent being declared a traitor.
- Access to an Explorer Society dig costs 2 Favor. This means that an Explorer Society member who isn't supposed to be on site can be, but probably still wouldn't be allowed to remove any relics or artifacts—outside of extreme circumstances, at least.

The Invisible College

For nearly one thousand years the universities of the Vaticine Church have searched for answers to Theus' riddles. The tools and techniques they developed have brought incredible discoveries in science and technology, leaps that another culture—with slightly different circumstances—may not have made.

When the recent troubles with the Inquisition began, the push for scientific research fell by the wayside. Funding for many smaller universities was cut off, and professors were dropped from the larger schools. Yet, none could believe that the Inquisition would dare go further.

The High Inquisitor, Esteban Verdugo, proved them all wrong, directly bringing the Inquisition into the sacred halls of learning. As the Church reels from the death of the Hierophant and the Cardinals attempt to keep things in order, scientific advancement has never been more vulnerable.

Verdugo's Inquisition has called for all scientific research to cease and all experimentation to come to a complete stop.

As Verdugo himself preaches: "The time of the Fourth Prophet is here. It is not time to research this world; it is time to prepare for the next." He will not tempt Theus' wrath because "scholars" wish to keep prying into the Creator's secrets. Those who have ignored his commands have found themselves on the end of a rope or tied to a burning stake.

Church leaders are too preoccupied with the Montaigne invasion (and the lack of a Hierophant) to worry about Verdugo's crusade, a sad fact for Vaticine scholars. But despite the watchful gaze of the Inquisition, research goes on, even if it must be veiled in secrecy.

Calling themselves "the Invisible College," these hidden scholars do their best to continue experiments while dodging the discerning Inquisition. However, without Church funding or resources, their experiments cannot go far. Therefore, they have used their own assets and the investments of others to continue their work. They have also created an underground system of communication, passing on the data, facts and evidence they gain to others within the College.

So far, Verdugo has not learned the identities of any of the members, and the only papers he has confiscated are written in a complicated code he has not yet been able to decipher. The members know each other only by pseudonyms and each knows only two others. Verdugo estimates that there may be as many as two dozen members of the Invisible College, but since the members themselves are uncertain of the true number, who can say how many scientists and scholars may be included?

Favor with the Invisible College

The Invisible College primarily concerns itself with gathering and transferring information to others, scientific discovery and restoring the Church to its former glory.

A Hero who belongs to the Invisible College can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Selling information or secrets is always worth at least 1 additional Favor if the information or secret is related to the Inquisition, their activities, or their agents.
- Saving important scientific knowledge from destruction is worth 6 Favor if that knowledge is then shared with the Invisible College.

A Hero who belongs to the Invisible College can call upon it for aid in the following ways.

- Passing a message through the Invisible College's information network costs 1 Favor. A member can reliably get a message—or small package—almost anywhere in Théah by passing it through the College's hands.
- Buying a dangerous secret costs 5 Favor. The Invisible College cares little for the political machinations of Théan nobles. No, the secrets of the Invisible College are things like the alchemical formula for an advanced and much more explosive form of gunpowder, the recipe for a highly potent poison (and its antidote) or the location of a secret Church library containing a controversial tome that is rumored to be written by the Prophet himself.

Knights of the Rose & Cross

"Just as wicked men will stop at nothing to do evil, so should just men stop at nothing to do right."
— *Rosenkreuz*

The Rose & Cross is one of Théah's strangest secret societies...chiefly because it is not secret at all. In fact, so much folklore and legend have sprung up around this "secret society" that it is difficult to discern fact from fiction.

The Knightly Order of the Rose & Cross is a "gentle's society" devoted to meting out justice, righting wrongs, and protecting those who cannot protect themselves. Many Knights are the fifth- or sixth-born of noble lords with few prospects. They join the Knights in order to gain a reputation for themselves or to attract the wandering eye of rich nobles' sons and daughters.

The Order's chapter houses are scattered throughout Théah, and their doors are open to any who hold a membership. Some noblemen purchase nominal memberships in order to support the Order's cause (and to claim membership in the most famous order of knights in the world). The headquarters of the Order is in Montaigne, in the city of Crieux. The leader of the Order is Aristide Baveux, whom one Church official has called "the most beloved man in all of Montaigne." He has proven a great asset to the Order, furthering its influence and gaining it prestige in almost every court in Théah. Currently, l'Empereur of Montaigne can count five Knights in his entourage of bodyguards.

Joining the Order is no easy task. Those with heavy purses may purchase honorary positions, but may not refer to themselves as Knights. Instead, they are called "Benefactors," though they are treated with high regard by the Knights they support. Actual Knights must undergo three years of service to the Order, serving the Knighthood without question, venturing on quests and duties that only a madman would undertake. However, if they prove themselves worthy, they are allowed to wear the Seal of the Rose & Cross and call themselves "Knight."

The Order is highly structured, with Knights gaining position and favor within the organization through acts of valor, selfless courage and generosity.

Favor with the Knights of the Rose & Cross

The Knights of the Rose & Cross primarily concern themselves with acts of derring-do, protecting those who can't protect themselves and acting as a moral example for others.

A Hero who belongs to the Rose & Cross can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Recruiting a new Benefactor to the Rose & Cross is worth 4 Favor. It takes more than just deep pockets to qualify as a Benefactor, however—a prospective candidate must have a reputation for responsibility and caring for those under their protection.
- Go on a heroic Quest for the Rose & Cross. A Quest is a Story: a task the Order requests from you. If you finish the Quest, in addition to normal Story rewards, you gain Favor equal to the Steps in the Story.

A Hero who belongs to the Rose & Cross can call upon them for aid in the following ways.

- Financial or material support from a Benefactor costs 1 Favor per 1 Wealth point. This is not an endless piggy-bank, however—particularly large sums of money (more than 5 Wealth, for example) are likely to draw attention and may require the Knight to perform some additional service to keep their Benefactor safe and secure.



Los Vagabundos

"Protect one and you protect one thousand."
— El Vagabundo

What began as a covert revolution in Castille has spread across Théah. A masked figure known as "El Vagabundo" (The Vagabond) arose during Castille's darkest hour, protecting the young King from danger. Since his first appearance, his legend has spread.

An attempt on Queen Elaine's life in Avalon was thwarted by a masked figure in purple. In Vestenmennavenjar, Jarl Auley Balderson nearly lost his life to treacherous bodyguards before the arrival of a figure bearing a strong resemblance to El Vagabundo. (Some outside Castille refer to the hero as "El Vago," an incorrect translation. Nevertheless, some foreigners still maintain the malapropism.)

This clandestine organization, which began as Castillian patriots, works to protect the "goodly crowns" of Théah. Their mission is simple: monarchs hold incredible power, and if a hero wears the crown, the people will thrive. If a villain wears the crown, the people will suffer. Los Vagabundos do what they can to protect goodly crowns and overthrow corrupt ones. Los Vagabundos work in secrecy and never reveal their true identity, for Théah is awash in potential enemies. Their numbers are small, but prominently placed; they have sympathizers in the highest avenues of power.

Not all agents serve under the mask. Most serve the organization in different ways: as spies, informants, and anonymous agents. While some outside the organization may wear masks pretending to be El Vagabundo, no agent dons a counterfeit mask: to do so would dishonor the real ones.

Favor with Los Vagabundos

Los Vagabundos are vigilantes through and through. They concern themselves with injustice, regardless of who the victim is. Remember, however, that injustice is not always the same as crime—stealing might be acceptable, if the man who is being robbed deserves it or is corrupt himself.

WHO WEARS THE MASK?

The secret is simple: there is no El Vagabundo. There are many Vagabundos. This is not a publicly known secret, although a few suspect it must be the case. In fact, there are five individuals who wear the mask. Only five. That is because there are only five masks and each bestows incredible power on those who wear them. But that power demands much. For some, too much. Only the most trusted agents are allowed to wear the mask, and when they do, they seem to gain great power but lose their identity. When they remove the mask, the memories of their actions are like dim dreams, easily forgotten.

A Hero who belongs to Los Vagabundos can earn Favor in the following ways

- Saving a Heroic noble from a Villain is worth 4 Favor. Los Vagabundos believe that a good king is worth protecting.
- Defeating a Villainous noble is worth 8 Favor. Los Vagabundos believe that the nobility have a responsibility to those under their protection, and to betray that responsibility is to betray all of mankind.

A Hero who belongs to Los Vagabundos can call upon them for aid in the following ways.

- Donning the Mask costs 10 Favor. While wearing the Mask of El Vagabundo, you gain 1 additional Rank in all Traits and all Skills, but you cannot activate your Virtue or gain Hero Points from your Hubris or Quirks—you are no longer yourself, you are El Vagabundo. You may still gain Hero Points from other sources, such as the GM buying unused dice from you during a Risk.
- Requesting the aid of an agent of Los Vagabundos costs 3 Favor. Los Vagabundos are primarily lone operatives, and because of this they are, typically, more skilled than individuals of other Secret Societies. An agent of Los Vagabundos is always +2 Strength more than an agent from another Society.

Močiutės Skara

The phrase is Curonian for "grandmother's shawl" (moi-choo-tay skah-rah). The group began in Curonia (the eastern part of the Commonwealth) during the War of the Cross. A group of women crossed the border into Ussura to help the widows and orphans of the war, bringing blankets, food, fresh water and anything else they could carry. Through the rest of the war, their little band grew, eventually becoming a movement.

Although the war is over, the Shawl's movement is not. The Shawl has no formal structure. No hierarchy. No officers and no dues. No requirements for membership. The only real requirement is compassion and a desire to help others. When disasters strike, the Shawl is there. Ready to give aid and comfort to all who need it. These are the people who run toward danger. Who run into the fire. Not to fight, but to rescue. They are bakers and cooks, wives and widows, clergymen and laymen alike. And in places like Eisen, they've even protected "monsters" from fire and pitchforks.

That's the Shawl, united in a single purpose. To aid, whoever may need it.

The Shawl's second agenda is much more international: they work to stop wars. This goal has been a recent development in the organization as more Heroic figures have joined. Rather than only taking a reactive stance—responding to disasters—agents of the Shawl use covert means to delay, stall and eliminate the possibility of another War of the Cross.

To be clear, agents of the Shawl are not pacifists. They understand that violence is sometimes necessary to stop a full-scale war, but they do their best to use peaceful means rather than violent ones. Sabotage and blackmail are perfectly valid means…so long as another horror like the War of the Cross doesn't sweep across Théah, making an entire generation a generation of orphans.

Favor with Močiutės Skara

Močiutės Skara primarily concerns itself with war and disaster relief. Anywhere people suffer, go hungry, or have no clean water, the Shawl does everything it can to go there with doctors, food and warm blankets.

A Hero who belongs to Močiutės Skara can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Providing food, water or medical relief to a community in need is worth 5 Favor. The Shawl cares nothing for borders, wars or the dominion of Théan nobility. They seek to end the suffering of those in need, no matter what colors they wear.
- Preventing an army from going to battle is worth 10 Favor. The Shawl doesn't care how this is accomplished—you can steal the army's provisions, you can negotiate a peace treaty, you can kidnap the general. All that matters is that young soldiers are not forced to march out onto a field and murder one another by the hundreds.

A Hero who belongs to Močiutės Skara can call upon it for aid in the following ways.

- Purchase information, request an agent or purchase a secret from any other Society. The Shawl is unique in that they are the only Secret Society who all other Societies seem to look favorably upon, and will grant their agents aid. While this does not grant access to restricted and special information or materials (Die Kreuzritter won't give you a dracheneisen blade, no matter how much they like you), it does mean that the Shawl, as a side effect of this working relationship, have the best support network in all of Théah.

Rilasciare

The Rilasciare are one of the most clandestine organizations in Théah. With no real hierarchy, no true leader, it is also the most disorganized and chaotic. But that is exactly how they want it.

Its enigmatic creator—a mysterious figure named "Uppman"—established the order some time in the distant past. Some say it was as long ago as the old Numan Republic. Others say it was only a decade ago. The stories about Uppman and his first followers are contradictory urban myth. Some say he was the mentor of El Vagabundo. Others say he was the mysterious teacher who founded the Knights of the Rose & Cross. All of this could be nothing more than rumor and innuendo, but one thing is certain: his Code and his followers continue to impact Théah's destiny.

The Rilasciare hope to lead humanity to a better place, a place of self-determination and freedom. "No Gods, No Kings." The Rilisciare see both religion and monarchy as the "Two Great Tyrannies," both created for the sole purpose of putting some in control of others. But how do they fight against such powerful foes?

Goals

> *"The wickedest words ever spoken: 'because that is the way it has always been done.'"*
>
> — *Uppman's Journal*

The symbol of the Rilasciare is a stone and a single drop of water. Water's slow, inexorable churning away at the seemingly invincible stone. Water can carve canyons and break down mountains. The process takes time, more than generations of human lifetimes, but it is inevitable.

The Freethinkers' goal is to wear down the Two Tyrannies…one drop of water at a time. Killing a king or a hierophant means nothing. The crown remains, the throne remains. The idea of these two tyrannies remains. What you must do is kill the idea of a monarch. Kill the idea of a hierophant. Then, and only then, will all be free from tyranny. Only when they are convinced of its wickedness and corruption.

This special kind of warfare—mimeme warfare (from the Numanari word meaning "an imitation," also the root for the word "mime")—puts the Freethinkers at odds with ideas and concepts poisoning the human spirit. "Slavery of the mind," some Rilasciare call it. Others call it "Tyranny of tradition." Doing things the way they've always been done because they've always been done that way.

The Rilasciare see questioning tradition as a sacred duty, going so far as to use the gadfly as one of their other symbols. They call back on the old Numanari philosophers, those who questioned the Empire's motives and methods at the risk of death. This is their tradition. Questioning the culture around them, attacking tradition, replacing poisonous mimemes with healthy ones.

The Code

As far as anyone within the Rilasciare can say, Uppman's Code has been a part of the order since its beginning…whenever that was. It not only provides rules but a philosophy for the Freethinkers and a goal.

> *Murder is the theft of the greatest gift and the villain's tool to maintain order.*
> *Question everything, including yourself.*
> *No man, woman, or child should ever want.*
> *Undo Dominion with its own words, deeds, and fears.*
> *Gather in no more than five.*

GREETING

Identifying another member of such a clandestine society is tricky at best. The Freethinkers have a standard greeting designed to identify each other.

Rilasciare wear identifying symbols on their clothing—"the Coat Code." However, anyone can wear a coat—especially a bandit who stole it, lifting it from a dead Freethinker's shoulders. And thus, when seeing a symbol, a Freethinker extends his left hand, palm forward, fingers spread wide. If the grip is met with the same gesture, both Freethinkers squeeze hands. The first to raise his hand begins the following conversation:

A: Handsome coat.
B: Uppman gave it to me.
A: It looks like it fits me.
B: It fits all of my family.
A: Then I am lucky to be your brother/sister.

Then, the two embrace.

Organization

The Rilasciare have no true leader. Many speculate Uppman may be entirely legendary. But then, a Freethinker may retort, "What does that matter?"

Freethinkers gather in groups of up to five. (Gather in no more than five.) Generally, Freethinkers call this a hand, as in "the hand gathers tonight." The hand votes on their actions and meets on a regular basis to share information. Groups have no official links to each other, and thus, the organization has no structure to attack. This, of course, is a double-edged sword. It is disjointed and impossible to pin down. It is also disjointed and impossible to organize. And while there is some communication between hands, it also means each group is on its own.

Regardless of its lack of communication, the Freethinkers have accomplished much over the centuries (if the stories are to be believed). Their unorthodox tactics have undermined some of the most powerful men and women in Théah. Yes, they are guilty of plastering propaganda on the walls of government buildings, but they are also guilty of getting corrupt public officials drunk and disorderly, thrown in jail, and run out of town, tarred and feathered. Utterly humiliated. They've also been known to replace church hymnals with identical copies carrying more provocative lyrics. Some groups have waylaid diplomatic envoys and replaced them with vulgar, irreverent copycats, sabotaging delicate financial negotiations. They've destroyed debtor's records and liberated debtor's prisons, absconded with boxes filled with tax collections and redistributed them back to the poor who could barely afford them. And they've gone so far as to replace known public figures with cleverly disguised "satirists" to permanently sabotage the public figures' reputations.

Each group has its own goals, its own agendas, its own methods. But one goal stands above all else: destruction of the Two Tyrannies.

Favor with Rilasciare

Rilasciare primarily concerns itself with authority and tyranny—specifically, destroying both. According to the Rilasciare, no one should be a king because no king is just. Instead, they envision a Théah that is free from kings, free from the nobility, free from the church, free from politicians and city councils and mayors and governors. They envision a Théah where every man is his own king, and every woman is her own queen.

A Hero who belongs to Rilasciare can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Overthrowing a noble ruler is worth 6 Favor. The Rilasciare believe that the tree of nobility is dead and rotting. There is no such thing as a good king, because a king is by its nature a wicked concept.
- Thwarting a Villainous Church official is worth 4 Favor. The Rilasciare want to see the entire Church brought down, but they realize there are good souls within its hierarchy.

A Hero who belongs to Rilasciare can call upon it for aid in the following ways.

- Gathering a Strength 10 Brute Squad costs 3 Favor. This Rilasciare Mob is composed of butchers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and other commoners armed with improvised weapons. For each 3 additional Favor you spend, the Mob's Strength increases by 10.

  The Mob will follow a rough instruction given when it is gathered (such as "storm the castle" or "dump all the tea into the bay"), but once it is set loose, the Hero no longer has any control over it. Mobs of extreme size break up and turn to chaos almost immediately—the Rilasciare are mindful of this and try to avoid it, so they may limit the size of a Mob they make available to its agents.
- Naming someone as Uppman's Friend costs 2 Favor. As Uppman's Friend, an individual is given special protection and attention by the Rilasciare. They are immune from Rilasciare's punitive actions, and Rilasciare agents are likely to aid them if they are in danger. If the individual to be named Uppman's Friend is a noble or church official, it costs 6 Favor—the Rilasciare really don't like nobles or priests. If someone named as Uppman's Friend actively betrays the interests or ideals of the Rilasciare, she loses her protection and you lose all Favor with the Rilasciare.



Sophia's Daughters

For an organization as disorganized as the Rilasciare, sects within the organization take on characters of their own. The best example is the Rilasciare in Vodacce, otherwise known as "Sophia's Daughters."

Without a doubt, the most powerful Merchant Prince in Vodacce is a man by the name of Villanova. He is a man who trusts only two people: his wife, Valentina, and his lover, the courtesan Juliette. And the greatest irony in Vodacce is that the two women are working together to overthrow his power.

Sophia's Daughters began as a conspiracy between two women—Juliette and Valentina—but it has since grown in both members and influence. The initial goal was to undermine the power of Vodacce's Merchant Princes. So far, that goal has not been met, but has earned small victories. They sponsor illicit reading circles, run a successful smuggling ring moving *Sorte Strega* out of Vodacce, and provide trained bodyguards to those sympathetic to their cause. There are now at least a dozen agents outside Vodacce's borders, providing clandestine protection. In some cases, the clients aren't even aware they are being protected.

Membership in Sophia's Daughters is almost exclusively female. A small number of men have been brought in as trusted advisors, but not as full members.

Favor with Sophia's Daughters

Sophia's Daughters primarily concern themselves with protecting and smuggling fate witches out of Vodacce and otherwise supporting female authority in other Nations.

A Hero who belongs to Sophia's Daughters can earn Favor in the following ways.

- Smuggling a Fate Witch out of Vodacce is worth 10 Favor. You must get the *Sorte Strega* out of Vodacce's borders and to a safe haven.
- Undermining a Merchant Prince's plot is worth 6 Favor. If you can turn two Merchant Princes against one another, all the better...

A Hero who belongs to Sophia's Daughters can call upon them for aid in the following ways.

- Requesting aid from a Fate Witch costs 3 Favor. A Fate Witch of Sophia's Daughters is typically Strength 6, but they also possess the Sorcery (Sorte) Advantage and roll 2 additional dice in any social Risks involving Vodacce courtly politics.
- Naming someone as Sophia's Friend is the same as Naming someone as Uppman's Friend with the same costs (see page 269).

Novus Ordo Mundi

We've left these folks for last for a very good reason: no Hero is a member of the New Order. Novus Ordo Mundi is a collection of the most diabolical and ambitious Villains in Théah. Criminal masterminds bent on controlling the destiny of every Nation.

The Order uses the symbol of an eye with a seven-pointed star as the pupil. The seven points of the star are the seven members of Novus Ordo Mundi. There are always and forever only seven members of Novus Ordo Mundi and the only way to earn a seat at the table is to take it from an existing member. If someone is strong enough to take it, they deserve to sit in the chair.

Members of the Order are seldom public figures. They prefer to remain in the shadows, unseen by the common folk. Unseen by heroes. They also enjoy using heroes to carry out their nefarious schemes. The irony is too delicious. In fact, members often refer to these "heroic endeavors" using food metaphors. "I have a stew brewing," and "I have some bread in the oven."

Novus Ordo Mundi began during the days of the Old Republic. Seven powerful senators decided to take control of the Republic themselves, putting up a puppet Emperor, killing him, replacing him with another puppet Empress, killing her, and going through the same cycle whenever it suited them. Eventually, the Empire fell. Some believe it may have been by Novus Ordo Mundi's hand.

Order Operandi

Novus Ordo Mundi almost never takes a direct hand in its actions. The Order uses its extensive funds to hire middle men who hire mercenaries, putting as much distance between themselves and their plots as possible. This means they seldom have direct control over a scheme, but it does keep them as far away from the danger as possible.

Many within the Order claim this is to maintain secrecy, but the fact of the matter is most of them are too cowardly to take direct action.

But there are always exceptions to the rule. Some members are particular about their schemes, knowing the best way to make sure something gets done is to do it yourself. However, to ensure the Order's secrecy, they eliminate any and all witnesses. Any and all. Occasionally, this leads to mass murder. Houses full of dead corpses. But that's the level of secrecy the Order demands.

The Order undertakes schemes voted on by the Chairs. A majority vote dedicates time, labor and resources to the scheme to ensure its success, the spoils divided by the Chairs. If a Chair decides to undertake an action on his own, he must refund the Order any resources used, plus ten percent.

Heroes and the Order

Heroes cannot join the Order. To become a member of the Order, you must deliberately kill a current Chair. This motive alone is enough to disqualify a Hero from becoming a member. Even if the purpose of killing a member of the Order is to infiltrate it, the amount of sheer, naked Villainy required to maintain the Chair is too much for any Hero's soul to bear. So, no. Heroes do not join the Order. And if they do, they don't stay Heroes for long.

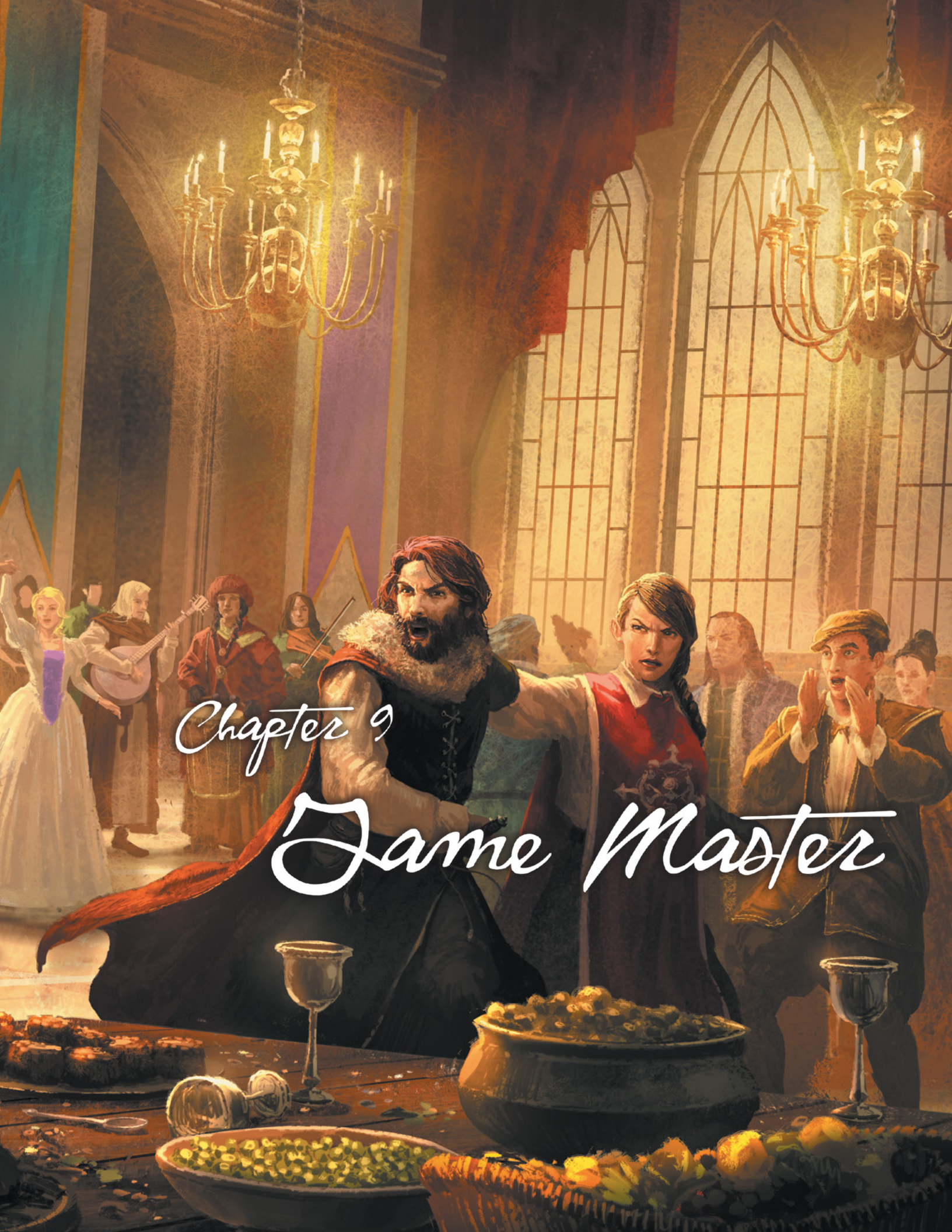
Knowledge of the Order

In general, very few people know of the Order's existence. If anyone even gets near discovering Novus Ordo Mundi's existence, the Order takes action. An assassination. An accidental fall down a well. A poisoned cup. A poisoned kiss. Political destruction. The Chairs of Novus Ordo Mundi have no qualms whatsoever about using assassination or blackmail to keep their existence a mystery. And they've been doing this for over one thousand years. They've become very good about it.

Members take a bloody, grisly vow to never speak of the Order with anyone other than current Chairs. Breaking this vow makes you open game: any other Chair can kill you without reciprocation from other members. Usually, Chairs are forbidden from meddling with each other's business, but in this one circumstance—breaking the vow—it is cause for complete and final extermination with extreme prejudice.

Still, rumors of such an organization are everywhere. So far, no one has been able to prove the Order's existence, but perhaps one day, someone will.





Chapter 9

Game Master



GAME MASTER

Players have it easy. A player has only a single character to keep track of. You—the GM—have an entire world. Not only that, you are also the arbiter of all the rules, the settler of disputes, an improvisational actor and voices for a cast of thousands. Sound impossible? Relax, it's easy.

The Only Medium

> *Roleplaying games are the only medium where the author and the audience are the same person.*
> —*Robin D. Laws*

In a roleplaying game, you aren't following a story written by someone else. You're *making the story yourself*. You aren't following the hero's footsteps, *you are the hero*.

In an RPG, there's a precious moment where the player stops saying "my character" and says "me." As in, my character isn't saving the prince from the fire, *I'm* saving the prince from the fire. My character isn't fighting for justice and truth, *I'm* fighting for justice and truth.

Movies can't do this. Novels can't, either. Nor can TV shows or comic books. Only *roleplaying games* can do this. That precious moment when the player and the hero are one and the same. In Greek tragedy, this is called *catharsis*: when the audience feels the same emotion as the hero on the stage. The difference, of course, is that in theater, you're watching the hero… in an RPG, *you are the hero*.

I'm going to spend the next few thousand words teaching you, the GM, how to achieve this moment, how to get your players to forget they're sitting a table. How to achieve catharsis. How to deliver on the kind of stories only RPGs can deliver.

Let's begin.

Before All Else: Preparation

While GMing requires improvisation, the other important ingredient for a successful game is preparation.

Your Group

Before you GM, take a moment to think about your group. Knowing your audience is one of the most important factors in entertainment—and make no mistake, *your job is to entertain the players*.

Let's say that again.

YOUR JOB IS TO ENTERTAIN THE PLAYERS.

They have a role in that job, but you should know your group, what they like or don't like, and most importantly, what they expect. Both so you can fulfill those expectations and *twist* them in fun, painful ways.

Table Rules

Every gaming group has a set of "table rules," acceptable and unacceptable behaviors at the gaming table. Do you allow cell phones or laptops? How about sketching or knitting? Every group is different.

Come up with your own set of table rules. Be up front and clear about them. When you all sit down for the first session, have a print out, hand it out and read through them out loud. Make sure everybody understands: this is what's going to happen at my table.

Spotlight

Think of your gaming group as a chorus, and yourself as the director. As long as everybody sings in harmony, you've got something beautiful going on. But nearly everyone wants a chance to sing solo.

Lay out all the Heroes' Stories in front of you and take a good look at them. Figure out which ones work together and which ones don't. The Heroes with similar Stories will be in the spotlight, at the center of attention, while the other Heroes act as supporting cast. Then, those who acted as supporting cast get their chance to stand in the spotlight while others lend a helping hand telling the main story.

Remember to explain your method to your players. If you explain to them how the round-robin storytelling works, they'll sit back and provide some colorful backdrop until it's their turn.

GOLDEN RULES

There's really only one rule in **7th Sea**.

The Golden Rule: Have Fun.

There's a second golden rule, but it only applies to Game Masters.

The Second Golden Rule: If someone isn't having fun, fix it.

Feel free to show your players the second rule if it's necessary. We hope it isn't.

The Three Hats

When you play the role of the Game Master, you're really playing three roles: the author, the referee and the storyteller. Let's take a quick look at each of those hats and see how they fit.

Author Hat

7th Sea is a collaborative storytelling game. That means all the players—including you—are *authoring* the story. But no plot survives contact with the players. They all have their own agendas and voices. Your job is not to tell the players a story, but to help the group tell *its* story.

Storyteller Hat

Once the game begins, the GM shifts modes from author to storyteller. You have to describe a world you've never seen before and maintain a suspension of disbelief for hours at a time. Calling a GM an improvisational actor isn't right—an actor has only to maintain a single character at a time. A GM has to maintain an entire world.

Referee Hat

When you put on your referee hat, you make sure everyone gets a fair shake from the rules of the game. You clarify the rules of the game and make decisions quickly, ensuring that the pace of the game doesn't lag so nobody has an opportunity to take out their cellphone.



The Author Hat

A story is a lot like a machine: it's made up of parts (moving and fixed) that make the whole thing work. If one part is broken the whole machine suffers, so you've got to make sure that you have your story well-oiled and maintained. It takes a little work, but as we said before, if you're clever, you can find ways to get your players to do a lot of the work for you.

Scope

When you sit down to decide what kind of story you want to tell, one of the first considerations is the story's scope. Just how big do you want your story to be? Do you want it to span the entirety of Théah, or do you just want to focus on a single tavern house and its regular customers? Both tight-angle stories and sweeping epics have their advantages and disadvantages, so let's quickly look at both.

Epics

The Iliad, *The Odyssey*, *Game of Thrones*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Dune* are all examples of the epic. The story isn't focused on just one perspective, but many. We don't see one person's struggle, but the struggles of many. With dozens of characters, all with their own complicated stories and motives, you've got a lot to keep track of.

The good part about epics is that you can tell a story with wide brush strokes. With so many different viewpoints, you can show players bits of information in flashes to give them impressions rather than details. In fact, epics that give too many details tend to drown their pacing, leaving the players feeling like they're plodding through a swamp of forever to get to the point of the story.

Personal Stories

Personal stories focus on individuals rather than groups. If you have a smaller group of players—maybe two or three—you can give each Hero a lot of spotlight, focusing on each of them and their personal struggles.

Think of the individual Avengers movies: *Iron Man*, *Thor* and *Captain America* all have individual stories focusing on each character, but when *The Avengers* movie rolls around, the story focuses more on the group than each individual.

Story Modes

You can tell almost any kind of story in Théah: swashbuckling adventure, court intrigue, high romance or even dungeon crawl hack-and-slash. We call these different flavors of **7th Sea story modes**. Here's a brief list of story modes with a couple of examples to show you how to make them fit your Heroes.

Adventure

More than anything else, **7th Sea** is about heroes and their adventures. It's a fast-paced game of action, with men and women performing amazing feats of daring, because that's what Heroes do. Adventure stories involve lots of Brutes, a few minor Villains and a chief Villain who's confronted only at the very beginning and at the very end of the story, when he's put to rights.

Stories that best emulate the adventure mode are the novels of Alexandre Dumas, such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Each includes tons of fighting scenes, death-defying jumps and leaps, lots of chases and beautiful swooning women (and men—we endorse equal-opportunity-swooning in Théah).

Conspiracy

7th Sea is also a game of global conspiracy. Who are O'Bannon and MacDuff really fighting for? Is l'Empereur of Montaigne really as short-sighted as he looks, or is he plotting on some level that we just can't even comprehend? How about all of those Vodacce Princes, each conspiring to seize control from the others?

The best resources for looking at how a **7th Sea** conspiracy game might work are Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* and Arturo Pérez-Reverte's *The Dumas Club*. The first deals with the issue of the Templar conspiracy on such a global level that you have to read it to believe it. *The Dumas Club*, on the other hand, is more of a murder mystery/conspiracy story involving a few handwritten pages of Dumas' work and what happens to every soul who touches them.

Espionage

The beginning of the sixteenth century is the birth of modern espionage. The most famous spy of the 1500s was Queen Elizabeth's own John Dee, who successfully stole charts, maps, and nautical instruments and brought them back to England.

In an espionage game, the threat of discovery is often more dangerous than death. If a spy is discovered she brings shame, disgrace and loss of face to her nation. She also leaves her nation in a highly compromising situation. Remember, this is still an age when nations may be willing to pay ransom for a spy; it all depends on whether your nation's ruler is a Villain or a Hero.

Espionage campaigns are all about smuggling information: a commodity always in demand. Whether it's rival technology, Invisible College research journals, maps and charts or even love letters, people always need information smuggled across unfriendly borders, and your Heroes are just the ones to do it.

Remember: at this time, nautical charts were not "public domain." They were documents considered to be state secrets. One of the most valuable things you can confiscate from an enemy ship is a nautical chart. Sure, the gold and tobacco in the hold are worth some coin, but as soon as a captain knows he's being boarded, the first thing he has to consider is destroying his charts.

Hack-and-Slash

Players who are aren't interested in witty banter, clandestine maneuvering or sneaking technology out of foreign nations may demand a good old-fashioned hack-and-slash campaign.

There's a whole lot of beasties out in the wilds of Théah. Remember, Théah hasn't reached the concept of mass production yet, so there are still huge, dense forests filled with critters just waiting to descend on some village and wreak terror on its inhabitants. Nearly every noble in Théah is looking for a good sheriff to maintain his lands and make certain that never happens. Sheriff campaigns are perfect for players who just want to go out into the wild and bash monster heads. In addition, the Shield Man division of the Explorer's Society is always looking for recruits.

Horror

Eisen.

You want horror? Go to Eisen. That place still suffers the scars of three decades of mass murder and the metaphysical consequences are very real. Eisen is a real-life horror story with vampires, werewolves, ghosts, and other awful things. It needs Heroes and it needs them bad. But there are other places in Théah to find horror as well.

What lies between the boundaries of the portals, and what happens to those who dare to open their eyes and take a look? How willing would your Heroes be to use Porté in a house filled with mirror ghosts? And who says a mirror ghost can't get out of its prison? Who says the mirrors aren't showing something we can't see? Perhaps the ghosts are wandering the hallways and we can only see them in the mirrors?

Don't forget that there are a lot of unexplored regions in Théah, all with slavering horrors just begging to be discovered. Underwater caverns with ancient evils. Dank ruins with unspeakable things, squirming and chittering.

Lastly, there are the black magic cults in Théah's shadows worshipping dark, hungry gods. Legion's minions are not to be trifled with, and they believe they can awaken the sleeping horrors from beyond and bring about the end of the world. Ain't that enough to just ruin your day?

Political

Then, there's politics. "The ability to tell someone to go to hell in such a way they look forward to the trip." Consider the kind of danger experienced by Montaigne courtiers. Sure, they go to parties and make deals over land or taxes—*boring*—but the most efficient way to get rid of a political rival is still a sword or a bullet. Courtiers in Carleon stop assassination attempts against Elaine all the time. Make no mistake: the political games are just as deadly as any other.

A political campaign is strongly linked to an espionage campaign, but there's an important difference. In an espionage campaign, you are the King's spy: someone who braves danger to uncover plots and transport information. In a political campaign, you are front and center, standing in front of the crown, deciding how to use the information the spy just delivered.

Political campaigns are best when the players are willing to leave their sabers and flintlocks behind and practice their wit and panache. Style is everything in the court; how you say something is more important than what you say. Until you start whispering in dark corners, that is.

Military

Théah just emerged from a thirty-year-long war that changed everything about politics. The War of the Cross destroyed Eisen to such an extent that no one wanted to claim the spoils—not even Eisen. It was a war of religion, and many scholars say this will be the last religious war fought in Théah.

Still, even if the War of the Cross was Théah's last religious war, it was certainly not the last time Nations will throw armies at each other. War could break out at any moment between any of the Nations. Ambitious Ussuran nobles could try exploiting the Commonwealth's weak borders to gain that warm water port they've always wanted. Castille could declare war on Avalon or Ussura because of its embrace of heretical powers. And the Montaigne Empereur could decide to invade Castille or Avalon because…oh, why not?

Playing in a military campaign involves a great deal of player accountability. Some Heroes will outrank others, which can cause tension between players. This requires that all participants recognize the importance of military procedure and protocol. Those with rank over others must not abuse their positions, while those in lower positions must obey orders. In other words, the two have to work together or the whole system falls apart. Just like a real military.

"I'M A BEGINNER, TOO!"

The first time you sit down to run **7th Sea** for your players, be sure to remind them that this is the first time you've run the game—perhaps even the first time you've ever been a Game Master. You're bound to make mistakes, but you'll be sure to correct them quickly and keep the game moving. Remember, these are your friends. They'll understand.

Theme

The first thing to consider before you do any other plotting or preparing is to consider your story's theme. The theme of a story is usually a single word or a phrase that sums up the main action of the story. It's not what happens within the story (that's plot, and we'll talk about that next), it's the idea behind the story. For example, if you said that *Hamlet* is the story of a man enjoined by his father's ghost to murder those who murdered him, you would be describing the plot. But if you said it was a story of revenge, then you would be speaking about theme.

Picking a theme helps you fill in the details of your story. For instance, a story about revenge has a very different tone of voice from a tragic love story. Characters relate to each other differently, events unfold in a different manner and the setting may even look different, all to emphasize that this is a story about revenge.

Dramatic Situations

It's been said that there are only seven stories in the world. Georges Polti wrote that there were thirty-six and dissected each one in brisk detail. We won't list all thirty-six here, but we are using his work to detail a list of a dozen "dramatic situations" for you to peruse and pick from. These aren't exactly plots, nor are they precisely themes, but something in between. They're story archetypes from which you can pull ideas when your well has run a little dry (or you just don't know what to run tonight!). Take a look, have fun and pick up Mr. Polti's *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* if you get a chance.

Abduction

Rather than rescuing the fair maiden, the Heroes find themselves needing rescue. Sometimes, the Heroes must only survive long enough until the rescue, but more dramatic stories involve escape. Escape stories are wonderful opportunities to see the Heroes operating at their finest with no equipment, no allies, nothing but their wits. Escape stories demand a lot of preparation, although you generally don't need to come up with an escape plan for the players—those clever rats usually come up with something all on their own.

Basic Concept: The Heroes are abducted, held against their will and must escape.

Important Questions: Who are the abductors? Why have they chosen to abduct the Heroes? What do they have to gain from the abduction and what do the Heroes have to lose?

Examples: *The Great Escape*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Iron Man*

Ambition

Usually this story is told from the perspective of a Villain with the Heroes attempting to thwart his bid for power. The more ruthless the Villain, the better. It's all a question of whom you are willing to step on to get up the next rung of that ladder, and who you're willing to shove off. Once the Heroes discover the underhanded deeds of the Villain, it becomes their duty to dispense justice on behalf of those who have suffered for his rise.

Basic Concept: The struggle for position and/or power and the price it brings.

Important Questions: Who is rising in power and what is he willing to do to get it? Whom must he topple to gain his goal? Who will halt his plan or stand against him when he achieves his goal?

Examples: *Richard III*, *Wall Street*, *Macbeth*

Daring Enterprise

Any journey that ends with the recovery or discovery of something lost is great material for 7th Sea. Archæological expeditions to lost cities have enough adventure for even the sternest of hearts. There are other kinds of daring enterprise, of course. Daring thefts, daring rescues and daring romance are just a few examples.

Basic Concept: A dangerous undertaking.

Important Questions: What is the undertaking: a theft, preparation for conflict, expedition? Who are the men and women who choose to put their lives at risk in this way? What is the prize/goal of the expedition and what are the consequences?

Examples: The *Indiana Jones* trilogy, *The Usual Suspects*, *Mission: Impossible*

Deliverance

The story of a Hero rescuing someone unjustly imprisoned or condemned to death is great swashbuckling material. The greatest mythic story in the world—the Hero's journey—involves the Hero going into the underworld to save a comrade or friend. Perhaps someone's father or patron has been captured by an enemy and will die when the sun rises tomorrow. A daring escape attempt must be made to save the victim, or serious consequences will follow. Perhaps the prisoner is of significant political importance, such as a king's first-born daughter or a son who has been engaged to marry to settle a border dispute. Lots of espionage and action are involved in this plot, one of the best for the genre.

Basic Concept: The Hero rescues a condemned friend or delivers another from captivity.

Important Questions: Who was captured? Who captured them? Who wants the victim rescued? What consequences will follow if the victim is not rescued?

Examples: *The Man in the Iron Mask* (film), *Aliens*

Disaster

Disaster stories remind us of the power of nature and how indomitable the human spirit can be when things are at their darkest. In the modern day, our technology keeps us (at least partly) sheltered from storms, earthquakes, fires, and floods, but in Théah such technology is still centuries away. Théans don't have storm sewers to protect from heavy rains, insulation and electric heaters to protect from bitter winter storms or flexible architecture to protect against earthquakes. While they may have water pumps, they don't have firehoses or fire-retardant suits or even professional firemen. Théans are highly vulnerable to disaster, which offers them great opportunity for heroism when it shows up.

Basic Concept: Great power gone wrong; nature turns against humanity.

Important Questions: What manner of disaster? Who will be affected by it? How will anyone survive?

Examples: *Titanic*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Poseidon Adventure*

Enigma

There are many different kinds of mysteries, and not all of them involve a body slumped over a table in a locked room. Mysteries also include puzzles that must be solved, tests that must be passed, and identities that must be discovered. All stories contain elements of mystery, but this situation revolves solely about the five questions: who, where, what, how and why (see page 292).

Basic Concept: A mystery that must be solved.

Important Questions: Who did it, where did they do it, what did they do it with, how did they do it and why did they do it?

Examples: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *North by Northwest*, *The Dumas Club*

Feuding Families

There are hundreds of stories that involve two families who wish to do each other harm for reasons that even the eldest in the family have forgotten. Old Greek tragedies center around the concept of family pride and honor, reiterating the importance of a son or daughter's duty to the family, despite the cost. Many of the other dramatic situations in this list can be coupled with feuding families: revenge against a rival family, love within two rival families, deliverance from a rival family, etc. Stories about families tend to deemphasize the importance of the individual, or at least show how a willful son can bring down a powerful family if he puts his own needs above those of his kin.

Basic Concept: Two (or more) families are involved in a feud that will lead to the ruin of one or both.

Important Questions: What is the character of each family? Do all family members seek to ruin the other, or are there those who are reluctant? What manner of power or influence do these families have that allows them to make such a conflict?

Examples: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Gangs of New York*, *Game of Thrones*

Love

The concept of "romantic love" isn't new in Théah, but it has been suppressed for nearly four centuries. Romantic love first found a voice in the Avalon romances of knights, ladies and chivalry: stories that were vastly popular in the 12TH and 13TH centuries, but faded from popularity soon after. Just recently, these works have been restored by the romantic authors of modern Théah, reviving the ancient debates on love and its effects on the human body and soul. Love is not a popular concept; it is a dangerous one. Men and women are to marry for family, not for each other. Marriages are arranged for money, property, influence and position, not for love. Eloping is a crime in nearly every country and harshly punished. Love stories are popular in the courts, but true love is dangerous, scandalous and punishable by torture.

Basic Concept: Two lovers must survive in a troubled sea of circumstances beyond their control.

Important Questions: What virtues do these lovers have that gives them the strength to survive? What do their families think? Who wants to split them apart and why?

Examples: *Tristan and Isolde*, *The Princess Bride*

Pursuit

Perhaps the most popular theme on television, the pursuit is one of the most intriguing dramatic situations. When using pursuit, be sure to emphasize the fact that the fugitive is always running ragged and those who pursue him never tire. Another important consideration is the justness of the pursuit. Is the fugitive falsely accused of a crime, or is she being pursued for an entirely different reason? The fugitive doesn't have to be running from the law; she could be on the run from criminals who seek knowledge she has obtained, or she could be on the run from something entirely unnatural, such as a horror from between the Portals...

Basic Concept: A fugitive is threatened with capture and punishment.

Important Questions: Who is the fugitive and why is she pursued? To what means are those who pursue her willing to go to be successful? How will others respond to the fugitive if they discover her identity?

Examples: *Les Miserables*, *The Fugitive*, *The Incredible Hulk* (TV program), *Nowhere Man*

Revenge

Revenge is the "great motivator" of literature. Nearly all the most famous stories revolve around it. It's important to note that justice is very different from revenge; the former is an impersonal punishment while the latter is a personal payback in pain. When using revenge, the crime must be something so foul that justice won't provide the proper personal satisfaction. Remember, it's considered honorable to gain revenge in many Théan circles and cowardly to let despicable acts go unavenged.

Basic Concept: A great wrong must be avenged with blood.

Important Questions: What wrong was committed and why does it demand revenge? Why was it committed? What were the consequences of the action?

Examples: *Hamlet*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Othello*

Revolt

Rebelling against authority can be handled on two levels: political and personal. Political revolt involves questioning the authority of the state, while in a personal revolt, the Hero questions the authority of those over him, such as his family or peer group. The important element of this situation is to show the heroism of the lone individual against a power that is far greater than he—or at least appears to be greater.

Heroes can also play the other side of revolt, trying to keep the status quo while those under them strive to remove the Heroes from power.

Basic Concept: Conspiracy or revolt against authority or convention

Important Questions: Who are the authority figures and what do they represent? Who are the revolters, and is their revolt just or selfish? What is the cost of removing the authority figures? How is revolt justified at all?

Examples: *V for Vendetta*, *The Caine Mutiny*, *Animal Farm*

IMPROVISING

The biggest problem with having a plot "all figured out" is the simple truth that your players have different plans. All too often, I've seen a GM flounder when the players go a direction she never intended.

My best advice for you is this: don't make plans, make contingencies. Let me give you an example.

One day, my friend David Williams—the game designer who made the *Legend of the Five Rings* and *Doomtown* CCGs, among others—and I were playing *Blood Bowl*, a fantasy football miniatures game. Dave was doing exceptionally well and I asked him what his strategy was. He told me, "I don't have a strategy...I have five of them."

He went on to explain that every play he made had a number of contingencies. If his initial plan didn't work, that was okay, because he was still set up for another. And if that didn't work, he had another. And if that didn't work...yeah, you see where this is going.

As the person "in charge" of the story, you can't rely on a single plot. You must have *all sorts of plots*, ready to fire if the players take off in some random direction. Not because you want to wedge them back to *your* story, but because you want to help them tell *their stories*.

Here's an example. Simplest story in the world. One of my players wants to find the Villain who murdered her mother and father. Easy enough. She's even been so generous as to tell me, "I don't know who it is. I want finding that out to be a part of the story."

So, I don't choose one character and say, "This is who killed her parents." No, I pick *five*. And as the game progresses, I see how she reacts to each one and make my choice based on those reactions. Or, I don't pick at all and spend the subsequent game sessions figuring out who it is.

This is the key to making collaborative stories. Don't have plans. Have contingencies. And prepare to have everything change on a moment's notice. Don't get married to any endings or plot twists. Let things happen naturally, listen to your players, and let them *tell you* what stories they want.

Then, give them what they ask for.

Plot

Plot is the engine of the story; it pushes the story along toward its conclusion. The plot's beginning establishes the direct problem at hand and sets the rules for your players. The middle of the plot is where those problems become compounded with even more problems and we learn a little bit more about the characters. The climax of the story is where the characters learn the real source of their troubles (even if the players have known all along). Here's an example:

The Opening: Presentation of the Problem

Once upon a time, there was a young boy named Jack who lived with his mother. They lived on a dry farm in a poor county and had very little to eat. But they weren't always poor. When Jack was just a little baby, a giant came to the county, burned down the crops, salted the earth and stole the county's wealth. The giant also killed Jack's father and stole his magic lute that could restore the land to prosperity.

The Middle: Development of the Problem

Jack's mother told him to take their last cow to town and sell it. On his way to town, Jack met a man who convinced him to trade him the cow for three magic beans instead. When Jack returned with the beans, his mother cried, "You fool! You traded our last cow for three beans?" and tossed the beans out the window. He and his mother had nothing to eat that night.

The Climax: The Source of the Problem

When Jack awoke in the morning, he saw the beans had grown into a tremendous beanstalk. He climbed the beanstalk and saw a castle high above the clouds. He discovered the castle belonged to the giant who had killed his father and stolen his magic lute.

The Conclusion: Resolution of the Problem

Jack crept into the castle and recovered his father's lute. However, the giant smelled Jack out ("Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum!") and chased him down the beanstalk. When Jack reached the bottom, he took his father's old axe and chopped down the beanstalk. The giant, clinging to the enormous vine, fell to his death. Jack restored the plenty of his county with the magic lute, became the hero of the land, married the mayor's beautiful daughter and lived happily ever after.

The Opening

At the beginning of a story, you make a promise to your players and their characters. With every opening, you dictate the tone of the story (we'll talk about that later when we get to The Storyteller Hat) and show some implicit rules. For instance, with "Jack and the Beanstalk," by even mentioning the phrase "Once upon a time" you're telling your audience that this is a fairy tale. The first words out of your lips when you and your players meet for the first time—whether they're dynamic, cryptic, mysterious, boisterous, epic, or even sedate—tell them a lot about the kind of game they're about to play. Choose your words carefully.

Beginnings are important for two reasons. First, they make a promise to the reader. That promise dictates the direction, speed, and tone of the story, almost like a compass. It's your way of saying, "Hey! This is where we're going, this is how fast we're going and this is how we're going to get there." Secondly, the beginning introduces all the important characters, or at least gives you hints at who will be important later on.

When writing your beginning scene, be certain you've made your beginning explicit to the players and remember that doing so also foreshadows the ending. This can be as simple as saying:

"Jack is poor, but by the end of the story, he'll be rich."

Or it can be said with more subtlety:

"Jack turned his eyes to the night sky. He watched the clouds tumbling across the moon and sighed. 'Oh well,' he thought. 'Maybe someday I'll get the chance to make things right.'"

The other essential element of a good beginning is the introduction of important characters. This is the spot you get to point at someone and say, "Watch this woman! She's important!" In the beginning of Jack's story, we introduce three main characters: Jack, his mother, and the giant. In fact, all the characters are introduced in the first paragraph. Of course, there are a lot of ways to point out important characters:

"As Jack finally fell to sleep, a dark figure moved by his bed. 'Tomorrow, little one,' the figure whispered. 'Tomorrow you will inherit your birthright.'"

With the above example, we've made a hint of someone important later in the story. By shrouding his identity, you're saying, "It's not important to know who this person is now, but you'd better remember to look out for him anyway."

In Medias Res

This Latin phrase means "in the middle of things." One of the best ways to begin any story is not at the very beginning, but when things have already gotten started and the plot is in full swing. *Star Wars* begins with a spaceship battle. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* starts off with our hero diving into an underground death trap. Begin with a bang and don't let up. Ever.

Start your Heroes in the midst of a carriage chase scene. They're riding away from some Villain's thugs (they've just stolen—ahem—*acquired* an ancient artifact for the Explorer's Society) and there's fighting on horseback and on the top of the carriage and bodies are flying everywhere. How did they get into this situation? No time to consider that now, you've got ten men trying to kill you. Fight now, ask questions later!

Or start things in a darkened room with a broken window and a dead body on the floor. What happened here?

However you choose to do it, make sure that when the game begins, the Heroes discover they're starting out in the fire, wondering how they fell out of the frying pan.

Old Uncle William

Let's tell the story of Old Uncle William, a close relative of one of the Heroes; he was once a powerful and influential man of court. He tells the Heroes about his failure, and about the man who took his position from him in a dastardly and deceitful way.

When the Heroes go to the court, they overhear a discussion in a darkened garden. Two hushed voices discuss a plot to overthrow the King's high advisor and take the position for themselves. While the characters gain a glimpse of one of the conspirators (naturally, they only get to see one) they notice it's the same Villain who betrayed Old Uncle William.

That's a good beginning. It has a personal hook and it invokes a sense of justice; the Heroes not only have the chance to stop a great wrong, but they also have the chance to set an old wrong right. The theme of Uncle William's story could be revenge, feuding families, rivalry (one of the Heroes could be the King's advisor!), enigma (solving how the Villain plans to put his plot into motion and carry it to its conclusion) or even a tale of ambition (the Villain's fall from power).

The Middle

The middle of the story further develops the situations and problems that were presented in the beginning. In other words, this is where things go from bad to worse. Problems degenerate through complications, misunderstanding or simple villainous maliciousness.

The middle is also where it's easiest for the story to get lost. Writing a story is like walking through a dark wood. In the beginning, the most difficult choice is choosing a place to make your first step. Once that's over and done with, the next few minutes are easy. It's when you look back and can't see the edge of the woods that things start getting scary.

Stories have no trouble getting started, but when they reach the middle, they tend to lose the excitement and momentum they had at the beginning, and trickle down into petty plots and dead ends. Don't let this happen. Don't lose sight of your objective! How do you do that? Remind yourself what you promised your players at the very beginning.

If you promised them a story of love between two Heroes from feuding families, stay focused on that. If you promised them an action-packed tale of espionage and intrigue, then keep that in mind. Don't let yourself or your players get distracted. If you make a strong assertion at the beginning that the story is going in one direction, your players will follow it. If, however, you don't, they'll wander wherever they want to, and sooner or later they'll wander right out of the story you've developed into uncharted waters that you aren't prepared for.

The Throughline

The middle of the story moves the players toward the conclusion. In movie terms this is called the **throughline**, a summation of all the events that happen to the protagonists of a story. These events put the heroes in proper position for the story's climax and resolution. The throughline for Old Uncle William could be "Three friends thwart the plans of the man who wronged an elderly relative."

Whenever you get lost, remember the throughline. Whenever your players get lost, remember the throughline. It will keep you on course, right to the other side of that forest.

More of Old Uncle William

Your Heroes realized that the man who is plotting the downfall of the King's advisor is also the man who caused the ruin of their beloved Uncle William. All they have to do is expose his plot. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, let's make things a little bit more complicated.

First off, our Villain isn't just any ordinary thug; he's got power, resources and influence (players tend to ignore details like that). He holds high rank in the military, owns a great deal of land, is incredibly wealthy and holds favors over half the King's council.

Not only that, but remember that raven-haired beauty that your Castillian is romancing? She's our Villain's daughter. I guess they shouldn't have trusted her with their plans.

Not to mention the fact that the Villain's lieutenant happened to be on the other side of that hedge, watching the Heroes watch the Villain.

The capstone on the whole thing is halfway through the middle when the Heroes discover that the other fellow the Villain was talking to… is Old Uncle William. But we're jumping ahead of ourselves, because that little discovery is the climax of the story.



The Climax

The climax is the most important part of a story. It's when the true evil is revealed, the Hero finds that she's so far into the plot that there's no chance to go back and all action that happens in the story now is directed towards the climax. All the energy of your story has been building toward this revelation. It's a moment that requires a great deal of thought and preparation. Once the climax reveals itself, there's no more time for muddling around. The most famous climaxes of all time still bear an emotional impact. When Hamlet's vengeance is sprung; when the man in the iron mask is revealed to be the king's twin; when Darth Vader reveals to Luke what really happened to his father—all of these moments reverberate through our minds when we see them for the first time, and continue to shake us up even after we've seen them a hundred times.

The climax is like a hidden objective. At the beginning of the story, you make a promise to your players. At the beginning of the Uncle William story, you promised your heroes: "You will be involved in a story of justice and revenge." By revealing Uncle William as a coconspirator, you haven't changed your promise. This is still a story of justice and revenge, it's just that the target has grown a little wider—or perhaps they just have to be more careful about where they point their pistols.

A climax must be true to the promise you made at the beginning and it must deliver an emotional impact. If you break the first rule, the Heroes will feel like they paid for one thrill ride and got rerouted onto another. If you break the second rule, the heroes will look at you from the other side of the GM screen and say, "Why am I supposed to care?" We never want that to happen.

Putting Uncle William in league with our Villain accomplishes both goals. First, it keeps the original promise. Second, it leaves the Heroes feeling betrayed. What's more, they must now face the prospect of turning in their favorite uncle as well as the Villain. Which brings us to the very last part of the story.

The Conclusion

This isn't "the end" of your story, it's the moment when you make good on the promise you made at the beginning. All the plot complications are tied up and all mysteries are made clear.

Keeping Your Promise

There are many ways to end a story, but there are usually only one or two good ways to do it. Let's take a look at the ending of the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

There were a lot of different ways to finish the saga, but the one that made it onto the screen kept the promise made at the beginning of the series. When Luke says, "I want to learn the ways of the Force and become a Jedi like my father," that's both a promise and a threat. He may become a Jedi like his father or *he may become a Jedi like his father*.

All the way through the series, we're told time and time again that the Light Side is all about peace, reaction (as opposed to aggression), and love. When Luke discovers that his father isn't dead, he refuses to destroy him, refuses to let his love for his father turn into hate and thus ends up redeeming his dad.

Uncle William, One Last Time

We started out learning about the man who betrayed him, set plans in motion to stop the same man from betraying someone else, then learned that Uncle William was in on the deal from the beginning.

Let's assume for the moment that Uncle William is really on the up-and-up. He learned about the Villain's plans as well, and has gotten close to the Villain to try to stop him. The Heroes have misunderstood Uncle William's role in all of this, and if they handle things poorly, it could spell tragedy for him. This is a great way to show how revenge can really backfire on you if you're not careful.

On the other hand, what if William is here to make the Villain stumble, then gain the position for himself? Or worse, he's used the Heroes to trip up the Villain while he takes the credit and inherits the Villain's position. Sure, nobody got hurt (except for the Villain, but they always get hurt), but Uncle William betrayed the Heroes' trust. Do they seek revenge for the slight on their honor? Stories like this show the cyclical nature of revenge and how once it gets started, it never seems to go away.

The Referee Hat

This next section is dedicated to your role as arbiter of the rules. Every decision you make influences the destinies of the Heroes and the enjoyment of your players. With this hat on you must be analytical and observant, making sure that your decisions are quick, decisive, and well thought out. It isn't easy, but hopefully this section will make things a little easier.

We'll start out with some friendly advice, show you what we've found while playing 7th Sea, and wrap the whole thing up with some dirty tricks...um, we mean optional rules.

Rulings, Not Rules

People always ask me how I feel about hearing GMs change the rules of games I've published. I always say the same thing: "Great! I'd love to see what they came up with." That answer tends to confuse people, so then I often have to explain that I see RPGs as a kind of urban myth. You can go to different cities, sit down at different game tables and play different versions of 7th Sea. To me, that's exciting. And it was hard for me to explain why…until recently.

A few months ago, I read an article online called "How I helped to pull the rope that tolled the bell for OD&D." Google it. You should read it. The article stunned me. In summation, the author—a kindly gentleman named Tim Kask—talks about the earliest days of *Dungeons & Dragons*, and how the rulebook wasn't a rulebook at all, but a list of example *rulings*. The difference, he argued, was that rulings gave the Dungeon Master freedom to improvise creatively while rules limited the DM's ability to run the game. He lamented that later editions went to the side of rules vs. rulings and the game has suffered ever since.

Like I said, the article stunned me. (I could talk about it for hours, really. And have.) It also got me thinking about how I run my own table. Many times, if I can't think of a specific rule, I make something up on the spot. A quick ruling that's fair, but also fast. I make the promise, "After the game, I'll look up the rule," and I do and I try to keep it in my head for the next time. But, generally, if I can't think of a rule, I ask for a quick roll of the dice. If the player has an Advantage that would benefit him, I let him use it. Sometimes, I even ignore an existing rule and create a new one that better fits the circumstance.

That's how I want you to look at these rules. These are the rulings we've come up with, that we've found fair and useful. Sometimes, they'll get in the way and a quick roll of the dice may be a better solution. Sometimes, the rules we've given you will fit like a glove and add to the fun.

The end result of all this navel-gazing is a simple piece of advice. When it comes time to run the game, you don't need to have all 300 pages memorized. Just stick to the basics:

1. You create a Scene.
2. Players create Raises.
3. Players use Raises to change the Scene.

That's really all you need. Those are the only *rules*. All the rest is *rulings*. Suggestions we found useful. You may not find them useful. You may ditch one in a moment of forgetfulness or panic or dramatic necessity.

That's okay. Nobody's sending the 7th Sea Rules Enforcement Force to your door to make sure you get everything right.

So, I want to emphasize this. **Your judgment is more important than the rules.** Every single rule in this book is a way *we* found to utilize the character sheet. We think they are elegant, fast and fair, but we're also not going to tell you they are the *only* ways to adjudicate the game.

Another way to put it, from my friend David Hewett, "Rules are for competition, rulings are for cooperation."

However, a quick word of warning. Be thoughtful with your changes. Don't just raise the target number for Raises to 30 without thinking about how it affects the game. And watch how your players react to changes too. If you make a change and it ends up making things chaotic, boring or unfun, change it back.

Improvise. Have fun. Be thoughtful. And remember: it's a storytelling game. And these are your friends. More importantly, this is *your game*. You bought it. You can change whatever you want in it, including the rules. Sometimes, *especially* the rules.

Decision Making

While running the game, you'll have to make a lot of decisions, usually on the spot. If you make decisions well, you build confidence in your players and in yourself. If you fumble, your players' suspension of disbelief begins to fail and arguments will become more frequent. Arguing slows down the game, and in a game like **7th Sea**, slowing down is almost always a bad thing.

So, here's some advice on how to make decisions. It could be said that knowing how to make decisions is the best skill a GM can have. Make sure you're prepared when your time comes.

The Final Word

When you make a decision, it stands, no matter what. Your word is law and it doesn't bend.

When you're running the game, don't let yourself get caught in decision making. Make a quick decision and move on. If your players want a voice in the decision, let them make a quick argument, evaluate their words, make your decision, then get the game going again. Make it plain to the players that you've listened to their advice and you've made your decision. Don't argue with them and don't let them argue with you. You have the final word and that's it. No questions, no arguments, no appeals.

If you find out later you've made a mistake, don't go back and try to fix it. Just make sure that you never make it again. In fact, make sure your players know that you'll never do it again. Also, have a conversation with the players about the mistake and why it happened. In the end, always talk to your players. I can't say this enough.

ALWAYS TALK TO YOUR PLAYERS.

Be Fair

We didn't say "arbitrary," we said "fair." If a GM were arbitrary, every decision he made would have to discount the players' interests in their characters. A judge is arbitrary; she can't allow her decisions to be influenced by compassion. She has to be concerned with the rules, the whole rules, and nothing but the rules. Likewise, an arbitrary GM doesn't care about the consequences of his decisions, as long as he follows the rules.

PRO WRESTLING AND IMPROV 101

I run a lot of GM seminars at conventions, and the two bits of advice I always give are: 1) Watch pro wrestling, and 2) Take an improv class.

First, professional wrestling tells one story and tells it incredibly well: "There's this belt. And everybody wants it. And the story is what each of the characters is willing to do to get it." Really. That's all professional wrestling is. The characters are so basic, they're really archetypal. It's broken down into heroes and villains and the sides are always very clear. Families and names communicate a lot. If someone has the last name "Flair," "Funk" or "Steamboat," I can tell you *immediately* whether that character is a villain or a hero and what they'll do to get the belt. Pro wrestling also resolves all of its conflicts with violence. You want to know how to tell a story with a fight scene? Watch pro wrestling. The whole point of pro wrestling is telling stories with violence.

As for that second suggestion, go to your local community college, pay out the money and take an improvisation class. Seriously. Most community college classes are pretty cheap. You can even find local groups who are happy to play exercises with you. Go do it. You'll learn *so much* about how to think on your feet, how to extend narrative with just a *single* class. Go do it. Trust me. You can thank me later.

Dice are arbitrary. They don't care about your game, your stories, the Heroes or the players. Dice are not sentient (no matter what you think) and don't care about the impact of rolling a 1 or rolling a 10. They Just. Don't. Care.

Dice are *arbitrary*. And because of that, you have to be *fair*.

You have to take things into consideration when you make decisions. You have to consider the consequences of your decisions and how they impact the players and the story. Of course, this means that sometimes you may have to break the rules in the book to maintain the **7th Sea** Golden Rule.

That's not arbitrary, but it is fair.

Consequences

When you bury your enemies, bury them deep.
A good rain can dig them back up again.
— Berek's Proverbs

It's true in physics and it's true in storytelling: every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

In other words, consequences are attached to everything your Heroes do. This is one of the most important parts of running a roleplaying game. In swashbuckling literature, any mistakes a Hero makes, any secrets she tries to keep, no matter how hard she tries to bury them, they always come back to haunt her. Sure, they don't show up in the very next game session, but they do show up when they're least expected...and when they can cause the most amount of trouble.

Every Brute your Heroes throw from a rooftop, every beggar they turn away, every hopeful lover they scorn is a new story seed waiting for you to harvest. A new Villain. A new NPC Hero. A new complication in a future story. Pay attention to *everything* your Heroes do. Take notes. Remember names and faces. Your players may have short memories, but you cannot. After all, you are Fate herself, watching over the Heroes, plotting out their destinies step by step.

Death

The 7th Sea game system reflects the metaphysics of the swashbuckling genre: happenstance doesn't kill Heroes, Villains do. Okay, sometimes boulders kill Heroes, but there's always a Villain on the other side, pushing it on top of him.

Random events can't kill Heroes; otherwise their deaths would have no meaning. Heroes die on deathbeds, surrounded by friends and family, or they die kicking on the end of a Villain's blade, just within sight of other Heroes (who then purchase the Villain as a Revenge Story).

Villains are the only way Heroes can die in 7th Sea. They can't die after falling off balconies, they can't die in burning houses, they can't die from the plague… only a Villain can kill a Hero. That's a deliberate choice on our part. The reason? Because in stories, death is too significant for it to be an accident.

If you kill off too many Heroes too quickly—or too arbitrarily—you lose death as a storytelling tool to create drama. If anyone can die at any time for any reason—including stupid reasons—your audience stops caring about your characters.

(Yeah. That's commentary.)

And in this case, "your audience" is your players.

But if death is something that can only happen under a specific circumstance, when that circumstance arises you can be sure your players' heart rates will go up. They'll worry. They may even panic.

But how do you kill Heroes? Simple. You make a deal.

Death Scenes

Killing a Hero should be a very deliberate act. In fact, you should go out of your way to do it. We recommend bringing the Hero's player in on the action.

After you've run the game a few times, go to each player individually and ask her, "How do you want your Hero to die?" Listen carefully, take notes and when you're done talking, go back to your GM planning room and think about what you just heard. You don't have to enact your plans right away, but you can still use your little talk in more ways than your players may suspect.

Let's use Rich and his Vodacce Duelist, Constanzo, as an example. Rich put a lot of work into his Hero, making him the twin brother of a Fate Witch (another Hero, by the way). Rich revealed to the GM that if his Hero has to die, he wants to die saving his sister's life. In fact, not only will Constanzo die for his sister, but he'll die protecting her from their father. The GM wrote that down and made preparations.

After a few months (and a few dueling scars), Constanzo has grown as a character and his sister has gained quite a reputation. Unfortunately, she's attracting the wrong kind of attention. Bounty hunters from Vodacce are looking for the pair, hoping to bring them back home. Every time one of these bounty hunters shows up, Rich remembers what he told the GM about Constanzo dying while protecting his sister and he sweats a little. And if you think bounty hunters make him sweat, just wait 'til their father shows up on the shores of Avalon, armed to the

teeth with six Fate Witches in tow, each scanning the strands for their lost sister.

And when it comes time, when it seems the whole world is against them, when the choice becomes "Me or my sister…" Rich will make the choice. Constanzo will trade his life for his sister's life. Because he told you he would. And you're giving him exactly what he wants.

Death scenes can be a lot of fun, but they aren't for everyone. Players who like playing the same character for years may find them a bit intimidating at first, but if you present the idea in the proper light, they'll warm up to it right away. After all, you're removing the random element from their Hero's final moments. They know exactly when, how, and why their Hero is going to die. That should warm the cockles of even the most skeptical player's heart.

Punishment and Failure

So, a few people have told me this section belongs in one of my *Play Dirty* books. (My collection of really mean, cutthroat, underhanded GM advice to make your players love to hate you.) It's unorthodox, to be sure, but it's also…rather mean. As in, permanently scarring a player's Hero kind of mean. So, go forward with a little caution.

The main idea here is something I espoused a long, long time ago. Way back when I was writing for *Legend of the Five Rings* 1st Edition. **The players' character sheets cannot protect their characters.** Most roleplaying games use character sheets as a way to shield players from the plot, from NPCs, from the world in general. Games have multiple redundant systems to protect them from injury…but you and I aren't going to engage those systems. Nope. We're going to hurt Heroes in ways that never even address that their character sheets exist.

Players are worried about their Heroes dying. Even in a game like this—specifically designed to make killing Heroes almost impossible—they'll worry about losing their character. And that's why they're setting themselves up for the ultimate sucker punch.

The plain fact is: the GM can kill every character at will. He doesn't need rules to do it. "Rocks fall from the sky, you all die." That's it. Pretty basic, pretty unimaginative, but if the GM is in charge of the world, there's really nothing stopping the world from killing the Heroes.

One of the Heroes catches an incurable disease and she dies in two months.

One of the Heroes has a blood clot that breaks off from a vein in the Hero's lower leg, works up to the brain and the Hero dies instantly.

It's not hard to come up with ways to kill Heroes. The real challenge…is to *hurt them* in ways that make them want to take action.

Contrary to popular belief, death isn't the ultimate failure, nor is death always the ultimate punishment. As the cliché goes, there are things far worse than death, and if you plan things right, your players will learn this the hard way.

Villains don't always kill defeated Heroes (especially when they have the Talkative Hubris). Sometimes they're content to lock them away in an impenetrable prison and let them rot there for twenty years. (See *The Count of Monte Cristo*.)

Think about that for a moment: locked in a ten foot by ten foot prison cell for twenty years. Nothing but you, the rats, rotten water, moldy bread, and a little hole in the corner where you do your dirty business. That's it. Twenty. Long. Years.

Now imagine locking a Hero in that tiny little cell. For twenty long years.

Could you imagine coming to your weekly role-playing session, knowing your Hero was locked up in prison, hoping that someone breaks in to rescue you? Otherwise, when the GM asks you what you're doing today, you reply, "I'm dodging the rats. They're really hungry this morning."

Villains can cut out your eyes.

Or shove your face in a brazier of red-hot coals.

Or murder your father and marry your mother.

Or steal away your true love when you aren't looking.

Don't think for a moment that death is the worst thing that can happen to a Hero. Don't think that when a Hero completely screws up you have to kill him. You can do all sorts of nasty stuff to him. All you need is a little imagination. And if a player ever complains about what you did to his Hero, you can say, "Hey, don't complain. I could have killed you."

Now, all of that is pretty underhanded. The kind of stuff you'd expect from *Play Dirty*.



Action Sequences

The next few sections talk a little bit about running Action Sequences, the bread and butter of the swashbuckling genre. We're hitting these fast and furious, so hang on.

Combat is two or more Heroes throwing punches at each other or swinging swords, inflicting Wounds, checking for Dramatic Wounds, checking initiative and attacking again.

How dull is this?

Any Game Master can run a stock combat scene. We want you running **Action Scenes**. Fast and furious, Action Scenes involve two groups—Heroes and Villains—fighting life and death struggles in the middle of a burning barn. While the Hero is being strangled over the edge of the loft, she looks down and sees that the flames are about to reach the explosives the Villain is smuggling across the countryside. She tries to tell the Villain, but she's a bit busy being strangled at the moment. She looks down again, and sees the flames will reach the explosives in five seconds... four... three... two...

In order to show you how to run effective Action Scenes, let's go over a few important ideas.

Improvising the Details

First and foremost, don't be afraid to "improvise the details" when an Action Scene starts. More importantly, encourage your players to improvise. For example, your Heroes are sitting at a tavern when a fight breaks out. One of them turns to you and says, "I pick up the bottle on the table behind me and smash someone over the head."

Now, you didn't say there was a bottle on the table behind them, but they are in a tavern house; there should be a bottle behind them, shouldn't there? Or how about grabbing a flaming log from the fireplace. Was the fireplace lit? Sure! Why not? Can the Hero grab one of the serving wenches and swing her around, throwing a pile of skirts in some Brute's face? Sure!

If the players' actions add flavor and drama to the scene, reward their ingenuity with a positive response. All they're doing is filling out the details of the scene. Don't cramp their style—especially if it makes the scene more exciting.

Pacing an Action Scene

Never give the Heroes a moment to breathe. Things happen at a breakneck pace, and if the players don't think quickly, they won't keep up. Let's take a look at examples of how to pick up the pace during your Action Scenes.

Reckless Abandon

When your players look at the **7th Sea** game system, one of the first things they'll probably say is, "Hey! I can't get killed in this game! I'm going to be jumping off the walls!"

If your players have this response...well then, good for them, because they're right. That's exactly what we designed the game to do. Heroes can't get killed by a bunch of Brutes, but they can get overwhelmed, held down and conked on the head. They can jump from tabletops to chandeliers without effort and they can survive incredible falls with nary a scratch. The game system encourages them to act with reckless abandon, to act in haste and repent at leisure.

Don't worry if they bounce around Brutes like nobody's business; that's what the Brutes are there for. It's when they bump into Villains that things start getting complicated. By the way, the first time they pull out a sword and slash at someone they think is a punk Brute and the punk Brute touches the scar on his face, slowly pulls his own sword from its sheath and looks at the Hero like he's a side of beef, make sure you're looking right into the player's eyes. That's a memory to carry around for a while.

"Give me a minute to think!"

When the Heroes jump into battle, they don't have time to look over a map, look at their Hero Points, consider which weapon to use, talk to the other Heroes about strategy or ask which Brute is by the door and which is by the bar. They have scant seconds to scan the area, come up with a game plan and leap into action.

In other words, if their Heroes don't have time to think, neither should the players. After players roll dice and you're about to ask everybody what they're going to do, give them a few seconds to look over the map, consider their options and shout out a couple of instructions to each other.

SLOW POKES

So, you've got a player who likes to take his time, likes to consider every consequence of his actions before he commits to one. And asking him to hurry up is stepping on the way he enjoys the game.

Okay, sure. There are exceptions to every rule. If a player wants to take time to make sure he's going to do the right thing, tell him this:

"Look, I'm not going to screw you over. This isn't about you vs. me and I'm not looking for a way to turn your decisions against you. I understand you want to make sure you make the best choice, but honestly, this isn't a game about making the best choices. This isn't a game about tactics and strategy. It's about telling stories. If you're worried you aren't going to make the best *story choice*, then take your time. But if you're worried about making the best tactical choice... don't worry about it. And remember: the best stories come from *mistakes*. So feel safe to make some. I won't screw you over. We're in this together, telling a story together. I'm on your side. Now...what does your Hero do?"

Then, clap your hands, look them in the eye and start demanding actions.

Don't ask 'em. Demand 'em.

Now, a quick note about being friendly. Remember: nobody likes a tyrant and if you turn this little procedure into an opportunity to make their Heroes look incompetent, the players will hate you forever. Don't do that. But *do* let them know that they have to think quickly. Don't dawdle. Don't be looking at your cell phone or chatting about Netflix. Focus. Make a decision. Do it now.

Things are happening fast and there's no time for doubt. They've got to act now or lose. That's it, end of discussion.

Now, the only way to make this work is to *put yourself under the same roof*. That means that all of your Brutes and Villains have only a few moments to act. If you hesitate, the Heroes can take advantage.

That's fair. And remember: always be fair.

The Storyteller Hat

You've learned how to prepare for a game and how to run the game smoothly. Now we'll show you how to bring those stories you've written to life using that most important storytelling rule—"Show, Don't Tell"—to make 7th Sea come to life for your players.

Every GM has her own unique voice. We don't want you to think that the suggestions we make below constitute the "official" or "correct" way to run 7th Sea. Like everything else in this book, these suggestions are just that: suggestions. These tools and hints have helped us, and we hope they'll help you.

Techniques (Literary and Otherwise)

The following sections discuss a whole bunch of highbrow literary techniques. The kind of techniques that "real" writers use. The ones we're looking at are "The Three Fives": three very important groups to remember whenever you're writing or running a game. First, we talk about the **five questions**: "who," "where," "what," "how" and "why." Second, the **five senses** teach you the sacred storytelling law of "Show, Don't Tell." Finally, the **five voices** show you how to give players information using different methods of narrative.

The Five Questions

Whenever you're writing up an NPC, writing the adventure for the evening, or considering an NPC's response, there are five questions you should always ask yourself: how, what, where, who and why. Asking yourself these five questions helps you fill in details you never even knew existed.

For example, let's make up an NPC. He's a Castillian Duelist with a scorned lover. That's enough to begin with. Now all we do is start asking questions.

How did he gain a scorned lover? What will he do when she confronts him for the first time? When did he begin his training as a duelist? Who is the scorned lover who seeks revenge against him? Finally, why did he decide to become a duelist? Every question reveals a little bit more about our faceless fellow.

Whenever you come up with a new plot twist or NPC, throw the five questions at it and see what happens. You may be surprised at what you find.

The Five Senses

There are two ways to describe a scene to a group of players. You can tell them about it, or you can show it to them. Let's look at both examples.

> The doors open. The air is stale. The room is big, fifty feet by fifty feet. There are red curtains hanging over the six windows. There are twelve chairs and three tables. One man, dressed in black leather and wearing a duelist's pin, is sitting in a chair. His hair and beard are black. He looks over six feet tall. He's looking at you across the room and says, "Come in and sit down." His accent is Castillian.

The players have all the important information to react properly to the scene. They're being invited into a large room filled with chairs and tables by a Castillian duelist dressed in black. But there's so much more information you can give them. Let's take a look at another example.

> The doorways open and a stale wind rushes out, making your faces frown and your noses itch. The light from outside tries to make its way through the dusty windows, but the corners are still filled with shadows. The red dye in the draperies hanging over the six windows has faded to a dull pink and the edges have been torn by ambitious rats. Among the scattered tables and chairs sits a man who does not belong in this room... or perhaps he does. His limbs are long and his fingers are fine.
>
> His black eyes flash in the dim light under his flowing dark curls. He raises a hand of welcome. "Come in and sit down," he says, his voice as smooth as a jenny's silk dress. His smile widens just as you catch a glimpse of the duelist's pin on his jacket and you wonder what's more dangerous, his sword or his smile.

The showing example tells the players about the room, the draperies, the chairs, the tables, and the Castillian Duelist, but it also gives them a sense of foreboding. The musty smell, the ruined tapestries, the trapped sunlight, the darkened corners all point toward one thing: Something in this room is as rotten as three-week-old fish.

Whenever you describe scenes to your Heroes, remember the oldest storytelling rule: Show, Don't Tell.



The Five Voices

When we say "the five voices," we're talking about narrative: the voice the author uses to communicate information. Whenever you convey information to the players—which is just about whenever you open your mouth—you're using narrative.

In a nutshell, when you pick up a book, the voice of the author is the narrative. There are five narrative voices, or methods of communicating information to your players: action, description, dialogue, exposition, and thought. Each has a strength and a weakness, and we'll talk about each one in turn.

Action

Sometimes, action does speak louder than words. When an NPC slams his fist into the wall after being told that his sister is missing, you show the players his anger without him ever saying a word.

Two rival courtiers—a man and a woman—argue endlessly in court, but when the Heroes see them steal away into the gardens for secret, midnight kisses, you show the players a lot without either of them saying a word. When the lord of the manor learns that his son is scheming to have him killed and he grasps the hard- boiled egg on his breakfast plate and gets ready to *squeeeeeze*...then places the perfect, unbroken egg back on the plate, you've shown the players something about the character that words just can't convey.

Action gives you a lot of opportunity to show emotion and thought without any words being spoken at all—other than your own, telling the story, that is.

Description

When the Heroes awaken on a bright summer's morning on the side of a hill, with the gleaming dawn warming their skin, and they feel the crisp dew on the backs of their necks and the thick taste of sleep in their mouths, they hear a cock crowing in the farm at the bottom of the hill...you are using description.

Description is simply conveying information through the Heroes' senses. Don't forget to use every one of them: sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. The previous paragraph uses all of them to convey the sensation of awakening.

Dialogue

As Game Master, you have to fill every role that isn't played by the players. This means you have to learn a thousand different voices—okay, maybe only five or six—in order to bring your NPCs' dialogue fully to life. Whenever you play a character, you convey information through dialogue.

The most important thing to remember here is that everyone sees things differently, and then has their own way of communicating it. A sailor sees a bar fight differently than a duelist. The sailor sees fists flying and chairs breaking across backs, and hears bottles breaking over heads. The duelist has a much more analytical approach to the situation. If you talked to both of these people about the same fight, you'd get two very different stories in two very different voices. Learn to master all of them.

Exposition

Exposition is conveying information directly from you to the players. No voices, no flash, no poetry, just plain explanation. Obviously, this is the most boring use of narrative ever invented. Don't use it. Not ever.

There's a way to make exposition interesting: turn it into dialogue. In other words, make the players speak to the world.

If they want to know the circumference of the world, quote the answer from one of Théah's scholarly texts. If you don't know one, make one up. If they need to know something their Heroes don't, make them look it up or find an expert on the subject.

Thought

Showing thoughts through actions—as we demonstrated above—is usually cleaner. However, sometimes showing the actual thought process, literally letting them inside a character's head, can show them more about the character than actions can. A character's thoughts may be erratic, showing madness, or they can be quite disturbing, showing something even darker.

A friend of mine named Tony uses this incredible technique I call "external exposition." When his character is deep in thought, he narrates it out loud for others to hear. And why not? RPG stories don't have to be all in first and second person limited POV. They can be third person omniscient, too.

Using Narrative

How you choose to present information to your players is important. Players assume that everything you show them is important, and in a way they're right. You can use narrative to misdirect your players or throw them into plot twists so mean they spin their heads around. They'll pay close attention to almost everything you show them, and you know what that means, right? That means *you* have to pay attention to everything you show them.

Be very deliberate with your narrative voice. How, when and why you show them things will influence their behavior down the road. If you throw them in the middle of a murder mystery and don't show them the proper clues, you'll have some disgruntled players. On the other hand, if you do show them everything they needed to know, but present it in a way that they don't notice unless they're looking for it, you can go back and point at the information and say, "Here! See this? You guys missed it!" How you show your players information is just as important as what you show them.

The Storyteller's Toolbox

As a storyteller, you have two very important tools: your voice and your body. Here are some examples of how to use these two all-important tools.

Voice

Whenever you speak as an NPC, whenever you invoke a thunder crash, whenever a Villain runs a cold knife along a helpless victim's skin, you can use your voice to make the moment come to life.

Whenever you design an NPC, make some notes about his voice. Is it gravelly or high-pitched? Is her accent so thick that the players can only barely make out what she's saying? Does he speak so fast that you have to ask him to repeat everything he says? The more distinct you make each voice, the easier it is for your players to recognize prominent NPCs by their voices alone.

Likewise, when describing a thunderstorm, don't settle for saying, "And the thunderstorm rages outside." Do the raging yourself! Make thunder with your voice, make the lightening flash across the sky. When the waves rush up over the side of your Heroes' ship, let your players hear it in your voice.

Body

If every character has a distinctive voice, she must also have distinct body language. When you make the sound of thunder streaking across the sky, let your body show it as well. Waves washing over the side of the ship don't just make sounds, they push over the side with the power of the ocean.

Using your body in concert with your voice can make magical effects. A young, brash Castillian duelist and an old Church scholar walk very differently; show that to your players. When the boatswain storms during a battle barking orders, storm right up to the players' faces and bark orders. When your Montaigne Porte sorcier steps between doorways, walk just behind him, whispering desperate pleas for him to open his eyes.

After the Game

So you've just finished your first session and everyone is still sitting round, chewing on cold pizza and downing the last sodas. This is the perfect time to get a little feedback on your game.

Rewards

The first thing to do when a game ends is hand out the rewards the players have earned. Most of the time, that's Advancements from Stories. However, sometimes you hand out rewards that don't involve direct game benefits.

For example, have each player secretly vote for who they think had the best or most dramatic moment of the night. This isn't a "Best Roleplaying Award," but voting for who had the most impressive in-character moment. Only rule: the players can't vote for themselves. Whoever the winner may be gets an extra Hero Point at the beginning of the next game.

Evaluation

After the players are done with their Advancements, take a moment or two to look at what happened, what went right and ways to fix what went wrong.

Evaluating Style

First, talk to your players about the game. Don't ask, "Did you have fun?" In fact, don't ask any Yes-or-No questions at all. Ask questions they have to think about. Go around the table and ask these two questions:

- What was the most memorable moment?
- What would you like to do differently?

If you don't feel comfortable asking these questions in public, take the players aside and ask them individually. Just make sure that they tell you what they liked and what they would want to see different. Mark down their answers and take some time to think about them. Your players are your best feedback when it comes to improving your Game Mastering style. Remember, you are here to entertain *them*.

If you're doing something they don't like, find out what it is and why they don't like it, then make the appropriate changes.

PROBLEM PLAYERS

A friend of mine always treats disruptive players like he treats people in movie theaters acting the same way. First, a polite, "Please stop." Then, a more firm, "Hey, could you please stop." And finally, a visit to the manager to have the person removed.

At your table, you are the manager of the theater. If a player continues to be disruptive, abusive, dismissive of other players, just ask them to leave the table and come back next week. But before that happens, have a talk. After all, we're all adults, we're all friends, and we all deserve that level of respect.

And, in the end, if you have someone in your group who only gains joy by making others miserable...ditch 'em. Just get rid of them. Go online, find another player in your town or city and replace 'em. I know that sounds hard, but the internet has made it a lot easier.

Evaluating Story

Your players can also help you plan for next week's session. All you have to do is ask them about the game and where they think it's heading. Ask them about the ambiguous or mysterious parts of the plot. Your players' feedback will give you options you never even considered. And remember, anything they haven't seen is part of the plot that you can change.

Retroactive Continuity

Sometimes the players bump into an NPC who has absolutely nothing to do with your intended plot and the players cling to him like a life preserver. Suddenly he's a very important part of your plot, the linchpin of your plans, and when the players come to you at the end of it all and say, "Wow! How did you know that Jack the Butcher was really our contact with the Rose & Cross?" you smile to yourself and say nothing.

This is called "retroactive continuity." It's the ability to make last-minute changes look like long-term plans.

In order to use retroactive continuity, you must be able to improvise quickly and keep all the details of your story as close to your chest for as long as possible. Keep your secrets close to you. The less you reveal up front, the more you can change at the last minute.



Villains

Villains are an essential element in a 7th Sea campaign. They set the tone of the game, showing Heroes exactly where the stakes rest. This section details how to use Villains in your campaigns, defines his role in a story, and builds a Villain from the ground up, starting with his past, his motives, and even his ethics. We'll discuss how to play him, how to fit him into your campaign, and how to keep him showing up just when the Heroes least expect it.

Thought and Deed

As far as 7th Sea is concerned, there's no such thing as an Evil Thought; it's when thought turns to deed that Evil occurs. All human beings suffer the pangs of temptation. Théans believe that the ability to say "No" to temptation is a virtue, and exercising that virtue brings one closer to the Creator.

Ends and Means

The Five Hundred Questions, one of Théah's oldest surviving books, is a dialogue between the Old Empire philosopher Klymosthynes (modern Théans know him as "Clement") and his students. One of his students asked, "Teacher, does the outcome of an act justify the means I employ?"

Clement only half-answered the question. "If your means are just," he said, "the end cannot be otherwise."

Heroes don't fall into the "ends justify the means" camp. That's for Villains. The "two wrongs do not make a right" philosophy lives here. Just because a Villain steals from a Hero does not mean the Hero may now steal from him.

Murder in 7th Sea

Characters aren't killed by accident in 7th Sea. Even gunfire cannot kill a character without a deliberate act from a Hero or a Villain. When a Villain or rival Hero or a Brute Squad is defeated, they don't simply die; they lay before you, Helpless...and vulnerable.

For the most part, killing a Helpless person is an unjustified killing. A murder. An Evil Act, under nearly any and all circumstances.

Heroes do not commit murder. Ever.

But Heroes do kill when their hands are forced by Villains and their cronies. They kill when there is no other way to get justice, when they must end a life to save another. They kill when there are no other options. But they remember it and often regret it. For some Heroes, the act haunts them to their grave.

It's Your Call

In the end, as Game Master, you have the final say over all actions. If you sense your players getting close to the line, stop them and let them know. A single Evil Act can send Heroes into the Villain camp faster than they can say Novus Ordo Mundi.

What Is a Villain?

It could be said that you can find out a lot about someone by asking them who their favorite villain is. A few may mention the classics: Fu Manchu, Professor Moriarty and Ming the Merciless come to mind. Shakespeare has his share of memorable dastardly fellows and ladies, such as Richard III, Iago and Lady Macbeth. Milady de Winter is still one of my favorite Dumas villains. Many even call up a few Disney villains as their favorites.

Your Villains can summon the same emotions that their aforementioned cousins do. In order to do so, we have to give them the same loving attention.

Bringer of Conflict

If plot is the engine of story, then conflict is the gas in the tank. Your Heroes are the protagonists, but in order for there to be a story, there must first be conflict. If there's no conflict in your story, your Heroes will find a nice, cozy tavern, sit down and start drinking.

The chief role of your Villains is to be the *antagonist*. To provide your Heroes with conflict. To change their lives in real and powerful ways. Not just standing between your Heroes and their needs and wants, but uprooting the Heroes' lives and throwing them in the gutter.

Darth Vader is the antagonist in *Star Wars* because he invokes change. He stops Leia from delivering the plans, thus sending R2-D2 and Threepio to Luke. Then, he indirectly causes the death of Luke's aunt and uncle, giving young Skywalker no reason to stay on Tatooine. Vader is the antagonist, causing change in Luke's life and standing between Luke and what he wants.

An example of a less obvious antagonist is Andy Dufresne from *The Shawshank Redemption*. Andy serves as the catalyst for change in the prison. He changes everyone's lives—including the Warden's. Andy is *not* the protagonist. He's not even the narrator. Andy doesn't change during the movie, but Morgan Freeman's character, Red, *does change*. He begins the story believing hope is dangerous and by the end, his friend Andy changes his mind…and possibly even saves his life.

This is the role of your antagonist: to create conflict, strife and change in your Heroes' lives.

Building the Villain

A Villain who has no motivations is nothing more than a literary device. You don't have to figure out your Villain's entire character before your Heroes meet him—a little ambiguity leaves you room for improvisation—but even a little clue to his personality will help you establish a firm first impression.

Goals & Motives

No one is evil for the sake of evil—no one.

Every Villain has his reasons for being a despicable, dastardly fellow. Below are some of the most common motivators for acts of depravity and evil. Your Villains should focus on one or two.

Acceptance

"I don't want to rule the world alone."

Some Villains just want to be loved. Of course, most of them want to be loved by someone else, but no self-respecting Villain would allow a little detail like that stand in his way.

A Villain looking for acceptance is generally concerned with his appearance and demeanor; he doesn't want word of his amoral acts getting back to his paramour. Often, he even goes out of his way to ensure she thinks the most of him. It could be said that the character of Valmont in *Dangerous Liaisons* is a Villain looking for acceptance. This desire slowly changes into a need for redemption (see page 203).

Aggression

"Laws are created by the weak to protect them from the strong."

Bullies. We all know them and we all hate them. That's why they make great Villains.

Aggression is like a drug: the more you use it, the more you want to use it, and the more you find you have to use it. Physical violence is an easy solution to almost any problem, especially if you're the biggest and the strongest. A Villain who uses aggression to get what she wants often finds she has to use it to keep what she has. Fortunately for her, she enjoys using it so much, she usually doesn't mind. Just remember the fourth law of nature: there's always something bigger and more powerful than you.

Ambition

> *"Of course the Prophet preached against ambition. He was the one at the top."*

Villains with the ambition motive don't care who's ahead of them on the social ladder; those folks are going to fall. Preferably with a knife in their back. Preferably with *your* knife in their back.

Ambitious Villains are best when they're ruthless. Richard III is a great example of a merciless man on his way to the crown. He kills men, women and children—or, at least arranges for their murder—then casts away all those who helped him get to the top so he can wear the crown all by himself. Of course, that attitude left him with no allies, but ambitious Villains seldom keep friends for more than a day or so.

Autonomy

> *"A man has only one voice he must listen to, and that is his own."*

Many James Bond Villains are perfect examples of people looking to free themselves from "conventional" societal restraints. They want to live alone on an island and never be bothered by another human soul. Unfortunately, the uranium they've stolen to power their underground lair is seeping radiation into a nearby school, fishery or hospital.

This Villain isn't necessarily looking to be King. In fact, she probably doesn't want to wear a crown at all. Monarchy puts too many limits on one's freedom. But, if everyone were to disappear, she certainly wouldn't complain—as long as a few Brutes remained to do her bidding and fetch her dinner.

Nationalism

> *"There is only one thing I am concerned with, and that is the welfare of our wounded nation. Any Eisen who does not put his life and soul on the line to heal her is not worthy of the name his father gave him."*

Parents will do anything to protect their children. Nationalists will do anything to preserve their homeland. "We will pay the price, but we will not count the cost" is a very heroic sentiment, but like all heroic sentiments, it travels into Villain territory once it's been taken too far.

Other times, however, Villains use the sentiment to drive good men to evil means. The quote about Eisen is a perfect example. Eisen needs Heroes desperately, but some seek to use that notion to further their own goals. El Vagabundo's love of Castille, on the other hand, does not further his own ambitions, but serves Good King Sandoval.

Order

> *"Theft. Murder. It's all around us. Only a strong man can bring order to this world. A man unafraid to break the law to make justice."*

You know his name. He lurks in the shadows of a big gothic city with his cowl and utility belt and his sleek, high-tech car. He swings through the night, thwarting crooks and distributing justice to the wicked. You know his name—but is he a Villain? He doesn't murder anyone and he upholds the "spirit" of the law. He's doing what's right in the name of a noble cause, isn't he? By all accounts that should make him a Hero.

That all depends on if you think he's trying to bring order to the city, or if he's out on his own personal vendetta. Everything comes down to intent. Put it this way: If someone else came into the city and did a better job than he does, would he retire? If the answer is, "Yes," he's a Hero. If not...

Revenge

> *"The meek arm themselves with justice. The righteous arm themselves with revenge."*

Revenge works best when it's righteous. In other words, give purpose to the Villain's anger. If the Hero is dueling the Villain, the Hero could make a mistake. Instead of disarming the Villain, he severely wounds her. Perhaps he cuts out an eye, or lops off an ear, or misses entirely and hits the Villain's son.

Now, when the Villain comes looking for revenge, what's the Hero going to say? Apologize? You think that's going to make everything all right? If the Villain has a legitimate hatred for the Hero, it makes it harder to "make things right."

All too often in roleplaying games, personal injury (physical and otherwise) is only used with Heroes. Stick it to a Villain and watch the games begin.

Ethics

The next important step is asking yourself, "What is my Villain willing to do to get what he wants?" In other words, you have to question his ethics. Here are three viewpoints to consider.

Doing the right thing for the wrong reasons

Villains often do the right thing for selfish or evil reasons. Billy Zane's character in *Titanic* is a great example. At the end of the film, as the great ship sinks into the ice-cold waters, he grabs a little girl and uses her to get on a lifeboat. Sure, he saved the little girl's life, but he wouldn't have done it if it wasn't the key to saving his own.

Doing the wrong thing for the right reasons

The hardest Villain to figure out is the misguided one. Villains who take hostages to free others being held against their will take the "Two wrongs make a right" point of view. "If you're going to take hostages, then I'm going to take hostages" is not a Heroic viewpoint. On the other hand, the Villain is attempting to do the right thing. Her jaded sense of right and wrong, however, has put her on the wrong side of the fence.

The *Batman* Villain Mr. Freeze is a great example of the "wrong thing for right reasons" Villain. His wife suffers from a deadly disease. In order to keep her alive long enough to find a cure, he began researching cryogenics. Due to circumstances beyond his control, Mrs. Freeze's cryo chamber is damaged. Now, Freeze *must* steal to keep her chamber operating. When her chamber is damaged beyond repair, he swears revenge instead of trusting the matter to the authorities.

Doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons

Finally, we have the despicable monsters who don't care about ethics. These are the Villains who simply do the wrong thing for the wrong reasons. They are selfish for the point of being selfish. They steal because they can. They murder because they can.

It's all too easy to let this kind of Villain get out of hand. The other two are much easier for players to believe. Sociopaths like this are just animals in human skin who need to be put down. Give your Villains motivations other than "I'm Evil!" even if it's just "... because I'm smart/daring/strong enough to get away with it."

Abilities & Resources

An important factor in your Villain's personality is the level of resources at his disposal. Some Villains are filthy rich, while others live in abject squalor. Some have an entire legion of soldiers at their beck and call, while others have nothing more than their sword, their wits and a thirst for revenge.

A Villain's resources aren't just limited to money. An officer in one of Théah's armies has an almost limitless supply of Brutes and minor Villains to draw from, not to mention powerful political allies. Courtiers have resources outside the money purse, including legal ties that can bankrupt a Hero.

Imagine a Hero who comes home one day to find her house claimed by the throne, her family clapped into irons and her friends running for cover. She has nothing. No resources, no allies, no means of gaining revenge for her family. All she can do is fight. Of course, the Villain who caused all this has hired the best Duelist in Castille to fight for him, but nothing can stand in the way of a Hero's revenge, right?

You're Going to Do Fine

That's a lot, right? But don't worry. You've got this. I know you do. I've got confidence in you. You've got a bunch of friends willing to help you and support you. You've got this book. You've got a whole heaping lot of 7th Sea fans on the internet willing to offer you advice.

Being a GM is hard work. But it's also rewarding work. When you pull it off, it really is like being a magician. Watching the players' reactions. Reacting to things *that don't exist*.

Yeah, I'm going back to that because it's important. Don't worry about the things you screw up. Chances are, your players didn't notice. And if they did, they're willing to ignore it. Just keep moving.

You're going to do fine. Trust me. I've been doing this my entire life. I know such things. Now go join your friends and help them tell stories.





Appendix

Index

Action 174-175, 179, 187
  Improvised Actions 173
  Unskilled Actions 173
Action Sequence 178-180, 192
  Action Sequence Example 183-186
  Running an Action Sequence 290-291
Advantages 133, 148-155, 160
Arcana (Virtues & Hubrises) 133, 156-158, 160
Avalon 17, 22-26
  Avalonian Heroes & Ships 119, 142, 248
  Current Relations with Avalon 32, 41, 47, 62, 69, 70, 78, 85, 94, 105
Backgrounds 133, 137-146
  Quirks 137-146, 160
The Brotherhood of the Coast 26, 32, 95, 108, 111, 164, 260
Brute Squads 191-192, 195
Castille 17, 27-32
  Castillian Heroes & Ships 122-123, 143, 248
  Current Relations with Castille 26, 41, 62, 70, 78, 85, 94, 105
Character Concept 133-136
Corruption 160, 203
Danger Pool 177, 192
Dievai 63, 66-67
Dracheneisen 35, 261-262
Dramatic Sequence 186-187
  Dramatic Sequence Example 188-190
Dueling 97, 139, 154
  Aldana 236
  Ambrosia 237
  Boucher 237
  Donovan 237
  Drexel 237
  Duelist's Guild 234
  Eisenfaust 238
  Leegstra 238
  Maneuvers 235
  Mantovani 238
  Mireli 239
  Sabat 239
  Torres 239
  Valroux 239
Eisen 17, 33-41
  Current Relations with Eisen 26, 32, 62, 70, 78, 85, 94, 105
  Eisen Heroes & Ships 124, 143, 248
The Explorer's Society 111-112, 164, 263
Favor with Secret Societies 259-270
Firearms 180
Game Master (GM) 15-16, 159, 174, 191-203, 274-299
Golden Liberty 32, 63-64, 68-69
Hero Points 177
The Highland Marches 17, 22, 42-46,
  Highlander Heroes 121, 142
"I Fail" 181
Inismore 17, 22, 47-52
  Inish Heroes 120, 142
Inquisition 30, 103-104, 106, 122, 264
Invisible College 104, 164, 264
Knights of the Rose & Cross 111, 164, 265
Die Krezritter 111, 164, 261-262
Map of Theah 21
Mociutes Skara 111, 164, 267
Monsters 114-115, 196-198, 255
Montaigne 17, 53-62
  Current relations with Montaigne 26, 32, 41, 62, 70, 78, 85, 94, 105
  Montaigne Heroes & Ships 125-126, 144, 248
The Montaigne Invasion 27, 53, 54, 60, 62
Novus Ordo Mundi 271
Objectionism 37-38, 99, 104-105, 121, 124
Pirates 26, 32, 41, 62, 70, 78, 85, 94, 108, 110, 253, 260
Pressure 176
Raises 173, 175-177, 179, 187-188, 191, 253
Reputation 150, 163
The Rilasciare 111, 164, 268-269
Risks 168, 171-190
  Approaches 171-172, 178, 187, 191, 254
  Consequences & Opportunities 171-172, 174, 178, 253
  Flair 176
Rulings 16, 286-287
The Sarmatian Commonwealth 17, 63-70
  Current Relations with the Commonwealth 26, 32, 41, 62, 78, 85, 94, 105
  Sarmatian Heroes & Ships 127-128, 144, 248
Sailing 240-255
Seas 95-96
  The 7th Sea 96
The Sidhe 22, 24, 51, 66, 119, 121
Ships 247-253
Ship Battles 254-255
Skills 133, 137, 146-147, 160, 169-170
Sophia's Daughters 111, 164, 270
Sorcery 16, 99, 150
  Dar Matushki 145, 217-218
  Hexenwerk 124, 143, 206-209
  Knights of Avalon 22, 119, 142, 210-216
  Porte 144, 219-221
  Sanderis 67, 144, 222-227
  Sorte 87, 90, 132, 146, 228-231
Stories 133, 159-163
  Game Master Stories 199, 202
The Syrne 16, 112-113
Traits 133, 137, 160, 169
Ussura 17, 71-78
  Current Relations with Ussura 26, 32, 41, 62, 70, 85, 94, 105
  Ussuran Heroes & Ships 129, 145, 248

Los Vagabundos 27, 104, 266
Vaticine Church 16, 54, 99-106, 264
Heroes' Views on the Church 119-120, 122, 126, 128
Nations' Views on the Church 24-25, 29-30, 37-38, 60, 66-67, 75, 92
Vendel League 40, 57-58, 62, 78-81, 83, 85, 87, 95, 131
Vestenmennavenjar 17, 79-85
Current Relations with Vestenmennavenjar 26, 32, 41, 62, 70, 78, 94, 105
Vesten Heroes & Ships 130-131, 145, 248
Villains 181, 193, 195, 296-299
Vodacce 17, 86-94
Current Relations with Vodacce 26, 32, 41, 62, 70, 78, 94, 105
Vodacce Heroes & Ships 132, 146, 248
War of the Cross 16, 33-34, 70, 105, 124
Wealth 164-165, 253
Wounds 165, 174, 180-181
Helpless 181

Advantage List

Able Drinker (1 point advantage) 148
Academy (4) 153
Alchemist (4) 153
An Honest Misunderstanding (3) 151
Bar Fighter (3) 151
Barterer (2) 149
Boxer (3) 151
Bruiser (3) 151
Brush Pass (3) 151
Camaraderie (3) 151
Cast Iron Stomach (1) 148
Come Hither (2) 149
Connection (2) 149
Deadeye (3) 151
Direction Sense (1) 148
Disarming Smile (2) 149
Duelist Academy (5) 154
Dynamic Approach (3) 151
Eagle Eyes (2) 149
Extended Family (2) 149
Fascinate (2) 149
Fencer (3) 151
Foreign Born (1) 148
Foul Weather Jack (3) 151
Friend at Court (2) 149
Got It! (2) 149
Handy (2) 149
Hard to Kill (4) 153
I Won't Die Here (5) 154
I'm Taking You with Me (5) 154
Indomitable Will (2) 149
Inspire Generosity (2) 149
Joie de Vivre (5) 154
Large (1) 148
Leadership (2) 149
Legendary Trait (4) 153
Linguist (1) 148
Lyceum (4) 153
Married to the Sea (2) 150
Masterpiece Crafter (3) 151
Miracle Worker (4) 153
Opportunist (3) 152
Ordained (3) 152
Patron (3) 152
Perfect Balance (2) 150
Poison Immunity (2) 150
Psst, Over Here (2) 150
Quick Reflexes (3) 152
Reckless Takedown (2) 150
Reputation (2) 150
Rich (3) 152
Riot Breaker (4) 153
Sea Legs (1) 148
Second Story Work (2) 150
Seidr (4) 153
Signature Item (3) 152
Slip Free (2) 150
Small (1) 148
Sniper (3) 152
Sorcery (2) 150
Spark of Genius (5) 154
Specialist (4) 154
Staredown (2) 150
Streetwise (2) 150
Strength of Ten (5) 155
Survivalist (1) 148
Team Player (2) 150
Tenure (3) 152
The Devil's Own Luck (5) 155
Time Sense (1) 148
Together We Are Strong (5) 155
Trusted Companion (4) 154
University (4) 154
Valiant Spirit (2) 150
Virtuoso (3) 152
We're Not So Different (5) 155

NATIONS OF THÉAH

Miles
0 100 200 300

THE TRADE SEA

Allfather Ice Floes

The Maw

Grumfather Bay

Montaigne / Avalon Strait

Hoppe Channel

WIDOW'S SEA

NUMANARI APPROACH

THE CRESCENT EMPIRE

Stróż Bay

Frothing Bay

Doré Bay

Vaticine Gulf

Los Grandes Bay

Highland Channel

Emerald Strait

Wyrd Isle

Jarl Forest

Thorshofn

Costa

Soroya

Klorhulg

KIRK

VESTENMENNAVENJAR

Eskjo

Vendel

Somajez

Ekatnava

PAVTLOW

Sladivgorod

Lake Vigil

Lake Cathay

Breslau

Scatha River

Vir'ava Forest

CATHAY STEPPES

USSURA

Rurik

Pösen

St. Anderson

Borovoi Forest

Tebizond

Vecho

Pratchie

Veide Hills

Lake Domovoi

Sousdal

Zlotogóra

Sanderas Forest

Yoruta

Zupan Mountains

Siev

Stanislawiec

St. Andresgorod

Freiburg

The Angenehme Wald

Heilgrund

Fischler

Sieger

Tännen

Hainzl

Adel

Rücken Island

Gottkirchen

Wische

Dechaine

Lierie

Pais

The Liebliche Wald

Atemlos

Dracheneisen Mountains

EISEN

Altamira

Starkbrunn

The Walder

Stutzung

Crieux

Muguet

Buché

Barcino

Lock-Horn Forest

Sice

Aur

MONTAIGNE

Arisent

Surlige

Toille

Arrent

Vergogne

Tarago

CHAROUSE

Mt Doré

Prevoye

Pourisse

Les Sommets Blancs

Coteau

Rayure

Rogne

La Motte

Simuéns Lake

San Juan

La Reina del Mar

Sandoval Forest

Las Pasiegas

Sandoval Island

SAN CRISTOBAL

Zepeda

Aldana

San Teodoro

Puerto del Sur

ODISEA PEN

Recaudadores Shoals

San Felipe

CASTILLE

Soldano

San Elisoo

Fontaine

Zvetochy Plains

BASHANTA

Five Sails

San Gustavo

San Agustín

Rioja

VESTINI

VATICINE CITY

Dovunque

SIGNORE ISLANDS

Casigua Rosa

Laurentia

Lucani

Villanova

Bessarion

Mondavi

Falisci

Caligari

Guarred de Puretofino

Porto Spatia

Orduño

VODACCE

Joppa

Tamamello

Wawelec

Szablewo

Sédilo

Saint Andrea

Lake Orduno

Pióro Peninsula

Pióro

Feniksowo

Dievat Marshes

Sejm River

Rokiecin

Rokosz

Sperus

Memel

Davidson Island

ISKANDAR

Crescent Hills

Paupys

Saulės Müsis

CURONIA

THE SARMATIAN COMMONWEALTH RZECZPOSPOLITA

BUDORIGUM

Cathay Forest

Lake Cathay

Borovoi Forest

THE HIGHLAND MARCHES

AVALON

KIRKWALL

Banesidhe Shoals

Connickmoor

MacDuff Highlands

Grinolet

Darwah

Mt Cymru

Wandesborrow

Balig

Shannagary Islands

O'Bannon Highlands

INISMORE

DONEGA

Dunkeen

CARLEON

LEGEND

Settlements
- Capital
- Major
- Minor

Boundaries
- National
- City State

Transportation
- Road
- Major Road
- Shipping Lane

Features
- River
- Major River
- Hill
- Mountain
- Marsh
- Light Forest Grassland
- Dense Forest
- Desert
- Glacier

Water Depth (ft)
- 0 - 500
- 501 - 1,500
- 1,501 - 3,000
- 3,001 - 6,000
- 6,001 - 9,000
- 9,001 - 12,000
- > 12,000

CHARACTER INFORMATION

Player
Character
Concept
Nation
Religion
Reputations

Wealth

ARCANA

STORIES

Name
Goal
Reward
Step 1

TRAITS

Brawn	○○○○○
Finesse	○○○○○
Resolve	○○○○○
Wits	○○○○○
Panache	○○○○○

SKILLS

Aim	○○○○○	Perform	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Sailing	○○○○○
Convince	○○○○○	Scholarship	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Tempt	○○○○○
Hide	○○○○○	Theft	○○○○○
Intimidate	○○○○○	Warfare	○○○○○
Notice	○○○○○	Weaponry	○○○○○

Rank 3: Re-Roll a single die
Rank 4: Sets of 15 = 2 Raises
Rank 5: 10s explode (+1 die)

DEATH SPIRAL

1: +1 Bonus Die to all Risks

2: Villains gain +2 Bonus Dice

3: Your 10s explode (+1 die)

4: You become Helpless



BACKGROUNDS

ADVANTAGES