

# Houses of the Bloated

# THE GREAT GAME

THE VEN LANGUAGE HAS ONLY ONE WORD FOR BOTH “LOVE” AND “REVENGE.” JUST A SLIGHT CHANGE IN PRONUNCIATION.

A game of romance. A game of revenge. A game of invisible wars and sorcerous blood. A game with no victors. Only casualties.

This is *Houses of the Blooded*: a roleplaying game in a violent world ruled by a magical race who call themselves “the ven.” The ven see all the world as an enemy and the inhabitants of the world as either weapons or tools. Their culture is highly ritualistic and obsessed with duality.

Six noble Houses play an elaborate, invisible game of deception and betrayal. Forbidden by law from declaring open war, their secret wars allow for more subtle weapons: seduction, espionage and assassination.

With this little book, you and your friends can tell stories of nobles engaged in these covert conflicts. You tell stories of adventure, exploration, romance, intrigue, loyalty and betrayal. All you need is this book, a handful of dice, some pencils and some friends. Get those together and we’ll get started.

## *Who Were the Ven?*

Before we go any further, a word or two about our subject matter.

The ven were an antediluvian race mentioned in works such as the Voynich Manuscript and Madame Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*. Their civilization thrived for a short period of time, but while it did, the ven were the hub of art and culture. At the same time,

the amount of blood shed during the reign of the ven rivaled the most brutal cultures the world has ever seen.

*Houses of the Blooded* is not a historical game. I have no interest in re-creating historical ven culture. Instead, *HotB* is a *literary* game, invoking the plays, operas and pillow books that made the ven so famous among historical scholars.

(Analogy time. Instead of capturing a historic Greece, we capture *mythic* Greece. The active presence of Gods and Heroes walking among simple mortal men. That’s what we’re going for here.)

So, we assume all the ven mythology is true. They really were magical creations of a great and terrible race of “sorcerer-kings” who nearly destroyed the world. Their blood really was a potent weapon capable of powering magical rituals. And their world—the world they called “the Great Enemy”—really was filled with monsters too terrible to imagine.

This is the world of *Houses of the Blooded*. A world where a cunning mind is just as deadly as a poisoned dagger. Where the ven Senate was a hotbed of schemes, plots and treason. Where mystery cults worshipped sleeping ancestors and the outlawed sorcery of the Old Ones was practiced in every Great House in Shanri.

You’ll learn more about the ven as we go along. Instead of giving you a heedful of history right off the top, we’ll teach you about the game as we go.



## *What is a Storytelling Game?*

You need at least two people to play, but you can have more. Most groups feel comfortable with four to six players. As a group, the players tell stories about their characters. Whenever those characters take risky actions, the players roll dice to determine the outcome. The higher you roll, the better.

In *Houses of the Blooded*, you play the role of a character in an ongoing story. You define your character with traits listed on a character sheet. Together with your friends, you sit down with other players and make your characters together, relying on each other to assist in that process. This game calls those characters player characters because they are characters controlled by the players.

One player takes on a special role. He doesn't make a character of his own, but instead, will be playing all the characters in the story you and your other friends don't play. The servants, enemies, rivals, and allies of your player characters (or PCs). Most games call her either the Narrator or the Dungeon Master. In this game, we call that player the Narrator because that better fits her role in the game.

Like I said, the Narrator plays all the secondary parts in the story you and your friends will tell together. She also narrates details of the scenes to the other players,

serving as kind of a storyteller and referee all rolled up into one. She is also the final arbiter in disputes between the players.

But before we go any further, let's take a look at the characters provided.

## *Reading the Character Sheet*

Each player—except for the Narrator—should get a copy of the character sheet provided at the end of this book, a pencil and a bunch of six-sided dice (the kind of dice you find in most board games).

Your character is a noble from a race called “the ven.” The ven are a magical race. They are taller than humans, stronger than humans, faster than humans, smarter than humans and more beautiful as well. The world they live in is called “Shanri.” That means “the Enemy” in the ven language and aptly reflects how the ven view the world around them. It is a dangerous world filled with monsters and other horrors.

Your character sheets help you define who your character is, what she's good at, in what areas she lacks strength, her desires and goals. Before we go any further, we must first talk about the most powerful influence in your character's life: her House.

# THE HOUSES

**Y**OUR CHARACTER IS PART OF A NOBLE HOUSE. AT THE CURRENT MOMENT IN VEN HISTORY, SIX HOUSES RULE THE VEN SENATE (FOUR REMAIN “VEILED” AND SHAMED — WEARING THE BLACK). YOU CAN READ ABOUT THEM BELOW.

## *Blooded of the Bear*



**Give me a man  
and I'll make him a Bear.**

**Families:** Burghe, Steiner, Rusu, Reinhold, Bowen

The House of the Bear holds lands far to the North, away from the reach of “civilized” hands. While no Blooded noble would ever say so to his face, the Blooded of the Bear are considered less refined than their southern neighbors. The House of the Bear know this, and could not care less.

Legends of the House founder—Jacob Burghe—are told all around Shanri. His Strength and courage are unquestioned, equaled only by his desire to be left alone. When the Betrayer Curse fell, Steiner took his family and followers North, far from the war they left behind. Some say he sought lands where he could teach his inheritors independence. Others say he wished to escape the inevitable politics that were sure to follow. But

all agree on one motivation: he didn't trust anyone he could not call kin.

The Burghe's motives live on in his descendants. They are fiercely independent, strong, capable, and isolated in their tundra. Children are taught how to fend for themselves, shunning subtlety and politics for pure honesty.

## *Blooded of the Elk*



**Nobility is not only in the Blood,  
but in the purpose.**

**Families:** Steele, Thayl, Jasnine, Uvan, Ballan

One of the most powerful families in the land, the Thayl held the Imperial Throne for centuries. The last Thayl Emperor, however, was driven insane by his own ambition. He was put down by the other Blooded families but not before he could impart a curse upon each one. His final curse shattered the land, sending all the families to the five corners of

the world. Ever since then, the Blooded of the Elk have sought to restore their family's name.

Regardless of their past, the Blooded of the Elk are still masters of the Subtle Game. They are the backbone of the courts, the power behind the thrones. Nearly every Great House has an Elk advisor, putting them in key positions all throughout the land.

Despite their unique position, many Laws restrict their Strength. These Laws, passed by the Senate, restrict how much land the Blooded of the Elk may hold and what sorceries they can practice. All of this ensures the family that almost destroyed the world will never have the opportunity to do so again.

### *Blooded of the Falcon*



**I am all that I own.**

**Families:** Thorne, Askhen, Krev, Sinjin, Thali

After the Betrayers Curse fell on the Houses, the Blooded spread across the face of the world looking for lands amidst the ruin. The lands were snatched up quickly, leaving little room for stragglers. One House, the Blooded of the Falcon, didn't look to the land for a home, but looked within themselves.

For centuries, the Falcon had no homeland. Instead, they wandered the lands by both caravan and ship, maintaining their Bloodline through discipline and strict code. Mistrusting all other Houses, developing secret symbols, signs and rituals to identify true cousins from false ones.

But fifty years ago, the Falcon made a daring move. Striking from the forests and wild lands, they took lands as their own, carving out their own provinces, unveiling their banner in the halls of the Senate. Because of their position, the Blooded of the Falcon are the noble house closest to the common folk. They Operate in the world of the unblooded, dealing with their issues, facing their troubles. Of all the houses, the peasantry trust the Falcon more than any other.

### *Blooded of the Fox*



**Never Enough.**

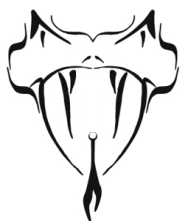
**Families:** Yvarai, Silja, Q'n, Eshu, Tammel

Their names are as elegant as silks and their poetry is like spice. The Blooded of the Fox take a special pride in Beauty, elegance and indulgence. They are the harvesters of culture and etiquette, masters of innuendo and double-meanings, speaking in elaborate codes that only the initiated may decipher.

The House of the Fox was founded by a man obsessed with excellence in all things. "If one is good, ten is better." Their music is loud and full of passion. It was the Fox who brought the Courts of Romance to the Blooded Houses, introducing the concept of courtly love with stories, poems and songs, and they are the masters of Opera—the high alchemical art—filled with stories of doomed lovers and grand tragedies. They are also masters of *sanjiën*, a martial art that binds the soul and Sword.

The House of the Fox views hedonism, *ajurna*, as the “art of pleasure.” Knowing one’s limits is the first step of this art: knowing when to stop the pleasure before pain begins. Excess causes pain, and the first lesson of *ajurna* is how to indulge in pleasure while avoiding the consequences of pain.

## *Blooded of the Serpent*



**I carry Wisdom's price.**

**Families:** Mwrr, Jalan, Ovjen, Ru, Valar

The House of Jalan was instrumental in Thayl's downfall, freeing the other Houses from the mad emperor's tyrannical rule. This historical fact has not been forgotten by the other Houses, but it does not diminish the level of mistrust they hold for the Blooded of the Serpent.

Houses must deal with politics, intrigue, and sorcery. All of these things have one element in common: the element of secrecy. The Serpent is a symbol of dangerous Wisdom in ven mythology. He is the trickster spirit with poison that kills the weak and enlightens the strong. The Blooded of the Serpent are the only house who do not trace their lineage back to a man, but back to Serpent himself, the grand trickster, who fooled a mortal woman and begat his children through her (although some suggest it was she who fooled Serpent).

No other House knows more about Shanri than the Serpent. Her mysteries and secrets,

her hidden ruins and strains of ork. Vast libraries document Serpent's knowledge of the world, available only to those strong enough to carry the pain of Wisdom.

## *Blooded of the Wolf*



**We are either tools or weapons.**

**Families:** Adrente, Banin, Drew, Sheeda, Tal

The Blooded of the Wolf live in the central isles where mountains reach up from the waters. They are a small people, dark-haired and dark-eyed. They who revere memory can list their lineages by heart. They take pride in knowledge and scholarship, but are best known for another trait: in combat, they are completely mad.

The House of the Wolf see knowledge as a weapon—just like everything else in the world—that a ven must use to maintain his freedom. They are fanatical scholars and truth-seekers. In fact, one could say the Wolf are fanatical about *everything*—at least the things important to the Wolf.

The dichotomy between scholar and berserk is the defining trait of the Wolf. The founder of the House, Tal Adrente, was a small man of great mirth and anger. Easily riled, he carried no weapons. “I’ll just take his,” he once said of a particularly rude opponent. He did, and beat his enemy to death with his own Sword.

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Every player picks a House. You may choose to all be from the same House or different Houses. That's your choice.

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# VIRTUES

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**Y**OUR CHARACTER SHEET SHOWS SIX VIRTUES. SIX. BUT, YOU MUST CHOOSE WHICH OF THESE VIRTUES YOUR CHARACTER DOES *NOT* HAVE. THAT'S RIGHT. SIX, BUT YOU ONLY GET FIVE OF THEM. THE VIRTUE YOU DO NOT HAVE IS CALLED YOUR *WEAKNESS*.

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Each Virtue has an accompanying *rank*. The higher the rank, the stronger the Virtue. Thus, a character with a 2 Strength would have a great deal of difficulty wrestling a character with a 5 Strength. A character with a 4 Wisdom knows more about the world than a character with a 2 Wisdom. And a character with a 3 Prowess will have a great deal of difficulty defeating a character with 5 Prowess.

So, read through the Virtues. Each is associated with a specific House.

## *Bear's Strength*

Strength represents almost all your character's physical actions. Lifting, pushing, tearing, pulling, punching, jumping, wrestling and other forms of unarmed combat are all determined by Strength.

**If you choose Strength as one of your character's Virtues**, he can always lift, push, pull, move, jump, run, climb better than anyone else around and never needs any help for anything.

**If you do not choose Strength**, your character is a weakling. He can't shove heavy (or

jammed) doors open, can't bend bars, and certainly can't lift gates.

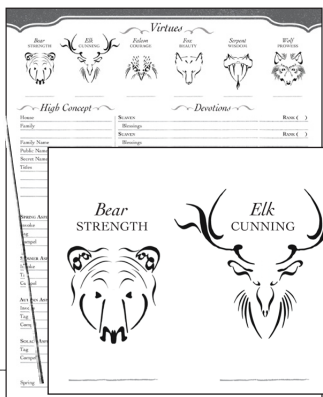
You roll a number of dice equal to your Strength for any physical risk. Physical force, manual dexterity, everything. If you do not have Strength, you get no dice. No dice means you do not get to narrate your character's success or failure.

## *Elk's Cunning*

Cunning is a measure of your character's ability to see what others are trying to hide and find creative solutions for difficult problems. You know how to put together elaborate plans from disparate parts and how to see patterns where others cannot.

**If you choose Cunning as one of your character's Virtues**, your character is always thinking outside of the box. He doesn't go for traditional solutions, turns disparate advantages into delicate and detailed plans. He can *see*.

**If you do not choose Cunning**, your character is overwhelmed by obstacles, cannot think quickly on his feet, or see what others want to hide.



*Bear*  
STRENGTH



*Elk*  
CUNNING



*Falcon*  
COURAGE



*Fox*  
BEAUTY



*Serpent*  
WISDOM



*Wolf*  
PROWESS



risks will face difficulties. Every dangerous risk requires that you test your Courage. If you are successful, your character receives bonus dice. If unsuccessful, your character's dice are penalized.

## *Fox's Beauty*

Beauty represents your character's creativity, expression, and natural charm. Whenever your character embarks on a creative endeavor, his Beauty determines his ability to create works that resonate.

If you choose **Beauty** as one of your **Virtues**, you're character knows and understands the finer points of sophistication and culture. He can debate, paint, sculpt, write music and plays, or conduct an orchestra.

**If you do not choose Beauty**, your character does not care for the finer parts of culture—probably because he does not understand them. He cannot interpret poetry, appreciate music, or enjoy the subtle nuances of any of the Arts.

A ven without any sense of Beauty will find great difficulty with Romance, Art and other vital elements in the game. You may want to take a few Aspects to compensate for your weakness.



## *Serpent's Wisdom*

A character's Wisdom represents his memory and learning ability. When you have to recall facts or memorize charts, you call upon your Wisdom.

**If you choose Wisdom as one of your Virtues**, the amount of information you carry is immense. You know something about everything and can talk for hours about even the most trivial matters.

**If you do not choose Wisdom**, your character is very naive about the world around him. He won't be able to draw on any experiences, won't know what berries are poisonous, and has problems making change between the different currencies.

Without Wisdom, you cannot define elements of the world. Wisdom is the key trait to knowing Shanri's secrets. If you want your character to know *anything* about the ven and their world, you must have Wisdom.

## *Wolf's Prowess*

Prowess reflects your character's martial training. Using weapons, surviving on a battlefield, understanding strategy and tactics all fall under the purview of Prowess.

**If you choose Prowess as one of your hero's Virtues**, a sword feels like a natural extension of his body. He will dodge deadly blows, maneuver through battlefields, and understand the philosophy of warfare.

**If you do not choose Prowess**, your character has never even been in a fight, let alone held a sword. He cannot stand on his own against a trained opponent and will likely break at the first sign of danger.

Without Prowess, your character will lose every fight. He'll be helpless. No hope. No chance. Get yourself a bodyguard or buy up some "fighting Aspects" to compensate. Otherwise, you'll be nothing more than a tool in a world of weapons.

# ASPECTS

**A** SPECTS ARE WORDS, PHRASES OR EVEN QUOTES THAT HELP DEFINE YOUR CHARACTER. THEY ARE THE KEYWORDS YOU USE TO DESCRIBE NOT ONLY WHO YOUR CHARACTER IS, BUT WHAT YOUR CHARACTER *MEANS*. ASPECTS CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GOOD CHARACTER AND A GREAT CHARACTER.

Start by thinking about who your character is. A ven noble. What makes your character unique from the others you'll meet? What makes you stand apart?

If you had only two things to say about your character—and each had to be summed up in five words or less—what would those two things be? That's a good way to start thinking about Aspects. And remember, an Aspect can be a single word, a couple of words, a phrase, an item, or even a quote.

For this demo, I've provided each character with two Aspects. Each Aspect has two elements: an Invoke and a Compel.

When you *invoke* an Aspect, you gain bonus dice. This is good.

Anyone—you, the Narrator, another player—can *compel* your Aspect. This makes your character act a certain way.

Read through the Aspect descriptions below for details on each Aspect.

## *Academy Educated*

The ven celebrate all intellectual endeavors, and in their academies, students are taught the seven great Arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. With this knowledge, they create haunting poetry, heartbreaking Operas, and tragic plays.

Of course, they also use this knowledge to study the universe around them, calculating the distance of stars, forecasting weather, and inventing tools to help them in their daily lives. Art is the beginning of understanding, the first step on the road to Wisdom.

**Invoke:** Invoke this Aspect when your knowledge of Shanri is called upon.

**Compel:** Another player or the Narrator can use this Compel to force your character to be fascinated by the unknown; eager to learn.

## *Athlete*

Physical training is part of any young noble's life. In fact, it nearly dominates every moment of his life. The mind must be rigorously trained, but so must the body if he is to survive the life awaiting him in court. He is taught gymnastics and calisthenics to keep his body physically fit, trains in long distance running, sprinting and climbing. A whole body is the perfect complement to a sophisticated mind.

**Invoke:** When making physical risks involving tumbling, jumping, etc.

**Compel:** Another player or the Narrator can use this Compel to force your character to be competitive.

## *Court Scholar*

The world is full of danger. Shanri, “the Enemy.” She has no mercy for her children. You know the wicked ways of the world. You know its secrets, its strengths and its weaknesses.

**Invoke:** Invoke this Aspect when you want to know something about the world of Shanri.

**Compel:** Another player or the Narrator can use this Aspect to compel your character to further his knowledge... regardless of safety to his person.

## *It's Only Fear*

Nothing can shake your Courage. Nothing

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when your Courage is tested. Invoking this Aspect gets you 3 bonus dice.

**Compel:** You don't back down from any kind of challenge. Physical, social or mental.

## *Loyal*

The loyalty you hold to others inspires songs and stories. Such loyalty will be remembered long after you are gone... either with admiration or snickers.

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when your loyalty to your friends and family is tested. Invoking this Aspect gets you 3 bonus dice.

**Compel:** Another player (or the Narrator) can compel this Aspect to make you protect or defend those you have sworn loyalty to, regardless of your own personal safety.

## *Maid/Valet*

Every noble has a maid or valet to assist with mundane matters, but yours is more competent than most. So competent, in fact, you sometimes suspect if there's more to this humble servant than first appears...

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when you want to overhear conversations or spy on secret meetings without being noticed.

**Compel:** Your servant is very useful and must be protected. Another player (or the Narrator) can compel this Aspect to make you protect your Maid/Valet.

## *Master Spy*

Your character is particularly good at espionage. Being where he should not be without leaving a trace. You are probably employed by another noble to serve as the “quiet hand.” You have a silent footprint and seem to blend into the shadows as if they knew your name.

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when you want to move without being seen or overhear a conversation you weren't supposed to overhear.

**Compel:** Another player (or the Narrator) can compel this Aspect to make you avoid confrontations and step behind those who better handle matters of the Sword.

## *My Mother's Diaries*

Before she left your life, your mother showed you a secret panel containing all her diaries. Each page drips with knowledge; information on all the noble families and their secrets.

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when you want to know secrets and scandals every noble family wants to keep hidden.

**Compel:** You must complete a diary of your own for your children. Another player (or the Narrator) can compel this Aspect to make you pursue secrets.

## *The Road is My Home*

Outside the city, Shanri is waiting. Waiting with claws and teeth and wily eyes. To travel outside the protection of the city requires a specific knowledge, a specific set of skills. Hunting, trapping, moving through the wilderness without leaving a trace. These are the skills of the Road. And without them, you might as well stay home.

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when you want to know how to get from here to there.

**Compel:** "I've stayed here too long." Another player can use this Aspect to compel you to wander away from dull and boring situations.

Outside the city, Shanri is waiting. Waiting with claws and teeth and wily eyes. To travel outside the protection of the city requires a specific knowledge, a specific set of skills. Hunting, trapping, moving through the wilderness without leaving a trace. These are the skills of the Road. And without them, you might as well stay home.

## *Smoldering Glare*

You have that look. You know what I mean. The look that melts hearts and makes knees weak. You know you have it and you know how to use it. A dangerous weapon. One that must be used with caution and cunning.

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when you want to seduce another character.

**Compel:** You enjoy the game too much. Another player can compel this Aspect to force your character to try seducing another character... just to see if you can.

## *Swordsmen*

The ven recognize only one weapon that is noble enough to be held by the Blooded hand: the Sword. Swordsmen (*senvu*: dancing with the Sword) are those who carry the weapon on their hips. In ven culture, if you aren't wearing a Sword, you cannot be challenged to a duel... but you also can't take offense to any insult. Does your character wear a Sword?

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when using a Sword.

**Compel:** This Aspect gives you a particular code of honor. Your code of honor means you cannot decline a challenge.

## *Well-Mannered*

You want your character to be trained in handling sticky social situations. Handling sticky social situations is a bit vague. I mean, just about any situation could be interpreted as a sticky social situation, so we have to be a bit more specific. In this case, the player decides "knowing my manners" is a good definition for this Aspect.

**Invoke:** You invoke this Aspect when you want to know the right thing to do at the right time. Invoking this Aspect gets you 3 bonus dice.

**Compel:** Another player (or the Narrator) can compel this Aspect to make you act according to the rules of culture and etiquette.



# BLESSINGS & SORCERY

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Some characters have Sorcery & Blessings. Check your character sheet to see if your character has one or both. Each is listed with its own rules.

Blessings are given by the *suaven*: the sleeping ghosts of your ancestors. Sorcerous Rituals are learned from the forbidden texts of the long lost sorcerer-kings.

Blessings are honorable. Sorcery is illegal. You may use your Blessing in public, but make sure nobody sees you use Sorcery. Only those you trust the most.

You may use each Blessing or Ritual once this adventure. Read the rules for the Blessings and Rituals on your sheet and use them when you need them. Remember: you only get to use each Blessing or Ritual once.

## VASSALS

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Your character also has Vassals: people who help him do his job. For this adventure, you have two Vassals with you. Look at your character sheet to see your Vassals and what they can do for you.

# STYLE POINTS

**F**INALLY, YOUR CHARACTER STARTS THE GAME WITH 3 STYLE POINTS. STYLE IS VERY IMPORTANT: IT MAKES EVERYTHING ON YOUR CHARACTER SHEET WORK AND ALLOWS YOU TO CHANGE THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE GAME.

## *Earning Style*

For the ven, flamboyance and panache is everything. Grace under pressure. Pomposity and presumptuousness. In a word: "Style."

The ven call this *sushana*, but for the sake of rules, we'll just use the English translation. Your character has Style Points. You want Style Points. As many as you can get. You earn Style with confidence and flair. By being all that you can be. By being ven.

Ven are dramatic. You get Style.

Ven don't read other game books at the game table. You get no Style.

Ven are tragic. You get Style.

Ven don't answer their cell phones during the game. You get no Style.

Ven fall in love. You get Style.

Ven don't argue about rules with the Narrator. You get no Style.

Ven declare duels at the drop of a hat. You get Style.

... I think you get the point.

## *Banking Style*

You may not have more than five Style Points. Any excess Style Points you earn are discarded. Spend 'em while you got 'em!

## *Using Style*

You can spend your Style Points for the following effects:

You can only invoke any Aspect once per game session. To refresh your Aspect, you must spend a Style.

You can spend a Style Point to add one element to a risk. I'll show you how to do that under the Risk section, below.

If you want to use a Blessing (see those just below), you have to spend a Style Point.

If you make a verbal mistake, you can spend a Style Point to retract it.

If you want to give another player advice or suggest a strategy, you can invoke the Kibitz Rule: spend a Style Point and tell them what you want them to know.

You may compel another character's Aspect, forcing him to act in a particular way.

You may spend a Style Point to add an element to a scene. Add a waterfall to a forest scene, add a sword on the wall, add a flaming torch to a dungeon corridor, or whatever single element you wish to add to the scene.

# NAMES

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**N**OW FOR THE FINAL DETAIL: THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MAKE YOUR CHARACTER DISTINCT AND UNIQUE. THESE ARE YOUR CHARACTER'S NAMES.

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First, we have your Family Name. Your House determines this.

If you were born under the shadow of the Bear, your Family Name is **Burghe**.

If you were born under the shadow of the Elk, your Family Name is **Steele**.

If you were born under the shadow of the Falcon, your Family Name is **Thorne**.

If you were born under the shadow of the Fox, your Family Name is **Yvarai**.

If you were born under the shadow of the Serpent, your Family Name is **Mwrr**.

If you were born under the shadow of the Wolf, your Family Name is **Adrente**.

Next, we have your Public Name. This is the Name everyone knows you by. You probably noticed it has a meaning. Remember that meaning because it will be important when you want your character to take risks.

Finally, we have your Secret Name. This is the Name your mother whispered in your ear after you were born. This is the Name you must make sure *nobody* ever learns. Again, it's important for risks. Remember that for later, too.

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## Yvarai and Mwrr

*We don't know how the ven pronounced these Names, but scholars suggest they were probably pronounced **ee-vabr-ay** and **moor**. Obviously, these are peculiar and stand out among the other Family Names. Again, there is much speculation on why these Names are so different. While I have my own pet theories, I'll let you do your own research and come up with your own conclusions.*

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# RISKS

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**N**OW THAT YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER, LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW YOU GET THINGS DONE IN THE GAME.

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You and your friends are about to tell a story. Your characters are the protagonists (and antagonists) in the story, so your decisions dictate which way the story goes. When the players disagree about which way the story goes or if a character's action is risky, you roll dice. I call this a risk.

## *Rolling Dice*

In order to take a risk, you must roll dice. To gather dice, take a look at your character sheet. You see those Virtues and Aspects? That's where your dice come from.

When you are about to take a risk, ask yourself, "What Virtue is most appropriate?" Is it Strength? Courage? Beauty? Find the appropriate Virtue and take a number of dice equal to your character's rank in that Virtue.

For example, if your character wants to lift something heavy, Strength is the appropriate Virtue. Take a number of dice equal to your character's rank in Strength. In this case, let's assume his Strength is rank 3. That gives him three dice for this risk. Not a lot, but enough to start with.

Next step. Do you have an Aspect that's appropriate to the risk? If so, you may *invoke* that Aspect to gain three dice for your risk. Just three: no more and no less.

For example, your character still wants to lift something heavy. He has his Strength Virtue, giving him some dice. He also has the

Athlete Aspect. He *invokes* the Aspect, giving him three more dice. With his rank 3 Strength, he now has a total of six dice.

Finally, look at your Public and Secret Names. If your Public Name is appropriate to the risk—if the meaning fits the theme of the risk—you may say it out loud ("I am \_\_\_\_\_!") and you gain one more die for the risk.

If your Secret Name is appropriate to the risk, you may say it out loud ("I am \_\_\_\_\_!") and gain *two* dice. That's a total of three dice if you use both your Public and Secret Name. Unfortunately, if you use your Secret Name, anyone in the area knows what it is. And they can use it against you.

In this case, let's say neither your Public Name nor your Secret Name are appropriate to the risk. You don't get any dice from those two sources. That gives you six dice to roll. Three from your Virtue and three from your Aspect. Okay, but what do you do with them?

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## *Refreshing Aspects*

*You may only invoke an Aspect once per game session. That's it. If you want to use it again, you have to refresh the Aspect by spending a Style Point. If you don't have any Style Points and you've already used all your Aspects, you have to earn a Style Point or two before you can refresh any Aspects.*

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## Privilege

Okay, you've got your dice. Now, how do you roll? Just roll them on the table and add them up. There are two outcomes:

*If your total is less than 10, the Narrator tells you how your character succeeded or failed.*

*If your total is 10 or higher, you tell the Narrator (and the rest of the players) how your character succeeded or failed.*

If your roll is ten or higher, you have *privilege*. This allows you to narrate the outcome of your risk. You get to say how and why your character succeeds or fails. That's right: you can decide your character fails at a risk, but you can say how it happens. After all, failure doesn't always lead to defeat. Sometimes in stories, failure is a "happy accident." It causes something else to happen, leading to victory for the hero.

If your roll is nine or less, the Narrator has *privilege*. This allows the Narrator

to describe the success or failure of your risk. Again, the Narrator can say your character succeeded, but did so in such a way that it leads to his eventual defeat.

Privilege allows you to say *one thing*. That is, you can say how your character succeeds or fails. You cannot add any further details: just success or failure. If you want the ability to add more details, you have to use a *wager*.

## Wagers

With wagers, you can add details to your description of the risk's failure or success. You make wagers *before* you roll dice. In order to make a wager, you must set aside some of the dice you are about to roll. Each die you set aside counts as one wager. The more dice you set aside, the less likely you are to beat a 10, and the more likely you are to lose privilege.

But if you make a wager or two and beat the 10, each wager you made before the roll allows you to use one "and..." You may give

one additional detail to the outcome of your risk.

For example, with six dice for a Strength wager, you can easily lift that something heavy. Six dice will roll (on average) between an 18 and 22. Sometimes higher, sometimes lower, but your chances are very good. You decide to set aside one of those dice for a wager. Now, when you roll and beat the ten (it

really doesn't matter how much higher you beat it by), you can say, "I lift the heavy chair over my head!" Because you have a wager, you can also say, "And I throw it across the room!" or "And I crush it in my grip!" or "And I bash it through the door!" or just about anything else your devious little mind can summon.

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## Bad Form

*When someone takes an action or says something that breaks the highly structured ven code of conduct, it is said they have "bad form."*

*Bad form is not good. It costs you a Style Point. Both players and characters can be guilty of bad form. Insulting a Count for no good reason: bad form. Insulting a Count because he's been sleeping with your wife and bragging about it? Shows Courage. Good form.*

*Arguing with the Narrator about rules, reading other game books at the table and talking on your cell phone during the game? Bad form. (Picking up your cell phone because your wife is on the way to the hospital to deliver a baby? We can forgive that.)*

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## Contested Risks

If you take a risk on your own, you just have to beat a 10. However, if you want to take a risk *against another character*, that's a little more difficult.

Use a *contested risk* when your character and another character *both* want the same thing. You both gather dice (from Virtues and Aspects), you both make wagers and you both roll. Whoever rolls higher gains privilege.

### Three Steps

First, each of you gathers dice. You announce how many dice you gain from your Virtues and your Aspects. If the appropriate Virtue is your *weakness*, you must say so. If you do not have an appropriate Aspect, you must say so. Announce how many dice you have *before* you make wagers.

Second, each player makes wagers... but you do so *in secret*. Hide your dice from your enemy—and make no mistake, he *is* your enemy; he wants the same thing you want which makes him your enemy—and make your wagers in secret. Then, at the same time, reveal your wagers.

Third, roll your dice. Whoever rolls highest gains privilege and the loser keeps only half his wagers, rounded up. If you made one wager, you get to keep it. If you made two wagers, you only keep one. If you made three wagers, you get to keep two. The winner keeps *all* his wagers.

Now, a complication. If either player does not roll at least a ten, that player loses *all* his wagers. If both players don't beat the 10, the Narrator tells them the outcome of the risk.

### Privilege & Spending Wagers

The loser only gets to keep half his wagers rounded up, but he still gets to use them.

Here's how.

The winner has privilege. He gets to narrate the outcome of the risk: who won and how. He then gets to say who spends the first wager. He may choose to spend his first wager or he can nominate the loser to spend his first wager.

After the first wager is spent, the second wager gets spent by the opposing player. That is, if the winner decides he gets to spend his

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### Spend Wagers for Style!

*Got extra wagers you don't know what to do with? That's okay. You may, if you choose, spend two wagers to get one Style Point.*

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first wager, the loser then spends his first wager. The winner then spends his second wager and the loser spends his second wager. It goes on like that until nobody has wagers to spend.

### More Than Two

If you have more than two characters competing for the same goal, follow the exact same instructions above. Everyone gathers dice. Everyone makes secret wagers. Everyone rolls.

The player who rolls highest has privilege. Everyone else is a loser and can only keep half their wagers, rounded up. The winner gets to say who spends their first wager and the sequence goes around the table clockwise with each player spending wagers as they see fit.

### Cooperation vs. Competition

If two or more characters are working together for the same goal, use the contested risk rules. Everyone gathers dice, everyone makes secret wagers, everyone rolls. The winner gets privilege and all of his wagers and the losers only keep half. Then, everyone gets to spend their wagers, one by one, going clockwise around the table.

# VIOLENCE

A SPECIAL KIND OF CONTESTED RISK IS ONE THAT INVOLVES VIOLENCE: THE RESULTS OF WHICH CAN BE DEADLY. BECAUSE *HOUSES OF THE BLOODED* IS A GAME THAT TRIES TO SIMULATE VEN LITERATURE (THEATER, OPERA AND LITERATURE), WE HANDLE VIOLENCE IN A HIGHLY SPECIALIZED WAY. HERE'S HOW IT WORKS.

There are two methods for handling violence. The first is the traditional ven way: *the duel*. The second is the barbaric, unsophisticated, uncivilized way. The ork way. That's *mass murder*.

## *The Duel*

When a ven noble has been wronged, he has the right to seek retribution. The ven word for this is *vrete*. The sacred and holy right of Revenge.

You may only seek Revenge if you have been Insulted or Injured. An Insult is a sincere attempt to defame your character. Not witty banter, not playful jest, but an earnest and forthright Insult. (Thus the difference between Insult and insult.)

If you feel you've been insulted, challenge you must declare so openly. The three highest ranking nobles present meet and decide among themselves if you deserve Revenge. You may make a plea—and your opponent may do the same—and then this Jury of Peers decides if an Insult has been made. They also decide what manner of duel will be fought: a "ladies' duel" (first touch), a bleeding duel (first blood), or even to the death. Typically, a duel inspired by Insult is a bleeding duel. The Jury of Peers also usually sets out a *cost* for the duel: the price the loser must pay. This is most often

an apology, although it could also be some sort of monetary settlement as well.

An Injury, on the other hand, is a sincere attempt to cause physical harm to your character. The ven define "physical harm" rather liberally, by the way. You stole from my castle? Injury. You slept with my wife? Injury. You robbed my son of his rightful inheritance? Injury. This is more than just breaking someone's jaw.

Remember, Injury is a *deliberate* attempt to cause harm. Accidental injuries fall more in the line of Insult: "Your carelessness and recklessness demonstrate your lack of respect for me, sir."

A duel declared under the shadow of Injury is almost always at least a bleeding duel and sometimes a duel to the Injury (until one opponent can no longer fight).

There is a third kind of duel. A duel to the death. The ven reserve this duel for only the most extreme cause: *true pain*. A deliberate attempt to cause both Insult and Injury. "When the plan has been given poetry."

*Vrentae*. The Hate. The Old Tongue. A red spirit possesses the Heart. Hungry. It can only dine on retribution. To satisfy the Hate, one must undertake High Revenge.

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## The Seven Laws

*All of ven Law springs from the Code of Jonan Drax. When the Empire of the sorcerer-kings fell, he was among those who dug the ven from under the ruins. He and his seven rajan (the word best translates to “holy warrior,” or “paladin”) gathered the ven together and built the beginnings of ven society.*

*His Code—a philosophy his followers embraced—was adopted by the early Senate as a standard for the Law. All ven follow his Code. Or, at the very least, pretend to.*

### The First Law: The Law Binds All

*No ven is above the Law. This is the First Law, reminding proud, vain ven that no matter what their cunning, plots or rank, no ven may claim immunity to the Laws Jonan Drax gave.*

### The Second Law: No Ven May Commit Murder

*Killing another ven is the most foul act a ven can commit. The Second Law deals with this. Remember; the ven don’t believe in souls. Murdering another is robbing that ven of Solace and whatever may follow. This is the greatest crime.*

### The Third Law: What You Own is Yours

*The ven tradition of ownership is pretty simple. If you own it, it is yours. Even if you just took it from another ven’s hands. If he did not want it, he wouldn’t have given it to you. This also creates a complication in issues of trust. “Hold this for me,” carries a whole new set of connotations now, doesn’t it?*

### The Fourth Law: You Own Your Promises

*The Fourth Law seems to be a follow-up on the Third. The ven are very careful about making a promise. Unlike our own culture, “being a flake” is a crime.*

*If a ven does not say the words “I promise,” he is not bound by anything else he says.*

### The Fifth Law: No Ven Will Practice Sorcery

*The Fifth Law is the one the ven ignore. All of them. Well, nearly all. There are a few exceptions in the literature, but otherwise, nearly every ven breaks this Law.*

### The Sixth Law: No Ven Will Make War

*Again, as evidenced by what we know of ven history, the Fifth Law was something the ven did not truly respect. They voiced respect for the Law, but in practice, secret armies are everywhere. Most Dukes keep secret armies to raid the fields and farms of their enemies.*

### The Seventh Law: Let the Punishment Fit the Crime

*Finally, the Seventh Law, giving the ven a guide for setting punishment for those who break the other six. Like everything else in their lives, the punishment must be appropriate.*



This is not analogy or allegory. The ven believe the magic of their Blood creates a spirit that swims through them, poisoning all it touches. They grow ill. They cannot eat. They cannot sleep. Consumed by Hate, action must be taken.

Hate. The sickness that can only be cured by the cause.

## Gaming the Duel

Now that you know *why* duels are fought, let's you and me talk about *how* they are fought.

### Quick, but Important Note

This system is used for any violence between two individuals. Even if the situation is an ambush, if two individuals face each other, use the dueling system below. For violence between three or more ven (and/or orks), use *Mass Murder*, below.

### Beats

First, a duel is fought in a series of *beats*. Each beat, one of the duelists is the *aggressor* and the other is the *defender*. The duelists trade back and forth... unless a switch in momentum occurs. A Maneuver striking the opponent off guard. We'll get to that later. First, let's go through the duel step-by-step.

### Step 0: Announce Intention

Like all other risks, the first thing to do is announce your intention.

If your opponent has been taken by surprise, he has no intention. He may not roll dice.

That's right. If you've surprised your opponent, he gets no dice. Right about now you want to know how to surprise your opponent, don't you? It's a contested Cunning risk.

If you've snuck up on someone and they have no clue you are there, you may start this system immediately. Your opponent may not gather dice.

### Step 1: Gather Dice

Each duelist (always and only two of them) gathers together whatever dice they can. Usually Prowess plus any Aspects the duelists can invoke and tag. Players should double check with the Narrator, as usual, for rulings on invoking and tagging Aspects that may or not be appropriate to the circumstance.

### Example

*My character, Shara, has stumbled into a duel. This is something she does not want to do. Not yet, anyway. She faces off against her opponent and I have to figure out how many dice she has.*

*Her Prowess is 3. That's three dice. Not a lot to play with. Shara also has an Aspect I want to invoke: "I know how to hurt you." The Narrator tells me that's fair. Someone is going to get hurt after all. I get three dice from my Aspect, giving me a total of 6 dice:*

*Shara's Sword also provides bonus dice. Two bonus dice, to be exact. So, I call on those bonus dice as well. Now, I have 8 dice total.*

Prowess	3
Aspect	3
Sword	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

*So, for this part of the duel, Shara and I have eight dice to play with. Okay, let's see what happens next.*

### Step 2: Strike Bid

Time to determine which duelist makes the first move. Not necessarily the most successful hit, but the first one. And sometimes, that's all you need.

With all those dice in hand, each player secretly sets aside a number of them, depending on how important it is for him to get the first strike. This is called the *Strike Bid*. Both players reveal their Strike Bid at the same time. The player who sets aside the most dice for the Strike Bid has the option to go first or second.

Dice set aside for the Strike Bid cannot be used for the rest of the beat.

### Example

*With those eight dice, it's time to figure out how important it is for me to get the first strike. I know I want to use at least four dice for the risk (to beat the 10). That leaves me two. The more dice I have, the more wagers I can make, the more Style I can get. Of course, if I lose the bid, I lose the dice. I waste the dice, in fact. Bidding dice to go second. I'd better make sure I don't do that.*

*So, I decide I'll put two dice into the Strike Bid. My opponent reveals one die. I get lucky. I get to pick whether I go first or second. I pick first. I have six dice left for the duel.*

In the event of a tie, the character with the highest Prowess goes first. If you still have a tie, each player may bid Style. Whoever bids the most Style goes first.

### Step 3: Intent

Each duelist declares his intent, starting with the duelist who won the Strike Bid. The duelists trade strikes, back and forth, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

This step starts with the first duelist declaring a risk. He states his intention clearly. "I want to stab your wrist," "I want to cut your thumb," or "I want to cut across your brow, just above the eyes." Say it loud and say it proud. No room for the timid here.

## Shara's Sword

*You'll notice that Shara's sword gives her two dice for duels. Some characters have items that give them bonus dice for specific risks. Consult your character sheet. You may have one as well.*

The first duelist declares his intent and then the second duelist responds, declaring his own intentions with clarity and pride. His intention could be "I want to parry your worthless excuse of a lunge," or "I want to bend sideways, leaving you open for a counterattack," or even "I want to spin out of the range of your blade."

The declarations are important. They set the standard for what happens next. Setting the baseline for following actions.

### Example

*Shara won the Strike Bid, so she has the option to go first. She takes it. I announce, "I want to slice your leg, just above the knee."*

*My opponent, looking to counter that, says, "I want to parry, putting your blade out of my way."*

*We've both announced our intentions. Now, it's time to see who is right and who bleeds.*

### Step 4: Risk

Both duelists make their wagers secretly. Then, each rolls their remaining dice.

Both duelists check to see if they roll at least 10. If either of them fails to roll at least a 10, the ven completely fails at her declaration. *Complete Failure.* Complete Failure means you can't use *any* of your wagers.

If both duelists succeed in rolling at least 10, see which rolled higher.

The duelist who rolled higher succeeds in his intent. He is the victor. He has Privilege. You get to use all your wagers.

The one who rolled lower is the defeated. He can only use half his wagers, round up.

So, again.

If you didn't roll 10 or better, you have Complete Failure. No wagers.

If you roll 10 or better, and you roll better than your opponent, you are the victor and have Privilege. You get to use all your wagers.

If you roll 10 or better, and you roll less than your opponent, you are the defeated. You get to use only half your wagers, rounded up.

### *Step 5: Consequences*

This is when the bleeding happens.

A successful attack means the victor may apply all his wagers against the defeated who may only use half his wagers, rounded up.

In some cases, the victor may be the defender. If the defender rolls higher than the attacker, the defender gets all his wagers and the attacker only gets half of hers.

Whoever rolls higher is the victor and he gains Privilege.

**If the attacker is the victor**, he has Privilege and may use the Injure Maneuver against his opponent. Or, he may not. He has privilege, so he may decide his attack fails. He may also throw his wagers into the attack, adding one rank of Injury for every wager.

Success equals a rank 1 Injury. You may also apply any and all wagers you made against the defender. Each additional wager adds to the rank of the Injury.

**If the defender is the victor**, he has Privilege and has successfully stopped the attacker from causing an Injury. Or, he may not. Because he has privilege, he decides what actually happens. He may choose to take the Injury.

### *Follow-Through*

After a successful attack or defend, whoever has Privilege has the first opportunity to spend

wagers. Each wager spent in a duel increase the Injury rank of a successful strike. Even if you fail to strike your opponent, you can still spend your wagers for Style Points. Even when the ven fail, they look good doing it.

Remember, the *victor* has Privilege. He says whether or not the attack was successful and he decides who spends their first wager.

### *Injury*

The ven get hurt, just like us. They feel pain, just like us. They die from Injury, just like us. The ven are just a little tougher, that's all. But they can still be killed. Just takes a little more effort.

When your character takes an Injury, that Injury has a rank. The rank indicates how severe the Injury is. You can have multiple Injuries. A cut above the eyes, a sprained ankle, even a missing hand.

Injury 1 and Injury 2 are *flesh wounds*. A sliver of pain. Just a distraction. Any Injury 1 or 2 heals in an equal number of days. Rank 1 and rank 2 Injuries both heal one rank per day. The next morning, a rank 2 Injury becomes a rank 1 Injury and a rank 1 Injury heals completely.

Injury 3 and Injury 4 are *crippling wounds*. A deep, piercing wound through the chest. A missing digit. An ear torn from the side of the head. A blinded eye. Rank 3 and 4 Injuries heal one rank per Season. At the beginning of next Season, a rank 3 Injury becomes a rank 2 Injury, a rank 2 Injury becomes a rank 1 Injury, and a rank 1 Injury heals completely.

Injury 5 is a *mortal wound*. Any ven who takes an Injury 5 is automatically knocked to the ground, helpless. He cannot protect himself. A single action by a ruthless enemy will kill him. A ven with a mortal wound is helpless for the rest of the adventure. The character can take

no risk without spending a Style Point. He may still take actions, but no risks.

Now, this is important. *You never lose dice because of Injury.* Your opponent can tag an Injury for bonus dice, but you always get your full pool of dice whenever you take a risk.

The ven are just that tough.

However, an enemy can spend a Style Point and “tag” your Injury, giving him a number of bonus dice against you equal to your Injury’s rank. So, if you give an enemy a rank 3 Injury, the next time you roll dice against him, you can spend a Style Point and gain 3 bonus dice for the risk.

## Mass Murder

Finally, let us speak of the most vulgar kind of violence. A desperate kind of violence reserved for those without character, class or Courage. Those who do not have the sophistication or Cunning to understand that violence is an Art. Those who deserve nothing less than drowning in a pool of ork Blood.

A mass of bodies throwing violence at each other. Iron and muscle, sweat and blood. Clamor and alarum. And in the end, there will be bodies bleeding their lives away.

This is *Sblwb’vennan*. Mass Murder..

Whenever groups of ven need to settle their differences with violence—anywhere from five to twenty-five to twenty-five thousand to fifty thousand ven—the Narrator calls for the Mass Murder rules.

Mass Murder handles any acts of violence that are not duels. If you have three combatants,

## Orks

*Our own word “monster” carries a lot of weight. You could be talking about a vampire, werewolf or some unspeakable horror no language can communicate. “Monster.” It can mean almost anything.*

*The ven word for “monster” is ork. (The Old English language inherited this word from the ven.) For the ven, it means “not ven.” So, anything that is not ven is “ork.” Ork could mean a vampire, werewolf or some unspeakable horror no language can communicate. “Ork.” It can mean almost anything. Including the act of ganging up on a single combatant. Ven perform violence in a ritualistic, respectful manner. Orks gang up and murder you.*

*Thus, the Mass Murder rules are used for such “ork behavior.”*

use Mass Murder. If you have three thirty, use Mass Murder. If you have three thousand, use Mass Murder.

Mass murder is just one big contested risk. Everyone follows the same steps.

### 1) Pick a Side

Everybody picks a side. Us vs. Them. Us vs. Them vs. Them vs. Them.

You may choose “Me” as a side. Good luck.

### 2) Pick a Leader

Each side picks a Leader.

### 3) Gather Advantage

Now, we gather dice. Each side gets a pool of dice. Only the Leader can add his Name, Prowess, aspects, etc. Each additional ven on his side adds one die. That’s it. Just one die.

Vassal Bands—such as your Spy Network, Personal Guard and Roadmen—add one die per rank. Thus, a rank 3 Personal Guard adds three dice, a rank 2 Spy Network adds two dice, etc.

### 4) Wagers

When the Leaders have their total dice, each



Leader secretly makes wagers.

### 5) Roll

All Leaders roll.

The victor (whoever rolled highest) keeps all his wagers.

The defeated (every side who rolled lesser than the victor, including sides who may be allied with the victor) lose half their wagers.

### 6) Murder

The victor goes first.

- a) He selects one ven on his side,
- b) spends a wager, and
- c) gives a rank 5 Injury to any ven or ork involved in the fight scene. Even one on his own side.

Each ven on each side may only act once. That is, the Leader cannot spend a wager and have you attack one enemy, then spend a second wager and have you attack another. The only circumstance you *can* attack twice is in the circumstance of a Suaven Blessing. Specifically, a Wolf suaven Blessing, "Teeth and Claws."

### 7) End of the Scene

When all the wagers are spent, the scene is over. Any side has the opportunity to surrender. The surrender may be accepted or denied. If accepted, that side is removed from the scene. If denied, they must continue to participate.

Ven with rank 5 Injuries are one step away from death. A single action kills them. Not even a risk. Just an action. Any Leader may spend a wager to murder that ven.

If any side does not surrender, go back to Step 1 and start over again. If a character cannot contribute to the scene (she has a rank 5 Injury), she cannot contribute a die to the Leader.

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### Courage Risks

*Make a Courage risk (Virtue + Aspect) before you confront something supernatural or potentially fatal. If you do not gain privilege (roll 10 or higher), you have to spend one wager for Fear for every risk against the danger. If you gain privilege, you add one die per wager you made to any risk involving the potential danger.*

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# END OF PLAYER SECTION

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You now know everything you need. The rest of this section is for the Narrator. If you are a player, read no further!

# NARRATOR SECTION

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**A**S YOU MAY HAVE GATHERED FROM THE TITLE, THIS CHAPTER IS FOR THE NARRATOR. PLAYERS CAN READ IT IF THEY WISH — THERE ARE NO METAPLOT SECRETS OR SPOILERS — BUT READING THIS CHAPTER IS A LOT LIKE LEARNING HOW A MAGIC TRICK WORKS.

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And trust me, learning how a trick works is a lot less sexy than watching the trick as a sucker sitting in the audience. In the audience, everything appears effortless. Magic. Once you know about the trap door in the floor or the marked cards or the slight hand gesture that hides the bird from plain sight... trust me, knowing how the trick works isn't as cool as it sounds.

After all, a Narrator is a kind of magician. Magicians create something out of nothing. Pulling rabbits out of hats, making beautiful assistants appear and disappear, pulling your card out of a deck of 52. Creating something from nothing.

Shanri and the ven are gone, but if the Narrator does his job, he'll convince you that your character *does* exist. To pull emotions out of you from pure fiction.

When you feel the ork's hot breath on your face.

When you feel the passion of Revenge bursting your heart.

When you feel the cool mist of the Shanri jungles.

Magician. Making something from nothing.

The ven called this *altrua*. (Do not believe scholars who say this is

the true root of the word "altruism" or "truth.") They're talking out of their hats.) The best translation for this word is the Greek *patbos*.

In a dark theater, watching the hero on the screen, and you feel his pain as your own.

Watching the TV, feeling the heroine's heart break, the pain as real as your own.

Reading the novel, the suspense in the detective's chest, pounding as hard as your own.

*Altrua. Patbos.*

This is the Narrator's primary goal. To make the players feel what the characters feel. What they see. What they smell. A hint of danger. That whiff of scented hair. The taste of the wine. The bliss of new love. The cut of steel against flesh.

All of these things are possible. Something from nothing.

Magic.

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## "When do I give out Style Points?"

*Give out Style Points whenever a player acts in a typically ven fashion. When he makes mistakes because of his pride, when he pimps and preens, when he refuses to back down when his honor is questioned, when he schemes against his best beloved ally for little bit of power or land. All of this behavior deserves Style Points.*

*Also give out Style Points when a player—rather than a character—contributes to the game in a positive way. When he assists another player with a rule question so the game isn't interrupted, when he explains a small bit of ven culture, when he brings a new player to the game, when he brings the Narrator a Coke (always a good idea around my house). Style Points encourage players and characters to act in ways that help the story, the game and their fellow players. When a player goes out of his way to do good, give him a Style Point.*

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# ROSES & THORNS: A SAMPLE ADVENTURE

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I WROTE THIS “SAMPLE ADVENTURE” TO SHOW HOW THE *HOUSES OF THE BLOODED* GAME WORKS FOR BOTH THE PLAYERS AND THE NARRATOR. I DREW IT FROM ONE OF MY FAVORITE PILLOW BOOKS: SHARA YVARAI, THE FAMOUS CHARACTER FROM VEN LITERATURE, IS THROWING A PARTY. YOUR VEN SHOW UP LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITY. OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE NEW CONTACTS, OPPORTUNITY TO TRADE, OPPORTUNITY TO CAUSE TROUBLE.

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Of course, Shara’s party is anything but typical. A whole series of events happen, throwing her young life into absolute turmoil.

Shara wouldn’t have it any other way.

The party takes place in Shara’s puzzle house: an old relic her father fought for long ago. Accepting the invitation to Shara’s party means each ven attending must bring a gift. Make sure your players spend a few moments thinking about what kind of gifts they want to bring. Some players may want to make Wisdom risks to know what the best kind of gifts they should bring. See Shara’s detailed description below for further advice on what to bring.

I’ve drawn this adventure from the first Shara pillow book. If any of your players have already read it, don’t worry, you can still throw them off balance. Set up their expectations and dash them with hidden secrets. Besides, the other players will probably do your work for you as they make Wisdom risks and spend style points.

## *The Set-Up*

When I run *Houses* at conventions, I bring a few notes with me, but in general, I allow the players to define the terms. Here’s how I do it.

First, we go through the process of making characters. I encourage the players to make characters with connections. The nobles have all participated in a ritual called “the Blood Contract.” This ritual binds them together in a magical vow preventing them from betraying each other. You can find it in a sidebar nearby.

Second, I give them the outline of the story. For “Roses & Thorns,” I tell them this:

*Young, beautiful and dangerous. Shara Yvarai’s coming out party is an opportunity for Romance, trade, Contracts... and murder. Your Count (or Countess) wants a Contract with Shara. Convince the young baroness to sign a Contract of servitude.*

Then, I have everyone make a Wisdom risk. This is a contested risk, so only the victor gets to use all his wagers. If I feel merciful (the ven word translates to “weak”), I give those with a Wisdom weakness a free wager. The result of the risk is “What do you know about the circumstances of the story?”

For “Roses & Thorns,” the question usually hinges on Shara, her party, the Count (or Countess). Because I do not determine the identity of the Count/Countess, the players can use their wagers to determine the gender/identity of the character and his/her motivations.

I’m not trying to be clever with the ambiguity of gender. By not identifying the PCs’ superior in any way, they are free to say anything they want. The wagers they make give them that opportunity.

Because the players define the important elements of the story, every time I run the game, it is a completely different game. To show you what I mean, here are a few examples of how wagers determined different circumstances.

### *Defining Circumstances*

I gave the players this information:

Shara is throwing a party.

She’s Blooded of the Fox, but her mother was a Wolf.

Your Count/Countess wants Shara as a vassal.

The players gave me this information (each point is a different wager):

*Our Countess is blind*

*Shara is the one who blinded her*

*Our Countess is Blooded of the Wolf*

*Our Countess has many enemies*

## **The Blood Oath**

*This ritual is one of the most ubiquitous in ven literature. A piece of parchment, a cup, a knife, a quill. Words are written on the parchment.*

*Powerful words. Promises. Punishments.*

*All provide blood for the cup, dipping the quill and signing their names. All ven who sign receive a rank 3 Injury. The Injury must be made with an Orichalcum knife.*

*All three names. Family, Public, and Secret.*

*All ven signing the Oath make a promise to abide by its edicts. They gain benefits for doing so.*

*You may spend a style point for three bonus dice if you are directly protecting another ven who signed the Oath.*

*You may spend a style point to know the emotional state of someone within your Oath. A reply of “nothing” indicates the ven is dead, and “Solace” indicates... you know.*

*You may spend a style point to know the general direction and distance of someone within your Oath.*

*While the Oath of Fellowship is a powerful tool, it also bears a heavy cost. If you ever betray any member of the circle, the Oath is broken for all of you. Also, the word “traitor” burns onto your forehead for a year and a day. Within that time, you may make no Oaths.*

*The Oath may be written in such a way that it lasts a specific amount of time or until a specific goal is reached. “The Oath expires in five years,” or “The Oath expires when we all become Dukes.”*

*Our Countess is cruel*

*Our Countess is fair*

*Shara is unmarried*

*Our Countess gives generous gifts, but always at a price*

With these facts in mind, the players embarked to woo Lady Shara. A relationship had already been established with the wagers, making their job difficult (I gave two Style to the player who made the job so hard).

Another group came up with *this* situation for the same adventure:

*Our Countess is a Serpent  
Her Name is Wren Thorne which means "to serve  
the servants"*

*If we can't recruit Shara, our Countess wants her  
killed*

*Our Countess is a sorcerer  
But she keeps that a secret  
She knows the Ritual to make twins  
She has a reputation as a lush  
But she isn't  
She keeps a close eye on her barons  
She has a financial obligation involving  
the sorcerer*

*Hush money for using the Twins Ritual*  
Again, by defining the Countess, the party  
came up with a completely different circum-  
stance for the adventure.

Finally, a third group:  
*Our Count is fond of the Sea  
He is a Wolf  
His name is Marco which means "Captain of the  
Seas."*

*He is most fond of Bejorak, Shara's uncle  
Bejorak is also the father of one of the PCs  
(making Shara a cousin)*

*Bejorak owes one of the PCs a favor  
Our Count's wife is dead  
And he's looking to make Shara into  
his wife*

*Our Count has a daughter  
"And she likes me best!"  
Our Count sent a painting as a gift  
for Shara*

By defining the Count/Countess, the players  
also defined their own goals. Kill Shara, win  
her favor, get her to fall in love with our Count.  
All of these are distinctly different goals. I  
particularly liked the mixed goal of the first  
group. They couldn't decide if they wanted to  
win Shara's favor or kill her for blinding their

Countess. The conflict made for great story  
and I rewarded them with Style.

## Story Outline

I've divided this Story into two sections. The  
first details significant NPCs at the Party and  
the second details the Events.

For the NPCs, I've listed a few details.  
Three Things that are true about each NPC  
along with some details of my own. When  
you introduce an NPC, announce these Three  
Things. This allows you to set precedent with  
the NPCs before the players get a chance to  
mold them with wagers.

As for the Events, I've also left those very  
scarce. There's really no reason to detail  
motives and machinations here. Your players  
will come up with all their own details. So, to  
begin, let's talk about the Party's hostess...

## NPCs

### *Lady Shara, Baroness of Tilvia, Blooded of the Fox*

First and foremost is the hostess herself.

Three Things about Shara:

She's carrying a beautiful (and very new)  
sword on her hip.

Calling her "bold" is like calling dry ice  
"chilly."

Her dress is ... well, it's amazing the damn  
thing stays on.

Shara knows what she wants and she isn't  
afraid to take it. Relying on the "easier to ask  
forgiveness than permission" philosophy, she  
acts almost without reflection, relying on her  
mother's diaries as a guide to her actions.

She flirts with everyone at the party, regard-  
less of gender or status. Men, women, husbands,



wives, counts, and dukes. But Shara's technique is a bit more sophisticated than most: you're never really sure if she's flirting with you or not. Her intention is to create desire but never give anyone a justification for it. It's a strange alchemical mixture: bold suggestions made through the most subtle innuendos.

Shara's behavior gets her closer to what she wants: protection for her father's lands. She wants Contacts and she's willing to sign blood contracts to get them. A contract protects her: others will protect her lands as long as she fulfills her end of the bargain. Anyone doing business with her will do what they can to make sure their investments don't go to waste.

As the hostess, Shara expects a gift from each ven attending. Although she is Blooded of the Fox, she is much more attached to her Wolf heritage. Gifts acknowledging that distinction earn guests a particular fondness from their hostess.

Shara's lands are famous for rare and exquisite spices. The pillow books invoke one of the spices: *avartha*. Scholars disagree on exactly what this spice is, although it seems to be a kind of sweet pepper. And it also seems the valleys of Shara's lands are the perfect place to grow it.

Despite what the ven may think of her, Shara does not share her favors lightly... if at all. She knows the most powerful motivator is desire. What we *want*. And the fires of *wanting* is quenched by *having*.

She is particularly distracted by the appearance of Valin Burghe. The two were childhood friends—before the tragedy that stole Valin's family from him. A new opportunity to reunite with an old crush.

## *Lord Valin Burghe, Baron of Ishnavay, Blooded of the Bear*

Three Things about Valin:

His hand seldom leaves his orichalcum sword, strapped to his belt.

He is quiet and only friendly with Shara.

A dark, shadowy figure follows his every step, whispering advice.

One of Shara's guests is the Baron of Ishnavay, Valin Burghe. The Baron is young—only twenty—and recently returned to public life under mysterious circumstances. When he was only a boy, his family was murdered by a spectre. For over a decade, the lands remained haunted; all those who dared enter the castle murdered by the creature. It was only last Season that Valin returned to his homeland and slew the spectre. Slew it with an artifact from the sorcerer-kings. An orichalcum sword.

Valin is a walking conversation piece, carrying the sword with him wherever he goes. He seems uncomfortable at the party, but his shadowy "doctor" that never leaves his side guides him through most social traps.

Anyone who pays any attention should notice Valin doesn't want to be at the party. He's here to meet with the only friend he knows. Anyone else is an annoyance until proven otherwise.

## *Lady Peacock, Duchess of Q'var, Blooded of the Fox*

Three Things about Lady Peacock:

She knows everyone.

She's surrounded by admirers.

She knows everybody's secrets, no matter how well-hidden.

"Lady Peacock" is a common character type in ven pillow books. "The Dowager Duchess."

An older, more experienced woman who guides the younger, less experienced heroine of the book.

Lady Peacock could be of great help to “little nobles” or she could be a great pain. She could even be dangerous. She’s rather flippant and doesn’t seem to take anything seriously. But, in fact, she is fiercely devoted to those who treat her with respect. She’ll even put her own reputation in danger to protect them.

### *Lady No, Countess of Ival, Blooded of the Elk*

Three Things about Lady No:

She’s a poison teddy bear.

She has three dead husbands. Currently looking for a fourth.

She has some kind of relationship with Zsanosz, Count Kether.

Lady No is small, demure, and absolutely darling. She’s also one of the deadliest guests at Shara’s party. Her three ex-husbands, all mysteriously deceased, provided her with a great deal of land, elevating her into the middle level of society. She also demonstrates all three of the villainous traits: red hair, pale skin, grey eyes.

Men don’t know whether to fear or desire her. Women don’t know whether to admire her or scorn her. All three of her husbands were stolen from other marriages. The wives mysteriously... oh, you get the picture.

Lady No is deadly. She’s also damn clever. There’s a reason she’s gotten away with so much without ever getting caught. Crossing her is a mistake. Starting a Romance with her could be the last thing you ever do.

I’d do it.

### *Count Kether, Zsanosz Yvarai, Blooded of the Fox*

Three Things about Count Kether:

He’s an honest, loyal and honorable ven.

He’s also the most ruthless bastard you’ve ever met.

He has some sort of relationship with Lady No, the Countess of Ival

He never breaks a promise. Always keeps his word. Keeps to the absolute letter of the law. And he’s the one of the most black-hearted bastards ever to grace a pillow book. Zsanosz, the Count of Kether, is an intriguing dichotomy.

Zsanosz is also good friends with the Duke of Syvala (see below) and has a “special” relationship with Lady No. Everyone knows about it, but nobody knows what it actually is or to what extent the two might protect each other... or betray each other.

While Zsanosz is Blooded of the Fox, his suaven is Jaymin Steele. And it shows. He’s willing to do anything—anything—to extend his lands. Make any promise, cut any throat. But he’ll never break his word. Never.

### *Dannin Steele, Duke of Shyvala, Blooded of the Elk*

Three Things about Duke Dannin:

He’s due to become the head of the House any Season now.

He’s spent time in the Senate trying to convince the Senators about a threat of “smart orks.”

He’s an Autumn ven, single, and every woman in the Senate wants him.

When he enters a room, all the ladies look. The walking, talking evidence that ven really do age into Beauty. Some claim he may even be the truest descendant of Jaymin Steele himself. He makes allies of his enemies and elevates his

allies. A true gentlemen, the most popular ven in the Senate. Until recently.

At the last meeting of the Senate, he spoke of an unspeakable horror. The possibility of orks organizing in his lands. He brought a spear, carved with what looked to be primitive language. He spoke of them using tactics. One of his Roadmen talked of a village. A village! What nonsense.

Of course, no-one in the Senate takes him seriously and the claims have begun to stain his reputation. The more ambitious Senators see this as an opportunity to steal the lands of a ven who seemed all but indefatigable a month ago. His allies see a ven failing in a very public way and cannot come to his aid for fear of being associated with his madness.

And that's how the majority of ven see Duke Dannin. He is approaching Solace. Perhaps the Winter Madness has come soon, clouding his mind and darkening his thoughts.

Or, perhaps he's right.

### *Lady S of the House Falcon, Blooded of the Falcon*

Courageous (Courage is her highest Virtue)

Long, brown hair

Lady S is a practical woman. She doesn't like politics and she particularly doesn't like shenanigans. Her vassals have been drawn from the unblooded she felt she could trust. This means almost all her vassals are at least a little rough around the edges. Manners isn't her primary concern, loyalty is. She won't keep secrets, so don't ask her to. In fact, she may take it as an insult.

She doesn't suffer fools. She doesn't tolerate liars. She particularly hates condescending Blooded who think they can talk down to her vassals. She's a fierce Falcon (I

made Prowess her second highest Virtue) and she'll shed blood for a friend. She doesn't have many friends.

### *Shara's Seneschal*

Three Things about Shara's Seneschal:

He's tall and creepy.

He's thin and creepy.

He's creepy.

He stands a head taller than the tallest ven. He's deep into Winter, his Solace Aspects the most prominent. His height. His brittle thinness. His smile. His damned smile. His paper skin. His chilling touch.

No ven knows his name. Every room they enter, every corridor they walk, even in the garden maze... he is there. Waiting patiently. Eager to serve. His voice, high pitched. As emaciated as his skin. His gleaming teeth.

The Seneschal seems to be a part of the puzzle house. And no-one knows his name.

Well, almost no-one.

### *Baron Xanos, Blooded of the Falcon*

Three Things about Xanos:

He carries a bow, but no sword

He looks like he slept in his clothes

He doesn't say anything unless he's spoken to. Xanos is everything you'd expect a Falcon to be. A walking, talking cliché. But, there's a slumbering storm under that calm, quite demeanor. Xanos does not tolerate the games the ven play. He knows them, he can play them himself, but he doesn't put up with them.

Xanos went native two years ago, living with the orks. He learned many of their secrets—including their language—and knows much about the ruins of the sorcerer-kings. He knows Shara's lands quite well... and yours for

that matter. In fact, he probably knows your lands better than you do.

Xanos isn't interested in being anyone's Master of the Road. He's already been there and done that. What he's looking for is something else. Two years ago, his Count was murdered and the criminal never identified. Xanos suspects his lord's wife was responsible but he has no evidence.

He has secrets, but no evidence. He'd be more than happy to trade one for the other.

### *Baroness Niassa, Blooded of the Elk*

Three Things:

Niassa is always with her Maid, Alyss  
She is Blooded of the Elk  
She is an Autumn

Baroness Niassa is a dear friend—honestly!—of Lady Peacock. The two go back a long time. Niassa is also never without Alyss: a petite, demure, harmless little girl who always seems out of place. Niassa sees Alyss as the daughter she never had and will go to great lengths to protect her. Niassa's Solace Aspect is her voice: never rising above a hushed whisper.

Niassa is quite infatuated with Duke Dannyn and will do almost anything to win his heart. Even betray him.

Young Alyss has a few secrets of her own. While looking completely harmless, Alyss is actually a Blooded and cunning spy master. Nothing escapes her notice. Because few Blooded actually pay attention to her, she is able to spy for her lady with little difficulty. She also has a deeper secret: she has Devotion for the forbidden suaven, Ikhalu. Using her illegal Blessings, she ensures Niassa's safety and security. Not even Niassa knows of her maid's secret.

## *Plots*

This section gives you a brief idea of what exactly happens at Shara's infamous Party. Like I said, if the players are familiar with the work, don't worry. They'll soon spin everything away from the "canon" of the novel. Just throw the Event at them and watch what happens.

### *Ikhalu Cult*

The Ikhalu cult is a prominent part of many blood operas. The ven fascination with Revenge makes Ikhalu an intriguing enigma: the forbidden suaven who grants the most sacred and holy gift.

The Ikhalu cult is present at the Party and they are here to murder someone. Who that is and what they want is up in the air. In the original story, the cult was at the Party to murder Duke Dannin, but just throw a nameless servant with an Ikhalu dagger into the mix and see what your players come up with.

### *Serpent Plot*

A small contingent of Serpents have shown up, accepting Shara's invitation, even though they have no reason to be here. They meet together, they speak together. They have a goal.

They want the house.

Something in Shara's puzzle house intrigues them. Perhaps it is the mysterious Seneschal. Perhaps a hidden hallway deep in the corridors. A relic. An artifact. A secret even Shara does not know.

They want the house. And they're willing to do anything to get it.

## *The Spectre*

Wandering the halls of Shara's puzzle house is dangerous. Rumors say a spectre waits for the lost. Waits to drink their blood and steal their Seasons. Whether or not the rumors are true, they provide an interesting possibility.

After all, even Shara does not know all the house's secrets...

## *The Hunt*

Shara holds a Hunt, giving her guests an opportunity to let their Swords meet the day. The orks in her nearby Forest have been giving her problems, and by letting a whole host of ven loose on the scene, she clears it of the Trouble she had been experiencing.

Of course, many things can happen on the Hunt. A stray arrow. A poisonous ork claw. A wayward kiss finding unsuspecting lips...

## *Players, Wagers & Style Points*

In many ways, running *Houses of the Blooded* is no different than running any other game. More specifically, your players will always come out of left field with some wild scheme and lay waste to your best laid plans. The difference in *Houses* is: we give them *mechanics* to do it. They use wagers and Style Points to screw things up. They'll take your best laid plans and throw them out the window... just like they do in other roleplaying games.

But you have an advantage here. *You have no plans*. You have a kind of outline and perhaps some motives, but as soon as players figure out they can assign motives and histories on their own, they'll start building the story themselves. So, what do they need a Narrator for?

They need you to throw surprises in the mix. They have to make wagers and spend Style to add details. You don't. You can make things up on your own... just as long as you don't contradict what your players have already established.

But this kind of power in the hands of the players is a good thing. It means they can tell you—right up front—exactly what they want.

When a player turns an NPC into a cousin or a former lover, it means "I want to have a relationship with that NPC." They don't have to ask you, they just do it. Same thing happens when a player spends a Style to say, "We've been enemies for a long time." The player doesn't need to spend points on an "Enemy" to add it to his character sheet, he can play the game for a few sessions, find an enemy he really hates (or loves to hate), throw down a Style Point, and *BANG!* he's got a new enemy.

Power in the players hands gives them the ability to tell you what kind of stories they want, what kind of allies they want, what kind of enemies they want. You don't have to be clever about it. You can give them *exactly* what they want *because they told what they want*.

That's the advantage of the *Houses* system: it allows the players to create characters, plots and mysteries all on their own. You aren't a "dungeon master" or a "game master." You're a Narrator: guiding the story along, working *with* the players—not against them—to make a story you all want to hear.



## *Conclusion*

You now have everything you need to run a game of *Houses of the Blooded*. If you need more, go to [www.HousesoftheBlooded.com](http://www.HousesoftheBlooded.com) where you can talk to me (the designer) and other players about their own experiences.

You're invited. Be sure to bring a gift for your host. Not bringing a gift would be Bad Form.

- JW

# Jallan Burghe, Blooded of the Bear

## Virtues

Bear  
STRENGTH



4



Elk  
CUNNING

2

Falcon  
COURAGE



3

Fox  
BEAUTY



2

Serpent  
WISDOM



0

Wolf  
PROWESS



4

## High Concept

House *Blooded of the Bear*

Family

Family Name *Burghe*

Public Name *Jallan: "Underestimated"*

Secret Name

Titles

## Devotions

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings *I Brought the Bear*

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings *No Fool*

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessing

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

## Aspects

SPRING ASPECT *Athlete*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

SPRING ASPECT *Loyal*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

## Contacts

Spring Summer Autumn Winter

## Sorcery

## Vassals

*Personal Guard*

Syva Steele, Blooded of the Elk

Virtues

Bear  
STRENGTH



0



Elk  
CUNNING

5

Falcon  
COURAGE



2

Fox  
BEAUTY



3

Serpent  
WISDOM



3

Wolf  
PROWESS



2

High Concept

House Blooded of the Elk

Family

Family Name Steele

Public Name Syva: "I know everyone's name"

Secret Name

Titles

Devotions

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings No Secret is Safe from Me

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessing

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

Aspects

SPRING ASPECT My Mother's Diaries

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

SPRING ASPECT Well-Mannered

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

Contacts

Spring Summer Autumn Winter

Sorcery

The Rose

Vassals

Spy Network

Yvail Thorne, Blooded of the Falcon

Virtues

Bear  
STRENGTH



3

Elk  
CUNNING



2

Falcon  
COURAGE



4

Fox  
BEAUTY



0

Serpent  
WISDOM



2

Wolf  
PROWESS



4

High Concept

House *Blooded of the Falcon*

Family

Family Name *Thorne*

Public Name *Yvail: "The Road is my Brother"*

Secret Name

Titles

Devotions

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings *Pain is Today*

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings *The Sacred Tool*

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessing

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

Aspects

SPRING ASPECT *It's Only Fear*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

SPRING ASPECT *The Road is My Home*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

Contacts

Spring

Summer

Autumn

Winter

Sorcery

Vassals

Roadmen

# Timon, Blooded of the Fox

## Virtues

Bear  
STRENGTH



0



3

Falcon  
COURAGE



2

Fox  
BEAUTY



5

Serpent  
WISDOM



2

Wolf  
PROWESS



3

## High Concept

House *Blooded of the Fox*

Family

Family Name

Public Name *Timon: "None can resist my kiss"*

Secret Name

Titles

## Devotions

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings *The Goodnight Kiss*

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessing

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

## Aspects

SPRING ASPECT *Maid*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

SPRING ASPECT *Smoldering Glare*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

## Contacts

Spring Summer Autumn Winter

## Sorcery

*The Curse*

## Vassals

*Maid*



# Ush'thay Mwnn, Blooded of the Serpent

## Virtues

Bear  
STRENGTH



3

Elk  
CUNNING



3

Falcon  
COURAGE



2

Fox  
BEAUTY



2

Serpent  
WISDOM



5

Wolf  
PROWESS



0

## High Concept

House *Blooded of the Serpent*

Family

Family Name *Mwnn*

Public Name *Ush'thay: "No secret is beyond my reach"*

Secret Name

Titles

## Devotions

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessing

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings

## Aspects

SPRING ASPECT *Academy Educated*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

SPRING ASPECT *Master Spy*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

## Contacts

Spring

Summer

Autumn

Winter

## Sorcery

*The Curse*

*Blood Oath*

## Vassals

*Apothecary*

# Phash Adrente, Blooded of the Wolf

## Virtues

Bear  
STRENGTH



2



3

Falcon  
COURAGE



3

Fox  
BEAUTY



2

Serpent  
WISDOM



0

Wolf  
PROWESS



5

## High Concept

House *Blooded of the Wolf*

Family

Family Name *Adrente*

Public Name *Phash: "I do not forget"*

Secret Name

Titles

## Devotions

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings *Your Fear is My Ally*

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings *Teeth and Claws*

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessing

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings

## Aspects

SPRING ASPECT *It's Only Fear*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

SPRING ASPECT *Swordsmanship*

Invoke Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

## Contacts

Spring

Summer

Autumn

Winter

## Sorcery

*The Bloodsword*

## Vassals

*Valet*

## Virtues

*Bear*  
STRENGTH



*Elk*  
CUNNING

*Falcon*  
COURAGE



*Fox*  
BEAUTY



*Serpent*  
WISDOM



*Wolf*  
PROWESS



## High Concept

House \_\_\_\_\_

Family \_\_\_\_\_

Family Name \_\_\_\_\_

Public Name \_\_\_\_\_

Secret Name \_\_\_\_\_

Titles \_\_\_\_\_

## Devotions

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings \_\_\_\_\_

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings \_\_\_\_\_

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings \_\_\_\_\_

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessing \_\_\_\_\_

SUAVEN RANK ( )

Blessings \_\_\_\_\_

## Aspects

SPRING ASPECT

Invoke \_\_\_\_\_ Refreshed ( )

Tag \_\_\_\_\_

Compel \_\_\_\_\_

SPRING ASPECT

Invoke \_\_\_\_\_ Refreshed ( )

Tag \_\_\_\_\_

Compel \_\_\_\_\_

## Contacts

Spring

Summer

Autumn

Winter

## Sorcery

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## Vassals

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## Virtues

*Bear*  
STRENGTH



*Elk*  
CUNNING



*Falcon*  
COURAGE



*Fox*  
BEAUTY



*Serpent*  
WISDOM



*Wolf*  
PROWESS



## High Concept

House

Family

Family Name

Public Name

Secret Name

Titles

## Devotions

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessing

SUAVEN

RANK ( )

Blessings

## Aspects

SPRING ASPECT

Invoke

Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

SPRING ASPECT

Invoke

Refreshed ( )

Tag

Compel

## Contacts

Spring

Summer

Autumn

Winter

## Sorcery

## Vassals

# REFERENCE SHEET

## *Blessings*

### *I Brought the Bear*

Spend a Style Point. You may spend two wagers in a row in one Strength-based contested risk.

### *The Goodnight Kiss*

My love. Sleep sweet. And dream only of me.

This Kiss sets the recipient to sleep until the next dawn. Nothing will wake him except a touch from the ven who originally kissed him.

### *No Fool*

The Burghe once said, "You cannot be fooled without your own consent." Spend a Style Point and you can cancel the effects of a surprise (you roll no dice). But only for you, no one else.

### *Pain is Today*

Pain is an illusion. It is a distraction. Pain is today. Honor is forever.

Spend a Style Point. You may cancel a tag against any of your Injuries as long as the Injury's rank is lower than your Courage.

### *No Secret is Safe from Me*

Cunning is the virtue of seeing the plan within the plan within the plan. And the Elk are the masters of that game. In ven literature, their ability to predict their opponent's moves sometimes borders on the supernatural.

When it comes time to make wagers in any contested risk, spend a Style Point. You may look at your opponent's wagers before you make your own. Your opponent may not change his wagers after you've looked at them. You do not have to show your own wagers. You also cannot reveal your opponent's wagers to other ven.

### *The Sacred Tool*

The steady hand, the unflinching eye. It takes more than just skill to use the Sacred Tool.

You cannot use this Blessing if Prowess is your weakness.

Spend a Style Point. When using a bow, you may add your Courage and Prowess together as your Virtue in the risk.

### *Teeth and Claws*

It is said the wolf carries two weapons. His teeth and claws. In fact, the wolf carries three weapons. The third is his mind.

During Prowess risks, you may spend two wagers in a row. This Gift also allows you to use two Maneuvers in a row.

### *Your Fear is My Ally*

The Blooded of the Wolf are trained from birth to sense the fear in their opponents. In their sweat, in their slightest movements, in their eyes.

During the strike bid, spend a Style Point. You may look at one opponent's strike bid before you bid dice yourself.



# Sorcery

## *The Bloodsword*

You own a powerful and deadly weapon. The Bloodsword is an artifact from the old days when the sorcerer-kings ruled the world. Using a Bloodsword will cause a stir among the more polite elements of Shanri, but what do you care for manners? Whenever you use your Bloodsword, add two dice the risk.

## *The Curse*

A blood curse requires only one sorcerer and one target. The target must be within sight and must be able to hear the sorcerer. The sorcerer cuts his skin, letting his blood flow. He takes one Injury ("severe cut") at least. He may take as many as five Injuries before the curse kills him.

The curse puts an Aspect on the target. The rank of the Aspect is equal to the number of Injuries the sorcerer is willing to take. Yes, this ritual can kill you. The Aspect must specify a thing the subject must or must not do and begin with the phrase "You will always" and "You will always." For example, the following curses are appropriate:

"You will never sleep in the same bed twice."

"You will always lie to the ones you love."

"You will never hold your father's sword again."

"You will always betray your family."

Whenever the target goes against a "You will never" curse, those that oppose him may tag that Aspect, gaining dice as appropriate. Whenever the subject follows the dictates of a "You will always" curse, he may invoke that Aspect for bonus dice as appropriate.

For example, a character with the "You will

always lie to the ones you love" blood curse lies to his brother about a delicate affair (sleeping with his brother's wife). "No, brother," he says. "We have never lay together." Following the dictates of his curse, he gains bonus dice.

As another example, a character with the "You will never sleep in the same bed twice" blood curse decides to ignore his restriction and do as he wishes, sleeping in the same bed two nights in a row. As soon as he does, his curse becomes a free Aspect that others may tag.

A blood curse may only be removed by the sorcerer himself or by a blood relative of the sorcerer (father, mother, son or daughter). It must be removed voluntarily and not under any kind of duress.

## *The Oath*

This ritual is one of the most ubiquitous in ven literature. A piece of parchment, a cup, a knife, a quill. Words are written on the parchment.

Powerful words. Promises. Punishments.

All provide blood for the cup, dipping the quill and signing their names. All ven who sign receive a rank 3 Injury. The Injury must be made with an Orichalcum knife.

All three names. Family, Public, and Secret.

All ven signing the Oath make a promise to abide by its edicts. They gain benefits for doing so.

You may spend a style point for three bonus dice if you are directly protecting another ven who signed the Oath.

You may spend a style point to know the emotional state of someone within your Oath. A reply of "nothing" indicates the ven is dead, and "Solace" indicates... you know.

You may spend a style point to know the general direction and distance of someone within your Oath.

While the Oath of Fellowship is a powerful tool, it also bears a heavy cost. If you ever betray any member of the circle, the Oath is broken for all of you. Also, the word "traitor" burns onto your forehead for a year and a day. Within that time, you may make no Oaths.

The Oath may be written in such a way that it lasts a specific amount of time or until a specific goal is reached. "The Oath expires in five years," or "The Oath expires when we all become Dukes."

### *The Rose*

This ritual was developed by a Fox sorcerer many generations ago. The sorcerer uses a rose—any rose will do—to perform the ritual. He cuts his hand or wrist, bleeds a few drops onto the petals, and places the rose on a table. As many as four may sit at the table. As long as they sit at the table, anyone not sitting at the table hears nothing but gibberish sing-song from those sitting at it. The ritual lasts until dawn, until the rose is removed, or if someone leaves the table.

### *Vassals*

Vassals are characters the Narrator controls. They have special abilities and will serve you without question. Unless otherwise noted, Vassals cannot roll dice—their fates are in the hands of the Narrator. They fail and succeed as he sees fit.

### *Apothecary*

You have an apothecary—a man skilled in perfumes, potions and poisons. He can prepare and identify poisons for you at your request. He currently has three doses of poison for this particular event. The ven immune system is powerful, thus any dose of poison puts another

ven into a shivering, helpless state, but does not kill him. You have to be the one to finish him off... by saying "I murder him" and spending a Style Point. If you don't do both of those things, you cannot murder another character.

### *Maid*

Your maid stands by your side wherever you go. She opens doors for you, fetches you drinks, fixes your bodice... and overhears nearby conversations while you are focused on more important matters. Your maid also stores Style Points for you. While you can usually only carry 5 Style Points, your maid can carry three more. (Be sure to give your maid a name!)

### *Personal Guard*

Your personal guard are an elite cadre of fighting men. You have three guards. Having any more is bad form. If you are ever ambushed, your personal guard can take Injuries for you, jumping in the way of that fatal blow. Your personal guard may take at least three ranks of Injury for you. That is, they can take one rank 3 Injury, three rank 1 Injuries or one rank 1 and one rank 2 Injury. Each Injury takes out one of your guards. Once they take those Injuries, you are on your own.

### *Spouse*

Almost every adult noble in Shanri is married, but your spouse is of particular skill and acumen. Beautiful and cunning, strong and wise. Courageous and... well, she can't fight to save her life, but that's what she's got you for. Your spouse has one Virtue that's particularly important: she rolls 3 dice for Beauty, compensating for your weakness. When she's around, you can roll four dice for Beauty risks. When she is not... you are on your own.

### *Spy Network*

Every noble has a spy network. Yours is currently embedded in the adventure, uncovering secrets everywhere they go. Three times this adventure, you may use your spy network to overhear a conversation you were not present for.

### *Valet*

Your valet stands by your side wherever you go. He opens doors for you, fetches you drinks, fixes your doublet... and overhears nearby conversations while you are focused on more important matters. Your valet also stores Style Points for you. While you can usually only carry 5 Style Points, your valet can carry three more. (Be sure to give your valet a name!)

## CREDITS

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