Conspiracy of Shadows

Revised Edition

Created By
Keith Senkowski

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PARANOIA ET HORROR

"He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."
~ Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 146

On the continent of Polian, strange things occur at an alarming rate. Towns suddenly become infested with rats only to have them all disappear days later. Some people disappear for days only to return completely changed. Others disappear and are never heard from again. In some places when night falls, the land and even the very air appear to warp into a sinister parody of the daytime.

All of these events go unacknowledged by the authorities, both secular and religious, but they do occur. The people of the land are ignorant of the sinister forces that are shaping their world; however, a small number of men and women have seen through the lies. They have discovered the conspiracy in the shadows that works against humanity. They strive to know the truth.

In *Conspiracy of Shadows* you are driven by the knowledge of a hidden evil and risk your life searching for a means to thwart it.

A game of paranoia and horror, *Conspiracy of Shadows* draws on themes from gothic and pulp horror fiction, conspiracy theories, and the kinetic action found in modern horror-action films while placing you in a mysterious setting that is a dark reflection of medieval Eastern Europe.

Conspiracy of Shadows is a role-playing game that places characters in an underground Cell in order to fight an insidious conspiracy in a gritty medieval world. In this game, you will secretly hunt demons, warlocks, and mortal conspirators. All you need are some six-sided dice, pencils, and a willingness to seek out the truth.

How far are you willing to go to learn the truth?

Paranoia and Horror

Conspiracy of Shadows is a game of paranoia and horror. The Players and Game Master alike will find many similarities as well as many striking differences between the continent of Polian and our own medieval past.

Fear is the heart of this game. The source of this fear derives from a sinister unknown, the slow discovery of truth, and the constant belief that something is out to get you. The Players are helpless and, at the same time, masters of their own fate. Like the protagonists in any good piece of conspiracy or horror fiction, they must eventually confront the evil within as well as without, but the when and how of that confrontation is up to them.

This type of story, like that found in classic gothic novels and television shows such as *X-Files*, relies on a terror that is shrouded in mystery. There is always a constant sense of danger and foreboding. Warnings are given, but the characters still try to unravel the mystery, seduced by scraps of knowledge. In the end they discover that the evil of the world is overwhelming and mankind is small, helpless, and unaware of its doom. However, unlike the often times maddening characters in fiction who seem to simply give up, the characters in this game refuse to give in and continue to fight the battle that needs to be fought.

Influences

I think it is very important for authors to acknowledge where their ideas come from. Below I have listed some of the many works of others that have influenced the creation of this game. Some are role-playing games that set in motion many of the mechanics found in this game. Others are TV shows, movies and books that helped shape the setting of *Conspiracy of Shadows*. This is by no means a complete list, but it should give you a good idea of where this game comes from.

The Birds (Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1963)
Blade II (Directed by Guillermo del Toro, 2002)
Conan (Written by Rober E. Howard, 1932)
Conspiracy Theory (Directed by Richard Donner, 1997)
Conspiracy X (Edited by M. Alexander Jurkat, 1997)
Dark City (Directed by Alex Proyas, 1998)
Delta Green (Written by Dennise Detwiller, Adam Glancy, & John Tynes, 1996)
The Devil's Horsemen (Written by James Chambers, 2003)
Dogs in the Vineyard (Written by D. Vincent Baker, 2004)

Dracula (Written by Bram Stoker, 1897)

Forest of the Vampire (Written by Charles Phillips & Michael Kerrigan, 2003)

GURPS Horror, 3rd Edition (Written by Kenneth Hite, 2002)

GURPS Illuminati (Written by Nigel D. Findley, 1992)

Hellboy (Written & Illustrated by Mike Mignola, 1994-2005)

The Hundred Years War (Written by Desmond Seward, 1978

Kolchack: The Night Stalker (Produced by Cy Chermak, 1974-75)

The Manchurian Candidate (Directed by John Frankenheimer, 1962)

The Middle Ages (Written by Morris Bishop, 1968)

Millennium (Produced by Chris Carter, 1996-99)

Poland (Written by James Michener, 1984)

The Polish Way (Written by Adam Zamoyski, 1997)

Primetime Adventures (Written by Matt Wilson, 2004)

Riddle of Steel (Written by Jacob Norwood, 2002)

The Shadow of Yesterday (Written by Clinton R. Nixon, 2004)

Sorcerer (Written by Ron Edwards, 2001)

The Teutonic Knights (Written by Henryk Sienkiewicz, 1900)

X-Files (Produced by Chris Carter, 1993-2002)

Why a Revision?

You may be wondering why I decided to revise this game. There are two primary reasons. The most obvious is the editing. The original edition was filled with all sorts of editing mistakes that really irritated me.

Secondly I was not entirely satisfied with many aspects of the rules. They were not integrated as originally intended and nowhere near as clear as they should have been. Hopefully these issues have been addressed in this edition.

Using This Book

The rules in this game are based on the kinds of dice normally found in board games. All you will need for this game is a pencil, paper, at least one six-sided die, and a healthy dose of imagination. Visit our web site for additional material and free downloads at http://www.bobgoat.com.
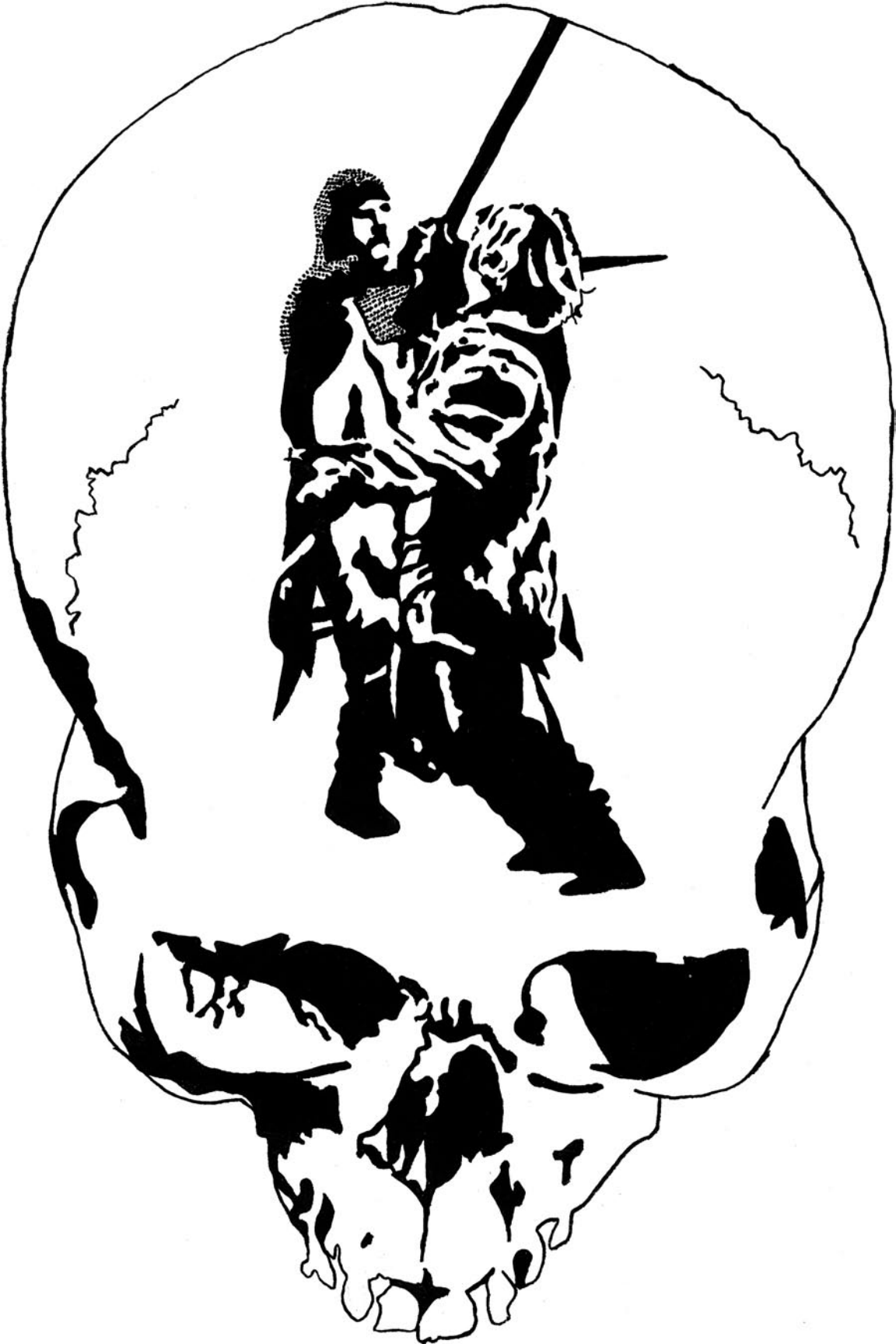
Game Mechanics

This chapter covers the basic rule system that governs the *Conspiracy of Shadows* game. The basic system consists of rolling 6-sided dice to resolve actions and events that affect the characters. These dice are just like the ones used in many board games and can be purchased at any game store. You really only need one, but it is convenient for every Player to have their own.

Dice rolling is only necessary when the success of an antagonist or protagonist in a given conflict is in doubt. This is the game's way resolving this conflict.

Traits

Characters are described by the personality that the Players create for them as well as the actions they take. However, for the game mechanics they are described by their traits. Character Traits are a numerical representation of the innate and learned abilities a character possesses. They range from one to six, with one being poor or weak and six being amazing or nearly superhuman. An average trait score falls at two or three.

There are two types of Traits, Attributes and Skills. A character's Attributes (Fortitude, Reflex, Knowledge, and Temperament) are innate abilities that all characters have. A character's Skills are learned abilities (most characters have six skills).

Descriptors

Descriptors are short descriptions that give the character's depth and help to make each one unique. They are broken into two categories, Positive Descriptors and Negative Descriptors. They function as a bonus die or a penalty die to any dice roll made during a Conflict. A Positive Descriptor grants a 1D6 bonus die to any action that meets the condition of the Descriptor. The result of the roll is then added to the total roll. A Negative Descriptor grants a 1D6 penalty die to any action that meets the condition of the Descriptor. Its result is subtracted from the total dice roll.

Conflict Resolution

In *Conspiracy of Shadows,* dice are only rolled when there is a conflict, not to resolve tasks. Players do not need to roll dice when their character is going to open doors or eat a meal. Instead, dice are only rolled in situations where two individuals are actively opposed to one another. These conflicts can be dealt with both physically and mentally.

The same basic die mechanic of two opposed rolls always resolves conflicts. Every time a conflict needs to be resolved, the Player rolls 2D6 and adds the result together with the two pertinent Traits. If it is higher than the opponents roll it is a success. In the case of a tie, the aggressor always loses.

There are two different types of rolls a Player can make to resolve a conflict. The first is the Attributes roll, which is the use of two Attributes together with the 2D6 roll. This is generally done for actions within a conflict that do not require training in a skill, such as resisting supernatural attacks. The second is the Skill roll, which is the use of both a Skill and an Attribute together with the 2D6 roll. This is used for most actions within a conflict. Below are some samples of both.

Attribute Rolls
  Keeping the enemy from breaking into the room: Fortitude + Reflex
  Making sure the enemy doesn't sneak up on you: Reflex + Knowledge

Skill Rolls
  Shooting a Crossbow: Archery + Reflex
  Defaming a Foe in Public: Etiquette + Temperament

Intentions

The very first step to resolving a conflict is the declaration of intentions by all the Players involved. Each player announces to the group at the table what they want to accomplish and how they plan on doing it. This determines if the it will be a Simple Conflict or an Extended Conflict. Situations default to an Extended Conflict if any named characters are involved (characters or primary antagonists) or if any of the Players wish to resolve the conflict in a granular manner. All other conflicts are considered Simple Conflicts.

SIMPLE CONFLICTS

A Simple Conflict is when the two opposing parties in the conflict roll once to reach an end to the conflict. The winner of the conflict narrates the ultimate outcome and the loser must abide by the outcome. This is most often used in competitive conflicts, such as running in a footrace or a tug-of-war situation, but it can also include combat. However a Simple Conflict can never be used to eliminate a named character.

EXTENDED CONFLICTS

An Extended Conflict is a blow-by-blow account of the action in a conflict. This can be a battle of wits, naked steel, or a combination of both. It is a system that attempts to capture the back and forth of all forms of conflict. To accomplish this, Extended Conflicts are broken down into individual segments called Exchanges.

An Exchange is an undefined time span within an Extended Conflict in which all the able participants get to take at least one action. An Exchange can last seconds, minutes, or even days depending upon the nature of the conflict. For example, if the conflict is a physical battle, each Exchange may only take seconds. If the conflict is a mental battle, such as a sorcerer attempting to bend a demon to his will, each Exchange could take hours or even days.

Extended Conflicts are resolved in one of two ways. They can be forced to end when either one or both sides in the conflict are Incapacitated. They can also be brought to an end when one or more sides in the conflict either concede, such as surrendering in battle, or flee.

INITIATIVE

The first roll before an Extended Conflict can begin is the initiative roll, which determines the initial order of action. Initiative is always determined by a Reflex/Temperament roll. The person with the highest total gains the Initiative Order number of one, and each roll below him gets the next number in order (1,2,3,4 etc.). In the case of ties, simply re-roll between those two Players.

As the Extended Conflict progresses, the Initiative Order can change with each Exchange. Players may purchase higher or lower spots in the Order by taking a penalty die for his very next action. For each spot he moves up or down, add an additional penalty die.

Momentum

When it is a Player's turn to act within the Initiative Order he has Momentum. This means that he may perform up to four actions in a row so long as they are all successful, however, the second he fails at any of his actions he loses Momentum and the next person in the Initiative Order gains Momentum.

When a Player is successful at two consecutive actions while he has Momentum, all of his following actions gain a bonus die. Each successful action after the second gives him an additional bonus die. This means that on his third action, he would gain one bonus die and on his fourth he would have two bonus dice. However, after the fourth action, the Player automatically loses Momentum and it shifts to the next person in the initiative order.

Conflict Modifiers

There are several different types of modifiers for Conflicts besides the standard rolls for attack and defense. Each of these are either situational or specific types of action that can be taken. These actions each have their own advantages and disadvantages. Listed below are the most common types of Conflict Modifiers.

Beat

The Beat maneuver is used when a Player purposefully strikes at an opponent's weapon to knock it out of the way so his next attack is unhindered. This means that if the attack is successful, his opponent cannot use that weapon against the next attack coming from the attacker. This can be a physical strike at a weapon or questioning an opponent's right to arrest you. It is often used as an opening move in a series of attacks. Players suffer a −1 penalty to their die roll when attempting a Beat.

Bind

The Bind maneuver is applied when a Player uses an off-handed weapon (dagger, shield, dirty secret) to bind an opponent's weapon, allowing him to strike freely. The Player rolls to attack as usual and, if successful, binds the weapon. The opponent is now unable to use that weapon in any defense or attack action for that exchange. Players suffer a –2 penalty to their die roll when attempting to Bind an opponent's weapon.

Charge

When a Player Charges an opponent, he makes a rushing attack and gains a +4 modifier to the damage of the attack. This can take the form of a cavalry charge or even a sudden barrage of accusations. However, charging an opponent leaves that Player open to attacks and the Player suffers a -4 to defend against the very next attack against him.

Counter

A Counter maneuver is used to quickly parry an opponent's attack and return with a quick strike. It is a very difficult thing to accomplish and can take the form of a sudden sarcastic jab or a riposte with a sword. However, the difficulty of this action is so great that the Player suffers a -2 for the roll.

Disarm

Disarm is used when a Player attempts to manipulate an opponent's weapon in such a way that he either takes the weapon from him or knocks it out of his hands. This can be ripping an opponent's sword out of his hand or even revealing information that gives him pause. It is difficult to do correctly and the Player suffers a –2 for the roll.

Double Shot

A Double Shot is a maneuver used to attack two different opponents at the same. This can be done by firing two arrows at once, throwing a weapon in such a manner that it bounces off one target and then hits the other, or making a statement that causes two opponents to question their actions. The attacker rolls once for his attack with a –3 penalty and the defenders each must roll separately to defend.

Feint

A Feint is an action used by a Player when faking an attack in one direction to draw an opponent off guard. This is a difficult but common maneuver. The Player suffers a –2 on his die roll and deals no damage but if he is successful, he gains a +3 on his very next attack.

Knockout

A Knockout is designed to disable an opponent, thus ending the Conflict. It might be a sharp strike to the head or stating something so shocking that his opponent is at a loss for words. When attempting to knockout an opponent, the Player suffers –6 to his die roll, but if successful, the opponent is knocked out of the Conflict.

Stun

A Stun is applied to give an opponent pause so he cannot react to the very next attack against him. It might be a punch in the nose or saying something so confusing that he must stop to think. When attempting a stun, the Player suffers –2 to his die roll. If successful, his opponent is unable to react to the next attack against him.

Multiple Opponents

Often in a Conflict, Players will be forced to face multiple opponents (up to a maximum of four per Exchange). This is a difficult situation to be in and adds a level of complication to a Player's ability to resolve it. When facing multiple opponents, a Player gains a penalty die for every opponent

beyond two. For example, if a swordsman is facing three footpads, he suffers from one penalty die. If there were four footpads, he would suffer from two penalty dice.

Damage

Vitality Levels are the measure of how much damage a character can take prior to becoming incapacitated. This covers not only physical damage but also intellectual damage, such as a blow to a character's self-esteem. It is calculated by adding a character's Fortitude rank and Temperament rank with the number six. This produces the character's total Vitality Level.

When a character fails to ward off an attack from an opponent he may suffer damage. The difference between the two opposed rolls is the amount of damage the character suffers. See the table below for the consequences of this.

Level	Fine (5+)	Bruised (4)	Battered (3)	Bloodied (2)	Broken (1)	Incapacitated (0)
Penalty Dice	0	0	1D6	2D6	3D6	Take No Actions

In *Conspiracy of Shadows,* characters can only die when they are considered Incapacitated. When this happens the Player may choose to allow his character to die. If he does not wish him to die, the character is merely mortally wounded and unable to take any actions.

Recovering Damage

Characters recover Vitality Levels slowly without aid. Vitality can be recovered in half the time with medical attention. This requires a Skill roll versus the total amount of damage the character has suffered. Most often this uses the Medicine Skill but any other appropriate Skill can be used, such as Folklore.

A character that is not dead moves from Incapacitated to Broken at the end of the Conflict in which he was struck down. A character moves from Broken to Bloodied in two weeks. He moves from Bloodied to Battered in two days and from Battered to Bruised in one day. A character who is Bruised becomes Fine in two hours, regaining all lost Vitality Levels.

Goons

Every great story has the hero pitted against a great villain. In all of these stories, the villains often have hoards of goons that they throw against the hero. These goons rarely harm the hero, but he must fight his way through them to get to his foe just the same. In Conspiracy of Shadows, use the following rules for generating goons.

Goon Statistics

Goons only have two stats to simplify their use. This allows for the creation of simple nameless adversaries that can be used as henchmen to a villain or even an ally to the Players. They can easily be customized and scaled to the situation.

Vitality Rank: *Instead of the standard Vitality Levels, Goons have a Vitality Rank. Instead of subtracting damage from this number, the Game Master would subtract the number of hits the Goon has taken. For example, a Goon with a Vitality Rank of two would be struck down after taking two hits.*

Skill Level: *A Goon's Skill Level is used to resolve all actions taken by the Goons in a Conflict. The more competent a Goon, the more dice he has for his skill level. For example, an incompetent Goon would have a Skill Level of 2D6 while an extremely capable goon would have a skill level of 4D6.*

Weapons and Armor

Most conflicts in *Conspiracy of Shadows* rely upon specific weapons and armor. At their very core, weapons and armor are simply advantages designed for specific situations. They can be physical artifacts, like a sword and breastplate, or mental advantages, like social status or having church authority over a matter.

Axe: Hand Axe
Modifiers: -1 to physical defensive rolls
                        +1 to physical attack rolls vs. hard armor

While the Norderin people are famous for their heavy axes, they also use smaller hand axes in combat. This tradition has been carried on in the lands they settled, as it is a favorite back up weapon. It is also effective as a thrown weapon.

Church Authority
Modifiers: +3 to all Rolls vs. those of the same faith

Religion is the driving force in the lives of all people. Those with divine authority command respect and great power over others. Church Authority opens many doors as well as defends against the social attacks of others.

Club: War Club
Modifiers: +1 to physical attack rolls

Only mankind would want to improve upon a simple design for killing. Most war clubs are made, but in Valadarin countries, it has been the tradition of peasants to grow them by placing bits of metal in a tree. As the tree grows, these pieces become a part of it and strengthen the wood. When the time is right, they cut it down and fashion it into a mighty weapon.

Daggers and Knives
Modifiers: -2 to physical attacks against hard armor

For most men, civilized or not, daggers and knives are as much an article of clothing as they are for self-defense. In many cities where weapons are not allowed to be worn, a knife can be the only line of defense. It can also be thrown very effectively as well as serve utilitarian purposes, such as an implement for eating.

Guild Membership

Modifiers: +1 to rolls concerning the character's guild and trade

Craft guilds are a recent development in society. Nevertheless, membership of each guild commands some level of respect. A guild charter carries with it a reputation for quality. This can open doors that would otherwise be closed to an independent craftsman.

Hammer: Warhammer

Modifiers: -1 to physical defensive rolls
+3 to physical attack rolls vs. hard armor

A favored weapon of the light cavalry, it can deal devastating blows to armored men. Somewhat lighter than the mace, it is very effective against troops in mail. Only the heaviest armor can stand up to the blows of a war hammer.

Hard Armor: Chain mail

Modifiers: +2 to physical defensive rolls

Developed early in history, the chain mail shirt is one of the most valued items a warrior can own. They include a coif, a type of hood, which is worn over the head but under a helmet. It ends at mid thigh and has sleeves that end just under the elbows.

Hard Armor: Lamellar

Modifiers: +3 to physical defensive rolls

The Vorian armies used this armor in ancient times and today the Narrlachi use it. It is made of small narrow plates that are laced together, creating a series of overlapping rows on top of tough leather. Because of its design, it is very flexible and easy to move in compared to other hard armor types.

Hard Armor: Cuirass

Modifiers: +3 to physical defensive rolls

This type of armor is a crucial item of defense during battle with other armies or simple brigands. It is lightweight and allows excellent freedom of movement while still offering a substantial amount of protection.

Horsebow

Modifiers: +2 to physical attack rolls

The horsebow is a curved lamination of wood, horn, and sinew that can be fired from horseback. The Narrlachi horsemen are known for

WARHAMMER

FALK BLADE

GORBWON SWORD

CROSSBOW

BATTLE SWORD

POLE AXE

FLAIL

SZAZBLA SABER

CUTLASS

NARRLACHI SABER

BATTLE AXE

MACE

MEY SWORD

DAGGER

HAND AXE

NARAW SWORD

WARCLUB
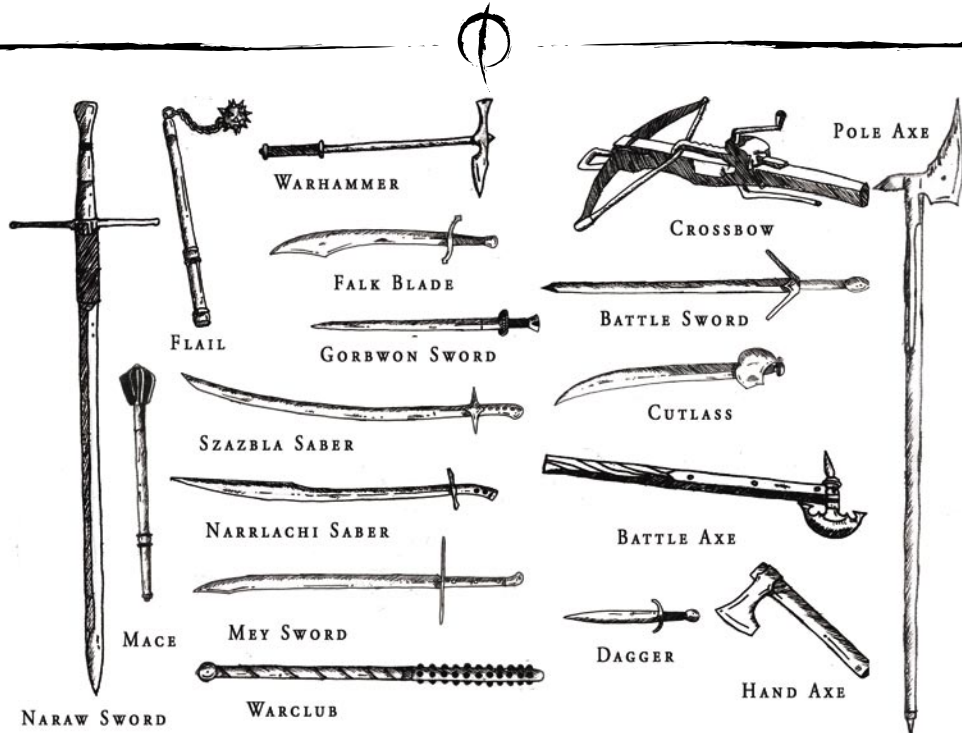
their use of this weapon while riding at a fast pace. It is said that with the horsebow, a Narrlachian can shoot as easily behind him as well as in front of him.

Legal Authority
Modifiers: +2 to all rolls vs. under your jurisdiction

Even in a world where the church dominates all aspects of life, the laws of man still carry weight. Those who bare the responsibility of maintaining order in society often command respect and/or fear.

Reputation
Modifiers: +2 vs. those who know of your reputation

It doesn't matter if you're famous or infamous, a man with a reputation can open doors other men can't. It can make it easier to gain access to people and places, or it can intimidate others into giving you what you want.

Secrets
Modifiers: +1 to rolls when revealed to a relevant person

Knowing a secret about someone or about something they care about is a powerful thing. However that power isn't realized until it is revealed. This revelation can have a damaging effect, giving that person's enemies an advantage.

Shield
Modifiers: +2 to physical defensive rolls
    -2 to physical attack rolls

The shield is one of the oldest pieces of defensive equipment. They tend to be wide with a flat top and a tapered bottom, but some are round and others are large rectangles. They are most often made of metal with a leather arm strap on the interior.

Staves
Modifiers: +1 to physical attack rolls
    +1 to physical defensive rolls

Every traveler is in need of self-defense, and the staff serves the dual purpose of being a weapon and an aid in hiking across the land. It is said that the Rankian nomads have developed a fighting style based on the use of a staff. In their hands is said to be a weapon as deadly as any blade.

Soft Armor: Gambeson
Modifiers: +1 to physical defensive rolls
Can stack with other armor types

Mail suits are not invulnerable, and it is always possible to penetrate one. Even if the blow does not penetrate, it often drives the mail into the skin to cause a terrible wound. It is for this reason that the Gambeson, a thick padded shirt, was invented.

Soft Armor: Jack
Modifiers: +1 to physical defensive rolls

Jacks are perhaps the most common type of armor found on the battlefield. It is inexpensive to make and offers sturdy protection to foot soldiers. They are usually constructed from small metal or bone plates which are stitched together between two pieces of canvas.

Soft Armor: Brigadine
Modifiers: +2 to physical defensive rolls

Plate and mail armor is very expensive, meaning most soldiers would be without armor if an inexpensive alternative did not arrive. Brigadine armor solves this problem. It is made from hundreds of small overlapping plates attached by rivets to a canvas or suede backing. It is then covered with a textile, like canvas and even velvets, creating a flexible armor.

SWORDS: LONG

Modifiers: +2 to physical attack rolls vs. hard armor

Long swords are light and fast, capable of handing out shearing blows, and come in two varieties in Polian. The Battle Sword was designed to oppose mail armor and is very effective in that respect. It also has a sharpened point so that it may be used as a stabbing implement.

The Mey sword, on the other hand, is primarily used to make sweeping cuts with one or two hands. Though it does have a functional point for thrusting, it is rarely used in such a fashion.

SWORDS: SABERS

Modifiers: +1 to physical defensive rolls
+3 to physical attack rolls vs. soft armors

The saber is the primary weapon of the light cavalry found in many Valadarin countries and in the Narrlachi countries. The Narrlachi style saber lends itself to an excellent slashing action, but also keeps the point sharp to use in thrusts. The Valadarin style, called an Awiza, is capable of delivering a shearing cut as well as a draw cut, ending the lives of enemies both on foot and on a horse.

Destiny Pool

The Destiny Pool is a reservoir of points that the Player can use to take narrative control for a scene of the game or spend to improve his character in some way. All Players start the game with one point in their Destiny Pool and gain more points from Negative Descriptors, staying true to their character's Passion, resolving their character's Drive or through Dramatic Moments.

Dramatic Moments

A dramatic moment can be when a character is played in a creative way, when a character is successful in some amazing feat, or when that particular character was key to the group's success for the episode. The key element to any Dramatic Moment is that it is memorable to the Players. See the example below for a better understanding of what a Dramatic Moment can be.

Dirk, the swordsman from Alcona, sees his lover being taken away in a carriage by his enemy, Valmont. He leaps onto an occupied horse from the second story window of the inn, forcing the rider off his mount. He quickly gains control of the mount, tips his hat and apologizes with flare to the owner, and speeds after the carriage. Eventually, he pulls alongside the carriage and leaps from the horse onto the roof. He quickly knocks the driver off of the carriage and takes over the reins, steering it back toward the inn.

Determining a Dramatic Moment is done by all the Players (including the Game Master) at any break in the action of the story. One or more of the Players proposes that a character had a Dramatic Moment. The Players then discuss it and decide, as a group, what the top two Dramatic Moments were by voting. If there is a tie, the Game Master's vote counts as two.

When teh best and second best Dramatic Moments have been decided, the Players update their character sheets. The character with the best Dramatic Moment gains two points to add to his Destiny Pool. The character with the second best Dramatic Moment gains one point to add to his Destiny Pool.

Using the Destiny Pool

A character can use his Destiny Pool Points in one of three ways. They can be used for two types of character improvements, or to introduce narrative elements to the game.

A Player can spend a Destiny Pool Point to improve upon a Trait. To improve one Trait by one rank, the Player needs to spend three points from his Destiny Pool. These improvements are permanent, but no Trait can ever exceed a rank of six. However, a character can never be improved by using Destiny Points earned by taking Negative Descriptors.

A Player can also purchase a new skill for his character using Destiny Points. This requires him to spend six Destiny Points from his pool. The new skill always begins with a rank of one.

A Player can also use the points from his character's Destiny Pool to introduce a narrative element to the game that makes a shift in the action. This can be an entire cut scene or a small moment. All that is required is an introduction of at least one fact that has an impact upon the story. If the fact simply added flavor, it does not cost any points, if it shifts the action it costs one Destiny Point per scene or moment introduced. The Game Master has the final say on whether or not a Destiny Point is needed.

When a Player wishes to introduce a new element, he first declares he wishes to spend a Destiny Point to do so. The only limit to his control is that he may not eliminate any characters and he cannot resolve any conflicts.

Taint

Taint is the representation of a character's decent into damnation or often times, insanity. Every character's path is unique to his personality and the events of his life. The actions that corrupt a character are often quick and easy but are always counter to the general ethical beliefs of his society. Murder, rape, blasphemous acts, and diabolical dealings are the most common actions that bring on Taint.

Each time the character commits a morally questionable act or goes against his faith he must make a Taint Check. This is a Knowledge/Temperament roll against a Piety/Taint roll. Characters with a Bloodline add that rank to the Piety/Taint roll. If the roll is failed the character gains a rank of Taint.

If a character gains a rank of Taint, the Game Master and the Players must confer to discuss the ramifications of this in terms of both game mechanics and how the character is roleplayed. The decision is ultimately up to the Player, but a group discussion on the matter can lead to interesting and exciting results.

Taint ranks always bring with them a new ability as well as a disability, and once a character reaches a Taint rank of six, he fully succumbs to his evil impulses and is no longer appropriate to be controlled by a Player. Below is a sample path that a character might have gone down.

Taint Rank	Positive	Negative
1	His attacks are more damaging when he is coated in his enemy's blood.	He can only engage in sexual acts if they accompany violence.
2	He can easily stun others with strikes from his fists.	He is restless causing frustration when not fighting.
3	When he is harmed, he becomes enraged and strikes harder and faster.	Has become mentally unstable to the point of being paranoid of his allies.
4	He has become fearless while in the midst of the carnage of battle.	His sleep is troubled by nightmares making him sluggish when not in battle.
5	He is able to dodge all attacks, even those that come at a surprise.	He hears voices during the day that urge him deeper and deeper into depravity.
6	His mere presence strikes terror in the hearts of others.	He desires only to kill and see bloodshed.

Taint and Madness

The unnatural corruption of those who succumb to Taint is not the only side effect. Those who have committed horrific acts also begin to fall deeper and deeper into madness. However, this madness isn't a constant state of being but rather a state that is triggered by different stressors depending upon how far the individual has fallen. This state can last minutes, hours and, in the worst situations, days.

The nature of the madness is also unique and can take many forms. It is not entirely uncommon for a Tainted individual to suffer from a new form of madness each time it is triggered. Still, most suffer from the same madness each time. The most common types of madness are visual and audio halucinations, paranoia, blind panic, a complete withdrawal from the world, and mindless rage.

When a character with Taint is subject to one of the stressors in the table below, he enters into a Simple Conflict with himself. He must roll Temperament/Knowledge versus his own Taint/Temperament roll. If he fails he succumbs to the madness of his choice.

Taint Rank	Trigger Condition
1 - 3	*Injury*
4	*Injury or Stress*
5	*Injury, Stress, or a Threat*
6	*Constant State*

Forming The Cell

Creating a character is easy. Various elements are brought together to create a person made of pure imagination. When combined with the role a Player wishes to play, they become a well-defined character. Players should skim through this chapter to get a better idea of the options available to them.

Step One: The Concept

The concept of the type of character a Player would like to play is possibly the most important element in the character creation process. It is the blueprint for how to construct the other aspects of the character. The concept is not just a guide; it is also the essence of the character.

Each character concept is made of the character's Drive, Trigger, Piety, and Ethnicity. The character's Drive is a body of tenets that he feels strongly about. His Piety is the public face of a very personal issue, his faith. The character's Trigger is what motivated him to join the fight against the evil conspiracy, and his Ethnicity is his cultural identity.

Drive

Drive is the heart of a character's emotional being. It is the idiosyncratic feelings of a person that distinguish him from those around him. A character's Drive is an intense personal emotion, such as loyalty, hatred, or love. It defines who he truly is and what he really believes. It is the character's emotional foundation that all of his actions stem from.

When creating a character, the Player should clearly define the character's Drive with either a single sentence or a short paragraph. It should not be fully fleshed out but offer a core idea that creates a foundation for the Player to build from during play.

Drive also affects the game in that at the end of each episode the group evaluates each Player. If a Player stayed true to his character's Drive, he gains a Destiny Point. If he didn't, he gains nothing.

TRIGGER

A character's Trigger is what hurled him into the struggle against the sinister Conspiracy. It is always an intense, emotion filled moment, which was a turning point in the character's life. It defines why he fights the Conspiracy and is a foundation for his actions.

When creating the character, the Player should clearly define the single event that brought him into the fight with a short description. The event should be open enough in concept to allow the Game Master and other Players the opportunity to use it in the game.

The Trigger impacts game play in two ways. First, it can grant a character a bonus die if the situation is tied to his Trigger. Secondly, it is one of two built in endgames for the character. When a character resolves his Trigger, he is either written out of the game or he is refocused with a new Trigger that symbolizes the shift in his personal priorities.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is the heart of a people's identity. It is the ethnic and cultural differences that set them apart from others. In the lands of Polian, a person's ethnic identity is an important part of who he is. It defines where he comes from, why he responds to situations in a certain way, and gives a strong bearing on what he cares about in life.

PIETY

A man's first duty in the world is not to himself or other people but to his God. It is his God's divine plan that dictates the course of his life. This is an absolute that cannot be questioned.

A character's Piety is his moral background based on this devotion. It is his reverence for the teachings of his religion as well as the standard of behavior dictated by his faith. It is not something that can be hidden and it has a direct impact on all his encounters.

When a Player creates his character, he must decide which religion he is a member of . Each religion is detailed in this book and has a series of laws that set the measure by which his actions are compared. The Player must also assign a rank for his Piety ranging between one and six. This is a measure of how strongly the character believes in his faith (one being the least and six being the strongest). This rank works as a bonus to any conflict roll where the character stays true to his religious convictions despite an easier course of action.

Doom

In conspiracy fiction the hero often suffers a tragic end. He may uncover the truth about the conspiracy only to be thwarted by his own father who is the secret leader. A character's Doom is a way of bringing that essential element into the game.

First each character must select, in broad terms, a Descriptor of his Doom. It should be general in nature so that it can be filled out organically through play. Once decided upon, the Descriptor is given a starting rank of one.

Throughout the game a Player may call upon his character's Doom to automatically end a Conflict in his favor; however, he must narrate how this particular conflict or situation ties into his Doom and it cannot be used to eliminate any named characters.

Each time this is done, the character's Doom Rank increases by one. When the Rank reaches six, the character's Doom is at hand. This means that the Game Master is allowed to bring about the end game for that particular character at anytime, and during that encounter the character's Doom Rank acts as a negative modifier for his conflict rolls.

Step Two: Attributes

Attribute ranks are a numerical representation of a character's physical and mental abilities. They are used in all aspects of Conflict Resolution in one form or another. There are four Attributes for every character. Players have 11 points to divide among them but can have no score higher than 5 and each must have a minimum of 1 point in them. Players must spend all of their initial 11 points on attributes and each must have a Descriptor, which are detailed later in the chapter. Details on how to use Attributes in game play can be found in Chapter One.

Fortitude (FOR)

The Fortitude rank is the character's physical presence. It is how strong the character is as well as how much punishment the character can handle. When the character is created, the Player must also choose one Descriptor for this Attribute.

Reflex (REF)

The Reflex rank describes the character's grace, swiftness, and general perception. The Player must also purchase one Descriptor for this Attribute when the character is created.

Knowledge (KNW)

The Knowledge rank is a representation of the character's general intelligence. It is a measure of how "book smart" the individual is as well as his common sense. One Descriptor for this Attribute is needed during character creation.

Temperament (TEM)

Temperament rank is the character's personality. It is a measure of his personal will as well as the strength of his personality. When the character is created, the Player must also purchase one Descriptor for this Attribute.

Step Three: Cover

All protagonists in *Conspiracy of Shadows* are living a lie. By day they strive to live a normal life. They have responsibilities to society, their families, and often to their faith. This makes everything they do in an effort to thwart the conspiracy a dangerous and difficult task. The nature of this threat to their lives and the lives of their loved ones varies depending upon where they fall in the social order.

Those at the top of the social ladder, the nobles, would seem to be in the best position to fight the conspiracy. They have incredible amounts of latitude in what they can do and the resources available. However, their status limits who they can interact with and often the responsibilities of ruling those below them will contradict with the goals of the Cell.

The clergy seem to have their actions constrained the most. They are beholden to their church and its desires as well as to the people as a whole. In many ways they direct the shape and direction of society, which sharply limits what they can and can't do.

The middle and lower classes of society have the most latitude to take action. They are not constrained by who they can and cannot deal with and usually do not have to answer to any formal organization. However this varies from region to region as well as by occupation. A peasant in a Vorish nation has fewer options compared to one found in a Valadarin nation.

Players must pick a profession or a lifestyle that suits their protagonist. Under this umbrella term, the Player determines his protagonist's social status, background, occupation, general lifestyle, and skills. Some sample Covers might be a blacksmith, a mercenary, a member of a traveling carnival, or even a priest. Anything is possible.

A protagonist's skill selection is also based upon his chosen Cover. A Player selects six skills that are appropriate for his Cover and divides 17 points among them. No score can start any higher than 5 and each skill selection must have a minimum of 1 point in them.

Social Class	Asset Points	Social Class	Asset Points
Narrlachi		**Valadarin**	
Royalty	*11*	*Magnates*	*12*
Noyars	*8*	*Royalty*	*11*
Bahadurs	*6*	*Landed Gentry*	*8*
Patricians	*10*	*Landless Gentry*	*6*
Clergy	*7*	*Clergy*	*9*
Peasants	*3*	*Merchants*	*9*
Noderin		*Craftsmen*	*5*
Those Who Fight	*8*	*Peasant Land Owners*	*5*
Those Who Work	*4*	*Peasants*	*2*
Those Who Serve	*2*		
Vorish			
Knights	*10*		
Clergy	*9*		
Freemen	*5*		
Peasants	*2*		

Skills

Skills are specific abilities the characters use in conjunction with Attributes. Below is a description of each of the skills most commonly found in Polian. Players must spend all of their initial 17 points on them and each must have a Descriptor, which are detailed later in the chapter. Details on how to use skills in game play can be found in Chapter Five.

Academics

Those who are lucky enough to attend a university and gain an education learn many disciples such as theology, alchemy, astronomy, history, and mathematics. Typically only the wealthy and the nobles of Polian can afford such an education.

Animal Mastery

This skill is the ability to raise, train, and utilize animals. Teaching dogs to guard domains, training a hawk to hunt rabbits, commanding horses, and breeding livestock are possible with this skill.

ARCHERY

Archery is the art, practice, or skill of shooting with bows of all kinds. Characters are also skilled in the care of bows and arrows, able to string and unstring one, as well as make minor repairs.

ARTISTRY

This is the ability to create beauty in an ugly world. A character with artistry can paint, draw and even sculpt, as well as identify the works of others. A character can identify techniques used, the creator of a work, and appraise the value of the artwork.

CRAFT

This skill covers the knowledge and ability to complete a highly skilled craft, such as blacksmithing, shipbuilding, and farming. A character can identify techniques, appraise value, and apply this knowledge.

DECORUM

Characters possess the knowledge and understanding of the proper forms of behavior required in various social circles. It is also the ability to negotiate with others in formal and informal settings.

FOLKLORE

Folklore is the knowledge of the stories and common history of a people or region. This can be common wisdom, local lore, and even the secrets small towns like to keep in their closets.

LARCENY

Characters with the larceny skill have the knowledge of and the ability to perform a wide range of criminal enterprises. It covers things like prowling through alleys, picking locks, and scrounging for information.

MEDICINE

This skill gives characters the knowledge of the usage of various treatments for the healing of wounds. The knowledge can also be used to harm as well as heal in the form of poisons.

Melee

Characters with this skill are capable of using a variety of weapons, armor, and even their bare hands to defend themselves and attack others. They are also capable of improvising, turning common items into weapons or protection.

Performance

Performance is the ability to entertain others by conveying character traits, playing musical instruments, telling tales or singing. This skill can even be used to impersonate other people.

Survival

This is the knowledge and ability to endure in the wilderness. This can be the knowledge of the weather, shelter creation, first aid, hunting, and scrounging for food.

Step Four: Character Refinement

There are several statistics that all characters have. They are either derived from a character's Attribute scores or are completely independent of all Attributes. These items complete the individual character creation process.

Languages

It is assumed that all characters can speak their native tongues. Most will be able to speak other related languages and even a few will be able to read one language if not more. The Cover of the character should be used as a guide to determine how many languages the character can speak and/or read. The more educated the character and the higher the character's social class, the more likely he will know more languages and be able to read. This is not a hard and fast rule and each character should be considered individually.

Vitality Levels

A character's Vitality Level is a representation of the physical and mental stress he can handle. All characters begin with a Vitality Level of six plus the character's Fortitude and Temperament ranks. This decreases as the character is harmed to a minimum of zero, at which time he is Incapacitated.

Witchblood

The Player must decide whether or not the character is one of the Witchblood. If it is decided that he is, the character gains one of the Witchblood powers in Chapter Three. Playing one of the Witchblood can be a lot of fun, but it is also very dangerous to the character. The Player should consult with the Game Master and the other Players before making this decision.

Cell Creation

All characters in *Conspiracy of Shadows* are members of a Cell of truth seekers and monster hunters. The nature of the cell depends upon the nature of the game. It might be a part of a network of Cells or it might be the only source of hope in existence. The following steps are a guide to creating a Cell:

Assets

The first step in Cell creation is to determine their starting Assets. The characters must add together their Asset Points. This pool is the Cell's Asset Pool, which is used to purchase their assets from the list below. The lists are just guidelines and the specifics of each should be determined by the Players and the Game Master.

AFFILIATIONS

Affiliations are organizations that one or more members of the Cell belong to. These Affiliations can be utilized to give aid, usually for more mundane situations. The extent of this aid is based upon the type of organization and the character's standing within it. These organizations as a whole are unaware of the existence of the conspiracy; however, some members may be aware or even a part of the conspiracy. Affiliations cost 5 Asset Points per rank.

1) Tiny Sized Organization (i.e. Village Elders)
2) Small Sized Organization (i.e. Band of Outlaws)
3) Average Sized Organization (i.e. Noble Household)
4) Large Sized Organization (i.e. Merchant Concern)
5) Huge Sized Organization (i.e. The Local Army)
6) Monstrous (i.e. The Orthodox Church)

ALLIES

Allies are individuals who help and support the members of the Cell, though they will be unaware of the conspiracy. They can be family members or close friends. Allies can be very useful as they can have their own contacts, allies, and resources. They can be called upon when the characters are in need; however, they are not at their "beck and call". It costs 2 Asset Points per rank.

1) One Ally
2) Two Allies
3) Three Allies
4) Four Allies
5) Five Allies
6) Six Allies

ARTIFACTS

Most Cells have at least one artifact of an occult origin that they use in their war with evil. These items are as much a danger to the Cell as they are to their foes. They are invaluable as they aid in either learning the true nature and weaknesses of their enemies or as actual weapons against them. Artifacts are dangerous and the mere possession of these items draw the supernatural out of the woodwork. Owning these items is also heresy and, in most places, getting caught means torture and death. Acquiring these artifacts is difficult and requires contact with the right people, as well as having the right amount of money. Artifacts cost 5 Asset Points per rank.

1) Part of a rare scroll
2) An incomplete book or complete scroll
3) A complete copy of a rare tome or a few incomplete books
4) A strange artifact of alien origin that is sometimes useful
5) A collection of minor artifacts
6) One major artifact that is dangerous to everyone

CONTACTS

Contacts are individuals that the characters can ask for favors. Unlike allies, Contacts cannot be called upon for aid on a regular basis. Instead they are individuals that have a working relationship with one or more of the characters. They have no knowledge of the character's true purpose, and the Players must be careful not to let these acquaintances know the truth. The Players and the Game Master should elaborate on the nature of each Contact beforehand. Contacts cost 1 Asset Points per rank.

1) One Contact
2) Two Contacts
3) Three Contacts
4) Four Contacts
5) Five Contacts
6) Six Contacts

Equipment

The Equipment Asset is a representation of the collective wealth of the members of the Cell. Equipment is needed to effectively fight the evil in the world. The members of the Cell and their network need arms, modes of transportation, and funds. Equipment costs 4 Asset Points per rank.

1) An Equipment Rank of One
2) An Equipment Rank of Two
3) An Equipment Rank of Three
4) An Equipment Rank of Four
5) An Equipment Rank of Five
6) An Equipment Rank of Six

Equipment	Rank
Armor	3 to 5
Fine Weapons	4 to 6
Most Weapons	1 to 3
Book	3 to 6
Cattle	2 to 3
Chicken	1 to 2
Clothes: Silk	4 or 5
Clothes: Wool	1 to 2
Dog	1 to 3
Falcon	3 to 4
Horse: Riding	2 to 4
Horse: War	5 to 6
Pony	2 to 3
Telescope	5 to 6
Tools	1 to 2
Wagon	3 to 4

Manpower

At times the fight against evil requires more individuals than the small Cell has. Manpower is the number of unaffiliated men that can be requested for many tasks. These can be laborers used to excavate occult locations, men skilled at specialized tasks, such as carpentry, or even soldiers. They are unaware of the Conspiracy and are simply a paid labor force. Manpower costs 6 Asset Points per rank.

1) Five men can be employed
2) Ten men can be employed
3) Fifteen men can be employed
4) Twenty men can be employed
5) Twenty-five men can be employed
6) Thirty men can be employed

Magic Rituals

It is not uncommon for Cells to have access to various Magic Rituals. Like Artifacts, Magic Rituals can be used to fight against the encroaching evil of the conspiracy. However, Magic Rituals can also be very dangerous and draw the attention of the supernatural as well as local religious authorities. Magic Rituals cost 1 Asset Point per rank.

1) One Magic Ritual
2) Two Magic Rituals
3) Three Magic Rituals
4) Four Magic Rituals
5) Five Magic Rituals
6) Six Magic Rituals

Mentors

Mentors are retired individuals who know the truth and have fought evil for quite some time. They are characters that once raised their fists and shook them in defiance. Now they are infirmed or are too old to carry on the war and make themselves useful by tutoring others in the nature of the fight. They are a valuable resource to any Cell lucky enough to have them. Mentors cost 4 Asset Points per rank.

1) A mentor of some knowledge and resources
2) A mentor of middling knowledge and resources
3) A well-versed character with good knowledge and resources
4) A mentor with excellent knowledge and resources
5) A powerful mentor with knowledge and quality resources
6) A legend in his own time with knowledge and resources

Real Estate

Real Estate is the base of operations and, for some, the home of the characters. It is here that they store all of their resources, make their plans, and carry out the fight against evil. Most are fronts to disguise their true purpose. Real Estate costs 3 Asset Points per rank.

1) A small shack or very rundown larger building
2) A small cottage or a rundown larger building
3) A single townhouse or a country farm
4) Two or three small houses in a town or a larger townhouse
5) A country mansion or several townhouses
6) A country estate or a city mansion

Retainers

Some Cells take on individuals to aid them in their war on evil. Retainers are people who are privy to some of the secrets the characters hold but do not actively take part. They are the support staff of the Cell. These people can be horse grooms, house servants, and warders. They are in the employ of the characters and are usually very loyal, understanding that what their masters do is necessary but do not understand the full details of their tasks. Retainers cost 3 Asset Points per rank.

1) One Retainer
2) Two Retainers
3) Three Retainers
4) Four Retainers
5) Five Retainers
6) Six Retainers

Origin and Asset Relationships

The next step in Cell creation is to determine the origin of the organization. How did the characters meet? Why do they work together? Why do they possess the assets they now possess and how did they gain them? This background information will not only help to define the goals and relationships of the characters but will also give the Game Master an idea of the type of game the players want to play as well as story seeds.

Using Cell Assets

The Assets of a Cell are not only useful information for fleshing out the characters and their relationships, but they also have an impact on the mechanics of game play. They function as bonuses for die rolls when they can be tied to a Conflict. Each time they are utilized, the rank of the appropriate Asset is added to all the die rolls in the Conflict as a bonus. However, they can only be used in this fashion on a limited basis for both the Game Master and the Players.

When a Player wishes to use a Cell Asset as a bonus for Conflict rolls, he must spend a Destiny Point and explain how that particular Asset affects the Conflict. He is limited in the amount of times he can do this by the number of Destiny Points he is willing to spend.

The Game Master on the other hand can use these same Assets to give bonuses to the opponents of the Cell. He too must explain why the use of the Asset is appropriate to the situation and is also limited in using these bonuses. The Game Master can only call on the Assets as a bonus once per episode.

Sample Uses
- *An Ally told the Cell about the secret plan of their enemy.*
- *The Cell is battling enemies on their home turf.*
- *A Contact let the Cell's plan of attack slip to an enemy.*
- *The Cell was duped into purchasing shoddy Equipment.*

Trust

An important aspect of any unit that works together is trust. The members have to trust each other in order to succeed and find strength; however, if they do not trust each other, their attempt at meeting a common goal is hampered. This mechanic is designed to give this very real relationship a mechanical meaning in the game.

As a group, the Cell begins with a Trust Pool. This is a number of dice equal to the number of members within the Cell. At any time during play, any Player can draw from this pool to gain a free bonus die for any of his Conflict rolls.

While the pool never refreshes, it does expand and contract based upon the actions of the characters as well as the time they have spent working together. At the start of each new episode, the pool increases by one new die. It also increases by one die anytime one of the characters sacrifices himself in some manner for the other members of the group. This can be a physical sacrifice, such as taking a blow meant for another, or something less concrete, like sacrificing a character's career. Finally, if at any time a character gives up his life for the good of the Cell, the current total Trust Pool is increased by half to represent the ultimate sacrifice.

The pool contracts when the exact opposite happens. If a character at anytime chooses not to sacrifice himself when the opportunity arrives or puts his personal goals before that of the group, the pool decreases by one die. Also, if one member should fall in some manner, such as dying or betraying the group, the entire Trust Pool is cut in half.

The Kicker

A Kicker is an event that begins before play and leads right into the game. A good example of a Kicker is the beginning of most James Bond movies. The movie starts with Bond in the middle of a mission, which seems completely unrelated to the rest of the movie. However, the end of the movie reveals its importance.

The Players must come up with an event that leads right into the game. It can be anything but the Game Master should be involved in its creation. For example, the character's mentor, Father Danya, could have sent them a note asking them to break into a nobleman's home and steal a blasphemous artifact. The game would then begin right as they have slipped into the courtyard of the nobleman's home.

CONSPIRACY OF ⟨SHADOWS

NAME: Gerard

DESTINY POOL

3

DRIVE:

Strength is in action and only the strong gain places of honor in this household. The end result of strong action is what is important.

TRIGGER:

Only Gregori stands in my way of attaining a place of primacy. However he is also my sword brother, strong in action, and should be treated with honor.

ETHNICITY:

I was born in Tor, but raised as a Tarathan by a childless noble lord who taught me that those below my station are only worthy of contempt.

DOOM: I will die with dishonor ⟨0⟩

PIETY: I am a devout Orthodox Albinican ⟨2⟩

COVER: House Guard Captain

SOCIAL STATUS: Landless Gentry

ASSET POINTS ⟨6⟩

VITALITY LEVEL

FINE: 5+ (NO PENALTY)
BRUISED: 4 (NO PENALTY)
BATTERED: 3 (1D6 PENALTY)
BLOODIED: 2 (2D6 PENALTY)
BROKEN: 1 (1D6 PENALTY)
INCAPACITATED: 0 (NO ACTIONS)

⟨12⟩

SKILLS:

Animal Mastery: I am a god on a horse. ⟨3⟩

Artistry: I have an eye for color. ⟨1⟩

Melee: My mace crushes all my foes. ⟨5⟩

ATTRIBUTES:

FORTITUDE ⟨3⟩
Alcohol has no hold on me.

REFLEX ⟨3⟩
I have a club foot.

KNOWLEDGE ⟨2⟩
I have no sense of numbers.

TEMPERAMENT ⟨3⟩
My smile softens any situation.

Archery: My aim is true from horseback. ⟨4⟩

Decorum: I am well schooled in courtly affairs. ⟨1⟩

Survival: The woods are no mystery to me. ⟨3⟩

CONSPIRACY OF SHADOWS

NAME: Vladick

DESTINY POOL
4

DRIVE:
I was born to rule this house. However, there is no reward without risk and I always pay my debts.

TRIGGER:
I framed Ivana for treason, but keep the reason for her death a secret. Only at the right time will I reveal the truth and at that time I will strike.

ETHNICITY:
I was born a Jenk and like my father before me I have an affinity for animals.

DOOM: I will pay dearly for my ambition
0

PIETY: I was raised Orthodox Albinican, but I believe in nothing but my will.
1

COVER: Young nobleman

SOCIAL STATUS: Jenkish Magnate
12 **ASSET POINTS**

VITALITY LEVEL
12
FINE: 5+ (NO PENALTY)
BRUISED: 4 (NO PENALTY)
BATTERED: 3 (1D6 PENALTY)
BLOODIED: 2 (2D6 PENALTY)
BROKEN: 1 (1D6 PENALTY)
INCAPACITATED: 0 (NO ACTIONS)

ATTRIBUTES:

4 **FORTITUDE**
I am strong like an ox.

3 **REFLEX**
I never lose my balance.

2 **KNOWLEDGE**
I have no head for study.

2 **TEMPERAMENT**
I am brash and arrogant.

SKILLS:

1 Academics: I never paid attention in class.

2 Animal Mastery: I love my dogs more than people.

4 Archery: I have mastered the crossbow.

2 Larceny: I have a few unsavory friends.

5 Melee: I was a prize fencing student.

3 Survival: The wild holds no fear for me.

CONSPIRACY OF SHADOWS

NAME: Wiktor

DESTINY POOL
2

DRIVE:
I am the rightful leader. No secrets shall be kept from me. I always get what I want regardless the cost.

TRIGGER:
It pains me that I had to order Ivana's death, but Vladick brought to me too much evidence. Zygmunt would be shattered if he knew she was a traitor and must always think her death an accident.

ETHNICITY:
I was born a Jenk and like my father have an affinity for animals.

DOOM: I will die with dishonor
0

PIETY: I am a devout Orthodox Albinican
2

COVER: House Guard Captain

SOCIAL STATUS: Landless Gentry

ASSET POINTS
6

VITALITY LEVEL
12
- FINE: 5+ (NO PENALTY)
- BRUISED: 4 (NO PENALTY)
- BATTERED: 3 (1D6 PENALTY)
- BLOODIED: 2 (2D6 PENALTY)
- BROKEN: 1 (1D6 PENALTY)
- INCAPACITATED: 0 (NO ACTIONS)

SKILLS:

Animal Mastery: I am a god on a horse.
3

Artistry: I have an eye for color.
1

Melee: My mace crushes all my foes.
5

Archery: My aim is true from horseback.
4

Decorum: I am well schooled in courtly affairs.
1

Survival: The woods are no mystery to me.
3

ATTRIBUTES:

FORTITUDE
Alcohol has no hold on me.
3

REFLEX
I have a club foot.
3

KNOWLEDGE
I have no sense of numbers.
2

TEMPERAMENT
My smile softens any situation.
3

Conspiracy of Shadows

Name: Zygmunt

Drive:
I mom the recent death of my wife Ivana and it has turned me cautious. I can at least count on my best friend Gregori to help me through this dark time.

Trigger:
Wiktor is a firm but fair head of our household and I will do what I can to keep Vladick's ambition in check.

Ethnicity:
I am a Jenk, proud and have an affinity for animals.

Doom: I will be shattered by the whole debacle
(0)

Piety: I am a devout Orthodox Albinican
(3)

Cover: Young nobleman

Social Status: Magnate

(12) Asset Points

(14) Vitality Level
Fine: 5+ (no penalty)
Bruised: 4 (no penalty)
Battered: 3 (1D6 penalty)
Bloodied: 2 (2D6 penalty)
Broken: 1 (1D6 penalty)
Incapacitated: 0 (no actions)

Destiny Pool
4

Attributes:

(3) Fortitude
I am surprisingly strong.

(1) Reflex
I have a withered arm.

(2) Knowledge
I remember everything.

(5) Temperament
I have a glowing personality.

(3) Animal Mastery: I calm wild animals with ease.

(1) Decorum: My depression turns people off.

(1) I've had lots of experience setting splints.

Skills:

(5) Academics: I know the secrets of the stars.

(3) Artistry: I have no trouble with writing.

(4) Melee: I am a master with my blade.

Conspiracy of Shadows

ASSETS:

Real Estate (2)
    Vladick's Inn. Three stories with a stable and smithy.
Retainers (2)
    Wiktor's bodyguards, Borya and Teodor.
Equipment (2)
    The Cell has an Equipment Rank of Two.
Artifacts (1)
    Gerard smuggled out a fragment of the Wenex Chronicles.
Contacts (3)
    Zygmunt's Uncle Elek, Father Javier, Gerard's friend from school
    and Anatoli's brother, Tolya
Manpower (1)
    Vladick's five employees (stable boy, smith, cook, and two waitresses).

ORIGINS:

All the members of the Cell happened to be at Vladick's Inn, the Soldier's Rest, when
the five men hired to kill Lord Petr got drunk and let slip their business. Together the
Cell slew the assassins but not without getting information concerning the Conspiracy
to kill the loyal supporters of the king who would weaken his position so that he might
be replaced. Since that night, they have worked together as a sort of secret police in
an effort to save Lord Petr, the king's staunchest supporter.

KICKER:

Stuck together at the inn during a snow storm, they have learned of another plot
against Lord Petr. However before they could do anything, the conspirator has died
and strange things have begun to happen.

The Supernatural

The world is a mystical place. Men and women perform incredible acts based upon their faith in their god and even in themselves. Others are born with the blood of witches in their veins. There are also those who strive for forbidden knowledge, gambling with their souls by summoning and trying to control demons. Not all of these individuals are involved with the evil that gnaws at the world, but most are drawn to it like moths to a flame.

Who are the Witchblood?

Those who are called the Witchblood are said to be the distant descendents of the First Men, demons, ancient gods, or all of the above. Their blood sings with the power of their ancestors and they pass this power down to their descendents. They have the power to use their minds to affect the physical world as well as the minds of others.

These Bloodlines come in many forms. Some are tight-nit families that have passed the knowledge of their family history along with their amazing powers for generations. Other Witchblood have no knowledge of their powers, let alone their origins, and wander the world as outcasts from both their family and society.

The price for all of this untamed power is terribly taxing on the mortal body and soul. Witchblood are more susceptible to madness and some even die from using their powers. They are feared by greater society and must work their powers in secrecy. If their powers are discovered, they are hunted and if caught, are tortured and slain.

Bloodlines

The first step for creating a Witchblood is to create his Bloodline. The Player needs to determine the type of Bloodline he wants for his character, so taking into account the style of game that he will be a part of. Below is a step-by-step tool-kit for creating your own Bloodline.

First the Player needs to determine the structure and origin of his character's Bloodline. This can be very involved or very simple.

- *Is it an ancient family that rules a distant province?*
- *Is the character a loner who doesn't know his power's origin?*
- *Was the Bloodline founded by the child of a demon and a witch?*

Once the question or origin has been answered, you can move on to determining the character's relationship to the rest of the Bloodline. This is the most important decision. It influences how the Bloodline will be brought into play throughout the game.

> - *Is the character closely tied to the rest of the Bloodline?*
> - *Is he estranged from them and why?*
> - *Do they hate and hunt him for some reason or does he hunt them?*
> - *Is there anyone in the Bloodline that he is close to or truly hates?*

A Witchblood's gift comes in the form of a Trait called a Bloodline Rank (BLD). This Trait measures the strength in which the magical blood of his ancestors flows within his veins. It is the average of the character's starting Fortitude or Temperament Rank (round up) and has a price in the form of a negative Descriptor. The negative Descriptor is always tied to the character's use of his powers.

Finally, the character must choose his Witchblood powers from the list below. He may have as many powers as his Bloodline Rank. He can also choose to have less or even none at all.

Bloodlines and Taint

Despite all the power the Witchblood command, their minds are particularly susceptible to the many forms of madness. They wield powerful forces with ease, but the price can be very steep. When a Witchblood must make a Taint Check from succumbing to Horror, the Game Master should add the Witchblood's Bloodline Rank to the roll.

Using Witchblood Powers

Witchblood powers are used in different ways based upon how they manipulate the world. When they manipulate physical reality, a Physical Conflict is required and when they affect the mental capabilities of an opponent, a Mental Conflict is required. If the power does not result in a Conflict, no roll is necessary. In all cases, the character suffers a loss of one Vitality Level for each use.

When a character uses his Witchblood power, it is typically a Simple Conflict creating the desired result immediately. Because Witchblood powers are singular instant effects, the use of the power takes place during a single Exchange.

COMPULSION

This is one of the Witchblood's most powerful abilities. Through its use, the Witchblood is able to force an opponent to take a single action of his choosing. This can be something as simple as forcing his target to ignore that the Witchblood or make him harm himself. Use of this power prompts a Mental Conflict.

DOWSING

This power allows the Witchblood the ability to find a specific item or item type in the local vicinity. The Witchblood senses the exact location of the item or item type if it is within a mile of his current location. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

EVIL EYE

The Evil Eye power is perhaps the most feared ability of the Witchblood. With it the Witchblood can cause a person to drop over and die in terrible agony. The target's Vitality Level is dropped to Incapacitated. The use of this power is probably the primary reason they are feared, hunted, and executed. Use of this power prompts a Mental Conflict.

FAR SIGHT

This power allows a Witchblood the ability to see events as they unfold. The Witchblood only gets a rough impression of what is going on at a location he designates. The information is clear, allowing him to briefly be a voyeur of events that are transpiring in the present. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

FIRE DANCING

Fire Dancing is the ability to cause objects to burst into flames. For flammable objects, a Witchblood can cause them to burst into flame just by thinking about it. Less flammable objects simply become warm to the touch. When this power is used to cause less flammable items to catch fire (wet wood, boil water, scorch flesh, etc.), a Physical Conflict is required.

Future Sight

This power allows a Witchblood the ability to look briefly into the future. The Witchblood only gets a rough impression of what is going to happen at a location within the next few hours. However, the future is not fixed and if one acts upon the premonition the information can change the precognition. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

Frost Dancing

Frost Dancing is the ability to freeze water. For liquids, a Witchblood can cause them to freeze solid just by thinking about it. Solid objects simply become cool to the touch. When this power is used to cause solid objects to freeze (metal, stone, flesh, etc.), a Physical Conflict is required.

Glamour

Glamour is the ability to create illusions that trick the eyes of others. This can take many forms such as creating darkness within a set area, creating a blinding light, turning invisible, appearing as someone else, or even creating a mirage of a city in the distance. Use of this power prompts a Mental Conflict.

Heightened Senses

Those Witchblood that have this power are physically a step above the rest of mankind. Their vision, sense of smell, hearing, taste, and even touch heighten to the level of an animal. This power grants the Witchblood a bonus die for all actions that have to do with the five senses for one Conflict. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

Horror

This is one of the Witchblood's most powerful abilities. Through its use, a Witchblood is able to force others to momentarily relive their worst nightmare. This sudden rush of terrible memories forces the target to stop doing whatever it was doing and, in some cases, drives the character into a panic or frenzy. This functions in an identical manner to Horror Checks caused by Supernatural Horrors. Use of this power prompts a Mental Conflict.

If the Horror Check is failed, the character suffers from the side effects. How a character reacts to horror is based upon his Temperament Rank. The two following tables show what a character suffers from after failing a Horror Check. The Player or Game Master can either roll for the outcome or an appropriate response can be chosen instead.

Response	Roll (2D6)
Faints.	*2*
Suffers from a psychosomatic ailment (blindness, mute, deaf, numb limb).	*3*
Panics and tries to flee.	*4*
Acts hysterically (screams, cries, pulls out hair, laughs).	*5*
Tries to physically harm self (gouge eyes, cuts wrists, etc.) with whatever is at hand.	*6*
Falls into the fetal position and is unresponsive.	*7*
Attacks anything that moves.	*8*
Suffers from uncontrollable tremors.	*9*
Freezes in place. He can be coaxed to move, but cannot take other actions.	*10*
Completely loses the ability to communicate.	*11*
Driven to destroy the source of the horror and won't stop until it is defeated or dies trying.	*12*

Mind Speech

This power allows a Witchblood to communicate with another living being via the mind. The two characters do not have to share a common language and the communication can go on for as long as the Witchblood wishes. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

Past Sight

This power allows a Witchblood the ability to look briefly into the past. The Witchblood only gets an impression of what has happened at a location within the past few hours. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

Second Sight

This power allows a Witchblood to see without the benefit of sight. He is not hindered by darkness or blindness. The power also allows him to see things that would normally be invisible, such as spirits and other Supernatural Horrors. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

Sleep

The Sleep power lets a Witchblood force one or more targets into a deep slumber. The target must be within a few feet of the Witchblood for this power to affect him or her. They will sleep for several minutes and cannot be woken. Use of this power prompts a Mental Conflict.

Spirit Hands

The Spirit Hands power allows a Witchblood to manipulate matter that he sees with his mind. This can range from levitating a candle, sliding a coin across a table, crushing a person's hand, or hurling a chair across the room. When this power is used against a living opponent, a Physical Conflict is required.

Surge

The Surge power gives a Witchblood a sudden burst of inhuman strength and the ability to ignore pain for a brief period of time. They turn into unstoppable dynamos of destruction, gaining a bonus die for all physical actions during the Conflcit. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

Trance

The Trance power allows a Witchblood to control his bodily functions. He enters a meditative trance, which slows his heart, breathing, his need for food, and even the process of aging. He will appear to others to be dead unless they study him for at least one hour. Many of the Witchblood have used this power to escape their foes by either playing dead or, in extreme cases, out-living them. Use of this power does not prompt a Conflict.

What is Ritual Magic?

Ritual magic is the use of specific ceremonies intended to manipulate both the seen and unseen worlds. Rituals are divided between two types, the Path of the Flesh, which are rituals that are designed to influence the physical world, and the Path of the Spirit, which are rituals designed to affect the unseen world. Most practitioners of ritual magic are sorcerers, called Wolkhuy (Volk-hooey), shamans, and priests of all religions.

All rituals require three elements, time, a place of power, and symbolic components, which combined act as a focus for the will of the practitioner. Time is important because most rituals take minutes, if not hours or days of repetitive actions, like chanting and dancing, to accomplish their goals. Places of power, like sacred groves and churches, are necessary because they act to protect the practitioner from the power they unleash. Finally, the symbolic components, like runes and chalices, act as a conduit to focus the will of the caster.

Using Ritual Magic

To effectively use a magic ritual, a character must possess either the Folklore or the Academics skill. In most cases the character makes a Simple Conflict roll. Still, a magic ritual, particularly a long one, can become an Extended Conflict, particularly when there are two strong personalities at odds.

Failure to enact a ritual can be costly. Spirits, demons, and other supernatural horrors do not respond well to failed attempts of manipulation. Regardless of the success of the ceremony, the character must pay the price of one Vitality Level.

Necromancy

Necromancy is the dark art of harnessing the life energy of the recently dead to benefit the Wolkhuy. When a Wolkhuy ritually murders an untainted mortal, he gains what is called a Necromancy Marker. This Marker can be spent in several ways to the benefit of the Wolkhuy. It can be used to gain a bonus die for any roll, to ignore the results of an attack, or to mimic a Witchblood power (KNW/TEM). A Wolkhuy can only have one Necromancy Marker at a time and once spent, it is lost until another ritual murder is committed.

Path of the Flesh

The Path of the Flesh concerns all things that have their source in the world of the seen. Any sort of ritual that has a direct affect on the material world falls under this path.

Animate

It is not uncommon for those who use the mystic arts to create mindless servants to help them in their labors. These servants can take the form of lifeless corpses, stone gargoyles, or even tattered clothes given life. The only requirements are that the materials can be neither living nor animated in any way. The end result is an automaton immune to mental attacks that can follow simple instructions. If they enter into a Conflict use the Goon rules found in Chapter One. No Conflict roll is required.

False Face

The subject of this ritual is transformed to look and sound like another person. This includes clothing and personal effects, such as a family sword or amulet. It does not grant the subject any of the abilities of the person they are imitating and the effects only last for a limited time. The duration is determined during the performance of the ritual. No Conflict roll is required.

Healing

The Healing ritual is a powerful tool that can be used to aid those who are near death. When it is successfully used, the Wolkhuy is able to heal an Incapacitated or Broken character by one Vitality Level. It does not require a Conflict roll.

Sanctifying

Sanctifying a place or an item is a difficult and time-consuming process. Regardless of the origin of the ritual, it takes at least an hour to perform. The details and length of each ritual is unique of its effects, but the general outcome is the same. When it is complete, the item or place grants a bonus die for conflicts against supernatural horrors and mortals who have a Taint Rank. No Conflict roll is required.

Spoiling

The spoiling ritual allows a Wolkhuy to literally ruin various materials. He can make fresh food rot, ruin crops, sour milk, and even turn hardened steel to rust. The ritual always requires a token taken from the owner of the items that the Wolkhuy wishes to spoil, and the duration of the ritual depends upon the size of the item. No Conflict roll is required.

Wards

This ritual commands a supernatural horror or Tainted mortal to flee a specific area. This is usually performed in a way that has the character standing before the evil creature and boldly commanding it to be gone. The items and actual motions of the ritual are different for each culture, but this short action always causes the evil being to panic. It requires a Conflict roll versus a Power or KNW/TEM roll by the target.

Sample Ritual

The Sarrlachi ritual of Atonement takes three hours and requires some preparation. The person that the shaman is attempting to save is placed naked upon a bed of straw beneath the starlight. A great bonfire is built next to him, close enough where he can feel the flames. For the first hour, the shaman dances around both him and the fire, chanting the ancient prayers to the gods. In the second hour, he begins to move in a figure eight around them, rattling his bone rattle and throwing ground horse bone onto the person and the fire. Finally in the last hour, he kneels next to the person facing the fire and cries out to the heavens. He then marks in horse blood the ancient tongue upon the naked body of the person.

Weather

The Weather ritual allows a Wolkhuy to make changes to the weather for one mile around him. This length ritual allows the Wolkhuy to summon up dense fog, driving rain, frigid winds, or even a blizzard. As long as the phenomenon is a natural one, it is possible for the Wolkhuy to create. The effects last until the Wolkhuy stops the ritual. A Conflict roll is only required when the Wolkhuy is trying to use the weather as a weapon.

Path of the Spirit

All rituals that deal with the unseen, or other world, are a part of the Path of the Spirit. This includes the spirits of the living, the dead, and things that are neither living nor dead, such as demons.

Banishing

The only way to be sure that a demon has been thwarted is to banish it. Banishing a demon is when a Wolkhuy sends a demon back to its home in the Infernum. This is performed in a complex ritual that is unique to each individual demon. The Wolkhuy must first research the ritual needed and understand the true nature of the demon he wishes to send back to the Infernum. Once he is satisfied with the knowledge, he can attempt to banish it. The specifics of each ritual are unique. It requires a Conflict roll versus a Power roll by the demon.

Binding

There are only two ways to try to control some Supernatural Horrors, binding and imbuing them into an object. Binding is the use of a ritual to force the horror (or mortal) to take an oath of compliance.

It comes in two parts, the oath and the tasks. The oath is what makes the horror a Wolkhuy's servant for a period of time (day, week, year, etc.), which is set when the ritual is cast. The tasks are the instructions that the Wolkhuy gives the Horror during the time he has it under control, such as seek out and return to me the diary of Lucian. However, the task must be a single sentence with a single objective.

Binding is a very dangerous practice and can lead to unforeseen results. Horrors and mortals who are bound will often seek to find loopholes in the tasks they are given so that they may bring about the downfall of the Wolkhuy. It requires a Conflict roll versus a Cunning or KNW/TEM roll by the target.

CLEANSE

Encounters with evil and even living life in a violent and uncaring society can corrupt the very soul of an individual. A character may attempt to wipe the Taint from the soul of another and bring them back in touch with their fellow man. This always includes a complex cleansing ritual, which varies in its nature from faith to faith. It requires a Conflict roll versus a Temperament/Taint roll by the target.

CONTACT

To harness the power of a supernatural being, a character must first contact it. This is either the first step in a process that will eventually lead to the Binding or Imbuing of the creature or an attempt to get information from it. The Wolkhuy must first know the subject's name and nature. This is most often found through intense research and the use of forbidden occult tomes. Once the information is gathered, the Wolkhuy may attempt the ritual. Contact requires a Conflict roll versus a Cunning roll by the supernatural being.

EXORCISM

The exorcism is one of the most involved and stressful of all rituals. It is extremely dangerous as it opens up the character to the possessing spirit. A character that wishes to exorcise a spirit does not know what the duration of the exorcism will be since it depends upon the strength of the possessing spirit. Each religious faith has its own rituals that need to be performed for the exorcism to work. It requires a Conflict roll versus a Cunning roll by the horror.

IMBUING

This ritual forces a spirit to inhabit an item, such as a sword or a crystal globe. The ritual requires that the spirit already be present in order to complete it. Once the ritual is complete, the spirit will be permanently imprisoned in the artifact until it is destroyed, which always requires drastic measures such as being tossed into a volcano.

When the ritual is complete, the Wolkhuy can control the Supernatural Horror and force it to do his bidding. This includes making it use it's powers to aid the Wolkhuy or even forcing it to manifest physically to perform tasks. It requires a Conflict roll versus a Power roll by the horror being imbued. Once imbued, it requires a Conflict roll versus a Cunning roll to command.

Mind Wipe

The Mind Wipe ritual is perhaps the most feared known to mankind. When it is successful, a Wolkhuy can mold the mind of the target to his will. This can take the form of inducing amnesia, false memories, or secret compulsions that he must perform when certain conditions are met, such as an assassination attempt or suicide clause. The target must always be present when the ritual is performed. Mind Wipe requires a Conflict roll versus a KNW/TEM roll by the target.

Summons

A summons is a ritual that draws a specific Supernatural Horror to the Wolkhuy's location. It is a very dangerous act that requires a lot of time and preparation to perform. The Wolkhuy must first fully research and understand the Horror he wishes to summon forth into the world. Once he gathers all of the information, he can try to summon it by using this ritual. Once summoned, he can either let it run free or attempt to Bind or Imbue it into an object. It requires a Conflict roll versus a Power roll by the Horror.

Supernatural Complications

In *Conspiracy of Shadows*, the supernatural is a serious threat to humanity. Creatures of monstrous power stalk the night with their own unknowable purpose. Arcane artifacts tempt men and bring them to ruin. Each is unique with its own personality, powers, and needs. The creation process below is used for all forms of Supernatural Horrors.

Step One: Concept

First decide upon a concept. It should be a concise idea that you can write down in a sentence or two. It can be taken from another source such as a movie or it can be entirely invented.

Step Two: Motivation

Every Supernatural Complication has wants and needs that it must fulfill. You have to decide what the creature's motivation is for its actions. What drives it to do what it does?

Step Three: Physical Description

Each Supernatural Complication needs a physical description. You should give a short description of the aspects of its form that make it stand out, such as wings, spider legs, or the fact that it is incorporeal.

Step Four: Telltale

All Supernatural Complication often can take the form of more mundane creatures, like men, animals, and even plants. Regardless of this form, all have a Telltale that gives them away. It can be a physical characteristic that stays constant, like red eyes or a tattoo of a mystic symbol, or it can be an trigger, like a smell or sound that always accompanies them. Each Telltale is unique to that creature with the exception of their spawn, which often share the same Telltale as their parent.

Step Five: Powers

The next step in the creation of a Supernatural Complication is to choose its powers. These abilities can make them formidable opponents and powerful allies for those willing to put their lives and souls in the hands of an inhuman monster.

Each power selected has a duration and a range that must be decided upon. There are three different durations (Instant, Limited, and Permanent) and two different ranges (Others and Self).

Duration (Instant): This duration occurs when power only lasts for a single exchange. An attack with claws and teleportation through shadows are two examples of Instant duration powers.

Duration (Limited): This duration is used for powers that last for a set period of time, be it seconds, minutes, or days. Inflicting a disease upon an opponent or injecting a poison are two good examples of Limited duration powers.

Duration (Permanent): This duration lasts forever or until it is ended by the creature. Having wings to fly, armor, and immunities are all great examples of Permanent duration powers.

Range (Other): This range describes powers that can be used upon individuals other that the creature. This range can take any form from claws attacking to pillars of fire erupting from the ground.

Range (Self): This range is limited to powers that can only be used upon the Supernatural Complication. This can be anything from enhanced senses to healing.

ATTACK

The Attack power is the ability to cause harm to an opponent. It comes in two forms, physical and mental. Physical attacks target the actual body of an opponent such as by claws, poison, gouts of flame, or stunning roars. Mental attacks are when the psyche of an opponent is harmed, such as mental drains,mind numbing terror, or will crushing blasts. Each attack is unique and counts as a separate power.

GLAMOUR

Glamour is the ability of Supernatural Complication to create illusions to trick the eyes of others. Creating darkness within a set area, creating a blinding light, turning invisible, appearing as a mortal, or even creating a mirage of a city in the distance are some examples. However, each individual Glamour counts as a single power.

HEALING

A Supernatural Complication with healing is able to recover Vitality Levels lost from injury. Some creatures may also heal allies in the same manner. What is required for the creature to heal an ally can vary, but it is always vile in nature. It may include ingesting its flesh, breathing in its breath, or by blood transfusion.

IMMUNITIES

Many Supernatural Complication are immune to specific forms of harm. The immunity can be very specific, such as cold forged iron axes, or they can be very general, such as wooden implements. Each individual immunity counts as a separate power.

MARKS

A mark is some form of physical marking that is fused to the skin of a target. This can be a terrible scar meant as a punishment or as a tattoo-like marking used to signify the ownership of a Supernatural Complication allowing it to know the whereabouts of its mark. It acts as a deterent for individuals not to cross the creature or to not harm his property.

MOVEMENT

Movement is the ability of the Supernatural Complication to move through space in non-standard ways. This can take the form of great wings that allow it to fly like a bird or the ability to teleport over distances by stepping into shadows. The specifics vary from creature to creature and each mode of transportation counts as one power.

POSSESSION

Many Supernatural Complication are so unlike humanity that they are not made of the same matter as mortals. In fact, they are often closer in makeup to the soul of human beings. Those inhuman monsters can turn into an invisible mist and possess a mortal, using them like a puppeteer uses a marionette.

SHAPECHANGE

This power allows a Supernatural Complication to alter his own shape and, in some cases, the shape of others. This can mean the ability for the creature to take the form of an animal, many animals (including humans), plants, inanimate objects, or mimicking the shape of a specific creature. Conversely, this means a Supernatural Complication may be able to change the shape of anything into one of those items as well. Each individual form counts as a single power.

SPAWN

Many Supernatural Complication have the ability to create progeny with either their own kind or with humans. This can be done one of two ways by reproduction or by infection. Each supernatural threat creates unique spawn and some even can control their spawn by force of will.

The creation of spawn through infection can take many forms. It can be physical, like forcing the ingestion of worms spawned of the creature's body. It can also be mental, with the creature dominating the soul of the target. The one constant is that the infected subject falls under the complete control of the Supernatural Complication.

Reproduction works in the same manner as reproduction works with normal members of a species that the Supernatural Complication is coupling with. This requires the creature to take the form of the mortal and engage in. The spawn usually takes the normal amount of time for the species to gestate; however, once it is born it usually matures twice as fast. These spawn are very powerful, taking the form of their mortal parent but with the powers and abilities of their supernatural parent. They have wills of their own and, though most become allies to their mortal parent, some rebel.

Step Six: Flaws

All Supernatural Complications have at least one or more flaws. They can be either a True Flaw, a Greater Flaw, a Lesser Flaw, or any combination of all three. When a Supernatural Complication is exposed to its True Flaw it is instantly destroyed. When a Greater Flaw is used against it, the attacker gains 2 bonus dice. True and Greater Flaw must be something specific, like the tears of a virgin maid or a certain type of attack, such as a stake through the heart.

Lesser Flaws only grant a single bonus die for actions taken against the Horror. However, they are more general in nature. For example, a Lesser Flaw might be pure silver or saltwater.

Step Seven: Traits

Once all of a Supernatural Complication's powers are chosen, its Traits need to be determined. Each creature has only three Traits, its Vitality Levels, Power Rank, and Cunning Rank. To calculate these you must first total all of the Supernatural Complication's Trait Points.

To get its Trait Points, add all the of Powers the creature possesses. Add an additional point for each power that has Permanent Duration. This total is then divided between the creature's Cunning and Power Ranks. Finally, add six to its Power Rank to calculate it's Vitality Levels.

A Supernatural Complication's Cunning and Power Ranks are used for the determination of all its conflict rolls. The Power Rank is added to a roll of 2D6 for all things concerning the use of force. The Cunning Rank is added to a roll of 2D6 for all things concerning the use of subtlety.

STEP EIGHT: WAKE

All Supernatural Complications have what is known as the Wake. The Wake is the effect the creature's presence has upon reality. All of these inhuman monstrosities create a distortion, bending reality unconsciously to their wills. This can take a myriad of forms but each is unique in some way to the demon. Some make the area around them distort visibly, like heat waves coming off of stone. For others, the Wake is gut wrenching like the spontaneous creation of rats within a 500 yard radius. The more powerful the Supernatural Complication, the more powerful its Wake.

Radek the Everdying

Radek the Everdying is just one example of the type of Supernatural Complication you can create. The only limit is your imagination.

Concept: *He isan undead sorcerer based upon a combination of Imhotep from The Mummy and the Russian myth of Koshchey the Deathless.*

Motivation: *He is driven by his desire to become a mortal man once again as he can no longer experience physical sensation. He can only attain this by sacrificing his power for true love. However, he is hindered in his quest by his need to maintain the very power he must give up.*

Description: *He looks like a handsome Dasian man with a shock of black hair, piercing blue eyes, deeply tanned skin, and a fit figure but only during the night. During the day he takes on the appearance of an ever-rotting corpse with scarab beetles scuttling across his decaying frame.*

Telltale: *He is always preceded and followed by the smell of rotting flesh during the daylight hours. At night, when he is a handsome man, he is marked by a great blue tattoo of a scarab beetle that covers his back.*

Powers:
- *Wind Gusts (Attack, Instant, Others)*
- *Lightning Strike (Attack, Instant, Others)*
- *Swirling Winds (Glamour, Permanent, Self)*
- *Unblessed Weapons (Immunity, Permanent, Self)*
- *Old Age (Immunity, Permanent, Self)*
- *Disease (Immunity, Permanent, Self)*
- *Poison (Immunity, Permanent, Self)*
- *Scarab Tattoo (Mark, Permanent, Others)*
- *Walk on Water (Movement, Permanent, Self)*
- *Thunderstorm (Shapechange, Permanent, Self)*

Flaw: *He suffers from a Greater Flaw. He is vulnerable to attacks made by those who have known true love and lost that love.*

Vital Statistics:
Power Rank: 8
Cunning Rank: 10
Vitality Levels: 14

Wake: *The weather changes to match his mood for a mile around him. When he is angry, lightning strikes from dark clouds. When he is happy, the skies clear and warm breezes pass through the area.*

THE CONSPIRACY

The heart of *Conspiracy of Shadows* is the conspiracy itself. It is the sinister organization that the characters are trying to thwart. However, there is no set conspiracy in this game. Instead the following section gives you a step-by-step guide for the creation and use of your own conspiracy.

CREATING THE CONSPIRACY

After the Players have made their Cell, the Game Master must create a conspiracy. This book gives you the tools and setting to create a conspiracy of your own. The Game Master needs to determine the type of conspiracy he wants the game to be centered around. In doing so, he should take into account the style of game that the Players want to play.

SINISTER AGENDAS

The first step to creating your conspiracy is to determine the ultimate goal. This is perhaps the most important decision. It influences the types of subgroups that the conspiracy controls, its methods, and the overall feel of the game.

> * *What is the organization's ultimate goal?*
> * *Are they trying to covertly take over the world?*
> * *Do they want to control all of the criminal activity in the world?*
> * *Do they want to control the fate of mankind or destroy it?*
> * *Do they seek to destroy something, like a specific organization?*
> * *Why do they seek this goal?*
> * *What is their motivation?*

THE SHAPE OF POWER

Once the goal of the conspiracy is determined, you can develop the power structure of the organization. The Game Master must determine which groups are involved, who leads the organization, and how the entire conspiracy is interconnected. The characters will most likely encounter this core group for well int game play or not at all, if ever, but knowing who they are creates the entire framework for the Game Master to build the conspiracy.

- *Is there one leader, one group, or several groups in control?*
- *Are the groups controlling the conspiracy cooperative or uncooperative?*
- *Are their multiple conspiracies?*
- *If so, what are their relationships with one another like?*
- *Is the conspiracy supernatural in origin?*

The Size of Evil

The size of the conspiracy is a determining factor in what it can and can't do. If it is too small, it may be unable to achieve its goals and if it is too big, it will be easy to discover and thwart. A happy medium must be determined based upon the organizations goals. This includes deciding upon the size of the inner circle that rules it as well as the various levels below it.

The Membership

Determining the size of the organization easily bleeds into the nature of the conspiracy's members. These are the individuals the Players will most often come in contact. Defining the membership defines the identity of the organization.

- *Who are the members and how do they become members?*
- *Are they all part of the same family?*
- *Are they simply individuals with similar interests?*
- *How do they recruit new members?*

Target Organizations

A major aspect of the conspiracy is the organizations that it controls and influences. In particular, they target those that have the greatest impact on their desired goal. They may choose financial institutions both large and small to support their projects, religious orders because of the influence they hold over the people, or even illegal operations for their innate ability to hide what they do.

Generally these organizations should fall into line with the goals of the overall organization. They will have their own goals and take action (overtly and covertly) to further their own goals as well as those of the conspiracy. Their members may be aware of the connection to the conspiracy but most will have no clue. Some might even start their own subconspiracies, believing that they are the real movers and shakers of the world.

- *Are the members willing pawns of the core group?*
- *Do they do the work without knowledge of who is in charge?*
- *Do they cooperate with the other subgroups?*
- *Do they even know of their existence?*
- *Are they in direct conflict with the other groups?*
- *Are they orphaned by the conspiracy as a whole?*

CRAFT GUILDS

Craft guilds are a recent development in society. They are organized groups of skilled craftsmen who have banded together to better control the market for their products and skills. In many ways they are direct rivals to organizations such as the church, the government and the syndicates, which are controlled by the privileged classes of society.

Craft guilds tend to be democratic in nature, composed of a group of leaders voted into positions of authority from a pool of senior members. Typically, the guilds have various qualifications that the leaders must meet in order to take office. This organizational structure can make it very easy for a conspiracy to infiltrate.

Guilds are very appealing to conspiracies in that they exert a lot of control over the general population of Polian. Their collective power can often be used to bend society to the will of the conspiracy. Guilds can be difficult to control on a large scale as they are fragmented into many subgroups based upon the skills in which their members specialize and their geographic locations.

CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

Organized crime is a conspiracy in of itself. Their stated goal is to maximize profits, much like a syndicate, but they act beneath the skin of society and do not bat an eye at breaking the law to do it. This is all accomplished through the use of offered wealth, the threat and use of violence, and the subornation of legitimate organizations and cultural institutions.

Dictatorial by nature, criminal organizations typically follow a military or a family structure. This limits the level of control the conspiracy can have, forcing it to rely upon the subtle use of select members within the power structure. However, if the head of a criminal enterprise falls, the entire organization would be at the beck and call of the conspiracy.

Criminal organizations appeal to the conspiracy because they already work in a secretive fashion. When used properly they can facilitate the secret activities of the conspiracy with ease. Some are simply extensions of the conspiracy and not separate organizations at all.

GOVERNMENTS

Governments are the machines that allow an orderly society to function. Without them civilization would collapse. Governments work to influence the actions of the population through the creation and enforcement of laws. This is accomplished in an open and overt manner, though this does not eliminate the possibility of corruption.

Most governments are built around the authority of a single figure, though some cities and towns have begun to embrace republicanism. This organization limits the direct influence of the conspiracy, but does not eliminate it. Governments are heavily layered with different people taking on various levels of authority over society. These layers are often more effective at influencing society than a single authority figure and allows for many entry points for the conspiracy.

Governments are appealing to the conspiracy for their impact on the day-to-day lives of the people, much like religion. This gives the government a level of power virtually unmatched and can be used effectively by the conspiracy; however, they are often rife with their own internal fighting, which can come into conflict with the goals of the conspiracy.

Religious Organizations

Organized religions are perhaps the most powerful and influential cultural institutions in the world. They work overtly to influence the beliefs of the faithful as well as the faithless. This is accomplished through both subtle messages delivered to their flock and overt actions taken by sub-organizations within their power structure, like monastic and knightly orders.

The power of a religion is derived from the belief of the people in its infallibility. This control allows churches to command believers everywhere with the weight of divine authority. A religion can just as easily bring peace to a region as it can spark a war based on zealous beliefs.

Like most governments, religious institutions tend to be dictatorial in nature, making them difficult to completely control. They also have their own internal power struggles with which the conspiracy must contend. This makes complete control of any religion difficult to accomplish, but a significant level of control is possible through the subtle placement of members.

The 13

A cabal of nobles and clergy in Taratha numbering 13

The cabal works primarily through three men:

Dobry Senkski, Mayor of Senk
Gerik Taraski, Head of Syndicate
Jan Howicz, Landless Noble

Membership spans every social rank within society. However it is primarily made up of members of the nobility.

The Conspiracy has infiltrated:
The Diocese of Taratha City
The Diocese of Senk
The Order of the Sacred Cup
The Masons Guild of Taratha
The Criminal Syndicate of Taratha City

Their goal is to destroy the support of the king of Taratha by isolating him and eliminating his allies. This will allow them to install their own monarch.

Syndicates

Syndicates are groups of merchants who have banded together in an effort to maximize their profits. They can be large syndicates that are spread across many kingdoms with their hands in every conceivable aspect of the economy, much smaller local organizations that specialize in a target market, or something in between. In many ways they are effectively conspiracies whose ultimate goal is to make money.

A board of directors, made up of the heads of various businesses, controls a syndicate. They often must answer to investors, such as banks. Typically they are democratic in nature and can be influenced through their various members.

Syndicates are the backbone of the economy, which gives them a great deal of influence. Through their practices they can shift the publics attitudes and beliefs in one direction or another. They also have a very direct affect on the social order simply because they supply or purchase the merchandise that people need to live. These factors make them very appealing to the conspiracy.

Relationship With The Cell

For a conspiracy to be used effectively as the primary foe of the characters, their relationship must be defined. In many cases they will be unaware of the true agenda of the conspiracy in regards to the Cell, but not always. Below are several different designs the conspiracy may use on the Cell. These can be the aims of the entire conspiracy or just the desires of a sub-group within the conspiracy.

Destruction

The most obvious aim for the conspiracy is to destroy the Cell. The characters may know some or all of the truth about the conspiracy. This makes them a threat to its current and future goals. This may simply mean the elimination of the members of the Cell or the destruction of everything they ever held dear.

However, this destruction doesn't have to be physical in nature. Instead, the conspiracy may attempt to destroy the Cell's credibility and social standing. This can be a much more effective and insidious way to neutralize the Cell, as it pits them against the very society they are trying to save.

Knowledge of the conspiracy isn't the only reason for it to attempt to destroy the Cell. It may be because one or more of the members of the

Cell are a part of a special bloodline. Perhaps they or their heirs are the culmination of an ancient prophecy that will destroy the conspiracy or even the world. The Cell may or may not be aware of this fact, making things that much more interesting, particularly if this information is revealed over time.

Manipulation

The conspiracy, by its very nature, is secretive and manipulative. It only stands to reason that it would try to manipulate the members of the Cell towards their own goals. It might use them as a weapon against deadly rivals or even as a means of dealing with troublesome members within its own ranks.

The manipulation of the Cell can be done directly through members of the conspiracy or indirectly via intermediaries who are unaware that their actions benefit a secret and malignant organization. Regardless of the means, the results are typically the same. The Cell is often fed information to steer them in one direction or another.

False recruitment is one way to use disinformation to lead to the Cell being misled from their true course. Typically it is done to make the Cell believe that they or one of their members has been seen as trustworthy by the conspiracy. This is almost never true and usually means that they are being set up for a fall.

Generally it begins with one or more members of the Cell being approached by member of the conspiracy. They might appear in their true guise or keep their true identity hidden, but their offer is always the same, your heart's desire in exchange for loyalty.

The recruitment may be a single exchange, such as some information for a single job; however, it may actually be the first step towards a long-term relationship. This approach is only ever used on those that he con-

spiracy believes they can turn. The end result is always the same. When a Cell member is turned, they are betrayed by one of their own, ending their threat to the conspiracy.

Often, a powerful conspiracy will see the emergence of a Cell as an opportunity to draw out and destroy real threats to their power. The Cell will be set up as a lightning rod to draw out the true threat. This always occurs in stages and can sometimes lead to the destruction of the Cell.

The first step is typically the recruitment of the Cell. This is generally done without the knowledge of the Cell, often coming in the form of a trusted friend or mentor. They are then given a task and the threat is notified in some manner that the Cell now works for the conspiracy. To send that message home the Cell will be attacked by lesser pawns that seem to have ties to one the conspiracy's enemies. This often leads the rivals to act, which draws them out into the open and leads to their destruction, often alongside the Cell.

Protect the Cell

On a rare occasion, the conspiracy may act to try to protect the Cell or a specific member of the Cell. This is very rarely done for altruistic reasons and is more often spawned by some benefit it sees in the continued existence of the Cell. It may also benefit the members of the Cell but rarely is this true.

Typically the Cell will be unaware of their mysterious benefactor. Their lives may just seem blessed as things just go their way. Aid always arrives in the nick of time and they are never truly in any legal trouble.

There are primarily three reasons for the conspiracy to desire the continued existence of a group of people hell bent on destroying it. The first may be that they are seen as an asset and are being groomed for recruitment. It may be because one or more members of the Cell are from a special family line that is important to the conspiracy for one reason or another. Finally, it may be that the characters are a part of an important prophecy, which will result in the culmination of all the conspiracy's plans coming to fruition.

Activities

The conspiracy is an organization always in motion. It is never simply sitting around waiting for the Cell to show up and disrupt their activities. It is always working towards an ultimate goal by whatever means necessary. This covers a variety of activities that are completed by members at all levels of the organization. Below are some of the most common actions that the conspiracy may take at any given time. Use them when constructing episodes.

Assassination

When the threat to the conspiracy becomes dire, it will make all efforts to eliminate it. To avoid the attention of society, these assassinations are typically disguised as accidents. The key to this is to make the accident not seem too unusual; however, if an accidental death is not possible, the conspiracy will instead frame a patsy for the assassination.

Counterespionage

All organizations are ripe for infiltration and the conspiracy is no exception. It must keep constant watch for infiltration by rival organizations and the Cell. Those members that are assigned to counterespionage activities are often put in the difficult position of watching their own colleagues. In most cases, this individual's activities are known only to a select few within the hierarchy.

Disinformation

Disinformation is the spread of false intelligence in order to conceal the true aims of the conspiracy. It is perhaps the most important task given to members of the conspiracy, as the spread of disinformation covers up its activities. This is typically accomplished through the effective use of rumors and manipulation of the few formalized information networks, such as the ravens used by the Orthodox Albinican Church for communication.

Information Gathering

If knowledge is power, the conspiracy is the master of gathering, controlling and keeping it. This can range from simple surveillance of individuals to in-depth research in the most esteemed and learned institutions. Much of the activity will be relatively benign, like transporting messages and intercepting the messages of others. It can also be much more aggressive and sinister as the conspiracy may choose to capture and torture individuals for information.

Infiltration

No secret organization works within a vacuum. It is made up of individuals who are members of other organizations that have a value for the conspiracy. Members are often actively trying to infiltrate these organizations in order to get some benefit for the conspiracy, though that benefit may not be readily apparent. On rare occasions where there are multiple conspiracies, members may be trying to infiltrate those rival organizations.

Acquiring Assets

One of the primary activities of the conspiracy is to acquire the skills that they need to accomplish their goals. This is done with a two-step process of recruiting and then running these assets. Recruiting a new asset can take many forms, like bribery, threats of violence or simply finding individuals who are of a like mind to those within the conspiracy. Once they are deemed trustworthy, these assets are then given orders that are overseen by members of the conspiracy. No asset is ever left to their own devices.

Subversion and Takeover

The conspiracy always controls public organizations, like a church, guild or even a government. This is done through subversion and takeover. Some organizations are easy to takeover since all that is required is enough members to infiltrate it. Others, particularly large and powerful organizations, are very difficult to subvert and takeover. They require a combination of all of the various activities listed in this section, but the end result is either overt or covert control of the organization by the conspiracy.

Sabotage

Sometimes an organization or an individual becomes a serious threat to the conspiracy but cannot be eliminated. When this is the case, members will attempt to sabotage the activities of the organization or individual with the goal of ending the threat or dissuading them from acting against the conspiracy. This can take a myriad of forms, but the most common acts are the accidental destruction of property, the disappearance of individuals, and the theft of important items.

Creating the Game

Running the game for the first time can be an intimidating task. The Game Master has a lot of responsibility as he must not only create the evil conspiracy, but he must also create the outline for the plot of the game. This section is designed to make that task as easy as possible.

Series Bible

When creating a new game, the first step is for the Game Master to construct his Series Bible. The Series Bible is a tool that allows him to keep the series on track and focused. It is a guide for the series overall as well as the individual episodes.

Themes

The theme is the central idea that the series explores and can be summed up as opposite ideas, simple statements, or questions. It is an implicit or recurrent set of ideas that are a part of every *Conspiracy of Shadows* game. They are the game's skeleton, giving it structure and purpose. They should never be obvious, but rather appear through character development and symbolism inserted into the game by the Game Master and Players.

When the Game Master is developing the Series Bible he should decide on its primary theme. This will be the core idea of the series, but it does not have to be the only idea. Often the best games use multiple themes that compliment and/or contrast each other. Below are several common themes you can center your series around.

Betrayal

Betrayal can play a key role in *Conspiracy of Shadows* games. It is based upon the idea that anyone can be a villain. Anyone can step over the line and leave their comrades out to die. It can appear in a symbolic fashion or as a tragic character flaw in one of the characters or supporting cast members; however, it can be easily overused and should not be used commonly in the forefront of every episode.

Corruption

The slow spiraling descent from the light into the pit of evil is a core aspect of *Conspiracy of Shadows*. It is easy to symbolically introduce to a game with decaying flesh, rotting wood, and other common horror trappings. It can also appear as the eroding morality of a protagonist or key supporting cast member in the face of evil. The most obvious use of this theme is found when the Cell must defend a corrupt world from an even worse alternative.

Doom

Doom is a difficult theme to use in a game because it is an end result instead of an ongoing struggle. It is the ultimate destiny of corruption. It can hang over the characters, antagonists, supporting cast members, or the world at large. It can also appear as a part of a prophecy or in the ruins of the ancient empires throughout parts of the world. Regardless of the way in which Doom is used, it works best when it is balanced against other themes.

Struggle

Struggle is a key theme for all *Conspiracy of Shadows* games. The basic idea of fighting a powerful conspiracy is built on the idea of struggle. It is rooted in both internal struggles of characters as well as external struggles. This can be represented in a black and white manner, such as "good versus evil." It can also be used effectively with complex issues like, "do the ends justify the means" and "how do you defeat violence with violence."

Faith

The world of *Conspiracy of Shadows* is a medieval one and, as such, is built upon faith. Religion is not simply a series of beliefs, but a solid way of life to people in the game world. However, the theme of Faith also covers an individual's belief in himself and his allies. This makes it an excellent theme to use and should be tested at every opportunity. The characters should see and hear things that shake their faith to its very foundation. When these tests are subtle they are more effective.

Series Length

Once the theme has been established, the length of the series should be decided. Typically a series can be broken down into four different types; the movie, the mini-series, the single season, and the multi-season series. A movie typically lasts a single game session, a mini-series will last between two to six episodes, a single season will often last between nine and twelve episodes, and multi-season series will typically be constructed of several seasons. This choice has a great deal of impact on how the game will unfold as well as what issues will be covered.

Screen Presence

Over the course of the game, each protagonist will receive varying amounts of attention in each Episode. This is simply the nature of a role-playing game. When mapping out the game, regardless of the length, the Game Master needs to create a guide to determine the level of Screen Presence each protagonist will have. This guide, of course, is very loose and meant to direct the focus of each individual episode.

There are three different levels of Screen Presence in any given episode. They are the Primary, the Secondary, and the Ensemble role. For each episode these roles should be assigned with no more than two characters being placed in the spotlight at a time. The only exception to this rule should be the debut Episode, in which every protagonist gets some time in the limelight.

The Game Master should be fair when dividing Screen Presence among the characters, allotting equal time to each character. However, because Players can introduce new elements at any time during play, it should be realized that the scheduled Screen Presence might result differently than your guide. This is expected and you can simply make adjustments to the Series Bible to accommodate the changes.

End Game

Regardless of the length of the game you choose to play, it is going to come to an end eventually. This is something that should be kept in mind when you design your episodes; however, the End Game has several parts and is not designed by the Game Master alone. Rather it is a collaborative effort by everyone involved.

The first step is for the Game Master to take into account the personal End Games of each character. This is readily apparent in their Triggers and should be kept in mind during Episode creation.

He then needs to take these various End Games and work out a rough idea of how the series will end. It could be the utter destruction of the conspiracy, the destruction of the Cell, or even the retirement of the characters. Regardless of the ending chosen, it should always be something that will be satisfying for the group as a whole.

Finally, everyone involved in the game should realize that the End Game can, and most likely will, change throughout play. *Conspiracy of Shadows* is built around the idea of collaborative play with both the Players and the Game Master constructing the shared imaginary space often ad lib. As long as that is kept in mind, the End Games, both the personal and that of the whole game, will produce a nice sense of closure.
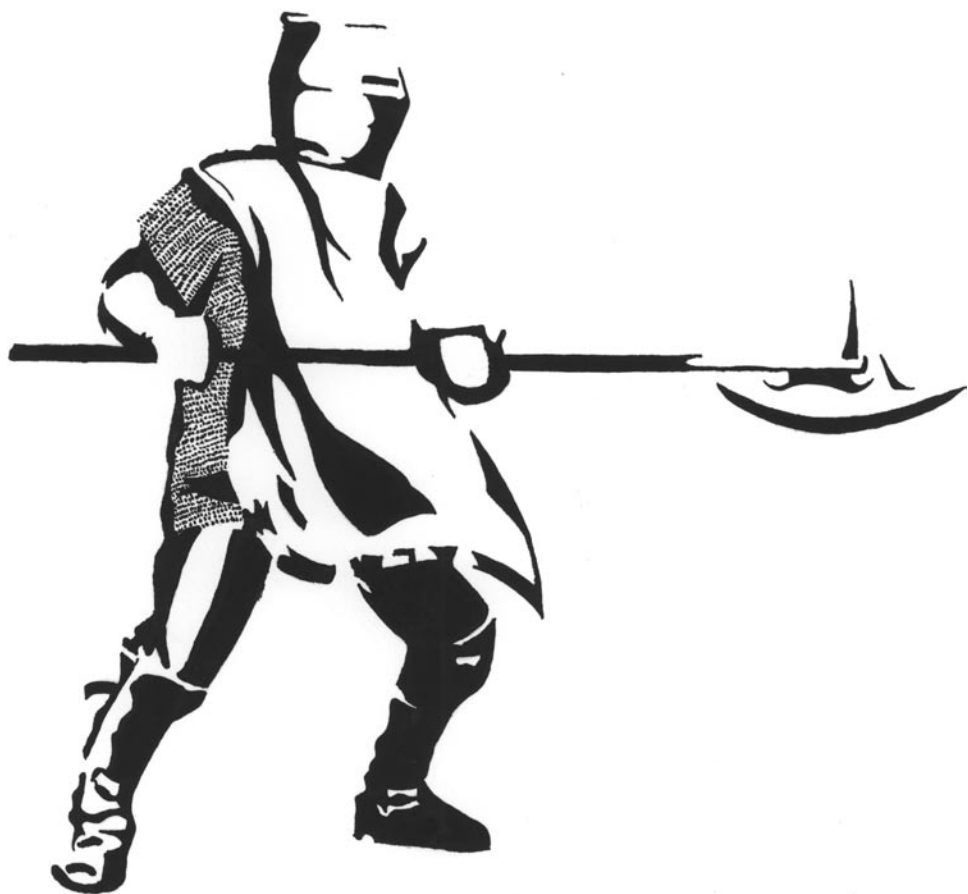
Conspiracy of Shadows

SERIES BIBLE: King's Fall
THEME: Betrayal
LENGTH: 6 Episodes   •   **END GAME:** Death of King

EPISODE ONE: THE FALL
   TYPE: Debut
   NARRATIVE FOCUS: Escape
   DESCRIPTION: Trapped together by agents of the conspiracy
      at and out.

EPISODE TWO: TAIL CHASING
   TYPE: Continuity
   NARRATIVE FOCUS: Quest
   DESCRIPTION: Series of murders tied to a cult.

EPISODE THREE: ALMOST COLOSSUS
   TYPE: Continuity
   NARRATIVE FOCUS: Nemesis
   DESCRIPTION: Golem attempts to assassinate agent of the king.

EPISODE FOUR: WILL TO POWER
   TYPE: Continuity
   NARRATIVE FOCUS: Quest
   DESCRIPTION: Secret leader of cult rises to place of power.

EPISODE FIVE: THE DIONAEA HOUSE
   TYPE: Continuity
   NARRATIVE FOCUS: Escape
   DESCRIPTION: Led into a trap by an ally.

EPISODE SIX: SEEKING ZAMPANO
   TYPE: Continuity
   NARRATIVE FOCUS: Nemesis
   DESCRIPTION: Climactic confrontation with the conspiracy
      during a siege.

Constructing Episodes

Conspiracy of Shadows game sessions are constructed in a similar manner to the episodes of a television shows. One of the reasons is because the structure of an episode easily lends itself to conspiracy and horror games. They also typically have a linear plot with a definite conclusion, which is needed for all games. Finally, they are very easy for the Game Master to run because there are clear goals from the begining.

There are four types of episodes that can be played and are all modeled on ideas you would find in television shows like *Millennium* and the *X-Files*. One episode begins the story, others move the plot along and alter the formula of the series while some episodes have no bearing on the overall plot of the show. These different types of shows are detailed below.

Debut

The debut episode is unique in that it will usually only be used once in the life of a series. The only time it is used more than once is if you are running a multi-season game. In that case, every season needs to open with a debut episode. The debut always opens with a major event, and the premise and theme of the series is always center stage. The debut is always an ensemble piece with every character getting pushed into the spotlight.

Stand-Alone

Stand-alone episodes exemplify the formula of the series. They are self-contained and may or may not have any bearing upon the overall plot, depending upon the subject matter explored. They always tie up any hanging plot threads that were introduced at the start of the episode and are either focused on a single character or the entire cast.

Continuity

Continuity episodes always work to advance the overall plot of the series. They can be self-contained in a single episode but are most often a part of several episodes. They can be used to introduce new plot threads as well as to close off old ones. This is often done by the return of an old villain or the introduction of a new nemesis. Continuity episodes can be focused on either a single character or the entire cast of the series.

Change-of-Pace

Change-of-pace episodes always play around with the formula of the series. In a game like *Conspiracy of Shadows*, which is very serious in nature, the most common episode of this type is one filled with humor, although humor is not the only way to change the pace of the show. An episode focusing on romance would be just as effective. Like most episodes, change-of-pace episodes can focus on a single character or the entire cast.

Narrative Focus

When constructing an episode, a Game Master must choose a narrative focus for it. The narrative focus is the basic structure of the type of story you are trying to construct in conjunction with your Players. Typically episodes will be built on one of the following types, though they can often be mixed and matched to get the greatest impact. Regardless of the narrative focus chosen, the Game Master should always be ready for it to shift based upon the changes to the story brought on by the Players.

Escape

The Escape model for an episode always begins with the characters in peril from which they must escape. The focus of the episode is the characters themselves and their actions, not on the antagonists trying to harm them. This can be a very common episode in a *Conspiracy of Shadows* game, as the characters will often find themselves in trouble, either of their own doing or by the actions of the Conspiracy.

Quest

The Quest model for an episode centers on the characters moving through a series of horrifying places. It is very much influenced by the literary "hero story arc" in which the hero travels through the metaphorical "wasteland" to reach his ultimate goal. In these types of episodes, the focus is on the journey of the characters and their interaction with the terrifying locations and horrific situations they encounter.

Nemesis

In the Nemesis model, a villain directly opposes the characters. The focus is upon the relationship between this primary antagonist and the characters. Typically these episodes only make their appearance at the beginning or at the end of story arcs, acting as bookends for a storyline.

Introducing Horror

While *Conspiracy of Shadows* is primarily about battling the insidious conspiracy, it is also about traditional horror, which can easily be introduced to the game. Most of the horrific action that takes place falls into two categories, the Invasion by Evil and the Evil Location. Together these two categories describe, in general terms, every horror story ever written, filmed and envisioned. It is always a matter of the evil coming to the characters or the characters going to the evil. Below the two types are detailed.

Invasion by Evil

The Invasion by Evil horror story always revolves around a safe haven being intruded upon by some form of evil, natural or supernatural. Horror and fear is created in this situation because of the contrast created between the safe haven and the evil that violates it. This requires that the Players establish the haven as safe, otherwise there is no contrast and therefore making it simply another encounter with evil.

The nature of the invasion varies depending upon the desired effect. It can be slow and subtle, like the corruption of a member of the Cell by demonic forces or even the conspiracy itself. It can also be brought about in a sudden brutal rush of blood and death, like a ravening monster striking suddenly like lightning. Regardless of the type of invasion, it should never be used too often as it will eliminate any sort of comfort zone the Players may have, making it ineffective at introducing horror.

Evil Locations

Evil Location stories are always about the characters entering a place they should not have and trying to find a way out. The horror and fear is created by the seeming helplessness of the characters and the hopelessness of the situation. These sorts of stories require the characters to leave their comfort zone and explore the darker reaches of the world.

Evil Locations are each unique in their environment, but certain elements will always remain the same for them to be effective. They must be complex, confusing locations and create the perception that the characters are trapped in the situation until they either solve its mysteries or die in the process. Escape from these places must never be easy and should always require some sort of sacrifice on the part of the characters. This is usually someone or something they hold dear, like their souls.

CURSES

Curses can be a powerful tool used in any game centered on conspiracies and horror. They can be simple flavor placed in the background to give more depth to the setting, or they can be a key component to the storyline of the series. No matter what their importance is to the game, to be effective they must be well thought out and only used in moments of high drama.

In its basic form, a curse is the result of one person's desire for revenge upon another in response to a terrible wrong. This is most commonly done in response to the suffering of an innocent party, such as a man being unjustly hanged for murder. However, it can just as easily be issued out of spite as well.

The truth or facts behind the actions that led to the desire for revenge are not important. What is important is that the wronged party perceives the actions as malicious. Curses are based upon the individual's desire for revenge more than who actually brought about the evil that befell them.

Each curse needs to be unique and customized to match the personalities of both parties that are involved. It needs to convey the raw emotion of the invoker and should be both imaginative and spiteful. The intent of the invoker must be clear through the wording and it needs to stay in tune with his desires.

Because the curse is being used in a role-playing game instead of a story, certain considerations need to be taken into account. The curse should never prohibit any actions but rather penalize and regulate the actions of the cursed. It needs to always reflect the nature of the wrong the character committed, should touch the victim in a personal and emotional way, and have some sort of escape clause, which should include a means of redemption.

The key to a good curse is that it has poetic justice. The victim of the curse should be rewarded for seeking redemption for his wrongs, but those who do not must be punished for their vice.

Prophecies

Good horror stories often include the awareness of a new and horrid truth. Role-playing games are no different in that regard and prophecies are a good way for bringing that truth to light. Used correctly, a well thought out prophecy can give a setting depth, direction, and character.

Prophecies can take on two primary forms. There are prophecies that depend upon a series of events to come true and if these events are somehow thwarted, the prophecy fails. There are also those prophecies that are inevitable. They are an action of destiny and are not preventable, which also makes them the hardest to use in a role-playing game as they take power out of the hands of the protagonists.

A well-constructed prophecy, regardless of the type, relies upon a consistent structure. This structure is often built on symbols where the words of the prophecy represent other concepts. This way the meaning is easily disguised. This works best for passive prophecies that are taking place in the background of the story.

The structure can also be built upon signs, which are actual events that can be seen and experienced. In this case, the protagonists have the opportunity to actually participate in the events. This works best when the prophecy is a part of the ongoing story of the series.

Episode Structure

When constructing an episode you should keep in mind the five segments that it is made up of. These segments are not absolutes and will be directly affected by the actions of the characters and the use of Destiny Points by the Players. It should act as a guide that the Game Master can use for pacing purposes rather than a complete blueprint for every game, as it doesn't take into account changes to the story brought on by the Players.

The Teaser

The first part of an episode, and the only part that the Players can't directly affect, is the Teaser. It is a cut scene delivered by the Game Master that sets the stage for the entire episode. It can foreshadow future events, introduce new characters, or conclude old issues. Teasers should be short and imply the tone of the entire episode. The only limitations are that it cannot eliminate any of the Player's characters or resolve any of their conflicts.

The Issue

The first collaborative part of every episode is the introduction of the immediate Issue. This is the problem that drives the entire episode. Typically it is what the characters struggle with most throughout the episode. It can be an old problem or an entirely new one, but regardless of its nature it needs to be introduced at the start of the episode following the Teaser.

The Complication

The Complication usually occurs when the characters have begun to get a handle on the Issue. It is always a set of circumstances that make the resolution of the issue more difficult than it was at the start of the episode. This is usually caused by some element or event unforeseen by the characters.

The Twist

Just when the characters think they have a handle on everything, the floor is dropped out from underneath them by the Twist. This can be a completely new problem that arises to change the dynamic of the Issue or simply a revelation that the Issue is not as it originally seemed. The Twist is particularly important to *Conspiracy of Shadows* because it reinforces the basic elements of the game.

The Resolution

Every episode needs to end with a Resolution of some kind. Even if the story spans several episodes, there needs to be a conclusion to some aspect of the Issue. Often with multi-episode stories, the Complication is resolved but the Issue still remains outstanding. For single episode stories, the immediate Issue may be resolved but in its Resolution, it may leave plot threads to be picked up at a later date.

Locations

For a *Conspiracy of Shadows* game to work, there needs to be interesting and believable Locations for the action to take place. The Game Master should determine what the world is going to look, sound and smell like. Make sure to take into account the atmosphere you are trying to create. This will act as a guide for describing locations during play.

The Game Master, however, is not the only person during play who can and will describe the environment. *Conspiracy of Shadows* allows for the Players to control much of the shared imagined space and, in doing so, will be creating the environment as well. Together, the combined visions of the Game Master and the Players will make the game world that much more real and enjoyable for everyone.

Location Types

Sometimes there is a need to expand upon a particular Location beyond its general descriptions. This is needed when utilizing the Cell's home ground or any other community; however, a community does not have to be a town or village. A community is any location in which people congregate together. This can be a traveling gypsy caravan, a particular neighborhood in a city, or even the bowels of a jail.

When describing out an entire community, the first step is to define what type of community it is. This not only covers what the community looks like physically, but also its general atmosphere. The possibilities are endless.

> - *Is this a quant village found at the crossroads?*
> - *Is it the rough neighborhood in which the docks are found?*
> - *Could it be the vile camp of a cannibalistic tribe of ghouls?*

PEOPLE

The next step is to define the people that call the community home. This covers their attitudes, ethnicity, religion, desires, as well as a rough population. It is a lot of information to create, but it doesn't need to be overly detailed. Just describe enough to get a feel for the people of the Location. Playing the game will do the rest.

- *Is the community made of a single ethnic group?*
- *Is it a melting pot of cultures?*
- *What do the people desire?*
- *Do they find entertainment important or are they reserved?*
- *How religious are the people of the community?*
- *Are they intolerant zealots?*
- *Do they shrug their shoulders at the faith of others?*
- *What motivates them, in general?*
- *Are they driven by their superstitions?*
- *Are they extremely xenophobic?*
- *Are they overly open in their expressions?*

POWER CENTERS

Defining the power centers in a community is very important. It defines who is in control in any given situation. It is inevitable that the Cell will come into contact with and even run afoul of these power centers, so understanding them is important.

- *Is the town council really in charge?*
- *Are there other centers of power within the community?*
- *What kind of influence do they have on the community?*

GEOGRAPHY

No community is complete without a description of the sights, sounds and smells found there. This contributes to the atmosphere of the game and the tone of all the actions that occur there. It is important because it can help you to either maintain a consistent mood or to create a sharp contradiction in tone.

- *Is it a decaying village built on ruins of forgotten origin?*
- *Is it a decaying city of stone older than civilization itself?*
- *Does the smell of cinnamon permeate the entire gypsy camp?*
- *Does it smell of rotting flesh?*
- *Is the wind in the caravansary constantly moaning?*
- *Is the hunting lodge utterly silent?*

Antagonists

One of the driving forces behind any role-playing game is the role of the antagonists. They are the opponents that the characters must confront in order to achieve their goals. Antagonists provide the plot and make the virtue of the characters interesting. They come in two types, the villain and the monster. This is not a description of their appearance but rather their motivations and actions.

Monsters

Monsters are the ravening, unstoppable horrors that tear through fiction of all types. Their actions are not driven by any discernable intelligence but by some sort of terrible instinct. This instinct compels them to commit savage and brutal acts of death and destruction. Their attacks often come in unstoppable waves, like the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead,* or cunning strikes, like the attacks of the beast in *Brotherhood of the Wolf.*

The irrational violence of a monster does not mean that it is necessarily a mindless horror driven strictly to destroy. They may have perfectly reasonable actions, like a mountain lion stalking its prey for food, but they are always tarnished by the viciousness of their actions. Regardless of their motivation, they all function in the same manner as a predatory animal.

Villains

Villains are the exact opposite of monsters. They are motivated by a specific goal that is driven by an intelligent choice instead of instinct and are always aware of a larger picture. When creating a villain, you must first define what they truly desire. It allows you to weigh his potential actions against the possible rewards that might be gained. The most common motivations for a villain are obsession, pride, conquest, destruction, madness, revenge, sadism, simple thrills, and even peace.

Because they have concrete goals, villains are never just sitting around waiting for the characters to arrive and fight them. They are proactive and have plans that they are constantly orchestrating; however, these plans should never be overthought. They should be simple and gain their complexity based upon the changes in the game. A good villain is always adaptive to the situation at hand.

Villains, unlike monsters, always have a defined source of power. This can be a type of magic, manpower, or even wealth. He is capable of drawing upon this resource, as he needs, making him capable of many different actions, unlike a monster, which is generally self-reliant.

Generally villains avoid direct confrontations at all costs. They are cunning and prefer to use intermediaries or minions whenever possible. If they do decide to confront the characters, it is always on their terms, which usually includes an ambush of some sort and an escape route. Rarely, if ever, will they be caught unaware or be without some sort of contingency plan.

They are always on the look out for an advantage they can exploit and will always use the best tools available to them. Constantly looking at all the angles of a situation, they are not easily discouraged and will exploit even the smallest actions taken by the characters. It is because of these reasons that villains are a dire threat to the Cell and will always pose as a challenge.

ARCHETYPES

Villains and monsters often appear in fiction and games within the bounds of several classic archetypes. These archetypes can help to, provide motivation and give the players a clear idea of what they are up against. Below are several archetypes that can be used as a starting point for creating your antagonists. These are not absolutes and antagonists may drift between two or more archetypes. Use them strictly as a jumping off point for creating your antagonists.

The Collector

The Collector is an antagonist that is driven by a desire to possess a specific type of object. He is obsessed with obtaining this item and will not allow anything to stand in his way, be it the laws of man or God. A villain of this archetype might be the ringmaster of a carnival who collects the misfits of society. A monster could be a lunatic obsessed with collecting the vertebrae of those he devours.

The Conqueror

The Conqueror has the need to challenge himself with conquests of some type. They feel an urge to meet a challenge and defeat it regardless of the cost it may entail on themselves and on others. A monster of this archetype might seek to destroy those within its territory, much in the way that male predators often do in the wild. A villain might be a general who seeks to conquer the world for no other reason than it is there.

The Destroyer

The Destroyer is driven by a need to ruin everything that is of value to others. Some fixate on a specific type of thing they wish to destroy, like beautiful women. Others are less discriminating. A villain of this archetype will often use very subtle and cunning plans for bringing about the destruction they desire, such as a plot to bring about a civil war. Monsters of this archetype are mindless engines of destruction that tear through the world, leaving nothing but death and desolation in their wake.

The Predator

The Predator is driven by the desire to stalk and kill his prey. Some fixate on a very specific type of prey, like small children, and others simply hunt anything that catches their interest. Monstrous predators are typically driven by the basic instincts of survival and territoriality. Villains of this type often stalk victims for the thrill they derive from it. The kill isn't whats important, but rather the thrill of the hunt.

The Tyrant

The Tyrant is driven to control and rule over others. They are built around controlling the actions and sometimes even the thoughts of others. The dictator who rules through terror and with an iron fist is a prime example of a villainous tyrant. A monster that falls under this archetype is much more rare and usually functions in a similar manner to an alpha male in a wolf pack or the dominant male in a pride of lions.

Playing the Game

By now you should realize that *Conspiracy of Shadows* is meant to be episodic and similar in nature to shows like the *X-Files* and *Millennium*. Both shows act as a good model for typical game play. This chapter gives all Players the final tools they need to capture that type of play.

Atmosphere

Conspiracy of Shadows is reliant on, among other things, atmosphere, mood and tone to be effective. The goal of the atmosphere in this game is to be appropriately dark and emotionally charged. This is accomplished by introducing several key elements to the game.

The key to conveying atmosphere is in the details being introduced. They solidify the imagery, theme, and tone in the minds of everyone involved. They should be concise and crisp in their description while utilizing all the senses; sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing. However, there shouldn't be too many details. It is easy to drown in details and lose the atmosphere. When this happens, the game suffers.

Accountability

In many games, the protagonist's accountability to society is never a concern. Particularly in fantasy games, the characters roam from place to place doing what they will regardless of any social, legal, or political considerations. This is not true in a *Conspiracy of Shadows* game where the Players and their characters must be very aware of the ramifications of their actions.

The degree in which characters in *Conspiracy of Shadows* are held accountable for their actions varies based upon their social class. Typically, the lower on the social scale the more the character will be held accountable and vice versa. Those who are higher on the social ladder have a harder time maintaining annominity and are unable to maneuver through much of society with ease.

EMOTIONS

Human emotion is very powerful and should be used in creating the atmosphere of a game. Emotions influence not only the flavor of the game, but also the tone and mood of each episode and the entire series. In particular episodes are driven by details introduced by the Players and Game Master. The most common emotions used for a *Conspiracy of Shadows* game are pain, despair, terror, hate, and desire.

Pain, both physical and psychological, as an atmospheric element, tends to be born of a deliberate infliction of suffering or from an agonizing death. This is easily introduced with details such as screaming voices, writhing figures, signs of torture, rending noises, and the sound of breaking bones. These details tend to be born of aggressive acts of evil and malice.

On the other hand, the element of despair tends to be born from the aftermath of great evil. It is the emotion of despondent brooding over the long-term, suicide, self-pity, and desperation. It is easily introduced with details like overcast skies, dying landscapes, moaning winds, and crumbling structures from a bygone era. On the whole they are passive details that, when used effectively, can convey despair with ease.

Terror is the atmospheric element born of irrational fear. It can be caused by encounters with overwhelming malice, but is most often realized in horrid acts in response to evil. It can also grow out of a fear of powerlessness, death, or even the loss of beauty. It is easily expressed in such details as lingering screams, the smell of sweat, writhing masses of insects or snakes, and rooms that seem to actively get tighter. These details tend to appear as active in their malice but are actually passive in nature.

The most violent emotional elements in a game are those that convey hatred. Hate is an emotion that seethes and consumes those who embrace it. It can obscure all rational thought and blind people to the original motivations for their malevolent actions. Shattered bones, uncontrollable flames, and sudden violent actions best convey this hard-edged emotion. Details born of hate are always powerful, violent, and aggressive in nature.

The last emotional element common to *Conspiracy of Shadows* games is that of desire. It can be the desire for pleasure, power, wealth, or control. It is overwhelming and distorts or destroys all rationality. It is most often found in beautiful yet macabre imagery, organic forms, rich foods, and fine objects, like velvet and silk.

ISOLATION

Isolation is a fundamental part of *Conspiracy of Shadows*. The characters are all cut off from society in their knowledge of a secret conspiracy. Part of their struggle is wrestling with the knowledge that nobody will ever believe their story. This makes them unable to get aid from those outside of their immediate network of allies.

It can easily be reinforced by the fact that the impossible events that they are a part of never occur before witnesses and if they do, those witnesses often disappear. They are forced to rely upon their beliefs and past experiences to deal with the impossible rather than relying on the support of society. Social isolation is a classic aspect of conspiracy stories. The information that the characters learn separate them from the people around them.

Physical isolation is a classic aspect of horror stories and is often the easiest way to introduce this element to the game. Placing the characters in locations in which they are separated from others is the primary way of accomplishing this form of isolation. Cutting off the places the characters go from the outside world can also do it. This can often be accomplished by using natural phenomenon, such as the weather or avalanches, or by using supernatural events, like curses and prophecies.

UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty is a vital component of a *Conspiracy of Shadows* game and the tension it produces should always be present in some form or another. The characters should always feel that they are in the dark to some degree about a variety of different subjects. This does not mean that everything should be a confusing mess, but the Players should constantly be in a position to question at least one thing that would normally not come into question.

The obvious way to introduce a level of uncertainty is to present no clear course of action for the characters. Presented with two unclear choices is a good way to do this; however, the uncertainty doesn't have to be tied to a direct action.

Making sure that the characters never truly feel safe or secure at any given time can easily bring about uncertainty. Even their well-protected safe house should have an air of uncertainty about it. Force them to constantly be questioning their safety by occasionally compromising the safety net they have built for themselves, but don't abuse this or it will lose its impact.

Weird and meaningless events are another way in which to introduce uncertainty. It doesn't have to happen to the Cell or even anyone within their support network. All that matters is that they hear about it, which will make them wonder about the meaning of the event. At times these events should have a meaning but most times they should simply be color.

Much of the conspiracy needs to be unknown and the choices the characters make about it will contain a moral uncertainty. The nature of those they encounter should also be mysterious. The malevolence of an antagonist should never be clear to the characters.

The Unnatural

The uncanny and unnatural are common to most *Conspiracy of Shadows* games. They should be used to contrast with the normality of reality. This of course depends upon the Player's belief on the game's norms. A framework of normal elements should be established before play begins and the Game Master and Players should litter the shared space of the game with details of normalcy.

Keep in mind, there should never be an excessive level of unnatural events. Too much unreality causes the game to lose its ability to unnerve and surprise the Players. This eliminates the sense of mystery and should be avoided at all costs.

Plot Hooks

Plot hooks are story related devices that offer up a starting point to take the game in a new direction. It can be a new character, object, event or piece of information introduced by both the Game Master and the Players. It allows everyone involved the opportunity to introduce a game element that they may be interested in without sacrificing the desires of the group as a whole. Plot Hooks are excellent for keeping the energy of the game from disappearing because they provide more options for the Game Master and the Players. Even if they are not used at all, Plot Hooks work to add depth and detail to the game, making the experience that much more enjoyable.

When constructing a plot hook, several variables need to be kept in mind. First and foremost they need to capture the attention of the group. They should be relatively obvious in their intent and versatile in application. If they are tied to something specific, they can be difficult to use and if they are too subtle, they will be missed. Plot Hooks also need to generate a clear path of action and function as an option, not a forced path.

Good plot hooks need to provide motivation for the Players in particular. This motivation can be a reward of some sort, monetary or otherwise, a personal need for a character, an irresistible mystery, or any combination of the three.

The Game Master can introduce a plot hook at anytime but should not overuse them. Players can also introduce a plot hook without spending Destiny Points as long as in doing so they are not making a narrative change in the game. If they do desire to introduce a Plot Hook that changes some aspect of the shared imagined space of the game, they must spend a Destiny Point.

Pacing

Pacing is the fine art of controlling how fast things move in the episode. If the pace is too slow, the Players attention will wander. If it is too fast, the group will lose track of the plot and might even feel as if they are being pushed in a specific direction. This is easy to control in fiction but with role-playing games, particularly *Conspiracy of Shadows* where the Players can make direct changes to the story nearly at will, this is much more difficult.

Typically, pacing works by moving between highs and lows within the action of the episode. This can swing back and forth like a pendulum, move along at a steady pace and then have the floor drop out, or be a slow

gradual rise towards a crisis point. It is often best to combine these three styles to create an exciting variety within the stories.

A Game Master can control pacing by creating Beats. Beats are moments of crisis that the characters must deal with immediately; however, they are never meaningless in their scope. Every Beat should either focus on the development of a character or advance the plot in some way.

When constructing an episode, the Game Master should write down the different Beats he would like to hit. They can be violent action-set pieces or quiet verbal encounters that reveal something integral to the story. Some may simply be Cut Scenes that don't include the characters at all but affect them in some manner.

Regardless of their nature, Beats should be written down as a general description of what the most likely conflict is going to be. They should also list where they take place, if necessary, and who the participants will be. Keep in mind that Beats may change on the fly because of the actions of the characters.

Cut Scenes

Cut Scenes are useful tools to help control pacing in a game for both the Players and the Game Master. Cut Scenes, like Beats, should be used to show character development or to further the plot in some manner. They depict moments in the game that the Players will see even though their characters may not, such as activity by general characters that occur parallel to their own actions. Typically they are designed beforehand but can easily be made on the fly if certain elements are considered.

Cut Scenes should always be designed to move quickly and inspire a jolt of emotion in everyone at the table. They can be used to reveal hidden layers to the story and add tension to the moment by introducing unknown facts; however, they should be short and sweet and not become the center of the story. They are meant to add to the episode, not become its focus.

Generally a Cut Scene should be introduced to the game after a short building of tension and before a crisis point, like an encounter with the main villain of the episode. They are also effective when used in the Teaser of an episode as a foreshadowing tool or as an epilogue that wraps up an episode or an entire series.

Portraying Characters

It is a common mistake on the part of Players and Game Masters to think that they need to know everything about a character in order to portray him or her. Background won't explain how to play a character and creating a fully realized character is a daunting and unnecessary task. The best way to portray a character is to use Marks, which are visual and verbal clues that give you insight on the personality of the character.

Marks help you get a grasp on the character and help to make him memorable and unique. There are three types of Marks you can use, auditory, manual, and visual. Together they give both Players and Game Masters a powerful tool for character portrayal.

In a role-playing game where the action all occurs in a shared imaginary space, your voice is your most powerful tool. It acts as a window to the world and encompasses the identity of that character. This is why the skillful use of auditory Marks are so important.

The most common type of auditory Mark is accent. Accents can be helpful but if you are not careful, they become silly or tiresome. Also, in the case of the Game Master, they can begin to blend together because of the many characters he is required to portray. Instead of relying on a different accent for everyone, you should be aware of the characters tone, diction, cadence, and word choice.

A character's tone is the overall sound of his voice, which includes the inflection or pattern of emphasis on the words spoken, such as husky, nasally and bellowing. His diction is how he pronounces words, such as in a slurred manner, very clearly or in a clipped manner. A character's cadence is the pacing of his speech. Finally, a characters word or phrase choice tells a lot about him, such as the use of nautical terms denoting that a character spent some time at sea.

Manual Marks are the things that you do with your body. This can be as simple as stroking your chin when thinking, the way you sit in a chair, or how you use you hands when you talk. However, manual Marks are easy to overdo. To be effective, they need to be applied consistently but with subtly.

Visual Marks are the descriptive cues that you give a character. Each character should have at least one noticeable trait that can be described in an encounter. It can easily become a calling card for that character. This is particularly important for the Game Master as it helps to differentiate between all of the characters he has to portray.

The People

The following section deals with the societies that inhabit the continent of Polian. There is no actual game mechanic information in this chapter. Instead you will find details on many aspects of the lives of the people that live there. These things are not set in stone and Players and Game Masters should feel free to make adjustments as they see fit.

Valadarin Culture

The Valadarins originated in the far eastern plains beyond the mountain borders of Polian but since have migrated and settled throughout northern Polian. The last major migration of Valadarins occurred in the fifth century when several tribes moved west into what is now Taratha, Brekav, and Jenka. This is commonly called the Great Migration.

Northern Valadarins have red-blonde hair, though deep brown and black is common with southern Valadarins. The men wear their hair long and grow beards or long mustaches. A few still maintain the ancient practice of braiding their hair before combat. Their complexion is light brown in the south and medium to fair in the north and most often they have blue or brown eyes.

Social Hierarchy

Valadarin society evolved from the system of self-ruling localized clans that were in place when they invaded Polian. This decentralized structure did not create a framework for a system of vassalage with a channel for the exercise of a central authority. Instead it gave rise to the current system of strong independent magnates who have nearly equal standing with the King.

Valadarin society is unique because it has a very large noble class. Of the entire population of the Valadarin people, nearly twenty percent are from distinguished families, opposed to the more common five percent found in other societies. It is also possible for commoners to improve their station. It is not uncommon for men to be declared members of the gentry after distinguishing themselves on the field of battle, though there are other methods of gaining distinction.

GENTRY

In the Valadarin social structure the highest estate is that of the gentry, which has several levels. At the top are the magnates who are the true power in Valadarin society. They command vast estates, control thousands of peasants through their rent, and field their own armies that often rival their Kings. They act as independent magistrates over their holdings with the power to change the law as they see fit, but most uphold the customary laws of their country.

Legally they are obligated to perform military service for the King and to support his court financially. They are also obligated to submit to his tribunals and to follow the edicts of his royal functionaries. This is rarely consistently followed and magnates have even been known to ally with foreign powers from time to time.

The King is the next highest position in the social hierarchy. It can be an inherited position or an elected position. In the case of an elected position, only the gentry and the high-ranking members of the clergy may vote. Because there is no system of fealty in Valadarin society, he must rely upon the good graces of the magnates or, if he is lucky, his own wealth. Royal control over a country, therefore, is dependent not on vassals but an appointed functionaries called Castilians. They exercise the judicial, administrative, and military authority of the King.

The lesser gentry are at the next level of Valadarin society. They are broken into two groups, the landed and the landless gentry. The landed gentry are families with proud names and small estates. Most often they are tied to one of the magnate families that hold power in the country. The landless gentry are generally men of good lineage without estates,

surviving as a hanger-on or mercenary. They are often used to fill the royal positions of territorial governor, Hetman (a military general), palace governor, palace functionary, or warden (a regional constable).

Among the Valadarin nobility there is only one title, King. There is no belief in a system of variation amongst the gentry. They are all equally members of the gentry. Titles such as duke, count or prince are not used. Only other countries confer them. They have no meaning within Valadarin society.

Clergy

Below the gentry are the clergy, though they are often from the noble class. The clergy in Valadarin society are the keepers and dispensers of knowledge and spirituality. It is at their great centers of learning that the nobles and wealthy merchants send their children to study. Regardless of faith, they own vast estates, villages and even towns, much like the magnates. The difference is that the overseer of this wealth is appointed by his church and does not inherit it. In some places, the clergy are the only individuals that can read and write, particularly in the smaller communities; however, they do exert great political power since the Valadarin people are very devout in their religious practices.

Middle Class

At the next level of Valadarin society are three distinct groups, all with equal standing. They are the merchants, the craftsmen, and the peasant landowners. Collectively they are often called the middle class.

Merchants in Valadarin Society are nobles without any title or respect. They are often well educated and, in many cases, wealthier than most nobles. They themselves can never become nobles because they run businesses that are not honorable, such as farming, lumbering, and mining. They often marry their children into noble families, giving them the title and respect their fathers could never receive.

Craftsmen are also most often found in towns, own their own businesses, and make up the third largest portion of the Valadarin population

(peasants are first and the gentry are second). They are skilled laborers that band together as guilds to control the market for their goods and services. Some, particularly the most highly skilled, become retainers of specific magnates or even the King, providing their service solely for their benefactor.

The peasant landowner is found only in rural regions. They or one of their ancestors gained their independent land either through clever service to the gentry or from acts of courage during times of war, but their lives are lived on the edge of a knife. They are rarely able to produce any form of profit and must work very hard to maintain their land. Even the smallest mishap is considered a major disaster.

Peasants

The lowest rung on the Valadarin social ladder is that of the peasant. They are the common folk who work the land for the gentry or perform menial labor for the middle class; however, they are not serfs, not owned in any way, and are not tied to the land. They, like any of the other classes, are free and able to rise above their current station. Many distinguished families were founded on the hard work of an enterprising peasant.

Vorish Culture

The Vors are the first race of man to settle in Polian. They built great city-states alongside the empires of Karth, Imrak, and Monnot. These great centers of culture eventually merged to form the Vorian Empire.

The Vors of today look much as their ancestor did. Their skin color ranges from a deep to light olive color. Their hair tends to be darker, but blonde and light brown hair is not uncommon. The men wear their hair short, often with a beard or mustache and the women wear their hair long and often up.

Social Hierarchy

Vorish society is based upon the social structure of the Vorian Empire and the clan structure of the barbarians who toppled it. It has created a unique society that is different from that of their neighbors and ancestors.

To those who process little or nothing, Vorish society can be harsh. To those who have wealth and title, the society can be wonderful. Only rarely does one move up the social ladder here.

Knight

At the top of Vorish society is the knight. They command all but the most powerful members of the clergy and their only responsibility is to their family and its name. They despise the Freemen of society and regard their peasants as property. Only their reputation is of any value to them and they guard it with their lives.

The knightly class is a combination of the traditional Valadarin gentry and the Vorian Patrician. The Vors adopted the practice of fighting from horseback and inherited rank. From the Patricians, they kept their control of economic institutions and interest in city life and politics.

Clergy

In Vorish society, the clergy spans the entire social ladder. Priests are found among the most destitute peasants as well as at the right hand of kings. Their position in society molds their worldview, with those in the upper ranks concerned with power and politics while those at the lower rank are more concerned with feeding their congregation. The Vorish clergy is a mirror for the rest of society.

The Church has a special place in society and in some ways is society. Religion is the one common thread that ties all people together in Vorish society. All people belong to the Church, and it is unthinkable to not be associated with one. This, along with the vast estates held by the Church, gives the clergy a unique place of power in society that often times surpasses the power of knights.

Names

Vorish first names are generally the names of ancestors whose true meanings have been lost; however, it is most likely that they were originally descriptions of places, abilities, or events. The surnames of the Vors are always the name of a person's birthplace. They use the word "ca," which means "from" or "place of birth" (ca Morino or ca Lavrini).

Male Names: *Adriano, Berto, Ciro, Diego, Edmundo, Federico, Grigorio, Hugo, Iago, Kemen, Lazaro, Marco, Neto, Oro, Paz, Quinton, Ramiro, Santiago, Turi, Vincente, Xalbador, and Zago.*

Female Names: *Aida, Bella, Camila, Dia, Esma, Freira, Generosa, Honoria, Idonia, Kemena, Lucita, Marcela, Neva, Olinda, Paz, Quinta, Ramira, Salvadora, Trella, Usoa, Vincenta, and Zita.*

FREEMEN

At the next level of society is the freeman. Freemen are the few commoners that have won their freedom from a life of servitude. They have either gained it through service to a benevolent knight or have taken it by force, living their lives as outlaws. Those who earn their freedom often become merchants, traveling through Vorish society in ways they were forbidden when in the bondage of servitude. Those who have taken their freedom either prey upon the rest of society or fight a losing battle to change the social order.

PEASANTS

The peasants occupy the very bottom of the Vorish social stratum. Generally they are hereditarily attached to the manor of a Lord in a state of semi-bondage. Their lives are essentially that of a slave. The difference is that they hold a body of rights under the law. A Lord cannot harm or command peasants in actions outside of their established role without just cause. This is, however, mostly an illusion as most Lords see peasants as their personal property.

Norderin Culture

The Norderins originated in the frigid North. Some of the Noderin tribes migrated to modern day Oldaska, some to Voria, while others went as far south as modern day Eskar and Amdrus. Even today, many of these tribes still migrate and settle throughout Polian.

Like other tribal people, their society is built on a warrior-based aristocracy, but men and women have equal standing within Noderin society. This structure fosters independence, which has made the creation and maintenance of a central authority very difficult. All Norderin nobles see themselves as equal to any other and sometimes superior.

The Norderins were once famous for their blonde, nearly white hair. After centuries of colonizing other lands this is no longer true, though it is believed that children born with blonde-white hair are bound for greatness. All hair and skin colors are possible because of the mingling of the Norderins and the conquered. The one constant is that all the warriors still wear their hair in a long single braid that is only cut as a result of defeat in battle.

Social Hierarchy

Norderin society is somewhat unique in Polian as it is split into three social groups. The three groups are broken into those who fight, those who work, and those who serve. These three social groups have not changed for thousands of years.

It is the only society to be without a distinct religious social class. This is mostly because of the lack of a historical organized religion. Holy men of all kind within Norderin society are members of the social class they were born into. Individuals are not prohibited from moving higher up the social ladder, but it is frowned upon when one of "those who serve" is freed.

Those Who Fight

In the old Norderin religion, the only way to reach heaven was to die in battle, which led to the creation of a noble class made up entirely of professional soldiers. This tradition continues and the ruling class of all Norderin societies is comprised of warrior families who distinguish themselves from one another with their family's battle history. The constant fighting between the noble clans is especially vicious and no Norderin noble is without a set of enemies.

Those Who Work

At the next level of society reside all the Norderin people who do not come from the afore mentioned select families. This does not exclude them from being fighters, for all have some training in the art of battle, but they make their living within other professions. Most are simple farmers and fishermen but others are skilled craftsmen like boat wrights and blacksmiths.

Those Who Serve

Those who serve, or slaves, populate the bottom of Norderin society. Most slaves are captives that were taken in battle and forced into bondage. Some of them are of Norderin decent, but most are foreigners or descendents of foreigners. It is considered a grave insult to capture instead of kill another Norderin in battle. Only those that truly have contempt for their enemies take Norderin slaves.
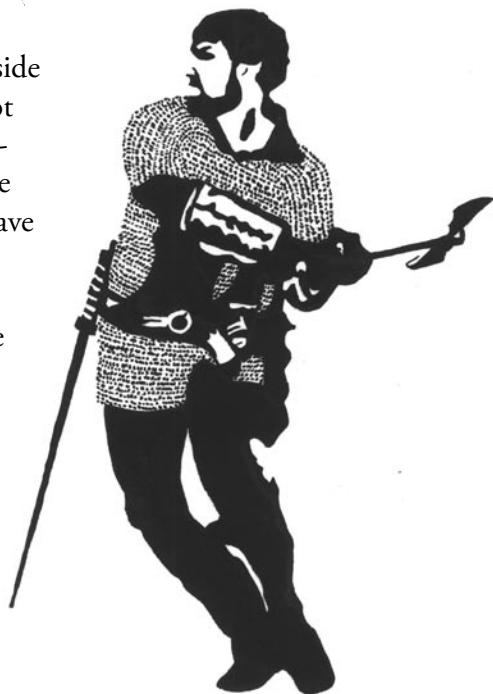
Names

Norderin first names typically describe a specific natural feature, such as green rolling hills or windswept fields. Occasionally they describe important events, such as major battles. Norderin surnames are often the first name of the person's father plus a suffix, which designates that person a son (van) or a daughter (va). Sometimes they are the name of their birthplace with the suffix gas (from) and other times it is the name of a famous battle with the suffix nak (sword born).

Male Names: Apsel, Born, Davarn, Djan, Hapka, Hvinn, Kel, Knut, Kjustav, Lars, Maelz, Nils, Pedar, Pkendol, Ronatj, Sven, Tal, Tjenn, and Vorno.

Female Names: Alma, Blenda, Dakjma, Djala, Hvibe, Kersten, Kjustava, Lora, Malena, Nanna, Petra, Pkedja, Rakel, Svella, Tora, Tjana, Viveka, and Zora.

Narrlachi Culture

The core of the Narrlachi society is the clan, a unit based upon a patriarchy. The clans are grouped together into greater ethnic groups that are often called tribes. Members of a clan are not permitted to intermarry, forcing the young men to choose their brides from other clans.

In their clans, polygamy is normal, though the first wife is always the most important. The Narrlachi, with the ban against intermarriage within the clan, require a high population of women and abduction is very common. This frequently caused feuds that used to develope into wars, but with the advent of the Great Khanate, wars have been forbidden.

The Narrlachi are a short people with light brown skin. Their hair color tends to be jet black or a deep brown and is worn long by the women and either close cropped or completely shaved by the men. The men wear thick mustaches and only the oldest wear beards. They, like many tribal cultures, tattoo their bodies to commemorate different events in their lives.

Social Hierarchy

The Narrlachi tribes have a social structure that is reminiscent of the Valadarin clan structure that was in place during the days following the fall of the Vorian Empire. It is made up of independent patriarchal clans that govern themselves. The difference is that all the clans answer to the Khan, who is the central authority on all matters.

Narrlachi society is unique in that it has adapted itself to accommodate the societies that it has conquered. Instead of simply regulating those who are not Narrlachi to the role of slaves or outsiders, it has embraced them and places them within the appropriate social class. It is also unique in because actually encourages and rewards those who seek to find a better place in society. Those who show skill and ambition often move up the social ladder at a quick pace.

Royal Family

At the top of the Narrlachi social ladder is the royal family. They make up the Khans and chief administrators of their khanates. They hold the power of life and death over their subjects but only as far as their laws allow. Unlike other societies, the law is separate from the ruling class. All members of society are subject to it.

Noyars

Beneath the royal family resides the noyars, a kind of nobility. They are made up of the clan chiefs and military leaders. The clan chiefs are elected for life to their position by all of the men of majority age (16) in the clan. The military leaders are professional soldiers who have been promoted to positions of leadership for their service and skill on the battlefield.

Bahadurs

The bahadurs are at the next level of society. They are akin to the Vorish knight as they are a noble class with a military background. Unlike the knight, their wealth is not measured by the land they hold, as only the Khan owns the land, but by the number of horses in his herd. Some act as advisors to the noyars and some live the lives of wealthy ranchers, much like merchants of other cultures. Others travel the land in search of battle, fame, and glory. Their only responsibility is that they must serve in times of war at the behest of their betters.

Patricians

At the next level of Narrlachi society are the patricians and clergy. Patricians are merchants, craftsmen, and men of education who are not native Narrlachi. They often are the surviving middle class of the nations the Narrlachi have conquered. They are awarded special respect for their skills and are often given administrative positions within the khanate.

Clergy

The clergy is made of the religious leaders of all the religions found within the khanate. They can be Narrlachi or foreigners and worship many different gods. They are all regarded with respect regardless of the faith that they subscribe to. All of Narrlachi society gives special homage to men of the cloth.

Peasants

Narrlachi peasants are similar in nature to the peasants found in Valadarin society. Unlike the Valadarins, Narrlachi farmers are the exception, not the rule. Most are nomads who herd livestock, usually horses but also cattle. They are also expected to know how to fight with spears and bows from horseback, as all men of majority age join the military in times of war.

Names

Narrlachi names are typically chosen from the names of ancestors. Occasionally they are named after events or places. Narrlachi surnames are typically a reference to a physical characteristic, event, or ability, such as Bear-slayer, Dead-eye, and the Golden One.

Male Names: *Aksel, Bar, Davri, Erdik, Felar, Griz, Harg, Kaza, Lukaz, Maraz, Nikar, Poz, Razar, Serg, Vlaz, and Zavik*

Female Names: *Aksa, Bara, Dava, Erda, Fela, Griza, Hara, Lika, Mara, Nika, Poza, Risa, Saza, Talza, and Zavia*

RELIGION

Religion, at its core, is a system of thought and belief that allows people to relate to one another as well as the world as a whole. It is a powerful force capable of driving men and women to do both great and terrible things. Nothing is as important to society as religion, and there is no clear dividing line between temporal and religious life. To the average man, woman and child, their God is a very real thing and he is directly involved in every aspect of their lives.

To understand how important religion is to society, you first must understand the institution that maintains the faith. Albinicanism is the most prevalent religion in the world and is split into two major branches. It isn't so much a part of society as it *is* society. Its influence is so great that a man can't strike a bargain, hurt himself, or find something that is lost without invoking Albin's favor or giving thanks to him.

Albinicanism has its origin in the time of the Vorian Empire before the beginning of recorded history. It was founded by Albin himself when he took human form and dictated his teachings to the great scholar and philosopher, Melgarius. After this act, Melgarius traveled through the empire, spreading the ministry of Albin, until he was arrested and executed by the authorities outside the city of Alcona.

It took centuries for Albinicanism to grow into the dominant force that it is today. Throughout this time it was considered a vile cult and persecuted by both the emperors of Karth and Voria as well as the by the dominant polytheistic Azari Church. It would take the conversion of Otho Cassium, the emperor of Voria for this to change. His adoption of the faith made Albinicanism the state religion of the largest empire in the world, spreading it like wildfire among the people.

While it was the catalyst that drove Albinicanism into the spotlight, its adoption as the state religion of Voria was not the primary reason it now resonates with the people of the land. It is the roots of the religion as well as how the faith was spread that has made it a part of everyday life.

The universal appeal of the religion comes from the three core aspects of the faith; ancient Vorian philosophy, the Vorian tradition of institution building, and the assimilation of the mysteries of the other religions found in the land. Combined together they created a strong base from which the religion grew.

From the ancient Vorian philosophers, Albinicanism gained the concept of an immortal soul. It also uses their writings as a foundation to prove that it is the only true faith. The combination of these two elements is the backbone of the entire religion, regardless of the branch.

The Legend of Albin's Victory

During the civil war that marred the first half of his reign, Otho Cassium was nearly defeated by his rival Maxentius Licinius. His army had been shattered at the Battle of Edirne Bridge and he and its remnants were forced to seek shelter at the Monastery of Eusebium, an early order of militant Albinican monks. There the monks offered to aid him in his battle with his rival if he converted to the faith.

Being a clever man, Otho famously replied, "If Albin can defeat my enemies, I shall make him and his church the true power in this world!"

The very next day the warrior monks of Eusebium set out to face Maxentius Licinius and defeated him, though they were slaughtered in the process. From that day forth, the Albinican Church became the one true faith of the empire and has overshadows all other faiths that have come before it.

However, the mysteries of other religions perhaps contributed the most to the faith. They gave it the concepts of a "god made flesh," of physical acts to stimulate divine intervention, the cult of relics, and ritual reenactments of Albin's actions. It also gained from these faiths scripture, a sense of history, a wrathful but caring god, a code of ethics, and a desire for social justice. Albinicanism took the legends of these various faiths and molded them into a singular vision.

This combination of old and new allowed for a dual faith to flourish. The people came to adapt the old beliefs to the new religion, splitting them between the two categories of clean and unclean forces. The malign spirits of nature and the dark gods of old became the unclean forces of the world and are now identified with the Adversary and his minions.

On the other side of the duality, the people now associate many of the old gods and beneficial spirits with Albinican saints, angels and prophets. They even use the old rituals to call for aid and ward against evil but now instead of calling upon Paszun, they call upon Saint Lucius. The association of religious figures from the past with those of Albinicanism is not the only example of this duality. Many of the old rituals were transformed to become Albinican rituals and the churches also moved their holidays to coincide with those of the old faiths. The entire belief structure of the Albinican world is an amalgam of the old and the new.

The Vorian strength for institution building lent the most important aspects of structure and organization to the various churches. From that model Albinicanism created a strict hierarchy, which has a strong administrative control and the right to exercise power that is legitimized by the laws of man.

From Paszun to Saint Lucius

Paszun was the old god of the storms and vengeance. It was believed that he rode a great storm cloud in search of those that betrayed their comrades. When he came upon them he would blast them with great bolts of lightning. However, they did not die. Rather their souls traveled to the center of his great storm where they powered his chariot across the heavens as they slowly burned for all eternity.

Lucius was a prophet of Albin as well as the teacher and advisor to the great king Altrius of the ancient kingdom of Vorta. He received a vision from Albin warning him of the coming of the Great Horde of Bagruush and urged the king to make an alliance with the twelve kings of Comdach. All twelve swore an oath to come to the aid of king Altrius should he need it.

When the Great Horde attacked, Altrius called for aid, but all he received was the heads of his messengers returned to him. Vorta was crushed and king Altrius was slain because the twelve kings took money from the Great Horde and broke their oaths. Lucius, enraged by the betrayal traveled to each of the twelve kingdoms in turn. Before the halls of the kings he summoned forth the wrath of Albin who sent forth a great lightning storm, which destroyed the kingdoms for their betrayal.

The spread of Albinicanism came about in three stages. The first stage was the intensive missionary work done on the Valadarins. They were perhaps the easiest to convert as their shamanistic tradition carried many of the same beliefs.

The second stage in the growth of Albinicanism came from the splitting of the faith into two distinct churches, Orthodoxy and Amdatism. Amdatism has its basis in the messages of the prophets, the last prophet being Dalthus, who founded the movement. Despite the conflict this movement created, it converted people rapidly. The fruit of this conflict was a world sharply polarized between the two branches of the faith, but at the same time still dominated by Albinicanism. The north became the domain of the Orthodox Albinican Church and the south became the home of the Amdati Church.

The third stage grew out of the introduction of parish priests during the early stages of the Holy Union of Voria. The nobility had been converted and granted land for churches and monasteries. These parishes were then populated with priests drawn from the peasants. Like those before them, these priests had a limited education but most were sent back to the communities they came from where they easily established a rapport with the people. This stage firmly rooted the faith in the lives of the people, making it the driving force of society.

Tenets of the Faithful

The central teachings of traditional Albinicanism are that Albin, the lion-headed god, loves humanity, forgives them for their sins, and will grant salvation and eternal life to those who have faith in him. This teaching is embodied in the Holy Scriptures, particularly in the Book of Melgarius, but other texts, such as the Book of the Magpie, are also accepted as sacred. Each of the two branches of the religion approach this idea in different ways, leading to their constant struggle for spiritual and temporal power.

The religious message of the Orthodox Church is that paradise is assured through the teachings of the church. These teachings are rather complex, requiring weekly instruction at the local parish and the reception of the four holy sacraments; Birth Rites, Second Rites, Confession Rites, and Death Rites. Also, at the core of orthodox belief is the belief that Albin created the world as a testing ground for the faithful. Only those who do not waiver will be received into his never-ending kingdom on judgment day.

The Amdati Church shares similar beliefs as its sister church, but differs in that it believes that salvation can only be achieved through following the teachings of Dalthus, the last prophet of Albin. His message is much simpler than those of the Orthodox Church. They only require that a person be conscientious, ethical, charitable, family caring, attend church on the high holy days, and says his three daily prayers (at dawn, noon, and dusk) with conviction. These teachings also posit that Sait, the Adversary, was the creator of the world and all material things, not Albin. They believe that only the spirits of all living things are divinely inspired, which contradicts with the teachings of the Orthodox Church.

Organization of the Faithful

The Orthodox Church is possibly the most powerful political and religious organization in the world. Through its three arms, it exerts an incredible amount of influence on not only larger issues between kings and countries but also on the daily lives of its flock.

The church is made of three distinct branches, the Bishops who are the leaders of the church, the Deacons who are the church's temporal agents, and the Presbyters who are the ministers of the church. Overseeing these three branches is the Patriarch of Tor, who is elected for life. He is the steward of the throne of the Holy Union of Voria as well as the spiritual leader of the Orthodox world.

Directly beneath the Patriarch of Tor is his Curia, which is a council of seven men from the three branches of the church, two from each individual branch plus an additional member from the Patriarch's personal staff. They are all appointed by the Patriarch and act as his agents and advisors in all matters.

Beneath the Curia is the Incardinare, the governing body of fifteen that elect the Patriarch. It is comprised of the five Archbishops of the church, the five heads of the diaconate orders, and the five heads of the holy orders. Each member is elected from the body of each branch to serve in this position for life, unless they are fortunate enough to be elected to the position of Patriarch.

The body of the church is broken into three branches, each made of five parts to total fifteen, which is the sacred number of the church as it represents Melgarius' fifteen disciples. The five Archbishops oversee the five archdiocese, which are divided into the five cardinal directions; the North, the South, the East, the West, and the Heart. Each archdiocese is made up of smaller diocese overseen by Bishops which are in turn made up of parishes which are ministered by Priests. Together they make up the core of the church and have the greatest direct influence on the people of the Orthodox Church.

The five diaconate orders make up the strong temporal arm of the church. Each order represents the five sacred occupations as dictated by Melgarius on his last night on the earth. They are the Cup Knights who are church's warders, the Shield Bearers who minister to the sick, the Artisans, who craft works of fine art and music, the Quills who preserve and seek out knowledge, and the Castilians who keep the Lord's house in order. Together they are a symbol of what the faithful can accomplish when they harness the gifts granted them by Albin.

The five holy orders are monastic orders that make up the soul of the church. Each order represents the five cardinal virtues of the church. They are the Castius Order, whose fortitude in the face of adversity allows them to spread the word of Albin, the Memdius Order who administers the church's justice, the Holastius Order that advises men and women of all stations on the most prudent course of action, the Caritasius Order, which spends its time ministering to the poor, and finally the Inopius Order who, by giving up their worldly goods and comforts, seek to humble themselves before Albin. Together they represent the shining ideal life that a good Orthodox Albinican can lead.

The Amdati Church rivals the Orthodox Church as a political and spiritual organization. The High Theocrat of Malindarov is both the leader of the church and ruler of Malindarov, giving the church massive amounts of political influence and loyal parishioners.

The church is divided neatly into two branches, the Priests who rule and minister to the faithful and the Lay Brotherhood, which is the strong arm of the church in all matters. Overseeing these two branches is the High Theocrat of Malindarov, who acquires the position by tracing his bloodline back to the brother-in-law of Dalthus, the first High Theocrat of the faithful. He is not only the spiritual leader of the faithful but also the political leader of the Theocracy of Malindarov, which he rules from Belyazny.

Directly beneath the High Theocrat are the Lesser Theocrats who oversee the seven theocracies of the faithful known as the heavily contested Bravich, Tecav, Medve, Kulraine, Bravar, Amdrus, and the now lost Tolinsk. Each of the seven theocracies is made of parishes which are ministered by Priests who also act as the political leaders of the parishes. As a whole, this branch of the church is the largest and is the very heart of the faith.

The Lay Brotherhood is outside of the priesthood of the church and is made up of three organizations that answer directly to the High Theocrat. Collectively these three organizations are called the Messengers of the Faithful. Each is led by a single individual who is appointed from among the membership to act in the High Theocrat's name. Individually they are the Messengers of the Word, whose primary responsibility is the education of lay population, the Messengers of the Flame who are a militant order that is tasked with purifying the world of Sait's evil, and the Messengers of Justice who administer and oversee the legal system of the Theocracy. They are the members of the church that the common folk most often come into contact with, as their responsibilities draw them directly into the day to day life of the people.

The Cult of Relics

Albinicans of both churches believe that when the soul of a holy man or woman ascends to Albin's breast, their body remains as a perpetual token. In fact their clothes and most intimate possessions are also considered to be divinely blessed. This belief, drawn from the earliest religions of man, has fostered a cult of relics in Polian.

Relics are very important to the functions of religion. They are required for the consecration of churches and are used in religious ceremonies. Men of noble blood carry them in the hilt of their weapons in hopes of divine protection during battle, and merchants carry them in bags around their necks in hopes of bringing them luck in business. It is not uncommon for kings to sign treaties on a relic and solemn oaths to be taken while touching one.

The belief in magical benefits from the remains of the holy is not the only reason relics are such an important part of life in Polian. The traffic of relics is very profitable, for both the church and frauds looking to trade on the beliefs of others. Shrines are often built around the most famous relics and the competition for superior relics is fierce, often leading to bidding wars between men of means. The value of these relics, however, can lead to theft, both for pious and impious reasons.

Faith in Everyday Life

If common men are the sturdy legs of Polian society and the nobles its strong arms, then the church is society's wise head. The church, as the head of society, has claimed the right to direct and rule it and, for the most part, does. If a man is near civilization, he is never out of sight of at least one church tower and the bells that call for services can be heard in all but the most inhospitable wilderness.

The church fulfills most of the services that are needed for society to function. It oversees civil and criminal cases that involve the church and makes decisions on legal contracts, such as divorce and marriage, all of which are binding in the eyes of the law. It also controls all scholarships and book production in the land. It is the largest patron of the arts and is, for all intents and purposes, the focus of high culture.

However, the most important and influential aspect of the church is its all embracing social services that impact the daily life of every man, woman, and child. Both the Amdati Church and the Orthodox Church maintain the only hospitals, leprosaria, alm houses, hospices, orphanages, and asylums for the stricken. They actively fight the last remnants of slavery in Noderin countries and even ransom prisoners from the Narrlachi.

The influence of the church does not end with the mundane aspects of life either. it is the source of all that is magical in the world. Claims of miracles abound and are recounted from the pulpit to encourage the faithful. Accounts of bleeding statues, miraculous cures brought forth by holy men, resurrections, and the reversal of the laws of nature all reinforce the power of Albin in everyday life; however, darker tales are also tools used to sway men to be true to the faith.

More often told are the tales of the damned and their actions. It is believed that agents of the Adversary are everywhere and they seek man's destruction. They who are blamed for the insanity that sometimes plagues pious souls as well as all the other woes of the world. Only through the church can salvation be found from these monsters.

The Old Faiths

There are only three other religions that still have a presence in Polian. Two of them, the Azari and the Norderin faiths, have been around for thousands of years in one form or another. The third is the polytheistic tradition of the Narrlachi, which also has existed for thousands of years among the Narrlachi tribes, but has only recently been introduced to Polian.

The polytheistic Azari religion has its roots in the Karthian thirst for knowledge and the nature based faith of the early Valadarin invaders. These two belief structures complimented one another and combined into one religion. The followers of the Azari faith believe that all humans are tied to the natural world and have a guiding spirit. These spirits are the children of the two great gods, the Earth Mother and the Sky Father. There is also a pantheon of lesser gods that rule over everything from a particular hill to the underworld.

Azari, like most religions, fosters the belief that the deeds of a person are judged in the afterlife, therefore determining his final destination. Azari is only practiced today among the Sarls, a Valadrin people who are found in small rural pockets in Falchia and eastern Amdrus. They continue to perform the rituals that were old when the Karthian people were young.

The Norderin religion is perhaps the oldest in existence, having its roots in the practices of the degenerated descendents of the First Men. It rose to prominence in the harsh Northlands and is based on the pursuit of spiritual purity through battle and a cycle of reincarnation. This cycle can only end when the individual dies while performing a great feat in battle. The soul then travels on to heaven to live in eternal bliss. This belief has survived the coming of Albinicanism better than all other religions because it has no gods or spirits, only a singular belief. Today even the most devout Albinican originating from Norderin stock look at the world through a lens colored by the beliefs of their ancestors.

The Narrlachi faith is newly arrived to Polian and can hardly be called a single religion. It is an amalgam of many faiths and accepts all gods from all religions equally. This open nature has made it easy for the members of many different faiths to interact with one another; however, it has also caused problems with those who believe in monotheistic religions.

Laws of the Faith

Orthodoxy
- *Faith in Albin is the only path to salvation.*
- *Albin forgives the sins of those who repent.*
- *Mother Church is the arbitrator between man and Albin.*
- *Only those who perform the Sacraments enter Paradise.*
- *You shall not suffer evil to live.*
- *Murder is hated by Albin.*
- *No theft without good cause.*
- *Hell holds a special place for adulterers.*

Amdatism
- *Faith in Albin is the only path to salvation.*
- *Albin forgives the sins of those who repent.*
- *The Heirs of Dalthus are the arbitrators between men and Albin.*
- *All things material are born from Sait's womb.*
- *The Word of Dalthus must be spread.*
- *Murder is hated by Albin.*
- *No theft without good cause.*
- *Hell holds a special place for adulterers.*

Norderin Faith
- *Salvation is found through glorious death in battle.*
- *Those who do not fight are weak.*
- *The weak are to be slain.*
- *Those who are unable to fight should be slain so they may start anew.*
- *Those who take without battle shall lose their hands.*

Azari Faith
- *You must listen to your spirit guide.*
- *All things are the children of the Mother and Father.*
- *Your deeds are judged in the afterlife.*
- *Those who defile the Mother and Father must suffer your hatred.*
- *Murder is hated by the Gods.*
- *No theft without good cause.*

Narrlachi Faith
- *No god is greater than any other.*
- *Accept the beliefs of others.*
- *Worship your god freely.*
- *Those who step on the beliefs of others should suffer your wrath.*
- *To steal a man's life or property is to be condemned.*

The Land

The following section deals with the societies that inhabit the continent of Polian. There is no actual game mechanic information in this chapter. Instead you will find details on many aspects of the lives of the people that live there. These ideas are not set in stone and Players and Game Masters should feel free to adjust retails as they see fit.

Geography

The continent of Polian is located in the far western portion of the super-continent that covers the planet Erd. It is located in a northerly clime and is surrounded by the Vorish, Vorian, Frosset, Daskan, and Skagi Seas. It is also home to a large inland sea known as the Bruti Sea. The chief river systems in Polian are the Falk, the Vistula, and the Horvad.

Polian is dominated by large mountain ranges, several of which separate the continent from the rest of Erd. Most of these mountain ranges are part of a single chain, which scholars call the Vlaka (Boreni, Falch, and Maugis). The continent is also home to the Iskargi, Baran, Goszin, and Warsza Mountain ranges. The highest points in Polian are Mount Drachin (22,848 ft) in the Baran Mountains and Mount Wulfrim (18,577 ft) in the Iskargi Mountains. Polian's lowest point is the surface of the Bruti Sea(81 feet below sea level).

The majority of the land in Polian is on a central plain called the Falk Plain, which stretches from the Maugis Mountains in the south to the Vorish Sea and from the Baran Mountains in the west and the Narana plains in the east. A large part of this plain is fertile soil as well as vast prairies, forests, and lakes.

Southwest of the Baran Mountains is the heavily forested Karoth region that bleeds into the foothills of the Maugis Mountains. North of the Baran Mountains is the Vistula River valley, which is a fertile and developed region. To the west of this valley lies a great wilderness called the Daskan Frontier.

To the north of the continent lies the Glacia Peninsula, which is covered in mountains and is home to many glaciers. Also to the north is the Vorish Island chain that is covered with mountains, forests, and tundra.

CLIMATE

The climate of Polian varies from polar to temperate. The southwest and western parts have a mild and generally humid climate. This area is influenced by the Halinga current system, which brings warm water and air from the far south. Central and southeastern Polian has a humid, continental-type climate with cool summers. The northern parts, including parts of the Vorish Island chain and the Glacia Peninsula, are generally of the subarctic climate with the extreme north being host to a harsh polar climate; however, despite the general consistency of the climate, strange anomalies have been known to occur, particularly in the last two hundred years.

THE CALENDAR

The history of Polian is measured in years based upon the founding date of the Orthodox Albinican Church as the state religion of the Vorian Empire. The age is called the Age of Albin (AA) and is only 780 years old. Most records that date before this time period have been lost or destroyed. The few that have been found, such as the infamous book called the Nator, have convinced most scholars that civilization is thousands of years old and it used its own dating system.

The people of Polian have also adopted the Karthian lunar calendar which has thirteen months, each of which is broken up into eight segments of days called moons. The number of days in a moon is either three or four, depending upon the moon.

HISTORY

The history of Polian is mostly lost to time. It is know that it was once ruled by an ancient and powerful race of people, often called the First Men by scholars. It is said that they wielded magic like men wield swords, practiced dark rites, dealt with unimaginable creatures from the Outer Darkness, and ruled empires that spanned worlds, not just continents. For tens of thousands of years they ruled the world until a great cataclysm brought it all to an end. Only weather beaten, cyclopean ruins remain as testaments to their glory.

From the ashes of their empire, great kingdoms arose. They were forged by the diminished descendents of the First Men and spanned only continents, not worlds. They continued many of the practices of their ancestors and enslaved mankind. They too ruled for thousands of years, but their empires crumbled into decadence and their slaves revolted, bringing them to their end.

Upon the ruins of these empires, the first kingdoms of men grew. They carried names like Karth, Imrak, and Monnot and ruled over a world in turmoil; however, they too fell under the heel of those whom they made slaves. The great empire of the east, Imrak, collapsed some 800 years ago and the onetime slaves spread about the world bringing an end to the last great empires and forging the kingdoms that now rule Polian today.

The first of the new kingdoms of men was Voria, which was founded by the Vorish tribes and once covered all of northern Polian where it vied with the lost kingdom of Karth to the south. For much of its history it was a decadent empire, like all those that came before it but when it embraced Albinicanism, the inevitable decline into ruin was kept in check. Human life regained its value and slavery slowly came to an end. It may have spurned a golden age if not for the trouble that arrived from the East.

They came in great hordes, the Valadarins, and tore through both Karth and Voria sending Polian into chaos. It is not known what brought this great migration of an entire people though the folklore speaks of great evils and inhuman empires seeking to reclaim the glories of the time before man. Whatever the reason, these tribesmen came and settled. They shattered the ancient empire of Karth and sent the Vorian empire reeling, which set the stage for its eventual replacement by the Holy Union of Voria. In fact, their impact was so great that they are still the most dominant culture in the land.

These tribesmen, with their strange culture, inevitably were conquered but not by soldiers or kings. Instead they fell to the power of religion. The Albinican Church, still young in its power, actively converted these new people and made them their own. This brought new life to the religion with new ideas, merging the old faiths of the Valadarins with the new faith, Albinicanism.

This combination was not perfect and was one of the leading factors in the eventual schism that occurred within the church. In the south, where the Valadarins mingled with the Karthians, an alternate view was taken on the Albinican faith. This led to the formation of the Amdati Church, a great rival to the power of the Orthodox Church. This rivalry spilled out into hundreds of years of bloodshed as each side tried to forcibly convert the other.

The war between the faiths would have destroyed civilization in Polian if it weren't for two other threats from abroad. The lesser of the two was the sudden emmergence of the Noderin people from the frigid north. They began to raid and conquer lands all over Polian, forcing the kings and priests of the land to turn their religious fervor onto a new enemy.

However, the Noderins would turn out to be simply a prelude to the coming war and strife that would strike Polian. From the Unknowable East riders once again stormed across the plains, only this time they were not entire tribes of people but rather a disciplined army set on conquest. The Narrlachi, under the command of a brilliant leader, arrived to conquer the world.

With lightning strike percision they conquered, establishing kingdoms in their wake. All the southern lands of the Holy Union of Voria fell to these barbarians, as did ancient Toloska and Falchia. Other nations would have fallen as well if not for the untimely death of their leader, which shattered the empire into many petty khanates.

This is the state of the land today. It is splintered by religious strife, people in the east toil under the yoke of a foreign oppressor, and the Noderins continue to raid and hairy the coastlines from the frozen north. In few parts of the land is there peace, but life goes on and people survive.

Bravich

The Land: Bravich is a heavily forested kingdom that straddles a series of valleys in which the Vistula River system drains. The land is dotted with lakes, rivers, and marshes and is prone to fog in the low regions. The Brav tribes conquered this lush region during the early part of the first century although it only holds one major settlement, the capital Witnow.

The city of Vitnow lies along the western coast of the kingdom and is home to seven thousand people. It is well known as an exporter of grain, wax, butter, and honey from the interior. The houses are mostly single story stone buildings with slate tile imported from nearby Oldaska. It is also home to both a Vorish merchant quarter and a Noderin trading colony.

The People: Much like other Valadarin societies, the Bravs are well known for their distaste for tyranny. This is readily apparent in their long history of conflict over tyrants, be they real or percieved. It makes them a people neither timid nor weak and insults are often answered with the point of a sword in a formal duel. Many regard the scars they recieved in such duels as badges of honor.

The kingdom is unique in that it is one of the few places where both the Orthodox Church and the Amdati Church have equal representation. Two separate armies at two separate times tried to conquer and convert the country but failed. Since that time the people have gained a certain independence from the organized churches and religious tolerance has grown. This has been helped over the last few centuries by a strong royal family which has mandated this tolerance.

The Law: Elek Tverska is the King of Bravich and rules with a just and even hand. He is respected, if not loved by the magnates; however, he has made an enemy of both churches because he continues to foster tolerance. This animosity has created three separate polities within the kingdom, the royal family and the two churches with the magnate families that support them. Peace is only maintained because Elek and his forbears have been successful at keeping them at odds with each other.

The Folklore: Old women warn children about the Flawed One who sleeps beneath the ground of the country. They say that the children must always be in bed on time because when the Flawed One sleeps, he dreams. However, unlike the children's dreams, his become real and wander the land in search of little boys and girls who are out past their bedtime on which to feed.

Brekav

The Land: Brekav is a harsh land in northeastern Polian, covered by deep valleys and rugged hills. The hills are made for sheep herding, providing Brekav with the wool that drives much of its economy. For most of its history, it was a territory held by other nations or a chaotic mix of tribal clans and has only recently become a cohesive unit.

The kingdom has two towns, Vaska and the capital Drethka. Vaska sits on the northern coast and is home to three thousand people. It conducts limited trade in wool and fish. Drethka lies in the center of the country on the River Galisz and is home to the largest salt mines in the north. Throughout the country homes are typically made from stone mined out of the rugged landscape and roofed with red tiles.

The People: The Breks are well known for being xenophobic, insular, and very proud. They are most proud of their heritage, tracing back families for generations. This is not a simple recording of who was alive when, but rather a recording and a retelling of the stories of their forebears, as if they witnessed the events themselves.

The people of Brekav are zealous followers of the Orthodox Albinican Church. It dominates their lives like much of northern Polian, but unlike other Valadarin nations there is little tolerance for the old ways. It is not unheard of for town mobs to take matters into their own hands and hang those suspected of witchcraft. This, unfortunately, can include people whose only crime is being different.

The Law: Brekav is a chaotic country that is barely held together by its current king, the young hero of the Battle of Galisz, Jan Teszen. Only his general popularity with the petty gentry, the common folk, and the support of the Orthodox Church allows him to keep the throne. It would only take a small crisis to tip the balance in favor of his many rivals amongst the magnates.

The Folklore: Minions of evil are not entirely unheard of in Brekav. There are rumors of ghostly apparitions haunting the battlegrounds and ancient Vorian fortifications of the county. It's known by a few that a necromancer makes his home here, working his dark magic to create and army of zombies and skeletons to do his bidding.

ESKAR

The Land: Eskar is a region of two distinct geographies. The islands to the west are rugged, hilly, and forested while the mainland is lightly wooded and flat. In the west most people herd livestock, and in the east they are generally traditional farmers.

The kingdom is home to only one major city, Eskaru, but it is a massive, populous city that controls all sea trade coming up from the Lost South. This bustling port of twenty thousand holds the same cosmopolitan air that Lanium, the capital of Omeron does, only it is flavored with the languages and cultures of the south. Anything can be bought or sold for the right price here.

The People: In Eskar, the Navari, Eskari, and Bravs have been fighting with each other for centuries. Warfare has become such a mainstay of their lives that everyone has experienced it in one form or another, making them equally numb and weary of its horrors. Only the recent years of peace and prosperity have begun to change this as the people have become more mercantile oriented, taking to the sea to ply their fortunes.

Like other lands that play host to travelers from distant cultures, the people hold many different beliefs, some so foreign as to be unknown anywhere else in Polian; however, on the whole the Bravs are typically followers of the Amdati Church or Azari Faith, and the Eskari and Navari stay true to the faith of their ancestors.

The Law: Wilvar the Fat rules Eskar like a Vorish merchant prince. He views the kingdom as a company and his chieftains as shareholers. Over the years he has converted many to this belief and as such has turned the kingdom into a smooth running machine bent on being profitable for its people. His only rivals for power are the traditionalist Navari chiefs in the west, who wish to reclaim the throne from the Eskari, and the Bravs in the east, who want to unite with Malindarov.

The Folklore: The Navari in western Eskar still speak of regaining their freedom from the Eskari. Legend tells that the last Navari king, Wulgar the Grim, sleeps in his burial mound awaiting the right moment to rise up and lead his people to freedom. Some scholars whisper that there is another part of the legend that is now forgotten. They say that he will rise up and lead an army of the dead to destroy all of the living, and he will rule the land from a throne made of the bones of his own people, the Navari.

Falkaz

The Land: Falkaz is the largest of the khanates that sprung up after the death of the Great Khan. Near the mountains the terrain is rocky and steep, but it spreads out into a vast rolling plain that is only broken by the great Falk River and the wide Bruti Sea. The soil is rocky and rough to till, but the Bruti Sea and Falk River are plentiful, leading more folks to farm the waters for fish and seaweed rather than farming land.

Falkaz, like most Narrlachi khanates, is not home to many permanent settlements. Those that do exist are small villages and towns populated by the native Falchians who once ruled the land. The Narrlachi prefer great encampments of tents that roam the countryside wherever their herds take them. This has split the khanate into two different but compatible societies.

The People: The majority of the population of Falkaz is made up of the Falchian natives, a Vorish people famous for their communal spirit and devotion to the Orthodox Church. Prior to the conquest most of the region was made up of petty fiefs that were virtually self sufficient. This practice has continued but instead of giving up the majority of their goods to the local Falchian lord, they pass it onto the effecient agents of the Khan.

The spirit worshiping Narrlachi that now dominate the land come mainly from the Naltar tribe. They are known as great hunters and their skill with the horse bow surpasses that of all other Narrlachi. They too have a communal outlook on life and as such have easily interacted with their new subjects. As more and more Naltar settlers come to Falkaz, it is only a matter of time before the two people begin to integrate with one another.

The Law: Kal-Skorpa, the nephew of the Great Khan, is a great blustering fellow who only took the throne after the deaths of his three elder brothers. He is not well respected because he did not gain his position by merit, despite the fact that he leaves the clans to their own devices. Despite this lack of respect, the clans support him in his ongoing attempt to quell the uprising in the south by the half brother of the former King of Falchia.

The Folklore: Deep in the heart of the khanate, not many know of a fortress known as the Cask. A great evil was defeated and imprisoned in the caves below this keep in the elder days of the First Men. Scholars say that the current fortress is built upon the ruins of the original building that marks and guards the resting place of this evil. The fearless Narrlachi avoid it at all costs, giving it miles of wide berth and making signs against evil whenever they come within sight of it.

JENKA

The Land: Jenka is a heavily forested country that once boasted populous cities, country palaces, and quaint villages. Today many of these institutions have been destroyed in the wake of the Narrlachi invasion, which laid the kingdom to waste. Now it is most characterized by its ravaged farmland and the deep forests that not even the Narrlachi could penetrate.

Jenka has four settlements remaining of noteworthy size; Lek, a village of five hundred people, Karva, a village of eight hundred people, Stur, a town of one thousand souls, and the castle Jenkaz, which is surrounded by a town of the same name with two thousand people. Jenkaz is also

home to one of the greatest monuments to the Orthodox Church, the Cathedral of St. Domash. What little trade remains after the war is in pottery made from the clay bed of the River Galisz and silver that is mined from the hills.

The People: The Jenks have always been seen as an odd people with curious habits. On one hand, they are well known for their ferocity and violent tempers and on the other, for their passionate love for dogs. For centuries this odd combination of compassion for animals and contempt for non-Jenks has stood side by side in their society, leading outsiders to derisivly call them "dog-men."

Although the dominant religious force in Jenka is the Orthodox Church, the recent devestation brought on by the Narrlachi War has shattered the faith of many. For the first time in the tumultuous history of the kingdom, the people are questioning their faith in Albin. This, combined with the labor shortage brought on by the many deaths in the war, has created an atmosphere of general unrest, which may explode into all out anarchy.

The Law: Vladyslaw the Weak is the nominal ruler of Jenka. He was elected to the throne shortly after his father, Vladyslaw the Brave, fell during the Narrlachi War. The only reason he was elected by the gentry was because of the influence of the two most powerful magnates in the land, Yuri Koveski and Henryk Nenkowski. Though they despise each other, they hated Vladyslaw the Brave, who ruled them with an iron hand, more. Together they could think of no better revenge than to rule the kingdom through his weak willed son.

The Folklore: Jenka has always been a land believed to be cursed. Ancient folktales speak of a demon lord hiding in her dark forests. It is said that he prowls through the night, searching for sleeping children to give his nightmares to.

Malindarov

The Land: The Theocracy is a large country that covers a third of all of Polian, stretching from the southern border of Bravich all the way south to the Southern Sea. It is divided into five distinct regions; the Misty Coast in the west, the Boglands in the southwest, Blackwood Forests in the southeast, the Fertile Plains in the south, and the Baran Mountains in the east. Yet, despite its vast size, the kingdom is not heavily populated and many of its cities are shadows of what they where during the age when Karth ruled the lands.

The Theocracy is home to two major cities, Vladistock in the north,

which is home to twenty-five thousand people, and Litalka in the south, which has a population numbering twenty thousand and the distinction as the birthplace of the Amdati Church. Both of these cities act as capitals for the royal family throughout the year. The country is also home to five large towns, Novor, Alinsk, Malveda, Vilius, and Sarlich, as well as thousands of small villages and hamlets. Combined, virtually every commodity known to man is manufactured and traded, but Malindarov is well known for its wine, grain, linen, silver, and copper goods.

The People: Malindarov is a country of two different cultures. The dominant groups are the religiously zealous Malins and Bravs who, on the whole, are known for their unyeilding stance on faith. Even in a world where religion is a part of everyday life, these people take it to a puritanical extreme, which is the backbone for the Amdati church.

On the other hand, there is a small minority of pagan Sarls who live in the distant eastern wilds of the country. They practice the old faiths and live the lifestyle of their forebears. Only their stubborness, nomadic lifestyle, and skill in battle has allowed them to remain free in a country ruled by religious extremism.

The Law: Vladimir Ivanivich, the High Theocrat of the Amdati Church, is both the spiritual leader and temporal authority in the kingdom and rules with an iron fist. Unlike other Valadarin nations, Malindarov is not at the mercy of the magnates and petty gentry. His only troubles come from the heretics that surround his nation and the Sarls that live within it.

The Folklore: The spirits of Karthian dead haunt the hills of Medve. Long ago when the Malins and Bravs first invaded the Karthian kingdoms, they slew men, women, and children in the thousands. The ghosts of these poor souls are said to walk the land seeking retribution from the descendents of their murderers.

NAVAREN

The Land: Navaren is located along the rugged coastline of the Glacia Peninsula, which is a maze of fjords and tiny islands. The land is harsh and cold with few places to grow sparse amounts of crop. In fact the islands are generally better places to raise livestock, though most of the population lives on the coastline and makes their living by fishing.

Svalo is the only real settlement to be found in Navaren. It sits on a nicely sheltered harbor and is home to five thousand souls. Only the dock area and the king's keep are made of stone. All other structures are made of wood and thatch; however, the entire coast is dotted with thousands of villages that make a brisk trade in timber, tar, fish, and iron.

The People: Much like in Eskar, the Navari and Isoli have been fighting since before anyone can remember; however, instead of a ravaged country, Navaren has remained virtually untouched by war. Instead a culture of raiding foreign lands has dominated every aspect of life, from religion to economics.

On the whole, the majority of the people stay true to the religion of their ancestors and preserve the old ways, but in recent years the Orthodox Church has made inroads into the society and have converted many. Like with the Valadarins, the Church has adapted itself to those it wishes to convert and has established a unique blend of the old beliefs and the new.

The Law: Navaren is a chaotic country where every village leader claims to be a king. These chieftains are barely held together by the High King of Svalo, Magnus Gormvan, who is also opposed by two other would-be kings, Eadric Winigas and Cnut Eadrin. Only his well disciplined personal army and large fleet keep these fiercely independent men from tearing the kingdom apart.

The Folklore: Not many know of the ancient magic of the Noderin Runecasters still surviving in Navaren. These mystics are rumored to be able to sap the will of men, forcing them into servitude. They are believed to work in secret cabals, controlling the fate of all who step upon Noderin soil.

OLDASKA

The Land: The kingdom of Oldaska is a vast swath of territory covered in mountains, rivers, forests, and great rolling plains. It was once home to what was a large portion of the Vorian Empire as well as the Noderin kingdom of Navara. It is so large that despite centuries of settlement, much of it is still wild and untamed. Still, the kingdom is home to a booming economy that deals mostly in timber, iron, salt, hides, butter, and honey.

Oldaska is home to three major cities, several small towns and thousands of villages. The city of Warnow is the largest and lies in the heart of Oldaska. It sits upon a hill overlooking the strategic plain that runs between the eastern and western portions of the kingdom and is home to nearly seventeen thousand people. Strava is located on the Island of Nara in the east. It is home to ten thousand souls and is the most important port in western Polian as it acts as a gateway between the north and south. Stosz in the east is modeled on the cosmopolitan cities of Voria. It is the center of education in the kingdom and home to eight thousand people.

The People: The people of Oldaska are famous for being proud, independent and fiercely patriotic; however, that only pertains to the two dominant cultures in Oldaska, the Daskans and the Navari. The Rankian minority, while proud and independent, are devoted to only their clan and not the kingdom. They wander through the land in small caravans with little or no regard for the state of the kingdom.

On the whole, the people of Oldaska are staunch followers of the Orthodox Church, but much like their southern neighbors in Bravich, they believe in religious tolerance, which explains how the Rankians, despised in all other parts of the north, are able to make their homes here. This does not mean that the people are immune to hysteria from time to time, but they are much less prone to it.

The Law: Casimir Piast has continued the tradition of his father and grandfather by strengthening the power of the royal family in Oldaska. Under his guidance and with the aid of his wife, the daughter of the Archduke of Voria, he has placated the magnates, promoted the arts, and encouraged economic growth through granting charters to several towns. He is perhaps best known and most loved for his role in lifting the siege of Jenkaz and being the first native of Polian to defeat the Narrlachi. This has solidified the loyalty of the petty gentry as well as the commoners of the kingdom.

The Folklore: The land that Oldaska now covers was once the heart of the Vorian Empire. Some people there can still trace their ancestry with much pride back to the Vorians who once ruled. These people have never forgotten the stories of how they suffered at the hands of the Valadarin invaders. It is rumored that some maintain the cults of their ancestors, worshiping the Vorian gods of war, weather, and sun. Some believe that they hold their rites in ancient ruins that still contain treasure from an age long past.

OMERON

The Land: Omeron, originally called Larippa, holds a strategic position as the crossroads of what was once the Vorian Empire, which has influenced its history tremendously. The kingdom covers the green and hilly island of Larippa as well as the southern portion of the Isle of Radu, which shares a similar geography. It is a valuable market for the exchange of goods from the long distance trade with the kingdoms of the Unknowable East.

The capital of Lanium is perhaps the most important city in the east since the fall of Alcona to the Narrlachi. It controls much of the trade between the Unknowable East and the rest of Polian. It is the gateway to the east and is very cosmopolitan. Many languages are spoken here and many cultures intermingle. It is one of the few places in the world where one can find merchants the world over sitting and doing business while their homelands war with one another.

The People: The world over the Omeroni, now a mixed people with Noderin blood and Vorish culture, are famous for their skill at sea. Their entire society revolves around the importance of the ship. It is the lifeblood of the people, acting as a provider as well as a means of combating enemies. The ship has in fact become so important to the people that instead of standard titles for positions of authority, the Omeroni use nautical ones. Instead of king, they call their ruler Admiral, Lords are Commedores, and Mayors are Captains.

If any religion can claim the hearts of these people it is the Orthodox Albinican Church. It was the faith of the native Vors who once ruled here and was adopted by the conquering Omeroni; however, because of the constant influx of many cultures, any and all faiths find a home here. It is not uncommon to meet an Omeroni that worships some foreign god from the east or a dark skinned foreigner from the east worshiping Albin.

The Law: Admiral Vikar ca Lanium, the great grandson of the Sea Wolf, Tacred Agdernak, who conquered and founded the kingdom, rules the kingdom in an undisputed manner. The Captains of the various towns are loyal to him because he has kept the kingdom neutral and fostered economic growth. Under his rule, Omeron has become the only nation to open peaceful relations with the Narrlachi and, because of this has grown wealthier than any other kingdom in all of Polian.

The Folklore: It has long been rumored that the King of Omeron is a sorcerer. Stories of him speak about the great storm that came out of nowhere to shatter an invading fleet from Radici against the rocks of the coastline. Some believe he used his powers and demonic servants to create this freak storm in order to save his kingdom. The people of the land would have no problem with this myth if not for the other more macabre stories that circulate around him and his activities.

⚓ARATHA

The Land: Taratha sits upon the We Plain along the western coast of the Vorish Sea. Most of the land is open grassland but there are pockets of hilly areas and small forests. The majority of the population lives on the coast or near these pockets, leaving the harsh soil of the prairie alone. There they trade in fish, wool, and livestock with their neighbors.

Once a powerful empire that covered Jenka, Brekav, and Omeron, Taratha is a broken nation that was devistated by the Narrlachi War as well as its current civil war, leaving only two communities of any note. The northern capital of Raszk is walled port with a great fort sitting upon a cliff overlooking the sea. In the south, a sprawling shanty town filled with refugees from the surrounding countryside as well as Tolor, is the ancestral castle of the Gezomils, a one time branch of the Orthodox Church. The people have come to call it Geza and it acts as the southern capital of the kingdom.

The People: The Taroths that dominate Taratha are seen as a hard people. Through the years their society has gained a very cynical view on life and have little time for charity and kindness. They are very self-reliant, almost to a fault some would say. In their eyes, all things must be earned.

The Orthodox Church dominates the faith of the people of Taratha. Unlike in Jenka, the people never lost their faith in Mother Church. Instead their belief grew stronger because when their kings and magnates failed them, the church arrived bringing charity and protection in the form of the Order of the Sacred Cup, which has a chapter house in Geza where it aids the refugees.

The Law: There is no government in Taratha. The kingdom is split in two and is dying a slow death. In the north, Teodor Dukowski, the elder of the two sons of the former king, keeps his court with the support of the northern magnates and the Admiral of Omeron. In the south, with the support of the Order of the Sacred Cup and the southern magnates, Alexi Dukowski attempts to maintain order, to keep the Narrlachi at bay, and to fight his brother for control of the kingdom. It is only a matter of time before the country falls apart into a thousand petty fiefs.

The Folklore: Claims have been made for many years about the royal family being witches. This could explain how they amassed their wealth and power, which is said to rival that of the Patriarch of Tor. Many feel the rumor may have its origin in the Order of the Sacred Cup who are known for their dim view of the current dynasty, but all concede there could be some truth to it.

Tolor

The Land: Tolor is a vast open plain that stretches between the gateway of the Unknowable East and the Baran Mountains. The land offers little for harvesting crops but is ideal for raising cattle and horses. Here the Narrlachi, like the Toloskans who once ruled the land, graze great herds and bring them to market in the only permanent settlement to be found, Alcona.

Alcona sits on the coast of the Vorish Sea and is famous for being the largest trading post for horses and cattle. Most of the year it is a ghost town with a population of only three thousand permanent residents. The only stone structures it possesses are the homes of these people, the docks, and the great fence yard; however, at the end of summer the city swells to ten thousand people and upwards of fifty thousand animals.

The People: The native Toloskans that stayed in the remnants of their kingdom have easily integrated with their new rulers, the Narrlachi of the Griks tribe. Like the Griks, the Toloskans lived a nomadic lifestyle, moving with their herds over the vast rolling plain. Both people are famous for their skill at handling horseflesh, and it is said that their horses are the strongest and fastest to be found in the world.

Prior to being conquered, the region was a stronghold of the Orthodox Church. This is not quite true anymore. While the people on the whole remain faithful, the church they worship in no longer has any ties to the Patriarch of Tor. This is because when the Khan Ust-Kasra took power, he destroyed the bishopric of Alcona and built a puppet church with a bishop appointed by him.

The Law: The nomads of Tolor answer to the grim Khan Ust-Kasra, the Great Khan's greatest general. When the Great Khan died, Khan Ust-Kasra took the khanate by force and has been its absolute ruler ever since. He brooks no rivals and has no advisors but allows his people to live in peace. He only intereferes when the rivalry of his khans break out into bloodshed, at which time he eliminates both participants with equal skill and finality.

The Folklore: The Khan put down a rebellion at the town of Csek and in the process the entire town was laid to ruin. Rumors have begun to spread that the khan's servant, the priest Harg, released a terrible demon that killed every person in the town and burnt it to the ground. They now say that this demon escaped his control and now wanders the countryside causing destruction and chaos everywhere it goes.

Toloskan March

The Land: The territory of the Order of the Sacred Cup, or Cup Knights as they are often called, is a rugged mountainous region best suited for goat herding, mining, and logging although there are some valleys that have fertile soil, which is covered with farms. Before the invasion by the Great Khanate, it also included rough plains that were home to livestock herds and large farms but now that land is theirs no longer.

The only true settlement in the ravaged Marches is the fortress of Karthasz. This invincible mountain fortress has never fallen to enemy hands and is the home to the Order of the Sacred Cup. The valley it overlooks is home to ten separate villages that support it and, in total, are home to three thousand people. There is no trade in the Toloskan Marches, only a never ending war with the Narrlachi in the east and the Amdati in the west.

The People: The people who live within the domain of the Cup Knights, both the Taroths and ethnic Toloskans, are known to be a serious folk. They have lived their lives under the domination of one religious group or another, with the Knights being the longest; however, this state of constant turmoil has made them great at adapting to any situation. It is rare for them to break or panic, which is why the Knights have done all they can to recruit from the people they rule as much as possible.

Outside of the city of Tor, the Toloskan March is the only place to be completely and truly devoted to the Orthodox Albinican Church. Adherence is strict and the people have neither the time nor the inclination to entertain anything else. The region is so devout that many of the worlds most famous Orthodox preachers and theologins were born here.

The Law: The Toloskan March is a land constantly under threat from enemies and as such is ruled with an iron hand by the Grandmaster of the Order of the Sacred Cup, Vladimir Piast, cousin to the king of Oldaska. Enforcement of order is harsh, and being in a constant state of war, the Cup Knights exercise a rough and expedient brand of justice. This, combined with the support they gain from both Oldaska and the Holy Union of Voria, allows them to maintain order.

The Folklore: The spirits of the dead haunt the lands of the Cup Knights. In some places, when the moon is full, armies of ghostly men fight and die again. There is always a poor fool who has been trapped out in the open during the full moon. It is said they are left mad and raving. The lucky ones are killed immediately while those who somehow survive live on to tell all about what they had seen.

Voria

The Land: The Holy Union of Voria is a large territory that covers the northeastern corner of Polian. It is made of a series of islands and two peninsulas that are home to many different types of terrain. The majority of the land is flat and either covered with woods or rolling plains that are broken up by the occasional rocky outcropping.

It is host to the two most populous cities in Polian, four major towns, and thousands of villages. More people call Voria home than anywhere else in the region. Its capital, Tor, is the spiritual center of the north, home to the Orthodox Church and bustles with over fifty thousand souls. Across the Radian Strait lies its sister city, Chenu, which is the home of the Archduke of Voria as well as thirty thousand people. These two cities, combined with the towns of Tial, Ravanna, Islia, and Alian make up the largest economy in Polian and virtually everything is traded here.

The People: The Union is home to two distinct Vorish populations, the Radians in the northeast and the Torians in the southwest, both devout followers of the Orthodox Church. The Torians have a well-desereved reputation for a need for order and control. They are not a people given to spontaneity and rarely, if ever, do anything without careful consideration and planning. One simply has to look at their perfectly ordered cities, which suffer from none of the random sprawl found elsewhere in the world; however, this meticulousness has the darkside of manipulative political scheming, which runs rampant in their society.

The Radians, on the other hand, are most well-known for their prickly sense of honor. No Radian man is ever without his dueling knife and never does he back down from any challenge to his honor, be it perceived or real. This often puts them at odds with their Torian cousins, who they often suspect of being duplicitous.

The Law: The Union is a land of barely controlled chaos that is overseen by the current Archduke, Mattias ca Brekav, the first non-Vor to be elected to the position. This fact made him perfect for everyone as he favors no side in any of the many squables between the various nobles. He is the perfect mediator and is able to keep the Union from breaking apart despite the loss of the south to the Narrlachi.

The Folklore: Legend says that Radici was once home to a race of giants made of ice that fought among themselves, saving the world from their mighty wrath. The inhabitants or Radici know better. From time to time they can hear their great war horns blowing and feel the earth tremble when one is felled. They say only fools enter the frozen tundra in the north where these monsters have been said to feast on entire villages.

Voru

The Land: Sheltered by great mountains and covered in deep forests, this coastal region is an unlikely place for the Narrlachi to conquer. Long has it been the gateway to the Unknowable East and is well known for its traffic in cotton, silk, drugs, spices, slaves, and dyes. This traffic continues but now under the rule of the Narrlachi.

The city of Borva is the only one to survive the war with the Narrlachi. All others were razed to the ground. It was the smallest of the cities of the region and is not well equiped for dealing in the massive amounts of trade the region once did. Housing only six thousand people, it acts more as a way station between the Unknowable East and Lanium, where the Omeroni control nearly all trade in the region.

The People: Unlike in other lands, the native Vors were all but whipped out by the Narrlachi. The Radians that once populated this region refused to surrender to the invaders and were nearly exterminated. Now the area is dominated by the Ashra tribe of Narrlachi who are well-known for their skill with metalworking of all kinds.

The people of Voru are dominated by the Church of Azar, a god of the forge from the Unknowable East whose rites are all but identical to those used by the Azari religion. Followers of the Orthodox Church can be found here as well, but they are no more numerous than those of the many hundreds of faiths that exist in the Unknowable East.

The Law: Hapa Khan is the inefficient and brutal ruler of the khanate. Prone to wild rampages and rash actions, he has stifled the rebuilding of the region. Instead the many khans virtually rule themselves, taking matters into their own hands. It is unknown if they would band together if the region were attacked by an outsider but most feel it is unlikely.

The Folklore: There are whispers that a strange plague has begun to spread among the Narrlachi. It is said that those afflicted become anemic and seem to die of blood loss though there are no visible wounds on the victims. Priests of the Orthodox Albinican Church have begun to preach that this is divine retribution sent to bring the enemies of the church low; however, it is said that the Narrlachi are not the only ones succumbing to this illness.

Holy Union of Voria

Omeron

Voru

Falkaz

Navaren

Brekav

Taratha

Tolor

Jenka

Toloskan March

Oldaska

Bravich

Theocracy of Malindarov

Eskar

N

THE INDEX