

Free from the Yoke



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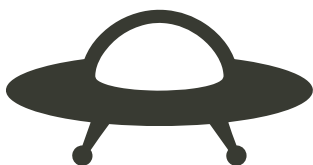
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Games from out of this world

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ENTERTAINMENT



POWERED BY THE APOCALYPSE

INTRODUCTION

I love the idea of Legacy – from the two tiers of play through to the very broad and open setting that somehow manages to carry its own style and flavour. The post-apocalyptic setting, and Legacy's particular flavour of it always intrigued me, but I also wanted to play with some of the ideas and twist them about. Post-apocalypse can always deal with an optimistic future, but you always have to worry about survival, the world before, and the threats that remain. I wanted to play with all these elements, but what if the focus was not just survival but prosperity?

A fantasy setting offers great opportunity to explore historical ideas and concepts in a more free-form way. The trappings can help guide you into a particular period – for me that was Medieval Russia, and the period where its various parts were vassals of the Golden Horde. What might similar situations look like when you add in myth and magic and let role-players go wild?

Thus the big question for **FREE FROM THE YOKE** is: what now, when your biggest threat is gone? What will a House or a Character make of the opportunities that open before them? Will they look to discovering their past? Nurse the wounds suffered in the fight? Finally pursue long-held ambitions? How might they be challenged, what new and unimaginable obstacles will be in their way?

Taking inspiration from Legacy, the setting is a broad playground for the players. Rather than a land that looks like Medieval Russia if you squint, it was much more rewarding to help players imagine a setting that uses some of these ideas, tropes and structures and let it loose. There should be plenty of flavour to get you started, but don't be afraid to search out for more and don't confine yourself to historical limitations. Read up on Slavic folklore, remember some of the monsters you fought in *The Witcher* games, then look further out into the history of Asian nomadic peoples, Iranian poets and anything else that helps you find inspiration.

Fighting is something I do a lot of in role-playing games. But some of my most enjoyable role-playing moments came from peaceful co-operation or non-violent antagonism, and I feel it's important to offer players ways to explore the setting without a sword in hand. After all, the possibilities available now that you have vanquished the Empire should at least have a chance of being peaceful, even if they still have difficulties or complications.

I hope you find wonderful places to explore with this game!

- *Fyodor Kasatkin*



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Chapter 1:



Liberty



ONCE, THIS LAND WAS FREE. Once, your ancestors tilled the fields, built a place where they could live, waged feuds fuelled by avarice or animosity, and learned the magic lurking in the land's hills, herds, steppes and seas.

That all changed when the Empire invaded. The old ways were suppressed. The ancestral lands were razed. Prized heirlooms were sold to the highest bidder, or found a new home decorating the regent's walls. Families with a long and proud history were scattered to the far corners of the world; rivals who had fought for generations toiled next to each other in the work camps. As the Empire consolidated their rule, your people began to forget that things had ever been different.

But eventually, one of the many rebellions found a greater foothold. Bringing the enslaved factions of the land together in a single effort, this revolution stood firm against the Empire's assaults, found new sources of strength, and won freedom.

Now you are freed from the Empire's yoke, but freedom has its own challenges. Do your people still suffer from the wounds inflicted by imperial rule? Or perhaps they're uneasy with the things they did to stay alive? Will you try to return to your ancestral life, as much as that's possible? Or will you try and find a new way to live in the modern society the Empire left behind?

And above you, there's the Arbiter. Once the driving force of the rebellion, now they sit in authority over the entire land. Will you bend the knee and help them build a new nation? Or will you forge your own course, hoarding your new-found autonomy?

FREE FROM THE YOKE is a game about what comes after freedom. You'll tell stories about different ideologies competing or co-operating to rebuild, evolve and adapt. Stories about building a new world, even as you rediscover the monuments of your ancestors. At the heart of these stories will be your characters. Measured or savage, diplomatic or dictatorial, your House's history is defined by the characters you make. As the ages turn, their actions will reshape the land.

THE BASICS

Each player controls a **HOUSE**: a political entity whose actions can send tremors across the nation. Your house playbook says how they were changed by the occupation, and what role they play in the modern society of the land: teachers, warriors, traders or something stranger.

Your story starts with the first age - the generation after the revolution. The aged heroes of the war now occupy political positions, and new heroes are emerging to seek glory. Starting with that first age of freedom, you'll tell the story of your Houses building a new identity for their nation.

Each age will present new challenges, spurred on by the Arbiter's ambitions. As you play you'll move between the actions of the house at large to specific heroic characters from their ranks as you tell that age's story. Sometimes characters from multiple players' houses will work together; other times the story will focus on one player's character, and other players will pick up Quick Characters to fill out the cast.

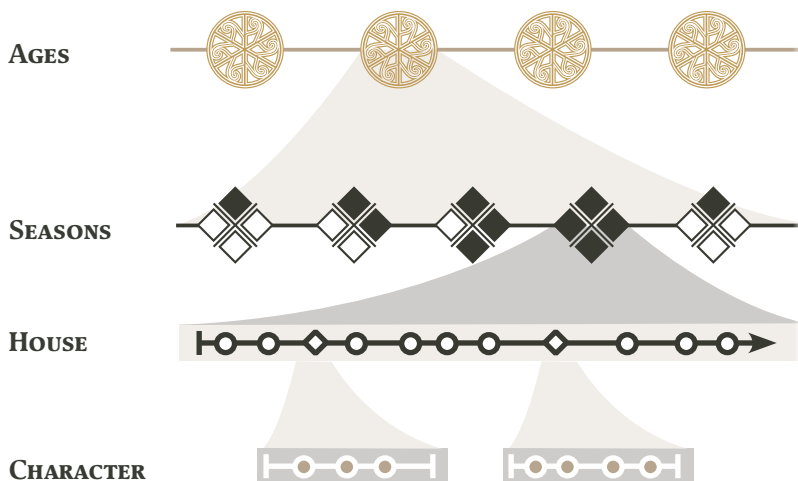
As your characters work to protect their house, undermine their enemies and rebuild the land, they may move between different roles in their house. As they do they'll change their house's fortunes and gain more experience. As characters die or step back from an active role in the house's operations, they leave behind a relic - a tool of theirs that future house members can use to remember them and call on their skills.

Once the Arbiter's project for the age has succeeded or come crashing down, the ages turn. You move the clock forward a significant chunk of time: maybe a few years, a generation, even a century. You alter the map, adding new threats and opportunities and describing how each House has changed in the intervening time. The game moves back to the house level, and the story continues.

One of you won't control a house but instead take the role of Game Master (GM). The GM is there to keep track of the setting, provide resistance and challenge to the characters, and make sure all the players get an equal chance to shine. They're also there to portray the Arbiter and other non-player characters (NPCs), voicing them in conversations and giving the players a supporting cast.

It's a role with a different set of responsibilities, detailed in their own chapter of this book. The GM often (though not always) takes the role of facilitator, arranging the game sessions and making sure

THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR SAGA



Your saga will take place over AGES. AGES are broken down into seasons - as many as you need. Within a SEASON, you spend some time at the HOUSE level, and some time zoomed in to particular events at the CHARACTER level.

the rules and procedures of the game are followed. If you'd like to run this game but aren't comfortable keeping all the rules in your head or making the real-world arrangements of session planning, it's fine to ask for volunteers among the other players to manage those responsibilities.

THE CONVERSATION

FREE FROM THE YOKE draws on the rule design philosophy of Vincent and Meguey Baker's *Apocalypse World*, which means that it concerns itself first and foremost with the conversation that's happening at the table. This is a roleplaying game: a conversation between the players and the GM, working together to build a story and see what happens to the world. Most of the time you'll be talking without using any rules. The players describe the actions their characters or families are taking, the GM describes how those actions change the situation, and the conversation continues.

Sometimes events in the ongoing conversation will activate a discrete chunk of rules (called a "**move**") that guides the story based on the player's dice rolls, choices or established fictional



Liberty

circumstances. Each move has an in-fiction trigger. This is something your character or house has to do in the story for the mechanics to start up. The consequences of moves are often just as much fictional as mechanical.

It's vital to note that you can make big changes to the world without triggering any moves by building on elements already established in the story. If someone's already offered to help, you don't need to roll **FIND COMMON GROUND**; if you've positioned a wooden palisade between yourself and an enemy, you don't need to roll **DISARM** to avoid their arrows. Other times you may want to use a particular move, but be unable to. If you're in a bad situation – say, tied to a chair with your hands behind your back – your ability to hit your moves' triggers and use them to move the story in a favourable direction will be severely limited.

Simply put: everything in the game starts and ends with the story you're telling. Moves tell you how particular flashpoints in the story play out.

THE GM'S REACTIONS

The GM doesn't make moves, but instead has *reactions*. These are specific ways to guide the story towards **FREE FROM THE YOKE**'s themes and create a fun experience. The GM never rolls dice, and instead uses reactions in response to the players' actions: when a player rolls a 6 or below, when everyone looks to them to say what happens next, or when the players do something with already established consequences (a 'golden opportunity').

Each GM reaction is a way of raising the stakes, shaking up the situation and providing adversity. Check out Chapter 5 for more details on these.

MAKING YOUR MOVE

Moves vary in complexity. The simplest don't have any sort of dice roll or choices; they just state that this fiction trigger will lead to this outcome. Others give you choices, or use dice to make the outcome less predictable.

When a move uses dice, you'll be told to roll **+STAT**. This means you take two six-sided dice, roll them, and add the total to the stat indicated.

- A 6 or lower (6-) is a setback. The GM makes a reaction, adding complications to your life.
- A 7 or above is a hit. You've succeeded, at least partially:
 - A 7-9 is a mixed success. You don't succeed fully, or maybe there's a cost.
 - A 10 or above is a full success. You succeed with style, and maybe learn something about the world.

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

When you roll with advantage, roll 3 dice and pick the highest two.

When you roll with disadvantage, roll 3 dice and pick the lowest two.

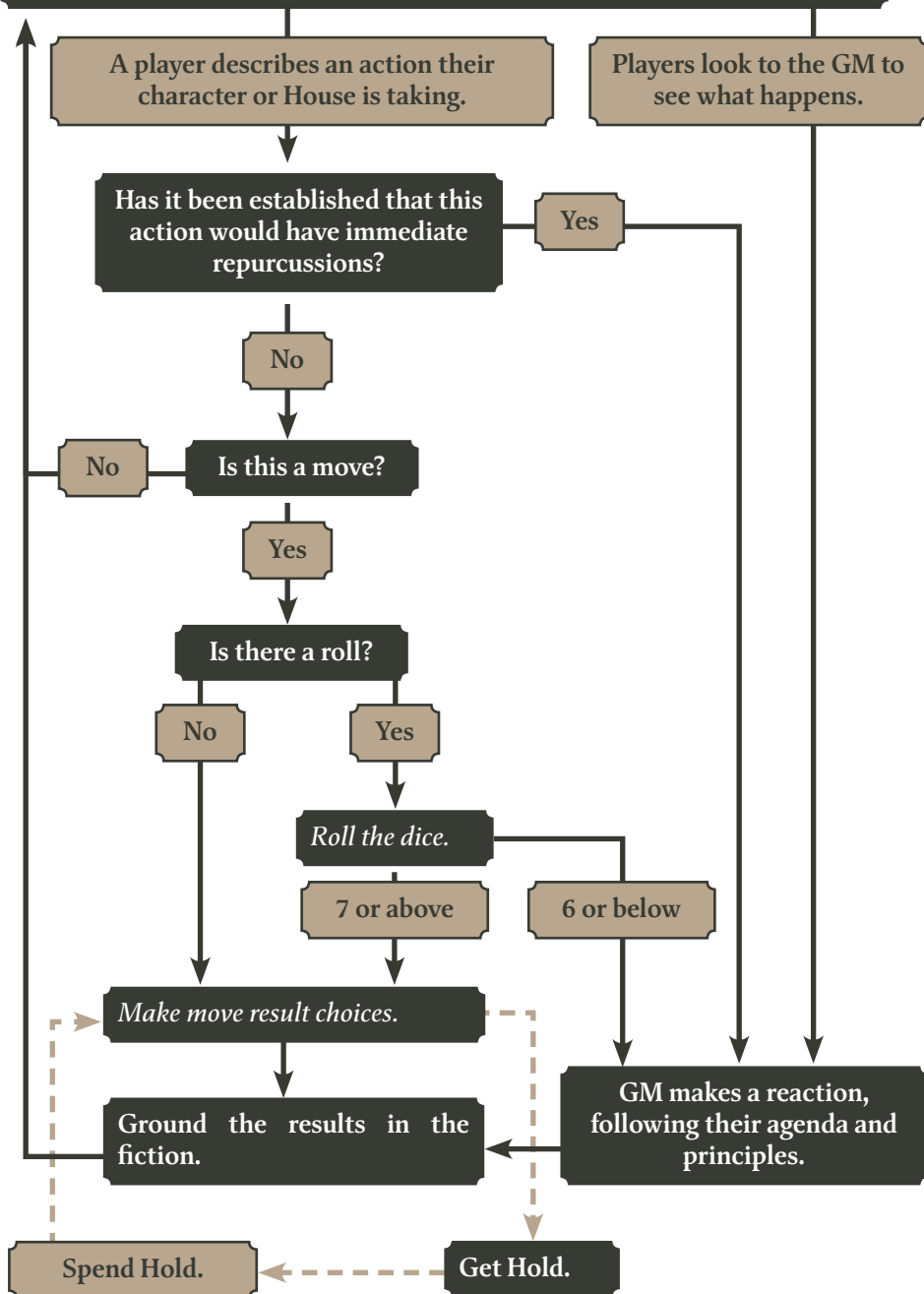
If you have advantage and disadvantage, roll normally.

Sources of advantage will specify which actions they apply to, and if they ever run out. Fleeting advantage is a special case that simply boosts your next roll, whatever move it's for, and then goes away.

HOW IT ALL WORKS

With thanks to Adam Koebel.

THE CONVERSATION: GM and players discussing what's happening now, the facts of the scene, the reactions of their characters etc.



BEGINNING YOUR GAME

To play **FREE FROM THE YOKE**, you'll need at least 2 players, though 5 is ideal. One of the players will take the GM role: managing the fiction, describing the world's response to the player's actions, and helping adjudicate rules.

You'll also need copies of the handout sheets, something to draw your map on, writing tools and at least two six-sided dice.

Here's how to get the game going:

STEP 1: THE GROUNDWORK

It's very important to start with a discussion of what you all want out of the game. To guide this conversation, I recommend the [CATS procedure](#) by Patrick O'Leary:

CONCEPT: *What's your elevator pitch for the game? What do you all want out of this story?*

AIM: *Agree on what the players are trying to accomplish. How much should players expect to be at each other's throats? How much are players expected to be invested in House vs. Character play?*

TONE: *Have a conversation about the tone of the game. Are we delving into the grim problems that plague revolutionary governments, or telling a hopeful story about reclaiming your past culture and forming a new nation? Is magic subtle and deniable, or overt and monstrous? Come to a consensus on what the group wants.*

SUBJECT MATTER: *Explain what ideas might be explored during gameplay. As a game of post-colonial fantasy, Free From the Yoke can easily touch on themes of genocide, cultural erasure and appropriation, nationalism and slavery. In addition, a lot of the source material of low-magic political fantasy can include themes like torture, gore, sexual assault, racism, ableism and so on. As the game's facilitator, make sure you create a safe environment for people to bring up any topics they don't want to see depicted on-screen, or that they don't want to come up in the game at all. Check in with your players occasionally to make sure that everyone's OK with the themes you have chosen.*

While **FREE FROM THE YOKE** takes a lot of inspiration from Slavic mythology and Eastern European medieval history, these are thematic and conceptual and should not be taken as prescriptive. Indeed, you may wish to draw on different cultures and periods of history; look at **SETTING ASSUMPTIONS** for suggestions about what might need to be adjusted.

Liberty

If you intend to bring in some historical parallels then it becomes necessary to provide adequate opportunity to critically examine them. This may be appropriate for your group, or become too unwieldy to fairly manage. In either case take inspiration from history, but don't be yoked to it.

STEP 2: THE ANCIENT PAST

In this step, you'll describe the land as it was before the Empire.

PICK PLAYBOOKS. *Each player chooses a different House playbook (see Chapter 2), while the GM chooses an Arbiter playbook (see Chapter 4).*

LANDMARKS. *Each player adds an element to your map of the Land according to their playbook - rivers, seas, steppes, etc. On top of those, each player picks an item from their Landmark list to add to the map, sketching in further detail if they wish.*

STATS. *What are your House's core strengths? What do those say about your ancestor's role in the nation's society?*

CUSTOMS. *What makes your House interesting? How are they ruled, who makes up their rank and file, how is their culture distinct from other Houses?*

ARBITER FORM. *The group decides if the Arbiter acts as a monolith, a council or oligarchy, or the collective voice of the populace.*

STEP 3: THE OCCUPATION

In this step, you'll mark the scars that the Imperial occupation left on the land.

LANDMARKS. *Each player adds a new element to the map, picking from their playbook's list or inventing their own.*

HISTORY. *Did you profit or suffer under the Empire's rule? Did your house help the other houses survive, or did they hurt them and steal from them? Based on your answers to these questions you'll determine your starting Favour with the Arbiter, and your Influence on the other houses*

FLASHPOINTS. *It's time to tell the story of the revolution. Each Arbiter playbook lists six flashpoints in sequence. For each one, the GM should read out the initial description, and then a House can volunteer to be the focus of it. They answer a question that adds further detail about how the flashpoint affected them, and the GM does likewise for the Arbiter. Once you've volunteered to answer a question, hold off on volunteering again until everyone else has had a chance to make their mark.*

SETTING ASSUMPTIONS

1: TECHNOLOGY IS AT THE LATE MEDIEVAL LEVEL

Specifically, Eastern Europe and Central Asia during the 13th-15th Centuries. Texts are hand-written, healing takes months if not years, and boats are the fastest mode of travel. If you want to include later advances like printing presses or gunpowder, move to an earlier time without castle walls or crossbows, or shift to another region of the world – replacing Viking longboats and axes with junks and dao, perhaps – alter Gear tags and House Asset lists as appropriate.

2: THE EMPIRE STILL EXISTS

The revolution has pushed the Empire out of the land's borders, but it's still an active force in the world and working to re-establish its control. As an alternative, maybe the Empire's leadership was decapitated and replaced by your Houses – or the Arbiter is a governor put in place by the Empire as part of peace accords. Change up Flashpoint questions to make changes here.

3: MAGIC IS A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND

You don't learn spells from arcane tomes, but are instead taught a way of speaking to the land by a patron that yields supernatural effects. There may be other ways of working magic out there in the world; look at the Church of Foreign Lands for inspiration. To make changes, the easiest thing to do is to change the Bane list – and alter what makes you pick more banes.

4: MONSTERS AND SPIRITS EXIST, BUT ARE RARE

The supernatural has been pushed to the fringes by the Empire's occupation, but the land's citizens remember them. Folklore creatures are major news when they appear, not a known pest haunting the woods. To replace supernatural creatures, we recommend using famed bandits and ferocious animals. If, on the other hand, you want supernatural elements to come to the fore, you might even let characters be inhuman; in this case, swap their Inheritance move for one fitting their inhuman nature.

5: THE LAND IS DIVERSE

The peoples we based this game on (see #1) weren't a monoculture. The Slavic ancestors of the Rus had mingled with the Finno-Ugric people before them, mixed with Scandinavian invaders and traders, had extensive contact with Middle Eastern travellers and had long been neighbours of the Khazards, Pechenegs and more recently the Mongols. Your game should be no less diverse, and you should consider your character's ethnicity as you create them. But remember – your characters won't conceive of race or ethnicity along modern lines. Identity was more drawn from religion, language, and homeland, and sartorial signifiers were more important than skin colour.

STEP 4: THE NEW LAND

What new nation did you build from the ashes of revolution?

LANDMARKS. *A final round of additions to the map.*

DOCTRINE. *Your overall philosophy as a House, and an associated ability. You'll be able to change this between Ages of the story.*

LIFESTYLE. *Where (and how) your House makes their home. When you've made your choice, mark your House's holdings on the map.*

RESOURCES. *Your resources say what advantages your House has, and what they lack. Pick two Surpluses and gain the rest as Needs.*

ABILITIES. *Pick some options from the ASSET list to represent the resources characters can draw on. Also get Moves from your House playbook - either a free pick of two, or one mandatory move and one free pick.*

ARBITER CUSTOMISATION. **THE GM MAKES CHOICES TO DEFINE THE TRAITS OF THE ARBITER'S NEW GOVERNMENT:** *their STYLE, their CEREMONIES, their LAWS, and a MOVE. Their CONTROL starts at 5.*

STEP 5: A NEW AGE

Finally, it's time to set up your first age of play.

YOU'LL REPEAT THIS STEP AT THE START OF EACH AGE.

PROJECT. *The GM decides which of the Arbiter Projects this age will focus on. Going round the table, the players answer its Foundation questions.*

AGENT. *The players pick which of the Agent playbooks they want to use this Age, though hold off on customising it for now.*

CHARACTERS. *Each player picks a different character playbook to be their avatar for this age. Decide on your STATS, LOOK and MOVES, and describe them to the group.*

BACKSTORY. *Who are your Characters to each other? Each player reads out at least one of the Backstory lines on their sheets, and asks for a volunteer to fill in the blanks. When you help a character you have Backstory with, you have an easier time of it.*

START PLAY. *It's the start of a new Season, so you trigger HOLDING COURT (p. 130) to decide what the Arbiter wants from you.*

Decide what ROLE your character is taking in their House in response to this, and work through the details with the GM. Then start playing - either ZOOMED OUT describing the actions of your House, or ZOOMED IN following a band of characters.

WHO IS THE EMPIRE?

We've kept the Empire themselves purposely vague in this game. That's something for you to decide as a group as you build your world and work through the flashpoints of the conflict. But here are some things for you to consider as you talk through this:

WHAT'S THE EMPIRE'S CULTURE?

Do you have a long, shared history and common culture with you? Are they foreign and strange to you, and their practices took a long time to get used to? How much of their culture lingers in the land now that you're free, and how much of your culture have they picked up and appropriated? If you base them on a different real-world culture than your player Houses, be careful not to unconsciously duplicate harmful and jingoistic tropes. On the other hand, research into how historical empires have subjugated their vassals can be really useful in giving depth to your depictions of the Empire.

WHAT MAGIC DO THEY HAVE ACCESS TO?

Your magic is based on agreements with the land, and power loaned from it. Is the same true with the Empire, and they made pacts that stole the land's power from it? Or do they draw power from another source: the stars, the elements, their ancestors, the souls of their slaves, something else?

WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

Are they just over one of your borders, or did they come from far shores? Did you meet those who lead the Empire, or did you only ever interact with other subjects a step higher up the pyramid?

HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT THE NEW NATION?

Are they jealous and wishing to return you to their control? Have they washed their hands of you, tired of the war? Did some elements of their society support the revolution, or are they united against you? How did they justify their domination of you?

PLAY ADVICE

PLAYER AGENDA

When playing roleplaying games it's often easy to fall into safe methods of play. You act conservatively, carefully husband your resources, and are leery of making new allies or breaking old relationships. **FREE FROM THE YOKE** will work a lot better with proactive players who are willing to risk everything, so here's some tips to bear in mind:

Use your House to get information and set up your plans.

Use your Character to dive deeper into specific bits of your setting and seal the deal.

Even if your Houses are at odds, establish good reasons to work with the other Characters.

Look at the map. Are there interesting locations you want to find out more about or make use of? What lies beyond the map that might be interesting for your House or Character to explore?

Think about what's driving the other Characters, and how you can build on that.

Think about what role your character plays in the House's operations. How did that lead to you meeting the other characters?

Always follow the fiction.

Play pro-actively, and act dangerously.

Ask questions about the world, other player's Houses and characters, and your own playbooks. Be willing to provide your own answers, if the GM asks you to.

Be ready to take temporary roles as someone's supporting cast. Offer other people roles in your retinue if they're lacking things to do.

GM AGENDA

If you're the GM, your job in the first session will be mostly reactive. Give the players space to fill out what their characters' daily lives are like, how their families deal with each other and outsiders, how the characters relate to each other, and how they begin working on their families' objectives.

Character roles are a great place to start here. Pick one of the roles within a character's House that they didn't choose, and use that to spotlight the House's dynamics:

- If they're a **LEADER**, give them a rebel to confront.
- If they're an **OUTSIDER**, show the one agent who still keeps in contact with them and holds out hope they'll rejoin the house.
- If they're a **ROGUE**, show them an outsider to drive home the cost of going against the flow too much.
- And if they're an **CHAMPION**, make sure to show the leader that gives them their orders.

Keep an eye out for triggers for the basic moves. Also look for chances to get players to describe their house and character, and respond with your own ideas.

Look out for conflicts and scarcities in the world for use as future plot seeds. Make a list of everything the families need, and everything the characters want. They can't have those things. Why not? And what will the characters do about that?

Look at the Arbiter playbook. What is the Arbiter's attitude to each House? If the players do something surprising, how does the Arbiter react? Is their view of the House reinforced or changed?

The GM chapter goes in-depth about how to run **FREE FROM THE YOKE** and you should read up on it between sessions, but for now here are some guiding principles to get you going:

Get comfortable with the moves everyone has access to; keep an eye out for their triggers.

Write down every detail.

Turn the players' questions back on them.

Firmly establish each House's strengths and weaknesses.

Vary the time scale: sweeps of weeks and months give Houses room to breathe, while zoomed-in minutes and hours give Characters a chance to shine.

Ask about Surpluses to flesh out the world.

Push Needs to bring urgency to the characters' lives.

Give every character screen time with the other characters.

Put interesting NPCs in the players' Houses and within other factions.

Look for seeds you can use for future conflicts.

Twist their ideas by splicing them with ones of your own.

Give them chances to pursue their objectives, with a cost.





К. МАКОВСКИЙ
1883

Chapter 2:

he Great Houses



Anatomy of a House

THE LAND IS FREE OF THE EMPIRE, BUT IT'S STILL OWNED. Each farmer owns their little plot of land. Each community knows a particular secret about their territory they call home. Each lord claims their holdings, and is claimed in turn by the nobles above them.

If you were to trace these lines of loyalty, blood, obligation and debt you'd find a handful of knots in the web: the Arbiter, yes, but also the great Houses. Each holds a part of the Land in the palm of their hand. As they act to work against common threats, to enrich themselves, and to push society in the direction they want, that web of obligations tugs and pulls around them.

As you take the reins of a House, you're not only responsible for the well-being of those who owe you fealty. You're responsible for the people who get rich picking through your spoils, for the refugees pushed out by your wars, for the settlements that are cursed when you drink too greedily of the land's power, and for the generations to come who will have to live in the world you created. Are you up to that responsibility?

ANATOMY OF A HOUSE CORE STATISTICS

Each House has three key stats. These are the bedrock of your capabilities - you'll be able to rely on them come rain or shine.

REACH represents your House's influence. You roll +REACH to **CONDUCT DIPLOMACY** with your allies.

GRASP represents your House's ability to project force and maintain control of its assets. You roll +GRASP to **CLAIM BY FORCE** new resources.

SLEIGHT represents your House's ability to hide its actions and misdirect others. You roll +SLEIGHT to perform **SUBTERFUGE**, spreading false information and framing others for their misdeeds.

The Great Houses

HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

Your House is much grander than a single individual, and so its overall health is more abstract. Still, you can tell how your House fares in the grand game of nations by checking these gauges:

MOOD is a measure of your House's overall health and well-being. Its rating goes up every time you obtained a **SURPLUS**, and down every time you suffer a **NEED**. You roll **+MOOD** when you **HOLD TOGETHER** against adversity.

FAVOUR measures your proximity to the height of power: the Arbiter's court. The greater your **FAVOUR**, the more you'll be able to draw on their resources and share in their triumphs. The lower your **FAVOUR**, the more ostracised you'll be but the less you'll suffer if the Arbiter's plans fail. You roll **+FAVOUR** when the Arbiter **HOLDS COURT** and when you **REQUEST AID** from them.

OTHER FEATURES

There are a few other things to track as you play your House:

INFLUENCE describes the balance of obligations between you and other Houses. You use **INFLUENCE** to restrict other House's actions by **CALLING IN A DEBT**, can **APPLY LEVERAGE** to help or hurt their chances of success, or gain **INFLUENCE** by using your playbook's **ALLIANCE MOVE**.

MOVES are your special abilities. You'll start with four - one from your **DOCTRINE** giving you strength from your core philosophy, one from your **LIFESTYLE** giving greater meaning to your position on the map, and two free choices from your House's move list.

ASSETS are the equipment your characters have access to. They come in four categories - **ARMOURY**, **OUTFIT**, **COMPANIONS** and **TRANSPORT**. You can draw on your **SURPLUSES** to improve your options, and unlock more **ASSET** options by raising your House's **MOOD**.

TRADITIONS are the ways your House has learned to call on the power of the land. Your characters may draw on these, but beware of tying yourself to the land when its health fails.

MAKING YOUR HOUSE

To make a House, you start by choosing a playbook (p. 40). Each playbook represents a role your House plays in the society of the Land, with options to flesh them out and make them yours:

STATS. Choices for **REACH**, **GRASP** and **SLEIGHT**. Each option decides something about your ancestor's lives before the Empire came.

CUSTOMS. Ideas for your House's society – how they're organised, who they are, and how they behave.

LANDMARKS. Points of interest to add to the map: monuments of your ancestors, marks of the imperial occupation, and initial signs of the land's burgeoning new culture.

HISTORY. Decide how your House was treated by the empire, and answer questions with the other players to establish the starting balance of **INFLUENCE** between you.

DOCTRINE AND LIFESTYLE. Your House's general philosophy and way of life - along with the skills they've gained from those.

RESOURCES. The things you have a **SURPLUS** of, and the things you really **NEED**. Anything not listed here, you're assumed to have just enough of.

TWO PLAYBOOK MOVES. Your special abilities – one may be mandatory.

ASSETS. Pick options for the possessions your family members start with. If you think up an option that fits your concept better than the given options, describe it to the group and write it down – give it the same number of tags/quality as the listed options.

The Great Houses

HOUSE MOVES

The actions Houses take are wide-ranging, slow-moving and world-changing. When you describe the actions of your House, take the long view - and get ready to rewrite the map.

HOW HOUSES WORK

While it's easy to imagine what a character can do to trigger their moves, the actions houses take can be more amorphous and vague. These moves are here to set out how, exactly, houses use their resources to act in the world.

If you're having difficulty imagining what house moves being used look like in-story or at your table, the key is that they abstract out multiple smaller efforts:

1. Someone decides something needs to happen.
2. They convince other house members to help do it.
3. Various agents of the house work on the problem according to their own skills.
4. Agents return to the house and report on how the effort went.

Your character is often the initiator in step 1, step 2 is what triggers a move, step 3 resolves the move, and step 4 ties things back to the fiction.

These are the key abilities all Houses have access to. These are the core actions your Houses will be performing - if a House is doing something and you're not sure how to resolve it, check to see if it's triggered one of these first.

Hold Together

When your House must resist hardship, temptation or infighting, roll +MOOD. On a hit you mostly remain OK; pick 1.

- You lose people to harm and/or desertion. Get Need: Recruits.
- Another House or Faction came through to help you out. Give them Influence over you.
- The danger hasn't passed so much as shifted into a different, more manageable problem. Say what it is.

On a 10+ you are brought close together by the trial; gain Surplus: Morale in addition to the above results.

Read the Wind

When you call on your House's agents and allies, roll +REACH and ask one of these questions:

- How do we get access to [a location, item or VIP]?
- How do we get Surplus: ____?
- What are the movements of [a particular group]?
- What's happening in [a particular region]?

On a hit you get an answer to your question, and on a 10+ you can mark the map with a sign of your answer. On a 7-9, choose one of the allies you consulted to mark the map instead.

Claim by Force

When you direct your House to seize or maintain control of a resource, roll +GRASP. On a hit it's theirs, but not without cost. On a 7-9 choose two of these; on a 10+, choose one:

- It's not completely yours yet. The forces you used must stay here until the start of the next season. If they leave (or are removed) before then, you lose control of the resource.
- There is a cost to your victory. Your House gets a Need of the GM's choice.
- You cause chaos and suffering; raise Turmoil.

Subterfuge

When your House infiltrates other factions, say what they try to do:

- They make a resource appear more or less desirable.
- They cause a scandal within a House's organisation.
- They remove any trace of your own involvement in an action; you may frame someone else in their place if you wish.
- They sabotage a particular asset, making it fail at a moment of your choosing.

Roll +SLEIGHT. On a hit, they do it. On a 7-9 pick one:

- They must move slowly to act with subtlety, and so the chosen effect will only occur at the start of the next season.
- The chaos and uncertainty raises Turmoil.

The Great Houses

INFLUENCE MOVES

These are the moves that govern how your House interacts with their peers in the Arbiter's court.

Lend Aid

When you involve yourself in the actions of a House you have Influence over, lose Influence and pass them a die to use as per advantage or disadvantage - your choice. If the die you gave comes up the highest, regain Influence on them; if it's the lowest, the GM will say what misfortune you suffer.

Call in a Debt

When you call on a House you have Influence over, lose your Influence and choose one:

- Gain Advantage on a move that targets them.
- Take a Surplus from them.
- Get them to back you up, fall into indecision, or protect something important.

If a player House refuses your request they must **HOLD TOGETHER**, with Disadvantage on the roll if their Favour is below yours.

SCALE MOVES

These moves are here to guide your story from the nation-changing actions of Houses to the moment-to-moment heroics of Characters.

Zoom In

When you focus on the efforts of a particular House's agents, say where you are on the map. That House's player may request the aid of the Arbiter's agent (p. 152), and say what the group's there to do.

The GM describes details of the environment, or asks the players questions about it. Other players may create or pick up quick characters to fill out the party. Characters select gear according to their family's assets and the established fiction, and you begin play.

Zoom Out

When you return to the House level after spending significant time at the Character level, each player whose character wasn't involved says what the character was doing instead, and gets fleeting advantage on their next House move that capitalises on their character's actions. Move the calendar forward a few days or weeks, and ask each player what their House is now doing. Or if you all want to pass more time, trigger **THE TURNING OF SEASONS**.

SURPLUSES AND NEEDS

The Location of Surpluses

Surpluses exist in two states: **DISPERSED** or **COLLECTED**.

COLLECTED Surpluses are gathered together and at your House's fingertips. You can use them in House moves, but they're vulnerable to being lost thanks to the GM's reactions or the efforts of other players.

DISPERSED Surpluses are scattered across your holdings. They're resistant to attack or calamity, but cannot be actively used for moves like **PREPARE AND PROVISION** or **RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB**.

Logistics

When your House moves a surplus from one place to another, collects a dispersed surplus, or disperses a collected surplus, pick one for each point of Mood below 0:

- GM says whose lands it must travel through. You'll need their consent to travel unopposed.
- It'll take a while - the process will finish at the start of the next season.
- The delivery stalls - GM says what's needed to get it moving again.
- You push yourselves to make it happen - gain a Need of the GM's choice.

Finding a Surplus

When your Character claims or creates a significant resource for your House, add it as a Surplus.

Right Tool For the Job

When your House uses their resources to confront a crisis, erase an appropriate Surplus and mitigate or resolve the problem.

Your Mood measures your House's overall health, calculated as total number of Surpluses minus total number of Needs. Adjust it whenever your number of Surpluses or Needs changes. This triggers special effects if this takes you above +3 or below -3:

The Great Houses

Flush with Resources

When Mood would go over +3, erase a Surplus and pick one:

- You trade it for information. Ask the GM one of the questions from **READ THE WIND**, and you're in a great position to take advantage of it.
- Gift the excess to your allies. Gain advantage with Reach until the end of this Age.
- Make a show of power with a great celebration. Gain advantage with Grasp until the end of this Age.
- Finance a network of informants. Gain advantage with Sleight until the end of this Age.
- You invest in better equipment. Permanently unlock one more Asset option.

You can only pick each option once per age.

Fall into Crisis

When Mood would go below -3, erase a Need and pick one:

- Someone takes advantage of your weakness: lose an important alliance or territory.
- Your House falls into infighting. Get disadvantage with Grasp until the dispute is resolved.
- Your House retreats into solitude. Get disadvantage with Reach until they are convinced out of isolation.
- Your House loses discipline and your contacts smell weakness. Get disadvantage with Sleight until you make a display of might and drive.
- Your old tools fail you. Permanently lose one Asset option.

You can only pick each option once per age.



Example Resources

This is the list of resources we used when designing **FREE FROM THE YOKE**, though you should feel free to make up your own to fit the situation - not all the ones listed here will be appropriate for every game. Read on to see what having each resource as a surplus or a need might look like.

Attunement

AS A SURPLUS: *The spirits of the Land lend your House assistance, and your ancestors visit in dreams to give you advice.*

AS A NEED: *You are haunted, cursed and shunned, and the Land will resent your attempts to draw on its power.*

Coin

AS A SURPLUS: *You have the resources to obtain whatever luxury you desire, and it's a rare bribe that strains your coffers.*

AS A NEED: *You can barely afford to pay your staff, and creditors are on the brink of knocking down your door.*

Crops

AS A SURPLUS: *Your people are fat and healthy. You can hold regular feasts for your allies and lieutenants.*

AS A NEED: *Your people are starving and riots aren't far off.*

Defences

AS A SURPLUS: *Your holdings are firmly fortified, or defended by well-trained warriors.*

AS A NEED: *Saboteurs and brigands can raid you with minimal risk, and you're at great risk of extortion and vassalage.*

Engineers

AS A SURPLUS: *You have skilled architects and engineers able to put advanced plans together, and the skills and tools needed to construct them.*

AS A NEED: *Everything you build is in constant need of repairs and patch jobs. Making something long-lasting is almost impossible.*

Herds

AS A SURPLUS: *Your herds provide plentiful food and transport, and greatly augment your farming and logistics efforts.*

AS A NEED: *Your animals are sickly, or weak, or thinned out. Your troop movements, crop planting and logistics are greatly slowed.*

The Great Houses

Justice

AS A SURPLUS: *Everyone who's done you wrong has been brought to task, and others now seek you out to advocate for them.*

AS A NEED: *There's a longstanding grudge that demands reparations. The group that hurt you hasn't suffered at all, while you have to deal with the harm they dealt every day.*

Land

AS A SURPLUS: *You control a vast swath of the nation, and you're able to keep it safe and useable. Your living areas are spacious and you have room to expand.*

AS A NEED: *You're penned in and cramped. There's nowhere to house new recruits, hide valuables, or build new facilities.*

Leadership

AS A SURPLUS: *However your House is governed, it's working well. They may have a charismatic leader who commands loyalty, a smooth and efficient bureaucracy, or a culture of respect and understanding.*

AS A NEED: *It's unclear who's in charge. There's no clear voice managing discussions, and few have a clear idea of what they're meant to be doing at any one time.*

Luxury

AS A SURPLUS: *Your House lives at the height of opulence. Their holdings are soft, beautiful, comfortable and desirable.*

AS A NEED: *Life is harsh. Tempers are frayed, stress is high, and it's hard to see how tomorrow will be better than today.*

Medicine

AS A SURPLUS: *You can treat most ailments and maladies. Even dire injuries can be dealt with, given time.*

AS A NEED: *You're vulnerable to illness. Maybe there's a particular plague spreading through your holdings, maybe you have weak immune systems, maybe your lifestyle leads to regular injury.*

Morale

AS A SURPLUS: *Your House has a clear sense of shared purpose, camaraderie and fellowship. They believe in each other, and think they can work together to do great things.*

AS A NEED: *Your House has descended into back-biting, factionalism and despair. Any attempt to organise them into a group action is likely to run into complaints, sabotage or apathy.*

Peace

AS A SURPLUS: *You luxuriate in hard-earned peace and stability.*

AS A NEED: *It feels like every time you blink a new crisis assaults your House. Between health, safety, shelter and innumerable other concerns there's too many fires to put them all out.*

Prestige

AS A SURPLUS: *Your family are at the forefront of society. They're respected, feared or beloved, and other groups welcome their presence and seek their approval.*

AS A NEED: *Your family are pariahs, disdained, or beneath other's notice. Your people get more done when they hide their affiliation, and others respect bargains and obligations only grudgingly.*

Rare Materials

AS A SURPLUS: *Whatever exotic resource your House needs, you have some of it in stock. Strange minerals, ancient bones, incredibly tough stones and more.*

AS A NEED: *Your family is feeling the lack of something hard to find – special feed for their pedigree horses, chemicals to fix dyes and leathers, or sacraments for their worship ceremonies.*

Raw Materials

AS A SURPLUS: *Your House has easy access to the resources needed for large-scale construction: lumber, ores, quarries and more.*

AS A NEED: *You have to scrape and beg for the resources to repair your possessions, and any grand projects are just a pipe dream.*

The Great Houses

Recruits

AS A SURPLUS: *Your House is bustling with people. They may not be particularly skilled or handy, but in terms of raw manpower no-one comes close.*

AS A NEED: *Maybe you have a lot of sick or wounded, maybe you're just only a few people. Either way, you don't have the manpower to accomplish any sort of large-scale action with finesse.*

Scholars

AS A SURPLUS: *Your family understands more of the workings of the world than most, and have used that to improve their quality of life. They're better able to predict the actions of the natural world, and they can plan out grand rituals to reshape the Land.*

AS A NEED: *Your family has little knowledge of how to exploit the laws of physics, alchemy or astrology. The magic of the Land is best avoided or fearfully warded against.*

Scouts

AS A SURPLUS: *Your guards, patrols, or mapmakers ensure you're well-informed about the surrounding area.*

AS A NEED: *There's something in your local area that mystifies you and poses a grave threat to your House: monsters glimpsed in the undergrowth, strange stirrings underground, or gathering brigands.*

Trade

AS A SURPLUS: *You're the focal point of a web of caravans and merchants that spans the land. You have your finger on the pulse of commerce, and collect a healthy skim off the top.*

AS A NEED: *You're isolated or ostracised. Maybe traders are too scared to visit you, don't want to risk associating with you, or they just know that you wouldn't be able to pay.*

Transport

AS A SURPLUS: *You have a well-maintained stable or fleet, and when your family travels they can do so swiftly and easily.*

AS A NEED: *Getting your family anywhere in a hurry is a nightmare. If they even have vehicles or mounts, they're ill-tempered and in constant need of maintenance.*

PITCHED BATTLE

When you meet another army in open warfare, first define what victory looks like for each party bearing in mind the scale of the forces involved.

Setting Stakes

Put a pot in the centre of the table, and get a set of tokens in two different colours (poker chips, beads, etc). For each of your Needs that is relevant to the battle, add a token of your opponent's colour to the pot.

Starting with the party with the lowest Grasp, take it in turns to make a statement and put a token of your colour in the pot.

Statements:

- I risk the majority of my soldiers.
- I risk harm to my VIPs.
- I risk losing a crucial resource.
- I risk compromising my ethics.
- I risk losing the respect of my followers.
- I risk giving up control of a location.

At any point, you can fold and avoid risking more. If you have no more statements you can make, you must fold.

Joining Battle

Starting with the general that didn't fold, they take it in turns to either:

- *Declare their retreat, bringing the battle to a close after the opponent's next turn.*
- *Or tap a nearby untapped Surplus or Character and draw a random token from the pot.*

If it's your token: pick one of your opponent's declared risks and say how you make it true. If all of their declared risks are already true, declare victory.

If it's their token: describe how your warriors regroup, fall back, or take shelter, and put this token in front of your opponent.

The Great Houses

After each round of draws, each player who isn't commanding an army may describe a short vignette of the battle - a few sentences at most, only touching lightly on named characters.

If a player has run out of Surpluses or Characters to tap, they can keep making draws - but for each draw must erase a Surplus or deal a Heavy Wound to a Character.

If neither player wishes to continue making draws, it's a stalemate. Bring the battle to a close.

Endgame

The victor gets the condition they set out at the battle's onset, or as much as is possible given the risks that came true.

If the battle ends through retreat or stalemate, the player with the most tokens in front of them is the victor. In the event of a tie, the player with the most risks declared is the winner.

Based on victory conditions and risks that have come true, the GM will describe the battle's outcome and assign Needs and transfer/remove Surpluses as is fitting.

Finally, when you wage PITCHED BATTLE within the land's borders, raise Turmoil by 1.

EXAMPLE OF WAR

The **Blood of Hydra** are besieging the **Golden Company's** coastal fortress. The **Blood of Hydra** have their character present - **Hilda the Bogatyr** - as well as *Surplus: Fleet*, *Surplus: Sailors* and *Need: Leadership*. The **Golden Company** don't have their character present, but do have *Surplus: Defences*, *Surplus: Recruits* and *Surplus: Morale*, along with *Need: Food* and *Need: Weaponry*.

They define their victory conditions: the Blood want to steal the bullion hidden in the fort's vaults, while the Company wish to last out the siege until reinforcements arrive.

The pot starts with 2 Blood tokens thanks to the Company's Needs, and 1 Company token thanks to the Blood's Needs. The Golden Company have lower Grasp, so they go first wagering risks. They start with '*I risk losing the majority of my soldiers*' and put a token in the pot. The Blood of the Hydra go next; they wager '*I risk compromising my ethics*' and put a token in.

The exchange goes on. The Blood are first to fold, having risked: *Their ethics, their VIPs, and control of a location (the battlefield).*

The Company has risked:

Their soldiers, their VIPs, the respect of their followers, and a crucial resource.

The pot has 5 Blood tokens and 6 Company tokens.

Based on assets present, both the Company and the Blood will get 3 draws before the draws start costing them dearly.

Turn 1: The Blood folded so the Company goes first. They tap *Surplus: Defences* and draw one of their tokens. They describe a salvo from the archers on the fort's walls striking Red Danica, Hilda's second; the Blood have taken harm to their VIPs.

Turn 2: The Blood are up next, and tap *Surplus: Fleet*. They draw one of the Company's tokens; their general describes the boats landing on the docks out of sight of the archers and disgorging their sailors, and gives the token to the Company's general.

Turn 3: The Company tap *Surplus: Recruits* and draw one of the Blood's tokens. They describe their soldiers shoring up the fort's defences, and give the token to the Blood's general.

Turn 4: The Blood tap Hilda and draw another of the Company's tokens. Their general describes their warriors circling the fort probing its defences, and gives the token to the Company.

Turn 5: The Company tap *Surplus: Morale* and draw one of their tokens. Using it, they declare that the Blood can break into the fort - if they're ok with sacrificing their soldiers to do it. The Blood's general doesn't want to retreat so they press forward, compromising their ethics.

Turn 6: The Blood tap *Surplus: Sailors*, finally drawing one of their own tokens. They charge into the fort and raid its stores, ensuring the Company 'lose a crucial resource'.

Turn 7: The Company have nothing untapped, so they declare retreat. They don't want to lose more.

Turn 8: The Blood could attempt another draw, but as the Company have more tokens victory is unlikely. Instead they declare their own retreat, abandoning the attempt on the Company's vault.

Aftermath: The Blood suffered injury to Red Danica and compromised their ethics; the Company lost a crucial resource. The GM transfers to the Blood the Company's *Surplus: Wealth*, but also gives them *Need: Morale* and *Need: Leadership*. Finally, Turmoil increases by 1 thanks to this House-on-House violence.

HOUSE PLAYBOOKS

FREE FROM THE YOKE comes with 8 Houses for you to use:

THE BRETHREN OF THE SEA SERPENT

Like the monsters of their ancient myths, the Brethren are perfectly at home far from land. When their boats set sail, it may be to explore, to trade, or to raid - but either way, the House will profit. The Empire may have kept them landlocked, or banished them from the land's coasts. Now the land is free, the Brethren will make sure that never happens again. You're resourceful and independent, and your armadas are vast.

THE HORSELORDS OF THE STEPPE

No-one could conquer the steppe - not even you. The Empire tried, butchering your herds and installing governors to keep you under control, but you won your freedom. Now your herds ride where you wish - to find new lands, to protect others, to muster for war. You're mobile, rugged, and opportunistic.

THE TEACHERS OF ANCIENT TRUTHS

The Land used to be rich in legends, lore, and knowledge. Under the Empire's rule, they stole the knowledge they could exploit, and destroyed the rest. You're the ones who were able to cling onto some fragments of that lore, and now shepherd truth, treasures and tales of your nation's forgotten past. Use them to reveal secrets of the land, apply new teachings, and find new truths. You're wise, mystical and subtle.

THE GLORIOUS MERCHANT REPUBLIC

A coalition of traders, guilds and messengers, you seek the sort of freedom that leaves you free to access your wealth. Though you may only wish to line your pockets, your trade forges links between the settlements of the land and binds the nation together. You're influential, rich in resources, and pervasive.

THE FORGERS OF THE MARBLED CITY

Artisans, artists and industrialists, the Forgers found their workers dying in quarries, shipped overseas to fortify the Empire's bastions, or demeaning their arts to make trinkets for the Empire's elite. Now the Forgers are tempered and strong, a steel heart gilded in the finest filigree. You craft beautiful jewellery, impossible monuments, and storied weapons.

THE CHURCH OF FORGOTTEN LANDS

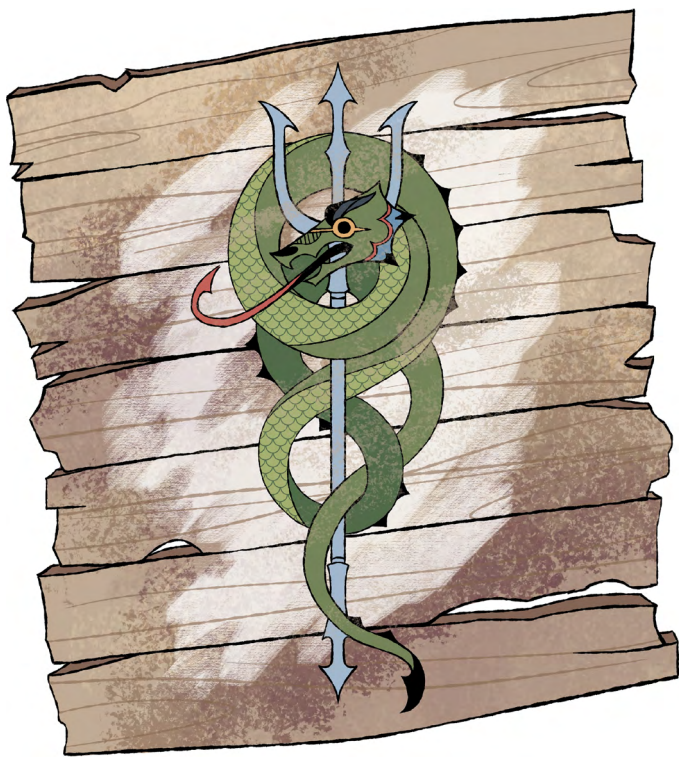
Your religion is not native to these lands. Your faith was carried there by the Empire like a seed lodged in a bear's pelt, but it soon found believers. The old gods of the land may have been outlawed, but they found expression of a sort in your dogma. Now, after generations of tyranny, your faithful find themselves wondering how to balance restoring what used to be, and staying true to the religion their adherents grew up with.

THE NEWFOUND FAMILY

Even as the rebellion began, refugees flooded into this land in search of a better life. You are the community those refugees have formed, holding onto the memories of your past while fighting for your own seat at the table.

THE ENVOYS OF THE WIDER WORLD

The Empire isn't the only major power, and you're here representing one of their rivals. During the revolution, you provided aid and support to the rebels. Now they're free, and it's time to collect on your investment.



THE BRETHREN OF THE SEA SERPENT

Ancient myths talk of great sea serpents and other creatures of the sea that were tamed once. They may have long died out, but a legacy lives on in those who live by the sea and look out to the waves for guidance. Restless, brash and adventurous, The Brethren of the Sea Serpent always seek something to do and goals to pursue, sometimes unthinking of the consequences.

MAKING YOUR BRETHREN

The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Draw the coastline on the map. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- A decaying island fortress, accessible only during low tide.
- A great circle of standing stones, now out at sea.
- The Empty Pens, once the home of giant sea serpents tamed by your ancestors.

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH 2, GRASP 0, SLEIGHT -1** if your ancestors were the explorers who first found this land.
- **REACH 1, GRASP -1, SLEIGHT 1** if your ancestors turned to a seafaring life to escape persecution.
- **REACH 1, GRASP 1, SLEIGHT -1** if your ancestors pillaged the land before being assimilated by the nation.

Customs

Pick one from each list or make your own.

RULE: The Captains' Table; an Admiral elected by Captains; 3 Ancient Houses rule according to traditional codes.

POPULACE: Every citizen must learn their way around a ship; the labourers who build the ships are valued above all; the word of any captain is valued above any serf or merchant.

CULTURE: Fashions and curiosities taken from each corner of the land; practical and pragmatic to survive at sea; fear and reverence of the sea serpents are wound into everything you make.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Hundred Wharfs, used to build an Emperor-worthy navy.
- The great lighthouse, an eyesore on land and sea.
- The cliffside keep, boldly watching against the only safe harbour for leagues.

The Great Houses

History

How did the Empire treat your house? If you were criminals or outcasts, start at Favour +1. If you profited under their rule, start at Favour -1, but gain Surplus: Coin.

Which house did an ancient ruler of your house form a blood-pact with? Gain Influence on each other.

The Empire used your sailors to carry their explorers to unknown lands. **What strange powers did the Empire bargain with there? What atrocity was your house complicit in during the occupation?** Say which other house suffered from your actions, and give them Influence on you.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- A new harbour made by the Brethren for the use of all.
- Coastal watchfires, made to warn all the lands of invaders.
- A statue of the Captain who first raised sail against the Empire.

Doctrine

Pick one:

- **STRANGE NEW LANDS:** *Once each season*, you may send explorers in a direction of your choice. *At the start of the next season*, the GM will say what they found and add a landmark to the map.
- **SAFE AT SEA:** The ocean grants safety. Your Character and House have Advantage on all rolls to resist adversity while at sea.
- **DRY LAND BARS NO SERPENT SHIP:** Light hulls and genius carpentry let you transport your ships over land. *With a few hour's work*, a crew can change a boat's *ship* tag to the *drawn* tag, or vice versa.

Lifestyle

Pick one:

- **COASTAL TOWNS:** Each one of your settlements is on the sea coast or the banks of a river. You do not trigger **LOGISTICS** when moving surpluses between your settlements.
- **RULE AT SEA:** Your house is ruled from a great ark that cannot be easily tracked. Attempts to find or trap it have Disadvantage.
- **SAFE PORT IN A STORM:** Your house's holdings are crowded around a great harbour, overlooked by an impressive fortress. Your damaged vessels can always limp back to the harbour, and the damage will be repaired there in a matter of days.

The Brethren of the Sea Serpent

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and mark the rest as Needs: *Fleet, Lumber, Fish, Sailors, Skins and Furs*. Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, say which Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

INHERITANCE

Your characters can add 1 to Bravery or Cunning, and always know how to pilot a ship and navigate by the moon and stars. In addition, they may **FIND COMMON GROUND** with the beasts of the rivers and oceans if they take a Flesh Wound in the process.

ALLIANCE MOVE

When you bring aid in another House's hour of need, gain Influence on them.

ASSETS

What marks your fleet out as special?

They have the ship tag plus two extra:

- ☐ Reinforced hulls (tag: *durable*).
- ☐ They're jewel-ornamented and opulent (tag: *luxury*).
- ☐ They can bear *siege* weaponry.
- ☐ They're incredibly manoeuvrable (tag: *swift*).
- ☐ They're equipped with rams and hooks for boarding actions (tag: *mighty*).
- ☐ They can stay at sea for seasons at a time.
- ☐ They can hold dozens of sailors and cargo (tag: *hulking*).
- ☐ They're numerous - you can outfit others with them when you **PREPARE AND PROVISION** without having to tap a Surplus.

What else can your character draw on?

Pick two:

- ☐ Navigators (Followers: *astute, drilled*).
- ☐ Bands of Raiders (Followers: *horde, vicious*).
- ☐ Ancestral axes (Weapon: *brutal, heirloom*).
- ☐ Ballistae (Weapon: *siege, far, brutal*).
- ☐ Grey-stave bows (Weapon: *far, silent*).
- ☐ Salt-hardened leathers (Outfit: *practical, tough*).
- ☐ Seaskins (Outfit: *subtle, hardy*).
- ☐ Purloined finery (Outfit: *regal, heraldic* - of another house).

The Great Houses

MOVES

Pick two:

Summon the Fleet

Even when they range far from home, your captains remain part of the fleet. How do you call for aid?

- ☐ Massive ship-mounted horns.
- ☐ Messenger gulls.
- ☐ Blood shed into salt water.

When one of your captains send the call, roll +REACH. On a hit, pick two:

- Reinforcements arrive refreshed and ready.
- Reinforcements arrive sooner than expected.
- Reinforcements arrive in great numbers.
- Reinforcements arrive with specialised gear.

On a 10+, get fleeting Advantage on House moves using the reinforcements.

Raid and Plunder

When you SEIZE BY FORCE a coastal settlement, pick one:

- You can quickly move any Surplus found in the settlement back onto your boats.
- The settlement's civilians dare not fight back.
- You're able to disarm their defences before striking.

Core of the Navka

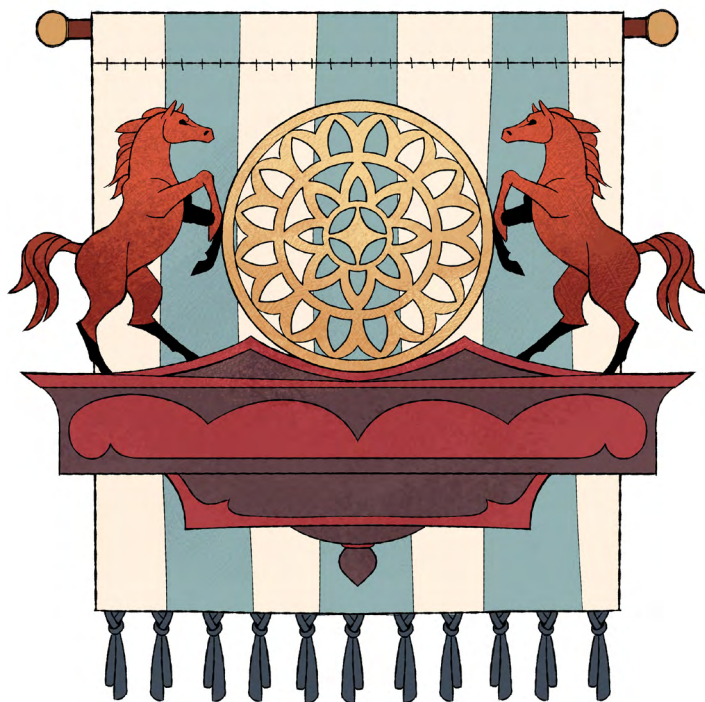
The spirits of the drowned linger as birds soaring in the depthless skies above - but you have ways of coaxing their favour.

Add the lore of the Navka to your House's Traditions. When your Character **Enacts this Ritual**, they carve wood into a bird or figurehead representing the drowned soul in life. This draws the spirit's attention, gaining protection from storms and from drowning. If the carving is installed on the prow of a ship, the Navka's will flows through the ship, granting it the *Canny* tag. Though, be warned - the spirit is hungry to experience the joys death denied them.

Trade Winds

Your ships sail beyond the homeland, finding exotic and strange things. **At the start of each season**, pick one to gain as a Surplus: *Spices, Dyes, Jewellery, Exotic Weaponry, Foreign Contacts*.

The Horselords of the Steppe



THE HORSELORDS OF THE STEPPE

We live far beyond cities and mills and garrisons and churches. Our land stretches from horizon to horizon, and no-one may claim it. It is wild, untamed, but with the grace of our herds we may borrow its freedom for a time.

MAKING YOUR HORSELORDS The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Draw the steppe on the map. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- The Field of Bones, where the dead will not stay buried long.
- A single, solitary barrow of a long-dead warlord.
- The dried-up spring, where the house clans first met to discuss politics.

The Great Houses

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH 0, GRASP 2, SLEIGHT -1** if your ancestors fiercely defended their pasture from invaders or competing herds.
- **REACH 0, GRASP 1, SLEIGHT 0** if your ancestors cultivated friendships with their pasture's neighbours, coming to their defence and receiving help in return.
- **REACH -1, GRASP 2, SLEIGHT 0** if your ancestors were a locust swarm, seizing pasture after pasture by force leaving ashes in their wake.

Customs

Pick one from each list, or make your own.

RULE: The mightiest always rule; a council of clans; the line of princes has been unbroken for a century.

POPULACE: Every citizen is mounted, ready for war; the clans are spread across the whole steppe to seek their means of life; once nomadic, the people still live off the land wherever they go.

CULTURE: Boisterous and warlike, but always welcoming in peacetime; the trophies of your enemies adorn saddle and abode; you adopt the best ways and practices of those you fight.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The racing track that the Empire built to display the might of the horses it stole from your people.
- The governor's mansion, built of brick and stone in defiance of your oldest traditions.
- The beacons that called the house to the Empire's wars.

History

How did the Empire treat your house? If you were raiders or fugitives, start at Favour +1. If you profited under their rule, start at Favour -1, but pick 3 Surpluses in the Resource section.

Which house did you feud with before the Empire came? If you put your grudges aside to fight the greater foe, gain Influence on each other. If you continued raiding in the midst of revolution, they get Influence on you.

Which land did the Empire send your horsemen to fight in? Say what strange beasts they brought back.

The Horselords of the Steppe

Which house brought you new stock to strengthen your breeds?

Give them Influence on you.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Great Stables, large enough to stable the house's horses.
- The Long Flats, where you first gathered for the uprising.
- The Farthest River, kept out of your reach by the Empire but now a tantalising frontier.

Doctrine

Pick one:

- **RIDE FAST TO ANY SUMMONS:** When you ride to pursue or escape, no-one can outpace you. *If anyone anywhere sends you a message by rider or bird*, you may narrate the arrival of a small band by the dawn of the next day.
- **ALWAYS PREPARED FOR WAR:** The dangers of steppe living mean you're always ready to ride. You can use martial Surpluses even if they're Dispersed.
- **THE FREEDOM OF THE SADDLE:** Each citizen gains rights and independence from their mount. Your characters can use **FIND COMMON GROUND** to work out what would make an animal allow itself to be ridden; when they ride, they leave no tracks.

Lifestyle

Pick one:

- **NOMADIC REMNANTS:** Although your House now has an urban centre, the surrounding steppes host many nomad kin-clans. *At the start of each Season*, get Surplus: Scouts if you didn't have it already, and you'll know if invaders enter the steppe.
- **FEUDAL KNIGHTS:** Each of your famed horsemen is supported by farmers, farriers, and blacksmiths to keep them in peak condition. *When you PREPARE AND PROVISION*, Surpluses within your holding count for double.
- **THE FINEST MERCENARIES:** Your House uses their warlike might to earn vital resources. *At the end of each Season*, gain Surplus: Coin if you're currently fighting on someone else's behalf.

The Great Houses

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and take the rest as Needs: *Herds, Land, Livestock, Soldiers, Scouts*. Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, say which Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

INHERITANCE

Your characters can add 1 to Might or Bravery, and always know how to ride and live off the land. In addition, whenever they look for their mount, it is always somewhere nearby.

ALLIANCE MOVE

When you arrive in time to save a group from a terrible danger, gain Influence over them.

ASSETS

Pick one option from each:

What Are Your Horses Famed For?

- ☐ Their endless stamina and loyalty (Transport: *mount, tough, canny*).
- ☐ Their grace and elegance matched only by speed (Transport: *mount, swift, luxury*).
- ☐ Their sheer power and might, bred to match the charge of lance and spear (Transport: *mount, hulking, mighty*).

How Do You Live off the Steppe?

- ☐ Roving between tracts of steppe (Followers: *hardy, astute*).
- ☐ Skilled rangers and foragers with deep knowledge of nature (Followers: *astute, spiritual*).
- ☐ Small herds providing a bounty of meat and dairy (Followers: *artisans, therapeutic*).

How Do You Make War?

- ☐ Lightly armed and armoured, your mobility is unparalleled (Outfit: *utility, mobile*; Weapon: *melee, elegant*).
- ☐ Taking the weapons of the Empire, each horseman and their horse is an unassailable war-machine (Outfit: *tough, heraldry*; Weapon: *melee, brutal*).
- ☐ Every rider has mastered the bow from an early age and all become the finest marksmen on horseback (Outfit: *mobile*; Weapon: *far, elegant, silent*).

The Horselords of the Steppe

MOVES

Pick two:

Find New Pastures

So long as you keep roaming, your herds will be healthy and strong. Gain advantage on Reach when you search for new pastures, and gain Surplus: Herds each spring so long as you do not have Need: Land.

Strength of the Mare

Your herdmasters are a mystery cult; through foaling rites, lines of mystic pedigree and funereal ceremonies, their herds tie them to the power of the land.

Add *The Strength of the Mare* to your House's Traditions. When your Character **ENACTS THIS RITUAL**, they may draw on the strength and endurance of the herd, heal a steed of any complaint, or open the gates to the ancestor's pasture and call through a steed of legend.

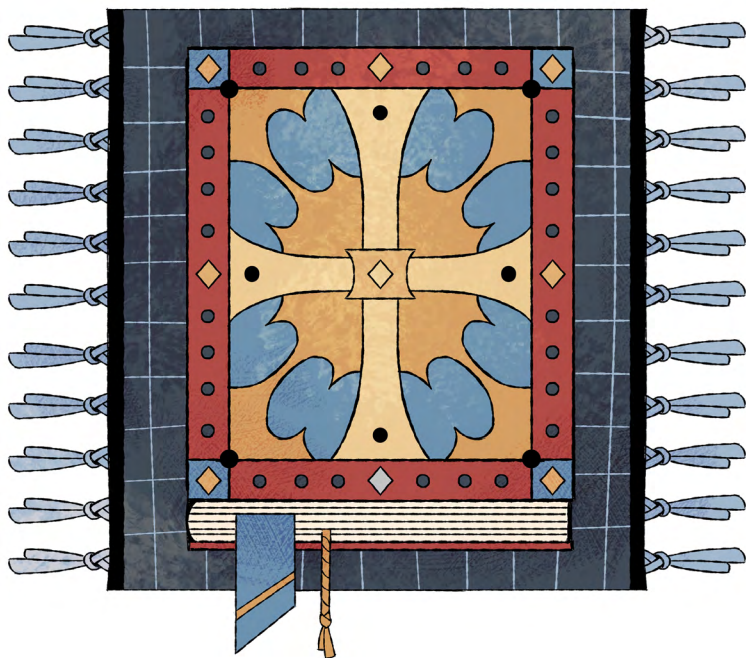
Hit and Run

When your forces charge in and assault a target, gain Advantage on **CLAIM BY FORCE**.

When you declare a retreat in PITCHED BATTLE, your opponent doesn't get another turn before the battle ends.

Endure

Your people have been hardened by the struggles of the steppe. Gain advantage on **HOLD TOGETHER**, and your Characters have an additional Light Wound slot.



THE TEACHERS OF ANCIENT TRUTHS

There is power in this soil, and truth in these hills. The Empire stole our lore, and made us forget the things our ancestors had learned. But the land is still talking to us all, and we can teach you how to listen.

MAKING YOUR TEACHERS The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Draw the oldest city on the map. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- The Field of Menhirs, many stones covered in ancient runes.
- The Blood Lake, once used for old rites and still hungry.
- The Dark Forest, home of your ancestors and their greatest secrets.

The Teachers of Ancient Truths

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH 1, GRASP -1, SLEIGHT 1** if you put applicants through dangerous trials before they are admitted.
- **REACH 0, GRASP -1, SLEIGHT 2** if you secretly watch candidates and approach them if they meet your standards.
- **REACH 2, GRASP -1, SLEIGHT 0** if anyone willing to learn is welcome, though many aspirants drop out.

Customs

Pick one from each list, or make your own.

RULE: The council of elders; the Grandmaster rules all; three elected from the wisest of the house.

POPULACE: The educated elites rise above the dirt and poverty of the farmers; all from the highest to lowest must learn the lore of the past, even if it haunts them; crafty landlords control the land, its people and its resources, yet they are guided to use it wisely.

CULTURE: The Ancient art and clothes still hold true; old is new and new is old and the ways of your people are strange and modern to others; the culture of the Empire is a good disguise, still adopted.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Schoolhouse, where the Empire's books and education addled the minds of your youth.
- A toppled statue, its features smashed and its purpose erased.
- An expensive temple, built to house the Empire's religion and now empty and abandoned.

History

How did the Empire treat your house? If you were outcasts or heretics, start at Favour +1. If you profited under their rule, start at Favour -1, but pick 3 Surpluses in the Resource section.

Which House did you teach an ancient secret in their time of need? They say how it helped, and you gain Influence on them.

What was most strange about the imperial scholars who tried to learn your ways? Say once piece of their lore you hope you can unlock now that you are free of their restrictions.

The Great Houses

What terrible curse did your ancestors lay upon a house long-gone that haunts you to this day? Say which two houses are that house's descendants, and give each Influence on you.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- A great library, to ensure your knowledge is never again lost.
- A gathering place where concentric circles of rocks house the discussions of rulers.
- The New and Ancient Hill, a peak that appeared the day the Empire was expelled.

Doctrine

Pick one:

- **FONT OF ANCIENT POWER:** The Land flows through you. *When others LEARN A RITUAL from you*, you may pick an extra requirement. During the **TURNING OF AGES**, get advantage on the roll **PAYING YOUR DEBTS**..
- **THE TRUTH MUST BE GUARDED:** Your initiates can write and speak in a language outsiders will not understand. *When you use SUBTERFUGE to hide your involvement in an action*, pick an extra option.
- **KNOW YOURSELF TO UNLEASH TRUE POTENTIAL:** You can use Surplus: Morale as if it was any other intangible Surplus (e.g. *Attunement, Leadership, Peace, Prestige*), and your characters always benefit from the *Meditative* tag.

Lifestyle

Pick one:

- **A CENTRE OF LEARNING:** Princes, merchants, and warlords all travel to your city to learn - and your house knows each and every one. *So long as you have a student from a faction*, gain advantage on **READ THE WIND** with them.
- **LONG-LIVED PEOPLE:** It takes long lives for wisdom to mature. Your holdings can always provide **PROFESSIONAL CARE** to your people. *If you bring your character from one age to the next*, add 1 to their Lore (max 3).
- **THE FURTHEST REACHES:** Your methods are old and storied and drawn from the ancestors of all Houses. Your characters may start with one ritual from the traditions of another House.

The Teachers of Ancient Truths

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and take the rest as Needs: *Ancient Writings, Land, Crops, Lumber, Vellum*. Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, say which Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

ALLIANCE MOVE

When you teach others a new way of gaining strength from the Land, gain Influence on them.

INHERITANCE

Your characters add 1 to Lore or Bravery, and always know how to read and write. In addition, they can sense when spirits are nearby, and may take a Flesh Wound to communicate with them.

ASSETS

How Do You Teach?

Choose one:

- ☐ Peripatetic philosophers (Followers: *genial, astute*).
- ☐ A vast array of scribes copying texts and distributing them throughout the land (Followers: *scholarly, horde*).
- ☐ Musicians keeping the stories alive (Followers: *artisans, roguish*).

How Do You Defend Yourself?

Choose one:

- ☐ By not looking like a threat (Outfit: *utility, subtle*).
- ☐ Athletic training keeps your mind centred and lets you escape harm (Outfit: *mobile, meditative*).
- ☐ The weather keeps invaders away (Outfit: *tough, hardy*).

What Are Your Greatest Treasures?

Choose two:

- ☐ Birch-bark texts, the earliest writings made by our people.
- ☐ An Ancient spear, heirloom of a warlord lost to the past.
- ☐ Words of Power recorded by the ancestors and never spoken.
- ☐ The Old Idol, its features weathered away.
- ☐ A strange pearl the size of a hand, glowing ominously in moonlight.

Bring a treasure out of storage once per age to accomplish an impressive feat - effects and cost to be determined by the GM.

The Great Houses

MOVES

Pick two:

Endurance of the Hills

Those who think you weak do not know how fiercely you'll fight to hold onto your lore. *When you CLAIM BY FORCE or enter PITCHED BATTLE to maintain control of a resource*, gain Surplus: Attunement as soon as battle is joined.

What's Old is New

When you have full understanding of your past, the present is full of opportunities. *When your House encounters a new practice or technology*, you may ask one of these questions:

- How can we make something like this?
- How is this dangerous to us?
- What cost is its owner paying?
- What are its hidden benefits?

Gain fleeting advantage when you act on this information.

Hallowed

In the time following liberation, your House has become pivotal in the cultural calendar of the land. *When the Arbiter is HOLDING COURT, you may pick one:*

- Laud the Arbiter and their virtues, and gain advantage on the Favour roll.
- Chasten the Arbiter and their excesses, and gain disadvantage on the Favour roll.

In addition, you will be expected to officiate any nationally-significant weddings, funerals, etc.

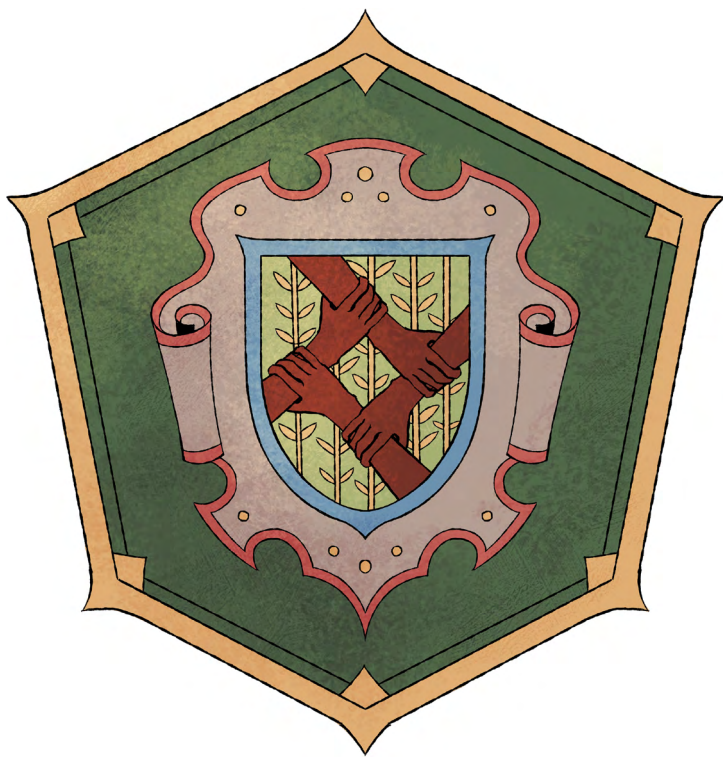
Eyes of the Ancestors

When your lorekeepers gather to seek a vision of the past, they may learn their ancestor's thoughts and feelings.

Add *The Eyes of the Ancestors* to your House's Traditions. *When your Character ENACTS THIS RITUAL*, they see a past event through the eyes of the people there, and feel what they feel. They cannot control the precise point in time they visit, but it will always include a fragment of ancient lore, a clue to an unanswered crime, or a insight into your ancestor's culture.

Feel free to offer all the players quick characters to play if you want to turn the past vision into a centrepiece scene!

The Glorious Merchant Republic



THE GLORIOUS MERCHANT REPUBLIC

As a coalition of traders, guilds and messengers, you seek the sort of freedom that leaves you free to access your wealth. Though you may only wish to line your pockets, your trade forges links between the settlements of the land and binds the nation together. You're influential, rich in resources, and pervasive.

The Great Houses

MAKING YOUR MERCHANTS

The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Draw three trading posts on the map and link them with roads. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- An overgrown stone circle, where disputes were once judged.
- A tall stele, still standing despite its seeming fragility.
- A dark and brooding bog, mist-shrouded and shunned.

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH 2, GRASP 0, SLEIGHT -1** if the Republic formed from local merchants forming links to aid their communities.
- **REACH 0, GRASP -1, SLEIGHT 2** if the Republic formed from the land's smugglers, fences and black marketeers.
- **REACH 1, GRASP 1, SLEIGHT -1** if the Republic expands by strong-arming those with resources they need into joining.

Customs

Pick one from each list or make your own.

RULE: Fair and measured hand of the elite; predatory and cut-throat dog-eat-dog; open and accessible to its citizens.

POPULACE: Great inequality of rich merchants and poor serfs; build upon towns of trade and commerce but with little cultivable land; prideful of being the only truly free people.

CULTURE: Practical and meek, favouring only what is necessary; careful craft and diligent work above all else; extravagant style often hides a cold and calculating approach.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Great Markets that exported your House's craft to far-off lands for the Empire's profit.
- The pit of ashes, where the goods of non-compliant merchants were burned.
- The public house where those chafing under the Empire met.

The Glorious Merchant Republic

History

How did the Empire treat your House? If you were smugglers or agitators, start at Favour +1. If you profited under their rule, start at Favour -1, but pick 3 Surpluses in the Resource section.

Which House was your ancient trading partner before the Empire came? They say what you supplied them, and you gain Influence on them.

Which new land of boundless opportunity did the Empire teach you of? Who from it now lives within your state?

Which family do you now rely on to be an effective trader? They say what they're supplying you - and what gathering it costs them - and gain Influence on you.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Senate House ruling the Republic in independence.
- The Way of the People, a long and busy road used by every trader in the land.
- The five districts, each sending a minister to help rule the Republic.

Doctrine

Pick one:

- **SUPPLY THE NEEDY:** The Republic is only strong if its people are fed and free. *When you use RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB to ease other's suffering*, you may erase a Need of your own.
- **TRADE WITH FOUR CORNERS:** Your merchants travel far and wide in search of a good deal. *When you send them out for a particular luxury*, roll +Reach; on a hit you get what you want, but on a 7-9 it's not all you hoped for - or there's strings attached.
- **KNOW THE TRUE NATURE OF YOUR PARTNERS:** You value discretion much more than simple profit. *When you READ THE WIND to investigate a trade deal*, you may also ask a follow-up question.

The Great Houses

Lifestyle

Pick one:

- **THE MERCHANT CITY:** The nation's power and trade all flows through one nexus, one city – walled and defensible. ***So long as the city stands,*** you never need to trigger **LOGISTICS** when moving Surpluses to or from it.
- **THE NETWORK:** The Republic spreads like a tree's branches from town to town, sharing information from far and wide. ***When anyone visits one of your guildhouses,*** they can ask a question about current events elsewhere in the land. The GM will tell you the truth; you may tell the asker what you wish.
- **A BRANCH IN EVERY STATE:** Your House has moved beyond local concerns, placing franchises in every major settlement. ***When you visit a new franchise,*** tell the group what their main product is and give your character a sample of it.

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and take the rest as Needs: *Crops, Valuable minerals, Land, Livestock, Building materials*. Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, say which Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

The Glorious Merchant Republic

ALLIANCE MOVE

When you sell a group something for far less than it's worth, gain Influence on them.

INHERITANCE

Your characters add 1 to Cunning or Lore, and can speak every language found in the Land and its neighbours. In addition, they have an instinctive grasp of value, and may always ask the GM for an honest appraisal of an object or service's worth.

ASSETS

Pick one option from each:

How Do You Trade?

- ☐ Libraries of detailed trade books and charters (Followers: *scholarly, astute*).
- ☐ Trading hubs with well-guarded warehouses (Followers: *drilled, astute*).
- ☐ An army of travelling salesmen preparing the contracts (Followers: *genial, roguish*).

How Do You Transport?

- ☐ Armoured caravans (Transport: *drawn, durable*).
- ☐ Trading vessels on sea and river (Transport: *ship, swift*).
- ☐ An organisation of peddlers bringing wares to the furthest corners (Transport: *mount, swift*).

How is the Republic Defended?

- ☐ A professional army funded by trade taxes, equipped with the best weapons and armour that can be bought (Followers: *drilled, vicious*; Weapons: *melee, elegant*).
- ☐ It is the duty of every citizen to train twice a year and be ready to be called up (Weapons: *melee, many*; Outfit: *practical, tough*).
- ☐ Passing beneath the notice of aggressors (Outfit: *practical, subtle*; Followers: *roguish, shadowy*).

The Great Houses

MOVES

Get *The Golden Republic*, and one other:

The Golden Republic

Your charter is an ancient scroll empowered by blood and gold, and it's a living document: the charter each Republic merchant carries rewrites itself as members assert and lose their rights. Pick two rights; when **THE AGE TURNS**, you can swap one for another.

- ❑ **A MERCHANT'S RIGHTS TO THEIR SIGNATURE PRODUCT IS SACROSANCT.** Your followers get *artisans* and your outfits get *regal*. If anyone attempts to duplicate a good a merchant has enshrined in the charter, they suffer a terrible curse.
- ❑ **ALL MERCHANTS WILL RESPECT THE BLACKLIST.** The names of blacklisted customers appear in the charter. At the start of each Season, give them Need: Trade. If they ask you to lift the boycott and you do, gain Influence on them.
- ❑ **ALL MERCHANTS MAY LEARN EACH OTHER'S CRAFT.** Each of your characters knows a particular craft skill, and can learn a new one each Season. They may **UNEARTH FORGOTTEN LORE** when they examine a crafted item.
- ❑ **THE REPUBLIC WILL USE FORCE TO ENSURE MEMBERS CAN TRADE FREELY.** If your character's a merchant, they can give their Followers *vicious*. If they're a warrior, they may add an extra tag to their weapons or outfit.
- ❑ **ALL MERCHANTS MAY FIND HOSPITALITY AT ANY OTHER MERCHANT'S RESIDENCE.** While your characters shelter within a guildhouse, those that wish them harm cannot enter without suffering a terrible curse.

Rationing

Whenever you lose a surplus for any reason, hold 1; spend 1 hold to get advantage on an action that surplus could help.

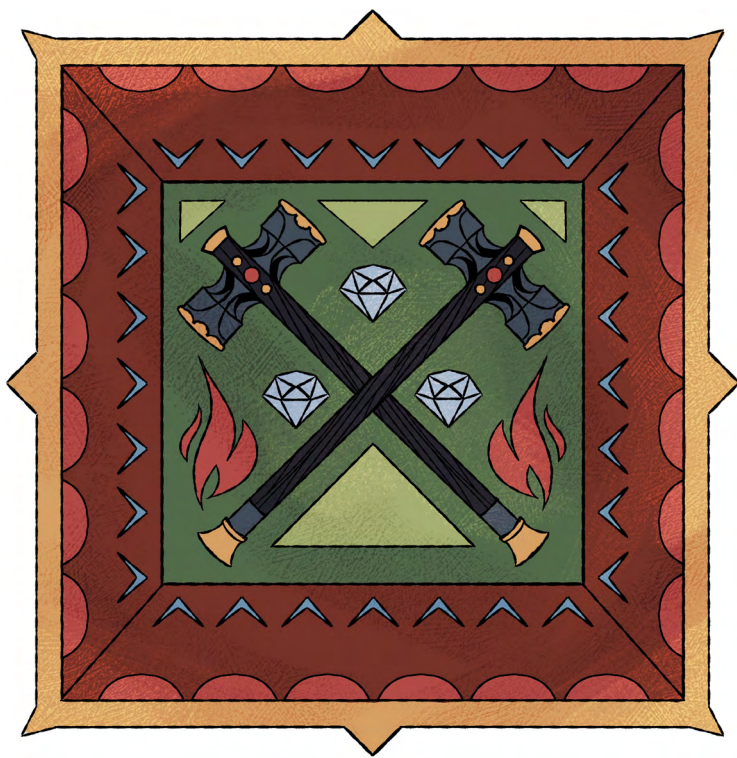
Trade Networks

At the end of each Season, name two settlements your traders have linked and draw a road between them. Nobody who moves resources between those places needs to trigger **LOGISTICS**.

Cut-throats

When you SEIZE BY FORCE a resource from someone, you may also give them a Need. *When you defeat someone in PITCHED BATTLE*, you may take one of their Surpluses for your own.

The Forgers of the Marbled City



THE FORGERS OF THE MARBLED CITY

Artisans, artists and engineers, the Forgers found their workers dying in quarries, shipped overseas to fortify the Empire's bastions, or crafting trinkets for the empire's elite. Now you're tempered and strong, a steel heart gilded in the finest filigree. You craft beautiful jewellery, impossible monuments, and storied weapons.

MAKING YOUR FORGERS

The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Draw a mountain range on the map. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- A great cairn, towering above the landscape.
- Cyclopean walls guarding a long-dead fortress.
- The old crater, where once a mysterious metal was unearthed.

The Great Houses

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH -1, GRASP 1, SLEIGHT 0** if your ancestors lurked in their keeps and hermitages, pushing back the outside world.
- **REACH 2, GRASP 0, SLEIGHT -1** if your ancestors used their prodigious skills to win favour at courts far and wide.
- **REACH 1, GRASP -1, SLEIGHT 1** if your ancestors only allowed the most worthy to benefit from their creations.

Customs

Pick one from each list or make your own.

RULE: The Tempered Monarch endures flames to win total power; two noble houses vie for power with the aid of lesser factions; the Forgers lurk in the shadows, pulling the Regent's strings.

POPULACE: Those who show talent are elevated from toil in the fields; social mobility only comes through substantial payments; the people wield the power and a revolt can topple any given order.

CULTURE: Great opulence and beautiful jewellery is highly prized; sculpture was perfected by the Forgers and their statues and carvings are everywhere; the clothes of crafters mark them out as loved and prized, while all others must follow strict codes.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Quarry, where the state's slaves were put to work.
- The Imperial Palace, built as an extravagant home for an Emperor that never visited.
- Six pyres on six hills, built with strange ritual significance.

History

How did the Empire treat your state? If you toiled in their mines and construction sites, start with Favour +1. If your craftwork was prestigious and desirable, start with Favour -1 but pick an extra Surplus in the Resources section.

Which House did you send artisans to after a war to rebuild?

They say what you put back together for them, and you have Influence on them.

Which corner of the Empire were your crafters sent to teach in?

What knowledge did they bring back? What was strange about the architecture there?

The Forgers of the Marbled City

What ancient site did you disturb to mine beneath? Say whose heritage you accidentally harmed and give them Influence on you.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Forge of the Earth, built at the site where the earth itself can melt any metal.
- The Breach, a defensive fortification in the pass where the Empire once attacked from.
- Seven Statues to mark those who defeated the Empire.

Doctrine

Pick one:

- **RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE.** *When you donate a Surplus towards the Arbiter's project,* gain fleeting Advantage to Favour. *If a project fails,* recover one of the donated Surpluses.
- **STRONG WALLS AND STRONG SOLDIERS.** *At the start of each Age,* you may build fortifications around any settlements you control. Any attempts to use **CLAIM BY FORCE** against a fortified settlement roll with disadvantage.
- **BEAUTY FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE.** Once per age, you may present another House with a beautiful work of craftsmanship. *When you do,* give them Surplus: Morale or Surplus: Luxury and get Influence over them.

Lifestyle

Pick one:

- **THE JEWELLED CITY.** You have made the seat of your House a thing of beauty. *When the game ZOOMS IN on your city,* describe the festival taking place there, and pick a stat characters who participate get fleeting advantage with.
- **BUILD RESILIENCE.** Your scattered people ensure that their neighbours have places to shelter from the storm. *When the GM declares a disaster befalls a settlement your people live in,* say what its inhabitants can do to find safety.
- **A CRAFT FOR EVERY SEASON.** You travel from settlement to settlement sharing your skills in a festival of arts and crafts. *When your House arrives in a new settlement,* say where you set up and what new craft you learn. Pick a tag your gear from a particular category has, for as long as you stay there.

The Great Houses

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and take the rest as Needs: *Marble, Crops, Dyes and Pigments, Lumber, Land*. Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, say which Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

ALLIANCE MOVE

When you work with another House to build (or repair) an item important to their culture, gain Influence on them.

INHERITANCE

Your characters add 1 to their Lore or Might, and have a beautiful object they personally crafted. They can repair any object or mechanism they encounter, given time and resources.

ASSETS

Pick one option from each:

What work is your greatest pride?

- ☐ Clear-thought crowns (Outfit: *heraldry, regal, meditative*).
- ☐ Runic blades (Weapon: *melee, elegant, weird*).
- ☐ Articulated plate (Outfit: *practical, tough, mobile*).
- ☐ Racing chariots (Transport: *drawn, luxury, swift*).

Who helps you in your craft?

- ☐ Labourers (Followers: *hardy, strong*).
- ☐ Apprentices (Followers: *artisans, drilled*).
- ☐ Philosophers (Followers: *therapeutic, genial*).
- ☐ Traders (Followers: *rogues, astute*).

How do you travel?

- ☐ In caravans of wagons (Transport: *drawn, hulking*).
- ☐ Riders carrying beautiful samples (Transport: *mount, luxury*).
- ☐ On foot through inhospitable lands (Outfit: *practical, hardy*).

MOVES

Pick two:

Crop Rotation

When you start a massive crop planting operation, erase an appropriate surplus. At the start of the next season, gain Surplus:

The Forgers of the Marbled City

Crops or Surplus: Raw Materials. At the start of the season after that, gain whichever surplus you didn't pick.

Skill Beyond Compare

Add the *reliable* tag to every item your House creates. An item with this tag will not break even when subjected to intense pressure and dire conditions. Even from one age to the next, your creations endure.

Bones of the Earth

The land is a living, breathing thing. As an apiarist works with the bees to create gold, so the earth takes an active role in your crafts.

Add *The Bones of the Earth* to your Traditions. When your Character **ENACTS THIS RITUAL**, they may draw on the stability and resolve of the earth, reinforce a structure with ramparts of rock, or crack open the rock to release a gout of water, a vein of valuable minerals, or the earth's scorching red blood.

Craftwork Surpassing Perfection

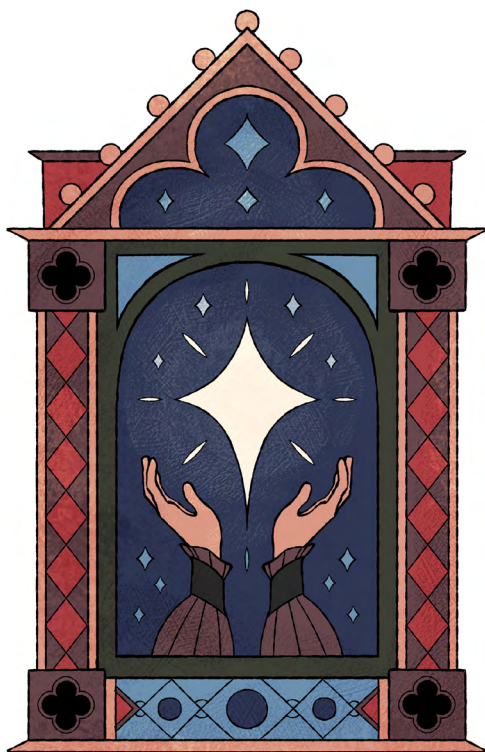
When your entire house works on a particular item, decide how many Surpluses you are collecting to support the crafting. If all collected Surpluses are still present at the end of the season, pick one legendary power to instil in the completed item:

- The owner of the item will be immune to the influence of spirits and mystical rituals.
- The owner of the item will be able to communicate wordlessly with their underlings.
- The owner of the item will become ageless and untiring.
- The owner of the item will be able to leap a river in one bound, and sprint as fast as lightning.
- The owner of the item will become supernaturally beautiful and graceful.

But there's a cost. Roll **+COLLECTED SURPLUSES**. On a 7-9 pick one curse, on a 6- pick two:

- The owner will hear constant whispers, sowing doubt.
- The owner will become incredibly frail, taking all Flesh Wounds as Heavy Wounds.
- The owner will feel a compulsion to reject any possession that is not incredibly beautiful.
- If lost, the item will return in the hands of an enemy or rival.

If the surpluses are lost before the end of the season, you may still roll **+REMAINING SURPLUSES**, but the GM will pick the curse and only reveal it at the worst time.



THE CHURCH OF FORGOTTEN LANDS

Your religion is not native to these lands. Your faith was carried here by the Empire like a seed lodged in a bear's pelt, but it soon found believers. The old gods of the land may have been outlawed, but they found expression of a sort in your dogma. Now, after generations of tyranny, your faithful find themselves wondering how to balance restoring what used to be, and staying true to the religion their adherents grew up with.

MAKING YOUR CHURCH The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Draw the border to your parent country on the map. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- An Ancient Temple converted to the service of your god(s).

The Church of Forgotten Lands

- A Dry River, once a source of life but now a cursed place.
- The Old Gods carved into the mountainside, now weathered, hidden and defaced.

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH 1, GRASP 0, SLEIGHT 1** if your faith is the ancestor faith of the land, adapted to exist under the Empire's rule.
- **REACH 1, GRASP -1, SLEIGHT 2** if your faith was brought here by the Empire's slaves, incorporating elements from their new allies in the land's locals.
- **REACH -1, GRASP 1, SLEIGHT 2** if you stem from the Imperial Faith everyone had to follow – a religion you're now trying to redefine and reclaim.

Customs

RULE: The Shining One is the Church's divinely-anointed ruler; rule is shared between Lords Temporal and Lords Spiritual in uneasy balance; though Princes have reigned before, now the Primate and Church hold power.

POPULACE: People in every walk of life are God-fearing to the last; the priesthood works tirelessly to minister to the poor and downtrodden, and hold back the excesses of the nobles and merchants; fully half the population live in monasteries, mastering crafts as well as prayer.

CULTURE: Austere and cold, the arts must labour under the guidance of the Church; the joy and wonder of life is celebrated in extravagant clothes and rites; no expense is spared decorating churches and art patronage is a religious duty.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Great Firepit, built for rituals of the Empire.
- An Ancient Monastery, toppled by the Empire.
- Martyr's Way, where the Empire executed many believers.

History

How did the Empire treat your House? If you were heretics or apostates, get Favour +1. If you were fêted in Imperial culture, get Favour -1 but pick an extra Surplus in the Resources section.

The Great Houses

Which far-off country brought the Church to these lands? Say what custom you still keep from that place.

Which House sheltered your people when the Empire persecuted them? They gain Influence on you.

Which House has refused to allow your clergy to preach in their holdings? They say why they don't trust you, and you lose any Influence you have on each other.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The Grand Cathedral, restored from the Empire's neglect.
- The Island Monasteries, home to many ascetic communes.
- The Lake of Penitents, where the masses were absolved of wrongs done under the Empire.

Doctrine

- **INTERNATIONALISTS.** Your existence is a reminder that Empire united many lands in suffering. *When you take part in a delegation outside the Land's borders*, you may find sanctuary and aid with fellow worshippers there.
- **COMFORTERS.** You have a god(s)-given duty to provide aid to those in need. *When you provide meaningful aid to those in peril*, gain Influence on whoever caused their hurt. If you break the Arbiter's laws while doing so, you don't lose Favour.
- **RADICALS.** You fight to ensure that the search for justice doesn't end with the Empire's defeat. *When you bring evidence of another House's crimes to the Arbiter's court*, win 1 Favour and they lose 1 Favour.

Lifestyle

- **A NETWORK OF CHURCHES.** Your churches are the focal point of communities. *When your character visits a new settlement*, its local priest will tell you one piece of gossip.
- **A BROAD CHURCH.** Each region's denomination has wildly divergent beliefs, adapted to fit their ancestral teachings. *When your character ENACTS A RITUAL as part of a religious ceremony*, the GM picks one less Bane.
- **CITY OF PILGRIMS.** Your centre of power is also a centre of pilgrimage, drawing believers from far and wide. If you start a Season with a Favour of 0 or higher, gain Surplus: Coin or Surplus: Prestige.

The Church of Forgotten Lands

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and take the rest as Needs: *Missionaries, Land, Crops, Literature, Wealth*. Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, say which Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

ALLIANCE MOVE

When you publicly condemn a group for their sins, hold 1.

Publicly absolve them of sins and spend the hold to get Influence on them. You can only have 1 hold at a time.

INHERITANCE

Your characters add 1 to their Lore or Bravery, and are able to perform all the rites of your faith. In addition, they each carry a reliquary containing the ashes of an ancestor; when they pray for guidance, the ancestor will appear and offer advice.

ASSETS

Pick three:

The Spoils of Reverence

- ☐ Luxurious robes (Outfit: *heraldry, regal*).
- ☐ Blessed plate (Outfit: *regal, tough*)
- ☐ Ceremonial swords (Weapon: *melee, heirloom*).
- ☐ Incense censers (Weapon: *melee, non-lethal*).
- ☐ Sworn acolytes (Followers: *spiritual, therapeutic*).
- ☐ Temple guards (Followers: *drilled, vicious*).
- ☐ Potentate's carriage (Transport: *drawn, luxury*).
- ☐ Stately Barge (Transport: *ship, hulking*).

The Gifts of Humility

- ☐ Sackcloth robes (Outfit: *subtle, meditative*).
- ☐ Travelling wear (Outfit: *practical, hardy*).
- ☐ Quarterstaff (Weapon: *melee, hidden*).
- ☐ Sling and stones (Weapon: *far, silent*).
- ☐ Rabble of zealots (Followers: *horde, vicious*).
- ☐ Healers and carers (Followers: *therapeutic, genial*).
- ☐ Humble steed (Transport: *mount, canny*).
- ☐ Rugged carts (Transport: *drawn, durable*).

The Great Houses

MOVES

Pick two:

Heretic Doctrine

Your Traditions don't draw on the land in the same way as the other Houses. Instead, pick which source of power you call on:

- ☐ **Celestial:** stars, sun, moon, the starless void. *You know a ritual to call on the perception and light of the sky.*
- ☐ **Spiritual:** ancestors, guardian spirits, gods. *You know a ritual to call the power of the spirits down into your body.*
- ☐ **Sorcerous:** shadows, fires, sacrifice. *You know a ritual to divine truths from the bodies of the dead and summon spirits.*

Also, you suffer Banes from this list instead:

- A mark of your faith is branded onto your body.
- A disquieting and unnatural phenomenon warps the area.
- You're incapacitated by a searing vision of the supernal.
- All present know exactly what it is you worship.
- Inhuman monsters will come for you.

You may still learn rituals from the other Houses, but you always suffer at least 1 Bane when enacting them.

Sanctuary

Your worship houses are a bulwark against the pain of the mundane world. *When you shelter someone in your temples,* those who wish them harm cannot cross the threshold. Those who recuperate there gain the benefit of **PROFESSIONAL CARE**.

Word Travels Fast

Once a Season, you may send a mission of your clergy to a chosen settlement. *As long as the owners of the settlement take no action to expunge your teachings,* any Sleight or Cunning roll involving the settlement has advantage.

Existential Terror

When your leaders attempt to keep the populace in line through religious fear, roll +**SLEIGHT**. On a 10+ pick one:

- Immediately end the effects of **FALL INTO CRISIS**.
- This age, you don't pick an option when you **FALL INTO CRISIS**.

On a 7-9, the populace are resentful of the scaremongering, but obey. Choose one of the above, but you cannot trigger **FLUSH WITH RESOURCES** until the next age. On a miss, the people rail against the theocracy. Gain Need: Peace.



THE NEWFOUND FAMILY

Even as the rebellion began, refugees flooded into this land in search of a better life. You are the community those refugees have formed, holding onto the memories of your past while fighting for your own seat at the table.

MAKING YOUR FAMILY

The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Draw two borders with neighbouring countries on the map. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- A time-worn monolith marking a forgotten war.
- A blasted desert that was almost impossible for you to cross.
- A moor whose animals viciously attack trespassers.

The Great Houses

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH 1, GRASP 0, SLEIGHT 0** if you come from countless different nations, displaced by innumerable deprivations.
- **REACH 0, GRASP 1, SLEIGHT 0** if you draw your members from a single nation that the Empire utterly obliterated.
- **REACH -1, GRASP 1, SLEIGHT 1** if you suffered at this nation's hands before the empire gave you bigger things to worry about.

Customs

Pick one from each list or make your own.

RULE: The loudest voices dominate; elected voices of the people; the family who's been here longest has the veto.

POPULACE: Working together to win the prestige you deserve; tension between youngsters wanting to assimilate and elders holding on to old ways; waging battles with each other over slights from the old country.

CULTURE: Demonstrate with your wisdom and actions why they should be grateful you live with them; combine the best parts of your heritage with the strengths of this new land to make something new; you must work to keep your home in our hearts, for you shall return one day.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The False Sanctuary, where migrants sought refuge before this land too was conquered.
- The Ashen Ward, a city's thriving international quarter burned to the ground by the Empire.
- A checkpoint garrison fortifying the border against anyone trying to cross.

History

How did the Empire treat your House? If you were reviled or scapegoated, get Favour +1. If they evicted others to give you somewhere to live, get Favour -1 but pick an extra Surplus in the Resources section.

How is this land different from your homeland? Say one way its climate, culture or wildlife were strange, and say how you adapted.

The Newfound Family

Which House was close to you before the Empire's invasion?

They say how they helped you find your feet in your new home.
You get Influence on each other.

Which House did you displace, undercut or outdo? They say why that activity was important to them and gain Influence on you.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- A vast market trading all the world's spices and fabrics.
- The shanty towns you've built on a settlement's fringes.
- An island nobody wanted, until you settled it and showed its bounty.

Doctrine

Pick one:

- **MUTUAL PROTECTION.** *When you defend another community against predation,* you gain Surplus: Justice, Spies, or Morale.
- **COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY.** *When you comfort a group suffering misfortune,* erase one of their Needs which you have as a Surplus. Optionally, move their Favour a step towards yours.
- **THE BEST DEFENCE.** *When your House uses CLAIM BY FORCE to defend what's theirs,* gain Surplus: Morale in addition to any other effects.

Lifestyle

Pick one:

- **NO FIXED ABODE.** Your life is unstable, and you never know when you might have to leave to get more work or avoid hostility from your hosts. *At the start of each season,* say what settlement you've moved onto and describe a key resource you're well placed to make use of.
- **INSULAR COMMUNITIES.** Life is easier when you don't need to hide who you are from your neighbours. *So long as you look for answers within your community,* you **READ THE WIND** with advantage.
- **STAND PROUD.** As you integrate into settlements across the land, you stay stridently proud of your culture. *When someone CALLS IN A DEBT on you,* get advantage on the Hold Together roll to resist it. *When you FALL INTO CRISIS,* erase all Influence anyone else has on you.

The Great Houses

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and take the rest as Needs: *Leadership, Morale, Recruits, Justice, Coin*. Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, pick a Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

ALLIANCE MOVE

When you show another House that they're causing unintended harm to a social group, gain Influence on them.

INHERITANCE

Your characters add 1 to their Bravery or Cunning, and can speak the language of their source culture. In addition, they know how to keep their head down, and have advantage on any **DISARM** rolls to avoid attracting attention to themselves if need be.

ASSETS

Pick three, describe them and give them two tags. You can pick each option multiple times.

- ☐ An outfit, weapon, followers or transport kept from your home culture.
- ☐ An outfit, weapon, followers or transport used in your industry.
- ☐ An outfit, weapon, followers or transport that helps you blend in.
- ☐ An outfit, weapon, followers or transport that helps you stand out.

MOVES

Pick two:

Whisper Network

You're well-practiced at warning others of hidden dangers. **When you spread word of someone's wrongdoing**, roll +**SLEIGHT**. On a hit, the warning reaches the people you want. On a 7-9, choose one way the warning mutates as it spreads:

- An innocent person is implicated in the offense.
- The offender can trace the rumour back to you.
- Vigilantes take action against the offender; raise Turmoil.

Fresh Eyes

The people of this land have biases and perspectives they may not even be aware of. You're able to see past those, and find opportunities they might have missed. *When your characters UNEARTH FORGOTTEN LORE*, they may ask a follow-up question based on the GM's answers. *When you add a ritual to your Traditions*, you may change one of its conditions.

Shunned Labour

You work jobs mainstream society is unwilling to perform. At the start of each season, this gives you Surplus: Coin.

Pick what defines the work:

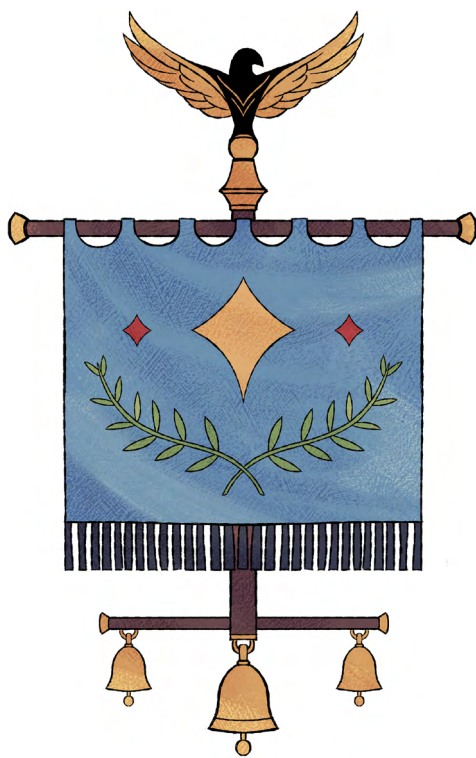
- **IT'S STRENUOUS GRUNT WORK.** At the start of each season, gain Need: Recruits if you don't have it already.
- **IT BREAKS MAINSTREAM SOCIETY'S TABOOS.** At the start of each season, gain Need: Prestige if you don't have it already.
- **IT'S REALLY BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH.** At the start of each season, gain Need: Medicine if you don't have it already.

The Grand Feast

Once per season, you may throw a week of festivals celebrating something from your source culture(s). Say how the festival finds new expression in this land, and roll +NEARBY Surpluses. On a 10+ pick two; on a 7-9 pick one; on a miss, pick one but the GM will say how the Arbiter interrupts the festival.

- You (and anyone who joins the celebrations) gain Surplus: Morale.
- Within the bounds of the festival, the Arbiter's laws will not be enforced.
- Within the bounds of the festival, magic follows the laws of another land.

At the end of the age, anyone who participated in a festival may change one condition of a ritual in their Traditions.



THE ENVOYS OF THE WIDER WORLD

The Empire isn't the only major power, and you're here representing one of their rivals. During the revolution, you provided aid and support to the rebels. Now they're free, and it's time to collect on your investment.

MAKING YOUR ENVOYS The Ancient Past

Landmarks

Mark three sites of priceless natural resources on the map. Then pick one to put on the map, or make up your own landmark:

- A giant boulder, covered in wind-carved whorls and glyphs.
- A dormant volcano, caldera filled with obsidian-dark water.
- A dense and verdant forest seething with predators and plagues.

The Envoys of the Wider World

Stats

Pick one:

- **REACH 1 GRASP 1 SLEIGHT -1** if your patron is a militaristic and interventionist nation.
- **REACH 2 GRASP -1 SLEIGHT 0** if your patron is a coalition of nations, often squabbling and divided.
- **REACH -1 GRASP 1 SLEIGHT 1** if your patron is a manipulative and cagey organisation.

Customs

Pick one from each list or make your own.

RULE: An appointed ambassador and their staff; a business given license by your patron to represent their interests; cells working independantly under the orders of a spymaster back home.

POPULACE: Citizens of your patron, each one a temporary visitor to the land; envoys who have lived here their entire lives, starting families and raising new envoys; locals recruited and managed by key personnel from your patron.

CULTURE: Subtle signs of your affiliation, worked into heraldry and outfits; arrogant deputies of a greater power; blending in with the greater populace, except in the safe areas where you celebrate your patron's culture.

Then as a group pick a Form on the Arbiter sheet.

The Imperial Occupation

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The looming garrison, where the occupying army was stationed.
- The grand quarry, extracting precious minerals from the earth.
- The ever-burning chasm, torn open following the Empire's worst atrocity.

History

How did your patron act during the occupation? If they fought against the Empire and sheltered refugees, get Favour +1. If they used the distraction to pursue the Empire's resources elsewhere, get Favour -1 but pick an extra Surplus in the Resources section.

How powerful is your patron? Say if it's a peer of the Empire and similarly colonialist, or significantly smaller but more humane.

The Great Houses

Who sent a delegation to request your aid? They say what they promised you if you aided the resistance, and why they haven't delivered it yet; you gain Influence on them.

Who hid your initial envoys from the Empire? They say what sacrifices they made to allow you to escape notice, and gain Influence on you.

Then work through the Flashpoints on the Arbiter sheet.

The New Land

Landmarks

Pick an option to put on the map, or make your own:

- The outlying islands, micro-nations friendly to your patron.
- The razed village, devastated by raids over the border.
- The folorn stockade, holding the occupation's worst criminals.

Doctrine

Pick a mission from your patron:

- **GUIDE THEIR GROWTH:** *When you use your resources to make peace between two Houses or reconcile a House with the Arbiter,* gain 1 Trust.
- **PROTECT OUR INVESTMENT:** *When you protect a key resource only found in this land, or export a Surplus of it back to your patron,* gain 1 Trust.
- **PUNISH THE EMPIRE:** *When you lead an attack on the Empire's armies, or remove or subvert one of their key figures,* gain 1 Trust.

Lifestyle

Pick one:

- **THE GRAND EMBASSY:** You have a central headquarters, as close to the seat of power as is possible. *When you seek an audience with the Arbiter,* spend 1 Trust to give the **READ THE WIND** roll advantage.
- **A THOUSAND EYES:** Your agents are spread throughout the land, giving you intimate knowledge of each faction's operations. *When you activate agents within another House's seat of power,* spend 1 Trust to give the **SUBTERFUGE** roll advantage.
- **CHAMPIONS:** Your people have been hand-picked to be the best and brightest your patron could offer. *When they stand against an outnumbering force,* spend 1 Trust to give the **CLAIM BY FORCE** roll advantage.

The Envoys of the Wider World

Resources

Pick 2 as Surpluses and take the rest as Needs: *Recruits, Weaponry, Coin, Raw Materials, Luxury*.

Work out where each Surplus is kept, or mark it as Dispersed. For each Need, say which Flashpoint it stems from.

Then the GM picks Customs and Moves for the Arbiter.

ALLIANCE MOVE

When another House accepts your offer of aid and resources, gain Influence on them.

INHERITANCE

Your characters add 1 to their Lore or Might, and can appear as either an average local, or a representative of a greater power. In addition, they have a form of diplomatic immunity; spend 1 Trust to suffer no Banes when you cast a ritual, or prevent a Heavy Wound you've just taken.

ASSETS

Pick three:

Signs of the Exalted

- ☐ Brass and silver staff (Weapon: *melee, weird*).
- ☐ Inscribed jewellery (Outfit: *heraldry, meditative*).
- ☐ Treasure junk (Transport: *ship, luxury*).
- ☐ Honour guard (Followers: *drilled, vicious*).

Signs of the Courier

- ☐ Short bow (Weapon: *far, silent*).
- ☐ All-weather gear (Outfit: *practical, hardy*).
- ☐ Purebread stallion (Transport: *mount, swift*).
- ☐ Outriders (Followers: *hardy, shadowy*).

Signs of the Subversive

- ☐ Poisoned knives (Weapon: *melee, hidden*).
- ☐ Thieves' garb (Outfit: *subtle, mobile*).
- ☐ Inconspicuous cart (Transport: *drawn, durable*).
- ☐ Infiltrators (Followers: *rogues, shadowy*).

The Great Houses

MOVES

You get Not From Here, and pick one:

Not From Here

While you live in this land, you aren't beholden to the Arbiter. The one who controls your fate is much more powerful, even if they are also far away. Your relationship with your patron is tracked with Trust points, starting each Age at 1.

At the start of each Age, decide with the GM if you're tasked with the Progress or Doom of the Arbiter's project. **When you add one of those points**, gain 1 Trust.

When the Arbiter is HOLDING COURT, instead of the normal results use these:

On a 6 or lower, your lack of influence is noted. Lose 1 Trust, and the GM says how your patron is expecting you to improve. **On a hit**, you are respected in the Arbiter's court. On a 7-9 pick one, on a 10+ pick two:

- You make a lucrative deal; swap one Surplus for another.
- You turn someone within their regime into your asset.
- You hold a private meeting with someone; no-one else will know.
- You hear a rumour about events in the Nation that bears further investigation.

Just a Humble Tailor

When you call on your patron's resources to set up a front organisation, spend 1 Trust and roll +SLEIGHT. On a hit, give them a name and an apparent trade. Your character can appear to be a member of the front instead of this House, and the front cannot be linked back to you without effort. On a 10+, pick one:

- Add a gear option usable to the front, with three tags.
- The front appears linked to a House you have Influence over.
- The front has a base in a secure, desirable or strategic location.

Call in the Cavalry

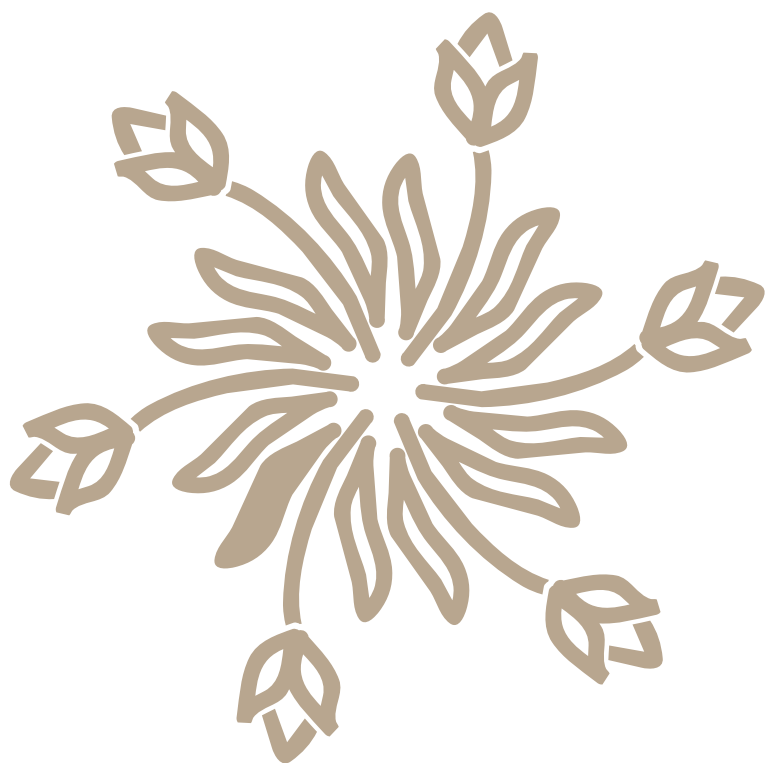
When you call on your patron for help, spend 1 Trust and say which Surplus you require. Roll LOGISTICS to see when it'll arrive.

Carry a Big Stick

When you negotiate with another House, you may spend 1 Trust to bring in leverage from your patron. If you do, they pick one:

- They commit their House to the action you describe, and trigger **FLUSH WITH RESOURCES** as your patron rewards them.
- They refuse, and must **FALL INTO CRISIS**.

The Envoys of the Wider World







Chapter 3:



Champions



EVERY AGE COMES WITH ITS OWN CHALLENGES, AND THOSE CHALLENGES CALL FOR HEROES TO RISE UP. These heroes, whether they're famed champions or subtle manipulators, will guide the course of history.

Your character is an exceptional member of the House, tasked with braving the dangerous world outside their House's holdings. They might be a commander, an operative, an agitator, or a bizarre and shunned figure on the House's fringes. However they approach the world's challenges, they're a dynamic and skilled individual worthy of sagas and songs.

As your character forms bonds with the other legendary heroes of this age, they'll learn more about the land and change their role in their House. They'll face down brigands and monsters, find love and treasure, and accomplish deeds the poets will sing about for ages to come.

And when their story comes to an end? Another hero will step forward from the House's rank and file and enter the stage of history.

CHARACTER COMPONENTS

CORE STATISTICS

MIGHT represents your strength, ferocity and skill with arms. It's what you use to **FIERCELY ASSAULT** your enemies, and gives you an extra edge when you **DUEL**.

BRAVERY is your ability to be quick-witted, daring, and unflinching in the face of danger. It's what you use to **DISARM** dangers in your way and **FORGE A PATH** through perilous terrain.

EUNNING is your sense of what other people want, and how you can exploit that. It's what you use to **FIND COMMON GROUND** and find **FAMILIAR FACES** in the places you visit.

LORE is your connection to the land, whether it's instinctive or learned. It's what you use to **UNEARTH FORGOTTEN LORE**, **CAST A RITUAL**, and **LEARN A RITUAL**.

GROUNDING

LOOKS are your character's appearance. They're there to help you describe them, but feel free to create your own options.

BACKSTORY details your character's relationship with the other characters. When your Backstory with someone is relevant to the situation, you're better able to **LEND AID** to help them.

ROLE describes how you fit into your House. Are you a **Leader**, a **Champion**, a **Rogue** or an **Outsider**? When you move from role to role, you introduce new plots into the story and gain new and improved capabilities for your character. When you've marked all four, it's time to retire the character.

GEAR represents assets external to your character - their **WEAPONS**, their **OUTFIT**, their **FOLLOWERS** and their **TRANSPORT**. Each piece of gear has tags to guide their effect on the fiction.

MAKING YOUR CHARACTER

To make a Character, you start by choosing a playbook (see p. 99). Each playbook represents a kind of archetype your Character fits in, with options to flesh them out and make them yours:

STATS. Choices for **MIGHT**, **BRAVERY**, **CUNNING** and **LORE**.
When you pick an array, remember to add +1 to one of the stats your House boosts (in its Inheritance section).

LOOKS. Short descriptors to help you imagine your character and describe them to the group. If you don't see anything here that you like, you are very much encouraged to make your own.

BACKSTORY. Go around the group, and on your turn read out a backstory entry (or pass). If someone volunteers for the entry, write their name down in its slot.

ROLE. Decide what position you have in the House at the start of gameplay, and use the associated move to start the fiction going. Remember to look out for opportunities to shift roles and thus gain advancements.

GEAR. You don't need to pick this now, but your playbook will let you add tags to gear from one or two categories. Look over your House's Assets and think about what you might want to go with when you **PREPARE AND PROVISION**.

MOVES. Pick two options from those listed in the playbook – you'll be able to pick up more later as you shift roles.

CHARACTER MOVES

Disarm

When you use quick action or heroics to de-escalate a dangerous situation, roll +BRAVERY. On a 7-9, you've bought some time, but choose one:

- Safety demands a sacrifice - GM says what.
- It's only temporary safety, and the danger will soon return.
- The danger's still present but threatening someone or something else.

On a 10+ the situation is safe unless changed significantly.

Fiercely Assault

When you use an appropriate weapon to hurt, capture or drive off your enemies, roll +MIGHT. On a hit, you've achieved your goal – they're wounded, bound or fleeing. On a 7-9, you choose one and the GM chooses two; on a 10+, you choose two and the GM chooses one.

Character list:

- Your avenue of escape is clear.
- You inflict savage, terrifying harm, and frighten your foes.
- You scavenge a useful piece of gear in the aftermath.
- You learn something useful: ask a question and get fleeting advantage acting on it.

GM list:

- Something or someone important to you is harmed.
- Others will come after you.
- You take Harm appropriate to the enemy.
- The situation is destabilised and chaos will follow.

Find Common Ground

When you ask someone to do something for you, roll +CUNNING.

On a hit they'll do it if you meet their terms. On 7-9 their player picks two and both must be met; on a 10+ they pick one:

They'll only do it if...

- ...a third party vouches for you.
- ...they can add or remove specific things to the task.
- ...they can back out as soon as the task costs them anything.
- ...you reduce the threat you pose to them.
- ...you can give them something now that's worth it.
- ...you reveal your full agenda here.
- ...their faction gets influence on your House.

Unearth Forgotten Lore

When you investigate a landmark or ritual from the past, roll +LORE. On 7-9 ask one; on a 10+, ask two:

- Whose ancestors are most tied to it?
- What was it made to remember?
- What dangers is it hiding?
- How can I draw on this for power?

Get fleeting advantage acting on the answer.

Call For Aid

After failing to roll as well as you'd like, you may say what a character nearby can do to boost your efforts. If the group agrees, the helper says how they do it and rolls +AN APPROPRIATE STAT.

If they get a hit, you increase your result by one category: 6- becomes 7-9, 7-9 becomes 10+.

On a 7-9, they also share in your move's consequences.

If they fail, your result drops to a 6- and they share in the consequences.

If the helping character has relevant Backstory with you, they take advantage while helping you.

Champions

Duel

When you face down a matched foe in single combat, gain Hold equal to your Might score, plus one for each that is true:

- You are better equipped.
- You are avenging a grudge.
- The audience favours you.

As you duel, you and your opponents take it in turns to describe your actions and then pick a statement from the list below. Keep taking turns until the duel is over.

- *I desperately hunker behind my defences. Do you press the attack, or recover your breath?*
- *I charge in heedless of your attacks. I take a flesh wound; yield, or take a flesh wound.*
- *I try to put space between us. Do you sprint heedlessly after me, or advance carefully?*

GAIN 1 HOLD BY PICKING ONE OF THESE:

- *I test your defences. Fall back, or reveal your full capabilities.*
- *I feint and you falter. Yield, or look foolish in front of our audience.*
- *I make an appeal for reason. Yield, or show how this must end in blood.*

SPEND 1 HOLD TO PICK ONE OF THESE:

- *I get my weapon inside your guard. Yield, or take a flesh wound.*
- *I strike at your armaments. Yield, or I knock away a weapon or a piece of your armour.*
- *I take advantage of your existing wounds. Yield, or I either turn a flesh wound into a heavy wound, or turn a heavy wound into a deadly wound.*
- *I discover a second wind, and step down my most severe wound. Yield, or tell me what you most fear I'll do next.*

RITUAL MOVES

The power dwelling within this land is a key part of **FREE FROM THE YOKE**, deserving its own set of moves:

Learn a Ritual

When you learn a ritual, roll +**LORE**. On a 7-9, your tutor picks two conditions; on a 10+ they pick one.

- You can only use the ritual when in mortal peril.
- You can only use this ritual in a certain environment.
- You cannot use the ritual to affect a certain group of people.
- You must conduct yourself according to a particular virtue.
- You are forbidden from carrying out a particular action.
- Once a season, you must perform a particular action.
- You cannot teach the ritual to others.

If you learn a ritual without a tutor, (e.g. with **UNEARTH FORGOTTEN LORE**), your tutor is the land itself.

When you teach a ritual, you must include the conditions you learned it under (if possible).

Rituals learned in House creation come with no conditions.

Enact a Ritual

When you perform a ritual of the land, say what you want it to do and roll +**LORE**. On a hit it does roughly what you want: on a 7-9 pick one Blessing, on a 10+ pick two.

Blessings:

- The magic does exactly what you desire – no more, no less.
- The magic is far more powerful than normal.
- The surge of power heals a Flesh Wound.
- Select two Banes: the GM cannot pick them.
- You gain fleeting Advantage.
- You gain an insight into your tutor's current state.

The GM picks one Bane, plus one for each broken condition your tutor gave you (see **LEARN A RITUAL**).

Banes:

- The land's power warps your body in some way.
- The land demands a small sacrifice from you.
- The land shows you something it thinks you need to know.
- The land's creatures avoid, attack, watch or crave you.
- The weather changes suddenly and dramatically.

Champions

HARM AND DEATH

You may be free of the Empire's clutches, but you live in a world that is far from ideal. Characters in **FREE FROM THE YOKE** can suffer harm from dehydration and avalanches, from arrows and spears, and from the predations of spirits. This harm is expressed in three levels:

FLESH WOUNDS are temporary, easily overcome with a bit of rest. Examples: Angry, Bruised, Distracted, Sprained, Stressed, Winded.

HEAVY WOUNDS stick around, taking resources and time to heal. Examples: Bleeding, Blinded, Cursed, Feverish, Haunted.

DEADLY WOUNDS put you in the ground - but let you trigger your playbook's Death Move in the process.

When you take harm, the GM will tell you what level it is; write a description of the wound in a slot of the appropriate level. *If you have no slots of the right level*, upgrade the level of the harm: flesh to heavy, heavy to deadly. *If you have a gear tag that provides ARMOUR*, you may strike out that tag to downgrade harm: deadly to heavy, heavy to flesh.

The harm system is augmented with these moves:

Shake It Off

When you put space between you and a threat, heal any flesh wound. The GM says what changes while you're distracted. *When you have a few hours of peace*, heal all flesh wound slots.

Professional Care

When you rest a few weeks in safety with access to a relevant Surplus, heal all heavy wounds. The GM says how the local area changes while you're being treated.

Death

Sometimes the dangers of this land are too much to overcome. *When you take a Deadly wound*, trigger your playbook's **DEATH MOVE**. Once that's resolved, your character is no longer playable.

Choose one of your character's moves and link it to one of your possessions as a relic. Any member of your House holding that relic is able to use that move, for the rest of history.

Make a new character from a different playbook; the GM will work to bring you in to the story as soon as makes sense.

Eulogy

When you bring a character's relic back to their House, you may spend time with them telling and being told stories of the deceased character's life and final moments. If you do, the House's player picks one:

- Your House gets Influence over theirs.
- Your character counts as a member of their House – mark a role representing this new relationship.
- Their next Character swears to perform a task of your choice.

GEAR

Equipment in **FREE FROM THE YOKE** comes in four categories: Outfits, Armoury, Followers and Transport. You give your character access to gear using this move:

Prepare and Provision

When your House outfits your character, they can access special tools based on their circumstances. Start with your Assets, adjusted based on your character's gear move. Each of your Surpluses can be tapped to provide a relevant benefit:

- Gain a new piece of gear with one tag.
- Add a tag to a piece of gear for this mission.
- Get as many copies of a weapon, outfit or transport as needed to outfit the whole party.

Each option can be picked multiple times.

OUTFITS

You can always outfit a character with an outfit with either the *Practical* or the *heraldry* tags:

PRACTICAL: *The outfit is unremarkable but can be easily repaired.*

HERALDRY: *The outfit displays your house affiliation boldly.*

Here are the other tags you might give outfits:

REGAL: *The outfit is impressive and eye-catching.*

SUBTLE: *The outfit helps you avoid notice. If you have cover or do not move, you will not be seen.*

HARDY: *The outfit helps you resist the elements. It negates disadvantage from cold, rain or dangerous weather, and provides Armour when those harm you.*

TOUGH: *The outfit is reinforced against physical blows. It negates disadvantage stemming from physical impacts (hail, landslide, suppressing fire, etc) and provides Armour when those harm you.*

Champions

MEDITATIVE: *The outfit helps you focus your thoughts. It negates disadvantage stemming from distraction, intrusive thoughts and spirits, and provides Armour when those harm you.*

MOBILE: *You can move freely in the outfit, allowing athletic and acrobatic movements.*

UTILITY: *Pockets and carry-loops let you carry far more than you otherwise would.*

ARMOURY

Every House can always outfit a character with a weapon with the *melee* tag:

MELEE: *This weapon can attack foes within a few yards.*

Here are the extra tags you might give weapons:

FAR: *This weapon can attack foes within eyesight.*

BRUTAL: *The weapon devastates and terrifies foes.*

SILENT: *The weapon doesn't draw attention to you when used.*

HIDDEN: *Carrying this weapon won't cause people to think you're dangerous.*

SIEGE: *The weapon can take on fortifications, but it needs a group of Followers with a relevant specialisation to operate it. Adds one of your tokens to the pot if used it in **PITCHED BATTLE**.*

NON-LETHAL: *The weapon doesn't cause lasting damage and can help capture your foes.*

MANY: *Should you lose this weapon, you'll have others at hand.*

ELEGANT: *The weapon is impressive and flashy in use, and can circumvent crude defences.*

HEIRLOOM: *The weapon played a pivotal role in your House's history and gives you Advantage on rolls to command and convince members of your House. If you lose it and don't recover it before we **Zoom Out**, your House must **HOLD TOGETHER**.*

WEIRD: *Something of the old lore of the land clings to the weapon, causing a spooky effect specific to the weapon.*

CLEAVE: *You can fight at full effect even when outnumbered.*

DEFENSIVE: *The weapon helps you defend yourself, or lets you carry a buckler or shield. Provides Armour against a blow to you or someone in arm's reach.*

FOLLOWERS

Between a House acting in concert and a character acting alone there's a middle ground: sometimes a character gets help from a few House members or another small band. In these situations, you can treat the helpers as followers.

All Followers have at least one specialty tag, and perhaps more:

ARTISANS: *They can make or perform beautiful work.*

ASTUTE: *They're great at spotting hidden or ambiguous details.*

DRILLED: *They work well together in dangerous situations and will not panic or break.*

GENIAL: *They're great at getting others to open up or listen.*

HARDY: *They can endure a great amount of hardship.*

HORDE: *There's dozens of them, able to use weight of numbers.*

ROGUES: *They're skilled at thievery and running cons.*

SCHOLARLY: *They have vast knowledge and can decipher and use written texts.*

SHADOWY: *They're great at avoiding notice and appearing where they should not be.*

SPIRITUAL: *They have an instinctive connection with the land and its spirits.*

STRONG: *They can perform physical labour: harvest, construction, clearing debris, etc.*

THERAPEUTIC: *They are skilled at healing humans and animals. With a few day's work, they can remove a Heavy Wound.*

VICIOUS: *They're skilled at using violence. In battle, they give your character the cleave tag.*

When followers act unsupervised outside their specialty tags, the GM should decide how well they do given the established fiction. When followers act unsupervised within their tags, use this:

UNDER ORDERS

When you send a group of followers to perform a task within their specialty, roll +TAGS. On a 10+ they do it, no problem. On a 7-9, it's done but choose one:

- They fell short in one particular aspect.
- There'll be unfortunate consequences.
- It cost them: they lose a tag.

When a group lose all their tags they're no longer useful – they may be wounded, exhausted, or no longer interested in helping you.

To restore lost tags, give a group of Followers **PROFESSIONAL CARE**.

TRANSPORT

The land is large, and characters benefit from methods to travel across it. In *Free From the Yoke*, your transport has one of three tags:

MOUNT: *An animal ridden by its passenger(s). Capable of intelligent and independent action, and can carry small loads.*

DRAWN: *A cart, wagon or sled drawn by animals. Slower than a mount and requiring a trained driver, but can carry larger loads.*

SHIP: *A vessel made to travel river, lake or sea. Both fast and able to transport large loads, but restricted in where it can travel.*

In addition, your transport may pick up these tags:

DURABLE: *The transport is resistant to harm. Gain advantage when you Disarm with it by enduring or powering through danger.*

LUXURY: *The transport is opulent and impressive. Time spent travelling on it counts as rest for the purposes of healing times.*

SWIFT: *The transport is nimble and rapid. Gain advantage when you Disarm with it by evading danger and acting fast.*

MIGHTY: *The transport can be used as a weapon (tags: Melee, Brutal). Gain Advantage when you Fiercely Assault a smaller-scale foe with it.*

HULKING: *The transport is much larger than other transports of its kind. It can carry many more passengers or cargo, but its size can make it slower and more cumbersome.*

CANNY: *The transport is much better able to control its movements than others of its kind. If it's a Mount, it gains a tag from the Followers list. If it's Drawn or a Ship, it gains the same ability to control its own movements as a Mount.*

CHARACTER PLAYBOOKS

There are 6 character types to play in **FREE FROM THE YOKE**:



THE BOGATYR is a knight, warrior, and adventurer, drawing on the heroes of Eastern Slavic legend.



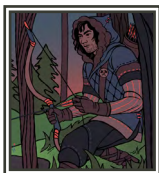
THE VAGABOND is a wanderer, low in social status but able to see the gears of society all the more clearly for it.



THE LOREMASTER knows the lore and magic of the land like no other, and has access to strange and mystical powers.



THE AMBASSADOR is good at talking to people and getting out of tense diplomatic situations.



THE SCOUT is good at sneaking, spying and exploring.



THE FACTOR has a keen mind for administration, acting by turns as a seneschal, a spymaster, a merchant and a general.

Finally, **QUICK CHARACTERS** are an explicitly more disposable playbook, designed to fill out a party when the group is spending significant time away from most of the characters.



THE BOGATYR

A stout and fearsome warrior, pledged to their house and the land.

MAKING YOUR BOGATYR

Stats

Pick one and add your House bonus:

- Might +1, Bravery +1, Cunning 0, Lore -1.
- Might +1, Bravery +1, Cunning -1, Lore 0.
- Might +2, Bravery 0, Cunning 0, Lore -1.

Looks

Pick or create one from each:

- Masculine, feminine, concealed, ambiguous.
- Handsome face, brave face, soft face, scarred face.
- Shining eyes, cruel eyes, judging eyes, one eye.
- Huge body, muscular body, stocky body, compact body.

Backstory

Read at least one out and ask for a volunteer:

I respect _____'s devotion to their House, even though it caused me trouble.

_____ and I fought a duel once. They won, but only barely.

_____ switched sides to help me. Can I trust them?

Champions

ROLE MOVES

Trigger one at character creation:

LEADER: Mark when you are placed in command of your House's warriors. Say who you've been tasked to defeat; the GM says where they are, and what obstacle stands in your way.

CHAMPION: Mark when you swear an oath to confront a particular foe. Say what you promise not to do until they're dealt with. The GM says one thing that won't harm you so long as you hold to your oath: bandits, honourable warriors, wild animals, the elements, thirst and starvation.

ROGUE: Mark when you ignore your House's interests to pursue vengeance. Say why it's crucial your foe is stopped before too late; the GM says where you might find allies in your quest.

OUTSIDER: Mark when you protect an enemy of your House, or kill an ally. Say why this is in your House's best interests; the GM says who is now coming to hunt you down.

When you change roles in play, add 1 to a stat or get a new move. If you mark all roles, retire to safety and narrate an epilogue, using as much of your Death move as you wish.

GEAR

Add a tag to your Armoury or Outfit when you **PREPARE AND PROVISION**.

BOGATYR MOVES

Pick two:

Against Countless Enemies

No matter the odds, you can trust in your skill with arms. Your melee weapons always have the *Cleave* tag on top of anything else, and you never suffer disadvantage from being outnumbered.

Gleaming Scale

You can treat the *Regal* tag as if it were the *Defensive* tag: you can erase it to avoid harm. When you have time to rest, you can restore an erased *Regal* tag.

Lead the Charge

When you charge into battle at the head of a group of allies, both you and those that follow you roll with fleeting advantage.

Sworn Sword

When you begin a DUEL with someone, use these statements instead of the standard three:

- I am fighting to protect someone else.
- I am fighting to hold true to a sworn oath.
- I am fighting to demonstrate my skill.

During the Duel, you can spend 1 Hold to instantly turn an incoming Heavy Wound into a Flesh Wound, or draw a new weapon.

Carry the Weight

When the need is dire, you can call on deep reserves of strength.

When you attempt a heroic feat of strength, roll +MIGHT. On a 7+ you can lift something as big as a horse just enough, and for just long enough, to do what is needed. On a 10+, pick one:

- You can put what you're carrying down with no harm to it or yourself.
- You can hurl what you're carrying away, causing great harm to it and whatever it impacts.

DEATH MOVE

When you mark off your Dead box, plant your feet and make your last stand. No matter what, you'll remain fighting until your allies are safe and the danger has passed. Only then do you die.



THE VAGABOND

A free and independent traveller, wandering across the land.

MAKING YOUR VAGABOND Stats

Pick one and add your House bonus:

- Might +1, Bravery 0, Cunning +1, Lore -1.
- Might 0, Bravery +1, Cunning +1, Lore -1.
- Might -1, Bravery +1, Cunning 0, Lore +1.

Cooks

Pick or create one from each:

- Masculine, feminine, concealed, ambiguous.
- Weathered face, grimy face, friendly face, scarred face.
- Hollow eyes, sunken eyes, wary eyes, cold eyes.
- Lean body, bulky body, scarred body, quick body.

Backstory

Read at least one out and ask for a volunteer:

_____ hurt people I love and they don't even know it.

_____ went out of their way to show me kindness.

I've heard fascinating stories about _____

Champions

ROLE MOVES

Trigger one at character creation:

LEADER: Mark when your House's misfortune brings them down to your level. Say what new opportunities are available if they follow your lead; the GM says who feels most resentment at your House's fall in status.

CHAMPION: Mark when your House needs something from the bandits, outcasts and margins of society. Say what contact you're calling on to make introductions; the GM says who's seeking them too.

ROGUE: Mark when your House snubs people like you. Say what strength of your House your fellow unfortunates managed to hold onto; the GM says what they need from you to maintain their fragile existence.

OUTSIDER: Mark when you set out into the world to walk your own path. Say what legends you're chasing the truth of; the GM says where you might find further clues.

When you change roles in play, add 1 to a stat or get a new move. If you mark all roles, retire to safety and narrate an epilogue, using as much of your Death move as you wish.

GEAR

You don't get any gear from your House, but can start with a Transport with one extra tag.

VAGABOND MOVES

Pick two:

The View from Below

After a taste of life in a settlement, you learn the true shape of its society. *Each day you're there*, ask the GM one:

- Who wields the real power?
- Where do folk gossip and swap stories?
- Who's the black sheep of the community?
- Who's most generous with their charity?

Free Agent

Your name, your House, your history... all a mystery to those who meet you. No-one will recognise you until you reveal yourself to them. *Whenever your House follows up your actions with a SUBTERFUGE attempt*, the roll has advantage.

Axe Soup

When you bring something or someone precious to a House to substitute for a Surplus, roll +CUNNING. On a hit, it'll be a workable substitute, though on a 7-9 pick one:

- They have to use it immediately or lose it.
- There's a key flaw that goes unnoticed; they gain a Need of the GM's choice as soon as they use the Surplus.
- It doesn't go the distance; they can only use it if they also have a complementary surplus collected nearby.

Wretch

When you abase yourself before someone, roll +CUNNING. On a 7-9 hold 1; on a 10+ hold 3. Spend your hold 1-for-1 to:

- Give a FIND COMMON GROUND use on them advantage.
- Notice something they were keeping hidden.
- Redirect their attention away from you.

Call on Hospitality

When you enter someone's home, roll +CUNNING. On 10+ they treat you with full hospitality. On 7-9 they give you the formal generosity for a while. On a miss they give you a cup of water, a piece of bread and send you on your way.

DEATH MOVE

When you mark off your Dead box, say what the travellers who know you will tell of your life and death. Going clockwise around the table, each player adds or alters one element of the tale, until the complete legend has been told.



THE LOREMASTER

An expert on the history of the land, deeply attuned to its secrets.

MAKING YOUR LOREMASTER Stats

Pick one and add your House bonus:

- Might -1, Bravery 0, Cunning +1, Lore +1.
- Might 0, Bravery +1, Cunning -1, Lore +1.
- Might -1, Bravery 0, Cunning 0, Lore +2.

Looks

Pick or create one from each:

- Masculine, feminine, concealed, ambiguous.
- Wrinkled face, wise face, tired face, rough face.
- Clouded eyes, sharp eyes, laughing eyes, weary eyes.
- Bent body, wiry body, slight body, stocky body.

Backstory

Read at least one out and ask for a volunteer:

- I don't understand how _____ can do the things they do.
- I want to teach _____ what's truly important.
- I don't think _____ knows I know what they did.

Champions

ROLE MOVES

Trigger one at character creation:

LEADER: Mark when you induct your House into ancient mysteries. Say what bargain you're trying to strike with the land; the GM says what will happen so long as you keep making the agreed sacrifices.

CHAMPION: Mark when you are sent to understand a mystery, place or creature. Say three possibilities you suspect for the truth, and the GM will say which one you can rule out.

ROGUE: Mark when you realise a core part of your House's culture is a fabrication. Say what harm the falsehood is causing - to your House or outsiders. The GM says which other faction might know the truth.

OUTSIDER: Mark when you seek the tutelage of a spirit of the land. Say what way you are warped by the pilgrimage in mind or body; the GM says what you'll need to do to win the spirit's approval.

When you change roles in play, add 1 to a stat or get a new move. If you mark all roles, retire to safety and narrate an epilogue, using as much of your Death move as you wish.

GEAR

When you PREPARE AND PROVISION, you can tag a Surplus to learn a Ritual from your House's traditions.

LOREMASTER MOVES

Pick two:

Discern Significance

When you UNEARTH FORGOTTEN LORE, you can always ask 1 question in addition to your roll results. You may also pick these questions:

- Who might know more about it?
- What spirits have walked this place?
- What vision do I have about its future?
- What vision do I have about its past?

Ancient Magic Uncovered

When you rest in the wilderness outside modern civilisation, you dream of ancient lore and gain 1 Vision. Spend 1 Vision to gain Advantage on **ENACT A RITUAL**, or spend 3 to **LEARN A RITUAL** from the land.

Sage Advice

When an ally CALLS FOR AID, you can always respond by offering advice and rolling +LORE. *If you roll a 6 or less on your aid attempt*, say what you learn from failure and gain Fleeting Advantage acting on it.

Remembered Oaths

When you demand someone honour promises they made, do not roll **FIND COMMON GROUND**. Instead roll +LORE, and on a hit the land will curse them until they honour their word. Pick a curse:

- All food they eat turns to ashes and blood.
- Animals will avoid or attack them.
- Their finery rots within hours of being donned.
- They will be afflicted by pox and warts.

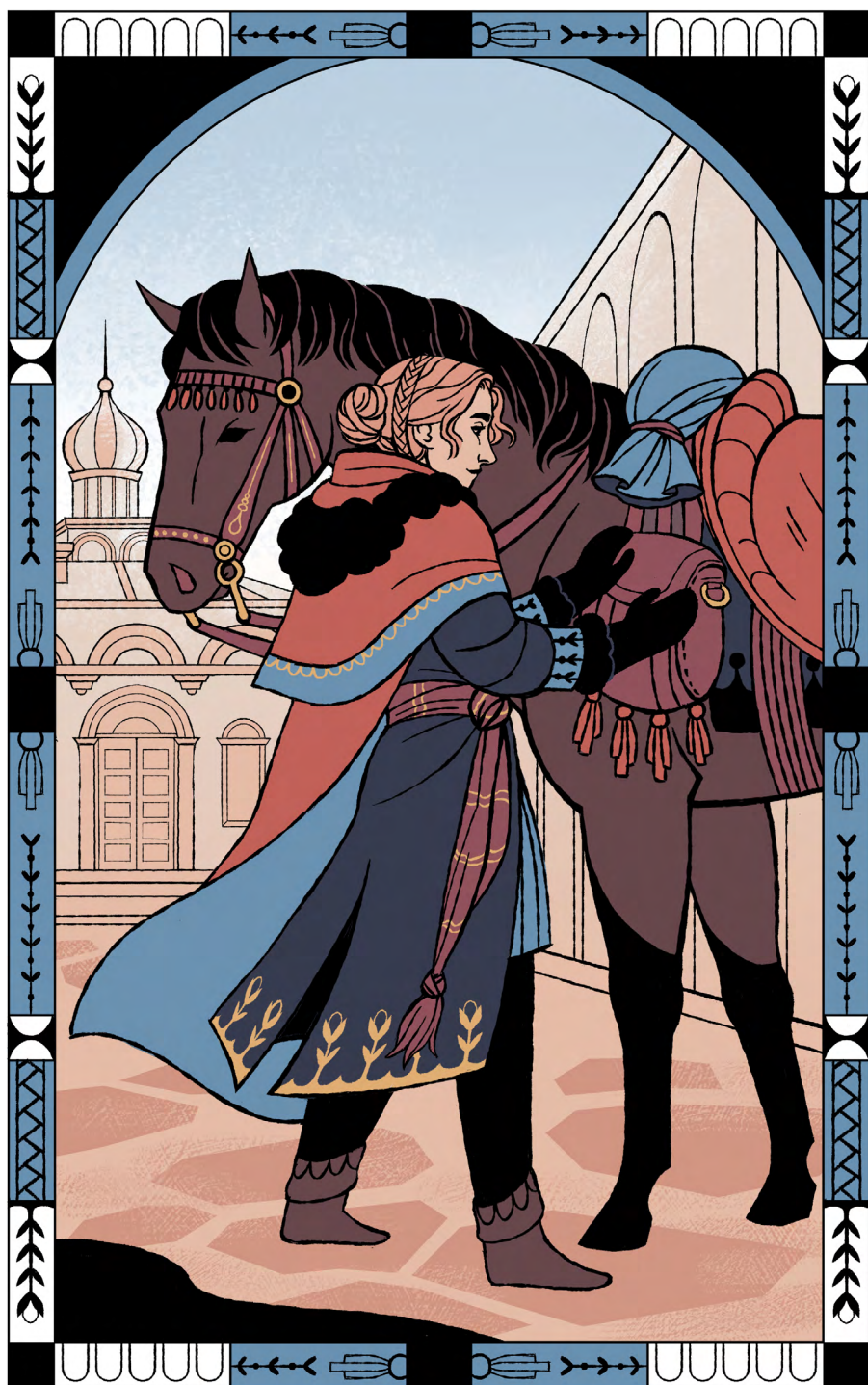
On a 10+ you seize their heart. Each season that passes with the promise unfulfilled, hold 1. Spend 1 hold to deal them a flesh wound, 2 to deal a heavy wound, 3 to kill them. Lose all hold if they fulfil the promise.

Traditional Remedy

You are an extraordinarily effective healer. Your presence counts as a Surplus for the purposes of *Professional Care*; if an appropriate Surplus is also present, your patient heals in days, not weeks.

DEATH MOVE

There's a particular power in death. *As you die*, describe the powerful and lasting Ritual you work with your final breaths.



THE AMBASSADOR

A silver-tongued diplomat.

MAKING YOUR AMBASSADOR Stats

Pick one and add your House bonus:

- Might -1, Bravery 0, Cunning +1, Lore +1.
- Might 0, Bravery 0, Cunning +2, Lore -1.
- Might -1, Bravery +1, Cunning +1, Lore 0.

Looks

Pick or create one from each:

- Masculine, feminine, concealed, ambiguous.
- Smooth face, wrinkled face, striking face.
- Piercing eyes, arresting eyes, wise eyes, welcoming eyes.
- Wiry body, angular body, stocky body, hale body.

Backstory

Read at least one out and ask for a volunteer:

- _____ told me something that was great for my house - and disastrous for theirs.
- _____ and I have history that is quite unprofessional.
- _____ saved my life when a deal went very wrong.

Champions

ROLE MOVES

Trigger one at character creation:

LEADER: Mark when you promise your House luxuries if they do what you say. You say how you've improved their lot already; the GM says what they now expect from you.

CHAMPION: Mark when you're sent to bring peace between two groups. Say who your contacts are in each; the GM says what grudge is keeping them apart.

ROGUE: Mark when you seek allies to bring a corrupt leader down. Say a group who's suffering under them; the GM says another group they're favouring.

OUTSIDER: Mark when you disclaim ties to build a greater alliance. Say why the larger threat needs everyone to band together to defeat it; the GM says what's distracting your allies from facing the threat.

When you change roles in play, add 1 to a stat or get a new move. If you mark all roles, retire to safety and narrate an epilogue, using as much of your Death move as you wish.

GEAR

When you PREPARE AND PROVISION, you can add a free tag to your Transport, or gain a new Transport with two tags.

AMBASSADOR MOVES

Pick two:

One of Them

When you mimic the customs and mannerisms of the people you're dealing with, roll +CUNNING. On a 10+, you duplicate their manners effortlessly; they're set at ease, and will trust you and consider your words.

On a 7-9 something is lacking in your mimicry; they notice your affectations, and may appreciate it or resent it depending on the individual.

On a miss, you have veered into caricature and given great insult.

Voice of the Crowds

When you seek out the troubles of the downtrodden or persecuted, roll +CUNNING. On a hit, you learn one:

- A secret weakness of the rulers.
- How to evade the ruler's attention.
- How the rulers maintain their control.

On a 10+ the people you talk to will shelter you or defend you if you get into trouble.

Razor-tongued

A duel is as much a matter of psychology as it is brawn. *When you DUEL someone*, gain Hold equal to your Cunning instead of your Might. Whenever your opponent deals you a Heavy Wound, they must also reveal a secret they'd rather you - or the audience - didn't know.

Sly Words

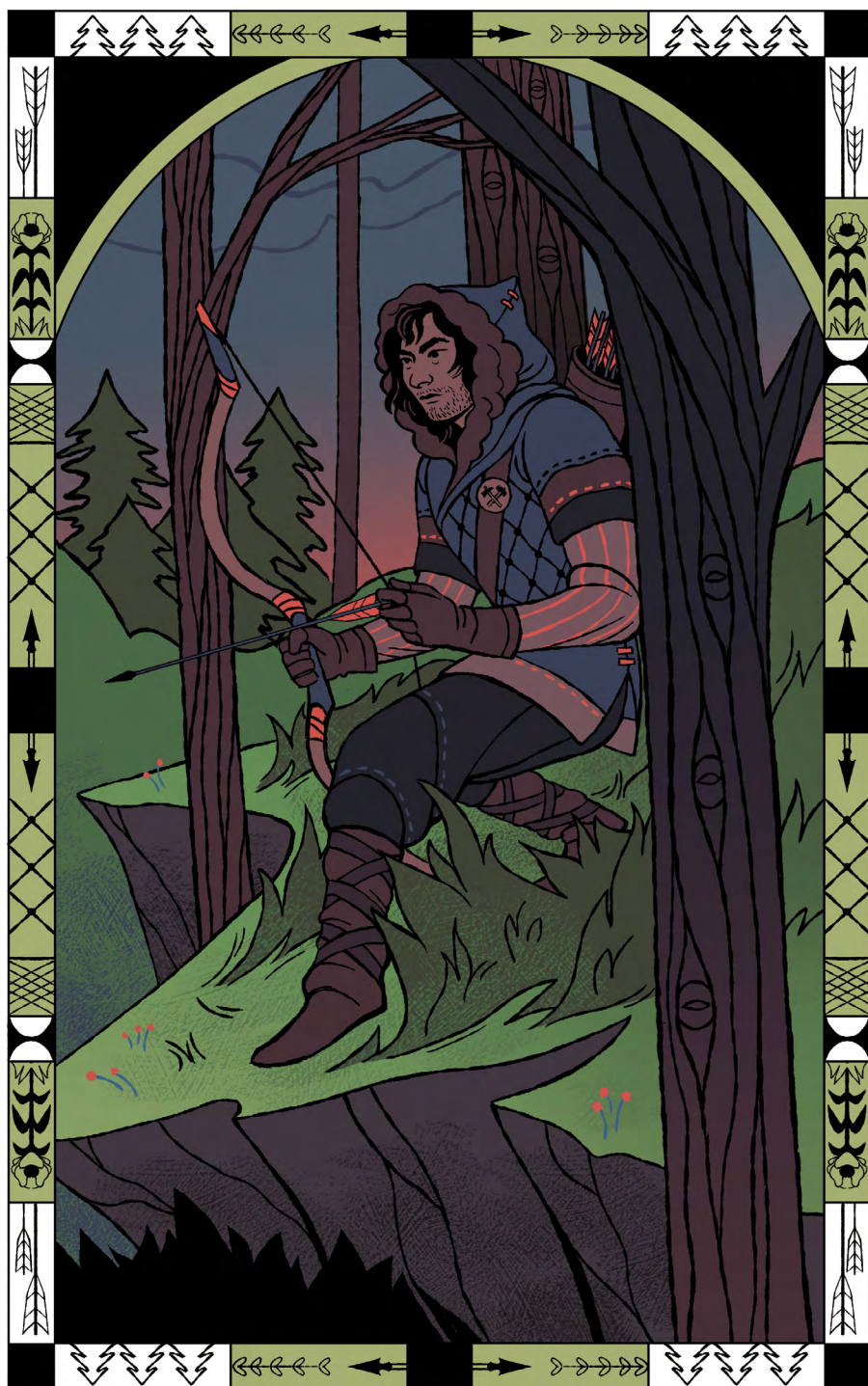
Like all successful politicians, you know how to exploit the weakness of others. *When you use someone's shameful or illicit secrets as leverage*, one of the requirements they pick for FIND COMMON GROUND must be "you promise to keep the secret hidden".

Long Memories

When you enter a new court, roll +LORE. On a 7-9 name one secret of the leaders, and an enemy of theirs. On a 10+ you've helped one of those parties in a major way. Say how.

DEATH MOVE

As you die, you may pass a letter to a companion. This letter can contain a piece of valuable information, a message which obligates the recipient to do something, a map to a secret treasure or location, or anything else important with GM approval.



THE SCOUT

A ranger travelling the Land's wilderness, finding hidden things and striking from unexpected directions.

MAKING A SCOUT

Stats

Pick one and add your House bonus:

- Might 0, Bravery +1, Cunning +1, Lore -1.
- Might +1, Bravery +1, Cunning 0, Lore -1.
- Might 0, Bravery +2, Cunning 0, Lore -1.

Looks

Pick or create one from each:

- Masculine, feminine, concealed, ambiguous.
- Young face, kind face, weathered face, glum face.
- Naïve eyes, soft eyes, quick eyes, bright eyes.
- Compact body, scrawny body, fit body, energetic body.

Backstory

Read at least one out and ask for a volunteer:

- _____ taught me how to survive in their territory.
- I guided _____ through the wilderness. Never again.
- I'm always happy to return to _____'s hospitality.

Champions

ROLE MOVES

Trigger one at character creation:

LEADER: Mark when you lead an expedition. Say what your objective is; the GM says the biggest hurdle you see in your path.

CHAMPION: Mark when you're sent to scout out your opposition. Say how you plan on getting close enough to observe them; the GM says who's most suspicious of you.

ROGUE: Mark when you pursue a personal vendetta. Say where you might find allies against them; the GM says your target's greatest strength.

OUTSIDER: Mark when you work with a group your House is on bad terms with. Say what proof you have that your House is mistaken about them; the GM says what questionable venture the group's currently pursuing.

When you change roles in play, add 1 to a stat or get a new move. If you mark all roles, retire to safety and narrate an epilogue, using as much of your Death move as you wish.

GEAR

When you PREPARE AND PROVISION, you can add an extra tag to your Outfit.

SCOUT MOVES

Pick two:

Range Far and Wide

You can travel across great distances far faster than others would expect. *If you're not in the current scene*, you can roll +**BRAVERY** to appear from an unexpected direction. On a 7-9 you've brought some trouble with you; on a miss, you're arriving under duress or severely wounded.

The Art of War

When you've scouted out a battlefield, your side in **PITCHED BATTLE** adds an extra token to the pot. When you would take a Heavy Wound in battle resolution, you can instead hide and remove yourself from the battle.

Walker of Ancient Paths

You are in tune with the land itself. *When you meditate to sense the energy of the land*, roll +CUNNING. On a hit, you have attuned to the terrain. When you ENACT A RITUAL in this area, roll +BRAVERY instead of +LORE. On a 10+, the GM gives you a rough outline of the major landmarks in your vicinity, including any potential threats.

Know Your Adversary

When you have the time and a vantage point to study your foe unobserved, gain Hold equal to Bravery. At any time, spend 1 hold at any time to:

- Remove a key weapon from your enemy.
- Separate your target from their allies.
- Shut down an action the target is making.
- Identify what you'd need to do to take them down.

Hunter's Core

When you investigate a track or spoor, roll +CUNNING. On a 7-9 ask 1, on a 10+ ask 3:

- What sort of quarry left this trail?
- What strengths do they have access to?
- What happened here?
- Where did they go?
- What's not what it appears to be?

Gain fleeting advantage when you act on each answer.

DEATH MOVE

When you die, you may either deal a fatal blow against the being or creature that killed you, or impart to your companions the location of a great hidden treasure.



THE FACTOR

A wise and canny administrator who can ably manage your House's fortunes.

MAKING YOUR FACTOR Stats

Pick one and add your House bonus:

- Might 0, Bravery +1, Cunning +1, Lore -1.
- Might 0, Bravery -1, Cunning +1, Lore +1.
- Might +1, Bravery -1, Cunning +1, Lore 0.

Cooks

Pick or create one from each:

- Masculine, feminine, concealed, ambiguous.
- Charming face, pretty face, grimy face, wrinkled face.
- Squinting eyes, calm eyes, appraising eyes, shifty eyes.
- Sumptuous body, lithe body, strong body, pampered body.

Backstory

Read at least one out and ask for a volunteer:

- _____ and I sat in judgement before, and I taught them wisdom.
- I suspect _____ is stealing from their House.
- I helped _____ escape a disaster that would otherwise have been the end of them.

Champions

ROLE MOVES

Trigger one at character creation:

LEADER: Mark when you take overt control of your House. They'll bring concerns to you before opposing you; the GM says what problems you're immediately made aware of.

CHAMPION: Mark when you become another leader's advisor. Say a weakness of theirs that you can exploit; the GM says a habit of theirs that's making your job difficult.

ROGUE: Mark when you seek to usurp the power of another. Say why you're not only right, but morally justified; the GM tells you who you will hurt by doing this.

OUTSIDER: Mark when you put another Cabal's interests ahead of your own. Justify your decision; the GM will tell you what your independence costs.

When you change roles in play, add 1 to a stat or get a new move. If you mark all roles, retire to safety and narrate an epilogue, using as much of your Death move as you wish.

GEAR

When you PREPARE AND PROVISION, you may add a free tag to your Followers or Outfit.

Factor Moves

Pick two:

Everyone Has a Price

When you try to flip an agent of your enemies to your side, remove a FIND COMMON GROUND option they can pick for each that is true:

- They have accepted a lavish gift from you.
- You have brought them evidence of their master's disloyalty.
- You have made a credible threat against their loved ones.

Quartermaster

You're skilled at commanding others. Add a tag to a group of Followers so long as they work for you. *When you take time to inspire and train them*, restore all lost tags.

My Little Sparrows

Your spies lurk across the land, feeding you reports. *When you enter a new settlement*, say which group they've infiltrated: its leaders, their enemies, the labourers, the profiteers. Each day, you may secretly meet them and ask them a question about that group; the GM will answer it honestly. You may ask follow-up questions, but after each one the GM may make a reaction increasing the spy's risk of discovery.

Political Upheaval

When you convince your Family to undergo radical change, roll +CUNNING. On a hit, shift their Doctrine or Lifestyle to whatever you like or swap one Family move for another. On a 7-9, they gain Need: Morale. When passions cool, the populace begins to second-guess the wisdom of their decision.

Canny Trader

When you personally add a Surplus to your House's wealth, pick one per point of Cunning:

- Treat those present to luxury and celebrations, gaining fleeting Advantage on Mood rolls.
- Gain a clue to how you can remove a Need, and get Fleeting Advantage acting on the clue.
- Get a free option pick the next time you **PREPARE AND PROVISION**.
- Exaggerate its value, and get Influence on the buyer when you sell it on.

DEATH MOVE

As you die, you identify a scheme of yours that's almost complete. Say what steps are left to perform, along with one House that'll gain a Surplus and one House that'll gain a Need if the scheme's completed.

Champions



QUICK CHARACTER

You're a supporting character: here to assist the party, flesh out the House and give you a voice in the fiction. If you survive this mission, pass this sheet to the House's player for use in later scenes.

MAKING A QUICK CHARACTER

Stats

Split +1, 0, 0, -1 between your stats. Add your family bonus to 1.

Relationship

Sibling, child, cousin, aunt, rival, protégé or peer of the family's main character.

Looks

- Masculine, feminine, concealed, ambiguous
- Trusting face, scowling face, angular face, worried face.
- Rebellious eyes, squinting eyes, calculating eyes, wise eyes.
- Muscular body, bony body, heavyset body, graceful body.

Name

Blagojce, Blagorodna, Bojidar, Borislava, Cedomir, Czcibor, Czeslawa, Dobrochna, Gojmir, Gradimir, Iva, Jovan, Lechoslaw, Liduna, Lubos, Marija, Mecislava, Myslik, Nadia, Navenka, Nedeljko, Nedjeljko, Ognjen, Pribuska, Radoslaw, Slavco, Slawoj, Snjezana, Sobeslava, Srebrenka, Suncica, Tsvetelina, Venuska, Vesna, Vihren, Yasen, Zan, Zelislav.

Inheritance

Gain gear and an ability from your House's Assets and Inheritance section, and learn a ritual from their Traditions.

ROLE MOVES

Pick one:

Leader

When you train a group for a few days, hold 3. When they do what you trained them for, spend hold 1-for-1 to add +1 to their roll's result or take any consequences they suffer onto yourself.

When you die, gain 3 more hold. Spend it when you wish to give another character's roll advantage. Each beneficiary says how your memory inspires them.

Champion

Say a narrow field you're an expert in: scavenging, diplomacy, hunting, etc. *When you use your skills*, reveal a secret about the situation and get fleeting advantage acting on it.

When you die, reveal your mission's final step. If the party does it, the mission succeeds.

Rogue

When you break the law of your House or the Arbiter, roll +CUNNING. On a hit they have higher priorities than punishing you. On a 10+ get fleeting advantage when you socialise with their rivals or enemies.

When you die, your House finally respects your outlook. Say a way they change in your honour.

Outsider

You have strange abilities. Pick a stat: you can take a flesh wound to roll it with advantage. When you do, describe how side effects twist the area or your body.

When you die, a terrible curse plagues the area. Those that untangle and banish the curse may **LEARN A RITUAL** from your lingering spirit.





Chapter 4:

he Arbiter



IN AS MUCH AS YOU ARE FREE NOW, IT'S BECAUSE THE ARBITER GUIDED YOU OUT OF THE EMPIRE'S SHACKLES. In as much as you are still chained, it's because the Arbiter rules over you.

The Arbiter is the star that the Houses orbit around, and the GM's avatar in the setting. As such they aren't a protagonist of the story, but instead somewhere between an antagonist, an environment, and an overbearing parent.

The Arbiter's impact on the story comes from three sources:

PLAYBOOK: Each Arbiter playbook describes where they draw their authority from, gives different prompts to tell the story of the revolution, and provides moves that will shape how the players interact with the Arbiter. Most importantly, it offers an Agenda to guide the GM as they run the game.

A GENT: There is always a member of the Arbiter's organisation who holds particular importance to the narrative. They'll be a recurring feature: every time the story moves in to a character level, the focus player may ask for the Arbiter's help and pass another player the Agent playbook. Each time the Agent is featured on-screen they grow in power.

PROJECTS: Every age of play is defined by a project the Arbiter is attempting. The project in play guides the conflicts and drama of the age, and provides opportunities to either support the Arbiter or sabotage their ambitions. If the project succeeds, those in the Arbiter's good graces prosper; if it fails, they suffer.

The Arbiter

ARBITER MOVES

These moves govern how the Arbiter operates in play, and how player Houses can interact with them.

FAVOUR MOVES

Holding Court

At the beginning of each season, the Arbiter calls on each House of note to serve them. Roll +FAVOUR.

On a 6-, you're beneath their notice. They don't demand anything of you, but others see your isolation: lose Influence on each other faction. The GM says what faction is taking your place in the court.

On a 7-9, they have something they need from you. The GM picks one:

- They wish you to deal with a threat.
- They wish you to solve a particular mystery.
- They wish you to convince a faction to aid the regime.
- They wish you to obtain a particular resource for the regime.

If you do it by the end of the season, gain 1-Favour. Otherwise, lose 1-Favour.

On a 10+, you are given trusted access to a part of their regime. The GM gives you control over one or more Surpluses invested in their Project, and says what the Arbiter wants done with them this season. If you achieve it, gain 1-Favour and add 1-Progress; if you fail at it, lose 1-Favour, the Surpluses, and 1-Progress.

Pay Your Dues

When you deliver the Arbiter one of the surpluses they need for their project, give the project 1 Progress and gain 1-Favour (see Arbiter Projects, p. 158).

When you take steps to withdraw from the Arbiter's court, lose 1-Favour.

Each time your favour drops, your Family's fortunes wane; trigger **HOLD TOGETHER**.

Each time you ask for the aid of the Arbiter's Agent, your Favour moves one step towards 0 (see Arbiter Agents, p. 152).

Using Favour

When you request assistance from the Arbiter, they are magnanimous in their support. Roll +FAVOUR. On a hit you get the assistance in the form of a loaned Surplus; on a 10+ there are few strings attached, on a 7-9 it's a mixed bag.

On a miss, GM picks one: the Arbiter sends their most incompetent lackey to oversee the surplus, or the assistance they send is effective but cares not for your wishes.

CONTROL AND TURMOIL

The Arbiter's grip on the land isn't perfect. Instead, the strength of their regime is governed by two ratings: Control and Turmoil. Each of these has their own meter on the Arbiter's playbook:



Each age, **CONTROL** starts at 5 while **TURMOIL** starts at 0. Certain House moves - **CLAIM BY FORCE** and **SUBTERFUGE**, for example - cause **TURMOIL** to notch up, and the GM can raise **TURMOIL** with a reaction (p. 178). Here's how these two traits manifest:

Breaking the Law

*When a House breaks the Arbiter's laws, they lose 1 Favour. If **TURMOIL** is under **CONTROL**, they must also pick one:*

- They must render their Character up to the Arbiter's justice.
- They must gain Need: Coin.
- They must offer up a Surplus the Arbiter's project needs.
- They must **HOLD TOGETHER**.

State of Emergency

*If **Turmoil** is over **Control**, all Houses attempting to use **LOGISTICS** must pick an extra option - even if their **MOOD** is positive.*

PASSING TIME

Turning of Seasons

When anyone suggests the story move on to the next season, anyone who hasn't yet been the focus of a character-level story may veto them. If they do, that player must call for play to **Zoom In** in on their character, following that move's steps.

If nobody vetoes the season's close, move the calendar on to the next season. The GM picks one for each point Turmoil exceeds Control:

- There's a disaster: lose a point of Progress.
- Raiders strike: give the House with least Favour a Need.
- An affliction strikes a settlement: plague, poisoning, murders or something weirder.
- Separatists, fanatics or revolutionaries claim a region as their own - mark out the borders they claim on the map.
- The old empire sends agents into the land; pick what they do from the *Subterfuge* options.

Then trigger *Holding Court*.



Turning of Ages

When the Arbiter's project is complete - or its doom comes to pass - this Age is over. Work through the project's Resolution steps.

Paying your Debts. All power is pulled from the Land, and the Land will claim its power back if its health suffers. Each House answers these questions and rolls two dice modifying the result according to their answers.

How did you manage your land? Get +1 if you tended and cared for it, -1 if you neglected or became estranged from it.

How did you treat the spirits? Get +1 if you sought out their company and formed personal connections. Get -1 if you feared them or used them as tools.

How has your House come together? Get +1 if you rediscovered old customs or found new ones. Get -1 if you spurned your community or descended into infighting.

On a 7-9 pick one, on a 6- pick two:

- Forget a ritual from your Traditions.
- Add a new condition to all your rituals.
- Your land withers; gain Need: Crops.
- Spirits haunt you; gain Need: Attunement.
- You must commit yourself to overthrowing the Arbiter; put the **Insurrection** Arbiter project in play.

Update the Saga: Each player gives the broad story of their Family through the Age, changes Doctrine, Lifestyle and Customs options as desired, and names a custom they develop to remember the Age.

Update the Geography: Go round the table, with each player adding one new threat, opportunity or faction to the map.

Update the Cast: Pick a Character playbook different from your old one. Decide if this is a new hero stepping forward, or your old character finding a different approach. If your old hero is around as an NPC, decide what role (if any) they still play in the House.



The Arbiter

ARBITER PLAYBOOKS

There are 3 different playbooks you may use for your Arbiter:



LEGENDARY WARRIORS. They're paragons of martial excellence, but the skills that let them fight the Empire are less useful in peacetime. Now, their tendency is to build a suffocating cage around the land, keeping it safe but unable to grow.



GUARDIANS OF HISTORY. Pilgrims who uncovered ancient knowledge and worked a grand ritual to win freedom. Now you must confront how the old ways may be foreign and constricting to the modern population of the nation.



THE LAND OF YOUR ANCESTORS. You were taken elsewhere by the empire. When you finally return the land is alien to you, and has new demands and new masters.

PLAYBOOK ANATOMY

An Arbiter playbook is made of these components:

FORM: Where does the Arbiter's power stem from? Are they **MONOLITHIC**, a central well of power? Are they **OLIGARCHIC**, a group of different factions and voices? Or are they **POPULIST** - a mass movement whose representatives speak the will of the mob instead of holding much power of their own?

FLASHPOINTS: The key events in the story of the revolution. Each Arbiter playbook found liberty in a different way, with very different costs to the Houses and the land.

CUSTOMS: The Arbiter is recognisable - their power demands that everyone know who they are. Their **STYLE** determines their appearance, their **CEREMONIES** describe what occurs each time they hold court, and their **LAWS** tell you which behaviours they prohibit in the Houses.

AGENDA: Each Arbiter shapes the homeland in a particular way, and presents their own set of challenges to the Houses and their champions. To help you evoke this at the table, each playbook has an **AGENDA** for the GM to append to the list on p. 139, and specific **REACTIONS** to add to those on p. 178.

MOVES: The power held by the Arbiter presents opportunities and challenges for the player's Houses. The moves the Arbiter picks will give the players ways to use the Arbiter's apparatus to their own advantage, though often with a cost.

INHERITANCE: Like your Houses, each Arbiter's mindset shapes their staff's abilities. These are abilities to help the group show how the Arbiter's Agent draws power from their culture.

ADVANCEMENT: The Arbiter isn't fixed, but can grow and change like everyone else. When things go well with the Arbiter's projects, they gain improvements for every House that has supported them. When things go badly, for each House that supported the Arbiter the GM picks a way things go wrong.



LEGENDARY WARRIORS

Liberty wasn't handed to you, but won with steel and blood. The arbiter lead the charge and brought you glory. But the long war is over, and it is time to see how the tools of war suit the needs of peace.

FORM

Pick one as a group:

Monolithic

For as long as the Land remembers, the Warriors have defended it. During the occupation they were mentors and assassins; now, they demand obedience so that they may teach the Houses how to be strong. They are small in number, but their agents cannot truly die unless bested in a fair **DUEL**.

Oligarchic

After the occupation, the Warriors formed as a guerrilla army striking from the shadows. As the insurgency grew, sub-chapters spread the light of revolution to each province. Now each region of the land is commanded by one of the Warrior's warlords, and they are aware of the movement of all troops within their domain.

Populist

As the Houses rose up in open rebellion, the people were a surging, furious tide they struggled to guide. With the Empire pushed back the revolutionary army roves the land searching for new enemies, urged on by whatever firebrand currently holds sway. When a House asks for military aid, roll **USING FAVOUR** with advantage. When they plead for peace, the roll has disadvantage instead.

FLASHPOINTS

For each one, a player volunteers and works through the consequences.

F **FOUNDATION:** You were the first House recruited into battle with the Empire.

YOU ANSWER: *How did the Arbiter convince you to join?*

GM ANSWERS: *Was the Arbiter faithful to their promises?*

C **COLLATERAL:** As war erupted, the Empire used you as an example to chasten the others.

YOU ANSWER: *What was the greatest loss the Empire inflicted?*

GM ANSWERS: *How did the Arbiter exploit this tragedy?*

C **ARNAGE:** You took to the battlefield, but found no glory - only bloodshed and death.

YOU ANSWER: *Who decided you would commit your forces here - you or the Arbiter?*

GM ANSWERS: *How did this tragedy place the entire rebellion in danger?*

The Arbiter

VICTORY: You played a major role in the Arbiter's victory, and saw the last bastion of the Empire's strength vanquished.

YOU ANSWER: *How did your House find glory in this final battle?*

GM ANSWERS: *What sacrifice did the Arbiter make to finally defeat the Empire?*

GLORIFICATION: As the rebellion was coming to a close, your House started agitating for the Arbiter to retain power.

YOU ANSWER: *Why did you choose to act as Kingmaker?*

GM ANSWERS: *What other faction sought power, and now bears a grudge against you?*

COMPLIANCE: As the land settled into peacetime, a threat within your holdings lead you to seek the Arbiter's help.

YOU ANSWER: *Who did you need help fighting off? Invaders, rebels, monsters, etc?*

GM ANSWERS: *What bloodshed resulted as the Arbiter used the tools of war in civilian lands?*

CUSTOMS

The GM picks one option from each category, or invents something else.

Style

- ☐ Gleaming armour and engraved weaponry.
- ☐ Austere uniforms and utilitarian gear.
- ☐ Each hero uniquely outfitted in their adventure's spoils.
- ☐ Simple clothing and impeccable weaponry.

Ceremonies

- ☐ A duel between two pledges, as much a dance as a fight.
- ☐ A chaotic, enthusiastic melee before a baying crowd.
- ☐ A sombre service honouring those who died in revolution.
- ☐ A grand feast lauding the Warrior's leading generals.

Laws

- ☐ Each House must tithe some of those that come of age to serve as the Arbiter's soldiers.
- ☐ Any request of food or shelter from our soldiers must be heeded.
- ☐ No House may raid another without our blessing.

AGENDA

Be the Tyrant they test themselves against.

You are defined by your strength. Through your force of arms and strategic brilliance the war was won. You were beloved and honoured with the highest office in the land. But the skills that excel in war are not the ones required for peace. When a crisis strikes, you'll deal with it like a military threat: identify an enemy, rally the troops to fight it, and crush all dissent within your ranks.

Reactions:

- Show a land kept safe by your cage.
- Reward service with glory.
- Applaud audacity and daring.
- When your authority is challenged, escalate force.

MOVES

Pick one:

Patron of the Blade

At the beginning of each season, the GM picks which House holds the best warrior in the land. That House rolls **HOLDING COURT** with Advantage.

Iron Discipline

Uniforms and drills keep the Arbiter's soldiers united and cool-headed in even the most dire situations - but that also leaves them unquestioning. *When anyone with positive Favour tries to manipulate the Arbiter's soldiers*, they roll **SUBTERFUGE** with Advantage.

Hail Caesar

When a House leads a successful military campaign outside the land's borders, the Arbiter will celebrate their return and grant them Surplus: Prestige, Luxury or Leadership.

The Cavalry Arrives

When a House misses a CLAIM BY FORCE roll within your borders, the GM may use their reaction to declare the arrival of the Arbiter's forces. Resolve the move like they rolled a 10+, but the leader of the forces will say why the Arbiter sent them.

The Arbiter

INHERITANCE

Add 1 to your Agent's starting Might or Bravery. Also, when you generate them, pick an Inheritance move for them:

LEGATE: *When in territory you control, you automatically get a 10+ on FAMILIAR FACE.*

DUELLIST: *You are trained for single combat. When you DUEL, gain 1 Hold every time you take a wound.*

WELL-EQUIPPED: *When you dress for war, add a tag to your weaponry and your outfit.*

HARDY: *The first time each day you take Harm, reduce it by 1.*

ADVANCEMENT

When a project is completed, pick one for each House with positive Favour:

- Gain a new move.
- Gain a point of control.
- Add a fortification to the map.
- Increase the size of a settlement.
- Introduce a new Ceremony honouring the project.
- Give every House Surplus: Peace.
- Mark out an area as under military control.
- Your Agents add an extra tag to their gear.

When a project is doomed, pick one for each House with positive Favour:

- Lose a move; gain a new move if it was your last.
- Lose a point of control.
- Enact a new law.
- Mark out an area as hostile and dangerous.
- Erase a fortification from the map.
- Shrink a settlement.
- Give every House Need: Recruits.
- Introduce a dangerous faction within the Arbiter.



GUARDIANS OF HISTORY

The Empire knew the power that lingered in your folklore and practices, and did their best to stamp them out. Their efforts failed, and the Arbiter used that power to win freedom. In victory, will traditions evolve to suit the needs of the populace, or lead to a reactionary suppression of modern ways of living?

The Arbiter

FORM

Pick one as a group:

Monolithic

The faltering rebellion knew that they needed a secret weapon to push back the Empire. Each House volunteered a sacrifice, and together the sacrifices were imbued and remoulded into living, terrifying avatars of the Land's power. Their power won the war, and now the circle of avatars command the realm from a citadel of entwined trees at the heart of a new and ancient forest. The very land serves them; when a House triggers **BREAKING THE LAW**, they must also pick an option from **THE AGES TURN** as if their traditions had become overwhelming.

Oligarchic

The Guardians are eternal: as long as the land exists, they will be here to speak for it. When our heritage was stolen, they walked among us keeping the stories alive. When the revolution came, the rivers and hills rose up to fight beside us. On the eve of victory, each of the Guardians walked into the heart of a settlement and planted a seed. Through the trees that grew, each Arbiter keeps watch over their citizens, advises community leaders in dreams, and sends natural disasters against those who attack their lands.

Populist

As the Empire worked to expunge the traditions of the nation, the Land called in ancestral pacts. Hundreds of people woke up one solstice morning with the lore of centuries seared into their minds. These cunning-folk used their magic to bind the rebellion together, inflict crop failures and misfortune, and cultivate discontent into outright insurrection. Even now the Land speaks via them, and each community has a rite to appoint a new oracle when theirs dies. When the GM chooses the **ENACT A RITUAL** Bane 'The land shows you something it thinks you need to know', it's the Arbiter that communicates the message to you, and they know what was said.

FLASHPOINTS

For each, a player volunteers and works through the consequences.



CULTURAL SUPPRESSION: The Empire's crackdown of your culture showed there was no choice but to resist.

YOU ANSWER: *What ceremony did the Empire interrupt?*

GM ANSWERS: *How did the Empire ruin your ability to use the rite?*

Guardians of History

RUMOURS: As a desperate resistance fought and died for liberty, you searched for a mystical way to turn the tides.

YOU ANSWER: *What sort of ritual were you searching for?*

GM ANSWERS: *How and where did you find the truth of the ritual?*

DISSENT: As each House's mystics gathered to understand the ritual, you expressed concern about its costs.

YOU ANSWER: *What was so horrifying about the action proposed?*

GM ANSWERS: *What alternative did the Arbiter propose?*

PILGRIMAGE: Your agents lead the others in a journey across the land, walking ancient paths and gathering key reagents.

YOU ANSWER: *How did you avoid the Empire's spies and patrols?*

GM ANSWERS: *What distraction did the Arbiter create to ensure the pilgrimage's success?*

SACRAMENTS: As the Arbiter prepared to channel the ritual's power, you lead the others through its final steps.

YOU ANSWER: *What, more than anyone else, did you sacrifice?*

GM ANSWERS: *How was the power used to liberate the land?*

SOLSTICE: As the new nation searched for an identity, the Arbiter declared a celebration to mark the first free solstice.

YOU ANSWER: *How did the Arbiter use the solstice to bind together the nation under their rule?*

GM ANSWERS: *What cost did they pay to achieve this working?*

CUSTOMS

The GM picks one option from each category, or invents something else.

Style

- ☐ Elaborate, antique traditional attire.
- ☐ Body paints, hessian and wooden crowns.
- ☐ Austere, formless robes.

Ceremonies

- ☐ A bloodletting to pay back the land for its bounty.
- ☐ A feast to mark the beginning of each season.
- ☐ A recitation of the lives of the ancestors.
- ☐ Walking the border, ritualistically banishing the empire.

The Arbiter

Laws

- No House may celebrate a holiday introduced by the Empire.
- No House's sacred space may be raided or damaged.
- No House may teach a ritual from their traditions to another House without the Arbiter's permission.

AGENDA

Show the costs demanded by stasis.

The dark side of the Guardians is their nationalism and reactionary outlook. They are firmly convinced that the old ways were best, and that every change wrought by the Empire must be walked back. When that position collides with the messy reality of the modern nation, with citizens of the Land who may be first- or second-generation immigrants or who derive comfort from foreign rituals and practices, the Guardians are unlikely to demonstrate nuance or flexibility. Suffering will follow.

Impulses:

- Evoke the glories of the faded past.
- Reward those who show wisdom and discretion.
- Reveal a forgotten truth of the land.
- Appeal to tradition and authority.

MOVES

Pick one:

Patron of the Wise

At the beginning of each season, the GM picks which House holds the wisest lorekeeper in the land. That House rolls **HOLDING COURT** with Advantage.

Library of the Ancients

The Arbiter holds a vast store of ancient knowledge. Any House with positive Favour may **LEARN A RITUAL** from the Arbiter when they **HOLD COURT**, but the ritual comes with an extra condition on top of that determined by the +LORE roll.

Once More We Return

Those beloved of the Land can never truly die. *When a character dies,* their House may lose 1-Favour to resurrect them. At the start of the next season, the character will emerge from a wooden, moss-lined cocoon in the Arbiter's court. The GM will say how the character is changed by the experience. This may also be used to preserve a character between Ages.

Enforcers of Ignorance

When a House brings an artefact to them containing great power or foreign magics, the Arbiter will hide the artefact away in their storehouses and reward the House with Surplus: Coin, Prestige or Morale.

INHERITANCE

Add 1 to your Agent's starting Lore or Cunning. Also, when you generate them, pick an Inheritance move for them:

DEEP LORE: *The first time you advise someone based on your knowledge of ancient traditions, they gain fleeting advantage acting on your words.*

MARK OF OFFICE: *When you brandish your symbol of authority, roll +Lore instead of +Cunning for FAMILIAR FACE.*

STRANGE INSIGHTS: *For each minute you spend observing an inhuman creature, ask the GM one of the following: What does it most want, what's hurting it, what can it sense that I can't?*

TONSURED: *When you wear the garb of your faith, people will assume you're one of: harmless, deadly, mystical, self-sacrificing.*

WILD TONGUE: *You can talk to and command any animal native to the Land. Treat them as Followers with an appropriate tag.*

ADVANCEMENT

When a project is completed, pick one for each House with positive Favour:

- Gain a new Arbiter move.
- Gain a point of control.
- Add a new natural feature (forest, lake, river, mountain, etc) to the map.
- Increase the size of a settlement.
- Introduce a new Ceremony honouring the project.
- Give every House Surplus: Crops
- Describe a new insight you have learned from the Land.

When a project is doomed, pick one for each House with positive Favour:

- Lose a move; gain a new move if it was your last.
- Lose a point of control.
- Enact a new law.
- Mark out an area as hostile and dangerous.
- Erase a site of growth or beauty from the map.
- Shrink a settlement.
- Give every House Need: Recruits.
- Introduce a dangerous faction within the Arbiter.



THE LAND OF YOUR ANCESTORS

When the Empire invaded, they weren't content to simply occupy your land. Instead you were forcibly moved over land and sea, to fight in the Empire's wars and labour in their mines. The revolution changed all that, liberating you from your bonds and leading you on a grand journey back to the land. Now you're here – but is it everything that was promised?

The Land of your Ancestors

FORM

Pick one as a group:

Despoiled

While you were labouring in foreign lands, the Empire raided your homeland of every natural resource of worth. Now you're back and it's clear the land's bounty is depleted, and those that remained are starving and forlorn. **When you identify a natural resource with READ THE WIND**, the GM will tell you an obstacle that must be overcome before the Surplus can be harvested.

Hostile

Like a wounded animal, the Land spits and claws at anyone who draws on it. Meanwhile, the people that remained are practiced at asymmetric warfare, and will not accept other's authority kindly. **When you Cast a Ritual**, the land fights you; suffer one more Bane than normal. **When you trigger Logistics**, the populace resists you; pick an option even if your Mood is 0 or above.

Alien

Most of the land's residents remained, and while you fought to hold onto your heritage under the Empire they evolved far beyond your common ancestors. Now they view you like another set of invaders, claiming kinship you haven't earned. The GM will mark down the areas they hold claim to; **when you CLAIM BY FORCE or wage PITCHED BATTLE in those areas**, lose 1 Favour.

FLASHPOINTS

For each, a player volunteers and works through the consequences.

PROPHETCY: While you laboured under the Empire's rule, one of your House had a vision of the Land of their ancestors.

YOU ANSWER: *Who was this visionary? What did they see?*

GM ANSWERS: *How did the Land bless or change its prophet?*

LIBERATOR: As the dream of the old land spread, you put in motion a plan to let everyone leave.

YOU ANSWER: *What action did you take to set everyone free?*

GM ANSWERS: *Who did you have to leave behind?*

BEARGUARD: The Empire tried to stop your caravan of refugees. As their forces struck, you held them back.

YOU ANSWER: *How did you defeat or outwit the Empire?*

GM ANSWERS: *Which part of the Empire is still pursuing you?*

The Arbiter

PIONEER: The path you took home was dangerous, difficult and draining. You kept the caravan alive, against the odds.

YOU ANSWER: *How did you keep everyone going? Foraging, navigation, raising morale, forging new links, something else?*

GM ANSWERS: *What lands did you pass through on your trails?*

AMBASSADOR: As the migration arrived at the borders of their ancestral land, you were the first to make contact with those who remained there – and make contact with the Land.

YOU ANSWER: *How did you prove you had a claim to this Land?*

GM ANSWERS: *How did the Land seal the new pact?*

OCCUPIER: As you founded settlements and rediscovered monuments and resources, tensions grew between newcomers and current residents. You were the first to draw blood to claim what you felt you were due.

YOU ANSWER: *What did you claim? How did you justify it?*

GM ANSWERS: *Who did you hurt, and how are they living now?*

CUSTOMS

The GM picks one from each category, or invents something else.

Environment

- ☐ Tundra, steppe and desert.
- ☐ Grasslands, forests and plains.
- ☐ High passes, deep gorges and winding rivers.

Seasonal Changes

- ☐ The great migrations of beasts and birds.
- ☐ Impressive and destructive storms at each season's onset.
- ☐ A sky of pure darkness on the night of each eclipse.

Laws

- ☐ Do not harm a single wild animal in Spring.
- ☐ Do not raise an axe against a tree older than you.
- ☐ Do not travel between settlements in Winter.

AGENDA

Show the truth behind nostalgia.

The Houses have finally returned to the land they were taken from long ago, but they can't recapture how things were. They've changed, and the land and its inhabitants have changed too. Show them what's different, and what's possible now.

The Land of your Ancestors

Impulses:

- Show a remnant of the past, reclaimed by nature.
- Surprise them with changes in climate or ecosystem.
- Ripple out unpredictable changes from their actions.
- Reveal unexpected vistas and strange new places.

MOVES

Get The Land and its People Are One, and one more:

The Land and its People Are One

Choose how the Arbiter is represented in play:

Speakers for the Land

The closest setup to other Arbiters: some of the locals are a conduit for the Land's power, and they guide the Houses in managing the Land and gatekeep its power.

The Active Will of the Land

The land itself speaks to you in dreams and visions. The Arbiter **HOLDS COURT** in stone circles and glades, and its Agent is an oracle hearing voices from stones and trees. Add to the **BREAKING THE LAW** list: "All your Rituals have 1 more Bane for this Age".

Ecology and Climate

How will you live in this land? **Favour** is how well you're making use of the land. **Projects** are opportunities or obligations presented by the land's shifting climate. **Agents** are skilled rangers, druids and naturalists. You **Hold Court** in the markets and festivals when you take stock of your harvests. Replace **USING FAVOUR** with this:

When a House manages the land, roll +**FAVOUR**, on a 10+, hold 2. On a 7-9, hold 1 and the GM holds 1. On a 6 the GM holds 2. You can spend your hold to say how you shape the land to your needs, and gain an appropriate surplus. The GM can spend their hold to add a Bane to your ritual, or narrate the onset of a natural disaster.

The Trees Walk

The land itself acts to keep you free. *When a House wages OPEN BATTLE on behalf of the Land or against the Empire*, they can add a token of their colour as the natural world takes up arms.

Patron of the Tender

At the beginning of each season, the GM picks which House has best ministered the Land's bounty. That House rolls **HOLDING COURT** with Advantage.

The Arbiter

Cines of Power

The GM draws four straight lines on the map, intersecting at least three times. At each intersection, the land's power is stronger; a House can use **CLAIM BY FORCE** to claim it, and exhaust that power to gain Surplus: Attunement or let a character **LEARN A RITUAL** with advantage. The power returns each Age.

INHERITANCE

Add 1 to your Agent's Lore or Bravery. Also, when you generate them, pick an inheritance move for them:

RANGER: *When you study an area thoroughly, get lasting advantage on **DISARM** and **FIERCELY ASSAULT** there.*

CUNNING FOLK: *In natural surroundings, you may **FIND COMMON GROUND** with the immediate environment.*

LIVE OFF THE LAND: *When you forage for your group, you'll always find enough food and shelter from the elements.*

ANIMAL COMPANION: *You have a bond with a wild creature. It has three Follower tags, or two Follower tags and Mount.*

The Land of your Ancestors

ADVANCEMENT

When a project is completed, pick one for each House with positive Favour:

- Gain a new Arbiter move.
- Gain a point of control.
- Add a new natural feature to the map.
- Grow a settlement.
- An endangered species grows to a healthy size; mark their habitat.
- Give each House Surplus: Crops.
- Add a **LINE OF POWER**.

When a project is doomed, pick one for each House with positive Favour:

- Lose a move (not **The Land and Its People Are One**).
- Lose a point of control.
- Enact a new law.
- A species of wildlife becomes endangered.
- Erase a site of growth or beauty from the map.
- Shrink a settlement.
- Give each House Need: Recruits.
- Remove a **LINE OF POWER**.

ARBITER AGENTS

The Agents are the Arbiter's active presence in your game. When you play, they'll be an active force pushing for the Arbiter's agenda, and forcing the other players to address whether they support it or resist it. They also fulfil an out-of-game purpose; players should be encouraged to pick these first when their character isn't suitable/available for a Zoom In, so that everyone always has the option of participating in the story. Of course there's a consequence: each time the Agent hits the table, they grow in strength.

There's a tension there. As they increase in power and ability the Agent becomes more appealing to call on, or to play, but if they reach a certain point they also retire and change the landscape of the game. And then you get a fresh Agent, with their own skills and agenda. In this way, using them grows the fiction as much as playing one of the PCs.

Every time a player plays the Agent, it's their opportunity to flesh out their motivations and philosophy. Stay true to the core laid down by previous players of the Agent, but feel free to reveal further depths, unexpected personality traits, or ways they have reconsidered previously held positions. Here's some example questions to ponder:

- Do they do this willingly or reluctantly?
- Have they ever helped with something like this?
- What have they learned that's particularly appropriate?
- What does the Arbiter expect of them?

THE SHADOW

One who operates behind the scenes, travelling unseen, perhaps with a dagger in hand.



Starting stats

Might -1; Bravery +1; Cunning +2; Lore +1.

Starting gear

- An outfit with *Practical* and *Subtle*.
- A weapon with *Melee* and *Hidden*.

When you begin playing the Shadow, say what secret the Arbiter wants you to learn or cover up.

At Home in the Darkness

When you scout out a location, roll +CUNNING. On a hit pick one, but on a 7-9 you do something that puts them on edge.

- You find a way to enter unobserved.
- You find a way to draw the inhabitants out.
- You find a way to disrupt the location's operations.
- You identify the greatest threat present.
- You identify the most valuable thing present.

Advances

Gain an Advance when a House asks for aid as they **ZOOM IN**:

- ☐ Learn a ritual from a church of the gutters.
- ☐ Add 3 tags of your choice to your gear.
- ☐ Gain a cabal of spies (Followers: *rogues, shadowy*).
- ☐ Add 1 to Lore.
- ☐ Add 1 to Might.
- ☐ Add 1 to Cunning.

When 4 advances have been taken, you may also pick:

- ☐ Assassinate or expose a key figure in one of the Houses, then disappear.

The Arbiter

THE FIST

One who solves problems with violence, bashing heads or simply exuding threat.



STARTING STATS

Might +2; Bravery +1; Cunning 0; Lore -1.

STARTING GEAR

- An outfit with *Tough* and either *Practical* or *Heraldry*.
- A weapon with *Melee* and *Brutal*.

When you begin playing the Fist, say who the Arbiter wants you to weaken, intimidate or hurt.

Fearsome Warrior

Your blood-curdling reputation precedes you. *When you FIERCELY ASSAULT with the goal of driving off your enemies, roll with advantage.*

ADVANCES

Gain an Advance when a House asks for aid as they **ZOOM IN**:

- ☐ Learn a ritual from an ancient martial cult.
- ☐ Add 3 tags of your choice to your gear.
- ☐ Gain a squad of soldiers (Followers: *Vicious, Drilled*).
- ☐ Add 1 to Bravery.
- ☐ Add 1 to Might.
- ☐ Add 1 to Cunning.

When 4 advances have been taken, you may also pick:

- ☐ Set yourself up as a warlord controlling a region of the map, refusing anyone else's authority.

THE VOICE

One who serves as the Arbiter's mouthpiece, and can find the right word to unlock any heart.



STARTING STATS

Might -1; Bravery 0; Cunning +2; Lore +1.

STARTING GEAR

- An outfit with *Heraldry* and either *Meditative* or *Regal*.
- Followers with *Scholarly* and *Genial*.

When you begin playing the Voice, say who the Arbiter wants you to sway to their point of view.

Poison Pen

When you spread a rumour out into a community, roll +CUNNING.

On a 10+ pick 2, on a 7-9 pick 1:

- A particular person hears the rumour exactly as you wish.
- A particular person will be ignorant of the rumour.
- A particular person seems to be the rumour's source.

On a miss, the rumour spreads and mutates out of control.

ADVANCES

Gain an Advance when a House asks for aid as they **ZOOM IN**:

- ☐ Learn a ritual from a circle of bards and mummers.
- ☐ Add 3 tags of your choice to your gear.
- ☐ Gain a squad of soldiers (Followers: *Guarding, Fighting*)
- ☐ Add 1 to Bravery.
- ☐ Add 1 to Lore.
- ☐ Add 1 to Cunning.

When 4 advances have been taken, you may also pick:

- ☐ Retire and pen a tale that reshapes society. Invert every House's Favour as crimes are made fair and heroics made foul.

The Arbiter

THE FALCON

One who can escort valuable assets wherever they need to go, and bring the Arbiter's will to the furthest borders.



STARTING STATS

Might 0; Bravery +2; Cunning +1; Lore -1.

STARTING GEAR

- An outfit with *Practical* and *Hardy*.
- Transport with *Mount*, *Drawn* or *Ship* and *Durable*.

When you begin playing the Falcon, say what is so valuable about the people or things the Arbiter is having you transport.

I've Been Everywhere

When you consult your logs and maps, add a detail to the map. Say one thing that's useful or interesting about this region, and the GM will say which danger or obstacle leads to inexperienced travellers avoiding it.

ADVANCES

Gain an Advance when a House asks for aid as they **Zoom In**:

- ☐ Learn a ritual from the legends of roadhouses and rambles.
- ☐ Add 3 tags of your choice to your gear.
- ☐ Gain a faithful crew of wayfarers (Followers: *Astute*, *Drilled*).
- ☐ Add 1 to Bravery.
- ☐ Add 1 to Might.
- ☐ Add 1 to Cunning.

When 4 advances have been taken, you may also pick:

- ☐ Head off on a journey to discover somewhere new. Place it on the map, and say if anyone knows what happened to you.

THE SOUL

One who serves as a conduit between the Arbiter and the land.



STARTING STATS

Might 0; Bravery +1; Cunning -1; Lore +2.

STARTING GEAR

- An outfit with *Meditative* and *Practical* or *Heraldry*.
- Transport with *Mount* and *Canny*.

When you begin playing the Soul, say how the Arbiter's connection to the land is endangered by something here.

The Land's Whispers

When you immerse yourself in the land – swim in the ocean, bury yourself alive, lose yourself in the forest, etc – roll **+LORE**. On a hit, the land sends you a vision laced in metaphor, telling you who poses the biggest threat to the arbiter and who would be willing to lend you aid. On a 10+ a creature of the land follows you as you leave your seclusion; you can ask it to do one thing for you and it will comply as best it can.

ADVANCES

Gain an Advance when a House asks for aid as they **ZOOM IN**:

- ☐ Learn a ritual from the land itself.
- ☐ Add 3 tags of your choice to your gear.
- ☐ Gain a cult of acolytes (Followers: *Spiritual, Shadowy*).
- ☐ Add 1 to Bravery.
- ☐ Add 1 to Lore.
- ☐ Add 1 to Might.

When 4 advances have been taken, you may also pick:

- ☐ Work a grand ritual to change the land, and be claimed by the earth as a sacrifice.

ARBITER PROJECTS

The Arbiter isn't merely a rective enforcer of rules and customs: they have their own agenda that they are actively pursuing. As they threaten grand changes to your setting, they'll promise rewards to those who help them and punish those who work against them.

In this book you'll find five different projects:

A GRAND CONSTRUCTION: *The Arbiter is building something that will change the land. It may be a wall that secures the border, a bridge to connect peoples seperated by rivers or oceans, or a lighthouse to guide ships in from leagues away, or somethign even grander.*

EXPANSION: *The Arbiter seeks to claim new land, or make useful regions that were rejected or despoiled. To do so they'll need to convince others to make the crossing, build new places for them to live, and work out what to do with the local wildlife - or natives.*

TRANSFORMATION: *The Arbiter wishes to reshape some aspect of your society. They may wish to modernise your traditional practices - or expunge all traces of Empire-brought modernity.*

OPEN WAR: *War is upon us. Can the land's forces prevail against the opponent, or at least avoid losing their lives in a senseless war?*

COUNTER-INSURRECTION: *The Arbiter grows tired of dissent in the land, and have embarked on a campaign to quash it. Will they succeed and punish the rebels, or fail and be replaced - perhaps by one of the rebellious Houses?*

Each project has four key elements:

CONCEPT

What is the Arbiter trying to achieve? What would victory look like?

FOUNDATION

This section guides the group in setting the stage for this age. Each player takes it in turns to pick a question, setting up the basics of where the project is taking place, who is already involved, what problems have already reared their head, and what the Arbiter needs from the Houses to make progress.

If you have more than four players, the remaining players can add an extra detail, keying off one of the other player's answers.

ENTANGLEMENT

Each project sets out two things: the surpluses that need to be given over to the Arbiter to increment the project's Progress (and where they need to be delivered), and the circumstances that will lead to an increase in the project's Doom. These are both described in the Entanglement section of a project.

RESOLUTION

Finally, each project sets out what will happen if Progress or Doom hits 5. Whichever occurs, the map will be adjusted in some way, and each player will choose an option to describe how their House in particular feels the impact of the project. The options when a project succeeds tend towards the positive granting Surpluses and Influence, while the options when it fails tend to inflict Needs or cost Favour or Influence.

The Arbiter

A GRAND CONSTRUCTION

From across the land architects, engineers, masons and haulers have been called to assist the Arbiter in constructing a grand edifice, such as has never been seen before.

FOUNDATION

Go around the table, answering these questions in turn:

- What is being built? A bastion, a fortification, a bridge, a monument?
- Where on the map is construction beginning?
- Who is construction displacing or disrupting?
- What problems will need to be overcome before construction goes further?

ENTANGLEMENT

Increase this project's Progress track when a House delivers to the construction site a useful Surplus, e.g.: Raw Materials, Artisans, Engineers, Recruits, Defences, Leadership.

Increase this project's Doom track when:

- The construction collapses or subsides.
- Saboteurs attack the building site.
- Leading architects and engineers fall out or suffer illness or injury.
- Turmoil exceeds Control (once per age).

RESOLUTION

If the project hits 5 Progress, the construction is complete. The GM draws it on the map. Each player chooses one:

YOU WIN A custodial role over the construction. Gain 1 Grasp and Surplus: Spies from watching the comings and goings.

YOU SEIZE THE new opportunities for profit granted by the construction. Gain Surplus: Trade and an Asset option.

YOUR HOUSE WORKS a grand ceremony to tie the construction to their ancestral magic. At the start of each Age it still stands, they gain Surplus: Attunement.

FROM THE WONDER'S heights, you can see further than ever. Gain Surplus: Scouts and add a revealed bounty to the map.

YOU HIDE AGENTS amongst the builders, letting you skim off building materials. Gain 1 Sleight and Surplus: Raw Materials.

YOU WORKED CLOSELY with another House to build the project; gain a move from their playbook, but they get Influence on you.

If, instead, the project hits 5 Doom, the construction is abandoned. Each player picks one:

MANY OF YOUR people died in an accident at the site. Get Need: Recruits, but get Influence over the House that let it happen.

THE COLLAPSE OF the Arbiter's dream drives you to withdraw and focus on your own traditions. Get a new move, but lose 1 Favour.

YOU GAVE THE newly-unemployed builders a place to work. Gain Need: Coin and Surplus: Engineers.

THE ARBITER STOPS investing in infrastructure after this debacle, stranding you in the hinterlands. Gain Need: Trade, but get 1 Grasp as your neighbours turn to you.

SABOTEURS AND ANARCHISTS strike at your House, encouraged by their victory over the construction. Gain Need: Defences, but you learn some tricks from them; get 1 Sleight.

The Arbiter

EXPANSION

The Land isn't big enough for the Arbiter's ambitions. Bit by bit or in one grand annexation, they mean to swell their nation's size.

FOUNDATION

Go around the table, answering these questions in turn:

- What region is the Arbiter looking to claim?
- Where have expeditions been launched from?
- What riches have expeditions already discovered?
- What's the source of the problems? Existing inhabitants, a dangerous crossing, hostile geography?

ENTANGLEMENT

Increase this project's Progress track when a House delivers to the new territory a useful Surplus, e.g.: Scouts, Transport, Raw Materials, Weaponry, Recruits, Spies.

Increase this project's Doom track when:

- An expedition is lost or goes rogue.
- A new threat appears in the region.
- The journey there becomes significantly more difficult.
- Turmoil exceeds Control (once per age).

RESOLUTION

When this project hits 5 Progress, the annexation is complete. The GM revises the Land's borders. Each player chooses one:

YOU CLAIM *a vast section of the new land. Gain Surplus: Land and raise Grasp by 1.*

YOU CLAIM *a valuable resource site. Mark it on the map as a new settlement and gain Surplus: Rare Materials.*

YOU CONTROL TRAVEL *to the new region. Erase Surplus: Transport to get Influence on each House that colonises the new region.*

YOU PUSH FOR *the rights of the new land's inhabitants. Get Surplus: Justice and Influence on the inhabitants, but lose 1 Favour.*

YOU LEARN SOMETHING *new there. Get a move from a playbook that isn't in play, and add a new ritual to your Traditions.*

YOUR EXPLORERS TRAVEL *far and wide. Gain 1 Reach and Surplus: Scouts.*

If, instead, the project hits 5 Doom, the expedition is abandoned. Each player chooses one:

INSTEAD OF HELPING *the expedition's retreat you raid the new land. Gain Surplus: Wealth and Need: Prestige.*

SOME OF YOUR *people are stranded in the new land. Gain Need: Recruits, but also get 1 Reach as they remain allies overseas.*

SOMETHING FROM THE *invaded land struck back: insurgents, disease, or monsters. Gain Need: Medicine or Need: Morale, but also get 1 Grasp as your House pulls together.*

YOUR HOUSE LEARNED *useful lessons working in hostile territory; gain 1 Sleight. Ask the other Houses which of them feels you acted dishonourably - lose Influence on them, and lose 1 Favour.*

AS THE SETTLERS *were forced to return, you offered your holdings as their new home. Gain Need: Land and Surplus: Recruits.*



The Arbiter

TRANSFORMATION

There's something about the nation's culture that the Arbiter wishes to alter. Through education or chastisement, incentives or strong-armed oppression, they will try to reshape your society.

FOUNDATION

Go around the table, answering these questions in turn:

- What does the Arbiter want to change?
- What was the inciting incident for this?
- Who is being celebrated as the Arbiter's ideal subject?
- Who is seeing their way of life become more difficult?

ENTANGLEMENT

Increase this project's Progress track when a House expends a surplus in service to the Arbiter's social change, e.g.: Leadership, Learning, Morale, Spies, Culture.

Increase this project's Doom track when:

- Protests against the cultural change descend into violence.
- Key figures in the Arbiter's administration speak out against the changes.
- A natural disaster or famine strikes the land.
- Turmoil exceeds Control (once per Age).

RESOLUTION

When this project hits 5 Progress, the change is accepted across the land. Each player chooses one:

YOU SEIZE A *lucrative position in the Arbiter's new social order. What's your new role? Gain Surplus: Coin and add 1 to Reach.*

YOU HOLD ON *to the old ways, despite disfavour from the Arbiter. Lose 2-Favour, but gain Surplus: Attunement and copy a ritual from each House you have Influence over.*

YOU RODE THE *wave of change, empowering your bright minds to try new approaches. Say one new innovation they discover, and add it as an Asset option - and gain Surplus: Scholars.*

THE NEW SOCIAL *taboos provide many opportunities for blackmail. Gain 1 Sleight, and gain Influence on every House that has not wholeheartedly embraced the new regime.*

THE CIVIL UNREST *caused by the upheaval meant you had to fight to keep peace and safety. Add 1 to Grasp, and gain Influence on your immediate neighbours.*

YOU FIND A *new way of carrying on your House's way of life. Gain a new move from your House playbook, but change your Doctrine and Lifestyle.*

If, instead, the project hits 5 Doom, the change is abandoned. Each player chooses one:

REACTIONARIES USE VIOLENCE *to restore the old ways, and you become one of their targets. Gain Need: Recruits, but get 1 Sleight.*

THE NEW WAYS *you employed had unexpected downsides. Say what went wrong and gain Need: Crops or Need: Morale, but gain a new House move as you adapt to your deprivation.*

THE CULTURAL SHIFT *has frayed the connections between you and your ancestors. Gain Need: Attunement, but gain 1 Grasp as you hold tight to what remains.*

YOU BECOME UNCERTAIN *in your way of life, and seek new tools. Gain a House move from a playbook that's not in use, but gain a Need suitable for the playbook (Ships for a Brethren move, Scholars for a Teacher move, etc).*

THOUGH THE ARBITER *has abandoned the cause, you stay true to the new way of living they attempted to champion. Gain Surplus: Morale as your commitment to this lifestyle brings you together, but gain Need: Trade as your old partners reject you.*

OPEN WAR

There is open conflict at the nation's borders. Armies march and convoys rumble, while those seeking to profit from the clashing of soldiers set up camps a safe distance from the frontline. The Arbiter demands victory, but what will it cost?

FOUNDATION

Go around the table, answering these questions in turn:

- What border is the war taking place on?
- What was the inciting cause of the war?
- What victory has the opposing side won?
- What power is still deciding who to support?

ENTANGLEMENT

Increase this project's Progress track when a House delivers a military surplus to the Arbiter's side of the war front, e.g.: *Recruits, Defences, Leadership, Weaponry, Morale, Scouts, Spies, Transport.*

Increase this project's Doom track when:

- A House leaks key information to the opposing forces.
- The Arbiter's agent is killed.
- A key settlement falls to the enemies.
- The opposing forces get support from another power.
- Turmoil exceeds Control (once per age).

RESOLUTION

When this project hits 5 Progress, the war is won; the GM changes the land's borders to include a valuable resource or settlement.

Your opponent cannot muster a military threat against you for at least the next Age. Each player chooses one:

YOUR HOUSE WAS *refined by the fires of war. Add 1 to Grasp, and gain Surplus: Morale.*

YOU TAKE A *valuable captive. Ransom them back for Surplus: Wealth, or learn from them and take a move from a House that's not in play.*

YOU TURN YOUR *wartime alliance into a continuing organisation. Gain Surplus: Prestige and 1 Reach.*

YOU PROVIDED INTELLIGENCE *support for another House. Gain Surplus: Spies, and influence on that House.*

YOU MADE SURE *that those displaced by the war landed on their feet. Lose Surplus: Land if you have it, but gain Surplus: Recruits and 1 Favour.*

THE ARBITER TASKS *you with protecting the new border. So long as you hold the border, you have an extra Asset option and advantage on USING FAVOUR.*

If, instead, the project hits 5 Doom, the war is lost. Each player chooses one:

RAIDERS FROM THE *other side pillage your holdings. Gain Need: Need: Crops or Need: Wealth and change your Lifestyle, but add 1 to Grasp as you make sure this won't happen again.*

YOUR WARRIORS WERE *massacred. Take Need: Recruits and lose a Follower option, but gain 1 Favour as the Arbiter honours your sacrifice.*

YOU FLED THE *war front. Add 1 to Sleight but gain Need: Prestige.*

YOU RAIDED STOCKPILES *for your own use as the battle lines collapsed. Gain Surplus: Weaponry and Need: Prestige.*

YOUR ENEMIES WORKED *a strange ritual that twisted the land's power. Gain Need: Attunement, and mark the map with a terrible blight that even now remains present.*

YOU WERE BETRAYED *by one of your allies. Pick a faction you have Influence on and say how they betrayed you. Lose that Influence, but gain Influence on two other factions who could have stopped them.*

The Arbiter

COUNTER- INSURRECTION

The Land has turned upon itself. Brother fights brother, armies march through pastures and villages, and strange plagues sweep through the populace. This will only end with the death of the rebels - or the Arbiter.

FOUNDATION

Go around the table, answering these questions in turn:

- What was the flashpoint that started the civil war?
- Which important faction has taken the side of the rebels?
- Who has already been executed by the Arbiter?
- Who's trying to profit off the conflict?

ENTANGLEMENT

Increase this project's Progress track when a House delivers a military surplus to the Arbiter's side of the war front, e.g.: *Recruits, Defences, Leadership, Weaponry, Morale, Scouts, Spies, Transport.*

Increase this project's Doom track when:

- A House changes sides to support the rebels.
- The Arbiter's agent is killed.
- A key settlement falls to the rebels
- Turmoil exceeds Control (once per age).
- Turmoil hits 10 (once per age).

RESOLUTION

When this project hits 5 Progress, the insurrection is quashed. The GM chooses how the Arbiter deals with the rebellious Houses:

WITH PUBLIC EXECUTIONS: *Rebels gain Need: Leadership and Favour -3. Loyalists gain 1 Favour and Surplus: Morale.*

WITH PUNITIVE TAXATION: *Rebels gain Need: Prestige, Favour -2 and lose all Coin. Loyalists gain 1 Favour and share all lost Coin between them.*

BANISHMENT: *Rebels gain Need: Crops, Need: Trade and Favour -2. Loyalists gain 1 Favour and Surplus: Land.*

EXCOMMUNICATION: *Rebels gain Need: Attunement and Favour -2. Loyalists gain 1 Favour, and can each remove a ritual from a rebel's Histories and add it to their own.*

If, instead, the project hits 5 Doom, the House most closely tied to the rebellion becomes the new Arbiter.

If that's you, pick an Arbiter playbook that best fits your House (or make a new one), and choose an Origin, Customs and Moves.

Each other House picks one:

- They support the new regime: lose a Surplus and gain Favour +1.
- They loot the old regime: gain a Surplus but take Favour -1.

Then, with the consent of the group, pick one: you take over the GM role and the GM makes a new House to play, or make a new House for yourself as the GM controls the new Arbiter.





Chapter 5:



unning the Game



GAMES WORKING ON THE APOCALYPSE ENGINE ARE INCREDIBLY REWARDING TO GM: you can flow from scene to scene, from moment to moment as the story demands. You'll spend most of your time in free conversation, unimpeded by restrictive rules, but at key points in the narrative the game's moves narrow down your focus to drive the story towards drama and interesting choices.

Getting the most of this structure needs a certain mindset: you're not writing a script for the players to experience, but gripping the reins of the story your group's telling as it rampages about and shifts direction, and guiding it towards entertaining outcomes.

In this chapter, you'll find advice, tip and tricks to help you run **FREE FROM THE YOKE** to the best of its potential.

YOUR LEADING LIGHTS AGENDA

These are the core of **FREE FROM THE YOKE**. Every time you respond to the players, it should serve these. Remember that you'll also pick up another agenda from your Arbiter playbook.

Make the world seem real

If the world's not believable, you're going to have problems. Make sure to stay grounded and human even in the most fantastical situations. Weave together the mundane realities of life in the nation with the folkloric supernatural elements that occasionally interfere with it.

Make the character's lives meaningful

Everyone's here to make interesting stories. If characters are spinning their wheels, give them choices to sink their teeth into. The character's successes should be momentous and their failures should be infamous – give them every chance to avoid mediocre or petty outcomes.

Show the spoils and costs of freedom

This is a game about what happens after liberation. Give the players opportunities to build a new identity for themselves, and allow that to be beautiful and wondrous – but do not let them pass the buck for the consequences of their actions, or remain ignorant of the costs. They're in control, now.

Running the Game

Play to find out what happens

This is your reward and your goal in running **FREE FROM THE YOKE**. There's no pre-planned story, and no assumed future. Just the logical consequences of the players' actions in the world, and the story they create. Avoid getting bogged down in planning – feel free to imagine possible situations and interesting conflicts to bring out, but stay ready to ditch everything in response to the player's choices.

WHAT TO SAY

FREE FROM THE YOKE is a conversation. That's why you should bear in mind what to say:

- **WHAT THE PRINCIPLES DEMAND.**
- **WHAT THE RULES DEMAND.**
- **WHAT YOUR PREP DEMANDS.**
- **WHAT HONESTY DEMANDS.**

A key part of running a game well is being fair. You should never attempt to negate a player's unexpected victory by inventing new threats or rewriting old ones, but neither should you change things about to make things easy for them. The characters should live interesting lives, but not effortless ones.

Between sessions you might decide things about how settlements function, what dangers might lurk out in the wilderness, and how factions will try to act against the player's Houses. If you've set up a conflict based on this prep, don't pull your punches and reverse it half way through – or add extra challenge to undercut the player's unexpected victory.

Also remember that your prep isn't everything; players will always come up with left-field solutions to the problems they face, and it's important to keep an open mind. When they try something unexpected, consider the situation in the fiction, the rules, and the Principles, and say what makes sense to you.

PRINCIPLES

Your Principles are how you pursue your Agenda. They're guidelines to keep in the back of your head as you play.

Evoke the past, think to the future

Always look for an opportunity to ground current events in the established past, and consider the impact their actions may have in years to come.

Fill the world with ruins

The Houses have regained their land but lost the cultural context to understand its wonders. As you describe the world, fill it with mystery and history. One House lives in a giant castle on an island in a lake; who built it, and what stories have its stones seen? Are those fields the site of a centuries-old battlefield, a yearly celebration cut short by the invasion, a plague pit?

Begin and end with the fiction

Remember that moves and their effects exist only within the fiction unfolding at the table. When your players make a move, its trigger should colour its results, and its results should be concretely contextualised in the fiction.

The Empire yet stands

The players shouldn't take their security for granted. The Empire may have been rebuffed, but there is a hostile world outside the Land's borders, and those borders begin play still in a state of flux. Make sure the players have reasons to look outward as well as inward when reckoning with threats to their House.

Draw maps, leave blanks

FREE FROM THE YOKE is grounded in the landscape. Houses fight over natural resources and political borders, characters go on dangerous journeys, and grand projects reshape the Land. A map helps you track all of these and keep everyone on the same page – but remember to leave room for players to add to it with **READ THE WIND** and other moves.

Write histories, and reference them

FREE FROM THE YOKE is also grounded in history. Keep a record of the significant events of each Age. When you're looking for ideas, consider how past events might cause new troubles.

Running the Game

Name people, know who backs them

Everyone has the potential to be important, and having a name keeps them memorable. As everyone's a member of a House, faction, clan or cult (however estranged) consider where they could get help once characters start making trouble.

Be a fan of the characters

Like an audience member, you're here to celebrate their victories and mourn for their losses. Put them into interesting situations, but never force them in a particular direction.

Apply consequences elsewhere

Sometimes it's better not to show the players the immediate consequences. Make a note and bring them to light later. Make sure their source is clear when they're revealed, so that it's clear you're not just inventing extra adversity as a power trip.

Ask questions and use the answers

Use questions to focus the group's imagination on specific elements of the world. When you want to highlight someone's day to day life, their motivations, or their history, just ask them. Answers build ties to the world, and give you foundations to build your own ideas on. Try to avoid completely open questions, though: giving a player the authority to declare too much in one sweep might make them feel crushed by the responsibility, or force you to step on their toes if something they suggest is harmful to the tone you all want from the game.

Be flexible with your responsibilities

Sometimes it's more interesting to put decision-making power in someone else's hands. This can be one of the players, giving them the choice of how a situation resolves, or letting them say what's happening when the spotlight moves to them. It can even be one of your characters, letting you make the choice that makes sense according to the characters and world as established.

Make your reactions look natural

When you use a reaction, consider the current story and what you'd like to see the players deal with. Don't give away any kind of meta-textual concern, though: channel your reactions through established parts of the fiction and maintain the illusion that they're a natural consequence of a living, breathing world.

Inform characters, not players

When you give the players information, relay it through their character's senses and inferences. For example: "Jane, Brigid realizes the underbrush here has been disturbed and then covered over. Looks like at least a dozen people, trying to cover their tracks". Doing this instead of just saying "Jane, there are people hiding here" adds an opportunity to say something about the character's insight and competence, and makes sure the focus stays on the character's feelings and experiences.

A House is a group of individuals

Even when actions are happening at the House level, you can put actions and reactions within the context of a character learning information and making choices – either their main character or an incidental character invented for this moment. "Irene, you're the first to see the scouts return. As they unpack they shout up a report – Morrow's Sons are on the move southwards".

YOUR REACTIONS

As the GM you're here to manage the pacing of the game, push the players into interesting decisions, and portray the world and its inhabitants. As such you don't make proactive *moves* so much as *reactions*. You make reactions in three situations:

- When a player rolls a 6 or lower on a move.
- When everyone looks to you to find out what happens next.
- When the players offer you up a golden opportunity.

To explain that third point, it's when the fiction so far has established that one thing will follow on immediately from the player's described action, before their intended action even has a chance to resolve. If it's been previously established that stepping on a pressure plate will trigger a bomb, and a player describes their character stepping on the plate, that's a golden opportunity.

Less dramatically, it's what happens when a PC makes a faux pas in a foreign court, when they consciously take the last supplies an expedition had, when they do something you want to immediately respond to.

The difference between this and the first two categories is that the GM can actively interrupt a player's narration to give an immediate reaction. The GM should only do this when the trigger has been firmly established beforehand.

Running the Game

THE STRENGTH OF A REACTION

When you make a reaction, it can be **HARD** or **SOFT**.

A **SOFT REACTION** is one that leaves room for the players to react – for example, describing a cache the characters spot on the other side of a chasm (**OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY**) or that a raider raises her spear and charges the Bogatyr (**PUT SOMEONE IN A SPOT**). Once you've described the reaction, you ask the players what they do and work through the actions they describe.

A **HARD REACTION** is one that cuts straight to the consequences. They tread on a weak roof section and fall a few stories (**DEAL HARM AS ESTABLISHED**), or they get home and find that their brother's gambled away their best boats (**ERASE A SURPLUS**). Often enough, a threat introduced by a soft reaction can lead to hard reactions down the line if the players overlook it or decide to focus their efforts on other dangers.

REACTIONS IN DETAIL

Reveal an unwelcome truth

Something about the world is more dangerous than the players thought, or one of their strengths is revealed to be less potent (or reliable) than they were expecting. Use this to add tension to the scene, but not necessarily in a way that demands immediate action.

Put someone in a spot

Force someone into a situation where they must make a decision. You can describe the situation and give them their options, or you can show that their current situation is untenable and let the player decide what decision they make. Use this to bring the scene's tension to boiling point.

Tell them the consequences and ask

If the thing a character's doing may cost them, you can say what the consequences will be and ask if they still want to go through with it. This way you can complicate their life while giving them the power to choose how much they suffer.

Separate them

Stop the players from working together. At the character level, a collapsing ruin might leave two players stranded away from the others; at the family level, a river in flood could divide the homeland and stop families from trading. In regular tabletop games splitting the party can bring the game grinding to a halt, but the

Apocalypse Engine powering **FREE FROM THE YOKE** helps you keep the game's spotlight flexible and highlight a character or family's strengths and weaknesses when isolated from the others.

Take away their stuff

The players have interesting gear, helpful followers, useful assets and strategic territory. Don't be afraid to take some of that away through sabotage, thievery or flaws. Make them want to get it back.

Capture them

Put the characters in a situation where their options are severely limited. This could be literal (bound and locked in a cell) or more fleeting (pinned down by archers). On the House level you can restrict a caravan's ability to escape an ambush, have an important agent go missing, or trap them in a web of obligations.

Deal harm (as established)

If the fiction says someone should get hurt, hurt them. If someone drives off a cliff, you can harm their vehicle; if a player gets a boar to charge over a previously-dug pit trap, you can narrate the boar's capture without the player having to roll **FIERCELY ASSAULT**. When a player's getting hurt, make sure the Harm level is appropriate to the fiction.

Raise Turmoil

Adding 1 to Turmoil lets you demonstrate that the character - or House's - actions have had a terrible effect on the functioning of the Land, even if everything looks rosy for them in the immediate aftermath.

Erase a Surplus

Erasing a Surplus is pretty dramatic, and represents great changes in the fiction: losing a mine, a spy network, or your granary. It'll take great effort to rebuild them. If a peril assaulting the House would reduce their capabilities but not cause ongoing issues, it makes sense to remove one of their Surpluses.

Add a Need

In contrast, a Need is something new that's afflicting a House. If a plague starts spreading through their ranks, if they're forced out of their holdings, or if they go through a schism, it makes sense to add a Need. A Need lingers and can cause repeated trouble with **IN WANT**, so they're best used for ongoing problems in the House.

Running the Game

Turn their move on them

If they were trying to make someone to do something, they instead end up promising a service; if they were trying to capture someone, they end up at their mercy; if they're trying to get information, they end up revealing something of themselves.

Give them recourse, solace or comfort

This world has room for moments of beauty, peace and grace. When your characters have gone through the wringer, it can be remarkably effective to take the pressure off and let them relax a little. Even on a 6- you can choose not to inflict misfortune – or even provide unearned rewards.

Offer an opportunity, with or without cost

Show them something they want, and say what they need to do to get it. Sometimes you'll want to put a huge cost on this to force a dilemma on the player; other times you'll make it easy because it's more interesting to see what the player does with it.

Show a remnant of the old ways, now re-contextualised

Every part of the land was touched by your ancestors and twisted by the Empire. Even the parts that remained intact may have been made irrelevant by the new nation, but they're still potent. Put settlements in the burned-out ruin of an ancient fort, peddle once-sacred fungi as a recreational drug, show cults who sacrifice to the spirits of the forest even though they no longer know their names.

Show the consequences of past decisions

When you revisit somewhere the players have been before, show how it's changed since we were last there. Demonstrate how their previous actions – both this age and in past ages – have had an impact on this place in expected and unexpected ways.

Show a downside to their playbook

Each playbook has strengths with sometimes inconvenient costs, and weaknesses they'd prefer to ignore. Bring those costs and weaknesses to the forefront – see what a Seneschal will do without their staff, or place a Vagabond in the spotlight among the nation's movers and shakers.

Introduce a new locale

If characters stumble onto an interesting new location, or you dramatically shake up the Land, put a marker on the map to cement it in player's imaginations.

Highlight a weakness of their House

Think about the weaknesses of their approach: the Brethren are literally out of their element on the land, and the Teachers need others to recognise their moral authority. By forcing them out of their comfort zone you give them opportunities to find new solutions, grow, and adapt.

Use a reaction from the Arbiter, a faction or a threat

The Arbiter has characteristic reactions, determined by their playbook. In addition, you may have Factions or Threats prepared, each with their own reactions to activate when the time is right.

After every reaction: "What do you do?"

Make it clear after every reaction that the ball's now in the player's court. Answer any questions they have, but it's their turn now to act.

Running the Game

DANGERS

This story you're telling – of what you do after liberation, what you owe your fellow citizens, and what this fledgling nation will become – is one that benefits from a bit of danger here and there.

There's a few potential sources of danger in your narrative:

THE OTHER PLAYERS

This goes without saying, but the players are more than likely to oppose each other. As a GM, try to make sure that direct competition between their Houses or Characters is rare. When two players are clashing, it's likely that their goals aren't entirely opposed. Try to work out what each player wants from the situation and have them trigger the appropriate moves, and if either party is putting effort in to sabotage the other give both players Disadvantage.

If this tension needs to come to a head, a **DUEL** or a **PITCHED BATTLE** is a great way of showcasing that. Before heading into this, make sure the stakes are clear to everyone and get the non-involved player's help in bringing the drama. Get reactions from the people watching the duel, observations from spies observing the battle, and flashbacks to better times.

INDIVIDUAL FOES

There's trouble across the land. As your characters brave the wilds and delve dark alleys in service to their Houses, they'll come across people wishing to do them harm. When you're building out an individual threat, consider the following things:

HARM: How much damage are they likely to do, if their hand is forced? Unskilled folk need a windup to even deal Flesh Wounds, the scared or desperate can deal Flesh Wounds, and skilled and scarred fighters are likely to deal Mortal Wounds.

MOTIVE: What does the foe want out of this conflict? Wealth, food, respect, revenge, an ego boost, safety?

DESCRIPTION: As per **NAME PEOPLE, KNOW WHO BACKS THEM**, an agent of a rival house or a criminal faction is always a better foe than a random mook. Play every foe like they could become a recurring villain, rival or potentially even ally.

All of these should help guide your description of the foe in the fiction, and give you clues for what to do when the players roll a miss or employ an unexpected strategy to deal with them.

ANTAGONISTIC FACTIONS

This land has many citizens – settlements, cults and organisations outside of the control of the players. To spotlight particular groups, write them up as a Faction.

To build a Faction, you first need an overall **CONCEPT**. Unused House playbooks are a good place to look for ideas, as well as the other settlements and potential dangers you defined when you drew your map together. The Empire's minions are another great source of Factions, whether they're armies at the border or spies working in the heart of the Arbiter's court. Each Faction should have something it's actively pursuing in the world, to ensure they come into contact (and conflict) with the players.

The second step is to create the faction's **FACE**. This character is a pivotal person in the story of the Faction – whether they're its leader, its emissary, or an agitator causing the Faction's current turmoil. Flesh them out and try to make sure they're someone the PCs would be interested in talking to.

Each Faction should have 2-3 **SURPLUSES** and 2-3 **NEEDS**, assigned to fit the fiction. Each Surplus represents one of the faction's key strengths. For each Surplus, write an ability the faction has gained from that resource that you can use as a GM reaction. Their Needs, on the other hand, represent the things the Faction is lacking and will be actively searching for. For each Need, say what will happen if the Faction gets it. Finally, Factions have Alliance Moves that give them Influence on other Families. You can spend this in the same ways player Houses can: take one of their Surpluses, or get them to back you up, fall into indecision or protect something important.

You should write an Alliance move specific to the ways the Faction can win obligation, prestige or fear from other groups. Here are some examples:

The Faction controls a desirable resource or luxury. When they give a gift of it to a player House, they gain Influence on them.

The Faction controls territory. When they give a player House safe passage through it, they gain Influence on them.

The Faction has cultural power. When they publicly praise a player House, they gain Influence on them.

Running the Game

MONSTERS

Finally, there's the inhuman entities haunting this land. What form these take, and how common they are, will depend on your group's decisions during worldbuilding, but here's some guiding principles.

Monsters come from broken promises.

All magic comes from pacts and promises. There's an energy in them; when they're held true they bring blessings, when they're broken they bring banes. A particularly egregious betrayal sinks into the soil, agitating the local flora and fauna and twisting the land's power into a monster. Work out what promise was broken: an oath to bring someone's body home, a wedding vow, a secret pact between thieves, an oath of fealty? From this, consider what the monster wishes to do:

- Punish those who act like the oathbreaker?
- Ruin those who swear similar oaths?
- Act like the impule that lead to the oath being broken, enlarged to monstrous extremes?
- Warn others who it feels are at risk of betrayal?

Monsters can only borrow physical form.

Monsters aren't flesh and blood. They're a memorial of a crime, wrapped up with magic, fear and anger. This makes it hard for them to take action, so they borrow physical form.



Dangers

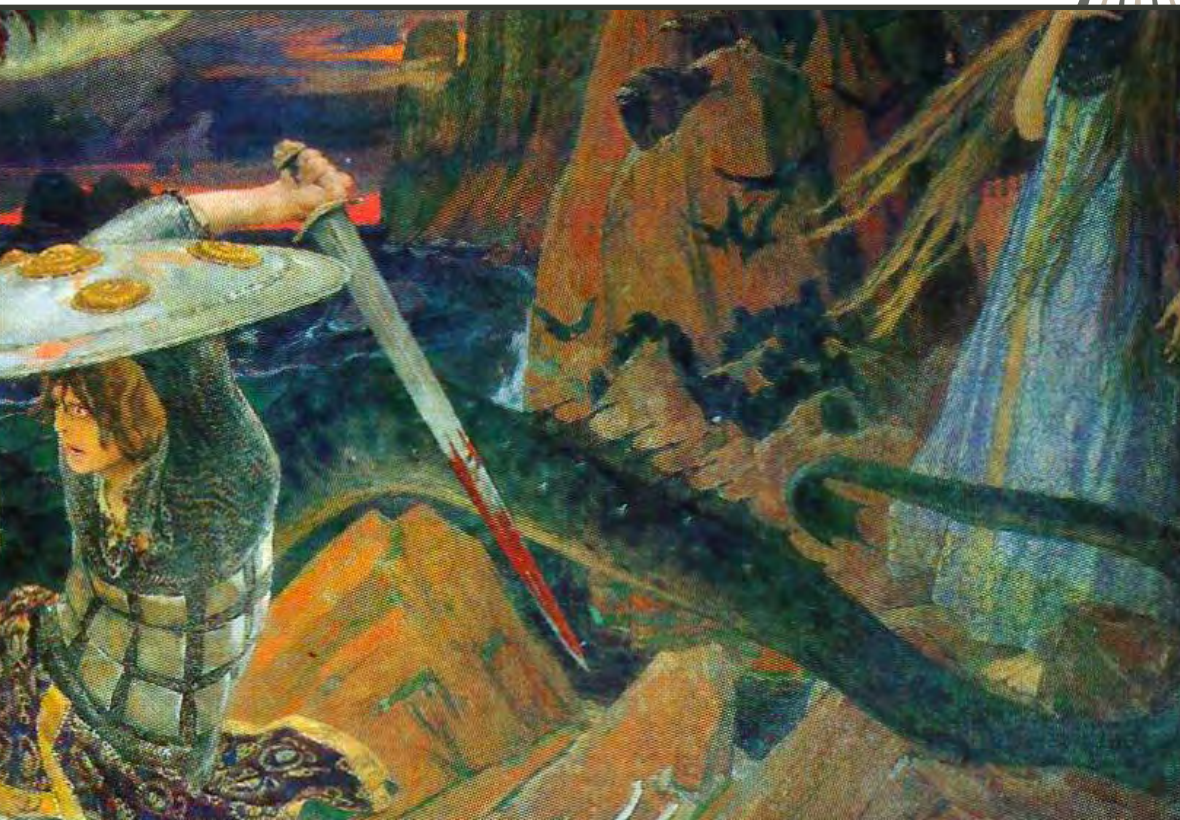
Here's some options for the shapes they might take:

- Discreet whispers in their target's ear.
- Grinding rocks, fallen trees, and unharvested crops.
- A fresh corpse, animated ghoulishly.
- An animal, its simple mind overwhelmed.
- A living person, battling the spirit for control or accepting its power for their own ends.

Monsters are immortal unless destroyed.

That physical form can be defeated, of course; indeed, you'll often need a stout Bogatyr to **FIERCELY ASSAULT** the fiend's body to buy yourself time to understand its curse. That broken oath remains at the heart of the creature, and so long as it's unanswered the monster will keep returning – even from one age to the next.

To defeat a monster for good, the players will have to understand the broken oath (perhaps with **UNEARTH FORGOTTEN LORE**), and untangle it. Maybe that means punishing the oathbreaker, or maybe it means salving the hurt of the betrayed. Or maybe players find some other way, perhaps via **ENACTING A RITUAL**, to present the spirit with an alternative form of catharsis.







Appendix:

Historical
Context



THE BROAD SWEEP

Two major inspirations went into conceiving **FREE FROM THE YOKE**. The first was the invasion and subjugation of Rus cities by the Golden Horde Empire in the middle of the 13th century and their subsequent rule as vassal states until as late as the end of the 15th century. The second was the idea of having a more political and potentially talk-heavy game where a build-up of political tension is perhaps resolved by violence (as in *Game of Thrones*) or through peaceful means (as we might hope should happen).

Having these two ideas was not enough: I feel that an RPG setting, especially a highly customisable one, must explore interesting tensions, scenarios and high-level concepts. In my experience, the period after a ruling Empire is defeated is ripe for tackling in an RPG context thanks to the wide set of options open to players and GMs. This is what then led to the idea of presenting your world's history through the lens of the Ancient Past (a time of myth, origins and legends), Recent Past (having been a vassal state and what that meant in terms of survival) and Future (what are you going to do now that the big fight is done?).

What about the setting background, though? In our world, the individual Rus city states had fractured after a partially unified Kievan Rus period in the 9-10th centuries due to succession laws and the resultant infighting. This left them open to conquest and vassalization, leading to a period of the 'yoke' (or 'ig' in Russian).

The actual nature of any oppression or exploitation is not entirely clear – the Mongols of the Golden Horde never really settled the Rus cities and the vassalization was largely confined to the payment of tribute and some humiliation of the state leaders collecting the tribute. In later years various cities were able to prosper and gather power under the rule, and it is during the 'yoke' that Muscovy (the state ruled by what we now call Moscow) was able to rise to prominence. Upon the final defeat of the Golden Horde, Muscovy ended up on top, able to assert a hegemony over other Rus states and bring them more directly under its rule.

A lot of this book's perspectives on the 'Empire' and your 'Houses' are presented in a way which makes things seem very clear-cut. This was the Evil Empire, and you play the Good Rebels who have liberated their homes. How true you make that for your version of the setting is up to you, and I encourage playing with the truth of the recent past.

HOUSE INSPIRATIONS

Each individual House Playbook has its own historical or mythological inspiration. **THE BRETHREN OF THE SEA SERPENT** speak to the original foundations of Rus states and the mingling of Norse invaders (Vikings, usually called 'Varangians' by the Rus) and Slavic inhabitants of Eastern Europe in the 8th and 9th centuries. With them, the Varangians brought martial and ship-building traditions. Although these were focused mainly on rivers across Russia, they were also put to good use in the Baltic and then the Black Sea. Raids were eventually conducted on 'Tsargrad' (King's City, which is what the Rus called Constantinople), often alongside a booming trade. There is no reason to think your Brethren can't both trade and raid like their historic inspiration.

THE HORSELORDS OF THE STEPPE of course are inspired by various nomadic or semi-nomadic cultures, including the Mongols themselves, alongside the Cumans, Khazars and Pechenegs, which often came into contact with the Rus states in the Medieval period. Our sources on them are typically limited and inevitably rely on what was written about them by historians and geographers in Iran, Persia, India and Russia. The Houses do not have to be monolithic in culture or ethnicity and can share many other common identities, not least that they were vassals of the Empire like the other houses.

THE TEACHERS OF ANCIENT TRUTHS are probably most inspired by the general process of Historical investigation and Historiography – a meta-discipline of history, looking at the methods of studying history and how they change based on the period we're investigating. How do we know what we know? How do we try to ascertain the truth of the past? In part it is always a construct in the context of a current time and place. But the study, teaching and attempts to make sense of it all are no less valuable and no less productive for what we might learn about ourselves (and our past selves). Today the study of history has shifted away from high level state politics, 'Great Men' and a procession of events. Social and cultural investigations of history offer new perspective and dimensions and help us understand a greater variety of people, and thus paint an altogether grander and hopefully more complete picture of the past. A perfect opportunity in role-playing to approach play more introspectively, or to think about how history is made, who writes it, and who it is for.

THE GLORIOUS MERCHANT REPUBLIC is most directly inspired by the Republic of Novgorod, one of the Rus city states from the

House inspirations

early 12th to the end of the 15th century. Although distinct in being ruled less by Princes (sometimes called 'Grand Dukes') as other Rus states and more the local nobility (the 'boyars'), it still typically had a Prince. This Prince was typically seen as a sort of ceremonial position, with the boyars remaining firmly in charge. Typically, a lot of these Princes were also those otherwise dominating the political landscape in the Rus states, so it's not entirely clear just how independent Novgorod really was. Nevertheless, the concept of a Merchant Republic is just as comfortable in this setting as it might be in Medieval or Renaissance Italy. A perfect opportunity to bring some unexpected ideas or tropes into the setting and play around with who holds the reins of power.

THE FORGERS OF THE MARBLED CITY draw their inspiration a little further afield than the others, looking to Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire. Of course, what we now call the Byzantine Empire called itself the Roman Empire and was a direct continuation of the Empire set up by Octavian in 27 BCE (itself merely transforming from the Roman Republic). The Romans were great builders at all stages of the Empire's growth, and Constantinople, the eastern Roman capital founded in 324 CE, was no exception with great walls, extensive palaces, magnificent churches and a dominating harbour. These works themselves inspired great works in Rus states once contact was established, and similar ideas of municipal building were adopted over time. In the game, the map plays an important part in establishing the geography of the setting and attention should be paid to the new works that will undoubtedly be created by the Houses – and the utility or prestige that might flow from them.

THE CHURCH OF FORGOTTEN LANDS, of course, takes its broad strokes inspiration from Kievan Rus adopting Christianity following the missionaries sent there by the Byzantine Empire. It replaced the Slavic paganism that dominated before (here mainly represented by **THE TEACHERS OF ANCIENT TRUTHS**), but the replacement wasn't neat and many practices were integrated into Christian worship. It also opened up the Rus states to a religious community spanning the lands of the Roman Empire and beyond, bringing in many new ideas such as asceticism, western philosophy and a new alphabet and writing system. The intent here isn't to bring in any real-world religions, but to play with the concept of a religiously-dominated state structure, as increasingly became the case in Medieval and Early Modern Rus and Russia. This offers an opportunity for the House and its characters to consider their relationship with power, positive or negative.

CHARACTERS

The character playbooks for the most part are broad and generic, but we have a few historical notes on the **BOGATYR** and **VAGABOND**. The **BOGATYR** can most directly be translated as 'Knight', but this doesn't fully capture the Eastern European flavour intended here. Similar to the mythic conception of Western Knights, the Bogatyr is an elite warrior who is strong, courageous and brave, wandering the land and putting wrong to right. They featured as specific characters in various stories, the three most famous of them being Alyosha Popovich, Dobrynya Nikitich and Ilya Muromets. There were other flavours to them than just strength and bravery, and they could be full of cunning wit – adventurers and explorers rather than warriors. The stories also frequently mention the Polenitsa, the female equivalent of the Bogatyr and typically similar to the Norse 'Shield Maidens', though you can simply call everyone a Bogatyr regardless of gender as you wish. In the broadest sense of the word, all the character playbooks are Bogatyrs of a sort, but we have taken the most common archetype as base for the playbook.

The **VAGABOND** is inspired by another type of character from Rus myths and stories – in particular Emilyan, who is lazy and foolish but nonetheless manages to be the hero of his story. His adventures included getting wishes from a talking pike (the river fish, not the weapon), lazily riding on a magical stove (these were typically the centre of a Russian house out in the country and provided cooking, heating and sleeping space), and getting chucked out of his own wedding in a barrel. We expanded on the more unorthodox characters of these legends, and built an adventurer relying on luck, happenstance and the kindness of people to get by. Possibly also being extremely lazy.

THE ARBITER

The idea for the Arbiter was to give players and the GM a focal point in the setting that can be living, breathing and evolving. It's inspired by the various Rus states that rose to prominence and dominated the fractured political landscape, or even unified it. The first major unifier was Kiev under Prince Oleg in 882 CE, and from then various others held the reins: Novgorod, Vladimir-Suzdal, Galicia-Volhynia and finally Muscovy from the 1470s CE.

None of this domination was particularly neat, and often the power held was very regional and limited, even when Muscovy came to dominate in the late 15th century. Thus, the Arbiter mechanics revolve largely around soft power and influence and how these relationships are built between the Houses. We made it a priority to give options for replacing the Arbiter: as the ages pass, fortunes rise and fall and these leadership structures easily change.

MAGIC AND MONSTERS

The mythological inspiration for magic is significantly more nebulous, and not purely dependent on Slavic myths or Slavic paganism. Indeed, the latter bears many similarities with other Indo-European mythologies and pantheons. There was a god of thunder (Perun), of time (Svarog), fertility (Mokosh), and fire (Ognebog), and many others were either shared or slightly different between various Slav groups across Europe.

There are a great number of spirits – spirits of water (rusalka, now often depicted much like a mermaid), forest (lesovyk), hunting (leshy) or home (domovyk). Many mythical creatures abound such as the dragon-like zmei, including a multi-headed variant (the Zmey Gorynich) or a water-dwelling one (the Chudo-ludo), the alkonost (a bird-headed woman much like the Greek siren), the shishiga (a swamp-dwelling goblin creature that mostly inconveniences drunks), the immortal lich Koschei, or the zhar-ptitsa (a firebird similar to the Greek Phoenix). Magic is typically strange, wonderful and coming from a variety of sources, typically innate to creatures or sometimes the land.

The latter part we've taken to be the core for the magic performed in the setting, typically requiring rituals and based on uncovering knowledge long left behind. The idea that magic has a cost and can go awry is perhaps more inspired by some more modern depictions of magic in fantasy, but fits well with the idea that the magic is not truly wielded by the heroes of these stories, but typically bargained-for or somehow won.

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